A Semantic and Syntactic Study
of Japanese Particle wa
--- a topic marker or a subject marker?

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Li Yee Na

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Abstract

This paper aims to re-examine the nature of the Japanese particle *wa* in terms of three constructions – *wa-ga*(*-ga*) sentences, *wa* sentences and *wa-wa-ga* sentences. Japanese particles *wa* and *ga* have long been considered as a topic marker and a subject marker respectively. On the basis of the previous studies (Kuno 1973, Kitagawa, 1982, Kuroda 1992), two major claims are made in this paper. First, the revisit of *wa* and *ga* as a topic marker and a subject marker supports that Japanese is a topic-subject-prominent language. Second, the alternation of *wa* to *ga* suggests that *wa* can mark both topics and subjects, which in turn arouses a question about the nature of the second *wa* phrase in *wa-wa-ga* sentences. Based on the assumption of one topic per clause, the observation that the first *wa* phrase occupies the topic position supports the claim that the second *wa* phrase is not a topic at least. Extending the study of topics from Japanese to Chinese, it is observed that sub-topics in Chinese and the second *wa* phrase in Japanese share a common feature: contrastiveness. This leads to the speculation that both Japanese *wa* phrase and sub-topics in Chinese are preposed to the position after the subject and adjoined to the VP, which is an issue subject to further studies.
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1. Introduction

The nature of the Japanese particle *wa*, which is traditionally defined as the topic marker (Kuno 1973), has long been controversial in Japanese linguistics, in terms of different levels (e.g. sentence level vs discourse level) and different approaches (e.g. syntactic vs semantic vs functional). The primary purpose of this paper is to investigate the syntactic and semantic properties of *wa* in three constructions: (i) *wa-ga(-ga)* sentences; (ii) *wa* sentences; and (iii) *wa-wa-ga* sentences.

(1) Hana-*wa* sakura-*ga* i-i.

Flower-TOP cherry-blossom-NOM good-PRES

“As for flowers, the cherry blossom is the best.”

(2) Nihon-no tabemono-*wa* sakana-*ga* fugu-*ga* umai.

Japan-GEN food-TOP fish-NOM blowfish-NOM good.

“Speaking of Japanese food, among fish, blowfish is good.”

(3) Naomi-*wa* udon-o tabe-ta.

Naomi-TOP noodle-ACC eat-PAST

“Naomi ate udon noodles.”

(4) Bunmeikoku-*wa* dansei-*wa* heikin zyumyoo-*ga* naga-i.

Civilized-nation-TOP man-TOP average life-span-NOM long-PRES

“As for civilized countries, as far as men are concerned, the average life span is long.”

To start off, we will examine the nature of *wa* by studying their syntactic distribution based on examples (1) to (4), with the adoption of the topic construction framework proposed by Kitagawa (1982), as to be outlined in section 2.

The discussion of the paper will proceed as follows. Section 2 lays out two conspicuous analyses of *wa* in the literature, namely Kuno (1973) and Kitagawa (1982). In section 3, a syntactic and semantic analysis of *wa* mainly on the basis of the framework of Kitagawa, as well as Kuno and others (cf. Kuroda 1992, Tateishi 1994, Iwasaki 2002, Xu & Liu 2007), is proposed. Section 3.1 re-examines the nature of *wa* as a topic marker in the *wa-ga(-ga)* sentence from a semantic and syntactic perspective. Section 3.2 investigates the *wa* sentence to see whether topics are base-generated or by
movement in terms of the Topic-Predication framework. Section 3.3 attempts to analyse the nature of the second wa phrase in the wa-wa-ga sentence and compare it with the first wa phrase from the Information Structure and syntactic perspective, followed by examining the semantic relation and ordering of particles in the wa-wa-ga cluster within the Topic-Predication framework. Based on findings obtained in the previous sections, we will extend our analysis to contrast sub-topics in Chinese with the second wa phrase in Japanese in Section 3.4. Section 4 concludes the paper.

2. Previous Analyses on Japanese Particle wa

To provide a sense of the field and lay a basis for our following discussions, this section provides a brief review of two previous analyses on Japanese topic. With an array of studies regarding the syntactic and semantic structures of wa from a wide range of viewpoints, we will focus on two which are most relevant to our current study, namely Kuno (1973) and Kitagawa (1982).

2.1 Kuno (1973)

Kuno proposes two distinctive and well-known uses of wa: thematic wa and contrastive wa. He proposes that a thematic wa phrase must be either anaphoric or generic, whereas there is no such constraint on contrastive wa.

Thematic wa:

    John-TOP the book-ACC read-PAST
    “Speaking of John, he read the book.”

Contrastive wa:

(6) John-wa sono hon-o yon-da ga Mary-wa
    John-TOP the book-ACC read-PAST but Mary-TOP
    yo-mana-katta.
    read-not-PAST
“John read the book, but Mary didn’t.” (Kuno 1973: 47)

The above examples are ambiguous between thematic readings and contrastive readings, as stated by Kuno. (6) has a contrastive reading as the wa marked noun phrase John, as the contrastive argument in the context, is set off against another entity Mary of the same class (i.e. a group of people consisting of John, Mary, and others), such that there is a polarity contrast between affirmative and negative predicates in (6). On the other hand, (5) is ambiguous in the sense that John can be either contrasted with some entity or not. To disambiguate sentences like (5), Kuno claims that there is prominent intonation in contrastive wa, while thematic wa does not receive any.

Regarding the notion of givenness, Kuno considers that wa marks given information and ga marks new information when they occur in the subject position of the matrix clause. Kuno uses the following example to illustrate the distinction of wa and ga in terms of given and new information.

(7) a. gootoo-ga boku-no ie ni hait-ta.
    robber-NOM I-GEN house into enter-PAST
    “A robber broke into my house.”

b. sono gootoo-*ga/wa boku ni pisutoru-o tukitukete
    the robber-*NOM/TOP I to gun-ACC point
    kane-o das-e to it-ta.
    Money-ACC give-IMP QT say-PAST
    “The robber, pointing a pistol at me, said.”give me money.”"

(Kuno 1972: 277)

Kuno notes that sono gootoo ‘the robber’ in (7b) is precisely co-referential with gootoo ‘a robber’ in (7a) and thus ‘the robber’ is predictable and recoverable in context. This gives an account of why the use of ga results in ungrammaticality.

Kuno’s account of two different functions of wa arouse extensive discussions about the syntax and semantics of this particle. Among these studies, there have been a number of studies suggesting a single function of wa (cf. Kuroda 1992, Miyagawa 1987, Watanabe 1989, Shibatani 1990), and the sense of contrast is derived from selecting an entity as the theme from related alternatives.
2.2 Kitagawa (1982)

On the basis of the framework of Farmer (1980) and Hale (1980), Kitagawa (1982) presents the definition of ‘topic’ in Japanese as follows:

(8) a. ‘Topic’ in Japanese is X'-wa, where X is [-V].
   b. Wa indicates that the immediately preceding X’ is outside of the domain of ‘evaluation’ in terms of the PAS (‘propositional argument structure’) of the nucleus V.

With the establishment of the formal definition of topic, the structure of topic construction follows the institution of the schema (9):

(9) [Top X'-wa] [Pred X'*V]

On top of the syntactic operation of topic, Kitagawa’s analysis involves the assignment of pragmatic functions referred as ‘Topic Binding’, based on Dik’s proposal (1978) as follows:

(10) The Topic X’ must be bound pragmatically to an X’ which is in the domain of Predication (Pred).

As commented by Kitagawa, ‘Topic Binding’ is to be considered as ‘a process of pragmatic evaluation achieved in terms of co-indexing at the level of topic structure assignment’ (Kitagawa 1982: 184). This evaluation thus insures that the topic X’ is linked to the pragmatically bound X’ in the Predication presented in (8b), illustrated by (3), repeated here as (11):

(11) Naomi-wa udon-o tabe-ta.
    Naomi-TOP noodle-ACC eat-PAST
    “Naomi ate udon noodles.”

(12) a. [V'[N'[N Naomi]]-wa [N'[N udon]]-om [V tabe-ta]]
    b. PAS: (GA Om tabe-)
    c. [Top[N'i Naomi]-wa] [Pred[N'i Pro] [N'udon]-o [V tabe-ta]]
    (Kitagawa 1982: 185)

The S-structure in (12a) with the accompanying PAS in (12b) shows the accomplishment of the evaluation of the O argument position by the overt NP udon-o ‘noodle-acc’, whereas the GA argument position remains unevaluated, as wa in Naomi-wa indicates the
stipulation of the position of Naomi, which is outside of the domain of semantic evaluation, as specified in (8b). To capture the evaluation, Kitagawa proposes a variable Pro bound to the topic such that the unevaluated GA argument retains the participation of the operation required for satisfying Topic Binding through the anchored Pro, as presented in (10).

However, it is not always the case where Pro is involved. Observe the following example (13):

(13) Taroo-wa Hanako-ga iede-si-ta. (Kitagawa 1982: 185)
    Taroo-TOP Hanako-NOM leave-home-do-PAST
    “As for Taroo, Hanako ran away from home.”
(14) a. \[V'[N'[N Taroo]]-wa [N'[N Hanako]]-gam [V iede-si-ta]]
    b. PAS: (GAm iede-si-)
    c. [Top[N'i Taroo]-wa] [Pred [N'i Hanako]-ga [V iede-si-ta]]

The wa-marked NP Taroo is left unevaluated despite the completion of the semantic evaluation, as it is not the required argument for the evaluation in the PAS. However, only when all elements in the sentence fulfill the evaluation under Topic Binding is the sentence judged to be acceptable. Kitagawa proposes that as long as the topic and the pragmatically bound NPs in the Predication obtain any of the following three types of relations, including: (i) a strong sense of identification in terms of real world knowledge between the referents involved; (ii) a sub-set relation; (iii) a genitive relation (cf. Kitagawa 1982: 186-187), Topic Binding may be satisfied. In this case, the identities of Taroo and Hanako are somehow closely related (e.g. Father and daughter, husband and wife etc.), which is a manifestation of the relation (i). At this point, the satisfaction of Topic Binding indicates the authorization of the overt NP Taroo for evaluation.

With respect to the syntactic aspect, contrastive wa proposed by Kuno (1973), namely ‘contrast wa’ in Kitagawa’s analyses, ‘refers to X’-wa which occurs embedded within a domain of Predication at the level of topic structure assignment’. (Kitagawa 1982: 188) An example quoted from her analysis may be presented as follows:
(15) Naomi-wa  udon-wa  tabe-ta.  (Kitagawa 1982: 189)
Naomi-TOP  noodle-TOP  eat-PAST
‘As for Naomi, udon noodle she ate.’
(16)  a.  [V'[N'[N Naomi]]-wa [N'[N udon]]-wa [V tabe-ta]]
b.  PAS:  (GA O  tabe-)
c.  [Top[N'i Naomi]-wa] [Pred[Top[N'j udon]-wa] [Pred[N'i Pro][N'j Pro] [V tabe-ta]]]

(16c) reveals that with the syntactic characterization of contrast wa, it is possible for the topic construction structure to recur, and thus there may be more than one contrast wa phrase in a sentence, as shown in (17).

(17)  [Top] [Pred [Top] [Pred [Top] [Pred…]]]
Within the Predication, the structure conducts a further Topic-Predication partition, indicating the recursion theoretically.

3. Discussion

3.1 Wa-ga(-ga) sentence

Previous analyses generally take the particle ga a nominative case marker (cf. Kuno 1973). Following Tateishi (1994), we propose that in the non-derived context, the maximal number of subjects in a single clause in Japanese is two

1 In Tateishi’s work (1994: 23, note 2), he points out that there is a controversy over the acceptance of the Major Subject. There are speakers who do not accept Major Subject construction, or even the Multiple Subject construction mentioned in note 2, such that the maximal number of nominative subject is one. However, this is nothing to do with our theoretical points that we are taking in this section, because there is still no speaker accepting three nominative-marked subjects. Even if the speaker rejects Major Subjects, which means he or she accepts only one subject in the sentence which is the θ-marked subject, the situation is the same as long as the wa-ga sentence is acceptable:

(i)  Hana-wa  sakura-ga  i-i.
    Flower-TOP  cherry-blossom-NOM  good-PRES
    ‘As for flowers, the cherry blossom is the best.’

The assumption of allowing only one nominative subject also results in the same conclusion that the wa marked phrase is not a subject, as mentioned in our discussion.
‘Major Subject Construction’\(^2\). It does not allow the alternation of \textit{ga} with the genitive case marker \textit{no}, making the genitive relationship not possible in this construction, as shown below.

(18) Nihon-no tabemono-ga sakana-ga umai.
Japan-GEN food-NOM fish-NOM good.
“It is Japanese food among which fish are good.”

(19) *Nihon-no tabemono-no sakana-ga umai.
(Tateishi 1994: 21)

If the sentence contains three subjects, it would lead to ungrammaticality:

(20) *Nihon-no tabemono-ga sakana-ga fugu-ga umai.
Japan-GEN food-NOM fish-NOM blowfish-NOM good.
“It is Japanese food which, among fish, blowfish are good.”
(Tateishi 1994: 21)

\(^2\)In fact, Japanese has a construction which generates more than two subjects, namely the so-called ‘Multiple Subject Construction’ (Kuno 1973). Observe the following example:

(i) Taroo-ga chichioya-ga ototo-ga nyuuin-shi-ta.
Taro-NOM father-NOM younger brother-NOM be hospitalized-do-PAST
“It was Taro whose father’s younger brother was hospitalized.”
(Tateishi 1994: 20, (1a))

However, the Multiple Subject construction differs from the Major Subject construction in the sense that the adjacent subjects in (i) are in genitive relation, which can be linked by the genitive marker \textit{no} to form a single nominal phrase.

(ii) Taroo-no chichioya-no ototo (Tateishi 1994: 21)
“Taro’s father’s younger brother”

In some cases Japanese allows the marking of the object with \textit{ga} triggered by a particular type of predicate as in the following:

Taro-NOM Hanako-NOM like-COPULA
“Taro likes Hanako.”

It should be expressly noted that in this study these cases would be set aside.
Hence, the fact that the number of subjects in Japanese is restricted to two is evident. Yet if the leftmost nominative argument among the three is altered to be marked with *wa* instead of *ga*, the result becomes acceptable. Consider the following example derived from (18):

(21) Nihon-no tabemono-wa sakana-ga fugu-ga umai.
    Japan-GEN food-TOP fish-NOM blowfish-NOM good.
    “Speaking of Japanese food, among fish, blowfish is good.”
    (Tateishi 1994:129)

Here the speculation of the *wa* marked phrase being one of the subjects is precisely impossible, as *sakana-ga* and *fugu-ga* have occupied the assumed subject positions, with the premise that Japanese has only two subjects at maximum in a single clause.

A question then arises: if the nominal phrase marked with *wa* is not a subject, what would it be? On the basis of the previous studies, the nominal phrase marked with *wa* is typically a topic (cf. Kuno 1973), despite the fact that a full agreement on the notion of ‘topic’ cannot be reached. Therefore, we postulate that the *wa* marked phrase in (21) is a topic, mainly on the basis of Kitagawa’s framework and others. The definition of ‘topic’ proposed by Kitagawa (1982) has been mentioned in the previous part, repeated here as (22) and (23):

(22) ‘Topic’ in Japanese is X’-wa, where X is [-V].
(23) Wa indicates that the immediately preceding X’ is outside of the domain of ‘evaluation’ in terms of the PAS of the nucleus V.

In terms of the definition, Kitagawa points out that the schema of the topic construction structure is derived from (22) and (23), which is based on Dik’s “Topic Binding” repeated below as (24).

(24) [Top X’-wa] [Pred X’*V]
(25) The Topic X’ must be bound pragmatically to an X’ which is in the domain of Predication (Pred)

Now, let us examine the plausibility of *Nihon-no tabemono* ‘Japanese food’ in (21) as a topic. The *wa* marked phrase in (21) is a non-VP, more specifically, a NP (i.e. Here Kitagawa’s N’ = NP), which has fulfilled (22). The assumed topic should be bound
pragmatically to one of the NPs in the Predication to fulfill Topic Binding for the sake of well-formedness. The examination of the semantic property of the assumed topic would be based on Kuno (1973) and Iwasaki (2002) other than Kitagawa.

Following Kuno (1973) and Iwasaki (2002), a topic-comment sentence ‘contains a sentence topic marked by wa which refers to an identifiable entity and makes an affirmative or negative assertion about it in the comment’ (Iwasaki 2002: 225). Here the term ‘identifiability’, according to Iwasaki, refers to the condition that ‘the speaker’s belief in the addressee’s ability to pick out (‘identify’) the referent the speaker has in mind from other possible candidates which might be categorized in the same way’ (Iwasaki 2002: 235). The identifiable entity must be either generic or anaphoric in sense. In this case, (21) is a generic sentence as the wa marked noun phrase *Nihon-no tabemono* refers to a category (i.e. the concept of Japanese food) and makes a general statement about itself. It is a ‘pragmatically bound’ topic (cf. Kitagawa 1982: 186) despite the absence of the anaphoric relation to a NP in the comment, as the wa marked NP *Nihon-no tabemono* ‘Japanese food’ expresses the specification of the domain of the comment, which restricts the range of food from various places to Japan, following the ‘aboutness condition’ of topics. As a result, the wa marked NP *Nihon-no tabemono* satisfies ‘Topic Binding’.

From a syntactic point of view, Xu & Liu (2007) summarizes an array of the syntactic characterization of a topic. Note that topics should be in the clause-initial (leftmost)
position, preposed to which precedes the predication. The *wa* marked phrase in (21) occupying the leftmost position is evident. To see whether it is in the position preceding the predication, we may adopt the schema (24) in Kitagawa’s approach:

(26) [Top Nihon-no tabemono-wa] [Pred sakana-ga fugu-ga umai]

It should be precisely noted that the internal structure of the predication is not our main concern and we would not further pursue such an issue here.

With the adoption of Kitagawa’s schema, the *wa* marked phrase as a topic structurally precedes the rest of the sentence as a predication, which is in accordance with the syntactic property of ‘topic’. Xu & Liu (2007: 25) also points out the feasibility of the ellipsis of topics, if the succeeding sentences share the same topic with the previous one. This can be realized through the ‘hitching post’ proposed by Iwasaki (2002)⁶. The topic, in the sense of a ‘syntagmatic notion’, is ‘thought of as a “hitching post” to which a predication or multiple predications are added’ (Iwasaki 2002: 244). The following example is derived from (21):

(27) Nihon-no tabemono-wa sakana-ga fugu-ga umai.
Japan-GEN food-TOP fish-NOM blowfish-NOM good
niku-ga gyuniku-ga takai.
meat-NOM beef-NOM expensive
soshite kudamono-ga ringo-ga yuumei-da.
and fruit-NOM apple-NOM famous-COPULA

“Speaking of Japanese food, among fish, blowfish is good. (Speaking of Japanese food,) among meat, beef is expensive. (Speaking of Japanese food,) and among fruit, apples are famous.”

The initial NP *wa* may cross over more than one sentence and acts as the topic for the next sentences, as in (27). The topic ‘Japanese food’ specifies the domain over the three predications.

Based on the semantic and syntactic examination, we propose that the hypothesis that the *wa* marked phrase in question is topic is reasonable.

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⁶ Iwasaki (2002: 244) points out that Mikami (1960) names this as the ‘periodic crossing’ of *wa*. 
In sum, the *wa-ga-ga* sentence structure, or simply the *wa-ga* sentence structure, gives an insight which both a topic (*-wa*) and a subject (*-ga*) co-exist in a sentence, and hence is a piece of evidence supporting Japanese as a ‘topic- and subject- prominent’ language (cf. Iwasaki 2002).

3.2 *Wa sentence*

Tateishi (1994) points out that the case particles like *ga, o* and *wa* do not allow the co-occurrence of each other in a single noun phrase.

(28) *Taroo -ga/o-wa* (Tateishi 1994: 161)

-NOM/ACC-TOP

-Taroo-wa

-Taroo-ga/o

We have a conclusion that *ga* marks the subject and *wa* marks topic in the previous section. Thus, a *wa* sentence without the presence of *ga* in Japanese may imply that the nominative-marked subject turns to be a topic. Following Kitagawa (1982) and Vermeulen (2007), we speculate that for a *wa* sentence, the topic is ‘base-generated in a left-peripheral position, binding a *pro* internally to the clause in their thematic position’ (Vermeulen 2007: 189)⁷. Kitagawa’s work (1982) gives a support of this claim. Observe the example in (11) and (12), repeated here as (29) and (30):

(29) Naomi-wa udon-o tabe-ta.

Naomi-TOP noodle-ACC eat-PAST

“Naomi ate udon noodles.”

(30) a. [V'[N'[N Naomi]]-wa [N'[N udon]]-om [V tabe-ta]]

b. PAS: (*GA Om* tabe-)

c. [Top[N’i Naomi]-wa] [Pred[N’i Pro] [N’udon]-o [V tabe-ta]]

(Kitagawa 1982: 185)

⁷ Kuroda (1992) argues that no topic phrase is base-generated and topicalization always involves movement.
Note that the variable Pro co-refers with the topic Naomi which is generated in-situ, such that the topic can participate in the semantic evaluation required for the satisfaction of Topic Binding.

How about the wa-ga sentence? For the types that the topic is not a θ-marked argument, Kitagawa proposes that there is no anaphoric item like Pro to link up the topic and the NP in the Predication, as presented in (31), repeated from (1):

(31) Hana-wa sakura-ga i-i. (Kitagawa 1982: 186)
    Flower-TOP cherry-blossom-NOM good-PRES
    “As for flowers, cherry blossoms are the best.”
    [Top[N'i hana]-wa] [Pred [N'i sakura]-ga [V i-i]]

On the basis of the absence of Pro, the topic which does not bind any argument in the Predication should be base-generated.

Summarizing, we propose that topics are base-generated, which provides a piece of evidence supporting Japanese has a TopP.

3.3 Wa-wa-ga sentence

In section 4.1 it is observed that Japanese has a topic-subject-prominent construction in terms of the wa-ga-ga sentence structure. In this section we study the syntax and semantics of the wa-wa-ga construction.

Having established that ga marks for subjects and wa marks for topics, the intermediate wa phrase (which we would call the second wa phrase hereafter) between the topic and subject raise a question of what it should be. Observe the following example, repeated from (4):

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8 For this type of sentences, Kuroda (1992) recognizes them as major subject construction, which is generated in situ. For details, see Kuroda (1992: 285-287).
As for civilized countries, as far as men are concerned, the average life span is long.

In (33), the alternation of ga in dansei ‘men’ shows that dansei is interpreted as the nominative-marked subject. With the possibility of wa marking the subject dansei in (32) as well as the recognition of marking topics, we speculate that the particle wa can mark both topics and subjects, refining the assumption in the previous section that wa only marks topics. For the reason that wa can mark both topics and subjects, the nature of the second wa phrase cannot be made explicit now. However, it should not be, at least, a topic as a clause can only have one topic, and such a position has already been occupied by the first wa phrase.

There is a general agreement that the second wa marked phrase shares a contrastive feature (cf. Kuno 1973, Noda 1996, Iwasaki 2002 etc.). Kuno’s well-known account of thematic wa and contrastive wa proposes that when a sentence contains more than one occurrence of wa for a single predicate, only the first assumes to be thematic, whereas ‘all the rest (and probably the first one also) are contrastive’ (Kuno 1973: 48), on the basis of the restriction that a sentence can have merely one thematic wa.

Kuroda (1992), akin to Kuno’s account in the sense of contrastiveness, has an alternative description on the function of the second wa phrase, namely ‘mini-topic’\(^9\). The function of mini-topics is ‘to indicate that a particular pairing is selected as a reality, from among other possible pairings, and then the mini-topic is contrasted with other possible mini-topics given or implied in the pragmatic context’ (Kuroda 1992: 40). The

\(^9\) Mini-topics are not only restricted to the second wa phrase, but refers to ‘topics inside noun phrases and postpositional phrases’ (Kuroda 1992:36). Yet note that in the present study, the second wa phrase would be our main concern.
structure of the mini-topic is the noun phrase, as well as the postpositional phrase, having a topic inside. Following Kuroda’s claim, we have a mini-topicalized noun phrase in (34), derived from (32):

(34) Bunmeikoku-wa[[dansei-wa] heikin zyumyoo]-ga naga-i.

Kuroda proposes that the semantic function of the mini-topic structure is to pragmatically presuppose other possible candidates with a variable degree of explicitness. In light of this, the presupposed table of (34) might be:

(35) Males average lifespan the longest lifespan the shortest lifespan…
    Females average lifespan the longest lifespan the shortest lifespan…

Therefore, the mini-topicalized noun phrase contained in (34) selects average lifespan from among the relevant types of lifespan and associates it with males, and in addition, males with this selective-associative function are contrasted with females whose association with some types of lifespan is only implied and is not explicitly stated. Hence, sentence (34) carries the contrastive meaning as shown below.

(36) Bunmeikoku-wa dansei-wa heikin zyumyoo-ga naga-i.
    Civilized-nation-TOP man-TOP average life-span-NOM long-PRES
    “As for civilized countries, the average lifespan of men is long, (but (as for civilized countries) the average lifespan of women is short).”

In view of the pragmatic presupposition function of the mini-topic, the presumption that the second wa phrase obtains the contrastive feature, as proposed by Kuno and others, is plausible.

Now this would lead to a prediction regarding the difference between the first and the second wa phrase with respect to the syntax, on the basis of Kitagawa’s schema, as specified in (24) earlier. Consider (37) below which reveals the topic construction structure of (32).

(37) [Top[N’i bunmeikoku]-wa] [Pred[Top[N’i dansei]-wa] [Pred[N’i heikinzyumyoo]-ga [V naga-i]]]

From the angle of information structure, the distinction between Given information and New information has to do with recovability, according to Kuno (1973), in which the
information presented is recoverable (i.e. Given) or not recoverable (i.e. New) by the preceding context. There is a usual overlap between the theme-rheme and information structures, such that the theme is typically given information, while the rheme offers new information. It should be noted that with the division of Topic and Predication in Kitagawa’s schema, the theme, normally put in the first position of the clause, syntactically corresponds to the Topic, whereas the rheme, as the remainder of the message, refers to the Predication. Therefore a natural conclusion that there is an overlap between the Topic-Predication and information structures can be drawn, such that Topic typically refers to given information, while Predication refers to new information.

From the viewpoint of the structure in (37), we may observe the syntactic distinction that the first wa phrase, as the Topic of the sentence, is independent of the Predication, whereas the second wa marked phrase is the embedded Topic within the Predication, which may allow more than one occurrence. Based on the fact that there is only one Topic (probably the first wa phrase in the initial position) which can be independent of the Predication, the uniqueness of the first wa phrase is the attestation of the claim that there is merely one topic per clause. With the correspondence of the Topic-Predication structure and the Given-New information, accompanying the basic assumption that the first and second wa phrase correspond to Topic and Predication respectively, the conjecture that the first wa phrase corresponds to given information and the second wa phrase corresponds to new information is reasonable. This also gives an account of why contrastive wa (i.e. the second wa phrase) cannot precede the topic (i.e. the first wa phrase). In the following example, dansei-wa carries a heavy stress to have a contrastive interpretation, while buneikoku-wa is not stressed and does not imply any contrast. Consider the following context which buneikoku-wa will be interpreted as the topic which bears given information, and dansei-wa new information.

(38) bunmeikoku-nituite osiete-kudasai.
    civilized-nation-about tell-please
    “Tell me about civilized countries.”
(39) bunmeikoku-wa DANSEI-WA heikin zyumyoo-ga naga-i.
(40) a. #DANSEI-WA bunmeikoku-wa heikin zyumyoo-ga naga-i.
In (40a), the sentence is unacceptable as the derived topic structure in (40b) shows that bunmeikoku, as the expected given information, is in the Predication which represents the new information, whereas DANSEI, as the new information, is within the Topic which represents the given information. The account of the prohibition of the contrastive wa (i.e. the second wa phrase) preceding the topic (i.e. the first wa phrase), from the information structure point view, is a piece of evidence supporting the claim that a topic should be in the clause-initial position.

In sum, in contrast with Kuno’s classic distinction wa and ga as the contrast between given and new information (cf. Kuno 1973), the present study illustrates a further distinction between the thematic wa and contrastive wa, such that wa as a topic marks given information, while the contrastive wa marks new information when it co-occurs with a thematic wa.

Recall that the topic should be pragmatically bound to the NP in the Predication, which would lead to a selection restriction between the topic and the NP predicate. The semantic relation between topic and predication is akin to that between the first and second wa phrase in the sense that the two wa phrases should be in a certain kind of relation which force them pragmatically link together. Consider the following:

(41) #Bunmeikoku-wa uchyuu-wa heikin
Civilized-nation-TOP universe-TOP average
zyumyoo-ga naga-i.
life-span-NOM long-PRES
“As for civilized countries, as far as the universe is concerned, the average life span is long.”

Though the sentence is syntactically acceptable, the violation of the semantic selection between the first wa phrase Bunmeikoku ‘civilized countries’ and the second wa phrase uchyuu ‘the universe’ causes the meaning of the sentence to be unacceptable.

Now we would examine whether there is a semantic ordering of the first and the second wa phrase. Consider the following:
(42)  a. sakana-wa  fugu-ga  umai.
    fish-TOP  blowfish-NOM  good.
  b. sakana-wa  fugu-wa  umai.
  Blowfish-TOP
  c. *fugu-ga  sakana-wa  umai.
  d *fugu-wa  sakana-wa  umai.

It should be noted that the sentence (42b) is derived from the unmarked form (42a) with the alternation of *ga to wa, such that (42b) in which the nominative-marked phrase fugu in (42a) is marked with wa is acceptable. In contrast with (42b), the unacceptability of (42d) that the order of the first and second wa phrases is inverted is apparently due to the fact that there is the restriction of the semantic ordering on the first and second wa phrases. However, this is not the case. With the accompanying consideration of (42a) and (42c), one may observe that the unacceptability of the scrambling also exists between the topic and the NP in the Predication, such that the hyponym fugu cannot precede the superordinate sakana or else violates the hyponymy relation. Hence, we propose that the semantic ordering of the first and second wa phrases is related to the one of the Topic and the Predication, applicable to the following example:

(43)  a. [bunmeikoku-wa] [dansei-wa]  heikin zyumyoo-ga  naga-i.
  b. [dansei-wa] [bunmeikoku-wa]  heikin zyumyoo-ga  naga-i.

The acceptability of the pairing (43a) and (43b) appears to indicate the allowance of the scrambling of the first and second wa phrase in (43b). However, the corresponding *ga marked sentence also allows the scrambling. An example from Tateishi (1994: 187) is cited below, with some modifications made.

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10 One may doubt that the scrambling of the first and second wa phrase is not allowed in all cases. Yet in fact it can be commonly found, as presented in the following:

(i)  a. [bunmeikoku-wa] [dansei-wa]  heikin zyumyoo-ga  naga-i.
  b. [dansei-wa] [bunmeikoku-wa]  heikin zyumyoo-ga  naga-i.

The pairing of (ia) and (ib) demonstrates the possibility of inverting the order of the first and second wa phrase, despite the fact that (ia) is contrasting dansei ‘males’ with other possible candidate, say, females, while (ib) is contrasting bunmeikoku ‘civilized countries’ with other countries such as uncivilized ones.
As a result, the semantic ordering between the *wa* phrases and the Topic-Predication is closely related.

In summary, based on the fact that *wa* can mark both topics and subjects, we have no way of judging what the second *wa* phrase is. Though the nature of the second *wa* phrase is not explicit, we speculate that it is not a topic, at least, due to the claim of one topic per clause. The characterization of the second *wa* phrase is contrastiveness. From the information structure and syntactic point of view, it differs from the first *wa* phrase in the sense that it occurs in the Predication which offers new information, while the first *wa* phrase as the Topic is a given information. The first and second *wa* phrases require a semantic relation to pragmatically bound to each other in terms of the Topic and Predication, and the acceptability of the semantic ordering between the first and second *wa* phrases is closely in relation with the one between the Topic and Predication.

### 3.4 A related issue: *wa* in *wa-wa-ga* and Chinese sub-topics

Though the nature of the second *wa* phrase is not clear, the fact that it is not a topic is evident. An apparently similar phenomenon can be found in Chinese, namely ‘sub-topic’. As its name suggested, it is not the main topic of a sentence, but rather a topic following it, usually the topicalized objects. An example is cited from Xu & Liu (2007), in which the sub-topic is *liexingjiu* ‘liquor’.

(45) Wo liexingjiu conglai buhe (in Mandarin Pinyin)
    I liquor ever NEG-drink
    “I, as far as liquor is concerned, never drink (it).”
    (Xu & Liu 2007: 52)

As Xu & Liu (2007) points out that Chinese is a topic-prominent language which has a SVO word order, while Japanese is a topic-subject-prominent language which basically is in SOV order, the two languages behave quite differently with respect to ‘topic’. Thus,
we may have difficulty in comparing sub-topics in Chinese and the second wa phrase in Japanese\(^\text{11}\).

However, there is a common feature shared by both sub-topics and the second wa phrase: contrastiveness. Xu & Liu propose that sub-topics are often used for contrastive function, as the ‘preposing of objects is triggered by a [+Focus] feature in VP’ (Ernst & Wang, 1995: 235), which forces a contrastive meaning on them. Consider the following:

(46) Ta yijing dayi ye chuanhao le (in Mandarin Pinyin)
    He alreadycoat also wear-finish SFP

   “He has already worn the coat, (but you have not started dressing yet.)”
   (Xu & Liu 2007: 56)

The focus operator ye ‘also’ triggers the preposing of the object dayi ‘coat’, resulting in a contrastive reading of the sentence. For example, the speaker may contrast the procedure of dressing, as implicitly stated in the translation of (46), or the expectation of one that he has not yet started dressing, such that the scope of the contrastive function depends on the discourse context.

Xu & Liu propose that the sub-topic is a topic within IP, preposed to the position after the subject and adjoined to VP. Interestingly, a similar structure can be found in Japanese. The example is cited from Miyagawa (1997):

(47) a. ??John-ga isoide hon-wa katta.
    John-NOM quickly book-CONTRAST bought

   “John quickly bought A BOOK.”

    John-NOM book-CONTRASTi quickly ti bought
   (Miyagawa 1997: 10)

It should be noted that the contrastive wa forces a contrastive focus interpretation of the object ‘book’ in the two examples. The manner adverbial ‘quickly’ bounds the focused object within the VP in (47a), resulting in a marginal case. Yet if it preposes to the

\(^{11}\) At the level of surface structure, with the object preposed to a position after the subject and adjoined to VP, the word order of a sentence having a sub-topic in Chinese is SOV, which is basic in Japanese.
position between the subject and the VP marked by the adverbial, the sentence becomes acceptable. Miyagawa thus suggests that there should be a focus position between the subject and the VP, based on the requirement that ‘a focused element must move to a position where the focus feature can be appropriately licensed’ (Miyagawa 1997: 10). The claim made by Miyagawa is similar to the one in Xu & Liu that a TopP is generated in between the IP and VP.

4. Conclusions

In this paper, a number of findings have been presented with respect to the characteristics of topics and the distinction between the first and second wa phrases, showing that ‘topic’ in Japanese is a cross-linguistic phenomenon which is in relation to semantics, syntax and information structure.

First, we have argued that wa typically marks topics in the sentences with overt nominative-marked subjects. Three arguments have been presented. First, as the Major Subject construction only allows two subjects in a single clause, the presence of wa in a wa-ga-ga sentence indicates that wa would not mark subjects in this case. Second, the noun phrase marked with wa satisfies the requirement of thematic wa and Topic Binding, as the wa phrase in question is generic and pragmatically bound to the subject in the Predication. Third, it satisfies the syntactic characterization of topics that it is in the clause-initial position and precedes the Predication, along with the feasibility of ellipsis, supported by the test of ‘hitching post’. The co-existence of wa marking topics and ga marking subjects in a clause demonstrates a hallmark of Japanese as a topic-subject-prominent language.

Second, the topic in the wa sentence is base-generated due to the co-reference of an empty pronominal pro with the topic. For the wa-ga sentence, the topic is also base-generated. Since it is not a θ-marked argument, it does not bind any argument and is thus generated in-situ. The results support the claim that Japanese has a TopP, which has yet been discussed and should be left for further studies.
Third, for the reason of one topic per clause, the second *wa* phrase in the *wa-wa-ga* sentence is claimed to be not a topic at least. However, the nature of it has not been made clear and thus the issue should be left for future researches. Regarding the distribution of the particle *wa*, the one in the second *wa* phrase can be altered to the nominative marker *ga*, which indicates that *wa* can mark both topics and subjects, remedying the previous assumption that *wa* only marks topics.

Then we have examined the contrastiveness of the second *wa* phrase in terms of Kuroda’s framework. In light of the interplay of syntax and information structure, the first *wa* phrase in the Topic receives given information, whereas the second one in the Predication corresponds to new information. The result gives an insight of arguing the second *wa* phrase is not allowed to precede the first one, which further supports the claim that a topic is in the clause-initial position. It has been then argued that the ungrammaticality resulted from infelicitous semantic relation and ordering between the first and second *wa* phrases indicates an implicit semantic selection operation has been conducted in topic constructions.

As an extension of the study, we have proposed that the sub-topic in Chinese and the second *wa* phrase in Japanese commonly share the contrastive feature. A noteworthy point has been made that a corresponding structure with the one of the sub-topic that it is preposed to the position after the subject and adjoined to the VP can be found in Japanese. This may provide some inspiration for the further study of both Chinese and Japanese topics.
References


