

- **The “topic” marker *wa***

Background preparation:

- *Heycock (2008) and HW #5*

0. Today's plan

Topics for today's discussion:

- Why is *wa* analyzed as a “topic” marker?
How is this different from a “subject” marker?
- What are the two kinds of *wa*, and how are they different?
- What are some factors that determine when it is appropriate to use *wa* vs. other similar options?

The *wa* examples in these slides are taken or adapted from examples and discussion in *Genki I* (Banno et al. 1999), Kuno (1973), Masuoka (1993), and Heycock (2008).

1. What is *wa*?

- What has the **Agent thematic role** in these examples? What is the **structural subject**?

Syuumatu-**wa** taitei nani-o simasu ka.
weekend-WA usually what-ACC do-FML-NPST C_[+Q]

Kyoo-**wa** Kyooto ni ikimasu.
today-WA Kyoto to go-FML-NPST

- Hint: What are some diagnostics we can use?

1. What is *wa*?

- What has the **Agent thematic role** in these examples? What is the **structural subject**?

Syuumatu-**wa** taitei nani-o simasu ka.
weekend-WA usually what-ACC do-FML-NPST C_[+Q]
nasaimasu
do.SSS-FML-NPST

Kyoo-**wa** Kyooto ni ikimasu.
today-WA Kyoto to go-FML-NPST
irassyaimasu. / mairimasu.
go.SSS-FML-NPST / go.HUMB-FML-NPST

1. What is *wa*?

- What has the **Agent thematic role**? What is the **structural subject**? What is the phrase with *wa*?

Bunpoo-**wa** kono hon de benkyoo-simasita.

grammar-WA this book INST study-do-FML-PAST

Ryoori-**wa** syuzin-ga saisyo ni hasi-o

food-WA INGRP.husband first ADV chopsticks-ACC

tukemasu.

attach-FML-NPAST

1. What is *wa*?

- What is going on here???

Zoo-**wa** hana-ga nagai.

elephant-wa *nose-ga* *long-NPAST*

For fun: The [nursery rhyme](#) that this example may have been inspired by

1. What is *wa*?

- *wa* is **not a subject marker**
 - *wa* can mark phrases that are **not** structural (or logical) subjects
 - *wa* phrases can occur **alongside** phrases that are structural (and logical) subjects
 - *wa* phrases can even appear as “**extra**” phrases in a sentence

1. What is *wa*?

- *wa* is traditionally called a “**topic** marker”
 - Topic in the sense of “aboutness”
 - In some cases, the subject is also the most natural topic
 - But non-subjects are often topics too
- Two types of *wa* can be distinguished
 - What are the two labels used by Heycock (2008)?

2. Two types of *wa*

- Two types of *wa* discussed in Heycock (2008)
 - **Contrastive** *wa*
 - **Noncontrastive** *wa*
(What was the older name for this one?)
- What are some **differences** in structure or meaning or usage that distinguish the two?

2. Two types of *wa*

- What are some **differences** in structure or meaning or usage that distinguish the two?
 - Implicature
 - Distribution in clause types
 - Position
 - Iteration
 - If initial: movement?

2. Two types of *wa*

- **Implicature?**

Noncontrastive <i>wa</i> phrase	Contrastive <i>wa</i> phrase
“convey[s] information... apparently without any implicature about the properties of any other [entity]”	“generate[s] implicatures concerning other entities in the discourse model”

2. Two types of *wa*

- **Distribution in clause types?**

Noncontrastive <i>wa</i> phrase	Contrastive <i>wa</i> phrase
main clause only (except: allowed with certain 'say'/'think' verbs)	main clause and many types of subordinate clause

2. Two types of *wa*

- **Position?**

Noncontrastive <i>wa</i> phrase	Contrastive <i>wa</i> phrase
must be clause-initial	clause-internal or clause-initial

2. Two types of *wa*

- **Iteration** allowed?

Noncontrastive <i>wa</i> phrase	Contrastive <i>wa</i> phrase
~No; only one occurrence per sentence (exception for 'scene-setting' PP or adverb <i>wa</i> phrases)	Yes; multiple occurrences possible in one sentence

2. Two types of *wa*

- If initial, did it undergo **movement**?

Noncontrastive <i>wa</i> phrase	Contrastive <i>wa</i> phrase
If no movement: noncontrastive <i>wa</i>	If movement: contrastive <i>wa</i>

- Note: The syntactic analysis of movement to utterance-initial position in Japanese (including *wa*-topicalization and scrambling in general) is far from settled, so apply these with caution — but Heycock (2008) adopts these diagnostics in her discussion

2. Two types of *wa*

- Some additional differences (Tomioka 2007/WPSI3)

	Noncontrastive	Contrastive
Focal accent? (high H followed by radically reduced pitch)	no	must [?? even if multiple?]
Category of phrase?	NP, PP, CP [also adverbs? -jls] (‘nominal or quasi-nominal’)	essentially anything, including also VP, AP
Referent?	contextually familiar or recoverable entity (‘given/old information’)	can be familiar or novel

2. Two types of *wa*

- Noncontrastive or contrastive *wa* phrases?

Watasi-**wa** [syuumatu ni]-**wa** hon-**wa** yomimasu kedo,
I weekend LOC book read-FML-NPST but

benkyoo-**wa** simasen.
study do-FML-NPST-NEG

3. *wa* versus *ga*

- If *wa* isn't a subject marker, why is it so difficult for learners (and linguists) to predict the usage of *wa* vs. the nominative case suffix **ga**?

3. *wa* versus *ga*

- What kind of *wa* phrase most looks like a “subject”?
 - Main-clause-initial, ‘given’ in the discourse, no special intonation, ‘quasi-nominal’ ... = ???
- Why do you suppose people are less likely to confuse *wa* with an “object marker”?
 - What kind of *wa* phrase is a *wa*-marked object...
 - ...if it remains in object position?
 - ...if it moves to sentence-initial position?

3. *wa* versus *ga*

- Upshot: The most confusing problem for a learner of Japanese (and for a theoretical linguist) is developing a theory to predict
 - what situations will call for noncontrastive topic marking (with *wa*)
 - what situations will call for subject marking (with *ga*)

3. *wa* versus *ga*

- What two types of *ga* phrase are discussed by Heycock (2008) (following Kuno (1973) and others)?

3. *wa* versus *ga*

- What two types of *ga* phrase are discussed by Heycock (2008) (following Kuno (1973) and others)?
 - Neutral description *ga*
 - Exhaustive listing *ga*

3. *wa* versus *ga*

- Are these two sentences completely equivalent?

Watasi-**wa** Tanaka desu.

/ **WA** *COPULA-FML-NPST*

Watasi-**ga** Tanaka desu.

/ **GA** *COPULA-FML-NPST*

Hint: What are some conditions on “neutral description *ga*”? Which *ga* is this?

3. *wa* versus *ga*

Additional examples and discussion

- Handout - [About the “particle” *wa*](#)
 - See especially **section (III)**

3. *wa* versus *ga*

Additional examples and discussion

- In this context...

Kinoo tikaku de densya-no dassen.ziko-ga atta.

yesterday nearby at train-GEN derailling-accident-NOM exist-PAST

...would you use *-wa* or *-ga* in these two follow-up sentences? And, how to gloss?

(a) Gen.in-____ untensyu-no hutyuui datta.

cause-__ driver-GEN carelessness COPULA-PAST

(b) Untensyu-no hutyuui-____ gen.in datta.

driver-GEN carelessness-__ cause COPULA-PAST

3. *wa* versus *ga*

Additional examples and discussion

- What is the difference between these two answers?
- Does A2 have a contrastive or a noncontrastive *wa* phrase? How do we know?

Q: Asita dare-ga ikimasu ka?
 tomorrow *who* *GO-FML-NPST* *C[+Q]*

A1: Nakano-san-**ga** ikimasu.

A2: Nakano-san-**wa** ikimasu.