Today's topic:

- **The "topic" marker *wa***

Background preparation:

- *Tofugu article on* -wa *and* -ga

0. Today's plan

After today's class, you should be able to:

- Apply concepts from the Tofugu article to explain some differences in meaning between -*wa* and -*ga*
- Provide evidence that -*wa* is not a "subject" marker
- Distinguish contrastive and noncontrastive -*wa* based on meaning/usage and structure/distribution
- Draw syntax trees for sentences with *wa*-phrases

Most of the sentence examples in these outline slides are taken or adapted from *Genki I* (Banno et al. 1999), Kuno (1973), Masuoka (1993), and Heycock (2008).

1. Warm-up

- We've noted that a sentence with *-ga* instead of *-wa* often sounds unnatural without a prior context:

  Aya-ga kono hon-o yon-da.

  Aya-NOM this book-ACC read-PST

- **Apply concepts** from the Tofugu reading to **explain** why a sentence like this might be odd on its own and better as an answer to a question such as, "Who read this book?"
  - Hint: What does *-ga* do? What does *-wa* do? Which is appropriate when, and why?

1. Warm-up

- Metaphors/mnemonics from the Tofugu article:
  - -*wa* “shines a spotlight”
  - -*ga* “points a finger”

- Which is more appropriate…
  - for commenting on what someone is doing?
  - for answering a “Who…” question?

2. Topic vs. subject

Work groups | Consider the following example:

Ryoori-wa	syuzin-ga	saisyo ni	hasi-o
food-??	*INGRP.husband*	*first ADV*	*chopsticks-ACC*

tuke-mas-u. (Masuoka 1993)

attach-FML-NPAST

- What has the **agent thematic role**?
- What is the **syntactic subject**?
- Does *ryoori* get a thematic role from the V?

2. Topic vs. subject

- Compare this example:

Syuzin-ga	saisyo ni	**ryoori ni**	hasi-o
INGRP.husband	*first ADV*	*food on*	*chopsticks-ACC*

tuke-mas-u.

attach-FML-NPAST

- What has the **agent thematic role**?
- What is the **syntactic subject**?
- Does *ryoori* get a thematic role from the V?

2. Topic vs. subject

Work groups | Consider the following example:

Bunpoo-wa kono hon de benkyoo+si-masi-ta.

grammar-?? *this book with* *study+do-FML-PAST*

(Masuoka 1993)

- What has the **agent thematic role**?
- What is the **syntactic subject**?
- Does *bunpoo* get a thematic role from the V?

2. Topic vs. subject

- Compare this example:

Watasi-ga kono hon de **bunpoo-o**

I-NOM this book with grammar-ACC

benkyoo+si-masi-ta.

study+do-FML-PAST

- What has the **agent thematic role**?
- What is the **syntactic subject**?
- Does *bunpoo* get a thematic role from the V?

2. Topic vs. subject

- More evidence that a -*wa*-marked phrase is not necessarily the **agent role** or the **syntactic subject**

Syuumatu-**wa** taitei nani-o si-mas-u ka.
weekend-?? *usually* *what-ACC* *do-FML-NPST* *C[+Q]*
(or) **nasai**-mas-u
*do.**SUBJ.HON**-FML-NPST*

Kyoo-**wa** Kyooto ni ik-imas-u.
today-?? *Kyoto to* *go-FML-NPST*
(or) **irassyai**-mas-u / **mair**-imas-u
*go.**SUBJ.HON**-FML-NPST* / *go.**HUMB**-FML-NPST*

2. Topic vs. subject

- How is this example different from the preceding examples?

Zoo-wa	hana-ga	naga-i.
elephant-??	*nose-GA*	*long-NPAST*

  - Does *zoo* get a thematic role from the A?

For fun: The nursery rhyme that this example may have been inspired by

2. Topic vs. subject

- *Conclusion:* **Topics** are **not** the same as **subjects**
  - -*wa* can mark phrases that are **not** syntactic subjects (or agents)
  - -*wa* phrases can occur **alongside** phrases that are syntactic subjects (or agents)
  - -*wa* phrases can even appear as "**extra**" phrases in a sentence, without a correponding "base" position inside the clause

3. Two types of -*wa*

- -*wa* is traditionally called a "**topic** marker"
  - Topic in the sense of "aboutness"

- Two types of -*wa* have been distinguished
  - **Contrastive** -*wa*
  - **Noncontrastive** -*wa*
    (also known as "thematic *wa*")

  These **differ** in meaning, usage, and structure
  (the following discussion is based on Heycock 2008)

3. Two types of *-wa*

- Overview: Differences between contrastive and noncontrastive *-wa* (Heycock 2008)

  Meaning/usage (semantics, pragmatics):

  - Implicature

  Structure/distribution (syntax):

  - Position
  - Iteration
  - Distribution in clause types
  - Syntactic movement

3. Two types of *-wa*

Difference in meaning/usage

- **Implicature** (basically, unstated communication)

Noncontrastive *wa* phrase	**Contrastive *wa* 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" = implicit contrast

3. Two types of *-wa*

Difference in structure/distribution

- **Position**

Noncontrastive *wa* phrase	**Contrastive *wa* phrase**
must be clause-initial	clause-internal or clause-initial

  - If you see a *wa*-phrase inside a clause, it must be…

3. Two types of *-wa*

Difference in structure/distribution

- **Iteration** (repeated occurrence in the clause)

Noncontrastive *wa* phrase	**Contrastive *wa* phrase**
~No; only one occurrence per sentence (exception for 'scene-setting' PP or adverb *wa* phrases: time, place. etc.)	Yes; multiple occurrences possible in one sentence

- If you see more than one *wa*-phrase in a clause, most of them are…
- If the other type occurs, which position is it in?

3. Two types of *-wa*

Difference in structure/distribution

- **Distribution** in **clause types**

Noncontrastive *wa* phrase	**Contrastive *wa* phrase**
main clause only (exception: allowed in subordinate clause under certain 'say'/'think' verbs)	main clause and many types of subordinate clause

  - If you see a *wa*-phrase in a subordinate clause that isn't a "quotation" situation, it is...

3. Two types of *-wa*

Difference in structure/distribution

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

Noncontrastive *wa* phrase	**Contrastive *wa* phrase**
If no movement: noncontrastive *wa*	If movement: contrastive *wa*

- Note: The syntactic analysis of movement to utterance-initial position in Japanese (including *wa*-topicalization and scrambling in general) is far from settled, but we will adopt the general perspective of this proposal from Heycock (2008)

- See nonconfigurationality handout, ex. (8), for landing site

3. 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

3. Two types of -*wa*

- Noncontrastive or contrastive *wa* phrases?

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

benkyoo-**wa**	si-mas-en.
study	*do-FML-NEG*

3. Two types of *-wa*

- The Tofugu article doesn't clearly distinguish the two types of *-wa*

Tofugu article	**Which type of *-wa*?**
"Shines a spotlight"; topic for discussion	Noncontrastive
Implies a contrast	Contrastive
Familiar information	Could be either

4. -*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**?
  - Which type of -*wa* is the difficult one?

4. -*wa* versus -*ga*

- What kind of -*wa* phrase most looks like a “subject”?
  - Main-clause-initial, familiar information, no special intonation, ‘quasi-nominal’ … = ???

- Why do you suppose people are less likely to confuse -*wa* with an “object marker”?
  - Which type of -*wa* is a *wa*-marked object…

    → …if it remains in object position?

    → …if it moves to sentence-initial position?

4. *-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*)

→ Let’s try some examples

4. *-wa* versus *-ga*

- Are these two sentences completely equivalent?

Watasi-**wa** Tanaka desu.

I ***WA*** *COPULA.FML.NPST*

Watasi-**ga** Tanaka desu.

I ***GA*** *COPULA.FML.NPST*

(example from Masuoka 1993; see also Tofugu article)

4. *-wa* versus *-ga*

- In this context... (example from Masuoka 1993)

Kinoo	tikaku de	densya-no	dassen-ziko-ga	at-ta.
yesterday	*nearby at*	*train-GEN*	*derailing-accident-NOM*	*exist-PAST*

...would you use *-wa* or *-ga* in the following? Why?

(a)	Gen.in-____	untensyu-no	hutyuui	da-tta.
	cause-___	*driver-GEN*	*carelessness*	*COPULA-PAST*

(b)	Untensyu-no	hutyuui-____	gen.in	da-tta.
	driver-GEN	*carelessness-___*	*cause*	*COPULA-PAST*

4. -*wa* versus -*ga*

- Consider two possible answers to this question:

Q:	Asita	dare-ga	ik-imas-u	ka?
	tomorrow	*who*	*go-FML-NPST*	*C[+Q]*

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

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

- What is the meaning difference between A1, A2?
- Does A2 have a **contrastive** or a **noncontrastive** *wa*-phrase? How do we know?

4. *-wa* versus *-ga*

Additional examples and discussion

- Handout - The topic marker *wa*
  - See especially **section (III)**

5. The syntax of *wa*-phrases

- What kind of **syntactic structure** would we propose for the following sentences?

(a) Aya-wa kono hon-o yon-da.
Aya-TOP this book-ACC read-PAST

(b) Kono hon-wa Aya-ga yon-da.
This book-WA Aya-NOM read-PAST

(c) Zoo-wa hana-ga nagai.
elephant-WA nose-GA long-NPAST

References

For more about *-wa*:

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Heycock, Caroline. 2008. Japanese *-wa, -ga,* and information structure. In Shigeru Miyagawa and Mamoru Saito (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Linguistics,* 54-83. Oxford: OUP.