Topichood, Givenness, and the Particle *wa* in Japanese: Reconsideration and Reconciliation

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In this talk I present a semantic analysis of (one major function of) the particle *wa* in Japanese, which integrates and reconciles existing, two major lines of analyses: the topichood-based approach and the givenness-based approach.

There has been a great deal of studies on information packaging strategies in Japanese, including and especially the use of the putative "topic-marker" *wa* (see Fry 2003 and Noda 1996, among others, for literature surveys). Scholars generally (but by no means unanimously) agree that the two functions of *wa* should be distinguished: *thematic* and *contrastive*. Opinions are divided, however, on the exact function/meaning of the thematic use of *wa*. Some scholars argue that it marks a topic of the sentence (Kuno 1973; McGloin 1986; Portner and Yabushita 1998, among others), and others say that it indicates old, given, or presupposed information (Hinds and Hinds 1979; Maynard 1980, 1982; Makino 1982, among others). (The term "thematic *wa*" turns out to be quite handy here, as it is used ambiguously in the literature.)

What complicates matters is the "terminological jungle" in the theory of information structure, where such fundamental terms/concepts as topic, old, given, presupposition, etc., have been given various labels, definitions, and interpretations in different frameworks and by different scholars (Lambrecht 1994; Kruijff-Korbayová and Steedman 2005). As a consequence, it is often difficult to evaluate individual analyses of *wa* in terms of their ability of making correct predictions and correct predictions only. On the other hand, recent years have seen important progresses toward an adequate theory of information structure, where insights from the accumulating works are integrated and problematic conceptual confounds are resolved (e.g. Lambrecht 1994; Vallduví and Engdahl 1996; Beaver and Clark forthcoming).

On this ground, I argue that neither the topichood-based approach nor the givenness-based approach constitutes a complete theory of (thematic) *wa*, testing their predictions against empirical data. This is, however, not to say that we need to introduce a third concept, which would further aggravate the terminological minefield. What we need instead is to combine the two approaches in an adequate fashion. Namely, I propose that *wa* marks a topic only when it is associated with certain grammatical functions, such as (direct or indirect) object, while it merely indicates givenness (groundness) when it is associated others, including subject. In other words, the function of a given occurrence of (thematic) *wa* is determined only in conjunction with the grammatical context surrounding it.

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