

## BRIEF SURVEY OF FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE “TOPIC” MARKER *WA* AND THE “SUBJECT” MARKER *GA* IN MODERN JAPANESE

ISAO IORI

### I. *Introduction*

Differences between the particles *wa* and *ga* have long been debated, unsurprisingly given their fundamental roles in Japanese syntax. I would like to survey these differences in this paper, focusing on arguments made by Akira Mikami and my own theory of the pedagogical grammar of Japanese.

### II. *Distribution of Wa and Ga*

To establish the scope of the paper, we will begin by surveying *wa* and *ga* as they are used in several syntactic environments.

#### 1. **Where is *Wa* Used?**

*Wa* is used in the following environments.

##### 1) After case-marked elements<sup>1</sup>

*Wa* is attached to case-marked elements.

(1) Tarou wa kono hon o kai-ta.

TOP this book ACC write-PST<sup>2</sup>

“Taro wrote this book.”

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<sup>1</sup> Japanese marks case by means of particles, which can be divided in two types. The first, simple case particles, are *ga* (nominative), *o* (accusative), *ni* (dative; to, on, at), *de* (in, with), *e* (toward), *to* (with), *kara* (from, since), *made* (until), and *yori* (than). The second, complex case particles, are composed of a simple case particle and a grammaticalized verb: for example, *ni-tuite* (on, about), which is composed of *ni* and *toku* (attach).

<sup>2</sup> The abbreviations used in this paper are as follows:

ACC: accusative, COMP: complementizer, COP: copula, CS: causative, DAT: dative, FT: future, GEN: genitive, HON: honorific, IMPF: imperfective, IND: indicative, NEG: negative, NOM: nominative, PF: perfect, POL: polite, POT: potential, PS: present, PSS: passive, PST: past, Q: question word, SG: singular, SM: simultaneous, SP: sentence particle, TOP: topic

- (2) Kono hon wa Tarou ga kai-ta.

NOM

“(Lit.) This book, Taro wrote it.”

“This book was written by Taro.”

- (3) Zirou ni wa Tarou ga sono hon o age-ta.

to that give-PST

“(Lit.) To Ziro Taro gave that book.”

“Ziro was given that book by Taro.”

- (4) Sono mondai ni-tuite wa watasi ga setumei-si-masu.

That problem on I explain-do-POL

“(Lit.) On that problem I will explain.”

“I will explain that problem.”

As we will see later, in this environment, the nominative and the accusative markers are deleted if they are followed by *wa*.

## 2) After conjunctive particles

*Wa* can be attached to some conjunctive particles.

- (5) Watasi ga ie ni kae-tta toki wa kanozyo wa mou ie ni i-na-katta.

home to return-PST when she already at be-NEG-PST

“When I came home, she had already left.”

- (6) Kyonen Nihon ni kae-tte kara wa kare wa itido mo gaikoku ni it-tei-na-i.

Last year Japan to return since he never abroad to go-IMPF-NEG-PS

“He has never been abroad since he came back to Japan last year.”

## 3) Within predicates

*Wa* can be used within predicates.

- (7) Watasi wa sono tegami o yon-de- wa-i- na-i.<sup>3,4</sup>

letter read-IMPF-TOP-IMPF-NEG-PS

“I have not read that letter yet.”

## 2. Where Is *Ga* Used?

*Ga* is used in the following environments.

### 1) Agent of action, event, state, existence; feeler of emotion

*Ga* is used to denote several types of agent, as well as the feeler of some emotions.

<sup>3</sup> The attachment of *wa* to the stem of verbs and *i*-adjectives necessarily generates contrast, while its attachment to the stem of *na*-adjectives and nouns does not. For example, (a) is a neutral, negative sentence with no contrastive implication, while this nuance is unavoidable in (7): i.e., “I have not read that letter yet, [but I know what it reads].”

(a) Watasi wa sono tegami o yon-dei- na-i.  
read-IMPF-NEG-PS

<sup>4</sup> *-Tei-* and *-dei-* are imperfective morphemes between which *wa* can be inserted.

- (8) Neko ga nezumi o oikake-tei-ru. (Agent of transitive verb)  
 Cat mouse chase-IMPF-PS  
 “A cat is chasing a mouse.”
- (9) Tarou ga puuru de oyoi- dei- ru. (Agent of unergative verb)  
 pool in swim-IMPF-PS  
 “Taro is swimming in the pool.”
- (10) Kazan ga hunka-si-ta. (Agent of event)  
 Volcano erupt-do-PF  
 “A volcano has erupted.”
- (11) Gurasu ga ware-tei-ru. (Agent of state)  
 Glass break-IMPF-PS  
 “A glass is broken.”
- (12) Tukeue no ue ni hon ga aru. (Agent of existence)  
 Table GEN top on be  
 “There is a book on the table.”
- (13) Tarou ga oko- tta. (Feeler of emotion)  
 get angry-PST  
 “Taro got angry.”

## 2) Focus of sentence

*Ga* can also be used to mark the focus of a sentence<sup>5</sup>.

- (14) Kore ga keturon da.  
 This conclusion COP  
 “This is the conclusion.”

## 3) Objects of emotions and physiological phenomena

*Ga* is used to denote objects of emotions and physiological phenomena.

- (15) Watasi wa Hanako ga suki-da<sup>6</sup>.  
 love-PS  
 “I love Hanako.”
- (16) (Watasi wa) atama ga ita-i.  
 head ache-PS  
 “My head hurts.”

## 4) Voice with no change in valence

*Ga* is used in sentences whose predicate contains voice with no change in the number of arguments (i.e., valence).

<sup>5</sup> Kuno (1972, 1973) calls this type of reading the “exhaustive listing” or *souki* in Japanese.

<sup>6</sup> *Sukida* is not a verb but a *na*-adjective. Note that although both *sukida* and *aisuru* are translated as “to love”, the adjective *sukida* denotes its object with *ga*, while the verb *aisuru* takes *o*, the default object marker.

(17) Tarou wa furansugo ga hanas-eru. (Potential)

French speak-POT

“Taro can speak French.”

Compare (17) with (18), which has no voice morpheme<sup>7</sup>.

(18) Tarou wa furansugo o hanas-u.

speak-PS

“Taro speaks French.”

Although the object marker changes from *o* (unmarked) to *ga* (marked), the valence of the argument, two, is unchanged.

##### 5) *Ga*-NP in *wa-ga* constructions

In so-called “*wa-ga* constructions” (“*X wa Y ga Z (da)*.”<sup>8</sup>), both *wa* and *ga* appear simultaneously<sup>9</sup>. Predicates in these constructions are usually adjectives, and cannot be verbs, and exist in two varieties. In Type A cases, “*X wa Z (da)*” becomes ungrammatical (i.e., “*Y ga*” is obligatory), as can be seen from (19) and (19’). In other words, “*Y ga Z (da)*” forms, as a whole, a single predicate. (By the same principle, “*hana ga nagai*” in (19) is functionally equivalent to “*nagai*” in (20).)

(19) Zou wa hana ga naga-i.

Elephant trunk long-PS

“(Lit.) Elephants are long in their trunks.”

“Elephants have long trunks.”

(19’) \*Zou wa nagai.

“\*Elephants are long.”

<sup>7</sup> In potential sentences, and in other sentences with similar voice, although the object marker changes from *o* (unmarked object marker) to *ga* (marked one), the valence, two, is unchanged. Note that in passive and causative sentences, which are the most archetypical voices in Japanese, the number decreases (passive) or increases (causative). For example, (b) has one argument, whereas the passive equivalent (b’) has two, while (c’) has two, and its causative counterpart (c) has three.

(b) Tarou ga nagur-are-ta. (Passive)

hit-PSS-PST

“Taro was hit.”

Cf. (b’) Dareka ga Tarou o nagu-tta.

Someone hit-PST

“Someone hit Taro.”

(c) Tarou wa Hanako ni hon o yom-ase-ta. (Causative)

read-CS-PST

“Taro made Hanako read a/the book.”

Cf. (c’) Hanako ga hon o yon-da.

read-PST

“Hanako read a/the book.”

<sup>8</sup> For more detailed discussions on this construction, see Mikami (1960), Li and Thomson (1976), Kikuchi (1990), Noda (1996), and Iori (2003a).

<sup>9</sup> This construction is called, in some literature, a “double subject construction” or “double nominative construction”. Note that constructions formed by topicalization of accusative NPs like (2) and ones in Environment 4 like (17) are not usually considered *wa-ga* constructions.

(20) Kanozyo no kami wa nagai.

She GEN hair

“(Lit.) Her hair is long.”

“She has long hair.”

In Type B cases, “X *wa* Z (*da*)” is still grammatical and “Y *ga*” is optional<sup>10</sup>.

(21) Kono mati wa oodoori ga nigiyaka-da.

town main street lively-PS

“This town is lively on the main street.”

(21') Kono mati wa nigiyaka-da. (Cf. (19'))

“This town is lively.”

As we have seen, *ga* appears in several syntactic environments. Among them, the *ga*'s in Environments 3) and 4) are “objects” rather than “subjects”, and in Environment 5), the Type A *ga* is a part of a predicate, while the Type B *ga* is not an obligatory element: that is, not all *ga*'s are subjects. To summarize, the *ga*'s that should be compared with *wa* are limited to those in Environments 1) and 2): for our purposes, we limit our discussion to these environments.

### III. *Subject and Topic*

The most important concepts to understanding the differences between *wa* and *ga* are “subject” and “topic”<sup>11</sup>. I will now review some of the discussions on these concepts, focusing on the arguments by Akira Mikami<sup>12</sup>.

#### 1. Mikami's “Subject Abolition Theory”

Mikami is one of the most important researchers in the history of research on *wa* and *ga*. In his day, the mainstream theory was that both *wa* and *ga* denoted the subject of a sentence. Mikami disagreed, insisting that Japanese lacks a “subject” in the same sense as English. His development of this idea turned into what is called “subject abolition theory”, or *syugo haisiron*.

There have been some criticisms of Mikami's theory, most important of which are Harada's (1973) and Shibatani's (1985), and his theory is now considered untenable in the narrow or literal sense. However, if we take a closer look, we can argue that he was on the right track: that is, the most important point of his theory lies not in the negation of the concept of “subject” itself, but rather in the insistence that *wa* and *ga* are syntactically different particles, and therefore they should be given different names<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Takahashi (1977) calls Type B's “Y *ga*” *sokumengo* (“supplemental words”).

<sup>11</sup> “Topic” is synonymous with “theme” as used by M.A.K. Halliday (Halliday 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Mikami spent most of his career as a high school mathematics teacher (although he became a university professor very late in his life), which meant that he was regarded as an “amateur” in academic circles and that most of his grammatical arguments, including those on the “abolition of subject”, were ignored in society. Nonetheless, he made important insights into many aspects of Japanese grammar, and is now regarded as “a father of modern Japanese grammar” (cf. Iori 2003a, Masuoka 2003).



There are other syntactic phenomena in which nominative *ga*'s behave in a "privileged" manner, and they also justify the existence of (grammatical) subject in Japanese<sup>17</sup> (cf. Harada 1973, Shibatani 1985).

### 3. On the Term “Subject”

As you may have noticed already, one of the most important causes of the confusion over *wa* and *ga* is ambiguity surrounding the definition of the term “subject”.

Mikami (1960: Appendix 2) criticizes the treatment of subject in traditional logic, quoting Chauvineau (1957). For example, he argues that (24) should be interpreted as in (25), although it is interpreted as in traditional logic as in (26).

- (24) Mon frère reçoit une lettre.  
My brother (NOM) receive (IND-3SG-PS) a letter (ACC)  
“My brother receives a letter.”
- (25) (Mon frère) reçoit (une letter).
- (26) (Mon frère) (est recevant une letter).  
is receiver  
“(Lit.) My brother is a receiver of a letter.”

To be more precise, in verb sentences like (24) the nominative NP is the argument, or *terme* in French, and has the same status as the accusative NP. Yet “Mon frère” in (24) had been analyzed as an element to which predication is done, and called the “subject”, or *sujet*.

He criticized this logical way of interpreting verb sentences, saying that “transformations” such as from (24) to (26) produce very unnatural expressions in French.

What Mikami insisted was that subject in the logical sense should not be conflated with subject in the grammatical sense (i.e. “grammatical subject”), which is defined by syntactic properties such as agreement. In Western languages these two are identical in most cases, which has made it difficult in Western linguistics to distinguish between them. That was (or in some cases, has been) the main reason for their introduction to Japanese linguistics, since the definitions in mainstream academia were essentially copied from Western linguistics in their entirety (Teramura 1982b). Subject in logical sense is identical to topic, and is sometimes called “topical subject” (Lyons 1977).

<sup>17</sup> There is, however, a little more to say. There are some cases in which the target of honorification is not a nominative-marked NP but a dative-marked NP. For example, in (e) the respect is directed not to “*syakkin* (debt)” which is marked as nominative but to “*Tanaka-sensei*” which is marked as dative.

(e) Tanaka-sensei ni syakkin ga o- ari-nina-ru.

DAT debt NOM HON-is-HON-PS

"Prof. Tanaka has a debt."

Shibatani (1985) explains this situation using the concept “prototype” in his so-called “theory of prototypical subjects” or *syugo-purototaipu-ron*. According to him, most nominative NPs having typical properties of a subject are “prototypical subjects”, while NPs in some sentences in which they behave as “subjects” but are marked with datives are “non-prototypical subjects”.

#### 4. De-thematization and the Distinction between *Wa* and *Ga*

Mikami made many contributions to modern Japanese linguistics. One of them, “de-thematization” (*mudaika*), has significantly influenced the discussion on the distinction between *wa* and *ga*. Consider the following:

- (27) \*Kinou Shinjuku ni it- ta- sou- da- yo. (as a discourse-initial utterance)  
 Yesterday to go-PST-seem-COP-SP  
 \*“(φ seemed to go to Shinjuku yesterday).”<sup>18</sup>

(27) is ungrammatical if it is used in a discourse-initial position, and necessarily evokes a WH-question sentence like (28B)<sup>19</sup>.

- (28) A: Kinou Shinjuku ni it- ta- sou- da- yo. (= (27))  
 B: Who did?

(28A) is ungrammatical because *ga* (nominative) -marked NP — one of the two arguments which *iku* (go) takes (i.e., *ga* (agent) and *ni/e* (direction))— remains unspecified, which violates the principle of “case frame” (cf. Teramura 1982, Iori 2012).

On the other hand, (29) lacks a nominative NP, and is grammatical even in a discourse-initial position.

- (29) Tarou wa kinou Shinjuku ni it-ta-sou-da-yo.  
 TOP

The grammaticality of (29) can be explained by Mikami’s de-thematization. Mikami designed a syntactic device that makes it possible to isolate the propositional part of a sentence, calling it de-thematization<sup>20</sup>.

- (30) [Tarou ga kinou Shinjuku ni it-ta] koto wa zizitu da.  
 NOM thing (COMP) TOP fact COP  
 “It is true that Taro went to Shinjuku yesterday.”

According to Mikami’s theory, (31) is the propositional part of (30) remaining after removing the modality part of the sentence<sup>21</sup>:

- (31) Tarou ga kinou Shinjuku ni it-ta (koto)

<sup>18</sup> Φ indicates there is no overt element.

<sup>19</sup> In this argument, “discourse-initial position” is important. Since Japanese is a so-called pro-drop language, any element whose referent is retrievable from the context can appear in zero form. Therefore, (fB) is grammatical.

(f) A: Tarou wa kinou nani o si-ta ka si- tte -ru?  
 what do-PST Q know-IMP-PS

“Do you know what Taro did yesterday?”

B: φ Kinou Shinjuku ni it-ta-sou-da-yo. (= (27))

<sup>20</sup> Mikami considered a sentence to be composed of a propositional part (“*koto*”, or “thing”) and a modality part (“*muudo*”, or “mood”). *Koto* is a formal noun (*keisiki meisi*) used to convert a sentence to a clause.

<sup>21</sup> As the definition above shows, the modality part cannot be contained in the propositional part, or in the relative clause of *koto*.

- (32) a. Tarou wa kinou Shinjuku ni it-ta. (cf. (29))

TOP

- b. Tarou ga kinou Shinjuku ni it-ta (koto) (= (31))

NOM

Let us compare (32a) with (30):

- (32a) Tarou wa kinou Shinjuku ni it-ta.

TOP

- (30) [Tarou ga kinou Shinjuku ni it-ta] koto wa zizitu da.

NOM

COMP TOP

We can see that the topic is the entire NP headed by *koto* (i.e., “*Tarou ga kinou Shinjuku ni it-ta koto*”) in (30), while it is “Tarou” in (32a) and “Tarou”—now marked with *ga* instead of *wa*—in the NP in (31).

In essence, a *wa*-marked NP cannot exist in a relative clause, so “Tarou”, which is marked with *wa* in (32a), must be marked with *ga* in (30). The change to the relative clause deprives the NP of topicality, downgrading (or “rank-shifting”, to use Halliday’s term) it to a mere non-topical NP. Mikami called this syntactic device that deprives an NP of its topicality “de-thematization”.

Now we can tell why (29) (= (32a)) is grammatical despite lacking a superficial *ga*-marked NP. The propositional part of (29) is (32b), in which *ga*-marked NP exists, clearing the requirement of the principle of case frame. Stated another way, the correspondence between (32a) and (32b) tells us that “*Tarou wa*” in (32a) is the topicalized counterpart of “*Tarou ga*” in (32b).

We can find a similar correspondence in (33a) and (33b), where “*Kono hon wa*” in (33a) is the topicalized counterpart of “*Kono hon o*” in (32b):

- (33) a. Kono hon wa Tarou ga kai-ta. (= (2))

This book TOP NOM write-PST

“(Lit.) This book, Taro wrote it.”

“This book is written by Taro.”

- b. Kono hon o Tarou ga kai-ta (koto)

ACC NOM

(32) and (33) illustrate that when topicalized, the nominative *ga* and accusative *o* are replaced with *wa*. Mikami described this phenomenon as *wa* “concurrently serving as” (“*kenmu-suru*”) *ga* and *o*.

On the other hand, *wa* does not concurrently serve as other case particles besides *ga* and *o*, meaning they are not deleted, as we can see in (34) and (35).

- (34) a. Zirou ni wa Tarou ga sono hon o age-ta. (= (3))

to TOP NOM that book ACC give-PST

“(Lit.) To Ziro Taro gave that book.”

“Taro gave that book to Ziro.”

- b. Zirou ni Tarou ga sono hon o age-ta (koto)

to NOM ACC

- (35) a. Hanako kara wa kinou denwa ga at-ta. (=4)  
           from TOP yesterday phone call NOM be-PST  
       “(Lit.) From Hanako there was a phone call yesterday.”  
       “‘There was a phone call from Hanako yesterday.’”

The findings so far can be formulated as in (36), where (36a) is the topicalized counterpart of (36b). In other words, (36a) and (36b) have a paradigmatic relationship (i.e., topic and non-topic. Cf. Noda 1996).

- (36) a. X-CP-*wa* Y. (X: NP, CP: case particle, Y: comment/rheme)  
       b. X-CP Y (*koto*)  
       c. CP is deleted if *ga* or *o*.

Since the distinction between *wa* and *ga*, the theme of this paper, is a case in (36) where CP=*ga*, the most important difference between *wa* and *ga* is that the latter belongs to the propositional and the former to the communication level of a sentence<sup>22</sup>.

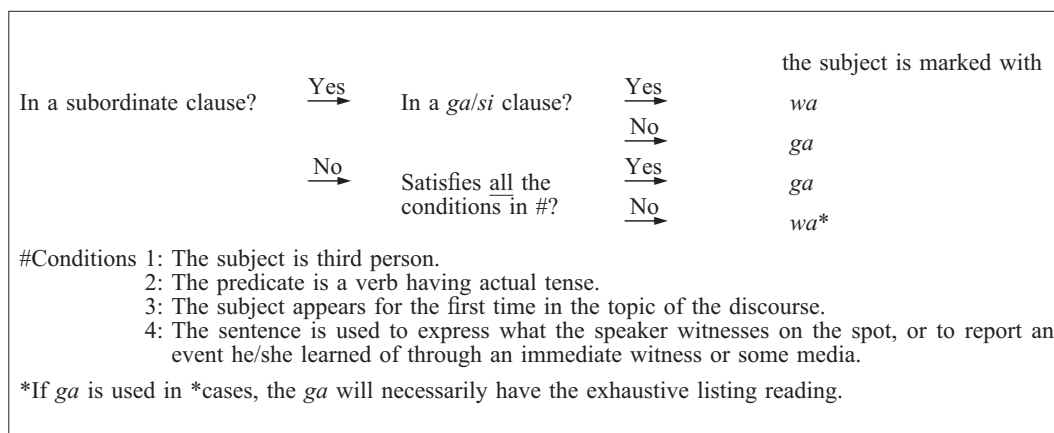
#### IV. Factors Guiding the Choice between *Wa* and *Ga*

I have proposed a flowchart to allow learners of Japanese to distinguish between *wa* and *ga* appropriately (Iori 2016, in press b). In this section, I explain the factors that guide the selection of the two particles based on the chart.

##### 1. Flowchart

Figure 1 is my proposed flowchart for the distinction between *wa* and *ga* (Iori 2016, in press b)<sup>23</sup>.

FIGURE 1 *Wa* vs. *Ga* FLOWCHART



<sup>22</sup> If we adopt Halliday's three-strata model, *wa* operates as a textual metafunction and *ga* as an ideational metafunction (cf. Halliday 1994, Iori 2012).

<sup>23</sup> This flowchart is based on my views on the pedagogical grammar of Japanese (Iori 2015, 2016, in press b).

I will explain the factors regulating their distinction in the rest of this section. Note that the first criterion regards subordinate clauses for cases in which the subject is different from in the main clause. When they are the same, the sentence is treated as a main clause for analysis purposes. In (37), for example, the subject in the subordinate clause (which always precedes the main clause in canonical word order in Japanese) is the same as that in the main clause: i.e. *watasi*. Therefore, the decision to choose *wa* or *ga* is made in the same way as if we were analyzing a main clause.

- (37) Heya ni hait-te, watasi wa nimotu o orosi-ta.  
 Room to come in I TOP baggage take down-PST  
 “I walked into the room and put my baggage on the floor.”

## 2. Factor (1): Subordinate Clause or Main Clause

The first factor is whether the subject is in a main clause or in a subordinate clause. When it is in a subordinate clause, the clause type is relevant to the distinction: its rules are as follows<sup>24</sup>:

- (38) a. The subject is usually marked with *wa* in *ga* or *si* clauses<sup>25</sup>.  
 b. It is marked with *ga* in other clauses.

The next factors are relevant if the subject is in a main clause or in a simple sentence instead.

## 3. Factor (2): Unmarked Cases: Representational Sentence or Not

The second factor is whether the subject belongs to a representational sentence or not. The rules are as follows:

- (39) a. The subject of a representational sentence is marked with *ga*<sup>26</sup>.  
 b. The subject is marked with *wa* in other cases.  
 c. When *ga* is used in (39b), it necessarily receives the exhaustive listing reading.

A representational sentence (or *gensyobyooosyabun* to use Nitta (1991)’s term) is one in which all the conditions in # in Figure 1 are satisfied. To be more precise, a representational sentence is a sentence having actual tense, whose subject is third person and appears for the first time in the topic of the text, and which expresses information the speaker sees on the spot or is reporting from an immediate witness or through some media (cf. Nitta 1991, Lambrecht 1994).

<sup>24</sup> Note that the rules in (38) and (39), which cover all necessary cases for the *wa/ga* distinction, are described in a style based on the concept of markedness. See Iori (2015, 2016, in press b) for the descriptive and theoretical appropriateness of this concept to the present discussion.

<sup>25</sup> *Ga* here is different from the case particle under discussion: it and *si* are conjunctive particles attached to a sentence to convert it to a clause. *Ga* includes its stylistic variations (*ga*, *kedo*, *keredo*, *kedomo*, *keredomo*).

<sup>26</sup> *Ga*’s in representational sentences receive a “neutral description” reading (Kuno 1972), called the *tyuunituzyozyutu* reading in Japanese (Kuno 1973).

#### 4. Factor (3): Marked Cases

Unmarked cases, in which *ga*'s receive neutral description reading, are covered by (39a) and (39b). (39c) regards the specific case where *ga* is used as in (39b), but when *wa* is the default option. In this event, *ga* necessarily receives an exhaustive listing reading, and such sentences are considered “marked” cases.

### V. What Is the Significance of These Factors?

The previous section lists the factors necessary to distinguish between whether *wa* or *ga* should be used. In this section, I will elaborate upon their deeper significance in linguistic terms.

#### 1. Sentencehood

The first factor, covered by the rules in (38), relates to sentencehood.

One of the most commonly discussed issues in Japanese grammar is its hierarchical structure (*kaisoukouzou*). Fujio Minami has made great contributions to the field with this concept.

Minami argued that the Japanese subordinate clauses can be classified into four types hierarchically in accordance with the grammatical categories they can contain. He classified them as A-type, B-type, C-type, and D-type clauses, in order of increasing inclusivity (Minami 1974, 1993).

For example, *nagara*-clauses, which express simultaneity, can contain all arguments the predicate of the clause takes (except for nominative-marked ones), as well as voice (and associated adverbs), but not other grammatical categories such as topic, tense, aspect, polarity, and modality. Accordingly, (40) is grammatical while (41a) and (41b) are ungrammatical.

(40) Uta o utai-nagara Tarou ga hait-te- ki- ta.

Song sing-SM come in-come-PST

“Taro came in singing a song.”

(41) a. \*Uta o utat-tei -nagara Tarou ga hai-tte-ki-ta.

sing-IMPF-SM

b. \*Uta o utai-masu-nagara Tarou ga hai-tte-ki-ta.

sing-POL-SM

Minami classified subordinate clauses in a grammatical model, now called the “Minami model”<sup>27</sup>.

Minami regarded the hierarchy shown in Table 1 as a reflection of sentencehood: subordinate clauses become closer in character to independent sentences the more inclusive they are (Minami 1993). According to this view, (38)’s proposition that *wa* can only appear in *ga*-/*si*-clauses—both C-type clauses having similar properties to independent sentences—can be interpreted to reflect differences in sentencehood: that is, *wa*-marked NPs are higher in

<sup>27</sup> For more detailed discussion on “hierarchical structure”, see Iori (in press a).

TABLE 1 GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES CONTAINABLE IN  
EACH TYPE OF SUBORDINATE CLAUSE

	Grammatical categories allowed
A-type	All arguments (except <i>ga</i> -marked ones <sup>28</sup> ), voice
B-type	All elements A-types can contain, plus <i>ga</i> -marked arguments, aspect, polarity (i.e. negative), and tense
C-type	All elements B-types can contain, plus <i>wa</i> -marked topics, politeness ( <i>teineisa</i> ), <i>darou</i> <sup>29</sup> , and interpersonal modality.
D-type	All grammatical categories <sup>30</sup>

sentencehood, or nearer to independent sentences, than *ga*-marked NPs.

## 2. Judgment Type

The second factor, reflected in the rules in (39), is judgment type.

Kuroda (1972) pointed out that there are two types of judgment in language—thetic judgment and categorical judgment—corresponding to (neutral-description readings of) *ga* and *wa*, respectively. Events are attended to as a whole in thetic judgments, while in categorical judgments they are separated into two parts, respectively containing an event/theme and judgments on it.

For example, (42) expresses a thetic judgment. It describes the event of a dog’s running as a whole, without any mental process involved.

- (42) Inu *ga* hasit-tei-ru.  
Dog run-IMPV-PS  
“A dog is running.”

Kuroda argues that there is no subject in thetic judgments: or more precisely, no subject in logical sense.

On the other hand, (43) expresses a categorical judgment in which the event/theme is “*inu* (dog)”, and the judgment on it is “*hasiru* (run)”. Kuroda argues that there is a subject in logical sense in categorical judgments.

<sup>28</sup> Although Minami excluded *ga*-marked “subjects” from A-type clauses, Takubo (1987) pointed out that they can be contained in some A-type clauses in general use, such as with *youni*:

(g) Koori ga hayaku tokeru youni teeburu ni oi- te-oi- ta.  
Ice soon melt purpose table on put-in advance-PST  
“I put the ice on the table so that it will melt soon.”

<sup>29</sup> *Darou* (“may be”) is the only epistemic modality which can be contained in C-type clauses but not in B-type clauses.

<sup>30</sup> D-types are direct speech clauses as in (h). The only difference between them and independent sentences are whether they are the arguments of a sentence or not.

(h) Kare wa “asita mata kuru” to it- ta.  
He tomorrow again come COMP say-PST  
“He said, ‘I will come again tomorrow’.”

- (43) Inu wa hasi-ru.  
run-PS  
“Dogs run.”

Note that Kuroda’s view, that *wa* and *ga* represent these two types of judgment, is compatible with modern arguments in Japanese linguistics:

Nitta (1991) argues that sentences with *wa*-marked and *ga*-marked subjects represent the two different sentence types, or *bunruikei* to use his term: the former belong to the category *handanbun* (sentences with judgement) and the latter to *gensyoubyouusyabun* (sentences describing events).

Onoe (1973) regards that a sentence with a *wa*-marked subject is divided into two parts, with *wa* serving as the divider. Onoe calls this function *nibunketugou* (in the Japanese literal sense, “once separated [by *wa*] and then combined”) (Onoe 1981). Onoe (1973) also regards sentences with only *ga*-marked subjects as incomplete ones, which project propositions outside the explicit discourse.

Masuoka (1987) divides sentence types using a different split: *zisyoyozyutubun* (sentences describing events) and *zokuseizyozutubun* (sentences describing properties), arguing that the former are usually expressed with *ga*-marked subjects while the latter are with *wa*-marked subjects. He also insists that the former lacks a subject, but not the latter<sup>31</sup>.

### 3. Copula Sentence Type

The third factor, relevant to the rules of (39c), is the distinction between two types of copula sentences.

Let us start with (44). *Watasi* in (44) is marked with *wa* from Figure 1 because it does not satisfy all the conditions under # in Figure 1.

- (44) Watasi wa sono kaigi ni syusseki-su-ru.  
I TOP the meeting at attend-do-FT  
“I will attend the meeting.”

We get (45) if we change *wa* in (44) into *ga*, a cleft sentence in which *watasi* is located in the focus position.

- (45) Watasi ga sono kaigi ni syusseki-su-ru.  
NOM  
“It’s me who will attend the meeting.”

Mikami (1953) pointed out that there are two types of copula sentences: *soteibun* (predicational copula sentence) and *siteibun* (identificational copula sentence)<sup>32</sup>.

*Soteibun* is a copula sentence whose complement NP is non-referential. For example, “*daigakusei*” in (46) is non-referential because it has no specific referent.

<sup>31</sup> Note that “subject” in Kuroda’s argument means subject in logical sense while in Masuoka’s argument it means grammatical subject.

<sup>32</sup> For recent semantic investigations of copula sentences, see Nishiyama (2003) among others.

- (46) Tarou wa daigakusei da.  
           student COP  
       “Taro is a student.”

In *siteibun*, on the other hand, the complement NP is referential. For example, “*sono daigakusei*” in (47) is referential because it has a specific referent<sup>33</sup>.

- (47) Tarou wa sono daigakusei da.  
           the                  COP  
       “Taro is the student.”

Mikami also pointed out that it is only in *siteibun* that one can convert the subject and the complement without changing the meaning. For example, (47)', which is the converted sentence of the *siteibun* (47), has the same meaning.

- (47)' Sono daigakusei ga Tarou da.  
       “It is Taro who is the student.”

However, (46)', the converted version of the *soteibun* (46), is ungrammatical<sup>34</sup>.

- (46)' \*Daigakusei ga Tarou da.  
       “\*A student is Taro.”

Now we can see why (45) functions as a cleft sentence, but not (44).

- (44) Watasi wa sono kaigi ni syusseki-su-ru.  
       (45) Watasi ga sono kaigi ni syusseki-su-ru.

(45) is a *siteibun* corresponding to (47)', from which we can derive (47), which corresponds to (48)<sup>35</sup>. (45)'s correspondence to (48), a cleft sentence, illustrates why (45) itself functions as a cleft sentence.

- (48) Sono kaigi ni syusseki-su-ru no       wa watasi da.  
   COMP TOP  
       “It's me who will attend the meeting.”

#### 4. Definiteness

The last factor relevant to determining whether to choose *wa* or *ga* is the definiteness of the subject NP.

When the subject is definite, it can be marked with *wa* in some cases even if the sentence satisfies conditions 1 to 3 in # in Figure 1. For example, both (49) and (50) are grammatical, even in the discourse-initial position.

- (49) Tarou wa kouen de ason-dei-ru.  
           TOP park in play-IMPF-PS  
       “Taro is playing in the park.”

<sup>33</sup> Note that the same argument holds in English, as the translations of (46) and (47) show.

<sup>34</sup> Note that the English counterpart of (46)' is also ungrammatical.

<sup>35</sup> When the complement of the converted version of *siteibun* is not a noun, as in (48), the complementizer *no* must be supplemented.

(50) Tarou ga kouen de ason-dei-ru.

NOM

“Taro is playing in the park.”

It is, however, not possible for an indefinite NP to be used with *wa* in a discourse-initial position, as (51) shows<sup>36</sup>: only (52) is grammatical in this situation.

(51) #Otokonoko wa kouen de ason-dei-ru.

Boy TOP

“(Intended) A boy is playing in the park.”

(52) Otokonoko ga kouen de ason-dei-ru.

NOM

“A boy is playing in the park.”

Common nouns without a demonstrative pronoun in Japanese are necessarily interpreted indefinitely when subjects in a discourse-initial position; indefinite nouns cannot be a topic in this case (Shibatani 1978). Accordingly, (51) is ungrammatical in a discourse-initial position.

## VI. Summary

In this paper, I surveyed research on *wa* and *ga*, mostly focusing on the arguments of Akira Mikami and my own theory of the pedagogical grammar of Japanese.

Topic and subject are important concepts for typological studies (Li, ed. 1976), and Japanese is greatly advantaged by its possession of markers to distinguish the two concepts overtly (see also Kuroda 1972). It would be my great pleasure if this paper could help to stimulate further research in this field.

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<sup>36</sup> Note that (51) is grammatical if “*otokonoko* (boy)” has been referred to previously, but is ungrammatical in a discourse-initial position. Since Japanese lacks syntactic articles, common nouns without demonstratives can be interpreted definitely or indefinitely according to the context (For more detailed discussion on articles in Japanese, see Iori 2003b).

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