

# NON-TOPICAL *WA*-PHRASES IN JAPANESE

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## 1 Introduction

The information structural status of an item, such as topic and focus, often influences its syntactic distribution. In this paper, I examine the syntactic distribution of topics in Japanese. The particle *wa* in this language is widely believed to be a marker for topic (Kuroda 1965, Kuno 1973). However, I will show that the syntactic distribution of a *wa*-marked item is at odds with the distribution of topics predicted by independent considerations at the interface between syntax and information structure: there are *wa*-marked items that show the predicted distribution of topics, but there are also *wa*-marked items that do not. I argue therefore that *wa*-marking is insufficient for identifying topics and *wa* should not be considered a topic marker. Rather, topics in Japanese should be identified solely on the basis of independently motivated discourse considerations. *Wa*-marked phrases identified as topics in this way display not only a distribution that is compatible with what is predicted by the interface considerations but also a set of syntactic properties that is not shared with those *wa*-phrases

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that are not identified as topics by the same considerations.

It is well-known that at the level of information structure, a focus-background structure can be part of a comment, but a topic-comment structure cannot be embedded inside a background, an observation initially noted by the Prague School (Hajicova, et al 1998).<sup>1</sup> This idea reflects the intuition that topic is an utterance-level notion, while focus is a propositional-level notion, and that utterances operate on propositions (Reinhart 1981, Krifka 2001, 2006, Tomioka 2009).

(1) *Information Structure*

- a. topic [comment FOCUS [background ... .. ]]
- b. \*FOCUS [background topic [comment ... .. ]]

In relation to how such insights may be represented in the syntax, Rizzi (1997) and Neeleman & van de Koot (2008) have proposed that the sister constituent of a fronted topic is interpreted as its comment, while the sister constituent of a fronted focus is interpreted as its background, as illustrated below:

(2) *Syntax – Information structure*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>a. <math>XP_i</math> [<math>_{YP}</math> <math>t_i</math> ]</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">     <math>\underbrace{\hspace{10em}}</math></p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Topic    comment</p> | <p>b. <math>XP_i</math> [<math>_{YP}</math> <math>t_i</math> ]</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">     <math>\underbrace{\hspace{10em}}</math></p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">Focus    background</p> |
|--|---|

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<sup>1</sup> For concreteness, I assume following Vallduví (1992) that information structure is a level of representation that mediates the mapping between surface syntax and a component that deals with pragmatic interpretation of sentences, just as LF mediates the mapping between syntax and semantic interpretation.

Neelemen & van de Koot argue that the two considerations in (1) and (2) together make predictions regarding the syntactic distribution of topic and focus, which are schematised in (3): a focus can follow a fronted topic, but a topic cannot follow a fronted focus. They show in detail that the predictions are borne out for Dutch. The cross-linguistic observation that topics generally precede foci also partially confirm these predictions (Hajičová, et al 1998).

- (3) a. topic<sub>i</sub> [comment FOCUS [background t<sub>i</sub> ]]  
 b. \*FOCUS<sub>i</sub> [background topic [comment t<sub>i</sub> ]]

In Japanese, however, a phrase marked with the putative topic marker *wa* can follow a fronted focus. Taking a constituent that answers the *wh*-part of a question to be focus, the object *John-o* ‘John-acc’ in the following exchange is a focus. As shown in (5b), the focus can be fronted to a position preceding the subject *wa*-phrase. Small capitals indicate an emphatic stress.

- (4) ano inu-wa dare-o kande-simatta no?  
 that dog-wa who-acc bite-ended.up Q  
 ‘Who did the dog bite?’

- (5) a. ano inu-wa kinoo kooen-de JOHN-O kande-simatta  
 that dog-wa yesterday park-at John-acc bite-ended.up  
 b. JOHN<sub>i</sub>-O ano inu-wa kinoo kooen-de t<sub>i</sub> kande-simatta  
 John-acc that dog-wa yesterday park-at bite-ended.up  
 ‘The dog bit John in the park yesterday.’

If the predictions in (3) are correct cross-linguistically, the post-focal *wa*-phrase in (5b) cannot be a topic. I argue that this is indeed the case. Concentrating mainly on *wa*-phrases that are not contrastive ('thematic' in Kuno's (1973) terminology), I provide arguments that it is not a topic, but is simply a discourse anaphoric item, in the sense that it has been previously mentioned (the notion 'topic' will be elaborated below). Specifically, I examine particular discourse contexts that require a topic and show that the word order in (5a), but not the one in (5b), is permitted in such contexts. The distribution of topics is in fact more restricted than what (3) suggests: they must occupy clause-initial position. I will demonstrate further syntactic differences between *wa*-phrases that must occupy clause-initial position and those that can appear in other positions.

In the next section, I will clarify the notion of 'topic' that this paper adopts. Section 3 illustrates that *wa*-phrases must occupy clause-initial position in discourse contexts requiring them to be topics. Section 4 provides evidence that *wa*-marking is available on items that are simply mentioned in the previous discourse. Such a *wa*-phrase need not, and sometimes cannot, appear clause-initially. Section 5 demonstrates that topic *wa*-phrases and discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases are licensed in different syntactic configurations. Some implications of the findings for a theory the syntax-information structure interface are discussed in Section 6.

## **2 'Topic'**

This paper is concerned with what is generally called 'sentence topic' rather than 'discourse topic'. Sentence topic is what the sentence is about and corresponds to a syntactic category, while discourse topic is what the whole discourse is about and can be more abstract (Reinhart 1981). I take the term 'sentence topic' to be further restricted, only referring to items that also affect the discourse topic, for example, by introducing one, re-introduce it, or shifting it from one item to another. This is roughly Givón's (1983) notion of 'chain-initial topic' and

Vallduví's (1992) notion of 'link'.<sup>2</sup>

A sentence topic can be identified as the item *X* in the answer to the request *tell me about X*. Such a request is an explicit instruction to the hearer to introduce *X* as the discourse topic. Thus, *John* in (6B) is a sentence topic.

(6) A: Tell me about John.

B: John likes hiking.

That it is Speaker B who introduces *John* as the discourse topic, and not A, can be seen from the fact that B's utterance is still felicitous even if the request is less specific about what is to be the discourse topic, such as *tell me about someone in your class*.

Sentence topics must be distinguished from items that simply refer back to them (Vallduví 1992, Vallduví & Engdahl 1996, Neeleman et. al. to app.). The point can be illustrated with the following discourse.

(7) a. Maxine was introduced to the queen on her birthday.

b. She was wearing a special dress for the occasion.

Uttered discourse-initially, *Maxine* in the example in (7a) is a sentence topic, introducing Maxine as the new discourse topic. The pronoun *her* in this utterance has the same referent as the discourse topic, but is not itself a sentence topic. It simply refers back to the discourse topic, indicating what other semantic role its referent plays in the event described by the

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<sup>2</sup> I refrain from using these terms however, as Givón also proposes several other types of topics and there are proposals that treat *wa*-phrases as links (e.g. Heycock 1993, Tomioka 2009). The data reported here are not compatible with either of these views.

sentence. By the same logic, I argue that the pronoun *she* in the subsequent utterance in (7b) only refers back to the discourse topic and is not a sentence topic itself. The utterance in (7b) can be described as an all-focus or all-comment structure where the discourse topic has been inherited from the previous utterance. Thus, the sentence in (7b) is understood as about the referent of the subject *she*, but this is so only because *she* happens to be anaphoric to the discourse topic.

The same considerations apply to the following type of exchange:

- (8) a. Who did Max see yesterday?  
b. He saw Rosa yesterday.

The pronoun *he* in (8b) is not a sentence topic. It refers back to the discourse topic Max, which is introduced as such in the preceding question in (8a). Thus, the information structure of the utterance in (8b) is that *Rosa* is the focus and the remaining items constitute the background. It is sometimes assumed for this kind of context that the subject in the answer is a sentence topic (e.g., Reinhart 1981, Lambrecht 1994). However, there appears to be no reason why a pronominal that refers back to a discourse topic should also be a topic. An anaphoric item does not usually inherit the discourse-related properties of its antecedent. A pronoun that refers to a focus is not also therefore a focus, and a pronoun that refers to a contrastive topic is not therefore a contrastive topic.

In English, sentence topics are not necessarily marked overtly and can therefore be difficult to identify. However, the distinction is formerly marked in some languages. For instance, in Catalan, the distinction reflects the direction of dislocation, i.e. left- or right-dislocation (Vallduví 1992). Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl (2007) also report similar syntactic and also prosodic effects of the distinction in Italian and German. I will show below that the

distinction is crucial in explaining the syntactic distribution of *wa*-phrases in Japanese too. In sum, I will use the term ‘topic’ to refer to sentence topic, i.e. a syntactic constituent that the sentence is about, that also affects the discourse topic.

### 3 The syntactic distribution of topics

In Japanese, a topic must appear with *wa* and clause-initially. The point is illustrated below.

The reply in (10b), in which the relevant *wa*-phrase is not in clause-initial position, is infelicitous. The sentence in (10b) is not ungrammatical, as it can be felicitously uttered in an exchange like (4)/(5b).

(9) ano inu-nituite osiete-kudasai.

that dog-about tell-please

‘Tell me about that dog.’

(10) a. ano inu-wa kinoo kooen-de John-o kande-simatta

that dog-wa yesterday park-at John-acc bite-ended.up

b. # John<sub>i</sub>-o ano inu-wa kinoo kooen-de t<sub>i</sub> kande-simatta

John-acc that dog-wa yesterday park-at bite-ended.up

‘The dog bit John in the park yesterday.’

Similarly, if the object in the reply is the topic, it must appear in clause-initial position (the nature of the empty category in (12b) will be discussed in Section 5):

(11) ano boosi-nituite osiete-kudasai

that hat-about tell-please

‘Tell me about that hat.’

- (12) a. ano boosi<sub>i</sub>-wa    John-ga    kinoo    *e<sub>i</sub>*    kaimasita  
           that hat-wa        John-nom   yesterday        bought
- b. #John-ga        ano boosi-wa        kinoo        kaimasita<sup>3</sup>  
           John-nom        that hat-wa        yesterday    bought  
           ‘John bought that hat.’

Contrastive topics display the same pattern. Their typical functions include shifting the topic from one item to another. They are often compared to items that generally bear B-accent in English or a rising pitch accent in German (Jackendoff 1972, Büring 1997, 2003, among others; for Japanese, see Hara 2006, Nakanishi 2007, Oshima 2008). Contrastive topics in Japanese are marked with *wa* and carry an emphatic stress. In the following discourse, information about John is requested in (13). Not knowing the relevant information regarding John, the speaker may provide the information about Bill, as in (14). In doing so, he has shifted the discourse topic from John to Bill, making *Bill-wa* a contrastive topic.<sup>4</sup> As the contrast between (14a) and (14b) demonstrates, *Bill-wa* must appear in clause-initial position.

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<sup>3</sup> For reasons not entirely clear to me, an object *wa*-phrase does not surface easily adjacent to a verb. This may be due to the fact that an unstressed *wa*-phrase requires an intermediate phrase boundary following it (Nakanishi 2001 and references therein), while simplex verbs may not be preceded immediately by an intermediate phrase boundary (Nagahara 1994). Adverbials are inserted to avoid this effect. Following Neeleman & Reinhart (1998), I assume that a structure where the object precedes an adverbial can be base-generated, hence the absence of an empty position in (12b). This does not affect the discussion in the main text.

<sup>4</sup> The set-up of the context is due to Neeleman & van de Koot (2008).

(13) John-wa kinoo-no party-de nani-o tabeta no?

John-wa yesterday-gen party-at what-acc ate Q

‘what did John eat at the party yesterday?’

(14) Hmm, John-wa doo-ka sira-nai kedo,

Hmm, John-wa how-whether know-not but,

‘Well, I don’t know about John, but...’

a. BILL-WA 8-zi-goro MAME-O tabeteita (yo)

Bill-wa 8 o’clock-around beans-acc was.eating particle

b. #MAME<sub>i</sub>-O BILL-WA 8-zi-goro t<sub>i</sub> tabeteita (yo)

beans-acc Bill-wa 8 o’clock-around was.eating particle

‘as for Bill, he was eating beans around 8 o’clock.’

Similarly, in (16), where the object in the answer, *mame-wa* ‘beans-wa’, is the contrastive topic, it must appear clause-initially.

(15) kinoo-no party-de dare-ga pasta-o tabeta no?

yesterday-gen party-at who-nom pasta-acc ate Q

‘who ate the pasta at the party yesterday?’

(16) Hmm, pasta-wa doo-ka sira-nai-kedo,

Hmm, pasta-wa how-whether know-not-but,

‘Well, I don’t know about the pasta, but...’

a. #BILL-GA MAME-WA 8-zi-goro tabeteita (yo)

Bill-nom beans-wa 8 o’clock-around was.eating particle

b. MAME<sub>i</sub>-WA BILL-GA 8-zi-goro t<sub>i</sub> tabeteita (yo)

beans-wa Bill-nom 8 o’clock-around was.eating particle

‘as for the beans, Bill was eating them around 8 o’clock.’

The examples in (13)-(16) demonstrate that the predictions in (3) are generally borne out in Japanese. (14b) and (16b) show, respectively, that a topic cannot follow a fronted focus, but a fronted topic can precede a focus. However, the distribution of topics is obviously more restricted. (16a) shows that a topic cannot follow an in-situ focus, and (10b) and (12b) illustrate that a topic cannot even follow a non-focus argument.

The standard characterisation in the literature is that non-contrastive topics ‘tend’ to appear in a left-peripheral position, allowing for instances like the one in (5b), but contrastive topics need not (see Heycock (2008) for an overview). However, the examples in this section make it clear that both types of topics must appear in clause-initial position. I formulate this observation as in (17) and take it as a trigger for the displacement of *wa*-phrases. In terms of mapping between syntax and information structure, the constraint can be viewed as a reflection of the fact that Japanese transparently represents the topic-comment structure in its syntax, following the idea in (2).<sup>5,6</sup>

(17) Topic is licensed in clause-initial position.

#### **4 Discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases**

According to the constraint in (17), *wa*-phrases in positions other than clause-initial position,

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<sup>5</sup> I will not discuss contrastive *wa*-phrases further here. See Vermeulen (2009) for discussion on contrastive *wa*-phrases.

<sup>6</sup> Adverbials do not seem to count for the purpose of satisfying the clause-initialness of topics. In (16b), for instance, the adverbial *8-zi-goro* ‘8 o’clock-around’ can precede *mame-wa* ‘beans-wa’. I leave this issue for further research.

such as the post-focal one in (5b), cannot be a topic. In this and the next sections, I provide arguments for their non-topical status.

The main factor determining whether a *wa*-phrase must appear in clause-initial position, as in the exchange in (9)/(10), or not, as in the exchange in (4)/(5) is the context set up by the request. The request *tell me about X* in (9) instructs the *wa*-marked *X* in the reply to be a topic. By contrast, questions of the type in (4) introduce the *wa*-phrase as the discourse topic themselves and the *wa*-phrases in the answers are anaphoric items referring back to them. One argument for the topic status of the *wa*-phrase in the question is that it must appear in clause-initial position if the question is uttered discourse-initially. Thus, analogous to the English example in (8b), the sentences in (5) are understood as about the *wa*-phrases, not because they are themselves topics, but because their antecedent is the discourse topic.<sup>7,8</sup> I will call such non-topical *wa*-phrases ‘discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases’.

Some authors have argued that an item that refers back to a discourse topic is also a topic, but of a different kind to one that introduces the discourse topic (e.g Givón 1983, Chafe 1987, Lambrecht 1994). However, a discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrase need not refer back to a

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<sup>7</sup> We cannot, however, rule out the possibility that the clause-initial *wa*-phrase in (5a) is a topic, re-introducing the discourse topic, though somewhat redundantly here. See Vallduví & Engdahl (1996: 474) for similar remarks for English. By contrast, we can be sure that the post-focal *wa*-phrase in (5b) is a discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrase due to (3b) and (17).

<sup>8</sup> One may wonder whether, being a pro-drop language, discourse anaphoric items are better expressed as empty pronominals and thus there might be awkwardness arising from the use of the full DP in (5). It is true that they are often not overtly expressed. However, there is evidence that an item must be mentioned twice before it can be pro-dropped (Clancy 1980). This is in contrast to English, where one mention licenses a subsequent use of a pronominal immediately, as in (8).

discourse topic. The example in (19), for instance, is a felicitous answer to the question in (18). Here, the object *ano hon* ‘that book’ is mentioned in the question, marked with the accusative marker *o*, indicating that it is not a topic, and yet it can be marked with *wa* in the answer. The standard description of an object *wa*-phrase in-situ is that it must bear an emphatic stress and be contrastively interpreted (Saito 1985, Fiengo & McClure 2002, Watanabe 2003, Tomioka 2009). However, in (19), no emphatic stress is required and no contrast is implicated.<sup>9</sup>

(18) Mary-wa ano hon-o tosyokan-de karita no?  
 Mary-wa that book-acc library-at borrowed Q  
 ‘Did Mary borrow that book from the library?’

(19) Ie, Mary-wa ano hon-wa honya-de kaimasita.  
 No, Mary-wa that book-wa book.shop-at bought  
 ‘No, Mary bought the book in the end at the bookshop.’

Further support for the non-topical status of the object *wa*-phrase in the above example comes from the fact that it cannot be fronted. The utterance in (20) is an infelicitous answer to (18). If it is not a topic, there is no trigger for its displacement. Examples such as (19) and (20) demonstrate clearly that previous mention of an item is sufficient for marking it with *wa*. Note that *Mary-wa* in (20) is referring back to the discourse topic introduced by (18), and therefore need not be in clause-initial position.

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<sup>9</sup> Whether or not an object *wa*-phrase can appear in-situ seems to be influenced by whether the preceding subject bears *wa* or the nominative case marker *ga*. If the subject bears *ga*, an object *wa*-phrase in-situ indeed requires an emphatic stress and a contrastive interpretation. See Vermeulen (2008) for discussion.

- (20) #Ie, ano hon<sub>i</sub>-wa Mary-wa honya-de e<sub>i</sub> kaimasita.  
 No, that book-wa Mary-wa book.shop-at bought

## 5 Topicalisation and island

There is a further syntactic difference between topic *wa*-phrases and discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases. There is a consensus in the literature that a non-contrastive *wa*-phrase is base-generated in a left-peripheral position and it can bind a *pro* in a thematic position internally to the clause, as illustrated below (Saito 1985).<sup>10,11</sup>

- (21) XP-wa<sub>i</sub> [<sub>IP</sub> pro<sub>i</sub> ]

This analysis explains the well-known observation that a *wa*-phrase can appear in a non-thematic, left-peripheral position and be construed as an argument inside a relative clause, without violating any island constraints. In the following example, *sono sinsi* ‘that gentleman’ is interpreted as the subject inside the following relative clause. Moreover, it is possible to overtly realise *pro* (Perlmutter 1972, Kuno 1973, Saito 1985).

- (22) sono sinsi<sub>i</sub>-wa [<sub>TP</sub>[<sub>NP</sub>  $\emptyset$ <sub>j</sub>] [<sub>TP</sub> pro<sub>i</sub>/kare<sub>i</sub>-ga e<sub>j</sub> kitei-ta] yoohuku]-ga  
 that gentleman-Top he-nom wearing-Past suit-GA

<sup>10</sup> Clause-initial contrastive topics are usually assumed to have undergone movement, based on facts involving Weak Crossover, resumptive pronouns and parasitic gaps (Hoji 1985).

<sup>11</sup> Kuroda (1988) and Sakai (1994) argue that topicalisation always involves movement.

However, the possibility of linking to a position inside a relative clause is still considered a characteristic of (a construction that can feed into) topicalisation.

yogoretei-ta.

dirty-Past

‘Speaking of that gentleman, the suit (he) was wearing was dirty.’

(modified from Kuno (1973: 249))

It seems reasonable to assume that generating a structure like (21), which involves displacement of XP from its thematic position, requires motivation. I propose that the motivation is the constraint in (17). It seems also reasonable to assume that a discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrase is base-generated in its thematic position in the absence of evidence to the contrary for discourse anaphoric items in general. We then predict a contrast between topic *wa*-phrases and discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases: a structure such as (22) should be possible only if the *wa*-phrase is a topic and not if it is a discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrase.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Kishimoto (2006) claims that *wa*-marked phrases always move to the CP-zone, based on the observation that the focus particle *dake* ‘only’ attached to a tensed verb cannot associate with a *wa*-marked item. The point is illustrated below by the contrast in the available interpretations for a nominative subject and a *wa*-marked subject. He proposes that *dake* undergoes QR at LF, adjoins to TP and consequently associates with any item inside the TP. The fact that the *wa*-marked subject cannot be associated with *dake* shows that it is higher than TP.

(i) John-ga/wa hon-o yonda-dake (da)

John-nom/wa book-acc read-only (cop)

a. ‘Only [John] read the book.’ (not available with *John-wa*)

b. ‘John read only [the book].’

Space limitation prevents a thorough discussion of Kishimoto’s proposal here. However, crucially, he claims that a *wa*-phrase may move to SpecCP covertly. The data in Section 3

The prediction is correct. In responding to the request in (23), *ano kodomo-wa* ‘that child-wa’, occupying clause-initial, non-thematic position in (24), can be construed as an argument inside the following relative clause.

(23) *ano kodomo-nituite osiete-kudasai.*

that child-about tell-please

‘Tell me about that child.’

(24) *ano kodomo<sub>i</sub>-wa kyoo kooen-de [<sub>NP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> *pro<sub>i</sub>* *e<sub>j</sub>* *kinoo katta*] *inu<sub>j</sub>]-ga**

that child-wa today park-in yesterday bought dog-nom

John-o kande-simatta.

John-acc bite-ended.up

‘As for that child, the dog that (he) bought yesterday bit John today in the park.’

To test the prediction for discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases is a little more complex and we need the following ingredients. First, the question must mention the phrase that is to be the discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrase in the answer. Second, it must be possible for the focus in the answer to be fronted to a position preceding the *wa*-phrase to ensure that the latter is a discourse anaphoric item (see footnote 7). Thus, the question must be an object wh-question, as in the exchange in (4)/(5). In addition, object fronting is most natural if the thematic

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show clearly that the constraint in (17) holds at the surface level. The prediction in the main text pertains to overt syntax: unless a *wa*-phrase is base-generated in a left-peripheral position, binding a *pro*, and hence is in a configuration like (21) at the surface level, it cannot take part in a structure like (22). My proposal here is that topic *wa*-phrases, but not discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases, are licensed in this configuration in overt syntax, which is compatible with Kishimoto’s proposal.

relations among other material remained the same in the answer and the question.

Consequently, the question must contain a *wa*-phrase that is already in a non-thematic position, binding a *pro* inside a relative clause, such as (25). The example in (26) shows that a discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrase cannot occupy a non-thematic position and be understood as an argument inside the following relative clause, as predicted.

(25) ano kodomo-wa kooen-de [<sub>NP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> *e<sub>j</sub>* kinoo katta] inu<sub>j</sub>]-ga dare-o kanda no?  
 that child-wa park-at yesterday bought dog-nom who-acc bit Q  
 Lit.: ‘Speaking of that child, who did the dog that he bought yesterday bite in the park?’

(26) # JOHN<sub>k</sub>-O ano kodomo<sub>i</sub>-wa kooen-de [<sub>NP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> *pro<sub>i</sub>* *e<sub>j</sub>* kinoo katta] inu<sub>j</sub>]-ga  
 John-acc that child-wa park-at yesterday bought dog-nom  
 t<sub>k</sub> kande-simatta.  
 bite-ended.up  
 ‘The dog that that child bought yesterday bit John in the park.’

If all *wa*-phrases were topics and licensed uniformly in the syntax as in (21), the contrast between (24) and (26) is unexpected.

## 6 How much information structure is in syntax?

In this section, I discuss the implications of the above findings for a theory of the interface between syntax and information structure. Neeleman & van de Koot (2008) view the schema in (2) as templates that constrain the mapping between syntax and information structure.

These mapping rules are not associated with particular positions in the syntactic structure. An item that is interpreted as focus can undergo movement to an adjoined position internally to IP, for instance. Following Neeleman & van de Koot, I will call this the flexible approach.

An alternative approach to the interface between syntax and information structure is the so-called cartographic approach, where functional projections associated with interpretations such as topic and focus are projected in a rigid order in the CP-domain of a clause (Rizzi 1997, 2004; Watanabe 2003 and Endo 2007 for Japanese). Items that are to be interpreted as topic or focus bear syntactic topic- and focus-features, respectively, and move to the specifier positions of TopicP and FocusP, where the features are checked by the functional heads. Typically, Topic-Phrase is projected recursively above as well as below Focus-projection, as shown in (27).

(27) ... TopP\* FocP TopP\* ...

On the cartographic approach, discourse anaphoric items are very often treated as topics. Thus, they also undergo movement to the specifier position of a TopP (Rizzi 1997, 2004, Belletti 2004, Grewendorf 2005, among others). Considering that I have argued that the Japanese particle *wa* can mark topics as well as discourse anaphoric items, data such as (5), which shows that a *wa*-phrase can precede or follow a fronted focus, may at first sight seem to give support for a clausal structure like (27). Watanabe (2003) and Endo (2007), for example, analyse a *wa*-marked phrases that follows a focus as topic. However, as we saw in Sections 3-5, discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases have a distinct syntactic distribution from topic *wa*-phrases, suggesting that they are unlikely to bear the same syntactic topic-feature and be licensed in the same manner in the syntax.

One may suggest that the post-focal Topic-Phrases are perhaps functional projections associated with discourse anaphoricity instead, bearing the label Disc.Ana.P, for instance.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl (2007) treat the kind of items that I call ‘discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases’ as one of three types of topics (‘familiar topic’) and postulate a corresponding



separate issue from the syntactic representation of a sentence containing a topic. A displaced item is interpreted as a topic by virtue of its sister constituent being interpreted as the comment by the discourse.

One may wonder then why the particle *wa* appears on topics at all. Here, I speculate that there are functional reasons for this. In the case of objects, it would be difficult without the particle to distinguish topicalisation from other kinds structures. Unlike languages such as English and German, Japanese does not have prosodic means to distinguish topic from focus (Jackendoff 1972, Büring 1997; Hara 2006 and references therein for Japanese).<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, a sentence containing an object topic has the same intonation as a sentence in which the object has undergone A-scrambling to above the subject (Ishihara 2001), as in (30). The subject *John-ga*, bears the main stress in both cases. Similarly, a sentence in which an object is a contrastive topic has the same intonation as a sentence with a fronted accusative object, which is interpreted as a contrastive focus, as demonstrated in (31). Here, the main stress falls on the object, with the rest of the sentence deaccented or showing downtrend (Ishihara 2007 and references therein).

(30) ano hon-wa/o          John-ga    yonda.

that book-wa/acc    John-nom   read

(i) with *wa*: ‘Speaking of that book, John read it.’

(ii) with *o*: ‘John read that book.’

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<sup>14</sup> Some researchers argue that Japanese has prosodic strategies indicating pragmatic effects similar to those associated with the B-accent in English (Oshima 2008, Hayashishita 2008). However, these strategies do not systematically distinguish topic in the sense discussed here from focus.

(31) ANO HON-WA/O      John-ga      yonda.

that book-wa/acc      John-nom      read

(i) with *wa*: ‘John read that book(, but perhaps not another book).’

(ii) with *o*: ‘It is that book that John read.’

For subjects, it is widely reported in the literature that a nominative subject in the matrix clause is interpreted as either narrow focus or part of broad focus (‘exhaustive’ and ‘neutral description’ in Kuno’s (1973) terminology; see also Heycock 1993, Tomioka 2009, Kuroda 2005). Thus, in order to receive a non-focal interpretation, which includes topicality, a subject must be marked otherwise and I suggest that *wa* assumes this function. I leave further precise characterisation of the function of *wa* for future research.

## 7 Concluding remarks

I have argued in this paper that the particle *wa* should not be considered a topic marker. It marks topics, but it can also mark discourse anaphoric items. It is therefore insufficient for identifying a topic. Rather, topics should be identified by means motivated by independent discourse considerations. *Wa*-phrases identified as topics in this way display syntactic properties that are not shared with discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases. A topic *wa*-phrase must appear in clause-initial position, while a discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrase can appear in other positions including positions predicted not to be possible for topics by interface considerations. Secondly, in some instances, a discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrase cannot appear in clause-initial position. Finally, a topic *wa*-phrase can appear in a non-thematic, left-peripheral position and be construed as an argument inside a relative clause, but a discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrase cannot. The data observed here are difficult to explain on any account that treats the particle *wa* uniformly as a topic marker, or on the cartographic approach that

proposes a rigid association between discourse-related interpretations and particular functional projections in the syntax.

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