

## Cross-dialectal patterns of focus marking in Japanese cleft constructions

Our understanding of synchronic patterns of morphosyntax can be advanced significantly if we incorporate cross-dialectal perspectives, as well as diachronic insight, when available. In this paper, we examine structural patterns of focus function for two particles, WA and GA, in the cleft construction in three different varieties of the Japonic language family; Standard Japanese (SJ), Kumamoto-Yatsushiro Japanese (KYJ), and Ikema Ryukyuan (IR). We raise two issues concerning the interpretation of focus in SJ and provide morphosemantic evidence that is available in KYJ and IR, but not in SJ.

It has been observed in the literature that there are two types of the cleft construction in SJ.

- (1) a. John-ga kinoo eki de atta no-wa [<sub>Focus</sub> Mary] da  
 John-NOM yesterday station at met person-TOP Mary Copula  
 b. [<sub>Focus</sub> John-ga kinoo eki de atta no]-ga Mary da  
 John-NOM yesterday station at met person-NOM Mary Copula  
 ‘It was Mary who John met at the station yesterday.’  
 ‘The person whom John met at the station yesterday was Mary.’

As shown in (1), the clause headed by the pronominal form *no* can be marked with either the topic particle WA or the nominative particle GA (Kuno, 1973; Noda, 1996). Interestingly, this WA-GA case particle alternation induces a crucial difference in the focus interpretation between the two clefts: In the WA-cleft the focus is on the noun phrase *Mary* in the predicate, a “postposed” focus structure, whereas in the GA-cleft the focus is on the clause *John ga kinoo eki de atta no* seemingly in the subject position, a “preposed” focus structure (Amano, 1996; Sunakawa, 1995). We understand that WA’s role of providing a postposed focus function is not anything new in the history of Japanese if we look at the WA-ZO construction in classical Japanese, like *umashi kuni zo akizushima Yamato no kuni wa* ‘A splendid land, this land of Yamato is’ (Man’yo) (Kasuga, 1968). Given the diachronically delayed development of the nominative particle, however, why GA in (1b) performs the role of focus function rather than that of nominative marking needs to be further explored with respect to the issue of syntactic-pragmatic distinction between the postposed and the preposed focus structures in SJ.

Particularly relevant to this question is the pattern found in Kumamoto-Yatsushiro Japanese (KYJ), a southern Kyushu dialect. In this dialect, GA must be deployed for a focused subject, with the role of nominative marking being left to NO (*Kachan \*ga/n korashita*. ‘(My) mother came.’) (Yoshimura, 1994; Iwasaki & Yoshimura, to appear).

- (2) [<sub>Focus</sub> Yacchiro de toreta suika]-wa sore-n/\*ga umaka yo.  
 Yatsushiro in was taken watermelon-TOP it-NOM/\*FOCUS delicious SFP  
 ‘As for watermelons produced in Yatsushiro, they are delicious!’ (SFP=sentence final particle)  
 (3) a. [<sub>Focus</sub> Gonen mae-ni hitto sita tu]-ga/\*n kou bai  
 five years before hit thing-FOCU/\*NOM this SFP  
 ‘The song that was a big hit five years ago is this.’  
 b. Yappa, [<sub>Focus</sub> kachan-no tukkuta mon]-ga/\*no itiban umaka  
 after all mother-NOM made thing-FOCUS/\*NOM first delicious  
 ‘After all, the foods (my) mother makes are most delicious.’

In (2), because WA is attached to the relative head *suika*, *umaka* ‘delicious’ in the predicate receives a topic/focus interpretation, like *Mary* in (1a) in SJ. Consequently, the resumptive pronoun *sore* ‘it’ for the head noun is not a focus constituent and cannot be marked by GA, a focus particle in KYJ; it must be marked by the nominative NO. Similarly in (3), given the pragmatic relation between the noun clause headed by *tu* or *mon* ‘thing’ and the stative-predicate, the GA marked subject in question must not be a regular subject, but a focused subject like (1b), hence the impossibility of NO. The data from KYJ confirm that the case particle GA involved in the cleft construction like (1b) maps its focus function onto the clause at hand; it is not a nominative particle. [It should be noted that GA can mark a regular nominative subject in SJ sentences such as *yuki ga furi-hajimeta* ‘it began snowing,’ but in KYJ, being a focus particle, it must be translated as ‘it was snow that started falling.’]

A subsequent question concerns the preposed vs. postposed focus function. This distinctive view does not seem to have been well established among Japanese linguists yet (Kumamoto, 2000;

Sunakawa, 2002) partially because an interpretation relies, to a large extent, on the context or situation in which a cleft sentence is uttered in communication. We found, however, Ikema Ryukyuan (IR), a dialect of Miyako spoken in the Ryukyu Islands, has a dedicated focus particle (DU) which indicate the location of focus explicitly. Observe first that DU, which maps the function of focus onto the constituent preceding it, as shown in (4).

- (4) a. Taru-ga        **du**    zzu-u    fautai ga  
       Who-NOM FOCUS fish-ACC *ae* Q  
       ‘Who ate the fish?’  
    b. Mayu-nu        **du**    fautai doo  
       cat-NOM FOCUS ate    SFP  
       ‘The cat ate it.’

Being followed by DU, *taru* ‘who’ and *mayu* ‘cat’ can receive a focus interpretation, respectively (Karimata, 2011). More crucially, the following contrast emerges between the two clefts in IR. Notice that the location of focus is clear in IR in contrast to that in SJ.

- (5) a. hnu hiima        fautai munu-u    timpura    **du**    atai    doo  
       Yesterday day.time    ate thing-TOP tempura FOCUS copula SFP  
       [Kinoo-no hiruma tabeta mono-**wa** tempura da] ‘It was tempura that I ate yesterday’  
    b. hnu hiima        faitai munu (nu)    **du**    tempura    atai doo  
       yesterday day.time ate thing-(NOM) FOCUS tempura copula SFP  
       [Kinoo-no hiruma tabeta mono-**ga** tempura da] ‘The thing that I ate yesterday is tempura’

As shown in the translation, in (5a), a WA-cleft like (1a), the focus particle DU appears in the predicate, rendering a focus reading to the preceding noun, whereas in (5b), a GA-cleft like (1b), DU appears after the nominative subject clause, giving a focus reading to it. While examining the data on focus construction from SJ alone remains speculative, the data from KYJ and IR provide morphological evidence for the hypothesized focus constructions.

We extend our discussion to the question of how plausible the following proposal would be for the distinct assignment of focus function in the two clefts: In the case of WA-cleft focus meaning can be transferred from WA to the relevant constituent by virtue of a concordance relation between the topic WA and the predicate; on the other hand, in the case of GA-cleft it is GA that can map a focus/exhaustive listing onto the constituent in the subject position. We assume that GA marks both a regular and focus subject in SJ, but only a focus subject in KYJ. [GA acquired this focus function as the focus particle ZO disappeared in the history of Japanese] (Yamada, 2001). This research thus goes beyond simple dialectal comparisons of lexical semantics of the morphemes, suggesting that our linguistic knowledge can be significantly advanced by looking at the interface between syntax and semantics/pragmatics synchronically and diachronically across the language varieties.

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