
The Japanese Particle *wa* Most Often Does Not Mark a Topic*

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1 Introduction

It has been widely held that the Japanese particle *wa* in its so-called thematic use is a topic-marker (Heycock 2008; Tomioka 2016 and references therein). This work aims to demonstrate that, contrary to this received wisdom (and in line with Martin 1975; Fiengo and McClure 2002, etc.), most often thematic *wa* merely indicates the *groundhood* (i.e. status as a non-focus), rather than the topichood, of the marked constituent, although it serves as a marker of *contrastive topic* (in Büring's 2003 sense) in limited configurations.

2 The thematic and contrastive uses of *wa*

Since Kuno (1972, 1973), it has been widely recognized that the Japanese particle *wa* has two uses: *thematic* and *contrastive*. There has not been a clear consensus, however, as to where to set the boundary between the two, and how to determine whether a given instance of *wa* is thematic or contrastive, let alone how the two uses are related (see Oshima 2020: 173–174 for some discussion of the last issue).

With Tomioka (2016), I take the view that the primary division is to be made between (i) instances of *wa* occurring on focus items (*wa_F* for short)

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and (ii) ones occurring on non-focus, or ground, items (wa_G for short). In line with Lambrecht (1994) and Rooth (1995), I adopt the following assumptions as to the notions of focus and ground: (i) focus is that semantic component of a sentence that is new and informative (from the hearer’s perspective), and ground (= non-focus) is that semantic component of a sentence that is expected and non-informative (from the hearer’s perspective), and (ii) a sentence meaning may consist either of some focus and some ground or solely of focus, but cannot consist solely of ground (“all-focus” utterances are possible but “all-ground” ones are not).

In Japanese, the focushood and groundhood of constituents are coded with – though not solely with – such tonal features as post-focal reduction and prominence-lending rise. Consequently, oftentimes prosodic cues “disambiguate” a given instance of *wa*-marked phrase (Tomioka 2016; Oshima 2020). To illustrate, in a natural production of (1B), the constituent after the *wa*-phrase “shiitake wa” is *not* affected by post-focal reduction (the process whereby phrase-tonal rises and accent falls within any constituents subsequent to the (last) focus item within a major phrase are compressed; Ishihara 2015); this indicates that the instance of *wa* here is wa_G . In a natural production of (1C), on the other hand, post-focal reduction takes place obligatorily after the *wa*-phrase “eringi wa”; this implies that *wa* here is wa_F .¹

- (1) (B and C went to the forest to collect shiitake (mushrooms) and king oyster mushrooms, and have just come back.)

A: Shiitake to eringi, totte kite
 shiitake and king.oyster.mushroom take.Ger come.Ger
 kureta?

Ben.Pst

‘Did you get us shiitake and king oyster mushrooms?’

B: Gomen, **shiitake wa** mitsukerarenakatta.

sorry shiitake wa_G find.Pot.Neg.Pst

‘Sorry, we couldn’t find any shiitake.’

C: Demo, [**eringi**]_F **wa** haete ta yo.
 but king.oyster.mushroom wa_F grow.Ger Npfv.Pst DP

‘But there were king oyster mushrooms.’

(adapted from Oshima 2020: 170–171)

¹ The abbreviations in glosses are: Acc = accusative, Ben = benefactive auxiliary, Cop = copula, Dat = dative, DAux = discourse auxiliary, DP = discourse particle, Ger = gerund, HonT = honorific title, Inf = infinitive, Neg = negation, NegAux = negative auxiliary, Nom = nominative, Npfv = non-perfective auxiliary, Plt = polite, PossHon = possessor honorific, Pot = potential, Pro = pronoun, Prs = present, Pst = past, SHon = subject honorific.

Furthermore, the *wa*-phrase in (1C) may optionally be accompanied by a prominence-lending rise (Oshima 2006) – a tonal rise that takes place toward the end of a focused constituent – while the one in (1B) cannot.

Note that some might characterize the *wa*-phrase in (1B), as well as the one in (1C), as contrastive, its referent (a mushroom) being contrasted with something else (another mushroom). I will, however, adopt the terminological assumption that “contrastive *wa*” exclusively refers to wa_F (so that the instance of *wa* in (1B) is *not* to be called contrastive *wa*).

Regarding the semantics of wa_F , as in Oshima (2020), I consider it to be a focus alternative quantifier that belongs to the same natural class as *mo* ‘also’, *sae* ‘even’, etc., and that induces the conventional implicature that at least one proposition alternative to the prejacent-proposition is not known (to the speaker) to be true.

3 Thematic *wa* and topichood

The view that thematic *wa* (i.e. wa_G) is a topic-marker has prevailed in the literature. Heycock (2008: 54), for example, remarks that “it has become a truism that Japanese has an overt marker for topic (*wa*)”. The notion of topic, however, is notoriously elusive, making it hard to prove or falsify the thesis that *wa* marks a topic.

Büring (2003) develops an empirically well-grounded account of topic, although he refers to the notion he addresses as “contrastive topic” and states that it is not to be equated with topic as a more general and abstract category.

Note that I use the term contrastive topic here to refer to a linguistic category manifested by linguistic means: in English, a fall-rise pitch accent. It is distinct from more abstract notions such as *topic* [...], *theme* or *(back)ground*, which may but need not be formally marked by intonation or otherwise in a given sentence [...]. I believe, though, that some of the properties attributed to these more abstract categories are in fact properties of contrastive topics in the narrow sense discussed here; hence the choice of term contrastive *topic*.

(Büring 2003: 512)

(2B) exemplifies an English utterance with a contrastive topic (CT), where the CT is associated with the fall-rise pattern ([L+]H* L- H%) commonly called the (*contrastive*) *topic accent*.

- (2) A: What about Fred? What did he eat?
 B: [Fred]_{CT} ate the [beans]_F.
 (L+)H* L- H% H* L- L%
 (adapted from Büring 2003: 511)

Büring (2003) proposes, in brief, that a statement with a CT indicates that the question that it provides an answer to, Q , has one or more “sister” questions (i) that are formed by substituting the CT-marked item in Q with some alternative, and (ii) that have been or are yet to be addressed in the same discourse. (2B), for example, presupposes the presence of a “d(iscourse-)tree” that looks like Figure 1.

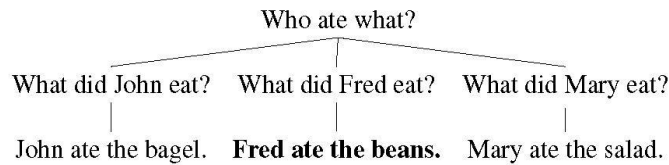


Figure 1: A discourse-tree relevant to (2)

The function of wa_G is clearly different from that of the CT accent. Observe, for example, that in (3), the use of wa_G is felicitous – and obligatory – despite there being no contextually relevant alternative questions to the currently addressed one (i.e. questions about the whereabouts of people other than Yamada).

- (3) A: Nee, Yamada-san iru?
 hey Y.-HonT exist.Prs
 ‘Hey, is Yamada here?’
 B: Yamada-san {wa/#ga} ima shutchoo de Osaka ni
 Y.-HonT {wa_G/Nom} now business.trip by O. Dat
 itte masu.
 go.Ger Npfv.Plt.Prs
 ‘Yamada is on a business trip and is in Osaka now.’

If wa_G is a topic-marker but does not mark a contrastive topic, it must mark a different type of topic – an *aboutness topic*, to tentatively adopt the term used in some previous works, including Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl (2007) and Miyagawa (2017). However, to my knowledge, no reliable criterion has been established to identify, on objective grounds, whether a given constituent counts as an aboutness topic or not. In my opinion, the received supposition that wa_G marks a topic is subject to the problem of circularity and

non-falsifiability, the notion of (aboutness) topic vaguely understood as “what the sentence/utterance is about” and lacking an independent criterion: the function of *wa_G* is to indicate an aboutness topic, which is the information-structural status of a constituent that is indicated by *wa_G*. I will argue that the function of *wa_G* can be accounted for without having recourse to the notion of aboutness topic, at least as far as *wa_G*-marking on argument nominals is concerned. The key ingredients of my account will be: (i) groundhood (non-focushood), (ii) contrastive-topichood, and (iii) the hierarchy of predicate complements.

4 Thematic *wa* and groundhood

4.1 *Wa*-marking on subjects

While *wa_G* has been widely regarded as a topic-marker, some scholars, including Martin (1975), Fiengo and McClure (2002), and Fry (2003), take the view that not all *wa_G*-marked constituents are topics, and the function of *wa_G* has to do with some other notion such as groundhood, backgroundedness, or (discourse-level) cohesion, rather than or in addition to topichood.

In Oshima (2009), it is argued that, in root clauses, a subject must be marked by *wa* if it is a ground item (i.e. if it is not the focus or part thereof); this amounts to saying that, as far as *wa* occurring on a subject is concerned, its function is better characterized as a ground-marker, rather than a topic-marker. This supposition is motivated by a data set like the following:²

- (4) [It is common ground that three students, Mari, Aki, and Emi read the literary works *Yukiguni*, *Kokoro*, and *Rashomon*, respectively (each student read exactly one work, and no two students read the same work).]

Q: Mari ga *Yukiguni* o yonda no wa itsu
 M. Nom *Y.* Acc read.Pst Pro *wa_G* when
 desu ka?
 Cop.Plt.Prs DP

‘When is it that Mari read *Yukiguni*?’

A_a: Mari {**wa/#ga**} *Yukiguni* o [senshuu]_F yomimashita.
 M. {*wa_G/Nom*} *Y.* Acc last.week read.Plt.Pst
 ‘Mari read *Yukiguni* [last week]_F.’

² When *wa* occurs on a nominative or accusative complement, the occurrence of the case-marker (nominative *ga* or accusative *o*) is obligatorily suppressed.

A_b: Yukiguni o Mari {**wa/#ga**} [senshuu]_F yomimashita.
 Y. Acc M. {*wa*_G/Nom} last.week read.Plt.Pst
 ‘idem’

(4A_{a,b}) are admittedly somewhat awkward even with *wa* on the subject, involving repetitions of the argument nominals. A more natural option here is to leave out the explicit arguments or to use a cleft construction with no explicit arguments, as in (5a,b).

(5) [Senshuu]_F {a. yomimashita / b. desu}.
 last.week read.Plt.Pst Cop.Plt.Prs
 ‘(She) read (it) last week.’ / ‘It is last week.’

Still, the contrast between the *ga*- and *wa*-versions of (4A_{a,b}) is evident.

Adding *wa* to the object does not lead to improvement of the acceptability of the *ga*-versions of (4A_{a,b}).

(6) [in reply to (4Q)]
 A_c: #Mari ga Yukiguni **wa** [senshuu]_F yomimashita.
 M. Nom Y. *wa*_G last.week read.Plt.Pst
 ‘Mari read *Yukiguni* [last week]_F.’
 A_d: #Yukiguni **wa** Mari ga [senshuu]_F yomimashita.
 Y. *wa*_G M. Nom last.week read.Plt.Pst
 ‘idem’

The patterns illustrated above leave open two interpretations. The first is that (*wa*_G invariably marks an aboutness topic and) an explicit subject must be an aboutness topic if it is not part of the focus. The second is that (*wa*_G does not necessarily occur on an aboutness topic and) an explicit subject must be marked with *wa*_G whenever it is not part of the focus. I find the second more sensible. The first interpretation amounts to saying that in Japanese, an explicit subject cannot be part of what Vallduví (1992) calls a “tail,” i.e. a component that is part of ground but not a topic (Tail =_{def} Ground – Topic). From the functional perspective, there appears to be no rationale for the expressivity of a language to be constrained in such a way.

Also, this line of analysis (the first interpretation) has a problem of non-falsifiability. It is logically possible for the subject NPs of (4A_{a,b}) to be presented (by the speaker) and perceived (by the hearer) as an aboutness topic, but there is no direct empirical evidence for this, apart from the fact that the form *wa*_G occurs on it. It is possible that we will eventually find such evidence, with a better understanding of the notion of topic from the general-linguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives. For the time being, however, it

seems that an account that does not have recourse to the notion of aboutness topic is to be favored, if such is available.

It has to be noted that *wa_G*-marking on a non-focus subject (of a root clause) is exempted when the subject linearly follows a focus constituent, as in (7A_{e,f}) (Kuno 1972: 288–289; Oshima 2009: 412–413).

- (7) [in reply to (4Q)]
- A_e: [Senshuu]_F Mari {**wa/ga**} *Yukiguni* o yomimashita.
 last.week M. {*wa_G/Nom*} *Y.* Acc read.Plt.Pst
 ‘Mari read *Yukiguni* [last week]_F.’
- A_f: [Senshuu]_F *Yukiguni* o Mari {**wa/ga**} yomimashita.
 last.week *Y.* Acc M. {*wa_G/Nom*} read.Plt.Pst
 ‘idem’

In Oshima (2009), it is proposed that the effect of relative word order between the (non-focus) subject and the focus item on *wa_G*-marking has to do with post-focal reduction, which, like *wa_G*-marking, indicates groundhood. The key difference between (4A_{a,b}) and (7A_{e,f}) is that the subject NPs of the latter are, and the ones of the former are not, within the domain of post-focal reduction. This implies that the groundhood of the subject NPs of (7A_{e,f}) is prosodically coded, while that of the subject NPs of (4A_{a,b}) is not. The contrast between (4A_{a,b}) and (7A_{e,f}) is accounted for by postulating the following constraint.

- (8) When the subject of a root clause is a ground item, its groundhood must be encoded either by *wa_G*-marking or by post-focal reduction (or both).

4.2 *Wa*-marking on objects

As seen in (4A_{a,b}), an object NP does not need to be *wa_G*-marked even if it is a ground item and is outside the domain of post-focal reduction. Indeed, adding *wa_G* to the object NPs of the *wa*-versions of (4A_{a,b}) leads to awkwardness. ((9A_{g,h}) are felicitous in some discourse configurations; see below.)

- (9) [in reply to (4Q)]
- A_g: ??Mari **wa** *Yukiguni* **wa** [senshuu]_F yomimashita.
 M. *wa_G* *Y.* *wa_G* last.week read.Plt.Pst
 ‘Mari read *Yukiguni* [last week]_F.’
- A_h: ??*Yukiguni* **wa** Mari **wa** [senshuu]_F yomimashita.
Y. *wa_G* M. *wa_G* last.week read.Plt.Pst
 ‘idem’

It is not uncommon, on the other hand, for an object to be *wa_G*-marked; furthermore, sometimes *wa_G*-marking on an object is obligatory. In (10A_a), for example, the object must be accompanied by *wa_G*; in (10A_b), where the object is within the domain of post-focal reduction, *wa_G*-marking on the object is optional (and is perhaps somewhat awkward).

- (10) [It is common ground that three students, Mari, Aki, and Emi each read exactly one of the three literary works *Yukiguni*, *Kokoro*, and *Rashomon*, and that no two students read the same work.]

Q: *Yukiguni* o yonda no wa dare desu ka?
 Y. Acc read.Pst Pro *wa_G* who Cop.Plt.Prs DP
 ‘Who is it that read *Yukiguni*?’

A_a: *Yukiguni* {**wa/#o**} [Mari]_F ga yomimashita.
 Y. {*wa_G/Acc*} M. Nom read.Plt.Pst
 ‘[Mari]_F read *Yukiguni*.’

A_b: [Mari]_F **ga** *Yukiguni* {**wa/o**} yomimashita.
 M. Nom Y. {*wa_G/Acc*} read.Plt.Pst
 ‘idem’

(11A) and (12) are additional examples of discourse segments where *wa_G*-marking on an object is obligatory.

- (11) Q: Ken ga chiketto o katta no wa doko
 K. Nom ticket Acc buy.Pst Pro *wa_G* where
 desu ka?
 Cop.Plt.Prs DP

‘Where is it that Ken bought (his) ticket?’

A: Chiketto {**wa/#o**} [kaijoo]_F de kaimashita.
 ticket {*wa_G/Acc*} venue at buy.Plt.Pst
 ‘(He) bought (his) ticket at [the venue]_F.’

- (12) [The speaker admires Kitagawa, his senior colleague. Kitagawa has been suspected of murdering the president of their company.]

Are wa Kitagawa-san ga yatta n ja
 that *wa_G* K.-HonT Nom do.Pst DAux Cop.Inf
 nai. Kitagawa-san ga yareru hazu wa
 NegAux.Prs K.-HonT Nom do.Pot.Prs reason *wa_G*
 nai n da. Datte, shachoo {**wa/#o**}
 NegAux.Prs DAux Cop.Prs because president {*wa_G/Acc*}
 [boku]_F ga koroshita n da mono!
 I Nom kill.Pst DAux Cop.Prs DP

‘It’s not Mr. Kitagawa who did it. There’s no way Mr. Kitagawa could do it. [I]_F killed the president, that’s why!’

(adapted from the short story *Suujiijoo* by Soji Shimada)

The key feature common to (10A_{a,b}), (11A) and (12) is that they do not involve a *wa*_G-marked subject, their subject being either a focus item or left implicit.

I propose that, as a rule, *wa*_G-marking is applied to at most one argument within a (root) clause, and is preferentially applied to one higher in the argument hierarchy, or equivalently, to one with a lower degree of obliqueness. (13) formulates this idea in more precise terms:

(13) ***Wa*_G-Marking on Arguments** (tentative)

Let α be an explicit, non-focal argument of a given root clause.

- a. α must be *wa*_G-marked if no co-argument β of α is such that β is non-focal, explicit, and less oblique than α .
- b. *Wa*_G-marking, however, is exempted (optionally applied) when this condition holds but α occurs within the domain of post-focal reduction.

This principle can be understood as a compromise of conflicting functional motivations: enrichment of information-structural coding on the one hand, and clarification of truth-conditional meaning and avoidance of prolixity on the other. For the purpose of information-structure encoding, it would be more straightforward and effective to apply *wa*_G-marking to all non-focal arguments. This, however, would incur obscurity of the meaning or added complexity of the form; a *wa*_G-marked accusative object (“X *wa*”) may be misinterpreted as a subject, and a *wa*_G-marked dative object (“X *ni wa*”) is more complex than the *wa*-less version.

The idea that arguments (and complements in general) are ranked on a certain scale, and this order is of relevance to various grammatical phenomena, including binding and relative-clause formation, is well-established. With Pollard and Sag (1994), I refer to this scale as the scale of *obliqueness*; I will remain agnostic about the exact nature of this scale, which is open to diverse theoretical interpretations. The following relation will be assumed to hold among complement nominals in Japanese:

(14) **The Obliqueness Hierarchy**

(Nominative or Dative) Subject < Dative Object < Accusative Object
< Adjuncts

The following examples illustrate that *wa*_G-marking is preferentially applied to dative rather than accusative objects, in accordance with the assumed hierarchy.

- (15) [It is common ground that Yumi is interlocutor B's fiancée.]
- A: Yumi-san to goryooshin ga
 Y.-HonT and both.parents.PossHon Nom
 hajimete awareta no wa itsu desu
 for.the.first.time meet.SHon.Pst Pro *wa*_G when Cop.Plt.Prs
 ka?
 DP
 'When is it that Yumi and your parents met for the first time?'
- B_a: Ryooshin ni **wa** Yumi o [shigatsu ni]_F shookai
 both.parents Dat *wa*_G Y. Acc April Dat introduce
 shimashita.
 do.Plt.Pst
 'I introduced Yumi to my parents [in April]_F.'
- B_b: ??Yumi **wa** ryooshin ni [shigatsu ni]_F shookai
 Y. *wa*_G both.parents Dat April Dat introduce
 shimashita.
 do.Plt.Pst
 'idem'

It appears that the contrast in acceptability between (15B_a) and (15B_b) is not as striking as that between (4A_{a,b}) with *wa*_G on the one hand and (6A_{c,d}) on the other. It is plausible that this is because the difference of obliqueness between dative and accusative objects is small in comparison to that between subjects and objects (i.e. Subject << Dative Object < Accusative Object), so that "reversal" is relatively tolerable.

5 Multiple arguments with thematic *wa*

Sentences like (9A_{g,h}), where more than one argument is *wa*_G-marked, are acceptable in certain contexts. (16) illustrates this point.

- (16) [It is common ground that Mari read the three literary works *Yukiguni*, *Kokoro*, and *Rashomon* (and nobody else read anything).]
- Q: 'I heard that Mari read *Rashomon* at the end of May. How about the other two works? When is it that Mari read *Yukiguni* and *Kokoro*, respectively?'

A_a: Mari **wa** *Yukiguni* {**wa/??o**} [senshuu]_F yomimashita.
M. *wa*_G *Y.* {*wa*_G/Acc} last.week read.Plt.Pst
‘Mari read *Yukiguni* [last week]_F.’
A_b: *Yukiguni* {**wa/??o**} Mari **wa** [senshuu]_F yomimashita.
Y. {*wa*_G/Acc} M. *wa*_G last.week read.Plt.Pst
‘idem’

I propose that the occurrences of *wa*_G on the objects of (16A_{a,b}) serve to indicate a contrastive topic in Büring’s (2003) sense. The setting of (16) makes it evident that two sister questions of (16Q) – i.e. when Mari read *Kokoro* and when she read *Rashomon* – are of current interest to (at least one of) the interlocutors, so that *Yukiguni* qualifies as a contrastive topic (Figure 2).

In contrast, in the original context of (9), no sister question of the form ‘When did Mari read *X*?’ is prominent, it being assumed that Mari read no work other than *Yukiguni*.

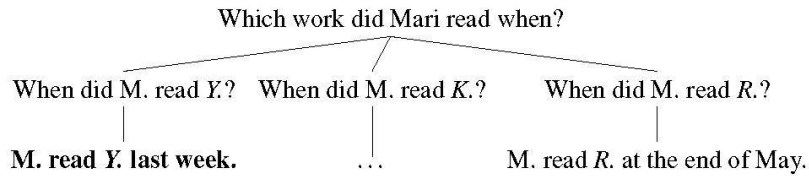


Figure 2: A d-tree relevant to (16)

Kuno (1973) makes the following remark on clauses with multiple occurrences of *wa*.

A given sentence can have only one thematic *wa*: if there is more than one occurrence of *wa* in a sentence, only the first can be thematic: all the rest (and probably the first one also) are contrastive.

(Kuno 1973: 48)

I suggest making two amendments to this generalization. The first is to some extent an issue of terminology. As explained in Section 2, I apply the label contrastive *wa* exclusively to *wa*_F. Consequently, none of the occurrences of *wa* in (16B_{a,b}) would count as contrastive *wa* (although the ones on the objects indicate contrastive-topichood).

The second is concerned with the definition of “second *wa*”. Is the order here to be based on linear precedence, or on the scale of grammatical obliqueness? While Kuno appears to think of the first option, it is the second that leads to empirically more appropriate predictions. The acceptabil-

ity of (16A_b) with *wa_G* on the object indicates that it is the more oblique, rather than the linearly subsequent, of the two *wa_G*-marked arguments whose referent is understood to be “contrasted” with some alternative(s). Note that in the setting of (16), the subject *Mari* does not qualify as a contrastive topic, there being no prominent sister question of the form ‘When did *X* read *Yukiguni*?’.

The amended version of (13) below integrates the effect of contrastive-topichood on *wa_G*-marking.

(17) ***Wa_G*-Marking on Arguments** (amended)

Let α be an explicit, non-focal argument of a given root clause.

- a. α must be *wa_G*-marked if either of conditions (i) and (ii) holds:
 - (i) no co-argument β of α is such that β is non-focal, explicit, and less oblique than α ;
 - (ii) α is a contrastive topic.
- b. *Wa_G*-marking is exempted (is optionally applied), however, when condition (i) holds but α occurs within the domain of post-focal reduction.

(17) (as well as (13)) dictates that a subject, which is the least oblique argument, be marked with *wa_G* whenever it is explicit and non-focal. As such, *wa_G* occurring on a subject does not indicate that it is a topic, in the same way that a label on a bag that says “fruit” does not indicate (though might suggest the possibility) that the content is an apple. An (explicit) subject may happen to be a ground item *and* a contrastive topic (in the same way as the content of the bag may be a fruit *and* an apple), but having the first property alone guarantees *wa_G*-marking on it. (18), a slight variant of (16), illustrates a case where the subject qualifies as a contrastive topic. Observe that the pattern of *wa_G*-marking here is no different from the one seen in (4)/(6), where the subject is a mere ground item and not a contrastive topic.

(18) [It is common ground that three students, Mari, Aki, and Emi read *Yukiguni* (and none of them read anything else).]

Q: ‘I heard that Emi read *Yukiguni* at the end of May. How about the other two students? When is it that Mari and Aki respectively read *Yukiguni*?’

A_a: Mari {**wa/#ga**} *Yukiguni* {**#wa/o**} [senshuu]_F
 M. *wa_G/Nom* Y. *wa_G/Acc* last.week
 yomimashita.
 read.Plt.Pst
 ‘Mari read *Yukiguni* [last week]_F.’

A_b: Yukiguni {#wa/o} Mari {wa/#ga} [senshuu]_F
 Y. wa_G/Acc M. wa_G/Nom last.week
 yomimashita.
 read.Pl_t.Pst
 ‘idem’

The same point holds for *wa_G*-marked objects not co-occurring with another *wa_G*-marked argument; in (19), whether *Matsui-sensei* is a mere ground item or a contrastive topic does not have any bearing on *wa_G*-marking on it.

(19) Matsui-sensei **wa** [watashi]_F ga shootai shimasu.
 M.-HonT wa_G I Nom invite do.Pl_t.Prs
 ‘[I]_F will invite Prof. Matsui.’

6 Conclusion

It was argued that *wa_G* occurring on a subject invariably indicates groundhood, while *wa_G* occurring on an object sometimes indicates contrastive-topichood. I have considered only *wa_G*-marking on arguments, leaving open the question of how that on other types of constituents (e.g. locative adjuncts) is regulated.

Most instances of *wa* occur on a subject. The 2020 version of the NINJAL Parsed Corpus of Modern Japanese³ (560,098 words) contains 17,505 instances of *wa* occurring in matrix environments, among which 13,890 (79.35%) occur on a subject. Some of these instances may be *wa_F*; however, it seems unlikely that this heavily affects the proportion, as presumably *wa_F* occurs much less frequently than *wa_G*. It can thus be concluded that *wa* most often does not mark a topic.

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³ <http://npcmj.ninjal.ac.jp/> (checked on July 20, 2020)

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