

# DROPPING ni IN TOPICALIZED POSITION IN JAPANESE

Noriko Nagata

Technical Report 83094, August 1994  
Department of Modern and Classical Languages  
University of San Francisco

## Abstract

This study investigates the conditions that govern the acceptability of dropping ni (dative case-marker) before wa (topic marker) in topicalized position in Japanese. According to the account presented, the degree of acceptability of dropping ni depends in a systematic way on one's beliefs. Aside from some clearly specifiable exceptions, the dropping of ni before wa in topicalized position is more acceptable when individual's beliefs more unambiguously determine which of the arguments to the verb is marked with ni, given nothing but the verb and the unordered set of its arguments in the sentence.

## 1. Introduction

This paper explores the conditions governing the acceptability of the deletion of the case-marking particle ni in topicalized position.

As has been described in detail in Kuno (1973), Japanese can be characterized broadly as a left-branching, verb-final language. Among the surface features of Japanese syntax, one sees, for example, the use of post-positional particles to mark syntactic and thematic roles such as the nominative case-marker ga, the accusative case-marker o, the dative case-marker ni, the genitive case-marker no, etc. The word order before a verb is relatively flexible because each noun phrase is followed by a case marker that indicates its grammatical function unambiguously. For example, the sentence John ga Mary ni hon o ageta 'John gave Mary a book' (in which John ga is a subject, Mary ni is an indirect object, and hon o is a direct object) may be expressed as John ga hon o Mary ni ageta, Mary ni John ga hon o ageta, hon o John ga Mary ni ageta, and so forth.

Japanese also shares a characteristic with other languages in its treatment of topicalization. Like most languages, Japanese shows a sentence-initial position for topicalized constituents.<sup>1</sup> In such cases, the constituent is marked by the topic marker wa. According to Chafe (1976), the topic of a sentence is a definite noun phrase for which the speaker assumes the listener already knows and can identify the particular referent the speaker has in mind. That is to say, the topic is already available in the discourse context and the sentence following the topic is a comment about the topic. The following examples illustrate topicalization in Japanese:

- (1) a. John ga hayaku okita.  
                  early got up  
          'John got up early.'

- b. John wa hayaku okita.  
TOP  
'As for John, he got up early.'
- (2) a. Minna ga sono hon o yonda.  
everyone the book read  
'Everybody read the book.'
- b. Sono hon wa minna ga yonda.  
TOP  
'As for the book, everybody read (it).'
- (3) a. John ga Tokyo ni itta.  
to went  
'John went to Tokyo.'
- b. Tokyo wa John ga itta.  
TOP  
'As for Tokyo, John went (there).'

There are no case markers before the topic marker wa in the above examples: the topic is immediately followed by wa without any intervening particles before wa. This is not always the case for ni-topicalization, however. Kuno (1973, p. 260) provides the following examples, in which ni cannot drop before wa.

- (4) a. John ga Mary o sono isya ni syookaisita.  
the doctor to introduced  
'John introduced Mary to the doctor.'
- b. Sono isya ni wa John ga Mary o syookaisita.  
TOP  
'To the doctor, John introduced Mary.'
- c.\* Sono isya wa John ga Mary o syookaisita.  
TOP  
'As for the doctor, John introduced Mary (to him).'

In (3b) ni can drop before wa, while in (4c) ni cannot drop before wa. Therefore, the problem of ni-topicalization is that ni can sometimes drop before wa, but not always. Martin (1987) notes that the dative particle ni often drops when it is marked by wa but he is not sure that the option is always available.

Native Japanese speakers frequently drop the particle ni before the particle wa in topicalized position, but they do not always do so. The purpose of this paper is to provide a theory predicting when this construction is deemed more or less acceptable. According to the theory, the strength of the hearer's judgment of the acceptability of dropping ni depends in a

systematic (and curious) way on the hearer's degrees of belief about features of the situation described by the sentence. Since these degrees of belief are affected by context, degrees of acceptability are also sensitive to context. As evidence for the theory, I asked eight native informants (including myself) to rate the acceptability of various examples on a five-point scale: 1 "unacceptable", 2 "seems unacceptable but not sure", 3 "not sure", 4 "seems acceptable but not sure", and 5 "acceptable." The term "acceptable" was used because any reference to "grammaticality" tends to suggest to the speakers that dropping ni is "substandard" or "colloquial" and leads to spurious rejections clearly atypical of ordinary usage.

First, I review several approaches that can be applied to the analysis of ni-topicalization in Japanese.

## 2. Approaches to the Analysis of Ni-topicalization in Japanese

There are four sets of studies concerning the dropping of ni before wa: 1. Kuno (1973) -- which shows parallelism between the deletability of particles before wa and relativizability; 2. Jackendoff (1976, 1983) -- which proposes a lexical-semantic representation of predicates in which arguments to verbs are identified by semantic relations; 3. Hinds (1982) -- which suggests three types of indicators of grammatical relationships in a given utterance; and 4. Li and Thompson (1976) -- which invokes pragmatic features of NPs to determine which NP is the subject in topic sentences.

### 2.1. Kuno's Relativization and Thematization

Kuno (1973) describes relativization in relation to topicalization. He proposes that a topic (a noun phrase) that is immediately followed by wa can be relativized, while a topic that is followed by other particles before wa cannot be relativized. The following examples (pp. 243-4) show parallelisms between the deletability of particles before wa and relativizability. (In Japanese, the relativized NP comes after the relative clause.)

- (6) a. Oozei no hito ga sono mura ni kita.  
many of people the village to came  
'Many people came to the village.'
- b. Sono mura ni wa oozei no hito ga kita.  
'To the village, many people came.'
- c. Sono mura wa oozei no hito ga kita.  
'As for the village, many people came (there).'
- d. oozei no hito ga kita mura  
'the village that many people came to'

- (7) a. John ga sono mura kara kita.  
           the village from came  
       'John came from the village.'
- b. Sono mura kara wa John ga kita.  
       'From the village, John came.'
- c.\* Sono mura wa John ga kita.  
       'As for the village, John came (from there).'
- d.\* John ga kita mura  
       'the village that John came (from there)'

In (6c) ni can be deleted before wa, and thus can be relativized, while in (7c), kara cannot be deleted before wa, and so cannot be relativized. Kuno also notes some counterexamples to this generalization involving the dative particle ni. However, he does not have any explanation as to why dative ni resist the NP-wa pattern and yet are amenable to relativization at the same time.

## 2.2. Jackendoff's Semantic Representation of Predicates

In the field of lexical semantics, many researchers have explored syntactically relevant semantic properties of verbs. Jackendoff (1976, 1983) proposes a semantic representation of predicates in which arguments to verbs are identified according to semantic rather than syntactic relations. He isolates five basic predicates; GO, STAY, BE, CAUSE, and LET. For example, a function GO (x,y,z) represents all verbs of motion such that an event takes place consisting of the motion of x (theme) from y (source) to z (goal). He adds restrictive modifiers on the function GO: GOpositional represents the verbs 'go', 'fall', etc.; GOpossessional represents 'receive', 'inherit', etc.; and GOidentificational for 'become', 'change', etc. In his examples (pp. 102-5), three sentences in (8) are represented by instances of the form GO (x,y,z) in (9):

- (8) a. The rock fell from the roof to the ground.  
       b. Dick received the money.  
       c. The metal turned red.
- (9) a. GOposit (THE ROCK, THE ROOF, THE GROUND)  
       b. GOposs (THE MONEY, y, DICK)  
       c. GOident (THE METAL, y, RED)

As seen above, the representations of sentences which have the same semantic class of verbs are reduced to the same underlying patterns.

According to Jackendoff's semantic classification of verbs, a verb such as kawaru 'change' is a GOidentificational verb and tomaru 'stay' is a STAYpositional verb. Kawaru takes a ni-marked goal/identificational argument, and tomaru takes a ni-marked positional argument. The following examples illustrate the deletability of ni before wa in ni-topicalization with those verbs:

(10) \* Aka wa, sono singoo ga kawatta yo.  
red TOP the traffic light changed  
'As for red, the traffic light turned (to one).'

(11) Sono hoteru wa, John ga tomatta yo.  
the hotel TOP stayed  
'As for the hotel, John stayed (there).'

Dropping ni in (11) is highly acceptable, whereas dropping ni in (10) is very unacceptable. It seems that GOidentificational verbs (e.g. kawaru 'change', naru 'become', etc.) do not allow ni to drop before wa in ni-topicalization. On the other hand, STAYpositional verbs (e.g. tomaru 'stay', taizaisuru 'stay', etc.) allow ni to drop before wa. Therefore, the semantic classes of verbs and their thematic roles seem pertinent to the acceptability of dropping ni before wa.

### 2.3. Hinds' Case Frame Markers

Hinds (1982) states that a sentence is interpretable if at least one of the three types of indicators of grammatical relationships is present. These three indicators are (i) postpositional particles (i.e., ga indicates the subject, ni the indirect object, and o the direct object), (ii) word order (i.e., the canonical word order is 'NP-ga (subject) + NP-ni (indirect object) + NP-o (direct object)'), and (iii) case frame markers. For example, a case frame with a verb, kangaeru 'think', is NP-ga (sentient being) + NP-o (abstract concept) + kangaeru 'think' (p.170). The sentence, kore wa boku itumo kangaete-ru n desu kedo ... 'This, I'm always thinking about ...', includes two noun phrases; kore wa 'this' and boku 'I'. The particle o is replaced by the topic marker wa and the particle ga is dropped after boku. They are not in their normal unmarked order, nor is there any way the postpositional particle wa can help in the interpretation of grammatical relationships. However, the noun phrase kore 'this' refers to an abstract concept which should be marked with o, and boku 'I' refers to a sentient being which should be marked with ga. Therefore, the sentence is interpreted with ease.

As Jackendoff and Hinds show, semantic case frames with certain verbs are important indicators for the deleted particles. However, they are not sufficient to explain the acceptability of dropping ni before wa. Consider the following sentences.

(12) ?/\* Paul wa, John ga okane o karita yo.  
TOP money borrowed  
'As for Paul, John borrowed money (from him).'

(13) Sono ginkoo wa, John ga okane o karita yo.  
the bank TOP money borrowed  
'As for the bank, John borrowed money (from there).'

In (12) and (13), the ni-arguments have the same thematic roles (source/giver) and occur with the same verb karuru 'borrow' (receiving verb), but the degrees of acceptability of (12) and (13) are

considerably different.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, in (13) it is highly acceptable to drop ni before wa, whereas in (12) the acceptability is very low.

#### 2.4. Li and Thompson's Ambiguity of Subjecthood in the Topic Construction

Li and Thompson (1976) take the following examples (p. 472) to show the ambiguity of agency in topic-comment sentences in Lisu:

- (14)      lathyu nya ana khu - a  
          people topic dog bite-declarative  
          'People (topic), they bite dog./People (topic), dogs bite them.'
- (15)      ana nya lathyu khu - a  
          dog topic people bite-declarative  
          'Dogs (topic), they bite people./Dogs (topic), people bite them.'

Sentences (14) and (15) are ambiguous because two NPs preceding a verb could be either the agent or the patient. However, Li and Thompson offer the pragmatic interpretation that the intended meaning would be 'dogs bite people', since people are normally not expected to bite animals. They also point out that semantic properties such as "human-ness" and "animacy" play a significant role in disambiguating sentences which may be otherwise ambiguous because of the lack of any indication of agency or subjecthood.

In Lisu, two arguments preceding a verb could be either the agent or the patient, resulting in ambiguity. In this case, the context of the discourse and features of arguments such as human-ness and animacy are very important factors in disambiguating interpretations. In Japanese, however, the type of ambiguity that occurs in Lisu cannot explain why ni sometimes does not drop before wa, because in Japanese, case markers indicate the grammatical functions and thematic roles of NPs, thereby disambiguating the roles of the NPs. Consider the following sentences.

- (16) ?/\* Mary wa, John ga aityaku o kanzita.  
          TOP                    affection        felt  
          'As for Mary, John felt affection (for her).'
- (17)      Sono kuruma wa, John ga aityaku o kanzita.  
          the    car    TOP                    affection        felt  
          'As for the car, John felt affection (for it).'

In (16) and (17), the ga-marked NP (John) is a subject and agent of the verb (kanzita 'felt'), and the o-marked NP (aityaku 'affection') is both object and theme. Thus, even though ni is dropped before wa, other case markers disambiguate the sentence. The problem is that if sono kuruma 'the car' in (17) is changed to Mary, the degree of acceptability of dropping ni before wa decreases dramatically.<sup>3</sup> Considering the difference between the sentences in (16) and (17), features such as human-ness and animacy of a ni-marked argument and other co-occurring

arguments in a sentence may be one of the determining factors accounting for when ni can drop before wa.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. The Acceptability of Dropping Ni in Topicalized Position in Japanese

First a few special cases:

(A) To begin with, there are sentences in Japanese in which a ni-argument functions as the subject. When the ni-argument is the subject, ni can always be replaced by wa. In fact, when the ni-argument is the subject, ni also alternates with ga. Therefore, the dropping of ni might be considered to result from an alternate derivation of the sentences in which it is ga that drops: ni --> ga --> \_\_. This pattern goes with potential verbs that take the ni-argument of abiliter (the one who is able to do something) and with possessing verbs that take the ni-argument of possessor. The following examples show ni-topicalization with a potential verb wakaru 'can understand' and a possessing verb iru 'have, exist'.

(18) a. John ni/ga nihongo ga wakaru yo.  
          Japanese-language can-understand  
          'John can understand Japanese.'

      b. John wa, nihongo ga wakaru yo.  
          TOP  
          'As for John, he can understand Japanese.'

(19) a. John ni/ga ootoo ga iru yo.  
          younger-brother exist  
          'John has a younger brother.'

      b. John wa, ootoo ga iru yo.  
          TOP  
          'As for John, he has a younger brother.'

(B) There is a constraint on the topicalization of agent ni in passive sentences. The following is an example of ni-topicalization in the passive.

(20) \* Mary wa, John ga butareta yo.  
          TOP  be hit  
          'As for Mary, John was hit (by her).'

In a passive sentence, a wa-marked noun is always interpreted as a subject. This means that if the ni-topic drops ni before wa, it conflicts with the ga-argument in subjecthood. Therefore, the agent ni cannot drop ni before wa in passive sentences.

(C) According to my intuition, verbs of becoming and changing that take the ni-argument of goal/identificational do not seem to allow ni to drop before wa in topicalized sentences under any conditions. Consider the following examples.

- (10) \* Aka wa, sono singoo ga kawatta yo.  
 red TOP the traffic light changed  
 'As for a red color, the traffic light turned (to one).'
- (21) \* Isya wa, John ga natta yo.  
 doctor TOP became  
 'As for a doctor, John became (one).'
- (22) \* Syoogyootosi wa, Pittsburgh ga natta yo.  
 business city TOP became  
 'As for a business city, Pittsburgh became (one).'
- (23) \* Isya wa, John ga musuko o sita yo.  
 doctor TOP son made  
 'As for a doctor, John made (one) of his son.'

The judgment of (21) and (22) varied from unacceptable to acceptable among eight native informants.<sup>5</sup> I leave the case of becoming and changing verbs open for future study.

The primary aim of this paper is to provide unified account of the remaining cases. Consider the pattern of acceptability judgments in the following set of examples:<sup>6</sup>

- (24) a. \* Paul wa, John ga Tom o azuketa yo.  
 TOP leave (leave X in Y's charge)  
 'As for Paul, John left Tom (in his charge).'
- b. Sono hoikuen wa, John ga Tom o azuketa yo.  
 the day-care center TOP leave (leave X in Y's charge)  
 'As for the day-care center, John left Tom (in its charge).'
- (25) a. \* Sono booru wa, John ga kono booru o ateta yo.  
 that ball TOP this ball hit  
 'As for that ball, John hit this ball (to it).'
- b. Sono kabe wa, John ga kono booru o ateta yo.  
 that wall TOP this ball hit  
 'As for that wall, John hit this ball (to it).'
- (26) a. ?/\* Sam wa, John ga mizu o ageta yo.  
 TOP water gave  
 'As for Sam, John gave water (to him).'
- b. Sono hana wa, John ga mizu o ageta yo.  
 the flower TOP water gave  
 'As for the flower, John gave water (to it).'



(27) a. ?/\* Sam wa, John ga butukatta yo.  
           TOP                  bumped  
           'As for Sam, John bumped (against him).'

b. Sono hasira wa, John ga butukatta yo.  
       the pillar TOP                  bumped  
       'As for the pillar, John bumped (against it).'

These examples may be accounted for as follows. Imagine being forced to solve the following problem, which we may call the "ni-identification problem." In this problem, a Japanese sentence is chosen and we are presented with the verb of the sentence together with its arguments, without being told which arguments are assigned which case markers in the sentence. If the sentence in question is (24a), for example, then we are presented with the following sort of table, in which the order of the arguments may be scrambled.

(24) a. \* Paul wa, John ga Tom o azuketa yo.  
           'As for Paul, John left Tom (in his charge).'

verb	azuketa 'left X in Y's charge'
arguments	John Paul Tom

Now we are asked to determine which of the arguments is marked with the particle ni in the unknown sentence, given only the above table. I assume that the verb azuketa 'left X in Y's charge' has three arguments, the agent (marked ga), the recipient (marked ni), and the theme (marked o). Unless background knowledge or the context of discourse provides strong constraints indicating who the recipient must be, it is impossible to determine which of the arguments is marked with ni in the unknown sentence. Therefore, it is impossible to solve this ni-identification problem.

Now let's consider the problem corresponding to example (24b). In this case, we might be given the following table.

(24) b. Sono hoikuen wa, John ga Tom o azuketa yo.  
           'As for the day-care center, John left Tom (in its charge).'

verb	azuketa 'left X in Y's charge'
arguments	Tom John sono hoikuen 'the day-care center'

In the above table, ordinary background knowledge about leaving someone in the day-care center makes it most probable (in the absence of further linguistic context) that the recipient is sono hoikuen 'the day-care center' and the recipient must be marked with ni. Nonetheless, it remains possible that the day-care center has been left in someone's charge (e.g., John or Tom may be a new director of the day-care center).

In example (25a), we are given a table like the following.

- (25) a. \* Sono booru wa, John ga kono booru o ateta yo.  
'As for that ball, John hit this ball (to it).'

verb	ateta 'hit'
arguments	John sono booru 'that ball' kono booru 'this ball'

I assume that the verb ateta 'hit' has three arguments, the agent (marked ga), the destination (marked ni), and the theme (marked o). In this example, one might suspect that the only human argument (John) does the hitting because humans are more likely to be agents than are inanimate objects in the absence of further information. But since the balls are the same except for the relative distance such as sono booru 'that ball (close to the hearer)' and kono booru 'this ball (close to the speaker)', it is impossible to determine whether this or that ball is the destination.

In example (25b), we might be presented with a table like the following.

- (25) b. Sono kabe wa, John ga kono booru o ateta yo.  
'As for that wall, John hit this ball (to it).'

verb	ateta 'hit'
arguments	sono kabe 'the wall' John kono booru 'this ball'

In this case, it is overwhelmingly probable that the destination is the wall, since the wall is not likely to be hit against the ball by a human. Therefore, we will assign the particle ni to sono kabe 'the wall' in the ni-identification problem.

In example (26a), we might be given the following table.

- (26) a. ?/\* Sam wa, John ga mizu o ageta yo.  
'As for Sam, John gave water (to him).'

verb	ageta 'gave'
arguments	Sam mizu 'water' John

I assume that the verb ageta 'gave' has three arguments, the agent (marked ga), the recipient (marked ni), and the theme (marked o). It is almost unavoidable that water is the theme since water rarely gives or receives people, but since the remaining arguments are both male humans differing only in name, it is impossible to tell which is the recipient. That is to say, we cannot determine which argument is marked with ni (though, as always, sufficient linguistic context could overturn this presumption).

In example (26b), we are given the following table.

- (26) b. Sono hana wa, John ga mizu o ageta yo.  
'As for the flower, John gave water (to it).'

verb	ageta 'gave'
arguments	John sono hane 'the flower' mizu 'water'

In this case, it is likely that the water is given by John to the flower, so that we can easily assign the particle ni to sono hana 'the flower' in the ni-identification problem.

Finally, in example (27a), we might be presented with a table like the following.

- (27) a. ?/\* Sam wa, John ga butukatta yo.  
'As for Sam, John bumped (against him).'

verb	butukatta 'bumped'
arguments	John Sam

I assume that the verb butukatta 'bumped' has two arguments, the agent (marked ga), and the destination or patient (marked ni). We can equally expect John and Sam to be either the agent or the patient. Unless more linguistic context is given, it is hard to determine which one is the agent and which one is the patient.

In example (27b), the table is as follows.

- (27) b. Sono hasira wa, John ga butukatta yo.  
'As for the pillar, John bumped (against it).'

verb	butukatta 'bumped'
arguments	sono hasira 'the pillar' John

Our ordinary background knowledge determines that John is the agent and sono hasira 'the pillar' is the patient, since pillars are not supposed to move and bump into anyone. Therefore, we readily assign the particle ni to sono hasira.

Our treatment of the examples together with their associated ni-identification problems, leads to the following account: Let S be a non-topicalized sentence of Japanese in which ni occurs. Let S+wa-ni (i.e., S plus wa minus ni) be the result of topicalizing the ni argument in S and then dropping ni. Let X be a competent Japanese speaker. Furthermore, suppose that S+wa-ni does not fall under one of the special cases (A), (B), or (C) already discussed above. Then, for the remaining cases:

- (28) X judges S+wa-ni to be more acceptable when the beliefs of X more unambiguously determine the solution to the ni-identification problem posed by S.

In other words, when presented with S+wa-ni, X must "pretend" that X is given only the verb and a scrambled list of the arguments to the verb and X judges the string S+wa-ni as more acceptable in case X can determine more unambiguously which of the arguments in the list is marked with ni. This simple rule explains why the acceptability judgments for (24b), (25b), (26b), and (27b) were much higher than those for (24a), (25a), (26a), and (27a). Examples (24b), (25b), (26b), and (27b) are all cases in which ordinary background beliefs make it fairly clear which argument in the table should be marked with ni. On the other hand, (24a), (25a), (26a), and (27a) are all cases in which ordinary beliefs are nearly indifferent as to which verb argument is marked with ni.

According to the present account, the acceptability of dropping ni depends in many cases upon the hearer's beliefs about the verb and its arguments. Since beliefs come in different strengths or degrees and since degrees of belief can shift in light of all sorts of factors, it should come as no surprise that judgments concerning ni also come in different degrees. The acceptability of (24b) would be stronger if Tom in (24b) Sono hoikuen wa, John ga Tom o azuketa yo 'As for the day-care center, John left Tom (in its charge),' is changed to kodomo 'child' such as Sono hoikuen wa, John ga kodomo o azuketa yo 'As for the day-care center, John left his child (in its charge).' This is because kodomo 'his child' is most likely the person who is left in the day-care center, and all three particles can be placed unambiguously. This effect is predicted by the proposed account because the ability to eliminate one argument to the verb as a candidate position for ni makes it easier to solve the ni-identification problem. In cases deemed



ni-identification problem will make the dropping of ni sound better, except in the special cases already considered above.

#### 4. Comparison with Other Accounts

Let us now compare this account of the phenomenon to earlier accounts. Recall Kuno's observation of the coincidence of relativization with the ability to drop ni, and the following counterexample to his proposal:

- (4) c.\* Sono isya wa John ga Mary o syookaisita.  
'As for the doctor, John introduced Mary to him.'

The present account yields the correct, negative judgment for this example because none of the particles can be uniquely fixed from the ni-identification table generated by the sentence without further linguistic context.

Recall the account of Jackendoff and Hinds, in which the dropping of ni would be governed by the semantic case frame of the verb. We have already noted the following counterexample to this approach:

- (12) ?/\* Paul wa, John ga okane o karita yo.  
'As for Paul, John borrowed money (from him).'
- (13) Sono ginkoo wa, John ga okane o karita yo.  
'As for the bank, John borrowed money (from there).'

The present proposal handles these two examples because the ni identification problem for (12) is unsolvable without further context, while background beliefs indicate that John rather than the Bank did the borrowing in (13), permitting one to solve the problem easily in this case.

The views of Li and Thompson are fairly close to the present proposal, except that they are concerned with phenomena of genuine ambiguity. As has been seen, the phenomenon of dropping ni is not governed by ambiguity, because the ni argument can be recovered uniquely by the process of elimination when the ga and o particles are still present. But on the present account, these disambiguating syntactic cues are irrelevant to the judgment whether a given instance of dropping ni is more or less acceptable. Aside from some clearly specifiable exceptions, the dropping of ni before wa in topicalized position is more acceptable for a given individual when individual's beliefs more unambiguously determine which of the arguments to the verb is marked with ni, given nothing but the verb and the unordered set of its arguments in the sentence.

#### 5. Conclusion

The proposed account of acceptability for ni dropping before wa in ni-topicalization is given as follows. Let S be a non-topicalized sentence of Japanese in which ni occurs. Recall that S+wa-ni is the result of topicalizing the ni argument of S and dropping ni. In the ni-identification problem, we are presented just with the verb of S together with its arguments (without case particles), and are asked to determine which of the arguments is marked with the particle ni in the unknown S. Let X be a competent speaker of Japanese. Then,

(I) if the verb of S is a verb of possessing and potential and the ni argument is the subject of S, then X judges S+wa-ni to be acceptable.

(II) if S is passive, then X judges S+wa-ni to be unacceptable.

(III) if none of the preceding conditions applies and the verb is not a verb of becoming and changing, then X judges S+wa-ni to be more acceptable in case X has beliefs that more unambiguously solve the ni-identification problem for S.

I leave the cases of becoming and changing verbs open, though according to my own judgment, they are not acceptable.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Li and Thompson (1976) state that since speech involves serialization of the information to be communicated, it makes sense that the topic, which represents the discourse theme, "center of attention," should be introduced first.

<sup>2</sup> According to the acceptability judgments made by 8 native informants on the five-point scale (i.e., 1 "unacceptable", 2 "seems unacceptable but not sure", 3 "not sure", 4 "seems acceptable but not sure", and 5 "acceptable"), the average rating for (12) was 2.38 (standard deviation (SD) = 1.51) and that for (13) was 4.75 (SD = .46).

<sup>3</sup> The average rating of acceptability judgments for (16) was 2.38 (SD = 1.69) and that for (17) was 4.38 (SD = 1.06).

<sup>4</sup> Kuno (1990) appeals to the features of human-ness and animacy, and uses the concept of "empathy" to analyze the marginality of passive sentences with inanimate subjects.

<sup>5</sup> The average ratings of acceptability judgments for (21) and (22) were both 3.0 (standard deviations of (21) and (22) were 1.51 and 1.60 respectively).

<sup>6</sup> The following presents the means and standard deviations of acceptability judgments for (24a) to (27b).

Example sentences	Means	SDs
(24 a)	1.13	.35
(24 b)	3.25	1.67
(25 a)	1.75	1.39
(25 b)	4.38	1.41
(26 a)	2.38	1.51
(26 b)	4.88	.35
(27 a)	2.50	1.41
(27 b)	4.63	.52

<sup>7</sup> (26a) is a three-argument sentence and (27a) is a two-argument sentence. In both sentences, two arguments, Sam and John, are equally likely to be assigned ni, and the average rating of acceptability judgments for (26a) was 2.38 and that for (27a) was 2.50. (25a) is another three-argument sentence in which one candidate can be eliminated with near certainty but it has a lower acceptability rating than (26a). (25a) and (26a) are different in many other respects that may account for the difference in acceptability, however. (26a) and (27a) involve the same arguments, so it is more important for the theory that they carry very similar acceptability ratings.

<sup>8</sup> The average rating of acceptability judgments for (29) was 1.63 (SD = 1.06) and that for (30) was 4.13 (SD = 1.36).



## REFERENCES

- Chafe, Wallace L. 1976. "Givenness, Contrastiveness, Definiteness, Subjects and Topics." In Subject and Topic, ed. by Li, N. Charles. Academic Press, New York.
- Hinds, John. 1982. Ellipsis in Japanese. Linguistic Research, Alberta, Canada.
- Jackendoff, Ray. 1976. "Toward an Explanatory Semantic Representation." Linguistic Inquiry 7.1.
- Jackendoff, Ray. 1983. Semantics and Cognition. Chapter 9 and 10. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Kuno, Susumu. 1973. The Structure of the Japanese Language. MIT Press Cambridge, MA.
- Kuno, Susumu. 1990. "Passivization and Thematization." In On Japanese and How to Teach It, eds. by Osamu Kamada & Wesley Jacobsen. The Japan Times, Tokyo, Japan.
- Li, N. Charles and Thompson, A. Sandra. 1976. "Subject and Topic: A New Typology of Language." In Subject and Topic, ed. by Li, N. Charles. Academic Press, New York.
- Martin, Samuel E. 1987. A Reference Grammar of Japanese. Tuttle Language Library. Tokyo, Japan.
- Nagatoro, K. 1978. "NP-ni Vi-potential' in Japanese." Unpublished paper. University of Hawaii.