Particle-Stranding Ellipsis in Japanese, Phase Theory and the Privilege of the Root

1. Introduction

In this squib, I analyze a new type of nominal ellipsis in Japanese, which I dub Particle-Stranding Ellipsis/PSE. This elliptic pattern, first mentioned in traditional Japanese linguistics by Hattori (1949, 1960), has been occasionally discussed in subsequent work (Arita 2009; Hayashi 2001; Sato 2008; Sato and Ginsburg 2006, 2007; Vance 1993; Yoshida 2004), but has not received due attention in the generative literature. PSE has emerged quite recently in Japanese grammar as a robust truncated reply pattern in colloquial dialogues under informal contexts, as shown in (1). [1]

(1) Speaker A: Tanaka-kun wa?
Tanaka-TIT TOP
'How about Tanaka?'
Speaker B: Wa ne, kaisha-o yameta yo.
TOP TAG company-ACC quit EXCL
'Oh, (he) quit (his) company!'
(Hattori (1960, p. 452), as cited in Vance (1993, p. 20))

In this dialogue, as a response to Speaker A's question, which introduces *Tanaka-kun* 'Tanaka' as a topic of discourse, Speaker B starts his reply with the (non-contrastive) topic-marker *–wa* without the accompanying NP. The topic marker under PSE is typically

followed by an intonational boundary, which is realized as comma intonation (Nespor and Vogel 1986; Selkirk 1984). A fuller examination of the PSE cases below shows that PSE is a root phenomenon targeting the sentence-initial topic position which can occur only once.

Rizzi (2005a) proposes within Phase Theory (Chomsky 2000, 2001, 2004) that the edge of the root clause may remain unpronounced while still being accessible to discourse identification and applies this approach ("the Privilege of the Root"/PoR) to topic drop in German (Ross 1982). Importantly, topic drop in German patterns with PSE in all relevant respects. Accordingly, I propose to analyze PSE in Japanese as another instance of the PoR Phenomenon. Specifically, a non-contrastive topic NP undergoes overt phrasal movement into the specifier of Top, leaving *-wa* behind. PSE obtains when the phase head Top triggers the Spell-Out of its TP complement to PF for phonetic interpretation.

2. Particle-Stranding Ellipsis in Japanese

PSE has three structural properties. Firstly, as the comparison between (2a) and (2b, c) shows, PSE can only apply to a sentence-initial topic element.

(2) Speaker A:	John-wa	kyoo	nani-o	si-teiru	no?
	John-TOP	today	what-ACC	do-TEIRU	Q

'What is John doing today?'

Speaker B:

a. Ø-wa, Mary-ni daigaku-de a-tteiru ne.
TOP Mary-DAT university-LOC meet-TEIRU TAG
'Intended: Ø (=John) is meeting Mary at a university.'

b. * Mary-ni Ø-wa, daigaku-de a-tteiru ne.
Mary-DAT TOP university-LOC meet-TEIRU TAG
'Intended: Ø (=John) is meeting Mary at a university.'

c. * Mary-ni daigaku-de Ø-wa, a-tteiru ne.
Mary-DAT university-LOC TOP meet- TEIRU TAG
'Intended: Ø (=John) is meeting Mary at a university.'

Secondly, PSE is a root phenomenon. PSE is impossible in an embedded clause, as shown by the ungrammaticality of the sentences uttered by Speaker B in (3, 4).

(3) Speaker A: John-wa sono-toki Taroo-o doo omotta no?
John-TOP that-time Taro-ACC how thought Q
'What did John think at that time about Taro?'

Speaker B:*John-wa sono-toki [$_{CP}$Ø-wa, tensai-da-to] omotta yo.
John-TOP that-time TOP genius-COP-COMP thought TAG
'Intended: John thought at that time that Ø (=Taro) is a genius.'

(4) Speaker A: John-wa sono-toki Taroo-o dare-ga korosita-to omotta no?

John-top that-time Taro-ACC who-NOM killed-COMP thought Q

'Who did John think at that time that killed Taro?'

Speaker B: *John-wa sono-toki [$_{CP}$ Ø-wa, Mary-ga korosita-to] omotta yo.

John-TOP that-time TOP Mary-NOM killed-COMP thought TAG

'Intended: John thought at that time that Mary killed Ø (=Taro).'

(adopted from Yoshida (2004, p. 297), with modifications)

Finally, PSE can occur only once in a clause, as shown by Speaker B's utterance in (5).

(5) Speaker A: Kono-hito-wa John-o dare-ni syookai-suru-tumori-na-no?

This-person-TOP John-ACC who-DAT introduce-do-intend-COP-Q

'To whom does this person intend to introduce John?'

Speaker B: *Ø-wa, Ø-wa, Mary-ni syookai-suru-tumori-nan-desu yo.

TOP TOP Mary-DAT introduce-do-intend-COP-POL EXCL

'Ø (=this person) intends to introduce Ø (=John) to Mary!'

(Yoshida (2004, pp. 297-298))

PSE must be treated differently from argument ellipsis/AS in Japanese, which has been a matter of considerable research in recent generative studies (Kim 1999; Oku 1998; Saito 2004, 2007; Takahashi 2006). AE does not exhibit any of the three properties that hold for PSE. First, AE can target a non-sentence initial position, as shown in (6b, c).

(6) Speaker A: John-wa kyoo nani-o si-teiru no?

John-TOP today what-ACC do-TEIRU Q

'What is John doing today?'

Speaker B:

a. Ø Mary-ni daigaku-de a-tteiru ne.

Mary-DAT university-LOC meet-TEIRU TAG

'Intended: Ø (=John) is meeting Mary at a university.'

b. Mary-ni Ø daigaku-de a-tteiru ne.

Mary-DAT university-LOC meet-TEIRU TAG

'Intended: Ø (=John) is meeting Mary at a university.'

c. Mary-ni daigaku-de Ø a-tteiru ne.

Mary-DAT university-LOC meet-TEIRU TAG

'Intended: Ø (=John) is meeting Mary at a university.'

Notice that the surface order in (6b, c) does not conclusively tell whether the nominal ellipsis indeed occurs in the positions indicated by Ø because Japanese is a free word order/scrambling language. Unless evidence to the contrary is presented, I assume that the ellipsis of an NP occurs in the surface position that it would be pronounced in the topic position. The variants of (6a-c) with an overt pronoun in the gap position are grammatical, as shown in (7a-c).

(7) Speaker A: John-wa kyoo nani-o si-teiru no?

John-TOP today what-ACC do-TEIRU Q

'What is John doing today?'

Speaker B:

a. Kare-wa Mary-ni daigaku-de a-tteiru ne.

he-NOM Mary-DAT university-LOC meet- TEIRU TAG

'He is meeting Mary at a university.'

b. Mary-ni kare-wa daigaku-de a-tteiru ne.

Mary-DAT he-NOM university-LOC meet- TEIRU TAG

'He is meeting Mary at a university.'

c. Mary-ni daigaku-de kare-wa a-tteiru ne.

Mary-DAT university-LOC he-NOM meet- TEIRU TAG

'He is meeting Mary at a university.'

Second, AE is not a root phenomenon as it can occur in an embedded clause (8a, b).

(8) a. John-wa sono-toki [$_{CP}$ Ø tensai-da-to] omotta.

John-TOP that-time genius-COP-COMP thought

'Intended: John thought at that time that Ø is a genius.'

b. John-wa sono-toki [$_{CP}$ Ø Mary-ga korosita-to] omotta.

John-TOP that-time Mary-NOM killed-COMP thought

'Intended: John thought at that time that Mary killed Ø.'

Finally, AE can occur more than once in a single clause (9a, b).

(9) Speaker A: Kono-hito-wa John-o dare-ni syookai-suru-tumori-na no?
this-person-TOP John-ACC who-DAT introduce-do-intend-COP Q
'To whom does this person intend to introduce John?'

Speaker B: Ø Ø Mary-ni syookai-suru-tumori-nan-desu yo.
Mary-DAT introduce-do-intend-COP-POL EXCL
'Ø (=this person) intends to introduce Ø (=John) to Mary.'

The afore-mentioned work has argued that null argument constructions in Japanese are best analyzed as involving ellipsis (e.g., LF-copy) rather than empty pronouns. The structural differences between PSE and AS suggest that the former needs a different explanation.

3. German Topic Drop, Phase Theory and the Privilege of the Root

In this section, I propose to analyze PSE in Japanese as an instance of the PoR Phenomenon. Rizzi (2005a) proposes that Phase Theory allows for an intriguing account of the optional non-pronunciation of linguistic material at the edge of the root category and applies this proposal to German topic drop. Within Phase Theory (Chomsky 2000, 2001, 2004; see also Nissenbaum 2000), Spell-Out applies to the complement of a strong phase head. The PoR phenomenon obtains when material in the specifier of the topmost phase head escapes Spell-Out to PF. Let us see how this theory applies to German topic drop, as illustrated in (10a-c).

(10)a. Ich hab' ihn schon gesehen.

I have him already seen

'I saw him already.'

b. Hab' ihn schon gesehen.

have him already seen

'Ø (=I) saw him already.'

c. Hab' ich schon gesehen.

have I already seen

'I saw Ø(=him) already.' (Huang (1984, p. 546))

In these examples, a topic undergoes overt movement into [Spec, TopP] in the left periphery (Rizzi 1997). The "topic drop" arises when the phase head Top Spells-Out its complement, leaving the topic inaccessible for pronunciation. Importantly, German topic drop exhibits the same structural properties which characterize PSE. Firstly, topic drop can only occur in the sentence-initial topic position. The examples in (11a, b) are ungrammatical for this reason.

(11) a. * Ihn hab' Ø schon gesehen.

him have already seen

'Ø (=I) saw him already.'

b. *Ich hab' Ø schon gesehen

I have already seen

'I saw Ø (=him) already.' (Huang (1984, p. 547))

Secondly, as observed by Cardinalletti (1990) and Rizzi (1994, 2005b), topic drop is a root phenomenon. It cannot occur in an embedded clause even when a topic occupies the initial topic position in the embedded clause. This point is illustrated in (12a, b).

(12) a. * Hans glaubt [Ø habe es gestern gekauft].
Hans believe have it yesterday bought
'Hans believes that Ø (=I) bought it yesterday.'

b. * Hans glaubt [Ø habe ich gestern gekauft].
Hans believe have I yesterday bought
'Hans believes that I bought Ø (=it) yesterday.'

((12a) from Rizzi (2005b, p. 14), (12b) from Yoshida (2004, p. 296))

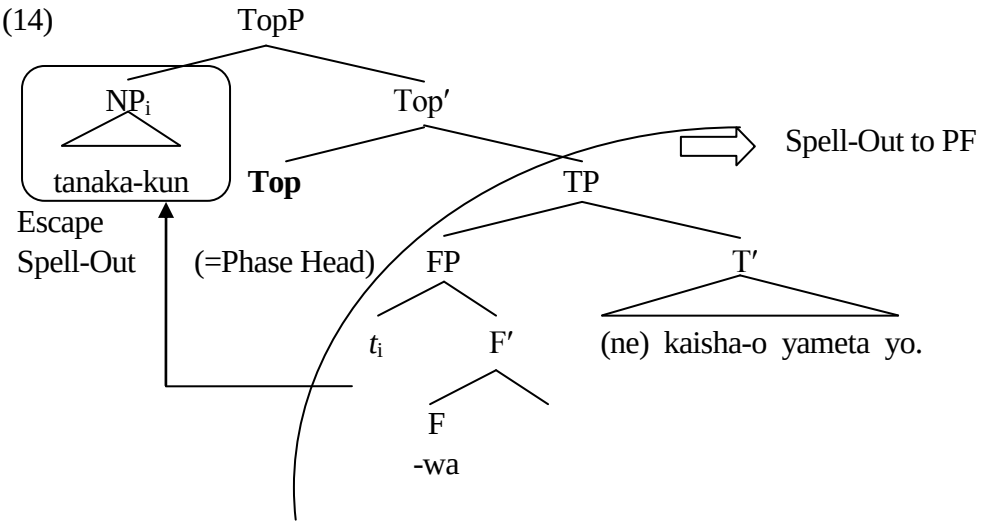
Finally, topic drop can occur only once in the root clause. As shown in (13), this option cannot target both subject and object NPs.

(13) * Ø hab' Ø schon gekannt.
have already known
'Ø (=I) already knew Ø (=him).' (Huang (1984, p. 548))

Based on the parallels between German topic drop and Japanese PSE observed above, I propose that PSE arises as the result of the movement of a non-contrastive topic phrase into the specifier of the phase head Top. PSE obtains when this topic phase head

triggers the Spell-Out of the complement and the topic NP escapes this Spell-Out via moving into the specifier of the head. The proposed analysis is shown in (14).

(14)



In (14), *–wa* heads a functional projection, as originally suggested by Kayne (1994, p. 143). Whitman (1997) presents two arguments for this analysis. First, *-wa* cannot co-occur with the nominative particle *–ga* or the association-with-focus particles *–mo* and *–dake*, as shown in (15). This behavior contrasts with other particles, such as dative/locative marker *-ni*, which can co-occur with *-wa* and the association-with-focus particles, as shown in (16).

(15) John-wa (*ga/*mo/*sae) kita.
John-TOP NOM/also/even came
'John (nom/also/even) came.' (Whitman 1997, p. 86)

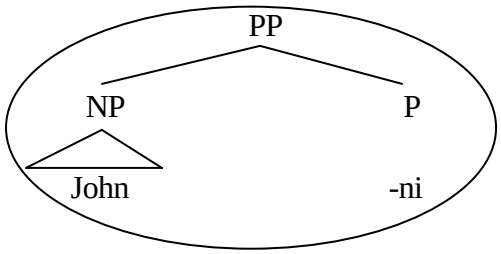
(16) Mary-wa John-ni (wa/mo/sae) ko-sase-ta.

Mary-NOM John-DAT TOP/also/even come-CAUS-PAST

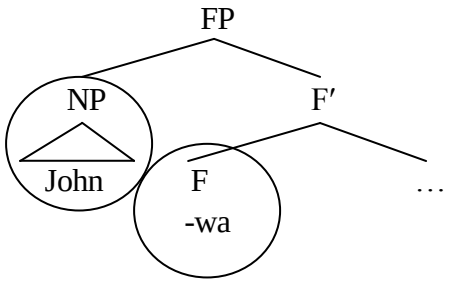
'Mary made John (top/also/even) come.' (Whitman 1997, p.86)

The contrast between (15) and (16) follows from the clausal head analysis of *–wa* under the standard assumption that *ga/mo/sae* are phrasal particles. (16) is grammatical because *wa/mo/sae* attach to the preceding PP *John-ni* 'John-DAT', as shown in (17). (15) is ungrammatical because *John-wa* 'John-TOP' does not constitute a single phrase that *ga/mo/sae* can attach to, as shown in (18).

(17) Dative/Locative *–ni* with *wa/mo/sae*



(18) Topic Marker *-wa* with *ga/mo/sae*



Second, the topic *-wa* must take a matrix interpretation under scrambling. Consider (19).

(19) [Sono hon-wa]$_i$ [Taroo-ga [t_i ii-to] omotteiru (*zizitu)

that book-TOP Taro-NOM good-COMP think fact

'(the fact that) that book, Taroo thinks is good.' (Whitman 1997, p. 87)

If *sono hon-wa* 'that book-TOP' underwent scrambling from within the embedded position, we would expect the topic-marker to be able to take scope as the topic of the embedded clause. The obligatory matrix scope reading of the topic-marked NP follows from the clausal head analysis. The topic-marker is base-generated directly in a matrix head position; *sono hon* 'that book' undergoes scrambling into the specifier of the head dominated by *-wa*.

Our analysis provides a straightforward account for the three properties in PSE observed earlier in section 2. First, PSE can only occur in the sentence-initial position because there is a dedicated functional projection (i.e., TopP) for the genuine non-contrastive topic element to move into, as shown in (14). Second, it is a root phenomenon because TopP occurs at the leftmost periphery of the syntactic derivation. Finally, it applies only once because there is only one Top projection to host the topic element.

4. Conclusions

In this squib, I have presented evidence that the PSE recently observed in colloquial dialogues in Japanese is best analyzed as an instance of Rizzi's (2005a) PoR Phenomenon on a par with German topic drop. I have proposed that the stranding of the topic-marker *–wa* arises when the topic NP undergoes movement into the specifier of the phase head Top, which triggers the Spell-Out of its complement domain to PF.

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NOTES

[1] The following abbreviations are used in data in this paper: ACC, accusative; CAUS, causative; COMP, complementizer; COP, copula; DAT, dative; EXCL, exclamation; LOC, locative; NOM, nominative; PAST, past tense; POL, politeness marker; Q, question; TAG, tag; TIT, title; TOP, topic.