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

1. Introduction

In this squib, I describe and analyze a new type of nominal ellipsis in Japanese. This elliptic

pattern was first mentioned in the traditional Japanese linguistics by Hattori (1960) and touched

on by 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. In

this squib, I call the ellipsis pattern Particle-Stranding Ellipsis/PSE. PSE has emerged as a

robust reply pattern quite recently in colloquial dialogues of Japanese, 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 topic-marker –*wa* without the

accompanying topic NP. A fuller examination of the PSE cases below shows that this pattern 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 being accessible to discourse identification and applies this approach ("the Privilege of the Root") to Topic Drop in colloquial German, Dutch and other Germanic languages (Ross 1982; Huang 1984). Importantly, Topic Drop patterns with PSE in all structural respects. Based on these parallels between PSE and Topic Drop, I propose to analyze PSE in Japanese as another instance of the Privilege of the Root Phenomenon. I argue that a non-contrastive topic NP undergoes overt phrasal movement into the specifier of TopP, leaving the overt topic-marker -*wa* behind. PSE obtains when the phase head Top triggers the Spell-Out of its complement domain.

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)   a.   Ø-wa Mary-ni   kyoo-koso   nanasi-o si-nakerebanaranaine.

 TOP Mary-DAT   today-precisely   talk-ACC do-must   TAG

'Intended: Ø must talk to Mary today.'

b. * Mary-ni   Ø-wa kyoo-koso   nanasi-o si-nakerebanaranai ne.

Mary-DAT   TOP today-precisely   talk-ACC do-must   TAG

'Intended: Ø must talk to Mary today.'

c. * Mary-ni   kyoo-koso   Ø-wa   nanasi-o si-nakerebanaranai ne.

Mary-DAT   today-precisely TOP   talk-ACC do-must   TAG

'Intended: Ø must talk to Mary today.'

(Yoshida (2004, p. 296))

Secondly, PSE is a root phenomenon. PSE is impossible in an embedded clause, as shown by

the ungrammaticality of the examples in (3a, b).

(3)   a. * John-wa   sono-toki   [CP   Ø-wa tensai-da-to]   omotta.

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

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

b. * John-wa   sono-toki   [CP   Ø-wa Mary-ga   korosita-to] omotta.

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

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

(Yoshida (2004, p. 297))

Finally, SPE can occur only once in a clause, as shown by the ungrammaticality of the utterance

made by Speaker B in (4).

(4)   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))

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

In this section, I propose to analyze SPE in Japanese as an instance of the Privilege of the Root Phenomena in the sense of Rizzi (2005a). Rizzi (2005a) proposes that Phase Theory allows for an interesting account of the optional non-pronunciation of linguistic material at the edge of the root category and applies this proposal to the ellipsis of matrix complementizers and German topic drop. It is generally assumed in Phase Theory (Chomsky 2000, 2001, 2004; see also Nissenbaum 2000) that Spell-Out applies to the complement of a strong phase head. The Privilege of the Root phenomenon obtains when material in the specifier of the topmost phase head escapes Spell-Out to the phonetic system. Let us see how this theory applies to German topic drop, as illustrated in (5a-c).

(5)   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.'

<div align="right">(Huang 1982, p. 546)</div>

In these examples, a topic undergoes overt movement into the specifier of TopP in a rich array of discourse-related functional projections such as FinP, FocP, among others (Rizzi 1997). The "topic drop" in German, then, arises when the phase head Top Spells-Out its complement, leaving the moved topic inaccessible for pronunciation.

Importantly, as Yoshida (2004) pointed out, German topic drop exhibits the same structural properties which we have seen to characterize Japanese PSE. Firstly, topic drop can only occur in the sentence-initial topic position. The examples in (6a, b) are ungrammatical because the topic is not in the topic-position.

(6)　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.'

<div align="right">(Huang 1982, p. 547)</div>

Secondly, as observed by Cardinalletti (1990) and Rizzi (1994, 2005b), German topic drop is a root phenomenon. It cannot occur in an embedded clause even though a topic occupies the clause-initial topic position in the embedded clause. This point is illustrated in (7a, b).

(7)   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.'

<div align="right">((7a) from Rizzi (2005b, p. 14), (7b) from Yoshida (2004, p. 296))</div>
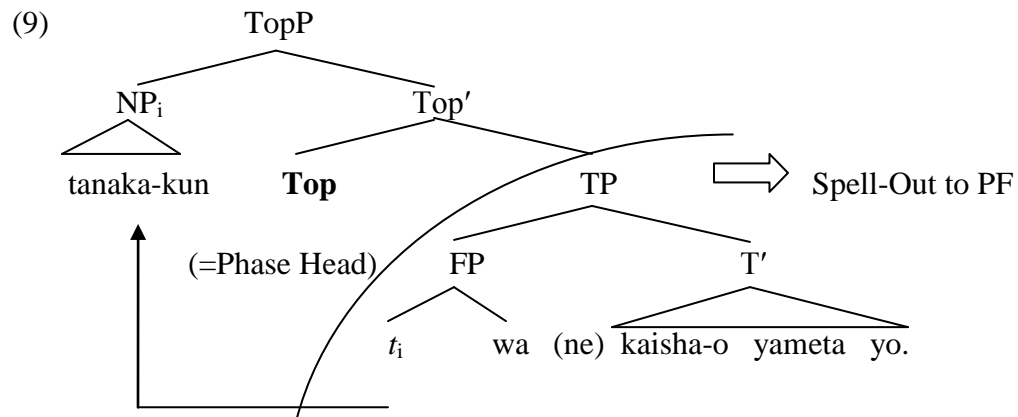
Finally, topic drop can occur only once in the root clause, as shown in the paradigm in (8a-e); the example in (8e) is ill-formed because topic drop targets both subject and object.

(8)   a.   Ich   hab' ihn   schon   gekannt.

             I   have him   already   known

             'I already knew him.'

       b.   Ihn   hab' ich   schon   gekannt.

             him   have I   already   known

             'I already knew him.'

       c.   Ø   hab' ich   schon   gekannt.

                    have I   already   known

             'I already knew Ø (=him).

       d.   Ø   hab' ihn   schon   gekannt.

                    have him   already   known

             'Ø (=I) already knew him.'

       e. * Ø   hab' Ø   schon   gekannt.

                    have   already   known

             'Ø (=I) already knew Ø (=him).'

(Huang 1982, p. 548)

The parallels between German topic drop and Japanese PSE observed above, thus, indicate that the latter is to be analyzable as another instance of the Privilege of the Root phenomena in the sense of Rizzi (2005a). 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 arises

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 (9).

(9)

TopP
- NP$_i$
  - tanaka-kun
- Top′
  - **Top** (=Phase Head)
  - TP
    - FP
      - t_i
      - wa (ne)
    - T′
      - kaisha-o yameta yo.

⟹ Spell-Out to PF

Whitman (1997) presents three empirical arguments that the non-contrastive topic-marker -*wa* is a clausal head, as shown in (9), an analysis originally suggested by Kayne (1994, p. 143); see also Endo (2007) for the view that –*wa* represents the head of distinct functional projections in the left periphery of a clause in Rizzi's (1997) sense. First of all, Kayne observes that -*wa* cannot co-occur with the nominative particle –*ga* or the association-with-focus particles –*mo* and –*dake*, as shown in (10).

(10) John-wa   (*ga/*mo/*sae)   kita.

      John-TOP   NOM/also/even   came

   'John (nom/also/even) came.'

(Whitman 1997, p. 86)

This behavior contrasts with other particles, such as dative/locative marker *–ni*, which can co-occur with the topic marker and association-with-focus particles, as shown in (11).

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

        Mary-NOM   John-DAT   TOP/also/even come-CAUS-PAST
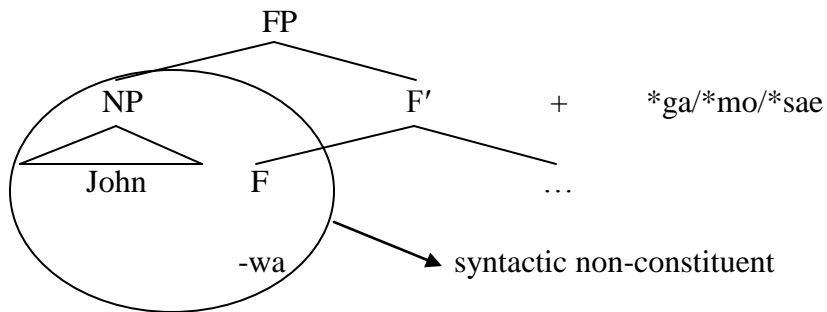
        'Mary made John (top/also/even) come.'

The contrast between (10) and (11) follows from the clausal head analysis of *–wa* under the standard assumption that the particles discussed here are phrasal particles. The example in (11) is grammatical because *wa/mo/sae* attach to the preceding PP *John-ni* 'John-DAT', as shown in (12). The example in (10) is ungrammatical, however, because the apparent sequence *John-wa* 'John-TOP' does not constitute a single phrase that *ga/mo/sae* can attach to, as shown in (13).

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

Syntactic constituent
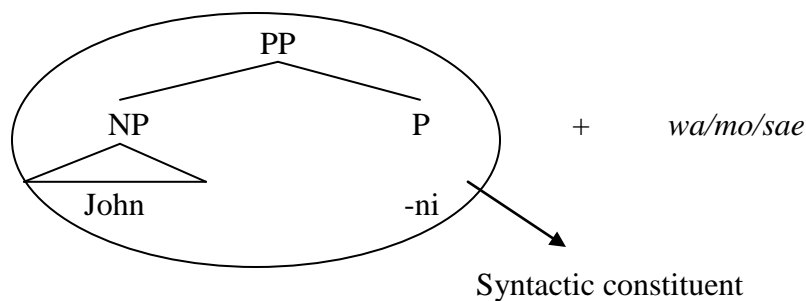
(13) Topic Marker *-wa* with *ga/mo/sae*

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                    FP
          _____|_____
         NP                    F'          +      *ga/*mo/*sae
        / \               _____|_____
      John   F           ...
             |
            -wa  ——————→  syntactic non-constituent
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The second argument is based on the inability of *wa*-marked subjects to undergo clefting, which has been used since Hoji (1985) as a standard diagnostic for movement/constituency, as illustrated in (14). The ungrammaticality of the example in (14) naturally falls into place under the clausal head analysis of the non-contrastive topic marker because the clefted element *Mari-wa* 'Mari-TOP' does not form a syntactic constituent

(14)   Eri-o   aisiteiru   no   wa   Mari (*wa) da.

       Eri-ACC   love   COMP   TOP   Mari   TOP   is

       '(The one) who loves Eri is Mari.'

(Whitman 1997, p. 87)

The third argument comes from the fact that scrambling of a topic-marked phrase is impossible. Whitman observes that the non-contrastive, topic *-wa* must take a matrix interpretation. Consider (15).

(15) [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)

This example is ungrammatical on the non-contrastive, topic reading when the whole clause is

embedded under *zizitu* 'fact'. Now, if the sentence-initial sequence *sono hon-wa* 'that book-

TOP' were a phrase that undergoes scrambling from the embedded position, we would expect

the topic-marker to be able to take scope as the topic of the embedded clause, contrary to facts.

The obligatory matrix scope reading of the topic-marked NP, however, directly follows from

the clausal head analysis. The topic-marker *–wa* is base-generated directly in a matrix head

position; the NP *sono hon* 'that book' undergoes scrambling into the specifier of the head

dominated by *-wa*. Under this analysis, there is no way for the fronted NP to take an embedded

scope because *-wa* is base-generated in a matrix clause.

The proposed analysis correctly derives the three properties associated with PSE. 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. Second, it is a

root phenomenon because the functional projection occurs at the top of the syntactic derivation.

Finally, it applies only once because there is only one projection to host the topic element.

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4.   Conclusions

In this squib, I have presented evidence that the PSE observed in casual dialogues in Japanese is best analyzed as an instance of Rizzi's (2005a) Privilege of the Root 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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[1] The following abbreviations are used in data in this paper: ACC, accusative; CAUS, causative; COMP, complementizer; COP, copula; DAT, dative; EXCL, exclamation; NOM, nominative; PAST, past tense; POL, politeness marker; Q, question; TAG, tag; TIT, title; TOP, topic.