

SPLIT TOPICS IN JAPANESE


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In this presentation, I will:

- discuss split topics in Japanese, which have been underdiscussed despite the topic prominence of the language (Li & Thompson 1976);
- present a structural and discourse-pragmatic analysis utilizing RRG;
- suggest that split topics have unique discourse-pragmatic properties; thus, they should be described as a construction which is separated from a regular topic sentence;
- point out similarities to the split topic/focus phenomena in other languages.

- Split topics as extraction phenomena

“a constituent’s core is extracted to the pre-field while leaving its non-core behind in the middle-field of the clause” (van Hoof 2006: 411).

- (1)  [CP [TOP Bohnen] [C' mag_i er nur [REM grüne ___]t_i]].
 beans likes he only green
 ‘As for beans, he likes only green ones.’

Issues

Syntactic analyses of SNPT [split noun phrase topicalization] “cannot offer a straightforward solution for the full range of different possible realizations of TOP and REM [“REMNANT”]. As soon as analyses aim to take into account all the possibilities in different varieties, they either overgeneralize or have to appeal to *ad hoc* mechanisms” (ibid, 451)

- RRG approach (syntax-semantics-pragmatics interface)

The discontinuous elements of an RP are related via the operator projection of the RP.

The split morphosyntactic realization reflects the split topic-focus, i.e. focus-structure.

(2) Italian partitive clitic *ne* (Bentley 2004; Van Valin 2005: 176)

Q: Quanti student-i sono venu-t-i alla festa?
 how.many student-pl be.3pl come-PSTP-3Mpl to.the party
 ‘How many students came to the party?’

A: Ne sono venu-t-i ventiquattro.
ne be.3pl come-PSTP-3Mpl twenty-four

 topical focal

‘Twenty four of them came.’

- (3) **kyookasho**-wa taroo-ga rika-**no**-o katta (Sugawara 2010: 4)
 textbook-TOP Taro-NOM science-one-ACC buy:PST
 'As for textbooks, Taro bought a science one.'
- (4) **jisho**-wa narubeku atarashii-**no**-o tsukau
 dictionary-TOP if.possible new-one-ACC use
 'As for dictionaries, (I) use as new ones as possible.'
- (5) **kaban**-wa tsuugaku-**no**-o katta
 bag-TOP attending.school-one-ACC buy:PST
 'As for bags, (I) bought the one for school.'

The pronominal *no* is obligatory for split topics.

“Base-generated” topics (not split topics)

(6) kyookasho-wa taroo-ga rika-o katta (Sugawara 2010: 6)

textbook-TOP Taro-NOM science-ACC buy:PST

‘As for textbooks, Taro bought “science”.’ [= the title of the book]

(7) sakana-wa tai-ga oishii (Kuno 1973: 62)

fish-TOP red.snapper-NOM delicious

‘Speaking of fish, red snapper is (the most) delicious.’

(6’) **textbook’** ([**do’** (Taro, Ø)] CAUSE [BECOME **have’** (Taro, science)])

(7’) **fish’** (**be’** (red snapper, [**delicious’**]))

(8)

- a. taroo-ga rika-no kyookasho-o katta [topic-less]
 Taro-NOM science-GEN textbook-ACC buy:PST
 'Taro bought a science textbook.'
- b. rika-no kyookasho-wa taroo-ga katta [regular topic]
 science-COP:ATT textbook-TOP Taro-NOM buy:PST
 'As for (the) science textbook(s), Taro bought (one/it).'
- c. kyookasho-wa taroo-ga rika-no-o katta [split topic]
 textbook-TOP Taro-NOM science-one-ACC buy:PST
 'As for textbooks, Taro bought a science one.'
- d. [**do'** (Taro, \emptyset)] CAUSE [BECOME **have'** (Taro, science textbook)]

- What influences the realization of a split topic sentence as opposed to the other variants based on the same logical structure?
- Assuming that the answer to the question requires discourse-pragmatic considerations, what topic-focus properties do split-topic sentences exhibit?

Main proposal - split topics have specific pragmatic constraints, which separate them from regular topics.

Used the search templates: [noun-*wa* ... noun/adjective-*no-ga/o* predicate]
and manually picked split-topic tokens.

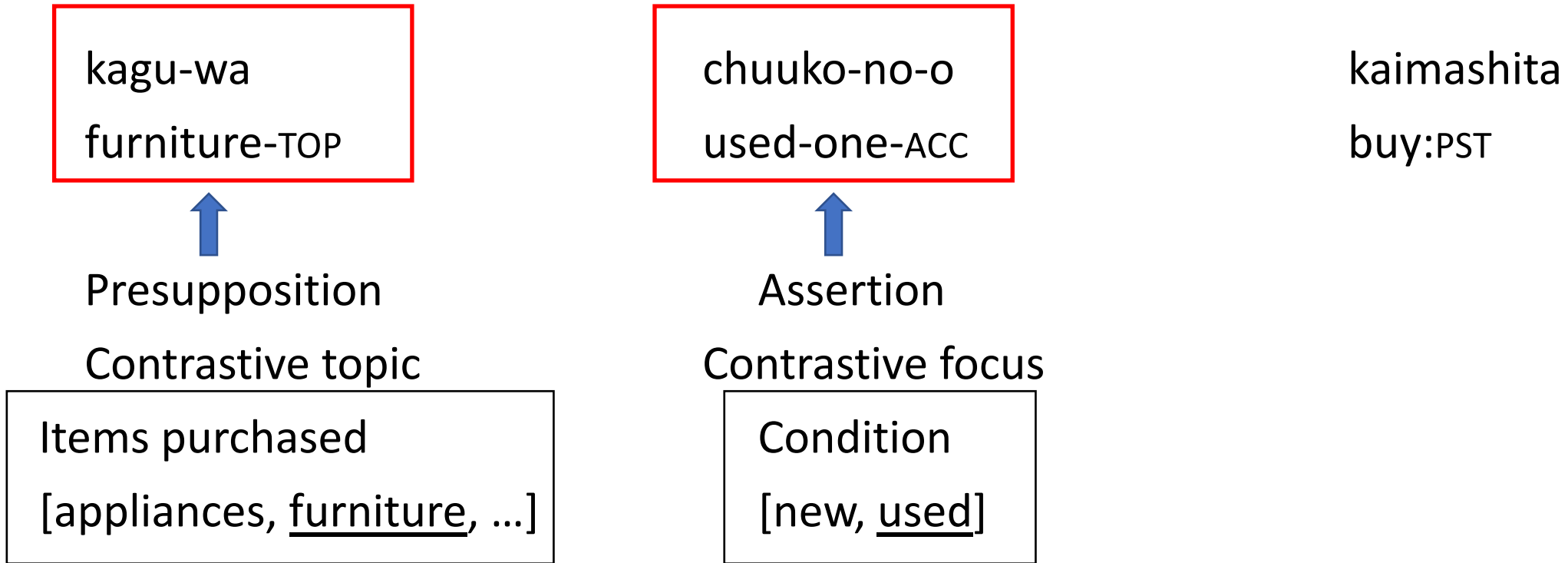
- 28 no-o ‘accusative’ cases
- 9 *no-ga* ‘nominative’ cases; mostly adjective-*no-ga*; all adjectival predicates
- Source texts: news articles, newsletters, user reviews, blogs, social media posts, user-submitted recipes, etc.

(9) A Japanese blogger in Brazil writes about his recent purchases of household goods for his new home. [I bought a gas range... Things that go on sale break quickly and end up costing more, so I bought one that was about three times as expensive...There are many shops in Marília that repair refrigerators and TV appliances to sell. ...]

kagu-wa chuuko-no-o kaimashita

furniture-TOP used-one-ACC buy:PST

‘As for furniture, (I) bought a used one.’



(10) Italian-style sushi role recipe in a user-provided recipe site [List of **ingredients** and five steps of instruction, followed by additional notes provided by the user.]

tomatopyuure-wa mutti-no-o tsukaimashita

tomato.puree-TOP Mutti-one-ACC use:PST

‘As for tomato puree, (I) used Mutti one.’

The split topic singles out ‘tomato puree’ from the presupposed set of ingredients [rice, cheese strips, zucchini, seaweed, tomato puree...], and the *in situ* argument singles out one brand from the set of tomato puree brands made accessible by the topic element.

(11) A food blogger reviews a restaurant known for “natto katsu” (pork cutlet topped with natto ‘fermented soybeans’). [I ordered **natto katsu, rice, miso soup, and pickled vegetables**. ...The owner said he picked the best natto among five types... The natto katsu is not only big but also thick!]

tonkatsu-wa buatsui-no-ga oishii

tonkatsu-TOP thick-one-NOM delicious

‘As for tonkatsu (pork cutlet), the thick one is (most) delicious.’

The split topic singles out an item from the presupposed set of menu items [natto, tonkatsu, rice, miso soup, ...], and the *in situ* argument singles out a particular condition from the set of possible conditions [thick, thin...], which is made accessible by the context.

(12) An online yoga store website [Things you need to begin yoga are **yoga clothes** and a **yoga mat**. ...There are many nice yoga clothes of a wide variety of domestic and overseas brands... And another necessary item is a yoga mat, and many people do not know what to buy. ... Now that many people practice yoga at home,]

ie-de	tsukau	yogamatto-wa	donna-no-ga	ii	no?
home-LOC	use	yoga.mat-TOP	what.kind.of-one-NOM	good	Q

‘As for yoga mats to use at home, what kind is good?’

The split topic denotes ‘yoga mats (for home use)’ singled out from the set of yoga gear [yoga clothes, mat, ...], and the *in situ* argument, the focus of the question, is intended to single out a particular element of a set of different types of yoga mats.

Unlike a regular topic sentence, a split topic sentence exhibits complex focus structure

Split topic

[{furniture_{FOC}, gas range, ...}_{TOP}]_{TOP}

[{tomato puree_{FOC}, rice, cheese strips ...}_{TOP}]_{TOP}

[{tonkatsu_{FOC}, rice, miso soup...}_{TOP}]_{TOP}

[{yoga clothes_{FOC}, yoga mat}_{TOP}]_{TOP}



Contrastive topic

In situ argument

[{used_{FOC}, brand-new}_{TOP}]_{FOC}

[{Mutti_{FOC}, x, y...}_{TOP}]_{FOC}

[{thick_{FOC}, thin}_{TOP}]_{FOC}

[{x_{FOC}, y, z...}_{TOP}]_{FOC}



Contrastive focus

(The notation based on Erteschik-Shir (2007).)

Furthermore, the focus structure of a split topic sentence shows the layered nature; the contrastive topic element represents the topic set for the contrastive focus.

Contrastive topic

[{furniture_{foc}, gas range, ...}_{top}]_{top}

Contrastive focus (*in situ* argument)

[{used_{foc}, brand-new}_{top}]_{foc}



Split topics provide a topic set for the contrastive focus expressed by the *in situ* argument. But this is not necessarily the case with “base-generated” topics.

(13) sakana-wa tsuri-ga omoshiroi (cf. 7)

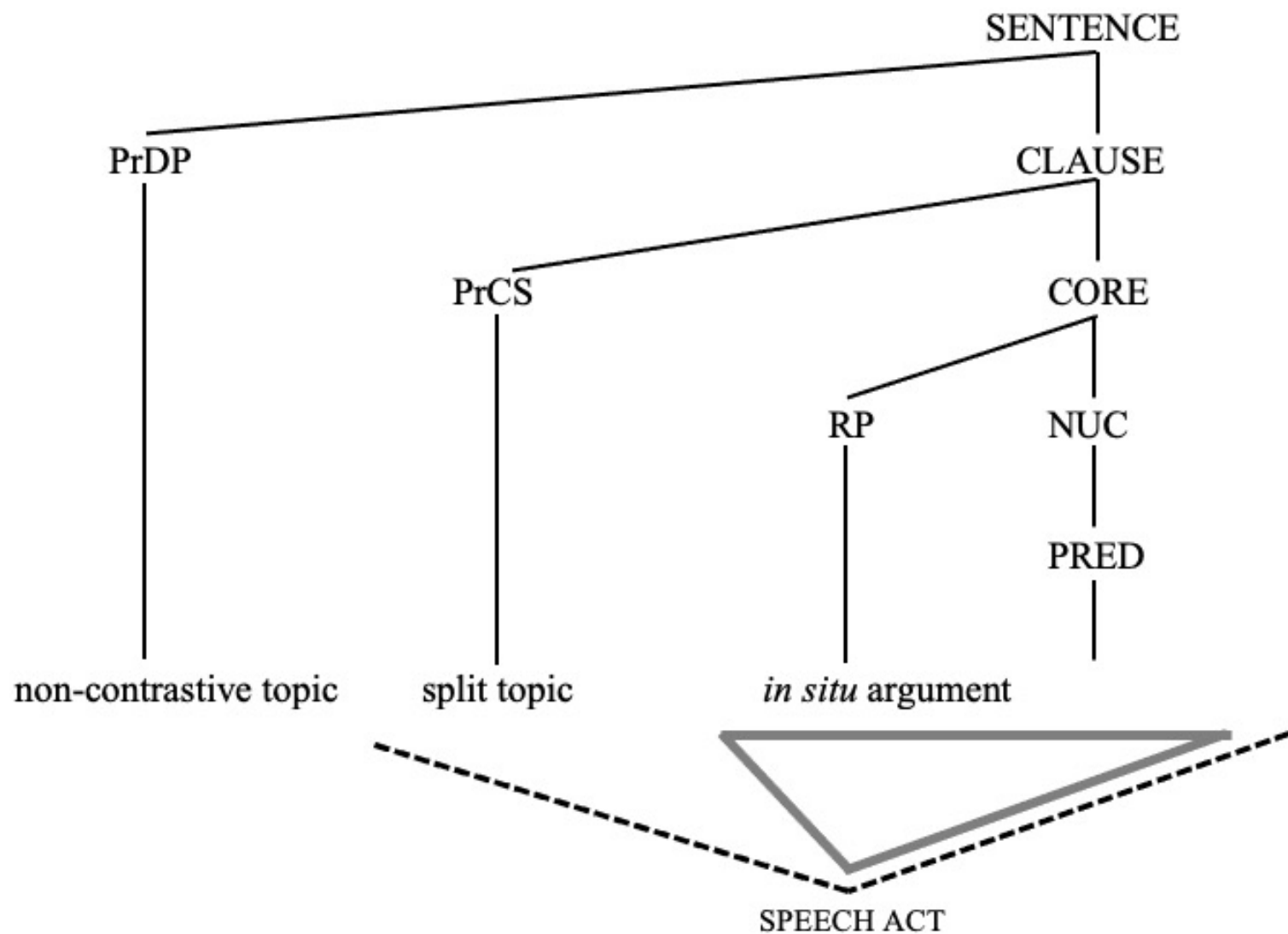
fish-TOP fishing-NOM fun

‘Speaking of fish, fishing is fun.’

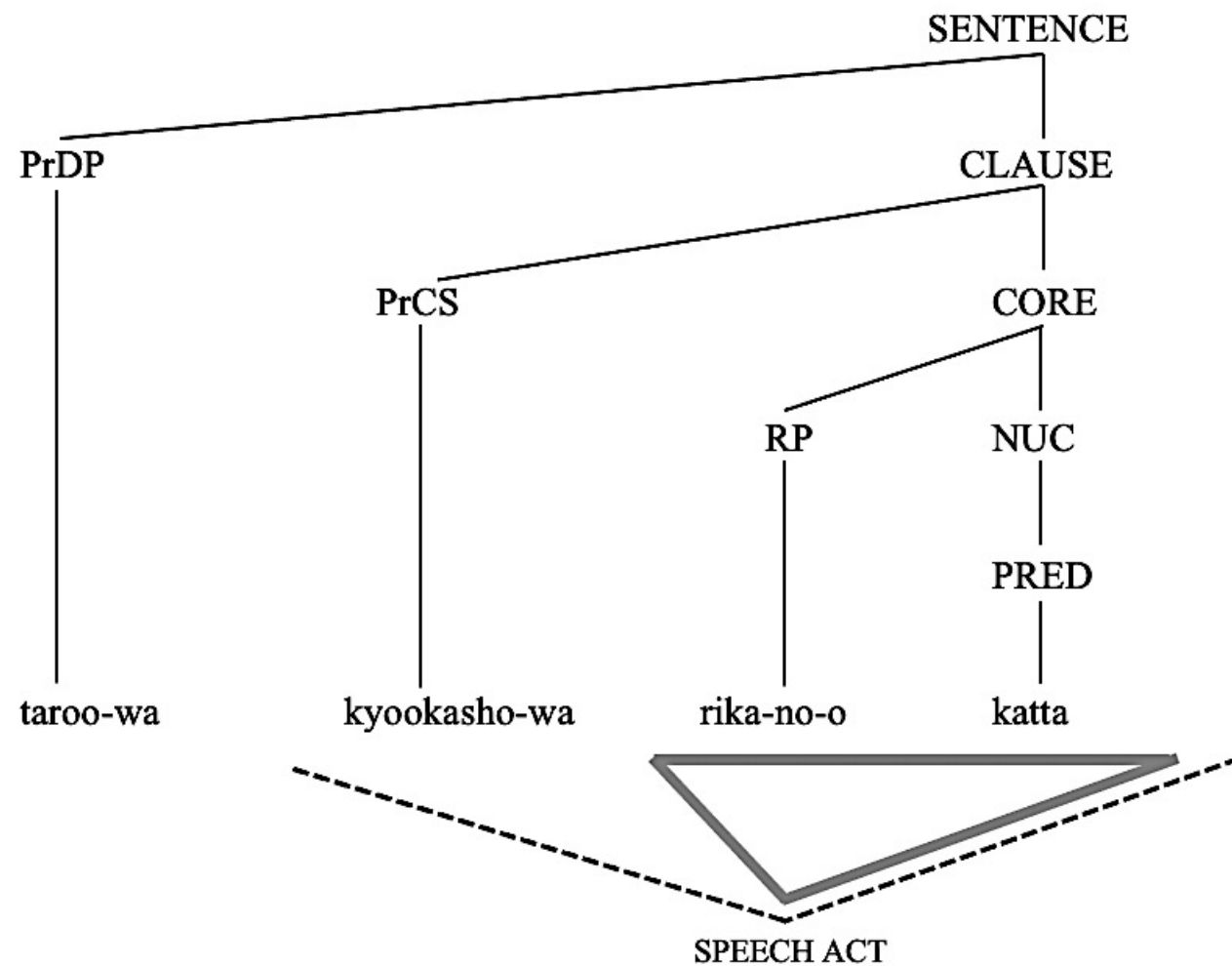
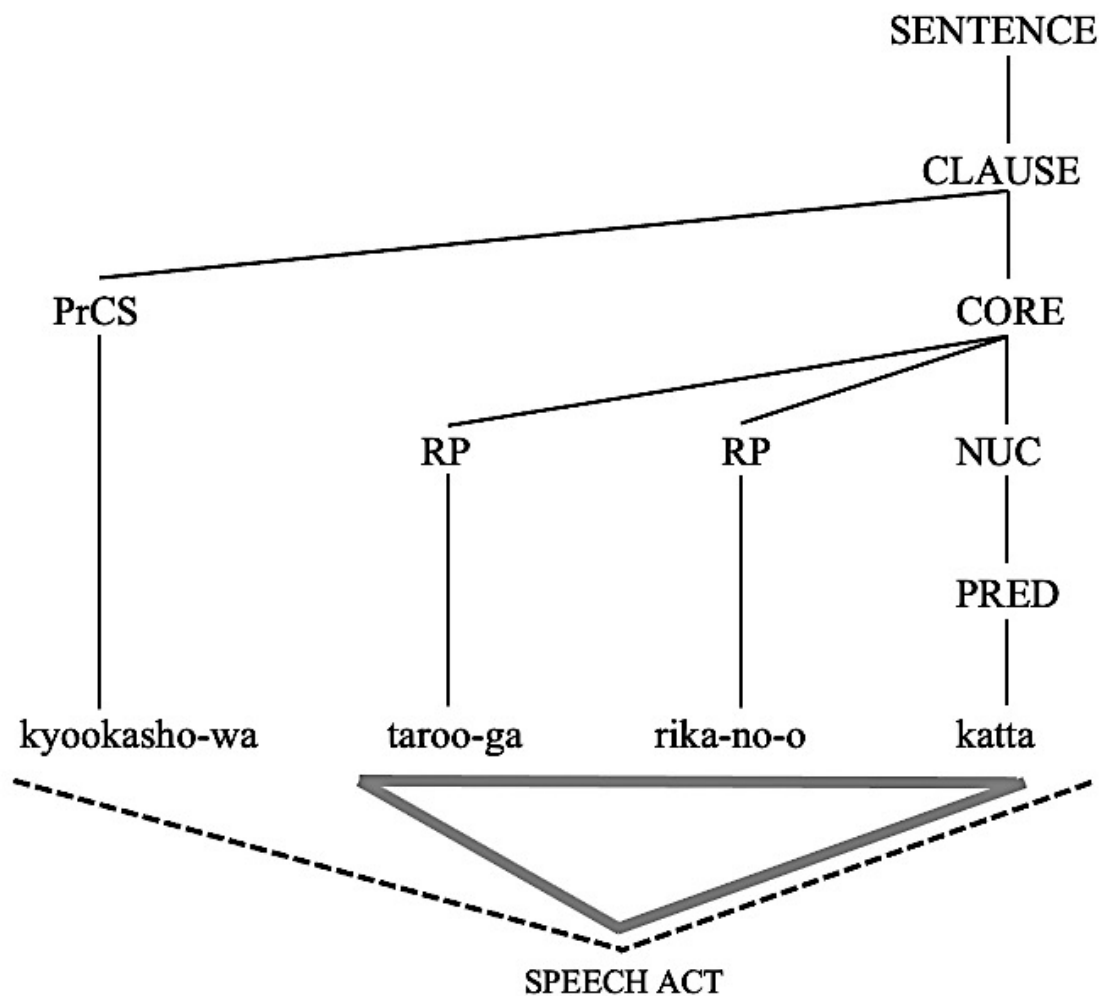
(14) hon-wa atama-ga yoku-naru

book-TOP head-NOM good-become

‘Speaking of books, (one) becomes smarter (by reading them).’



The split topic in the precore slot due to its focal nature (but outside the actual focus domain).
 The *in situ* argument in the actual focus domain.



(= (3))

'As for textbooks, Taro bought a science one.'

- While a split topic is possible with a nominative argument, accusative arguments are more commonly paired with a split topic.

Lexical-semantic constraint: the pronominal *no* carries a derogatory tone (Kuroda 1992).

(15) *gakusee-wa wakai-no-ga kita*
student-TOP young-one-NOM come:PST
'As for students, a young *one* came.' [derogatory]

All nominative cases found online were inanimate arguments with state predicates (e.g. 11-12).

- A split topic paired with an accusative argument exhibits a more clearly defined contrast, with a more clearly defined topic set from which an element is singled out.
- Topic sets for a split topic paired with a nominative argument are often not explicitly expressed in the preceding context.

(16) The title of a review of a grape-picking site

shainmasukatto-wa kiiroi-no-ga oishii yo!

shine.muscat-TOP yellow-one-NOM delicious PP

‘As for shine muscat, yellow ones are delicious!’

[I thought big and blue shine muscat grapes were delicious. While picking grapes, I was told that, **for shine muscat**, small and yellow ones are more delicious, and I actually found they were sweet and rich, and very delicious. ...]

- The asymmetry is predicted by predicate-focus being the unmarked focus structure (Lambrecht 1994; Van Valin & LaPolla 1997), with the accusative argument as the default actual focus domain.
- Because the *in situ* argument and the topic have overlapping referents, the focal (i.e. contrastive) nature of the topic is more foregrounded if it is associated with default focus elements.

Topic

 $[\{V_{\text{foc}}, W \dots\}_{\text{top}}]_{\text{top}}$ *In situ* argument $[\{X_{\text{foc}}, Y \dots\}_{\text{top}}]_{\text{foc}}$ 

- Peripheries are more restricted with respect to split topics.

(17) *pen-wa atarashii-no-de tagami-o kaita [periphery]
park-TOP new-one-INS letter-ACC write:PST
'As for pens, (I) wrote a letter with a new one.'

(18) dezaato-wa taroo-ga amai-no-ni shita [core]
dessert-TOP Taro-NOM sweet-one-DAT do:PST
'As for desserts, Taro did/decided on the sweet one.'

- Pragmatic-aboutness condition on topicalization and relativization

“The sentence fragment following a topical element in the precore slot or a restrictive relative clause must be pragmatically interpretable as being about the precore slot element or the head noun” (Van Valin and LaPolla 1997: 627).

But the regular topicalization and relativization counterparts of (17) are acceptable.

(19) a. sono pen-de-wa tegami-o kaita
 that pen-INS-TOP letter-ACC write:PST

‘As for the pen, (I) wrote a letter (with it).’

b. [tegami-o kaita] pen
 letter-ACC write:PST pen

‘the pen (with which I) wrote a letter’

- A split topic paired with an adjunct is most acceptable if the *in situ* element is the only focal element.

(20)

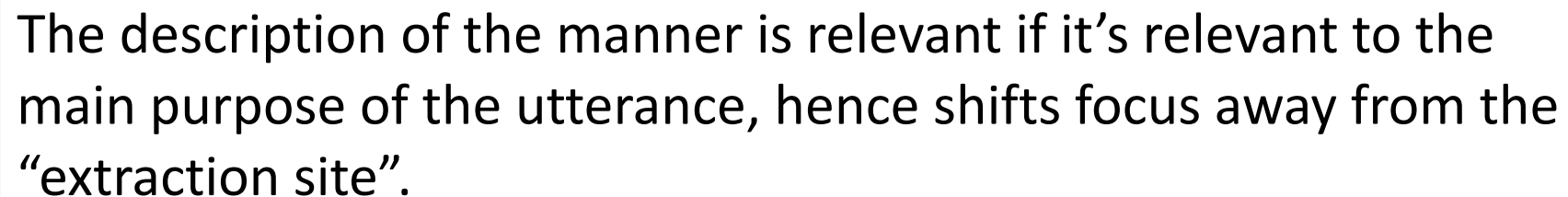
A: dono pen-de kaita no
which pen-INS write:PST Q

‘Which pen did (you) write (it) with?’

B: pen-wa atarashii-no-de kaita
pen-TOP new-one-INS write:PST

‘As for pens, (I) wrote (it) with a new one.’

- The aboutness condition is still valid (because it's a topic sentence), but there is an additional requirement for a periphery.
- Because the purpose of a split-topic sentence is to identify a subset of a topic set, this identification must be the only assertion of the sentence when the split topic is paired with an adjunct, which is not a primary unit of the clause. This makes the *in situ* element (and the split topic) pragmatically interpretable as the main purpose of the utterance.
- Relevance of the Gricean Principle (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997: 630):
“What did Fred say/*murmur that Mary had bought?”



The description of the manner is relevant if it's relevant to the main purpose of the utterance, hence shifts focus away from the “extraction site”.

- In German, object is the preferred function for *in situ* arguments (Van Hoof 2006: 416).
- In Italian, the split topic/focus with the clitic *ne* excludes actors of transitive and intransitive verbs (Van Valin 2005: 176).
- In Japanese, the lexical-semantic and syntactic constraints and the discourse preference collectively point to undergoers as unmarked *in situ* elements.

Constructional schema for Japanese split topic

CONSTRUCTION: Japanese split topic

SYNTAX: Template(s): precore slot for topic

MORPHOLOGY:

Topic: *-wa*

In situ argument nucleus: *-no*

SEMANTICS: Split topic: head of the argument

PRAGMATICS:

Illocutionary force: unspecified

Focus structure: split topic = contrastive topic; *in situ* argument = contrastive focus; split topic = topic set for the contrastive focus

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- Despite the topic prominence of the language, split topics in Japanese have been underdiscussed, yet they are prevalent in discourse.
 - Split-topic sentences have specific syntactic, semantic, and discourse-pragmatic features, which separate them from regular topic sentences.
 - Overall, the topic-focus ambivalence of an argument (expressing both presupposition and assertion simultaneously) and the grammatical and discourse asymmetry align with the cross-linguistic patterns of the split phenomena.

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