

■ *Wa* and *Ga*: Topic-Present Sentence and Topic-Absent Sentence

There are topic-present and topic-absent sentences. In a topic-present sentence the nominative case is marked by *wa*, as in (1). In a topic-absent sentence the nominative case is marked by *ga*.

(1) *Watashi wa Kyōto ni sunde imasu* ‘I live in Kyoto.’

(2) *Kinō Hokkaidō de jishin ga arimashita* ‘There was an earthquake in Hokkaido yesterday.’

Topic-present sentences and topic-absent sentences are differentiated by such factors as predicate types, types of the nominative case nouns, and functions within discourse.

First, we will look at types of the predicate. A topic-present sentence is generated when the predicate expresses a constant state of things or a repetitive phenomenon, as in (3). When the predicate describes a temporary situation or a one-time event, a topic-absent sentence is generated, as in (4).

(3) *Yamada san wa mainichi, inu to sanpo shimasu* ‘Ms. Yamada takes a walk with her dog every day.’

(4) *Yuki ga futte kita yo* ‘It’s started to snow.’

Regarding the types of nominative case nouns, when the nominative case is an indefinite noun, such as *dareka* or *nanika*, the sentence has to be a topic-absent sentence, as in (5).

(5) *Dareka ga ōgoe de sakende imashita* ‘Somebody was shouting in a loud voice.’

If the referent of a nominative case noun is present right where the utterance takes place, or if it was mentioned in the previous context, it is easy to generate a topic-present sentence with that noun as the topic. Conversely, if the nominative case noun does not exist in the immediate environment or in the previous context, the sentence tends to be a topic-absent sentence, as in (7).

(6) *Kono isu wa totemo suwariyasui* ‘This chair is very comfortable to sit in.’

(7) *Ekimae ni pan'ya-san ga dekiru mitai desu* ‘It looks like there will be a bakery in front of the station.’

Lastly, regarding the function in discourse, topic-present sentences have the function of continuing with the previous topic. Topic-absent sentences set up a new topic or change the topic. In (8), a topic is set up in the first topic-absent sentence, and the topic continues in the next topic-present sentence.

(8) *Konogoro kōen ni mita koto ga nai tori ga imasu. Sono tori wa, suzume yori sukoshi ōkikute kuchibashi ga akai desu.* ‘Lately, there is an unfamiliar bird in the park. The bird is a little bigger than a sparrow, and its beak is red.’

→主題 Topic (2-I), 文章のまとまり Consistency of text: 結束性・一貫性 Cohesion and Coherence(2-K), 旧情報・新情報 (定・否定、既知・未知) Old Information vs. New Information (Affirmative/Negative, Known/Unknown) (2-K)

- References

Noda, Hisashi (1996). ‘*Wa to ga*’ (*Wa* and *Ga*) in *Shin Nihongo Bunpō Sensho 1* (New Anthology of Japanese Grammar 1.) Kurosio Publishers.

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