Zero Particle and Ellipsis of Case Particles

In speech, particles often do not show up, as shown below. (ø indicates absence of particle in the space.)

(1) (To Ms. Hayashi) Hayashi san ø kono kaban ø kau? ‘Ms. Hayashi, are you going to buy this bag?’

Such absence of particle has two functions.

One function appears, as in (1), at the beginning of a sentence, and it replaces wa. The difference between wa and zero particle is that the latter does not indicate comparison. Especially when the subject is first or second person, zero particle happens more often than wa. Conversely, when the context is comparative, it is not common to leave out the particle.

(2) A: Rei no paatii ni iku? ‘Are you going to that party we’ve talked about?’
   B: Boku {wa/?ø } iku. Tsuma {wa/?ø } ikanai ‘I am. My wife isn’t.’

Ga of exclusion does not easily become a zero particle.

(3) A: Dare da, garasu o watta no wa? ‘Who (was it that) broke the glass?’
   B: Boku {ga/?ø } warimashita ‘I did.’

The other function shows up elsewhere in a sentence, as “kono kaban ø” in (1). It is an omission of a case particle (ø, in this example).

Of the case particles, ga, o, ni (direction), and e may be omitted. Ni (the other party, location), de, to, kara, and made cannot be omitted.

(4) Kondo Oosaka {ni/e/ø} ikō ‘Let’s go to Osaka next time.’ (Direction)
(5) Kono ken wa kare {ni/*ø} tanomō ‘I’ll ask him to take care of this matter.’ (The other party)
(6) Kare wa jiko {de/*ø} shinda ‘He was killed in an accident.’ (Cause)
(7) Kare wa Chūgoku {kara/*ø} kita ‘He came from China.’

Such non-use of particle is grouped together as ellipsis of particles. However, in the first example there is a positive reason for the absence of particle, and thus, it is not appropriate to call it ellipsis. (This is sometimes called the ø-marker case.) In written language absence of particles do not normally occur.

→Topic (2-I), Characteristics of Spoken Language (4-B)

References


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