Scope and Prosody in the Japanese Contrastive Topic Construction

Christopher Davis

I build on the theory of the Japanese Contrastive *wa* construction presented in Tomioka (2009, To appear). Tomioka’s account builds on data like the following:

1) **Contrastive Topic versus Bare Focus**
   a. Ken-*wa* ukatta
      Ken-WA passed
      “(At least) Ken passed.”
   b. Ken-*ga* ukatta
      Ken-NOM passed
      “(Only) Ken passed.”

2) **Contrastive *wa* with Different Clause Types**
   a. **Interrogative**
      . . . **zyaa** Erika-*wa* doko-e itta no?
      well Erika-*wa* where-to went Q
      “. . . well then, where did Erika go?”
   b. **Imperative**
      eigo-*wa* chanto yatte-ok-e
      English-*WA* without.fail do-prepare-IMP
      “At least, prepare yourself for English.”
   c. **Exhortative**
      Kyouto-ni-*wa* iko-u
      Kyoto-to-*WA* go-HORT
      “At least, let’s go Kyoto.”

3) **Variety of Implicatures**
   Who passed?
   Ken-*wa* ukatta
   Ken-WA passed
   “(At least) Ken passed.”
   a. **Ignorance**: Doesn’t know whether other people passed.
   b. **Secrecy**: Is not at liberty to say whether other people passed.
   c. **Coyness**: Teases the hearer by withholding information.
I show that Tomioka’s account of these data has difficulty dealing with two other features of the construction:

(4) Island-sensitivity of *wa’s Attachment Site* Hara (2006)

a. *itsumo [uchi-ni John-wa kita toki], inu-ga hoe-ru
always house-to John-WA came when dog-NOM bark-NONPAST
“When at least John comes over, the dog always barks.”

b. *itsumo [Chomsky-wa kai-ta hon]-ga shuppan
always Chomsky-WA write-PAST book-NOM publish
sa-re-ru
do-PASS-NONPAST
“Books that at least Chomsky writes are always published.”

(5) Focus Sensitivity within the *wa*-marked Constituent (Koma-gata 1998)

a. [Imaizumi-ga mottekita awamori ] -wa oisikatta yo
Imaizumi-NOM brought awamori WA tasty
“The Awamori that Imaizumi brought was good.”
(Does not commit to the Awamori that other people brought)

b. [Imaizumi-ga mottekita awamori ] -wa oisikatta yo
Imaizumi-NOM brought awamori WA tasty yo
“The Awamori that Imaizumi brought was tasty.”
(Does not commit to the other drinks that Imaizumi brought.)

c. [Imaizumi-ga mottekita awamori ] -wa oisikatta yo
Imaizumi-NOM brought awamori WA tasty yo
“The Awamori that Imaizumi brought was tasty.”
(Does not commit to the other drinks that Imaizumi brought, or to the drinks that other people brought.)

I show how a modification to Tomioka’s basic picture helps to understand this additional data. The two components of the analysis are:

1. A contrastive *wa*-marked constituent undergoes island-sensitive movement to a high structural position (outside the scope of the exhaustivity operator of Fox (2006)).

2. Focus alternatives within the *wa*-marked constituents are computed using a restrictive Rooth-style approach Rooth 1985. It is the structural position of these alternatives (moved to a position above the speech act level) that is responsible for their special interpretation when compared with bare focus.

The combination of Rooth-style focus semantics, which relies on Hamblin alternatives with point-wise function application, and movement, which relies on variables, introduces tricky formal issues. I adopt the solution proposed in Novel and Romero (to appear), providing the relevant formal mechanisms for a compositional semantics to interpret the structures I posit for the CT *wa* construction.
References

Fox, Danny. 2006. Free choice and a theory of scalar implicature. Ms., MIT.


