

JAPANESE *WA, MO, GA, WO, NA, NO*

Frederik Kortlandt

Lone Takeuchi's stimulating book (1999) has given me an opportunity to reconsider my (unpublished) semiotactic analysis of Japanese particles, which includes the following components:

X *wa* = for an entity X there is a situation E in which X occupies a position.

X *mo* = for an entity X there is a situation E in which X occupies the same position as an entity Y.

X *ga* = for an entity X there is a predicate P of which X is the subject.

X *wo* = for an entity X there is a predicate P of which X is the complement.

X *na* = for an entity X there is an entity Y which carries the features of X directly.

X *no* = for an entity X there is an entity Y which carries the features of X indirectly.

A situation is an entity with a temporal dimension. A predicate is a set of features with a temporal dimension. The subject of a predicate is an entity which carries the features of the predicate directly. The complement of a predicate is an entity of which the participation in the situation is coextensive with the predicate. An entity carries a set of features directly if the features do not exist without the entity. The six particles mentioned above refer to the three principal levels of a semiotactic analysis (situation, predicate, entity) and differ in the property that the second member of each pair implies the existence of an additional participant in comparison with the first member of the pair. For the theoretical background of the analysis I refer to Ebeling 1978, and for earlier applications of my variety of semiotactics to Kortlandt 1992 and 1998.

The analysis outlined here will now be confronted with Takeuchi's pertinent examples, here labeled with a T followed by the page number in Takeuchi 1999. It must be noted that the analysis is limited to the particles under consideration.

wa/ga

(T127) *kuruma wa kosyoo sita* 'my car broke down': for the car there is an event, viz. that it broke down. The car does not fall under the scope of the time frame of the event in which it participated because it is introduced as a timeless entity before the event.

(T127) *kuruma ga kosyoo sita* 'my car broke down': for the car there is a predicate of which it is the subject, viz. that it broke down. The car falls under the scope of the time frame because it is introduced together with the event in which it participates as the carrier of the predicated features.

(T127) *PLO gityoo toozyooki ga humei* 'plane carrying PLO leader missing' was the headline of the Asahi Sinbun when the plane had presumably crashed in 1992: the plane was introduced as a missing entity.

(T128) *arafato gityoo wa buzi* 'leader Arafat safe' was the headline in the following morning edition, presupposing that the PLO leader was in the reader's mind and now reporting his safety.

(T128) *kosyoo sita no wa kuruma da* ‘what broke down is the car’: for the breakdown there is an entity which participated in the event, and for this entity there is a situation, viz. that it was the car.

wa/no

(T130) *poti wa kainusi ni sinareta* ‘Pochi’s owner died’: for Pochi there was an event, viz. that he was affected by death coming to his owner.

(T130) *poti no kainusi ga sinda* ‘Pochi’s owner died’: for Pochi there is an owner who participated in the event, viz. that he died.

(T130) *haruo no syakkuri wa tomaranaku natte simatta* ‘Haruo’s hiccups just would not stop’: for Haruo there are hiccups for which there is a situation, viz. that they did not stop.

(T130) *haruo wa syakkuri ga tomaranaku natte simatta* ‘Haruo’s hiccups just would not stop’: for Haruo there is a situation, viz. that his hiccups did not stop.

(T130) *zoo wa hana ga nagai* ‘elephants have long trunks’: for elephants there is a situation, viz. that their noses are long.

(T130) *zoo no hana ga nagai* ‘the elephant’s trunk is long’: the elephant has a nose which is long.

wa/ga/no

(T131) *poti ga nomi ga ooi* ‘Pochi has lots of fleas’: Pochi carries the features of a situation where fleas are many.

(T131) *poti wa nomi ga ooi* ‘Pochi has lots of fleas’: for Pochi there is a situation where fleas are many.

(T131) *asa no uti wa, kore de sunda; dakedo, gogo ni natte kara ga taihen datta nda* ‘for the morning that was all; however, the terrible bit was after noon’: for the morning there is a period for which the situation is that it finished with this; however, the period after it had become afternoon was the carrier of the features of a situation which was terrible.

(T132) *ano oyazi-san ni wa ziken koso nani yori mo bitaminzai na no da* ‘to that old man, cases, more than anything else, are vitamins’: for the situation as it is to that old man, it is just cases which more than whatever carry the features of something which carries the features of vitamins.

(T132) *hahatati wa kyoosi ni takusite iru kitai to iu mono wa, boku wa sore wo kangaeru to, zibun ga kowaku narimasu* ‘this expectation that mothers have in teachers, when I think of it, I fear for myself’: for mothers there is a situation where they put their trust in teachers, this expectation is something for which, for me when I think this, my self becomes fearful.

(T133) *bunmeikoku ga dansei ga heikin zyumyoo ga mizikai* ‘it is in civilized countries that males have a short lifespan’: civilized countries carry the features of a situation where males carry the features of the average lifespan being short.

wa/mo

(T134) *obake ni asi ga nai* ‘ghosts have no legs’: for ghosts the situation is that there are no legs.

(T134) *obake ni wa asi ga nai* ‘ghosts have no legs’: for ghosts there is the situation that there are no legs.

(T134) *obake ni mo asi ga nai* ‘ghosts, too, have no legs’: for ghosts there is the same situation as for another entity, viz. that there are no legs.

(T134) *kore-tte iu, sigoto mo nai wake da si, oisii mono mo taberarenai si, hito kara mo kangei sarenai mono* ‘neither do they (= ghosts) have a proper job, nor can they eat delicious food, nor are they welcomed by people’: speaking of this, the thing is that for work as for something else, the circumstances are that there is no actual situation, moreover, for tasty things as for something else, there is no actual situation, viz. that they are affected by eating them, moreover, for what comes from people as for something else, there is no actual situation, viz. that they are affected by a welcome.

(T135) *moo, yoru mo hukete kita kara, oyasumi* ‘it is already late now, so good night’: already since for the night as for something else there is a situation, viz. that it has come advancing, good night! (where “something else” refers to the the speaker’s intention to leave).

(T135) *moo, yoru wa hukete kita kara, oyasumi* ‘it is already late now, good night’: already since for the night there is a situation, viz. that it has come advancing, good night! (where the substitution of *wa* for *mo* results in a “strangely non-committal utterance”, T135).

(T135) *beddo ni wa moohu mo aru* ‘and there is a blanket, on the bed’: for the situation on the bed there is a blanket in addition to something else (viz. that everything is okay).

(T135) *moohu wa aru (ga)* ‘there is a blanket (but)’: as for blankets, there is one (but).

(T135) *dekiru to mo* ‘you bet I can!’: as for (me) to be able, (say this) beside what else (you may think).

(T135) *dekiru wa* ‘I can!’: as for (me) to be able, there is a situation (where this is the case).

(T136) *sannin ita* ‘there were three (of them)’: three persons were there.

(T136) *sannin wa ita* ‘there were (at least) three (of them)’: as for three persons, each of them was there.

(T136) *sannin mo ita* ‘there were as many as three (of them)’: as for three persons, each of them was there beside the other two.

(T136) *okaasan ga otte mo, poti wa tuite kita* ‘even if mother chased it away, Pochi followed her’: with mother chasing (it) away in addition to another event, for Pochi there was the situation that it came following (her).

(T136) *okaasan wa keeki wo tukutte, bokutatai wa otya wo ireta* ‘mother made a cake and we made tea’: for mother there being an event of making cake, for us there was an event of pouring tea.

(T136) *kanozyo wa musuko no tegami wo yonde wa, namida ga koborete kita* ‘whenever she read her son’s letters, tears rolled down her cheeks’: for her for a situation of reading a letter of (her) son, the situation was that tears came overflowing.

wa/ga/wo

(T138) *watakusi wa kitune ga arawareru no wo mita* ‘I saw the fox appear’: for me there was a situation, viz. that I saw something which carried the features of a fox appearing.

(T138) *watakusi wa okaasan ga nisesatu wo tukutta koto wo siranakatta* ‘I did not know that mother had made forged notes’: for me there was a situation, viz. that I did not know the fact that mother had made forged notes.

(T139) *watakusi wa akatyan ga kage ni odoroiita no wo mita* ‘I saw the baby becoming surprised at its own shadow’: for me there was a situation, viz. that I saw something which carried the features of the baby being surprised at (its) shadow.

(T139) *watakusi wa sitai ga keisatu ni hori dasaseru no wo mita* ‘I saw the corpse being dug up by the police’: for me there was a situation, viz. that I saw something which carried the features of a corpse being affected by digging out at (the hands of) the police.

wo/ni

(T145) *mati wo deta* ‘I left the town’: leaving the town removes the town from the picture.

(T145) *soto ni deta* ‘I moved outside’: this results in being outside.

(T145) *uti kara soto ni deru* ‘move out of the house to the outside’: the movement replaces being inside (the house) by being outside.

(T145) *tori ga sora wo tonda* ‘a bird flew across the sky’: this “does not imply anything about the bird’s whereabouts as a result of its flight, in fact, the bird may still be in the sky” (T146).

(T146) *kooen wo aruita* ‘I walked across the park’: I may still be in the park.

(T146) *kooen made aruita* ‘I walked as far as the park’: this implies *kooen no mae ni ita* ‘I was in front of the park’.

wo/no

(T149) *kakumei wo kenkyuu sita* ‘I studied revolutions’: revolutions are the object studied.

(T149) *kakumei no kenkyuu wo sita* ‘I did studies of revolutions’: revolutions is what the studies were about.

(T149) *kooen wo sanpo sita* ‘I walked in the park’: I did park-walking.

(T149) *kooen no sanpo wo sita* ‘I walked in the park’: the park is where I walked.

(T152) *otoko wo yatte iru toki nodo ga kawaku koto ga ooi* ‘when I am acting the man, I often get thirsty’: the time of doing the man, the fact that my throat gets dry is frequent.

wo/ni/ga

(T155) *okaasan ga hanako wo/ni arukasetara iyagatta* ‘when mother made/let Hanako walk, she (= Hanako) did not like it’: here *ni* implies that the causee Hanako walked of her own accord.

(T155) *suzuki-san wa sensoo de musuko wo sinaseta* ‘Suzuki let his son die in the war’: the son’s dying was not a volitional act and Suzuki did not act to prevent it.

(T155) *niwa no bara wa kirei na hana wo sakasete iru* ‘the roses in the garden are blooming with beautiful flowers’: for the roses in the garden there is the situation that they have let beautiful flowers burst into bloom, where the flowers are the result of bursting into bloom.

(T155) *yukiko wa katayama no aibu ni iki wo hazumasete ita* ‘Yukiko was panting at Katayama’s caresses’: for Yukiko there was the situation that she let her breath rebound at Katayama’s caresses.

(T156) *yuurei ni denwa ga kakerareru desyoo ka* ‘I wonder if ghosts can make telephone calls’: for ghosts the question is if a phone call can be made.

(T156) *hanako wa denwa wo kakerareru desyoo* ‘I wonder if Hanako can make a phone call’: for Hanako there is the question if she can make a phone call.

(T156) *boku wa sinsoo wo(/ga) hanasitai* ‘I want to tell the truth’: for me there is a situation, viz. that I want to tell the truth.

(T156) *boku wa sinsoo ga(/wo) kikitai* ‘I wish to hear the truth’: for me there is a situation, viz. that I want the truth to come to my ears.

(T158) *sensei ga doobutu ga suki na no wo siranakatta* ‘I did not know that the professor likes animals’: that the professor carries the features of a situation where animals are liked is something of which I had no knowledge.

no/koto

(T199) *sinu no* ‘the one(s) who is/are going to die’: an entity which is not dying but carries the features of somebody dying.

(T199) *kuzira ga honyuu doobutu de aru koto wo siranakatta* ‘I did not know (the fact) that a whale is a mammal’: the replacement of *koto* ‘fact’ by *no* ‘something which carries the features (of whales being mammals)’ results in an incoherent sentence.

(T199) *hanzai ga syoorai okoru no/koto wo boosi sinakereba narimasen* ‘we’ve got to prevent crime from occurring in the future’: in comparison with *koto* ‘fact, event’, *no* ‘something which carries the features (of an event)’ “connotes relatively greater urgency of the event, or in the case of a future event greater likelihood that this event will occur” (T199).

na/no

(T81) *akiraka na syooko da* ‘it is a clear proof’.

(T81) *hanzai no syooko da* ‘it is proof of a crime’.

(T81) *atatakai* ‘(it is) warm’.

(T81) *atataka na* ‘carrying warmth’.

(T82) *mugon no hito* ‘silent person’: a person of silence.

(T82) *miti no sekai* ‘unknown world’: world of the unknown.

(T82) *genki na okaasan* ‘high-spirited mother’.

(T82) *genki wo dase* ‘cheer up!’: expose your spirits.

(T82) *heiwa na kuni* ‘peaceful country’.

(T82) *heiwa no sisya* ‘messenger of peace’.

(T82) *heiwa e no miti* ‘road to peace’: the road of an entity which moves toward peace.

References

- Ebeling, Carl L. 1978. *Syntax and semantics* (Leiden: Brill).
- Kortlandt, Frederik. 1992. On the meaning of the Japanese passive. *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 24, 97-108.
- Kortlandt, Frederik. 1998. Syntax and semantics in the history of Chinese. *The Journal of Intercultural Studies* 25, 167-176.
- Takeuchi, Lone. 1999. *The structure and history of Japanese* (London: Longman).