Arguments Against the Rigid Order and Occurrence Restrictions Among Topic Elements: Evidence from Japanese and Hungarian

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It has been recently argued that in languages such as German and Italian, topic elements occur in a sentence with a rigid order. Frascarelli and Hinterhölyl (2007:112) suggest the following topic hierarchy.

(1) [$_{ShiftP[+aboutness]}$ [$_{ContrP}$ [$_{FocP}$ [$_{FamP*}$ {continuing; familiar} [IP

Namely, topic elements occur with the rigid order of Shifted (Aboutness)Topic--Contrastive Topic--Familiar Topic. Besides, Focus Phrase occur between CntrP and FamP. Moreover, only Familiar Topics can occur more than once, which is indicated by *. Molnár, Egerland and Winkler (2019:28) also propose the following schema.

(2) [$_{ShiftP}$ A(boutness)-Topic [$_{ContrP}$ C(ontrastive)-Topic [$_{FocP}$ [$_{FamP*}$ G(iven)-Topic [$_{FinP}$ [IP

The aim of this paper is, by giving Japanese examples, to argue against this view on the ordering and occurrence of topic elements. Let us begin with the following paradigm in (3a-c).

Wa-marked phrase in (3a) constitutes a typical example of aboutness topic (A-Topic). However, as can be easily detected from (3b), *syoobootai-wa*, which designates contrastive topic (CT), can occur before A-Topic. This is confirmed by the fact that the sentence can be easily followed by (3c).

Let us take a look at the next example in (4).

The first *wa*-marked phrase here is considered to specify given topic (G-Topic). This is because unlike the *wa*-phrase in (3a), the one in (4) is an argument of the verb. The fact that the order of G-Topic--CT is easily noticed makes up another evidence against the schema shown in (1) and (2).

Moreover, as Nakamura (2020:171) argues, the particle *wa* can signal focus when it is given focal stress. This is shown in (5). Here, focally stressed *wa*, shown here as *WA*, denotes focus. In addition, the sentence has an order of A-Topic--A-Topic--Focus--CT. This order again does not observe the rigid order shown in (1) and (2). Furthermore, the sentence has two A-Topics, which is not allowed under the schema.

The final piece of evidence comes from the fact that we can easily detect still another kind of topic called frame-setter. Tomioka (2016:762) puts forward an example of frame-setter in (6). Tomioka notes that *wa*-marked phrase here signifies frame-setter because *wa* is attached to the gerundive form of the verb, and argues that this should be distinguished from A-Topic.

Summarizing our discussion, we have argued that Japanese does not have the rigid order of topic elements detected in German and Italian. CT can occur at the beginning of a sentence before A-Topic. We have also asserted that Japanese allows the order of G-Topic--CT. Besides, in Japanese, multiple occurrences of A-Topics are allowed, and a focus element can occur before CT and after G-Topic. Finally, we have claimed that Japanese makes use of another type of topic: frame setting.

Theoretical implication this paper invokes is that we are given evidence in another type of language that behaves differently from German and Italian.

471 words

(3) a. Sono-kazi-wa saiwai   syoobootai-ga   hayaku ki-ta

　　 that-fire-Top fortunately   fire-brigade-Nom quickly come-Past

　　 'That fire, fortunately the fire brigade came quickly.'

　 b. Syoobootai-wa sono-kazi-wa   saiwai   hayaku ki-ta

　　 fire-brigade-CT that-fire-A-Topic fortunately quickly come-Past

　　 'The fire brigade came quickly as for that fire.'

　 c. Demo kyuukyuusha-wa kuru-no-ga   sukosi osokat-ta

　　 but   the ambulance-CT come-Noninalizer-Nom   a bit   late-Past

　　 'But the ambulance came a bit late.'

(4)　Sono-hon-wa   hyooronka-wa syoosan-shi-ta

　　 that book-G-Topic critics-CT   admire-do-Past

　　 'As for that book, critics admired.'

(5)　Yooroppa-de-wa   Taro-no-otooto-wa   furansu-de-WA

　　 Europe-Loc-A-Topic T-Gen younger brother-A-Topic   France-Loc-Focus

　　 wain-wa nomi-tai

　　 wine-CT drink-want to

　　 'In Europe, as for Taro' younger brother, in France (not in Italy), he wants to drink at least

　　 wine.'   (Nakamura (2020:171))

(6)　Sono-ken-ni kansite-wa   Mary-ni   makaseru-beki-desu

　　 That matter-Dat concern-Top   M-Dat   entrust-should-be

　　 'About that matter, we should let Mary take care of it.'   (Tomioka (2016:762))

References

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