

ELLIPSES OF CASE-MARKING PARTICLES IN CONVERSATIONAL DISCOURSE IN JAPANESE

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Summary: It is well known that NPs without being followed by case-marking particles may occur in conversational discourse in Japanese. Some researchers argued that ellipses most naturally occur when shared information is conveyed. This paper investigates the validity of this claim examining actual conversation data. The investigation seems to allow a conclusion that ellipses of case-marking particles are not controlled by pragmatic notions such as sharedness of information but by syntactic and semantic conditions.

Keywords: Case-marking particles, topic-marking particle, ellipsis.

1.INTRODUCTION

Tsutsui (1984), to my knowledge, is the only comprehensive study on particle ellipsis. His study was done on the basis of native speakers' judgment on «naturalness» of ellipsis in sentences he himself composed. His «rules,» therefore, need to be tested against actual conversation data. The goal of this paper is to report the result of that investigation and to propose alternative principles for ellipsis. As the title of the paper indicates, the topic-marking particle WA, which Tsutsui includes in his discussion, will not be dealt with in the present paper.[1]

My data come from three conversation samples: (i) «Ide et al. 201» which represents a very formal conversation; (ii) «Tetsuko,» the transcription of a famous one-hour TV interview by Kuroyanagi Tetsuko which represents mostly formal but occasionally informal speech; and (iii) «Ide et al. 301» which represents the most informal conversation of the three.

ISBN: 0 08 043 438X

2. TSUTSUI'S GENERAL RULES FOR CASE-PARTICLE ELLIPSIS

Tsutsui (1984: 90) proposes the following four rules:

G-Rule 1 : The lower the formality level is, the more natural the ellipsis of case particles is.

G-Rule 2 : The ellipsis of the case particle (CP) of an NP-CP is unnatural if the NP-CP conveys the exclusivity.

G-Rule 3 : The ellipsis of a CP is unnatural if it is in a generic sentence.

G-Rule 4 : The ellipsis of the CP marking a monosyllabic NP is less natural than that of the CP marking a multisyllabic NP.

G-Rule 1 means that ellipses occur more frequently in informal conversation. As will be shown later, my data statistically endorse it.

G-Rule 2 concerns what Kuno (1973) calls «exhaustive-listing GA» as well as the NP marked by particle WO that is stressed. My data show that GA or WO following focused NPs does not delete. It is appropriate, then, to make a generalization like G-Rule 2.

G-Rules 3 and 4 are of minor importance. I will therefore omit discussion on them and only mention that my data do not endorse the former and that the latter is true with the exception of accented monosyllabic words.

3. TSUTSUI'S RULES FOR THE ELLIPSIS OF *GA* AND *WO*

3.1. GA-Ellipsis:

Rule 1 : The ellipsis of the GA of an NP-GA in a sentence is natural in informal speech if the NP-GA is preceded by the subject of the sentence and immediately followed by the predicate.

Rule 2 : The ellipsis of GA in a sentence is natural if the sentence satisfies one of the following conditions:

(A) The speaker believes the sentence carries expected information. (Expected information condition)

(B) The speaker believes the sentence carries shared information. (Shared information condition)

(C) The speaker expects the hearer to take some action in response to the sentence. (Expected action condition)

I find problems in all of these rules. When Tsutsui says that the ellipsis of GA is natural because one of the three conditions of Rule 2 is met, it may be that the pertinent NP is actually the topic of a sentence. In fact, an NP which satisfies these three pragmatic

ISBN: 0 08 043 438X

conditions would be the very NP that qualifies as a topic NP. When Tsutsui says the ellipsis of GA is unnatural, on the other hand, it sounds natural to me. The pertinent NP without case particle in such examples is usually the first NP in the sentence and it can again be interpreted as the topic of a sentence. Such zero-marked topic NPs differ from WA-marked topic NPs in their discourse function. Detailed discussion on them will be in Terakura (1997).2

There is another problem in GA-ellipsis rules. If expected or shared information warrants the naturalness of GA-ellipsis, as Tsutsui claims, then GA-ellipsis is expected to occur in the second mention of a referent in a sentence similar to the first mention in its semantic content. However, that is not the case. In the total conversation data, there are 27 instances where one and the same referent is mentioned for the second or the third time in similar sentences. In only three instances out of 27, GA-ellipsis occurs in the second mention and in two instances in the third mention. In addition, some inconsistency is found as to when ellipsis occurs. There is an instance where GA is absent in the first mention but appears in the second mention as well as an instance where GA is absent both in the first and the second mentions.

The low frequency of ellipsis in the second or third mention together with the inconsistency explained above seem to suggest that the sharedness or expectedness of information is disqualified as a condition for GA-ellipsis.

3.2. WO-Ellipsis

Rule : Unless the speech is very formal, the ellipsis of the WO of an NP-WO in a sentence is natural if the NP-WO is immediately followed by the predicate of the sentence.

In order to determine whether or not this «no-intervention» rule is sound,

let us investigate what types of syntactic materials occur in actual conversation intervening the NP and its predicate. Consider (1). Intervening materials are in Italics.

(1)(a) Soo-yuu shinpai WO *watakushi wa ne daibu* itashimashita keredomo
such worry I TOP PRT a-lot do-PAST-HUM though
(201: 68)
«That kind of worry, I did have quite a lot, though.»

(b) Sonna kiza-na kimochi WO NE anata jibun-de kangaeta no?
such showy intention you by-self think-PAST SP
(Tetsuko: 33)
«Did you come up with such a showy thing yourself?»

In (1a) the intervening materials are created by preposing the NP. In (1b) the particle NE intervenes the NP and the predicate. These two kinds of intervening materials are devices to place focus on the NP, the case particle of which never gets deleted. We will, therefore, exclude them from our consideration.

Intervening materials other than the above two kinds are the following: (a) quantity expressions such as hitotsu «one,» ninen «two years,» takusan «a lot,» etc., (b) manner adverbs such as chanto «properly,» baatto «at a stroke,» etc., (c) fillers such as ano/koo «well,» and (d) adverbial phrases/clauses such as kooshite «doing this way,» soozoo de

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«using imagination,» rajio shika nai koro de «when there were nothing but radios,» etc. The ellipsis of WO may naturally occur, counter to Tsutsui's Rule, even if the intervention is made by such items. Particularly, quantity expressions and manner adverbs allow WO-ellipsis to occur at fairly high frequency rates of 56% and 43%, respectively.

To conclude the review of Tsutsui's Rules for the ellipsis of case particles, his General Rules such as the naturalness of the ellipsis in informal conversation, or the unnaturalness of the ellipsis with NPs conveying «the idea of exclusivity,» can be quantitatively substantiated with actual data; however, his specific rules for GA- and WO-ellipsis are more or less problematical.

4.ALTERNATIVE PRINCIPLES FOR GA/WO ELLIPSIS

Consider now the ellipsis frequency of case particles in the three conversation samples provided in Table 1.

Table 1 : Ellipsis Frequency of Case-Marking Particles

Particle	GA			WO		
	GA	Ø	Total	WO	Ø	Total
201	246 (89%)	32 (11%)	280 (100%)	107 (54%)	90 (46%)	197 (100%)
Tetsuko	139 (90%)	15 (10%)	154 (100%)	74 (56%)	57 (44%)	131 (100%)
301	92 (73%)	34 (27%)	124 (100%)	17 (24%)	53 (76%)	70 (100%)
Total	477 (85%)	81 (15%)	558 (100%)	198 (50%)	200 (50%)	398 (100%)

Table 1 shows that the average frequency rate of ellipsis is 15% for GA and 50% for WO. In the most informal conversation (301), the rate of ellipsis frequency is 27% for GA and it is as high as 76% for WO.

The alternative principles for case-particle ellipsis I propose is this: the closer the syntactic and semantic distance between the NP and its predicate is, the greater the likelihood of case-particle ellipsis. I will first argue for the syntactic closeness. There are three arguments: First, the ellipsis of case particles occur more frequently inside the VP than outside. The most remarkable evidence for this is the much higher frequency rate of WO-ellipsis than that of GA-elllipsis. Table I shows that the ellipsis of WO occurs three to four times more frequently than that of GA. Another evidence is that the object-marking GA in a sentence such as Watashi kore GA/Ø daisuki yo «I like this very much» or in a sentence with a potential verb as its predicate such as Kookoo GA/Ø dekinakute gomen ne «I'm sorry for not being able to do what a daughter should do for her parents» (Tetsuko: 123) is deleted rather frequently (22%) whereas the subject-marking GA in a sentence such as Zoo wa hana GA nagai ne «Elephants have long trunks» or Go-shujin GA Gakushuuin no suugaku no sensei de «(Her) husband is a math professor of Gakushuin (University)» (201: 142) is rarely deleted

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(12%). This argument that the ellipsis of case particles is largely a phenomenon that occurs inside the VP provides an explanation as to why the particle WO following wh-words can delete (5 times out of 8 in the data) but the particle GA following wh-words cannot.

My second argument is with regard to the ellipsis of case particles inside complex NPs. The ellipsis of either GA or WO, as noted by Mikami (1972), rarely occurs inside complex NPs, i.e., relative clauses and noun-complement clauses (only 6% for GA and 17% for WO). Nonetheless, these figures clearly show that WO-ellipsis occurs more readily than GA-ellipsis. A possible reason for it is that the subject NP without GA may be perceived by the hearer as an element outside of the complex NP and will be interpreted as the topic of the whole sentence embedding that complex NP. On the other hand, the absence of the particle WO is less likely to be interpreted that way because the object NP is more closely connected with the predicate both syntactically and semantically.

My third argument is that the ellipsis of case particles seems slightly less frequent when the pertinent NP and the predicate are intervened by some materials than when there is no such intervention. As discussed earlier, if the intervening materials are quantity expressions which regularly occur after case particles or if they are manner adverbs which naturally occur before the predicate, the ellipsis of case particles is as frequent as when without any interventions. However, if fillers and adverbial phrases intervene, the frequency of ellipsis seems restricted to some extent, presumably because they distance the NP from its predicate syntactically and semantically.

I will now argue the semantic closeness of the NP to its predicate. I have two arguments for this. First, the ellipsis of both GA and WO most frequently occur in fixed expressions. The particle GA frequently deletes from expressions such as those in (2). The frequency rates are indicated in parentheses.

(2) ...wake/hazu GA nai «there is no expectation that...» (100%)
...suru/shita koto GA aru «there are times when I do/did...» (67%)
Set-phrases such as onaka GA suita «to be hungry» (22%)
Existential sentences such as ...GA aru/ooi/sukunai «there are/are many/are few...» (17%)

The particle WO frequently deletes from expressions such as those in (3).

(3) (soo yuu) koto WO yuu «to say such-and-such thing» (88%)

Set-phrases such as jooken WO tsukeru «to attach conditions,» go-meiwaku WO o-kake itashimashite «(sorry) to have troubled you,» etc. (67%)

So-called «sa-hen dooshi or suru-verbs» such as yama-nobori WO suru «to do mountain-climbing,» ii omoi WO suru «to feel good,» shitsumon WO suru «to ask a question,» etc. (52%)

In all these expressions the NP and its predicate are closely connected so that it is often predictable from the NP what sort of predicate will follow.

My second argument for the semantic closeness of the NP to the predicate is the case of so-called «motion verbs.» Although it is debatable whether or not the particle WO occurring

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with them is a case particle, the particle WO frequently deletes (55%) from such expressions as uchi WO deru «to leave one's house,» kono michi WO aruku «to walk along this street,» etc. This again demonstrates that the ellipsis is affected by the semantic factor.

On the basis of these observations, it seems correct to say that the closer the syntactic and semantic distance beween the NP and its predicate the greater the likelihood of case-particle ellipsis, and by claiming this way I hope to have shown that the ellipsis of case particles is determined syntactically and semantically, unlike the markings of topic NPs which need to be discussed in pragmatic terms. As Table I above clearly shows, the ellipsis of both GA and WO occurs most frequently in the informal conversation sample. It means that the speaker most actively applies in informal speech the above principles of case-particle ellipsis thus increasing the frequency of ellipsis to the greatest degree.

NOTES

1. Particle ellipsis considered in this paper is optional ellipsis in conversation. Ellipsis that is grammatically obligatory will not be dealt with.

2. To briefly explain the primary function of a zero-marked topic, it is to draw the addressee's attention to a certain entity which is somehow relevant to what the speaker is going to say. (i) below is an example:

(i) Kondo-no gakkai *WA/Ø nani-ka kangaeta?
next conference something consider-PAST
«Have you come up with any paper topic for the coming conference?»
(Lit. «The next conference, have you thought of anything?»)

Sentence (i) is an abbreviated way to say, «It's about the coming conference that I want to say about. Have you thought of any topic for a paper to be delivered at the conference?» Notice that topic-marking particle WA cannot occur here. It is not appropriate then to say that this zero-marked topic is derived by WA-ellipsis. Consider now sentence (ii).

(ii) Kore {(a) Ø, (b) GA, (c) WA } watashi dai-suki.
this I very-fond-of
«(a) This, I like it very much.»
«(b) This one and only this one I like very much.»
«(c) I like this one very much (but not other ones).»

As indicated in the English translations, the NP kore that is marked by GA receives exhaustive-listing reading and the NP marked by WA contrastive reading. If neither reading is intended, the speaker will not mark the NP with either GA or WA. In other words, a zero-marked topic has its own function in this kind of sentence. It allows the speaker to bring up a topic without inviting unwanted readings. Zero-marked topics, therefore, are not derivatives of WA-marked topics.

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ISBN: 0 08 043 438X