

RESOLVING THE PROBLEM OF SUBJECT DEFINING IN THE SIMPLE JAPANESE SENTENCE



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Annotation. *The article deals with the status of subject in the simple Japanese sentence. Two kinds of subject (direct and indirect) are grounded. Direct subject, marked by the particle *ga*, expresses the immediate agent of event from the sentence semantic structure. The indirect subject, marked by the particle *wa*, is related to the action or state through the direct subject. The holo-meronimic relation between indirect and direct subject in sentences with non-subjective predicate is established. If the predicate is subjective one, then the compound predicate acts as a part of the whole in relation to the indirect subject. The compound predicate expresses the characteristics of the person represented by indirect subject, through a part of his mental space.*

Key words: *direct subject, indirect subject, simple sentence, particles *wa* and *ga*, subjective predicate, compound predicate, simple predicate, holo-meronimic, logical relation.*

When solving didactic and translation problems connected with the constant search for lexical and grammatical equivalents, it is impossible to avoid the need to identify the subject in the original Japanese text, which is presented as an obligatory structural component of the sentence in a number of European languages. Beginning with the study of Japanese grammar from a new 'europeanized' angle in the Meiji era (1868-1912), discussions on the status of subject in Japanese sentence have not subsided. Many Japanese linguists (K. Kusano, Y. Nakamura, A. Mikami, S. Bekku, and others) argue on this issue.

Judging by the publications on the topic of subject, two main debatable issues can be identified in this area: 1) is there a subject in a Japanese sentence; 2) if there is, how is it marked and how can it be recognized.

A number of scholars, primarily Japanese, argue that the subject identifying is inspired by European ideas about syntax; that a subject similar to that in European languages does not exist; and that a Japanese sentence remains fully legitimate with only a predicate in it [1], [2]. And what is traditionally called a subject is either a means of attracting attention (marked by the particle *wa*), or new information (marked by the particle *ga*) [3, p. 79-80]. In fact, such view addresses the actual division of a sentence into theme and rheme, topic and comment. Other scholars, including the Meiji era's linguist K. Kusano, are of the opinion that the Japanese subject does exist and it is highlighted in the surface structure on the basis of the particles *ga* or *wa* [4], [5, p. 190, 440].

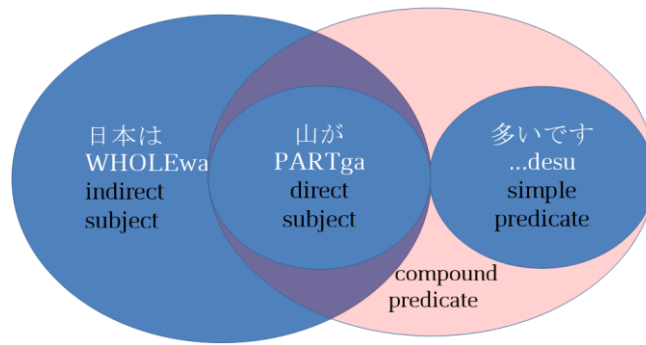
Moreover, in one simple sentence there can be more than one subject of different types [6, p. 256], [4], [7], as in the following example with two supposed

subjects (*elephant* and *nose*): 像は鼻が長い. According to the American linguist S. Martin, in a number of cases this is essentially due to a conflict between the surface and deep levels of the sentence, associated with the initially intransitive nature of the Japanese predicate [6, p. 257].

Yet we support the view that the root of the theoretical problem of subject defining in Japanese lies in the confusion of units of two other fundamentally different structures: syntactic, related to language system, and communicative, related to speech. Obviously, this confusion is due to the fact that, on the one hand, in Japanese the topic – a component of the communicative structure of the utterance, receives grammatical representation through the particle *wa*, and therefore it receives also grammatical status and must be somehow named in the sentence syntactic structure. On the other hand, the particle *wa*, by means of which the grammaticalization of the topic is carried out and therefore it received the name *thematic*, can also indicate the subject – a component of the syntactic structure. As M. Shibatani points out, "Japanese affords an interesting perspective on the two basic types of sentence construction that are generally merged in one direction or the other in many other languages" [8, p. 92]

The ambiguous status of the subject and the role of the particle *wa* leads to confusion in solving practical problems of teaching Japanese as a foreign language. Japanese textbooks usually avoid using the terms *subject* and *predicate*, which are familiar at least to Eastern European schoolchildren. It is proposed to memorize sentence patterns (*wa...ga*, etc.), for instance, as in the textbook *Minna no Nihongo*; or essentially 'form-to-content' approach is used, which involves considering the functions of various particles, including *wa* and *ga* (*Genki* textbook). In some textbooks, in attempt to combine elements of different functional levels, such terms as *thematic subject*, *nominative thematic case*, etc. are introduced into usage, and, judging by practical experience, learned with some difficulties.

Yet probably a large lot of experts in Japanese do not disagree about the function of the particle *ga*, which almost always, closely adjoining the substantive, indicates the latter as the subject of the action, state, etc. [6, p. 183], [5, p. 190]. At the same time it should be noted that if the particle *ga* indicates the subject, then the connection between the subject and the predicate is direct. If the subject is marked by the particle *wa*, then the connection between the subject and the predicate will be indirect. If both particles indicating the corresponding subjects are present in the sentence, then these subjects, firstly, are not isolated from each other, they are connected by logical hierarchical relations of the **whole** and the **part**; secondly, the *ga*-subject is part of a compound predicate characterizing the *wa*-subject (Picture 1).



Picture 1. Logical relation between subjects in the model *wa...ga*.

Let us provide some examples.

- 1) 日本は山が多いです。 *There are a lot of mountains in Japan.*
- 2) 太郎くんは頭がいいですね。 *Taro is smart.*
- 3) 私は気が変わりました。 *I changed my mind.*

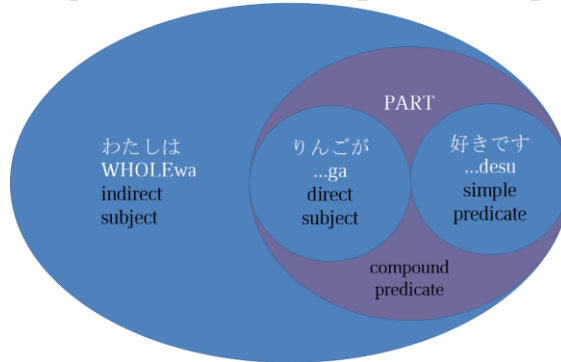
In the example (1), the *mountains* are part of *Japan* and characterize it by *their* abundance. In the example (2), the *head* is both literally and figuratively part of the *Taro*, who is characterized intellectually by *its* features. In the example (3), *my mood* is part of *me*: if *it* has changed, then in general *I* have changed my mind. Thus, with the sentence scheme *wa...ga*, one subject is indirectly related to the predicate through another subject, just as the whole is characterized by the features of its part.

Based on the above observations, we propose to operate with the terms of direct and indirect subjects by analogy with the existing concepts of direct and indirect objects. **Direct subject**, marked by the particle *ga* and may be an inanimate entity, expresses the immediate agent of the event in the sentence semantic structure. **Indirect subject**, marked by the particle *wa*, is related to the action or state through the direct subject.

As it can be seen, the *wa...ga* model as a characteristic of the whole through its part is especially revealing with words naming parts of the human body and soul, since the words of this class are in holo-meronymic relations and successfully combined with the semantics of this syntactic model. As it is known, they belong to the most ancient original layer of Japanese lexis [9] and are extremely common. There are hundreds of expressions involving such words in Japanese, for instance 気がまわる *to be attentive to someone*, 目が高い *to have good taste*, etc. We believe that their stability in the lexical language subsystem is associated with the opportunity they provide not to directly and unambiguously indicate the subject, that entirely correlates with Japanese politeness. They also allow somewhat to wall off from responsibility for the actions performed (*it's not me, but my hands*).

The *wa...ga* model with subjective predicates has a slightly different interpretation of meronymic relation. By *subjective* we mean the predicates, that denote psychophysiological processes and states of a person, such as thinking, sensations, experiences [10, p.97], expressed by verbs and adjectives like ほしい *desirable*, 好きな *favorite*, etc.

In such a structure of logical relations, not a part of a compound predicate (direct subject), but the entire compound predicate is part of the indirect subject (Picture 2). A compound predicate with a simple subjective one in its composition expresses a part of the mental space of the person expressed by a direct subject.



Picture 2. Logical relation between subjects in the model *wa...ga* with subjective predicate.

Let us look at the following examples.

(4) 私はりんごが好きです。 *I like apples.*

(5) 妹はドイツ語が上手ですよ。 *My younger sister is good at German.*

(6) 母は父がこいしいですよ。 *My mother misses my father.*

In the example (4), *my love for apples* is part of *my* preferences. In the example (5), *my younger sister's ability* is part of *her* skills. In the example (6), *my mother's feelings* occupy a certain part of *her* mental life. In all three cases, sensory and mental features are part of the internal mental space of the persons expressed in the syntactic structure by the indirect subject, which characterize them in some way.

It seems that any action or state of a person can be attributed to parts of his body or soul. Therefore, in any Japanese sentence we can assume the presence of a direct subject. For example, the sentence *Watashi wa daigaku he ikimasu* can be represented as *Watashi wa [ashi ga] daigaku he ikimasu*. However, with many verbs such usage has not taken root in speech practice due to probable semantic redundancy, as well as with adjectives of Chinese origin, containing in their semantics defining and defined components. For instance, 利口な *smart* is interpreted by hieroglyphs like 'quick mouth'. It can be accepted that in such sentences the direct subject is omitted, and the verbs in relation to the indirect subject are used metaphorically.

I. Takashi gives an interesting example with the omission of the direct subject [11, p. 193]:

(7) 学問の自由はこれを保障する。

At first glance, this sentence may be translated as *Freedom of science guarantees this*. However, the author interprets it as *Freedom of science is guaranteed [by people, the constitution, etc.]*, and it can be presented like 学問の自由を憲法が保障する。

In such examples the ambiguity is caused by the direct object as the topic of the utterance, which is marked by the particle *wo* in the rheme, but loses it in the

thematic position. In cases where the particle *wa* is used for marking of a direct object, that can only be understood from the context, the indirect subject and compound predicate are absent in the sentence (provided that there is one particle *wa* there). Consequently, the holo-meronimic relationship between them or their components is not established. Such utterances are constructed with a deviation from the basic word SOV order of a simple Japanese sentence.

It is also necessary to take into account the existence of another function of the particle *ga* – an emphasizing one. In this case the particle *ga* is directly adjacent to the indirect subject. Such sentences can be translated into English using the construction *it is ... who ...*. For example:

(8) 私がみかんが好きですよ。 *It is me who likes tangerines.*

In example (8) there are two particles *ga* in different functions: the first one – in the emphasizing one, the second *ga* marks the direct subject.

Summarizing the above, we can conclude that the problem of defining the subject in a simple Japanese sentence consists in finding a way to combine two fundamentally different levels of utterance consideration: syntactic and communicative. This is due to the fact that the component of the communicative structure – topic – is marked grammatically in Japanese. The posed problem can be solved by identifying the nature of the logical-semantic connection between the direct and indirect subjects, subjects and predicates. In any simple Japanese sentence with the basic word order or containing particle *wa* it is possible to imply the direct and indirect subjects, which in the case of a non-subjective predicate are connected by holo-meronimic relations. If the predicate is subjective one, then a compound predicate acts as a part of the whole in relation to the indirect subject. The compound predicate expresses the characteristics of the person represented by indirect subject, through a part of his mental space.

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