

Conditionals and Topics: How They are Similar but not Quite the Same

Tomioka (2015) notes, inspired by the observation by Munakata (2006), that the Japanese reduced conditionals of the forms *XP-na-ra*, *XP-be-if*, and *XP-datta-ra*, *XP-be.past-if*, can be functionally equivalent to a topic-marked phrase *XP-wa*, as shown below.

- (1) *Have you seen Mari today?*

Aa, Mari-wa/na-ra/datta-ra, tsui sakki mikake-mashita.

Ah, Mari-Top/be-if/be.past-if, just moment.before see-Past

‘Ah, Mari, (I) saw (her) just a moment ago.’

The similarity between the two constructions is not surprising. Since Haiman (1978), the correspondence between them has been frequently noted (most recently Hara 2017 for Japanese). There are other similarities observed in Japanese: (i) focalized reduced conditionals yield the same scalar interpretations (i.e., ‘at least’-like meaning) that contrastive *wa*-phrases do, (ii) the meaning of a relevance/biscuit conditional can be expressed by *wa* (cf. Tateishi 1990, Kuroda 1992).

However, there is at least one important difference between the two strategies that must be accounted for. It is the strong anaphoricity required of the reduced conditional construction. (1) is a reaction to the question ‘Have you seen Kenji’, where the topic of (1) *Kenji* is explicitly mentioned. Without such a context, the reduced conditional cannot be used while *wa* is more tolerant. As in (2), a *wa*-phrase can follow a topic-changing expression like *by the way*, but reduced conditionals are infelicitous.

- (2) Tokorode, saikin, uchi-no inu-wa/#nara/#dattara byookigati-na-n-desu-yo

By.the.way, recently home-Gen dog-Top/be.if/be.past.if sickly-be-NML-be-Particle

‘By the way, our dog has been sickly lately.’

We argue that topical reduced conditionals are derived from *factual conditionals*, in which the antecedent is taken for granted to be true (cf. Iatridou 1991, Bhatt and Pancheva 2004). (3) is an example of this type of conditional in English.

- (3) A: Joe is married to a Chinese woman.

B: Oh! If his wife is Chinese, his Chinese must have improved a lot.

As in (3), a factual conditional most commonly follows a statement that asserts the content of the antecedent. In other words, it is essentially anaphoric. We propose to analyze a topical reduced conditional in Japanese as a special kind of factual conditional, more concretely, as a shortened form of *if (it) is XP (that you mean)* or *if (it) is XP (that is at issue)*. Its pragmatic function is to reconfirm what the *QUD* is about. It is therefore predicted to be used only when the matter of *XP* has been brought up prior to the utterance of the sentence.

Why does a topical reduced conditional have to be derived from a factual conditional, then? Or putting the question differently, why is a usual, hypothetical conditional not a good source for a topical reduced conditional? We argue that it is due to the ‘temporary’ status of the update function of an *if*-clause. Adopting Kaufmann (2000), Isaac and Rawlins (2008) propose the following update system.

1. Utterances are not interpreted relative to single contexts (such as the traditional Stalnakerian context) but to ‘stacks’ of contexts. With a conditional sentence *if p, (then) q*, a derived context is created by making a copy of the current top of the stack and updating it with the propositional content of the antecedent (= *p*). This temporary context is *pushed* onto the top of the stack.

2. The consequence of the conditional (= *q*) is interpreted relative to the stack. After that, the temporary context is *popped* i.e., eliminated from the stack. However, not all information obtained with the temporary context and its update should be lost.
3. Isaac and Rawlins propose the system (in their (46) on pp.293) that obtains the desired result: After asserting *if p, (then) q* in the context *c*, *c* is updated to *c'* in such a way that the worlds in which *p* & $\neg q$ holds are eliminated from *c*.

The temporariness of an antecedent has a conflict of interest with what a topic is supposed to do. Once a topic is chosen, it is assumed to stay as a topic (unless a topic-shift is indicated). If a reduced conditional is a shortened form of an ordinary, hypothetical conditional, however, it indicates that the choice of the topic is only temporary and will be rescinded after the assertion of the sentence. On the other hand, a topic is not predisposed to be only temporary. A topic introduced in a sentence often remains as the topic for subsequent discourse (i.e., the notion of *topic continuation/chain*). A factual conditional is more suitable, as the content of the antecedent is assumed to be true, and there is no rescinding of its content.

Our analysis correctly predicts that contrastive topical uses of reduced conditionals need not be anaphoric (see (4)), indicating that factual conditionals can be the input for such uses. In (4), no previous mention of *syake* ‘salmon’ is necessary.

(4) Context: *Does John eat fish?*

SYAKE-WA/NARA/DATTARA, tabe-raru-hazudesu-ga...

SALMON-wa/be.if/be.past.if eat-can-should-but...

‘He should be able to eat SALMON (at least).’

The temporariness of an ordinary conditional is compatible here: The focal accent on ‘salmon’ elicits a set of alternatives, and it leads to a set of alternative propositions, such as ‘if (it is) tuna, he should be able to eat it’, ‘if (it is) eel, he should be able to eat it’, and often the negation of those propositions are implicated. This in turn means that, after the sentence (4), there may be a follow-up statement like ‘other fishes, I am not sure if he can eat’. In this sequence, the topichood of ‘salmon’ in (4) is only temporary, as a new topic will be introduced immediately after it. The situation is therefore compatible with the nature of an ordinary hypothetical conditional.

If time permits, we will discuss implications of the correspondences between topics and reduced conditionals in information structure theory in general. In particular: (i) The closeness between the two constructions cannot be easily accounted for within the ‘givenness’ theory of topics. It strongly suggests that topicality is related to the structurally layered update system, as proposed in Portner and Yabushita (1998) among others. (ii) A proper analysis of contrastive topics should have topicality as one of its components (cf. Tomioka 2010, Constant 2014). The contrastive topic-like behavior of contrasted reduced conditionals cannot be easily accounted for within the ‘conventional’ analyses of contrastive topics (e.g., Lee 1999, Hara 2006 among many others) in which the scalar meaning is conventionally encoded for the particle *wa/(n)un*.

Partial References: Constant, N. (2014) *Contrastive Topics: Meanings and Realizations*, UMass dissertation, Iatridou, S. (1991) *Topics in Conditionals*, MIT dissertation, Isaac, J. & K. Rawlins (2008) ‘Conditional questions,’ *J of Semantics* 25: 269–319, Kuroda, S.-Y. (1992) *Japanese Syntax and Semantics*, Kluwer, Tomioka, S. (2015) ‘Information structure in Japanese,’ in *Handbook of Information Structure*, OUP.