

Topics of Contrast

Contrastive Topics (CTs) are known to elicit a pragmatic effect of uncertainty, partiality and/or non-finality. Based on Japanese CT data, I argue that this effect is derived via a set of alternative speech acts and pragmatic inferences associated with it. The analysis provides an account for the following Japanese facts:

- (i) appearances of CTs in various kinds of speech act sentences,
- (ii) CTs having focal accents (i.e., no special accents) and no requiring additional focal elements, and
- (iii) the morphological transparency (the use of *wa*).

Another crucial component of the analysis is the comparison between focus and CT. The focus strategy is preferred to the CT strategy because it necessarily leads to a stronger speech act. The notion of competition between focus and CT explains a variety of (often subtle) pragmatic differences: When the two strategies compete, the CT option necessarily leads to a weaker pragmatic interpretation (hence, uncertainty/non-finality). When they don't, on the other hand, a stronger inference (exhaustive interpretation) survives. When the two strategies yield the same result, the CT option is infelicitous.

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