

# A Study of the Occurrence of *Ga* and *Wa* in the Stage of Two-Word Utterances

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The purpose of the present study on two-word utterances is to describe and discuss the significance of the initial production of particles by a native child speaker of Japanese in the process of his mother language acquisition. The focus here is especially on the acquisition of *ga*, the subject marker, and *wa*, the title marker.<sup>1</sup>

The data is chosen from Noji (1977),<sup>2</sup> which is a word for word record of the utterances by Noji's son, Sumihare, at the age of one month to two years.

## Background Information on the Japanese Sentence

In the Japanese sentence the order of the sentence constituents is not rigid except for the nucleus of the predicate<sup>3</sup> which comes at the end of the sentence, and the grammatical relation of the other sentence constituents is marked by particles. Some particles occur at the end of the sentence following the predicate nucleus. These are sentence particles and they add such an extra meaning or nuance to the sentence as "interrogative," "affirmative," or "feminine."

In the Japanese sentence, the so-called subject of the sentence is not an obligatory element. When a sentence has a predicate with a time element, it is a grammatical sentence, though not a full sentence. When an infant, therefore, produces an utterance, and if that utterance consists of the nucleus of the predicate with a time element, he can be said to have produced a sentence. A predicated element, the subject or the topic, is naturally dropped when it is well understood between the speaker and the listener, and the drop of that element usually suggests that the predication is about the speaker himself. The general aim of this study, however, is the syntax of child language, how a child acquires a grammatical relation among the elements in a sentence. Our attention, therefore, should be on those utterances that have a nucleus of the predicate and one more element.

## General Information on Sumihare's Utterances between 1:4 and 2:00

Sumihare began to produce two-word utterances at the age of 1:4 (one year and four months), and at the age of 1:7, he began to produce three-word utterances.

At the age of 1:4 the child produced three<sup>4</sup> incomplete<sup>5</sup> two-word utterances, and two at the age of 1:5. At 1:6, he produced about twenty-five two-word utterances, and one, his first, three-word utterance and one "two words + a sentence particle" utterance, which is a sort of three-word timed utterance. At 1:7 in addition to two-word utterances, he produced one three-word utterance and one three-word timed utterance. At 1:8 he produced nine three-word utterances and eight three-

word timed utterances ; at 1 : 9 he produced six three-word and six three-word timed utterances. At 1 : 10, nineteen were three-word and five were three-word timed utterances, and ten of these seemed to suggest the occurrence of complex sentences.

At the same time in this month (1 : 10), he also produced new kinds of utterances, such as "adjective + noun + sentence particle," "noun + particle + noun" with a new particle *no*, the possessive marker, between the nouns, or "noun + particle + noun + particle" with *ga* after the first noun and another new particle *to* 'with' after the second noun.

What was evident, in addition, about Sumihare's utterances at the age of 1 : 10 was that he came to produce a new construction using *choodai* quite often. The word *choodai* appeared very early, as a matter of fact it was the first word that made his utterance two word construction, and it was used mostly with an object in the meaning of 'give me (something)' or '(I) want (something)' :

Mamma	choodai.	'Give me food. / (I) want food.'
'food'	'give me'	

At the age of 1 : 8 he produced the following expression, which we cannot tell whether it was "request" or "desire" :

Tata	pai.	'Will you take off my boots? / (I) want to
'boot'	'an onomatopoeia, expressing	have my boots off.'
	throwing away'	

At this age he used the past form of the verb to express the request or the desire while in other situations he was using the same expression to show the 'action done,' the past tense.

Atchi	ita.	} 'Will you take me over there? / (I) want
'there'	'went'	
		} '(Something) went there.'

Chii	shita.	} 'Will you take me to the toilet? / (I) want
'urine'	'did'	
		} '(I) piddled.'

At the age of 1 : 9, he still used the past form for the request or the desire<sup>6</sup>, but he first produced the request form of a verb :

Buuwa	tsuite (= tsukete) ne.	'Will you turn on the light?'
'light'	'turn on (Request)'	

At this age he used for the first time the word *choodai* with the request form of a verb in the meaning of 'will you (do something)':

Wanwan totte choodai.	'Will you bring me that toy dog?'
'doggy, 'bring (Request) indicating a toy dog'	

At the age of 1:10 he began using *choodai* in this construction quite often, though without the request form of the verb:

Hoocho pan choodai.	'Will you cut (it) with the knife?'
'knife' 'an onomatopoeia, expressing cutting'	

Ame hanbun choodai.	'Will you (cut) the candy in half?'
'candy' 'half'	

Takitaki choodai.	'Will you boil (it)?'
'boiling'	

Atchi choodai ya.	'Will you take me there, won't you?'
'there' 'Sentence Particle'	

Also at this month he first used the desire form of a verb:

Nenne (shi) tai.	'(I) want to sleep.'
'sleep' 'want to'	

From these facts—as stated above, that the number of three-word utterances increased, that newtypes of utterances appeared, and that he seemed to have made an overt differentiation between the request and the desire at this age—it is proper to judge that Sumihare arrived at the next stage of language acquisition at the age of 1:10, which marked the beginning of his multi-word utterances. We can judge that the stage of two-word utterances of this child was 1:6 to 1:10.

All the more-than-one word and more-than-one-word timed utterances between 1:6 through 1:10 were chosen here as the data for the analysis of the process of the child's acquisition of particles.

### Introduction

The term "two-word utterance" has been used without a clear definition. What is meant by it here should be clarified. The problem is whether a particle should be considered as a unit to be called a word here or not. In the previous section I called

an utterance of "word + word + sentence particle" a "three-word timed utterance." The last particle in an utterance, serving to make it longer, appeared only when the child arrived at a certain age, the next stage of language development. Since all the one-word utterances the child produced in the first stage of language acquisition consisted of a unit of meaning, a word, or a sentence particle only, and they never consisted of both of the two; an utterance of "word + particle" should be considered as a two-word utterance. Table I, p. 164 below shows the kinds of "more-than-one" word utterances the child produced at the age of 1:6 through 1:10.

Table I

Kinds of More-than-One-Word Utterances (1:6 — 1:10)

1. Word + Particle	Pan na. / Otoo-chan wa? 'bread' 'daddy'
2. Word + Word	Buu itta. / Mamma choodai. 'car' 'went' 'food' 'give me'
3. Word + Particle + Word	Baa-chan ga (o) kuta. / Nyan no me. 'grandma' 'sent' 'cat' 'eye'
4. Word + Word + Particle	Buuwa takitaki na. 'fire' 'burning'
5. Word + Word + Word	Puu atchi ita. 'car' 'there' 'went' Too-chan, ame choodai. 'daddy' 'candy' 'give me'
6. Word + Word + Word + Particle	Batabata atchi ita na. 'car' 'there' 'went'
7. Word + Particle + Word + Particle	Chiitan ga Shima-chan to. 'a name' 'a name, indicating of a girl' himself'

Children try to produce sentences in order to tell others what they have in their minds. Even the early utterances have the function of conveying the abstract ideas that children have, and these utterances show functional differences. The utterances Sumihare produced between 1:6 through 1:10 can be divided into several types according to function. (Table II, p. 165) The number of the declarative utterances was exceedingly large, and this kind can further be divided into several types according to meaning. (Table III, p. 166) Among these, utterances describing action were most frequently produced, and this kind of utterance is the one requiring the subject or

the title of the nucleus of the predicate if the "action" is not performed by the speaker himself.

Table II

Functional Types

1. Declarative	Buu itta. 'car' 'went'	'The car went.'
	Chii shita. 'urine' 'did'	'I piddled.'
	Ringo kita. 'apple, 'came' indicating an apple-seller'	'The apple-seller came.'
2. Interrogative	Otoo-chan wa ? 'daddy'	'Where's Daddy?'
	Itai-itai shita ? 'hurting' 'did'	'Did you get a shot?'
3. Imperative	Nee-chan oide. 'an address 'come' to an older girl'	'Come, nee-chan.'
	Mamma choodai. 'food' 'give me'	'Give me food.'
	Atchi choodai. 'there' 'give me'	'Take me there.'
4. Exclamatory/Greeting	Aa-aa nainai. 'alas' 'not (there)'	'Alas, nothing there.'
	Jii-chan baa. 'grandpa/ 'peekaboo' an address to an elderly man'	'Peekaboo, grandpa.'

Table III

## Semantic Types

## 1. Affirmative

a. Nomination/Location	Pan na.	'Bread, isn't it?'
	'bread'	
	Chinchinbuu an na.	'There is a street-car
	'stree-car' 'there'	there, isn't there?'
b. Possession	Taitai omeme.	'The eye of a fish.'
	'fish' 'eye'	
	Okaa-chan no obi.	'Mommy's sash.'
	'mommy' 'sash'	
c. Attribution	Atsui wa.	'(Something) is hot.'
	'hot'	
	Ringo okii ne.	'This apple is big.'
	'apple' 'big'	
d. Action	Chii ta.	'I piddled.'
	'urine' 'did'	
	Ringo kita.	'The apple-seller came.'
	'apple, 'came' indicating an apple-seller'	
	Baa-chan ga okutta.	'Grandma sent (us this).'
	'grandma' 'sent'	
	Mikan ga atta.	'(I) found an orange.'
	'orange' 'was'	
2. Negative	Shii nai.	'(I) have no urine./ (I)
	'urine' 'not-is'	don't want to piddle.'
	Ombu wa iran.	'(I) don't want to be
	'piggy- 'need-not' backing'	carried on your back.'

**The Occurrence of Particles**

The first particle Sumihare acquired as early as 1:6 was *na*, one of the sentence particles, asking for affirmation or consent:

Chi shita na. 'I piddled, didn't I?'  
'urine' 'did'

Ani na. 'There (it is), isn't it?'  
'there'

Chinchinbun an na. 'There is a street-car there, isn't there?'  
'street-car' 'there'

As he began to use *na*, he used it in almost every utterance if the number of words in an utterance did not exceed three including *na* itself. He used it also for direct address :

Too-chan na. 'Daddy, . . . .'  
'daddy'

He also misused it. When he meant 'I want bread,' he said, "*Pan na*," which actually means 'What I want is bread, isn't it?'  
'bread'

The next particle he used as early as 1 : 8 was also a sentence particle *ne*, asking for consent :

Inai ne. '(Something) isn't (here), is it?'  
'is-not'

Baa-chan inai ne. 'Grandma isn't (here), is she?'  
'grandma' 'is-not'

At this age Sumihare began to use the particle of the title marker, *wa* in a question, adding it to a noun' :

Otoo-chan wa ? 'Where's Daddy?'  
'daddy'

Myan wa ? 'Where are oranges?'  
'orange'

Otoohu wa ? '(What are you going to do with) the bean  
'bean curd' curd ?'

Since in the Japanese language the predicate of a sentence is quite often deleted when it is well understood in the context, these questions of "noun + *wa*" are full utterances which an adult speaker also produces.

At the age of 1:9 the child first used the subject marker *ga* :

Too-chan <i>ga</i> .	(indicating the sand	'Daddy (brought the sand).'
'daddy'	his father brought	
	home)	

Within a couple of days he used *ga* in a full sentence structure :

Baa-chan <i>ga</i> (o) kutta.	'Grandma sent (us this).'
'grandma' 'sent'	

At the age of 1:10, he began to use a few kinds of new particles ; first *no*, the possessive marker ; next *to*, 'with' ; *yo*, a sentence particle ; *ya*, another sentence particle ; and *o*, the object marker :

Okaa-chan <i>no</i> obi.	'Mommy's sash.'
'mommy' 'sash'	

Chiitan <i>ga</i> Shima-chan <i>to</i> .	'Chiitan (did something) with
'a name of 'a name, indicating	Shima-chan.'
a girl' himself	

Toon shita itai <i>yo</i> .	'(I) fell down. It IS painful.'
'falling' 'did' 'painful'	

Oimo choodai <i>ya</i> .	'Give me some potatoes, will you?'
'potato' 'give me'	

Taataa o choodai <i>ya</i> .	'Give me socks, will you?'
'sock' 'give me'	

### **The Significance of Early Particle Use**

The sentence particle is the first kind of particle Sumihare began to use. This may be because the last part of an utterance easily remains in people's auditory memory and Sumihare caught it quite early. Also, since the end of an utterance is clearly marked when there is a sentence particle, Sumihare might have felt that he had really said something if he used the end marker. The topic marker *wa* first appeared functioning at the same time as a sort of end marker of a question with a question intonation. It was quite often used as a question marker. Since in the Japanese language the predicate of a sentence is quite often deleted when it is well understood in the context, these questions of "noun + *wa*" are full utterances which an adult speaker also produces.

As was mentioned above, a Japanese sentence may have either a subject or a



topic, or both at the same time. The original purpose of this study of the two-word utterances in child language development was to find which of the two markers, the subject or the topic, would appear first and how they would be differentiated from each other. The answer to the first question was given in the previous section: *wa* appeared first (*wa* at 1:8 and *ga* at 1:9), but *ga* came to be used first in actual sentence structure (*ga* at 1:9 and *wa* at 1:11). In order to describe the answer to the second question, the acquisition of the differential usage of the two, all the sentences that contain the element predicated by the nucleus of the predicate have to be examined and the element has to be designated as the subject or the topic. The utterance with either marker, then, should be checked to see if the right marker is given, and the correct marker should be given to those utterances without either one.

Native speakers of Japanese can intuitively choose the right marker between the subject and the topic in utterances containing neither of them. What are their criteria to choose between the two? It depends on the kind of predicate. Kuroda (1979) explains the differential usage of the two in the light of predicational and nonpredicational descriptions of the content of the sentence predicate. He states that "... the English subject of a predication is translated in Japanese with a *wa*-phrase, while the subject of a nonpredicational description appears as a *ga*-phrase." (p. 46) McNeil (1970) explains *wa* and *ga* usage by extrinsic and intrinsic predicates. He says while in the English language there are no overt differentiating markers in the surface structure, in the Japanese language, in the surface structure, *wa* is used for intrinsic, and *ga* for extrinsic predicates.

As the present writer attempted to place the correct particle in each utterance, it became clear that in addition to differentiation by the type of predicate, the context in which an utterance is produced should also be taken into consideration. In order to use the right particle to complete an utterance Sumihare produced, I had to refer to the description of the situation in which he produced a particular utterance. For example, in the utterance *Shupopo atchi ita naa*, if the speaker caught the sound 'train' 'there' 'went' of the running train and that "going" caught his attention rather than the "thing," the train, *ga* would be the correct particle to be added after *shupopo*. However, the 'train' actual situation was that he and his mother were walking down the street and they heard the train coming. Sumihare stopped for a while and listened to the train coming and going away, then he produced the utterance. He took it for granted that his mother was listening, too, and the "train" was already a common topic between them at that time, though it was not overtly referred to. In this situation *wa* is the particle to be added after *shupopo*. 'train'

All the *wa* and *ga* that appeared in Sumihare's utterances were correctly used, but they were not constantly used after they first appeared. At the age of 1:8, when *wa* first appeared with a noun, it did not occur in *wa* sentence constructions. At 1:9, when *ga* first appeared in a sentence, out of seven *ga* constructions, one *wa* const-

ruction, and one unidentifiable<sup>8</sup> construction, only one sentence was produced with *ga*. At 1:10, out of fourteen *ga* and three *wa* constructions, three sentences appeared with *ga*. Even at 1:11, when *wa* first appeared in a sentence, and 1:12, not all the *ga* and *wa* sentences were produced with respective markers.

From the fact that Sumihare used *ga* and *wa* correctly but not constantly in sentence constructions, we can judge that he seemed to have acquired the differential usage of the two particles before he was fully able to produce them. Even after he became able to produce longer utterances, three- or four-word utterances which consisted only of content words, he dropped the marker, *wa* or *ga*, in two- or three-word utterances. This suggests that there was no problem of utterance production on the part of the child, but that there was a problem of function of the markers, or, of functionlessness. In other words, the marker is not assigned a function in actual use even though it is called a "function" word. The listener can identify most of the predicated elements as subject or topic without either marker. Since Sumihare was understood even when he did not use the markers, he dropped the markers most of the time. This occurred, of course, at the time of initial occurrence of the markers in the process of language acquisition, and Sumihare's further development should be examined in order to see the process of his acquisition of subject and topic markers.

#### NOTES

1. Cf. "A Discussion on Japanese Subject and Object Markers" by the present writer in *Kobe College Studies* Vol. XX No. 2 (1973).
2. Junya Noji, *Description and Report of Child Language Development I* (Hiroshima, 1977).
3. The nucleus of the predicate in the Japanese sentence is either of the verb, the adjective, the adjectival-verb, or the noun *da*.
4. Excluding the repetition of the same word, such as *nenne nenne*.
5. Each of these three utterances consisted of two words but with incomplete pronunciation.
6. Sumihare used the past form of *pai*, which he used at the age of 1:8 in *Tata pai* (shown above), in *Baba paita* 'Will you take the dirty thing off my clothes?/(I) 'dirty thing' 'took away' want to have the dirty thing taken off my clothes.'
7. *Wa* in a full sentence construction did not appear until the age of 1:11.
8. It was unidentifiable because there was no clear description of the situation in which the utterance was produced given in the book.

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The objective of the present study of the two-word utterances is to describe and discuss the significance of the initial production of particles, especially *ga*, the subject marker, and *wa*, the title marker, by Sumihare, a native child speaker of Japanese. All the more-than-one-word utterances of the child between the age of one year and six months through the age of one year and ten months were chosen as the data.

The sentence particle was the first kind of particle Sumihare began to use. Between *ga* and *wa*, the latter appeared first, though as a sort of end marker of a question, but *ga* came to be used first within the sentence structure. The child used *ga* and *wa* correctly from the initial occurrence but not constantly. The differential usage of these two particles seemed to be acquired before the child was fully able to produce the particles accurately.