

ROBO-SENSEI Grammar Notes

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Particle Lesson 1

USAGE RULE: The particle GA indicates the subject that performs the action or the subject that the stative predicate describes. The particle O indicates the object that the action operates upon. The particle WA indicates the topic of the sentence.

I. Subject GA and Object O

The phrase-particles GA and O attach to a noun. GA and O are used with action verbs that involve human decision or will (e.g., tabemasu “eat”, ikimasu “go”, tsukurimasu “make”, etc.). GA indicates the subject who performs the action. O indicates the object that the action operates upon. Study the following sentence.

(1) Tanaka-san ga sushi o tsukurimashita. Ms. Tanaka made sushi.

In sentence (1), TANAKA-SAN is the subject who performed the action of making sushi, so it is marked with GA. SUSHI is the object that the action of making operated upon, so it is marked with O.

In English, subject and object are marked by word order alone:

Ms. Tanaka made sushi.

In Japanese, subject and object are marked by distinct particles, so the word order is relatively flexible:

Tanaka-san ga sushi o tsukurimashita. Ms. Tanaka made sushi.

Sushi o Tanaka-san ga tsukurimashita. Ms. Tanaka made sushi.

The following illustrate more examples of the particles GA and O.

(2) A: Dare ga nomimashita ka. Who drank it?

B: Sumisu-san ga nomimashita. Mr. Smith drank it.

(3) A: Nani o nomimashita ka. What did you drink?

B: Sake o nomimashita. I drank sake.

Some predicates express states rather than actions involving human decision or will. Such predicates are called stative predicates:

oishii desu is delicious

imasu exist (animate existence)

arimasu exist (inanimate existence)

The particle GA is also used to mark the subject in sentences involving stative predicates:

(4) Tanaka-san ga imasu. Ms. Tanaka is (lit. exists) there.

(5) Jinzya ga arimasu. A shrine is (lit. exists) there; there is a shrine.

(6) A: Nani ga oishii desu ka. What is delicious?

B: Sushi ga oishii desu. Sushi is delicious.

II. Topic WA

The particle WA marks the topic of a sentence. The topic of a sentence, if there is one, can be any noun that has already been introduced into the conversation or discourse. Intuitively, the topic may be thought of as the noun currently “under discussion.” So either the subject or the object (but not both) could be marked with the topic particle WA instead of GA or O if it is the one under discussion in the conversation. If the sentence has a topic, it usually comes at the beginning of the sentence.

English has no specific topic marker. But similar functions are served by putting the noun at the beginning of the sentence or using phrases that directly indicate presence in context, like “as for ...” or “speaking of ...”.

Sailing – I love it.

As for sailing, I find it wet and uncomfortable.

Speaking of sailing, I nearly drowned last week.

Consider the following examples.

(7) Tanaka-san wa sushi o tsukurimashita.

Ms. Tanaka made sushi. (As for Ms. Tanaka, she made sushi.)

(8) Oishii biiru wa Asahi ga tsukurimasu.

Great beer, Asahi brewery makes it. (Speaking of great beer, Asahi brewery makes it.)

In (7) TANAKA-SAN is the subject who performed the action and also the topic of the sentence you are talking about. If the subject is the topic, it is marked with WA. In (8) BIIRU is the object that the action operated upon and also the topic of the sentence, so it is marked with WA.

Question words (i.e., DARE “who”, NANI “what”, DOKO “where”, DORE “which”, etc.) cannot be marked with WA because they are unknown information and cannot already be in context. Answers to the question words cannot be marked with WA either because they are new information. See the examples (2) and (3) again.

(2) A: Dare ga nomimashita ka. Who drank it?

B: Sumisu-san ga nomimashita. Mr. Smith drank it.

(3) A: Nani o nomimashita ka. What did you drink?

B: Sake o nomimashita. I drank sake.

In (2) neither DARE (unknown information) nor SUMISU-SAN (new information) can be marked with WA. In (3) neither NANI (unknown information) nor SAKE (new information) can be marked with WA.

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Particle Lesson 2

USAGE RULE: The particle DE indicates the location where the activity takes place. The particle NI indicates (i) the location where something exists that is not an activity, (ii) the direction toward which the action moves, or (iii) the goal that the action is targeted to.

I. Location DE and Location NI

The particles DE and NI have many different functions. One such function is to mark location, in which case we speak of location DE and location NI. Location DE marks locations at which some activity takes place. Location NI marks locations at which something exists that is not an activity. See the following examples.

- (1) Kamakura de Daibutsu o mimashita.
I saw Daibutsu (Great Buddha) in Kamakura.
- (2) Kamakura ni Daibutsu ga arimasu.
Daibutsu is located in Kamakura; there is Daibutsu in Kamakura.

In (1) Kamakura is the location where seeing (activity) took place, so it is marked with DE. In (2) Kamakura is the location where Daibutsu exists that is not an activity, so it is marked with NI.

II. Direction NI (or E) and Goal NI

The particle NI has more functions. Direction NI (or E) indicates the direction toward which the action moves. It is used with moving verbs (e.g., ikimasu “go to some place”, kaerimasu “return to some place”, etc.). Goal NI indicates the goal that the action is targeted to and is used with goal verbs (e.g., aimasu “meet someone”, kakimasu “write to someone”, etc.). See the following examples.

- (3) Kamakura ni ikimasu. (or Kamakura e ikimasu.) I will go to Kamakura.
- (4) Kamakura de Tanaka-san ni aimasu. I will meet Ms. Tanaka in Kamakura.
- (5) Tanaka-san ni tegami o kakimashita. I wrote a letter to Ms. Tanaka.

In (3) KAMAKURA is the direction toward which the action of going moves. In (4) TANAKA-SAN is the goal that the action of meeting is targeted to. In (5) TANAKA-SAN is the goal that the action of writing a letter is targeted to.

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Particle Lesson 3

USAGE RULE: The particle DE indicates the means by which the action occurs. The particle O indicates the location through or around which the action moves.

I. Instrument DE

You already learned location DE. Instrument DE indicates the means by which the action occurs. See the following examples.

- (1) Densha de Kamakura ni ikimashita. I went to Kamakura by train.
 (2) Basu de Kamakura-eki ni kaerimashita. I returned to Kamakura Station by bus.

In (1) DENSHA is the means by which the action of going occurred. In (2) BASU is the means by which the action of returning occurred.

II. Location O

You already learned object O. Location O indicates the location through, along, or around which the action moves. Location O is used when the action involves change of place. See the following examples.

- (3) Kamakura o arukimasu. I will walk around Kamakura.
 (4) Hashi o watarimasu. I will cross the bridge.

In (3) KAMAKURA is the location around which the action of walking moves. In (4) HASHI is the location through which the action of crossing moves.

Let's review the direction and location particles. You have just learned direction NI, location NI, location DE, and location O. The following examples summarize the differences.

- (5) Kamakura ni ikimashita. (direction NI) I went to Kamakura.
 (6) Kamakura ni Daibutsu ga arimasu. (location NI) The Great Buddha is in Kamakura.
 (7) Kamakura de Daibutsu o mimashita. (location DE) I saw the Great Buddha in Kamakura.
 (8) Kamakura o arukimashita. (location O) I walked around Kamakura.

In (5) KAMAKURA is the direction toward which the action moves, so it is marked with NI. In (6) KAMAKURA is the location where the Great Buddha exists that is not an activity, so it is marked with NI. In (7) KAMAKURA is the location where the activity of seeing the Great Buddha took place (the activity doesn't involve change of place), so it is marked with DE. In (8) KAMAKURA is the location around which the action of walking moved (the action involves change of place but KAMAKURA is not the direction of the action), so it is marked with O.

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Particle Lesson 4

The following is a brief summary of the particles, GA, O, WA, NI, and DE. Detailed descriptions and example sentences are provided in ROBO-SENSEI Particle Lessons 1, 2, and 3.

- (1) **Subject GA** indicates the subject that performs an action or the subject that a stative predicate describes.
- (2) **Object O** indicates the object that the action operates upon.
- (3) **Topic WA** indicates the topic of the sentence.
- (4) **Location DE** indicates the location where the activity takes place.
- (5) **Location NI** indicates the location where something exists that is not an activity.
- (6) **Direction NI (or E)** indicates the direction toward which the action moves.
- (7) **Goal NI** indicates the goal that the action is targeted to.
- (8) **Instrument DE** indicates the means by which the action occurs.
- (9) **Location O** indicates the location through or around which the action moves.