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Introductory abstract by Werner Abraham (Wien, München) werner.abraham@lmu.de for the WS 'Thetic- vs. Categorical: Distinctions and commonalities' (493 words, Nov. 2, 2017)

'Thetic- vs. Categorical: How are such sentential types to be distinguished, what is common about them?' WS-introductory paper.

Sentences like *Es sind KÜHE im Garten* There are cows in the garden – *KÜHE sind im Garten* – *Im GARTEN sind KÜHE* – *AUFtritt MACBETH* Enters MacBeth have in common that they are used as text starters. By common definition, true text starters are sentences that do not presuppose a precontext. In more syntactic terms, the sentential prefield hosting topical material remains empty. By contrast, the very same sentences lose their text-incipient status as soon as a modal particle is selected. See *AUFtritt eben_{MP} MACBETH* Enters, as announced, MacBeth. This sentence cannot be used as a stage direction for a drama script since *eben* entails a common discursive ground with a topic that the communicators have had it about already. The two types of sentences, those with and without a precontext, run under the terminology of *categorical sentence* (with a topic) vs. *thetic sentence* (no topic, true text starters). As to these, Kuroda has claimed that Japanese has morphological means to unambiguously distinguish thetic from categorical sentences: thetic are marked by the suffix *-ga* for case nominative, whereas the suffix for categorical status is *-wa*, which is also used to mark topicality. By contrast, German has no means to signal discourse involvement or text theticity.

In accordance with the WS-topic, this contribution pursues the following goals: **1.** It seems that Kuroda's generalization has to be modified on grounds of evidence from Japanese.– **2.** Following Ladusaw, Milsark, Carlson, Maienborn, a.o.s, it is tempting to compare the categorical-thetic distinction with other concepts such as thema-rhema, individual level-stage level predicates, synthetic-analytic, weak-strong quantization, mereological homogeneity-inhomogeneity and other relations. e.– **3.** It seems that, given the discursive distinction in the following sentences, Kuroda's topicality generalization has to be replaced by a common ground criterion. Striking example: Father tries to decide which of his two kids, Kai and Momo, did wrong. A: *Kai-ga wurui* gives no room for further discussion (Father has come to the conclusion that Kai did wrong.) By contrast, B: *Kai-wa wurui* signals that the decision has not been taken yet, but that there is room for further negotiation. In modern conceptualizations, the common ground for A collecting speaker's and addressee's knowledge-about, the topic under discussion has led to a definite result, whereas that for B has not yet reached a result and is in need of further checking out motivations and details of information. Notice that the Japanese nominative suffix *-ga* allows for thetic interpretation, while *-wa* excludes thetic status as it presupposes a topic-about and a common ground status still to be negotiated out.– **4.** Formally, thetic sentences are described as fully VP-incorporated argument structures (as signaled most clearly by presentational sentences with expletive subjects), while specific prosodies even mark non-presentational sentences with full thetic status.– **5.** The VP-subject integration tenet (simple judgment) seems to imply non-truth worthy, i.e. non-propositional status. From this follows that Japanese *ga*-sentences have non-propositional, speech act-only status.- **6** The WS-discussion will reveal relevant and novel issues about the categorical nature of Common Ground in terms of back tracing and looking forward. With this, novel views on theticity will be provided both for Japanese and Western languages.

Basic literature: Deguchi, M. 2012. Revisiting the Thetic/Categorical Distinction in Japanese. Modern and Classical Languages.– Kuroda, S. Y.1972. The categorical and the thetic judgment: Evidence from Japanese syntax. *Foundations of Language* 9: 153-85.- Sasse, H.-J. 1987. The thetic/categorical distinction revisited. *Linguistics* 25. 511-580.- Sæbø, K.-J. 2007. Focus interpretation in Thetic statements: Alternative semantics and optimality theory pragmatics. *Journal of Logic and Language Information* (2007) 16; 15-33.