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# Contrastive *Wa* Operates on Outlooks\*

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## 1 Introduction

The so-called contrastive *wa* in Japanese typically appears in examples such as (1), expressing either the speaker's epistemic uncertainty (as in (1a)), or a sense of concession, in which the speaker weakens commitment to a stronger claim (as in (1b)).

- (1) a. Hanako-**wa** paatii-ni ki-ta.  
Hanako-WA party-DAT come-PST  
'Hanako came to the party.' (↗ The speaker is uncertain whether anyone else came.)
- b. (Sukunakutomo) doo-medaru-**wa** toreru.  
at.least bronze-medal-WA get.can  
'(At least) we can win a bronze medal.'

One notable property of contrastive *wa*, which makes it distinct from the thematic, topic-marking use of *wa* is that examples like those in (1) presuppose that the *wh*-question corresponding to the

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focus structure of the sentence is relevant in some sense (e.g., ‘Who came to the party?’ for (1a)). Note that exchanges such as the following are infelicitous with contrastive *wa*:

- (2) a. A: What happened yesterday?  
 B: Paatii-ni Hanako-*{ga/#wa}* ki-ta.  
 party-DAT Hanako-NOM/WA come-PST  
 ‘Hanako came to the party.’
- b. A: What’s your goal for next year?  
 B: Tsugi-no orinpikku-de doo-medaru-*{o/#wa}* tori-tai.  
 next-GEN Olympics-LOC bronze-medal-ACC/WA get-want  
 ‘I want to win a bronze medal at the next Olympics.’

In the literature, there are two competing approaches to contrastive *wa*: the *lexicalist approach* (e.g., Hara 2006; Sawada 2012) and the *pragmatic approach* (e.g., Tomioka 2010). The pragmatic approach is essentially a reductionist approach which attempts to derive the noncommitment implication via general Gricean principles. By contrast, the lexicalist approach takes this implication as a conventionally encoded meaning of *wa*, rejecting (either explicitly or implicitly) the reductionist thesis embodied in the pragmatic approach. The pragmatic approach faces a major challenge from the fact that contrastive *wa* can be embedded in certain environments such as the complement clauses of propositional attitude verbs (see Section 2.1). The lexicalist approach faces essentially the opposite problem: on this type of approach, the discourse constraint exemplified by (2) isn’t straightforward, and the relationship between this constraint and the different flavors of noncommitment implication (ignorance vs. concession) observed in (1) is unclear.

Independently of these studies, recent work on Japanese focus particles has identified a class of items (including *nanka* and *kurai*) that can be descriptively characterized as expressing some sort of ‘evaluative’ meanings reflecting subjective stances (see Ido 2023; Ido and Kubota 2025; Kubota and Ido 2025; Kubota 2025). Kubota and Ido (2025) analyze these focus particles as *outlook markers*, which are essentially abstract discourse markers that reflect subjective ‘outlooks’ on how the prejacent relates to the preceding discourse. Building on this idea, we propose that contrastive *wa* is another outlook marker, or, more precisely, it can function as an outlook marker under certain conditions. Specifically, it functions as a discourse-level downtoner marking the prejacent as a weakened alternative outlook for discourse update, just when it appears in a type of semantic environment embodying subjective judgments.

Though a detailed comparison is beyond the scope of the present paper, the key difference between our proposal and previous approaches is that the former takes contrastive *wa* as an operator that has its effect at the level of subjective judgments, which is ‘above’ the level of description of facts but ‘below’ speech acts tied to specific illocutionary forces (see Repp 2013 for a similar idea on modal particles in German, cast in a somewhat different theoretical framework). We take it that the earlier lexicalist and pragmatic approaches run into difficulties because they both fail to identify the right level of linguistic meaning at which contrastive *wa* operates. Viewing contrastive *wa* as a (part-time) outlook marker allows us to overcome this problem and at the same time clarifies the ways in which its discourse function relates to the fundamentally discourse-oriented and ‘subjective’ meanings of other discourse markers in Japanese (and other languages).

## 2 Contrastive *Wa* as a Part-time Outlook Marker

This section reviews key properties of contrastive *wa*. We focus on the way in which contrastive *wa* functions as an *outlook marker* in the sense of Kubota and Ido (2025), as well as differences between genuine outlook markers such as *nanka* and *kurai* and the ‘part-time’ outlook marker *wa*.

### 2.1 Discourse Requirement

One characteristic property of outlook markers such as *nanka* and *kurai* is that they are unnatural in an out-of-the-blue context (Kubota and Ido 2025). For example, (3) with *nanka* is felicitous when uttered in a context in which the speaker expresses disagreement to some currently at-issue proposition; it is infelicitous to a general *wh*-question.

- (3) Sato-iri-no ryokucha-**nanka** oishiku-nai-yo.  
 sugar-with-GEN green.tea-NANKA delicious-NEG-SFP  
 ‘Green tea with sugar isn’t delicious (at all).’  
 ↗ OK as a response to ‘Green tea with sugar is delicious, isn’t it?’  
 ↗ # as a response to ‘What kind of drink tastes good with sugar in it?’

Contrastive *wa* similarly requires the existence of a ‘contrasting’ proposition in the prior discourse. As illustrated in (4a), both *kurai* (another prototypical outlook marker) and contrastive *wa* are infelicitous in a general information-seeking context. By contrast, in a context such as (4b), where the speaker is correcting or challenging the hearer’s previous remark, both *kurai* and *wa* are felicitous, and they are almost synonymous to each other in this type of context.

- (4) a. A: Tell me something interesting about Tokyo Station.  
 B: #Akihabara-**{kurai/wa}** aruite ikeru-yo. Shitteta?  
 Akihabara-KURAI/WA walk go.can-SFP know.PST.Q  
 ‘You can walk to Akihabara (from there). Did you know that?’  
 b. A: It’s quite a walk from Tokyo Station to Akihabara.  
 B: Iya, Akihabara-**{kurai/wa}** aruite ikeru-yo.  
 no Akihabara-KURAI/WA walk go.can-SFP  
 ‘No, you can walk to Akihabara.’

The above examples may give one the impression that *kurai* and contrastive *wa* have similar meanings and distributions. However, a moment’s reflection reveals that they are not completely equivalent. *Kurai* has a stricter licensing condition: it is felicitous only in contexts that involve some sort of evaluation or judgment—we will make this more precise in the next section. As a consequence, while contrastive *wa* can appear in a response to a simple *wh*-question, *kurai* cannot:<sup>1</sup>

- (5) A: Tookyoo-eki-kara doko-made aruite-ikeru-ka-na?  
 Tokyo-station-from where-to walk-go.can-Q-SFP

<sup>1</sup> The *kurai* variant of (5B) actually improves in a context in which the speaker and the hearer share some scale pertaining to accessibility from Tokyo Station to various places including Akihabara; the *wa* variant is just fine without such additional contextual support.

- ‘I wonder how far you can walk from Tokyo Station.’  
 B: Akihabara-**{wa/??kurai}** aruite-ikeru-yo.  
 Akihabara-WA/KURAI walk-go.can-SFP  
 ‘You can walk as far as Akihabara.’

The contrast between *kurai* and contrastive *wa* is perhaps clearer in simple episodic sentences:

- (6) A: Kinoo-no paatii-ni-wa dare-ga ki-ta?  
 yesterday-GEN party-DAT-WA who-NOM come-PST  
 ‘Who came to the party yesterday?’  
 B: Taroo-**{wa/#kurai}** ki-ta-yo.  
 Taro-WA/KURAI come-PST-SFP  
 ‘Taro came. (But Hanako didn’t.)’

Having clarified the similarities and differences between contrastive *wa* and genuine outlook markers, we note two additional properties of contrastive *wa* pertaining to its discourse sensitivity. First, the epistemic uncertainty implication tied to examples such as (6) can be readily cancelled by setting up the context appropriately. Note, for example, the following (7).

- (7) **Faculty search aftermath scenario** [A and B are colleagues. B was the committee chair of a recent faculty search, but all was hidden to A. After all the decisions have been made and the offer sent to the candidate, A confronts B and says:]  
 A: So, you weren’t involved in this search, were you?  
 B: Jinji-iinkai-ni-**wa** haitte i-mashi-ta.  
 search-committee-DAT-WA enter COP-POL-PST  
 ‘I was in the search committee.’ (↗ ‘Let me refrain from saying more.’)

In (7), B, the chair of the search committee, responds to A by acknowledging only that he was a member of the committee. From the context, it is clear that B’s avoidance of committing to a stronger claim is not due to lack of knowledge. Rather, B uses contrastive *wa* strategically, as a way of deflecting A’s interrogation and thereby refusing to acknowledge an inconvenient fact.

Second, ‘discourse sensitivity’ here should be understood in a general sense, encompassing embedding under attitude predicates. When embedded under attitude predicates, outlook markers exhibit a perspective shift, that is, the contrast between the prejacent and the counterstance reflects the attitude holder’s belief rather than the speaker’s (Ido 2023; Kubota and Ido 2025). Contrastive *wa* aligns with *nanka* and *kurai* in showing this perspective sensitivity, as noted by Tomioka (2010) and Sawada (2022). In (8), the use of both *kurai* and contrastive *wa* suggests that the belief Taro ascribes to himself (i.e., the prejacent) stands in opposition to some counterstance (that many places including Shibuya are not within walking distance from Tokyo station)—the latter typically being a hypothetical thought that Taro had entertained before he articulated his actual belief.

- (8) Taroo-wa, [Shibuya-**{kurai/wa}** Tookyoo-eki-kara arui-te ikeru]-to omot-ta.  
 Taro-WA Shibuya-KURAI/WA Tokyo-Station-from walk-TE go.can-C think-PST  
 ‘Taro thought that (at least) Shibuya would be within walking distance from Tokyo Station.’

## 2.2 (Lack of) Sensitivity to Subjectivity

As noted above, contrastive *wa* is similar to genuine outlook markers in imposing a certain condition on the preceding discourse. However, there is one important difference between the two: genuine outlook markers serve to explicitly mark the relationship between the prejacent and the counterstance as an opposition between conflicting subjective stances. By contrast, contrastive *wa* has a more neutral function of marking a focus-induced contrast that can be characterized in purely logical terms as an asymmetrical entailment relation between the prejacent and a contrasting proposition salient in the discourse. This has some important consequences for the distribution and the semantic/pragmatic functions of genuine and part-time outlook markers. Since *nanka* and *kurai* are essentially markers for stance adjustment/negotiation, they obligatorily occur in subjective judgments such as statements of taste, value judgments, or (subjective) inferences about possibility (see Ido and Kubota 2025); contrastive *wa* is not so constrained.

Evidence for this distributional difference comes from data involving semantic environments that disallow subjective judgments. To see this point, note that these markers have different distributions in whether or not they can appear in embedded interrogatives introduced by *-ka-dooka*, which cannot embed a subjective judgment as shown by (9) and (10).

- (9) Kinnen-no kenkyuu-ni-yotte, Kasei-ni mizu-ga sonzai-suru-ka-dooka  
 recent-GEN research-by.means.of Mars-DAT water-NOM exist-do-Q  
 akiraka-ni nat-ta.  
 clear-ADV become-PST  
 ‘It has become clear, through research in recent years, whether there is water on Mars.’
- (10) a.??Kinnen-no kenkyuu-ni-yotte, mizu-ga oishii-ka-douka akiraka-ni  
 recent-GEN research-by.means.of water-NOM tasty-Q clear  
 nat-ta.  
 become-PST  
 ‘It has become clear, through research in recent years, whether water is tasty.’
- b.??Kinnen-no kenkyuu-ni-yotte, kekkon subeki-ka-dooka akiraka-ni  
 recent-GEN research-by.means.of marriage do.should-Q clear-ADV  
 nat-ta.  
 become-PST  
 ‘It has become clear, through research in recent years, whether one should get married.’

Contrastive *wa* can appear in *-ka-dooka*-interrogatives but *nanka* and *kurai* cannot:

- (11) a. Kinnen-no kenkyuu-ni-yotte, Kasei-ni mizu-**{wa/??kurai}**  
 recent-GEN research-by.means.of Mars-DAT water-WA/KURAI  
 sonzai-suru-ka-dooka akiraka-ni nat-ta.  
 exist-do-Q clear-ADV become-PST  
 ‘(Although the existence of oxygen had already been ruled out,) it has become clear, through research in recent years, whether there is water on Mars.’

- b. Kinnen-no kenkyuu-ni-yotte, Kasei-ni mizu-**{wa/??nanka}**  
 recent-GEN research-by.means.of Mars-DAT water-WA/NANKA  
 sonzai-shinai-ka-dooka akiraka-ni nat-ta.  
 exist-NEG-Q clear-ADV become-PST  
 ‘(Although the existence of oxygen had already been established,) it has become  
 clear, through research in recent years, whether there is no water on Mars.’

### 2.3 Stance Sensitivity

We finish our data presentation by noting one important semantic similarity between genuine and part-time outlook markers. An interesting property of outlook markers such as *kurai* and *nanka* is that they show what Kubota and Ido (2025) call ‘stance sensitivity’ when occurring in modal judgments with different flavors. This is illustrated by the examples in (12) and (13) involving deontic, ability and bouletic modals.

- (12) Tori-niku  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{a. } \mathbf{kurai} \\ \text{b. } \mathbf{\#nanka} \\ \text{c. } \mathbf{wa} \end{array} \right\} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{i. } \text{tabe-te-mo yoi} \\ \text{ii. } \text{tabe-rare-ru} \\ \text{iii. } \text{tabe-tai} \end{array} \right\}.$   
                                     KURAI                      allowed to eat  
                                     NANKA                     can eat  
                                     WA                        want to eat  
                                     ‘{ It is okay to eat / one can eat / I want to eat } chicken.’
- (13) Buta-niku  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{a. } \mathbf{\#kurai} \\ \text{b. } \mathbf{nanka} \\ \text{c. } \mathbf{wa} \end{array} \right\} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{i. } \text{tabe-te-wa ikenai} \\ \text{ii. } \text{tabe-rare-nai} \\ \text{iii. } \text{tabe-taku-nai} \end{array} \right\}.$   
                                     KURAI                      not allowed to eat  
                                     NANKA                     can’t eat  
                                     WA                        don’t want to eat  
                                     ‘{ You must not eat / one cannot eat / I don’t want to eat } pork.’

The first thing to note about these examples is that *nanka* and *kurai* are not freely interchangeable (Numata 1989; Noda 1995): *nanka* co-occurs with ‘negative’ predicates, whereas *kurai* requires ‘positive’ predicates.<sup>2</sup> The distributional patterns of *nanka* and *kurai* here reflect their properties as outlook markers: *nanka* responds to its counterstance by expressing disagreement—it is essentially a marker that flags the counterstance as embodying an unacceptable claim; *kurai*, by contrast, embodies a concessive strategy of proffering a more palatable context update candidate than the stronger claim entailed by the counterstance. As already noted above, contrastive *wa* is a more neutral, or a versatile discourse marker: it merely signals a contrast between the prejacent and some other proposition introduced in the discourse, but this contrast doesn’t have to be a specific type of opposition in subjective opinion. Thus, it is free from the type of restrictions that govern the distributions of *nanka* and *kurai*.

<sup>2</sup> Here, ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ are elusive descriptive notions that don’t perfectly align with better understood distinctions such as (morpho-syntactically expressed) negation or polarity (characterizable by logical entailment).

In the examples in (12) and (13), the prejacent embody inherently subjective judgments. For example, (12i)/(13i) involve deontic judgments. This type of judgment cannot be justified by objective facts alone; rather, the truth of the statement depends on what kind of underlying moral and/or socio-cultural norms one brings to bear to support the claim. Likewise, in the ability/dispositional modal examples (12ii)/(13ii), enabling factors that support the modal judgment can be understood differently; they may include cultural customs, the quality of the meat, or even simple preferences like whether one is in the mood of eating pork/chicken in the relevant situation. The bouletic examples (12iii)/(13iii) are similar.

What is common to these examples is that truth judgment of the statement varies depending on the stance one takes—what Kubota and Ido (2025) call ‘stance sensitivity’ of modal judgments. The descriptive generalization is that *nanka* and *kurai* require the prejacent to embody stance-dependent judgments, and that they mark conflicts between different underlying stances. This is why the actual discourse-functional effects of the meanings of *nanka* and *kurai* changes slightly depending on what type of modal judgment is involved: in deontic judgments, stance-dependent truth variability reflects value-laden judgments; when possibility/disposition is at issue, then truth judgment reflects variable assessments of likelihood of the realization of the situation in question. Of these two types of judgments, the latter is somewhat more neutral in not involving norm-related judgments even though both are still subjective. What is interesting about contrastive *wa* is that even though it doesn’t require the prejacent to embody a stance-dependent judgment, when it does occur with such judgments, it ends up fulfilling a pragmatic function that is nearly identical to that of genuine outlook markers such as *nanka* and *kurai*—the *wa* variants in (12c) and (13c) are almost synonymous to the *nanka* and *kurai* variants in (12a) and (13b). We analyze how this effect arises in more detail in the next section.

## 2.4 A Note on Previous Approaches

In the pragmatic approach in the previous literature, the implication that the proposition corresponding to the prejacent does not hold for the contrasted alternatives is derived from the Gricean quantity implicature, whereas in the lexicalist approach this is directly encoded in the meaning of *wa*. In both approaches, however, the discourse status of this ‘contrast proposition’ remains unclear, and for this reason some of the properties observed in this section remain problematic. A major issue for the lexicalist approach is the cancellability of the (otherwise robust) epistemic uncertainty implication in examples such as (7). The pragmatic approach, by contrast, leaves unexplained why the epistemic uncertainty implication arises in embedded contexts if it is purely Gricean. Furthermore, the fact that the discourse function of contrastive *wa* comes very close to that of genuine outlook markers such as *nanka* and *kurai* in modal sentences remains largely mysterious in both, given the unclarity of the status of the contrast proposition. In the next section, we show that, by treating contrastive *wa* as a part-time outlook marker and treating the contrast proposition on a par with the counterstance of genuine outlook markers, we can develop an analysis that overcomes these problems for the previous approaches.

## 3 Part-time Outlook Marker in a Formal Model of Discourse

In this section, we present an analysis of contrastive *wa* as a part-time outlook marker. In Section 3.1, we formalize the function of contrastive *wa* as a discourse-level contrast-sensitive downtoner

within Farkas and Bruce’s (2010) Table model. We show that this analysis captures two basic properties of contrastive *wa*: the existence of a contrasting proposition in the prior discourse and the cancellability of the epistemic uncertainty implication. Section 3.2 then extends the analysis with Coppock’s (2018) outlook-based semantics for the treatment of subjectivity. This extension yields a unified account of three additional properties observed in Section 2: the semantic difference between genuine outlook markers and part-time outlook markers, stance sensitivity in modal judgments, and perspective shift in embedded environments under attitude predicates.

### 3.1 Contrastive *Wa* in the Table Model

The Table model (Farkas and Bruce, 2010) allows us to represent pending issues in discourse explicitly with the notion of a Table, formally a stack of propositions currently under negotiation among interlocutors as candidates for CG (or Context Set) update. As will become clear below, this is suitable for modelling the discourse function of contrastive *wa*, in particular, for making explicit the status of the notion of ‘contrast’ in discourse management: in our analysis, the focus-induced ‘contrasting proposition’ is nothing other than a salient pending issue on the Table, and if the prejacent embodies a subjective judgment, it is a counterstance that was added to the Table by somebody other than the speaker as a candidate for joint context update.

In the Table model, we can write the lexical entry for contrastive *wa* as in (14).<sup>3</sup>

$$(14) \quad [[x\text{-}wa\ P]] = \lambda\langle C, T \rangle. \partial(\exists\varphi \in T. \forall y \in \mathbf{C}_{alt}(x). \varphi \models P(y)); \langle C, T[\varphi/P(x)] \rangle$$

Here, we assume that the denotation of a sentence is a function that takes a tuple of a Context Set (CS)  $C$  and a Table  $T$  and returns an updated CS-Table tuple. (14) says that a contrastive *wa* sentence is an alternative-sensitive partial function (where the underlined part states the definedness condition) that maps a CS-Table tuple to another CS-Table tuple. We assume that  $\mathbf{C}_{alt}(x)$  is the focus alternative set for  $x$  and that it contains  $x$  itself. The presupposition/definedness condition and the actual update effect can be unpacked as follows:

- **definedness condition:** the current Table contains a proposition  $\varphi$  which entails that  $P$  holds of all the members of  $\mathbf{C}_{alt}(x)$
- **update effect:** *wa* updates  $\langle C, T \rangle$  with  $\langle C, T[\varphi/P(x)] \rangle$ , where  $T[\varphi/P(x)]$  is identical to  $T$  except that  $P(x)$  replaces  $\varphi$

In (15) (= (1a)),  $\mathbf{C}_{alt}(x)$  denotes some contextually salient group of people including Hanako.

- (15) Hanako-**wa** paatii-ni ki-ta.  
Hanako-WA party-DAT come-PST  
‘Hanako came to the party.’

<sup>3</sup> For expository ease, we have specified the reference to focus-induced contextual alternatives explicitly as part of the conventional meaning of contrastive *wa*. In a more explanatory analysis, this focus-association effect may be derived from the contrast invoking conventional meaning of contrastive *wa* and general pragmatic functions of focus. Exploring this issue in detail is a task we leave for future work.

(14) requires that in the context in which (15) is felicitously uttered, a stronger claim that  $P =$  ‘came to the party’ holds of all the individuals in  $C_{alt}(x)$  is entertained as a possibility. (15) then rejects this counterstance and proposes to replace it with a weaker claim  $P(h)$ . This effectively means that contrastive *wa*’s function is that of a discourse downtoner: it acknowledges the existence of a stronger proposition  $\phi$  which asymmetrically entails the prejacent, and proposes to replace it with the prejacent.<sup>4</sup> This analysis shares with previous approaches the idea that contrastive *wa* is an alternative-sensitive operator, but it encodes the alternative-sensitivity explicitly at the level of a contrast between the prejacent and a pending discourse update proposal.<sup>5</sup>

This analysis already predicts two basic properties of contrastive *wa* observed in the previous section. First, it follows from this analysis that contrastive *wa* imposes a specific restriction on felicitous question-answer pairs, reflected in data observed in Section 2.1.

- (16) A: Akihabara-**wa** aruite ikeru-yo.  
 Akihabara-WA walk go.can-SFP  
 ‘You can walk to Akihabara.’  
 ↗# as a response to Q1: ‘Tell me something interesting about Tokyo Station’.  
 ↗ OK as a response to Q2: ‘Which places are within walking distance from Tokyo Station?’

In the felicitous Q-A pair (16Q2/A), the Table contains all the possible answers to the *wh*-question ‘Which places are within walking distance from Tokyo Station?’, from which it follows that the strongest answer ‘All the places in  $C_{alt}(akb)$  are within walking distance from Tokyo Station’ is on the Table. This satisfies the definedness condition for (16A), and hence this Q-A pair is well-formed. By contrast, in the infelicitous Q-A pair (16Q1/A) this condition is not satisfied, since Q1 only asks a general question about Tokyo Station. This doesn’t put any particular proposition about Akihabara or other places comparable to it, and hence the definedness condition for contrastive *wa* is not satisfied.

Second, the cancellability of the epistemic uncertainty implicature is also straightforward. To see this, note that (14) doesn’t say anything directly about the epistemic state of the speaker. The epistemic uncertainty implicature of (17) (= (1a)) in typical contexts follows from general conversational principles (see Tomioka (2010)).

- (17) Hanako-**wa** paatii-ni ki-ta.  
 Hanako-WA party-DAT come-PST  
 ‘Hanako came to the party.’ (↗ The speaker is uncertain whether anyone else came.)

That is, asserting the prejacent while acknowledging explicitly that a stronger epistemic claim is being entertained as a candidate for CG update strongly implies that the speaker is not in a position

<sup>4</sup> Examples such as *Taroo-wa odor-ta ga, Hanako-wa odor-anakat-ta* ‘Taro danced, but Hanako didn’t’ may seem to suggest that the assumption that contrastive *wa* requires the existence of a contrasting proposition in the prior discourse is too strong. We take it that such examples are cases in which the discourse requirement is resolved within a single sentence—assuming that ‘who of the two people danced?’ is the salient issue, each of the two conjuncts by itself provides only a partial answer to it, satisfying the condition in (14).

<sup>5</sup> A closely related idea can be found in Deo (2022), who identifies the discourse function of the Hindi downtoner *=to* as one involving resetting the ‘Current Question’ to a weaker one in the QUD-based model of discourse.

to accept the stronger claim as their own epistemic possibility. But this is only a pragmatic inference that can be overridden by other factors. Thus, in (18), the context makes it clear that the speaker has the relevant knowledge but that they have a specific reason for not wanting to commit to it. In such cases, the epistemic uncertainty implicature simply ends up being suspended.

- (18) **Faculty search aftermath scenario** [Context: same as (7)]  
 Jinji.iinkai-ni-wa                      haitte i-mashi-ta.  
 search.committee-DAT-WA   enter COP-POL-PST  
 ‘I was in the search committee.’ (↗ The speaker refuses to say anything more.)

### 3.2 Extending the Analysis with Outlook-based Semantics

The Table model allows us to explicitly model the relationship between the prejacent and the ‘contrasting’ proposition in the discourse by identifying the latter as a pending proposal for discourse update embodying a stronger claim. However, this analysis does not by itself account for the similarities and differences between contrastive *wa* and genuine outlook markers, in particular, the way in which the former—even though it does not encode stance conflict explicitly—ends up serving a discourse function virtually identical to the latter in certain environments. In order to analyze this effect precisely, we need to extend the model so that it can distinguish between subjective judgments and statements of simple facts. For this purpose, we incorporate Coppock’s (2018) outlook-based semantics to the Table-model analysis.

The idea behind outlook-based semantics is simple: in order to analyze propositions whose truth varies even after settling objective facts about the world, we take the truth of a statement to be determined relative to something that is more fine-grained than worlds, called ‘outlooks’. That is, outlooks replace worlds, and everything else in the standard model-theoretic semantics remains the same. In this approach, multiple outlooks (each representing different opinions about matters whose truth cannot be resolved by facts) can correspond to a single world. The correspondence between a set of outlooks and a world is technically defined by equivalence classes, called ‘refinement classes’, imposed on the set of outlooks by the set of worlds. Conceptually, outlooks reflect not just how the world ‘is’, but how the world is ‘perceived’ from a certain outlook, settling fine-grained judgments about evaluative or normative standards and preferences about sensory experience, i.e. matters beyond objective truth. Once the world is settled, the truth of all objective propositions is fixed; once the outlook is settled, the truth of subjective propositions is fixed as well. Members of the same refinement class preserve entailment for propositions describing objective facts, called *objective propositions*; propositions that reflect subjective opinions are called *discretionary propositions*, and their truth can vary across outlooks in at least one world (see (19) below). Standard notions such as entailment and contradiction are defined in the familiar way, replacing possible worlds with outlooks.

Technically, objective propositions and discretionary propositions are distinguished by the properties they respectively satisfy, along lines spelled out in (19). In these definitions,  $\mathcal{W}$  and  $\Omega$  are sets of all worlds and all outlooks in the model, respectively, and  $\propto$  designates the refinement class relation (where  $O' \propto w$  iff  $O'$  is the refinement class for  $w$ ).

- (19) a. A set of outlooks  $O$  is an *objective proposition* if and only if there is some subset  $W$  of  $\mathcal{W}$  such that  $O = \bigcup \{O' \subseteq \Omega \mid O' \propto w \text{ for some } w \in W\}$ .

- b. A set of outlooks  $O$  is a *discretionary proposition* if and only if it is not an objective proposition.

(19a) says that, for any given world  $w$ ,  $O$  either contains all of its refinement outlooks or doesn't contain any of them. In other words, different world-mate outlooks always agree with each other on the truth of the proposition  $O$ . (19b) says that any proposition that doesn't satisfy the condition in (19a) is a discretionary proposition.

### 3.2.1 Part-time vs. Genuine Outlook Markers

Building on this outlook-based model, Kubota and Ido (2025) define the meaning of *nanka* as in (20). Comparing this with the meaning of contrastive *wa* (repeated in (21)), we can see that both are operators that replace some pending issue on the Table with the prejacent; however, they differ in their definedness conditions in one crucial respect: *nanka* requires that the prejacent  $\varphi$  be a discretionary proposition whereas contrastive *wa* doesn't impose any such constraint (the relationship between  $\varphi$  and the counterstance also differs, but this is irrelevant here).

$$(20) \quad [[nanka-\varphi]] = \lambda\langle C, T \rangle. \partial(\mathbf{discretionary}(\varphi) \wedge \exists \varphi' \in T. \varphi' \cap \varphi = \emptyset); \langle C, T[\varphi'/\varphi] \rangle$$

$$(21) \quad [[x-wa P]] = \lambda\langle C, T \rangle. \partial(\exists \varphi \in T. \forall y \in \mathbf{C}_{alt}(x). \varphi \models P(y)); \langle C, T[\varphi/P(x)] \rangle$$

From this, the distributional difference between *nanka* and contrastive *wa* observed in Section 2.2—where only the latter is compatible with objective propositions—follows immediately. For example, assuming that the interrogative complementizer *-ka-dooka* requires its complement clause to be an objective proposition as in (22), the infelicity of the *nanka* variant in (11) falls out since this presupposition is incompatible with the presupposition of *nanka* (note that  $\mathbf{discretionary}(\varphi) \wedge \neg \mathbf{discretionary}(\varphi)$  is a plain contradiction).

$$(22) \quad [[-ka-dooka]] = \lambda p \lambda x. \partial(\neg \mathbf{discretionary}(p)); p$$

### 3.2.2 Embedding Outlooks

Another natural consequence of this extension is that subjective judgments and stance-marking on them can be embedded. To deal with embedding cases, we actually need to extend the Table model slightly so that we can deal with embedded Tables, but this technical extension is straightforward. This can be done by refining the dynamic extensions of analyses of attitude embedding such as Heim (1992). The idea is that in an enriched model of discourse that distinguishes agreed-upon propositions in the Context Set and pending issues on the Table, reported speech and attribution of belief also has an enriched context in which pending thoughts are explicitly modelled. Intuitively, just as interlocutors take stances in context update negotiations, the belief holder manages the 'negotiations' between competing outlooks when they update their own belief states.

Technically, this can be formalized by defining 'Table-extended doxastic alternatives'  $\mathbf{DOX\&T}_{x,t,o}$  for agent  $x$  at time  $t$  in outlook  $o$ , which is a tuple of doxastic alternatives (in the standard sense) and a Table, the latter of which is a set of propositions that the agent hasn't yet accepted. Then, in (23),  $\mathbf{believe}(p)(x)(t)$  (modelled after Heim 1992 with adjustments) is a set of outlooks in which the doxastic alternatives for  $x$  at  $t$  (dynamically) changes from the immediately

preceding time  $t_0$  (where, for convenience, we take immediate precedence  $<$  to be an unanalyzed primitive) such that they entail  $p$  (i.e., the CS component of  $\mathbf{DOX\&T}_{x,t,o}$  entails  $p$ ).  $\uparrow$  denotes a CS update function such that  $\uparrow(\mathcal{C})(p)$  moves  $p$  from the Table of  $\mathcal{C}$  to its CS (replacing  $p$  with the tautology  $\top$  (a vacuous claim) is the same as removing it from the Table).<sup>6</sup>

$$(23) \quad \mathbf{believe} = \lambda p \lambda x \lambda t \lambda o. \partial \left( \exists t_0 < t \wedge \mathbf{DOX\&T}_{x,t_0,o} \in \mathbf{Dom}(p) \right). \mathbf{DOX\&T}_{x,t,o} = \uparrow \left( \mathbf{DOX\&T}_{x,t_0,o} + p \right)(p) \\ \text{where } \uparrow(\mathcal{C})(p) = \langle \mathbf{CS}(\mathcal{C}) \cap p, \mathbf{TBL}(\mathcal{C})[p/\top] \rangle$$

The definedness condition in (23), which requires that the doxastic alternatives  $\mathbf{DOX\&T}_{x,t_0,o}$  at the pre-state is in the domain of the update function  $p$  (i.e., the context update succeeds without incurring presupposition failure), plays a crucial role in how the discourse function of contrastive *wa* is interpreted. Let's unpack this with a simple example in (24).

$$(24) \quad \text{Hanako-wa, [Ken-wa paatii-ni ki-ta]-to omot-ta.} \\ \text{Hanako-WA Ken-WA party-DAT come-PST-C think-PST} \\ \text{'Hanako thought that (at least) Ken came to the party.'}$$

The translation for (24) goes as in (25).

$$(25) \quad [[ (24) ]] = \mathbf{believe}(\mathbf{WA}(\mathbf{came})(\mathbf{k}))(\mathbf{h})(t) \\ = \lambda o. \partial \left( \exists t_0 < t \wedge \mathbf{DOX\&T}_{h,t_0,o} \in \mathbf{Dom}(\mathbf{WA}(\mathbf{came})(\mathbf{k})) \right) \\ \mathbf{DOX\&T}_{h,t,o} = \uparrow (\mathbf{DOX\&T}_{h,t_0,o} + \mathbf{WA}(\mathbf{came})(\mathbf{k}))(\mathbf{WA}(\mathbf{came})(\mathbf{k}))$$

The definedness condition imposed on **believe** in (25) contains the clause saying that updating  $\mathbf{DOX\&T}_{h,t_0,o}$  (the doxastic alternatives for Hanako at  $t_0$  in  $o$ ) with  $\mathbf{WA}(\mathbf{came})(\mathbf{k})$  is well-defined, that is, the former is in the domain of the latter. Thus, (25) can be further unpacked as in (26).

$$(26) \quad \text{a. definedness condition: } \exists \varphi \in \mathbf{TBL}(\mathbf{DOX\&T}_{h,t_0,o}). \forall y \in \mathbf{C}_{alt}(\mathbf{k}). \varphi \models \mathbf{came}(y) \\ \text{b. denotation:} \\ \lambda o. [\mathbf{DOX\&T}_{h,t,o} = \uparrow (\mathbf{DOX\&T}_{h,t_0,o} + \mathbf{WA}(\mathbf{came})(\mathbf{k}))(\mathbf{WA}(\mathbf{came})(\mathbf{k}))] \\ = \lambda o. [\mathbf{DOX\&T}_{h,t,o} = \langle \mathbf{CS}(\mathbf{DOX\&T}_{h,t_0,o}) \cap \mathbf{came}(\mathbf{k}), \mathbf{TBL}(\mathbf{DOX\&T}_{h,t_0,o})[\varphi/\top] \rangle]$$

(26a) says that at a time immediately before belief update takes place, the local Table representing candidates for belief update for Hanako included the stronger claim that a larger group of people including Ken had come to the party. (26b) replaces this proposition on the Table with the weaker claim that (only) Ken had come, and updates the CS with this proposition.

<sup>6</sup>  $\mathbf{CS} = \pi_1$  and  $\mathbf{TBL} = \pi_2$ ; mathematically these are just projection functions which return the first (CS) and second (Table) components of a CS-Table tuple, respectively.

Thus, the effect of *wa* is calculated relative to the perspective of the attitude holder. This is a natural consequence of treating propositions as sets of outlooks that can be attributed to attitude holders and extending the context for belief update to include local Tables for ‘pending thought’.

### 3.2.3 Accounting for Stance Sensitivity with Modal Judgments

As we have already seen, when contrastive *wa* appears in modal judgments, its meaning and function often comes close to that of *nanka* and *kurai*. What factors underlie this pattern? In what follows, we sketch an account of how this effect arises. Our account consists of two steps. We first show that when contrastive *wa* co-occurs with a modal judgment, the contrast between the focused element and its alternatives gives rise to an indication of a stance conflict. We then show that this focus-induced effect ends up serving a discourse function that is nearly identical to the lexically encoded discourse functions of *nanka* and *kurai* as conflict signalling markers.

Let us first examine how contrastive *wa* indicates a stance conflict in subjective judgments. By definition, when the prejacent  $P(x)$  and its counterstance  $P(y)$  (for  $y \in C_{alt}(x)$ ) are discretionary, their truth can vary even after settling all factual understandings, that is, it depends on what kind of evidence one brings to bear to support the claim in question. This truth variability in turn is grounded in more basic opinions pertaining to value judgments, estimates on epistemic and/or stereotypical likelihood, etc, depending on the type of modality involved (*cf.* Kubota and Ido 2025). Outlooks differentiate such basic judgments. The use of contrastive *wa* by the speaker in such a situation has the effect of signalling to the hearer that, for any world  $w$  compatible with the speaker’s belief, the set of outlooks that the speaker commits to is distinctly weaker than the set of world-mate outlooks compatible with the contextual counterstance, in that the former only validates  $P(x)$  whereas the latter validates  $P(y)$  for all  $y \in C_{alt}(x)$  including  $x$ . Explicitly flagging this asymmetry between the prejacent and counterstance effectively means that the speaker is not ready to accept a stance that validates a stronger claim on a currently open issue. Crucially, the issue here cannot, by its very nature, be resolved by merely aligning factual understandings. This is how contrastive *wa* becomes a stance marker when co-occurring with a modal judgment.

Building on the above discussion, let us consider how *nanka/kurai* and contrastive *wa* become near synonyms in the examples in (13i) and (12i), repeated here in (27) and (28).

- (27) Buta-niku { a.#**kurai** / b. **nanka** / c. **wa** } tabe-te-wa ikenai.  
 pork { KURAI / NANKA / WA } not allowed to eat  
 ‘One may not eat pork.’
- (28) Tori-niku { a. **kurai** / b.#**nanka** / c. **wa** } tabe-te-mo yoi.  
 chicken { KURAI / NANKA / WA } allowed to eat  
 ‘It is okay to eat chicken.’

In (27b), the use of *nanka* signals a direct conflict of opinion regarding whether eating pork is allowable. By contrast, the primary function of contrastive *wa* in (27c) is that of a concessive marker invoking contrast: whatever may be the case for other kinds of meat, as far as pork is concerned, the speaker explicitly proffers their judgment that one shouldn’t eat it. But then, it pragmatically follows from this that the speaker is ready to back up this judgment about pork, in other words, to refute any judgment that contradicts their own. The relation between this derived implication and the prejacent is nothing other than what *nanka* lexically encodes.

Similarly, in (28a), the use of *kurai* marks the prejacents as a judgment that is relatively easy to accept. This is presented as a partial rejection of a much too strong counterstance entailing that nothing (including chicken) should be eaten. By contrast, contrastive *wa* is a partial acceptance marker, where the presumed counterstance is that chicken, in addition to other kinds of meat, *may* be eaten. But this contrast between chicken and other kinds of meat invokes the additional implication that the speaker has a commitment only to the former. This resembles the implicit acceptance of the negative judgment on non-chicken that is lexically invoked by *kurai*, resulting in near synonymy between the *kurai* and *wa* variants of (28).

Thus, contrastive *wa* in modal judgments can indirectly signal a stance conflict and thereby approximate the discourse functions of genuine outlook markers. When the prejacents and counterstance are discretionary propositions, the use of *wa* as a discourse level downtoner, combined with focus-induced contrast among alternatives, is interpreted as a partial rejection of a stronger claim. In examples such as (27) and (28), the discourse effect that arises from this converges with the explicit stance-marking effects that *nanka* and *kurai* realize lexically.

## 4 Conclusion

Contrastive *wa* is a part-time outlook marker, a discourse operator whose outlook-related effects arise just when it co-occurs in subjective judgments in interaction with other factors (focus-induced contrast in the case of contrastive *wa*). Contrastive *wa* patterns with genuine outlook markers in such environments, in requiring a salient counterstance in the prior discourse, exhibiting stance-sensitive truth variability, and allowing perspective shift under attitudes. But crucially, unlike genuine outlook markers, it can appear in non-subjective, purely factual contexts.

The formal analysis we proposed in this paper is couched in a framework that combines Farkas and Bruce's (2010) Table model with outlook-based semantics due to Coppock (2018). The distinction between discretionary propositions and objective propositions in outlook-based semantics made it possible to explicitly analyze the difference between contrastive *wa* and genuine outlook markers. By employing the Table model, we clarified how contrastive *wa* functions as a discourse-level downtoner whose concessive strategy derives from focus-induced contrast. Furthermore, combining the Table model with outlook-based semantics was shown to be crucial for capturing two important properties of contrastive *wa* reflecting its outlook-related effects: perspective shift in attitude embedding and stance sensitivity in modal judgments.

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