

The particle 'ka' and its significance

Johan Sageryd

j@1616.se

8 June 2015

Bachelor's dissertation

Japanese



LUND UNIVERSITY

Centre for Language and Literature
Helgonabacken 12, SE-223 62 Lund, Sweden

Supervisor: Arthur Holmer

arthur.holmer@ling.lu.se

Abstract

This work investigates the significance of the sentence-final particle 'ka' in modern Japanese by means of questionnaire and qualitative discussions with native informants. The Japanese language makes use of short words known as particles to indicate grammatical category. 'ka' is one such particle that can be used to indicate, among other things, the interrogative mood. Questions can be formed both with and without 'ka', hinting at a relatively low semantic significance in select cases. The results of this study show a few cases where the sentence-final particle 'ka' may be omitted as well as a couple in which it may not, demonstrating that the particle is not purely decorative and does add semantic value to the sentence for some cases, but that it in others provides little gain other than giving the sentence a slightly different nuance.

THIS PAGE HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK.

Contents

Conventions	3
Transcription system	3
Intonation	3
Glosses	3
1 Introduction	4
1.1 Previous work	4
1.2 Aim	4
1.3 Scope	4
1.4 Structure	4
1.5 Particles in Japanese	5
1.6 Usage of 'ka'	7
1.6.1 Sentence-final 'ka'	7
1.6.2 Mid-sentence 'ka'	8
2 Method	10
3 Discussion	12
3.1 Results	12
3.1.1 Yes/no question	12
3.1.2 Wh- question	13
3.1.3 Offer	14
3.1.4 Invitation	15
3.1.5 Request for confirmation	15
3.1.6 Rhetorical question	16
3.1.7 Cross-category results	17
3.1.8 Zooming in on 'ka'	19
3.2 Sources of error	20
4 Conclusion	21
References	22
A Questionnaire	I
B Questionnaire answers	XIII

List of Tables

1	Gloss abbreviations	3
2	Sentence variant terminology	10
3	Triple-choice answer weighting	12
4	Results for the yes/no sentences	13
5	Results for the wh- sentences	13
6	Results for the offer sentences	15
7	Results for the invitation sentence	15
8	Results for the request for confirmation sentence	16
9	Results for the rhetorical sentence	16
10	Summary of base sentences per category	17
11	The significance of 'ka'	21

Conventions

Transcription system

The transcriptions in this work use the Hepburn romanisation system with two modifications; the particle ‘は’ is transcribed as ‘ha’ instead of ‘wa’, following the Japanese spelling rather than transcribing it differently depending on context, and long vowels are transcribed analogous to their representation in Japanese phonetic spelling; ‘こうえん’ and ‘おおい’ would thus be transcribed ‘kouen’ and ‘ooi’ respectively.

Intonation

Symbols ↗ and ↘ respectively mark rising and falling intonation of the preceding syllable.

Glosses

Glosses follow the Leipzig Glossing Rules. Table 1 lists the abbreviations used.

ACC	Accusative marker
ADV	Adverbial
ATTR	Attributive
CONF	Particle used when requesting confirmation
CONJ	Conjunctive
COP	Copula
DAT	Dative marker
EMPH	Particle used for emphasis
EXPL	Explanatory particle
HUM	Humble
INT	Interrogative
LST	Listing particle
NEG	Negative
NPAST	Non-past tense
PAST	Past tense
PN	Proper noun
POL	Polite
POT	Potential
RCV	Indicating that subject is benefitting from the action
STAT	Stative verb
SUBJ	Subject marker
TE	‘-te’ form
TOP	Topic marker
VOL	Volitional

Table 1: Gloss abbreviations

1 Introduction

This work seeks to give an overview of the grammatical particle ‘ka’ and its usage and significance in modern Japanese.

1.1 Previous work

The particle ‘ka’ has been described extensively, cf. e.g. Iwasaki [4], Martin [8], Tsujimura [13]. Itani [3] briefly notes how ‘ka’ may be omitted in questions and examines theories (Kendall [6]; Tsuchihashi [12], Uyeno [14]) on the analysis of ‘ka’. Shinzato [11] mentions how in Old Japanese the particle ‘ka’ formed questions addressed to the speaker him/herself, while the particle ‘ya’ was used in questions directed to the addressee. It may be interesting to dive deeper into and explore various ideas to investigate potential correlations, but it lies outside of the scope of this work.

More closely related, Zhèng [16] presents a study that investigates the omission of ‘ka’. The study discusses in what conditions omission of ‘ka’ occurs and in what conditions it does not. It also looks at the difference in meaning between sentences with and without ‘ka’. A brief summary and comparison may be found in section 4.

1.2 Aim

The primary aim of this work is to investigate the significance of ‘ka’, or more precisely in which cases it may and in which it may not be omitted, as well as in which cases if any it must be omitted. Focus will fall on ‘ka’ as a sentence-final question marker.

A secondary aim is to provide an overview of the usage of ‘ka’ in general, as deemed necessary to give sufficient background information.

If one were to formulate the aim of this work as a question to be answered it would likely be: “Is the particle ‘ka’ as a question marker needed and if so why?”

1.3 Scope

Even though it is the primary aim of this work to investigate the omission of ‘ka’, it will be limited to what one might call an overview of cases where such omission would occur and not. It also does not claim to provide an exhaustive definition by any means of the particle and its usage patterns but will merely touch upon relevant cases one might commonly see in modern Japanese. As noted in section 1.2 focus will lie on the usage of ‘ka’ as a sentence-final question marker and less on its other uses.

1.4 Structure

This work is divided into four main sections; [Introduction](#), [Method](#), [Discussion](#), and [Conclusion](#). [Introduction](#) gives a background to the subject. [Method](#) explains the means used for data collection and how the data is used. [Discussion](#) serves to describe the data collected and discusses points that can be made from it. Finally, [Conclusion](#) provides a summary of the work.

1.5 Particles in Japanese

The Japanese language makes use of particles, which are short postpositional words that provide syntactic, semantic and pragmatic information. [4]

Even though a particle can be composed of either a single syllable or multiple syllables, one can note that counting only single-syllable single-character particles, about one third of all characters in the Japanese phonetic syllabary (including voiced and so-called semi-voiced variations) by themselves spell a particle. A generally adopted classification system for the particles define final particles (*shuujoshi*) that occur in sentence-final position, interjectory particles (*kantoujoshi*) that occur within a clause without affecting sentence formation, conjunction particles (*setsuzokujoshi*) for conjoining sentences, case particles (*kakujoshi*) indicating semantic or logical relationships, adverbial particles (*fukujoshi*) modifying the predicate, governing particles (*kakarijoshi*) affecting a whole clause or sentence [10, 15], and furthermore e.g. particles for listing elements (*heiritsujoshi*) and nominalisers (*juntaijoshi*) [1]. A concrete example of two case particles (*kakujoshi*) follows.

- (1) Neko ga mizu wo nom-u.
Cat SUBJ water ACC drink-NPAST
'The cat drinks water.'
- (2) Neko ga kouen ni ik-u.
Cat SUBJ park DAT go-NPAST
'The cat goes to the park.'

Example 1 uses the case particle 'wo' to indicate the accusative case, making 'water' the direct object to 'drink'. Example 2 uses the case particle 'ni' to indicate the dative case, making 'park' the indirect object to 'go'.

The extensive use of particles to encode grammatical category makes the Japanese language very forgiving when it comes to word order. Tsujimura [13] mentions that in general, except for the restriction that the verb must be placed at the end of the sentence, the relative word order among other constituents can be random.¹

- (3) Ashita issho ni kaimono ni ik-u↗
Tomorrow together shopping DAT go-NPAST
'Do you want to go shopping together tomorrow?'

¹Tsujimura [13] does note some further restrictions on the word order, such as that of the placement of the subject, but maintains that the order is still relatively free.

- (4) Issho ni ik-u↗, ashita kaimono ni
 Together go-NPAST, tomorrow shopping DAT
 'Do you want to go shopping together tomorrow?'

Example 3 and example 4 can both be translated into the same English sentence and there is rather little difference between them. As shown in example 4, although limited to spoken Japanese, even the verb may be placed in the middle of the sentence, contrary to the restriction placed by Tsujimura [13]. However, one might argue whether or not in this case it grammatically remains a single sentence. As for the nuance, example 4 puts slight emphasis on the part of 'going together' by placing it at the beginning of the sentence. Notable also is that the intonation remains on the verb, in accordance with the grammatical breakdown of the sentence – 'ashita', 'issho ni', 'kaimono ni' can be seen as extra information added to 'iku↗', which by itself is also grammatically correct and natural.

As for sentence-final particles (*shuujoshi*), a big part of their role appears to be to add a final touch of nuance to the sentence rather than add concrete meaning. Martin [8] states (in part quoting Kindaichi [7]) that the use of sentence-final particles is accounted for by the tendency of Japanese speakers to avoid letting a sentence end on a note of finality, and that the final particle adds a hint of the speaker's attitude towards what is said – doubt, conviction, caution, inquiry, or request for confirmation, recollection, etc. Examples of sentence-final particles 'ne' and 'yo' follow.

- (5) Kaer-u ne.
 Return-NPAST CONF
 'I am going home, ok.'
- (6) Abuna-i ne.
 Dangerous-NPAST CONF
 'It's dangerous, don't you think?'
- (7) Abuna-i yo.
 Dangerous-NPAST EMPH
 'It's dangerous, I'm telling you.'
- (8) Abuna-i yo ne.
 Dangerous-NPAST EMPH CONF
 'It's dangerous, don't you agree?'

The particle 'ne' is in general used to add softness or to request confirmation. Example 5 demonstrates the former. Without the softening 'ne' the general meaning remains the same but the tone is colder. Example 6 shows a request for confirmation.

The particle 'yo' is used to add emphasis to a sentence. Similar to the usage of 'ne' in example 5, omitting 'yo' in example 7 will generally give a sentence close or identical in meaning but with less emphasis – something that may instead be added by e.g. change of voice.

The two particles can also be combined to get both senses. In contrast to example 6, example 8 gives the impression that the speaker is more certain of what is stated. The added softness or request for confirmation remains.

1.6 Usage of ‘ka’

The particle ‘ka’ has several distinct uses. This section provides an overview. It is of course a matter of definition whether or not ‘ka’ in its many different uses should be thought of as many distinct particles that happen to share the same sound and glyph, or one single particle that has many distinct uses. In this work the latter definition will be used.

‘ka’ is used both as a sentence-final particle and a mid-sentence particle. It seems like a good idea to divide its use into these two categories. Although this work will not cover ‘ka’ as a mid-sentence particle it is still relevant to touch upon its usage in this situation.

1.6.1 Sentence-final ‘ka’

Looking at the first things taught by many textbooks [2] for foreign learners of the the language one will find a description of ‘ka’ as the particle used to convert a statement into a question.

Some languages use something similar to the Japanese particle ‘ka’; examples include the sentence-final particle ‘ma’ (吗) of Mandarin Chinese² [9] and suffixes ‘-ko’, ‘-kö’ of Finnish³ [5]. These markers are used mainly for non-wh- questions; in the case of Mandarin Chinese ‘ma’ (吗) it is even ungrammatical to use it together with an interrogative word.⁴ In Japanese the particle ‘ka’ may be used in both yes/no questions and in wh- questions.

Yes/no question

- (9) Kore ha hon desu ka.
This TOP book COP.POL INT
‘Is this a book?’
- (10) Kono densha, Ochanomizu ni tomar-imas-u ka.
This train Ochanomizu DAT stop-POL-NPAST INT
‘Does this train stop at Ochanomizu?’

Wh- question

- (11) Kore ha nan desu ka.
This TOP what COP.POL INT
‘What is this?’

²‘Zhè shì shénme?’ (What is this?), ‘Zhè shì shū ma?’ (Is this a book?)

³‘Mikä tämä on?’ (What is this?), ‘Onko tämä kirja?’ (Is this a book?)

⁴Mandarin Chinese also has the particle ‘ne’ (呢) which may be used as a question marker, even in wh- questions. [9]

- (12) Eki ha doko desu ka.
 Station TOP where COP.POL INT
 ‘Where is the station?’

Sentence-final ‘ka’ can be used when expressing a variety of things including offering of help, invitation, request for confirmation, and rhetorical questions.

Offering help

- (13) Tetsuda-imashou ka.
 Help-NPAST.VOL.POL INT
 ‘Do you want me to help you?’

Example 13 uses the volitional form in combination with ‘ka’ to ask if the listener wants help.

Invitation

- (14) Issho ni tabishi-masen ka.
 Together travel-NEG.POL INT
 ‘Would you join me on a trip?’
- (15) Ik-imashou ka.
 Go-NPAST.VOL.POL INT
 ‘Shall we go?’

There are a few ways to express an invitation. Example 14 shows one where the negative is used with ‘ka’ to form something not unlike the English ‘Won’t you [...]?’ As the above translation also indicates, using the negative in Japanese is perhaps more common than it is in English for this purpose. The second example uses the volitional form with ‘ka’, similar to example 13. Leaving out the final ‘ka’, the meaning of example 15 changes to ‘Let’s go.’

These above examples shall suffice for this introduction; further examples and explanations can be found in section 3.

1.6.2 Mid-sentence ‘ka’

Mid-sentence ‘ka’ bares similarities with sentence-final ‘ka’ but is generally classified differently. Daijirin [1] places mid-sentence ‘ka’ in three categories, namely *fukujoshi* (predicate-modifying), *kakarijoshi* (governing), and *heiritsujoshi* (listing).⁵ This work will not discuss the distinction between the former two but instead concisely list a few examples. Examples 16 through 19 demonstrate four usage patterns; the first three respectively embed examples 11, 12, and 9. The fourth shows stacking ‘ka’ to add more elements. The particle ‘ka’ is still purposely marked INT so as to not dive too deep into details. Lastly, example 20 shows use of ‘ka’ as a listing particle (*heiritsujoshi*) corresponding to the English ‘or’. Notable is that while example 12 without copula and ‘ka’ still makes

⁵Terminology also briefly described in section 1.5.

a proper natural sentence, dropping the copula and 'ka' (or only 'ka') from example 17 makes it both ungrammatical and unnatural; ergo mid-sentence clause-final 'ka' and sentence-final 'ka' must be analysed separately.

- (16) Kore ha nan da ka wakar-anai.
 This TOP what COP INT know-NEG
 'I don't know what this is.'
- (17) Eki ha doko da ka wakar-anai.
 Station TOP where COP INT know-NEG
 'I don't know where the station is.'
- (18) Kore ha hon ka dou ka wakar-anai.
 This TOP book INT how INT know-NEG
 'I don't know whether or not this is a book.'
- (19) Kore ha hon na no ka zasshi na no ka
 This TOP book COP.ATTR EXPL INT magazine COP.ATTR EXPL INT
 wakar-anai.
 know-NEG
 'I don't know whether this is a book or a magazine.'
- (20) Ao ka midori ka aka ka
 Blue LST green LST red LST
 'Blue or green or red'

2 Method

A questionnaire in combination with discussions with native informants will be the primary source material for this work.

The questionnaire will be given to native speakers only and care will be taken to try to limit the influence of dialectal variation.

Considering the scope of this work, the questionnaire will be aimed to only investigate the final particle ‘ka’ and its use in questions. The results of the questionnaire is hoped to provide an indication of the level of naturalness of different variants of interrogative sentences. Its structure is such that the same base interrogative sentence has been repeated in several different variants and for each the respondent is asked to rate the naturalness and assign one of three levels “very natural”, “not natural but possible”, “very unnatural”. The same sentence variants are repeated for sets of different types of sentences with the hope to be able to see in which cases certain variants are used and not. The following categories will be investigated:

- Yes/no question
- Wh- question
- Offer
- Invitation
- Request for confirmation
- Rhetorical question

As a means to try to confirm the answers of each respondent, a couple of the categories have been repeated under a different name; the actual questionnaire contains two categories for “Yes/no question”, one with a two of what one might call a “plain yes/no question” and one with a request for help, which, perhaps arguably, in its essence is nothing but yes/no question. Similarly it lists “Offer” twice, the first of which gives a sentence offering help in general and the second of which gives a sentence where tea is offered.

For each category, the following sentence variants are listed:

POLITE+KA ↘	Polite form with particle; low final intonation
POLITE+KA ↗	Polite form with particle; high final intonation
POLITE ↗	Polite form without particle; high final intonation
PLAIN+KA ↘	Plain form with particle; low final intonation
PLAIN+KA ↗	Plain form with particle; high final intonation
PLAIN ↗	Plain form without particle; high final intonation
POLITE ↘	Polite form without particle; low final intonation
PLAIN ↘	Plain form without particle; low final intonation

Table 2: Sentence variant terminology

Symbols ↗ and ↘ at the end of each variant descriptor (e.g. 'POLITE+KA ↘') in this case respectively indicate rising and falling sentence-final intonation. The last two variants only occur in two categories ("Offer" and "Rhetorical question") and have therefore been separated by a horizontal line to reduce confusion. The nature of the second of the two sentences in the "Offer" category is such that plain form cannot be used so in this case none of the plain variants have been listed. Instead an additional polite variant without question particle and low final intonation has been added. The category covering the rhetorical question sees one addition in the form of a plain variant without particle and low final intonation, to be able to determine whether or not the nature of a rhetorical question would allow this.

Following each category a free-form comment section is provided to give the respondent the ability to express any concerns, questions or comments in general related to the contents of the questionnaire.

All sentences contained in the questionnaire have beforehand been verified by a native speaker so as to make sure they are correct.

The results of the questionnaire will be analysed to find which sentence variants in which categories are natural and not, in order to serve as a base in determining whether or not omission of the particle 'ka' is possible.

Questions arising out of the questionnaire results will be further discussed with native informants to bring clarity and also to identify possible sources of error.

The questionnaire in its entirety and its answers can be found in appendices [A](#) and [B](#).

3 Discussion

3.1 Results

The questionnaire had in total 13 respondents. Its results will be discussed in this section. In order to mould the data into something meaningful, each answer for the triple-choice questions has been weighted according to the following table. The weight values were selected to try to match the naturalness level represented by each answer.

Very natural	+10
Not natural but possible	−5
Very unnatural	−10

Table 3: Triple-choice answer weighting

For each sentence variant the sum of weights was used to arrive at a number indicating the naturalness of the variant. What follows is a listing of each category with its base sentence and a discussion of the results.

To make the text more readable, the different sentence variants will be written abbreviated using small-caps and intonation marker according to table 2 in the [Method](#) section.

3.1.1 Yes/no question

Three sentences were used for this category, each with slightly different characteristics. The first one, example 21, is a straightforward yes/no question using a verb predicate. The second, example 22, differs by using a copula instead. The third, example 23, adds more complexity through both sentence structure and speaker/listener relation.

The initial assumption was that all three yes/no questions would give a similar result. On the contrary the results indicate that there are a few discrepancies.

POLITE+KA ↗ and PLAIN ↗ seem to be natural for all three sentences. In the POLITE ↗ variant, example 22 suddenly becomes unnatural.

Verb (simple)

- (21) Kono densha, Ochanomizu ni tomar-imas-u ka.
This train, PN DAT stop-POL-NPAST INT
'Does this train stop at Ochanomizu?'

Copula (simple)

- (22) Kore ha hon desu ka.
This TOP book COP.POL INT
'Is this a book?'

Verb (favour)

- (23) Yarikata wo oshie-te-mora-e-mas-u ka.
 Method ACC teach-TE-RCV-POT-POL-NPAST INT
 ‘Can you teach me how to do it?’

	Verb (simple)	Copula (simple)	Verb (favour)
POLITE+KA ↘	−45	−60	−20
POLITE+KA ↗	80	110	115
POLITE ↗	80	−20	60
PLAIN+KA ↘	−110	−70	−35
PLAIN+KA ↗	15	40	−5
PLAIN ↗	115	45	100

Table 4: Results for the yes/no sentences

3.1.2 Wh- question

Interestingly, it seems that POLITE ↗ of example 24 is not considered equally unnatural as the same variant of example 22, be it because of the interrogative word or other circumstance is hard to say but there does seem to be a difference. The same is true for example 25. As with the yes/no examples, POLITE+KA ↗ and PLAIN ↗ are the most natural variants.

Copula (directions)

- (24) Eki ha doko desu ka.
 Station TOP where COP.POL INT
 ‘Where is the station?’

Copula (thing)

- (25) Kore ha nan desu ka.
 This TOP what COP.POL INT
 ‘What is this?’

	Copula (directions)	Copula (thing)
POLITE+KA ↘	−45	−25
POLITE+KA ↗	115	115
POLITE ↗	55	65
PLAIN+KA ↘	−75	−50
PLAIN+KA ↗	−65	−45
PLAIN ↗	100	115

Table 5: Results for the wh- sentences

A note from one respondent worth bringing up is about PLAIN+KA ↘ of example 24, which by itself is not natural but in the right context it is perfectly fine. The form in question is shown in example 26.

- (26) *Eki ha doko ka.
Station TOP where INT

If this were to be put in the following context, it would be perfectly natural:

- (27) Alice: Eki ha doko desu ka.
Alice: Station TOP where COP.POL INT
'Alice: Where is the station?'
- (28) Bob: Eki ha doko ka.
Bob: Station TOP where INT
'Bob: Where the station is?'
- (29) Alice: Hai, eki ha doko ni ar-imas-u ka.
Alice: Correct, station TOP where DAT be-POL-NPAST INT
'Alice: That's right, where is the station?'

As luck would have it, example 28 translates perfectly into English in that it also in English out of its context is an ungrammatical question.

3.1.3 Offer

The base sentence POLITE+KA ↗ and its plain form PLAIN+KA ↗ seem to be the most natural in example 30; its different structure contributes to the fact that POLITE ↗ and PLAIN ↗ do not work at all. This is because, in contrast to the earlier examples these forms have well-rooted separate meanings.

It can be concluded that it is not possible to drop 'ka' for any variant of example 30.

In example 31 on the other hand it looks like it is possible to drop the particle in all cases, even with falling intonation. One possible reason is that other parts of the sentence already contribute to create the offering or invitational context, to the degree that a dropped particle does not change it significantly.

Verb (help)

- (30) Tetsuda-imashou ka.
Help-NPAST.VOL.POL INT
'Do you want me to help you?'

Copula (tea)

- (31) Tsumeta-i ocha wo go-youishi-te-or-imas-u ga
 Cold-NPAST tea ACC HUM-prepare-TE-STAT-POL-NPAST CONJ
 ikaga deshou ka.
 how.POL COP.POL INT
 ‘Would you care for a cup of iced tea?’

	Verb (help)	Copula (tea)
POLITE+KA ↘	30	40
POLITE+KA ↗	80	75
POLITE ↗	−60	25
PLAIN+KA ↘	−15	
PLAIN+KA ↗	115	
PLAIN ↗	−95	
POLITE ↘		45

Table 6: Results for the offer sentences

3.1.4 Invitation

The only unnatural variants of example 32 seem to be POLITE+KA ↘ and PLAIN+KA ↘. Whether this is because lack of respondents or a real truth is hard to determine, but we can at least conclude that it seems possible to drop ‘ka’ in this case.

Verb

- (32) Issho ni tabishi-masen ka.
 Together travel-NEG.POL INT
 ‘Would you join me on a trip?’

	Verb (trip)
POLITE+KA ↘	−25
POLITE+KA ↗	100
POLITE ↗	70
PLAIN+KA ↘	−25
PLAIN+KA ↗	45
PLAIN ↗	100

Table 7: Results for the invitation sentence

3.1.5 Request for confirmation

Coincidence or not is again hard to determine, but it seems possible to conclude that ‘ka’ is omissible even in this case in both polite and plain variants.

Verb (confirmation)

- (33) Samu-ku ar-imasen ka.
Cold-ADV be-NEG.POL INT
'Are you not cold?'

Verb (confirmation)	
POLITE+KA ↘	-15
POLITE+KA ↗	115
POLITE ↗	70
PLAIN+KA ↘	-35
PLAIN+KA ↗	115
PLAIN ↗	110

Table 8: Results for the request for confirmation sentence

3.1.6 Rhetorical question

In the case of the rhetorical question the results strongly indicate that it is not possible to omit 'ka'. The reason for this is likely similar as for the examples in section 3.1.3, in the sense that leaving the particle out makes the sentence assume a different meaning.

Verb

- (34) Sate, shukudai yar-imas-u ka.
Well then, homework do-POL-NPAST INT
'Time for homework then I suppose.'

Verb (rhetorical)	
POLITE+KA ↘	45
POLITE+KA ↗	25
POLITE ↗	-75
PLAIN+KA ↘	65
PLAIN+KA ↗	10
PLAIN ↗	-70
PLAIN ↘	-95

Table 9: Results for the rhetorical sentence

3.1.7 Cross-category results

Comparing the results per-variant it is possible to see some characteristics of each variant in relation to the sentence category. Table 10 provides a summary of the base sentence(s) in each category for easy reference.

Yes/no question

Kono densha, Ochanomizu ni tomarimasu ka.	‘Does this train stop at Ochanomizu?’	(21)
Kore ha hon desu ka.	‘Is this a book?’	(22)
Yarikata wo oshiete-morae-masu ka.	‘Can you teach me how to do it?’	(23)

Wh- question

Eki ha doko desu ka.	‘Where is the station?’	(24)
Kore ha nan desu ka.	‘What is this?’	(25)

Offer

Tetsuda-imashou ka.	‘Do you want me to help you?’	(30)
Tsumeta-i ocha wo go-youishi-te-orimasu ga ikaga deshou ka.	‘Would you care for a cup of iced tea?’	(31)

Invitation

Issho ni tabishi-masen ka.	‘Would you join me on a trip?’	(32)
----------------------------	--------------------------------	------

Request for confirmation

Samu-ku arimasen ka.	‘Are you not cold?’	(33)
----------------------	---------------------	------

Rhetorical question

Sate, shukudai yarimasu ka.	‘Time for homework then I suppose.’	(34)
-----------------------------	-------------------------------------	------

Table 10: Summary of base sentences per category

POLITE+KA ↘ This variant is natural only for the offers and the rhetorical question.

Discussions with native informants reveal no particular reason for why it is natural for offers but not the other categories, other than the vague speculation that the request for a response in these sentences as compared to the others is not as strong, since the main purpose of the utterance is making an offer rather than demanding an answer.

As for the rhetorical question the same speculation applies but is even stronger since there is no direct listener.

POLITE+KA ↗ In all categories this variant was proven natural. Given that all categories contain questions it seems logical to assume that a rising final intonation, as is common in questions generally, in combination with the interrogative particle ‘ka’ give natural-sounding sentences. The only case where this

seems slightly out of the ordinary is for the rhetorical question where an answer is not requested in the first place.

POLITE ↗ This proved natural for all categories except the second yes/no question (copula), offer (help) and the rhetorical question. Starting with the yes/no category, the reason(s) for why this variant turned out to be unnatural for the copula sentence and not the other two remains a mystery.

As for the first of the two offer sentences about offering help it is obvious that the reason that omitting 'ka' produces an unnatural question is that without the particle the sentence assumes a completely different meaning.

The rhetorical question in its nature does not demand an answer, so a rising intonation as if one were requesting one does not make sense. This however contradicts the results for POLITE+KA ↗ as noted above. Notable though is the lack of the particle 'ka' and the fact that the meaning of the sentence changes without the particle 'ka', which should be reason enough.

PLAIN+KA ↘ This variant was proven unnatural for all categories except the rhetorical question. It turns out that for the rhetorical question this variant was the most natural of them all. The fact that this variant is unnatural for most questions could indicate that rising final intonation plays a significant role in questions.

PLAIN+KA ↗ For all but the yes/no (favour) question and the wh- questions, this variant was shown to be natural. A reason for the unnaturalness could be that both the yes/no (favour) question and the wh- questions demand information from the listener. Given this scenario, it would seem out of place to use anything but a polite form.

PLAIN ↗ This variant was shown natural for all but offer (help) and the rhetorical question. The reason for its unnaturalness in the case of the offer (help) sentence is the same as that given in POLITE ↗ – the sentence takes on a completely different meaning without the particle.

Likewise for the rhetorical question, the reason is believed to be the same as for POLITE ↗, namely that it does not demand an answer so a rising intonation would seem out of place. The same question arises when it comes to POLITE+KA ↗ and PLAIN+KA ↗ – why the rhetorical question works in these cases is not known.

POLITE ↘ This variant was found natural for the offer (tea) sentence which was the only category in which it was tested. As noted in section 3.1.3 a possible reason is that the other parts of the sentence already contribute to create the offering or invitational context, to the degree that a dropped particle does not change it significantly.

PLAIN ↘ Finally, this variant was found not natural for the rhetorical question, which was the only category in which it was tested. The reason as also

mentioned in section 3.1.6 is likely that omitting 'ka' in this case makes the sentence assume a different meaning.

3.1.8 Zooming in on 'ka'

Slicing the results a little differently to focus only on the effect of the particle 'ka', the following can be said.

Polite form

Comparing POLITE+KA ↗ to POLITE ↗ for each category, it seems that generally POLITE+KA ↗ is just slightly more natural. Notably though there are three cases that stand out in which POLITE ↗ is considered very unnatural, namely the yes/no question with copula, offering of help, and the rhetorical question. The explanation for the latter two cases would likely be, as noted earlier, that the sentences assume a different meaning without the particle. Mentioned earlier but worth emphasising is the case with the yes/no question with copula (see example 22); in contrast to both wh- questions with copula (examples 24 and 25) the yes/no question is thought to be very unnatural without 'ka'. This could be a seed for further study; the results do not reveal the reason behind this.

Polite form with falling intonation (POLITE+KA ↘) applies only to the offer (tea) question and therefore it is hard to draw any conclusion.

Plain form

Looking at the plain form comparing PLAIN+KA ↗ with PLAIN ↗, the results relatively strongly indicate that PLAIN+KA ↗ is not natural. Exceptions are the offering of help and the rhetorical question, for which as previously mentioned the sentence assumes a different meaning without the particle, and also the yes/no question with verb (example 21) for which PLAIN+KA ↗ does not seem to be considered completely unnatural, but still far less natural than PLAIN ↗. In all other cases the use of PLAIN+KA ↗ turns out to be unnatural.

As with POLITE+KA ↘, plain form with falling intonation (PLAIN ↘) only applies to one example (the rhetorical question) and it is therefore not possible to draw any conclusion other than what has been already noted.

Rising vs. falling intonation

For all cases but the rhetorical question POLITE+KA ↘ was considered less natural than POLITE+KA ↗ and in most cases even unnatural. This shows to some degree that even when 'ka' is included the intonation plays a role in forming a natural question, which in correlation with the results for POLITE ↗ and PLAIN+KA ↗ vs. PLAIN ↗ mentioned above demonstrates that proper intonation is more important than the use of the particle 'ka' when forming questions.

3.2 Sources of error

The primary source of information for this work is a questionnaire. Due to circumstances it was not possible to gather a large enough number of respondents to come close to statistically viable results.

Furthermore, the shape of the questionnaire may be a contributing factor to potentially erroneous results, as also noted by respondents of the questionnaire as well as by native informants after the fact. A concrete example is the intonation chosen for the polite sentences (POLITE+KA ↗ and POLITE+KA ↘), which may or may not have conveyed the correct message – the argument was that the intonation is neither rising nor falling, but flat. One solution to mitigate or possibly even eliminate this problem could be to substitute the sentences for audio clips recorded by a native speaker. This way ambiguities and misunderstandings may be reduced. Another example is the formulation used in the triple-choice answers; specifically the use of the word ‘very’ in ‘very natural’ and ‘very unnatural’ about which comments were received saying that if it were written without the emphasis a different answer may have been selected. One could also argue, and this was the reasoning behind the choice of having this emphasis, that if a strongly emphasised answer has been selected, it could possibly increase the chance that the respondent is sure about the choice.

Another source of error is the lack of context around the sentences given; without sufficient context the nuance and meaning may become skewed depending on the interpretation of each respondent.

One could list many factors and combinations thereof that give rise to potential errors. The gist of it all is that with any investigation there is the risk of errors occurring, but with this work specifically the risk is in all likelihood higher given the above noted.

4 Conclusion

This work has by means of questionnaire and discussions with native informants investigated the use of the sentence-final particle ‘ka’ in modern Japanese. It has provided a brief overview of the particle and its use through various examples.

Arriving at the core question of this work about whether or not ‘ka’ is omissible and if there is any case in which it is not possible to use ‘ka’, the conclusions that can be drawn are shown in table 11. It can be concluded that in yes/no questions, wh- questions, offering objects, invitations, and requests for confirmation, the particle ‘ka’ may be omitted. This indicates that the significance of the particle in these cases is not enough for it to be considered meaningful. The only cases where ‘ka’ cannot be omitted is when offering help and when posing rhetorical questions. The reason for this is likely that it causes the sentence to assume a different meaning. As for cases where it is not possible to use ‘ka’, grouping together rising and falling intonation PLAIN+KA for wh-questions came close, but not close enough for it to be possible to draw a proper conclusion. Consequently, the conclusion is that none of the cases studied in this work demand a form where the particle ‘ka’ must be left out.

Case	Omissible	Impossible
Yes/no question	YES	NO
Wh- question	YES	NO
Offer (help)	NO	NO
Offer (tea)	YES	NO
Invitation	YES	NO
Request for confirmation	YES	NO
Rhetorical question	NO	NO

Table 11: The significance of ‘ka’

A similar study carried out by Zhèng [16] arrives at the conclusion that when sentence-final ‘ka’ is used to form a question where the listener is in focus it tends to be omissible and the nuance of the sentence does not change significantly, whereas when the focus does not lie on the listener such as for an exclamation or when expressing doubt – both of which in this case should be to some extent comparable to a rhetorical question – the particle is less likely to be omissible. Zhèng [16] also notes cases where the particle cannot be omitted and arrives at the same conclusion that these are cases where the meaning of the sentence would change remarkably. The results arrived at in this work so seem to corroborate above mentioned conclusions drawn by Zhèng [16].

Lastly, it should be emphasised that while everything has been done to conduct an accurate study in order to be able to present correct results, this work shall by no means be thought of as an exhaustive and therefore neither a conclusive investigation of the topic presented, but merely an effort to provide further insight into the Japanese language and its structure.

References

- [1] *Super Daijirin Japanese Dictionary*. Sanseido Co., Ltd., digital edition, 2013.
- [2] BANNO, E., OHNO, Y., SAKANE, Y., and SHINAGAWA, C. *Genki – An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese*. The Japan Times, 2004. ISBN 4 7890 0963 7.
- [3] ITANI, R. *The Japanese sentence-final particle ka: A relevance-theoretic approach*. *Lingua*, 90:129–147, 1993.
- [4] IWASAKI, S. *Japanese – Revised edition*. John Benjamins Publishing, 2013. ISBN 978 90 272 7314 7.
- [5] KARLSSON, F. *Finnish – An Essential Grammar*. Routledge, 1999. ISBN 0 2031 8753 9.
- [6] KENDALL, S. A. *Japanese Sentence-Final Particles as Commitment Markers*. *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, pages 164–174, 1985.
- [7] KINDAICHI, H. *Nihongo (The Japanese Language)*. Iwanami Shoten, 1957.
- [8] MARTIN, S. E. *A Reference Grammar of Japanese*. University of Hawai’i Press, 2004. ISBN 0 8248 2818 6.
- [9] ROSS, C. and MA, J. *Modern Mandarin Chinese Grammar – A Practical Guide*. Routledge, 2006. ISBN 978 02 037 9993 2.
- [10] SHIBATANI, M. *The Languages of Japan*. Cambridge University Press, 1990. ISBN 978 0 521 36070 8.
- [11] SHINZATO, R. *Cognition, epistemic scale, and functions of the Old Japanese question particle ka*. *Linguistics*, 40(3):553–578, 2002.
- [12] TSUCHIHASHI, M. *The speech act continuum: An investigation of Japanese sentence final particles*. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 7:361–387, 1983.
- [13] TSUJIMURA, N. *An Introduction to Japanese Linguistics*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2 edition, 2007. ISBN 978 1 4051 1065 5.
- [14] UYENO, T. *A study of Japanese modality: A performative analysis of sentence particles*. PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 1971.
- [15] WALLACE, D. J. *The Use in Modern Japanese of the Grammatical Particles Known as Kakari-joshi and Fuku-joshi*. Master’s dissertation, The University of Arizona, 1970.
- [16] ZHÈNG, X. *“Ka”-gimonbun ni okeru “ka” no shouryaku ni tsuite (About the omission of “ka” in interrogative sentences)*. *Waseda nihongo kenkyuu*, 5, 1997.

文章の自然さの調査（日本語を母国語としている方のみ対象）

こんにちは！日本語学科の卒業論文を書いているヨハンと申します。大変お手数ですが、5月8日金曜日の23時（日本時間）までに下記の質問に答えていただけますでしょうか。

各質問に、文章が書いてあります。それぞれ文章が日本語として自然に聞こえるかそうでないかを調査対象とします。とても自然なのか、自然ではないが言えなくはないのか、とても不自然なのか、選んでください。

各部分のタイトルの下に短い説明を書きました。話し相手がいるかいないか、質問のどういう答えを求めているか書いています。この説明に当てはまる質問だと思って、答えてくださると助かります。同じ質問が複数あって若干形が変わります。同じ話題の質問文が同じ意味であるという解釈をしてください。

質問文の後に「↑」、「↓」が書いてあります。これはイントネーションを表す印です。「↑」は最後にイントネーションを上げる、「↓」は最後のイントネーションを下げることを示します。

各部分の最後にコメントが書ける場所があります。質問が変など、ご自由に書いてください。特にコメントがなければ何も書かなくても大丈夫です。

全部の質問文が標準語だと思ってお答えください。

よろしくお願いいたします。

はじめに

私は日本語を母国語としている日本人です。

日本語を母国語としている方、チェックを入れてください。日本語を母国語としていない方であれば、アンケートのお答えが使いにくくなりますので記入しないでください。

☐ はい

性別

☐ 女性

☐ 男性

☐ 秘密

年齢

- ☐ 20 歳以下
☐ 21～30 歳
☐ 31～60 歳
☐ 61 歳以上
☐ 秘密

方言

日常使っている言葉は標準語ですか、それともどちらかの方言ですか。方言の場合、地域または方言名を入れてください。

- ☐ 標準語
☐ Other: _____

連絡情報

調査の結果が知りたい方は、メールアドレス等の連絡情報を入れてください。個人情報はもちろん公開しません。

Yes/no question

質問相手がいて、答えが「はい、止まります」または「いいえ、止まりません」

この電車、御茶ノ水に止まりますか↘

- ☐ ●とても自然
☐ ▲自然ではないが言えなくはない
☐ ✕とても不自然

この電車、御茶ノ水に止まりますか↗

- ☐ ●とても自然
☐ ▲自然ではないが言えなくはない
☐ ✕とても不自然

この電車、御茶ノ水に止まります↗

- ☐ ●とても自然
☐ ▲自然ではないが言えなくはない
☐ ✕とても不自然

この電車、御茶ノ水に止まるか↘

- ☐ ●とても自然
☐ ▲自然ではないが言えなくはない
☐ ✕とても不自然

この電車、御茶ノ水に止まるか↗

- ☐ ●とても自然
- ☐ ▲自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕とても不自然

この電車、御茶ノ水に止まる↗

- ☐ ●とても自然
- ☐ ▲自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕とても不自然

これは本ですか↘

- ☐ ●とても自然
- ☐ ▲自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕とても不自然

これは本ですか↗

- ☐ ●とても自然
- ☐ ▲自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕とても不自然

これは本です↗

- ☐ ●とても自然
- ☐ ▲自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕とても不自然

これは本か↘

- ☐ ●とても自然
- ☐ ▲自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕とても不自然

これは本か↗

- ☐ ●とても自然
- ☐ ▲自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕とても不自然

これは本↗

- ☐ ●とても自然
- ☐ ▲自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕とても不自然

上記の Yes/no 疑問文についてのコメントがあれば是非書いてください

Wh- question

質問相手がいて、回答を求める

駅はどこですか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

駅はどこですか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

駅はどこです↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

駅はどこか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

駅はどこか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

駅はどこ↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

これは何ですか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

これは何ですか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

これは何です↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

これは何か↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

これは何か↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

これは何↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

上記の Wh-疑問文についてのコメントがあれば是非書いてください

--

Offering help

手伝ってあげたいときに、相手にその必要性があるか聞く

手伝いましょうか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

手伝いましょうか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

手伝いましょう↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

手伝おうか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

手伝おうか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

手伝おう↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

上記の Offering help 疑問文についてのコメントがあれば是非書いてください

Invitation

相手を誘う設定

一緒に旅しませんか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

一緒に旅しませんか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

一緒に旅しません↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

一緒に旅しないか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

一緒に旅しないか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

一緒に旅しない↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

上記の Invitation 疑問文についてのコメントがあれば是非書いてください

Request

相手に何かをやってほしいと求める設定

やり方を教えてもらえますか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

やり方を教えてもらえますか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

やり方を教えてもらえますか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

やり方を教えてもらえるか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

やり方を教えてもらえるか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

やり方を教えてもらえるか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

上記の Request 疑問文についてのコメントがあれば是非書いてください

Confirmation

相手に事実確認を求める設定

寒くありませんか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

寒くありませんか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

寒くありません↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

寒くないか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

寒くないか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

寒くない↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

上記の Confirmation 疑問文についてのコメントがあれば是非書いてください

Rhetorical question

自分自信に質問をする形

さて、宿題やりますか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

さて、宿題やりますか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

さて、宿題やります↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

さて、宿題やるか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

さて、宿題やるか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

さて、宿題やる↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

さて、宿題やる↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

上記の Rhetorical question 疑問文についてのコメントがあれば是非書いてください

Offer

相手に何かを提案する設定

冷たいお茶をご用意しておりますがいかがでしょうか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

冷たいお茶をご用意しておりますがいかがでしょうか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

冷たいお茶をご用意しておりますがいかがでしょうか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

冷たいお茶をご用意しておりますがいかがでしょうか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

冷たいお茶をご用意しておりますがいかがでしょうか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

冷たいお茶をご用意しておりますがいかがでしょうか↗

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

冷たいお茶をご用意しておりますがいかがでしょうか↘

- ☐ ● とても自然
- ☐ ▲ 自然ではないが言えなくはない
- ☐ ✕ とても不自然

上記の Offer 疑問文についてのコメントがあれば是非書いてください

最後に

最後に全体に対してのコメント、質問があれば、是非書いてください。コメントがなければ、入れなくても大丈夫です。

全体に対してのコメント

[illegible]

[illegible]