

1. The Particle 「も」 has strong parallels in English. Let's try to fully dissect its meaning:

田中さん も 食べた。 [= "Tanaka, too, ate."] Both presume the following:

- a. Tanaka ate.
- b. There were other people besides Tanaka.
- c. Some of those other people ate.

ハンバーガー も 食べた。 [He ate a hamburger, too. / He ate hamburgers, too.]

- a. Tanaka ate hamburger(s).
- b. There were other things to eat besides hamburgers.
- c. Tanaka ate at least some of those other things.

Conclusions:

- a. The particle 'mo' marks the word that precedes it.
- b. It implies a group of items (the 'scope') in addition to the specific item that it marks.
- c. It implies that the sentence holds true for at least some items in that group.

What happens when 「も」 is inserted into other case-positions?

- a. 今日 も 食べた。 [He ate today, too.]
- b. レストラン でも 食べた。 [He ate at a restaurant, too.]
- c. 水曜日 にも 食べた。 [He ate on Wednesday, too.]

Note some special uses:

- d. 三つ も 食べた。 [He ate not just two, but as many as three.]
- e. 見て も いない。 [I haven't even seen it.]
- f. 見 も しない。 [I won't even look at it.]
- g. おいしく も ない。 [It's not even delicious.]
- h. そう でも ないよ。 [That's just not true.]

What happens to the case particles when using 「も」?

ネズミ も 食べた。 >>> This has two possible meanings:

- a. The mouse, too, ate. >>> where 'nezumi' is the subject.
- b. {It, e.g., the cat} ate the mouse, too. >>> where 'nezumi' is the object.

Conclusion: Because 'mo' replaces the case particles 'ga', 'wo', and 'o', one must rely upon context alone to figure out what the original case of the word was. Only with the other particles ('ni', 'de', 'to', 'he', 'kara', 'made', etc.) is the original marking preserved. Thus, 'mo' is not a case marker! It can be a *destroyer* of case information (*grrr!*).

Still, one occasionally sees: ハンバーガーをも食べた。(but never も and が together)

2. Consider another contrastive particle with close English equivalents: 「だけ」

田中さん だけ 食べた。 [Only Tanaka ate.]

ハンバーガー だけ 食べた。 [He ate only hamburgers.]

- a. The particle 'dake' marks the word that precedes it.
- b. It implies the existence of other items (a 'scope') in addition to the one marked.
- c. It implies the sentence holds true for only the item that is marked, but *not* for the others.

今日 だけ 食べた。 [He ate today, only.]

レストラン だけで 食べた。 [He ate only at the restaurant.]

お箸 だけで 食べた。 [He ate using only chopsticks.]

水曜日 にだけ 食べた。 [He ate only on Wednesday.]

三つ だけ 食べた。 [He ate only three of them, not more.]

Conclusions about 'dake':

- a. 'dake' does not mark case.
- b. 'dake' can actually *obscure* case marking (ga, wo).

Still, occasionally one sees: ハンバーガーをだけ食べた。 / ハンバーガーだけを食べた。

3. Contrastive particle 「は」:

田中さん は 食べた。 The context probably went like this: The speaker is discussing people who went to the party, and ascertaining who did eat and who did not eat. When the speaker comes to discussing Tanaka, the declaration is that Tanaka did in fact eat, but the others may or may not have eaten. In other words, the speaker is saying, "Whatever the others may have done, let's put them aside for the moment and talk about Tanaka: Tanaka, at least, ate."

ハンバーガー は 食べた。 The speaker is discussing foods she ate. When she comes to the hamburgers, she declares that whatever else she may or may not have eaten, at least she ate hamburgers.

Conclusions about は. Note the strong structural similarities to も and だけ:

- The particle 'は' marks the word that precedes it.
- It implies a grouping of items (a 'scope') in addition the specific item that it marks.
- It implies that the sentence is true for the item that is marked.
- It temporarily puts off discussion of the other items.
- It does not mark case, and may even obscure case marking (with ga, wo).

4. Other examples of 「は」:

- レストラン では 食べない。
 - お箸 では 食べない。
 - 水曜日 には 食べる。
 - 今日 は 食べる。
 - 早く は 食べない。
 - 急いで は 食べない。
 - 三つ は 食べた。 >>> special: Maybe he ate more, but at least he ate three.
 - おいしく は ないけど。 [It may be other things, but delicious it isn't.]
 - 読んで は いるけど。 [Well, I've read it {but that doesn't mean I understood it}.]
 - 食べ は しない。 [Whatever else I may do, I don't eat them.]
- Note: Classical (文語) and rare dialects sometimes retain the case marker を, resulting in 「をば」
Note: 「は」 almost never follows question words. It wouldn't make sense.

5. Contrastive Particle 「さえ」:

- 去年のノートと さえ 持って来る。 [= This student brings everything to class: his electronic dictionary, his other textbooks, a full set of mechanical pencils. "He even brings his notebook from last year."]
- 先生 にさえ 分からない。 [= The problem assignments in this text are so difficult that none of the students can understand them. "Even the teacher doesn't understand them."]

Note: Compared to the group, the designated item is an extreme case, thus the sentence holds true "even" for the item that is marked.

6. Contrastive Particle 「しか」 (always used with negative):

- 10円 しか なかった。 [I did not have but ten yen]
- ウイスキー しか 飲まない。 [I drink nothing but whiskey]
- ハイフェツ にしか できない。 [It's not possible for anyone but Heifetz]

7. Contrastive Particle 「のみ」 (= classical/literary equivalent of 'だけ')

- 無意味な結果 のみ 生じた。 [It produced only meaningless results]

8. Contrastive Particle 「すら」 (= slightly more literary equivalent for 'さえ')

- 子供 にすら わかる。 [Even a child can understand it]

9. Contrastive Particle 「こそ」 (= minimizes other possibilities, to elevate the one at hand.)

- 今日 こそ 勉強します。 [= I admit I haven't studied so much on other days. Today I'll study.]
- S speaks to T: (S)ありがとうございます。 / (T)いいえ、こちらこそ。
[(S) Thank you so much. / (T) No, it is I (who ought to be thankful).]

10. Contrastive Particle ばかり／ばっかり／ばかりし／ばっかし (= indicates "X, only X, and lots of X")

- 日本語 ばかり 勉強している。 [That's all he studies -- Japanese, Japanese, Japanese.]
- 勉強 ばかり している。 [All he does is study, study, study.]
- 日本語を勉強して ばかり いる。 [All he's doing is studying.]

11. Charting Contrastive Particles (Venn Diagram style):

- ハンバーガー だけ 食べる。 [+] [-, -, -, -, -]
- ハンバーガー のみ 食べる。 [+] [-, -, -, -, -]
- ハンバーガー しか 食べない。 [+] [-, -, -, -, -] (neg. x neg.)
- ハンバーガー さえ 食べる。 [+] [+, +, +, +, +]
- ハンバーガーすら 食べる。 [+] [+, +, +, +, +]
- ハンバーガー も 食べる。 [+] [+, +, +, ?, ?, ?]
- ハンバーガー は 食べる。 [+] [?, ?, ?, ?, ?, ?]