

Re-Presenting Action in a Shareable Way Using an X-*hora*-Y Format: One Way to Resolve Epistemic Imbalance*

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1 Introduction

This study presents an empirical analysis of the use of a Japanese interjection, *hora*, in naturally occurring everyday interactions. *Hora* is generally classified as one of a group of interjections used to attract someone's attention (Masuoka & Takubo 1992). To date, only a few studies have investigated this particular interjection. Oshima (2001) pointed out that *hora* is a word that appears only in conversations and is used when the speaker is directing their speech to the hearer. Oshima (2001) stated that this interjection is used to direct the hearer's attention to what is observable or unobservable at the moment of speech, which is shared or expected to be shared in advance between the speaker and the hearer. In their conversation analytic study, Ryu and Hosoma (2017), discussed *hora* used in live TV coverage of car racing, illustrating that the speaker with expertise in car racing uses *hora* to refer to an extralinguistic event appearing on the TV monitor that has already been predicted by the speaker. That is, the speaker uses *hora* to indicate the congruence between the here-and-now event and his earlier prediction of the event. These studies suggest that the occurrence of *hora* depends crucially on the nature of the elements preceding and following it.

* This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP23K00513.

Japanese/Korean Linguistics 31.

Edited by William Giang, Lucien Brown, Shimako Iwasaki, Satoshi Nambu, and Daniel Pieper.

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Building on these studies, this study employs the methodology of Conversation Analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974) to further investigate the use of *hora*. Unlike previous studies, it focuses exclusively on the use of an X-*hora*-Y format and attempts to reveal how participants use this format to achieve an interactional goal. The data are drawn from the Corpus of Everyday Japanese Conversation collected by the National Institute of Japanese Language and Linguistics (Koiso et al. 2022). The spoken data are transcribed according to the conventions of Conversation Analysis. Additionally, details of body movement are transcribed according to the conventions developed by Mondada (2018). All the symbols used in the transcripts are found in the appendices.

2 X-*hora*-Y Format

The X-*hora*-Y format examined in this study is typically used when the speaker has exclusive access to the initial action embodied by Component X. The subsequent *hora* serves as a signal to initiate Component Y, that is, an action that re-presents or reformulates the initial action in a more shareable way. This is schematized in the following diagram.

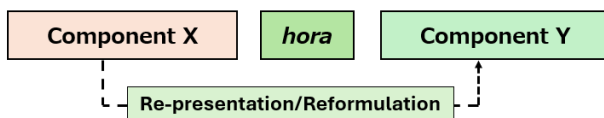


Diagram 1: X-*hora*-Y Format

In the X-*hora*-Y format, Components X and Y are not always verbal actions. Out of the 37 cases identified in the present study, 17 cases involved one of the components being actualized as a nonverbal action. Throughout this paper, I will demonstrate that the X-*hora*-Y format is utilized as an interactional practice to resolve epistemic or information imbalance between the speaker and the hearer.

3 Re-presenting Action with the X-*hora*-Y Format

3.1 Reformulating Verbal Action with Nonverbal Action

The X-*hora*-Y is typically utilized when the speaker reformulates their verbal action with a nonverbal action to make the former become more transparent, accessible, and shareable with the hearer. Excerpt (1) is a case in point. In this excerpt, two university classmates, Yuka and Shion, talk over lunch in a university classroom. Before this excerpt, they discussed class registration. After some lapse of talk, the following exchanges of talk begin. Here, the X-*hora*-Y format is used when Yukais is answering the question posed by Shion in lines 04, 06, and 07, .

Excerpt (1) K003_006 00:30

01 YUKA : pokemongo yattekita.
 Pokemon.Go play.came
 "I played Pokemon Go on the way here."
 02 (0.8) ((Shion puts her phone and looks at Yuka.))

03 SHION : e? Yuka-chan mo yatten no? (0.4)+ (0.6)+ Pokemon.
 eh Yuka too playing FP Pokemon
 "Eh? Do you play it, too? Pokemon Go."
 yuka +nod +

04→ YUKA : nn
 yeah
 "Yeah."

05 SHION : majika?
 really
 "Really?"

06→ YUKA : ho+ra.
 "Hora."
 yuka +picks up her phone--->

07→ (1.1) +(0.5)
 yuka ---> +shows Shion her phone--->

08 SHION : hora no imi(h) +ne(h)? h .h majika::
 hora GEN meaning FP really
 "Is ((that)) the meaning of "Hora," right? Really?"
 yuka --->+

Yuka in line 01 begins to inform Shion that she has been playing a specific social game, namely *Pokemon Go* on the way to the present location. During the subsequent 0.8-second pause, Shion stops clicking on her phone and puts it on the table, while gazing towards Yuka. In line 03, Shion produces an *eh*-prefaced question, *e? Yuka-chan mo yatten no? (1.0) Pokemon* ('Eh? Do you play it, too? Pokemon Go') (Hayashi 2009). This indicates that Shion has just realized what Yuka said, and thus asks a confirming question in a sequentially displaced manner, regarding the fact that she is playing that specific game. The subsequent answer produced by Yuka is constructed using the *X-hora-Y* format.

Here, Yuka first affirms the question by nodding before Shion produces an increment *Pokemon* in line 03, followed by an acknowledgment token, *nn* in line 04. The combination of nodding and the short verbal token constitutes Component X in the format. Note that within Component X, Yuka has her primary and exclusive access to what is being questioned by Shion. In other words, there is an information imbalance between Yuka and Shion regarding what Yuka has just said. In line 05, Shion says, *majika* ('really'), with a rising intonation, thereby displaying surprise or unexpectedness towards Yuka's answer, which may urge Yuka to provide the information more accessible to Shion. The subsequent deployment of *hora* and Component Y is intended to resolve the information imbalance between them. Yuka produces *hora* in line 06, signaling that Component Y will follow immediately. During the production of *hora*, Yuka picks up her mobile phone and subsequently shows Shion her phone screen, which displays the game in question (see Figure 1). These nonverbal actions constitute Component Y. In this way, Yuka nonverbally represents or reformulates her prior action, that is, the answer to Shion's question. Consequently, Shion can visibly understand Yuka's answer, and the information imbalance between them is resolved.



Figure 1

3.2 Sequentially Unbounded Nature of the X-hora-Y Format

Re-presenting or reformulating a prior action using the *X-hora-Y* format is not an interactional practice bounded to a specific sequential position such as the answer to a question, which we have just observed in Excerpt (1). Rather, it can be considered a sequentially unbounded interactional practice. In Excerpt (2), the *X-hora-Y* format serves as a pre-mention within a preliminary to preliminary sequence, or a pre-pre sequence (Schegloff 1980). Excerpt (2) is drawn from the same conversation as in Excerpt (1). The following exchange of talk transpires shortly after Excerpt (1). Here, in line (1), Yuka displays trouble in forgetting to bring the outlet to charge her phone's battery. After several exchanges of turns at talk, Shion eventually offers to lend her outlet to Yuka, as in line 10. Here the *X-hora-Y* format can be found between lines 05 and 09.

Excerpt (2) K003-006 00:45

- 01 YUKA : a yabe. (.) a dame jan. (.) uwa konsento mottekun no wasureta wa.
oh gosh oh no.good TAG MIM outlet bring N forgot FP
"Oh gosh. Oh I can't do it. Gee, I forgot to bring an outlet."
- 02 SHION : aifon?
iPhone
"((Do you use)) iPhone?"
- 03 (0.9)((Yuka is showing a cable plug to Shion.))
- 04 YUKA : un
yeah
"Yeah"
- 05→ SHION : aru yo. =+atashi ima aifon >natteru yo.=+juudenshiten da mon.<+
exist FP I now iPhone becoming FP charging COP FP
"((I)) have ((an outlet)). I am now an iPhone user. I am charging ((my iPhone))."
shion +lean her body to the left-----+return her body to the original ptn+
- 06 +(0.9)
shion +lean her body to the right-->
- 07→ SHION : hora.
"Hora."
- 08 (1.0)+
shion --->+
- 09→ SHION : +terere tettere ((These sounds are produced like a musical tone.))
shion +showing her iPhone while returning her body to the original ptn

- 10 SHION : >cho+ [odai.<
give
"Pass ((me your iPhone))."
- 11 YUKA: [(chigau) koko no
different here GEN
"(((It's)) different.) This ((part))."
- shion -->+
12 (1.4)
- 13 SHION : un. kore dakara atashi mo tsunaideru kara (.) kocchi kashitageru yo.
yeah this so I too connecting because this lend.give FP
"Yeah. Because I have ((my iPhone)) hooked up ((to the cable plug)),
I can lend this ((for you))."
- 14 YUKA : e ii yo. juudenshiten nara ii yo.
eh good FP charging if good FP
"Eh no thanks. If you are charging ((your iPhone)), no thanks."

In line 02, Shion produces *aifon* ('iPhone') with a rising intonation to inquire about whether Yuka's mobile device is an iPhone. This question is not designed to be a simple request for information but designed to be a question serving as a pre-pre, which leads up to the offer finally produced by Shion in line 10. During the following 0.9-second pause, Yuka shows Shion some kind of cable plug, which anticipates the answer to the question. Indeed, in line 04, Yuka affirms Shion's question. In line 05, Shion says that she has an outlet for an iPhone and that she is actually charging her phone. This informing can be understood as a pre-mention, leading up to Shion's actual offer in line 10. This pre-mention is constructed as Component X of the X-hora-Y format. At this point, what Shion has just said, that is, the fact that Shion has an outlet for an iPhone now and has been charging the battery, is not visible or accessible to Yuka. In other words, Shion has exclusive access to what is being informed. It should be noted that while producing the pre-mention, Shion leans her body to the left (see Figure 2). Also during the following 0.9-second pause, Shion now leans her body to the right (see Figure 3). These body movements indicate that she is searching for something related to the informing. Subsequently, in line 07, Shion produces *hora*, indicating that she is now ready to re-present the prior informing in a more shareable manner. During the 1.0-second pause after the use of *hora*, Shion inclines her body further to the right (see Figure 4). In line 09, Shion grabs her iPhone, which is connected to the cable, and shows it to Yuka (see Figure 5), while producing a series of nonlexical tokens, *terere ttetere*, with a certain musical tone. Thus, Shion re-presents the prior informing and makes it visible to Yuka. In line 10, Shion eventually offers to lend her outlet to Yuka.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

3.3 Sharing the Discovery Using the X-hora-Y Format

Participants in a conversation often engage in individual activities other than talking, such as reading books, surfing the Internet, or eating food. During these activities, they sometimes notice or discover something that is not immediately accessible to others. On such occasions, sharing discoveries with others becomes relevant. Participants use the X-hora-Y format as a resource for sharing discoveries. Excerpt (3) includes one such instance. In this excerpt, Moe and Natsu talk about the location of a hotel in which they are planning to stay during their upcoming trip to Europe. Before this excerpt, they searched for and identified the location of the hotel using books and the Internet on their phones. Subsequently, they confirmed the distance between the hotel and the nearest station.

Excerpt (3) K001-014 22:47

- 01 NATSU : tatoeba maa sokode:-
for.example well there
"For example, well there-"
- 02 MOE : un=
yeah
"Yeah"
- 03 NATSU : =matte. juukyuu ka.
wait 19 FP
"Wait. ((It's)) 19."
- 04 (2.8)((Moe is drinking coffee, while Natsu is searching for something on the phone.))
- 05 NATSU : chotto matte.
a.little wait
"Wait a little."
- 06 (13.0)((Moe is searching for something on her phone, while Natsu is eating some cake.))
- 07 MOE : hu::::n
ITJ
"I see."
- 08 (2.5)((Both Moe and Natsu are looking at their phone.))

- 09→ MOE : a (.) hora (.) basuroobu ni (0.5) surippa yooisareteru tte. (.) hhh
 oh hora bathrobe and slippers prepared QT
 “Oh hora ((it)) says that ((the hotel)) provides bathrobes and slippers.”
- 10 NATSU : oo
 oh
 “Oh”
- 11 (0.8)
- 12 NATSU : mezurashiiji ne.
 rare FP
 “That’s rare, right?”
- 13 MOE : [mezurashii yo ne
 rare FP FP
 “That’s rare, right?”

Natsu, in line 01, tries to suggest something but stops halfway through, and between lines 03 and 05, she picks up her phone and starts searching for something on it. During the 13-second long silence found in line 06, Moe also starts searching for something. In line 07, Moe produces *hu:::n*, indicating that she is displaying an unexplicit evaluative stance (Tanaka, 2010) towards certain information that she is looking at. Of particular focus here is Moe’s subsequent discovery of something on her phone in line 09.

After another 2.5-second silence, Moe in line 09 produces a change of state token *a* (‘oh’), which appears to mark an event as the discovery of something new (Endo 2018). This can be understood as Component X. In fact, the component after the use of *hora*, that is, Component Y, *basuroobu ni surippa yooisareteru tte* (‘((it)) says that ((the hotel)) provides bathrobes and slippers’), retroactively indicates that Moe has just discovered the information that is only available to her. Note that the quotative particle, *tte*, marks the end of Component Y. Here, Moe thus verbalizes what she has just discovered on her phone screen. This explains why the entire Component Y is a report of the information that Moe has just discovered on the screen of her phone. In this case, Component X is thus retrospectively understood as the discovery of the information, and the subsequent Component Y is a verbal retelling of the discovery of the information.

3.4 Complex Case

The following excerpt shows a complex case in which the initial action, that is, Component X originally may not be produced as Component X in the X-*hora*-Y format. The initial action is contingently and retrospectively treated by the speaker as Component X of the format. In this excerpt, Shion and Mami, Shion’s mother, discuss what color to use for the signage of the shop they are running. They talk in the shop, and Mami faces many colored bottles on the shelf.

Excerpt (4) K003_003 13:06

- 01 MAMI : ((Picks up a colored bottle)) nanka (.) obaachan da yo ne kore.
like grandmother COP FP FP this
"Like, grandmom's ((color)), right? This ((color))."
- 02 SHION : wakarū. obaachan no sa[a, ichiban okini[irino buroochi no iro.
understand grandmother GEN FP most favorite brooch GEN color
"I understand. Grandmother's most favorite brooch color."
- 03 MAMI : [obaachan- [soo soo soo soo soo soo soo
grandmother so so so so so so so
"Grandmother-" "Right right right right right right."
(2.3)((Mami picks up another colored bottle and looks at it.))
- 04 MAMI : a kore ga ii kana:::
oh this SUB good FP
"Oh I wonder if this would be good."
(2.1)((Mami shakes the colored bottle and then tries to pick up another bottle.))
- 05 MAMI : .h.h.h
- 06→ SHION : nanka sono ichiban hidari no koi buruu ii to omou kedo.
like that most left GEN dark blue goo QT think though
"Like, that leftmost dark blue ((one)) is good, I think, though."
(0.6) ((Mami is searching for the bottle mentioned by Shion.))
- 07→ SHION : sore ka sono (.) masshoomenni aru keikoo buruu mitaina yatsu
it or that straight.ahead exist fluorescent blue like one
"That or the one that looks like fluorescent blue directly in front of you ((is good)) ."
(1.6) ((Mami is searching for another bottle mentioned by Shion.))
- 08 MAMI : ((Points to one of the bottles)) kore?
"This?"
- 09 SHION : chigau wa.
different FP
"No, it's not."
- 10 MAMI : ((Points to another bottle)) kore?=
this
"This?"
- 11 SHION : =chigau. (.) sono [+ tonari.
different that next
"No. The one next to it."
- 12 MAMI : [+kore?
this
"This?"
- shion +stands up and bends her body towards a shelf--->
(0.7)
- 13 MAMI : ko+re?
this
"This?"
- shion --->+reaches her arm towards a specific bottle in the shelf--->
- 14 SHION : kore.
this
"This."
(1.2) + (0.7)
- shion --->+grab the bottle and put it on the table--->

21→ SHION : +hora.
 “Hora.”
 shion -->+show the bottle to Mami--->

22 (0.3)

23→ SHION : kirei [janai? [+uso jan. kire[i +da yo.
 beautiful TAG lie TAG beautiful COP FP
 “((It’s)) beautiful, right?” “((There’s)) no way, right? ((It’s)) beautiful.”

24 MAMI : [ee::: hen he[+n [hen hen +hen.
 ITJ weird weird weird weird weird
 “What? ((It’s)) weird, ((It’s)) weird.” “((It’s)) weird, ((It’s)) weird, ((It’s)) weird.”
 shion ---> +grabs another bottle from the shelf+shows the bottle to her mom

In line 01, Mami takes one of the colored bottles off the shelf and says that the color is associated with elderly women. In line 02, Shion concurs with her and provides elaboration, stating that it is the most popular brooch color among elderly women. In line 03, Mami displays strong agreement before Shion completes her elaborated statement. During the subsequent 2.3-second pause, Mami picks another colored bottle off the shelf and looks closely at it. Subsequently, in line 05, Mami says as if talking to herself, *a kore ga ii kana:::* (‘Oh, I wonder if it would be good’). Shion does not respond to Mami, whereas Mami shakes the colored bottle and then tries to pick up another colored bottle. In lines 08 and 10, Shion proposes two colors located at specific places as candidates for the use of the shop’s signage, namely *ichiban hidari no koi buruu* (‘left most dark blue’) and *mashoomenni aru keikoo buruu mitaina yatsu* (‘the one that looks like fluorescent blue directly in front of you’). Since Mami can perceive these two colors, her response should become relevant in the next turn. However, Mami cannot identify one of the colored bottles (i.e. *mashoomenni aru keikoo buruu mitaina yatsu* ‘the one that looks like fluorescent blue directly in front of you’), as indicated by her subsequent utterances in lines 12, 14, 16, and 18 through which she shows difficulty identifying the specific colored bottle mentioned by Shion. Mami’s difficulty identifying the colored bottle indicates that she could not fully access the specific bottle mentioned by Shion. Thus, Shion recalibrates her initial action and retrospectively reframes it as Component X in the X-hora-Y format. As indicated in the transcript, after Mami makes a second guess in line 14, Shion stands up and inclines her body towards the shelf where the targeted colored bottle is located (see Figure 6), while she negates Mami’s second guess. When Mami is making the fourth guess in line 18, Shion reaches her arm towards the bottle in question (see Figure 7). After Shion in line 19 says *kore* (‘this’), she grabs the bottle and puts it on the table that Mami is facing (see Figure 8). In line 21, Shion produces *hora* as a signal to reformulate her initial action. Interestingly, as can be seen in line 23, the color term in question is absent in the subsequent Component Y. Instead, Shion shows the bottle to Mami. In doing so, she resolves the problem of the identification of the color. Further, she reformulates her previous action, that is, a proposal into a request for agreement. This instance shows that the speaker contingently reconfigures the prior action as Component X in the X-hora-Y format when the hearer unexpectedly displays difficulty accessing the object referred to as part of the prior action.



Figure 6

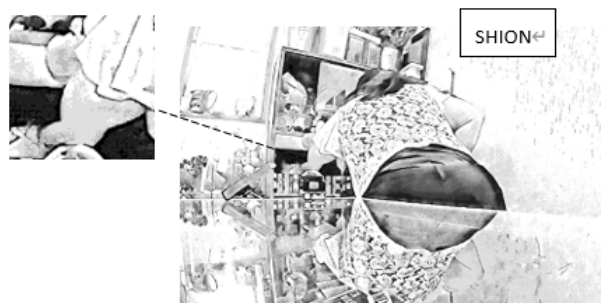


Figure 7



Figure 8

4 Conclusion

This study investigated how the *X-hora-Y* format is used in everyday Japanese interactions. The analysis has shown that this particular format, which is located at sequentially rather heterogeneous positions, is used to redress an epistemic or information imbalance between the speaker and the hearer regarding what is initially referred to by the speaker. While in the literature, *hora* generally falls into a group of interjections used to attract the hearer's attention, the present findings suggest that the use of this interjection not only serves to direct the hearer's attention to what the speaker will say next but is also sensitive to an epistemic or information imbalance between the speaker and the hearer regarding what the speaker previously said. In this particular usage at least, *hora* can be best understood as a convertible device between the speaker's territory of information and the shared information.

In his seminal paper, Heritage (2012: 32) insisted as follows:

(W)hen a speaker indicates that there is an imbalance of information between speaker and hearer, this indication is sufficient to motivate and warrant a sequence of interaction that will be closed when the imbalance is acknowledged as equalized for all practical purposes.

Similarly, this study argues that the use of the *X-hora-Y* format is motivated by the need to produce more talk or action in the face of an epistemic or information imbalance between the speaker and the hearer, and it is one way of redressing such an imbalance.

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Appendix 1: Abbreviations

CONJ	conjunctive
COP	copula
FP	final particle
GEN	genitive
ITJ	interjection
MIM	mimetic expression
OBJ	object particle
QT	quotative particle
SUB	subject particle
TAG	tag question

Appendix 2: Transcription Conventions for Conversation

[the point where overlapping talk starts
]	the point where overlapping talk ends

- = latching
- (0.5) silence in tenths of a second
- (.) micro-pause
- . falling intonation
- ? rising intonation
- , continuing intonation
- : prolongation
- cut-off
- word produced in an emphatic manner (not in terms of loudness but in terms of a notable voice quality quite different from the surrounding talk)
- WORD louder than the surrounding talk
- h exhalation
- (h) laughter within a word
- (()) transcriber's descriptions of events

Appendix 3: Transcription Conventions for Body Movement

- * * Body movements and descriptions of embodied actions are delimited between two identical symbols (one symbol per participant).
- *---> Actions described continue across subsequent lines.
- *--->> Actions described continue after the excerpt's end.
- >* Actions described continue until the same symbol is reached.