

NOT SAYING EXACTLY WHAT IT IS IS SOMETIMES GOOD ENOUGH: THE  
UNSPECIFIED USE OF DEMONSTRATIVE *ARE* IN JAPANESE EVERYDAY TALK

日常会話における指示対象が特定されない指示詞「あれ」の用法

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Japanese distal demonstrative *are* ‘that’ has long been discussed with regard to its anaphoric use both in linguistics and language teaching (Kuno 1973; Martin 1975; Iwasaki 2013; Jordan & Noda 1987; Fujii & Sugawara 2007; Miura & McGloin 2007; Hatasa et al. 2011b, etc.) along with its spatial use (Banno et al. 2011; Hatasa et al. 2011a; Tohsaku 2006, etc.). When considering its spatial use, the demonstrative refers to an object far in space from both the speaker and the addressee. For example, in an introductory Japanese language textbook by Banno et al. (2011), where the demonstrative is introduced, there is a picture of a woman talking to a man. She points to a pen, which is held by another person far from both her (the speaker) and the addressee, and says:

- (1) **あれ**は私のペンです  
‘That is my pen.’

(Banno et al. 2011: 62)

This type of *are* is used when the referent is physically available and possibly visible to both the speaker and the addressee.

In terms of anaphoric use, a referent is introduced first in the discourse and demonstrative *are* refers back to it. In the following example constructed by Kuno (1973), A is talking about a fire which s/he saw the other day:

- (2)  
1 A: 私もちょうどハーバードスクウェアのそばにいて  
‘I also happened to be in the Harvard Square area and’  
2 **その火事**を見ました.  
‘saw **that fire**.’  
3 **あれ**はひどい火事でしたね.  
‘**That** was a terrible fire, wasn’t it?’

Kuno (1973: 286)

A says to the addressee 私もちょうどハーバードスクウェアのそばにいてその火事を見ました ‘I also happened to be in the Harvard Square area and saw that fire’ in lines 1-2. Then s/he comments on it in line 3, saying **あれ**はひどい火事でしたね ‘That was a terrible fire, wasn’t it?’ This *are* ‘that’ refers to **その火事** ‘that fire’ in line 2.

Recently, its cataphoric use has been highlighted by Hayashi (2004), who suggests that *are* can serve as a ‘dummy’ to project a subsequent specification. In the example below, the speaker A is talking about gas pipes:

- (3)
- 1 A: その= 最近 **あれ** なんですよ.  
 ‘Uh, recently (it)’s been **that**.’
- 2 あの=, ガス管あるじゃないですか=  
 ‘Uhm, you know there are gas pipes, right?’
- 3 **あれ全部今プラスチックになりつつある** んですよ=  
 ‘They’ve all been changing to plastic pipes now.’

(Hayashi 2004)

In line 1, A begins by saying その= 最近 **あれ** なんですよ ‘uh, recently (it)’s been **that**’. Then A introduces gas pipes in line 2 by saying あの=, ガス管あるじゃないですか= ‘uhm, you know there are gas pipes, right?’ Then in line 3, he continues **あれ全部今プラスチックになりつつある** んですよ= ‘they’ve all been changing to plastic now’. According to Hayashi (2004), the phrase in line 1 **あれ** なんですよ ‘(it)’s been **that**’ projects the subsequent specification of *are*. That is, the addressee is “instructed” that its specification is coming. In line 3, the speaker says **あれ全部今プラスチックになりつつある** ‘they’ve all been changing to plastic pipes now’ to specify the *are* from line 1. Please note that *are* in line 3 is anaphoric; it refers back to ガス管 ‘gas pipes’ in line 2.

In examining my conversational data, I have found another use of *are*; *are* is sometimes used even when it does not have a specific referent in the discourse. In excerpt (4), H gives advice to his colleague T:

- (4)
- 1 H: 要は= ... どんだけ ... そ=の= システムティックにやってその  
 ‘The thing is, no matter how systematically (you) do and uh’
- 2 情報化社会にやっぱ **あれ** してもやるのは人間だから=  
 ‘even if (you) do **that** to an information-oriented society after all, it’s humans who do (the job), so...’
- 3 T: うん.  
 ‘Yeah.’

As far as I can tell, there is no expression in the conversation which specifies the referent for the *are* in line 2. In spite of that, the participants do not have trouble continuing the conversation. This type of *are* (hereafter, unspecified *are*) appears to occur when the speaker does not have an exact referent but still recognizes its presence.

Although there are a large number of studies on the distal demonstrative *are* mainly focusing on situations in which it can be used appropriately, its unspecified use has not been discussed widely (for an exception see Kenchu 1996). In addition, many of the studies on the demonstratives, as well as language textbooks, have been based mainly on constructed sentences (e.g., Kuno 1973; Martin 1975; articles in Kinsui & Takubo

1992; Iwasaki 2013; Banno et al. 2011; Hatasa et al. 2011a, 2011b). As I will show in the next section, unspecified *are* is in fact quite frequent in my data, which suggests the need to examine how it might be used in actual context.

The purpose of this study is to describe how unspecified *are* is used in Japanese everyday talk. In the following sections, first, we will see that unspecified *are* is used quite frequently. Second, I will examine how unspecified *are* functions based on the examination of two representative examples. Interestingly, coming up with what the speaker means by using unspecified *are* is not difficult even for those who are not in the conversation such as the present author. I will suggest that when unspecified *are* is used, a) the speaker more or less has a referent in mind, and b) the context of the conversation, along with some grammatical cues, provides the addressee with enough information which allow for general understanding of the referent of unspecified *are*. Third, I will show that there are three frequently used grammatical configurations in which unspecified *are* is found; that is, these configurations appear to have been grammaticized as formulas/prefabs (e.g., Bybee 2010) which allow participants to continue the conversation without having the referent fully specified. In the last section, I will summarize the results, and suggest the importance of analyzing conversational data to fully capture how demonstrative *are* is used in actual context and finally seek pedagogical implications.

## 2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study examines 51 conversations (audio- or video-recorded) totaling 8.5 hours of talk. They contain everyday talk such as dinner talk, telephone talk, and arguments. The conversations are between participants engaged in a variety of social relationships; between friends, family members and teachers and their students. The age of the speakers ranges from mid-teens to 80s. The total number of the speakers is approximately 140 (male: 55, female: 83).

This study focuses on unspecified use of *are*. I first excluded some other uses of *are* including the spatial use from my data analysis. Excluding these uses of *are* resulted in 223 cases of *are* which are anaphoric, cataphoric, or unspecified. In 223 cases of *are*, 135 are categorized into anaphoric (60%), 44 cataphoric (20%), and 44 unspecified (20%) respectively, which suggests that unspecified *are* is fairly common in everyday talk. In this study, I have made a close analysis of these 44 cases of unspecified *are*.

## 3. ANALYSIS

This section examines two representative examples of unspecified *are*. We will see how *are* is used in conversations without having a specific referent. We will also see that unspecified *are* is used in certain grammatical configurations. In example (5), which is the extended version of (4), H and his colleague T are talking about their work. Just before this excerpt, T tells H how hard his new job is going to be. Then H starts advising T:

(5)

1 H: 要は= ... どんだけ ... そ=の= システムティックにやってその<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Please note that *その* in line 1 is not a demonstrative ‘that’ but a filler ‘uh’.

- ‘The thing is, no matter how systematically (you) do and uh’  
 2 情報化社会にやっぱ**あれ**してもやるのは人間だから=  
 ‘even if (you) do **that** to an information-oriented society after all, it’s humans who do (the job), so...’  
 3 T: うん.  
 ‘Yeah.’  
 4 H: 人と人と- との関係って[いう]のはね  
 ‘The relationship between people,’  
 5 T: [ね].  
 ‘Right’  
 6 H: .. もうこれ絶対断ち切れないから やるのは人間なんだから  
 ‘(we) can’t break off this (relationship), so, it’s humans, so...’

In lines 1-2, H starts talking about the importance of man power, saying 要は= ... どんだけ ... そ=の= システムティックにやってその情報化社会にやっぱ**あれ**してもやるのは人間だから= ‘the thing is, no matter how systematically (you) do and uh even if (you) do **that** to an information-oriented society, it’s humans who do (the job), so...’. The unspecified *are* in line 2 is followed by the light verb *suru* ‘do’. The referent for the demonstrative is not specified in the entire conversation. In spite of that, T seems to have no trouble understanding H’s utterance as he immediately responds to it, saying うん ‘yeah’ in line 3. H continues giving advice focusing on the importance of human relationships, saying 人と人と- との関係っていうのはね .. もうこれ絶対断ち切れないから やるのは人間なんだから ‘The relationship between people, (we) can’t break off this (relationship), so, it’s human, so...’ in line 4. Again T shows his understanding, saying ね ‘right’ in line 5 even before H is done with his utterance.

The reason why T can respond to H appears to be that the unspecified referent is more or less clear from the context. Intriguingly, even those who are not in the conversation like the present author can easily come up with specific candidate interpretations such as the following for the utterance involving unspecified *are*:

- (6) 適応しても      ‘even if (you) adjust (to an information-oriented society)’  
 順応しても      ‘even if (you) adapt (to an information-oriented society)’  
 合わせても      ‘even if (you) assimilate (to an information-oriented society)’  
 etc.

One of the factors which enables us to understand the utterance **あれ**しても ‘even if (you) do **that**’ seems to be H’s utterance itself. In line 2, the contrast between 情報化社会 ‘information-oriented society’ and human involvement to the society (as in やるのは人間だ ‘it’s humans who do (the job)’) is highlighted. It is interesting that there are in fact some fixed expressions involving 情報化社会 ‘information-oriented society’ such as 情報化社会に適応する ‘to adjust to an information-oriented society’. Such expressions nicely fit with the contrast the utterance is making. As a result line 2 can be understood to mean ‘even if you adjust to an information-oriented society, it’s humans who do the job’. Thus the presence of such fixed expressions might also help the addressee interpret the

speaker's use of *are*. In terms of grammatical configuration, unspecified *are* in this example is followed by the light verb *suru* 'do' in the predicate position.

Example (5) has illustrated that general understanding of the referent of unspecified *are* can be relatively easily reached by participants, and even those who are not in the conversation, based on the speaker's particular utterance along with the context. This is most likely because some information provided in the speaker's utterances, including fixed expressions, makes it possible to suggest specific interpretations such as those given above.

The following example will also show how unspecified *are* functions, but with a different grammatical configuration from the last example. A and B are talking about *hanami* 'flower viewing' event. In spring, people in Japan customarily assemble to watch cherry blossom trees bloom and drink with their friends and colleagues, which is called *hanami* 'flower viewing'. As this event is very popular, people compete to get the best viewing spot by arriving earlier. Here, A is talking about his experience of the event:

(7)

1 A: 俺= は .. その日バイトがあったから **あれ** なんだ[けど=],

'Because I had a part-time job that day, (I) am (in) **that** (situation), but'

2 B: [んん].

3 A: 俺の友だちとかが <@ さ= @> 前の日から行ってさ=,

'my friends, among others, went (to the place) the day before (to get a good spot for *hanami* the next day),'

4 B: <@ ん @> @.

In line 1, A explains that he was in 'that' situation, which is expressed by the unspecified *are* in **あれ** なんだ, saying 俺= は .. その日バイトがあったから **あれ** なんだけど= 'because I had a part-time job that day, (I) am (in) **that** (situation), but'. The demonstrative *are* in line 1 is used with the copula *da* 'be' in the predicate position, and its referent is not found in the conversation. B, however, seems to have no trouble understanding A's utterance as can be seen in B's response んん 'uh-huh' produced even before A's utterance is completed in line 1. Right after B's response, in line 3 A continues describing what had happened, saying 俺の友だちとかが <@ さ= @> 前の日から行ってさ= 'my friends, among others, went (to the place) the day before (to get a good spot for *hanami* the next day)'. B, again, responds to A with a backchannel ん 'yeah' with laughter right after A's utterance, which also shows that B understands what A has said.

The reason why B has no trouble understanding A's utterance even though the referent of *are* is unspecified is likely because the context gives enough information that the addressee ends up having a general understanding of the referent. This allows you to come up with these candidate referents for the unspecified *are* in **あれ** なんだけど:

- (8) 行けなかったんだけど            '(I) couldn't go, but'  
 行かなかったんだけど            '(I) didn't go, but'  
 いなかったんだけど                '(I) wasn't (there), but'  
 etc.

It seems that the structure of A's utterances helps us analysts, and perhaps also B, understand what A is saying. The particle *wa* is known for its contrastive function (Kuno 1973; Maruyama 2003), and *wa* on 俺 'I' in 俺=は .. その日バイトがあったからあれなんだけど= 'because I had a part-time job that day, (I) am (in) **that** (situation), but' in line 1 contrasts its referent (i.e., A himself) with his friends introduced in line 3. In addition, the contrastive connective *kedo* contrasts what A did (expressed with the unspecified *are*) with what his friends did (they went to the *hanami* 'flower viewing' place the day before the event to get a good spot). These contrasts help us grasp a general idea that A did/could not go to the place or he was not there the day before the event.

This section has examined two cases of unspecified *are*, and shown that the addressees have no trouble understanding an utterance which includes the unspecified *are*. I have also shown that information given in the discourse including specific utterances that the speaker produces allows the addressee to come up with a general understanding of the referent of the unspecified *are*.

#### 4. STRUCTURAL ASPECT

This section focuses on the structural aspect of unspecified *are*. Interestingly, I have found that unspecified *are* appears in three configurations: a) *are* occurs with the light verb *suru* 'do', b) *are* as a predicate followed by the copula *da* 'be', and c) *are* as the head of a NP where it is preceded by a modifier (see Table 1).

Table 1: Three specific grammatical configurations for unspecified *are*

Configurations	Number	Percentage	Examples
a) あれ + light verb する 'do'	18	41%	あれしても 'even if (you) do <b>that</b> ' (example (5)) あれしてるけど '(I) am doing <b>that</b> but'
b) あれ + copula だ 'be'	17	39%	あれなんだけど '(I) am <b>that</b> but' (example (7)) あれだから 'because (it) was <b>that</b> ' (example (9) below)
c) Modifier + あれ	8	18%	
d) Other	1	2%	
Total	44	100%	

Out of 44 cases of unspecified *are*, 18 cases are used in the configuration [*are* + verb *suru* 'do'] (41%): e.g., *are shitemo* 'even if (you) do **that**' as in (5), and *are shiteru kedo* '(I) am doing that but'; 17 cases are used in the configuration [*are* + copula *da* 'be'] (39%) including *are nan da kedo* '(I) am that but' as in (7), and *are da kara* 'because (it) was that'. In addition, 8 cases are used in [modifier + *are*] configuration (18%) though it is not as frequent as the first two configurations. Here, let us look at one example of unspecified *are* of this type. In the following example, R and her friend T, who is working for a Cancer Center, are talking about T's work environment. Right before this excerpt, T has said that his workplace has a good environment for medical staff:

(9) c) *Modifier + are*

1 R: ...やっばりがんセンターがトップレベルの...**あれ**を保ってる

... 秘密がそこにあったりしてね。

‘After all, the Cancer Center’s secret of keeping the highest level of **that** might be there.’

[@@@]

2 T: [いや=] ほんと僕もそう思いますよ。

‘Yeah, I really think so, too.’

After R has listened to T describe her good work environment, she concludes that that might be the secret for the Cancer Center’s keeping the highest level of **あれ** ‘that’ (i.e., something). Interestingly, T responds to R by strongly agreeing with her, saying いや=, ほんと僕もそう思いますよ ‘yeah, I really think so, too’ immediately after her utterance even though the referent of *are* is not specified. Similar to the other two structural types discussed in Section 3, the modifier トップレベルの ‘the highest level of’ appears to give enough information for the addressee to gather a general understanding of the referent for unspecified *are*; there are a number of candidate referents one can relatively easily suggest such as 質 ‘quality’, ランキング ‘ranking’, 水準 ‘standard’.

Intriguingly, most examples of unspecified *are* (43 out of 44) in my data are found in one of these three grammatical configurations. Therefore, it can be suggested that these three configurations may have been grammaticized as formulas/prefabs (e.g., Bybee 2010) which allow the speaker to continue talking without making the referent fully specified.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined unspecified *are* in everyday talk. In general, it has traditionally been assumed that the distal demonstrative *are* refers to a specific referent in the speech or discourse context. In anaphoric use, first the referent is introduced, and then followed by *are* which refers back to the referent mentioned previously. In the cataphoric use, *are* projects the referent which is introduced in the upcoming talk. However, my conversational data revealed a third type, unspecified *are*, for which no specific mention of the referent is found in the surrounding discourse. By examining examples of this type of *are* from various conversational data, I have found that for this type 1) in using *are* the speaker more or less has its referent in mind, 2) the addressee has no trouble continuing the talk because s/he has a general understanding of the referent based on what is given in the context and some grammatical structures used in the speaker’s utterances, and 3) there are three formulas/prefabs which have been grammaticized for this function.

A close examination of conversational data has allowed us to identify the unspecified *are*, which escaped the attention of research and teaching previously. In addition, it has highlighted the fixed nature of human language by allowing us to observe unspecified *are* appearing in specific grammatical configurations. This study has demonstrated that the analysis of conversational data helps us reach a better understanding of how the demonstrative *are* can be used in real life. My finding that unspecified *are* is fairly common in conversation is particularly interesting in the context

of language teaching. I have found that none of the Japanese language textbooks I examined introduce unspecified *are*, and this highlights the importance of actual language use informing language teaching.

#### TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

[ ]	overlap
@	laughter
<@ @>	laugh quality
..	short pause
...	pause
-	truncated
=	lengthening

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