

**Abstract.** The Japanese expression *hodo-ga aru* literally means ‘there is a limit’. However, when it co-occurs with a gradable predicate, it conveys an extreme degree accompanied by negative emotion. In this paper, I show that the intensifier use of *hodo-ga aru* has been conventionalized based on corpus data and a questionnaire survey. I then argue, based on the analysis of Sawada (To appear), that *hodo-ga aru* constitutes a special type of mixed content (McCready 2010; Gutzmann 2011) in that (i) it semantically denotes that the target  $x$  exceeds the maximum permissible limit, under the presupposition that  $x$  already meets a contextual standard, and (ii) it conventionally implies that the speaker holds a negative evaluation of  $x$ . In the second half of the paper, I compare the intensifier *hodo-ga aru* with the excessive marker *sugiru* ‘too’ and wh-exclamatives, and clarify their similarities and differences. This paper proposes a new type of excessive expression in natural language: an emotive excessive expression.

**Keywords.** limit; intensification; expressivity; presupposition; conventional implicature; excessives; wh-exclamatives

**1. Introduction.** The Japanese expression *hodo-ga aru* literally means ‘there is a limit’:

- (1) Nani goto-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
what thing-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
‘There is a limit to everything.’

However, when it co-occurs with a gradable predicate, it conveys an extreme/excessive degree:

- (2) Taro-no furumai-wa futekisetu-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
Taro-GEN behavior-TOP inappropriate-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
‘lit. There is a limit to how inappropriate Taro’s behavior can be.’  
(= Taro’s behavior is extremely inappropriate.)

Where does this emphatic meaning come from? Is the emphasis conveyed by *hodo-ga aru* different from that expressed by excessive expressions such as *-sugiru* ‘too’ and from wh-exclamatives?

- (3) Taro-no furumai-wa futekisetu-sugi-ru.  
Taro-GEN behavior-TOP inappropriate-too-NON.PST  
‘Taro’s behavior is too inappropriate.’

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- (4) Taro-no furumai-wa nante futekisetsu-nan-daroo.  
 Taro-GEN behavior-TOP how inappropriate-EXPL-EXCL  
 ‘How inappropriate Taro’s behavior is.’

In this paper, I will investigate the meaning and use of the intensified use of *hodo-ga aru* and argue that it has been conventionalized as a special degree expression. After clarifying the phonetic difference between the intensifier and non-intensifier uses of *hodo-ga aru* in Section 2, in Section 3, we look at some descriptive properties of the intensifier *hodo-ga aru*, concerning its evaluativity, embedding context, and presupposition, based on corpus data and the results of a questionnaire.

I then argue in Section 4 that *hodo-ga aru* constitutes a special type of mixed content (McCready 2010; Gutzmann 2011) in that it semantically denotes that the target  $x$  exceeds the maximum permissible limit, under the presupposition that  $x$  has already met a contextual standard, and it conventionally implies that the speaker holds a negative evaluation of  $x$  given the speaker’s experience in the utterance situation. In analyzing the meaning of *hodo-ga aru*, I will use multidimensional semantics and suggest a new compositional rule, i.e., mismatch mixed application.

In Section 5, I will compare the intensifier use of *hodo-ga aru* to the excessives and the wh-exclamatives in English and Japanese, respectively and clarify the similarities and differences. I demonstrate that *hodo-ga aru* belongs to a new type of intensification construction, distinct from standard excessives, and wh-exclamatives. Section 6 concludes.

**2. Difference between the literal type and the non-literal type in terms of intonation.** Before investigating the meaning and use of the intensifier *hodo-ga aru*, this section clarifies the difference between the literal and non-literal types of *hodo-ga aru*. One might assume that the two are essentially the same and differ only in use; however, they actually differ in their intonation patterns. As the following examples show, in the literal type, accents fall on both *hodo* and *aru*, whereas in the intensifier *hodo-ga aru*, the entire phrase forms a single intonation unit, and only *aru* receives an accent.<sup>1</sup>

- (5) a. (Literal type)  
 Nani goto-ni-mo [hodó]-ga [á-ru].  
 what thing-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
 ‘There is a limit to everything.’
- b. (Intensifier type)  
 Taro-no furumai-wa futekisetsu-ni-mo [hodo-ga á-ru].  
 Taro-GEN behavior-TOP inappropriate-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
 ‘lit. There is a limit to how inappropriate Taro’s behavior can be.’  
 (= Taro’s behavior is extremely inappropriate.)

The observation that *hodo-ga aru* forms a single intonation unit in the literal type strongly suggests that it functions as a single scalar expression. I assume that the intensified meaning originally arose pragmatically from the interaction between its literal meaning, ‘there is a limit’, and contexts in which the relevant degree was extremely high. Over time, however, through repeated use, this pattern of intensification became conventionalized and was incorporated into

<sup>1</sup> I thank Shin’ichi Tanaka for the valuable comment regarding the intonation patterns.

the meaning of *hodo-ga aru*.

**3. Basic properties of the intensifier *hodo-ga aru*.** Let us now consider the meaning and use of the intensifier *hodo-ga aru*. In this section, we will particularly investigate its meaning and use in terms of its evaluativity, embeddability, and presuppositional nature.

3.1. EVALUATIVE PROPERTY OF *hodo-ga aru*. The first important property of the intensifier *hodo-ga aru* is that it is used when the speaker conveys annoyance toward the relevant individual. Accordingly, it typically co-occurs with negative evaluative expressions. When it appears with positive gradable expressions, such as *tekisetsu* ‘appropriate’ and *seijitsu* ‘sincere’, the resulting sentences are generally judged to be unnatural:

- (6) a. Taro-no furumai-wa futekisetsu-ni-mo [hodo-ga a-ru].  
Taro-GEN behavior-TOP inappropriate-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
‘lit. There is a limit to how inappropriate Taro’s behavior can be.’  
(= Taro’s behavior is extremely inappropriate.)  
b. ?? Taro-no furumai-wa tekisetsu-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
Taro-GEN behavior-TOP appropriate-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
‘Taro’s behavior is extremely appropriate.’ (lit. There is a limit to how appropriate Taro’s behavior can be.)
- (7) a. Ano sensei-no okonai-wa fuseijitsu-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
that teacher-GEN behavior-TOP insincere-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
‘There is a limit to how insincere that teacher’s behavior can be.’  
b. ?? Ano sensei-no okonai-wa seijitsu-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
that teacher-GEN behavior-TOP sincere-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
‘There is a limit to how insincere that teacher’s behavior can be.’

This kind of asymmetry is not observed with the regular intensifier *totemo* (Sawada To appear).

To assess how clearly this asymmetry is manifested in actual usage, I conducted a corpus-based investigation using the Balanced Corpus of Contemporary Written Japanese (BCCWJ), examining which predicates co-occur with *hodo-ga aru*. For this purpose, I conducted string searches for *ni-mo hodo-ga aru*, examining two patterns: cases in which *hodo* was written in kanji and cases in which it was written in hiragana. The results showed that 24 instances were found when *hodo* in *hodo-ga aru* was written in kanji, whereas 33 instances were found when it was written in hiragana (a total of 57 instances, as of October 18, 2025). Of these, one instance was interpreted literally:

- (8) Gaman-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru. Wareware zenin-ga shin-de-shimau.  
patience-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST we all-NOM die-PRED-PRT  
‘Patience has its limits. We will all die.’ (BCCWJ, PB19\_00028)

In this example, *gaman* is not a gradable predicate. It also does not express a negative evaluation toward a specific target. Furthermore, the intonation pattern follows the literal pattern of *hodo*.

Among the remaining 56 examples, I examined what type of expression immediately preceded *ni-mo hodo-ga aru* and categorized the preceding expression into three groups—positive, negative, and neutral—based on the lexical meaning itself, independent of context. The results

are as follows (When an expression appears in multiple examples, the number of occurrences is displayed in parentheses.) Several examples are provided under each group:

(9) Negative evaluative predicates (50 examples)

zuuzuushii ‘nerve’ (4)	burei ‘rude’ (2)	monozuki ‘having unusual tastes’ (2)
bakabakashii ‘ridiculous’ (3)	baka-ni suru ‘make fun of’ (2)	baka ‘stupid’ (2)
hijoushiki ‘senseless’ (2)	ingou ‘obstinate’	mubou ‘inconsiderate’
futodoki ‘uncaring’	musekinin ‘irresponsible’	iikagen ‘irresponsible’
mushi-ga ii ‘selfish’	fuzake-teiru	fushizen ‘unnatural’
anbaransu ‘unbalance’	osoi ‘slow’	bonkura-tte koto ‘slow-witted’
kahogo ‘overprotection’	bujoku ‘insult’	bujoku suru ‘to insult’
akumu ‘nightmare’	manuke ‘stupidity’	hikikomori ‘social withdrawal’
hikyou ‘sneaky’	ukareru ‘carry away’	akuyou suru ‘abuse’
hajishirazu ‘shameless’	kotoba tarazu ‘inadequate expression’	wakazukuri ‘youthfully dressed’
bachigai ‘mistime’	jiyuu sugiru ‘too free’	itazura ‘mischief’
kyokutan ‘extreme’	hansupootsu kouji ‘anti-sport conduct’	tanin makase ‘rely on others’
tonchiki ‘idiot’	fuzakeru ‘play a prank’	nonki ‘easygoing’
tennen ‘pure, spacey’		

(10) Jibun-ga mudan-de gaihaku shi-ta koto-o tana-ni age-te kotira-dake-o  
 self-NOM unauthorized-with overnighting do-PST fact-ACC shelve-to put-*te* me-only-ACC  
 seme-ru-to-wa zuuzuushii-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
 blame-NON.PST-THAT-TOP shameless-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
 ‘To blame me alone while ignoring your own unauthorized overnight stay is beyond  
 shameless.’ (BCCWJ, OB3X\_00022)

(11) Lee, anna daijina mono-o nakus-u nante, musekinin-ni-mo hodo-ga  
 Lee that important thing-ACC lose-NON.PST CONJ.MIR irresponsible-to-*mo* limit-NOM  
 a-ru-zo.  
 exist-NON.PST-PRT  
 ‘Lee, losing something that important is beyond irresponsible.’ (BCCWJ, OB5X\_00019)

(12) Positive evaluative predicates (3 examples)

shimekiri-o mamoru ‘meet deadlines’	mujaki ‘innocence’	hayaoki ‘early rising’
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(13) (Context: The speaker is talking about a maiko (an apprentice geisha).)

Mujaki-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru-no-desu.  
 innocent-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST-EXPL-PERF.HON  
 ‘There is a limit to how innocent she can be.’ (BCCWJ, OB6X\_00024)

(14) Mada yoi-o sugi-ta bakari-da. Hayane-ni-mo hodo-ga aru.  
 still dusk-ACC pass-PST barely-PRED go.to.bed.early-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
 ‘It’s barely past dusk. Going to bed this early is going too far.’ (BCCWJ, LBe9\_00005)

(15) Neutral predicates (3 examples)

joudan 'joke'	tanin-o tayora-nai 'do not depend on others'	daburi 'overlapping'
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- (16) Dekiru koto-nara kantoku Nakashima-ni-mo ano pasokon-no  
possible thing-COND Manager Nagashima-to-*mo* that personal.computer-GEN  
shiiemu-dake-wa yame-te morai-tai. Joodan-ni-mo hodo-ga  
commercial-only-TOP stop-*te* BEN-want joke-to-*mo* limit-NOM  
a-ru-kara-da.  
exist-NON.PST-because-PRED  
‘If possible, I wish Manager Nagashima would at least stop appearing in that commercial for the PC. It’s taking the joke too far.’ (BCCWJ, LBI7\_00071)
- (17) Tanin-o tayora-nai-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru-zo kono honya.  
others-ACC rely-NEG-TO-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST-PRT this book.store  
‘This bookstore takes not relying on others way too far.’ (BCCWJ, OB5X\_00149)

The crucial point here is that even when co-occurring with a positive or neutral predicate, the phrase *hodo-ga aru* introduces a negative connotation. For example, in (13), being innocent is (usually) considered a positive attribute, but when co-occurring with *hodo-ga aru*, the speaker is interpreted as holding a negative attitude. Furthermore, the predicate *tanin-o tayora-nai* ‘not relying on others’ in (17) is lexically neutral in terms of evaluation, but when used with *hodo-ga aru*, it takes on a negative meaning. In this case, the speaker is not purely praising the book store; rather, the utterance conveys a negative meaning of mockery.

Note that some speakers deliberately use *hodo-ga aru* to convey an opposite evaluative meaning, such as intimacy, as shown in (18). I assume that this is a derived or marked use of *hodo-ga aru*, and that its primary function is to convey a speaker’s negative evaluation.

- (18) Kawaii-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
cute-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
‘There is a limit to how cute it can be.’ (Example from the Internet)

3.2. *Hodo-ga aru* IN THE EMBEDDED ENVIRONMENT. The second notable characteristic of *hodo-ga aru* is its restricted environment of occurrence. As seen in (19), *hodo-ga aru* cannot occur in interrogative sentences, conditional clauses, or modal environments:

- (19) a. Taro-no furumai-wa burei-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
Taro-GEN behavior-TOP rude-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
‘There is a limit to how rude Taro’s behavior can be.’
- b. ?? Taro-no furumai-wa burei-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru-no?  
Taro-GEN behavior-TOP rude-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST-Q  
‘Is there a limit to how rude Taro’s behavior can be?’
- c. ?? Moshi Taro-no furumai-ga burei-ni-mo hodo-ga a-reba,  
by.any.chance Taro-GEN behavior-NOM rude-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-COND  
jooshi-ni uttae-masu.  
supervisor-to report-PERF.HON  
‘If there is a limit to how rude Taro’s behavior can be, I will report this to my supervisor.’

- d. ?? Taro-no furumai-wa burei-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru-nichigainai.  
 Taro-GEN behavior-TOP rude-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST-MUST  
 ‘There must be a limit to how rude Taro’s behavior can be.’

This kind of restriction is not observed with the regular intensifier *totemo* (Sawada To appear).

To examine the naturalness of the above sentences, I conducted a questionnaire survey with 32 undergraduate and graduate students at Kobe University on December 18-19, 2025, using Google Forms. All participants were native speakers of Japanese. Participants were asked to rate the naturalness of the sentences under two intended readings on a 7-point scale (1 = completely odd, 7 = completely natural). The results are shown below.

(20) Native speakers’ judgments of (19)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	average
a. simple sentence	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.1%)	2 (6.3%)	4 (12.5%)	25 (78.1%)	6.66
b. question	12 (37.5%)	12 (37.5%)	5 (15.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.1%)	2 (6.3%)	2.22
c. conditional	13 (40.6%)	11 (34.4%)	2 (6.3%)	3 (9.4%)	1 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	2 (6.3%)	2.25
d. modal	15 (46.9%)	9 (28.1%)	3 (9.4%)	2 (6.3%)	2 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.1%)	2.09

In the survey, I also used *futekisetu* ‘inappropriate’ to test the naturalness of the pattern discussed above. The results were nearly identical, showing that it is highly unnatural in interrogative, conditional, and modal sentences. The question, then, is where this phenomenon originates. Below, I explain this phenomenon based on the fact that *hodo-ga aru* expresses a negative evaluation of the target based on the speaker’s experience in the utterance situation.

3.3. PRESUPPOSITION-HOOD OF *hodo-ga aru*. The third characteristic of *hodo-ga aru* concerns presupposition: namely, when using *hodo-ga aru* sentences, the speaker typically needs to acknowledge that “*x* is *A*” prior to the utterance. For example, the examples in (21a - c) differ only in their contexts, and only (21a) and (21b) sound perfectly natural, as they presuppose that President Yamada’s attitude is/has been inappropriate:

- (21) a. (Context 1: The speaker had long felt President Yamada’s attitude was inappropriate, but today it felt extremely inappropriate.)  
 Yamada-shachoo-no taido-wa futekisetu-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
 Yamada-president-GEN behavior-TOP inappropriate-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
 ‘There is a limit to how inappropriate President Yamada’s attitude can be.’
- b. (Context 2: The speaker has felt President Yamada’s attitude has been inappropriate since the start of the meeting, but now feels it has become so inappropriate that it has crossed the line.)  
 Yamada-shachoo-no taido-wa futekisetu-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
 Yamada-president-GEN behavior-TOP inappropriate-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
 ‘There is a limit to how inappropriate President Yamada’s attitude can be.’
- c. (Context 3: The speaker felt that President Yamada’s attitude was extremely inappropriate the moment they first met him.)  
 ?? Uwa, Yamada-shachoo-no taido-wa futekisetu-ni-mo hodo-ga  
 wow Yamada-president-GEN behavior-TOP inappropriate-to-*mo* limit-NOM  
 a-ru.  
 exist-NON.PST

‘Wow, there is a limit to how inappropriate President Yamada’s attitude can be.’

This kind of asymmetry is not observed with the regular intensifier *totemo* (See Sawada To appear).<sup>2</sup> Due to space constraints, I cannot provide additional data, but this tendency was also observed in similar patterns involving *Taro-wa hijoushiki-ni-mo hodo-ga aru* ‘there is a limit to how unreasonable Taro can be’. This paper explains such presuppositional (anti-mirative) behavior in terms of the lexical presupposition inherent in *hodo-ga aru*.

**4. Formal analysis.** Based on the above empirical facts, let us consider the meaning of *hodo-ga aru* in a formal way.

4.1. *Hodo-ga aru* IS A SPECIAL KIND OF MIXED CONTENT. I assume that *X-ni-mo hodo-ga aru* functions as a fixed expression and claim that it exemplifies a special kind of mixed content (e.g., McCready 2010; Gutzmann 2011), in that it simultaneously involves presupposition, at-issue meaning, and conventional implicature (CI) as in (23) (The left side of  $\blacklozenge$  indicates the at-issue component, while the right side represents the CI component. The superscript  $a$  stands for the at-issue type and the superscript  $s$  stands for a shunting type, which is used in the interpretation of CI involving resource-sensitive application (McCready 2010). The underlined part represents the presupposition.)

$$(23) \quad \llbracket \text{ni-mo hodo-ga aru} \rrbracket: \langle G^a, \langle e^a, \langle i^a, t^a \rangle \rangle \rangle \times \langle e^a, t^s \rangle = \\ \lambda G_{\langle d^a, \langle e^a, \langle i^a, t^a \rangle \rangle \rangle} \lambda x \lambda t \exists d' : \exists t' \exists d [t' < t \wedge d > \text{STAND}_G \wedge G(d)(x)(t')] \cdot \\ d' > \text{max}_{\text{permissible-for-}j}(\{d'' \mid G(d'')(x)(t)\}) \wedge G(d')(x)(t) \blacklozenge \lambda x. \text{Neg-attitude}(j, x) \text{ given } \\ j\text{'s experience in the utterance situation } s^*$$

In prose, *ni-mo hodo-ga aru* takes a gradable predicate  $G$ , an individual  $x$ , and a time  $t$  and semantically denotes that there exists a degree  $d'$  such that  $d'$  exceeds the maximum permissible degree for  $j$ , associated with the gradable predicate  $G$  at time  $t$ . In conveying this at-issue meaning, *ni-mo hodo-ga aru* presupposes that  $x$  has already met the contextually determined standard of  $G$  at some point prior to  $t$ , as indicated in the underlined part. (Here, *-ni-mo hodo-ga aru* is treated as a fixed expression, but this presupposition is thought to come from the meaning of *mo*.) In the CI component, *hodo-ga aru* conventionally implies that the judge  $j$  (typically the speaker) expresses a negative attitude toward  $x$ .

Let us check the status of the presuppositional and the expressive components of *hodo-ga aru*. As shown in Section 3.2, *hodo-ga aru* cannot occur in interrogative, conditional, or modal environments, making it difficult to test its presupposition using the so-called ‘family-of-sentences test’. However, *hodo-ga aru* can appear in confirmatory interrogatives accompanied by the sentence-final particle *yone*, where its presupposition projects (survives):<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In order to check this asymmetry, in the same questionnaire as indicated in Section 3.2, I asked the speakers how natural the sentence is in Context 1-3, and the results show that the sentence is degraded in Context 3:

(22) Native speakers’ judgments of (21)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	average
a. Context 1 (=21a)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (6.3%)	0 (0%)	2 (6.3%)	5 (15.6%)	23 (71.9%)	6.47
b. Context 2 (=21b)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.1%)	7 (21.9%)	24 (75%)	6.72
c. Context 3 (=21c)	1 (3.1%)	4 (12.5%)	4 (12.5%)	3 (9.4%)	10 (31.3%)	5 (15.6%)	5 (15.6%)	4.63

<sup>3</sup> The questionnaire survey mentioned in Section 3.2 also examined the naturalness of the confirmation questions (24), which were judged to be quite natural. The results are as follows:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	average
confirmation seeking Q (=24)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)	7 (21.9%)	5 (15.6%)	18 (56.3%)	6.19

- (24) Taro-no furumai-wa burei-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru-yo-ne.  
 Taro-GEN behavior-TOP rude-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST-PRT-CONF.Q  
 ‘There is a limit to how rude Taro’s behavior can be, isn’t it?’ (Presupposition: Taro has been rude.)

From the above sentence, we can infer that Taro is rude (or he has been rude). Furthermore, the discourse conditions discussed in Section 3.2 also support the view that this is a presupposition. If the presupposition is not satisfied, the sentence is perceived as odd.

As for the CI component, it is safe to assume that it is a CI. It is speaker-oriented and independent of “what is said” (e.g., Grice 1975; Potts 2005; McCready 2010; Sawada 2010, 2017; Gutzmann 2011) (unless it is embedded by the attitude predicate such as *omou* ‘think’). The independence of this component is evidenced by the fact that its expressive meaning cannot be directly targeted by denial, as shown in (25). As seen in (25B), it is possible to raise an objection against the at-issue meaning of *hodo-ga aru*, but it is not possible to raise an objection against the expressive component of *hodo-ga aru*, as in (25B’):

- (25) (Context: One employee was late for a meeting again. Conversation between the president and the general manager.)
- A: Mata okure-te ku-ru-nante kare-wa burei-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
 again late-*te* come.NON.PST-COMP he-TOP rude-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
 ‘It is beyond rude of him to be late again.’ (CI: I have a negative attitude toward the employee.)
- B: Iya, sore-wa ii-sugi-desu. Sokomade burei-de-wa nai-desu-yo.  
 No that-TOP say-too-PERF.HON that rude-PRED-TOP NEG-PERF.HON-PRT  
 ‘No, that’s an overstatement. He is not that rude.’
- B’: Iya, watashi-wa soo-wa omwa-nai. # Anata-wa kare-nitaishite kouteitekina  
 No I-TOP so-TOP think-NEG you-TOP he-toward positive  
 taido-o tot-tei-ru.  
 attitude-ACC take-PROG-NON.PST  
 ‘No, I don’t think so. #You have a positive attitude toward him.’

Regarding the analysis of the expressive component, one alternative approach is to assume that *hodo-ga aru* conventionally implies that the speaker has a negative attitude toward the proposition that there exists a degree  $d$  such that  $d$  exceeds the maximum permissible degree of  $G$  and  $G(d)(x)(t)$ . In this approach, (24) would be paraphrased as (26):

- (26) Damn, Taro is above the maximum permissible degree of rudeness.

However, this does not capture the meaning of *hodo-ga aru*. If *hodo-ga aru* conveys a speaker’s negative attitude toward the entire proposition, then it would predict that the following sentence would be natural, but actually it is quite odd:

- (27) ?? Kaze-ga fuku-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
 wind-NOM blow-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
 ‘Intended. The wind is blowing too hard.’

*G-ni-mo hodo-ga aru* describes a property of an individual, and it is used when the speaker conveys a feeling of annoyance toward the individual.

4.2. EXPLAINING THE DISTRIBUTION PATTERNS. I argue that the expressive component plays a crucial role in accounting for the distribution of *hodo-ga aru*. As observed earlier, *hodo-ga aru* cannot appear in modals, interrogatives, or conditionals. In these contexts, the at-issue proposition is non-veridical (i.e., not entailed to be true), making it pragmatically infelicitous to express a negative attitude toward the target individual.

One related point is that *hodo-ga aru* cannot also appear in negative sentence (anti-veridical environment), as well:

- (28) \* Taro-wa burei-ni-mo hodo-ga nai. (Negation)  
 Taro-TOP rude-to-*mo* limit-NOM NEG.exist  
 At-issue: Taro is not beyond rude.  
 CI: The speaker has a negative attitude toward Taro given the speaker's experience in the utterance situation

We can consider that this can be explained in terms of compatibility as well. In the at-issue component, the sentence denotes that it is not the case that Taro is beyond rude. However, in the CI component, the sentence conventionally implies that the speaker has a negative attitude toward Taro given the speaker's experience in the utterance situation. This creates an emotional contradiction.

Note that expressives like *bastard* can naturally appear in interrogatives, conditionals, modals, and negative sentences (Potts 2005, 2007):

- (29) a. Is that bastard Kresge coming here? (Interrogative)  
 b. If that bastard Kresge gets here, let me know. (Conditional)  
 c. That bastard Kresge may have screwed up again. (Modal)  
 d. That bastard Kresge did not greet me. (Negation) (Expressive meaning: Kresge is bad in the speaker's opinion.)

Unlike *bastard*, *hodo-ga aru* evaluates individuals based on the speaker's experience within the context of the utterance.

4.3. COMPOSITIONALITY. Next, let us consider the compositional system/derivation of *hodo-ga aru*, focusing on example (30) in combination with *shitsurei* 'rude':

- (30) Taro-no taido-wa shitsurei-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
 Taro-GEN behavior-TOP rude-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
 'lit. There is a limit to how rude Taro's behavior can be.'  
 (Actual meaning: Taro's behavior is extremely rude.)

The key point is that in *hodo-ga aru*, the input arguments in the at-issue dimension (which includes a presupposition) and those in the CI dimension are not exactly the same. As shown in the denotation in (23), repeated below, *hodo-ga aru* takes the gradable predicate  $G$  only in the left-hand side of  $\blacklozenge$ .

- (31)  $\llbracket \text{ni-mo hodo-ga aru} \rrbracket: \langle G^a, \langle e^a, \langle i^a, t^a \rangle \rangle \rangle \times \langle e^a, t^s \rangle =$   
 $\lambda G_{\langle d^a, \langle e^a, \langle i^a, t^a \rangle \rangle \rangle} \lambda x \lambda t \exists d' : \exists t' \exists d [t' < t \wedge d > \text{STAND}_G \wedge G(d)(x)(t')].$   
 $d' > \max_{\text{permissible-for-}j} (\{d'' | G(d'')(x)(t)\}) \wedge G(d')(x)(t) \blacklozenge \lambda x. \text{Neg-attitude}(j, x)$  given  
 $j$ 's experience in the utterance situation  $s^*$

To account for this, I introduce what I call mismatch mixed application, in addition to mixed

application, which is utilized in the analysis of mixed content (McCready 2010).<sup>4,5</sup>

(32) Mismatch mixed application

$$\alpha(\gamma) \blacklozenge \beta : \langle \sigma^a, \tau^a \rangle \times \langle \sigma^a, v^s \rangle$$

$$\alpha \blacklozenge \beta : \langle \iota^a, \langle \sigma^a, \tau^a \rangle \rangle \times \langle \sigma^a, v^s \rangle \quad \gamma : \iota^a$$

(33) Mixed application

$$\alpha(\gamma) \blacklozenge \beta(\gamma) : \tau^a \times v^s$$

$$\alpha \blacklozenge \beta : \langle \sigma^a, \tau^a \rangle \times \langle \sigma^a, v^s \rangle \quad \gamma : \sigma^a$$

(Based on McCready (2010))

As for the meaning of gradable predicates such as *futekisetsu* ‘inappropriate’, I assume that they represent relations between individuals and degrees (e.g., Cresswell 1977; von Stechow 1984; Klein 1991; Kennedy & McNally 2005):

$$(34) \quad \llbracket \text{shitsurei} \rrbracket : \langle d^a, \langle e^a, \langle i^a, t^a \rangle \rangle \rangle = \lambda d \lambda x \lambda t. \text{rude}(x) = d \text{ at } t$$

In this system, *ni-mo hodo-ga aru* first combines with *shitsurei* ‘rude’ via mismatch mixed application, and then combines with an individual via mixed application. When the derivation of the CI component of the mixed content is complete,  $\blacklozenge$  is replaced with  $\bullet$  (McCready 2010). The following figure illustrates the logical structure of example (30) with *shitsurei* ‘rude’ ( $G^a$  is an abbreviation of  $\langle d^a, \langle e^a, \langle i^a, t^a \rangle \rangle \rangle$ ):

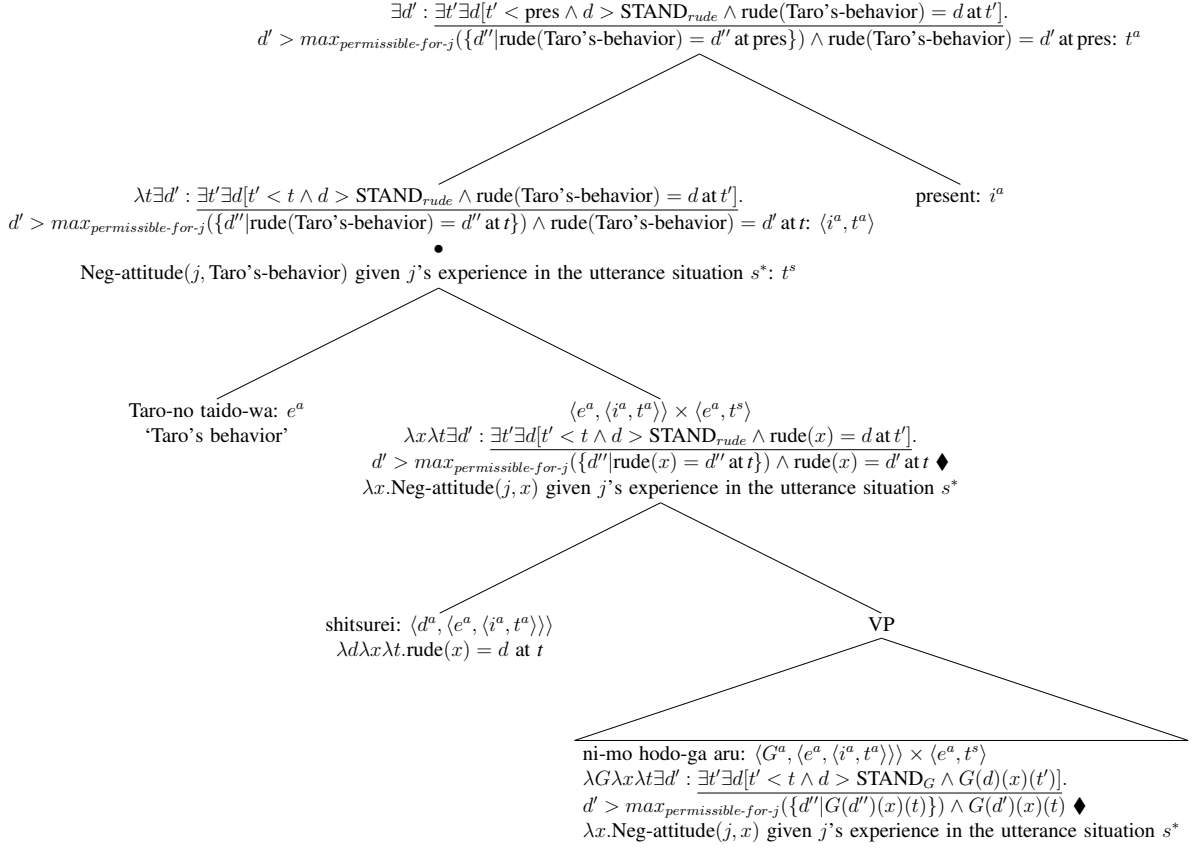
<sup>4</sup> One might think that the usual mixed application would suffice if the type of the CI meaning were adjusted so that *hodo-ga aru* vacuously takes an argument of type  $G^a$  and returns the proposed meaning of type  $\langle e^a, t^s \rangle$  in the CI dimension. However, if we allow this option, the status of mixed content becomes blurred. Mixed application is used for mixed content, but it can in principle also be used for non-mixed content (for example, in a situation where an expression vacuously takes an argument of type  $G^a$  and returns  $t^s$  without interpreting  $G^a$ .) I would like to continue to think about the theoretical implications. I thank the audience of LENLS 21 for their valuable comments.

<sup>5</sup> It may be that Japanese subject honorifics are also relevant to the mismatch mixed application. The subject-honorific expression *-ni naru* morphologically combines with a verb, but V is not necessary to convey a CI meaning that the speaker honors a referent  $x$  in the subject position.

- (i) Yamada-sensei-ga o-warai-ni nat-ta.  
 Yamada-teacher-NOM SUBJ.HON-laugh-DAT become-PST  
 ‘Prof. Yamada laughed.’  
 CI: The speaker honors Prof. Yamada.

In the analysis of subject honorifics by Potts & Kawahara (2004) and Potts (2005), it is assumed that an element deriving honorific meaning combines with the subject at LF, although honorifics appear in the predicate position (see also McCready (2019)). Technically, it seems possible to regard this as a special kind of mixed content: in the at-issue component, it takes a predicate  $P$  and an individual  $x$  and returns  $P(x)$ , while in the CI component, it takes only an individual. The extent to which the proposed mismatch-mixed application is attested in natural language warrants further investigation. I thank Elin McCready for valuable discussions.

(35)



At the final stage of the derivation, applying the parsetree interpretation (Potts 2005; McCready 2010) in (36) yields the interpretation in (37):

(36) Parsetree interpretation (McCready 2010; cf. Potts 2005)

Let  $\mathcal{T}$  be a semantic parsetree with the at-issue term  $\alpha : \sigma^a$  on its root node, and distinct terms  $\beta_1 : t^{\{c,s\}}, \dots, \beta_n : t^{\{c,s\}}$  on nodes in it. Then, the interpretation of  $\mathcal{T}$  is the  $\langle \llbracket \alpha : \sigma^a \rrbracket, \llbracket \beta_1 : t^{\{c,s\}} \rrbracket, \dots, \llbracket \beta_n : t^{\{c,s\}} \rrbracket \rangle$  (Based on McCready 2010: 32)

(37)  $\exists d' : \exists t' \exists d [t' < \text{pres} \wedge d > \text{STAND}_{\text{rude}} \wedge \text{rude}(\text{Taro's-behavior}) = d \text{ at } t']$   
 $d' > \text{max}_{\text{permissible-for-}j}(\{d'' | \text{rude}(\text{Taro's-behavior}) = d'' \text{ at } \text{pres}\}) \wedge \text{rude}(\text{Taro's-behavior}) = d' \text{ at } \text{pres} : t^a$  • Neg-attitude( $j$ , Taro's-behavior) given  $j$ 's experience in the utterance situation  $s^* : t^s$

**5. Comparison with related phenomena.** So far we have examined the meaning and use of the intensifier *hodo-ga aru*. In this section, we compare *hodo-ga aru* with *sugiru* ‘too’ and wh-exclamatives and discuss their similarities and differences.

5.1. COMPARISON WITH EXCESSIVE *sugiru* ‘TOO’. Semantically, *sugiru* resembles *hodo-ga aru* in that both convey excess. However, they differ in their meanings and distributions. First, *sugiru* naturally co-occurs with positive predicates and does not necessarily express the speaker’s negative evaluation.

(38) Kono kuruma-wa (watashi-ni-wa) seinou-ga yo-sugi-ru.  
 this car-TOP I-to-TOP performance-NOM good-too-NON.PST  
 ‘This car performs too well for me.’

Second, unlike *hodo-ga aru*, *sugi-ru* can appear in modal, interrogative and conditional sentences:

- (39) a. Kono shatsu-wa ooki-sugi-ru-kamoshirenai. (Modal)  
 this shirt-TOP large-too-NON.PST-may  
 ‘This shirt may be too large.’  
 b. Kono shatsu-wa ooki-sugi-masu-ka? (Interrogative)  
 this shirt-TOP large-too-PERF.HON-Q  
 ‘Is this shirt too large for you?’  
 c. Kono shatsu-ga ooki-sugi-tara, oshiete-kudasai. (Conditional)  
 this shirt-NOM large-too-COND tell-BEN.HON  
 ‘If this shirt is too large for you, please let me know.’

Note that *sugiru* and *hodo-ga aru* can co-occur when *hodo-ga aru* takes a gradable predicate containing *sugiru*. Crucially, however, they cannot co-occur when *sugiru* attaches to *aru* and thereby modifies *hodo-ga aru*:

- (40) a. Koko-no raamen-wa taka-sugi-ru-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru.  
 here-GEN ramen-TOP expensive-too-NON.PST-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
 ‘There is a limit to how too expensive the ramen here can be.’  
 b. ?? Koko-no raamen-wa takai-ni-mo hodo-ga ari-sugi-ru.  
 here-GEN ramen-TOP expensive-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST  
 ‘There is too much of limit to how expensive the ramen here can be.’

This suggests that *sugiru* is gradable, whereas *hodo-ga aru* itself is not gradable.

5.2. COMPARISON WITH EXCLAMATIVES. Next, let us compare *hodo-ga aru* with wh-exclamatives. Wh-exclamatives are a type of sentence that express a speaker’s heightened emotion toward a counterexpected situation. In this respect, wh-exclamatives are similar to *hodo-ga aru*.<sup>6</sup>

- (41) a. (My,) What delicious desserts John bakes! (Rett 2011)  
 b. How tall John is!

- (42) Nante Taro-wa burei-nan-daroo.  
 how Taro-TOP rude-EXPL-EXCL  
 ‘How rude Taro’s behavior is!’

Furthermore, *wh-exclamatives*, like *hodo-ga aru*, occurs in factual contexts and serves to express emotional intensification. As the following examples illustrate, the wh-exclamative *nante*, like *hodo-ga aru*, is excluded from interrogative, modal, and conditional environments:

- (43) a. \* Taro-wa nante burei-desu-ka?  
 Taro-TOP how rude-PERF.HON-Q  
 ‘How rude Taro is?’

<sup>6</sup> It has been considered in the literature that wh-exclamatives are degree-related phenomenon and various researchers have investigated how their scalar meanings are derived in a compositional fashion, including the degree-based approach and the question-based approach (e.g., Zanuttini & Portner 2003, Rett 2008, Castroviejo 2008). Hirayama (2021) and Ito & Ihara (2023) analyze the semantics of Japanese wh-exclamative sentence with *nante* using the notion of degree.

- b. \* Taro-wa nante burei-kamosirenai-n-daroo.  
Taro-TOP how rude-may-EXPL-EXCL  
'How rude Taro may be.'
- c. \* Moshi Taro-ga nante burei-de-areba, shachoo-ni uttae-masu.  
by.any.chance Taro-NOM how rude-PRED-COND president-to report-PERF.HON  
'If how rude Taro is, I will report him to the president.'

However, there are also differences in meaning and usage. The first salient difference concerns their evaluative nature. Unlike *hodo-ga aru*, the wh-exclamative *nante (...n-daroo)* can convey a positive evaluative meaning.

- (44) Nante Taro-wa reigitadashii-n-daroo.  
how Taro-TOP polite-EXPL-EXCL  
'Intended. How polite Taro's behavior is!'

Second, unlike *hodo-ga aru*, *nante... (n-daroo)* does not carry a norm-related presupposition that “*x* is/has been *A*”, but instead conveys heightened emotion as new information. Consequently, it is infelicitous to use *nante* together with *hodo-ga aru*:

- (45) ?\* **Nante** Taro-no furumai-wa futekisetu-ni-mo hodo-ga  
how Taro-GEN behavior-TOP inappropriate-to-*mo* limit-NOM  
a-ru-**n-daroo**.  
exist-NON.PST-EXPL-EXCL  
'Intended. How inappropriate Taro's behavior can be!'

Note that Japanese also has a sentence final exclamative *nante*, and it is also incompatible with *hodo-ga aru*:

- (46) \* Taro-no furumai-wa futekisetu-ni-mo hodo-ga a-ru-**nante!**  
Taro-GEN behavior-TOP inappropriate-to-*mo* limit-NOM exist-NON.PST-MIR  
'There is a limit to how inappropriate Taro's behavior can be!'

Note that Japanese also has a sentence-final exclamative *nante*, which is likewise incompatible with *hodo-ga aru*. However, it is possible to use *hodo-ga aru* after an exclamatory sentence that states a fact, as shown in (47). In this case, the exclamatory sentence (which functions like a participial phrase) and the *hodo-ga aru* sentence are interpreted separately.<sup>7</sup>

- (47) Konna osoi jikan-ni ku-ru-nante, Taro-wa futekisetu-ni-mo hodo-ga  
such late hour-to come-NON.TNS-MIR Taro-TOP inappropriate-to-*mo* limit-NOM  
aru.  
exist-NON.PST  
'Coming at such a late hour, Taro is beyond inappropriate.'

**6. Conclusion.** In this paper, I investigated the intensifier use of the Japanese *hodo-ga aru*. I argued that the intensifier *hodo-ga aru* represents a special type of ‘mixed content’ (McCready 2010; Gutzmann 2011). More specifically, I claimed that semantically, *hodo-ga aru* denotes

<sup>7</sup> The sentence contains a *ru*-form, which typically expresses non-past meaning (future or present tense), but in this sentence the event of Taro coming late is interpreted as a past event. See Sawada & Sawada (2020, 2021) for discussion of the tense interpretation of sentence-final *nante*.

that the target  $x$  exceeds the maximum permissible limit of the given gradable predicate  $G$  and presupposing that  $x$  has already met a contextual standard of  $G$ . In addition to these, it also conventionally implies that the judge  $j$  expresses a negative evaluation of  $x$  given  $j$ 's experience in the utterance situation.

I also compared the intensifier *hodo-ga aru* with the excessives and wh-exclamatives and clarified the similarities and differences. This paper demonstrates a new type of excessive expression in natural language: an excessive emotive expression.

This paper leaves many things for future research. First, it is more detailed investigation will be necessary for the presupposition component of *hodo-ga aru*. Among native speakers, some were able to use *hodo-ga aru* even for first-time experiences. Such speakers may be using it purely as an emphatic expression. If so, the presupposition and the at-issue are interpreted simultaneously, blurring the distinction between them and making the meaning of *hodo-ga aru* more conventionalized.

Second, further examination is needed regarding the extent to which mismatch mixed applications constitute a general rule. Finally, further examination is necessary concerning the phenomenon where expressions that do not appear to carry emphatic meaning literally are nonetheless interpreted as having an emphatic meaning. For example, Japanese has the expression *ii kagen-ni shi-ro!* (lit. 'make it a good level'), used to admonish someone for behavior that has gone too far:<sup>8</sup>

- (48) Ii kagen-ni shi-ro.  
good level-DAT do-IMP  
'That's enough!' (lit. Make it a good level!)

There may be similar underlying mechanism for the development of intensifiers.

**Abbreviations.** The following abbreviations are used for example glosses: ACC: accusative, BEN: benefactive, CONJ: conjunctive, CONF: confirmation, COND: conditional, DAT: dative, EVAL: evaluative, EXCL: exclamative, EXPL: explanatory, GEN: genitive, HON: honorific, IMP: imperative, MIR: mirative, NEG: negation, negative, NOM: nominative, NON.PST: non-past tense, NON.TNS: non-tensed, PERF: performative, PRED: predicative, PRES: present, PROG: progressive, PRT: particle, PST: past, PROG: progressive, Q: question, SUBJ: subject, TOP: topic.

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<sup>8</sup> I thank Kyoko Sano for valuable discussion.

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