"No Songs to Sing!":
An Interaction Analysis of a Problematic Scene in a Karaoke Space

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1. Introduction

Karaoke is a musical activity that does not require special training. It is normally participated in by lay people who do not necessarily have a mastery of music. For this reason, karaoke is regarded as one of the ordinary musical activities of our social lives (see Hale 1997; Drew 1997, 2001). Karaoke is often thought of as a "hobby" or "socializing" (Ben-Ari 1989). In this sense, karaoke is a form of musical experience that contributes to our everyday social life.

Theoretically, according to various studies, karaoke is a phenomenon related to media (Keil [1994] 2005), culture (Lum 1996, 1998), and identity (DeNora 2002). Contrary to these ideas, this paper relates ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967) to karaoke as a music activity. Consequently, the aim is to practically respecify (Lynch 1993) tasks included in music activities conducted by lay people.

While ethnomethodological studies on musical activities have been presented in institutional settings such as rehearsals (Weeks 1990, 1996), lessons (Nishizaka 2006), and master classes (Haviland 2007; Reed, Reed & Haddon 2013), Peter Tolmie *et al.* (2013) have extended their study to everyday musical activities. More specifically, Tolmie *et al.* analyze how participants in Irish music sessions select tunes when playing their own musical instruments in pubs.

What is worth noting is that Tolmie *et al.* have examined the selection of tunes by analyzing conflict during the activity. For example, Tolmie *et al.* have analyzed scenes in which the musicians "self-select" a song that the participants reject (Tolmie *et al.* 2013: 234–40). Nevertheless, it can be said that the work of Tolmie *et al.* is to analyze activities that are not always accessible to non-musicians because they are music performance activities.

With these prior studies in mind, this paper focuses on the following two points. First, it analyzes conversations in places where karaoke takes place. Secondly, it focuses on scenes where karaoke participants have difficulty choosing songs.

2. Data

2.1 Karaoke in Japan

Before analysis, it is necessary to explain the characteristics of karaoke which are analyzed in this paper.

To begin with, the karaoke activities described in this paper are conducted in private rooms called "karaoke boxes." These rooms have equipment for choosing songs (from servers owned by music distribution companies in Japan), a large display for lyrics, a microphone, a sound system, and a remote control. There is a table in the center of the karaoke boxes, and the participants sit in chairs in such a way that they can see both the display and each other.

The first thing participants do is select a song using the remote control. It has a touch panel, so participants can search for a song and then select it. A song begins 10 seconds after it has been selected. The remote is then passed on to the next participant, and each chooses a song. When everyone has chosen a song, the remote is usually returned to the first singer. The songs are played in the selected order. Each participant holds a microphone and sings when their song begins. There is a period of about 10 seconds between songs. Participants may enjoy short conversations during this time.

2.2 Research

This paper analyzes data obtained by a joint survey carried out in Tokyo in February 2017. The survey was conducted three times. Details concerning each survey (including its duration, number of people, and their names) can be found below in table 1.

Table 1. Survey Details

	#1	*#2*	*#3*
Duration	90 min.	90 min.	120 min.
Number of participants	2	3	4
Names	O, Y	O, Y, I	O, Y, I, B

The first preliminary survey was conducted by the author (Y) and the author's research partner (O). In addition, Y and O also participated in the second and third surveys. In the second and third surveys, the participants included one or more people that were participating together for the first time. In other words, even if they were previously acquainted, this was their first time doing karaoke together. The second survey was the first time O and I did karaoke together, and the third survey was the first time I and B did karaoke together.

The seating arrangement during the second and third surveys is shown below in figure 1.
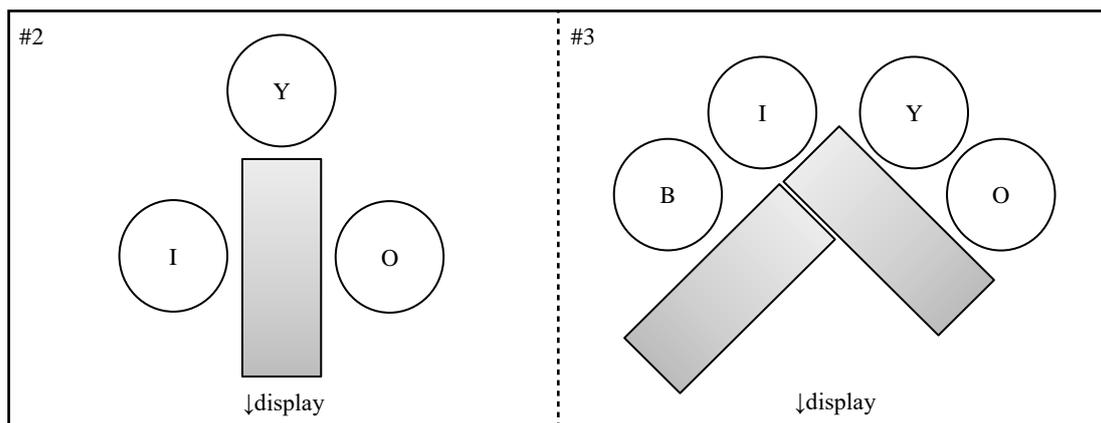

Figure 1. Seating Arrangement of Participants

2.3 Methods

The data obtained by the survey was analyzed using two methods.

The first method is video data, and the second is the transcripts of those videos. During transcription, the names of songs and artists mentioned in the videos were altered.

In the analysis, three fragments that show the participants experiencing difficulty choosing songs are examined. These fragments were selected from approximately 200 minutes of video data obtained during the surveys.

3. Analysis

3.1 A typical case: initiation of an effort to continue song selection

As a result of the analysis, the following was elucidated: when presenting the reason why the song selection activity cannot be continued, participants also show that they are willing to continue the song selection at the same time. Below, I will unpack this.

In fragment 1 below, we can see this practice performed. Fragment 1 is an excerpt from the beginning 5–6 minutes of the second survey. At the beginning of fragment 1, O is holding the remote and is considering his first song selection. In line 2 (=>), O says, "There's Hashino Ken and Hawaii Summers," conveying that he is experiencing difficulty in choosing a song.

<p align="center">**Fragment 1. Survey #2 (00:05:13-)**</p>

```
01              (0.6)
02 =>  O:    chotto (nayamu) Hashino Ken ka Hawaii Summers kaga
             There's Hashino Ken and Hawaii Summers.
```


remote
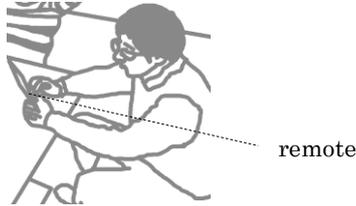
```
03              (2.3)
04 ->  Y:    [konomae nani utattake
             [What did you sing the last time?
05     I:    [na-
             [Why-
06              (0.5)
```

In line 2, by naming two artists, "Hashino Ken" and "Hawaii Summers," O is reporting not only that he has not yet chosen a song but also that he doesn't have a decisive factor to help him choose one. In line 4 (->), Y is asking O what he sung in the past. In this way, Y is inviting O to produce some ideas that can help him choose a song.

What you can see from fragment 1 is that O's difficulty in choosing a song is not understood as a reason for O to abandon the selection activity but as an effort to continue it. How can O's remarks in line 2 be understood as such?

In line 2, O not only admits his difficulty in choosing a song but also in continuing to operate the remote by directing his orientation to it. In other words, O suggests why he cannot continue choosing a song, even though he wants to continue searching. O has been able to present his difficulty as a problem to be solved by stating the reason why he cannot continue the song selection.

3.2 Aggressiveness in the process of selection: to show the participant's consideration
The analysis of fragment 1 reveals that O presents the reason why he cannot continue searching to show that he is willing to continue. This paper will continue to discuss the situated rationalities of such a practice in karaoke from two points of view.

First, participants can demonstrate their positive attitude towards choosing music through the practice. This is because expressing the difficulty they are encountering also expresses that they are working on some sort of challenge.

The fact that this practice is intended to display the speaker's efforts is demonstrated in fragment 2, which was taken at the 56-minute mark of the third survey. In line 5 of fragment 2, Y's remark "I do not have any more ( )" suggests that he is experiencing difficulty choosing a song.

<p align="center">**Fragment 2. Survey #3 (00:56:02-)**</p>

```
01     Y:    nani ireyou
             What shall I choose?
02              (1.2)
03              ((throat clear))
04              (0.8)
05 =>         mou naindayo( )
```

<p align="center">3</p>

```
                    I do not have any more( ).
```
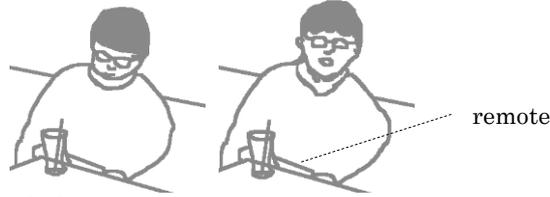


```
         06           (0.2)
```



```
         07   O:    hohhu[huhu
                    hohohoho
         08   B:         [¥mo:u nai¥
                         $anymore$
         09   O:    ¥hayai¥
                    $early$
         10           (0.4)
         11         >¥chot[to hayai¥<
                    >It is slightly early<.
         12   B:         [¥mada yonkyokume desu(yo)¥
                         $It is still the fourth round$.
         13   I:    ahahaha
                    hahahaha
         14 -> Y:   konomae issyoni iretano toka- ka- kaunto suruto mou nai
                    Considering the songs that I chose before,
                    I do not have any more.
         15   B:    mounai
                    any more
         16           (0.6)
         17         mou, mada(yo )desuyo
                    Indeed, it is still the (four ) round.
```

Fragment 2 has the following structure. In line 5 (=>), by stating that the selectable songs are exhausted, Y explains why he has not yet selected a song. When making this statement, Y looks at the front display once and then looks at the remote again. This indicates that, as with fragment 1 (3.1), the remark in line 5 shows that Y is interested in continuing song selection. In lines 7, 9, and 11, O notes that "It is slightly early," laughs, and points out the problem by indicating the time at which Y's selectable songs have been exhausted. In line 8, B focuses on the problem by quoting a part of Y's remark ("any more") while laughing. In line 12, by combining the number of songs Y has sung so far with the expression "still," B is insisting that the problem is the timing of the remark. In line 14 (->), Y added the expression "Considering the songs that I chose before" before the remark already stated in line 5 ("I do not have any more"). By doing this, Y has presented the reason why the current problem occurred: he was taking into consideration previous choices so that his fellow participants would not have to listen to the same songs again.

Through the above exchanges, Y reveals that he was choosing songs while taking care to show consideration to his fellow participants. That is, in line 14, Y details the reason he was not able to choose a song in line 5. The reason was that Y was taking into consideration songs that were sung in previous karaoke sessions with the same participants. The remark in line 5 is therefore a part of Y's positive stance on the selection process.

3.3 Reluctance to selection: saying that the selection is not ideal
Secondly, the participants can also show a passive attitude to the result. The ideal song was not chosen; therefore, the actual song selected was the next best.

Fragment 3 is an excerpt from the first 7–8 minutes of the third survey. In the silence around 18 seconds, as shown in line 1, Y continues to operate the remote. In lines 2 and 5 (=>), Y continues to operate the remote and says that he "cannot find a song."

Fragment 3. Survey #3 (00:07:33)

```
01              (17.6)
02 => Y:        nai. hahh[hh
                Cannot find. Haha
```


remote
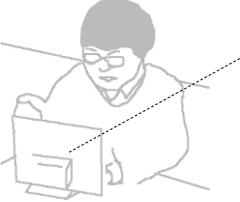
```
03    B:                 [e
                          Huh.
04              uta- utaitaino ga nai[( )
                Cannot find a song.
05 => Y:                            [utaitaimono ga nai
                                     Cannot find a song.
06    B:        teka, DOM tte sukunai (.) kanji simasuyone (>chotto<)
                I mean, DOM has less songs, (>slightly<).
07              (0.7)
08    Y:        sounano?
                Does it?
09    B:        un. sukunai (.) to omoimasu
                Yup. It has a few songs (.) I think.
10              (0.3)
11 -> Y:        >atta< hehehehe (0.6) °attta°
                >Found one<. Hehehehe. (0.6) °Found one°.
```

Fragment 3 has the following structure. In lines 2 and 5 (=>), by saying "Cannot find a song," Y says why he hasn't chosen a song even though he started looking. In lines 6–9, B and Y interact to clarify that the reason why Y could not find a song has to do with the model of karaoke equipment—DOM. In line 11 (->), Y indicates that a song was chosen by saying "Found one."

In fragment 3, Y first conveys the difficulty of choosing a song in lines 2 and 5 and then makes the final song selection in line 11. At this point, no matter which song Y chooses in line 11, karaoke participants will view the choice as a last ditch effort to make any choice.

4. Concluding Remarks

In the preceding analysis, this paper discussed the practice of suggesting a reason why song selection cannot be continued with the aim of continuing song selection in karaoke (3.1). Through this practice, karaoke participants can show a positive attitude towards music selection (3.2) or a passive attitude towards the result of selection (3.3).

Why do participants exhibit a positive attitude (3.2) or a passive attitude (3.3)? The reasons may be related to the fact that the participants in each survey did not usually go to karaoke together (2.2). In other words, karaoke participants can use this practice to prevent themselves from annoying the other participants whose karaoke preferences are not well known. Of course, in order to confirm this viewpoint, further investigation and research is necessary in another karaoke scene, perhaps in a naturally occurring one.

This paper focused on karaoke as a musical activity engaged in by lay people and analyzed conversations involving conflict. The analysis provided by this paper clearly demonstrates that musical activities have become a part of everyday life (see Tolmie *et al.* 2013). Because karaoke does not require special training, a wide variety of people will participate. This paper shows practices that can encourage the diversity of participants. As mentioned above, a practical study of musical activities by lay people, such as karaoke, is an approach to one part of our social life (see Keil & Feld [1994] 2005; Lum 1996, 1998; DeNora 2002).

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