

Goroawase

Japanese number-based wordplay

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A series of horizontal stripes in various colors (yellow, green, blue, dark blue, orange, red, white, green) are located at the bottom of the slide.

Presentation Overview

- What is goroawase?
- How is it used?
- What are some examples?
- Is there something similar to goroawase in English?
- What linguistic attributes of Japanese make wordplay like goroawase possible?

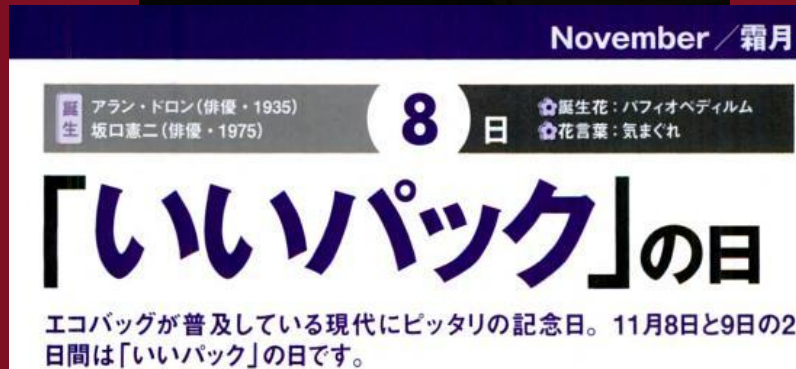
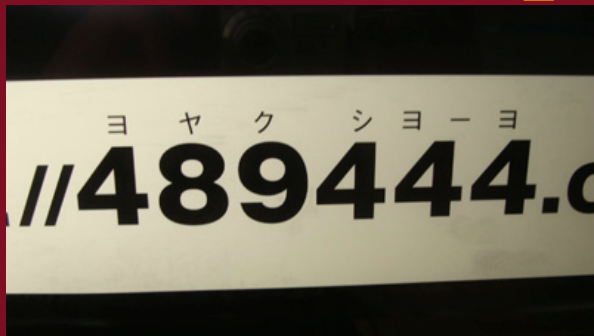
What is "goroawase"?

- Goroawase can literally be translated to the English word “wordplay”, but more specifically refers to the practice of replacing syllables in Japanese words (that would normally be written in hiragana, katakana, or kanji) with numbers that are homophones.
- For example, the phrase “sankyuu” (thank you) can be written in goroawase as “39”

Uses of goroawase

- In the case of "39", it can be used as a cute, slangy, and short way to write words
- However, goroawase is most famously used as a mnemonic device to remember important strings of numbers (most commonly, phone numbers and dates), and is thus often used in advertisements.

Some examples of mnemonic usage



- 489444 can be read as "yo ya ku shi you yo", or "Let's make a reservation!" (source: japanvisitor.blogspot.jp)
- "i i pa kku" refers to the two day period of November 8 and 9 (source: [リンクアップ](#))
- The last 4 digits of the phone number for this dental clinic are 6480 or "mu shi ba zero" ("zero cavities") (source: hyenasclubs.org)

Examples of slang terms in goroawase

Not used as mnemonic devices, but might be used while texting, etc.

- 893 - ya ku za (“the yakuza”)
- 4649 - yo ro shi ku (“please be kind”)
- 0840 - o ha yo u (“good morning”)
- 2525 - ni ko ni ko (“smiling”)

As well as many others. The only limit is the creativity of the goroawase user!

Is there a goroawase equivalent in English?

- In the early 2000's, English "chatspeak" became popular
- Users of chatspeak would replace words with "to", "for", "ate/eat", etc. with numbers (for example: "2day", "4get", "gr8")
- Unlike goroawase, often numerical wordplay in English chatspeak is a blend of numbers and letters that "spell" out the word.

Why does this type of wordplay seem more effective in Japanese?

- A language like English is limited in its ability to use numerical wordplay because each number only has one possible pronunciation.
- However, as we know, this is not the case in Japanese!

Number	Japanese kunyomi readings	Japanese onyomi readings	Transliterations from English readings
0	maru, ma, wa	rei, re	o, zero, ze
1	hitotsu, hito, hi	ichi, i	wan
2	futatsu, fu, futa	ni, ji	tsu, tsū, tū
3	mitsu, mi	san, sa, za	su, surī
4	yon, yo, yotsu	shi	fō, ho
5	itsutsu, itsu, i	go, ko	faibu, faivu
6	mutsu, mu	roku, ro	shikkusu
7	nana, nanatsu, na	shichi	sebun, sevun
8	yatsu, ya	hachi, ha, ba	eito
9	kokonotsu, ko	kyu, ku	nain
10	tō, to	ju, ji	ten

kunyomi - Japanese-derived pronunciation
onyomi - Chinese-derived pronunciation
(source: tofugu.com)

So what?

- Goroawase utilizes the kunyomi (Japanese-derived pronunciation), onyomi (Chinese-derived pronunciation), and English pronunciation of numbers
- Often, even within these categories, there are more than one way to pronounce the number. (for example, the English pronunciation of 0 could be "zero" or "oh" or just "ze")
- This leads to an incredible amount of flexibility for the users of goroawase!

Conclusion

- Goroawase is only possible because of Japan's rich history of borrowing - with so many different possible pronunciations, many words and phrases can be easily constructed using numerals as "spelling". This is not possible in languages like English.
- There are many different pronunciations of numerals due to repeated borrowing from Chinese, sound change over time, and more modern borrowing from English.

Your turn!

- Can you think of any goroawase?
- Does your language have number-based wordplay?
- <http://seoi.net/goro/>
"The Goroawase Generator"

Resources Used

- Cutler, Anne. *Native Listening: Language Experience and the Recognition of Spoken Words*. p.428. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2012. Print.
- Hilpisch, Kai. *English in Japanese Language and Culture: A Socio-historical Analysis*. Norderstedt, Germany: GRIN Verlag, 2009. Print.
- Koichi. "Goroawase: Japanese Numbers Wordplay (i.e. How To Remember Japanese Telephone Numbers)." Tofugu. N.p., 30 Aug. 2011. Web. 07 July 2013.
- リンクアップ. この日何の日: 1億人のための366日使える話のネタ本. Tōkyō: Shūwa Shisutemu, 2009. Print.
- and those cited earlier in the presentation