

SPEECH PLAY

PHILIP M. COHEN
Aliquippa, Pennsylvania

In the August 1976 Kickshaws, I claimed that linguistics and logology have little in common. Having just read Speech Play, edited by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), I take it back. Although the ten papers in this book are linguistic in style rather than logological, a few are sufficiently nontechnical that they should interest Word Ways readers.

Most of us have probably been fluent in Pig Latin at some time. I've read of other 'play languages' (Opish, Turkey Irish, Cockney backward slang), but never knew anyone who used them, though Maxey Brooke mentions speaking 'Carney Hash' as a child (see November 1974 Word Ways). Other cultures use them more: two papers give examples from Cuna (five types), French, Javanese (seven types), and Surinam 'Bush Negro' Creole (five types). Particularly interesting is a play language using the Javanese consonantal alphabet. Vowels are unchanged, but every consonant is replaced by the corresponding letter of the reversed alphabet; for example, p, the third letter, interchanges with l, the third from last. People are actually able to speak it rapidly. This is much more a 'secret language' than the easily-learned Pig Latin.

'How to Remember Numbers in Japanese', by Anthony E. Backhouse, is a thorough treatment of Japanese number mnemonics, informally described by A. Martin Cohen in the February 1976 Word Ways. It includes a table of all standard mnemonic elements, and many examples. Here are a few:

- 0039 = sankyuu 'thank you' (for a bar)
 4989 = yoku yaku 'we cook well' (an eel restaurant)
 0101 = maruimarui (Marui Department Store); maru is Japanese for 'circle'
 5656 = gorogoro 'rumblingly' (Kaminari Confectionaries); kaminari means 'thunder' and gorogoro is a common onomatopoeia for thunder in Japanese

These mnemonics are also used in educational guides sold to school children. Where possible, they are incorporated into sentences connected with the fact to be learned, and the sentence is memorized as a whole. Here are some examples, with the mnemonic underlined:

- 1215 (Magna Carta) = hito ni i go oboerare 'learned by people thereafter'

- 1492 (Discovery of America) = iyoiyo kuni ga mieta 'at last a country was sighted'
 1592 (height in meters of Mt. Aso) = Higo no kuni 'the province of Higo' (where Mt. Aso is located)
 2-4-6-9-11 (numbers of months having less than 31 days) = nishi suku samurai 'a samurai facing 'west'

The last mnemonic is useful in Japanese because the months are named by numbers; nigatsu 'February' is literally 'two-month', and so on. The use of 'samurai' for '11' is interesting; it is a graphic pun on the character for shi 'samurai' (±) and those for jyuuichi '11' (+).

More than a third of the book is taken up by the editor's 'Bibliographic Survey of the Literature on Speech Play and Related Subjects' (an annotated bibliography). This should prove useful to logologists as well as linguists. The subheadings under 'Genre and Subject Bibliographies' are: Concept of Genre; Play; Children's Play; Word Play; Nursery Lore; Nonsense and Limericks; Play Languages; Numbers, Letters, Mnemonics, and Counting Out Rhymes; Names; Humor; Joking Relationships and Interaction; Verbal Contests; Psycho-Ostensive Expression; Obscenity; Proverb and Speech Metaphor; Riddle; Narrative; Audio-Visual Resources. At least half show clear relevance to logology, and who knows what the rest may hide?

Coverage appears to be good, even in the strictly recreational area. For example, the Word Play section mentions Word Ways first off, and such standbys as Bombaugh, Borgmann and Espy. This is not a book for everyone's shelf, but it's certainly worth recommending to your library.

POTOMAC MAGAZINE COMPETITION

Move over, Mary Ann Madden! Potomac Magazine (in the Sunday Washington Post) is featuring reader competitions very much in the spirit of Giant Sea Tortoise. Two recent examples:

- Spell a word of five or more letters backward and suitably define it: REVLOVER - a girl enamored with her pastor; PALRUB - a massage given to a close friend; LEMAC - French fast-food concoction; EMULOV - ostrich adoration
 Invent and define a word containing three of the letters JQXZ: ZJAX - a low-grade cleanser; BRJEXINSQI - phonetic spelling of the name of Carter's foreign policy expert; JAQXZ - what Jill plays with; J'AQUUZE - Howard's French cousin and real heir.