

# JAPANESE HEIST-SLANG

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Iceman, crasher, penny-weighter, sniper, jackroller, screwman, hugger-mugger, thief: take a group of average Americans on a linguistic underworld tour of the South Bronx, and they would throw up their hands in despair at the unintelligible, fast-flying words that snipe from street corner to street corner. But leave the tourists there for a week or two, and even the most tongue-tied will begin to pick up the street jargon as they meet the local in-crowd.

But in Japan, criminal lingo is far more byzantine: sub-rosa cliques of every shape and denomination use their own private *ingo* (hidden language) or *agotataki* (chin bangings), and no sooner has the visitor picked up Japanese pickpocketese than he or she must start again from scratch with *car-heisterese*, *muggerese*, or *robber-talk*.

An even bigger linguistic hurdle is the marked dialect differences in criminal speech. Tokyo prowlers, for instance, will often find that they have difficulty talking shop with out-of-town colleagues: in Tokyo, picking locks is called *atetsukai* (touch-using), or more arcanelly *tanka tsuri* (swearword fishing). In Wakayama the expression is *hana o toru* (taking the flower) and *hana o konasu* (handling the flower), while the Yamaguchi cliques use *koburu* (jiggering). Blow-torching locks, as one travels south from Tokyo, changes even more rapidly. Some regional gangsters call it *aka* (red), others *fuki* (blow), *senkofuki* (incense blowing), *senbonfuki* (blowing a thousand pieces), *terikiri* (burn-and-cut), or *kamaboko* (fish-paste).

With the tourist trade in Japan growing rapidly in the mid-nineties, American visitors find themselves venturing further afield into inner-city bars and local late-night groggeries. As they mingle with the local crowd they begin to ask themselves: what kind of criminal is a spider (*kumo*)? What does a fox master (*inarishi*) do for a living? How dangerous are the toddlers (*chiko*), the snip-snaps (*choki*), the dwarfs (*chibi*), or the bell-nests (*kanesu*)? And how do the nightingales (*uguisu*), the shrimps (*kurumaebi*), or the nest-floaters (*ukisu*) ply their trade?

The following multiple-choice selection is designed to test Americans' grasp of the ins and outs of Japan's criminal language. Japanese gang-slang expressions are presented in romanized transliteration, along with a literal translation. Following the Japanese gang word are four possible explanations. The correct answers are given in Answers and Solutions.

1. CHOKI (snip snip) A a pickpocket who uses scissors to cut into pockets, B a pickpocket who works in parks, C a pickpocket trainee, D a bag-

snatcher

2. KUMO (spider) A a thin spindly criminal, B a ninja-type thief dressed in black, C a thief who specializes in climbing walls, D a thief who sets traps for his victims
3. KANESU (bell nest) A a thief targeting rare bird-nests for their eggs, B a specialist in de-rigging alarms, C a safe-cracker, D a thief who targets temples
4. UKISU (nest floater) A a thief on a ship, B a thief who floats through crowds, C a petty thief who works at markets, D a prowler
5. ICHIMAIMONO (one sheet of individual) A thief behind a screen, B a thief who regularly targets silk factories, C a thief who works alone, D a thief with a long criminal record
6. DOSHI (kindred spirit) A a pickpocket with a knife, B partners in crime, C a murderer, D a mild-mannered kindly thief
7. GANHARI (eye stretcher) A the watchman for a gang of thieves, B a lock-picker, C a bank robber, D a mugger
8. FUMITSUKERU (attaching the steps) A taking care not to leave fingerprints, B planning a robbery, C following a victim into the house, D climbing up a ladder to reach a window
9. TAKO (octopus) A a key, B a flash-light, C a stop watch, D a rope ladder with hooks
10. SHIRIMAKURI (lifting the skirt from behind) A to snatch bags, B to enter a house through the back entrance, C to enter a house by climbing a nearby tree, D a pickpocket who targets women
11. NYANZOKU (meow gang) A thieves who enter houses via the roof, B novice muggers, C pickpockets who work on buses, D large gangs of thieves
12. HARA-KIRI (belly cutting) A robbing a victim of everything, B breaking into a house by cutting a hole into the side, C breaking down a door, D a sneak thief surprised by a victim
13. KABUWAKE (stock dividing) A murder, B dividing the loot after a robbery, C targeting the stock exchange, D theft by computer
14. BAIHARU (stretching the purchases) A dividing the loot after a robbery, B dividing the loot unfairly after a robbery, C stealing from a store, D caught at the scene of the crime
15. AMERIKAN (American) A bad-quality loot, B a knife, C a band of robbers, D bank robbery
16. KANE O TSUKU (hitting the gong) A mugging on a subway train, B getting away with the loot, C pulling out a knife, D the victim starts

screaming for help

17. WAPPA (rings) A a wallet, B handcuffs, B a tool bag, D a key
18. NASU (eggplant) A a key, B a torch, C a beeper, D a wallet
19. GIRISHI (grab specialist) A a pickpocket, B a murderer, C a jail-bird, D a mugger
20. MOMIWAKE (grope-and-understand) A bank robbing, B escaping from the police, C feeling pockets for wallets, D targeting rich-looking houses
21. SAGARI NI KIKU (listening down there) A slipping fingers into trouser pockets on a crowded train, B climbing over a wall into a garden, C using a blowtorch to burn off a lock, D escaping from the police
22. HAKONORI (box-riders) A thieves on trains and subways, B thieves that hide in packing cases, C sneak thieves, D hold-up men
23. UESHITA O TSUKERU (up and down together) A groups of thieves climbing walls together, B being caught redhanded, C laying out and discussing the plans for a heist, D running away together
24. NETABAI (the seeds enter) A choosing and placing the tools for the trade into a bag, B running a plantation of illegal drugs, C stealing diamonds, D hiding from the police
25. SHUTOME O KUDOKU (silencing one's mother-in-law) A poisoning the guard dog, B lying to the police, C giving false evidence, D a police chase
26. KIKU NO HANA (flower listening) A stealing objets d'art, B hiding of the stolen goods, C a final all-round check before breaking into a house, D the victim surprises the burglar
27. TEN (heaven) A a prison, B a police station, C a garden, D a roof
28. TAKEHARI (bamboo needle) A a key, B a lock-picking needle, C a safe, D a flash-light
29. HAIYU (hot-water enterer) A thief who enters through the bathroom window, B a thief who is caught red-handed, C a prison inmate, D a master pickpocket
30. MIMIBARASHI (tearing off the ears) A cross-examination, B blasting a hole into a wall to break in, C mugging, D bag-snatching
31. NAMASHI (cash master) A a rich thief, B a talented pickpocket, C a burglar who only steals money, D a crooked stockbroker
32. JARA (Yokohama Chinese gang-jargon for 'snip') A to murder, B to burgle, C to lie, D to run

33. OYADAMA (daddy bullet) A a fast train, B a chief inspector, D a subway thief, D a pickpocket
34. TEEJITARI (Tokyo Korean gang-jargon for 'pork chop') A an elderly criminal, B a getaway car, C a safe, D a gun
35. NAMAHAKU (cash-vomiter) A a rich-looking victim, B a thief who loses his loot, C a temple thief, D a bag snatcher

### The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language

In November 1991, Word Ways reviewed David Crystal's *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*, a wide-ranging overview of many different aspects of language. He has now complemented this earlier work with one focused more narrowly on the English language, logically organized around three great themes: history, structure (vocabulary, grammar, spoken vs. written) and use. Published by Cambridge University Press for \$49.95, it is a handsome coffee-table volume of 489 pages, printed on coated paper with lavish use of color (for photographs, maps and diagrams as well as for background coloration of sidebars to set them off from the main text). One should not, however, dismiss this book as a gee-whiz-isn't-English-wonderful romp. There's an astonishing range of facts and figures to be savored (along with the occasional bit of fluff, such as a third of a page devoted to a charity event in which the entire Encyclopedia was read aloud).

Wordplay has been expanded from two to four pages, with references to Scrabble, word squares, anagram generators for the computer, Hangman, palindromes, univocalics and chronograms. Most examples are drawn from British sources. Word Ways readers will be interested in the 17x31 rectangle of presidential surnames (through Reagan), considerably inferior to the Feb 1994 Word Ways rectangle of 17x23 (including Bush and Clinton). Crystal views all wordplay through the prism of word games, either two-or-more-person games like Scrabble or games in which the reader matches wits with the constructor, as in cryptic crosswords. Would he regard logological research, such as the search for a ten-square or for that scrambled alphabet which maximizes the number of self-referential number names, as a game against Nature?