A couple of years ago, a craze for riddles swept Japan; this in­spired an article by James Bailey in the August 22, 1975 issue of Tok­yo Weekender, which A. Martin Cohen passed along to me. Many ex­amples (39 out of 54, by my count) in the article are bilingual, or at least involve English loan-words; I give a sampling below.

Word Ways readers are already familiar with Japanese number puns in the February 1976 and May 1977 Word Ways; here are 3 more:

Q: Several kings got together for a chat; how many were there?
A: Ten. to is 'ten', so they were tokingu (talking, in Japlish).

Q: At what age did Beethoven first exhibit his genius?
A: Ten. -sai is the counter for 'years of age', and tensai means 'genius'.

Q: Which American rock group has four or five members?
A: Chicago. sika go means 'four or five'.

Three of the riddles involve American state names:

Q: In what American state is it always morning?
A: Ohio. or ohaiyo, as in ohaiyo gozaimasu, 'good morning'.

Q: What American state is famous for its waterworks?
A: Missouri, or mizurii. Mizurii means 'sell water'.

Q: What American state frowns on love affairs?
A: Georgia, or jojia. Jojia means 'love affairs are disgusting'.

As the last example suggests, many riddles have an erotic under­current. Here are a couple of the milder ones:

Q: When is a k-i-s-s only a k-s-s?
A: When it lacks love, or ai.

Q: Where in England are sex-change operations often performed?
A: Essex, or Esekkusu. Ese means 'false', and sekkusu is, of course, sex. Together: false sex.

Finally, here is the most labored Japanese pun in the whole article:

Q: What do people drink who think doctors are god-like?
A: Doctor Pepper (dokuta peppa). Peppa sounds like pelpaa 'pa­per'; kami, the usual Japanese word for 'paper', also means 'god'.