

Japanese rubi: Layered representation of meaning

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In Japanese, *rubi* refers to the various graphematic conventions that underlie the materialization and deployment of marginal annotations. Undoubtedly, the most frequent form is, as in (1), where a hiragana-script rubi represents the pronunciation of a kanji-script (or mixed kanji-kana) base-word; a practice also known as *furigana*.

- (1) ふりがな
振り仮名 /furigana/ kana above (or next to) kanji to indicate pronunciation

Within the classification framework initially proposed by Joyce et al. (2023) and developed in this presentation, *furigana* constitutes the default type of graphematic variants—base and rubi are different graphematic representations of the same word. In contrast, the second major category is of semantic fusions—base and rubi are conjunctions of different words (or phrases). As the creative products of artfully layering different meaning representations, semantic fusions typically materialize nuanced forms of written expression, such as subtly blending stipulation and emphasis. However, given the issues of representative sampling by virtue of their ubiquity, this presentation focuses on semantic fusions within two specific contexts.

The first is the common forms of telephone-number wordplay, as mnemonics or for emphasis, that are possible because each digit in Japanese has at least one Native- (NJ), Sino- (SJ) and Foreign-Japanese (FJ) pronunciation as well as abbreviation and voicing variants. The final digits of a cram school's number in (2) are a rather contrived example, which is noteworthy for the rubi's kanji-kana-mix and its placement below.

- (2) 1359 Base: 1 = /ichi/ → /i/, 3 = /san/ → /za/, 5 = /go/ → /gō/, 9 = /ku/
いざ合格 Rubi: /iza gōkaku/ I'll pass! [Note: /ka/ is not represented in the base digits]

The second context is a sample spanning several months of Japan's bestselling manga anthology 週刊少年ジャンプ /shūkan shōnen jyanpu/ *Weekly Shōnen Jump*. Singling out just a couple of notable characteristics of the manga sample, (3) illustrates the frequent instances of referent-stipulation and (4) exemplifies the manga's penchant towards FJ annotations.

- (3) コイツ
強盗 Rubi: /koitsu/ this guy (causal) [NJ] → this robber guy
Base: /gōtō/ robber; robbery [SJ]
- (4) プ
殺し屋 Rubi: /puro/ professional [FJ] → professional hitman
Base: /koroshiya/ hitman [NJ]

In further refining the classification framework, this presentation underscores the innovative nature of rubi as a device for the richly nuanced, layered representation of meaning.

Joyce, Terry, Masuda, Hisashi, & Fujita, Chikako. (2023). Japanese rubi: Finessing the writing/reading/meaning interface. Oral presentation given at the *writing/reading interface: 14th International Workshop on Written Language and Literacy*, 10-12 November 2023, Rome, Italy.