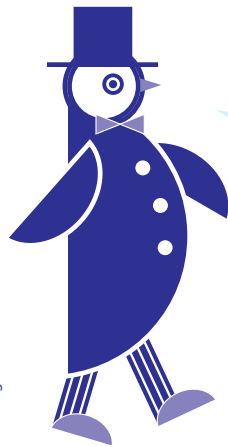


Green..... midori? ao?

Design: Masako Ban



I have found that taxi drivers in Japan are willing to talk with their customers, so it is a good opportunity for me to improve my Japanese by talking with them. I took a taxi last Friday night, and I said to the driver, "midori desu yo (It's green!)" when the signal changed from red to green. I had just learned how to describe colors in Japanese, so I wanted to try out the words. But the driver said to me, "ie ao desu yo midori ja nai desu (No, no. It's blue, not green!)" I looked at the signal again, but to my eyes the color was green. When I got back to my office, I asked my friends about the color of traffic signals. Some said, "It's blue," while others said, "It's green." Ms. Hirayama, what color do you think it is?

■ Most colors are described using katakana versions of the English words. However, shiro (white), aka (red), kuro (black), midori (green) and chairo (brown), etc. tend to be described using the original Japanese words. However, note that white wine is described using either English or Japanese (shiro wine or white wine). In addition, colors are usually described in the English form if the hues are related to industries that label their products in English, such as the colors of clothing, automobiles, etc. For example, pink no shirt (pinkish shirt), wine-red no kuruma (wine-red car). Most Japanese generally understand English terms for basic colors.

e.g., Making a promise to meet a customer for the first time by talking on a phone

customer: Well, then, let's meet at the West Exit of Shinjuku Station at 9 tomorrow morning.

じゃ、明日 9時に 新宿駅の 西口で(会いましょう)。
ja ashita ku-ji ni Shinjuku-eki no nishi-guchi de (aimashō)
(Well then)(tomorrow)(at 9 o'clock)(Shinjuku Station)(at the West Exit) (Let's meet)

What are you going to wear?
ポールさんは どんな格好で 来ますか。
Pole-san wa donna kakkō de kimasu ka
(What kind of; How) (style) (will come)

Pole-san: I'll be wearing a light-blue hat and carrying a silver bag.

私はライトブルーの帽子、シルバーのバッグ、
watashi wa light-blue no bōshi, silver no bag,
(hat)

And I'll also be wearing an orange T-shirt and pink shoes.
オレンジのTシャツ、ピンクの靴、
orange no T-shirt, pink no kutsu,
(shoes)

Also, I have blue eyes and black hair.
そして目はブルー、髪はブラックです。
soshite me wa blue, kami wa black desu
(and) (eyes) (hair)

I think you'll be able to recognize me immediately.
多分すぐわかんと思います。
tabun sugu wakaru to omoimasu
(maybe) (immediately) (recognize) (I think)



color
色
いろ
iro

red
赤
あか
aka

black
黒
くろ
kuro

- A) 色をつける
iro o tsukeru
to add something, to exaggerate, to estimate a little bit more, to pay a little bit more, something extra, an addition
- B) 色眼鏡で見る
iro-megane de miru
to look at things from a biased viewpoint
- C) 赤字
akaji
a deficit, in the red
- D) 真っ赤な嘘
makka na uso
a downright lie
- E) 赤の他人
aka no tanin
a complete stranger
- F) 黒字
kuroji
a surplus, in the black
- G) 黒いうわさ
kuroi uwasa
a dark rumor
- H) 黒星
kuro-boshi
to be defeated
- I) 腹黒い
hara-guroi
to be black-hearted, with a black soul

blue
青
あお
ao

white
白
しろ
shiro

- J) 顔が真っ青
kao ga massao
a pallid face
- K) 白い目で見ると
shiroi me de miru
to look coldly upon somebody, to give somebody the cold shoulder
- L) 頭が真っ白になる
atama ga masshiro ni naru
the mind goes blank
- M) 空白
kūhaku
a blank
- N) 白黒をつける
shiro kuro o tsukeru
to get it settled once and for all
- O) 白タク
shiro-taku
unlicensed taxi
- P) 白紙にする
hakushi ni suru
to forget everything and make a fresh start, to go back to the drawing board
- Q) 白星
shiro-boshi
a victory mark, to win



■ It is also common to put "ma...(pure)" in front of a color word to describe its purity. Even if the color of something is not pure, the word "mass/makk...(真っ)" can be used to emphasize the description of its color. For example, when you overcook a fish, you can say, "sakana wa makkuro koge (The fish was burnt black)." But please remember that it cannot be said in front of every color. Examples 1 though 4 are frequently used. Be careful with the conjugated pronunciations!

- 1. pure white (snow white) shirt.
pure white なシャツ
na shirt
- 2. pure red (deep red) lipstick
pure red な口紅
na kuchibeni (lipstick)
- 3. pure blue sky
pure blue な空
na sora (sky)
- 4. pure black (deep-black) hair
pure black な髪
na kami (hair)

Answers
1. 真っ白 masshiro 2. 真っ赤 makka
3. 真っ青 massao 4. 真っ黒 makkuro

■■■ I see it as green, but in general, the colors of the signals are described as "ao (blue), aka (red) and kiro (amber)" in Japanese. Even Japanese people sometimes ask the same question. Let me explain it as I saw it on a TV program the other day. In ancient Japan, there were only four words to describe colors—aka (red), kuro (black), shiro (white) and ao (blue)—and there was no word for green until the Heian period (794-1192). Every shade between blue and green was called blue until the first crayons were imported to Japan in 1917, and there was a green (midori) crayon inside. The idea of distinguishing green from blue was first introduced in the teaching guidelines for first graders in 1951, and people started to use the word midori. That is why many Japanese proverbs and phrases in daily life have the word ao more than midori because the word midori started to be used only in recent years. For example, vegetables are green, but they are described as ao-mono (Lit. blue things), and the budding green leaves are called ao-ao to shita ha (Lit. budding blue leaves).

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red 赤 あか aka	black 黒 くろ kuro	blue 青 あお ao	white 白 しろ shiro
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1. Oh, gees... I'm in the red again! I need to cut down more on expenses!
あ〜また in the red だ。もっと 節約しなくちゃ。
a mata (Oh) (again) da motto setsuyaku-shinakucha (more) (save on expenses)(casual style of "have to")

2. When I had to give my speech, my mind went blank, and my words became more and more incoherent.
スピーチの時、the mind しどろもどろ になりました。
speech no toki goes blank shidoro-modoro ni narimashita (when) (confused; incoherent)(became)

3. Are you feeling bad? Your face looks pale.
気分が悪いのですか? a pallid face ですよ。
kibun ga warui no desu ka? (feeling) (bad, ill) desu yo

4. friend: Our company has been in the black since he became the new president. He is quite smart!

新しい社長になって売り上げが in the black
atarashii shachō ni natte uriage ga (new) (company president)(became)(sales)
になりました。やっぱりやり手ですね。
ni narimashita yappari yarite desu ne (became) (as I expected) (man of ability)

Pole-san: But, I heard a dark rumor about him that makes me worry.

でも a dark rumor を聞きました。
demo (but) o kikimashita (heard)

ちょっと心配です。
chotto shimpai desu (a little) (worried)

5. friend: You were with a beautiful woman in the first-class (green) car of the Shinkansen bullet train the other day, weren't you?

先日 きれいな人と新幹線の
senjitsu kirē ina hito to Shinkansen no (the other day) (beautiful) (person)
グリーン車にいましたね。
green-sha ni imashita ne (first-class car) (were)

Pole-san: What? Oh, she was a complete stranger to me!
えっ? あ、あれは a complete stranger ですよ。
e? a are wa desu yo

friend: Oh, yeah? I heard a rumor that she is your fiancée.

そうですか? うわさでは婚約者とか。
sō desu ka? uwasa dewa konyakusha toka (Is that so?) (rumor) (according to)(fiancée)

Pole-san: Absolutely not! That's a downright lie!

いいえ a downright lie ですよ。
ie desu yo

Answers 1. C 2. L (頭が真っ白になって) 3. J 4. F, G 5. E, D

With cooperation from Yasuhiro Koga