

Re: use of small kana on the increase?

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In article <koskfd25f2xt\$.v6oy4qvpwxk7.dlg@xxxxxxxxxx>, Phil Yff <Phil.Yff@xxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On Tue, 05 Dec 2006 07:20:37 -0800, Dan Rempel wrote:

Louise Bremner
<trap_for_junk_mail@xxxxxxxxxx>
dixit:

I do so wish
you'd used
ROT13

ROT13? Hugh and Nye are
showing our ages. Who
knows about ROT13
these days?

It's still in the usenet newsreader standard.
Of course, usenet, too, is
showing it's age. Kids are more into instant
messaging and chat. The
command my newsreader (40tude dialog
has) is scramble/unscramble with
rot13 in parentheses.

Phil Yff wrote:

I should add that one of the reasons it crept into the
newsreader standard
is because it was easy to do on UNIX systems. There's a
UNIX utility (tr)
that does the cipher automatically. Back in the 80s when
ROT13 came into
vogue, UNIX protocols were a heavy influence on Usenet.
After all, Usenet
itself originated as a UNIX to UNIX file transfer protocol.

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Or more probably because it both encodes and decodes 26-character input like the English alphabet. I don't think ease of use had much to do with it: 'tr' doesn't do ROT-13 any more automatically than it will do any other substitution.

I know for a fact that it did because I was a sysad back when it came into use. I first started seeing it in 1982. There used to be a group called net.jokes. Jokes with real or perceived offensive material generated a lot of flame wars. People started to use the rot13 cipher using the tr (transliterate) utility. The reason I know that is that my news server was not UNIX and I started getting questions about it.

Although the tr utility can do other substitutions, the rot13, was the simplest cipher to use with the English alphabet. Later, after it started seeing widespread use, it was incorporated into the usenet newsreader standard.

You're quibbling about what Phil meant by the word 'automatically'. Dan points out that it doesn't feel automatic if you have to tell the 'tr' command each time that the letters A-Z and a-z are to be mapped to the letters N-ZA-M and n-za-m, and probably feels that a command to automatically do the deciphering would at most require the use of a single option/flag.

It looks like Phil is being defensive because to his mind, having to type "tr A-Za-z N-ZA-Mn-za-m" is small price to pay for the subsequent "automatic" operation.

Most people I knew who read USENET back in the day found typing that long string tedious, and just learned to read ROT13 text straight.

To add quibbles though:

USENET should be capitalised, especially if you are talking about the good old days. 'tr' is a command, not a protocol, and it stands for 'translate', not 'transliterate'. ROT13 could loosely be called a protocol, but not a UNIX one. USENET did not originate as a file transfer protocol; it began by using the UUCP file transfer protocol. ROT13 is not the simplest cipher to use with tr; it would save quite a few keystrokes to use say "tr A-z N-zA-M". RFC 1036, the closest thing there is to a USENET newsreader standard, makes no mention of ROT13.

John

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