

Prototype Analysis of *Tori*

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1. Introduction

This paper attempts to describe the semantic structure of the Japanese word *Tori*, which literally means ‘birds’ in English.

The paper will begin by considering the most prototypical meaning of *Tori* by analyzing what features characterize the word. It will then investigate related but less prototypical meanings of *Tori*, showing what features are preserved and what features are replaced in each case.

2. Prototype Analysis

Twenty-six Japanese college students, twenty-five of whom were females, were asked to fill out the following form:

Instructions:

On this form, you are asked to rate how good an example of *Tori* each of the three *Tori* below is, on a five-point scale: rating something as ‘1’ means that you consider it an excellent example; ‘3’ indicates a moderate fit; ‘5’ suggests that it is a very poor example and probably should not be included in the category at all.

<i>Tsubame</i> (Swallow)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
<i>Dacho</i> (Ostrich)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
<i>Tsuru</i> (Crane)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

<u>Results</u>	
	<u>Mean Rank</u>
<i>Tsubame</i> (Swallow)	1.04
<i>Dacho</i> (Ostrich)	3.42
<i>Tsuru</i> (Crane)	1.96

The results are shown above. Twenty-five students rated *Tsubame* as '1' and only one student as '2', resulting in the mean rank of 1.04. *Dacho* was ranked by four students as '2', by eight students as '3', by thirteen students as '4', and by one student as '5'. The mean rank for *Dacho* is therefore 3.42. As for *Tsuru*, nine students classified it as '1', eleven as '2', four as '3' and two as '4', amounting to the mean rank of 1.96.

The results indicate that *Tsubame* is an excellent example or the most prototypical meaning of *Tori*; *Tsuru* is less prototypical than *Tsubame*; while *Dacho* is considered to be the least prototypical of the three.

3. Feature Analysis

For the basis of determining what features characterize *Tubame* as well as for finding what features are preserved or replaced as we go from *Tsubame* to *Tsuru* to *Dacho*, each of the following aspects of *Tori* are examined: size, wings, legs, and neck. By extension, this will allow us to deem what characteristics are the most prototypical of *Tori*.

(A) *Tsubame*

Size: *Tsubame* is considered to be small in size within the category of *Tori*. Its body is around 17 centimeters in length. The small size of its body helps explain why *Tsubame* can fly so swiftly.

Neck: It has a short neck that is barely discernable.

Legs: Its legs are short and underdeveloped, making it difficult for it to walk on the ground.

Wings: It has large, well-developed wings that help it to fly swiftly.

(B) *Tsuru*

Size: *Tsuru* is a medium-size *Tori*, measuring about 100 centimeters in body

length.

Neck: Its neck is far longer than that of *Tsubame*, but not as long as that of *Dacho*.

Legs: *Tsuru* has long legs, allowing it to walk for relatively long distances.

Wings: Like *Tsubame*, its wings are well-developed. However, due to its medium size, *Tsuru* can not fly as swiftly as *Tsubame*.

(C) *Dacho*

Size: *Dacho* is one of the largest *Tori* on earth, with a body length that ranges from 200 to 250 centimeters.

Neck: Its neck is much longer than that of *Tsuru*.

Legs: It has long and highly-developed legs, allowing it to run as fast as 60 to 70 kilometers per hour.

Wings: Compared to its body, the *Dacho*'s wings are relatively small and under-developed. This renders it unable fly.

The following table summarizes the above points:

<u>Table</u>			
	<i>Tsubame</i>	<i>Tsuru</i>	<i>Dacho</i>
Small Size	○	△	××
Short Neck	○	×	××
Short Legs	○	×	××
Highly-developed Wings	○	○	×
Ability to Fly Swiftly	○	△	××
Unable to Walk	○	×	××
○ : affirmative △ : neither affirmative nor negative × : negative ×× : strongly negative			

4. Summary

Considering the number of native speakers of Japanese who participated in this study represents only a small percentage of the entire population, the results can be considered tentative at best.

The semantic structure of *Tori* possesses a core meaning based on the following characteristics: being small in size; having a short neck and legs; being equipped with highly-developed wings; being able to fly swiftly but having difficulty in walking. These attributes best characterize *Tsubame*. Therefore, members of the *Tori* category differ in the degree to which they fit the core meaning.

5. References

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