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A Lexical Gap in the Humor Domain of Japanese and Its Possible Implications for Theories of Conceptual Language

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Abstract: Interviews with native speakers of Japanese reveal that, within the humor domain, Japanese experiences a lexical gap, lacking terms for ethnic, political, and religious humor and their corresponding preference terms. However, Japanese terms do exist for the same concepts in non-humorous domains but yet, they do not cross into the humor domain, thus pointing to a specific phenomenon within the language. These limited data may indicate a variation in the mind's conceptual structure or, perhaps more likely, of the concepts' realizations as lexical items depending on one's native language. Not to fall into Whorf's overgeneralization, this may still suggest that the acceptable application of a concept's expression in a language is more than simply a linguistic variation and but may still be the consequence of a language's influence on conceptual structure, resulting in its deliberate and possibly societal and ethically conventionalized deviation from the organization of the language-independent ontology.