An Investigation into Japanese EFL Learners’ Mental Lexicon through the use of a Word Association Task

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A wide range of research has been carried out to investigate the L2 mental lexicon from cross-linguistic perspective. This paper is regarded as a pilot study to carry out a thorough investigation on Japanese EFL learners’ mental lexicon. Some aspects of Japanese EFL learners’ mental lexicon were explored through the use of a word association task. Specifically, two types of association stimuli were used in the following way.

Stimuli:
1. 25 hypernyms (i.e. category words) and 25 hypomys (i.e. examplar words)
   - English: e.g., animal, cat, clothes, skirt, flower, tulip, furniture, desk
   - Japanese: e.g., 動物, ネコ, 衣服, スカート, 花, チューリップ, 家具, 机
2. 25 concrete nouns and 25 abstract nouns
   - English: e.g., ball, bath, beef, blanket, advice, attitude, belief, conclusion
   - Japanese: e.g., ボール, 風呂, 牛肉, 毛布, 助言, 態度, 信念, 結論

The Japanese stimulus words were made by translation from the English ones, so both the Japanese and English stimuli were semantically equivalent. Thus the test material consists of a total of 200 words.

The participants were given an association task sheet and were required to write down an associated word as soon as possible. The results obtained through this task were analyzed in terms of two perspectives – i.e. within Japanese participants’ Japanese and English responses and between Japanese participants’ English responses and native English speakers’ ones under favor of Edinburgh Associative Thesaurus.