

Baka and *Fool*

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This is a study in the comparative semantics of the Japanese *baka* and the English *fool*. The primary meanings of *baka* and *fool* are similar, but there are lexical differences between them. In general, there are more diverse ways of calling someone a fool in English than there are in Japanese.

1. The Word *Baka*

1.1. The Origins of *Baka*. The Japanese word *baka* comes from an unusual source: a Sanskrit word for 'fool' that was once used in the argot of Japanese Buddhist priests. Although it is widely agreed that *baka* came from Sanskrit, no one is certain from which particular Sanskrit word.

According to Shinmura (1930: 102-3), the two most likely etymons for *baka* are *moha* 'bewildered' and *mahallaka* 'senile'. The first of these two Sanskrit words, *moha* means 'bewilderment, loss of consciousness, delusion, folly' and comes from the root *muh* 'bewildered, perplexed, confused' (Macdonald 1954: 236).¹ The second of these two etymons, *mahallaka* means 'senile, feeble minded, stupid, decrepit', is associated with another lexeme, *mūrka* 'dull, stupid, foolish, inexperienced', and comes from the root *mūrkh* 'coagulate, thicken' (Macdonald 1954: 220, 232).² In addition, there are some other less probable speculations about the origins of *baka*.³

The word *baka* is usually written 馬鹿 with the characters for 'horse' and 'deer' used as *ateji* 当て字. The use of these two particular characters is both a phonological rebus of pronunciation, *baka* or *maka*, and a pedantic allusion to a fool who mistook a deer for a horse. In ancient Chinese,

the word 馬鹿 **mag-luk* was an allusion to a historical fool, Chao Gao 趙高. In the *Shiji* 史記, there is a story that says Chao—a courtier of Qinshi Huangdi 秦始皇帝—was foolish enough to have mistaken a deer for a horse.⁴ The earliest use of these ‘horse’-‘deer’ characters to write *baka* was in the *Unbo irohashū* 運歩色葉集 (c. 1547) (Shinmura 1930: 103).⁵

The *terminus ante quem* for *baka* was in the early fourteenth century. In a passage within the *Taiheiki* 太平記 about an imperial visit during the Ryakuō 暦応 (1338–41) period, the word *baka* is used as an insult. Shinmura (1930: 101) found that the original editions (fourteenth century) of the *Taiheiki* had *baka* written バカ; later movable-type editions (c. 1600) had the characters 馬鹿.

Unfortunately, some of the more interesting aspects of the origins of *baka* are unknown. Why did such a basic word as ‘fool’ come from a slang Sanskrit term? Was there a taboo against the use of such an insulting word? What Japanese word for ‘fool’ was used before *baka*?

1.2. The Meanings of *Baka*. There are at least eight different meanings of *baka*, as shown in Figure 1.

These eight meanings of *baka* are interrelated. *Baka*¹ ‘ass, jerk, fool’, *baka*² ‘ament, imbecile, fool’, and *baka*³ ‘blockhead, dullard, fool’ are the most basic meanings, and the semantic distinctions among them are overlapping. *Baka*^{1–3} can all mean different types of ‘fools’. Both *baka*⁴ ‘worthless’ and *baka*⁵ ‘excess’ are semantic extensions of ‘folly’ or ‘foolish-

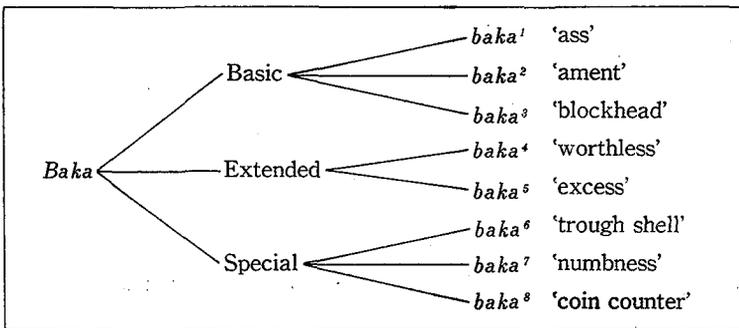


Figure 1. The Meanings of *Baka*

ness'. *Baka*⁶ 'trough shell' is a truncation of *baka gai* 馬鹿貝 'trough shell, surf clam, *Mactra chinensis*'. *Baka*⁷ 'numbness/dullness (of limbs)' is used in the expression *baka ni naru* 馬鹿になる, and could possibly be a semantic extension. And *baka*⁸ '(an antique kind of) coin counter' is an apparently unrelated specialization of meaning.

The three basic meanings of *baka* 'fool'—*baka*¹ 'ass', *baka*² 'ament', and *baka*³ 'blockhead'—are found in many common expressions. Some compounds with these basic meanings are *baka warai* 馬鹿笑い 'foolish/horse laugh' and *baka zura* 馬鹿面 'foolish face, stupid look'. And these basic meanings are used in several verb phrases: *baka ni suru/sareru* 馬鹿にする/される 'make a fool of (someone)', *kobaka ni suru* 小馬鹿にする 'make a fool of (someone), look down on (someone)', *baka yobawarisuru* 馬鹿呼ばわりする 'call (someone) a fool', and *baka o miru* 馬鹿を見る 'make a fool of (oneself)'. There is a difference among these verbal uses of *baka*. For making a fool of another person, one can say either *baka o suru/sareru* or *kobaka o suru*; for making a fool of oneself, one can only say *baka o miru*.

The extended meaning of *baka*⁴ 'worthless, foolish, valueless' is used in expressions such as *bakageta* 馬鹿げた 'foolish, absurd, ridiculous'; *bakana* 馬鹿な 'foolish, silly, stupid'; and *bakarashii* 馬鹿らしい, *bakabakashii* 馬鹿々々しい, or *bakakusai* 馬鹿臭い all meaning 'foolish, absurd, ridiculous'. And *baka*⁴ is the meaning in phrases like *baka ie* 馬鹿言え 'Go on! Nonsense! (Don't say such a foolish thing)', and *bakana mane o suru* 馬鹿な真似をする 'do a foolish thing, act foolishly'.

The other extended meaning of *baka*⁵ 'excess, foolish, absurd' is found in a number of expressions: *bakani* 馬鹿に or *bakabakashiku* 馬鹿々々しく 'awfully, terribly, extremely'; *bakayasui* 馬鹿安い 'ridiculously/dirt cheap'; *bakane* 馬鹿値 or *bakadakai* 馬鹿高い 'ridiculously high price'; *bakateinei* 馬鹿丁寧 'excessive politeness'; *bakashōjiki* 馬鹿正直 'honest to a fault'; and even *baka* 馬鹿, in a highly restricted usage meaning 'lengthening of a fishing line'.

1.3. The Lexical Fields of *Baka*. The various meanings of *baka* do not exist independently. To use the "organic" analogy of Matisoff (1978:

Table 1. The Lexical Fields of *Baka*

Lexical Field	Ōno and Hamanishi		NLRI	
	Category	Words	Category	Words
<i>baka</i> ¹ 'ass'	581 a	36	1. 234	9
<i>baka</i> ² 'ament'	673 b	34	1. 3003	8
<i>baka</i> ³ 'blockhead'	674 a	22	3. 304	19
<i>baka</i> ⁴ 'worthless'	174 c	29	3. 3010	4
<i>baka</i> ⁵ 'excess'	190 b	49	3. 1993	8

146) for language "organ-ization," lexemes are cells, lexical fields are organs, and language is an organism. The best way to understand the semantics of *baka* is to view it in the organic perspective of lexical fields. This is greatly facilitated through the use of Japanese thesauri which are divided into lexical categories, especially Ōno and Hamanishi (1981) and NLRI [National Language Research Institute] (1964). Table 1 indicates the relative—but not the absolute—sizes of the basic and extended lexical fields for *baka* within these two thesauri.⁵

The reason for the apparent imbalance in the sizes of the lexical fields in Table 1 is the arbitrariness of the distinctions between different meanings of *baka*, especially for *baka*¹⁻³. Many of the NLRI words for *baka*³ could be classified as *baka*¹ or *baka*². The complexities of semantic space cannot be adequately represented with simple categorizations. However, Table 1 does give a very general indication of the relative sizes of the lexical fields for *baka*.

The most primary lexical field of *baka* is that for *baka*¹ 'ass, jerk, fool'. This field contains, in addition to *baka*, some stronger lexemes such as *bakamono* 馬鹿者 'stupid/born fool', *ōbaka* 大馬鹿 'big/damn fool', and *baka-yarō* 馬鹿野郎 'stupid jerk, ass, asshole'. The word that is closest to being a synonym for *baka* is *ahō* 阿呆 'fool, (jack-) ass, simpleton'.⁶ The synonymy of these two words is even seen in the derived forms.⁷ There are differences between *baka* and *ahō*—*ahō* is more slangish, and *ahō* is said to be used more commonly in the Kansai area. Some of the

other more salient words in the field for *baka*¹ 'ass, fool' are *tawakemono* 虚け者, *oroka-mono* 愚か者, *hakuchi* 白痴, *manuke* 間抜け, *dekisokonai* 出来損い, and *hiruandon* 昼行燈.

The lexical fields for *baka*² 'ament, fool, imbecile, idiot' and *baka*³ 'blockhead, fool, dullard, dim-wit, simpleton, dolt' both intersect with the field of *baka*¹ 'ass, jerk, fool'. Many words are found in two, or three, of the fields for *baka*¹⁻³. For example, to call someone a *hakuchi* 白痴 can mean an insulting opinion (*baka*¹ 'ass'), a mental deficiency (*baka*² 'ament'), or a lack of good judgement (*baka*³ 'blockhead'). The multi-valency of meaning is largely dependent upon the situation and context. The lexical field for *baka*² contains both common words, such as *asahaka* 浅はか, *senpaku* 浅薄, *kokoronai* 心ない, *mukangae* 無考え, *oroka* 愚か, and *guretsu* 愚劣; and technical psychiatric terms, such as *teino* 低能, *seihaku* 精薄 (coming from 精神薄弱), and *hakuchi* 白痴. The lexical field for *baka*³ contains words such as *noroma* 鈍間, *manuke* 間抜け, *nibui* 鈍い, *donkan* 鈍感, *muchinkei* 無神経, and *sanman* 散漫.

The lexical fields for *baka*⁴ 'worthless, valueless, trifling, insignificant' and *baka*⁵ 'excess, extreme, extravagant' both contain words that have notions of 'foolish'. Some of the more salient words in the field for *baka*⁴ 'worthless' are *tsumaranai* 詰まらない, *guretsu* 愚劣, *kudaranai* 下らない, *chiriakuta* 塵芥, and *mu-imi* 無意味. The lexical field for *baka*⁵ 'excess' contains common words such as *sokonuke* 底抜け, *ketahazure* 桁外れ, *muchakucha* 無茶苦茶, and *tondemonai* 飛んでもない.

The lexical and semantic fields for *baka* are co-occurrent. Many lexemes are found within more than one field. Some examples of this are *hakuchi* 白痴, which can mean *baka*¹ 'ass' or *baka*² 'ament', *guretsu* 愚劣 which can mean *baka*² 'ament' or *baka*⁴ 'worthless', and *tawakemono* 虚け者 or *manuke* 間抜け which both can mean *baka*¹ 'ass' or *baka*³ 'blockhead'.

2. The Word Fool

2.1. The Origins of Fool. The etymological origins of *fool* are much clearer than those of *baka*. The English word *fool* is derived from Latin. *Fool* can be traced back to the Middle English *fōl*, then to the Old French

fol, and ultimately to the Latin *follis* 'bellows, inflated ball'. In vulgar Latin, this *follis* was extended semantically to 'windbag, empty-headed'. The English *fool* is paralleled by several Romance words that mean 'fool': French *fou*, Provençal *fol*, Italian *foole*, and Spanish *fol*. The earliest written use of *fool* (according to the OED) are Layamon's *Brut* (c. 1275) and Hampole's *The Pricke of Conscience* (1340).

The word *fool* is perhaps related to the words *ball* and *belly*; and is linked with *blow* through an Indo-European base **bhla-* (Onions 1966: 101-2, 368).⁸ Some speculations have been made concerning another possible Indo-European origin for the Latin *follis* and the English *fool*. Turner (1966: 533, 535, 538) notes that the two Sanskrit words *bhanda* 'jester, mime, fool' and *bhānda* 'vessel, pot, swell' come from a base of **bhal-* (and perhaps associated with **bhar-*, as in *bharbharā* 'confused, foolish'). An Indo-European origin for *fool* is possible, but uncertain.

2.2. The Meanings of *Fool*. There are at least nine different meanings for *fool* in modern English, as shown in Figure 2 below.

The various meanings of *fool* are interassociated. The most basic sense of the word, 'one who lacks sense or judgement, one who acts stupidly', can be applied to *fool*¹ 'ass, jerk', *fool*² 'ament, idiot', and to *fool*³ 'blockhead, ignoramus'. The distinction is that *fool*¹ 'ass' is an (abusive or derogatory) opinion, *fool*² 'ament' is a (frequently congenital) psychological state, and *fool*³ 'blockhead' is a (sometimes voluntary) lack of

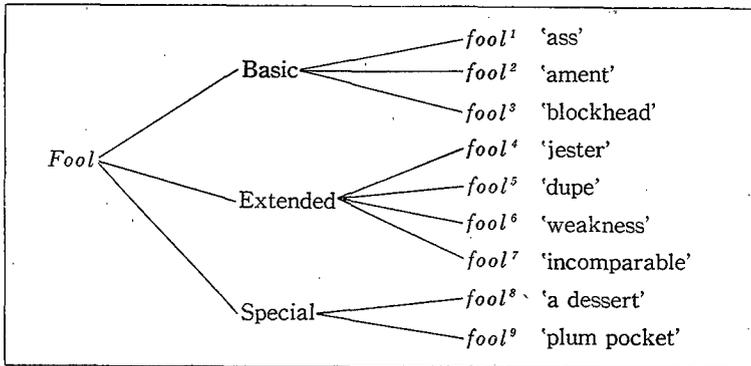


Figure 2. The Meanings of *Fool*

reason or education. *Fool*, as well as many of its synonyms, e. g., *idiot*, *moron*, and *imbecile*, can indicate a lack of mental faculties in any of these three basic senses of *fool*¹⁻³. The actual meaning depends upon the speaker and context. The statement "He's an idiot" can mean *fool*¹ 'ass' when said by an acquaintance, *fool*² 'ament' when said by a psychiatrist, and *fool*³ 'blockhead' when said by a teacher. There are many lexical forms derived from the basic meanings of *fool*¹⁻³, such as *folly*, *foolish*, *foolishness*, *foolery*, *fooling*, *foolhardy*, *fool's gold*, *foolproof*, and *fool's errand*.

The meanings of *fool*⁴⁻⁷ are semantic extensions based on *fool*¹⁻³. The sense of *fool*⁴ 'jester, clownish retainer' refers to one who acts foolishly for the entertainment of others. That is, one who *plays the fool* or *acts the fool*. For historical reasons, the meaning of *fool*⁴ 'jester' is associated with the meaning of *fool*² 'ament'.⁹ Some forms derived from *fool*⁴ 'jester' are *fool's cap/coat/motley*. The meaning of *fool*⁵ 'dupe, one who is fooled, one who is made to appear foolish' is another semantic extension from the basic meanings; and is seen in the expressions *make a fool of*, *be fool*, and *be a fool for (one's pains)*. The sense of *fool*⁶⁻⁷ are rather limited. *Fool*⁶ 'one with a special weakness, overly ardent enthusiast' is seen in the expression *be a fool for (something)*. And *fool*⁷ 'incomparable, beyond comparison, to be in every way inferior to' is seen in *to be a fool to (something)*.

The final two meanings are only found in specialized usages. *Fool*⁸ 'a dessert made from mashed fruit and cream' is usually found in a compound such as *gooseberry fool*. And *fool*⁹ 'plum pocket (disease)' is chiefly an American usage for a type of plum tree disease.

The word *fool* can be used as a verb in several ways: 1. 'dupe, trick, decieve' (from *fool*⁵), 2. 'joke, jest, play a comic role' (*fool*⁴), 3. 'banter, pretend, make believe' [*only fooling*] (*fool*⁴), 4. 'trifle, flirt, string along' [*fool along*], 5. 'philander, putter aimlessly' [*fooling around*], and 6. 'waste, squander' (esp. time or money), [*fool away*].

All of the above meanings for *fool*¹⁻⁹ are found to some extent in modern English, but the word *fool* has undergone some diachronic changes.

in meaning. This topic was studied by Empson (1964: 105-157) who was interested in the use of *fool* in Shakespeare.¹⁰ Using basically the OED, Empson (1964: 111) found that the meanings of *fool* subdivided sometime after the thirteenth century. The basic *fool*¹⁻³ 'one who is stupid, simple-minded, or lacking in common sense' was used as far back as 1275, though the meaning of *fool*² 'ament' was used in 1540. The meaning of *fool*⁴ 'jester' is found back to 1370, and that of *fool*⁵ 'dupe' found back to 1440.¹¹ However, there is one archaic sense of *fool* that was lost by the thirteenth century. In the Bible, e. g., Ecc. X. 12, Matt. V. 22, *fool* is a word of stern contempt meaning 'viciously stupid, impious'. This insulting contempt is not found in the same degree in any of the modern meanings of *fool*, unless it transformed into an intentional sense of *fool*³ 'blockhead'.

2.3. The Lexical Fields of *Fool*. This analysis of the semantic and lexical fields of *fool* is based upon three of the best English thesauri: the preeminent Roget's (Chapman 1977), the antiquated March's (1910), and the fascinating ATS [*American Thesaurus of Slang*] (Berry and Van Den Bark 1952). In Table 2, the relative sizes of the lexical fields for *fool* are indicated. Many lexemes are listed under more than one category, and certain closely related fields are indicated in parentheses.¹²

The most basic lexical field under consideration is that for *fool*¹ 'ass,

Table 2. The Lexical Fields of *Fool*

Lexical Field	Roget's		March's		ATS	
	Category	Words	Category	Words	Category	Words
<i>fool</i> ¹ 'ass'	471	181	Fool	101	396 397 (151.9)	466 199 (43)
<i>fool</i> ² 'ament'	471.8 (473)	22 (64)	Maniac	24	152	210
<i>fool</i> ³ 'blockhead'	477.8 (471.3)	16 (32)	Dunce	16	433.3	155
<i>fool</i> ⁴ 'jester'	612.10	24	Wag	47	—	—
<i>fool</i> ⁵ 'dupe'	620 967.7	42 24	Gull	17	(391) 392	(330) 117

jerk, one lacking in sense or judgement'. In this sense, the word *fool* is used in various combinations of colloquial forms (*tomfool perfect|born|precious fool*, and *foolheaded*), vulgar forms (*damn|goddamn fool*), and derived slang forms (*darn|dern|dang fool*). Some of the other more salient words in this field are *stupid|egregious ass*, *jackass*, *boob(y)*, *sap*, *jerk*, *silly (ass|goose)*, *blockhead* and *numskull*.

The lexical field of *fool*² 'ament, idiot, one who is mentally deficient' is more limited than, but in many cases coincides with the field of *fool*¹ 'ass'. In the field for *fool*² 'ament' there are both common words like *simpleton*, (*driveling|blithering*) *idiot*, *imbecile*, *moron*, *half-wit*, *lunatic*, *loon*, *madman*, *nut*, *crackpot*, *screwball*; and technical terms like *psychotic*, *psychopath*, and *schizophrenic*.

Many of the above lexemes for *fool*¹⁻² are also found in the field for *fool*³ 'blockhead'. Some of the words in the lexical field for this *fool*³ can refer to lack of education, like *dunce*, *ignoramus*, *know-nothing*, *illiterate*; lack of intelligence, like *dolt*, *dullard*, *ninny*, *dope*, *nincompoop*, *nitwit*, *dimwit*, *dumbbell*, *lowbrow*, or *harebrain*; or lack of sophistication, like *oaf*, *lout*, *lummo*, *dabbler*, *greenhorn*, or *dillettante*.

The lexical field for *fool*⁴ 'jester, clownish retainer, is largely antiquated vocabulary. Within this limited field are words such as *buffoon*, *clown*, *zany*, *merry-andrew*, *motley (fool)*, and *harlequin*. Professional entertainers today are only figuratively "jesters," though they do "jest."

The lexical field for *fool*⁵ 'dupe, one who is made a fool' is the last one to be considered here. Some of the lexemes within this field refer to someone who is made fun of, such as *laughingstock*, *butt*, *goat*, *fair game*, *figure of fun*, or *everybody's fool*. Other words in this field refer to a gullible person who is taken advantage of, such as *gull*, *patsy*, *sucker*, *victim*, *easy mark*, *sitting duck*, or *chump*.

Many of the individual lexemes that are found within the lexical fields for *fool* are polysemous and can apply to more than one meaning of *fool*. In this respect, the lexical arrangements for *fool* are quite similar to those for *baka*.

3. Comparison of *Baka* and *Fool*

3.1. Etymologies. The original sources for these two words are quite different, yet there is an intriguing possibility of a coincidence. *Baka* came into Japanese from a Buddhist priests' adaptation of a Sanskrit word for 'fool'. The actual word is uncertain, but it was probably *moha* 'bewildered, deluded', *mahallaka* 'senile, decrepit', or *mūrka* 'stupid, dull'. The origins of *fool* are clearer than those of *baka*. *Fool* is derived from the Latin *follis* 'bellows, inflated ball' that was extended to mean 'windbag, empty-headed'. There is a possibility that this Latin *follis* came from an Indo-European root. Thus, it is conjecturable that both *baka* and *fool* came from Proto-Sanskrit, or Proto-Indo-European, words. The earliest textual use of *baka* was in the early fourteenth century; and the earliest textual use of *fool* was in the late thirteenth century.

3.2. Parallels in Meanings. The various meanings of *baka* and *fool*, as diagrammed in Figures 1 and 2, are quite interesting when compared. In Figure 3, only the basic meanings of *baka* and *fool* are displayed, and not the extended or special meanings.

Admittedly, the enumeration of meanings for *baka* and *fool*, as shown in Figure 3, were chosen intentionally. Thus, *baka*¹ could have been called *baka*², *mutatis mutandis*. But still, there are some remarkable semantic parallels.

The strongest parallels are among the basic meanings. Both *baka*¹ and *fool*¹ mean 'ass, jerk'; both *baka*² and *fool*² mean 'ament, idiot'; and both *baka*³ and *fool*³ mean 'blockhead, ignoramus', though *baka*³ tends to imply 'dullard' and *fool*³ tends to imply 'dunce'. There are also many lexical co-occurrences among the fields of *baka*¹⁻³ and *fool*¹⁻³. Perhaps this is an indication that the primary meanings of *baka*¹⁻³ and *fool*¹⁻³ ought

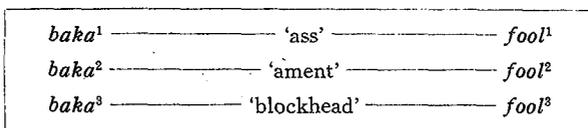


Figure 3. Basic Meanings of *Baka* and *Fool*

not to be subdivided into three, but should be one basic 'fool'—'person lacking in sense or intelligence'.

There are also some other semantic parallels between the secondary meanings of *baka* and *fool*. *Baka*⁴ 'worthless' and *baka*⁵ 'excess' are semantic extensions of 'foolish' from the basic sense of *baka*¹⁻³ 'fool'. And *fool*⁶ 'special weakness for' and *fool*⁷ 'incomparable' are likewise semanto-syntactic extensions of the basic sense of *fool*¹⁻³, as found in *fool for* and *fool to*. There is a weak possibility of a parallel between *baka*⁵ 'excess, foolish' and *fool*⁶ 'special weakness, ardent enthusiast'—if moderation is wise, then excess is foolish. There are no apparent parallels among the specialized meanings of *baka*⁶⁻⁸ and *fool*⁸⁻⁹.

3.3. Equivalent Expressions. The above semantic parallels are abstract, but there is another kind of parallel between *baka* and *fool* that is more concrete. This is the lexical equivalency between certain compounds and expressions.

The modifiers *bakageta* 馬鹿げた, *bakana* 馬鹿な, *bakabakashii* 馬鹿々々しい, and *bakakusai* 馬鹿臭い can all mean 'foolish'. The expressions *baka ni suru* 馬鹿にする, *baka ni sareru* 馬鹿にされる, and *koboaka ni suru* 小馬鹿にする all mean 'make a fool of (someone else)'. *Baka o miru* 馬鹿を見る means 'make a fool of oneself, do something foolish'. Additionally, *baka o suru* 馬鹿をする, *bakana koto o suru* 馬鹿な事をする, and *bakana mane* 馬鹿な真似をする all mean 'act like a fool, do something foolish'. *Baka yobawarisuru* 馬鹿呼ばわりする means 'call someone a fool'. And *bakadokoro ka nakanaka nukemeganai* 馬鹿どころか中々抜け目がない means 'be nobody's fool'. These are all cases in which there are trans-lational equivalents for foolish actions.

3.4. Lexical Resemblances. If we include nonstandard (literary, slang, and vulgar) levels of the lexicon, there are a number of synonyms for *baka* and *fool* that have similar elements. For example, the slang expression *hanninmae* 半人前 (lit. half a person/portion) 'dolt, dullard' is similar to the expressions *halfwit* or *only half there*. Some of the more productive semantic elements for 'fool' words are 'empty', 'wood', 'short' and 'shallow', 'dull', 'dark', 'head' and animal names.

The semantic element of 'empty' is seen in a number of words meaning 'fool'. In Japanese, there are *tawakemono* 虚け者 'fool, ass, idiot' and *koke* 虚仮 'fool, dunce'—and in English there are *empty headed/beaned*, *empty plate*, *vacancy of mind*, and *have a vacant attic/belfry/loft*. The sense of 'wood(en)' is found in *tohenboku* 唐変木 'stock, stick, log, block-head', *dekunobo* 木偶坊 'puppet, blockhead, dunce', *kairai* 傀儡 '(political) puppet, dummy', *koppa* 木端 'wood chip, splinter' is used in *koppa-yarō* 木端野郎 'fool', and *udo no taiboku* 独活の大木 means 'gawky/useless fellow'.¹³ Some similar English terms are *blockhead*, *dummy*, and *stick*.

The meaning of 'short' or 'shallow/thin' is seen in several words; *usu-baka* 薄馬鹿 'fool, simpleton', *usuppera* 薄っぺら 'shallow-minded', *asahaka* 浅はか 'shallow/short-witted, foolish', *senpaku* 浅薄 'shallow, superficial', and the technical *seishin-hakajaku* 精神薄弱 'weak/feeble minded'. These same notions are seen in the English words *short-witted/sighted*, *shallow brain/pate*, and *shallowness of mind*.

'Dullness' is a productive element in lexemes having to do with foolishness. In Japanese, there are: *nibui* 鈍い 'dull, thick', (*tan*) *don-baka* (単) 鈍馬鹿 'fool', *donbutsu* 鈍物 'dunce, dullard', *donsai* 鈍才 'dull-witted', *tonchiki* 頓痴気 'silly/stupid fool', *tonchinkan* 頓珍漢 'absurd, contradictory', *rodon* 魯鈍 'imbecile, stupid', *tonma* 頓馬 'ass, donkey, dunce', *donkan* 鈍感 'insensible, stolid, dull', *chidon* 遅鈍 'dull, stupid', *gudon* 愚鈍 'stupidity, silliness', *donkon* 鈍根 'dull-witted', and *dontsuku* 鈍つく 'dull-/slow-witted'. In English, there are: *dull-witted*, *dull understanding*, *dullard*, *dullhead*, *dull-brain*, as well as the opposite, *not too sharp*.

One semantic element that would predictably be found for words in the lexical fields for 'fool' is 'brain' or 'head'. In Japanese, there are lexemes such as these: *no-misonai* 脳味噌ない 'blockhead, dunce', *no-tarin* 脳たりん 'slow-witted, simpleton', *sono* 粗脳 'fool, idiot', *nomakuen* 脳膜炎 'meningitis, fool', *tori-atama* 鳥頭 'stupid fool', and perhaps *ishi-atama* 石頭 'hard-headed, stubborn'. There are many more such words in English, especially for slang, such as: *pinbrain*, *peabrain*, *addlebrain*, *blubberbrain*, *birdbrain*, and *fatbrain*; *asshead*, *blockhead*, *blubberhead*, *bonehead*, *chowderhead*, *fathead*, *featherhead*, *hardhead*, *jughead*, *knucklehead*, *meathead*,

mushhead, saphead, softhead, thickhead, and woodenhead.

The element of 'darkness' is seen in *hiruandon* 昼行燈 '(as foolish as) a lamp in broad daylight', *akimekura* 明き盲 'blind person, ignoramus', *angu* 暗愚 'imbecility', and *gumai* 愚昧 'stupid, idiot'; just as it is in *dimwit, blind fool, and be in the dark.*

Many languages have words for 'fool' that are derived from the names of animals. There seem to be more such lexemes in English than in Japanese. There are general terms: *chikūsho* 畜生 'beast, ass'; and *animal, beast, varmit*. A number are equine terms: *doaba* 駕馬 'hack, fool', *tonma* 頓馬 'ass, dunce', and *daben* 駄弁 'foolish talk' (coming from *daba* 駄馬 'pack/draft horse'); and *ass, jackass, horse's ass* (and its many euphemisms), *horse, mule, and donkey*. In English there are terms referring to cattle: *calf, mooncalf, bull head, and (big/dumb) ox*. Birds are quite common sources for 'fool' terms: *tori-atama* 鳥頭 'fool' (primarily Hokkaido dialect?), *hiyoko* 雛 'fledgling, greenhorn', and perhaps *aho-dori* 阿呆鳥 (or 天信翁), the name of the 'albatross'; and (*sad/dumb*) *bird, birdbrain, featherbrain, owl, loon(y), (silly) goose, (dumb) cluck/dodo, and cuckoo*. For canines, there are *inu-chikushō* 犬畜生 'ass, fool', and (*dirty/hound*) *dog, airdale, cur, (dirty) hyena and son-of-a-bitch*.¹⁴ In English, there are some terms for primates: (*big/dizzy*) *ape, (big) baboon, and (big/little) monkey*; and for fish: *sardine, (poor) shrimp, cod, and (big/poor) fish*. And many other such terms for miscellaneous animals: *blind as a bat, dumb bunny/rabbit, (dirty) skunk, swine, pig, worm, and toad*; cf. *inonaka nokaeru* 井の中の蛙 'fool (of limited views)'. There are many other such animal terms for 'fool'.¹⁵

3.5. Pragmatics of Fool-Calling. There are many ways to call someone a fool in both Japanese and English. The speech-act is essentially the same, but there are some pragmatic differences.

One important factor in the pragmatics of derision is vocabulary availability. It seems that there are more words for calling someone a fool in English than in Japanese. Referring back to Tables 1 and 2, it is evident that the lexical field for *fool*¹ 'ass' is larger than that for *baka*¹ 'ass'. Within the standard level of vocabulary, there are about 180 words for

*fool*¹ in Roget's as compared with some 36 words for *baka*¹ in Ōno and Hamanishi. In the slang level of the lexica, there are about 700 words for *fool*¹ (ATS), compared with about 140 slang words for *baka*¹ (Horiuchi 1975: 391-3). And within the dialect level, there are said to be over 1300 dialectal English words for *fool* (Weekly 1932: 137), and about 120 Japanese words for *baka* (Tōjō 1954). Naturally, a thesaurus is not the same as a lexical structure; comparing lexical groups in different thesauri of different qualities is not the same as comparing the lexical fields. But in general, there seems to be greater lexical diversity for 'fool'-words in English.

Simply making the observation that English has more words for 'fool' than Japanese is not *per se* significant. The significance is in why this is so. To use the well-known example of the many words for 'snow' in certain Eskimo languages; the fact there are many words for 'snow' is not that important in itself. The linguistic importance lies in the reason that a lexicon has such semantic specialization. The reason for the many 'snow' words in Eskimo languages is climate. What is the reason for the relatively few 'fool' words in Japanese?

One likely reason for the relatively few Japanese words for 'fool' is vagueness. In both English and Japanese, the words for 'fool' have meanings that vary along scales of friendly-hostile, or joking-serious. In English, at one end of a scale are words like *silly goose* and at the other end are words like *stupid asshole*. And in Japanese, at one end are words like *kamaboko baka* 蒲鉾馬鹿 'silly chump' and at the other end are words like *baka-yarō* 馬鹿野郎 'damn fool'. The difference is in the degree of lexical diversification along the scales of meaning. English seems to have more 'fool' words with more specificity—Japanese seems to have fewer 'fool' words with more vagueness.

There are decided pragmatic and communicative advantages to such lexical vagueness. If you call me a *stupid son-of-a-bitch*, I know exactly what you mean. But if you call me a *baka-yarō*, I cannot be so sure of what you mean. The expression *baka-yarō* 馬鹿野郎 is one of the most insulting terms in the Japanese lexicon, but it is vague and can range in

meaning from an affectionate 'silly-willy' to an abusive 'jerk-off fool'. *Baka-yarō* is so widely used that it has become semantically weak and vague. Such vagueness can serve to conceal hostility and thus to maintain social harmony.

Consider the following example. In the first situation, two children have a tricycle accident; in the second, two taxi-drivers have an automobile accident. In Japanese, both the child and the taxi-driver might be likely to use a word such as *baka-yarō* to mean 'fool'. But in English, the child might use a word such as *turkey*, and the taxi-driver might use a vulgar word such as *piece of shit*; both of these words mean 'fool', but they are far too specific to be used interchangeably. In English, it would be inappropriate for a child to use an expression like *piece of shit*, and it would be practically inconceivable for a taxi-driver to use an expression like *turkey* when there are so many other English words that are exquisitely more suitable.

It cannot be said that English is better suited for fool-calling than Japanese. English may have more semantic diversification for 'fool' words, but Japanese has other kinds of lexical diversification. In Japanese, there are a great many pronouns, and this lexical diversification even includes some insulting second-person forms, such as *omē* おめえ and *kisama* 貴様.

The basic meanings of *baka* and *fool* are very close, and in many expressions they are translationally equivalent. The Japanese and English lexical structures for 'fool' words are relatively disparate.

4. Footnotes

1. Shinmura (1930: 102-3) notes several early lexical texts with *moha*. Both the *Honyaku myogishū* 翻訳名義集 and the *Shiojiri* 塩尻 have *boka*, ボカ. The *Bongo somyo* 梵風雑名 has *moka*, もか. And the *Rigen shūran* 俚言集覽 has 慕訶, *moga* or *boka*.

2. Shinmura (ibid.) also notes early texts with *mahallaka*. The *Rigen shūran* 俚言集覽 has the transcription 摩訶羅, *makara* or *bakara*. Both the *Geno ongi* 玄応音義 and the *Shibunritsu shoshokushiki* 四分律疏 飾宗記 have 莫喝洛迦, *mokarakuku* or *bokkarakuka*. And the *Bongotenjibun*

梵語千字文 has 母羅佉, *borikya* or *bōrakyā*.

3. Both the *Rigen shūran* 俚言集覽 and the *Komondo kairoku* 好問堂海錄 associate *baka* with *ōmaka* 大まか 'generous, unsparing'. In the *Matsuya hiki* 松屋筆記, *baka* is associated with *bokeru* 耄る 'grow senile, dote, become feeble-minded'.

4. In modern Chinese, this 馬鹿 *mǎlù* does not mean 'fool', but is the name for the 'red deer'.

5. In addition, Horiuchi (1975: 391-3) lists about 140 slang words for *baka*¹, but does not list any for *baka*²⁻⁵. In Ōno and Hamanishi (1981): *baka*¹ is subcategory 581a, *gujin* 愚人 'fool, idiot'; *baka*² is 673b, *angu* 暗愚 'imbecility'; *baka*³ is 674a, *donkan* 鈍感 'obtuse'; *baka*⁴ is 174c, *mukachi* 無価値 'worthless'; and *baka*⁵ is 190b, *kado* 過度 'excess'. In NLRI (1964), the subcategories are untitled, but the relevant categories are these: *baka*¹ is part of category 1.234, *jimbutsu* 人物 'people'; *baka*² is in 1.3003, *seijo* 性情 'character'; *baka*³ is in 3.304, *kashikoi-oroka* 賢い・愚か 'intelligence and stupidity'; *baka*⁴ is in 3.3010, *koroyoi* 快い 'pleasant'; and *baka*⁵ is in 3.1993, *hanahada* はなはだ 'excess'.

6. Like *baka*, *ahō* is also written with *ateji*, either 阿呆 or 阿房. There are no less than five possible etymologies for *ahō* (given in Shogakukan 1972, 1: 392): 1. from *urotaeru* 狼狽える or *awateru* 慌てる 'get confused, flustered', 2. from *awai* 淡い 'faint, pale', 3. from names for 'wet nurse' such as *ahō* 阿保 or *abō* 阿母, 4. an allusion to Qinshi Huangdi's 秦始皇帝 (remember Chao Gao?) palace called the *Āfáng gōng* 阿房宮, and 5. from *okogamashii* 烏澁 'presumptuous, absurd'. The author would like to suggest another possibility—a Chinese word for 'fool', *ā-dōu* 阿斗. This word, like *dunce*, is a reference to a foolish person, A Dou, the son of the last emperor of the Shu Han 蜀漢 dynasty (221-263). The origins of *ahō* deserve more study.

7. *Ahōna* 阿呆な means *bakana* 馬鹿な 'foolish' *ahōzura* 阿呆面 means *bakazura* 馬鹿面 'foolish face', *ahōkusai* 阿呆臭い means *bakakusai* 馬鹿臭い 'foolish' and *ahōrashii* 阿呆らしい means *bakarashii* 馬鹿らしい 'foolish'.

8. *Ball* came from a Middle English *bal*, an Old Norse *ball*, and a Germanic root **balluz* that is related to *balloon*. *Belly* came from an Old

English *belig*, and is akin to an Old High German *balg* 'swell, bag'. *Blow* came from an Old English *blāwan*, an Old High German *blājan*, and perhaps an Indo-European **bhlā-* 'swell' that is associated with the Latin *flāre* and the English *inflate*.

9. In many countries and throughout history, the royal courts kept freaks, dwarfs, and idiots for the purpose of providing amusement. However, the court fool or jester was seldom an actual imbecile; instead, the role of fool allowed for a range of satire, wit and tricks.

10. Especially "King Lear," "As You Like It," and "Twelfth Night."

11. Empson (*ibid.*) notes that the meaning 'loved and pitied as a dependent' began around 1503, but has been lost in modern English. Cf. *oyako-baka* 親子馬鹿 'overly fond parent'.

12. The most complete treatment of *fool*'s lexical fields is in Roget's (Chapman 1977) in subcategories 470 "Foolishness" and 471 "Fool." In Roget's *fool*¹ is found under subcategory 471, "Fool"; *fool*² is especially 471.8, and 473.15-17 under subcategory 473, "Insanity, Mania"; *fool*³ is in 477.8, "Ignoramus" under 477, "Ignorance"; *fool*⁴ is within 612, "Entertainer"; and *fool*⁵ is in 620, "Dupe" and 967.7 "Laughingstock." In March's (1910) thesaurus the categories have names, but not numbers. *Fool*¹ is under the categories "Sage-Fool" and "Sagacity-Incapacity"; *fool*² is under "Saneness-Maniac" (March gives 24 words for a 'maniac' but none for a 'sane person'); *fool*³ is under "Scholar-Dunce"; *fool*⁴ is quite similar to "Wag"; and *fool*⁵ is under "Gull." In the ATS, *fool*¹ is widespread, and found under 151.9, "Foolish; Silly; Witless (of persons)," 396, "Terms of Disparagement," and 397, "Contemptible Person"; *fool*² is under 152, "Insanity, Crazy" but there are only verbal forms (e. g., *go crazy*, *go insane*) and compounds (e. g., *nutty as a fruitcake*) listed; *fool*³ is given in 433.3, "Stupid Person" and 433.4 "Ignoramus"; *fool*⁴ is not listed, but the closest field is 583.12, "Comedian"; and *fool*⁵ is given in 392, "Gullible Person, Dupe" and 391, "Unsophisticated Person, Dupe."

13. The *udo* is an herb (*Aralia cordata*) which has shoots eaten as vegetables, especially in salads.

14. Two similar parallels are seen for *mesu-inu* 雌犬 'bitch' and

megitsune 雌狐 'vixen' which both have the same literal and extended slang meanings in Japanese and English.

15. In ATS categories 396-7, there are many words for 'fool' that are derived from animal and food names. There are hardly any such Japanese terms coming from food names, except perhaps *tōfu-atama* 豆腐頭.

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