Classical concept learning experiments (1960s)

- Experimenter teaches a "concept" to a subject, giving new positive and negative examples (with feedback) until subject learns successfully
- Dependent measure is number of trials (examples) required for successful learning
- Independent measure is the type of concept

Examples

Concept

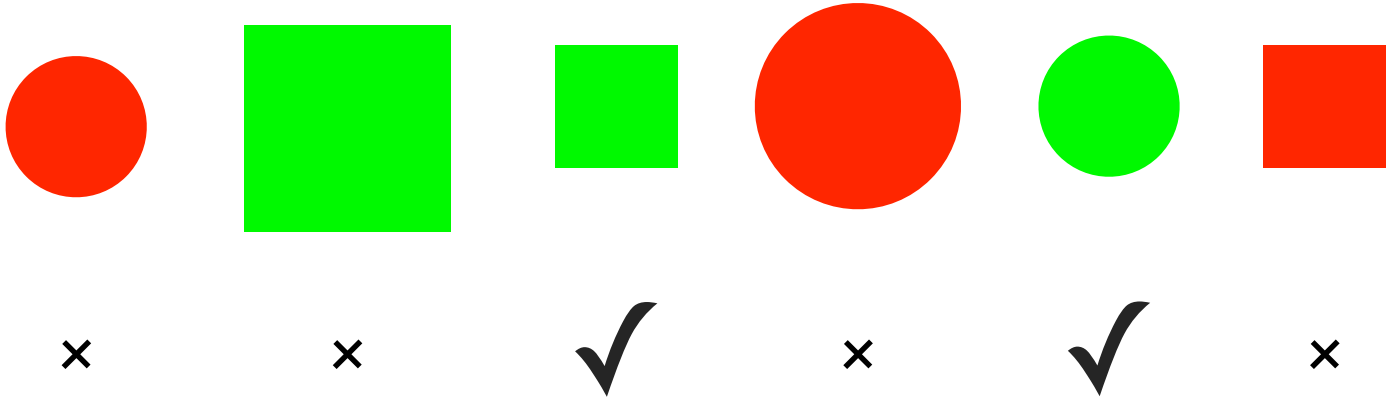
square

× ✓ ✓ × ✓ ×

affirmation

Examples

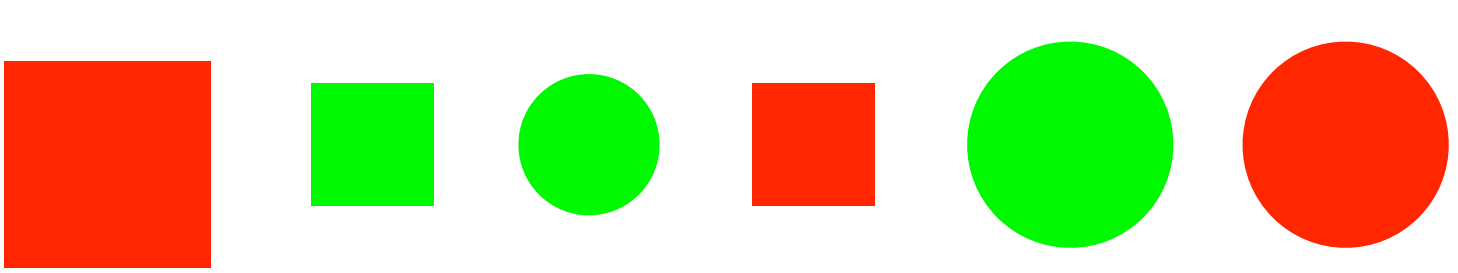
Concept



× × ✓ × ✓ ×

small ∧ green

conjunctive



✓ ✓ × ✓ × ✓

square ∨ red

disjunctive

Experimental conclusions

- Affirmation < Conjunction < Disjunction (inclusive) < Disjunction (exclusive)

  - especially: Conjunction < Disjunction

- This was seen as a very basic conclusion about learning
- But: it assumed that "concepts" were defined logically.

Classical vs. modern views of categories

- In the classical view, categories are logical constructs and have definitions

  A bachelor is an unmarried adult male person

  A triangle is a 3-sided geometric figure

- A definition lists necessary and jointly sufficient features

  Being unmarried is necessary, but not sufficient

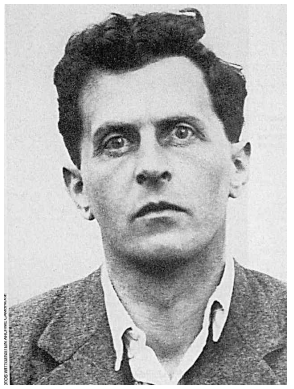
  All 4 features are jointly sufficient.

  - Bachelor $\leftrightarrow$ unmarried $\wedge$ adult $\wedge$ male $\wedge$ person

- Classical categories have clear-cut boundaries

  Objects are either members or non-members of the category

Fuzziness and family resemblance



Ludwig Wittgenstein

- Most mental categories have “fuzzy” boundaries

  Objects within them have a family resemblance but no clear definition

- Examples:

  game

  furniture

  bachelor (?)

  even number (?)

Prototypes

- Posner & Keele (1968) taught subjects artificial categories by providing examples with various degrees of distortion.

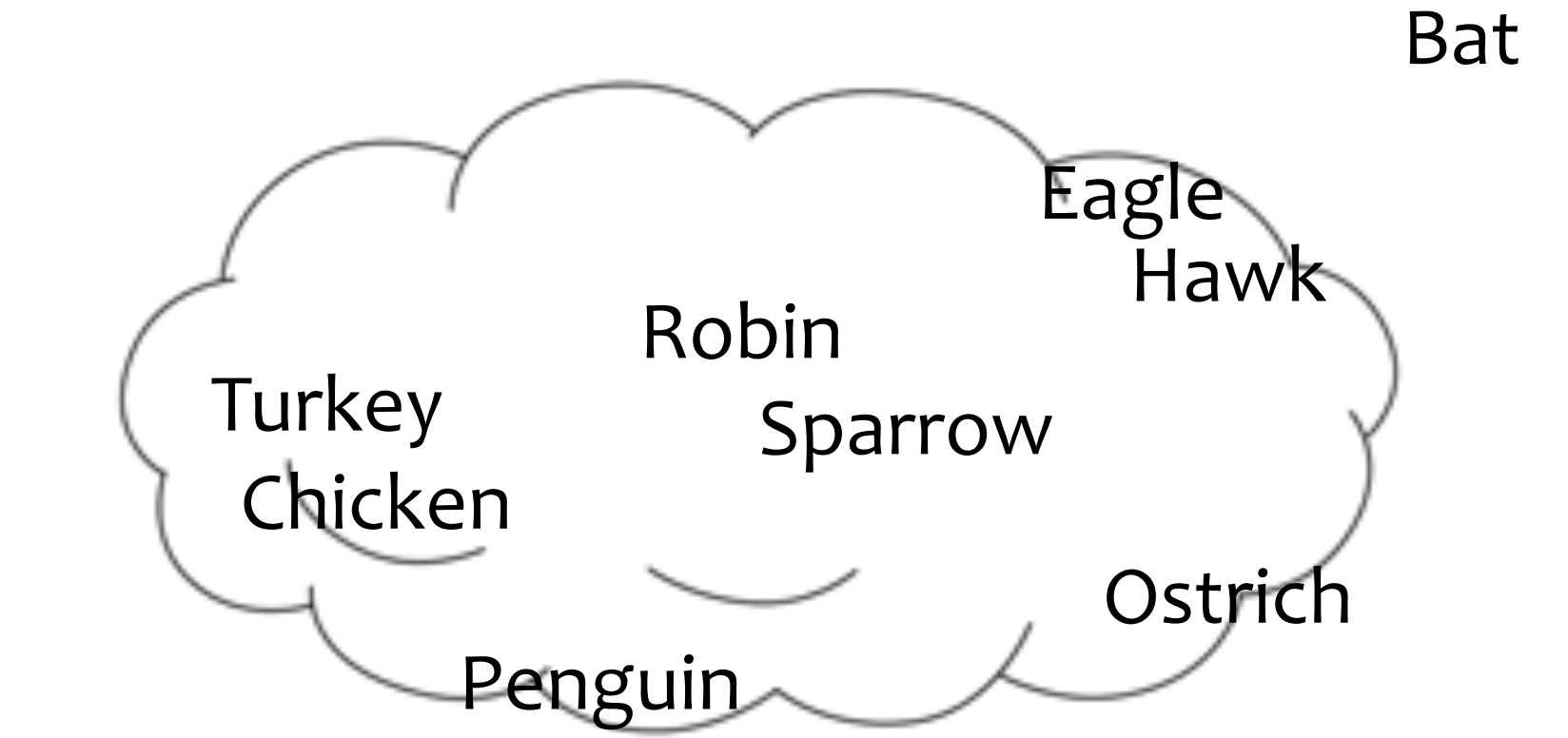
  - Subjects induce a "prototype"—a characteristic "normal" form

  - … even when highly typical examples were withheld (called prototypification).

- Eleanor Rosch (1973) studied color concepts in Dani people in Indonesia and concluded that concepts have "natural" central tendencies

  - Subjects had more trouble remembering atypical examples

Example: the bird category



Concept learning in the prototype model





"Average squirrel"

E.g.:

- Each feature in proportion to its prevalence
- Mean of positive examples

The prototype view

- The "prototype" (aka fuzzy, aka family-resemblance) view of human concepts:

  Mental concepts exhibit degrees of membership, called typicality

  ... and are defined by their central tendencies, called prototypes.

- e.g. Birds usually have feathers, fly, lay eggs, sing, make nests, live in trees, ...

  but none of these features are necessary or sufficient

- Category membership is determined by similarity to the prototype

Even definitional categories act fuzzy

- Armstrong, Gleitman & Gleitman (1983) tested very "definitional" categories like *odd number*, *female*, *grandmother*

  - Measured typicality ratings, RT to classify

- They found that even these concepts behave like fuzzy categories
- They argue however that definitions must be part of the meaning of certain concepts
- Instead they propose distinguishing between core meaning and identification procedures

Exemplar model

- In 1978 an alternative version of the "fuzzy" view was introduced, called the Exemplar model
- An exemplar models stores examples (called exemplars) to represent the "concept"
- Future instances are evaluated by comparison with the stored exemplars
  - *X* is a squirrel if it is more similar to stored examples of squirrels than it is to other stored exemplars
- There is no generalization or abstraction
- From about 1980-2010 much of the psychological literature centered on the battle between prototype models and exemplar models