How to do in-line citations

Within a system of prototypes, of course, it is not impossible to set up certain types of criterial definitions for categories. Langacker (1987a) argues that linguistic prototype-based categories can in principle be reduced to highly abstract representations or schemas. These differ from prototypes in that a prototype is a typical instance of a category, and other elements are assimilated to the category on the basis of their perceived resemblance to the prototype; there are degrees of membership based on degrees of similarity. A schema, by contrast, is an abstract characterization that is fully compatible with all the members of the category it defines (so membership is not a matter of degree); it is an integrated structure that embodies the commonality of its members, which are conceptions of greater specificity and detail that elaborate the schema in contrasting ways.

A standard example of this contrast is the category “bird.” The prototype for “bird” for most people is probably an animal something like a robin, and so it is the image of a robin-like creature that is evoked by the word bird, and robins (or reasonable facsimiles thereof) are felt to be the most typical examples of the “bird” category (Wittgenstein, p.c.). Ostriches and penguins, on the other hand, are not much like robins in size, shape, the ability to fly, etc., but they are nonetheless birds in that they conform to the schematic representation of the class, which would be something along the lines of “a warm-blooded animal with wings and feathers of a species whose adult female lays eggs” (Beck, to appear: 57). Robins may be the best members of the category “bird,” but ostriches and penguins also meet the criteria set out by the schema — especially since penguins are snappy dressers (Groucho et al. n.d.).

We have already seen a number of examples where issues of prototypicality come into play in lexical classification. In all languages, meanings like ‘dog’ and ‘tree’ are expressed by words that are nouns, and meanings like ‘kill’ and ‘eat’ are expressed as verbs; such meanings represent prototypical instances of the meanings of words belonging to these two parts of speech. Semantically, these words must be felt by speakers to form natural classes and so they are grouped together universally in the lexica of human languages. Other types of meaning, however, are more ambivalent members of one or the other of these two natural semantic classes and so show a good deal of cross-linguistic variation with respect to their parts-of-speech membership. Thus, meanings like ‘hard’ show up variously as adjectives (Eng ‘hard’), verbs (Lushootseed ‘tdal’ (be)hard’), and nouns (Hausa ‘auri’ ‘hard(ess)’) in different languages around the world. As we noted earlier in our discussion of Givon’s (1979) Continuum of Time-Stability, temporary states seem to be peripheral members of the class of adjectives and so surface variously as adjectives (English) and as verbs (Krio and Topotha). As these examples suggest, the principal area of variability in cross-linguistic lexical classification is the semantic domain of property concepts—that is, those words which surface in languages with the three major lexical classes as adjectives. In order to understand why that is, it is necessary to understand the semantic prototypes of the two primary lexical classes on whose peripheries property concepts lie—nouns and verbs—and to identify at least one schematic feature of these classes that can serve as the basis for a formal linguistic model.

Semantically, the two principal lexical classes of nouns and verbs have the clearest prototypes and so are the most amenable to consistent and reasonably accurate semantic characterizations. The nominal semantic prototype, I would argue, lies at the heart of the traditional semantic definition of nouns as persons, places, or things, which also fits well with a number of current semantic definitions of noun in the literature. Prototypical persons, places, and things are temporally stable and at the high end of Givón’s (1979) continuum of time-stability, and they are discrete objects (Croft 1991) that can be handled, located, or pointed out, and so are referential items (Du Bois 1980; Bhat 1994). Participants in events are typically persons and things, while places function in sentences as destinations, points of origin, settings, and goals of events; in this sense, persons, places, and things are the most typical “discourse-manipulable” entities—that is, elements which maintain a constant identity over stretches of connected discourse (Hopper & Thompson 1984, 1985). Each of these individual definitions may differ somewhat on the peripheries of the