

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385936679>

When is the extreme also typical? Using prototypicality to investigate representations of the lone-wolf terrorist

Presentation · November 2024

CITATIONS

0

READS

22

1 author:



[Daniel Malone](#)

Edge Hill University

7 PUBLICATIONS 3 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

When is the extreme also typical? Using prototypicality to investigate representations of the lone-wolf terrorist

Daniel Malone

Edge Hill Corpus Research Group :
Meeting #13

15/11/2024



Abstract

The term *lone wolf* figuratively conjures an image of an individual acting in isolation, perhaps motivated by a desire to break from societal norms. When applied to terrorism, *lone wolf* draws attention to the perceived aloneness of the perpetrator. However, evidence from the Lone Wolf Corpus (Malone, 2020) reveals that representations in the British press showed notable diachronic trends in how the lone-wolf terrorist's (LWT) aloneness was (re)presented, which in turn indexed broader discursive shifts.

In this presentation, I report on my approach to investigating representations of the LWT by adopting a prototypical categorisation framework to analysing discourse prosodies (i.e., implicit and explicit attitudes) (Stubbs, 2001: 66) of connection. This categorisation hinges on four key attributes identified during manual corpus annotation: (1) perpetration, (2) ideological motivation, (3) logistical support, and (4) resource provision. These attributes address whether the LWT was represented as operating in complete isolation or receiving some form of assistance, either direct or indirect, from individuals or organisations.

Six distinct connection types emerged from the data, reflecting different combinations of these attributes: the *Prototypical Lone Wolf Terrorist*, depicted as ideologically self-driven and operationally independent; *Assisted by Non-Affiliated Individual(s)*; *Inspired by Organisation*; *Informed by Organisation*; *Directed by Organisation*; and *Member of Organisation*. Each connection type was quantified, and its frequency was statistically analysed to trace diachronic discursive shifts.

The findings reveal a discursive reconstruction of the LWT over time. In the early period (2010-2014), the LWT was more frequently presented as a solitary actor, but later portrayals (particularly during 2015-2017) increasingly associated the lone wolf with broader, often Islamist, networks. This shift resulted in the LWT being depicted not as a fully independent individual, but rather as institutionalised and depersonalised—a faceless agent acting on behalf of extremist organisations.

First published 1903; not yet revised (entry history) [More entries for lone](#) [Nearby entries](#) [Share](#) [Cite](#) [Contribute](#) [Tab](#)

lone

- ADJECTIVE -

[Factsheet](#) [Etymology](#) [Meaning & use](#) [Pronunciation](#) [Forms](#) [Frequency](#) [Compounds & derived words](#)

3.c. lone wolf *noun*

1897-

(figurative) (a) a person who mixes little with others, a person who prefers to act alone; (b) a criminal who operates alone; also *attributive*. Hence (with hyphen) as *v. intransitive*, to live, work, operate, etc., alone.

1955 She is..a kind of lone wolf thief.

Publications of American Dialect Society No. 24. x. 166

1955 A 'lone wolf' terrorist.

Times 11 July 10/1

1959 He's no lone wolf from Leeds or anywhere else.

Streetwalker viii. 154

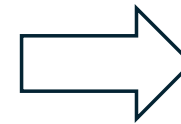
lone-wolf terrorist can be considered a sense-within-sense.

Prototypicality of *sandwich*

sandwich, *n.*² An article of food for a light meal or snack, composed of two thin slices of bread, usually buttered, with a savoury (originally *spec.* meat, esp. beef or ham) or other filling. [...]

Occasionally with only one slice of bread, as in *open sandwich* or open-faced sandwich (see [open-face adj. 2](#)), or with biscuits, sliced buns, or cake. (OED, 2024)

The prototypical sandwich?



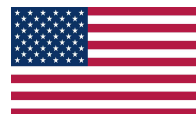
Other types
/within-senses
of sandwich?



Bánh Mì



Grilled Cheese



Steamed Buns



Smørrebrød



Relevant theoretical notions

Semasiology The exploration of the different meanings, or senses, of a lexical item.

Polysemy How a word is used to refer to different concepts.

Language in use perspective
(e.g., Geeraerts et al., 2024)

- the formal level – e.g., the lexical item *sandwich*.
- the conceptual level – e.g., cognitive frames for sandwich.
- denotational level – e.g., instantiations of sandwich, like grilled cheese, smørrebrød, or bánh mì.

Within-sense Polysemy
(e.g., Geeraerts et al., 2024)

- Investigates instances of use (i.e., denotational level).
- Aims to distinguish between overlapping (i.e., non-discrete) senses to identify which is more central or prototypical to the concept.

Prototype theory

- Relates to the users' experience (i.e., linguistic contexts).
- Meanings are not always static and uniform but instead are often shaped by the most typical (i.e., frequent) instances of usage.

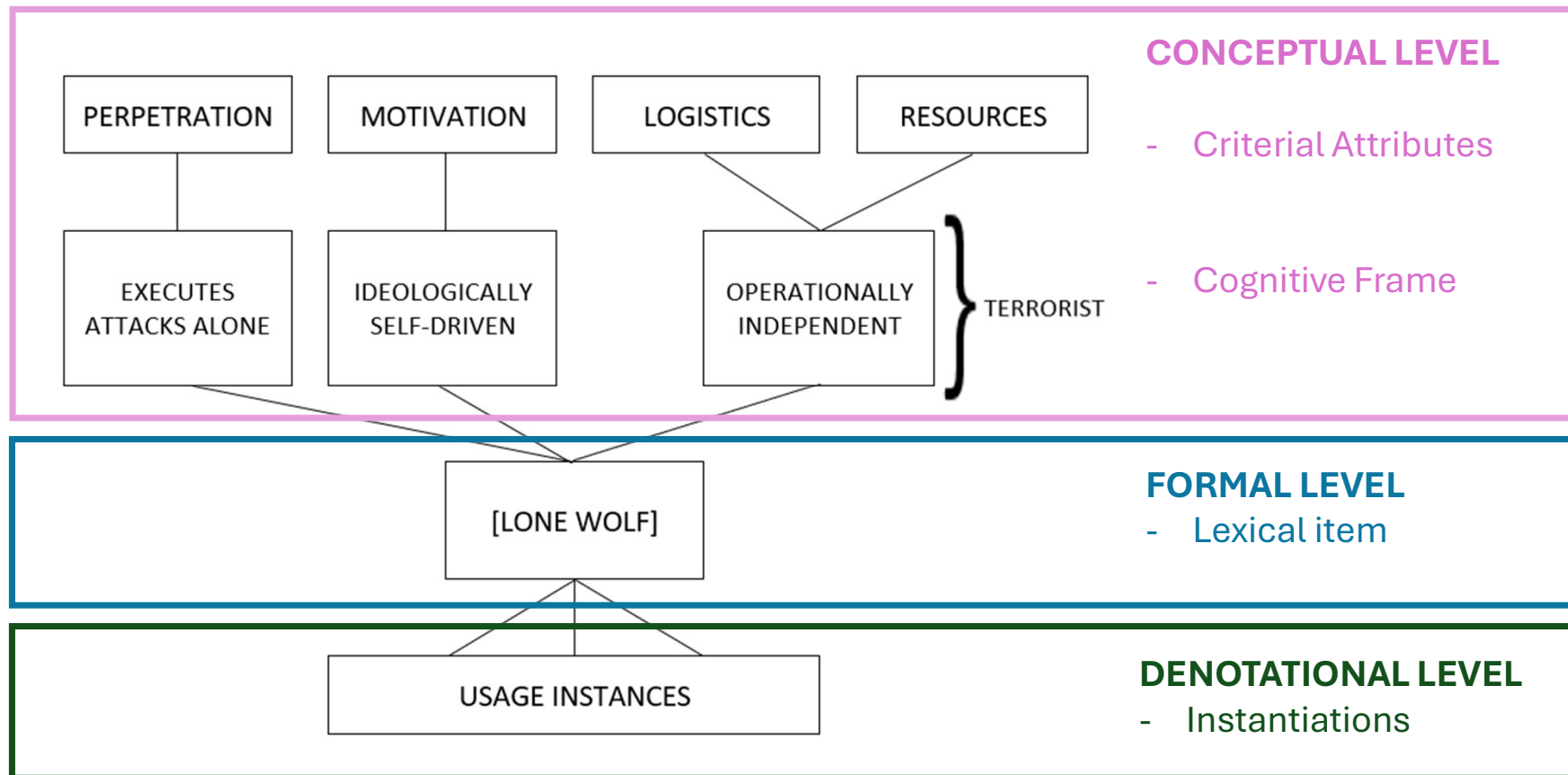
Identifying within-senses/types can be understood as “emerging definitions” (Gabrielatos, 2011, 2022; Moon, 2014). Any fluctuations in their usage (i.e., frequency changes) index discursive shifts.

Key characteristics of prototypical categories (Geeraerts et al., 2024: 9):

- Cannot be defined by a *single* set of criterial attributes
- Similarities are evident between types/sense (or senses-within-senses), but no criterial attributes are common to all .
- May have blurred or “fuzzy” boundaries (e.g., hotdog?).

Prototypicality and LWT Representations

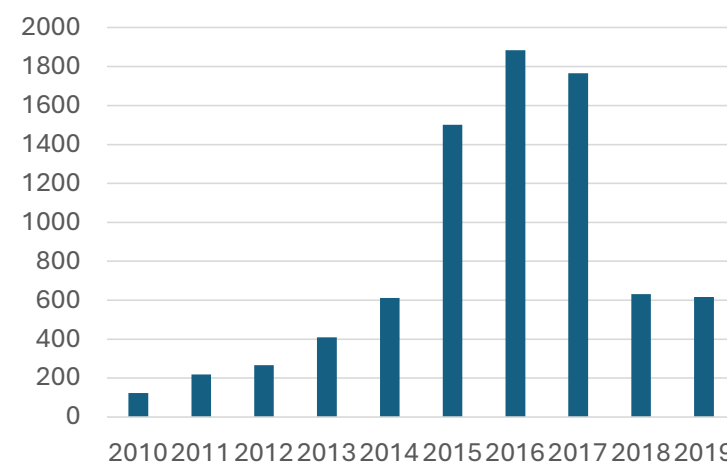
(cf. Evans, 2018)



The Data & Technical Aspects

- The Lone Wolf Corpus (Malone, 2020)
 - Topic-specific corpus, 8,655 UK press articles, 2000-2019
 - Time-specific subcorpora: 2010-2014, 2015-2017, 2018-2019
- Manual annotation of corpus instances of LONE WOLF
 - Categories and values developed via a bottom-up, iterative process
 - Approximately 3,000 instances examined with extended co-text (i.e., initial analytical window of 200 words)
- Sampling of corpus instances
 - 12 consistent collocates (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008) of LONE WOLF
 - C-collocates are defined by strength, reliability, and stability (ibid)
 - ACTOR, ATTACKER, FANATIC, TERRORIST, ACT, ATTACK, CARRY OUT, INSPIRE, THREAT, TERRORISM, *so-called*, *could*

LWC annual text frequency
2010-2019



Connection Types – Componential Analysis

Connection Types	Resemblance Attributes				Example Corpus Instances
	Perpetration	Motivation	Logistics	Resources	
<i>Prototypical LWT</i>	●	●	●	●	LONE WOLF KILLER: Westminster terrorist Khalid Masood 'acted alone'. <i>Express Online</i> , 2017
<i>Inspired by Organisation</i>	●	●	●	●	Major Nidal Hasan [...] was considered a lone wolf who supported terror network Al-Qaeda. <i>Daily Mail Online</i> , 2019
<i>Informed by Organisation</i>	●	●	●	●	Security fears have been raised for major public events such as London's Notting Hill Carnival after an Isis leader urged lone wolf attackers to target innocent people. <i>Evening Standard Online</i> , 2016
<i>Assisted by Unaffiliated Individuals</i>	●	●	●	●	The jury were sure that when [Madihah Taheer] ordered and paid for the cold steel knife she intended to assist her husband in terrorism. "Ummar Mirza you had moved a long way down the road to preparing acts of the lone wolf type. <i>Express Online</i> , 2017
<i>Directed by Organisation</i>	●	●	●	●	While he is thought to have been acting alone, other supposed ' lone wolf ' attackers are known to have been guided by distant, messaging handlers until the final moment. <i>Times</i> , 2017
<i>Member of Organisation</i>	●	●	●	●	He said that it was the last big plot attempted by al-Qaeda before it switched to ' lone wolf ' attacks. <i>Times</i> , 2015

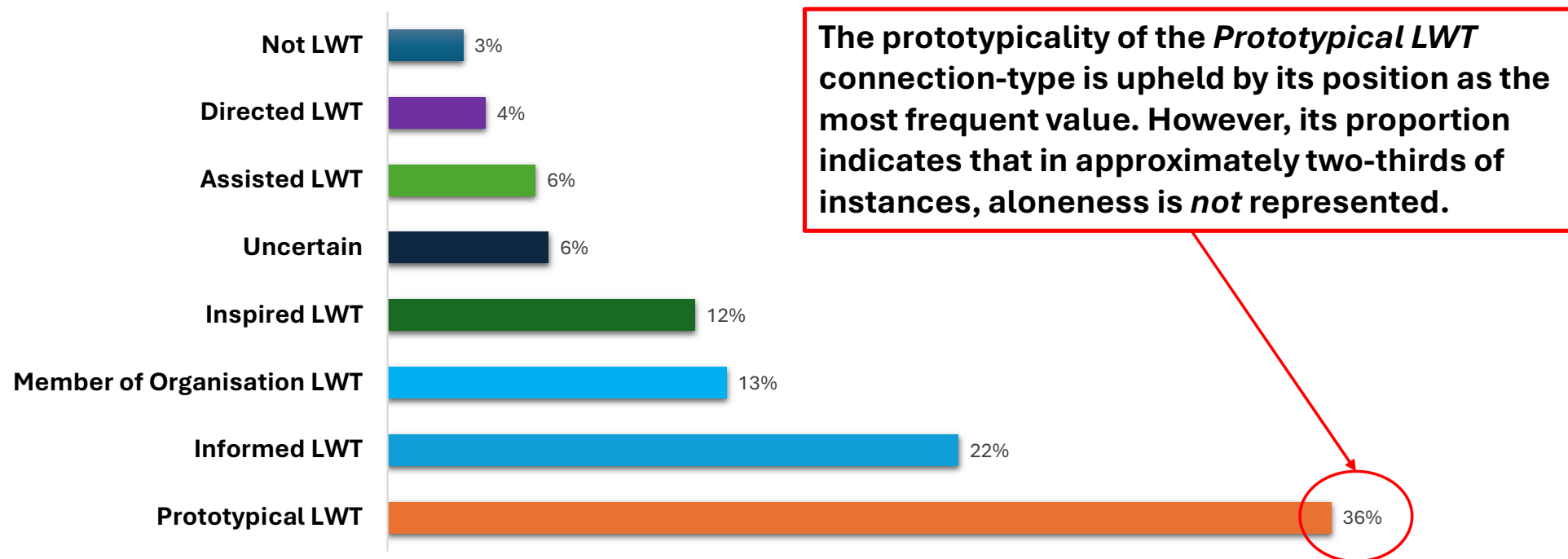
Key

Green = full independence

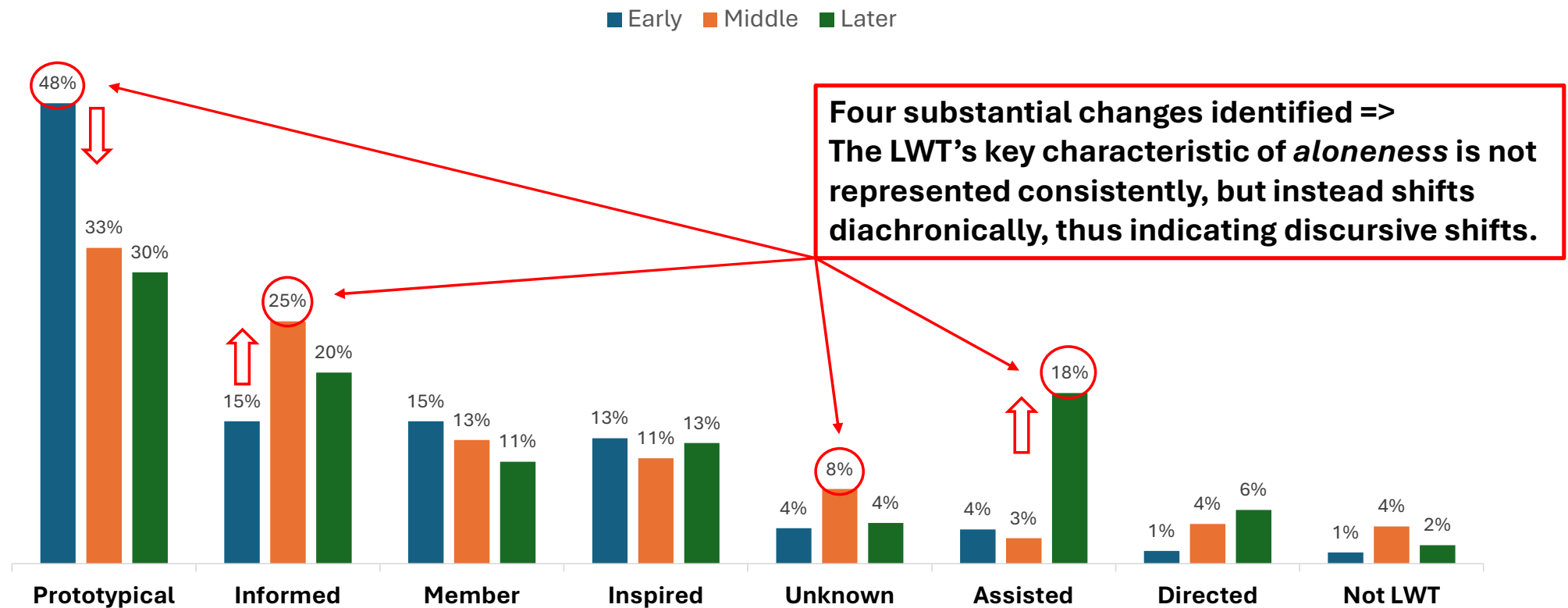
Yellow = influence or support in at least one highlighted attribute

Red = external influence

Results – Full Corpus Analysis



Results – Diachronic Analysis



Conclusion

- Early years: LWTs portrayed as autonomous, agentive terrorist actors.
- Middle years: Increased association with ISIS.
- Later years: Increased discourses on counter-terrorism success.

Representational shift - from *Lone Wolves* to *Drone Wolves*

Underpinned by two core processes:

1. Depersonalisation

- Reduced to a generalised, faceless mass
- Stripped of individual complexity and agency

2. Institutionalisation

- Functionalised as an organisational strategy of ISIS
- Essentialised as part of a coordinated global threat, connected through ideology and digital radicalisation

References

Evans, V. (2018). Conceptual vs. inter-lexical polysemy. In Pickering, L., & Evans, V. (eds.). *Language learning, discourse and cognition*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. [10.1075/hcp.64.08eva](https://doi.org/10.1075/hcp.64.08eva)

Gabrielatos, C. (2011, December 1-2). Collocational approaches to critical discourse studies: A case of critical corpus lexicography. *International Symposium on the Sociology of Words: Lexical Meaning, Combinatorial Potential and Computational Implementation*, LACELL, University of Murcia, Spain.

Gabrielatos, C. (2022). Corpus lexicography and critical discourse studies. *Critical Discourse Studies and Social Change*, Spain.

Gabrielatos, C., & Baker, P. (2008). Fleeing, sneaking, flooding: A corpus analysis of discursive constructions of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press 1996-2005. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 36(1), 5-38.

Geeraerts, D., Speelman, D., Heylen, K., Montes, M., De Pascale, S., Franco, K., & Lang, M. (2024). *Lexical variation and change: A distributional semantic approach*. Oxford University Press.

Malone, D. (2020) Developing a complex query to build a specialised corpus: Reducing the issue of polysemous query terms. Paper presented at *Corpora and Discourse International Conference 2020*, University of Sussex, UK.

Moon, R. (2014) Meanings, ideologies, and learners' dictionaries. In Abel, A., Vettori, C. & Ralli, N. (eds.) *Proceedings of the XVI EURALEX International Congress: The user in focus*. Bolzano/Bozen: Institute for Specialised Communication and Multilingualism. 85-105.

Stubbs, M. (2001). *Words and phrases: Corpus studies of lexical semantics*. Blackwell.