Key commitments and research methods

1 Categorisation and family resemblance

a. The philosopher Wittgenstein famously argued that the category GAME exhibits family resemblance. To test this, first make a list of as many different kinds of games as you can think of. Now see if there is a limited set of conditions that is common to this entire list (‘necessary’ conditions) and sufficient to distinguish this category from other related categories (‘sufficient’ conditions) like competitions, amusement activities and so on. Do your conclusions support or refute Wittgenstein’s claim?

b. Now see whether you can identify the ways in which the different games you list share family resemblance ‘traits’. Try to construct a ‘radial’ network showing the degrees of family resemblance holding between games of different kinds. A radial network is a diagram in which the most/more prototypical game(s) is/are placed at the centre and less prototypical games are less central, radiating out from the centre.

2 Polysemy

a. Consider the word head. Try to come up with as many different meanings for this word as possible. You may find it helpful to collect or create sentences involving the word.

b. Now consider the closed-class word you. Cognitive linguists assume that even closed-class words exhibit polysemy. Collect as many sentences as you can involving you and try to identify differences in how this word is used. Do your findings support the view that this closed-class word exhibits polysemy?
3 Metaphor

a. Reconsider the different meanings for head that you uncovered in the previous exercise. Would you class any of these distinct meanings as metaphorical? Explain your reasoning.

b. Now try to give an account of what motivated the extension from the ‘core’ meaning of head to the metaphoric usage(s).

c. Now compare your explanations with a dictionary based on historical principles, such as the Oxford English Dictionary. How does your account compare?