Language and Cognition – lecture 2

Construal

富嶽三十六景
東海道
吉田
不二見茶屋
御茶法事

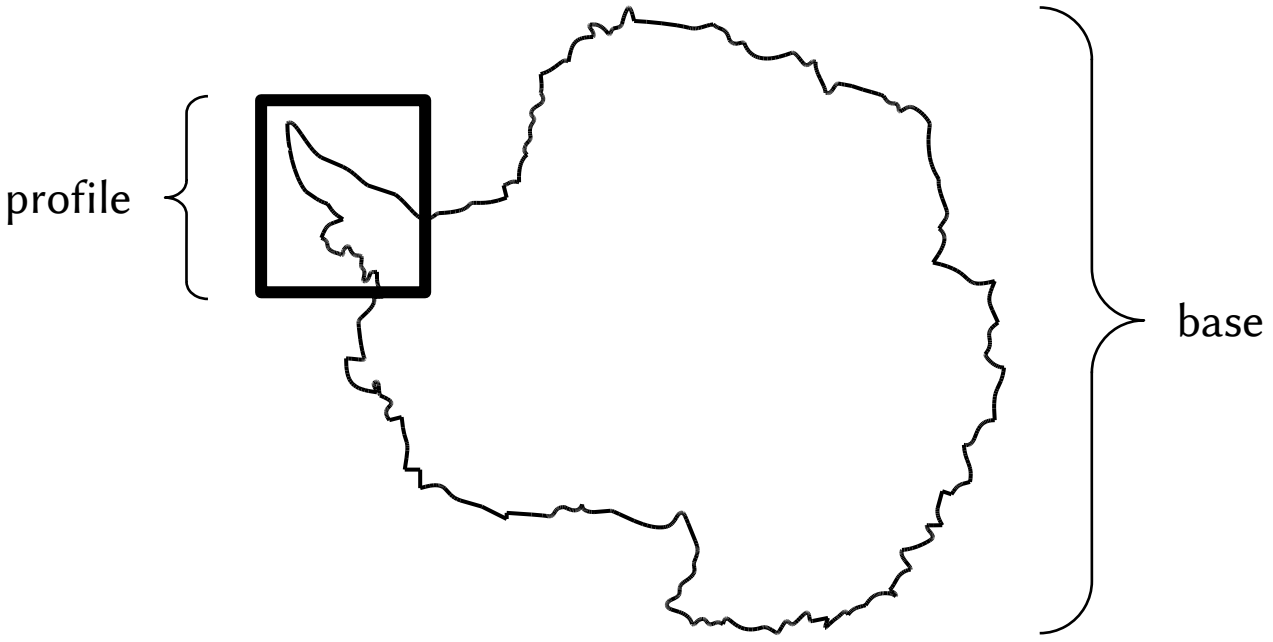
Definition of construal

- Construal is a way of mentally depicting the referent of a word or an expression. The referent can be portrayed in a number of different ways, depending on which aspect the conceptualizer wishes to emphasize. Therefore, there are typically several alternate ways of construing the referent.
- For example, the English expression *fountain pen* depicts the object differently than the Polish expression *wieczne pióro*. The former focuses on the fact that ink can squirt from the pen and the latter on the fact that the pen can be refilled and used "eternally."

Profile and base

- Our knowledge about the world is organized into the so-called **domains**.
- A representation of an object or an event is created when we "highlight" certain parts of a domain by directing our attention to these parts.
- These "highlighted" parts are the so-called **profile** and the respective domain is the so-called **base** for the profile.
- When we describe the meaning of a word or expression, we need to describe (among other things) what the profile and the base are.

peninsula



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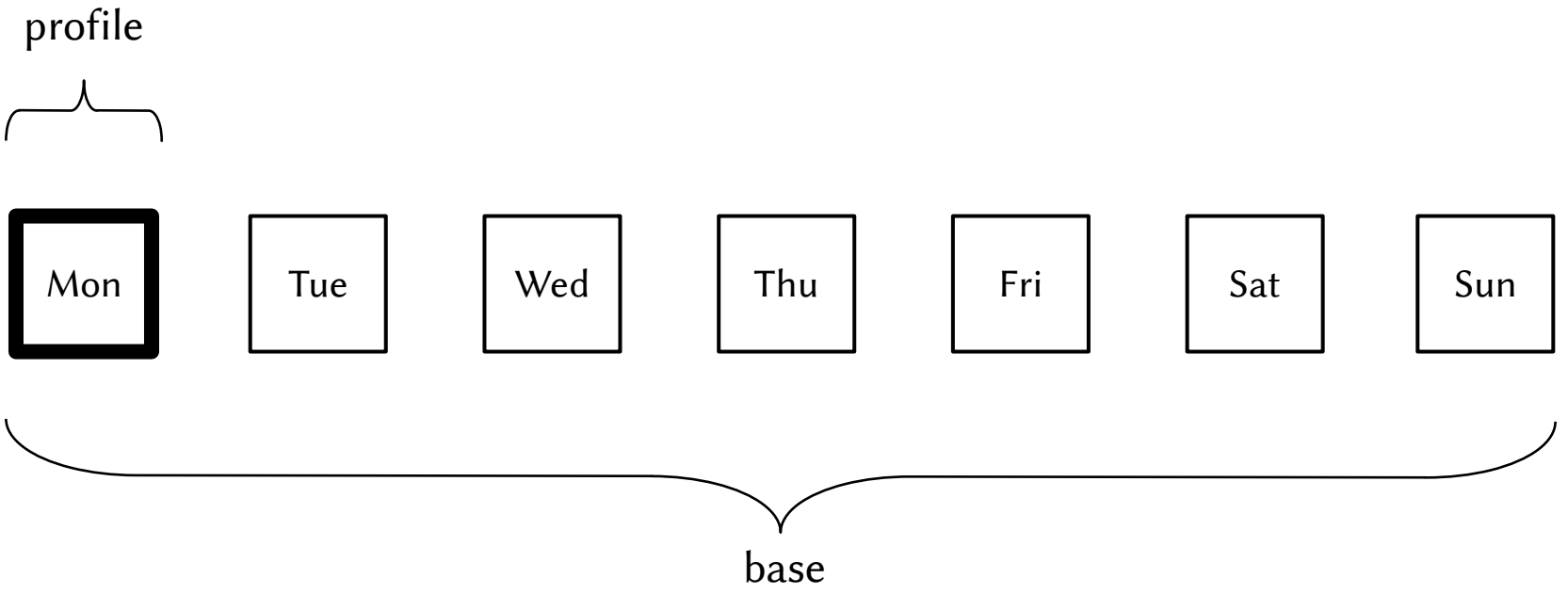

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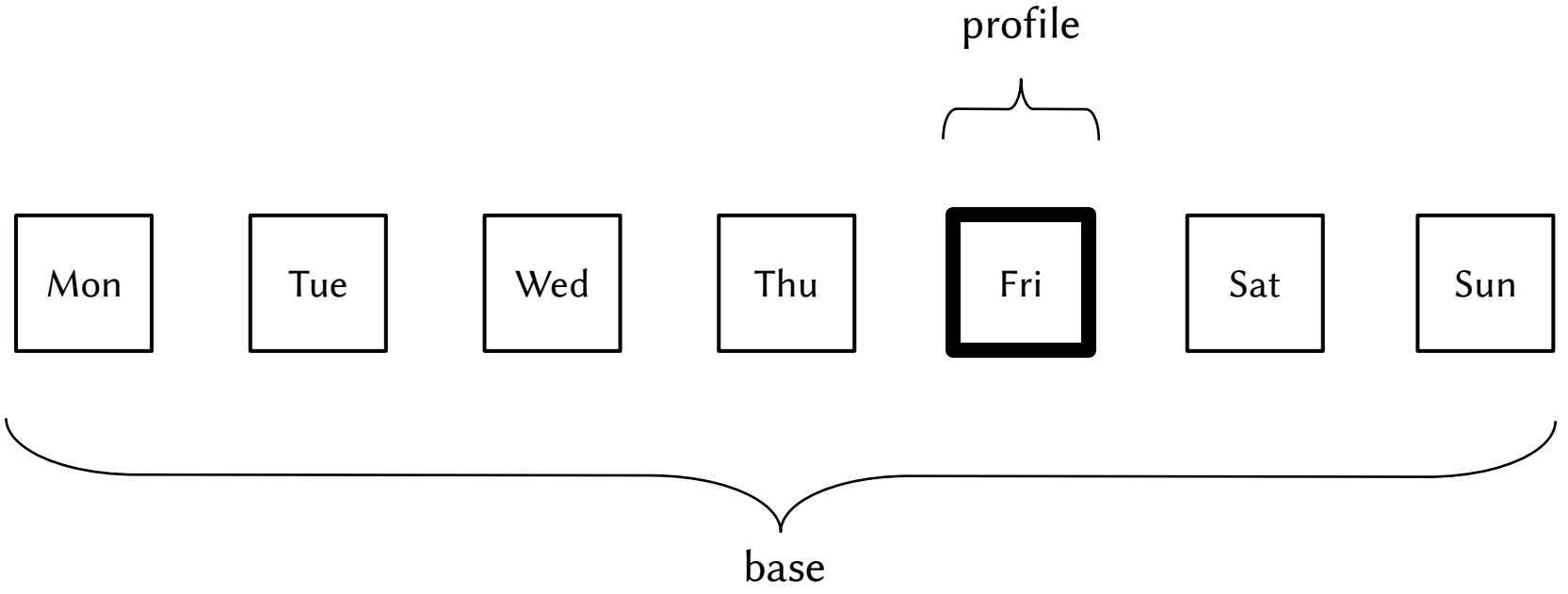
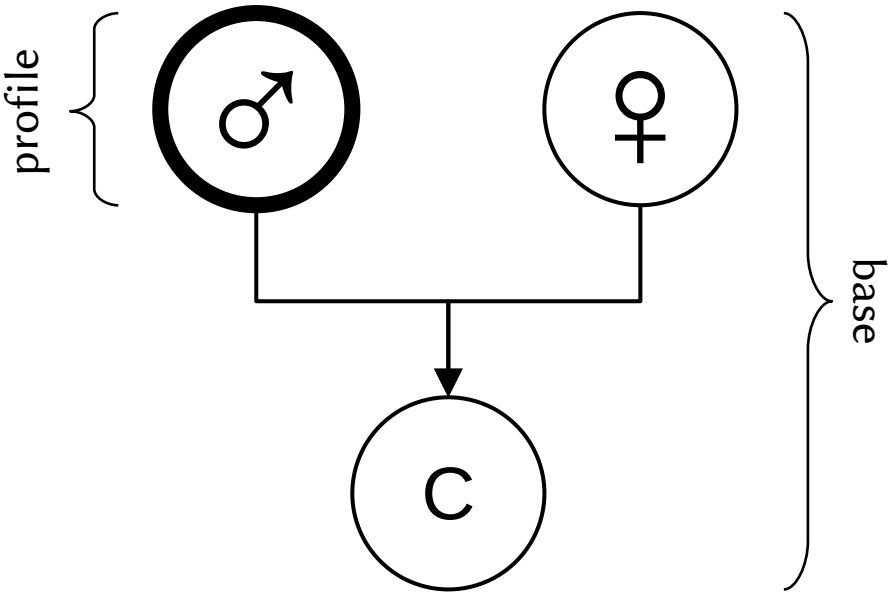
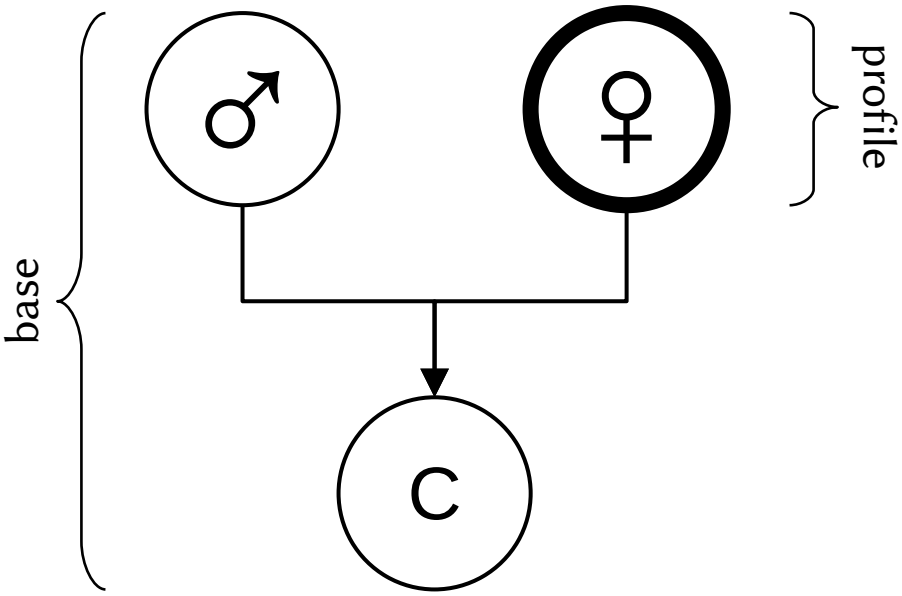
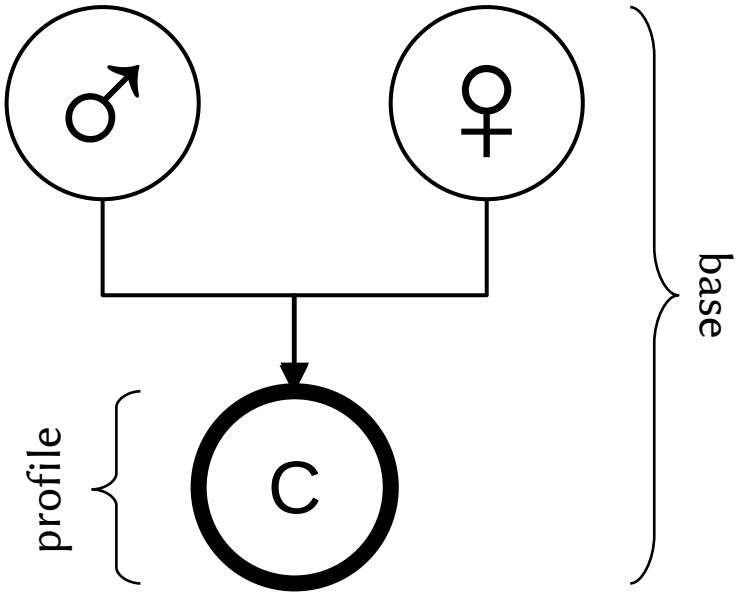


father / mother

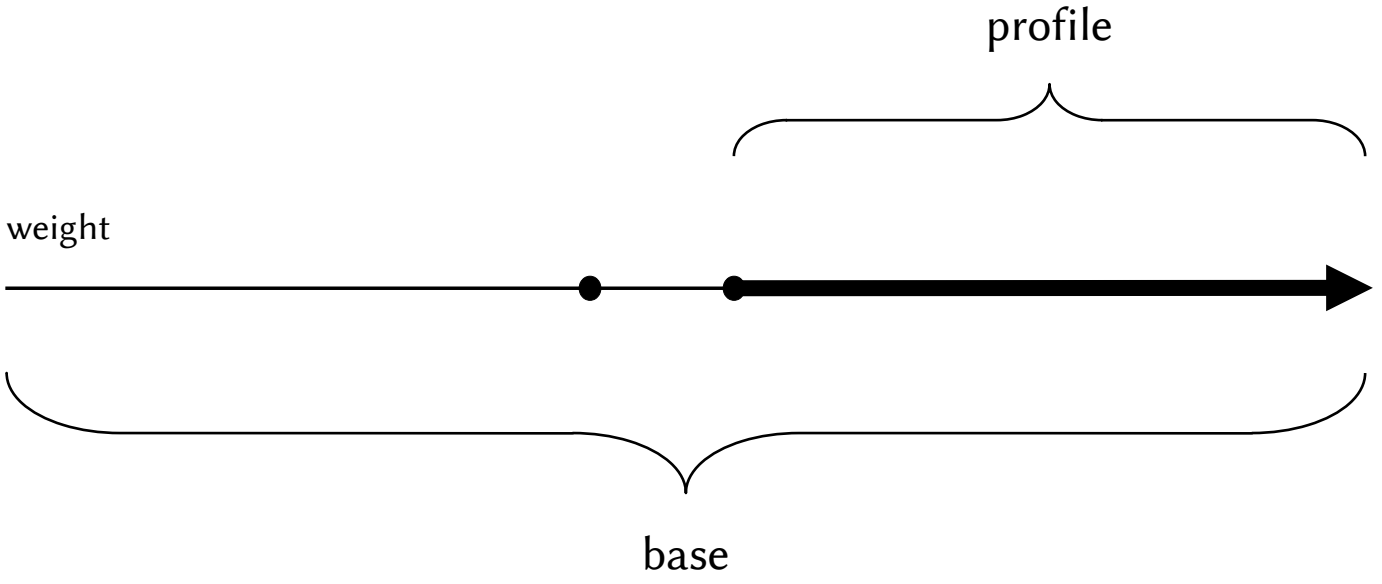




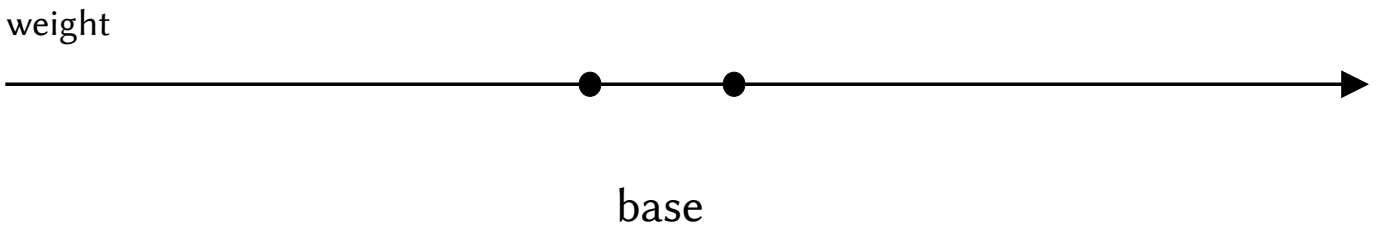
child



heavy



heavy



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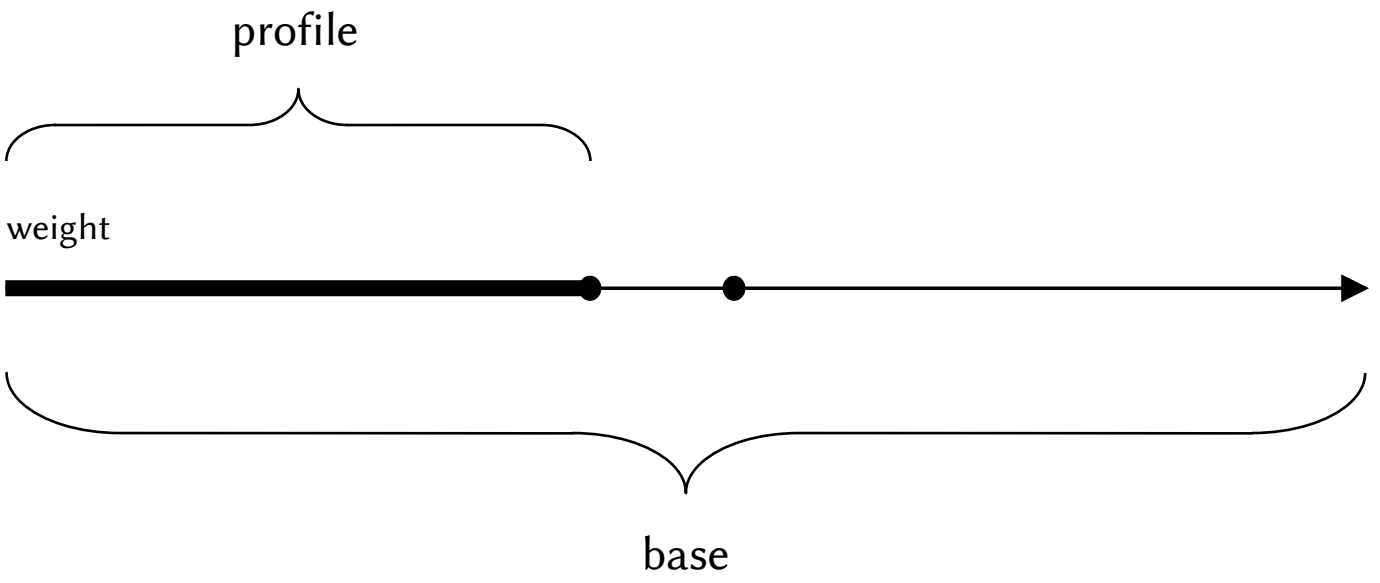
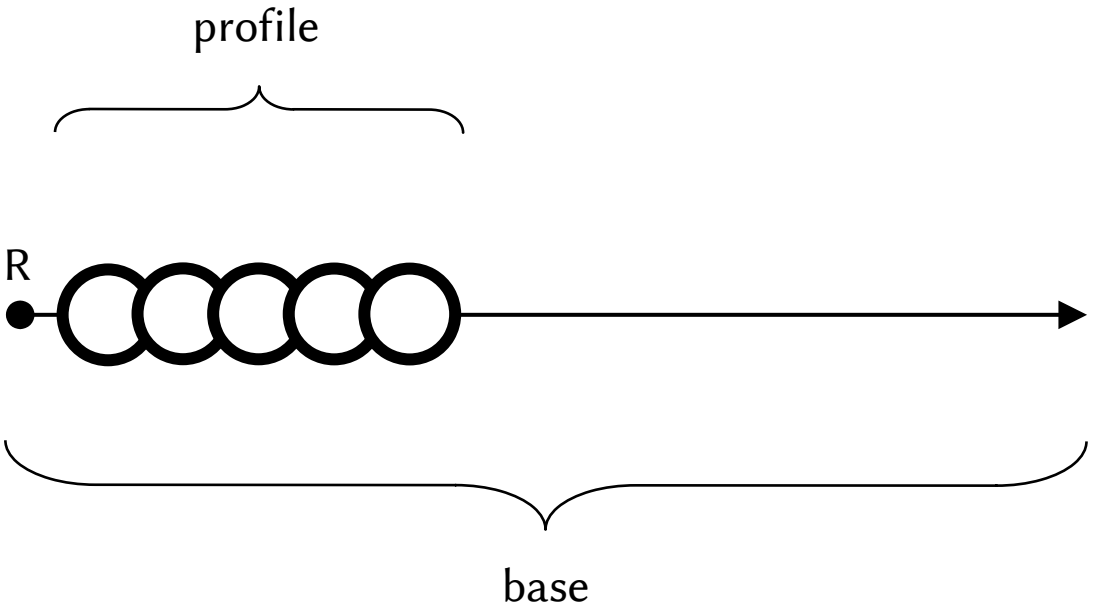
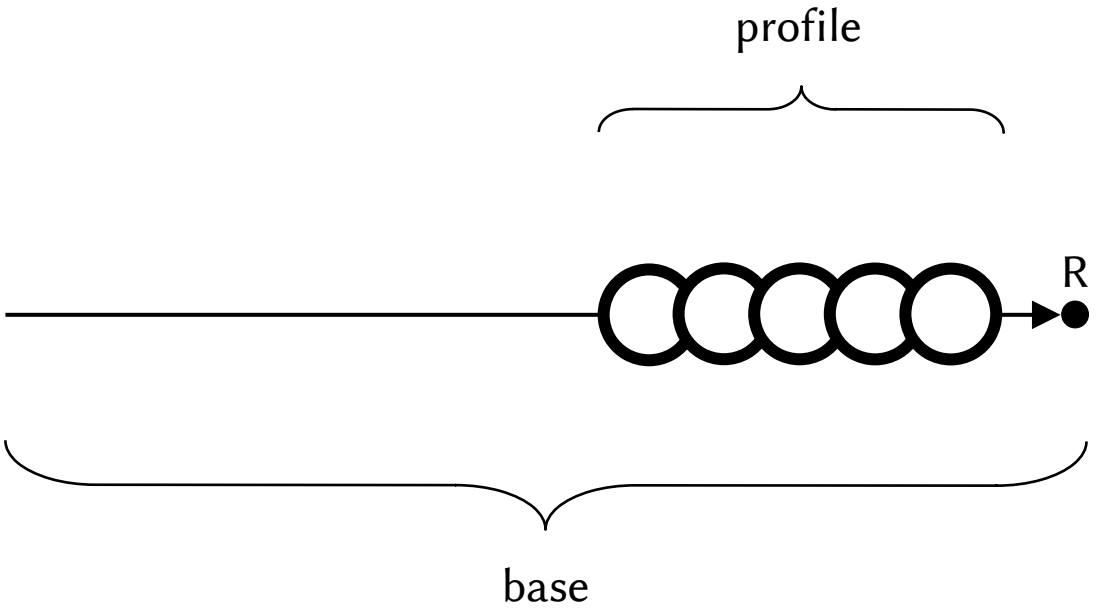


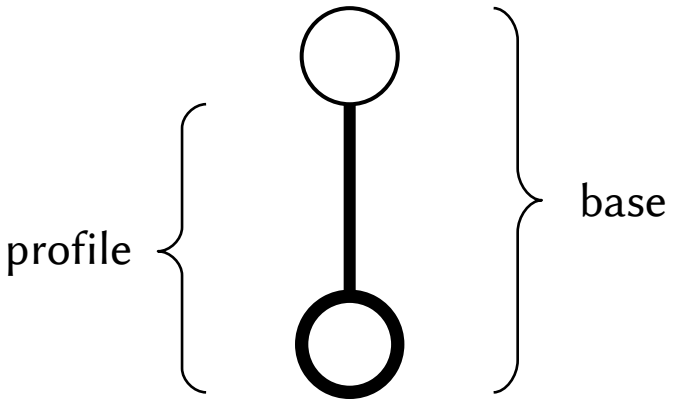
to depart

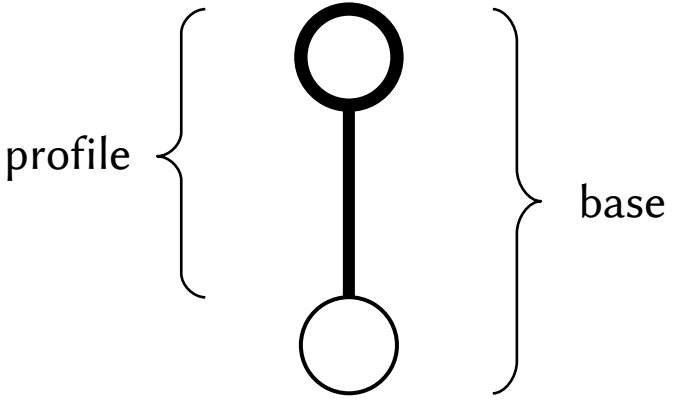


to arrive

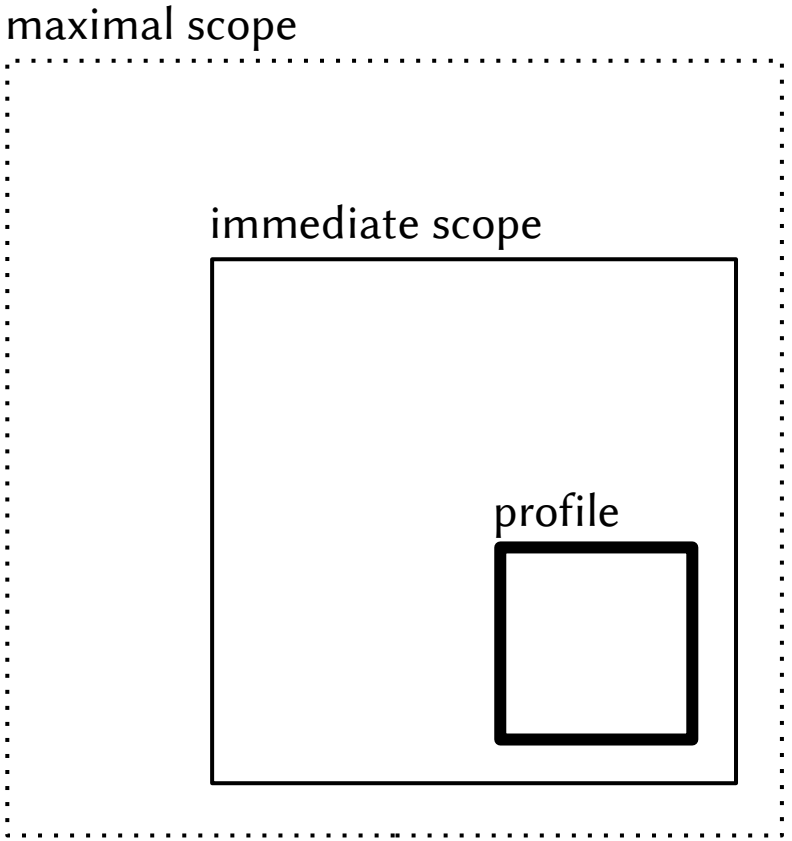


under / over





Scope of construal



Scope of construal – parthood

(1)(a) *A knuckle is a part of a finger.*

(b) ???*A knuckle is a part of a body.*

KNUCKLE < FINGER < HAND < ARM < BODY

[[KNUCKLE < FINGER]$_{\text{immediate}}$ < HAND < ARM < BODY]$_{\text{maximal}}$

Scope of construal – locatives

(2)(a) *The lecture takes place in the auditorium.*

(b) ??? *The lecture takes place on Earth.*

LECTURE < AUDITORIUM < UNIVERSITY < LUBLIN < … < EARTH

[[LECTURE < AUDITORIUM]$_{immediate}$ < UNIVERSITY < LUBLIN < … < EARTH]$_{maximal}$

Scope of construal – containment

(3)(a) *The kettle is boiling.*

(b) ??? *The apartment is boiling.*

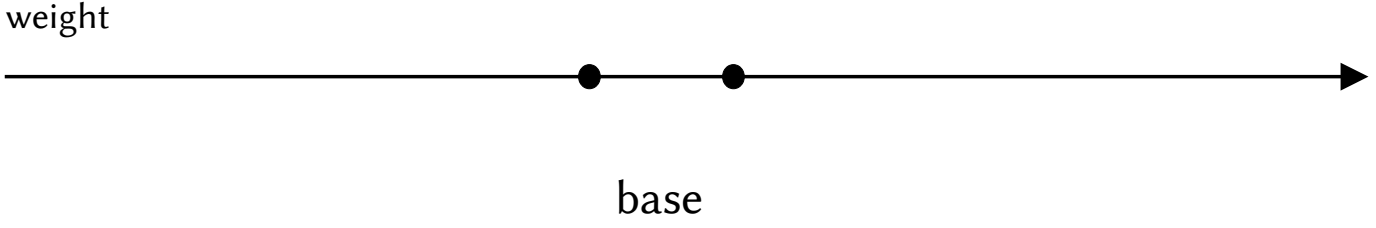
WATER < KETTLE < KITCHEN < APARTMENT

[[WATER < KETTLE]$_{\text{immediate}}$ < KITCHEN < APARTMENT]$_{\text{maximal}}$

Scale of construal

(4)(a) *The Uranium-238 has a very **heavy** nucleus.*

(b) *Mercury is a very **light** planet.*



Dimensions of construal

- profile/base organization
  (What is in the foreground? What is in the background?)
- scope and scale of construal
  (How much of the domain is relevant for the profile?)
- specificity
  (How much detail there is in the construal?)
- perspective
  - vantage point
    (What is the point of view from which one imagines the construal?)
  - viewing arrangement
    (What is in the focus of attention? What is outside the focus of attention?)

References

- Langacker, Ronald W. 2013. *Essentials of Cognitive Grammar*. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press.
  - Sections 3.1-3.4
- Langacker, Ronald W. 2008. *Cognitive Grammar. A Basic Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.
  - Sections 3.1-3.4
- Taylor, John R. 2002. *Cognitive Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  - Chapter 10