

Lecture 1

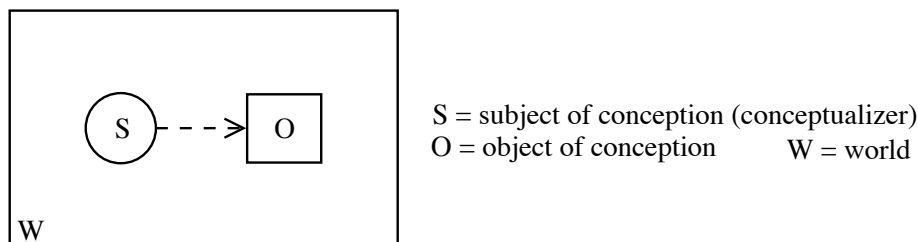
Meaning and Construal

- A. Interactive Cognition
- B. Selection
- C. Prominence
- D. Perspective
- E. Dynamicity
- F. Imagination
- G. Conclusions

A. Interactive Cognition

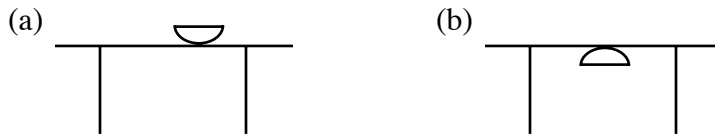
- (1)(a) Cognition is fundamentally *interactive*, arising from *engagement* with the world. A **subject** of conception engages some facet of the world that functions as an **object** of conception. The subject's role is always active, even for perception.
- (b) How the subject views the object is not determined solely by the object's nature but depends on the subject's own activity, reflecting its capabilities, previous history, and present circumstances. There is no neutral perspective.
- (c) **Construal:** Our ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways.
- (d) Construal is unavoidable because the world does not just imprint itself in our minds, producing a full miniature copy. Rather, our view of the world is *mentally constructed*.

(2)

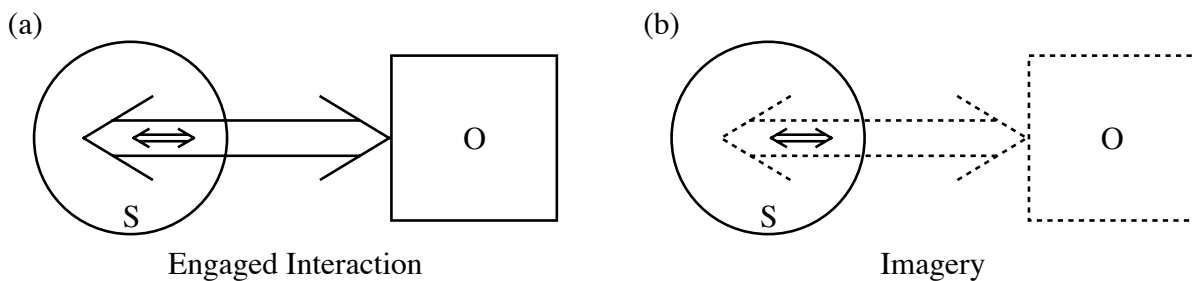


- (3) Factors that constrain variation:
- (a) We occupy the same physical world.
 - (b) We have the same basic type of body, defining a range of potential interactions and experience that are largely the same for all individuals (**embodiment**).
 - (c) Social interaction is crucial for cognitive development and constructing our mental world.
 - (d) Communicative interaction is an ongoing means of sharing knowledge and aligning views.
- (4)(a) *Language* is essential to social interaction and the construction of our mental world.
- (b) Lexicon and grammar form a *continuum*, all elements of which are *meaningful*.
 - (c) Every lexical and grammatical element incorporates a particular way of apprehending conceptual content—linguistic descriptions are never truly neutral.
 - (d) Languages vary greatly in the specific details of their lexicon and grammar, which constitute *conventional patterns of construal*.
 - (e) We are not forced by our language to view a situation in one particular way. It always provides alternative means of expression that construe it differently.

(5)

(6)(a) *A bowl is on the table.*(b) *A bowl is sitting on the table.*(c) *On the table is a bowl.*(d) *The table has a bowl on it.*(e) *There is a bowl on the table.*(7) Essential factors in the construction of our mental world:(a) **Disengagement:** Processing activity that originates in a certain context is later carried out independently of that context (perceptual/motor *imagery*, *memory*, mental *simulation*).(b) **Abstraction:** only certain aspects of a conception being retained for subsequent purposes. As a special case, *schematization* gives rise to conceptions of lesser specificity.(c) **Conceptual integration:** the combination of simpler conceptions to derive more complex ones. Special cases are *metaphor* (e.g. conceiving of politics as warfare) and *blending* (e.g. the cartoon conception of a dog that thinks in language like a person).

(8)



(9)(a) Even the most abstract conceptions can ultimately be traced back to bodily, perceptual, and motor experience (embodiment).

(b) The term **viewing** is used for both visual perception and conception in general, which are analogous in a number of respects.(c) The dimensions of construal—**selection**, **prominence**, **perspective**, **dynamicity**, and **imagination**—all have analogs in basic aspects of visual perception.

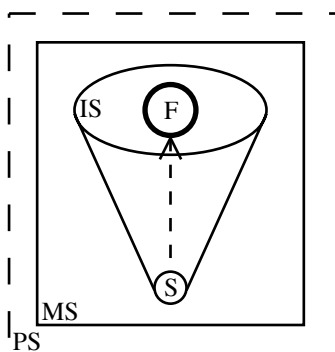
B. Selection

(10)(a) The meaning of an **expression** (e.g. a word, phrase, or sentence) depends on both the conceptual **content** invoked and how that content is **construed**.(b) The distinction is not a sharp one. In particular, the **selection** of conceptual content determines what that content is. Two aspects of selection are **scope** and **specificity**.

(11)

(a) Visual Perception

S = viewer (subject of perception)
 F = focus of attention
 IS = immediate field of view
 MS = maximal field of view
 PS = potential field of view



(b) Linguistic Conception

S = conceptualizer (speaker/hearer)
 F = focus of attention (profile)
 IS = immediate scope of conception
 MS = maximal scope of conception
 PS = potential scope of conception

(12) For the sentence *Jill is working in her study*:

- (a) The event of Jill working is the **focus of attention** (the expression's **profile**).
- (b) The **immediate scope** (with respect to space) is the study.
- (c) The **maximal scope** includes a house (evoked by *study*).
- (d) Countless aspects of the situation are simply omitted (e.g. the furnishings of the study, what Jill was working on, the time of day, the temperature of the room).

(13)(a) **Specificity** (or its converse, **schematicity**) is the degree of precision and detail at which a situation is described. Other terms are *resolution* and *granularity* (fine-grained vs. coarse-grained). It is the general conceptual analog of *visual acuity*.

- (b) *Something was happening.* > *Someone was doing something.* > *A girl was interacting with an object.* > *A little girl was looking at a container.* > *A pretty little girl was examining a bowl.* > *A pretty little girl wearing a red sweater was carefully scrutinizing a beautiful porcelain bowl with a very distinctive shape.*
- (c) *thing* > *creature* > *person* > *female* > *girl*; *thing* > *object* > *container* > *bowl*;
do > *look at* > *examine* > *scrutinize*
- (d) *a* > *a girl, a container, a red sweater, a beautiful porcelain bowl ...*

C. Prominence

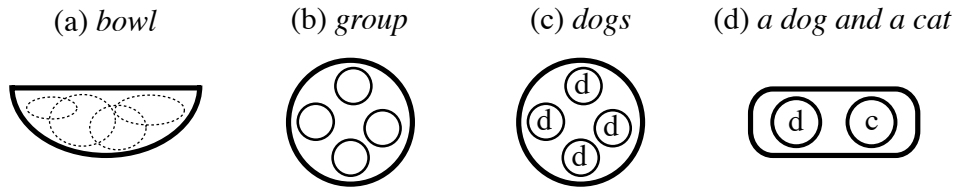
(14)(a) In vision, an object is rendered more *prominent* and apprehended with greater *acuity* by being made the **focus of attention** within the immediate field of view.

- (b) Many kinds of prominence have a role in language. Essential for grammar are **profiling** and **trajector/landmark alignment**. Both involve the focusing of attention.

(15)(a) An expression's **profile** is the focus of attention within its immediate scope. It is the *conceptual referent*—the entity referred to within the content evoked (the **base**).

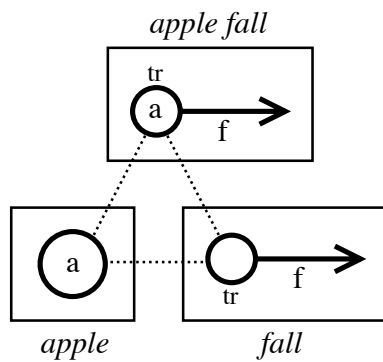
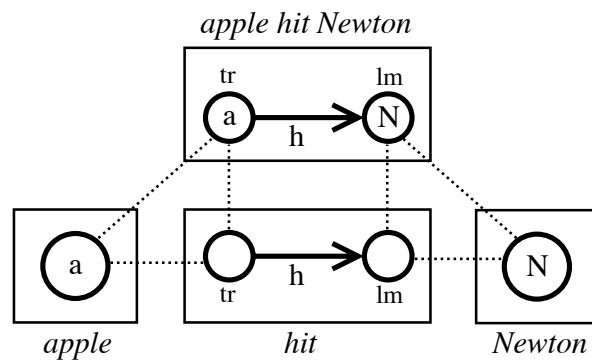
- (b) Expressions with the same content can differ in meaning due to their choice of profile.
- (c) An expression profiles either a **thing** or a **relationship** (abstractly defined).
- (d) Relationships differ in the number of salient **participants**, and in whether they are conceived as **evolving through time** or being fully manifested at a single moment.

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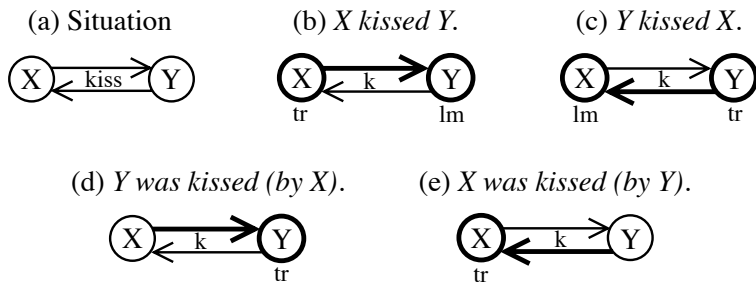


- (22)(a) A **subject** is a nominal (“noun phrase”) specifying the *trajector* of a profiled relationship.
 (b) An **object** is a nominal specifying the *landmark* of a profiled relationship.

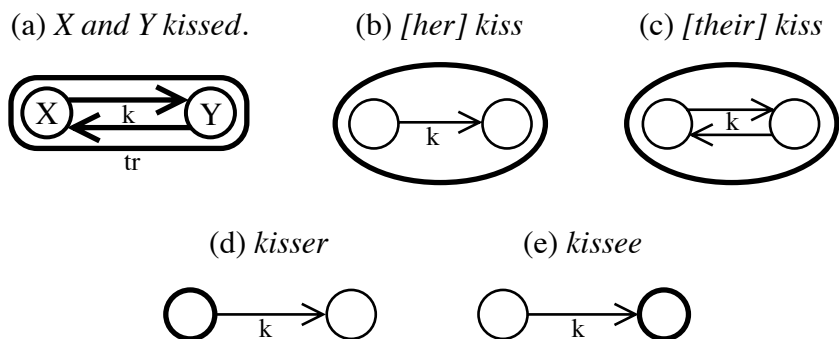
(23)

(a) *An apple fell.*(b) *The apple hit Newton.*

(24)



(25)

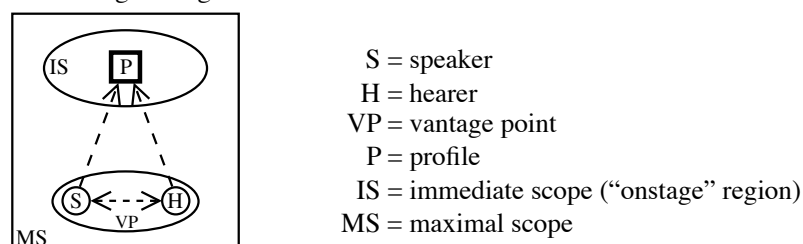


D. Perspective

- (26)(a) *Perspective* pertains to the **viewing arrangement** (for both *perception* and *conception*).
 (b) **Vantage point**: location of the viewer; the place from which a situation is apprehended.
 (c) The *speaker* and *hearer* are the viewers for the meanings of linguistic expressions. They are **subjects of conception**, the *situation described* being the **object of conception**.
 (d) The **immediate scope** comprises the content being attended to—metaphorically, it is the “onstage” region. An expression’s **profile** is the *focus* of attention within this region.
 (e) In the **basic viewing arrangement**, the speaker and hearer are distinct from the object of description, viewing the same onstage situation from the same offstage vantage point.

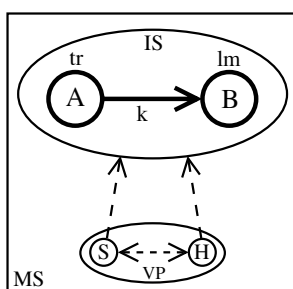
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Basic Viewing Arrangement

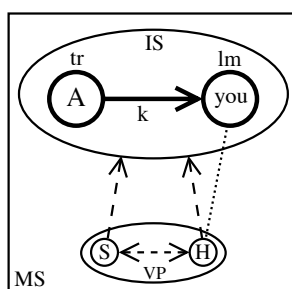


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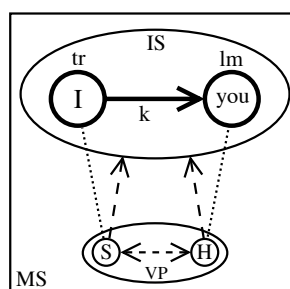
(a) *Alice kissed Bill.*



(b) *Alice kissed you.*



(c) *I kissed you.*

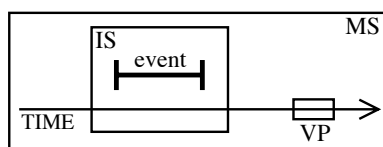


- (29)(a) *She came up onto the roof.* [event viewed from spatial VP on roof]
 (b) *She went up onto the roof.* [event viewed from spatial VP down below]

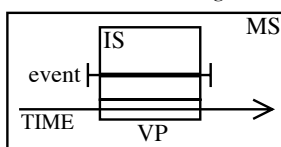
- (30)(a) *Alice washed her cat.* [earlier event viewed from temporal VP]
 (b) *Alice is washing her cat.* [event viewed from temporal VP internal to it]
 (c) *Alice was washing her cat.* [earlier event viewed from imagined internal temporal VP]
 (d) *Bill said that Alice was washing her cat.* [VP₁ = speaker’s temporal VP; VP₂ = Bill’s]

(31)

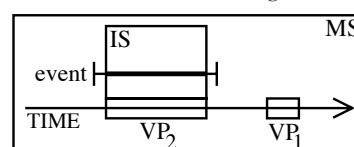
(a) *washed*



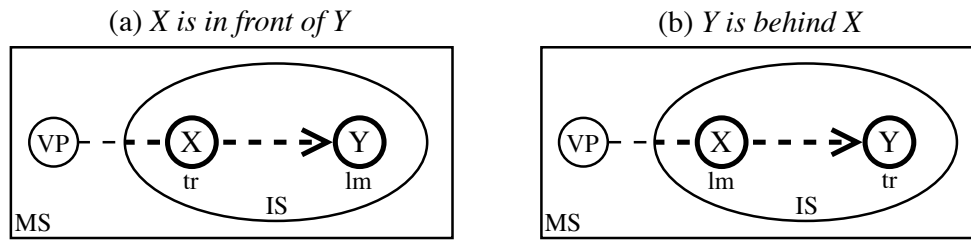
(b) *is washing*



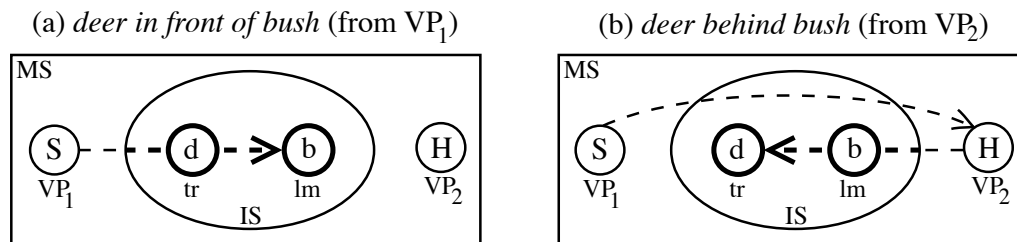
(c) *was washing*



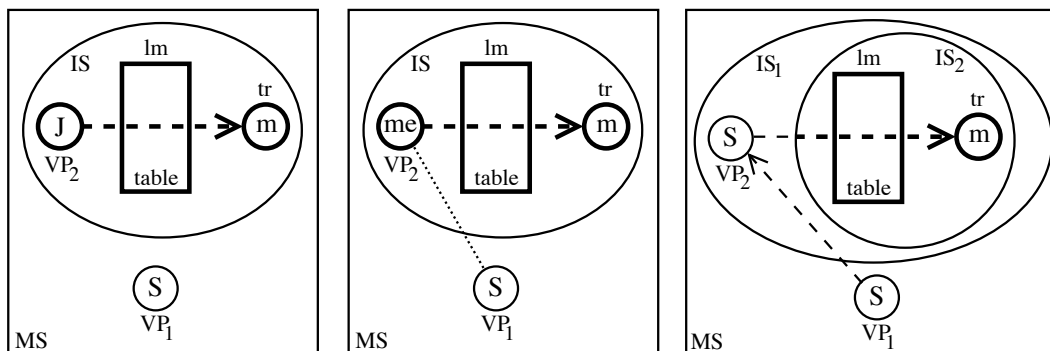
(32)

(33)(a) *I see a deer. It's right **in front of** that big bush.* [in front of reflects the speaker's VP](b) *Can you see the deer? It's right **behind** that big bush.* [behind reflects the hearer's VP]

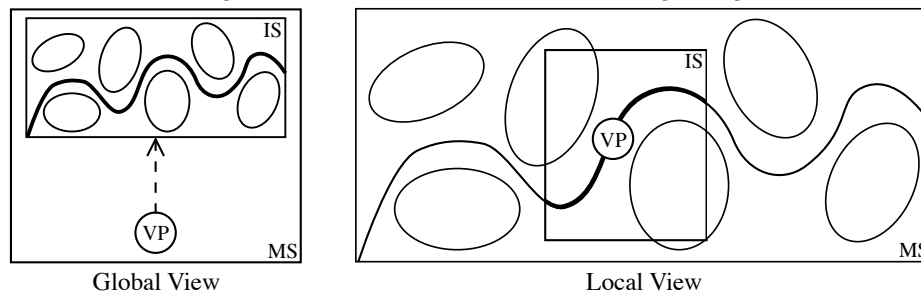
(34)

(35)(a) [We were at this formal dinner, and] the mayor was sitting **across the table from Jill**.(b) [I was at this formal dinner, and] the mayor was sitting right **across the table from me**.(c) [I was at this formal dinner, and] the mayor was sitting right **across the table**.

(36)

(a) *across the table from Jill* (b) *across the table from me* (c) *across the table*

(37)

(a) *The road winds through the hills.*(b) *The road is winding through the hills.*

E. Dynamicity

(38)(a) **Actual motion:** *The snake is winding through the grass.*

(b) **Fictive motion:** *The road is winding through the hills.*

(39)(a) In fictive motion, *physical motion* by an *onstage mover* (object of conception) is replaced by *mental scanning* along the same path by an *offstage viewer* (subject of conception).

(b) This represents a kind of **disengagement** [(7)(a)], since the scanning involved is inherent in the conception of actual motion but occurs independently of it.

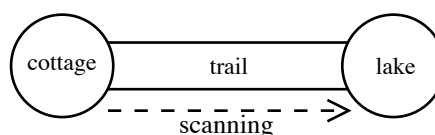
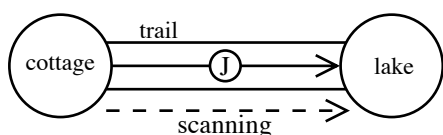
(c) Fictive motion expressions can be used for describing spatial configuration even when there is no real potential for actual motion.

(d) *Direction of mental scanning* can itself constitute a difference in meaning.

(40)

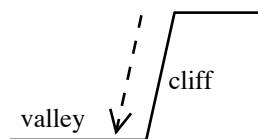
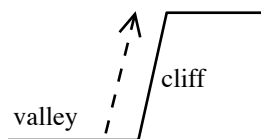
(a) *Jill ran from the cottage to the lake.*

(b) *The trail runs from the cottage to the lake.*



(c) *The cliff rises steeply from the valley.*

(d) *The cliff falls steeply to the valley.*



(41)(a) Linguistic meaning is not self-contained but depends on a vast **conceptual substrate**.

(b) Meanings are not contained in words or sentences, but are **mentally constructed** by the interlocutors based on all available conceptual resources, including the context.

(c) An expression's acceptability depends on the situation described and how we construe it.

(42)

(a)



His forehead rises steeply.

**His forehead is rising steeply.*

(b)



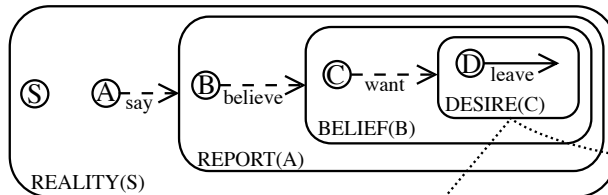
Mount Rushmore, South Dakota

F. Imagination

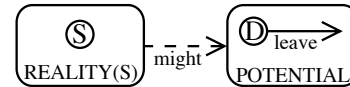
- (48)(a) Large proportions of the mental world we construct are **imaginative**: fictitious versions of reality (e.g. movies), conceptions of the future, unknown aspects of the past and present, the knowledge and experience of other conceptualizers, and so on.
- (b) The countless imagined realms we deal with constitute different **mental spaces**: separate but connected “working areas”, each hosting certain conceptual structures.
- (c) We avoid confusion by assigning conceptual content to particular spaces, knowing how these spaces relate to one another as well as to those spaces we identify as reality.
- (d) Connections between spaces define a **path of access** which a conceptualizer follows to locate a certain entity (abstract *mental scanning*, an aspect of dynamicity).
- (e) Choosing among alternative paths of access is a kind of construal.

(49)

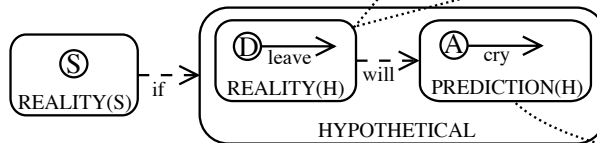
(a) *Alice said Bill believes Chris wants Doris to leave.*



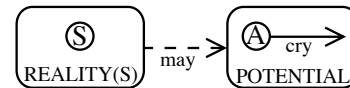
(b) *Doris might leave.*



(c) *If Doris leaves, Alice will cry.*



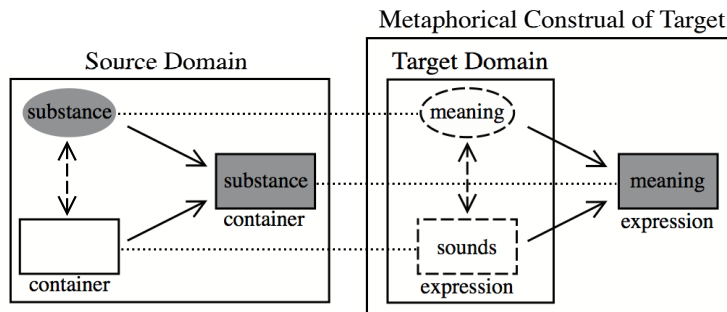
(d) *Alice may cry.*



(50) **Metaphor** consists in correspondences between a *source domain* and a *target domain* (usually more abstract). Ways of thinking about the source are projected onto the target.

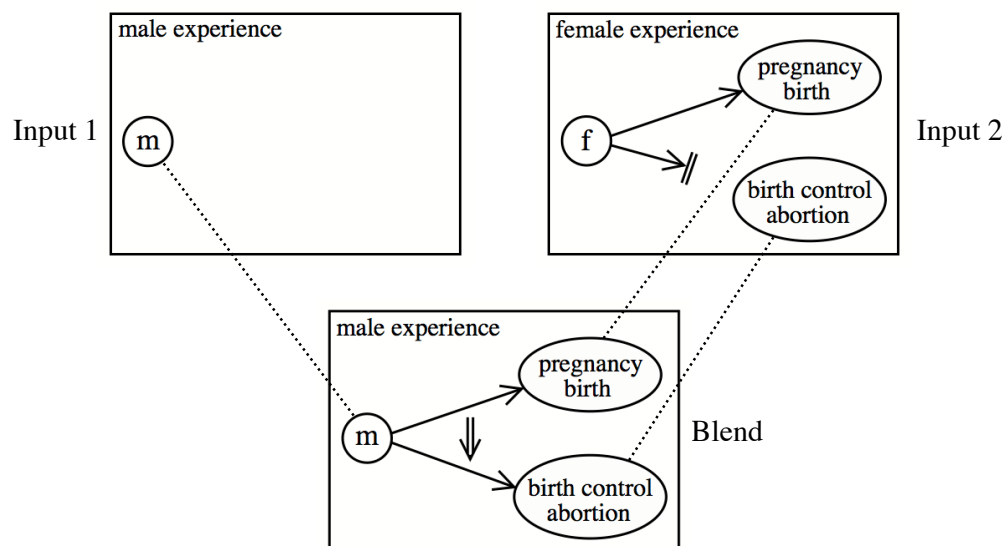
- (a) THOUGHTS ARE OBJECTS: *We tossed around some ideas.*
- (b) UNDERSTANDING IS PHYSICAL CONTROL: *He couldn't grasp what I was saying.*
- (c) EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS: *I couldn't put my thoughts into words.*
- (d) COMMUNICATION IS SENDING: *She finally managed to get her idea across to me.*
- (e) MEANING IS A SUBSTANCE: *There was little substance in what he said.*
- (f) SENTENCES ARE CONSTRUCTED OBJECTS: *Bush can't even put a sentence together.*

(51)



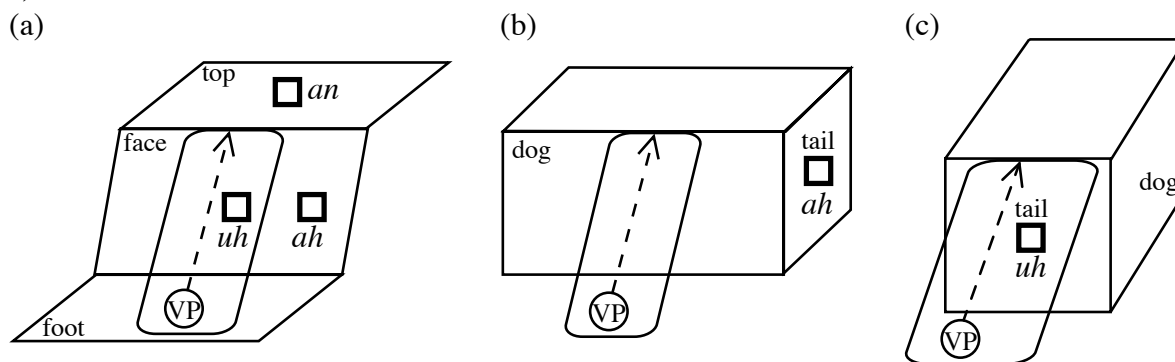
(52) In **conceptual blending**, selected elements of two **input** spaces are projected into a third space and integrated (along with other content) to form a **blend** with emergent properties.

(53) *If men had babies, birth control and abortion would be freely available.*



(54) the *leg* of a table, the *head* of a pin, the *foot* of a mountain, the *eye* of a needle, the *shoulder* of a road, the *hands* of a clock, the *face* of a cliff, the *neck* of a bottle ...

(55)



(56)(a) *á-n pú a'-u-h-n'éh-sin*
 outside-top he away-inside-face-arrive-DURATIVE
 'He's going up the hill to the top.'

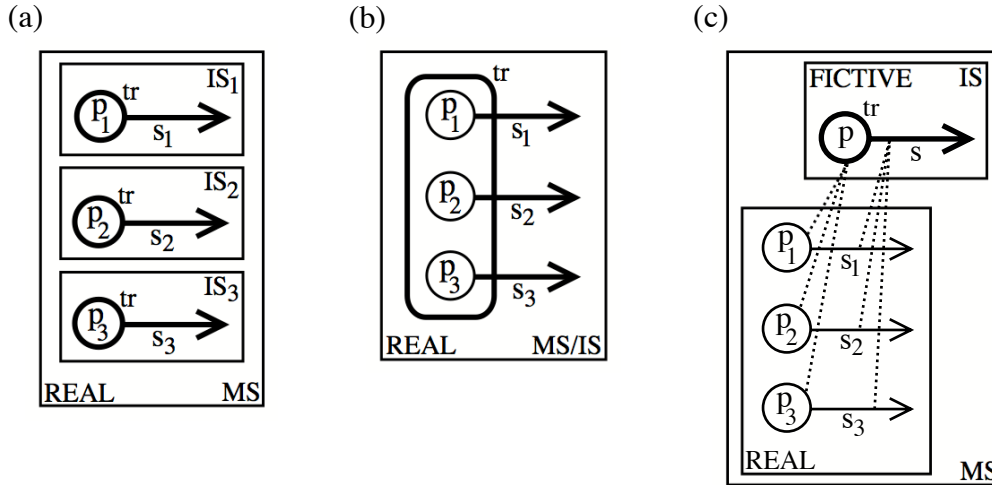
[Cora]

(b) *a-h-kí-tvapu'u* 'Its [dog's] tail is chopped short.' [seen from side]
 outside-face-short-tail

(c) *u-h-kí-tvapu'u* 'Its [dog's] tail is chopped short.' [seen from rear]
 inside-face-short-tail

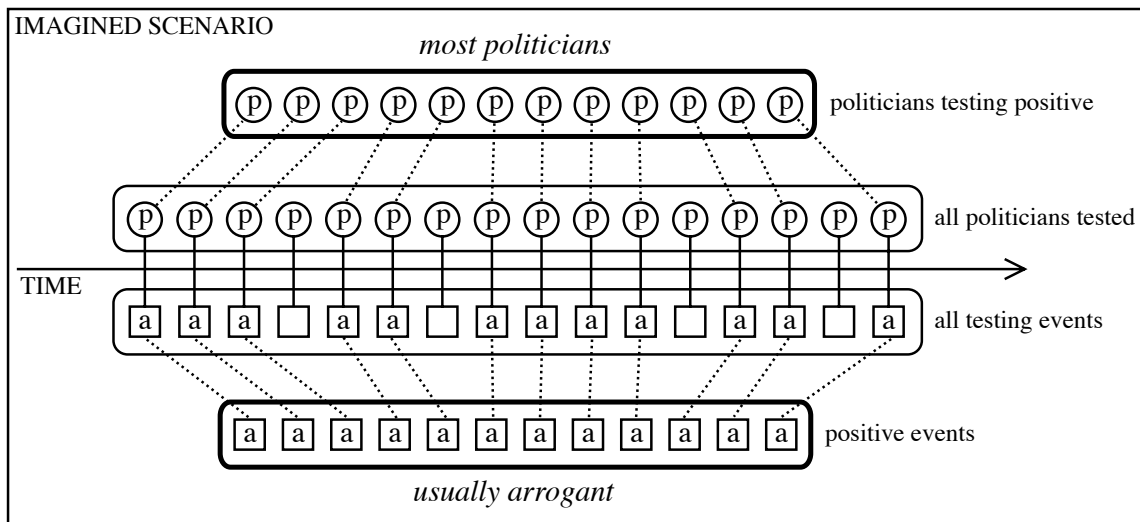
- (57)(a) *During the meeting, a protestor shouted. Then another protestor shouted. Then still a third protestor shouted.*
 (b) *During the meeting, three protestors shouted.*
 (c) *Three times during the meeting, **a protestor** shouted.*

(58)



- (59)(a) ***All** politicians are devious.*
 (b) ***Most** politicians are arrogant.*
 (c) ***Some** politicians are corrupt.*
 (d) ***No** politician is humble.*
- (60)(a) *A politician is **always** devious.*
 (b) *A politician is **usually** arrogant.*
 (c) *A politician is **sometimes** corrupt.*
 (d) *A politician is **never** humble.*

(61)



G. Conclusions

(62) Cognition

- (a) Cognition is **dynamic**, consisting in processing *activity*.
- (b) It is both **embodied** and **interactive**, residing in neural activity that emerges from bodily, sensory, and motor experience.
- (c) On this basis we **construct** our mental world—in all its richness, abstractness, and complexity—through *disengagement*, *abstraction*, and *conceptual integration*.

(63) Construal

- (a) Construal is inherent in our apprehension of the world, which—being the product of interactive activity—is shaped by many factors.
- (b) Of necessity, construal is reflected in language, which is both a product and an instrument of cognition and social interaction.
- (c) Construal is fundamental to semantics. There are no neutral linguistic expressions: the construal imposed on conceptual content is essential to their meaning.
- (d) Lexicon and grammar form a continuum of meaningful elements. Grammatical meanings are generally schematic, consisting mainly in the construal imposed on lexical content.

(64) Linguistic relativity

- (a) To what extent does the language we speak determine how we think?
- (b) In using expressions, we have to construe situations in the manner they specify, at least momentarily for purposes of speaking and understanding.
- (c) There is empirical evidence that general patterns of construal may have measurable impact on the performance of non-linguistic tasks.
- (d) We are not confused when expressions construe the same situation in different ways. This shows that we can ignore construal and apprehend a situation in its own terms.
- (e) Embodiment ensures the basic comparability of human experience across languages and cultures. We can learn the patterns of construal characteristic of another language.
- (f) Our language does not force us to view a situation in one particular way, but provides resources for alternative means of expression that construe it differently.

(65) Conceptual analysis

- (a) Conceptual structure exists, is non-mysterious, and can be described explicitly.
- (b) This is necessary for the proper description of language, which serves the basic function of symbolizing conceptual meaning.
- (c) The mental capacities responsible for construal are the same ones used in constructing our mental world. Linguistic analysis can tell us a great deal about this process.
- (d) Language is both a window on cognition and a key to understanding it.

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