

Parsing Protocol Standards to Parse Standard Protocols

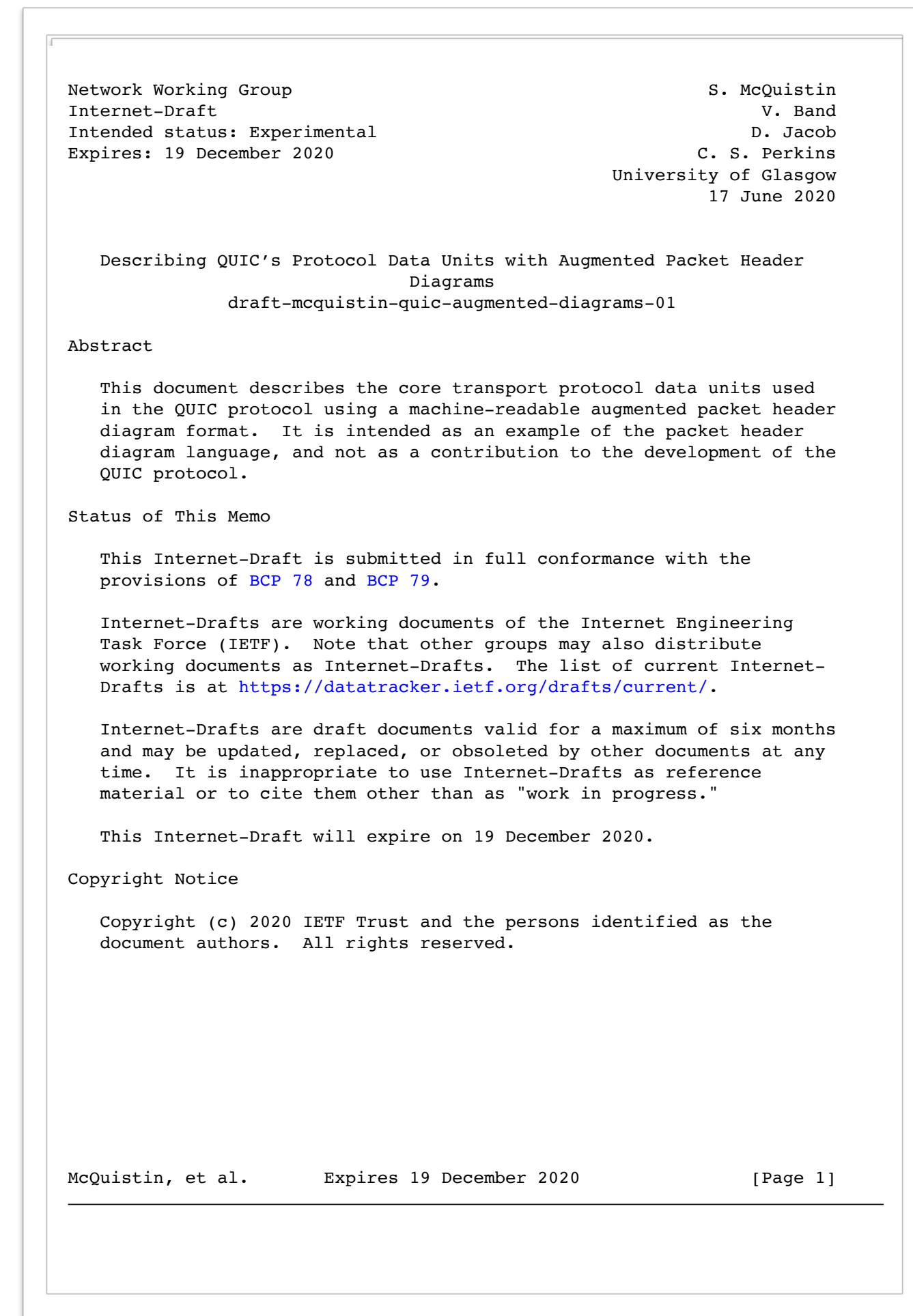
Stephen McQuistin
Vivian Band
Dejice Jacob
Colin Perkins

Applied Networking Research Workshop 2020



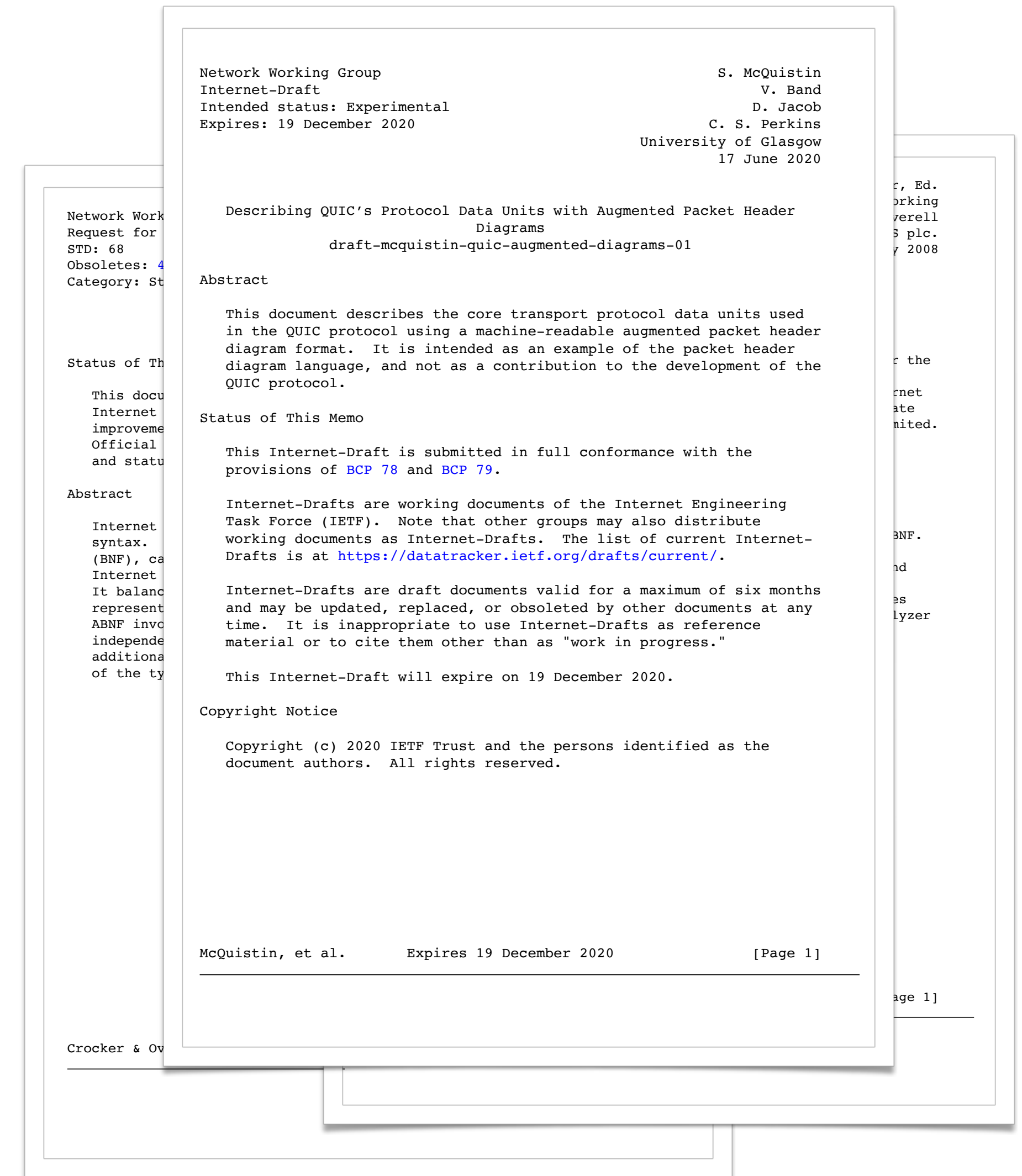
Parsing Protocol Standards ...

- Internet standards documents are typically written in English prose
- As protocols become more complex, this becomes undesirable
- Inconsistencies and ambiguities are easily introduced by natural language descriptions
- Formal specification languages would make documents more concise and consistent, and enable machine parsing



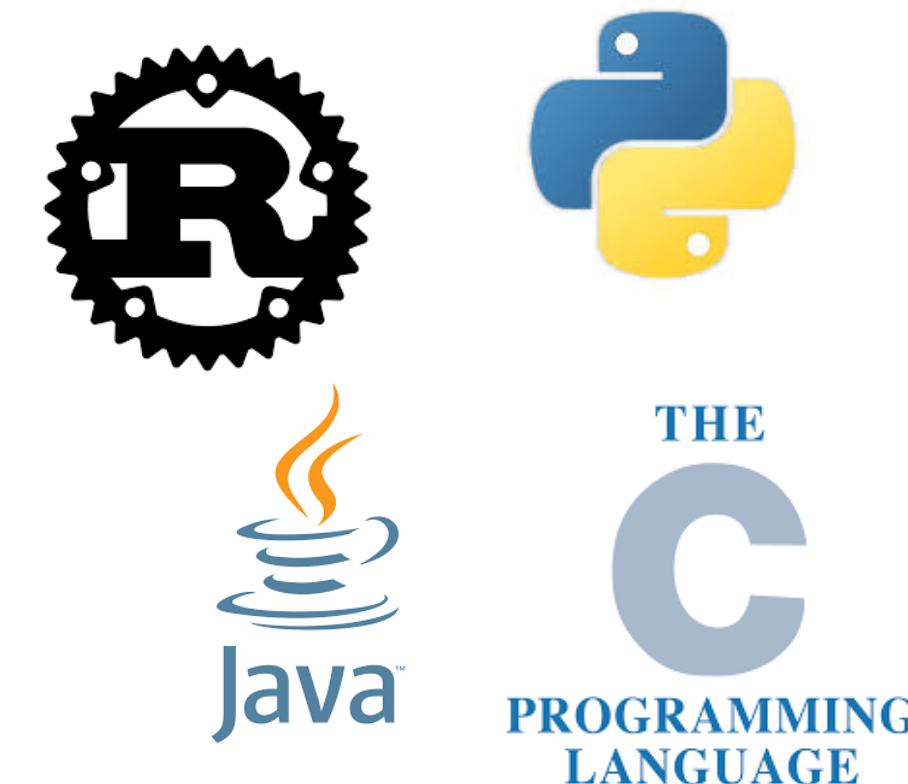
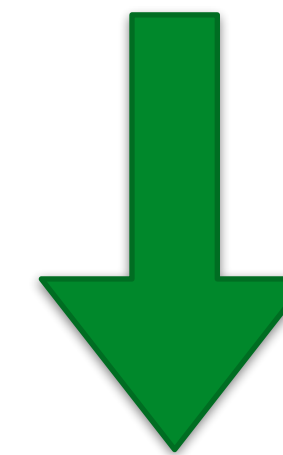
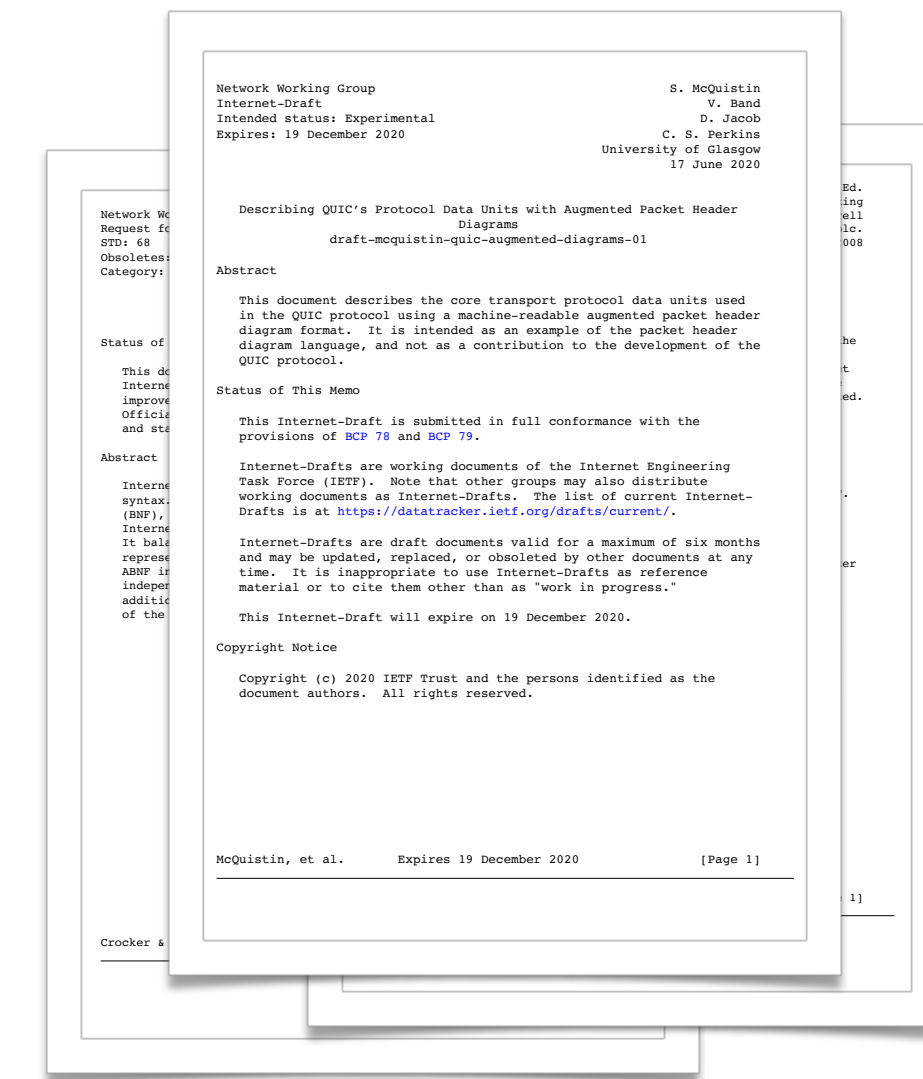
Parsing Protocol Standards ...

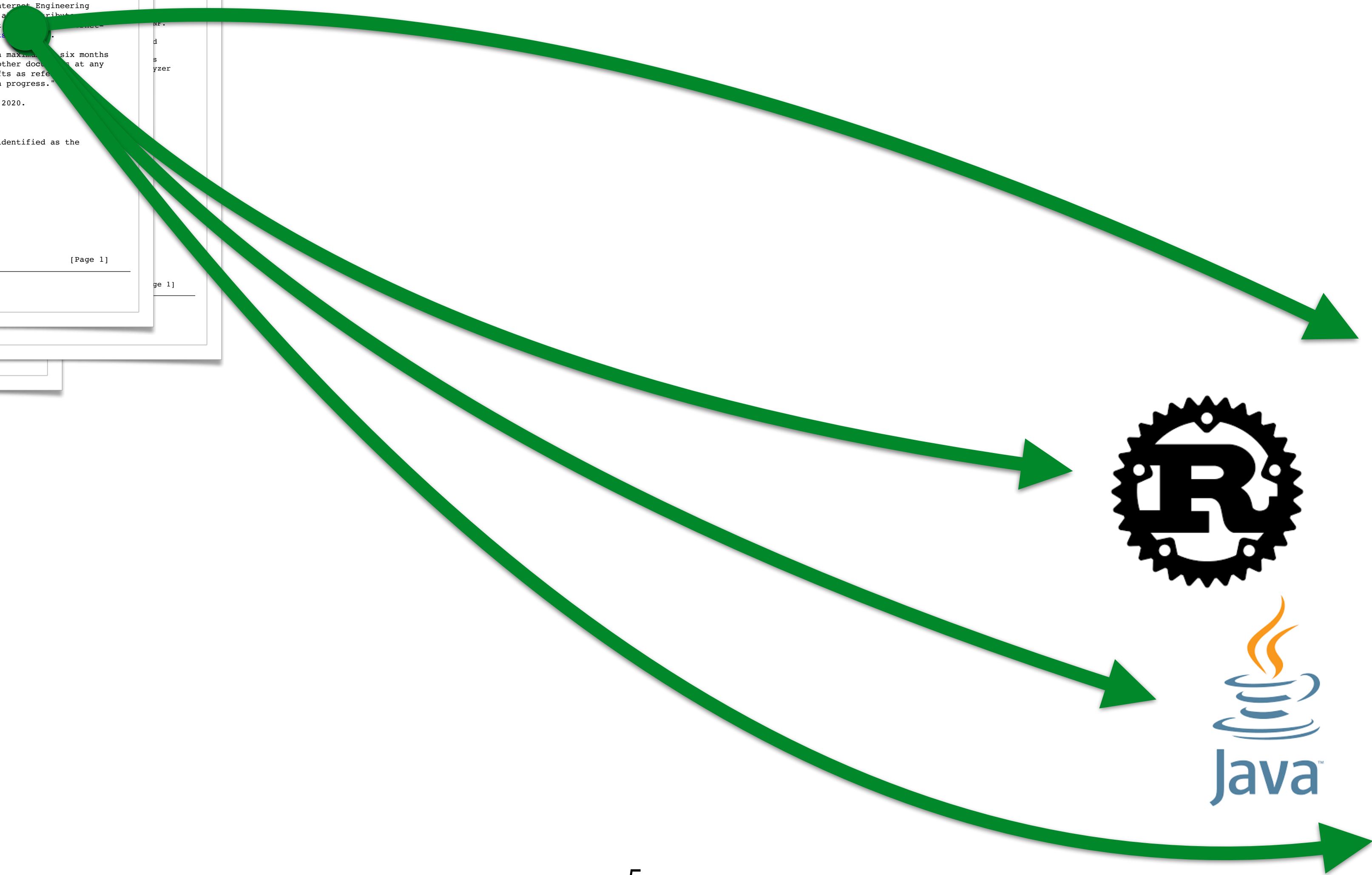
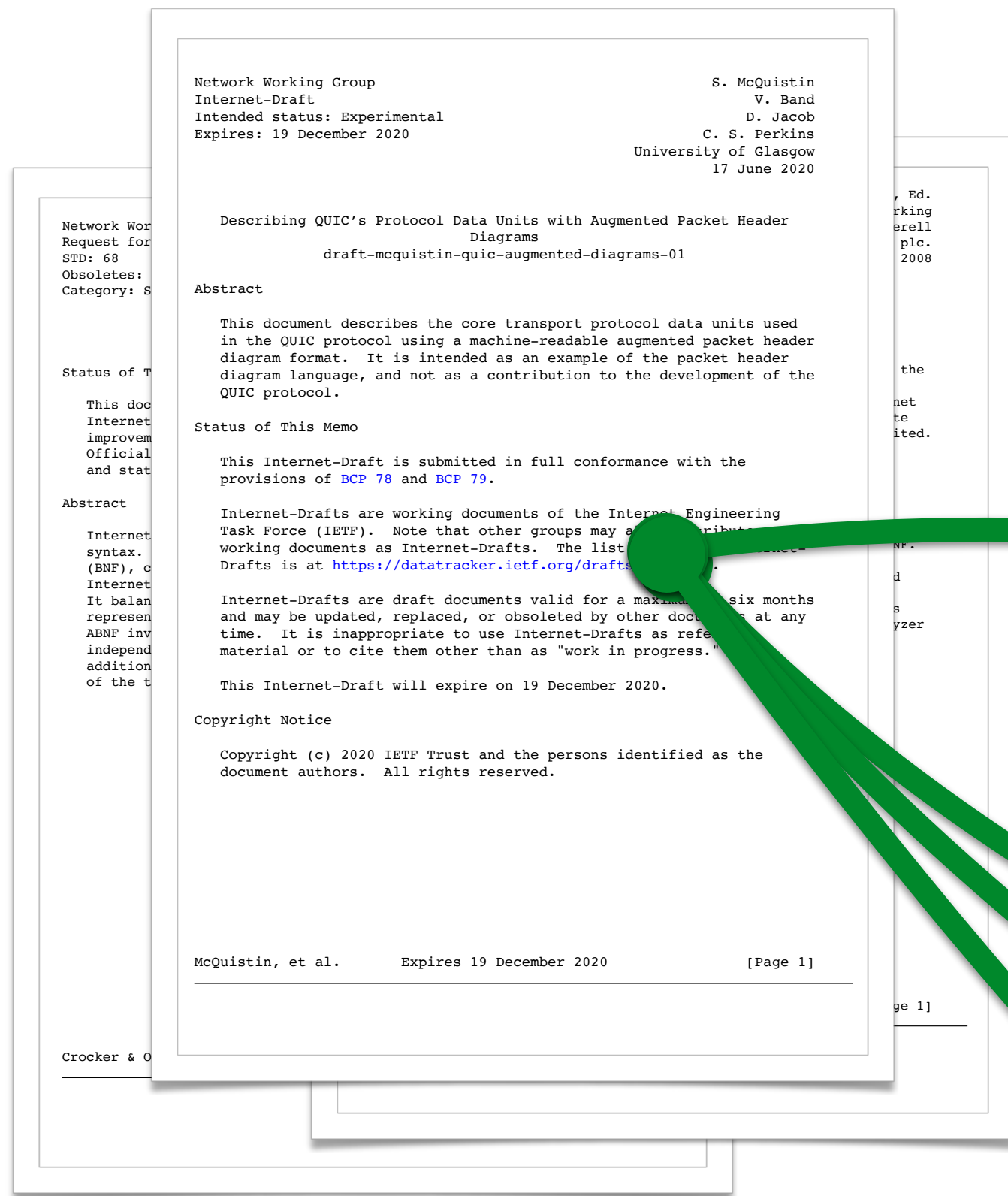
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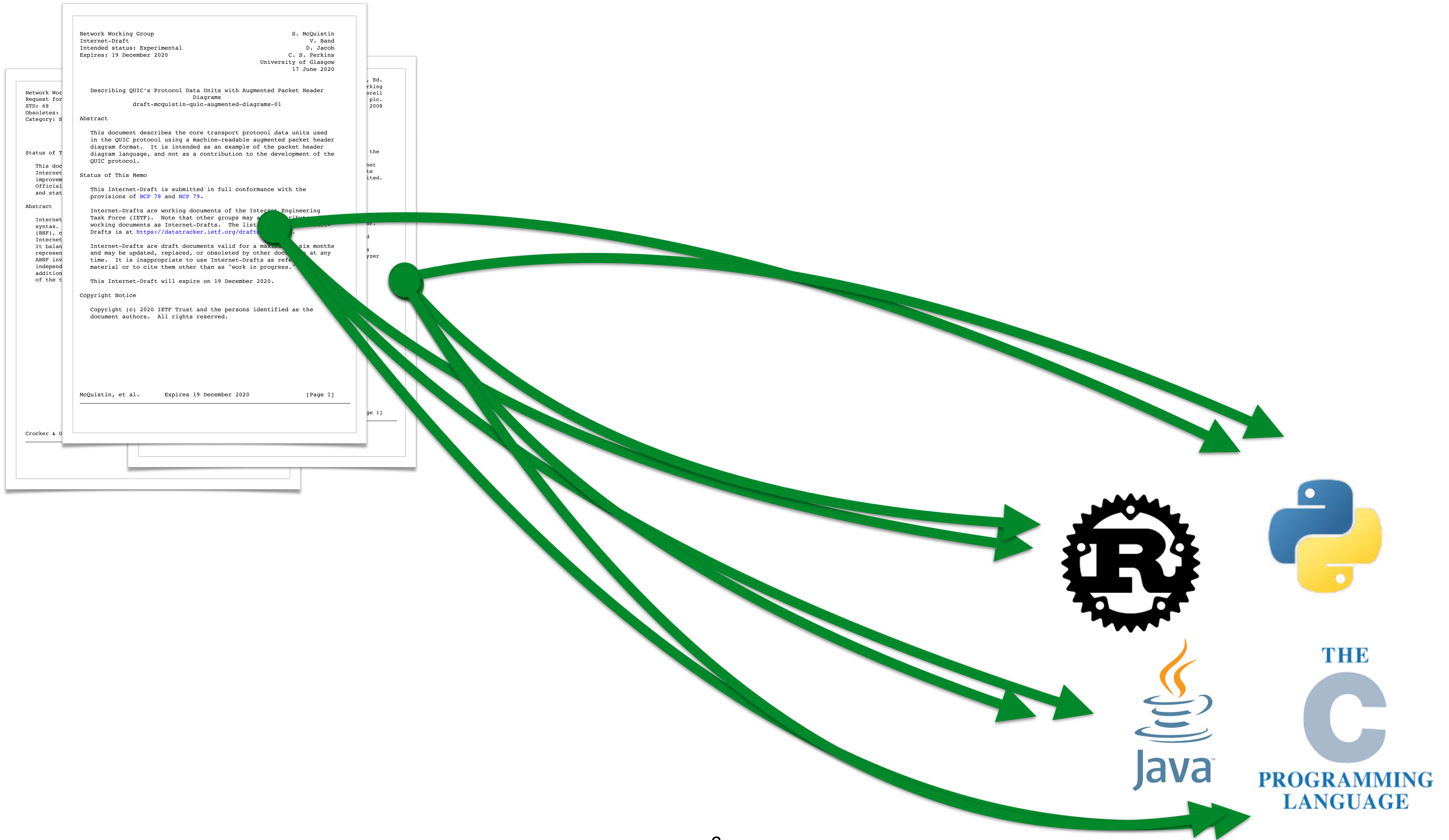


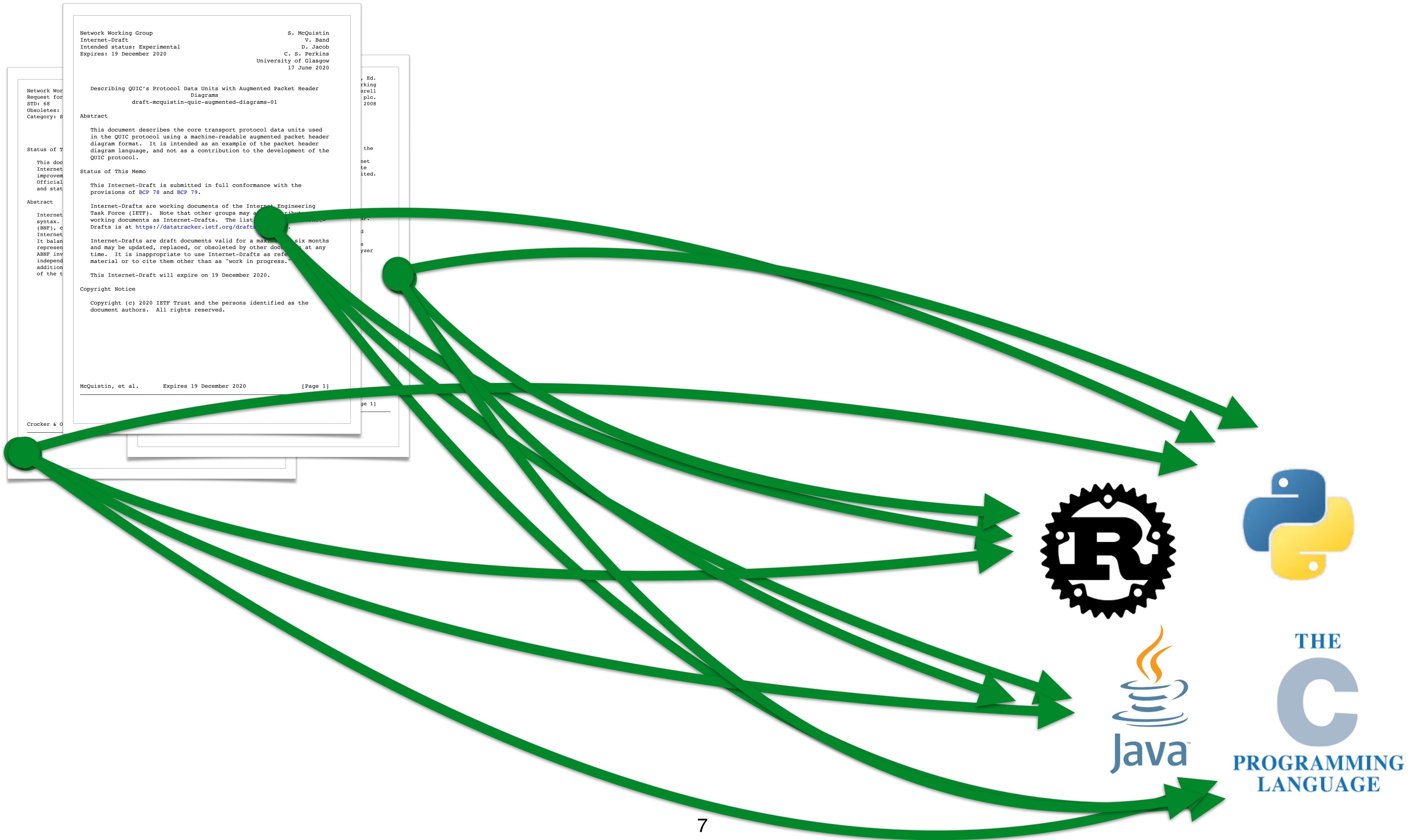
... to Parse Standard Protocols

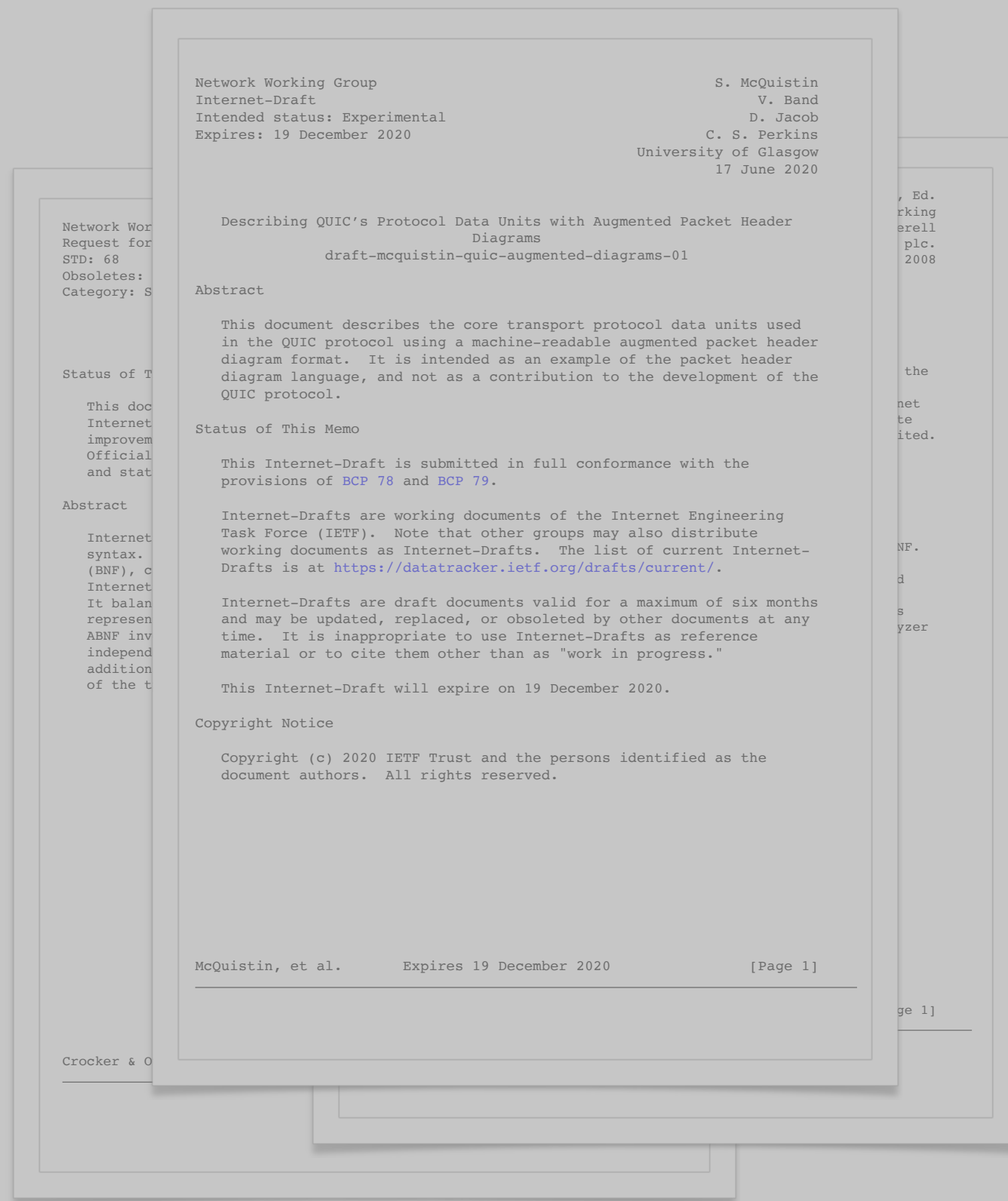
- Machine readability would enable automatic code generation
- This enables testing of the protocol specification as it develops
- Modern, secure systems languages can be supported
- Overall, the security and trustworthiness of standards may be improved











A common protocol
representation



**What are the requirements of
a common protocol representation?**

Representing Protocol Data

- **Syntax description languages**
 - ABNF, ASN.1, the TLS 1.3 presentation language, ...

Representing Protocol Data

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 - ABNF, ASN.1, the TLS 1.3 presentation language, ...

These languages can only be used to describe protocol syntax

Representing Protocol Data

- **Syntax description languages**
 - ABNF, ASN.1, the TLS 1.3 presentation language, ...
- **Protocol type systems**
 - eTPL, YANG, NetPDL, PADS, DataScript, PacketTypes, the Meta Packet Language, ...

Representing Protocol Data

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These languages couple external *and* internal representations:
can't model protocols where these are different

Representing Protocol Data

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 - eTPL, YANG, NetPDL, PADS, DataScript, PacketTypes, the Meta Packet Language, ...
- **Protocol representation systems**
 - Nail, Narcissus, ...

Representing Protocol Data

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 - Nail, Narcissus,

Need support for strong type guarantees *and* support for context-based, multi-stage parsing

**We need a common representation
that is safe and extensible**

The Network Packet Representation

- A typed protocol representation
- Decoupled from protocol description languages and target output languages
- Provides type constructors for a number of basic type classes, that can be composed into descriptions for complex protocols

The Network Packet Representation

An RTP Data Packet is formatted as follows:

```

0      1      2      3
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|V=2|P|X|  CC   |M|      PT      |      sequence number      |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|                                     timestamp                    |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|               synchronization source (SSRC) identifier          |
+=====+=====+=====+=====+=====+=====+=====+=====+
|               [CSRC identifier list]                            |
|               (4 * CC octets)                                   |
|               CC may be zero                                    |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|   defined by signalling   |   header extension length   | |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|               header extension                                | | OPTIONAL
|               format defined by signalling                    | | (if X=1)
|               |                                               | |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|               Payload                                         |
|               (variable format and length, depends on PT)    |
|               |                                               |
|               +-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+
|               |Padding (PadCnt octets, if P=1)|PadCnt (if P=1)|
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+

```

where:

Version (V): 2 bits; V == 2. This field identifies the version of RTP.

The version defined by this specification is two (2). (The value 1 is used by the first draft version of RTP and the value 0 is used by the protocol initially implemented in the "vat" audio tool.)

The Network Packet Representation

An RTP Data Packet is formatted as follows:

Bit strings to represent raw protocols

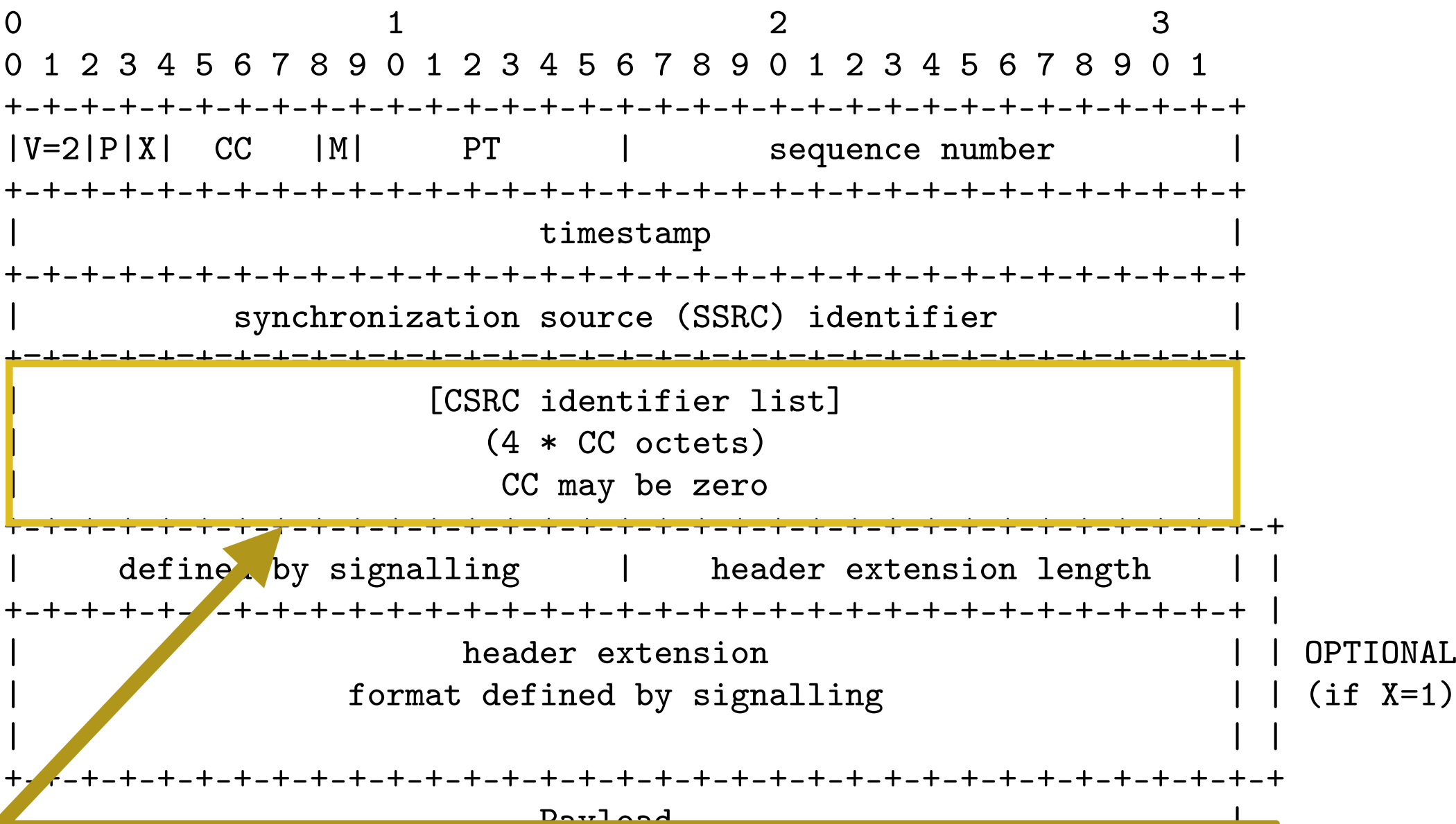
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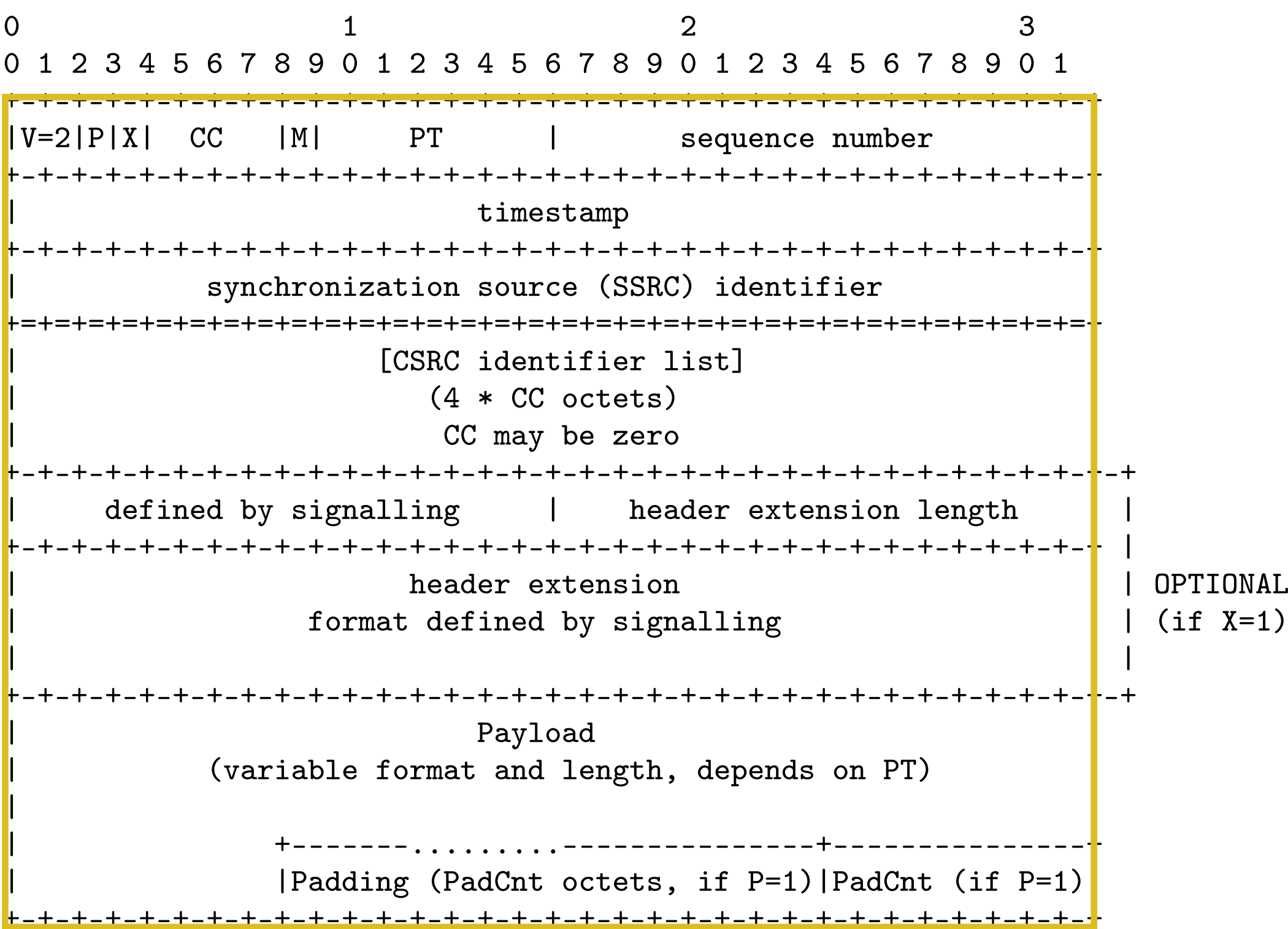
Arrays to represent sequences of elements of the same type

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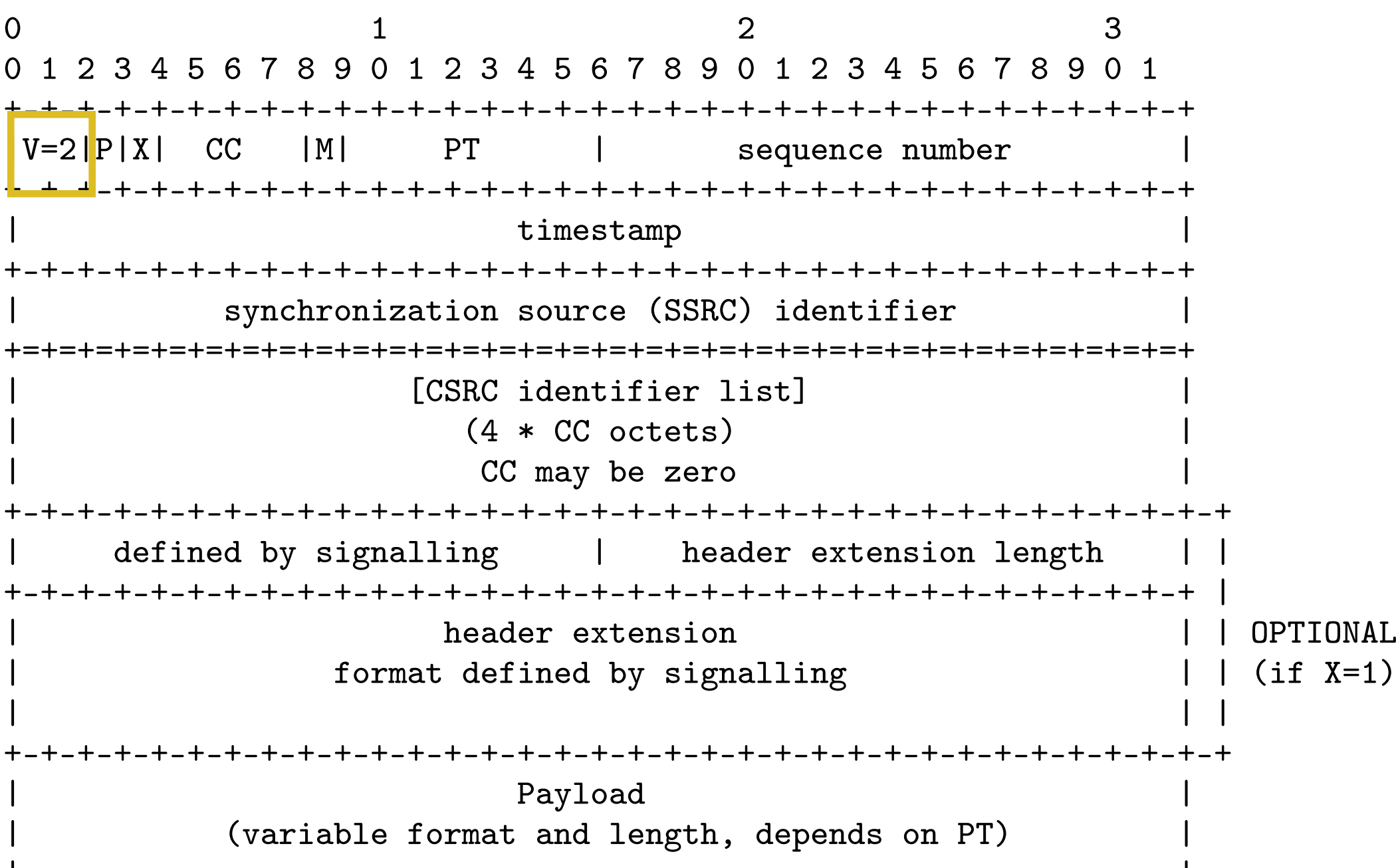
where:

Version
The v
is us
the p

Structures to represent packets themselves

The Network Packet Representation

An RTP Data Packet is formatted as follows:



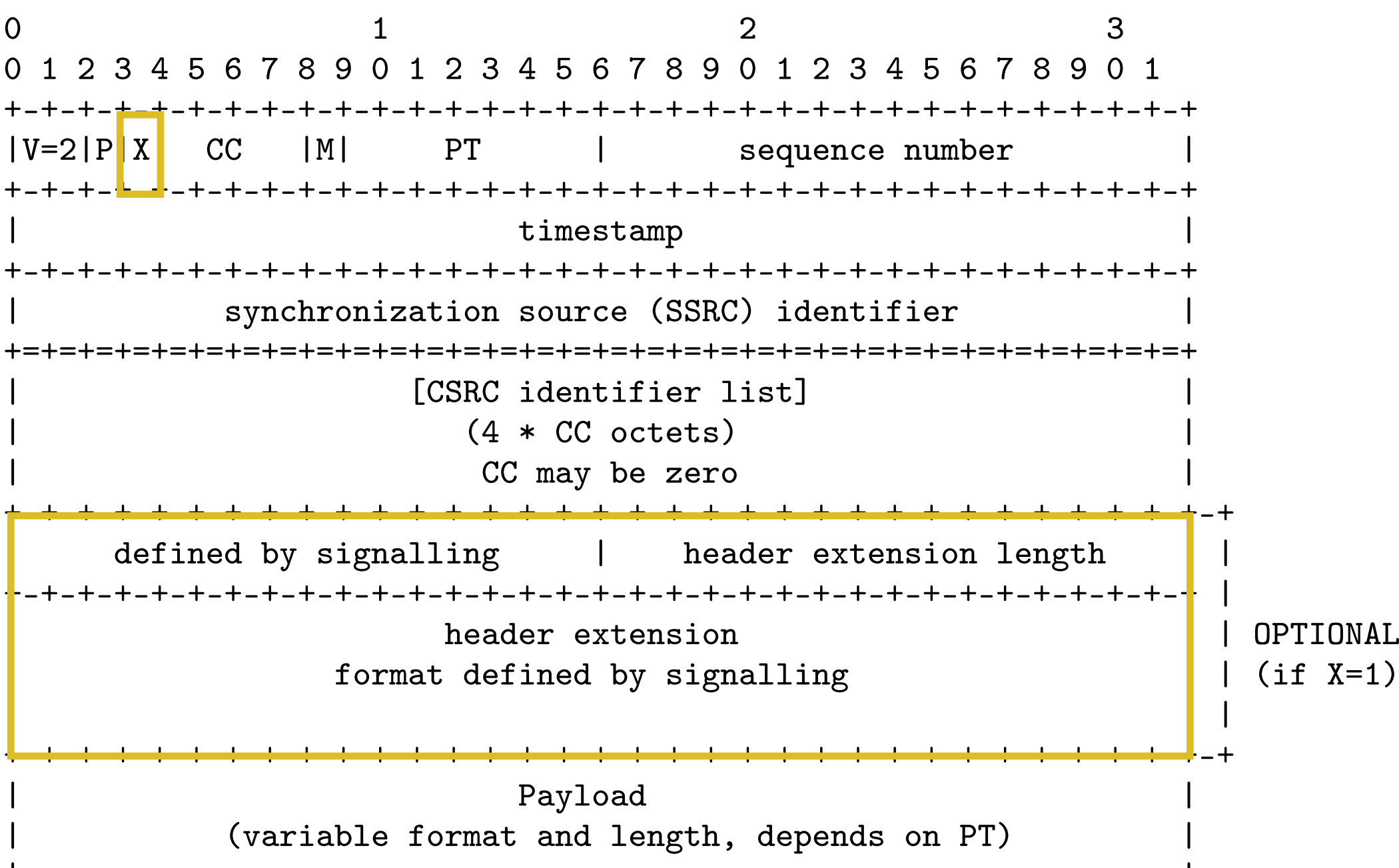
Constraints within structures

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The Network Packet Representation

An RTP Data Packet is formatted as follows:

[illegible]

Contextual data shared out-of-band or between different PDUs

where:

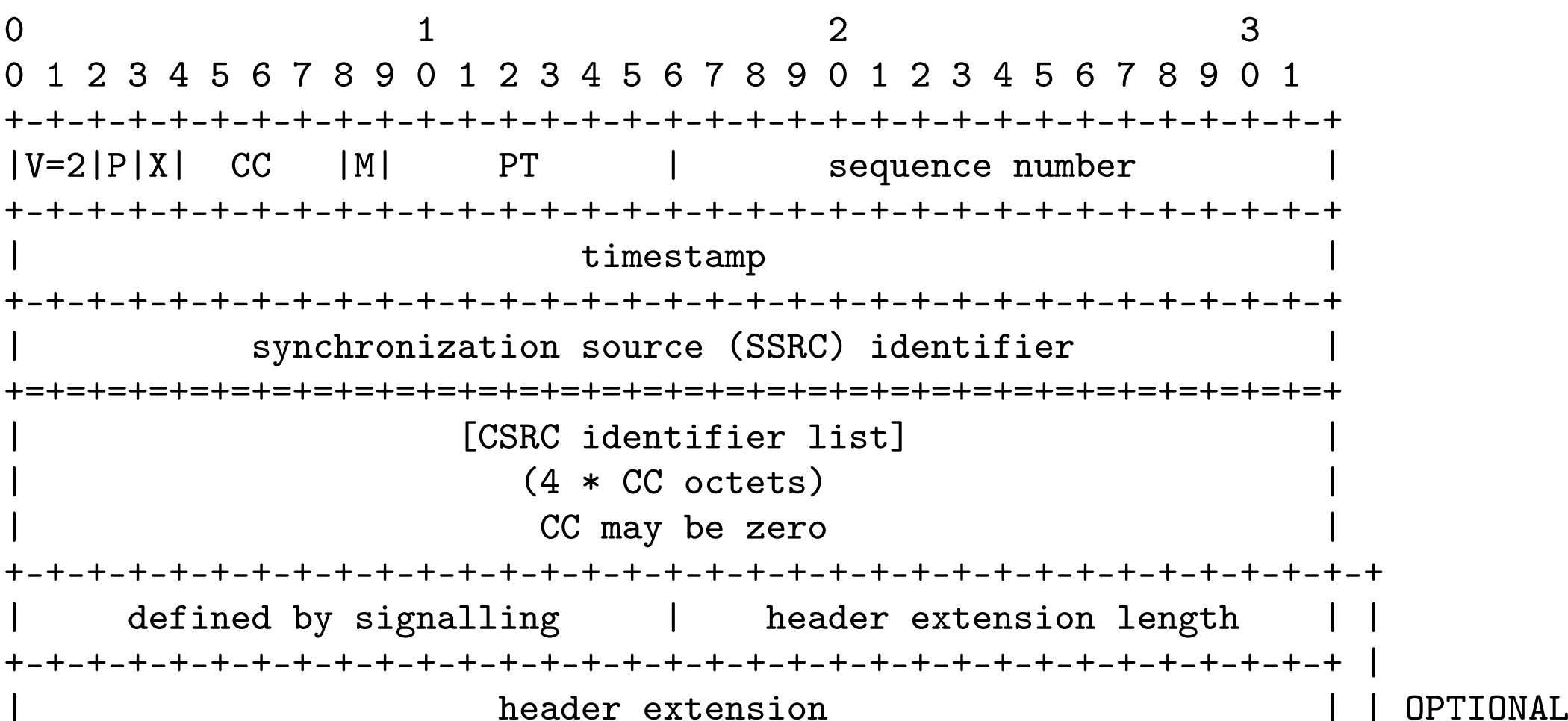
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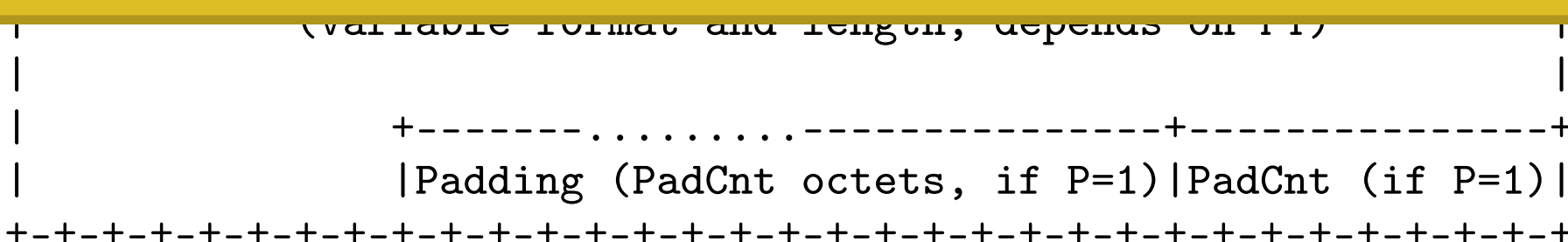
De 11: (D) 11:11 16:11 11:11 11:11

The Network Packet Representation

An RTP Data Packet is formatted as follows:



A protocol is comprised of multiple PDUs



where:

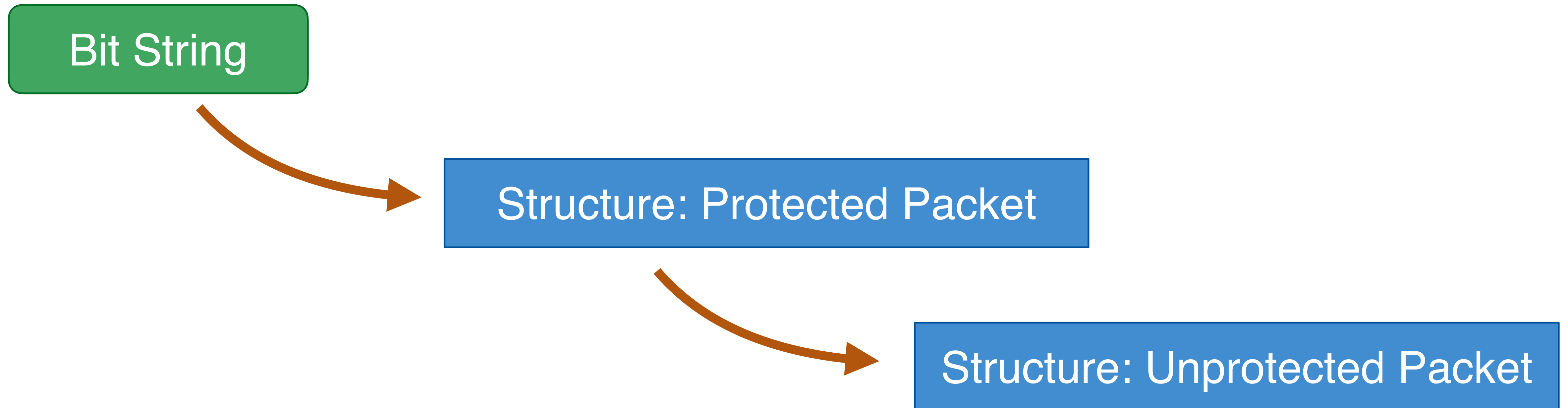
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Parsing Functions

- PDUs may have multi-stage parsing processes, with decryption or decompression necessary

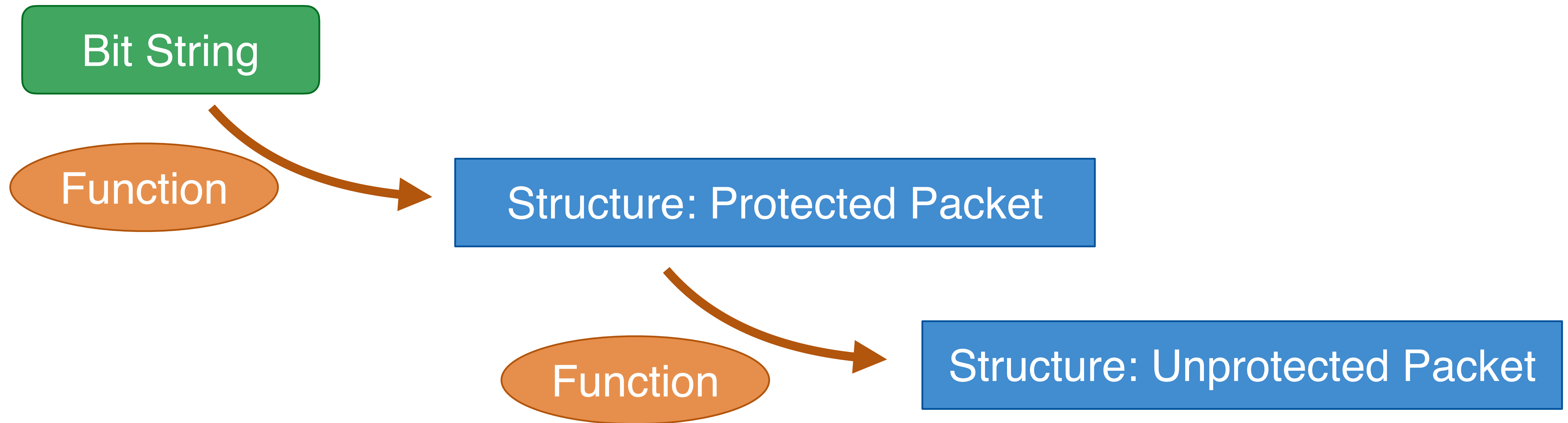
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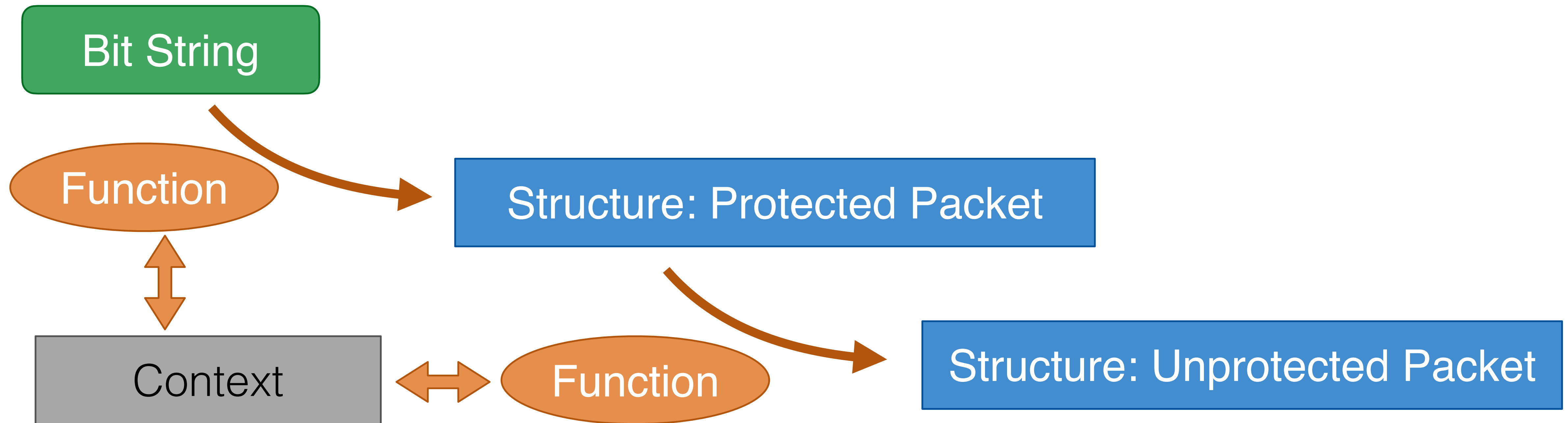
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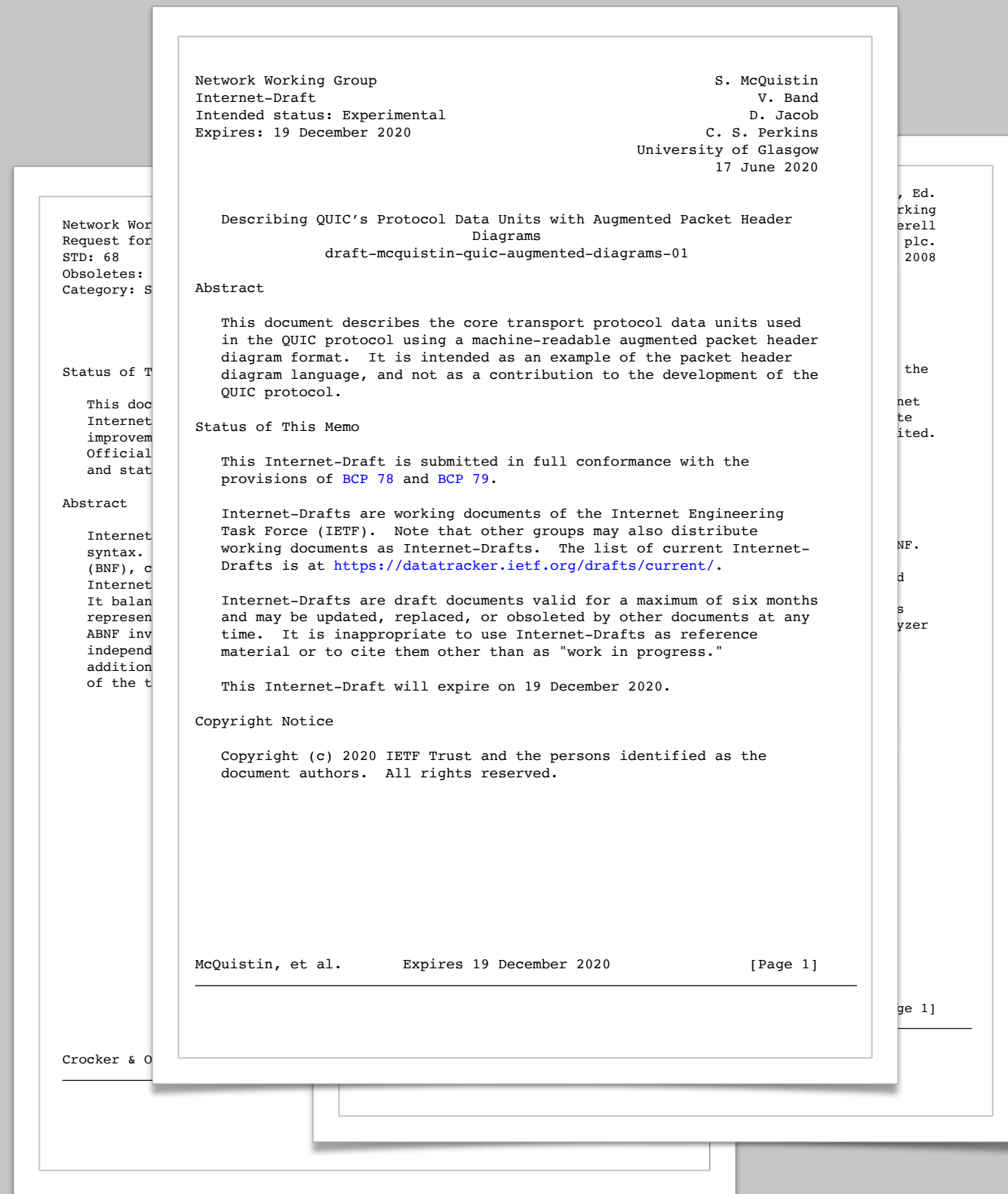
The Network Packet Representation

- A typed intermediate protocol representation, independent of input and output languages
- Enables state to be maintained between the parsing of different PDUs using typed *parsing contexts*
- Provides support for dependently formatted PDUs, constraints on and between PDU fields, and for multi-stage parsing via typed functions: all needed for parsing complex protocols

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More details about the type system in the paper



Network Packet Representation



**There are social barriers to the adoption of
protocol description techniques**

Integrating with Protocol Standards

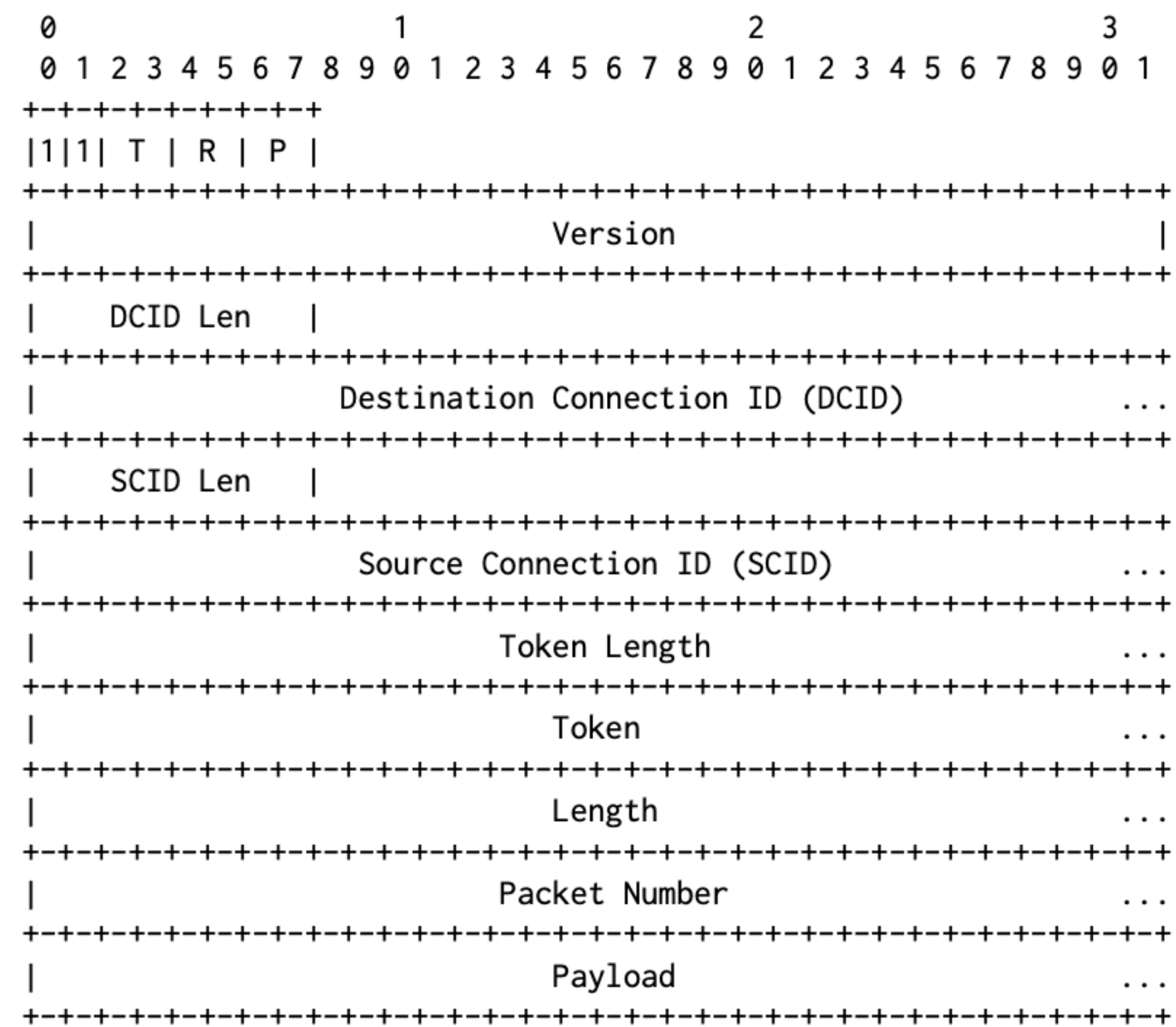
- Most readers are human
- Authorship workflows are diverse
- Canonical specifications
- Expressiveness
- Minimise required change

Protocol Description Languages

- A wide number of languages are already in use: ABNF, ASN.1, YANG, the TLS 1.3 presentation language, ...
- Any tool that aims to see broad adoption should accept multiple description formats
- The Network Packet Representation supports this: it is language agnostic
- Parsing structured description languages is well understood, and it should be possible to generate a Network Packet Representation from them
- Informal languages, like packet header diagrams, are more challenging

Augmented Packet Header Diagrams: QUIC example

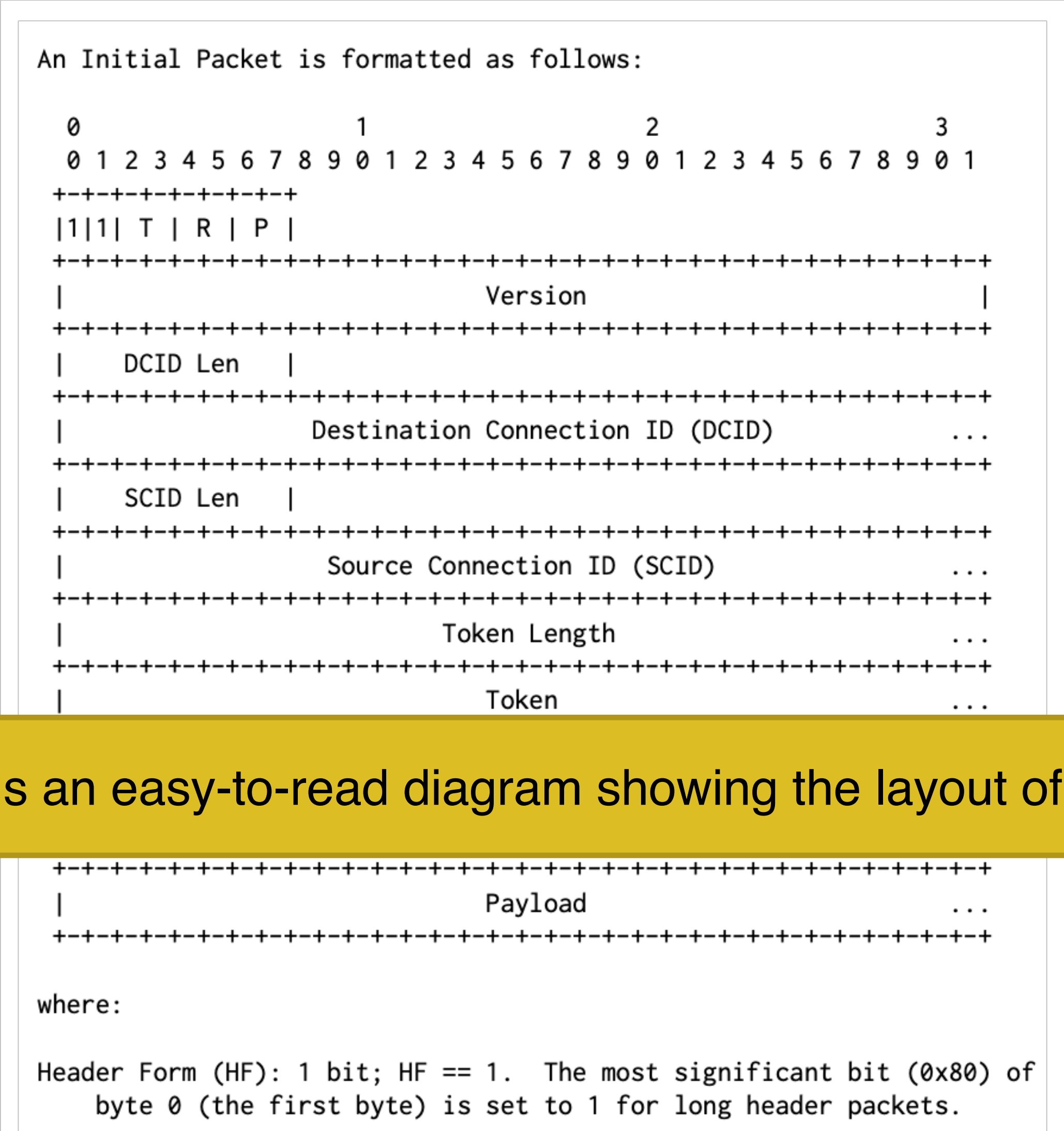
An Initial Packet is formatted as follows:



where:

Header Form (HF): 1 bit; HF == 1. The most significant bit (0x80) of byte 0 (the first byte) is set to 1 for long header packets.

Augmented Packet Header Diagrams: QUIC example

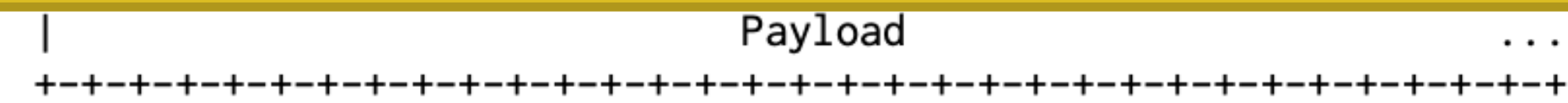
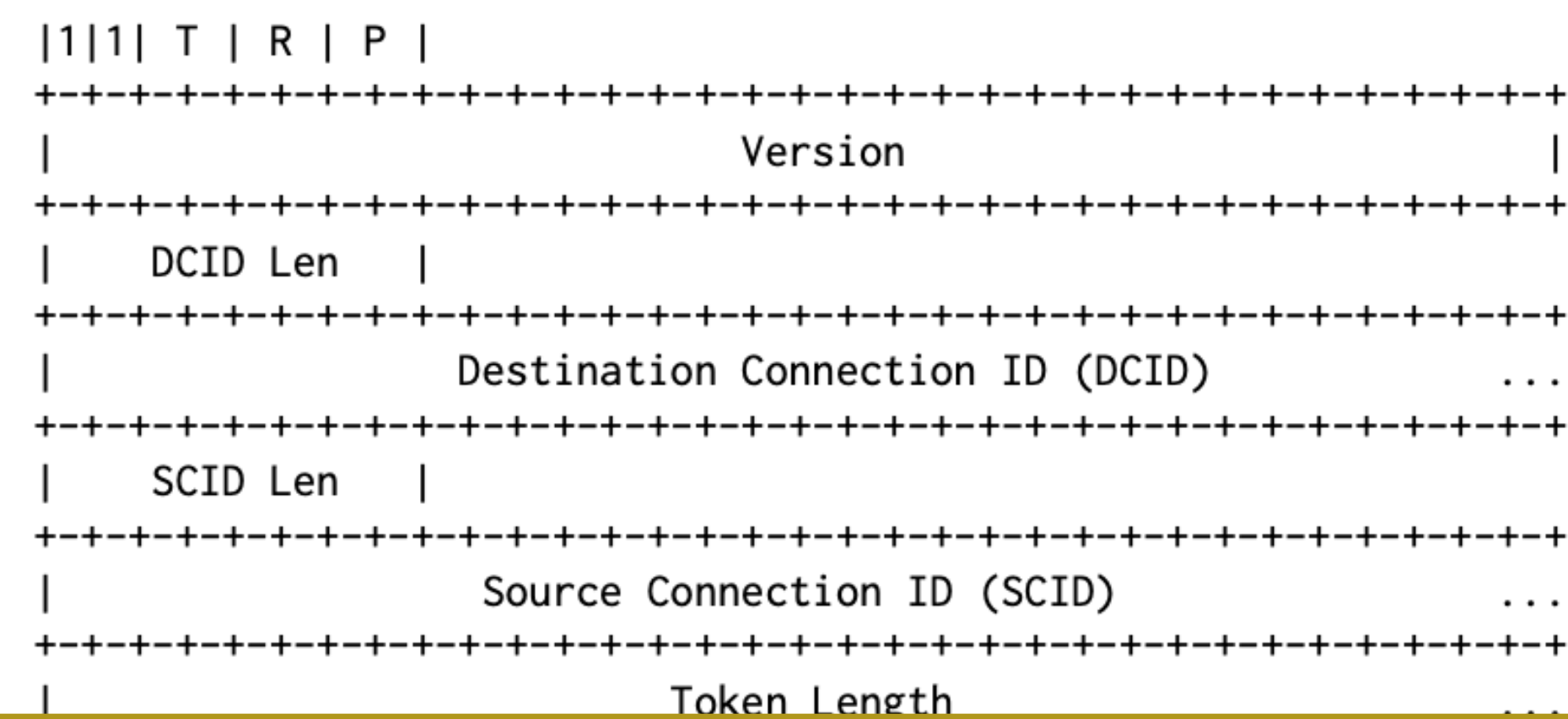


Maintains an easy-to-read diagram showing the layout of packets

Augmented Pac

JIC example

Uses structured, but idiomatic, text to provide constraints and model parsing context use



where:

Header Form (HF): 1 bit; HF == 1. The most significant bit (0x80) of byte 0 (the first byte) is set to 1 for long header packets.

...

DCID Len (DLen): 1 byte; DLen <= 20. This field contains the length, in bytes, of the Destination Connection ID field that follows it.

Destination Connection ID (DCID): DLen bytes. The Destination Connection ID field is between 0 and 20 bytes in length. On receipt, the value of DCID is stored as Initial DCID.

SCID Len (SLen): ...

Augmented Packet Header Diagrams: QUIC example

A Protected Packet is either a Protected Long Header Packet or a Protected Short Header Packet.

An Unprotected Packet is either a Long Header Packet or a Short Header Packet.

An Unprotected Packet is parsed from a Protected Packet using the `remove_protection` function. The `remove_protection` function is defined as:

```
func remove_protection(from: Protected Packet) -> Unprotected Packet:  
  ...
```

An Unprotected Packet is serialised to a Protected Packet using the `apply_protection` function. The `apply_protection` function is defined as:

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func apply_protection(to: Unprotected Packet) -> Protected Packet:  
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Provides support for functions and context use

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func apply_protection(to: Unprotected Packet) -> Protected Packet:  
    ...
```

Augmented Packet Header Diagrams

- The format of packet header diagrams can be regularised with minimal change
- The format remains extremely close to that in common use, easing adoption
- It balances structure and uniformity, needed for machine parsing, with the flexibility needed for practical use
- Prototype tooling that supports this input format, generating the Network Packet Representation from it

An Initial Packet is formatted as follows:

```

0      1      2      3
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+-----+
|1|1| T | R | P |
+-----+
|                                     Version                                     |
+-----+
|   DCID Len   |
+-----+
|               Destination Connection ID (DCID)               ...
+-----+
|   SCID Len   |
+-----+
|               Source Connection ID (SCID)               ...
+-----+
|               Token Length               ...
+-----+
|               Token               ...
+-----+
|               Length               ...
+-----+
|               Packet Number               ...
+-----+
|               Payload               ...
+-----+
```

where:

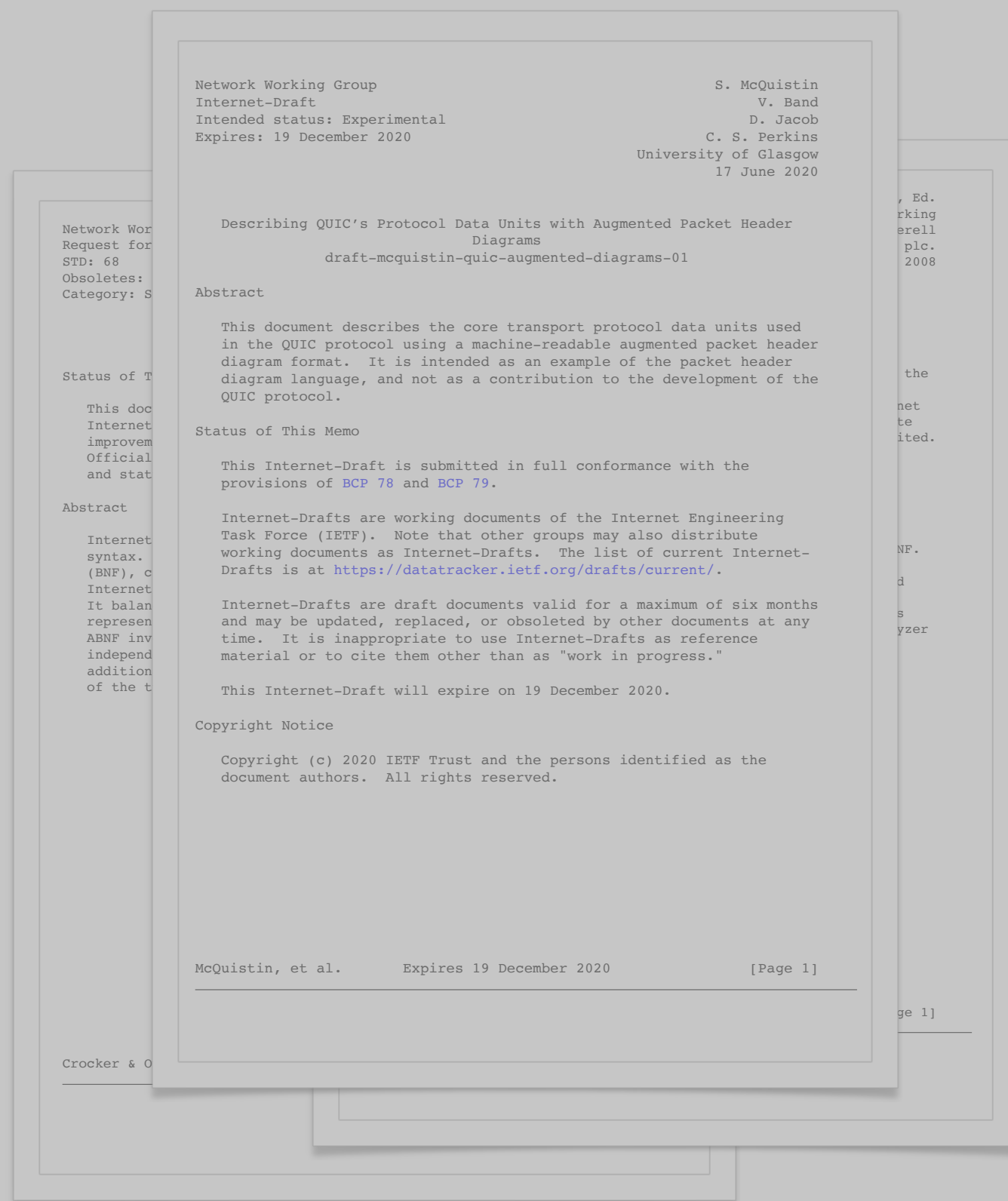
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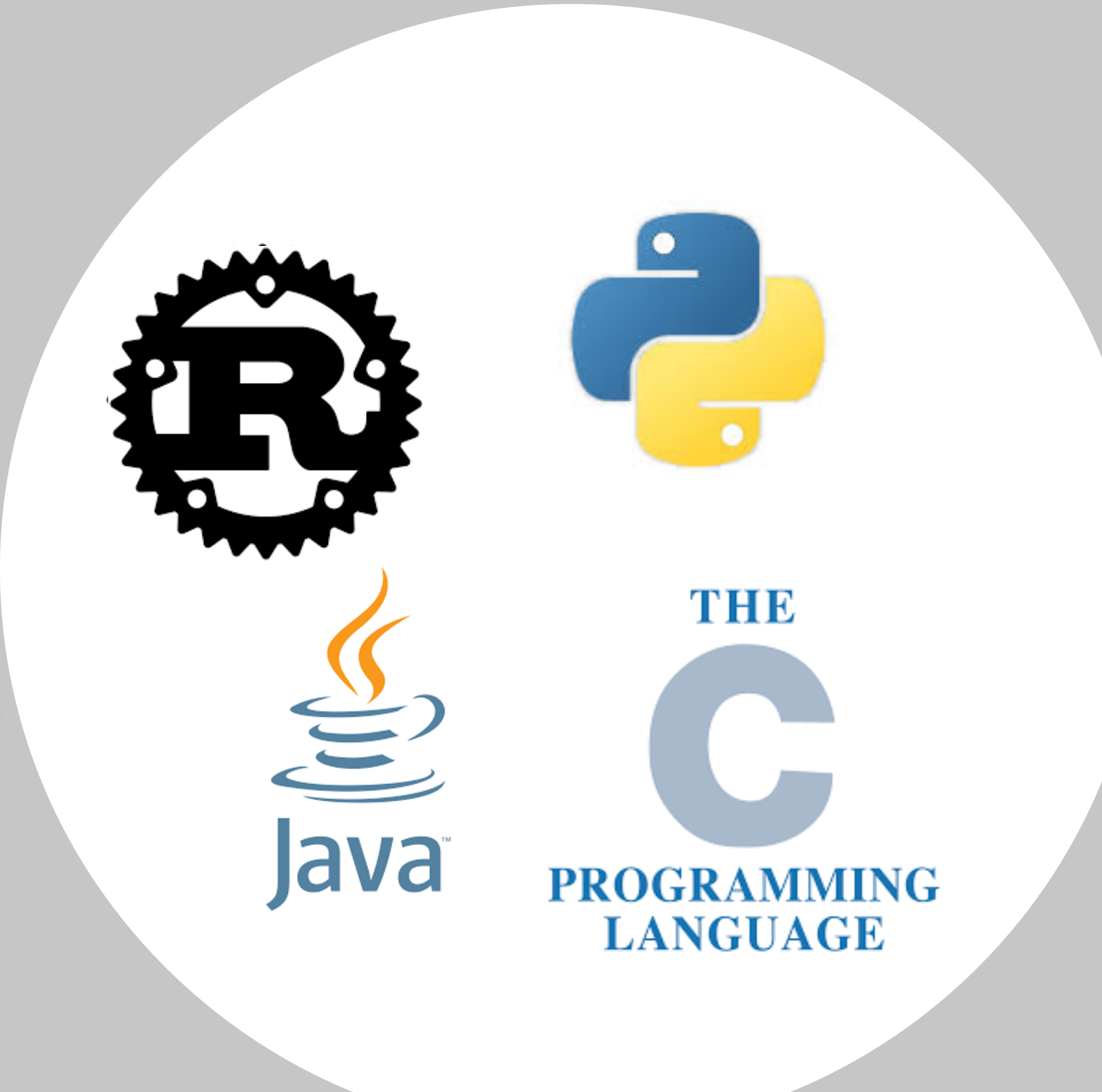
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Network Packet Representation



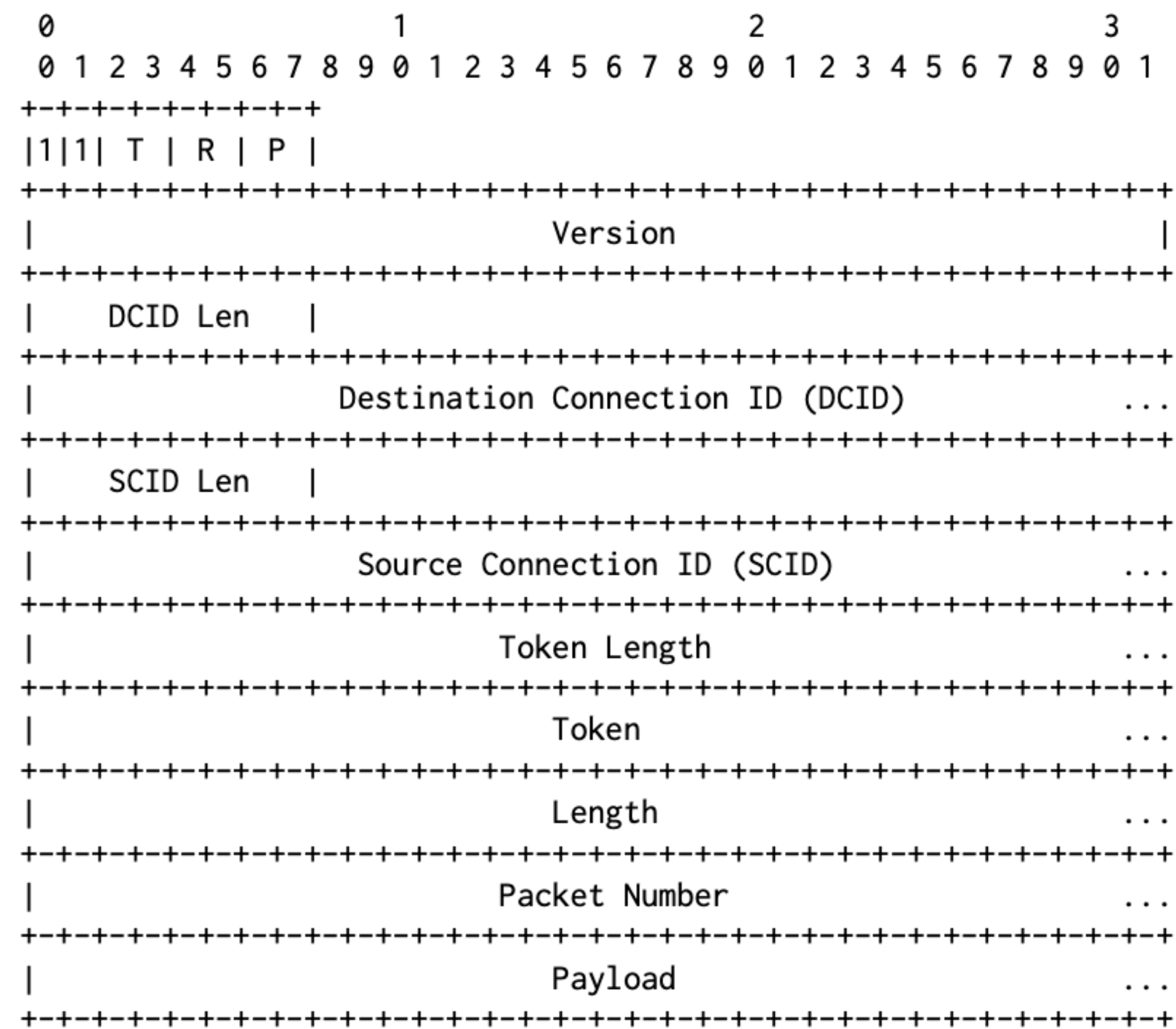
**Automatic parser generation provides a
number of opportunities to improve security**

Parser Generators

- The Network Packet Representation can be used to generate implementation code in any number of target programming languages
- Core code generation functions can be implemented once, easing the development of code generators for new languages

QUIC example

An Initial Packet is formatted as follows:

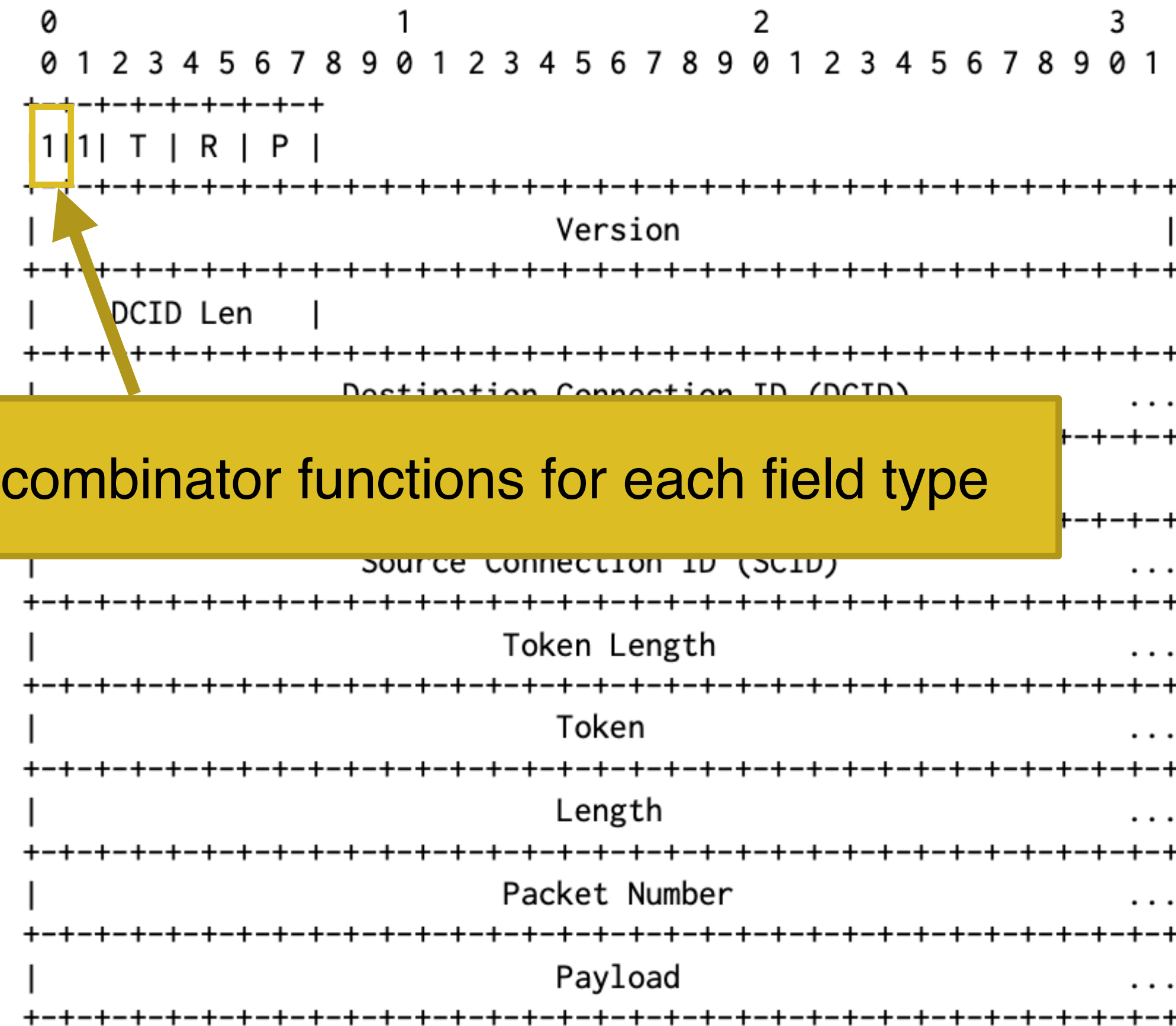


where:

Header Form (HF): 1 bit: HF == 1. The most significant bit (0x80) of

QUIC example

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where:

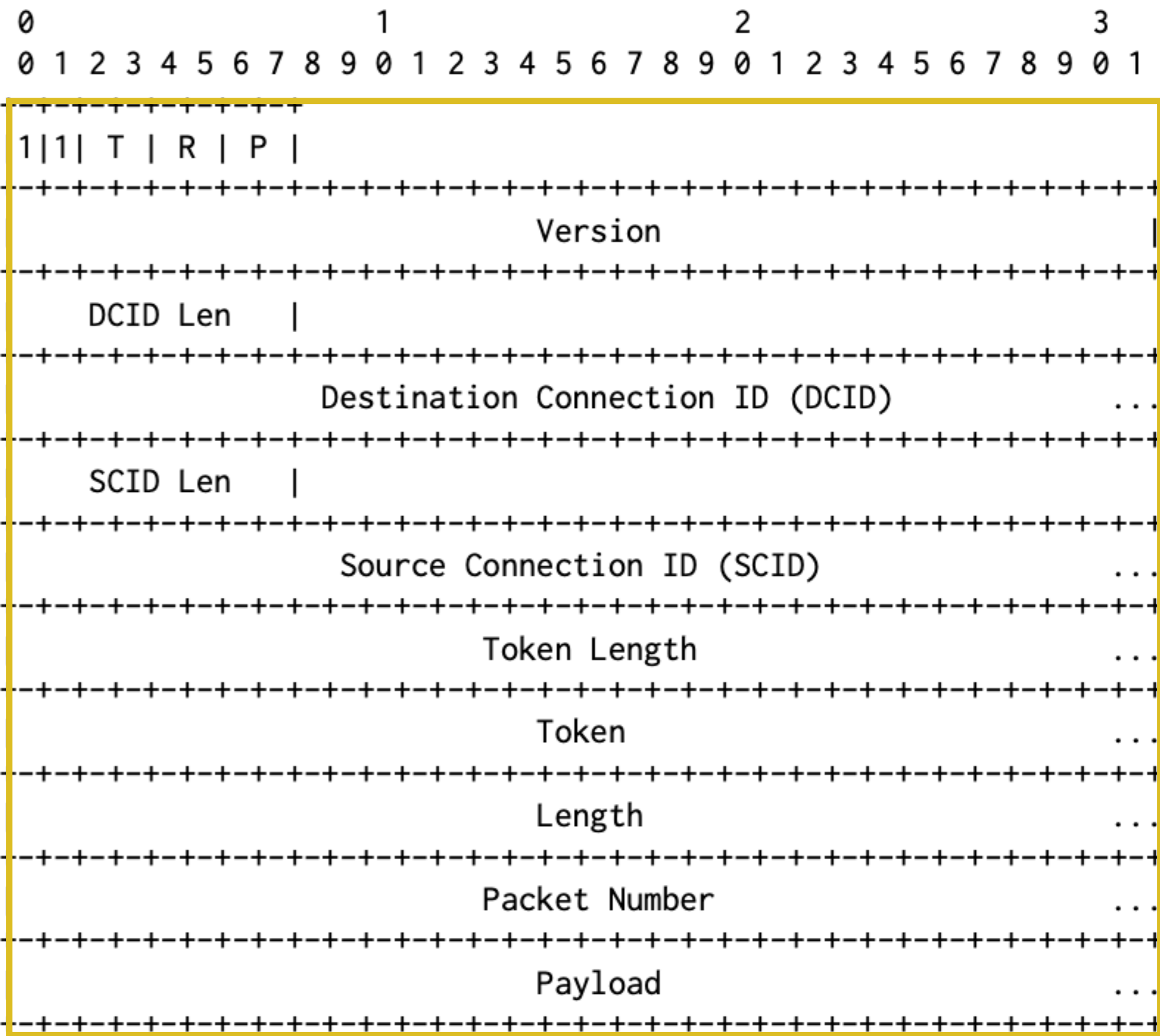
Header Form (HF): 1 bit: HF == 1 The most significant bit (0x80) of

Emit types and parser combinator functions for each field type

QUIC example

Emit types and parser combinator functions for structures

An Initial Packet



where:

QUIC example

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```

An Unprotected Packet is serialised to a Protected Packet using the `apply_protection` function. The `apply_protection` function is defined as:

Generate stubs for functions

Parser Generators

- Support for different parser models — like parser combinators — can be implemented once
- This has implications for security: modern systems languages, like Rust, can be easily supported, encouraging their adoption and use
- Our prototype tooling supports Rust code generation

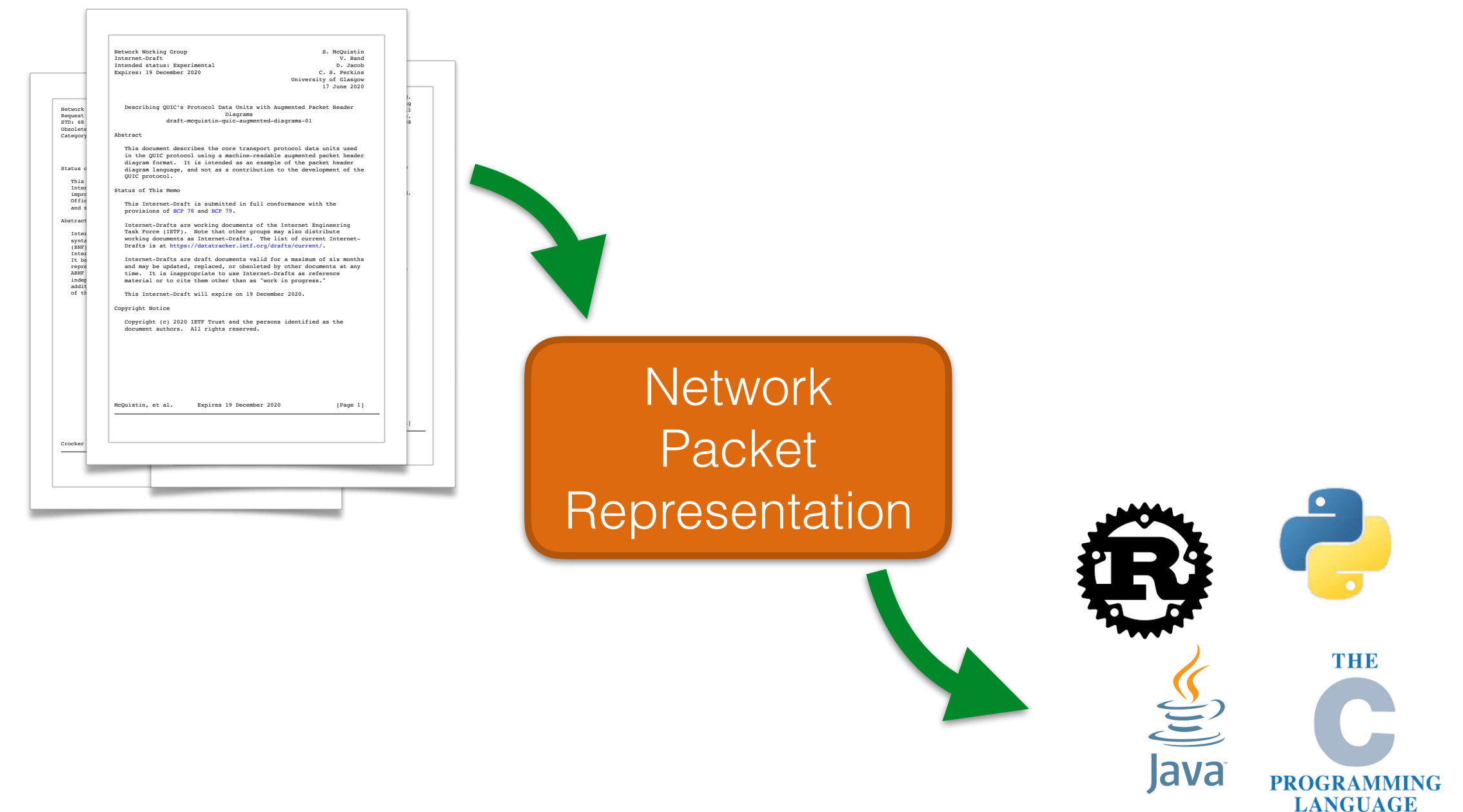
The diagram illustrates the process of network packet representation. It begins with a stack of Internet-Draft documents on the left. A green arrow points from the top document to a central orange rounded rectangle labeled "Network Packet Representation". From this central box, another green arrow points to a collection of programming language logos on the right, including R, Python, Java, and C.

Network Packet Representation



Conclusions

- Support for complex protocols with contextual, multi-stage parsing processes
- An incremental path to adoption within the standards community
- An important step towards the routine use of parser generating tooling, that should lead to standards that are safer and more trustworthy



Paper: <https://irtf.org/anrw/2020/program.html#p21>