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SAPERE ET FARI

Task 3

Introduction

Natural language is inherently ambiguous, which means that some words, phrases or sentences can have two or more meanings. In this task you will deal with so-called “structural ambiguity” – a kind of ambiguity that results from the arrangement of words in a sentence and its possible interpretations.

Part 1

The sentences given below have multiple meanings. Try to find all the possible meanings that these sentences can have.

1. *Penelope hit the boy with a backpack.*

Meaning A:
.....
.....

Meaning B:
.....
.....

2. *Salvatore met the son of the neighbour who has just come back from Singapore.*

Meaning A:
.....
.....

Meaning B:
.....
.....

3. *The cat was sitting on the couch near a woman.*

Meaning A:
.....
.....

Meaning B:
.....
.....

4. *Scotsmen like whisky more than Welshmen.*



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Meaning A:

.....
.....

Meaning B:

.....
.....

5. *The dog chased the cat and the rabbit with the mouse.*

Meaning A:

.....
.....

Meaning B:

.....
.....

Meaning C:

.....
.....

Part 2

Now consider an example of an ambiguous sentence from Polish:

6. *Janina zauważyła mężczyznę bez okularów.*

The ambiguity of Sentence 6 results from the multiple interpretation of one phrase. This phrase expresses a specific function: "X doing Y uses Z". In this sense, Sentence 6 is similar to:

- A. Sentence 1
- B. Sentences 1,3,4
- C. Sentences 2 and 4
- D. Sentences 1 and 5

On the basis of A. Radford et al., *Linguistics. An Introduction*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2009.



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KEY

Part 1

1. Meaning A: Penolope hit a boy and this boy was wearing a backpack.
 Meaning B: Penolope hit a boy using a backpack (instrumental interpretation).
2. Meaning A: It is the son that has just come back from Singapore.
 Meaning B: It is the neighbour that has just come back from Singapore.
3. Meaning A: The cat was sitting on the couch and this couch is situated near the woman.
 Meaning B: The cat and the woman are both on the couch and near each other.
4. Meaning A: Scotsmen like whisky more than Scotsmen like Welshmen.
 Meaning B: Scotsmen like whisky more than Welschmen like whisky.
5. Meaning A: The dog chased a cat and a pair of other animals (rabbit and mouse)
 Meaning B: The dog together with the mouse chased the cat and the rabbit.
 Meaning C: The dog chased the cat and the rabbit by using a mouse (instrumental, for example riding on a mouse).

Part 2

Answer D

Sentence 6 is similar to sentences 1 and 5 because they both share the possibility of an instrumental interpretation.