

(15 points)

(H) This problem is pretty // easy

True story: a major wireless company recently started an advertising campaign focusing on its claim that callers who use its phones experience fewer dropped calls.

The billboards for this company feature sentences that are split into two parts. The first one is what the recipient of the call hears, and the second one - what the caller actually said before realizing that the call got dropped. The punch line is that dropped calls can lead to serious misunderstandings. We will use the symbol // to separate the two parts of such sentences.

- (1) Don't bother coming // early.
- (2) Take the turkey out at five // to four.
- (3) I got canned // peaches.

These sentences are representative of a common phenomenon in language, called "garden path sentences". Psychologically, people interpret sentences incrementally, before waiting to hear the full text. When they hear the ambiguous start of a garden path sentence, they assume the most likely interpretation that is consistent with what they have heard so far. They then later backtrack in search of a new parse, should the first one fail.

In the specific examples above, on hearing the first part, one incorrectly assumes that the sentence is over. However, when more words arrive, the original interpretation will need to be abandoned.

- (4) All Americans need to buy a house // is a large amount of money.
- (5) Melanie is pretty // busy.
- (6) Fat people eat // accumulates in their bodies.

H1. Come up with two examples of garden path sentences that are not just modifications of the ones above and of each other. Split each of these two sentences into two parts and indicate how hearing the second part causes the hearer to revise his or her current parse.

For full credit, your sentences need to be such that the interpretation of the first part should change as much as possible on hearing the second part. For example, in sentence (6) above, the interpretation of the word "fat" changes from an adjective ("fat people") to a noun ("fat [that] people eat..."). Note: sentences like "You did a great job..., // NOT!" don't count.

H2. Rank sentences (4), (5), (6) as well as the two sentences from your solution to H1 above, based on how surprised the hearer is after hearing the second part. What, in your opinion, makes a garden path sentence harder to process by the hearer?

