

# (P) The Old Man the Boats (1/2)

Ambiguity in sentences can be a source of humor. For example, "flies" can be a noun or a verb and "like" can be a verb or a preposition, resulting in the amusing juxtaposition of

Time flies (verb) like (preposition) an arrow.

Fruit flies (noun) like (verb) a banana.

For this puzzle, we will be concerned with ambiguity in parts of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition) as well as ambiguity in the structure of a sentence. The sentences below are bracketed to show the structure of the sentences.

[ [ Time] [ flies [ like [ an arrow ] ] ] ]

[ [ Fruit flies ] [ like [ a banana ] ] ]

Local ambiguity arises when there is not enough information midway through a sentence to decide on the parts of speech or the structure. For example, when you hear or see the words "the old man" you don't know whether the sentence will continue with "man" being a verb as in "The old man the boats" or as a noun as in "The old man is wise." The structure of these two sentences is shown below. Notice that in addition to changing its part of speech, the word "man" participates differently in the structure of the sentence. In "The old man the boats", "man" is grouped with "the boats" to make a verb phrase "man the boats", but in "The old man is wise", "man" is grouped with "the old" to make a noun phrase "the old man".

[ [The old ] [ man [ the boats ] ] ]

[ [ The [ old man ] ] [ is wise ] ]

**P1.** Each of the following sentences contains a local ambiguity. For each sentence, provide an alternate continuation which shows what the other interpretation is. For example, if you were given the sentence "The old man is wise" your answer could be "The old man the boats".

Your answers should always start with at least the first three words of the sentences provided. In some cases, more words should be shared. Your answers should differ from the original sentence in at least one word changing its part of speech or in at least one word being grouped with different words in the structure.

1. The old train the young.

2. The thief seized by the police turned out to be our cousin.

3. I convinced her children to do their homework.



## (P) The Old Man the Boats (2/2)

4. The man who whistles tunes pianos.

5. The cotton clothing is drying in the sun.

