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La leçon se déroule en anglais. Elle est suivie d'un entretien en français.

SUBJECT:

"Why can superlatives function as quantifiers? A fairly natural answer suggests itself. Consider (11), for example:

(11) *The faintest noise bothers my uncle.*

The universal quantified reading makes sense here if one assumes that if a certain noise bothers somebody, then a louder one will too. We can express this by saying that a pragmatic scale, ranging from *faint* to *loud*, along the dimension noise, is associated with the predicate *bother*.

"the loudest" ---
 X1 ---
 x2 ---
 "the faintest" ---

Given two noises *x1* and *x2*, such that *x1* is higher on the scale than *x2* (i.e. louder), one assumes that the truth of *x2 bothers y* will always entail the truth of *x1 bothers y*. This assumption entails in particular that, if the proposition is true for the lowest element on the scale, it will be true for all the elements on the scale. And the lowest element is of course normally identified by means of a superlative, in this case *the faintest noise*.

[...]

Moreover, this hypothesis predicts that logical negation of a proposition will have the effect of reversing the corresponding scale [...]. This is verified in sentence (99):

(99) *The loudest noise doesn't bother him.*"

Gilles FAUCONNIER, "Pragmatic Scales and Logical Structure", *Linguistic Inquiry* 6:3, 1975, p. 361.

Discuss.

Candidates will use relevant excerpts from the following corpus to address the above topic.

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Excerpt 1

Malai military doctors treating Danuese, again mostly kids. For me, it was the hardest thing to watch. My eyes filled with tears, that took me as unexpectedly as one of the Corporal's ambushes.

Timothy Mo, *The Redundancy of Courage*, 1991

Excerpt 2

There is no doubt at all that she found him overwhelmingly attractive, for his "manly beauty", as well as for the strength and goodness of his character, but there is not the slightest hint that her feelings for him were in any degree reciprocated.

"Thomas Russell", *Devlin Family*, <http://www.devlin-family.com/Russell.htm>, accessed 2014

Excerpt 3

Katy was looking very pleased with herself when she came home from the nursery. "We were running races," she said, "and I was the fastest. I can run faster than anybody."

Miscellaneous unpublished creative writing, 1985-1994, BNC

Excerpt 4

Leo kissed her on the forehead. "It's late now. You've been dreaming. Everything will be clearer in the morning. All right?" He gave her the slowest, steadiest smile he could manage.

Lisa Appignanesi, *Memory and Desire*, 1992

Excerpt 5

Mott's assistant, Ralph Nicks, noted: "He is not the fastest work horse in the morning, especially when he is by himself. I wouldn't say he's lazy, just on the conservative side, unless you put another horse out there with him. He's fit, but obviously not wound up as he will be after two or three races."

New York Times, 1996

Excerpt 6

Get your moccasins on, he thought dismally. Natty Bumpo Wahl, the last of the Mohican emulators – so attuned to the corporate wilderness he could detect the minutest rustling in the undergrowth.

Alan Leonard, *The Kabbalist of Madison Avenue*, 2007

Excerpt 7

"All of us, even Raynor," she said, and smiled. "Although he is not the best of our cooks, ma'am. But sometimes he prepares a dish of what we call Cais Breac – that is lake fish cooked in wine, with our own herb cheese. Quite delicious."

Bridget Wood, *The Lost Prince*, 1992

Excerpt 8

Although I've said I'm happy with how I look, it doesn't mean there's nothing about myself I wouldn't like to change. I know I'm not the ugliest person in the world, but then again, I don't want to walk around thinking I'm the prettiest, I'm perfect, I don't need to change a thing.

Jill Dawson, *How do I Look?* 1990

Excerpt 9

Some others suffer from severe health related problems. They keep going around hospitals. They have the best food on their plate but are constrained not to eat it. To them, even the best mattress does not induce sleep.

Ashram Sai Geetha, "Master of Destiny", sgashram.org/master-of-destiny/, accessed 2013

Excerpt 10

We'll go west. We'd better not waste any time. I don't want to be anywhere near here when the sun comes up.

Amanda Browning, *The Stolen Heart*, 1992

Excerpt 11

"Is he a good son, Hal?" Shepherd laughed. "He is the best of sons, Shai Tung. Like Li Yuan, his respect is not a matter of rote, as it is with some of this new generation, but a deep-rooted thing."

David Wingrove, *Chung Kuo*, Book One: *The Middle Kingdom*, 1989

Excerpt 12

But then you had the people completely humorless – besides Alan Simpson – like Richard Nixon, who was not the funniest guy in the world.

Neal Conan, *NPR_TalNation*, 2006

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Excerpt 13

And as I am talking to Denise that is exactly what I want to do, roll over and die – because it is the easiest thing to do, the least painful, because I can't reconcile the happiness I feel in being with her and the anger that she's abandoned me and the fear that she still wants to hold on to me.

Christian A. Abouzeid, *Background Noise*, 1998

Excerpt 14

There was no wind. Not even the slightest breeze.

Tracy Bateman, *The Widow of Saunders Creek*, 2012

Excerpt 15

His handwriting was so bad that Mr Sunderland had pinned his composition to the notice-board in the hall so everyone could see he was the worst writer in the whole school.

Domini Highsmith, *Frankie*, 1990

Excerpt 16

Nina Pratt, a business consultant to art galleries, believes that having your own gallery is not the easiest or the best way to show or sell your art. She says. "It's much more practical to have shows out of your studio once or twice a year, or even to use your studio as a gallery."

Daniel Gran, *The Pros and Cons of Running your Own Gallery*, 1992

Excerpt 17

"To turn an enemy into a friend, all you have to do is love him." "Love him? Are you sure? That doesn't sound easy at all. That sounds terribly difficult to me." "Oh, it is difficult," Herkimer agreed. "Probably one of the most difficult things in the world. But I said it was simple, not easy."

Stephen Lawhead, *A Tale of Annabelle Hedgehog*, 1990

Excerpt 18

The difference is clear. Postscript is recognisable as something which can be written and read by us humans. It is not the easiest language to learn, but it has structure and legibility.

Reed Business Pub, 1991, BNC

Excerpt 19

The mountain of the same name (we old-timers call it Ajax) rises like a cloud from the city streets; the least difficult skiing is at the top, with glades, bumps, and ravines lower down – a perfect mix for almost anyone but rank beginners and super-experts.

Skiing, 1992, COCA

Excerpt 20

The peak we did that day was the Ober Gabelhorn, and I look back on it now with no embarrassment. It is not the hardest peak in the Alps but it is one of the classics, and we had done it, though we had only been in the area a couple of days and had still been acclimatising.

Climber and Hill Walker, 1991, BNC

Excerpt 21

We saw a dozen and more of them and they did not show the least bit of interest in us – too busy trying to survive.

walkscotland.plus.com, GloWbe, accessed 2014

Excerpt 22

As you try to see him for who he is, you know that he would not pay the compliment back, as he would not show any interest in you, unless he could use you to get to his destination.

scatterthestones.co.uk, GloWbe, accessed 2014

Excerpt 23

His blue eyes were vigilant, never resting, darting toward the slightest noise.

Kevin Shushtari, *The Sweet Dry Fruit of the Lotus*, 2012

Excerpt 24

The boy reached them and stopped. He did not spare even the slightest glance for the monsters that snarled balefully in the gloom beyond the fringes of his lamp. His eyes remained fixed on the brothers.

Terry Brooks, *The Talismans of Shannara*, 1993