

Which connective fits best: ‘car’ or ‘parce que’? A challenge for both humans and LLMs

Louis Escouflaire, Joanna Blochowiak, Liesbeth Degand, Marie-Catherine de Marneffe

UCLouvain – louis.escouflaire@uclouvain.be ; joanna.blochowiak@uclouvain.be ;
liesbeth.degand@uclouvain.be ; marie-catherine.demarneffe@uclouvain.be

Abstract

We analyze how well human annotators, ChatGPT and a fine-tuned CamemBERT transformer model are able to predict words in French which differ subtly in meaning. We focus on *car* and *parce que*, two French connectives considered as near-synonymous, distinguished only by fine-grained syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features. We used a test set of 420 sentences from French news articles and SMS text messages containing the word *car* or *parce que*, which was masked and had to be predicted. Our results suggest that this task is particularly difficult both for native speakers of French and for large language models. However, we find that fine-tuning CamemBERT on a training corpus of 10,000 masked sentences containing *car* vs. *parce que* allows it to grasp the syntactic and semantic subtleties between the connectives, and to perform significantly better than the human annotators.

Keywords: Large Language Models, Annotation, Connectives.