

Copredication as Illusion

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Damn me, but all things are queer, come to think of 'em. But that's against my principles. Think not, is my eleventh commandment.—Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, chapter 29.

1 INTRODUCTION

The paper will argue that copredications are semantically incoherent, and that their apparent coherence is a species of illusion. If this claim is right, then the longstanding difficulty of distinguishing acceptable copredication from zeugma is put on a different footing; the difference is not semantic (still less syntactic), but a difference between falling into illusion and not.

'Copredication' describes a construction wherein a single nominal supports categorically disjoint predicates without any felt ambiguity, deviance, or unacceptability (*Lunch was delicious, but lasted all afternoon; Germany was happy after its World Cup success*). Such constructions appear to be truth-apt, yet, if so, we seem to be landed with a bizarre ontology (food that has duration, abstract objects with weight, geographical areas with psychological properties, etc.). Prima facie, something must give: either truth-conditional semantics must be qualified/modified/abandoned or we allow the bizarre ontology. This bind poses a challenge to a traditional conception under which truth-conditional semantics is happily wedded to a coherent ontology, one we should otherwise sanction.

Broadly speaking, the current literature exhibits three attitudes to the challenge of copredication to semantics. Some think the challenge is really misplaced, requiring a diagnosis rather than any overhaul of semantics (Liebesman & Magidor, 2017; King, 2018; Devitt, 2021). Another position recognises the problem as serious, but still holds that standard world-involving truth conditions are linguistically determined, yet not in a one-to-one way at the lexical level, i.e., word meaning *overdetermines* reference (Vicente, 2021; Ortega-Andrés, 2022). Others think that the problem does require an alternative semantics, or at least a non-standard version of truth-conditional semantics under which semantic values cannot be simply read off of nominals (Pustejovsky, 1995; Chomsky, 2000; Asher, 2011; Pietroski, 2018; Quilty-Dunn, 2021). Another version of a related thought is that complex mereological objects may serve as the suitable nominal referents accompanied by rules for how construal is sensitive to the mereological structure (Gotham, 2014, 2017). The account I shall propose offers a different perspective.

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As advertised at the top, the claim to be here spelt-out and defended is that copredicative constructions present competent speakers with illusions: the constructions possess no ontologically coherent truth conditions as a linguistic property, but competent speakers do not notice because (i) the sentences are perfectly well-formed and (ii) associated coherent truth conditions are easily constructed, albeit not ones that have a linguistic licence from the relevant sentences. So, we treat copredications as truth-apt because of the associated content, not the content the sentences compositionally express. In effect, copredication amounts to a case of unrecognised zeugma. The problem of how to account for the difference between copredication and zeugma thus dissolves, at least at the level of semantics.

Two points bear emphasis upfront. First, I intend the illusion hypothesis to be an empirically testable claim rather than a mere abstract possibility or some kind of conceptual truth derived from some assumptions about the nature of meaning. Section 8.1 will suggest some ways in which the claim may be tested, and so potentially falsified. Secondly, the following arguments will be concerned with so-called *regular* polysemy, which is cross-linguistically associated with nominals of certain semantic classes. So-called *irregular* polysemy is more ad hoc, peculiar to specific lexical items (e.g., *dream* as in aspiration and experience had during sleep) (Carston, 2021). Irregular polysemy appears to be a species of metaphor and does not systematically support copredication.

The paper is organised as follows. The next section will introduce the very idea of a linguistic illusion. In the linguistics literature, illusions come in three basic forms, each of which includes syntax as a factor. On the view to be advanced, copredication is different as it is a wholly semantic illusion; that is, there is no issue of copredications being syntactically ill-formed or competent speakers being mistaken about their structure. The third section will present the bare bones of a truth-conditional semantics with especial reference to the supposed language-world connection such a semantics enshrines and the various problem cases it faces, such as fiction and other constructions concerning the sky, the average American, etc. In effect, copredication will generalise these difficulties as virtually applying to every nominal. The section after will layout the copredication phenomena and explain the challenge to truth-conditional semantics it poses. The fifth section will show that the problem cannot be evaded or even ameliorated by construing the challenge as if it turned on ambiguity or context-sensitivity, as is pursued by Liebesman & Magidor (2017) and King (2018). Section six will argue against a ‘generosity’ view that admits whatever objects are required to support univocal reference. In particular, Devitt (2021) contends that polysemy can be deflated by way of the simple-minded thought that a single object may possess a variety of different kinds of properties. The problem here is that going simple-minded on the metaphysics offers no insight into how the semantics of copredication is supposed to work. In the seventh section, an insightful proposal from Vicente (2021) will be considered. Vicente’s core claim is that while copredication challenges the apparent *univocity* of world-involving semantic relations, it does not challenge the world-involving aspect of the relations. The logic here is correct, but once univocity is forgone, linguistic determination of the copredicative multiple (non-univocal) content cannot be periphrastically recovered in the way Vicente imagines. If that is right, then we have an illusion of truth conditions, where the sentence itself has no coherent interpretation precisely because there is neither a univocal interpretation nor multiple ones that can be sourced to the structure of the sentences. Section eight will clarify the illusory position in relation to its empirical testability, lexical polysemy, truth, and fiction. A central claim here is that fiction and copredication are distinct inasmuch as while both are treated as true, fictions can be literally true, even though there is no Holmes, Batman, etc.,

whereas copredications are literally incoherent, but have an associated content that is true much as fiction is.

2 THREE SPECIES OF LINGUISTIC ILLUSION

Within contemporary empirical inquiry into linguistic cognition, linguistic illusion has much the same status as the more familiar cases of perceptual and cognitive illusion. While nothing that follows depends upon any specific account of illusion, whether linguistic or otherwise, I shall assume that the very idea of an illusion in the present context involves an interface effect in the sense in which illusions arise due to the interaction of different cognitive systems, which in themselves are not dysfunctional or delusive. Thus, perceptual illusions are characterised in terms of stimuli triggering processes that give rise to non-veridical experiences *only relative* to a distinct capacity to distinguish how things are from how they perceptually seem. Similarly, cognitive illusions arise from stimuli eliciting certain modes of reasoning that lead to the wrong conclusions *only relative* to a distinct capacity to determine what is right and wrong reasoning. So it is with linguistic illusion, where linguistic stimuli produce interpretations that are misaligned with a competence that determines a non-delusive interpretation. The robustness of illusion in general, therefore, is due to the different systems functioning together, and only with effort, if at all, can one disaggregate the contributions of the different systems to the illusory experience or judgement their ensemble produces. Illusion is not merely getting the world wrong relative to some stimuli, not even systematically so, but getting it wrong in ways (i) that do not involve cognitive malfunction but (ii) for which we have the competence to be debriefed on the illusion without affecting its robustness. Without the latter condition one simply has a system that is unreliable over certain kinds of stimuli.

So, in general, linguistic illusion occurs where competent speaker-hearers of a language systematically experience or judge certain constructions to possess properties they lack; they have attitudes towards the constructions that are misaligned with their underlying linguistic competence, which leads to various kinds of misattribution to the constructions.

The phenomenon comes in at least three varieties.

First, there are grammatically well-formed structures that appear to be ill-formed:

- (1) a. The horse raced past the barn fell.
- b. The boat the sailor the dog bit built sank.

The first example is a case of a ‘garden path’; so called because speakers are led down the garden path of misconstruing the first verb in the sentence as the matrix verb¹. The second example is a case of ‘centre embedding’, where a relative clause modifies the head of a relative clause². There is nothing inherently wrong about either form, for both have acceptable instances:

- (2) a. The onions fried in the pan burnt.
- b. The boat the sailor I knew built sank.

1 See Sanz *et al.* (2013) for extensive coverage.

2 The *locus classicus* is Miller & Chomsky (1963). See Fodor *et al.* (2019) for the insightful proposal that the unacceptability of centre-embeddings is due to prosodic chunking rather than memory limitations, as has been traditionally thought

Hence, the very grammar that will generate cases like (2) will also generate cases like (1). One could constrain such a grammar not to generate (1)-like cases, but, without further ado, this would be a non-explanatory stipulation and a complication to an otherwise good grammar. That is, the simplest grammar that will generate (2) will also generate (1). Moreover, the comparison allows us to see that the cases in (1) are perfectly meaningful, as explicit bracketing shows:

- (3) a. [The horse [_{RC} raced past the barn]] fell.
 b. [The boat [_{RC} the sailor [_{RC} the dog bit] built] sank.

In (1a)-like cases, the illusion arises through our interpreting the first verb we come across as the main verb, not the verb of a reduced relative clause. This expectation is blocked in (2a) because onions cannot be construed as the agents of frying, but can only undergo frying. The case of (1b) is somewhat more contentious. What is agreed is that modifying the head of a relative clause with a relative clause often results in unacceptability, even though the form of modification is perfectly OK.

Crucial for the illusory status of these kinds of construction is that the misperception is robust or persistent over debriefing; that is, knowing how the illusion arises does not make one immune to it (to this extent, the relevant processing appears to be encapsulated relative to one's beliefs about one's language); indeed, in a very real sense, one cannot even *say* (2b) with the intonation contour of a declarative with a pair of relative clauses, making the sentence unusable, but grammatical and meaningful nevertheless.

A second kind of case is a semantic illusion, where a sentence appears to have a meaning it lacks. Consider:

- (4) a. No head injury is too trivial to ignore³.
 b. The mother stopped the child from nearly drowning.

Speakers reliably interpret (4a) to mean that no head injury, however trivial, should be ignored. Its linguistically determined interpretation, however, is that all head injuries, even the trivial ones, should be ignored. The contrast is clear with *No atom bomb is too small to ban*. Similarly, (4b) is reliably interpreted to mean that the mother saved the child, who was near drowning, whereas its linguistically determined interpretation is that the mother changed the state of the child from nearly drowning, which is consistent with the child drowning. As with garden paths, one can be debriefed to see a particular sentence aright, but that does not immunise one against the general effect. In these cases, there is a clear semantic interference, where a far more plausible or coherent reading overrides the reading that the sentence actually possesses as a feature of its syntactic-semantic composition.

Thirdly, there are a class of constructions, which, although apparently acceptable, have no linguistically determined interpretation at all, being ill-formed:

- (5) a. Many more people have been to Paris than I have⁴.
 b. The patient the nurse the clinic had hired met Jack⁵.

3 This is a so-called 'depth charge' illusion, originating with [Wason & Reich \(1979\)](#).

4 This is a case of the much-discussed comparative illusion. See [Wellwood et al. \(2018\)](#) for a comprehensive treatment of the phenomenon.

5 This is a case where a move from unparsable but grammatical centre-embedding to ungrammaticality *improves* acceptability. See [Frazier \(1985\)](#) and [Huang & Phillips \(2021\)](#).

- c. The bills that no senator voted for will ever become law⁶.
- d. Users of this car park do so at their own risk.

The problem with (5a) is that the elided VP needs to match the antecedent VP, but this fails to deliver a proper comparison (cf., **Many more people have been to Paris than I have been to Paris*). The problem with (5b) is that *the nurse* lacks a VP, which we fail to note because of the interference of the verb in the reduced relative clause *the clinic had hired*. The problem with (5c) is that it is a polarity violation: *ever* should occur in the scope of a negative item, but the relevant licenser *no* occurs in the relative clause, and so does not scope over *ever* (cf., *No bills that senators voted for will ever become law*). The problem with (5d), which I observed on a mass-produced sign, is that *do so* has no verbal antecedent, but is read as if it picks up the verbal root of nominal *users*.

The examples here, familiar from the psycholinguistics literature, are only intended to establish that there are linguistic illusions, systematic and robust mismatches between intuitive judgement or parsing and the properties determined by the structures themselves. I shall propose that the copredication cases are another species of illusion in that their coherence is an illusion generated by the coherence of an interpretation that is associated with the copredication, but not determined by it. This is a somewhat different case from the above ones for syntax is not a salient factor. That is, in the above kinds of case, there is a misalignment, in one way or another, between syntax and semantics/acceptability. In copredication cases, there is a misalignment between linguistically determined semantic properties, which issue in incoherence, and interpretations of what is being said by speakers, which while coherent is not linguistically determined.

A general approach to such illusion phenomena is so-called ‘good-enough’ processing (Ferreira *et al.*, 2002; Ferreira & Patson, 2007; Karimi & Ferreira, 2016). The basic idea is that linguistic processing produces a shallow or partial representation to satisfy the demands of limited memory resources. Thus, processing works on local properties, not a fully articulated global structure. Such a cognitive organisation makes speakers prone to illusion when the parsing heuristics that are designed merely to be good enough to retrieve a likely interpretation are confronted with constructions whose syntax fails to reflect the presumptions of the heuristics, such as with the local ambiguities of garden paths or even when thematic order is misaligned with linear order of arguments as in the passive⁷. What I am suggesting for copredication is a species of this view insofar as the illusion of coherence arises from a failure to register the global features of a copredication, i.e., while each predication is by itself coherent, the predicates together produce incoherence. I am not here committed, though, to any ‘good-enough’ model in general. It will be good enough for present purposes that copredication is seen to be illusory because of speakers’ failure to be sensitive to the global features of the construction and so the requirement of a shared referent (in *some* sense) across the predicates. The general architecture of linguistic processing is another matter for another day, but see section 8.

6 This is a so-called ‘negative polarity illusion’. See Parker & Phillips (2016).

7 The basic idea that processing proceeds in local chunks rather than a global structure dates to at least (Frazier & Rayner, 1982).

Before anything else, then, here is how I understand the relevant terms of art:

(LD) A semantic property *P* of a phrase *C* is *linguistically determined* iff every token of *C'* that shares the syntax and lexical items of *C* has *P*.

(A) A semantic property *P* is *reliably associated* with a phrase *C* iff tokens of *C* are typically/default construed as expressing *P*.

In simple terms, linguistic determination just amounts to the idea that certain semantic properties are fixed by syntax and lexical items regardless of speaker intention, negotiation, context, or any other conceivable factors. It follows that truth conditions in general will not be linguistically determined, for valuation of pronouns, for example, depend upon context or speaker intention. That said, insofar as binding theory *is* syntactic, various binding options will and will not be linguistically determined (Reinhart, 2006; Reuland, 2011). Equally, if one assumes a broad ‘contextualist’ position under which truth-conditions are typically pragmatically determined, then that just means that they are not linguistically determined. Still, many of the semantic properties will be so determined lest we follow Humpty Dumpty (Recanati, 2004; Collins, 2020). One could modify (LD) to include contextual information that enters into content under a linguistic licence⁸. The scope and status of such a licence, however, is highly controversial and does not directly impact on the issues that concern us (but see section 4), so the unmodified form of (LD) will suffice.

Reliable association is a much looser notion and can have varied sources. Some properties will associate with a structure under a linguistic licence, such as with binding (options are linguistically determined, but the choice of option is not—whether, say, a pronoun is bound or not outside of its clause), while others will be extra-linguistic such as with the interference effects mentioned above.

My claim about copredication cases, therefore, is that, in effect, they are all zeugmatic, and the perceived difference between acceptable and unacceptable cases of copredication is not a semantic difference, one grounded in linguistic properties, but an illusion brought about by the relative ease speakers experience in recovering an associated proposition that is coherent. A range of factors are potentially relevant here. For example, a copredication on *school* that renders school pupils and school buildings as contiguous (*The school was happy but dilapidated*) will be found more easily acceptable than one that explicitly makes them non-contiguous (*The school burnt down when on an excursion*). Still, in neither case would a speaker accept that there is the one thing that is *both* buildings and pupils. Thus, while the structure of the sentence demands a single interpretation, or at least an interpretation that counts as relevantly *the same*, across all predicates in the construction, speakers are often blind to the tension or even incoherence this creates unless it is made explicit. As said, in this light, the illusion account should be testable (see section 8.1), but I shall be mostly concerned to spell out the attractiveness of the model on theoretical grounds.

The next section will spell out some background assumptions about truth-conditional semantics and some problems related to, but not the same as, those polysemy/copredication poses.

8 For example:(LDC) A semantic property *P* of a construction *C* is *linguistically determined* iff every token of construction *C'* that shares the syntax and lexical items of *C*, and occurs in the same context relative to any context-sensitive items of *C* has *P*.

3 TRUTH-CONDITIONAL SEMANTICS

Linguistic meaning is something of an ‘unknown’ in an algebraic sense. We know how to tell meanings apart and what properties it should have, but we have no direct insight into what meanings are themselves, or even if there are such entities. Thus, whatever meaning is, we know that the meaning of *bank* in (6a) is different from the meaning of *bank* in (6b):

- (6) a. The bank raised the interest rate.
b. The bank formed through sedimentation.

We say that *bank* is ambiguous between a financial institution, which can raise interest rates, but not be formed through sedimentation, and the side of a river, which is often formed through sedimentation, but cannot raise interest rates. Of course, someone, absurdly, could mean *bank* to be the same in both cases, but the fact they do not need to is enough to show ambiguity.

Similarly, (7) is ambiguous, but only two-ways, not three-ways (sane dogs and mad Englishmen are out):

- (7) Mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun.

Here we could say that the sentence has two meanings, not because any of the constituent words are (relevantly) ambiguous, but because of its syntactic organisation (whether *mad* modifies just *dogs* or the conjunction *dogs and Englishmen*).

Minimally, then, an account of meaning should (i) assign some properties to words that differentiate them with respect to the contributions they make to sentences (ambiguities are distinguished, synonyms aren’t), and (ii) mark the significance of syntactic organisation, such as what modifies what. The nice thing about truth-conditional semantics is that we at least know, in principle, that it can satisfy these desiderata, because they can be satisfied in the context of formal languages. The task, therefore, might be understood to show that natural languages are sufficiently like formal languages, whether first-order logic or some version of lambda calculus or intensional logic or categorial grammar (Larson & Segal, 1995; Heim & Kratzer, 1998; Jacobson, 2014). Thus, words are assigned certain kinds of objects, and sentences are true when such objects stand in the right relations to one another as specified in the interpretation of the syntactic organisation of the sentence.

The world enters the picture when we simply take the relevant objects and their properties to be what the world is, at least at the granularity our language reflects. Of course, in a formal context, in model theory, we may stipulate a domain of geometrical objects (points on a Euclidean plane) or real numbers, and take such objects to be what make our formulae true, but in such formal cases we have no, or need not have, any independent take on the status of such objects. One can have any ontological view one likes about numbers, say, without any difference in attitude towards model theory.

An easy way to see the difference between the formal and natural case is that, in the latter, we definitely *do* have a take on how the world is independent of detailing truth conditions. In this respect, one cannot read ontological commitment directly off judgements of truth. For example, all of the cases in (8) might be reasonably judged to be true:

- (8) a. The sky is blue.
b. The average American has 2.3 children.
c. Holmes wears a deerstalker.
d. Rainbows contain violet, but not brown.

On second thoughts, do we really want to say that the world contains the sky, the average American, Holmes, and rainbows? Well, there are at least four ways one can proceed here.

One can bite the bullet and admit the lot⁹. This would be a *recherche* metaphysical view, however, not a recording of how the folk think, who assuredly recognise, at least if gently pressed, that we talk of the unreal as easily as the real, and are lax at keeping track of which is which. In other words, taking the folk's untutored view of what's true to be a guide to what is is to defer to the folk in ways they themselves would demur.

Alternatively, one may hold that all such claims as (8) exemplifies are false, because there is no sky (as such) or the average American, etc¹⁰. But we are now owed some account of the difference between such cases in (8) and other falsehoods such as *The average American has 14.3 children* or *Holmes wears a fedora*.

On the third hand, as it were, one may suggest that such cases in (8) are, after all, true, but they require a paraphrase¹¹. So, (8c) might be true, unlike the false *Holmes wears a fedora*, because both sentences are to be paraphrased as making reference to certain stories and films, and, in such media, Holmes wears a deerstalker, never a fedora. That is all true enough, but, without further ado, such paraphrases do not record the semantic properties of the sentences. Quine (1960, p. 250) did advise that 'paraphrase makes no synonymy claim. It only coordinates the uses one makes of diverse theories for diverse advantages'. If that is right, then, while *every* sentence can be more or less paraphrased to reflect some or other ontological view for some or other advantage, semantically interesting paraphrases amount to a proposal as to the syntaco-semantic form of the relevant sentences, and so evidence is required that the relevant paraphrases genuinely track underlying linguistic properties rather than simply reflect one's favoured metaphysics. So, one might want it to be the case that, insofar as the sentences *really* are true, they are *really* about things other than the sky or the average American *tout court*, but meeting this desideratum entails a substantial theoretical burden and there is no obvious a priori reason to expect success in supporting that burden. After all, why should the semantics of natural language reflect what we independently think there is or what happens to be of cognitive advantage to us?¹²

A final approach is one I commend: what makes a sentence true need not, and often is not, recorded in the sentence's semantics, i.e., understanding a sentence does not amount to any kind of knowledge of how the world must be to make the sentence true (Azzouni, 2004, 2010; Collins, 2019). Thus, the cases in (8) will all be treated as true by competent speakers and have a logical form that is perfectly aligned with the sentences of the language that do not concern dubious entities like the sky or the average American. The required rider is that the conditions under which the sentences are true are not determined by the properties of the sentences. For example, claims about Holmes are true relative to certain texts and films, not

9 I'm not sure anyone has ever endorsed what we might think of a generalised Meinongianism, what Lewis (1990) calls an 'allist' position. The problem with such a view is not so much that we ought to shun what Gaskin (2020) calls 'ontological generosity', but that we are systematically susceptible to error in ways our language does not reflect. In other words, one clear problem with allism is not so much its ontological extravagance as its semantic vaulting ambition.

10 This attitude is standardly sourced to Russell (1905) and Quine (1948).

11 The *locus classicus* is Quine (1960, chp. 7). Also see Carlson (2002) and Keller (2015).

12 See Carlson (2002), Kennedy & Stanley (2009), and Collins (2017b) for how these issues play out with respect to *the average N* constructions.

a Holmes entity, but such conditions do not enter into the linguistically determined semantic properties of the sentences (one may be perfectly competent with *Holmes* without knowing anything about the relevant texts). Similarly, the sky being blue is due to the refraction of sunlight in our atmosphere, not the property of some object, which has a different property when the sky is grey. The distinctive feature of this general approach is that it divorces semantics from ontology in the sense that to understand a sentence and so know its truth conditions does not amount to knowing what the world is like when the sentence is true except in the *thinnest* of senses, a sense that does not distinguish fiction from non-fiction or reality from illusion, and so leaves open various ways in which the sentence could be true. The sentences are not incoherent, but their semantic properties do leave open how the world is such that it makes the sentences true or not. Thus, *Holmes wears a deerstalker* can be viewed as specifying a range of different circumstances, including what is written or what appears in film, that make the sentence true. In a thin sense, then, the world is in a *Holmes-wears-a-deerstalker* way thanks to containing various texts, but not Holmes himself (*mutatis mutandis* for *the sky, the average American, et al.*). Yet all this means is that we can find some way of saying what makes a sentence true by reference to the world. I am not concerned to defend this general view here, although see the above references, but will suggest that my approach to copredication is a specific variation on this general approach (see §8). So, copredications are not semantically, still less syntactically, ill-formed, but they have no ontologically coherent truth conditions for all that.

All of these views will appear again when copredication is broached. Pro tem, I just want to distil two points. First, natural language semantics, unlike formal semantics proper, should forge, afford or otherwise contribute to some marriage between language and world. Hence it is that such a semantics faces the kind of problem cases just addressed. Secondly, absent such cases, it might appear that truth-conditional semantics ought to be the default view, not least because it cleanly satisfies the desiderata for a theory of meaning, a theory that gives content to our ‘unknown’. The major problem on the horizon, however, is that the kind of problems raised by (8) are utterly endemic and cannot be corralled into a corner of linguistic space. In other words, the marriage between language and world is *everywhere* problematic in similar ways as fiction is or flat-footed talk of queer objects like the sky is. This is the putative challenge of copredication, which the following section will explain.

4 THE CHALLENGE OF COPREDICATION

Let *copredication* be defined as follows:

(C) A construction *C* is a copredication iff a nominal and/or pronoun bound by it in *C* is the argument of two or more categorically disjoint construed predicates, or the head where the predicates are adnominal or in relative clauses.

(M) Predicates *P* and *P'* are categorically disjoint iff the extension of *P* includes different kinds of thing from the extension of *P'*.

The notion of kinds of thing can be kept somewhat informal; the crucial point is simply that there are distinct conditions of individuation for the things in question. Thus, material objects differ from psychological objects, the former being locatable in space and possessing mass, the latter not, but possessing various affective and cognitive properties. And both differ from abstract objects, which have neither sorts of properties, but may have tokens or be multiply realised. Similarly, groups are distinct from individuals (the former have members, the latter do not), and neither are events, which are extended in time or occur at points in

time. So much said, copredication, then, occurs where a nominal's predicates are such as to render its referent as belonging to distinct categories, as both abstract and psychological, say, or a material individual and an event.

Copredication is intimate with (regular) *polysemy*:

(P) A word is polysemous iff it may selectively or simultaneously support distinct but conceptually related construals¹³.

Thus, polysemy is different from ambiguity insofar as the relevant meanings or construals an ambiguous word may express are conceptually unrelated (financial institution and the side of a river, say). With polysemy, the construals can be variously related. For example, words for containers (*glass, cup*) are polysemous between the container and contained. Words for portals (*door, window*) are polysemous between the spatial path and a barrier in the path. Words for cities or nations (*Manchester, Germany*) are polysemous between the geographical areas, the political institution, and a population. Words for people (proper names) are polysemous between psychological continuity, body, and character. And so on.

Putting all this together, then, polysemous nouns inherently give rise to copredication where the different construals of the nouns are simultaneously selected by different predicates. For example:

- (9) a. The **book**, interesting enough, was too heavy to pack [abstract content (story), material individual].
 b. **Manchester** is proud after the success of the Games, despite them being held in its outskirts [population, area].
 c. The delicious **lunch** lasted all afternoon [material stuff, event].
 d. Sam painted the **door** and walked through it [material individual, path].
 e. Bill slammed the **glass** down and drank another one [container, stuff].
 f. Laura annotated every **score** for the orchestra, and it sounded perfect [material tokens, abstract content (music)].
 g. Bill memorised every **book** in the library then burnt them [abstract content, material individual].

In all these cases, a single nominal is simultaneously construed, whether via anaphora or not, in different ways relative to a pair of categorically disjoint predicates. A couple of qualifications are in order.

First, while polysemy gives rise to copredication, it is not necessary for it, at least not without extending the idea of polysemy to pronominal items, which support copredication as easily as substantive nominals¹⁴.

Secondly, copredication is not always acceptable in the presence of polysemous nominals. For example:

- (10) a. #*The Times* invested in new premises, but can blow away easily.
 b. #The school enjoyed the day out, but was demolished the next day.

13 *Polysemy* is normally defined in terms of an item encoding multiple but related senses. My definition is more operational in specifying how polysemous items behave. Still, what all parties accept is that polysemous nominals flunk tests for ambiguity but retain distinct construals. For general discussion of polysemy, see Apresjan (1974), Cruse (1986), and Falkum & Vicente (2015). Murphy (2021) includes a broad and up-to-date survey of positions.

14 For example, *It is fascinating but too heavy* might be truly said of a book.

These cases of zeugma show that there are restrictions on copredication, although these are not grounded in the polysemy of the nominals, for acceptable copredication is supported across the same categories:

- (11) a. *The Times*, which relies on advertising, is, unsurprisingly, full of it.
 b. The school is generally happy, but it's in a parlous state.

Thirdly, copredication, as the examples above attest, applies across all syntactic positions of a predicate, whether adnominal, relative clause, or matrix predicate.

Let us agree, then, that copredication is a real linguistic phenomenon. The problem for truth-conditional semantics is that if copredications can be true, which they appear to be apt to be (they are, at any rate, perfectly acceptable), then what can the referents of the nominals be? Prima facie, we do not accept there being abstract objects with mass, or geographical areas with psychological states, etc. In this light, copredication serves as a kind of generalisation of the problem fiction and queer objects (the sky, etc.) cause for semantics. There is an apparent mismatch between our unreflective acceptance of the truth of claims and any remotely plausible independent ontology.

Chomsky (2000, p. 37) frames the matter as follows:

London is not a fiction, but considering it as *London*—that is, through the perspective of a city name, a particular type of linguistic expression—we accord it curious properties: . . . we allow that under some circumstances, it could be completely destroyed and rebuilt somewhere else, years or even millennia later, still being London, that same city. [. . .]. We can regard London with or without regard to its population: from one point of view, it is the same city if its people desert it; from another, we can say that London came to have a harsher feel to it through the Thatcher years, a comment on how people act and live. Referring to London, we can be talking about a location or area, people who sometimes live there, the air above it (but not too high), buildings, institutions, etc., in various combinations (as in London is so unhappy, ugly, and polluted that it should be destroyed and rebuilt 100 miles away, still being the same city). Such terms as London are used to talk about the actual world, but there neither are nor are believed to be things-in-the-world with the properties of the intricate modes of reference that a city name encapsulates.

Chomsky (2000, p. 17) generalises the point:

In general, a word, even of the simplest kind, does not pick out an entity of the world, or of our “belief space”. Conventional assumptions about these matters seem to me to be very dubious.

As Chomsky claims at the beginning, the challenge polysemy/copredication poses is not exactly the same as talk of Holmes or Vulcan. However the semantics for fiction pans out, only the benighted think the world contains Holmes, say, while only the benighted would think that London does not exist. The present challenge is that there is a mismatch between what our language appears to mandate as flat-footed truths about the world, and what, upon reflection, we reckon the world to be like independent of our language. In other words, if we were reading our ontological commitments off of what we guilelessly hold to be true, or even off of what could be true, then we should land with an absurd ontology. In a sense to be determined, the referential properties of common nouns appears to be radically non-univocal in ways we are mostly insensitive to as users of the language. Vicente (2021, p. 921) encapsulates the problem along with reference to others who endorse some version of this line of reasoning:

[D]eclarative sentences do not have a particular truth conditional content, because their constituents do not have a denotational semantics, i.e. their constituents are not representations in the sense explained above: they are not about particular entities or events in the world. From here critics conclude that semantics is not in the business of explaining word-to-world relations (Chomsky, 2000, Pietroski, 2005, 2018, Yalcin, 2014, Collins, 2017a).

I think this puts the complaint too strongly. The charge is not so much that semantics does not explain ‘word-to-world relations’; rather, it does not specify such relations as univocal properties of lexical items. This leaves the theorist open to consider ‘real’ semantic relations as in fact interface effects between language proper and varied other cognitive systems.¹⁵ Be that as it may, since the standard view is to think of semantic theory as specifying univocal word-to-world relations, and it is this view that is being challenged, we may put this qualification to one side.

As indicated in the previous section, although polysemy/copredication is not a species of fiction, this line of reasoning can be resisted in the ways analogous to how the significance of fiction and talk of the sky and the average American can be stymied. Perhaps copredications are all *really* false, or the weird entities, *pace* Chomsky *et al.*, do exist, or perhaps copredications require a paraphrase. Recall the rules of the game, though. It is not enough blithely to select from such choices, for each carries a burden. We shall see some of this in the following sections. Before that, it is well to be clear just what the copredication phenomena is supposed to show.

On the face of it, what copredication and polysemy suggest is that worldly semantic values cannot be *univocally* assigned, and so, as Vicente puts it above, sentences ‘do not have a *particular* truth conditional content’ (my emphasis). It remains an option, at least in principle, to support a truth-conditional semantics minus the relevant univocity. This is the avenue Vicente explores. Before tackling that, however, I want to show that it is misguided to divorce polysemy from copredication. Further, I shall address, in effect, a dismissal of the phenomenon due to Devitt (2021).

5 LIEBESMAN AND MAGIDOR ON THE ‘AMBIGUITY APPROACH’

With reference to Chomsky (2000) and Collins (2017a), Liebesman & Magidor (2017) seek to defend a traditional semantics via a rejection of what they call the ‘ambiguity approach’ towards copredication (*ibid.*, p. 133). This appellation might be confusing. Liebesman and Magidor do not erroneously reduce polysemy to ambiguity in general; they are only interested to show that copredication does not involve reference to distinct objects or the activation of multiple senses. In other words, copredication is consistent with univocity

15 Chomsky (1981, p. 324) suggests:

[I]nterpretation [of syntax] is not to be confused with what might be called “real semantics”, that is, the study of the relation between language or language use and the world. Rather it should be considered to be in effect an extension of syntax, the construction of another level of mental representation beyond LF [syntax], a level at which arguments at LF are paired with entities of mental representation, this further level then entering into “real semantic interpretation”.

See Collins (2017b) for extensive discussion. Another view of the matter is that Chomsky *et al.* are offering an *intensional* view of semantic vocabulary (D’Ambrosio, 2019). A glitch arises if we think of intensions as determining extensions.

of reference. So, as far as their arguments go, the relevant nominals might be otherwise polysemous, but this property is not called for to explain copredication. The basis for this thought is that a single nominal like *book* just denotes an entity with varied properties, some of which might be relevant to the truth of one predication but not to another in a given context.¹⁶ I have raised some doubts about this approach elsewhere.¹⁷ In the following, I shall only be concerned with their negative arguments that a polysemy approach to copredication is inconsistent with some clear phenomena.

Liebman and Magidor offer three considerations against what they call the ‘ambiguity approach’ to copredication. I shall question each argument in turn.¹⁸

(i) *Too many meanings.*

Liebman and Magidor claim that the ‘primary evidence for the polysemy of nouns like “book”, “lunch”, and “bank” is that quantificational sentences containing those nouns admit multiple readings’ (2017, p. 133). By way of example, they offer (12):

(12) Three books are on the shelf,

where books may be counted as informational types or material individuals, construals that deliver different truth values in different contexts.

Liebman and Magidor (2017, p. 134) suggest that if *book* is rendered as having multiple senses (in whatever way) because of its multiple readings as in (12), then so too should *colour* and *wooden thing* because of the multiple readings of (13) that deliver different truth values in different contexts:

- (13) a. Three colours are on the canvass.
b. Exactly one wooden thing is in the room.

The point of (13a) is that we can arbitrarily settle on different shades to count as different colours, leading to the one canvas being understood as showing three different colours in a potential infinity of different respects. Similarly, we can count wooden parts of a thing as arbitrarily wooden things to be counted or not. The upshot is that ‘[g]iven the infinite number of possibilities, the ambiguity view would result in an infinite number of senses for “wooden thing” [and “colour”]’ (ibid., p. 134). The basic complaint, therefore, is that the ‘ambiguity approach’, if supported by the putative ambiguity of (12), renders unambiguous items ambiguous, and generates an infinity of meanings to boot. Moreover, this explosion of senses is easily avoided: ‘there is an independent explanation of the multiple readings of [(13)] which requires no such proliferation of senses: that “colour” and “wooden thing” are

16 Thus, the entities aren’t supposed to be queer, but hum-drum in the way a red table needs a good part of its surface to be red, whereas for the table to be touching the wall, only any part of it needs to be in contact with the wall.

17 The core problem is that it is unclear whether and how context plays a role in copredication. First, context is mostly irrelevant, for construals are triggered by choice of predicate rather than any feature of context. Secondly, the range of construals a putative polysemous nominal has are not members of a uniform domain that something akin to a variable/index can be defined over; they are categorically distinct. Thirdly, if the relevant nominals pick out complex objects, it is hard to see what to say about books with no contents, or book contents without material realisation, or lunches without events (*The lunches for the week are in the fridge?*) or lunches without food (*The lunch was a disaster—the food did not turn up*). For some discussion, see below and Collins (2017a).

18 Also see Viebahn (2022) for related but distinct arguments.

contextually restricted' (*ibid.*, p. 134). In other words, there is no ambiguity here, but simply ways of being more or less restricted in one's intended referent (Liebesman and Magidor (*ibid.*, p. 133) take their lead here from Stanley & Szabó, 2000). Both of these considerations can be questioned.

It is a perfectly sound precept to avoid ambiguity explosions, but polysemy does not preclude any such explosions, for there is no significant analogy between (12) and (13), and certainly not in the minds of Chomsky *et al.* It is true that the different readings of *book* available in (12) evidences its logical or inherent polysemy, but we know for the kind of independent reasons discussed in the previous section that *book* is polysemous but not (relevantly) ambiguous, because it allows the simultaneous selection of different readings that are logically or conceptually connected. No-one should or does (I'd wager) conclude anything much at all from their intuitions about (12) alone. So far, all we have is the dual polysemy (not ambiguity) of *book*, supported by a range of phenomena including (12). One can hold onto so much without concluding anything about *colour* or *wooden thing* just on the basis of (13).

It appears, however, that such nominals are open to contextual restriction in much the way Liebesman and Magidor imagine, even if not by the particular mechanism they intimate. I take it to be common ground hereabouts that nominals and adjectives can be more or less restricted due to contextual factors, an observation going back at least to Austin (1962) and thoroughly discussed in the contemporary pragmatics literature (e.g., Sperber & Wilson, 1986; Carston, 2002; Travis, 2008). None of this immediately bears upon polysemy, for nominals open to contextual restriction are not *eo ipso* polysemous. Indeed, *colour* and *wooden thing* are not polysemous in the relevant sense of supporting distinct but conceptually connected readings that can be simultaneously activated copredicatively. At any rate, contextual restriction being a property of *colour* and *wooden thing* (or any other nominal) is perfectly compatible with everything Chomsky *et al.* intend to conclude from consideration of *book*, *lunch*, etc.

A further issue is over the plenitude of polysemy. Might it be an objection that polysemy entails an infinity of senses? It would be, but there is no such entailment in the offing, because polysemy is *not* a product of contextual restriction. Suppose we say that *book* has three-way polysemy, because it can be construed as picking out a material individual (*The book is dog-eared*), a type of such individuals (*The book sold out in a week*), and an abstract informational content (*The book is picaresque*). That might be it, because predicates can only select for such readings and no more, excluding obviously figural or metaphorical readings. At any rate, Liebesman and Magidor offer no reason to think that polysemy entails an infinity of senses.

So, Liebesman and Magidor's deflating of the putative significance of (12) on the basis of (13) looks to be insignificant, because the cases in (13) do not exemplify copredication or even polysemy.

(ii) *Simultaneous meanings.*

Liebesman and Magidor (2017, p. 136) write:

A second reason to treat "book" as univocal is that there are sentences in which "book" must be true of both informational and physical copies.

They proceed to spell out an example. Someone who thinks *book* is polysemous, however, would precisely *insist* on what Liebesman and Magidor claim; indeed, on my view copredication *just is* an example of a single occurrence of a nominal shouldering two or

more interpretations. If *book* is understood to be ambiguous, then the reason Liebesman and Magidor offer is decisive, but *book* is not held to be ambiguous precisely for the reason Liebesman and Magidor offer, which is criterial of polysemy in the shape of copredication.

A dialectical point bears emphasis. Liebesman and Magidor appear to be assuming that univocity is supported to the extent that ambiguity is excluded. On my view, though, this is to miss the very issue that polysemy raises, *viz.*, how lexical items can be simultaneously construed in conflicting ways that belie a univocal external semantic value. The issue is significant for Chomsky *et al.* *precisely* because polysemy does not reduce to a matter of ambiguity, which, if it were to, would effectively trivialise the problem they raise. If univocity is secured by so little as excluding ambiguity, then the real problem of copredication is not so much resolved as elided.

(iii) *Available readings.*

Liebesman and Magidor (2017, pp. 136-7) offer a third objection:

Suppose you point at a copy of *War and Peace* and say 'This isn't a book!'. If 'book' is ambiguous between a meaning that is only true of physical books, and a meaning that is only true of informational books, the sentence should have a true reading. But it really does not seem to have a true reading.

The argument here is a version of the thought that ambiguities admit an escape hatch, as it were, from apparent contradictions. Compare:

- (14) a. This carburettor is not a carburettor.
b. This bank is not a bank.

If we exclude a metalinguistic construal, where a speaker might be denying another's descriptive judgement about a case, (14a) looks like a flat-out contradiction, whereas (14b) does not. Such a difference seems to be due to the ambiguity of *bank*; that is, the two occurrences of the word in (14b) can receive different interpretations and so (14b) need not be contradictory. Since *carburettor* is not ambiguous, no such rescue is available for (14a). Analogously, Liebesman and Magidor's example utterance appears to lack a true reading, which, it could have, were *book* to be ambiguous. Thus, *book* patterns with non-ambiguous *carburettor* as opposed to ambiguous *bank*.

The ambiguity phenomena are clear enough here, but the contradiction test is not much good at differentiating polysemy from ambiguity. First off, unlike ambiguity, an apparent contradiction of polysemous items cannot always be saved by appeal to different senses holding between the different occurrences of an item, for polysemy always entails the possibility of both (or more) senses being active simultaneously, *i.e.*, both being selected by the predicative expression. Thus, in the Liebesman and Magidor example, if both senses of *book* are indeed active, as seems to be the case given the specification of the book as *War and Peace*, then the utterance seems contradictory because some other non-negated sense cannot be selected in order to rescue the truth of the utterance. Again, clearly distinguishing ambiguity from polysemy is crucial.

That said, polysemy can readily rescue a sentence from apparent contradiction. Imagine Smith boasting in the bar about his many authored books. Smith mentions a manuscript titled *Truth & Meaning*. You respond with (15):

- (15) That is not a book!

The point of your riposte, let us suppose, is that *Truth & Meaning* is not published as a hard-copy book, or remains in disorganised note form, or might never be published because

it is rubbish. You do not need to doubt that it is a book in an informational sense. Imagine the next day in a meeting assessing Smith's intended research over the forthcoming year. Smith counts his books and again includes *Truth & Meaning*, saying, 'The book is completed, I just need to organise it into chapters and respond to reviewers'. To respond with (15) with the same intent would be to misunderstand how *book* is now being understood informationally.

Likewise, imagine you want to keep a door open. You know that Sally has a hardback copy of *War and Peace*. You say from the other room, 'Pass me *War and Peace*, could you?' Sally comes round the corner with her kindle. You: 'That isn't a book!'

In short, the two senses of *book* can be teased apart to rescue truth from the jaws of contradiction, which renders *book* akin to an ambiguous term (in the relevant respects).¹⁹ Since polysemy is not ambiguity, however, this possibility will not always hold; for polysemy does not involve two or more unrelated meanings, so negation can unselectively apply over all senses of a polysemous item.

King (2018, p. 779) offers a more direct response to the polysemy problem:

[One might think] that count nouns like 'book' quite generally have one meaning on which they refer to book tokens and another meaning on which they refer to book types. Of course this does mean that strictly speaking there is no straightforward answer to the question "what does 'book' refer to simpliciter?" But that fact does not force us to reject an externalist semantics any more than the phenomenon of ambiguity does . . .

This is true enough, but it misses the problem. The problem is not that *book* (etc.) is ambiguous, but that it can simultaneously express categorically disjoint notions, precisely in a way ambiguities cannot be express. Whatever account works for ambiguity will not, *eo ipso*, work for polysemy/copredication. King is right, though, that the import of the considerations is an apparent lack of semantic univocity; the problem for his complaint is simply that the lack of univocity does not amount to ambiguity.

6 GENEROSITY

A general approach to referentially problematic words flagged in §3 is to bite the bullet and accept the queer objects apparently entailed by semantic univocity without appeal to context sensitivity of the kind Liebesman and Magidor endorse. Gaskin (2020) refers to such an attitude as 'ontological generosity'. The problem polysemy/copredication poses for semantics, however, is not based upon an overly parsimonious attitude towards ontology. Even were one minded to be generous to a fault and allow whatever entities semantic univocity would appear to entail, the *semantic* problem would not be ameliorated. The thing to note here is that a polysemous nominal can both *simultaneously* express some range of construals relative to two or more predicates and *selectively* express one construal relative to a single predicate. It would be a mistake, therefore, to think that polysemous nominals refer to queer objects upon *any* tokening of them with respect to some predicate. Generosity, here as elsewhere, can be misplaced. For example, consider:

- (16) a. The lunch was rice and chicken.
 b. The lunch went on till early evening.
 c. The lunch was rice and chicken and went on till early evening.

19 *Book* is ambiguous, of course, between, say, a nominal and a verbal construal. I'm presently just concerned with the nominal difference between material and informational construals.

(16a) does not refer to an event of temporal duration, but simply some food, which may or may not be eaten, still less eaten over a particular time period. Equally, while food might be involved in the event referred to in (16b), *lunch* does not refer to it, for food is not bounded in time. Suppose, then, that *lunch* in (16c) encourages us to generosity and to think of its referent as both food *and* an event, somehow mereologically combined. The problem is that such an entity would seemingly provide the wrong referent for *lunch* in (16a, b), which is one thing or another, but not both.²⁰

The problem vividly arises with Devitt's (2021) attempted deflation of the problem:

[W]hen I assert "This book is real fun" I *am not* predicating a property of an "aspect" of the book; I am predicating a property of *the book*, a property it has in virtue of having that content. It is a fact *about the world* that a certain physical object on my desk is both a book and real fun. No theory of words, a mere *semantic* theory, can gainsay that worldly fact. So when one turns to semantics, there should be no resisting the obvious view that "This book is real fun" attributes being real fun to that particular physical object. . . [A]n important moral is: just because a term refers to things that have different sorts of properties, including physical properties and functional ones, does not alone show that the word has two senses.

Devitt's general point is that we should not count objects in terms of the kinds of properties they may possess. So, books can be heavy and fun, but this does not mean that there are two kinds of book; instead, there are simply books, which can have different properties pertaining to, say, their material constitution and content. Devitt appears to imagine that some theorists take semantics to gainsay such a fact about the world. Some might, but the polysemy/copredication problem has nothing to do with semantics dictating terms to metaphysics.

Let us grant that one may hold up a book, qua material individual, and speak of the weight and content of that very thing being held in one's hand. Who could deny that? Still, the moral of polysemy is that one can speak of books where there is nothing to hold up, but there is content (one's next book, a book on a hard drive, a memorised book as in *Fahrenheit 451*), or where there is no content, but is a material individual (so-called 'low content' books are now common). Such things can still count as books. It is simply not true, therefore, that, in general, books are physical things with content properties, even if paradigm books are like that.

Given this fact, we should be able to select one sense of book while neglecting the other. If I say *This is moving*, holding up a copy of *War & Peace*, I am not saying something about the individual thing in my hand, but about the story, for my claim would remain true in the absence of the particular material object in my hand. My assertion is about the story, which is not a mere property of the thing in my hand, for it is not a property of any particular thing or things at all (again, think *Fahrenheit 451*). Likewise, if I say, *This is dogeared*, holding up the same thing, what I say will be true or not relative to the material state of the thing in my hand, because a story cannot be dogeared; indeed, an object I hold up need not feature any content at all, and still be a book.

The situation worsens when we move away from books. Books (on one reading) are quotidian material individuals, and so *book* has, as Devitt supposes, a kind of anchor to

20 At a push, one could think that *lunch* (etc.) is ambiguous between referring to food, events, *and* queer objects, but this would be to multiply referents beyond necessity, as there appears to be no equivocation across (16).

the world, which we may then imagine possesses disjoint properties, like being dogeared and moving. As just discussed, however, there are perfectly kosher books that do not fit the paradigm. As it is, it is wholly unclear what kind of anchor, if you will, *Manchester* or *Germany* is supposed to have. They are not, paradigmatically, one thing or another. Could we blithely say that Manchester is in the world the way Devitt says that books are on his desk? The worry here, note, is not animated by too pinched a conception of what is in the world, an undue parsimony. It is, rather, that we simply have no ready uniform individuation conditions for cities or countries. They are not *merely* geographical areas, or political institutions, or populations, or buildings, etc. but all of these things, either simultaneously or selectively. There is, in other words, no identifiable *x* that can be said to have the relevant diverse properties; instead, *Manchester* or *Germany* expresses any or all such properties given some relevant predicate. This is not to say that Manchester is unreal, only that if *Manchester* is to refer to anything, it needs to be settled, relative to some predicate, what would make the host sentence true. Thus, the truth of *Manchester tends to vote Labour* turns on the behaviour of a somewhat scattered population, some of whom do not reside in Manchester (qua area), and the buildings could be bulldozed and the institutions radically changed without a change of what makes the sentence true. This selectivity is due to the verb *vote*, which determines what *Manchester* refers to (population, not area) in the construction. In distinction, the truth of *The Irwell runs through Manchester* turns on the geography of the area, and would remain true if all the relevant people were to be wiped out. This is because the predicate *runs through* determines the referent of *Manchester* (qua argument of the predicate) to be an area through which paths may run. There is, in short, no invariant Manchester, between or including population and area, that shows up as a semantic univocity for all occurrences of *Manchester*. In this sense, there is no metaphysical invariance that cannot be gainsaid by semantic theory; the whole issue is semantic from start to finish.

To rub the moral in, it is worth noting that proposals for mereological objects (Gotham, 2014, 2017) or appeals to complex social objects (Arapinis & Vieu, 2015) face a similar problem. It is not that there is or should be an ontological interdiction against such objects; rather, they do not immediately help with the problem of how to marry simultaneity and selectivity.²¹ Minimally, what is required is some model like Pietroski's (2018), where a single lexical root can 'fetch' one or more concepts or the dot-object model of Pustejovsky (1995) and Asher (2011), where a lexical item contains choices of interpretation, one or more being selected by the relevant predicate. The shared feature is a rejection of semantic univocity. That is the core moral of the phenomenon.

That said, some such model alone will not be adequate. These models typically trade in *coercion* whereby a nominal is construed relative to its predicate.²² While coercion is not to be denied, it is hard to see it as a straight-up answer to copredication for two reasons. First, even if we take each predicate of a copredication to coerce a construal of its relevant

21 Gotham (2014, 2017) commendably addresses the problem of selectivity, where each predicate selects some aspect of the mereological complex. The approach can be formally implemented, but the objects appear to be creatures of model theory in the sense that we would reject such objects as supererogatory save for the purpose of providing univocal values for nominals in copredications.

22 Pietroski (2018) does not explicitly appeal to coercion but something akin to the operation must be in play, for since different concepts can be 'fetched' from the one address, it is presumably the predicate that fixes which concept is, indeed, fetched by the given nominal in a given construction

argument position, the fact that the argument positions must be co-construed in at least *some* sense remains to be accounted for. Secondly and relatedly, mere coercion does not explain zeugmaticity in distinction to acceptable copredication. In other words, if coercion is available, why does not it always serve to save a construction from unacceptability?

7 VICENTE ON UNIVOCITY

The moral so far is that polysemy/copredication involves a rejection of univocal semantic relations. The outstanding question is whether this involves a renunciation of truth-conditional semantics. The standard assumption is certainly that semantic relations are univocal, and so this assumption is refuted (as far as the arguments considered go), but it remains open for a theorist to seek a non-standard view. Vicente (2021, p. 934) pursues this line. He centrally claims:

[I]f lexical meanings are concepts, lexical meanings do not have denotations, but only offer possibilities for denotation, i.e., a variety of possible denotations from which the speaker has to select. That is, the denotation potential of a word-type is not explained in terms other than the information stored in the meaning of such a word-type. In this view, thus, a word is associated with a number of denotations, and a sentence with a number of contents that determine different truth-conditions. Usually, the number of contents that a sentence can have will appear to be smaller than the number of denotational possibilities associated with a single word, given that much of the selection of denotations is supposed to be intra-linguistic: in *I have talked to the school*, as *talk* has selectional restrictions for animacy in both of its arguments, there are some denotations of *school* that are ruled out.

Vicente's idea is that a word, qua type, will encode a range of denotations. A given denotation is selected mostly through composition. Thus, *school* may refer to staff, building(s), institution, pupils, etc. A given construction will determine a selection of a denotation: *talk to the school* [staff]; *paint the school* [building]; *the school gained high marks* [pupils]; etc. So, at the type level, we might think of word meaning as overdetermined (as least for nominals), which in a construction will go to determine a particular truth-conditional content via selection: 'language should prima facie be regarded as a representational device: sentences do have contents that determine truth-conditions'.

As noted, however, as well as the selection of construals, there is also the simultaneous expression of construals as with copredication. Here is what Vicente (2021, p. 935) says on the matter:

[C]o-predication creates a puzzle for this kind of account. The account has it that word meanings are conceptual structures that offer possibilities for denotation by having aspects or parts that can be selected. However, what can we say about sentences such as.

[i] Brazil is a large Portuguese-speaking republic that is very high in inequality rankings but always first in the FIFA ranking?

It seems that co-predication generates a problem, since, prima facie, Brazil in sentences like this "intends" to stand for many parts of the concept simultaneously. An option that I think should be taken seriously is to hold that co-predicational structures are shorthands of more complicated structures. Thus, [i] can be taken to be shorthand of:

[ii] Brazil [place] is a large piece of land & Brazil [people] is Portuguese-speaking & Brazil [State] is a republic & Brazil [economic system] is very high in inequality & Brazil [football team] is always first in the FIFA rankings.

Actually, this explication of truth-conditions is the best option for anybody who wants to hold at least that linguistic utterances have representational contents.

Vicente readily admits that the kind of explicit paraphrase here offered is only straightforward where the relevant predicates are effectively stacked, and might not be so easily specified for other constructions; still, the idea is that some such paraphrase will express the intended ‘representational content’. The crucial point is that the paraphrases express perfectly coherent truth conditions in a way the copredicational constructions appear not to do. The difference is that univocity is renounced with the relevant polysemous nominals giving way to a range of particular construals fixed by the relevant predicates. All the paraphrase does, in other words, is to show what the truth conditions are, conditions that can be worldly realised without recourse to absurdly weird objects.

While Vicente has a perfect grasp of the problem copredication/polysemy poses for truth-conditional semantics, his solution faces the same problem that besets any periphrastic attempt to recuse truth-conditional content in the teeth of ontological absurdity. In essence: the paraphrase has to be licensed by properties of the language. As noted, when the predicates are stacked or co-ordinated, the licensing appears to pose no problem, for each predicate requires an argument, and so can be construed as selecting one construal from whatever number the single morphophonemic item encodes. I think one can show, however, that various constructions fail to support any relevant paraphrase. These are ones where one of the disjoint predicates applies to a nominal modified by the other predicate.

Consider the following examples:

- (17) a. The dilapidated school improved its marks to the surprise of its governors.
 b. Most interesting books weigh more than a brick.
 c. The only glasses people finished were those with long stems.
 d. Imperial Russia grew to the same proportion as democratic Russia shrank.
 e. Sam memorised and then burnt every book in the library.

Let us briefly take each in turn. In (17a), three construals of *school* are active: buildings, pupils, and institution. So much is what is expected of copredication. Note, though, that the pronouns are anaphoric on the DP *the dilapidated school*, which refers to buildings. The only linguistically determined reading, therefore, is one where the buildings received marks and have governors, neither of which is coherent or what is intended by a speaker. Any interpretation that distinguished between the kinds of school, as it were, would be inconsistent with the anaphoric determination of the value of the pronoun, which is not negotiable in this construction. In (17b), most of the very books that are interesting must have a certain weight. There cannot be different books here—contents and individuals—for the two things must coincide more than not. In (17c), there is a coincidence of the drinks finished with glasses possessing a certain material feature. Again, interpreting the construction as speaking of two different kinds of entity is consistent with there not being the coincidence *only* entails. In (17d), it is essential that whatever is a state, qua abstract, increases or decreases as an area. Again, the abstracta cannot be ontologically distinguished from the geographical areas. Finally, in (17e), everything in the library that is memorised must be burnt, but this runs together content and material construals, as might be appreciated by noting that the library may contain more books to be burnt than can be memorised (five copies of *War and Peace*, say).

If all of this is correct, then, it would seem that the cases in (17) have no linguistically determined coherent truth conditions. Yet the sentences appear to be OK in precisely the way Vicente's paraphrases would license, where we would be referring to different kinds of book, countries, glasses, etc. In this light, we might think of the cases as illusions, or exemplifying forms of constructions that give rise to illusions: the constructions have no coherent truth conditions qua linguistic structures, but we reliably associate them with kosher truth conditions. In effect, the association is illusory precisely because it is not underwritten by any semantic analysis or syntactic structure. The association is simply the result of the normal effort to make sense of constructions that are syntactically well-formed, which is robust over relatively subtle lexical choices. This stance raises a host of questions and likely complaints; the next section will tackle them.

8 TRUTH-CONDITIONAL ILLUSION

In this section, I shall address a number of issues individually, but as a whole the discussion will present an all-round picture of how to make sense of the kind of semantic illusion I suggest; in particular, far from being a crazy view, I think it accommodates the relevant phenomena in a natural way and suffers none of the problems of the alternatives.

8.1 *Empirical testability*

The preceding has spelt out and defended the illusion model of copredication on theoretical grounds. I mean the view, however, to be an empirical truth about semantic competence, and so it should be amenable to empirical testing. There are two immediate routes available, the first direct, the second more indirect bearing upon a consequence of the view.

If we consider the familiar cases of linguistic illusion detailed in section 2, the basis of their illusory status is that competent speakers can be debriefed, as it were, that they indeed suffer from the relevant illusion, even if the debriefing does not immunise against the illusion. That is, speakers have access to their linguistic competence that delivers a judgement on the constructions that is misaligned with their immediate intuition or interpretation concerning the constructions. Note that here, the debriefing is not predicated upon some contentious theoretical claim concerning syntax (some particular account of relative clauses, say), but the reflective judgement of the speakers. The same stratagem should be available in the present case of copredication. A natural approach, therefore, would be to investigate if speakers can be elicited to rethink the acceptability of a construction via the presentation of an unacceptable construction that should semantically follow from an acceptable copredication.

So, speakers might be tested on the acceptability of an existential generalisation of a kind that is otherwise perfectly acceptability. For example:

- (18) a. London is expensive but cheerful.
b. Something is expensive but cheerful.
- (19) a. The glass was drunk and then smashed.
b. Something was drunk and then smashed.
- (20) a. The school was happy but dilapidated.
b. Something was happy and dilapidated.

- (21) a. *The Times* is bankrupt but remains a good read.
 b. Something is bankrupt but remains a good read.

A prediction of the illusion model is that speakers should reject the generalisations or find them confusing, but also find them valid inferences from the acceptable copredications. One might think of the method here as a variation on *20 questions*, where, if arriving at the information that the thing to be identified is expensive and cheerful or can be drunk and smashed, etc., a player would not guess at a city or a glass (etc.). To the contrary, the answer would appear to be playing on a pun as do the generalisations. In this light, other kinds of construction should be investigated, such as copredication in cleft constructions and other focused cases. It strikes me that the following are unacceptable, although they should follow from the respective acceptable and simple copredications:

- (22) a. It is the door that Sam painted and walked through.
 b. What was delicious and lasted all afternoon was lunch.
 c. London is what is expensive but voted Labour.

Here, focus serves to isolate the nominal from coercion and so makes the incoherence apparent; at any rate, that would be a prediction in line with the illusion model. The problem with (18)–(21) is more direct. The polysemy of common nouns is not shared by determiners, even though the inferences to the generalisations are perfectly acceptable where no polysemy is active. Where polysemy is active, as with copredication, generalisations should breakdown signalling that while copredication is not treated as punning, speakers can recognise the tension in copredication when altered to the unavailability of an otherwise acceptable generalisation that appears to be a pun. If, contrary to these predictions, speakers accept the generalisations without any sense of double-talk, then the illusion model would appear to be false.

A second line of potential empirical inquiry extends the pioneering work of [Murphy \(2021\)](#). A key aspect of Murphy's project is to differentiate zeugma from copredication. To this end he proposes that there is a semantic hierarchy:

(SH) PHYSICAL < INFORMATION < EVENT < INSTITUTION²³.

The processing of copredications follows a preference of *incremental semantic complexity* (*ibid.*, p. 123):

(ISC) Seek to process linguistic representations in incremental stages of semantic complexity.

Murphy (*ibid.*, p. 16) explains:

This preference is such that the parser prefers constructions which adhere to a Simple-to-Complex sense order (in terms of semantic complexity). One of the consequences of this preference is that it predicts sentences adhering to a Complex-to-Simple sense order to be less acceptable, and costlier to process, than sentences showing the reverse order.

So, the basic idea is that, all else being equal, zeugma results when (ISC) is flouted. This claim has some suggested support in the theoretical literature and tracks the preferences of

23 Where ' $x < y$ ' means ' x is less complex than y '

speakers in Murphy's own experiments. For example, the model is intended to account for the *apparent* differences between the 'a' and 'b' cases below:

- (23) a. The bank used to be a police station and is FTSE-100 listed.
b. #The bank is FTSE-100 listed and used to be a police station. (Gotham, 2014).
- (24) a. The translation lies on the table and was difficult.
b. #The translation was difficult and lies on the table.
- (25) a. The city has 500,000 inhabitants and outlawed smoking in bars last year.
b. #The city outlawed smoking in bars last year and has 500,000 inhabitants. (Asher, 2011).
- (26) a. The school starts at 9 am and hired a new teacher.
b. #The school hired a new teacher and starts at 9 am.
- (27) a. The dissertation yellowed with age and is thought-provoking.
b. #The dissertation is thought-provoking and yellowed with age. (Norrick, 1981).
- (28) a. The door was painted red and walked through by John.
b. #The door was walked through by John and painted red (Cruse, 1986).

The 'a' cases cleave to (ISC) with their order of predication proceeding from simple to complex, whereas the 'b' cases reverse the order.

On the illusion model, order should not really play a significant role, for all cases are, in effect zeugmatic. What does play a role in accounting for divergencies in acceptability is the accessibility of a nearby coherent proposition. So, greater experimental inquiry into order should be revealing. For example, even if we accept the judgements in the kind of cases exemplified, other reverse orderings strike me as perfectly acceptable:

- (29) a. The bank called in its debts to pay for its refurbishments.
b. The translation was the first to be done but remains under lock and key.
c. The school was ranked first in the county despite being dilapidated.
d. The dissertation is thought-provoking but poorly bound.
e. John walked through the door scuffing it on the way.
f. Germany's liquidity was damaged by the extensive flooding.

If my hunch is right here that order is not in fact a significant differentiating factor, then, per the illusion model, all the cases may be properly deemed to be zeugmatic. Where (ISC) might play a role is in how a speaker accesses the relevant proposition by which to interpret the target sentence. That is to say, accessing a more concrete concept first allows speakers to exclude a range of potential cases. For instance, a school need have no buildings, but if one starts with buildings, then the rest should follow (pupils, administration, etc.), but not necessarily, as an abandoned school building can still be referred to as a school. Similarly, if one has a concrete door, then one has a portal, in the normal run of things, whereas the reverse is not always the case, but, again, this need not be the case (think of a door shop). There is certainly cognitive benefit, then, in initially interpreting a nominal referent to be more concrete (less complex), but if the illusion model is right, this is only because such an interpretation makes more accessible a proposition by which to interpret the sentence, not because the preference for the less complex is constitutive of acceptability or the isolation of zeugma.

Again, these are empirical matters. If speakers are found consistently to favour constructions in alignment with (ISC), then the illusion model would require amendment, for it would

appear that finding copredication acceptable is less a case of accessing a nearby proposition, than a case of directly applying interpretive bias to the construction at hand.

8.2 A generalisation

I have throughout appealed to the distinction between a semantic property being linguistically determined and such a property only being reliably associated with a construction. The sceptic will be minded to put pressure on this distinction, or at least my application of it. In the previous section, I argued that cases are readily constructible that do not admit to the kind of paraphrase Vicente entertains, a kind of paraphrase which does, *prima facie*, apply to other cases of copredication. My reasoning might be turned back onto me, by way of the claim that the *acceptable* paraphrases precisely show that paraphrases should be available elsewhere. Such a riposte goes wrong in two respects.

First, the two kinds of case considered—those with and without apparently acceptable paraphrases—traded on the thought that, in the latter cases, one can *show* that no linguistically determined paraphrase is available, because any such construal would contradict the structure of the relevant sentences such that one cannot have a disjoint construal when the syntax dictates coincidence. My argument, therefore, cannot be inverted.

Secondly, and more fundamentally, we may return the complaint with interest. If we may accept cases where a linguistically determined paraphrase is not available, we should ask if a relevant paraphrase is ever *really* available. I think the answer is in the negative.

Consider Vicente's own example from above (numbers changed):

- (30) a. Brazil is a large Portuguese-speaking republic that is very high in inequality rankings but always first in the FIFA ranking.
 b. Brazil [place] is a large piece of land & Brazil [people] is Portuguese-speaking & Brazil [State] is a republic & Brazil [economic system] is very high in inequality & Brazil [football team] is always first in the FIFA rankings.

There is no doubt that the paraphrase imparts the information (30a) is used to express, but why ought we to think it is linguistically determined? In effect, the paraphrase treats each predicate (*large, Portuguese-speaking, republic, high inequality, first FIFA rankings*) as having its own distinctive argument (respectively, area, population, state, economy, football team). Yet this is not how the sentence is put together. In essence, we want to avoid punning, i.e., the matrix subject (*Brazil*) must fix that, in *some* sense, we are talking of the same thing across the various predicates; the connection is semantic, not accidental as with orthography or phonology. The structure of the sentence precludes punning in this sense. Note the difference between the matrix predicate, including adnominal predicates, and the predicates of the relative clause. The latter modify *a large Portuguese-speaking republic*, not *Brazil* directly; similarly, *large* and *Portuguese-speaking* modify *republic*, not *Brazil* directly. The reason *Brazil* is the understood argument of *all* of the predicates is that it is the subject of the matrix copular predicate, and there are no other independent argument positions. Hence, the distinct construals must be 'triggered' by the predicates, but the predicates are not modifying distinct positions: whatever is a republic is large and Portuguese-speaking, and also suffers from inequality and has a FIFA ranking, but now we are back with the initial problem of interpretation the paraphrase was meant to resolve. The point is clear via an alternative paraphrase:

- (31) $(\exists x)[x = \text{Brazil} \wedge \text{REPUBLIC}(x) \wedge \text{LARGE}(x) \wedge \text{PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING}(x) \wedge \text{HAS-INEQUALITY}(x) \wedge \text{HIGH-FIFA-RANKING}(x)].$

This paraphrase captures the fact that the target sentence features *Brazil* unmodified as matrix subject and that all the predicates are linked to Brazil without punning. But this makes it transparent that the sentence determines there to be a single thing x (Brazil) that has all the properties, which is precisely what was to be avoided.

The same holds for simple cases:

- (32) a. Bill painted the door and walked through it.
 b. Lunch was delicious and lasted all afternoon.

Rendered in the above fashion to capture the linkage:

- (33) a. $(\exists e)(\exists x)[\text{PAINTING}(e) \wedge \text{AGENT}(\text{Bill}, e) \wedge x = \text{the door} \wedge \text{PATIENT}(x, e) \wedge \text{WALKED-THROUGH}(\text{Bill}, x)]$.
 b. $(\exists x)[x = \text{the lunch} \wedge \text{DELICIOUS}(x) \wedge \text{LASTED-ALL-AFTERNOON}(x)]$.

It strikes me that these kinds of non-punning paraphrases pose a fundamental problem for any paraphrase account and so any account that seeks to render copredication as truth-conditionally coherent. There is a dilemma. On one prong, univocity is dispensed with to reflect the divergent predicates triggering divergent senses of the polysemous nominal, but this renders the target construction a pun, failing to account for the linkage between the predicates via a matrix argument position. On the other prong, punning is avoided, but this lands us back into truth-conditional incoherence. The right move to make, or at least one that avoids the dilemma, is to let copredications have linguistically determined truth conditions, at least up to the granularity to support the kind of paraphrases exemplified in (31) and (33). The only thing to add is that such truth conditions are ontologically incoherent, a fact that natural language does not care about but which we fail to notice.²⁴

8.3 Truth

To say that copredications do not have coherent truth conditions, but only do so as an illusion, is not to say that a speaker is talking nonsense or failing to communicate anything. On the contrary, the paraphrases discussed precisely do offer a perfectly coherent content for copredications. The illusion is only that such content is linguistically determined. This view is a variation on a general approach I flagged in §3 on how to think about familiar cases of fiction, *the sky*, etc. The difference, however, is that these cases are not illusory. A speaker who thinks *Holmes wears a deerstalker* is true is not (or need not be) under any illusion that there is a Holmes entity (*mutatis mutandis* for the sky, etc.), and, of course, the semantics of the sentence do not exhibit any predicate incompatibility. In short, the kind of cases fiction exemplify as discussed in §3 specify truth conditions that *are* conceptually coherent, but may be realised in various ways. Copredications, on the other hand, specify no coherent truth conditions, but only seem to give an associated or recoverable content that is coherent, such as Vicente's paraphrases.

This position on what is distinctive about copredication allows me to address a potential objection, the answer to which will clarify the illusion position *vis-à-vis* the concept of truth. The objection is as follows. The challenge of copredication to standard truth-conditional

24 In this light, a speaker's picture of the world is not determined by the semantic properties of her language but a massive interaction effect of different cognitive systems. The mismatches copredication exhibits is what might be expected on such a model (see Chomsky, 2000; Collins, 2017b; Pietroski, 2018).

semantics is along the same lines as the challenge fiction and statements about the sky and the average American pose: they appear to be truth-apt, yet there is not the right kind of thing in the world or our 'belief space' to make them true. A simple expedient here for the defender of the semantic status quo is simply to deny the premise that fiction et al. is ever true. There are consequences to this denial, to be sure, but these can perhaps be dealt with extra-linguistically. The same kind of tactic for copredication: the problem it poses is defanged by rendering the constructions not really true at all.

The complaint is well taken, but it misconstrues the issues by conflating truth with what might make a claim true. Thus, the illusion model does not deny that *utterances* of copredications can be true; its claim is only that the constructions have no coherent linguistically determined truth conditions. In this respect they are like fictions. A statement like *Bond is a spy* I take to be literally true, but what makes it true is not James Bond, for there is no such thing, only various films and stories. Two people who agree that Bond is a spy, even though one thinks he is an actual spy, the other being less benighted, both say something true in uttering *Bond is a spy*, albeit for different reasons, one being ignorant of what makes the statement true. The same holds for copredication.

It can be true to say that Laura painted the door and walked through it or that lunch was delicious but lasted all afternoon, and it is certainly true that *War and Peace* is thick but never sags. Yet what makes these constructions true are not weird objects that are simultaneously portals and barriers, etc. What makes the constructions true, if true, is a coincidence of factors, which is not linguistically expressed, much as speakers can rightly judge fictional statements to be true even if for the wrong reasons; that is, not recognising fiction to be fiction is not to be linguistically incompetent. So, if *Laura painted the door and walked through it* is true, then Laura painted a relevantly door-like barrier to a portal and afterwards walked through the portal. But this is not what the sentence determines as a content; on the contrary, the truth conditions that are fixed by the sentence are incoherent in virtue of fixing the door to be a very thing that can be painted and walked through. Likewise, if it is true that lunch was delicious but lasted all afternoon, then some food was tasty that was consumed without relevant interruption over the course of an afternoon. But this is not the linguistically determined content.

The difference between fiction and copredication is that typically a competent speaker can readily construct coherent truth conditions for copredication cases, so readily that the zeugmatic nature of the construction is missed—hence the illusion. Fiction tends to work differently insofar as competent speakers often have little sense of what makes a fiction or do not even know if a statement is fictional or not; at any rate, no such sense is required for competence.

Our talk of the sky and average American are closer to copredicative illusions. We hardly notice any oddity, in part because we readily recognise what would make the relevant sentences true. For example, an utterance of *The sky is cloudy today* will be true, if the cloud coverage above one is relevantly extensive on the day in question, but *the sky* does not refer to *what* is observable above one's head or the location, for while the moon and far off suns are visible in the night sky, the objects are not in the sky (Neil Armstrong did not visit a place in the sky). The sky is a perspective we treat as a location. Similarly, talk of *the average N* is readily understood to be made true by some mean or median calculation on the class of Ns. Still, it is another matter entirely whether *the average N* expresses any such operation on the class instead of the phrase determining a kind of abstract object, whose existence we should deny, if queried (Collins, 2017b).

Suffice it say, much more could be said here, but I at least hope that the shape of a proper response to the complaint is clear.

8.4 *Zeugma*

The illusion model claims that copredication is really zeugmatic, or truth-conditionally incoherent. It only *appears* not to be. Looking at *apparent* zeugma lends credence to this view. A serious challenge for any model of copredication is to account for zeugma. The illusion account offers a straightforward story.

The problem of zeugma is: why are some copredications unacceptable, when the categories of predicate, in other constructions, are acceptable? Here are some examples:

- (34) a. #*The Times* invested poorly but it is still easy to read.
 b. *The Times* revenue is mainly from advertising, and it is full of it.
- (35) a. #The school was painted while (it was) on a field trip.
 b. The school's dilapidated state did not stop it being happy.
- (36) a. #The Netherlands is flat and liberal.
 b. The Netherlands contains much reclaimed land, which it uses (/is used) for agriculture.

If paraphrase were a general strategy that could be rolled out, then it should apply to the a-cases:

- (37) a. *The Times* (institution) invested poorly but *The Times* (type of content) is still easy to read.
 b. The school (buildings) was painted while the school (pupils) was on a field trip.
 c. The Netherlands (area) is flat and The Netherlands (population) is liberal.

The unacceptability of the a-cases shows, however, that the strategy is not general at all. Copredication, therefore, is not a mere shorthand. Furthermore, it cannot be understood simply in terms of predicates triggering 'senses' of a polysemous nominal, for the predicates and the senses are here all in place, yet unacceptability still results.

The illusion model offers insight by inverting the perspective. Rather than zeugma being the problematic outlier, it might be viewed as what should be the normal case; that is, for extra-linguistic reasons, copredicative zeugma is unthinkingly treated as acceptable, but is as truth-conditionally incoherent as patent zeugma. Such reasons might pertain to order effects as suggested in section 8.2 as a reinterpretation of [Murphy's \(2021\)](#) findings or, more generally, tighter conceptual connections in the acceptable cases. For example, in (34b), advertising is both something an institution pays for and something that can materially appear; thus, who pays for it and where it appears can be easily conflated. But with (34a), investing and being easy to read have no common factor. Similarly, in (35b), the school buildings and pupils are typically understood to be contiguous, and so can be readily conflated, whereas in (35a), they are non-contiguous, the pupils being explicitly distinguished from the school buildings in being physically at some other location. The same principle applies for (36b). The common factor is the land and the use the people make of it, whereas in (36a), there is no common factor of the land and the political views of the population who live in the land.

In short, all cases of acceptable copredication are *really* zeugmatic, truth-conditionally incoherent. Some cases only seem not to be because extra-linguistic conceptual associations

allow for a ready conflation given some common factor or a robust association (e.g., physical contiguity) between the extensions of the operative concepts. Suffice it to say that this proposal is a hypothesis that requires corroboration rather than any kind of a priori claim. My only suggestion here is that it makes good sense of prototypical cases and is theoretically coherent.

8.5 *Lexical items*

What is the relation between the current proposal to handle copredication and the polysemy of lexical items? Broadly speaking there are two options, if we exclude a kind of polysemy-denial position (King, 2018; Devitt, 2021).

The first position I have in mind treats lexical items as *roots*, which carry no inherent linguistic information (syntactic or semantic), but can be seen as long-term memory entries that, on the one hand are linked to conceptual information, and on the other hand enter into syntactic structure, acquiring their structural features configurationally, and whose conceptual information via the memory links does not affect the structural possibilities. There are various ways to implement the proposal (Borer, 2005; Pietroski, 2018). As regards polysemy, the simple thought, idealising somewhat, is that a given root is linked to two or more memory packages. Thus, Pietroski thinks of meanings as instructions to fetch concepts; polysemy is simply the case where a root can fetch two or more concepts.

The second position I have in mind comes in two flavours. The common feature is that lexical items have an inherent complex structure that determines or at least affects compositional structure. An *overdetermined* model attributes to an item more structure than is normally expressed. Thus, Pustejovsky (1995) and Asher (2011) posit dot-objects as a core aspect of the meanings of items. Such objects are concept packages that are not Boolean in the sense in which they do not express the conjunction or complement of the constituent concepts, but merely contain them as options that may be selected by other lexical items, such as verbs and adjectives. *Book*, say, will have the dot-object [material•content], and *is red* or *is picaresque* will select different constituents. An *underdetermined* model attributes a more formal content shared across kinds of items, which is differentially realised given specific items and contextual factors (Copestake & Briscoe, 1995; Falkum, 2011; Carston, 2021). Again there are different ways of implementing the model.

It seems that that the illusion model is consistent with all of these accounts of the basis for polysemy. For independent reasons, I favour the first *root* proposal, but here I only want to show that the illusion proposal is consistent with polysemy insofar as it is consistent with these accounts (Collins, 2020).

So, on the root model, truth conditions are not determined by linguistic properties precisely because such properties are so sparse; in particular, since lexical items have no referential properties as inherent features, no such properties compose to determine truth conditions. It is perfectly consistent, therefore, to consider polysemy to be an extra-linguistic matter that allows for nominals to express a diversity of related contents *and* copredication to issue in incoherent truth conditions, because the former do not determine truth conditions at all.

On the overdetermined model, polysemy is a lexical matter insofar as dot-objects fix the content of items that fix the range of polysemy they admit. Still, the model is intended to explain polysemy, not to sanction weird objects. That is, the dot-object is a semantic-conceptual item, not a putative entity in the world, or even the representation of such an entity. This is reflected in the crucial fact that ‘•’ is non-Boolean, and so the object does

not represent any state of affairs. Again, then, it is consistent with this model to think that coherent truth conditions are illusory; what the model seeks to explain is how acceptable copredication is compositional, which allows for the copredications to be incoherent, if viewed as representations of how the world might be.

Finally, the underdetermined model exactly leaves truth conditions underdetermined relative to lexical structure. What makes for the expression of the range of polysemy is the interaction of the general structure shared across classes of noun, verb, etc. and other conceptual and pragmatic factors. Again, as with the other models, what is sought to be explained is the acceptability of copredication (*inter alia*), not how the world is such that it contains a referent that possesses mismatched properties.

9 CONCLUSION

My aim has been to show how copredication might be situated as a form of illusion, alongside other more familiar forms, which has the consequence that the phenomena in general involve interacting factors from both semantics and whatever the conceptual/cognitive basis is for the misperception of the linguistically determined content and ready recovery of a distinct content. In this light, it is a mistake to seek a purely semantic explanation that tackles copredication *au fond*. It is more of a mistake to conjure up weird objects or think there is nothing that needs adding or amending to the standard semantic picture. If nothing else, viewing copredication as a form of illusion makes all of this explicit.²⁵

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