Interpretation of copredicative sentences

Copredication occurs when the same polysemous nominal expression comes along with simultaneous predications selecting for two different senses of the word in a sentence:

(1) The school caught fire and was celebrating 4th of July when the fire started.
(2) The city has 500,000 inhabitants and outlawed smoking in bars last year (Asher 2011)

In (1) ‘school’ takes two different senses: building, and “participants”. In (2) ‘city’ takes the senses place and council.

In this talk, I explain (i) why some senses allow co-predication and others do not, and (ii) how we interpret co-predicative sentences.

Some authors argue that senses that copredicate denote constitutive parts of complex entities (Arapinis & Vieu, 2015; Gotham, 2016). However, they need specific conditions why some entities are complex and others are not.

The proposal is that different senses of a word are aspects of a conceptual structure that denote simple entities that are linked by explanatory/realization relations. For example, the structure of ‘school’ represents that a school is, prototypically, an educative institution. As institutions, schools require buildings (physical-realization); social organizations and representations (social-realization); and students and teachers (participants) that participate in the educating process (temporal-realization).

When the reader reads (1), the word 'school' activates the conceptual structure. The predicate ‘caught fire’ selects the building aspect of ‘school’, the other senses are all still active when the reader encounters ‘was celebrating 4th of July’, and the aspect participants is selected. So, (1) could be paraphrased as follows:

(3) The school {physical-realization of a school-institution} caught fire and {the group of participants of the institution} was celebrating 4th of July when the fire started.

Summarizing: The response to (i) is that related senses of a noun allow copredication when the entities they denote are linked by explanatory/realization relations. The response to (ii) is that interpreting copredicative sentences involves a process of sense de-compilation from the copredicative noun and sense selection from the structure.

References:

