Title: Copredication and Meaning Transfer

Abstract:

The problem of copredication occurs where a true sentence ascribes to a single object to two apparently categorically incompatible properties. Consider for example, the following sentence:

(i)   The book by Tolstoy is on the shelf.

It seems that 'book' could either refer to a physical volume or to an informational text. But on the assumption that physical volumes cannot be by Tolstoy and informational objects cannot be on shelves, it is hard to see how we can account for the truth of (i). This is the problem of copredication.

One initially attractive solution to the problem of copredication states that the true reading of copredicational sentences is achieved via a process of *meaning transfer*, wherein one of the predicates has a nonstandard (transferred) meaning. Suppose Bill ordered a ham sandwich, then (in the right context) we can get a true reading of the following sentence:

(ii)   Bill is a ham sandwich.

To achieve this reading, 'is a ham sandwich' undergoes meaning transfer and is interpreted as 'is a person who ordered a ham sandwich'. Similarly, according to the meaning transfer account of copredication, in (i) 'on the shelf' undergoes meaning transfer and is interpreted as 'is instantiated by a volume which is on the shelf', which can then apply to an informational book.

In this talk, I will discuss the meaning transfer account of copredication, and contrast it with my favoured account (the Property Versatility approach, defended by Liebesman and Magidor). I argue that despite its initial attraction, the Meaning Transfer account is not a viable solution to the problem.