A LEXICAL CONSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH TO ILLOCUTIONARY CONSTRUCTIONS: THE CASE OF REQUESTS[1]

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Abstract: *The present paper focuses on the description of illocutionary constructions at level 3 of the Lexical Constructional Model (Ruiz de Mendoza & Mairal, 2007, 2008; Mairal & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2008, 2009). Level 3 illocutionary constructions will be shown as providing structure in terms of the interplay between construal operations and general social conventions. We will present an inventory of realizational procedures that give linguistic form to requests and differ in their potential to instantiate the features that characterize this illocutionary type. It is our aim to show that the realization of requests is based on the use of linguistic mechanisms that exhibit different degrees of instantiation potential for the pragmatic basis of requests. Such basis will be formulated on the basis of Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi's Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model and will be shown to lie at the core of the constructional composition of requests.*

Key words: *Illocutionary meaning, illocutionary constructions, Lexical-Constructional Model, requesting, conventionalization, Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of illocutions has traditionally been assigned to pragmatic analysis (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1979). The two most significant fields of research in the field of illocutionary meaning are represented by inferential accounts (Leech, 1983; Sperber & Wilson, 1995) and functional grammar approaches (Dik, 1989; 1997; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). The accounts belonging to the first group assume that the understanding of speech acts is dependent on inferential processes. The conventionalization of illocution is restricted to generic categories associated with the three main sentence types (i.e. imperative, declarative and interrogative). The theories belonging to the second group recognize a number of grammatically codified illocutions. For example, Halliday approaches speech act meaning in the four basic semantic functions of stating, offering, questioning and commanding, while Dik assumes the existence of four basic universal speech acts that are coded in most languages, namely, statements, questions, commands and exclamations.

Although both approaches have made important contributions to the study of illocution, they are not exempt of problems. Pragmatic theories provide incomplete accounts of illocution as either inferential or conventional (cf. Pérez, 2001, for a discussion of the main flaws of pragmaticist accounts). It is necessary to develop an integrated model for the description of illocutionary meaning that takes into account not only the motivation and constraints of illocution but also the socio-cultural variables that affect illocutionary interpretation. The development of Cognitive Linguistics has shed some light on the research of illocution with a high degree of psychological adequacy. Within the field of Cognitive Linguistics, illocution has been approached in terms of cognitive operations that apply to a type of cognitive models called illocutionary scenarios (Panther & Thornburg, 1998, 2003). Cognitive analyses have also evidenced the existence of conventional speech acts or illocutionary constructions, defined as formal realizations capable of specifying the illocutionary meaning of a given expression (Pérez, 2001; Pérez & Ruiz de

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Mendoza, 2002; Ruiz de Mendoza & Baicchi, 2007). Such insights have provided evidence that illocutionary interpretation is based on coded meaning to a greater extent than has been assumed by pragmatic theories. In turn, these studies have made it easier to incorporate illocutionary phenomena into a principled model of meaning construction called the Lexical Constructional Model or LCM (Ruiz de Mendoza & Mairal, 2007, 2008; Mairal & Ruiz de Mendoza, 2008, 2009).

The LCM, which adopts a cognitive stance on the study of meaning construction, focuses much of its attention on the description of the relations that hold between syntax and the various facets of meaning, such as traditional implicature, illocutionary meaning and discourse relations. In order to achieve this aim, the model is structured on four levels of description. Level 1 deals with argument structure representations. Level 2 accounts for low-inferential aspects of communication. Level 3 deals with illocutionary meaning and high-level inferencing. Level 4 captures discourse phenomena, including coherence and discourse aspects. The main objective of the LCM is to account for the way in which the elements of one level are incorporated into other levels. Two cognitive processes regulate the integration of lower-level constructions into higher-level ones, *subsumption* and conceptual *cueing*. The former is a meaning production mechanism by means of which lower levels of semantic structure are incorporated into higher levels of syntactic structure. The latter is a form of guided inferencing based on linguistic clues.

A further goal of the LCM is to find unifying features across the different levels of meaning construction. This assumption, which is termed the *equipollence hypothesis*, stipulates that it is necessary to find out to what extent, if any, each level or domain of linguistic enquire makes use of the same, or at least comparable, cognitive processes. The potential ubiquity of cognitive processes is but a methodological assumption that seeks to endow the LCM with a greater degree of descriptive and explanatory adequacy.

Within this theoretical framework, our study explores the realizational potential of a number of constructions that are highly specialized to convey a request value. It is our aim to determine the linguistic mechanisms that exhibit instantiation potential for the realization of requests. On the basis of real data drawn from the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English, we will enquire into illocutionary constructions expressing request values. We will discuss each construction as the result of the interplay between selected structure from the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* and a number of construal operations that give prominence to different parts of the selected structure. We will further argue that the LCM provides a robust semantic theory for a unified account of illocution.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the LCM approach to illocution in terms of illocutionary constructions and situational cognitive models. Section 3 examines the rationales of the LCM behind a number of constructions used to perform requests. The final section provides a summary of the main proposals of this research and discusses some future prospects.

2. ILLOCUTION REVISITED: THE LEXICAL CONSTRUCTIONAL MODEL PERSPECTIVE

For the LCM, illocutionary meaning can be made explicit by means of linguistic mechanisms or left for the addressee to infer. In the first case, illocutionary meaning is conveyed through largely conventionalized strings that possess a default speech act value (e.g. the sequence *Could You VP?* for requests). In the second case, illocutionary meaning is a matter of inferential activity based on the metonymic activation of high-level situational models. Such models are obtained by generalizing over every day social interactions captured by low-level situational models, such as going to the dentist, taking a taxi or teaching a class. While the activation of low-level

models results in the derivation of implicated meaning or implicatures, the access to high-level models produces illocutionary meaning. Let us provide an example to back up and illustrate this claim. The interpretation of the utterance *What's the child doing in the garden with the pruning scissors?* at the implicational level exploits a low-level situational model about children being naughty.[22] Then, the same utterance at the level of illocution has a conventionalized complaint meaning. This value arises from the activation of high-level knowledge about our reactions in undesired situations (cf. Ruiz de Mendoza, 2007; Ruiz de Mendoza & Baicchi, 2007). Unlike low-level situational models, high-level models capture a number of cultural generalizations that are also part of our knowledge about the world. These generalizations carry different types of pragmatic information, including power, social distance, politeness, and optionality variables. Such generalizations are realized through the use of linguistic mechanisms that have an instantiation potential. In the case of requests, for instance, the oblique modal can instantiates ability, while the adverb please activates willingness:

1.   a. Can you open the wine? (Bnc)
       b. Pass me the salt, please. (Coca, 1991)

Interrogative constructions like (1a) instantiate the addressee's ability to carry out an action in our benefit. According to the principles of interaction, the addressee is expected to bring about those states of affairs that are beneficial to others provided that he has the ability to do so. Questions about the addressee's ability are therefore taken as a way to remind him that he is expected to act as specified by the speaker in order to comply with cultural conventions. The same applies for the use of please in example (1b). This adverb generally function as a mitigator by increasing the degrees of politeness of the utterance in which it is used (e.g. Please, I'm exhausted; Don't do that, please; Will you please be quiet?). The mitigating effect of the adverb please results from its appeal to the addressee's willingness to comply with an explicit or implicit instruction. All in all, these two realization procedures have become largely entrenched for the expression of requests. This high degree of specialization relates to their high potential to activate relevant semantic structure of this illocutionary type. Let us see some possible low-level cognitive models for requests to illustrate this issue:

2.   A person is in need of something. This person makes someone else aware of his need. The second person takes care of the first person's need.

3.   A person is in need of something. This person makes another person aware of his ability to provide for his need. The second person takes care of the first person's need.

4.   A person is in need of something. This person makes someone else aware of his need. The person appeals to the addressee's willingness to help. The addressee may be persuaded or not.

5.   A person in need pretends not to be in a needful situation. Another person, however, becomes aware of the need and is moved to provide for the first person's need.

As observed, utterances (1a) and (1b) instantiate the second and the third low-level structures respectively. Hence their default meaning value as requests. We may derive a generic structure based on the common elements of the low-level models above:

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[2]   In fact, this utterance is an instance of the What's X Doing Y? construction, which is first approached by Kay and Fillmore (1999). The authors observe in a vast array of examples that this construction conveys a complaint meaning sense that is not derivable from the combination of the meaning of the lexical items. Such a view of constructions is consistent with Fillmore et al.'s (1988) definition of constructions as symbolic structural items with specific meanings. For the LCM, the complaint value of the What's X Doing Y? construction derives from conventionalized meaning implications produced at the implicational level.

6.   A person is in need of something. The person makes someone else aware of his need. The person makes this other person aware of his ability to provide for his need. The person appeals to the addressee's willingness to help. The addressee may be persuaded or not.

It is still possible to derive further generic structure from the semantic makeup of different types of high-level models. The Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model has been postulated by Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007) as capturing the relevant information of high-level cognitive models associated to illocutionary meaning. The first version of this model, called the politeness convention, was formulated by Ruiz de Mendoza (1999) in an attempt to develop Leech's (1983) cost-benefit pragmatic scale and adapt it to the needs of an account of conventionalized illocution in grammar. Ruiz de Mendoza's politeness convention stipulates that people are culturally bound to help other people if it is within their range of abilities. In further formulations proposed by Pérez and Ruiz de Mendoza (2002) and Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007), the convention has been articulated as a cognitive model. In its more recent version, the Cost-Benefit Model is described as a high-level cultural model based on the concept of mutual manifestness put forward by Sperber and Wilson. For these authors, a state of affairs is "manifest" to us if we are capable of making a conceptual representation of it. Thus, when we construct a message, we trust that our addressees will be able to make a mental representation of what we communicate that will allow us to achieve our communicative purposes. In this way, an utterance such as I'm hungry functions as a request to the extent that it makes it manifest to the addressee that there is a non-beneficial state of affairs affecting the speaker. Here is the Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model as postulated by Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007: 111–112):

a.   If it is manifest to A that a particular state of affairs is not beneficial to B, and if A has the capacity to change that state of affairs, then A should do so.

b.   If it is manifest to A that a potential state of affairs is not beneficial to B, then A is not expected to bring it about.

c.   If it is manifest to A that a potential state of affairs is beneficial to B, then A is expected to bring it about provided he has the capacity to do so.

d.   If it is manifest to A that it is not manifest to B that a potential state of affairs is (regarded as) beneficial for A, A is expected to make this manifest to B.

e.   If it is manifest to A that it is not manifest to B that a potential state of affairs is beneficial for B, A is expected to make this manifest to B.

f.   If it is manifest to A that a state of affairs is beneficial to B and B has brought it about, A should feel pleased about it and make this feeling manifest to B.

g.   If it is manifest to B that A has changed a state of affairs to B's benefit, B should feel grateful about A's action and make this feeling manifest to B.

h.   If it is manifest to A that A has not acted as directed by parts (a), (b), and (c) of the 'cost-benefit' model, A should feel regretful about this situation and make this feeling manifest to B.

i.   If it is manifest to B that A has not acted as directed by parts (a), (b), and (c) of the 'cost-benefit' model and A has made his regret manifest to B, B should feel forgiveness for A's inaction and make his feeling manifest to A.

j.   If it is manifest to A and B that a particular state of affairs is not beneficial to B but A has no power to change it to B's benefit, A should still feel sympathy for B over the non-beneficial state of affairs and make this manifest to B.

k.   If it is manifest to A that A is responsible for a certain state of affairs to be to A's benefit, A may feel proud about this situation and make it manifest to B.

The LCM incorporates these previous findings in its description of level 3 activity. It thus postulates an inferential route based on the metonymic access of relevant parts of the Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model to derive speech acts values. For example, the utterance Why did you do that to me? can be used to complain about the addressee having acted in a way that turned out to be harmful to the speaker. This value is derived through the metonymic activation of part (b) of the Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model on the basis of the following rationale:

a.   At level 2 of meaning construction, a why interrogative construction presupposes that the event described has taken place, so the hearer must have done something to the speaker.

b.   At level 2 of meaning construction, asking about the reasons for someone's behavior is usually taken to involve the speaker's dislike of that person's behavior, so the hearer must have done something that the speaker did not like.

c.   At level 3 of meaning construction, communicating the idea that someone has done something that the speaker does not like activates elements of part (b) of the Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model, i.e. that the state of affairs referred to is not beneficial for the speaker. This in turn affords metonymic access to the rest of part (b) of this model, i.e. the idea that the hearer should have not brought about that negative state of affairs, which gives rise to the complaint value of the utterance.

The LCM further recognizes that a reasoning protocol like the one above may become entrenched for one or more speakers. If the entrenchment takes place over a significant number of speakers within a speech community, the result is the linguistic conventionalization of form and function. In fact, the complaint value of the expression Why did you do that to me?, uttered with the right intonational contour (which would include prominence on "do") can be an example of conventionalized implicational and illocutionary value.

3. THE REALIZATION OF REQUESTS

As argued in previous section, the explanatory apparatus of the LCM regards illocutionary constructions as conventionalized sequences that afford access to relevant parts of high-level situational models. This section explores how different realization procedures activate relevant points of access to the generic structure of requests formulated above. As it became apparent in our previous discussion, two subdomains of the Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model apply in the interpretation of requests: If it is manifest to A that a particular state of affairs is not beneficial to B, and if A has the capacity to change that state of affairs, then A should do so. If it is manifest to A that a potential state of affairs is not beneficial to B, then A is not expected to bring it about.

Acts of ordering also arise from these two parts of the Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model, with the difference that, while orders are uttered by speakers who are in a position of authority (physical, institutional, moral or any combination of these) over the addressee, requests are performed by speakers who are in the same position of authority as the addressee. This does not mean that

the addressee's optionality to decide on the realization of the requested action is unconstrained. The fact that requests involve a benefit to the speaker forces the addressee to consider the conventions of social interaction stipulated above because his decision may affect others. However, the addressee still has freedom to decide on the performance of the requested action, as specified in our description of the generic structure for this illocutionary type. In fact, the most numerous group of constructions in the corpus is the one that makes use of the interrogative sentence type. As Risselada (1993) has observed, interrogative sentences are characterized by inherent optionality, and are therefore an excellent means for the performance of requests. Let us see the formal realizations of requesting that make use of each of the sentence types.

3.1. Interrogative request constructions

As argued by Pérez (1996, 2001), the realization of requests shows a notable preference for the use of interrogative sentences. However, interrogatives must make use of specific linguistic mechanisms to inhibit a default request value. Without the presence of such mechanisms, the interpretation of an interrogative as a request relies on contextual variables. By way of illustration, consider the following examples:

7. a. Will you stop slamming the door? (Coca, 1997)
   b. #Will she stop slamming the door?

According to our description of the generic structure of requesting, the person who is asked to act in the speaker's benefit is the addressee himself. Hence the oddity of the interpretation as a request of example (7b), which is more likely to be understood as a complaint. Utterance (7b) can only be assigned a request value in a context in which the speaker knows that the addressee has control over the person making noise. Except in contexts of that kind, interrogative requests involve the second person subject (i.e. you), like the example (7a) above. Likewise, interrogative sentences need to make use of a non-past tense to convey a request value:

8. a. Do you mind turning on the light? (Coca, 1998)
   b. *Did you mind closing the window?
   c. Would you mind closing the window?

The use of a non-past verb tense instantiates the part of the request structure that presents a future action for realization. Thus, (8b) is not compatible with a request interpretation. Examples (8a) and (8c) are better adapted for the performance of this speech act.[3] The third specification for the interpretation of interrogatives as requests has to do with the nature of the verb. Compare examples below:

9. a. Can you read? (BNC)
   b. Can you read, please?
   c. Can you read for me?
   d. Can you hear the sea? (Coca, 1994)
   e. *Can you hear the sea, please?

In interrogative request constructions, the verb must be realized by a controlled action-denoting element plus a benefit-to-the-addressee component. Utterance (9a) has not such condition and thus its interpretation as a request is dependent on contextual information. In contrast, utterances (9b) and (9c) fully activate the benefit component and produce more explicit requests. In

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[3]   As observed, the use of the past modal *would* is not affected by the time variable of requesting. Past modals have been recognized as a conventionalized pragmatic mitigator in English (Taylor, 1995; Pérez, 1996). In fact, interrogative constructions making use of past modals display the highest degree of specialization as formal realizations of requests (e.g. *Could You VP?, Would You VP?*). According to Taylor, there is a first metaphoric mapping that structures the time domain in terms of space (cf. near future, distant past) and a second one that structures distance in terms of social involvement (cf. close friend, distant relative). The use of the past tense thus indicates a psychological distance between the addressee and the requested action. Pérez (1996) adds the observation that the distance needed to obtain the mitigating effect needs to be established both between the addressee and the speech act, and between the intended speech act and the actual speech act.

examples (9d) and (9e), the verb denotes a non-controllable activity, which is incompatible with the nature of requests. We shall conclude that not every interrogative sentence equally fits as a request. However, the openness that characterizes the interrogative sentence type manages to instantiate two of the distinctive features of requesting, namely, optionality and politeness. Since granting someone with optionality is perceived as a sign of politeness in our social system, both elements are closely related. The following interrogative constructions are the most specific means to instantiate the high degrees of optionality and politeness that are characteristic of requests:

10. *Can You VP?/Could You VP?*
    Can you give me a lift? (Bnc)
    Could you give me a lift to my motel? (Coca, 1990)

Through the application of part (a) of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model,* the addressee, if aware of the speaker's need, should have offered a lift to the speaker without being asked to do so. The only exception to this expected reaction of the part of the addressee is his or her inability to act as needed. The speaker's question about the addressee's ability to give him a lift is grounded in this aspect of the cognitive model. Through a metonymic inferential schema the linguistic instantiation of the *Can You VP/Could You VP* construction gives easy access to the generic structure and has thus become conventionalized for the expression of requests.

11. *Can You Please VP?/Could You Please VP?*
    Can you please keep your music down? (Coca, 1993)
    Could you please keep your voices down? (Coca, 1998)

The metonymic operation specified above is to a large extent cued by the adverb please, which functions as a mitigator and is a decisive factor in the production of more explicit requests. Please thus does not only code a concept (i.e. the idea of mitigation) but also an interpretive procedure (i.e. the instruction to activate a metonymic schema in connection to the relevant part of the Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model), very much in the way that has been postulated by relevance theorists for some discourse markers like so and after all which code evidence-conclusion reasoning patterns (cf. Blakemore, 2002). The high degree of politeness arises from the combination of the Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model and the convention of politeness.

12. *Will You VP?/Would You VP?*
    Will you turn off the light? (Coca, 2001)
    Would you turn off the light, Fred, so I can sleep? (Coca, 1995)

According to part (a) of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model,* the addressee should have turned off the light without being asked to do so. Then the speaker inquires about the addressee's willingness to turn the light off. The request reading of constructions of this kind is fairly simple to grasp, although they may function as questions (cf. *Will you divorce your wife?*).

13. *Will You Please VP?/Would You Please VP?*
    Will you please give me a call? (Coca, 1994)
    Would you please sign my book? (Coca, 2009)

The rationale here is the same but the addition of *please* increases the degrees of politeness. As a result, the construction is highly conventionalized for the performance of a request and would require a highly marked context to be interpreted as a different speech act.

3.2. Imperative request constructions

Imperative constructions may not seem an appropriate vehicle for the expression of requests due to their inherently imposing nature which decreases the optionality of an unimposing act. Nevertheless, our constructional analysis contradicts such belief. The linguistic devices present in imperative request constructions (some tags like *can you?/will you?* and the adverb *please*) function as mitigators that activate the optionality and politeness variables of the generic structure of requesting. The following examples illustrate the most common cases:

14. *IMP VP Please*
Please, give me a call when you can. (Coca, 2008)

The construction above manages to activate the most central parameters of the structure of requesting and thus displays high degrees of conventionalization. The imposing nature of the imperative is reduced by the adverb *please,* which enhances the addressee's optionality towards the requested action. Consider now:

15. *IMP VP Can You/IMP VP Could You?*
Tidy me a bit, can you? (Coca, 2004)
Call them at seven, could you? (Coca, 1996)

As in previous examples, through the application of part (a) of the Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model, the addressee should have helped the addressee without being asked to do so. Because in normal circumstances, the speaker would expect the addressee to help, the speaker inquires about any unexpected inability on the part of the addressee to perform the action.

16. *IMP VP Will You/IMP VP Would You?*
Hand me the hammer, will you? (Coca, 2009)
Bring her a glass, would you, madam? (Coca, 1998)

The rationale here is the same, but in this case, the addressee inquires about the addressee's unwillingness. The willingness of the addressee is activated through the use of *will* and *would*, which have the consequence of increasing the degree of politeness of this type of realization. We should note that the *will you* tag may affect the construction in a different way depending on whether the structures of ordering, advising or offering hold:

17. Get rid of it, will you? (Coca, 2006)
Try to develop a little trust, will you? (Coca, 2010)
Have a drink, will you? (Bnc)

In example (17a), the *will you* tag functions as a mitigator of the command. It reinforces the piece of advice in (17b) and the offer in (17c). In contrast to this, the would you tag conveys an inherent politeness that inhibits a default request value.

A relatively different situation is illustrated by (18) below:

18. *IMP VP Can't You?*/IMP VP *Won't You?*
Be quiet for just a minute, can't you? (Coca, 2004)

Take care of the girl, won't you? (Coca, 2010)

Here the speaker treats the addressee as if he had not realized that there is a state of affairs that affects him negatively. As shown in Pérez (2001: 143) the use of negated modals gives rise

to a type of realization characterized by its impoliteness. The reason is that, counter to all expectations, the addressee has not complied with the rules of behavior to carry out the requested action. Then, the use of negated modals presupposes the addressee's refusal or inability to act and presents him as impolite.

3.3. Declarative constructions

Declarative sentences are rather unspecified for the realization of requests. However, further specification of the declarative form through lexical mechanisms gives rise to request constructions with high degrees of effectiveness. These realizations involve a first person singular subject and a verb of desire. The following examples illustrate explicit declarative constructions used to perform requests:

19.   *I Need NP*
        I need a cup of coffee. (Coca, 1999)

Through the application of part (d) of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, the speaker makes it manifest to the addressee that there is non-beneficial state of affairs affecting the speaker. Then, through the application of (c), the addressee is expected to offer the speaker whatever he needs. Now, consider example (20):

20.   *I Want NP*
        I want a guitar for Christmas. (Coca, 1994)

Here applies the same rationale as before, but the use of the verb want makes the manifestness of the speaker's desire even more explicit. This situation partially contrasts with the one for (21):

21.   *I Wish NP*
        I wish this thing were a bit more maneuverable. (Coca, 2005)

Here, through the activation of part (d) of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model,* the speaker makes his wish manifest to the addressee. The addressee is expected to infer that the speaker wants him to satisfy such wish (i.e. making the car maneuverable). Note that this rationale only works if the item can be given to the speaker. Otherwise these constructions only express desire or concern:

22.   a. I need a lot of attention. (Bnc)
        b. I want a career, not just a job. (Coca, 2008)
        c. I wish I had long hair. (Bnc)

Thus, for these constructions to be interpreted as requests, it must be clear from the context that the addressee has the ability to provide the speaker with his need. The request value of these sequences is therefore largely dependent on contextual variables. The addition of other procedures, such as the adverb *please*, increases the mitigation of the act and functions as a hint towards the request interpretation. Consider the examples below:

23.   a. I need a dictionary, please. (Bnc)
        b. I want a shave, please. (Coca, 1993)
        c. I wish entry, please. (Coca, 2002)

In this analysis, the expression of wishes to make requests is a way of activating part (d) of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, whereby the addressee becomes aware of a state of affairs

and infers the request interpretation through part (a). The exploitation of different parts of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* would yield an ordering value in these constructions.

24. a. I need your help right away. (Coca, 2003)
     b. I want a response! (Bnc)
     c. I wish you'd stop shouting at me! (Coca, 1991)

Given this, we may argue that the request meaning of these constructions shows a low degree of conventionalization and the statements could be interpreted as indirect instances of requesting. Other more specified declarative request constructions present the addressee as the agent of the action expressed in the predication:

25. *I Would Appreciate If You VP*
     I would appreciate it if you gave up without a fight (Bnc)

Due to the mitigating effect of the conditional tense, its presence in declarative constructions points with increasing certainty to a request interpretation.

26. *You Could VP For Me*
     Perhaps you could find a place to store this for me. (Coca, 2007)

Because the action is presented as beneficial for the addressee, the addressee is expected to bring it about if it is within his range of abilities. Here is enough to expect that the addressee will do his best to satisfy the speaker's wish.

27. *I Wonder If You Could VP*
     I wonder if you could recommend an accountant (Bnc)

As observed in the examples, the use of conditional expressions and beneficiary satellites increases the optionality of the addressee and consequently enables the request reading. Furthermore, all these constructions present the falling intonation that is proper of requests. Because of this, they represent a fairly specified means for the performance of this illocutionary type.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study represents a first step towards the development of the illocutionary component in the LCM. The LCM argues that inferential activity has a place in grammar in all its descriptive levels. From this perspective, it contemplates the possibility of combining inferential and non-inferential processes in the construction of illocutionary meaning. This proposal makes use of the two general mechanisms that operate at all other levels of meaning construction (*subsumption* and *cued inferencing*) and has thus a high explanatory power. The present contribution applies the theoretical insights of the LCM to the study of the constructional composition of illocution. Our study has evidenced that the semantic and pragmatic base of requests consists of high-level situational meaning. We have also shown that the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* captures all relevant information from the high-level structure of requesting. In this analysis, we have examined a number of conventional realizations of requests and explored their realization potential. Finally, we have contended that the realization of requests is based on different linguistic mechanisms capable of instantiating relevant parts of the generic structure. This study however needs further development counting on an extended version of the corpus that can be applied to the analysis of the constructional realization of other speech act categories.

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