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COGNITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE ACT OF OFFERING*

*“The silent adjustments to understand
colloquial language
are enormously complicated.”*

Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Philosophicus* 4.002

1. On illocutionary meaning

The wide range of perspectives on the interpretation of the illocutionary meaning that scholars of different scientific persuasions have put forward in the twentieth century can be subsumed into two main schools of thought. Advocates of the *Codification Hypothesis* give prize of pride to sentence types (Searle 1969, Morgan 1978, Halliday and Matthiessen 2004, *inter alios*) and by way of typological analyses across a huge number of languages they identify basic sentence types that amount to illocutionary functions (e.g., Sadock and Zwicky 1985, Givón 1990, Dik 1989 and 1997, Croft 1994); proponents of the *Inferential Hypothesis* emphasize the role of inferential processes in the comprehension of the speaker's communicative intentions and ascribe the interpretation of illocutions to mental mechanisms (e.g., Grice 1975, Bach and Harnish 1979, Leech 1983, Sperber and Wilson 1995, *inter alios*). It is undeniable that illocutionary meaning is conveyed through grammatical devices, which is tantamount to saying that it forms part of grammar and that grammatical patterns must receive due consideration in speech acts research. Yet, many illocutions convey meaning that often contrasts with the sentence type (e.g., *Hands up!* vs. *Drink more coffee!*), which is indeed utilized to instantiate different speech acts. In addition, the indirectness of illocutions is quickly and automatically derived by the interlocutors, whose capacity is ascribed to inferential processes; yet, scholars have not identified so far the inferential patterns that are activated in the derivation of implicit meaning nor the cognitive motivation of speech acts at discourse level. As insightful as they are, neither of the two strands are able to offer a full-fledged analysis of the interplay between the linguistic structures that speakers utilize to convey their communicative intentions and the mental paths that guide speakers in the verbalization process and hearers in their interpretive tasks.

Since the '90s cognitive linguists have proposed new models to overcome the weaknesses of traditional theories and they have identified in conceptual metonymy a natural inferential schema that regulates the felicitous performance of speech acts (Thornburg and Panther 1997, Panther and Thornburg 1998, Gibbs 1999). Panther and Thornburg propose that our knowledge of illocutionary meaning may be systematically organized in the form of what they call *illocutionary scenarios*, a type of conceptual frames that, on the basis of metonymic reasoning, allow for the retrieval of all elements contributing to the derivation of illocutionary meaning, either conventionally or inferentially. They claim that conceptual metonymy guides much of pragmatic reasoning by expanding the source meaning into a target meaning, which is a more complex and dense conceptual structure that contains the source meaning. Illocutionary scenarios are composed of three components - a BEFORE, a CORE and an AFTER - which correspond to: (a) pragmatic pre-conditions (BEFORE) that *enable* a physical action, *legitimize* a social action or *motivate* an action (including speech acts); (b) pragmatic core and result (CORE), i.e., properties that define the action as such and the immediate outcome of a successful performance of the action; and (c) pragmatic consequences (AFTER), that is, the intended or

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unintended consequences of the action, with the latter not being their immediate result. If we consider directive speech acts as an example, the BEFORE component contains presuppositional and motivational pragmatic pre-conditions (*Can you pass me the salt?*), while the CORE component contains the degree of obligation imposed on the hearer (*Pass me the salt*), and the AFTER component encompasses the consequences of the speech act (*You will pass me the salt, won't you?*): it is therefore sufficient to mention one of the components to activate the whole directive scenario in the hearer's mind. In the case of indirect illocutions, either the BEFORE or the AFTER components are uttered: the *Can you X?* construction makes reference to the hearer's ability to perform the required action, and the utterance is licensed by the ABILITY TO PERFORM AN ACTION IS A REQUEST² conceptual metonymy:

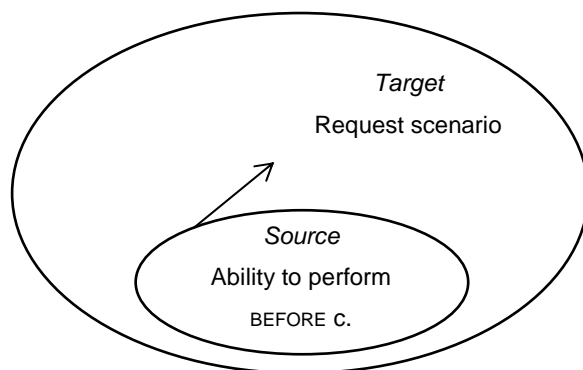


Figure 1. ABILITY TO PERFORM AN ACTION IS REQUESTING metonymy

whereas the *You will X?* construction makes reference to the hearer's ability to perform the required action, and the utterance is licensed by the reasoning WILLINGNESS TO PERFORM AN ACTION IS A REQUEST conceptual metonymy:

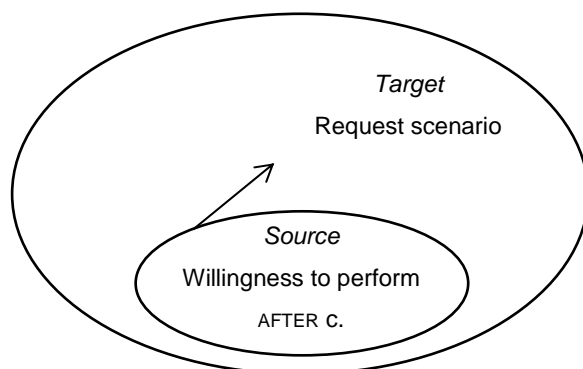


Figure 2. WILLINGNESS TO PERFORM AN ACTION IS REQUESTING metonymy

Panther and Thornburg's proposal has the great merit of ascribing the main elements contributing to the retrieval of illocutionary meaning to the storage of scenarios in our long-term memory and to metonymic reasoning. Yet, Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007) have argued that not only metonymy but the whole set of *Idealized Cognitive Models* (ICMs) - frames, image schemas, metonymy and metaphor - are sensitive to the requirements of a full-fledged cognitive account of illocutionary meaning. To ICMs, we have added a number of socio-cultural conventions carrying pragmatic information and regulating the different types of illocutions as well as the constructional resources realizing them (Baicchi and Ruiz de Mendoza 2010). We believe that all these aspects of illocutionary complexity are better understood in terms of what we prefer to

² Conceptual metonymies are conventionally typed in CAPITALS.



call *high-level situational cognitive models* rather than “illocutionary scenarios”. A high-level situational cognitive model (e.g., requesting, offering, complimenting) is the way in which speakers mould interactional meaning representations abstracted from a number of low-level cognitive models, i.e. stereotypical everyday illocutionary situations (i.e., ordering a meal, making a promise, expressing gratitude) where people try to have their needs satisfied through expressions of various kinds. In order to identify the overall make-up of illocutionary meaning, by banking on the “cost-benefit scale” (Leech 1983) and on the notion of “mutual manifestness” (Sperber and Wilson 1995), we have elaborated a cognitive model, the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, which we conceive of an ICM encompassing a number of stipulations that motivate the different speech act categories (Baicchi 2012):

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| <p>(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.</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>(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 A.</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>(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 this feeling manifest to A.</p> <p>(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 and make this manifest to B.</p> <p>(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.</p> <p>(l) If it is manifest to A that it is not manifest to B that A has positive feelings for B, and if A is aware that the manifestation of his feelings is beneficial for B, A is expected to make this manifest to B.</p> |
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Table 1. The conventions of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*

By way of exemplification, stipulation (a) encompasses many types of directive acts: from those where the speaker says that he has a problem (*I cannot solve this maths problem*) to those where he questions the hearer about his ability or willingness to do something (*Can you / Will you answer the phone?*), including those acts where the speaker uses the more indirect strategy of asking with surprise whether the hearer is not capable of doing (*Can't you see I need a hand here?*) or willing to do something (*Won't you open the door?*). Stipulation (b) regulates a declarative sentence like *It's cold*, which politely depicts a negative state of affairs for the speaker and makes unnecessary the use of a more direct and less polite request (*Switch on the heating*). Stipulation (c) regulates an utterance like *I'd love an evening out*, which is grounded on the idea that the speaker wants the hearer to become aware of her needs or desires, but it regulates also promises (*I'll buy you a new bike*) since they convey a form of reassurance to the hearer about the



speaker's intention to meet the hearer's desire. The use of a negative-interrogative question (*Couldn't you bring me that newspaper?*) illustrates the idea that the speaker knows that the hearer has the ability to perform the requested action, but that he is not willing to do so; this example is motivated by stipulation (d). Suggestions (*Why don't you take an aspirin?*) are regulated by stipulation (e), while stipulation (f) illustrates the case in which the speaker is pleased about something and expresses his feeling to the hearer (*Well done! A great job!*), and stipulation (g) motivates the expression of gratitude (*Thank you a lot for your help*). When a person behaves in an unexpected way and he realizes that it is necessary to apologize for his wrong action, he expresses his regret (*I'm sorry I couldn't come to your party*) by activating stipulation (h). A reply to such a regret, which may communicate forgiveness for the other person's inaction (*Don't worry, it's ok*), exploits stipulation (i). Stipulation (j) is activated when the speaker expresses his feeling of sympathy to the hearer for a non-beneficial state of affairs (*I'm sorry your purse was stolen*). The utterance *This is the best cake I've ever baked* exemplifies the case in which the speaker is proud of his actions and, by means of stipulation (k), exults in being responsible for a positive state of affairs. Finally, stipulation (l) regulates the speaker's expression of positive feelings for the hearer (*You're such a nice friend!*). As we hope we have made it clear, in constructing their messages speakers trust that their hearers will be able to make a mental representation of what they want to communicate, and, even if it is a partial representation, they trust that it will be enough for their communicative purposes.

The *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* enables us to explain how speakers make use of illocutionary cognitive models to motivate the conventionalized illocutionary value of utterances, since it includes, besides the stipulations illustrated above, those socio-cultural conventions, like PROTOTYPICALITY, QUANTITY, OPTIONALITY, POLITENESS, FORCEFULNESS, SOCIAL POWER, COST-BENEFIT, that motivate the different types of speech acts. PROTOTYPICALITY refers to the degree of conventionality of the construction that instantiate the illocution; FORCEFULNESS and SOCIAL POWER refer to the asymmetrical relation between two participants holding different positions in the social hierarchy of authority (Leech 1983; Verschueren 1985); connected to these two variables is OPTIONALITY, i.e. the degree of freedom the hearer is afforded to decide whether to perform as uttered by the speaker, which in turn closely intertwines with POLITENESS and QUANTITY, whereby the more linguistic items used to encode the illocutionary meaning, the higher the degree of POLITENESS; finally, the COST-BENEFIT variable, a cognitive version of Leech's cost-benefit scale, regulates the socio-cultural conventions motivating the different types of illocutions.

With the aim of providing an exemplification of the way in which the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* accounts for illocutionary meaning, in the ensuing section we will focus on the qualitative analysis of the offering high-level situational cognitive model. Data have been retrieved from the *WebCorp*³. We will pin down the main constructional procedures that instantiate the speaker's commitment to carrying out a course of action that is beneficial for the hearer, we will describe the semantic make-up in terms of high-level and low-level structures, and finally we will identify some conceptual metonymies that motivate the performance of the offering ICM.

Baicchi and Ruiz de Mendoza (2010) have recently integrated the notion of *illocutionary construction* into the illocutionary layer of the *Lexical Constructional Model*, a usage-based theory of meaning construction that aims to produce constrained semantic descriptions at each level of the linguistic organization⁴. In concert with Cognitive Construction Grammar (Goldberg 1995, 2006), we conceive of speech acts as form-meaning pairing like other kinds of constructions. However, illocutionary constructions differ from the others in the relatively fixed nature of their form and the situational and high-level nature of the meaning part of the pairing. We diagnose the link between linguistic form and conventional meaning in an entrenched procedure together with socio-cultural conventions. The *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* is the only model that circumscribes speech acts under the theoretical underpinnings of Construction Grammar, and it is able to

³ <http://www.webcorp.org.uk/live/>

⁴ The *Lexical Constructional Model* bridges between projectionist and constructional theoretical frameworks and expands its concerns as to explain all facets of semantic representation and to investigate the relationships between syntax and all aspects of meaning construction, including implicature, illocution and discourse (Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal 2008; Baicchi 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014; Mairal and Ruiz de Mendoza 2009; Butler 2009; Baicchi and Ruiz de Mendoza 2010; Ruiz de Mendoza & González-García 2011, Pérez 2012, *inter alios*).



accommodate, along a cline of idiomaticity, fixed and variable expressions showing family resemblance relationships (Rosch and Mervis 1975). To be more specific, in the *Lexical Constructional Model* a construction is a form-meaning (or function) pairing where form affords access to meaning and meaning is realized by form to the extent that such processes have become entrenched, through sufficient use, in the speaker's mind, and are generally recognized by competent speakers of the language in question to be stably associated or at least potentially replicable by other competent speakers of the same language with immaterial variation in its form and meaning (Ruiz de Mendoza 2013). Accordingly, Baicchi (2012) defines illocutionary constructions as

entrenched, productive and replicable form-function pairings characterized as constructional procedures capable of jointly activating relevant parts of illocutionary scenarios in connection to relevant elements from the context of situation (57).

2 The offering high-level situational cognitive model

The offering high-level situational cognitive model expresses the speaker's commitment to perform some future course of action that will be beneficial for the hearer. The hearer is afforded a high degree of OPTIONALITY for he can freely decide whether to accept or reject the offer. The offering ICM is regulated by stipulations (c) and (d) of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, which are briefly illustrated as to make it clear how they motivate the speaker's behaviour. Stipulation (c) regulates an utterance like *Would you like some more tea*⁵, which expresses the speaker's belief that the hearer needs his help to bring about a state of affairs, and he makes it manifest that he has the possibility to do so. Stipulation (d) motivates the case in which speaker plans a strategy in such a way as to make it manifest that the offer is beneficial more for himself than for the hearer, as is the case of an utterance such as *Will you let me buy you a drink?*⁶, an expression that represents a peculiar way of increasing the degree of POLITENESS of an offer.

From various situations in which we realize that people may need something, it is possible to derive low-level generic structures: e.g., a person appears to be in need of something; the speaker realizes that he has the possibility to help the hearer; the speaker believes that a potential course of action may be beneficial for the hearer; the speaker makes it manifest that a future action is beneficial for the hearer; the speaker commits to performing the beneficial action that may satisfy the hearer's need; the speaker expects the hearer to accept his offer. These low-level scenarios have a corresponding range of common elements belonging to the generic structure, as the ensuing ones: a person appears to need something; a person needs to become aware of a potential course of action that is beneficial for him; the speaker communicates that he has the possibility to change a state of affairs; the speaker communicates his willingness to change a state of affairs; the speaker offers to change the situation so that it may become beneficial for the hearer; the hearer is expected to accept the offer. Overall, this high-level semantic structure is realized through a number of constructional procedures, that is, sets of entrenched lexico-grammatical devices that have an instantiation potential with respect to one or more combinations of cognitive models, which are regulated by socio-cultural variables. Table 2 exemplifies the interplay between possible scenarios and common elements and lists some constructional procedures.

⁵ www.fanfiction.net/s/2094842/1/

⁶ <http://npop.com/spots/keith-harkin/articles/31518/>



OFFERING		
scenarios	common elements	constructional procedures
1. From A's perspective, B is in need of something. A tells B that he will provide him with what he needs.	A person is in need of something.	<i>Do you want another cup of coffee? Have some more coffee.</i>
2. A tells B that he needs help. B tells A that he will help him.	The speaker offers to perform the action that satisfies the hearer's need.	<i>Shall I help you with your luggage?</i>
3. A learns from a third part that B needs something. A tells B that he will provide him with what he seems to need.	The speaker makes manifest his willingness to help.	<i>I would like to do that for you.</i>

Table 2. The offering high-level cognitive model

We will now set out to discuss some constructional procedures that realize the act of offering.

2.1 The interrogative construction

The interrogative construction is the most prototypical pattern that is employed to offer someone something. The open nature of the interrogative form qualifies the speaker's utterance as a very polite strategy to address the hearer, who is thus afforded a high degree of **OPTIONALITY** whether to accept or reject the offer. In terms of **PROTOTYPICALITY**, the *Would You like X?* construction is certainly the most ritualized formula to make an offer and to commit oneself to bringing about a state of affairs. By means of an utterance like

1. *Would you like a pen?*

[\[www.wrongplanet.net/postt89046.html\]](http://www.wrongplanet.net/postt89046.html)

the speaker understands that the hearer is in need of something and he explicitly offers his help to satisfy his need through the activation of the **BEFORE** component. The utterance is motivated by the conceptual metonymy according to which **ASKING FOR PREFERENCE IS OFFERING**.

The *Would You like X?* construction is employed for the expression of other speech acts, such as inviting, complaining, and threatening, hence the intended illocutionary force is understood with recourse to the situational context. The difference between offering and a directive act like inviting lies in the fact that in the inviting ICM it is the hearer the one who carries out the action, whereas in offering, being a commissive, it is the speaker the one who performs the action for the hearer's benefit. In this respect, the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* has the advantage over other theoretical frameworks that its stipulations are able to regulate not only different speech acts within the traditional Searlean speech act taxonomy, but also across them. In other words, it can capture all the relevant information from high-level scenarios that are connected to the whole range of speech act categories. It thereby allows for a more comprehensive and flexible account of the manifold aspects of illocutionary meaning, thus providing the analyst with a more parsimonious and explanatory framework.

The *Would You Like Me X?* construction is a variant of the previous pattern, whereby, through the explicit mention of the personal pronoun *me*, the speaker reinforces the idea that he is really willing to perform an action that may have a beneficial result for the hearer:

2. *Would You Like Me to find you a box?*

[\[www.hark.com/clips/clfjgyqqhv\]](http://www.hark.com/clips/clfjgyqqhv)



Yet, we must observe that this construction is rather polysemous because it can be used to convey other types of illocutionary meaning. It can be exploited to utter a threat, such as

3. *Would you like me to turn your life into hell?*

[\[http://weknowmemes.com/2012/03/\]](http://weknowmemes.com/2012/03/)

but in this case the illocution is regulated by stipulation (e), according to which we are expected to make manifest to the hearer that a potential state of affairs is (non)-beneficial for him; in the case of the threatening high-level situational cognitive model, the construction points to a potential course of action that will have negative consequences for the hearer, and the speaker makes this manifest.

The same construction can be used to express a complaint:

4. *Would you like me to die of a panic attack?*

[\[http://it.twitter.com/Eva_Lang?protected_redirect=true\]](http://it.twitter.com/Eva_Lang?protected_redirect=true)

the variable, non-parametrizable part *Would you Like Me to?* is the fixed part of the speech act and it is the task of this variable part to convey the speaker's illocutionary intention.

An offer can be realized with another variant of the *Would you like X?* construction; some examples attest the variant construction *Would You X?*:

5. *Would you have some more tea, Lad?*

[\[www.louislamour.com/firstchapt/sackettsland1st.htm\]](http://www.louislamour.com/firstchapt/sackettsland1st.htm)

the utterance is interpreted as an offer where the speaker commits himself to realizing a specific course of action. Given its polysemous nature, this construction is widely exploited in the requesting ICM, as in

6. *Would you close the window?*

[\[http://billwalsh.blogspot.it/2004_12_01_archive.html\]](http://billwalsh.blogspot.it/2004_12_01_archive.html)

whereby, through the application of stipulation (a), the speaker inquires about the hearer's willingness to perform as required. This is further example of the flexibility of constructions in the realization of the speaker's intention and of the importance that the context holds in the interpretation of illocutions. It also testifies to the applicability of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, whose stipulations are capable of accounting for a number of different speech acts.

Other interrogative forms employed for the expression of an offer are the *Will You X?* construction and its negative counterpart *Won't You X?*:

7. *Will you have more coffee, my guest?*

[\[www.gutenberg.org/files/16589/16589-h/16589-h.htm\]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16589/16589-h/16589-h.htm)

8. *Won't you drink more tea and eat another cracknel before you go?*

[\[www.smashwords.com/extreader/read/9831/15/\]](http://www.smashwords.com/extreader/read/9831/15/)

These utterances activate the AFTER component where the speaker inquires about a future action; his question is motivated by the metonymy A QUESTION ABOUT A FUTURE ACTION IS AN OFFER, which stands for the whole offering scenario. It is interesting to notice that the literal meaning of utterance (8) in the negative form conveys a shade of surprise which is meant as a token of courtesy: by showing surprise, the speaker aims to make the hearer feel at ease and accept his offer. Yet, the *Won't You X?* construction may express disappointment, as in:

9. *Won't you do the dishes?*

[\[http://sixoclockswill.com/performances/images/show/\]](http://sixoclockswill.com/performances/images/show/)



where the speaker inquires about an unexpected unwillingness on the part of the hearer to perform the action. In unmarked contexts, this construction has a strong power to produce a request, while in more marked ones, it is used to ask a question, or, indeed, to offer.

The *Will you let me?* Construction exploits stipulation (d) of the Cost-Benefit ICM. It represents an interesting way of encoding an offer since it allows for the highest degrees of POLITENESS whereby the speaker pretends of being the one who will benefit more from the future action:

10. *Will you let me drive you there?*

[\[http://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/view_episode_scripts.01e17\]](http://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk/view_episode_scripts.01e17)

11. *Will you let me pay for it?*

[\[http://www.asianfanfics.com/story/view/58678/22/\]](http://www.asianfanfics.com/story/view/58678/22/)

These utterances illustrate very interesting examples where the speaker has recourse to a strategy that allows him to upgrade his illocution along the scale of POLITENESS. The *Will you let me?* construction exemplifies the case in which the speaker makes it manifest to the hearer that there is a potential state of affairs which is beneficial for the speaker and he asks the hearer to allow him to carry out the action. Asking for permission connects to politeness strategies: in this way, the offer does not offend the hearer since he believes that the speaker's is the one who will benefit from the action. The ASKING FOR PERMISSION IS OFFERING metonymy motivates this constructional procedure.

A similar rationale stands behind the *Let Me X* construction:

12. *Let me pay for your coffee.*

[\[http://aroundtheworldin80brands.wordpress.com\]](http://aroundtheworldin80brands.wordpress.com)

where the difference lies in the degree of POLITENESS, which is higher in the interrogative sentence type.

The *Do You X?* and the *Do You Want Me X?* constructions are widely used in contexts where there exists intimacy between the interlocutors:

13. *Do you want some marmalade on it?*

[\[http://bnc.phon.ox.ac.uk/transcripts-html/KBW.html\]](http://bnc.phon.ox.ac.uk/transcripts-html/KBW.html)

although the degree of FORCEFULNESS is higher than in the *Would You Like X?* construction, this utterance is not perceived as impolite due to the fact that the interlocutors share the same social status. Likewise, the utterance

14. *Do you want me to do it for you?*

[\[http://thehopenet.org/blog/?p=35\]](http://thehopenet.org/blog/?p=35)

profiles a situation where the degree of POLITENESS is low due to the social proximity of the interlocutors and the recourse to a modal auxiliary verb is not felt necessary; the interrogative sentence type, however, affords the hearer a high degree of OPTIONALITY.

A variant construction is the *Do You Think I Can X For You?*:

15. *Do you think I can do this for you?*

[\[http://60secondmotomojo.wordpress.com/2012/06/12/the-brain-cell/ \]](http://60secondmotomojo.wordpress.com/2012/06/12/the-brain-cell/)

here it is the fixed part *For You* that evokes the offering interpretation. In fact, the *Do You Think I Can X?* construction shows a high level of semantic flexibility and it can be employed to convey other illocutionary meanings.



2.2 The use of the performative verb

The explicit performative verb is seldom used to express an offer since it conveys a sense of impositiveness; when it is used, it co-occurs with mitigating devices:

16. *I offer you some cake if you like.*

[\[http://www.energysavers1.com\]](http://www.energysavers1.com)

The use of the progressive form conveys a very high degree of FORCEFULNESS and it may be more suitable to express a reproach rather than an offer:

17. *Now I'm offering you my help. Do you want it?*

[\[www.fanfiction.net/s/3685949/3/Harry-Potter\]](http://www.fanfiction.net/s/3685949/3/Harry-Potter)

by exploiting this strategy, the speaker conveys a meaning of irritation or even impatience, and the expression scores a high degree of FORCEFULNESS.

2.3 Modality

The interrogative construction calls for the hearer's response, which could be interpreted as a suitable strategy; however, it often includes mitigating devices like modal auxiliary verbs that modulate the forceful impact of the sentence type. Consider these utterances:

18. *May I help you to do it?*

[\[http://forums.gaspowered.com/viewtopic.php?p=486695\]](http://forums.gaspowered.com/viewtopic.php?p=486695)

19. *May I pour you some bourbon in the meantime?*

[\[www.trollkingdom.net/forum/showthread.php?t=1067\]](http://www.trollkingdom.net/forum/showthread.php?t=1067)

The *May I?* construction prototypically instantiates a request for permission. When it is used to express an offer, the use of the construction is metonymically extended to serve another function. The difference in the SOCIAL DISTANCE between the two interlocutors is such that the speaker feels necessary to upgrade along the scale of POLITENESS and to ask for the hearer's permission to offer his help; the process is metonymic and it can be represented as REQUEST FOR PERMISSION IS AN OFFER OF HELP. The hearer is afforded access to the whole scenario through the activation of the BEFORE component, whereby, in a specific context, the request for permission is a pre-requisite condition for the speaker's offer of help.

The *Can I X?* construction is an interesting constructional procedure which profiles a rather complex situation:

20. *Can I buy you a coffee?*

[\[www.theferrett.com/ferrettworks/2012/08/\]](http://www.theferrett.com/ferrettworks/2012/08/)

The construction conveys two types of meanings: the modal auxiliary verb expresses a request for permission with a lower degree of POLITENESS than the *May I X?* construction in example (19); at the same time, it implies the speaker's ability for the performance of the action. The *Can I X?* construction is quite similar to the *May I X?* one, but the former focuses on the ability component. The prerequisite condition of ability, which corresponds to the BEFORE component of the scenario, is exploited by the speaker also in the utterance below:

21. *Don't fret. I can do this for you.*

[\[http://brettdeaton.com/services/\]](http://brettdeaton.com/services/)



The rationale behind this strategy profiles the situation in which the speaker is culturally bound to carry out those actions that are beneficial for the hearer, provided that he has the capacity to do so. The metonymic thinking motivating this type of illocutionary meaning is ABILITY TO PERFORM AN ACTION IS AN OFFER.

2.4 The imperative construction

The imperative construction is prototypically used to give a command; however, in the offering context, it profiles a substantial benefit for the hearer:

22. *Drink some more wine.*

[\[www.tvfanatic.com/quotes/characters/\]](http://www.tvfanatic.com/quotes/characters/)

The speaker is sure that, if the hearer performs as 'ordered', he can derive the maximum benefit. On the other hand, however, the hearer may feel that he has fewer options to refuse the offer and may perceive a degree of impositiveness. For this reason, there are cases in which certain devices, such as inserts (*please*) or tags (*will you?*), co-occur with the imperative construction:

23. *Eat some more cake, please!*

[\[http://lastyearsgirl.pixlet.net/?p=3945\]](http://lastyearsgirl.pixlet.net/?p=3945)

In these utterances the mitigating devices are meant to downgrade a potentially impositive interpretation and the degree of FORCEFULNESS.

The imperative sentence type points directly to the action that the hearer is supposed to carry out, and in so doing it activates the CORE component of the illocutionary scenario; nevertheless, the offering interpretation requires recourse to a metonymic schema whereby AN ORDER TO PERFORM AN ACTION IS AN OFFER metonymy.

2.5 The conditional construction

Finally, an offer can be instantiated by the conditional construction, as in the ensuing utterances:

24. *If you like, I will do it for you.*

[\[http://forums.aaca.org/f119/1932-dodge-hubcap-rings-328244.html\]](http://forums.aaca.org/f119/1932-dodge-hubcap-rings-328244.html)

25. *If you prefer, I will assemble one complete set for you.*

[\[http://clowninroundbooks.com/pages/\]](http://clowninroundbooks.com/pages/)

26. *If you want me to, I will prepare an upload for you.*

[\[http://osdir.com/ml/debian\]](http://osdir.com/ml/debian)

The degree of the hearer's OPTIONALITY is activated by the *if*-clause, whereas the main clause encodes the speaker's commitment to performing the action that the hearer may like, want, or prefer. At a higher level of schematicity, the construction is represented as *If You X, I Will Y*: this syntactic configuration is exploited to utter other speech acts, such as threatening and promising, as in

27. *If you break her heart, I will hunt you down and kill you.*

[\[http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Film/DEBS\]](http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Film/DEBS)

28. *If you behave well, I'll give you some cookies I made before the trip.*

[\[www.fanfiction.net/s/7066091/5/Lucky-Love\]](http://www.fanfiction.net/s/7066091/5/Lucky-Love)



whereby, through recourse to the stipulations of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, the hearer is able to grasp the intended illocutionary force according to the given context.

3 Conclusive remarks

Our cognitive and constructional analysis of the offering high-level situational cognitive model has attempted to foreground some features of its semantic make-up, to identify the main constructional procedures employed to convey the offering meaning, and to pin down some metonymic schemas motivating such procedures.

An offer can be expressed through the exploitation of a number of constructional procedures that are regulated by the socio-cultural variables of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, depending on the given situational context. We have defined an offer as the illocutionary activity in which the speaker makes manifest his intention and willingness to cater for the hearer's need and where the outcome of the speaker's performance of a course of action is beneficial for the hearer.

Along the COST-BENEFIT scale, offering involves a benefit for the hearer and, under usual circumstances, it is not a cost for the speaker, who has spontaneously made himself available to satisfy the hearer's need. Offering is an ICM that is uttered when the speaker understands that the hearer is in need of something and he has the possibility to realize, or change, a state of affairs to the hearer's advantage. The speaker then makes manifest his ability and willingness to change the situation for the hearer, who is expected to accept the offer. The semantic make-up of offering is such that a degree of FORCEFULNESS amounts to the speaker's manifestation of willingness to be helpful to the hearer. This interpretation of FORCEFULNESS is closely connected to the high degree of POLITENESS, which is one of the constituting features of offering. In this illocutionary situation, the variable of SOCIAL POWER is not particularly relevant since offers can be uttered whatever the power relationship and the social distance that hold between the interlocutors. As a consequence of all this, OPTIONALITY scores high degrees because the hearer is free to accept or refuse the offer as he prefers. Offering is hence a benefit for the hearer and it is not a cost for the speaker, who may have his own benefit as a result of his behaving politely and cooperatively.

We will now sum up the constructional procedures employed along their degree of PROTOTYPICALITY and with reference to the different socio-cultural variables.

Routinized formulae represent the most prototypical procedure in the expression of an offer. Highly prototypical are also those offers instantiated through the imperative form, which is interpreted not as a way of obliging the hearer to accept the offer, rather as the way in which the speaker wants to make manifest his willingness to realize a beneficial state of affairs for the hearer. Lower degrees of PROTOTYPICALITY are scored by the conditional construction. The use of the performative verb and of the noun *offer* are quite unusual and dispreferred in the realization of this illocution since they may convey a sense of impositiveness and constrain the hearer's optionality.

With reference to the sentence type perspective, the interrogative form is the most prototypical sentence type: it is represented by routinized formulae, polar questions and interrogative modals. The imperative sentence type occupies the middle position along the scale of PROTOTYPICALITY and its degree of FORCEFULNESS is interpreted as the degree of the speaker's willingness to cater for the hearer's need. The declarative sentence type is the least prototypical: it expresses an offer through the use of modals, the conditional form, the performative verb and the noun *offer*, with these four strategies scoring different values along the scale.



more PROTOTYPICAL

<i>sentence type</i>	<i>constructional procedures</i>
INTERROGATIVE	routinized formulae
	polar questions
	modals
IMPERATIVE	Verb + XP construction
DECLARATIVE	modals
	conditional
	performative verb/noun



less PROTOTYPICAL

TABLE 3. PROTOTYPICALITY of sentence types for offering

The offering ICM affords the hearer a high degree of OPTIONALITY, but the various constructional procedures used to instantiate it display different values of OPTIONALITY, POLITENESS and FORCEFULNESS. Along the scales of OPTIONALITY and POLITENESS, routinized formulae, polar questions and modal question types score the highest degrees because they afford the hearer the highest degree of choice whether to accept or refuse the offer.

more

less

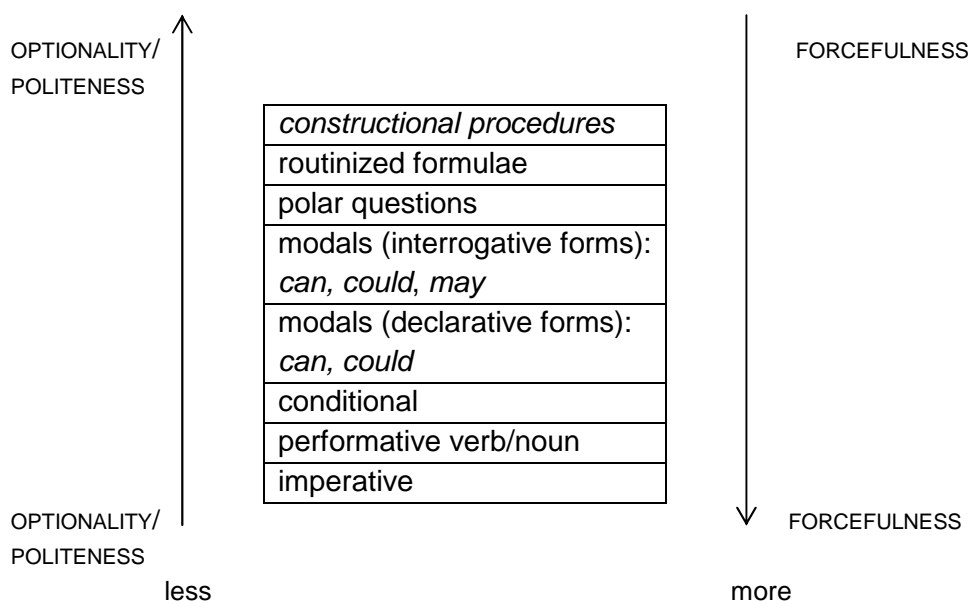


Table 4. Scales for the offering ICM

The imperative sentence type conveys the highest degree of FORCEFULNESS, which however is not here to be interpreted as a way of manipulating the hearer's will, rather of representing the speaker's willingness to perform a course of action meant to satisfy the hearer's needs. This is the rationale behind the fact that FORCEFULNESS scores opposite values than OPTIONALITY and POLITENESS.

As for the stipulations of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* that regulate this type of illocutionary activity, the *offering* ICM is regulated by stipulations (c) and (d).

The offering ICM can be activated by any of the three components of the scenario - the BEFORE, the CORE and its RESULT, and the AFTER - together with a number of socio-cultural conventions that regulate its performance. The make-up of the offering ICM is summarized in the ensuing table:



Offering ICM:

- (i) the BEFORE
 - the hearer is in need of something;
 - the speaker knows he can satisfy the need;
- (ii) the CORE
 - the speaker makes the hearer aware of his possibility/willingness to commit to bringing about a beneficial action for the hearer;
- the RESULT
 - the hearer can freely decide whether to accept the speaker's offer;
- (iii) the AFTER
 - the hearer is expected to accept the speaker's offer;
- (iv) COST-BENEFIT: prototypically high benefit for the hearer;
- (v) OPTIONALITY: prototypically very high;
- (vi) POLITENESS: prototypically high;
- (vii) SOCIAL POWER: offers can be uttered whatever the power relationship between the speaker and the hearer;
- (viii) FORCEFULNESS: prototypically low.

Table 5. The offering ICM

A number of conceptual metonymies motivate the offering ICM according to the three components of its scenario.

The CORE component is activated when the offer is realized through the performative verb or the noun *offer*. It is also activated by the imperative sentence type, which is an explicit mention of the action that the speaker's deems beneficial for the hearer: in offering, the imperative encodes the highest degree of willingness on the part of the speaker to commit himself to catering for the hearer's need. Nevertheless, since the imperative sentence type is prototypically used to give a command, when it is used in the context of offering it triggers a metonymic thinking whereby AN ORDER TO PERFORM AN ACTION IS AN OFFER. The BEFORE component motivates the routinized formulae since they make explicit mention of pre-requisite conditions for the performance of the suggested action; by asking about the hearer's preference (*Would you like X?*; *Would you like me to X?*) the speaker indirectly expresses an offer and commits himself to performing the necessary course of action. The conceptual metonymy that motivates this illocutionary meaning is ASKING FOR PREFERENCE IS OFFERING. When the speaker's offer is communicated indirectly through a request for permission (*Will you let me X?*; *May I X?*), it is again the BEFORE component that is exploited and it is motivated by the ASKING FOR PERMISSION IS OFFERING metonymy. Ability can be invoked to express an offer indirectly (*Can I X?*), where the metonymic thinking motivating this utterance is ABILITY TO PERFORM AN ACTION IS AN OFFER. The AFTER component is activated when the offer is expressed by asking about a future action (*Will you X?*), which is motivated by A QUESTION ABOUT A FUTURE ACTION IS AN OFFER metonymy. Finally, the *Will You Let Me X?* construction activates the AFTER component, whereby the speaker pretends he is the one who will benefit more from the performance of the action and, in doing so, he endows his utterance with a higher degree of POLITENESS.

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