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## Current issues in the ontology and form of directive speech acts

### Abstract

A general issue in pragmatics concerns the definitions of speech act (SA) types. Cognitive linguists agree that a directive SA involves a speaker exerting a force towards her addressee's (A) performance of some action, and the subtypes of directives have been approached in terms of a metaphorical grounding based on force image-schemas. These idealized cognitive models include graded features, the values and the centrality of which differ across directive subtypes. I address the relationship between the form of utterances used as directives and the ontology of directives, and I discuss recent experiments supporting a view of SAs as graded categories. I show that these approaches enable adopting an empirically adequate distinction between the levels of pragmatic meaning and semantic meaning, which raises interesting possibilities for further experimental work on speech act recognition in cognitive linguistics.

### 1 Introduction

Language is used to perform speech acts (SAs) such as informing about a state of affairs, asking whether something is the case, wishing someone good luck, to only name a few. In this paper, I address one such category of actions accomplished by way of uttering sentences: "directive" SAs, which consist in telling someone to perform some action.

There are several reasons why directives constitute a very interesting research topic. First, they are ubiquitous in daily communication. Sooner or later, we need other people's assistance to achieve our goals, in which cases we can get them involved by performing a directive, or we engage in a joint activity, and naturally come to interact by means of requesting and offering help (see Drew & Couper-Kuhlen 2014). Second, insofar as, in performing a directive, a speaker presents an addressee with a potential course of action for its realization by the addressee, directives are a possible source of conflicts between individuals (Brown & Levinson 1987). This is especially true when the speaker (S) imposes her preferences on A, and thus goes against A's freedom of action, as in the case of requests and commands.

A third reason that makes directives (still) worth investigating is the large variety of forms that are used to perform them. For instance, to request that someone close the window, one can use one of the following constructions: the imperative sentence-type (1), the declarative sentence-type (2), interrogative sentence-types (3)-(4), or even a declarative sentence such as (5).

- (1) Close the window. Lock it up. (COCA, Davies 2004-)
- (2) You should shut the window. (<http://theholidayze.com/mombasa>)
- (3) Could you close the window? (COCA)
- (4) Buddy, would you please close the window? (COCA)
- (5) It's getting cold in here. (Esther Royer Ayers, *The Amazon ladies' caper*, 2013)

Even though these are only a few examples, such a variety raises the question of what makes a linguistic construction a convenient means for the performance of a directive SA. In fact, the relationship between different linguistic forms used as directives and the definitions of the subtypes of directives in the cognitive linguistics (CL) framework requires further research. Considerable work has been devoted to illocution within CL (e.g., Marmaridou 2000, Martínez del Campo, Panther & Thornburg 1998, Pérez-Hernández 2001; 2013, Pérez-Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza 2002, Takahashi 2012, Vassilaki 2017). However, with the exception of Marmaridou (2000), available CL approaches to SAs are incomplete inasmuch as

they do not make explicit the connection between their conceptualizations of directives and the original notion of force exertion developed by early CL scholars such as Johnson (1987) and Talmy (2000).

Adopting a CL perspective and graded SA categories, this paper addresses this shortcoming. I will focus on the relationship between the form of utterances used in the performance of directives and the CL accounts of directives.<sup>1</sup> It is structured as follows. To begin with, I will situate, in Section 2, available CL approaches to directive illocutionary force within the general prototype-based view of speech act categories. After surveying the conceptual grounding of directives based on the notion of force exertion, I will follow the insights provided by Marmaridou (2000) and clarify the conceptual import of force exertion in the cognitive models corresponding to different directive SAs, such as that of requesting. In Section 3, building on Pérez Hernández' (2013) analysis of the variety of linguistic expressions used as directives, I will show why CL enables drawing a clear boundary between the formal and conceptual properties of directive SA types.

## 2 What is a directive speech act according to cognitive linguists?

CL approaches to SA categories are prototype-based. The view that SAs constitute graded categories defined with respect to a prototype builds on Rosch's (1973) theory. According to Rosch, a concept such as "bird" constitutes a category, with some exemplars being better members of the category than others. For instance, a sparrow is more representative or more "prototypical" of the category of birds relative to an ostrich or a penguin, which are peripheral members of the category of birds. As a first application of the prototype-based view to SAs, consider the imperative (1) uttered by a high-status person (a boss) and addressed to a lower-status individual (her employee); such an utterance would be a prototypical realization of the SA of commanding in that specific context.

(1) Close the window! (repeated)

A peripheral member of the category of commands would be the same imperative uttered in a context where the relative status of the participants is inverted, such as an employee addressing her boss; in this case, the imperative is more likely to be interpreted as an offer or a suggestion. This analysis implies that the imperative construction *per se* does not make a particular SA of commanding prototypical; rather, the utterance (1) is a prototypical command because of the power asymmetry between S and A and the lack of politeness markers in the utterance (see Section 2.2).

Support for the prototype-based approach to SAs is provided by Coleman & Kay's (1981) empirical investigation of the semantics of the word *lie*. These authors defined lies according to three features: (a) S makes a false statement; (b) S believes that she makes a false statement; and (c) S intends to deceive A. They then presented participants with stories and asked them to rate the extent to which they considered that a given utterance consisted in a lie. They found a positive correlation between the ratings and the summed weights of the features satisfied by the utterance; the most important feature was (b). The results of Coleman & Kay's study suggest that the notion of a lie refers to a fuzzy category defined with respect to a prototype that satisfies the three features proposed.

According to the CL approaches addressed in this paper, the subtypes of directives, such as requests, are defined in terms of a conceptual scenario that consists in a set of features

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<sup>1</sup> An important research question is whether SA categories should be defined in terms of necessary and/or sufficient conditions, as in the speech act theoretic tradition (e.g., Bach & Harnish 1979, Searle & Vanderveken 1985), or, rather, in terms of graded categories (cf. Rosch 1973). Unfortunately, I will not be able to address this issue here, but the evidence discussed in Section 2 largely supports the graded view of SA types.

(more on this in Sections 2.2 and 2.3). Some of these features are more central to an utterance being a request than others. Van Tiel (2016) extended Coleman & Kay's (1981) approach, and tested the predictions of prototype theory on the "genuine" SA categories of promise, apology, claim, complaint, question (as the SA of questioning someone about something) and suggestion. Here I assume that, as suggesting, questioning belongs to the macro-category of directives in that it amounts to requesting A to answer a question (see, e.g., Bach & Harnish 1979, Searle & Vanderveken 1985). Van Tiel used (6b) as a prototypical question in the context of (6a) and (7b) as a prototypical suggestion in the context of (7a).

- (6) a. Susan and Mark are leaving the cinema. They just watched a movie together. Susan turns to Mark and says,  
b. Did you like the movie?
- (7) a. Mark just failed his exam. He wasn't able to study properly because he had a serious cold. Susan says,  
b. Maybe you can ask your teacher for a resit.

The participants were able to rate the extent to which a SA is a representative member of its category. For instance, they considered that "question" was an appropriate label for (6b), but that (8b) was not appropriately described as a "question" in the context of (8a), and, in a forced categorization task, they classified (6b) more often as a question than they did (8b).

- (8) a. Susan sees Mark. Mark is carrying a sports bag with a squash racket sticking out. Susan walks up to Mark and says,  
b. So you play squash.

In addition, these representativeness ratings correlated positively with the likelihood that the SAs are classified as genuine members of a category. Furthermore, the speed of forced categorization correlated positively with the representativeness ratings: SA categorizations were faster for prototypical exemplars of the category such as (6b) relative to less prototypical ones such as (8b) (see also Rosch & Mervis 1975). Finally, the representativeness ratings correlated positively with the summed weights of the features that the participants proposed to define the SA categories. Taken together, the results of van Tiel's experiments provide evidence that the SA categories for directives, such as questions and suggestions, are fuzzy, with more prototypical members and less prototypical members depending on the number of features that are satisfied. Which exact features are involved in these definitions, however, is subject to further empirical research, and the results of these experiments are expected to change significantly if social variables such as degree of familiarity and power are manipulated. In addition, it is unclear what features are necessary to define the "macro" category of directive SAs. A plausible candidate, to be examined in the next section, is some degree of force exerted by a speaker towards A's performance of some action.

### ***2.1 Force exertion and directive force***

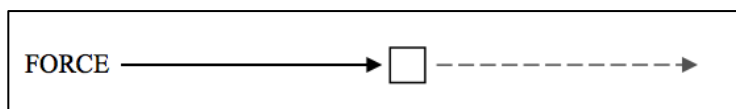
The hypothesis considered in this section is that performing a directive SA amounts to subject one's addressee under a psycho-social force towards his performance of some action; if the directive is successful, the force exerted will create an obligation for A to act as requested/commanded/etc. We will see that, while CL approaches agree to conceptualize the performance of a directive in terms of the exertion of some degree of force, there is—strictly speaking—no unique feature corresponding to force exertion in the cognitive models they propose for the subtypes of directives. Rather, force exertion is a notion that provides the metaphorical grounding for a combination of such features.

A first CL account of directive SA force is Johnson’s (1987) approach to meaning, which belongs to the overall framework of “embodied cognition”. Broadly speaking, embodied cognition is the hypothesis that “human physical, cognitive, and social embodiment ground our conceptual and linguistic systems” (Rohrer 2007, 27-28). For Johnson (1987, 41-64), physical forces that we experience make their way into the structures that allow us to understand meaning, to reason, and to communicate. He decomposes the meaningful, “gestalt” structure that constitutes our notion of “force” into the following features (Johnson 1987, 43-44). Force is experienced through interaction, and conceptualized as oriented in a certain direction. A force typically includes a single path of motion, has a source, is directed towards a target, with varying degrees of intensity, and is the means by which causal interaction is achieved between the source and the target. Johnson’s (1987) notion of force is in line with Talmy’s (1988; 2000, 409-470) force dynamic semantics, which is a defence of the view that speakers tend to conceptualize certain aspects of verbal meaning in terms of force interactions between entities of the world.

In CL, image-schemata are recurring patterns that find their source in our physical interactions with the environment, and structure our experience, understanding, and reasoning. According to Johnson’s (1987, 44), the basic “path” image-schema is a structure manifested in a variety of events that we experience, for instance in throwing a ball at someone, or in moving from one place to another.<sup>2</sup> This schema consists in a starting point (source), an end-point (goal), and a sequence of contiguous locations between the source and the goal (Johnson 1987, 28-29, 113-117). Metaphorically speaking, it represents a route from one point to another.<sup>3</sup> This schema underlies the representation of “force exertion”: in line with this metaphorical grounding of force, in performing a directive SA the speaker stands for the source of the force exerted towards a target, i.e., the addressee.

Investigating what is part of our gestalt structure for “force”, Johnson (1987, 45-48) proposes seven force structures. The first one, “compulsion”, corresponds to the general notion of force (Fig. 1).

**Figure 1:** Illustration of Johnson’s (1987) compulsion schema



Gestalts such as “blockage”, “removal of restraint”, “diversion” and “counterforce” reflect how illocutionary forces can be conveyed and blocked—these gestalts will be dealt with in Section 2.2. According to Johnson (1987, 57-61), it makes sense to consider that SAs are conceptually experienced in terms of force interactions and that there is a “level of speech-act force (illocutionary force) dynamics” (1987, 58). In the “compulsive force” image-schema, which itself is a specification of the path schema, a force originates from a source, with a given magnitude, moving along a path in a certain direction.

Given the “compulsion” gestalt, Johnson (1987, 59-60) distinguishes between different force dynamic patterns involved in the structure of utterances, two of which are the most relevant to the present discussion. First, in Johnson’s words, the illocutionary force “acts

<sup>2</sup> In CL, image-schemata are a type of idealized cognitive models. An idealized cognitive model (ICM) is a mental structure of conceptual representations (See Lakoff 1987, 284-285). ICMs have an ontology (the set of elements used in the model) and a structure (the properties of these elements and the relations between these elements). As Glynn (2006, 158) puts it, ICMs are idealized in that “they are not necessarily present in any speaker’s mind, but are abstract generalizations that any speaker of a speech community may make use of”.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson’s work falls in with Lakoff & Johnson’s (1980) metaphor theory, according to which metaphors reveal how we structure abstract meanings and concepts in terms of our concrete experience with the world.

on the hearer to determine how the hearer understands the utterance”. This force thus determines the specific illocutionary act performed in uttering a sentence. For example, while assertive SAs can be conceptualized as “forcing” A to add a new belief to his set of beliefs, directives “exert a force to compel [A] to realize some state of affairs”.<sup>4</sup> Second, SAs also differ as to their respective “degrees of strength”. Although, literally speaking, strength is a property of physical entities (e.g., living creatures and forces), speakers describe abstract, metalinguistic entities such as SAs in terms of their strength. For instance, they understand that a claim is stronger than a guess or a suggestion, and that a command is stronger than a suggestion.

Takahashi (2012) proposes a definition of the English imperative sentence-type that involves force dynamics. According to him, imperative sentences are characterized by their hypotheticality, non-past tense, second-person subject, and varying degrees of “force exertion”. In Takahashi’s prototypical imperative, S exerts, in an actual setting, a high degree of force towards A, who will perform (in a hypothetical setting) the action referred to by the imperative. He defines *force* as the psychological influence that S exerts on A to cause A to make the world fit the words of the sentence uttered. This proposal is in line with the view that, even though directive force is not encoded by imperatives, directives are the prototypical SAs associated with them. That being said, Takahashi considers that some degree of force exertion is involved in the meaning of any imperative sentence, whether it is uttered as a directive SA or not. His definition should therefore not be confused with a definition of the *directive illocutionary type* in terms of force exertion. However, there is nothing incompatible with analysing an imperative utterance in terms of force exertion at the semantic level (qua instantiation of a sentence-type) and doing the same at the pragmatic level (qua speech act).

In line with Johnson (1987), Langacker (2008) puts forward an image-schematic representation of how speakers conceptualize the performance of a directive SA. According to Langacker (2008, 470-471), a “speech act scenario” includes the conditions that are required for the SA in question to be performed, the participants, their roles in the SA situation, the expected consequences of the SA, as well as information relative to the form of the expression used (although Langacker is not very explicit on this latter information). In the case of a directive, which Langacker illustrates with the imperative *Leave!*, the scenario incorporates the preparatory conditions for the successful performance of the SA (cf. Searle 1975a, 71-72; Searle & Vanderveken 1985, 16-18), such as that A be able to do the action. Two events and a causal link between them make up the SA scenario. The *usage event* refers to the action of uttering a sentence, for instance an imperative. The *potential result* is the action or state of affairs that can (but need not) take place after the utterance act. The linguistic content expressed by the imperative simply consists in the action/state of affairs encoded by the verbal phrase (VP). A is the referent of the grammatical subject of the verb in the usage event, and A is represented as the entity that will initiate the profiled process in the *potential result*. S is conceptualized as intending to bring about the profiled process corresponding to A’s action, which amounts to S’s exerting psychological force on A so that A share S’s intent and act as S expects. In that respect, Langacker shares Johnson’s (1987) view according to which the performance of a directive involves force exertion from S towards A. In Langacker’s scenario, the result of (an imperative utterance used as) a directive is potential, which accords with the commonsensical view that directives are not always causally effective.

Thus, following Johnson’s (1987) and Langacker’s (2008) analysis of directives in terms of forceful interactions between sentient entities, one can conceive of the performance

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<sup>4</sup> This corresponds to Stalnaker’s (1978) definition. However, it would be too strong a definition: not all assertives are attempts to add a belief to the addressee’s (for a discussion, see Kissine 2013).

of a directive in terms of S exerting some degree of force towards A's performance of an action. In line with this idea, several force exertion image-schemata proposed by Johnson (1987) have been used by Pérez Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza (2002) to conceptualize the subtypes of directive SAs.

## 2.2 Force exertion and subtypes of directives

Following Johnson's (1987) insights, Pérez Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza (2002, 270-280) associate the subtypes of directives with particular force image-schemata proposed by Johnson (1987, 45-48): these consist in compulsion, blockage, counterforce, removal of restraint, enablement, and iteration.

According to Pérez Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza, requests performed with utterances such as (3) are based on the "removal of restraint" schema (2002, 275-276).

(3) Could you close the window? (repeated)

The idea underlying this metaphorical conceptualization is that, when S performs a request, she not only tries to identify possible obstacles to A's compliance with the request, but she also attempts to remove such obstacles by using a particular linguistic form (see also Francik & Clark 1985). A request allows for two possible moves: A's compliance or A's refusal. In the case of a refusal, the restraint is not removed.

In this framework, the "compulsive force" schema provides conceptual grounding for orders and commands (Pérez Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza 2002, 274-275). The potential obstacles to the success of an order are that S lacks the power required to issue the order in question or that the order is perceived as unjustified. If it is manifest that S is more powerful than A, the prototypical move following an order is compliance. Rejecting the validity of the order amounts to "the building up of barriers to the force of the order" (2002, 274). In that respect, requests, which allow some space for refusal, are more tentative than commands, which are conceptualized as inexorable forces.

A directive subtype that contrasts with commands and requests is beggings (Pérez Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza 2002, 278-279). Begging is not conceptualized in terms of an inexorable or a tentative force, but it involves a schema of "iteration". In prototypical beggings, the degree of S's willingness that A do the action is higher than in other directives, and this strong desire is manifested in the use of repetitions. The iteration schema can get activated when a directive is performed more than once, as in prototypical beggings. The rationale behind the repetition of the directive is twofold: ensure that the obstacle of A's unwillingness to do the action be removed, and show that one really wants the action to be done while at the same time avoiding imposing on A.

In Pérez Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza's (2002) account, subtypes of directives are distinguished in terms of which components are central or, rather, peripheral, in the scenario corresponding to that particular subtype.<sup>5</sup> For example, while S's desire that A do the expected action is a central (but not necessary) feature of directives such as requests, commands, and beggings, it is not central to the definition of advising and warning. In that respect, these authors stand in sharp contrast to speech act theoretic approach, in which S's

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<sup>5</sup> A previous attempt to analyse the form of directive SAs in CL is Panther & Thornburg's (1998) "illocutionary metonymies" approach (see also Panther & Thornburg 2005). In a nutshell, these authors reinterpret speech act theory's felicity conditions for the performance of directives in terms of components of a "speech act scenario". For instance, the "before" component of the scenario concerns the conditions that have to be fulfilled before the SA can take place. Accordingly, when an utterance such as *Can/could you close the window?* is used as a request that A close the window, A's ability to close the window "stands for" the request SA. In these authors' words, the utterance bears a "metonymic" relation relative to the request SA.

desire is a *necessary* condition for any directive SA to be successful.<sup>6</sup> The three variables that define a prototypical request are the presence of an assessment of the costs and benefits of the profiled action for S and A, the relatively high optionality of the action, and the presence of mitigating expressions (I come back to the notion of mitigation in Section 3).

Pérez Hernández' (2013, 133-136) builds on the variables proposed by Pérez Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza (2002, 262-270).<sup>7</sup> To define subtypes of directives, she uses nine features that are shared by all the subcategories, some of which having a different values depending on the subtype of directive. These features correspond to the ontology of the ICM: 1) whether the agent of the action is A or not, 2) whether A is able to do the action, 3) A's willingness to do the action, 4) whether S needs and desires that A do the action, 5) the cost-benefit of the SA for S and A, 6) the degree to which A is free to decide to do the action or not, 7) whether the directive is mitigated, 8) the power relationship, and 9) the social distance between S and A. Pérez Hernández also proposes a set of conventions that make, alongside these variables, the structure of the ICMs for directive SAs; the particular conventions involved in the performance of a directive differ across the variety of subtypes. There are internal and external conventions (see also Pérez Hernández 2001). Unlike internal conventions, which stem from a combination of variables of the ICM, external conventions involve general principles of human cooperation, such as Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle that one should maximize the benefits and minimize the costs to other people.

For requests, the agent of the action is A, who must be able to do the action, but A's willingness can either be low or unknown, and S needs/wants the action to be performed. Assuming that S's willingness is a gradable feature, it is higher for begging than for requesting, but weaker for advising than for requesting. Another variable that makes it possible to distinguish between the subtypes of directives is the power relationship required between S and A for a successful directive to take place. In the case of requests, there is no specific power relationship that holds between S and A. Thus an utterance of (3) should be understood as a command if S has more power than A, but as a request if the power variable is left unspecified.

(3) Could you close the window? (repeated)

An important element in Pérez Hernández' ICM approach is that prototypical requests are mitigated. For instance, in (9) S phrases her request so as to minimize A's cost of doing the action and to avoid imposing on A's freedom of action.

(9) Doofenshmirtz: Perry the Platypus, look could you just use the front door from now on? Could you just do that for me? (Phineas & Ferb, *Jerk De Soleil*, 8<sup>th</sup> episode of the 1<sup>st</sup> season)

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<sup>6</sup> Note that it is quite unclear whether advising and warning should be classified as directives in speech act theory. For instance, for Searle (1969, 66-67), requesting, advising, and warning constitute three distinct illocutionary types, but he does not tell us whether all of them fall under the category of directives. Even though they both concern a future act of A, requesting is distinguished from advising on the basis that, for requesting, S wants A to do some action, whereas, for advising, S does not necessarily have such a desire, but she has the belief that the action will benefit A. Even though they note that advising and warning can be either assertives or directives, Searle & Vanderveken (1985, 202-203) and Vanderveken (1990, 197) classify these two SAs as directives, arguing that the aim of advising/warning is in general to get A (not) to do some vaguely defined action (see also Bach & Harnish 1979). What this lack of consensus concerning warning and advising suggests is that they are *both* assertive and directive: it makes little sense to consider that a warning or an advice can be successfully performed without ipso facto conveying some information.

<sup>7</sup> I do not address these conventions here for the reason that IRs with a high degree of conventionalization, which are the topic of this paper, do not rely on them.



In (9), S uses a marker of optionality (*could* instead of *can*) and an adverb to attenuate the cost of A's action, i.e., *just*. The term *mitigation* is confusing here because it is often used, in politeness research, to cover a range of verbal devices used to minimize the emotional impact of a directive for A. Now, the formal properties of a linguistic expression used in the performance of a directive SA—an *utterance*—do not constitute, strictly speaking, conceptual aspects of the *type* of SA instantiated by the utterance, i.e., of a directive. In fact, mitigation is not a property of directive force here, it does not amount to “a low degree of force exerted on A”. It is a cognitive operation that consists in downgrading the cost associated with A's future action. Mitigation can be achieved by using a specific tone of voice or non-verbal information. As the other variables proposed by Pérez Hernández (2013: 143), it can also be realized linguistically or by manipulating other variables of the request ICM.

An important variable in the scenarios for directive SAs is the evaluation of the cost-benefit of A's future action both for S and A. In the case of requests and commands, the expected action involves a cost for A and a benefit for S. By contrast, for advising A to do some action it is not required that the action be beneficial to S or that it be costly for A.

Finally, the feature “degree of optionality” builds on Leech's (1983) notion of an option for addressees not to perform the action expected by S. It represents the extent to which A is free to do the requested action (Pérez Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza 2002, 265-268) or, to be more precise, S's assessment of A's degree of freedom (Vassilaki 2017). Whereas a request conveys a high degree of optionality and the power relationship between S and A is “immaterial”, a command conveys low optionality and implies that S is more powerful than A. I will come back to the notion of optionality in the next section, where I discuss the sort of obligation created in the performance of directives.

Summing up, recent CL analyses of directive SAs assume a prototype-based view and propose a set of variables that make up the categories for directives; these variables have different values across the subtypes of directives. These approaches should be complemented in at least one respect, because it remains unclear whether the ICM for the generic, macro-category of directives includes a “common denominator” of the variety of subtypes. In line with the early CL accounts, force exertion is expected to be central there, but it is not straightforward to see how this notion of force exertion translates into ICM variables, and how it can be distinguished from obligation. To this difference I now turn.

### **2.3 Force exertion and obligation**

The definition on which CL researchers agree amounts to considering that a directive consists in S exerting a psychological force towards A's performance of some action. However, while in Johnson (1987) force exertion is central to the definition of a directive SA, this notion, used as a metaphorical grounding of directives in more recent CL approaches, remains largely implicit, but I believe that its role in the interpretation of directive utterances should be clarified.

Arguably, unlike the particular subtypes of directives, the general notion of a directive is a vague concept that does not come with a prototype (on vague concepts, see Kamp & Partee 1995). Under this view, it makes sense to consider that the superordinate category of directives is graded in nature (see van Tiel 2016 for empirical evidence), the criterion for identifying a directive being the possession of some degree of force exertion. This notion of force exertion provides the conceptual grounding for directives, but the way it translates into ICM variables differs across subcategories. Particular directive subtypes are also expected to differ in the degree of force exerted by S on A. For instance, some subcategories, such as *beggings* and *commands*, are more central within the macro-category than others because they involve a high degree of force exertion. Exemplars of the category with a very weak degree of

force exertion, such as advising and suggesting, will count as peripheral members. The notion of force exertion thus allows a straightforward account of borderline cases of directives, for which it is not easy to determine whether any force at all is exerted by S. This enables locating such borderline directives within the superordinate category of directives (see also Pérez Hernández 2001). Finally, SAs that do not involve any degree of force exertion (e.g., stating) will count as non-exemplars of the category.

In Pérez Hernández' (2013) approach, directives are defined in terms of a cluster of features, the values of which change according to the type of directive under consideration. The feature that is closest to force exertion is the degree of obligation, which negatively correlates with the degree of optionality to do the action. Since Pérez Hernández is not very explicit on what she takes "obligation" to consist in, some clarification is needed at this stage. A relevant discussion of the sort of obligations involved in the performance of directives is proposed by Alston (2000, 97-103). Alston (2000, 100) defines *obligation* by saying that "whenever [A is] subject to blame for doing or not doing something, what lies behind this is some obligation on [A's] part [A] failed to carry out". This obligation is only *prima facie* in the sense that it can be overridden by another obligation (Alston 2000, 65). For instance, if I am told to arrive at the office at 8am, this professional obligation can be overridden if I need to bring my daughter to the hospital at the same time. The difference between a command and a request, Alston explains, is that, for directives such as commands, the obligation is laid on A by a valid institution and it is not up to A whether or not he should perform the action; the obligation is *categorical*. By contrast, for a request, A either is obliged to do the action or must be prepared to give S an acceptable reason for not doing so; in this case the obligation is *disjunctive*. Alston's schema for directives also includes background conditions for the existence of the obligation, among which, for categorical obligations, the authority relationship between S and A.

For Alston (2000, 98), understanding an utterance as a directive amounts to recognizing that S purports to lay on A an obligation to do an action, but not that the purported obligation takes effect: "When I issue an invalid order, I purport to be obligating [A] to do [some action], even where I fail to carry this through" (Alston 2000, 101). For instance, if I order my supervisor to revise a paper on my behalf, no obligation will be engendered because institutional conditions would be violated: I do not have the hierarchical status or power that would allow me to give him any orders. Nonetheless, in line with Alston's view, some degree of force would be exerted on my supervisor.

Thus, according to Alston's definition, the performance of a directive, i.e., force exertion from S towards A, is distinct from the creation of an obligation for A to act. Such a distinction is not made explicit in early CL work such as Johnson's (1987), but Panther & Thornburg (1998, 759) distinguish between S putting A under a more or less strong obligation to do some action and A's being under an obligation to perform that action. However, these authors do not explain what sort of obligation is involved in the performance of directives. Within the CL framework, a frame-based account of the semantic structure underlying the concept of obligation is developed by Furmaniak (2010), who also discusses the variety of linguistic expressions that are used to activate the concept in discourse. For the purpose of this paper, I will retain from the preceding discussion the ideas that, first, force exertion and the creation of an obligation to act are related concepts that should not be confused and, second, that these two notions translate into components of the ICMs for directive SAs.

### **3 The relationship between the form and the meaning of directives**

I have discussed, in Sections 2.1 and 2.2, how variables included in the ICMs for directive types can be realized linguistically. An interesting research question concerns how one should

conceive of the relationship between, on the one hand, these ICMs and, on the other hand, the variety of constructions that are actually used as directives. An approach that is directly relevant to this issue is Pérez Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza's (2002), complemented by Pérez Hernández (2013), which I already addressed from a conceptual point of view. I will show that this approach is theoretically and empirically adequate because it draws a clear distinction between the pragmatic meaning (i.e., the definition of a SA category) and the semantic meaning (the linguistic content) of utterances used as directives.

In Section 2.2, we saw that the ICM for requests consists of a structure (several layers of conventions) and an ontology made up from nine features that are graded in nature. One such feature, the "optionality of A's doing the action", can be realized by adapting the phrasing of one's utterance. For instance, the interrogative mood indicates higher optionality relative to the imperative and the declarative moods. This is because a negative answer to the question asked gives A a way to prevent the creation of an obligation to do the requested action and, in so doing, to avoid performing that action. As (10) illustrates, the utterance of an expression can activate several components of the request ICM: the mitigation of A's costs (*please*), and the optionality of A's action (*if you don't mind*).

(10) You mind putting out your cigarette, please. If you don't mind. (COCA)

This is also the case for our example in (9), which activates the mitigation component with *just* and the conditional *could*, and refers to the fact that the action is beneficial to S (*for me*).

(9) Doofenshmirtz: Perry the Platypus, look could you just use the front door from now on? Could you just do that for me? (repeated)

Recall that Pérez Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza (2002, 275-276) use Johnson's (1987) "removal of restraints" schema as conceptual grounding for the requests. In this particular instance of the generic compulsive force schema, an obstacle stands between the force and its target, a possible result being that the restraint is removed and the force can be exerted on the target. Frequent obstacles that may prevent the success of a request from being successful are A's lack of ability or willingness to comply with the request, and also the high cost of the action requested from A. They illustrate this schema with examples such as the following:

(3) Could you close the window? (repeated)

(11) Man, will you close the window? (COCA)

In (3) the obstacle would be that A cannot close the window, and in (11) that A is not willing to close the window. For these authors, expressions dealing with potential obstacles are generally chosen when S does not want to impose on A. In such cases, the success of A's future action is not intended to be ensured by S's exercising her power; or, at least, S does not use a linguistic expression that realizes the variable of power. In her attempt to overcome possible obstacles to A's compliance, S resorts to linguistic mechanisms such as downgraders, cost minimizers, markers of optionality.

Even if it makes sense to conceptualize requests in terms of "removal of restraint", only a limited number of expressions actually used as requests instantiate this image-schema, mostly interrogative sentences. In other words, the "removal of restraint" force image-schema does not constraint speakers' verbal means for requesting and, therefore, one does not expect this schema to translate into the whole variety of utterances used in the performance of requests. For instance, a common way to make a request is to express a prospective positive emotion (12) or a mental state such as a desire (13).

(12) I would be pleased if you could advise me on my plants, especially the Amazon swords. (BYU-BNC)

(13) Right now I want you to do a bit of adding up okay. (BYU-BNC)

In these two examples, the form of the request utterance is indirectly related to the metaphorical grounding for requests based on force dynamics. Nonetheless, variables of the request ICM, such as S's willingness that some action be performed and some mitigation by means of modal *would* in (12), are activated. The use of mitigation suggests that S is trying to overcome a possible obstacle to A's compliance, namely A's unwillingness to cooperate. Unlike *Can/could you VP?*, to which a "yes" answer indicates that the potential obstacle to A's compliance is removed, the constructions in (12)-(13) consist in statements about S's desire. Their linguistic content does not directly mention obstacles to compliance. This observation suggests that the properties of linguistic forms used in requests, which refer to the components of ICM for requesting, may not always coincide with the content of the force image-schema of "removal of restraint".

As Pérez Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza's (2002, 271; see also Pérez Hernández 2013, 132) put it, "the degree of obligation and the degree of optionality of the acts are, in fact, two sides of the same coin and together they determine the degree of strength of the speech act under scrutiny". Here, one must be careful that the degree of optionality conveyed by the form of an utterance (how the SA is formulated) is different from A's actual freedom to decide whether or not he should carry out the expected action. Thus, some "degree of optionality" does not necessarily negatively correlate with the degree of obligation S puts on A when she performs a directive. For example, provided S is hierarchically superior to A, an interrogative such as (3), which illustrates the "removal of restraint" schema, is more likely to be interpreted as a command.

(3) Could you close the window? (repeated)

Conversely, the choice of an utterance lacking mitigating expressions is not incompatible with a situation in which A's performance of the requested action has a high degree of optionality. An obvious example is that of offers, which are commonly performed with bare imperatives (*Help yourself, Come with us, Have some more tea*) because, unlike stronger directives such as requests, they do not need to be mitigated (i.e., mitigation is not a central variable in the ICM for offers). In addition, the SA performed by a high-status person saying (14) to his subordinate would be a command, rather than a request, in a situation where it is mutually obvious to the participants that A's performance of the action is mandatory.

(14) After 'while, Mr. Leroy called out, "Spencer, if you don't mind, could you call him on in?" (Christopher Paul Curtis, *Elijah of Buxton*, Scholastic Inc., 2012)

This would be so despite the fact that the linguistic content of (14) includes three markers of optionality. Such examples demonstrate that the linguistic content of an utterance is not a completely reliable indicator of the SA actually performed with that utterance; it is only one piece of evidence to infer the intended SA interpretation. Rather, a request interpretation is the result of the activation of ICM variables, some of which are already contributed by the context in which the utterance takes place. This analysis may also explain what happens if the request realization and some features of the context at hand provide contradictory information. Imagine, for instance, a general saying to his private "Private, could you please, if you don't mind, just clean the latrines a little bit?"<sup>8</sup> Here, the information given by the use of verbal markers of optionality (--> requesting) and by the speaker-addressee power

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<sup>8</sup> This example was suggested to me by Lorena Pérez Hernández (PC).

asymmetry (--> commanding) gives rise to a successful directive, albeit one with a “special”, sarcastic interpretation.

We saw, in Section 2.2, that the ontology of Pérez Hernández’ (2013) ICMs for directives consists in several components, some being more central than others depending on the subtype of directive under consideration. As it stands, this proposal does not straightforwardly account for the use of nominal expressions (*The door!*) and imperatives (*Close the door!*) in the performance of directives. Following the author’s ontology, the only component to be activated by these expressions is the reference to the addressee, implicit in the verb of the imperative construction. However, imperative sentences not only encode a reference to an addressee: they mention an action to be performed by the addressee, and, by way of these two types of reference, they can activate the ICM for a directive SA. For the sake of consistency, I propose to explicitly distinguish the component of A’s ability to perform some action from a component corresponding to “the action to be performed”, with a conceptual distinction for actions involving an object, e.g., the action of closing, and the item that undergoes the action, e.g., a door.

Another interesting question raised by Pérez Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza’s treatment of imperative directives has to do with the view that a prototypical command takes the form of an utterance containing no mitigating expressions, uttered by a high-status speaker and addressed to a lower-status person, as in (15).

(15) Bring me the bloody cheese grater in the [unclear]! (BYU-BNC)

Even though it only makes sense to think of a prototypical command in a particular context where several variables of the corresponding ICM are activated, like *You will VP* declaratives and unlike interrogatives, imperatives can be straightforwardly used as strong directives because they lack mitigation. On the one hand, according to Pérez Hernández & Ruiz de Mendoza (2002), strong directives such as orders and commands are conceptualized in terms of a “compulsive force” schema, where the force S exerts on A is intended to be inexorable. However, we have seen that Johnson’s (1987) compulsion image-schema makes sense for the whole variety of directive subtypes—they all involve some degree of force exertion—, thus not only for “strong directives” such as commands and orders. On the other hand, as we already saw above, a variety of non-imperative constructions can be used as commands in some contexts. For instance, in the situation of a boss ordering her employee, commands can be performed by means of non-imperative sentences such as the following:

(16) Could you bring us something to wipe up the mess? (COCA)

(17) Now I would like you to tell me about numbers. (BYU-BNC)

(18) Would it be too much trouble for you to cut off your gadget and join us in this meeting, Bill? (Cheryl Hamilton, *Communicating for Results: A Guide for Business and the Professions*, Thomson-Wadsworth, 2008, p. 298)

The acceptability of these utterances, where declarative and interrogative sentence-types are used in the performance of directives stronger than requests, demonstrates that there is no one-to-one correspondence between a subtype of directives and a form used as a directive. However, what makes bare imperatives appropriate for the performance of the whole array of directives, and the connection between the imperative sentence-type and the ICMs for directives are two issues that deserve future research within the CL framework.

#### **4 Conclusions and perspectives**

In this paper, I have proposed a critical discussion of the most detailed CL account of directive SAs, both from an ontological perspective (definitions of SA categories) and from a

formal perspective (variety of utterances used as directives). We saw that, according to these approaches, SA categories for the subtypes of directives are conceived of as graded and metaphorically grounded in force-dynamic image schemas. I also emphasized the general consensus among cognitive linguists who agree that, conceptually speaking, directives involve some degree of force exertion from a speaker towards A's performance of some action, and that subtypes of directives can be distinguished in terms of particular variables taking different values for different subtypes. The notion of "force exertion", which grounds the performance of directives, does not directly correspond to one feature of the ICMs for directives, but it translates into different variables of ICMs, such as the cost-benefit assessment, the speaker-addressee power relationship, and the need for mitigation.

Turning to the relationship between the form of utterances used as directives and the ontology of these SA types, I adopted the working hypothesis according to which the linguistic content of expressions commonly used as directives reflects the components of ICMs for directives. Accordingly, whether the declarative, imperative or interrogative sentence-type is instantiated by a particular illocutionary construction is not central to determining the type of directive performed with the construction. Rather, the number and combination of variables realized linguistically depends on the particular interaction where the utterance takes place. The fact that speakers need to adapt the form of their SAs to interactional and contextual parameters explains the match between ICM variables and realization procedures; any attempt to associate SA types with sentence-types or particular linguistic expressions thus becomes irrelevant within the CL framework. This view implies that the meaning of the linguistic expressions used in an utterance is but one among other possible information taken into account when interpreters identify the SA performed with an utterance. Another important consequence of this is that, even though the distinction between the semantic and pragmatic aspects of utterances is still a matter of debate, the levels of illocutionary meaning, utterance and sentence meaning are clearly separated in the CL approaches discussed in this paper.

The research discussed in this paper opens further perspectives for empirical CL approaches to utterance interpretation. An unexplored aspect of ICMs for directives concerns the lexical elements referring to the components of the directive scenarios and, in particular, the syntactic possibilities to refer to these components. For instance, the syntactic constituent that corresponds to the mention of the action expected from A is a VP; the same analysis applies to constructions concerning S's desire (*I want/would like you to*) and A's capacity to act (*Are you able to, Can you*). By contrast, mitigating expressions such as *please, for a second, just* are adjuncts to other syntactic constituents, which suggests that mitigation is, from a syntactic point of view, optional in the phrasing of requests. It would be interesting to explore in more detail which generalizations can be made concerning the link between certain aspects of the syntax of the constructions used as directives and the centrality of the corresponding ICM components. Two other research questions that I will address in future work concern, on the one hand, the sort of empirical evidence that can be adduced to confirm the view that force-dynamics provides metaphorical grounding for directive utterances—a continuation of the work initiated by Pérez Hernández (2001, 2013), and, on the other hand, the cognitive processes through which interpreters activate ICM variables and categorize utterances as belonging to a specific SA type.

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