

The Cognition of Requests

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I attempt to analyse the cognitive structure of requests. In order to do so, I shall follow those cognitive theories on the organization of knowledge developed by Lakoff (1987) and Johnson (1987), taking advantage of the image-schematic, metaphoric and metonymic models they propose. Contrary to those authors, however, I believe that it is necessary to posit the existence of a general definer for all the members of the category of requests. Therefore, following Ruiz de Mendoza (1995), I take the structure of this category to be that of a conceptual schema, whose general definer would be represented by a force image-schema.

0. INTRODUCTION

The present paper constitutes a first approach to the analysis of the cognitive structure of speech acts and its derived prototype effects. As is well known, a considerable number of studies carried out within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics have already provided ample evidence supporting the claim that language is a part of general cognition and that, as a result, linguistic categories are subject to prototype effects.¹ The evidence which has been put forward covers most levels of linguistic description (syntactic constructions, morphology, phonology, the lexicon, etc). Little attention, however, has been paid to speech

acts, to how they are categorized, to whether or not they show prototype effects, which cognitive models are activated in their execution, etc. It is precisely on this that the present paper wishes to focus, with the general purpose of shedding some light on at least some of the implications of Cognitive Models Theory and Prototype Theory for the analysis and understanding of speech acts. The advantages of pinpointing the above mentioned implications are meant to be twofold. On the one hand, we are seeking to achieve confirmation of the Cognitive Models Theory and Prototype Theory in the domain of Speech Acts. On the other hand, we are contributing to a better understanding of speech acts from a cognitive perspective.

I shall proceed in three stages. First, I shall begin with a brief overview of those theoretical constructs of current cognitive theories which I will make use of in my analysis. Second, I shall survey some of the limitations of cognitivism and suggest how we might go beyond them towards a more satisfactory theory. This will lead to a third stage in which I shall attempt to apply some of the principles of Cognitive Models Theory to the analysis of **requests**.

1. COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

Following the tenets of Cognitive Linguistics, I start off from two basic assumptions, namely, that linguistic categories, like conceptual categories, show prototype effects which occur at every level of language (syntax, morphology, phonology, etc.) and that prototype effects are not organizing structures of knowledge themselves, but rather the by-product of such an organization.² Among the attempts that have been made to establish the possible sources of prototype effects and a theory of mental representation, I shall focus on Lakoff's Idealized Cognitive Models. As is well known, he identifies four sources of prototype effects according to the propositional, image-schematic, metonymic and metaphoric structuring principles they use. In the following analysis, I shall closely follow Lakoff's description as regards propositional³, metaphoric⁴ and metonymic⁵ models, while taking advantage of Johnson's more detailed account of image-schemas⁶ and especially of his treatment of a force gestalt and his classification of force schemata.

Three further cognitive constructs, which will also be central to my analysis, remain to be noted. First, **Conventional Images** which like image-schemas are context-free, non-specific, unconscious, and effortless but which, unlike the latter, are rich in detail, more specific, and show a high degree of uniformity. Second, the concept of **motivation**. According to traditional linguistic theory,

any meaning which could not be predicted or inferred was arbitrary; within the cognitivist framework, motivation is a third alternative, as long as there is an independent link that makes sense of the relationship between the expression and its meaning. Finally, **Folk Models** are defined by Lakoff (1987:8) as informal, experience-based theories that ordinary people have about every important aspect of their lives. They are yet another construct which, together with motivation and conventional images, has been taken into account in the cognitive paradigm and which in turn will prove useful in the following analysis of requests.

2. BEYOND PROTOTYPE THEORY. CONCEPTUAL SCHEMAS

Relevant though the prototype theory of categorization is, most cognitivists including Lakoff (1987: 5) are careful not to reject bluntly the tenets of classical theory. It is generally admitted that the Aristotelian view that categories are based on shared properties is not entirely wrong. It cannot be said to be the whole story, as had been held in the past, but it is certainly part of it.

Another matter, however, is whether and how to integrate both approaches within a unified account of categorization. Being as it is an option which most followers of either theory would flatly reject, it has nevertheless been taken into consideration by a number of linguists.⁷ In this fashion, Ruiz de Mendoza (1995), has posited the existence of **conceptual schemas**. These consist of a set of necessary and sufficient conditions (**a general definer**), plus their related **prototypical associations** which are instantiated by means of **internal relational arcs**. As Ruiz de Mendoza points out, the network of internal relations constitutes the cognitive domain of a concept (i.e., an ICM) and defines it in prototypical terms as they instantiate the general definers. Such an account of the nature of propositional categories runs partially counter to that of Lakoff's. Unlike the latter, who posits the existence of clusters of cognitive models which converge to yield an ideal model, Ruiz de Mendoza argues that it is possible to state a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for any concept. For instance, according to Lakoff (1987) a concept such as «mother» would be said to consist of several different models (birth, nurturance, genetic, marital and genealogical models) which converge to form the ideal concept of «mother». On the contrary, according to Ruiz de Mendoza's account, that concept invokes a schema with a general definer («woman who has (at least) one **child**») which can be instantiated in different ways as needed. Both Lakoff and Ruiz de Mendoza make use of operational models for the extension of their propositional categories. But once

more they differ as to their nature. While Lakoff makes use of metaphoric and metonymic models, Ruiz de Mendoza posits a number of internal relational arcs of the action, process, position and state types. The advantages of an approach based on general definers plus prototypical instantiations have already been shown by Ruiz de Mendoza as regards a propositional category such as «mother». ⁸ In the present analysis of requests, I will take advantage of his construct of a general definer (force schema) whose extension, due to its imagistic nature, will be carried out in terms of metaphoric, metonymic and propositional models.

3. A COGNITIVE STUDY OF REQUESTS

Following this brief overview of those constructs of cognitivism which I shall use in my study, I am now in a position to concentrate on what constitutes the subject matter of the present paper, namely, an analysis of **requests** from a cognitive viewpoint. Consider the following examples:

- (1) I ask/request you to shut up.
- (2) Can you shut up?
- (3) Can you shut up, please?
- (4) Could you shut up ?
- (5) Could you shut up, please ?
- (6) Will you shut up, (please)?
- (7) Would you shut up, (please)?
- (8) Would you mind shutting up, (please)?
- (9) Shut up, please.
- (10) Shut up, will you?
- (11) Shut up, can you?
- (12) You are too noisy.
- (13) What a noisy boy you are!
- (14) Can you shut the fuck up?!

These are all requests for somebody to be quiet. Nevertheless, any native speaker of English will certainly take some of them as better examples of requests than others. Moreover, he or she will not have any problem in deciding that «*Can you shut up, please?*» is a request, but they will probably hesitate as to what extent «*You are too noisy*» can be regarded as such. It is not difficult, however, to imagine a situation in which such an utterance is produced and interpreted as a request for silence.

It is clear from the above that the speech act category of **requests** shows prototype effects, some of its members being better examples than others. Prototypical requests display a number of properties in terms of **grammatical**

and pragmatic correlates. On the one hand, their degree of prototypicality is directly related to their degree of grammatical codification and conventionalization. Thus, we can see that examples 2-8 constitute conventionalized types of requests, the seven of them occupying the first positions regarding their prototypicality. On the other hand, their degree of prototypicality is inversely related to their degree of optionality. In this sense, example 12, which is anything but a prototypical request, offers the addressee the widest option to decide upon whether to perform the action.

Following Ruiz de Mendoza (1995), I would now like to posit that the nature of this category of requests is that of a **conceptual schema**, which consists of a **general definer** (force schema) and its **prototypical instantiations**. Furthermore, the expansion of the schema from its most prototypical to its most peripheral members will obey those same cognitive mechanisms and knowledge arrangements that are found in general cognition (idealized propositional models, metaphors, metonymies, folk models, etc.)

3.1. A General Definer: Force Schema

It was Johnson's insight (1987: 57) that **force image-schemas** could be found to structure speech acts themselves. In the same way that «physical» or «social» actions are subject to forces, speech acts, which are understood as linguistic actions, should also be subject to these forces, but in this case metaphorically understood.

A first step in this cognitive analysis of requests will, therefore, involve a metaphoric mapping of the non-propositional, pre-conceptual structure of the force image-schema onto the domain of requests. As will be made clear in the following lines, the metaphoric projection we are proposing in order to endow requests with an experiential, directly understood structure, complies with the two requirements which constrain possible metaphors. On the one hand, the cross-domain mapping is firmly grounded in bodily and everyday experience and knowledge. In our daily life, requests are very much perceived like forces that move one to perform a certain action. Sometimes one is willing to carry out the request and the force has its effect; other times, one is not so willing and one opposes his/her own forces against the original force with varied results depending on a number of factors (social hierarchy, intensity of the request, etc.). Many everyday expressions reflect this understanding of requests as forces. For instance, «*His requests pushed/forced me to face the problem*», «*Her request for love hit my heart and moved me to change my feelings*» or «*His request was endowed*

with an ineludible force.» On the other hand, according to the **Invariance Principle** (Lakoff, 1993), the image-schema structure of the source domain is preserved when projected onto the target domain in a way which is consistent with the inherent target domain structure.

It is necessary, before going any further in this analysis, to offer Johnson's (1987: 42-48) description of the internal gestalt structure of force schemas, since most of the following is based on it. A number of typical features constitute force gestalts:

First, forces have agents and targets.

Second, forces are directional. They involve the movement of an object or the force itself through space in some direction.

Third, they have typically a single path of motion.

Fourth, forces display degrees of power or intensity.

Fifth, forces are always experienced through interaction. Because of that, they always involve a sequence of causality (causal interaction).

Of the many different force schemata which are constantly operating in our daily experience, only those variants which are relevant to this analysis will be dealt with here. The first of them is the commonest of the forces we experience in our daily life and it is known as **compulsion**. It can be represented by the diagram below, where the dark arrow represents an actual force vector and the broken arrow denotes a trajectory or potential force vector:



Figure 1

Removal of restraint is yet another variant of force schema which takes into account the presence either actual or potential of a barrier which could block the force.

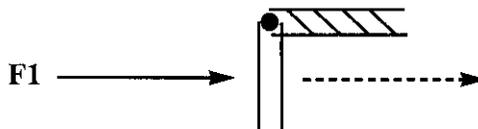


Figure 2

When the actual barrier is removed or the potential barrier is not actually present, force F1 can be exerted.

Let me now return to my original objective of metaphorically mapping the source domain (force gestalt) onto the target domain (request). It is clear that

requests, just like forces, have their origins in a certain agent and are aimed at a particular target (a person who is asked to perform the action). They are, therefore, directional, i.e., their vector moves from a speaker to an addressee.

More interestingly, requests show different degrees of power or intensity just like any physical force. This is related, on the one hand, to their degree of conventionalization and codification. In this sense, «*Shut up, please!*» (which consists of a codified imperative form, plus a pragmatic mitigator) is more powerful than «*Can you shut up, please?*» (a conventionalized form with the same pragmatic mitigator), which in turn is much more powerful than «*You are too noisy*» (whose interpretation as a request can only be reached through a complex cognitive process motivated by folk models, metaphors and conventionalized images).

On the other hand, it is also linked to the last of the force gestalt features, i.e., the fact that, just like forces, requests are also subject to interaction constraints. Moreover, since requests are speech acts, they are used in **social interaction** between members of a linguistic community. As a result, the age, social status and social distance between speakers and addressees (to name just a few factors) will have their effects on the power of a particular request. The same request, «*Can you shut up?*», will be interpreted as more powerful when it is addressed by a father to his children than viceversa.

Regarding the interactional properties of requests, I shall hereafter focus on two interesting aspects. First, I shall pay attention to the degree of politeness inherent in different instances of requests and attempt to find out a cognitive interpretation of the mechanisms (like mitigators or the use of the past tense) that are responsible for it. Second and most importantly, I shall concentrate on how the activation of our ICMs of social interaction favour and even motivate the interpretation of certain utterances as requests. Sweetser (1984), interestingly pointed out that social interaction can also be found to be organized by means of ICMs. Following this, I posit the existence of an ICM of Politeness such as the following:

ICM of Politeness

If there is a state of affairs which is negative for B and A is aware of it, then A should do something in order to alter such a state of affairs. Not doing anything about it would be considered socially impolite.

The Politeness ICM we are proposing here is a cognitive version of Leech's (1983:79) Politeness Principle which regulates social distance and which is

mainly structured in terms of the so-called pragmatic scales of cost-benefit, optionality and indirectness. Accordingly, the true nature of our ICM of Politeness would be that of a cluster of three models, namely, the cost-benefit, the optionality and the indirectness model. The internal structure of each of these models can be defined as follows:

– **Cost-benefit model:** a speech act will be taken as inherently impolite whenever it represents a cost for the addressee and a benefit for the speaker.

– **Optionality model:** whenever the speech act involves a cost for the addressee, the speaker will have to maximize the amount of choice given to the addressee to act as needed.

– **Indirectness model:** whenever the speech act involves a cost for the addressee, the speaker will have to maximize the inferential path connecting the illocutionary act to its illocutionary goal.

If we follow Lakoff's account of the nature of categories in terms of clusters of cognitive models, we could say that the three models presented above could be said to converge to yield our ICM of Politeness. Nevertheless, counter to Lakoff's theory, and following Ruiz de Mendoza (1995) it is possible to take one of the models (namely, the cost-benefit model) as more basic than the others since the latter necessarily follow from it. As a matter of fact, it is a *sine qua non* that we should evaluate the cost that a certain speech act represents for the addressee in order to assess its degree of impoliteness and in order to activate those models (optionality and indirectness models) aimed at minimizing the inherent lack of politeness of our speech act.

It is also interesting to point out that the three models are interrelated and subordinated in such a fashion that through indirectness one maximizes optionality and through optionality one maximizes non-cost for the addressee and, as a result, the degree of politeness of the speech act is maximized as well. Therefore, we will find that, in general, whenever a speech act involves a cost for the addressee the speaker will make use of so-called **negative politeness** in order to minimize its lack of courtesy, either via maximizing optionality or via maximizing indirectness.

3.2. Prototypes and Schema Extension

It is clear from the above discussion that all members of the category of requests share a general definer, namely, a force schema, which by virtue of its pre-conceptual, experientially-based nature, provides a directly meaningful anchor to this concept of *request*. Some members of the category will be

In the cognitive interpretation of these expressions, as in that of example 1, there has also been a metaphoric projection of a force schema onto the domain of requests. But this does not suffice in itself to account for the fact that a question about someone's capacity to shut up can be interpreted, and is most frequently interpreted as a request to keep quiet. What else is going on in our mind in order to arrive at such an interpretation and not one about capacity? The answer to this question begins by focusing on the second type of force schema presented above, i.e., removal of restraint.

It is a fact which we encounter in our everyday experience that the forces we exert upon objects or people may be blocked by abstract or material barriers, which will have to be removed if we want our forces to achieve their intended effects. In exactly the same way, the utterance of a question about our capacity to perform an action is just intended to make sure that a potential or actual barrier has been removed and that the addressee is capable of performing the action. After projecting the structure of the force schema onto the structure of a request, we are focusing on just one element of the schema (removal of restraint) and taking it to stand for the whole force gestalt. It is precisely this **metonymic operation** that allows the interpretation of a question about capacity as a request.⁹ Such understanding of sentence 2 is also aided by the activation of the ICM of Politeness, according to which we are socially expected to alter those states of affairs that do not benefit others especially if we are capable of doing so.

As for example number 3:

(3) Can you shut up, please?

The pragmatic mitigator «*please*» contributes to the interpretation of the question as a request. As a matter of fact the interpretation of 3 as a question about capacity is basically ruled out by virtue of the pragmatic mitigator. This can also be explained in cognitive terms by going back to the fifth feature characterizing a force gestalt: interaction.

Requests, as a consequence of their being structured in terms of force schemata, are also experienced via interaction. Furthermore, because of the fact that requests are speech acts, they are experienced via social interaction within a linguistic community. In the interpretation of sentence 3 as a request, the ICM of Politeness, which contains our knowledge on the principles of interaction that regulate our society, has been activated. It is not surprising, therefore, that a politeness operator such as «*please*» can be applied to a sentence like «*Can you shut up?*» when it is used as a request, but not so when it is just a question about capacity. Questions about capacity are not structured in terms of force schemata and as a result, they do not partake of their interactional properties or any of

their implications. Furthermore, in using the mitigator «please», we are especially activating the optionality model. The mitigator cuts on the cost-benefit scale by setting up the condition that the speech act will be performed only if the addressee is willing to do as requested (cf. «*Can you shut up, (if you) please?*»). In doing so, we seem to be acknowledging the impolite nature of our speech act and trying to minimize it by means of a pragmatic mitigator such as «please».

«*Can you shut up?*» and «*Can you shut up, please?*» are still prototypical members of the request category. Accordingly, they are conventionalized, their degree of power is quite high and they are still cognitively quite basic.

The cognitive interpretation of examples 4 and 5 is also related to the same feature of interaction discussed above, as both of them are regarded as more polite types of requests than those that have been dealt with so far.

(4) Could you shut up ?

(5) Could you shut up, please ?

In example 5, the pragmatic mitigator «*please*» has the same function as in example 3. Nevertheless, its presence in the sentence does not seem to be so necessary for an interpretation of the utterance as a request as was the case in the previous example. «*Could you shut up ?*», by itself, is mostly used as a request and only very rarely is it taken as a question about capacity. (For instance, in unusual conditional sentences such as «*Could you shut up if I stuck an iron bar in your mouth?*».) It seems that what leads us to straightforwardly understand example 4 as a request is the use of the past tense (could) as a pragmatic mitigator. Taylor (1989: 149-154) has proposed an explanation which accounts for this phenomenon in cognitive terms .

In his analysis of the past tense as a polysemic morphosyntactic category, Taylor points out that the past tense is structured as a family resemblance category where the various meanings of the tense are related to one another. Among them, there is the use of the past tense as a pragmatic mitigator, which according to Taylor, has been conventionalized in the meanings of the past tense modals in English. How the past tense can come to be understood in such a fashion is a rather complex cognitive process that seems to involve a double metaphorization.

In the first place, there is a metaphoric mapping which structures the **time** domain in terms of **space** (for instance, we usually talk about the «*distant past*» or the «*near future*»). The second step consists of a further metaphor which projects the schema of **distance** and **proximity** onto the domain of **social involvement** (e.g. «*close friend*», «*distant relative*»). Therefore, by using the past tense, the speaker can distance him or herself from the speech act they are performing (in this case, a request). Hence, the greater tact and politeness of

«*Could you shut up?*» and hence, its straightforward interpretation as a request. Such politeness would not be necessary in the production of a question about capacity as this is not experienced via social interaction as requests are. Therefore, a reading of sentence 5 in terms of someone's capacity to perform an action would sound somewhat forced to say the least.

To Taylor's account of sentence 5, we should add that the distance needed to obtain such a mitigating effect has to be established not only between the addressee and his/her speech act, but also between the intended speech act and the actual speech act. In using the past tense, we are activating our indirectness model as we are maximizing the inferential path connecting the illocutionary act to the illocutionary goal. As a result, optionality is being maximized, which in turn maximizes non-cost for the addressee and the degree of politeness of the speech act itself.¹⁰ Furthermore, the presence of the mitigator «please» is not essential for the interpretation of the sentence as a request anymore, as in order to activate our ICM of Politeness we only need to invoke either the optionality or the indirectness models. If we invoke both of them though, politeness is increased.

The explanatory power of Cognitive Models Theory can be positively assessed in relation to the fact that a similar analysis in terms of metaphoric mappings, metonymic operations, and the activation of ICMs, can be applied to requests of the following kind:

- (6) Will you shut up, (please)?
- (7) Would you shut up, (please)?
- (8) Would you mind shutting up, (please)?

Intuitively, we could complete each of the above sentences to yield lexicalized requests such as «*Would you shut up if I asked you to?*». Once more, our minds are focusing on just one element of the force schema (i.e., the potential presence of an obstacle). As opposed to examples 2-5, the source of a possible impediment to the satisfaction of our request is not to be found in the addressee's capacity to perform the action, but in his/her willingness to do so (once more the optionality model has been activated). Cognitively, this element of the force-request schema is metonymically taken to stand for the whole schema and interpreted as such. The certainty that, if the addressee is willing to perform the action in observance of the Politeness ICM, our request will be attended to, is pragmatically and psychologically real for both speaker and addressee. The metonymic operation which follows can thus be found an explanation in terms of a cognitive process aimed at the economy of linguistic resources. Moreover, exactly as was the case in the previous examples (2-5), the interpretation of sentences 6-8 as requests is aided by the individual or simultaneous activation

of the optionality («please») or the indirectness (use of the past tense) models. It is interesting to point out that there are many cases in which requests are based on a combination of more than one model of our ICM of Politeness. Take the following sentences for instance, in which the italics show the use of optionality operators and the constituents in bold are those that activate the indirectness model.

- *Do you think* **you could** be quiet,*(please)?*
- **Would** *you mind* being quiet, *(please)?*
- *Do you think* **you could** *possibly* be quiet,*(please)?*

They all show a higher degree of politeness than those instances in which only one model is activated.

So far, we have only taken into account instances of requests in which the verb is a one-place predicate. The cognitive analysis of those instances in which the verb takes a complement, however, posits certain specific problems. In his pragmatic study of illocutions, Ruiz de Mendoza (1994) has shown how the degree of specificity of the complement influences the interpretation of the utterance as a request. He offers the following examples:

- (15) Can you lift that box?
- (16) Can you lift a box?
- (17) Can you lift a box for me?

It seems that the existence of a specific identifiable complement or a beneficiary of the main verb favours the reading of questions of this kind as requests. The cognitive correlate of the pragmatic explanation offered by Ruiz de Mendoza is quite straightforward. First, the potential obstacle to the satisfaction of our request should be specific and concrete. The interactional nature of force-request schemas links them to specific situations, so that a question containing a generic complement is either immediately ruled out as a request or would require a much more marked context for its understanding as such (imagine a magician asking a member of the audience to lift any one of the boxes that he has previously arranged on a table). Second, the use of the beneficiary is just making explicit the interactional nature of the utterance and pointing out that the speaker is going to benefit from the addressee's action, thus activating our Politeness ICM and achieving the same result of yielding a request reading.

As regards example 9:

- (9) Shut up, please!

Its lower degree of prototypicality and politeness have a common source which is the fact that «*Shut up!*» is basically an order. Once more, it is the use

of the pragmatic mitigator «*please*» that allows the interpretation of the utterance as a request.

It is extremely interesting to note here that orders can also be cognitively understood and structured by means of a force schema, with the only difference that, in this case, the force that is involved is of such an ineludible nature that it does not leave the speaker any chance to refuse to perform the action.¹¹ Orders imply social distance and lack of politeness. Just like requests, they represent a cost for the addressee and a benefit for the speaker, the basic difference between them being that when uttering a request, we are acknowledging that there is such cost and we are giving the addressee an option not to perform the action. Once more this is achieved through the negative politeness operator «*please*». This enables a metaphoric mapping which construes courtesy and social closeness in terms of freedom of action. («Familiarity breeds contempt»). By virtue of this metaphoric mapping, the utterance ceases to be an order and is understood as a request that leaves the addressee the choice to refuse to attend the speaker's demand (i.e., the optionality model is activated).

As for the next two examples:

(10) Shut up, will you?

(11) Shut up, can you?

It can be pointed out that an identical function to that of the mitigator «*please*», is the one that is carried out by question tags of the «*Will you?*» and «*Can you?*» types, which interestingly enough have their origin in the conventionalized requests that have been treated above. It should be pointed out that the number of cognitive processes involved in the understanding of these sentences as requests includes all those which were needed in the interpretation of sentences 2, 6 and 9. Therefore, their cognitive complexity turns them into less prototypical requests. Formed by an imperative (codified prototypical order) plus a mitigator, they seem to be half way between orders and requests. Too polite to be orders, too harsh to be prototypical requests, their interpretation as either will be triggered by further underlying propositional models such as the **ICM of Social Distance**, which could be formulated in the following terms:

ICM of Social Distance

Whenever there is an action which represents a cost for the addressee and a benefit for the speaker, the wider the social distance between them, the lesser the range of optionality to perform the action.

Thus, if the above sentences are produced by somebody who is higher up in the social scale (eg. the boss), we will tend to understand them as orders. On the contrary, if they are uttered by someone who is an equal, we will take them as rather impolite requests, but not as orders.

Much more interesting to our analysis are examples such as:

- (12) You are too noisy.
- (13) What a noisy boy you are!

According to traditional linguistic theory, any linguistic form which cannot be predicted is arbitrary. As is well known, Cognitive Linguistics provides us with a third alternative: motivation. The «request» interpretation of the above sentences is not predictable from the meanings of the individual words that make them up, nor is it predictable from the use of any codified or conventionalized grammatical procedure. Therefore, according to traditional theories, the use of these utterances as requests must be arbitrary.

On the contrary, taking sides with Cognitive Linguistics, we would like to propose that the relationship between those sentences and their interpretation as requests can be motivated since there is an independently existing link such that all those elements can fit together and make sense. The use of «*You are too noisy*» as a request is motivated largely by the use of a conventional image together with a metaphor that exists independently in our conceptual system and the activation of the ICM of Politeness. These cognitive mechanisms provide the necessary link between the above declarative sentence and its interpretation as a request. Let us enter into more detail.

Most people have a conventional rich image associated with the situation in which an utterance such as the one we are dealing with takes place:

- Two or more people share the same room.
- One of them, who is trying to concentrate on his or her work or has got a headache, is being disturbed by the noise someone else is producing (usually a child accompanied by his parents.)
- There is not enough familiarity to ask the noise producer to stop making the noise.
- The person who is being disturbed by the noise states, almost inflexibly with a smile, the fact that the other person is being too noisy.
- The noise producer usually takes notice of it and stops making the noise.

In addition, people have a certain knowledge about such images:

- The purpose of stating the obvious (namely, that someone is being noisy) is usually rewarded by a change of attitude towards a quieter behaviour (effectiveness).

– Stating the obvious in a friendly sort of way is not usually going to challenge any rule or principle of politeness (lack of offence).

Given the image, and the knowledge that the image is associated with effectiveness and lack of offence, it provides a link to the use of the sentence as a request. On the other hand, such an interpretation will be aided by the following metaphor:

Physical or psychological harm is social harm

The noise produced is causing physical harm (headache, loss of concentration, etc.) and as a consequence, social harm too (the person that has to bear the noise develops a negative attitude towards the noise producer).

According to our ICM of Politeness, knowing that there is a state of affairs which is disturbing somebody and knowing that one is the source of that disturbance should be followed by an action that is aimed at putting that state of affairs to an end, so that the social harm will stop. Not doing anything in this respect would be considered extremely impolite. As a result, «*You are too noisy*» can be used and interpreted as a request. Besides, sentences 12 and 13 are very good examples of requests based on the activation of the indirectness model. There is an unsatisfactory state of affairs that has to be changed in the benefit of the speaker but the addressee has wide options to do nothing about it because the distance between the speaker's goal and what he actually says is great. Thus, indirectness generates optionality and optionality generates non-cost for the addressee and politeness.

Such an account of these phenomena could be rejected as a sort of «folk theory» in the following way: we feel that the use of the above sentence as a request is not completely arbitrary. On the contrary, we are acquainted with its effectiveness in a large number of particular everyday life situations. The «request» interpretation, however, cannot be completely predicted from the form of the sentence. As a result, we come up with an explanation such as the one we have presented above. Even though this could all be wrong, it should be pointed out that people, in their daily life, automatically and unconsciously come up with folk theories of this kind which are psychologically real for them and this should be accounted for.

Finally, one further observation can be made with respect to the last of the sentences which are the object of this study.

(14) Can you shut the fuck up?!

This utterance displays the conventionalized form of a request, just like examples 2 and 3. On the whole, however, there is something too harsh about it that prevents it from reaching the status of a prototypical request. It could be suggested that it is the presence of the NP «*the fuck*» that is responsible for this. Once more, there is a clash between the polite nature that requests are expected to have as phenomena which are usually experienced via social interaction, on the one hand; and the utterly impolite connotations of the NP «*the fuck*», on the other.

It is precisely this that makes example 14 a more peripheral member of the request category. As a matter of fact, it is something we experience in our everyday life that «*Can you shut the fuck up?!*» is more often used as an order than as a request.

Taylor (1989:156) makes a further observation about instantiations of more peripheral members such as the one we are dealing with at the moment. He observes that they appear to have acquired the status of «conventionalized, quasi-independent linguistic forms». It is worth noting here that one typically experiences uncertainty as to whether to write them with a question or an exclamation mark. Sentences of this kind seem to be little more than formulaic expressions of orders. Although, on the other hand, they have not yet lost the conventionalized form of a request and they could be used as such in certain unusual situations (imagine a dialogue between two punk mates, for instance).

4. FINAL REMARKS

Analyses of speech acts have traditionally been carried out from the point of view of pragmatics. Thus, codified, conventionalized and inferred (motivated) instances of a certain speech act¹² have already been explained in terms of pragmatic principles and conventions.

The present paper has attempted to carry out this same task from a cognitive point of view, using as its methodological tools the various constructs and the overall framework of Cognitive Linguistics. It represents a first approach to what should be a comprehensive and much more detailed analysis of speech acts from this perspective. In this sense, I have sketched what might become a fairly productive line of research:

– the cognitive study of speech acts at a basic level of categorization (orders, requests, promises, apologies, approvals, etc.) by focusing on those cognitive mechanisms and knowledge arrangements that take part in their production and interpretation and on their possible correlations with other aspects of the grammar, pragmatics, and semantics.

– the cognitive analysis of speech acts at a superordinate level (directive, compromisives, etc.) in terms of family resemblance categories or other cognitive devices.

As we have pointed out above, a cognitive approach to speech acts is complementary to those studies which are carried out from other perspectives (pragmatics, semantics, discourse analysis, etc.) and should lead to complementary conclusions, so that the final objective of a comprehensive all-embracing description of language can be achieved.

NOTES

¹ Lakoff (1987, ch. 3); Taylor (1989, ch. 8-12).

² E. Rosch (1978) herself, developer of the Theory of Prototypes, had fallen into this misunderstanding. Around the first decades of the 1970s and under the influence of information processing psychology, Rosch took prototype effects to reflect the internal structure of categories as they are represented in the mind. In other words, prototypes were thought to constitute mental representations. Later on, in the 1970s, Rosch abandoned this view and took pains to distinguish between what her experimental results showed, i.e., that categories show prototype effects and any theories which might provide an explanation of those findings.

³ **Propositional Cognitive Models**, which overlap to a large extent with what others have variously referred to as **scripts** (Schank and Abelson, 1977), **domains** (Langacker, 1987), **schemas** (Rumelhart, 1975), indicate the set of elements, their properties and the relations that hold among them, with respect to a particular domain.

⁴ Within Cognitive Linguistics, **metaphors** are defined as mappings from a source domain (which is structured by a propositional or image-schematic model) onto a target domain (which is then structured and understood in terms of the source domain). These mappings apply both to novel poetic expressions (literary metaphors) and to much of ordinary everyday language.

⁵ **Metonymic models** generally take place in one single domain, which is also structured by means of a propositional or image-schematic model. One element integrating such domain may stand for the whole domain and in doing so, it becomes a potential source of prototype effects.

⁶ For a detailed study on image-schemas, see Johnson (1987). It is important to point out that image-schema models differ in important respects from the standard meaning of the term schema. While the former are «non-propositional structures of imagination» (Johnson, 1987:19), the latter are typically thought of as information and knowledge packages.

⁷ In the field of semantics, Lipka (1992:118) has argued in favour of an integration of feature semantics and prototype semantics, with the purpose of yielding a theory of wider explanatory power.

⁸ See Ruiz de Mendoza (1995) for a more detailed analysis of the concept «mother» in terms of conceptual schemas and prototypical associations.

⁹ An alternative explanation for the interpretation of questions about capacity as requests is offered by Taylor (1989:155). He regards sentence types as a polysemous family resemblance category. As a result, a yes-no interrogative such as «*Can you shut up?*» has a range of possible senses. It could be a question about capacity which requires a positive or negative answer; or it might have the force of a request. He adds that the number of occasions on which one asks a yes-no question for the sole purpose of eliciting the specification of polarity is rather unfrequent. Our «folk theory» tells us that a yes-no question is invariably anticipating something else, most frequently a request.

¹⁰ The activation of the indirectness model will be more clearly understood when dealing with instances of requests of the kind of examples 12 and 13.

¹¹ This needs further research. A comprehensive study of every particular speech act in detail will very probably reveal that basic speech acts such as orders and requests, which can be grouped under the label of directives on a superordinate level, obey the same cognitive mechanisms and form higher level categories with general definers and schema extensions. They may also be found to constitute family resemblance categories.

¹² The distinction between codified, conventionalized and inferred speech acts has been taken from Ruiz de Mendoza (1994).

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