A CONSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH TO THE EXPRESSION OF ILLOCUTIONARY MEANING: AN ANALYSIS OF CONSTRUCTIONS PERFORMING THE SPEECH ACTS OF REQUESTING AND BEGGING[1]

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ABSTRACT. *The present paper aims at describing the linguistic parameters of illocutionary constructions within the scope of the Lexical-Constructional Model (Mairal and Ruiz de Mendoza 2008, 2009; Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal 2008). Illocutionary constructions are conventionalized strings conformed by fixed and modifiable elements that convey specific forms of illocutionary meaning. In this work, we study the semantic and pragmatic base of a number of illocutionary constructions performing the speech acts of requesting and begging. This analysis attempts to reveal the formal differences in the constructions in relation to their illocutionary meaning. The formulation of the Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model (Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi 2007; Baicchi and Ruiz de Mendoza 2011) will serve as a guiding tool in this research.*

KEY WORDS. *Illocutionary construction, illocutionary meaning, conventionalization, begging, requesting, Lexical-Constructional Model, Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model.*

RESUMEN. *Este estudio se encuadra dentro del Modelo Léxico-Construccional (Mairal y Ruiz de Mendoza 2008, 2009; Ruiz de Mendoza y Mairal 2008) y tiene como objetivo describir los parámetros lingüísticos de construcciones ilocutivas. Las construcciones ilocutivas son correspondencias convencionalizadas de elementos fijos y variables asociados a diferentes implicaciones ilocutivas. En este trabajo se estudia la base semántica y pragmática de un gran número de construcciones idiomáticas de las peticiones y las súplicas como actos de habla. Este análisis trata de revelar las diferencias entre dichas construcciones en relación a su significado ilocutivo. El Modelo Cognitivo de Coste-Beneficio (Ruiz de Mendoza y Baicchi 2007; Baicchi y Ruiz de Mendoza 2011) servirá como herramienta de análisis en este estudio.*

PALABRAS CLAVE. *Construcción ilocutiva, significado ilocutivo, convencionalización, súplicas, peticiones, Modelo Léxico-Construccional, Modelo Cognitivo de Coste-Beneficio.*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to describe the semantic and pragmatic base of a number of illocutionary constructions performing the speech acts of requesting and begging within the scope of the *Lexical-Constructional Model* (henceforth *LCM*; Mairal and Ruiz de Mendoza 2008, 2009; Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal 2008). The *LCM* emerges in an attempt to overcome discrepant perspectives on meaning construction held by functionalist projectionist theories, on the one hand, and cognitively-oriented constructionist approaches, on the other. The *LCM* combines insights from *Role and Reference Grammar* (Van Valin and La Polla 1997; Van Valin 2005), *Construction Grammar* (Goldberg 1995, 2006) and recent work on idealized cognitive models (Lakoff 1987, 1993; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Ruiz de Mendoza 2000, 2005; Ruiz de Mendoza and Díez 2002). The *LCM* is concerned with the study of the relationship between syntax and all aspects of meaning construction, including implicature, illocutionary meaning and discourse coherence. For the *LCM*, illocutionary meaning is not a separate dimension outside grammar, so it needs to be incorporated into grammatical description if there are grammatical mechanisms to convey such meaning. The approach to illocution of the *LCM* has been mainly developed by Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007) and Baicchi and Ruiz de Mendoza (2011), who claim that an illocutionary value is permanently associated with a linguistic expression if there is a frequent use of the form-meaning pairing. These authors contend that the degree of conventionalization of certain linguistic expressions is such that speakers do not need to make use of inferential mechanisms in order to arrive at the illocutionary value (e.g. the *Could You VP* configuration is almost invariably used to perform polite requests). Thus, the *LCM* proposes a constructional account of non-pragmatic illocutionary meaning where illocutionary constructions contain *parametrizable*, and modifiable elements (e.g. *VP* in the *Can You VP* request construction) and *non-parametrizable*, or fixed elements (e.g. *Can You* in the *Can You VP* request construction). As will become evident in our analysis of constructions, we take sides with the notion of conventionalization as a way to determine the illocutionary value of idiomatic constructions. For this reason, we will first provide the reader with an extended critical discussion of the major assumptions held by the *LCM* to account for illocutionary meaning. Secondly, we will focus on the study of illocutionary constructions used to perform requesting and begging, aiming to observe the similarities and differences between their realization procedures and relate such points of divergence to distinct forms of conventionalization. Such analysis makes use of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, a cognitive model designed by Pérez and Ruiz de Mendoza (2002) and later on revised by Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007) and Baicchi and Ruiz de Mendoza (2011), whose stipulations structure the constructional composition of illocutionary meaning. Finally, we will give an outline of the main findings and propose further lines of research.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE LEXICAL-CONSTRUCTIONAL MODEL

The *Lexical-Constructional Model* emerges as an effort to conciliate a number of opposed perspectives on meaning construction held by functional projectionist theories, on the one hand, and constructionist approaches to language, on the other. Functional projectionist theories assume that syntactic structures can be predicted on the basis of the information coded by the lexical item in combination with a number of linking rules (Dik 1989, 1997; Van Valin and LaPolla 1997; Van Valin 2005). As argued by Goldberg (1995, 2006), constructions may add arguments whose final meaning (e.g. the caused motion sense in *The audience laughed the poor guy off the stage*) cannot be predicted from verbal projection (i.e. the argument structure of *laugh*). In contrast, constructionist approaches make no strict division between syntax and semantics and take into account the existence of constructional meaning capable of capturing the grammatically relevant aspects of lexical meaning (Goldberg 1995: 28). The *LCM* argues that both perspectives are necessary to account for all facets of meaning construction. For this purpose the *LCM* was born having as its primarily concern the development of a usage-based model of meaning construction capable of explaining all facets of meaning, including those that go beyond core grammar representations, like traditional implicature, illocutionary meaning and discourse structure. The account of the *LCM* is based on two methodological assumptions. The first assumption, which has been labeled the equipollence hypothesis, postulates that all levels of linguistic description and explanation make use of the same, or at least comparable, cognitive processes. With regard to the second assumption, which is grounded in Cognitive Linguistics, the LCM recognizes the existence of a continuum between linguistic phenomena.

The approach to language provided by the *LCM* is based on two axes. In the first place, it distinguishes four constructional levels (i.e. argument structure, implicational, illocutionary, and discursive). Secondly, it defines the cognitive processes that license the incorporation of lower-level constructions into higher-level ones (i.e. *constructional subsumption*, *parametrization*). Subsumption operations are constrained by internal and external factors and apply to the interaction between lexical and argument structure constructions at the argument structure level. Parametrization operations take place at the other three levels and assume the existence of variable elements that must be fixed according to the conditions imposed by the recipient constructions. These two processes function at all levels and are regulated both by internal and external constraints. Internal constraints specify the conditions under which lexical templates may vary their internal makeup. External constraints are related to high-level metaphorical and metonymic operations that affect subsumption processes. The *LCM* bases its descriptions on the notions of *lexical* (LTs) and *constructional templates* (CTs), which are the two building blocks of the model. Lexical templates are lexical representations that operate at the argument structure level and are made up of a *logical module*, which captures the logical structure of a predicate, and a *semantic module*, which contains semantic, pragmatic and contextual information. Conversely, constructional templates operate at all levels of

linguistic representation. At the level of argument structure, CTs are viewed as *argument constructions* consisting of elements of grammatically relevant semantic interpretation. At levels 2, 3 and 4, CTs are considered idiomatic constructions including non-modifiable or fixed (*non-parametrizable*) and modifiable or variable (*parametrizable*) elements. The following representation is borrowed from Ruiz de Mendoza and Gonzálvez-García (2011) and it captures the general architecture of the *LCM*. This diagramme represents all constructional levels as well as the cognitive operations underlying the meaning generation process.
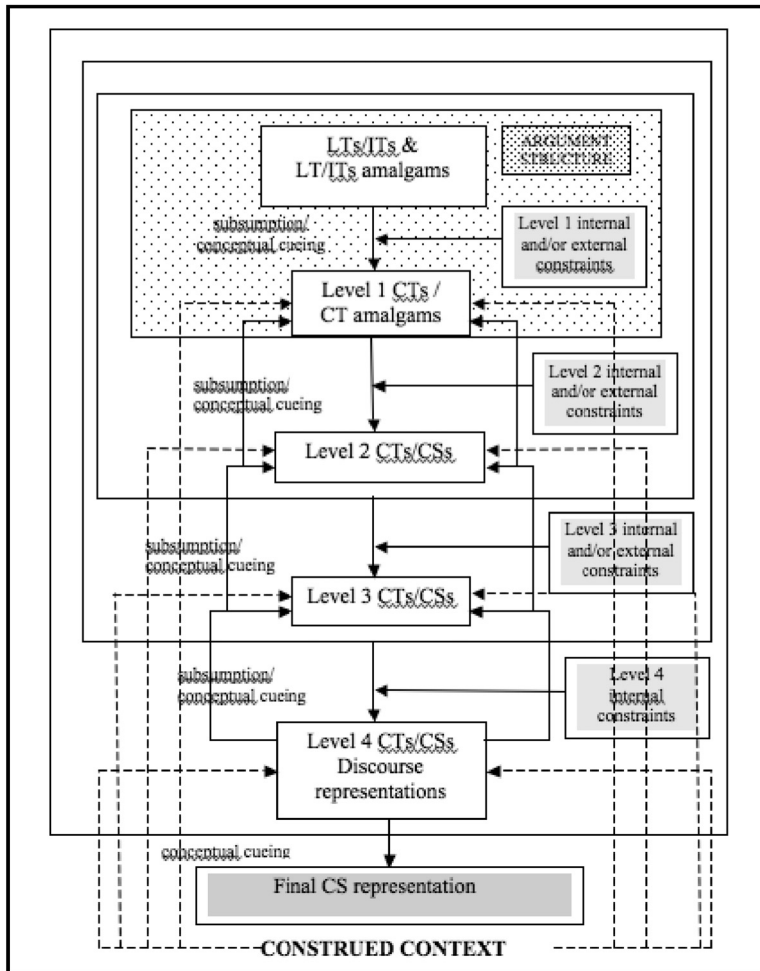

Figure 1. *The architecture of the Lexical-Constructional Model.*
LT = lexical template; IT= idiomatic template; CT = constructional template; CS = Conceptual Structure.

When dealing with the issue of illocutionary meaning, the *LCM* agrees with functionalist theories (Dik 1989, 1997; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004) in that illocutionary meaning has to be introduced into grammatical description if there are mechanisms to express such meaning. Following Dik's argumentation, such linguistic mechanisms are capable of deriving other illocutions from the basic ones (i.e. *declarative*, *interrogative*, *imperative* and, in some languages, the *exclamative* constructions). This process is labeled *illocutionary conversion*, which can be pragmatic, lexical and grammatical. For example, we can transform an imperative construction into a request by adding the adverb *please* (cf. *Hand me that book, please*). The point of divergence of the *LCM* with respect to this functionalist approach relates to the *LCM*'s assumption that illocutionary expression is not so much a matter of derivation, as it is of constructional conventionalization. as noted by Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007) and Baicchi and Ruiz de Mendoza (2011), a derivational approach cannot explain those cases where we obtain an illocutionary value without any use of a derivational mechanism (e.g. *Can you listen to me?* denotes an intention and therefore can not be interpreted as a question).[2] Postulating the activation of well entrenched form-meaning pairings (Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal, 2008), such as the construction *Can you VP?* for the performance of requests, solves such problem. Furthermore, the fact that the *LCM* assumes that there are default interpretations that are not predictable on the basis of linguistic form calls for a non-derivational approach.

For this reason, the *LCM* is rather concerned with the study of linguistic expressions that become *entrenched* (in Langacker's words, 1999: 105) as inferential shortcuts (e.g. the *Can You VP* configuration for requests) and specify the semantic base for the parametrizable and non-parametrizable elements of representations. Thus, the analysis of illocutionary constructions requires a clear specification of their meaning composition, where the range of fixed and variable elements is detailed. It also requires a characterization of their semantic composition in relation to the formal linguistic elements. Additionally, such an analysis must contemplate the possibility that the variable elements in a construction can be completed with contextual information (e.g. in *Can you read?* the *VP* element needs to be compatible with a question about the addressee's ability for some contexts and as a request in other contexts). In any case, contextual information must be accomodated to the semantic requirements of the construction. The first piece of research focused on the semantic grounding of speech acts from a constructionist perspective is carried out by Pérez (2001). Her study describes the prototypical realization procedures (i.e. linguistic mechanisms that exploit one or another part of an illocutionary scenario) for ten directive and commissive speech acts. Pérez provides a quantitative basis for the use of sentence types and other formal properties to perform these speech acts (for instance, the use of imperative-based sentences in commands, the use of *please* in requests and the use of repetitions and interjections in acts of begging). Her approach shows that certain expressions are capable of activating the full scenario of a speech act and therefore are more prototypical in performing this speech act. However, her research does not defend a specific constructional status for these formulations. Unlike Pérez, Ruiz

de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007) and Baicchi and Ruiz de Mendoza (2011) recognize the pervasive role of the constructional component in illocutionary expression. Within the scope of the *LCM*, Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi claim that certain configurations become entrenched as inferential shortcuts with frequent use. Suffice it to note that the illocutionary level in the *LCM* is based on high-level situational models, originally labeled *illocutionary scenarios* by Panther and Thornburg (1998, 2003). Panther and Thornburg define scenarios as conceptual structures that organize our knowledge of illocutionary meaning on the basis of the information provided by prototypical situations. Scenarios are exploited metonymically in order to create indirect illocutionary meaning (e.g. the request *Can you give me something to drink?* affords access to the 'addressee's ability' to perform the requested action, thus leaving it up to the hearer to activate all the other scenario elements that are relevant for illocutionary interpretation). The *LCM* contends that illocutionary scenarios (e.g. requesting, offering, apologizing) are high-level situational models constructed through the application of the high-level metonymy SPECIFIC FOR GENERIC to multiple low-level situational models. Such scenarios are applied to specific situations through the application of the converse metonymy GENERIC FOR SPECIFIC (Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi 2007: 95). For instance, in requests, we derive generic structure from every-day situations where people need something and want someone to solve their need. A central element of the scenario is the idea that people are culturally bound to help other people if it is within their range of abilities. As argued by the authors, this part of the scenario can be exploited by different linguistic strategies, such as statements of need (cf. *I'm hungry*), questions about the addressee's ability to perform the desired action (cf. *Can you give me something to eat?*), or statements about the addressee actually carrying out the action (cf. *You will give me something to drink, won't you?*). Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi identify cultural elements common to all these expressions and establish them as the basis for the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*. This model is based on a previous version elaborated by Pérez and Ruiz de Mendoza (2002), who describe it as a cognitive model according to which people are expected to do their best to help other people, and at the same time, they expect not to be put to too much effort in that respect. In the later formulation provided by Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi, the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* is described as a socio-cultural model whose stipulations specify that people should conventionally change a negative state of affairs in such a way that it becomes beneficial to other people. Here we reproduce the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* as postulated by Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This model lies at the root of conventional and non-conventional expressions used to convey illocutionary meaning. Non-conventional expressions require inferential metonymic activity to generate illocutionary meaning. On the contrary, conventional expressions have become entrenched to convey some type of illocutionary meaning (e.g. the aforementioned sequence *Could You VP* for polite requests).[3] In any case, the stipulations of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* regulate the cognitive process that lead speakers to the illocutionary value of an expression and capture the realizational potential of a construction by means of semantic conditions. These stipulations are seen as part of our knowledge about the world and are therefore included in Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi's conception of illocutionary scenarios. Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi's scenarios thus considerably refines those proposed by Panther and Thornburg since they carry pragmatic information like power, politeness, optionality and cost-benefit variables and also provides a cultural background for the semantic makeup of interactional speech act categories. The *LCM* includes the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* in its description of illocutionary activity and postulates an inferential path based on the metonymic activation of relevant parts of the model with may become conventionalized to one or more speakers. In the next section, we will explore the theoretical implications of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* based on a number of instances of the acts of

requesting and begging. Our study of the data collected will attempt to provide evidence of the relationship between a linguistic form and its illocutionary meaning.

3. AN ANALYSIS OF ILLOCUTIONARY CONSTRUCTIONS PERFORMING THE SPEECH ACTS OF REQUESTING AND BEGGING

For Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi, the acts of requesting and begging are not essentially different from each other, since they arise both from part (a) of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, which stipulates that people are culturally bound to help other people when these are in need. There is, however, a significant difference between these speech acts with regard to the power relationship holding between the speakers. Unlike requests, in the begging scenario, the addressee has some authority over the speaker, and because of his authority, he has the choice to decide whether or not to satisfy the speaker's wish. At the same time, the speaker believes that the authoritative addressee is not desirous to give him what he wants, and urges him to do so. This is not the case for requests, where the relationship holding between the interlocutors is thought to be on equal terms. Further, we recognize very different realization procedures in the performance of requesting and begging. Requests are prototypically realized through interrogative constructions, whereas the act of begging shows preference for the imperative mood. This may sound strange, since in begging it is the addressee who has an acknowledged authority over the speaker. The use of imperative constructions for begging is related to the fact that the speaker enhances his desire to the extent that he demands what he wants from the addressee. But the speaker knows that he is not in a position to make a forceful demand so he adopts a submissive role. For this reason, acts of begging usually involve the use of interjections, repetitions and exclamations to arouse the addressee's willingness to satisfy his need.

After having considered these preliminary issues, we will postulate two different generic structures for requesting and begging. These scenarios will be formed by a number of formulations underlying the constructional realization of these speech acts and will be set up as the basis for our analysis. These scenarios will refine Panther and Thornburg's account since our approach will be focused on the socio-cultural stipulations of Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi's *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*.Let us begin by formulating a possible scenario for the act of requesting:

(a) The speaker is in need of something.

(b) The speaker makes the addressee aware of his need.

(c) The speaker makes the addressee aware of his ability to satisfy his need.

(d) The speaker appeals to the addressee's willingness to help him.

(e) The addressee is expected to help the speaker.

Each of the components of this request scenario can be realized by means of linguistic expressions. Let us illustrate how different realization procedures instantiate distinct parts of the generic structure we have formulated above. These examples are artificial:

(1) I'm thirsty.

(2) I need a glass of water.

(3) You can give me a glass of water, can't you?

(4) You should give me a glass of water.

(5) You will give me a glass of water, won't you?

Utterances (1) and (2) point to the part of the scenario where speaker makes his need manifest to the addressee. Utterance (3) instantiates the part of the scenario focused on raising the addressee's awareness of his ability to help the speaker. Utterance (4) activates the part of the scenario where the speaker appeals to the addressee's willingness to give him a glass of water. Utterance (5) activates the part of the scenario concerning the addressee's expected response. The cultural conventions that constrain these utterances are also present in the begging scenario, but they are exploited in a different way because of the authority element characteristic of begging we mentioned before. Below we put forward our proposal of the illocutionary scenario for the act of begging:

(a) The speaker has a strong desire to obtain something from the addressee.

(b) The speaker thinks the addressee is not desirous to give him what he wants.

(c) The speaker urges the addressee to give him what he wants.

(d) The speaker accepts his dependence on the addressee to obtain what he wants.

(e) The addressee is expected to give the speaker what he wants.

As we did in the previous case, we will now provide examples instantiating each of the different parts of the begging scenario. The following utterances are capable of affording metonymic access to the whole scenario by activating one part of it:

(6) I'm dying for a cigarette!

(7) Why won't you let me have a cigarette?

(8) Oh, come on, let me have just one cigarette!

(9) You know I really need one cigarette!

(10) Promise me you will let me have one cigarette!

These examples are artificial and instantiate different parameters of the begging scenario. The first four examples are relatively direct. Utterance (6) points to the part of the scenario where the speaker makes his wish manifest to the addressee. Utterance (7) activates the parameter dealing with the speaker's belief that the addressee will not give him what he wants. Utterance (8) instantiates the parameter of the scenario in which the speaker urges the addressee to provide him with the required object. Utterance (9) gives access to the part of the scenario concerning the speaker's dependence on the addressee to get his need satisfied. Utterance (10) activates the part of the structure that points to the future course of action the addressee is expected to perform. This example is much more indirect than the previous ones (Searle 1975). Here begging is achieved by means of urging the addressee to make a promise, which has the communicative consequence of creating an expectation on the part of the speaker that the addressee will perform the promised action. Again, cultural conventions provide an adequate background to define the parameters of the scenario. These conventions are thus at the core of the constructional realization of illocutionary meaning. As we have mentioned at the beginning of the section, acts of requesting and begging arise both from part (a) of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, which stipulates that if it is manifest to us that a state of affairs is not beneficial to another person, and we have the capacity to change that state of affairs, then we should do so. Because of this property, we agree with Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007: 118) in that requesting and begging can be included in a similar illocutionary category within the directive acts, but at the same time, we suggest classifying begging as a special form of requesting where a submissive speaker thinks he will not obtain some benefit from an authoritative speaker. Note that the *submissiveness* component is crucial to differentiate begging from requesting. Consider the following examples extracted from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA):

(11) Please, please, please! I'll do anything. Just don't call my mom. (COCA)

(12) Oh how sweet! Do let me have it, you haven't bought me jewelry in ages. (COCA)

Submissiveness in utterance (11) is marked by an emphatic repetition of the mitigator *please* in order to arouse the addressee's desire to satisfy the speaker's wish. In the case of (12), the use of *do* reinforces the licensing meaning involved in the first person imperative *let me*, which relates to the addressee's authority and enhances the speaker's eagerness to obtain what he wants. The imperative mood is used to express the sense of urge that the speaker has. In (12) submissiveness is marked by the exclamation *Oh how sweet!* which explicitly indicates that the speaker really loves what he is going to ask for. Then, the sense of urge that is associated with the imperative is enhanced by the use of *do* and the explicit mention of the benefit to the speaker (cf. *let me have it*). The speaker's submissive role seems therefore to be essential in the understanding of begging. In contrast, the speaker does not typically show a very strong wish in requests,

but only a necessity that needs to be satisfied by the addressee in accordance to cultural conventions. The following two examples may shed some light on this issue:

(13) Read me a story, please.

(14) Oh, come on, read me a story, please, please, read me a story, please!

Although utterances (13) and (14) are grounded in the same cultural convention, the first one performs a request and the second instantiates the act of begging. Utterance (13) appeals to the addressee's willingness to help the speaker, which relates to part (d) of our scenario for requests, which is in turn based on parts (a) and (b) of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*. Thus, this request emerges from the speaker's expectation that the addressee will feel he should help the speaker. Conversely, utterance (14) performs the act of begging, and links up with the part of the scenario that refers to the speaker's submissive role to the addressee's authority, instantiating part (d) of the scenario we formulated for begging. The use of repetitions emphasizes the speaker's eagerness to get the action performed by the addressee and intends to strengthen the addressee's sense of ascendancy and condescension over the speaker and thus arouse his willingness to help him. The sense of urgency of the speaker's wish may be increased by an additional use of the performative verb. By way of illustration, consider the following examples:

(15) I beg you from woman to woman, make this war end. (COCA)

(16) I'm begging you, please, please, let him live. (COCA)

Constructions *I Beg You VP* and *I Am Begging You VP* enhance the speaker's eagerness to obtain what he wants. These configurations activate the whole begging scenario through the explicit use of the performative verb.[4] The progressive tense form of *I Am Begging You VP* conveys the idea of insistence (Dik 1989), which suggests that the speaker is impatient and irritated. Using a progressive form (which has no end-point) with a telic verb (one that involves and end-point for the action) creates a conceptual clash that is solved by iteration, i.e. by construing the state of affairs as consisting of a repeated number of finished actions. The speaker seems to be making a more repetitive begging in utterance (16) than in (15) due to the progressive form. In contrast, requests are not sensitive to expression through explicit performatives. This is because they are grounded on cultural conventions of appropriate behavior and do not require the use of an explicit performative to increase their illocutionary value. Further, acts of requesting that make use of an explicit performative verb increase the speaker's willingness to get something, which is one of the characteristic features of the begging scenario but not of the requesting scenario. This makes it difficult for the addressee to interpret the correct illocutionary value. Let us illustrate this point with an example:

(17) Think about it, My Prince. That is all I ask. Think about it! (COCA)

Utterance (17) implies a strong need on the part of the speaker in getting the other person think about something. The construction *NP Is All I Ask* implicates that what the speaker is asking is not too much and is generally found in requests that involve a notable interest in the speaker to get something done by the addressee.[5] However, as we mentioned previously, acts of begging, but not requests, emphasize the speaker's willingness. For this reason, the construction *NP Is All I Ask* is frequently found in acts of begging too:

(18) Fifty cents is all I ask. Vietnam, man. (COCA)

In the context of a homeless man begging for fifty cents, the use of *NP Is All I Ask* aims to diminish the addressee's degree of involvement in helping him as required. As formulated in the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, people are expected to act to other people's benefit provided they have the ability to do so. Following this generalization, the stronger the addressee's capacity to act in a way that is beneficial for the speaker, the stronger his obligation to bring about such state of affairs. As observed, the addressee's ability to act to the speaker's benefit is an essential part of the request scenario, which is part (c) of the generic structure we defined for requests. In fact, many cases of requesting point to the addressee's ability to perform the action, which has an impact on the default value of the *Can You VP/Could You VP* configuration as a request. Take as representative the following examples:

(19) Can you come in and help out? (COCA)

(20) Could you please sign this book for me? (COCA)

Examples (17) and (18) are aimed to make the addressee aware of his ability to help the speaker to get something done. If the speaker knows he is capable of satisfying someone's needs, he will feel he should help him according to social conventions. As argued by Panther and Thornburg (1998, 2003), it is a metonymic mapping that underlies this form of reasoning. The mitigator *please* is used as a mechanism that mitigates the impact of the request, since it increases the addressee's optionality as to whether or not to act as required by the speaker. The use of *please* is therefore related to politeness conventions specifying rules of social interaction (cf. Pérez, 1996: 198). Also in connection to politeness conventions, the past tense modal in the *Could You VP* sequence has a softening value that mitigates the request effect. The addressee is left with much freedom to decide whether he wants to help the speaker or not. Taylor (1995: 152) has argued that the past tense has been conventionalized as a pragmatic mitigator in English and has put forward an explanation that accounts for this phenomenon in cognitive terms. In his analysis, there is a first metaphoric mapping that structures the time domain in terms of space (cf. *near future*, *distant past*) and a second one that structures distance

in terms of social involvement (cf. *close friend*, *distant relative*). Thus, the use of the past tense indicates a psychological distance between the addressee and the requested action.

Pragmatic mitigators (e.g. *past tense modals*, adverb *please*) are frequently used in acts of requesting and begging, but they serve different purposes. In requests, the relationship between interlocutors is thought to be on equal terms, and because of this, the speaker has to appeal to the addressee's willingness to act in his benefit. The addressee is expected to help the speaker in accordance to the social conventions generalized in the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, but he is not compelled to do it, since the speaker has no authority over him. Conversely, in begging, the addressee has an acknowledged authority over the speaker and does not seem to be willing to satisfy the speaker's wish. Mitigators in begging are used to make the addressee aware of the speaker's strong eagerness to obtain something and arouse the desire to satisfy the speaker's wish. In such a position of inferiority, the speaker openly recognizes his dependence on the addressee to obtain what he is asking for. In this connection, we find many examples of begging where the speaker literally asks the addressee to *let him* do what he wants:

(21) Please, just let me get at least one hour of sleep. (COCA)

The verb *let* in this example acknowledges the addressee's authority and appeals to his generosity to comply with the speaker's desire. We additionally find the element *just* indicating the little effort the addressee needs to make in order to satisfy the speaker. This meaning is similar to the one conveyed by the construction *NP Is All I Ask*, which has been discussed previously. As we mentioned, the configuration *NP Is All I Ask* is used both to perform acts of requesting and begging. The illocutionary value changes in relation to the relationship holding between the speaker and the addressee. In begging, the speaker has to temper his pride in order to strengthen the addressee's sense of ascendancy over him. One common strategy in begging is to ask the addressee to commit himself to acting as requested, thus diminishing his effort in satisfying him. Because the speaker thinks the addressee is not willing to comply with his wish in the present, he may look for his commitment to do so in the future. Let us provide an example of begging using the constructional configuration *Promise Me You Will VP*:

(22) Promise me, promise me you will never tell. (COCA)

The construction *Promise Me You Will VP* is based on the rationale that people are expected to do good things to other people when we realize they are in need. Since we make promises when we become aware that the people we care for need something, this configuration puts the addressee in a position to show that he cares for the speaker. If he does not make the promise, the speaker will show frustration or disappointment at the addressee's attitude. This rationale is grounded in part (c) of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, according to which people are expected to bring about a state of affairs they

believe to be beneficial to other people. In contrast, requests do not generally ask for the addressee's future commitment to act in the speaker's benefit. This is so because the speaker needs to get something done in the present and thus requires the addressee's involvement to help him. Further, because of cultural conventions, the speaker expects the addressee to help him out of any potential problem. This is not the case for begging, where the addressee's authority interferes with the rules for behavior and the speaker does not expect the addressee to give him what he wants. Since he does not expect the addressee to act as required, the speaker attempts to enhance the addressee's condescension over him and arouse his desire to satisfy him. In this connection, the use of repetitions, exclamations, interjections and vocatives aim to appeal to the addressee's willingness to act as the speaker desires. Both requesting and begging are grounded in the same cultural convention according to which people are bound to help other people to bring about a state of affairs that is supposed to be beneficial to them. However, in the first case, the addressee acts in accordance to such generalization –part (c) of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*– because he feels compelled to do so. This is not the case of begging, where the addressee has some authority over the speaker and then is in a position to decide whether or not he is giving the speaker what he is asking for. In begging, the addressee is also culturally bound to help the speaker, but his superiority enables to choose not to comply with the cultural convention that tells him to satisfy his wish. Our analysis of illocutionary constructions performing requesting and begging supports Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi's claim that cultural conventions play an essential role in the interpretation of speech acts. Following Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi's argumentation, acts of requesting and begging could be included in a general category that exploits part (c) of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, although defining their distinctive features in their respective scenarios, which have been proved to be related to their realizational procedures. The linguistic mechanisms used to activate different parts of the scenario change according to the relationship holding between interlocutors and the different expectations the speaker has towards his demand from the addressee. Some of these procedures are capable of activating significant parameters of the scenario (e.g. the *Can You VP* pattern for requests and repetitions of adverb *please* for begging), and they become entrenched as inferential shortbuts. This idea is related to the assumption of the *LCM* that certain linguistic expressions have become conventionalized to express an illocutionary value, thus helping speakers to reach a correct interpretation of the pragmatic meaning of utterances.

4. CONCLUSION

This contribution is based on the assumption that certain illocutionary expressions become entrenched through a process of conventionalization. Our main aim was to explore the theoretical implications of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* based on a number of instances of the acts of requesting and begging. The analysis of the constructional features of these speech acts has proved that their constructional features

are related to distinctive parts of their respective illocutionary scenario. In turn, these parts of the illocutionary scenarios we have proposed here are strongly related to the cultural conventions specifying rules of behavior, which are stipulated by the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*. Therefore it has been shown a direct relationship existing between cultural rules and the constructional composition of illocutionary meaning. Thus, the instances of requesting and begging that have been studied have a common background in the first stipulation of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, according to which people are expected to do things that are good to other people if they have the ability to do so. What differentiates both speech acts is that in begging, the speaker adopts a submissive role to arouse the addressee's willingness to satisfy his desire. Acts of begging are therefore defined by the submissiveness element, which activates the whole begging scenario by means of repetitions and interjections. The submissiveness role adopted by the speaker is strongly directed by an acknowledged position of authority held by the addressee and the speaker's belief that the addressee is not inclined to grant the speaker's request. Conversely, requests are grounded in the rules of behaviour generalized by the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model* and they expect the addressee to act to the speaker's benefit. As seen in the examples, the speech act of requesting is invoked by means of the activation of the addressee's ability or his willingness (cf. *Can You VP*/*Could You VP*) to act as requested. Also, illocutionary constructions performing requesting and begging result from the combination of social rules and linguistic forms, which lead speakers to the illocutionary meaning of the expression in the appropriate context. Because the analysis of illocutionary constructions in relation to the social conventions avoids ambiguity between those expressions associated to requesting and begging, it is necessary to study the social generalizations that motivate the semantic and syntactic construction of these speech acts and underlie their purpose in speech.

NOTES

2. In the case of *Can you listen to me?*, the *VP* component denotes intentionality, which eliminates the possibility of interpreting the utterance as a question. In contrast, in *Can you write Morse code?* the default interpretation relates to the addresee's ability to perform an action. In fact, utterances of this kind do not readily admit the *please* element (**Can you write Morse code, please?*). The aforementioned intentional value explains why *Can you lift that box?* has a preferential interpretation as a request in comparison to *Can you lift a ('any') box?*, which is normally understood as a question about the addressee's ability. The reason lies in the fact that mentioning an action about a specific object presupposes that both the speaker and the addressee know the object and the features that characterize it (which may make it easy or difficult to carry out the action). This characteristic of the object is more compatible with an intentional action than with a

non-intentional one, which in a case of constructional homonimy, induces to a desambiguation of the nature of the construction to the request value.

3. The *Could You VP* construction is a variant from the basic configuration *Can You VP*, which has a default interpretation as a request. A *Can You VP* sequence (cf. *Can you close the window?*) is understood as a request by virtue of parts (a) and (c) of the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*, which stipulate that we have to do out best to satisfy other people's needs.

4. Contrast the approach defended by Dik (1997), who holds that the illocutionary values of explicit performatives are obtained derivationally where the starting point is the basic declarative sentence type (e.g. the use of verb *promise* in *I promise I'll go* transforms the statement into a promise). The constructional perspective first undertaken by Pérez (2001) and then by Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007) and Baicchi and Ruiz de Mendoza (2011) is incompatible with the notion of *illocutionary derivation* since illocutionary values are obtained through the activation of illocutionary scenarios, which are specifications of a high-level conceptual construct called the *Cost-Benefit Cognitive Model*. With highly specialized grammatical constructions and with explicit performative predicates, we have full activation of the corresponding scenario. With less specialized constructions, we activate the non-overlapping areas of different illocutionary scenarios, which leads to constructional polysemy.

5. The implication that the speaker is not asking too much has been conventionalized and has its origin in a reasoning schema: since we are not expected to ask for an unreasonable amount of goods, it is necessary to make it manifest to the other person that the amount of goods we request is not unreasonable and if he believes the amount is unreasonable, he is wrong. The implicature has become an entrenched reasoning schema that has given rise to a conventional request.

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