

A COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE ON THE INDIRECT FRAMING OF DIRECTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

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1. KEY CONCEPTS AT ISSUE

1.1. Directive constructions and requests

(i) Constructions by means of which S attempts to get H to do something.

(ii) Directive constructions belong to the frame of **request** ⇨ not just a question of linguistic form. Requests have an intrinsic potential for social conflict and belong to the category of **Face Threatening Acts** (Brown & Levinson).

(iii) Face	Goffman	'an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes'
	Brown and Levinson	'the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting in [...] negative face [and...] positive face' ' negative face : the basic claim to non-distraction- i.e. freedom of action and freedom from imposition ' positive face : the positive consistent self-image or "personality" (crucially including the desire that this self image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants'

(iv) **Facework** the interactants have a mutual interest to save, maintain, or support each other's face (Watts 2003: 274).

Requests threaten primarily H's face ⇨ FTAs tend to be avoided or mitigated by S

1.2. Indirectness

(v) Leech's scales operating on the Politeness Principle

the Cost-Benefit Scale (S's cost to her/himself is weighed against H's Benefit)

the Optionality Scale (H's degree of choice)

the Indirectness Scale (H's amount of work in interpreting S's speech act)

(vi) 5 superstrategies for performing FTAs

1. Bald on record (direct, clear, unambiguous)

2. Positive politeness (to redress H's positive face wants)

3. Negative politeness (to redress H's negative face wants)

4. Off record (more than one attributable intention)

5. Withhold the FTA

– polite
mitigated politeness
+ polite

(vii) Weightiness $W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x$
x = FTA D = social distance between interlocutors
P = relative power that H has over S R = rank (the degree of imposition of the FTA)

(viii) scale of indirectness (Blum-Kulka 1987: 133)

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Mood derivable | <i>Clean up after you!</i> |
| 2. Performative | <i>I'm asking you to clean up after you.</i> |
| 3. Hedged performative | <i>I would like to ask you to clean up after you.</i> |
| 4. Obligation statement | <i>You will have to clean up after you.</i> |
| 5. Want statement | <i>I want you to clean up after you.</i> |
| 6. Suggestory formulae | <i>How about cleaning up after you?</i> |
| 7. Query preparatory | <i>Would you mind cleaning up after you?</i> |
| 8. Strong hints | <i>You've left the room in a mess.</i> |
| 9. Mild hints | <i>We don't like finding the room in a mess.</i> |

(ix) **The straight correlation between indirectness and politeness is problematic**

- IRONY
(1) *Would you think it an imposition on my part if I were to ask you not to answer your mobile phone in class?*
- CASES IN WHICH POLITENESS IS IRRELEVANT
(2) [mother to child] *Don't make me come up to you and give you a spanky.*
- CULTURAL FACTORS (cultural constructivist theory of politeness)
Blum-Kulka (1987)
 - no linear correlation between non-conventional indirectness and politeness
 - conventional indirectness (3) *Do you have ten bucks?*
☞ the act is realized by a reference to some condition needed for its realization there is potential pragmatic ambiguity between illocutionary intent and literal meaning
 - non-conventional indirectness (4) *I'm broke, mate.*
☞ open-ended in terms of illocutionary intent, linguistic form, and pragmatic force

2. AIMS AND CLAIMS

(x) Problems with the classical approach

1) Much attention has been paid to (a) a characterization of indirect requests in terms of general, rigid speech acts or broadly defined cultural patterns, (b) the correlation between indirectness (conventional or not) and politeness.

2) Conversely, the cognitive roots of indirect requests and their realizations as linguistic constructions have received little attention.

(xi) This is all the more problematic as linguists working in this field have thus left aside frequent situations in which the subtle form/meaning interplay made possible by some

directive constructions echoes the ad hoc construction/negotiation of interactants' personhood.

(xii) This is particularly conspicuous when the specific role of each interactant is unclear or unconventional, and therefore subject to momentary negotiation.

(xiii) cf. Smith (1992), Sunaoshi (1995) on innovative directive strategies in Japanese. Takano (2005): professional Japanese women in positions of authority and leadership. My perspective is more "local".

(xiv) Constructions – understood as conventional pairings of form and meaning – are themselves not just a question of linguistic form. Their creation, use and modification are highly dependent on the creation/negotiation of personhood through verbal interaction.

3. CASE STUDY: PSEUDO-DIRECTIVES

(xv) Some previous research on pseudo-directive strategies: Goldschmitt (1998), Pufahl Bax (1986), Rusickova (2007), Troemel-Ploetz (1994).

(xvi) Pseudo-directive constructions occur when speakers attempt to get someone to do something without giving the impression of restricting the addressee's freedom of choice of action or without impinging upon the addressee's self-assessment that s/he has that freedom of choice.

(xvii) Case study: directive constructions whose defining trait is not so much politeness (though it is not totally absent) as the ad hoc construction/negotiation of personhood.

(xviii) The pseudo-directive strategy in requests can be implemented either compressively or expansively. Are the cognitive processes at work in each strategy radically different?

4. COMPRESSIVE STRATEGY

(5) *You do not **want to** appear brash or pushy. (The Times)*

(6) *You might not **want to** take those drugs if you drive.*

(7) *'Did you enjoy that?'*

'I did. Very much.'

'Really? Very much?'

'Yes.'

'But you hate the theatre.'

'I think ... I think I thought I hated the theatre. It was, it was a prejudice I hadn't examined properly.'

*'**You want to be careful.**'*

'Why?'

'If you start examining your prejudices carefully there'll soon be nothing left of you.' (Nick Hornby, *How To Be Good*, 2001)

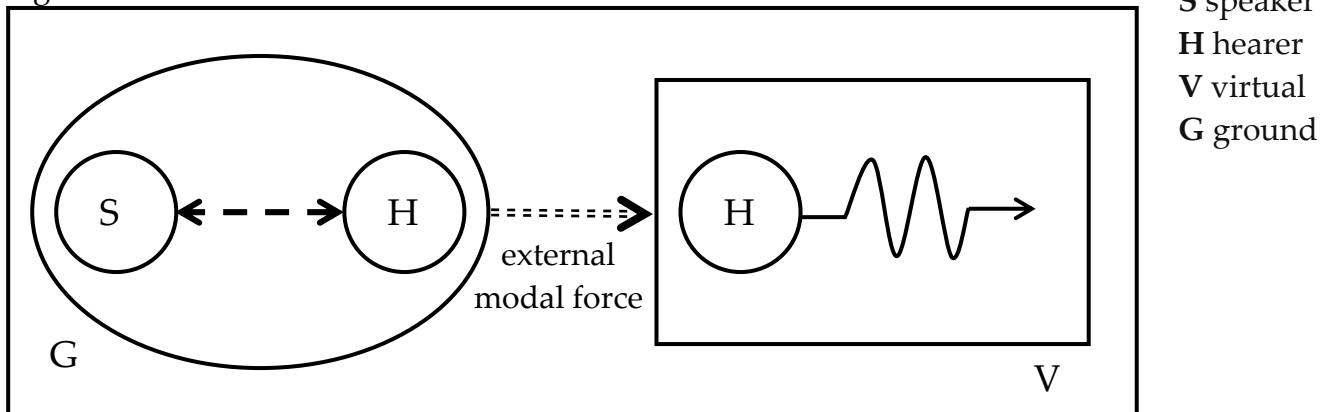
(8) *You **wanna** be careful where you're throwing your accusations!*

Illocutionary act	Speaker comments upon Addressee's objective need of doing X
Constructional pattern	'Addressee wants X'
Illocutionary force	Speaker wants Addressee to X

(xix) **Deliberate vagueness at the cognitive level**

Ex 8. Apparently we have

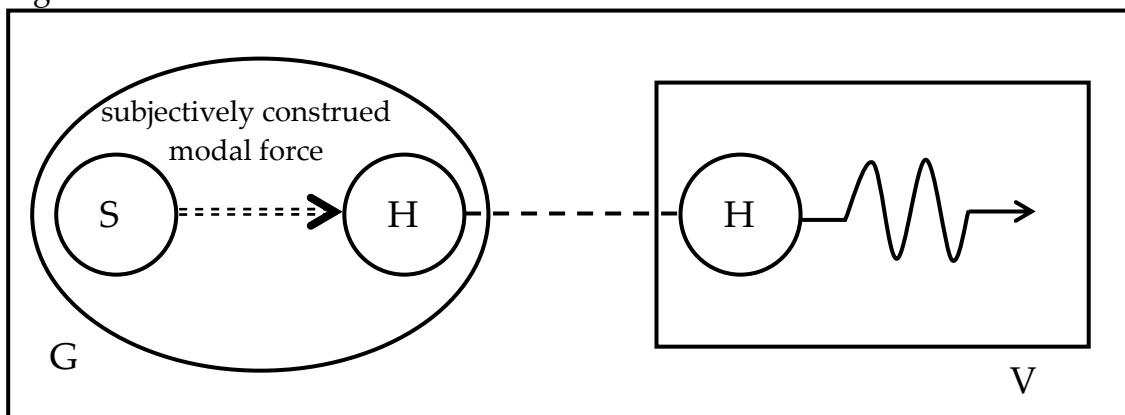
Fig. 1



S comments upon the objective necessity of being careful

In fact

Fig. 2



S wants H to realize the process <be careful>

(xx) Deliberate vagueness is particularly useful there is ad hoc negotiation regarding the role of each participant

S appears to put the cards in H's hand to avoid explicit coerciveness
 does not put all the cards in H's hand for pragmatic clarity

H freedom from imposition → freedom of decision
 nonetheless feels a certain pressure towards the realization of the process

S/H relieved of direct responsibility
 collaborative work
 can adjust, retract, or adapt to communicative development

(xxi) Politeness? Not necessarily ☞ compare (7)/(8) ☞ situation-specific factors
 This conscious strategy is made possible by the construction

(xxii) **Deliberate vagueness at the constructional level**

It is precisely the form/meaning compression typical of Fauconnier and Turner's grammatical blends that successfully frames the directive as collaborative work and mitigates the inherent coerciveness of the act.

Fig. 3

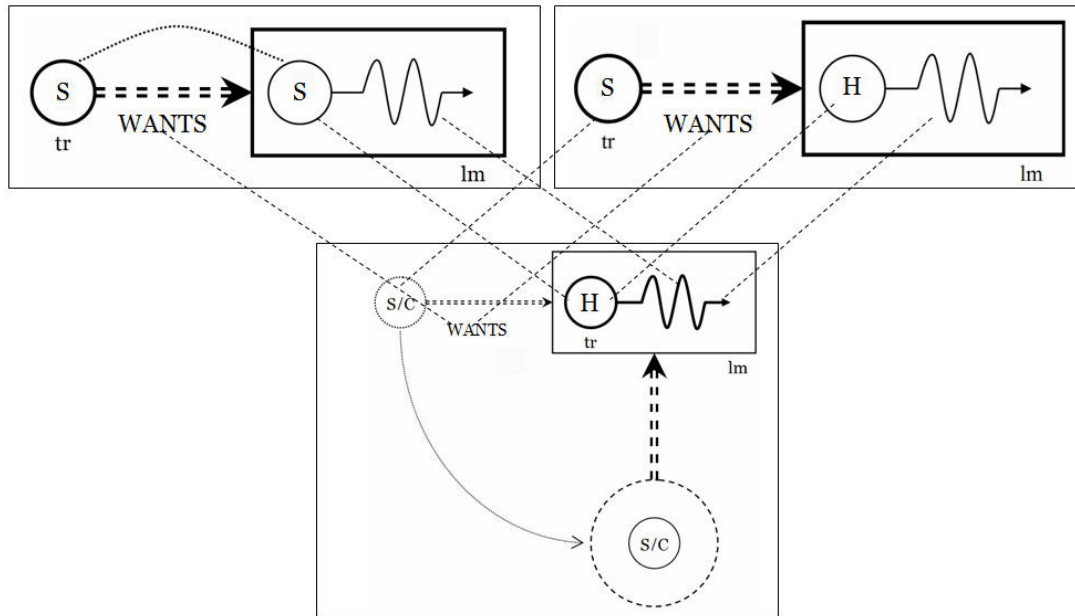
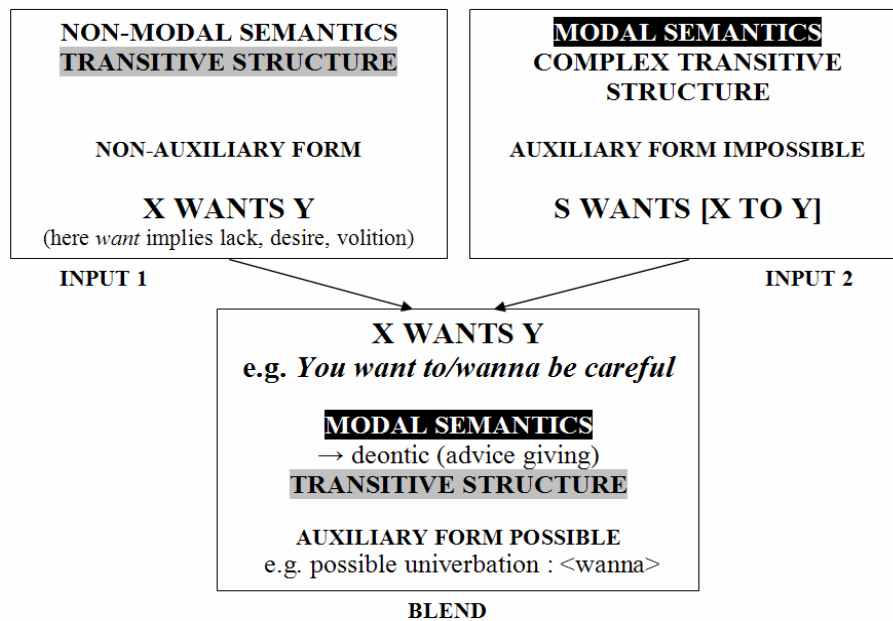


Fig. 4



5. EXPANSIVE STRATEGY

<I am going to have to ask you to X>

- (9) *I told you again not to take any photographs. I'm going to have to ask you to stay behind.*
- (10) *I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to check with the Defense Department.*
- (11) *Mister, you can say anything you want about me, but I'm gonna have to ask you not to talk about my horse that way.*
- (12) [Cathy Berta, a 66 retired school teacher, is part of a protest rally against Dick Cheney; she is carrying a sign that says: "No, You Can't Have My Rights, I'm Still Using Them" and a little American flag on a stick. But the police won't let her, or anyone else, carry the flags.]
Police officer – *I'm going to have to take your stick.*
Cathy Berta - *I know you're just doing your job.* [<http://www.progressive.org>]

(xxiii) The driving force of the illocutionary intent (Speaker wants Addressee to X) is realized as a Performative ('Speaker asks Addressee to X') and disguised as something impending (*going to*) and extrinsic from the speaker's own will (*have to*).

Improv Everywhere, Mission "Best Buy" (<http://www.improveverywhere.com>)

- (13) Employee - *I'm going to have to ask you to leave.* [hedged performative]
Participant - *You're kicking me out?*
Employee - *No, I'm not saying that.*
Participant - *Ok, then I can stay? (...)*
Employee - *I'm asking you to leave.* [performative]
Participant - *Are you kicking me out?*
Employee - *No.*

Fig. 5 *I'm asking you to leave*

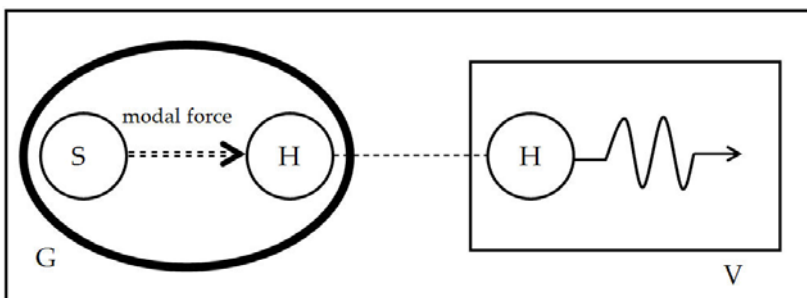


Fig. 6 *I have to X*

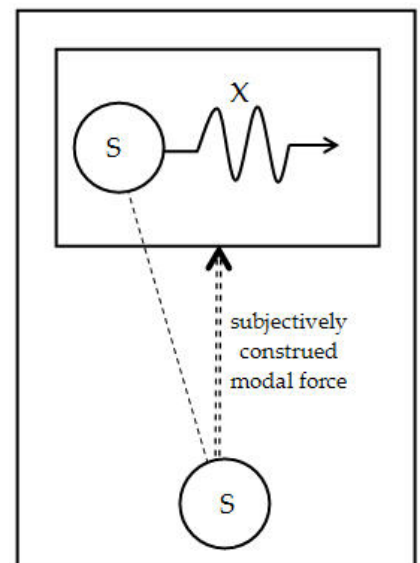


Fig. 7 *I'm going to X*

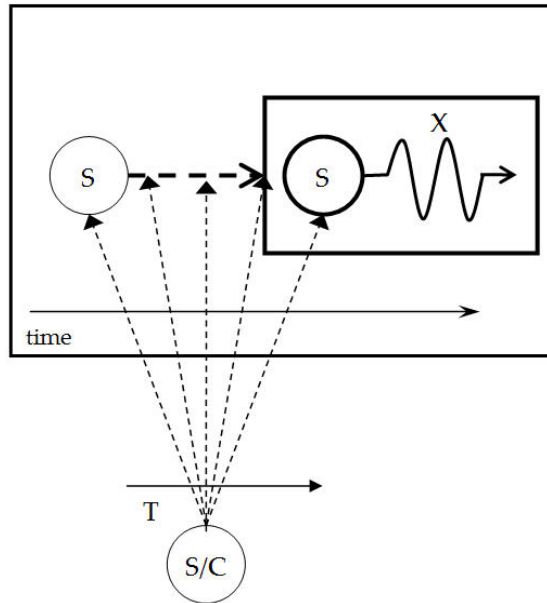
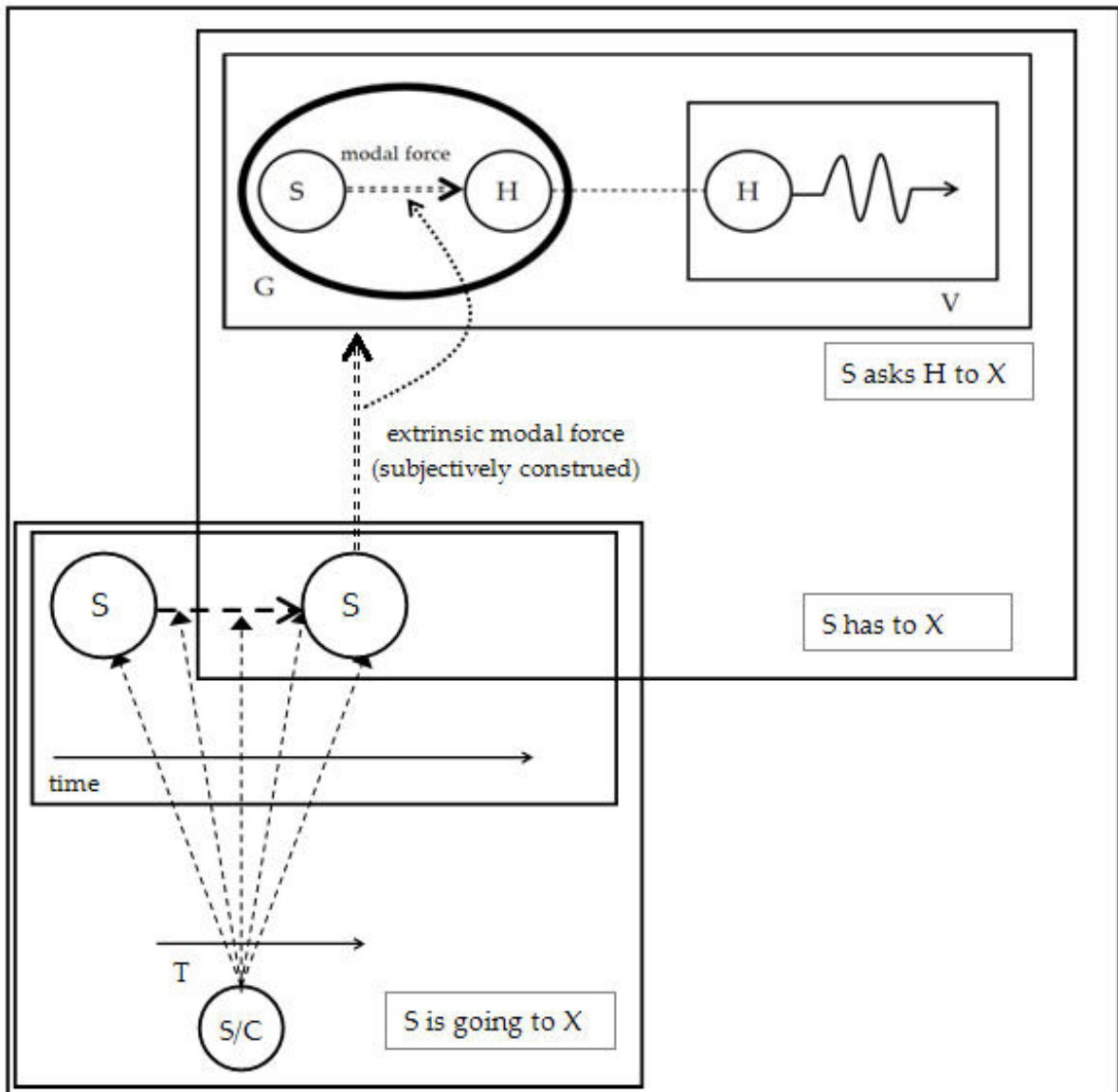


Fig. 8 *I'm going to have to ask you to X (cumulative hedging)*



(xxiv) At the constructional level

- **expansive strategy** insofar as the catenative sequence marks iconic distance between S and the realization of the event. The more catenative elements S removes, the more constraining the request.
- **compressive strategy** since <I'm going to have to ask you to> forms a morphosyntactic chunk, i.e. an iconic marking of the cognitive conflation depicted above.

6. CONCLUSION

(xxv) Deliberate vagueness is at work at two levels – cognitive and constructional – no matter which structural strategy – whether compressive or expansive – is adopted.

(xxvi) The indirect framing of a directive construction is not just the property of an utterance limited to the sentence unit: it is constructed on the basis of a subtle combination of form and meaning at the crossroads of strict conventions and situation-specific variation.

(xxvii) More importantly, grammatical constructions go hand in hand with the construction of personhood through verbal interaction.

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