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# A metonymyic approach to indirect speech acts in English

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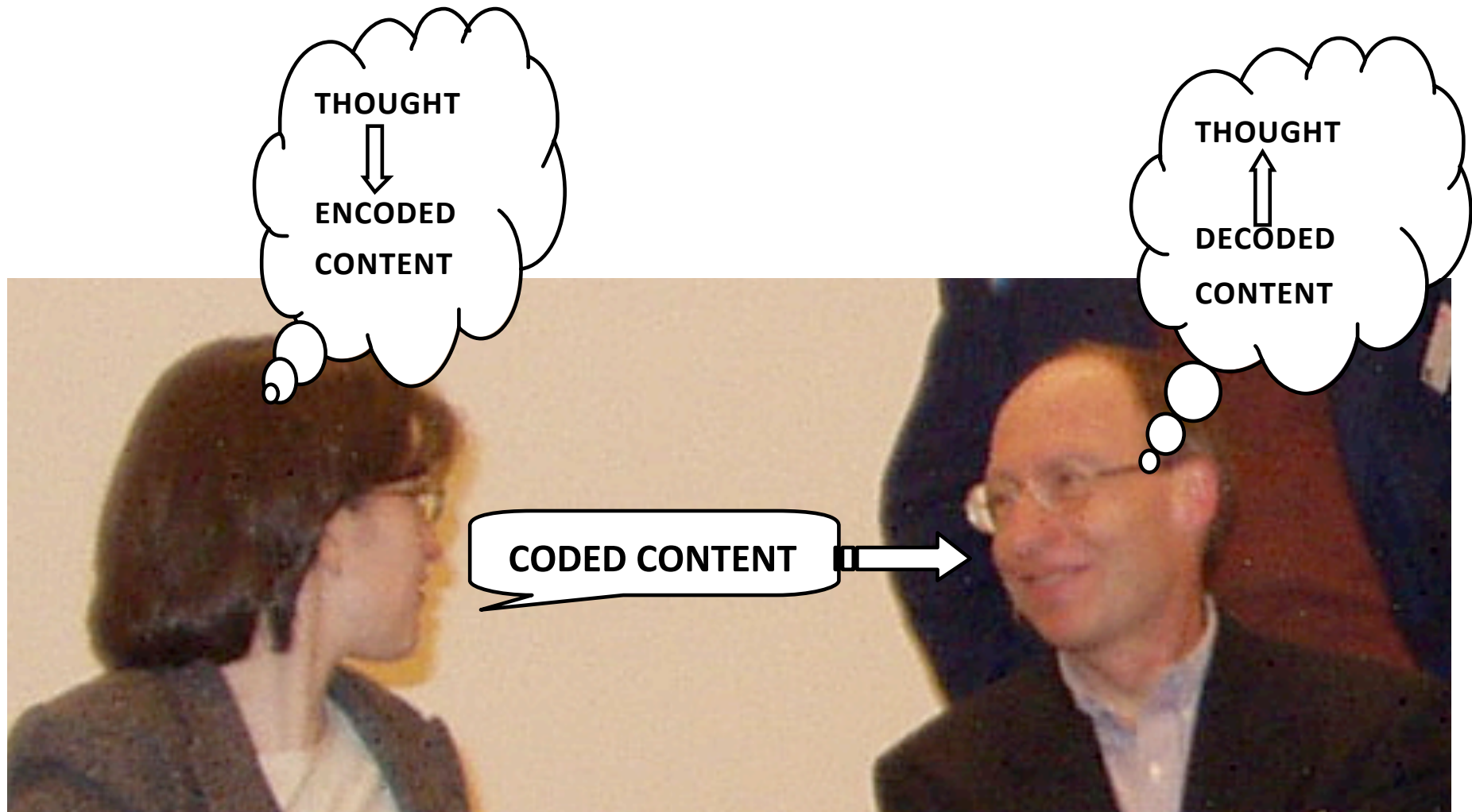
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# 1. Introduction: Code model vs. inferential model of communication

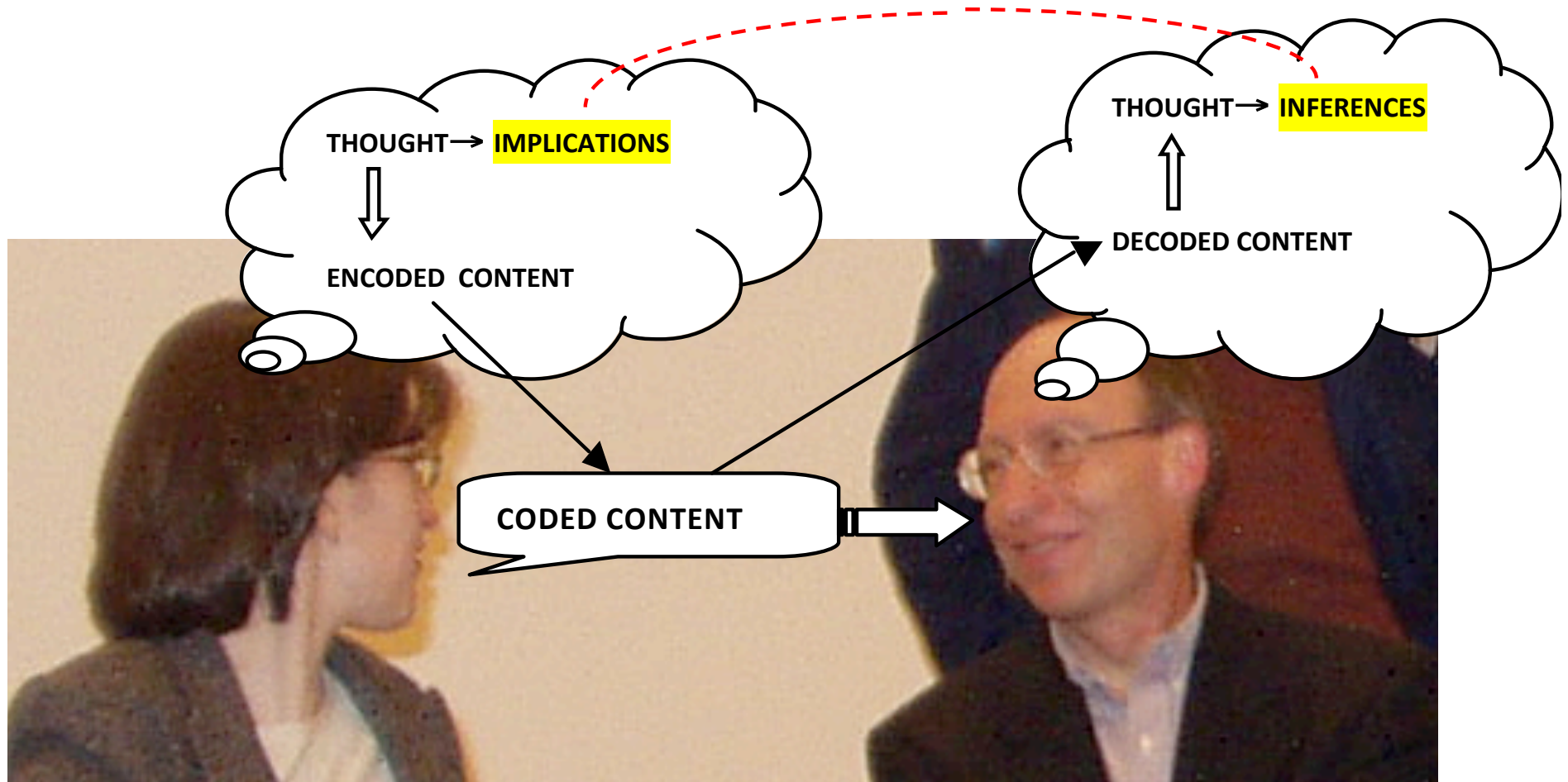
(Sperber & Wilson 1995)

# Code Model of Communication





# Inferential Model of Communication



## 2. Indirect speech acts

# Searle's (1975) terminology

One illocutionary act (**primary illocutionary act**) is performed by way of another illocutionary act (**secondary illocutionary act**). Example:

*Can you reach the salt?*

**Secondary illocutionary act:** questioning H's ABILITY to reach the salt (**S's literal utterance**)

**Primary illocutionary act:** requesting H to reach the salt (**S's intended meaning**)

# In class-exercise 1

Determine the **primary** and the **secondary** illocutionary acts in the following utterances:

- (1) Would you mind opening the window slightly?
- (2) Why don't we go to Portugal this summer?
- (3) Can I help you?
- (4) The garbage hasn't been taken out, Bill.
- (5) I will help you with this project.

## In-class exercise 2

Determine the **primary** and the **secondary** illocutionary acts in the following utterances:

(6) Could you be a little more quiet?

(7) I believe you have been looking for me.

(8) If you could explain this problem to me.

(9) Don't you think you ought to phone your mother?

(10) You will wash the dishes tonight.

# Panther & Thornburg's terminology

- An indirect illocutionary act is performed by way of mentioning (stating or questioning) **one component** of the **scenario** of the intended illocutionary act.
- The selected component **metonymically** stands for the intended illocutionary act itself. Example: *Can you reach the salt?*
- **Source meaning: questioning** H's ABILITY to reach the salt
- **Target meaning: requesting** H to reach the salt

# Indirect speech acts: terminology

Searle	Panther & Thornburg
Secondary illocutionary act	Source meaning
Primary illocutionary act	Target meaning

# Conventional vs. non-conventional indirectness

A distinction has to be made between conventional indirect speech acts and non-conventional indirect speech acts:

- (1) Can you (please) open the window?  
[conventional indirect request]
- (2) It's warm in here. [possibly a  
non-conventional indirect request]



### 3. The role of Manner scales in indirect speech acts

# Manner scales

- Words or expressions on a Manner scale have the **same (or a similar) conceptual content**, but they differ in their formal properties.
- The formal properties considered here:
  1. *length*
  2. *prosodic emphasis*
  3. *grammaticalization/lexicalization*

# Horn scales vs. Manner scales

- The values on Horn scales are ordered in terms of **meaning**:
  - (i) stronger member *entails* weaker member;
  - (ii) weaker member *implicates* **negation** of stronger member.
- The values on **Manner scales** are organized in terms of the properties of their **form**.

# ABILITY scale: length

*<can, be able to, have the ability to>*

(1) Can you VP?

(2) Are you able to VP?

(3) Do you have the ability to VP?

**Question:** Which one is the more conventionalized indirect directive?

# Can you VP? (COCA: 23289 hits)

- (1) Can you get me a drink?
- (2) Can you find and fix the following errors in the article?
- (3) Can you guys listen for two seconds?
- (4) Can you move that bicycle?

## Utterances (1)–(4):

foregrounded: 'request' (target meaning)

backgrounded: 'question' (source meaning)

# Are you able to VP? (COCA: 158 hits)

(1) *Are you able to* travel?

(2) *Are you able to* tell this jury how this woman died?

**Utterance (1):** foregrounded *question* meaning

**Utterance (2):** can be interpreted as a *question* (*source meaning*), but also as an indirect *request* to tell the jury how the woman died (*target meaning*).

# Do you have the ability to VP?

(COCA: 4 hits)

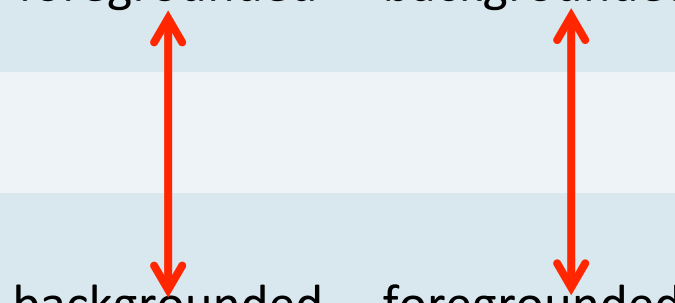
(1) Do you have the ability to take yourself away from the Internet?

(2) All right. Now Ms. Clark, do you have the ability to play those over ...

**Utterances (1) and (2):** are strongly foregrounded questions (source meaning).

# ABILITY scale: *length*

Utterance type	Request reading	Question reading
Can you VP?	foregrounded	backgrounded
Are you able to VP?		
Do you have the ability to VP?	backgrounded	foregrounded





# ABILITY scale: *prosodic emphasis*

Prosodic ABILITY scale <[kən], [kæn]>:

(1) [kən] you call me? Here's my home number.

(2) [kæn] you lift two hundred pounds?

(1): foregrounded (**target**) meaning: 'S asks H to call S' (**indirect request**)

(2): foregrounded (**source**) meaning: 'S asks H whether H is able to lift 200 lbs.' (**direct/literal question**)

# ABILITY scale: *prosodic emphasis*

Utterance type	Request reading	Question reading
Can [ <b>kən</b> ] you VP?	foregrounded	backgrounded
Can [ <b>kæn</b> ] you VP?	backgrounded	foregrounded

## 4. Pragmatically motivated constraints on indirect speech acts

# The problem 1

Consider (1)–(4):

- (1) You will clean up your room right now.  
[directive]
- (2) Will you clean up your room right now?  
[directive]
- (3) I want you to clean up your room right now. [directive]
- (4) Do I want you to clean up your room right now? [~~directive~~]

## The problem 2

- The **assertion** 'H will do A' *can stand for* the **request** 'S asks H to do A'.
- The **question** 'Will H do A?' *can stand for* the **request** 'S asks H to do A'.
- The **assertion** 'S wants H to do A' *can stand for* the **request** 'S asks H to do A'.
- However the **question** 'Does S want H to do A' **cannot stand for** the **request** 'S asks H to do A'!

# Explanation 1

The **question** ‘Does S want H to do A?’  
**cannot stand for** the **request** ‘S asks H to do A’!

Speakers have privileged access to their own mental states; i.e., speakers usually **know** their mental states and, therefore, do **not question** *their existence*: \*Do I want you to do A? is infelicitous as a request.

[cf. Forman 1974: *the speaker knows best principle*]

## Explanation 2

- The **assertion** 'H will do A' *can stand for* the **request** 'S asks H to do A'.
- The **question** 'Will H do A?' *can stand for* the **request** 'S asks H to do A'.
- The **question** 'Does S want H to do A' **cannot stand for** the **request** 'S asks H to do A'.

The speaker S can either **assert** that or **question** whether **the hearer H will perform A** without being pragmatically inconsistent, but S **cannot question** whether **S wants H to do A** and, by way of the question, accomplish an indirect request.

## 5. Indeterminacy (schematicity) of illocutionary target meaning



# Schematic speech acts

(indeterminacy of indirect act)

Consider the utterance:

*It's warm in here!*

Possible target meanings:

1. Turn on the air-conditioner.
2. Open the window.
3. Close the window.
4. Switch off the heating.

What do these interpretations have in common?

All of them are **requests** according to the **schema**: 'Do something to the effect so that it is no longer warm in here'

Metonymic inference chain from **source** to  
**target** meaning

S asserts that it is warm in here →

S evaluates 'It is warm in here' as BAD →

S DESIRES that 'It is warm in here' NOT be the  
case →

S ASKS H to do something to the effect  
so that 'It is warm in here' is **not** the case.

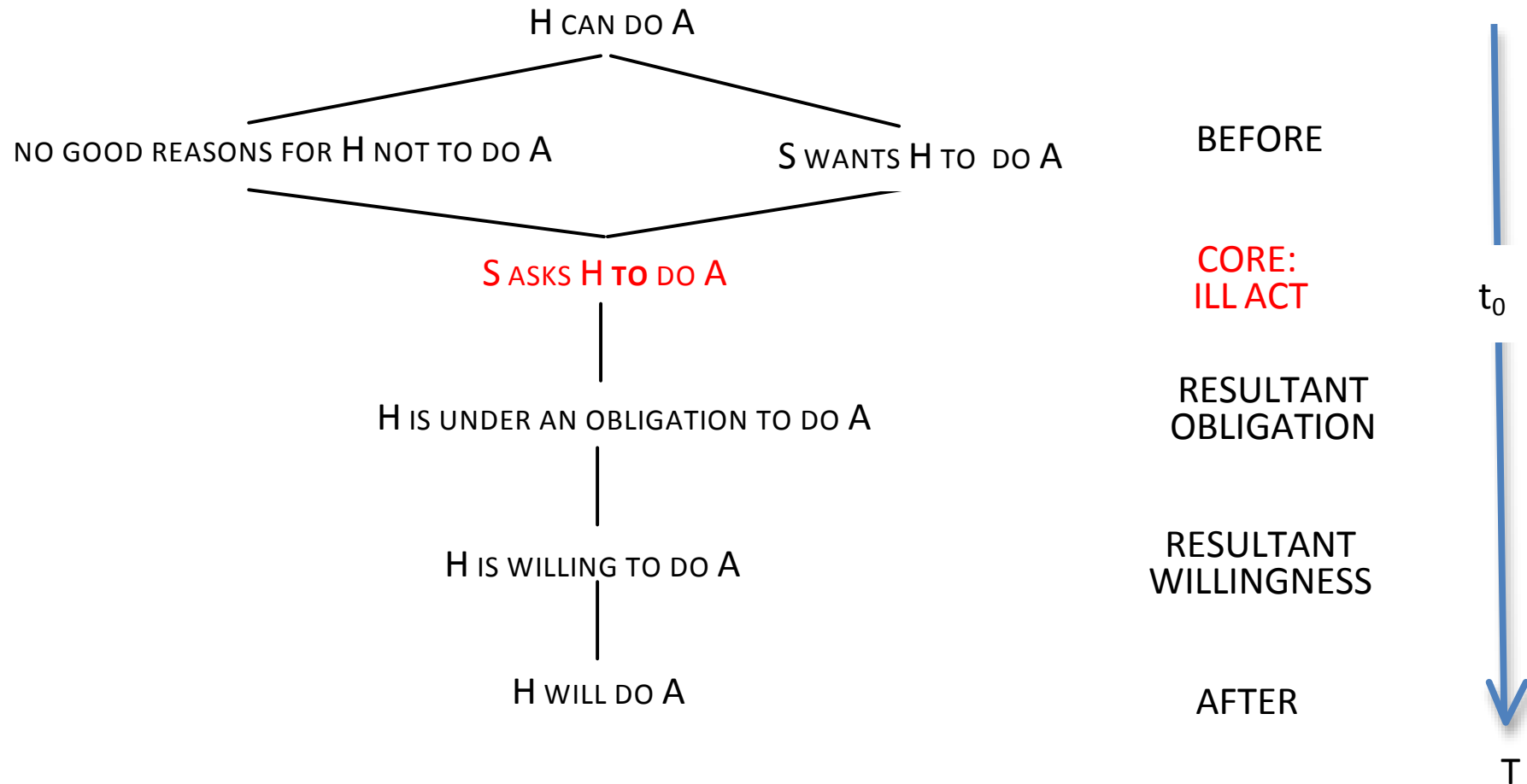
# More schematically

Source <sub>1</sub>	ASSERT (S, p) ↓
Target <sub>1</sub>	EVALUATE (S, BAD (p)) ↓
Target <sub>2</sub>	WANT (S, not-p) ↓
Target <sub>3</sub>	REQUEST (S, H, CAUSE (H, not-p))

# Research problem

Can the **metonymic chain** on the previous slide (31) be accommodated by the **Directive scenario** on the next slide (33)?

# Directive scenario



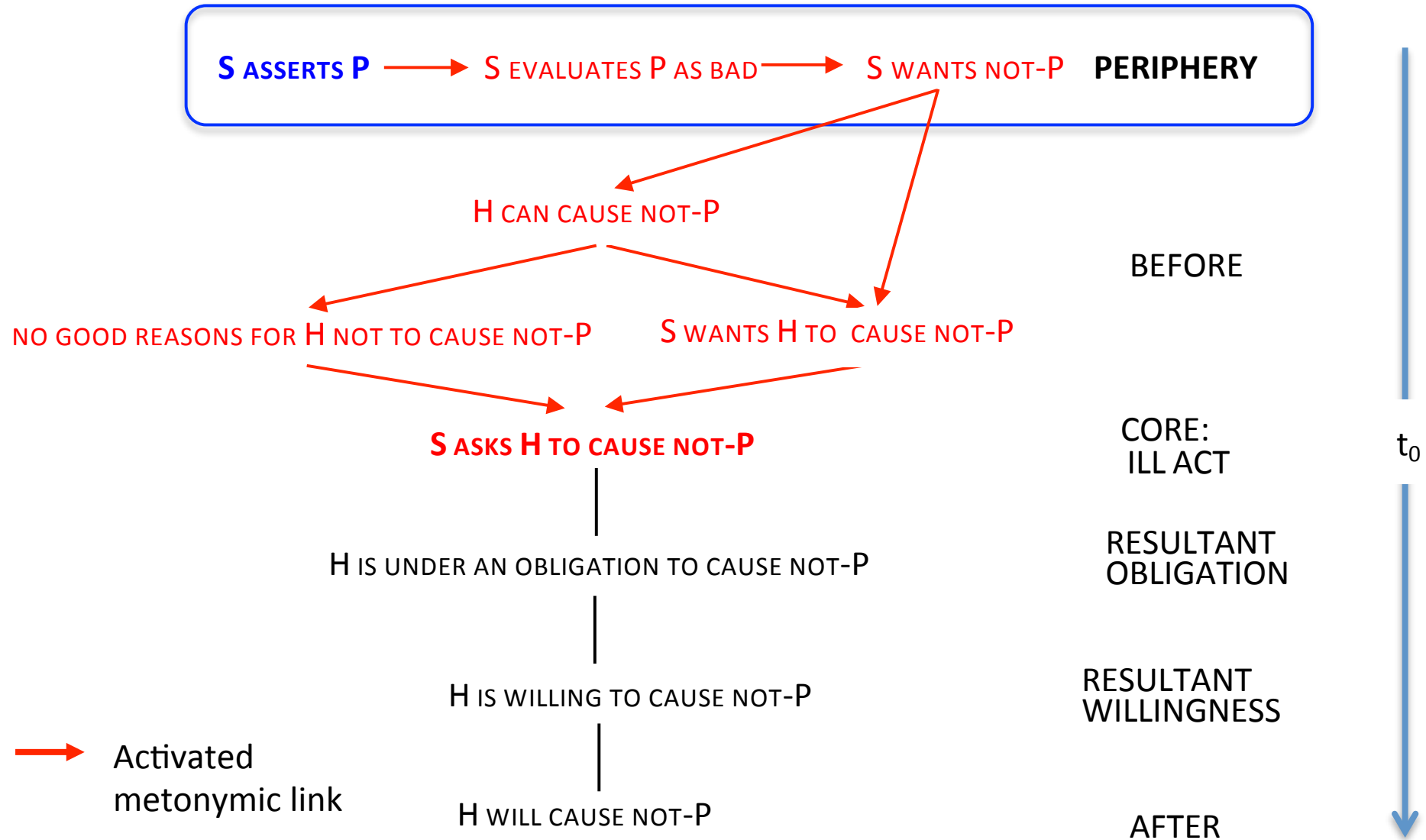
# Research problem

Can the **metonymic chain** on slide 31 be accommodated by the **Directive scenario** on slide 33?

The answer is **no**!

The Directive scenario has to be **expanded**.

# Expanding the Directive scenario 2



## 6. *If*-clauses as independent speech acts



# Illocutionary functions of *if*-clauses

(1) If you will (please/kindly) close the door.

[request]

(2) If you would like some cookies. [offer]

(3) If we could go up to your room, sir ...

[suggestion]

Note that from the point of view of traditional grammar the above sentences are not complete!

# *If*-requests 1

*If you will (please/kindly) close this door.*

Highly entrenched (conventionalized)

‘request’ meaning:

It seems almost **impossible to cancel** the

**request** meaning:

#If you will (please/kindly) close this door but  
I am not *asking/requesting* you to close this  
door.

## *If*-requests 2

Despite the conventionalized (entrenched) indirect request **target meaning**, the **source meaning** is *activatable* in the interlocutors' minds.

It is also possible to activate an **apodosis** (consequent clause):

*If you will close this door, I will begin my lecture.* [protasis has **requestive** force]

# Analytical tools

- Expanded Directive scenario with activatable metonymic links
- Two conceptual spaces (in the sense of e.g. Fauconnier & Turner 2002; Panther & Thornburg 2005): **REALITY SPACE** & **IF-SPACE** (with correspondence lines between them)

If you will close this door  
(then I'll begin my lecture)

## ***IF-SPACE***

**SOURCE:** You will close the door [H will do A]

**IMPLIED CONSEQUENCE:** I'll begin my lecture [q]

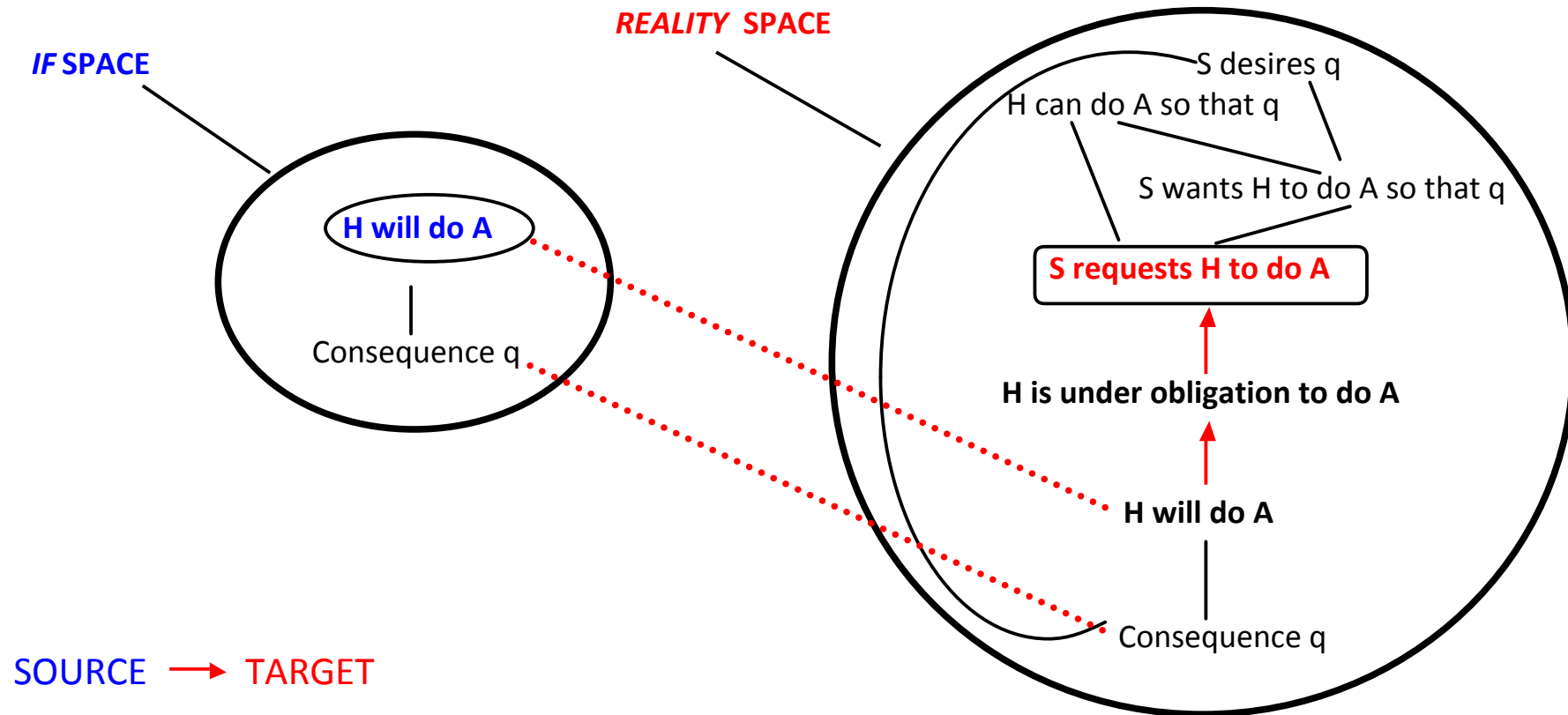
## **REALITY SPACE**

**TARGET:** I request you to close this door [S requests H to do A]

**CORRESPONDENCE LINES** between elements of *IF-SPACE* and **REALITY SPACE**

**METONYMIC CHAIN** in **REALITY SPACE**: You will close the door  
[H will do A] —> .... —> I request you to close this door  
[S requests H to do A]

# If-requests schema



Metaphorical and metonymic structure of the request type

*If you will*  $VP_{ACTION}$

# References

- Fauconnier, Gilles & Mark Turner. 2002. *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Forman, Donald. 1974. The speaker knows best principle. Or why some complicated facts about indirect speech acts are really obvious facts about questions and declaratives. *Chicago Linguistic Society* 10: 162–177.
- Panther, Klaus-Uwe & Linda L. Thornburg. 2005. Motivation and convention in some speech act constructions: A cognitive linguistic approach. In: Sophia Marmaridou, Kiki Nikiforidou, & Elini Antonopoulou, eds. *Reviewing Linguistic Thought: Converging Trends for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* [Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs 161], 53–76. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Searle, John. 1975. Indirect speech acts. In: Peter Cole & Jerry Morgan, eds. *Speech Acts* [Syntax and Semantics 3], 59–82. New York: Academic Press.

# Next week (November 7, 2012)

You may choose the topic!

1. A cognitive approach to speech acts. Part IV:  
Question tags in English – a theoretical and a  
pedagogical problem, e.g.

Close that door, will you? John's here, isn't he?

OR

2. Cognitive morphology: English *-er* nominals, e.g.  
teacher, trucker, thriller, green-earthier, fender-bender ...



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