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Inglés EOI

Volumen práctico

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1. Bloque 1: Communicative Competence and Pragmatic Meaning-Making

1.1 Ejercicio 1

Consider the utterance: "Could you possibly close the window? It is rather cold in here."

- Identify the primary language function.
- State the speech act performed.
- Explain why the utterance is indirect rather than imperative.

Solución

Paso 1: Identification and strategy

The task requires three related but distinct analyses of the utterance: its **primary language function**, the **speech act** it performs, and the reason why it is **indirect** rather than an imperative. It therefore draws mainly on communicative functions, pragmatics, speech-act theory, modality and politeness.

The key strategy is to distinguish carefully between three levels:

- **Grammatical form:** the first sentence is an interrogative introduced by the modal verb *could*; the second is a declarative statement.
- **Literal meaning:** the speaker appears to ask whether the hearer is able or willing to close the window, and states that the room is cold.
- **Communicative force:** in context, the speaker wants the hearer to close the window. The utterance is therefore not principally an information question about ability.

This distinction between sentence type and intended illocutionary force is essential. In pragmatic analysis, grammatical interrogatives may perform requests, declaratives may function as warnings or suggestions, and imperatives may express invitations as well as orders.

Paso 2: Reasoned solution

Primary language function

The **primary language function** is **requesting action**, more specifically making a **polite request** for the interlocutor to close the window.

The utterance is:

Could you possibly close the window? It is rather cold in here.

Although the speaker uses the interrogative form *Could you possibly…?*, the central communicative purpose is not to obtain factual information about the addressee's physical capacity. In an ordinary shared context, closing a window is a feasible and immediate action. The intended perlocutionary outcome is that the hearer closes it.

The second sentence, *It is rather cold in here*, reinforces and justifies the request. It provides the reason why closing the window is desirable. It may also be analysed as a supporting move: it mitigates the imposition by presenting the request as contextually motivated rather than arbitrary.

Consequently, a precise exam formulation would be:

- The primary function is **directive**: the speaker is **politely requesting** that the hearer close the window.
- The declarative clause additionally performs a **supporting explanatory function**, expressing the reason for the request.

Speech act performed

In speech-act terms, the utterance performs an **indirect directive speech act**, specifically a **request**.

A useful distinction is the following:

- The **locutionary act** is the production of the words *Could you possibly close the window? It is rather cold in here.*
- The **illocutionary act**, or intended social action performed through language, is a polite request that the hearer close the window.
- The **perlocutionary effect** sought is that the hearer actually closes the window, possibly accompanied by recognition of the speaker's discomfort.

The request is classified as a **directive** because the speaker attempts to get the hearer to carry out a future action. In Searle's terminology, directives include requests, commands, orders, suggestions, invitations and advice. What distinguishes this case from an order is its conventional politeness and its presentation of the action as optional rather than imposed.

The lexical choices contribute to this force:

- *Could* is a modal verb that conventionally softens requests. In its literal sense it concerns possibility or ability, but in this construction it is widely conventionalised as a polite request marker.
- *Possibly* is a **downtoner**. It reduces the apparent force of the request and signals deference to the hearer's freedom of action.
- *Rather cold* is a mitigated evaluation. Instead of saying *It is freezing*, the speaker uses a less forceful formulation.

- *In here* identifies the shared physical setting and makes the justification immediately relevant.

The entire sequence can thus be described as a **conventionally indirect, mitigated request**, supported by an explanation.

Why it is indirect rather than imperative

The utterance is indirect because its **surface grammatical form** does not match its **intended illocutionary force**.

A direct imperative request would normally use the imperative form of the verb, for example:

Close the window.

This form directly encodes a directive: the speaker explicitly tells the hearer to perform the action. It may be appropriate in situations with authority, urgency, familiarity or a low need for politeness, but it can sound abrupt in many ordinary interactions.

By contrast, *Could you possibly close the window?* has the syntax of an interrogative. It consists of modal *could*, subject *you*, and the bare infinitive *close*. On the literal semantic level, it asks whether the hearer can or is prepared to close the window. However, in normal conversational circumstances, speakers and hearers recognise this interrogative as a conventional means of requesting action.

The indirectness can be explained through the distinction between literal and pragmatic meaning:

- **Literal meaning:** "Are you able or willing to close the window?"
- **Pragmatic meaning:** "Please close the window."

The following declarative, *It is rather cold in here*, strengthens this interpretation. It provides a reason for the action and enables the hearer to infer the speaker's communicative intention. If the speaker merely wanted information about the hearer's ability, the comment about the temperature would be unnecessary or much less relevant. According to the principle of relevance in interaction, the hearer interprets both sentences together and identifies the intended request.

The utterance is therefore **indirect in form but clear in context**. It also illustrates a major politeness strategy: the speaker reduces the imposition on the hearer by avoiding an overt command, using the tentative modal *could*, adding the downtoner *possibly*, and supplying a reasonable justification.

Paso 3: Exam keys

A frequent error is to identify the utterance simply as a **question** because it ends with a question mark and has interrogative word order. That describes its grammatical form, not its main communicative function. In this type of task, always ask: "What does the speaker want the hearer to do?" Here, the answer is: close the window.

Another common mistake is to call *could* only a marker of past time. In this context, *could* is not past reference. It is a modal form conventionally used to make a request more tentative and polite.

It is also important not to confuse **indirectness** with vagueness or incomprehensibility. The request is indirect because it is expressed through an interrogative rather than an imperative, but it is pragmatically transparent in the situation. Its indirectness is conventional: speakers of English readily recognise *Could you possibly...?* as a request formula.

Avoid saying that *It is rather cold in here* is itself the primary request. It is primarily a declarative statement that functions as a **reason**, **justification** or **supporting move**. In a suitable context, such a statement alone could operate as a hint requesting someone to close the window, but here the explicit interrogative request is already present.

A concise but complete examination answer could be written as follows:

- The primary function is to make a polite request for action.
- The utterance performs a directive speech act: a conventionally indirect request that the hearer close the window.
- It is indirect because the request is grammatically realised as an interrogative, *Could you possibly...?*, rather than as the imperative *Close the window*. The modal *could*, the adverb *possibly*, and the explanatory statement about the cold mitigate the imposition and enhance politeness.

Paso 4: What you should learn

To solve similar tasks, you must distinguish **grammatical sentence type** from **communicative function**. Declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives are forms; asserting, requesting, ordering, suggesting and apologising are communicative acts. The two levels often coincide, but they need not do so.

You should be able to identify the main speech-act categories, especially **directives**, which aim to influence the hearer's actions. Then specify the narrower act whenever possible: request, command, suggestion, invitation, warning or advice.

You should also recognise common linguistic indicators of indirectness and politeness in English. These include modal questions such as *Can you...?*, *Could you...?*, *Would you...?* and *Would you mind...?*; downtoners such as *possibly*, *perhaps*, *just* and *a bit*; conditional forms; apologies; and explanations or justifications.

Finally, analyse the whole utterance rather than an isolated sentence. A request may be accompanied by a reason, an apology, a hedge or a statement of need. These elements often do not change the primary function, but they reveal how speakers manage interpersonal relations, negotiate meaning and mitigate the possible threat to the hearer's autonomy.

1.2 Ejercicio 2

During an advanced English class, two learners discuss a delayed train. One says, "It may be cancelled, although the app still says it is running." The other replies, "Well, it must be delayed somewhere, because nobody has arrived for twenty minutes." A third learner interrupts: "Can we stop speculating and ask the station staff?" The teacher notes that the speakers use different degrees of certainty, different interactional purposes, and different strategies to manage the conversation. The utterances also illustrate how grammatical choices contribute to interpersonal meaning rather than merely transmitting factual information.

Analyse the communicative competence displayed in the exchange, distinguishing grammatical, pragmatic, discourse and strategic components.

Solución

Paso 1: Identification and strategy

The task asks for an **analysis of communicative competence** in a short spoken exchange. It explicitly requires four components: **grammatical competence, pragmatic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence**. The central point is not simply to label verb forms: it is to show how linguistic choices encode speakers' assessments of the situation, their communicative intentions, and their management of the interaction.

This question is primarily connected with the syllabus areas concerning communicative competence, language in use and negotiation of meaning, oral interaction, discourse analysis, assertion and emphasis, certainty and probability, and modal verbs. A strong answer may acknowledge that models of communicative competence differ in terminology. For example, Canale and Swain distinguish grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence; later models also foreground discourse competence. In this exercise, however, the categories are supplied by the prompt, so the analysis should be organised around them rather than around a purely historical account of models.

The best examination strategy is to proceed from the **whole communicative event** to the **individual linguistic forms**. First, identify the situation: learners are waiting for a train and have incomplete, partly conflicting evidence. Next, isolate each utterance and determine its proposition, degree of commitment, speech act, and contribution to the conversational sequence. Finally, classify the relevant evidence under the four requested components, while making clear that the categories interact.

Paso 2: Reasoned solution

The communicative situation and its interpersonal meaning

The exchange takes place in an everyday institutional setting, presumably a railway station. The speakers face uncertainty: the application reports that the train is running, but no passenger or

train has arrived for twenty minutes. Their language is therefore not designed merely to report verifiable facts. It performs interpersonal work: they formulate hypotheses, express different degrees of confidence, challenge unproductive speculation, and propose a practical way of obtaining authoritative information.

The relevant utterances are:

- "It **may be cancelled**, although the app still says it is running."
- "Well, it **must be delayed somewhere**, because nobody has arrived for twenty minutes."
- "**Can we stop speculating and ask the station staff?**"

The modal auxiliaries **may** and **must** are especially important. In both cases they express **epistemic modality**, that is, the speaker's judgement about the likelihood or necessity of a proposition on the basis of available knowledge. They are not cases of deontic modality: neither speaker is granting permission nor imposing an obligation on the train.

Grammatical competence

Grammatical competence is knowledge of the formal resources of the language: morphology, syntax, lexical selection, phonology or graphology, and the rules governing well-formed combinations. In an oral exchange, phonological realisation may also contribute, particularly through stress and intonation, although the written prompt gives no prosodic information and therefore does not permit detailed claims about it.

In "It may be cancelled", the subject pronoun **it** refers to the train. The construction is formed with the modal auxiliary **may** followed by the bare infinitive **be**, and the past participle **cancelled**. Structurally, **may + be + past participle** creates a passive clause. The passive is appropriate because the focus is on the train as the affected entity, while the possible cancelling agent is irrelevant or unknown. The modal does not locate the possible cancellation in a past time; it assesses the present status of the train: perhaps it is now in a cancelled state.

The subordinate concessive clause "although the app still says it is running" is also grammatically and semantically significant. **Although** introduces a concession: the content of the main clause remains possible despite evidence that might appear to contradict it. The present simple forms **says** and **is running** represent the current information displayed by the app. **Still** marks persistence: the app continues to give the same status.

In "it must be delayed somewhere", the pattern is again modal + bare infinitive **be** + predicative complement **delayed**. Here, **delayed** is most naturally analysed as an adjectival or participial complement describing the train's state, rather than as a full passive event in which the agent matters. **Must** expresses a strong inferential conclusion. The adverb **somewhere** leaves the precise location unspecified.

The clause "because nobody has arrived for twenty minutes" provides a grammatical and logical basis for the inference. The present perfect, **has arrived**, combined with the duration phrase **for twenty minutes**, relates a period extending up to the present moment to the absence of arrivals. More idiomatically, speakers might say "no train has arrived for twenty minutes"

if trains rather than passengers are intended; however, within the given context, "nobody has arrived" can be interpreted as no relevant person or train party having appeared. The negative indefinite pronoun **nobody** produces a negative proposition without requiring an additional negative marker.

The final utterance is an interrogative in form: "Can we stop speculating and ask the station staff?" Grammatically, it begins with the modal auxiliary **can**, followed by the subject **we** and coordinated bare infinitives, **stop** and **ask**. The first verb takes a gerund-participial complement, **speculating**; the second takes the noun phrase **the station staff** as its direct object. The coordination joins two proposed actions: ending the current activity and replacing it with another.

Thus, grammatical competence enables the learners to select accurate modal constructions, passive or stative predication, tense-aspect forms, subordination, coordination, negation, and appropriate verb complementation. However, listing these forms would be insufficient. Their communicative value emerges only when grammatical form is related to use.

Pragmatic competence

Pragmatic competence concerns the ability to use language appropriately in context, including the interpretation and performance of speech acts, the management of interpersonal relations, politeness, stance, implicature, and register.

The first learner performs an act of **tentative conjecture**. "It may be cancelled" does not assert cancellation as a fact. By choosing **may**, the speaker signals low or medium commitment and leaves room for alternative explanations. This is a face-sensitive and epistemically cautious choice: the speaker avoids presenting an uncertain claim as established truth. The concessive clause makes the reasoning transparent and acknowledges counter-evidence. Pragmatically, this is a cooperative move because it shows awareness that the app's information weakens, but does not completely eliminate, the cancellation hypothesis.

The second learner produces a stronger **inference**. In epistemic use, **must** conveys that the speaker considers the proposition the most compelling conclusion from the available evidence. The meaning is not absolute logical certainty: natural-language epistemic modality is context-dependent. The speaker's claim can be paraphrased as "Given that nobody has arrived for twenty minutes, I strongly infer that the train is delayed." The causal clause introduced by **because** supplies the evidential grounds and makes the inference accountable rather than arbitrary.

The discourse marker **well** has a pragmatic function too. It can signal that the speaker is taking a turn after considering the previous contribution, introducing a response, qualification, or reformulation. Here it frames the second learner's conclusion as a reaction to the ongoing discussion rather than an isolated statement.

The third learner's question is formally about shared ability or possibility, but pragmatically it functions as a **proposal** and a mild **directive**. "Can we stop speculating and ask the station staff?" is not likely to request information about whether the group is physically capable of doing so. Its intended force is closer to "Let us stop speculating and ask the staff." The interrogative

form and inclusive first-person plural **we** mitigate the directive: the learner does not command the others directly but frames the change of action as a collaborative decision.

This intervention also evaluates the preceding talk as speculative and redirects the group towards a more reliable source. It therefore carries an interpersonal meaning: it may express impatience, practical orientation, or a preference for authoritative evidence, but does so without directly accusing either speaker of being wrong. The mention of "the station staff" is register-appropriate in a public-service setting and identifies an institutionally legitimate source of information.

Discourse competence

Discourse competence is the ability to construct and interpret coherent, cohesive stretches of language beyond individual sentences. It includes the management of reference, logical relations, information flow, turn-taking conventions, adjacency relations, and genre-appropriate organisation.

The exchange is coherent because all contributions concern the same discourse topic: the unexplained absence of the train. Reference is maintained through the pronoun **it**, whose antecedent is recoverable from the situational context, and through the lexical network of **cancelled**, **running**, **delayed**, and **station staff**. These items create semantic cohesion around train service and its status.

The first utterance contains an internal contrast. The conjunction **although** establishes a concessive relation between two propositions: possible cancellation and the application's continuing report that the train is running. The contrast is important because it represents conflicting sources or pieces of evidence.

The second turn develops the preceding discussion through an alternative hypothesis. The phrase **well** marks its relation to the prior turn, while **because** establishes an explicit cause or evidential justification. In discourse terms, the speaker does not merely add another disconnected sentence; they provide a more strongly supported explanation for the observable situation.

The third turn is a conversational boundary-setting move. It interrupts the sequence of hypotheses and initiates a new course of action. Its coherence lies in its responsiveness: the imperative force of "stop speculating" is licensed precisely by the preceding speculative turns, and "ask the station staff" offers a relevant next step. This creates a clear progression from uncertain interpretation to information-seeking action.

The sequence also displays a recognisable interactional pattern. The first speaker offers a tentative assessment; the second offers a competing or refining assessment with stronger epistemic commitment; the third metacommunicatively comments on the kind of talk taking place, labels it "speculating", and redirects it. Such management of topic development and conversational sequencing is a central manifestation of discourse competence in spoken interaction.

Strategic competence

Strategic competence is the ability to use verbal and non-verbal resources to overcome communicative problems, compensate for limitations, maintain interaction, repair misunderstandings, and achieve a communicative goal effectively. It should not be reduced to compensating

for missing vocabulary. At advanced levels, it includes sophisticated interactional strategies for handling uncertainty and coordinating collective action.

The first learner uses **hedging** as an epistemic and interpersonal strategy. By saying "may be cancelled", the speaker avoids overcommitment when evidence is incomplete. The concessive reference to the app is also a strategy of evidential balancing: it anticipates an objection and demonstrates that the speaker has considered available information.

The second learner uses **inferential reasoning** strategically. Rather than simply contradicting the first speaker, they present observable evidence, "nobody has arrived for twenty minutes", and connect it explicitly to their conclusion with **because**. This supports mutual understanding and makes the claim easier for others to assess or challenge.

The third learner uses a **problem-solving and interaction-management strategy**. They identify that continued speculation is not producing reliable knowledge and propose consultation with an authoritative interlocutor. The inclusive wording "Can we ...?" seeks group alignment and reduces the potential abruptness of the interruption. This is a strategic shift from internal conjecture to external information retrieval.

The exchange therefore illustrates negotiation of meaning in a broad sense. The speakers do not negotiate the denotation of an unknown word; instead, they negotiate how to interpret uncertain circumstances and what communicative action should follow. Their strategies preserve cooperation, express differing epistemic positions, and move the interaction towards resolution.

Integrated conclusion

The four components are analytically distinct but inseparable in actual communication. The grammar of modal auxiliaries, tense-aspect, subordination and interrogative form provides the linguistic resources. Pragmatic competence determines that **may** functions as a cautious hypothesis, **must** as a strong inference, and "Can we ...?" as a mitigated proposal. Discourse competence links the turns through reference, concession, evidence, topical continuity and a shift from speculation to action. Strategic competence allows speakers to hedge, justify, redirect, and seek a more reliable source of information.

The exchange thus confirms that grammar is not merely a system for encoding factual content. Choices such as **may**, **must**, concessive **although**, causal **because**, and inclusive interrogative **Can we ...?** construe degrees of certainty, social alignment, stance, and the management of collective interaction.

Paso 3: Examination keys

A frequent mistake is to identify **may** and **must** simply as "modal verbs" and stop there. In an examination answer, the crucial next step is to state their **type of modality**, their **degree of epistemic commitment**, and their **interactional effect**. Here both are epistemic: **may** marks possibility and tentativeness, whereas **must** marks a strong conclusion based on evidence.

Do not confuse epistemic and deontic readings. Deontic **must** expresses obligation, as in "Passengers must show a ticket." In the exercise, "it must be delayed" cannot mean that the train has an obligation to be delayed; it means that the speaker infers delay. Likewise, **can we** is formally a question involving the modal **can**, but its communicative force is a collaborative proposal rather than a literal enquiry about ability.

Another common weakness is to treat the four competences as watertight boxes. The same form may be relevant to more than one component. For instance, the interrogative syntax belongs to grammatical competence, its directive force belongs to pragmatic competence, its turn-redirection role belongs to discourse competence, and its use to obtain cooperation belongs to strategic competence. The answer should classify the evidence clearly but may explicitly note this overlap.

Avoid unsupported claims about pronunciation, social status, emotions, or exact speaker intentions. Since the prompt provides no intonation or contextual detail beyond the station setting, write cautiously: "may indicate impatience" or "functions as a mitigated proposal", rather than claiming certainty about an attitude that the text does not establish.

A clear examination presentation can follow this sequence:

- Briefly define communicative competence and establish the communicative situation.
- Analyse the linguistic forms that are most relevant, especially modality and clause relations.
- Devote a separate, clearly labelled paragraph to each required competence.
- Support every analytical point with a short quotation from the exchange.
- End with an integrated conclusion explaining how formal choices create interpersonal meaning.

It is also advisable to distinguish **cohesion** from **coherence**. Cohesion is realised through overt linguistic links such as pronouns, repetition, conjunctions and discourse markers. Coherence is the interpretable conceptual unity of the exchange: every turn is relevant to explaining the train's absence or deciding what to do about it.

Paso 4: What you should learn

To solve similar tasks autonomously, you should master a practical framework for analysing communicative competence. First, identify the context, participants, shared problem, available evidence and communicative goals. Then ask of each utterance: what is its grammatical form, what does the speaker do with it, how does it connect to the preceding discourse, and what strategy does it implement?

You should be able to distinguish **grammatical competence** from the other components while recognising their interaction. Grammatical competence involves accurate forms and structures;

pragmatic competence involves context-sensitive meaning and speech acts; discourse competence involves cohesion, coherence and sequential organisation; strategic competence involves the resources used to sustain, repair, redirect or successfully advance communication.

You should also command the major meanings of modal verbs. In particular, distinguish epistemic possibility, probability and inference from deontic permission, obligation and prohibition. Do not assign a modal meaning mechanically: determine it from the subject, context and proposition. A useful diagnostic is whether the modal evaluates the truth of a proposition or regulates an action. If it evaluates truth, the reading is normally epistemic; if it regulates conduct, it is normally deontic.

Finally, remember that advanced language use involves **stance**. Speakers select grammar to calibrate commitment, protect face, acknowledge evidence, invite cooperation and organise talk. In analytical answers, move consistently from form to meaning and from meaning to communicative function. That is the procedure that turns a list of grammatical labels into a rigorous account of communicative competence.

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Fin de la muestra

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