THE USE OF *OCUPAR* AS A VERB OF NECESSITY IN MEXICAN SPANISH

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ABSTRACT. In Mexican Spanish, *ocupar* ('to occupy') is often employed as a verb of need and necessity, with a similar use and denotation to those of *necesitar* ('to need'). Despite it being widespread, very little has been written about this phenomenon. In this article, I provide a description of this novel meaning. This description is supported by a Twitter-based study on the distribution of the meanings of *ocupar* around three Mexican cities. The quantitative analysis of the data confirms the extensive use of *ocupar* as *necesitar*, although to varying extents; concretely, it was found to be most frequent in Monterrey. In qualitative terms, I demonstrate that *ocupar* as *necesitar* is more often used to express need (i.e., with a nominal complement) than modal necessity (i.e., as a semiauxiliary with a sentential complement). Lastly, I propose that the emergence of this meaning represents a case of ongoing grammaticalization, whose origin can be traced back to older meanings via semantic reanalysis.

Keywords: semantic reanalysis; grammaticalization; modality; Mexican Spanish

RESUMEN. En el español de México, *ocupar* viene empleado a menudo como un verbo de necesidad, con un uso y denotación semejantes a los de *necesitar*. A pesar de ser tan extendido, poco se ha escrito sobre este fenómeno. En este artículo se ofrece una descripción de este significado innovador. Dicha descripción se sustenta en un estudio basado en datos de Twitter sobre la distribución de los distintos significados de *ocupar* en tres ciudades de México. El análisis cuantitativo de los datos confirma el uso extendido de *ocupar* como *necesitar* en el español mexicano, si bien con importantes diferencias entre ciudades; en concreto, se observa un mayor empleo entre usuarios de la zona de Monterrey. Cualitativamente, se demuestra que *ocupar* como *necesitar* es usado más a menudo con complementos nominales que como un semiauxiliar modal de necesidad. Por último, se propone que la aparición de este significado representa un caso de gramaticalización en marcha, que se habría originado a partir de significados más antiguos por medio de reanálisis semántico.

Palabras clave: reanálisis semántico; gramaticalización; modalidad; español de México

1. Introduction

Ocupar (lit. 'to occupy') is a highly polysemous Spanish verb. Nonetheless, most of its meanings can be grouped into two archisememes: the first denotes spatial occupancy (from now on [[ocupar]]space; e.g., *ocupar un espacio* 'to occupy a space'; *ocupar un cargo*[1] 'to

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[1] To the extent that offices are positions (or places) within a hierarchically structured institution, *ocupar* in this sense expresses, metaphorically, the occupation of a space. The *Diccionario del español de México*

hold an office'), while the second relates to occupation in terms of work or dealing with a task (from now own [[ocupar]]$_{work}$; e.g., *ocupo a diez personas en construir un muro* 'I employ ten people in the building of a wall'; *ocuparse de un problema* 'to deal with a problem').

In this article, I raise attention to an additional meaning of *ocupar* found in Mexican Spanish, namely that expressing necessity and being interchangeable with *necesitar* ('to need'). Despite it being widespread, to the best of my knowledge, very little has been written about this meaning of the verb.

Two types of necessity-denoting *ocupar* can be identified below. In the first case, shown in (1), it is a psychological verb and takes an NP as its complement (from now on [[ocupar]]$_{need}$). In the second case, shown in (2), it is a modal verb, therefore taking a VP as its complement (from now on [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$). While these two meanings are closely related, it is nonetheless important to tell them apart, as will be discussed below.

(1)

    Twitter – Monterrey-based user

    a. No necesito amor, lo único q(ue) **ocupo** ahorita es un elote con mucho chile.
        'I don't need love, the only thing **I need** right now is spicy corn on the cob.'

    Twitter – Mexico City-based user

    b. Quiero estar en una banda ¿alguien **ocupa** alguna bajista en CDMX? no soy muy buena, pero aprendo rápido.
        'I want to be in a band, does anyone **need** a bassist in Mexico City? I'm not very good, but I learn fast.'

(2)

    Twitter – Guadalajara-based user

    a. **Ocupo** que me respondas esta pregunta.
        '**I need** you to answer this question (for me).'

    Twitter – Monterrey-based user

    b. @USER ya **ocupas** cambiarte de deporte.
        '@USER, **you need** to switch sport already.'

The purpose of this article is threefold. In the first place, it provides a general description of [[ocupar]]$_{need/modal}$. In the second place, it looks at the use of these novel meanings of *ocupar* in Mexican Spanish. In the third place, it seeks to identify the grammaticalization pathway that has led to the modalization of *ocupar*.

The text is structured as follows: In Section 2, I explore the meanings of *ocupar* according to Spanish dictionaries and provide an overview of previous descriptions on this novel use of the verb.

In Section 3, I give a quick overview of need and necessity verbs in Spanish. In Section 4, I present the results of an empirical study that explores the frequency of the different meanings of *ocupar* in Mexican Spanish. Lastly, in Section 5, I set forward the hypothesis

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provides a definition along these lines (see definition 5 below). When needed, this specific meaning will be represented as [[ocupar]]$_{m-space}$.

that [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$ is the result of an ongoing grammaticalization process –more precisely, a case of modalization.

2. The meaning of *ocupar*

The *Diccionario de la lengua española* (RAE 2022) provides 11 meanings of *ocupar*, while the *Diccionario del español de México* (COLMEX 2022) lists 8, all of which are contained in the former dictionary. These are:

1. Llenar un espacio o un lugar: "Los muebles *ocupan* todo el cuarto"
2. Estar alguien en un lugar o entrar en él para habitarlo o para trabajar en su interior: "Su nieto *ocupa* la casa", "*Ocupo* la oficina de enfrente"
3. Entrar a un lugar, generalmente por la fuerza, y quedarse en él ejerciendo un dominio: "El ejército *ocupó* la ciudad"
4. Tener alguien determinado puesto o cargo, tomar posesión de él: "Su padre *ocupa* el puesto de director"
5. Tener una posición determinada dentro de una serie, enumeración o jerarquía: "*Ocupó* el primer lugar en la carrera"
6. Utilizar algo o emplear a alguien para hacer alguna cosa: "*Ocupa* sus ratos libres en leer", "No ocupan ayudantes, ellos hacen todo el trabajo"
7. *Ocuparse* prnl Dedicarse alguien a cierta actividad: *ocuparse* de los niños, *ocuparse* en leer
8. Mantener algo la atención de alguien o ser objeto de su actividad por cierto tiempo: "El tema que nos *ocupará* hoy es el de la vacunación"

'1. Fill a space or a place: "The furniture occupies the entire room"
'2. Being someone in a place or entering it to live in it or to work inside it: "Your grandson occupies the house", "I occupy the office in front"
'3. Entering a place, generally by force, and remaining in it exercising dominance: "The army occupied the city"
'4. Have someone a certain position or position, take possession of it: "His father occupies the position of director"
'5. Holding a certain position within a series, enumeration, or hierarchy: "He occupied the first position in the race"
'6. Use something or employ someone to do something: "He occupies his free time reading", "They do not employ assistants, they do all the work"
'7. (Pronominal verb) To dedicate oneself to a certain activity: to take care of the children, to take care of reading
'8. Maintain someone's attention or be the object of their activity for a certain time: "The issue that will concern us today is vaccination"

These meanings can be grouped into two classes of related meanings or archisememes. These are, on the one hand, spatial occupancy (definitions 1-5), and on the other, occupation in terms of work or dealing with something (definitions 6-8). No meaning related to need or necessity is contained in either of these dictionaries.

Beyond the two dictionaries cited above, neither the *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* (RAE & ASALE 2005) or the *Diccionario de dudas y dificultades de la lengua española* (Seco 2011) define *ocupar* as a verb of necessity. The only reference to [[ocupar]]$_{need/modal}$ can be found in the *Diccionario de americanismos* (DA) (ASALE 2010), where it is explicitly defined as a synonym of *necesitar*. The DA notes that this meaning occurs not only in Mexican Spanish bur also in Central American varieties. Incidentally, the DA lists

another novel meaning of *ocupar* that is found not only in Mexico but in various Central and Southern American varieties, namely that denoting 'use' (from now on [[ocupar]]$_{use}$). I will return to the relation between this meaning and [[ocupar]]$_{need/modal}$ in Section 5.

Both the DA and the The Mexican Academy of Language associate the use of [[ocupar]]$_{need/modal}$ with colloquial registers. The latter also adds that it is only common in "certain dialects" while discouraging its use due to potential ambiguity when occurring with complements that denote a space, like the example in (3).

Aside from the risk of ambiguity, this use of *ocupar* as *necesitar* tends to be frowned upon by prescriptivists due to its connotation relating it to low-prestige varieties.

(3) **Ocupo** un espacio en el foro.
'**I need/occupy** a space in the forum.'

Many of these aspects surrounding the use of [[ocupar]]$_{need/modal}$ have been described by Moreno de Alba (1987). In a brief account, he provides some examples of this use of the verb, which he considers a peculiarity of the variety of Spanish spoken in Tepic, in Western Mexico.

More recently, Tovilla-Loza (2021) has studied the use of *ocupar* as *necesitar* from a Linguistic Variation approach. Based on data taken from oral corpora of Mexico City and Monterrey, it is shown that young male speakers in the latter city are more likely to employ *ocupar* as a verb of necessity. As to the linguistic factors that come at play, it is noted that *ocupar* replaces *necesitar* most often when it takes a nominal complement, i.e., [[ocupar]]$_{need}$.

A diachronic inspection of the meaning of *ocupar* suggests that [[ocupar]]$_{need/modal}$ are indeed innovations, and not archaisms. Neither *Tesoro de la lengua española* (Covarrubias 1611) or *Diccionario de autoridades* (RAE 1726-1739) contains a meaning relating *ocupar* to need or necessity. In fact, the meaning of the verb seems to have remained rather constant. The first dictionary contains both [[ocupar]]$_{space}$ and [[ocupar]]$_{work}$, while the second only mentions [[ocupar]]$_{space}$.

> OCUPAR: del latino ocupare, como **ocupar algún lugar.** Significa también embaraçar y **dar en qué trabajar**, a lo qual llamamos ocupación. Hombre ocupado, hombre de negocios. Desocupar, desembaraçar; desocupado, el ocioso. (Tesoro de la lengua española)
>
> OCUPAR. v. a. **Tomar possessión o apoderarse de alguna cosa**. Viene del Latino Occupare, que significa esto mismo. HERR. Hist. de Phel. II. tom. 3. lib. 5. cap. 9. Y dando fondo, echó en tierra como catorce mil infantes y algunos pocos caballos, y fácilmente ocupó el castillo. PUENT. Epit. del R. D. Juan el II. lib. 3. cap. 34. [v.18] Como supieron que el Rey de Castilla se quería apoderar de la Ciudad, se adelantaron, y la ocuparon primero. (Diccionario de autoridades – Tomo V 1737)

Aside from this, virtually nothing has been written on the use of *ocupar* as a verb of need and necessity. I will therefore take the description so far outlined as the starting point for a description of [[ocupar]]$_{need}$ and [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$.

3. And overview of verbs of need and necessity in Spanish

Let us briefly discuss the concepts of need and necessity and how these are conveyed by Spanish verbs. As mentioned above, it is important to distinguish between modal ne-

cessity and need. I apply this distinction following Guéron's (2000) paper on the modalization of *bisogna* in Italian. In fact, I will argue that a similar process occurred in the case of *ocupar* (in Section 5).

Need in Spanish is typically manifested through verbs such as *necesitar* 'to need' (4a) and *requerir* 'to require' (4b) and its derivates (e.g., *necesario, requerido*, etc.); these verbs take a nominal complement.
These verbs belong to the semantic class of psychological verbs. They are characterized by carrying "psychological entailments with respect to one of its arguments (the Experiencer[2]). A psychological entailment involves an individual being in a certain mental state." (Landau 2010: 137). Need can evolve into necessity via semantic change (Bybee et al. 1994).

(4)
    a. Necesito ayuda/un favor/el dinero.
        'I need help/a favor/the money.'
    b. Requiero ayuda/un favor/el dinero.
        'I require help/a favor/the money.'

Necessity, in turn, is one of the two poles of contingency in modality, opposite to possibility. Modality is a grammatical feature (Bybee et al. 1994; Van der Auwera & Plungian 1998; Ziegler 2019) connected to the speaker's attitudes towards a given proposition (Kiefer 1986; Narrog 2009). A succinct definition provided by Kiefer states that "The essence of 'modality' consists in the relativization of the validity of sentence meanings to a set of possible worlds" (1994: 2515). Yet, to this date, there is no consensus on a single system of varieties of modality in language, although different proposals often overlap to varying extents. Here I will adopt the fourfold classification adopted in some typology-oriented works (e.g., Bybee et al. 1994; van der Auwera & Plungian 1998).

This proposal assumes the following types of modality: (i) **Participant-internal modality**, defined as "a kind of possibility or necessity internal to a participant engaged in the state of affairs." (Van der Auwera & Plungian 1998: 80) (ii) **Participant-external modality**, described as referring to "circumstances that are external to the participant, if any, engaged in the state of affairs and that make this state of affairs either possible or necessary." (Van der Auwera & Plungian 1998: 81) (iii) **Deontic modality**, concerned with "enabling or compelling circumstances external to the participant as some person(s), often the Speaker, and/or as some social or ethical norm(s) permitting or obliging the participant to engage in the state of affairs." (Van der Auwera & Plungian 1998: 81) (iv) **Epistemic modality,** which refers to "judgment[s] of the Speaker: a proposition is judged to be uncertain or probable relative to some judgment[s]." (Van der Auwera & Plungian 1998: 81).

Modal verbs in Spanish are typically auxiliary verbs in modal periphrases, where they are followed by an infinitive. This is the case, for instance, of *deber* (lit. 'to owe'/ 'must'), and *tener que* (lit. 'to have to'). *Necesitar* ('to need'), however, belongs to the class of so-called semiauxiliary verbs. As shown in (5), a crucial characteristic that distinguishes these two classes of verbs is the ability of the latter to occur with a complement clause with a

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[2] Fábregas (2015) has noted, however, that in Spanish, the subject of subject-experiencer verbs does not always take the EXPERIENCER role.

non-coreferential subject (RAE & ASALE 2009 § 28.1). The infinite phrase that appears after *necesitar* is therefore a sentential complement.

(5)
    a. [Necesito/debo/tengo que] comprar un nuevo par de zapatos.
       'I need to buy a new pair of shoes.'
    b. [Necesito/*debo/*tengo que] que me compres un nuevo par de zapatos.
       'I need you to buy me a new pair of shoes.'

Moreover, not all necessity-denoting verbs allow expressing all types of modality. This can be seen in (6), where a comparison of the distribution of *necesitar, deber*, and *tener que* in terms of the typology presented above is provided.

(6)
    a. *Participant-internal modality*
       [Necesito/$^?$debo/$^?$tengo que] dormir mejor para no sentirme tan cansado.
       'I need to sleep better so as not to feel so tired.'
    b. *Participant-external modality*
       [Necesitamos/debemos/tenemos que] contratar más personal.
       'We need to hire more personnel.'
    c. *Deontic modality*
       [Necesitas/debes/tienes que] tener un permiso para entrar.
       'You need to have a permit to enter.'
    d. *Epistemic modality*
       Si se ve como un pato y camina como un pato,
       [*necesita/debe/tiene que] ser un pato.
       'If it looks like a duck and walks like a duck, it must be a duck.'

First, it is observed that *deber* and *tener que* are odd when used to designate participant-internal modality. In (6a), the interpretation obtained is rather that of deontic necessity, i.e., the need to sleep is due to a self-imposed rule of the speaker.

Secondly, (6d) demonstrates that *ocupar* cannot express epistemic necessity. However, if the antecedent is removed (i.e., the *if-clause*), a different interpretation might be forced[3].

Having briefly reviewed how verbs of need and necessity work in Spanish, let us now look at the syntactic distribution of *ocupar*.

4. An empirical study on the frequency of necessity-denoting *ocupar* in Mexican Spanish

Given that [[ocupar]]$_{need/modal}$ occur mostly in oral speech and colloquial registers, the data for this study was taken from social media (Twitter). On top of the similarities in terms of register between social media text and colloquial oral speech, it was also selected since

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[3] For instance, *Juan necesita ser un pato* ('Juan needs to be a duck.') would exhibit either a participant-internal or external type of necessity. In the former case, it could be due to a strong desire of Juan to be (or, more likely, dress up like) a duck. In the later, it would be imposed by an external agent; for instance, if he works as an entertainer and is required to dress up as a duck (and only as a duck).

it allows for an unobtrusive analysis at the level of social interactions (Androutsopoulos 2006; Salganik 2017).

Tweets containing an instance of the lemma *ocupar* (excluding *ocupado/a*) were scraped and classified according to the type of complement taken by the verb (either an NP or VP/CP). The tweets were fetched using a Python script based on the library Tweepy during August of 2020.

To determine whether the use of *ocupar* varies across Mexican dialects, geo-localized tweets posted from three selected areas were considered. These areas were centered around Guadalajara, Mexico City, and Monterrey, delimited by a 40km radius, hence roughly comprising the metropolitan areas of these cities.

It is important to note, however, that the findings drawn from the data cannot be applied to their varieties of Spanish (dialects) spoken in the selected areas, as it is not possible to determine whether the users posting from a certain city are indeed locals or simply happen to be there at the time. In any case, the quantitative differences observed in the use of *ocupar* shall serve as a starting point for further studies.

With respect to items selecting a NP complement, further annotation to determine the meaning of *ocupar* was performed. Items were classified into one of the following six meanings. All meanings except for number 5 –which is only contained in the DA– are listed in the *Diccionario del español de México*.

1. To occupy a space (e.g., ocupa mucho espacio 'it occupies a lot of space').
2. To have a job or hold an office (e.g., ocupan una posición importante en la compañía 'they hold an important position in the company').
3. To give someone a task or to employ (e.g., las obras públicas ocupan a mucha gente 'public works employ many people').
4. To deal with something (pronominal verb, e.g., ocuparse de un problema 'to deal with a problem').
5. To use (e.g., ocupo el teléfono todo el día 'I use the phone all day').
6. To need (e.g., ocupo ayuda 'I need help').

Items containing an instance of *ocupar* with a VP or CP as complement were labeled as modal verbs i.e., [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$. These were not annotated for the type of modality expressed, as this is in most cases difficult to determine. Nonetheless, below I provide examples for each of the types of modality that the verb can convey.

Lastly, instances in which the meaning of the verb could not be determined for whatever reason were assigned to a separate category labeled as "ambiguous". An exception was made for those items where *ocupar* was ambiguous between [[ocupar]]$_{use}$ and [[ocupar]]$_{need}$, as these are both novel meanings and, moreover, as I will claim in the next section, the latter came from the former.

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of the meanings of *ocupar*.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of the meanings of *ocupar* across three cities in Mexico

Meaning	Comp	Guadalajara N		Mexico City N		Monterrey N	
Spatial occupation	NP	74 (14,2%)		498 (26,49%)		135 (6,62%)	
Work position (e.g., an office)	NP	57 (10,94%)		236 (12,55%)		43 (2,31%)	
Occupation (*ocupar a*)	NP	11 (2,11%)		34 (1,81%)		7 (0,34%)	
	VP/CP	0		0		1 (0,05%)	
Occupation (*ocuparse de*)	NP	28 (5,37%)		122 (6,49%)		47 (2,3%)	
	VP/CP	0		2 (0,11%)		2 (0,1%)	
Use	NP	16 (3,07%)		283 (9,73%)		17 (1,28%)	
Ambig. Use/Need	NP	18 (3,45%)		74 (3,94%)		38 (1,86%)	
Need	NP	188 (36,08%)		366 (19,47%)		1250 (61,06%)	
Necessity/Modal	VP/CP	51 (9,79%)	48,56%	88 (4,68%)	26,65%	382 (18,66%)	80,6%
	?4	4 (0,77%)		47 (2,5%)		18 (0,88%)	
Ambiguous		92		204		129	
Total		**521**		**1880**		**2047**	

It is noted that the proportion of "traditional" meanings varies considerably among cities. Both the spatial- and work-related meanings are used more often in Mexico City, followed by Guadalajara, and then Monterrey in a distant third place.

In Mexico City, [[ocupar]]$_{space/m\text{-}space}$ comprise almost 40% of all the instances of the verb, down to 25% in Guadalajara, and only 9% in Monterrey.

Surprisingly, work-related meanings make up less than 10% of the data in all three cities. However, here too the data from Monterrey exhibits by far the lowest frequency (>3%), compared to Mexico City (8%) and Guadalajara (7%).

Likewise, the frequency of [[ocupar]]$_{need}$ and [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$ varies considerably among the selected areas. Yet, in this case, an inverted ordering appears, with Monterrey having the highest use of both [[ocupar]]$_{need}$ and [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$. Altogether, need and necessity meanings make up 80% of the instances of the verb in this city.

Lastly, it is observed that [[ocupar]]$_{need}$ is more frequent than [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$ in all three cities.

These findings agree with Tovilla-Loza (2021), who reported a greater use of *ocupar* as *necesitar* in Monterrey (compared to Mexico City), and with NP complements over sentential complements.

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[4] This class contains items that consist of *ocupar* followed by a hyperlink leading to a website or a picture. In these cases, the speaker intends to convey that whatever is contained in those hyperlinks is needed (e.g., *¿ocupas HYPERLINK?*). However, it is impossible to determine whether these expressions are to be interpreted as denoting need, i.e., *ocupo esto* 'I need this' ([[ocupar]]$_{need}$) or necessity, i.e., *ocupo tener esto* 'I need to have this' ([[ocupar]]$_{modal}$).

A qualitative analysis of the data reveals that *ocupar* follows a similar distribution to that of *necesitar*, i.e., it allows both nominal and sentential complements, exhibiting both need and necessity, respectively. As a modal verb, it can express participant-internal, participant-external, and deontic necessity, but not epistemic necessity, just like *necesitar*. Syntactically, it is a semiauxiliary verb. This is shown in (7).

(7)
  a. *Participant-internal necessity (Twitter – Guadalajara-based user)*
     @USER [¿]cómo creer en alguien que **ocupa** leer su disculpa y aparte ni leer sabe[?].
     '@USER How to believe in someone who **needs** to read his/her apology and, on top on that, can't even read?'
     [Twitter, Gaualajara-based user]
  b. *Participant-external necessity (Twitter – Guadalajara-based user)*
     @USER[,] te estás viendo muy miserable, lo cual no me extrañaría, **ocupas** echarle más ganitas.[5]
     '@USER[,] you are becoming very despicable, which wouldn't surprise me, you **need** to work harder.'
  c. *Deontic necessity (Twitter – Monterrey-based user)*
     Para la restitución de lo robado **se ocupa** que se proceda legalmente, esto no está pasando y probablemente no va a pasar.[6]
     'To restitute what was stolen, **it is necessary** to proceed legally; this is not happening, and it will probably not happen.'
  d. *Epistemic necessity*
     Si se ve como un pato y camina como un pato, *[7]**ocupa** ser un pato.
     'If it looks like a duck and walks like a duck, it needs (lit. 'occupies') to be a duck'

Despite these similarities, some data seem to suggest that the meanings of *necesitar* and *ocupar* are not always the same, as illustrated by the examples in (8). At first glance, the contrast appears to be related to the degree of necessity. However, it is unclear whether *necesitar* expresses a stronger necessity than *ocupar* or vice versa. In (8a), the speaker seems to be attenuating the need for gifts by using *necesitar,* which *ocupar* apparently exceeds. In (8b), in turn, it is difficult to tell whether the order of the verbs corresponds to an ascending scale. If that were the case, it would suggest that *necesitar* is stronger than *ocupar*. Alternatively, these verbs could simply be synonyms. In any event, more data is needed to provide a more complete analysis.

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[5] In this example, the speaker establishes that it is necessary for the subject (@*USER*) to work harder in order to stop being a despicable person.

[6] The restitution of what has been stolen is ordered by the law. Therefore, it is an instance of deontic necessity.

[7] As *ocupar* cannot express epistemic necessity, and therefore no example could be retrieved form the data, (8) is reproduced.

(8)
    Twitter – Mexico City-based user
    a. Era fuera de lugar[;] somos un equipo grande que no **necesita**[…] bueno, sí
        necesitamos[,] pero no **ocupamos** regalos.
        'It was offside; we are a big team that doesn't **need** […] okay, we do need, but
        we don't **need**(?) gifts.'
    Twitter – Monterrey-based user
    b. Quiero[,] **ocupo**[,] **necesito**.
        'I want, I **need**, I **need**(?).'

In sum, it is evident that both [[ocupar]]$_{need}$ and [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$ are productive in Mexican Spanish. Having looked at the distribution of *ocupar*, let us now explore the origin of these novel meanings.

5. The grammaticalization of *ocupar*

Grammaticalization is defined as the process by which the lexical semantic features of a word –in this case, a verb– are replaced by grammatical functions, such as tense, mood, modality, or aspect (Bybee et al. 1994; Traugott, 2011).

As *ocupar* in Mexican Spanish has acquired the function of a modal semiauxiliary verb, it can be regarded as a case of grammaticalization underway.

The hypothesis that I will present here is that [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$ is the product of the ongoing grammaticalization of [[ocupar]]$_{need}$, which in turn derives from [[ocupar]]$_{use}$.

As mentioned earlier, the latter meaning is only recognized in the DA, where it is claimed to be found across several dialects in the Americas. [[ocupar]]$_{use}$ behaves syntactically like *usar*, and so it takes only nominal complements. An example is given in (9).

(9) *Twitter – Mexico City-based user*
    Me desespera la gente que **ocupa** su computadora de trabajo como si fuera personal
    […]
    'People who **use** (lit. occupy) their work computer as if it were personal exasperate me.'

This claim raises the question as to how [[ocupar]]$_{use}$ originated in the first place. To answer this, it is necessary to look at the historical meanings of *ocupar*. Before doing so, however, I will outline some relevant theoretical aspects concerning the theory of grammaticalization and semantic change.

The emergence of [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$, being an instance of grammaticalization, constitutes a process of semantic change. According to Dasher & Traugott (2002), semantic change is the result of the conventionalization of an inference made by the hearer carrying a novel interpretation of a word used by the speaker. This inference is, in turn, prompted by the speaker. The conventionalization of the inference then gives rise to a new generalized meaning.

Eckardt (2006, 2011), who adopts a compositional semantics approach to semantic change, regards grammaticalization as a case of Semantic Reanalysis (SR). SR occurs when the compositional meaning a sentence *S*, [[S]], is interpreted in a new way, [[S]]$_{new}$,

forcing hearers to assume that the meaning of one of the components of *S* (for instance, the meaning of the word *ω,* [[ω]]) has changed. This process by which [[ω]]$_{new}$ is inferred can cause a reorganization of the morphosyntax of *ω* or the syntactic pattern in which it occurs. The grammaticalization of the English verb 'go' that culminated in the *Going-to* future periphrasis is an example of semantic reanalysis that led to the syntactic reanalysis of the phrase (2006, p. 35).

SR, furthermore, occurs in specific sentential contexts where the use of the relevant expressions is ambiguous between the former and the novel meanings (Heine 2002; Diewald 2006). Heine (ibid.), following Evans & Wiklins (2000), refers to these contexts as *bridging contexts*, i.e., syntactic contexts were meaning change can occur due to multiple interpretations being functionally equivalent, and adds that they are prompted by metaphoric and metonymic interpretations. This last remark is not shared by other scholars, such as Eckardt, who nonetheless agrees on the role of contextuality in SR, by stating that it is only when confronted with suitable utterances that speakers hypothesize new uses of old words (2006: 1).

Grammaticalization itself is also strongly dependent on the context, according to Heine, as not all the uses of a given verb undergo the semantic change. Thus, it is rather constructions with certain lexical items in them that become grammaticalized and not the lexical items in question themselves (2002; 2003).

I will now outline the path followed by *ocupar* that led to [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$ via semantic reanalysis.

As shown in Section 2, [[ocupar]]$_{space}$ and [[ocupar]]$_{work}$ used to be roughly the two sole meanings of *ocupar* in the XVII and XVIII centuries. Therefore, I will assume that [[ocupar]]$_{use}$ originated from them. I will further presume that the bridging contexts that gave rise to use-denoting *ocupar* ([[ocupar]]$_{use}$) from the older spatial ([[ocupar]]$_{space}$) and work-related ([[ocupar]]$_{work}$) meanings are like those in (10) and (11), respectively.

(10) [[ocupar]]$_{space}$ → [[ocupar]]$_{use}$
  18th Century (CNDHE)
  a. Todas estas cuatro religiones han fabricado magníficos templos en esta ciudad y han tenido y tienen sujetos de mucho lustre, así en lo excelente de las virtudes como en lo apreciado de las letras; con éstas y con aquéllas han **ocupado** los púlpitos, las cátedras y los confesonarios para utilidad de los ciudadanos.
    'All these four religions have built magnificent temples in this city and have had and still have subjects of great luster, both in the excellence of virtues and in the value of letters; with these and those they have occupied the pulpits, the cathedrae and the confessionals for the benefit of the citizens.'
  Twitter – Mexico City-based user
  b. Porque para ese momento estaba tan gordo que **ocupaba** dos [lugares/asientos]
    'Because at that time *pro*$_i$ was so fat that *pro*$_i$ **occupied/used** two [seats].'
  Twitter – Mexico City-based user
  c. Chrome nunca me ha gustado[;] **ocupa** mucha memoria.
    'I've never liked Chrome; it **occupies/uses** a lot of memory.'

(11) [[ocupar]]$_{work}$ → [[ocupar]]$_{use}$

18th Century (CORDE)

a. En la pintura 50 se representa un niño de 4 años a quien **ocupan** sus padres en cosas fáciles para irlo imponiendo al trabajo.
'Painting 50 depicts a 4 year-old child whose parents **employ** (lit. occupy) in easy tasks to get him used to work.'

18th century (CNDHE)

b. Cuando el ingenio **se ocupa** en considerar un objeto, vuela velozmente por todos los entes y objetos criados y posibles del universo […]
'When ingenuity is **occupied (lit.)/used** to consider an object, it flies quickly through all created and possible entities and objects in the universe […]'

Twitter – Mexico City-based user

c. Bueno, al menos a veces **ocupo** mi mente en hacer corajes y no en estar triste.
'Well, at least sometimes I **occupy (lit.)/use** my mind with throwing tantrums instead of being sad.'

The reanalysis in these cases can be framed in terms of a shift involving the semantic role of the complement, going from LOCATION to INSTRUMENT in the (10) and from AGENT to INSTRUMENT in the (11). I will propose, moreover, that contexts like those in (10) had a more prominent role in the development of [[ocupar]]$_{use}$ than those in (11).

(10a) shows a context where, while the meaning of *ocupar* can only refer to a space, the causal adjunct (*para la utilidad de los ciudadanos* 'for the benefit of the citizens') opens the possibility to an interpretation whereby the seat is construed as an INSTRUMENT. The ambiguity can be appreciated more clearly in (10b), where a seat may either be construed as '**where** one sits' or 'something **used** to sit on'. Then, in (10c), the memory storage of a computer can be understood as a space (cf. *memory **space***) or as something that is used to perform computations, leading to this ambiguity.

The second bridging context, observed in (11), involves the shift from AGENT to INSTRUMENT and comprises cases where the meaning of *ocupar* is ambiguous between '**employing** (as in keeping busy) someone or something to perform a task' and '**using** someone or something to perform a task'. More precisely, I will claim that the semantic change originated in concepts where the complement of *ocupar* denotes an inanimate or abstract object, as the ambiguity in these contexts is greater than when the complement denotes a human or living creature. Indeed, instruments are prototypically inanimate (Luján 2010).

The examples in (11) illustrate this point; while it is difficult to construe *un niño de 4 años* ('a 4-year-old child') as an instrument in (11a), *el ingenio* ('ingenuity'), in (11b), can be more readily conceptualized as such. The contemporary example in (11c) is also ambiguous between these two interpretations, as the mind can be construed either as an emotion-processing instrument or as an actor who can be assigned a task.

The relationship among these three semantic roles has been described by Luján (2010). Following a semantic map approach, he shows that INSTRUMENT is located between AGENT and LOCATION in several word formation patterns in different languages, including Spanish (e.g., the nominalizer *-dor*, AGENT: *mata-dor* 'killer' > INSTRUMENT: *destornilla-dor* 'screwdriver' > LOCATION: *come-dor* 'dining room'). Furthermore, he describes various diachronic semantic changes and connecting both AGENT and LOCATION to INSTRUMENT, as well as synchronic context where these the semantic role of the noun in question is

ambiguous among them. An instance of the latter is the class of Spanish nouns formed with *-ero/a*, such as *llavero* ('keyholder') and *cenizero* ('ashtray'), both of which are ambiguous between places and instruments. The semantic change in these cases, he argues, is due to metaphor and metonymy.

Back to *ocupar*, there are some additional contexts where its complement is ambiguous among several meanings. This is the case, for instance, of the construction *ocupar tiempo* '(lit.) to occupy time'. It is difficult to tell whether time is construed as a space, following the TIME IS SPACE metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), as an actor that is employed –like in (11a)– or, instead, or something that is used. An example is shown in (12).

(12) *Twitter – Mexico City-based user*
Te digo que no me preocupo por el tiempo, yo ocupo mi tiempo.
'I'm telling you that I don't worry about time, I occupy (lit.) my time.'

Once the novel [[ocupar]]$_{use}$ became available, [[ocupar]]$_{need}$ arose –through SR– in bridging contexts like those in (13), i.e., where the complement can be construed as something that is used or needed.

(13) [[ocupar]]$_{use}$ → [[ocupar]]$_{need}$
Twitter; Mexico City-based user
a. Una vergüenza, en lugar de abrir debate, exhiban dónde posicionaron laboralmente a quienes **ocupaban** esos triciclos para llevar un alimento a su familia […].
'Such a shame; instead of starting a debate, tell us where those people who **used/needed** those tricycles to feed their families where relocated.'
Twitter; Guadalajara-based user
b. @user madres, voy a tener que sacar mis espadas de la guerra de las galaxias oxidadas e inservibles, parece ser que ahora si (sic) se van a **ocupar**.
'@user, no way! I'll have to take out my rusty and broken Star Wars sabers, it seems they will be **used/needed** this time'.

Lastly, [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$ would have emerged from [[ocupar]]$_{need}$. In this step the scope of the necessity drifted from being limited to entities designated by NPs to whole propositions.

Due to the nature of the grammatical meaning they convey, modal verbs operate over propositions. Let us recall Kiefer's (1994) remark cited above, according to which modality operates on "sentence meanings".

Syntax-based accounts have explained similar cases involving the development of modal verbs in terms of a loss of the thematic grid by the verb (e.g., Roberts 1985). This situation, in conjunction with the emergence of grammatical meaning, leads to auxiliarization, which Kuteva (2001) describes as "a morphosyntactic change whereby the lexical structure *verb-complement* turns into the grammatical structure *grammatical marker-main verb*." (p. 1). It must be recalled, however, that *ocupar*, like *necesitar*, while expressing necessity, are not auxiliary verbs, but semiauxiliaries.

The step involving the shift from need to necessity is perhaps the least controversial one, as it is a semantic change commonly observed across languages (Bybee et al. 1994). An

analogue case can be found in Italian, viz. the semantic reanalysis of need-denoting *bisogna* as a necessity modal (Guerón 2000).

Figure 1, part of van der Auwera & Plungian's (1998) semantic map of modality, presents some of the most common paths leading to necessity and beyond. It is observed that need leads to participant-internal necessity, which in turn leads to participant-external necessity and deontic necessity. From there, epistemic necessity or post-modal meanings may arise.
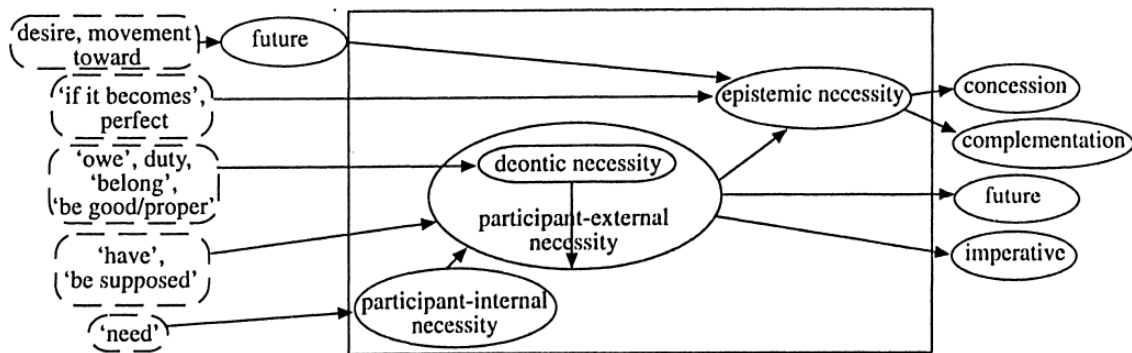

Figure 1: Van der Auwera & Plungian's (1998: 96) semantic map of necessity.

I have so far outlined the path of semantic changed that lead to [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$. I would now like to clarify some of the points made, seeking to justify the role of [[ocupar]]$_{need}$ as an intermediate step between [[ocupar]]$_{usar}$ and [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$.

I will argue that [[ocupar]]$_{usar}$, like *usar*, carries a POSSESSION seme in the contexts so far discussed, as the use of an instrument is extensionally equivalent to (temporarily) possessing it. This claim is supported by one of the definitions of *ocupar* provided by the *Diccionario de autoridades*, i.e., 'taking **possession** or seizing something'.

The shift from [[ocupar]]$_{use}$ to [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$ could be ultimately described as a change along the well-known POSSESSION to OBLIGATION path (Heine & Kuteva 2002: 243-245). A clear instance of grammaticalization via this path in Spanish is the case of *tener* ('to have') whose original meaning denoting HOLD shifted to POSSESSION and then to OBLIGATION and other types of necessity. *Ocupar*, however, shows some important differences with respect to *tener*.

As seen in Section 3, however, *tener*, when used as a modal verb, can express other types of necessity, but not participant-internal necessity. In contrast, *ocupar*, as well as *necesitar*, can denote both need and necessity. These two verbs can moreover express all types of necessity but epistemic. These distributions agree with the model in Figure 1, which shows that participant-external necessity cannot evolve into participant-internal necessity. This model also accounts for the situation of the modal verb *deber* ('to owe'), as OWE evolves directly into deontic necessity. From there the modal meaning can be extended to participant-external and epistemic, but not to participant-internal necessity.

Furthermore, the data presented in Section 4 shows that [[ocupar]]$_{need}$ is far more frequent than [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$. Given that both meanings are fairly recent, this distribution seems to suggest that the latter appeared after the former.

Naturally, as in other instances of grammaticalization, previous meanings remain (e.g., the modalization of *deber* and *tener* did not get rid of their pre-modal meanings). Hence, [[ocupar]]$_{need}$ and [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$ coexist, along with other previous meanings, such as [[ocupar]]$_{use}$ and [[ocupar]]$_{space}$.

To summarize, I hypothesize that [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$ is the result of the ongoing grammaticalization of [[ocupar]]$_{need}$, which, in turn, seems to have developed from [[ocupar]]$_{use}$ via semantic reanalysis, which, likewise, emerged from [[ocupar]]$_{space}$ and [[ocupar]]$_{work}$. An in-depth diachronic study of the use of *ocupar* in Mexican Spanish is needed to confirm this claim.

6. Conclusion

I have presented a description of *ocupar* to express need and necessity in Mexican Spanish. These novel meanings coexist with other older meanings.

To support this description, I have provided data from a Twitter-based study that reveals that [[ocupar]]$_{need}$ and [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$ are productive throughout Mexico, although to varying extents. The data from Monterrey showed the highest frequency of these novel meanings, accounting for over 80% of all the instances of *ocupar*; at the same time, data from this region had the lowest frequency of "traditional" meanings. Furthermore, [[ocupar]]$_{need}$ was more frequent than [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$ in the three regions studied. These findings agree with a recent study on the topic (Tovilla-Loza 2021).

As to the origin of this meaning, I have proposed that [[ocupar]]$_{need}$ arose from [[ocupar]]$_{use}$, which in turn was derived from [[ocupar]]$_{space}$ and [[ocupar]]$_{work}$. In either case the new meanings were the result of semantic reanalysis. [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$, for its part, can be regarded as the result of the grammaticalization of [[ocupar]]$_{need}$.

Further research should look at the historic distribution of the meanings of *ocupar* through time, in order to support or dismiss the hypothesis as to the development of [[ocupar]]$_{modal}$ through semantic reanalysis. On a different note, research could be directed at looking at the contexts where *ocupar* is preferred over *necesitar* and viceversa in Mexican Spanish, as well as the types of necessity that both verbs tend to express.

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