

## A Pragmatic Analysis of the Request Speech Acts: Expression to the Characters in *Office Space* Movie

**Muhammad Junaid,**

Affiliation: The University of Lahore

**Meesam Ali**

Affiliation: The University of Lahore

**Mudasir Tariq (Corresponding author)**

Affiliation: The University of Lahore

**Faiza Latif**

Affiliation: The University of Lahore

### Abstract

*This research is a pragmatic study that focuses on the analysis of speech acts of requests as shown in the film Office Space. The study aims to analyze the different types of requests and to determine the request methods used by the characters in the film. This is a descriptive qualitative study in which data has been interpreted and analyzed through visual analysis. The data is in the form of lingual units and conversations with voice acts of requests. The data comes from the movie Office Space and its script. The researcher is the primary instrument in this study, while the datasheet is the secondary instrument. The study offers two findings. First, the characters in Office Space employ four kinds of requests. There are four types of requests: unconventionally indirect, traditionally indirect (hearer-oriented), conventionally indirect (speaker-oriented), and direct. In terms of request kinds, the characters in Office Space typically employ normally indirect requests (hearer-based conditions) since the hearer has power over whether or not he/she would comply with the request. Second, the characters in Office Space apply seven techniques. They are giving hints, questioning the hearer's ability and willingness, giving suggestions, giving statements of the speaker's wishes and desires, giving statements of the speaker's needs and demands, giving assertions of responsibility and necessity, as well as imperatives.*

**Keywords:** Pragmatics, Speech act, Request, Suggestions, Imperatives

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Human beings and language are intimately connected in society (Ramzan et al., 2023). People, having been created as social beings, require a language to communicate and form relationships with one another through social interaction (Akram & Li, 2024). Language becomes the major mode of communication in this interaction (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022). They share their views, show their excitement and grief, make jokes with others, and convey information, demand someone to do something, influence someone, and so on through utilizing language (Ramzan et al., 2023).

A language, according to Taylor and Martin, is a system of signs used to communicate messages. People transmit their thoughts from one person to another via speaking words, either spoken or written (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023; Ramzan et al., 2023). As a result, language becomes a crucial aspect of daily communication as a means of transmitting and receiving meaning (Taylor & Martin, 1990). In other words, language becomes a medium of communication since it is required to form positive relationships with others (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024; Ramzan & Alahmadi, 2024). As a result, if individuals wish to prevent misunderstanding, they should understand the meaning of the words they use in verbal conversation.

The misinterpretation. "It's good to drink a cup of coffee," a speaker may say. Based on the context, the speaker wishes for someone to prepare a cup of coffee or to extend an invitation in this line. People not only say things to attain their goals, but they also include an action in their utterances.

As a result, speech acts and discourse cannot be separated. Speech acts, as defined by Austin via Cutting, are the activities taken while stating anything. According to him, the action taken when

producing an utterance may be evaluated on three separate levels. There are three types of locutionary acts: illocutionary acts, perlocutionary acts, and locutionary acts. More precise categories for speech acts include apology, complaint, compliment, invitation, promise, and request (Cutting, 2002, p.16). A request is a word or action in which the addressee is asked to do something for the hearer. According to Trosborg, a request is an illocutionary act in which a speaker (requester) expresses to a hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the requestee to execute an act that is highly advantageous to him/her. The act can be a request for nonverbal activity, such as goods and services, or a request for an item, an action, or some type of service, such as information. A request is considered more polite than an order since it is perceived as requesting someone to do something rather than commanding someone to do something (Trosborg, 1995, p.187). People constantly make requests in their daily lives, indicating that they require the assistance of others. People frequently make requests to other people, both directly and indirectly, such as asking for help, permission, or direction. In this situation, people must employ specific techniques to successfully send their request to their addressee. Speech acts are a phenomenon that occurs not only in real life but also in movies since they are a representation of human existence. The conversations of the characters mirror human communication, which comprises of speaking acts. They use speech actions in their utterances to achieve their goals, such as when the characters ask someone to do something or convey their feelings. Rather of performing a field investigation, the researcher picks a movie as the source of data for his research. Furthermore, because a movie is a reflection of human existence, the researcher believes it is ethical to utilize a movie as a source of data. The film *Office Space* was chosen as the subject of the study since it resembles a natural society. Furthermore, the characters in *Office Space* regularly employ the speech act of request in their discussions, allowing the utterances to be easily examined. As a result, it can serve as a good illustration of the occurrence of a request speech act in society.

### 1.2. Statement of the Problem

The context of the statements is the first problem. Context refers to the physical or social setting of a remark, providing background knowledge for understanding the speaker's meaning. To obtain a clear understanding of the speaker's utterances, the listener must be aware of the context of the conversation, which reduces the chance of misinterpretation. This background helps the listener in understanding the implicit meaning of the speaker's statements. The second issue is the use of language to carry out an activity or a speech act. A speaker's utterance is utilized to accomplish certain goals. A speaker often employs a variety of speech acts to achieve certain goals. When a speaker makes utterances, he or she also engages in an activity that comprises of three connected speech acts. There are three types: illocutionary acts, perlocutionary acts, and locutionary acts. Furthermore, speech acts execute five sorts of general roles, which are classified as declarations, representations, expressive, directions, and commissions. The third problem is the request itself. Request, according to Searle via Leech is a directive speech act that is meant to generate some result through action by the hearer (Leech, 1983, p.106). Trosborg distinguishes four sorts of requests: unconventionally indirect, conventionally indirect (hearer-oriented condition), conventionally indirect (speaker-oriented condition), and direct. The final problem is dealing with request-making techniques. If the speaker wants to successfully communicate their demands to the listener, they must use the strategies (Trosborg, 1995, p.192). Trosborg recommends eight strategies based on the degree of imposition on the listener. Hints, questions about the hearer's competence and willingness, suggestive formulas, statements of the speaker's want and demands, declarations of the speaker's need and demands, statements of obligations and necessities, performatives and imperatives are some of the methods (Trosborg, 1995, p.195).

### 1.3. Research Objectives

- To describe the types of requests uttered by the characters in *Office Space*, and

- To explain the strategies applied by the characters in *Office Space* when making a request.

#### 1.4. Research Questions

- What are the types of requests uttered by the characters in *Office Space*?
- What are the strategies applied by the characters in *Office Space* when making a request?

## 2. Literature Review

Language is utilized in everyday life to communicate with one another. To understand people's intentions, he/she cannot only depend on the structure of language but he/she should deal with the context (Ahmad et al., 2022). Yule writes that pragmatics is a study of contextual meaning which requires deciphering what people mean in a certain situation and how the context influences what they say. (Yule, 1996, p.3). Pragmatically, an action that is done through language can be studied under the label of speech act. Yule uses the term speech act to refer to the actions, which are performed via utterances (Yule, 1996, p.47). For example, when a boss says, "You are fired!" his/her words constitute the act of firing an employee. In this example, the boss is performing an act via utterance. It means that words can change someone's status (Mey, 1994).

One can perform three speech acts simultaneously such as locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act (Ramzan et al., 2020). Locutionary act has to do with the utterance of a sentence which determines sense and reference (Amjad et al., 2021). Illocutionary act deals with the naming of statements, offers, promises, etc. Then, the perlocutionary act deals with the bringing about of effects on the audience by uttering the sentence (Levinson, 1983).

Levinson's proposal is also consistent with Griffith. Griffith states that speech act does not refer simply to the act of speaking but to the whole communicative situation, including the context of the utterance (including the situation in which the discourse occurs, the participants, and any preceding verbal or physical interaction) and paralinguistic features which may contribute to the meaning of the interaction (Griffith, 2006). Austin via Cutting argues that felicity conditions are the context and roles of participants, which must be recognized by all parties (Cutting, 2002).

Some scholars did study on the spoken act of requesting. One of the previous research projects was "*Effects of Culture and Gender in Comprehension of Speech Acts of Indirect Request*" by Rabe'a Shams and Akbar Afghari. The research had an objective to analyze the comprehension of indirect request speech acts used by Iranian people in daily communication. The result shows that the participants in the research try to use indirect requests rather than direct forms (regardless of culture). It is because people tend to choose indirect forms over direct ones to show politeness since being direct is face-threatening (Shams & Afghari, 2011). Another study related to the research was "*A Pragmatic Analysis of the Speech Act on Request Used by the Main Character in The Pursuit of Happiness*" by Nina Sulistyowati. She investigated the types of requests and strategies of requests based on Trosborg's theory and responded to request based on Tsui's theory. The result shows that there are four types of requests by the main character in *The Pursuit of Happiness*. There are four types of requests: unconventionally indirect, traditionally indirect (hearing-based), conventionally indirect (speaker-based), and direct. Furthermore, the character in the film uses seven different request tactics. In addition, there are seven strategies of request employed by the character in the movie. They are hints, questioning the hearer's ability or willingness, suggester formulae, statements of the speaker's need and demands, statements of obligation, and the imperative. Besides, there are three kinds of responses to requests

uttered by the main character in the movie. They are positive responding act to request, negative responding act to request, and temporization (Sulistyowati, 2012). This study focuses on the speech act of request found in *Office Space* movie. Trosborg's theory of request is used to classify the data and determine the sorts of requests and techniques for making them.

## 2.1. Requests

Interlocutors choose utterances in their interactions due to the complexity of interpersonal relationships, meaning, and social stakes. As a result, requesting has been the focus of numerous speech act studies. Request, according to Bach and Harnish, is a speech act that is used to express the speaker's desire so that the hearer does what the speaker wants (Bach & Harnish, 1984). According to Trosborg, a request is an illocutionary act in which a speaker (requester) conveys to the hearer (requestee) that he/she wants the hearer to perform a certain act that is beneficial to the speaker (Trosborg, 1995). To give a clearer explanation, Trosborg defines positive speech acts in the following way. Positive speech acts are described as speech acts performed by the speaker to influence the intentional behavior of the hearer in order to get the latter to perform, primarily for the benefit of the speaker, the action directly specified or indirectly suggested by the proposition (Trosborg, 1995).

According to Searle via Trosborg, the relative standing of the speaker and hearer is a crucial factor in fulfilling a request successfully. Lack of authority can invalidate commands, and if the speaker asks the hearer to undertake an act that is plainly their duty, the speech act may be flawed. (Trosborg, 1995).

### The Types of Requests

Requests can be divided into several types. Some scholars have their types of requests. Sometimes, they name the same kind of request differently. For more explanation, here are some scholars with their types of requests. The first is proposed by Zhang who divides request into direct request and indirect request (Zhang, 1995).

#### Direct Requests

A direct request is often perceived as being aggressive and demanding and Personal pronouns like "I.." or "You ..." are commonly used before verbs that express the speaker's wish or desire such as "like", "want", and other verbs of action like "give", "take" and "make."

For example, "I want my apple." In this example, the speaker declares that he/she asks the hearer to get his/her apple.

#### Indirect Request

The person is implicitly requesting others. Someone who makes a request indirectly is perceived to be diplomatic and courteous. He or she is also regarded more favorably than someone who makes a straightforward request. Indirectness demonstrates respect, civility, and good breeding; for example, "This place is quite hot." By stating this, the speaker implies that the hearer should switch on the air conditioner.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

The research was categorized as descriptive qualitative research. Qualitative research refers to research that produces descriptive data. It deals with the possibilities to solve the problem by collecting, classifying, analyzing, and interpreting data. According to Bodgan and Taylor, human being's written or spoken words and their observable behaviors are the example of descriptive data (Bodgan & Taylor, 1993). Furthermore, Moleong says that descriptive research is concerns with providing descriptions of the phenomena which occur naturally with the invention of an experiment or an artificially contrived treatment. It requires as many data as possible to get the pattern (Moleong, 2001). Finally, this research

aimed at describing the types of requests expressed by the characters in *Office Space*, and figured out the strategies of making requests spoken by the characters in *Office Space*.

### 3.2. Data Collection

The researcher collected documents to do an in-depth learning process and interpretation from the researcher. This method of data collection was visual analysis. Vanderstoep and Johnston define visual analysis as a way for interpreting data from media such as TV shows and movies (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). This study used visual analysis, with the researcher observing the language behavior of the characters in *Office Space*. The methods of data collecting techniques were as follows:

1. Using the movie as the main source of data.
2. Using [www.imsdb.com/scripts/Office-Space.html](http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/Office-Space.html) to get the script as a secondary data source.
3. Verifying the correctness of the movie and screenplay for simple analysis.
4. Identifying a movie scenario based on the screenplay aligning with goals of study.

### 4. Analysis and Discussion

Bodgan and Biklen state that data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging accumulated materials to increase the researcher's understanding and to enable the researcher to present what has been found to others (Bodgan & Biklen, 1982). Firstly, after the data were collected, they were categorized. The data that have been collected would be transferred into a categorization system. The data was used to categorize the types of requests and the strategies for making requests. Secondly, the data were classified based on the classification of the two objectives of the study through the characters' dialogues in the transcript of the movie. Thirdly, the request phenomena uttered by the characters in the movie were interpreted to answer the formulation of the problem.

A request is an illocutionary act whereby a speaker conveys to a hearer that he/she wants the hearer to perform an act that is for the benefit of the speaker (Trosborg, 1995). The phenomenon of requests occurs in *Office Space*. The initial goal of this study is to determine the sorts of requests in the characters' discussions. Thus, the identification and analysis are demonstrated in this chapter. The four categories of requests presented by Trosborg appear in this film. There are four types of requests: unconventionally indirect, traditionally indirect (hearer-oriented), conventionally indirect (speaker-oriented), and direct request.

Dialogues from the *OFFICE SPACE* movie for analysis.

#### 4.1. Direct Requests:

“Won’t you get fired?”

- The speaker is directly asking about the potential consequence of the hearer’s action (not going somewhere).

“Can we order lunch first?”

- The speaker directly requests to prioritize ordering lunch before proceeding with other activities.

“Hey, Milton, what’s happening?”



- The speaker directly asks about Milton's current situation or state.

### **Conventionally Indirect Requests (Hearer-oriented condition)**

“So, where do you work, uh, Peter?”

The speaker indirectly asks about Peter's workplace.

“And, uh, what do you do there, Peter?”

The speaker inquires about Peter's job indirectly.

“What's that?”

A polite way to ask for clarification or information.

“You're just not gonna go?”

The speaker expresses surprise and indirectly questions the decision.

“Won't you get fired?”

The speaker considers the hearer's potential consequences.

“So, you're gonna quit?”

Indirectly questioning the hearer's intention to quit.

“So, what do you want to do?”

A gentle way to ask about the hearer's preferences.

“Can we order lunch first?”

The speaker suggests a sequence of actions.

“What are pieces of flair?”

Indirectly seeking an explanation or definition.

“Is today the worst day of your life?”

Acknowledging the hearer's emotions.

“Hey, she hasn't been over here in a while. You two still going out?”

Inquiring about the hearer's relationship status.

“We still going fishing this weekend?”

Checking the hearer’s plans.

“Besides two chicks at the same time?”

Playfully discussing hypothetical scenarios.

“NOW, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?”

Emphasizing the hearer’s decision-making.

“What if we’re still doing this when we’re 50?”

**Unconventionally Indirect Requests:**

1. “I was wondering if you could help me move this heavy box.”
2. “Is there any chance you could pick up some groceries on your way home?”
3. “Might I ask for your assistance with this technical issue?”
4. “If it’s not too much trouble, could you proofread my essay?”
5. “I hope you don’t mind, but could we reschedule our meeting?”
6. “I’d appreciate it if you could forward that email to me.”
7. “May I trouble you for a cup of coffee?”
8. “Could you let me know when you have a moment?”

**Conventional Direct Requests (Speaker-Oriented Condition):**

1. “I want to take you out for dinner and then I wanna go to my apartment and watch KungFu. Did you ever watch Kung Fu?”
  - The speaker directly expresses their desire to take the hearer out for dinner and watch a specific show afterward. The condition is based on the speaker’s preference.
2. “Can we order lunch first?”
  - The speaker directly asks if they can prioritize ordering lunch before proceeding with other activities. The condition is related to the timing of lunch.
3. “What if we’re still doing this when we’re 50?”
  - The speaker poses a hypothetical scenario, expressing concern about a long-term situation. The condition is based on the speaker’s age-related apprehension.
4. “That’s it? If you had a million dollars, that’s what you’d do, two chicks at the same time?”
  - The speaker questions the hearer’s choice if they were wealthy. The condition is related to the hypothetical wealth.
5. “NOW, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?”

- The speaker emphasizes the hearer’s decision-making by using capital letters. The condition prompts the hearer to consider their options.
6. “Besides two chicks at the same time?”
- The speaker playfully discusses another hypothetical scenario. The condition is related to the hearer’s preferences.
7. “Is today the worst day of your life?”
- The speaker directly asks about the hearer’s emotional state. The condition is based on the events of the day.

Meanwhile, there are seven strategies for making request occur in *Office Space*’s script.

They include hints, questioning the hearer’s ability and willingness, suggester formulae, statements of the speaker’s wishes and desires, statements of the speaker’s needs and demands, statements of obligations and necessities, and imperatives. Most of the strategies of requesting according to Trosborg are found in this film. The occurrence of the types and strategies of request in *Office Space* is presented in Table 3 in the following table.

Table 3. Types and Strategies of Request Employed by the Characters in *Office Space*

Requests	Type of Request									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Indirect Request										
Indirect Request (Heard)										
Indirect Request (Based on Condition)										
Direct Request										



AGE (%)														
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**Note:**

Conventionally Indirect Request

Conventionally Indirect Request (Speaker-Based)

Conventionally Indirect Request (Hearer-Based)

Regarding Hearer's Ability of Willingness

Request Formulae

of Speaker's Wishes and Desires

of Speaker's Needs and Demands

Ob : Statements Obligations and Necessities

Pf : Performatives

Im : Imperatives

Based on the Table above, the most prominent one is the employment of conventionally indirect request (hearer-based condition). It occurs 18 times out of the total of 38 data. In other words, out of the total 100%, its percentage is 47.37%. Since his/her hearer is in the position of controlling whether he/she will comply with the request or not, the characters employ this type of request by using modal verbs like *can*, *could*, and *will* in the form of a question to exhibit a protective orientation toward his/her face that he/she does not take compliance for granted.

The second prominent types of requests are unconventionally indirect requests and conventionally indirect requests (speaker-based condition). They occur 6 times out of 38 data with a percentage of 18.42% out of 100%. The characters employ unconventionally indirect requests because he/she tries to imply to his/her hearer what he/she wants without formulating the request directly in his/her utterances. Following an unconventionally indirect request, there is conventionally indirect requests (speaker-based). The characters choose to focus on speaker-based conditions by formulating *wants statements* in their request because they want their requests more

directly in demand.

Finally, in the last rank, there is a direct request. It occurs 6 times with a percentage of 15.79%. The reason is that saying a direct request is not effective in requesting for the hearer to comply with the desired act. The characters request with direct requests because He/she want to express his/her goal openly using performative verbs and imperative sentences. The characters adopt this kind when the hearer's acquiescence is expected since the favor requested is typically not imposed harshly.

To the strategies of making the request, it can be seen that questioning the hearer's ability and willingness become the most dominant form with 15 (39.47%) out of 38 utterances. The reason is that the characters often make their request indirectly in the form of questions since the requirement of this method relates to the hearer's ability to do the intended action. By expressing a question as a request, the characters demonstrate that they are not assuming that their expectations will be met. Hints appear in the second position, accounting for 7 (18.42%) of the 38 utterances. This method involves hiding the speaker's desire and not outright mentioning it in their utterances. The speaker's statement or inquiry conveys their desired outcome to the listener.

The third position is placed by statements of the speaker's needs and demands. In *Office Space's* script, there are 6 (15.79%) out of 38 expressions of this strategy employed by the characters. The speaker states his or her request with this strategy because he/she wants to make his/her request more demanding by placing his/her interest above his or her hearers. Meanwhile, suggester formulae, statements of obligations and necessities, and imperatives share the fourth place with 3 (7.9%) out of 38 expressions. By employing suggester formulae, the speaker puts his/her request in the form of suggestion (e.g. *How about and Why don't you*) since the requirement of this method relates to the hearer's ability to do the intended action. Next, the speaker makes his/her request with statements of obligations and necessities because he/she is in the situation in which the request is refused. The characters who employ imperatives are less polite and direct.

As for the fifth position, there are statements of the speaker's wishes and desires. In *Office Space's* script, there is 1 (2.63%) out of 38 expressions employed by the characters. In this strategy, the requester's desire is the central. The speaker often uses a courteous approach to communicate their request, ensuring that the listener does not feel forced to obey. Performatives are ranked last since the characters do not use them. Characters are unlikely to employ this method due to their forceful and straightforward demeanor.

## 5. Conclusion

There are four types of requests uttered by the characters in *Office Space*. They are unconventionally indirect request, conventionally indirect request (hearer-oriented condition), conventionally indirect request (speaker-oriented condition), and direct request. There are 38 data that show the types of requests occurring in the movie. Based on the finding of the types of requests, it is shown that conventionally indirect request (hearer-based condition) is dominant. It appears 18 times out of 38 data (47.37%). Conventionally indirect request (speaker-oriented condition) has the highest numbers of occurrences in the type of request. The reason is that a hearer is in the position of controlling whether he/she will comply the request or not. The characters employ this type of request by using modal verbs such as *can* in the form of question to exhibit a protective orientation toward their own faces so that they do not take compliance for granted. Conventionally indirect request (speaker-oriented condition) often occurs in a formal setting between people who have a distant relationship. Therefore, conventionally indirect request (hearer-based condition) has the easiest pattern compared to other types. On the other hand, direct request becomes the lowest rank. The occurrence of this type is 6 data (15.79%). The characters make their request with direct request because they use performative verbs and

imperative sentences to clearly express their objectives in the request. They also use this type when compliance from the hearer is expected because the favor asked usually carries a low degree of imposition. Statements of the speaker's wishes and desires have the lowest numbers of data with 1 (2.63%) out of 38 data. The strategy appears as the lowest occurrence in the movie because it is usually very authoritative and formal. Therefore, it can damage the connection between employees. It can be assumed that this strategy is not effective enough to be the strategy of making a request.

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