Exploring Request Strategies in U.S. Dialogues: A Pragmatic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigates request in everyday American conversations. It tackles the act of request pragmatically. Consequently, it attempts to achieve the following aims : (1) Identifying the various types of requests strategies in American conversation; (2) Finding out the function of request in American conversations. To achieve the aims of this study, it is hypothesised that: (1) individuals in daily American conversations tend to utilise specific types of requests; (2) requests serve different functions in communication. To test the validity of these hypotheses, certain procedures have been followed: (1) Conducting a survey of the relevant literature written about request in American conversations; (2) Clarifying the types and the functions of request in American conversations; (3) Analysing certain texts represented by "Everyday Conversations: Learning American English" using qualitative methods. The findings of this investigation verify the above hypotheses.

Keywords: request, types of requests strategies, functions of request, texts from

استكشاف استراتيجيات الطلب في الحوارات الأمريكية: تحليل تداولي

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الملخص

تبحث الدراسة الحالية عن الطلب في المحادثة الأمريكية اليومية. تتناول الدراسة الحالية فعل الطلب من الجانب التداولي، فهي تحاول تحقيق الأهداف التالية: التعرف على أنواع استراتيجيات الطلب في المحادثات الأمريكية وإظهار وظائف الطلب في المحادثات الأمريكية . لتحقيق أهداف هذه الدراسة ، يُفترض أن في المحادثات الأمريكية اليومية ، يفضل الناس استخدام نوع معين من استراتيجيات الطلب في محادثاتهم وهناك وظائف مختلفة للطلب في المحادثات الامريكية اليومية .

لاختبار صحة هذه الفرضيات، تم اتباع إجراءات معينة: إجراء مسح للأدبيات ذات الصلة المكتوبة حول الطلب في اللغة، وتوضيح أنواع ووظائف الطلب في المحادثات الأمريكية، وتحليل نصوص معينة تمثلها محادثات أمريكية يومية مأخوذة من كتاب (المحادثات اليومية: تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية الأمريكية) باستخدام الطريقة النوعية.

تؤكد نتائج هذه الدراسة الفرضيات المذكورة أعلاه وتؤكد على أهمية دراسة الطلب في الحوار بين الاشخاص .

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطلب، انواع استراتيجيات الطلب، وظائف الطلب، نصوص من المحادثات الأمريكية، اليومية.

Introduction

A request is a type of speaking act or communication that someone uses to ask someone else to do something or give them something during a conversation.   It functions as a means of requesting assistance, information, or action from another person.   Interpersonal communication requires the use of requests, which can vary in formality and tone according on the circumstances and the parties involved.

Requests can take many various forms, depending on the situation and cultural norms. Depending on the parties' interpersonal interactions and communication styles,   they could be direct or indirect, explicit or implicit .   Successful requests must include politeness, clarity , and concern for the other person's capacity and willingness to cooperate.

Even though the concept of requests is well-known in linguistics, more research is still needed to fully understand their types and functions from a pragmatic perspective.

1.1 Problem

Since it enables the expression of needs, wants, and intentions, asking is a fundamental component of daily communication. Understanding the different types of request strategies and their functions in American conversations is essential for creating natural language processing tools and language learning materials, as well as for effective cross-cultural communication. Nevertheless, despite its significance, there is a dearth of comprehensive studies on the types of request strategies and functions utilised in American conversations . By analysing various types of request strategies and their functions in American conversations , the current study seeks to close this gap.

1.2 Research Objectives

The present study aims to:

1. Identify the types of request strategies in American conversation.

2. Finding out the function of request in American conversations.

1.3 Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

1. In daily American conversation, people prefer to use particular type of requests.

2. Requests serve different functions in communication.

1.4 Procedures

To achieve the aims of the current study and to test its hypotheses , the following steps will be adopted:

(1) Conducting a survey of the relevant literature written about request in American conversations.

(2) Clarifying the types and the functions of request in American conversations.

(3) Analysing certain texts represented by "Everyday Conversations: Learning   American English" using qualitative methods.

1.5 limits

This study investigates the act of request from pragmatic perspective . This investigation will be carried out on some texts taken from the book " Everyday Conversations : Learning American English " These texts were chosen because they contain request strategies relevant to this researcher's objectives.

1.6 Value

It is hoped that the present study would be of some value as it is tries to present a general framework of the speech act of request from pragmatic perspective .   It is also hoped to be of value for those interested in pragmatic analysis of conversation.

2. Request: The Concept

Although request is a very known concept , yet some space need to be devoted to exploring its strategies and its function from pragmatic point of view.

From social point of view , Blumer (1969) states that request means social interaction in which participants talk about duties and obligations within social environments—making distinction according to social hierarchies and cultural norms.

From linguistic point of view , Searle (1969) confirms that request can be defined as a kind of speech act in which the speaker intends to get the listener to perform an action.

In line with Searle , Blum−Kulka et al. (1989) , denotes that request can be considered as a speech act that involves a speaker asking a listener to perform an action.

From a psychological point of view , per Cialdini (2001) , declares that request focuses on how people communicate needs and desires to

others through explicit and implicit appeals influencing influencing behaviour— psychological studies .

In short, the current study deals with request from the pragmatic perspective utilising the model of Blum−kulka et al (1989) as an attempt to explore the three types of request strategies and their functions.

2.1 Speech Act Theory and Requests

Language is utilised to reflect emotions, ideas, and thoughts . It is also used to perform acts that have the potential to cause critical change .   Speech acts are these spoken acts that are carried like orders, refusals, complaints, requests, apologies, and promises.

Austin (1965) originally established the idea of speech acts , which are utterances that a speaker uses to carry out acts.

Conversely , Searle (1975) distinguishes between two types of speech acts : direct and indirect.

According to Brown and Livenson (1987) , people prefer indirect expressions of politeness over direct ones because the latter can be perceived as face threatening.

In line with Searle (1975) , Blum−Kulka et al (1987) points out that there are three types of request strategies in which the speaker ask the listener to do something.

2.2 Types and functions of Request Strategies in US dialogues

This section is devoted to the classification of the different strategies employed in fulfilment of requests in American English , and to the functions of requests.

According to Blum−Kulka et al. (1989) , there are three types of request strategies that can be categorised as :

(1) Direct strategies : This type of strategy are characterised by the use of an imperative or a verb that explicitly designates the action as a request.

(2)   Conventionally indirect strategies : They are divided into suggested formula and query preparation.

(3)   Non-conventionally indirect strategies : These strategies are classified into two types: mild hint and string hint . They Depend on contextual situation .

Concerning the functions of request , Eccles & Wigfield (2020) confirm that In the United States , requests have diverse social functions for the participants engaged in conversation . Requests are commonly utilised to obtain information , goods, or services from others.

Farhang (2020) states that requests are often designed to minimise the relational distance between the speaker and the listener , while in other times they tend to be aimed at preserving that distance.

Generally speaking , speakers utilise requests to express their desires , intentions , and particular convictions. Thus , requests serve as significant communicative interactions that can carry diverse social implications.

4. Data Collection and Description

The researcher employed a qualitative approach to ascertain how people in daily American conversations carry out the act of request . This choice is rooted in the fact that qualitative techniques are used when data is presented in the form of words , sentences , or images (Subroto, 1992).

The data for this study consists of scripted dialogues with two or more participants exchanging words . The studied conversations vary in length and primarily cover topics from regular discussions. All conversations analysed in this study are scripted.

In total , the researcher chose only six extracts from a total of six conversations . According to Ritchie , Lewis, and Elam (2003) , qualitative research focuses on meaning rather than making hypothesis claims . They also affirm that adding more data to the study won't

necessarily produce more information because it will only be used as a component of the analytical framework . The extracts for the current study were not selected at random but were chosen because they are distinguished by the presence of the spoken act of request.

4.1 Data Analysis

This section represents the practical side of this research , i.e. data analysis .   On the basis of the analysis , the findings are introduced and discussed .

4.1.1 The first text

MARK : Excuse me. Could you tell me where the library?

NANCY : Yes, it's that way. You go three blocks to Washington Street, then turn

right .   It's on the corner , across from the bank.

MARK : I've only been in town a few days , so I really don't know my way around

yet.

NANCY : I know how you feel . We moved here a year ago, and I still don't know

where everything is!

Pragmatically speaking ,   the text make use of conventionally indirect strategy

 when Mark said : "Excuse me . Could you tell me where the library ? This type of

strategy uses a polite, indirect approach to making a request .   By phrasing the request as a question with " Could you tell me..." , Mark minimises imposition on Nancy , making the request more socially acceptable and considerate . This

 indirectness helps maintain politeness and respect in the conversation .

4.1.2 The second text

WAITER : Hello , I'll be your waiter today . Can I start you off with something to drink?

RALPH : Yes . I'll have iced tea , please.

ANNA : And I'll have lemonade.

WAITER : OK . Are you ready to order , or do you need a few minutes?

RALPH : I think we're ready . I'll have the tomato soup to start , and the roast beef

with mashed potatoes and peas.

WAITER : How do you want the beef — rare, medium, or well done ?

RALPH : Well done , please .

ANNA : And I'll just have the fish, with potatoes and a salad .

Pragmatically, the previous text make use of two types of request strategies :

1. "WAITER : "Can I start you off with something to drink ? ".

      The previous strategy is conventionally indirect .   The waiter uses a polite,

 conventional question to offer drinks ,   indirectly requesting the customers'

 preferences .The function of request is offering a service .   The waiter is asking if the customers would like to begin by ordering drinks , which serves both as a polite initiation of service and as an offer.

2. RALPH : Yes. I'll have iced tea , please.

    This text make use of direct strategy because Ralph directly states his choice using a straightforward imperative form softened by "please.

        The function of request is ordering .   Ralph is making a specific request for aniced tea, which serves as his order for a beverage .

3. Anna : And I'll have lemonade .

The type of request strategy in this speech is direct .   Anna directly states herchoice in a similar manner to Ralph ,   without additional politeness markers beyond the structure itself .

The function of request is also ordering .   Anna is also making a specific request for a lemonade ,   similarly placing her order for a beverage.

4. WAITER : OK .   Are you ready to order , or do you need a few minutes ?

The type of request strategy here is conventionally Indirect . The waiter politely   inquires about the customers' readiness to order using a conventional question format that offers them options .

The function of request is Inquiry / Offering assistance .   The waiter is checking whether the customers are ready to place their food orders or if they need more time , thus facilitating the ordering process.

5. RALPH : I think we're ready . I'll have the tomato soup to start , and the roastbeef with mashed potatoes and peas.

Pragmatically speaking , the type of request strategy is direct. Ralph clearly and directly places his order   using an imperative structure.

The function of request is Ordering .   Ralph is placing his food order directly .

6. WAITER : How do you want the beef — rare, medium, or well done?

The type of request strategy is conventionally indirect . The waiter uses a conventional question form to specify how Ralph wants his meal prepared , indirectly

 requesting more specific information .

The function of request is Requesting Specification : The waiter needs morespecific information about how Ralph wants his beef cooked.

7. RALPH : "Well done, please."

In the previous speech ,   the   type of request strategy is direct   Ralph directly states his preference for how he wants his beef cooked using an imperative softened by 'please' .

The function of request is ordering .   Ralph specifies how he wants his beef cooked.

8. ANNA : "And I'll just have the fish , with potatoes and salad ."

The type of request strategy is direct .   Anna directly places her order similarlyas   previously .   The Function of request is Ordering . Anna places her food order directly .

4.1.3 The third text

BOB: We'd like two tickets for the 3:30 show, please .

TICKET SALES: Here you go. Enjoy the movie! [Inside the theater]

BOB: Would you mind moving over one, so my friend and I can sit together?

WOMAN: No, not at all. BOB: Thanks a lot!

There are two types of requests in the text:

1. BOB : "We'd like two tickets for the 3:30 show , please."

Pragmatically ,   the type of request strategy is direct .   Bob is directly requestingtickets for a specific movie showtime. The function of his request serves to ask fortickets in a polite manner , indicating BOB's desire to purchase while maintaining a respectful tone.

2. BOB : Would you mind moving over one, so my friend and I can sit together ?

Pragmatically , the type of request strategy is conventionally indirect. Bob is focusing on requesting Action. Bob is politely asking the woman to move seats to accommodate him and his friend . The function of request is to soften the request with polite phrasing , showing consideration for the woman's space and comfort .

In both instances , the requests are utilised to promote politeness and facilitate a positive social interaction .

4.1.4 The fourth text

Hello ? Hi , Stephanie , how are things at the office ?

Hi, Luke ! How are you ? Can you please stop and pick up extra paper for thecomputer printer?

What did you say ? Can you repeat that, please ? Did you say to pick up ink for the

printer ? Sorry , the phone is cutting out.

Can you hear me now ? No, I need more computer paper . Listen , I'll text you exactly what I need. Thanks, Luke. Talk to you later.

Thanks , Stephanie. Sorry , my phone has really bad reception here .

The text make use of conventionally indirect strategy   "Can you please stop and pick up extra paper for the computer printer ? " This request uses a conventional structure ("Can you…") to ask someone to do something . It's polite and mitigates any imposition by framing it as a question about ability .

The function of request is to check if Luke is capable and willing to fulfil thisrequest .

2. "Can you repeat that, please ?"

The type of request in this speech is conventionally indirect . This request uses a conventional form ("Can you…") but asks for repetition instead of action . It's polite and seeks permission or capability before making an imposition . The function of request is to clarification . Luke asks Stephanie to repeat her previous statement due to unclear communication.

3. "Can you hear me now?

Pragmatically speaking , the type of request is conventionally indirect . This

request seeks confirmation about hearing ability rather than directly stating "Hear me."   The function is Information-Checking Request (confirming communication clarity) .   Luke seeks confirmation from Stephanie regarding whether he can be heard over a poor phone connection.

4.1.5 The fifth text

SALESPERSON: Can I help you?

GLORIA: Yes, I'm looking for a sweater — in a size medium.

SALESPERSON: Let's see … here's a nice white one. What do you think?

GLORIA: I think I'd rather have it in blue.

SALESPERSON: OK … here's blue, in a medium. Would you like to try it on?

GLORIA: OK … yes, I love it. It fits perfectly. How much is it?

SALESPERSON: It's $50. It will be $53, with tax.

GLORIA: Perfect! I'll take it.

 Pragmatically speaking ,   the type of request is conventionally indirect

1.   " Can I help you? " .   This request uses a conventional polite form ("Can I…?") to

offer assistance .   It is polite and checks if assistance is needed without imposing

directly .   The Function : is offer of assistance – The salesperson checks if Gloria

needs help and opens the interaction .

2. "Would you like to try it on?"

 The text make use of conventionally indirect . This request also uses a

conventional form (" Would you like…? ") that makes an offer while being polite and non-imposing .   The function : is suggestion / offer –

The salesperson offers Gloriathe opportunity to try on the sweater, suggesting she might want to ensure it fits properly before purchasing.

4.1.6 The sixth text

JIM: Who's the tall woman next to Barbara?

CHARLES: That's her friend Mary. Didn't you meet her atSteve's party?

JIM: No, I wasn't at Steve's party.

CHARLES: Oh! Then let me introduce you to her now. Mary, this is my friend Jim.

MARY: Hi, Jim. Nice to meet you.

JIM: You, too. Would you like a drink?

MARY: Sure, let's go get one.

Pragmatically speaking. , the text use two types of request strategies :

1. " Then let me introduce you to her now .

The type of request strategy in the previous text is direct because Charles states

his intention (" let me introduce you ") without any mitigating language or checking for Jim's preference .   The function of request is offer of introduction – Charles offers

to introduce Jim to Mary directly, facilitating social interaction.

2. " Would you like a drink? "

Here the type of request is conventionally indirect . This request uses a conventional polite form (" Would you like…?") to offer a drink . It is polite and non-imposing by framing it as a question about Mary's preference .

The function of request : is offer of assistance / service – Jim offers Mary a drink in a polite and socially appropriate manner .

5. Conclusion

The study has come up with the following conclusions:

1. The research reveals that American conversational requests often employ

conventionally indirect strategies that promote politeness and consideration in social

interactions while also employing direct strategies when appropriate for clarity andefficiency in communication.   This clearly verifies the first hypothesis which states that in American conversations , people prefer to use particular type of Requests.

2. Functions of requests in U.S. dialogues , vary widely from offering services andordering items to requesting action politely and checking information clarity . This shows that the second hypothesis , which reads : Requests serve different function in communications, is also verified.

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