

Anna Trosborg's Request Speech Act Strategies in Spongebob Squarepants Selected Episodes

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Abstract- This research discusses the strategies of speech act of requests used in selected episodes of the animated series SpongeBob SquarePants based on Anna Trosborg's concept in pragmatic studies. The aim of this research is to identify and analyze eight strategies grouped into 4 categories of speech act of requests used in the conversations of characters in the series. The episodes "Culture Shock," "Help Wanted," and "Band Geeks" from the SpongeBob SquarePants series were selected for their diverse situations, rich dialogues, and specifically because they depict a wide range of social interactions and character dynamics, which are critical for examining the nuances of request speech acts. The research gap in this study lies in the fact that previous studies have not explored the characters' roles within the story and their positions involved in the dialogues under scrutiny, which is a crucial aspect of understanding the nuances of speech acts in different contexts. The research method used is qualitative descriptive with Miles and Huberman data analysis techniques to examine the speech act strategies of requests. Data were collected through film observation and translated into oral and written language. The research results indicate that in selected episodes of the animated series SpongeBob SquarePants, there are four categories of speech act of request strategies that can be found according to Anna Trosborg's concept. This research contributes to understanding the application of speech act strategies in the context of animated films, as well as its relevance to pragmatic theory. Future research could build upon this study by examining the role of speech acts in various media platforms, focusing on those that cater to diverse age groups or cultural contexts. Researchers could also delve into how the use of speech acts in animated media shapes children's and young adults' perceptions and interactions with the world. Moreover, a comparative analysis of speech acts in animated films versus live-action films could offer valuable insights into the distinct communication strategies employed across different media formats.

Keywords: Speech Act, Request, Anna Trosborg, Animated Film, Pragmatic Analysis, Qualitative Research

I. INTRODUCTION

SpongeBob SquarePants, a beloved and culturally impactful animated series, has captivated audiences worldwide with its humorous and relatable characters. Beyond its entertainment value, SpongeBob SquarePants offers a rich tapestry of social interactions and dialogues, making it an ideal subject for studying pragmatic phenomena such as request speech

acts. Understanding how characters in such a popular show make requests can provide valuable insights into communication strategies and their application in everyday life.

The request speech act itself is an illocutionary action in which the speaker communicates to their interlocutor the desire for the interlocutor to undertake an action beneficial to the speaker, as explained by Trosborg (1995).

This action may manifest as non-verbal requests for goods and services, such as requesting an object, an action, or a specific type of service, or it can also encompass verbal requests for goods and services, such as requests for information. Based on the method or strategy, Trosborg (1995) divided the request strategies into 4 categories:

1. Indirect request category: This category, as outlined by Trosborg (1995), involves providing hints or cues (the first request strategy) and allowing the interlocutor to infer the intention. For instance, saying "I need to be at the airport in half an hour" employs this strategy. Naturally, for this approach to be effective, the speaker must be aware of the context they and their interlocutor are in; otherwise, the intended meaning may not be fully grasped.
2. Conventionally indirect request category (hearer-oriented conditions): This category, focusing on the interlocutor's willingness, must consider the interlocutor's willingness factor (the second request strategy), such as in the example "Could you lend me your car?" Besides inquiring about willingness, this category of conventional indirect requests can also take the form of suggestions (the third request strategy) addressed to the interlocutor, as in "What if you lent me your car?"
3. Conventionally indirect request category (speaker-oriented conditions): This category is based on the speaker's wishes (the fourth request strategy), as in the example "I want to borrow your car." Additionally, there are strategies within the same category based on the speaker's desires/needs (the fifth request strategy), as in "I need to borrow your car to get to the airport tonight."
4. Direct request category: This category involves direct communication of the obligation (the sixth request strategy) that the interlocutor must fulfill, as in "You have to drive me to the airport!" or through performative strategies (the seventh request strategy), as in "I'm asking you to lend me your car," or through imperative/command strategies (the eighth request strategy), as in "Lend me your car!"

To empirically prove the implications of Trosborg (1995)'s request strategies as

mentioned above, this study will investigate the episodes "Culture Shock," "Help Wanted," and "Band Geeks" from the SpongeBob SquarePants series. These films were selected for their diverse situations and rich dialogues, enabling researchers to observe various request strategies within different contexts. Furthermore, the language and sentence structures in cartoons are generally simpler and clearer compared to live action films or dramas, as cartoons are typically aimed at younger audiences. Despite being fictional, cartoons can still represent situations and dialogues that occur in the real world, allowing researchers to gain insights into how request strategies are utilized in everyday life.

Research related to speech acts of request has been conducted several times. Previous studies have explored various aspects of directive speech acts and requests, providing a foundation for understanding request strategies:

1. General Examinations: Several studies have examined directive speech acts and presented requests in a general manner without focusing on specific strategies (Atteta et al., 2022; Widiyarti et al., 2022; Maulida & Solihati, 2023; Darwis, 2019; Syah, 2017; Yuliarti et al., 2015; Arifiany et al., 2016; Qomariyah, 2017).
2. Maxim Fulfillment and Violations: Research has also analyzed requests in the context of maxim fulfillment and violations (Alfiansyah et al., 2021).
3. Media Contexts: Studies have examined the function of request speech acts in live-action films and literary works (Fahrurrozi, 2015; Andari et al., 2018; Valensia, 2014).

However, despite these contributions, there is a notable gap in analyzing request speech act strategies within animated series, particularly focusing on characters' roles and positions in dialogues. This lack of attention to the characters and their positions in the dialogues under scrutiny creates a research gap that this study aims to address by examining the request speech act strategies employed by Anna Trosborg in selected episodes of *SpongeBob SquarePants*. Thus, the research gap in this study lies in the fact that previous studies have not explored the characters' roles within the story and their positions involved in the dialogues under scrutiny, which is a crucial aspect of understanding the nuances of speech acts in different contexts.

Based on the research gap identified above,

the questions that need to be answered in this study include:

1. What are the various request categories and strategies used by characters in *SpongeBob SquarePants*?
2. How does the position and role of characters in *SpongeBob SquarePants* influence the request strategies they use?
3. How does the context in which requests are made influence the strategies used by characters in *SpongeBob SquarePants*?

This study addresses this questions by applying Anna Trosborg's theoretical framework to selected episodes of *SpongeBob SquarePants*, offering new insights into the pragmatic strategies employed in popular animated media.

II. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research method utilizing Mules & Huberman (1992) data analysis technique. According to Miles & Huberman (1992: 16), the analysis consists of three simultaneous activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Therefore, the data analysis steps used are as follows:

- a. **Data Reduction:** The data reduction process involved transcribing dialogues from the episodes 'Culture Shock,' 'Help Wanted,' and 'Band Geeks' in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* series. The researcher used coding to categorize the data into relevant themes and reduce data complexity.
- b. **Display Data:** The next step is to display the data, which involves organizing and compressing the data into a more understandable form. The researcher presented the selected data for analysis and explained the request speech act strategies according to Anna Trosborg that emerged.
- c. **Drawing Conclusions:** The final crucial stage is drawing conclusions, which involves interpreting the analyzed data and depicting the research findings. The researcher used the analyzed data to illustrate the request speech act strategies according to Anna Trosborg in the selected *SpongeBob SquarePants* episodes and drew relevant conclusions.

Table 1.1 A sample of the compressed data format that illustrates the categorized request strategy.

Category	Episode	Character	Dialogue	Strategy
Conventionally				
Indirect (Hearer-Oriented Conditions)	Culture Shock	Squidward	"Now will you stop bugging me?"	Willingness Inquiry

By employing Miles and Huberman's data analysis, the researchers were able to reduce data complexity, expedite data analysis, and produce more accurate and easily understandable conclusions.

In data collection, researchers employed the orthographic method. As described by Kesuma (2007:49), the orthographic method is a means of transcribing oral language into written form.

1. **Episode Selection and Transcription:** The researchers selected three episodes from *SpongeBob SquarePants*: "Culture Shock," "Help Wanted," and "Band Geeks," and then transcribed the dialogues, focusing on instances where characters make requests.
2. **Analysis of Dialogues:** The transcribed dialogues were analyzed to identify the various request strategies used by characters. This involved examining the language and actions of the characters to understand how they make requests and how these requests are responded to.
3. **Categorization and Coding:** The request strategies were categorized based on their purpose, effectiveness, or context, and assigned codes or labels to each request strategy identified in the analysis.
4. **Interpretation of Results:** The results were interpreted, discussing the implications of the findings in the context of pragmatics and request speech acts.

This entailed the direct transcription of conversations among characters, alongside the notation of pertinent scene details essential for data analysis. However, preceding this, researchers conducted a preliminary selection of episodes, opting for those most pertinent to the study's focus. Subsequently, scenes that best represented the research focus, namely the strategies of request speech acts as per Anna Trosborg's framework, were identified. Data were gathered through the viewing of episodes "Culture Shock," "Help Wanted," and "Band Geeks" from the *SpongeBob SquarePants* series.

Following this, dialogue transcription from these episodes ensued, with resultant transcripts meticulously logged for subsequent analysis, aiming to discern and delineate relevant request strategies in alignment with Anna Trosborg's theoretical framework.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section aims to present and analyze the findings from the study, focusing on the application of Trosborg's (1995) request strategies in selected episodes of the *SpongeBob SquarePants* series. The analysis will determine the presence of the four categories of Trosborg's request strategies and how these are manifested in the episodes "Culture Shock," "Help Wanted," and "Band Geeks." The discussion will highlight the request strategies used by different characters, providing insights into the pragmatic use of language in the animated series.

Result

A total of 55 data were found, confirming the presence of speech act request strategies according to Trosborg (1995) across 3 episodes of the *SpongeBob Squarepants* series, namely "Culture Shock," "Band Geeks," and "Help Wanted." Based on the successfully collected data, an analysis will be conducted to ascertain the existence of the 4 categories of Trosborg's (1995) request strategies and whether these speech acts of requests are indeed presented in the *SpongeBob SquarePants* episodes "Culture Shock," "Help Wanted," and "Band Geeks." These four categories are:

1. Indirect request category, which encompasses hinting strategies;
2. Conventionally indirect request category (hearer-oriented conditions), which includes strategies of asking for willingness and suggesting;
3. Conventionally indirect request category (speaker-oriented conditions), which includes strategies of expressing desires/needs;
4. Direct request category, which includes strategies of conveying obligation, performative/performatives, and imperative/command strategies.

The characters involved in the dialogues discussed in this research include Mr. Krab, a crab who owns a renowned restaurant in Bikini Bottom, namely the Krusty Krab; Squidward, an octopus who serves as a senior employee at the Krusty Krab; SpongeBob, a sponge who is the

main character in this story and works as a junior employee at the Krusty Krab; and finally, Patrick, a starfish who is SpongeBob's close friend. Although not employed at the Krusty Krab, SpongeBob regards Patrick as his equal. Additionally, Squilliam, Squidward's schoolmate and rival, is also considered. He is a wealthy individual who constantly competes with Squidward, particularly in artistic endeavors.

Discussions

Out of the 55 data found, this study will only take and analyze 9 data according to the number of request strategies by Anna Trosborg (1995), which will be divided based on the category of request strategies by Anna Trosborg (1995). Here are some findings and analysis of request speech acts based on their categories.

1. Indirect Request Category

This category, as outlined by Trosborg (1995), involves providing hints or cues (the first request strategy) and allowing the interlocutor to infer the intention. Naturally, for this approach to be effective, the speaker must be aware of the context they and their interlocutor are in; otherwise, the intended meaning may not be fully grasped.

• Data 1

In the animated film *SpongeBob SquarePants* (episode 'Culture Shock', 1999: 01:45 - 01:51), Mr. Krabs says to Squidward and SpongeBob: "*Now as you may have noticed, profits are way down this month. We've got to think of a gimmick to bring in customers. Do you lubbers have any ideas?*"

During this scene, Mr. Krabs provides hints by explaining the restaurant's condition and he's not directly asking his employees to bring him a solution, but instead he's asking his employees for ideas to increase customers. This is an example of providing hints/cues for the interlocutors to infer the intention, which is a key strategy in Trosborg's framework for indirect requests.

The speech act **hints** in the form of explaining the restaurant's condition and this question is uttered by Mr. Krabs to his two employees, Squidward and SpongeBob, to help Mr. Krabs find a solution to increase the visitors of the Krusty Krab and boost their revenue.

The use of hints is the first request strategy by Anna Trosborg (1995), from the category of indirect speech acts, where a speaker asks for something from their interlocutor indirectly, and

the examples provided fit into Trosborg's framework by illustrating various strategies for making indirect requests. Trosborg (1995) categorizes indirect requests into the first strategy: providing hints or cues and allowing the interlocutor to infer the intention. The examples demonstrate how speakers use these strategies to make requests indirectly, often by providing context and allowing the hearer to infer the intended meaning.

2. Conventionally Indirect (hearer-oriented conditions) Category

This category, focusing on the interlocutor's willingness, must consider the interlocutor's willingness factor (the second request strategy). Besides inquiring about willingness, this category of conventional indirect requests can also take the form of suggestions (the third request strategy) addressed to the interlocutor.

• **Data 2**

In the animated film *SpongeBob SquarePants* (episode 'Culture Shock', 1999: 05:06 - 05:09), Squidward says to SpongeBob: *Now will you stop bugging me?*

In the *SpongeBob SquarePants* episode, Squidward uses the second request strategy by asking SpongeBob to stop bothering him, which is an example of inquiring about the interlocutor's willingness. This strategy is part of the conventionally indirect category, where the speaker considers the interlocutor's **willingness** factor.

This example demonstrates how speakers utilize conventionally indirect requests that focus on hearer-oriented conditions. This approach is a key concept within Trosborg's framework for analyzing speech acts in contexts like English contracts.

• **Data 3**

In the animated film *SpongeBob SquarePants* (episode "Culture Shock", 1999: 01:52 - 02:12) SpongeBob says to Mr. Krabs: *"I've got one!" A free pair of socks with every purchase! Or maybe 'Double Patty Midnight Madness'! Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh! I know! I know! I know! How about 'mouth full of clams' day! Everyone who shows up with a mouthful of clams... ..gets a free drink! Huh? Huh?*

In this sentence, SpongeBob's **suggestion** to Mr. Krabs is intended to encourage Mr. Krabs to listen and consider the unique ideas presented.

SpongeBob indirectly presents his ideas and implicitly requests his interlocutors (Mr. Krabs and Squidward) to pay attention and accept his suggestions, aligning with the characteristics of the third request strategy outlined by Anna Trosborg (1995).

As we understand it, suggestion is one of the strategies of indirect request, oriented toward the hearer, wherein a speaker indirectly requests something from their interlocutor, but the realization of the request depends on the interlocutor's acceptance.

3. Conventionally Indirect (speaker-oriented conditions) Category

This category is based on the speaker's wishes (the fourth request strategy), but additionally, there are strategies within the same category based on the speaker's desires/needs (the fifth request strategy).

• **Data 4**

In the animated film *SpongeBob SquarePants* (episode "Band Geeks", 2001: 01:12 - 01:15) Squilliam says to Squidward: The problem is, I'm busy next week and can't make it. *So, I was hoping you and your band could cover for us.*

In this instance, Squilliam expressed a hopeful discourse to Squidward, urging him to fill in for Squilliam's band at the upcoming Bubble Bowl due to their busy schedules, rendering them unable to attend. Thus, through this expression of hope, Squilliam indirectly requested Squidward to substitute for his band's performance at the Bubble Bowl.

The use of a **wishful** tone aligns with Anna Trosborg's (1995) fourth strategy of request, wherein an individual implicitly seeks assistance or makes a request through the use of hopeful language. Rather than employing direct coercion, the speaker subtly conveys their desire to be aided or to request something through the articulation of hope.

• **Data 5**

In the animated film *SpongeBob SquarePants* (episode "Band Geeks", 2001: 03:32 - 03:35) Squidward says to his band members: Let's just try stepping in rhythm! *Now, I want everyone to stand in straight rows of five.*

In this speech, Squidward is practicing the speech act of request in the form of **desire/needs**, which is the fifth request strategy outlined by Anna Trosborg (1995). In this context, he indirectly asks the residents of Bikini

Bottom who are part of his band (notably, his role here is that of conductor and band coach, with some Bikini Bottom residents serving as members of his band) to walk in rhythm as part of Squidward's music rehearsal. He conveys his desires without explicitly stating a request or command, opting for a more subtle approach to express what he wants.

4. Direct Request Category

This category involves direct communication of the obligation (the sixth request strategy) that the interlocutor must fulfill, or through performative strategies (the seventh request strategy), and imperative/command strategies (the eighth request strategy).

- **Data 6**

In the animated film *SpongeBob SquarePants* (episode "Culture Shock", 1999: 05:04 - 05:06) Squidward says to SpongeBob: So you really want to be in the show? *Ok, you get to mop up afterwards!* (memberikan pel pada SpongeBob)

In Squidward's statement, a direct request is evident, directed at SpongeBob, where Squidward instructs SpongeBob to mop the floor and makes it a requirement for SpongeBob if he wants to perform at the art show at the Krusty Krab.

As mentioned earlier, among the direct request strategies is **obligations**, which involve reminding or indicating obligations to the discourse partner. In this scenario, Squidward, as a senior employee at the Krusty Krab and the person entrusted by Mr. Krabs to organize the art show stage, commands SpongeBob to mop the floor directly. Failure to comply may result in SpongeBob being excluded from participating in the art show.

This exemplifies one of Anna Trosborg's (1995) sixth request strategies, wherein Squidward's position as a senior figure and the individual responsible for selecting talent for the art show stage imposes an obligation on SpongeBob to mop the floor if he wishes to participate in the Krusty Krab's art show.

- **Data 7**

In the animated film *SpongeBob SquarePants* (episode "Help Wanted", 1999: 05:25 - 05:28) Squidward says to the anchovies: *One single file line is all I ask!*

In this instance, Squidward addresses the swarm of small fish congregating at the Krusty Krab, eager to purchase Krabby Patties.

However, due to their large number and hunger-induced frenzy, they become uncontrollable, causing chaos at the Krusty Krab. Squidward and Mr. Krabs, frightened by the situation, are compelled to climb one of the poles at the Krusty Krab, while Squidward attempts to organize the small fish into orderly queues.

This discourse exemplifies the utilization of the seventh request strategy outlined by Anna Trosborg (1995), which involves the use of **performative** language to request or instruct others to perform a task as requested by the speaker.

- **Data 8**

In the animated film *SpongeBob SquarePants* (episode "Culture Shock", 1999: 09:58 - 10:00) Squidward says to SpongeBob: *Stand aside, SpongeBob!* (Menyingkirilah SpongeBob!)

While there isn't an extensive dialogue presented here, it's evident from one of Squidward's lines that he instructs SpongeBob to step aside because he believes the cheers from the audience are directed at him, indicating his desire to resume performing.

In this scenario, Squidward employs the eighth request strategy outlined by Anna Trosborg (1995), which involves a direct request in the form of an **imperative/command**. Squidward, serving as both SpongeBob's senior and the event organizer of the art show, is in a position to assert direct requests firmly. This authority stems from his seniority at the Krusty Krab, coupled with his role as the individual entrusted by Mr. Krabs to organize the art show event.

- **Data 9**

Additionally, in the animated film *SpongeBob SquarePants* (episode "Help Wanted", 1999: 04:22 - 04:24) Bus driver tells the anchovies: *Hey hey please! Passengers are to stay seated and not put their fins out the window!!!*

The context of the sentence is when the bus driver instructs the anchovies not to stand inside the bus and to keep their fins (hands) inside the window, akin to how bus drivers commonly scold children on the bus. The speech style employed by the bus driver is **elliptical phrases**, one of the commanding styles described by Anna Trosborg (1995) to illustrate that such sentences fall under **imperative** sentences, which constitute one of the request strategies.

Summary of Key Findings

1) Indirect Request Category

Most Prevalent Strategy: Providing Hints

Significance: This strategy maintains politeness and allows interlocutors to infer requests, reflecting the social dynamics and hierarchical relationships within the series.

2) Conventionally Indirect (Hearer-Oriented Conditions) Category

Most Prevalent Strategies: Willingness Inquiry and Suggestions

Significance: These strategies emphasize the importance of considering the hearer's willingness and encourage cooperative interaction, crucial in maintaining workplace harmony and fostering creative problem-solving.

3) Conventionally Indirect (Speaker-Oriented Conditions) Category

Most Prevalent Strategies: Expression of Hope and Needs

Significance: These strategies reflect the speaker's indirect expression of desires and needs, promoting collaboration and subtly conveying requests without imposing directly.

4) Direct Request Category

Most Prevalent Strategies: Obligation, Performative, and Imperative Commands

Significance: Direct strategies are used in situations requiring immediate and clear action, often leveraging authority to ensure compliance and maintain order.

The analysis of request strategies in *SpongeBob SquarePants* episodes reveals that:

1. Indirect and Conventionally Indirect Strategies are the most prevalent, highlighting the characters' efforts to maintain politeness and social harmony.
2. Direct Strategies are employed sparingly, reserved for moments that demand clear and immediate responses.
3. These findings underscore the nuanced communication dynamics in *SpongeBob SquarePants*, where the choice of request strategy is influenced by the context, character roles, and relationships. This pragmatic analysis offers valuable insights into the portrayal of request strategies in popular animated media, illustrating the intricate balance between indirect and direct communication to achieve various conversational goals.

IV. CONCLUSION

The analysis of request strategies in *SpongeBob SquarePants* episodes demonstrates that each of

Trosborg's (1995) four categories of request strategies is present and represented in the episodes. The speech context, situation, participants, and purpose of the speech significantly influence these strategies, highlighting the pragmatic aspects of communication within the analyzed episodes.

Summary of Findings

1. Indirect Request Category:

Indirect request strategies, such as hinting, are used to subtly prompt action. For example, in the episode "Culture Shock," Mr. Krabs uses a hinting strategy to ask his employees for ideas to boost profits at the Krusty Krab. This approach reflects the hierarchical relationship and the need to maintain politeness.

2. Conventionally Indirect (Hearer-Oriented Conditions) Category:

Strategies like willingness/ability inquiries are employed to politely ask for help. In "Culture Shock," SpongeBob uses a willingness inquiry strategy when he offers Mr. Krabs his ideas to help the restaurant.

3. Conventionally Indirect (Speaker-Oriented Conditions) Category:

Strategies such as expressing needs are used to indicate the speaker's requirements indirectly. In "Band Geeks," Squilliam expresses his need for assistance in finding a substitute for his band's performance, indirectly requesting Squidward's help.

4. Direct Request Category:

Direct request strategies, including imperative commands, are used in situations requiring clear and immediate action. In "Culture Shock," Squidward uses an imperative strategy when instructing SpongeBob during the art show, reflecting his authority and urgency.

Limitations

This study is based on only three episodes ("Culture Shock," "Help Wanted," and "Band Geeks") of *SpongeBob SquarePants*. This limited selection may not comprehensively represent the full range of request strategies employed across the entire series. Consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to other animated series, as different shows might use varying pragmatic

strategies influenced by their unique contexts and character dynamics. Additionally, the interpretation of request strategies can be subjective, with different researchers potentially categorizing and interpreting the same dialogue differently based on their perspectives and understanding of the theoretical framework.

Implications and Future Directions

The findings illustrate how request strategies in *SpongeBob SquarePants* reflect real-world communication patterns, particularly in hierarchical and social contexts. Future research could expand the analysis to a larger and more diverse set of episodes from the series, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the request strategies used throughout. Comparative studies involving other popular animated series could highlight differences and similarities in the use of request strategies, offering broader insights into communication dynamics in media.

Furthermore, a longitudinal analysis examining how request strategies evolve over different seasons of *SpongeBob SquarePants* could provide insights into character development and changes in communication styles over time. Research could also explore how different audiences perceive and interpret the request strategies used in animated series, adding a layer of understanding regarding the impact of these strategies on viewers. Finally, analyzing request strategies in animated series from different cultural backgrounds could reveal how cultural norms influence communication styles in media.

By addressing these points, the study can provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of request strategies in animated series, contributing valuable insights to the field of pragmatic communication.

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