

Pragmatic Functions of Questions in the TV Series *The Office*

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ABSTRACT

Questions are always present in people's lives as they are used in daily conversation, not only as a tool to initiate a conversation, but also to keep a conversation alive and at the same time to gain information from the interlocutor. This research aims to investigate the syntactic forms of questions and their pragmatic functions found in a TV series entitled *The Office* as the data source. The data used in the research were interrogative utterances, their answers, and the context of the conversation. The results show that 409 questions were found, consisting of 214 (52%) yes/no questions and 195 (48%) WH questions. The question word *what* outnumbers other question words with a total of 117 (60%) questions. These questions were used to serve 27 pragmatic functions with *seeking information* being the most frequent function, amounting to 140 questions or 34% of the whole data. The dominant use of the question word *what* and the function *seeking information* might be due to the setting of the place, i.e., the office, where the conversations took place.

Keywords: *interrogative utterance, pragmatic functions, questions, The Office.*

INTRODUCTION

In our daily conversation, questions are always present. We ask questions since the first time we meet someone in order to get to know them. However, in conversation, oftentimes, it is unbalanced between questions and answers. Mertz (2012) argued that sometimes, someone is eager to tell their story but does not return the question to their interlocutor (para. 3). He stated that "a person's character is learned from the questions unasked in a conversation" (Mertz, 2012, para. 3). In other words, it is important for someone not only to answer questions but also to ask his or her interlocutor back. Thus, the question itself is crucial to be present in a conversation to show full attention to the speaker.

Furthermore, questions play a crucial role in keeping a conversation alive by showing that the hearer is interested in the topics as well as to gain information from the interlocutor. During counseling, for example, it is impossible for the counselor not to ask any questions to the client. A counselor is obliged to ask probing questions during a counseling session (Hough, 2014). This means that counselors need to gain as detailed information as they could without being too fussy. They also may repeat or clarify a statement but cannot ask any leading questions. The questions being asked also need to have no options so the client can give the exact answers on how they feel. As a matter of fact, asking questions is crucial since it is one of the standard operating procedures of counseling. The example mentioned above therefore shows that

asking questions during a conversation is vital not only to show that the person is listening to his or her interlocutor, but also to maintain the conversation and show interest to the topic being discussed.

Questions, in many languages, have been studied by scholars from all around the world. Articles found regarding questions ranging from intonation in Maltese question words (Grice, Vella and Bruggeman, 2019), comparing Estonian declarative *vä*- and *jah*-questions (Hennoste, Rääbis and Rumm, 2019), Italian tag questions and their conversational functions (Tomaselli and Gatt, 2015), to the gender differences in the use of questions in Iranian languages (Yeganeh and Heidary, 2015). Also, the objects are not only spoken languages but also written texts. For instance, Camiciottoli (2007) studied how spoken and written questions, whether they are printed or online, are different. However, little has been done to investigate questions in TV series or other kinds of fictional discourse. With the exception of Fareh and Moussa (2008) who investigate plays, none has investigated questions in TV Series. This research attempts to examine the forms and pragmatic functions of questions in a TV series entitled *The Office*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Questions, both written and spoken, have been an interesting object to be studied since they are used on a daily basis. In addition to the studies mentioned previously, five other articles examine questions written by Fareh and Moussa (2008), Hyland (2002), Min and Park (2007), Webber (1994), and Umami (2015). The first four articles focus on the function of questions, while the last one compares the grammatical features of questions in English and Bahasa Indonesia.

The first research is an article by Fareh and Moussa (2008) who explored various functions of interrogative sentences in English. They found that interrogative sentences have different discourse functions. The function that is most commonly used is the direct function of interrogative sentences,

which is to seek information. Some other functions are the indirect functions of interrogative sentences, including to express surprise, deny, and give suggestions.

Hyland (2002) examines the functions of questions in academic writing. He stated that academic writing starts with a question, which makes it crucial for the writer. The research results show that questions function to express the writers' purposes, organize texts, evaluate arguments, and set up claims.

Min and Park (2007) observed that indirect uses of interrogative sentences are generally carrying the speaker's emotion with a negative attitude. They found that rhetorical questions with the question words *who* and *why* dominates the use of question words. The repetition of the same phrase also emphasizes the speaker's negative emotions.

Webber (1994) investigates the use of questions in medical texts. She found that questions are used to arouse interest, as discourse organizers, as attitudinal markers particularly to express doubt or caution, as reader guidance devices as well as to point to the future, also to criticize or attack opponents.

Finally, Umami (2015) examines interrogative sentences in English and Bahasa Indonesia based on the grammatical features and the usage of both languages. She reported that both languages share many common features: the same structure of yes/no question, equivalent interrogative pronouns, and both languages have tag questions. Yet, there are some differences between them, including the form of the questions and the auxiliary verb.

In the present research, we focus primarily on questions produced by the characters in a TV Series *The Office*. The TV Series allows us to observe the reality of Americans in their daily life due to its portrayal of authentic experiences and more comprehensive behavior of them in the workplace. In this research we attempt to reveal the pragmatics functions of interrogative utterances produced by office workers in the American TV series.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Clause Types

A clause, as explained by Huddleston and Pullum (2005), has a head element which is a verb phrase (VP) and every VP, in turn, has its Verb (V) as head. Therefore, a verb, the head of a VP, is always present in every canonical clause. According to Huddleston (1984), there are four major clause types: declaratives, interrogatives, exclamatives and imperatives. Similarly, Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik (1985) also divided the clause into four major types according to their syntactic form: declaratives, interrogatives, imperatives and exclamatives. They further classify interrogatives into two: yes/no questions and wh-questions. However, Huddleston and Pullum (2005) argued that there are five major types of clause: declaratives, closed interrogatives, open interrogatives, exclamatives, and imperatives.

Yes/no questions, as argued by Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad & Finegan (1999), are used to invite the interlocutor to indicate whether a statement is true or not. Therefore, yes/no questions expect a yes or no answer or some other possible answers that indicate various degrees of certainty, such as definitely or perhaps (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002). Yes/no question begins with a verb as the result of reversing the subject and verb of the declarative form of the sentence. For example, in the sentences “Was Patrick late?” and “Is Anna writing a paper?” (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985), the main verbs *was* and *is* are placed at the beginning of both questions as a reversal from the declarative form “Patrick was late” and “Anna is writing a paper.”

Unlike yes/no questions, WH-questions start with a question word *what*, *where*, *when*, *who*, or *how*, or a phrase (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002). The interrogative word in WH-questions suggests the missing information that the speaker wants the hearer to give (Biber et al., 1999). Question words are used to ask particular types of questions and, therefore, to get particular answers.

Speech Acts

Austin (1962) argued that rather than paying attention to what words mean, it is more important to focus on what people mean. Similarly, using a language to do something, also called a speech act, is crucial and needs to be studied. According to Hurford, Heasley, and Smith (2007), a speech act allows the speaker to do something by saying something. In other words, a speech is an action; therefore, language can be used to do something. In addition, Downing (2015) explained that speech act is when we perform acts through our words, such as thanking or promising. Speech act theory is used in this research since the object of this research is utterances in the form of interrogatives and their pragmatic functions. Searle (1976) classified speech acts into five groups, namely declarations, representatives, commissives, directives, and expressive, where all of them require actions to be done.

Context

Context refers to particular parts of an utterance similar to a unit that is the focus of attention (Crystal, 1991). In other words, context is the surrounding objects in which the utterance happened. Cutting (2002) stated that there are three types of context: situational context, background knowledge context, and co-textual context. Situational context is the physical situation where the conversation happens, and the speaker and hearer can see. Background knowledge context can either be cultural or interpersonal. Cultural means the knowledge that each person has regarding the area of life and interpersonal is obtained by knowing the interlocutor from shared experiences or verbal interactions. Co-textual context means the context of the text itself, such as the ability to know the person mentioned in a third-person point of view.

METHODS

The data source of this research is the TV series entitled *The Office* Season 1. It was accessed legally

from Netflix. *The Office* is originally a British TV series aired in 2001-2003. Starring Steve Carell as the “funny” boss, *The Office* ran for nine seasons consisting of 198 Episodes and nine Webisodes. The first season itself consists of six episodes with approximately 22 minutes per episode.

The data was collected by watching the entire six episodes of *The Office* US Season 1 as well as reading the movie script. In case there are any differences between them, the actual dialogues spoken by the actors in the series are used in this research. The steps began with identifying in each episode all interrogative utterances in the form of question words (WH questions) or yes/no questions. In addition, the suprasegmental features by listening to the intonation were also considered. WH questions are commonly marked by falling intonation, even though they possibly end in rising intonation regarding repetition or clarification of information the speaker has already known. The last step was to list all of the interrogative sentences found in *The Office* US Season 1 along with their functions by referring to the 35 pragmatics functions of questions proposed by Fareh and Moussa (2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From a total of 133 minutes, 409 questions were found in season one. Those interrogative utterances consist of 214 (52%) yes-no questions and 195 (48%) WH-questions. On average, there are three interrogative utterances produced in one minute. The results show that questions are often present in a formal situation, like in *The Office*, whether they are in the form of yes/no questions or WH-questions.

Forms of Questions

Yes/no Questions

Questions requiring a yes or no answer are called yes/no-questions (Nordquist, 2019). Yes/no questions are formed with an auxiliary verb (*be, do or have*) as an operator + subject + main verb or modal verb + subject + main verb. These two examples illustrate the formula aforementioned:

(1) S01E02 | 00:00:35 → 00:00:38 | YN – MO

Context: *During Diversity Day, corporate sends Mr. Brown as the speaker to talk about diversity in the office. Michael, the manager of Dunder Mifflin, is excited. Mr. Brown is arranging the chairs in the conference room, and Michael offers to help him with that. However, the chair arrangement is almost made.*

MICHAEL: Hey, uh, **can I help you out here?**

MR. BROWN: Oh, I’m all set, thanks.

The questions above is a yes/no question because the answer implies “no.” The question does not require a long explanation like the WH-questions commonly do.

WH-questions

WH-questions start with one of these interrogative words: *what, when, where, who, whom, whose, which, why, and how* (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985). These question words are commonly used to obtain information. Therefore, the response cannot be *yes* or *no*.

(2) S01E03 | 00:11:13 → 00:11:25 | WA – SI

Context: *When Dwight is planning the office’s healthcare plan, Jim had the idea of faking diseases to prank Dwight. This conversation takes place at Pam’s desk as Jim tells her his plan.*

JIM: **What are you writing?** Don’t write Ebola or mad cow disease. Right? Cos I’m suffering from both.

PAM: I’m inventing new diseases.

The question above matches the typical function of *what*, that is, to seek information about people or things.

Pragmatic Functions of Questions

The ten most common functions of a total of 409 questions found in *The Office* were 1) to seek information (33%), 2) to maintain or initiate a conversation (9%), 3) to seek confirmation (8%), 4) to seek clarification (7%), 5) to order (4%), 6) to express irritation or exasperation (4%), 7) to express surprise or disbelief (4%), 8) to express

disappointment, complain or dissatisfaction (4%), 9) to joke (4%), and 10) to make an offer (3%).

Table 1. The frequency of 10 most commonly used functions of questions in the TV series

No	Function	Token	%
1	Seeking/requesting information	135	33
2	Maintaining/initiating conversation	38	9
3	Seeking confirmation	33	8
4	Seeking clarification	27	7
5	Ordering	18	4
6	Expressing irritation or exasperation	17	4
7	Expressing surprise or disbelief	15	4
8	Expressing disappointment, complain or dissatisfaction	15	4
9	Joking	15	4
10	Making an offer	13	3

Seeking Information

The primary function of questions is to seek information. In other words, questions that are used to seek information express literal meaning. In *The Office*, this is the most frequent function of questions found, as it amounts to 135 or 33%. The example below illustrates how a question can function to seek information:

(3) S01E01 | 0:02:03 → 0:02:06 | YN – SI

Context: Michael is at Pam's desk at the receptionist. He asks Pam whether he got any messages, and Pam tells him that he got a fax from the corporate.

MICHAEL: Any messages?

PAM: Yeah, just a fax.

The question is used only to get information, proven by the answers that give the exact information asked by the speakers. Moreover, there are no further implications or hidden purpose in the questions rather than to seek information.

Maintaining/Initiating Conversation

Sometimes, it is challenging to keep a conversation going, whether it is because the people involved do not know each other well or the interlocutor is not

interested in talking or continuing the conversation. Questions, however, can help a conversation going or start one. The example below shows how a question can function to maintain a conversation as found in *The Office*:

(4) S01E01 | 0:17:01 → 0:17:23 | WA – MC

Context: Pam is engaged to Roy. Jim invites Pam to get a drink with the office workers, but Roy disagrees. Jim finds the situation awkward after Pam leaves her desk, leaving only the two boys. To maintain the conversation and break the silence with Roy, Jim asks a random question to Roy.

ROY: No, it sounds good, but seriously, we gotta get going.

JIM: Yeah. Um, what's in the, um, **what's in the bag?**

ROY: Just tell her I'll talk to her then.

Jim uses the filler word "um" in his sentence. In Linguistics, a filler word is a meaningless word, phrase, or sound, indicating pause or hesitation in speech (Amiridze, N., Davis, B., & Maclagan, M., 2010). Considering the filler word and pauses when Jim talks, it can be seen that he does not actually know what to talk about; therefore, he seeks any topic he might discuss. In that situation, Jim wants to keep his conversation with Roy going to end the awkward silence by asking what is inside Roy's bag.

Seeking Confirmation

Confirmation means "B2: a statement or proof that something is true" (Confirmation, n.d.). In other words, to seek confirmation is to validate something. Below is an example of how a question can function as a tool to seek confirmation:

(5) S01E04 | 0:02:58 → 0:03:02 | YN – SCO

Context: Michael likes to hold parties in *The Office*. Today, he wants to celebrate Meredith's birthday. However, Pam is not sure about it because Meredith's birthday is still next month.

PAM: **You still wanna have a party?**

MICHAEL: Yeah, why not? Sure. Go ahead, live a little.

Pam is confused that Michael wants to hold a birthday party for Meredith since her birthday is still on the following month. She thinks that it is too early to celebrate Meredith's birthday.

Seeking Clarification

Clarification means "an explanation or more details that make something clear or easier to understand" (Clarification, n.d.) Simply, a question functions to seek clarification when the speaker is not sure whether his or her utterances are true or not. In *The Office*, questions can function to seek clarification, one of which is shown in the example below:

(6) S01E04 | 0:17:40 → 0:18:00 | YN – SC

Context: *Michael is thrilled to write the best joke on Meredith's birthday card. However, as Meredith reads out his joke, the office workers think it is lame. Michael feels that he needs to prove that he can make good and funny birthday wishes, so he reads another joke he wrote earlier. The wish involves Meredith's marriage background, and Michael wants to clarify that his statement is true.*

MICHAEL : You know what? Actually I have a bunch of these, good ones, that I didn't use. Um, oh, where's that? Oh, OK. Here's a good one. "Hey Meredith, Liz Taylor called. She wants her age back and her divorces back." Cos Meredith's been divorced, like, twice. **Is that right?**

MEREDITH : You're right. You're right. Yes.

Michael uses the question to elucidate whether his statement saying that Meredith has been twice divorced is true. The question "is that right" follows his joke about the notorious actress Elizabeth Taylor who got divorced seven times.

Ordering

Order means "to issue a command" (Order, n.d.). In other words, to order means to ask someone to do something.

(7) S01E02 | 0:03:34 → 0:03:46 | YN – OR

Context: *Jim, one of the salesmen, is on the phone with Mr. Decker, one of his clients. In the middle of their conversation, Michael asks all of his employees to gather in the conference room to join the Diversity Day training program. Michael orders Jim to end his call and immediately join his coworkers.*

MICHAEL: Jim, **could you wrap it up, please?**

JIM: (on the phone) Mr. Decker, please.

MICHAEL: It's Diversity Day, Jim. I wish everyday was Diversity Day.

Diversity Day is important to Michael. Therefore, Michael orders Jim to join the program even though he is in the middle of speaking to a client on the phone. In addition, Michael uses question rather than imperative utterance to order because he wants to look polite in front of Mr. Brown, the speaker of the program.

Expressing Irritation or Exasperation

Irritation means "C2: the feeling of being angry or annoyed" (Irritation, n.d.). Meanwhile, exasperation means "the feeling of being annoyed, especially because you can do nothing to solve a problem" (Exasperation, n.d.). A question can be used to express irritation as shown below:

(8) S01E03 | 0:16:14 → 0:16:17 | WA – EI

Context: *The day Dwight plans the health care plan is a tough day for the office workers since he got a terrible plan for making huge cuts. Michael sees this and treats his employees with ice cream sandwiches to cheer them up. Michael offers two ice cream sandwiches to Ryan because Ryan does not get healthcare from the company.*

RYAN: Did you get the kind with the cookies?

MICHAEL: **Why don't you just eat it, OK?**

Rather than answering Ryan's question regarding his ice cream sandwich flavor, Michael replies with a question showing his irritation to Ryan's comment on his ice cream sandwiches. He feels irritated because he expects Ryan to thank him for handing two ice cream sandwiches, yet instead of doing that, Ryan comments on his ice cream sandwiches.

Expressing Surprise or Disbelief

Surprise is “B2: the feeling caused by something unexpected happening” (Surprise, n.d.). Meanwhile, disbelief means “the feeling of not being able to believe that something is true or real” (Disbelief, n.d.). In *The Office*, a question can be used to express disbelief, as illustrated below:

(9) S01E01 | 0:18:20 → 0:18:40 | WA – ESD

Context: *Michael tries to pull a prank on Pam as if she is fired due to the downsizing. In his office, Michael fake-fires Pam in front of Ryan. Pam shows her disbelief by using a question.*

MICHAEL: Pam? Can you come in here for a sec?
Just have a seat, I was gonna call you in anyway, um, you know Ryan? As you know, there is going to be downsizing and you have made my life so much easier, in that I’m going to have to let you go first.

PAM: **What?** Why?

The example shows that Pam does not believe the fact that Michael fired her. Her rising intonation in saying “what” supported by her facial expression shows how she is shocked by Michael’s utterance.

Expressing Disappointment, Complain, or Dissatisfaction

Disappoint means “B1: to fail to satisfy someone or their hopes, wishes, or to make someone feel unhappy” (Disappoint, n.d.). Meanwhile, complain means “to express feelings of pain, dissatisfaction, or resentment” (Complain, n.d.). In *The Office*, a question can be used to show a complaint as explained below:

(10) S01E02 | 0:01:15 → 0:01:36 | YN – DC

Context: *Jim is on the phone with Mr. Decker, one of his clients. Unfortunately, there is a problem with the signal, so he cannot listen to Mr. Decker clearly. The situation worsens when Dwight, whose desk is in front of Jim’s, turns on the paper shredder.*

JIM: **Do you really have to do that right now?**

DWIGHT: Yes, I do. I should have done it weeks ago, actually.

Like the one on the phone, Jim is annoyed by the paper shredder noise used by Dwight because they sit facing each other. Jim then expresses his complaint to Dwight by saying, “Do you really have to do that right now?” with a facial expression that implies annoyance.

Joking

Joke means “B1: something, such as a funny story or trick, that is said or done in order to make people laugh” (Joke, n.d.) In *The Office*, a question also functions as a joke:

(11) S01E01 | 0:06:39 → 0:06:47 | YN – JO

Context: *Packer is Michael’s best friend. In the middle of Michael and Jan’s meeting, Packer called. Michael answers it on loudspeaker.*

PACKER: **Does the carpet match the drapes?**

MICHAEL: Oh, my God! Oh! That’s horrifying.

Urban Dictionary (2004) explains the meaning of the joke as “a question used to indicate the belief that a woman’s hair is dyed” (para. 1). The carpet indicates the pubic hair, and the drapes are the hair on the head. Packer’s joke refers to Jan’s brownish hair.

Making an Offer

Offer is “the act of asking if someone would like to have something or if they would like you to do something” (Offer, n.d.). A question can be used to make an offer as shown below:

(12) S01E03 | 0:05:02 → 0:05:11 | YN – MO

Context: *Dwight wants to ally with Jim so he can obtain as much information as he could. Jim, however, sees this as an opportunity to pull a prank on Dwight.*

DWIGHT: I think an alliance might be a good idea, you know. Help each other out. **Do you want to form an alliance with me?**

JIM: Absolutely, I do.

Dwight offers Jim to form an alliance since he considers Jim as his close friend. Dwight puts his trust in Jim, while on the other hand, Jim accepts his

offer as one of the chances to pull another prank on Dwight.

Asking for Permission

Permission means “the act of allowing someone to do something, or of allowing something to happen” (Permission, n.d.). In *The Office*, a question can be used to ask for permission, as explained below:

(13) S01E03 | 0:15:38 → 0:15:42 | YN – AP

Context: *Jim locks Dwight in the conference room. Dwight, feeling outraged, then calls Jan, the vice president for regional sales, to ask for her permission to fire Jim.*

DWIGHT: Since I have you on the phone, um, **can I fire Jim?**

JAN: No.

One way to ask for permission is by using a question. One formula of forming a question that asks permission is “can I...” as uttered by Dwight.

Denying or Negating

Deny means “B2: to say that something is not true” (Deny, n.d.). Meanwhile, negate is “to show something to be wrong or to be the opposite of what was thought” (Negate, n.d.). In *The Office*, a question can be used to deny, as shown below:

(14) S01E01 | 0:14:57 → 0:15:05 | HW – DN

Context: *This conversation takes place at Dwight’s desk during work time. Dwight finds out that his stapler is covered in jelly, and he asks Michael to reprimand Jim.*

DWIGHT: Can you reprimand him, please?

JIM: **How do you know it was me?**

The question “How do you know it was me” implies a denial of the idea of Jim putting Dwight’s stapler in jelly. Jim’s utterance means, “I didn’t do it.”

Asserting or Confirming

Assert is defined as “C2: to behave in a way that expresses your confidence, importance, or power and earns you respect from others” (Assert, n.d.). Meanwhile, confirm means “B2: to prove or state the

truth of something that was previously not completely certain” (Confirm, n.d.).

(15) S01E04 | 0:05:58 → 0:06:34 | YN– AS

Context: *Jim accepts Dwight’s offer to form an alliance with him. After that, Jim tells Pam about his plan. Seeing this, Dwight suspects Jim that he is trying to betray him.*

DWIGHT: That’s good. Pursue this.

JIM: I’m trying to. **Do you see what I’m doing?** I’m going to have to talk to her a lot.

Jim is using the question to assert that he is not betraying Dwight. Instead, he tries to help Dwight to obtain information about the downsizing from Pam.

Expressing Suspicion

Suspicion is defined as “doubt or lack of trust” (Suspicion, n.d.). Expressing suspicion can be done by using a question as illustrated below:

(16) S01E06 | 0:13:43 → 0:13:56 | YN – ESU

Context: *Michael offers to give Katy a ride home. Seeing this, Dwight is uncertain whether Michael will only give her a ride or proceed to go out for a date with her.*

MICHAEL: She asked me for a ride, so I’m going to give her a ride home.

DWIGHT: **Is that all it is?** Just a ride home? Like a taxicab?

Dwight suspects Michael to not merely give Katy a ride home as a friend and sees this as an opportunity for Michael to get closer to Katy. He interrogates him by asking multiple questions and uttering them quickly.

Seeking Agreement or Approval

Agreement means “B2: the situation in which people have the same opinion, or in which they approve of or accept something” (Agreement, n.d.). Meanwhile, approval means “B2: the feeling of having a positive opinion of someone or something” (Approval, n.d.). In *The Office*, a question can be used to seek approval as explained below:

(17) S01E05 | 0:07:08 → 0:07:10 | YN – SAA

Context: *Dwight wants to be the team captain, yet Michael is the office manager, so Michael automatically thinks he is.*

DWIGHT : **Can I be team captain?**

MICHAEL : No, I'm team captain.

Dwight secretly implies that he wants to be the team captain, yet he realizes he should get Michael's approval to become one since Michael is his boss.

Demeaning

Demean means "to cause someone to become less respected" (Demean, n.d.). A question can be used to demean someone, as illustrated in the following example:

(18) S01E05 | 0:17:07 → 0:17:10 | HW – DE

Context: *During the basketball game, Michael says many things to demean the warehouse workers. One of which is when Jim succeeds in scoring a point which makes the office workers team ahead.*

MICHAEL: Ouch! Oh, **how much does it hurt? How much does it hurt?**

The word "ouch" is uttered to condescend to the warehouse workers when Jim, Michael's team, has scored and not them. He proceeds to ask them how much Jim's score "hurt" in a condescending tone with a loud voice and repeating the sentence twice to give more tension.

Greeting

Greeting means "B1: something friendly or polite that you say or do when you meet or welcome someone" (Greeting, n.d.). In *The Office*, a question can function as a greeting as explained below:

(19) S01E01 | 13:51 → 13:55 | WH – GR

Context: *Michael introduces Dwight to Ryan, the new temporary worker in the office.*

MICHAEL: This is Ryan, the new temp.

DWIGHT: **What's up?**

Referring to Urban Dictionary, "what's up" means "hello" in a conversation. It can also mean "what are you doing?" or "what is happening?"

Inviting

Invite means "A1: to ask or request someone to go to an event" (Invite, n.d.). In *The Office*, a question can function as an invitation, as illustrated below:

(20) S01E01 | 0:16:03 → 0:16:06 | YN – IN

Context: *Jim invites Pam to have a drink with the office. He wants Pam to come because he is close to her, and Pam is the only coworker who shares the same joke with him.*

JIM: **Do you like, um, going out at the end of the week for a drink?**

PAM: Yeah!

His filler word "um" indicates that Jim is a bit shy to invite Pam, afraid to be judged that he is asking her on a date. Fortunately, Pam accept Jim's invitation by saying "yeah!"

Suggesting

In this research, two definitions of suggesting are used; both are from Cambridge English Dictionary. The first one is "to mention an idea, possible plan, or action for other people to consider" and the second definition is "B2: to communicate or show an idea or feeling without stating it directly or giving proof" (Suggest, n.d.). Below is an example of giving a suggestion that is uttered by using a question found in *The Office*:

(21) S01E06 | 0:16:17 → 0:16:23 | WA – SU

Context: *Katy sells her purse in the conference room in the office. Angela is looking for a purse for her, but she has not decided what to buy yet.*

KATY : **What about the raspberry one?** It's really, uh, kind of festive.

Without stating it directly, Katy, as a purse seller, gives suggestions to Angela regarding the most suitable color for her by asking the question.

Changing the Topic of Conversation

Sometimes, a conversation that goes not as planned or expected needs to be cut. One way to stop unwanted topic is by asking a question as found in *The Office*, which shown below:

(22) S01E06 | 0:16:40 → 0:16:56 | WA – CT

Context: *Dwight wants to ask Katy out on a date. However, Katy does not want to.*

DWIGHT: Was that no to talking to me in private or was that no to the date?

KATY: (to Dwight) Both. (to Angela) **What colors do you like?**

Katy asks Angela the question not because she genuinely wants to know the color that Angela likes but to get out of the conversation with Dwight as he will not talk to her again after talking to another person.

Requesting Verbal Action

Verbal is “C2: spoken rather than written” (Verbal, n.d.). Below is an example of requesting verbal action using a question found in *The Office*:

(23) S01E02 | 0:01:15 → 0:01:21 | WA – VA

Context: *Jim is talking with his client on the phone. Unfortunately, the signal is unstable, and their conversation is disturbed. In addition, Dwight, who sits in front of Jim, uses the paper shredder, adding the disruption to Jim’s important call.*

JIM: What? Hello? Uh-huh. Wait. **What?**

Jim asks his client to repeat what the client said by saying, “What?”. To say something is one example of verbal actions.

Expressing Disapproval or Disagreement

Disapproval means “C1: the feeling of having a negative opinion of someone or something” (Disapproval, n.d.). Meanwhile, disagreement is “B2: an argument or a situation in which people do not have the same opinion” (Disagreement, n.d.). Below is an example of expressing disagreement using a question:

(24) S01E05 | 0:12:19 → 0:12:20 | YN – ED

Context: *Jim wants to use the basketball match to prove himself to Pam. He wants to have Roy, Pam’s fiancé. In fact,*

MICHAEL: OK, Ryan, you have Darryl. I have Roy.

JIM: **Really?** I thought I’d take Roy.

By saying, “Really?” Jim shows that he disapproves of Michael’s plan to have Roy because by so he cannot prove he is better than Roy.

Expressing Anger

Anger means “the feeling people get when something unfair, painful, or bad happens” (Anger, n.d.). A question can be used to express anger, as found in *The Office* and explained below:

(25) S01E05 | 0:18:07 → 0:18:11 | WA – EA

Context: *Michael feels threatened that the office workers team is going to lose the basketball game. He then overreacts to Jerry, one of the warehouse team, whose hand hits Michael’s nose accidentally.*

JERRY: I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to do that.

MICHAEL: **What’s your problem, man?** Just clocking me for no reason.

Michael’s purpose is not to get any information on whether Jerry has a problem with him but to show that he is bothered after Jerry hits him at the game and says it is a foul.

Giving Permission

To give permission is “the act of permitting” (Permission, n.d.). It is possible to give permission using a question, as found in *The Office*:

(26) S01E01 | 0:07:14 → 0:07:17 | YN – GP

Context: *Jim and Pam are close friends in The Office. Jim came to Pam’s desk at the receptionist to chat whenever he was bored. They both like to joke around.*

PAM: I have an important question for you.

JIM: **Yes?**

By saying the word “yes” with falling intonation, Jim allows Pam to ask her question.

Reminding

Remind means “B1: to make someone think of something they have forgotten or might have forgotten” (Remind, n.d.). A question can be used to remind someone as found in *The Office* which elaborated below:

(27) S01E03 | 0:19:08 → 0:19:39 | WA – RE

Context: *Michael promises his employees surprise at the end of the day. However, he cannot find anything to surprise his employees until 5 PM. He abruptly ends his sentence by saying it is time to go home.*

MICHAEL: I wish I had time to change it but Jan needs it by five, and, what time is it? What time is it? Oh, it’s after five. Oh, oh, it’s awful! So. Well. OK. See you guys on Monday.

ANGELA: **What about the surprise?**

By asking Michael regarding the surprise, Angela reminds Michael that he has to give the surprise he promised before going home.

Reprimanding or Blaming

Reprimand means “to express to someone your strong official disapproval of them” (Reprimand, n.d.). Meanwhile, blame means “B1: to say or think that someone or something did something wrong or is responsible for something bad happening” (Blame, n.d.). In *The Office*, a question can be used to reprimand as illustrated below:

(28) S01E03 | 0:09:55 → 0:10:03 | TQ – RB

Context: *Dwight is in charge of choosing the healthcare plan for the office. He asked his coworkers to write down any diseases they want to be covered so he can choose the most suitable healthcare plan for them.*

JIM: We can’t write our diseases down for you because that’s confidential.

DWIGHT: **Okay, well, I didn’t say to write your name down, did I?** Fill it out, leave it anonymous.

Jim states that he disagrees with Dwight’s order, even though he said it just to make fun of

Dwight. Dwight, however, is tired of Jim’s prank and trying to be serious.

Threatening

Threat means “B2: a suggestion that something unpleasant or violent will happen, especially if a particular action or order is not followed” (Threat, n.d.). In *The Office*, a question can be used as a threat as shown below:

(29) S01E01 | 0:15:02 → 0:15:05 | HW – DN

Context: *Jim always makes fun of Dwight by pulling pranks on him. Dwight found out that his stapler was covered in jelly, and he asked Michael to reprimand Jim.*

DWIGHT: **Are you gonna discipline him or not?**

MICHAEL: Ooh discipline, kinky! All right, here’s the deal you guys, the thing about practical jokes, is that you have to know when to start, as well as when to stop!

Dwight is tired of Jim’s prank since he had his stapler covered in jelly three times. This time, Dwight is eager that Michael must punish Jim, so Jim does not pull any pranks on Dwight again. He uses the question to threaten Michael that he must discipline Jim.

CONCLUSION

The idea that questions can function beyond requests for information, as proposed by Fareh and Moussa (2008), is proven in this research. There are 27 pragmatic functions of questions found in *The Office*. The functions mainly depend on the context of the utterance. The present research has shown that the most frequently used question word is *what* and the most frequent function of questions is *to seek information*. This dominant use is likely due to the setting of the place. *The Office* takes place in a paper supply company, and most of the conversations are used to gain information, rather than conversations that discuss interpersonal relationships. It is more important to ask a question that seeks information in formal situations, not personal ones.

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