

Jones, Leo. & C Von Bayer. (1983). [Rpt. 2008].
Functions of American English: Communication Activities for the Classroom
Cambridge: CUP. ISBN 978 0 521 28528 5



A short review of the book

As the title suggests, this is a course book on communicative activities for the language classroom. This book is meant for the learners and is accompanied by an audio cassette tape (it was written and published in the 80s!). (*It is possible that more recent editions may either have a CD accompanying the book in the place of a pre-recorded cassette, or a website from which the audio content can be downloaded.*) Apart from this student copy, there is also a teacher's manual.

There are 15 units, and at the end, a separate section for communication activities is included. This book is based on the earlier version of the British text *Functions of English* by the same authors. This demonstrates how the same content

can be used in the two books for two different sets of learners. In the contents page, we can see that the units are driven by language functions. It is therefore clear that the book has used a communicative functional approach, with materials presented in a dialogic mode.

In the section titled *Introduction to the student*, the authors answer questions, such as who is this book for? And what does this book cover? Such questions make the purpose of the book clear, and provide the users a right perspective on how to use the materials.

The units are divided into smaller sections, each with a different focus as stated: *conversations, presentations, exercises, communication activities, written work, and listening activities* (marks the sections that are recorded

on cassette tape). The conversations in the book are close to real-life situations. The communication activities and exercises are not presented in a routine manner, similar to what we see in grammar books based on the structural approach.

A sensitive reader from India perceives that this book cannot be used for beginners because it presupposes some exposure to language – learners from semi-urban backgrounds with five plus years of exposure to the English language. Therefore, it can be assumed that the book is suitable for use at the beginning of the pre-intermediate level, as proposed in the ‘New Cutting Edge’ series of the Longman publication, London. To substantiate this point, the next section of the review provides a brief description of each unit in the book.

Unit 1: ‘Talking about yourself, starting a conversation, making a date’

This provides materials for a good ice-breaking session for the facilitator and the learners in the classroom. The latter learn expressions related to functions, like introducing oneself and making a date. There is a sample conversation given. They then get to practice it through an exercise and produce what they have learned with the help of another exercise. At the end of the unit, written tasks are given to the learners, which involves dialogue writing.

Unit 2: ‘Asking for information: Question techniques, answering techniques, getting more information’

Has a conversation between two friends asking for and get information from each other. The learners do not just learn about asking questions and answering them, but will also be introduced

to hesitation devices like *I was wondering...*, *I hope you don't mind my asking...*, and so on. They also learn about fillers, which are a big part of real-life conversations. Fillers like well..., oh..., let me see..., and so on.

Unit 3: ‘Getting people to do things: Requesting, attracting attention, agreeing and refusing’ The conversation is among three people, a waitress, and a couple. Agreeing and refusing does not mean simply saying yes or no. Learners learn different expressions like sure, all right, I'm sorry but.... The written task at the end requires the learners to write three different letters in three different situations. The learners work individually and in pairs for the communication activities and exercises.

Unit 4: ‘Talking about past events: Remembering, describing experiences, imagining What if...’

This unit is about going down memory lane while talking about the past. Learners will learn to use questions like ‘*What happened next?*, *How did you feel when...?*’ to get specific information. The communication activity requires students to work in pairs and it is about finding out what their partner did the previous day. The writing exercise at the end involves writing a letter, writing a note, and writing a story.

Unit 5: ‘Conversation techniques: Hesitating, preventing interruptions and interrupting politely, bringing in other people’

Conversation has a lot of fillers. These fillers are used to express hesitation. It also includes expressions we can use when we do not want to be interrupted. Learners will have a lot of fun doing exercise 5.3. They just need to prolong the conversation using fillers like *umm*, *well*, *I*

think..., without focusing much on the content. The presentation part talks about expressions used when we do not want to be interrupted. Learners also learn how to bring in new people into the conversation for their opinion. The interaction pattern for the communication activity is in groups.

Unit 6: ‘Talking about the future: Stating intentions, discussing probability, considering What if...’

Learners learn expressions like *yes, definitely, probably, no probably not*, to perform functions like stating intentions and probability. Learners work in groups for communication activities. They learn to use ‘*will*’ and ‘*going to*’ when they talk about the future. At the end, the written task includes writing a letter, a description of a note, and a short write-up on what would one do if one became a president.

Unit 7: ‘Offering to do something, asking for permission, giving reasons’

Learners learn to use expressions like *let me get that for you* and *how about me getting that for you* when they are offering to do something. They also learn expressions they need to use when they are asking for help and expressions they need to use while giving people reasons. The learners work in pairs and also in groups for the communication activities. The written task includes writing different letters for permission.

Unit 8: ‘Giving opinions, agreeing and disagreeing, discussing’

Giving opinions is really important in one’s professional life. This also helps the learners perform better in debates. We do not always agree with everything. Expressing disagreement

politely is something we do in debates. Expressions like *if you ask me, In my opinion, and As I see it* are used to give opinions, while *Exactly, I couldn’t agree more, maybe, but don’t you think...* are used for agreeing and disagreeing. The learners work in pairs and groups for the activities. Written work focuses on writing a report expressing their opinions.

Unit 9: ‘Describing things, instructing people how to do things, checking understanding’
Instructions play a huge role in getting things done. The presentation part talks about describing things, giving instructions step by step, and checking and understanding. Expressions related to these language functions are given to the learners. The communication activity requires learners to work in pairs. The written work focuses on writing descriptive notes with the help of diagrams.

Unit 10: ‘Talking about similarities, talking about differences, stating preferences’

This unit focuses on the language function of comparing and contrasting. A sample conversation is given, where two persons talk about similarities and differences of cars. Expressions like *slightly higher, more or less the same, very little in common, and it is nowhere near* are taught to help learners talk about similarities and differences. There are no communication activities in the unit. The written work is about writing an essay by comparing and contrasting things.

Unit 11: ‘Making suggestions and giving advice, expressing enthusiasm, persuading’

Learners get to learn about performing functions, like suggesting and persuasion. They learn the difference between polite suggestions and informal suggestions. Learners have to work in

groups and in pairs for the activities.

Unit 12: ‘Complaining, apologising and forgiving, expressing disappointment’

Language plays a huge role in performing these functions. There is a sample conversation where people express their complaints in a polite manner and also apologise. The presentation part talks about how it is safe to complain politely so that we do not come across as rude. Learners work in groups and pairs for the activities. Students also learn expressions used for expressing disappointment. The written work focuses on writing complaint letters.

Unit 13: ‘Describing places, describing people’

A vivid description makes the conversation better. The presentation part gives information about questions we need to ask before describing people or places. The exercises require the learners to work individually. There are no communication activities for this unit. The written work focuses on writing notes describing people and things.

Unit 14: ‘Telling a story: Narrative techniques, handling dialogue, controlling a narrative’

This unit focuses on narration. Learners learn different narrative techniques. It also talks about using direct and indirect speech in narration. There is an exercise where the learners have to create a narrative from the comic strip given. They need to work in pairs for the activities. The written work focuses on writing a story based on newspaper headlines.

Unit 15: ‘Dealing with moods and feelings: Anger, sadness, indifference. Saying goodbye’

Expressing feelings is an important part of language function. In the sample conversation given, we see a couple having a heart-to-heart conversation. The presentation part deals with expressing different moods, like anger, sadness, and indifference. As it is the last unit, there is an activity which focuses on the language function of *saying goodbye*. The written work requires students to write about what they have learnt from the book.

Conclusion

This book is quite useful, both for teachers and learners who would like to adopt a communicative-cum-functional approach to language learning. A further strength of the book is that it presents the content in the form of dialogic conversations. The book clearly underscores what we actually do with language and the same has been used as a guiding force to present the learning materials in communicative language functions. In the introduction to the book, Leo Jones states that the material used in this book is taken from his own book, published in Britain as *Functions of English*. Both the book have the same purpose of helping the instructors use a functional syllabus to develop English and to help the learners use it to improve their proficiency in English.

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