

Language Functions in ESL Textbooks

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Abstract

Language functions are often used as fundamental guiding principles in ESL (English as a Second Language) textbooks especially now that focus on meaning has become crucial to ESL teaching and learning. This paper identifies general and specific language functions used in five beginner ESL textbooks to provide baseline data that will guide instructional material developers and teachers. It also examines language function content in relation to the objectives of each textbook to aide teachers in appropriately selecting materials for their students. Finally, the study analyzes the language function content of ESL textbooks *vis-à-vis* the needs of beginner ESL learners.

Keywords: language functions, instructional material development, ESL textbooks, content analysis

Introduction

For effective language use and acquisition, Chomsky (1957, 1965) argues the importance of linguistic competence as the goal of language learning. Such a notion puts emphasis on learning the form, structure, and grammatical content of the target language. Hymes (1967, 1972), on the other hand, asserts that development of communicative competence should be the goal in language learning. This concept takes into account both the linguistic aspect of the target language and the importance of context in language acquisition. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, a significant shift from a linguistic to communicative approach to language teaching had occurred (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Widdowson, 2000). This shift paved the way for Hymes' terminology, perspective, and notion of communicative competence to be adopted in the teaching approaches and development of new teaching materials by language teachers and applied linguists (Celce-Murcia, 2007).

Several studies have noted the need for a dual focus in language teaching – a focus on form (FoF) and a focus on meaning (FoM) (Baleghizadeh, 2010; Long, 2000; Shang, 2007). This suggests that learning a language is never an isolated study of its linguistic form, but rather a complex process which also includes knowledge of the language context. This is crucial in understanding the message communicated by the speaker and to enable appropriate responses from other interlocutors. This view of language learning is becoming more popular as a greater number of English as Second Language (ESL) textbook publishers adopt language functions as the core of their instructional materials (Peppard, 2010). Jiang (2006) noted that the trend is primarily because of concerns over learners' language needs, which is paving the way towards making connections between language functions and forms. This has been further intensified by an emphasis on the increasing role of pragmatics in English

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language instruction which draws on natural conversations to be integrated into commercially available English-language learning materials (Bardovi-Harling, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, & Reynolds, 1991). Considering these practices, it is crucial that the language function contents of existing ESL textbooks be assessed and evaluated. This is to provide sufficient information to material developers and ESL teachers whose tasks include designing, continuously modifying, and upgrading instructional materials to suit and address the needs of ESL students.

Language Functions

One significant aspect of communicative competence is learning to use language for a variety of functions (Pien, 1985). Such functions include: *asking for information*, *explaining*, *making a request*, etc. Learners' knowledge of language functions has been noted to provide various advantages to students (Hughes & Lavery, 2004; Kinsella, 2010). Accordingly, this knowledge enables students to interpret and react appropriately to what others say. Moreover, it enables them to put their ideas together in a wide range of ways; internalize the patterns needed to express their ideas; identify the language demands of specific tasks and content concepts; and ultimately increase their use of complex sentence structures (Kinsella, 2010).

Various definitions have been accorded to the term *language functions*. Cook (1985), for one, defines language functions as the purposes for which people use language; Thomas (2009) considers language functions as the communicative functions involved in an oral, interactive, or discursive interchange; Soto-Hinman and Hetzel (2009) perceive them as the various tasks accomplished by means of language; while Green (2012) asserts that language functions are social actions that people intend to accomplish through the use of language. Proponents of language functions may have defined the term in various ways, however, every definition asserts an active concept that makes language useful and purposeful.

One of the most notable works on language functions has been provided by Van Ek and Trim in their *Threshold* series: *Breakthrough*, *Waystage*, *Threshold*, and *Vantage* level (Trim, 2001; Van Ek & Trim, 1990; Van Ek & Trim, 1991; Van Ek & Trim, 2001). The project yielded an exhaustive and comprehensive list of the classifications of language functions noted in the field of language education (Table 1). Moreover, it has also pioneered the function-oriented approach used in various instructional materials and syllabi (Harrison & Barker, 2015).

A distinct characteristic of the *Threshold* series is its classification of language functions into general and specific categories. The working definition for general language functions include the six broad categories identified by Van Ek and Trim (1991): (1) *imparting and seeking factual information*; (2) *expressing and finding out attitudes*; (3) *deciding on courses of action-suasion*; (4) *socialising*; (5) *structuring discourse*; and (6) *communication repair*; while the working definition for specific language functions includes the list of functions under each broad category heading. For instance, under the major language function of *imparting and seeking factual information* are more specific sub-categories such as: *identifying and defining*; *reporting/describing and narrating*; *correcting*; and *asking and answering questions*.

This study, therefore, aims to identify the general and specific language functions used in several beginner ESL textbooks. Identifying and classifying language functions, in general, has been helpful in identifying topics, activities, and language exponents (vocabulary, structures, and grammatical content) which learners should be exposed to and are expected to acquire (Canale & Swain, 1980; Green, 2012). Such data provides for a range of meanings or meaning potential appropriate for beginner ESL learners (Halliday, 1975).

Table 1
Specifications of Language Functions in Threshold 1990 (van Ek & Trim, 1991)

1	Imparting and seeking factual information Identifying/defining; reporting (describing and narrating); correcting; asking; answering questions
2	Expressing and finding out attitudes <i>Factual agreement:</i> Expressing agreement with a statement; expressing disagreement with a statement; enquiring about agreement and disagreement; denying something <i>Factual knowledge:</i> Stating or enquiring whether one knows or does not know a person, thing, or fact; stating or enquiring whether one remembers or has forgotten a person, thing or fact or action; expressing or enquiring degrees of probability; necessity; certainty <i>Factual modality:</i> Expressing or enquiring about obligation; ability and inability to do something; something is or is not permitted; granting permission; withholding permission <i>Volitional:</i> Expressing and enquiring wants; desires; intentions; preferences <i>Emotional:</i> Expressing, reporting, or enquiring about pleasure; displeasure; happiness; unhappiness; dislike; satisfaction; dissatisfaction; interest; lack of interest; surprise; lack of surprise; hope; disappointment; fear; reassurance; worries; gratitude; apologies; moral obligation; approval; disapproval; regret; sympathy
3	Deciding on courses of action (Suasion) Suggesting course of action; agreeing to a suggestion; requesting others to do something; advising; warning; encouraging; instructing; directing; requesting or offering assistance; giving, accepting, or declining an invitation; asking someone for something
4	Socialising Attracting attention; greeting people; responding to greetings; addressing people; introducing someone; reacting to being introduced; congratulating someone; proposing a toast; taking a leave
5	Structuring discourse Opening a conversation; expressing hesitation; introducing a theme; expressing an opinion; enumerating; exemplifying; emphasizing; summarizing; changing the theme; following a discourse; interrupting; asking someone to be silent; going over the floor; indicating a wish to continue; encouraging someone to continue; indicating that one is coming to an end; using the telephone; letters
6	Communication repair Signaling non-understanding; asking for repetition; asking for repetition; asking for clarification; asking for confirmation of understanding; asking for or spelling a word; asking for something to be written down; expressing ignorance of an expression; appealing for assistance; asking a speaker to slow down; paraphrasing; repeating what one has said; asking if you have been understood; supplying a word or expression

Research Questions

In this study, a total of five beginner ESL textbooks—two South Korean published and three internationally published—were analyzed. The analysis sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What language functions are used in beginner ESL textbooks?
2. How do language functions relate to beginner ESL learners' learning needs?

Methodology

This study consisted of two steps: 1) textbook selection, and 2) content analysis of existing English language learning textbooks.

Textbook Selection

An informal survey was conducted at local language institutes in Baguio City, Philippines. These language institutes cater to various ESL learners from countries such as Korea, China, and the Middle East. Administrators, ESL teachers, and students were asked for the titles of the books that they use in their classes. From the responses, the five most commonly used ESL textbooks were chosen: *Speed Up English* (Yang & Hong, 2005), *Click English* (Hong & Cho, 1999), *Side by Side* (Molinsky & Bliss, 2000), *Exploring English* (Harris & Rowe, 1995), and *Expressways* (Molinsky & Bliss, 1996).

Speed up English is a conversational textbook for English learners (Yang & Hong, 2005). The lessons and activities are geared towards giving learners opportunities to understand the basics of English structure and to become familiar with English vocabulary and expressions. It also aims to build a strong foundation in the fundamentals of conversational English and to help students develop their speaking skills. It contains twenty units with each unit consisting of the following sub-sections: *Getting Ready*, *Focus*, *Talk 1*, *Talk 2*, *Activity 1*, and *Activity 2*. *Getting Ready* introduces relevant vocabulary items and expressions; *Focus* provides the target structures of the English language for each unit; *Talk 1* is a short dialogue that includes the target structures of each unit; *Talk 2* provides a more challenging conversation script with additional expressions; *Activity 1* is designed to stimulate learners to practice conversation with their peers; and *Activity 2* provides authentic materials and cloze quizzes.

Click English is a conversational English course for adult and young adult learners of English (Hong & Cho, 1999). It aims to develop communication skills, especially speaking skills, and to encourage accuracy and fluency. The book is designed to provide ESL students with opportunities to practice and develop their speaking skills. It provides various strategies for students to be effective independent learners. The book contains 30 units with each unit consisting of the following subsections: *Warm up*, *Focus*, *Follow Along*, *Look Again*, *Activity*, and *Follow up*. *Warm up* introduces new vocabulary and goals for the lesson; *Focus* provides an overview of specific language functions and grammatical structures; *Follow Along* helps students learn to use the language with accuracy; *Look Again* provides additional practice through less controlled and more challenging exercises; *Activity* provides various forms of task-based speaking activities for effective use of the language; and *Follow up* is an extension of the *Activity* section which wraps up the lesson.

Side by Side is a standard and grammar-based English language textbook for adults and young-adult learners (Molinsky & Bliss, 2000). As a standard-based textbook, the topics are rooted in competency-based approaches to language instruction including national, state, and local standard-based curricula. The grammar, on the other hand, is graduated based upon students' increasing ability levels. Also, it is a four-skill textbook that integrates conversation practice, reading, writing, and listening. Other features of the book include: *Vocabulary Preview* sections in every chapter to introduce key words in picture dictionary form; *How to Say It* lessons highlight communication strategies; and *Pronunciation Exercises* which provide models for practicing pronunciation, stress, and intonation.

Exploring English is a textbook that teaches all four language skills and gives students opportunities to practice what they have learned (Harris & Rowe, 1995). It is designed for communicative practice and uses student-centered activities to enable students to engage in meaningful communication. Basic competencies are taught in context: asking directions, taking a bus, buying food, etc. It also has grammar sections which are presented inductively in context in both reading and conversation activities. By encountering the target grammatical structures in a variety of contexts, students are able to make reliable and useful generalizations about the language (Larsen-Freeman, 2014).

Expressways integrates life-skills topics, functions, and grammar to engage students in learning English with the aid of simulated contexts (Molinsky & Bliss, 1996). The book is set up with a highway motif using various

activities for each unit. The *Guided Conversations* activity offers meaningful and lively communication practice; *Cross Talk* and *Cultural Intersections* provide activities that help students to relate lesson content to their own lives and to discuss cross-cultural issues; *Reflections* and *Community Connections* provide opportunities for self-assessment, critical thinking, problem solving, and task-based activities involving community resources; *Interactions* and *Interview* activities engage students in role playing and cooperative learning; *Constructions Ahead* and *Listen* exercises provide reinforcement of grammar and intensive listening comprehension practice; finally, *Reading Passages* and *Your Turn* activities provide students with reading and writing opportunities based on the themes of each chapter.

Content Analysis of ESL Textbooks

Content analysis was employed to determine the language functions used in the ESL textbooks. Content analysis has been defined as the study of recorded human communications including books, magazines, web-pages, poems, newspapers, songs, paintings, etc. (Babbie, 2010). It is a method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from texts and makes them easier to classify into more relevant and manageable data (Weber, 1990). Krippendorff (2013) noted three distinguishing characteristics of a contemporary content analysis:

- a) Content analysis is an empirically grounded method, exploratory in process, and predictive or inferential in intent;
- b) Content analysis transcends traditional notions of symbols, contents, and intents;
- c) Contemporary content analysis has been forced to develop a methodology of its own, one that enables researchers to plan, execute, communicate, reproduce, and critically evaluate their analyses whatever the particular results. (pp. 1-4)

To address Research Question 1 on the language function content of ESL textbooks, close attention was paid to language items in each unit of the textbook for the purpose of language functions analysis. The first author conducted the initial coding of the language functions. It was then followed by a series of consultation with the second author until both authors agreed on 90% of the coding made on the language function content of the five ESL materials. As each chapter of every textbook was subdivided further into various sections, only the main lessons were analyzed. Utterances and dialogues were abstracted to understand the context of the discourse. Language functions were classified into general and specific language functions as noted in the *Threshold 1990* specifications of language functions by Van Ek and Trim (1991). The choice to use *Threshold 1990* specifications, as opposed to *Breakthrough* or *Waystage* specifications, which are both geared towards beginner learners, was intended primarily to provide a more comprehensive list of language functions in the event that some textbooks deviate from the expected content; using *Threshold 1990* was also intended to yield more detailed and specific information on the language functions used in current ESL textbooks.

To address Research Question 2 on how language functions relate to beginner learners' learning needs, the list of language functions from the five English language learning textbooks and their exponents were compared and contrasted to the recommended language functions and exponents noted in *Breakthrough* and *Waystage* specifications for beginner ESL learners. Exponents are expressions, utterances, or linguistic forms used to achieve the intended language functions. For instance, *Waystage* recommends the following exponents in "imparting and seeking factual information" particularly on identifying or defining certain words:

- a) (With pointing gesture— this (one), that (one), these, those, me, you, him, her, us them
- b) (+N) + be + NP
This is the bedroom.
- c) I, you, he, she, it, we, they + be + NP
He is the owner of the restaurant.)

Results

What language functions are used in beginner ESL textbooks?

Language Functions in Speed Up English

Figure 1 shows the language functions used in this textbook. Of the six main categories identified by Van Ek and Trim (1991), most of the language items from the textbook use “imparting and seeking factual information” (36.36%), followed by “expressing and finding out attitudes” (32.95%). “Suasion” comes third (22.73%); while “socialising” and “structuring discourse” are fourth (3.41%). “Communication repair” is the least frequently occurring (1.14%) of the major classifications of language functions used in the textbook. The findings show *Speed Up English* fulfilling its promise of providing sufficient opportunity for students to converse in the target language as can be seen from the various activities provided for “imparting and seeking factual information,” “expressing and finding out attitudes,” and “suasion.” Language items using the “imparting and seeking factual information” function focus on asking and answering inquiries about information; correcting statements (simple present and past tenses); expressing physical state; reporting (describing and narrating); and asking and answering about knowledge. The “expressing and finding out attitudes” function yields information on: emotional states, likes/dislikes, needs, future plans and activities, certainty, sympathy, surprise, health problems, obligation, permission, preferences, wants/desires/hopes/wishes, opinions, comparison of objects, ability/ inability, gratitude, possibilities, expressing agreement/disagreement and the cause of unhappiness/ disappointment. The “suasion” function is used in various situations such as inviting others to do something, offering and accepting or declining an invitation, requesting and offering assistance, asking and giving advice/suggestions/tips, asking for permission, booking a flight, making requests, refusing requests or favors, giving instructions, and asking for and giving directions. The “socialising” function renders actions including greetings and responding to greetings, offering congratulations, and wishing someone success. The “structuring discourse” function is used once in closing a conversation. Finally, the “communication repair” function is used to ask for confirmation of understanding. “Socialising,” “structuring discourse,” and “communication repair” have been integrated into dialogues and free conversation practices.

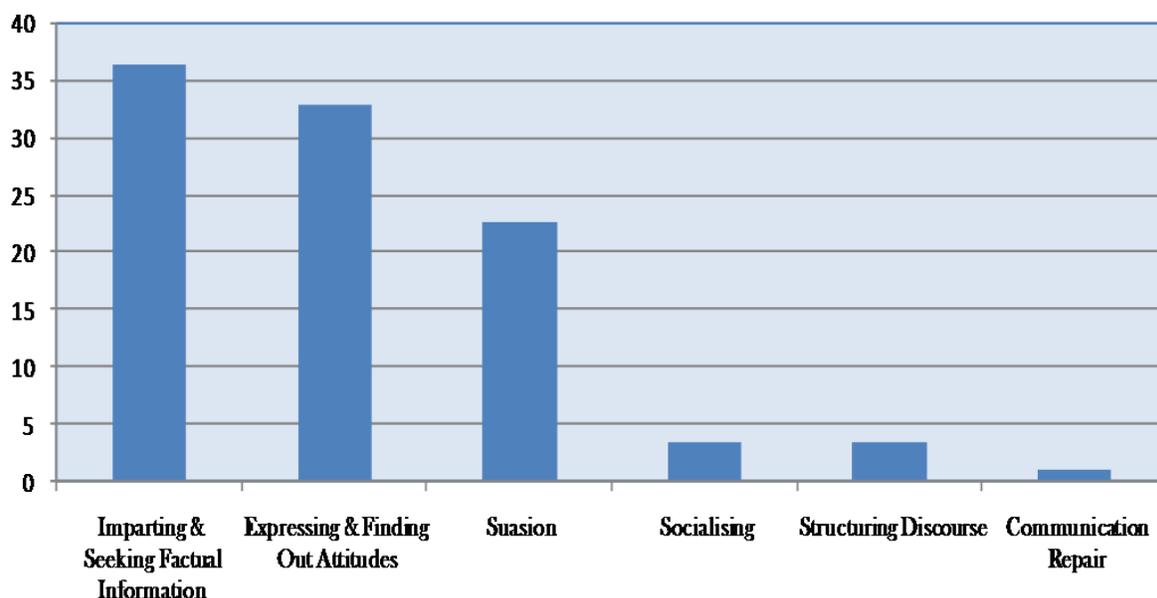


Figure 1. Language Functions in “Speed Up English”

Speed Up English also aims to familiarize students with beginner-level English vocabulary and expressions. The result of the analysis shows a vast amount of target vocabulary, expressions, and language functions used in various contexts (grocery shops, restaurants, tourist spots, hospitals, hotels, museums, libraries, parks, etc.) and situations (travelling, cooking, meeting people, watching movies, advertising, planning for special events, giving advice, giving instructions, understanding symbols, etc.).

Language Functions in Click English

Figure 2 shows the language functions used in the textbook *Click English*. Of the six main categories of language functions identified by Van Ek and Trim (1991), “imparting and seeking factual information” ranks first (58.33%) with language items used in: seeking and answering identification, asking and answering for information (wh-questions: when, where, how do you, and how far), reporting (describing and narrating), asking for specifications, asking for confirmations, and making comparisons. “Expressing and finding out attitudes” ranks second (18.06%) with language items used in: inquiring and answering about health conditions and emotional states, expressing disagreement with a statement, asking about likes and dislikes, asking for and answering about the future, expressing ability and inability, inquiring about wants/desires, asking for and answering about possibilities, expressing concern, and seeking and giving permission to call someone. Ranked third is “socialising” (8.33%) and “structuring discourse” (8.33%). The “socialising” function focuses on introducing oneself, introducing others, replying to a greeting, and attracting attention. “Structuring discourse,” on the other hand, centers on expressing hesitation/looking for words, expressing an opinion, and closing a conversation or dialogue. Ranked fourth is “suasion” (5.56%) which concentrates on offering assistance in a grocery store and in a clothing store, asking for and giving directions, and giving advice on health problems. Ranked last is “communication repair” (1.39%) which focuses on asking for confirmation of understanding.

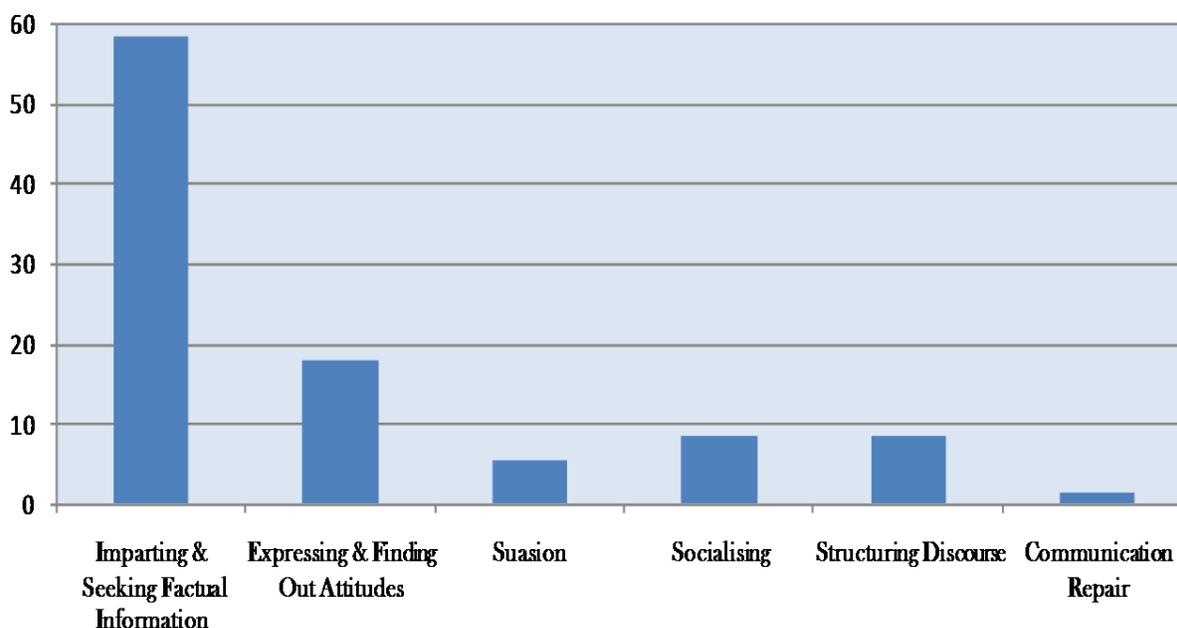


Figure 2. Language Functions in “Click English”

Click English aims to develop communication skills and encourage accuracy and fluency. To attain these goals, two techniques were employed: presenting language functions alongside its target grammatical structures and repetition techniques. For instance, Chapter 2 uses the theme *Jobs* with the specific language function “seeking and answering identification” and with the target grammatical structure “Who is/are + Pronoun?” as its foci. Moreover, the same language functions and grammatical structures are integrated in Chapter 3 with the theme *Family*. Accuracy and fluency is further emphasized with controlled practice on target structures, grammar, and vocabulary.

Language Functions in Side by Side

Figure 3 shows the language functions used in the textbook *Side by Side*. Of the six main categories of language functions identified by Van Ek and Trim (1991), “imparting and seeking factual information” ranks first (50.57%) with emphasis on: asking and answering about personal information, asking and answering for confirmation, and reporting (describing and narrating). “Expressing and finding out attitudes” ranks second (24.14%) and focused on: expressing wants and desires (I like/I want), satisfaction, gratitude, surprise, obligation to do something, sympathy, complimenting, ability/inability, reacting to information, apologizing, asking, answering and expressing dissatisfaction/disappointment, inquiring and talking about future intentions, and certainties. The “structuring discourse” ranks third (11.49%) with language items highlighting situations such as: opening a telephone conversation, verifying a caller in a telephone conversation, opening and closing a conversation, responding to a call, expressing opinion, expressing hesitation/looking for words, and enumerating. The “socialising” function ranks fourth (8.05%) with language items highlighting: greeting people, responding to greetings, introducing someone, and attracting attention. “Suasion” ranks fifth (4.60%) with language items concentrating on: offering assistance, inviting others to do something, refusing an invitation, and recommending products. Ranked last is “communication repair” (1.15%) where language items center on asking someone to spell something and checking for understanding.

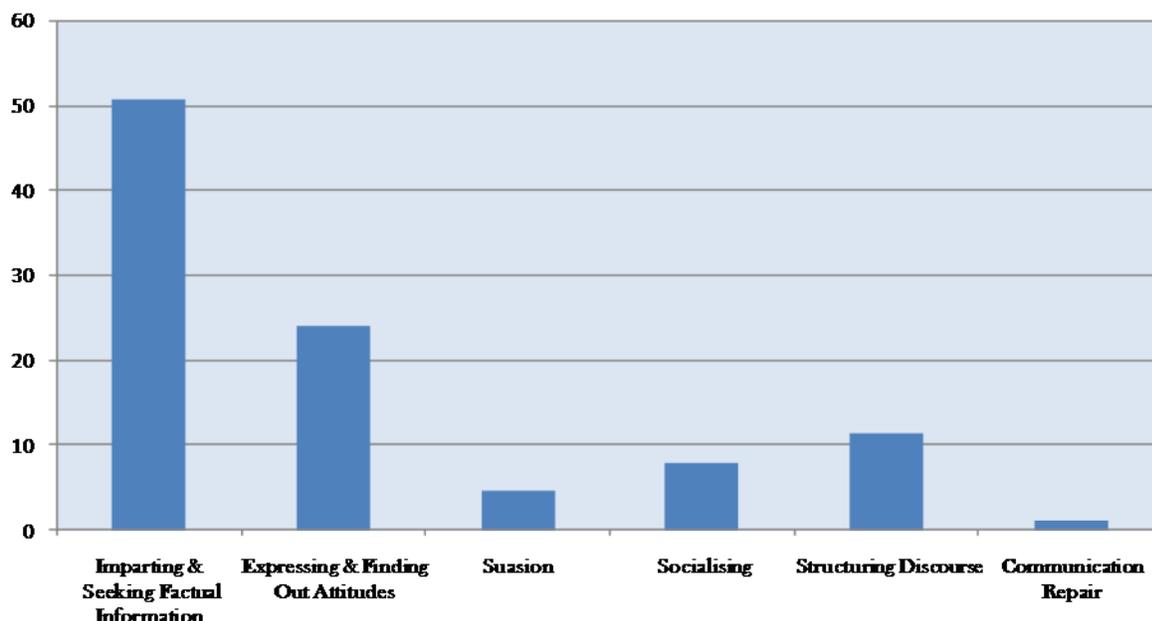


Figure 3. Language Functions in “Side by Side”

One of *Side by Side's* main goals is to go beyond the textbook as students are expected to share and talk about their experiences. To achieve this objective, language functions focus on the past, present, and future experiences of beginner ESL learners. For example, the specific language function “asking and answering questions for information” emphasizes topics related to the past and future. Language functions on “expressing and finding out attitudes,” on the other hand, draw on information about the present and highlight the present continuous tense and simple present tense as the grammar focus. Themes include: expressing likes and dislikes, satisfaction, ability and inability, etc. “Suasion,” “socialising,” and “structuring discourse” also provide more true to life tasks for exploring language functions, such as: attracting attention, opening and closing conversations, hesitating or looking for words, etc.

Language Functions in Exploring English

Figure 4 shows the language functions used in the textbook *Exploring English*. Of the six main categories identified by Van Ek and Trim (1991), “imparting and seeking factual information” ranks first (51.92%) with language items focusing on: asking and answering questions for information, asking and answering for confirmation, and recording (describing and narrating). “Expressing and finding out attitudes” ranks second (23.08%) with language functions highlighting topics on: giving compliments, inquiring about preferences, expressing needs/wants/desires/satisfaction/dissatisfaction, expressing likes/dislikes, inviting others/accepting/declining invitations, apologizing, and reminding. “Suasion” ranks third (11.54%) and emphasizes: giving and understanding commands, making requests, ordering food, and offering assistance. “Socialising” ranks fourth (9.61%) and focuses on: greeting people, introducing oneself, taking leave, and attracting attention. “Structuring discourse” ranks fifth (3.85%) which concentrates on: using a telephone and enumerating. “Communication repair” ranks sixth with no language item (0%) presented.

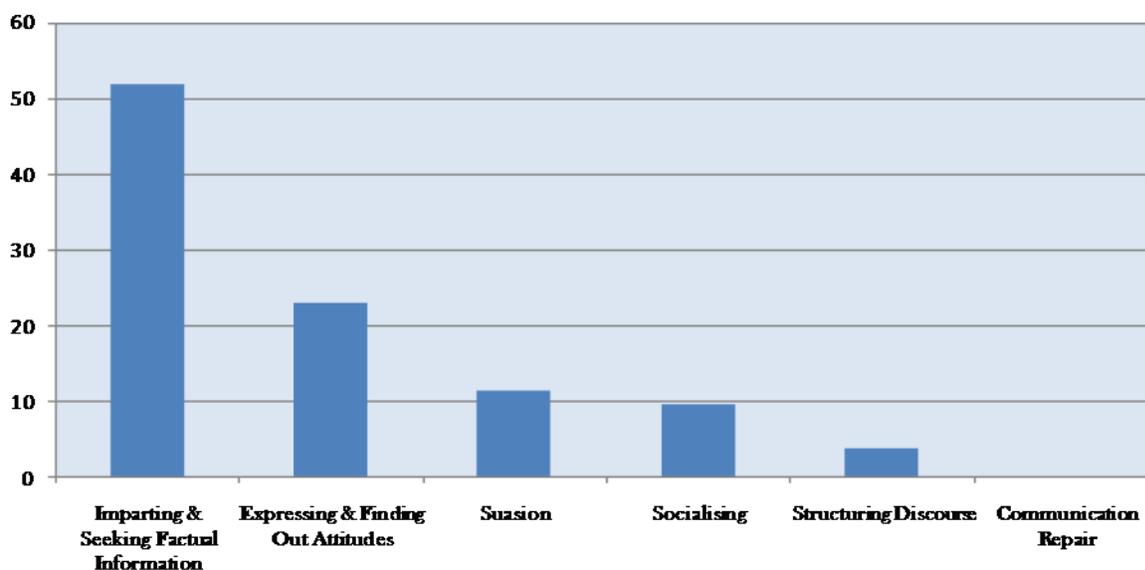


Figure 4. Language Functions in “Exploring English”

The two distinct goals of the book are to provide meaningful communication and to be student-centered. To attain these goals, specific language functions were used in various activities (guided conversations, discussions, pair work, role-plays, readings, etc.). They are also used for personal expression as students are encouraged to express their opinions and feelings through the text’s free response section. Similarly, life situations

(food, clothing, transportation, housing, healthcare, etc.) that are important to students become the dominant themes for practicing the target language functions. A cast of characters is also incorporated in humorous illustrations, which the students can relate to as they discuss and talk about life problems in the classroom.

Language Functions in Expressways

Figure 5 shows the language functions used in *Expressways*. Of the six main categories identified by Van Ek and Trim (1991), “imparting and seeking factual information” ranks first (41.07%) with language items used for: asking and answering for information, recording (describing and narrating), and asking and answering for confirmation. This is followed by “expressing and finding out attitudes” which ranked second (26.79%). Language items focused on: giving compliments, inquiring about preferences, expressing needs/wants/desires/satisfaction/likes/dislikes, giving/accepting/declining invitations, apologizing, and reminding someone about health concerns. “Socialising” ranks third (12.5%), highlighting dialogues on: greeting people, introducing oneself, taking leave, and attracting attention. Ranked fourth is “suasion” (10.71%) which emphasizes conversations on: giving and understanding commands, making requests, ordering food, and offering assistance. “Structuring discourse” ranks fifth (7.14%) and focuses on: using the telephone and enumerating. Ranked sixth is “communication repair” with (1.79%).

Expressways explicitly uses language functions as one of its core elements. This is evident as it enumerates target specific language functions early in each part of the chapter; then ends it with a checklist of *Can Do* statements involving tasks based on the target language’s functions and specific target vocabulary. Chapter 3, for instance, lists “asking for and reporting information” as one of its target specific language functions. At the end of the chapter, the *Can Do* checklist includes a statement that says *I can describe the locations of places in the community*.

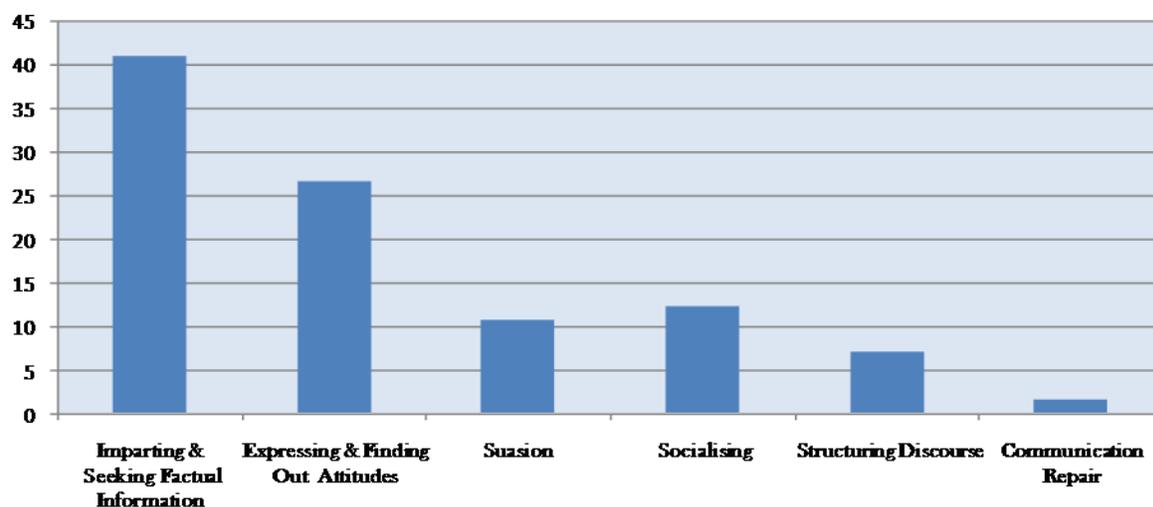


Figure 5. Language Functions in “Expressways”

The analysis of the language functions showed that general and specific language functions are used in all five ESL textbooks. Table 2 shows the summary of the language functions analyzed in this study. The textbooks primarily emphasize “imparting and seeking factual information” (47.32%), followed by “expressing and finding out attitudes” (25.35%). Ranked third is “suasion” (11.27%), and fourth is “socialising” (7.89%). Fifth is “structuring discourse” (7.04%), and finally, “communication repair” is ranked sixth (1.13%).

Most general language functions are presented alongside specific language functions. For instance, the major language function for “imparting and seeking factual information” in the textbook *Speed Up English* contains several specific language functions that include: “asking for and answering personal information”; “asking, answering, and expressing about the past”; “reporting physical state”; and “asking and answering about knowledge.” According to Van Ek and Trim (1991), the use of various specific language functions is significant in the development of sociolinguistic awareness among learners and ensures a variety of practice for more effective learning. For learners, this implies readiness to use the target language in various social contexts. They should develop respect and understanding towards cultural diversity as they are exposed to the norms and practices of the target language. Teachers, on the other hand, may need to become aware of the pragmatic use of varied utterances and be able to explain them clearly to their students. Bardovi-Harlig and Dornyei (1998) demonstrated the importance of this notion in their study when ESL learners and teachers ranked pragmatic errors as more serious than grammatical errors. For instructional material developers, varied language functions may be used as a springboard upon which they can develop relevant topics appropriate for students. This is critical as the diversity of ESL students coming from different cultural backgrounds is increasing and the practice of random and intuition-based selection of lessons is prevalent among ESL teachers (Dornyei, 1994).

In all five ESL textbooks, the general categories of language functions are comprised of similar specific language functions. For instance, the general language function of “socialising” has for its specific language functions: greeting, introducing people, replying to greetings, etc. On the other hand, the specific language functions for “imparting and seeking factual information” are: asking and answering for information, identifying, and reporting in the form of description and narration. This result implies that the authors of the five language learning textbooks are very aware of the major and specific language functions of the English language.

Table 2
Summary of Language Functions Used in the Five ESL Textbooks

Language Functions	<i>Speed Up English</i>	<i>Click English</i>	<i>Side By Side</i>	<i>Exploring English</i>	<i>Expressways</i>	TOTAL	Percent
Imparting and seeking factual information	32	42	44	27	23	168	47.32%
Expressing and finding out attitudes	29	13	21	12	15	90	25.35%
Suasion	20	4	4	6	6	40	11.27%
Socialising	3	6	7	5	7	28	7.89%
Structuring discourse	3	6	10	2	4	25	7.04%
Communication repair	1	1	1	0	1	4	1.13%
TOTAL	88	72	87	52	56	355	100%

There is, however, unequal coverage and representation of each type of language function. Both “imparting and seeking factual information” and “expressing and finding out attitudes” occupy a total of 73% percent of all the ESL textbooks analyzed in this study while the remaining types of language functions occupy less than 30%. “Communication repair” seems to lag behind all the major categories of language functions with 1.13% representation in all five texts. While no specific study has been conducted to highlight the significance of greater representation of each major language function, curriculum and instructional material developers seem to have a common understanding of the importance of integrating most if not all language functions into the various stages of language learning. This has been the case with the educational reform in teaching Latvian as a second language as noted by Salme (2006). Accordingly, a thorough examination of the linguistic content of textbooks used by different age groups was conducted prior to the development of Latvian as a second language to ensure that all function groups were represented throughout the various stages of language learning. This

resulted in the creation of distinct guidelines to further develop Latvian as a second language education. Taking Latvian as a second language as a model, future material developers may further improve the quality of ESL instructional materials. According to the literature, suggested strategies may include adopting implicit and explicit strategies in language function content, and the use of sequencing strategies to ensure sufficient amounts of each language function type are consolidated into the material (Murray, 1989; Willingham & Goedert-Eschmann, 1999).

How Do Language Functions Relate to Beginner ESL Learners' Learning Needs?

Breakthrough and *Waystage* are the lower versions of *Threshold* and *Vantage* (Table 3). The higher the version, the more refined are the specific language functions used. Under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) language proficiency scale, *Breakthrough* is intended for A1 Level students; *Waystage* is for A2 Level students; *Threshold* is for B1 Level students; and *Vantage* is for B2 Level students. *A1 Level* addresses the needs of basic ESL learners; while B Level caters to independent ESL learners. The analysis showed that most specific language functions adhered more to *Breakthrough* and *Waystage* specifications; while a few language functions point to *Threshold* and *Vantage* specifications of language functions. For instance, specific language functions under communication repair identified in *Waystage* and *Breakthrough* as signaling for non-understanding/asking for repetition/clarification/asking for spelling/asking to write something down/expressing ignorance/appealing for assistance/and asking to slow down were frequently used in most of the five ESL textbooks; on the other hand, expanded categories of specific language functions under communication repair identified in *Threshold* and *Vantage* series as hesitation pauses/confirmation/substituting/ correcting/supplying words, etc. were used sparingly in few of the ESL textbooks analyzed. Hence, it can be concluded that the language functions used in the five ESL textbooks primarily correlate to the needs of beginner ESL learners. Publishers have taken great care to ensure that the materials they have developed cover language specifications relevant to the needs of beginner ESL learners.

Table 3
CEFR L2 Proficiency Level

Level Group	Level Group Name	Level	Level Name
A	Basic User	A1	Breakthrough
		A2	Waystage 1990
B	Independent User	B1	Threshold 1990
		B2	Vantage
C	Proficient User	C1	Effective Operational
		C2	Mastery

As this study endeavors to establish the relation between language functions and beginner learner's needs, further analysis was conducted to investigate the exponents used to fulfill the different language functions. According to Green (2012), the progression of lessons will be more evident on the language exponents than through the functions as the same language functions recur from beginner to advanced level textbooks. Thus, a second analysis was performed to investigate recommended exponents alongside language functions in the five ESL textbooks analyzed. This is to determine whether language forms used in the textbooks are relevant to beginner ESL learner's needs. Samples of the exponents gathered from the five ESL textbooks are:

Click English: "Where is the magazine?" "Where does Helen usually go?" "Where did you wash your car?" "Where are they?" "How often does Joe go to the movies?" "How many toothbrushes are there on the shelf?" "How much do you want?" "How many do you want?"

Exploring English: “Where is Barbara?” “Where is the truck?” “Where are the cards?” “When is the next bus?” “Where is Sam going?” “How is your family?” “How many months are there in a year?” “Why does Mr. Pasto like the painting?” “Why is Nancy feeling good?”

Expressways: “How do I get to the City Hall?” “How much is the rent?” “Where do you want this sofa?” “How do the pants fit?” “Where is the elevator?” “Where are the restrooms?” “How do you want to send it?” “Where were you yesterday evening?”

Side by Side I: “Where is Mr. Molina?” “Where are Mr. and Mrs. Sharp?” “Where is the school?” “Why is Amy happy there?” “Where does he live?” “How often do you wash your car? Why?” “What time is it?” “How does David feel?” “How did he get to the train station?” “How does Maria communicate with her friends?”

Speed up English: “When is your birthday?” “Where do you live?” “How many nights would you like to stay?” “How much is the Teddy bear?” “How big is it?” “How can I turn it off?” “How come?” “Why do you want to take him to the palace?”

Abstracted exponents were then compared and contrasted to the guidelines of exponents expected from beginner users as prescribed by *Threshold Series*. For instance, the specific language function of “asking *wh* questions” under the general language function of “imparting and seeking factual information” recommended the exponents shown in Table 4 as expected of CEFR levels A1, A2, B1, and B2. The results revealed that though general and specific language functions seem to correspond to the needs of beginner ESL students, most exponents are more representative of *Threshold* and *Vantage* specifications than they are of the *Breakthrough* or *Waystage* specifications. For instance, under the *Breakthrough* or *Waystage* specifications, asking *wh* questions consists primarily of a single word or a simple syntactical structure as exponents, such as: *Where? How many? Why?* etc. However, beginner ESL textbooks use longer and more complicated syntactical structures for their exponents such as: *Where did you wash your car? How many months are there in a year? Why does Mr. Pasto like the painting?* This finding suggests that while the language function specifications in the five language learning textbooks correlate to beginner ESL learners, the exponents used to achieve the target language functions do not. Most of the exponents are more suitable for independent rather than beginner learners. Alesh (1992), in a study of syllabus design, emphasized the importance of selecting language exponents appropriate to the proficiency level of the target students. Accordingly, at lower levels of proficiency, students are expected to recognize and produce language exponents of isolated vocabulary items. More sophisticated exponents may be chosen as students progress to higher levels of proficiency. Hence, teachers and textbook developers should ensure that the exponents they choose match the level of their target learners appropriately. As there are a whole range of exponents to perform one language function, simple and less complicated language exponents may be chosen for beginner learners. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have demonstrated inconsistencies between English textbook content and actual language use (Swales & Feak, 1994; Williams, 1988; Wilson, 2002).

Table 4

Exponents Used in Asking Wh-Questions from Threshold Series

Breakthrough (A1)	Waystage (A2)	Threshold (B1)	Vantage (B2)
When?	When?	When will the guests arrive?	Same exponents as used in <i>Threshold</i> but with the addition of the following:
Where?	Where?	Where is my purse?	
How?	How? How far/much/ long/hot/etc.?	How do you make an omelet? How far is it to New York?	When is it your train leaves (<i>wh</i> + <i>is</i> it + complement clause)
Why?	Why?	Why did you say that?	

Discussion and Conclusion

All of the texts in this study have allotted a greater portion of their content to informative function. According to Pien (1985), the informative function is the most sophisticated and the final linguistic function to develop as it is dependent on the context. For teachers, this implies the need to provide sufficient scaffolding as they use these materials, especially for low beginner ESL learners. Teachers may also want to consider a variety of techniques or methods of teaching in order to facilitate learning of the target language. On the other hand, instructional materials developers may look into ways to effectively and clearly convey meanings, concepts, and ideas to learners. For instance, they may consider the use of pictures, drawings, and other visual representations or incorporate more creative activities like games, role playing, enrichment exercises, etc., as a way to facilitate learning despite focusing on more sophisticated language functions. Another way is for textbook designers to make use of students' prior knowledge when developing instructional materials to motivate and arouse interest among beginner learners. Attempts have also been made to present local culture in English language materials. Localization and cultural adaptation of ESL instructional materials are recent trends which may provide alternatives to material developers.

Both general and specific language functions play a crucial role in attaining the objectives of ESL textbooks and addressing beginner ESL learners' needs. On this account, a great challenge lies ahead for instructional material designers and ESL teachers to ensure a greater representation of language functions when developing ESL textbooks. The study also revealed that general language functions are less informative than specific language functions when analyzed in relation to textbook objectives and beginner learners' needs primarily because they tended to be repetitive throughout the analysis. Specific language functions, however, disclosed key elements in determining the themes, topics, strategies, and activities contained in instructional materials.

While language functions were correlated to beginner learners' needs as per *Threshold* series criteria, the result did not yield much data on the language forms contained in the textbooks. Language functions have to be examined alongside language exponents to determine syntactical structures, lexical, and grammatical content used in the textbooks. This finding reveals the salient relationship between language functions and language exponents.

Moreover, the multifunctional analysis conducted in this study reflected how language functions and their exponents provided data on both language forms (structures, words, and phrases) and language context. The use of language functions and exponents as a core component of ESL textbooks highlights both of these key features that have long divided the structural and communicative paradigms in language education.

As this study covered only five ESL textbooks, future researchers may expand their analysis to include more texts. Additionally, researchers may explore this concept further in textbooks aimed at higher learner levels.

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