1 The theoretical foundations for functions in the Council of Europe modern languages projects and the Common European Framework of Reference for languages

What are language functions in the CEFR?

In building detailed reference level descriptions based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2001), 'it is important' as Hulstijn, Alderson & Schoonen (2010) suggest, 'to emphasise that the 2001 version of the CEFR itself did not suddenly appear out of nothing' (p.12). The CEFR not only reflects the 30 year history of the Council of Europe projects, to which Hulstijn et al allude, but also the longer traditions of linguistic analysis and language pedagogy that are concerned with language as a means of social interaction. This chapter traces some of the precedents for functions in these traditions and considers the part they came to play in the CEFR model of communicative competence.

Influenced by speech act theory and by the emergence of sociolinguistics as well as by wider socio-economic issues (Milanovic & Weir, forthcoming), the adoption of communicative language functions by the Council of Europe led the English language teaching profession in the social turn that it experienced during the 1970s and 1980s: a process that is still underway in many parts of the world. In this shift of emphasis, English language teaching moved from a structural to a communicative paradigm as educators became increasingly concerned with the ways in which language may be used meaningfully in social contexts. The growth in interest in the use of language for communication led to new insights, which in turn fed back into the Council of Europe projects (see Trim, in Preface).

The starting point for the system of levels that led to the CEFR was the concept of a stage in the language learning process at which knowledge of the language begins to 'cohere into an overall communicative competence, with which the learner can cope, albeit in a very simple fashion, with the general

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demands of daily life' (Trim above, p. xix). This was conceived as a *threshold* or critical point in the language learning process associated with a radical change in the ability to use a language. It was considered to be the lowest level at which it would be meaningful to speak of a general level of language proficiency and so would provide a logical objective for basic language learning programmes. The specification of this as a learning objective in the form of the *Threshold Level* (1975) also marked the crossing of a first threshold in the development of what would eventually become the CEFR.

The institutional context is important. The Council of Europe has been involved in the promotion of the teaching and learning of foreign languages throughout its history. Linguistic diversity is seen to be a defining and enriching feature of the European identity and language learning as essential to mutual understanding, to participation in a fully European culture and to continuing economic and social progress. The Council of Europe has committed itself to the democratisation of education: languages being regarded as a resource that should be accessible to all rather than to a social or professional élite.

Approaches to education at the Council of Europe provided the impetus for the modern languages projects. During the 1960s, recognising the need for greater flexibility in education in the face of rapid technological and societal change, the Council of Europe supported the concept of 'permanent education' (Schwartz 1969), subsequently recast as 'lifelong learning'. Traditional school-based education was regarded as 'an institution that tried to prepare the generation of tomorrow by instilling in their minds the culture of the past' (Council of Europe 1973:4). Such an institution, with its orientation towards developing 'know-how' rather than the required 'know how to become' (p.7), could not equip learners to cope with the rapidly changing world beyond the classroom and the 'growing gap between the sum of knowledge available and the sum of knowledge taught' (p.2). Europeans would need a form of education that would give them access to the new technologies and new areas of knowledge as they emerged. Schwartz (1969, 1974) proposed that in a suitably flexible approach to education, subjects (whether traditionally academic or vocational) would not be taught or assessed as monolithic wholes, but broken down into modules, which could be accessed as (or if) they became relevant to the needs of the learner. Teachers would play a more facilitative part as learners took greater responsibility for their own learning choices. Learner-centredness and learner autonomy were at the heart of developments from the beginning, together with a strong supporting role for educational technology and new media.

A Symposium was convened in 1971 at Rüschlikon in Switzerland on the theme of *Languages in Adult Education* to discuss a modular 'unit/credit' approach to language learning. It was quickly recognised that it would not be possible to divide up language learning into a set of discrete modules that

could be dealt with in any arrangement, and a working party was established to explore alternatives (see Trim, above).

As Trim makes clear in the Preface to this volume, the *situational approach* then in vogue was discussed as a possible vehicle. The approach was pioneered by A S Hornby (1954–56;1959), following in the footsteps of other global best-selling authors of the 1930s to 1950s, such as Laurence Faucett, Michael West and Charles Eckersley. Faucett's *Oxford English Course* (1933), West's *Learn to Speak by Speaking* (1933) materials and Eckersley's four-volume *Essential English for Foreign Students* (1955) followed similar patterns. The starting point for each teaching unit would be a situation considered to be relevant and of interest to foreign learners. These were presented in the form of texts or dialogues covering paradigmatic grammar points, followed by practice exercises and tests. Typically, each book would be restricted to a certain number of new words, based on the ideas on vocabulary limitation of West (1953) and Faucett, Palmer, Thorndike & West (1936). The approach was exemplified in contemporary British ELT textbooks for adult learners such as *English in Situations* (O'Neill 1970), the *Kernel Lessons* series (O'Neill, Kingsbury, Yeadon & Scott 1971) and *New Concept English* (Alexander 1967).

Although the situational approach offered a contextualised alternative to the grammar-translation then dominant in schools across Europe, it seemed to the Council of Europe working group to be too limiting. There were too many uses of language which could not readily be captured through an analysis of situational scenarios so that the situational learner might be left 'unprepared for anything out of the ordinary' (Wilkins 1976:18). Furthermore, there seemed to be a *common core* of language that all learners would need and that would be of value across most contexts or situations that learners might encounter. Specifying the language associated with specific situations and organising the syllabus on this basis appeared unnecessarily restrictive.

Wilkins (1972a, 1976), the member of the Council of Europe working party tasked with outlining the common core linguistic and situational content of the system, suggested an alternative: turning the traditional structural syllabus on its head. Instead of taking grammatical structures as the basis for syllabus design, he recommended that the meanings that learners might want to express should be the point of entry, with grammatical structures relegated to the role of exponents: the linguistic tools for realising meanings.

Semantico-grammatical categories and *functions* would provide the common component. The semantico-grammatical categories are categories of meaning such as time, quantity and space that 'interact significantly' (Wilkins 1972a:3) with traditional grammatical and lexical categories and so can usually be more or less straightforwardly mapped onto them (e.g. temporal relations are expressed by tense, quantity is expressed by grammatical number). Functions are expressions of feeling and attitude that do not

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typically correspond to grammatical categories (there are no grammatical categories that straightforwardly convey, for example, apology or sympathy). Wilkins argued that these categories could provide a clear rationale, from the standpoint of learner requirements, for selecting 'the language to which the learner will be exposed and which we will expect him to acquire' (Wilkins:1). In the T-series, Wilkins' semantico-grammatical categories became *notions*. As Johnson (1982:38–39) among others has pointed out, the label 'notional syllabuses' used in the title of Wilkins' 1976 book is often misinterpreted. For Wilkins (1972a) both functions and semantico-grammatical categories are notional or semantic in the sense that they prioritise meaning in the same way as do 'notional' grammars. Wilkins (1976) in fact advocates that both semantico-grammatical categories and functions should be considered in syllabus design and the term notional-functional is more often used to characterise his overall approach (Richards and Rogers 2001; Brown 2007).

Notions may be general or specific. *General notions* are concepts that learners may need to refer to whatever the situation. These include *deixis*, *dimension*, *direction* and *duration*. In contrast, *specific notions* are related to topic and situation so that, in *Threshold*, the specific notional category of *occupation* (within the theme of *personal identification*) includes *baker*, *butcher* and *businessman*. *Functions* describe the social actions that people intend to accomplish through language and are expressed in *Threshold* in terms like '*expressing agreement with a statement*' or '*showing that one is following a person's discourse*'. In the English Profile, general notions are identified most readily in the work of Hawkins and Filipović (2012) on grammatical progression while specific notions have been subsumed within the broader remit on vocabulary (Capel 2010).

The notional-functional approach seemed particularly promising to educators in that it 'presented to many people for the first time the possibility of describing, at a new and higher level of generality, that which learners need to learn and hence which teachers need to teach' (Strevens 1980:116). Functions would seem to have had a greater impact on language pedagogy than their communicative team-mates' notions. This is perhaps because it was functions that were 'the most original part of the framework' (Wilkins 1976:23), notions being more difficult for users to distinguish from the traditional categories found in pedagogic grammars and word lists (Widdowson 1990:42): grammar explanations found in *Kernel Lessons Intermediate* (O'Neill et al 1971), for example, already had a distinctly notional flavour. Although the fashion for basing syllabuses on notional-functional principles has been largely superseded (by task- and content-based models), functions themselves have survived and continue to play an important role, taking their place alongside the more traditional grammatical and situational elements: 'woven indelibly into the fabric of language teaching' as Johnson (2006:417) expresses it.

A brief history of functions

The Council of Europe has, over the 40 years since the unit/credit scheme was first mooted, drawn on a wide range of ideas in developing the concept of language functions. In the following section I will briefly review some of the more prominent theories that have informed their thinking.

Origins for this conception of language function and its dependence on context as well as form have been traced in the 'social acts' of the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Thomas Reid (1710–96), in the same term as used by the legal theorist Reinach (1913 cited in Mulligan 1987) as well as in the later work of Wittgenstein (1955) and Austin (1962). By the time of the first Rüschlikon Symposium in 1971, the idea that meaning and its relation to context should be a central concern was already well established in British linguistics, especially through the London School associated with J R Firth (see for example Firth 1957:93–118). This contrasted with the situation in the USA where the structuralist linguistics of Bloomfield and his followers (see Bloomfield 1933), which prioritised the study of language as a decontextualised system, was in the ascendancy. However, American sociolinguistics was an early influence through the work of Hymes in particular, with its insistence that 'communicative competence' includes being 'able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others' (Hymes 1972:277).

For Hymes (1974:52), speech acts are units within *speech events* (such as private conversations, lectures, formal introductions) analogous to nouns within sentences. A speech event is a bounded by a beginning and end and is governed by rules or norms. Just as one speech act may occur in different speech events (a joke in a conversation or in a lecture) so speech events may occur within different situations (a conversation might occur at a party or during a break in a tennis match). As we will see in Chapter 3, the need for units beyond the function would emerge as an important theme in the development of the Council of Europe projects and Hymes' *speech events,* picked up in later models of communicative competence such as Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995), certainly resonate with the *language activities* of the CEFR.

Firth's thinking had been much influenced by Malinowski, a social anthropologist, whose ethnographic studies of the organisation of Polynesian societies led him to recognise the importance of 'context of situation' – the context in which an utterance is spoken – as well as the 'context of reference' – the topical content of a text – in explaining linguistic choices (e.g. Malinowski 1935). He was the first to use the term, 'phatic communion' (Malinowski 1922:315) to characterise conventional greetings, gossip and other exchanges that served the primary purpose of 'creating an atmosphere of sociability' between individuals rather than conveying information; an idea picked up in

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the *socialising* functions of the T-series. Firth analysed language in its rela-
tionships with contextual factors such as the 'non-verbal action of partici-
pants', the 'relevant objects' that surrounded the speakers and 'the effect of
verbal action' (Robins 1968:28). By the 1930s, he was already identifying *func-
tions of speech* (such as *address; greetings; farewells, adjustments of relations,
creating solidarity*) in terms of their social value as 'acts' (Robins, *loc cit.*).
Firth is acknowledged by Trim in the Preface to this volume as a particular
influence on the CEFR.

For those working empirically from the analysis of observed language use
in the tradition of Malinowski and Firth, classification of functions is made
or refined according to the exigencies of the data. This is true whether the
work is in the more distanced or etic orientation of discourse analysis (e.g.
Sinclair & Coulthard 1975) or in the more embedded, emic orientation of
conversation analysis, linked to Garfinkel's (1974) ethnomethodology, which
interprets conversation from the point of view of the participants (e.g. Sacks,
Schegloff & Jefferson 1974). In both approaches, functions are understood
in relation to the specific speech event or text in which they play a part. For
example, Pike (1967) – the originator of the emic/ etic dichotomy – used
observations of social events to examine the conventions framing certain
human communicative behaviours.

Others have eschewed performance data, relying on introspection in
looking for more universally applicable functional categorisations. The phi-
losopher Searle (1969, 1975, 1979), building on the earlier work of Austin, is
identified with the development of speech act theory. In his *How to Do Things
with Words*, Austin (1962) had introduced the distinction between three acts
that we may perform whenever we say something:

- a locutionary act – producing a recognisable grammatical utterance. A
  speaker states '*It is cold in here*'.
- an illocutionary act – the performance of an act in saying something.
  Depending on the context and the manner of speech, the speaker may
  have said '*It is cold in here*' simply to inform the addressee, or as a way
  of requesting the addressee to close the window. The utterance carries
  an illocutionary force representing the speaker's intent. The Council of
  Europe functions mainly concern illocutionary acts.
- a perlocutionary act – the effect brought about on the feelings, thoughts
  or actions of either the speaker or the listener: the addressee closes the
  window as a result of what the speaker has said.

Searle (1979:22) argued that 'if we adopt the illocutionary point as the basic
notion on which to classify uses of language, then there are a rather limited
number of basic things we do with language'. He made a distinction between
illocutionary *verbs* – the verbs that can be used to report speech acts (such
as apologise, beg, complain, demand) – and illocutionary *acts*, which he

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considered to be much more limited in number. He built on Austin's (1962) classification (verdictives, expositives, exercitives, behabitives and commissives) in suggesting a taxonomy of speech acts based on 12 dimensions of variation, the three most important being the *illocutionary point* (the purpose of the act), the *direction of fit* between words and the world and differences in the psychological state expressed (the sincerity condition). Application of these conditions yields the five basic speech acts in Table 1.

Table 1 Searle's (1969) five speech acts

Speech acts	Illocutionary verbs	Illocutionary point	Direction of fit	Sincerity condition	Example utterance
Assertives	affirming boasting concluding	true/ false proposition	word to world: The speaker's words represent the world	belief	*Pragmatics is a division of linguistics.* *I won the race.*
Directives	asking begging commanding	make the addressee perform an action	world to word: The speaker elicits action to make the world match the words via the addressee	wants, wishes, desires	*Bring me a cup of coffee.* *May I leave?*
Commissives	arranging betting committing to	bind the speaker to doing something in the future	world to word: The speaker intends to adapt the world to fit the words	intention	*I'll drive.* *I bet it's going to rain.*
Expressives	apologizing berating congratulating	express how the speaker feels about the situation	N/A	various	*I'm sorry.* *Well done!*
Declarations	appointing awarding conceding	change the state of the world in an immediate way	Both word to world and world to word: The words come to match the world and the world matches the words as a result of the utterance. Depends on the nature of speaker and addressee roles.	N/A	*You're fired! (employer to employee) I hereby sentence you to five years in prison (judge to prisoner)*

Although Searle's system might appear attractive as a basis for classification, Sarangi and Coulthard (2000:xvii) suggest that, being based in introspection rather than observation 'the [speech act] approach has many drawbacks for those attempting to adapt it to investigate naturally-occurring data'. Of

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course it is naturally occurring language that learners have to handle and that is the chief concern of the CEFR. In relation to the debate between speech act theory and text or speech based systems of analysis, Flowerdew (1990) points to a 'basic theoretical problem of the conflict between an all-purpose system, which is likely to have defects in relation to specific situations in which it is applied and a system derived from one narrowly defined situation, which is liable to lack applicability to other, more general situations'. The wording of the Council of Europe functions is intended to be widely interpretable and so is based on the everyday expressions used by teachers – having something in common with the use of 'native terms' in the ethnography of speaking (Hymes 1974) – referring to acts that adult learners might need to accomplish in specific situations. The generalisability of the system comes from the familiarity of the common core of situations and functions that apply across a wide range of language use contexts; its specificity comes from local needs analysis and flexible local application and refinement of the scheme.

Developing an adequate *general* theory for the interpretation of utterances is challenging for linguistics, just as it is for language learners, precisely because there is often no clear relationship between the grammar of an utterance and the speech act that it realises. Jakobson (1960:354), reminding us of the key role played by phonology in realising functions (as later reflected in the 1990 revision of Threshold) refers to an exercise adapted from the famous director Stanislavski in which an actor is asked to generate 50 different meanings from one phrase merely by 'diversifying its expressive tint'. According to Jakobson, the intended implications of most of these variations were accurately recognised by listeners. But even if we include phonology, linguistic form is not sufficient to account for variation in the function of utterances: the situational context in which an utterance is made must also be considered.

Reflecting this lack of congruence between form and function, Searle (1969) makes a distinction between *direct* speech acts, in which the illocutionary force is reflected in the structure of the utterance (declarative-as-representative: *it's cold in here [as a straightforward observation]* or imperative-as-directive: *'close the door!'*), and *indirect* speech acts in which it is not (declarative-as-directive: *it's cold in here [meaning 'close the door!']*). If communication is to be successful, the addressee must distinguish between the primary illocutionary force of an utterance – which reflects the intended perlocution – from secondary illocutionary acts (which may be implied by the grammar: what van Ek (1986:33) refers to as the 'conventional meaning').

Searle envisages that the process by which the addressee understands that something other than the literal meaning is intended must involve a form of conversational implicature. Searle's own system of implicature is in part derived from Grice's (1975) well-known conversational principles such as the Cooperative Principle (CP) and its maxims of quantity ('give the right
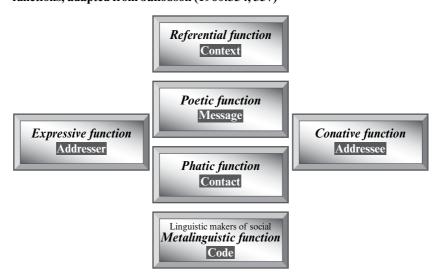
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amount of information'), of quality ('try to make your contribution one that is true'), of relation ('be relevant') and of manner ('be perspicuous'). According to Searle, if communication is to be successful, the addressee must appeal to what they know of the conversational context for the utterance, drawing on background knowledge and the assumption that the speaker is being relevant and co-operative in the interaction.

Further developments of Grice's (1975) principles of relevance to speech act production, sequencing and comprehension are found in Sperber and Wilson's (1995) relevance theory, Brown and Levinson's (1987) conceptions of face and politeness strategies and Leech's (1980) politeness principle which encompasses communicative aspects such as tact, modesty and maximising agreement. All of these may affect the selection of forms in realising functions. The original Threshold (1975) specification paid little attention to implicature and the intensifying or modifying effects of linguistic choices, but, as we will see, this was taken up in later revisions.

Jakobson, already encountered above, is another influential figure in the functional description of language. Although working within the structuralist paradigm, unlike Bloomfield, Jakobson (1960) was concerned with the role of context in communication. His scheme, elaborating on Bühler (1990) and later adopted by Hymes (1964) conceives of six functions of language, all of which may be recognised in a text, but in different hierarchical configurations. Each function is closely associated with one of the constitutive factors of a speech event or text (Figure 1). In this conceptualisation,

Figure 1 Factors involved in verbal communication and their associated functions, adapted from Jakobson (1960:354, 357)

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all verbal communication entails an addresser directing a message to an addressee. For communication to be successful, addresser (speaker/writer) and addressee (hearer/reader) must share an understanding of the context; a common code, or language; and a 'physical and psychological connection' (channel), 'enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication' (Jakobson 1960:353).

As set out in Figure 1, each function predominates in certain kinds of speech event or text. However, any text is likely to fulfil a number of functions. Advertisements, for example, may seek to attract our attention (phatic function), convey information about a product (referential function), make use of alliteration or other forms of word play (poetic function) and convey positive feelings about the product (emotive function), but their primary purpose is to persuade us to buy (conative function). News reports, on the other hand are primarily referential, but may also involve alliterative (poetic), attention-getting (phatic) headlines or openings. The possibility that an utterance may fulfil a number of functions is taken up by the T-series, but is not pursued. No guidance is given in *Threshold* on how or why learners might use multifunctional utterances.

Table 2 Jakobson's (1960) functions of language

Function	Purpose	Sentence/ text types	Examples
Expressive	expressing emotions, attitudes, opinions	interjections	*'Tut! Tut!'* *'Ouch!'*
Referential	informing describing	statements news reports	*'Pragmatics is a division of linguistics'*
Poetic	word play and rhyming	word play, alliteration, punning, rhyming poetry	*'I like Ike'* *'Many a mickle makes a muckle'*
Phatic	making and sustaining contact	greetings attention getting	*'Hello. How are you?'* *'Can you still hear me?'*
Metalinguistic	checking and repairing communication	language teaching and learning grammar books	*'I don't follow you – what do you mean?'* *'This animal is called a "gavagai"'*
Conative	persuading addressing	imperatives vocatives	*'Drink up!'* *'Hey, Joe!'*

Sometimes in his earlier work referred to as a neo-Firthian, Halliday (1970) also views language as a systematic resource for expressing meaning in context, but builds on Firth and Jakobson by considering the role of linguistic form in the exchange of meaning, concluding that 'both the general kinds of grammatical pattern that have evolved in language, and the specific manifestations of each kind, bear a natural relation to the meanings they have

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evolved to express' (1994:xviii). In understanding the choices available to the language user in a given context, it is necessary 'to look at both the system of language and its functions at the same time' (Halliday 1970:142).

In his unifying systemic-functional approach Halliday (1985) suggests three metafunctions that most language use will fulfil: the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual. The ideational function is concerned with ideas or concepts (the experiential function) and their interrelationships (the logical function). In realising the experiential function, the speaker is likely to refer, among other things, to participants (people, objects, abstract ideas – usually realised as nouns) and processes (actions, events and states – usually realised as verbs). Realising the logical function involves relations of co-ordination or subordination between parts of an utterance or text.

The interpersonal function embraces most illocutionary acts. It involves informational interaction (similar to Searle's assertive acts or Jakobson's referential function), social interaction (which parallels Jakobson's phatic function), instrumental interaction (directives and commissives/conative function) and expressive interaction (expressives/expressive function).

The textual function involves the organisation of information through, for example, placing phonological stress on a certain word to indicate the informational focus: compare 'Joe would like a cup of *coffee*' (i.e. Joe wants coffee rather than tea) with '*Joe* would like a cup of coffee' (i.e. Joe, not Mary wants the coffee) or using pronouns to avoid repetition of elements that have previously been mentioned: 'I saw Joe this morning. <u>He</u> was drinking some coffee'.

Linguistic theory and the Council of Europe agenda

In the same year that his initial proposals for the unit/credit system appeared, Wilkins also published *Linguistics and Language Teaching*. In this book (Wilkins 1972b), he set out his belief that linguistic theory could help in building 'understanding of the nature of language and consequently of the nature of language learning' but that insights from theory might not offer 'specific points of information that can be built into language teaching' (Wilkins 1972b:217). Wilkins and his Council of Europe colleagues did not attempt to apply the ideas of Searle, Halliday or Hymes directly to language teaching, but drew on them eclectically to suit their purpose of building an approach to teaching and learning that would prioritise learner needs.

In this spirit, Wilkins does not adopt a Hallidayan systemic-functionalist analysis – 'Halliday's three-fold division of "functions" does not parallel the division into three types of meaning that is proposed' (Wilkins 1976:21) – but does borrow from his terminology. For Wilkins (1976, *loc cit.*), like Halliday, the *ideational* is semantic and encompasses 'events, processes, states and abstractions', embracing 'all the semantic information to be found in a grammar, a dictionary and a thesaurus' (Wilkins 1972a:3). However, Wilkins

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has a different purpose from Halliday. By adopting a notional approach to grammar (Lyons 1970) (with a debt to Jespersen, Zuidema and others, Trim 2007), he neatly absorbs and recasts the familiar traditional pedagogic grammatical syllabus while prioritising meaning over structure. Tense and case are not discarded from the functional-notional scheme, but become the means by which learners can convey 'universal, presumably innate' (p.9) notions of time and agency. This ideational type of meaning is expressed through the *general notions* in the T-series (Table 3).

Table 3 Categories of semantico-grammatical meaning in Wilkins (1972a) and general notions in Threshold 1990

Wilkins 1972a	Threshold 1990
1. Time: point of time; duration; time relations; frequency; sequence; age	1. Existential existence/non-existence; presence/absence; availability/non-availability; occurrence/non-occurrence
2. Quantity: grammatical number; numerals; quantifiers; operations	2. Spatial location relative position; distance; motion; direction; origin; arrangement; dimension
3. Space: dimensions; location; motion	3. Temporal points of time; divisions of time; indications of time; duration; earliness; etc. (27 categories)
4. Matter	4. Quantitative degree; quantity; number
5. Case: agentive; objective; dative; instrumental; locative; factitive; benefactive	5. Qualitative physical; evaluative
6. Deixis: person; time; place; anaphora	6. Mental reflection; expression
	7. Relational logical; possessive; contrastive; action/event; temporal; spatial
	8. Deixis definite; indefinite

A second type of meaning is *communicative* (Wilkins 1972a, 1976) and concerns the social meaning of the utterance in context – its illocutionary force – which is not readily traceable through (even a notional) grammar. The units of communicative meaning are, of course, the functions. The third type of meaning, modal, concerns the attitude of the speaker towards what he is saying (Wilkins 1976:22) and includes scales of certainty, intention and obligation. For Wilkins, modal meaning is intermediate between the ideational and the communicative types of meaning and in *Notional Syllabuses* (1976:66) becomes a separate category (modality – scale of certainty: *personalised, impersonalised*; scale of commitment – *intention, obligation*), but van Ek in *Threshold* (1975), and subsequently in the other T-series specifications, follows Wilkins (1972a) in treating modal meanings as functional (within the category of 'expressing and finding out attitudes').

Wilkins' conceptualisation of functions began to find its way into the

models of communicative competence that, inspired particularly by the work of Hymes (1972) and of Savignon (1972) (who first applied the term 'communicative competence' to the teaching and learning languages), accompanied and informed the movement towards communicative language teaching and assessment during the 1970s and 1980s.

Communicative competence in applied linguistics and language education

Importance for functions

In his extension of the influential model first proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983) included four components of communicative competence. Functions were a focus for a *sociolinguistic competence* that concerned the ability to use language to fulfil communicative functions in social contexts. The other components of the model included grammatical competence (relating to underlying grammatical principles), discourse competence (concerned with the combination of utterances in forming a coherent text or interaction) and strategic competence (concerned with the strategies that learners might use to compensate for their shortcomings in other areas of competence and to maintain or repair communication – such as repetitions and reformulations).

Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996) considerably extended this model, emphasising the role of context and of the topic knowledge and personal characteristics of the learner in what they term *communicative language ability*. In the Bachman and Palmer model, language knowledge is divided into *organisational knowledge* (comprising grammatical and textual, or discourse knowledge) and *pragmatic knowledge*. Within *pragmatic knowledge*, contrary to Canale (1983), *functional knowledge* is distinguished from *sociolinguistic knowledge* (knowledge of dialects, registers, natural or idiomatic expressions, cultural references and figures of speech). Four functions are included: *ideational* (the way we convey meanings and experiences), *manipulative* (using language in an instrumental way to achieve ends), *heuristic* (using language to extend our knowledge of the world around us) and *imaginative* (using language to create imaginary worlds for aesthetic effect). Note that again, despite the Hallidayan terminology, these are all illocutionary (indeed in the earlier, 1990 version of the model, Bachman uses the term *illocutionary competence* to refer to them).

With the intention of more explicitly embedding lists of speech acts and functions (of the kind appearing in the Council of Europe outputs) in their pedagogically oriented model of oral communication, Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995) develop Bachman and Palmer's (1996) conception of functional knowledge in their component of 'actional competence'
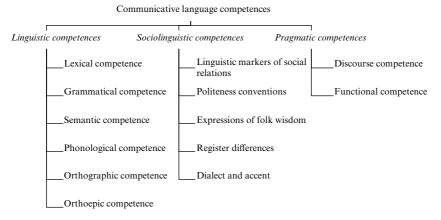
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(they also suggest a parallel 'rhetorical competence' for written language). This actional competence consists of 'competence in conveying and understanding communicative intent . . . based on the knowledge of an inventory of verbal schemata that carry illocutionary force (speech acts and speech events)' (p.17). In common with Bachman and Palmer (1996), they see functions as distinct from sociolinguistic competence and link them with pragmatic knowledge. They suggest that actional competence is made up of two major components: knowledge of *speech act sets* and knowledge of language functions (in seven categories: *interpersonal exchange*, *information*, *opinions*, *feelings*, *suasion*, *problems*, *future scenarios*). Speech act sets, a term derived from Cohen and Olshtain (1991), are identified with speech events (see above) and reflect the common patterns and sequences that are often associated with interrelated speech acts. The importance of such sequences was also being increasingly recognised in the Council of Europe projects (see below) and is reflected in the 'verbal exchange patterns' discussed in *Threshold 1990* (van Ek and Trim 1998b).

The CEFR model, based on van Ek (1986), makes a similar distinction to Canale and Swain's (1980) between *linguistic*, *sociolinguistic* and *pragmatic competences* as elements in the communicative language competence construct. Sociolinguistic or *sociocultural competences* (as they appear in the T-series) include such elements as markers for social relations, politeness conventions and register differences, while the pragmatic competences include both *functional competence* and *discourse competence* (Figure 2). Linguistic competences (*lexical*, *grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic* (to do with 'correct' pronunciation) are also specified. These are included 'to identify and classify the main components of linguistic

Figure 2 *Communicative competences* **in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2001:108–121)**

Communicative language competences

Linguistic competences — Sociolinguistic competences — Pragmatic competences

Lexical competence — Linguistic markers of social relations — Discourse competence

Grammatical competence — Politeness conventions — Functional competence

Semantic competence — Expressions of folk wisdom

Phonological competence — Register differences

Orthographic competence — Dialect and accent

Orthoepic competence

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competence defined as knowledge of and ability to use the formal resources from which well-formed, meaningful messages may be assembled' (*ibid.* 109). As we are reminded all along the route towards insights into functional progression, language functions cannot be conceived without their structural exponents.

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) includes a brief overview of functional competence (see below), but refers readers to the T-series for detailed listings relevant to each of the levels (p.30). All of the T-series volumes follow the same basic pattern of specifying learning objectives in terms of situations, activities, functions and notions. Van Ek sets out the basic approach in straightforward terms and is worth quoting at some length:

> In order to define the learning objective for a target-group we first have to specify the situations in which they will need the foreign language. Specifying a situation means stating the roles a language-user has to play, the settings in which he will have to play these roles, and the topics he will have to deal with . . .
>
> Once we have determined the situations in which the members of the target-group will want to use the foreign language we can try to specify just what they will have to be able to *do* in those situations . . .
>
> First we specify the language activities the learner will be likely to engage in . . . [such as] understanding the weather-forecast on the radio or . . . summarising orally in a foreign language a report written in one's native language . . . [then] we try to specify for what general purposes the learner will have to use the foreign language, what language functions he will have to fulfil. For instance, he may have to give information about facts, he may wish to express certainty or uncertainty, whether he considers something right or wrong, he may wish to express gratitude, he may wish to apologise.
>
> But the learner will have to do more than fulfil such general language functions. He will not only have to give information in the abstract, but he will want to give information about *something*, he will wish to express certainty or uncertainty with respect to *something*, he will want to apologise for *something*. In other words, he will need the ability to refer to things, to people, to events etc, and to talk about them. In order to do all this he will have to be able to handle a large number of *notions* in the foreign language. What notions he will need depends to a large extent on the topics he will deal with. If he is dealing with the topic "weather" he will have to handle notions such as *fair*, *sunshine*, *to rain* etc.
>
> When the specification of a language-learning objective has been completed up to this point we can determine what actual *language forms* (structures, words and phrases) the learner will have to be able to use in order to do all that has been specified. These forms are determined by considering each of the language-functions and notions separately and establishing how they are realised in a particular language – in other words by establishing their *exponents*.

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> The final component of a language-learning objective is a statement
> about the degree of skill with which a successful learner will be expected
> to be able to do all that has been specified, in other words how well he will
> have to be able to do it. It is very easy to do this in general terms, but very
> difficult, if not impossible to do it with anything approaching the degree
> of exactness we can achieve for the other components of the definition
> (Van Ek 1975:4–5).

In the current version of Threshold – *Threshold 1990* (van Ek and Trim 1998b) – the reader is presented with lists of functions selected to 'meet the most likely and urgent needs of the learners' and representing a surprisingly precise 'average learning load of two to three years for courses of average intensity, i.e. two to three hours per week, 35–40 weeks a year' (van Ek and Trim 1998b:27) or 'an average of 375 learning hours – including independent work' (p.8). Surprising in its precision not only because of the known variability in rates of language learning associated with factors such as individual aptitude and language distance, but also because we have been told that the increased flexibility of the revised objective 'makes an assessment of the learning load in terms of "an average number of learning hours" even more difficult' (p.8). The CEFR repeats the advice that, 'extreme caution should be exercised in using any scale of levels to calculate the 'mean seat time' necessary to meet particular objectives' (p.18). With the increasing diversity of language learning environments, this caution may have even greater justification today.
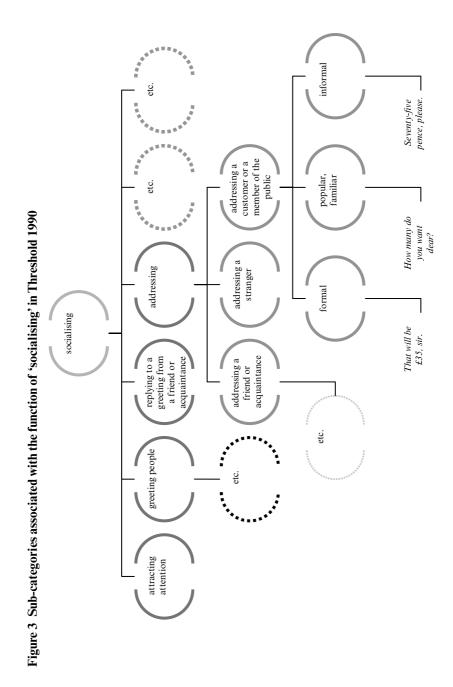
The categorisation of functions in Threshold adapts Wilkins (1976) (see Table 4). The functions are presented in the form of a branching system that makes increasingly fine distinctions (Figure 3) and provides illustrative exponents for each.

Table 4 Functional categories in Wilkins (1972a, 1976) and Threshold (1975)

Wilkins Modern Languages 1972a	*Wilkins Notional Syllabuses 1976*	*van Ek Threshold 1975*
1. Modality	1. Argument	1. Imparting and seeking factual information
2. Moral discipline and evaluation	2. Emotional relations	2. Expressing and finding out intellectual attitudes
3. Suasion	3. Judgement and evaluation	3. Expressing and finding out emotional attitudes
4. Argument	4. Personal emotions	4. Expressing and finding out moral attitudes
5. Rational inquiry and exposition	5. Rational enquiry and exposition	5. Getting things done (suasion)
6. Personal emotions	6. Suasion	6. Socialising
7. Emotional relations		
8. Interpersonal relations		

Figure 3 Sub-categories associated with the function of 'socialising' in Threshold 1990

socialising

- attracting attention
- greeting people
- replying to a greeting from a friend or acquaintance
- addressing
- etc.
- etc.

addressing:
- addressing a friend or acquaintance
- addressing a stranger
- addressing a customer or a member of the public

- formal
- popular, familiar
- informal

That will be £35, sir.

How many do you want dear?

Seventy-five pence, please.

etc.

etc.

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The listings are derived from speculative needs analyses based on the pro-
posal by Richterich (1972), representing the language required for adult lan-
guage learners to 'conduct the necessary business of everyday living when
abroad with a reasonable degree of independence' (van Ek & Trim 1998b:1).
Richterich (1983) collects 11 case studies 'in identifying language needs', all
of them submitted to the Council of Europe Secretariat in 1980. If not fully
empirical – in the sense that the analyses are not based directly on representa-
tive samples of learner language – the intention is nonetheless to capture the
variation in uses of language that emerges from the investigation: 'the list
represents a deliberate selection for T-level' rather than 'an exhaustive list'
(van Ek 1975:19). At the same time, the specification is intended to be quite
comprehensive in scope and, as we have seen, the functions are intended to
generalise across situations.

It can be seen from Figure 3 that the branching arrived at is not simply
a matter of drawing ever finer distinctions between illocutionary verbs (as
between greeting and addressing), but also incorporates sociolinguistic con-
straints such as degrees of acquaintanceship, levels of formality and back-
ground knowledge. Taking account of interpersonal and contextual variables,
in *Threshold 1990* there is a differentiation between greeting i) friends and
acquaintances, ii) strangers and iii) members of the public (Figure 3) and a
distinction (not shown in Figure 3) between responding to a greeting from
a friend or acquaintance '*when in good health*', '*when in poor health*' or '*when
recovering from an illness*'. We are also told that '*Good morning/afternoon/
evening*' is more formal than '*Hallo*' when greeting people.

Such differentiation may be a response to criticism of the original
Threshold specification (1975) for its failure to take account of sociolinguistic
issues (Flowerdew 1990). In his criticism, Flowerdew points to a lack of guid-
ance on the effects of choosing '*I'd like*', '*I want*', or '*may I have*' in grading
expressions of wants/desires. However, these continue to be listed as parallel
choices in *Threshold 1990* (van Ek & Trim 1998b, Chapter 5) (see Appendix
B).

Reflecting this and other feedback received, new insights gained in
the intervening years as well as the possibilities suggested by the different
approaches taken in specifications developed for other languages – espe-
cially *Un Niveau Seuil* (French) and *Kontaktschwelle* (German) – a number
of changes were made to the *Threshold* specification between 1975 and 1990.
Although it is, in the main, direct functions that are presented, in both the
1975 and 1990 versions a few conventional indirect functions – such as '*can I
. . .*' for requests – are included in the listings (as in Table 5). It is stressed that
the limited listing of indirect functions 'does not mean that the indirect fulfil-
ment of language functions should be avoided in course materials designed
for Threshold Level [as] an attempt to do so might lead to highly unnatu-
ral language use' (van Ek & Trim 1998b:28). In *Threshold 1990*, guidance

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Table 5 Exponents of *expressing wants/desires* in Threshold 1990

2.23   expressing wants/desires
2.23.1   I'd like + NP *I'd like an ice cream*
2.23.2   I'd like + to + VPinf *I'd 'like to .wash my hands.*
2.23.3   I want + NP, please *I .want a cup of tea, .please.*
2.23.4   I want + to + VPinf, please *I want to .go to the toilet, please.*
2.23.5   (please) may I (+ VPinf) *Please may I .have a drink.*
2.23.6   Can I have + NP (please) *Can I .have my bill, please?*

on when and why indirect realisations of functions may sometimes be more appropriate is provided in a new chapter (van Ek and Trim 1998b, Chapter 11: Sociocultural competence).

Another of Flowerdew's (1990) objections is that *Threshold* (1975) does not refer to 'intermediate' categorisations of the kind made by Leech (1981). Leech observes that a tag question such as 'you will come, won't you?' is neither a clear-cut order, nor simply an invitation, but something in between the two. Again, such considerations are addressed in Chapter 11 of *Threshold 1990* (Sociocultural competence): in this case, in some detail (Table 6).

The T-series also acknowledges that utterances may be multi-functional ('one may seek factual information while at the same time expressing surprise', van Ek 1975:19), but as with indirectness, the issues that this raises are bypassed in the presentation of the lists of functions in Chapter 5 of *Threshold 1990* (van Ek & Trim 1998b) on grounds of convenience and practicality.

Roberts (1983) raises the issue of intonation. He objects that 'all students have to be helped to recognise that there is a connection between function and attitude on the one hand, and stress and intonation on the other', observing that available functional materials, including *Threshold* 1975, had failed to provide sufficient direction.

The 1990 version of Threshold does include guidance on intonation patterns. There are also changes in the arrangement of some of the functions, the collapsing of the three 'expressing and finding out' categories of functions in *Threshold* 1975 (Table 7, categories 2–4) to one in 1990 (category 2) and the addition of two new functional categories in the 1990 specification (categories 5 and 6 in Table 7). The scheme adopted for *Threshold 1990* (van Ek & Trim 1998b) is now used to cover all four levels in the T-series (see Appendix B).

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Table 6 Offers, invitations and politeness conventions in *Threshold 1990* (van Ek and Trim 1998b), Chapter 11

Offers and invitations are very much subject to politeness conventions, but in a complex way, since they attempt to persuade the partner to act in a certain way, but in the interests of the partner rather than of the speaker. Invitations and offers may be strong or weak.

A 'strong' offer or invitation, making it easier for the partner to accept, may be conveyed:
• by using an imperative as though it were an order:
  e.g. Let me help you.
        Give me that case to carry.
        Come and spend the day in Oxford.
• by expressing obligation or necessity:
  e.g. You must let me carry that case.
• by demanding a promise:
  e.g. Promise you will come to dinner with us.
• by demanding confirmation of an imputed intention:
  e.g. You will be our guests| won't you?
Note the use of low falling intonations with strong offers and invitations.

A 'weak' offer or invitation makes it possible for the partner to decline:
• by using an interrogative question regarding the partner's intentions, desires, needs or ability.
  e.g. Are you coming to dinner?
        Would you like some help with that problem?
        Do you need any help?
        Can you come to dinner next Wednesday?
Especially weak are offers that:
a) require the partner to admit that he/she is unable to refuse:
  e.g. Can you manage?
        Are you stuck?
b) are negatively phrased:
  e.g. I don't suppose you could do with some help?
        You don't require assistance |do you?

Note the prevalence of rising intonation with weak offers. Strong offers can be accepted without demur, or confirmation can be invited:
e.g. Are you sure?
      Is that all right?
A weak offer or invitation is not usually accepted without demur. More commonly, a repeated offer is invited:
e.g. Won't that be too much trouble?
      Can you spare the time?
      It's very heavy| that case.
or a weak rejection is offered:
e.g. No, thank you|I don't want to ˘bother you.
      I'm sure you're much too busy.
This allows the partner to withdraw the offer or invitation:
e.g. Well| as a matter of fact| I am rather busy.
      Right then | So long as you can manage.
or to repeat it, usually in a stronger form:
e.g. No|really | I'd like to help.
      No| do come | We'd very much like you to come.
The declining of a strong invitation is usually accompanied by an apology, or a reason for declining an offer:
e.g. Well thank you| but I'm ^sorry| I'm afraid I have another engagement.
      No thank you|I don't smoke.
      Thanks| but it's easier by myself.
A suggestion for further contact, or even an invitation to visit, may be a polite or a well-intentioned way of ending a contact. Its formal acceptance need not entail a firm commitment on either side:
e.g. A: Do visit us next time you're in London.
      B: Thank you|I will.

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Table 7 Functional components and chapter titles in *Threshold* 1975 specification compared with the 1990 edition

Functional categories		Chapter titles	
Threshold 1975	*Threshold 1990*	*Threshold 1975*	*Threshold 1990*
1. imparting and seeking factual information	1. imparting and seeking factual information	1. Objectives in a unit/credit scheme	1. The objective: levels of specificity
2. expressing and finding out intellectual attitudes	2. expressing and finding out attitudes	2. Language learning objectives	2. The objective: general characterisation
3. expressing and finding out emotional attitudes	3. getting things done (suasion)	3. Language learning objectives in a European unit/credit system	3. The objective: extended characterisation
4. expressing and finding out moral attitudes	4. socialising	4. The threshold level	4. The objective: components of the specification
5. getting things done (suasion)	5. structuring discourse	5. Specification of situations	5. Language functions
6. socialising	6. communication repair	6. Language activities	6. General notions
		7. Language functions	7. Specific notions
		8. Topics: behavioural specifications	8. Verbal exchange patterns
		9. General notions	9. Dealing with texts: reading and listening
		10. Specific notions	10. Writing
		11. Language forms	11. Sociocultural competence
		12. Degree of skill	12. Compensation strategies
			13. Learning to learn
			14. Degree of skill

Another development from the 1975 specification in *Threshold 1990* (van Ek & Trim 1998b) is the greater acknowledgement of organisational influences on interaction and textual organisation such as juxtaposition (addressed in *Vantage*, Chapter 8), conversational gambits and routines (Keller 1981), schemata (Wunderlic, 1972), framing (Goffman 1974), scripts (Schank & Abelson 1977), genres (Swales 1990) and similar schema-based conceptions of the cultural knowledge and expectations that we bring to interaction. There is also recognition of the role of adjacency pairs and preference sequences (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974; Schegloff 1992): 'function exponents are more likely to occur in sequences [which] exhibit certain regularities in the order of their elements. Thus, an apology will very often be followed by an explanation' (van Ek and Trim 1998b:82). As with issues of politeness and indirect functions, this is dealt with in the text (Chapter 8 in van Ek & Trim 1998b) rather than being integrated into the lists of functions (van Ek & Trim 1998b, Chapter 5).

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Beyond offering a 'praxeogram' or 'general schema' for goods and services (reproduced in the CEFR on pp. 127–128) the newer specification does not attempt to offer comprehensive guidance on sequencing. This is on grounds that: 'to attempt to do so would be at once too restrictive and over elaborate' (van Ek & Trim 1998b:85).

Table 8 Functional categories in the T-series by level

Vantage	Threshold	Waystage	Breakthrough
1. Imparting and seeking information	1. Imparting and seeking factual information	1. Imparting and seeking factual information	1. The learner CAN impart and elicit factual information
2. Expressing and finding out attitudes	2. Expressing and finding out attitudes	2. Expressing and finding out attitudes	2. The learner CAN express and find out attitudes
3. Deciding and managing courses of action: suasion	3. Deciding on courses of action (suasion)	3. Getting things done (suasion)	3. The learner CAN get things done (suasion)
4. Socialising	4. Socialising	4. Socialising	4. The learner CAN socialise
5. Structuring discourse	5. Structuring discourse	5. Structuring discourse	5. The learner CAN structure discourse
6. Assuring and repairing communication	6. Communication repair	6. Communication repair	6. The learner CAN repair snags in communication

A distinction not found in the T-series is made in the CEFR between *macrofunction* and *microfunction*. This is not the same as the distinction more often made by applied linguists, as by Cook (1989), wherein macrofunctions stand in a superordinate relation to the microfunctions (the microfunction *request* is a category within the macrofunction of *directives*). In the CEFR, a microfunction is associated with an individual utterance or sentence (the kind of function that appears in the T-series listings). A macrofunction, on the other hand, is associated with the rhetorical purpose of an extended stretch of written text or spoken discourse and is identified in the CEFR with genre (p.93), parallel to speech events or speech act sets (see above). No comprehensive listing of macrofunctions is provided, but examples (p. 126) include *description, narration, commentary, exposition, exegesis, explanation, demonstration, instruction, argumentation* and *persuasion*.

We are told that, 'At higher levels of proficiency, the development of discourse competence . . . becomes of increasing importance'. There is therefore likely to be scope for specifying how macrofunctions and their associated 'text types' or 'genres' (Council of Europe 2001:123) relate to the CEFR levels, perhaps by identifying level-related differences in knowledge of 'conventions

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in the community concerning, e.g. how information is structured in realising the various macrofunctions (description, narrative, exposition, etc.)' (p.123).

Functional progression between levels: what does the Council of Europe have to say?

The CEFR offers guidance on what is *criterial* about each of the levels. The general characterisations (Council of Europe 2001:36) of the A and B levels describe progression in explicitly functional terms, but the C level includes very little that relates directly to functions. Level A2, for example seems to involve an increase in the range of interpersonal functions available to learners. Criterial (and clearly functional) abilities include to *greet people, ask how they are and react to news; handle very short social exchanges; ask and answer questions about what they do at work and in free time; make and respond to invitations; discuss what to do, where to go and make arrangements to meet; make and accept offers*. The illustrative scale for *sociolinguistic appropriateness* has A2 learners able to *perform and respond to basic language functions, such as information exchange and requests* and to *express opinions and attitudes in a simple way* (p.122), although there is no indication within the A2 specification of which functions are not 'basic'. Comparisons with B1 are, of course, possible ('a wide range of language functions'), but would breach the requirement for independence – descriptions should be self contained – and do not in any case make it clear how the user should determine whether a function is 'basic' or not.

At the B2 level learners are able to present and develop a coherent argu-ment: *construct a chain of reasoned argument; develop an argument giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view; explain a problem and make it clear that his/her counterpart in a negotiation must make a concession; speculate about causes, consequences, hypothetical situations; take an active part in informal discussion in familiar contexts, commenting, putting point of view clearly, evaluating alternative proposals and making and responding to hypotheses*. There is a growing role for textual functions supporting cohesion and conversation management – *plan what is to be said and the means to say it, considering the effect on the recipient/s* – and effective communication repair: *correct mistakes if they have led to misunderstandings; make a note of 'favou-rite mistakes' and consciously monitor speech for it/them; generally correct slips and errors if he/she becomes conscious of them* (Council of Europe 2001:35).

At C1 we are told that learners have a *fluent repertoire of discourse func-tions,* but the focus here is on the fluent and spontaneous nature of learner production, rather than on its range of functionality. The characterisation of the C2 learner concerns the 'precision, appropriateness and ease' with which learners manage the language. A C2 learner is said to be able to *convey shades of meaning precisely* and *has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms with awareness of connotative level of meaning*. The higher level

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learner appears to have a developed pragmatic sensitivity to choices between functional exponents and to the role of *modification devices* (Council of Europe 2001:35).

Although functions are included in a number of the illustrative scales, they are (perhaps because of their recursivity) not scaled separately under the heading of '*Functional Competence*'. Instead, two generic qualitative factors are provided. Although these qualitative factors clearly do not relate exclusively to functions, they are said to 'determine the functional success of the learner/user' (Council of Europe 2001:128). They include:

a)   *fluency, the ability to articulate, to keep going, and to cope when one lands in a dead end*

b)   *propositional precision, the ability to formulate thoughts and propositions so as to make one's meaning clear.*

Included in the fluency scale are descriptions of hesitation and pausing behaviours; flow and tempo of delivery; degrees of ease/effort in production; naturalness and spontaneity; the degree of strain imposed on partners in interaction; the occurrence of false starts and reformulations (Table 9). The descriptors on the propositional precision scale relate to shades of meaning; modification and qualification; modality; degrees of informational detail or precision (Table 10).

Table 9 Spoken Fluency illustrative scale (Council of Europe 2001:129)

C2	*Can express him/herself at length with a natural, effortless, unhesitating flow. Pauses only to reflect on precisely the right words to express his/her thoughts or to find an appropriate example or explanation.*
C1	*Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language. Can communicate spontaneously, often showing remarkable fluency and ease of expression in even longer complex stretches of speech.*
B2	*Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he/she searches for patterns and expressions, there are few noticeably long pauses. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without imposing strain on either party. Can express him/herself with relative ease. Despite some problems with formulation resulting in pauses and 'cul-de-sacs', he/she is able to keep going effectively without help.*
B1	*Can keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production. Can make him/herself understood in short contributions, even though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very evident.*
A2	*Can construct phrases on familiar topics with sufficient ease to handle short exchanges, despite very noticeable hesitation and false starts.*
A1	*Can manage very short, isolated, mainly pre-packaged utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate less familiar words, and to repair communication.*

Table 10 Propositional Precision illustrative scale (Council of Europe 2001:129)

C2	*Can convey finer shades of meaning precisely by using, with reasonable accuracy, a wide range of qualifying devices (e.g. adverbs expressing degree, clauses expressing limitations). Can give emphasis, differentiate and eliminate ambiguity.*
C1	*Can qualify opinions and statements precisely in relation to degrees of, for example, certainty/ uncertainty, belief/doubt, likelihood, etc.*
B2	*Can pass on detailed information reliably. Can explain the main points in an idea or problem with reasonable precision.*
B1	*Can convey simple, straightforward information of immediate relevance, getting across which point he/she feels is most important. Can express the main point he/she wants to make comprehensibly.*
A2	*Can communicate what he/she wants to say in a simple and direct exchange of limited information on familiar and routine matters, but in other situations he/she generally has to compromise the message.*
A1	*No descriptor available*

These qualitative factors appear to reflect quite closely the criterial features of the C levels noted above from the general characterisations. At the C levels, the production of functions involves greater sensitivity to context (reflected in the use of modifying, qualifying and clarifying devices), greater spontaneity and less hesitancy than at the lower levels.

In terms of the topics and situations in which learners might be able to apply their functional competence, there is again relatively little to be said at the C levels (Council of Europe 2001:224). Appropriately enough, by the B1 *Threshold* Level, the learner is able to cope with *accumulated factual information on familiar matters* and *most topics pertinent to everyday life*. Beyond B1 there is only one mention of topic in the illustrative scales: the ability to provide a *clear detailed description of complex subjects*, which occurs at the C1 level on the illustrative scales for *sustained monologue* and *essays and reports*.

Turning from the CEFR to the T-series, there is no specification concerned exclusively with the C levels: the highest level *Vantage* specification (van Ek and Trim 2001) represents a level beyond *Threshold* (B1). In the CEFR *Vantage* is equated with B2 (p.23). However, according to Trim (see Preface), *Vantage* is not bounded in the same way as B2 and in some respects may go well beyond B2. The *Vantage* specification should therefore offer insights into the nature of language ability above the *Threshold* Level including C1 and C2, although it may have relatively little to say about what distinguishes B2 from the higher levels.

Wilkins (1976) illustrates the range of potential levels in communication around a particular notional-functional category, for example *definition,* where

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his examples include, '*Thyme is a kind of herb used in cooking*'and at a higher level of proficiency, '*A reversible reaction may be defined as a reaction which will proceed in either direction if conditions are arranged appropriately*'. The functional progression thus involves cumulative proficiency with the same function appearing at different levels, but expressed through different exponents.

As is clear from Appendix B, for the most part, the T-series adopts the same approach to progression. The same functions recur from *Breakthrough* (Trim 2009) up to *Vantage* (van Ek & Trim 2001) and progression is evident more through the increasing sophistication of the exponents than through the functions themselves. The intention from the earliest stage is to provide the broadest possible functionality from minimal resources.

In moving from *Threshold* to *Vantage*, there is a refinement of both functional and general notional categories, with more exponents provided for both. There is 'a more sensitive sub-categorisation of functions, particularly those in which a personal reaction, intellectual or emotional, is called for' (Van Ek & Trim 2001:22). This is perhaps most clearly marked in the functional categories of *expression of emotions* (expanded from 22 to 37 categories and sub-categories and from 102 to 194 exponents) and *suasion* (expanded from one category with seven exponents to eight sub-categories with 26 exponents) (Van Ek & Trim 2001:22). There is also a considerable expansion both in the 'common core' vocabulary and in more specialised vocabulary expressing specific notions in topic areas of interest to individual learners.

The *Vantage* learner has access both to more formal and to more colloquial language, and is starting to use variation more appropriately than those at lower levels. Learners gain an increased range and greater control of goal-directed conversation strategies together with a greater recognition and a limited control of important register varieties. This means that learners are 'more familiar with the conventions and able to act more flexibly with regard to formal and colloquial registers and the politeness conventions of a host community' (Van Ek & Trim 2001:18).

As in the movement from the B levels to the C levels in the CEFR, *Vantage* represents a qualitative development from *Threshold*: '*Vantage* as compared to *Threshold*, is marked by a relaxation of constraints, learners at *Vantage* level may be expected to communicate not only more effectively but also more efficiently and with greater ease in most of the communication situations in which they may find themselves' (Van Ek & Trim 2001:115).

Increasing proficiency gives the learner greater scope for creativity and for dealing with the unexpected: 'by *Vantage* level, greater control over greater linguistic resources enables the learner to rise above stereotypical schemata and to make more varied, flexible and effective use of principles of discourse structure and verbal exchange' (Van Ek & Trim 2001:23).

Table 11 Topics appearing in illustrative scales by CEFR level (Council of Europe 2001:224)

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
DESCRIBING & NARRATING	• where they live	• people, appearance • background, job • places & living conditions • objects, pets, possessions • events & activities • likes/dislikes • plans/arrangements • habits/routines • personal experience	• plot of book/film • experiences • reactions to both • dreams, hopes, ambitions • tell a story • basic details of unpredictable occurrences e.g. accident		• clear detailed description of complex subjects	
INFORMATION EXCHANGE	• themselves & others • home • time	• simple, routine, direct • limited, work & free time • simple directions & instructions • pastimes, habits, routines • past activities	• detailed directions • accumulated factual info on familiar matters within field			
RANGE SETTINGS	• basic common needs • simple/predictable survival • simple concrete needs: pers, details, daily routines, info requests	• routine everyday transactions • familiar situations & topics • everyday situations with predictable content	• most topics pertinent to everyday life: family hobbies interests, work travel, current events			

Language Functions Revisited

Functional progression between levels: what do functionalist approaches to second language acquisition and interlanguage pragmatics have to say?

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research has not always proved to be readily applicable to language education and is more usually concerned with linguistic forms than with functions. However, it is important to consider what evidence exists for the acquisition of functional competence. Might there be observable acquisitional sequences of the kind found for the morpho-grammatical features explored in Hawkins and Filipović (2012, Chapter 4)? Do research findings support the Council of Europe specifications?

Although the earliest studies now date back over 30 years, research into developmental sequences in the acquisition of pragmatic abilities is still said to be in its infancy (Kasper & Schmidt 1996). A major project carried out in the 1980s, the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) (*Applied Linguistics* 1983; Blum-Kulka, Kasper & House 1989), heralded an explosion of research into cross-cultural pragmatics, involving comparisons between native and non-native speaker realisations of various speech acts. However, (contrasting with a wealth of research on L1 child pragmatic development) this work has mainly been concerned with how L2 speakers comprehend or produce speech acts, rather than with the processes by which they learn to do so (see Bardovi-Harlig, Kasper & Schmidt 1996; Rose 2000; 2001). At the same time, the various functionalist approaches to SLA (Mitchell and Myles 2004) are more often concerned with what are termed notions in the CEFR scheme than with functions (see above). Attempts have been made, for example, to trace development in the linguistic expression of spatial and temporal relations or of modality, but functions or speech acts have attracted relatively little research.

Leech's (1983) distinction between *sociopragmatic* and *pragmalinguistic* knowledge is helpful in understanding the challenges that learners may face. Although most adults are aware of social conventions governing behaviour, these conventions may not transfer successfully across cultures (even when cultures share an L1). Sociopragmatic knowledge refers to this awareness of conventions governing behaviour – being aware for example, that in certain cultures rejecting an offer of food or drink may cause offence. Even if they have the linguistic resources to accept an offer, learners may fail to act appropriately because they are unfamiliar with the culturally conditioned expectations of their hosts. On the other hand, even when learners have sociopragmatic awareness, they may experience pragmalinguistic failure. They may lack the linguistic resources to support their illocutionary intent – not knowing appropriate phrases to indicate polite acceptance of the offer, or failing to recognise that an indirect offer is being made.

Kasper and Rose (2003) provide a useful overview of the relatively few

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developmental studies of interlanguage pragmatics, addressing both com-
prehension and production. These include studies that have concerned
the speech acts (or functions) of apology (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986;
Maeshiba, Yoshinaga, Kasper & Ross 1996; Rose 2000; Trosborg 1987),
complaint (Trosborg 1995), invitation (Scarcella 1979), refusal (Houck &
Gass 1996, Robinson 1992), request (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1986; Chiba
2002: Ellis 1992; Hassall 1997; Hill 1997; Rose 2000, Svanes 1992), response
to compliments (Rose 2000), and suggestion and rejection (Bardovi-Harlig &
Hartford 1993a).

These studies have generally shown the functions produced by learn-
ers becoming, with increasing language ability, more target-like: involving
increasingly complex syntax and greater use of modification of the main
speech act (the *head act*). Modification may be accomplished through inter-
nal modifiers including softeners such as hedges ('*kind of*'; '*I guess . . .*') or
downgraders ('*could you possibly . . .*'), intensifiers ('*I insist that you . . .*')
and external modifiers such as grounders ('*I don't have any moneywith me*').
Kasper and Rose (2003:307) suggest that, at least for requests, there is now
sufficient evidence to suggest some developmental sequencing. Beginning
learners tend to rely on pre-grammatical utterances, formulaic speech and
direct rather than indirect requests. There is a gradual move toward conven-
tional forms of indirectness, followed by the appearance of request modifica-
tion as proficiency increases.

Developing the ability to control the form of speech act realisations in
response to variation in the social context would seem to be particularly
challenging. Kasper and Rose (2003) sum up the findings as follows: 'despite
already possessing considerable universal pragmatic knowledge, adult L2
learners appear to require a great deal of time to develop the ability to appro-
priately map L2 forms to social categories. This appears to be especially true
in foreign language contexts' (p.145). This is probably because the foreign lan-
guage classroom provides fewer opportunities for developing sociopragmatic
awareness than are available through immersion in a foreign culture.

Although much of the interlanguage pragmatics research involves L2/L1
speaker comparisons, Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (2005) remind us that it
should not be assumed that native speakers have a pragmatic mastery that
non-natives lack or that observed differences between L1 and L2 speakers
necessarily impact on the effectiveness of communication. Tarone (2005)
suggests that an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) perspective might
be a helpful one for conceiving pragmatic competence. ESP distinguishes
between novices and experts according to their individual levels of aware-
ness of the conventions associated with discourse genres rather than native
speaker status. Hence 'a request may fail or succeed in a discourse commu-
nity depending on whether its realization fits genre norms. All novices (native
speaker or not) must master genre norms'(Tarone 2005:160).

Language Functions Revisited

Thomas (1983) makes the point that sociopragmatics are closely bound up with issues of personal and cultural identity and suggests that learners may not always need or wish to adopt the roles implied by the conventions of the target culture – in fact they may prefer to reject or subvert genre norms. The participants in the study by Siegal (1996), for example, although having both the sociopragmatic awareness of the conventions and the pragmalinguistic means to realise them, avoided adopting features of 'women's speech' in Japanese. The cultural basis of sociopragmatics makes such issues particularly sensitive for English language education, given the status of English as a global language and the questions that this raises about what might be suitable as a 'target culture'. In an interaction between, let's say, a Mexican, an Egyptian and an Indonesian at an international conference, which sociopragmatic conventions would the interaction be expected to follow?

The distinction made in the CEFR between *plurilingual* and *pluricultural* competences, makes operational definitions of pragmatic competence particularly difficult for those who, following the models of communicative language ability outlined above, may wish to isolate this aspect for testing. Hudson, Detmer and Brown (1995) suggest a range of indirect and direct techniques that may be used to test awareness of and production of speech acts for research purposes, but concede that their work is exploratory and, with a hint of understatement given the controversy that the topic has provoked (see for example Crystal 2003), that 'the role played by the "native speaker" as the standard against which performance is judged is far from resolved' (Hudson, Detmer and Brown 1995:66).

The evidence from tests of pragmatics on developing competence is mixed. Using discourse completion tasks (DCT – short written dialogues with a gap to be filled with an appropriate speech act) in both constructed (written) and selected response (multiple choice) formats together with self-assessment questionnaires, Liu (2006) found little (multiple choice) or no (written and self-assessed) significant relationships with TOEFL scores. On the other hand, Roever (2005), using similar multiple-choice and short-answer measures in a web-based test of pragmalinguistic knowledge of speech acts (requests, apologies and refusals), conversational implicature and interactional routines (associated with greetings, introductions, telephone interaction, meals etc.), found a positive relationship between language proficiency and knowledge of speech acts and implicature, but found that awareness of conversational routines was more closely associated with exposure to an English-speaking environment than with classroom-based learning. An unfortunate shortcoming of much of the interlanguage pragmatics research acknowledged by Hudson, Detmer and Brown and by Roever is that the most popular elicitation method, the DCT, may in fact be a poor predictor of performance in unscripted interaction (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford 1993b, Golato 2003).

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O'Sullivan, Weir and Saville (2003) investigate functions in language tests from a different perspective. Their study involves comparisons on the basis of a checklist of language functions, between the language that test tasks are designed to elicit and the language that is actually produced by test takers. The checklists proving to be operationally effective for the practical analysis of large quantities of oral test data, this approach may, as O'Sullivan et al suggest, allow for meaningful comparisons to be made between learners performing similar tasks at different CEFR levels. However, the checklists do not include issues such as turn length, awareness of routines and sociolinguistic variation that the interlanguage pragmatics research suggests may be criterial at the higher levels.

The suggestions in the T-series that speech acts can be realised through different exponents at different levels and that sociolinguistic variation is a high-level skill both receive some support from research into the use of functions by learners. However, the available evidence is perhaps too limited in scope (only a handful of speech acts have been studied) and methodology (unrepresentative, small scale case studies or unrealistic DCT) to provide many substantial insights into functional progression. There is scope for projects related to English Profile to make a substantial contribution in this area.

Conclusions

This chapter has reviewed functions and functional progression as conceived in the work of the Council of Europe. This has provided a general picture of the functional capabilities of the C level learner. Functional competence is seen to develop iteratively and to involve elements of both linguistic and cultural knowledge. At the C (*Proficient User*) levels, learners are likely to have both a repertoire of more formulaic functional exponents and the potential for more creative realisations. They will probably be confident in the use of implicature and familiar with a wide range of conventional indirect speech acts. They will be able to deal flexibly with a range of situations. They are likely to be able to make use of a range of internal and external modifiers to shape their own production to suit audience, purpose and context, with an awareness of the social implications of choices between exponents and modifiers.

Since the 1970s the work of the Council of Europe, mediated through language syllabuses, course materials and tests, has of course had a profound impact on language teaching and testing practice. However, the CEFR is neither the beginning nor the end of the story. The CEFR levels are intended to provide 'an adequate coverage of the learning space relevant to European language learners' (Council of Europe 2001:23) engaged in socially organised and publicly recognised learning. In other contexts and for other purposes, the description of different learning spaces with levels above or below those

of the CEFR may be appropriate. Equally, it is acknowledged that the CEFR levels represent an attempt to capture a 'wide, though by no means universal, consensus on the number and nature of levels appropriate to the organisation of language learning' (Council of Europe 2001:22–23): a consensus that predates and continues to exist alongside the framework. A re-examination of this wide consensus as it relates to the English language (and so passes beyond the scope of the CEFR) is imperative for the English Profile. The continuing use of language functions and associated concepts in language classrooms and examination halls, filtered through the accumulated experience of teachers and testing professionals, should provide a rich vein of evidence on the nature of this consensus as it relates to functional progression and, as the focus of this book, to the C levels. The following chapter therefore pursues the question of functional progression in language learning materials: curricula, textbooks, examinations and associated materials.