

FUNCTIONS DEFINITIONS

WHAT IS A FUNCTION?

A linguistic function is what we do with language. The main function of language is to communicate. As mentioned above, there are specific functions that are core to the communicative process such as identifying things, expressing likes and dislikes, asking questions, comparing things, placing an event or object in time and space. There can be several ways of expressing or performing the same function, for example in English we can say:

I don't like green beans.
I prefer peas to green beans.
I hope I never see green beans again in my life!
I can't believe you like green beans.
I won't eat these (green beans)!
No thank you, I had green beans for lunch.
No thanks, I hate 'em!!

Each of these utterances expresses the fact that the speaker does not like green beans. The degree to which the speaker expresses dislike or in one instance employs politeness to refuse an offer of green beans show ways we choose (as speakers) to express dislike.

What is important to remember is that vocabulary and structure are our tools to perform linguistic functions. Just as we can travel by car, train or plane to Chicago, we can perform a single linguistic function using a variety of structures and words. Each function listed below is defined linguistically and then illustrated by examples. The examples are NOT an exhaustive list of every way to perform a function. They are merely intended to show in a concrete manner how one might perform a particular function. Examples are given in a variety of speech styles and levels of grammatical complexity to demonstrate the different types of language that can be used to perform these functions