Language functions

What are functions?

We can describe language by using words to talk about grammar. But we can also describe language by saying how it is used. This is the function of the language (functional description).

If I were you, I'd leave now.

grammatical description: second conditional
functional description: giving advice

- **Choosing what to say**

Our choice of words can be influenced by the situation we are in, by the person we are talking to, and by what we are talking about. Look at these phrases for asking permission.

Asking permission from a friend: *Is it all right if I use the phone?*

Asking permission from the same person, but about a more serious topic: *Do you think I could possibly phone Australia?*

Asking permission from a stranger: *Do you mind if I open the window?*

The first example was informal and friendly. The second two examples were more formal and polite.

Match each sentence (a-j) with a function from 1-10.

a) That's very kind of you, I'd love to 4 . . . . . .
b) Well, it's been nice talking to you, but I'm afraid I have to go.....
c) Could you tell me how to get to the post office?.....
d) You might have told me you were having a party!.....
e) Shall I carry this bag for you?.....
f) What do you think I should do?.....
g) Actually, I don't think that's right.....
h) Would you like to come round for a drink later?.....
i) Jack, this is my brother, Mark .....
j) Could you tell me what time the bank opens?.....

1 Complaining
2 Inviting
3 Asking for information
4 Accepting an invitation
5 Asking for advice
6 Asking for directions
7 Introducing other people
8 Offering to do something
9 Disagreeing
10 Ending a conversation

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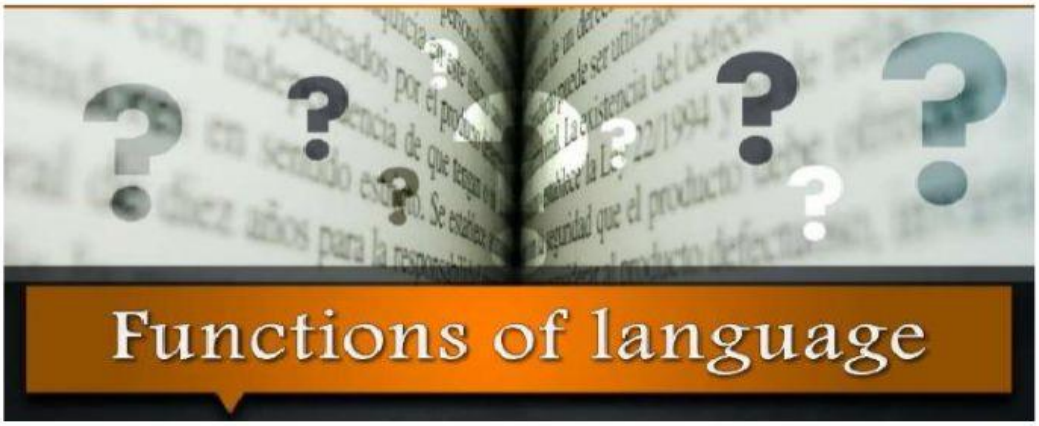
2 Match each sentence (a-j) with a function from 1-10.

a) Would you like some more tea?.....*6*.....
b) I think you'd better phone the police.....
c) I'd love to come, but I'm already going out that evening.....
d) Good morning, I'm Brenda Watson, the Marketing Manager.....
e) I'm sorry I'm late - it won't happen again.....
f) Would you like me to do the washing-up?.....
g) Excuse me, but is the bus station anywhere near here?.....
h) Hi, Sally, how are you?.....
i) I think that's the point exactly.....
j) It's at the end of this street, opposite the church.....

1 Declining an invitation
2 Introducing yourself
3 Greeting a friend
4 Offering to do something
5 Asking for directions
6 Offering something
7 Agreeing
8 Apologising
9 Giving directions
10 Giving advice



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