

## ***Inductive, deductive... or seductive?***

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Most of you reading this will, I imagine, be non-native English teachers, working with classes of native speakers of Spanish or Portuguese in Latin America, whose needs, difficulties and many advantages when it comes to learning English are quite specific, and relatively easy to define.

However, most of you will also be using teaching materials and methods devised in Anglophone countries, usually by native speakers of English, who may or may not have experience of teaching in Latin America. Such materials are designed to accommodate both multilingual classes - in order to sell 'at home' in the UK/US, etc., but also 'for different L1 speakers around the world', following the usual, generalised, 'global English approach'. Typically, they are based on 'native speaker frequency', employing some kind of 'communicative/task-based-type' approach. These 'packages' – which is what most course book series now are – have, by definition, to be much less specific to fit a multitude of scenarios, most of which are very different from our day-to-day reality here in Latin America. Despite commercial claims otherwise, they cannot be 'ideal' for our learners, as they aren't designed specifically for them, ignore what they know, often hiding lexis and structures that are easy for them, simply because it's too hard elsewhere. This results either in teachers having to skip, adapt, supplement and even apologise for not using the prescribed material, or equally often, 'teaching the book' in spite of students' real needs and potential strengths, which cannot provide their most efficient route to learning English quickly.

Obviously, we should be using much more locally tailored materials across the board, but that's a topic for another day. This article will exemplify the problem by focusing on one simple way to modify standard practice, to best advantage our teenage and adult students by better exploiting their existing linguistic knowledge.

Mainstream grammar teaching follows two approaches: **deductive** or **inductive**. Deductive is essentially rule-driven, top-down, taking a general 'rule', then applying and polishing it through examples. Inductive is more bottom-up, first noticing patterns then, through guided discovery, working out 'the rule'. Both approaches are usually followed by a series of exercises, which are often very similar.

Both approaches have pros and cons, both are reciprocal and iterative. Inductive learning works best when languages have consistent patterns of use and form, e.g. the written form of past tense endings, or comparative/superlative adjectives, but not when things are irregular, complex or subtle, e.g. the **pronunciation** of *-ed* endings, the use of modal verbs, or the use/non-use of articles, where a deductive list of rules, given by the teacher, followed by multiple examples, is more effective. Most teachers, including myself, combine the two approaches, and most contemporary course books include both, often using induction within the lesson itself, and deduction in a separate grammar summary later.

My problem with both methods in our Latin American context is that neither approach is consistently appropriate for Spanish and Portuguese speakers, and so will always be 'clunkier' than need be. Being more learner-centred, inductive teaching/learning is generally deemed superior as it requires active engagement, choice-making and, through deeper-processing, should lead learners to understand and

remember better. When done well, inductive 'discovery learning' can increase confidence and motivation. However, my objective here is to look at the downsides of induction, particularly with classes of students with the same native language, which the teacher knows, then offer an equally effective but far more efficient alternative.

On the face of it, induction appears logical and democratic but, in practice, numerous problems arise. Text-based inductive or 'guided discovery' classes usually follow this sort of route:

- 1 Some kind of lead-in to a text, maybe pre-teaching a key item or two.
- 2 Read/listen once for gist.
- 3 Re-read/listen again for more detailed understanding, often doing further lexical work.
- 4 Re-re-read/listen again to [part(s) of] the text or extracts to induce, or discover with the help of the teacher, the key features and rules of the target language.

### **Comments on the above process**

In my experience, by the time you reach the third reading of a written text, it can often feel repetitive, dragging learners back through a text, which they may not have found particularly thrilling in the first place, just to service an inductive routine. This is especially unnecessary when the grammar point is exactly the same in their own language!

Obviously, this is the same more generally with the inductive elicitation of features and rules of lexical items too. What's the point of dancing around and through hoops, providing a glossary or even an illustration to elicit or concept-check a word or phrase which is a cognate for our learners? Surely we can find better uses for class time?

Or, equally, with a difficult listening text which they didn't understand much of the first or second time, the third time they listen won't be significantly different unless they're reading the script as well, which is normally an acceptance of defeat in listening work anyway! Repeated visits to a text, which learners didn't and often wouldn't choose for themselves, can't be the most efficient way to make a point to a disparate class trying to learn English as fast as possible. All classes are mixed ability, learners will not achieve the same levels of comprehension simultaneously, so it's bound to feel either too hard, too easy or repetitive to some, and probably most of them. Here in Latin America, we usually face mixed motivation too, passing the course or getting the certificate and moving on a.s.a.p. being most learners' main priority.

So, motivation to re-re-read/listen comes mainly from the teacher, in the name of a particular tactic, not from the students' real curiosity about text content, much of which they will already either have absorbed, or given up on.

Besides, texts – and increasingly video clips – are often chosen not so much for their relevance to a particular group of learners but because they exemplify certain language points. For example, the most suggested song lyrics to teach the Present Continuous on the Internet are Fools Garden's *Lemon Tree* (1996) and *Tom's Diner* by Suzanne Vega (1984), neither of which are likely to be the musical choices of contemporary learners.

The main issue is the length of time induction can take to make what is often a relatively straightforward point, particularly for Romance language speakers, where English is often very similar to what they

already know in their own language. Class time is precious: for many it's still their only, weekly chance to practise expressing themselves face to face with others in English. Could this 'trying to work out what's going on time' not be more profitably used giving everybody additional language development and communicative practice? My reasoning is this:

- Class teaching isn't remotely the same as one-to-one teaching. The key thing is to keep all the group busy, simultaneously wherever possible. Some students will always 'get it' faster than others, the bigger the class the larger the differential usually is. Yes, the quick can try to explain or exemplify to the slower ones, but that can be awkward, fragmentary, even divisive, as well as very time-consuming, and teachers often have to intervene, re-explain, and then end up eliciting or providing a translation or explanation anyway.
- And, when do students 'get it' anyway? What is the 'hallelujah moment', when they finally say 'Ahora sí / Agora sim'? Nine times out of ten it comes when the penny drops and they've just worked out the equivalent in their own language! So, why not make that moment happen sooner, for all of them at once? Thornbury (2010) concurs: "Learners will use translation, even if covertly, as a strategy for making sense of L2, so it makes sense to use it as an overt tool, so all the class get the message simultaneously".
- Using an induction approach places a significant extra demand on teachers, native and even more non-native English speakers, to elicit, prompt and guide students appropriately and effectively. This is obviously easier for teachers with stronger English, plus training in eliciting, concept-checking and the like, and they are certainly not the majority of teachers in Latin America.
- There's always the danger of learners not getting it or coming up with an incomplete or inaccurate rule, which means more (wasted) time and living longer still with uncertainty.
- Many learners, particularly those more used to teacher-led deductive spoon-feeding, or simply the weaker ones in any class, find this frustrating.
- Global course books cannot take individual L1s into account, so lessons often end up taking a long time to make what is a very simple point, for example, in our case, not only the passive voice or conditionals, but also a lot of lexis. After all, 58% of English derives from Latin, we share thousands of recognisable cognates, and much about English is guessable, even transparent, for our learners.
- Many of the exercises created around inductive methods are simply there to induct, when the time and page space could be better used for earlier and additional practice, e.g. inclusion of more cognates in texts and analysis/glossaries only for the few false cognates.
- Over-using the same approach or strategy, whatever it may be, unit after unit, level after level, is, I believe, certainly not the most stimulating nor effective way to teach a class.
- The current penchant for 'flipping' (out of class instruction, e.g. a handout or online), which I heartily endorse, suggests it would surely often be wiser to have the induction (or deduction) done **before** class, so teachers can begin by confirming the point immediately, then get on with the really important phases of practice, personalisation and appropriate feedback.

This is exactly how my suggested alternative would work. Imagine writing on the board one of these items at the start of a class, intended to practice **either** expressing age **or** uses of the present perfect:

~~I'm~~  
~~I have fourteen years.~~

have studied  
I ~~study~~ English since last year.  
have you lived  
How long ~~do you live~~ in Texas?

How would any learner whose L1 is a Romance language understand the error and correct form in these examples? Through mental contrast, thinking between languages, without having to say a word in their own language. This might appear to come directly from a page of the 'Contrastive Analysis Handbook.' However, unlike traditional translation or contrast-based methods, you're not being asked to verbalise anything in any language but English, merely **notice** what goes wrong if you translate literally, **extrapolate** and **begin to say or write it correctly**.

For me, this is the best approach to dealing with almost inevitable errors, and can work particularly well if combined with a pre-class 'flip' too. The huge difference between same L1 and multilingual classes is that you can anticipate obvious L1-transfer errors, so we really should be making that our starting point, both for lesson preparation and input, to exploit that advantage to best effect. The simple message is 'Whatever you do, don't make this transfer mistake!' If we don't do this, we know it will happen, again and again, so why not do it? You don't need to verbalise any L1 to make the point nor understand it. Indeed, you don't even need a teacher! It talks directly to our learners, in their heads.

To reiterate the point, international course books don't do this simply because they can't anticipate mixed nationality/language groups' transfer errors, and don't want to suggest what might be an irrelevant error. Teaching multilingual classes, as in the UK, USA or multilingual countries, and being unable to translate or have much idea what translation might bring, you have to elicit and check thoroughly until you're sure everybody whose language you don't know has 'got it', which is why inductive approaches are so dominant. I'm not saying 'don't induct', not at all, it can be very effective and I use it all the time. I'm merely stating the obvious, that here in Latin America, we don't have to use induction nearly as much as teachers in other contexts, and that we have a more efficient option available whenever we wish, **during, before or instead of** induction.

To my mind, this effectively combines deductive – students are given 'the rule' almost at once – and inductive – from the examples the students quickly conclude the rule.

Since I work mainly with Latin Americans, most of whom are broad-minded, with a great sense of humour, I'm calling this alternative 'seductive'! What could be more enticing to learners and teachers than 'seductive grammar'?!

This simple technique works across all levels, from Beginner to C1. Here are four more examples, from Seligson et al (2020).

*f W*  
(From where are you?)  
*am*  
I from Spain.

Home is the most nice *st*  
place *of* the world.  
*in*

*many*  
How *much* people were there?  
*do*  
How often *you* eat pizza?  
*did go*  
Where *you* went?  
*Do you*  
You like pop music?  
*long* have you lived  
How *many-years* do you live here?

*had*  
If I ~~would have~~ paid to  
park my car, I wouldn't *get*  
a parking fine. *have gotten*

Can you sense a context, or even hear someone saying these sentences? Perhaps yourself correcting a student, or maybe even making the error years ago when you were learning English if it isn't your native language?

My suggestion is that we **consistently model translation L1 interference traps to avoid right at the start of class**. Students look at them, ideally on arrival, think, get the message, and on we go with the

lesson – without speaking Spanish or Portuguese at all. As with an initial ‘flip’, they comprehend the main thrust of the lesson, the sentences you choose provide them with a context, they know what not to do as well as what to do, and are ready to get on with practising from the off, without having to say a word in their own language.

The multiple advantages are:

- **We avoid over-using the same approach or strategy**, whatever it may be, unit after unit, level after level, which is certainly not the most stimulating nor effective way to teach a class.
- **Mental contrast**, immediately contextualises language for them. You don’t need to spend time building a context for the examples.
- **Accelerated comprehension**. No need for lengthy deductive presentation or lengthier inductive session.
- **You can’t stop teens and adults from seeking equivalents and translating, so it embraces the inevitable**. Trying to deny L1-English contrast can confuse, frustrate, delay and generally slow down classroom learning.
- **Efficient, giving much more time for practice**. ‘Contrast is a time-efficient way to convey meaning, compared to demonstration, explanation, working out meaning from context’ (Thornbury 2010).
- **Truly democratic**. Everybody, weak and strong, gets the message faster than piece by piece induction.
- **Wholly relevant**: students recognise the errors as ‘their own’.
- **Anticipating errors accelerates early accuracy**, saving both the embarrassment of making obvious errors and the need for so much teacher correction.
- **Respecting existing linguistic knowledge, builds confidence and autonomy**. Learners feel smarter and more able to teach themselves.
- **Generates more peer correction sooner** because students know what is right and wrong and have a model to refer (each other) to from the get go.
- **Anticipating errors accelerates early fluency** and is **memorable** too. Learners produce more, sooner, internalising ‘the rule’ through repeated use. They should remember at least as well as if they had been through ‘induction’, as outlined above, as they will have had more time practising and generating examples of their own within the class itself.
- **Plays to the bilingual teacher’s strengths**. Knowing the L1 of all your students, being able to put yourself in their linguistic shoes, anticipating and guiding appropriately, is a huge advantage, offering enormous opportunities for empathy, learner-respect for you as a model and your pedagogy. It’s tremendously comforting for students to know they’re in the hands of an ideal teacher for them.
- **Highly motivating and wholly appropriate** for teenagers and adults in same L1, mixed ability classes.
- Best of all, **nobody is asked to verbalise the students’ own language at all**. A perfect fit for language schools where its use is considered undesirable, and cross-lingual activities like translation are discouraged. Indeed, it has exactly the opposite impact. **It actually reduces the need to speak anything but English**. Once students have worked out the equivalents, and know what they’re expressing and how to do so in English, it’s much easier to speak with security and confidence.

- **Up-to-date, in line with contemporary expert thinking.** There's no research to support 'banning' classroom translation (Cook, 2011). Monolingual or English-only teaching is being replaced by an acceptance that all students are involved in a bi-lingual process. Knowledge of other languages is now seen as an asset in language learning. Translanguaging and code switching have moved from acceptable, to inevitable, to desirable.
- Besides, the plain fact is that until C1 level, students mentally translate from L1 most new items and complex ideas they wish to express in English, anyway. So why not swim with rather than against the flow? This is one way to bring in translation **without opening the flood gates to lots of L1 in class.**
- Best of all, **it advantages the vast majority of non-native teachers**, who are effectively bilingual and able to use this approach easily, playing to their own strengths to tailor locally more relevant classes.

One last example: Which expression of lesson content would you prefer to see as a learner as you arrive in class, 1 or 2?

### 1 Today's aims

- likes / dislikes
- use / non-use of *the*
- pages 27-28

### 2 Today's aims

I love ~~the~~ games.  
I don't like ~~the~~ water.  
I hate ~~the~~ soccer.

One looks like a science class, no context or examples, just a theoretical shopping list. The other immediately makes the point, you can see the purpose of the forthcoming lesson, what (not) to do and say, at once. Many teachers have been doing this for years. If you haven't yet, try *seductive grammar* with your same L1 classes. I'm sure you won't look back.

## References

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