



La Mansión  
del Inglés

# CURSO DE INGLÉS

AVANZADO

Lección 4



# Shopping with Style: Mastering Returns, Complaints & Bargains (C1 Level)

## The Art of Indirect Communication



Quiero un reembolso  
"I'd like a refund, please."

**The "Softening" Strategy**  
Use "I'd like" or "I was wondering" instead of the direct Spanish "Quiero" (I want).



"I seem to have a problem with this item"  
**Avoiding Confrontation**  
Using "seem" avoids direct confrontation or accusing the staff of selling faulty goods.



"I'm afraid we don't offer refunds on sale items"  
**The "I'm Afraid" Marker**  
In English, "I'm afraid" is a politeness marker used to introduce bad news, not an expression of fear.

## DIFFERENCES WITH SPANISH & USAGE TIPS



Use "by card" (NOT "with a card").



Use "I'll take it" (NOT reflexive "Me lo llevo").

## Advanced Lexis & Regional Nuance



**Refund**  
Cash being returned to their refund.



**Exchange**  
Swap a sweater for another of the same value.



**Store Credit**  
Limiting future spending to that shop.



PANTS



Underwear  
Careful!



PANTS



Trousers

## Value Idioms



**RIP-OFF**  
An overpriced scam.



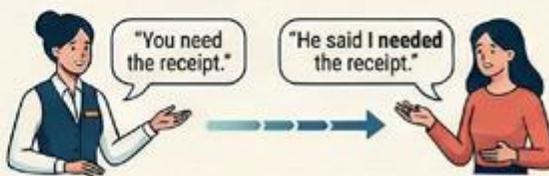
**STEAL**  
An incredible bargain.

## C1 Spotlight for Spanish Speakers



"You need the original copy of the receipt."

## Reported Speech Backshift



When reporting a clerk's words, shift tenses back: "You need the receipt" becomes "He said I needed the receipt."

## Spanish vs. English Tone



**SPANISH TONE**  
Higher emotional intensity.



**ENGLISH TONE**  
Calm, logical, and understated approach.

## False Friends

Word	English Meaning	Spanish False Friend
Receipt	Proof of purchase	Not Ticket
Actual	Real	Not current
Faulty	Defective	Not lack

# Shopping with Style: Returns, Complaints & Bargains

ADVANCED C1 LEVEL ENGLISH



Facilitated by La Mansión del Inglés

# The Scenario

## Returning a Faulty Item

### Customer

Good afternoon. I'd like to return this, please.

Yes, I **seem to have a problem** with the zipper. It doesn't close properly.

Yes... I think I'd prefer a **refund**. It's **not quite** what I was looking for.

### Assistant

Of course. Is there a problem with it?

I see. Do you have the **receipt**?

I'm **afraid** we can only offer **store credit**...

# The Resolution

What are you asking for?



## Refund

Money is returned to you (Cash or Card).  
Common in the US/UK.



## Exchange

Swapping the item for another product of equal value.



## Store Credit

A voucher or balance to spend in the shop later. No cash back.

Cultural Context: UK shops are often policy-driven, while US shops may offer refunds more freely.

# Precision Vocabulary

## False Friends & Key Terms



**Say:**  
Receipt  
(Silent P).

**Do Not Say:**  
Ticket (This is for  
entry/cinema).



**Say:**  
Faulty  
(Defective).

**Do Not Say:**  
False (Incorrect).



**Say:**  
On Sale  
(Reduced Price).

**Note:**  
'In the Sale' is  
British seasonal  
seasonal usage.



**Warning:** 'Fabric' = Cloth/Material.  
'Factory' = Where goods are made.

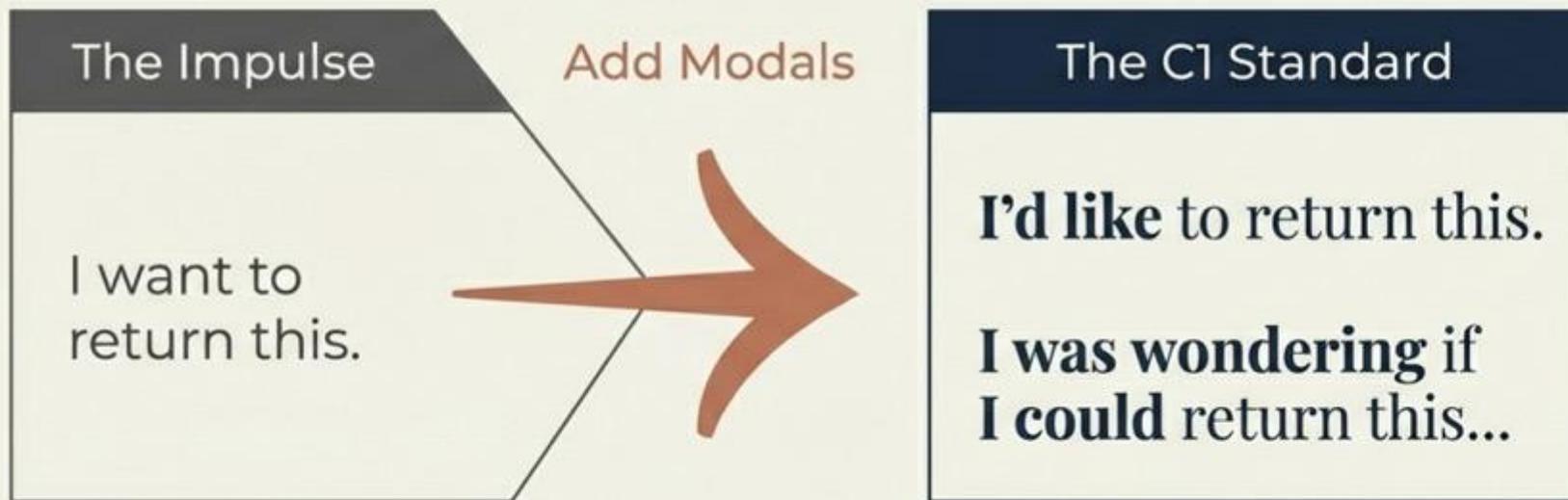
# The Value Scale

Discussing Price & Worth



# The Art of Softening

Directness vs. Politeness



**Rule:** English prefers modals (*would, could*) over direct desires (*want*). *Rising* intonation signals politeness.



# The Indirect Complaint

Firm but not Aggressive



## The “Seem” Filter

Instead of “It is broken,”  
say: “**I seem** to have a  
problem with...”

## The “Afraid” Buffer

Instead of “It doesn’t work,”  
say: “**I’m afraid** this isn’t  
working.”

Note: “I’m afraid” is a politeness marker,  
not an expression of fear.

# The Diplomatic Refusal

Montserrat Polite Disengagement

“ It’s not quite what I was looking for.”

**Context:** Use this when you don’t like an item but want to avoid direct criticism.

**Why it works:** ‘Not quite’ softens the rejection and avoids blaming the object.



# Gossip Mode: Indirect Speech

Reporting the conversation later

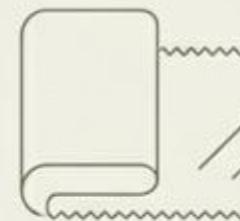
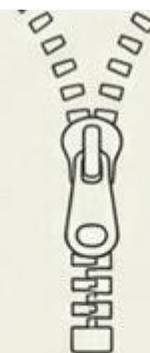
## The Backshift



Rule: Present Tense shifts to Past Tense. Pronouns also shift (I -> She).

# Reporting Instructions

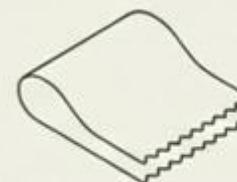
Grammar: Reporting Commands & Requests



**Told + Object + To + Verb**



Direct: "Bring the receipt."



Reported: "She **told me to bring** the receipt."



Avoid the "that" clause common in Spanish structures. Use the English infinitive.





# The Atlantic Divide

UK vs. US Vocabulary



Trousers

Jumper

Trainers

Pay by card



Pants

Sweater

Sneakers

Pay with a card



**Danger Zone:** In the UK, 'Pants' refers to underwear. Use 'Trousers' to be safe.

# Cultural Intelligence

## Service Expectations & Persona



### USA

Assertive.  
High flexibility.  
'Customer is King'.



### UK

Understated.  
Policy-driven.  
Politeness is paramount.



### Spain

Expressive.  
Emotional intensity is accepted.

**Takeaway:** When speaking English, adopt a calm, logical persona. Avoid translating emotional intensity directly.

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# The Spanish Speaker's Watchlist



No Reflexives: “I’ll take it” (Correct) vs. “I take it myself” (Incorrect).



Countability: “Receipt” is countable. “Advice” and “Information” are uncountable.



False Friends:

- Actual (Spanish) = Current (English)
- Actual (English) = Real (Spanish)
- Eventually (English) = Finally

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# Sounding C1: Pronunciation & Tone



## Intonation:

Use rising intonation for requests to sound polite.



## Silent Letters:

**Recei(p)t** (Silent P).



## Register:

Match your tone to the context.

(e.g., Use 'dissatisfaction' in formal letters, not 'rip-off').

# Confidence Comes from Nuance

Mastering shopping language is about strategy. Combine accurate grammar with the right level of politeness.

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Try using "**I seem to have a problem**" in your next interaction.



## Lesson 4: Shopping... But with Style: Returns, Complaints and Bargains

In this lesson, we will explore how to shop confidently in English, especially when dealing with returns, complaints, and special offers. At a C1 level, mastering shopping language is not just about knowing vocabulary; it is about understanding tone, politeness strategies, cultural expectations, and subtle differences between British and American English. We will analyse a realistic dialogue about returning a faulty item, examine essential expressions such as “I’d like to return this, please” and “It’s a rip-off,” and clarify key vocabulary like “receipt,” “faulty,” and “discount.” We will also study the differences between “refund,” “exchange,” and “store credit,” and review the use of indirect speech in reporting conversations. Throughout the lesson, we will compare English usage with Spanish, highlighting important linguistic and cultural differences that Spanish speakers must understand to communicate naturally and effectively.

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### Dialogue: Returning a Faulty Item

Customer: Good afternoon. I’d like to return this, please.

Assistant: Of course. Is there a problem with it?

Customer: Yes, I seem to have a problem with the zipper. It doesn’t close properly.

Assistant: I see. Do you have the receipt?

Customer: Yes, here it is. I bought it last week.

Assistant: Thank you. Would you like a refund or an exchange?

Customer: I think I’d prefer a refund. It’s not quite what I was looking for.

Assistant: No problem. I’m afraid we can only offer store credit without the original packaging.

Customer: Oh, I didn’t realise that. In that case, I’ll take the store credit.

Assistant: That’s fine. I’ll process that for you right away.

This dialogue illustrates several important elements: politeness, indirect complaint language, and specific retail vocabulary. Notice that the customer never sounds aggressive. Even when pointing out the defect, the language remains measured and calm.

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### **Essential Phrases and Their Meaning**

“I’d like to return this, please.”

This is a polite and standard formula. The use of “I’d like” (I would like) softens the request. In Spanish, one might say “Quiero devolver esto,” but that literal translation (“I want to return this”) sounds too direct in English. English typically prefers modal forms such as “I’d like,” “Could I,” or “I was wondering if I could.”

“It’s not quite what I was looking for.”

This phrase is especially useful when you simply do not like the item but do not want to criticise it openly. It is indirect and diplomatic. In Spanish, “No es exactamente lo que buscaba.” The nuance of “not quite” softens the statement and avoids blaming the product directly.

“I seem to have a problem with...”

This is another softening device. Instead of saying “This is broken,” the customer says “I seem to have a problem with the zipper.” The verb “seem” reduces direct confrontation. English culture, particularly British culture, values understatement in complaint situations.

“It’s on sale.”

This means the item has a reduced price for a limited time. In British English, you might also hear “It’s in the sale” during seasonal promotions. In American English, “on sale” is more common year-round.

“It’s a rip-off!”

This expression means something is too expensive and not worth the price. Spanish equivalent: “Es un timo” or “Es un robo.” Be careful: this is informal and can sound strong.

“That’s a steal!”

The opposite of “rip-off.” It means the item is extremely cheap for its value. Spanish: “Es una ganga increíble.” It is informal and enthusiastic.

“Can I have a refund?”

This is direct but still polite. Using “can” in this context is acceptable, although “Could I have a refund?” is slightly more polite in British English.

“I’ll take it.”

A spontaneous decision to buy something. In Spanish, “Me lo llevo.” Notice that English does not use a reflexive structure.

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## Basic Vocabulary in Retail Contexts

Receipt: “Do you have the receipt?”

Spanish: “Recibo” or “ticket.” In Spain, “ticket” is commonly used, but in English “ticket” refers more to entry passes. “Receipt” is the correct term in shops.

Faulty: defective or not working properly.

“The product is faulty.” Spanish: “Defectuoso.” Do not confuse with “false friend” words like “fabric” (which means “tela,” not “fábrica”).

A bargain: something bought at a good price.

“It was a real bargain.” Spanish: “Una ganga.”

A discount: a reduction in price.

“They offered a 20% discount.” Spanish: “Descuento.”

Cash or card?

This is a standard question in shops. In American English, you might also hear “Credit or debit?” Notice that in English “card” is uncountable in this expression, and we do not say “with card” but “by card” in British English, whereas Americans commonly say “with a card.”

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## **Refund, Exchange and Store Credit**

Understanding these three terms is essential.

Refund: the money is returned to you.

Exchange: you replace the item with another product.

Store credit: you receive credit to spend in the same shop, but not actual money.

In Spain, returns are often more restricted. Many shops only allow exchanges unless the product is defective. In the United States, return policies are often extremely flexible. Large retailers may allow returns without much explanation. However, this flexibility also means strict policies about receipts and time limits.

Culturally, Americans may expect easy returns, while British shops may be more policy-driven. In Spain, returning an item simply because you do not like it is sometimes more complicated unless it was bought online (due to EU consumer protection laws).

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## Polite Language for Complaints

English complaint language avoids direct accusation.

“I’m afraid this isn’t working.”

“I’m afraid” does not indicate fear; it is a politeness marker. Spanish speakers often omit such softeners, which can make their English sound blunt.

“There seems to be an issue.”

Passive or impersonal constructions are common. Instead of saying “You sold me a broken product,” English speakers prefer neutral structures.

“I was wondering if you could help me.”

This is extremely polite. Spanish often uses direct questions, but English uses past continuous or conditional forms to soften requests.

The tone is crucial. In English-speaking cultures, especially the UK, raising your voice or sounding confrontational is socially unacceptable in most retail environments.

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## British vs American Vocabulary Differences

One classic example: “pants.”

In American English, “pants” means “pantalones.”

In British English, “pants” means “calzoncillos” or “bragas.”

Therefore, in the UK, if you say “I like your pants,” you may cause embarrassment. The safer word for “pantalones” in British English is “trousers.” In American English, “trousers” sounds formal or old-fashioned.

Other differences include “jumper” (UK) vs “sweater” (US), and “trainers” (UK) vs “sneakers” (US). Spanish speakers should be aware of context and audience.

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### **Grammar Focus: Indirect Speech**

Indirect speech (reported speech) is essential at C1 level.

Direct speech:

The assistant said, “You need the receipt.”

Indirect speech:

The assistant said I needed the receipt.

Notice the backshift: “need” becomes “needed.” English usually shifts the tense back when reporting past speech. Spanish also changes tense, but not always in the same way.

Another example:

She told me, “Bring the receipt.”

She told me to bring the receipt.

Imperatives become “told + object + to + verb.” Spanish uses “me dijo que trajera el recibo,” a subordinate clause. English uses an infinitive structure.

If the statement is still true, sometimes English does not backshift:  
He said the store closes at nine. (If it still closes at nine.)

Spanish learners must pay attention to pronoun changes as well:  
“I want a refund,” she said.  
She said she wanted a refund.

The shift from “I” to “she” and “want” to “wanted” is mandatory in most cases.

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### **Subtle Grammar and Usage Points**

Countable vs uncountable nouns:

“Advice” is uncountable (“some advice,” not “an advice”).

“Information” is uncountable.

“Receipt” is countable.

Prepositions:

“Pay by card” (UK), “Pay with a card” (US).

“On sale” not “in sale” (except British seasonal “in the sale”).

False friends:

“Actual” in English means “real,” not “actual” in Spanish (which means “current”).

“Eventually” means “finally,” not “eventualmente.”

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## Cultural Interpretation of Complaints

In Anglo-Saxon cultures, especially the UK, complaining effectively means remaining calm and logical. Emotional intensity may weaken your position. In the US, customers may be more assertive, but politeness is still expected.

In Spain, emotional expression is more accepted. However, translating that emotional intensity directly into English may create misunderstanding.

The phrase “The customer is always right” reflects American retail philosophy. While not literally true, it influences customer service culture.

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## Advanced Pragmatic Nuances

Tone and modal verbs are crucial. Compare:

“I want a refund.” (Too direct)

“I’d like a refund, please.” (Polite)

“I was hoping to get a refund.” (Even softer)

The progressive form can soften requests:

“I was wondering if you could...”

Spanish does not use verb tenses to soften requests in the same way.

Intonation also matters. Rising intonation can signal politeness in English.

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## Price and Value Expressions

“It’s overpriced.” (Too expensive for its value.)

“It’s reasonably priced.” (Fair price.)

“It’s good value for money.” (Buena relación calidad-precio.)

Spanish often uses longer explanations. English prefers concise evaluative phrases.

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## Register Awareness

Formal complaint letter:

“I am writing to express my dissatisfaction...”

Informal spoken complaint:

“I’m not happy with this.”

At C1 level, choosing the correct register is essential.

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Mastering shopping language in English requires more than vocabulary memorisation. It involves understanding politeness strategies, grammatical shifts in reported speech, subtle cultural expectations, and lexical differences between British and American English. By internalising these structures and nuances, Spanish speakers can interact confidently in retail situations, whether requesting a refund in London, exchanging a product in New York, or comparing discounts online. The key lies in combining accurate grammar with culturally appropriate tone and flexible vocabulary choices that reflect advanced proficiency.