



La Mansión del Inglés

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Lección 4

Transcripción Podcast

Curso de Inglés Avanzado

I want you to picture a scenario for a second. Okay.

It is a Tuesday.

You're in London, or maybe New York. You bought a shirt yesterday.

You're feeling great about it, but you get home and realize, well, it's a complete disaster.

Oh, yeah.

We have definitely all been there. The classic buyer's remorse.

Exactly.

Maybe the stitching is coming undone, or the color just makes you look like you have the flu.

Yeah.

But here is the kicker for this scenario. English is not your first language.

Ah.

Now you have to walk back into that store, march right up to the counter, and engage in that terrified dance we call the return.

Yeah, the return. It's stressful enough in your native language.

Right.

Your palms are sweating, your heart is racing, and you're just running a script in your head over and over again because you are terrified of being rude.

Yeah.

Or worse, accidentally agreeing to sign up for, like, a store credit card you don't even need.

It really is the anxiety of the polite confrontation. And it's not just about having the right vocabulary, you know.

Yeah.

It is about navigating a total social minefield. That is exactly what we are unpacking today.

We are doing a deep dive into the nuances of shopping, returns, and complaints.

But, and this is the key thing for you listening, we aren't doing the beginner version today.

No, not at all. We are just learning how to say, how much is this?

Right.

We are aiming for C1 advanced proficiency today. We are going to look at tone, cultural expectations, and the grammar of actually reporting these conversations.

Yeah. And I should definitely mention right up front, the source material for today's deep dive is a fantastic lesson facilitated by mansioningles.com.

mansioningles.com, yeah.

Exactly. And it's designed specifically for Spanish speakers who are really mastering their English.

So, if you are a Spanish speaker, this deep dive is going to target some very specific friction points that you might face.

But honestly, the psychological tricks we're going to talk about today, they really work for anyone.

We're going to help you avoid the dangers of it. The danger zones.

That sounds a little ominous for a shopping trip, doesn't it?

Oh, it is.

I mean, I'm teasing it right now. There is a word that means trousers in the U.S., but if you use it in the U.K., you are literally telling the shop assistant about your underwear.

Ah, yes. The classic wardrobe malfunction just waiting to happen. We will definitely get to that one.

We will.

But let's start with the core scenario from our source text.

So, we have a customer returning an item with a broken zipper.

Okay. Now, I'm an American.

If I buy something and the zipper is busted, I walk in, I say, hey, this is broken, I need a new one.

Right. And while that is perfectly grammatically correct in a British context, or really any formal English context, that approach is a bit like taking a sledgehammer to a walnut.

A sledgehammer.

Yeah. Really.

Because to me, it just feels honest. I'm just stating a fact.

It is honest, yeah, but it's accusatory. You are blaming the object, and by extension, you're blaming the person who sold it to you.

Oh, I see.

The dialogue in our source uses... This is a much more sophisticated phrase.

The customer actually says, I seem to have a problem with the zipper.

I seem to have a problem.

Okay, let's just pause right there. Why seem? I know I have a problem. The zipper is stuck.

There's no seeming about it.

And that is the absolute beauty of the softener.

The softener.

Yeah, this is a huge concept for C1 speakers.

Yeah.

By using the word seem, you are removing the objective blame. You aren't saying, you sold me junk.

You're saying, well, there... There appears to be an issue, possibly involving me, possibly involving the universe, so let's just solve it together.

Wow. It's almost like you're taking a little bit of the blame on yourself, just to be polite.

Like, maybe I am just completely incompetent at operating zippers.

Precisely. It de-escalates the tension immediately.

British culture, in particular, really values this kind of understatement.

There is another phrase in the source that I absolutely love, actually.

What is it?

The phrase is, it's not quite what I was looking for.

Oh, I feel like that is the ultimate code.

Right. It's not quite what I was looking for, but it basically just means, I hate this, it is ugly, and I regret everything.

Exactly. But you cannot say that. If you say this is ugly, you've insulted the shop's taste.

So it's not quite what I was looking for is basically a diplomatic shield.

A shield, yeah.

It implies the product itself is perfectly fine, but the match with your personal needs just isn't right.

It allows you to reject something without offering a specific criticism that the salesperson could argue with.

It shuts down the negotiation.

It shuts down the negotiation without starting a fight.

Exactly.

Now, this brings up a massive point for our listeners, especially Spanish speakers.

The source material really highlights the difference in directness.

Yes.

This is a very common stumbling block because in Spanish it is perfectly polite to be direct.

You might go into a bakery and use a phrase that directly translates to give me bread.

Give me bread.

Right. And that's fine. It's completely normal there. But if you walk into a bakery in London and say, give me bread, you sound like you are robbing the place.

You really do. Or at the very least, like a really demanding toddler.

Exactly.

So we have to talk about the word want.

Ah, the forbidden word.

In a retail context, I want is a trigger. I want a refund. I want to speak to the manager.

It immediately puts the listener on the defensive because it focuses entirely on your desire with absolutely no regard for the other person.

So what is the upgrade then? How do we sound like a sophisticated C1 speaker?

We shift to modals.

So instead of I want, we use I'd like. I would like to return this. But if you want to go for the absolute gold standard of politeness, you use the past continuous.

I was wondering.

Yes, I was wondering if I could return this.

Okay, let's look at the grammar there for a second because it's a bit weird.

I was wondering, that's past tense but I am wondering right now. I'm standing right in front of you wondering, so why do we put it in the past?

It's about distance. It is all about creating psychological distance.

By putting the thought in the past you make the request less immediate and less demanding.

It is strictly a politeness marker. It basically turns the demand into a hypothetical thought that you just happened to have previously.

That is so subtle. It's like I had this thought earlier but I am certainly not imposing it on you right now.

Exactly. And you will hear shop assistants do it right back to you.

They'll say things like I'm afraid I can't do that.

Which always cracks me up. I'm afraid.

Like what are you scared of?

Yeah. Is the store manager a monster?

It's just another softener. It signals.

It signals that bad news is coming but it frames it as I wish I could help you but I am restricted.

It softens the blow of the word no.

Okay. So we have softened our language. We are being incredibly polite.

Now we need to navigate the actual transaction. But before we get to the money I want to talk about the item itself.

Okay. Let's say I am returning a shirt because I just don't like the material.

Right.

If I'm a Spanish speaker I have to be really really careful here. There is a classic false friend.

That the source material warns us about.

Oh this is a big one.

So you want to talk about the material of the shirt, the cotton, the silk, the wool.

In English the word for that is fabric. But if your brain is operating in Spanish mode.

You see the English word fabric and you think of a large building with smokestacks.

Right.

Because the Spanish word for factory looks almost identical to fabric. But they are completely different things.

So if I say I don't like this fabric, I'm talking about the cloth.

But if I say I don't like this factory, I am making a political statement about industrial labor conditions.

And imagine the confusion if you try to say you work in a manufacturing plant.

And you say I work in a fabric. People will think you're a moth living inside a sweater.

That paints quite a picture.

Okay. So we've got the fabric right. We've used our softeners.

Now we hand over the proof of purchase.

Ah. Another vocabulary trap right there. A little piece of paper.

What do we call it?

It is a receipt. And please, everyone listening, note the pronunciation here.

There is a silent P in that. It is not receipt. It is receipt.

Receipt.

But the temptation for Spanish speakers is to call it a ticket.

Yes, because in many European languages, the word is ticket or something very similar.

But in English, a ticket is what you buy to enter a cinema or what you get from the police for parking your car in the wrong spot.

Right. You generally cannot return a shirt with a parking ticket. You need a receipt.

Okay.

Let's say you have the receipt. You have successfully navigated the politeness dance.

Yeah.

What are the actual outcomes?

The source text outlines basically the holy trinity of returns.

Right. So outcome number one is the refund.

The absolute best case. Money back in your pocket or back on your card.

Outcome number two is the exchange.

You swap the faulty item for a new one. It's the same product, just working properly.

And then outcome number three, the one we all dread. Store credit.

The ultimate consolation prize.

Essentially, yeah.

You don't get your money back. You get a voucher or a digital balance that you can only spend in that specific shop.

And this is exactly why knowing the difference between refund and store credit is vital before you even start the conversation.

Speaking of money, the source mentions some really great idioms about value.

Yes, it does.

So if you walk into a shop and the prices are just outrageously high, you might whisper to your friend, this is a ripoff.

It's a ripoff. It sounds almost violent, like someone is literally ripping your wallet open.

It is informal, but it is incredibly common.

But then you have the exact opposite.

When you find something for a price that is incredibly low.

Oh, it's a steal.

That's a steal, yeah.

Which I always find funny. Usually stealing is a bad thing.

But in shopping, if you got it for a steal, you are the victor.

You have basically won capitalism for the day.

It really implies the value is so high compared to the price, it almost feels like you committed a crime to get it.

All right, I want to shift gears a bit. We've done the vocabulary. We've done the politeness.

Now I want to get into the heavy lifting. The grammar.

The grammar.

The source material spends quite a bit of time on indirect speech. Or reported speech.

Yeah.

This is really where you separate the B2 speakers from the C1 speakers.

It is the difference between quoting someone like a parrot and actually explaining the narrative of what happened.

Right.

So let's role play this for a second. I am the shop assistant.

I look at you and I say, you need the receipt. That is direct speech.

Now, if I go home later and tell my partner about this interaction, I don't say, he said you need the receipt.

That just sounds unnatural. I would use indirect speech. I'd say, the assistant said I needed the receipt.

Whoa.

Wait, what just happened there? Need became needed.

That is the back shift.

The back shift. Yeah.

In English, when you report something that was said in the past, you generally shift the tense back one step into the past.

So present simple becomes past simple.

It's like time travel.

You were distancing the statement from the present moment because it's no longer happening now.

Exactly.

But the tense shift is really only half the battle.

The real headache and, honestly, it's tricky for everyone, not just Spanish speakers, is the pronoun shift.

Oh, right.

Give me an example of that.

Okay. Imagine the angry customer says, I want my money back. Direct speech.

I want my money back.

Now, report that to someone else.

You cannot say, he said I want my money back because that means you, the person speaking, want the money.

You have to say, he said he wanted his money back.

You have to rotate the entire perspective in your head. I becomes he. My becomes his.

And you have to do all of that instantly in real-time conversation.

That is high-level cognitive processing right there.

It is. Let's make it even harder. What about commands? Like, what if the security guard yells, open your bag?

This is a classic C1 trap. You cannot say, he said that I opened my bag.

That is a direct translation from Spanish grammar structures using the subjunctive, but it is completely wrong in English.

So what is the fix?

You use the infinitive. You say, he told me to open my bag.

He told me to open it. She told me to bring the receipt. They told us to wait.

Yes.

The formula is subject plus told plus object plus infinitive.

If you can master that specific structure, you sound infinitely more fluent than if you try to fumble around with, he said that I should open my bag.

It's just cleaner. It's faster. And it sounds native.

Now, speaking of sounding native, we promised the listeners a trip to the danger zone.

Ah, yes. The geography of language, the UK versus the US. We have to talk about pants.

We really must.

Okay. So I am American. If I spill coffee on my leg, I say, oh man, I spilled coffee on my pants.

I'm talking about my jeans, my slacks, the visible clothing covering my legs.

Right.

But if you walk into a store in London and tell the shop assistant, I need to buy some pants, you are immediately being directed to the underwear section because in the UK, pants refers exclusively to undergarments.

So if I enthusiastically compliment a British colleague and say, hey, nice pants, I am basically harassing them.

You are certainly going to get a very confused and possibly highly offended look. In the UK, the outer garment covering your, your legs is trousers.

Trousers. It just sounds so formal to my American ears, you know, like something a grandfather wears, but it is the safe bet in Britain.

It is the only safe bet. And it goes both ways. Really.

We have sneakers in the US versus trainers in the UK.

We have sweaters in the US versus jumpers in the UK.

I always thought a jumper was like a jumpsuit, like a full body onesie.

Not in England.

It's just a pullover sweater, but there is a subtle grammar difference.

The source mentions regarding payment that I find really really fascinating.

Oh, right. The prepositions.

Yes.

In the UK, the standard phrasing is to pay by card. Can I pay by card?

Or is it, I would almost always say, can I pay with a card?

Or honestly, just do you take credit?

Exactly. By card versus with a card.

It's a tiny, tiny detail, but using the local preposition is one of those things that makes people instantly think, wow, their English is really good.

What about the overall attitude towards returns? Is there a philosophical difference there between the US and Europe?

Oh, a huge difference. In the US the retail philosophy is generally the customer is always right.

Return policies are incredibly flexible. You can sometimes return things you've already used without a receipt months later.

It's true.

I literally have friends who have returned dead plants to a garden center, like completely dead plants and they got a full refund.

That absolutely would not fly in Europe. The source notes that in the UK and Europe, the culture is much more policy driven.

The attitude is more like, do you have the resources? Is the item in original condition?

Is it within the strict 14 day window?

So in the US you can kind of charm your way into a refund, but in the UK you better have your paperwork in order.

Generally, yes. The European approach protects the business a bit more, whereas the American approach prioritizes customer satisfaction at almost any cost.

I want to circle back to something we touched on earlier, specifically for our listeners using the mansioningles.com materials.

Sure.

We talked about false friends like fabric and factory, but there's another one in the source that, oh, this is pervasive.

Spanish speakers use actual to mean current or happening now, because that is exactly what the similar word means in Spanish.

So a learner might say, but in English, actual means real or factual. It contrasts with imaginary.

So the actual cost means the real cost, not the current cost.

Correct.

If you want to talk about something happening right now, you should use current or present.

The current situation.

That is a game changer for sure. And there's one more grammar nerd point from the source that I loved.

Advice.

Yes. Can I give you an advice? I hear this all the time. She gave me an advice.

And it immediately sets off alarm bells for a native speaker. Because in Spanish, the word for advice is countable.

You can have one advice, two advices. But in English, advice is an uncountable concept. It's like water or sand.

You cannot have an advice.

So what do I say instead?

You can say some advice.

Or if you really need to count it, you say a piece of advice.

Let me give you a piece of advice.

Yeah, that sounds so much better.

And finally, we have to touch on intonation. This is the absolute secret sauce.

We talked about softeners earlier, but the voice itself actually matters, doesn't it?

English uses intonation to signal emotion much more than volume.

If you complain in a flat, monotone voice, which is actually more common in Spanish declarative sentences, you can sound incredibly angry.

Or sarcastic to an English ear. I want to return this. See? Scary.

It's robotically aggressive.

But if you use a rising intonation, I was hoping to return this, it sounds friendly and open.

So you lift the voice up at the end?

No. Be a little bit melodic with it?

Smile with your voice. It really goes a long way.

This has been such a great refresher.

It's funny, we usually think of shopping as this mundane transaction, you know, just buying stuff.

But when you look at it through this lens...

It's all about relationships.

It's all about relationships, isn't it?

Even a 30-second interaction with a cashier is a relationship.

Language isn't just about transmitting facts like the zipper is broken. It is about managing the emotion of that fact.

I seem to have a problem.

Exactly. It preserves dignity for everyone involved in the transaction.

I do have a question for you, though. And this is something for you listening to think about after the deep dive is over.

We have spent nearly 20 minutes talking about how to be polite, how to soften our words, how to be indirect.

We have, yeah.

Does being that polite actually stop us from getting what we want sometimes?

Like, if I am too busy saying I seem to have a slight issue, does the huge corporation just ignore me?

Is there a point where the polite, maybe slightly aggressive American style of just asking exactly for what you want is actually more honest and more effective?

That is the million-dollar question right there. Is politeness a lubricant that makes society run smoothly, or is it a barrier that prevents honest feedback?

I suspect the answer is yes.

The answer depends entirely on which side of the Atlantic you're standing on, and, well, perhaps how broken your zipper really is.

A truly fascinating thought to end on. Thank you to everyone for listening to this deep dive.

We really hope this helps you navigate your next shopping trip with C1 confidence.

Keep practicing those softeners, watch out for the pants, and remember, always check your receipt.

See you in the next deep dive.