

## Embedding Grammar while Developing Communicative Competence in English: Relevant Cultural Contexts and Teaching Approaches

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### Abstract

This article examines Arab-heritage learners' preferences on how grammar is taught in English classes with a communicative competence focus, serving as a basis for developing principled teaching practices and teacher-training. Data was collected via a questionnaire from 336 adult learners that attend a private teaching facility using primarily Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methods. In the study, learners were pooled into lower-level, or higher-level groups depending on their Common European Framework (CEF) language level. Data was collected on learners' preferred teaching/learning strategy choices including (i) deductive or inductive approaches, (ii) embedding grammar in local or 'international' cultural contexts, (iii) use of tasks and exercises or activities, and (iv) immediate or delayed teacher intervention. Results indicate Arab learners' overall preference of grammar instruction practices based on deductive approaches, conditional to teaching practices being embedded in meaningful contexts. Lower-level learners prefer local cultural contexts, while higher-level learners prefer Western/international ones. Very few Arab-heritage learners prefer methods based on guided inductive approaches using tasks and exercises with periodic teacher-intervention, and almost none chose the deep-end CLT inductive approach. Conversely, shallow-end inductive approaches, with contextualized tasks, activities and delayed teacher intervention are almost as popular as contextualized deductive approaches. This study indicates the importance of meaningful cultural contexts for embedding grammar instruction, reappraising contemporary deductive methods, and the balanced use of shallow-end CLT and inductive approach. These results should therefore help teachers and teacher-trainers realign popular Western beliefs about English teaching and teacher-training when operating in Arab-heritage communities.

**Keywords:** Arab heritage learners, communicative competence focus, cultural contextualization, embedding grammar, inductive and deductive approaches, teacher-training.

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## Introduction

### *The case for grammar instruction*

The importance of English grammar teaching around the world remains contentious, and learners continue to face many divergent positions. “When, and to what extent, one should teach grammar to language learners is a controversial issue” (Celce- Murcia, 1991, p.459). For example, in the 1960s and 1970s most Anglophone countries such as England, Australia, New Zealand and the USA renounced grammar instruction on the grounds that it was ineffectual (Jones *et al*, 2013). The teaching of language forms has also been disparagingly described as “Neanderthal” (Long, 1988, p.136), and Hillocks and Smith (1991) stated that “Research over a period of nearly 90 years has consistently shown that the teaching of school grammar has little or no effect on students” (p.602). Yet currently English grammar is in the process of re-introduction into the English curriculum in many Anglophone countries, even if the ambiguity of its role and if and when to teach it still persist (Myhill & Jones, 2011; Myhill, 2011).

### *Grammar-teaching methodologies*

This ambiguity has resulted in learners being exposed to markedly opposing strategies for teaching English grammar, for example, form vs. function, form vs. meaning, fluency vs. accuracy, meaning-based instruction vs. form-based instruction, and communication vs. grammar (Lock, 1997). There often are varied and often conflicting perceptions, motivations and attitudes towards the role of grammar and how it should be taught in much of the Arab-speaking world, stemming from both learners and teachers. Such countries include, and not restricted to Algeria (e.g. Senoussi, 2012), Egypt (e.g. Latif and Mahmoud, 2012), Iraq (e.g. Al-Mawl and Al-Azzawi, 2011), Libya (e.g. Tantani, 2012), Morocco (e.g. Dkhissi, 2014), Oman (e.g. Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam, 2011), Saudi Arabia (e.g. Assalahi, 2013), South Sudan (e.g. Mallia, 2014a), Sudan (e.g. Mallia, 2013a; 2014b), the United Arab Emirates (e.g. Eltantawi, 2012) and Yemen (e.g. Ezzi, 2012).

Arab-heritage countries therefore have concerns about the rationale behind the methods and approaches for English grammar teaching and their efficacy, particularly communication versus grammar. Additionally, negative connotations with the attitudes of Arabic-heritage English learners exist, and that they are not open to new approaches. For example in Saudi Arabia “[...] learners’ perceptions and beliefs about grammar are influenced by their cultural, social, and environmental factors. As such, participants from Saudi Arabia favoured traditional grammar method of teaching...” (Rattar, & Dilshad, 2010, p.28).

Newby (2003) suggests that making informed choices about the role of grammar and its effective instruction have been helped via the three general ways of approaching grammar throughout ELT history, including traditional grammar teaching and communicative language teaching (CLT). López Rama and Luque Agulló (2012) summarize that “Traditional grammar teaching was based on a formal notion of competence: the underlying knowledge of concepts and rules stored in the minds of speakers which equated grammar with syntax and morphology, considering meaning as totally different linguistic level” (p.180). The classroom practices utilized are essentially based on the procedure known as ‘presentation, practice and production’ (PPP): new grammar rules, particularly the form and meaning, are first presented, followed by decreasingly controlled tasks and exercises, leading to freer and more natural production of the target language (TL) (Harmer, 2007).

The explicit knowledge of rules was often the main classroom objective for PPP, generally with greater focus on knowing about grammar, rather than its written or oral communicative purpose. Research on the relation of language with culture and society by Hymes (1972) resulted in the introduction of the concept of ‘communicative competence’, with the ensuing critical shift of importance, “...to highlight the difference between knowledge ‘about’ language rules and forms, and the knowledge that enables a person to communicate functionally and interactively” (Pérez Martín, 1996, p.316).

### ***Communicative competence, grammar and context***

Yet the strategy of pitting communication vs. grammar (Lock, 1997), and idea that CLT requires an exclusive focus on meaning, at the expense of grammar, is far from accurate (Spada, 2007). Indeed, communicative competence has been categorized into four aspects including the grammatical and linguistic competence, in addition to sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence (Canale and Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). Analogously, Bachman (1990), and Bachman and Palmer (1996) subdivide communicative competence into language competence, strategic competence and psychological mechanisms. Language competence is further divided into ‘pragmatic competence’ and ‘organizational competence’, the latter including grammatical and textual competencies.

It is therefore also of importance to evaluate the role of context and culture within communicative competence. Using it may facilitate embedding grammar in a CLT classroom, but learners’ perceptions on the preferential use of local, familiar cultural context, versus extraneous ones needs also to be examined.

### ***CLT, PPP, inductive and deductive approaches***

CLT is divided into the shallow-end and deep-end approach (Thornbury, 1999). The latter approach, based on Krashen’s theories of the Natural Approach (1985) rigorously excludes the role grammar in classroom teaching due to the perception that it may interfere with communication. Instead, the meaning and use of grammar items are acquired by learners inductively through activities and tasks that replicate real-world scenarios. This is in sharp contrast to PPP and traditional methods of teaching grammar which are often based on deductive learning and involve explicit teaching of grammar (e.g. see Mallia, 2014a).

While the use of PPP has somewhat waned, particularly in Western (or Western-influenced) classroom environments, deep-end CLT is virtually obsolete. Concerns regarding the latter started to appear in the literature almost 25 years ago, for example Larsen-Freeman (1991) wrote:

“Despite the popularity such approaches [the Natural Approach] now enjoy, if the pattern alluded to earlier is perpetuated [no grammatical analysis in the classroom], then one would expect them to be challenged. Indeed, there are already signs that this is happening. [...] Thus, a more satisfactory characterization of teaching grammar, harmonious with the above assumptions, is that teaching grammar means enabling language students to use linguistic forms accurately, meaningfully and appropriately” (p.279-280).

More recently, López Rama and Luque Agulló (2012) state that:

“[...] even when the contradiction about teaching grammar still exists in ELT literature, in the classroom the deep-end approach is not currently used, as most authors and teachers attach a role to grammar, without diminishing the main target of communication” (p.182).

Conversely, in the shallow-end CLT approach grammar is often taught via a guided inductive approach. For example, the teacher may create classroom scenarios where grammar can be embedded in meaningful, communicative contexts that are essentially learner-centred. The teacher’s role becomes that of a facilitator, guiding learners appropriately to utilize the target language in a contextualized and meaningful manner. The teacher’s guidance may involve the implicit or explicit discussion and analysis of the TL, employing caution not to interrupt the ‘communicative flow’ of the lesson.

Grammar teaching in the CLT classroom is clearly synchronous with the ultimate objective of developing the learners’ communicative competence. Hence, while the importance of cognitive theories of language acquisition cannot be underestimated, so to must the need for their practice in the context of ‘real-operating conditions’ Johnson (1988, 1996). Similarly, real-world conditions are advocated as a necessary part of the lesson, with a having concrete practical activity (Lantolf and Johnson, 2007) or favouring communicative behaviour (DeKeyser, 1998).

### ***Research objectives***

Despite these underpinning principles, the pragmatic views of learners themselves, increasingly exposed to a wider variety of teaching methods and approaches, are often ignored. Learners represent a valuable resource of knowledge on ‘best practices’ when teaching and learning grammar in the contemporary English classroom.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to:

- (1) Examine contemporary Arab learners’ acceptability of traditional grammar teaching classroom practices using deductive approaches, such as PPP;
- (2) Examine Arab learners’ acceptability of deep-end CLT classroom practices using ‘rigorous’ inductive approaches;
- (3) Examine Arab learners’ acceptability of shallow-end CLT classroom practices using guided inductive approaches;
- (4) Explore the importance of using familiar and meaningful ‘Arab heritage’ cultural contexts in which to embed grammar instruction as an aid to presenting its form, and illustrating meaning and use;
- (5) Explore the importance of using ‘new’ cultural contexts that may strengthen intercultural communicative competence.

## **Methods**

### ***Participants and course***

The study population consisted of 175 male and 161 female adult Sudanese learners with ages ranging from late teens to early sixties, attending English classes at the British Council in Khartoum, Sudan. Some learners had been attending courses of progressive levels for over a year, while the newest arrivals were on the second month of their first course. Learners can join a general English course at the appropriate level as indicated by their placement test. The main pre-selection criterion for this study was having Arabic as the mother tongue (L1), having learnt

English in a non-Western scholastic environment (e.g. Sudan), and having been on one of the ongoing courses at the British Council for at least six weeks.

The study population of 336 learners was placed at various levels of the European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF). Following the British Council's CEF-language level equivalency as indicated *A Core Inventory for General English* (North, Ortega & Sheehan, 2010), there were 48 learners at A1 CEF level (approximately 'elementary 1'), 46 at A2 CEF level (pre-intermediate 1), 50 at A2 CEF level (pre-intermediate 2), 34 at B1 CEF level (intermediate 1), 92 at B1 CEF level (intermediate 2), 50 at B2 CEF level (upper-intermediate 1), and 16 at C1 CEF level (advanced 1).

Learners are taught by one or more different teachers having a CELTA course, undergraduate degree and several years of international experience as the minimum set of qualifications. The syllabus adopted by all teachers is guided by the course book series *New Cutting Edge* (elementary-advanced level as appropriate). Teachers supplement course book materials with their own, choosing resources from other course books, adapting materials or creating their own independently as they feel is suitable. However, the core syllabus covered for a specific language level is generally adhered to, and the British Council strongly encourages the use of CLT in its Sudan classes. However, the actual approach and materials adopted may vary within any single teacher's course, and certainly across courses conducted by different teachers. This diversity exposes learners to many teaching styles, and encourages them to experiment with different learning approaches.

### ***Measurements***

The research tool used was a written questionnaire (*Table 1*), with a single question about learners' preference for new grammar instruction (e.g. future perfect). The participants chose one out of these seven options:

(1) Teachers initially give the learners the new grammar rules, then look at the course book for examples, having a Western context, and then doing exercises and activities to practice. While this procedure is wholly deductive, it is preceded by a lead-in, personalization, and activation of schemata. Additionally, the teacher may even model the target language (TL) via live-listening, recordings, video clips, anecdotes etc. Rule presentation (form) is followed by a phase where the teacher uses resources in the book, or others with also a Western context, to show the meaning of the TL situations where language can be used in context. A final phase allows practice through exercises (controlled practice) and activities (freer practice) as prescribed by the text book.

(2) Teachers first give the learners the new rules, then directly do course book exercises and activities to practice them. The procedure is similar to (1) above, i.e. deductive, but rule presentation (form) is not followed by the phase where meaning is highlighted. Learners therefore immediately pass to a practice phase, doing exercises (controlled practice) and activities (freer practice) from the course.

(3) Teachers initially giving the learners the new grammar rules, then discuss many examples using Sudanese culture and life, before proceeding to practice by doing exercises and activities that use the grammar in Sudanese life-situations. This option is also essentially similar to (1) i.e. deductive, except that the teacher links the use of socio-culturally familiar resources extraneous to 'generic international textbooks', to show the meaning of the TL situations where language can be used in a socio-cultural context relevant and meaningful to the learners.

(4) Teachers giving learners simple tasks and exercises, including cloze exercises (gap-fills), using 'Western situations' from the start, where they have to use the TL (new grammar), then the learners form the rules themselves. This procedure is a form of guided inductive approach. It is preceded by a lead-in, personalization, activation of schemata. Again, there could be discreet modelling of TL by teacher, via video clips, recordings etc. The guided inductive phase follows, where the teacher guides the learners to use resources in the book to encourage consciousness raising of the TL, showing the meaning, use and form of the. While rules and form are not presented or highlighted as such, tasks such as gap-fills will encourage learners to focus on the TL needed. The teacher therefore has the role of guiding learners towards the consolidation of the form-function relationship so they can apply it in 'real' operating conditions. Other book-based activities, generally with a more overt 'communicative' aspect, additionally focus on the meaning and use of the TL.

(5) This option also follows a guided inductive approach. The learners therefore engage with exercises, such as cloze exercises, using Sudanese contexts and socio-cultural situations', where they have to use the new grammar, and then find the rules themselves. Other culturally meaningful activities, having a 'communicative' function reinforce the meaning and use of the TL. This option is essentially similar to (4) but makes use of a cultural context that is familiar to the learner.

(6) Teachers solely give the learners situations or observations to interpret, case studies to analyze, or a complex real-world problems to solve. Through such activities and tasks in class students can subconsciously notice the meaning, use and form of new TL, and inductively understand the links between form and function without discussing the rules or additional guidance. This is a 'deep-end' CLT inductive approach, where non-communicative actions such as rule-giving or consciousness-raising may distract from the communicative focus.

(7) This option is based on a shallow-end CLT inductive approach, but a TL focus occurs towards the end of the lesson to consolidate TL. If needed, teacher intervention can, however, occur earlier in the lesson: learners may receive guidance and prompts from the teacher towards the end of the inductive process. This option, unlike (4) and (5), does not utilize gap-fills and other tasks that strongly focus on the TL and bring it to attention to the learners. Instead, more subtle 'real-world' challenges are presented in the course of the lesson.

### ***Procedure***

This was a convenience sample, and all Sudanese learners in a course that voluntarily chose to participate in this study and satisfying the selection criteria entered the study. Information was gathered through the use of a written questionnaire (*Table 1*) incorporated as part of the 'routine' feedback collected from students at the teaching centre, and participants could choose to remain anonymous, helping to avoid possible bias and guaranteeing confidentiality. The study was also conducted inside the learners' own classrooms, and during regular class hours, further reducing possible bias that can be caused by changing the educational setting or hours.

No confounding variables (e.g. gender, age etc.) were solidly identified as being influential. Groups being compared were therefore not matched for such criteria as this could actually introduce bias, and possibly lessen the power of the study (i.e. ability to find significant differences).

The researcher was always present to help orally administer the questionnaire to guarantee a full understanding of the question and answer choices, the latter offering several often subtle differences. This procedure increases the internal validity of the study, namely the accuracy of learners' answer choice in that it truly reflects their thoughts, and also reliability (i.e. repeatability of questionnaire across the different classes, as this may be a concern (Fink, 2003). Despite its brevity, on average the questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete as learners often asked the researcher for specific differences among the options. The questionnaire was conducted by the same person (the researcher) for all classes, eliminating the possibility of introducing bias via the use of different questionnaire administrators. Learners were not allowed to discuss the answer options, or interact in any manner so as not to influence each others' answers.

### *Statistical analyses*

Descriptive statistics, expressed as counts and percentages were compiled for the seven answer options given in relation to the CEF-language level (North, Ortega & Sheehan, 2010). Similar statistics were also compiled for deductive, guided inductive and deductive choices according to learners' language-level after pooling results from options 1-3, options 4-5 and options 6-7, respectively. Additionally, statistics were collected and analyzed for learners favouring either local, culturally contextualized embedding of grammar (pooling options 3 and 5), or Western cultural contexts (pooling options 1, 2 and 4).

A suitable 'cut-off' point across language levels was identified by statistically assessing differences in the proportion of learners that chose for example, deductive-type options based. The Pearson's chi-square test was used for this purpose (Preacher, 2001): comparing the proportion of learners at intermediate level 1 with that at intermediate level 2 for deductive-type options (options 1-3), gave a statistic of 6.445. The p value is 0.011 and therefore this result is significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

On this basis, two groups were formed, one group by pooling learners from 'elementary 1' through to intermediate 1' (lower level group,  $n = 178$ ); the second group was formed by pooling learners from 'intermediate 2' through to 'advanced 1' (higher level group,  $n = 158$ ). Subsequent comparisons between the two groups used the Pearson's chi-square test for the deductive and inductive comparisons, and additionally with Yates correction for the guided approach comparison due to the small sample size and cell values.

As three comparisons between the same two groups are made the problem of multiplicity arises: the number of hypotheses in a test was increased (i.e. to 3), and consequently the likelihood of reject the null hypotheses when it is true (type I error) is also increased. The Bonferroni correction statistically adjusts for this phenomenon (Bonferroni, 1936; Dunn, 1959), and for three comparisons (each with  $p = 0.05$ ) requires  $p$  to be lowered to 0.017. This value is taken conservatively at  $p = 0.01$  for each test, and quoted at  $p = 0.005$  in this study.

When examining the importance of the cultural context, learners that favour embedding grammatical learning within local cultural contexts, or those that opt for a Western cultural context were identified. A single comparison was made between the proportion of lower-level learners versus higher level learners ( $n = 272$ ).

## Results

### *Descriptive statistics*

Descriptive statistics, expressed as percentages were compiled for the seven answer options given in relation to the CEF-language level (North, Ortega & Sheehan, 2010). They are summarized in *Table 2*.

Many higher-learners prefer inductive approaches where the teacher's interventions occur towards the latter part of the lesson (option 7: 25.06%). In contrast, they are clearly reluctant to adopt a 'deep-end' inductive approach (option 6: 1.23%) where the focus would be exclusively 'communicative' throughout the lesson and the onus for deciphering TL falls squarely on the learners. Similarly, guided inductive approaches, where the teacher along the course of the lesson are not popular choices (options 4-5: 11.39 %). The majority of higher-level learners prefer the use of deductive approaches to introduce and focus on new grammar while developing communicative competence in English (options 1-3: 63.29%).

The use of tasks and activities with the teacher's opportune intervention towards the end of the lesson was popular (inductive option 7: 11.24%), and is preferred to the use of more 'traditional' tasks with the teacher's periodic involvement at all learner levels (guided inductive options 4-5: 1.12 %); they rigorously avoid the 'deep-end' inductive approach (option 6: 2.25%). When using more traditional tasks and exercises learners clearly preferred deductive approaches, which was the overall preference for both lower and higher-level learners (options 1-3: 62.92 %). While using deductive approaches, reducing or eliminating the presentation and discussion of contextualized examples and moving directly to practice was not favoured by learners of high- and low-levels (option 2, overall 4.17 %).

Creating a context and embedding examples that clearly show the meaning and use of the new language was favoured by learners at all levels, e.g. from all learners choosing deductive approaches (options 1-3), 93.65% wanted a context (options 1 and 3). Lower- and higher-level learners preferred deductive approaches with local contexts out of all the choices (51.69 %, 32.91% respectively) as a backdrop for developing an understanding of the accurate meaning of new language and noticing its appropriate use. Analogously, Western contexts were preferred by 28.09 % and 20.26 % of lower- and higher-level learners, respectively.

### *Teaching approach preference*

Statistics were also compiled for deductive, guided inductive and deductive choices according to learners' language-level by pooling results from options 1-3, options 4-5 and options 6-7, respectively. The statistics are summarized in *Table 3*.

When comparing the proportion in the lower-level group that chose a deductive approach (options 1-3) with that in the higher-level group, the Pearson's chi-square statistic is 21.81 ( $p = 3 \times 10^{-06}$ ). This result is significant at  $p < 0.05$  (after Bonferroni correction), therefore the proportion of learners at lower-levels that prefer to learn new grammar via deductive approaches is significantly higher than that of higher-level learners.

When comparing the proportion in lower level group that chose a guided inductive approach (options 4-5) with that in the higher level group, the Pearson's chi-square statistic is 13.99 ( $p = 1.81 \times 10^{-04}$ ). This result is significant at  $p < 0.05$  (after Bonferroni adjustment and Yates correction), therefore the proportion of learners at higher-levels that prefer to learn new grammar via guided inductive approaches is significantly higher than that of lower-level learners.

A comparison of the proportion in lower level group that chose an inductive approach (options 6-7) with that in the higher level group, the Pearson's chi-square statistic is 10.65 ( $p = 1.1 \times 10^{-03}$ ). This result is significant at  $p < 0.05$  (after Bonferroni correction), therefore the proportion of learners at higher-levels that also prefer to learn new grammar via inductive approaches is significantly higher than that of lower-level learners.

### ***Cultural context preference***

Statistics were also collected and analyzed for learners favouring either local, culturally contextualized embedding of grammar (pooling options 3 and 5), versus those preferring a Western cultural context (pooling options 1, 2 and 4). The statistics are summarized in *Table 3*.

The comparison of the proportions in the lower level and higher groups that chose a familiar 'local' cultural context for embedding the learning and practice of grammar (options 3 and 5) as opposed to a western context (options 1, 2 and 4), yielded a Yates corrected Pearson's chi-square statistic of 6.93 ( $p = 8.51 \times 10^{-03}$ ). This result is significant at  $p < 0.05$ , therefore the proportion of learners at lower-levels that prefer grammar learning to be embedded in a familiar context is significantly higher than that of higher-level learners.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

### ***Deductive approaches***

This study has shown that teachers, particularly those having Western training, need to acknowledge Arab learners' continued marked overall preference of traditional grammar teaching classroom practices using a deductive approach. This is true for adult learners at all language levels examined in this study, from elementary through to advanced levels (A1 – C1 CEF levels). However, learners first choice generally included deductive strategies having an underpinning Western or local cultural context. Accordingly, this indicates an ongoing clear shift away from 'traditional' decontextualized learning that attempts to teach TL via the book-based teaching of rules and exercises with progressively freer use of language.

Differences between how Arab teachers impart grammar and how Arab learners would like to take it on are generally present. For example, in a Saudi Arabian study (Rattar & Dilshad, 2010) learners stated they needed more explicit grammar teaching while also feeling the need to be more communicative. Both these conditions cannot be satisfied by traditional decontextualized teaching of grammar, and was largely rejected in this study. Regretfully, this model may be closest to that often widely practiced in the past (and possibly also the present), and as stated by Mulder (2013): “[...] grammar has traditionally been taught and learned in an environment that is devoid of context” (p. 73), suggesting that this issue which extends well beyond the Arab-speaking world.

This study therefore also suggests that Arab-heritage learners may, indeed, be more exacting in their preferred methods of learning grammar, even via explicit deductive approaches. This was specifically shown by their rejection of the decontextualized reaching option in favour of those with a meaningful and involving context.

Decontextualized teaching results in failure to involve the learners imaginatively from the onset of the lesson as no 'real-world' scenarios in which the TL could be embedded meaningfully are created. Therefore examples, anecdotes and situations, where the teacher can demonstrate the use and relevance of the TL to Arab learners by embedding it in either familiar, 'safe' local cultural contexts, or titillating new Western ones, are absent. Contemporary Arab-

heritage learners largely have come to expect the inclusion of context alongside the use of deductive approaches.

The underpinning theory for some of the results in this study may be explained by Badstone and Ellis's (2009) Given-to-New Principle, "[...] where existing world knowledge is exploited as a resource for connecting known or 'given' meaning with new form-meaning mappings" (p.194). This gives an understanding as to why decontextualized teaching and failure to activate learners' schemata pushes learners away from deductive approaches as presented in option two, devoid of context. Learners are not presented with opportunities to affix new TL with previous language experience (or indeed life experience), making learning slow and stilted.

However, as even 'higher-level' learners were opposed to decontextualized deductive approaches, the implication is that this rejection was not only 'technical', i.e. based on rendering the learning of TL meaning and use difficult due to abstraction. An additional important factor for the rejection was that of removal the 'pleasure factor' by eliminating the cultural contexts in which TL could be embedded. For example, learners often enjoy sharing elements of local culture and news among each other and also with their teachers, and take pleasure from listening and interacting with them and talk about foreign countries and cultures. This is particularly so if foreign are foreign, hence the greater information gap.

In addition to the useful pleasure of sharing facts and ideas, learners can be trained to utilize opportunities given by contextualized discussion and debate to raise their TL awareness. An increase of 'useful teachers talking time' can therefore be employed by instructors to model TL, particularly its meaning and use, in addition to correct forms. This suggests an additional purpose, namely to direct learners' conscious attention to grammatical features that they might normally fail to notice. This satisfies another second condition that helps create successful learning of grammar, the Awareness Principle as described by Badstone and Ellis (2009) and "[...] which states that discovering new mappings between form and meaning is a process which necessarily involves awareness" (p.194).

With the careful use of 'contextualized deductive approaches', lessons therefore additionally create numerous opportunities for dialogue, debate and sharing of experiences: a CLT-type of environment that allows for the embedding of more TL-focussed aspects of this approach through cultural contextualization. This also allows the intimidating, formal and dry classroom environment, stereotypically associated with deductive approaches to be mitigated. The resulting fortification of social bonds among teacher and learners further facilitates the learning experience.

### ***Cultural context preference***

This study has also highlighted adult Arab learners' preference between the possible use of local, or international cultural contexts when teaching language. Interestingly, higher-level learners are more open to Western contexts than those reflecting local culture, and the opposite is true for lower-level learners. This ambiguity is not a new issue, and referring to learners worldwide, Kramsch (1996) stated that "The teaching of culture as a component of language teaching has traditionally been caught between the striving for universality and the desire to maintain cultural particularity" (p.5).

It has, however, frequently been suggested that more importance should be given to local cultural contexts. For example, Tsui and Ng (2010) discuss the importance of the "[...] teacher in perceiving and exploiting "situated possibilities" in the classroom, this article argues that it is important for teachers to construct local understanding of their work embedded in the local

cultural traditions [...]” (p.364). A study in Saudi Arabia (Shah *et al.*, 2013) indicated that pedagogy was negatively influenced by social, cultural and religious insensitivities. Similarly, learners of Arabic heritage in Western countries may face challenges: for example, a study in the U.S.A. showed that these students face challenges associated with the culture, in addition to learning English and the culture (Omran Akasha, 2013).

Lower-level learners in this study may therefore have preferentially chosen the use of local cultural contexts versus Western ones as not having to grapple with new cultural understanding would be one learning obstacle less. This study suggests that the degree of incompatibility between the Arabic language and culture, and those of English may potentially lessen the motivation of some learners, as also evidenced in other studies (eg. Al-Mahrooqi & Asante, 2010; Burns, 2010).

In contrast, higher-level learners were, however somewhat more enthusiastic about using Western contexts: being less encumbered by linguistic challenges they perhaps viewed English as being a tool to learn more about the world...arts, culture, history politics and science. Indeed, studies in Egypt (Mallia, 2013b) have evidenced similar attitudes: most high-level Egyptian learners felt that English significantly facilitated choices and knowledge through internet, cinema, TV, and reading choices. Their awareness of world politics and general knowledge was also broadened, and they generally felt that English helped them to be more open-minded. In addition to the transactional functions of English (e.g. exams, interviews, degrees and career), emphasis on the importance of the interpersonal role of language was clearly in evidence.

Therefore using an extraneous context (i.e. not local) may generate an information-gap that encourages learners to notice and use new language while communicating, by creating opportunities to learn about new cultures and interact with the rest of the world, hence the concept of ‘intercultural communicative competence’ (Byram, 1997; Simons, 2010). Simons (*ibid*), refers to this as the ability to "cope with different cultures ... pay attention to differences in culture, detect them and react on them in an adequate way on the daily work floor" (p.33). This study indicates a clear preference among high-level for developing this ability.

### ***Inductive approaches***

Learners of all levels in this study mostly rejected the ‘fully inductive’ CLT deep-end method. Based on Krashen’s natural approach, the underpinning theory is that grammar should be acquired subconsciously, and in which there is no role for grammar, as it would affect the final aim of communication. Long’s (1996) Interaction Hypothesis similarly proposes that the learner’s attention to the TL form develops naturally during communication challenges, objectives and problems experience while performing meaning-focused activities.

However, this study shows learners generally wanted the teacher’s final contribution or step by step validation during lessons. The ‘extreme’ inductive approach is therefore not perceived as a means of empowering them through greater autonomy; instead, it generates a sense of insecurity. As indicated in other scenarios (Batstone and Ellis, 2009), the greater emphasis on communicating (meaning), the more likely are the details relating to form are to be missed; the connection between meaning and form can therefore all too easily fail to be achieved.

Conversely, learners in this study, particularly of higher levels are enthusiastic about inductive approaches associated with shallow-end CLT precisely because time to focussed grammar teaching is allocated during the latter part of the lesson. This approach fully qualifies

as an inductive approach, as Prince and Felder (2006) precise: “When we speak of inductive methods, we therefore do not mean total avoidance of lecturing and complete reliance on self-discovery, but simply teaching in which induction precedes deduction” (p.3). Learners have the knowledge that the later stage of the lesson is teacher-led, and supplies the necessary focus on TL, with clarifications as may be needed. This helps create a secure learning environment for learners that allows them to participate, enjoy and learn in the initial ‘more communicative’ and inductive phase of the lesson. Analogously, Batstone and Ellis (2009), suggest that “An alternative way of developing students’ explicit understanding is to make the target feature explicit to the students in the course of their performing a communicative task [...] (p.199).

In contrast, learners in this study largely did not choose the guided inductive approaches, despite the CLT focus and periodic intervention by the teacher to ensure learners were on-track. While Batstone and Ellis (2009) reiterate that the teacher’s guidance must necessarily involve the Given-to-New and Awareness Principles, precisely how this guidance is to be achieved remains controversial. Perhaps the teacher’s role here was seen to be too ‘soft’, and the essentially learner-centred lessons evidently created a sense of insecurity. Or perhaps the teacher simply is ‘too absent’ and not overtly available, i.e. not sufficiently teacher-fronted. This is the main difference between the guided inductive options with periodic but subtle intervention of the teacher, versus that in inductive approach (option 7). The latter option is popular because an overt teacher-fronted phase routinely occurs in the latter part of the lesson.

### *Listening to learners’ choices*

It has often been suggested that learners in several countries (including Arab-heritage ones) gravitate towards deductive approaches because this is generally the only approach they are accustomed to. This ‘teaching-learning culture’ (which must be distinguished from the cultural context discussed above in which TL is embedded) can be seen from this study (Rattar, & Dilshad, 2010), where:

“[...] participants from Saudi Arab firmly believed in explicit grammar teaching and declarative knowledge. They showed their reluctance in participating group discussions [...] These findings indicate that learners’ perceptions and beliefs about grammar are influenced by their cultural, social, and environmental factors. As such, participants from Saudi Arab favoured traditional grammar method of teaching [...]’ (p 28).

However, it is of particular importance to note that learners in Arabic countries may also have the opportunity to be exposed to a variety of teaching methods. For example, those in this study participate in learning environments based on guided inductive and inductive approaches, as these are favoured by the teaching centre. Even when given these alternative choices, this study suggests that a more balanced perspective, namely encouraging the use of deductive approaches, in addition to the existing repertoire of methods based on inductive approaches, would be appropriate. Yet the latter are invariably seen as progressive and “[...] often universally assumed to be the better choice [...]” (Mallia, 2014a:, p.223), although they may not necessarily reflect “[...] local cultural perceptions on language learning [...]” (*ibid*, p.223), and the former as ‘traditional and backwards-looking’.

While learners’ preferences, if not aligned with CLT, are often surrounded by a negative connotation, i.e. too traditional and backward looking, this is certainly at times unwarranted. This study has shown that learners of Arabic heritage (i) will not necessarily ‘make do’ with

traditional or decontextualized deductive approaches because other methods and approaches are not on offer; (ii) enjoy overt emphasis on TL (e.g. grammar), particularly if embedded in a meaningful and contextualized scenario that is meaningful and interesting; (iii) both inductive and deductive approaches are welcome if they satisfy condition (ii), even if there was a slight preference for methods using a deductive approach, and (iv) the communicative aspect of language learning is imperative but should not be seen as being ‘in competition’ with overt language TL instruction: the two are symbiotic.

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**Table 1. Questionnaire of preferred teaching-learning approach for embedding new grammar while developing communicative competence in English in the classroom**

<p>Choose only ONE option that you feel is best for you.</p> <p>When learning NEW grammar, for example new verb tenses such as the future perfect, I want the teacher to:</p> <p>(a) first give the students the NEW rules, then look at the book for examples (Western), and then do exercises and activities to practice;</p> <p>(b) first give the students the NEW rules, then directly do book exercises and activities to practice them;</p> <p>(c) first give the students the NEW rules, then discuss many examples using Sudanese culture and life, then practice by doing exercises and activities that use the grammar in Sudanese life-situations;</p> <p>(d) first give the students exercises, such as a gap-fill, using ‘Western situations’, where they have to use the NEW grammar, then the students find the rules themselves;</p> <p>(e) first give the students exercises, such as a gap-fill, using ‘Sudanese situations’, where they have to use the NEW grammar, then the students find the rules themselves;</p> <p>(f) do activities / games in class and students can notice the way NEW grammar is made without discussing the rules;</p> <p>(g) do activities / games in class, students alone produce and notice the NEW grammar is made and rules are discussed</p>
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**Table 2. Teaching strategy preferences (%) chosen by learners at different language levels**

* Teaching strategy preference	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	6 (%)	7 (%)
<b>Level</b>							
Elementary 1 CEF A1 (n=48)	41.67	4.17	37.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	16.67
Pre intermediate 1 CEF A2 (n=46)	0.00	0.00	86.96	0.00	0.00	4.35	8.70
Pre intermediate 2 CEF A2 (n=50)	32.00	4.00	48.00	0.00	4.00	4.00	8.00
Intermediate 1 CEF B1 (n=34)	41.18	17.65	29.41	0.00	0.00	0.00	11.75
Intermediate 2 CEF B1 (n=92)	28.26	6.52	30.44	4.35	4.35	0.00	26.09
Upper Intermediate 1 CEF B2 (n=50)	28.00	0.00	36.00	12.00	4.00	0.00	20.00
Advanced 1 CEF C1 (n=16)	12.50	0.00	37.50	12.50	0.00	12.50	25.00

\* Teaching strategy 1 = deductive, western context; 2 = deductive, no contextualized examples; 3 = deductive, local cultural context; 4 = guided inductive, tasks & exercises, western context; 5 =

guided inductive, tasks & exercises, local cultural context; 6 = 'deep-end' inductive; 7 = 'shallow-end' inductive, tasks and activities, delayed teacher intervention

**Table 3. Differences between choices of lower- and higher-level learners for teaching approach and cultural context**

Teaching approach and cultural context <sup>^</sup>	Language level *		chi-square	P value	Significant (p=0.05)
	Lower (n)	Higher (n)			
<b>Deductive</b> (n = 252)	152	100	21.81	3.0x10 <sup>-06</sup>	yes **
<b>Guided inductive</b> (n = 20)	2	18	13.99	1.81x10 <sup>-04</sup>	yes ***
<b>Inductive</b> (n = 64)	24	40	10.65	1.1x10 <sup>-03</sup>	yes **
<b>Western</b> (n = 110) (teaching strategy 1, 2, 4)	50	60	6.93	8.51x10 <sup>-03</sup>	yes
<b>Local</b> (n = 152) (teaching strategy 3,5)	94	58			

<sup>^</sup> Deductive = options 1-3; guided inductive = options 4-5; inductive = options 6-7; \* Lower = elementary pre-intermediate pre-intermediate 2, intermediate 1; Higher = intermediate 2, upper-intermediate 1, advanced 1; \*\* Chi square significant with Bonferroni adjustment; \*\*\* Chi square significant with Yates correction & Bonferroni adjustment.