CONSCIOUS INVESTIGATION AND INVESTIGATIVE-ORIENTED LEARNING (IOL) IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the need for a particular English Language Teaching methodology termed Investigative-Oriented Learning (IOL) which is absent in foreign language teaching. IOL is meant to develop investigative questioning in language learners so as to empower them with skills of Conscious Investigation. Empowerment means that opportunities are given to language learners to develop strategies and skills for learning language which can be transferred outside of the language classroom. The skills that could be developed are those of Noticing, Hypothesising and Experimentation.

It is argued in this paper that Conscious Investigation is especially important in heightening the awareness of learners about the usage of common idiomatic and metaphorical expressions which are prevalent in native British English. As a result, authentic language material such as those found in corpora, newspapers, advertisements, recordings of spoken communication, etc are valuable resources for the development of tasks used in IOL activities. The language payoff would be that through the development of the Noticing, Hypothesising and Experimentation skills learnt in IOL, foreign language learners are able to make informed choices of language use in a foreign language environment. Furthermore, they are also able to make comparisons between the foreign language and their own language, cultural and world experiences.

KEY WORDS

Conscious investigation, corpus, Investigative-Oriented Learning (IOL), language awareness, language empowerment, prepositional cluster.

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Resumen

Este artículo se centra en lo necesario de una metodología en particular para la enseñanza del inglés llamada Aprendizaje Orientado a lo Investigativo (IOL) que no se halla presente en la enseñanza de lengua extranjera. El sentido de IOL es el desarrollo de cuestionamientos investigativos en los alumnos de idiomas con objeto de equiparlos con destrezas de Investigación Consciente. Este equipamiento quiere decir darle a los alumnos de idiomas oportunidad de desarrollar estrategias y destrezas para el aprendizaje de la lengua que puedan ser transferidas fuera del aula de idiomas. Las destrezas que podrían desarrollarse son las de Percepción, Formulación de hipótesis y Experimentación.

Este artículo defiende que la Investigación Consciente es especialmente importante para elevar la conciencia de los alumnos acerca del uso de expresiones idiomáticas y metafóricas corrientes que son predominantes en inglés británico. En consecuencia, los materiales lingüísticos auténticos como los que se encuentran en corpus, periódicos, publicidad, registros de comunicación hablada, etcétera, son valiosos recursos para el desarrollo de tareas utilizadas en actividades IOL. El resultado en cuanto a la lengua sería que a través del desarrollo de las destrezas de Percepción, Formulación de hipótesis y Experimentación que se aprenden en IOL, los alumnos de lengua extranjera sean capaces de tomar decisiones informadas en cuanto al uso de la lengua en el entorno de la lengua extranjera. Aún más, también serán capaces de establecer comparaciones entre la lengua extranjera y su propia experiencia lingüística, cultural y global.

Palabras clave

Investigación consciente, corpus, Aprendizaje Orientado a lo Investigativo (IOL), conciencia lingüística, capacitación lingüística, cluster preposicional.

Résumé

Cet article est centré sur le besoin d'une méthodologie spécifique pour l'enseignement de l'anglais dit Apprentissage Orienté à la Recherche (IOL) qui n'existe pas dans l'enseignement d'une langue étrangère. Le sens de IOL est le développement de mises en question de recherche chez les élèves de langues modernes dans le but de les équiper avec des skills de Recherche Consciente. Cet équipement veut dire donner aux élèves de langues l'opportunité de développer des stratégies et des adresses pour l'apprentissage de la langue pouvant être transférées en dehors de la classe de langues modernes. Les adresses qui pourraient être développées sont celles de Perception, Formulation d'hypothèses et Expérimentation.

Cet article défend que la Recherche Consciente est particulièrement importante par élever la conscience des élèves à propos d'expressions idiomatiques et métaphoriques courantes prédominantes en anglais britannique. En conséquence, les matériaux linguistiques authentiques tels qu'on les trouve dans des

corpus, des journaux, de la publicité, des enregistrements de communication parlée, etcetera, sont des recours précieux pour le développement de tâches employées dans des activités IOL. Le résultat, quant à la langue, en serait qu'à travers le développement des adresses de Perception, Formulation d'hypothèses et Expérimentation que l'on apprend en IOL, les élèves d'une langue étrangère soient capables de prendre des décisions exactes quant à l'emploi de la langue dans l'environnement de la langue étrangère, plus encore, ils seront aussi capables d'établir des comparaisons entre la langue étrangère et leur propre expérience linguistique, culturelle et globale.

MOTS-CLÉ

Recherche consciente, corpus, Apprentissage Orienté à la Recherche (IOL), conscience linguistique, capacitation linguistique, cluster prépositionnel.

INTRODUCTION: KNOWLEDGE-BASED SOCIETIES AND LANGUAGE EMPOWERMENT

The issue of learner empowerment and the role of language towards its development is an important starting point. This issue is now gaining prominence as a result of a global trend around the world towards knowledge-based societies. In the following extract taken from a speech by Professor Koh Tai Ann, Dean of the School of Arts, National Institute of Education in Singapore, the call to be competitively positioned in a knowledge-based society is clear:

> "Language is an instrument of thought. It is an instrument of critical thinking. It is an instrument of intellectual analysis. It is an instrument through which you obtain knowledge and articulate a culture. As long as we understand the functions of language, we are adequately fitted for a knowledge-based economy at a certain high level." (Professor Koh Tai Ann, quoted in the *Straits Times,* Singapore, July 25, 1999).

From the above extract, it is clear that possessing knowledge about language and its functions is important if one is to belong to a knowledge-based society. By "understanding the functions of language", it is understood that one needs to have developed language awareness, which is consciousness about aspects of language, such as lexis, grammar, functions of language, differences between written and spoken language, history of language as well as knowledge about varieties of English. However, the focus in this article is not on the development of all these aspects of language awareness which are taught in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) but on a heightened awareness of language use and usage. This singular focus could provide a more holistic development of descriptive awareness about language. In order to

develop this descriptive awareness, skills have to be activated. Thus, in the case of language learners, they should be empowered with the skills of reflection, observation and meaningful communication. These skills have been termed investigative-oriented skills or skills of Conscious Investigation which consist of noticing, analysis and experimentation. Such skills enable the language learner to do three things:

a)   be consciously aware of the unfamiliar usages of language they have heard or read in native speaker contexts,

b)   investigate how these unfamiliar usages are employed in natural authentic communication, and finally,

c)   experiment with these usages in spoken or written communication, so that they become familiar.

The skills of Conscious Investigation described above are considered language empowerment skills, because they enable language learners to develop an awareness about common structures and patterns of language use, based on idiomatic usages, choices and metaphoricity found in natural authentic communication.

In the competitive arena of knowledge based societies, empowered learners who have developed the skills of Conscious Investigation will not be disadvantaged on linguistic grounds, because of unfamiliarity with particular language expressions used in countries where English is the native language. Empowered learners are still competitively positioned to look for jobs and business opportunities globally, if they are equipped with the skills of Conscious Investigation. These skills will help them to be consciously aware of, investigate and experiment with unfamiliar English expressions as they are used in native speaker contexts. Consequently they would be empowered to make informed choices in language for purposes of business, exchange of ideas, social interaction or social appropriateness. Before embarking on a discussion of the development and application of Conscious Investigation some terminology need to be defined.

Language Awareness was defined in 1985 by the National Congress on Language in Education as "a person's sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life". Put simply, this definition can be rephrased as the descriptive knowledge about aspects of language mainly involving lexis, grammar, functions of language, differences between written and spoken language, history of language as well as knowledge about varieties of English. These aspects

of language awareness form the crux of communicative language teaching which is being practised in current EFL/ESL curricula**.** Extensive work carried out on language awareness can be found in Aplin (1981), Hawkins (1984), Donmall (1985), Carter (1990), Mittins (1991), Ellis (1992, 1997, 1998), van Lier (1992, 1997) and Wright and Bolitho (1993).

Conscious Investigation is a process which activates an awareness about aspects of language as well as language use. Thus, Conscious Investigation could be defined as a process of developing an awareness about common structures and patterns of language use, based on idiomatic usages, choices and metaphoricity as used in natural authentic communication. For example, if a student has developed Conscious Investigation, this implies that he or she has developed an awareness of some common recurrent syntactic patterns that occur in everyday communication such as metaphorical expressions composed of prepositional clusters e.g. *ins and outs, ups and downs, on and off, etc*. Also, the student has knowledge of how such metaphorical expressions are not used literally but allusively and informally, particularly in countries where English is the native language.

Investigative-oriented learning (IOL) shares some similarity to task-based activities used in communicative language teaching (CLT), in its aim to encourage reflective thinking. IOL tasks however, differ from task-based activities, in that they extend reflective thinking to include experimentation and production, which are skills that can be transferred outside of the classroom. A further difference between IOL tasks and task-based activities is the monothematic nature of IOL tasks. All IOL tasks consist solely of analysing various examples of common language patterns to investigate their usage. The main resources employed are authentic data taken from corpora and various other sources of written and spoken English. As a result of the monothematic nature of the tasks, IOL confines itself simply to the development of three skills: Noticing, Hypothesising and Experimenting. These three skills are formed from an interface between formal instruction[1] (Present-Practice-Produce) of a particular grammatical pattern and observation of its usage. While IOL activities focus on completing all three stages of the skills development, task-based activities stop at the Hypothesis stage. A final note about IOL tasks is that they are both process-and-product-oriented, where the value of the task lies in both. This is because the results or answers

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[1]   See Ellis (1992) and Fotos (1993, 1998) for details on empirical studies they have conducted on consciousness-raising in language through formal instruction.

(the product) given by the learners can demonstrate to what extent they have been able to apply the three skills of IOL (the process). Thus, an evaluation of the product can give an indication of how successful the process has been applied in the tasks.

The need for Conscious Investigation and Investigative-Oriented Learning (IOL)

The IOL approach is unique in the sense that it need only utilise basic knowledge about language, mainly aspects to do with lexis, grammar and simple communicative functions, and develops this knowledge into the critical skills required for Conscious Investigation. This basic knowledge about language is termed Subsidiary Language Awareness. Although Subsidiary Language Awareness might be considered inferior in its attainment value because of its emphasis on competence and not performance, there are advantages for using it as a basic entry point for IOL:

• the IOL approach becomes suitable for teaching investigative questioning at lower levels of linguistic ability. A series of graded tasks will ensure that language learners from intermediate to advanced levels can benefit from this approach.

Besides the advantage of using of Subsidiary Language Awareness as a basic entry point, there are other advantages of IOL which are listed below:
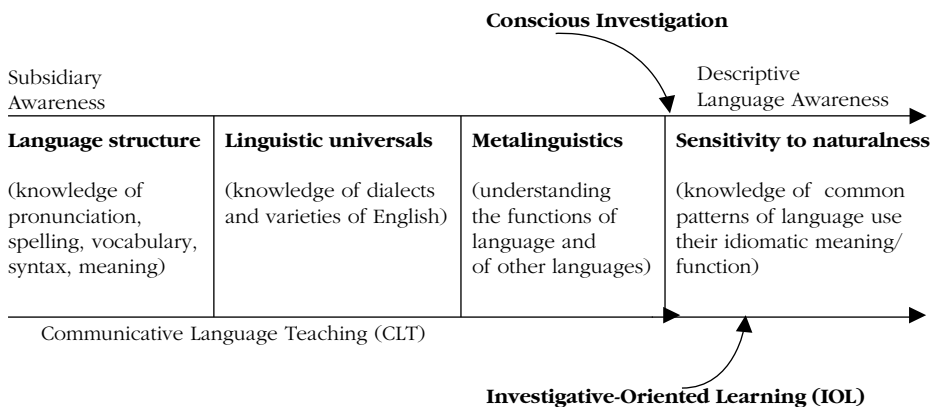
• IOL has the flexible advantage that it can be integrated into existing teaching methodologies like CLT or can exist as an individual approach in itself. Thus, it can be adapted to fit communicative task-based activities or employed in separate lessons dealing with study skills or investigative learning. The flexibility of the IOL lends itself to a better accommodation of learner needs.

• IOL does not disregard the learner's existing knowledge about aspects of language, but rather, builds on this knowledge, and extends it to develop critical skills for Conscious Investigation.

• IOL provides learners with authentic examples of unfamiliar English usages taken from real language interactions so that comparisons can be made with the learners own language, cultural and world knowledge or experiences. Depending on the level of the learner, awareness of these differences can later be heightened to empower him or her to

make informed choices of language use, according to the situation. (For further discussion, see Carter, 1998; McCarthy, 1998; McCarthy and Carter, 1994, 1995; Tsui, 1994).

The most important language payoff gained by using the IOL approach is the development of Conscious Investigation[2]. Conscious Investigation encompasses an awareness about aspects of language as well as language use. It is an awareness that needs to be developed to provide language learners with a more holistic descriptive knowledge about language. The diagram below summarises the argument and shows two parallel but related continua. One continuum shows the position of Conscious Investigation in relation to Language Awareness. Thus, on the lowest end of this continuum, there is Subsidiary Awareness and on the highest end, there is Descriptive Language Awareness. The second continuum shows the pedagogical approaches related to developing the above kinds of awareness. Here, we have Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the first foundation approach, followed by Investigative Oriented Learning (IOL).

Conscious Investigation

Subsidiary Awareness — Descriptive Language Awareness

Language structure	Linguistic universals	Metalinguistics	Sensitivity to naturalness
(knowledge of pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, syntax, meaning)	(knowledge of dialects and varieties of English)	(understanding the functions of language and of other languages)	(knowledge of common patterns of language use their idiomatic meaning/ function)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Investigative-Oriented Learning (IOL)

PRINCIPLES OF INVESTIGATIVE-ORIENTED LEARNING (IOL)

The principles used in IOL involve issues of methodology, tasks, linguistic level of students and the role of the teacher.

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[2]   Van Lier (1992) uses the term *focal awareness* to describe an ability to transcend the use of ordinary and mundane language necessary for us to get on with our lives, work and make sense of the world. However, this term does not capture the spirit of conscious investigation that is being proposed in IOL.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in IOL follows a questioning slant. It involves questioning how particular language usage patterns mean and are formed. Thus, the focus of IOL is mainly on aspects of lexis, patterns, idiomatic usages and metaphoricity based on natural authentic communication. The approach endeavours to develop particular, investigative-oriented skills such as noticing, hypothesising and experimenting. In a sense, the IOL approach, makes the target language an object of study and not a vehicle of communication as in CLT.

TEACHING MATERIAL: PREPOSITIONAL CLUSTERS AND IOL

A common pattern of language usage commonly found in English which can be suitable to use as teaching material in IOL tasks is the prepositional cluster. A prepositional cluster is an idiomatic fixed expression which comprises of two prepositional constituents. Examples of these are binomials such as *ins and outs, ups and downs, over and beyond, out and about, etc.* One reason prepositional clusters are a suitable teaching focus for IOL is its absence in coursebooks as a common fixed expression native to British English. Furthermore, the predominance of prepositional clusters in language (written and spoken) used metaphorically and how EFL/ESL language learners struggled to make sense of their meanings as a result of this absence is another contributing factor which makes them suitable as teaching material for IOL tasks. The common use of prepositional clusters in a native English environment is obvious in the frequency with which they occur. Some spoken and written examples of these clusters are given below; they were taken from the television and local newspapers in the space of one week.

- *"Although links between **on and off** screen violence have yet to be proven, we cannot deny that watching too much fictional brutality can desensitise the viewer to any real-life horrors…"* (Dr Marian Watts, child psychologist, in an interview with *Channel 4 News*, about the effects of the increase in television violence on children, 16th August 1999).
- *"Nottingham's **down and outs** were having a cuppa with Housing Minister Hilary Armstrong last week…"* (*Nottingham and Long Eaton, Topper,* local newspaper, 18th August 1999).

- *"The doctors are not only working in the hospitals but are also **out and about** the disaster area, treating victims…"* (Stephen Sackur, reporter for *BBC World News,* in an interview about the earthquake situation in Istanbul, 19th August 1999).

- *"I've got a new cell-mate… He's okay I guess… been **in and out** of jail a few times…but he's alright…"* (The TV character "Matt" from *East Enders,* BBC 1, 23rd August 1999).

Besides their pervasive use in daily British life prepositional clusters are also used very frequently on the Internet in various types of written texts – electronic mailing lists, on-line advertisements, social messages, etc. With the Internet becoming so much a part of the information age and English being by far the most widely used language on the Internet, users of the Internet have to employ English to communicate with one another. This has resulted in the language of the Internet tending towards the informal where the use of idiomatic English is prevalent. Prepositional clusters are very frequently used in informal communication on the Web metaphorically. One implication of this prevalent use is that prepositional clusters will not be an idiomatic aspect confined only to British English. Other English language users of the Internet virtual community (native and non-native speakers of English) will soon acquaint themselves with their use through informal written interactions. In this respect, skills in IOL enable non-native speakers of English to develop an understanding of how idiomatic English expressions like prepositional clusters which are unfamiliar to them, mean and are used in communication. However, this does not necessarily mean that they must make use of these expressions if they want to communicate in English. The main aim is to ensure that they are not put off from participating and sharing information by their unfamiliarity with the English idiomatic expressions used by the Internet virtual community. How they choose to express themselves in English, with or without the use of prepositional clusters is then a matter of personal choice.

Widdowson (1979, p. 142) was among one of the first linguists to make a similar observation about the pervasive use of metaphor in everyday language interactions. He also delivered a warning about the dangers to language users if non-metaphorical language were allowed to exist:

> "metaphor surely lies at the heart of everyday communicative behaviour. What seems to be abnormal is non-metaphorical communication, a strict conformity to rules. Indeed, if language users were strict

conformists, their language would presumably lose its capacity for adaptation and gradually fossilize…" (Widdowson, 1979, p. 142).

The examples which were taken from everyday language are indicative of the way in which prepositional clusters can be considered part of the pervasive use of metaphor. The aim of IOL thus is to extend and heighten students' awareness how idiomatic phrases such as prepositional clusters are commonly used in everyday language, written or spoken, and have nuances and metaphorical allusions that inauthentic material used in coursebooks are not able to capture. By developing the investigative skills mentioned above, it is hoped that the prospect of empowering students to engage not only as fluent communicators of a language, but also as thinking observers and assessors of language use would be realised.

Sample Activities Used in IOL

Below are three sample activities which seek to raise awareness in learners about how speakers from different cultures use similar or different kinds of prepositional clusters as those found in English to express the same kind of human experience. The activities are designed such that EFL students could compare and contrast the literal and figurative usages of prepositional clusters in English and in their own native languages. Learners will first use their powers of observation (Noticing) about how a particular idiomatic expression is used in English from the given examples. Then they will guess (Hypothesise) a general meaning for the idiomatic expression. Finally, they will attempt to elicit their own examples of idiomatic expressions from their native language (Experiment) based on their previous hypothesis.

The learning outcome for the learners from the three activities is that they develop an increased awareness about the contrastive usage of prepositions (idiomatic versus spatial meaning and as phrasal units versus single words) in their native language and in English. Consequently, the language payoff would be a better understanding and sensitivity to the differences between prepositional usage in English and in their own native language.

Activity 1

The English sentence "I read it **in** the newspaper" is different from its Italian and Malay equivalents. Italian speakers would say, "l'ho let-

to sul giornale" which means "I read it **on** the newspaper" whereas Malay speakers would say "Saya baca dalam suratkhabar" which means "I read it **inside** the newspaper". Also, the sentence "The cat is stuck **in** the tree" is "Il gatto è bloccato sull'albero" ("The cat is stuck **on** the tree") in Italian and "Kucing di dalam pokok" ("The cat is stuck **inside** the tree") in Malay.

Question: Make a list of two or three prepositions in your language that are used differently compared to English. Are the differences due to the meaning the prepositions have in your language or culture, compared to English?

Activity 2

Find in your own language phrasal expressions which use the preposition "up" and, if so, list as many of them as you can. Do you agree with the concept in the English Language that anything which is UP is always good?

Activity 3

The following examples show some idiomatic expressions which are commonly used in English –*up and up, up and coming.* Substitute these idiomatic expressions with a word or phrase in English to show how they are used in each sentence. Write out some idiomatic expressions in your own language which convey similar meanings to those found for each sentence.

• If you're honest and on the **up and up**, you will go far in this line of work.
• 'Our marriage has its ups and downs, but it is mainly on the **up and up**', observes Gould.
• Ipsos is probably one of the most **up and coming** resorts we know of.
• Luciano Pavarotti took a night off from his sell-out performances of Tosca at Covent Garden last month to appear at a Masterclass for four **up and coming** young singers.

The role of the teacher in IOL

The teacher's role in IOL is a dual one. On the one hand, the teacher's role is an authoritative one because she has to formally instruct the students and initiate them into the skills of investigative

learning. However, she is also a facilitator, guiding the students in the process of applying the skills of investigative learning. A typical lesson is shown below, where the teachers' role as authority and facilitator is clearly illustrated:

Pre-learning activity (Teacher as Authority)

Step 1: Providing students with data of metaphorical expressions showing common language usage patterns

Step 2: Demonstrating how meaning usages of these metaphorical expressions are derived from observations about lexical choices and syntactic patterns.

Step 3: Making hypotheses based on the observations

Step 4: Experimenting and testing out the hypotheses by providing further examples and encouraging students to also provide their own examples
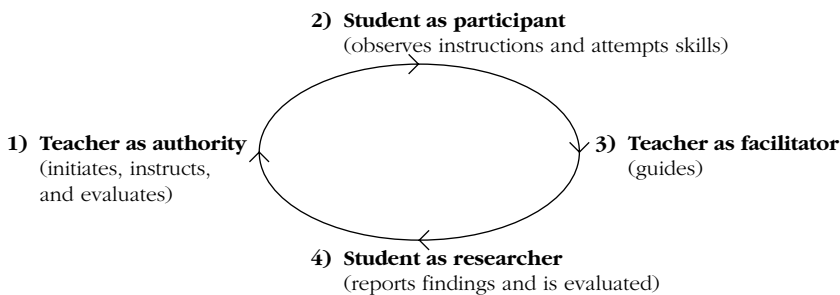
Learning activity (Teacher as Facilitator)

Step 5: Provide students with new data and guide them through Steps 1-4 again.

Post-Learning activity (Teacher as both Facilitator and Authority)

Step 6: Students are asked to practise the usage of the metaphorical expressions learnt, either by using them in a written assignment or providing oral examples. The teacher evaluates the appropriacy and accuracy of the usages by correcting errors or affirming the correct usages.

In fact, in IOL the relationship between teacher and student can also be likened to that of teacher and researcher (see Ellis, 1998) and is summarised below:

2) Student as participant
(observes instructions and attempts skills)

1) Teacher as authority
(initiates, instructs, and evaluates)

3) Teacher as facilitator
(guides)

4) Student as researcher
(reports findings and is evaluated)

CONCLUSION

One of the best resources which can be utilised in the development of Conscious Investigation through IOL are idiomatic expressions taken from authentic texts such as corpora, encyclopaedias, newspapers or recordings of spoken communication. Through such resources IOL offers a discovery-based interaction with real language use in which a heightened awareness of language, cultural and world experiences when learning a foreign language can be developed and compared with the learner's own.

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