

THE ROLE OF ERRORS AND HOW TO ADDRESS THEM IN TEACHING SPOKEN LANGUAGE

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***Abstract:** This article proposes a series of effective strategies to mitigate the stress and anxiety associated with error correction during spoken language instruction.*

***Key words:** error, communication, self-correction, language learning*

INTRODUCTION

Everyone makes mistakes even while using their own L1, thus, errors in second language acquisition are an inherent part of the learning process. Effective pedagogical practice necessitates judicious error correction, strategically employed to enhance fluency and discourage discouragement rather than impede the development of speaking skills. “Correcting students is seen as potentially dangerous because it can damage learners’ receptivity to learning. It needs to be given in an atmosphere of support and warm solidarity” (Ur, 1996:3). It means that when a teacher does corrections, it should be done nicely and kindly. Error correction strategies can be broadly categorized as immediate (or on-the-spot) and delayed. Delayed correction, a particularly valuable technique, allows students to complete their utterances without interruption, promoting fluency. This approach involves careful monitoring during speaking activities, meticulously documenting errors (grammatical, lexical, and pronunciation) pertinent to the lesson's focus, and prioritizing errors that obstruct communication or are recurring. Errors unrelated to the current lesson or minor errors that do not impede comprehension warrant no immediate correction. This selective approach facilitates focused learning while preserving the flow of spontaneous communication.

Following the activity, the teacher compiles a list of sentences containing errors on the board. Students are then divided into pairs and tasked with correcting each sentence, writing their proposed revisions on slips of paper. These submissions are collected by the teacher, who evaluates the pairs' accuracy, culminating in a declared "winning" pair. The correct solutions are then discussed in a class-wide session. This structured approach, transforming the correction phase into a competitive exercise, reduces learner anxiety and fosters a dynamic learning environment. Furthermore, highlighting both errors and exemplary language use on the board encourages in-depth analysis and collaborative error identification. Students actively participate in identifying and rectifying mistakes within a supportive, peer-based environment. Harmer (2000:3) states that during communicative activities, however, it is generally felt that teachers should not interrupt students in mid-flow to point out a grammatical, lexical, or pronunciation error, since to do so interrupts the communication and drags an activity back to the study of language form or precise meaning.

To illustrate the natural occurrence of errors in language acquisition, teachers can present sentences containing mistakes on the board. Students then categorize these errors into two columns: one for errors that impede comprehension and create ambiguity in communication, and another for minor errors that do not significantly disrupt the communicative flow. This activity helps students recognize that not all errors necessitate immediate correction, normalizing the process of language learning and highlighting the distinction between errors that impact meaning and those that do not.

Ellis (2009:1) suggested that corrective feedback be directed at marked grammatical features or features that learners have shown they have problems with. To target advanced learners familiar with grammatical terminology, teachers can use error identification activities involving specific grammatical labels. For instance, after an activity where errors were made, students could be asked to analyze the mistakes, identifying the specific grammatical error (tense, agreement, article use) and explaining why it affected or did not affect the

communication. This approach deepens their understanding of grammar and error analysis, fostering more nuanced awareness of linguistic structures. “You used the wrong tense”, “You need an adverb, not an adjective” “Can change that into the passive? “Say the same sentence, but with the comparative form”

Facial expression and body language

Teachers frequently use nonverbal cues, such as subtle facial expressions or gestures, to gently guide students toward self-correction during on-the-spot error feedback. A tilted head or a slight frown signals an area needing review, prompting students to reconsider their response. Similarly, a backward-pointing thumb can indicate a past tense error, directing students to reevaluate the sentence's temporal context. Visual aids, such as classroom posters showcasing appropriate idioms, prepositions, or functional language, provide immediate reference points for self-correction. This targeted approach allows for subtle, yet effective, feedback, promoting student autonomy and ownership of the learning process. Echoing – Repeat what they have said This can mean repeating the whole sentence or one section of it including the wrong part with an increasing intonation:

Student: “The man GOED to the shop.”

Teacher: “The man GOED to the shop?”

Student: “Went to the shop”.

Teachers can strategically repeat sentences, isolating the erroneous portion or omitting the problematic element (perhaps accompanied by a humming sound to highlight the missing piece), to subtly guide students toward identifying the mistake. This method, while helpful, should be used judiciously to avoid appearing overly patronizing, and instead, create a more nuanced learning environment for students. The questioning tone employed during this repetition can subtly guide students towards the error, prompting a more considered and insightful self-correction.

Self-correction

Effective error correction in speaking practice often involves a nuanced approach. Simple repetition prompts, encouraging self-correction, can be highly effective in some cases. By asking students to repeat a sentence, focusing on a particular element, or offering phrases like "Give it another go" or "Think about the grammar this time," instructors can foster a sense of accomplishment and heightened language awareness. However, systematic error correction is crucial to prevent incorrect patterns from becoming entrenched. To avoid demotivation, teachers should judiciously choose which errors to address, potentially collaboratively establishing targets with students. Visual aids, like whiteboards, textbooks, or posters displaying correct forms, can provide subtle, yet effective cues. Highlighting grammatical concepts (tense, verb form, future tense) or specific words within a contextualized sentence can guide students towards accurate expression. This approach minimizes over-correction while maximizing learning and engagement.

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