General Issues in Error Correction

1. Changes in Attitudes toward mistakes and correction:

   **Traditional attitudes**
   - Mistakes are a revelation of students’ ignorance, laziness and lack of commitment.
   - Mistakes should be highly avoided.
   - A good lesson should be mistake-free.

   **The Communicative Approach**
   - Mistakes show that students are experimenting with the language, trying to formulate sentences and responses for themselves.
   - Mistakes are an inevitable part of the learning process.
   - A good lesson is one full of student mistakes and students correcting themselves and each other.

2. Which errors to correct

   **Comprehensibility**
   Teacher should correct errors that cause misunderstanding or lack of intelligibility.

   **Frequency**
   Errors that are constantly made by an individual student or the entire class should be given priority.

   **Pedagogical focus**
   Errors in form that students have recently learned in class should be corrected.

   **Individual student concerns**
   Teacher correction varies according to students’ proficiency levels, needs and personal preferences.

3. Types of correction in language classroom

   **Concerning Who**
   - **Self-correction**: students correct themselves
   - **Peer correction**: students correct each other
   - **Teacher correction**: teacher corrects students

   **Concerning How**
   - **Direct correction**: Teacher stops the student, points out mistake, gets student to self-correct or be corrected by another student.
   - **Indirect correction**: Teacher takes notes of mistakes and deals with correction at a later time.

Teacher correction and student performance

*Teacher correction can either have a positive or negative effect on students’ language performance.*

**Positive (desired) effects**
- Students become fully aware of their area of problems and work toward solving it.
- Students are more open and tolerant of their own mistakes and those of their classmates.
- Students are willing to try out new language items and consider teacher correction as useful guided helps.

**Negative (undesired) effects**
- Students are afraid of being criticized and play it safe by stop trying to produce the language.
- Students become critical of their own mistakes and those of their friends.
- Students feel frustrated and insecure during class periods.
General remarks for TEACHERS

Place more emphasis on correction during drill (accuracy-focused activities) than during communication activities (fluency-focused activities).

Do not interrupt the students too quickly. Research has shown that if “the teacher waited three to five seconds to intervene after asking a question (instead of the typical one second), student responses increased dramatically”.

Avoid confusion in giving correction: asking for ambiguous word choices, giving inexplicit directions, using vague correction techniques that lead to error repetition.

Make correction in a positive manner. Correct gently and with respect. This is especially important with oral work, since it is almost always in front of others.

(Source: Error correction techniques for the FL classroom, Waltz J.)

Oral Correction techniques

Finger correction

Use each finger of your left hand to represent the word. Holding your palm towards you, your little finger represents the first word of the sentence. Point to the word with your right hand. Move from left to right (backwards) so that the student reads the other way around, from left to right.

This technique is often used for the following mistakes: missing contraction, missing word, or too many words.

Question mark/ Intonation

Use a question mark, in your voice and/or in your face.

E.g.: S: I go yesterday.

T: [turns face to the side a bit and frowns: go?]

S: Oh. Yes. I went yesterday.

Alternative

Give the students an alternative: tell them the correct answer and the wrong answer, put a question mark into your voice and get them to choose the right one.

E.g.: S: He go to the market everyday.

T: He go or he goes?

S: He goes.

BB prompt

Use the model sentences written on the board to remind the students of the form, word order, contraction, etc.

E.g.: S: I've been here since two years.

T: [point at the word “for” on the board]

S: Oh! I've been here for two years.

Student-to-Student correction

If these above techniques do not work, use other students in the class who can provide the answer correctly to help the student who has made the mistake. Point at a good student and then point at the student who needs help and say “Help him/her”.

Indirect correction (during pair work and group work)

Go around from group to group, with a notebook and pencil. Listen to the group for a while and write down one or two discernible and BIG mistakes that they make. At the end of the class or at the beginning of the next class write the mistakes on the board or read them out to the class. Get the student to correct the mistakes.

“The main job of teachers is not comparing students’ use of language with standard English”. Edge, J.
The issue as to whether error feedback helps L2 student writers improve the accuracy and overall quality of their writing is controversial.

Some researchers say that feedback on error to L2 students is discouraging and generally fails to produce any improvements in their subsequent writing (Robb, Ross & Shortreed 1986; Kepner 1991; Sheppard 1992; Polio, Fleck & Leder 1998; Fazio 2001). On the other hand, other researchers affirm corrective feedback was effective when combined with classroom discussions (Master 1995).

Similarly, Fathman & Whalley (1990) stated there are “positive effects for rewriting from feedback on both grammar and content”.

As controversy continues as to whether feedback on error helps L2 student writers to improve the accuracy and overall quality of their writing, as English language teachers, what is your standpoint on this matter? To what extent do you think your correction benefits your students’ writing performance?

Let’s share to be shared! 😊

**Written Correction techniques**

Basically, there are two kinds of techniques that teachers can use to correct students’ written work: direct and indirect feedback.

**Direct feedback** is given when the teacher provides the correct form for the student writer; if the student revises the text, s/he needs only to transcribe the correction into the final version.

**Indirect feedback** occurs when the teacher indicates in some way that an error exists but does not provide the correction, thus letting the writer know that there is a problem but leaving it to the student to solve it.

Second language acquisition theorists and ESL writing specialists alike argue that indirect feedback is preferable for most student writers because it engages them in “guided learning and problem solving” (Lalande, 1982), leading to reflection about linguistic forms that may foster long-term acquisition (James and Reid).

Error correction researchers who have examined the effects of these two contrasting types of feedback have reported that indirect feedback helps students to make progress in accuracy over time more than direct feedback does (Ferris et al., 2000; Ferris & Helt, 2000 and Lalande) or at least equally as well (Frantzen and Robb).

“Error correction is one of the language teacher’s most important functions and is one of the things that distinguishes classroom interaction from interaction outside the classroom.” – David Nunan

**Suggestions for correcting students’ written errors**

1. First, identify and record the error types that each learner produces frequently. Then, student reads his written work to search out and correct all high-frequency errors.
2. Use different color inks for distinguishing more important errors from less important ones.
3. Underlining a word and providing a verbal tip such as “use subjunctive”, crossing out superfluous words and supplying correct form or structure.
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References


