



2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

## Correcting learners' Speaking and Writing Errors

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DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.13.4.304](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.13.4.304)



### Article info

Article Received: 03/11/2025  
Article Accepted: 06/12/2025  
Published online: 12/12/2025

### Abstract

There has been a lot of emphasis and stress giving to the different methods of teaching English but correction is somewhat a neglected topic. Methods and approaches and techniques for teaching are very helpful in the hands of a skilled teacher; similarly, careful correction is useful for the students so that they will not repeat the same errors in their future speaking and writing. Mistakes and errors in speaking and writing are committed in many different ways and reasons for instance, by just following from other people and interference of the mother tongue. As there are different ways to correct the students' mistakes both in speaking as well as writing, the teacher should have enough patience to find out when to correct and what kind of correction will be helpful for the learners. It is hoped that this article will help more teachers to be careful with how they correct the learners' mistakes and errors in the process of their teaching.

**Keywords:** teaching and learning, speaking, writing, correcting, errors, mistakes.

### Introduction

At the very outset we need to be clear between mistakes and errors that the students commit. We all make mistakes (including the native speakers of English) and they are easy to correct because they do not become our linguistic habit. These mistakes are sometimes slips; for instance, they are slip of the tongue, slip of the hand, slip of the eye, ear etc. On the other hand, errors get fossilised and are committed without any realisation (Verma & Krishnaswamy 2009). Here is where the learners

need the help of their teacher to be aware and develop their speaking and writing skills in English.

When learners take up a new language, for example, English, they commit mistakes and errors which is a part and parcel of learning. However, with the help of the teacher they can keep on learning and reach the international level and the near perfection. In the process of using English, students commit errors; they happen to commit for example: wrong pronunciation, lexical form, grammar, syntax,

verbosity, and register<sup>1</sup>. These errors can be both spoken and written which teachers have to note down. Therefore, one of the most important responsibilities of the teachers is to correct the students constructively; hence, students will improve how to speak and write better.

The aim of this article is to bring to the realisation of teachers about the wide range of correction techniques for spoken and written errors; to encourage teachers develop a positive plan in their correction and to help teachers realize the importance of the learners' errors. Furthermore, as Krishnaswamy (2006) suggest that teachers should be careful and ask themselves the following questions: should these learner errors be corrected? If yes, when should they be corrected? What type of errors are to be corrected? How should the errors be corrected? And who should correct the errors?

### **Kinds of Common Errors Learners Committed**

The kinds of errors learners committed in speaking can be of various types: One of the errors learners committed while speaking is the English which they pick up from the street; as they walk, they talk naturally not realizing the wrong word or phrase. For instance, 'one of my friend'; 'myself did it'; 'I can able' etc. Next is the interference of the mother tongue (MT). The common fallacies that occur here are with sounds and syntax: when the MT does not have the consonant sounds; and also, the English phonemes such as the long and short vowel sounds (/I/and /i:/) so they are unable to differentiate the pronunciation between 'live' and 'leave' which are unfamiliar to the L2 learners; therefore, they commit a blunder unconsciously and abstractedly. Here is another example of an Indian host speaking to his guests: "My dear friends! Snake is waiting for you in hole." He actually wanted to say, "My dear friends! Snack is waiting for you in hall" (Vyas & Patel, 2009, p. 427). Similarly, the syntax errors occur with the order of words in sentences. Consequently, if the MT has a different structure which is different from

English, the learners are likely to be in a muddle when speaking or writing in English.

### **The Importance of Correction**

Sometimes, some of the students, when they write they get into a bad practise. That is, they waste their words. They becloud their thoughts and demolish their delivery. Their writing is then just to get something into paper and blind themselves with errors. This hypnotises them into believing they have accomplished what they plan to convey. Here is an example of wordiness: "Every seat in the house was filled to capacity". Therefore, to cut the excess waste of words, the sentence can simply be written, "Every seat was taken". Baker, 1984, p.177). Students can develop good writing habits with practice and the help, encouragement, and correction they get from their teachers.

According to Chaudron (2009) the idea of we teachers in the classroom in its wide sense can be inferred as feedback which includes error correction. In the classroom, usually, the teachers have superior knowledge and provide feedback when it is needed.

Other than the general and normal instruction, the language teacher's role is to provide correction which many times taken as a negative feedback and positive sanction which is an approval of learners' work. When the correction is done for students, teachers should do it very carefully so it can be constructive and get benefit from it and do better in future as suggested by Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) as cited in Chaudron (2009). Chaudron (2009) opines that "If correction of another is to be done, it is done discreetly with difference, since there is a strong preference to allow speakers to correct themselves" (p. 132).

Feedback and oral correction in the classroom are inevitable; they are a part of the classroom interaction where the learners can derive the acceptable information. Therefore,

the type of correction discussed in this article is a formative evaluation.

The point of view of both teacher and students is the same – to learn. From the teachers' view point, correction is a "major means" for learners to gain the exact answer to improve their knowledge in speaking and writing. From the students' point of view, correction is to repair their unacceptable utterances and it is a strong source for them to improve their knowledge (Chaudron, p. 33).

### **Etiquettes for Correction**

The principles for correction whether modern or traditional are more or less the same. Today with the use of technology, teachers can teach English online, in the classroom, and hybrid. Whichever way we teachers teach, the ground rules for correction can be quite similar or same. We will now focus on how we can correct the students, what we should do and what we should not do.

We teachers have to know the needs and preference of our students. At the beginning of a semester, we can ask our students what kind of corrections they like or suit them best. Some students may like to be corrected on the spot so they can see their error and learn what is right and acceptable; while others are shy and prefer to be corrected later and privately.

We should show kindness and patience in the way we correct. Our tolerance will encourage them to learn more. We should tell them that mistakes and errors is a part of learning and we should explain to them time and again the portions of the lesson where they need help.

Self-correction and peer-correction in the classroom can be a good chance for the students to find out their own mistakes. Some students may feel good when they are corrected by their own classmate friends. Sometimes we can use non-verbal cues to correct our learners; such as, shaking of the head and raising of the eyebrow, that will help them to realize they have made a

mistake. We can use gestures; for instance, a mistake made in tense, we can just point back to indicate the tense should be in the past (Kawasaki, 2020).

We teachers must maintain polite behaviour with the students. We should keep in mind that whenever we make a correction, its purpose is to help the learners not to commit errors again. Therefore, the error correction should be relevant. For instance, if the lesson we teach is spelling rules and for a class activity, we ask the students to write a paragraph; the markings should be only on spelling errors. If there are any other errors creeping in in their writing such as syntax or morphology, they should be corrected but leave them for some other time; too many markings in a piece of writing, will not help, it will only discourage the students. Kawasaki (2020) has also suggested the same; that is, not to over-correct every single mistake our students make.

Next, teachers should not interrupt the students while they are speaking; especially, when they are speaking during their presentation. Interrupting them while they are making their effort to present their point can be very counter-productive. They might miss out their enthusiasm and motivation.

The last but not the least regarding etiquette in correction is do not berate, do not show furious facial expression, and do not be impatient. Correcting the learners by scolding, threatening, unfriendly tone, and rolling of the eyes is a wrong attitude it will not help the learners to learn; instead, the learners will feel hurt and even stop coming to class. But "through the teacher's verbal and non-verbal modelling, repetition, praise, corrective feedback, and scaffolding...the [learners] gradually learned to engage competently in these routines..." learners will feel motivated and become "competence beyond their initial L2 ability" (Rose & Kasper, 2010, p. 43). In learning a second or third language, mistakes and errors are a part and parcel of learning and there is no

silly or rubbish answer. Otherwise, the students might pick up moods and emotions instead of learning from our correction.

### **Correcting Learners Oral Production**

Parrot (2010) has suggested that correcting learners' oral error in the classroom can be in a variety of ways: a teacher can pause while teaching and point out the learners' errors and encourage the learners to try for a self-correction, showing the learner where the error is in a speech sentence or a written paragraph. Furthermore, teachers can make a note of mistakes and errors and correct them sometime later individually or if many students have the same issue, then it can be corrected in the classroom in the presence of all the students [by writing the slips and blunders on the writing board].

Responding to students' oral production is a complex activity. Teachers need to take into account when and how to respond to their flaws. The purpose we teachers need to keep in mind is to help them learn better. If the mistakes are those which they can do by themselves then we can leave it untouched. As Yardi (1994) has suggested that problems such as tag...are better to leave them untouched as they are not harmful. Perhaps we should keep in mind the "ease with which the error or mistake can be corrected" (Parrot, 2010, p. 70).

### **Timing to Correct the Learners Speaking Errors**

The timing to correct the learners speaking errors is very critical, since it has an immense impact to do with success or failure on our students' learning process. Only the right timing can help them receive and retain the correct and acceptable pieces of advice effectively.

When the teacher teaches speaking skills or spoken English and conducts a class activity, if fluency is the goal, for instance, if the activity is for the learners to give a presentation or a speech, it will be better for the teacher to note

down the mistakes and correct the learners at the end of their presentation. Otherwise, they might lose the flow of their speech and feel demotivate to continue to speak (Kavasaki, 2020). Similarly, while the students are reading aloud in class it is better not to interrupt as it might discourage them to read freely or they may lose their inspiration and motivation.

When the teacher is teaching an activity aiming at accuracy, for instance, a grammar rule or spelling, the teacher might ask the students to write a paragraph based on what she has just taught and give the students time to edit their own writing first or with the help of a classmate. The teacher should correct only on the lesson or topic she has just taught and leave the other errors which are not related to the current lesson (Kavasaki, 2020; Yardi, 1994; Doff, 2007).

Baker and Westrup (2006) suggest that the timing for correction can be at the end or at the beginning of the next class. Teachers should keep in mind that correction should be done positively so that students will not feel bad that they have committed an error, but they should feel encouraged and learn through their mistakes. Correcting error/s at the beginning of the class must be done right at the start of the class. The teacher should point out to the students and let them know what the error is and after they understand the problem the teacher can give them some time to try and correct it by themselves. If they cannot do it, then, the teacher can give a crystal-clear explanation with the correct answer. Baker and Westrup (2006) also suggest that the teacher can use finger correction for word which are missing in a sentence, for wrong words, for contractions, [for a missing letter in a word], and so on. Let us suppose that the sentence is "I have pen." The article is missing; therefore, a teacher can point to the finger representing the article 'a'.

### **Correcting Learners Written Work**

According to Doff (2007) there are four different ways teachers can correct the written work:



1. The teacher can collect the written work at the end of the lesson, correct them and give the work back to the learners the next day.
2. The teacher can go through the answers and get the learners correct their own written work. If needed the teacher can write the answers on the writing board.
3. The teacher can ask the learners to sit in pairs and correct each other's work. Then the teacher can go through all the answers together with the students.
4. The teacher can ask the students to exchange their script, then the teacher can go through the answers and they correct each other's writing.

There might be advantages and disadvantages of each of these correcting techniques; they might be suitable for some written work but fail for some. Correcting written work orally in class is a good idea for a large class, it also reduces the teacher's workload. Making a correction immediately after the test in class is good the teacher can draw the students' attention to the issue easily since they are still fresh in the learners' mind. Asking the students to correct each other's work takes time; however, it gives the learners a good practice to read through what they have written and to be aware of their own mistakes and keep the whole class involved. Of course, this type of correction works fairly well for controlled writing activities where the possible answers to the questions are few.

Baker and Westrup (2006) opine that correction and marking can bring some disadvantages to both teachers and students. The teacher will take longer time to complete the correction work. The students might feel demotivating to find so many markings in their written work with red ink. They suggest (p. 128) that if the teacher marks and corrects all the mistakes in the written work of the learners, can lead to harming the students' learning. The test

or exam paper of students when there are too many red marks can make the students to become discourage; moreover, students do not usually take the time to see all the details of the corrections.

One of the ways the teacher can save time is by making the students understand the correction; the teacher can give and explain to them the correcting code. Given below are a few examples of the correcting and marking codes:

T = wrong tense

G = grammar

WW = wrong word

^ = missing word

WWO = wrong word order

SP = wrong spelling

NT/? = not clear

Correcting the written work of the students can be very strenuous; however, many students can learn from their mistakes for it is a part of their learning, and it will help them to commit lesser mistakes in their future writing.

It is worth mentioning that to make the correction easier, teachers should mark the students written work as soon as possible rather than leaving the work of the student pile up like a high hill and when the students have almost forgotten what they have written. A teacher with a large number of students will have to do it in two or three sittings, but not to keep it for weeks.

The teacher should make it a point to follow a consistent system of marking and to hold up an important principle to be fair, positive, and helpful. Leaving some positive comments can be useful for the students. Comments such as: try to do better, good work, very good, ... it is also useful when the teacher gives some indications for the learners how they can improve. Indications such as: go to a dictionary to check the spellings, construct simple, complex, and long sentences, pay

attention to the beginning and ending of the story, subject verb agreement etc.

Hurd & Murphy (2005) opine that tutors provide feedback to the learners in many different ways. "Some write out corrections in full, but others may prefer to use a marking code" p. 201. That is, they use symbols or abbreviations; for instance, VT for tense errors, A/Art for wrong articles, a square bracket, [ ] or a line crossing to omit unnecessary phrases, Rel. for relevance, Str. for structure errors. Furthermore, teachers may sometimes underline to indicate that there is an error in the sentence and not necessarily giving full feedback for all errors. This does not imply that a teacher is not doing her work but this will help the learner to have a role in the process of corrections.

Writing assignments can be submitted electronically and teachers can show the corrections through electronic annotations which is typically has to be done with the use of tools in word processors.

### Conclusion

The question which is the crux of the matter is, do students really learn through teacher's correction? The answer could be both-yes and no. This is similar to what Yule (2021, p.207) has discussed on how learning may not take place through correction; especially, when the correction is given in a fine-drawn, subtle way. Therefore, the learner may continue to write or speak using the same form despite of the repetition of what the correct form is; for instance, the word 'grammar' some students continue to write it as \*grammer or gramer!

When corrected some students may feel ashamed, upset, worried, or indifferent. But some will be happy and feel thankful to the teacher for her correction. Furthermore, researchers say that there is a reason to be happy because students can see their mistakes and that shows they are actively involved in the learning process. Teachers have to be careful how and

when to correct the errors. It is important to keep in mind that teachers should not look only for errors the learners commit but also to pay enough interest in what the students have accomplished and done well. We teachers should give compliments whenever is due. Big tick marks, encouraging comments should be the indicators to provide and show the progress that the learners have done.

In checking these two aspects- speaking and writing, teachers will gain a more subtlety understanding of the learners' weak points and strengths. Therefore, they will have better ideas how to target their instructions for the improvement of their students.

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