Correcting Errors and Giving Feedback in the ESL/EFLS Classroom

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Focus of the discussion

- What is an error/&Mistake?
- Why do students make errors?
- What type of errors do students make?
- What strategies of error correction can teachers use?
- When is appropriate to correct student's error?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of different error correction techniques?

What is an Error in ESL/EFL?

An **error** is a deviation from accepted rules of a language made by a learner of a second language. Such errors result from the learner's lack of knowledge of correct rules of the target language. Wikipedia.

Errors vs Mistakes

Mistakes can be defined as a failure to utilize a known system correctly. Or performance errors e.g. slips of the tongue and random ungrammatical formations.

Errors are resulting from a learner's lack of proper grammatical knowledge. Errors are systematic in that they occur repeatedly and are not recognizable by the learner. They are a part of the learner's interlanguage (the language used by a student in the process of learning a second language), and the learner does not generally consider them as errors

Categorizing errors

▸ we can categorize an error by the reason for its production or by its linguistic type.

▸ What's the reason for the error?

  ▸ It is the result of a random guess (pre-systematic).

  ▸ It was produced while testing out hypotheses (systematic).

  ▸ It is a slip of the tongue, a lapse, a mistake (caused by carelessness, fatigue etc.) (post-systematic).

▸ To be sure about the type of error produced by a student we need to know where the student's interlanguage is.

Categorizing errors

▶ What type is it?
We can classify errors simply as productive (spoken or written) or receptive (faulty understanding). Alternatively we can use the following:

  ▶ A lexical error - vocabulary

  ▶ A phonological error - pronunciation

  ▶ A syntactic error- grammar

  ▶ An interpretive error - misunderstanding of a speaker's intention or meaning

  ▶ A pragmatic error - failure to apply the rules of conversation

▶ Our Focus today will be spoken errors

Why do students make errors?

- Interlanguage (L1 transfer) e.g. phrase structure? Mzuri mtoto?

- Overgeneralization (studying a rule and overgeneralizing it) e.g. -ed past tense

- When students want to get their message across (they deliberately / intentionally make errors)

What Should I do about the Error?

Students have differences; some like to be corrected and some do not like to be corrected at all because they feel shame about that.

Should error in speaking be ignored or repaired?

To correct

▶ Students benefits from error correction

Not to correct

▶ Undermining confidence

▶ Interrupting conversation

▶ Negative effect on motivation

▶ Students may stop taking risks and speak only when they are sure

When do you correct students' errors?

- ► As soon as errors are made
- ► After the student finishes speaking
- ► After the activities
- ► At the end of class

If the teacher chooses to correct the error, other decision must be made; when to correct the error (immediate or later) who should correct the error (the teacher, another student or the speaker) and how the error should be corrected.

When is it appropriate to correct a student's errors?

▶ These questions are presented as a guide to deciding whether to let an error go or not.

1. Does the error affect communication?
2. Are we concentrating on accuracy at the moment?
3. Why did the student make the error?
4. Could the student react badly to my correction?
5. Is it something the students have already learned?
7. What time is it?
8. What day is it?
9. What's the weather like?

When to correct an error?

Students can differ greatly in their attitude to producing spoken English. Some are only interested in developing their fluency at the expense of accuracy while others are so focused on accuracy that they have no fluency.

During fluency activity, it is generally accepted that the teacher should not interrupt students to point out a grammar or vocabulary error or to correct pronunciation. Doing so stops the communication that is taking place, shifting the focus from meaning to form. Many teachers feel that the only appropriate time to focus on error correction is after the activity is completed, however the teacher may find it is imperative to intervene, especially if communication is at risk.

When to correct an error?

Immediate correction

▶ Focus: Accuracy

Pros:

▶ Context

▶ Self-correct

Cons:

▶ Quickly forget

▶ Feel embarrassed

When to correct an error?

Delayed correction
- Focus: Fluency

Pros
- Doesn't interrupt student communication
- Anonymous
- Work together

Cons
- Fail to realize that an error has been corrected

Who should correct an Error?

Teacher

Pros

- ▶ Saving time
- ▶ Immediate
- ▶ All students

Cons

- ▶ Teacher centered approach
- ▶ Does not stimulate thinking

Who should correct an Error?

Other Students /peer correction

Pros

▶ Involving/ engaging everyone

▶ Stimulating Thinking

▶ Cooperation

Cons

▶ Other incorrect forms

▶ Hurt feelings

Peer correction must be handled very delicately so no one student feels like he or she is the only one who does not know something.

Who should correct an Error?

Self-correction

- It is possible only when the student knows the rules or it is just an error.

Pros & Cons ??

How it should be corrected? Strategies we can use

Direct correction vs less direct correction?

1. Explicitly correction

 S: He speak Swahili

 T: He speaks Swahili

2. Recast

(i.e. teacher reformulate what the student have just said)

S: He speak Swahili

T: He speaks Swahili and French

S: I am more tall than my brother

T: Oh' you are taller than your brother!

Strategies we can use

3. Clarification request

(i.e. the teacher signals the error to encourage student to self-correct uses the words like **pardon, what is that? etc**

S: He speak Swahili

T: pardon

S: He speaks Swahili

4. Metalinguistic clues

(i.e. **just saying the word** *article* **or** *preposition* **to help** the student to see that there was an error)

S: He speak Swahili

T: the third person -S is missing

S: He speaks Swahili

Strategies we can use

5. Elicitation

(i.e. a teacher elicit the correct form from the student e.g. a teacher pause and allow the student to complete a sentence that the teacher has started Or ask the student to reformulate what they have said e.g. say it again please

S: He speak Swahili

T: Say it again please

S: He speaks Swahili

6. Repetition (i.e. the teacher repeat the student's construction but change the intonation to signal that something was wrong in this sentence.

S: He speak Swahili

T: He **SPEAK** Swahili

S: He speaks Swahili

Questions

S: I got to the beach yesterday.
T: Oh, you went to the beach yesterday, how nice!

S: I got to the beach yesterday.
T: What is the past tense of this irregular verb?

S: I got to the beach yesterday.
T: Sorry?

Questions

S: I got to the beach yesterday.
T: No, went.

S: I got to the beach yesterday.
T: I **GOT** to the beach yesterday.

S: I got to the beach yesterday.
T: Could you repeat it, please? What did you do yesterday?

ANSWERS

1. RECAST
2. METALINGUISTIC CLUES
3. CLARIFICATION REQUEST
4. EXPLICITLY CORRECTION
5. REPETITION
6. ELICITATION

Word

There is no best technique to correct errors for all students and for all situations and as a teacher you have to evaluate and harmonize your situation and your context and make your final decision. *Practice for effective use!*

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- Thank you all for coming!

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