

Correction strategies

Trainer's notes

Aims	To raise awareness of strategies for dealing with errors To give practice in choosing error correction strategies
Syllabus area	Correcting learners
Timetable fit	For use in an input session on oral error correction
Interaction pattern	Pair work or group work
Timing	30 minutes
Materials needed	One set of error cards (see 3.7A and B), put up on walls of room One copy of the answer grid (see 3.7B) for each trainee

Instructions

- Elicit different possible teachers' responses when learners make a mistake in speaking. Write them on the board and include the following:
 - Peer correction
 - Echo correction (with rising intonation)
 - Finger correction
 - Identifying the mistake through explanation
 - Ignoring the error (focusing on content and communication)
 - Focusing on minimal pair work
 - Seeking to clarify ideas
 - Gesture
 - Delaying feedback
 - Feeding in the correct language
- Explain that around the room are various examples of learners' oral errors, each with three possible correction strategies. Show trainees the answer grid and explain that for each example they should 1) identify the error 2) summarise the possible strategies and 3) choose the 'best' strategy and say why they chose it.
- Hand out the answer grid and have trainees work in pairs or threes. Monitor, promoting discussion and clarifying where necessary.
- Conduct feedback using the answer key below, but stress that there are pros and cons of each method. Draw out the following factors which affect decisions about correction and write them on the board:
 - student's level
 - error or slip - can the student self-correct?
 - activity taking place
 - stage of lesson/learning
 - self-confidence of student
 - motivation of student
 - frequency of mistake
 - who's listening
 - reason for speaking

Work towards the conclusion that different strategies are more or less appropriate in different situations, but that certain kinds of mistakes lend themselves to certain correction techniques.

Answer key

Here are some suggested answers:

	Type of error	Correction options	'Best' strategy and why
1.	Grammar	a) identifying the mistake through explanation b) ignoring error c) echo correction	c) echo correction It gives the student a chance to self-correct quickly, especially if the teacher thinks it's a small slip. It will not disrupt the activity.
2.	Pronunciation	a) ignoring the error b) focusing on minimal pairs c) identifying the mistake using humour	a) ignoring the error The reason the student is speaking is to share something of their life in English, not to produce a perfect sentence. The student could even be praised for using the word <i>beat</i> at elementary level.
3.	Word order	a) finger correction b) seeking to clarify ideas c) peer correction	a) finger correction It's quick and won't interrupt the flow of the interaction, which is most important in this situation.
4.	Grammar	a) ignoring the error b) delaying feedback c) finger correction	a) ignoring the error The content is more important than the grammar here. The student has clearly communicated their idea. It may also adversely affect the self-confidence of the learner to be corrected for this so publicly.
5.	Grammar	a) gesture and echo correction b) feeding in the correct language c) delaying feedback	a) gesture and echo correction There's a high probability the student will self-correct easily and continue the conversation.
6.	Vocabulary	a) seeking to clarify ideas b) feeding in the correct language c) echo correction	a) seeking to clarify ideas The student may be able to self-correct here, depending on whether they've already learnt the correct word. If they don't know <i>retired</i> , a discussion now should help them remember the potential error in future.
7.	Register	a) gesture b) echo correction c) feeding in the correct language	c) feeding in the correct language The frequency of the error suggests the student is really not aware of it. It is a simple error to correct so can be dealt with quickly in this way.
8.	Pronunciation	a) peer correction b) feeding in the correct language c) ignoring the error	c) ignoring the error If the student is still making this mistake after a lot of practice, it suggests that this is an error that the student will have to live with.
9.	Grammar	a) echo correction b) ignoring the error c) identifying the mistake through explanation	b) ignoring the error The student doesn't yet have the grammatical knowledge to express this correctly, but has still managed to communicate.

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Error cards

1. You have just presented the present perfect for actions which started in the past and continue to the present. The students are now doing a controlled practice activity and one of them says: '**I am learning English 7 years.**' The teacher ...
 - a) draws a diagram to show the difference between *am* and *have been*.
 - b) says: 'Oh, really! 7 years ...'
 - c) repeats the sentence, stressing the word *am* with rising intonation.
2. The teacher is chatting to a fairly new group of elementary teens as they come into class. She asks how their afternoons were the day before. One student says: '**My friend bit me at tennis yesterday.**' The teacher ...
 - a) responds: 'What a shame! Did you really want to win?'
 - b) points to /ɪ/ and /i:/ on the phonemic chart and says: 'hit; heat', 'sit; seat'
 - c) laughs, and says: 'Your friend bites you?! You poor thing!'
3. The teacher has given a class of intermediate students five minutes to check their homework exercises in small groups before collecting it in. One student says: '**Please pass my book work.**' The teacher ...
 - a) holds up two fingers and then turns them around.
 - b) says: 'I'm sorry? What would you like me to pass you?'
 - c) asks the other students in the class: 'Is it a book work?'
4. It's the end of the cycle and a group of young learners have made a card to say thank you to you, the teacher. You are reading the comments out loud and the students are enjoying the moment. One student has written: '**You the best teacher ever.**' The teacher ...
 - a) says: 'Gosh! Thank you! I have loved teaching you too.'
 - b) makes a mental note to write this sentence on the board at the end of the class.
 - c) repeats the sentence, touching a different finger for each word, including for the missing word.
5. The teacher is starting an evening class with a small pre-intermediate group but notices that one of the participants is missing. She asks the others: 'Where is Sam?' One learner says (to the teacher): '**Sam is not here tonight. He is at your house.**' The teacher ...
 - a) looks very surprised, points at her own chest and says: 'My house?'
 - b) repeats: 'Yes, Sam is at his house', stressing the word *his*.
 - c) writes a story with the same mistake in it for students to correct next day.
6. An elementary group have just studied the lexical set 'jobs' and are now in groups completing a survey about their family members' occupations. The teacher is monitoring and hears one student say: '**My grandfather is 70 now so he's unemployed.**' The teacher ...
 - a) asks: 'Is your grandfather looking for a new job?'
 - b) asks: 'Are you sure you don't mean *retired*?'
 - c) repeats the word *unemployed* with rising intonation.
7. Whenever he hasn't quite heard what somebody in class says, a finance manager in an in-house pre-intermediate business class says: '**What?**' The teacher ...
 - a) looks questioningly at the student, frowning slightly.
 - b) repeats: 'What?' 'What?' in the same tone of voice used.
 - c) says: 'Pardon?' and encourages the student to do the same.

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Error cards

8. After much practice of the phoneme /ð/, the lesson sequence moves on to a freer practice activity about how leisure time is spent. During this stage, one of the older learners is heard to say: **'Dis is very difficult.'**
The teacher ...
a) stops the activity and asks another student to say the sentence correctly.
b) bends down and says into the student's ear: 'this is very difficult', emphasising /ð/
c) smiles and lets the activity continue.
9. You've been teaching the past simple to a group of beginner students, and have just set some homework. At the end of the class one student says: **'If I not do my homework, you angry?'**
The teacher ...
a) repeats with rising intonation 'not do' and 'you angry'?
b) responds: 'Well, not angry but not very happy, either.'
c) explains: 'You need the first conditional there. This is how it looks ...'

Answer grid

Situation	Type of error	Correction options	'Best' strategy and why
1.		a) b) c)	
2.		a) b) c)	
3.		a) b) c)	
4.		a) b) c)	
5.		a) b) c)	
6.		a) b) c)	
7.		a) b) c)	
8.		a) b) c)	
9.		a) b) c)	