

ELT



Ireland bulletin

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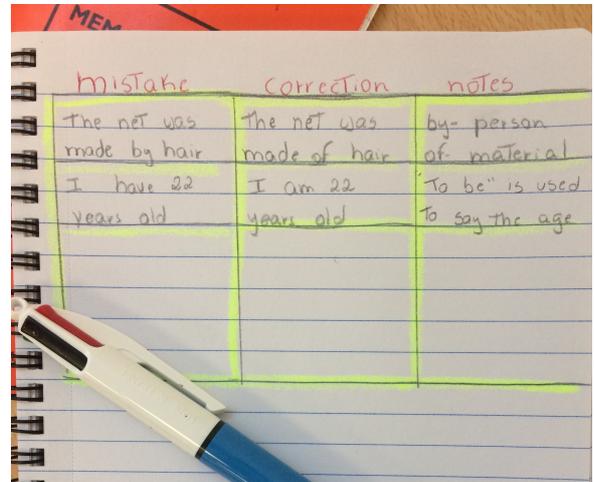
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Stimulating Autonomy in Speaking through Self and Peer Correction

By Gabriela Pozza

One of my main challenges as an ESL teacher is trying to find effective ways to deal with students' mistakes in speaking activities without making them feel uncomfortable or demotivated. How can we do so and, on top of that, still encourage them to have an active approach towards their own learning process?

Mistakes are often seen as something to be avoided at any cost and they are one of the reasons why our students might feel anxious in the classroom environment. Occasional lapses in performance should, however, be seen as a natural part of the learning process – after all, if students are making mistakes, it means they are trying different – and unknown – structures.



mistake	correction	notes
The net was made by hair	The net was made of hair	by- person of material
I have 22 years old	I am 22 years old	To be is used to say the age

An example for a mistake record

Pic by: Author

When a student makes a mistake, many questions come to our minds, such as: when should we correct them? Should this correction be on the spot? What is the best way to deal with this mistake? Having that in mind, I decided to analyse the possible strategies teachers can use to improve learners' self-correction in speaking and proposing solutions to improve self-correction in spoken discourse because I believe that students can become less dependent on their teacher, we can actually help them to be more autonomous.

First of all, there is an important factor to be considered: students can only correct themselves if they know where the mistake is, and they should be able to reflect on how to correct it. Therefore, we need to be aware of our students' competences and what they are capable of for their level of proficiency. If students enjoy helping and being helped, we can involve the whole class in an engaging peer correction process - a useful example would be, according to Harmer [LO1] suggests (2000, p/ 97) when a student makes a mistake, teachers can correct by asking if one of their peers can help out, or by explaining the problem themselves. Example: Student A makes a mistake, we can ask the whole class – or to an individual student - for an accurate version, ask the class for choral repetition and then return to the original student for them to say the sentence correctly.

A useful example of peer correction would be when student says, "I can to dance", the teacher asks the class "Is this correct? What is the correct way? Let's help Student A." and then students say the correct version, everybody repeats, and student A says their sentence again in the correct way. However, we need to be thoughtful as peer correction will only work if the classroom atmosphere is favourable and friendly.

There are also ways of enhancing students' capability of self-correction is by repeating what the student has just said, rising intonation up to the point of the mistake and wait for them to correct themselves. Example: when a student says, "Yesterday I eated popcorn", the intonation and emphasis should be on "eated". The teacher might even want to make use of facial expression

to show puzzlement and request clarification, as this is, per se, an accurate and acceptable way to deal with mistakes.

An interesting alternative to create a balance between accuracy and fluency in the same activity is to record students engaging on a communicative task and ask them to analyse their own oral production and justify their criteria. This strategy helps students become more aware of the language they are using. If the topic of the class is verbs in the past, for instance, the teacher might want to record a speaking activity in which students are talking about their last holidays and can ask them to listen to their own production to analyse if they had used the regular verbs correctly afterwards.

During speaking activities that are focused on fluency, teachers are supposed to monitor to notice any frequent mistakes. In this case, teachers can write down on cards the most common errors and hand them out to students at the end of the class or they can be used for a game in the following class, or students can work in pairs to correct them. These same cards can be given to students for them to stick in their notebooks and used for reflection: three columns can be drawn - one with the mistakes written on it, the second one with the correct / accurate version and the third one with extra notes of what learners consider important or relevant.

“ It also helps if we make the objective of the activity clear, whether it is fluency or accuracy, so students know what is expected from them.”

Role plays are always a good idea. In this case, adapting and using them could work surprisingly well. Students will be given a role play and perform it as their first step. They will then write the lines with their acquired language, without pre-planning it. They will use the same activity and write a second version of it to present again. By doing so, they are more likely to use a more accurate language than the first time. Peers can compare both versions and students can check their progress, think about the language they used and the purpose of the activity, write another version of it and present it for the third/ last time if they wish to do so.

Teachers can provide opportunities for students to be more aware of the language they are using and ways to make their communication more effective and get their message across. It also helps if we make the objective of the activity clear, whether it is fluency or accuracy, so students know what is expected from them. Should they focus on communication and being understood or should they use the structures they were taught beforehand? Peer correction is effective because it shows students that their active participation is extremely valuable for the entire learning process.

It can push students to produce more accurate language and, most importantly, keep their improved accuracy on later occasions. Having said that, from my experience, implementing these correction strategies have worked quite well - with all levels – as it also contributes to a less teacher-centred lesson and it is an excellent way to ensure students actively participate actively in class, either through speaking more or helping in the corrections.

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