

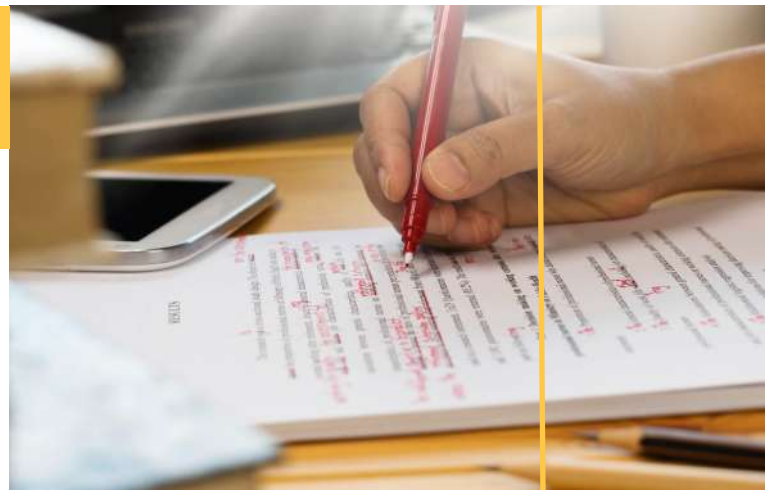


How and when should teachers correct students' errors in spoken English?

Correcting spoken errors is an important task for teachers. Without correction, student errors can become fossilized and much harder to eliminate. Many errors in spoken English are due to interference from L1 so it is good for teachers to recognise errors which are common for Mexican students of English.

Here are some examples of errors committed by Mexican students:

- 1 Adding an 'e' before words beginning with 's' : 'especial' instead of 'special', or 'estudy' instead of 'study'.
- 2 Overgeneralising the use of /i:/. Some Mexican students won't make much difference between the way they say 'fit' and 'feet' or 'sit' and 'seat'.
- 3 Missing articles. For example, 'I left my book in (the) taxi' or 'She had (a) cup of coffee for breakfast.'
- 4 Confusing 'make' and 'do'. For example: I **made** my homework. She **did** a mistake.
- 5 Possessive adjectives. Mainly confusing 'his' and 'her' which are the same in Spanish – 'su' .
- 6 Third person 's'. For example: 'She **go** to work by bus.'
- 7 Using people with 'are'. Many students will make mistakes such as 'These people **is** not very nice'.
- 8 'I **am** agree with you' instead of 'I agree with you.'





When teachers correct spoken errors, they have several options:

1 To try and get the student to self-correct the error by echoing the mistake.

Student: 'They didn't went to the party because it was too far'.

Teacher: 'Didn't **went!**'

Student: 'Oh ...um didn't go!'

Teacher: 'That's right.'



2 If self-correction doesn't work, asking another student to correct the error:

Alicia: 'If I didn't eat that fruit, I wouldn't get ill.'

Teacher: 'Um, Can someone help her?'

Juan: 'I think you have to say 'If I hadn't eaten that fruit, I wouldn't have got ill.'

Teacher: 'Thank you Juan. Alicia, can you correct the sentence? '

3 If all 1 and 2 don't work, the teacher can correct the error.

When should teachers correct? Not all errors interfere with communication and understanding so you should select which errors to correct and which to leave. If you are teaching new vocabulary or structures you will want to insist on accurate use of these so you will correct more.

If students are involved in a fluency activity such as a role-play, discussion or simulation, persistent error correction will reduce fluency and probably affect students' confidence. In these cases, it is probably better to make a note of persistent or serious errors and point these out once the activity has finished. You can write the errors on the whiteboard and see if students can identify them.

Remember that error correction is an important part of teaching another language.