



Five College Center for World Languages

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Correcting Errors

One of the more important roles of the conversation session is to give the student the opportunity to practice creating language in the presence of a native speaker who can give immediate feedback. There are instances in which the person serving as the conversation partner is a fellow student, is younger than the person studying the language, or comes from a culture where it is considered rude to correct someone trying to speak a foreign language. It is imperative that the conversation partner set aside these mitigating factors and make certain that students understand that they have made an error and what is the correct word, phrase, or structure.

Correction techniques vary and each conversation partner needs to come up with a system that works and is comfortable for the individual. Correcting a student can be as easy as making a hand gesture and saying the correct word and then making the student repeat it. This method allows the session to continue in the target language with no break into English. Sometimes the error is such that a brief explanation in English is required such as “you said ‘kitchen’ but you mean ‘chicken’” before making the student repeat “chicken” and continuing the conversation.

Remember that the job of the conversation partner is to correct oral errors. Students want to practice and want to be corrected. Letting an error pass does no one any favors.

Correcting Errors I (Hindi)

Note how the conversation partner makes the students repeat and repeat until they get it right:

Correcting Errors II (Hindi)

Students can also critique each other and thus cement what they have learned. Note here how the group has fun with the student’s mistake.

Correcting Errors III (Hindi)

Note how the conversation partner doesn’t stop until the student gets the pronunciation right.

Correcting Errors IV (Hindi)

Note how the conversation partner makes the students repeat the correct pronunciation.

Correcting Errors V (Pashto)

Here the conversation partner gives the correction in English thus forcing the student to analyze his error and come up with the correct form.

Correcting Errors VI (Swahili)

Students are reading dialogues from the text with the conversation partner correcting their pronunciation as they read.

Correcting Errors VII (Pashto)

Here is an example of self-correcting. The student makes the utterance and then corrects himself and goes on.

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