

saying that they should rewrite assignments, incorporating corrections (see point 4 below). So, I think we can believe the students here: it is genuinely more helpful for them to be told what the right form is than to have to look for it themselves (and maybe not find it, or not be sure they are right). This also corresponds to some other research, e.g. Chandler (2003).

Another objection would be that surely it is better for learning if the learners have to make the effort to work out what's wrong. There is, indeed, evidence from the research (see Section 7.4) that it is important for students to invest some work in clarifying what's wrong in negotiation with the teacher. But the teacher does need to confirm the right version.

**Most students don't like to be corrected by other students.** We have to guess the reasons for this. Maybe it is because they feel embarrassed or uncomfortable being corrected by peers. However, it is more likely that they simply don't rely on each other to be right, and prefer the more reliable source of the teacher. Whatever the reason, it seems to be a fairly clear majority opinion, and one that we should take into account.

**Students think they should rewrite.** Students say that in writing it is not enough for them to be told that something is wrong, or even for them to be shown the right answer: they should be asked to rewrite the corrected text. This was the answer which convinced me that the students are not just looking for easy answers (see point 2 above) and also confirmed my own intuitions. They are right, of course: learning is much better if they rewrite, implementing the corrections from the first draft (see Section 7.5 below).

## Conclusion

The results of the questionnaires are interesting and thought-provoking, and probably reliable. They do not, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, necessarily oblige us to change our practice in order to provide exactly what students say they want: but it is important to listen to the students and respect their opinions. If we decide to do things otherwise, we need to have convincing research-based, pedagogical, educational or practical reasons for doing so.

### Action task

Administer the questionnaire to a group of students and see if the results are similar to mine. If there are significant differences, can you explain or comment on them?

You may, of course, wish to change individual items to make them more appropriate to your own teaching situation, or even create a new questionnaire.

## 7.4 Oral correction

The main methods of oral correction used in most classes are as follows:

1. **Recast.** The teacher simply says the correct version of the student's erroneous utterance, without any further comment:

Student: I reading a book  
 Teacher: I **am** reading a book.

2. **Elicitation.** The teacher elicits the correct form from the student (assuming that the student can in fact produce it!):

Student: I reading a book.  
 Teacher: Can you correct that?  
 Student: I am reading a book.

3. **Clarification request.** The teacher asks for a clarification of the meaning:

Student: I reading a book.  
 Teacher: I didn't understand, can you tell me more clearly?

4. **Metalinguistic feedback.** The teacher explains using grammatical or other linguistics terminology:

Student: I reading a book.  
 Teacher: In the present continuous you need the verb *be* before the *-ing* form of the verb ...

5. **Explicit correction.** The teacher says explicitly that there has been a mistake, and what the right form is:

Student: I reading a book.  
 Teacher: No, that is incorrect. You should have said ...

6. **Repetition.** The teacher repeats the incorrect utterance, with a rising intonation and a doubting expression, implying that there's something wrong with it:

Student: I reading a book.  
 Teacher: I *reading* a book??

### Task

Before reading on, which of the above would you guess would be the most effective in getting the student to learn from the correction and stop making the error in future? Which would you expect to be the least effective?

### Effectiveness of the different techniques

The 'recast' is by far the most common of all the techniques listed above. Teachers use it because it is quick and easy and causes minimum disruption of a student's speech. However, it is also the least effective in producing 'uptake' (i.e. in getting the student to understand and produce the correct form in response to the correction), and therefore the least likely to result in lasting learning. This may be partly because the student sometimes does not realise it is a correction at all; he or she may not notice that the teacher's utterance was different from his or her own and understand it merely as an 'echo' or confirmation.

Various studies carried out by Lyster (e.g. Lyster, 2004) indicate that the most effective oral correction involves some kind of negotiation and active contribution from the student. So elicitations, repetitions or metalinguistic feedback, which get

the student to rethink what he or she has said and produce the correct form, are significantly better than recasts.

### Should we correct during fluent speech?

The above conclusion produces a dilemma. On the one hand, we do not want to interrupt a student as they are speaking, which might disrupt the flow of speech, discourage and harm communication. On the other hand, no correction at all might lead to the mistakes being confirmed or 'fossilized'. So many teachers correct during student talk using a quick 'recast', hoping to disrupt the speech as little as possible. But then, as we have seen, the correction might be totally ineffective: they might as well not have bothered. If you are going to correct effectively, you need to stop the student, and correct in a way that ensures that he or she has noticed and accepted the correction – which will inevitably involve some disruption of communication. There is always the possibility of noting the mistake and coming back to it later, but this is probably less effective than 'online' correction.

So we have the following dilemma: are you going to correct effectively and risk disturbing the flow of communication, or are you going to refrain from correcting and risk the error being reinforced?

The answer to this question is that it is up to your own professional judgement, taking into account a number of factors, such as the level and confidence of the student, the goals of the course, the frequency or gravity of the error, the willingness of the students to tolerate interruption and so on. The main point to be remembered here is that even if generally you prefer not to interrupt communicative interaction, there may be times where such interruption for the purposes of error correction may be useful and productive. It is up to you to identify when this is so: one of the many 'on your feet' decisions that you gradually learn how to make as you gain experience.

## 7.5 Written correction

This section relates to the correction of language errors in short writing assignments, such as language exercises, answers to comprehension questions, or brief compositions, in response to communicative tasks. (For guidance on giving feedback on longer written assignments, including corrections, aimed at the rewriting and improvement of the composition as a whole, see Unit 11: Teaching writing, pp. 158–62.) Below are some samples of uncorrected student work, followed by some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) which relate to the correction of such assignments.

### Task

Imagine that the written assignments shown below are ones submitted by your own (intermediate-level) students.

The first sample is a grammar exercise on the present perfect tense, which the students did for homework. The second is a test on vocabulary, which is also intended to check students' mastery of the use of relative clauses in definitions.