



Web: <https://www.uni-marburg.de/en/language-center/language-tandem>

Email: tandem@uni-marburg.de



How to deal with mistakes in a language tandem

General advice on error correction:

- + In the tandem partnership both partners should feel free and safe to try out their language skills.
- + Come to a mutual agreement of when and how you want to be corrected.
- + Concentrate primarily on what your partner wants to say, not on the mistakes.
- + Do not correct in a mean way.
- + Correct in an appreciative and encouraging way.
- + Corrections should not interrupt or negatively affect the conversation.
- + Unimportant mistakes/slips should be not be corrected as long as they are do not occur on a regular basis.
- + Regular mistakes should be discussed.
- + Correct mistakes without elaborating grammatical explanations.
- + Errors should only be explained if you are able to do so; better none than an incorrect explanation.
- + When pointing out the mistakes to your partner, try to use the following wording: The mistake is that..., correctly it would read as follows..., the rule for this is as follows...
- + All in all, self-correction is one of the most important stages in a learning process!

Errors

Types of errors:

- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- Pronunciation

Error criteria:

- Errors your partner would like to have corrected
- Errors you intuitively think should not be allowed to go by
- Errors that occur frequently
- Errors that may come across as misleading or rude

Basic questions:

- Is the error the kind of expression native speakers would not use in this way?
- Does the error deviate from the grammatical norm?
- Is the error the kind of expression native speakers would not understand?
- Is the error a violation of a form of usage used within the language community?

Possible Types of Correction

Verbal Error Correction:

- Gently interrupt your partner and suggest a correct formulation to her
- Repeat an incorrect sentence of your partner in a correct form
- Repeat the mistake with a certain emphasis so that your partner notices that something in the sentence is not correct
- Signal to your partner through gestures or facial expressions that something is wrong (non-verbal correction is recommended especially for grammatical/pronunciation errors)
- If your partner makes a mistake, ask if he is sure of his answer → this will give him guidance
- Allow your partner time to correct herself and e.g. look for the word she is looking for
- Wait until your partner is finished with the sentence, only then improve it
- Take notes while your partner is talking and only later explain to her which mistakes you have noticed (at the end of the exercise/session) → It is important to find your own suitable method for taking notes (e.g. write down what is wrong and cross it out, write the correct one behind it)
- Give your partner valuable feedback at the end of the conversation: highlight the positive aspects you have noticed and correct some common mistakes
- Record yourself or your partner with a voice recorder or mobile phone and listen to the recording together
- Give your partner learning tips if you have identified a specific deficit (e.g. teach rules or areas of application for repeated mistakes)

Errors

A: Winning the race was his most big success

B: No, **biggest**, not most big

A: There were a lot of flying papers in the canteen today.

B: What did the flyers say? Were they political flyers?

A: He eat

B: He **eats**, okay?

A: He eats a banana

A: How did the robbers try to get the money?

B: The robbers got the money with an black gun.

A: With **a** black gun? But did they get it?

A: He is called...

B: Attention **feminine!**

A: I am searching for an train.

B: **Excuse me?**

A: I am searching for the train.

A: He has a cats

B: **He has...?**

A: A cat.

A: What idea does the singer have? Maybe I'll give her...?

B: A night with you?

A: A night with you? What would make more sense?

B: With her.

B: **With her?**

A: With my.

B: **With my?**

A: With me.

Types of (immediate) error correction

Explicit (direct) correction:

The native speaker corrects the mistake and gives the correct answer

Implicit (indirect) correction:

The native speaker paraphrases the error, thus points out the error to the learner, but does not correct it himself

Isolated transformation:

The native speaker corrects the error by repeating the utterance and replacing the error with the correct form

Extended recast:

The native speaker reformulates the erroneous utterance and expands it in some way

Metalinguistic feedback:

The native speaker points out the incorrect form through comments, information or questions without giving the correct answer

Request for explanation:

The native speaker asks the learner to rephrase the contribution

Asking for clarification (elicitation):

The native speaker starts a sentence and makes clear that the learner should continue

Repetition:

The native speaker repeats the utterance and emphasises the incorrect element

Examples

Written Error Correction

The cat sit on an tree.

2F

The man works in the shop of her wife.

Before I eat, I had washed my hands.

T (Tempus)

She studys (**studies**) at the University of Marburg.

You don't have to run here. (**Incorrect modal verb usage**)

You don't have to run here. (**Incorrect modal verb usage: since it is a prohibition, the modal verb "may" (you may) must be used at this point.**)

The native speaker can:

- write the number of errors at the end of the line without giving any further information (indirect, non-localised, implicit handling of errors)
- localise the error, e.g. underline it without saying what kind of error it is (indirect, localised handling of errors)
- underline the error and give an indication of the type of error with a code (indirect, localised handling of errors)
- underline the error and write the correct form (direct, localised handling of errors)
- underline the error and explain it (indirect, localised approach to errors)
- underline the error, explain it and write down the correct form (direct, localised handling of errors)



Selective Correction

If your partner wants to practise certain expressions or sentence patterns, he or she can ask you to correct only a certain selection of mistakes. As it is difficult for inexperienced tandem users to understand the content of what is being said, to focus on the mistakes and to write them down at the same time, keep the following in mind:

1. Plan a short period of time in which you correct your partner in detail; depending on your level, this can range from five minutes for beginners to about 20 minutes for advanced users.
2. If your partner makes many mistakes, limit your correction to certain recurring patterns of errors (e.g. the order of words).

→ Do not try to pay attention to all of your partner's mistakes, rather concentrate on a maximum of 3 recurring mistakes → Where lies the focus of the exercise?

An excess of corrections can even be counterproductive because:

- ✘ the constant interruption prevents communication
- ✘ the receptiveness is limited
- ✘ the partner may get the impression that he/she cannot say anything correct in the language, which in turn negatively influences and discourages motivation

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at any time:

Ariane Wenz

ariane.wenz@uni-marburg.de

Bianca Geisler

tandem@uni-marburg.de