

# To Correct or Not Correct?

Ideas for Subtle Grammar Correction  
During Speaking Tasks



# Pre-Webinar Questions Review

1. What activities do you do in your classes to practice speaking?
2. If you correct your students' grammar while they are speaking, when and how do you correct it?
3. Why do you think students struggle to speak freely?

# The Importance of Speaking Practice

- Grammar exam scores do not necessarily indicate oral proficiency
- Practice leads to language being more fluent
- TOEFL and IELTS exams require speaking



# The Problem

- Correcting during flow of speech interrupts thought process
- Repeating mistakes creates bad habits





1. Written Grammar versus Spoken Grammar
2. Techniques for correcting spoken grammar errors and mistakes
3. Practical application of correction techniques

# Written Grammar Versus Spoken Grammar

- **Written grammar allows students to:**
  - Stop and think before they write
  - Correct before the teacher sees it
- **Written grammar does not:**
  - Allow questions from the reader
  - Require answers from the writer



**One-way communication**

# Written Grammar Versus Spoken Grammar



- **Spoken grammar requires:**
  - Instant speech
  - Interaction between the speakers
  - Appropriate interactions
    - Volume
    - Body language
    - Level of formality
    - Facial expression

**Two-way communication**

# Written Grammar Versus Spoken Grammar

## Spoken Grammar Features

- Ellipsis
  - Omitting part of the sentence
- Fillers
  - Pauses with words or silence
- Heads
  - Moving words to the beginning
- Tails
  - Moving words to the end



# Written Grammar Versus Spoken Grammar

- **ELLIPSIS: specific details are omitted from the sentence**

## Ellipsis

He left to go there.

Any questions?

Yes.

The box was made in Italy.

## Non-Ellipsis

John's brother left to go to the store

Do you have any questions?

Yes, I have a question.

The box on the table was made in Italy.

# Written Grammar Versus Spoken Grammar

- **FILLERS:** words, sounds, or silence in speech

So, umm speaking  
can be hard, like  
when I'm nervous.

Uh, so when I'm  
nervous ... it's umm  
... really hard.

# Written Grammar Versus Spoken Grammar

- **HEADS AND TAILS: placing a word or phrase for emphasis**

- **Heads**

- **Grammar**, it can be confusing for learners!
- **The game**, it was amazing!

- **Tails**

- It's so confusing for learners – **grammar that is.**
- It was an amazing game, **wasn't it?**





# Helping Ease the Fear of Speaking



- **Authentic text**
  - Movies and speeches not ideal, as they are scripted
- **Recorded speech**
  - Natural, unscripted
- **“Unscripted” media**
  - Talk shows, interviews

# Spoken Grammar Features

**A:** This one gives a whole lot of food, **so ...** you end up with a lot of food **not quite as good ...** but **you know it's...it** was okay considering what we were doing.

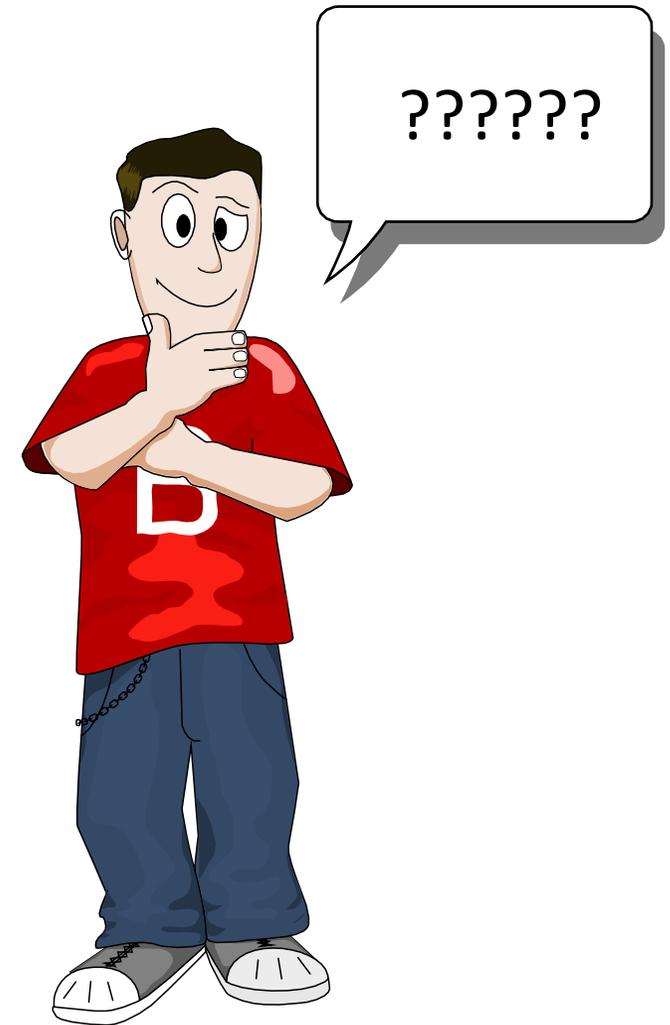
**B: Yeah ... um** mine was pretty good, but **... um** it was a little **too ... too** rich for me.

**A: Too rich?**

**B:** The sauce was really thick. I would have liked it to be a little thinner.

# Why are Fillers Used in Speech?

- **The speaker is thinking!**
  - Searching for a word or idea
  - Searching for the correct grammar
  - Translating from the first language



# Errors Versus Mistakes

- **Errors** result from a lack of knowledge
  - Students don't know the rule
- **Mistakes** result from various factors, usually requiring time to think
  - Students know the rule



**People are more likely to make mistakes during speech than in writing.**

# No Need to Correct...

These problems indicate where your student is struggling.



# No Need to Correct...

- During situations that will embarrass
  - Formal class presentations
  - Extremely shy students
- When a student is clearly struggling
  - Correct them afterwards, let them work through it first.



**EXCEPTION:** student asks for help



# Speech Correction

## Focus on:

- Grammar you're working on in class
- Mistakes that create misunderstandings
- If the student asks for help

**Keep in mind, you won't hear every mistake!**

# To Correct or Not Correct - Summary

| Correct  | Do not correct  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Forms being practiced</li><li>• Mistakes that create misunderstandings</li><li>• Student asks for help</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fillers, pauses, repairs and self-corrections</li><li>• Situations that might lead to embarrassment</li><li>• Formal class presentations</li><li>• Student trying</li></ul> |

# Importance of Noticing

- Grammar stops improving when students do not **notice** mistakes
- This might happen when:
  - Learners are able to communicate their needs
  - Correction of mistakes/errors has stopped
  - Consistent practice and study slows



# Guiding Students through Self-Correction

1. Recasting
2. Clarifying questions
3. Negotiating meaning



# 1. Recasting – The Most Subtle

- Purpose: to make your student notice the mistake
- Restate what the student said, but with the correction
  - *S: What were the question?*
  - *T: What **was** the question?*
  - *T: Can anyone tell us what the question **was**?*
- Student response is not required

# Recasting: When to Use

- During whole class discussions
  - Quickly recast and move on
- During conversation
  - Teacher/Student
  - Student/Student





## 2. Clarifying Questions

- Two methods
  - Ask a genuine question
    - *S: **He** will come tonight. (means she)*
    - *T: Who?*
    - *S: Um, **she** will come tonight.*
  - Pretend you didn't hear
    - *S: Yesterday, I **go** to the park.*
    - *T: Pardon?*
    - *S: Yesterday, I **went** to the park.*



## 2. Clarifying Questions

- Encourage student to self-correct
- Distinguish mistakes from errors
  - Errors cannot be self-corrected
  - Mistakes can be self-corrected



# Clarifying Questions: When to Use

- Clarifying questions work best when:
  - A question can be asked (Who, What, When...)
  - It's a form you've been working on
- Best times to use:
  - Whole class discussions
  - One-on-one conversations
- Don't use:
  - While students are talking with each other
  - During formal presentations

### 3. Negotiating Meaning – Least Subtle

- Teacher and student discuss meaning for clarity

S: Yesterday, **I goes** to the mall.

T: Did **you go or someone else?**

S: I did.

T: Did you mean **I went?**

S: Yes

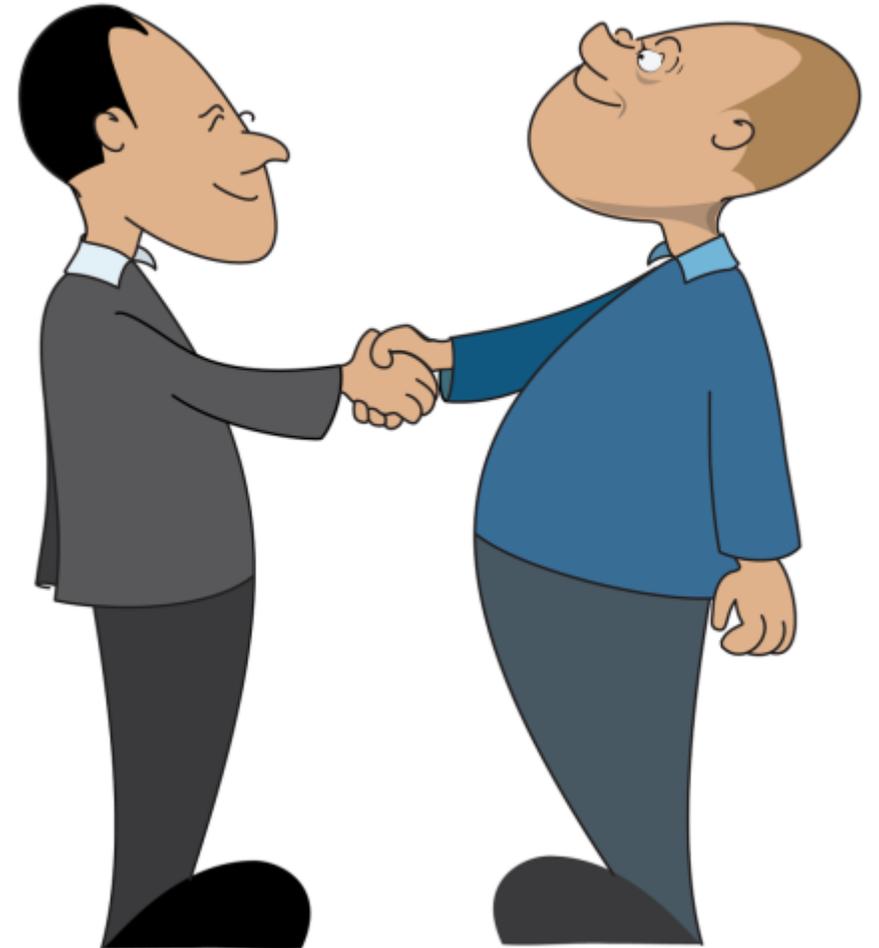
T: Could you repeat your answer?

S: Yesterday, **I went** to the mall.

T: And what happened at the mall?

# Negotiating Meaning: When to Use

- Works best for activities involving
  - One-on-one conversation
  - Small groups (2-3 friends)
  - Private tutoring
- Don't use...
  - During whole class discussions
  - Anywhere you might embarrass a student



# Benefits of Subtle Correction Techniques

- Students self-correct
  - Promotes awareness
- Maintains the flow of conversation
- Shows that you are listening
- Shows that mistakes are noticeable





# Correcting Example One

Yes, um...I think the author um **was said** that um he ran away because his parents were mean.

- Recast: The author **was saying** that he ran away.
- Clarifying question: **Could you repeat that?**
- Clarifying question: **What was the author saying?**
- Negotiating meaning would be hard because the meaning is clear.



## Example One

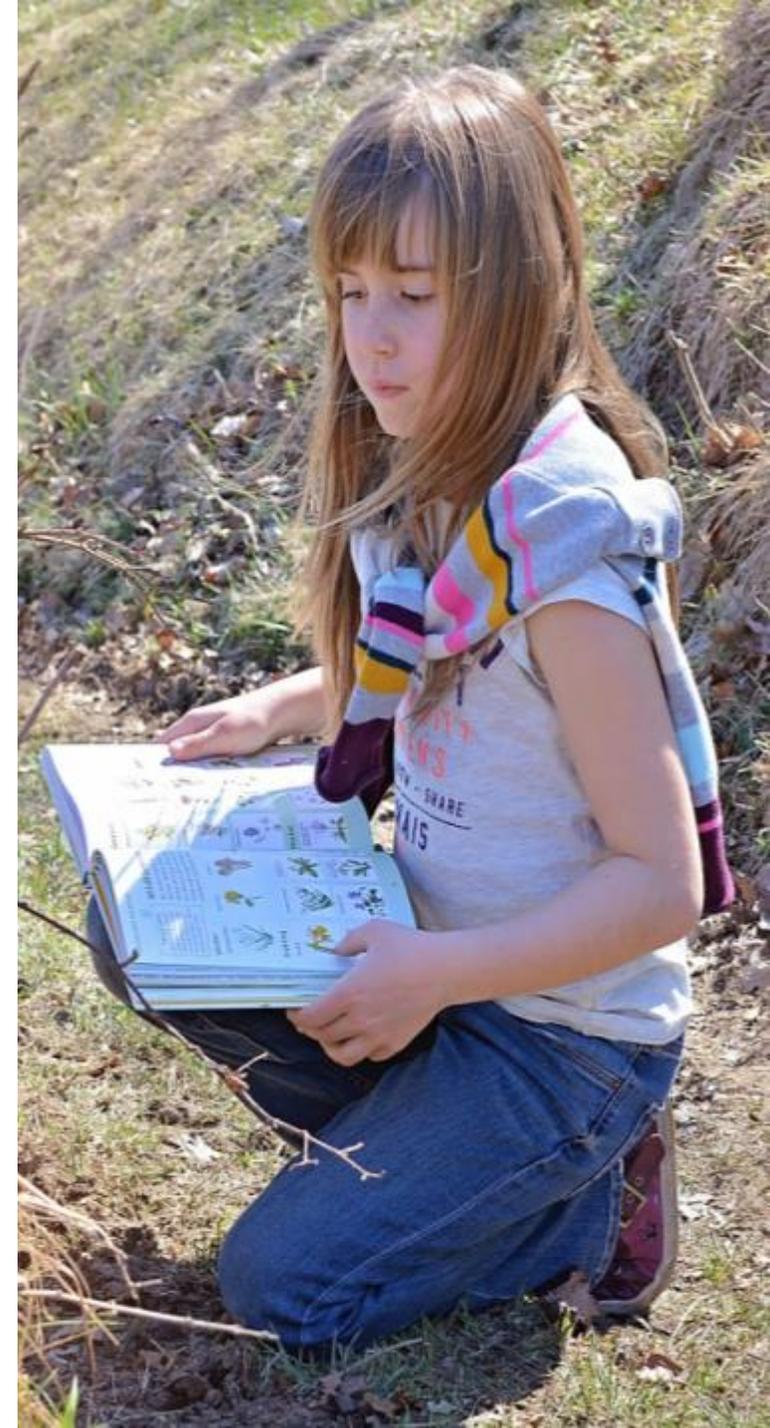
Yes, um ... I think the author um **was said** that um he ran away because his parents were mean.

- Something to notice
  - Student improved after thinking
- When can we correct this sentence?

## Example Two

I no like that book...it was eh diff diff eh...difficuls.

- Works well for pronunciation, too!
- When can corrections be made?
  - During pauses
  - At the end of the sentence



# Negotiating Meaning: Example

S: I **no** like that book ... .. it was eh hh diff diff eh hh ... **difficuls**.

T: **Did** you like the book?

S: No.

T: So, **you didn't like it**. Was it **difficult**?

S: Yes

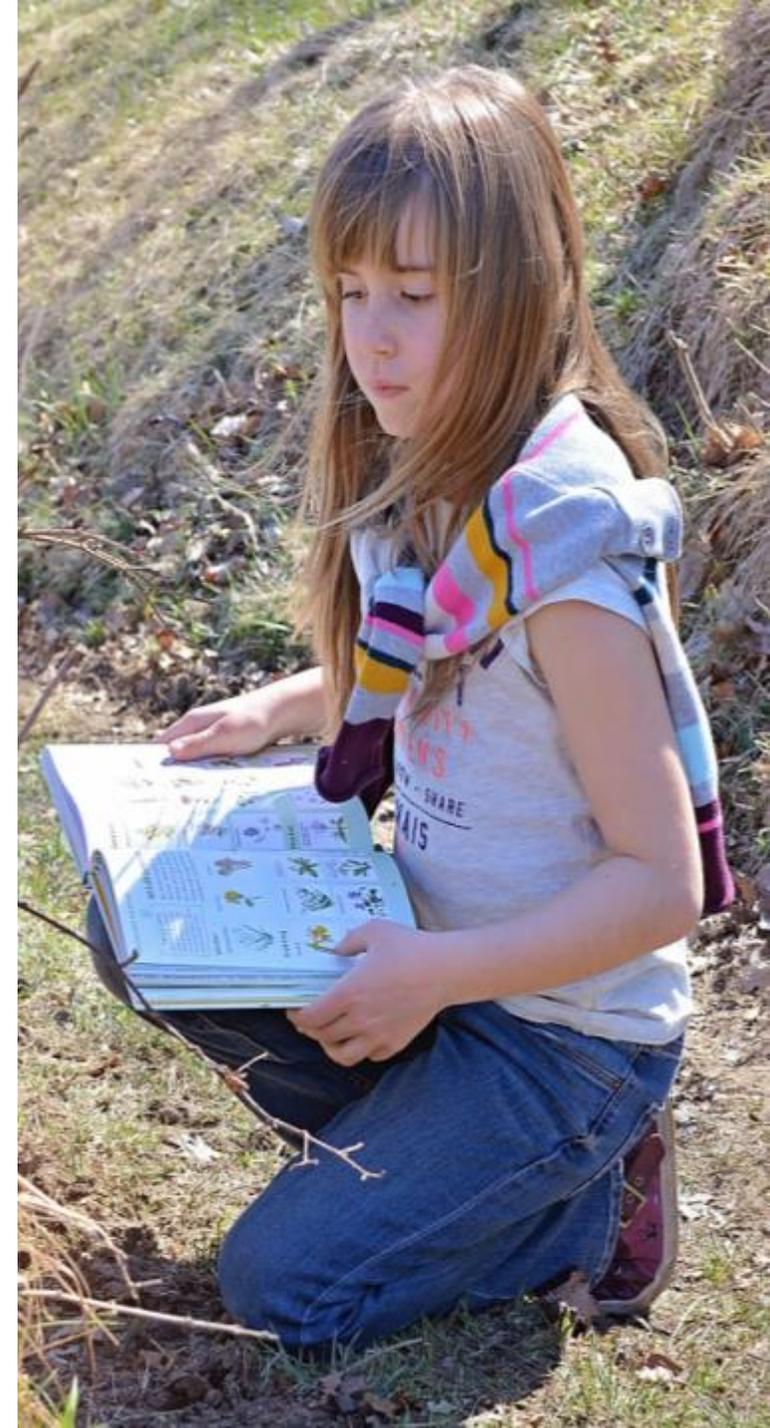
T: Try saying that as a sentence now.

S: **I didn't** like the book.

T: Good. Why **didn't** you like it?

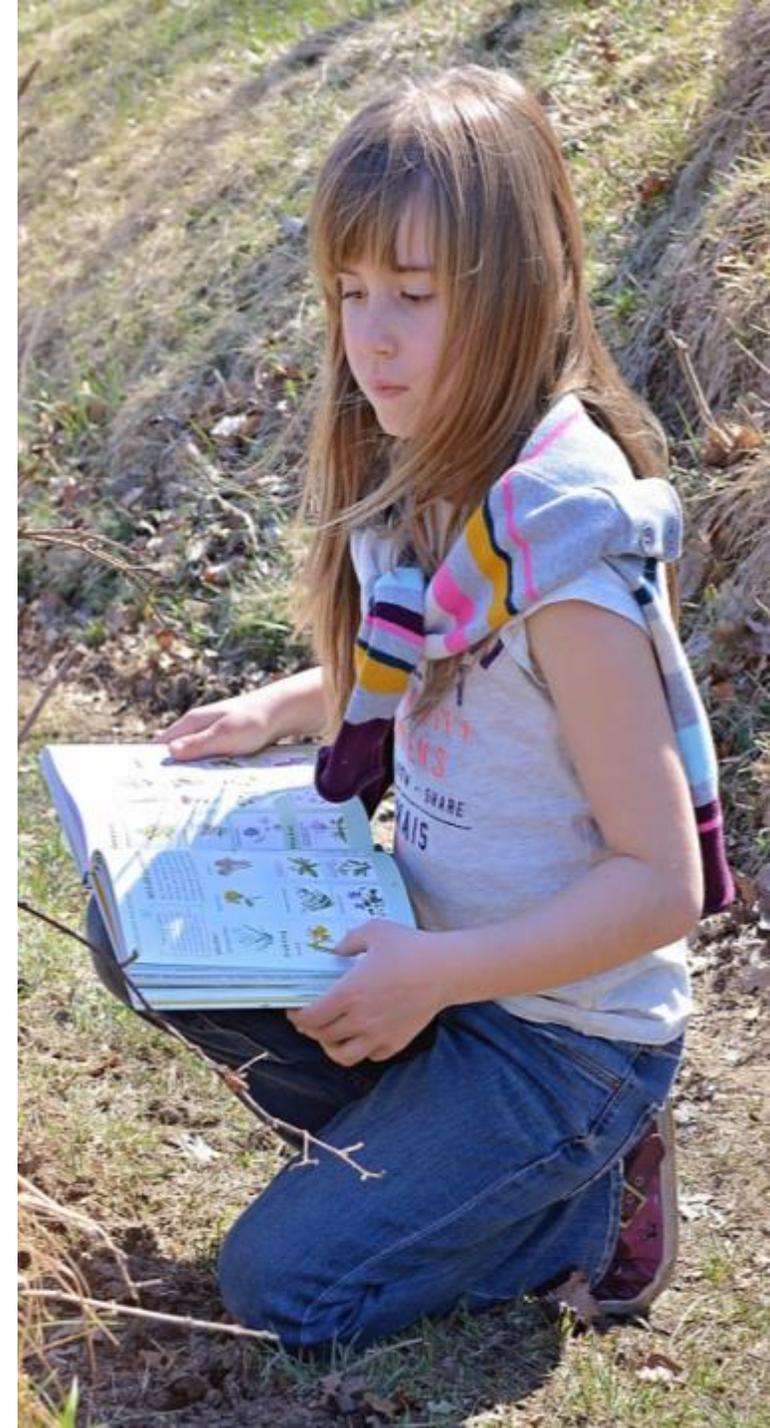
S: It was **difficult**.

T: Good!



# One Word Answers – Recast

- S: I **no** like that book...it was eh diff diff eh... **difficuls**.
- T: **Did** you like the book?
- S: No
- T: I **didn't** like the book



# Ideas from “Reading to Speak”

- Re-enact the reading
- **Debate a topic**
- Read to interview



# Example: Debate on School Uniforms



- Steps for successful speaking practice and grammar correction
  1. Pre-plan
  2. Read and discuss with classmates
  3. Have the debate
  4. Discuss the debates

# Pre-Planning

1. Introduce topic
  - Find out what they already know
  - Find out if they have strong opinions
2. Write vocabulary they may need on the board
3. Predict Grammar issues
  - Use of auxiliary “do”
  - Conditional tenses



# Pre-Planning – Examples Of Correction

T: Who thinks we should wear school uniforms? Do you like your uniform or not?

S1: I **not** like my uniform

T: I **don't** like my uniform. What about you S2?

S2: I ... **don't** like it.

T: Good. Why do we have uniforms?

S3: My mom likes them **to ready**.

T: Why does she like them?

S3: To ready.... In the morning.

T: **To get ready** in the morning?

S3: Yes ... **to get ready** in the morning.

T: Good, who else?



# Read and Discuss Related Articles

1. Divide students into two groups:
  - Group 1: For school uniforms
  - Group 2: Against school uniforms
2. Each group reads an article related to their position
3. Break into pairs – one from each group
  - Students explain articles to each other



# Read and Discuss Articles – Corrections

S1: Schools with uniforms are safer.

S2: That's not true.

S1: The article says bad people are **easier to saw**.

T: **Easier to see**, go on.

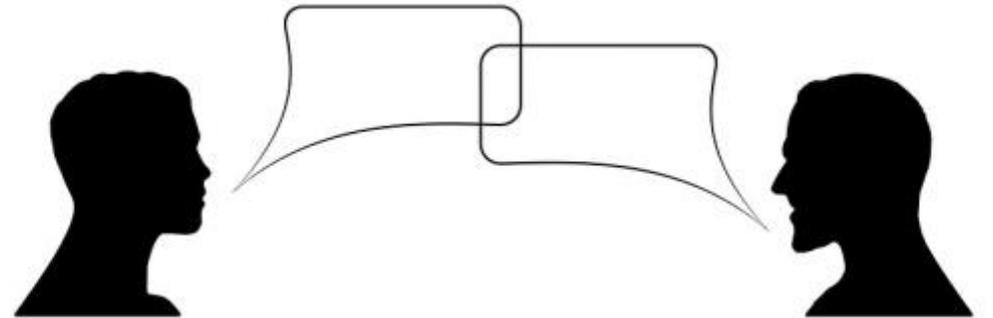
S2: No they aren't. Bad people **will be saw** cause teachers **do no know** them.

T: Bad people **would be seen** because teachers **do not know** them.

**Good. Keep going!**

# Debate

- Students sit in assigned groups
  - Move desks or tables to face each other
- Each student must take a turn to speak
- Teacher moderates
  - Offer opportunities to correct



# Debate – Examples Of Corrections

S1: School uniforms **would limited** our freedom.

T: School uniforms **would limit** our freedom.

Team 2, what do you think about that?

S2: But school uniforms **do us safe**.

T: Pardon? I didn't hear you.

S2: Umm... School uniforms **make us safe**?

T: **Yes, very good** and very good point. How do they make us safe – someone else in your group.

S3: We know who **belong** at school.

T: We know **who belongs** at school. Very good. Back to team 1. How would uniforms limit your freedom?

# Discussion After The Debate

- Begin by having class vote on the topic
- Discussion questions:
  - How did you feel about arguing against your opinion?
  - Did anyone change their opinion? Why?
  - Most of you think \_\_\_\_\_, why?
- Call on students to increase participation
- Try to keep the conversation calm

# Discussion After The Debate – Corrections

T: Did anyone change their opinion?

S1: I never thought about **how made schools safest.**

T: **How what** made schools **safer?**

S1: Uniforms.

T: Oh, okay. Try saying that again.

S1: I never thought about **how uniforms made schools safest.**

T: I never thought about how uniforms **made schools safer.**

S1: **Safer** – oh, okay.

# Unscripted Text

S1: Uh, the boy is the dog, uh, the boy bring bucket and fish net.

S1: Um, maybe he like the lake-

S1: and he found, he found a frog ... in the pond in the lake.

S1: He want to catch the frog ... too, he want to go there but he hooked the river and also his dog or something.

# Corrections

S1: Uh, the boy **is the dog**, uh, the boy **bring** bucket and fish net.

T: **the boy brings a bucket**

S1: Um, maybe he **like** the lake-

T: **he likes the lake, keep going.**

S1: and he found, he found a frog ... in the pond in the lake.

T: **good!**

S1: He **want** to catch the frog ... too, he **want** to go there but **he hooked the river** and also his dog or something.

T: **What did he hook?**

# Spoken Grammar Features

S1: **Uh**, the boy is the dog, **uh**, the boy bring bucket and fish net.

S1: **Um**, maybe he like the lake-

S1: and he found, **he found** a frog ... in the pond in the lake.

S1: He want to catch the frog ... too, he want to go there but he hooked the river and also his dog or something.

# Summary

- **Recast** – Simply repeat what your student said with the correct form
- **Clarifying questions** – Two types
  - Ask the student a question that makes them notice the mistake
  - Pretend you didn't hear the response and ask them to repeat it
- **Negotiating meaning** – Ask the student clarifying questions and arrive at a corrected sentence

# Last Thoughts

- Expect your students to struggle
  - They need time and practice, expect...
    - Slow speech
    - Pauses
    - Fillers
  - You can't teach basketball without letting students play, and...
    - you can't teach English without letting students speak!





# Thank you!

*See you during the  
post-discussion on Ning!*

# References and resources

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