The student of a second language will realize that in all languages, people express ideas, needs, and desires; make jokes; give descriptions; use idioms. What they need to know is to observe caution in how the second language operates, and that some things are called by different names in different languages. For example, an English-speaking student of French may automatically think that “une veste” in French means “a vest”, whereas it really means “a short jacket.”

*The Role of the First Language in Foreign Language Learning,* states, “Research shows that the first language has a small but important role to play in communicating meaning and content.” This is indeed true about the role of native language in second language acquisition. The student will realize that the same patterns he/she used to learn his/her language: listening and comprehension, reading and writing, conversation, repetition, audiovisual aids, charts, maps, signs, role-play; are also used to teach the new language, and he begins to realize that there is nothing weird or impossible about another language.

Professor Paul Nation

During the 1950s most linguists believed that errors were due to interference from the mother tongue, and they placed a great deal of importance on contrastive analysis. According to this theory, languages should be systematically analyzed and compared in order to identify structures that would be difficult to learn. For example, if the first and second languages were similar, language learning would be easy, but if the languages were dissimilar, learning the second language would be more difficult. Linguists sought to use the formal distinctions between the learner’s first and target language to predict errors.

Research has shown that all learners appear to go through basically the same stages in the process of learning a language. Corder’s work in the 1960s gave rise to the field of error analysis, which examined systematic errors to determine the underlying rule-governed behaviors of learners. These studies showed that though some errors are due to transfer from the learner’s first language, many have nothing to do with the first language; instead, they are based on developmentalism (learning develops in stages as learners interact with the environment). Many errors reflect the learner’s creative capability of using language.

Initially, L2 learners rely heavily on L1 structures and even vocabulary to get meaning across. As the L2 becomes more internalized, the L1 is relied upon less and less. Investigations of errors by second language learners have revealed surprising statistics. Although some errors are the direct result of native-language interference, the percentage is not so large as had previously been believed. Numerous studies have shown that developmental errors far outweigh errors caused by interference.
Examples of typical interference errors are:

- *I am agree with you.*
- *Put attention!*
- *Does Juan can sing?*
- *I don’t know what time is it.*

Nowadays, errors are classified as:

1. Slip: an accidental and trivial mistake in speaking
2. Error: a systematic deviation made by learners who have not yet mastered the rules of the target language.
3. Mistake: if one says something incorrect and then corrects himself, that’s a mistake, not an error.

A lot of mistakes are caused by multiple factors. A learner may overgeneralize a rule or may assume that a structure can be used in the same way as in the first language, on the basis of evidence that it sometimes is and overapply it. Other factors can contribute, too; learners may be more likely to make mistakes with a certain tense, for instance, if they are concentrating on another one, or to make more mistakes if they are tired. In fact, the same mistake might have different origins on different occasions.

H. D. Brown (1994:205) offers the following distinctions. A mistake, he says, is "a performance error that is either a random guess or a ‘slip,’ in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly." According to this definition, a native speaker could make a mistake in her native language.

Errors, on the other hand, are problems that a native speaker would not have. Brown defines an error as "noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner."

The key term in this definition is "interlanguage." As someone learns a foreign language, the errors that person makes indicate her/his level of proficiency. Clearly, the errors of a beginner are different from the errors of an advanced student, and what were once errors can become mere mistakes.

Edge (1989:9–11) offers simpler definitions which are especially important for classroom teachers to keep in mind. He says a slip is what a learner can self-correct, and an error is what a learner can’t self-correct. An attempt is a guess or when neither the intended meaning nor the structure is clear to the teacher.
This distinction between error and mistake, or between error and slip, is reason enough for teachers to abandon the practice of immediately correcting students. Often, a brief pause or a nonverbal cue is sufficient for students to recognize and then correct mistakes they make while speaking. The teacher simply has to allow that pause to occur. Errors and attempts are different, of course, because students can’t correct themselves, but that doesn’t mean the teacher must.

The reason why teachers sometimes say that mistakes shouldn't be avoided is that they believe one of two things or both:

1. Mistakes are an inseparable part of the learning process because the only way to avoid language mistakes would be to avoid speaking and writing in a foreign language, and that would be bad. Therefore mistakes are inevitable.
2. Making mistakes, and having them corrected, is a good way to learn a language. So mistakes are good.

On the other hand, there are many different ways you can correct the mistakes without actually giving the answer. On written texts for example, you can just underline the mistake and write what kind of mistake it is (i.e., grammar, structure, vocabulary) and let the student correct his mistakes as homework.

Errors occur for many reasons. One obvious cause is interference from the native language. All learners may make errors because they assume that the target language and their native language are similar, when in fact they are different.
This kind of overgeneralization is also the cause of many mistaken guesses. Another obvious cause is simply an incomplete knowledge of the target language. A third common cause of errors is the complexity of the target language. Certain aspects of English (e.g., the s in the third person singular present tense) are difficult for all students, no matter what their native languages. Spelling is also problematic for nonnative speakers of English (and many native speakers, too!). Finally, fossilization occurs when an individual reaches a satisfactory level of competence in the L2 and does not worry about persistent mistakes she may make, which may not inhibit communication. (Brown 1994:203–225, and Ellis 1994:47–71, for a thorough discussion of causes of errors.)

There are many reasons why teachers should correct every error and why teachers shouldn’t. The most frequent reason given for not wanting correction was the negative impact of correction on students’ confidence and motivation (affective filter). The most frequent reason given for wanting correction was the importance of learning to speak English correctly.
Frequent reasons why teachers should not correct every error

1. Correction may develop something like a barrier, and students will be afraid of making mistakes and will not speak or study English with pleasure.
2. If teachers correct every error students make, pupils begin hating them.
3. If the teacher corrects all the errors students make, then the students will think that they are dumb and not good enough to speak English.
4. Correcting every mistake would take too much time.
5. The student can’t even process all of those corrections.
6. Students will forget the corrections.
7. The correction of each mistake will confuse a student.
8. The teacher should correct the errors in order to let the students know what’s wrong and what’s right.
9. Every mistake should be taken care of at the moment it is made; otherwise students will keep on making the same mistake over and over again.
10. If a teacher doesn’t correct errors, he is not a real teacher.
11. Teachers should be the main way to develop students’ skills.

How much should you correct?

- Decide priorities.
- Choose a method of correction.
- Devise follow-up work for both the class and individuals.

Explain your marking system

- GR = grammar
- WO = word order
- Sp = spelling
- L = Incorrect choice of lexis
- ^ = Omission
- X = Addition
- E = Expression
Distinguish between three main categories of errors

1. Those which lead to misunderstanding or breakdown of communication - caused by:
   - Translation, confusing grammatical patterns too long or complex sentences too short
2. Lesser but often irritating errors -
   - wrong tense
   - non-agreement
   - word order
   - articles omitted or misused
   - spelling mistakes
   - punctuation

Samples of students' writing:

1. Poor grammar: I has driven to London shopping. In the afternoon I come back, and I've eaten anything, after this I went tio a pub. At 11 o'clock I went home in my bed.

2. Poor graphical skills - letters aren't vertical enough: He coming from Airport Hintero by Train to Brighton From ppighton to my flat by taxi I have flat near school. I walking from my flat to school.

3. Poor spelling & punctuation - I give you Some instrustions how to get to my adreas or my place You can comeing from heathrou airport to victory station buy anderGraon and after you can comeing by trian to Hove.

4. Direct translation - I'm very pleasant for me that you spend some days with me in my town, but you needn't go to a hotel, I think is much better that you go to my house. The form easier to get there is that you take a taxi, and indicate my address.