

PROVIDING GRADES AND FEEDBACK TO SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENTS: SUPPLEMENT 2

The Error Type Table

(For instructors who want to invest more in L2 students' linguistic errors, you can refer to this document for specific suggestions on different types of errors. This document first talks about the definitions of "performance errors," "interlanguage errors," and "L1 influence errors." It then uses a table to visually represent the relation between specific error types and whether students can self-correct the errors from the second language acquisition perspective. The last section focuses on how instructors could respond to the errors that students may not be able to self-correct.)

Generation Description of Errors

There are typically three types of errors from the second language acquisition perspective

1. Performance Errors

These are the types of errors that result from "a slip of the tongue" in spoken language. In written language, these types of errors can likewise be attributed to slips of concentration or memory. Typographical errors also fall into the category of performance errors. All users of every language – even highly proficient native speakers – make these types of errors on occasion.

2. Interlanguage (IL) Errors (sometimes referred to as "Learner Language Errors")

These are the types of errors that result from an incorrect understanding of the grammar of the target language (TL). Note that the term "target language" refers to any language that a person is in the process of acquiring, whether it is his or her first language (L1) or an additional language (L2), and whether he or she is engaged in formal language instruction or informal interaction with the language.

Note that the syntactical and morphological knowledge encoded on items in the lexicon, as described on the SLA supplement, constitute a type of grammatical knowledge distinct from, but complementary to, the type of grammatical knowledge stored in the mental grammar. Thus, limitations in the lexicon can result in IL errors.

3. L1-Influence Errors

These are the types of errors caused by "influence" or "interference" from the speaker's L1.

Error Type Table

Below is a table that shows common examples of Performance Errors, Interlanguage Errors and L1 Influence errors. In the first column, we list the three main errors discussed in the first section. Although Interlanguage and L1 influence errors originate from different sources, they can both result in similar errors. For example, a verb-form error could be the result of interlanguage development or L1 influence. In the second column, a more detailed description of these errors is provided and we also offer eight specific interlanguage/L1 influence errors. In the third column, whether students can self-correct these errors is suggested.

Following this table, we offer a detailed description of all error types and the recommended strategies.

Error Types	Description	Is it likely that a student will be able to correct each of these developmental errors, if the errors are called to his or her attention?
Performance Errors	Any error that is made on a strictly occasional basis is likely to be a performance error. These errors typically include spelling errors, punctuation and capitalization.	Yes, students can correct these errors. We would also encourage you hold L2 students responsible for correcting these errors once they have been offered adequate instruction in class or in your previous assignment feedback.
Interlanguage and L1 Influence Errors (The following pages provide detailed descriptions of these error types and the recommended responding strategies)	Type 1: Verb-form errors	Probably yes
	Type 2: Subject/verb agreement errors	Probably yes
	Type 3: Relative clause errors	Probably not
	Type 4: Incorrect use of determiners	Probably not
	Type 5: Incorrect use of noun forms	Probably not
	Type 6: Incorrect use of prepositions	Probably not
	Type 7: Incorrect pronoun use	Probably yes
	Type 8: Sentence structure	Probably not

Strategies for responding to the types of errors listed above

In general, it's a good idea to mark language-use errors on a clean copy of the student's paper after content comments have been made and a content grade has been assigned. See the tip sheet **"Providing Grades and Feedback on Multilingual Writers' Work"** for advice on assigning a "grammar grade" separately from a content grade. Many instructors find it easiest to mark language-use errors by hand on a hard copy of the paper. An example can be found in **Supplement 4: Using Error Codes to Respond to an L2 Paper**.

Performance errors

Choose a highlighter color that you will use consistently to mark performance errors. Make sure all students understand that they are expected to self-correct errors highlighted in this color.

Interlanguage and L1 Influence Errors

Type 1: Verb-form errors

Underline or circle each verb-form error and annotate it with the code VF. Provide students with an error code key, in which you explain that VF stands for "Verb Form" and means that the student chose the wrong verb tense or aspect. (Tense = past or present; Aspect = perfect, simple, or progressive)

Type 2: Subject/verb agreement errors

Underline or circle each instance of incorrect subject/verb agreement and annotate it with the code AGR or with the code VF. Provide students with an error code key, in which you explain that AGR stands for "Agreement" and means that the subject and verb of the sentence do not agree.

Type 3: Relative clause errors

There are three key ways in which a relative clause can be used incorrectly:

- 1) The relativizer, or relative pronoun, may be missing. (Relativizers are words like "that," "which," and "who.")
- 2) The relativizer may be misleading. For example, the student may use the relativizer "that" in reference to a person.
- 3) The word order within the relative clause may be incorrect.

In situation 1, underline or circle the place in the text where the relativizer should be and annotate it with the code MW. Provide students with an error code key, in which you explain that MW stands for "Missing Word."

In situation 2, underline or circle the relativizer and annotate it with the code WC. Provide students with an error code key, in which you explain that WC stands for "Word Choice."

In situation 3, underline or circle the entire clause and annotate it with the code WO. Provide students with an error code key, in which you explain that WO stands for "Word Order." The WO code can be used for other instances of word-order errors, as well.

Type 4: Incorrect use of determiners

Determiners are words such as “many,” “all,” “some,” “the,” “a,” and “an.” It is notoriously difficult to teach the correct use of English determiners, especially in light of the fact that different varieties of English use determiners in different ways. Think, for example, of British “I’m in hospital” vs. American “I’m in the hospital.” Many international students learn British English; thus, their confusion over the accurate and appropriate use of determiners may stem, to some degree, from the differences between American and British English. Most of the difficulty, however, stems from the fact that the rules governing determiner use are generally not captured well in prescriptive grammars. Thus, students whose innate knowledge of determiner use is not yet complete have few reliable resources that can help them understand how to use determiners correctly. A handful of sources do list reasonably comprehensive and comprehensible rules for using determiners in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways. One of the best of these sources can be found online at this URL:

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/determiners/determiners.htm>

Some students find this website to be helpful; others do not.

Unless you have a good deal of time to work individually with students in helping them understand how to use determiners correctly in their writing, you may want to ignore these kinds of errors in students’ writing. If meaning is substantially affected by the student’s choice of determiner, you might consider providing him or her with options for expressing his or her meaning more accurately. If meaning is not substantially affected by the student’s choice of determiner, it might be best to simply overlook this type of error in a paper that contains many other errors. If you decide to focus attention on a student’s use of determiners, underline or circle the portion of text in which a determiner is used inaccurately or inappropriately and annotate it with the code DET. Provide students with an error code key, in which you explain that DET stands for “Determiner.” If desired, you can use the following three alternate codes, instead of the generic DET: MDET, DETC, UDET. These codes stand, respectively, for “Missing Determiner,” “Determiner Choice,” and “Unnecessary Determiner.”

Type 5: incorrect use of noun forms

This type of error is often linked to errors in the use of determiners. For this reason, students may have difficulty self correcting these types of errors. Moreover, certain phrases, like “eating habits,” use a plural noun in idiomatic ways that won’t be immediately obvious to an L2 speaker. If you want students to try to self correct errors in noun number, underline or circle the noun in question and annotate it with the code WF. Provide students with an error code key, in which you explain that WF stands for “Word Form.” You may need to further explain that the code “Word Form” refers to the question of whether a noun should be singular or plural.

Type 6: Incorrect use of prepositions

The use of prepositions is largely idiomatic; thus it can be difficult for L2 speakers to self correct a misused preposition. It is probably best either to ignore this type of error or to provide the correct preposition. It may also be helpful to share the following links with students:

<http://www.ozdic.com/>

<http://prowritingaid.com/Free-Online-Collocations-Dictionary.aspx>

<http://oxforddictionary.so8848.com/>

<http://collocations.longmandictionariesonline.com/>

These online collocations dictionaries can help students discover which prepositions frequently appear with which verbs and nouns.

Type 7: Incorrect pronoun use

Underline or circle each incorrectly used pronoun and annotate it with the code WC. Provide students with an error code key in which you explain that WC stands for “Word Choice.”

Type 8: Sentence structure

Consider highlighting a syntactically infelicitous sentence and writing a note in the margin explaining that the sentence isn’t very reader friendly. Ask the student if he or she can break down the highlighted sentence into shorter sentences, each of which expresses a single idea in a very explicit and straightforward manner. This strategy will be effective in helping many students self correct infelicitous syntactical structures. However, if this strategy doesn’t work, you may consider doing the following:

- 1) highlight the infelicitous sentence or sentences
- 2) in the margin of the paper, provide alternate ways of expressing the ideas contained in the sentence
- 3) ask students to reword using one of your suggestions
- 4) point out that your suggested wordings may not accurately capture the student’s intended meaning. Let the student know that, if this is the case, he or she should meet with you, with a Sweetland writing instructor, or with a Sweetland peer tutor for help in finding a more reader-friendly way of expressing his or her ideas accurately in this particular passage.