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**THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES MADE BY ESL STUDENTS AND
WAYS OF CORRECTING THEM**

ESL students practice speaking, reading, writing and listening. However, it is when speaking that they find themselves in a tight corner. This is the case because speaking mistakes might make them look bad. Speaking is the most difficult skill to master since it takes more practice and requires a lot more confidence as it

involves real-time comprehension and reaction than any other skill. Let's consider the most common mistakes and see how we can help our students move past them towards better fluency.

Word order might pose a problem for ESL students in general, but when it comes to questions, the mistake is obvious. This type of mistake when asking questions is often accompanied by the wrong intonation which makes the question sound like a statement or an incomplete sentence.

It is very easy to tell when a student has not effectively learned the difference between countable and uncountable nouns. They make mistakes with much, many, a little and a few, and less and fewer, giving us phrases like, "I have a few money", and "I read much books".

There are words that ESL students typically mix up; some are quite similar like fun and funny, or farther and further, and there are others that are easily confused like watch, see and look.

Quite often, ESL students use a noun as the subject of the sentence and yet feel compelled to add the pronoun right after it, e.g. My company it is big.

Subject-verb agreement is a big problem in both speaking and writing, e.g. He has a lot of money. It is very common in ESL learners but a hurdle they should overcome if they want to make a better impression when speaking.

A correct preposition is one of the most wide-spread issues with students. They use the wrong preposition in so many cases and so often, it is impossible to correct every single one.

Students often confuse pronouns giving rise to all types of funny statements, from them claiming to have spent "your" money to reports of parents having cleaned "your" room.

Mistaking words that are similar to the words in the native language is another mistake that often takes place. Each language has words that may sound a lot like words in English but have completely different meanings, and students should be careful with these.

Using inappropriate language can pose another problem for students as they have a hard time figuring out what is appropriate or inappropriate depending on the context.

A student may say something that is perfectly correct, grammatically speaking, but what happens if they put the stress on the wrong word? It may lead to confusion or misunderstanding. Consider the difference between, "He didn't pay for one lesson" vs "He didn't pay for one lesson".

What can be done to help students without discouraging them from speaking?

There are two tiers to correcting and improving these mistakes. The first tier is the easiest to attack; it is composed of the typical grammatical errors students can work on through extended practice and worksheets. The second tier involves things that students have a hard time understanding, like the difference between

informal and more formal language, intonation and stress, as well as the other nuances of the English language.

When it comes to correcting grammar mistakes while students are speaking, every ESL teacher comes to this hard realization: you cannot correct every single mistake. Firstly, it seriously hinders fluency and does not help boost morale if students are being corrected every few seconds or so. Secondly, it is simply impossible to accomplish unless you record what a student says and replay it so you can correct every single mistake. Thus, how can we correct these mistakes in a way that will not affect overall fluency? The best course of action is to find some way of signalling the mistake. For example, if the same student typically forgets the s in the third person singular, trace an s in the air or flash a card with the letter s when they make this mistake.

How can we improve mistakes of the second tier? One of the keys is exposure. Exposure to the English language, especially outside the ESL classroom. The more ESL students hear native English speakers using expressions correctly, using sarcasm and colloquial phrases, greeting others and making jokes, the easier it will be for them to grasp these differences and start using them themselves. In addition to exposure, role plays are instrumental in teaching proper intonation, word stress and the use of appropriate expressions.

Our task as ESL teachers is not only to teach, but it is also our duty to motivate our learners to speak out and participate. We need to help reduce their fears and provide a comfortable environment for them to learn and to make them feel more at ease. Speaking is by far the most important skill needed when it comes to ESL learning. Speaking is everywhere in real life, and those students who have more of a positive attitude when it comes to language learning will likely have more confidence and willingness to perform and participate.