"How mean can you be?"

A study of teacher trainee and teacher views on error correction

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*December 2010*

Degree project in English Language Teaching 15 HP

Teaching methodology and practice

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Abstract

The present study investigates three teacher trainees and three teachers’ views on error correction during oral communication, and the similarities and differences between them. These six people were interviewed separately and they were asked six questions; the first five questions were asked to all six people but the last question differed between the teacher trainees and the teachers. My result shows that the teacher trainees are insecure when it comes to error correction and that the teachers’ sees it as a part of their job, and that is the biggest difference between them. The teacher trainees and the teachers focus on the same types of errors and those are the errors that can cause problems in communication, and that can be pronunciation errors, grammatical errors or vocabulary errors.

Key words: Error correction, correction techniques, teacher beliefs, error types
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1. Introduction

The traditional view when it comes to error correction is that the teacher, or the material that the pupils are working with, should correct every major errors that the pupils’ are making. In the 1960s there was research going on that investigated whether or not teachers should explain explicit grammar to the pupils’ in the second language classroom, and the traditional view of error correction derives from that time. However, today there are researchers saying that the pupils’ should be corrected and get feedback when their utterances cannot be understood and that it also depends on the types of activities that pupils’ are working with (Crookes & Chaudron in Celce-Murcia 2001, p. 31 & 40, Harmer 2007, p. 146).

I got the inspiration for this topic during my practice period when I read the English B course. I had my own lessons for six weeks and then I realized that it was very difficult for me to know when I should error correct and what types of errors I should focus on. There are many questions that a language teacher has to ask him or herself: When should I correct? What types of errors should I focus on and what types of techniques should I use to correct?

1.1 Aim

The aim of this essay is to explore the views of three teacher trainees and three teachers when it comes to error correction during oral communication. The second aim is to examine the similarities and differences between them.

2. Background

In this section I am going to go through some of the research that has been done in this field and look at teacher trainees and teacher beliefs, what types of mistakes there are, when a teacher should error correct and what types of mistakes he or she should focus on. At the end of this section I am going to present different types of error correction techniques.

2.1 Teacher trainees and teacher beliefs

The research about beliefs is a huge field and Pajeres maintains that “[c]onvincing research suggests that beliefs are the best predictors of individual behavior, and, in particular, that teachers’ beliefs influence teachers’ perceptions and judgments, which, in turn, affect classroom performance” (Pajeres 1993, p. 1). Research on teacher beliefs suggest that it derives from different sources:

1. Their own experience as language learners
How they themselves were taught is often reflected in the way teachers´ teach.

2. **Experiences of what works best**

When it comes to beliefs about teaching, teaching experience is the primary source.

3. **Established practice**

Different schools might use, and prefer, certain practices and teaching styles.

4. **Personal factors**

The teacher might prefer a certain type of activity because it fits that person’s personality well.

5. **Educationally based or research based principles**

Teachers may try to use a specific learning principle in their classroom that they themselves have drawn their own conclusions about.

6. **Principles derived from an approach or method**

Certain teachers may believe and trust the effectiveness of a certain method and use it in his or her classroom (Richards & Lockhart 1994, p. 30-31)

When it comes to teacher trainees and their beliefs, they tend to think that they have many of the qualities that they think a good teacher should have, that they are better than other trainees and that they will not face problems in their classroom like other teachers do (Pajares 1993, p. 1). The views and options that the teacher trainees have are very much colored by past experiences and “[e]ven during their student teaching experience, they simply return to places of their past, complete with memories and preconceptions of days gone by, preconceptions that often remain largely unaffected by higher education” (Pajeres 1993, p. 1).

2.2 **Different types of mistakes**

Harmer (2007) refers to Edge (1989) who argues that we can divide the pupils´ mistakes into three different categories: "Errors" are mistakes that teachers needs to explain because the pupils cannot correct themselves, "Attempts" are when the pupil cannot say something in a correct way yet but at least he tries, and "Slips" are mistakes that when it has been pointed out
the pupils can correct themselves. According to Harmer, "Errors" are the mistakes that concern the teachers the most (Harmer 2007, p. 137).

According to Ellis (1997), there are ways for teachers to try to distinguish between errors and mistakes. Ellis gives an example with the words "contain" and "contained" and writes that a student shows a lack of knowledge if he or she, consistently, uses the word "contain" where "contained" should be used, and that would be an error. But if the student sometimes says "contain" and sometimes "contained" it indicates some kind of knowledge and this would be seen as a slip, a mistake. Teachers can also ask the student to try to correct their own utterances. If they are not able to it, then we are looking at an error. If they are able to correct themselves, then the student has made a mistake. But Ellis points out that it may not always be as simple as this and that it can be hard to make a clear distinction between errors and mistakes (Ellis 1997, p. 17).

In 1967, Corder focused on looking at errors that language learners made. Error analysis, the investigation of second language learners’ errors, showed that the errors that language learners made did not all originate from their first language, that the Contrastive analysis argued for, and Error analysis argues that the errors must have its origin in the learner-internal (Mitchell & Myles 2004, p. 38).

There are two sources from which "Errors" mostly occur and the first source is L1 Interference and that is when the pupils’ L1 language comes into contact with the English language and confusion can occur, and these mistakes can occur when it comes to, for example, grammar, vocabulary or the level of sounds (Harmer 2007, p. 137).

The other source is called Developmental errors and has to do with "over-generalization" among the pupils’ when it comes to grammatical rules, and Harmer describes this by saying that “[w]hat seems to be happening is that the child starts to over-generalize a new rule that has been (subconsciously) learnt, and, as a result even makes mistakes with things that he or she seemed to have know before” (Harmer 2007, p. 138). Later on, when the pupils get a better understanding, everything will be sorted out and they will stop over-generalize. Developmental errors are a part of a natural process when it comes to language learning and these errors are a part of the pupils Interlanguage that can be explained as a version of the language that they are trying to learn and it will re-shape on their way to really mastering the language (Harmer 2007, p. 137).
2.3 What types of errors should a teacher correct and when?

Studies that have looked at when teachers tend to correct shows that they usually focus on content errors, grammatical and pronunciation errors and errors that have to do with vocabulary (Richard & Lockhart 1994, p 190) and Goodwin (in Celce-Murcia 2001) mentions three different types of errors that teachers should correct:

1. Errors which cause a breakdown in communication

2. Errors which occur as a pattern, not as isolated mistakes

3. Errors which relate to the pronunciation points we are teaching.

It is the errors that learners make that guide us toward what to teach (Goodwin in Celce-Murcia 2001, p. 130-131).

Allwright (1975) shows that teachers are not consistent with what types of errors they correct and to what extent they corrected particular pupils´. To avoid confusion among the pupils, Allwright argues that teacher needs to be more consistent when it comes to error correction. The research also shows that teachers are not often precise when it comes to feedback and “Allwright (1975) observes that teachers often give imprecise feedback on learner errors. Rather than showing the learner where the error occurred and why it was incorrect, they tend merely to repeat the correct target language form” (Richards & Lockhart 1994, p 191).

The types of activities that pupils are working with may be one factor that decides when error correction should or should not occur. When it comes to activities that are meant to train the pupils´ fluency, the teacher might accept more errors than during a more controlled activity, but sometimes the teacher might feel forced to interfere even though it is a fluency activity. If the communication breaks down and the pupils´ have no idea how to keep the conversation going then the teacher might have to step in and if the teachers choose to do some form of correction it will be more “gentle”:

If this is the right moment to point out a language feature, we may offer a form of correction. Provided we offer this help with tact and discretion, there is no reason why such interventions should not be helpful. But however we do it, our correction will be more ´gentle: in other words, we will not stop the whole activity and insist on everyone saying the item correctly before being allowed to continue with their discussion (Harmer 2007, p. 146).
One way of offering gentle correction might be to reformulate what the pupil has said. But when it comes to fluency work, teachers have to be aware not to interrupt the flow of the conversation by stepping in and correcting too often. The teacher must make a decision whether the correction he or she wants to make can help the conversation to move along or if it is not necessary at that moment (Harmer 2007, p. 146).

Lazaraton (in Celce-Murcia 2001) talks about meaning-centered activities and accuracy based activities, and during meaning-centered activities the use of explicit error correction might not be a good idea because it might disrupt the communication. If the teacher notices that errors do occur during these activities, he or she should write it down and take it up in whole class or individually with a certain pupil later on. But if the pupils´ are working with an accuracy-based activity, the teacher must decide if he or she wants to correct an error that is being made and have the context in mind and also what type of error is being made:

Some teachers choose to correct only those errors which impede communication (such as incorrect word order) and ignore less serious errors (such as third person singular –s or phoneme confusion). Teachers must determine, perhaps in consultation with their students, how these errors should be corrected, and by whom (Lazaraton in Celce-Murcia 2001, p. 110).

There are studies that claim that pupils´ cannot make use of teachers’ feedback, but “immediate uptake cannot be the sole criterion of its usefulness. Negative evidence gives students the feedback they need to reject or modify their hypotheses about how the target language is formed or functions” (Larsen-Freeman in Celce-Murcia 2001, p. 262).

### 2.4 Different types of error correction techniques

According to Harmer, teacher correction has two stages; the teacher will show the pupils´ that something is not correct and then help them to correct it if necessary. To show incorrectness can be done in many different ways and Harmer presents six different techniques:

1. **Repeating:** The teacher can ask the pupil to repeat what he or she has said and this can with the help of intonation signal to the pupil that something is not correct.

2. **Echoing:** This can be a very effective way of showing that something is not correct in a pupil´s utterance, because the teacher repeats what the pupil has said and emphases the part that was not correct.
3. **Statement and question:** We can ask the pupil if he or she thinks that the utterance was correct.

4. **Expression:** A facial expression or gesture from the teacher can be enough to show the pupils’ that something was not correct, but this works best when the teacher and pupils’ know each other well and this method should be done with care so that the pupil do not feel that the teacher is making fun of them.

5. **Hinting:** If the teacher knows that the pupils’ know a certain rule but does not use it in the right way, the teacher can give a little hint to help the pupil to correct him or herself.

6. **Reformulation:** The teacher can repeat the correct version of the sentence that the pupil has uttered, and not make a big issue of it. (Harmer 2007, p. 144-145).

   In their book “How languages are learned”, Lightbown and Spada refer to Lyster and Ranta (1997) who have done observations in French immersion classrooms and looked at how teachers gave feedback and how the pupils´ responded to it. From these observations, Lyster and Ranta came up with six different feedback types:

1. **Explicit correction:** The teacher provides the correct form and tells the pupil that what he or she said was incorrect.

2. **Recasts:** This technique “involve the teacher’s reformulation of all or part of a student’s utterance, minus the error” (Lightbown & Spada 200, p. 126). When a teacher use this technique they do not start it by saying "You mean", You should say" or "Use this word".

3. **Clarification requests:** The teacher asks the pupil to repeat what he or she has said, and it can indicate to the pupil that the utterance was incorrect in some way or that the teacher did not understand.

4. **Metalinguistic feedback:** These comments indicate to the pupil that there is some kind of error in their utterance, but the teacher does not tell what it is. The teacher might point in the direction of the error by using grammatical terms such as feminine or plural to signal what type of mistake the pupils´ make

5. **Elicitation:** This method refers to at least three different techniques that teachers can use and “[f]irst, teachers elicit completion of their own utterance (for example, ‘Its a´...). Second, teachers use questions to elicit correct forms (for example,... ‘How do we say x in English?’).
Third, teachers occasionally ask students to reformulate their utterance” (Lightbown & Spada 2006, p. 126-127).

6. Repetition: The teacher repeats what the pupil have said, and the teacher often adjust their intonation on the part that was incorrect in the sentence.

In their observations, Lyster and Ranta found that the teachers in content-based French immersion classes mostly used recasts, and recasts can also be described as “(...) responses to non-target non-native speaker utterances that provide a target-like way of expressing the original meaning” (Mitchell & Myles 2004, p. 178). Studies have shown that recasts are effective in 20-25 % of the time and “[t]his effectiveness may be because they occur when the learner has reached a stage of grammatical competence that allows him or her to perceive the slight difference in use” (Celca-Murcia 2001, p. 41).

The teachers used different kinds of techniques depending on what type of mistakes the pupils made. Recasts were mostly used when the pupils made grammatical or phonological errors and when the pupils’ made lexical errors the teachers often made a clarification request. The study showed that recasts were a less effective technique to use when the teachers wanted to correct grammatical errors but it worked well with phonological errors, when the researchers looked at how many percent of the errors were later repaired by the pupils’ (Mitchell & Myles 2004, p. 181).

3. Method

I have interviewed three teacher trainees and three teachers about their views on error correction. The teacher trainees and the teachers are six people that I know and I did not actively chose to interview six women; I asked both men and women but I only got six responses and these six people happened to be women. I have given these six women the names Anna, Charlotte, Maria, Linda, Annie and Sandra, and these are not their real names but fictive ones to ensure their anonymity. Anna, Charlotte and Maria are teacher trainees and Linda, Annie and Sandra are teachers.

I wanted to know these six peoples’ opinions about error correction and that is why I chose to interview them, because then they had the opportunity to speak more freely and I had the opportunity to ask follow up questions if there was something that I wanted to know more about. To use a questionnaire could also have been an option, but then I was afraid to miss out on some of their opinions and my possibility to ask follow up questions disappeared. When it
comes to a questionnaire, the same questions are asked in the same order to many different people. In an interview, the interviewer can change the way him or her asks the questions and also the question order, it can be adjusted to the situation and to the person that is being interviewed (Ekholm & Fransson 2002, p. 78). The positive thing about using a questionnaire is that many people can answer your questions rather quickly, but the people that are answering it cannot always ask for help with the questions if they do not understand what it means and the person answering a questionnaire does not need to feel pressured about answering the questions in a well thought out way and that can be negative for the person who has made the questionnaire. One of the positive things about choosing to interview instead of handing out a questionnaire is that the person who is interviewing has the opportunity to ask more questions until he or she thinks that the respond is intelligible. But people that are not used to interviewing may not always take the opportunity that is given when it comes to asking for more developed answers, instead the feeling of wanting to ask new questions takes over (Ekholm & Fransson 2002, p. 53-54 & 88).

During the interviews, I asked six questions and the first five questions I asked both the teacher trainees and the teachers, and the sixth question differed between them. First, I wanted to know their general view when it came to error correction, what they thought about when they heard the term, and this question was asked as an introduction to try to get the women to start to think about error correction and then it would hopefully be easier to answer the other questions. I asked Questions 2-4 because I wanted to know more precisely when they correct, what they correct and what types of techniques they use, and those questions are “When do you error correct”, “What types of errors do you correct” and “What types of techniques do you use when you error correct”. Question number 5 is, “Do you have any negative or positive experiences when it comes to error correction” and the reason for asking that question was because I wanted to see if these people had any experiences of error correction that might influence their opinions and decisions around the subject.

The teacher trainees got to answer this question:

- If I ask you these questions in ten years, do you think you will answer them in the same way?

I asked this question because I wanted to see if they think that the experience of error correction that they have now will change over time when they have more experience.
The question I will ask the teachers is:

- Do you remember how you felt about error correction when you were a teacher trainee?

I wanted to compare this answer with the answers that the teacher trainees gave about their view on error correction.

The teachers have more experience when it comes to error correction than the teacher trainees, so I told the teacher trainees to answer the first five questions on the basis of their own experience, whether from their practice periods or from their own time in school as a pupil. I stressed that it does not matter how much experience they have. The teachers have working experience and Linda has worked as a teacher for eight and a half years, Annie has worked for thirteen years and Sandra has worked for four years as a teacher.

I used a tape recorder during the interviews and afterwards I transcribed them word by word, and the transcribed versions of these interviews are attached as six different appendixes at the end of the essay. I interviewed these people one on one and I asked beforehand if I could tape record our interview and all six of them said yes. The interviews were conducted in English because I did not want to translate the interviews from Swedish into English and risk misinterpreting what they actually wanted to say as a result of my own translation and interpretation. To tape record the interview can be good in the way that the risk of the response of the interviewee being misinterpreted decreases. A negative aspect with tape recording the interviews can be that some people get nervous and inhibited when they get tape recorded and another negative thing is that it can take a lot of time to listen through these tapes and transcribe it (Ekholm & Fransson 2002, p. 58). In my result part, in subsection 4.1 (Anna) and 4.3 (Maria), there are three quotations that have some Swedish words in them. Anna and Maria used those Swedish words themselves during the interview which I chose not to translate into English in the quotation. An English translation of the words is given in brackets after the Swedish words.

4. Results

In this section I will present the results I got from my six interviews, and the first three interviews are with the teacher trainees and the last three are with the teachers.
4.1 Anna

Anna is a teacher trainee and she is studying to become an upper secondary school teacher, and one of her subjects is English. Anna thinks of error correction in a negative way, and that is because the word “error” is in it. For Anna, error correction sounds like a form of discipline, and that it sometimes can be hurtful. It can also be difficult for some pupils to handle the fact that they are being corrected. She also feels that error correction is a difficult field for her as a teacher “because it is like a minefield. How mean can you be? I think you should correct your students mistakes or errors but not very harsh” (Appendix 1).

Anna says that she would not correct a pupil in front of the whole class, because she does not want the pupil to feel ashamed, but in one on one conversation and in small groups she would consider correcting. For her it does not matter what types of activities the pupils are working with, she would correct during all types of oral communication:

Maiybe not on the Nationella proven muntligt, [The national tests, the speaking part] then I would not because that is a test. But if they are speaking informal, like before a class or in between assignments, if I would be there and take part in the conversation then maybe I would correct a bit, even if it is not an assignment. I think I would try to correct it in all oral activities except for tests of course and then not in large groups (Appendix 1).

The errors she would focus on are the ones that can interfere with getting the message through to others, and that could be both vocabulary and grammatical errors. She gives an example from her practice period where some pupils said “I looked at TV yesterday”, and Anna’s response to that was “Oh, you mean you watched TV ?” Anna also gives an example of a type of mistakes that she would not correct and that was if someone would say “There is a lot of cars”, because she feels that everyone will understand the meaning of the utterance anyway.

During her practice period, Anna can only recall that she has used one technique when it comes to correcting the pupils ‘errors, and that is the technique she calls “The question technique”. When a pupil said something that was incorrect, Anna would ask that pupil “Oh is this what you mean” instead of just giving the correct answer to the pupil “[b]ut I think like talking, camouflaging it sort of, just getting it into the conversation naturally instead of really correction (…)” (Appendix 1). She would not tell a pupil “You watched TV, you are supposed to say watched”.

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I asked her if she could be sure that the pupils’ understand that what they have said is incorrect when she uses the correct form in a question back to the pupil. She answered this question by saying that she can never be sure of a pupil’s understanding when she uses this technique, she tries to put stress on the incorrect word and she believes that the pupils can read the signals given by such correction.

On the question if she has had any negative or positive experiences when it comes to error correction, she tells about a situation when she was walking up to a teacher to hand in a text, and that teacher corrected her when she did not pronounce a certain word in the correct way, and that made her feel pointed out and she had a hard time talking to that teacher after that incident. This is also the reason why she does not want to correct pupils in a harsh way, because she does not want them to feel the same way she did after the incident she had with her teacher. She does not want her pupils to feel bad about making mistakes, because everybody does that from time to time.

Anna had a hard time remembering any positive experience regarding error correction, and the only example she could think of that had something to do with error correction was something that happened during her practice period. She had given the pupils’ the assignment to write a story about anything they wanted, and there was a pupil that asked her about the English word for “spruta”. She told the pupil to look up the word in a dictionary, and the pupil found the word “syringe” and asked Anna if that word was correct. Anna said to the pupil that maybe that is not the correct word to use in the story, because it does not fit the context. Anna suggested the word “injection” instead and Anna and the pupil had a discussion about this and according to Anna the pupil looked kind of happy after their discussion:

So we talked about it for quite some time actually, the difference between the two words and what you want to say, and I did not say ´No, that is wrong´ but we really talked about it and she was kind of happy when I walked away because she was like ´Hmm´ and she looked as if she was really happy to have learned something and she did not seem too offended, she just seemed ´Oh well, injection´ and she kept writing (…) (Appendix 1).

On the last question, if Anna thinks that she will respond the same way to these questions in ten years, she responded that she does not think that her response will be the same because she will learn more and more over time.
4.2 Charlotte

Charlotte is studying to become an upper secondary teacher in English and Swedish. She usually error correct when she has a conversation with a pupil one on one, and she does not correct in front of the whole class because the pupils´ might be very insecure and that can make the pupils´ even more quiet. If a pupil has said something incorrect in whole class, she tries to remember that pupil, and when the pupils´ are working on their own she circles the classroom and talks to that specific pupil about the error he or she made and together with that pupil tries to come up with a better option than what he or she first said.

When it comes to what types of errors teachers should correct, Charlotte has experience from her practice period that weak language learners often get the time aspect wrong when they speak, so these pupils´ can have a hard time separating what has happened and what is going to happen. When this occurs, Charlotte sits down with these pupils´ and talks to them and tries to figure out if they really do not understand this and tries to help them. I asked Charlotte if she corrects vocabulary errors and her response to that was “[y]es, I do, if it changes the meaning of what is said, then I do help. And if I hear something that is absolutely incorrect and makes no sense at all, it can be a direct translation from Swedish to English, a pupil might think its correct but it is really not” (Appendix 2).

Two methods that Charlotte uses when she error correct is gap filling and scaffolding:

The gap filling is when a pupil cannot find the word and I might not just give one option but I will give several and we will speak a bit, `What do you mean exactly, what is it that you want to express, can you explain to me? We have a few different words here and we will look at them and fill in`. And I think scaffolding is that you do it without the pupil being really aware and they are very comfortable with it. I hear a sentence and I just repeat it back in a corrected form (Appendix 2).

I asked her if she could be sure if the pupils´ understand her hints, when she repeats the sentence back in a corrected form, and she answered that it is hard to say, but it is easier if a teacher has been working with a class for a long time because then the teacher can see if the same error keeps on reoccurring. If that is the case, then Charlotte thinks it is important to bring this issue to attention, and talk about it with the pupil that is making the errors.

When I asked her about positive and negative experiences when it comes to error correction, she tells me about the weak language learners, for example pupils´ with dyslexia
or ADHD, that she has met during her practice period and that these pupils´ often want to be left alone and that they do not want the rest of the class to know that they have a problem. On several occasions, she has told these pupils´ that if they do not know how to work with the task they have been given then they should watch her circling the classroom and try to notice how many times she is helping other pupils´, that these pupils´ with certain difficulties are not alone with the feeling that they do not understand, and she also asks them to listen when she helps other pupils´ because they might have the same problem as themselves. Charlotte was given the question if she uses different error correction techniques for the stronger and the weaker pupils, and she said no and that there is no real difference in the effort you as a teacher put in because every pupil has something that can be improved and she thinks that it is a good idea to let the pupils´ evaluate themselves, where they think they are when it comes to their knowledge, what their biggest improvements are and what they need to focus more attention on.

In ten years time, if I would ask her the same questions again, Charlotte hopes that she will have more knowledge and experience when it comes to error correction, because she thinks that the knowledge that she has now is only theoretical knowledge, and that she can always improve her skills and she says that “I hope that my attitude stays the same, that I want to put the same amount of work into every aspect of pupil ability, whatever ability they have I still want to put the work in” (Appendix 2).

4.3 Maria

After finishing her studies, Maria will be a teacher for pupils´that are 7-12 years old, and one of her subjects is English. For Maria, error correction has a negative tone because when she was younger and spoke English in the classroom, her teacher corrected her and it made her feel ashamed and she did not want to speak English in class again.

According to Maria, it depends a lot on the pupil when it comes to how and when you should correct. If she knows the pupil well and knows that the pupil can take the correction, then it is much easier. She could correct a pupil in whole class, but not in a way that would make the other pupils´ think that it is “funny”. She feels that if you hear a pupil say something that is incorrect, and write it up as a reminder to talk to that pupil later on, it is so easy to forget to do so. Thus, it is better to take it up immediately.

During individual presentations, when one pupil is standing in front of the class, Maria would not correct “[b]ecause she is so utelämnad (exposed) and just standing there, and if I
just correct her, maybe she is nervous already and if I point at her and tell her then I think she would feel like this is more jobbigt (uncomfortable) (Appendix 3).

As long as a pupil can make him or herself understood, then Maria do not see the point in correcting. Maria is going to work with younger children and feels that it would be wrong to expect that the pupils would know everything at that young age. Maria would not correct grammatical mistakes, maybe when her pupils are a bit older, around 12 years old, but only if they say something that is totally wrong and not when they just forget an –s in a word. It is hard for pupils to speak another language and if a teacher points out everything that they do wrong, then they may not think it is fun to speak English. Maria thinks it is more important correcting the pupils in that way when it comes to their written work. When it comes to choice of technique, Maria is kind of sure how she would do it:

I think I would say “Oh, do you mean this word instead?” and just to make them feel, how do you say, så att dom inte skäms [So that they do not feel ashamed] in the right way so you can say another word for that or do you mean like this or like that, and not just point them out and I think that is a good thing to do (Appendix 3).

If a pupil says something that is completely wrong, then Maria could say “No, that is wrong”, because she feels like it can be necessary. But when it comes to 7-12 year old pupils, Maria thinks that she needs to be a bit careful because these pupils are working with a totally new language and she does not want them to stop talking.

I asked Maria if she thinks that an upper secondary school teacher should be harder on the pupils’ when it comes to error correction than she needs to be as a teacher of younger children:

I think you can have higher goals on the students, so for me this is a question about age and the level you are on, if you are a good speaker of course you want to hear if you say something wrong but if you are just practising in English when you are a little child then I don’t think you should (Appendix 3).

In the beginning of the interview, Maria told about a negative experience she has had with error correction, the fact that she was corrected by her teachers when she was younger and that made her feel ashamed. I asked her if she had any positive experiences, and she mentions her time at the university when she took the English A course. She mentions two teachers that she really liked and that she knew that she was making many mistakes when she was talking
to them but they did not correct her because they knew what she wanted to say. Maria feels that error correction can be good, but you do not have to have someone that points out all your errors, all the time.

One of the last questions I asked Maria had to do with her own negative experiences with error correction when she was younger. I asked whether these experiences have influenced her opinions about error correction:

Yeah, I think so, because I know how I felt when the teacher was on me or on another student. I think that you should correct but in a right way and it depends on what situation and in what age and what you are doing. But I think its so good that the students wants to speak, that is the most important, that she wants to and that she doesn’t feel insecure (Appendix 3).

If I were to ask Maria the same questions in ten years time, she thinks that she would respond in a different way, that the experience she gets will change her views, but she does not know what her answers might be in ten years time.

### 4.4 Linda

Linda works as an English teacher at an upper secondary school and she has been working as a teacher for eight and a half years. For Linda, how much she corrects depends on what the pupils’ are doing. If the pupils’ are presenting a speech that they have had time working with, then she would correct more than if the pupils’ did not have time preparing themselves. She would never interrupt a pupil while he or she is speaking and correct, only if the pupil seek Linda’s attention and want help with, for example, a word that he or she don’t know. If there is an error that reoccurs more than one time, then Linda will write it down and take it up later, and the pupils’ get comment papers from Linda when they have had speeches and communication activities. On those comment papers she sometimes writes down if there is something a pupil needs to think about when it comes to their speaking. Linda does not correct in front of the whole class, unless there is something that is completely wrong, that no one understands. She corrects mostly after an exercise, individually or in small groups. Linda would not point out a certain pupil and say “You made this mistake”, because she does not see the point in doing that.

When it comes to correcting, Linda focuses on pronunciation, grammatical errors and the use of words in the wrong context. On the question of what types of techniques she uses, she responded like this:
I would say that ‘You said this’ and then explain why its wrong, why another word can be more appropriate to use, so to be constructive and not just say ‘This is wrong’ but ‘This is wrong and you can fix it like this, and use this word instead’ and if there is something they have done grammatically wrong then you can compare to Swedish perhaps and give an explanation and give them something to move on with and not just the feeling ‘Oh shit, that was wrong, I cannot do this’. Be constructive (Appendix 4).

I told her that the teacher trainees often used the technique recasting, to answer the pupil with the corrected form of the sentence the pupil uttered. She said that she used that technique sometimes but that it is hard to do when she is not a part of the conversation, because if she jumps into the conversation then it can be very obvious that she is just there to error correct.

On the question of whether she has any positive or negative experiences when it comes to error correction, she has a hard time coming up with anything particular, but she tells about the fact that she sometimes has pupils that want all their mistakes pointed out so that they can fix them. Linda tries to focus on everything these pupils’ do that is good, and also tries to make the pupils focus on the good things, not just the mistakes they make. While other pupils do not like to be corrected and can have a hard time distinguishing between themselves and their language.

I asked her if she thinks that the error corrections she makes work, if she thinks that the pupils learn anything from it:

Well, at least they are aware of the fact that they have made a mistake, and then some students are really eager to fix it really fast and others are kind of “Ok”. I mean, no one is going to learn if I just repeat a grammatical rule once, I mean at least they can start thinking about “Ok, I do tend to say the V sound in not a good way” and then if you think about it. And some students are really ambitious and really try hard and others are more into having a good flow and you manage anyway (Appendix 4).

When Linda was a teacher trainee she did not like to error correct, she thought it was horrible. So this has been a process for her and now she sees it as part of her job as a teacher. The pupils go to school to learn and for the pupils to improve they need to know what they are doing well but also what they need to work on. She thinks you should give the pupils the right tools to be able to improve and not just say “This is wrong”. Her advice was “[j]ust be nice
about it then they don’t really mind, they expect it from you, to correct their errors”  
(Appendix 4).

4.5 Annie

Annie works as an English teacher at a secondary school and she has been a teacher for thirteen years. Her general view when it comes to error correction is that it is hard to correct young people because they need to feel that it is fun to speak English, and feel like this is something that they want to do. She wants the pupils to feel safe in the classroom and not feel like the teacher is there to complain on everything that they do, and Annie does not want to complain on her pupils. Annie would never correct a pupil in front of the whole class, but if she knows the pupil very well then she could tell him or her, when they for example sit in a small group, that what they said was not really correct. At the school she works on, they have special groups with pupils that have for example dyslexia:

For example, if I have these poor students and they don’t speak much English because they are afraid of speaking English, then I would absolutely not saying something about “Now you are wrong Mattias, don’t say so”. I am very happy if they speak English because most of these pupils they don’t like writing and things like that so it’s very important to talk when you have these groups because we have poor groups, you know, people with dyslexia and things like that and then I don’t want to complain at all, I just want them to speak, speak as much as possible, because that is the best way of learning, and they will eventually start talking more and more (Appendix 5).

The errors that Annie mostly focus on has to do with vocabulary, if the pupils cannot find the right word then Annie tends to help them, and she does not think that the pupils see that as a form of correction but as a help. If she has really good pupils that she knows well, then she can correct, for example, their grammar.

I asked her when she thinks that it is time to start to correct the pupils, if it should happen on upper secondary school or earlier. She answered that she does not know if her approach is the best, the fact that she does not correct that much, but she just want her pupils to feel safe and have the feeling that they want to speak English. She does not think that she needs to correct that much, because the pupil’s level of English has improved during the last ten years.

When Annie corrects a pupil, and if it is a pupil that she knows very well, then she can say “You must think about the grammar here” and most of the times the pupils are aware of this. I
asked her about the technique the teacher trainees often used, the rephrasing, and she said that she uses that technique as well, and that she mostly do it without thinking about, and she believes that rephrasing can work, at least when she is sitting in a small group with some pupils because then they are really listening and paying attention to what she is saying and that it can be harder in whole class because the pupils may not have the same focus.

She could not think of any positive and negative experiences when it comes to error correction but she is aware that young people can be a bit sad sometimes if they are being corrected because they are at a very sensitive age, but she do not think that the pupils feel like that in her classroom because she wants them to feel comfortable and at home in her classroom.

Annie had a hard time with error correction when she was a teacher trainee; she had the feeling that she could not correct the pupils. I asked her if it has to do with experience, and told her that one teacher trainee that I interviewed answered “How mean can you be?” on the question what her general view on error correction was:

It has nothing to do with that, and if you are a trainee then I think you feel more that you want to become a friend and you want them to like you but when you are the teacher you just know that ‘I am the teacher and that is my role and it is my job to do that’ so I don’t care. Of course I care but I don’t think I am mean, not at all, because I am not mean (Appendix 5).

She feels that the correction that she gives the pupils can maybe help them to grow a bit, and that some pupils might appreciate that she corrects them, but in a constructive way.

4.6 Sandra

Sandra has been a teacher for four years and now she is working at an upper secondary school, and the first question I asked her was about her general view when it comes to error correction, and she responded:

When it comes to error correction in speaking I would say that my view is that there are no errors as long as it is not an obstacle in communication. I would have to define what an error is to see what my view on error correction is. Grammatical error, pronunciation error, idiomatic error, it depends on what it is (Appendix 6).
Sandra corrects things that would sound strange to a native speaker, for example grammatical mistakes, pronunciation problems and if something is unidiomatic. But she does not comment on if a student mix British and American English, only if the mix a lot of different accents.

Sandra never error corrects in whole class or while someone is speaking, and she only error correct when an error is repeated throughout, for example, a speech. If a student says something incorrect once or twice and makes a correct sentence of that particular thing later on in the speech, then she does not correct. What they have done wrong, the pupils will find out afterwards when Sandra has one on one conversations with the students.

Since I always write down examples from their actual speaking, while they are speaking, I give them first the general problem that for example you mispronounce some English sounds and then I give examples of words, concrete examples always, I never do a general statement about anyone, it is always based on what they actually said, and then I ask them, usually, if they know that they have this problem or if they know how it is supposed to be pronounced like (Appendix 6).

Sandra gives the weak language learners and the more advanced ones the same opportunity to try to improve. She gives all students one or two things to focus on and try to improve, but for the weak learner the things might be very basic while for the more advanced learner it might be some more advanced aspects of the language.

I asked her if she used the technique that the teacher trainees said they used the most, rephrasing. She said she rarely use that technique because it is not often that she has discussions in whole class so she does not often have the chance to comment back on what they are saying. But when she walks around listening to group discussions she tries to pick up on different things that many students seem to struggle with and then she takes it up in whole class and says that this is something she has heard that many in that class struggle with and asks if they know what problem she is talking about. Sometimes when she does brief grammar presentation she bases those presentations on the mistakes made by the students themselves.

When it comes to a positive experience with error correction, she tells me about something that she learned early on when she started to work as a teacher:
My first year I think I tried to be nice so I made more general comments like ‘Your vocabulary is not that advanced’ and they went like ‘Ehhh, how do you mean?’ So I learned very early on to give them examples they had actually produced (Appendix 6).

From her experience, she has noticed that every pupil wants to know what kinds of mistakes they have made, because otherwise they will not be able to correct them and she tries to make the students realize that it is from their mistakes that they will learn.

I asked Sandra if she was insecure or scared about error correction when she was a trainee and she answered that she “was very afraid of correcting because I wasn’t sure that I was right either, since this is not my native language I wasn’t sure that I was going to be the one with the right answer, I think that was my biggest fear” (Appendix 6).

I noticed that Sandra sometimes used the expression “error” and other times she used “mistake”, and I asked her if she thinks there is a difference between an error and a mistake:

I think I use them as synonyms but a mistake can also be just a slip of the tongue where as an error is something that is erratic, something that is “wrong”, if you want to use that word. So a lot of people when they speak to fast make mistakes and not errors, whereas errors will come up in their writing as well for example (Appendix 6).

5. Discussion

The aim of this essay is to explore the views of three teacher trainees and three teachers when it comes to error correction in oral communication in the English classroom and in this section, I am going to discuss my results and the questions that I asked during the interviews will be discussed under separate paragraphs.

When I asked the teacher trainees about their general view when it comes to error correction, Anna and Maria said that error correction had a negative tone for them and Charlotte did not say that it had a negative tone for her but that she does not want her pupils’ to feel ashamed, but the general view among these three teacher trainees indicates that error correction can, to a certain extent, be seen as something negative. This was also the main difference between the teacher trainees and the teachers. The three teacher trainees said that they did not want the pupils’ to feel ashamed. Anna was especially concerned about error correction and she even said “How mean can you be?” and that error correction could
sometimes be hurtful. The teacher trainees seemed to think that error correction, to some extent, is the same as being mean to the pupils’. The teachers, on the other hand, said that error correction is a part of the job and that the pupils do not mind to be error corrected as long as it is done in a constructed way.

Previous research suggests that the exercise that the pupils´ are working with is a determiner for how the teacher should error correct, or if they should correct at all, see section 2.3. If teachers’ correct during fluency work, then there is a risk that the flow of the pupils’ discussion might fade and that is why research suggests that correction belongs to accuracy based work, not in the fluency work, unless there is a risk of total breakdown in communication. The teachers that I interviewed all agreed that they would error correct when the pupils have had time to, for example, prepare a speech, and then they would talk to the pupils’ afterward one on one, not in front of the whole class. But they would not correct during non – formal activities, when the focus is on fluency. The teacher trainee Anna said that it did not matter for her what type of exercise that the pupils´ are working with; she could error correction during every exercise except during the speaking part of the National test. She could even error correct when the pupils´ are talking in between exercises. The age of the pupils, the exercises that they are working with and what types of errors that they are doing comes back in the interviews, in some more than others.

The biggest similarity between the three teacher trainees and the three teachers lays in the errors that they chose to correct. Both the teacher trainees and the teachers focus on errors that can cause communication difficulties, see section 2.3. That can be pronunciation errors, grammatical errors and vocabulary errors. The teachers Linda and Sandra said that they correct errors that they see reoccurring over and over again, which Celce-Muricas research also shows, see section 2.3. Maria, who is going to work with 7-12 year old pupils´, said that she would not correct errors as long as the pupils´ get their message through and the older the pupils´ get the more the teacher can focus on correction. Maria said that she would maybe correct a 12 year old pupil’s grammatical mistake, but only if the pupil said something that is totally wrong. She thinks that the teacher can have higher goals for the pupils´ when they get older, and that teachers should not correct small children that are practicing speaking English because they should feel like speaking English is fun and if teachers start to correct these pupils´ then they might not want to speak, just like what happened to Maria herself when she was a language learner. Annie, who is working with 13-16 year old pupils´ at a secondary
school, said that she could help the pupils´ to find the right word if they have a hard time and the only pupils´ that she would consider to correct, for example grammatical errors to, are the pupils´ that are good at English. Annie said that she did not know if her way of not correcting that much is the best, but she does not feel like she has to correct that much because the pupils´ English is so much better now than it was ten years ago, and she does not want to “complain” so much. Annie also agrees with Maria that the age of the pupils´ determine how much the teacher should focus on correction. Anna and Charlotte, the two other teacher trainees, do not mention age of the pupils´ when it comes to error correction. They focused on what type of activity the pupils where working with, but Charlotte mentions in the beginning of the interview that she is happy when the pupils´ talk and to focus too much on form when the pupils´ actually choose to speak can scare them into not wanting to speak at all.

The teachers seem to be more direct in their error correction techniques. Linda said that if a student said something that was incorrect she would say that “This is wrong and you can fix it like this, and use this word instead”. She tries to do it in a constructive way and provide tools for them to change what they have done wrong. Sandra writes down concrete examples from the pupils´ speeches and tell them afterwards, one on one, that this is something that they have to improve, and Annie does not correct that often but when she does she would say to a pupil, if she knows that pupil well and if they sit in a small group, that he or she said something wrong, but not in a harsh way. Sandra said that during her first year working as a teacher she only gave the pupils´ general statements about their errors, that for example a certain pupil did not have such an advanced vocabulary, but that she now has learned to give the pupils´ concrete examples of their errors so that they know what they have to work on. That Sandra and Linda give precise feedback goes against Allwrights research that shows that teachers often give imprecise feedback on their pupils’ errors, see section 2.3.

The teacher trainees had almost the same opinion when it comes to this issue; Anna asks the pupil “Oh, is this what you mean” and tries to get it in as natural as possible in the conversation, Charlotte tries to repeat the sentence back to the pupil in the correct form or she asks the pupil what her or she means and tries to help to come up with the right answer and Maria does not error correct that much but if a pupil said something that was totally wrong then she would say that to the pupil and that it is easier if she knows that the specific pupil can handle a correction.

When it comes to choice of technique, the teachers have more experience of what works for them and their pupils´, while the teacher trainees only can use the experience that they
have from their practice period and maybe what they think worked for them when they were language learners. Research has shown how well certain error correction techniques works for different errors, but that does not mean that it works for all teachers and pupils. The pupils might respond very well to a certain technique that according to research does not work so well, so the teacher has to try what works.

When it comes to negative and positive experiences revolving error correction, the teacher trainees Anna and Maria mentioned that they have been error corrected in a way that made them feel ashamed and pointed out when they were younger and that they do not want their pupils to go through the same experience. A positive experience for Anna was when she had her practice period and she helped a pupil with some vocabulary difficulties and Anna saw that she helped the pupil. But in general, these six women had a hard time coming up with examples of positive and negative experiences when it comes to error correction, especially positive experiences.

The teachers said that they were a bit insecure about error correction when they were trainees and that they did not want to point out the mistakes that the pupils made, and Sandra said that she was afraid of error correction because she was not sure if she would have the right answer either. Linda said that it has been a process for her and that she now knows that it is a part of her job as a teacher to error correct because otherwise the pupils will never learn. She also said that the pupils expect error correction from the teacher and as long as the teacher is nice about it then the pupils do not mind. Annie’s answer confirms what Linda said, that after a while you realize that this is a part of being a teacher. According to Annie, teacher trainees often have the feeling that they want to be the pupils’ friend and that they do not want to be mean and harsh. Annie is not worried by error correction now because she knows that she is not being mean when she error corrects. The correction might help the pupils to develop a bit and, according to Annie, some pupils appreciate a constructive correction.

On the question whether the they think that they will respond to these questions in the same way if I asked them in ten years, all of the teacher trainees answered that they think that they will respond in a different way. Charlotte said that the knowledge she has about error correction is only theoretical knowledge, it is not based on experience. Anna thinks that she will change her opinions about this because she hopes that she will have developed, and Maria agrees with her. The teacher trainees seem to be aware of the fact that they will change their opinions about error correction over time, with the help of experience. To walk around
with the feeling that error correction is the same as being mean and sometimes hurtful might stop a teacher from reacting even on those occasions when he or she sees that the same pupil is making the same error over and over again or that the pupil cannot get his or her message through, and when there is a risk for a breakdown in communication then the teacher should correct, according to Celce-Murcia (2001), see section 2.3.

The insecurity that the teacher trainees show and that the teachers said that they had before they qualified as teachers might have something to do with lack of experience. The experience that the trainees have are their practice periods, their own time in school being a pupil, and perhaps some of them worked as a substitute teacher in schools. They also get knowledge from the literature that they are reading at the university that addresses this issue. The question is if teacher trainees get to talk about this issue enough at the university, maybe they need more guidelines from the literature, from their teachers and from each other. In one way it is not strange that the trainees feel a bit insecure when it comes to error correction, since they do not have much experience. When the teacher trainees get more experience they will see what works and what does not work in their classroom. Research has shown that teachers’ views derive from different sources and one of them is their own experience as a language learner, the way they were taught reflects how they will teach. The trainees mentioned their own experience of being a pupil as an influential factor when it came to their view on error correction today. Both Anna and Maria had been corrected in a way that made them feel ashamed when they were younger and they both said that they do not want their pupils’ to go through that. The teachers did not mention anything about their own experience of being language learners affecting them; the only thing they said was that they were insecure about error correction when they were teacher trainees themselves. Pajares, see section 2.1, argues that beliefs are hard to change and that teacher trainees often return to their old experiences and that higher education does not change their views that much. With the help of teaching experience, which Richards & Lockhart (see section 2.1) says is one of the primary sources for teachers’ beliefs, they may change their view on error correction. When these trainees have worked a while they may realize that other factors and not just previous experiences are important when it comes to decisions about error correction. With experience you see what works and what does not work and that knowledge might work as a primary source instead of previous experience, or they might work together. But as research has shown, to change our beliefs can be very difficult.
The teacher Sandra was the only one that I reacted to when it came to her choice of words: Errors or mistakes. I asked her about it and she answered that mistakes can be a slip of the tongue while errors are something that will come up in the pupils´ writing as well as their speaking, but she thinks that she uses them as synonyms. According to previous research, teachers can divide pupils’ mistakes into three categories; Errors, attempts and slips, and that errors is the type that concern teachers´ the most see section 2.2. Error and mistakes is maybe used as a synonym, and the question is if that is good or bad.

If error correction is done in a constructive way, with the pupils’ well being and language development in mind, then error correction can be a good thing. But error correction can also make pupils insecure about themselves and their knowledge if they get harsh and disrespectful corrections from a teacher. Teachers need to find out what techniques work for them and their pupils´ so that the pupils´ will understand that something is not correct and then help them to understand that the correction is not something against them as a person. Linda brought this up and said that many pupils´ feel like teacher corrects the person behind the error, not the error itself, so many pupils’ cannot separate themselves from their errors. If the teacher has in mind that the correction should be constructive and talks to the pupils´ about this then hopefully the pupils´ will understand that the teacher is trying to help.
6. Summary

The aim of this essay was to examine the views of three teacher trainees and three teachers when it comes to error correction during oral communication in the English classroom, and the second aim was to explore the similarities and differences between them. The teacher trainees were insecure when it comes to error correction because they did not want their pupils’ to feel ashamed, and the teachers said that they had experienced the same feeling when they were teacher trainees themselves but that they do not longer feel that way because they know that error correction is in the best interest of the pupils’. With experience, the teacher trainees may change their opinion and start to feel comfortable when it comes to error correction and start to see it as a part of their job. The teacher trainees and the teachers focused on the same types of errors, the type of errors that can create problems in communication, and that can be pronunciation errors, grammatical errors and errors that have to do with vocabulary.
7. References

Primary sources


Secondary sources


Appendix 1
4/11 2010

Sofie – I have some questions for you about error correction and my first question is what is your general view when it comes to error correction? What do you think about when you hear it?

Anna – What I think about when I hear it?

Sofie – Yes, what you think about when you hear it. Do you have any general opinions?

Anna - My first thought is, I just think that the word is kind of, I think of error correction in a negative way. I think maybe because the word error is in it. My first thought is “Oh, this is negative”, for some reason, I don’t know why.

Sofie – You don’t know why?

Anna – I think it is because the word error is in it.

Sofie – So if we gave it another name then it would be more positive?

Anna – Maybe, but at the same time, error correction can be, first it sounds like discipline. It can be hurtful and can be difficult for many people to take it, to get corrected. Their self esteem, their self confidence. But when I take another step into the thinking about error correction it makes me a bit scared because I think it’s a very difficult field.

Sofie – You mean for you as a teacher?

Anna – Yes, because its like a minefield. How mean can you be? I think you should correct your students mistakes or errors but not very harsh.

Sofie – Lets get into the second question that I have. On the base of your experience, when do you think you should correct your pupils? What situations?

Anna - That’s a very difficult question. I don’t think I would do it in front of a lot of people. I would not do it when there are like more than five people in the room, I wouldn’t, because I think that makes the students very uncomfortable and ashamed and so on. In one and one conversations or in small groups, I could just, I don’t know.

Sofie – Does it matter what kind of activities you do with the pupils?
Anna – I don’t know, not to me. Maybe not on the Nationella proven muntligt, then I wouldn’t, because that’s a test. But if they are speaking informal, like before a class or in between assignments, if I would be there and take part in the conversation then maybe I would correct a bit, even if it is not an assignment. I think I would try to correct it in all oral activities except for tests of course and then not in large groups.

Sofie – What types of errors would you correct? Would you correct everything that is wrong?

Anna - No, I wouldn’t. My first priority in correcting their language would be choice of words I think, for example when I had my practice period some students said “I looked at TV yesterday”. And then I asked them “Oh, you mean you watched TV?”. And that’s a correction but I wasn’t like “No, that’s wrong, this is the way you should say it”. So I prefer to correct those kinds of mistakes because those kinds of mistakes can interfere with getting the message through.

Sofie – Do you have any other examples of errors that you would correct?

Anna – I might correct some grammatical errors too, depending on the situation and if they interfere too much with the communication. I wouldn’t correct grammatical mistakes like “There is a lot of cars”, because everybody understands anyway. But I would correct it in a text. Things like, I don’t know, I cant think of any examples but errors that somehow can interfere with communication.

Sofie – On the base of your experience, what kinds of tequnices have you used and would you use to correct?

Anna – As I said before, I like the “Questions tequnice”, asking “Oh, is this what you mean?” instead of just saying the correct word. If you would say “I looked at TV”, then I wouldn’t say “You watched TV, you are supposed to use watched”, I wouldn’t do that, I would rather ask. I think that is the tequnice I use, I haven’t done it very much so, I haven’t tried that many, at least that I can recall anyway. But I think like talking, camouflaging it sort of, just getting it into the conversation naturally instead of really correction, and I do the same in Swedish if I talk to someone and they use the wrong word for example then I say “Oh you mean..?”

Sofie – Can you be sure that your pupils will understand that “Oh, I am not suppose to use this form, I am suppose to use the form you said”? 
Anna – I think you can never know, but I think my way of trying to make sure is how I say it. If I say “You watched TV”, but if I stress *watched* then I think it gets a bit clearer, just to stress the word. I think that helps, I believe that people have some kind of inner language, I mean they know one language already and I think that they can read the signals to that kind of correction. But I don’t have any references or so, this is just my personal opinions.

Sofie – The last question, also based on your experience, do you have any negative and positive experiences when it comes to error correction? Moments when you have corrected someone, for example, and it had a positive or negative outcome? But also for yourself, when you have been a pupil.

Anna – It happened to myself, I remember walking up to a teacher after class and I was going to hand in something that I wrote, and I said something about, I have a hard time writing long texts, I am very short and concise, and I was going to say that to my teacher “Oh I am sorry I haven’t written long enough but I am very concise”, and I didn’t pronounce it right, and he said “Concised”, the right way of saying it, and I was so ashamed and I felt like I wanted to die. I was embarrassed and I thought it was very hard to talk to him afterwards because it is a lot of prestige and since I like English a lot I was kind of, well, it was hard for me because you know pride and everything so that’s a negative experience because it really bothered me for a long time with that teacher, I didn’t go home and cry about it but I had a hard time talking to him.

Sofie – Is that why you don’t think that it would work for you as a teacher, that you don’t want your pupils to feel the same?

Anna – Exactly, I don’t want them to feel ashamed and embarrassed or feel bad about making errors because everybody do that, I do it all the time, especially now when I haven’t talked in English for a very, very long time, almost a year.

Sofie – Do you have any positive experiences?

Anna – Just orally?

Sofie – Yes, just orally.

Anna – Well, no, nothing that I can think of. But I am sure something must have happened. The closest thing, the memory that is closest to what you are asking for was during my
practice period and they were supposed to write stories and they could be as crazy as they wanted and one girl was writing about a man that was a werewolf and he met a doctor and the doctor said he could cure him and she wanted to know the word for “Spruta”, so I said “Look it up in a dictionary”, and she looked up “Spruta” and she got syringe. So she asked if she could write “I can give you a syringe”. And I said “Well, you can say that but I don’t think that, its interfering with what you are trying to say” so I said that it means that you give them the actual syringe but you want to say that you have the injection, the thing in the syringe, that’s what you want to say, so we talked about it for quite some time actually, the difference between the two words and what you want to say, and I didn’t say “No, that’s wrong” but we really talked about it and she was kind of happy when I walked away because she was like “Hmm” and she looked as if she was really happy to have learned something and she didn’t seem to offended, she just seemed “Oh well, injection” and she kept writing and I think that was successful because I think that she will remember it and I think it made her aware that some words can mean different things but they are very similar, so now I think she is aware of it and she remembers that exact situation, those two words, she knows the differences between syringe and injection and also in a positive way, but that was with writing, but that was the closest, I cannot get any closer than that.

Sofie – If I would ask you these questions in ten years, do you think you would answer them in the same way?

Anna – No, I don’t think so. I don’t know why I think so, but I will learn more and more as time goes by.
Appendix 2
5/11 2010

Sofie – The first question is about your general view when it comes to error correction?

Charlotte - When students and pupils are speaking in English?

Sofie – Yes, during oral communication not when it comes to written communication.

Charlotte – Yes, you come into the mindset like many teachers do that you are just so happy when pupils are actually speaking in their target language that you leave it, you do not want to interrupt. Error correction tends to happen when you are speaking to a pupil one on one and that is when you sort of do an interjection or you do the feedback thing that you say the wrong sentence and you say it back corrected.

Sofie – So, you have touched on that right now, but when do you think you should do this error correction? Only when you speak one on one or in whole class?

Charlotte – I tend not to do it when it is in front of a whole class because as a teacher you are the center of attention and people are looking at you to do the right thing and the pupils may be very insecure and if you correct a pupil in front of the whole class that pupil will get very quiet, unless it is a very confident pupil, but you get to know your classes. You can have discussion groups with pupils and encourage them to, so to speak, be good language learners, to guess. If you don’t know a word, guess, ask friends, stay on the topic, try to speak English even though it’s hard, and there are more aspects to language correction, I think, the biggest problem I have is to get people to stay on topic even if they have to break into Swedish. When they do, they leave the task and topic at hand because they think they have the mind that if I stopped speaking English I am done, I can’t be bothered anymore and I usually say that there is more to it than that, there is a task at hand as well to keep interested, there is something to be done, usually you talk before you write, you talk about your topic, you are going to have a presentation. Do stay with the task at hand.

Sofie – What types of errors do you think should be corrected?

Charlotte – Well, I think that really weak language learners, at upper secondary level, are the ones who cannot get the time aspect right. I had that experience myself in French actually, I couldn’t say last week, this week, what is going to happen and what has happen, and I tend to
sit down then and work a bit on that and try to check “Do you really not know this?” Simple spelling mistakes, I never go straight into those, we are talking about communication but usually you communicate about what you have written and what you are doing. When they are looking for the correct word, do I correct them? Yes, I do, if it changes the meaning of what is said, then I do help. And if I hear something that is absolutely incorrect and makes no sense at all, it can be a direct translation from Swedish to English, a pupil might think its correct but its really not. We have, for example, the words pain, hurt and injury, can be mistaken. If you have heart pain, that’s one thing, and if you have hurt your heart, if you have injured your heart or your arm, that is such a difference in meaning that I have to correct it and we need to speak about it.

Sofie – Would you correct mistakes like that in whole class? Or would you write it down and take it up as a general thing later?

Charlotte – Not if I was standing in front of the class, but maybe I would try to circle the classroom and try to focus on and try to remember that pupil and get back to that pupil and say “Let’s look at the context here, what you were saying. I think I know what you mean here but we have a few different options”.

Sofie – When we are talking about that, the next question is about what types of teqnics do you use when you error correct?

Charlotte – I do gap fillings, I think I do what is called scaffolding, and what else do I do? I do actually bring things out in front of the class if I have heard it a lot, and I say “This is something I have noticed, I think there is something I have to clear up”. I write things on the board.

Sofie – The first two things, can you explain those?

Charlotte – The gap filling is when a pupil cannot find the word and I might not just give one option but I will give several and we will speak a bit, “What do you mean exactly, what is it that you want to express, can you explain to me? We have a few different words here and we’ll look at them and fill in”. And I think scaffolding is that you do it without the pupil being really aware and they are very comfortable with it. I hear a sentence and I just repeat it back in a corrected form.

Sofie – Do you think you can be sure that the pupils will get your little hint?
Charlotte – Hard to say, unless you have been working with the class for a long time, then you will see if this is an error that keeps recurring and recurring and they might not hear you, then you might need to bring it to attention, you might need to sit and write it down and you need to talk about it with the pupil.

Sofie – And the last question has to do with negative and positive experiences when it comes to error correction. It could be something that has happened to yourself as a pupil or something that has happened when you have been out teaching.

Charlotte – One problem is that pupils who are weak and consider themselves weak in a classroom situation or they might have some problems with dyslexia, ADHD, ADD, they can feel very, very targeted and you might, you cannot leave off and leave them alone, they want to be left alone, they do not want the rest of the class to see that they have a problem. What I have needed to do on several occasions is to say to them “If you cannot do your task, watch me, I am circling the classroom, check how many times I have stopped to help others and you will see that you are not alone. And also listen what I say to other pupils, it might be the same thing that you are wondering about yourself that is keeping you stuck and be aware of what is happening in the classroom, and you might have to point things out to these pupils because they live in their own little world sometimes and they think their experience is everyone else’s experience, they think everybody is looking at them, everybody is noticing them sitting there with a blank sheet of paper and that’s not true. And usually, when you have had a chat with them that will work a couple of lessons and they will feel comfortable and you might need to remind them again that “Look, I have just helped four other pupils, I have stopped there three times and I will keep circling and I will get back to you.

Sofie – Would you use different techniques depending on if they are weak or strong pupils? Would you correct the weak pupils more than the strong ones or vice versa?

Charlotte – No, there is no real difference in the effort you need to put in. The very strong pupils are sometimes over confident, they think they are done after one draft and they know that they don’t make the same mistakes as the weaker or medium average student, so with them I would say that there is always room for correction. Imaging this was an essay in your first language, in Swedish, what could you look at? Punctuations, maybe you are repeating yourselves? Usually I have a click of very good students, then I have a different group of weaker students and I say that “Ok, then I use this with giving feedback to each other, start
reading each other’s essays, and with the weaker students I try to encourage them to move on, just to get started and as I said before, if its writing, just get started to write and if its speaking, well, find something interesting to talk about, because then the words will come much easier if it is something you know, something you have experienced and then we move on. Of course with the weaker students you want them to pass, and its good to have maybe self evaluations with the pupils, see where do you think you are at, and you have the results on the diagnostic tests, but where do you think you are at, what do you think your biggest improvement is and what could you improve the most? What do you find the hardest?

Sofie – If I would ask you these questions in ten years, when you have been working for a while, do you think you will respond the same?

Charlotte – Hopefully I will have a lot more knowledge and experience. This is theoretical knowledge, you can always better your skills. But I hope that my attitude stays the same, that I want to put the same amount of work into every aspect of pupil ability, whatever ability they have I still want to put the work in.
Appendix 3
9/11 2010

Sofie – My first question has to do with your general view when it comes to error correction? What do you think about when you hear it?

Maria – I think it is a little bit negative for me because when I was younger when I spoke English and the teacher corrected me I felt very, how do you say it, ashamed and that made me not wanting to speak very much English. But if I see it from when I had English A here at Högskolan it was good because you learn so much if a teacher say “Oh, say it like this instead” or if some students say it.

Sofie – So it depends on the method the teacher use to correct you?

Maria – Yeah, and how old you are maybe, if you are self confident or if you are shy. I think you have to see the person first and then you can correct the student after that.

Sofie – When do you think you should correct a pupil? At what exercises? In front of whole class? How would you do it?

Maria – I think it depends so much on the student, like I said before, because if I know that this student can take this, if you just know the students well then I think you can feel it, how you should correct it. But not so the others thinks its funny, just its like this and not like this.

Sofie – So you could correct in front of whole class?

Maria – Yes, I think so. I think if you say “Oh, I will take this later” and write it up then you can forget it, I think you have to do it right now.

Sofie – Does it matter what kind of exercises the students are working on, could you correct during all exercises?

Maria – I don’t think I would do it if a student is standing on her own in front of the class, you know what I mean, I don’t think I would correct in that way.

Sofie – Why not?
Maria – Because she is so utelämnad and just standing there, and if I just correct her, maybe she is nervous already and if I point at her and tell her then I think she would feel like this is more jobbigt.

Sofie – What types of errors would you correct? Would you correct everything?

Maria - Maybe if you just understand what the student says then I think it’s OK, it depends on the age too, you have gymnasiet and I have the ages 7 to 12 then I don’t think they can do everything right. You can correct them if they say something that is totally another meaning. But I say wrong all the time, so I don’t know really, I think it depends on the student and how old they are and what kind of words they are using, if it is a different meaning then you have to “Oh, you mean this word”

Sofie – So you wouldn’t correct if someone said something that was grammatically wrong?

Maria – No

Sofie – Not even when they are 12 years old?

Maria – Maybe when they are 12, if they say totally wrong, but not if they just forget an S in the end or something like that. I think if you just understand and when they write I think it’s more important to say that “This is not right”, because it is so on the paper, this is wrong. Every student are different and I think it’s so hard for them too to speak another language and if you just point at them all the time I don’t think they will like it.

Sofie – What types of techniques do you use when you correct?

Maria – I think I would say “Oh, do you mean this word instead?” and just to make them feel, how do you say, så att dom inte skäms, in the right way so you can say another word for that or do you mean like this or like that, and not just point them out and I think that is a good thing to do.

Sofie – What types of techniques wouldn’t you use? Could you say to them “No, that’s wrong”?

Maria – Yes, you can do that if it’s really, really wrong, then I think you have to do that. But if they are 7-8 years old and they say, I can’t come up with an example right now, but I think you have to be försiktig because it is another language and I think everyone thinks it’s harder to
Sofie – Do you think that an upper secondary school teacher should be harder on the pupils?

Maria – I think you can have higher goals on the students, so for me this is a question about age and the level you are on, if you are a good speaker of course you want to hear if you say something wrong but if you are just practicing in English when you are a little child then I don’t think you should.

Sofie – The next question has to do with negative and positive experiences when it comes to error correction, something that you have experienced yourself or when you have been out on your practice periods?

Maria – I can remember from my school when I was a child when you were corrected by the teacher and you felt ashamed and I don’t think the teachers were so pedagogiska. I know that I didn’t want to speak in front of the class when I was like 11-12 and up at the higher levels too. It’s here on Högskolan when I really learned that its good here, like in our group when someone corrected me it was like, yeah, it was OK but everyone has different experiences with the language, but of course you want to know of you say something that is really, really wrong.

Sofie – So it depends on how you say it?

Maria – Yeah.

Sofie – Do you think that your experiences from your younger ages has given you the opinions that you have now, that you don’t want to correct?

Maria – Yeah, I think so, because I know how I felt when the teacher was on me or on another student. I think that you should correct but in a right way and it depends on what situation and in what age and what you are doing. But I think its so good that the students wants to speak, that is the most important, that she wants to and that she doesn’t feel insecure.

Sofie – Do you have any positive experiences?

Maria – Well, I think Tore was really good, and Per. I know that when I like spoke to Per I know that I said wrong things but he wasn’t there to correct me all the time. He knew what I
wanted to say and he wasn’t like “Oh, you do it wrong”. So I think its important to know what you are doing wrong but not to like correct all the time.

Sofie – The last question, if I would ask you these questions in 10 years, when you have been working for a while, do you think that you will answer them in the exact same way?

Maria – No, I don’t think so. I think when you have experience of it and I think it’s a very big difference from now, but I am not sure what I would answer in 10 years, ask me in 10 years!

Sofie – But you think that with your experience you might change some of your views?

Maria – Yes, I can imagine that.
Sofie – The first question is about your general view when it comes to error correction?

Linda – Ok, it kind of depends on what you are doing how much you correct the students because if the purpose is to discuss a book or discuss a film and its not something that they can prepare like a prepared speech then I don’t really correct as much as I do perhaps when they give a speech and they have prepared and so on. I never go in while they are talking and say “You say this or that” unless I notice that they seek my attention and maybe they are asking and wondering how to say a word or something. If they present their speeches and also when we have discussions, if there is something that keeps on reoccurring more than one time then I write it down and then they get the comment paper and then they can actually see what mistakes they made and sometimes I write “The V sound” and then I say “Ask me” because it’s not enough to write it, they might not understand. It differs but I never correct while they talk, because I don’t want to, unless they look to me for confirmation because I don’t want to make them feel self conscious and I don’t want to disturb the communication, unless there is something that is completely wacked and no one understands, then of course.

Sofie – So, you have talked a bit about it, but when do you error correct?

Linda – If it is a prepared speech then I always do it afterwards, individually. If there has been a discussion, and if one starts to pronounce a word wrong then it tends to be picked up by the others and then I comment on it within the entire group so they hear. Afterwards and always in small groups or individually.

Sofie – But you never do it in whole class?

Linda – No, unless there is something I have heard in several groups if they have been discussion things and I notice that they all say something weird, then I can comment on it, like “I have heard from several people that you say this”.

Sofie – But you would never say that “You made this mistake” in whole class, and point somebody out?

Linda – No, I don’t see the point in doing that.

Sofie – What types of errors do you usually focus on?
Linda – Pronunciations, grammatical errors, the use of words in not appropriate context, when it doesn’t mean what I assume they are trying to say.

Sofie – When you error correct, what types of techniques do you use?

Linda – I would say that “You said this” and then explain why its wrong, why another word can be more appropriate to use, so to be constructive and not just say “This is wrong” but “This is wrong and you can fix it like this, and use this word instead” and if there is something they have done grammatically wrong then you can compare to Swedish perhaps and give an explanation and give them something to move on with and not just the feeling “Oh shit, that was wrong, I can’t do this”. Be constructive.

Sofie – All the teacher trainees that I talked to they said that they mostly use the technique that if you say something to me and its wrong then I change the sentence and say it back in the correct way, do you use that technique?

Linda – Well, if I am part of the discussion, yes, but sometimes when you are not a part of the discussion then its kind of hard to jump in cause then its so obvious that you are trying to error correct them. I mean, if you are having a conversation, sure, then you would do that but of the mistake has already happened and it has been a few minutes then there is no point in doing that. So if I am a part of it, sure.

Sofie – Do you have any positive or negative experiences when it comes to error correction?

Linda – It differs really, I mean some students want to hear every mistake they make, “Please tell me what I do wrong”, while others are more, they don’t take it personal but they have a harder time to kind of distinguish between themselves and the language. But nothing in particular, no.

Sofie – If a student wants to hear everything that they do wrong, do you say everything to them?

Linda – No, I have a student now that and she wants me to focus on every single thing that she does wrong and she is an A student, and I don’t want her to focus on everything that she has done wrong, I want her to focus on what she has done that is good. She doesn’t make so many mistakes but I do comment on her mistakes of course but I tend to stress more the good things she has done and I try to get her to stop thinking that way cause she gets all “Ahh”.
Sofie – The error corrections that you make, do you see that they work? Do the pupils learn anything when you say “Maybe this is not right, maybe you should use this instead”, do they learn from it or is it just “Ok”.

Linda – Well, at least they are aware of the fact that they have made a mistake, and then some students are really eager to fix it really fast and others are kind of “Ok”. I mean, no one is going to learn if I just repeat a grammatical rule once, I mean at least they can start thinking about “Ok, I do tend to say the V sound in not a good way” and then if you think about it. And some students are really ambitious and really try hard and others are more into having a good flow and you manage anyway.

Sofie – The last question has to do with the teacher trainees I interviewed, they were scared about error correction and they didn’t want to embarrass the students. Do you remember how you felt when you were a teacher trainee when it came to error correction?

Linda – I thought it was horrible, just point out their mistakes. And it has kind of been a process, I mean if they are going to improve they need to know what they are doing that is good but they also need to know what they can improve. As long as you give them tools to improve instead of just saying “This is wrong” then I don’t see any harm in it and of course there are students that make so many mistakes that you don’t know where to start, and then you pick or two wrong because they will just discouraged. Maybe one or two things that you can actually handle that you can explain well and so on, that works for them.

Sofie – So you don’t feel now that you are afraid to press someone down if you say to them “Oh, I am sorry, that is wrong”?

Linda – Well, they are here to learn, and you have to be nice about it. It’s a part of the job as well, you cannot just say “Oh, you are so good, but here you get a G” and the student will be “Oh, but I was so good”. Just be nice about it then they don’t really mind, they expect it from you, to correct their errors.
Appendix 5

10/11 2010

Sofie – The first question is about your general view when it comes to error correction?

Annie – I think it’s very difficult to just correct young people when they want to speak English because I think they must feel like “This is something that I like to do. I like to speak and I think its fun”. I think that is the best thing we do when we have English lessons and things like that. That is what I think about that.

Sofie – When do you error correct?

Annie – Absolutely not in the whole class. If you are my pupil and if you don’t say the S, if you say “She walk”, then I don’t say before everyone “You must say She walks”, not that stupid things because I think the best thing is, oh I can’t find the word, that you feel säker, that you feel like “I enjoy this place, I want to be here and no one complains about what I do” and things like that. I don’t want to complain that much, maybe if you know the pupils very well and you sit in a small group and you talk about something and I know you very well and I can say “Sofie, why do you say so? You know it isn’t like that”, then I can say it because I know that pupil very well. But sometimes I have smaller groups with poor knowledge of English and I haven’t spoken English since last year. For example, if I have these poor students and they don’t speak much English because they are afraid of speaking English, then I would absolutely not saying something about “Now you are wrong Mattias, don’t say so”. I am very happy if they speak English because most of these pupils they don’t like writing and things like that so its very important to talk when you have these groups because we have poor groups, you know, people with dyslexia and things like that and then I don’t want to complain at all, I just want them to speak, speak as much as possible, because that is the best way of learning, and they will eventually start talking more and more.

Sofie – What types of errors do you correct?

Annie – Maybe if they don’t know the right word, I help them, yes I think so, if they try to say the word in other words you know, try to explain and I know the word and I help them, and they say “Yes, of course” because sometimes you don’t always remember all the words when you want to speak English, so then you need help and I don’t think that they feel like that is like correcting, they just helping more. And then if you have those very good pupils that I
know very well, then I can correct, grammar and things like that. But not that very much about their accent, no I don’t do that. Some of the pupils they speak very American English, some of them speak very English, British English and others speak a mix, and I think that when they are that age it’s very important that they speak a lot.

Sofie – When do you think its time to start to correct? Do you think that its something that you should do on upper secondary school?

Annie - Maybe you should correct earlier, I don’t know if I am right but I just want them to feel safe and feel like this is a place where I can speak English and I don’t want to correct that much because most of them are very good at speaking English, since the last 10 years pupils have been much better at speaking English because they listen a lot to music and they are sitting in front of the computer and things like that so they are much better than 10 years ago. I don’t need to correct that very much I think. Maybe those poor people, those with dyslexia and things like that. But they need to speak as much as possible so I don’t correct them, no, I don’t do that. Maybe other teachers say other things.

Sofie – When you correct, what types of techniques do you use?

Annie – How do I say it? It depends on who it is, yes, because if it is a person I have met for 3 years it’s very easy, I know this person very well and if we say its you then I can say to you, because I know you and you know me. You know that I know that you are a clever girl so you can take that. And then maybe I say that “You must think about the grammar here” or something like that, and that pupil often says “Yes, I know”.

Sofie – The teacher trainees that I talked to say that they use Rephrasing, if you say “I watch TV yesterday” then I respond “Oh, you watched TV yesterday”. Do you use that?

Annie – Oh, yes of course, like you do with small children, of course I do that too. I do that without thinking about it because that is something you do with smaller kids.

Sofie – Do you think that works?

Annie – I think it works, well at least if we are sitting in small groups I think because then they are listening, but if we are in a classroom they don’t listen that very much but if we are sitting like this then they are listening. I have done that a lot with sitting in small groups and if
I rephrase they say “Yes, yes I know”. Because they know it but when they are talking they forget like we all do.

Sofie – Do you have any positive or negative experiences when it comes to error correction?

Annie – I probably have but I think I have forgot it. I think sometimes young people they feel very sorry if I say something because they are very sensitive at that age, but I don’t remember, I cannot anything, I am sorry. I don’t think they feel so in my classroom, that’s what I think, maybe I am wrong, I don’t think they feel like that because I want them to feel like at home when we are in the classroom.

Sofie – Maybe the pupils feel that also, that they can relax?

Annie – Yeah, I think they can relax, because I am not that kind of person, “Now you are wrong”, no, I don’t think I am that kind of person.

Sofie – The last question has to do with the three teacher trainees that I talked to and they were insecure about error correction and they didn’t want to upset the pupils. When you were a teacher trainee, do you remember if you had the same kinds of opinions and feelings?

Annie – If I could correct them if I was a trainee?

Sofie – Yeah, if you felt like error correction was not a problem?

Annie - I was more like “Oh, I cant correct them, no no”, I was more like that. I still think I am, but I rephrase a lot, I do, because that is something you do with small children and I just do it without thinking.

Sofie – And maybe with experience you get to know that I don’t do this to be mean, because one of the teacher trainees said “How mean can you be”? That it has nothing to do with being mean.

Annie – It has nothing to do with that, and if you are a trainee then I think you feel more that you want to become a friend and you want them to like you but when you are the teacher you just know that “I am the teacher and that is my role and it is my job to do that” so I don’t care. Of course I care but I don’t think I am mean, not at all, because I am not mean.

Sofie – So it may be something that comes with experience?
Annie – Yes, I think so. And I think they want me to do that too because I do it when they write but not when talking because that is something, in the context you can't to it because in one way you don’t want to be interrupted when you are talking and then it's better to maybe rephrase or just to talk about it afterwards, let's say we have been talking about love and afterwards maybe I say “Think about this”, I take you aside and say this, if I know that pupils very well I can do that. And I think that pupil will appreciate that because it will help that pupil to grow a little bit, maybe.
Appendix 6
15/11 2010

Sofie – The first question is about your general view when it comes to error correction, what do you think about when you hear it?

Sandra – When it comes to error correction in speaking I would say that my view is that there are no errors as long as it is not an obstacle in communication. I would have to define what an error is to see what my view on error correction is. Grammatical error, pronunciation error, idiomatic error, it depends on what it is.

Sofie – When do you error correct?

Sandra – Only when an error is repeated in speaking and never while someone is speaking but afterwards in grade talks, that is the only time.

Sofie – But how many times does it need to be repeated?

Sandra – It depends on how long the speech is or the discussion is that I am grading or commenting on. If it is a long speech and it is repeated only twice and they make a correct sentence of that particular thing later then I don’t correct it. But if for example a pronunciation error is repeated throughout the speech then I comment on that afterwards.

Sofie – What types of errors do you correct?

Sandra – When it comes to grammar, the things that would sound strange to native speakers. I do not comment on if you mix British and American English. I mostly do not comment on informality errors, if they happen to say shit for example in a formal speech, I would probably say that but if it is something like a slider error when it comes to style I do not comment on that. But grammatical mistakes, pronunciation problems, you do not make mistakes but if they mix accents a lot for example or if they end up with an Australian pronunciation or something I would comment on that. Let’s see, grammar, pronunciation and intonation as well when it comes to pronunciation, if they have the non native intonation, for example a Swedish intonation in English sounds kind of weird so anything that a native speaker would comment on.

Sofie – Vocabulary then?
Sandra – If something is unidiomatic I would comment on that. I see that sort of as a grammatical error but I also comment on the variety of vocabulary, for example they are giving a speech they need to have a formal vocabulary and if they only use an informal one I comment on that as well.

Sofie – When you error correct, what types of techniques do you use?

Sandra – Since I always write down examples from their actual speaking, while they are speaking, I give them first the general problem that for example you mispronounce some English sounds and then I give examples of words, concrete examples always, I never do a general statement about anyone, it is always based on what they actually said, and then I ask them, usually, if they know that they have this problem or if they know how it is supposed to be pronounced like.

Sofie – One on one?

Sandra – Yes. always one on one.

Sofie – You would never say anything in whole class?

Sandra – Sometimes I base my sort of presentations of grammar, very brief presentations, on their general mistakes in the group. I can do that as well, just to stress something.

Sofie - All of the teacher trainees, they rephrased sentences, if you say something to me then I rephrase it back in the correct way, do you do that?

Sandra – I very rarely have classroom discussions so that they answer me when the whole class is there so I do not have the opportunity to comment back on them but sometimes when I walk around listening to groups I just try to pick up on things that a lot of people have problems with and then I say something like “In almost all groups or almost all individuals made this mistake, or made the same mistake, do you know which one?”, to get them interested in what’s coming next, and then I give an example of an erratic sentence and ask them “Do you see the problem in this sentence?” to make them understand, I do not want to correct them to sort of see it themselves that they know this, because a lot of them say “The teacher walk” sometimes when they have a specific topic the same mistake comes up in all groups and then I usually do that on the board right afterwards to get the connection straight away to what we are talking about.
Sofie – Do you have any positive or negative experiences when it comes to error correction?

Sandra – My first year I think I tried to be nice so I made more general comments like “Your vocabulary is not that advanced” and they went like “Ehhh, how do you mean?”. So I learned very early on to give them examples they had actually produced.

Sofie – And that is a positive experience?

Sandra – Yes, positive and a negative, the errors that they made, everyone wants to know exactly where they made the mistake otherwise, how are they supposed to correct that mistake? But I always stress as well that mistakes are what we learn from because they tend to remember the things that I comment on and nothing else. So to make mistakes a positive thing.

Sofie – Do you see a difference between errors and mistakes?

Sandra – I think I use them as synonyms but a mistake can also be just a slip of the tongue where as an error is something that is erratic, something that is “wrong”, if you want to use that word. So a lot of people when they speak to fast make mistakes and not errors, whereas errors will come up in their writing as well for example.

Sofie – The last question, when I interviewed the teacher trainees they were a bit scared when it comes to error correction, did you feel the same when you were a teacher trainee?

Sandra – Yes, I was very afraid of correcting because I wasn’t sure that I was right either, since this is not my native language I wasn’t sure that I was going to be the one with the right answer, I think that was my biggest fear. I had some previous experience of teaching as well where I learned, and I had that confirmed later, that if you focus on a few mistakes, the major ones instead of trying to cover everything, you can actually help someone to correct that basic, for example if someone always uses subject – verb agreement in the wrong way, if I focus on that and explain that to them and I don’t bring up all the mistakes that they made, things can actually change, so I think I was more afraid before I had this other teaching experience before.

Sofie – Do you use different techniques if you are talking to a pupil that is weak in English and that is really good in English?
Sandra – Yeah, since I always try to focus on one or two things for them to improve on, the level of the mistakes, if it is a very advanced student I would probably comment on more advanced aspects as well because I think that everyone should get the opportunity to improve, that is sort of what the goals in the course are based on the opportunity for everyone to improve. And if it is a weaker student I comment on, still, only on one or two things for them to work on even though they have more things to work on, they still only need one or two comments at the time I think.

Sofie – Do you think it works?

Sandra – It depends on if the student is motivated to learn or not. If someone is not there because they are not interested then nothing is going to change, if they are not motivated to change. But if someone comes to class and wants to improve his or her English then these types of comments are very helpful.