Linguistic and Non-Linguistic University Students' Attitude towards Error Correction in EFL Learning

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Abstract: The research implies that in EFL learning there are some differences in the attitudes towards error correction shown by linguistic and non-linguistic university students. Supposedly, they are caused by the purpose of EFL acquisition – to achieve language proficiency and accuracy or to develop communication and interaction skills. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is used in the research paper to experimentally and theoretically justify these differences. The necessary data were collected with the help of the questionnaire specially designed for the research. The study concludes that the future profession of the respondents greatly influences their attitude towards error correction. Future EFL teachers are more open and eager to being corrected while non-linguistic respondents do not like it, though they recognize its importance. Other differences include benefits that error correction can bring, remembering of errors, analysis of the errors made in the written speech. The knowledge of students' different attitudes towards error correction can help teachers choose the most appropriate EFL teaching methods. Hence, a set of general and specific recommendations for EFL teachers working with linguistic and non-linguistic university students has been worked out on the basis of the obtained research results.

Keywords: *EFL teaching and learning; error correction; attitudes; linguistic and non-linguistic university students; recommendations.*

Introduction

Everybody understands that learning a foreign language is impossible without making errors. How to benefit from it is an interesting and important subject for language science and teaching methodology researchers and practicing teachers. There have been hot discussions "to correct or not to correct".

Recent trends of language teaching advocate that teachers need not correct all the errors right after they are made (Katayama, 2007; Ovchynnikova, 2019). Teachers should resist the temptation of correcting every error even though they might feel doing so to prevent fossilization of errors (Akhter, 2007, p.10). More valuable is to encourage a student to communicate. Others support the idea of correcting errors as students are unable to master a foreign language without analyzing errors they make (Zhu, 2010, p.127).

Literature Overview

The literature on the problem in question is rather extensive. Researchers and practitioners carry out their investigations to find out EFL students' attitude, preferences, perceptions and expectations regarding error correction. Scholars from different countries with different cultural backgrounds found out that EFL learners of their countries having the different age, gender, proficiency level demonstrate positive attitude toward error correction (Azar & Molavi, 2013; Bargiel-Matusiewicz & Bargiel-Firlit, 2009; Fitriana, 2017; Salteh & Sadeghi, 2015; Zublin, 2011; Zahroh et al., 2020).

Very close to our research are the papers by Lithuanian and Polish scholars. The first ones (Kavaliauskiene & Anusiene, 2012) examined the English for Specific Purposes learners' attitude to error correction. They indicated that correction of written work is more appreciated by the students than correction of oral speech.

Polish scholars' (Bargiel-Matusiewicz & Bargiel-Firlit, 2009) findings showed that most learners are not afraid of making errors, consider them to be natural in the process of learning. However, almost half of their respondents feel guilty after making an error. "They use an avoidance technique in order not to be laughed at when they make an error" (Bargiel-Matusiewicz & Bargiel-Firlit, 2009).

Special attention to the problem of students' attitude to error correction is paid to in the research by Japanese scholar A. Katayama (2007).

While most EFL learners prefer all their errors being corrected, Japanese students are sure that they can learn a lot from error correction. At the same time, they do not desire all their errors to be corrected. In their opinion, "correcting errors would affect students' feelings" (Katayama, 2007).

The problem of error correction and efficient corrective feedback are in the circle of interest for Ukrainian researchers, as well. The literature overview shows that the main subjects of investigation are the types of errors in oral and written speech and the ways of their correction (Batiuta & Hordienko, 2017; Kurovska 2004; Ovchynnikova, 2019; Serdechny, 2015).

Few works are devoted to the peculiarities of error correction in the process of EFL teaching and learning of linguistic students (Mospan, 2012; Kotsiuk & Pelypenko, 2016) and to non-linguistic students' errors (Lobanova & Sternichuk, 2015; Lytvyn et al., 2019).

However, there are no publications in foreign and Ukrainian scientific literature devoted to the comparison of error correction in linguistic and non-linguistic students' speech. In view of this, **the goal of the research** is to investigate university students' attitude to error correction and to trace if there are any differences between those students who will become future EFL teachers and those who will frequently use English in their future profession. We suppose that linguistic and non-linguistic students may have different emotions and preferences towards how their errors are corrected in the language classroom. Realizing this difference and knowing linguistic and non-linguistic students' attitude to being corrected, their preferences when to be corrected may help teachers to motivate their students more effectively and to optimize the process of second language acquisition.

In our research we apply to the term "error" as the most general lexical unit that embraces all types of errors, errors and slips. It seems inappropriate to distinguish between all of them (attempts, errors, fossilized errors, errors, slips (Hayward, 2020)) or between "global" and "local" errors (Burt & Kiparsky, 1978) for this research**.** Neither it is reasonable here to specify the ways of correcting them (self-correction, peer correction, group correction, teacher correction (Zublin 2011)) for the accent will be put on the differences in linguistic and non-linguistic students' attitude to the error correction.

Research Methods

In view of this, we designed a special questionnaire to both groups of students. It consists of 2 blocks of questions: the first one regards specific

information of the respondent (age, gender, future profession), the second is designed to determine various aspects of respondents' attitude towards being corrected in EFL classes. On the whole, 80 students took part in the survey. The first group students (39 participants) are learning English as future teachers of English while the second group (41 participants) students are learning English as an ordinary university discipline.

In addition to the questionnaire, a qualitative approach is also undertaken as it "best answers or sheds light on a particular problem" (Moron-Garcia, & Willis, 2009, p. 7). It means we apply the "two Q word silos" (Gorard, 2012, p.12) methodology: quantitative and qualitative. The data in numbers that are obtained due to the questionnaire are validated with the considerations of EFL university teachers on the problem. We invited 8 EFL teachers working in Kyiv universities to participate in the analysis and discussions of the results of the students' questioning. To be objective, we addressed the teachers who have enough experience in teaching EFL both linguistic and non-linguistic students in higher educational institutions. The teachers were presented with the preliminary research results to support or reject them. The discussion was conducted in the form of a "round table" (panel discussion). The teacher substantiated the questionnaire results. Generally, such a combination of methods allowed us to make the research significant, reliable, "time consuming and resource intensive" (Smeby, 2012, p. 17).

Results

Both groups of respondents are university students aged between 17 and 22 years old. But in the first group major part is within 21-22 years old (64%) while the other is mostly 19-20 year-olds (57%). Defining the age of the respondents, as we assumed, might also play some role in the way the students take their errors. In both groups there are more females (89% and 76%) which is caused by the specialty education they are acquiring. The first group are studying to become future EFL teachers. The second one are getting higher education to become tourism employees. Both professions in Ukraine are traditionally considered female.

The question on the most suitable time of correcting students' errors embraced 3 options: when errors are corrected immediately, when errors are corrected after the student's answer, when errors are analyzed at the end of the lesson. The answers of the linguistic students showed that they prefer being corrected after their speech (46,1%) and immediately after making an error (41,1%). Roughly, these options correlate approximately equally. As it

can be seen from Table 1, the most notable difference occurs in the second option. The second group students are inclined to be corrected after their speaking activity (74,7%) and much less (only 17,2% respondents) chose the option to be interrupted just after they made an error. Another interesting correlation concerns the corrections of errors at the end of the lesson. Non-linguistic students prefer their errors to be corrected at the end of the lesson twice less than those whose future profession is EFL.

Table 1. The students' answers on the most suitable time of correcting errors

When errors are corrected:	Linguistic students		Non-linguistic students	
	No of students	%	No of students	%
immediately after making an error	16	41,1	7	17,1
just after the speaking activity	18	46,1	31	75,6
at the end of the lesson	5	12,8	3	7,3

The question on how a student feels when being interrupted by the teacher to correct an error was put to specify the emotions of the respondents. Respondents were asked to choose all emotions they feel starting with the most typical emotion. The options included agitation, fear to make an error again, embarrassment, confusion, frustration, annoyance, despair, irritation, loss of the thought flow, concentration not to make another error, ignoration of the error correction.

We chose the 5 top repeated emotions the respondents pointed out and represented them on Figure 1.

The most typical emotions for linguistic students are concentration not to make a following error (27 answers – 69,2%), fear to error again (24 students – 61,5%) and the loss of the thought flow (21 students – 53,8%). Non-linguistic respondents pointed out the loss of the thought (35 students – 85,3%) as the most typical emotion when they are interrupted and corrected, the second typical emotion is frustration (29 answers – 70,7%). The third place in the emotion rating is given to concentration (21 students – 51,2%). Other feelings did not overcome the barrier of 20%, thus were not included in the graph. Nevertheless, not a single respondent from both groups chose the option of not paying attention when they are interrupted and corrected by their teacher.

The question on the results the immediate error correction gives implied the following: 1) it does not give the opportunity to fix an error, 2) it stimulates correct literary speech, 3) it helps improve communication skills, 4) it does not bring any benefit, 5) it helps students avoid repeated and similar errors, 6) it is desirable for those who are eager to communicate correctly.
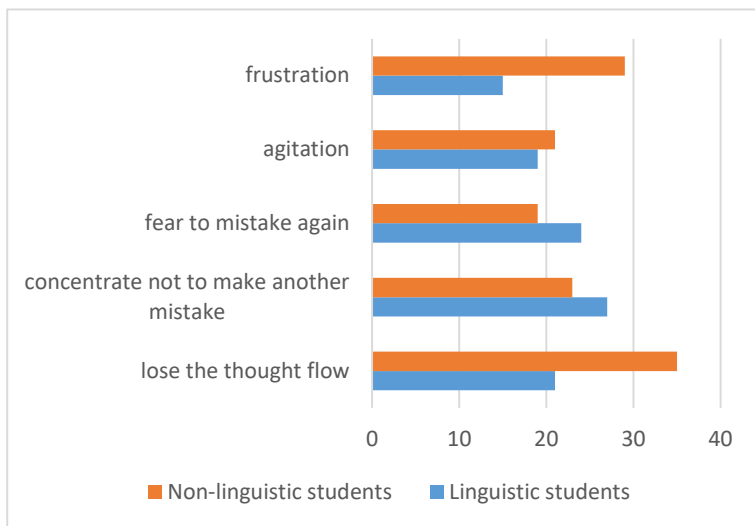

Figure 1. Typical emotions caused by teacher's correcting.

Recognizing the importance of acquiring EFL knowledge for their future profession, linguistic respondents ranged the offered options in this way (Figure 2). 12 students are sure that immediate correction of their errors can help improve their speech skills (30,8%), 10 respondents (25,6%) consider that it stimulates correct literary speech. 8 students are of the opinion that immediate error correction is desirable for those who are eager to communicate correctly (20,5%).
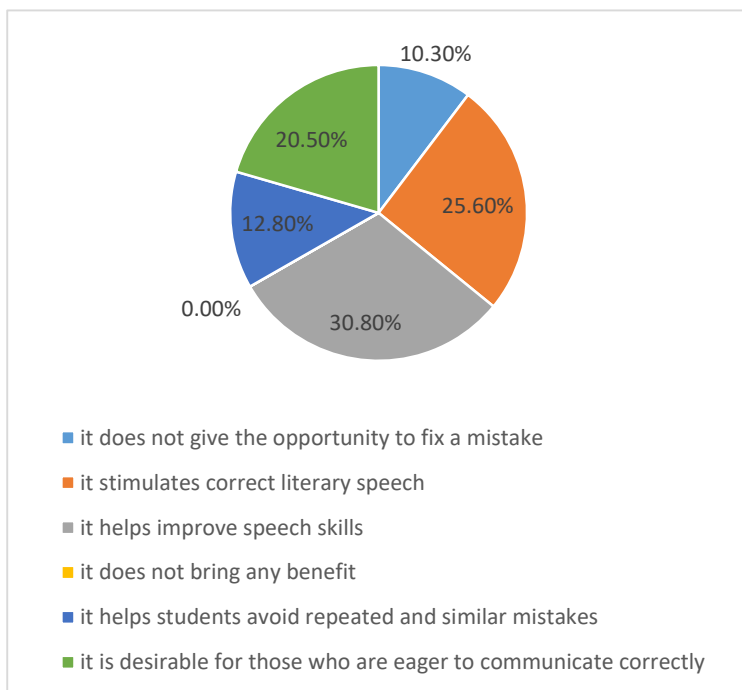
Figure 2. Linguistic respondents' opinion on the results
the error correction gives.

Interestingly, the second group respondents concentrated the benefits of immediate error correction on more pragmatic aspect. For 13 of them (31,7%) it helps avoid similar and repeated errors; 10 students think that it does not give the opportunity to fix an error (24,4%); 9 students (21,9%) consider that it stimulates correct literary speech. These and other results are shown in Figure 3.
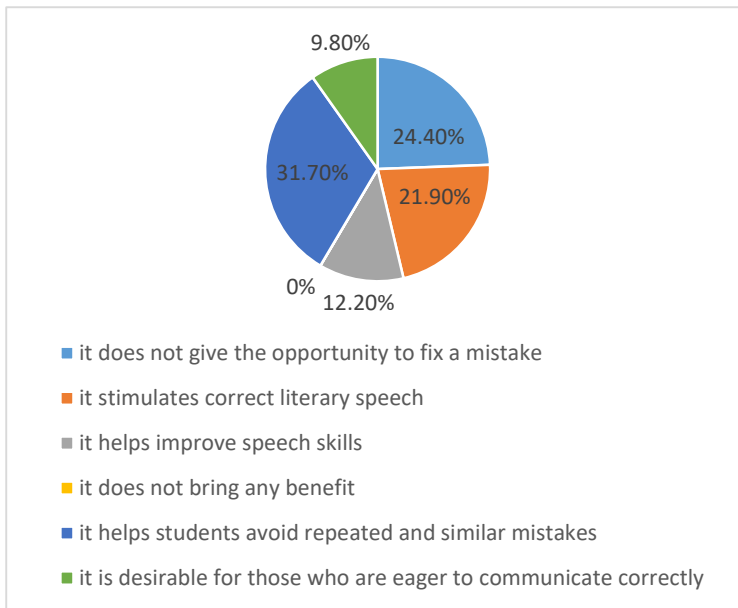
Figure 3. Non-linguistic respondents' opinion on the results the error correction gives.

Like in the previous case, none of the respondents from both groups considers error correction useless.

The answers to the question to investigate if the students remember the errors that have been corrected by the teacher are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results if respondents remember their error corrections

Category of students	Remember all corrected errors		Remember most of corrected errors		Do not remember errors	
	No of students	%	No of students	%	No of students	%
Linguistic students	22	56,4	14	35,9	3	7,7
Non-linguistic students	13	31,8	25	60,9	3	7,3

Unsurprisingly, linguistic students answered positively that they remembered all corrections (56,4% – 22 students), most of corrections was remembered by 35,9% (14 students) and 3 students confessed that they did not remember (7,7%) any corrections. The majority of non-linguistic respondents remembered most of the corrections (25 students – 60,9%), whereas all error corrections were kept in mind by nearly the third of the students (13 students – 31,8%). Just like linguistic students, 3 non-linguistic respondents did not remember, that constitutes 7,3%.

The last question concerns if students analyze and work at their errors made in their written speech. Here we witness a similar situation like with the previous question (Table 3).

Table 3. Results if respondents analyze and work at their errors made in their written speech

Category of students	Always analyze and work at errors		Sometimes analyze and work at errors		Never analyze and work at errors	
	No of students	%	No of students	%	No of students	%
Linguistic students	26	66,7	12	30,8	1	2,5
Non-linguistic students	10	24,5	27	65,8	4	9,7

The majority of linguistic students always analyze and work at their errors made in the written speech (66,7%) while non-linguistic respondents do it three times less (24,5%). At the same time the majority of non-linguistic students (65,8 %) do it from time to time and only one third of future EFL teachers do. In both groups there were students who never analyze and work at their errors made in the written speech with the ratio approximately 1 to 4.

Discussion

The university teachers were asked to comment the questionnaire results concerning the first block of questions. Generally, they expressed the idea that older students are more loyal to being corrected if to compare with their younger groupmates. They expressed their conviction that 21-22 year-old students unlike 19-20 year-olds are more motivated to learning EFL thanks to their realizing importance of acquiring good foreign language communication skills for their future profession.

It should be noted that university teachers unanimously supported the statement about the impact of the future profession on their attitude

towards error correction. Those whose profession will be EFL teacher are ready to be interrupted in case a teacher corrects their errors and they take it as a norm. Linguistic students are focused on the accuracy of their oral and written speech.

The time of error correction is of great importance to students. Some prefer immediate correction of errors in spite of its "inpracticality" (Kavaliauskiene & Anusiene, 2012). Others do not wish to have their errors discussed in public as they consider such a practice to be rather stressful (Bargiel-Matusiewicz & Bargiel-Firlit, 2009). And some studies prove that students receiving feedback on errors over a period of time can improve their language accuracy (Soler, 2015). Hence, the problem of time for error correction is rather controversial. Still, it is a fact that errors in oral speech can be corrected both immediately and delayed, while the correction in written tasks is usually delayed. Some researches prove that the most appropriate time for error correction in oral speech is immediately after its finishing (Papangkorn, 2015). Our research results substantiated this idea in relation to non-linguistic students who disliked to be interrupted during their speech. The reason for it was easily explained by the EFL teachers. Error correction could be frustrating to these students and even reduce their motivation to learn EFL. Besides, it was stressed that the main aim for non-linguistic students is to communicate, to interact with others and to be understood. Speech accuracy does not matter much for them. That is why, it is not desirable to interrupt these students "to point out a grammatical, lexical or pronunciation error, as the train of thought may be cut, focusing on language form and accuracy rather than on communication" (Zublin, 2011, p. 34); "erroneous English is all right as long as it's understandable" (Katayama, 2007).

Nevertheless, both groups of respondents are accustomed to being corrected. The penal discussion revealed the reason for it. Supposedly, students are used to be corrected by their teachers because the teaching process in Ukraine has long been teacher-centered. And only since recent times when Ukraine in its educational policy oriented to Europe and the world integration, the EFL teaching and learning has become student-centered. It means that linguistic and non-linguistic students are subconsciously ready to be interrupted and corrected, the difference being the time of correction. Another reason is, in Rosana B. Zublin's opinion, in students' belief that teacher correction is the most beneficial one as the teacher is the one who "knows" (Zublin, 2011).

Panel discussion teachers who are working currently with non-linguistic students supported the idea by Krashen (1982) that continuous

correction of errors raises the level of students' agitation and anxiety and even impedes learning. They recommended to correct only those non-linguistic students' errors that hinder communication. In addition, it is desirable to correct serious and repeated errors without delay but preferably after their speech.

The knowledge of the emotions, error correction raises in students, can greatly help teachers in EFL teaching. They can work out the appropriate correction strategy for their students, depending on their attitudes towards error correction and create a friendly learning environment.

As for the benefits students get when they are corrected, our experts expressed the following idea. Linguistic students think for the perspective, imagining themselves real teachers. Hence, it is more significant for them to have sufficient speech skills, ability to speak literary and skills to communicate correctly. Non-linguistic students consider the immediate pragmatic result. If they are corrected, it is done to avoid using the same or similar error or to prevent it fixing in the memory. Though the skills to communicate correctly are important for them, as well.

Our experts explained students' remembering of corrected errors in the following way. Linguistic students keep in mind all their errors that have been corrected because of such reasons. Firstly, they understand the nature of their errors as EFL learning implies detailed analysis of errors. Secondly, linguistic students are trained to fix the made error especially when teachers apply peer correction. It develops their ability and skill to notice any errors and correct them in their future professional activity. Non-linguistic students are not taught to do it purposefully. So they remember most of corrected errors thanks to their good memory.

Analogically, the situation with the analysis of the errors made in the written speech clearly shows the peculiarities of EFL training as a specialty. Linguistic students are taught to analyze and work at their errors in oral and written speech. That is why they demonstrated the obtained results whereas non-linguistic students mostly do it from time to time. Supposedly, because they are given such a task from their teachers. Only the most diligent students always analyze made errors. And these are students who are really motivated to EFL learning and do it on their own without being forced or encouraged by their teacher.

In the result of EFL teachers discussing the research, there have been worked out a number of recommendations for linguistic and non-linguistic EFL teachers in error correction. They are grouped in 3 categories:

- general recommendations that can be used for both linguistic and non-linguistic students;
- those that suit linguistic students;
- the ones for non-linguistic students.

General recommendations include the following: to keep students' motivation to learn EFL; to reduce the tension caused by error correction; to encourage students to improve their writing and speaking skills: to apply frequently individual error correction in oral and written speech as it facilitates personal learning, especially in relation to those learners who painfully accept error correction; to provide "sandwich-type feedback that is positive-negative-positive remarks" (Kavaliauskiene & Anusiene, 2012). Delay in error correction should be used only when the attention is focused not on the language accuracy (with linguistic students) but on keeping the smooth speech (preferably with non-linguistic students), especially during emotional discussions (with both categories of students). Care should be taken as the longer delay of error correction, the less it is effective (Ovchynnikova, 2019).

Specific recommendations for linguistic students: to correct all errors unless the purpose is not communication but language accuracy; to encourage more self- and peer-correction to help develop necessary skills of correcting errors in their future profession; a short discussion on error correction in the end of every lesson is necessary and will be appreciated by the students

Specific recommendations for non-linguistic students: to avoid over-correction; to use error correction in group oftener than peer correction as the latter violates the concept of "ingroup harmony" (Katayama, 2007).

Conclusion

The assumption of the age importance in students' attitude to error corrections proved to be true. Those students who are older take being corrected more loyal than younger ones. Besides, the future profession of the respondents also influences the attitude towards correcting errors. Future EFL teachers are more open and eager to being corrected while non-linguistic respondents do not like it although they recognize its importance. It is the greatest difference between linguistic and non-linguistic students' attitude towards error correction. The first ones perceive error correction as a method of their training, whereas the second consider it frustrating and being the reason for the break of their thought flow. Other differences in

students' attitude towards error correction are also caused by their specialty (benefits that error correction can bring, remembering of their errors, analysis of the errors made in the written speech). The knowledge of students' different attitudes towards error correction can help teachers choose the most appropriate teaching techniques, adjust them to every student's individual need (Kavaliauskienė & Anusiene, 2012) and make EFL learning effective and enjoyable both for students and teachers.

Perspectives of further research involve the investigation if the gender influences the type of error correction, particularly in peer, self, group and teacher corrections.

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