

Investigating Spanish EFL Students' Beliefs and Preferences Regarding the Effectiveness of Corrective Feedback¹

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Abstract

The main goal of the present research study was to examine Spanish EFL students' beliefs about the role and effectiveness of corrective feedback as well as their preferences about how corrective feedback should best be provided in classroom settings. Although the resulting data confirm the need and pedagogical value of corrective feedback in classroom settings, the fact is that research evidence also points to the conclusion that corrective feedback may at times inhibit or discourage L2 learning because some learners may feel seriously inhibited and embarrassed when being orally corrected, particularly in class-fronted situations. What seems to be still unclear is the timing of correction, or rather, whether corrective feedback should be provided right after the error is detected or preferably once students have already finished. Accordingly, the resulting data somehow suggest that learners do not always receive the corrective feedback that they expect and/or prefer.

Key words: learner beliefs, corrective feedback, inhibition.

1. Literature review

What has been discovered so far about how L2 acquisition actually happens in classroom settings is highly speculative and at times unclear. How do learners learn an L2? No one knows exactly how. So far we have mere theoretical speculations or conjectures on this issue. Generally, SLA research aims to find out how learners actually acquire an L2, inside or outside the classroom, by describing and explaining what they really do and why they do it in the way when discovering and processing the new language data (Ellis, 1997). As a matter of fact, the main way of investigating the development of SLA is by analysing diverse samples of learner language, focusing particularly on the errors made (Ellis, 1997; Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005; Tarone & Swierzbina, 2009). Errors² or linguistic deviations constitute clear indicators of the developmental sequences of interlanguage systems that are constantly being restructured and modified when discovering the new language.

¹ A great body of literature has dealt with the issue of error treatment and numerous terms have been used in this area. The term 'corrective feedback' is used as an umbrella term to refer to both implicit and explicit negative feedback in natural and instructional settings. Russell & Spada (2006:134) defined corrective feedback as "any feedback provided to a learners, from any source, that contains evidence of learner error of language form. It may be oral or written, implicit or explicit". Although the term 'error correction' has also been used instead of 'error treatment' to refer to teachers' responses to learner errors, Lyster et al. (1999) prefer the terms *feedback on error*, *corrective feedback*, or *error treatment*, which reflect the observations made by Long (1977) that what the teacher can do is to provide information to the learner, but it is the learner who will (or will not) eventually 'correct' the error. While *error correction* implies an evident and direct correction, *corrective feedback* is a more general way of providing some clues, or eliciting some correction, besides the direct correction made by the teacher, so as to draw learners' attention to the errors (Han, 2002). Ellis et al. (2005:340) claimed that "Corrective feedback takes the form of responses to learner utterances that contain error. The responses can consist of (a) an indication that an error has been committed, (b) provision of the correct target language form, or (c) metalinguistic information about the nature of the error, or any combination of these".

So far the discussion has mainly focused on how learners' errors help us gain a better understanding of L2 learning. The fact is that we can learn a lot from learners' errors by discovering the common learning difficulties and problems that most learners experience when discovering the new language as well as identifying the cognitive strategies or mechanisms employed when processing the new language data. Additionally, learners' errors let us know how far these have progressed over time and what remains to be learned. Accordingly, learners' errors and mistakes need to be carefully analysed because they may provide us with some of the keys to the understanding of SLA, offering important clues or guiding evidence on how L2 is actually being processed or learned at a particular stage of language learning, what strategies or procedures L2 learners employ when discovering the new language and how effective language teaching methodology is. In short, the study of the inevitable existence of errors will be of great help.

The value attributed to corrective feedback (henceforth, CF) in language pedagogy varies according to the different language teaching methods and approaches being used by language teachers or their beliefs about error treatment (Ellis, 2009a). In the 1950s and 1960s, grammatical accuracy was stressed and, thus, errors were avoided at all costs. In the 1970s, research questioned the pedagogical value and role of corrective feedback in second language classrooms. With the changing of the trends in second language teaching from traditional methods to the communicative approach, attitudes towards learner errors and the role of error treatment have evolved over the last decades. With the emergence of communicative approaches, error was then viewed as evidence of learners' interlanguage development, not as a sin to be avoided (Nicholas et al., 2001; Russell, 2009). The fact is that learners' errors cannot be seen as signs of failure or serious obstacles to be overcome or eradicated because they actually constitute an important aspect or rather an unavoidable feature of language learning, being then considered as sign of achievement or progress in language learning and as part of language creativity as well. In this sense, James (1998:1) reminds us that 'Error is likewise unique to humans, who are not only *sapiens* and *loquens*, but also *homo errans*'. Given that learning takes time and that nobody learns a language without making mistakes, errors are then viewed as a developmental phenomenon and are consequently unavoidable in the discovery of a new language (James, 1998) and as such they should be treated in a flexible and rational manner. In response to the question of whether error can be seen as a linguistic 'sin' or learning device, Brown (2000) claimed that errors, far from being bad, represent a natural, indispensable and even necessary phase of L2 learning. It needs to be remembered that L2 learning, like L1 learning, is a process of trial and error (Brown, 2000) because learners need to constantly make inferences and guesses about the functioning of the new language. Generally SLA constitutes a slow, gradual and often arduous process.

Over the last decades the role of corrective feedback in classroom settings has been extensively debated in both SLA research and language pedagogy, being discussed from both theoretical and pedagogical grounds. Certainly, few issues in second language pedagogy have generated as much controversy as that of corrective feedback. The overall effectiveness of corrective feedback in classroom settings has been demonstrated in terms of empirical classroom research as well as theoretical perspectives. Most research studies advocate the facilitative role and/or effectiveness of corrective feedback in classroom settings (e.g., DeKeyser, 1993; Roberts, 1995; Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Lyster, 1998; Long et al., 1998; Havranek, 1999; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Han, 2002; Panova and Lyster, 2002; Mackey et al., 2003; Ammar & Spada, 2006; Ellis et al., 2005; Ellis, 2006; Sheen, 2004, 2007; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener and Knoch, 2009; Ellis et al., 2008; Ellis, 2009a). In addition, several meta-analyses have confirmed its effectiveness (Russell & Spada, 2006; Mackey & Go, 2007; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Shaofeng, 2010; Li, 2010). However, there still exist many challenges and complexities still to be explored regarding corrective feedback effectiveness (Truscott, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2007; Lyster et al., 1999). The fact is that research literature has revealed different positions or opinions as well as evidence for and against error treatment. The theoretical debate over whether corrective feedback, which is a type of 'negative evidence', is necessary, or even beneficial for language learning still continues. Those who advocate corrective feedback argue that negative evidence plays a facilitative role in language acquisition.

² An error can be defined as a deviation from the norms of the target language (Ellis, 1994). Bearing in mind that the error/mistake distinction is a problematic one, we consider that James's (1998) definition can be helpful. This author defines error 'as being an instance of language that is unintentionally deviant and is not self-correctible by its author', whereas a mistake 'is either intentionally or unintentionally deviant and self-correctible' (James, 1998:78).

The research evidence from several classroom studies reveals that corrective feedback can be helpful for L2 learning or rather supports the potential benefits of error treatment (Lyster, 1998; Lyster et al., 1999; Russell & Spada, 2006). Corrective feedback –whether oral or written- is believed to facilitate L2 learning by providing learners with two types of input: positive and negative evidence. Certainly, learners need to receive negative evidence or corrective feedback (information about ungrammaticality) when they are not able to discover themselves how their interlanguage differs from the L2 (Lyster et al., 1999). On the contrary, there are some scholars who believed that corrective feedback should be avoided because it can have potentially negative effects on learners' affect and, consequently, on SLA (Krashen, 1982; Schwartz, 1993; Truscott, 1996, 1999). Despite making clear that corrective feedback may be useful for monitored production (i.e., writing) but not for spontaneous oral production, Krashen (1982:75) argued that corrective feedback was not only unnecessary, but also potentially harmful to language learning because it "has the immediate effect of putting the student on the defensive". Likewise, Schwartz (1993) made clear that corrective feedback is only useful in effecting superficial and temporary changes to L2 learners' performance, not to their underlying competence. On the other hand, Truscott (1999) strongly believed that feedback on error does not actually work and, consequently, should be abandoned because corrective feedback may cause embarrassment, frustration, inhibition, and feelings of inferiority among learners. This is the reason why he reached this conclusion: 'Correction is a bad idea'.

In addition to describing error treatment as a traumatic experience and not at all helpful for students, Truscott (1999) even suggested that teachers' time and effort should be better spent on *other aspects of teaching*. In fact, its negative and harmful effects may discourage and demotivate learners. In short, these researchers argued that SLA depends solely on positive evidence and thus negative evidence is not necessary and might even be harmful for interlanguage development. Evidently, Lyster et al. (1999) disagreed with Truscott's recommendations and view corrective feedback as potentially effective and, in some cases, even necessary. Differences in opinion also exist concerning written corrective feedback, as is evident in the debate between Truscott and Ferris because Ferris argued that corrective feedback depended on the quality of the correction, that is, if the correction was clear and consistent it would actually work. According to Ferris (1995), corrective feedback should be provided unless its ineffectiveness and harmfulness have been conclusively proven. In this sense, Ferris (1999, 2004) states that we are at present unable to confirm that error correction actually works because there are too many methodological flaws in the design and analysis of the published studies. However, recent studies have shown that written corrective feedback can result in acquisition (Sheen, 2007; Ellis et al., 2008). Thus, the debate on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of feedback on errors still continues and generates much controversy among SLA researchers.

Corrective feedback effectiveness has been justified from different perspectives. Long's (1996) 'interaction hypothesis' claims that negative evidence provided through interactional feedback helps the learners notice the gap between their deviant interlanguage forms and the L2 (Gass, 1997, 2003; VanPatten, 2003; Long, 2007). Likewise, the role of corrective feedback is grounded in Schmidt's (1990, 2001) 'noticing hypothesis' which suggests that in order to learn anything that is new, noticing is essential. For this reason, the degree of explicitness of corrective feedback is necessary to promote noticing (Russell & Spada, 2006). While the stronger version of the hypothesis states that noticing is a necessary condition for learning, the weaker version claims that noticing is helpful but not necessary. The proponents of the Noticing Hypothesis advocate the benefits of corrective feedback in stimulating noticing, or rather, in drawing learners' attention to form (Ellis, 1994; Robinson, 1995).

Over the last decades several controversial issues concerning corrective feedback have been profoundly discussed by both SLA researchers and language educators (see, for example, Hyland & Hyland, 2006). In this sense, Ellis (2009a) highlights five main controversies concerning corrective feedback: (1) whether learners' errors should be corrected or not, or rather whether corrective feedback actually contributes to L2 acquisition?, (2) which errors should be corrected?, (3) who should correct? (the teacher or the learner him/herself/), (4) which type of corrective feedback is the most effective?, and (5) when is better to do corrective feedback (immediate or delayed)?.

Do errors upset and discourage EFL teachers? Of course they do. What is actually questioned by language teachers is why students go on making the same errors over and over again even when such errors have been repeatedly explained to them. One of the most frustrating tasks for L2 teachers is that of constantly correcting the same errors.

In fact, many teachers simply do not understand why their students are unable to use correctly the linguistic forms being taught and, thus, many of them somehow feel guilty. Certainly L2 teachers seem to be afraid of using corrective feedback for fear of interrupting the flow of communication in some activities and of inhibiting the learners' participation. In response to the dilemma of whether or not errors should be corrected, the fact is that leaving students' errors untouched might lead to the fossilization of ill-formed structures. No matter what teachers do, some students will benefit from corrective feedback, while others will not (Guenette, 2007). The fact is that L2 teachers somehow feel obliged to face and deal appropriately with all errors, even though they must be aware that there does not exist any 'ideal corrective feedback recipe'. As a matter of fact, they devote considerable time and energy to error treatment. The amount of time and effort teachers spend in providing corrective feedback somehow suggests that error treatment is very important for many teachers as well (Ferris, 1995). Ideally, corrective feedback should be individualized, even though this would evidently involve an enormous challenge for L2 teachers. The question is how and how much? It has been shown that overcorrection can become counterproductive since it may discourage learners, even though too little can be equally negative. Ur (1996) suggested the idea of investing better time in avoiding errors than in correcting them, as most teachers agree. Corrective feedback generally involves a time-consuming and exhaustive activity of teacher's job. Given that checking every single error does not make any sense, the fact is that corrective feedback should be provided selectively as many researchers recommend. This necessarily implies that errors should be prioritised. Additionally, quick corrections are not useful, unless they are about something repeatedly worked on in class. The fact is that students require quick correction of mistakes but extended correction of errors.

Although both L2 learners and teachers find corrective feedback important, attitudes towards corrective feedback seem to vary among them. Although corrective feedback is desired and accepted by most L2 learners who need feedback on how well they are doing (Ur, 1996), the fact is that they do not always receive the corrective feedback that they expect and/or prefer. Despite the fact that most learners find corrective feedback helpful and, subsequently, need and wish to be corrected regularly in class (Schulz, 2001; Havranek, 2002), the fact is that many of them also find corrections embarrassing to varying degrees. What language teachers cannot actually do is to make learners feel embarrassed or frustrated when being corrected. In addition, many learners neither notice nor understand all evidence of corrective feedback until they are explained in a direct way by the teachers themselves (Ferris, 1995; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). The fact is that a great deal of teacher feedback is unnoticed on the part of learners. What really matters is that learners are aware of being corrected and understand the nature of the correction as well (Roberts, 1995). Accordingly, the real challenge for teachers is to make sure that their corrective feedbacks are actually noticed and understood on the part of learners.

Numerous investigations have been undertaken to explore a variety of factors that may influence the effectiveness of corrective feedback. Learners' individual differences (personality, attitudes...) and affective factors need to be seriously taken into consideration in all aspects of teaching. In fact, second language pedagogy has highlighted the importance of positive feedback or reinforcement in providing affective support to the learner and stimulating motivation to continue learning (Ellis, 2009a). However, negative evidence provided through corrective feedback may seriously damage learners' feelings and attitudes (Martínez, 2008). As Ellis (2009a) claimed, corrective feedback does not function as 'punishment' but it may inhibit or discourage learning. That is the reason why L2 teachers are somehow afraid of causing learners anything that may demotivate them from learning the new language. That is, they frequently worry about the emotional damage or impact corrective feedback can have over their learners' self-esteem (Schulz, 2001). Accordingly, the potential affective damage corrective feedback can cause needs to be seriously taken into consideration. In short, learner individual characteristics and affective aspects may affect or influence the effectiveness of corrective feedback (Hyland, 2003; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010).

The complexity of error treatment as an instructional practice and interactive phenomenon as well as a potential tool for language acquisition (Ellis, 2009a) deserves special emphasis. What is really true is that corrective feedback is a complex issue that needs to be carefully examined. As a matter of fact, research on corrective feedback provides us with valuable information about the effectiveness of this instructional practice as well as knowledge about how language learning actually occurs (Panova and Lyster, 2002).

The fact is that researchers still face the dilemma of how to ensure effective corrective feedback in classroom settings. Both SLA research and L2 pedagogy have convincingly shown that learners can greatly benefit from corrective feedback in communicative classrooms, or rather, corrective feedback actually works in the language classrooms (e.g. Leeman, 2003; Lyster, 2004; Ammar & Spada, 2006; Russell & Spada, 2006; Mackey & Goo, 2007; Ellis et al., 2005; Sheen, 2007; Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener and Knoch, 2009; Ellis, 2009a; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Li, 2010; Shaofeng, 2010). Based on the premise that corrective feedback is more effective than no feedback, the fact is that there are still many variables that mediate feedback effectiveness (Lyster & Saito, 2010), or rather, many variables influencing differential effectiveness of corrective feedback such as age, language proficiency, L1 transfer, complexity of the target structure, to name only a few (Li, 2010). Additionally, several research studies have shown that teacher's feedback can often be imprecise, arbitrary, idiosyncratic, ambiguous and unsystematic (Lyster & Mori, 2006). According to Ellis (2009a), current research has moved from addressing whether corrective feedback actually works to examining what type works best. The fact is that feedback on error can be provided in a wide variety of ways as to learners respond to corrective feedback in different ways.

The most comprehensive taxonomy of corrective feedback is the one proposed by Lyster and Ranta (1997): explicit correction, recast, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, repetition and clarification request. Research examining the effectiveness of certain types of feedback is still inconclusive. There is still debate over what types of corrective feedback are more effective and, consequently, the fact is that it is uneasy to decide which type of feedback is best for all contexts (Ellis et al., 2005; Russell & Spada, 2006; Loewen & Erlam, 2006; Loewen & Nabei, 2007; Mackey & Goo, 2007). As indicated above, there does not exist any 'ideal corrective feedback recipe'. In this sense, Ellis (2009a) and Lyster & Saito (2010) remind us that teachers need to adapt and adjust flexibly a wide variety of corrective feedback techniques to the particular learner's cognitive and affective needs. As is evident, this does not necessarily mean that they can correct all students in the same way. The effects of corrective feedback strategies have also received a great deal of attention in SLA research (Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Lyster, 2004; Loewen, 2004; Sheen, 2004; Truscott, 2004, 2007; Bitchener et al., 2005; Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Ellis et al., 2008; Ellis, 2009a, 2009b). Bearing in mind the considerable effort and time devoted to corrective feedback, the fact is that we know so little about it.

2. Research Questions

Over the last decades the results and interpretations of many experimental studies have been rather conflicting and contradictory which might be attributed to the differences in research design and methodology (Guenette, 2007). According to Russell & Spada (2006), each research study considers different populations, employs different measures and applies different methodologies and, consequently, produces different results as well as different conclusions and interpretations which makes it difficult to generalize beyond the particular sample considered. Likewise, Hyland and Hyland (2006:84) claimed that "it is difficult to draw any clear conclusions and generalizations from the literature as a result of varied populations, treatments and research designs".

Although much has been published on the role and effectiveness of corrective feedback, the fact is that few research studies have focused on analysing what students actually believe about how errors should best be corrected inside the classroom. An important area that has recently attracted much attention is how students perceive the importance and usefulness of written corrective feedback (WCF) (see, for example, Schulz, 2001; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Hyland, 2003; Diab, 2005; Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Brown, 2009). The main goal of the present research study was to examine Spanish EFL students' opinions and beliefs about the effectiveness of corrective feedback as well as their preferences about how corrective feedback should be actually provided inside the classroom. We believe that the exploration of students' beliefs, opinions and preferences with regard to the importance of the role of corrective feedback constitutes an essential source of information to improve second language learning and teaching. With this in mind, we want to discover whether or not students find teacher feedback in the classroom efficient. Although students' preferences are important, the fact is that such preferences should not be idealized as James (1998:253) suggested "Students' preferences for certain types of correction cannot be ignored of course. Nor should they be put on a pedestal, because they are not necessarily more effective for being preferred". In fact, research has revealed that students' preferences and expectations are often affected by their prior language learning experiences, and these experiences may not necessarily have been beneficial.

The fact is that students' preferences have been left much unexplored, thus, this type of research needs to be highlighted. Accordingly, this article aims to fill this gap in the research literature. As evident, this research has important implications for language learning and teaching.

Given the need to control as many variables as possible (Russell & Spada, 2006), this research study hopes to throw some light on the effectiveness of corrective feedback in investigating the emotional impact or damage corrective feedback can cause among learners when being corrected in class-fronted situations. In short, we set out to answer the following research questions:

- What do bilingual students actually think about the role and effectiveness of corrective feedback, and how should this best be provided in classroom settings?
- To what extent does corrective feedback emotionally influence bilingual learners?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Learning at least one foreign language is compulsory in almost all primary and secondary schools of Europe. In Spain there exists a growing number of Primary and Secondary state schools involved in bilingual education programmes. One of the pioneering projects was the result of the agreement between the British Council and the Spanish Ministry of Education for the teaching of an integrated curriculum (Spanish/English) in a number of schools ranging from nursery, through primary to secondary level, in a pilot scheme. This project started in 1996 at the pre-school level, and has recently reached secondary education. At this level, all the participating schools teach social sciences (geography and history) in English, while the other subjects selected for the projects depend on the availability of specialists willing to teach their subject in English. At secondary level, CLIL teachers need to be content specialists with a high level of English since the selected subjects are entirely taught in the target language.

The present research study has been carried out in bilingual secondary schools located in Extremadura, an autonomous region of western Spain, on the border with Portugal. We collected data from four bilingual secondary schools which were randomly selected, particularly two classes from each school. A total of 181 Spanish secondary school students participated in the investigation voluntarily. After receiving 181 questionnaires, the researcher discarded 9 invalid questionnaires which were either incomplete or failed to follow the instructions of the questionnaire. Accordingly, the valid response rate was 95,02% and a total of 172 questionnaires were identified as valid data for statistical analysis in the present study. A sample of 172 Spanish secondary school learners was eventually employed, these 71 (41,28%) were males and 101 (58,72%) were females. Of the 172 students 95 (55,23%) were in the first year of Bachillerato and 77 (44,77%) were in the second year. Their average age was 17, ranging from sixteen to nineteen. Additionally, the participants in the survey had studied English for an average of 14 years. The average classroom level was upper intermediate. It needs to be added that the vast majority of these learners (89%) had never visited an English-speaking country, and only a small minority (11%) had spent some time (a few weeks) in either Great Britain or the USA.

3.2. Instrument and data collection procedure

Data collection took place in a single one-hour session in 2011. Participants were administered one particular questionnaire on error treatment from Valdeón (1999). As can be seen, the questionnaire presented below was simplified to *Yes – No – Not sure* questions in which the informants could provide us with straightforward answers that threw some light on the importance of carrying out correction work in the classroom. Additionally, the questionnaire included two additional questions, being the second an open one, i.e. students could provide their preferences or suggestions for effective correction work.

The questionnaire was administered by the researcher himself, who explained the purpose and potential usefulness of the survey and also made clear to the participants that the questionnaire was not a test, and that their responses would be used for research purposes only. After reminding our group of informants of the importance of giving honest answers, they were assured of the confidentiality of the data.

3.3. Analysis and discussion of results

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were only utilized for descriptive statistics to answer the aforementioned research questions. Table 1 displays the results of descriptive statistics.

Questions	Yes	No	Not sure	Total
1. Is error making an essential part of the learning process?	80.81%	17.44%	1.74%	100.00%
2. Do you resent it when you make mistakes?	59.30%	38.95%	1.74%	100.00%
3. Is error correction an essential part of the teaching process?	77.91%	19.77%	2.33%	100.00%
4. Do you resent being corrected by the teacher?	30.81%	65.12%	4.07%	100.00%
5. In speaking activities, do you expect the teacher to correct you?	75.00%	20.35%	4.65%	100.00%
6. Should the teacher interrupt you when you make a mistake?	57.56%	41.86%	0.58%	100.00%
7. Should he/she correct you once you have finished?	59.30%	38.37%	2.33%	100.00%
8. Should he/she correct you once the exercise is finished so that the whole class can learn from your mistakes?	79.07%	15.70%	5.23%	100.00%
9. Should he/she correct you in private?	20.35%	79.07%	0.58%	100.00%
10. If you answered the previous question in the affirmative, why? A. Otherwise, you feel embarrassed (32.55%) B. Your mistakes are of no interest to other students (39.55%) C. When corrected in public, you do not pay much attention to it (27.90%)				100.00%
11. In writing activities, should the teacher use a red pen?	82.56%	13.37%	4.07%	100.00%
12. Do you feel corrections in red have a negative effect on you?	25.58%	74.42%	0.00%	100.00%
13. Would you prefer the teacher use the same colour as you?	9.88%	87.21%	2.91%	100.00%
14. Do you expect the teacher A. to provide you with all the information or (72.58%) B. use a code to tell you the type of mistake you have made and check it yourself? (27.42%)				100.00%
15. Which method will help you most to understand the reason why you have made the mistake and, consequently, to avoid it in the future? A. Explanations (11.04%) B. Examples (17.45%) C. A combination of both (59.30%) D. Mere correction of the mistake without any explanations (4.07%) E. Eliciting students to self-correct their own mistakes (8.14%)				100.00%

Table 1: Questionnaire taken from Valdeón (1999).

Table 1 reports the results obtained from learners' responses with percentages of students selecting each alternative. After the data-gathering process, the next step was to synthesise and analyse the results.

With respect to the nature of error production –Question 1-, the vast majority of respondents (80.81%) believed that error making constitutes an essential and necessary phase for second language learning. However, nearly 60% of the participants recognised that they resented when making mistakes in the classroom –Question 2-. Although they accept the nature of errors as an essential part, or rather, an unavoidable feature of the learning process, they also view them as an unpleasant aspect. This does not necessarily mean that they do not wish to be corrected.

As regards the facilitative role and effectiveness of error treatment in the classroom context, most of the respondents (77.91%) stressed the importance of corrective feedback –Question 3- as an essential instructional practice to improve second language learning. Additionally, nearly two thirds of the subjects (65.12%) surprisingly acknowledged not feeling resentment when being corrected by the teacher inside the classroom –Question 4- because they find teacher feedback highly necessary and helpful.

Questions 5 to 10 are mainly concerned with oral corrective feedback in class-fronted situations, which seem to generate certain doses of anxiety among some learners. Approximately 75% of the participants preferred or expected to be corrected by teachers –Question 5-. However, more importantly, the timing of correction seems to be unclear because while somewhat more than half of the subjects (57.56%) believed that the teacher should interrupt them and correct them immediately when they make errors –Question 6-, about 59.30% of the subjects, in contrast, preferred to be corrected once they have already finished –Question 7- and, more specifically, once the exercise has finished (79.07%) so that the rest of the classmates could learn from the errors –Question 8-. Accordingly, the correction at the end of the class was assessed as the best alternative. While the vast majority of the respondents (79.07%) preferred to be corrected in front of the classmates in the classroom, only 20.35% preferred to be corrected in private –Question 9-, among other reasons –Question 10-, because they might feel embarrassed (32.55%) or considered that their mistakes were their concern and nobody else's (39.55%) or did not pay much attention to corrective feedback when being corrected in public inside the classroom (27.90%). As can be seen, Questions 7 to 9 propose several alternatives to immediate corrective feedback –Question 6-.

Unlike oral corrective feedback in class-fronted situations, written mistakes seem to be more private, not subject to general scrutiny. Questions 11 to 13 focus on written corrective feedback. The vast majority of the participants (82.56%) preferred that the teacher used a red pen when correcting written activities –Question 11-. Additionally, nearly 74.42% disagreed with the idea that corrections in red could have a negative effect on them –Question 12-. In fact, approximately 87.21% of the subjects would not prefer the teacher use the same colour as them –Question 13-. The data obtained somehow suggest that the informants consider the red pen a tool to bring their attention to specific points rather than a method to discourage them from learning. Accordingly, the use of a red pen, or rather, corrections in red do not seem to have the negative effect that has been assumed it has, at least for this sample of population surveyed.

In Question 14, two possible correction methods or techniques are provided. While about 72.58% of the subjects surveyed would prefer the teacher to provide them with all the information, only 27.42% believed, in contrast, that the teacher should use a code to indicate students the type of mistake they have made and check it themselves. Surprisingly, most respondents preferred the traditional approach rather than the option proposed by the communicative approach.

As regards the last question, in which the participants were requested to state their preferences for possible corrective feedback techniques, the combination of both explanations and examples obtained the highest percentage (59.30%) being the preferred option, followed to a lesser extent by the mere provision of examples (17.45%). On the contrary, both direct correction without any explanations and self-correction are believed to be unhelpful at least for this sample of population surveyed.

Although the data shown in Table 1 reveal different percentages of responses, the data obtained are consistent enough to draw overall conclusions. In fact, several questions generated high percentages of agreement which somehow confirm the need and pedagogical value of corrective feedback in classroom settings. In the light of these findings, the fact is that corrective feedback plays a facilitative role in second language learning. The sample of population surveyed supports the effectiveness of corrective feedback by stating their preferences for being orally corrected even in public inside the classroom. However, the resulting data also suggest that corrective feedback may at times inhibit or discourage L2 learning because some learners may feel seriously inhibited and embarrassed, particularly when being orally corrected in class-fronted situations.

4. Conclusions

The main goal of this research article was to explore what bilingual students actually think about the role and effectiveness of corrective feedback and how this should best be provided in classroom settings. The fact is that this issue was the main focus of the present research study. Somehow the resulting data suggest that learners do not always receive the corrective feedback that they expect and/or prefer. Although corrective feedback has generally been found to be beneficial and/or helpful to L2 learning, what seems to be still unclear is the timing of correction, or rather, whether corrective feedback should be provided right after the error is detected or preferably once students have already finished. Additionally, learners' attitudes towards corrective feedback should not be neglected because those students who constantly receive negative comments from teachers seem to have more negative attitudes towards language learning than those who receive positive feedback.

Accordingly, affective aspects cannot be overlooked because the resulting data also suggest that corrective feedback could have a potentially harmful effect on some students' emotional states, in terms of personalities and attitudes. In this sense, learners' individual differences and affective aspects are believed to significantly influence the effectiveness of corrective feedback. In short, this study recognises the importance of considering the influence of learners' individual differences and characteristics when providing corrective feedback in classroom settings.

5. Limitations and future research

Further research is needed on the issue of how corrective feedback actually works for SLA and how it should best be provided in classroom settings. More research is also needed on the differential effects of corrective feedback strategies on SLA in classroom settings (Li, 2010) and, more specifically, on learners' affect. Further research investigating variables influencing differential effectiveness of corrective feedback is also needed. One final point should be kept in mind when interpreting the results: given that the number of informants and questions in this study was limited, the results cannot be easily generalized to a wide variety of contexts. For future studies, a greater number of participants from different instructional contexts and the inclusion of open-ended questions to the instrument could be considered.

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5. References

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