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THE PROBLEM OF FOSSILIZED ERRORS AND THEIR CORRECTING DURING A FOUR-MONTH INTENSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSE (ALC – AMERICAN LANGUAGE COURSE)

Background. *Fossilized errors remain a persistent and widely discussed problem in the process of foreign language acquisition, particularly among learners attending intensive English language courses. Such errors tend to become fixed over time and resist correction even after repeated exposure to correct language forms. As a result, they hinder the development of communicative competence and negatively affect further language development, especially at intermediate and advanced levels. The problem becomes more complicated under conditions of intensive instruction, where a large volume of learning material and limited time for reflection may contribute to the reinforcement of incorrect language forms. Despite the considerable amount of theoretical research devoted to the phenomenon of fossilization, there remains a need for practice-oriented approaches aimed at effective error correction in real educational settings. The aim of the study is to identify effective methods and techniques for correcting fossilized and semi-fossilized errors under conditions of intensive foreign language learning instruction.*

Methods. *The study is based on the observation of the educational process and the experimental application of error correction strategies during a four-month intensive English language course (ALC – American Language Course). Fossilized and semi-fossilized errors were identified, classified, and analysed. Various correction techniques were systematically implemented and evaluated, including self-correction, peer correction, and teacher-guided feedback, and teacher-assisted correction.*

Results. *The findings indicate that the systematic and purposeful application of correction strategies significantly contributes to reducing the number of fossilized errors. The combination of different correction methods proved to be more effective than the use of isolated approaches. Continuous feedback, repeated practice of problematic language forms, and active learner involvement were identified as key factors in successful error correction.*

Conclusions. *Systematic and consistent work on fossilized errors contributes to the improvement of learners' communicative competence and ensures more effective foreign language acquisition under conditions of intensive instruction.*

Keywords: *fossilized errors, English language acquisition, intensive learning, teaching strategies, overcoming errors and mistakes.*

Background

Fossilization is a well-documented phenomenon in second language acquisition, referring to the persistence of incorrect linguistic patterns in a learner's language use despite exposure to correct forms. This issue becomes particularly evident among learners who have already achieved pre-intermediate, intermediate, or advanced levels of proficiency. At these stages, learners often demonstrate stable yet incorrect patterns that negatively affect communication.

The relevance of this study lies in the growing need to address fossilized errors in intensive language learning environments, where rapid progress is expected but time for deep consolidation is limited. If such errors are not systematically addressed, they may become deeply ingrained and hinder further language development.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the nature of fossilized errors, identify their causes, and evaluate the effectiveness of correction strategies applied during a four-month intensive English course (ALC).

Literature review. The study of learner errors has been central to applied linguistics since the works of Noam Chomsky, who distinguished between competence and performance (Chomsky, 1965; Berwick, & Chomsky, 2016), and Pit Corder, who emphasised the importance of learner errors as a valuable source of insight into language acquisition (Corder, 1967). Later, Larry Selinker introduced

the concept of interlanguage and fossilization, which remains fundamental for understanding persistent learner errors in second language learning (Selinker, 1972).

Subsequent research has demonstrated that fossilized errors may result from interlingual interference, intralingual processes such as overgeneralization, insufficient corrective feedback, and limitations within the learning environment. These findings are supported by the theoretical framework of Stephen Krashen, particularly his Input Hypothesis, which highlights the importance of comprehensible input but has been criticized for underestimating the role of output and feedback in error correction (Krashen, 1982). Many contemporary linguists and language instructors continue research regarding mother tongue interference (Syafuri, & Saputra, 2021).

From a pedagogical perspective, scholars such as Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers have contributed significantly to the understanding of language teaching methods and the role of error correction within different methodological frameworks. Their work emphasises that approaches to error treatment vary depending on the underlying teaching paradigm (Richards, & Rodgers, 2014).

Practical classroom-oriented insights are provided by methodologists such as Jeremy Harmer, Jim Scrivener, and Penny Ur, who stress the importance of timely, selective, and context-sensitive error correction. They argue that

excessive correction may hinder learner confidence, while insufficient feedback can lead to the stabilisation of incorrect forms (Harmer, 2015; Scrivener, 2005; Ur, 1996).

In addition, Diane Larsen-Freeman highlights the dynamic nature of language development and the need to view errors not as failures but as natural stages in the learning process (Larsen-Freeman, & Cameron, 2008). This perspective aligns with contemporary communicative and task-based approaches, where fluency and meaning-making often take precedence over immediate accuracy.

Despite extensive theoretical and methodological research, there remains a need for empirical studies that focus on effective strategies for correcting fossilized errors in intensive learning environments. Such contexts require a careful balance between communicative practice and systematic feedback, which this study aims to address.

Aim of the study: The aim of the study is to identify effective strategies for correcting fossilized learner errors in foreign language acquisition and to determine the pedagogical conditions under which these strategies can be successfully implemented in intensive learning environments.

The following **research objectives** are addressed in the study:

- to identify and characterise the main types and causes of fossilized errors in foreign language learning;
- to analyse the factors contributing to the persistence of such errors, including interlingual and intralingual influences, as well as instructional practices;
- to examine and systematise existing approaches to error correction in communicative language teaching;
- to determine effective methods and techniques for correcting fossilized errors in intensive learning contexts.

Methods

To achieve the aim of the study, the following methods were employed: analysis and synthesis – to define the research problem, aim, and objectives; content analysis – to examine scientific literature on learner errors, fossilization, and error correction in foreign language teaching; classification and systematisation – to identify and group the main types and causes of fossilized errors; comparative analysis – to evaluate different approaches to error correction within various teaching methodologies; generalisation – to formulate conclusions regarding effective strategies for correcting fossilized errors in intensive learning contexts.

Results

Tackling semi-fossilized and fossilized errors during the 4-month intensive course is essential since it touches upon facilitation of a further studying of the English language. The research on correction regards mostly pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advanced students since they have studied the language previously and join the course having a set of possible errors. The above mentioned levels of English possession show a greater deal of mistakes and errors since learners of lower levels have not required these mistakes yet. Why are we regarding learners of higher levels and exclude beginners? Because semi-fossilized and fossilized errors are the ones learners may start acquiring after learning the English language for some time, and these errors occur during the most important stage of learning, i.e. production, after they have reached a certain level of the language possession. These errors have to be dealt with to let learners overcome language barriers, misunderstanding and wrongly learned patterns, master the target language to progress and be able to communicate and perform with fewer mistakes on a higher level in a working or an international and multicultural environment.

It is necessary to examine the nature of these errors and to clarify the grounds for their classification as semi-fossilized and fossilized. A mistake is described as a surface inaccuracy, a slip of a tongue or a slip of the pen that learners make unconsciously due to being inattentive or tired while producing the target language. Learners are able to spot such mistakes and correct themselves since they potentially know the grammar pattern of the question rather well. At this important point we understand that learners possess the knowledge of the pattern. An error, on the other hand, is a repetitive language inaccuracy, that occurs when a learner is not able to fully understand a pattern, doesn't know one, learned it incorrectly, or/and considers its usage correct and applies this linguistic pattern freely in communication. At this crucial point we come to the conclusion that it is essential to work on patterns that a learner acquired insufficiently or incorrectly.

Mistakes and errors are made during speaking and writing, i.e. while producing the target language, and are the most important stages. Therefore, mistakes and errors have to be identified and corrected to help learners become productive and efficient language users. Any error may grow into becoming a semi-fossilized and then fossilized if it is overlooked by both the instructor and learners. There is not a definite rule or sign when learners' errors start to fossilize, let alone separating semi-fossilized from fossilized errors. Everything depends on many various factors, reasons and environments. At this stage we must consider individual abilities, pace of studying, materials, learning context, peers, instructors' activity and expertise, and learners' motivation and attitude to learning. Learners may be aware or unaware of their fossilized errors, so the instructor becomes aware too and takes interest in their correction.

Diving into the classification of fossilized errors will help separate them for better understanding how to deal with them.

- Grammatical. These errors involve incorrect use of verb tenses, that is also connected with the difference in tense patterns of the Ukrainian language, parts of speech, or sentence order and structures. We consider it to be the largest and most crucial in learning the English language by Ukrainian learners since it serves the basis while mastering English.

- Syntactical. Errors in sentence structure that may confuse understanding or lead to awkward phrasing. Again the Ukrainian language syntax differs from the English language one and we must not forget this fact. Yet syntax must not be disregarded since it serves as the language's scaffolding.

- Lexical. These errors occur when language learners use incorrect vocabulary or fail to choose the appropriate word or collocations. The Ukrainian language and the English language do not mirror most of each other's collocations and attention must be paid to differences.

- Morphological. These errors deal with incorrect forms of words, such as adding wrong or inappropriate suffixes or prefixes. We must not overlook this topic as well, since the morphologies of the languages in question are different.

- Phonological. Errors related to the sounds of speech, i.e. mispronouncing sounds, can significantly impact communication clarity. It goes without saying that these two languages' phonologies differ to some extent and mastering the English accent is also important.

Fossilized errors develop due to various factors and it is essential to identify and address these ingrained mistakes to improve learners' language proficiency. These fossilized errors refer to habitual mistakes that are persistent in speech and communication. Learners may have their own set of these errors that are often used subconsciously, making

them very difficult, yet possible, to identify and correct, moreover, they must be worked on to perfect and facilitate further knowledge and language acquisition. Therefore, there is the need for instructors to recognise each learner's errors during the course. By identifying, categorising, and addressing these errors, language instructors use targeted correction strategies, particular methods, and drill exercises to work on them to correct and create a new improved and flawless knowledge.

At this point we are obliged to stop to look at the classification of errors by importance because it helps the instructor decide on when and how to tackle them. Thus, there are:

- on-target errors – the ones that appear immediately during learning. Such errors have to be corrected on the spot. The learning environment allows to study language patterns carefully and allows to submerge learners into the process, explain, drill, use these patterns right away and fight errors if they arise;
- high-frequency off-target errors – a set of individual errors having been acquired by learners and occurring very often during language production. These errors are the result of continuous use of incorrect patterns and become ingrained if they are not dealt with in good time. They may distort meaning and often cause misunderstanding during communication, therefore, they must be spotted and worked on;
- low-frequency off-target errors – are minor and occur from time to time and since they do not interfere in and interrupt communication there is tendency to correct them when it is convenient.

Questions why, how, when mistakes fossilize have interested linguistics and been studied for decades. Methods and strategies have been theorized, and exercises developed to facilitate acquisition of a language and tackle mistake successfully. In early 1950-ies Uriel Weinreich pioneered the study of errors and the terms interlingual and intralingual interference (errors) appeared and Jack C. Richards continued the study in 1970-ies. The investigation of learner mistakes and errors, as well as the search for effective correction strategies, continues to occupy an important place in contemporary research on language acquisition (Chorlango, & Arroyo, 2024; Albelihi, & Al-Ahdal, 2024).

Since there are many different possible mistakes and errors that a learner may develop, it is not possible to set a clear list, but it is possible to categorise mistakes and errors by types and sources of cause. All the above mentioned leads us to finding out the sources of mistakes and errors that we have to be aware of to be able to know how to tackle them. Here are the following causes:

- Individual learning that is not complete or/and incorrect when a learner understands, interprets, memorises certain patterns and features of a language incompletely or/and incorrectly. It is definitely not possible to encompass all rules, exceptions and possible uses and variations of linguistic patterns. Therefore, the gaps in learners' knowledge lead to mistakes and errors. Since the intensive course provides a great deal of patterns and features and pushes learners to acquire and practice them quickly which is particularly challenging under time pressure. There is often limited time to drill them enough for long-lasting results of correct language use. On the one hand, the instructor must concentrate on occurring on-target mistakes, on the other hand, they must not neglect each learner's off-target errors that start to appear during communication. The instructor must be a conductor covering new material, monitoring accuracy, and locating ingrained errors. The observation along the course shows that learners tend to revert to fossilized errors in the flow of speech.
- The interference of a mother tongue in the target language, so called interlingual interference. The mother

tongue linguistic patterns may push a learner to copying, transferring or overlaying these patterns on the second language patterns if the instructor's assistance or explanation is limited or not provided. We noticed that learners always compare and contrast the patterns of both languages and may overlay the Ukrainian language patterns on the English language ones. This happens because the structures of the first language are natural to learners and they may try to use these structures on the English language. Due to the habit of thinking and translating in their mother tongue, learners are likely to use this overlaying of patterns.

- Overgeneralization (intralingual interference). During overgeneralization learners hypothetically use the target language patterns they learned or are learning without knowing or paying attention to exceptions to the rules. It happens quite often since during the language production the learners seek for possible ways to express themselves.

- Context and environment of learning. The context embraces all the materials, the participants as well as the environment of the learning process, i.e. the classroom. The educator plays an integral part in the process since they are not only instructors and facilitators but may also be the unconscious source of misunderstanding and even errors. Learners also play critical roles in this process. When learners are inattentive, distracted, not focused on their studies, they tend to miss information and mistakes appear. If learners are willing to study, attentive, and participate actively, they are more likely to receive correct information and reduce the risk of mistaking and, therefore, fossilization. Authentic, trendy, appropriate, and timely materials are important in the learning context. It is the core of any course and its collection, selection, and adaptation is the task of both instructors and curriculum developers.

- The absence of effective corrective feedback during learning can provoke and deepen fossilization. When learners do not receive timely and appropriate feedback, they continue making the same mistakes, and these mistakes become deeply ingrained in their speech. With time, learners may become used to using incorrect patterns thinking they are using them correctly.

Agreeing with J. Scrivener, a well-known expert trainer and author within the English language teaching world, who listed 5 decisions a teacher has to make when dealing with errors, namely "Is this error important now? When should I correct it? Who should correct it? How should I correct it? What is the aim of correcting this error?" (Scrivener, 2005). We have to cope with errors because correction is not automatic – an instructor decides about timing, purpose, and impact on learners, providing training strategy and feedback.

There are recommended strategies, effective methods, and drill exercises to combat fossilization that both instructors and learners must employ to fight mistakes and errors. Instructors are to provide appropriate environment as well as assessment, explanation and correction. Learners must accept, be engaging, cooperative and willing to work on their errors. It is also important to mention that an instructor may develop their own methods along the course to tackle students' particular errors.

Among the most useful strategies is self-monitoring and further self-correction that are the basis in error correction. Studies indicate that if learners are encouraged by instructors to identify most frequent mistakes and errors and acknowledge their errors, they can more effectively fix their speech for improvement, leading to improved performance and reduced errors. Most learners show their interest and motivation in self-correcting their errors. It is part of their intrinsic or internal motivation to be able of using the language correctly.

We must keep in mind the constant question whether fluency, accuracy or pronunciation is more valuable during language acquisition. Whether learners have to target grammar accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation or communicative competence. Some argue that acquiring one skill often comes at the cost of other skills. As learners become more fluent and skilled, they may overlook mistakes and errors which later may become fossilized. Yet, a perfectly balanced combination of teaching methods will ensure students' best results. These best learning results may be achieved by well-planned curriculum with clearly emphasised targets, beneficial and various environment, broad and modern materials, teacher-student cooperation.

Effective curriculum and structured lesson planning are crucial regarding our interest and target in fighting fossilized errors. Exercises and tasks have to be designed to offer students opportunities to practice language in authentic contexts to satisfy their present and future linguistic needs. Production skills exercises, namely communicative exercises, have to represent a significant amount in the curriculum since they allow both the learner to develop communicative expertise and the instructor to see more mistakes and errors and start thinking about drafting a plan for further work on correction.

Teaching strategies, practical methods and correction exercises for tackling fossilized errors in learning a second language are crucial for overall language proficiency and may include effective error correction methods, metacognitive approaches, implementation of structured lesson plans, updated curriculum, changes in the learning environments, psychological nuances, and many others that teacher choose according to learning goals and students' needs.

High-frequency errors which are persistent should be corrected as soon as possible, especially those relevant to the current learning targets; low-frequency errors which are occasional and minor must not be overlooked during the course either. The instructor is able to prioritise them in the learning environment.

Let's contrast three methods of correction, namely self-correction, peer or/and group correction, and teacher correction. It is vital for teachers to hear and collect mistakes and errors, communicate when an error has occurred, discuss, work on it individually or collectively, and provide individual or collective feedback. The final stage will be a learner's understanding and correct usage of patterns.

- Self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and further self-correction provide learners with the power of assuming responsibility for correcting their own mistakes and errors. We consider it to be the best and fastest method since learners come to realizing an error themselves. An instructor's role may be secondary, i.e. to pause the conversation, prompt learners, draw attention to an error, and let them correct it. The minuses of this method on the one hand are time consumption and not adequate work on an error, on the other hand the error becomes an example for other learners to check themselves too. Another minus is that learners may not even acknowledge they are making mistakes, so the instructor's interference is needed to attract attention to errors. We were able to notice that with time this method keeps learners aware of errors, pushes to identify them, and challenges to correct these errors. One more important observation is that errors which are considered minor and of lesser importance are still omnipresent and interruption becomes frequent during answers and discussions. A short answer containing an error permit to look into it right away, while interrupting a longer answer or a monologue may be confusing and disorienting, and decrease motivation. Therefore, we regard it best to collect each learner's errors or/and group errors for further individual or/and group correction.

- Peer/group correction is another way of fighting errors, though all participants must be aware of some drawbacks of this method. When an instructor delegates error correction to learners it is important to be sure they are able of providing right correction. Observation and experience show that some dynamic students interrupt their peers intending to help them and bring confusion and may provoke anger and demotivation, that's why there must be agreeing on not interfering without the instructor's prompt. Thus, peer correction may carry a nuance of superiority and could be considered a major drawback of this method. At the start of every course it will be our role to introduce some rules regulating peer correction in class. We must not forget that pluses of peer correction are cooperative work, teambuilding, and mutual support and assistance. Learners unite in their mutual goal of fighting each other's errors.

- Teacher correction is motivating and constructive, and must also be timely. Many researches in education have shown that correction of errors is most effective when there is a clear aim how to correct them, learner's cooperation, and the instructor's feedback. We would like to highlight how important it is for the instructor to construct an efficient plan how to fight engrained errors along the way. Teacher correction during this intensive course proves to be the essential in addressing engrained errors all along the course the instructor provides direct consistent assistance and feedback on fossilized errors, working on them together with learners to achieve the desired aim of perfecting the language. This mutual work increases learners' awareness of fossilized errors' existence and encourages learners to correct errors to be able to use the language effectively in real communication. The observation demonstrated that targeted correction, motivation, and cooperation can reduce the number of engrained errors. The result of this work will continue to encourage and motivate learners in their acquisition and mastering the language.

Full or partial success in error correction will contribute to faster and more efficient language acquisition, greater accuracy, and learners' communicative competence. The observation showed the instructor's targeted support, using linguistic methods, and adequate consistent exercises are essential in motivating learners. Learners become confident and engaged in the learning process noticing their progress. Through constant instructor's support and feedback, and comfortable learning environment learners not only realise and correct their errors but also become more confident in using the language.

Discussion and conclusions

The issue of learner errors remains one of the central concerns in both applied linguistics and foreign language pedagogy, as it directly relates to the effectiveness of the learning process and the achievement of communicative competence. In particular, the phenomenon of fossilization continues to attract considerable scholarly attention, as it represents a significant barrier to language development. However, despite extensive theoretical research, the problem of correcting fossilized and semi-fossilized errors in intensive learning contexts has not been sufficiently addressed in practical terms. As demonstrated by this study, there is a clear need for more focused pedagogical approaches aimed at overcoming such persistent errors.

The findings of the research indicate that the range of factors contributing to fossilization is quite broad. These include interlingual interference, intralingual processes such as overgeneralization, insufficient or inappropriate corrective feedback, as well as specific characteristics of the learning environment, particularly in intensive educational settings. In such contexts, learners are often exposed to a high volume

of input within a limited time, which may lead to the stabilisation of incorrect language forms if not properly addressed.

The study identifies a number of effective pedagogical strategies and techniques for correcting fossilized errors, some of which are already widely used in teaching practice, while others demonstrate significant potential for further implementation. These include the use of focused and selective corrective feedback, raising learners' awareness of persistent errors, the integration of form-focused instruction within communicative activities, systematic recycling of problematic language forms, and the use of reflective and self-correction techniques. Particular emphasis is placed on the need to balance fluency and accuracy in order to prevent the reinforcement of incorrect forms while maintaining learner motivation.

The results of the study suggest that the correction of fossilized errors should be viewed as a gradual and continuous process that requires a combination of methodological flexibility, learner engagement, and consistent pedagogical intervention. Effective error correction is not limited to isolated techniques but should be integrated into the overall instructional design of the course.

The perspective for further research lies in the development of a comprehensive model for correcting fossilized errors in foreign language learning, particularly within intensive educational environments, as well as in the empirical validation of the proposed strategies through classroom-based studies.

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ПРОБЛЕМА ФОСІЛІЗОВАНИХ ПОМИЛОК ТА ЇХ КОРЕКЦІЯ ПІД ЧАС ЧОТИРИМІСЯЧНОГО ІНТЕНСИВНОГО КУРСУ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ (ALC – AMERICAN LANGUAGE COURSE)

Вступ. Фосілізовані помилки залишаються стійкою та широко обговорюваною проблемою у процесі оволодіння іноземною мовою, зокрема серед слухачів інтенсивних курсів англійської мови. Такі помилки мають тенденцію закріплюватися із часом і чинити опір виправленню навіть за умов багаторазового ознайомлення з правильними мовними формами. У результаті вони ускладнюють формування комунікативної компетентності й негативно впливають на подальший мовний розвиток, особливо на середньому та просунутому рівнях. Проблема ускладнюється в умовах інтенсивного навчання, де значний обсяг навчального матеріалу й обмежений час для рефлексії можуть сприяти закріпленню неправильних мовних форм. Незважаючи на значний обсяг теоретичних досліджень феномена фосілізації, існує потреба у практично орієнтованих підходах, спрямованих на ефективне виправлення помилок у реальних умовах освітнього процесу. Метою дослідження є визначення ефективних методів і прийомів виправлення фосілізованих і напівфосілізованих помилок в умовах інтенсивного навчання іноземної мови.

Методи. Дослідження ґрунтується на спостереженні за освітнім процесом та експериментальному застосуванні стратегій виправлення помилок під час чотиримісячного інтенсивного курсу англійської мови (ALC). Фосілізовані та напівфосілізовані помилки було виявлено, класифіковано та проаналізовано. Систематично впроваджувалися та оцінювалися різні прийоми корекції, зокрема самокорекція, взаємокорекція і корекція за участю викладача.

Результати. Отримані результати свідчать, що систематичне та цілеспрямоване застосування стратегій корекції суттєво сприяє зменшенню кількості фосілізованих помилок. Посвідчення різних методів корекції виявилось більш ефективним, ніж використання окремих підходів. Безперервний зворотний зв'язок, багаторазове опрацювання проблемних мовних форм та активна залученість здобувачів освіти визначені як ключові чинники успішного виправлення помилок.

Висновки. Системне та послідовне опрацювання фосілізованих помилок сприяє підвищенню рівня комунікативної компетентності здобувачів освіти й забезпечує більш ефективне оволодіння іноземною мовою в умовах інтенсивного навчання.

Ключові слова: закріплені помилки, оволодіння англійською мовою, комплексне навчання, стратегії викладання, подолання помилок.

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