The Accuracy on the Usage of Active Voice and Passive Voice by Learners of English as a Second Language: Tertiary Level

Dr. Ramani Ratnamali Jayasinghe

Senior Lecturer, Department of English Language Teaching, University of Kelaniya
ramani@kln.ac.lk

In English grammar, voice refers to the form of verb in a sentence: Active voice or Passive voice. In active voice, the *subject* of the sentence performs the action where as in passive form, the *subject* receives the action. In English Language, there are 12 tenses to indicate active voice, but the possibility of transforming them to passive voice depends on the given verb and the context of the sentence. Though the active voice verbs are stronger and usually more empathetic than the passive voice verbs, the university undergraduates of the Faculty of Science have to master the passive voice accurately in order to report their experiments and research findings quite frequently. However, even having a good knowledge of the 12 tenses in active voice, many ESL (English as a Second Language) learners fail to transform some of them into passive voice successfully. The aim of this study is to examine the accuracy patterns of the ESL learners' usage of passive voice and thereby to find out the causes of these learners' difficulties in transforming active voice sentences into passive voice. The hypothesis of this study is, the intralingual difficulties in English language, create undergraduates' errors in passive voice construction. A pool of 150 Physical Science first year students of University of Kelaniya were examined in this study. These students were given a writing task to transform active voice sentences of all the 12 tenses in English language into passive voice. These students' accuracy was marked and analyzed by using an ANOVA test followed by an HD Tukey test in SPSS. The results showed a substantial number of significant variances between the accuracy of passive voice sentences in different tenses. This study concludes that the students make errors in transforming active voice to passive voice due to the interlingual difficulties caused by the negative influence of their first language, Sinhala, and also the intralingual difficulties in their target language, English. These findings can be used to facilitate teaching *passive voice* in ESL classrooms at the tertiary level.

Key words: Active voice, ESL, Interlingual, Intralingual, Passive Voice