Students' Difficulties in Changing Active Voice into Passive Voice

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ملخص الدراسة

تستكشف هذه الدراسة البحثية محاولات طلاب الفصل الدراسي السادس في نقل الجمل المبنية للمعلوم إلى جمل مبنية للمجهول، حيث تلقي هذه الدراسة بعض الضوء على جمل مبنية للمعلوم تحتوي على أزمنة مختلفة إلى مبني للمجهول، ومحاولة اكتشاف العوامل المختلفة التي تجعل الطلاب يفشلون في انشاء جمل مبنية للمجهول. ولغرض الوصول إلى أهداف الدراسة، فلقد استخدمت المقابلات كأداة لجمع المعلومات. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تم استخدام احدى عشرة جملة مبنية للمعلوم، وطلب من هؤلاء الطلبة تحويلها إلى مبني للمجهول. كل جملة تمثل زمن من أزمنة اللغة الانجليزية لمعرفة أي من هذه الأزمنة يعجز الطلبة في تحويلها للمجهول. حيث سيقوم خمس عشرة طالبًا من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، فرع المرج، كلية التربية، جامعة بنغازي بإجراء هذا الاختبار. وكشفت نتائج التحليل والاختبار والمقابلة أنه على الرغم من أن الطلاب قد درسوا المبني للمجهول في مادة القواعد، إلا أن معظمهم فشلوا في تحويلها إلى مبني للمجهول، كما كشفت الدراسة أن السبب يمكن في ضيق الوقت لإعطاء المنهج بشكل تفصيلي. كما كشفت الدراسة أنه أكثر الأخطاء كانت على مستوى المضارع التام المستمر. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أن النظام الفصلي في الجامعات الليبية ليبيا لم يكن مفيدًا في إعطاء دروس القواعد بالتفصيل للطلاب. تقدم هذه الورقة رسائل قيمة إلى جامعة بنغازي لإعادة النظر في الوقت من أجل تمكين أعضاء هيئة التدريس من إعطاء دروس القواعد بالتفصيل للطلاب.

Abstract

This research explores sixth semester undergraduate students' attempts in rendering active sentences into passive, and sheds some light on the different tenses in the active forms of the sentences and tries to discover various factors, which make students fail to provide passive sentences. Questionnaires were used as data collection tool. In addition, eleven active sentences were used in the test . They were asked to change them into passive. Each sentence represents an English test in order to see which tense they most fail to render it into passive. Fifteen students from department of English, EL-Marj branch, faculty of education, university of Benghazi undertake this test. The analysis of the tests interviews revealed that although students take passive voice in their grammar courses, most of them failed to render them successfully into passive. The highest errors of the passive voice were at present perfect progressive tense. In addition, it seems that time of the semester systems in Libya was not helpful to give grammar lessons in detail to the students. This paper provides valuable messages to the University of Benghazi to reconsider time in order to enable academic staff members to give grammar lessons in detail to the students.

Key Words*: passive voice; University of Benghazi; tenses; active and passive sentences.

1. Introduction

Passive voice is considered important in English language. It can be used when we focus on what is done than what is carried out the action. In terms of meaning, passive and active sentences have the same meaning, however; the structure is different. In addition, passive voice is used when we would like to ignore the doer of the action. Having provided general idea about passive voice, let us now highlight some scholars' viewpoints about passive voice. According to Drummond, (1977:308) "the passive voice is used if we are more interested in what is done than in what performed the action. It is also for the sake of convenience and if the doer of an-action is unknown". Beedham (1982:44) provided different notion from Drummond's in which he argues that

passive and active voice sentence have the same meanings but different structures. In this regard he says, "actives and passives are equivalent in meaning is based on the assertion that each passive construction includes an active sentience in its structure". Ahmed (2012:47), on the other hand, claims that the usage of the passive voice comes from the idea of getting rid mentioning the doer of the action. In this respect he postulates, "Passive voice construction is mainly used in method section to get rid of personal whims and fancies, and thus oblation impersonality and universality of the research". Quirk et al definition is similar to Ahmed's (ibid) in which the aim of the passive is to ignore the doer of the action. Quirk et al (1985:159) write, "voice is a grammatical category which makes it possible to view the active of sentence in either of the two ways, without change in the fact reported". Nida and Taber (2003:204) refer the passive voice as linguistic feature by stating that, "grammatical form of a verb and/or a clause in which the grammatical subject expresses the semantic goal and the semantic agent is expressed either by an agent complement or by nothing; opposed to the active voice".

This paper will investigate problems that encounter senior students of the department of English, faculty of education, University of Benghazi, EL-Marj Campus when they attempt to change different active sentences into passive voice. These sentences will cover different tenses in order to make sure whether these students are able to overcome the problems of changing active sentences into passive. In addition, we are going to investigate students' errors when they change active sentences into passive, the results and findings will also be mentioned. A challenging problem which arises, based in informal discussion with our colleagues, in this domain is that most of the senior students at the department of English fail to produce a correct passive voice structure. They have this problem when they have been asked to render different active sentences into passive. Therefore; we see the need for investigating why, most of them, fail to provide a correct transfer of the active sentences into passive. The aims in this paper are twofold: First to investigate which tenses that students find it difficult to change it into passive,

second, to find out the factors that make students fail to provide correct passive form of the active sentences.

2. Uses of the Passive Voice:

Dooley and Evans (1999) proposed three uses of the passive voice. First, when the doer of the action is unknown, unimportant or dear from the text. Consider the following example, 'My flat was broken into the flat last week' . (we do not know who broke into the flat). Second, when the action itself is more substantial than the person who carries it out , as in information , magazine , advertisements , processes , etc . For example, 'The new hospital will be opened by the queen on May 15th'.   Formal notice. 'The milk is taken to factory where it is pasteurized' Process. Third, when we motion something bad and do not want to tell who or what is to admonish as in, 'A lot of mistakes have been made'. Instead of, you have made a lot of mistake. In English, and according to Hewings (1999), there are some situations that passive voice is preferred to be used rather than active: First, when the agent is not known, or unimportant. This situation is in line with Dooley and Evans' claim of passive usage. Second, in factual writing, i.e when we write about facts. For instance, Nuclear waste will still be radioactive even after 20,000 years, so it must be disposed of very carefully. Here, since we are talking about scientific facts, it is preferable to use passive voice. Third, English prefers using passive in formal academic writing. Consider the following very formal writing sentence; The new computer system is being installed next month. Fourth, English prefers putting old information at the beginning of a sentence and new information at the end. Finally, t is natural to put subjects that consist of long expressions at the end of a sentence. E.g. I was surprised by Don's decision to give up his job and move to Sydney.

In terms of Arabic, passive voice occurs in the change of the internal vowel. Holes (2004:317) supports this point of view by stating that, "The passive of a verb in MSA is regularly formed by a change in its internal voweling, for example, Pattern I qatala 'he killed', qutila 'he was killed', Pattern X staqbala 'he greeted, met', stuqbila 'he was greeted, met'" . From our personal point of view, passive voice can be used not only when the doer of an action is

unknown, but also when the doer of an action is already known by people; and no need to mention him again. For example, in the holy Quran, people already know that God, 'Allah', is the creator who brought the Quran to earth. Therefore, it is no need to mention Allah in every verse. Consider the following qur'anic verse 183 in (Chapter Cow): يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ(183), which can be translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali and IFTA "O ye who believe, fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you That ye may learn self-restraint". (The Cow Chapter, verse 183). However, Shaalan and Othman (2007:1) return to the usage of passive voice in Arabic to three diferent poinys. In this prospective they argue, "In Arabic, passive voice is used as a writing style when: 1) the subject is unknown, 2) the subject is unimportant enough to be mentioned, or 3) the author wants to highlight the object".

3. Categories of Passive Voice in English:

Many scholars and researchers classified the categories of passive voice in English. According to Areibi (2013), there are four categories of passive voice. They are, agentive passive: agentless passive: personal and impersonal passive. Agentive passive voice has connection with a personal or impersonal agent. eg. He was killed by the dog. It requires agentive phrase to be added. e.g This table was made by John. This is also Thompson's point of view. In this context he postulates, (1987:501) "agentive passive is rarely used informal written English and even less in informal English". The notions of Areibi and Thompson regarding agentive passive voice are similar to that found in Wang (2001) who refers that agentive passive comprises with and without expressed agents. The with expressed has a personal agent. For example, coal has been replaced by oil; and the without expressed does not have a personal agent as, this difficulty can be avoided in several ways. An agentless passive can be used when the doer of an action is not known; it is not very important to mention the doer; or we want to elude mentioning him. In other words, it is a passive sentence in which the agent is not stated. For instance, The car was stolen. Personal passive refers to that the object in the active becomes the subject in the passive. It can normally deal with transitive verbs, i.e verbs that are used with nouns, or

pronouns and refer to a person who is affected by the action of the verb, in order to. Hence, the personal passive can be formed. For instance, the car was bought. Consequently, personal pronouns cannot be formed without transitive verbs. In terms of its usage, a personal pronoun is used when the agent is unnoticeable. Siewirska supports this point of view by stating that, "the personal passive is marked by the lack of a visible agent and by the fact that it is morphological and syntactically characterized"(1984:132). The last category that can be specified in our research study here would be the 'impersonal passive'. It primarily deals with intransitive verbs. This is also Abraham and Leiss' (2006:262) point of view when he stressed that, "it is common knowledge, though, that impersonal passives derive from intransitive verbs or intransitivity used predicates". It is related with non-action verbs such as think, say, report, believe, know etc. Consider Fowler's example. It was believed that a large green car was in the vicinity of the accident. (1979:440). In spite of that impersonal passive is considered one of the categories of passive, yet it is rarely used and, according to Siewierska(Ibid: 93) it, " have not been deeply studied and analyzed".

4. Key Concepts:

This section provides an overview of some previous researches made on the misuse of passive voice structure by students in different countries. This section introduces the frame work for the case study that comprises the main focus of the research described in this work. Most early studies as well as current work focus on passive voice structure. These studies include researchers likes Dilla Raffike Riskie (2016-2017), Hakeem M. Elmadwi (2015), Abdul Qadir (2006) and Eniko Tanko (2010) highlight the problem of passive voice. Dilla Raffike Riskie (2016-2017), discussed the error analysis of the passive voice sentence made by the ninth grade students of MT's Negeri 1 Sukoharjo, in the academic year 2016/2017. He used the quantative and descriptive methods in order to carry his research. The instrument of the research was passive voice test that examines how the 231 students changed different types of active tenses into passive. The findings of research showed that the highest errors were made by the students, are that they resorted to

omission .i.e they delete some structure of a sentence due to their misunderstanding of how to change these active sentences into passive .

Hakeem M. Elmadwi (2015) discovered the same result of Dilla raffik riskie's. In his article entitled, 'Problems Encountered by Students at AL-Amal secondary school in using passive voice in written English. This research was a study of errors made by experienced students in the use of passive voice structure. The results showed that the students face difficulty in the use of passive voice structure because they face the difficulty of understanding the rules; in addition, the interference of the mother tongue had a great effect of these mistakes. It is not only Hakeem M. Elmadwi and Dilla riffike who came to the conclusion of the participants' difficulty in using passive voice structure, but, also H. Abdul Qodir (2006). In his paper, 'An Error Analysis on Changing Active Voice into Passive Voice'. The main aim of his paper is to identify errors on changing active to passive; and also discovering which tense that has the highest frequency of errors. He found that the highest error was at the present continuous tense level. He recommends that teachers must focus on and interest in the education of rules and especially passive. In a study made by Eniko TANKO(2010) in his article, 'Facing Difficulties in the Acquisition of the English Passive by L1 Speakers of Hungarian'. we find a completely different result from the previously researchers mentioned above. In Hungari, according to him, they do not teach passive voice; and passive voice is difficult to teach. This is because there was large difference between Hungarian and English grammar structures that make students avoid learning them. Therefore, he avoided using the direct method when teaching passivisation to his students. He found that avoiding the use of direct method in the class, and to apply the intervention instead, will enable students to understand the passive structure, successfully.

As it has been noticed through scholars above, that passive voice problem is a public problem and student all over the world face problems of providing a correct passive voice structure. This is some of views that help readers to know some of views of the

researchers who studied the problems of the passive. The results may be similar or different to ours. In this study, we are going to investigate the problems that English department students at the faculty of education may confront when using passive voice structures as we are going to see in our analysis of data.

5. Methodology

The data of this study is a collection of 11 sentences. Each sentence expresses a tense. The reason for choosing this is to test the performance of the students when changing active sentences into passive. These active tenses will be changed into passive by the six semester students of English. Their performances will be investigated and analyzed in order to see which tenses that they fail to change it into passive and to see the reasons behind this failure.. In addition, semi-structured interview questions were provided with the test. The aim of the semi-structured interview is to discover the reasons behind their failure in providing correct passive voice structures. It is a worthy to mention that we are going to mention the participants who answered the test and the interviews.

6. Participants

Fifteen undergraduates students who were selected randomly from the faculty of education, English Department at the university of Benghazi El-Marj campus to participate in the rendering of active sentences into passive. The study participants were aged between 20 to 30 years and consisted of both males and females. Sixth semester students were selected to undertake the test because they were expected to be competent in grammar rules. By this, students will have completed grammar (A), grammar (B) courses, students had. One week to render these active sentences into passive, which was believed to be sufficient time for them to complete the task. They were asked not to consult teachers when rendering these sentences into passive. In order to facilitate the analysis, the participants were allocated letters from (A) to (O) in the test sample , and then simply referred to as student A, student B, student C, etc. In the interview samples, students were allocated numbers from (1) to (15).

Then the students were asked to answer the questionnaire, and interview's questions. They were also told to answer the following questions:

Q1- Have you taken passive voice lessons in grammar? Did teachers explain it deeply?

Q2- Why cannot you distinguish between tenses?

Q3- Why do you make mistakes when changing active sentences into passive?

The aim of these interview questions is to distinguish the students' ideas about teaching grammar courses. It is worth pointing out that most of the students did not provide suitable answers. Interestingly, students who answered the questionnaire are cited in the study. Others might either have left the space empty or they had the same responses.

7. Results

As the main objective of this study is to investigate the students' performance of changing active sentences into passive, students are asked to change different active sentences into passive voice. The data that are collected from the test and interviews will be discussed. In addition, the percentages of the students' errors and corrections will be assessed. The methods used for analysis is quantitative and qualitative in order to discover the obstacles, which encounter those students.

7.1 Results of the test

Before going to proceed in investigating the students' attempts, let us first present our data in a graphical format. Figure (1) below presents the students' attempts of using passive voice tenses.
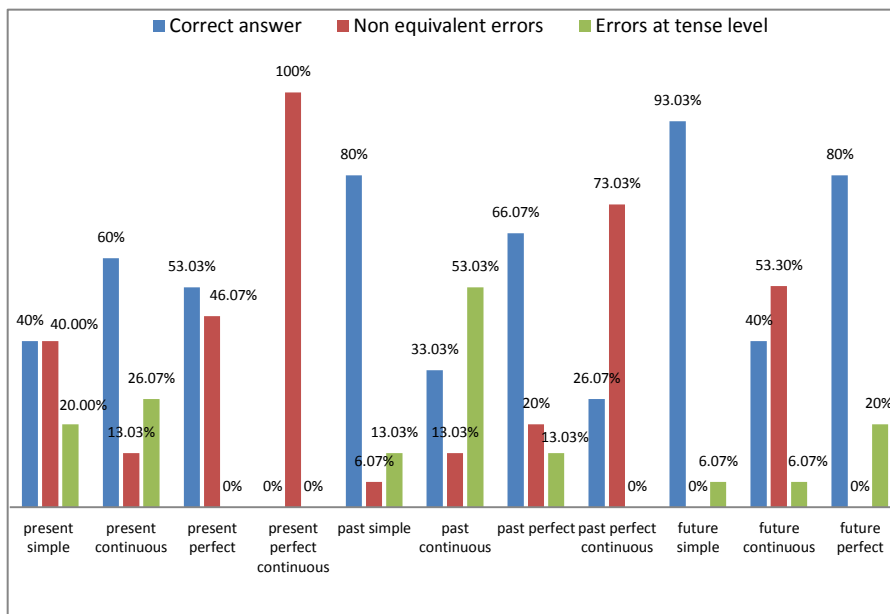
Figure (1) Students' attempts of using passive voice tenses

Overall, the above figure shows that the students' commitment of errors at the present perfect progressive tense was the highest percentage (100%). It means that all of the participants could not provide a correct rendering of the active present perfect continuous into passive. To begin, the correct rendering of active future simple sentence had the highest percentage about (93%). It has also a much higher successful rendering of past perfect and present continuous tenses into passive, and the lowest percentage of students who had successful rendering was at past continuous and past perfect continuous tenses. The range of percentages for students who provided correct rendering of active future perfect and past simple tenses into passive was absolutely parallel (08%). Additionally, the correct rendering of the active tenses future progressive; and present simple are parallel.

Now, we are going to analyze the kinds of errors, which made by students at tense level. Throughout the analysis of students' attempts of rendering active present continuous into passive, it is revealed that students D, H, I, and K committed errors at tense level. For instance, Students (K, and I) applied the past

continuous on present continuous (A letter was writing by me). Student (H), applied the present simple on present continuous as (A letter is written). The other student (D) applied the past simple on present continuous which is wrong. Only students A and C provided correct passive voice structure, which is (A letter is being written). It was expected that the students may make errors at tense level due to their little knowledge of passive voice structure rules. In spite that they are at the sixth semester at the department of English, yet it was discovered that most of them fail to provide a correct grammatical rules for passive voice. The same can be said of the students C and E who attempted to render the simple past active sentence (I killed a snake) into passive. It is clear that they have confusion when they use (is) followed by a verb and the progressive form (ing). Consider their attempts (A snake is killing by me). However, most of the students give an appropriate rendering as (A snake was killed). The disappointment to use the correct passive voice structure at tense level appears to be a worryingly persistent feature with nine of students i.e above the half, incorrectly rendering the active present simple sentence, (factory workers test the products), into passive as (The products was tested by factory worker) and (The products are being tested by factory workers). In these examples, the students are confusing the passive simple past tense and the passive present progressive tense. It seems that they do not know that when changing active present simple tense into passive, the verb (are) should be put immediately after the subject in the passive sentence in order to provide a correct simple present passive structure in the case of the previously mentioned sentence. Therefore, the appropriate rendering would be (the products are tested by workers). In spite of that the interviewees admit that their grammar teachers have explained to them deeply the passive voice structures, and the changes of tenses, yet they still fail to distinguish between passive tenses. In addition, students (C, D, L, M) fail to produce subject verb agreement, what raises eyebrows is that they are at their final semester and expected that they are graduating soon, and it is supposed to have ideas about subject verb agreements. In an interview of some students who answered the sample (I), we asked the question, why cannot you distinguish between tenses? One of the students answered, "Because the tenses are similar", the other

blamed the teacher himself. Consider his or her answer "Because some teachers do not give all tenses step by step or not give example of them. Some of the students were not taught of the previous level". Others state that they confuse between tenses and tenses are difficult for them. "Because the tenses are most difficult". Through our analysis of their answers in sample (I) and interview in sample (II), we can deduce that most of them face difficulty at tense level.

It has also been noticed through the test provided that most of the errors at passive voice level were at non-equivalent error. Students' rendering of the active sentences into passive involved a lot of mistakes that makes the meaning vague and misunderstood. Therefore, in the active sentence that expresses present perfect progressive, (I had been writing the letters when you came). Students faced problems of rendering this sentence into passive. They experienced the problem of disorder of the structure; and hence the meaning was lost. Consider their attempts: (when you came have been written by the letters) , (when you came has been writing by the letters) , (when you came was had been being writing by letters) , (the letters has been being writing by me when you came) and (the letters had been being writing when you came). This might come as no shock due to the fact that they think that the last word of the active sentence should be transferred into the subject in the passive sentence without taking into account the object in the active sentence can be put in the middle; and the complement (when you came) is not an object to be transferred as a subject in the passive sentence. Fatefully, many attempts have shown that students have selected the wrong word order. Their errors are classified as consider nonequivalent errors. Consider their attempts: (English since 2000) has been being studying by her). (English has been being studied by she since) and (English will be being studied by she since 2000). Their mistakes were very serious, when we asked the following question to interviewees 11, 14, and 15 (why are you having many mistakes when changing active sentences into passive?)**.** They answer as follows: student number 13: (Because some of teachers taught us without explanation or some of them taught us quickly). Student number (14) : (Because I have not understand the tenses) and student (15):

(Because the difficult of tenses affected to the answer) we then can conclude with these answers that some students have a problem in changing active voice into passive, in spite of that some students admitted that they do not face any problems in change active voice into passive for example, interviewee (3) : (I don't have any problem in change it) .

8. Discussion and Findings

The test and semi-structured interview, which are made to the students, provided enough explanation of why they fail to produce correct passive voice structure. The semi-structure interviews enabled students to express and clarify their deficiencies, their weaknesses, and the reasons behind them. In spite of that some of the students did provide correct structure of passive voice, yet most of them fail to produce correct structures of passive voice at some tenses such as active present continuous tense. This basic finding is consistent with the research of Abdul Qodir (2006). He noticed that the overwhelming majority of errors were at the present continuous tense level. In addition, concerns about students' inability to perform well-structures passive voice sentences. For example, student number (12), protested that (grammar teachers did give them passive voice lesson). However, he did not explain how the passive voice can be formed at all tenses. Hence, they could resort to omission of some important words or changing active present tense into passive simple tense for example. This result was broadly in line with the study of Riskie (2017) when he investigated how some students from Nigeria can use passive voice structure. He concluded that because of students do not know how to perform the passive voice structure; they resorted to delete some structure of a sentence. It is also has been observed that approximately one hundred percent of the participants could not provide correct use of the passive voice at the present perfect continuous level. This might be resulted from the misunderstanding the rules. This corresponds with different previous study of ELMadawi (2015) that examine secondary students' attempts to render active sentences into passive voice. Those students were unable to use passive voice structure because of their misunderstanding of passive voice rules.

9. Conclusion and recommendations

As it is argued in the introduction above, the purpose of this study was to investigate the use of English passive voice structure among English department students at the faculty of education, EL-Marj branch, university of Benghazi. Generally, it was obvious in this study that students face difficulties of changing active sentences into passive. These difficulties includes the misuse of the passive rules, misunderstanding of changing active sentences into passive, and the lack of identifying the object in the active sentence in order to put it as subject in the passive voice. They think the last word of the active sentence would be the subject in the passive sentence. The main finding that has been identified is that most of the errors were at present perfect continues, past perfect continues, and future continues. This proves student's claim at the discussion section that teachers did not teach them how passive can be performed at all tenses. Others could not distinguish between subject-verb agreements. This suggests that grammar teachers at the faculty of education have to provide deep explanation of passive voice to show students how to differentiate between tenses; and to show them how to form the passive voice sentences according to tenses. The teachers' inability to explain passive voice deeply may be because of the tight time in the semester. Semester systems would not allow staff members to explain each subject deeply. Grammar staff members have to finish their course description, which includes a lot of sensitive and important issues in approximately ten lectures. This study recommends the University of Benghazi to reconsider the system of semesters because it has proved futile since staff members are not in a position to fulfill their mission in a very tight time.

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