

# Do Learners Acquire the Functions of the English Passive Along with Its Form? Case Study of Armenian Learners

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## ABSTRACT

The study investigates the impact of learners' mother tongue (L1) on second language (L2) acquisition, with a focus on Armenian learners of English. By analyzing the use of the passive voice in both native English speakers' and Armenian learners' corpora, the study aims to address a research gap concerning the influence of L1 on the acquisition of form but not function in the Armenian context. The study hypothesizes that the pragmatic aspect of the passive voice in Armenian would influence its usage in English. Utilizing Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed to analyze the Armenian learners' corpus (compiled in line with International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE)) and a sub-corpus of the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOUVAIN). The analysis revealed that Armenian learners effectively utilized the passive voice without errors, and their pragmatic usage closely resembled that of native speakers. This finding contradicts the hypothesis that learners struggle with acquiring the functions of grammar issues.

## 1. Introduction

In the realm of language acquisition, a persistent debate centers around the notion that even advanced learners may master the form of a grammar issue without fully grasping its functional aspects. This research seeks to challenge this theory by investigating the proficiency of Armenian learners in comprehending not just the structure but also the functional nuances of a specific grammar issue—passive voice. Recognized as one of the most challenging grammatical constructs, passive voice serves as the focal point for this inquiry.

The importance of this investigation is underscored by the inherent differences between the Armenian and English languages, as each of them belongs to distinct language branches. The profound dissimilarities between these languages, coupled with the less elaborate exploration of the pragmatic aspect of passive voice in Armenian compared to English, lead us to hypothesize that Armenian learners might encounter unique challenges in mastering various functions of passive voice in English. Therefore, the study delves into the pragmatic aspects of passive voice in both English and Armenian, aiming to discern commonalities and disparities that can condition their use of passive voice in English.

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The chosen methodology for this exploration is Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIS), a framework employed to compare the frequency of different pragmatic aspects of passive voice by Armenian learners and native English speakers. The corpora under scrutiny are a native speakers' corpus (LOCNESS) and an Armenian learners' corpus, providing a comprehensive basis for discerning distinctions and parallels in the application of passive voice by these two distinct linguistic groups. Following the quantitative analysis, a qualitative examination has been undertaken to investigate whether Armenian learners utilize the passive voice for diverse pragmatic purposes akin to how native speakers (NS) do.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. The Impact of L1 on L2 Production**

The influence of learners' mother tongue (L1) on the acquisition of a foreign language (L2) is a widely acknowledged phenomenon. According to Gries and Wulff (2013), learners initially grapple with particular patterns and gradually develop sensitivity to specific structures in their second language (L2). Their findings underscore the persistence of challenges even among advanced learners when it comes to L2-specific linguistic phenomena. These difficulties predominantly stem from differences between the learner's native language (L1) and the target language (L2).

Ma (2013) also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the influence of learners' native language (L1) on their acquisition of a second language (L2). The study highlights the significance of understanding the transfer of linguistic properties from L1 to L2. McManus (2022) describes transfer of L1 properties in L2 acquisition as copying and/or cloning one body of knowledge (L1) to create another body of knowledge (L2). It is widely reported that learners are initially exposed to a new language with cognitive mechanisms optimized for processing and utilizing a different language (their L1). Consequently, when confronted with a language divergent from their own, learners often encounter difficulties.

It is reported that learners, even at advanced level, cannot reach native-like command of the language. The fact, that their native language (henceforth L1) has an influence on their target language (henceforth L2) production, has been discussed by many scholars. Schachter and Rutherford (1979) state that Chinese and Japanese advanced learners of English make many mistakes, mainly in terms of discourse structure. The same idea is observed in Coppieter's (1987) work, where it is argued that learners' mistakes were mainly functional and not formal. Carroll et al (2000) conclude that the learners mostly acquire the forms of the target language at near native level, but what refers to the function, they mostly are ignorant of the applications of those forms in the context. Granger et al (2002) express a similar idea, according to which learner writing is different from Native Speakers' writing in terms of the use of several words and structures. Stutterheim (2003) states that L2 learners can achieve very high level, nearly native-like production of L2 in terms of formal system of the language, nonetheless, what refers to the application of the forms in context in line with the principle of information structure, they usually face some problems. The same holds true for Stutterheim and Lambert's (2005) work, where they state that with regard to forms, advanced learners do not have any problems and can achieve native-like command, but what refers to the use of those forms, they confront many difficulties.

The L1 influence on L2 acquisition is often attributed to the typological discourse parameter, particularly the concepts of topic prominence and subject prominence introduced by Thomson and Li (1976).

In languages characterized by subject prominence (Sp), the subject holds a pivotal role in sentence construction, being essential for the formation of coherent sentences. This means that the verb in such languages often aligns grammatically with the subject, underscoring its syntactic significance. Sometimes, the subject may not carry a specific semantic meaning, as seen in cases involving dummy or empty subjects. Nevertheless, it consistently serves as the core element upon which the verb operates. Furthermore, many languages require agreement between the subject and the verb, further emphasizing the importance of the subject in shaping sentence structure within subject-prominent languages.

In Topic-prominent (Tp) languages, the arrangement of grammatical relations into topic-comment structures holds paramount significance. Unlike in Subject-prominent (Sp) languages, where the verb's relationship with the subject is pivotal, in Tp languages, the verb is not inherently linked to the topic. Instead, the topic serves as the focal point of attention within the sentence, as described by Thompson and Li (1976, p. 464). Notably, there is no requirement for agreement between the verb and the topic; the topic consistently maintains its independence from the verb and is consistently positioned at the beginning of the sentence. In summary, while the subject pertains to sentence-internal organization, the topic represents a broader discourse notion. English serves as a prominent example of a Sp language, while Chinese exemplifies a Tp language.

There exists a variety of instances illustrating the transition from Topic-prominent (Tp) languages to Subject-prominent (Sp) languages. Schachter and Rutherford (1979) undertook a comparative analysis of L2 production among Japanese and Chinese students, revealing a notable prevalence of "it-extraposition" and "there-sentences" in their English output. This phenomenon suggests that the influence of their Tp native languages extended to their L2 production, leading them to transfer the topic-comment information structure principle into their L2 acquisition.

Similarly, in the study by Green et al. (2000), Chinese learners of English demonstrated a tendency to place connectors at the beginning of sentences, in topic position, more frequently than native English speakers. This observation suggests that due to the influence of their Topic-prominent (Tp) native language, Chinese learners tended to transfer this feature to their L2 (English) production, resulting in its overuse even in instances where it was unnecessary.

Thus, it is evident that learners' native language (L1) being topic prominent is reflected in their second language (L2) production in terms of information organization. Another notable study conducted by Jung (2004) pioneered research on the transition from Subject-prominent (Sp) languages to Topic-prominent (Tp) languages. This choice of transition was motivated by the substantial existing research on the transition from Tp to Sp languages, which consistently demonstrated the impact of Tp languages on the acquisition of Sp languages. To substantiate hypotheses posited by various researchers (Green, 2000; Schachter & Rutherford, 1979; Xiao, 2002) regarding the influence of learners' L1 on their L2 acquisition, Jung conducted a study involving English learners of Korean, following a similar study previously conducted on English learners of Chinese by Jin (1994). The results indicated that as the students' proficiency level increased, they demonstrated a tendency to acquire L2-specific features regardless of their Subject-prominent (Sp) native language.

Hence, it can be inferred that regardless of whether learners' native language exhibits topic-prominent or subject-prominent features, their ability to absorb the characteristics of the second language (L2) is evident through prolonged exposure.

## 2.2. Passive Voice in English and in Armenian

Before delving into the patterns of passive voice use by the native speakers and the Armenian learners, it is important to understand the specifics of the Armenian passive, which will lay ground for conducting the comparative analysis of the use of passive voice by the Armenian learners and native speakers. The comparison will illustrate the differences and similarities in both languages, in the light of which the learners' usage patterns of the passive voice can be examined.

As previously emphasized, the Armenian language belongs to a separate branch of the Indo-European language family, distinguishing it significantly from English, which falls under the Germanic branch of Indo-European languages. English is an analytic language, where the main means of conveying the meaning is the word order, whereas Armenian is mostly an inflective language. While it does demonstrate some characteristics of agglutinative characteristics, such as the use of suffix to indicate a grammatical relationship (i.e. in case of passive voice), Armenian primarily relies on inflections to indicate case, number, tense, etc. Thus, it can be hypothesized that typologically these two languages are rather different from each other in terms of the form and the use of passive voice.

Comparing the passive voices in the English and Armenian languages, it is important to state that in English the passive voice is a syntactic phenomenon, whereas in Armenian it is mostly morphological. It is known that English follows the Subject+Verb+Object (SVO) pattern of word order, and the logical subject mostly is the grammatical subject. In contrast, in Armenian the word order is comparatively flexible and the grammatical properties of sentence members are determined by their morphology and not the position they have in the sentence. To illustrate the point, the following example can be considered (adapted from Papoyan, Badikyan, 2003).

- (1) *Քամւոյ*                      *կոտորւեց*                      *ծառը*:  
Wind (Abl)                      was broken                      tree (Nom).  
“The tree was broken by the wind.”

In the example above the word *քամւոյ* (*because of the wind*) is in the subject position in the passive sentence, however, it is not the grammatical subject of the sentence, as it does not have any properties of the subject, i.e., it is not the bearer of the action. Moreover, the grammatical subject of the sentence is in the final position, which makes it thoroughly different from the English SVO word order. Thus, it can be concluded that in Armenian passive the logical subject may not coincide with the grammatical one.

In terms of the formation of the passive voice, in English it is formed with the help of the verb *be* and *past participle*. Though, it should be stated that instead of the copular verb *be* there can also be other copular verbs, such as *get*, *become*, *feel*, *look*, *remain* and *seem*. This is conditioned by the fact that the main ‘bearer’ of the passiveness is the past participle.

In Armenian the passive voice is formed with the addition of the affix -վ- (v) to the verb (examples from Jahukyan, 1974).

- (2) Active voice:                      *Գրիգորը*                      *սպանեց*                      *Հակոբին*:  
Grigor (Nom)                      killed                      Hakob (Acc).  
“Grigor killed Hakob”.  
Passive voice:                      *Հակոբը*                      *սպանւեց*                      *Գրիգորի կողմից*:  
Hakob (Nom)                      killed (was)                      Grigor (Gen) by.  
“Hakob was killed by Grigor”.

The example demonstrates a transition from active to passive voice by simply adding the affix *-վ-* to the verb (in bold) and repositioning the object as the subject. Notably, these syntactic changes are similar to those observed in English. It is crucial to emphasize that syntactically, the formation of the passive voice in both English and Armenian shows similarities, yet each language possesses distinct morphological characteristics.

As the formation of the passive voice falls outside the purview of this research, substantial attention is directed toward a comprehensive examination of the functions of the passive voice in both English and Armenian.

### 2.3. Pragmatic Aspect of English and Armenian Passives

Upon a pragmatic examination of English and Armenian passives, a notable difference is observed. The primary distinction lies in the exploration's depth, with Armenian pragmatics receiving comparatively less comprehensive study than their English counterparts. Delving into the works of various authors, including Quirk (1985), Murcia (1999), Huddleston (2002), Carter (2006), Cowan (2008), Qiu (2008), Wanner (2009), and others, seven categories of pragmatic aspects of the passive voice are identified in English. In contrast, four overall categories are discerned in Armenian; yet, intriguingly, these four align precisely with those recognized in English.

The first notable similarity lies in the observation of certain Armenian linguists (Jahukyan, 1974; Sahakyan, 2007; Sevak, 2009), who contend that the passive voice is employed to emphasize a specific constituent within a sentence. To illustrate, akin to its function in English, the Armenian passive voice is utilized when the speaker intends to thematize the object (Granger, 1983; Pinker, 2014). In both languages, the passive serves the common purpose of highlighting the logical object of the sentence (Jahukyan, 1974; Sevak, 2009).

Secondly, another shared aspect is the use of the passive voice when the initiator of the action is unknown. Additionally, similar to English, in Armenian, the passive voice is applied when the doer of the action is redundant or it can easily be inferred from the sentence context.

Lastly, both languages deploy the passive voice when the speaker aims to convey a sense of impartiality (Murcia, 1999; Sahakyan, 2007).

Notwithstanding the similarities, there are also some functions of the passive voice in English that are not identified in Armenian. For instance, numerous linguists (Granger, 1983; Weiner and Labov, 1983; Murcia, 1999; Huddleston, 2002; Cowan, 2008 among others) claim that the English passive voice serves as a tool for structuring and organizing old and new information to ensure the cohesion of the sentence. While this specific function of the passive voice may not be explicitly recognized in Armenian, a word-for-word translation of such instances reveals that, in Armenian, the passive voice serves the same pragmatic purpose as it does in English. A case in point is the following example (example from Granger, 1983, p. 28).

- (3) ... *he*            *died*            *and*            *was buried*            *at Stoke Poges.*  
       ...նա            մահացավ    և            թաղվեց            Սթոք Փոքսում (Dative):  
       ...he            died            and            buried (was)            at Stoke Poges.  
       “He died and was buried at Stoke Poges”.

As we can see in the English example the second verb is in passive voice, which is done to ensure the coherency. The same can be observed in word-for-word Armenian translation, where the second verb is in the passive voice, the purpose of which is, like in English, to ensure the coherency.

Another distinguishing feature between English and Armenian lies in the use of the passive voice in accordance with the end-weight principle. In English, the passive voice is employed to adhere to the end-weight principle, which dictates that the heavier components of a sentence are positioned at the end of the sentence. Conversely, in Armenian, the passive voice does not serve this purpose, as there is no equivalent principle in the Armenian language.

- (4) Roman writings on agriculture were condensed into one volume by a senator of Bologna, Petrus Crescentius, whose book was one of the most popular treatises on agriculture of any time.

In the aforementioned example, the employment of the passive voice facilitates the placement of the weightier constituent at the end of the sentence. Despite the absence of this principle in the Armenian language, a literal translation involving the passive voice would achieve a comparable effect to that in English. This is attributed to the flexibility of word order in Armenian, in contrast to English.

Finally, in English, the passive voice is employed to convey politeness and avoid pinpointing a specific individual. This particular function is not explicitly recognized as a distinct feature in the Armenian passive voice. Nevertheless, in certain contexts, the Armenian passive can be utilized to tactfully omit reference to the initiator of the action for the purpose of maintaining politeness as well.

Thus, it can be concluded that although not all pragmatic functions are explicitly identified and taught in Armenian, the passive voice in Armenian serves the same pragmatic functions as the passive voice in English.

### **3. Methodology**

The method used for this research is Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (hereafter referred to CIA). The idea was instigated by Granger (1998). The approach has been developed due to the advent in computer technologies and corpus linguistics.

With the emergence of learner corpora there was a need for a methodological approach to investigate the data at hand. The researchers were interested in the learners' language and its specifics. There are two approaches to be considered in connection therewith: Contrastive Analysis (hereafter referred to CA) and Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis.

By definition, contrastive analysis compares, contrasts and studies the linguistic relationship between languages which could promote language acquisition and language learning methodologically and structurally (Gilquin, 2001; James, 1980; Willems et al., 2003). Because of its emphasis on comparing and contrasting language structures, CA is a prime candidate in a grammar or structure-focused language pedagogical approach.

CIA compares the interlanguage (the language produced by the learners) with the one produced by the Native Speakers. With the help of this method, it is possible not only to highlight the mistakes that the learners make, but also to underline the under or overuses. In the frames of CIA there are certain important features that are taken into account, such as learners' mother tongue, proficiency level, command of other foreign languages along with the interlanguage produced. Furthermore, there are some linguistic features that are also to be taken into account, e.g., spoken or written utterances, different genres, etc. Also, Granger (1998) highlights the importance of following the guidelines set by International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE).

CIA presupposes two types of comparisons: comparison between NS vs NNS languages and NNS vs NNS. The comparison of NNS interlanguage with NS is of utter importance, because it serves the purpose of improving learners' proficiency of the language by highlighting the

differences of their interlanguage with the NS, which, in its turn, will bring their interlanguage closer to the NS norms (Granger, 2007, p. 13). Thus, with the help of CIA, we have compared the usage patterns of passives by NS and NNS. Firstly, with help of quantitative research method we have retrieved the frequency figures of different pragmatic functions of passives by NS and NNS, which aimed at underlining the under or overuse of specific passive voice functions by NNSs in comparison to NS.

After collecting the quantitative data, we have applied qualitative research method, in order to understand the learners' usage patterns. Riazi (2016) emphasizes, qualitative research is a broad term that encompasses a variety of methodologies derived from diverse theoretical and disciplinary traditions. Qualitative research uses narrative data (words as opposed to numbers) and qualitative data analysis to draw findings on the study problem (nonstatistical analysis). Typically, qualitative researchers accomplish this by observing, describing, interpreting, and evaluating. Thus, by observing, interpreting and describing the differences between the interlanguage and NS language, we have tried to understand to what extent their L1 (Armenian) has had an impact on their L2 production by delving into the specifics of their L1. Special attention has been given to the pragmatic aspect of passives to test whether the hypothesis that advanced learners can retain the form but not the function is applicable to the Armenian learners too.

#### **4. Corpus Compilation and Research Variables**

The corpora under scrutiny are the Louvain Corpus of Native Speaker's Essays (LOCNESS) and the Armenian Learners Corpus (compiled by me).

LOCNESS is the compilation of British pupils' A level essays, British university students' essays and American university students' essays, and covers a total of 324.304 words. Given the significant difference in size between the two corpora, a sample of LOCNESS essays, totaling around 27.000 words, was selected for the comparative analysis of the passive voice with the Armenian learners' corpus.

In the absence of Armenian learners' corpus, an original small corpus (consisting of 100 essays) was meticulously compiled following the guidelines of ICLE (International Corpus of Learner English). The undertaking of corpus compilation was an exhaustive endeavor spanning a duration of two years. This can be attributed to the students' reluctance to write essays, given the absence of official grading or assessment. The participants were students from two higher educational institutions of Armenia, notably Yerevan State University and French University in Armenia. The linguistic proficiency of participants ranged from upper-intermediate to advanced levels. This gradation in proficiency is determined by their institutions, where students are assorted into groups based on their performance on placement tests.

The participants in the study were second and third-year bachelor's students and master's students from Yerevan State University and first- and second-year bachelor's students from the French University in Armenia. The learner profiles of the participants are presented in the table below.

Table 1.

*Data on Research Participants*

Category	Number of students
Female students	75
Male students	25
Mother tongue	Armenian (100)
Languages spoken at home	Armenian (100), Armenian and Russian (21), Armenian and English (5)
Years of studying English	8 years (2 students), 9 years (22 students), 10 years (21 students), 11 years (19 students), 12 years (13 students), 13 years (8 students), 14 years (8 students), 15 years (4 students), 16 years (3 students)

It is noteworthy that all participants in the study reported Armenian as their mother tongue. However, a minority of students reported using other languages at home, with 21 students indicating that they spoke both Armenian and Russian, and only 5 students reporting English as an additional language of communication at home. The prevalence of Russian as a second language is not surprising given Armenia's historical ties with the Soviet Union, during which Russian was widely used as a language of communication in Armenia.

Regarding the years of studying English, it can be observed from the table that the majority of the students (22%) have been studying English for nine years, followed by 21% who have been studying for 10 years, and 19% for 11 years. This suggests that the English language is a significant part of their academic curriculum, and the students have been exposed to the language for a considerable amount of time.

Moreover, the distribution of the number of years of studying English shows that the students start learning English at a relatively young age, as evidenced by the number of students who have been studying for 12 years or more. This indicates that the country places a high value on English language education and recognizes its importance in the global context.

After the completion of the Learners' profile, the students were requested to write argumentative essays on different topics. The selection of essay topics was thoughtfully chosen, encompassing themes ranging from socio-political matters to scientific discussions and cultural reflections. This diverse approach was carefully planned to shed light on the multifaceted aspects of passive voice usage. The students were not timed in time while writing essays. They were allowed to use some reference tools, such as dictionaries, grammar reference books or other Internet resources. The word count of essays, as per ICLE guidelines, was to be at least 500 words; however, some of the students' essays fell short of this requirement.

The data from Learners' profile was collected and subjected to analysis separate from the essays. The latter were compiled within one Word document and analyzed with the help of LancsBox software, a tool developed by the University of Lancaster. LancsBox is a new generation software which allows language data analysis. The choice of the software was predicated upon its capacity to facilitate the automated extraction of passive voice instances. However, the retrieval of other types of passive voice (such as *have* passives, *get* passives, bare passives, etc.) was done manually as the software does not recognize them as passives.

Utilizing the KWIC tool of the LancsBox software, all instances of the passive voice were systematically extracted from both corpora. Subsequently, a comprehensive analysis was conducted for each example within its contextual framework to discern the pragmatic functions associated with the passive voice.

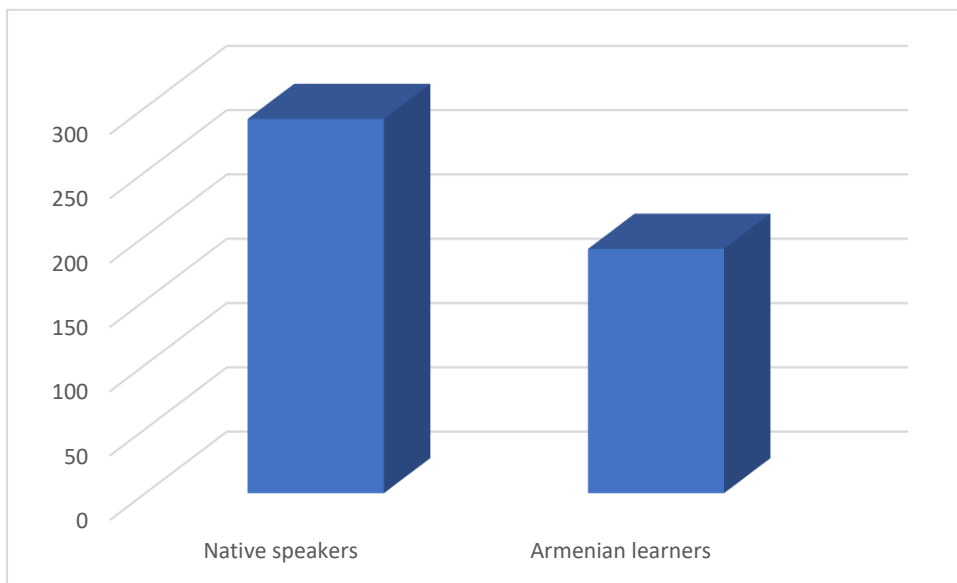


## 5. Data Analysis

Since pragmatic aspect of the passive voice is not as extensively studied in Armenian as in English, the pragmatic functions of English were used as a reference point for comparison. It is interesting to note, however, that while not all of the functions of the passive voice are identified as thoroughly in Armenian as they are in English, they are similar in both languages.

Drawing on the works of various scholars (Quirk, 1985; Murcia, 1999; Huddleston, 2002; Carter, 2006; Cowan, 2008; Qiu, 2008; Wanner, 2009 among others), seven categories have been identified for the study: to focalize the actor, to ensure cohesiveness (linear progression and continuous progression), to sound objective, to omit the redundant agent, to sound tactful and to ensure the end-weight principle.

Before delving into the usage patterns by NS and Armenian learners, we should state that in comparison with NS, Armenian learners underused the passive voice.



*Figure 1. The Use of Passive Voice by NS and NNS*

As shown in the graph, native speakers (NS) used the passive voice 291 times in around 28,000 tokens, whereas Armenian learners employed it for 190 times in the same number of tokens. Based on these figures, the frequency rate of the use of passive voice by NS and Armenian learners was calculated to be 10.78 times per 1000 tokens and 7.04 instances per 1000 tokens, respectively. This indicates that NS demonstrate a greater preference for using the passive voice than Armenian learners.

Further, the percentage difference between the use of passive voice by NS and Armenian learners can be calculated as 42.03%. This suggests that the NS used the passive voice approximately 42.03% more frequently than the Armenian learners, based on the provided data.

As the frequency rate of the use of the passive voice by NS is higher than the Armenian learners', it is no surprise that the numbers of each function are higher than the Armenian learners.

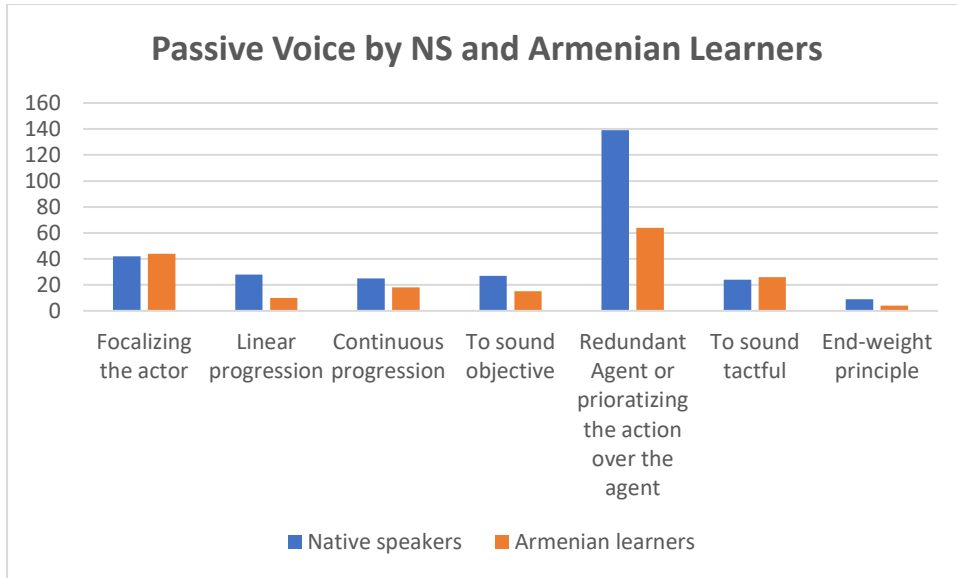


Figure 2. Functions of Passive Voice by NS and NNS

As evidenced from Figure 2, there are some similarities and differences between the use of passive voice by NS and Armenian learners. While some differences are noted in frequency rates, the overall patterns are rather similar. For instance, in both cases, the greatest preference was given to the use of passive voice when the agent was redundant or when the action was of greater importance than the doer of the action. In both corpora, this category registered the highest numbers, 139 cases in NS corpus and 64 cases in Armenian learners' corpus. Equally noteworthy is the common tendency among both NS and Armenian learners to use the passive voice for focalizing the actor, NS having used it for 42 times and Armenian learners for 44 times. Furthermore, both groups seem to employ the passive voice to convey tactfulness with comparable frequencies, appearing 24 times for NS and 26 times for Armenian learners.

Notwithstanding all the similarities in trends, there are also some differences. For instance, when it comes to linear progression, native speakers employ passive voice nearly three times more frequently (28 times) than Armenian learners (10 times), showcasing a preference for this construction to convey a sense of sequential actions or events. In contrast, Armenian learners use passive voice less often in this context.

Similar pattern is observed in the category of sounding objective, NS again exhibiting a greater usage of passive voice (27 cases) compared to Armenian learners (15 cases). This implies that native speakers are more inclined to employ passive constructions when aiming to convey objectivity in their language, while Armenian learners use this strategy less frequently for the same purpose.

Another category, where a significant divergence is observed, is the end-weight principle, which appears to be significantly less frequent among Armenian learners compared to native speakers, who used it nine times. This discrepancy may reflect differing grammatical preferences between the two groups, indicating that the end-weight principle is not a significant factor influencing the use of passive voice among Armenian learners. This can be attributed to their mother tongue, which lacks the concept of end-weight principle in information packaging.

## 6. Discussions

As previously discussed, the utilization trends of passive voice among native speakers (NS) and Armenian learners exhibit a remarkable similarity. The prevalent motivations behind employing passive voice for both groups center around the omission of redundant agents and

the focalization of actors. Moreover, quite similar figures are registered in the categories of focalizing the agent, continuous progression and sounding tactful. However, the data reveals variations in usage patterns, particularly in the contexts of linear progression, sounding objective, and adherence to the end-weight principle. These distinctions highlight the influence of linguistic and cultural factors on the utilization of passive voice in different contexts.

## **6.1. Functions of the Passive Voice by NS and Armenian Learners**

### **6.1.1. Agent is Redundant or Unimportant**

As previously discussed, the use of passive voice by both NS and Armenian learners is predominantly observed when the agent of the action is considered redundant or unnecessary. This pattern is likely influenced by the fact that both English and Armenian textbooks emphasize the passive voice as a means to exclude the agent of the action when it is deemed irrelevant or can be deduced from the context. The prominence of this pattern can also be attributed to the broader cultural and linguistic conventions of both languages, where the use of passive voice is a common tool for presenting information in a more neutral and objective manner.

It is important to state that the Armenian learners managed to use the passive voice in English the right context where the mentioning of the agent was unimportant. To substantiate this assertion, let us delve into illustrative instances from Armenian learners' corpus.

- (5) In order to sum up what was said, I would like to point out
- (6) On top of that, we are given lots of tasks and homework...
- (7) All types of documents are digitized now and notwithstanding your profession...
- (8) Whenever news is circulated about inhumane conditions animals are in...

Considering some of the examples from the Armenian learners' corpus, it is evident that the use of the passive voice is justified in all the examples, as the agent is either superfluous or unnecessary to mention. For instance, in example (5), the student has used passive voice as it can be easily understood from the context that "everything was said by him/her", so there was no need to highlight that once again. The same approach can be observed in example (6), the agent can be easily understood from the sentence, usually students are given "tasks and homework" by their teachers/professors, so, it does not make any sense to mention that. Likewise in example (7) the student opts for the passive voice as there is no need to mention "who digitized documents" since it is a commonly understood that it is done by specialists. The same holds true for example (8).

The fact that the Armenian learners could assimilate this pragmatic function of the passive voice can be traced back to their mother tongue. As it was described earlier, one of the most common pragmatic functions of the passive voice described by many scholars in Armenian was the omission of the agent if it is unnecessary or redundant. It is likely that this linguistic feature has enabled them to utilize the passive voice appropriately and effectively to this end, given their familiarity with the concept in their mother tongue.

### **6.1.2. To Focalize the Actor**

The second most commonly used pragmatic function in both corpora is focalizing the actor. The convergence can be attributed to a shared information packaging principle across both languages. This principle involves the sequencing of old information preceding new information. Consequently, when speakers aim to emphasize the doer of an action, they often achieve this by transforming an active sentence into a passive one. By doing so, the agent is positioned at the end of the sentence, presenting it as new information.

The extraction of these examples was done in the following way: with the help of KIWI option, I have searched for occurrences word “by”. Subsequently I manually curated instances of passive voice constructions featuring the employment of the preposition “by”.

It is important to note that in nearly all the cases in sub corpora of LOCNESS (with the exception of one) the use of the preposition “by” is justified, as the students have focalized the actor by placing it at the end of the sentence and presenting it as new information. There was only one case, where the use of the agent was unnecessary.

- (9) Therefore, it is seen by them as no more than an indirect tax.

In example (9) the inclusion of the agent can be considered superfluous, as, according to the grammar rule, the agent of the action should not be mentioned in the passive voice if it is presented through a preposition. In this instant, the agent’s identity could be readily deduced from the context, obviating the necessity for its explicit mention, which would serve primarily to underscore it needlessly.

It is interesting to note that the Armenian learners' utilization of this function surpasses that of the native speakers, which can be ascribed to the frequent employment of this linguistic tool in Armenian to accentuate the agent's significance.

When examining the instances of focalizing the actor among Armenian learners, it becomes evident that there is a disparity: unlike NS, who had only one case of inclusion of the agent for no apparent reason, Armenian learners had three such cases. Let us delve into the examination of those specific cases.

- (10) Music, for example, is increasingly used by people to battle depression...  
(11) In my opinion, this problem must be tackled because it is a global issue and most people, especially those who live in big cities, are affected by it.  
(12) In my way of thinking, this problem must be tackled because it is a global issue and most people, especially those who live in big cities, should care and do something about it, if they don’t want to be affected by it.

Upon scrutinizing the examples, it can be concluded that in those three instances the inclusion of the agent is unnecessary. In example (10) it is inferable from the context that music is primarily used by “people”, given its inapplicability to other creatures. Similarly, in examples (11 and 12), where the agents are denoted by pronoun “it”, the preferable course is to omit these pronouns. In both cases, the context readily permits the inference of the agents, obviating the need for their explicit inclusion.

It is intriguing to note that there was only one case that the agent was represented with a proper noun, unlike NS, who had six such cases.

- (13) According to data collected by Barbara Orlans, 60% of all animals used in testing are used in biomedical research and product-safety testing.

Though there is only one case, the strategic use of the agent through proper noun has been purposeful. By incorporating the name of the person who has gathered data, “Barbara Orlans”, the student has not only accentuated her importance but also has highlighted her credibility.

There are cases when Armenian learners have employed the definite article “the” preceding the agents. Upon initial scrutiny, the application of the definite article with ostensibly new information can seem paradoxical. The application of the definite article can be explained by the fact that the agent presented is not unfamiliar to the reader, as its introduction is augmented by the definite article. A total of ten instances follows this pattern. Let us discuss some of them.

- (14) We all know, that businesses nowadays provide home delivery services, and such time bond businesses are strongly influenced by the traffic jam.
- (15) Along with many problems caused by the increasing population of the Earth, the rising number of cars is an actual problem nowadays and should be taken very seriously by the governments of every single country existing.
- (16) Nevertheless, this problem must be solved by the government.

In the examples above, the agents are conjoined with the definite article, signifying that the information being conveyed holds discourse-old status. The students have managed to give it prominence by employing passive voice and positioning them at the end of the sentences.

In the rest of the examples, the agents are mostly nouns in plural or singular form denoting a category and there are only three cases where the agents are accompanied by some determiners, such as “other” (once), “many” (one case) and “our” (one case).

- (17) ... when men have problems in their lives and they want just cry and live their emotions but they can't because it is not accepted by our culture...
- (18) How we grow and progress is greatly influenced by other people around us...
- (19) Art and music are the subjects enjoyed by many students.

As can be observed in the examples, the use of determiners with agents is justified. In example (17) the student has used the determiner “our” to highlight its cultural relevance, distinguishing it from other cultures, and strategically places it at the end of the sentence for added emphasis. Similarly, in example (18), the inclusion of “other” serves the purpose of highlighting the significant influence that other individuals have on our growth and progress. Likewise, in example (19), the student utilizes the determiner “many” to underscore the notion that a substantial number of students, rather than just a few, derive enjoyment from art and music as subjects.

These deliberate choices suggest that the students have a strong grasp of the functions of the passive voice in English and are able to employ it appropriately in their writing.

### **6.1.3. To Ensure Coherency: Linear Progression**

The data collected also suggests that the third most common function of the passive voice among NS was ensuring coherency through linear progression (27 cases), while in the case of Armenian learners it emerged as the least significant rationales (10 cases).

Linear progression suggests turning the rheme (new information) of the sentence into the theme (old information) of the second one. This helps in creating a smooth flow of ideas and connection between the clauses.

The instances of employing linear progression to enhance coherency were notably less frequent in the corpus of Armenian learners. This trend was observed in only ten cases. Furthermore, additional distinctions came to light upon closer examination. To begin with, a divergence emerged as the relative clause word “that” emerged as the most frequent choice, in contrast to the practices of native speakers (NS) (who used “which” as the most common reference word). Additionally, in two instances, Armenian learners opted for a different approach by resorting to the repetition of a single word instead of utilizing a reference word or a relative clause word.

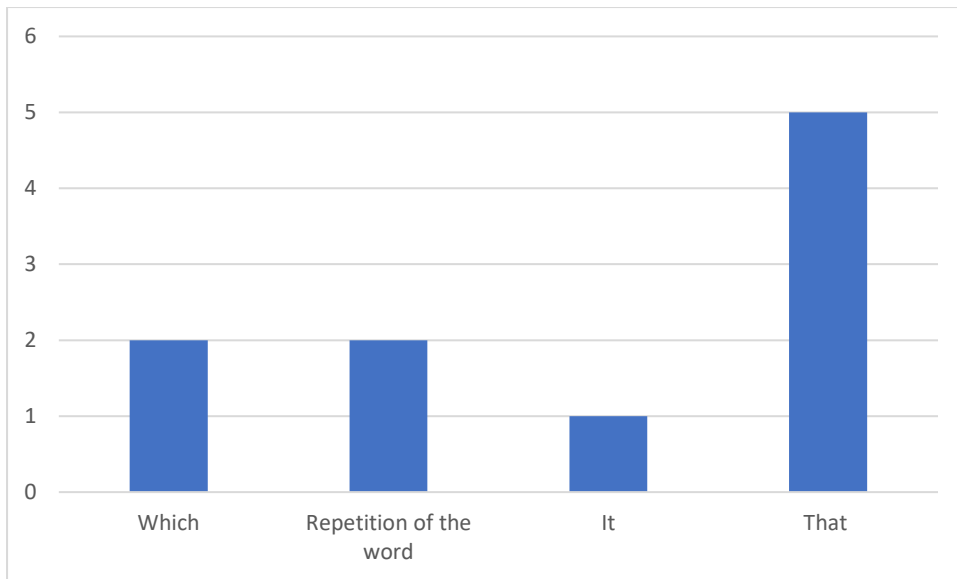


Figure 3. Passive Voice by NS and NNS

As can be observed in the chart, the most frequent relative clause word was “that”, which was used for half of the cases (five times). “Which” was used only twice for transitioning the rheme of the first clause into the theme of the second clause. Unlike NS, who have mostly used a relative clause word or omission of them, Armenian learners have repeated the rheme word as a theme word in the second clause. There was only one case of “it” used as a relative clause word.

Now let us consider some examples taken from Armenian learners’ corpus.

- (20) Many people have died from drugs that were tested on animals and declared safe for humans.
- (21) Animals are inflicted with unnatural damage to create so-called “models” that are used to mimic human diseases.
- (22) ... drugs are taken off the market due to unforeseen dangers or even fatal side effects in humans - effects that have not been observed in animals.

After a careful examination of the examples, it becomes evident that Armenian learners employed the passive voice successfully to achieve cohesiveness by transitioning the rheme of the first utterance into the theme of the second one. In example (20), the word “that” is used as a reference to “drugs,” which is presented as new information in the first clause. Moreover, the use of passive voice, along with the reference word, contributes to smoother and more cohesive reading. Similarly, in example (21), the use of passive voice serves to create a sense of cohesiveness, with the focus of the first clause, “so-called “models,”” becoming the given or old information in the second clause. The same objective is pursued in example (22), where the author continues the chain of thought about “side effects” by utilizing passive voice and providing additional information about them. Interestingly, in the second clause, there is no reference word used for the word “effect”; instead, it is repeated once again.

Now let us examine the examples where Armenian learners have repeated the rheme word of the first clause in theme position.

- (23) The result of this unscientific extrapolation from lab animals to humans is that drugs are taken off the market due to unforeseen dangers or even fatal side effects in humans - effects that have not been observed in animals.
- (24) The other reason that causes the traffic jam is the roads are not designed properly to accommodate all the vehicles on the streets, thus, the jam is created.

It is intriguing to observe that in example (23) “fatal side effects” is presented as new information, as it is positioned at the end of the sentence. The second clause continues the logical thread of the first one; the student has chosen to repeat the rheme word and present it as a theme. However, the student's decision to reiterate the rheme word, subsequently treated as the theme, is of particular interest. This choice engenders two hypothetical explanations: firstly, the student may have employed this repetition for stylistic emphasis; secondly, it could be indicative of potential referencing skill limitations, leading to the reiteration of the same term.

Likewise in example (24), “the traffic jam” has a nucleus role in the first clause, in the second clause, where “the traffic jam” is no longer new information, the student has referred to it with the definite article “the jam”. In this case, the repetition of the word “jam” can be a deliberate choice, considering that utilizing a reference word like “it” could potentially lead to reader confusion given the considerable span between the reference and referee words.

The successful acquisition of this pragmatic function of the passive voice can be attributed to the influence of learners’ native tongue. In Armenian, similar cohesiveness can be achieved through the strategic application of the passive voice. More specifically, the utilization of relative clauses permits provision of additional information concerning the rheme of the primary clause, and the strategic employment of the passive voice proves invaluable in the succinct and comprehensive conveyance of such information. Furthermore, a plausible hypothesis can be posited: the verbs used in the aforementioned examples take passive forms in Armenian as well, thereby contributing to the appropriate utilization of passive constructions.

#### **6.1.4. To Ensure Coherency: Continuous Progression**

The concept of continuous progression implies the presence of a subject and more than one predicate, a condition typically fulfilled through the application of passive voice. As previously mentioned, Armenian learners do not resort to the passive voice for continuous progression with the same frequency as NS.

In contrast to LOCNESS dataset, where the majority of instances (19 out of 25) featured one predicate in the active voice and the other in the passive voice, the Armenian learners’ corpus displayed a different pattern. Specifically, in half of the cases (9 cases), one predicate was in the active voice while the other in the passive voice. In the remaining half both predicates were constructed in the passive voice.

In half of the instances of continuous progression Armenian learners have used both active and passive predicates for the same subject.

- (25) Even if animal experiments were useful, which is not a fact, they are still not ethically justified.
- (26) We all know, that businesses nowadays provide home delivery services, and such time bond businesses are strongly influenced by the traffic jam.
- (27) ... research is still not good and it is done to help save the humanity.

In the given examples, one of the predicates functions as the main action performed by the subject, while the second action in passive voice serves to provide additional information on the same subject with a smooth transition. In example (25), it can be observed that the subject is “animal experiments” and more than one predicate are used for it: first, “were useful”, and the second predicate, “are not justified”, refers to the same subject expressed through the pronoun “they”. In this example, the use of passive voice serves to support the unbroken flow of thought by enabling the sentence to center on the consideration of the experiment’s utility,

devoid of intricate details about potential actors. In example (26) the subject “businesses” assumes the predicate “provide” in the first clause. Subsequently, in the second clause the same subject, contextualized as “such time bond business”, adopts a predicate in passive voice, which helps to provide more information with a smooth transition. Likewise, in example (27), the subject “research” takes more than one predicate: in the first clause the predicate is “is” and in the second clause the subject is represented with pronoun “it” and takes a predicate in the passive voice.

Armenian learners’ adeptness in effectively utilizing the passive voice to maintain coherence within the context of continuous progression can be attributed to the presence of a similar structure in Armenian. This structure, akin to the one observed in English, permits a single subject to take multiple predicates either all in passive voice or both in active and in passive voices, thereby fostering a cohesive narrative.

However, it should be stated that the cases were not very frequent (only 18 cases out of 190, only about 9.5 % substituted the continuous progression), as this structure requires much advanced knowledge and mastery of the language.

#### **6.1.5. To Sound Tactful**

It is worth noting that it is one of the categories where the numbers among NS and Armenian learners were relatively similar (24 and 18 accordingly). It is worth noting that Armenian learners, similar to NS, have employed the passive voice strategically to convey tactfulness in contexts involving official bodies and animal research. Both subjects are of a delicate nature, requiring a tactful and diplomatic approach for discussion. In all these cases, utilizing the passive voice proves advantageous for students as it allows them to refrain from directly identifying the parties accountable for those actions.

Let us explore some examples from Armenian learners’ corpus to illustrate the idea.

- (28) Some cosmetics are tested on animals before they can be used.
- (29) Mostly all animals are tested such as guinea pigs, mice, rats, rabbits.
- (30) ...yet animals’ rights are violated when they are used in research...
- (31) Millions of tests are carried out each year which involve painful procedures such as injections, burns, cuts and many more.
- (32) Since fake information is very well written and given to us, there is always...

Upon analyzing the examples, it becomes clear that, similar to NS, Armenian learners also aimed at maintaining polite and tactful tone by refraining from explicit mention of agents. As evident in examples (29-32) the use of passive voice helps to deflect the attention from the doer of the action on to the action itself. This helps to create a neutral tone by avoiding direct attribution of blame. It is a well-known fact that nowadays there is a huge propaganda against animals being used in different tests and consequently, the people who conduct those tests are to be blamed. To ensure that the tact is maintained and to avoid direct culpability toward the people conducting those tests, Armenian learners adeptly used passive voice to reach this objective. In example (32) a ton of reproach is detectable, as the author states that fake information is written and given to us. Although the context strongly suggests the intended agents, namely journalists, the omission of this agent ensures a sense of diplomacy, thereby refraining from assigning direct culpability to any specific party.

The proficient use of the passive voice by Armenian learners in this pragmatic context may also be attributed to their native language, where the passive voice similarly serves the purpose of avoiding direct assignment of blame.



### 6.1.6. To Sound Objective

The other category where the figures of Armenian learners slightly exceeded the ones of Native Speakers is sounding objective, where the formers utilized it for 26 times and the latter for 24 times.

Upon reviewing all instances of sounding objective in a sub-corpus of LOCNESS, a notable pattern emerges: each case involves the use of impersonal passives. This construction facilitates the introduction of information while distancing it from the speaker, allowing for a sense of detachment. It should be stated that the most common verbs used in impersonal passives was “argue” (was used six times), “shown” (four times) and “seen” (four times). The second most frequent verb was “believed” (used three times) and “it is known”, which was used twice. The other verbs used in impersonal passives are “taken, said, seems, expected, estimated, talked, noted, hopes”, each of which was utilized only once.

A notable observation arises from the analysis: Armenian learners also adeptly used the passive voice to distance themselves from information, often employing impersonal passives to achieve this purpose. However, it is important to highlight that their utilization of this grammatical construct significantly diverged from that of the NS. Specifically, Armenian learners exhibited a distinct preference, with the verb “consider” being the most frequently employed (11 instances). This inclination aligns with the linguistic tendencies of their native tongue, as the Armenian verb */huniunql/*, which translates to “consider” in English, is commonly used to discuss objective information. Additionally, the Armenian learners employed four other verbs in constructing impersonal passives: “believed”, “regarded”, “known”, and “supposed to be”.

Let analyze some examples from Armenian learners’ corpus.

- (33) In marketing the worth of a good is considered to be the most important aspect for...
- (34) Some common skills like writing, reading and maths are considered to be the most important ones...
- (35) Schools are believed to be the main institution of preparing...
- (36) ...especially those that somehow are considered to be “useless” for people...

In example (33), the author has used the passive voice to indicate that the opinion expressed is not solely their own, but rather a generally accepted opinion in the public: that “marketing the worth of a good is the most important aspect...”. Similarly, in example (34), the student employs the passive voice to convey a widespread belief that “writing, reading and maths are the most important ones”. Example (35) utilizes passive voice to demonstrate the prevailing belief that “schools are main institution”. Finally, in example (36), the use of the passive voice “are considered” serves to present the statement as a commonly held belief rather than a personal opinion or bias. This construction fosters an objective and neutral perspective on the perception of certain things as “useless” for people.

The accurate use and comparable frequency of this function of passive voice can be elucidated by the existence of a similar technique in Armenian, where the verb */huniunql/* (consider) is often used to express objective opinion.

### 6.1.7. End-weight Principle

According to the end-weight principle, heavy components are positioned at the end of a sentence to aid readers in efficiently retaining and processing shorter elements at the beginning. This arrangement prepares readers to navigate subsequent, more extensive segments of the sentence with ease. Within this framework, the passive voice emerges as a valuable instrument, facilitating both readability and comprehension.

This is the only category where there was a significant difference between NS and Armenian users, as the formers had 9 cases of end-weight principle, whereas the latter had only 4 cases.

The use of the passive voice by Armenian learners comes as surprise, as there is no such principle in the Armenian language. Moreover, no textbook provides any information about the use of passive voice for ensuring end-weight principle (have considered a number of international textbooks as in Armenian Educational Institutions (HEI).

It is noteworthy that the examples illustrating the end-weight principle encompass not only a function of the passive voice but multiple functions. These instances will be discussed subsequently.

#### **6.1.8. The Use of Passive Voice for Multiple Functions**

As evidenced from the examples, both Armenian learners and NS adeptly employed passive voice to address various pragmatic functions. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the categorization of these pragmatic functions was not always straightforward. Some instances encompassed multiple pragmatic functions, resulting in the same example being placed in more than one category. It should be stated that Native Speakers registered more examples where more than one pragmatic function of the passive voice was achieved in an example (totaling six examples). Armenian learners were not so proficient in the use of passive voice with more than one pragmatic function, accounting for four cases.

Based on the examples provided, it is clear that Armenian learners, contrary to the hypothesis that they would not utilize the passive voice for end-weight principle due to its absence in their native language, have employed it on four occasions. In two instances, the passive voice was used not only to adhere to the end-weight principle but also to emphasize the actor. In the remaining two cases, the passive voice was employed to enhance linear progression while adhering to the end-weight principle.

- (37) These tests are used by companies to check if any dangerous compounds in their products could affect people.

The provided example (37) not only underscores the agent of the action by positioning it at the end of the first utterance, but also adheres to the end-weight principle. The constituent “by companies” is positioned at the final position of the first clause which gives special significance to it. Moreover, the heavy component of the sentence is strategically positioned in the end, which makes the reading flow smoothly.

There are also two cases of instances with alignment of end-weight principle and ensuring linear progression. Let us consider the aforementioned examples.

- (38) I can note that the vast majority of the testing happens on animals, especially those that somehow are considered to be "useless" for people such as rats, rabbits or other similar ones.
- (39) Many people have died from drugs that were tested on animals and declared safe for humans.

In example (38) the rheme of the first clause “animals” becomes the theme of the second one being presented with reference word “those”, contributing to the cohesion and linear progression of the sentence. Moreover, the use of the passive voice facilitates the placement of the long constituent at the end of the sentence enhancing its readability. A similar pattern can be observed in example (39), where the new information “drugs” transitions into the theme (old information) in the second clause and the use of the passive voice makes it possible to place the lengthy constituent at the end of the sentence.

There is also a case where the use of the passive voice serves dual purpose: to make the utterance objective and to ensure the linear progression.

- (40) I can note that the vast majority of the testing happens on animals, especially those that somehow are considered to be "useless" for people such as rats, rabbits or other similar ones.

The use of the passive voice facilitates the linear progression of the sentence, with “animals”, the rheme of the first utterance, seamlessly transitioning into the theme of the second utterance, where it is represented with the phrase “especially those”. Moreover, the use of the phrase “are considered” in the passive construction makes the utterance objective.

## **7. Conclusions**

As it was hypothesized initially, the usage of passive voice by Armenian learners and Native speakers would differ significantly due to the typological difference. Upon analysis, some subtle distinctions were noted, notably in the categories of linear progression, redundant agent, and the end-weight principle. In each of these categories, Native speakers exhibited a higher preference for the passive voice compared to Armenian learners. It is important to note that these differences primarily relate to frequency. The only categories where Armenian learners' figures exceeded that of NS, were focalizing the actor and sounding tactful, which can be closely connected with cultural specifics of Armenian culture and their language and thought.

However, the patterns observed were surprisingly similar. Armenian learners demonstrated a comparable usage pattern to Native speakers, suggesting their ability to effectively employ the passive voice in a manner akin to NS.

While the pragmatic aspects of the passive voice in Armenian are not as extensively studied as in English, and there are fewer identified functions in Armenian compared to English, Armenian learners have effectively used the passive voice for all the functions defined in English. Moreover, despite the absence of the End-weight principle in the Armenian language, Armenian learners have successfully employed the passive voice to achieve this purpose as well.

In terms of frequency, it should be stated that NS gave much more preference to passive voice than Armenians. In general, in the same word count of approximately 28.000 words, NS used passive voice for 291 times, whereas Armenian learner used it for 190 times. Consequently, the usage numbers for different categories were higher among NS than in Armenian learners. But, overall, the tendencies were rather similar.

- Both NS and Armenian learners primarily used passive voice when the agent was redundant or unimportant.
- The second most common reason for both of them to use the passive voice was to focalize the actor.
- Both NS and Armenian learners used passive voice for sounding tactful and for ensuring continuous progression with nearly equal frequencies.
- Both NS and Armenian learners managed to use passive voice with multiple functions in a sentence (NS-six cases, Armenian learners- four cases).

These similarities indicate that Armenian learners have not only retained the grammatical structure of the passive voice but also its functions. Interestingly, international English manuals used in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Armenia typically do not provide extensive elaboration on the pragmatic aspect of the English passive voice during instruction. The effective retention and proper use of the passive voice in suitable contexts with appropriate

pragmatic functions can be attributed to the influence of their mother tongue and the linguistic acumen developed over years of language study.

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