
PASSIVE VOICE IN ENGLISH AND ALBANIAN: COMMON ERRORS IN STUDENT TRANSLATIONS

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Abstract: Voice is a grammatical category of verbs in both English and Albanian. However, there are significant differences in the use of the passive as well as in its formation in these two languages. The aim of this study is to compare passive voice constructions in English and Albanian, while focusing on the difficulties that students face when translating between the two languages. The difficulties that students may encounter as well as the errors that they make are expected to be related to two aspects: there are structural differences- in English there is only one way of forming the passive regardless of the tense whereas in Albanian there are three different ways of forming non-active voices depending on the tense and mood of the verb. The other aspect is functional – in English there is only passive voice as opposed to active voice, while in Albanian except the active voice there are three voices which are formed by non-active forms of the verbs: the passive voice, the middle voice and the reflexive voice. A mixed method approach was used in this study. The descriptive method was used to describe the use and structure of the passive in both languages. From this description we can define the differences and similarities. The qualitative research method was used to analyze the errors and the error patterns of the passive translations while the quantitative method was used to analyze error percentages. The participants of the study are first-year IT students of intermediate English level from University Mother Teresa. The materials used to conduct this research are translation exercises. The first exercise consists of six English passive sentences and the second exercise consists of six Albanian non-active sentences. These sentences were supposed to be translated into Albanian, respectively English. In addition to these two exercises, two questions were given for the students to answer. Both questions are about the number of voices in these two languages and which those voices are. According to the analysis, the differences between English and Albanian passive structures and usage lead to the errors that students make while translating, which will be further discussed in the paper. A limitation of the study is the relatively small number of participants, however these results serve as a solid basis for further studies. Finally, recommendations are provided to enhance teaching strategies for reducing errors and improving the proficiency of Albanian students in both their mother tongue and in English as a foreign language.

Keywords: Passive voice, English, Albanian, translation errors, second language acquisition

1. INTRODUCTION

Verbs have several grammatical categories to describe the relationship of the verb with the other parts of the sentence. The passive voice is a crucial grammatical category in many languages, including English and Albanian. While both languages use the passive to shift focus from the agent to the action, differences in formation and usage often lead to translation errors among students. Analyzing and understanding the nature of these errors is of great importance for improving translation skills and creating suitable teaching approaches in second and foreign language acquisition (SLA/FLA).

The aim of this study is to compare the structure and function of the passive voice in English and Albanian; to identify the most common translation errors made by students, as well as to analyze the linguistic factors that contribute to those errors.

Voice is one of the categories which indicates whether the subject performs or receives the action of the verb. From this perspective, when the subject does the action the verb is in active voice and when the subject receives the action described by the verb, the verb is in passive voice. Thus, in English voice can either be active or passive. ‘The passive voice is often employed to emphasize the action or the object of the action, and it is particularly common in formal and scientific writing where the doer’s identity is less important’ (Safarova, 2023, p.85)

On the other hand, in Albanian most of the grammars list three types of voice: active voice, passive voice and reflexive voice; however, in other grammars we can also find four types of voice: active voice, passive voice, reflexive voice and middle voice. Similar to English, in Albanian the verb is in active voice when it shows an action performed by the subject of the sentence. In *passive voice* the subject is the receiver of the action expressed by the verb. Albanian has two forms of voice which are different from English, *reflexive voice* – ‘a verb is in the reflexive voice when it has a non-active form and denotes an action that is both performed and experienced by the subject of the clause’ (Newmark, p.34), and *middle voice* – ‘a verb is in the middle voice when it has a non-active form and its subject is the underlying agent’. (p.32)

In the following examples we will look at each of these types in both languages:

- The boy **hit** the ball. (active)
- The ball **was hit** by the boy. (passive)
- Djalie **godititopin**. (active)
- Topiu **goditngadjali**. (passive)
- Ajokrihet. (reflexive voice)
- Unë **krenohem** me arritjet e mia. (middle voice)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Voice is a verb category which along the other categories of verbs defines the relationship of the verb with the other parts of the sentence. The category of voice has mostly been defined only from the syntactic point of view, however the morphological and lexical aspect should also be considered, as Likaj (1970) states in his paper. He claims that if we only consider the syntactic classification, which describes the relation of the subject and object through the verb, then we would have to leave out the middle voice, in which the verb expresses no relation of the subject to the object. He also claims that the category of voice has been mixed up with the transitivity and intransitivity of verbs (p. 103). Furthermore, Likaj adds another category to voice – that of *intransitive voice*, in which an active or other structure of the verb expresses an action or state of the subject that does not go beyond the subject (p.105) as in the example *Dritapushonte* (Drita was resting). Deda (2017) on the other hand analyses voice in relation to valence, not attempting to unify the two concepts. In addition, Kananaj(2020) also claims that ‘voice is a linguistic operation that creates alternate constructions as a result of semantic-syntactic changes of verb valence and such alternations are closely related to valence however she does not equalize the two concepts (p. 126).

In English, passive voice is formed by the verb **be** combined with the past participle of the main verb. Whentransforming an active sentence to passive voice we should have in mind this rule and the fact that the verb **be** must match the tense that the main verb in the active clause.

- Ben **buys** flowers. / Flowers **arebought** by Ben. (present simple)
- Ben **bought** flowers. / Flowers **were bought** by Ben. (past simple)
- Ben **has bought** flowers. / Flowers **have been bought** by Ben. (present perfect)
- Ben **will buy** flowers. /Flowers **will be bought** by Ben. (future simple)

As we can see, in all these examples which are in different tenses in the active voice, when we transform them in the passive voice the tense remains the same and the auxiliary **be** carries the tense marking.

In contrast, Albanian employs three ways of forming the passive voice, middle voice and reflexive voice (non-active voices):

- a. By means of verb inflections
- b. By means of the clitic **u**
- c. By means of the auxiliary verb **jam (be)** followed by a participle

Some verb tenses have distinct verb endings, such as the non-active forms of the present indicative (*lahem*) and subjunctive (*tëlahem*), the imperfect indicative (*lahesha*) and subjunctive (*tëlahesha*) as well as the future (*do tëlahem*) and past future (*do tëlahesha*) (Newmark, p. 58).

Other tenses such as the non-active past definite (e kryera e thjeshtë) tense *-u lava, u hap-* form the non-active voices by means of the clitic **u**. Apart from the past definite, here are some other tenses that form the non-active voices by the clitic **u** – the present and imperfect admirative *- u lakam, u lakështa-* (koha e tashme the e pakryer e mënyrës habitore), the present optative *-u lafsha-* (koha e tashme e mënyrës dëshirore), the imperative *- hapu/ lahu, mos u hap/mos u laj-* (mënyra urdhërore), negative and participle non-finite forms *-pa u larë, duke u larë, për t’u larë, me t’u larë-* (format e pashtjelluara të mohores dhe përcjellores), non-finite future forms of the type *për t’u larë/kam për t’u larë*, as well as the past future of the type *kisha për t’u larë*. (Domi,p. 303, Newmark, p. 60)

The third way of forming non-active voices in Albanian is by using the auxiliary verb **jam** with a participle which is structurally the same as the English **verb+ participle** form. However, in Albanian this form is only used with the tenses that form the active voice by using the auxiliary **kam** (have), such as: the present perfect *-jam larë-* (e kryera), past perfect *- isha larë-* (më se a kryer), pluperfect *-qeshë larë-* (e kryer e tejshkuar) , past future *- do të jem larë-* (e ardhmja e përparme) and past future perfect *- do të isha larë-* (e ardhmja e përparme e së shkuarës) of the indicative mood; the present perfect *-qenkam larë-* and past perfect *-qenkëshalarë-* of the admirative mood; the present perfect *-tëjemlarë-* and past perfect *-tëishalarë-* of the subjunctive mood and the present perfect *-qofshalarë-* of the optative mood. (Domi,p. 303, Newmark, p. 60)

Voice is also related to the type of verb, whether the verb has an active or non-active form. Therefore, in English the distinction is clear, if the verb has an active form it is in active voice and if it has a non-active form it is in passive voice. However, in Albanian, if the verb has an active form it is in active voice, but if it has a non-active voice it can

be in passive, reflexive or middle voice. According to Domi (2002) the verbs in middle voice belong to one of these groups:

- a. Verbs which describe movement: *hidhem, mbahem, nisem, ngrihem, rrotullohem, etc.*
– **Unë ngrihem** në ora 7. (I **get up** at 7)
- b. Verbs which describe psychological states/ actions *gëzohem, hidhërohem, mendohem, pikëllohem, etc.*
– **Unë kërenohem** me arritjet e tua. (I **am proud** of your achievements.), non-progressive passive.
- c. Verbs which describe physical or psychological changes of the subject *dobësohem, plakem, qetësohem, skuqem, etc.*

– Ajou **plakngadalë**. (She **grew old** slowly)

The reflexive voice is formed by a non-active verb form which describes an action that is performed and experienced by the subject, such verbs include *krihem, lahem, vishem, zhvishem, etc.*

Të gjithë **ishinveshurnjës**oj.

Domi (2002) makes a further distinction – the reciprocal reflexive voice in which the subject consists of two or more people who act reciprocally on each other, such as *fejohem, martohem, përshëndetem, zihem, etc.* (p.271)

Besapërshëndet me shoqet.

Blertaishtemartuar me Drenin.

Qamili (2019) makes a contrastive analysis of the verbal system of English and Albanian passive voice, focusing on the similarities and differences among these two languages. Skuka (2020) makes a similar comparison of passive voice errors made by 9th graders, focusing on the verbal system and language interference. Due to such differences in the structure and categorization of passive, students make errors when translating from English into Albanian and vice versa. Since ‘mistakes are an unavoidable part of the foreign language learning and teaching’ (Kaçani, 2014) identifying and analyzing students’ errors is crucial for targeting them and recommending teaching strategies to minimize those errors in the future. Errors resulting from L1 interference are present in almost every foreign language learning and acquisition. Regardless of the various factors that contribute to errors, the leading two are poor language competence as well as the influence from L1 (Gupta & Yadav, 2024). ‘In contrast, Dulay and Burt (1974d) determined that only 3% of the errors were due to interference of L1. According to these researchers, the errors did not originate in the influence of L1, but were the result of an imperfect knowledge of L2.’ (as cited Wood, 2017, in p.6). Besides, the effect on the second language can be both positive and negative depending on the similarities between the two languages, as Lou (2023) and Fitri & Alawiyah (2023) claim, and they further discuss that teaching strategies have a great impact on minimizing the negative transfer.

3. METHODOLOGY

A mixed method approach was used in this study. The descriptive method was used to describe the use and structure of the passive in both languages. From this description we can define the differences and similarities. The qualitative research method was used to analyze the errors and the error patterns of the passive translations, while the quantitative method was used to analyze error percentages.

The participants of the study are first-year IT students of intermediate English level from University Mother Teresa. The materials of this research are translation exercises and questions. Firstly they were given two questions followed by two exercises. The first exercise consists of six English passive sentences and the second exercise consists of six Albanian non-active sentences.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first exercise of the questionnaire consists of six English passive sentences which the students were asked to translate into Albanian. The first sentence ‘**The boys were found after an hour**’ is correctly translated ‘*Djemtë u gjetën pas një ore.*’ by 75% of the students and the remaining 25% made a direct translation using the present or past form of the verb *jam*, thus changing the meaning by using wrong tenses. (*Djemtë janë gjetur pas një ore. / Djemtë ishin gjetur pas një ore.*). The second sentence which is in past continuous ‘**She was being bullied by her classmates**’ is correctly translated with the imperfect tense ‘*Ajo (po) ngacmohejngashoket e klasës. / Ajobullizohejngashokët e klasës.*’ by only 40% of the students. The other 60 % have used incorrect forms or incorrect tenses such as ‘*Ajo ishtebullizuar/ Ajokaqenë e bullizuar/ kishte qenë e bullizuar/ ishte ndjer e bullizuar...*’ The third example is in past perfect ‘**The thief had been caught when I arrived**’ and the correct translation is ‘*Hajduti ishte kapur/zënë kur arrita.*’ which makes 68% of the correct translations. Incorrect translation makes 32 % and most of the mistakes include wrong tenses and wrong verb forms which may be influenced by the English auxiliary **had**: ‘*Hajduti kish qene kaur/ e kanë kapur/ e kishin kapur/ ishte i kapur/ u kap...*’. The fourth example is in past simple ‘**They were never seen again**’ which is translated as ‘*Ato nuk u panë kurrë më*’ by 61% of the students, whereas some of the wrong answers include ‘*Ata nuk e panë/ nuk do shihen/ nuk e kanë parë/nuk janë*

parë/ s'ishin pare...'. The fifth example '**The rules have been set**' has been correctly translated by 64% of the students '*Rregullatjanëvendosur/ bërë/ vënë*' while most of the incorrect answers are translations with past perfect and there are also some blank answers. The last example of this exercise is in present simple '**He is re-elected every year**' and is translated by the present indicative by 43% of the students. In addition 11% of the students have used a correct verb form, however they have used the verb *zgjidhet* (*elected*) instead of *rizgjidhet* (*reelected*). Since the focus is on the passive translations mainly, these could count as correct translations of the passive, making 54% correct translations. Most of the incorrect translations are '*Ai është rizgjedhur/ izgjedhurçdovit.*' indicating the influence of the English auxiliary **be**.

The second exercise of the questionnaire consists of six Albanian passive sentences that students were asked to translate into English. As it has already been mentioned, apart from the passive voice, Albanian has middle and reflexive voice. As Panolli (2000) claims 'Grammar does not always harmonize with meaning' therefore when translating from English into Albanian or vice versa, we encounter English passive verbs which are translated by active verbs in Albanian, as well as English active verbs translated by passive ones in Albanian, or more specifically they are in middle or reflexive voice. (p.38). In the following analysis we will discuss such differences.

The first example of the second exercise is '**Unë lahem çdo ditë**' which is in reflexive voice and has been correctly translated by most of the students with an active sentence such as: '*I wash myself every day.*' (32%), '*I take a shower/bath every day.*' (28%), '*I shower every day*' (7%). On the other hand, 18% of the students translated this sentence as '*I wash every day*' which is grammatically correct, however, it does not convey the same meaning. 14% of the students did not translate this example at all. The second example '**Motrat ishin veshur njejtë**' is in past perfect reflexive voice and is correctly translated by only 3% of the students '*The sisters had been dressed the same*'. Almost half of the students translated it with a past simple tense '*The Sisters were dressed the same*'. The remaining half translated this example with an incorrect active sentence '*Sister was wearing/ dressing the same./The sisters dressed the same. / Sisters have been wearing same. / The sisters were wearing the same outfit. / The sisters wearing the same.*' (32%) and no answers were given by 18% of the students. The third example is in the future tense, reciprocal reflexive voice '**Do të takohem me Vesën në mbrëmje**' which is correctly translated with a future active sentence in English '*I will meet/date (with) Vesa in the evening.*' (64%), '*I will be meeting with Vesa tonight.*' (3%), '*I am going to meet with Vesa in the afternoon.*' (7%). A quarter of the students either gave an incorrect answer or no answer at all. The fourth example is in past perfect passive '**Frutat ishin mbledhur më herët**' and is correctly translated with a past perfect passive sentence by only 21% of the students. Half of the students translated this sentence with past simple passive, which is similar to the English one only in structure, but not in function. The remaining 29% did not translate this sentence at all. The fifth sentence is in Albanian past definite '**Disa u vranë e disa u shpëtuan**' and is correctly translated by 54% of the students as '*Some were killed and some were saved./ Some were killed, some saved*'. The rest of the answers were either left blank (18%) or they gave incorrect verb forms or tenses '*Some one killed and someone... / Some was killed some was helped/ saved./ Some got hurt/ injured and some got away/saved. / Some get murder some get saved./ Some have been killed some were saved.*' The last example of the second exercise is '**Ajo hidhet me litar çdo ditë**' which is in middle voice. It is correctly translated by 18% of the students '*She jumps rope every day*' while 29% of the students have translated the sentence '*She jumps with a rope every day*' which is grammatically correct although the meaning is not completely the same (it may imply jumping while holding a rope). In addition, 7% of the students have translated it as '*She does rope jumping every day*' which even though it has a different structure, it implies the same activity. The remaining half of the students have not answered this example at all (18%) or have given incorrect verb forms (29%).

Besides these two exercises the students were asked two questions regarding the number of voices in English and Albanian respectively and which those voices are. It is interesting that 71% of the students answered that English has active and passive voice, 14% stated that English has two voices, while 15% did not answer the question. On the contrary, as far as voice in Albanian is concerned, even though the students' mother tongue is Albanian 35% did not answer this question at all, 25% answered with active and passive voice, 7% only wrote two types of voices, 14% wrote that there are four voices, but did not mention them and the remaining 19% named active, passive and reflexive voice, from which only one of them mentioned reciprocal voice, while only two mentioned middle voice. As appalling as this may seem, it is not a revelation. Albanian students in North Macedonia learn English as a foreign language since the first grade and passive voice is part of every year's curriculum, which is not the case with Albanian grammatical category of voice. In Albanian as a mother tongue, voice is only studied as part of verbs in the subject of Morphology. Since most students are not really fond of grammar, we assume that they do not pay the necessary attention to this verb category, therefore we have such results.

Regarding the errors that students make while translating passive sentences from English into Albanian and vice versa, from the analysis of students' answers we can see that the English- Albanian translations have a higher

percentage of correct answers than the Albanian-English translations. This is directly connected to the fact that students translate better in their mother tongue than in the foreign language.

Concerning the nature of the errors that students have made, most of the errors are structural as a result of the differences in the use and structure of passive voice in these two languages. Surprisingly, we can notice interference both from the mother tongue – Albanian and the foreign language – English. In the Albanian translations, the errors consist of the overuse of the auxiliary *jam* (be) influenced by the English structure *be+ past participle* even though in Albanian there are three different structures of forming the passive. Similarly, in English most of the errors are also related to this structure as well as tenses. Two of the examples with the lowest percentage of correct answers are in the same tense- past perfect: ‘Motrat ishin veshur njejtë’ and ‘Frutat ishin mbledhur më herët’ one in reflexive voice and the second in passive voice. Most of the incorrect answers in these two examples are related to the tense of the verb *be*. Due to the English interference the students have used **were** instead of **have been**, they have translated the structure but not the tense.

5. CONCLUSION

Following the comparison of the passive in English and Albanian as well as the analysis of students’ errors while translating from one language to the other, various conclusions can be drawn. There are structural differences between English and Albanian passive voice which result in the errors that the students make when translating between the two languages. The differences are in the number of voice categories, English has two- active and passive, while Albanian has four – active, passive, reflexive and middle voice. Furthermore, English has a relatively simple rule of forming the passive: *be + past participle*, whereas Albanian has three ways of forming the passive: by means of verb inflections, by means of the clitic *u* and by means of the auxiliary verb **jam** (**be**) followed by a participle. As a result of such differences between the two languages, negative language transfer plays a role in student’s error. Usually L1 has a negative transfer on the target language, however, from the analysis of students’ errors we can see that the foreign language also influences translations since passive is a topic which is frequently taught in all foreign language curricula. The analysis of common errors suggests that a more context-driven teaching approach can significantly improve students' translation accuracy.

A limitation of the study is the relatively small number of participants, however these results serve as a solid basis for further studies. Finally, it is recommended that teachers enhance teaching strategies for reducing errors and improving the proficiency of Albanian students in both their mother tongue and in English as a foreign language.

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