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## Teaching and Assessing the English Passive Voice Inductively

La enseñanza y evaluación inductivas de la voz pasiva en inglés

César Alberto Navas Brenes  
Universidad de Costa Rica. San José  
cesar.navas@ucr.ac.cr

**ABSTRACT:** To analyze the effect of the inductive instruction in the acquisition of the English Passive Voice in EFL students is the main concern of this research. Although this target population takes the second course of the English major, this is the first-time learners study and assimilate the passive voice at this level. After administering a diagnostic instrument on such structure, the instructor observed the acquisition, progress, and usage of the passive voice in two types of written tasks throughout the course. At the end of the semester, students will take a second, non-graded instrument to assess the acquisition of the passive voice with the help of Task-based activities.

**KEYWORDS:** Passive voice, Task-based learning, lesson planning, inductive learning, TEFL

**RESUMEN:** Este estudio de caso examina el efecto de la instrucción inductiva en la adquisición de la voz pasiva del inglés en un grupo de veinticinco estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera. Aunque esta población meta se encuentra en el segundo curso del Bachillerato en Inglés, esta es la primera ocasión en la cual los estudiantes estudian y asimilan la voz pasiva en este nivel. Después de aplicar un instrumento diagnóstico para evaluar esta estructura, el docente analiza la adquisición, progreso y uso de la voz pasiva en dos tipos de actividades escritas a lo largo del semestre. Al finalizar, los estudiantes completan un segundo instrumento con el fin de evaluar la adquisición de la voz pasiva por medio de actividades basadas en tareas.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Voz pasiva, Aprendizaje Basado en Tareas, planeamiento de lección, aprendizaje inductivo, enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera

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## Introduction

Some grammar structures seem to be very challenging, for low intermediate level students. The passive voice is one of them even though it is traditionally taught with form-focused materials. However, new course textbooks and instructors tend to teach grammar structure by designing task-based lesson plans. In fact, recent materials derive from active methodologies to innovate teaching and the teaching and learning processes; thus, learners focus on meaning before exploring and analyzing form. The underlying aspects behind a grammar rule such as the passive voice, Willis (2003, p.218) mentions three elements that may orient learners through this process:

- A. *Recognition*: this deals with the identification of the relationship between clauses or words.
- B. *System building*: learners will be able to construct more complex and acceptable noun phrases.
- C. *Exploration*: learners need time to explore when the usage of a given form is appropriate. To write a concept, it is more appropriate to use the passive voice instead of the active voice. What is the most significant difference?

Designing task-based materials to teach the passive voice is not easy. The instructors should get acquainted with the framework of such methodology. Willis J. and Willis D. (cited in Carter and Nunan, 2001) point out that “one feature of TBL [task-based learning], therefore, is that learners carrying out a task are free to use any language they can do to achieve the outcome: language forms are not prescribed in advance” (p.174). There has been some debate in regard to active methodologies and the notion of learner-centeredness, so Nunan (1999) clarifies the following:

[...] in a learner-centered classroom, key decisions about what will be taught, how it will be taught, when it will be taught, and how it will be assessed will be made with reference to the learner. Information about learners, and, where feasible, from learners will be used to answer the key questions of what, how, when, and how well. (p.11)

So, in other words, learner-centeredness does not mean to transfer teacher's responsibilities and instructional decisions to students; on the contrary, the idea is for the learner to implement learning and metacognitive strategies throughout the EFL process.

Learners use authentic materials to process input, carry out the main task, explore, and infer the rule it comprises. It is worth noting that authentic texts are “not [...] written for language teaching purposes to illustrate a specific language point, or simplified to the point of distorting natural language use” (Tomlinson, 1998, p.46). When it comes to designing this type of meaning-based tasks, the process is challenging and time consuming. Perhaps, this is why many instructors end up explaining complex grammar structures with traditional forms, such as the Presentation, Practice, and Production model. Thus, this case study aims to address the following two research questions:

1. Does task-based instruction have a positive effect on students' understanding of the passive form?
2. To what extent, do students' outcomes (pretest, posttest, and two writing tasks) reflect such gain?

## Review of the Literature

Teaching grammar through inductive approaches has come within the scope of recent EFL course textbooks and programs. Although deductive teaching of grammar forms has prevailed in many recent language programs, inferential instruction seems to be a more challenging method to help learners assimilate and process new structures. Before referring to the insights regarding inductive instruction, it is essential to review how individuals acquire L1 and L2 structures. In fact, achieving the desired positive evidence (from their parents' feedback) and linguistic input, “by about 5 years of age [children] have mastered most of the constructions of their language, although their vocabulary is still growing” (Guasti, 2002, p.4). Also, a bilingual child is more likely to surpass a monolingual one as the former will “have superior creative thinking and flexibility of thought, which is assumed to emerge from being able to see things from two perspectives as a function of being in possession of two linguistic systems” (Dornyei, 2009,

p.17). Language acquisition, thus, fosters cognitive and problem-solving skills.

The study of how individuals acquire L2 grammatical and phonological constructions is complex. In relation to this, Nunan (1999) explains that “comparatively few individuals who begin the study of a second language after they have mastered their first ever develop the equivalent of native mastery” (p.40). At this point, one should review the notions of naturalistic and instructed second language acquisition. The former concept refers to the acquisition of an L2 in the native environment over a long period of time; individuals are exposed to a vast range of input. On the other hand, Dornyei (2009) explains the main idea behind the notion of instructed second-language acquisition (SLA):

In contrast, instructed SLA—that is, the learning processes whereby an L2 is predominantly mastered within an educational context with no or little contact with native speakers of the L2—follows a very different principle; here the course of L2 development is largely determined by formal curricula and syllabi, and even small details of classroom events are often controlled by man-made lesson plans. Thus, in such formal school contexts the role of human agency—that is, the impact of policymakers, curriculum designers, materials writers, language teachers, and testers—is paramount. (p.20)

There are key factors that influence L2 acquisition such as age, extrinsic or intrinsic motivation, predisposition, social interaction, and other constituents of an educational setting; some of these include “teacher and student roles, classroom management, inter-student relationships and interaction patterns, group norms, classroom goal structures, and group cohesiveness [...]” (Dornyei, 2009, p.20).

Systematicity of second language learning is another main aspect. This means that the speed in which learners move through the developmental stages of grammar acquisition may vary. Some individuals are more likely to acquire grammar structures faster than others. Eventually, they would assimilate and reach more advanced L2 constructions as a result of formal instruction. So, although systematicity is a feature of interlanguage, it is also variable. The same source (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p.16)

explains that “learners’ utterances seem to vary from moment to moment, in the types of errors that are made, and learners seem liable to switch between a range of correct and incorrect forms over lengthy periods of time.” These two features, systematicity and variability, occur in the acquisition of L1 and L2, but the latter is more substantial when it comes to learning a second language.

Another aspect related to second language learning (SLL) is called fossilization, which interferes with the progress of producing correct L2 constructions. Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992) define this as “a process which sometimes occurs in which incorrect linguistic features become a permanent part of the way, and [...] grammar may become fixed” (p.145). Thus, interlanguage differs markedly from correct conventions. Mitchell and Myles (2004) go beyond and explains that there are two possible explanations for such phenomenon: at a psycholinguistic level, some learners are unable to transfer L1 learning mechanisms; furthermore, at a sociolinguistic level, they are unable to plug into the L2 community successfully (p.18).

There are significant differences and similarities among first and second language acquisition. Dornyei (2009, p.21-23) lists the following aspects:

- There is an understandable differential success.
- L1 acquisition is automatic, but motivation in SLL is essential.
- L1 acquisition tends to be homogenous while L2 is characterized by many heterogeneous cognitive processes.
- The surrounding knowledge and context in L1 acquisition and the knowledge of the world involved in SLL play a key role.
- There is a language transfer between L1 and L2, and this may hinder various facets of SLL, being accent and interference examples of such aspect.
- The amount of input differs in L1 and L2 acquisition.
- The notions of implicit and explicit learning are present in both processes.

As the main issue behind this study is related to grammar acquisition of the passive voice, there are three crucial concepts to explain and distinguish: order of acquisition, competence, and performance in SLL. As mentioned before, learners move through developmental stages; that is, there is a sequence in which grammar constructions are acquired. Saville-Troike (2006) enumerates three features of this multidimensional model:

(1) “Learners acquire certain grammatical structures in a developmental sequence. (2) Developmental sequences reflect how learners overcome processing limitations. (3) Language instruction which targets developmental features will be successful only if learners have already mastered the processing operations which are associated with the previous stage of acquisition. (p.81)

The second concept to define is *competence*, which is sometimes confused with the notion of performance. Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992, p.68) define competence as “a person’s ability to create and understand sentences, including sentences they have never heard before.” Learners also have the capacity to differentiate those possible correct structures from those that are incorrect. *Performance*, on the other hand, not only refers to how people speak a language but also “interpret and process incoming language data in some form, for normal language development to take place” (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p.20).

## The Acquisition of Grammar Constructions

Although learners can be able to get acquainted with grammar rules deductively or inductively, linguists have opposing views in this regard. This is significant with certain “systems that defy explanation either because they are too complex (the distinction between past perfect and past simple; the use of the passive) or too wide-ranging (pattern grammar)” (Willis, 2003, p.219). For students to rapidly assimilate grammar rules, some experts have become advocates for explicit instruction; an example of this is the traditional PPP framework (Presentation, Practice, Production) to teach new rules. Some teaching methods tend to focus on form and others on meaning, and it seems that students assimilate

and acquire a certain linguistic item when they are able to do so. In relation to inductive learning and consciously raising tasks, Loewen (2020) explains the following:

In this type of instruction, learners are presented with examples of a specific structure, and they are asked to extract the pattern of rule that pertains to all the examples. For example, learners might be provided with a text in Spanish containing multiple examples of verbs in the preterit and imperfect forms. Learners could be asked to identify the ways in which the two verb aspects are used and extrapolate a rule or set of rules to explain the grammatical patterns. In this way, consciously raising activities are inductive because learners must figure out the rules from the data they are given. (p.109-110)

This inductive approach is clearly more challenging as figuring out the structure behind comprehensible input is not easy at lower levels. One disadvantage relies on the fact that certain populations tend to prefer traditional, deductive teaching methodologies. Some language learners, especially adults, may prefer traditional grammar explanations as content and rules is explicitly presented. This is also the case of very large groups of language learners since instructors should monitor if everybody has successfully identified and assimilated the rule behind a target linguistic item.

## The English Passive Voice

There are various aspects that increase the level of difficulty at the moment of assimilating the passive voice. Willis (2003) explains that learners need to pay attention to the function of the verb tense as it will “enable us to orient ourselves to the elements in the proposition and to relate them to one another, particularly in terms of time” (p.34). Also, speakers and writers should analyze text orientation, the theme or topic of the idea, the organization of the clauses (subject versus agent), and discourse markers such as clefting (i.e., a sentence with the form It is known as the physician who operated on the patient); in short, “the passive voice is one of the devices we have for organizing information in the clause” (Willis, 2003, p.36).

Basically, in the passive voice, the subject of the sentence undergoes the effects of the action. Traditionally, many language instructors tend to ban this structure in their writing courses as it, supposedly, hinders meaning and implies an impressive and weak effect. Writers should avoid the overuse of passive sentences in their texts. Folse (2016, p.300) highlights three of the some of the most common mistakes that English learners make in regard to the construction of the passive voice:

- a. Using the passive voice when the active voice is the appropriate and correct target form (e.g., The lamp broke the cat).
- b. Omitting the conjugated form of BE (e.g., The books written by the French scholars).
- c. Including the BY + agent phrase when this is obvious (e.g., The bike was stolen by someone).

Also, Flores and Alfaro (1995, p.76-77) explained the six rules behind the usage of the English passive voice, which are summarized in Table 1:

**TABLE 2:**  
RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Rules	Example
1.To signal that the performer is unknown.	The diagnostic test was carried out in the language laboratory.
2. To hint that the "doer" is a general group.	The gathering was held in the morning.
3. To avoid mentioning the performer of the action.	Second grammar instrument or posttest.
4. To place emphasis on the "receiver" rather than on the performer of the action.	The employees were interviewed by the human resources department.
5. To describe a scientific experiment or process.	The corpus was recorded for further analysis.

Source: Flores, Berta y Alfaro, Vilma (1995). *Practicing english Syntax*.

In short, active and passive sentences express actions, but the active voice focuses on the doer of this action while passive constructions highlight their subject.

To transform an active sentence into a passive one, it is necessary to keep the same verb form. Alfaro and Flores (1995, p.75) explain that “no part at all of the verb form in the active sentence can be deleted in the corresponding passive one. Thus, the modal auxiliaries, the have plus past participle, and the be plus -ing forms that appear in an active sentence will appear in the passive one.” With explicit or traditional methodologies, this is something that instructors may easily explain, but with inductive approaches, this clearly constitutes a challenge.

Active and passive sentences may be formed by several verb tenses. However, language learners should be acquainted with the fact that some passive forms are not common, as opposed to the active version. This is the case of some progressive tenses. Folse (2016) warned that “a search in the 480-million-word COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English) found just 13 examples of past perfect progressive tense in passive voice” (p.97). For example, it is not very common to encounter a sentence such as *in one hour, these patients will have been waiting in this clinic for approximately six hours*. Thus, the same source points out that language instructors should “need to establish which verb tenses are most useful for our student populations in the correct genre of reading material [...] as well as which voice those verb tenses might occur in” (Folse, 2016, p.97). This has important implications at the moment of developing materials, especially in ESP contexts.

The recognition of the passive voice has been a subject of research. In her study, Horgan (1978, p.3) analyzed the recognition of passive sentence elicited from children and young adults, and she distinguishes between various types of passive constructions; the first type is known as the full passive + agent, which contains “a form of be or not, a past tense marker, and a preposition followed by a noun phrase that could logically be construed as the actor or instrument.” An example of this is *The child was scolded by his father for what he did*. Consider the following two types of full passive constructions:

- The vaccine was distributed by a well-known pharmaceutical company.

- The houses were destroyed by the fire.

Both are full passives; however, the first sentence is an instrumental reversible passive as the noun phrase may function as the doer of the action and the object of the sentence. Semantically, this is not possible with the second sentence, which is an agentive non-reversible passive form because the construction *The fire was destroyed by the houses* is not allowed. In addition, Horgan explains that a truncated passive lacks the agent (i.e., The tests were graded), and there is a type of stative construction, which has to do with “a state of affairs rather than to an action, event, or process” (i.e., They got killed) (1978, p.6).

Additional research has been conducted to study the recognition and acquisition of the passive voice. In her single-subject pilot research, Hill (1998) worked with a child to observe the recognition of reversible passive and active constructions; as part of her conclusions, she observed that there was a degree of comprehension of the passive form at an early age (p.63). This also means that they are aware of the difference between active and passive forms. Hill explained that “if the subject was at the stage of development where he comprehended the passive construction, but was unable to produce them, he should have correctly acted out the reversible passive test sentences” (Hill, 1998, p. 67). The analysis of word order was one of the strategies she used to differentiate appropriate or unacceptable reversible sentences.

Cognitive grammar was also studied in the teaching of active and passive sentences. Bielak, Pawlak, and Mystkowska (2003) investigated the benefits of feature-focused grammatical teaching of the active and passive voices (form, meaning, and use) with the implementation of cognitive grammar (CG); in this case, despite the limitation of time, there was “relatively high effectiveness of both instructional options in fostering the use of the target structures in both more controlled and more spontaneous performance, with traditional instruction being more successful than that based on CG with respect to the latter” (p.581).

## Task-based Learning (TBL)

Among recent teaching and learning methodologies, task-based learning places EFL students at the center of the educational

process. To teach grammar rules, this methodology can be used to vary traditional form-focused structures. Thus, students assimilate structures inductively by accessing authentic materials and task-based exercises. In relation to this, Willis (1996) explains that “we have had the experience of presenting and practicing a particular language pattern, with learners getting it right during the form-focused practice stage, but then, at the meaning-focused free production stage, they do not use the ‘new’ item at all” (p.4). Learners focus on meaning and carry out a series of appealing tasks without receiving explicit, direct, or traditional instruction on the target rule, which not the case of well-known Presentation-Practice-Production materials.

To successfully design TBL materials, language instructors must get familiar with all the components of the following framework proposed by Willis (1996, p.6):

**Pre-task:** Introduction to the topic and task instructions. This gives instruction to teacher talk, but brainstorming useful topic words and phrases is a good way of involving students in this phrase. Task cycle: Learners use language in varying circumstances and are exposed to others by using it. The Task Phase gives opportunities for interactive spontaneous use of language in the privacy of their pairs where mistakes don't matter. The Report Phase encourages a combination of accuracy and fluency [...]. The Planning Phase is the time for teacher input and advice. Learners plan what to say at the report stage, to correct mistakes, to thrive to use “better” language and to focus on form [...]. Language focus: Analysis and Practice. Learners get repeated exposure to the language from the task cycle and have a chance to focus on form and ask questions about language features. (p.6)

The concept of task plays a key role in this active learning, but it has to follow the characteristics aforementioned so as to guide learners through the TBL lesson (or lessons). In summary, task-based learning includes various advantages when designing grammar-based lessons:

- a. To teach a target grammar form, teachers must carefully select authentic materials in which it is used. This input should correlate with the learners' level of proficiency.
- b. It would be relevant to indicate that, ideally, the new grammar rule should not have been explained before in the current course or in the previous course that belongs to the same program.
- c. TBL materials may integrate various language skills. So, instructors can incorporate reading comprehension, listening texts, vocabulary, and grammar in the same lesson.
- d. Willis J. and Willis D. (cited in Carter and Nunan, 2001) point out that "the challenge for TBL, therefore, is to devise a methodology which affords learners the freedom to engage in natural learning processes in the creation of a meaning system" (p.174).

To explain how to create a lesson to teach the English passive voice, it is worth noting to indicate that this is "a context-sensitive grammatical" form in regard to discourse and context; in other words, to internalize and produce such structure consists of "a much larger process in which the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse appropriateness of the construction itself is also judge with respect to the context in which it is used" (Celce-Murcia and Olshtain, 2000, p.52). So, before designing a TBL sample lesson to teach and practice the passive voice at an intermediate level, it is important to define the concept of *task* in this methodology.

Dave and Jane Willis (cited in Carter and Nunan, 2001) point out that "one feature of TBL, therefore, is that learners carrying out a task are free to use any language they can to achieve the outcome: language forms are not prescribed in advance" (p.174). Also, Ellis (2003) defines the notion of task as those "activities that call for primary meaning-focused language use. In contrast, exercises are activities that call for primary form-focused language use" (p.3).

The purpose of the task cycle is, as Ellis explains, for "participants to function primary as language users in the sense that they must employ the same kinds of communicative processes as those involved in real-world activities" (p.3). For this reason, the lesson, which intends to integrate various skills, places the form-

based activities at the end of the process. Thus, the TBL framework consists of three main stages:

- *Pre-task* (meaning-based activities)
- *Task cycle*: meaning-based activities (task, planning, and report)
- *Post-task: analysis and further practice* (form-based or consciousness-raising activities)

The first stage of the pre-task has two steps. With this framework, the topic of the lesson is introduced. To clearly guide the use of the passive voice and contextualize this lesson, the theme of the lesson presented in this case study is the world's *amazing inventions*. In small groups, learners share their ideas with their team members in regard to a general question: *What is, in your opinion, the greatest idea or invention?* As a second pre-task activity, the instructor distributes a set of sixteen cards; some just include the name of a well-known invention (e.g., hay, steam engine, plow, the Gregorian calendar, compass, phonograph, the Swiss army knife, among others), and the other half includes a short text with their descriptions. Each student reads out loud the content of each text. The idea is to match descriptions with the correct name. Texts must include at least four sentences in the passive voice. Inductively, students get acquainted with the use of the passive voice. Due to the level of difficulty of the descriptions, most students focus on finding out the meaning and/or pronunciation of unknown or technical words.

The next part is known as the Task Cycle. It is divided into three sections: task, planning, and report. The task, according to Nunan (2004), "should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle and an end" (p.4). For this reason, this stage has three parts that integrate a warm-up activity, a vocabulary-building activity, an information-gap task, and a series of comprehension questions to report on their work to the class. The first activity is an adaptation of an introductory task proposed by Dave Willis and Jane Willis (2007, p.37); so, students are given a series of sentences about inventions to be discussed in small groups.

## Methodology

### Participants

There were 25 English majors who participated in this case study. They were all Spanish speakers. They took the team-taught course LM-1002 Integrated English II at the University of Costa Rica. This level of difficulty of this course is intermediate (B1+CEFR). This is the second course of the programs of English and English Teaching. The age of this population ranged from 17 to 25 years. A significant aspect of this group is that most students had previously taken virtual courses (first semester of the year) due to the recent pandemic, so this is the first time they resume their courses on campus.

Although most students took the required first-year course LM-1001 Integrated English I, the level of proficiency was heterogeneous. The new textbook series of both courses presents grammar content inductively, which is a challenging feature for students and instructors. In terms of the target course, students have access to two printed books and a commercial platform. As this is a team-taught course, both professors may also implement virtual activities via *Mediación Virtual*, the mandatory, institutionalized platform to complement computer-lab sessions.

### Materials

The course Integrated English II includes two textbooks. Each book covers two macro skills. The Reading/Writing textbook (Kirn and Hartmann, 2020) barely introduces the passive in its fifth chapter. Thus, the language focus section briefly mentions the use of the passive voice, and this is followed by an exercise to contrast two sentences for students to decide which one is more appropriate. Then, students are asked to identify all the passive constructions in a reading text. Finally, they are asked to correct two sentences, which sound better if active forms are changed into passive ones. Clearly, this Language Focus section is not enough to fully teach, learn, assimilate, and acquire such grammatical content. To fulfill this significant gap, the instructor decided to design activities to teach the passive voice in an inductive, challenging, and thorough way. In other words, to teach this content inductively, more systematically, and student-centered,

the instructor created original materials that follow the principles behind Task-based Learning.

### **Assessment Instruments**

Although this course covers the four macro skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) as well as the four micro skills (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and culture), this study focuses on the passive voice, being the most difficult grammar content to learn for students. On the first day of this face-to-face course, students took a grammar test to assess such form. There are twenty-one items distributed in four types of exercises: (1) sentence production, passage completion, sentence formation, and question formation.

Before taking this assessment instrument, students were not told that the passive voice is the target topic. Instead, they had to complete the four exercises based on their prior knowledge. During the last week of the course, students took the same instrument to measure how much they have learned not only about the passive voice but also about sentence formation, lexicon, and verb tenses. Finally, students received feedback on such instrument.

The second type of instrument to elicit students' data was an academic, in-class composition. Each instructor was in charge of teaching the writing process and revising two writing outcomes: a draft composition and its final, edited version. In this case, they were given three topics to choose from. As the first draft is to be improved by adding more content or incorporating a few sentences, the final version is, therefore, somewhat more extensive. The idea is to observe if students are able to use passive constructions correctly in both compositions. Error correction is part of this. Table 2 summarizes the research procedure of this study:

**TABLE 2:**  
RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Week	Procedure
Week 11	In-class draft composition
Week 13	Revised in-class composition
Week 14	Second grammar instrument or posttest
Week 16	Students receive feedback on the grammar instrument

Source: Author's original work

## Analysis of the results

As mentioned before, students (n=25) took the pretest without being informed about the target grammatical form. This was the first non-graded test they took on-campus, as they had taken virtual courses for the past two years and a half. This diagnostic instrument was tabulated to assess students' prior knowledge of the passive voice. Also, it was valuable to observe if they knew the past participles of irregular verbs. The posttest includes the same 21 items, which are divided into four exercises: sentence production, sentence completion, sentence formation, and question formation. Table 3 shows the results of both instruments as well as learners' improvement at the end of the course.

**TABLE 3:**  
SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE PRETEST AND POSTTEST

Type if item	Pretest		Posttest		Level of improvement
	correct	wrong	correct	wrong	
1. Sentence production	10	15	19	6	+9
2. Sentence production	3	22	18	7	+15
3. Sentence production	5	20	19	6	+14
4. Sentence production	4	21	20	5	+16
5. Sentence production	9	16	21	4	+12
6. Sentence production	5	20	17	8	+12
7. Sentence completion	12	13	17	8	+5
8. Sentence completion	11	14	21	4	+10
9. Sentence completion	12	13	20	5	+8
10. Sentence completion	3	22	12	13	+9
11. Sentence completion	5	20	16	9	+15
12. Sentence formation	2	23	16	9	+14
13. Sentence formation	17	8	22	3	+5
14. Sentence formation	15	10	16	9	+1
15. Sentence formation	7	18	10	15	+3
16. Sentence formation	11	14	10	15	-1
17. Question formation	3	22	15	10	+12
18. Question formation	2	23	14	11	+12
19. Question formation	0	25	10	15	+10
20. Question formation	5	20	13	12	+8
21. Question formation	6	19	13	12	+7

Source: Author's original work

Certainly, the first exercise, sentence production, represents a higher cognitive level in terms of structure, vocabulary, and sentence formation. In this case, students were given a concise and clear picture and a prompt question to guide the inductive use of the passive voice (e.g., What will happen to the environment if these forests disappear? Or What is going to happen to the owner's data of this hacked computer equipment?). In this case, an answer was considered *wrong* if the passive construction was not accurate; so, misspelling of past participles, wrong vocabulary usage, or

punctuation mistakes were not considered. In this case, the correct answers of the pretest reached only 24%. At the end of the course, there was 76% of correct answers. The resulting sentences from posttest had a higher level of construction and correctness.

Based on the categories mentioned before, the resulting sentences are classified as full passives (including the agent), truncated passive sentences, and, to a lesser extent, stative passives. In some cases, students used past participles that were not part of the official list of the textbooks. Some examples of accurate sentences taken from the posttest are:

- The message is being delivered by a carrier pigeon.
- Someone is going to be given a marriage proposal.
- Deforestation will be spread all over the planet.
- The thief is going to be taken to jail.
- She got bad advice.
- It got stolen.

The second exercise, sentence completion, aimed at assessing passive verb forms based on the context of a passage. Its topic was related to one of the themes of the textbooks: architecture. According to the instructions, students had to carefully observe context clues to determine the verb tense forms that best complete the following text:

One of the most famous buildings is *known as* the Dancing House. Its peculiar shape *was designed by* the Croatian-Czech architect Vlado Milunic. Originally, a very old house occupied the place where this building is, but sadly this 19th century house *was destroyed* during a bombing in 1945. The remaining space was small but sufficient for a modern building. Because a Dutch insurance company supported the construction, the project *was given* unlimited budget *by* this bank. As this iconic design was unusual, the building received constant criticism, but it *was opened* in 1996 by its owners, two years after the construction started. (Information taken from Google)

Thus, this is a discrete-based exercise in which students only focus on verb forms. To increase the level of complexity and assess students' recognition of a possible verb to conjugate, the passage does not contain any target verb as a hint. Once again, minor spelling mistakes were not considered (e.g., stopped - stoped), but accuracy or logical meaning (e.g., **was destroyed** during a bombing – **was opened** during a bombing) were graded. Thus, 34.4% of the answers of the pretest were correct, but the posttest showed an increase of 68,8% of correct answers in this second exercise.

The purpose of the third exercise is to observe if learners were able to construct sentences based on a list of scrambled words and a verb in its simple form. To guide students, a time phrase was also included to mark the verb tense. Although most students identified the subject and the agent of the sentence, others did not distinguish the doer of the action and the subject of the passive construction. Some resulting sentences in the pretest were incorrectly written as the reversible form was not possible; others contain incorrect verb forms or misspelling mistakes:

- a. *The intense flood was destroyed by the three houses so far. [sic]*
- b. *The Anglo-Saxons was begun the celebration of Halloween long ago. [sic]*
- c. *Yesterday was founded the side of the road by a vehicle. [sic]*
- d. *Two physicians will be operate on by the patient at this moment. [sic]*
- e. *Tomorrow, Star Wars posters are going to be cover with the walls. [sic]*

In this exercise, 41,6% of the answers were correct (pretest); at the end of the course, 59,2% of the resulting sentences were correct. This was the item with the lowest level of improvement (17,6%), but it is a true that students must take several steps to come up with a correct, meaningful sentence in its passive voice. The level of difficulty of this exercise is considerably higher.

Finally, the last exercise assessed students' ability to write a complete Yes/No or Wh question (e.g., Who was The DaVinci Code written by? or where was the mysterious man seen last night?) based on the underlined segment of a sentence (e.g., The concert

was cancelled because the singer was sick.). Writing questions is a challenging task, especially in the passive form. Although passive questions are less frequently used in the oral or written mode, it is important to study them in this course. In the pretest, 12,8% of the questions were correct, and the posttest had 52% of correct questions in the passive voice.

Apart from using passive constructions in the pretest and posttest, students had to produce an academic composition in its draft and final version. Throughout the course, the instructor explained the writing conventions (mechanics, sentence errors, content, lexicon, organization, among others) related to the themes of the coursebook. Then, students started the writing process of producing a composition, whose topic includes prompts to incorporate the passive voice as well as other grammar forms. After revising this first draft, and two weeks later, students wrote the edited, final version of the composition. The instructor counted all the passive constructions. Table 4 summarizes the number of correct and incorrect sentences with the target form:

**TABLE 4**

NUMBER OF PASSIVE SENTENCES IN BOTH COMPOSITIONS

Draft Composition 1		Final Version	
Correct sentences	Incorrect sentences	Correct sentences	Correct sentences
39	9	52	3

Source: Author's original work

In this case, the group performance shows a difference of seven sentences; however, it is important to clarify that, if a composition is limited in terms of content, the writer has the opportunity to add a few sentences to meet the desired number of ideas. There is some evidence of improvement in terms of error correction. Students had only one hour to write both versions of their academic composition.

### **Discussion of the Results**

The analysis of the findings showed that students had studied the passive voice during secondary school; however, this is not the case of the previous course, LM-1001 Integrated English I, as this

grammar rule is not part of the course syllabus. In this second-year course, some were not able to recognize non-reversible forms. In addition, it was a must to make a review of most verb forms, especially because the previous course does not include the past perfect, the present perfect or the present perfect progressive. Also, there was a need of producing original and additional materials to teach the passive form, in this case, inductively.

Most students were interested in discovering the various aspects behind this rule, which were later incorporated into their academic compositions. In subsequent lessons, modal auxiliaries may be incorporated to complement content (e.g., The patient must be taken to a physician). As opposed to the pretest, some resulting sentences in the posttest were correctly written and evidenced a higher level of construction. These are some of the students' sentences:

- a. *The sculptures were designed by the well-known artist Jorge Jiménez Deredia.*
- b. *The research on snakes was conducted by Clodomiro Picado in Costa Rica.*
- c. *The injured patient was successfully operated on at HSJD.*
- d. *This invention, which was acknowledged by other scientists, simplified the lives of many people all over the world.*
- e. *The computer system was hacked by foreign terrorists; this became a new challenge to investigators.*

In relation to both academic compositions, the second version of the paragraph is not just a repetition of the previous one. On the contrary, based on feedback from the instructor, students have a chance to expand on content, correct syntactic errors, and join or separate ideas. Thus, at the moment of revising the new version, the instructor has to check how students deal with error correction, which makes this process more time-consuming. However, in general, students made a significant improvement in all the aspects established in the evaluation rubric: content, vocabulary, organization, structure, spelling, mechanics.

## Sample TBL Lesson

To illustrate the production of TBL materials for such course, this brief section will present a series of activities to teach the passive voice at an intermediate level. The following sample lesson is aimed at presenting the English passive voice, whose outcome will be for students to write an academic composition. This lesson exemplifies meaning-focused activities at a primary level; then, the lesson will also illustrate form-focused activities.

**TABLE 5:**  
SAMPLE WARM-UP ACTIVITY

**Instructions. Here are some statements about inventions and innovations. Individually, read each statement and give each one a mark of 1 to 4, according to the following scale:**

1=strongly agree    2=agree    3=disagree    4=strongly disagree

- a. An innovation is the same as an invention.
- b. The wheel is by far the greatest invention of all time.
- c. Thomas Edison was the most important inventor.
- d. A successful invention must be profitable.

Then, compare your answers with your team members. Justify your answers.

Source: Contextualized activity adapted from Dave Willis and Jane Willis (2007)

After this warm-up activity has been checked, the instructor will present a vocabulary-building exercise to prepare learners for a short reading text. This short exercise contains academic lexicon, which is a necessary component in such course. Coxhead (2006) points out that “if learners are not able to recognize or use this language, this can act as a kind of barrier or lexical bar to higher learning” (p.3). So, the following sample activity, proposed by Coxhead (2006, p.37), consists of building students’ background knowledge by matching some inventions with some parts of learners’ lives (the boldfaced words belong to the Academic Word List or AWL).

**TABLE 6:**

SAMPLE ACTIVITY TO ACTIVATE STUDENTS' BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

<p><b>The word crucial is an academic word meaning <i>very important</i>. Read the list inventions and the list of effects on people's lives. Which three items in both lists do you believe to be crucial for your lives and why? Give some reasons.</b></p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Paper currency</li> <li>2. Paper</li> <li>3. Refrigerator</li> <li>4. Microscope</li> <li>5. Printing Press</li> <li>6. Calculator</li> <li>7. Antibiotics</li> <li>8. Pasteurization</li> </ol>	<p>To <b>purchase</b> goods and services                  To <b>spread knowledge</b>                  To <b>analyze</b> and <b>observe</b> items                  To <b>publish</b> books                  To <b>undergo</b> medical treatment                  To <b>quantify</b> the size or amount of something                  To <b>compute</b> an answer or an amount                  To <b>prevent</b> food from decaying</p>

Source: Activity adapted from Coxhead, 2006, p.37

The central activity from this Task Cycle is an information-gap activity. In this case, students work in pairs and negotiate meaning to fill the gaps. The text contains various sentences in the passive voice. This meaning-focused activity helps learners observe inductively the use and purpose of the passive voice.

**TABLE 7:**

SAMPLE INFORMATION-GAP ACTIVITY

<p><b>Instructions:</b> Read the text silently. Then, in pairs, ask your classmate about the piece of information that you need to complete your text. Ask complete questions.</p>	
<p>The printing press is a machine by which text and images are transferred to paper by means of ink. Movable types and paper were invented in _____. The oldest book was created in Korea in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In Europe, a wooden, mechanized printing press was created by _____. He is well-known for reproducing the Bible in 1455. The edition was printed by Gutenberg and _____ with the use movable types. At the</p>	<p>The printing press is a machine by which text and _____ are transferred to paper by means of ink. Movable types and paper were invented in China. The oldest book was created in Korea in the _____. In Europe, a wooden, mechanized printing press was created by Johannes Gutenberg. He is well-known for reproducing the _____ in 1455. The edition was printed by Gutenberg and his associates with the use _____. At the beginning</p>

beginning this was a time-consuming process, but later, _____ sheets were printed on one side per hour. In the 18 <sup>th</sup> century, metal presses were used, which combined a cylinder and _____.	this was a time-consuming process, but later, 250 sheets were printed on one side per hour. In the 18 <sup>th</sup> century, _____ were used, which combined a cylinder and the implementation of steam.
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Source: Text taken and adapted from Encyclopedia Britannica (2022)

It is worth mentioning that students use language in order to negotiate meaning to complete this passage. They may take advantage of communication strategies (e.g., What do you mean by this word? Can you say it again?) and question formation to carry out the task. The instructor is a facilitator and does not interfere while students try to fill the gaps. If necessary, he or she may explain the meaning of a new word.

The next step is called **planning**. In sum, students have to report to the class on their findings. In other words, they are asked to explain orally how they solved the gaps. At this point, the instructor may correct mistakes and provide positive feedback. The part of the cycle ends with the **report**. With a group of twenty-four students, approximately, it is important to check the correct answers of the information-gap task. A few volunteers may read aloud the passage and clarify answers. As an optional follow-up activity, the instructor may read the passage out loud, emphasizing passive constructions and the correct pronunciation of -ed endings. After this part, students are ready to carry out the form-focused activities.

The focus-on-form section consists of three parts: **analysis**, **practice**, and **follow-up**. As Willis and Willis (cited in Carter and Nunan, 2001) indicate, “in task-based approaches, therefore, language development is prompted by language use, with the study of language form playing a secondary role” (p.174). However, during this part of the lesson, students get acquainted with the intricacies of language form by observing how a grammar structure is consistently used in various sentences. The instructor does not explain rules explicitly; students have to explore and discover how this new construction is used. The following True and False activity consists of a series of contextualized sentences. Each sentence contains the passive voice, and students, in pairs, have to say if its content is correct or incorrect. They do so orally.

**TABLE 8:**  
TRUE AND FALSE ACTIVITY

Instructions. In pairs, read the following sentences about inventions. decide if they are true or false. Explain why you think some sentences are wrong and correct the false information. Pay attention to the boldfaced words.

*Talking about Inventions*

- a. In 1455, the Bible **was printed** by Alexander Graham Bell as his associates.
- b. Stone tools **were created** more than 2000 years ago by Homo habilis, an early human ancestor.
- c. The first saxophone **was patented by** Antoine -Joseph Sax in Paris in 1846.
- d. The cylinder phonograph **by invented by** Thomas Alva Edison
- e. Apple II personal computer **was designed by** Bill Gates in 1977.

Source: Sentences taken and adapted from Encyclopedia Britannica (2022)

The second activity is a consciousness-raising exercise. In this case, students take a closer look at the meaning, form, and use of the passive voice. As mentioned before, the instructor facilitates the recognition of a given grammar form. Folse (2016) suggests instructors to use a mnemonic device to help students write the passive verb form correctly; in other words, “a helpful hint is to count the number of verb parts in the active sentence and then add one” (p.383). The instructor can use the same sample sentences from the True and False activity to exemplify how passive constructions contain an additional word in regard to verb forms:

- Letitia Geer invented (1) the medical syringe.
- The medical syringe was invented (2) by Letitia Geer.
- Pharmaceutical companies are going to do (4) new research on respiratory illnesses.
- New research on respiratory illnesses is going to be done (5) by pharmaceutical companies.

Thus, this is a detail that students can reflect on during the analysis component of the TBL framework. Consider the exercise below:

**TABLE 9:**  
SAMPLE CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING EXERCISE

Instructions. Read the following two sets of statements. In pairs, answer the question below.

<i>Set A</i>	<i>Set B</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 1455, the Bible <b>was printed</b> by Johannes Gutenberg as his associates.</li> <li>• Stone tools <b>were created</b> more than 2 million years ago by Homo habilis, an early human ancestor.</li> <li>• Computers <b>are used</b> all over the world.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Johannes Gutenberg and his associates printed the bible in 1455.</li> <li>• Homo habilis, an early human ancestor, created stone tools more than 2 million years ago.</li> </ul>

Reflect on the answers to these questions:

1. Which set of sentences best expresses the main ideas? Why?
2. Read the boldfaced words. When is [**was/were + verb**] used?
3. What is the purpose of the underlined phrases?
4. Find a sentence that has no doer of action. Why does it lack a doer or explicit agent?
5. Focus on both verb forms and count those words. Do you notice any difference?
6. When should we use the passive voice?

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Source: Sentences taken and adapted from Encyclopedia Britannica (2022)

**TABLE 10:**  
EDITING NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

Instructions. Read the newspaper headlines below. In pairs, decide which set requires the active voice or the passive voice. Then, edit the headlines to correct its structure. There is ONE headline that does not require any correction.

<b>SET A</b>	<b>SET B</b>
Costa Rican WhatsApp Numbers Published on Dark Web	Covid aid benefited mostly large companies in developing countries.
More than 900 Coral Reefs Restored in Costa Rica in 2022	Tamarindo Art Wave to showcase local, national and international artists.

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Source: Original headlines taken from The Tico Times (2022)

These activities form the basis of the next step: practice. Traditionally, learners are asked to rewrite active sentences in the passive form. A more appealing activity is to unscramble segments of sentences (e.g., sleeps of paper) so that students come up with either active or passive sentences. In a virtual course, several tools allow instructors to design the same exercise in order to click, drag, and drop words to form sentences. Feedback can be given immediately. Also, with the purpose of choosing the correct verb tense in the passive voice, students may complete partially erased sentences, which must include time phrases to guide the answers. Finally, the last component of this lesson is called follow-up. A sample activity may integrate listening comprehension and grammar. To achieve so, the instructor can read out loud the description of an invention. As he or she reads, students are only asked to count the sentences that include passive constructions.

## Conclusion and recommendations

To finish the presentation of this TBL work, it is essential to indicate that tasks should have a sense of authenticity; this means “to correspond to some real-world activity” (Ellis, 2003, p.6). So, this work seeks an integration of inductive grammar and explicit writing instruction (e.g., students will write two academic compositions to describe an invention and its benefits to their lives). Similarly, at the workplace, students will be more likely to write reports or short texts with a very similar objective. Nunan (2005, p.46) also advises teachers to “keep the learning load manageable” while working with beginners.

This case study responded to the need of complementing commercialized materials to teach the passive voice. This had to be done as the course textbook lacked detailed explanations and further practice. Also, in terms of the TBL framework, instructors may distribute content and activities in several lessons, including computer-lab sessions or virtual lessons. With larger groups, one should assess if this active methodology is feasible. Materials must be contextualized according to the themes of official textbooks and their chapters, especially if students’ written outcome is an academic composition (draft and edited version). At the end, to implement TBL as an active methodology will certainly vary

traditional, form-focused explanations and, as a result, make English lessons more appealing and challenging.

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