



Facultade de Filoloxía

Traballo de fin de grao

The use of the passive
voice by Native and Non-
Native English Speakers.

Autora: Antía Nerga García

Titora: Susana María Doval

Suárez

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

Curso académico 2018 / 2019

Traballo de Fin de Grao presentado na Facultade de Filoloxía da Universidade de Santiago de Compostela para a obtención do Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas



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Summary



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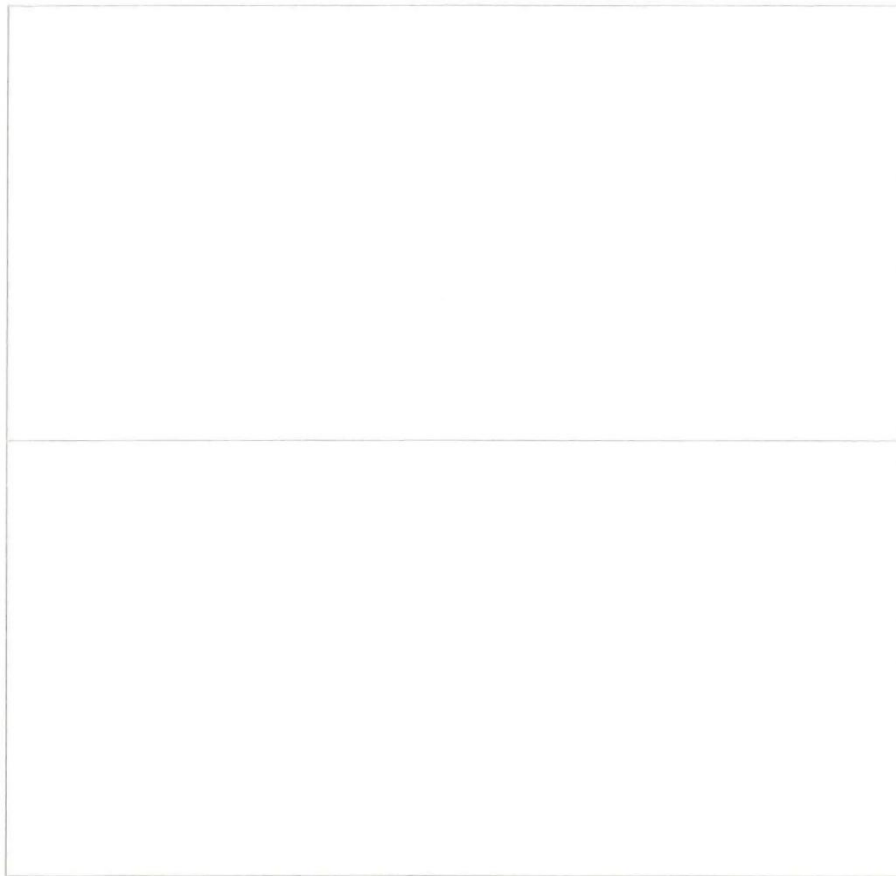
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SOLICITO a aprobación do seguinte título e resumo:

Título: The use of the passive voice by Native and Non-Native English Speakers.
Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redactar o TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]: The aim of this dissertation is to investigate how non-native speakers of English use the English passive construction. The objective is to compare EFL speakers of two completely different languages (Spanish and German) with the English native speakers. The first part will be devoted to exploring the basic uses of the passive and how it is constructed. This part will be more theoretical and it will broadly describe the passive in the three languages mentioned above. Moreover, the topic will be extended by revising other studies on the use of the passive by EFL learners. The second part will be practical and corpus-based in order to analyse different data in the three groups of speakers. It will analyse similarities and differences among the three groups, focusing especially on quantitative comparisons between native and non-native speakers (i.e. focusing not only on questions of misuse, but also on overuse and underuse). These data will be used with the intention of answering the following questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Is the passive used by non-native speakers as frequently as it is by native ones?2. If there are any differences, does the learners' L1 matter?

SRA. DECANA DA FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA (Presidenta da Comisión de Títulos de Grao)



Santiago de Compostela, 1 de Novembro de 2018.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CALE	<i>Corpus of Academic Learner English</i>
CIA	Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis
D.O	Direct Object
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ICLE	<i>International Corpus of Learner English</i>
ICNALE	<i>International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English</i>
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LIBSMEC	<i>Lancaster IBM Spoken English Corpus</i>
LOCNESS	<i>Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays</i>
NNS	Non-Native Speakers
NP	Noun Phrase
NS	Native Speakers
pttw	per ten thousand words
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
VP	Verb Phrase

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1. Introduction

The passive voice in English has been widely discussed and the aspects covered in its description include syntactic, semantic and discourse pragmatic features, as well as stylistic features regarding genre and register (Siewierska, 1984; Biber, Conrad and Leech, 2002; Huddleston and Pullum, 2002; Carter and McCarthy, 2006). However, passives have been defined as complex, marked constructions (Hinkel, 2004; Dabrowska and Street, 2006) and this characteristic makes them difficult to acquire and use. Non-Native Speakers (henceforth, NNS) not only experience problems when acquiring passive constructions, but also Native Speakers (henceforth, NS) may struggle when using passives. Even though proficiency level is supposed to be important in terms of acquisition, previous research shows that the passive (as well as other Information Structure devices) also pose problems to Advanced Learners (Callies, 2008). Interestingly, Second Language Acquisition (henceforth, SLA) research has covered the problem why passive constructions are a source of difficulty for L2 learners. However, the passive has not been sufficiently covered by SLA research in general, and, most specifically, by L2 studies exploring how Spanish-speakers and German-speakers learners of English learn English passive constructions. Although not many studies which specifically analyse the issues that make passives one of the main problems for NNS have been carried out, some investigations try to shed light on the possible reasons why NNS do not correctly use passive constructions in context (Espinoza, 1997; Biber and Xeppen, 1998; Carrol, Murcia-Serra, Warotek and Marzena, 2002; Hinkel, 2002; Hinkel, 2004; Granger, 2013).

Therefore, I find it interesting to analyse passive constructions in two groups of NNS (Spanish and German NNS) and compare them to NS. Thus, the aim of this study is to compare the use of English *be* passive constructions by NS and Spanish and

German NNS, focusing on different factors which might affect the production of passive constructions by NNS, for instance, the influence of the L1.

This dissertation is divided into two parts: The review of the literature (Section 2) and the corpus study (Section 3). Section 2.1 presents a description of *be* passives in English while section 2.2 presents a contrastive analysis of the English passive constructions and those of German and Spanish, in order to help us explore how Spanish and German EFL¹ speakers acquire the English passive. Thus, a description of passive constructions in each language is provided so that it is possible to compare them syntactically and pragmatically. Syntactically, some similarities are described. In English, the construction is *be*+ *-ed* participle; Spanish uses *ser* (*to be*) + past participle and German *werden* (*become*) or *sein* (*to be*) + past participle (*Vorgangspassiv* and *Zustandspassiv*, respectively). Other passive constructions are described, as the *get* and *have* passive in English or *pasiva refleja* in Spanish.

Section 2.3 focuses on L1 acquisition of passive constructions (De Kock and Molina, 1985; MacWhinney, 2002; Cychosz and Salazar, 2016) and also explores differences between NS and NNS, not only syntactically, but also pragmatically.

Section 3 is a corpus-based study whose aim is to analyse the frequency of use of passive constructions in NS, Spanish NNS and German NNS. Firstly, the objectives and research questions are formulated (Section 3.1). Section 3.2 presents the methodology used in the study, describing the corpora used to find the examples in the three groups of speakers, the procedures used in retrieving data, and the different variables that will be analysed. Thus, Section 3.3 presents the analysis and discussion of results. Finally, Section 4 presents the conclusions and suggestions for further research.

¹ English as a Foreign Language

2. Review of the literature

2.1. A description of the passive voice in English

2.1.1. Canonical passives: *Be* passive

The term *passive* refers to a type of construction mainly characterised by three features. First, the direct object of the *active* becomes the *subject* of the passive. Secondly, the subject of the active can be omitted in the passive or expressed by means of the *agent*. Finally, the verb in the passive takes the form of the past participle and the tense is expressed in the auxiliary verb *to be*. In English, "[t]he term voice applies to a system where the contrasting forms differ in the way semantic roles are aligned with syntactic functions" (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, p. 1427), as illustrated in example (1).

	subject/ agent	verb	object/ patient
(1) a. Active:	The policeman	arrested	the burglar.
	subject/ patient	be + ed-p	agent phrase/ agent
b. Passive:	The burglar	was arrested	by the policeman.

Siewierska (1984, p. 3) suggests that passive constructions are *marked*, since they "deviate from the syntactic norm" in terms of word order, case marking or verbal morphology. Therefore, the active voice is an *unmarked* construction "typically chosen to state something about the agent of an action." (Carter and McCarthy, 2006, p. 793). In the case of passive constructions, the clause structure is organised differently so that the semantic roles and the starting point of the clause are changed. Although the role of *patient* is one of the most commonly aligned roles, there are others which can be also the grammatical subject of a passive clause, such as "recipient, benefactive, source, instrumental, locative, temporal, manner and causal NPs" (Siewierska, 1984, p. 3). Therefore, the syntactic features of the passive are significantly different from those concerning the active and "syntactically the passive version is clearly more complex

than the active by virtue of containing extra elements." (Huddleston and Pullum, 2005, p. 26).

Passive constructions can be short or long depending on whether the agent -also known as *internalised complement* (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, p. 1428)- appears or not. The internalised complement results from the conversion of the subject of the active into the agent of the passive, which is internal to the Verb Phrase. Examples (2) and (3) illustrate the difference between long and short passives.

LONG PASSIVES

SHORT PASSIVES

- | | | |
|-----|--|---------------------------|
| (2) | a. His laptop was stolen by Jenny. | b. His laptop was stolen. |
| (3) | a. His essay was revised by the teacher. | b. His essay was revised. |

Carter and McCarthy (2006) identify two main types of agentless passives: what they call "general cases" and "detached/ impersonal styles". Firstly, the agent can be omitted when the responsible of the action is not relevant, or when it is so obvious that it does not need to be specified, but also when the speaker wants to avoid criticism or embarrassing situations. As a result, agentless passives focus on the process, which means that the most important thing in the clause will be what happens or what is performed. Secondly, agentless passives are usually found in impersonal speaking or writing styles and are normally related to reporting verbs such as *believe* or *say* among others. Moreover, some corpus-based studies have showed "that 80-90% of the passives are agentless" (Svartvik, 1966; Granger, 1983; quoted by Granger (2013, p. 6). These agentless passives are sometimes introduced by anticipatory *it* which "makes reference to a complement clause" (Carter and McCarthy, 2006, p.799), expressing impersonal agency as in example (4a).

- | | |
|-----|--|
| (4) | a. It has been decided that all business pay higher taxes. |
| | b. It is said that she is an excellent person. |

c. She is said to be an excellent person.

Agentless passives can be impersonal as example (4b), but also raising constructions, as example (4c). According to Callies (2008), raising constructions move the subject/object of a subordinate clause to the subject/ object position of a "raised" clause, i.e. a higher clause, so that there is "a comparatively large distance between syntactic form and semantic meaning, potential ambiguity and vagueness of surface forms" (p. 2002).

Although most passives normally have an active counterpart, there is no exact equivalent of passives lacking the internalised complement, as example (2b) above. In addition, agent phrases usually begin with the preposition *by*, but a range of other prepositions can be used (such as *to*, *at*, *in* or *on*, as illustrated in example 5), when the grammatical subject of the equivalent active clause does not happen to be the real active agent of an action, a situation which normally takes place when stative verbs are involved (examples 5a and 5b), but not with dynamic verbs (examples 5c and 5d).

- (5) a. He is known to the police. (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, p. 1439)
b. She was pleased at the results. (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, p. 1439)
c. Drugs are sold in supermarkets these days. (Carter and McCarthy, 2006, p. 798)
d. The instructions are included on a separate sheet. Carter and McCarthy, 2006, p. 798)

Regarding argument structure, three different types can be distinguished: *monotransitive passives*, *ditransitive passives* and *prepositional passives*. While monotransitive passives -as example (2) above- take the direct object of the active as the subject of the passive, ditransitive passives are characterised by the possibility of taking either the direct (example 7b) or indirect object (example 6b) as the subject for the passive construction, i.e. these objects are externalised:

- (6) a. My mum gave Sue a new dress. (ACTIVE)
 b. Sue was given a new dress by my mum. (PASSIVE)
- (7) a. My mum gave Sue a new dress. (ACTIVE)
 b. A new dress was given to Sue by my mum. (PASSIVE)
 c. ? A new dress was given Sue by my mum. (PASSIVE)

However, example (7b) is not considered an exact passive counterpart for example (7a). Huddleston and Pullum (2002, p. 249) claim that examples such as (7c) are exactly corresponding passives to (7a), although this option is considered unacceptable by others.

Apart from monotransitive and ditransitive passives, we also have to consider prepositional passives, i.e. whenever there is a verb followed by a prepositional phrase complement, as illustrated in example (8) (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, p. 1429):

- (8) a. Everyone refers to her paper. (ACTIVE)
 b. Her paper is referred to by everyone. (PASSIVE)

Apart from the fact that passives are only possible with monotransitive, ditransitive and prepositional constructions, Granger (2013, p. 6) mentions that "some verbs display strong passive attraction, while others are characterised by a passive repulsion". For instance, *be reputed* or *be rumoured*, *be born*, *be populated*, *be strewn*, *be deemed* and *be taken aback* are only allowed or are preferred in passive constructions (cf. Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, p. 1435; Carter and McCarthy, 2006, p. 802). On the contrary, there are other verbs restricted only to the active voice, such as *boast* or *lack* (Huddleston and Pullum, 2005, p. 244) and others that present a low passive ratio such as *want*, *attend* or *receive* (Granger, 2013, p. 7).

Regarding the pragmatics of the passive, Gómez-González (2001) observes that in the LIBSMEC² "most passive processes [...] are expressed by means of non-special thematic constructions", i.e. unmarked themes (p. 321). It is crucial to understand that the choice between active and passive is mainly determined by information packaging factors, i.e. by how the speaker decides to organise information in the clause. From the point of view of discourse and information structure, actives and passives contain the same propositional content, but the choice will determine whether the pragmatic function of *topic* representing the given information lays in the agent -as in active structures- or in the patient -as in passive structures, in which the agent represents new information. Additionally, a number of discourse pragmatic factors may also determine the use of a long or a short passive. On the one hand, in long passives the "subject must not be less familiar in the discourse than in the internalised NP" (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, p. 1444), i.e. long passives require that the agent should contain newer information than the subject. On the other hand, the subject in short passives may be discourse-old or discourse-new information, but this information is not allowed to be less familiar than the internalised complement. As Gómez-González (2001) suggests, by placing the agent at the end, passive constructions "can display end Focus and end Weight" (p. 326). Consequently, by placing one element or another at the beginning of the clause, a different *point of departure* or *theme* appears (Downing and Locke, 2006, p. 222). Thus, speakers decide how to organise information according to the necessities of discourse, in a way that the newest information and heaviest part of speech is placed at the end.

In terms of genre and style, Palmer (1974) suggests that the passive "is very common in scientific writing [...] for the work may be described impersonally -without

² The Lancaster IBM Spoken English Corpus. Machine-readable corpus of natural spoken English.

indicating who did it". In addition, Granger (1983) claims that "it is to be expected that English stylists will regard the passive as a style marker", since the connection between passive and style is widely identified (p. 44-45). The LIBSMEC corpus shows that passive constructions appear in a higher frequency in academic and more formal contexts, so the less formal the texts, the less instances of passive. Therefore, passive constructions are very common in lectures or constructive texts, but they are not frequently used in "more subjective genres such as Fiction [...] and Poetry" (Gómez-González, 2001, p. 324).

2.1.2. Other passive constructions: *Get* passives and *have* passives

Be is not the only auxiliary verb that can appear when making a passive. *Get* and *have* - the latter in the so-called *pseudo-passives*- also appear in some passive structures³. These passives do not have an overt subject, although in some cases they can have one.

The formation of *get* passives results from the combination of *get* + *-ed* participle of the verb, as illustrated in example (9).

(9) She got injured while playing football.

Turning now to tense-aspect combinations, there is a more limited range of forms which can be used with *get* passives, present simple or past simple being the most frequently used (Carter and McCarthy, 2006, p. 797). Remarkably, the *get* passive is really common in spoken language and sometimes it is similar to pseudo-passives with *have*, which "enables the person affected by an action to be made the grammatical

³ However, some structures, such as bare passives, lack *be* and *get*, so "past-participial clauses also occur elsewhere with a passive interpretation" (Huddleston and Pullum, 2005, p. 245)

subject". This is the reason why within *get* passives we can find non-causative uses as in (10a), and also causative uses as in (10b) (Carter and McCarthy, 2006):

- (10) a. I got my belt searched once when I went to Sweden.
b. I'll get you sorted out with some boots for the walk, cos it'll be muddy.

Downing and Locke (2006) define causative constructions as "some external Agent or Force [that] causes something to happen." (p. 132). This causative meaning can be also expressed in the previously mentioned pseudo-passives with *have*, whose formation results from the combination of *have* + an object + *-ed* participle of a verb. This means that pseudo-passives start with the person affected by the action as the grammatical subject as in example (11), although they can also be either causative or non-causative depending on the context.

- (11) I had my hair cut.

The main differences between *get* passives and *be* passives can be summarised as follows: Firstly, *get* passives "tend to be avoided in formal style". Secondly, these passives appear along with dynamic verbs, so when other verbs rather than dynamic ones appear, *get* cannot be used instead of *be*. In addition, *get* passives are more propitious "to an agentive interpretation of the subject", that is, when the "subject referent is seen as having an agentive role in the situation, or at least having some responsibility for it.". Finally, *get* passives are more frequently used when the clause covers adversity or benefit (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, p. 1442).

2.2. A contrastive study of the passive voice in English, German and Spanish.

2.2.1. The passive in Spanish

The typical Spanish passive, known as periphrastic passive, is formed by the combination of the verb *ser* (Eng. *to be*) + past participle. Both English and Spanish distinguish between two voices: active and passive, as illustrated in (12). There are a number of similarities between the active and passive voice in both languages.

(12) a. *La policía arrestó al ladrón.*

'The police arrested the thief.'

b. *El ladrón fue arrestado por la policía.*

'The thief was arrested by the police.'

In both languages, the changes affecting the semantic roles of the arguments are similar and transitivity plays an important role, since passives can only be made from transitive verb processes. Although intransitive verbs cannot be made passive, Spanish has an alternative to the periphrastic passive called *pasiva refleja*, made up with the pronominal form *se* + an active transitive verb + NP. This type of passive is formally an intransitive construction with a passive meaning which tends to reject the agent (Spanish Royal Academy⁴, 2009).

According to Butt and Benjamin (2000) there are four types of passive in Spanish. By passive with *ser* they refer to the periphrastic passive described by the Spanish Royal Academy, whose participle must agree in gender and number with the subject. It is mentioned that these passives are more typical of written and non-spontaneous discourse. Unlike English, indirect objects in Spanish active constructions

⁴ Real Academia Española (RAE) in Spanish

cannot be converted into the subject of passives⁵. The same happens with phrases with preposition + noun/ pronoun which can never become subjects in passive constructions. Furthermore, the amount of verbs which cannot be used in the passive form is even bigger in Spanish than in English. *Passive se* "can only be used with transitive verbs and in the third person, normally only with non-human nouns and pronouns[...]" (p.389). These passives do not accept agents as easily as the previous type. The *mixed construction se* + transitive verb (always singular) + prepositional phrase headed by *a* is only considered a passive construction in terms of meaning, but it is impersonal in form. *Se* "always implies an unidentified *human* agent, in which respect it resembles English *one*" (p. 392). *Impersonal se* is the last type mentioned, but it is only considered passive if an implied object appears, as illustrated in (13). According to Butt and Benjamin (2002), the meaning of agentless periphrastic passives is slightly similar to the meaning of the passive with the pronoun *se* (*pasiva refleja*).

(13)	<u><i>En mi país</i></u>	<u><i>se</i></u>	<u><i>come</i></u>	<u><i>mucha fruta.</i></u>
	ADJUNCT	PRONOUN	PREDICATE	SUBJECT

'A lot of fruit is eaten in my country.'

Furthermore, the Spanish grammatical system allows other structures to express the same meaning as passives by means of word order. In addition, "OVS word order" as in example (14) is preferred rather than passives in informal speech, such as "business letters or public speech", where the English system tends to prefer the *get* (Benedet, Christiansen, Goodglass, 1998, p. 315).

⁵ Some varieties of Spanish use indirect objects as subjects in passives, but it is regarded as an influence from English (Real Academia Española, 2009, p. 3042)

(14)	<u>A la niña</u>	<u>la</u>	<u>secuestró</u>	<u>el vecino.</u>
	D.O.	D.O.	PREDICATE	SUBJECT

'The girl was kidnapped by the neighbour.'

Finally, regarding the frequency of passive constructions in both languages, De Kock and Molina (1985) found that passive constructions are less frequent in Spanish than in English.

2.2.2. The passive in German

There are two major types of passive in German -*Vorgangspassiv* and *Zustandpassiv*, illustrated in examples (15).

(15) a. *Der Taschendieb wird von der Polizei festgenommen.*

'The pickpocket is arrested by the police.'

b. *Der Taschendieb ist von der Polizei festgenommen.*

'The pickpocket is being arrested by the police.'

The *Vorgangspassiv* (example 15a) is formed by the combination of the auxiliary verb *werden* (Eng. *become*) + past participle (Ger. *Partizip II*) of the main verb. *Werden* agrees in person and number with the subject and the construction expresses an action in progress. The first difference with English is found in that two different prepositions can be used in the agent: When a person is the agent, the preposition *von* + dative case is used, but when it focuses on how the action has been done, the preposition *durch* + accusative case appears. Furthermore, both agents can appear in the same sentence (Durrell, 2003, p. 236). Another significant difference between English and German is

that indirect objects are never used as subjects in German passive constructions, although it might be confusing to see the indirect object at the beginning of the sentence as in example (16). This is possible thanks to the flexible word order in German, but we must not confuse the initial position with the function, which is never changed from active to passive constructions (Fandrych and Thurmair, 2018, p. 55).

(16) *Meiner Schwester* wurde *ein Bonbon* gegeben

DATIVE CASE

NOMINATIVE CASE/ SUBJECT

'My sister was given a sweet'

In passive constructions, the syntactic function of indirect objects in dative case is the same as in active constructions, and is referred to as *Adressat*. (Helbig and Kempter, 1997, p. 12).

The *Zustandspassiv*, *sein-Passiv* or *adjectival passive* is formed by auxiliary verb *sein* (Eng. *to be*) + past participle. Its meaning is *stative* instead of the dynamic meaning of the *Vorgangspassiv* and, in addition, it is much less frequent than the first type (Durrell, 2003, p. 234). To date, it has been noted that *Zustandspassiv* "is a copular construction", throwing ambiguity over the concept, since no verbal process is usually implied (Schlücker, 2005, p. 417).

Comparatively, these passives do not exist in English (Davison 1980, p. 5), but they are quite relevant in German as they are marked constructions in terms of information packaging. Durrell (2003) points out that passive constructions in German are less frequently used than in English, since the former allows other elements rather than the subject to be in initial position. Active sentences with impersonal subject *man* are more frequent in German where English would use a passive. Notwithstanding, the

passive is considerably frequent in German, "particularly in formal writing" (Zorach, Melin and Kautz, 2009, p. 164).

Apart from these two types of passive in German, "impersonal ('subjectless') passives" appear -often in written German- to refer to an action going on. They are impersonal because of subject *es*, and sometimes *subjectless* when *es* is left out (Durrell, 2003, p. 235-236).

2.3. Passives in L1 and L2 research

2.3.1. Passives in L1 research

Regarding English, it may seem obvious that NS of English are able to automatically and naturally produce writings or utterances with passives and without thinking whether it is the best option or not. Thus, a study by Tomasello, Brooks and Stern (1998) points out that in English-speaking children between three and three years and a half the passive construction is quite rapidly learned by means of repetition of passive sentences which they hear from adults. In contrast, Fox and Grodzinsky (1998) show "that [English-speaking] children are incapable of handling passive sentences up to age 5" (p. 311). Similarly, MacWhinney (2002) suggests that children "might have troubles understanding the passive" (p. 3), so until they are four or five years old they do not begin to understand passive constructions and to identify the corresponding semantic roles. As NS grow up, they acquire more awareness about passive constructions until they are capable of organising information according to what discourse and context demand. Research carried out by Dabrowska and Street (2006) shows that NS have full contact with passive constructions in early stages of language acquisition. In their study of the comprehension of passives, they point out that even within NS of English,

differences in the use of passives are found. Since passives are considered complex constructions which require good knowledge of the language, Dabrowska and Street conclude that speakers without formal education may encounter problems when creating or identifying passive constructions, whether native or not. Crossley , Duran, Kim, Lester and Clark (2018) point out that "processing and producing passive linguistic constructions [...] [is] more challenging than processing and producing active constructions" (p. 1) and, in addition, they claim that passives are a type of construction which tends to be lately acquired by NS.

Turning now to Spanish, Pinker, Lebeaux and Frost (1987) show that "children at some point come to possess a semantic constraint distinguishing passivizable from non passivizable verbs" (p. 196), i.e. children do not have the necessary knowledge to produce complex constructions such as passives. Cychosz and Salazar (2016) claim that the acquisition of Spanish passive constructions by Spanish-speaking children is also a difficult process due to the complexity of passive constructions. In their work, they point out that there is a "delay in the production of the passive which varies cross-linguistically". Furthermore, they add that that the *pasiva refleja* is more frequently produced than periphrastic passives and that "Spanish-speaking children aged 4-5 and 5-6 show a more diminished capacity to produce the passive than even those aged 3-4.". In addition, the flexible word order permitted in Spanish has proved that, although helpful for acquiring different semantic roles, negative effects are also possible, "as children detangle the active form from the passive" (Cychosz and Salazar, 2016, p. 310).

In the case of German, a study conducted by De Kock and Molina (1985) shows that only 6.9% of conjugated verbs in written German are used in their passive form, since German is a language which frequently uses active sentences rather than passives.

Remarkably, German-speaking children produce the *Zustandspassiv* more frequently than the *Vorgangspassiv*, mainly because children learn the auxiliary verb *sein* (Eng. *to be*) before *werden* (Eng. *to become*). German-speaking children do not successfully produce passive constructions until they are six years old (Cychosz and Salazar, 2016, p. 310).

2.3.2. Passives in L2 research

The English passive has been reported to be a source of difficulty for L2 learners of English. Espinoza (1997), for instance, points out that Spanish-speaking learners experience problems when they try to build English passives from the Spanish *pasiva refleja*, a problem which can be solved by transforming this *pasiva refleja* into a *periphrastic passive* before building the English construction. Granger (1997) investigates passive constructions appearing in the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE⁶).

Biber and Xeppen (1998, p. 191) state that "NSs use grammatical structures avoided by NNSs, such as passives " and that "[t]here are also marked differences in the discursal roles of the expressions used by the NSs and the NNSs", indicating that NS frequently use these type of constructions so as to indicate that their discourse is more indirect and impersonal by using passives, among other constructions. This contrasts with how NNS usually "overstate their case by using intensifying and categorical expressions", showing that passive constructions are often less common in NNS than in NS (Biber and Xeppen, 1998, p. 191). NNS learning English have problems with the

⁶ "a 1 million+ word computerized learner corpus of argumentative writing by EFL learners from 11 different mother tongue backgrounds (Chinese, Czech, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Japanese, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Swedish)" (Granger, 1997, p. 116).

choice between passive vs. active, as Biber and Xeppen state, as well as with other type of constructions such as the pronoun or connectors use. Thus, the frequency of the English passive in NNS -either German or Spanish- discourse is usually lower than that by NS, but the frequency of the passive in the L1 might have an impact on L2 passive constructions, i.e. L1 features may interfere in the acquisition of L2 passive constructions.

Furthermore, Izumi and Lakshmanan (1998) focus on whether negative evidence from NNS has some effects on L2 learning and acquisition. L1 characteristics can interfere in the developing of L2 giving rise to learnability problems. Therefore, "negative evidence may be required for successful L2 acquisition" i.e. errors influenced by the L1 might have positive results in L2 acquisition (p. 63). In addition, Carroll and Swain (1993; quoted in Izumi and Lakshmanan, 1998) studied adult Spanish-speaking learners of English as L2 who were determined by *negative feedback* when learning English, and the results proved that those groups which received negative evidence performed better than others. However, this approach to L2 acquisition has been questioned by some SLA scholars (Schwartz and Gubala-Ryzak, 1992; quoted in Izumi and Lakshmanan, 1998).

Carroll, Murcia-Serra, Warotek and Marzena (2002) tackle the issue "of whether adult L2 speakers achieve nativelike proficiency" (p. 442). With respect to discourse structure, their study looks at features which could explain *topic* and *focus* organisation in the clause, but also studies passive constructions which can be used "to mark topicalisation" (p. 444). Topics in English tend to coincide with subjects, although in other languages such as Spanish and German "this function may be marked by reserving a slot in sentence-initial position." (p. 444). Nativelike discourse organisation cannot be achieved until L2 learners arrange discourse structure and information as NS would.

Therefore, discourse organisation is not always an easy task. In addition, the origin of these languages plays an important role, since English and German are Germanic languages and Spanish is a Romance language. Despite their same origin, English and German have developed differently and "differ with respect to core structural features that are crucial in information organization" (Carroll et al., 2000, p. 463). For instance, topics in English tend to coincide with syntactic subjects but, surprisingly, "[the] syntactic subject in German is not topic tied to topic function" (Carroll et al., 2000, p. 462), as word order and verb position create a slot towards which topic information will be mapped.. Therefore, discourse and information organisation in English is more related to the Romance languages, since this language has received Latin and French influence while German remained closer to Germanic languages (Treptow, 2012, p. 1). Thus, how NNS display the information in a clause in their L1 might have an effect on how they will perform in L2 complex constructions as the passive.

The literature on the acquisition of the English passive has not already completely solved why this type of construction results to be one of the main problems when learning the language. Hinkel (2002) highlights that "many learners even at advanced levels often do not form a passive construction correctly and do not use it in appropriate contexts." (p. 1). Some issues noted by Hinkel (2002), such as the "notion of noun animacy", cause difficulties in some NNS. For instance, inanimate nouns in English are commonly found as subjects, but not in other languages such as Japanese. In the specific case of German-speaking learners of English, Swan and Smith (2001) state that "German speakers [...] find English easy to learn initially, and tend to make relatively rapid progress." (p. 37). MacWhinney (2002) points out that English learners from different countries tend to "systematically underuse the passive" (p. 12), making reference to the interferences between L1 and L2 mentioned above. He points out that

although the syntactic patterns are correct, NNS produce pragmatic inaccurate constructions. MacWhinney analyses Hebrew-speaking learners of English and finds out that overuse and underuse are easily found until these speakers acquire the adequate skills in the L2, since Hebrew passive constructions depend on genre features.

In addition, Hinkel (2004) elaborates a study which "analyses specific written discourse in which NNSs' usage of English tenses and voice appears to be dramatically different from that of NSs." (p. 5). She examines how trained NNS writers use complex constructions in L2 academic texts, such as passives, comparing them to NS writing academic texts. The speakers, university students of seven different languages from four different universities in the USA, were tested in order to observe the voice features that they used. The results show that L2 learners experience difficulties when they try to include common uses of the passive in their academic texts. In addition, Hinkel (2004) shows that trained NNS tend to use more past tenses than non-trained NS, but usually forget about complex constructions such as the passive. The results present "the propensity of NNS writers to avoid using syntactically and semantically complex verb structures" (p. 22), not being surprising that NNS passive constructions represent a lower frequency in comparison with NS. Remarkably, one NNS sample provided only accounts for one passive construction, while another NS sample shows five instances of passive constructions. Syntactic features are therefore not the only problems that NNS face when producing English passives, but the capacity to choose the adequate discursal context in which passive constructions are needed also represents one main difficulty.

Interestingly, Guilquin (2008) compares French NS to English NS to observe if there are any differences of frequency in both languages. The results confirmed that the use of passive constructions in English double that of passives in French, and as a

conclusion, she suggests that French-speaking learners of English might transfer the underuse of L1 constructions to English. However, Gilquin presents another factor for underuse. Taking the example of Swedish, a language whose passive frequency is almost at the level of passives in English, Swedish learners of English also underuse L2 passive constructions (Granger, 1998; quoted in Gilquin 2008), so there must be another reason which explains passive underuse. Therefore, Gilquin points out that the underuse of passive constructions "seems to be a universal feature of interlanguage" in relationship with how learners choose between marked and unmarked constructions and personal or impersonal style (p. 6).

Similarly, a study carried by Granger (2013) analyses the features of "both native and learner corpora" so as to observe how the passive is used by English learner groups found in the ICLE and ICNALE⁷. Similarly to MacWhinney's study (2002), Granger (2013) states that "most learner populations significantly underuse the passive" (p. 7), such as the consistent underuse found by Hinkel (2004) in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, Vietnamese and Arabic learners of English. Apart from underuse, examples of misuse are also found among L2 learner groups, i.e. overpassivisation of verbs such as *occur*, *disappear* or *suffer* (Oshita, 2000, p. 307; Cowan, Choi, Kim, 2003. p. 455; quoted by Granger 2013), but Granger also observes that some NS in LOCNESS⁸ show difficulties, since they are novice writers. In her study, the most commonly found error is overpassivisation, although not much research has been carried out in relation to the learners' L1 background in relation with L2 proficiency level. Thus, her conclusions are summarized as follows: L2 learners of English underused passive constructions and many errors of overpassivisation are found

⁷ The *International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English* (Ishiwaka, 2011)

⁸ The *Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays*

Finally, adopting a cognitive approach to the passive, Crossley et al. (2018) point out that previous research about processing passive constructions has proved that once the passive structure is acquired, it is easier for NNS to spontaneously reproduce passives after hearing or reading some similar constructions. However, this assertion "does not shed much light on the challenges in processing passive structures during the moments of comprehension." (p. 2). With respect to Spanish-speaking learners of English, they point out that the flexible word order which characterises Spanish makes these NNS of English experience difficulties when producing English passives, despite the fact that these systems are very similar in both languages. Different abilities in producing passive constructions are found in Spanish adult NNS since, although learners have a different language proficiency level, they all are capable of processing these constructions. However, there is a quantitative difference, as the number of examples produced by beginners and intermediate learners using the English passive is lower than the results of advanced learners. Crossley et al. based their study on action dynamics, i.e. how people respond to language stimuli, to capture "continuous and real-time cognitive process" (p. 6), with some predictions in mind: the processing of passives take longer than the processing of actives. By comparing 57 Spanish-speaking NNS of English and 43 NS they observed that language experience has an important role in the acquisition of passives, since NS took less time to identify the passive constructions and they "initiated a movement toward a response option earlier" (p. 14). The results showed that the effort made by NNS demands huge cognitive processing, as time and distance responses were larger than NS ones. In addition, NS tended to anticipate to the responses and to be quicker than NNS, although the more language proficient the latter are, the more instances of velocity similar to those on NS. The study demonstrates how differently NNS produce and process English passive constructions, thus being

considered a new approach in addition to traditional behavioural measures which had already been used in SLA, i.e. response time and comprehension tests accuracy.

3. The study

3.1. Objectives and research questions

The aim of this study is to compare the use of *be* passive⁹ constructions in NS versus Spanish and German NNS. As already explained in the previous sections, NS and NNS use English passive constructions differently, since NNS tend to struggle with its acquisition and usage. Based on the contrastive analysis on passive constructions in English, Spanish and German and on the review of the literature on SLA research, the following research questions are formulated:

- a) Are there any differences between NS and NNS regarding the frequency of use of *be* passive constructions in English? Are there any differences between the two groups of NNS?
- b) Is the degree of lexical variety similar in each group of speakers when building passive constructions? i.e. Does each group of speakers differ in the selection of the verbs they passivize?
- c) Do the passive constructions used by the groups of subjects display formal and functional differences regarding the following aspects: (1) Subjects: Animate or inanimate; nominal or pronominal; (2) Argument structure: monotransitive, ditransitive, prepositional; which is the most frequent type of structure in each of the groups? (3) Agent: is the agent mentioned? Does argument structure

⁹ For reasons of time and space, it has not been possible to analyse the other types of passive described in the review of the literature.

influence the choice of agentless passives? (4) Does it contain an impersonal construction with anticipatory *it* or a raising construction?

- d) Do the results show quantitative errors of overpassivization?
- e) How does the L1 affect the acquisition of English passives by NNS?

3.2. Methodology

The methodology used in this investigation to describe quantitative differences between NS and NNS is Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (henceforth, CIA) (Granger, 1996; quoted by Granger, 2015), one of the most common approaches to learner language in recent years, which has been adopted as a corpus-based methodology that can "shed light on non-native features of learner writing and speech through detailed comparisons in linguistic features in native and non-native corpora" (Granger, 2002, p. 12). Granger (2015) states that "[t]he more popular branch of CIA has involved a comparison of learner data with native data" (p. 11), so that it is possible to observe the main difficulties that NNS can experience, such as typical errors, but mainly quantitative differences, i.e. overuse or underuse of some words or expressions. Furthermore, CIA helps not only to compare NS to NNS, but also to compare different groups of NNS. While traditional SLA research tended to focus mostly on the earlier stages of the learning process, the aim of CIA is to focus on advanced learners. Thus, this study focuses on Spanish and German advanced learners of English.

This study is corpus based and contrastive in order to analyse the possible differences among the three groups of speakers. The data were taken from two written corpora.

- a) The *International Corpus of learner English* (ICLE) (Granger, Dagneaux and Meunier, 2009) is a compilation of argumentative essays written by learners of English whose level goes from higher intermediate to advanced. 16 different

sub-corpora are found within ICLE (Bulgarian, Chinese, Czech, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Tswana), with a total number of 3.7 million words. The two sub-corpora I am focusing on in this dissertation are the German component of ICLE (ICLE-GE) (containing 199,501 words), and the Spanish component (ICLE-SP) which consists of 250 essays and 197,358 words.

b) The *Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays* (LOCNESS) (Granger, 1998) is a comparable corpus "of native novice writing" consisting of 324,304 words written by American and British university students and by British A-level students.

For practical reasons, only ten texts from each of the groups (British university students, Spanish and German learners) were analysed. Table 1 shows the number of words in the ten texts selected, compared to the total number of each corpus.

Table 1. Number of words in each of the corpora (ten texts and total number).

Word number	LOCNESS	ICLE-SP	ICLE-GE
Ten texts	28,692	17,764	13,233
Total	324,304	197,358	199,501

The first step of the research was to extract all the examples from each group of speakers. With the help of my supervisor I retrieved the data from the corpora using *AntConc 3.5.8* (Anthony, 2019). Since the corpora were not annotated, the search had to be carried out by introducing the following forms of verb *to be* as keywords: *be, am, are, is, was, were, being* and *been*.

Once all the examples were obtained, a process of disambiguation was carried out, i.e. they were analysed manually so as to select only the registers which were passive constructions. Then, the retrieved data were stored in an EXCEL database coded for these variables:

- a) The subject's L1.
- b) Lexical verb
- c) Subject- NP type: Pronominal vs. nominal subject¹⁰
- d) Animacy: Animate vs. inanimate subject
- e) Type of argument structure of passive predicate: monotransitive, ditransitive, prepositional.
- f) Presence/ absence of agent
- g) Presence/ absence of impersonal passives and raising constructions
- h) Presence/ absence of erroneous constructions: overpassivization, construction errors, etc.

After analysing all the variables in each of the groups, an intragroup quantitative analysis has been carried out to observe how the different groups of speakers behave, but also an intergroup analysis which permits to compare the frequency of passives and other features of these constructions in NS and NNS. In order to find out the frequency of passives and other variables, the normalised frequency per ten thousand words (henceforth, pttw), together with the raw frequency, was calculated for some of the variables.

¹⁰ Pronominal subject refers to subjects in which the head is a pronoun. Nominal subject refers to subjects whose head is a noun.

3.3. Results

The first objective of this study was to observe if Spanish-speaking and German-speaking NNS of English use passive constructions in English with the same frequency as NS. The results in Table 2 show the general frequency of passive constructions in the three groups.

Table 2. General frequency of the *be* passive.

<i>Be</i> passives	NS	Spanish NNS	German NNS
Raw frequency	304	183	105
Normalised frequency (frequency pttw)	105.95	103.017	79.35

Comparing NS and Spanish NNS, the number of passive constructions is very similar, as is proved by the normalised frequencies. However, within these ten texts produced by German NNS of English, the frequency of use of the passive is considerably lower than the frequency of NS and Spanish NNS. This can be related to the fact that, as mentioned in section 2.3.1, German speakers prefer active rather than passive constructions (De Kock and Molina, 1985). As a matter of fact, the frequency of passives in Spanish NNS corpus contrasts with the results reported by De Kock and Molina, since they state that passives in English are more common than passives in Spanish (cf. Section 2.2.1 above). These results show that the frequency of the passive in the NS and the Spanish NNS corpora is really similar, despite the fact that it is usually believed that Spanish NNS underuse this construction.

The second research question is connected with the analysis of lexical variety. The type-token ratio indicates (cf. Table 3) that English NS and Spanish NNS behave similarly in terms of lexical variety. Surprisingly, the group which shows the highest lexical variety is German NNS.

Table 3. Type-token ratio in NS, Spanish and German NNS.

	NS	Spanish NNS	German NNS
Tokens	304	183	105
Types	154	91	84
Type-token ratio	0,51	0,50	0,8

These results are confirmed by the intragroup analysis (Table 4): The seven most frequent verb types in each group were selected and we calculated the percentage of use of each type with respect to the total number types.

Table 4. Seven most frequent passivized verbs in NS, Spanish NNS and German NNS

	NS	N (%)	Spanish NNS	N (%)	German NNS	N (%)
7 most frequent verb types	see	35 (22.73%)	deceive	34 (37.36%)	use	7 (8.33%)
	show	11 (7.14%)	punish	12 (13.19%)	spend	4 (4.76%)
	use	9 (5.84%)	form	7 (7.69%)	solve	4 (4.76%)
	portray	8 (5.19%)	separate	7 (7.69%)	characterize	3 (3.57%)
	kill	7 (4.55%)	find	4 (4.40%)	interpret	3 (3.57%)
	carry out	5 (3.25%)	see	3 (3.30%)	remember	3 (3.57%)
	punish	2 (1.30%)	use	3 (3.30%)	see	1 (1.19%)
% total tokens	50%		76.93%		29.75%	

As illustrated in Table 4, the most frequent verb in NS is *see*, representing 22.73% of tokens. This verb is also found in the other two groups, but its frequency is considerably lower than that of NS, representing 3.30% in Spanish NNS and only 1.19% in German NNS. The verb *use* also appears in the three groups. On the one hand, in NS it appears in the third place, but very distant from the use of *see*, with 5.84%. On the other hand, Spanish NNS have only used this verb three times, representing 3.30%. Significantly, in the German NNS group, *use* is the most frequent verb with 8.33%, despite the fact that its percentage is not quite high. The second most frequent verb in Spanish NNS, *punish*, appears only in NS, but its frequency varies from Spanish NNS to NS, representing 13.19% and 1.30% respectively. In addition, the highest percentage of use in Spanish NNS is *deceive*, but it does not have any representation among the most frequent verbs in the other two groups, nor in the total number of different verbs in each group.

Remarkably, the sum of these percentages in each group reveals some interesting data. In NS, these seven verbs already represent 50% of the total number of tokens, so it seems that lexical variety is considerably high. The results of Spanish NNS reveal that these verbs represent 76.93%, giving room only to around 20% of other different verbs. In the German sub-corpus, these seven verbs represent only 29.75%, so it seems that there is an elevated number of other types accounting for over 60% of the tokens. This coincides with results in Table 3 above, since the type-token ratio shows the highest result in German NNS, confirming that this group accounts for the highest lexical variety, even higher than in the NS group.

Turning now to formal and functional differences, the frequency of pronominal and nominal subjects can be seen in Table 5. It shows that 39.47% of the subjects used by NS are pronominal, so pronominal subjects in these ten texts are less frequent in

passive constructions than nominal subjects. Similarly, Spanish NNS and German NSS also use lower pronominal subjects, representing only 26.76% and 21.90% of the subjects, respectively.

Table 5. Frequency of pronominal and nominal subjects.

Type of subject	NS	Spanish NNS	German NNS
Pronominal	120 (39.47%)	49 (26.76%)	23 (21.90%)
Nominal	184 (60.53%)	134 (73.22%)	82 (78.09%)

The intergroup analysis is useful to identify the frequency differences in pronominal subjects. Table 6 shows their raw and normalised frequencies, and it reveals that the highest frequency of pronominal subjects is found in NS, while German NNS is the group which uses fewer pronominal subjects.

Table 6. Frequency of pronominal subjects.

Pronominal subjects	NS	Spanish NNS	German NNS
Raw frequency	120	49	23
Normalised frequency (frequency pttw)	41.82	27.58	17.38

Another variable connected with subjects is animacy. Table 7 shows the frequency of animate and inanimate subjects in *be* passive constructions.

Table 7. Animate and inanimate subjects in passive constructions.

Semantic type	NS	Spanish NNS	German NNS
Animate	129 (42.43%)	105 (57.37%)	28 (26.67%)
Inanimate	175 (57.57%)	78 (42.62%)	77 (73.34%)

While the percentage of inanimate subjects used by NS is higher than animate subjects, the percentages in Spanish NNS are inverted, since animate predominate over inanimate subjects, representing 57.37% and 42.62%, respectively. Passive constructions produced by German NNS present more inanimate than animate subjects, therefore being similar to English. Furthermore, an analysis was carried out to discover the relationship between pronominal subjects and animacy. The results of the combination of the two variables under study are shown in Table 8:

Table 8. Relationship between animacy and subject NP type in the three groups of subjects.

NS						
Type	animate		inanimate		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Pronominal subject	67	55,83	53	44,17	120	100%
Nominal subject	62	33,70	122	66,30	184	100%
TOTAL	304 (100%)					

Spanish NNS						
Type	animate		inanimate		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Pronominal subject	39	79,59	10	20,40	49	100%
Nominal subject	66	49,25	68	50,75	134	100%
TOTAL	183 (100%)					
German NNS						
Type	animate		inanimate		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Pronominal subject	17	73,91	6	26,09	23	100%
Nominal subject	12	14,63	70	85,37	82	100%
TOTAL	105 (100%)					

This intergroup analysis shows that in NS, nominal subjects which are inanimate are the most frequent (66,30%) (Example 17a), coinciding with Hinkel (2002), who observes that inanimate nouns in English are commonly used as subjects. It is interesting to highlight that this is repeated in both groups of NNS. Nominal, inanimate subjects (example 18a) are also more frequent than animate ones (example 18b) in Spanish NNS (50,75%) and German NNS (85,37%) (example 19a), the latter being considerably more

elevated than in the other three groups. Similarly, pronominal, inanimate subjects have the lowest frequency in the three groups.

(17) a. The acts of violence **are accepted** in both works yet certainly in 'Les Justes' are kept to a minimum (LOCNESS: 339BRSUR1.txt) INANIMATE

b. Dora and Kaliayev are constrained by their commitment to the Organisation not to avow their love for each other. (LOCNESS: 331BRSUR1.txt) ANIMATE

(18) a. This change **is called** turning-point. (ICLE-SP: SPAL1010.txt) INANIMATE

b. Leontes **is brought about** by appearances (ICLE-SP: SPAL1005.txt) ANIMATE

(19) a. "The car **has to be banned!**" (ICLE-GE: GEAU3082.txt) INANIMATE

b. Lucius Apuleius **was born** the son of a Roman official in Morocco (ICLE-GE: GESA2010.txt) ANIMATE

Turning now to predicates, as explained in section 2.1.1, there are three types of passive constructions depending on the argument structure of the corresponding active verb: monotransitive, ditransitive and prepositional. In the corpora analysed, examples of the three types have been found. Examples (20), (21) and (22) show the use of these types by the three groups of learners:

(20) a. [...] several thousands of Jews **were deported** from Amsterdam, (LOCNESS: 332BRSUR1.txt) MONOTRANSITIVE

b. Kaliayev **is given** three attempts to save his life. (LOCNESS: 337BRSUR1.txt) DITRANSITIVE

c. This is referred to as être-pour-soi (LOCNESS: 338BRSUR1.txt)
PREPOSITIONAL

(21) a. Most of them **are corrupted** by temptations of wealth (ICLE-SP: SPAL1010.txt) MONOSTRANSITIVE

b. Although Beatrice knows that she is going to be given this potion (ICLE-SP: SPAL1008.txt) DITRANSITIVE

c. [...] dissapointment **can be brought about** by their absence (ICLE-SP: SPAL1005.txt) PREPOSITIONAL

(22) a. [...] an agricultural exhibition **was held** in the village in autumn (ICLE-GE: GEAU4010.txt) MONOTRANSITIVE

b. We've been promised an official funeral (ICLE-GE: GEAU3100.txt)
DITRANSITIVE

c. I began to be put off a bit by anything that was quaint (ICLE-GE: GEAU4010.txt) PREPOSITIONAL

Table 9. Argument structure in *be* passives

Type	NS	Spanish NNS	German NNS
Ditransitive	21 (6.90%)	1 (0.55%)	1 (0.95%)
Monotransitive	262 (86.18%)	175 (95.63%)	102 (97.14%)
Prepositional	21 (6.90%)	7 (3.82%)	2 (1.90%)
Total	304 (100%)	183 (100%)	105 (100%)

Although in the three groups the most frequent is the monotransitive type, the main difference appears in ditransitive passives. As explained above, English is a language which allows indirect objects of actives to become subjects of passive constructions, a process which is not allowed in Spanish and German. This could be the reason why, while in NS 6.90% of passive constructions are ditransitive, in the Spanish and German NNS corpora they only represent 0.55% and 0.95% of the examples respectively. In addition, prepositional passives in NS represent 6.90%, while the percentage in the other two groups is considerably lower, especially in German NNS. Therefore, the most frequent type of passive found in the ten texts of each group regarding argument structure is the monotransitive passive construction. A comparison of monotransitive passives in the three corpora is shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Frequency of monotransitive passives.

Monotransitive passives	NS	Spanish NNS	German NNS
Raw frequency	262	175	102
Normalised frequency (frequency pttw)	91.31	98.51	77.08

Spanish NNS is the group which most frequently uses monotransitive passives. This might be explained because of the impossibility in Spanish to build passive sentences out of ditransitive constructions, which might be an example of L1 influence. German NNS represent the lowest frequency of monotransitive passives in this intergroup comparison, despite the fact that the intragroup analysis shows that monotransitive passives represent the most frequent type in German NNS (97.14%).

The last syntactic feature we are going to analyse is the presence or absence of an agent complement (i.e. the frequency of *long passives* vs. *agentless* passives) (see examples 23, 24 and 25 below): Granger (2013) observes that over 80% of the English passives do not have agent. Table 11 illustrates the frequency of passives in each group of speakers, showing similar results for all of them:

Table 11. Frequency of long and agentless passives.

Type	NS	Spanish NNS	German NNS
Long passives	75 (24.67%)	70 (38.25%)	29 (27.62%)
Agentless	229 (75.33%)	113 (61.75)	76 (72.38%)

(23) a. People think that everything **is predetermined** by the Gods,
(LOCNESS: 335BRSUR1.txt) LONG

b. Remorse **is also shown** in the mourning clothes the people wear
(LOCNESS: 334BRSUR1.txt) AGENTLESS

(24) a. Hermione's husband **is deceived** by appearances (ICLE-SP:
SPAL1004.txt) LONG

b. [...] he **will be enclosed** in a hospital for the rest of his life. (ICLE-SP:
SPAL1006.txt) AGENTLESS

(25) a. On one of my walks through the country I **was actually attacked** by rams several times (ICLE-GE: GEAU4010.txt) LONG

b. [...] if Olympic games **were abandoned** (ICLE-GE: GEAU3021.txt)
AGENTLESS

This intragroup analysis shows that in the three groups, agentless passives are the most common choice, the percentages being very close to the 80% described by Granger. But since we were interested in finding out in which corpus agentless passive constructions are more frequent, an intergroup analysis was also carried out. The following table illustrates the raw and normalised frequencies of agentless passives in the three corpora:

Table 12. Frequency of agentless passives.

Agentless passives	NS	Spanish NNS	German NNS
Raw frequency	229	113	76
Normalised frequency (Frequency pttw)	79.81	63.61	57.43

As shown in Table 12, the frequency of agentless passives is more prominent in NS than in both groups of NNS. The fact that in Spanish the *pasiva refleja*, a passive construction which typically rejects the agent, is widely used may influence the decision of Spanish NNS of English to use agentless passives in English, since its normalised frequency is considerably high. The normalised frequency of agentless passives produced by German NNS represents the lowest frequency of all. This result may be influenced by the fact that sometimes in German one of the two possible agents -or even both of them- must appear in the sentence in order to get to know whether the agent refers to an action or to a person, but it might be also related to the fact that the flexible word order of German permits reorganising information in the clause using other means. This might result in lower frequency of agentless passives.

Additionally, we were also interested in exploring the relation between the previous variable (argument structure) and the present variable (long vs. Agentless passives). (cf. Table 13).

Table 13. Frequency of the agent regarding argument structure

NS						
Type	agentless		long		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Monotransitive	200	76,34	62	23,66	262	100%
Ditransitive	14	66,67	7	33,34	21	100%
Prepositional	15	71,43	6	28,57	21	100%
TOTAL	304 (100%)					
Spanish NNS						
Type	agentless		long		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Monotransitive	109	62,29	66	37,71	175	100%
Ditransitive	1	100	0	0	1	100%
Prepositional	3	42,86	4	57,14	7	100%
TOTAL	183 (100%)					

German NNS						
Type	agentless		long		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Monotransitive	75	73,53	27	26,47	102	100%
Ditransitive	1	100	0	0	1	100%
Prepositional	0	0	2	100	2	100%
TOTAL	105 (100%)					

Agentless passives represent the highest percentage of monotransitive passive constructions, therefore confirming the claim that agentless passives are the most common choice in the English language. Comparatively, NS present a considerably higher percentage of monotransitive, agentless passives (76,34%), while these constructions in Spanish NNS represent 62,29%. However, the difference between agentless passives and long passives in Spanish NNS is lower than the difference existing between these two types in NS. Particularly, in NS the difference amounts to 52.68, while in Spanish NNS this difference is only 24.58, proving that the usage of agentless and long passives by Spanish NNS is more evenly distributed than in NS, who prefer agentless passives. The difference between agentless and long monotransitive passives in NS doubles the one in Spanish NNS. Significantly enough, German NNS

use agentless, monotransitive passives a lot (73,53%) and the difference between agentless and long passives is similar to the one found in NS. Regarding ditransitive passives, NS also tend to select agentless passives, representing 66,67%. In addition, the only case found both in Spanish and German NNS is also agentless. Examples (26), (27) and (28) illustrate ditransitive passives in the three corpora:

(26) Sisyphus is given special dispensation by the Gods to come back to earth
(LOCNESS: 339BRSUR1.txt)

(27) Although Beatrice knows that she is going to be given this potion (ICLE-
SP: SPAL1008.txt)

(28) We've been promised an official funeral (ICLE-GE: GEAU3100.txt)

Nevertheless, although in prepositional passives the results of NS show that agentless passives are still the most frequent ones, in both groups of NNS the highest percentage appears in long passives. In addition, the two examples of prepositional passives present in German NNS are long passives, i.e. there are no examples of agentless, prepositional passives.

Turning now to the number of impersonal passives found in the ten texts of the three groups, even the results of NS are considerably low, since only 9 examples out of 304 passive sentences appear, representing only 2.96%. As illustrated in example (29), some of these impersonal passives are raising constructions. Spanish NNS only use 5 impersonal passives out of 183 (2.73%) (example 30) and, interestingly, German NNS do not use impersonal passives at all (0%).

(29) Caligula is shown to be lucid and logical (LOCNESS: 335BRSUR1.txt)

(30) [...] it was thought that Universe was formed by different transparent spheres, (ICLE-SP: SPAL1009.txt)

Table 14. Frequency of impersonal passives

Type	NS	Spanish NNS	German NNS
Impersonal	9 (2.96%)	5 (2.73%)	0 (0%)
Personal	295 (97.05%)	178 (97.27%)	105 (100%)

Finally, regarding the presence of erroneous constructions, we expected to find a high percentage of overpassivisation errors, but examples have been found only in Spanish NNS. Example (31) shows that the passivized verb is used wrongly, since the correct form would be the active verb *focuses on*. Table 15 illustrates the scarce results of errors performed by the three groups:

(31) The action and development of the play **is focused on** a famous popular fable (ICLE-SP: SPAL1005.txt)

Table 15. Erroneous constructions

Errors	NS	Spanish NNS	German NNS
Misuse	1	3	0
Overuse	0	3	0
Spelling	1	2	1
Other errors	0	1	0
No errors	302	174	104

As shown in the previous table, the group which performs more errors is Spanish NNS, showing errors of overuse and other types with no representation in the other two groups. The only example of other errors is illustrated in example (32), since the subject uses an *-ing* form instead of the *-ed* participle:

(32) They are avaritious but they are cheating by Volpone. (ICLE:

SPAL1002.txt)

German NNS do not present any significant errors, only with one of spelling, and results in NS only reveal one error of misuse and spelling, respectively. It seems that there is not enough evidence in the then texts selected for each group. There are few examples of errors, spelling being the only type represented in the three groups.

4. Conclusions and suggestions for further research

The present study has attempted to analyse the use of English passive constructions by NS, Spanish NNS and German NNS. After describing passive constructions in the three languages, the review of the literature has revealed that, since passives are complex and marked constructions, NNS struggle when they acquire English passive constructions. This might be in relation with Callies (2008), who states that marked constructions are "structurally more complex, less frequent and therefore cognitively more salient", explaining the effort made by speakers when facing these constructions. Moreover, even when advanced learners have already acquired the structure, they experience difficulties of use (Hinkel, 2002), which results in underuse of passive constructions. The results of the corpus-based and quantitative analysis have provided answers to the research questions formulated in section 3.1 of this study.

a) Are there any differences between NS and NNS regarding the frequency of use of *be* passive constructions in English? Are there any differences between the two groups of NNS?

The analysis of the general frequency of passive constructions has revealed that the group which most frequently use passive constructions is NS. Passive constructions also appear in both groups of NNS, but the normalised frequency indicates that the use of these constructions is lower than NS. These results agree with Guilquin (2008), who states that the underuse of passive constructions is a universal feature of interlanguage. However, despite the fact that De Kock and Molina (1985) found out that passive constructions are less frequent in Spanish, the Spanish NNS group behaves similarly to NS, while the use of passives in German NNS considerably differs from NS and Spanish NNS. The analysis supports the claim that, since English is a language with quite a rigid word order, passive constructions are one of the ways in which speakers

can organise discourse information differently in order to highlight one part of the speech over another (cf. Section 2.1.1 above). Therefore, as Spanish and German are two languages in which word order is quite flexible, passive constructions are not the only means used to organise discourse differently. However, it is possible to see that the use of English passive constructions differs depending on the learners' L1. This could be explained as follows: On the one hand, as explained in section 2.2.1 above, although Spanish has a flexible word order, the *pasiva refleja* is really frequent, so Spanish NNS might transfer the use of the *pasiva refleja* into passive constructions in English. On the other hand, in section 2.2.2 above we mentioned that the high flexible word order in German allows other ways rather than passives to organise discourse, making German a language which prefers active rather than passive constructions (Durrel, 2003), therefore influencing the use of passive constructions in English.

b) Is the degree of lexical variety similar in each group of speakers when building passive constructions? i.e. Does each group of speakers differ in the selection of the verbs they passivize?

The expected answer to this research question was that NS represent the highest results of lexical variety. Nevertheless, the type-token ratio proved that German NNS show the highest lexical variety, while the ratio in NS and Spanish NNS is practically the same. As mentioned in section 2.1.1 above, Granger (2013) mentions some verbs which display passive attraction and repulsion, but the retrieved data showed that the seven most frequent verbs in each of the groups do not represent the verbs mentioned by Granger. However, we observe that there are differences in the selection of the verbs. In many cases, these differences may have been motivated by differences in the essay topic (i.e. the subjects in the different corpora did not write exactly about the same topics). In addition, the sum of these seven verbs in each group proves the results given by the

type-token ratio. This analysis reveals that the highest percentage appears in Spanish NNS, while these seven verbs in NS represent half of the verbs used. These results confirm that Spanish NNS display less lexical variety, and that the percentage of these seven verbs in German NNS is so low that explains the high lexical variety.

c) Do the passive constructions used by the groups of subjects display formal and functional differences?

Regarding subjects, the analysis carried out in this study reveals that the three groups of speakers prefer nominal subjects rather than pronominal ones and, as expected, the group which most frequently use pronominal subjects is NS. The notion of noun animacy can be a problem to some NNS, for instance, Japanese speakers (Hinkel, 2002). However, this study has not found that animacy could be a major problem for Spanish and German NNS when using passive constructions. Interestingly, the analysis has revealed that in the three groups the most common choice is nominal, inanimate subjects.

In terms of argument structure, the analysis reveals that monotransitive passives are the most frequent type in the three groups. Remarkably, ditransitive and prepositional passives only show significant results in NS, while examples are scarce in both groups of NNS. It also seems that the choice of agentless passives is mainly influenced by argument structure, since the results confirm the claim by Granger (2013), which states that almost all passives in English lack the agent. In this study, it seems that both NS and NNS prefer agentless rather than long passives, as well as monotransitive passives rather than other types. Finally, the analysis does not reveal interesting data about impersonal passives, since even the results in NS show that in

these ten texts impersonal passives are not highly used. Remarkably, in the German NNS corpus, no examples of impersonal passives were found.

d) Do the results show quantitative errors of overpassivization?

The scarce number of erroneous constructions reveals that within these ten texts the subjects have used passive constructions quite accurately, maybe because of their advanced level. The main errors found in the three groups are spelling errors, and Spanish NNS is the group in which more errors are found, showing some examples of misuse and overuse. Unexpectedly, no important results of overpassivization have been found, so we can conclude that either the fact that the subjects are advanced learners or the fact that we are analysing only ten texts may have influenced these results.

e) How does the L1 affect the acquisition of English passives by NNS?

English and German belong to the same family branch -German languages- while Spanish belongs to the family of Romance languages. For this reason, I expected that German NNS behave similarly to NS, but the results show that German NNS is the group which most notoriously differs from NS in the frequency of use of passive constructions, as well as in some of the other variables analysed. Remarkably, the results of the Spanish NNS corpus have revealed that they behave very similarly to NS when using passive constructions, by the fact that English has been very influenced by Latin and French.

However, we can still conclude that the L1 affects how speakers use passive constructions in the L2: The fact that Spanish NNS use the English passive frequently, may be due to the high frequency of *pasiva refleja* in Spanish; and that German NNS underuse English passives, may be connected with the fact that German favours active constructions.

This is just an exploratory study of English passive constructions and how NS and NNS behave when acquiring and using them. For time and space constraints, only the *be* passive in ten texts was analysed in the corpus study, but it would be useful to extend the research to a higher number of texts and also to *get* and *have* passive constructions in order to discover whether the results obtained would be similar.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to carry out a similar study with different corpora. Callies and Zaytseva (2013) point out that ICLE is too limited, since the texts included are "of a general argumentative, creative or literary nature" (p. 126). They also say that they are too subjective, as essays express a specific point of view or express personal opinion. Therefore, they find the Corpus of Academic Learner English (CALE) more useful, which includes more specialised and less subjective academic texts. Thus, further research based on specialised corpora should be carried out, in order to obtain a deeper view of the acquisition of English passive constructions by NS and NNS.

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