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"TO BE" IN DESIGN, TRAVEL AND NATURE:

THE APPLICABILITY OF E-PRIME TO DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Margaret Jane Ashworth

June 1994


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Approved by:


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4/25/94
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ABSTRACT

In order to determine the applicability of E-Prime (English without the verb "to be") to descriptive writing, eighteen articles from design, travel and nature magazines were examined. Three articles were taken from each of six 1993 periodicals: *Architectural Digest*, *Art & Antiques*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *Travel and Leisure*, *Audubon*, and *National Wildlife*. "To be" verbs in both dependent and independent clauses were counted and categorized as forming the copula, the progressive aspect, or the passive voice. Each category was then compared to the total number of remaining verbs in the article. It was determined that overall use of the verb "to be" accounted for an average of 31% of all verbs used, with the copula most used at 51%, the passive second with 34%, and the progressive aspect with only 7%. Portions of texts for each category were then rewritten in E-Prime to determine if revision strengthened or weakened the prose. While it was often more effective to rewrite examples using the copula and the progressive aspect, the passive voice proved more difficult. Passive constructions were shown to be appropriate and often necessary in descriptive prose concerning antiquities and historical events, especially when the agent's identity was either unknown or unnecessary. The potential value of E-Prime was shown to lie in its use as a pedagogic tool, not as a strict discipline to be practiced in descriptive writing.

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CHAPTER ONE

Claimed by many to be the most used, and often most overused, verb in the English language, the verb "to be" has been under attack by semanticists for many years. As early as the seventeenth century and well into the twentieth century, philosophers have been calling attention to the problems of logic presented by the little word "is." Some have advocated avoidance, even abstinence, from its use. Perhaps the most extreme response to the use of "to be" comes from some members of the International Society for General Semantics, who find no acceptable use of any form of the verb. These semanticists advocate the use of a form of English called E-Prime, which eliminates every form of the verb "to be" from spoken and written English.

But E-Prime presents its own problems since it not only prohibits the use of "to be" as a copula, but also its use as an auxiliary to form both the progressive aspect and the passive voice so frequently used in descriptive writing. This study will examine E-Prime as it applies to the writing found in two design periodicals, *Architectural Digest* and *Art & Antiques*, in two travel periodicals, *National Geographic Traveler* and *Travel and Leisure*, and in two nature periodicals, *Audubon* and *National Wildlife*, in order to determine the applicability of this subset of English to descriptive writing.

In order to demonstrate how the elimination of "to be" affects descriptive writing, portions of the eighteen texts studied herein will be rewritten in E-Prime to determine in what specific instances the writing is substantially strengthened or weakened by being recast into E-Prime. The problems associated with eliminating the copula and the progressive aspect will also be discussed, and possible solutions to overcome these difficulties will be provided. The study will demonstrate that the use of the passive voice is extremely beneficial, and often absolutely necessary, in describing antiquities and historical events where the agents are unknown or unnecessary. While the practice of E-Prime in descriptive writing will be demonstrated as problematic, its potential value as a pedagogic tool to draw attention to overuse of "to be" will be shown to have considerable merit.

Philosophy of General Semantics

Although the notion of eliminating such a common verb as "to be" may at first seem trivial, sound epistemological reasons for questioning its validity exist. Thus, before discussing any practical application of E-Prime, it becomes necessary to understand the philosophy behind the current movement to eliminate "to be" from the English language.

Early classical scholars such as Plato were aware of the problems of using the verb "to be," and later critical thinkers, including Thomas Hobbes, Augustus de Morgan, Bertrand Russell, Alfred North Whitehead, George Santayana,

and Alfred Korzybski, struggled to understand the semantic consequences of the verb. These thinkers came to realize that the Aristotelian logic of polar opposites, thinking in terms of right-wrong, presents many semantic dilemmas (Johnston 19). In 1915 George Santayana published an entire paper on the subject, entitled "Some Meanings of the Word Is" (Gardner 263), in which he made the following much-quoted statement:

It names and identifies different things with the greatest innocence; and yet no two are ever identical, and if therein lies the charm of wedding them and calling them one, therein too lies the danger. Whenever I use the word *is*, except in sheer tautology, I deeply misuse it; and when I discover my error, the world seems to fall asunder (Murphy 20)

Eighteen years later Count Alfred Habdank Skarbek Korzybski, a polish engineer who emigrated to the United States, concurred with Santayana that the use of "is" accounts for many semantic difficulties. Like Santayana, Korzybski was concerned with statements such as "Mary is a woman" and "Mary is cold." The use of "is" in both statements implies a tight coupling of equivalency; yet in the statement "Mary is a woman," the verb joins nouns with different levels of abstraction; and in the statement "Mary is cold," the verb joins a noun to an adjective that does not completely qualify it (Murphy 20). Trivial as they may at first appear, these statements pose fundamental problems of logic.

In his controversial book, *Science and Sanity*, published in 1933, Korzybski claimed that "identity," which he defines as "absolute sameness in all respects," actually appears in language only as a "generalization of similarity, equality [or] equivalence" and thus constitutes a "*structural impossibility*" (Bourland, "Linguistic Note" 60). In English, as well as in other Indo-European languages, the verb "to be" serves not only as an auxiliary verb but also as a verb to posit "false to facts identity," wherein the "*semantic reactions* [are] such that words [are] identified with the objective levels" (60). Thus, claimed Korzybski, the use of "is" as a copula results in a statement that actually says nothing at all:

Let me repeat once more that the "is" of identify forces us into semantic disturbances of wrong *evaluation*. We establish, for instance, the *identity* of the un-speakable objective level with words, which, once stated, becomes obviously false to facts. The "is" of identity, if used as indicating "identity" (structurally *impossible* on the objective levels), says nothing. Thus, the question, "What *is* an object?," may be answered, "An object *is* an object" -- a statement which says nothing. (Bourland, "Linguistic Note" 61)

In explication of the Non-Aristotelian Premises, Korzybski employed a teaching procedure referred to as the "Map-Territory Analogy." In his article, "The Semantics of a Non-Aristotelian Language," D. David Bourland, Jr. explains this analogy as follows:

A "map" belongs to a level of abstraction different from that of the "territory" it represents.

A "map" does not contain all the structural characteristics of the "territory" it represents.

A "map" may self-reflexively contain a "map" of higher order that shows the relation between the "territory" represented in some detail to the surrounding "territory." (69)

Karen Ruskin adds a fourth qualification to the map-territory analogy, pointing out that one needs to know as much as possible about the "map maker" and the time the map was made in order to properly evaluate the credibility of the "map" itself (Ruskin 30). Thus, the use of E-Prime forces one to either express oneself in the first person or at least to ascribe a source or basis for an assertion.

Korzybski founded the Institute of General Semantics in 1938, which launched the general semantics movement. The beliefs of general semanticists build upon the Whorf Hypothesis, which essentially holds that the "world view of a culture is subtly conditioned by the structure of its language" (*Language Files* 413). While acknowledging that most people think of language as something that "at least allows us to express our perceptions of reality," general semanticists believe that "the very structure of language can influence or distort our perceptions" and that "a failure to observe the many ways in which language can do this results in an inability to apprehend the meaning not only of other people's words but of one's own as well" (Murphy 18).

Semantic Use of To Be

Some semanticists claim that the verb "to be" has as many as 23 separate uses, but according to the Random House unabridged dictionary it serves the following major functions:

verb intransitive:

1. to exist or live: *Shakespeare's "To be or not to be" is the ultimate question.*
2. to take place; happen; occur: *The wedding was last week.*
3. to occupy a place or position: *The book is on the table.*
4. to continue or remain as before: *Let things be.*
5. to belong; attend; befall: *May good fortune be with you.*
6. used as a copula to connect the subject with its predicate adjective, or predicate nominative, in order to describe, identify, or amplify the subject: *Martha is tall. John is president. This is she.*
7. used as a copula to introduce or form interrogative or imperative sentences: *Is that right? Be quiet! Don't be facetious.*

auxiliary verb:

8. used with the present participle of another verb to form the progressive tense: *I am waiting.*
9. used with the present participle or infinitive of the principal verb to indicate future action: *She is visiting there next week. He is to see me today.*
10. used with the past participle of another verb to form the passive voice: *The date was fixed. It must be done.*
11. used in archaic or literary constructions with some intransitive verbs to form the perfect tense: *He is come. Agamemnon to the wars is gone. (Random House Dictionary)*

Korzybski and his followers, most notably S. I. Hayakawa and D. David Bourland, Jr., have primarily concerned themselves with two semantic usages of "to be" which they term Identity and Predication. The general structure of Identity contains a first Noun Phrase plus an appropriately inflected form of "to be" plus a second Noun Phrase (Noun Phrase + TO BE + Noun Phrase), as in "Jack is a rancher." The general structure of Predication contains a Noun Phrase plus an appropriately inflected form of "to be" plus an adjective Phrase (Noun Phrase + TO BE + Adjective Phrase), as in "The banana is yellow" (Bourland, "E-Prime as Tool" 204).

Identity

Let us first examine the structure of Identity (Noun Phrase + TO BE + Noun Phrase). Critical thinkers argue that the "to be" of Identity presents problems because it "immediately produce[s] high order abstractions that lead the user to premature judgments" (204). When one makes the simple statement that "Jack is a rancher," such an identification represents an unjustified abbreviation, which interferes with the communication of an idea. The term "rancher," after all, constitutes a very broad term and may or may not include the facts that "Jack runs 200 head of cattle on federally-owned grazing land in Nevada," or "Jack owns and operates a chinchilla ranch," or even that "Jack recently left his job as a New York stockbroker and bought a sheep ranch in Montana." Although each of these statements

make extremely different comments about Jack's position as a rancher, most English-speaking people have no difficulty making the leap from such broad statements to the simple idea that "Jack is a rancher."

But the statement "Jack is a rancher" is certainly inadequate (a chinchilla rancher probably does not have the same job requirements as a cattle rancher), and quite possibly incorrect (does buying a ranch automatically make one a rancher?) Of course, no structure can have precise identity with another (one cattle rancher is not precisely the same as another cattle rancher), or even with itself at two different times (Jack the cattle rancher on branding day is not precisely the same Jack the cattle rancher during Spring roundup). For these reasons the Identity relation is considered invalid by general semanticists, as well as many other critical thinkers (204).

Predication

The second major use of "to be" concerns Predication (Noun Phrase + TO BE + Adjective Phrase) as in "The banana is green," "The banana is yellow" and "The banana is black." These three statements could refer to the various ages of a banana, from conditions of immaturity to ripeness to decay, and illustrate that the verb "to be" carries with it a "huge intellectual momentum of completeness, finality, and time independence" (205). Each of the statements about the banana are adequate descriptions for some restricted purposes and at

some restricted time, and this dual condition of adequacy-inadequacy in the Predication usage of "to be" may constitute inaccuracies.

E-Prime

Although many critical thinkers recognized the problems associated with "to be," they continued to use it in their own writings. Even Korzybski, who expounded more about the dangers of "to be" than any other critical thinker, used the Identity and Predication constructions in 37% of his sentences in *Science and Sanity* (206). But it was not until the late 1940s that the idea of actually eliminating "to be" came about. Curiously enough, the initial suggestion to eliminate the verb cannot accurately be attributed to anyone by name, but only to a person from Tolland, Connecticut, who wrote to the Institute of General Semantics in 1949 suggesting that the "is" problem could be solved by simply abandoning all uses of the verb "to be" (202). Although no one else at the institute, including Korzybski, seemed much interested in the suggestion, David Bourland was intrigued by the concept. Bourland subsequently revised a paper he had prepared for the Third Congress on General Semantics, eliminating all forms of "to be" (with the exception of a single inadvertent use of "was") and considered the experiment successful even though he "acquired an intermittent, but severe, headache which lasted for about a week" (202). Fearing that he would be regarded as "some kind

of nut," Bourland told no one of this experiment, although he continued to experiment with the concept by writing some papers without the verb "to be" from 1949 until 1964 (203).

Bourland subsequently coined the term E-Prime (sometime in the 1960s), which comes from the equation $E' = E - e$, where E represents all the words of the English language, and e represents the inflected forms of "to be" (202). In employing the subset of English called E-Prime, claims Bourland, one simply abandons 20 or so lexical items, including "be, is, am, are, was, were, been, being," as well as "the contractions -- 'm, 's, 're; plus various archaic and dialectual forms -- e.g., war, wert, beest, amn't, and ain't (203).

While E-Prime may make only trivial changes relative to the English lexicon, it naturally affects syntax. At its simplest level, writing in E-Prime is often a matter of simply substituting one of many linking verbs such as "become," "seem," and "appear" for the copula. But, admits Bourland, E-Prime makes use of the progressive aspect difficult and use of the passive voice not only difficult but sometimes impossible (203).

Benefits of E-Prime

E-Prime supplies a kind of "instant General Semantics," claims Bourland in his article "The Semantics of a Non-Aristotelian Language," and its use can offer seven major services and benefits, including most notably:

- 1) E-Prime completely removes the insidiously easily available and culturally acceptable handmaidens of subject-predicate language and is-of-identity forms.
- 2) E-Prime forces the issue by tending to make fallacious constructions more noticeable and hence more obviously needful of revision.
- 3) By introducing the constraint of avoiding all forms of an all-too-commonly used linguistic form, a heightened degree of verbal consciousness becomes forced upon the given individual writer. This consciousness can lead to two particularly beneficial developments: (1) greater care in linguistic sensitivity; and (2) consciousness of abstracting on a more general level.
(Bourland, "Semantics" 70)

In addition to these advantages, Bourland further supports his advocacy of E-Prime by claiming four major consequences to be gained: vanishing questions, vanishing internal instructions, abbreviations, and the return of the role players (Bourland, "E-Prime as Tool" 207).

Vanishing Questions: By using E-Prime, claims Bourland, one simply cannot ask a number of questions which, by virtue of their semantic structure, invite identifications and confusions in orders of abstraction. Such questions as "What *is* man?" and "*Is* it art?" do not lead to useful information generation or exchange and may better be expressed on a lower order of abstraction such as "What characterizes man or woman uniquely?" or "In what way can I relate to this art form, if any?" (206-7).

Vanishing Internal Instructions: What we tell ourselves, both vocally and sub-vocally, is of great importance to our psychological well-being. When one says "I am a failure," such a statement represents an expression of silent assumption which may be crippling. Various schools of psychotherapy, especially the "rational therapy" developed and practiced by Dr. Albert Ellis, have recognized the importance of these assumptions. By using E-Prime, one may be able to think in more positive terms, and a more appropriate statement would be "The project I attempted failed" (207).

Abbreviations: Abbreviated statements that convey little or no information are often facilitated by forms of "to be." Examples of such empty comments include "It is clear that . . ." and "The problem is just a matter of semantics" (207). The problem with the second statement arises in the fact that while most human problems involve important semantic issues, the issues do not disappear simply because they have been labeled as "problems of semantics." Thus, such a statement is an analysis stopper. A more productive response might be "Yes, at least in part, but let's try to clarify some of the semantic problems" (207).

The abbreviated statement also appears in mathematics as in "one plus one is two," instead of the more specific "one plus one equals two." Such confusion, often emphasized in elementary schools, may result in children's problems with

understanding fractions; one-third may equal two-sixths, but the two certainly are not the same.

Return of the Role Player: Since E-Prime makes use of the passive voice difficult, one is forced to use active constructions, forcing the role of the players into greater prominence. The elimination of the passive voice also forces acknowledgment of responsibility for actions.

E. W. Kellogg III, a general semanticist who claims to speak, write, think, and even dream in E-Prime, concurs with Bourland that replacing the passive voice with the more informative active voice is a distinct advantage in using E-Prime. He further considers E-Prime as beneficial because it "brings the user back to the level of first-person experience" and eliminates the "overdefining of situations that confuse one aspect of an experience with a much more complex totality" (Kellogg 312). By eliminating sentence structures of the "x is y" form, E-Prime encourages the use of verbs other than "to be." Most importantly, claims Kellogg, E-Prime discourages the "Deity mode" of speech, as seen frequently in political speeches, and users of E-Prime must often take overt responsibility for their opinions (312).

Criticism of E-Prime

E-Prime is not advocated by all general semanticists, and indeed there are many who strenuously object to it, deeming the form no more than an intellectual exercise or at best a

pedagogic tool. James D. French, a computer programmer at the University of California, Berkeley, writes frequently on the subject of general semantics and adamantly objects to E-Prime. In "The Top Ten Arguments Against E-Prime," French voices these objections:

1. E-Prime does not distinguish between statements that violate principles of general semantics and those that do not. For example, a statement such as, "I am going to the market," does not violate formulations of general semantics, yet this statement in the progressive aspect cannot be made in E-Prime. While use of the is-of-predication and the is-of-identity clearly violate the map-territory paradigm, use of "to be" in the progressive and passive do not, yet they are prohibited in E-Prime (French 179).

2. Rather than moving from lower to higher orders of abstraction, and subsequently to a "general consciousness of abstracting," as claimed by Korzybski, E-Prime actually makes the expression of higher orders of abstraction more difficult. For example, rather than saying "He is a mechanic," the E-Prime writer is required to say something like "He repairs automobile engines," which is actually a forced return to a lower order of abstraction (179).

3. The language of mathematics relies heavily on the notion of equivalence and equality (x equals y , x is y), yet E-Prime prohibits such statements. Training in general semantics, not total elimination of "to be" from the

language, would serve to avoid the is-of-identity and the is-of-predication (178).

4. Although advocates of E-Prime claim it is easier to eliminate all forms of the verb "to be" rather than just the offensive is-of-identity and is-of-predication, there is little evidence that this is true and such efforts are needlessly time-consuming. It may be easier to distinguish between different uses of "to be" than to eliminate it entirely (177-8).

5. "Identity-in-the-language is not the same thing as the far more important identity-in-reaction (identification), and the two should not be confused." One of the training techniques of general semantics is to reword is-of-identity and is-of-predication statements, e.g., "That man is a fool" becomes "I evaluate that man as a fool." This technique existed long before E-Prime was thought of, and although the rewording eliminates "to be," such elimination is not the goal; it is only a side effect of the goal of taking responsibility for the statement (177).

6. Prohibiting the use of "to be" may not have much effect on eliminating identity from the English language. For example, it is easy to see that the statement "The practice of E-Prime is silly" has the structure of identity. Such a statement in E-Prime might become "The silly practice of E-Prime continues," which avoids the verb "to be" but does not avoid the assumption of identity -- E-Prime is still

silly (176-7).

7. E-Prime prohibits statements of asymmetrical relations (Mt. McKinley is higher in elevation than Mr. Shasta;" negation ("The map is not the territory;" location (Oakland is on the west coast;" and auxiliary ("I am going to the store" and "It is raining") with no proven benefit (176).

8. The negative effects of the is-of-identity and the is-of-predication are often ameliorated by the context, so the need to eliminate such statements is not as great as claimed by E-Prime advocates. If the statement "He is a professor" is supplied in response to the question "What does John do for a living," the context of the question has clearly affected the answer and no rules of general semantics are broken even though the verb "to be" has been used (176).

9. Promoting E-Prime as a general semantics practice is not reasonable, even if it improves one's writing, because effective writing techniques are not part of general semantics (175).

10. Because E-Prime necessarily results in fewer alternatives in writing, the claim that it benefits writing is questionable. The greater variety of available wordings should make the writing more interesting. Any poor writing that results from overuse of "to be" can be overcome by reducing the instances of use, not the total elimination of the verb (175).

Robin T. Lakoff, a professor of Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, concurs with French in noting that the gain in logic achieved by writing in E-Prime is not a direct result of the elimination of the verb "to be" but only an indirect result thereof (Lakoff 142). Any substitution, claims Lakoff, will have similar effect because it is the "compelling nature of novelty" that creates logical thought, not the change itself (143).

Lakoff also points out that although there are many languages which make much less use of "to be" than English, such as Modern Russian and Greek, there is little reason to believe more logical communication is achieved in those languages than in English, and there is no empirical evidence that this is so. More importantly, even if E-Prime were to produce the benefits claimed, its adoption would involve a radical change in grammar and would be extremely difficult to inculcate (143). Further, notes Lakoff, most human "attempts to 'improve' language by deliberate changes have met with abject failure and have sometimes led to worse situations than those they were designed to correct" (143-4).

Lakoff further argues that recasting sentences so that they do not contain "to be" merely reorganizes their illogic rather than removing it. For instance, replacing "to be" statements will often change an illogical proposition from an assertion to a presupposition. Consider the following two sentences. In the first, the italicized matter is asserted;

in the second, presupposed.

- a. *Michael Dukakis is President of the U.S.* and has dissolved the Internal Revenue Service.
- b. *U. S. President Michael Dukakis* today dissolved the Internal Revenue Service.

The erroneous information in the first statement (Dukakis is President) is immediately evident since it is syntactically and psychologically accessible. But the same information in statement b is much more likely to slip our notice, since it is encoded in a form that we normally interpret as "old information" (144).

Clearly, E-Prime can claim many benefits for its users. It forces the writer to use more active verbs and may thus result in more varied verb choice. It encourages acknowledgment of responsibility for thoughts and acts and promotes clarity by forcing attention on is-of-identity and is-of-predication statements. But this form of English may ultimately prove more troublesome than beneficial since some revisions in E-Prime may still indicate identity and predication and may make higher orders of abstraction more difficult. E-Prime also prohibits use of the progressive aspect and the passive voice, which are frequently used in descriptive writing, and its use may result in fewer, not more, alternatives for the writer. A further examination of E-Prime in descriptive writing in the next chapter will shed some light on these advantages and disadvantages.

CHAPTER TWO

To Be in Descriptive Writing

In order to determine the frequency of use of the verb "to be" in descriptive writing, articles by eighteen authors in six current periodicals of highly descriptive natures were examined. For purposes of this study, the only functions of "to be" considered were the copula, the progressive aspect, and the passive voice. Three articles were selected from each of two design periodicals, *Architectural Digest* and *Art & Antiques*; two nature periodicals, *Audubon* and *National Wildlife*; and two travel periodicals, *National Geographic Traveler* and *Travel and Leisure*. Table A lists the authors and titles for each article, preceded in parentheses by the abbreviated name by which the articles will hereinafter be referred.

All instances of the use of "to be" as the main verb in both dependent and independent clauses were counted and then divided according to their function as a copula, as an auxiliary to form the passive voice, or as an auxiliary to form the progressive aspect. This method of counting only main verbs precluded noting every instance of the use of "to be," since it did not include the infinitive and gerund forms, which appeared infrequently. All other remaining verbs in both dependent and independent clauses in each article were counted so that a comparison could be made, and the ratio of the use of "to be" verbs to the total number of

Table A

TITLES AND AUTHORS OF ARTICLES STUDIED

Design Periodicals:

Architectural Digest, Sept. 1993:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| [English Glass] | Drummond, Sarah. "Antiques: English Colored Glass." |
| [Italianate Villa] | Harris, Dale. "An Italianate Villa Holds a Rare Cache of German Art." |
| [Shingle House] | Goldberger, Paul. "Invoking Lutyens for a Shingle Style House in New Jersey." |

Art & Antiques, Nov. 1993:

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| [Elegance] | Bell, Judith. "Earthy Elegance." |
| [Holiday Table] | Irvine, Chippy. "Tales of the Holiday Table." |
| [Menagerie] | Tarbell, Bethany. "Rosa Bonheur's Menagerie." |

Nature Periodicals:

Audubon, Oct. 1993:

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| [Everglades] | Derr, Mark. "Redeeming the Everglades." |
| [Green Fairways] | Grossman, John. "How Green Are These Fairways?" |
| [Grizzlies] | Bass, Rick. "Grizzlies: Are They Out There?" |

National Wildlife, Oct./Nov. 1993:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| [Little Birds] | Rogers, Michael. "Little Birds Lost." |
| [Mussels] | Kuznik, Frank. "America's Aching Mussels." |
| [Survival] | Turbak, Gary. "Survival by the Numbers." |

Travel Periodicals:

National Geographic Traveler, Sept./Oct. 1993:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| [Branson] | Martin, Paul. "Booming Branson." |
| [Loudoun] | Kostyal, K. M. "Living Well in Loudoun." |
| [Superior Drive] | Griffin, Larry. "A Superior Drive." |

Travel & Leisure, Nov. 1993:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| [Beyond Bali] | Koenig, Rhoda. "Beyond Bali." |
| [Coast Highway] | Cruikshank, Douglas. "Cruising the Coast Highway." |
| [St. Petersburg] | Russell, John. "At Liberty in St. Petersburg." |

verbs per article could be determined on a percentage basis. Table B represents this breakdown by article, indicating the total number of "to be" verbs compared to the total number of verbs in dependent and independent clauses and the resulting percentage of overall "to be" usage.

The articles varied in length as shown by the total number of main verbs present in each article, which ranged from 81 to 649, with an average of 231 total verbs per article. The frequency of use of "to be" ranged from a low of 8 percent in "Superior Drive" to a high of 46 percent in "English Glass." The average combined use of "to be" in all eighteen articles was 31 percent. This figure clearly does not support the claims that "to be" appears in more than half of English sentences (Ralph 7); however, it does suggest that these descriptive writers relied significantly on "to be," using it nearly one-third of the time.

Copula

The verb "to be" often serves as a copular or "linking" verb in which instances it is followed by a subject complement or an adverbial or adjective phrase. Table C represents a breakdown of the use of "to be" as a copula in the articles studied. Not surprisingly, the copula represented the highest frequency of use of the three forms of "to be." The copula represented an average of 58.6 percent, or better than one-half of all uses of "to be" in the writing studied.

Table B

RATIO OF *TO BE* VERBS TO ALL VERBS

<u>Article</u>	<u>To be Verbs</u>	<u>Total Verbs</u>	<u>Ratio of To Be Verbs</u>	<u>Group Averages</u>
Design:				
English Glass	47	102	46%	
Italianate Villa	27	81	33%	
Shingle House	49	125	39%	
Elegance	33	92	36%	
Holiday Table	63	173	36%	
Menagerie	69	259	27%	.361%
Nature:				
Everglades	113	399	28%	
Green Fairways	72	297	24%	
Grizzlies	217	649	33%	
Little Birds	69	204	34%	
Mussels	78	202	39%	
Survival	85	268	32%	.316%
Travel:				
Branson	39	183	21%	
Loudoun	53	251	21%	
Superior Drive	8	95	8%	
Beyond Bali	53	170	31%	
Coast Highway	103	401	26%	
St. Petersburg	92	208	44%	.251%
Average use of <i>To Be</i> verbs in all 18 articles				.309%

Table C

RATIO OF COPULA TO ALL *TO BE* VERBS

<u>Article</u>	<u>Copula</u>	<u>Total To Be Verbs</u>	<u>Ratio Copula to To Be Verbs</u>	<u>Group Averages</u>
Design:				
English Glass	15	47	32 %	
Italianate Villa	17	27	63 %	
Shingle House	34	49	69 %	
Elegance	13	33	39 %	
Holiday Table	26	63	41 %	
Menagerie	40	69	58 %	.503%
Nature:				
Everglades	47	113	42 %	
Green Fairways	38	72	53 %	
Grizzlies	142	217	65 %	
Little Birds	47	69	68 %	
Mussels	49	78	63 %	
Survival	65	85	76 %	.611%
Travel:				
Branson	29	39	74 %	
Loudoun	31	53	58 %	
Superior Drive	5	8	62 %	
Beyond Bali	29	53	55 %	
Coast Highway	61	103	59 %	
St. Petersburg	71	92	78 %	.643%
Average use of copula in all 18 articles				.586%

Appearance of the copula ranged from a high of 78 percent in "St. Petersburg" to a low of 32 percent in "English Glass," which, although lowest in copula use, rated highest (66 percent) in use of the passive voice, as well as highest in overall usage of "to be" at 46 percent.

"At Liberty in St. Petersburg" is a travel magazine article that discusses and endorses real estate investment by foreign travelers in the newly-liberated Russian city. This article made more frequent use of the copula than any of the articles examined, and in many instances more active verbs might have been used to greater effect. Let us examine some of the uses of the copula, in both the is-of-identity and the is-of-predication form, in this short article and explore possibilities for their revision in E-Prime.

The first use of the copula "to be" appears at the beginning of the second paragraph.

Example One (Identity):

An immediate proof *is* the English-language banner that hangs high above the street, just a yard or two from the Nevsky Prospekt." (Russell 106)

This sentence might easily be rewritten by substituting the verb "provides" or the verb "offers" for the copula "is" and changing the word order slightly: "The English-language banner that hangs high above the street just a yard or two from the Nevsky Prospekt *provides/offers* immediate proof." Although the word order has been changed, the revision does not sacrifice the essential subject-verb-object word order of

the sentence, and the meaning of the sentence is virtually unaltered.

Example Two (Predication):

However, certain doughty rental agents in Stockholm are well thought of in this context and will go to bat for the beginner. (107-8)

This statement actually represents a redundancy, since the adjective "doughty" by definition implies that the rental agents are indeed "resolute, valiant, or worthy" (*Random House Dictionary*). By further explaining the character of the agents (claiming that they "are well thought of in this context), the writer actually insults the intelligence of the reader by assuming the adjective "doughty" will not be understood. There is much to be gained by rewriting this sentence in E-Prime through the elimination of the offending phrase, and an improved statement would be "However, certain doughty rental agents in Stockholm will go to bat for the beginner."

Example Three (Identity):

But meanwhile you could spend time every year in what is not only one of the most beautiful cities in the world but, oddly enough, one of the least known. (110)

Again, the writer who wishes to reduce reliance on the verb "to be" might simply shorten this sentence to "But meanwhile you could spend time every year in one of the most beautiful, but least known, cities in the world." In this revision nine words have been eliminated from the sentence without

seriously altering the meaning or impact of the statement. If brevity is the desired goal, the revision clearly has merit. A second alternative is "But meanwhile you could spend time every year in a city that can compete with the most beautiful cities in the world and, oddly enough, remain one of the least known." The second rewrite, which actually adds one more word than the original, eliminates the use of "to be" yet retains the emphasis on the fact that the city is little known.

Example Four (Predication):

On the Russian side, there was the fear that visitors would see what they were not supposed, or not allowed, to see. (111)

The sentence might be revised as follows: "On the Russian side, officials feared that visitors would see what the government did not want them to see." However, this revision does not make precisely the same statement. There is a distinction made between what the visitors would not be "allowed" to see and what they were not "supposed" to see, the latter "sights" being not necessarily prohibited but perhaps not desired.

Example Five (Predication):

All over town, glorious buildings were under official occupation and off-limits to the tourist. (111)

This sentence can easily be recast into E-Prime as "All over town, glorious buildings *remained* under official occupation and off-limits to the tourist."

Example Six (Predication):

In late June, the city lives through the white nights during which, as everyone knows, it never gets dark and you can read, as if by daylight, at two in the morning. Those nights are truly very peculiar, with a motionless light that casts no shadow and in its color *is* midway between skimmed milk and opaline. It *is* not quite white, but it's not quite anything else, either. (174)

A possible alternative in E-Prime might be "The peculiarity of those nights lies in a motionless light that casts no shadow, a light with color midway between skimmed milk and opaline, not quite white but not quite anything else, either." This revision eliminates "are" and "is," while maintaining the expressiveness of the original statement; and by combining the two sentences, the resulting statement is shorter by four words.

Many of the statements proved more difficult when attempting to recast into E-Prime.

Example Seven (Identity):

'Stay as long as you like -- or forever!' *is* the message. (107)

This sentence presents problems in E-Prime revision since the quotation "Stay as long as you like -- or forever!" represents only an implied thought, not someone's actual words. Thus, the main verb cannot be changed to something as concrete as "reads" or "says" the message. Another choice might be "The message *implies* one might stay as long as one likes or forever; "however, use of the formal pronoun "one" (in an effort to avoid gender-specific pronouns) is not in

keeping with the chatty, informal tone already set in the article. A third, and slightly more appropriate, choice is "The message *implies/suggests* that visitors can stay as long as they like -- or forever!" But the original sentence places the tantalizing quotation, "Stay as long as you like -- or forever!" in a place of prominence at the beginning of the sentence in order to emphasize the concept of hospitality, an idea that is diminished if "the message" becomes the subject of the sentence. While the sentence can clearly be rewritten in E-Prime in several different fashions, the original phrasing, and its attendant use of "to be," is actually the stronger choice.

Example Eight (Identity):

To have one's own apartment -- for a month, a year, or a lifetime -- *is* one of the many new options that are now open to the foreign visitor.
(107)

This statement might easily and effectively be reworded with an active verb: "To have one's own apartment -- for a month, a year, or a lifetime -- *represents* one of the many new options [that are] now open to the foreign visitor."

However, the elimination of the second use of "to be" in this sentence ("options *that are* now open") constitutes a grammatical ellipsis, so, of course, the phrase "that are" is still implied in the context of the sentence. One word has been eliminated without altering the meaning of the statement, but very little in the way of clarity is actually

gained by the omission.

Example Nine (Predication):

The standard 'city tour' and the one-morning scamper through the Hermitage have their fascination, but in relation to what St. Petersburg has to offer they are almost laughable. (110-11)

These two sentences, the second of which relies on information contained in the first (the idea of laughability), present great difficulty when attempting to revise into E-Prime. The concluding phrase of the first sentence, "they are almost laughable" might be restated in one of the three following ways: 1) "they *seem* almost laughable;" 2) "they *pale* in comparison;" or 3) "they *represent* ordinary tourist fare." Of these three alternatives, the first weakens the concept of laughability (a strong statement in the original version), and the second is a cliché. The final revision ("they *represent* ordinary tourist fare"), while eliminating the verb "to be," still does not convey the strength of the original claim of "laughability." Recasting the statement into E-Prime in this instance is clearly not the best solution.

The second sentence, "The same *could be said* of the standard day trip that whisks visitors through the outlying palaces of Tsarskoe Selo and Pavlovsk and sends them back into town almost before they are done with the group photo opportunity," is easier to transform into E-Prime. A logical alternative might be to eliminate the dependent adjective

clause and allow "whisk" and "sends" to serve as the predicate: "Similarly, the standard day trip whisks visitors through the outlying palaces of Tsarskoe Selo and Pavlovsk and sends them back into town almost before they can finish the group photo opportunity."

Example Ten (Predication):

Ever present, therefore, was the fear that visitors would act as free individuals, breaking the iron rhythms of the tour, going off on their own, asking questions, getting in where they had no business to be. (111)

Possible revisions for this statement include "Ever present, therefore, *remained* the fear . . ." or "The fear remained ever present that visitors . . ." But the writer would then become reliant on "remained" as a common substitute for "to be" verbs, and "remained" is clearly not the best choice here.

Example Eleven (Predication):

But the truth about St. Petersburg *is* that you cannot hurry it. (174)

As noted previously, a statement which claims that the "truth *is*" something, invites identification and confusion in the order or abstraction. "The truth *is*" can be eliminated by revising the statement to "But St. Petersburg *should be/is* best experienced at a slow pace; "however, this revision still does not eliminate "to be." Another alternative is "You cannot hurry through St. Petersburg," yet this revision lacks the punch of the original statement. Revising into

E-Prime clearly weakens the original statement.

Example Twelve (Identity):

This *is* a talkers' town, and always has been.
But it *is* also a walkers' town. (174)

It is very difficult to revise these statements and maintain emphasis on what type of town St. Petersburg represents.

"Both talkers and walkers appreciate St. Petersburg" is not nearly as emphatic in intent. The concept of St. Petersburg being both a walkers' and a talkers' town is more fully explained in the paragraph that follows these statements, and these two sentences, which serve as transitional statements into the next paragraph, are perhaps best left as stated even though they use "to be."

The preceding twelve examples in "St. Petersburg" illustrate that revising a text into E-Prime, while certainly possible, does not always result in improvement. As discussed above, six of these revisions (Examples 1 through 6) represent some degree of improvement over the original statement, but six revisions (Examples 7 through 12) failed to improve the writing significantly. Whether or not the statements were expressed in the is-of-identity or the is-of-predication form did not significantly affect the ease with which the sentences were rewritten in E-Prime. Two is-of-identity statements were successfully revised while three were not; four is-of-predication statements were successfully revised while three were not.

Limited Use of To Be as Copula

In contrast to the heavy reliance on the copula found in "St. Petersburg," "Redeeming the Everglades" successfully avoided overreliance on the copula, which appeared only 42 percent of the time throughout this nature article. Let us consider a complete paragraph which employed only one instance of "to be" among eight total verbs in both dependent and independent clauses. The main verbs in both dependent and independent clauses have been italicized and the single use of "to be" is indicated in boldface type:

Example Thirteen:

For 6,000 years, water *shaped* the topography and *defined* the plant and animal communities of the Everglades. During the May-to-October rainy season, it sometimes *fell* in torrents, joining a mass of water that *meandered* through the twisting channel of the Kissimere River and parallel creeks into Lake Okeeshobee, which regularly *sloshed* over its banks to join Pa-hay-okee, the Grassy Water, called the river of grass by conservationist Marjory Stoneman Douglas. From there, the water *curled* toward the east coast before turning south and west in a slow-moving sheet as much as 40 miles wide, crossing the center of the peninsula to Florida Bay, Whitewater Bay, and the Gulf of Mexico. Just beneath the surface, water *cut* through a huge aquifer reaching under Biscayne Bay, off the east coast, and Florida Bay, to the south. Occasionally it *bubbled* up in freshwater springs. To the east, surface water *crossed* the coastal ridge through transverse glades, rivers, and creeks. This **was** a lush, wet wilderness, hosting hundreds of species of birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, and plants *found* nowhere else in North America. Millions of plum birds *filled* the sky; herds of green turtles *grazed* the grass beds of Biscayne Bay; alligators, crocodiles, and otters *abounded*. Mosquitoes *swarmed* so thickly they *could suffocate* animals and *make* grown men faint. (Derr 50)

One reason that this paragraph is so effective is that it maintains a focus on the water and its activities as the main subject; the water becomes a living thing through the active verbs used. In the first six sentences, the water "shaped," "defined," "fell," "meandered," "sloshed," "curled," "cut," "bubbled," and "crossed." The remaining active verbs describe the activities of animals which "grazed," "abounded," "swarmed," "suffocate[d]," and "ma[de] men faint." All of these verb choices are lively and engaging and serve to animate the subject matter. The one reliance on the verb "to be" appears in the past tense toward the end of the paragraph: "This was a lush, wet wilderness, hosting hundreds of species of birds" This sentence could easily be rewritten in E-Prime as "The Everglades once *existed* as a lush, wet wilderness, hosting hundreds of species of birds"

Both this paragraph and the entire article are excellent examples of strong writing using active verbs; and they demonstrate that E-Prime, whether practiced intentionally or not, can result in clear, animated, and very effective descriptive prose.

Progressive Aspect

The progressive aspect focuses on a situation as being in progress at a particular time and nearly always requires some form of the verb "to be." It may be used to imply limited duration of an event ("I am liking music lessons"), the

dynamic durative or a duration not yet completed ("I was playing the piano last night"), or events that repeatedly occur over a period of time ("She is playing the piano") (Greenbaum 53-4). As an alternative to using the progressive aspect in the above sentences, the writer may use the phrase "continues to" with an active verb.

The progressive tense or aspect was the least used among the instances of "to be," ranging from zero usage in five articles (four of which were design articles) to a high of 21 percent in "Grizzlies," with an average of only 7 percent total usage in all the descriptive articles. Table D represents a breakdown of the use of "to be" to form the progressive aspect.

"Grizzlies: Are They Out There?" was the longest article studied; it contained 649 main verbs compared to an average of 231 main verbs for all the articles combined. This *Audubon* article supports the idea that Grizzly Bears are still alive and well in Colorado's San Juan Mountains, although there have been no actual sightings of the animals. As a method to personally engage the reader in this largely theoretical discussion of the existence of grizzlies, the writer utilizes both the present and the progressive tense frequently. Such choices in verb tense encourage the reader to personally travel along with the author as he meets various people and builds his argument for the existence of the bears.

Table D

RATIO OF PROGRESSIVE TO ALL TO BE VERBS

<u>Article</u>	<u>Progressive</u>	<u>Total To Be Verbs</u>	<u>Ratio of Progressive to To Be Verbs</u>	<u>Group Averages</u>
Design:				
English Glass	1	47	2 %	
Italianate Villa	0	27	0 %	
Shingle House	0	49	0 %	
Elegance	0	33	0 %	
Holiday Table	0	63	0 %	
Menagerie	3	69	4 %	.01%
Nature:				
Everglades	12	113	10 %	
Green Fairways	11	72	15 %	
Grizzlies	45	217	21 %	
Little Birds	9	69	13 %	
Mussels	10	78	13 %	
Survival	1	85	1 %	.121%
Travel:				
Branson	4	39	10 %	
Loudoun	7	53	13 %	
Superior Drive	0	8	0 %	
Beyond Bali	3	53	5 %	
Coast Highway	19	103	18 %	
St. Petersburg	3	92	3 %	.081%
Average of progressive in all 18 articles				.07%

The style of "Grizzlies" is chatty and very informal. Most of the information is provided in the form of opinions of various people who are not necessarily experts, as opposed to statements of documented scientific material. The first three paragraphs, written entirely in the present tense, set the scene in a mountain cabin where several people are gathered to discuss possible locations for sighting the bears. In the fourth paragraph the progressive aspect appears in three statements.

Example Fourteen:

Spread out on Betty's table are topo maps covering hundreds of square miles. We're *squinting* at the steep contour lines, all of us gathered under a halo of lantern light. All eyes are focused on the end of Doug's blunt, mountain-climbing-hammered finger, which *is* slowly *tracing* contours, *pausing* at the base of cirques, *wandering* across springs and high altitude marshes, and *traversing* other wild country of the imagination. Doug *is grunting* every time the finger passes over a good place for grizzlies. (Bass 68)

The use of the progressive aspect makes it easier for the reader to join in with what appears to be a current, active situation; however, use of the historical present tense can also achieve this same effect. The statements might be rephrased as "We *squint* at the steep contour lines," or "finger, . . . which slowly *traces* contours," or "Doug *grunts* every time the finger passes over a good place for grizzlies." By using the historical present, it is relatively simple to recast these statements into E-Prime while still maintaining the general effect of events

occurring while the reader is present.

Example Fifteen:

When we catch up with Doug, he's *standing* over bear tracks. (71)

Again the historical present may be substituted, and a simple and suitable alternative to this statement in the progressive is "When we catch up with Doug we *find* him standing over bear tracks.

Example Sixteen:

He sees me watching him and comes over and asks who I *am*. I tell him, and he asks, "You're *working* with the grizzly bear project?" I told him I *was*. (73)

If the statement is indeed a direct quotation, then the writer cannot be faulted for using "to be" in the progressive aspect. However, some poetic license might be exercised in the interest of E-Prime, and the statement could be revised to "You *work* with the grizzly bear project?"

Example Seventeen:

. . . he picked up his backpack and went out the door and back up the mountain. He *was running*. He ran everywhere then." (73)

In this instance the historical present could easily serve in place of the progressive. The statements might thus be shortened to "He picked up his backpack and ran out the door and back up the mountain. He *ran* everywhere then."

It is a little more difficult to rewrite instances of the dynamic durative for of the progressive aspect in E-Prime:

Example Eighteen:

This story is about live bears, not dead ones. To recount it as briefly as possible, a bow hunter (Mike Niederee of Kansas) was out *hunting* with his guide, Ed Wiseman of Crestone, Colorado. According to them, a sow grizzly charged Wiseman, mauling him. Wiseman, while in the bear's embrace, reached into his quiver, pulled an arrow out, and jabbed it into the bear's throat, killing it. Niederee, the bow hunter, went for help. Wiseman survived. (70)

Of primary importance in this paragraph is the fact that the activity of "hunting" continued to occur over a period of days, although the precise number of days or time of the month or year are probably not important to the story. In the absence of more specific information, it is nearly impossible to recast this paragraph into E-Prime. A possible solution is to move the progressive verb into an adverbial clause: "To recount it as briefly as possible, a bow hunter (Mike Niederee of Kansas), *while out hunting* with his guide, Ed Wiseman of Crestone, Colorado. . . ." The problem with using this adverbial clause is that the remainder of the sentence must necessarily then read, "*was charged* and mauled by a grizzly," which uses the passive voice and the attendant auxiliary form of "to be." And the phrase "while out hunting" still implies the elliptical phrase "he was." In order to avoid use of "to be" in the progressive, the sentence might be rewritten as follows: "To recount it as briefly as possible, a sow grizzly charged Mike Niederee of Kansas, while [he was] out bow hunting with his guide, Ed

Wiseman of Crestone, Colorado." Again, the elliptical use of "was" is understood, and little is gained by this revision in E-Prime.

The following instances of use of the progressive in "Grizzlies" create similar problems:

Example Nineteen:

Marty and I *are trotting* to stay up with Doug, famished from a week of eating little but rice and peppers. (71)

If this sentence were rewritten in the historical present, "Marty and I *trot* to stay up with Doug," much of the activity is lost, since it now appears that the two individuals only trotted in order to catch up with Doug at one point, and did not continue to trot to keep up the pace throughout the entire hike.

Example Twenty:

Back when Betty lived in Kansas City and *was doing* work for civil rights legislation in the '60s, the FBI hounded her, and Doug chuckles, says something like, "Yeah, the bastards," and Betty pours another glass in silent, smiling agreement. . . ." (73)

Like Example Fifteen, this instance of the progressive is necessary because Betty continued to perform work for civil rights legislation through the years. There is no suitable alternative for recasting this statement into E-Prime, with the exception of using "continued to" before the verb "work."

Example Twenty-One:

In four, maybe five, weeks, the bears, if they are up there, *will be sleeping*, having survived one more year -- 10,000 years of humans in the San Juans, and then one more. (73)

Because the bears will continue to sleep through the winter, the progressive aspect is again necessary to the meaning of the statement. The only possible alternative would be to eliminate the information concerning the length of hibernating time ("four, maybe five, weeks") and revise the statement to read, "If they *remain* up there, the bears *will continue* to sleep, having survived one more year" But this renders the statement inaccurate. The article appeared in the October edition of *Audubon*, and the timeliness expressed in the statement is important to the fact that in October the bears would not yet be hibernating.

Example Twenty-Two:

Peacock was out of Vietnam, medals and all, and was a fire lookout that summer. Dennis was *working* with biologist Chuck Jonkel on the Border Grizzly Project and was *having* an after-hours beer at the Northern Lights Saloon. (73)

The progressive aspect is necessary here because Dennis continues to work with the biologist and he continues to have the beer, yet to state each of these instances of the progressive with the form "continues to" would soon become redundant and would certainly detract from the effectiveness of the writing through unnecessary repetition that does not serve to enhance the prose.

Example Twenty-Three:

He saw that the bears *weren't being helped* by the heavy approach of baiting, snaring, tranquilizing, and radio-collaring. He saw that respect for the animal *was being lost*. (73)

The fact that the bears were not being helped and that respect was being lost are most definitely continuing actions which cannot be stated in the historical present. It is apparent that the progressive is necessary in these instances as well, and the use of "continues to" would be awkward.

Example Twenty-Four:

The bears are out there. Photos and hair samples likely *aren't going to be* accepted as proof by the men in green. Even a grizzly's tracks might not "count" -- it could always be argued that someone had cut the foot off a stuffed grizzly and was *parading* around the state with it We're *looking* for the grizzly, but the more time we spend on it, the more ambivalent we are about the kind of microspecificity that the feds, and others, seek. Even if we get hot video -- then what? We're *trying* to help return the San Juans to what Peacock calls "their full and former biological glory." (75)

This entire paragraph relies on the progressive to accurately sum up the article. Revision to restate the first instance of the progressive ("Photos and hair samples likely *aren't going to be* accepted") results only in the use of the historical present which still employing the verb "to be": "Photos and hair samples likely *will not be* accepted." The second use of the progressive ("was *parading* around the state with it") could effectively be restated in the past tense ("had *paraded* around the state with it"). However, the last

two uses of the progressive in this paragraph (We're looking for the grizzly . . ." and "We're trying to help . . . ") absolutely require statements in the progressive if the authors are to be believed sincere in their continuing attempts to save the grizzly.

Only four of the above instances of the progressive (Examples 14 through 17) could easily have been rewritten in E-Prime. The remaining seven instances (Examples 18 through 24) presented great difficulty in rephrasing in E-Prime. Because the only viable alternative to any of the necessary progressive statements is the use of "continues to," the writing in this article would certainly suffer from being rewritten entirely in E-Prime.

Passive Voice

Argument Against Passive:

In recent years the passive voice, which relies on inflected forms of "to be," has come under attack by many writers, teachers, and editors. Writers of style manuals often advise writers to avoid the passive and use the active voice whenever possible for a number of very good reasons. They claim that overuse of the passive weakens prose by robbing it of the energy of more active verbs and by increasing the number of words necessary to make a statement. Along with general semanticists, they also worry about the deleted agents of actions and the attendant avoidance of responsibility for stated acts.

Nonfiction guides, such as William Zinsser's *On Writing Well*, advise writers to use active verbs unless there is "no comfortable way to get around using a passive verb," since passive constructions sap the reader's energy (Zinsser 108). In conjunction with their admonitions to use simpler, anglo-saxon based words rather than the often more pretentious words borrowed from other languages such as French, many stylists now recommend a plainer literary style with shorter sentences as well as shorter words. According to literary critic L. A. Sherman, the English sentence in literary prose declined significantly in length from the Elizabethan period to the late 19th century, resulting in what Rudolf Flesch claims is an average modern sentence of from thirteen to seventeen words (Baron 6).

The passive voice, say its detractors, results in longer sentences and should therefore be avoided in modern prose. Indeed, when the agent of an action is not deleted, the passive form of a sentence is slightly longer than the active form. For example, the active construction, "The secretary typed the letter," contains five words. The passive construction of this same statement, "The letter was typed by the secretary," contains seven words, two more than the active construction. Although two more words in an isolated sentence may not matter much, if passive constructions are used frequently in the course of a longer text, the prose loses some of its momentum (Raskin and Weiser 35). However,

if the agent of the action is deleted in the passive construction, as in "The letter was typed," then this four-word passive construction is actually the shortest of all. Thus, claims that the passive always results in longer sentences are not necessarily true.

Some grammarians claim that the passive version of a sentence may be 50% to 100% longer than the active version, and that the passive adds only length, not meaning, to the sentence. Consider the following statements:

- (a) A doctor should reevaluate his condition.
(active)
- (b) There is a need for his condition to be reevaluated by a doctor. (passive with agent)
- (c) There is a need for his condition to be reevaluated. (passive without agent) (36).

As indicated above, the passive sentence (b) contains 13 words, 7 more than the active sentence (a) which has only 6 words. In this instance the passive construction is more than 50% longer than the active construction. But the passive without agent statement (c) results in ten words, only 4 more words than the active construction. Of the three sentences, the first active sentence is clearly the best choice, although its conciseness alone does not make it preferable. The construction "there is" in sentences (b) and (c) adds length without meaning, while the emphasis on the agent of action (the doctor) in sentence (a) serves to strengthen the statement. Of course, since varied sentence structure is preferred throughout the body of a text, there

will naturally be instances where the occasional use of constructions such as (b) and (c) may be warranted.

The loss of the agent of action in a passive sentence is of great concern to writers and educators. In the passive construction the agent is generally taken out of the subject position and placed as the object of an adverbial prepositional phrase tacked onto the end of the sentence. For example, consider the following statement: "The small white ball was thrown over the fence by James." Because the performer of the action is not mentioned until the end of the sentence, readers must remember what occurs (the verb, "was thrown") and to what it occurs (the object, "ball") until they discover who (the agent, "James") is responsible for the action. However, the sentence becomes even easier to follow if the agent is removed entirely: "The small white ball was thrown over the fence." Of course, the latter statement is acceptable only if the identity of the agent is not necessary.

Argument Supporting Passive:

Although many educators deplore the use of the passive, the form does have its share of supporters. Linguistics Professor Dennis Baron argues that the passive voice, by virtue of how often it occurs in language, is a natural part of English sentence structure, and that a ban on its use leaves the writer with fewer choices of expression. Baron claims that in informative prose, such as the descriptive

writing studied herein, the passive voice is not only common, it is usually less wordy, more direct, and more efficient in conveying information than the active voice (Baron 9).

Modern language critics Bergen and Cornelia Evans support the passive construction, noting that it is a sophisticated device popular among educated speakers and writers, and that it is often indispensable in presenting ideas and generalizations. Rather than being weak or clumsy, as is claimed by proponents of active constructions, the passive may often have more emphasis than the active, particularly when the agent is mentioned (9).

As to claims that deletion of the agent in passive constructions disguises responsibility for acts, Evans and Evans suggest that the writer, not the grammatical form, should be blamed for the evasiveness (9). Use of the passive voice without an agent allows the writer to emphasize the object of an action without having to specify a subject and, if used skillfully, will serve to give situations a "terser realism" (Mayper 315). Because the performers of actions are not always known and their identity may also be unimportant or irrelevant, the passive is often the preferred choice. In his classic text, *The Practical Stylist*, Sheridan Baker concurs that meaning sometimes demands the passive voice since it may be best to leave the agent "under cover -- insignificant, or unknown, or mysterious" (8). There are times when it may also be more diplomatic to omit the agent.

Many of today's commentators on voice, particularly authors of writing textbooks, are clearly prejudiced against the passive voice, especially in informative writing where the passive voice most commonly appears. They claim that the passive results in longer, less direct statements and is thus less efficient in conveying information. But an examination of the descriptive writing in travel, nature and design periodicals does not entirely support these views.

The passive voice, formed when the appropriate form of the auxiliary "be" is added to the *-ed* participle of the main verb, accounted for the second highest usage of "to be" in the descriptive articles studied. Use of the passive voice ranged from a low of 14 percent in "Grizzlies" to a high of 66 percent in "English Glass," with an average of 34% for all 18 articles. TABLE E is a breakdown of the use of "to be" as a passive verb.

The passive tense appeared most frequently in "English Glass," which begins with a fictitious scenario in which the reader is invited to "imagine" a dinner table scene in 1780:

Example Twenty-Five:

Imagine for a moment the dinner table at an English gentleman's house in around 1780. It *is* time for the dessert course, and servants remove the white damask cloth. A pyramid of fruit *is* at the center of the table, and finger bowls are placed beside all the guests, some in rich blue glass with gilt decoration. Sweetmeats, jellies, crystallized fruits and almonds *are served* in clear, amethyst, blue and green cut-glass dishes. Wine *is poured* from elegant serving bottles into small green drinking glass. (Drummond 152+)

TABLE E

RATIO OF PASSIVE TO ALL *TO BE* VERBS

<u>Article</u>	<u>Passive</u>	<u>Total To Be Verbs</u>	<u>Ratio of Passive to To Be Verbs</u>	<u>Averages</u>
Design:				
English Glass	31	47	66 %	
Italianate Villa	10	27	37 %	
Shingle House	15	49	31 %	
Elegance	20	33	60 %	
Holiday Table	37	63	59 %	
Menagerie	26	69	38 %	.486%
Nature:				
Everglades	54	113	48 %	
Green Fairways	23	72	32 %	
Grizzlies	30	217	14 %	
Little Birds	13	69	19 %	
Mussels	19	78	24 %	.265%
Survival	19	85	22 %	
Travel:				
Branson	6	39	15 %	
Loudoun	15	53	28 %	
Superior Drive	3	8	37 %	
Beyond Bali	21	53	40 %	
Coast Highway	23	103	22 %	
St. Petersburg	17	92	18 %	.257%
Average use of passive in all 18 articles				.336%

Let us first consider the main purpose of the article, which is to inform the reader about a particular type of antique glass. The writer immediately engages the reader's interest by painting a picture of where and how the glass was used. Although a scene is always more interesting if described in animated terms, the focus in this descriptive article is on the tableware, not the individuals present at this imaginary dinner. The writer wants the reader to visualize the table, but the primary information is contained in the descriptive nouns and adjectives, not in the verbs. The verb "to be" here functions as no more than a repetitive device to provide a certain cadence to the prose and to draw attention to the description itself.

Although the first two instances of the use of "to be" are as copulas ("It *is* time" and "fruit *is* at the center"), the third usage, "finger bowls *are placed*," employs the passive voice because it is not important to know the agent of the action of placing the finger bowls. The primary information required here has to do with the bowls, not the person who placed them, and the passive voice is therefore much more appropriate.

If the writer chose to employ E-Prime and avoid the passive throughout the remainder of the article, the only method by which to do this would be to refer to the persons who made the glassware discussed as either "glassmakers," "artisans" or "craftsmen." Even if these three synonyms were

used interchangeably throughout the article, the repetition of these nouns would draw attention to the makers of the glassware, not the glassware itself, which is the main subject of the article. For example, consider the following original statements and their revisions in E-Prime:

Example Twenty-Six:

Manganese was used for amethyst, cobalt for blue -- the best raw material being smalt from Bohemia -- and iron or sometimes copper for green, allowing a wide range of hues depending on the exact compound. (152)

To eliminate the passive voice, the sentence could be restated "Artists used manganese for amethyst, cobalt for blue -- the best raw material being smalt from Bohemia -- and iron or sometimes copper for green, allowing a wide range of hues depending on the exact compound." But by making "artists" the only subject, the intended emphasis on the metals "Manganese," "cobalt," "iron" and "copper" is lost. The metals used to color the glass represent the important information to be provided here, particularly since the "artists" are unknown.

Example Twenty-Seven:

Rarer colors, such as the difficult reds, were derived from copper or gold, and silver or uranium from pitchblende was used for yellow and amber (152).

Like Example twenty-six, this sentence emphasizes that the rarer colors were made from metals. One possible alternative in E-Prime is to revise by using a prepositional phrase:

"Glassmakers made the rarer colors, such as the difficult reds, *by using* copper or gold, and made yellow and amber from silver or uranium from pitchblende." Again, however, the emphasis is placed on the unknown "glassmakers." A more appropriate alternative in E-Prime is "Copper or gold produced the rarer, more difficult colors such as red, and silver or uranium from pitchblende produced yellow and amber."

Example Twenty-Eight:

The largest body of eighteenth-century gilt glass *is attributed* to the workshop of James Giles, principally a porcelain decorator. (154)

The logical alternative to this statement is "James Giles, principally a porcelain decorator, may have produced the largest body of eighteenth-century gilt glass." This statement puts emphasis on the glassmaker, James Giles, not on the glassware, but in this instance the specific name of the artist is important, and the revision in E-Prime is certainly acceptable. However, the use of "may have" is not as strong a supposition as is "attributed to."

Example Twenty-Nine:

Bristol produced some of the best-quality blue glass pieces, and the name has since become synonymous with the color, but glassworks in Lancashire, London, Stourbridge and Sunderland also made "Bristol" glassware. The finest pieces were made between 1780 and 1820. (154)

As demonstrated in Examples 25 and 26, the only possible E-Prime revision is to change the subject to the anonymous

"workers," "artisans," or "glassmakers." Such a substitution would then be "Workers (or Artisans or Glassmakers) from those areas made the finest pieces between 1780 and 1820." This statement emphasizes the unknown artisans instead of "the finest pieces," which will be further described in the remainder of the paragraph.

Example Thirty:

A leading Bristol glassmaker and gilder, at the Non-such glass house, was Isaac Jacobs. His Bristol blue wares were much *sought* after. . . .
(154)

Although the name of the glassmaker is of some importance, it is the description of his "blue wares" which is the subject of the entire paragraph. Thus, the vital information here is not the man's name, but his occupation as a "leading Bristol glassmaker and gilder." If the sentence is rephrased in E-Prime, the alternatives are "Isaac Jacobs *served* as a leading Bristol glassmaker and gilder . . ." or "People *sought* his blue wares." In either case the emphasis on the glassware is subsequently lost.

Example Thirty-One:

Sets were *starting* to become fashionable, and a whole separate world of glass was *devoted* to the requirements of the dessert. (154)

This statement presents no problem with being revised into E-Prime. The first use of "to be" ("Sets were *starting* to become fashionable . . .") need not necessarily be expressed in the progressive aspect and could easily be reworded as

"Sets *became* fashionable." The second clause could easily be restated in E-Prime so that the entire statement would read: "Sets *became* fashionable, and a whole separate world of glass *now included* the requirements of the dessert."

Example Thirty-Two:

It appears that finger bowls (and their ambiguous use) were quite unknown in France, at least in 1784, (155)

A possible revision of this statement is "Many people in France, at least in 1784, knew nothing of finger bowls and their ambiguous use. Although this statement makes "people in France" the subject of the sentence, nothing is detracted from the core information, "finger bowls and their ambiguous use."

Example Thirty-Three:

Miss Leslie's House Book, published in Philadelphia in 1840, refers to "Finger Glasses -- These are generally blue or green, and *are filled* with water and set round the table just before the cloth is removed. (187)

An E-Prime alternative might be "Generally blue or green, they hold water and servers set them round the table before removing the cloth." Although it meets the requirements of E-Prime, this is a poor revision because emphasis is now placed on the unknown servers or persons who place the glasses and remove the cloth.

The following six examples of passive use and their attendant revisions, which emphasize the unknown agents, further illustrate the difficulties in rewording the passive

into E-Prime in descriptive prose. In each case the suggested revision is clearly not as strong as the original statement:

Example Thirty-Four:

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries clear glass was often *tinged* green, as early manufacturers had difficulty obtaining sand free of minute traces of iron, which imparts a greenish tinge. (187)

E-Prime Revision: "In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, artisans often tinged clear glass green"

Example Thirty-Five:

Wineglasses of the Georgian period seem small by today's standards, but they were often *used* for toasts, usually at the end of a meal, when the contents were *drunk* at once and refilled for the next toast. (187)

E-Prime Revision: "Wineglasses of the Georgian period seem small by today's standards, but toasting was their most frequent use, usually at the end of a meal, when diners/toasters/people drank at once and refilled the glasses for the next toast."

Example Thirty-Six:

Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries wine was *served* from serving bottles or decanters. (187)

E-Prime Revision: "Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries people served wine from bottles or decanters."

Example Thirty-Seven:

Wine bottles themselves *were considered* unsightly (and there *is* a well-documented incident of an officer being cashiered for not observing the correct etiquette). (187)

E-Prime Revision: "Most people thought wine bottles themselves unsightly (and there exists a well-documented incident of an officer being cashiered for not observing the correct etiquette)."

Example Thirty-Eight:

The extraordinary capacity of glass to refract light, and its dual qualities of fragility and solidity, *were elegantly exploited* in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. (187)

E-Prime Revision: In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, artisans exploited the solidity and fragility of glass and its extraordinary capacity to refract light."

Example Thirty-Nine:

By the time Queen Victoria came to the throne, new techniques *were developed* and glassmaking entered a new phase in which decoration began to take precedence over form. (187)

E-Prime Revision: "By the time Queen Victoria came to the throne, artisans had developed new techniques, and glassmaking entered a new phase in which decoration began to take precedence over form."

The preceding six examples illustrate that by rewording the sentences into active constructions, the fictitious "people" or "artisans" gain prominence as the main subjects, instead of the glassware itself. While in virtually each of

the above thirty-nine examples of passive use in "English Glass" it is possible to reword the information in E-Prime, there are few instances where the revision either does not alter the original statement or improve upon it. In discussing and describing inanimate objects such as antique glassware, the passive voice is quite often necessary.

Limited Use of To Be

Of the eighteen descriptive articles studied, total usage of "to be," whether as a copula or auxiliary to form the passive voice and the progressive aspect, ranged from a low of 8 percent to a high of 46 percent. Table F indicates the percentages of overall use of "to be" for each article in order of frequency from lowest to highest.

As indicated previously, articles in travel periodicals generally contained fewer uses of "to be," while articles in nature and design periodicals relied more heavily on it. The subject matter and purpose of each article often seemed to dictate the style used. For instance, the main purpose of articles about travel was to entice readers to travel to the same locations and experience similar pleasant situations. For this reason, travel articles are written primarily in the present or historical present tenses. Articles in the nature periodicals dealt with subject matter in both the past and the present. The articles in the design magazines dealt with inanimate objects and therefore required more use of the passive voice.

Table F
OVERALL USE OF *TO BE* VERBS

<u>Article</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Percentage of <i>To Be</i></u>
Superior Drive	Travel	8 %
Branson	Travel	21 %
Loudoun	Travel	21 %
Green Fairways	Nature	24 %
Coast Highway	Travel	26 %
Menagerie	Design	27 %
Everglades	Nature	28 %
Bali	Travel	31 %
Survival	Nature	32 %
Grizzlies	Nature	33 %
Italianate Villa	Design	33 %
Little Birds	Nature	34 %
Elegance	Design	36 %
Holiday Table	Design	36 %
Mussels	Nature	39 %
Shingle House	Design	39 %
St. Petersburg	Travel	44 %
English Glass	Design	46 %
Average use of "to be" verbs in travel articles		25%
Average use of "to be" verbs in nature articles		31%
Average use of "to be" verbs in design articles		36%
Average overall use of "to be" verbs		31%

The articles with least usage of "to be" were all articles in travel magazines. In contrast to the other 17 articles, *Travel & Leisure's* "Superior Drive" relied on "to be" for only 8 percent of its verbs, a remarkably low figure; and the second and third lowest percentages also came from *Travel & Leisure*: "Branson" and "Loudoun" each claimed only 21 percent usage.

Let us examine "Superior Drive" in order to determine how the writer avoided using "to be." Personification is used quite frequently and to great effect:

Example Forty:

The arrowhead *trail tugs* me aside. (Griffin 44)

Example Forty-One:

Here houses and landscaping only partially screen the shimmering of *Lake Superior* beyond. It *beckons* and I will follow. (44)

Example Forty-Two:

Ruffled by the breeze, the *leaves*, glowing vermillion and gold, *dance* to the edges of rocky headlands and down foothills to crunchy beaches, all but *hissing* where the lake stops them cold. (47)

The article is also written primarily in the first person, employing simple active verbs to great effect:

Example Forty-Three:

I *drive* to where it ends beside McFarland Lake and *come* to a halt at a low wooden bridge beside a beaver dam. (44)

Example Forty-Four:

The car ticks as it cools, and the sound of it carries through the still air. (44)

Example Forty-Five:

A beaver bobs up at the lake's edge and paddles away. (44)

Example Forty-Six:

. . . the eerie call of a loon peals across the silvery waters, amplified by the lake's narrowness here, and heightened by its tranquility. (44)

There are only eight uses of the verb "to be," out of a total of 95 verbs in dependent and independent clauses in "Superior Drive," and each of these instances could easily be rewritten in E-Prime.

Example Forty-Seven:

Here, deep in the North Woods of Minnesota, 150 miles northeast of Duluth and just about a mile from Canada, the rasp of tires easing to a stop on gravel is an affront to the quiet. (44)

E-Prime Revision: "Here, deep in the North Woods of Minnesota, 150 miles northeast of Duluth and just about a mile from Canada, the rasp of tires easing to a stop on gravel *offends* the quiet."

Example Forty-Eight:

Hawks are up. Way up. They swirl in graceful patterns under a jet contrail so crisp it *could have been painted* across the sky with a fine camel hair brush. (44)

E-Prime Revision: "Hawks soar high in the sky. They swirl in graceful patterns under a jet contrail so crisp it appears painted across the sky with a fine camel hair brush."

Example Forty-Nine:

Today the water *is* sapphire out to the horizon, free of whitecaps but merrily thwacking the bows of tourist-laden charter boats. (47)

E-Prime Revision: "Today the water *appears/glows* sapphire out to the horizon, free of whitecaps but merrily thwacking the bows of tourist-laden charter boats."

Example Fifty:

Lake Superior, with 31,800 square miles of surface, *is* so immense that it brews its own weather. (47)

E-Prime Revision: "The immensity of Lake Superior, with 31,800 square miles of surface, causes it to brew its own weather."

Example Fifty-One:

The tallest, perhaps, but they haven't made much of an impression on Shovel Point, the monolithic slab of thylite that's *been jutting* out into Lake Superior for more than a billion years. (47)

E-Prime Revision: "The tallest, perhaps, but they haven't made much of an impression on Shovel Point, the monolithic slab of thylite that *has jutted* out into Lake Superior for more than a billion years."

Example Fifty-Two:

Beyond the town of Grand Marais, a road marked Highway 12 heads inland. It's *called* the Gunflint Trail, and it leads to heaven on earth. (47)

E-Prime Revision: "Beyond the town of Grand Marais, a road marked Highway 12 heads inland. Called the Gunflint Trail, it leads to heaven on earth."

Example Fifty-Three:

"There *is* about this place an undeniable divinity." (47)

E-Prime Revision: "An undeniable divinity abounds in this place."

"Superior Drive" is a first-rate article precisely as written; however, as indicated by the preceding seven examples (Examples 47-53), it might just as easily have been written entirely in E-Prime without losing any of its impact. This article clearly supports the many benefits claimed by advocates of E-Prime.

Summary of Findings

The articles in the design periodicals, *Architectural Digest* and *Art & Antiques*, relied the heaviest on overall use of "to be," with an average of 36 percent of all verbs falling into the "to be" category. Articles in nature periodicals, *Audubon* and *National Wildlife*, were second with an average of 31 percent; and articles in travel periodicals, *National Geographic Traveler* and *Travel & Leisure*, had the lowest usage of "to be" with only 25 percent. Within the category of "to be" verbs, the copula was used most frequently by the travel periodicals (64.5 percent), followed by the nature periodicals with 61 percent, and the design periodicals with 36 percent.

The progressive tense appeared more frequently in nature periodicals with 12 percent, followed by travel periodicals

with 8 percent, and design periodicals with only 1 percent. It would be expected that the progressive might appear more in nature and travel articles, which dealt with current events, and not in design periodicals which dealt with completed events or historical subjects.

The passive voice was used most by design periodicals with 48 percent, second by nature periodicals with 26.5 percent, followed closely by travel periodicals with 25.7 percent. This is not surprisingly because the articles in the design periodicals dealt with antiques and historical events and, thus, the passive voice was required more often.

CHAPTER THREE

Alternatives to E-Prime

Although himself a general semanticist, Emory Menefee views E-Prime as nothing more than a "purist language," which will probably gain little acceptance by actual language users, who adopt changes slowly, if at all, through a "poorly understood process of evolution and diffusion" (Menefee 196). Instead of attempting to comply with the stringent rules of E-Prime, Menefee advocates use of what he terms "E-Choice," wherein a language user becomes acutely conscious of the use and interpretation of "to be" verbs, eliminating those occurrences that might be deemed objectionable but allowing some use of "to be." After all, claims Menefee, one simply cannot substitute a mechanical device (the elimination of all forms of "to be") for the process of understanding.

Menefee particularly objects to Bourland's idea that the is-of-identity is pernicious because a tree seen one day is not precisely the same tree as seen another day. "The tree I look at today is," claims Menefee, "to an adequate approximation in my mind the same tree I saw yesterday [and] life is made somewhat more bearable to me by accepting this kind of identity" (200). To claim otherwise, he claims, borders on the absurd.

Instead of lumping everything into the is-of-identity and the is-of-predication categories, Menefee suggests that there should be various categories of the "is" of assertion:

Is of opinion: That painting is beautiful; Jack is an idiot.
Is of description: The pencil is green.
Is of approximation: The density of lead is 11.3 g/cc.
Is of labeling: My name is Jack.
Is of fact: Hoover was the 31st President of the U.S.
Is of equality: $1+1$ is 2; The velocity of light is constant. (198)

Menefee does not seriously propose a different "is of" for every possible usage, but suggests that one can remain aware of the abstractions in discourse and realize that "there is no such thing as exactness, but only assertions that have precision ranging from zero to very high" (201).

William Dallmann also advocates a modification of E-Prime, a form which he terms "E-Prime mod." The modification eliminates the is-of-identification (He is a general semanticist) and the is-of-predication (She is beautiful), but retains "is" as an auxiliary to form the progressive (She is dancing), the "is" of existence (To be or not to be), and the denial of identity (The map is not the territory) (Dallmann 134). Dallmann concurs with Menefee that although the value of E-Prime has not yet been demonstrated scientifically, it can still be conceived as a useful tool designed to increase our consciousness of abstracting (134).

E-Prime as Pedagogic Tool

Most general semanticists believe that the true merit of E-Prime lies in its pedagogic value. For example, in much the same way that diagramming sentences may clarify grammatical structure, writing exercises in E-Prime may help

students learn how to avoid unnecessary reliance on "to be" (Menefee 203). In *Classroom Exercises in General Semantics*, Ruth S. Ralph outlines a method for introducing E-Prime to adult English language students. Ralph first gives the students a short, overnight reading assignment which concerns the background and philosophy of E-Prime. The students are then instructed to write an 300-word essay, on any subject they choose, entirely in E-Prime. Students are advised to consult the dictionary first to be sure they are aware of all the uses of "to be." The finished essays are then read aloud in class so that others can hear precisely how "to be" was avoided (Ralph 62). Other introductory exercises in E-Prime might also include prohibiting the use of "to be" for a single hour in class discussion, or prohibiting students from writing it in any particular essay, letter or report.

Ralph's experience is that the subject matter students choose can make a big difference in facilitating the use of E-Prime. She notes that students who write descriptive essays, such as those describing passive, inanimate subjects like the Library of Congress or the King Tut exhibit, have much more difficulty writing in E-Prime than those who write about personal experiences. The exercise usually results in essays rich in action verbs and with fewer adverbs (63). Ralph claims that students usually agree that their writing improves in E-Prime because of lively descriptions, clearer thinking, and honest expression.

Philip Sabatelli demonstrates the principles of general semantics in classes from junior high through adult education in a 50-minute class period (Sabatelli 69). Sabatelli uses four index cards; one card contains the instruction "Signal any time you hear any form of the verb 'to be' used by any of the participants," and the other three cards contain the instruction "During the discussion which follows, you are not permitted to use any form of the verb 'to be.'"

The procedure for the exercise begins with three volunteers seated in front of the class. After the three students have agreed upon a topic for discussion, they are each handed an index card with the instruction not to use any form of the verb "to be" in their discussion, and they are asked not to reveal to the student audience what is written on the cards. The remaining index card with the instruction to signal whenever a form of the verb "to be" is heard is handed to one class member who acts as monitor during the discussion. Each time a panel member "fails" by using a form of "to be," he or she returns to the audience and is replaced by a new student from the audience. After a number of students have attempted the task, the audience is advised of the nature of the exercise, and the class discusses the consequences of eliminating "to be." Emphasis is placed on exactly how the panel members coped with the situation; how their language usage changed; and, specifically, what the characteristics of those changes entailed (Sabatelli 69).

In order to demonstrate the perils of the is-of-identity and the is-of-predication, Alice Grace Chalip brings to the classroom a slightly green banana in a closed, clear bottle and asks the students "What is this?" After the responses stop coming, she tells the class "But you still have not told me what this *is*." The purpose of the demonstration is not immediately explained to the class. Instead, Chalip brings the banana to class approximately once a week and repeats the procedure, adding "Is this the same banana?" By the time the banana becomes black and moldy, the students may argue that it *is* no longer a banana, and Chalip protests their "inconsistencies" (Chalip 57). Chalip follows up with a lecture on the is-of-identity, emphasizing the naming and categorizing process, and the is-of-predication and the opinions it fosters. After the lecture students complete a quiz on general semantics, in which they are first asked to identify sentences as containing either the is-of-identity or the is-of-predication, and then to rewrite the sentences without using "to be."

Conclusion

The overuse of the common verb "to be" can present many problems for speakers and writers of English. Alfred Korzybski, David Bourland, and numerous other philosophers and linguists have railed against the use of the verb, particularly when it serves as a copula and results in the offensive is-of-identity or is-of-predication forms, both of which may constitute finite statements of equivalency of fundamentally unequivalent facts or ideas. Because "the map is not the territory" (Bourland, "Semantics" 69), the use of "to be" may be severely limiting.

Although the use of "to be" as an auxiliary to form both the progressive aspect and the passive voice does not violate the teachings of general semantics, many general semanticists, most notably David Bourland and E. W. Kellogg, believe that the only way to avoid misusing "to be" is to forego its use altogether. They claim that the practice of E-Prime, the removal of all uses of "to be," will solve the is-of-identity and the is-of-predication problems; will make fallacious constructions more noticeable and thus easier to revise; and will foster a heightened degree of verbal consciousness, resulting in greater linguistic sensitivity and consciousness of abstracting. The E-Prime user will also achieve greater clarity in his or her writing because vanishing questions ("What is truth?) cannot be asked, nor can vanishing internal instructions ("I am a failure") be

stated. Abbreviated statements which begin with "It is" or "There is," which often contain little or no information, cannot be asked in E-Prime. Finally, the speaker or writer is forced to take responsibility for actions and statements.

Despite the claimed benefits of E-Prime, there are many linguists and educators who believe the practice is more harmful than beneficial. James D. French and others concur that E-Prime is especially disadvantageous because it prohibits the use of the progressive aspect and the passive voice, even in instances where they do not violate the principles of general semantics. E-Prime may also make the expression of higher orders of abstraction more difficult and may not always eliminate the structure of identity as claimed. The practice of E-Prime, claim its detractors, may actually result in poor writing because it provides fewer, not more, alternatives for variety in prose.

The examination of eighteen articles in travel, nature and design periodicals revealed that these professional writers of descriptive prose relied on forms of "to be" for an average of 31 percent of verbs in both dependent and independent clauses. Within the subject categories, writers in the design periodicals claimed the highest overall usage of "to be" with an average of 36 percent, while writers in travel periodicals chose "to be" verbs on an average of only 25 percent. The copula, and its attendant practice of the is-

of-identity and the is-of-predication, accounted for the highest percentage of use, with an overall average of 58.6 percent, and there were many instances where "to be" could easily have been replaced with a stronger copula. However, revision in E-Prime proved to be problematic and was found to be successful in only one-half of the twelve copula examples cited.

Five of the eighteen articles studied made no use of the progressive aspect at all, and the progressive appeared on an average of only 7.1 percent of the time. But the progressive proved to be more difficult to revise, since the only viable alternatives were to rephrase in the historical present (where appropriate) or to state that an action "continued to" be performed. Only four of eleven progressive statements could adequately be restated in E-Prime.

The passive voice accounted for an average of 33.8 percent of the overall use of "to be" in the articles studied; and although most of the passive constructions could be rephrased in E-Prime as active constructions, the results were not usually positive. Descriptions of inanimate objects, such as antique glassware, were less effective when the emphasis was shifted from the objects to the unknown makers of the glassware. The use of the passive voice was clearly preferable in many instances, particularly in articles in design periodicals.

The attempted revisions in E-Prime in this study provide proof that there are indeed many different ways to make a statement, and it is often the search for variety that results in better writing. The practice of E-Prime as an intellectual exercise has much merit; however, the simple reduction of reliance on "to be" probably has equal value. The key lies in understanding the various uses of "to be," not eliminating the verb altogether, and thus the practice of E-Choice or E-Prime mod may be just as beneficial.

E-Prime is a noble effort in helping writers understand why and how language can mystify and confuse, but language is only the messenger, not the message. Eliminating a verb, particularly such a common verb as "to be," is not the answer. Language users must understand the consequences of their word choices and stop thinking illogically in order to keep language from being illogical.

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