

**Student writers' strategies of using the English passive
voice for impersonalisation in their English Studies BA and
MA theses: Three case studies**

**Az angol szenvedő szerkezet alkalmazásának stratégiái a
személytelenség
elérésére hallgatói angol alap- és mesterszakos
szakdolgozatokban: Három
esettanulmány**

TDK

**Oszlovics Kitti
osztatlan tanárképzés
angol nyelv és kultúra tanára - etikatanár
Bölcsészet- és Társadalomtudományi Kar
Miskolci Egyetem
2024**

**Konzulens: Magnuczné Dr. Godó Ágnes
egyetemi docens, intézeti tanszékvezető**

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. The usage and the frequency of the English passive voice	4
3. Characteristic features of the English academic style	9
4. Comparison of strategies of passivisation and impersonalisation in Hungarian and English academic style.....	11
5. Difficulties faced by non-native learners of English regarding the correct usage of the English passive voice	13
6. The passive voice in academic writing: A triangulated investigation	15
6.1. Preliminary study	15
6.2. Aim and research questions	16
6.3. Participants	16
6.4. Methods, data collection and data	17
6.5. Results and discussion	21
6.5.1. What is the frequency of passive voice usage in the examined MA and BA theses as a whole, and, in the different sections (e.g., introduction, methodology, conclusion) in particular?	21
6.5.2. What are the common reasons behind the use of passive voice in the academic writing of Hungarian university students?	28
6.5.3. What are the functions of the passive voice in the present corpus perceived by the reader-researcher and according to the student writers?	30
7. Conclusion	60
8. Magyar nyelvű összefoglaló	63
Bibliography.....	67

1. Introduction

The passive voice tends to be a problematic part of English grammar as it might pose challenges for language learners both in terms of its formal complexity and culturally embedded expectations of its functional use in different stylistic registers. Hungarian learners of English are often faced with difficulties when using the passive voice as its scope and frequency differ in English and Hungarian.

Authors of academic writings are often advised to use an objective tone and impersonal structures, including, for instance, active sentences with impersonal subjects (e.g., the study presents an analysis of...) or the passive voice (Downing & Locke, 2006; Swales & Feak, 2012; Parrott, 2010; Scrivener, 2010; Benett, 2009). This is a highly challenging task, as it requires finding a balance between the expression of authorial presence and scientific objectivity (cf. author visibility and invisibility). Numerous studies have examined this topic (Ding, 2002, as cited in Khaganinejad et al., 2022; Ali Lubis & Miranti, 2024; Benett, 2009; Hyland & Jiang, 2017; Khaghaninejad, Azarian & Javanmardi, 2022; Abkas & Hardman, 2017), but relatively few focus on the characteristics of academic prose produced by Hungarian native-speaker students majoring in English (Károly, 2009). This study therefore aims to contribute to this area.

Three case studies will be presented, in which Hungarian English major thesis writers' decisions and strategies regarding their use of the passive voice in their BA and MA-level theses will be mapped out with the help of a triangulated research design. As the first line of investigation, the frequency of the passive finite verbs was counted in the three theses, and the intended academic functions of passive finite verbs were analysed. Although the present research is primarily concerned with the strategies guiding the usage of passive voice in BA and MA theses written by Hungarian university students, in the Introduction and Conclusion sections of the three theses, other tools used for impersonalisation are also examined (e.g. abstract rhetors which are terms like "*this paper*," "*the study*," etc. used in order to preserve an impersonal style without revealing the author's identity). Three case studies will be presented, in which the thesis writers' decisions and strategies regarding their use of the passive voice in academic writing will be mapped out with the help of a triangulated research design. As the first line of investigation, the frequency of the use of the passive finite verbs was also counted in the three theses, and the intended academic functions of passive finite verbs were analysed. Following this first phase, interviews were made with the authors to ask them about the reasons for the use of the passive voice in selected parts of their theses.

2. The usage and the frequency of the English passive voice

In most cases, the passive constructions are formed with the auxiliary *be* and followed by an *ed*-participle: “*Similarly, a polariser can be shown to act linearly*”. One key function of the passive voice is to downplay the importance of the verb’s agent while highlighting the affected patient as the main topic. The passive voice is not simply an equal alternative to the active voice- a number of factors might influence the use of the passive (e.g. discourse-, register-, lexical factors)- (Biber, Conrad, Finegan, Johansson, & Leech, 1999). In English, the passive voice is more common than in Hungarian; however, its usage is highly dependent on style, it serves specific functions which is not characteristic of passives used in Hungarian. The English passive voice is used in the following cases:

1. It is preferred to use a passive structure if the agent is unknown in the active structure.
Example: *I’ve been robbed. – Someone has robbed me* (Graver, 1986; Bailey, 2015; Byrd & Benson, 2001; Scrivener, 2010).
2. The passive provides a means of avoiding an awkward change of subject in the middle of a sentence, thus it allows us to maintain a good flow of ideas. Example: ***The Prime Minister arrived back in London last night, and was immediately besieged by reporters.*** – ***The Prime Minister arrived back in London last night, and the reporters immediately besieged him*** (Graver, 1986; Swan, 2016; Swales & Feak, 2012).
3. The passive voice can also be used when we want to express a statement impersonally.
Example: *The new working methods that are to be introduced may result in some redundancies.* — *The new working methods we have introduced will result in higher earnings for all workers* (Graver, 1986; Scrivener, 2010; Veselovská, 2019; Bailey, 2015)
4. Passives allow focusing on the result rather than the cause. Example: *The escaped convict was arrested two days later.* – *The police arrested the escaped convict two days later* (Graver, 1986; Bailey, 2015; Byrd & Benson, 2001; Swan, 2016; Scrivener, 2010).
5. Some actions, however, can be expressed naturally both in active or passive structures.
Example: *France beat England in yesterday’s rugby international.* – *England was beaten by France in yesterday’s rugby international* (Graver, 1986).
6. The use of the passive voice is also preferred when the identity of the agent can be inferred from general knowledge. Example: *The heart transplant was carried out successfully. [by one or more surgeons]* (Downing & Locke, 2006).

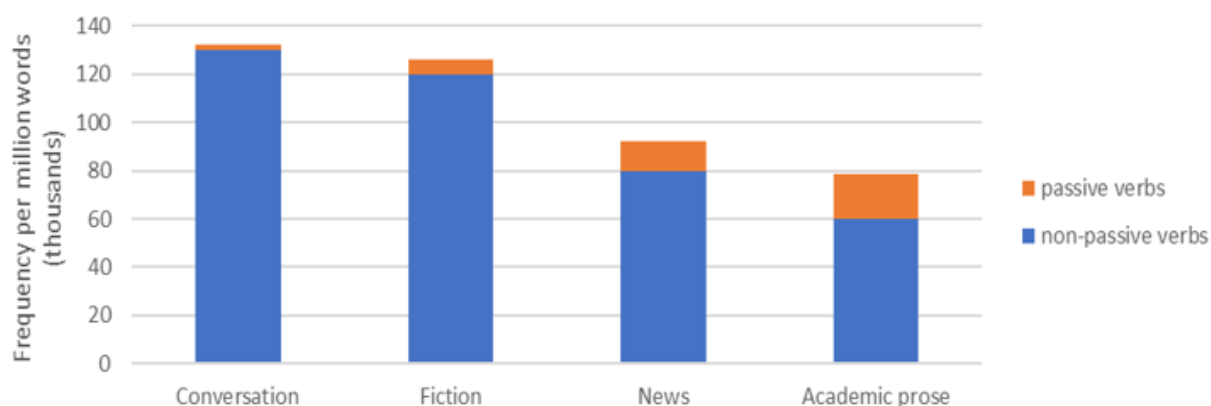
7. We might opt for the passive voice if the agent is universal or general. Example: *It is hoped that war can be avoided. [Everyone has this hope]* (Downing & Locke, 2006; Scrivener, 2010).
8. The passive voice can also be used when the identity of the agent is not relevant at a particular point in the discourse. Example: *Ten thousand soldiers will be needed to operate the emergency service* (Downing & Locke, 2006; Parrott, 2010).
9. The passive voice enables the speaker to intentionally to conceal the identity of the agent in order to deceive or-, avoid blame and taking responsibility. Example: *The documents have been shredded and the fax hasn't been sent* (Downing & Locke, 2006; Byrd & Benson, 2001; Scrivener, 2010; Parrott, 2010).
10. The passive structure can also be used to protect privacy. Example: *It was given to me as a present. [speaker doesn't want to reveal the Agent]* (Downing & Locke, 2006; Scrivener, 2010).
11. The passive structure can help avoid mentioning the authorial "I" in formal writing. Example: *This point will be dealt with in a later chapter* (Downing & Locke, 2006; Swales & Feak, 2012; Parrott, 2010; Scrivener, 2010).
12. A common reason for using the passive voice is placing new information at the end of a sentence, so that what we already know can come to the beginning of the sentence. Example: *"Nice picture." "Yes, it was painted by my grandmother."* (Swan, 2016; Veselovská, 2019; Huddleston & Pullum, 2005).
13. Longer and weightier expressions are processed more easily if they follow the subject and main verb in the sentence. Example: *"I was annoyed by **Emily wanting to tell everybody what to do.**"* (Swan, 2016; Biber, Conrad, Finegan, Johansson, & Leech, 1999)
14. We can use the passive voice in academic writing. Example: *Each virus stain is grown separately inside the eggs over the course of several days, after which it is harvested, inactivated, and purified* (Swales & Feak, 2012; Parrott, 2010).

It has been confirmed by many studies that the use of the English passive voice varies significantly across different registers, being most common in academic and scientific writing and least common in casual conversation (Granger, 2013, as cited in Biber & Reppen, 2015, p. 506).

Figure 1 shows the frequency of passives observed by Biber et al., (1999, p. 476) in the Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus, which consists of standard varieties of native

English from various English-speaking countries, and contains more than 40 million words of text.

Figure 1
Frequency of passive vs. non-passive finite verbs across registers



Passive structures appear the most commonly in the academic prose register, around 18000 times per million words. Passive structures frequently appear in the news register as well, around 12000 times per million words. In academic prose, passives account for around 25% of all finite verbs. What is conspicuous is that this proportion is only 2% in the case of the conversation genre.

An analysis of the proportion of active and passive voice predications in the different genres of the Brown Corpus (a collection of American English texts from 1961, categorized into various genres, designed to study linguistic patterns and usage) also showed that the passive voice is more frequently used in informative (press reportage, editorials, reviews; religion; skills and hobbies; popular lore; belles lettres; government documents and reports of various kinds; academic texts) than in imaginative prose (general fiction, mystery and detective, science fiction, adventure and western, romance and love story, humour). Within the informative genre, 21.95% of the academic texts were written in passive voice (Francis and Kucera, 1982, as cited in Kennedy, 1988).

An earlier corpus study done by Svartvik (1966) cited by Kennedy (1988) shows the usage of passive voice in different registers. That study showed that in scientific writings, 23.1 passives occur per thousand words. Svartvik also noted that in the case of passive voice, the primary factor influencing the frequency of its use appears to be the distinction between informative and imaginative prose, rather than differences in subject matter or between spoken and written language.

Other studies – with significantly smaller corpora – have also been conducted with the intention of trying to map the frequency of passive structures in different academic writings.

Bada and Ulum (2018) made a study about the frequency of passive constructions in English academic writing (Social Sciences, Natural and Applied Sciences, Health Sciences). They focused on the frequency of active and passive sentence constructions rather than the number of finite verbs. Their results suggest that the frequency of the passive structures (39%) in the overall analysis was lower than that of the active voice (61%). In Social Sciences, the ratio of active structures was 74% and 26% in the case of passives. The ratio of active sentences was 60% and it was 40% in the case of passive sentences in Natural and Applied Sciences. In Health Sciences, 51% of the sentences appeared in active and 49% in passive voice.

Leong (2014) studied the usage of passive voice in 60 original research articles from six well-known science journals. His unit of analysis was the clause. He found that around 30% of all clauses were passive clauses.

Subagio, Prayogo and Iragiliati (2019) studied passive voice usage in theses of graduate EFL students of Universitas Negeri Malang. They were focusing on the occurrences of passive voice suggesting that each instance of a passive structure was counted as a separate occurrence (basic passives, bare passives, modals, perfectives, to-infinitives, non-finite INGs and progressives). They found 1883 (61.64%) occurrences of active voice and 1171 (38.36%) occurrences of passive voice.

Fauziah and Bashtomi (2024) examined and compared articles published by journals originating in Indonesia (JOI) to research articles published by journals originating in English-speaking countries (JOE). They specifically focused on analysing the “Introduction” and “Methodology” sections. They justified this decision by stating that introduction sections contain more active voice, while the methodology sections contain more passive voice in general. They used a Passive Voice Detector, and they counted passive clauses. Their results suggest that passive voice appeared more in the methodology sections both in JOI and in JOE. They also found that the frequency of passive voice in JOI was higher than in JOE. In JOI, the frequency of passives in the “Introduction” section was 43.32%, and 57.98% in the “Methodology” section. In JOE, the frequency of passives in the “Introduction” section was 34.06%, while it was 46.92% in the “Methodology” section (Fauziah & Bashtomi, 2024).

The studies above indicate that in scientific written language usage, the proportion of passive structures is relatively high, around 30%. This trend highlights the role of the passive voice in academic texts, where it helps keep the tone neutral and emphasizes results rather than the people involved. Although studies report different percentages ranging from 26% to 58%,

there is a consensus that the passive voice is a key feature in academic writing, supporting a formal and objective style.

3. Characteristic features of the English academic style

Benett (2009) highlights that from an outside perspective, English academic style may appear to be a rigidly standardized and monolithic phenomenon. Indeed, it can be described as a “massive impersonal machine” (Benett 2009, p. 43), aimed at striving for uniformity and eliminating individuality. Benett’s research revealed that the books she examined (which dealt with definitions of academic writing or general principles) emphasized the following as important principles: clarity, economy and conciseness, objectivity and impartiality, rational argumentation, differentiation between facts and opinions, support for every argument with facts or evidence, and general caution or limitation regarding claims. The academic style is impersonal, formal, objective and it is often characterised by the usage of impersonal pronouns, phrases and passive verb forms (Jordan, 1999; Jordan, 1977, as cited in Károly, 2009, p. 6). Jordan (1999) also notes that when reporting research or making claims, authors tend to use cautious language in academic writing. Academic writings should also not be influenced by emotive language (Pagliawan, 2017, as cited in Khaganinejad, Azarian and Javanmardi, 2022, p. 120). Although the passive voice is more frequently used in academic discourse, some still suggest that it should not be overused (Bailey, 2006, as cited in Benett 2009, p. 48; Bailey, 2015).

Impersonalization, which is characteristic of academic writing, stems from the fact that social sciences follow the dominant model of natural sciences, which are dominated by quantitative research methods, and authors strive for generalizability and objectivity, thus also seeking to avoid any suspicion of subjectivity or bias (Benett, 2009). The use of expressions such as “the research was conducted” suggests that the research was carried out rigorously, with the researcher following specific procedures and protocols that can be replicated by anyone, and that the data revealed are accurate and clear (Brown, 2006, cited in Benett, 2009). However, several authors of the books examined by Benett (2009) advocate for the use of active voice and advise avoiding the passive voice. As essay writers, there are several ways to refer to ourselves: I, we, the present author, one. The use of “one” and “we” is considered by some to be avoided, as they create an archaic and pompous tone. To avoid personal pronouns, determiners (e.g., arguably), the passive voice, or personifying the essay by stating the agent (e.g., “this essay explains how...”) can be employed (Fabb & Durant, 2005, as cited in Benett 2009, p. 49). Some argue that today it is more of a matter of personal choice regarding which

form to use in our writing, and it is not possible to make generalizations about the issue as we once did (Levin, 2004, as cited in Benett 2009, p. 50).

4. Comparison of strategies of passivisation and impersonalisation in Hungarian and English academic style¹

Regarding the characteristic features of the Hungarian academic style, Veszelszki (2016) points out that the stylistic aspects of scientific writing differ across language families. While Benett (2009) emphasized that the English academic style should be simple and clear, speakers of Romance languages (Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Romanian) do not exclude subjectivity, linguistic complexity, or detailed elaboration from scientific texts. According to Veszelszki's observations, Hungarian academic writing falls between these two extremes (English and Romance). Key characteristics of the Hungarian scientific style include an individual tone, an effort toward objectivity, simplicity, and the preservation of the author's idiolect.

Both Hungarian and English have impersonalization strategies beyond the passive voice, but these play a much greater role in Hungarian, where they have essentially replaced the passive voice, whereas in English, they coexist as complementary structures. In Hungarian, impersonalization can be achieved through expressions (e.g., *fölösleges* 'unnecessary,' *hiábavaló* 'futile,' *hiba* 'error,' *szükséges* 'necessary,' *muszáj* 'must,' *szabad* 'allowed,' *érdemes* 'worthwhile') and verbs (e.g., *illik* 'becomes,' *kell* 'must,' *tetszik* 'pleases,' *sikerül* 'succeeds,' *nincs* 'is not,' *van* 'is,' *lehet* 'may'), which are used impersonally and are often accompanied by subordinate clauses or infinitives. These constructions can background or de-emphasize the agent. Such sentences are not truly subjectless, as the subject in these cases is the infinitive or the subordinate clause. However, they are often agentless, as the actual actor is not specified (Keresztes, 1995). Similar agentless expressions can also be observed in English, such as "*it is raining*" or "*there is a problem*". However, these exist alongside the passive voice, which continues to be widely used in scientific and journalistic styles.

Just like in English, in Hungarian we use the passive voice when we want to present an action without referring to the agent. Style dependence is a striking difference between the English and Hungarian passive structures. While in English, the passive is most commonly used in journalistic and scientific texts, in Hungarian, among the structures listed above, there are many more that are frequently used in everyday language, for example: instead of "*I broke the vase*" ('*eltörtem a vázát*'), we might say "*The vase is broken*" ('*eltört a váza*'). This difference in usage scope could also be a potential difficulty in language teaching. The passive structure in both

¹ I synthesized research findings on the passive structure in earlier publications (Oszlovics, 2024a; Oszlovics, 2024b).

English and Hungarian not only differs in its structure but also in its functional use. The agent can be backgrounded in several ways. Therefore, The Hungarian passive voice is used when:

1. the identity of the agent is not exactly known,
2. the identity of the agent is obvious,
3. the subject of the sentence is not presented as the actual doer,
4. we do not want to reveal the identity of the agent for reasons of politeness, evading responsibility, etc. (H. Varga, 2015).

5. Difficulties faced by non-native learners of English regarding the correct usage of the English passive voice

As pointed out above, one way to sound, formal and impersonal can be using the passive voice. Previous research proves that the passive voice is crucial in academic writing since it helps authors emphasize their scientific objectivity rather than their subjective, personal views (Ding, 2002, as cited in Khaganinejad et al., 2022). The expectations for impersonality in scientific writing can vary significantly across languages (Veszelszki, 2016), posing a substantial challenge for language learners. This is often due to insufficient language proficiency and a lack of experience with the conventions of academic style in the target language. Moreover, many learners have not mastered the characteristics of scientific writing even in their native language, and differing stylistic expectations can further contribute to interference.

Károly (2009) compared experts' research articles and Hungarian EFL students' writing in English MA theses regarding the author identity. She concluded that there is a significant gap between students' statements regarding academic discourse and their actual writing practices. The interviews made with the students indicate that they are aware of the conventions of the style in English academic writing, but they cannot apply these rules. Károly concluded that linguistic and cultural factors might be just as important as the apprentice status of the students or the instruction they receive.

The usage of the passive voice may pose some difficulties for academic writers, especially for example, novice EFL (English as a Foreign Language) writers with Hungarian L1 (first language) backgrounds. The reason behind this might be the significantly lower frequency of use of the passive voice in Hungarian than in English (Károly, 2009). Furthermore, Ali Lubis and Miranti (2024) reviewed experimental studies that compared the effects of active and passive voice on reader comprehension in English academic writing. The studies they reviewed showed reduced readability, slower processing and lower comprehension scores when the texts were written in passive voice. The reason behind these "negative results" may be that the writers' performance on the passive voice was worse on grammatical errors, comprehension questions and coherence rating than on the active voice. This means that passive voice is more likely to cause confusion and incomprehensibility.

What further complicates the situation is the fact that expectations of formality, objectivity and impersonalisation may vary across disciplines as well. While traditionally the use of the third person or passive voice is characteristic, the use of the first person in academic

writing is already on the rise (Benett, 2009). For example, in their study of changing patterns of stance marking in academic journal articles written in English, Hyland and Jiang (2017) concluded that academic discourse in the science and engineering disciplines has become less formal in recent years, while the tendency for impersonalisation has increased in the humanities and social sciences. A decline in the use of passive voice in different academic texts was also revealed in the study of Khaghaninejad, Azarian and Javanmardi (2022). The increase in informal features can relate to the changing rhetorical practices “which support greater efforts to involve readers in arguments and secure support for their claims through positioning themselves more explicitly in relation to their ideas and readers” (Hyland & Jiang, 2017, p. 49).

When examining the functional use of the passive voice in a text, it is not only about the knowledge of a grammatical structure. At the level where someone is writing a thesis and presenting their own research, the question of author identity also arises—how the author wishes to present themselves in the text; whether through active structures with self-identifications or through passive structures for the sake of impersonalization and generalizability. Akbas and Hardman (2017) explored the notion of explicit (*I* and *we* instances) and implicit (passive and impersonal instances) representation of postgraduates (Turkish native speaker, Turkish speakers of English and English native speakers) as the novice writers in social sciences. They examined the discussion sections of completed master’s dissertations. Akbas and Hardman found that the Turkish authors writing in their mother tongue and in English as a foreign language (EFL) favoured the use of impersonal constructions (such as passive voice or inanimate subjects) to minimize their author visibility. The English native writers, however, chose to create a more self-prominent academic prose. The fact that the Turkish authors felt a greater need to present themselves more objectively in both Turkish and English than the native English-speaking authors suggests that there are cultural factors influencing the choice of the representation of authorial identity.

Károly (2009) concluded that linguistic and cultural factors, along with students’ apprentice status, influence their ability to use academic conventions. This suggests that Hungarian EFL students may face similar challenges when using the passive voice effectively for impersonalization, indicating that the difficulty lies not only in understanding the passive’s function but also in integrating it naturally into their academic writing.

6. The passive voice in academic writing: A triangulated investigation

This chapter begins by presenting the results of a preliminary study that explored the difficulties Hungarian university students majoring in English encounter when using the passive voice in English. Following this, the case studies are presented in detail.

6.1. Preliminary study

A preceding study laid the foundation for the current research and inspired me to examine the students' actual linguistic output. This study (Oszlovics, 2024a; Oszlovics, 2024b) aimed to investigate challenges faced by Hungarian native-speaking university students majoring in English when using the passive voice in English. The research addressed several questions, including students' ability to recognize various forms of the passive voice, its stylistic prevalence across registers, and the shifts in topic-comment structure during active-to-passive transformations in both Hungarian and English.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire completed by 47 first-, second- and third-year university students, primarily from the University of Miskolc. The results revealed several important findings. In certain example sentences, nearly half of the students (46.8% and 42.6%) struggled to identify different forms of the passive voice in English. Furthermore, many students were unaware of the prevalence of the passive voice across different stylistic registers, with only 40.4% recognizing that it is most common in the academic genre. When it came to identifying the topic-comment shift in their native language, 48.9% of respondents were successful, while 36.2% failed to do so. A similar trend was observed in English, where 66% of participants correctly identified the shift, but 40.4% misinterpreted the topic-comment positioning. Most participants demonstrated an understanding of the stylistic function of agent omission in journalistic and academic writing, with 65% recognizing it in the former and 70% in the latter. Additionally, 63.8% of students reported using the passive voice frequently in their academic work, though some avoided it, citing the simplicity of the active voice as their reason. Finally, 36.2% of students felt they had not received sufficient instruction on the form and scope of the passive voice, while those who felt adequately informed rated the instruction positively.

Overall, the study revealed that the functional use of the passive voice poses a challenge for Hungarian English major, underscoring the need for more targeted instruction in its use, particularly within academic contexts. These findings inspired a deeper exploration into how

learners utilize this structure in their academic writing and how various factors influence their use of the passive voice.

6.2. Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to explore the use of the passive voice in the BA and MA theses of Hungarian university students who have completed a BA or MA in English. By applying a triangulated approach—combining interviews with text analysis—this study seeks to provide an understanding of the passive voice in academic writing. The research is guided by the following questions:

- 1) What is the frequency of passive voice usage, particularly in different sections (e.g., introduction, methodology, conclusion) of the MA and BA theses written in English by Hungarian university students?
- 2) What are the functions of the passive voice in the present corpus perceived by the reader-researcher?
- 3) What are the student writers' reasons for the use of the passive voice in their English academic writing?
- 4) How do Hungarian university students perceive the appropriateness or necessity of using the passive voice in different sections of their academic theses (e.g., introduction, conclusion, literature review)?

6.3. Participants

The participants of this study consisted of Hungarian university students who had recently completed BA (English studies graduate) or MA (English teacher graduate) degrees in English at the University of Miskolc. In the interest of protecting privacy rights, I use pseudonyms.

The first participant was Andrea, who entered the short-cycle, four-semester English teacher training program with a master's degree in violin teaching and a C1-level English language proficiency certification. Although she wrote her MA thesis on adult language learning, incorporating empirical methods (survey-based data collection), psychological constructs (self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, attribution), and a focus on adult learners, her formal academic background in English language and culture was not longer than that of the two BA participants in the study.

The other two theses are BA theses. The second participant, Bella, graduated with a (single-major) bachelor's degree in English studies. She wrote a research-based linguistics thesis on bilingual and multilingual language acquisition. It involves empirical methods (data collection through questionnaires), investigates the role of environmental and parental factors, and focuses on the bilingual/multilingual language development of children.

The third participant, Cézár also graduated with a (single-major) bachelor's degree in English studies. His thesis was based on a comparative film and literature analysis. His paper emphasizes cinematic techniques used to interpret and recreate the original literary work. It explores media-specific storytelling while discussing how the film balances fidelity with its own artistic innovations.

The participants joined the research at my invitation. Only authors of papers whose theses were graded with a five were included, indicating that they presumably mastered the formal requirements of academic writing in English to an optimal degree. All three subjects participated in the interviews.

6.4. Methods, data collection and data

This study employs a triangulated approach, which means involving more than one data collection method and/or researcher perspective to enhance the reliability of the investigation (Stavros & Westberg, 2009, as cited in Fusch et al., 2018, p. 20). Four categories of triangulation can be identified: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1970, as cited in Fusch, Fusch and Ness, 2018, p. 22). The present mixed-methods study is a between-method or across method triangulation, that is the data are triangulated through the combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. (Denzin, 1970, as cited in Fusch et al., 2018, p. 22). One advantage of the application of triangulation is that it can enhance the reliability of the study results (Stavros & Westberg, 2009, as cited in Fusch et al., 2018, p. 20).

The investigation involved the following steps:

- 1) First, a quantitative statistical overview was conducted of the occurrence of passive finite verbs in three selected academic theses written by Hungarian university students. The frequency and distribution of passive voice constructions were analysed in the whole text and then across various sections of the theses (introduction, literature review, methodology and research, conclusion). It is important to mention that Molino (2010),

as cited in Akbas and Hardman (2017, p. 144.), suggests that authors can balance personal expression and objectivity by using metonymic or possessive expressions (such as “this paper”) as “abstract rhetors”, maintaining authorial presence without relying too much on subjective phrases. The frequency of the use of such abstract rhetors in the Introduction and Conclusion sections of the theses will also be shown.

Collectively, the three theses comprised a total of 36,611 words. To determine the frequency of passive voice constructions, the total number of finite verbs in each thesis was counted manually. Then, the number of finite verbs used in passive voice was also counted. Andrea’s thesis contained 1141 finite verbs, out of which 218 were passives. Bella’s thesis consisted of 760 finite verbs out of which 154 were passive verbs. In the case of Cézár, out of the 1039 finite verbs in his thesis, 121 were passives. The total number of finite verbs used in passive voice was filtered with different methods. First, each finite verb used in the passive voice was examined in two sections of each thesis: the introduction and the conclusion. I chose to examine all the finite verbs in passives in these sections for two reasons: firstly, these two sections are relatively short in length making it easier to go through all the verbs systematically. Secondly, both the introduction and conclusion parts of a thesis seem to be interesting when it comes to academic writing. Usually, both sections are likely to be a little less objective since the authors are supposed to either state their expectations or make claims based on the results of their research.

- 2) Secondly, an analysis was performed in connection with the functional use of selected passive finite verbs related to describing the research process and expressing opinions. From these two types of verbs, I extracted the most frequently used ones and addressed them (each verb with each of their occurrences) in the interviews. This section is a discourse analysis, in which the selected functional verbs were analysed from a reader-researcher perspective. The discourse analysis aspects of the passive verbs were defined based on the functions described by the linguists mentioned in the literature review section (Bailey, 2015; Biber et. al, 1999; Byrd & Benson, 2001; Downing & Locke, 2006; Graver, 1986; Huddleston & Pullum, 2005; Parrott, 2010; Scrivener, 2010; Swan, 2016; Swales & Feak, 2012; Veselovská, 2019). Table 1 shows the concise criteria for analysing passive voice usage in the three theses:

Table 1
Criteria for analysing the passive voice usage in the three theses

Criteria for Passive Voice Use	Key Characteristics
1. Unknown agent	Agent is unspecified; e.g., “The report was published last week.”
2. Flow maintenance	The passive provides a means of avoiding an awkward change of agent in the middle of a sentence, allowing to maintain a good flow of ideas.; e.g., “Data were collected, and anomalies were identified.” (Compare with: “The research team collected data, and the software identified anomalies.”)
3. Impersonal statement	Avoids a personal stance, typically reflecting the opinion or belief of specific individuals (e.g., researchers, authors) without explicitly naming them. This usage differs from the universal agent case, where the belief is generally accepted by a wide audience; e.g., “It is believed that climate change will have significant impacts on biodiversity.”
4. Focus on result	Emphasizes outcome over cause; e.g., “The theory was developed based on extensive research.”
5. Agent assumed from context	The agent is not explicitly stated but can be inferred from the context or general knowledge. In academic and scientific contexts, this often implies that the researchers, authors, or relevant professionals are the agents performing the action; e.g., “The decision was made to proceed with the experiment.”

6. Universal agent	Agent is universally known or general; e.g., “It is widely accepted that social media influences public opinion.”
7. Irrelevant agent	Agent unimportant; e.g., “The results were published in several peer-reviewed journals.”
8. End-weight principle	Longer or more weighty expressions, referring to the agent, are typically placed in the second half of the sentence, after the main verbs for ease of processing. e.g., “The survey was completed by practicing teachers with minimally 20 years of teaching experience in higher education.” (Compare with: “Practicing teachers with minimally 20 years of teaching experience in higher education filled in the survey.”)

- 3) Thirdly, a qualitative interview study was conducted exploring writer decisions about the use of passive structures. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the authors of the theses. Semi-structured interviews are often used in qualitative research and tend to be preferred as they make the interviews focused while also permitting the interviewer to explore new topics with the help of open-ended questions based on the interviewee’s responses (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The interview questions were sent to the interviewees prior to conducting the interviews enabling them to think through their answers and prepare in advance. The interviews explored the student writers’ decision-making processes, perceptions of the passive voice, and the strategies they employed when choosing between passive and active voice constructions. Some questions were presented to all three of the authors, while most of the questions were designed specifically for individual authors. The questions created specifically for the individual authors were based on the selected finite verbs used in passive (and sometimes active) voice. The interviews were conducted in Hungarian with all participants, and the extracts from the interviews are going to be shown in my own

translation. The interviews were audio recorded with the prior consent of the participants. The interviews were 20 minutes and 56 seconds, 39 minutes and 50 seconds, and 43 minutes and 36 seconds long. The research took ethical considerations into account: participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous, and that they could withdraw their consent to participate at any stage of the research. As the potential strategies of passive voice use from the researcher's perspective were analysed, my observations were also compared with the authors' ideas.

6.5. Results and discussion

6.5.1. What is the frequency of passive voice usage in the examined MA and BA theses as a whole, and, in the different sections (e.g., introduction, methodology, conclusion) in particular?

Figure 2 shows the proportion of passive and non-passive finite verbs collectively in the three theses:

Figure 2
Proportion of the passive and non-passive finite verbs in the three theses

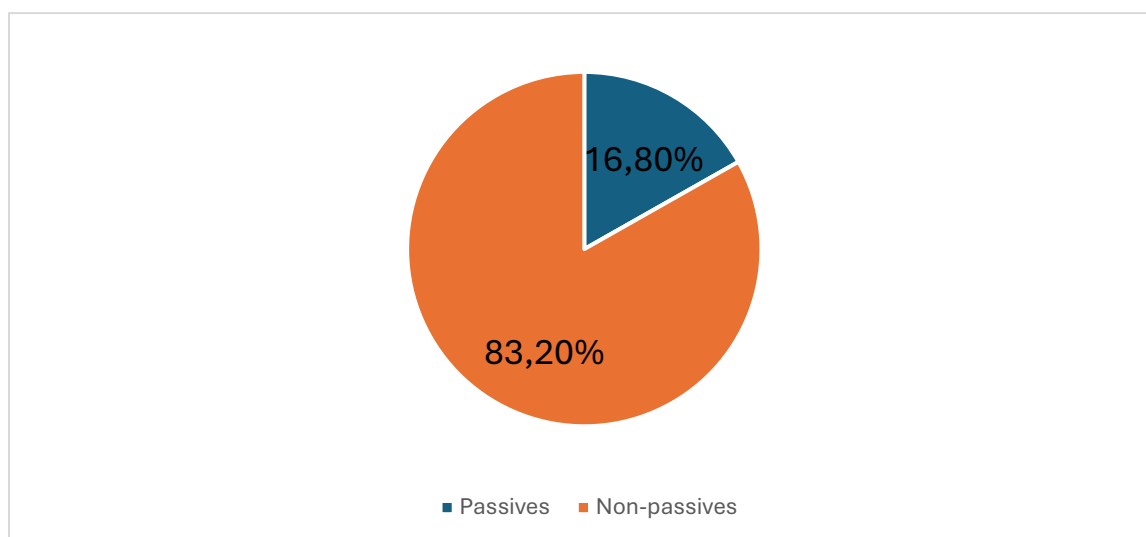
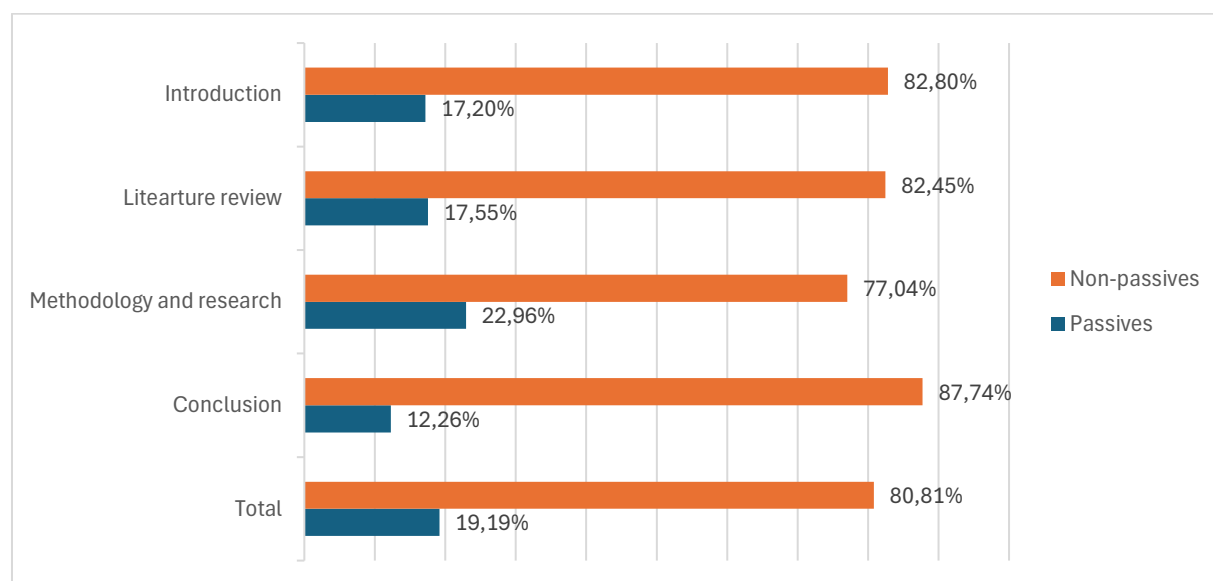


Figure 2 shows that only 16.8% of all finite verbs were passives and 83.2% of all finite verbs were used in the active voice. This percentage is relatively low, particularly when compared to other academic writings where the passive voice is typically more prevalent. While

Károly (2009) does not specifically analyse passive structures, her findings imply that Hungarian students may not consistently apply conventional academic practices, which could include the passive voice. Her study might partially explain why Hungarian students use non-finite passives less frequently than experts or more inconsistently (e.g. due to linguistic challenges or instructional limitations). As it has been pointed out, according to Biber et al. (1999), passives account for around 25% of all finite verbs in native English academic prose. The three theses written by Hungarian university students altogether do not contain as many passive structures as the average frequency of occurrence academic writings observed by Biber et al. (1999). Biber et al. (1999) provide an overall proportion based on academic texts from various disciplines, where the ratio may differ across specific fields. Additionally, since these case studies involve novice writers, they may not yet use the passive voice as confidently for impersonalization as expert writers do. As this paper is going to show later, in one of the three analysed theses the first-person singular is used quite frequently, in another thesis the first-person singular is only occasionally employed, while in the third thesis there is hardly any use of the first-person singular. It is also important to note that the limited use of the passive voice does not necessarily indicate a lack of objectivity or impersonalization in the theses. There are alternative methods for achieving impersonalization which can help maintain a formal and objective tone.

Figure 3 shows the passive and non-passive finite verb proportions in different sections of the thesis of Andrea:

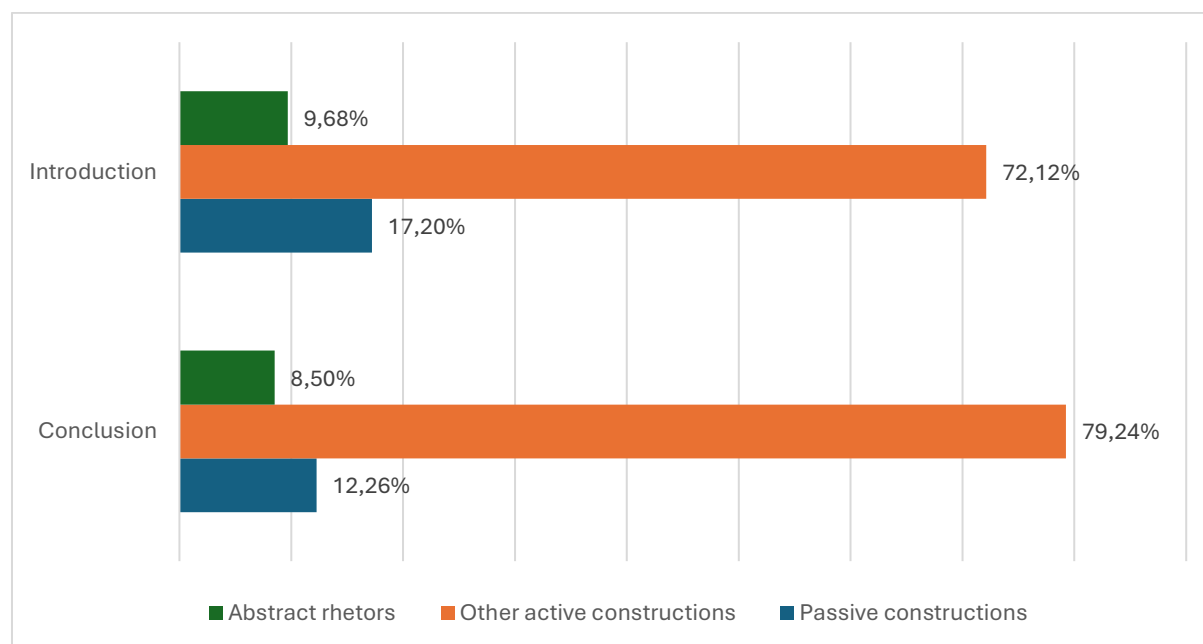
Figure 3
Frequency of passive occurrences in the thesis of Andrea



As it is indicated by figure 3, the introduction and conclusion sections contained the smallest proportion of passive finite verbs. In the former one, the author used 17.20% of finite verbs in passive, while in the latter one 12.26% of all finite verbs were used in passives. In the literature review section, the ratio of passive finite verbs is almost identical (17.55%) to that of the introduction. The largest proportion of passive finite verbs appeared in the methodology and research part, where 22.96% of all finite verbs were used in passives. Altogether (in the introduction, literature review, methodology and research, and the conclusion sections), Andrea used 19.19% of the verbs in the passive voice throughout the thesis. Andrea used the largest proportion of passives in the methodology section of her thesis, which supports the statement of Fauziah and Bashtomi (2024), according to which the methodology sections generally contain a higher proportion of passive voice.

Figure 4 shows the ratio of the use of abstract rhetors, the passive voice and other active constructions in Andrea's thesis:

Figure 4
The ratio of the use of abstract rhetors, the passive voice and other active constructions in the Introduction and Conclusions sections of the thesis of Andrea



Andrea's reliance on abstract rhetors in both sections suggests she consciously employed objective phrasing. In the Introduction, she used expressions like "chapter 2 highlights", "chapter 3 explores", "chapter 6 includes" etc. in 9.68% of the cases. In the Conclusion, she used expressions like "this study investigated", "the research concentrated on", "the research opens up", "the study opens up", etc. in 8.50% of the cases. Out of the three authors, Andrea used the most abstract rhetors as another alternative to sound objective and impersonal.

Andrea's use of both abstract rhetors and passive voice constructions suggests a layered approach to objectivity.

Figure 5 shows the passive and non-passive finite verb proportions in different sections of the thesis of Bella:

Figure 5
Frequency of passive occurrences in the thesis of Bella

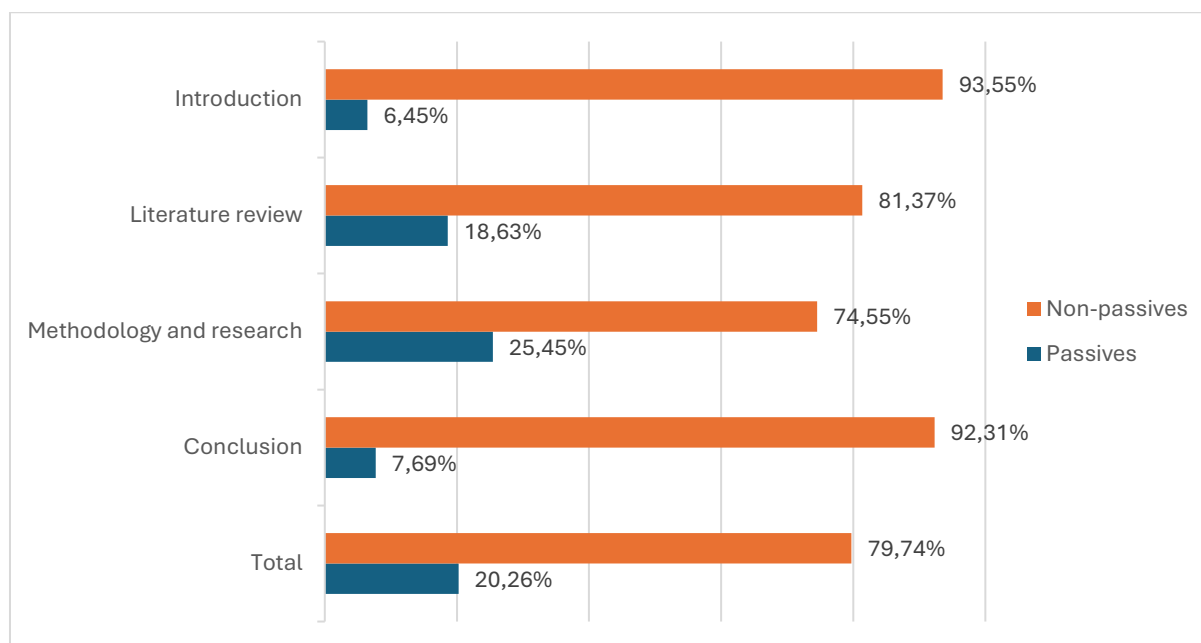
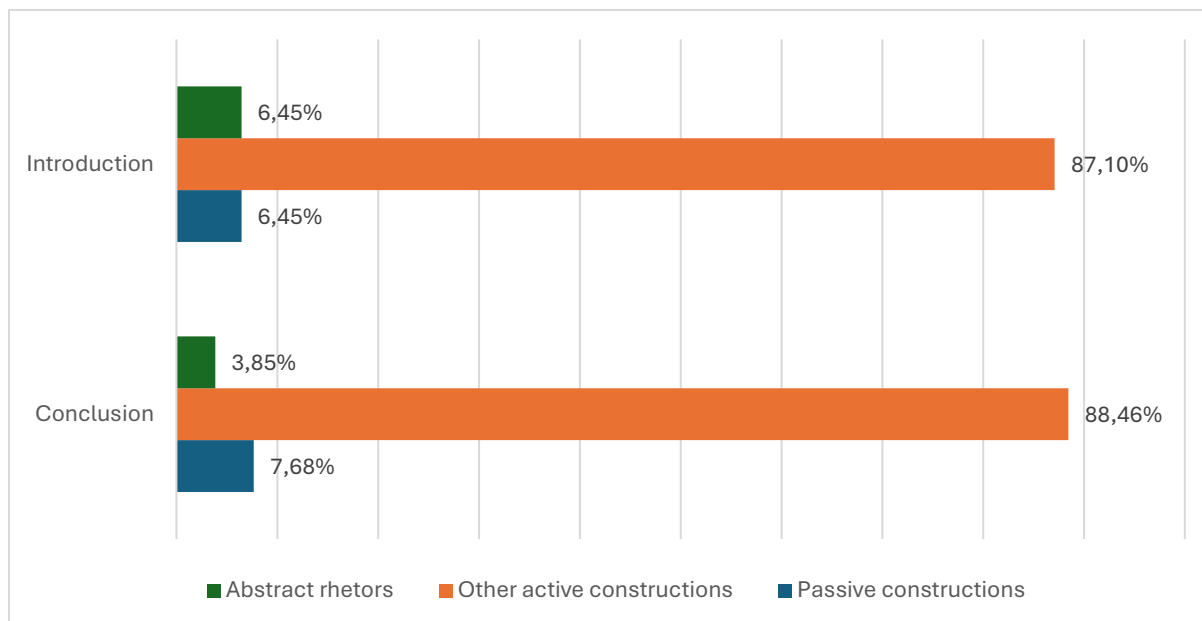


Figure 5 indicates clearly that the author used the passive voice differently in each section. In the introduction and conclusion sections, the frequency of the use of passive voice is notably low, 6.45% and 7.69%, respectively. In the literature review section, there is a higher representation of passive voice: 18.63%. The methodology and research section shows the highest proportion of passive voice with 25.45%. The proportion of the passives in the methodology section aligns with the proportion of passives in the academic writing provided by Biber et al. (1999). Overall, on average, 20.26% of the finite verbs were used in the passive voice throughout the thesis.

Figure 6 shows the ratio of the use of abstract rhetors, the passive voice and other active constructions in Bella's thesis:

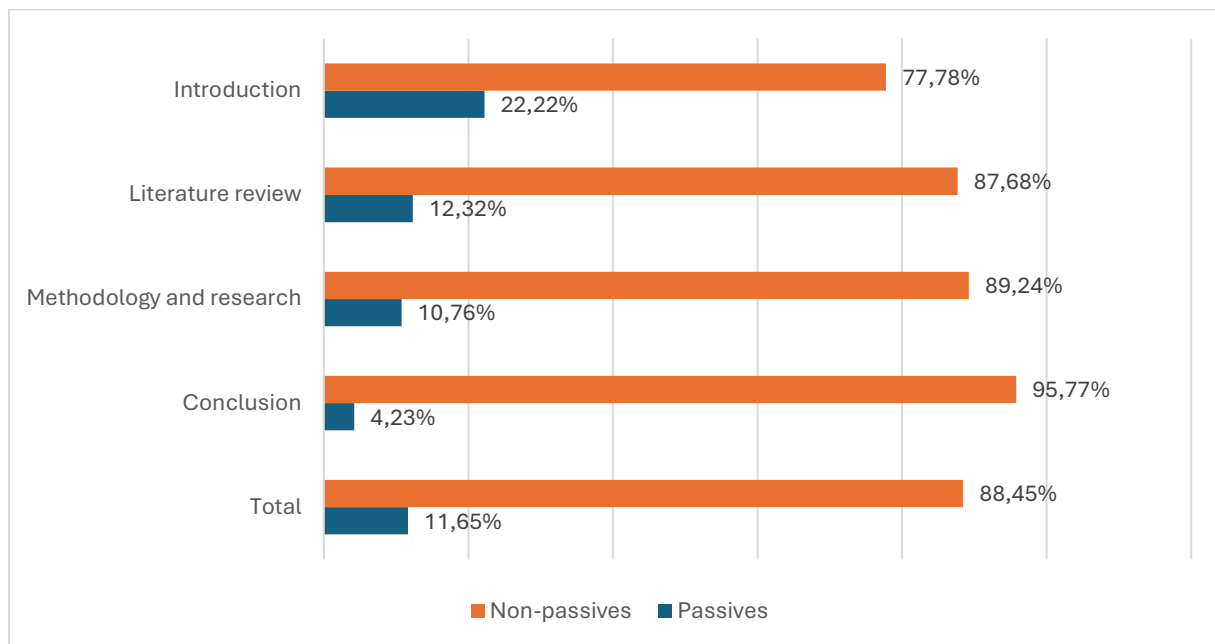
Figure 6
The ratio of the use of abstract rhetors, the passive voice and other active constructions in the Introduction and Conclusion sections of the thesis of Bella



As figure 6 shows, Bella used a small proportion of abstract rhetors, with 6.45% in the Introduction and only 3.85% in the Conclusion section of her thesis. In the Introduction, she used expressions like “this paper would like to suggest” and “this research has shown”. In the Conclusion, she used the following expression: “as the result of the research has shown”. In these two sections, she tended to use other active structures rather than abstract rhetors or the passive voice. Given that Bella used both options (abstract rhetors and the passive voice) to sound impersonal, we can conclude that she is aware of the style and tone of the academic writing.

Figure 7 shows the passive and non-passive finite verb proportions in different sections of the thesis of Cézár:

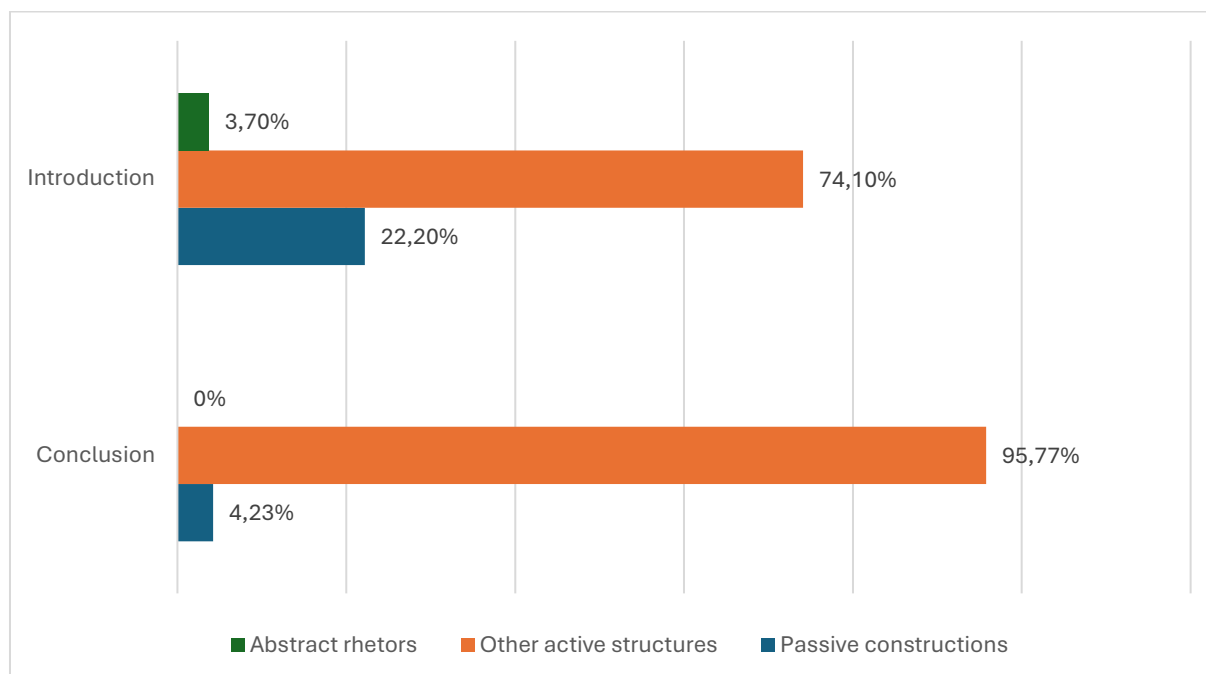
Figure 7
Frequency of passive occurrences in the thesis of Cézár



Surprisingly, the ratio of passives in the four sections in Cézár's thesis largely differs from the previous two theses. The author used the most passive constructions in the Introduction section, with 22.22%. Each passive occurrence in the Introduction part was used to convey information about the analysed film adaptation rather than the personal thoughts of the author. In the literature review part, 12.32% of the finite verbs were used in passives, and in the methodology and research part, this ratio was approximately identical to the literature review with 10.76%. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the thesis of Cézár lacks a clear distinct "methodology and research" section. Instead, his personal contributions were embedded throughout the thesis without any clear headings to indicate his thoughts. Thus, it was necessary to consult with Cézár to determine which sentences and paragraphs belonged to the "methodology and research" part. The author used the lowest proportion of passive constructions in the conclusion part, where only 4.23% of the finite verbs were used in the passive voice. Overall, in the introduction, literature review, methodology and research, and conclusion sections, the fact that Cézár used only 11.65% of verbs in passive voice suggests a clear preference for active structures over passive ones. It is likely that Cézár has a much stronger drive to prove that these were his own thoughts and his own conclusions. This shift may be attributed to the less explicit nature of the research components in Cézár's work compared to the other two theses. The lack of verbs typically associated with conducting research may have further contributed to the perception of the thesis as being less objective.

Figure 8 shows the ratio of the use of abstract rhetors, the passive voice and other active constructions in Cézár's thesis:

Figure 8
The ratio of the use of abstract rhetors, the passive voice and other active constructions in the Introduction and Conclusion sections of the thesis of Cézár



As figure 8 shows, Cézár almost completely avoided using abstract rhetors in these two sections. There was only one example for it in the Introduction: “this paper will examine”. He did not use abstract rhetors in the Conclusion at all. Out of the three authors, he insisted on the use of other active constructions the most. While both Andrea and Bella used abstract rhetors to varying degrees, Cézár's (almost complete) avoidance of them could reflect a distinctive academic style or a different disciplinary expectation. The low representation of abstract rhetors and the passive voice may suggest, on one hand, that the author either does not know how to use these structures confidently and therefore consciously avoids them (as evidenced by the overall low frequency), or that the author is deliberately aiming for a more dynamic, personal, and less objective writing style. The above observations also guided the individual content of the interviews.

6.5.2. What are the common reasons behind the use of passive voice in the academic writing of Hungarian university students?

In this section of the paper, the answers to the common interview questions related to general writing strategies of personalisation and impersonalisation are going to be discussed. First, each author was asked the same four questions:

- a. How did you ensure that the thesis remained objective and academic in tone?
- b. Did you consciously use the passive voice in your thesis? If so, why?
- c. How important did you consider it for your personal opinion to be reflected in the thesis? And in which part of the thesis?
- d. If you were to rewrite your thesis now, would you change anything about the use of passive structures? If yes, what and why?

With the help of *question a)*, the authors were asked to explain how they ensured that the thesis remained objective and academic in tone.

Andrea said she tried to avoid using personal pronouns. She also tried to phrase objectively and avoid contractions, idioms and phrasal verbs, and she also used the passive voice.

According to Bella, reading many different academic articles and other research meant a fertile ground for her thesis. She claimed that the formal articles have certain characteristics she tried to follow, for example, she used the passive voice. She wanted to phrase her ideas as concisely - but still informatively - as possible. Besides, she avoided mentioning herself, because she remembered that they had a class where they were learning about this. There, they were told that they could be a little bit more subjective in the introduction section, but, personally, she chose not to mention herself in the introduction section either because she thought it was not relevant.

As Cézár stated, “I thought of something and then my teachers either confirmed it or they corrected it.”

Comparing the three answers, we can conclude that Andrea relied most heavily on her existing knowledge of the disciplinary expectations in academic writing, Bella emphasized the importance of academic writing models, while Cézár sought to find a balance between authorial identity and academic objectivity during consultations with supervisors.

Question b) asked the authors whether they consciously used the passive voice in their theses, and if they did, what principles they followed.

Andrea said she thought she used it consciously to some extent, because the passive voice is a significant part of the formal style. But she admitted that sometimes she did not use it deliberately.

Bella said she tried to follow the rules of passive voice, for example, she used it primarily when the agent was irrelevant, not known, or obvious. She also mentioned why she thought that the proportion of passives was low in her thesis: *“Most part of the thesis is about Chomsky’s analysis, and because these are his thoughts, I thought it would not make my thesis less objective to use active voice when describing his thoughts. In his case, it is relevant who said it, and I was quoting him.”*

Cézár stated that in a sense, he used passives consciously, as his teachers and consultant had pointed out to him that *“a piece of academic writing cannot be written without any passive voice in it”*.

Examining the three answers to question b), we might conclude that perhaps Bella is the most conscious student in terms of actively seeking examples in the literature for the practical application of the passive voice learned in language classes. In contrast, Cézár’s case confirms the assumption that there is uncertainty regarding the function of the passive voice, as reflected in the overly simplified thought presented in the quote.

Question c) asked the authors how important they considered it for their personal opinions to be reflected in the theses and in which section.

Andrea did not find it too important, however, she said it can be found in the thesis to some extent. But because it was supposed to be objective research, she did not want to lay emphasis on her own perspective. According to Andrea, her personal opinion can be found in the conclusion and the introduction.

Bella stated she did everything order to minimize her presence in the thesis, because she did not want subjectivity to weaken her paper. She said there was one part titled “A Comprehensive Review of Arguments for the Innateness Hypothesis”, where her style of argumentation and maybe even her personal opinion could be found. She stated that she did not find it important at all to include her personal opinion, as she is not a professor with a great expertise to confidently state her thoughts.

Cézár noted that he must have felt it important to include his own thoughts. He added that he felt that the Introduction turned out well as it is objective, compact and concise, but apart from that one thesis statement stating the aim of the paper, there are no independent thoughts in it (that is, he mostly presented information taken from other sources).

With regard to question c), Andrea felt it was not very important to include her personal opinion as she aimed to prioritize research over her personal views. Bella also sought to minimize her presence to avoid subjectivity weakening her thesis. While she identified a section where her argumentation style appeared, she did not consider it essential to include her opinions, given her lack of expertise. In contrast to Andrea and Bella, Cézár placed much greater emphasis on including his personal opinion in his thesis.

Question d) explored if they would change anything about the use of the passive structures if they had the chance to rewrite their theses now. If the answer was yes, they were also asked what and why they would change.

Andrea stated that she would not change the passive constructions, but if she could change something, she would probably use the first-person singular when presenting her own opinion.

Bella said she would not change anything in the use of passives and actives. She only remarked that she could have phrased in a more diverse way with the passive voice sentences, for example, she could have tried to find more synonyms for expressions like “was concluded”.

Cézár stated he was not able to answer this question, because if he were to rewrite it, he would probably not have an “aspect” (like the passive voice) in mind to guide him throughout the thesis.

It is worth noting that, of the three authors, only one had a more defined strategy for implementing author (in)visibility and appeared satisfied with their approach afterward. In contrast, Andrea, who followed less conscious principles, was not completely satisfied with the way she implemented authorial presence. She struggled to find the balance between authorial presence and academic objectivity. Meanwhile, Cézár clearly uses academic writing as a platform to showcase his own creative ideas, so any expectations related to impersonalization do not play a central role in his planning process.

6.5.3. What are the functions of the passive voice in the present corpus perceived by the reader-researcher and according to the student writers?

First, the reader-researcher observations (containing the criteria for analysing the passive voice usage) are going to be discussed. Then, the authors’ responses to the interview questions are going to be elaborated. The list of the examples of the passive occurrences is going to be

included. Next, the authors' explanations and my discourse analysis are going to be compared to reveal any potential differences or similarities between the authors' ideas and the reader's observations.

First, I will present the discourse analysis of Andrea's thesis.

In the Introduction of Andrea's thesis, 17.20% of the finite verbs were formulated in the passive voice (1-12).

- (1) „Foreign language learning **is considered** an integral part of education and an essential component in our lives.”
- (2) „However, learning a new language in adulthood **can be associated** with numerous challenges.”
- (3) „**It has been argued** that there is a close link between achievements and the individual's beliefs.”
- (4) „Motivation also plays a crucial role as far as adults' language learning **is concerned**.”
- (5) „There are also integrative and instrumental motivations which have their own roles in language learning that **need to be taken into account...**”
- (6) „Their level of self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation as well as failure and success attribution **will also be explored** and the correlations between these features and success **will also be examined**.”
- (7) „The challenges that they face and the correlations between the extent of students' success and their self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation and attribution **will also be revealed**.”
- (8) „Moreover, the level of students motivation **were influenced** by their test results, self-efficacy and their cultural connection to the language that **is studied**.”
- (9) „Therefore, I also anticipate that an important relationship between attribution, self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation and the self-perceived success **will be revealed** in adult language learning.”
- (10) Taking these findings into account tailored interventions and strategies **could be developed** in the future that would ultimately promote more successful foreign language acquisition in adulthood.”
- (11) “Chapter 5 includes results and discussion where the results of the questionnaire **are analysed and discussed**.”
- (12) “It explores how adults define success and to what extent they consider themselves successful which **is followed** by investigation of the degree of self-esteem and self-efficacy...”

The analysis suggests that in the case of verb phrases such as (1) *is considered*, (2) *can be associated*, (3) *has been argued*, and (5) *need to be taken into account*, the author is essentially conveying her own opinion/perspective in an *impersonalized* form. Example (4) *is concerned*, suggests a general agent and does not contain an element of personal opinion. The verbs (6) *will also be explored*, (6) *will also be examined*, (7) *will also be revealed*, (8) *is studied*, (9) *will be revealed*, (11) *are analysed and discussed*, and (12) *is followed* are phrases related to the process of conducting the research, which authors typically place in the passive voice in academic writing to sound *impersonal*. The passive verb phrases suggest that the procedures were systematically implemented and are thus reliable and repeatable even though they clearly represent the authors own research design and activities. In the case of (8) *were influenced*, the author presumably used the passive voice to apply the *end-weight principle and to avoid a long, inanimate agent into subject position*. The use of (10) *could be developed* in the passive voice is likely to shift the *focus to the action* (the development of interventions) and the generality.

First, Andrea was asked about the reasons why she chose to use the passive voice in each case (1-12). For (1) *is considered*, Andrea said she wanted to sound more objective. In the case of (2-3) *can be associated*, *has been argued*, *is concerned*, she stated that she had included someone else's opinions, and this must have affected her style: she wanted to put the focus on what was said. In the example (5) *need to be taken into account* and (8) *were influenced* she stated that one reason for this phrasing might have been the fact that she did not want to quote literally. In the case of (6-7) *will also be examined*, *will also be revealed* she said she was highlighting her own ideas, and she wanted to make her phrasing more diverse using passives. She did not remember why she used passive voice in (10). In the case of (11), she mentioned that in the context there were active structures, so she might have tried to be more diverse in style. Regarding example (12), she said she might have used the passive voice because that sounded the best.

Comparing my analysis with Andrea's explanations, the reader-researcher observations suggest different reasons for the use of passives in most cases. According to a reader-researcher point of view, the potential reasons or motivations behind the use of passive voice were to try to make universally valid statements without mentioning the agent, end-weight principle and focus on results. In comparison, Andrea mostly attributed her choice of passives to trying to be more diverse and trying to avoid literal translations. It is noteworthy that although Andrea did not use the passive voice based on clearly conscious decisions, she was still largely able to fulfil the functions expected in academic prose.

In the Conclusion of Andrea's thesis, 12.26% of the finite verbs were formulated in the passive voice (13-24):

- (13) „This study **was aimed** to explore various aspects of adult language learning.”
- (14) „However, it **can also be seen** that reaching the desired level of proficiency as well as overcoming obstacles are also important goals for adults...”
- (15) „It **was evidenced** by their confidence, risk-taking willingness and willingness to seek help while those learners who perceived themselves less successful demonstrated lower level of self-esteem.”
- (16) „The differences in results regarding integrative motivation among the 3 groups **can be explained** by individual differences.”
- (17) „Regarding attributions, those participants who perceived themselves successful **were tended** to attribute their success and failure to both internal and external factors.”
- (18) „...it was not evident that either the dependent or the independent factor **would be considered** important as far as their success in language learning **was concerned**.”
- (19) „It **can be seen** that communicative aims are the highest priority for most language learners.”
- (20) „It means that students **are mostly motivated** by practical reasons to learn the language.”
- (21) „Considering the limitation of the present research, it **was conducted** with a relatively small sample size of adult language learners...”
- (22) „Therefore, larger and more diverse samples **should be included** in the future studies...”
- (23) „Those additional factors that may influence self-esteem and motivation as well as success and failure attribution **can be explored** in future studies...”
- (24) „Moreover, strategies that **could be implemented** to boost self-esteem and motivation in the classroom could also be an important field for further investigations.”

It appears that the verbs (13) *was aimed*, (14) *can be seen*, (15) *was evidenced*, (16) *can be explained*, (18) *would be considered*, (18) *was concerned*, (19) *can be seen*, and (21) *was conducted*, are mostly related to procedures of conducting the research, which authors typically place in the passive voice in academic writing to make *impersonal statements about their own activities*. Examples (22) *should be included* and (23) *can be explored* pertain to future perspectives, and here one of the purposes of the impersonal phrasing is for the author to outline potential research directions not only for themselves but also for other researchers. In the case of (20) *are mostly motivated*, the author presumably used the passive voice because the *focus*

was on the result and on the motivating factors (also end-weight principle). In example (24) *could be implemented*, the author suggests that the results of this research, as well as the questions raised here for further investigation, are also relevant for others. The case of (17) *were tended to* is interesting, as the phrase 'tend to' does not need to be in the passive voice; it would be more linguistically correct to phrase the sentence as follows: “*Regarding attributions, those participants who perceived themselves as successful tended to attribute their success and failure to both internal and external factors.*”

I asked Andrea why she chose to use the passive voice in each case (13-24). She said she had tried to sound formal in (13) *was aimed*. In (14-16) *can be seen, was evidenced, can be explained* she said she either had tried to be more diverse or that was how these sentences sounded the best for her. In (17-18) she said she could best express what she had wanted to say with the passive voice. In (19), she stated she had wanted to sound formal and diverse by employing both active and passive voices. In examples (20-24) *are mostly motivated, was conducted, should be included, can be explored, could be implemented*, she used the advantages of passive voice like putting the emphasis in the results by not mentioning the agent.

The reader-researcher observations aligned with Andrea's explanations in some cases, e.g. avoiding specifying a concrete agent, which would have been irrelevant or simply wanting to sound formal and objective. Example (17) *were tended* is likely just a mistakenly learned structure as it is not quite correct linguistically, and she could have simply used the active voice here. The uncertainty regarding the conscious use of functions is noticeable, alongside the instinctive usage that results in relatively well-executed, recognizable functions.

Next, those verbs are going to be listed and examined that are related to describing the research process and to expressing opinions and which were the most frequently used in Andrea's thesis.

The verb “**explore**” is used both in active and passive voices in Andrea's thesis:

(25) „*In this study, **I would like to** focus on English language learning in adulthood and **explore** the relationship between these features and the self-perceived success of foreign language learners.*” Active voice

(26) „*Their level of self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation as well as failure and success attribution **will also be explored** and the correlations between these features and success will also be examined.*” Passive voice

(27) „*...while Chapter 3 **explores** those features including students' mindsets, attributions, self-esteem, motivation and self-efficacy that influence success.*” Active voice

- (28) „3.1 **explores** motivation, 3.2- self-esteem, 3.3- attribution-beliefs that influence success and 3.4 highlights self-efficacy.” Active voice
- (29) “It **explores** research questions, hypotheses and data collection...” Active voice
- (30) “It **explores** how adults define success and to what extent they consider themselves successful...” Active voice
- (31) „Extrinsic motivation **was also explored** in question 8.5.” Passive voice
- (32) „The language learners’ self-esteem and self-efficacy as far as language acquisition is concerned **was also explored** in the questionnaire.” Passive voice
- (33) „Question 8.6 **explored** the students’ risk-taking willingness based on the assumption that more confident speakers are willing to take more risks as well.” Active voice
- (34) „Question 8.3 **explored** whether the learners feel motivated to learn and improve their competence in the chosen foreign language.” Active voice
- (35) „Question 17.3, which **explored** whether the participants would want to work/study abroad, was also a Likert-scale question.” Active voice
- (36) „Integrative motivation **was explored** through questions 17.7, 17.8, 17.9, 17.10, 17.11 and 17.12.” Passive voice
- (37) „Persistence **was also explored** through question 10.2.” Passive voice

It can be inferred that Andrea used the personal pronoun “I” in (25) *I would like to...explore* in order to claim ownership of her research. Then she shifts to the use of passive constructions (26) *will also be explored*, (31) *was also explored*, (36) *was explored*, (37) *was also explored* due to the objective, impersonal tone. When she subsequently uses the verb 'explore' in the active voice (27) *chapter 3 explores*, (28) *1.3 explores*, (29-30) *it explores*, (33) *question 8.6 explored*, (34) *question 8.3 explored*, (35) *question 17.3...explored*, she does not make herself (“I”) the subject, but rather the thesis or a part of it (*chapter 3, question 17.5*). These examples show how “the visibility or invisibility of authors in texts may be realised by ... metonymic expressions functioning as “abstract rhetors” (e.g. this paper)” (Molino, 2010 as cited in Akbas and Hardman, 2017, p. 144). Thus, despite using the active voice, she is able to remain more objective and distance herself.

I asked Andrea to explain why she decided to use two different voices (25-37). She said that in example (25), she simply wanted to tell what she wanted to do and that is why she chose the first-person singular with the active voice. Regarding example (26), she said the decision might have not been conscious. In the case of examples (27-30), she stated that she might have thought that they sounded the best in the active voice, but she did not necessarily think it through. In examples (31-32), she wanted to make impersonal statements. In examples (33-35), she

acknowledged that she used the active voice, but she still made sure not to sound too subjective by using inanimate subjects. In examples (36-37), she simply said she found these phrasings the most appropriate.

Correlating my insights with Andrea's statements reveals that in some cases the two views aligned (for example with the use of "I" she acknowledged she wanted to claim ownership of her research, and by using abstract rhetors she wanted to maintain the objective tone. However, in some cases Andrea admitted that her decisions were not always conscious and sometimes she relied on what "sounded good". For example, in examples (36-37), the analysis suggested that Andrea aimed to phrase her ideas objectively, while in the interview, she claimed that she found the passive structures the most appropriate. These cases also confirm that the passive voice is often used intuitively, but it still produces functions that are fairly well-executed and identifiable.

Andrea used the verb "**examine**" both in active and passive voices throughout her thesis:
(38) „...success attribution will also be explored and the correlations between these features and success **will also be examined**." *Passive voice*

(39) „Instrumental motivation **was examined** through questions 17.2 -17.5..." *Passive voice*

(40) „...the participants' responses related to the mentioned categories **were examined**." *Passive voice*

(41) „The responses of the participants from the previously formulated three categories **were examined**..." *Passive voice*

(42) „The questions **were examined** separately..." *Passive voice*

(43) „Regarding motivation, the **questions examined** various types of motivations, such as integrative and instrumental as well as intrinsic and extrinsic." *Active voice*

(44) „In order to get a more accurate picture, **we need to examine** the additional questions as well." *Active voice*

(45) „This study ...**it** also **examined** the relationship between self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivations,..." *Active voice*

(46) „The reason of these differences can be various, for example the cultural differences among the groups **I examined** and groups in the previous research, individual variations, and the small sample size of the participants in my study." *Active voice*

The analysis indicates that the passive structures were included in the paper to maintain impersonality and a neutral tone. In the first active example, (43) *the questions examined*, the author placed a part of the paper (*questions*) in an active position, thereby keeping the objective tone while using an active verb form. The second active example (44) *we need to examine* helps

engage the reader while clearly stating the author's aim. In the third active example (45) *it examined*, the use of the active structure combined with an abstract rhetor again aims to remain objective. In the fourth active example (46) *I examined*, the author's authority is established, emphasizing the originality of the research conducted by the author and also distinguishing her own contribution from the other studies in the field.

I also asked Andrea why she used the verb “**examine**” in both passive and active constructions. In examples (38-42), she stated she had wanted to phrase in a diverse way while also making impersonal statements. In example (43), she emphasized that due to the inanimate subject she could still be objective. In (44) she said she might have tried engaging the reader, but she was not quite sure why she had used this expression. In example (45) she wanted to sound impersonal. Regarding example (46), she admitted that she was not sure why she used the active voice.

Comparing the analysis and Andrea's explanation, we can see that Andrea was not sure about some of her decisions. Also, the fact that she often justifies the usage of the passive voice by aiming to phrase her ideas in a “diverse” way, suggests that she might consider the passive voice to be a tool of structural variety in a block mainly containing active verb phrases. However, the reader-researcher analysis and her explanation aligned in most cases, such as the use of abstract rhetors and the use of passives to sound impersonal, and in the case of engaging the reader in (44) *we need to examine*.

Andrea used the verb “**focus**” in both active and passive voices in her thesis:

(47) „***I would like to focus** on English language learning in adulthood...*” Active voice

(48) „***Questions 9 to 13 focused** on attributions.*” Active voice

(49) „*The following two **questions focused** on the participants' success in language learning.*” Active voice

(50) „***Questions 14 and 15 were focused** on the encountered difficulties and failures of the language learners.*” Passive voice

(51) „*Questions 5 and 6 concentrated on success, while **questions 14 and 15 were focused** on difficulties and failures.*” Passive voice

(52) „***Question 5 was focused** on defining success.*” Passive voice

(53) „***Questions 14 and 15 were focused** on the difficulties and failures of the learners.*” Passive voice

(54) „*...various **questions of the questionnaire were focused** on the students' degree of self-esteem...*” Passive voice

(55) „**Question 7** was a Likert-scale question that **focused** on how confident language learners feel when they communicate in a foreign language.” Active voice

(56) „**The last question** related to self-esteem **focused** on the students' willingness of asking for help/ support when facing language learning challenges.” Active voice

(57) „**Question 17.6** also **focused** on intrinsic motivation and explored whether they enjoy language learning.” Active voice

(58) „**The answers that focused** on the independent factor were as follows...” Active voice

(59) „**Questions 12.1, 12.2, 12.3, 12.4, 12.5 and 12.6** **focused** on learner -independent attributive factors.” Active voice

With the exception of one personal subject, every other active sentence structure contains an abstract rhetor, which functionally serves the same impersonalizing role as the passives. This clearly demonstrates that the use of active sentence structures alone does not equate to a more dynamic presentation of authorial presence. From this perspective, it is understandable that the explanation for using the passive voice was solely structural variety, as even with her active structures, she conveyed impersonality. Regarding the verb ‘focus’, it is probable, that the two different voices were not intentional especially because the structure “*questions were focused*” is not particularly good from a language usage perspective.

Andrea was asked to explain the use of two different voices regarding the verb “focus”. Regarding example (47), she said she must have wanted to emphasize what she did. In examples (48-49) and (55-59) she used inanimate subjects with the active voice to remain impersonal. In examples (50-54) she explained she aimed to phrase her ideas in a diverse way.

Juxtaposing my analysis with Andrea’s responses, apart from “were focused”, the two reasonings predominantly aligned.

Andrea uses the verb “**calculate**” in both active and passive voices:

(60) „...the average value **was calculated** for each category...” Passive voice

(61) „The average values of the categories **were calculated** and compared with the previously calculated success value.” Passive voice

(62) „The responses of the participants from the previously formulated three categories were examined, and an average value **was calculated**, resulting in the following...” Passive voice

(63) „The average of all results related to self-efficacy **was also calculated** for a clearer interpretation.” Passive voice

(64) „The questions were examined separately, averages **were calculated**, and finally...” Passive voice

(65) „...the average values of the responses **were calculated**...” Passive voice

(66) „The average value of the responses to all questions related to instrumental motivation **was calculated**.” *Passive voice*

(67) „**I calculated** average values for the responses, and finally, both the dependent and independent factors were compared with the level of success.” *Active voice*

(68) „The responses were categorised, then average value **was calculated** and compared with the participants’ perceived success rate.” *Passive voice*

It appears that the examples using the passive voice (60-66) and (68) *was calculated* support the objective, *impersonal* tone while clearly suggesting the author’s agency. The example with the active voice (67) *I calculated* is “unique” in its context, as the author used passive voice and active voice with abstract rhetors throughout the surrounding text. Therefore, in this single case, the isolated use of “I” might indicate an effort to claim ownership of her research. However, in the same sentence Andrea used the passive voice with the verb “compare”, thus this shift to active voice can also indicate that it might have not been an entirely conscious decision.

Andrea was asked to explain why she used both voices with the verb “calculate”. She said she used the passive examples to sound objective, while she could not explain why she used that one active example.

Comparing my analysis with Andrea’s response, no difference in the explanation for the use of the two voices could be found, apart from that one active voice structure about which she was not sure.

Andrea uses the verb “**compare**” in both active and passive voices.

(69) „The average values of the categories **were calculated and compared** with the previously calculated success value.” *Passive voice*

(70) „Afterwards, **I compared** the results with the three categories used for comparison...” *Active voice*

(71) „To investigate the degree of intrinsic motivation of the participants, the average values of the responses were calculated and they **were compared** with the three categories, such as...” *Passive voice*

(72) „The average value of the answers **was also compared** with the students’ perceived success rate” *Passive voice*

(73) „I calculated average values for the responses, and finally, both the dependent and independent factors **were compared** with the level of success.” *Passive voice*

(74) „...the three categories, namely successful, moderate, and unsuccessful, **were compared** with these obtained values.” *Passive voice*

(75) „The responses were categorised, then average value **was calculated and compared** with the participants' perceived success rate.” *Passive voice*

It can be inferred that the examples using the passive voice (69) and (71-75) ‘was/were compared’ support the objective, *impersonal* tone. The active voice example (70) ‘I compared’ is “unique”, as passive structures were mostly used in the surrounding text, therefore in this case, the use of the active voice might indicate an effort to claim ownership of her research.

I asked Andrea why she used the verb “compare” both in active and passive voices. For examples (69) and (71-75), she stated that she used the passives to be formal and impersonal. In the case of (70), she said she was not sure, but probably that choice seemed the best at that time.

Comparing my observations with Andrea's explanation, it can be concluded that the reasonings aligned in the two viewpoints. The only difference was again, the use of the active voice, which – according to Andrea's explanation – might have been intuitive.

Andrea uses the verb “**investigate**” in both active and passive voices.

(76) „Despite the fact that integrative and instrumental motivation can also be both intrinsic and extrinsic, **the research** did not extend to examining this, and it only **investigated** them as separate categories.” *Active voice*

(77) „The questions were examined separately, averages were calculated, and finally, the response values for each type of motivation **I investigated** were averaged based on these types.” *Active voice*

(78) „The statement from in **question 8.4 investigated** what language learners think about developing their language skills” *Active voice*

(79) „Instrumental orientation **was also investigated** in the questionnaire.” *Passive voice*

(80) „**Question 17.11 and 17.12 investigated** whether the respondents are motivated by finding the speakers of English-speaking countries attractive...” *Active voice*

(81) „**Question 10.3, which investigated** the participants' thoughts about consistency...”

(82) „These **questions investigated** whether respondents attribute their success or failure to external factors...” *Active voice*

(83) „**Question 12.6 that investigated** luck as an independent factor influencing success showed no significant differences between the groups.” *Active voice*

The analysis suggests that the examples (76) and (78) and (80-83) contribute to objectivity and *impersonality* by using the passive voice or inanimate subjects with the active voice. However, there is an active example with the subject “I”. In the case of this example (77), the author may have used the active voice to avoid further complicating an already lengthy

sentence with a passive structure. Additionally, the author's authority and emphasis on the originality of the work might be relevant here, as this is otherwise a functionally unnecessary subordinate clause. In (79), she might have tried to sound *impersonal* by using the passive voice.

Andrea was asked to explain why she used both voices in the above examples (76-83). She stated that she used the passive examples and the active ones with an inanimate subject in order to sound objective and impersonal. She said that using the active voice with the first-person pronoun in example (77) was essential, because she could not have expressed herself better with other structures.

Comparing the analysis with Andrea's explanation, it can be concluded that in most cases she used the passive voice to create an impersonal style while describing her research questions.

Throughout Andrea's paper, it was noticeable that a relatively large number of passive structures were used. For example, in the "Research" section of the paper, 22.96% of the main verbs are formulated in the passive voice:

(84) „...the following research questions **were formulated**...” *Passive voice*

(85) „More detailed information can be found in table 2, where the questions **are classified and grouped** by the studied categories.”

(86) „Based on the responses, the students **were put** into three groups...” 30.old

(87) „Self-efficacy **was also measured** in the questionnaire” 33.old

(88) „...**there was not significant difference discovered** between moderately successful and successful participants...” 37.old

The analysis suggests that examples (84-88) include verbs that are related to conducting research, which authors typically use in passive voice in academic writing to achieve objectivity and an *impersonal tone*.

I asked Andrea why she chose to use the passive voice relatively frequently in the "Research" section of her thesis. She said the use of passives was very conscious, because she wanted to keep a formal tone. She also mentioned how she had prepared a lot for her Cambridge language exam, and there she could practice the formal writing style a lot.

My analysis identified passive voice use as a strategy for conveying objectivity in research-related verbs, and Andrea's explanation confirms this intention. She does not always use passive constructions consciously but rather instinctively, drawing on her experience. However, these choices effectively contribute to creating an objective, impersonal style.

The last noteworthy detail in her thesis was -despite the fact that Andrea barely used any active sentences with the subject being “I”- how there was still one whole paragraph (89) in the Conclusion section, in which “I” as a subject was used in almost each active sentence:

(89) „During my research, **I encountered** the most challenges in processing the questionnaire, because many open-ended questions yielded a significant amount of unusable "partial information," especially in the case of attribution questions. If **I could start again, I would formulate** the questions related to attribution even more clearly. As an aid, for example, **I would include** the meaning of attribution. This might help participants formulate more precise answers to the open-ended questions regarding attribution. In the Likert-scale questions, **I would also provide** a uniform set of options for responses, as this could simplify the data processing later.”

In this paragraph, towards the end of the paper, the author probably aimed to emphasize that the paper is the result of her work and sought to create a slightly personal tone by mentioning the difficulties she as the author faced.

During the interview, I asked Andrea why she decided to write a whole paragraph with first-person pronouns, and she claimed that she was aiming for objectivity in the Conclusion section as well, however in that specific paragraph, she intended to describe her personal experiences. Because of that, she felt it was more appropriate to use first-person pronouns with the active voice.

Next, I will continue the discourse analysis with the thesis of Bella. Bella used 6,45% of the finite verbs in the passive voice in the Introduction section:

(90) „With the emergence of cognitive linguistics arose constructivist perspectives, which consider learning as an organizational process: new information **is categorized and organized** within the mental faculty based on previous experiences and knowledge.”

(91) „...in these cases, direct connections **can be made** between the success in one language's acquisition and the frequency of use as well as the sources of encouragement and exposure...”

It appears that in example (90) *categorized and organized*, the author may have used the passive structure because she wanted to *emphasize the process rather than the doer*. Additionally, the passive voice results in a general formulation, which is characteristic of academic writing. The phrase (91) *can be made* allows the author to *avoid naming who exactly creates the connections (irrelevant agent)*, thereby crafting a generally accepted and also an *impersonal* statement.

In Bella's paper, 20.26% of the main verbs are formulated in the passive voice. In contrast, this proportion is noticeably lower in the introduction and conclusion sections (6.45%

in the former and 7.69% in the latter). At first glance, one might explain that these two sections of the paper are not surprising in being somewhat more personal in tone than the Literature review and Research sections of papers in general. This tendency aligns with the findings of Fauziah and Bashtomi (2024), in which they found that the frequency of the passive voice was lower in the Introduction section and relatively large in the Methodology sections. In the case of non-native speakers, the proportion of passives in the Introduction was 43.32%, and in the Methodology section it was 57.98% (Fauziah & Bashtomi, 2024). However, Bella made neither first-person singular nor any other self-referential remarks in these two sections. Both the introduction and the conclusion are of an 'information conveying' nature, and the author does not mention personal involvement. For example: (Introduction) “*Children’s ease and speed of language acquisition led to the birth of theories such as Chomsky’s Innateness Hypothesis, which states that the efficiency of the young mind is due to it having the essence of all human languages, Universal Grammar, innately coded within.*” This suggests that the use of active voice did not make the thesis more subjective, as the author avoided the first-person singular forms even when using the active voice.

Bella was asked why she decided to use the above examples in passives in the Introduction. She claimed that in the case of (90), the agent was evident, thus it did not need to be mentioned. For (91), she gave an interesting answer: “*This example manipulates the reader into believing that this conclusion is valid and logical. I also did not want to use an active sentence with “I”.*”

The two explanations align to a certain degree, as the aim for impersonality appears in both cases. However, it is interesting how Bella mentioned the use of the passive voice to manipulate the reader.

Bella used 7.69% of the finite verbs in passive in the Conclusion section:

(92) „*The majority of responses indicated quicker and more efficient acquisition of one or more languages, which, as **can be deduced** from Table 6.1 **can be directly connected** to increased exposure and encouragement of language use.*”

The analysis suggests that in example (92), the verb phrase *can be deduced* refers to a general agent, implying “everyone,” and (92) *can be directly connected*, is an explicit expression of the author’s stance, presented in an *impersonal* form. The thoughts mentioned in the introduction similarly arose in my mind regarding the conclusion: both the introduction and the conclusion are of an 'information conveying' nature, and the author does not mention personal involvement. For example: (Conclusion) “*Even though constructivism may prove to be a more efficient way to observe language acquisition than nativism, to say that the work of Noam Chomsky is not one of the most valuable to modern linguistics would be a shameful*

understatement. His creation of Generative Grammar, his observations in Language Universals, and the countless other studies he conducted proved to be invaluable contributors to the knowledge humanity has of language today: its structure, its inner workings, its nature, and how we understand it." This again suggests that the active occurrences did not make the thesis more subjective, as they were not used with the first-person singular. However, there is a recognisable tendency here to attribute ideas to specific authors increasing their agency and credibility.

Bella explained the small proportion of passives in the Conclusion by highlighting that the overuse of the active voice with "I" would have weakened the thesis by making it more subjective.

My observation and Bella's response aligned, as the aim of the passives was to be impersonal. Bella's thesis was written with an excellent strategy. Structurally, the author is absent in terms of first-person singular agents and active structures, and the thesis is filled with impersonal constructions, which suggest maximum objectivity. However, the author's attitude and evaluations still come through in various other ways, such as hedging by using modal auxiliaries (e.g., *may prove, would be*) and employing evaluative adjectives (e.g., *shameful understatement, invaluable contribution*).

Bella used the verb "**conclude**" in both active and passive forms.

(93) „*Thus – **concluded Chomsky**- as it can be said about any other organ within the human body, every normal human has a heart, a brain, and a nose.*" Active voice

(94) „***Jarvis and his team**, when exploring the vocalization of songbirds and the grammatical phenomenon in birdsong **concluded** that as of current knowledge of vocal learning species, songbirds, like zebra finches possess a tool of communication similar to human language.*" Active voice

(95) „*After discovering that closer relatives, nonhuman primates do not possess the same motor-pathway duplication, **it has been concluded** that these capabilities did not come from a common ancestor for avians, but instead developed independently through evolution.*" Passive voice

(96) „***It may therefore be concluded** that the Innateness Hypothesis does not treat bilingualism nor multilingualism as a special field of interest in the examination of language acquisition.*" Passive voice

(97) „*...however, based on reports about the conditions which she was forced to endure **it was concluded** that the stimulus must have been insufficient.*" Passive voice

(98) „...a few case studies cannot be considered sufficient evidence for a topic as global and complex as language acquisition, partly because **it cannot be concluded** how typical one child's case is to the whole.” *Passive voice*

(99) „Even from this general analysis alone, **it can be concluded** that more than 77% of bi – and multilingual children have at least one language they acquired more easily...” *Passive voice*

(100) „**It may be concluded** that the force of input and encouragement are undeniable, and heavily influence one's language development.” *Passive voice*

(101) „...there should be encouragement of the use of the community language, since – as **it may be concluded** from the results – exposure is only part of acquisition.” *Passive voice*

It can be inferred that in the cases where the author used the verb “conclude” in the active voice (93-94), she emphasized who is responsible for the conclusion, thereby directly attributing the recognition to Chomsky and Jarvis. Examples (95) and (97) clearly present conclusions attributed to others, with the passive voice suggesting that the source is either *unimportant* or *unknown* to the author. Examples (96) and (98-101) clearly convey the author's own conclusions in an *impersonal* form.

I asked Bella why she used both voices with the verb “conclude”. She explained that the active examples (93-94) needed to be in active, as she mentions the agents, thus making them passive and adding the “by” preposition with the agents would have been useless. She stated that in example (95), the agent was already known, thus she could return back to the use of passive voice. In the case of (96-99), she claimed that using the passive voice was inevitable, because she needed to remain impersonal while presenting her own thoughts. Also, she added that with the use of passives, she again, wanted to manipulate the readers into thinking that her conclusions are logical. In examples (100-101), she stated she did not want to make strong claims and she also used hedging (e.g. “may”) since she was not relying on empirical evidence.

Comparing my analysis with Bella's explanations, we can conclude that the reasonings were similar in some cases (impersonal tone, unimportant agent). Additionally, in examples (100-101), Bella did not simply attribute the use of the passive voice to be impersonal, but she highlighted that her use of hedging (e.g., “may”) with the passive voice softens the strength of her claims, demonstrating caution due to the lack of empirical evidence. Bella's explanations show how she used the passive voice in order to show author's attitude and evaluations while still remaining objective and impersonal.

Bella used the verb “**consider**” in both active and passive forms.

(102) „With the emergence of cognitive linguistics arose constructivist **perspectives, which consider** learning as an organizational process...” Active voice

(103) „It is not stated clearly what **may be considered** negative evidence, but if grammatical errors in speech are, then there is much more negative evidence in the everyday life of children than one may realize.” Passive voice

(104) „Even still, those **could be considered** negative evidence.” Passive voice

(105) „**The sentiment, which considers** the role of the environment a crucial factor is in no terms an innovative one.” Active voice

(106) „...**Chomsky does not consider** bilingualism – and supposedly, multilingualism – a special field of interest in researching language acquisition.” Active voice

(107) „...a few case studies **cannot be considered** sufficient evidence for a topic as global and complex as language acquisition...” Passive voice

(108) „**Explored environmental factors** that may influence the children’s language development **were considered** the following: ...” Passive voice

(109) „The reinforcement/correction aspect may also be crucial: even though **it cannot be considered** a natural occurrence of linguistic symbols in the same way that everyday speech – general exposure – is...” Passive voice

The analysis indicates that in some cases (102) *consider*, (105) *considers*, Bella’s choice to use an abstract rhetor and active voice reflects her intent to focus not on specific authors, but on the theories or ideas themselves. In the example (106) *Chomsky does not consider*, the author emphasizes Chomsky’s stance. Examples (103-104) and (107-109) clearly convey the author’s perspective in an *impersonal* form.

Bella was asked why she used both the active and the passive voices with the verb “consider”. In example (102), she said she found it important to name the agent, thus the active voice was needed. She justified the use of passives with modals in examples (103-104), (107, (109), with the same reasoning as in example (101) she used the passive voice and modals in order to weaken her statement. For (105), she said that the use of active does not necessarily make the thesis less objective, as the subject of the sentence was inanimate. In example (106), she stated she wanted to avoid plagiarism, and also, as Chomsky -whose identity is important- is the agent of the sentence, thus the use active voice is justified.

Comparing the analysis with Bella’s explanation, it can be concluded that the reasonings align in most cases. We can also conclude that Bella consciously combined the use of the passive structures and active structures (either with abstract rhetors to sound impersonal or to attribute ideas to specific authors) in her thesis.

Bella used the verb “**theorize**” in both active and passive forms.

(110) „Therefore, **one may theorize** that when producing an innovative sentence of their own, they will use an adjective before cat to signify that animal’s specific color, black.”

(111) „**It may be theorized** that the reasons for preference lie in either the exposure to the very first language they encountered or the more frequent use of it.”

(112) „Here, again, the reason **can only be theorized** for now.”

The analysis suggests that the active voice (110) *one may theorize* sounds more direct than the passive structure. In the active example, the author more easily engages the reader, allowing them to reflect on the argument. With the two passive voiced examples (111-112) *it may be theorized*, *the reason can be only theorized* the author articulated her thoughts impersonally, and also, the passive structure also allows them to express uncertainty.

Bella was asked to explain her different choices of “theorize”. She said that the example (110) is a “substitution” of the passive voice. She used it for similar purposes she used the passive structures (objectivity, impersonality). Examples (111-112) (with modals) are used to help her make more impersonal and less strong statements.

Juxtaposing my analysis with the author’s explanation, it can be concluded that the passives were used to make impersonal statements. The purpose of example (110) ‘one may theorize’ differed in the two interpretations. While the analysis suggested it was used to help engage the readers, Bella did not mention aiming to engage the readers.

Bella used the verb “**suppose**” in both active and passive voices.

(113) „...**it may be supposed** that without a precise and deliberate explanation of the system’s rules, the child would be able to pick up on the concepts of addition and subtraction...” *Passive voice*

(114) „Prior knowledge of those anatomical features of course is required, but if **this paper may suppose**, not necessarily innate knowledge.” *Active voice*

(115) „If the Innateness Hypothesis proposes that children fill their lexicon through the acquisition or learning of the lexical items, **it may also be supposed** that they could be able to do the same when it comes to syntactic structures, a grammatical feature heavily implied to be part of UG.” *Passive voice*

(116) „Now, if lexical items can be acquired, **it may be supposed** that the elements in UG can be as well.” *Passive voice*

(117) „For example, **one would suppose** that if the child in case 2 was exposed mainly to Hungarian – judging by the answer to question 2, stating the family speaks only Hungarian at home ... Hungarian would be their strongest language.” *Active voice*

(118) „By the indication that the child has been exposed to both languages simultaneously (question 15) **it may be supposed** that the child received English input from birth...” Passive voice

(119) „After seeing a correlation between the MFUL and BAL, **it may be supposed** that the reason English is deemed the MFUL is that the family uses it in the nursery school and workplace...” Passive voice

It appears that in the example (114) *this paper may suppose*, the author places the paper in the active subject position. This allows the author to remain somewhat objective and *impersonal* while providing a clear and concise phrasing through the use of the active voice. In the example (117) *one would suppose*, the author more easily engages the reader, prompting them to reflect on the argument. The passive examples (113), (115-116), (118-119) help the author maintain objectivity and *impersonality*, somewhat weakening the assertions and indicating that her thoughts are not entirely certain statements.

Bella was asked to explain why she used “suppose” in two different voices. She said that examples (113-116) and (118-119) (with the modals) were used to weaken her statements. For (117), she stated that as it was a conditional sentence without a concrete subject, it was not inappropriate to use the active voice.

In most of the examples what the analysis supposed and what Bella explained aligned: she tried to phare her ideas impersonally while also weakening her statements.

Bella used the verb “**make**” in both active and passive voices.

(120) „... in these cases, **direct connections can be made** between the success in one language’s acquisition and the frequency of use as well as the sources of encouragement and exposure...” Passive voice

(121) „A **correlation is made** through acquisition, leading to the child being able to name them.” Passive voice

(122) „Instead, a **formula was made** that draws parallels between the frequency and source of input and the consequent success in acquisition.” Passive voice

(123) „If the correlation (in figures: C – correlation) **could not be made**, factors were gathered from data provided on other questions, such as the language of the institution the child attends...” Passive voice

(124) „To increase developmental speed, children **should also be made** active participants in communication...” Passive voice

(125) „His creation of Generative Grammar, his observations in Language Universals, and the countless other studies **he made** proved to be invaluable contributors to the knowledge

humanity has of language today: its structure, its inner workings, its nature, and how we understand it.” Active voice

It may be concluded that in the case of the first passive example (120) *can be made*, the author likely used the passive structure because *the agent of the sentence is not relevant*, and she wanted to *focus on the result rather than the agent*. In the passive examples (121) *is made* and (124) *should also be made*, the author presumably chose the passive voice to *maintain objectivity and impersonality*. In the examples (122) *was made*, *could not be made*, the author avoided first-person singular expressions to preserve the objective tone. In the example (125) *made*, the agent is Chomsky. With the active voice, the author emphasizes Chomsky’s direct and personal contribution to linguistics.

Bella was asked why she used the verb “make” in both voices. She said again that she wanted to manipulate the readers in (120) and make them believe that it is not only her who can make a connection, but it can be made by anyone. In (121), she stated that it is a strong claim, and it implies that it can be supported by facts. In examples (122-123), she pointed out that these sentences were taken from the research section, where the active voice with “I” should be avoided. In (124), she wanted to weaken her statement because of her lack of expertise. She said the use of active was justified in example (125), as the agent was important.

Comparing the analysis with Bella’s responses, we can conclude that in most cases, the use of the passive voice was to achieve impersonality. As usually, the use of the active voice with a relevant agent was justified.

A similar “phenomenon” was observed in Bella’s paper as well as in that of Andrea’s. Throughout Bella’s paper, it was noticeable that a relatively large number of passive structures were used. For example, in the “Research” section of the paper, 25,45% of the main verbs are formulated in the passive voice:

(126) „To explore the aforementioned supposed connections, a questionnaire **was created**...”

(127) „For example, as **will be detailed** below, many parents referred to the OPOL (one parent, one language) method...”

(128) „The ratio of general data in analyzable responses **will be demonstrated** in the following table.”

(129) „However, as stated before, only those responses **will be analyzed** in which better performance in one language is indicated...”

Based on examples (126-129), I concluded that the verbs used in passive voice were verbs related to conducting research, which authors typically use in passive voice in academic writing to achieve objectivity and *impersonality*.

Bella was also asked to explain why she used a big proportion of passives in the Research section of her thesis. She claimed she tried to minimize her presence and her own thoughts. She admitted that there were some cases where she found it difficult to avoid referring to herself. In such cases she used expressions like “as this paper may suppose”.

Lastly, the discourse analysis discovered that Bella completely avoided the usage of expressions like “I believe/think” or “In my opinion” etc. and she rather used passive constructions (130-136) instead.

(130) „*it **cannot be concluded** how typical one child’s case is to the whole.*”

(131) „*By the indication that the child has been exposed to both languages simultaneously (question 15) it **may be supposed** that the child received English input from birth...*”

(132) „*Even from this general analysis alone, it **can be concluded** that more than 77% of bi – and multilingual children have at least one language they acquired more easily...*”

(133) „*It **may be concluded** that the force of input and encouragement are undeniable...*”

(134) „*After seeing a correlation between the MFUL and BAL, it **may be supposed** that the reason English is deemed the MFUL is that the family uses it in the nursery school and workplace...*”

(135) „*It **may be theorized** that the reasons for preference lie in either the exposure to the very first language they encountered...*”

(136) „*Here, again, the reason **can only be theorized** for now”*

It may be concluded that she avoided expressing personal opinions in order to maintain objectivity.

She was asked why she used such expressions (130-136) instead of expressions like “I think” etc. She claimed that in an academic writing it is not appropriate to use expressions like “I think” etc. She pointed out that she had learnt it this way and that it was how they were expected to write.

Comparing my analysis with her explanations, it can be concluded the analysis correlated with Bella’s ideas. Bella emphasized that avoiding direct self-reference was a priority, aligning with my observation that passives were strategically employed to focus on the research process rather than the researcher.

Next, I will continue with the thesis of Cézár.

In the Introduction of the thesis, 22.22% of the finite verbs were formulated in the passive voice (137-139).

(137) „My definition of “faithful” entails that the original work’s main ideas and themes, as well as its atmosphere, **was reproduced or recreated** to great effect without noticeable alterations.”

(138) „The book **is known** for its distinctive atmosphere, lack of a happy ending, and unique way of storytelling and writing...”

(139) „Since these two works are different media, not everything **has been recreated**, some bits **have been left out**, others **were added or reimaged**, which are side effects of the nature of the medium...”

The passive verbs in the examples (137) and (139) show that the passive structures were used to *focus on the results rather than the agents* and to *maintain a good flow of the sentence* by placing a long agent in the subject position because it would make the sentence more difficult to comprehend. Example (138) implies a *general agent*, that is why it might have been used in the passive voice.

Cézár was asked to explain why he chose to use the passive voice in the given examples. Regarding example (137) *was reproduced or recreated*, he claimed that -it being the very beginning of the paper- he wanted to create a good first paragraph, but he did not consciously use the passive structure. In the case of (138) *is known*, he said he could not have found another way to word the sentence. Regarding (139) *has been recreated, have been left out, were added or reimaged*, he answered that he had mixed feelings, as he still tried to keep up the image of this thesis as being a professionally written paper, but he could have used the active voice and include the agent as well, since the agent is known and the identity of the agent in fact is important. It is conspicuous that he did not find the use of the passive voice justified, even when he used it.

In this case, my observation differs from Cézár’s explanation. While the analysis concluded that he used passives in these examples to have a good flow of sentence and to focus on results, he claimed he used passives because he felt like he had no other choice, or even he did not really understand his choice (for example when he felt he hid the identity of an agent whose identity in fact was important).

In the Conclusion of the thesis, 4.23% of the finite verbs were formulated in the passive voice (140-141).

(140) „While a movie’s success **is determined** by many factors, one could hardly make a case that *Requiem for a Dream* was not a successful movie...”

(141) „Jared Leto (Harry) and Ellen Burstyn (Sara) might say that, for them, success of the movie depended on whether they **were nominated** for an Academy Award.”

It appears that in the case of (140) *is determined*, the author likely used the passive structure because the emphasis is on the fact that success is a complex outcome, rather than on the specific factors that contributed to that success. That is, the *focus is on the result* in this case. In the case of (141) *were nominated*, the *identity of the agent is not relevant and is evident*, which is why the author may have used the passive voice.

Cézár was asked why he used the passive voice in the given examples. He answered he could not find any other way to build up the sentences.

My observation and Cézár's explanation do not seem to align this time either, as he attributed the use of passive voice to a lack of choice or options.

It was noticeable throughout the thesis that passive constructions were used relatively infrequently, as most of the sentences are in the active voice. (Only 11.65% of the main verbs in the thesis are used in the passive voice.) The following sentences show the type of active voice structures Cézár frequently used throughout his thesis.

(142) "***This paper will examine*** how Darren Aronofsky was able to faithfully adapt one of Hubert Selby Jr.'s most famous novels..."

(143) „To do that, ***I will be analysing*** parts of the movie, contrasting some of its scenes to the book, and..."

(144) „***I will focus*** on analysing key scenes of my choosing, breaking down techniques of the director, the editing of the movie, and..."

(145) „but on this ***I will elaborate*** later."

(146) „But what ***I wanted to focus*** on in this section is the constant cutting between the characters."

(147) „***I will talk*** about the kitchen scene first because it was upon reading this very scene that..."

(148) „Two aspects of the ending ***I wanted to highlight*** in particular are the editing style and the cinematography."

(149) „As ***I mentioned*** earlier, editing is one of the most important parts of a movie, and..."

Cézár wrote a comparative thesis in which he compared a book and its film adaptation. The analysis suggests that due to the chosen genre, the author might have felt that he needed a greater degree of subjectivity than, for example, the authors of the previous two theses. The proportion of passive structures throughout the entire paper is noticeably lower than in the previous two papers. The introduction contains the highest proportion of passive structures with 22.22% of the main verbs formulated in the passive voice. However, the verbs he used in passives are not related to the author's opinion, nor do they pertain to the verbs associated with

conducting the research. The verbs formulated in the passive voice (170-173) *is amputated, is forced, has been amputated* etc. primarily serve to convey information about the film, the book, and the story. And in these cases, it is likely that he wanted to put the *focus on the results* and also, for those who are familiar with the story, the *agents were obvious*.

(170) „Since these two works are different media, not everything **has been recreated**, some bits **have been left out**, others **were added or reimaged**...”

(171) „...Harry’s arm **is amputated** in a prison hospital...”

(172) „Tyrone, often the subject of racial abuse, **is forced** to work in the very same prison Harry **is incarcerated** in; Marion **is “forced”** to participate in orgies...”

(173) „After coming to, he realizes his arm **has been amputated**...”

Cézár was asked whether the high proportion of the active voice in his thesis was a conscious decision, and if it was, why he decided that way. He explained that the choices were not conscious. Once he had written something in passive, he did not rewrite it in the active and vice versa. Regarding example (142), I find it important to quote Cézár: “*Perhaps the logical explanation for this is that I wanted to present this idea as if the thesis were presenting itself. Not as me, the writer, but as itself, as an independent product*”. Reflecting on example (143) *I will be analysing*, he claimed the sentence would not sound natural otherwise, while in the case of (144) *I will focus*, he answered that he probably wanted to avoid repetition. In connection with (145-148) *I will elaborate, I wanted to focus, I will talk, I wanted to highlight*, he stated he wanted to show that these thoughts were not quoted from somewhere else. With these examples he wanted to show that his thesis was not just “30 pages of quotations”, but he did have some original ideas in it. For (149) *I mentioned*, he claimed it sounded more natural, as he was referring to something and it would not have sounded nice in passive.

While the reader-researcher perspective suggests that the author simply (probably consciously) chose to be more subjective, the author disproved this. Cézár justifies the use of the active voice and the first-person pronoun by stating that this structure highlights best that he is presenting his own thoughts. It is important to examine his explanation for the use of (142) *this paper will examine*. The use of ‘this paper’ is indeed another method to sound objective besides the passive voice. However, Cézár was struggling to clearly explain the significance of using an inanimate subject in his sentence.

Throughout the thesis, instead of expressions like ‘it has been concluded / it may be supposed / theorized,’ he used the following expressions: (150-169).

(150) „...and talking about sound design and the soundtrack, which **I believe** to be key aspects of movie...”

(151) „The adaptation was both a commercial and a critical success and this is owing, **I believe**, to every aspect of the movie...”

(152) „...but none of the changes were – **in my view** – to the detriment of the movie.”

(153) „While these were just some aspects of the big picture, **I believe** they encompass the most important parts of book adaptation theory.”

(154) „I chose that one scene specifically, because **I believe** it best encompasses the techniques the movie uses to recreate the feel of the novel.”

(155) „...which **I think** is a great showcase for how the movie stands on its own two feet...”

(156) „**I also think** that the film does a better job at hinting at a continuation of the characters’ suffering...”

(157) „One omission that **I do feel** slightly changes the overall story is the removal of the parts where the...”

(158) „**I still believe** this adds another layer to the effects of addictions...”

(159) „This was the director’s vision, and **I think** it illustrates exceptionally well what addiction has caused to these people.”

(160) „...the sole reason Harry survives is because his suffering has only just begun, which **I think** sums up the bleakness of the story and the atmosphere of the story quite well.”

(161) „I will talk about the kitchen scene first because it was upon reading this very scene that Aronofsky decided to adapt the book, so **I think** it is obvious why it is such a paramount scene.”

(162) „**I think** nothing else speaks quite so much to the importance of the kitchen scene as its runtime, clocking in at roughly one-tenth of the entire movie.”

(163) „While it might seem like a big change, **I do not believe** it to substantially alter the scene, as Aronofsky and his actors make it clear...”

(164) „**I think** it is safe to say the title speaks for itself, as it accompanies some truly horrifying scenes.”

(165) „Overall, the ending is basically the same, which **I think** is important to mention, since there was pressure on Aronofsky to change it into a happy ending.”

(166) „And **I think** that’s the beauty of it.”

(167) „While the author is just one member of the overall people connected to the film, **I still believe** it to be one of, if not the biggest achievements of the movie that...”

(168) „**I still think** that by pleasing him, a director must have done at least an alright job, but likely better.”

(169) „**I also think** that in no small part the film owes much of its success to its lack of conventions, whether we talk about the lack of a happy ending...”

Literary comparative theses should be just as impersonal in style as those in the field of linguistics. The findings reveal that the author did not wish to detach from his personal impressions and did not pay attention to maintaining objectivity.

Cézár was asked if he deliberately chose to use a high proportion of actives with the first-person pronoun and if it was intentional why he decided that way. His explanation was considered thought-provoking, thus his answer is quoted: *“Since these examples are about my own thoughts, and they are not quotations, it is more appropriate to use actives with “I” instead of passives. If I were to write all of my thoughts in passive voice, it wouldn't be appropriate stylistically. The main aim of a thesis is for the author to add something new, and in my opinion, this can be best achieved by starting a sentence with “I”. Although, I do not think that these decisions were consciously made.”*

While the reader-researcher perspective suggests that Cézár's thesis could benefit from a more impersonal and objective tone, Cézár justifies his frequent use of opinion markers by stating that active, first-person expressions like “I believe” better represent his original ideas which he felt would not stylistically align with passive phrasing. He acknowledges that his decisions were not consciously made to avoid impersonal language but, he wanted to share his own ideas directly. However, Molino (2010), as cited in Akbas and Hardman (2017, p 144.), suggests that authors can balance personal expression and objectivity by using metonymic or possessive expressions (such as “this paper”) as abstract rhetors, maintaining authorial presence without relying too much on subjective phrases. Interestingly, Cézár did use “this paper” in example (142), which shows that he recognizes other options besides the passives to sound impersonal, but for some reason he chose not to use them consistently.

Table 2 compares the aspects functions of the passive voice that emerged during the analysis, with the arguments the authors provided to justify its use.

Table 2
The comparison of the reader-researcher view of the use of the passive voice with that of the authors' reasonings

Reader-researcher perspective	Authors' reasonings
Impersonal statement	Impersonal statement
Focus on result	Focus on result
Flow maintenance	Agent assumed from context
Irrelevant agent	Irrelevant agent
End-weight principle	
Agent assumed from context	

Table 2 clearly indicates that the reader-researcher analysis suggested different explanations (in some cases) for the use of the passive voice than those suggested by the authors' reasoning. In most cases, both the discourse analysis and the authors' claimed that the passive voice was used to make more impersonal statements. The second most common explanation (both by the analysis and by the authors) for the use of the passive voice was that the authors aimed to emphasize the result not the agent. The analysis suggested two reasons for the use of passives (flow maintenance, end-weight principle) which were not mentioned by the authors. However, the authors mentioned some factors that contributed to the use of the passive voice which were not mentioned in the criteria in Table 1. Table 3 shows these factors:

Table 3
Some other factors (mentioned by the three authors) that contributed to the use of the passive voice

Andrea	Bella	Cézár
Trying not to quote literally	Manipulating the reader	Lack of other options
Make the phrasing more diverse	Trying to avoid making strong claims due to lack of expertise	Did not remember
The sentence sounded the best/ most appropriate with the passive voice		Admitted that occasionally, the use of the passive voice was not necessarily justified
Did not remember		

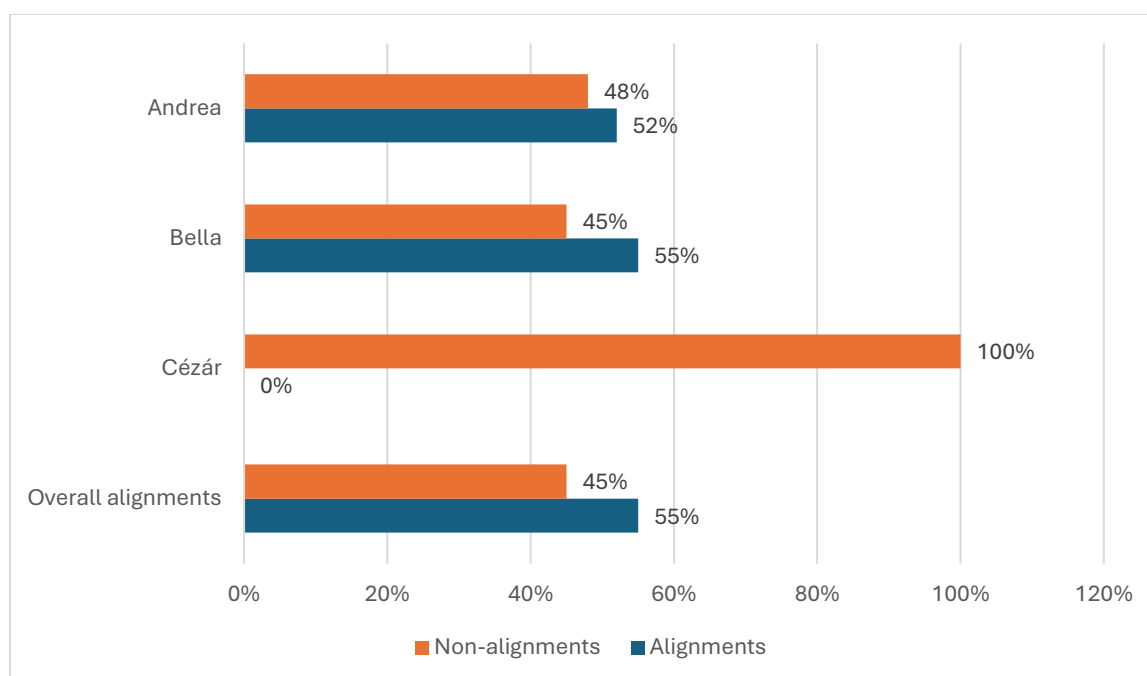
Table 3 reveals that, beyond the more standardized reasons for using the passive voice, each author also cited unique, personal motivations for its use. Andrea mentioned stylistic concerns, such as avoiding literal quotations and enhancing sentence variety. Although she did not explicitly mention it (perhaps because it was an unconscious factor), Andrea also seemed to have used the passive voice instinctively. Bella, on the other hand, noted an intent to guide the reader's perception and to avoid making assertive claims due to limited expertise. Nevertheless, Bella successfully and deliberately placed her perspective and assessments in her thesis through various means, such as hedging with modal auxiliaries (e.g., may prove, would be) and the use of evaluative adjectives (e.g., shameful understatement, invaluable contribution) while using the passive voice. Cézár, meanwhile, expressed practical constraints like limited phrasing options and occasionally not recalling the reason for the passive construction choice. He also acknowledged that he used the passive voice in some cases where the active structure would

have been more appropriate. These factors highlight how individual authorial choices can shape the use of passive voice, suggesting that stylistic preferences, strategic intentions, and limitations often complement traditional explanations (such as impersonal tone and emphasis on results).

To see an overall alignment percentage, all the passive example sentences (101 sentences) were selected and examined altogether in the three theses, and individually as well. Figure 9 demonstrates the alignment of the reader-researcher's perceived perspective and the authors' own intended perspective on the use of the passive voice.

Figure 9

The alignment of the reader-researcher's perceived perspective and the authors' own intended perspective on the use of the passive voice



Throughout the discourse analysis, 101 example sentences containing passive structures were selected from the three theses. These sentences were part of the active and passive examples discussed during the interviews. The reader-researcher's observations aligned with the authors' reasoning in 56 cases (approximately 55%). While this ratio was consistent in Andrea's and Bella's theses, it differed significantly in Cézár's analysis.

In Andrea's case, 58 sentences were examined that contained a passive structure. The analysis and Andrea's explanations aligned in 52% (30 example sentences). This suggests that while Andrea's use of the passive voice was often interpretable from a reader-researcher perspective, nearly half of the instances demonstrated divergence in reasoning or intent. In 29

cases of agreement, the functional usage of the passive voice was reasoned by the intention to make impersonal statements, and the remaining one alignment was the intention to put the focus on the results rather than the agent.

In Bella's thesis, 38 example sentences were examined that contained passive structures. My observation and Bella's explanations for the use of the passive voice aligned in 55% (21 example sentences). This ratio demonstrates, again, how the passive voice usage can sometimes be clearly interpreted by external readers, while in other cases, the reason behind its use may remain ambiguous or specific to the author's unique perspective. Out of these 21 alignments, in 20 examples both the analysis and Andrea's explanation suggested that the reason behind the use of the passive structure was to make impersonal statements. In the remaining one example, both the analysis and Bella suggested that the passive voice was used because there was an unknown agent in the sentence.

Since Cézár's thesis lacked verbs related to conducting research, and all verbs related to expressing opinion were used in the active voice, there were only 5 example sentences (taken from the introduction and conclusion section) in which I managed to examine the alignments. Out of these 5 examples, in no case (0%) was any alignment found. While the small sample size makes broad conclusions difficult, the lack of agreement highlights the variability in how the passive voice is perceived and rationalized.

Based on the analysis of the passive voice usage in the theses, several non-alignments were observed between the reasons identified through the reader-researcher's perspective and the authors' explanations. These instances reveal some interesting patterns that could help explain the discrepancies. In the case of Andrea's analysis, there were instances where she did not fully recall or was unsure of why she had used the passive voice. For example, in one case, the Andrea could not remember the reason for using the passive, and in several others, she indicated that the passive voice was used simply because it "sounded the best" or for stylistic diversity. She also attributed her use of the passive voice to wanting to avoid literal quotation, suggesting a desire for more varied expression. However, it's worth noting that in a few cases, the passive was used incorrectly, and the author did not recognize the error, instead believing it was the best option. In Bella's case, the non-alignments predominantly involve the passive voice usage for reasons such as "manipulating the reader" or avoiding strong claims. In many instances, Bella emphasized hedging as a reason for choosing the passive voice, highlighting a strategic decision to make her claims seem less direct or assertive. There were also cases where she admitted using the passive with the intention to make the conclusions appear more logical or valid. For Cézár, the non-alignments were all marked by a sense of necessity. He explained that he used

the passive voice because he felt there was no other option, even when he realized that the active voice might have been more appropriate.

These findings illustrate the variability and complexity in how the passive voice is used and reasoned across different authors. While there is some degree of alignment between the reader-researcher analysis and authors' explanations, the differences across cases suggest that the use of passive structures can be influenced by a range of factors, including the individual author's stylistic preferences, disciplinary conventions, and specific rhetorical goals. Future research could benefit from a more detailed exploration of these factors to better understand the nuances of passive voice usage and its interpretation in academic writing.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the passive voice across various registers reveals a clear pattern: its usage is significantly more prevalent in academic and informative writing compared to casual conversation. Studies indicate that in academic prose, passive constructions account for a substantial portion of finite verbs, highlighting their importance in maintaining an impersonal tone and focusing on results rather than agents. While different studies present varying percentages of passive voice usage, we can find a common ground: the passive voice is a dominant feature in academic writing, reflecting authors' strategic choices to maintain a formal and objective style.

Hungarian university students may face difficulties regarding the passive voice while writing an English academic paper: It is likely, that they were not given enough information about the form and the use of the passive voice, and perhaps they have limited experience in reading and writing academic texts to realise the full potential of passive voice in disciplinary discourse. They might often feel that the passive voice is simply another alternative, but since the active voice is simpler to construct, they rather avoid the passive voice. Sometimes the students are aware of the conventions of English academic writing, but they cannot apply these rules. The significantly lower frequency of use of the passive voice and its different distribution across registers in Hungarian might also complicate the situation. The complex structure of the passive voice may cause reduced readability, slower processing and lower comprehension for the students, which could also prompt them to avoid the use of the passive voice. Finally, some cultural factors are also likely to influence the choice of the representation of authorial identity.

The analysis of passive voice usage in the theses of Andrea, Bella, and Cézár reveals significant variation in their writing styles. Overall, the three theses collectively showed a lower frequency of passive constructions compared to the typical academic standard. Andrea displayed a consistent use of passive voice across all sections of her thesis and also effectively used abstract rhetors, suggesting a deliberate and occasionally instinctive effort to maintain objectivity in her writing. The analysis of Bella's thesis demonstrates a varied use of passive voice across different sections. Overall, Bella showed a moderate reliance on the passive voice throughout her thesis apart from the Introduction and Conclusion sections, in which the proportion of the passive voice was rather low. Furthermore, her use of abstract rhetors was minimal. Bella's thesis demonstrates an excellent approach, characterized by an impersonal structure that avoids first-person singular and active forms, emphasizing objectivity.

Nonetheless, the author's perspective is evident through hedging with modals and evaluative adjectives, which could be the next step of the investigation. Cézár's thesis shows a distinctive approach to the passive voice usage. In total, Cézár used passive voice in a small proportion of his finite verbs, showcasing a clear preference for active voice constructions that highlight his personal contributions. His avoidance of abstract rhetors in the Introduction and Conclusion suggests a unique academic style, emphasizing personal engagement over objectivity.

The analysis of the common reasons behind the use of passive voice in the academic writing of the authors reveals differing approaches. Andrea and Bella emphasized how they were trying to use the characteristics of the academic style to maintain objectivity, while Cézár relied on guidance from teachers. Each author acknowledged varying levels of conscious choice regarding passive voice usage, with Andrea and Bella prioritizing research over personal opinion, while Cézár included his views more prominently. Ultimately, none of the authors expressed a desire to make significant changes to their passive voice usage in future revisions.

In conclusion, the analysis shows that while both the reader-researcher perspective and the authors' reasoning agree on common uses of passive voice—such as creating an impersonal tone and emphasizing results—the reader-researcher analysis identified additional motivations (flow maintenance, end-weight principle) that the authors did not explicitly mention. Each author also had personal reasons for using passive voice, for example, focusing on stylistic diversity, aiming to influence the reader's perception, and practical constraints. These findings suggest that the passive voice usage in the academic writing is shaped by both standardized and individual choices. It is also important to remark that the use of the passive voice, in some cases, was instinctive (especially in Andrea's thesis).

It appears that the topic choice might also influence the use of the passive voice for the impersonalization of the theses: in Andrea's research-based language-pedagogy thesis and in Bella's research-based linguistics thesis, the consistent use of the passive voice was prominent, while in Cézár's case, the comparative analysis—unlike the more research-focused approach in the other two theses—was written in a much more subjective tone, using many active constructions with the first-person singular. This study was exploratory in nature, employing a triangulated approach that allowed for an in-depth analysis of authors' decisions and strategies. Its primary aim was to develop effective research methods and to raise further research questions. Because of these reasons, certain limitations of the study need to be acknowledged. The small corpus restricts the ability to make generalisable statements about the investigated phenomena. Future research could improve the methodology by incorporating tools like the AntConc concordance software to identify and analyse passive constructions easier, especially

if adjusted to match the specific features of academic writing. Additionally, the triangulated approach could also be enhanced by using interview data to better define the different functions of passive structures.

Future research could improve the methodology by incorporating tools like the AntConc concordance software to identify and analyse passive constructions easier, especially if adjusted to match the specific features of academic writing. Additionally, the triangulated approach could also be enhanced by using interview data to better define the different functions of passive structures.

The study also raised intriguing questions that were beyond the scope of this research. For instance, a systematic investigation of impersonal subjects and the strategies used for depersonalization in describing one's own research and expressing opinions could shed further light on the rhetorical choices in students' academic texts.

8. Magyar nyelvű összefoglaló

A szenvedő szerkezet különböző nyelvi regiszterekben történő elemzése egyértelmű mintát mutat: használata jelentősen gyakoribb a tudományos és ismeretterjesztő stílusrétegekben, mint a hétköznapi beszélgetésekben (Biber et al., 1999; Francis és Kucera, 1982, idézi Kennedy, 1988; Svartvik, 1966 idézi Kennedy, 1988; Bada és Ulum, 2018; Leong, 2014; Subagio et al., 2019; Fauziah és Bashtomi, 2024). Egyes tanulmányok szerint a szenvedő szerkezetek használata kiemelkedő jelentőségű a tudományos prózában: hozzájárulnak a személytelen hangnem fenntartásához, valamint lehetővé teszik a cselekvők helyett az eredményekre való fókuszálást (Benett, 2009). Bár a különböző kutatások eltérő százalékokat mutatnak a szenvedő szerkezetek használatára vonatkozóan, egy közös pont megállapítható: a szenvedő szerkezet domináns jellemzője a tudományos írásnak, tükrözve a szerzők stratégiai döntéseit a formális és objektív stílus kialakítására.

A magyar egyetemi hallgatók nehézségekkel szembesülhetnek az angol nyelvű tudományos szövegek írásakor a szenvedő szerkezetek használata terén. A tanulmányaik során kapott információ gyakran nem elegendő, és úgy érezhetik, hogy a passzív csupán egy másik strukturális alternatíva az aktív szerkezet mellett, de mivel az aktív szerkezet egyszerűbben megalkotható, inkább kerülik a passzív használatát. Előfordul, hogy a hallgatók tisztában vannak az angol tudományos írás szabályaival, de ezeket nem tudják alkalmazni (Károly, 2009). A szenvedő szerkezetek jelentősen alacsonyabb használati gyakorisága és eltérő eloszlása a magyar nyelvben szintén bonyolíthatja a helyzetet (Veszelszki, 2016). A szenvedő szerkezet összetett szerkezete az információ lassabb feldolgozását és alacsonyabb szövegértést okozhat a hallgatók számára, ami szintén arra készítheti őket, hogy kerüljék a passzív használatát (Ali Lubis és Miranti, 2024). Ezen kívül, bizonyos kulturális tényezők is befolyásolhatják az írói identitás reprezentációjának megválasztását (Akbas és Hardman, 2017).

Egy korábbi kutatás (Oszlovics, 2024a; Oszlovics, 2024b) alapozta meg a jelen vizsgálatot, amely a magyar anyanyelvű angol szakos egyetemisták szenvedő szerkezet használatával kapcsolatos nehézségeit tárta fel. A kutatás online kérdőívének eredményei szerint a diákok közel fele nem tudta azonosítani a szenvedő szerkezet különböző formáit angol mondatokban, és sokan nem ismerték fel, hogy a passzív leggyakrabban a tudományos műfajban fordul elő. A topik-komment szerkezet átalakulását a magyarban 48,9%-uk, míg angolban 66%-uk tudta helyesen azonosítani. A résztvevők többsége felismerte a cselekvő elhagyásának stilisztikai funkcióját az újságírói és tudományos szövegekben. Bár 63,8% gyakran használta a szenvedő

szerkezetet, néhányan a cselekvő szerkezet egyszerűsége miatt kerültek. Emellett 36,2% úgy érezte, tanulmányai során nem kapott elegendő információt a szenvedő szerkezetekről. A kutatás rámutatott, hogy a passzív használata kihívást jelent a hallgatóknak, és célzottabb oktatásra van szükség a tudományos íráskészség fejlesztéséhez.

A jelen kutatás célja a szenvedő szerkezet használatának vizsgálata magyar egyetemisták angol nyelvű BA és MA szakdolgozataiban. Ezen vizsgálat interjúk és szövegelemzés segítségével a szenvedő szerkezet tudományos írásban betöltött szerepét térképezi fel. A kutatás fő kérdései:

- 1) Milyen gyakran fordul elő a passzív szerkezet a dolgozatok különböző részeiben (pl. bevezetés, módszertan, konklúzió)?
- 2) Milyen funkciókat tölt be a passzív szerkezet az elemzett szövegekben?
- 3) Miért használják a hallgatók a passzív szerkezetet az akadémiai írásban?
- 4) Hogyan értékelik a hallgatók a passzív szerkezet alkalmazásának szükségességét dolgozatuk különböző részeiben?

A kutatásban három magyar egyetemi hallgató vett részt, akik nemrégiben BA vagy MA diplomát szereztek angol szakon a Miskolci Egyetemen, és akiket Andrea, Bella és Cézár néven említek a dolgozatban. Ez a kutatás triangulált megközelítést alkalmazott, azaz különböző adatgyűjtési módszereket kombinált a megbízhatóság növelése érdekében. A kutatás három fő lépésben zajlott:

- 1) Kvantitatív elemzés: A kutatás első lépésében három magyar egyetemi hallgató angol nyelven írt szakdolgozatában a szenvedő igealakok előfordulását elemeztem. A statisztikai elemzés a teljes szövegre, valamint a dolgozat egyes részeire (pl. bevezetés, módszertan, következtetések) vonatkozott.
- 2) Funkcionális elemzés: A szenvedő igealakok funkcionális használatának vizsgálata különösen a kutatás leírásában és vélemények kifejezésében. A kiválasztott igealakok elemzésére az olvasó-kutató és az interjúalanyok nézőpontjából került sor.
- 3) Kvalitatív interjúk kutatás: Félig strukturált interjúkat készítettem a dolgozatírókkal, hogy feltérképezsem a szenvedő szerkezetek használatára vonatkozó döntéseiket, stratégiáikat és a szenvedő igealakokkal kapcsolatos véleményüket. Az interjúk magyar nyelven zajlottak, és hangfelvétel készült róluk.

A vizsgált MA és BA szakdolgozatokban az összes ige 16,8%-a volt szenvedő, míg 83,2%-a cselekvő szerkezetben szerepelt. Ez az arány viszonylag alacsony, összehasonlítva a tudományos írásokban jellemző szenvedő szerkezetek előfordulásával, amely általában körülbelül 25% (Biber et al., 1999). A szakdolgozatok különböző részeiben a szenvedő

igehasználat a legnagyobb mértékben a módszertani és kutatási szakaszokban volt jelen. Például Andrea dolgozatának módszertani szakaszában 22,96%-os volt a szenvedő igehasználat, Bella dolgozatában ez az arány 25,45%, de Cézár esetében csupán 10,76%. Az bevezető és konklúzió részekben alacsonyabb volt a szenvedő szerkezetek aránya Andrea és Bella esetében, azonban Cézár itt is kivételt képezett, hiszen ő a dolgozata a bevezető részében használta a szenvedő szerkezeteket a legmagasabb arányban (22,22%). Ugyanakkor Cézár dolgozata mutatta a legkevesebb passzív szerkezetet összesen, mindössze 11,65%-kal. Ez azt jelzi, hogy a szenvedő szerkezetek használata jelentősen eltért a különböző dolgozatok és szakaszok között, egyes hallgatók inkább aktív vagy személyes szerkezeteket alkalmaztak.

A szenvedő szerkezetek használata a magyar egyetemi hallgatók tudományos írásaiban többféle indokra vezethető vissza, amit az interjúk alapján láthatunk. Andrea és Bella állításaik szerint azért használták a szenvedő szerkezeteket, hogy megőrizték a szakdolgozatuk objektivitását és formális jellegét. A szenvedő szerkezet használata Cézár esetében a konzulense és tanáraitól kapott iránymutatásokra épült.

A saját kutatói-olvasói elemzésem során számos esetben eltérő különböző stratégiákat azonosítottam a szenvedő szerkezetek használatára, mint amik a szerzők magyarázatai alapján kiderültek. A legtöbb egyezés azokban az esetekben mutatkozott, amikor a szerzők a szenvedő szerkezetet személytelen kijelentések megfogalmazására használták. A passzív használatának második leggyakoribb magyarázata (mind az elemzés, mind a szerzők szerint) az volt, hogy a szerzők az eredmény hangsúlyozására törekedtek, nem pedig az ágens megjelenítésére. Az elemzés néhány olyan indokot is felvetett a passzív használatára, amelyeket a szerzők nem említettek („flow maintenance”, „end-weight” elv). Azonban a szerzők is említettek néhány egyéb tényezőt, amelyek hozzájárultak a szenvedő szerkezetek használatához: a passzív használatának standardizált okain túl mindegyik szerző egyedi, személyes motivációkat is említett a használatára. Andrea stilisztikai szempontokat említett, mint például a szó szerinti idézetek elkerülése és a mondatok változatosságának növelése. Bár ezt nem említette kifejezetten (talán azért, mert tudattalan tényező volt), gyakran úgy tűnt, mintha Andrea ösztönösen használta volna a szenvedő szerkezeteket. Bella viszont jelezte, hogy szándékában állt irányítani az olvasó percepcióját, és elkerülni az erőteljes állításokat a korlátozott szakértelem miatt. Cézár azonban gyakorlati akadályokat említett, mint a korlátozott mondatszerkezeti lehetőségek, és hogy időnként nem emlékezett a szenvedő szerkezet választásának okára. Elismerte, hogy voltak esetek, amikor szenvedőt használt, miközben a cselekvő szerkezet alkalmasabb lett volna. Ezek a tényezők illusztrálják, hogyan formálhatják az egyedi szerzői döntések a szenvedő szerkezet használatát, és azt sugallják, hogy a stilisztikai

preferenciák, stratégiai szándékok és korlátozások gyakran kiegészítik a hagyományos magyarázatokat (mint például a személytelenség és az eredmények hangsúlyozása).

A három dolgozatban összesen 101 szenvedő szerkezetet tartalmazó példamondat került összevetésre az olvasó-kutató által következtetett, illetve a szerzők magyarázatai alapján indokolt szenvedő szerkezet használatáról. Összességében az olvasó-kutató következtetései és a szerzők szenvedő szerkezet használatára adott magyarázatai a példa mondatok 55%-ában mutattak egyezést. Külön-külön tekintve ez az arány hasonló volt az Andrea és Bella példa mondatainak vizsgálata során (előbbi esetében 52%-os, utóbbi esetében 55%-os volt az egyezés). Cézár esetében azonban az egyezés 0%-os volt, ám részben azért is születhetett ez az arány, mivel Cézár dolgozatában nem szerepeltek a kutatással kapcsolatos igék, és minden véleménynyilvánítással kapcsolatos ige cselekvő szerkezetben jelent meg, így csupán öt példamondatot sikerült kiválasztanom (a bevezetés és következtetés részből), amelyekben meg tudtam vizsgálni az egyezéseket.

Ezek az eredmények illusztrálják, hogy a szenvedő szerkezetek használata és indoklása szerzőnként mennyire változatos és összetett lehet. Míg van bizonyos fokú egyezés az olvasó-kutató elemzése és a szerzők magyarázatai között, az eltérések arra utalnak, hogy a szenvedő szerkezetek használatát számos tényező befolyásolhatja, beleértve az egyes szerzők stílus-beli preferenciáit, tudományági konvenciókat és specifikus retorikai célokat. A jövőbeli kutatások profitálhatnak e tényezők részletesebb feltárásából, hogy jobban megértsük a szenvedő szerkezet használatának árnyalatait és azok értelmezését a tudományos írásban.

A tanulmánynak voltak bizonyos korlátai: a viszonylag kis résztvevői létszám, azon belül is akülönböző tématerületek nem teszik lehetővé az eredmények általánosíthatóságát. Ugyanakkor ez a tanulmány feltáró jellegű, melynek erőssége a triangulált megközelítés, mely lehetővé tette a szerzők döntéseinek és stratégiáinak alapos elemzését. Fő célja a hatékony kutatási módszerek kifejlesztése és további kutatási kérdések felvetése volt.

A jövőbeli kutatások javíthatják a módszertant olyan eszközök bevonásával, mint például az AntConc konkordancia szoftver, hogy a szenvedő szerkezeteket könnyebben azonosíthatóak és elemezhetőek legyenek, különösen, ha a tudományos írás sajátosságaihoz igazítjuk. Ezenkívül a triangulált megközelítést tovább lehetne erősíteni az interjúdokumentáció felhasználásával, hogy jobban meghatározhassuk a szenvedő szerkezetek különböző funkcióit.

A tanulmány olyan érdekes kérdéseket is felvetett, amelyek túlmutattak ennek a kutatásnak a határain. Például a személytelen alanyok szisztematikus vizsgálata és a személytelenítés stratégiáinak elemzése a saját kutatás leírásában és vélemények kifejtésében további betekintést adhatna a tudományos szövegekben alkalmazott retorikai választásokra.

Bibliography

- Adeoye-Olatunde, O. A., & Olenik, N. L. (2021). Research and scholarly methods: Semi-structured interviews. *Journal of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy*, 4(10), 1358-1367.
- Akbas, E., & Hardman, J. (2017). An exploratory study on authorial (in)visibility across postgraduate academic writing: Dilemma of developing a personal and/or impersonal authorial self. In C. Hatipoglu, E. Akbas, & Y. Bayyurt (Eds.), *Metadiscourse in written genres: Uncovering textual and intertextual aspects of texts* (pp. 139-174). Frankfurt: Peter Lang Edition.
- Bada, E., & Ulum, Ö. G. (2018). Utilization of active and passive constructions in English academic writing. *International Journal of Human Sciences*, 15(1), 413-421.
- Bailey, S. (2015). *Academic writing - A handbook for international students*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Benett, K. (2009). English academic style manuals: A survey. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 8(1), 43-54.
- Biber, D., & Repper, R. (2015). *The Cambridge handbook of English corpus linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Biber, D., Conrad, S., Finegan, E., Johansson, S., & Leech, G. (1999). *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*. Harlow: Longman.
- Byrd, P., & Benson, B. (2001). *Applied English grammar*. Boston: Heinle ELT.
- Downing, A., & Locke, P. (2006). *English grammar - A university course (Second edition)*. 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Fauziah, H., & Bashtomi, Y. (2024). "Expunge virtually all use of the passive voice": How does style guideline affect passive voice occurrences in research articles? *Journal of Language and Education*, 10(2), 59-70.
- Fusch, P., Fusch, G. E., & Ness, L. R. (2018). Denzin's paradigm shift: Revisiting triangulation in qualitative research. *Journal of Social Change*, 10(1), 19-32. doi: 10.5590/JOSC.2018.10.1.02
- Graver, B. D. (1986). *Advanced English practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G. (2005). *A student's introduction to English grammar*. Cambridge: University Press, Cambridge.
- H. Varga, M. (2015). A 'passzív' jelentés és nyelvi kifejezőeszközei a magyarban. Debreceni Egyetem Finnugor Nyelvtudományi Tanszék.
https://finnugor.arts.unideb.hu/fud/fud22/fud22cikkek/20_hvargamarta.pdf
- Hyland, K., & Jiang, F. K. (2017). Is academic writing becoming more informal? *English for Specific Purposes*, 45, 40-51.

- Jordan, R. R. (1999). *Academic writing course - Study skills in English*. Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Education Limited.
- Károly, K. (2009). Author identity in English academic discourse: A comparison of expert and Hungarian EFL writing. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica*, 56(1), 1-22.
doi:10.1556/ALing.56.2009.1.1
- Kennedy, G. (1988). *An introduction to corpus linguistics*. Harlow: Longman.
- Keresztes, L. (1995). Személytelen (alanytalan és ágens nélküli) kifejezések a finnben és a magyarban . *Hungarologische beitrage 3. Finnish-Ugrische kontrastive untersuchungen*, 39-54.
- Khaghaninejad, M. S., Azarian, M., & Javanmardi, F. (2022). A corpus-based cross-disciplinary analysis of "objectivity" manifestations in academic texts. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Applied Literature: Dynamics and Advances*, 10(1), 119-140.
- Leong, P. A. (2024). The passive voice in scientific writing. The current norm in science journals. *Journal of Science Communication*, 13(1) 1-16.
- Miranti, R., & Ali Lubis, M. Y. (2024). Passive voice and active voice. *Cemara Journal*, 2(2) 1-4.
- Oszlovics, K. (2024a). Az angol szenvedő szerkezet funkcionális használatának vizsgálata magyar anyanyelvű egyetemisták körében. *Alkalmazott Nyelvészeti Közlemények*, 17(1), 212-232. <https://doi.org/10.32977/anyk.2024.015>
- Oszlovics, K. (2024b). Az angol szenvedő szerkezet használatának nehézségei a tudományos írás során magyar anyanyelvű egyetemisták körében. *Miskolci Egyetem Diáktudomány*. (in press)
- Parrott, M. (2010). *Grammar for English language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scrivener, J. (2010). *Teaching English grammar - What to teach and how to teach it*. London: Macmillan Education.
- Subagio, U., Prajogo, J. A., & Iragiliati, E. (2019). Investigation of passive voice occurrence in scientific writing. *International Journal of Language Teaching and Education*, 3(1), 61-66.
- Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (2010). *Academic writing for graduate students - Essential tasks and skills*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- Veselovská, L. (2019). *Form and functions in English grammar*. Olomouc: Olomouc Modern Language Monographs.
- Veszelszki, Á. (2016). Academic writing, wissenschaftliches Schreiben, tudományos írás. Egyetemi hallgatók írásos produktumai – stilisztikai és grammatikai szempontból. In Feld-Knapp, I. (Ed.), *Grammatik. Cathedra Magistrorum 3*. (pp. 286-305). Budapest: Eötvös-József-Collegium.

