

## **Week 5: Voice and the use of personal pronouns**

**Task 1: Read and discuss the following text with another student. What do you think of it as a piece of academic writing?**

**A.** I recorded a total of 14 case studies. I analysed the data using principles of conversation analysis and thematic analysis set within a hermeneutic interpretative framework. In order to illuminate presentations of autonomy in practice, I used focus-group discussions with nurses and older people as part of the interpretative process. I discuss the factors that prevented the operationalisation of an individual rights-based concept of autonomy for older people.

**Do the same with the following text. On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite 'Text B' in an appropriate academic style.**

**B.** Nobody knows exactly when someone invented gunpowder. People know for a fact that the Chinese made rockets and fireworks long before people used gunpowder in Europe, which occurred at about the beginning of the thirteenth century. We generally believe that gunpowder brought to an end the 'Age of Chivalry', since anyone with a firearm could bring down a mounted knight. In fact, people did not develop efficient firearms until the sixteenth century. They used gunpowder mainly in siege cannon when people first introduced it. Later, they used it in engineering work and in mining, but they found that it was extremely dangerous. Modern explosives have now replaced gunpowder, but we still use it for making fireworks, just as the Chinese did.

**Begin your rewrite of Text B as follows:** *It is not known exactly when gunpowder was invented...*

**Task 2: Which of the two sentences in the following sets is preferable, and why?**

- 1a. Someone built this bridge in 1901.
- b. This bridge was built in 1901.
- 2a. Reference books must not be taken out of the library.
- b. Nobody must take reference books out of the library.
- 3a. Scientists working in California have discovered a drug which stops premature ageing. The drug will now be manufactured commercially, and it should be available soon.
- 3b. A drug which stops premature ageing has been discovered by scientists working in California. They will now manufacture the drug commercially, and it should be available soon.
- 4a. Alexander Graham Bell was a scientist and inventor. The telephone was invented by him in 1876, and he also worked on early radio transmitters.
- 4b. Alexander Graham Bell was a scientist and inventor. He invented the telephone in 1876 and also worked on early radio transmitters.
- 5a. The Health Service has prospered under this government. It is true that we have closed hospitals and spent less money, but the system is now more efficient.
- 5b. The Health Service has prospered under this government. It is true that hospitals have been closed and less money spent, but the system is now more efficient.

**The passive voice is used widely** (this is an example!) in academic writing. Research has shown that academic texts produced by non-native speakers (another example) do not contain as many examples of the passive voice as texts produced by native speakers (approximately 25%).

**Task 3: By now, you should have come to some conclusions as to the function of the passive. Working with one or two other students, write a set of rules in the box below.**

**Task 4: The use of the passive in the methodology section. How many can you spot?**

A bilingual group and a monolingual group, each comprising 30 children, were compared. In each group there were six subjects at each of five different age levels. The subjects were selected from seven day care centers in Huston, Texas. These centers accept only children from below poverty line thus, comparable socioeconomic status among the test subjects was insured.

The bilingual subjects were selected from the 99 Mexican American children in a previous study (Carrow, 1971) on the basis of performance at age mean or above in both languages on a test of auditory comprehension. This criterion was employed to assure basic understanding of both languages.

The test instrument employed in this study was a revised version of the Auditory Test for Language Comprehension (Carrow, 1968), which permits the assessment of oral language comprehension of English and Spanish without requiring language expression. It consists of a set of 114 plates, each of which contains three black and white line drawings representing 15 grammatical categories.

Both groups were tested by the same examiner, a Mexican American fluent in both languages. The children were brought individually to a test area where they engaged in spontaneous conversation. For the bilingual children, conversations were conducted in English and Spanish to determine the language in which each child appeared more fluent. Each bilingual subject was tested first in the language in which he demonstrated less fluency so that learning would not be a significant factor in subsequent performance when the test was administered again in the second language.

The test required the child to indicate his response by pointing to the picture which corresponded to the examiner's utterance. A score of one was given for each item passed. Test administration required 30 to 45 minutes in each language for each child.

### The most common verbs used in the passive in academic writing are:

<i>make</i>	<i>see</i>	<i>find</i>	<i>consider</i>
<i>give</i>	<i>use</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>show</i>

In the box below you will find a selection of other academic verbs used predominantly in the passive voice.

<i>achieve</i>	<i>apply</i>	<i>ask</i>	<i>attribute</i>	<i>base</i>	<i>calculate</i>	<i>choose</i>
<i>compare</i>	<i>compose</i>	<i>define</i>	<i>describe</i>	<i>determine</i>		
<i>distribute</i>	<i>label</i>	<i>estimate</i>	<i>explain</i>	<i>express</i>	<i>group</i>	
<i>identify</i>	<i>introduce</i>	<i>present</i>	<i>link</i>	<i>lose</i>	<i>measure</i>	
<i>note</i>	<i>observe</i>	<i>perform</i>	<i>relate</i>	<i>replace</i>	<i>require</i>	<i>say</i>
	<i>study</i>	<i>think</i>	<i>understand</i>			

### Typical problems with the use of the passive

**A. Verb forms:** Writer uses the wrong form of the verb: it is the **third** form of the verb (the past participle) which is needed rather than the **second** form – the past tense.

#### Examples:

1. \*The articles on the sociology of crime were wrote by John Smith.
2. \*Psychology studies were conduct at Harvard University.
3. \*Students who plagiarise are usually catched by their lecturer.

\* = grammatically incorrect sentence

### Be especially careful with strong (irregular) verbs!

**B. Passive with intransitive verbs:** Writer uses a passive structure with intransitive verbs (verbs that don't take an object).

#### Examples:

1. \*This problem was happened in my country.
2. \*The change in climate was occurred in coastal areas.

### Are you familiar with these uses of the passive?

It is quite common to use a passive/A passive is commonly used (which do you prefer?) to express a belief or feeling which may be held by a number of people, especially if you do not wish to indicate who holds the belief – be careful academic writers! (see 'NB' below Task 5). For example:

**It is thought** Swine Flu is present in several European countries.

**It is thought** that the couple's daughter was involved in the accident.

Another (possibly better) way of expressing this is:

Swine Flu **is thought** to be present in several European countries.

The couple's daughter **is thought** to have been involved.

(Note the difference between 'is/was' and 'to be/to have been')

**Task 5: Transform the following sentences using the above structures and the verbs in brackets.**

- a) Shakespeare is the greatest of all playwrights. (consider)
- b) He travelled widely across Europe. (say)
- c) House prices will fall for the next 18 months. (predict)
- d) Mrs Thatcher needed very little sleep. (believe)
- e) The economy of the country is in an extremely precarious state (think)
- f) He was a member of the communist party when he was in his twenties. (know)
- g) Global warming will become a major problem in the relatively near future (expect)

**NB. In academic writing, you would, of course, need to say who holds the belief, by providing references!!**

**The use of personal pronouns in academic writing**

**Task 1: Corpus analyses have shown that first- and second-person pronouns ('I', 'we', 'you') are rare in most academic writing. Why do you think this is?**

**Task 2: Read the following short texts regarding the use of the first person singular ('I') in academic writing. What is the policy in your department?**

**a.** In most university assignments you will be asked **not** to use the **first** or second **person**, because they require you to write based on academically credible research rather than your personal experience.

<http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:ZmeCfhGGPEMJ:www.usq.edu.au/resources/grammar.pdf+first+person+singular+in+academic+writing&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=25&gl=uk>

**b.** I still find first person voice jarring in the body of an academic writing, outside of perhaps very occasional anecdotal material which is usually relegated to foot/endnotes. I believe this was formerly the accepted standard until recently. Even so, use of first person voice should be sparse. If you're writing an academic paper, it shouldn't be presented as an opinion piece, because it's not. Academic papers should present evidence, arguments, and conclusions that are independent of opinion, and therefore also of you, as merely the voice presenting them.

<http://www.heardworld.com/higgaion/?p=685>

**Tip: There are different schools of thought regarding the use of the first person singular pronoun ('I') in academic writing. However, it might be advisable to try and avoid it. If in doubt, check with your lecturer, as some assessment tasks (e.g. reflections and journals) will require a more personal approach.**

### **Task 3: Suggest alternatives to the following to avoid the use of personal language.**

#### **Example**

In this essay I will discuss the main differences between the English and Scottish legal systems.

→ In this essay, the main differences between the English and Scottish legal systems will be discussed.

a. I have divided my report into five sections.

b. I will conclude by proposing that all drugs should be legalized.

c. The opinion of the present author in this essay is that the importance of the monarchy should be reduced.

d. In the third part of the essay, we will look at the reasons for public hysteria over the SARS virus.

e. Although I am not an expert in the field, I have tried very hard to understand the main ideas.

#### **Homework task?: Proposal for a graduate tax**

**Scenario:** In country X, all state education, including higher education, is free to suitably qualified students. The government is now proposing to introduce a 'graduate tax', whereby all graduate students will have to repay the full cost of their higher education over a period of 10 years.

The following short text argues against a graduate tax. Your task is to rewrite the text i) replacing the sections beginning with 'I', 'in my opinion', etc. with something more appropriate, and ii) adding appropriate cautious language. Doing this will make the text far more academically 'respectable'.

I don't see why people should pay for higher education. State primary and secondary education are free so I think state higher education should be, too. In my opinion, it is in the interests of the country to have all its citizens educated to the best of their ability. An educated workforce is the real wealth of a country. I think everybody benefits from it, not only the ones who have been educated. If graduates have to repay the full cost of their fees, I think many clever people will be discouraged from going into higher education, and the whole country will suffer as a consequence. To my mind, a university education is more than just preparation for work: it is every citizen's human right to be educated free of charge according to their ability and their interests.

Some people argue that graduates earn more money than people who do not have degrees, and so they can afford to pay the extra graduate tax. I don't think this is fair. In my experience, not all the jobs that graduates do are well paid. Also, I know lots of people who do not go to university, but go straight into a trade or into business and many of these people end up being relatively wealthy. I don't see why only graduates should be penalised. I would argue that graduates have already been 'taxed' in a sense as, for

many years, they have not been able to earn the salaries they would have earned had they gone straight into business after school.

Another argument for a graduate tax is that students will take their studies more seriously if they know they will eventually have to pay for them. I think this argument is irrelevant: if students don't take their studies seriously, they will fail and never graduate, and so they won't pay the tax back anyway.