

THE USE OF PASSIVE VOICE IN ACADEMIC WRITING

EVIDENCE FROM DANISH, NORWEGIAN
AND SWEDISH AS L1 AND L2

PAULINA HORBOWICZ
DOMINIKA SKRZYPEK
MIKOŁAJ SOBKOWIAK
NATALIA KOŁACZEK

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań



ABSTRACT. The paper studies the use of the passive voice in academic texts written in Mainland Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian and Swedish) by their native speakers and by adult Polish learners of those languages. The corpus consists of 37 MA theses written in Scandinavia and in Poland. A number of referring verbs were chosen for the purpose of the analysis. The results show that while there are discrepancies in the use of the passive voice in texts written by Polish and Scandinavian students, they cannot be unequivocally diagnosed as resulting from the grammatical and stylistic influence of the mother tongue.

1. INTRODUCTION

The passive voice and impersonal constructions are often taken to be the hallmarks of professional, academic discourse. Although writers of Mainland Scandinavian languages are frequently advised to avoid the passive voice (e.g. the *Klarspråk* (=plain language¹) movement), suggestions that it may be the preferred structure can occasionally be found in publications regarding stylistic advice to authors of formal texts. This tendency is heightened by the avoidance of naming the agent, which is common to all Scandinavian languages.

¹ <http://www.sprakochfolkminnen.se/sprak/klarsprak/in-english.html>

On the other hand, there are a number of impersonal structures which help demote the agent but are still in the active voice.

Learners of mainland Scandinavian languages as second languages² (henceforth L2), that is Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, face two problems when writing academic texts with regards to the use of the passive voice. Firstly, there are two passives in Scandinavian languages and their distribution is dependent on a number of factors. Secondly, the stylistic demands of their mother tongue and Scandinavian texts may differ with respect to the use of the passive voice, which may lead to stylistic transfer. It has been observed that not only the structural, but also the rhetorical features of L1 may interfere with L2, especially in second language writing:

Foreign students who have mastered syntactic structures have still demonstrated inability to compose adequate themes, term papers, theses, and dissertations. Instructors have written, on foreign-student papers, such comments as: “The material is all here, but it seems somehow out of focus”, or “Lacks organization”, or “Lacks cohesion”. [...] The foreign-student paper is out focus because the foreign student is employing a rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violate the expectations of the native reader” (Kaplan 1966:3f.)

The aim of the present study is to investigate the use of the passive voice in academic texts written by native speakers of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish and in academic texts written by adult Polish learners of these languages, pinpointing the potential differences between the two groups. The study is a part of a larger project dealing with Scandinavian languages as second languages in academic writing.

2. ACADEMIC L2-WRITING

Academic writing in second language context has so far been investigated mainly for English. The predominant sources of data are academic essays written during language classes (Allison 1995, Crossley/McNamara 2009) or as a part of various exams or diagnostic tests (Hyland/Milton 1997; Hinkel 1997, 2009). There appears to have been little research conducted on longer academic texts, such as papers or theses, written in a second language. Such texts differ from the aforementioned essays in that their primary goal is to give a report on conducted research, and to share the results with the community of researchers, rather than to show the learners’ command of the target language. Nonetheless,

² Following Kowal, we refer to Danish, Norwegian and Swedish as the non-native writers’ *second languages* even though they are in fact subsequent non-native languages acquired by them. This is “due to the fact that no explicit reference is made to the interconnectedness between the already acquired languages” and the Scandinavian languages in question (Kowal 2016:52).

a good command of the target language is necessary in order to be able to convey one's findings in an appropriate way. It is not unjustified to claim that the linguistic features of any academic text influence the reception of this text and its findings among scholars.

Much of the research on academic L2 writing focuses on the contrast between English and the languages of Far East Asia. Allison (1995) studies assertions in essays written by undergraduates in Hong Kong, while Hyland/Milton (1997) compare expressing qualification and certainty in academic essays by English L1 texts and Cantonese English L2 texts. Hinkel (2002, 2004) bases his findings on six groups of English as L2 writers: Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Arabic. His study shows that L2 writers generally tend to avoid syntactically and semantically complex verb structures, and thus the frequency of passive voice used in L2 texts is significantly lower than in the L1-texts.

There are reasons to claim that "English passive constructions are largely collocational and idiomatic" (Hinkel 2004:24), which makes the construction difficult to master by L2 writers. At the same time, there are some verbs that appear almost only in passive constructions (for instance *consider*, *do* or *find*), so "an easy technique that L2 writers can rely on with great effect is to select the verbs that almost always occur in passive and learn and practice using them in context" (Hinkel, op.cit.). Also Granger suggests that the associations between specific lexemes and constructions they appear in, are strong, and states that "some verbs display strong passive attraction, while others are characterized by passive repulsion" (2013:3).

3. THE PASSIVE VOICE IN MAINLAND SCANDINAVIAN LANGUAGES AND POLISH

Mainland Scandinavian languages have two means of expressing the passive voice: morphological, the so-called *s*-passive and the periphrastic *bli*-passive³. Both have full inflectional paradigms in all tenses in Swedish, whereas in Danish and Norwegian⁴ the *s*-passive is found only in the present tense and infinite verb forms (apart from a few exceptions). The two passives are not fully interchangeable and factors such as animacy of the subject and aspectual value of the verb influence the choice of the passive form.

Historically, the morphological *s*-passive stems from the so-called medial voice, the *-s* being the reduced and suffixed form of the reflexive pronoun *sik* (related to Polish *się*). The *s*-forms have many, partly overlapping, functions;

³ The full form of the auxiliary is *blive* in Danish and *bliva* in Swedish.

⁴ In Norwegian, there are two variants of written language, *bokmål* and *nynorsk* that show a number of differences regarding passive voice. In the study we only include master's theses written in *bokmål*, as there are very few theses written in *nynorsk* in Poland.

among them reflexive, reciprocal and even active with a handful of verbs, such as Swedish *andas* ‘breathe’.

The periphrastic passive is made of an auxiliary, *bli* ‘become’ or *vara*⁵ ‘be’ (for procesual and statal passives, respectively) and the past participle, e.g. Swedish *han blev jagad* ‘he was hunted’.

The distribution of both passives differs among Mainland Scandinavian languages, since both passives have evolved in the time where first differences within the originally uniform North Germanic had started to show and the developments are language-specific.

	Danish	Norwegian	Swedish	
Infinitive	<i>bruge -s</i>	<i>bruke-s</i>	<i>använda-s</i>	<i>be used</i>
Present tense	<i>bruge-s</i>	<i>bruke-s</i>	<i>använd-s</i>	<i>is used</i>
Preterite	<i>brugte-s</i>	<i>brukte-s</i>	<i>använde-s</i>	<i>was used</i>
Perfect	<i>kastede-s</i>	<i>*kastet-s/*kasta-s</i>	<i>kastade-s</i>	<i>was thrown</i>
Pluperfect	<i>*sang-s</i>	<i>*sang-s</i>	<i>sjöng-s</i>	<i>was sung</i>
	<i>*har brugt-s</i>	<i>*har brukt-s</i>	<i>har använt-s</i>	<i>has been used</i>
	<i>*havde brugt-s</i>	<i>*hadde brukt-s</i>	<i>hade använt-s</i>	<i>had been used</i>

Tab. 1. The *s*-passive in Mainland Scandinavian languages.

	Danish	Norwegian	Swedish	
Infinitive	<i>blive brugt</i>	<i>bli brukt</i>	<i>bli använt</i>	<i>be used</i>
Present tense	<i>bliver brugt</i>	<i>blir brukt</i>	<i>blir använt</i>	<i>is used</i>
Preterite	<i>blev brugt</i>	<i>ble brukt</i>	<i>blev använt</i>	<i>was used</i>
Perfect	<i>er blevet brugt</i>	<i>har blitt brukt</i>	<i>har blivit använt</i>	<i>has been used</i>
Pluperfect	<i>var blevet brugt</i>	<i>hadde blitt brukt</i>	<i>hade blivit använt</i>	<i>used</i>
				<i>had been used</i>

Tab. 2. The *bli*-passive in Mainland Scandinavian languages.

Both passives are used productively in all Mainland Scandinavian languages, however a number of factors affect the choice between them. In Danish and Norwegian the *s*-passive is mainly limited to expressions of states, rules,

⁵ In the study we count examples of the *vara*-passive together with examples of the *bli*-passive. The periphrastic constructions with *vara* ‘be’ differ to some extent from *bli*-passive. In Swedish the auxiliary *bli* is the only option, while constructions with *vara* and participle are adjectival (and usually resultative, e.g. *bänken är målad* ‘the bench is painted’). In Danish and Norwegian constructions with *være* can be ambiguous with respect to their passive status (e.g. *benken er malt* ‘the bench is painted’ can be construed as passive, but *benken er nymalt* ‘the bench is newly painted’ only has an adjectival reading, since the verb *nymale* ‘new-paint’ does not exist). For the sake of clarity we chose not to delve further into those differences here.

instructions, norms and plans as well as actions not limited to a particular time, whereas the *bli*-passive is preferred when describing singular completed actions (Mikkelsen 1911:381, Western 1921:159-161, Engdahl 1999, Hansen/Heltoft 2011 II:741 ff., Laanemets 2012).

(1) Norwegian

Fluesoppen	spises	ikke	(er	ikke	spiselig; men
toadstool-DEF	eat-S	not	(is	not	edible but

allikevel blir	den	kanskje	undertiden	spist).
still BLI	<i>it</i>	<i>maybe</i>	<i>off and on</i>	<i>eaten</i>)

‘The toadstool should not be eaten, but off and on it gets eaten’

(2) Danish

a generic interpretation

Der tales	ikke	mere	dansk	i	Skåne.
there speak-S	no	longer	Danish	in	Scania

‘Danish is no longer spoken in Scania’

b actual events

Der bliver	(ofte)	talt	dansk	i	Skåne
there BLI	(often)	spoken	Danish	in	Scania

‘Danish is (often) spoken in Scania’

(all examples after Engdahl 1999)

The distribution of both passives in Swedish is not as clear-cut as in Danish and Norwegian and in many contexts the two are interchangeable. The *bli*-passive seems however to be favored when the subject of the passive sentence is animate and has some influence on the situation.

(3) Swedish

a. Representanten	försökte bli	omvald.
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Representative-DEF	tried BLI	reelected
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b. ??Representanten	försökte	omväljas
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representative-DEF	tried	reelect-S
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Also in Polish the passive voice is a periphrastic construction. It’s made of an auxiliary, *być* ‘be’ or *zostać* ‘become’ and the past participle, where not only the participle but also the auxiliary verb agrees with the subject noun, e.g. *książka jest czytana* ‘the book is read’, *oni są widziani* ‘they are seen’ (Fisiak et al. 1978:198, Nagórko 2007:105). Passive voice is generally avoided in the Polish language (Doroszewski 1963:238) as it is seen as a stylistically marked structure (Nagórko 2007:105). On the other hand, there are some impersonal subjectless passive constructions, e.g. reflexive constructions with *się*: *Książka się drukuje* ‘The book is being printed’ or constructions with impersonal verb

forms ending with *-no/-to*: *Książkę przeczytano*. ‘The book has been read’ (Fisiak et al. 1978:200, Kuhnert 1998:349).

Grammatical differences aside, all Mainland Scandinavian languages and Polish are similar in that they disallow the use of passives for stylistic reasons in most text genres⁶. Active voice is preferred, even if the agent of the action is unknown. Given such similarities, positive transfer (facilitation) may be expected to occur in learners’ texts:

It is quite possible that the means for expressing a shared meaning are the same in the first and second language. [...] In [such] cases [...] it is possible to transfer the means used to realize a given meaning in the L1 into the L2. When this is possible, the only learning that has to take place is the discovery that the realization devices are the same in the two languages. The learner does not need to overcome proactive inhibition by mastering a different realization device. (Ellis 1985:22)

However, there is another factor that needs to be taken into consideration, namely the notion of what constitutes academic discourse in a given culture, and what language forms agree with that notion. In section 4 we offer a brief overview of the rhetoric traditions concerning academic writing in Scandinavia and Poland.

4. SCANDINAVIAN TEXTBOOKS ON ACADEMIC WRITING

Scandinavian textbooks on academic writing contrast the use of passive with writing more “personally” by means of using the pronouns “I” or “we”. The students are generally encouraged to avoid excessive use of passive, as it “may give the text an unnecessary impersonal character”⁷ (Galberg Jacobsen/Skyum-Nielsen 2007:16) or it “may create a nobody’s language, which in turn makes the text dull to read” (Rognsaa 2015:140). It has also been claimed that verbs in the passive voice can make the meaning of the sentence blurrier by not naming the agent (Språkrådet 2014). Hence, the students are advised to “avoid using passive voice as far as that is possible” (Svensk språkguide 2014), or to use the passive voice “only when the context allows for it” (Rognsaa 2015:140). The use of passive voice is deemed legitimate in the following cases:

- when one refers to general methods that others can repeat (Rienecker/Stray Jørgensen 2010:354, Stray Jørgensen 2014:32);
- when it is not important or obvious who the agent is (Språkrådet 2014);
- when one does not want to state who the agent is (Galberg Jacobsen/Skyum-Nielsen 2007:16).

⁶ There are, however, genres where passive forms are used extensively without sounding unnatural or stylistically awkward, e.g. recipes and user’s manuals.

⁷ The translation of the quotation here and henceforth by the authors.

The use of active voice along with personal pronoun “I” is recommended in introductions and conclusions. Hiding the agent in those cases is seen as “superfluous” (Rienecker/Stray Jørgensen 2010:353). Other textbooks however, recommend caution when using personal pronouns, as they focus on opinions rather than arguments (Busch 2013:24). Instead, students are encouraged to “hide” the pronouns in inverted sentence structure (not beginning with the subject, Rognsaa 2015:140) or by using inanimate subjects such as “the analysis shows” etc. (Busch 2013:24).

The advice that textbooks on academic writing offer can be very vague, e.g. one of Stray Jørgensen’s rules of thumb for using passive and active forms in academic texts states that one should use active forms when there are no particularly good reasons to use the passive voice (2014:32). At times the advice is even contradictory and very often refers to the writers’ innate knowledge of the language. Such advice is of little use to L2 writers. It also seems that different parts of a master’s thesis require a difference in style that is not explicitly discussed in the textbooks.

The notion of academic language that can be deduced from the Scandinavian textbooks on academic writing differs from Polish academic discourse. Among such discourse’s most important features one should name its objectivism and tendency to ‘hide’ the author which are expressed by formal register, impersonal constructions, such as passive constructions (passive voice, reflexive constructions, impersonal verb forms) or use of first-person plural “we”, the so called authors’ “we” (Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak 2008:129, Kuhnert 1998:349). One can therefore expect that Polish L2-writers of Scandinavian languages will avoid using personal pronouns and overuse the passive voice. On the other hand, studies show that the passive voice is rather underused by learner populations (Granger 2013:4). In our study, we show how learners cope with those two contradicting tendencies.

5. THE STUDY

5.1 MATERIAL AND METHOD

The material chosen for this study is a corpus of MA theses in linguistics written by native speakers of Danish (n=5), Norwegian (n=5) and Swedish (n=5) and an equivalent number of MA theses written in these languages by Polish students of Scandinavian studies at the Department of Scandinavian Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland). The choice of texts was dictated by the following considerations:

- Length: each text is of considerable length and consists of several clearly defined parts;

- Availability: the texts are available online (the Scandinavian material) or accessible via the University's database of bachelor projects and master's theses (<https://apd.amu.edu.pl/>);
- Genre: each text represents the academic genre but is not (obligatorily) proofread by a native speaker (in the case of the Polish material). The proofreading is restricted to eradication of the most obvious grammatical and lexical errors, and covers only a 10 pages long fragment of the text. As such, the students are responsible for the quality of the remaining text themselves. Therefore it may be said to represent the author's level of language proficiency.
- All texts are available in a digital, searchable format.

The total number of words in each language differs from 221,505 words in the case of Danish to 362,175 in the case of Swedish, with Norwegian situated in between with 324,476 words⁸. The differences are caused by different requirements given to MA theses in each country: the Swedish theses are definitely the shortest, with an average length of 15,300 words, whereas the Norwegian ones are at least twice as long (average: 36,916 words). The theses written in Poland, on the other hand, all measure approximately 20,000 words. The exact numbers for the analyzed corpus are presented in table 3.

Wordcount	Danish	Norwegian	Swedish
L1-text	137079	184578	153007
L2-text	84426	139898	209168
Sum	221505	324476	362175

Tab. 3. The number of words comprising each corpus.

5.2 THE RESULTS

In order to enable cross-linguistic comparison of the data, we have chosen five verbs common for all three languages, here in Norwegian: *anse* 'judge', *beskrive* 'describe', *diskutere* 'discuss', *presentere* 'present' and *tenke* 'think'. Those verbs were chosen since they are typical for the academic style and appear frequently in passive voice. In addition, we chose five other verbs for each of the languages in our corpus based on their frequency in our corpus. There is, however, an overlap between the examined language-specific Danish and Swedish verbs as three out of five of the selected Danish verbs in this portion of the data have formal equivalents in Swedish that are also subject to our analysis. Only one of the Norwegian-specific verbs chosen for analysis has formal

⁸ The number of words refers to the main text only, excluding preface, list of contents and bibliography.

equivalents among the selected Swedish and Danish verbs. Contrary to the common verbs, the choice of the language specific verbs was not meant for cross-linguistic comparison of the data but for additional analyses of data within one language. It is, furthermore, a testament to the data's authenticity. The complete list of the examined verbs is presented in table 4.

Language	Danish	Norwegian	Swedish
Common verbs	anse	anse	anse
	beskrive	beskrive	beskriva
	diskutere	diskutere	diskutera
	præsentere	presentere	presentera
	tænke	tenke	tänka
Language specific verbs	forvente	forklare	förvänta
	opfatte	kalle	nämna
	nævne	se på	redovisa
	forstå	si	se som
	kalde	tolke	kalla

Tab. 4. The list of the studied verbs.

In the study we compared the frequency of each verb in both voices per 1000 words⁹. In addition, we investigated the frequency of the two types of passive voice, i.e. the morphological *s*-passive and the periphrastic passive. The results are presented in tables 5 and 6.

Language	DK			NO			SE		
	Active	Passive	Passive to active ratio	Active	Passive	Passive to active ratio	Active	Passive	Passive to active ratio
L1	1,63	1,37	0,84	2,09	1,37	0,66	1,95	2,44	1,25
L2	1,81	1,59	0,88	1,10	1,76	1,6	1,86	1,53	0,82

Tab. 5. Active and passive voice densities for the studied verbs and passive to active ratios across the studied texts.

The numbers show that Danish L2 writers use the studied verbs with a higher frequency than L1 writers, in both voices. Active voice is generally preferred by both groups over passive, but L1 writers of Danish choose to use passive rather

⁹ The normalized frequency value for passive forms (i.e. the number of occurrences of passive forms per 1000 words) is elsewhere known as *passive voice density* and used as a measure of syntactic complexity (cf. Polio/Yoon 2018). In this paper we occasionally use the terms *active voice density* and *passive voice density* accordingly.

than active forms of the studied verbs slightly less frequently than the respective L2 writers. In the case of Swedish it is L1 writers who generally use the studied verbs more frequently than their non-native counterparts. There is a discrepancy between these two groups in that passive voice is generally preferred by L1 writers, while L2 writers of Swedish tend to use the active forms of the studied verbs more often than passive forms. The groups for which the numbers differ most, however, are Norwegian L1 and L2 writers. While L1 writers generally use the studied verbs more often and tend to choose their active forms more often than passive ones, L2 writers have a strong tendency to use the passive voice more often than their native counterparts. The passive to active ratio values for Norwegian L1 and L2 writers are the lowest and highest ones across the dataset, respectively, which makes the difference between passive to active ratios for these two groups the largest one across the languages investigated here.

Language	Danish			Norwegian			Swedish		
Passive type	<i>s</i> -passive	periphrastic	STP ratio ¹⁰	<i>s</i> -passive	periphrastic	STP ratio	<i>s</i> -passive	periphrastic	STP ratio
L1	1,08	0,29	3,72	0,93	0,44	2,11	2,41	0,03	80,33
L2	1,18	0,41	2,88	1,24	0,52	2,38	1,52	0,01	152,00

Tab. 6. The frequency of both types of passive voice per 1000 words and *s*-passive to periphrastic passive ratios across the studied texts.

There are also several differences across the different portions of our corpus in the use of *s*-passive and periphrastic passive. The data in table 6 show that the *s*-passive form is clearly preferred by both L1 and L2 writers. In the case of Norwegian L2 writers, the STP ratio is a little higher than in the case of L1 writers, while data regarding Danish L1 writers show an even clearer tendency to choose the synthetic *s*-passive rather than periphrastic passive forms (STP=3,72 as opposed to 2,88 for L2 writers of Danish). Even though Swedish L2 writers used the *s*-passive forms of the studied verbs much less frequently (in terms of number of occurrences per 1000 words) than the respective L1 writers, the STP ratio is much higher in the case of L2 writers. At the same time there is an enormous discrepancy with regards to STP ratios between Danish and Norwegian versus Swedish, which is due to the extremely low frequency per 1000 words of periphrastic passives in the Swedish corpus.

The results also show that Mainland Scandinavian languages differ amongst themselves with respect to the frequency of the passive voice; the

¹⁰ STP ratio = *s*-passive to periphrastic passive ratio.

overall passive voice density in L1 texts is 1,37 for Danish and 1,38 for Norwegian, while it is 2,44 for Swedish. At the same time, in terms of frequency alone, the Polish learners of Mainland Scandinavian languages seem to use the passive voice with more or less the same frequency, i.e. 1,59 for Danish, 1,76 for Norwegian and 1,53 for Swedish.

In the following sections we present the results separately for each of the three languages.

5.3 DANISH RESULTS

Both L1 and L2 writers have shown a tendency to use the verbs *anse* ‘judge’ and *præsenterere* ‘present’ more frequently in the passive voice, while both groups prefer using the verbs *beskrive* ‘describe’ and *tænke* ‘think’ in the active voice. The only discrepancy between the two groups here is the verb *diskutere* ‘discuss’, which is used more frequently in the active voice by L1 writers and in the passive voice by L2 writers (cf. table 7 below).

Verb	L1			L2		
	Frequency per 1000 words	Active voice density	Passive voice density	Frequency per 1000 words	Active voice density	Passive voice density
<i>anse</i>	0,35	0,12	0,23	0,19	0,02	0,17
<i>beskrive</i>	0,49	0,34	0,15	0,65	0,56	0,09
<i>diskutere</i>	0,19	0,11	0,08	0,09	0,04	0,05
<i>præsenterere</i>	0,10	0,03	0,07	0,20	0,07	0,13
<i>tænke</i>	0,13	0,08	0,05	0,03	0,02	0,01

Tab.7. The distribution of active and passive forms in Danish L1 and L2 texts (common verbs).

As indicated in table 8 below, there is less unanimity between L1 and L2 writers as far as the remaining/non-common verbs (i.e. the ones that are “characteristic for Danish”) are concerned. While both L1 and L2 writers tend to use the verb *opfatte* ‘perceive’ more frequently in the passive and the verb *forstå* ‘understand’ in the active voice, the verb *kalde* ‘call, name’ was used more often in the active voice by the L1 users but in the passive voice by the L2 users. The verb *forvente* ‘expect’ had more L1 occurrences in the active voice, while L2 writers used it with the same frequency in both passive and active voice.

Verb	L1			L2		
	Frequency per 1000 words	Active voice density	Passive voice density	Frequency per 1000 words	Active voice density	Passive voice density
forvente	0,10	0,07	0,03	0,08	0,04	0,04
opfatte	0,55	0,21	0,34	0,52	0,15	0,37
nævne	0,32	0,17	0,15	0,75	0,49	0,26
forstå	0,48	0,34	0,14	0,38	0,24	0,14
kalde	0,28	0,15	0,13	0,53	0,19	0,34

Tab.8. The distribution of active and passive forms in Danish L1 and L2 texts (verbs specific for the Danish corpus).

Nævne ‘name, mention’ is by far the most interesting verb in this group – L1 writers use it almost just as frequently in the passive as in the active voice, most of the active voice occurrences being ones with third person animate agents, e.g.

- (4) ...til forskellige sprog (Pavlenko 2004:23). **Hun nævner...** (D1-Kan¹¹)
 [...] to different languages (Pavlenko 2004:23). **She mentions...**
- (5) Jensen (2001) **nævner** at assimilation er almindeligt i... (D1-Sch)
 Jensen (2001) **mentions** that assimilation is common in...

Among L2 writers, on the other hand, the verb in question is used almost twice as frequently in the active voice as in the passive. Out of all active uses 50% include a first-person agent (the so called reader's guide, where the author guides the reader through their text, cf. 6 and 7), while 30% of occurrences involve a third-person animate agent (reference to sources, cf. 8 and 9).

- (6) [...] at ordene refererer til en af kategorierne af bandeord som **jeg har nævnt** før. (D2-Tab)
 [...] that the words refer to one of the categories of swear words that **I have mentioned** before.
- (7) Her **nævner jeg** mange regler (samt undtagelser) vedrørende deres deklination... (D2-Adj)
 Here **I mention** the many rules (and exception) connected to their declination.
- (8) Eisenberg **nævner** også to typer antonymi... (D2-Adj)
 Eisenberg **mentions** also two types of antonymy.

¹¹ The abbreviation can be spelled out as follows: the language of the thesis (D/S/N for respectively Danish, Swedish and Norwegian), first or second language writer (1/2) and the reference to the author or title.

- (9) **Hun nævner** blandt andet... (D2-For)
She mentions among others...

Yet another interesting fact about the use of *nævne* in the analyzed data is that L2 writers use the analytical form *nævnes* almost exclusively when accompanied by a modal verb (cf. 10), while we have not observed a single such use among L1 writers despite numerous uses without a modal verb (cf. 11).

- (10) Som eksempel herpå kan nævnes følgende ord... (D2-Tab)
 As an example of that **can mention-PASS** the following words...

- (11) De efterfølgende gange hvor kirkegården nævnes i dialogen... (D1-Sch)
 The following times when the churchyard **mention-PASS** in the dialogue...

5.4. NORWEGIAN RESULTS

The analysis of L1 texts shows that the common verbs appear frequently both in active and passive voice. A predomination of the active form is seen in the case of *tenke* ‘think’ and *beskrive* ‘describe’. In the L2 texts, one can observe a clear preference for using the passive voice in two cases, i.e. *anse* ‘judge’ and *presentere* ‘present’ as well as a minimal one in the case of *beskrive* ‘describe’ and *tenke* ‘think’.

Verb	L1			L2		
	Frequency per 1000 words	Active voice density	Passive voice density	Frequency per 1000 words	Active voice density	Passive voice density
anse	0,11	0,03	0,08	0,35	0,04	0,31
beskrive	0,36	0,23	0,13	0,35	0,17	0,18
diskutere	0,34	0,16	0,18	0,03	0,01	0,02
presentere	0,44	0,22	0,22	0,41	0,09	0,32
tenke	0,29	0,23	0,06	0,19	0,09	0,10

Tab.9. The distribution of active and passive forms in Norwegian L1 and L2 texts (common verbs).

The verb *tenke* is interesting due to the specificity of forms and contexts. In the analyzed texts it appears mainly when discussing the results or speculating, for instance when discussing the applied methodology. In the active voice, the verb is used predominantly in its reflexive form, either with the personal pronoun *vi* ‘we’ or the impersonal pronoun *man/en* ‘one’. Its use in the passive voice is limited to the morphological *s*-form. Moreover, it usually appears with the modal verb *kan/kunne* ‘can/could’ and often with a sentence adverb, such as *kanskje* ‘maybe’ or *derfor* ‘therefore’. The use of adverbs reflects the function

of reviewing possible explanations for a given phenomenon or presenting one's own conclusions.

- (12) **Det kan** derfor **tenkes** at innlærerne med disse morsmålene har visse fordeler... (N1-Rag)
It can therefore **think-PASS** that...
- (13) **Man kunne tenke seg** at [...], men det har ingen annen betydning enn... (N1-Bac)
One could think oneself that [...], but it does not have a different meaning than...

In the examined L2 texts, *tenke* appears only once in a reflexive form.

- (14) **En kunne** likevel **tenke seg** at toleransen for lingvistisk variasjon i Norge... (N2-Maj)
One could nonetheless **think oneself** that the tolerance for linguistic variation in Norway...

Other uses include speculating or commenting on one's choice of methodology.

- (15) ...så **man kan tenke** at de ikke er tilfeldige. (N2-Wal)
[...] so **one can think** that they are not accidental.
- (16) Egentlig **har jeg tenkt** på å bruke en polsk bok til, nemlig "Quo vadis"... (N2-Bor)
Actually **I have thought** of using another Polish book, namely "Quo vadis"...

Those uses are not incompatible with the uses found in L1 texts, yet the Polish writers only seldom employ it to discuss the results.

Another interesting case is the use of the verb *diskutere* 'discuss', which is rather frequent in L1 texts, but is seldom found in the L2 part of the Norwegian corpus. L1 writers employ this verb in both forms, active and passive, in a variety of functions, including referring to one's own text or source literature, but also discussing the results or the conclusions. When used in a discussion, the verb appears in the company of the modal verb *kan*.

- (17) I 4.7.3 **diskuterer jeg** om mer bruk av femininum på semantisk grunnlag. (N1-Rag)
In 4.7.3. **I discuss** more extensively the use of feminine on semantic basis.
- (18) Garrett (2010) **diskuterer** om det i det hele tatt er mulig å... (N1-Myk)
Garrett (2010) **discusses** whether it is at all possible to...
- (19) Når jeg her har valgt å [...], er dette selvsagt en metode som **kan diskuteres**. (N1-Bug)
When I have chosen to [...], it is naturally a method that **can discuss-PASS**.

In the L2 part of the Norwegian corpus, the frequency of the verb *diskutere* per 1000 words is more than 8 times lower than in L1 corpus (0,04 as opposed to 0,34). In all of the cases the verb is used to refer either to the author's own text (reader's guide) or in general references to external sources. What is missing, again, is the use of *diskutere* in the discussion.

(20) Til slutt **har jeg diskutert** noen begrensninger for oppgaven. (N2-Jan)
In the end **I have discussed** some limitations for the thesis.

(21) Blant forskerne finnes det dog uenigheter og **det diskuteres** heftig om ... (N2-Bor)
Among the researchers there is no unanimity and **it discuss-PASS** whether...

All of the verbs that were frequently used in passive voice in Norwegian L1 texts also appeared in both forms in their L2 counterparts. We have chosen to focus on the verb *forklare* 'explain', which shows an interesting pattern across L1 and L2 texts.

Verb	L1			L2		
	Frequency per 1000 words	Active voice density	Passive voice density	Frequency per 1000 words	Active voice density	Passive voice density
forklare	0,29	0,08	0,21	0,37	0,26	0,11
kalle	0,39	0,25	0,14	0,42	0,16	0,26
se på	0,56	0,44	0,12	0,22	0,08	0,14
si	0,47	0,35	0,12	0,37	0,14	0,23
tolke	0,20	0,10	0,10	0,15	0,06	0,09

Tab.10. The distribution of active and passive forms in Norwegian L1 and L2 texts (verbs specific for the Norwegian corpus).

As the table shows, the verb *forklare* is used more frequently in the passive voice by L1 writers (the passive voice density being 0,21 compared to active voice density of 0,08), whereas L2 writers show a preference for using it in the active voice (passive voice density of 0,11 compared to active voice density of 0,26). This is an interesting finding, as overall the Polish writers of Norwegian showed a general preference for using the passive voice rather than the active voice. The data shows however, that this seemingly inconsistent choice of forms is caused by the functions in which the verb is used. L1 writers use *forklare* mainly to pose certain claims. In this function, the verb appears in the active voice with a non-animate agent or in the passive voice, and is very often accompanied by modal adverbs:

(22) Dette **kan imidlertid forklare** hvorfor ... (N1-Rag)
This **may explain** why...

- (23) Dette **kan antakelig forklares** med at flere med bare norsk som morsmål ... (N1-Myk)
This **can probably explain-PASS** by the fact that more with Norwegian as first language...
- (24) [...], i en rekke eksempler som **neppe kan forklares** som tilbakedanninger. (N1-Bac)
[...] in a series of examples which **hardly can explain-PASS** as back-formation.

L1 writers also use the verb to refer to external sources or to the authors' own texts, but this function is by no means as frequent as the one described above.

- (25) Bogen & Wodward (1988:305, 317) **forklarer** data som... (N1-Bre)
Bogen & Wodward (1988:305, 317) **define** data as...
- (26) Før **jeg forklarer** hva som trolig ligger til grunn for konsensusen ... (N1-Rag)
Before **I explain** what probably is the source of the consensus...

In L2 texts, the tendency is the opposite – while one finds examples of *forklare* used to offer some claims, the predominant function of this verb is to refer to one's own text and external sources.

- (27) Dressler (ibid.115) **forklarer** også forskjellen... (N2-Bor)
Dressler (ibid. 115) **explains** the difference...
- (28) **Jeg vil forklare** kort to av de tre kategoriene... (N2-Wal)
I will shortly **explain** two of the three categories...
- (29) Bruken av to forskjellige tempusformer i disse setningene **kan** altså **forklares** slik at ... (N2-Wal)
The use of different tense forms in these sentences **may explain-PASS** as...
- (30) Kanskje **kan man forklare** det med en høy frekvens av setningene ... (N2-Jan)
Maybe **one may explain** this fact with a high frequency of sentences...

Interestingly, the use of *forklare* together with the impersonal pronoun *man* as seen in the last example, has not been attested in the L1 part of the Norwegian corpus.

5.5. SWEDISH RESULTS

All common verbs are used when referring to secondary sources as well as the author's own interpretations. The verbs *anse* 'judge' and *tänka* 'think' can only be used with animate, human agents, whereas *beskriva* 'describe', *diskutera* 'discuss' and *presentera* 'present' can be used either with human agents or with inanimate ones, e.g. *kapitlet presenterar/beskriver/diskuterar* 'the chapter presents/describes/discusses'.

The overall results in L1 texts show that among the verbs chosen only *presentera* is used distinctly more often in the passive than in the active voice, *beskriva*, *diskutera* and *tänka* show similar distribution in the passive and the active whereas *anse* shows propensity for the active form. The results in L2 texts show similar tendencies, both *beskriva* and *tänka* are, however, used overwhelmingly in the active voice, whereas *anse*, *diskutera* and *presentera* show only slight preferences for either active or passive.

Verb	Frequency per 1000 words	Active voice density	Passive voice density	Frequency per 1000 words	Active voice density	Passive voice density
anse	0,61	0,43	0,18	0,48	0,25	0,23
beskriva	0,70	0,39	0,31	0,80	0,53	0,27
diskutera	0,34	0,15	0,19	0,20	0,11	0,09
presentera	0,66	0,14	0,52	0,62	0,29	0,33
tänka	0,26	0,16	0,10	0,12	0,11	0,01

Tab.11. The distribution of active and passive forms in L1 and L2 texts.

Among the passive forms, the periphrastic *bli*-passive constitutes a negligible group, with only one instance of *presentera* in L1 texts and one of *anse* in L2 texts. Therefore, the *bli*-passive will be disregarded in the analysis and only *s*-passive will be analyzed.

The only verb studied that appears more frequently in the passive than in the active voice is *presentera*. The dominant frequency of passive is conspicuous in the L1 texts, with similar values for passive and active forms in the L2 ones.

The scope of the use of *presentera* is, despite different frequencies, similar in L1 and L2 texts. The verb is mainly used to direct the reader to specific parts of the texts and is overwhelmingly accompanied by locative adverbials such as *nedan* ‘below’, *i följande avsnitt* ‘in the following section’ etc. Interestingly enough, this is the main function of the verb irrespective of voice.

- (31) Tidigare i avsnittet **presenterades** reklamfilmerna och dess formalia i tabell 4. (S1-KB)
Earlier in the section **presented-PASS** commercials and their formal attributes in table 4.
- (32) I det här avsnittet **presenterar** och kommenterar **jag** elevernas egna utsagor (S1-POR)
In this section **I present** and comment the students’ own statements.
- (33) enligt denna metodologi som **presenterades** i det teoretiska kapitlet (S2-MT)
pursuant to the methodology which **presented-PASS** in the theoretical chapter

- (34) för att sammanfatta de vill **jag presentera** nedan en samling av... (S2-MT)
to summarize them **I** want to **present** below a collection of...

The examples quoted above show that the voice of the verb is irrelevant for the function, which is mainly that of directing the reader to a particular fragment of the text. Both L1 and L2 texts show this use of the verb *presentera*. However, in the L1 material the verb may also take an inanimate subject, as in the following example:

- (35) Kapitel tre **presenterar** tidigare forskning inom området internordisk språkförståelse (S1-EFF).
Chapter three **presents** earlier research within the field internordic language comprehension.

This use is found only sporadically in L2 texts.

The second verb chosen for analysis is *nämna* ‘mention’. In the L1 material it is used more frequently in the passive than in the active voice, while in the L2 material the situation is the reverse, cf. table 12 below.

	L1			L2		
	Frequency per 1000 words	Active voice density	Passive voice density	Frequency per 1000 words	Active voice density	Passive voice density
fövänta	0,39	0,19	0,20	0,04	0,03	0,01
nämna	0,39	0,14	0,25	0,48	0,30	0,18
redovisa	0,37	0,08	0,29	0,08	0,06	0,02
se som	0,45	0,12	0,33	0,04	0,00	0,04
kalla	0,23	0,16	0,07	0,52	0,18	0,34

Tab.12. The distribution of active and passive forms in Swedish L1 and L2 texts (verbs specific for the Swedish corpus).

Both L1 and L2 writers use the verb *nämna* in the active voice:

- a) with a first-person pronoun to refer the reader backwards and forwards in the text;
- b) with a third-person pronoun (or name) to refer results from other publications;
- c) with the impersonal pronoun *man* ‘one’, typically with a modal verb.

- (36) Han **nämner** engelskan som exempel på hur fonem kan skrivas på olika sätt i olika ord. (S1-AA1)
He **mentions** English as example of how phonemes can be written in different way in different words.

The use in the passive voice seems to have a similar function: to direct the reader to a proper passage in the text.

- (37) Som **nämndes** i materialavsnittet, har motioner en bra utformning för retorikanalyser. (S1-AE)
As **mentioned-PASS** in the chapter on material, proposals have a suitable form for a rhetorical analysis.

However, we have also noted a number of examples in the passive voice with modal verbs, which seem to function as recommendations.

- (38) Som ett exempel från undersökningen **kan nämnas** att eleverna från Eskilstuna... (S1-EFF)
As an example from the study **can mention-PASS** that the students from Eskilstuna...

More surprising are the regularly appearing mistakes where the verb's active form is used while the passive would be correct, as in the following example.

- (39) **Som tidigare nämnt** skiljer sig kontexterna åt (S1-AE)
As (somebody) earlier **mentioned** the contexts are different from each other

L2 writers tend to prefer to use the verb *nämna* in the active voice; however, this is the verb where individual results are wildly different. While S2-ML only has 1 occurrence of *nämna* in the active voice and 18 in the passive, S2-MS has only 2, both in the active voice. Generally, L2 writers use the verb in the active voice:

- (40) I det stycket **nämner jag** bara några teoretiska koncept (S2-AL)
In this part **I** only **mention** some theoretical concepts
- (41) Vidare **nämner** Åke Daun följande egenskaper... (S2-ML)
Further **mentions** ÅD the following features...

In the passive voice, *nämna* is used predominantly with modal verbs, especially *kan* 'can', *bör* 'should' and *måste* 'must', cf. (42). This use would seem to be a translation of the Polish *należy wspomnieć* 'one should mention', however, we have seen it to be frequent in the L1 texts as well. *Nämna* appears also with the impersonal pronoun *man*, always accompanied by the modal *kan*.

- (42) Avslutningsvis bör det **nämnas** att modalitet är en kategori som... (S2-MT)
Finally should it **mention-PASS** that modality is a category which

The frequent mistake in the L1 material, where active form *har tidigare nämmt* ‘have mentioned earlier’ has been used where passive *har tidigare nämnts* ‘has been mentioned earlier’ would be correct, does not appear in the L2 material. Only one L2 writer, S2-MM, has three occurrences of the wrong form, alongside three correct ones. In other texts the phrase always appears in the correct passive form.

6. DISCUSSION

Composing academic texts poses many challenges for learners of second languages. Not only do they need to master the structure of the language, but they also need to meet the high demands put on the stylistic form of the text. Each academic text belongs to a particular genre, and although some of its properties, such as objectivity, may be seen as universal, many authors are influenced by the culture in which the given text has been written.

Intuitively, and perhaps naively, the Scandinavian and the Slavic writing cultures are considered to be discrepant. The generally less formal Scandinavian discourse is often equated with the tendency to avoid the passive voice, even in academic texts. The distance between the formal and informal discourse has in recent decades lessened significantly in Scandinavia (cf. Mårtensson 1988). Still, our study has shown that there are certain verbs that are more commonly used in the passive voice than in the active voice. This is true for the Danish verb *opfatte*, the Norwegian verb *forklare* as well as the Swedish verbs *presentera* and *redovisa*. This finding suggests that the use of passive voice in Scandinavian languages is often idiomatic, as has been observed for English by Hinkel (2004) and Granger (2013).

The Polish academic discourse is characterized by the use of a more formal register (Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak 2008). Apparently, the use of the passive voice is not a necessary feature of formal texts (cf. Doroszewski 1963). The results presented in the present paper only partly confirm the intuitive hypothesis that non-native users of the Scandinavian languages will use the passive voice more frequently than the native ones. Even though Polish students may be less comfortable using personal pronouns to refer to the results of their studies or their opinion on publications quoted, their use of the passive voice is not noticeably more frequent than the native speakers’. Rather, irrespective of their L2, the Polish students use the passive voice with more or less the same frequency. The results of L2 writers of Norwegian show uniformly that the Polish students do in fact prefer the passive to the active voice even with verbs more commonly found in the active voice in the native speakers’ texts. The use of the passive voice among Polish students is uniform, while the native speakers of Mainland Scandinavian languages differ significantly with respect to frequencies of passive. The discrepancies in the results obtained by L2 Danish

and Swedish users on the one hand and those of Norwegian on the other are due to the differences between Danish, Swedish and Norwegian rather than different strategies adopted by L2 speakers. In this sense the L1 stylistic constraints seem to influence Polish students when choosing passive or active voice.

The distribution of the passive voice is subject to many factors, which are different for different languages. In Swedish, for instance, animacy of the subject in the passive sentence plays a significant role in the choice between the morphological and the periphrastic passive, while its role in the distribution of the passive voice in Danish and Norwegian is rather negligible. It seems also that the traditions for academic writing in all three countries are not as uniform as they appear to be. The data presented in table 5 suggests that the stress on using the active voice is the strongest in Norwegian, and hence the great discrepancy between L1 and L2 writers observed in the Norwegian data.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The main focus of the present study is academic L2 writing in mainland Scandinavian languages. The subject matter requires a number of different factors to be touched upon and accounted for: the influence of L1, the writing cultures in L1 and L2 and finally the functions of grammatical categories with respect to academic texts. We have chosen to concentrate on the category whose one member (the passive as opposed to the active voice) is associated with the particular text genre of academic texts.

Our results show that Polish students used the passive voice with comparable frequencies per 1000 words irrespective of their L2, although admittedly the passive to active voice ratio for L2 writers of Norwegian is considerably higher than both the Danish and Swedish ones. Taking into account the differences between the Mainland Scandinavian languages noted in earlier studies and confirmed by the study of the L1 corpus, we conclude that L1 is a factor in the choice between active and passive voice, although further study into passive voice in Polish texts written by native speakers would be necessary to validate this.

There are a number of glottodidactical implications stemming from our results. The category of voice seems to be neglected in the teaching process. Partly, it is due to the fact that since there are so many (superficial) similarities between expressions of voice in Polish and in Mainland Scandinavian languages, it is not considered necessary to explain it in greater detail (the teaching materials concentrate mainly on drilling exercises and producing correct forms). Partly, this absence of voice in teaching is due to the fact that its functions, especially in written, formal texts, are not identified well enough.

The results presented in the present paper show that more research into the grammar of academic writing is necessary in order to fully comprehend the language-specific functions of grammatical categories and to develop adequate teaching materials.

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Paulina Horbowicz
Dominika Skrzypek
Mikołaj Sobkowiak
Natalia Kołaczek

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
Department of Scandinavian Studies
al. Niepodległości 4
61-874 Poznań
Poland

paulina.horbowicz@amu.edu.pl
dominika.skrzypek@amu.edu.pl
mikolaj.sobkowiak@amu.edu.pl
natalia.kolaczek@amu.edu.pl