The development of the passive voice in L2 German writing: A functionally oriented longitudinal study

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Impetus for study

- Ongoing curriculum-based research on the development of advanced L2 writing abilities in the Georgetown University German Department (GUGD)
- Awareness during data analysis of the passive voice as a linguistic feature for furthering the understanding of advancedness
Advancedness

– Varied operationalizations
  • Institutional status / Program level
  • Test scores
  • “Native-like” ability
  • Facility with late-acquired language features
  • Increasing incidence, variety, and length of clauses yet reduced number of clauses
– Varied research designs
– Varied educational contexts
– Varied data elicitation
– Varied or absence of theoretical framework

➔ Absence of longitudinal research at collegiate level from programmatic perspective
GUGD-based writing research 1

- **Syntactic development** (Byrnes, et al., 2005; Byrnes, et al., 2010):
  - Increase in Mean Length of T-Unit (MLTU) and Mean Length of Clause (MLC) from intermediate to very advanced learners
  - Increase in Clauses per T-Unit (CTU) for intermediate and advanced learners but decrease for very advanced learners

- **Relativization** (Byrnes & Sinicrope, 2008):
  - Emergence and use of more marked relative clauses already at intermediate level. Increase in relativization and reduction of more marked types of relativization at upper levels
GUGD-based writing research 2

- **Grammatical Metaphor** (Byrnes, 2009):
  - Increase in use of grammatical metaphor for meaning making and information structuring

- **Clausal manifestation of advancedness** (Maxim & Petersen, 2008):
  - Increased hierarchical organization of information through increased hypotaxis & decreased parataxis
  - Increased complexification at the phrasal, rather than at the clausal, level (longer, denser, yet fewer, clauses, i.e., increased lexical density and decreased grammatical intricacy)
  \[ \Rightarrow \] increase in *intra*clausal activity & decrease in *inter*clausal activity
Passive voice in German  (Pape-Müller 1980)

• Omission of explicit agent
  - institutionalized identification
  - specific process in connection with circumstance of location
  - text type
  - generalization of proposition
  - cataphoric or anaphoric ellipsis

• Text structure
Systemic Functional Linguistics

Processes

Participants

Circumstances
Educational setting: Georgetown University German Department (GUGD)

• Integrated four-year, literacy- and content-oriented, genre-based undergraduate curriculum
  – Articulated curricular and pedagogical practices across 5 curricular levels for the development of advanced competencies
  – Sequenced, genre-based learner pathway
    • Primary – secondary discourses (Gee, 1998)
    • Congruent – synoptic semiotic practices (Halliday, 1993)
    • Narrative – expository language (Martin, 2002)
Data source I

- 14 undergraduate learners who completed three consecutive curricular levels:
  - **Level II** (“Intermediate”): telling personal stories about contemporary issues in the German-speaking world (e.g., environment, multicultural society, identity, art and society)
    - 170 contact hours upon completion of level
  - **Level III** (“Advanced”): framing personal stories against public events and histories in the German Federal Republic (e.g., post-war Germany, divided Germany, unified Germany)
    - 255 contact hours upon completion of level
  - **Level IV**: “reading” discourses of contemporary public life
    - “Students begin to develop the kinds of literacy abilities that are at the heart of summarizing, interpreting, critiquing, presenting and substantiating an opinion or argument, and practice these orally and in writing. Such language use is critical for study abroad as well as any other professional context in which the German language is used.” (Developing multiple literacies)
    - 310 contact hours upon completion of level
Data source II

- End-of-level prototypical performance writing tasks (PPTs)
  - Curriculum-dependent and pedagogy-embedded tasks
    - that reflect content and language focus of particular level
    - that are designed to elicit performances prototypical for end-of-level learners
  - Detailed “task sheet” divided into 3 categories
    - Task appropriateness
    - Content
    - Language focus
  - Rough draft submitted to corpus
# Overview of PPTs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic Focus</th>
<th>Textual Focus</th>
<th>Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level II</td>
<td>Imaginative treatment of personal relationships</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Alternative Ending to the Novel „The Story of Mr. Sommer“]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Placing narration about personal lives into the context of a literary work,</td>
<td>Personal and public</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>literary conventions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level III</td>
<td>Multicultural lives in contemporary German</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Journalistic treatment „At home in Germany? A Portrait of a Vietnamese Family“]</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Placing personal experiences into a broader social context</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level IV</td>
<td>Germany’s role in the EU; creation of a constitution</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[European Union and the United States: comparisons and lessons´´]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Making an argument about social, political, economic developments in societies</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Incidence of passive voice
Clauses in the passive voice, Levels II-IV
(as percentage of total number of clauses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Upper CI</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Lower CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Agency:
Percentage of passive clauses with explicit agent, Levels II-IV
3. “Convertibility”: Percentage of passive clauses that are convertible to active voice, Levels II-IV

- Level 2: Convertible
- Level 3: Convertible, Non-Convertible
- Level 4: Convertible, Non-Convertible

Legend:
- Blue: Convertible
- Red: Non-Convertible
Examples

Level 3

1117
Tung hat zwei der Jungen erstochen. Matthias F. starb an seinen Wunden. Der andere Junge wurde ernsthaft verletzt.

Tung stabbed two of the boys. Matthias F. died of his wounds. The other boy was critically injured.

2095
Oft wurde sie auf der strasse von deutschen nach zigarretten gefragt und einmal, als sie zum klavierunterricht gegangen sei würde sich von einem polizisten gefragt, ob er in ihren rucksack schauen konnte.

Often on the street she was asked for cigarettes by Germans, and once, as she went to her piano lessons she was asked by a police officer if he could look into her backpack.

Level 4

1117

The United States were built on a standard language, a habit of self administration, a shared set of moral values and a belief in equality and freedom.

2095
Die Fundamente der EU sind ein Erfolg. Die Interessen aller Länder werden gut repräsentiert und man kann ihre Stimmen klar hören.

The fundamental parts of the EU are a success. The interests of all countries are well represented and you can hear their voice clearly.
### 4. Classification of entities (Martin and Rose 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indefinite pronouns</th>
<th>some/any/nothing/nobody/no one</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concrete</strong></td>
<td><strong>everyday</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>man, girlfriend, face, hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specialized</td>
<td>mattock, lathe, gearbox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abstract</strong></td>
<td>technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>inflation, metafunction, gene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>institutional</td>
<td>offence, hearing, applications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>semiotic</td>
<td>question, issue, letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>generic</td>
<td>colour, time, manner, way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Metaphoric</strong></td>
<td>process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relationship, marriage, exposure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quality</td>
<td>justice, truth, integrity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Classification of entities:
Classification of subjects of passive clauses, Levels II-IV
(as percentage of total number of clauses in passive)
Examples of entities as subjects, Levels II-IV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Level III</th>
<th>Level IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concrete – everyday: Herr Sommer wurde von der Regierung geschickt (Mr. Sommer was sent by the government)</td>
<td>Concrete - everyday: Oft wurde sie auf der Straße von Deutschen nach Zigaretten gefragt (Often on the street she was asked for cigarettes by Germans)</td>
<td>Concrete – specialized: Die 13 Kolonien wurden vereinigt (The 13 colonies were unified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract: Frauen werden misshandelt (Women are mistreated)</td>
<td>Abstract: Die Interessen aller Länder werden gut repräsentiert (The interests of all countries are well represented)</td>
<td>Metaphoric: Eine starke Einigkeit wurde gefördert (A strong unity was promoted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphoric: Aber neulich wird wenig Fortschritt gemacht. (But recently little progress has been made)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Classification of human participants

Incidence of generic participants, Levels II-IV
(as percentage of total number of human participants)
Distribution of human participants, Levels II-IV

- Level II: 0.96%
- Level III: 0.61%
- Level IV: 0.54%
## Human participants in one learner’s writing, Levels II-IV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Level III</th>
<th>Level IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3110.2</td>
<td>3110.3</td>
<td>3110.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herr Sommer</td>
<td>Vietnamese (Vietnamese) Immigranten (immigrants) Tran ihre Familie (her family) ihre Mutter (her mother) ihr Vater (her father) Ausländer (foreigners) Pham van Man</td>
<td>Ureinwohner (<em>native inhabitants</em>) Ethnische Gruppen (<em>ethnic groups</em>) Europäische Völker (<em>european peoples</em>) Staatsmänner (<em>statesmen</em>) Amerikaner (<em>Americans</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ich (I)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seine Frau (<em>his wife</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seine Familie (<em>his family</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sein Onkel (<em>his uncle</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seine Eltern (<em>his parents</em>)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Representation of national/regional space
National/regional space as circumstance
National/regional space as participant

![Graph showing data points for level 3 and level 4 across different years.]
Representation of national/regional space in levels 3 and 4
Examples of representations of national space

Level 3

1117
Als Tung fast zwei war, ging seine Mutter nach ehemaligen DDR, als Vertragsarbeiterin in einer Schuhfabrik zu arbeiten. Sie tat dies, um ihr Kind und Mann, der als Bauarbeiter nahe Hanoi arbeiteten, zu stützen. Vor fünf Jahre entschied sie, Tung nach Deutschland für ein besseres Leben zu holen.

When Tung was almost two his mother went to the former GDR to work as an employee at a shoe factory. She did this in order to support her child and her husband who worked as a construction worker near Hanoi. Five years ago she decided to bring Tung to Germany for a better life.

Level 4

1117
Ein anderer Unterschied ist, dass die EU die europäische Charter der grundlegenden Rechte annahm bevor sie eine Verfassung hatten. Sie erkannten, dass die Mitgliedsstaaten eine Tradition des Respektierens der grundlegenden Rechte hatten und es ein Teil ihrer einzelnen Verfassungs war.

Another difference is that the EU accepted the European charter of basic rights before it had a constitution. It realized that the member states had a tradition of respecting the basic rights and that it was a part of their constitution.

2095
Die originalen dreizehn Kolonien der USA hatten nicht eine solche Geschichte. Sie konnten ihre Macht nur bilden als sie vereint wurden. Die Kolonien hatten ein einziges Interesse, das durch die amerikanische Verfassung geschützt und vereint wurde. Diese Elemente sind nicht gegenwärtig innerhalb der Union oder seiner Mitgliedsländer.

The original 13 US colonies didn't have such a history. They could only build their power when they were united. The colonies had one single interest that was protected and unified by the American constitution. These elements are not existent inside the union or its member countries.
Conclusions

• Factors affecting elicitation of passive voice among L2 German learners:
  – Synoptic semiosis
  – Field (as manifested in entities, participants)
  – Agent’s saliency
  – “Convertibility”

• Cline of appropriateness for passive voice

• Relevance of passive voice for lower-level instruction within articulated curricula
Works Cited

  http://www3.georgetown.edu/departments/german/programs/undergraduate/curriculum/


Thank you

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