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MASTERING THE USE OF THE PASSIVE VOICE
IN ENGLISH: A CORPORA-BASED PROJECT
FOR MATURE ADVANCED POLISH LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

INTRODUCTION

From the perspective of Chomsky's (2002) views upon the essence of language, grammar constitutes its core, its fundament, unlike the lexis, which is easily modified. Consequently, learning and teaching grammar should constitute the focus of didactics of a foreign language (Batstone, 1994; Nassaji, 2019) because in this area differences between and among languages are profound, unlike relatively superficial and easier to master lexical distinctions. According to Nassaji (2019, p. 205) grammar consists in "what learners know about language rules and structures, so the acquisition of language in its essence is learning these rules and structures and then the adequate use of them in communication".

However, in the present ambience of the methods of learning and teaching foreign languages, a lot of controversy surrounds the issue of teaching the grammar of a foreign language in an explicit way. Questions are asked about the type of instruction and/or correction concerning grammar (Loewen, 2015; Nassaji, 2019; Pawlak, 2014, 2015). It is not clear whether and to what extent grammar should be learned through being exposed to explicitly stated and illustrated grammatical rules (explicit learning), or whether it should be acquired through exposure to meaningful, relevant communicative contexts (implicit learning) (Bialystok, 1994; Ellis, 2005; Reber, 1993). These issues are especially important in the acquisition of the second language, which may be governed by different principles than those of the first language (Krashen, 1982, 1985).

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Some research points to many benefits of learning grammar in an explicit way (DeKeyser, 2005; Paradis, 2004). According to this approach explicit knowledge of grammatical rules and principles results, with practice, in communicative fluency. The golden mean between the explicit and implicit ways of acquiring the grammar of a given language may be what Nassaji (2019) calls the weak interface position, where the explicit knowledge of grammar is viewed as a factor facilitating the acquisition of implicit knowledge of language (Smidt, 2001; Ellis, 1993). Some positive effects of formal instruction have been extensively documented in recent years by e.g. Doughty (2003), Fotos and Hinkel (2007), Loewen (2015), Spada (1997), and Williams (2005).

The project presented in this paper is constructed with a view to relying on the weak interface between explicit grammar instruction and implicit, communication sensitive knowledge of a foreign language. In particular, we aim at integrating the explicit instruction in passive voice structures in English with viewing and using passive structures in extended, natural language contexts in order to make mature, advanced learners of English aware of the differences in the use of the passive voice in both languages for the sake of the improvement of students' communicative skills at an advanced level.

We particularly concentrate on the input based type of instruction in the form of *input flood* (Hernandez, 2011; White, 1998; Alanen, 1995; Lee & Huang, 2008; Simard, 2009), which in the case at hand means supplying students with extensive material relating to the use of passive structures in English. Combining explicit instruction with meaning-focused context, as well as with the active use in the communicative context should give the best results possible. In our opinion teaching/learning the issues related to the passive voice use through the ample material from linguistic corpora presents such an opportunity.

1. CHARACTERISING THE LEARNERS

The present project is destined to provide instruction to adult learners, already advanced and relatively competent in using English in the passive and active way. In particular, it is addressed to students who are going to use English in the process of creating their diploma theses and/or in writing research papers, thus focused on the skills which, in this day and age, are indispensable to reach the international scientific community. Consequently, the target group consists of adult and reasonably mature students.

The most exhaustive review of the characteristics of adult learners can be found in Komorowska (2003) and Pawlak (2015). Komorowska estimates the age

of adult learners at over 19 years of age. She characterises them as individuals able to skilfully write and read, capable of performing well as far as abstract thinking processes are concerned. She also stresses their intellectual and social maturity. Additionally, Brown puts stress on the development of cognitive abilities of adult learners, which makes them very successful participants in language courses. Pawlak (2015) argues further that the above mentioned characteristics of adult learners should not be overgeneralised, and that individual features of adult learners come into play as well. Nevertheless, he admits (Pawlak, 2015, p. 53) that “the teaching techniques used can capitalize on [students’] language awareness, capacity for abstract thought, long attention spans and superior analytical abilities, which means that learners can be openly informed about the instructional targets and requested to deliberately practice the TL features selected.” Older students are experienced at recognizing problems and presenting solutions, they are also likely to reflect upon the material they have covered. They have the feeling of responsibility for the way in which their process of acquiring knowledge is going. Frequently, they are not happy about being told directly to do things, but prefer to join in some tasks on their own accord. Consequently, Pawlak (2015) opts for selective teaching of grammar with raising awareness in its chosen areas, as these areas should be selected according to students’ needs. In the case of students with the need to write their theses, there is no real danger of focusing too much on grammar, as a good command of grammar is essential to their endeavours. All these characteristics taken together allow mature students to function well when faced with complex language tasks and a demanding class situation, the factors with which students will have to come to terms in this project.

However, one should not overlook some of the problems that mature students can face while dealing with their task of learning a foreign language. Hamer puts stress on significant differences between young and adult learners. According to the author, these differences stem predominantly from the fact that adults bring with them into a class situation a lot of experience with varied material they have already studied, so they have very specific expectations as to the style of instruction, techniques used, the material they have to cover, etc. Consequently, mature students expect the instructor to communicate with them and listen to their ideas about the form of a course. These are the issues that Komorowska takes up, stressing the importance of current needs of communication in the case of mature students. Although adults are usually highly motivated as, ideally, nobody imposes the task of learning a foreign language on them, but they consciously agree to perform it, they frequently have not enough time to spare, being faced with all the distractions and requirements of their daily routine. Thus, the instructor may be well advised not to burden them with home assignments, but to make the best

use possible of their time in the classroom. In this project, all the work is to be performed in situ, under the non-intrusive supervision of the instructor.

The non-over-apparent supervision addresses another possible problem of mature students, which may result from their prior experience in language classrooms: some of them may be reluctant to communicate in class in a foreign language because their attempts to communicate may have been flouted in the past. The work with a language corpus, rather than doing drills in a class situation, may put shy students with bad communicative experience at their ease.

In the project we are preoccupied with here, we hope to address the specific characteristics of adult students and respond to their needs in the area of building grammar indispensable for competent writing in formal, scientific English.

2. LANGUAGE CORPORA IN TEACHING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO ADVANCED STUDENTS

Language corpora are very good tools for teaching a foreign language. The material contained in them provides language forms used in context, so there are ample clues to sectional restrictions and meanings of particular lexical items, collocations and grammatical choices, the material far richer than that available in any dictionaries. Students of foreign languages are familiar with the options offered by dictionaries but they are largely unaware of the opportunities presented by good language corpora. In this project they are presented with new prospects to avail themselves of these additional, enlightening options. On top of that, parallel corpora also allow us to compare existing renderings of pieces of communication in one language into another, bestowing a plethora of good and bad translations—where both kinds can be equally illustrative in the situation of instruction.

In the case of students about to use a scientific foreign language, the proper use of the passive voice in English cannot be overestimated. In the area of the use of the passive voice we observe a great disproportion between English and Polish. In formal writing, native speakers of Polish tend to use impersonal constructions, nominals and modal expressions beside passive structures—the style of writing natural in the Polish language. These constructions are either unavailable or stylistically awkward in English. In consequence, when writing in English, students are inclined to overuse stylistically odd structures. The work with language corpora is aimed at making students aware of the prevalence of the passive voice in formal English, recognizing various types of passives in context and, finally, employing passive structures in their own writing.

For the purpose of this project we are going to use three language corpora: the British National Corpus, Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego [National Corpus of Polish], and the Paralela corpus.¹ The access to these corpora is free of charge, although the particular search engine (for the British National Corpus) devised by Lancaster University requires registration, available to all interested users.

The British National Corpus is an extensive corpus devoted to the language material representing the British variety of English (Aston & Burnard, 2022). The corpus includes over 4,000 text fragments, containing over 100 million words. It is not a very up-to-date corpus, as it contains the material collected between the 1980s and 1993. However, dated as its vocabulary may be at times, it is freely available and its grammar reflects very well the modern grammar structures of the language, which do not change as rapidly as its vocabulary. Consequently, we believe that it is adequate for pedagogical purposes. The corpus has been compiled by a consortium with the leading role of Oxford University Press, with the help of Longman and Chambers publishers and other research centres, such as universities of Lancaster and Oxford, as well as the British Library, and it was funded by the Department of Trade and Industry, as well as by Science and Research Council. For the purpose of this project, we have used the research engine supplied by Lancaster University. The current version of this software interface has been created by Stefan Evert and Sebastian Hoffmann. The interface is relatively easy to employ, yet it creates ample opportunities to search not only for individual words and lexical structures, but also for grammatical structures, the option essential for work with the passive voice data. Although relatively simple in use, the search engine requires some skill to form queries of a grammatical type, so it has a built-in short guide for users in the pdf format.

The National Corpus of Polish (Przepiórkowski et al., 2012) was constructed as a result of a scientific project which took place between 2007 and 2011 and it was accomplished by the Polish Academy of Science, the University of Łódź and the Polish Scientific Publishers PWN. The corpus is thus newer and more up-to-date than the British National Corpus, although it contains some texts pre-dating 2007. In its most extensive version, the Polish corpus contains about 1.8 billion segments (roughly corresponding to 1.5 billion words). The corpus subsumes a few sub-corpora, among which we may list the balanced corpus containing 100 million words (roughly 120 million segments). In the balanced sub-corpus particular types of texts are included in an established proportion, reflecting the readership in Poland. For the purposes of this project we are going to use the IPI PAN search

¹ Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego will be cited in the References as Przepiórkowski et al. (2012) and Paralela as Pęzik (2016).

engine, which, apart from searches for particular lexical forms and their compositions, allows us to look for grammatical structures, irrespective of their lexical content, just like the Lancaster University search engine. As in the previous corpus, the Polish corpus makes available a help section providing users with the information on how to construct corpus queries. This section is less user-friendly than that in the British National Corpus as it is not provided in the pdf form, and a user has to switch between the help section and the search engine itself while constructing queries.

Paralela (Pęzik, 2016) belongs to the category of parallel corpora, i.e. the corpora which supply corresponding texts from two or more languages. This particular corpus offers Polish and English data. It contains texts translated from English into Polish and from Polish into English, with 262 million words contained in 877,000 translation fragments. The corpus has been financed by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education through the CLARIN-PL research infrastructure. It is equipped with a search engine allowing queries for individual words, sequences of words, as well as a basic system of grammatical queries, much more rudimentary in comparison with the search engines of the National Corpus of Polish and the British National Corpus, but adequate for the needs of adult advanced students of English. Like in the National Corpus of Polish, the information about the ways to build queries is supplied in the help section, but not in the pdf format. Unlike in the two previous corpora, search possibilities are limited to major lexical categories, with no resort to inflectional specifications. This shortcoming of Paralela makes it less useful when we want to look for complex grammatical structures, and passive voice structures in particular.

Notwithstanding some shortcomings of the search engine software of these three corpora, i.e. complex rules for producing grammatical queries and the poor annotation system of Paralela, we find these corpora very useful in building grammatical competence of language learners.

3. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project is addressed to mature students of English as a foreign language, who are about to write either their diploma theses, PhD theses, or scientific research papers in English. It has already been implemented in the form of a workshop for PhD students of the KUL Doctoral School at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin in the years 2021–2022. Students are required to have advanced passive and active command of the English language. The use of personal

computers is also necessary, as well as the pre-registration indispensable for accessing the Lancaster University search engine software.

Adult students at an advanced level of competence in English communicate easily as far as their fluency in the use of appropriate academic vocabulary is concerned, but they frequently lack in the awareness of the use and naturalness of various syntactic structures in the foreign language. The use of the passive voice in the two languages, English and Polish, constitutes one of the areas whose disparate nature in both languages is not made apparent enough. If not mastered adequately in English, the passive voice may cause problems for students in using satisfactory academic English in their research.

3.1 WORKING WITH THE BRITISH NATIONAL CORPUS

The work on the project begins with an introduction to the use of language corpora, as not all students are aware of the existence of such language resources, and those who are, may not be knowledgeable about the full extent of their possibilities.

Having provided some introductory information about language corpora, and the corpora about to be used in this project in particular, we move to the functioning and possibilities of their search engines. First, students are made aware of the existence of help sections, assisting corpus users in constructing queries relevant to their research. With the aid of the help section within the British National Corpus students are tasked with the construction of simple grammatical queries, e.g. looking for plural nouns modified by adjectives in the corpus on their personal computers. Students verify the accuracy of their queries looking at the passages extracted from the corpus, and, if necessary, correct the formulation of a query under the supervision of the instructor. Simple grammatical searches make students sensitive to the requirements of a search engine as not even the smallest error in the form of a query is tolerated by the system: an extra space or the lack thereof may render the search futile. After this initial stage, students are asked to construct searches for the grammatical categories building passive structures in English.

Constructing queries for passives makes students revise their prior knowledge about grammatical structures characterising the passive voice in English, such as the use of the passive participle, auxiliary elements *be*, or *get*, as well as the involvement of the perfective aspectual marker *have*, different constructions of particular tenses with the passive voice structures, as well as the possibility of using various modal elements in the passive voice in English. First, students are re-

quired to construct queries for particular passive voice patterns and to check their accuracy against the data supplied by the corpus. If errors occur in the data, the instructor's help can be sought and the query reconstructed.

As the next step, they move to the main task of providing the generalised query for all passive voice structures in the corpus (limiting the choice of the auxiliary element to *be* only, not to complicate the matter too much for their further work). As a result, they have to discover what all passive structures in the language have in common. This task helps them reflect on the main, fundamental features of the passive. The role of the instructor is to aid students in their tasks, point to errors in constructing generalised grammatical patterns and review the results against the data extracted from the corpus in response to a constructed query.

Constructing the generalised query for passives entails building mixed queries, consisting of chosen lexical items and grammatical categories at the same time. Students aim at the following format: {be} _VVN, which reflects the generalisation that passive voice structures necessarily use various inflectional forms of the verb *be* and the passive participle of a lexical verb. The search for such structures alerts students to the necessity of constructing the queries meticulously, in accordance with all the conventions imposed by the corpus. Unless they include the lexical element in curly brackets, they are not going to arrive at all inflectional forms of *be*.

At this point students frequently make an error and construct the query in the following way: *be* _VVN. This format allows them to extract only a subset of passive forms, i.e. those incorporating *be* in its basic dictionary form, and the corpus supplies such examples as:

- (1) *You will **be asked** to complete an application form and subsequently to attend an ACET training course one evening a week for six weeks.
Any contributions may **be edited**.
You can **be tested** for infection at a special hospital clinic.*

The choice of examples makes it apparent to students that *be* must be used in all of its inflectional forms and that the query is inadequate. They have to find a way to address all inflectional forms of *be* at the same time. The instructor should make it clear that searching individually for passive structures with *am*, *are*, *is*, *was*, *were*, *been*, and *being* is not good enough, though recalling instances illustrating all these possibilities may be useful to revise passive grammar.

The task of arriving at the general format of the query for the passive voice is quite demanding, as we have found out, and students feel gratified when, eventually, the corpus data show that they have succeeded. The satisfaction is a reward in itself, while in the meantime students have been flooded with massive passive outputs supplied in non-artificial meaningful language contexts.

As an additional task, it may be useful to ask students to look in the corpus, with the help of additional queries, for less frequent passive constructions, to count them and compare their frequencies of occurrence. The sentences below illustrate some of the structures to be searched and compared. Constructing queries for such structures is easier, as they mostly involve the use of lexical items. One of the queries may have the form: “_VM0 have been”, where VM0 annotates modal elements. Its application supplies examples of the sentences like the ones below:

(2) *Even taped interviews can only be read with caution, since they **may have been** edited, and the reader will not be told how.*

*His early comedies **might have been** taken to represent an unheard-of civility from the back of beyond.*

Among those closest who should have been frightened was Annie, his girl for a while.

Performing such tasks helps students to review less frequently used passive structures. Additionally, their attention could be drawn to the fact that adverbial phrases could modify passives and appropriate queries may be constructed as well.

At his point students are asked to supply the overall number of passive sentences without adverbial modification in the corpus, to be compared later on with the number of passives in Polish. The number is supplied in the header of the corpus data and it amounts to 905,982 hits.

The work with the British National Corpus encourages students to reach into foreign language corpora in the future and allows them to arrive at the general format of the passive voice in English. It also enables them to review many guises of the passive voice, including various tense forms, aspectual and modal constructions. Finding the overall number of passive hits prepares students to realise how frequently passive structures are used in English.

3.2 WORKING WITH THE NATIONAL CORPUS OF POLISH

In order to truly appreciate the extent of the use of the passive voice in English, a comparison has to be made with the Polish data. That is why the next step that students have to take is to work with the National Corpus of Polish. Getting acquainted with another corpus and a different search engine prepares them for their work with a larger selection of language corpora in the future and makes them realise that every corpus works in a different way.

As the description of this project is addressed not only to native speakers of Polish, a few words are necessary to outline passive voice constructions and other constructions that serve a similar communicative purpose in Polish.

The major property of the passive voice in languages of the world is to promote the object (or objects) of an active voice sentence to the position of the subject. In Polish, unlike in English, only direct objects can thus be promoted:

- (3) a. *Jan wysłał (Ani) list.* (active)
 Jan.NOM sent Ania.DAT letter.ACC
 ‘Jan has sent a letter to Ania.’
- b. *List był wysłany (do Ani) (przez Jana).* (passive)
 letter.NOM was sent.PASS PTCP to Ania.GEN by Jan.ACC
 ‘The letter has been sent to Ania by Jan.’
- c. **Ania była wysłana list przez Jana.*
 Ania.NOM was sent.PASS PTCP letter.ACC by Jan.ACC

The example in (3c) shows that the indirect object cannot be promoted to the role of the subject in Polish, unlike in English.²

Apart from canonical passive structures Polish offers a number of ways of demoting/deleting the subject of an active sentence. Here we will illustrate the two most frequently used impersonal structures, while other ways of realising subjectless clauses are to be found in Section 3.3.

A very effective way of disregarding the agentive subject in the information structure of a clause is to use *-no/-to* impersonal verbal forms, which can be applied to describe past events:

- (4) *Wysłano/podarto list (do Ani).*
 send.IMP³/tear.IMP letter.ACC to Ania.GEN
 ‘The letter has been sent to Ania/The letter to Ania has been torn.’

While the indirect object can be present in such a clause, the *przez* ‘by’ phrase is ungrammatical and the agentive subject of the corresponding sentences like in (3b) cannot be named.

To refer to past, present or future events, an impersonal structure with the reflexive-like clitic *się* can be used. This element in impersonal structures does not have reflexive or anticausative functions, as it does in other types of clauses in Polish (see Malicka-Kleparska, among others). However, it is useful in forming impersonal structures coding events with unlimited time reference and without the subjects which would appear in the corresponding active clauses. Below we will illustrate this impersonal structure in the present tense:

² Actually, we have a variety of passive structures in Polish, both eventive and non-eventive, and *być* ‘be’ is not the only auxiliary element that can appear in them (see Bondaruk & Rozwadowska, 2018, among others). However, for the purpose of this project we have decided to delimit the material in a manageable way.

³ IMP stands for impersonal.

- (5) *Pisze się list (do Ani).*
 write.3rd.SG.PRS REFL letter.ACC to Ania.GEN
 ‘The letter is being written (to Ania).’

As in the example in (4) above the *przez* phrase is inadmissible.⁴

Having presented the rudiments of the passive voice and other structures demoting/deleting the subject participant of an active sentence in Polish, we may go on to describe the work with the corpus itself.

Out of the selection of sub-corpora within the National Corpus of Polish students are initially asked to select the balanced corpus. The instructor may present some information about this type of corpora, as opposed to language corpora which are not balanced. Balanced corpora reflect the actual language use better since they include appropriate proportions of written and spoken language, as well as of different genera of texts.

The balanced sub-corpus in the National Corpus of Polish contains about 300 million words. The IPI PAN search engine has a very extensive system of annotations, well suited to the inflectional nature of the Polish language, but somewhat more difficult to operate than the one available for the British National Corpus. While constructing a query students, have to include each element of the structure in square brackets. Within a bracket they have to write an appropriate command, e.g. *base* for all inflectional forms of a given lexical item, *pos* for grammatical annotation of a form, or *orth* for an orthographic form of a word. Apart from these basic commands, a variety of other annotations are available, e.g. we may look for such inflectional classes as: case, number or person, but students should not be asked to use all possible annotations as this would distract them too much from their major undertaking.

The main task of students at this point is to find the total number of passive structures in the corpus—to be compared with the figure given in the British National Corpus. In order to arrive at the figure, they again have to construct a general query for Polish passives with the auxiliary verb *być*. Both in English and in Polish apart from *be* passives, we also have passives with other auxiliary elements, but a simplification is necessary not to make students’ tasks too complex.

⁴ Another impersonal structure, banned by language purists, but frequently used by native speakers is constructed without the clitic *się*, and usually without the object in a clause. As we are dealing here with the formal style of writing, we will not include this impersonal structure in the content of the paper further on. However, it can be illustrated by the sentence below:

- (i) *Pisze w gazecie że...*
 write.3rd.SG.PRS in newspaper.LOC that
 ‘It is written in the newspaper that...’

With the use of the help section students arrive at the query of the form: [base = być][pos = ppas]. This query corresponds to the English passive structures that have already been counted. However, students will find out that, unlike the British National Corpus, the National Corpus of Polish does not provide the overall number of the selected constructions. For grammatical structures which are relatively numerous, the Polish corpus supplies just 1000 of the relevant examples, and no clue to the total number of such structures in the corpus is provided. Such is the case with the passive structures in question. Thus students are encouraged to probe the smallest sub-corpus within the National Corpus of Polish, i.e. the manually annotated corpus, but here the result is equally inconclusive.

Consequently, students have to think of the passive structures that are more specific, and, in result, less frequent in the corpora. A delimiting factor is the presence of the Agent in the structure, i.e. the participant performing the act coded by the passive voice. Students have to recall that such Agent is placed in the *by* phrase in English and *przez* phrase in Polish. When they construct the appropriate query [base = być][pos = ppas][orth = przez], they come up with just 84 hits for the Polish data. The modified query for the English data, i.e. ‘{be} _ VVN by’, gives 108,299 hits, with some examples as the ones in (6) below:

(6) *Often infected people are rejected by family and friends.*

Pre-recorded broadcasts were made by BBC Radio News for Radio 4’s ‘World at One’.

The disproportion between passives in both languages is overwhelming and at this point students have to find an error in the method of approaching the problem.

On the one hand the problem lies in different contents of the two corpora compared (the British National Corpus with 100 million words and the Polish manually annotated sub-corpus with about 1 million words), and on the other hand—in the fact that unlike English, Polish is not a positional language, and consequently particular elements of the passive structure may appear in different orders in a sentence.

If students are not able to find these methodological errors by themselves, then the instructor helps them to arrive at this conclusion. Then, queries for Polish positional variants of passives are constructed in the following way: [pos = ppas][base = być][orth = przez]—giving 27 hits and [orth = przez][][pos = Vppas][base = być]—giving 4 hits. With 84 hits for the first structure ([base = być][pos = ppas][orth = przez]), we arrive at the sum of 115 hits, which has to be multiplied by 100 to balance the contents of the English and Polish corpora. When we compare the 11,500 passive structures for Polish with 108,299 passive structures for English, we notice that English uses passive structures almost 10 times more frequently than Polish. This should make one realise how important the passive voice is in English, in comparison with its relative insignificance in Polish.

This part of the project makes students review passive structures in English again, with stress put on the frequency of Agentless passives, as opposed to those with *by* phrases. It also stresses the frequency of passives in English. However, it does not give an answer to the question why the discrepancy between the two languages arises. In order to answer this question the instruction has to make use of a parallel corpus.

3.3 WORKING WITH PARALELA

Working with mono-lingual corpora may teach us about shapes and uses of particular structures in individual languages and it may give us a chance to notice differences in their frequency, but it will not tell us anything about the source of the disparity. However, parallel corpora create an opportunity to disentangle this conundrum. In a parallel corpus identical texts in two or more languages are juxtaposed, enabling the user to compare directly the ways of rendering the same message in different languages.

Paralela offers texts in English with Polish translations and texts in Polish with English translation. By comparing both versions we will discover why passives in English are so frequent and what Polish non-passive constructions should or could be replaced by passives in English.

In order to find possible translations of the passive voice in English students have to choose in the corpus the option of translating English to Polish and then select English passive structures. The search engine allows us to specify passive structures with a great margin of error as it does not pick out passive participles of lexical verbs, but just all verbal forms. Consequently the query <lemma = be> <tag = v.*> does not retrieve only passives, but a variety of other structures containing various forms of *be* and the following lexical verb. However, this gives us an opportunity to ask students to look for passives in the data, which constitutes an exercise in itself. Then, selected passive voice structures and their translations can be analysed to discover how passive voice is rendered into Polish. Students will find that only a fraction of English passives is translated as passives into Polish.

Original English passives are frequently translated into Polish as various impersonal clauses. In (7) below we supply examples of English texts (a) and their Polish translations with impersonal structures (b). The relevant parts are given in bold characters:

- (7) a. *Schengen enabled the abolition of internal border checks between signatory states and the creation of a single external border where border checks on entry to the Schengen area **are carried out**.*

- b. *Schengen umożliwia zniesienie kontroli na granicach wewnętrznych między państwami sygnatariuszami i utworzenie jednolitej granicy zewnętrznej, gdzie **przeprowadza się** kontrole graniczne przy wjeździe na obszar Schengen.*
- a. *Mr President, I am going to go back over some things that **have been said** here.*
- b. *Chciałabym nawiązać do pewnych kwestii, o których już tutaj **mówiono**.*

At other times English passives (8a) are translated as active voice sentences in Polish (8b), sometimes with the use of a different lexical verb. Where lexical verbs are significantly altered, a back translation into English is supplied:

- (8) a. *I **am told** that some are potentially dangerous.*
- b. ***Słyszałem**, że niektórzy są potencjalnie niebezpieczni.*
'I have heard that some are potentially dangerous.'
- a. *In states governed by the rule of law, prisoners **are brought** to justice and have the right to defend themselves.*
- b. *W państwach, w których panują rządy prawa więźniowie **stają** przed sądem i mają prawo do obrony.*
'In states governed by the rule of law, prisoners stand in the court of law and have the right to defend themselves.'
- a. *However, we **are concerned** by certain aspects of the report.*
- b. ***Niepokoją** nas jednak pewne elementy omawianego sprawozdania.*

Another frequent Polish way of translating English passives involves modal particles and infinitival clauses in Polish (see 9 below):

- (9) a. *The objectives **can be achieved** in full by this means.*
- b. *Za pomocą tych środków **można** w pełni **zrealizować** określone cele.*
- a. *It is worth remembering that ties were invented by the Croats and it **should also be emphasised** here in the European Parliament, which so values liberty and freedom, that the Croatian port of Dubrovnik was the first in Europe to prohibit trading in slaves at the beginning of the 15th century.*
- b. *Warto przypomnieć, że krawaty to właśnie wynalazek Chorwatów, a wręcz **trzeba podkreślić** tu w Parlamencie Europejskim, jakże ceniącym wolności i swobody, że chorwacki port Dubrownik był pierwszym w Europie, który zakazał handlu niewolnikami na początku XV wieku.*

Equally frequently Polish nominals replace passives in English, as the examples in (10) below illustrate:

- (10) a. *It is not acceptable for international law to be violated, for torture **to be carried out**, for secret prisons to **be opened** or for prisoners to be made to disappear.*
- b. *Nie można akceptować łamania prawa międzynarodowego, **stosowania** tortur, **otwierania** tajnych więzień i **znikania** więźniów.*

- a. *The legal uncertainty that exists concerning eligibility for cross-border healthcare and refunds must be removed, and accurate and clear information about when and how medical treatment in other Member States **is covered** must be available to patients.*
- b. *Trzeba zlikwidować utrzymującą się niepewność prawną dotyczącą prawa do transgranicznej opieki zdrowotnej i **zwrotu** kosztów oraz zapewnić pacjentom dokładną i jasną informację dotyczącą tego, kiedy i w jaki sposób obejmuje to leczenie w innych państwach członkowskich.*

Selecting texts with passives in English and analysing and grouping them according to the ways in which they were rendered in Polish allows students to review various passive structures once more. At the same time this exercise reveals what Polish expressions should or could be replaced with passives in English.

3.4 TRANSLATING POLISH TEXTS INTO ENGLISH WITH THE USE OF PASSIVE STRUCTURES

The final part of the project gives students the opportunity to come up with their own translations of Polish texts into English. In these translations they should attempt to use passive structures. The translations should be compared with those available in Paralela, and created by professional translators. Below in (11) we supply a sample of such short Polish texts from Paralela and their English translations.

The Polish texts in (8) below have been selected with the use of the following query in the Polish part of the corpus: <lemma = .*no> <lemma = się>:

- (11) a. *Starano się jednak usilnie (i w rezultacie skutecznie), aby nie kolidowały one z ochroną najcenniejszego gatunku zwierzyny łownej – żubra, i zasadniczą rolę Puszczy jako królewskiego łowiska.*
- b. *However, great (and successful) efforts were also made to prevent the exploitation of the forest from colliding with the protection of its most precious game, European bison, or with the forest's core role as a royal hunting ground.*
- a. *Starano się też uchwycić zróżnicowanie przestrzenne omawianych procesów w Polsce oraz pokazać je na tle zmian dokonujących się w krajach Unii Europejskiej.*
- b. *Efforts have also been made to capture the spatial diversity of processes running in Poland and to show them also against a background of changes taking place in the European Union countries.*

The examples in (9) below represent hits selected by the following query:

<lemma = .*no tag=v.*> <lemma = że>

- (12) a. *Wiedziano, że nim rządziła.*
- b. *It was known that she did what she pleased with him.*

- a. *Czy pan wie, co można zrobić ze szprotka? – spytał z kolei komisarz.*
 b. *Do you know what may be done with a sprat? – the Assistant Commissioner asked in his turn.*
- a. *O moich uczuciach dla własnego kraju nikt nie może wątpić.*
 b. *My sentiments for my own country cannot be doubted.*
- a. *Musi ona nadal przestrzegać porozumienia z Ohrid, w szczególności w odniesieniu do Albańczyków oraz innych mniejszości w tym wieloetnicznym kraju.*
 b. *It must continue to abide by the Ohrid Agreement, especially as far as the Albanians and also other minorities in this multi-ethnic country are concerned.*
- a. *Chociaż należy unikać pustych przebiegów w trosce o środowisko i efektywność, i chociaż kabotaż w drodze powrotnej z innych krajów należy poprzeć, nie można jednak zapominać, że takie działania osłabiają również pozycję kolei.*
 b. *Although empty runs must be avoided for the sake of the environment and efficiency, and although cabotage on the homeward route from other countries should also be supported, subject to the restrictions set out in the report, it must not be forgotten that such measures also weaken the position of the railways.*

Examples to be translated and then checked against the existing translation can be multiplied as the resources of Paralela are really extensive. Doing translations and checking them allows students to practice a variety of passive structures in English.

The use of language corpora by mature learners is thus of great help in mastering a foreign language. Their work with corpora makes learners re-construct the basic syntactic structures that lie at the root of passive sentences in English, allows them to review a variety of such passive voice structures and supplies the material that illustrates how English passive structures are rendered in Polish. Corpora also constitute a source of texts reflecting the natural use of language, which can be drawn on to devise more grammatical exercises.

CONCLUSION

Working with language corpora constitutes a great opportunity to learn lexical elements, with their selectional restrictions and collocations, but it also gives one a chance to get familiarised with more extensive grammatical structures. Language corpora supply natural language examples for the use of such grammatical structures. Working with a few corpora, like in this project, has an additional advantage of being able to overcome some grammatical barriers that may be created by different language systems. The limited use of passive structures is one of such barriers for Polish speakers and it maybe an obstacle in writing in stylistically

good English, especially when formal research papers are concerned. Once Polish speakers realise that a difference exists between the two languages in this area of grammar, they may become sensitive to the issue and are able to make an effort to use the passive voice more frequently in their texts. Massive exposure to passive structures while participating in the project makes passives easy to reconstruct when required.

In this text we have made use of three specific corpora because they are available free of charge and can be used by everybody, but of course different corpora may be selected for more specific purposes.

The project has already been implemented in the form of a workshop and the response of the participants has been very positive. Working with language corpora was a new experience for the majority of our students, so the initial stages of constructing queries were rather arduous. At the same time, the tasks were new and not boring. When our students finally extracted the appropriate data with the help of self-constructed queries, they felt really gratified. In the meantime, they reviewed their knowledge of English passives and expanded their grammatical competence through explicit and implicit learning. We really hope that the project will pay off in their individual research work, as writing in English opens new vistas of reaching a wider readership.

An additional, marginal, benefit of working with the National Corpus of Polish should be observed as well. The corpus supplies many model structures and expressions to be used in formal Polish. Many Polish students nowadays have unexpected problems with writing in formal Polish and they may find the grammar and lexis offered by the corpus quite useful.

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MASTERING THE USE OF THE PASSIVE VOICE
IN ENGLISH: A CORPORA-BASED PROJECT
FOR MATURE ADVANCED POLISH LEARNERS
OF ENGLISH

S u m m a r y

This paper is devoted to the problem of teaching grammar to advanced adult students of English. It is based on material related to passive voice structures. The material used comes from English and Polish language corpora (British National Corpus, Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego and one parallel corpus, Paralela). The students are taught how to use language corpora to improve their mastery of a foreign language, alongside gaining additional knowledge and skills in using passive voice structures. We place particular stress on the differences in using passive voice structures in English and Polish. This paper is based on results obtained from an actual course that was given to PhD students of the KUL Doctoral School at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin in 2021–22.

Keywords: passive voice; corpus; parallel texts; English; Polish

DOSKONALENIE UŻYCIA STRONY BIERNEJ W ANGIELSKIM:
PROJEKT OPARTY NA KORPUSACH JĘZYKOWYCH
PRZEZNACZONY DLA DOROSŁYCH UCZĄCYCH SIĘ ANGIELSKIEGO
NA POZIOMIE ZAAWANSOWANYM

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł porusza zagadnienie nauczania gramatyki wśród studentów uczących się języka angielskiego na poziomie zaawansowanym, opierając się na materiale związanym z konstrukcjami strony biernej. Wykorzystany materiał pochodzi z korpusów języka angielskiego i polskiego (British National Corpus, Narodowy Korpus Języka Polskiego oraz jeden korpus równoległy – Paralela). Studenci uczą się, jak korzystać z korpusów językowych w celu poprawy znajomości języka obcego, a także zdobywają dodatkową wiedzę i umiejętności w zakresie stosowania struktur strony biernej. Szczególny nacisk kładziony jest na różnice w stosowaniu strony biernej w języku angielskim i polskim. W artykule wykorzystano wyniki kursu oferowanego doktorantom Szkoły Doktorskiej KUL w latach 2021–22.

Słowa kluczowe: strona bierna; korpus; konkordancja; angielski; polski