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**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MONOLINGUALS
AND MULTILINGUALS IN THE EFL CONTEXT¹**

The aim of this paper is to analyze the differences between monolingual and bilingual speakers in the process of acquiring the English passive in

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order to find out which group of informants has an advantage. This small-scale research begins with a hypothesis that bilinguals will have better results due to the fact that they already speak two languages, which gives them an advantage over monolinguals. The research includes 60 informants from the University of Novi Sad, Serbia, who speak only Serbian, only Hungarian or both languages. They filled out a questionnaire and the data was analyzed quantitatively in order to compare the three groups of informants. Considering all the factors and results, it can be concluded that bilingual speakers do have a certain advantage over their monolingual peers, but this advantage is not significant so more testing should be done with a larger sample.

This paper² explores the differences that exist between monolingual and bilingual speakers and attempts to discover if these differences pose any advantage to bilingual speakers when learning a foreign language. In order to support the hypothesis that bilinguals hold an advantage in foreign language learning over monolinguals, a small-scale research study was conducted with the aim to investigate the acquisition of the English passive. The research included three groups of students answering questions related to the passive voice in English: one monolingual Serbian-speaking group, one Hungarian-speaking group and one bilingual, Serbian-Hungarian-speaking group, whereby all informants have been learning English as a foreign language for a while.

Even though monolingualism is possible to find, it is rather difficult to maintain due to inevitable language contact. Moreover, if a person learns a language beyond puberty, he/she will be considered multilingual just as someone who has been acquiring two languages since birth, as suggested by Bhatia & Ritchie [1]. In other words, a monolingual speaker can become a multilingual speaker over time, which explains the rare cases of pure monolingualism. According to Appel & Muysken [2], Bhatia & Ritchie [1], Cenoz & Genesee [3] and Thomason [4], bilingualism, simply put, could be defined as the ability to know and use two languages proficiently. Bilingualism can appear in different forms, meaning that not all bilingual speakers became bilingual the same way. Some speakers do acquire two languages simultaneously as they grow up, but others first acquire one language and add another one during childhood, whereas there are also people who acquire/learn the second language as adults.

In the first half of the 20th century it was believed that bilingualism was a handicap and that acquiring two languages simultaneously is

² The author would like to thank Dejan Vicai, MA, for his selfless help in data collection and for his permission to use part of the data in this paper.

detrimental, especially for children, so languages would not be acquired properly. However, this attitude has changed over time and research has shown that it is the opposite case, i.e. that bilinguals develop slightly faster and have a slight advantage over monolinguals. For that reason this paper looks into the way bilinguals, in comparison with monolinguals, acquire one aspect of the foreign, or third, language, the passive voice in English.

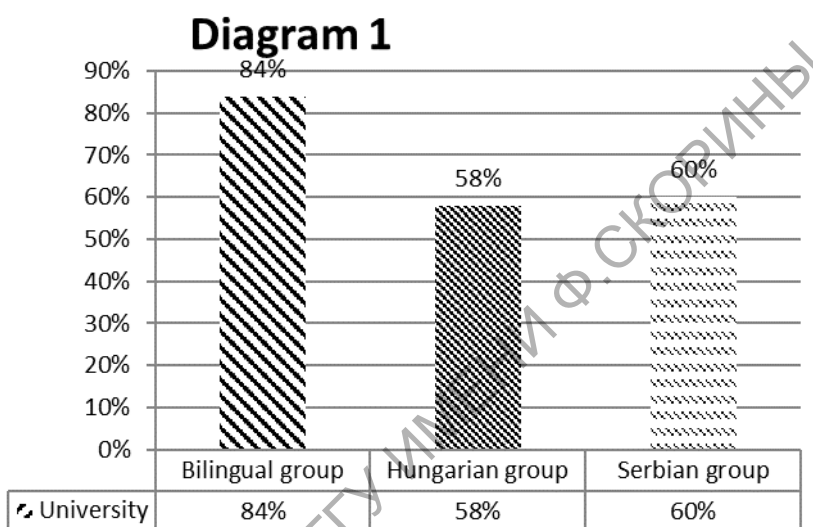
The passive voice is present and frequently used in English (Quirk et al. [5]; Huddleston & Pullum [6]), while in Serbian it does appear, but it is fundamentally not the same as in English (Piper [7]). On the other hand, the passive voice is less frequently used in Hungarian and, even if it is, the constructions include active sentences rather than passive ones. The biggest difference between the passive constructions lie in the different syntactic rules found in English, Serbian, and Hungarian (cf. Huddleston & Pullum [6] for English; Stanojčić & Popović [8] for Serbian; Lengyel [9] and Andrić [10] for Hungarian; Zvekić-Dušanović & Redli [11] for a comparative view of English, Serbian and Hungarian). One example of that is that the word order used in the English passive voice allows for the object of the active sentence to be denoted as the subject of the passive sentence, which is not necessarily the case in Serbian or Hungarian. The latter two languages use reflexive verbs more frequently instead of the passive voice, which is why their speakers can understand what the passive voice is, but do not always use it.

The initial hypothesis in this research was that bilingual learners of English understand and learn the passive voice at higher rates in comparison to monolingual speakers of Serbian and Hungarian. The premise that previously learnt languages positively influence the learning of the passive voice in English is also taken into account. The aim is to try and explore significant differences which can have a major impact on language learning, as well as to explore how bilingualism influences and possibly helps speakers learn a foreign language more efficiently. The questionnaire used as an instrument of data collection is based on Szabo [12] and it was administered to 60 students aged 19–21 (20 Hungarian speakers, 20 Serbian speakers and 20 Hungarian-Serbian bilingual speakers; 53% males and 47% females) who study at the University of Novi Sad, Serbia. Due to the multilingual nature of the region in which the research took place and the fact that there are parts of Vojvodina where Hungarian is the only language spoken, but speakers still do have some contact with Serbian, at least in school, the Hungarian monolingual group was taken into account with some reserve.

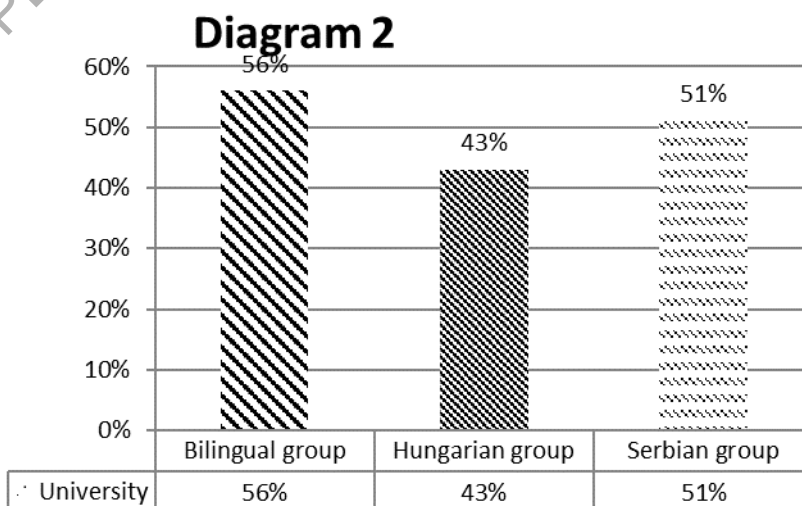
The questionnaire consisted of four different parts measuring the informants' knowledge and competence in the use of the passive voice in

English. Each part consisted of ten questions, but there were differences among types of tasks. The questionnaire was designed to measure not only the productive competence of the informants, but also how much they actually understood and to what extent they could use the passive voice.

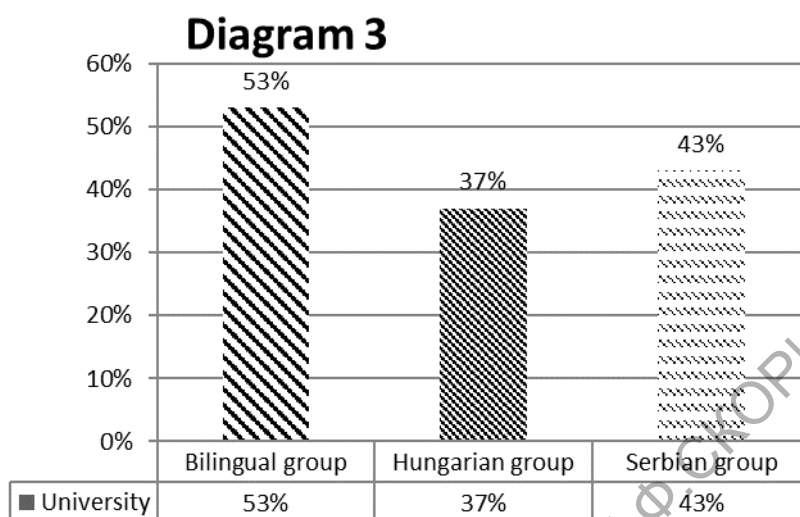
Section A (Diagram 1) was designed to measure whether the informants understood the difference between the active and passive voice by deciding whether ten sentences were in the active or passive voice. Diagram 1 below indicates that the bilingual group achieved the highest score (84%), followed by the Serbian group (60%) and the Hungarian group (58%).



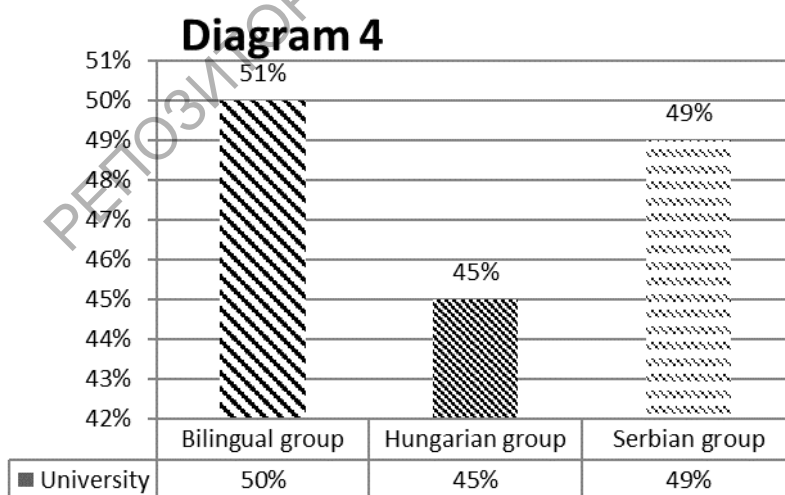
Section B (Diagram 2) consisted of a gap-filling exercise in which the informants had to form the passive voice with the verbs given in brackets. It can be seen in Diagram 2 below that again the bilingual group scored the highest (56%), closely followed by the Serbian group (51%) and with the Hungarian group scoring the lowest (43%).



Section C (Diagram 3) required the informants to rewrite active sentences as passive. As this task was more demanding, the overall scores were lower, but again the bilingual group had the highest score (53%), followed by the Serbian group (43%) and the Hungarian group again scoring the lowest (37%).



In section D (Diagram 4) the informants had a multiple-choice task to choose the correct transformation of an active sentence into the passive voice. Like in the previous three tasks, the bilingual group performed the best (51%), closely followed by the Serbian (49%) and the Hungarian group (45%), but this time the differences were not that great.



As can be seen from the data presented in all four diagrams, the bilingual students did better to some degree, but not by a large margin and it cannot be concluded with absolute certainty that a bilingual speaker will always perform better than a monolingual speaker. Some tasks seemed to

be equally hard for both the monolingual and bilingual students, for example Section 2 and Section 4. This small-scale research study has shown that knowing a second language, in this case Serbian, can compensate to some degree the lack of passive in the Hungarian language and vice versa, which means that the bilinguals were at an advantage over monolingual students, who relied on the knowledge of only one language. While some aspects of the research indicate that there is an advantage for bilinguals, it is not absolutely conclusive and thus needs further exploring and testing. One of the factors that needs to be looked further into is the individual's potential to learn a language manifested in a whole range of individual differences (multiple intelligences, learning aptitude, styles, strategies etc.). Another factor could be the surrounding culture and the status of various native and foreign languages within it, whereby English, for example, is very popular and widespread.

In conclusion, the research shows that there is a possibility that bilingual speakers could learn a foreign language with more success but further investigation and a more in-depth analysis with more informants of diverse profiles and levels of proficiency is necessary to conclusively prove that bilingualism definitely gives speakers the edge necessary to perform better than their monolingual peers regarding functional knowledge. Furthermore, socio-economic and cultural factors should also be taken more into consideration as, in some cases, they can be more influential than expected.

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