Filipino Students' Active-Passive Voice Preference in Invitation Letters

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Abstract Discussions on active and passive use are rich in literature. However, there is a remarkable dearth of studies showing students' actual voice preferences after all concepts of the voice have been introduced. This study aims at ascertaining Filipino university students' actual preference of voice in invitation letters written in 2012, 2014, and 2015. It also looks at the tense-aspect combinations and the semantics achieved in the two voice categories. Three groups taking technical writing course from three universities in Manila produced 135 letters. Letters were run using AntConc and UAM Corpus tools. Results confirm the dominance of active voice, with passive almost nil in the corpus. The preference is found to be statistically significant. The dominance of active voice may suggest that foregrounding the doers is important. Moreover, there is no significant difference between the long and agentless passive. Although the results came from the parochial Philippine context, implications respecting students' preference of voices may be universal. Limitations and trajectories are offered accordingly.

Keywords: active voice, business letters, invitation letter, passive voice

Introduction

An invitation letter may be considered as a persuasive genre as it aims to convince the receiver to accept the invitation. In this respect, the manner of writing may affect the way the receivers read the letter. One way of achieving this communicative purpose is to craft the voice of the verb that may influence the way the readers see themselves as either the agents and the patients of the actions. In business writing, Booher (2001) maintains that active is preferred because it is always important to know who does the action. Booher continues by reviewing Louis Pasteur's article on fermentation and found out that this intellectual writing contains more personal references and active-voice verbs. With this, she debunks the idea that the use of passive is capable of making the text more intellectual and objective.

Voice once became a debated grammar point as regards its appropriacy of use (e.g., Altstiel & Grow, 2015; Armstrong & Dienes, 2014; cf. Berry, 2012; Franklin, 2009; Freeman, 2009; Strunk, 1918; Thompson & Scheepers, 2013). A number of research studies have given a plethora of guidelines and acknowledge when one voice is preferred to another (cf. Thompson, Ferreira, & Scheepers, 2018). For instance, while good writers are characterized as active voice users (Writing Worth Reading, as cited in Delahunty & Garvey, 1994), the study of Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (2000) reports that the passives are commoner in academic prose than in fiction, news, and conversation genres. Master (2004) also reveals that "about one third of all verbs in scientific writing occur in the passive voice" (p. 51). Passive is also a good alternative when active voice does not fit the purpose of emphasis (Swales & Feak, 2004) in academic writing, and when the doer is either unknown or unimportant (Murphy, 2019; Woods, 2018). Recently, Woods (2018) personally believes that the active voice is often a better choice that the passive.

However, for Downing (2015), "the active-passive alternative enables the representational strand and the interpersonal strand of meaning to cohere as a message, not simply as a sentence in isolation, but in relation to what precedes it in the discourse" (p. 5).

> *Worst: The passive voice should be avoided.*

> *Bad: The passive voice should be avoided by writers.*

> *Better: Writers should avoid using the passive voice.*

> *Best: Writers should use the active voice. (Altstiel & Grow, 2015, n.p.)*

The active sentence with a transitive verb situates the doer in the subject position that presents the event from the vantage point of the agent in a thematic role (Danesi, 2006; Dorling, 2017; Dorling, 2016; Hudson, 2000), thus giving prominence to the one responsible for the action. The use of passive verb form keeps the topic noun phrase, not the subject noun phrase in the subject position (Master, 2004). In passive voice, the doer of the action in the *by*-phrase may be truncated, optional, irrelevant, given, obvious, or unimportant (Coffin, Hewings, & O'Halloran, 2004; Delahunty & Garvey, 1994; McGee Wood, 1993; Wilson & Wauson, 2010). Consequently, there is an issue of focus in the use of voice. Master (2004) underscores that focus is generally achieved by placing the element deemed to be relevant in a stronger position. Thus, the preference of voice of the verb may be about linguistic resources which imply a kind of emphasis. Downing (2015) reminds that "a situation can be expressed in different ways, in which the order of clause elements can vary, since different elements of structure can be moved to initial position" (p. 7).

Delahunty and Garvey (1994) mention that style manuals and composition textbooks advise writers to shun the passive. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2009) also encourages writers to use the active as much as possible. Active sentences are capable of enhancing writing to be vigorous, lively, and less wordy (Sharma & Mohan, 2011). It is alive, personal and immediate (Booher, 2001). Jain (2013) explicates that passive in technical writing is a wrong choice. Bell (2004) describes the use of impotent verbs (passive constructions) as a threat to the "health" of one's business letters. It may be a culprit that brings a host of problems (Booher, 2001). The introduction of the sentence with the noun phrase whose thematic role is not that of an agent makes the construction weak (Delahunty & Garvey, 1994). Therefore, sparing use of passive voice is encouraged.

Passivization has discourse-pragmatic functions (Allan, 2009; Azar & Hagen, 2016; Master, 2004). Specifically, Booher (2001) offers that passive voice can add variety. A uniform use of active can produce monotonous and pompous constructions. Thus, it may be asserted that eschewing passive voice is impractical. Second, it may soften commands and protect someone's feelings (Booher, 2001; Delahunty & Garvey, 1994). This may be applicable when hiding who is responsible for the action. "You have been suspended" may be much subtler and safer than: "I have suspended you" (Munalim, 2014). In this case, it is appropriately used to express the doer's greater distance (Gramley & Pätzold, 1992). Third, passive verbs sound more courteous and less accusatory without stating the person. Lastly, Delahunty and Garvey (1994) posit that the passive plays a variety of roles in discourse such as conveying certain presuppositions, allowing topic continuity, allowing the agent to be expressed as new information, particularly by being placed in a *by*-phrase at the end of the sentence (cf. p. 235).

As regards meaning, both voices are related to each other because of their complementary sentence forms (Thompson,

Ferreira, & Scheepers, 2018). There are also certain systematic correspondences between the active and passive forms of a sentence (Delahunty & Garvey, 1994). Consequently, neither of the two types is ungrammatical. It is only a matter of giving prominence to either the doer or the receiver. Lastly, the process of transformation from one voice to another is directly related to paraphrases, as maintained by Hudson (2000) who indicates that "paraphrases are related to syntactic rules, and provide explanations of the apparent function of some of these rules" (p. 290). Langacker (1987) also maintains that the difference between two voices is a focal adjustment analogous to the difference between: *The cat is under the blanket* and *The blanket is over the cat.* Altenberg and Vago (2010) also believe the systematic relation between the active and passive voice.

Amid the rich literature explaining the nature of voice, there has been less research focusing on the actual preference of voice among students after the concepts have been introduced, at least in the Philippine local context. This is perhaps because of the interchangeable nature of active and passive voice constructions in academic and non-academic writing (Yannuar, Shitadevi, Basthomi, & Widiati, 2014). To this end, two interfacing questions need to be explored in this study: "Can we really prescribe the voice of the verb to use, for example, in invitation letters? What is the actual preference of voice of the verb of the students?" Students presumably also make their own choice when composing their letters. Over many years of teaching Business Communication/Technical Writing, the researchers in this present study are left with one importunate question: "What is the students' actual preference of voice of the verb in their invitation letters?" In essence, the study sought answers to these queries:

1. What is the dominant voice of the verb used in the whole corpus?
2. What semantic purposes are achieved in both voices of the verb?

3. What tense-aspect combinations/structural forms are achieved in both voices?

It is assumed that the corpus may be loaded with the default active voice. The bulk of literature supports the use of active voice in technical writing, with so few favoring the use of passive voice (Liberman, 2006; Quiller-Couch, 1916; Sigel, 2009; Strunk, 2011; Strunk & White, 1979; Vuolo, 2012). Likewise, the concepts of voice of the verb were explicitly introduced prior to the actual letter writing. The teacher's lecture may have affected students' initial preference of the voice. Consequently, this backdrop sets to claim that the text producers in this present study are also likely to utilize more instances of active voice constructions over passive voice ones.

The study remains timely and relevant. Investigating students' preferences of the voices of the verb is important in understanding the linguistic choices they make when composing business and technical materials. The concern is not only an issue parochially in the Philippine context, but also universally (cf. Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2008). Therefore, teachers have the indispensable roles in making their students aware of the choices they make in active and passive voice, and the effect of their choice to the intended readers. As Delahunty and Garvey (1994) assert, the choice of verb is a matter of audience, not of grammar. Of course, the audience of these students changes from time to time based on the receiver, either Filipino or other readers with varied linguistic landscapes in the multicultural world today.

Methodology

Research Design and the Corpus

This study employed a corpus-based linguistic analysis that describes the language use as realized in the text of invitation letters. This type of linguistic analysis requires the collection

of naturally -occurring texts (Coffin et al., 2004, Friginal & Hardy, 2014). This study also employed a quantitative method, that is, the descriptive statistical features such as frequency counting and percentages of the hits of active and passive verb phrases, and the tense-aspect combinations in both voice of verb.

Table 1.   Number of Letters and Word Tokens per University.

Schools	Year	No. of Letters	No. of Word Tokens
University A	2012	34	4,155
University B	2014	29	3,675
University C	2015	72	8,656
	Total	135	16,486

Table 1 shows the total word tokens of 16,486 with the corresponding word types of 1,964 words based on 135 invitation letters. Baker (2006) emphasizes that a corpus of 200,000 words may suffice for a discourse study. This study, however, did not use the lens of discourse analysis; thus, said number of word tokens was considered enough to provide initial information of students' preference of voice. (See Ghadessy, Henry, & Roseberry's edited book on small corpus).

The same table reflects that the collection of the corpus varies in year. The primary author in this present study worked full-time for University A. He also worked full-time at University B while working part-time at University C. It was therefore impossible for the primary author to collect the corpus in the same year from three different schools. Needless to say, the year of collection and the number of universities where the corpus was collected were not the primary goal of the analysis. Instead, the primary aim of the study is the analysis of the preference of the voices of the verb as a whole, not per year, per university, nor the transition from year to another. For example, only the following variables were made relevant in corpus building as maintained by Atkins, Clear, and Ostler (1992)

and Connor and Upton (2004) such as dialectal variables (age, gender, mother tongue, region), diatypic variables (medium, field, genre, topic, length), learner variables (L2 exposure), and task variables (timing, exam, reference tools). Moreover, this study is not longitudinal in nature, thus should be of worthy of recommendation for future studies.

Text Producers

Text producers of the invitation letters were university students in their second year of study from three universities in Metro Manila. They were taking Bachelor courses such as Information Technology, Hotel and Restaurant Management, Culinary Arts, Tourism, Marketing, Entrepreneurship, Fine Arts and Design, Animation, Accountancy, and Multimedia Arts. They took a technical writing course labelled differently such as Communication Arts 4 (School A), Technical Writing (School B), and Business Communication (School C). It should be noted, however, that these different courses, gender, and other students' demographic profiles were not treated as variables in this study.

Corpus Collection and Treatment

The corpus of invitation letters was collected in 2012, 2014, and 2015. One of the teacher-researchers made sure that that no cases of plagiarism were committed. Letters were composed inside the classroom without internet access. After the teacher-researcher reviewed the letters, students had to encode the letters, print them, and send the copies to the email of the teacher-researcher. Teacher's reviews were not an attempt to modify the voice. Students' preferences after an explicit discussion on the voice of the verb were kept. The lectures on the concepts and the style of reviewing the letters were observed consistently in 2012, 2014, and 2015. Students were presented with all the vast literature involving active and passive use and choice. All students were required to compose

their invitations letters with complete obligatory parts such as the date, receiver's information, salutation, body of the letter, closing salutation and the sender's information. They were advised that the letter might be either fabricated or real. They might act as person in authority and positions in a company. Most importantly, they were reminded to be mindful and conscious of the choice between the active and passive voice in the sentence constructions in the body of the letter. This part of the instructions was to ascertain their preferences of the voice of the verb, thus to address the objective of this paper.

Letters in MS Word were converted to .txt format, and underwent a manual review to make sure that right spacing between words was observed (Friginal & Hardy, 2014). Only the body of the letter was extracted from the letters, excluding all obligatory and optional parts of the letter that were irrelevant in the analysis. After being converted to .txt file format, each letter was automatically run using the UAM Corpus Tool (O'Donnell, 2015). Automatic layering in this software such as *Automatic Annotation*, *Grammatical Structure*, and *SFL-Mood* options were chosen, leading to the intended layers such as tense-aspect combinations, and two types of voice of the verbs. AntConc (Anthony, 2014) software was also used to determine the number of hits of the target verb phrases in the passive voice. All instances of different verb phrases in passive voice, including tense-aspect combinations in the active voice were subject to manual descriptive statistics after careful classification of the types of passive verb phrases as presented in Table 2.

Using the Antconc (Anthony, 2014) software, hits of the passive voice were determined based upon the possible passive verb phrases observed in the body of the letter. Table 2 presents the tense-aspect combinations and modal auxiliaries, and the number of subject-verb concord that were used to cull the hits of passive voice.

Table 2.   Passive Structures.

Tense-Aspect Combinations and Modal Auxiliaries, etc.	Subject-Verb Concord	
	Singular Subject	**Plural Subject**
Simple present	am + pp	are + pp
	is + pp	
Simple past	was + pp	were + pp
Simple future	will be + pp	
Present progressive	am being + pp	
	is being + pp	are being + pp
Past progressive	was being + pp	were being + pp
Simple perfect	has been + pp	have been + pp
	is going to be + pp	are going to be + pp
	has to be + pp	have to be + pp
Modal/ phrasal modal auxiliary, semi-modals, etc.	can be + pp & could be + pp; shall be + pp; be about to be + pp; must be + pp; should be + pp; ought to be + pp; be supposed to be + pp; would be + pp; may be + pp; might be + pp; be to be + pp	

T-test on two -paired sample was used to see the significance difference between the preference of two voice. One-way ANOVA was used to see the differences between the various tense-aspect combinations in both voices of the verb. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS, with statistical significance set at the probability of 0.05.

Results and Discussion

This section further explicates the dominant tense-aspect combinations and structural patterns in both voices, and the semantic purposes achieved in these constructions. Results show that there is a conspicuous attempt by the writers to employ active voice in their invitation letters. The bulk of literature has favored the preference of active voice as a good practice among good writers (Liberman, 2009; Wanner, 2009).

Voice Preference in the Corpus

Table 3 confirms the dominance of active voice. Table 3 shows the consistent use of active voice in three years. It can be seen that students used passive voice sparingly.

Table 3. Preference of Voice among Three Groups of Text Producers.

Schools	Years	No. of Letters	Hits of Voice	
			Active	Passive
University A	2012	34	503	26
University B	2014	29	507	49
University C	2015	72	1,186	45
	Total	135	2,196	120

Such a pattern supports what Yannuar and colleagues (2014) found out. Accordingly, active voice construction accounts for 64.8% much higher than the passive voice construction of 35.2%. They further claim that "active voice construction creates directness impression to the reader, and it helps the reader to follow the author''s thought. While passive voice construction is fruitful to project process, methods, and giving instructions, both constructions become productive devices in academic writing, as long as they are not overgeneralized in every section of the academic writing" (p. 1407). Hewings (2013) also supports that the passive is used in describing procedures and processes.

More instances of active voice compared to passive voice is a strong indication that students may have preferred a voice that places the noun phrase in the subject position who is responsible for the action (Gramley & Pätzold, 1992; Huddleston, 1988). These text producers appeared to be obedient to the preference of active voice constructions. They placed the agents as the animate instigators of the action in the subject position which plays a thematic role in the sentences (Delahunty & Garvey, 1994). An invitation letter may be the

best occasion where the writers can highlight the invitee in the subject position, while placing their companies or the writers themselves in the *by*-phrase.

Table 4.   Descriptive Summary and the Significance Test of Active and Passive.

	Active	Passive	p-value
Mean	16.27	0.890	0.000
Standard Deviation	6.17	.990	

Table 4 confirms that the difference of voice constructions in the corpus is statistically significant. Going back to Table 3, when the preferences of passive voice among the three universities were checked statistically, only University B shows significance difference. This implies that they have the propensity to favor passive compared to the other two universities. Overall, the results in Table 4 affirm what Garvey and Lindstrom (1989) report that student writers use passive voice less often than expert writers. However, other studies reveal differently. For example, passives are frequently used in scientific writings (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2008), and in methodology section in academic papers (Swales, 1990).

Conviction and strength in writing is achieved with the use of active tone of voice (Souter, 2007). Active voice is generally used in business writing to emphasize the doer of the action. In this way, the reader or the audience will not be wondering who does the action (Munalim, 2014). When the passive is used, the doer of the action can be deleted, irrelevant, or unknown. To claim that these groups of text producers of invitation letter are good writers may be acceptable. "Good writers prefer the active voice most of the time. It is clearer and more direct, and it packs more punch. It immediately identifies the responsible actor..." (Writing Worth Reading, 2nd ed., pp. 284-285, as cited in Delahunty & Garvey, 1994, p. 422).

The preference of the active voice may be predictable in nature. First, users of the English language may always operate in the default active voice, as compared to other languages with a different default voice. Furthermore, when the preferences of active voice among the three universities are treated statistically, results also confirm that there is no significant difference in the use of active voice. They only deflect from using active when the discourse-pragmatic functions of passive voice warrant them to hide the doers. Seen from this light, the necessity of passive voice is still acknowledged in practical instances. The 120 hits of passive voice against 2,196 hits of active voice may imply that writers cannot do away with passive voice in an invitation letter.

Semantic Purposes Achieved in Active and Passive Voice

From the dominance of active voice, the writers put the doers in a stronger prominence and focus. They may be guided by the idea that invitation letters should have clear doers of the action. Although letters are intended to build rapport with the receivers, the writers still foreground themselves in the spotlight. They see themselves, their companies, and their representatives as much more important than the receivers of the action. The cases of active sentences have shifted the attention to the writers and their organization, not to the receivers of the action. This confirms Beason and Lester's (2003) argument that the use of passive can lead to a dull style because it intentionally hides the actor in the object position.

Table 5.   Comparison of Presence and Absence of *By*-phrase.

Presence or Absence of *by*-Phrase	Hits	Average	std Deviation	p-value
absent (pure agentless/short passive)	11	0.081	0.2750	0.000
present (long passive)	8	0.059	0.2370	

Table 5 shows students' use of agentless and long passive. The absent *by*-phrase dominates in the corpus with a total of 11 hits. They, however, include completion phrases because there are instances that the absence of phrases after the past participle makes the sentence ungrammatical (Fillmore, 1968). Answering the question "by whom" or "by what" in a passive sentence, or attaching completion phrases after the past participle can give the reader useful information (Master, 2004). The results support what Master (2004) found that approximately 80% of all passive sentences in English exclude the active subject by omitting the *by*-phrase, while the remaining 20% are included in the *by*-phrase. The absence of the *by*-phrase is because the doer of the action may be too general (Hayes, 1992, as cited in Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2008), too weak, too obvious to mention, or unknown (Master, 2004).

The present or long passive is used for 8 times in the corpus. A long passive is a clause in a passive voice that include the actor or agent responsible for the process indicated in the *by*-phrase, called the *by*-agent (Coffin et. al., 2004). The order of information deployed in a sentence depends on whether or not there is familiarity, special prominence, or whether the information is topical (Brown & Miller, 1991; Delahunty & Garvey, 1994). The results also echo the findings of Master (204) who claims that the remaining 20% of English passive use long passive constructions. It lengthens sentences by 15 to 50 percent (Booher, 2001). Table 8 shows that there is no significant difference between the use of long and agentless passives. The results do not seem to agree with the earlier studies that show that the short passive occurs much more frequently than the long passive in academic writing (Downing & Locke, 2006; Huddleston & Pullum, 2008). Although the presence of passive voice is almost nil in the corpus, the students did not seem to pay much attention whether the passive is long or short/agentless. Put simply, the students use passive voice with the intention to defocus the doers by hanging the doers after the

verb phrase *be* + past participle of the main verb, or by simply omitting it in the sentence (Hartley, 2008).

Tense-aspect Combinations in Active and Passive Voice

4.3.1. Structural forms and patterns in active voice. Table 5 shows the two dominant tense-aspect combinations of active voice constructions. The dominance is claimed by *simple modal* (556 hits), and *simple present tense* (407 hits). An invitation letter provides the invited individual some background of the company or institution as regards its celebration, status of the company, and other pertinent information related to the occasion. Furthermore, invitation letters contain actions that have to be completed in the future. Given these considerations, writers in this study have shown this likelihood to use *simple modals* and *simple present tense* in their letters.

Table 6. Tense-aspect Combinations Achieved in Active Sentences.

Tense-Aspect Combinations	Hits	Mean			p-value
		University A	University B	University C	
Simple modal	556	4.29	3.62	4.24	0.329
Simple present	407	1.79	4.62	2.94	0.00
Present progressive	109	.06	.66	1.22	0.000
Modal progressive	38	.03	.28	.40	0.005
Present perfect	32	.03	.41	.26	0.039
Simple past	30	.18	.41	.17	0.06
Simple future	6	0.00	0.00	.08	0.00
Present progressive perfect	3	.06	.07	.04	0.341
Past progressive	1	0.00	0.00	.01	0.649
Modal perfect	1	0.00	0.00	.01	0.649
Past Perfect	1	0.00	0.00	.01	0.649
Total	1, 184				

Table 6 shows the frequency of simple modals such as *will, would, can, may, could, should, might, shall,* and *must* (Leech & Svartvik, 1975). The results confirm Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman's (2006) notion that *will* is more formal and neutral as an expression of future time. It is also considered less interpersonal than *be going to*. In addition, *will* conveys a sense of promise or commitment compared to *be going to* that would only convey a plan or intention (Murphy, 2004). *Would* is also predictable especially that writers have to be most courteous in their letters. *Would* is one of the modals used in making polite requests (Colman, 2007). Results indicate that *would like to* was used to offer and invite the invitee politely. To illustrate:

We **would like** to invite you to become our guest.

Table 6 shows the significance tests of the tense-aspect combinations of active voice. Among the 11 tense-aspect combinations, 7 combinations are found to have equal mean scores across three universities. They include *simple modal, simple past*, *simple future*, *present progressive perfect*, *past progressive*, *modal perfect* and *past perfect.* For the *simple modal* which tops the ranking, the results indicate that the use of simple modal is favored by all three groups of students. On the contrary, the difference of *simple present* is statistically significant. There is no significant difference between and among these 11 tense-aspect combinations.

The preference for simple present tense is predictable. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (2008) confirm these uses of simple present tense: habitual actions in the present, general timeless truths, such as physical laws or customs. In an invitation letter, writers are expected to resort to simple present tense to convey one or more intended meanings highlighted above.

The same table shows that it is not a surprise that perfect tense-aspect combinations were infrequently used. *Perfect* involves current relevance in the present, considered as an unmarked form (Gramley & Pätzold, 1992). Perfect tense-aspect is a challenge even to advanced learners because it is an optional alternative to the simple past tense. Consequently, the results confirm Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman's (2008) argument that the traffic on the map of the 12 traditional tense-aspect combinations is mostly situated in the northwest part including the present progressive, giving little attention to the perfect tenses. As an observation, English books widely used in the Philippines have not heavily concentrated on the territory of perfect tenses. These books often present only the basic simple tense-aspect combinations.

Structural Forms and Patterns in Passive Voice

Table 6 shows the distribution of passive verb forms that students produced in passive voice constructions. The simple future passive voice *(will be + pp)* tops the ranking of commonly used passive form with 50 hits, followed by present simple passive voice, both in singular and plural form of the verbs (*is + past participle;* and *are + past participle),* with 21 hits.

Table 7. Tense-aspect   Combinations/structural   Forms Achieved in Passive Sentences.

Tense-Aspect Combinations	Hits	Average	std deviation	p-value
Future simple passive *(will be +pp)*	50	0.370	.632	
Present simple passive *(is + pp)*	21	0.156	.421	
Present simple passive *(are + pp)*	20	0.148	.466	
Future simple passive *(shall be + pp)*	2	0.015	.121	
Present perfect passive *(have been + pp)*	2	0.015	.121	
Future simple passive *(would be + pp)*	1	0.007	.086	0.0000
Present progressive passive *(are being + pp)*	1	0.007	.086	
Total	97			

Table 7 shows that future simple passive voice becomes the most preferred form of the passive voice, showing that it is the only passive form whose mean is statistically different from the rest of the structural forms. Future simple passive voice appears to be anticipated. The writers must be well-versed with the simplicity of structure by using the simple *will*, plus the *past participle* of the main verb. The prevalent use of *will + pp* then confirms a more formal and neutral expression of future events as a form of commitment (see Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2008; Leech & Svartvik, 1975; Colman, 2007). To illustrate:

The party **will be held** at The Manila Hotel.

Other phrasal verb forms in passive constructions were found with limited hits, ranging from 1 to 2 occurrences: *have been + pp; shall be + pp;* and *would be + pp*. These forms may not be common in business writing. Many technical writing books (e.g., Bovée & Thill, 2010; Munalim, 2014; Souter, 2007) encourage writers to be as simple as possible. The use of simple verbs forms may help the manuscript appear straightforward. Furthermore, the use of *has/have been + past participle* is a form which students may have not preferred due to the simplicity of *is* and *are*.

Table 8. Comparing the Types of Phrase Proceeding the Past Participle Form.

Types of Phrases	Sample Phrases	Hits	Average	std Deviation	p-value
Adverbial phrases	will be held **at the Manila Hotel.**	51	0.378	0.5730	
Completion using infinitive *to*	are expected **to** wear…	16	0.119	0.4410	
Without phrases	is appreciated**. (x)**	11	0.081	0.3470	
Completion using a noun phrase	are given **20** minutes.	11	0.081	0.3470	0.000
By-phrase	will be shouldered **by the company.**	8	0.059	0.2370	
	Total	97			

Table 8 presents the phrases that proceed the past participle form of the verb. In terms of structure, passive sentences may either end with the past participle of the main verb, or followed with phrases to complete the intended meanings. Without these phrases, sentences may appear hanging or ungrammatical (Fillmore, 1968). Although adverbial phrases appear to be the most preferred structure of the passive voice, the overall difference is statistically insignificant.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study confirms the students' preference for active voice over passive voice. This is supported in the inferential statistics that show significant difference in the preference of voice, favoring active voice constructions. This preference may be predictable in nature given that the default sentences in English may be in active voice. Second, the dominance of active voice is a suggestion that the doers of the action deserve foregrounding. This discourse-pragmatic function warrants the students to structure the doers in the subject, not in the object position. Likewise, when they structure the doers in the object position, they employ both long and agentless passive. The significant difference is however statistically identical.

The active voice being the default voice means that the students strategically foreground the doers in their invitation letters. This is acknowledged, but the main point of argument is that regardless of the choice of voice, this preference should be respected. To prescribe or restrict them to one voice is to stifle them from the freedom to write and express. Delahunty and Garvey (1994) share that "to view passives as errors and to attempt to eliminate them from one's writing is simply to impoverish the resources available to the writer" (p. 161).

English teachers then should strike a balance when introducing the voice concepts. They have the responsibility to

make their students aware of the choices they make in voice constructions, and the effect of their choice to the intended readers. "It is misleading to students to present the passive as if it were derived from the active voice. Therefore, it is better from the start to introduce the passive as a grammatical structure with a particular use of its own" (Celce-Murca & Larsen-Freeman, 2008, p. 355), and that the passive is the counterpart of the active voice (Berry, 2012). Teachers may also introduce voice through the help of cognitive grammar (Bielak, Pawlak, & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2013) to further the understanding why the students prefer one voice over the other.

This present study has a number of limitations to consider for future studies. It may be practical to use at least 200,000 words (Baker, 2006) by utilizing a combination of different business letters from different academic programs (Leki, 1991; Swales, 1990). One interesting result shows that passive voice is much preferred by University B, with significant difference compared to the other two universities. University B is considered the "most elite" school. Future studies may look at whether the use of voice of the verb is directly related to students' social prestige and economic status (cf. Barnbrook & Sinclair, 2001; Bondi, 2001; Ragan, 2001 for small corpus). Moreover, future studies should administer the *Voice Judgement Test* before the lecture on voice. Future studies should look into the interference of the mother tongues to the preference of active and passive voice (cf. Xiao, McEnergy, & Qian, 2006). Lastly, there is a dire need to triangulate whether the text-producers find the active voice structurally easier than passive voice. Finding this out means understanding that the preference of the active voice over the passive voice is based on the complexity of syntactic structure of the sentences.

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