

## Teaching Passive Voice of Japanese to Sri Lankan Learners

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**Abstract**– This article aims at analysing the difficulties in teaching Japanese passive voice to Sri Lankan learners in secondary schools and private institutes in two districts of Sri Lanka. It also shows the difficulties in teaching the Passive Voice of Japanese and better methods to reduce the difficulties. Based on this, a questionnaire was provided, and an interview was held among 20 Japanese language teachers as convenience sampling to collect data and find out their difficulties in teaching the Passive Voice and find suitable methods to reduce their difficulties. Once the data was collected, it was analysed using a cross-sectional analysis. The results show that some factors can strongly affect passive voice teachings, such as cultural differences, lack of practice, the complexity of Japanese passive voice, and L1 interference in L2 acquisition. Then the researcher concludes that to gain better results in teaching Japanese Passive voice, teachers need to give the learners a good knowledge of Japan's language and culture. For that, unique methods and strategies are vital, and it will help the teachers to give the learners a good knowledge of the Japanese culture and develop their linguistics and communicative competence.

**Keywords** Passive Voice of Japanese · Sri Lankan learners · Difficulties · Teaching · Culture of Japan ·

### 1. Introduction

Passive voice is the grammatical construction in which the noun working as the subject of a sentence, clause, or verb is affected by the action of a verb or being acted upon by the verb. The noun performing as the grammatical subject is generally the recipient of the action denoted by the verb instead of the agent and

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perhaps used to avoid assigning responsibility to the doer (Choomthong, 2011, Crystal, 2008).

The passive voice is commonly used in the Japanese language. It is used more frequently because it is a regular feature in formal, both in spoken and written texts, while in Sinhala, passive is used only in the written language. The Passive Voice of Japanese is included in the Sri Lankan school syllabus of foreign languages in the secondary schools (G.C.E., General Certificate of Education) Advanced level). Furthermore, the general syllabus of the courses is conducted in private institutes. Passive grammar is found in conversations, translations, and other sentences. Passive voice is one of the main competencies to be achieved by the students who learn Japanese as a foreign language. Since Japanese and Sinhala languages do not belong to the same language family, it is evident that they differ in varied grammatical aspects, including passive voice. However, the grammatical structures of both languages are similar. Both have the SOV (subject, object and verb) structure. Therefore, sometimes the teachers expect the learners to make correct sentences. However, many Japanese language teachers know from their experience that teaching the meanings, uses, and functions of the passive voice represent one of the teaching field's thorniest problems.

In this study, it is concerned to consider the teachers of secondary schools (G.C.E. Advanced level) and private institutes having significant difficulties teaching Passive Voice of Japanese to non-native learners.

The study aims to find the reasons for the difficulties the teachers face when teaching passive voice to non-native learners. Furthermore, find better methods so that the teacher would make the learner understand and make them fluent in the Passive Voice of Japanese and that way, the learners can make accurate passive sentences.

For this purpose, the data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. Interviews and questionnaires were provided among 20 Japanese language teachers as convenience sampling to collect data to discover their difficulties in teaching the Passive Voice of the Japanese language and find better methods to teach Japanese passive grammar to the learners. In the field survey, 20 participants were selected for the interviews: the teachers of secondary schools and private institutes. Teachers expressed different views of Japanese language teaching difficulties. Most of the teachers responded that student's attitudes and negative transfers in the voice grammar of Japanese, the complexity of Japanese passive Voice, L1 (First Language) interference on L2 (Second Language)

acquisition and the knowledge of the culture of Japan could strongly affect the result of learning the passive grammar of the Japanese language.

Moreover, the lack of facilities in the teaching and learning system is also a problem. Furthermore, authentic materials are essential to give the learners a good knowledge of Japanese culture. After analysing the collected data, the researcher came to a conclusion and recommendations.

## **2. Literature review**

A considerable number of researches have been done on the passive voice and the difficulties concerning teaching passive voice of the Japanese language.

The passive voice is a construction of syntax in which the subject of a sentence denotes the recipient of the action instead of the actor, a group of verbs associated with what thing or person is acting, and what thing or person is being acted upon (Arianna, 2011).

There is an active voice in a language, and the passive voice is also used to express ideas. According to Shibatani (1985, 1988, 1998), The passive Voice is one among the foremost well-attested voice alternations within the world's languages, and its complex properties have fascinated several linguists and have advanced and challenged grammatical theories.

Several solutions and strategies are discussed to help Japanese language teachers reduce the difficulties and get the learners to excel in the voice grammar of the Japanese language.

One of the challenges that Japanese teachers face in the teacher's role is the cultural differences that often cause learners to feel disturbed. They are, however, unable to grasp numerous expressions and sentences on account of cultural variations (Abdullah, 2015).

Nida (1964) acknowledged that, as words have meanings only in the entire cultural setting, the larger cultural context is of utmost importance in understanding the meaning of any message.

Another difficulty that teachers face in teaching the voice grammar of Japanese is that all learners are Sinhalese (Sri Lankas speaking the Sinhala language), and their native language always interferes when learning the Japanese language. In other words, L1 interferes with L2 acquisition.

Taylor (1975) acknowledged that when learners learn a new language, they over-generalise second language rules, reduce syntactic redundancies, and omit those rules they have not learned before.

Carroll (1964) argues that sometimes interferences and infrequent responses from one language system will interfere with the speech in the other language and circumstances of learning a second language are like those of a native language.

Beardsmore (1982) suggests that a second language learner has many problems in speech, grammar and vocabulary of the target language due to the interference of habits of the first language. The formal components of L1 are utilised within the context of L2, leading to errors in L2 because the structures of the two languages, L1 and L2, are different.

Both Sinhala (the native language of Sri Lanka) and Japanese languages have the same grammatical structure: SOV (subject, object, and verb). As for this similarity, the teachers feel it is easy to teach Japanese and straightforward for the learners to learn the language's grammar.

The contrastive analysis hypothesis has two assumptions: the first one is that the degree of difference between the two languages shows the degree of difficulty. Moreover, the second is the degree of similarity shows the degree of simplicity (Hayati, 1998).

It is clear that if the two languages have more differences, it will be harder for learners, and if the two languages have more similarities, it will be simpler for the learners. There are many similarities between Sinhala and Japanese languages, and learners find it easy to learn the basic grammar of Japanese. Although there are similarities between the two languages, most teachers have difficulties teaching passive voice due to the complexity of the passive Voice of Japanese.

Another challenge that the Japanese teachers face in teaching the Japanese language is the learners' attitude. This attitude can be positive or negative. Some learners may not have much interest in learning the language, which is a negative attitude, while some are very interested in learning which shows a positive attitude. Gardner (1980) defines attitudes because of the entire of a man's instincts and feelings, prejudice or bias, preconceived notions, fears, threats, and convictions about any specified topic.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) have concluded that the learners' skills to learn a second language are influenced by the mental competence or language skills and

the learners' attitudes and perceptions towards the target language. They also advocated that the attitude concept probably enhances language learning, influencing the nature of students' behaviours and beliefs towards the other language, its culture, and community, and this will identify their tendency to accumulate that language.

Many scholars have researched learning second or foreign languages; some have agreed that learning a language environment influences. It depends on teachers' plans of managing classrooms, thereby creating open discussions to instil confidence inside the students to speak language freely, and thus, improve their skills (Mustafa et al., 2014).

The role of the teacher is vital in learning a new language. Considering the use of authentic materials in teaching the Japanese language and getting a good knowledge of the culture of the language Widdowson (1990) maintained, "It has been traditionally supposed that to obtain and acquire the language easily, language presented to learners should be simplified. Recently there are recommendations that the language should be taught authenticity" (Widdowson1990).

Gao (2006) states that foreign languages teachers should raise the learner's communication capability by strengthening the learners' cultural awareness and being conscious of cultural studies within the foreign language classroom. According to Wang (2008), "teaching a new language is like teaching a new culture. It can be explained that foreign language teachers are foreign culture teachers".

Motivating the learners is also very important in teaching the Japanese language. As the Passive Voice of Japanese is hard for learners to understand, authentic materials are essential to motivate the students. According to Nuttall (1996), authentic texts are proof that the language is utilised for real-life purposes by real people, and authentic texts are often motivating. The learner needs to know how the Japanese people use the language in real life.

Japanese language teachers complain that although the teacher uses the best methods, it is hard for some learners to acquire the language and makes many errors in constructing sentences, including Passive Voice.

Each learner holds his/her unique ability and capacity, differentiating them from each other. This belongs to each learner's specific skills in handling their smartness to improve the language learning process. Some researchers link

intelligence with second or foreign language learning and contend that intelligent learners can learn a second or foreign language more successfully (Brown, 2007).

Brown (2000) commented that communication is likely to occur in the classroom when: (1) a significant amount of pair work and group work is conducted; (2) authentic language input in real-life context is provided; (3) students are encouraged to supply language for genuine, meaningful communication; and (4) classroom tasks are conducted to get the learners ready for actual language use outside the classroom.

### 3. Method

The methodology used in this study was designed to shorten the difficulties the teachers face when teaching the Passive Voice of Japanese to foreign language learners. Moreover, this study was conducted to recognise the type of difficulties when teaching Japanese Passive voice to the secondary school (G.C.E. Advanced level) learners and adults who study the Japanese language as a foreign language in private institutes in Sri Lanka. This research used the descriptive quantitative method. Gay (2000) said that descriptive research involves collecting data to answer questions concerning the present status of the study, which is an appropriate choice when the research aims to recognise the characteristics, frequencies, trends, and categories. This method was used to discover the types of difficulties teachers face when teaching the passive Voice of Japanese to the learners of native speakers. Two research tools were used to reach this objective: questionnaires and interviews.

**Participants:** The participants of this research were 20 teachers. Ten teachers from the secondary schools (G.C.E. Advanced level) and ten from private institutes were selected. All participants were randomly chosen from different schools and institutes from the Colombo and Gampaha districts of Sri Lanka. Five government schools, one private school and three private institutes were selected as the research sites. All the teachers have experience teaching the Japanese language for 5 to 20 years.

Furthermore, most teachers have been trained in Japan or studied in Japanese schools or universities in Japan and have a good knowledge of Japanese culture. Different schools and private institutes were chosen to represent both genders of Japanese language teachers. However, only female teachers were found as the participants. Male teachers are scarce as Japanese language teachers. These teachers are teaching the students of secondary schools who have selected the

Japanese language as one of the main three subjects for the secondary school examination (G.C.E. Advanced level examination) to fulfil their graduating requirements. Teachers of private institutes teach non-native learners who learn the Japanese language as a foreign language for many purposes, such as fulfilling university requirements, working in Japan, or going for higher studies in Japan.

**Instruments and procedure:** The primary method of inquiry utilised in this study was a questionnaire. It contains two sections: A and B. In Section A, items were used to collect the teachers' backgrounds. In Section, B items were used to identify the difficulties teachers face when teaching Japanese passive voice to non-native learners.

The other method was interviewing the teachers of schools and private institutes. It was used to obtain data to supplement and cross-validate the teachers. The teachers were interviewed to identify factors that influence students' errors in learning the passive voice of the Japanese language. Moreover, the interview was held to determine how teachers help the learners of secondary schools and private institutes understand the Passive Voice of the Japanese language. Before conducting the interviews, the themes were briefed on the aims and procedures of the interview sessions. The interviewees were informed that their answers would be completely confidential.

#### **4. Difficulties in teaching passive voice of Japanese to Sri Lankan students**

Teaching is a multidimensional process, and teachers should pay enough attention to all the students in the class. Teachers should know what students learn, how and why instruction influences such learning, and how the lessons might depend on this information to be more influential when teaching them in the next lesson (Berk, Hiebert, Jansen, & Morris, 2007). Moreover, similarly learning a second or a foreign language is a long and complex process because learners are required to cover all the aspects of a new language, such as the structure and culture of the new language (Brown, 2007). This study shows the difficulties teachers face when teaching the passive Voice of Japanese to the Sri Lankan learners, such as cultural differences, unfavourable transfer, L1 interference on L2 acquisition, attitude.

##### **4.1 Cultural differences**

One of the language teachers' challenges in teaching the Japanese passive voice is the cultural differences. As for the students, the culture of the language is critical

in learning a particular language. Each country has a unique culture, and it is bound with the language in multiple and complex ways.

Nida (2001) acknowledged that differences between cultures affect more serious issues than differences in language structure.

This study shows that the cultural differences of Japan and Sri Lanka cause many errors in using the passive voice. Due to these differences, the language teachers find it challenging to reduce the learners' errors when using passive voice.

One of the differences in the passive voice usage in the two countries is that the Japanese tend to use more passive voice than the Sinhala language. Japanese use passive Voice in both written and spoken languages, while the Sinhalese use passive voice sentences in academic writing but are not usually used in the spoken language. For instance,

Jap (Japanese language) Sin (Sinhala language)

- (a) (Jap) *watashi wa sensei ni homeraremashita*. – I was praised by the teacher
- (b) (Sin) *guruthumiya wisin mata prasansa karana ladi* – I was praised by the teacher

The sentence (a) can be used both in written and spoken languages, and the Japanese people use the passive voice in their day-to-day life. However, the Sri Lankans do not use the passive voice in the spoken language, and the Passive Voice is used only in the written language. The sentence sounds unnatural if the passive voice is used in the spoken language of Sinhala; they are better understood in the active voice. The sentence (b) differs when it comes to the spoken language.

- (a) (Jap) *watashi wa sensei ni homeraremashita* – I was praised by the teacher
- (b) (Sin – Spoken language) *guruthumiya mata prasansa kala*. (Active Voice)- Teacher praised me

The active voice of the above Sinhala sentence is used in the spoken language, and it is very natural and understood when the sentence is in the active voice.

Another difference in the passive voice usage in the two countries is that the Japanese usually use the passive voice to express someone's feelings, such as when someone is troubled, sad, happy. Moreover, passive shows that something

terrible has happened because of particular misfortune. The example below explains the different usage of passive in the two languages.

(a) (Jap) *watashi wa ame ni nurare mashita (passive) - I got wet by the rain.*

(b) (Sin) *mama wassata themuna (active)- I got wet by the rain*

Sentence (a) shows that I got wet by the rain and I am unhappy or troubled about the situation. However, by reading Sinhala sentence (b), the feeling of trouble is not included or felt. It gives the same meaning as the active sentence of Japanese. The situation will not be understood if the passive voice is used in the Sinhala sentence. These situations are better explained using the passive Voice in Japanese instead of the active voice.

Another difference in the passive voice usage in the two countries is that the Japanese passive voice is used to show the politeness of a sentence, and it expresses a politeness level above the normal *masu, desu* forms.

(a) Normal form: *ashita shigoto ni ikimasuka* (Jap) - Are you going to work tomorrow?

(b) Polite form: *ashita shigoto ni ikaremasuka.* (Jap)

(c) *heta wadata yanawada?* (Sin)

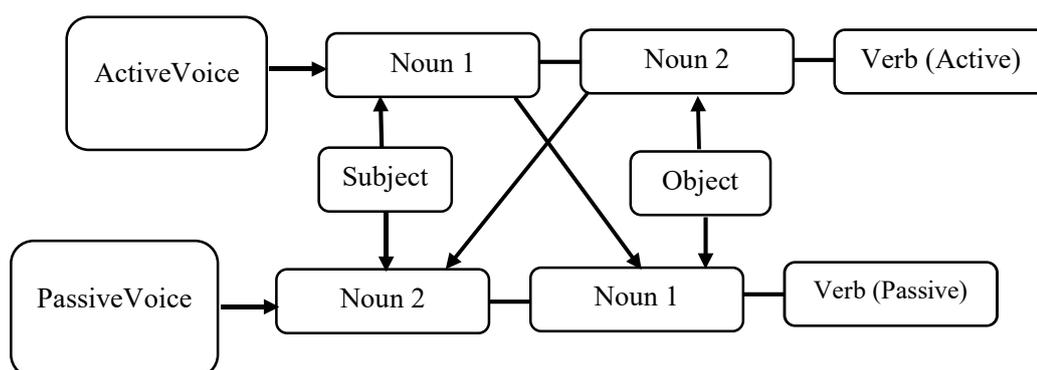
The sentence (a), (b,) and (c) give the same meaning. The sentence (a) is politer than the usual Japanese sentence (b), and the listener feels respected. However, in Sinhala (c), there is no unique way to respect those in higher positions. The usual form is used in the Sinhala language, even for people in higher positions. Although there are some unique respectable words in the Sinhala language, they are used only when speaking to the Buddhist priests in Sri Lanka.

## 4.2 Negative transfer

All languages have their structures. As language structure significantly impacts learning, most learners adapt their native language structure when learning a second language. In negative transfer, the learner uses the structure of the first language when constructing sentences of the second or the target language. If learners use the wrong structure, it will cause a negative transfer and ambiguity in the language. The grammatical structure of both Japanese and Sinhala languages is similar, and both have the SOV (Subject, Object, Verb) structure. However, the structure slightly differs in the passive voice of the two languages. In the Japanese language, the two nouns (subject and the object) change when an active voiced

sentence is changed into a passive voice sentence. Figure 1 below explains how the active sentence of Japanese changes into a passive sentence.

Figure 1: Syntactical difference of active and passive of Japanese



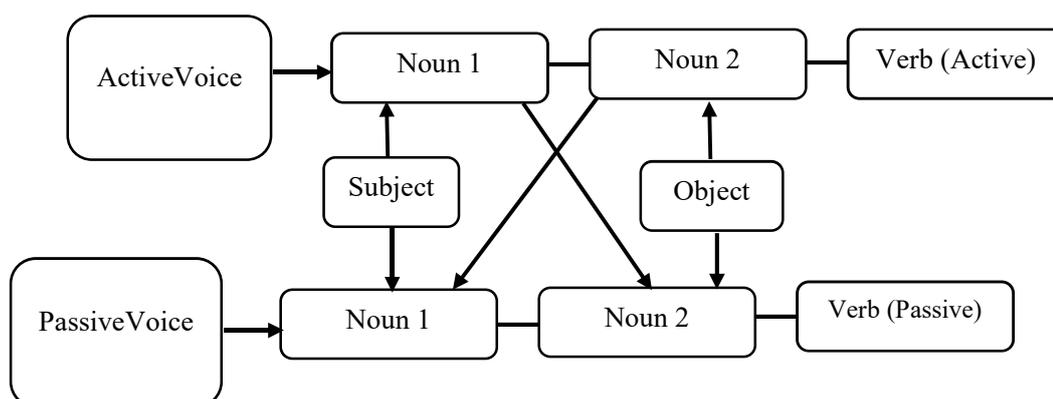
The examples below explain how the subject and the object act in Japanese's active and passive sentences.

- (a) Active: *sensei wa watashi o shikarimashita*- The teacher scolded me
- (b) Passive: *watashi wa sensei ni shikararemashita* – I was scolded by the teacher

In the above sentence, noun 1, sensei in the active voice sentence has changed places in the passive voice, and noun 1 sensei has become the object. Noun 2, watashi in the active voice sentence has changed places in the passive voice, and noun 2, watashi has become the subject of the Passive sentence.

As shown in figure 2 below, in the Sinhala language, two nouns (subject and the object) do not change places when an active voiced sentence is changed into a passive voice sentence. However, noun 1 of the active sentence (subject) changes to object, and noun 2 (object) of the active sentence becomes the subject in the passive voice sentence.

Figure 2: Syntactical difference of active and passive of Sinhala



The Sinhala active and passive voices are explained in the sentences below. It examples how the subject and the object change places and acts in the active and passive sentences.

- (a) Active: *janadhipathiamathiwurun kadawai-* The president summons ministers
- (b) Passive: *janadhipathi wisin amathiwaru kadawanu labati-* Ministers are summoned by the president

In the active sentence (a), the noun 1 (*janadhipathi*) has not changed places in the passive voice. Moreover, noun 2 (*amathiwurun*) has not changed the passive voice. However, the subject of the active voice has changed into the object, and the object (*amathiwaru*) of the active voice has changed into the subject in the passive voice sentence. However, most learners do not care about this issue, or they mistakenly do not make the changes when transferring the active voice sentence into the passive voice sentence of Japanese, and ultimately learners tend to make mistakes in the passive sentences. Therefore, the result becomes a negative transfer.

### 4.3 Complexity of grammar

Grammar complexity in a language will make it difficult for the learners to use and produce correct grammatical tenses and sentences. If the learner constructs ungrammatical sentences, then the delivering message will be wrong. In the passive Voice of Japanese, learners tend to make errors in the sentences they make because of grammar. The Japanese passive has three particles used in the passive voice, '*ni*,' *kara*,' and '*ni yotte*'. In the Sinhala, only one preposition suffix

is used in the passive voice 'wisin'. To make the Japanese passive sentence semantically correct, the appropriate usages of these particles are essential. Among the particles used in the Japanese passive voice, the particle 'ni' is used when a sentence is changed from active to passive.

- (a) Active: *sensei wa watashi o yobimashita* – The teacher called me
- (b) Passive: *Watashi wa sensei ni yobaremashita*- I was called by the teacher

Sentence (a), the active sentence, has used the particle 'o' after the object of the sentence, and the particle 'ni' is used in the passive voice.

Not only the particle 'ni' but When verbs do not indicate physical contact, the particle 'ni' can be replaced with the particle 'kara'. The example below shows when to use the particle 'kara' in a passive voice.

- (a) Passive: *sensei ni homeraremashita*. - I was praised by the teacher

Particle 'ni' has been used after the doer. However, the particle 'kara' can also be replaced in this sentence instead of the particle 'ni'.

- (a) *sensei ni/kara homeraremashita* - I was praised by the teacher

In the above sentence, the particle 'ni' or 'kara' is possible. However, in some sentences, the particle 'kara' is essential to be used instead of 'ni', or the sentence will be semantically incorrect, and the listener will not understand the meaning of the sentence correctly.

- (a) *sukejuru ga Yamada san kara bucho ni setsumei sare mashita*  
The schedule was explained by Mr Yamada to the manager.

In the above sentence, there is a particle 'ni' to get the meaning of 'to' (to the manager). If the speaker uses 'ni' instead of 'kara', the sentence will be incorrect.

- (a) *sukejuru ga Yamada san ni bucho ni setsumei sare mashita*.

As there are two 'ni' particles in the same sentence, the listener will be confused and not get the sentence's correct meaning.

In the passive Voice of Japanese, the particle 'ni' indicates a target. Where there is no target, the doer needs to be expressed, and in cases like that, the particle 'ni yotte' is used.

- (a) *Kono shosetsu wa mori ogai ni yotte kakaremashita*

This novel was written by Mori Ogai

There are particular sentences that, if the speaker uses particle '*ni*' instead of '*ni yotte*', the sentence will be semantically incorrect, and the listener will get a wrong idea,

(a) *Kono shosetsu wa mori ogai ni kakaremashita.*

The particle '*ni*' also gives the meaning of 'to', and the listener will not understand whether the particle '*ni*' is used to give the meaning of 'to/ for' or if it is used to indicate the passive. The listener may get the wrong idea and understand, "*This novel was written for Mori Ogai*". The Japanese use the particle '*ni yotte*' in the passive sentences to avoid these mistakes.

In the Sinhala language, only one preposition, '*wisin*', is used instead of all the particles mentioned above. The preposition suffix '*wisin*' is used to the doer when the passive voice of the sentence is constructed.

Another complexity of grammar in the Japanese language is that the Passive Voice in Japanese is often conjunct with the causative form, and it is simply the combination of causative and passive and named as causative-passive form. It is often used when someone is made to do something, unhappy or troubled about it.

(a) *Nomitakunakatta noni murini nomaserareta*

Despite not wanting to drink, I was made to drink.

Conjunct the passive voice with the causative form is rare in the Sinhala language, and even in rare cases, it can be used only in the written form and not in the spoken language.

In the complexity of the grammar in Japanese, the passive Voice of Japanese can be classified into two varieties: direct and indirect passive sentences. The direct passive sentences in both active and passive sentences denote the same single event.

(a) Active: *Yamada ga Tanaka o nagutta* - Yamada hit Tanaka

(b) Passive: *Tanaka ga Yamada ni nagurareta* - Tanaka was hit by Yamada

This type of Passive sentence is called direct passives. The first example, the active sentence, is written from Yamada's point of view, while the passive sentence is written from Tanaka's point of view. The structures are similar, but the particle "*ni*" function has changed from the particle "*o*" of the active sentence.

Indirect expressions are often preferred in Japanese culture. Therefore, the Japanese people prefer using indirect passive in their conversation. Most of the indirect passive sentences have a regrettable meaning.

(a) *Watashi wa chichi ni shinareta*

I was (affected) by my father's death

In the above sentence, the actions of the father's death indirectly affect the person. Therefore, this pattern is called "indirect passive sentences."

#### 4.4 L1 interference in L2 acquisition

It is known that the first or the native language impacts second language acquisition, and L1 can interfere with the acquisition of L2. Most researchers believed that the role of L1 within the L2 depends on some similarities and differences between the two languages. One of the essential and interesting aspects of human development is language acquisition (Ali & Elham, 2015).

Karim and Nassaji (2013) investigated the first language transfer in second language writing, and they found that when the learners write in the second language learners, their first language affects their writing.

Learners tend to use their first language structures when producing sentences of the target language. When the structures of the languages differ, many errors arise in the new language. It shows the interference of the first language on the second language (Decherts & Dllis, as cited in Bhela, 1999).

In this study, the L1 uses passive voice sentences in academic writing and is not usually used in the spoken language. However, the L2 (Japanese) uses the passive voice in written and spoken languages. Therefore, the learners tend to make errors passive Voice of L2. Most learners use the active Voice of Japanese, where the passive is suitable for the particular situation. For example,

(a) (Sin)*guruthuma mata prashansa kala.*

In Japanese passive sentences are used with the sentences in which the feelings are included. Therefore, the correct sentence should be

(a) (Jap) *watahi wa sensei ni homeraremashita.* - I was praised by the teacher

However, as passive is not used in the spoken Sinhala language, the learners use the active voice: *sensei wa watashi o homemashita* - the teacher praised me. And the sentence is syntactically incorrect due to the situation.

The mistakes that arise in learning a second language due to interference can be categorised as follows: 1. Developmental errors: the errors that are not related to the learner's first language. 2. Ambiguous errors: the mistakes that concern interference and developmental errors. 3. Unique errors: Neither those errors

cannot be categorised either in interference or developmental errors. Old manners of the first or the native language result in interference, and it must be removed before learning the new habits of a second language (Dually et al., 1982).

According to the language teachers, the learners tend to transfer their first language's forms, meaning, and culture to the target language when learning a new language. Moreover, those forms, meanings and cultures interfere when speaking the new language. The habits of the native language interfere when learning the second language habits, and then the learners tend to make errors (Beebe & Seliger, as cited in Nemati & Taghizadeh, 2006). Similarly, as mentioned in the literature review, Beardsmore (1982) suggests that because of the interference of habits from the first language, the learners have difficulties in phonology, vocabulary, and syntax of the second language.

Considering the Passive grammar of the learner's native language, the Sinhala language, the particle "*wisin*" is used when a sentence is converted from the active voice into the passive voice. In the second language, which is the Japanese language, three particles are used in the passive voice, "*ni*", "*kara*", and "*ni yotte*". To form the Japanese passive sentence semantically correct, the appropriate usages of these particles are essential. Learners have difficulties choosing the fine particle to form the passive sentences in Japanese. As for this difference within the two languages, L2 (second language) learners make many mistakes in constructing passive sentences.

Another difference between L1 and L2 is that the passive voice is utilised only with the transitive verbs within the Sinhala language because the subject of the sentence is vital within the passive voice. But within the Japanese passive voice, there is no such rule,

- (a) Transitive: *gowihu waga katayuthu karathi* – farmers cultivate
- (b) Intransitive: *mal pipei* – the flowers bloom

From the above two sentences, the passive voice is used only within the sentence "(a)," a transitive verb used at the end of the sentence. The transitive sentence "(a)" "*gowihu waga katayuthu karathi*" can be changed into passive voice as "*gowin wisin waga katayuthu karanu labai*". The sentence "(b)" the intransitive sentence "*mal pipei*" cannot be used with the Passive Voice. Due to these differences between the two languages, learners may tend to form errors within the L2 grammar.

#### 4.5 Attitude

Attitude can strongly affect the result of learning a new language. As it influences learners' success or failure in learning a language, it is stated that attitude towards language learning plays a crucial role (Zainol & Alzwari, 2012). If students have a positive attitude towards learning a language, they will enjoy the lesson more and, as a result, they can catch up more knowledge and skills of the language. On the other hand, when the students' attitude towards language learning is negative, they will be reluctant and pay less attention during the teaching-learning activity.

Teachers find several students holding negative attitudes to language learning in teaching Japanese. For those students, learning Japanese grammar is uneasy, and they do not tend to pay full attention in the class while the lesson is going on. Those learners with negative attitudes have more difficulties in understanding the voice grammar. Attitude is wholly related to feelings, and these feelings cause a negative attitude, and learners fail to learn the language properly. If the learners do not feel interested, it is hard for them to acquire the grammar form and make errors.

When learning a new language, as negative feelings bring in a distorted image, learners need to avoid being influenced by such negative feelings. Instead of adverse reactions, learners are encouraged to establish a hospitable relationship (Bingol, 2014).

#### 5. Analysis of data

The data was collected from the Japanese language teachers and analysed by percentages (%) to conduct this study. The analysed data is shown below in the form of a table. Table 1 presents the Common challenges that Japanese language teachers face in teaching the passive grammar of Japanese, and Table 2 presents the methods to reduce the difficulties in teaching passive voice.

The first item in Table 1 shows 55% of the participant strongly agreed; also, 40% agreed, while 5% disagreed and 0% strongly disagreed (Cultural difference is one of the difficulties in learning the passive voice of the Japanese language). Regarding the next item in the table, 20% of the participants strongly agreed; meanwhile, 70% agreed, while only 10% disagreed (Many Japanese language learners face difficulties in the passive voice due to and impact of the first language). The other item (negative attitudes of the learners have more difficulties understanding the voice grammar), 25% of the respondents strongly agreed, and 65% agreed, while only 10% disagreed. Regarding the fourth item, which states (Adopting their native language structure in

learning the passive Voice of Japanese is another difficulty), 20% of respondents strongly agreed. Also, 45% agreed, while 25% disagreed and 10% strongly agreed on this item. The next item is (The complexity of passive grammar in the Japanese language makes the learners feel it challenging to use and produce correct passive sentences), 10% of the respondents strongly agreed, and 70% agreed, while 15% disagreed. (Use of three different particles in Japanese makes the learner confused in the usage of passive voice) 10% of the respondents strongly agreed, 55% agreed, and 25% disagreed. The next item, (Construction of potential form polite form and the passive form of Japanese has the same rules and the learners find it difficult to understand) 20% of the respondents strongly agreed, and 65% agreed, while 15% disagreed.

Table 1: Common challenges that Japanese language teachers face

Variables	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Cultural difference is one of the difficulties in learning the passive voice of the Japanese language	11	55	8	40	1	5	0	0
Many Japanese language learners face difficulties in the passive voice as a result of and impact of the first language	4	20	14	70	2	10	0	0
Negative attitudes of the learners have more difficulties in understanding the voice grammar	5	25	13	65	2	10	0	0
Adopting their native language structure in learning the passive voice of Japanese is another difficulty	4	20	9	45	5	25	2	10
The complexity of passive grammar in the Japanese language makes the learners feel difficult to use and produce correct passive sentences	3	15	14	70	3	15	0	0
The use of three different particles in Japanese makes the learner confused in the usage of passive voice	2	10	11	55	5	25	2	10
Construction of potential form polite form and the passive form of Japanese has the same rules and the learners find it difficult to understand	4	20	13	65	3	15	0	0
Usage of causative passive voice is confusing for the learners and hard to make them understand	14	70	6	30	0	0	0	0
Varieties of passive such as direct and indirect passive is hard to explain and learners make errors	2	10	13	65	4	20	1	5
Different from Sinhala, Japanese passive voice is used to express someone's feeling and, that is a hard for the learners to understand	2	10	9	45	8	40	1	5

n=20

Regarding the following item, which states (Teaching methods and strategies have a significant impact on learning outcomes), 70% of the respondents strongly agreed, and 30% agreed, while 0% disagreed. The next item is (Teachers can motivate and facilitate learning language process) 10% of the respondents strongly agreed, and 65% agreed, while 20% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed. For the last item, 10% of the respondents strongly agreed. Also, 45% agreed, while 40% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed (different from Sinhala, Japanese passive voice is used to express someone's feelings and is hard for the learners to understand). Table 2 below presents the percentage of the suggestions to reduce the difficulties in teaching the passive voice.

Table 2: Percentage of suggestions to reduce the difficulties in teaching passive voice of Japanese

Variables	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
A positive attitude encourages learners to learn the passive voice	6	30	14	70	0	0	0	0
Visual aids are one of the best materials to teach passive grammar	4	20	10	50	6	30	0	0
Watching Japanese videos of natural conversations will help learners to understand the usage of passive grammar	5	25	11	55	4	20	0	0
Uses of multimedia projectors have a great impact on the results of learning outcomes	3	15	11	55	5	25	1	5
Uses of authentic materials are also important to give the learners a good knowledge of the Japanese culture	6	30	14	70	0	0	0	0
Giving more chances to speak with Japanese native speakers will encourage learners	3	15	9	45	5	25	3	15
Increasing the number of hours on practice of the passive voice will fluent the learners	4	20	13	65	3	15	0	0
Teachers should motivate and facilitate the learners as motivation has a great impact on the results of learning passive voice	2	10	12	60	6	30	0	0

n=20

Regarding this table, its first item; (Positive attitude encourages learners to learn the passive voice), 30% of the respondents strongly agreed, and 70% agreed. In the next item, 20% of the respondents strongly agreed, 50% agreed, while 30% disagreed (Visual aids are one of the best materials to teach passive grammar). The third item in the table states; (Watching Japanese videos of natural conversations will help learners understand the usage of passive grammar); 25% of the respondents strongly agreed, and 55% of the respondents agreed, while 20% disagreed. For the next item, 15% of the respondents strongly agreed, and 55% agreed, while 25% disagreed and only 5% strongly disagreed (uses of multimedia projectors have a significant impact on learning outcomes). 30% of the respondents strongly agreed with the next item, and 70% agreed.

In contrast, none of the respondents disagreed on that (Uses of authentic materials are also essential to give the learners a good knowledge of the Japanese culture) Regarding the sixth item of the table which is (Giving more chance to speak with Japanese native speakers will encourage learners), 15% of the respondents strongly agreed. Also, 45% agreed, while 25% disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed. Regarding the seventh item of the table (Increasing the number of hours on the passive voice practice will become fluent the learners), 20% of the respondents strongly agreed; also 65% agreed; while 15% disagreed. The last item of the table (teachers should motivate and facilitate the learners as motivation has a significant impact on learning passive voice) 10% of the respondents strongly agreed; also 60% agreed; while 30% disagreed.

## **6. Results and discussion**

The current study is focused on difficulties in teaching the passive Voice of Japanese. According to the teachers, most of the students who learn the Japanese language as a foreign language are less interested in the Passive Voice of Japanese. The research gave the information that, although Sinhala and Japanese have the same grammatical structure and the passive voice is used in both languages, there are differences in the usage of the languages interference of L1 on L2 acquisition. The results show that the cultural background, the complexity of Japanese passive voice, attitude, and negative transfer strongly affect learning a new language, influencing the teaching and learning process.

The interviews with the teachers show that learners have a poor understanding of the culture of Japan, complexity of passive grammar, negative attitudes of the learners. Moreover, lack of practice and lack of authentic materials are problems in teaching passive voice to the learners. To give the learners a good knowledge

of Japan's cultural background and reduce L1 interference on L2 acquisition, the uses of authentic materials and increasing the number of hours of practice are essential. As a result, the current study's findings show many difficulties in teaching passive Voice to Sri Lankan learners. Moreover, at the same time, the findings propose some crucial material and ways to reduce the difficulties.

## **7. Conclusion and suggestions**

In teaching the Japanese language to foreign language learners, passive voice is one of the most challenging grammars that are hard to convince the learners, and the teachers suffer most. Teachers face many difficulties, mainly when learners produce sentences in Japanese passive voice. As a theoretical work, the study focuses on identifying the difficulties when teaching Japanese voice grammar to the native Sinhalese who learn the language in the secondary schools (G.C.E. Advanced level) and the adult learners who study the Japanese language in other languages private institutes. The study also focuses on unique methods that can be applied to reduce teachers' difficulties when teaching passive voice to the learners and minimise the number of errors learners make when making passive sentences.

Teachers have difficulties in teaching the Passive Voice due to many reasons. One reason is that the students are less interested in the voice grammar of Japanese. There are many differences in the grammar of the Passive Voice between Japanese and Sinhala, and learners make many errors in producing passive sentences. Therefore, although teachers try to teach the Passive Voice, learners lose interest in learning passive grammar. L1 interference in L2 acquisition is also a reason in teaching Passive grammar. As Japanese syntax is structurally similar to Sinhala, learners get the wrong idea that all sentences should be constructed the same way. So unknowingly, learners have the interference of Sinhala when making Japanese sentences. Lack of practice and lack of authentic materials are some difficulties the teachers face in the teaching and learning system. Although the uses of authentic materials are also essential to give the learners a good knowledge of Japanese culture, many schools do not have the chance to use these facilities.

Learners cannot learn the language by themselves. To improve their language knowledge and learn the culture, they need good guidance. Only the teacher can give the learner good guidance and participate in this process. In the teachers' role, teaching methods and strategies are also vital. Especially the uses of authentic materials are essential for the learners to get a good knowledge of the Japanese

culture, and that way, learners can reduce the number of errors in producing passive voice sentences.

In conclusion, it shows that teacher's role is vital in teaching Japanese as a foreign language, especially in teaching passive voice. It depends on the methods, teacher's role, strategies performance, and environment in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers must have a good plan and use the best techniques to minimise these difficulties in teaching passive Voice of Japanese, such as practising the passive Voice of Japanese compared with the Sinhala language, having contacts with Japanese native speakers, and having a good attitude. Then the teachers will be able to reduce their difficulties, give a good knowledge of Japanese culture, and make the learners make appropriate and accurate passive voice sentences.

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