

## THE ENGLISH PASSIVE CONSTRUCTION ACQUISITION PROCESSES: A CASE STUDY OF DHOLUO SPEAKING PUPILS

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### ABSTRACT

*The current study investigated the processes by which Dholuo speaking pupils acquire the English language passive constructions. The study investigated the role of gender and age in the acquisition of the English passive constructions. The theoretical paradigm of Interlanguage was used. The study adopted the descriptive cross-sectional design which involves categorizing respondents in different groups according to their respective levels of development. The cohorts were pupils aged 6-8; 9-11 and 12-14 years. The design enabled the study to compare peers as they successively reached a given age or points of development. It also allowed for child cohort comparison. Data was collected using research instruments that consisted of receptive and production tasks which were administered to the pupils. Data was analysed and interpreted qualitatively in terms of percentage scores, and quantitatively in prose form. The study found out that whereas gender had no significant influence on the acquisition of English passive constructions by Dholuo speaking pupils, the age of the pupils had a significant influence. The findings of this study have implications not only on the acquisition of English grammatical structures, but also on the cross-linguistic influence in Second Language Acquisition and recommends as follows; syllabus designers and material developers should take due cognisance of the cross linguistic influence while designing syllabi and developing instructional materials for lower primary classes, and teachers handling English language in the corresponding grades to be made aware of the potential effects of the L1 on the acquisition of English target structures. The study also creates an opportunity for further research in other aspects namely: the interaction of Dholuo with the acquisition of other aspects of English grammar; interaction of other languages with English during the acquisition process; focus on adult learners so that any differences attributable to age of the learners could be noted and lastly, focus on child language acquisition within the African background so that inherent differences can be noted and accounted for.*

**Keywords:** *Second Language Acquisition; Dholuo speaking pupils, passive constructions;*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*Dholuo*, also known as *Luo*, is a Western Nilotic language spoken by approximately three million people in south-western Kenya (GoK, 2009 census). The particular dialect used in this study is spoken in Bondo District, Kenya. Hamlaoui (2013:2) has described *Dholuo* as “a rigidly Subject Verb Object (SVO) Nilo-Saharan language”. This implies that like all other SVO languages, the canonical clause structure is such that the verbs usually precede the subject and is followed by the object. (The St Joseph’s Society, 1921; Omondi, 1982; Tucker, 1994)

A recent syntactic study like Ochola (1999) describes active sentences with an indefinite subject proclitic. These sentences constitute ‘pseudopassives’ or ‘passive equivalents’ in that they function as passives without actually displaying passive marking. Moreover, *Dholuo* lacks central passive constructions but has ‘a pseudo-passive construction in which a fronted Noun Phrase (NP) has very interesting properties’. She goes on to argue:

Through the use of a null subject construction, a patient NP can be emphasized. Moreover, movement of the patient is an optional additional focusing property of the construction, since the

"passive" reading obtains even without the fronting of the patient. In addition, *Dholuo* exhibits at least four distinctions of terms of identification of agency. In the active, the agent is clearly identified. In the pseudopassive, the agent may be optionally identified, but without being focused. Moreover, in this pseudo-passive, the agent can also be omitted. Finally, in the generic subject construction, the agent is marked as understood by context, but it is neither suppressed nor less focused than the passive agent in a *gi*-phrase. (p.18)

To the best of our knowledge, these studies make no mention of an actual passive/voice marking of the verb. According to The St Joseph's Society (1921: 54), *Dholuo* expresses passive voice by means of 'the root of the transitive verb and prefixing of 'o' as an impersonal pronoun' in perfect tenses and 'when one indicates an action still going on the 'o' is dropped and an 'i' is employed with the active verb'.

The debate on the process of second language acquisition has drawn a great deal of interest from a number of second language acquisition scholars. Most such scholars argue that pupils who are proficient in their first language (L1) should not experience any problem in acquiring a second language. For instance, Pérez and Torres-Guzmán (1996:96) state that "Pupils who develop proficiency in using their native language to communicate, to gain information, to solve problems, and to think can easily learn to use a second language in similar ways".

According to Tabors (1997), young pupils who are learning a second language bring all of the knowledge about language learning they have acquired through developing their first language. He goes on to argue that for these pupils, second language acquisition is not a process of discovering 'what language *is*, but rather of discovering what *this* language is'. This study sought to contribute to this debate by focusing specifically on how the acquisition of the English passive form occurs in pupils who already have an established first language which is *Dholuo*.

In the English language, the English passive voice is formed with an auxiliary verb (usually *be* or *get*) plus a participle (usually the past participle)

of a transitive verb. For example, '*Adhiambo was kissed by Jared*' uses the passive voice. The subject denotes the person '*Adhiambo*' affected by the action of the verb. The counterpart to this in active voice is, '*Jared kissed Adhiambo*', in which the subject denotes the doer, or agent, *Jared*. A sentence featuring the passive voice is sometimes called a *passive sentence*, and a verb phrase in passive voice is sometimes called a *passive verb*. English differs from languages in which voice is indicated through a simple inflection, since the English passive is periphrastic, composed of an auxiliary verb plus the past participle of the transitive verb (Sierwieska, 2010). It has been claimed in the literature on acquisition of English as a second language that pupils, whether acquiring a first or a second language, do not have the ability to use passive voice until about age 4 or 5. This is despite the fact that they control the morphology (the auxiliary verb

'be' and the participial form of the verb) by this age (Pinker, 1984). It has also been claimed that the delay is due to the fact that pupils have a maturational delay (which is universal) which prevents them from connecting the patient role to the subject position in passives (Pinker, 1984). The Passive is used as one of the main arguments that a certain number of verbs of a given type must be individually learned before the child can generalize a more abstract pattern. The present study focuses on the acquisition of English passive constructions by second language learners of English, namely *Dholuo* speaking pupils who have undergone about six years of English instruction. Given that the above debates and predictions have centered on English as acquired by English speakers, a study that focuses on the acquisition of English passive by second language learners of English is bound to reveal critical and theoretical relevant insights.

**1. Statement of the Problem** Ochola (1999) has argued that the NP movement illustrated in the *Dholuo* passive is a characteristic of a true passive. She concludes that "these peculiar properties of the *Dholuo* passive present an interesting phenomenon for further grammatical investigation" (p. 21). Of particular interest to the present study was the issue stated by Ochola (1999) that unlike languages such as English, the only difference between the *Dholuo* passive and its counterpart active construction is tone placement on the verbal morphology and that *Dholuo* passive has more properties in common with a true passive in English than pseudo-passives

in other languages. The study, therefore, sought to establish how the already acquired structure of the *Dholuo* passive affects the acquisition of the English passive in terms of the cross linguistic influence of the properties of *Dholuo* passive on the acquisition of English passive given that both have shared properties. Chomsky (1969:1) observes that “a common assumption among pupils of child language has been that the child has mastered the syntax of his native language by about age 5.”

Pupils’ learning English as a second language find active sentences such as ‘*Atieno ate the banana*’ much easier to understand and produce than passive sentences such as ‘*The banana was eaten by Atieno*’. Even when passives are acquired, they are likely to be truncated (lacking the ‘by phrase’; (Berman, 1985). Thus, the study deemed it insightful to investigate its English Passive acquisition by *Dholuo* speaking pupils.

## 2. Objectives of the study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- a) To establish the role of age in the acquisition of the English passive by *Dholuo* speaking pupils.
- b) To establish the role of gender in the acquisition of the English passive by *Dholuo* speaking pupils.

## 4. Justification of the Study

Given that *Dholuo* and English do not demonstrate any documented genetic or typological relatedness, the nature of this cross-linguistic influence was linguistically significant in contributing to the theory and debate within this area in general.

Other studies that have grappled with the nature of cross-linguistic influence have claimed that it occurs in the form of transfer (Lado, 1957), nontransfer (Sharwood, 1983), transfer in reverse (Odlin, 2003), or avoidance (Kellerman, 1979). Related studies using data drawn from local African languages are not readily available, hence the present study.

Another rationale for the study is in the fact that the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) in its annual report noted that the passive is one of the most problematic areas for pupils in both the primary and the secondary examinations (KNEC, 2009). This is yet another motivation for the present study.

On a more practical level, the findings of this study contribute to linguistic theory by providing more data and furthering the already existing discourse on passive, pseudo-passive and crosslinguistic influences in second language acquisition. Curriculum developers and syllabus designers in Kenya are also likely to benefit from the insights of the study as they prepare instructional materials for *Dholuo* and the English syllabus.

## 5. Theoretical Framework

**5.1 Interlanguage Theory (IL)** Learner’s language is what Selinker (1972) calls ‘**interlanguage**’ – an evolving linguistic system that incorporates features of both the learner’s L1 and L2. Inter language is, therefore, neither the system of the native language nor the system of the target language, but instead falls between the two; it is a system based upon the best attempt of learners to provide order and structure to the linguistic stimuli surrounding them. Interlanguage theory basically looks at second language learning as “a creative process of constructing a system in which the learner is consciously testing hypotheses about the target language from a number of possible sources of knowledge ...” (Brown 1980: 162). Accordingly, the interlanguage theory guided the study in characterising and analysing the data in terms of the interlocking systems of both *Dholuo* passive and the English passive and to analyse particular L1/L2 combinations.

## 6. Literature Review 6.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Age and Second Language Acquisition

One of the most obvious potential explanations for the lack of success of L2 learners compared to L1 learners is that the acquisition of a foreign language begins at a later age than that of the mother tongue (cf. Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991: 153). Thus, it has been prevalently assumed that age itself is a predictor of second language proficiency. The influence of age is actually assessed to be not only significant but even decisive on the degree of L2 competence and performance attained (cf. Abello-Contesse et al. (2006). But what exactly do researchers mean when they talk about age in language acquisition? Orwenjo (2009) makes the following clarification on this issue:

When talking about age in reference to language acquisition studies, reference is normally made to two related but distinct concepts: age of acquisition and age at acquisition. “Age of acquisition” is interpreted as

identifying a critical period, a period beyond which effects of increasing age are not manifested in the acquisition profile. “Age at acquisition” on the other hand, is used to refer to the age at which a child or a group of pupils actually acquire specific linguistic units and structures (p.246).

The present study adopts the latter reading of the concept of age as used in acquisition studies because of the nature of the research questions it seeks to answer.

It is often (see for instance Scovel, 2000 & Johnstone, 2002) claimed that pupils are superior to adults, that is, the younger the learner of a foreign language, the more effective the learning process and the better the outcome obtained. This assumption often derives from a distinctive element in the study of the age factor, called Critical Period Hypothesis Lenneberg (1967).

CPH predicts that if the acquisition of a foreign language starts between the age of 2 and 12- 14 (i.e., puberty), the process will be straightforward and the product will be complete (which is usually claimed to be the case in the acquisition of the L1). Individuals who begin their learning after this point – a kind of biological border – will find the process considerably difficult and the final outcome will be incomplete.

However, there exist more studies which dispute the assumption that pupils are superior to adults in learning an additional language and maintain the exact contrary. Likewise, the explanations for the critical period as well as their empirical foundations have been questioned by different researchers. Since educators are interested in knowing what the best time is to start their instructions and how far older pupils can progress, the age factor is not only of great significance for SLA theory but also for language teaching practice. An important question which arises in this context is whether there is sufficient conceptual and empirical reason to justify making educational decisions on the basis of SLA research concerning the age factor. Accordingly, the present study delved into the role of age in the acquisition of English passive constructions by *Dholuo* speaking pupils, borrowing the ideas already advanced on CPH.

### 6.1.1 The Age Factor in Second Language Acquisition

Because of the way age intersects with a range of social, affective, educational, and experiential variables, clarifying its relationship with learning rate and/or success is a major challenge. There is a popular belief that the younger the learner, the quicker the learning process and the better the outcomes. Nevertheless, a closer examination of the ways in which age combines with other variables reveals a more complex picture, with both favourable and unfavourable age-related differences being associated with early and late-starting L2 learners (Johnstone, 2002).

The views on the age factor range from the position that pupils are in all respects more efficient and effective second language learners than adults to the complete contrary position that adolescents and adults are more efficient and effective second language learners than pupils (cf. Singleton, 1995: 11)

Pinker (1994) reported on an experiment by psychologist Elissa Newport at the University of Illinois in which Korean and Chinese-born pupils and faculty who had spent at least 10 years in the U.S. were given 276 simple English sentences, half of which contained minor grammar errors, and asked to identify and/or correct the error. The results were not surprising:

The immigrants who came to the United States between the ages of three and seven performed identically to American-born pupils. Those who arrived between the ages of eight and fifteen did increasingly worse the later they arrived, and those who arrived between 17 and 39 did the worst of all... (p. 296)

#### 6.1.1.1 The Critical Period Hypothesis

The original formulation of the CPH is based upon the work of the German-born American neurologist Eric Lenneberg (1967). The hypothesis implies that pupils have a special innate propensity for acquiring language that is determined by biological factors – so to speak a biological clock that limits the period during which natural language acquisition can take place. This assumption is based on the biological observation that the brain of a

child is plastic whereas the brain of an adult is rigid and set.

According to Lenneberg, during early childhood language appears to be more spread out across both brain hemispheres, but as the child grows older and the two hemispheres become increasingly specialized for certain functions, language gradually relocates, settling in the left one. The CPH holds that primary language acquisition must occur during a critical period which starts at about the age of 2 years and ends at puberty (around the age of 12 or 13) with the establishment of lateralization of the language function.

Lenneberg argues that language acquisition before the age of 2 is impossible because the brain has not developed the capacities it needs. After puberty the natural acquisition of language is blocked because the brain has lost its cerebral plasticity. Lenneberg notes that "Most individuals of average intelligence are able to learn an L2 after the beginning of their second decade, although the incidence of 'language-learning blocks' rapidly increases after puberty" (Lenneberg, 1967: 176). As medical science has progressed, some points in Lenneberg (1967) are under criticism. For example, his claim that the CPH could be supported by the study of Down's syndrome cases is attacked. According to his argument, the development of pupils with Down's syndrome is so slow that they pass their critical period for language learning. However, one disputes his claim because pupils with Down's syndrome have a build-in endpoint to their ability (Gleitman et al., 1984). It therefore needs to be recognized that there is a marked contrast between the CPH as an issue of continuing dispute in SLA, on the one hand, and, on the other, the popular view that it is an invariable 'law', equally applicable to any L2 acquisition context or situation (Lightbrown, 2000).

Thus, most classroom-based studies have shown that there is not only a lack of direct correlation between an earlier start and more successful/rapid L2 development but also a strong tendency for older pupils and teenagers to be more efficient learners. For example, in research conducted in the context of conventional school programmes, Cenoz (2003) and MunÖz (2006) have shown that learners whose exposure to the L2 began at age 11 consistently displayed higher levels of proficiency than those for whom it began at 4 or 8.

Furthermore, comparable limitations have been reported for young learners in school settings involving innovative, immersion-type programmes,

where exposure to the target language is significantly increased through subject-matter teaching in the L2 (Genesee, 1992; AbelloContesse et al. 2006). Taking due cognisance of the controversy surrounding CPH, the present study investigated the effect of age on the acquisition of the English passive by *Dholuo* speaking pupils without recusing this hypothesis. This was done by dividing the pupils into three cohorts on the basis of age as laid out in the methodology section.

## 6.2 Gender and Second Language Acquisition

Contemporary researchers such as Penelope and Sally (2003) observe that the influence of gender on language acquisition begins even before a baby is born due to the cultural behavior of the parents. For instance, newborn babies cannot easily be identified as girls or boys if they are dressed identically. Therefore, in many cultures; babies are dressed in ways to make their gender clear. Gender assigning process takes different forms, starting with the tradition of providing pink caps for girls and blue caps for boys.

Moreover, from early childhood girls and boys are interpreted and interacted with differently. People usually behave more gently with baby girls and more playfully with baby-boys. Parents and even strangers talk to them differently. Thus, while addressing girls more diminutives (doggie, sweetie etc.) are used, whereas more direct prohibitive (don't do that!) occur while talking to boys Gleason & Bernstein, (1994); Protassova (2007); KoreckyKröll & Wolfgang (2007).

Second language acquisition is a complex process which involves several factors and of particular interest to this study is the influence of gender on child language acquisition. Recently, the topic of the role of gender in second language acquisition has been of great interest to English as a Second Language (ESL) and language specialists (Holmes, 1995). However, contradictions and counter contradictions have arisen in analyzing the role of gender. This study believes that this has somewhat been caused by not understanding that while talking about gender, it is not something we are born with, and not something we have, but something we do or perform as explained by West and Zimmerman, (1987).

Orwenjo (2009) in his study of lexical innovations by *Dholuo* speaking pupils reported that gender had no significant influence on the production of lexical innovations by *Dholuo* speaking pupils aged 3 to 9 years old. However, to

the contrary, the study by Green and Oxford (1995) intended to build on previous studies by examining the use of individual strategies as well as strategy categories and overall strategy use in second language learners. The study showed greater use of learning strategies by females than by males. The pupils' use of fifteen individual learning strategies was evaluated on the test. Men and women used almost a third of the total fifteen strategies differently. Females used fourteen strategies more often than males and males used only one strategy more often than females. Males and females used cognitive and compensation learning skills about equally in this study.

This finding is very important as it suggests that there are consistent differences in the way females learn compared to males. Significant differences between the two groups have been found in studies occurring all over the world in many different cultures. This suggests, "that biological and/or socialization-related cause for these differences might exist and that these causes might have a real, if subtle, effect in the language classroom" (Green & Oxford, 1995, p. 266). The current study adopts the perspective that gender may or may not play a significant role on the acquisition of English passive by *Dholuo* Speaking pupils.

### 7. Methodology

The study was carried out within Bondo District in Siaya County in the Republic of Kenya. The district, which is predominantly occupied by the Luo tribe speaking the *Dholuo* language, is generally a rural set up with virtually limited economic, industrial, or any other income generating activity save for subsistence agriculture and small scale trading activities. The study conveniently sampled one primary school (*Singapala*) within the District through random sampling from which subjects (*Dholuo* speaking pupils) were identified for the study.

This one school was settled on and the assumption was that since Bondo is a rural town, all the pupils in the chosen school were *Dholuo* speakers with no influence from other languages. The primary school settled on was a representation of other primary schools in the district since all the primary schools in the district are structured in the same way as follows: they follow the same national English syllabus stipulated by the Kenya Ministry of Education of Science and Technology, the pupils are taught by the teachers with similar training

background and they have *Dholuo* speaking pupils with limited influence of other languages, especially Kiswahili.

The study adopted a time-lag strategy research design (Bennet-Kastor, 1998; Orwenjo, 2009; Salkind, 2010) which combines both the longitudinal and a descriptive cross-sectional design. The design enabled the study to compare peers or cohorts as they successively reached a given age or points of development. The cohorts were pupils aged 6-8; 9-11 and 12-14 years. Therefore, the research design enabled the researcher to determine whether the observed changes in terms of the acquisition of the English passive were due to age or gender. The study population consisted of ninety eight (98) *Dholuo* speaking pupils within Bondo District, of the ages between 6-14 years. These ages were suitable for the study because the critical period for language acquisition is normally the ages between two years and puberty. This implies that a lot of activities characterize the child's language development during these years (Brown, 1973). Since the process of acquisition of English passive constructions is one of the activities that characterize early linguistic development in pupils

(Clark & Clark, 1979), it was indeed appropriate to study it during these ages. At this age, it is also assumed that these pupils have already acquired the *Dholuo* passive (see Chomsky, 1959) and have also been exposed to English language through classroom instruction.

The selection was done purposively based on those in the same socio-economic status, age and taking consideration of the gender disparity. By selecting pupils with relatively low socio-economic status, the study ensured that the influence of other languages such as Swahili at home was controlled since most of the families had minimal interaction with other tribes speaking other languages. The study ensured equal gender representation per cohort following the requirements of the new constitution of Kenya.

In order to achieve objective 1, pupils (e.g. ages 6-8 years, 9-11 years and 12-14 years) were presented with three production tasks and a further four receptive tasks. The need to include both receptive and production tasks was motivated by the fact that competence in any language involves not only the ability to produce appropriate structures in that language, but also that of being able to successfully process and comprehend input in the language. A study on language acquisition

must therefore, of necessity, take into account both the receptive and productive language use. Data on the relationship between age and gender and the acquisition of English passives was statistically presented using the spearman’s correlation coefficient at a significant level of 0.05.

**8. Discussion**

**8.1 The role of age and gender on the acquisition of English passive**

**i) Matching English Sentences with the Correct Pictures Described by the Sentences**

The researcher initially presented the pupils with pictures showing people carrying out certain actions. The pupils then listened as the researcher read sentences, which were a mixture of active and passive voice, depicting the activities captured in the pictures. The pupils then performed the matching task. To determine the influence of age, the scores were entered in the SPSS program that generated the means, Standard Deviations, Pearson Product correlations and ANOVA. The results of the analysis were presented in Table 1. The mean scores of 3.5 and above indicate that age highly influenced the task. The Standard Deviation was used to determine the difference in responses received. Table 1 indicates that age has an influence on matching English sentences with correct pictures; mean scores in the task increased with age from a low mean of 4.32 for those aged between 6 to 8 years to a high mean of 8.86 for those aged 12 to 14 years.

**Table 1: Influence of Age on Matching English Sentences with the Correct Pictures Described by the Sentences**

Age	N	Mean	Std Deviation	Minimum score	Maximum score
6-8 years	31	4.32	2.37	0.00	8.00
9-11 years	24	6.38	3.49	0.00	10.00
12-14 years	43	8.86	1.79	3.00	10.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>6.86</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>10.00</b>

Further explanation of Table 1 is that age influenced the task as the least mean was 4.32. Table 1 also shows that pupils aged between 9-11 years had a significant difference in terms of responses given that their standard deviation was at 3.49. The table shows that the difference in responses of the pupils between the ages of 6-8 years was somewhat significant with a standard deviation of 2.37 and this is because the pupils had never possibly learnt the English passive structures before, and the difference in responses given by the pupils aged between 12-14 was closely related. This means that the classroom instructions based on the Kenyan curriculum had a significant effect on the task, given the difference in terms of their response was 1.79 meaning it was statistically insignificant.

Further correlation test was carried out to determine the level of influence of age in matching English sentences. The table indicates that age had an influence on matching, at a significance level of 0.626% and a significant level of 0.01. Notably, these results show that the influence of age on ability to match sentences is at 62.6%. The correlation between the dependent (scores) and independent variable (age) is +0.626 which can be described as a strong correlation.

**Table 2: Correlation between Age and Matching English Sentences with the Correct Pictures Described by the Sentences**

<b>Pearson Product Moment Correlation</b>	0.626 (**)
<b>Sig.</b>	0.000

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 2 shows the ANOVA of the estimates between the groups of variance (the mean groups). The results of ANOVA indicated in Table 2 reveal a significant effect on the relationship between age and matching English sentences with correct pictures. This is because of the large size of the computed F (30.697), which indicates that there is difference in the mean distribution of the variables at 0.05 level of significance, the observed differences are thus significant. The correlation analysis in Table 3 shows a slight negative

correlation (-0.060) which can be described as negligible. When it comes to matching English sentences there is not much Gender difference in the task performance.

**Table 3: Results of the Correlation between Gender and Matching English Sentences with the Correct Pictures Described by the Sentences**

Pearson Correlation	Product Moment	-0.060
Sig.		0.558

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

The ANOVA in Table 4 further indicates that there is no significant relationship between gender and matching English sentences with correct pictures. This is because of the small size of the computed F (0.345), which indicates that there is no difference in the mean distribution of the variables at 0.05 level of significance, the observed differences are thus not significant.

**Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) between Dependent and Independent Variable for Gender**

Age	Sum of squares	Df	Mean squares	f	Sig.
Between groups	3.444	1	3.444	0.345	0.558
Within groups	957.250	96	9.971		
Total	960.694	97			

To further determine the influence of gender and age, the scores were entered in SPSS program that generated the means, standard deviations, Pearson Product correlations and ANOVA. The ANOVA in Table 5 proves that there is a significant relationship between age and the acquisition of the passive by *Dholuo* speaking pupils. This is because of the large size of the computed F (245.287), which indicates that there is a difference in the mean distribution of the variables at 0.05 level of significance. The observed differences are thus significant.

**Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) between Dependent and Independent Variable for Age**

Age	Sum of squares	Df	Mean squares	F	Sig.
Between groups	35521.719	2	17760.859	245.287	0.000
Within groups	6878.812	95	72.409		
Total	42400.531	97			

**9. Conclusions**

With regard to the influence of age and gender on the acquisition of English passive constructions by *Dholuo* speaking pupils, statistical analyses conducted on the performance of the pupils in the production and receptive tasks administered revealed that age has an influence in the acquisition of the passive by *Dholuo* speaking pupils. The ANOVA test proved that there is a significant relationship between age and the acquisition of the passive by *Dholuo* speaking pupils.

On the influence of gender, the analysis revealed that it had no influence in the acquisition of the passive by *Dholuo* speaking pupils. The ANOVA test indicated that there was no significant relationship between gender and the acquisition of the passive by *Dholuo* speaking pupils.

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