

PASSIVE VOICE

Shihab Hamad Abdullah

Ahmed Othman Muhammed

Meisoon Abdullah Muhammed

INTRODUCTION

ABSTRACT

Grammarians studied the English structure in details, and dealt with the sentence in both forms active and passive. The passive form needs certain change and reordering the words. The passive form of the sentence took much importance by the three schools of grammar. More attention was given to this subject by the structuralists. Quirk et al, [1976:20] analyze the sentence into subject + verb [transitive] + object.

Then transformationalists also dealt with this subject. Liles [1971:67] analyzed the sentence into its components by using the tree diagram. Accordingly, this research tries to focus on the hypothesis which says that students still face a problem in constructing the passive form of an active

sentence like: We like physics very much. The students may misunderstand the form of the word physics, Thus, they may misuse the correct form of the verb in the passive voice. The technique used in this study depends on all the sources of English grammar available in the libraries.

The study includes a test to prove the hypothesis in order to specify the difficulty faced by the students and to put the solutions for it. The purpose of the study is to find whether or not the students have a problem in making the passive form of the active sentence. Finally the research ends with the findings and recommendation.

Passive voice

The terms passive form, passive structure and passive voice are used to mean the same wherever they occur. The structure of the sentence takes one of two forms either active or passive. The active structure consists of a common order including the subject, transitive verb, object and a complement if necessary as in: The boy lost the book last week. In order to change the example above into passive form do the following steps:

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- 1- Put the object of the verb in the beginning of the new sentence
 - 2- Derive the suitable form of be to agree with the subject of the new sentence.
 - 3- Derive the past participle of the transitive verb.
 - 4- Drop the subject of the active sentence or put it at the end of the sentence preceded by [by...]. So, the sentence above becomes: The book was lost last week [by the boy].

Forms of nouns and tenses with passive:

Forms of nouns may have a difficulty for the students in choosing the correct form of the auxiliary verb to make the passive structure. Other nouns may not have this difficulty-

PASSIVE WITH DIFFERENT TENSES:

tense	Mood	subject	Verb	Object
Simple present	active	Tom	writes	a letter
	passive	A letter	is written	by Tom
Simple past	active	Tom	wrote	a letter
	passive	A letter	was written	by Tom
Present perfect	Active	Tom	has written	a letter
	passive	A letter	has been written	by Tom

Past perfect	Active	Tom	had written	a letter
	passive	A letter	had been written	by Tom
Present progressive	Active	Tom	is writing	a letter
	passive	A letter	is being written	by Tom
Past progressive	Active	Tom	was writing	a letter
	passive	A letter	was being written	by Tom
Modal 1	Active	Tom	will write	a letter
	passive	A letter	will be written	by Tom
Modal 2	Active	Tom	will have written	a letter
	passive	A letter	will have been written	by Tom
Modal 3	Active	Tom	would have written	a letter
	passive	A letter	would have been written	by Tom

Passive with count nouns:

Count nouns are either singular or plural. The singular noun takes a singular verb and the plural noun takes a plural verb. Notice the following:

- The teacher rewards the clever student.

- The clever student is rewarded.
- The teacher rewarded the clever students.
- The clever students were rewarded. [Leech and Svartvik, 1977:257]

Passive with mass nouns:

A mass noun is always treated as singular. Thus, a singular verb must be used with it. Consider the following sentences:

- We need much water from the shop.
- Much water is needed from the shop.

But, if the mass noun is preceded by a certain number like two, three,.... etc, the number governs the verb as in:

- We bought two kilos of sugar.
- Two kilos of sugar were bought.

Passive with plural forms:

Nouns like scissors, trousers, goods,.....etc always have plural forms. they have no singular forms. Thus , they always act with plural verbs as in:

- The seller sold the goods.
- The goods were sold.

- I cleaned my trousers.
- My trousers were cleaned.

But. Other nouns have plural forms but they always take singular verbs as in:

- The students studied semantics last year.
- Semantics was studied last year.
- Politics is taken in the second year. (leech, 1977: 230)

Passive with personal pronouns

Personal pronouns have two forms nominal and accusative or subject and object. Students have to change the object form in the active sentence into subject form in the passive sentence. The subject forms of the personal pronouns are: I, we they, he, she, you and it. Their object forms are: me, us, them, her, you and it respectively. The last two forms are the same in both cases. Notice the following sentences:

- The teacher asked me to answer the question.
- I was asked to answer the question.
- The chairman let them leave out.
- They were let leave out.
- I saw her in the classroom.
- She was seen in the classroom.

- She helped us to take the bus.
- We were helped to take the bus.

Passive with [n] either [n] or:

In sentences containing either or or neither ... nor the nearest subject governs the verb [Quirk et al, 1976:320]. Consider the following examples:

- The car crushed either the children or their father
- Either the children or their father was crushed.
- The judge sentenced neither the man nor the woman.
- Neither the man nor the woman was sentenced.

Passive with two objects :

Some transitive verbs take two objects. Either one can be used to make the passive form as in:

- Jack gave Linda two books.
- Linda was given two books.

Or:

- Two books were given to Linda.

However, it depends on you whether you want to put the emphasis on the first or on the second object with regard to the number signalled by each, as in the examples above.

Kinds of passive voice :

1- Personal and impersonal passive.

All the examples shown above are called personal passive. There is another form of passive called impersonal. This structure contains intransitive verb like say, think, know. etc. For example: He says, it is said. This structure is also called indirect speech (Anson and Schwegler, 2000: 118]. Notice the following examples :

- It is said that English is easier than Arabic
- It is thought that Arabic is more difficult than English.

It is also possible to use the personal passive in the examples above as follows:

- English is said to be easier than Arabic
- Arabic is thought to be more difficult than English

2- Stative passive

All the passive forms described so far are eventive or dynamic ones. There is another kind of passive called stative or resultative. This kind describes the result of the action rather than describing the action. Consider the following:

- The rule was broken.

This sentence has two meanings. The first one is: (someone) broke the rule (eventive) and the second is: The rule was in the broken state (stative) (Rosen, 1997: 240).

3- Adjectival Passive

This kind of passive is restricted to the adjectives derived from the participle as in the following example:

- The merchant was surprised to see his goods undamaged .
- Here, the verbphrase (was surprised) is in the passive form.

4- Double passive

English has many structures containing two passive verbs – especially object– raising verbs, one is in the main clause and the other is in the complement (Trimble, 2000:55). Notice the following:

- The work is expected to be finished next month.
This sentence is taken from the active sentence which can be as follows:
- Someone expects the work to be finished next month.
- Someone is expected to finish the work next month.

5- Mediopassive:

There are some ergative verbs which can be either transitive or intransitive. When the verb is intransitive, its subject plays the same semantic role when the verb is transitive. Consider the following:

- The airplane flew.
- The airplane was flown.
- (someone) flew the airplane .
- (Anson and Schwegler, 2000:369) .

The Procedures :

According to the previous discussion of passive structures, the following test is constructed in such a way to check the ability of the students who are supposed to have good mastery of these structures since they have been taught these structures for many years in their schools. The sample included in this test is chosen at random in Al-Rassafa Institute because these students have come from different schools in Baghdad. These schools are supposed to have good teachers of English. The samples of the tests is arranged as follows:

- 1- I do my homework every day .

- 2- The students drink milk every morning .
- 3- The family sent the children to the school .
- 4- The third person singular takes an (s) in the present tense .
- 5- We study statistics every year.
- 6- I hear good news at night.
- 7- Ali bought new scissors yesterday.
- 8- My brother brought new goods to his shop.
- 9- They rewarded either the winners or the referee.
- 10- The gunner shot either one or two birds on the tree.
- 11- The policeman helps me to cross the street.
- 12- The teacher examined them last week.
- 13- Could you find him?
- 14- We must defend our country.
- 15- Ahmed has sent two letters this morning.
- 16- The car had crushed the tree.
- 17- The doctor is examining the sick man.
- 18- The boys are playing football.
- 19- The foreigner asked us some questions.
- 20- The sun gives the earth heat and light.

Error analysis

The results of scoring the test showed that more than 80 per cent failed to answer all the items correctly. There are many reasons behind the errors made by the students. Items from I to 5 are used to check the correct use of count and mass nouns in the simple tense. The errors committed by the students showed that they misused the correct auxiliary with the subject of the passive structure in spite of the clear number of the subject. Errors with mass nouns are less than those with count nouns because the students were familiar with the mass nouns mentioned in the test. Item 6 is used to check the student's mastery of some nouns plural in form but singular in function. Most of the students failed to use the correct answer. On the contrary, items 7 and 8 are used to check the correct use of the passive structure. They showed that most of the students had used the correct form of the verb since those nouns are always plural in form and function. Items 9 and 10 are used to check the student's mastery of using the correct structure with (n) either..... (n) or. The nearest noun governs the verb. Most of the students failed to answer correctly because of the interference from Arabic into English. Items 11 and 12 are used to check the student's

mastery of using the correct forms of the personal pronouns. Most of the students misused the correct forms of the personal pronouns when they act as subjects. Items 13 and 14 are used to check the student's mastery of modal verbs with passive voice. Most of the students answered them correctly as (sub+ modal+ be+ p.p). Items 15 and 16 include the perfect tense. The errors are due to the misuse of (be) after (to have). The passive structure should be as follows: subject + to have + been + p.p. Items 17 and 18 are used with the continuous tense. More than 90 per cent of the students misused the form (being) in the passive voice. The structure should be as follows: subject+ to be+ being+ p.p. Items 19 and 20 conclude the test. They contain two objects. It depends on the students to choose one of them as the subject of the passive voice. Most of the students failed to form the correct answers. They used both objects as the subject of the passive voice.

Conclusion

The researchers arrive at the following findings depending on the discussion above:

- 1- The passive voice constitutes a great problem to the students.

- 2- Teaching the passive voice in the schools received less importance than other features of grammar.
- 3- The test showed that most of the errors are due to the misuse of the correct number of the subject, tense and the past participle of the transitive verb.
- 4- There is no passive voice without a transitive verb.
- 5- The students misused the correct forms of the personal pronouns.
- 6- The subject of the active voice can be deleted in the passive voice without any influence on meaning.
- 7- The passive voice is generally used in scientific writing, business and law either to save time and effort or to hide the agent for security purposes.

Recommendation

The researchers recommend that pupils in schools should be given more passive structures in all stages of their study in order to get good mastery of constructing the passive voice. Also, the teachers, themselves, should learn how to make passive voice in order to be able to teach the pupils because the test showed that some teachers committed mistakes in constructing the passive sentences.

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الخلاصة

يتناول هذا البحث موضوع المبني للمجهول في اللغة الانكليزية. وهذا الموضوع يمثل مشكله يعاني منها الطلبة بشكل عام. يشتمل البحث على مقدمة واختبار ثم النتائج والتوصيات. حيث وجد الباحثون ان الموضوع بحاجة الى التركيز عليه في المدارس التي تدرس اللغة الانكليزية فيها من اجل مساعدة الطالب على تحويل الجملة من المبني للمعلوم الى المبني للمجهول بطريقة سهلة وصحيحة قواعدياً.