

Uses and Usages of Passive Voice

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الخلاصة

كما هو معروف بان المبني للمجهول يمكن تعريفه من وجهتي نظر مختلفتين وهي : الوجهة النحوية و الوجهة الاسلوبية . فيما يخص وجه النظر النحوية ، يعرف كلا من ليچ و جان (١٩٩٤:٢٠٩) المبني للمجهول على انه احد العمليات اللغوية التي تغير مواقع اجزاء الجملة. اما من الناحية الاسلوبية ، يشير بابير وآخرون (١٩٩٩:١٥٤) الى ان المبني للمجهول عملية تفوق كونها مجرد تغيير ترتيب اجزاء الجملة نحو النمط اللغوي المتضمن بالفاعل والمفعول به والحال الى كونها عملية منظمة لاعادة تركيب وتنظيم اجزاء الجملة باختيار جزء (المفعول به) غير الفاعل كنقطة بداية للجملة من غير المساس بالمعنى الاساسي للجملة. واعتمادا على وجهتي النظر المختلفتين ، يمكن ان نستنتج بان هناك طرق خاصة لاستخدام صيغة المبني للمجهول ، يحدد و يفسر من خلالها الغرض او الفائدة الناجمة من اختيار هذه الصيغة بالذات عن غيرها و يؤكد بان لهذه الصيغة استعمالات خاصة و ليست عشوائية . و وفقا لذلك سيتناول هذا التقرير المصغر هذه الاستعمالات المختلفة ، كما انه سيتحدث ، بالاضافة الى ذلك عن موضوع اساسي و هو الاختلافات بين صيغتي المبني للمعلوم و المبني للمجهول في اللغة الانجليزية و اخير سيشير هذا التقرير الى الفروقات الرئيسية بين صيغتي المبني للمجهول في اللغة العربية والانجليزية ليس بهدف المقارنة بين اللغتين وانما بهدف الحصول على مفهوم اعمق لصيغة المبني للمجهول في اللغة الانجليزية.

Abstract

As it is known, passive voice is defined differently from two different aspects: the syntactic and the stylistics aspect. As far as the syntactic aspect is concerned, Leech and Jan (1994:209) say that passive voice is a grammatical process which changes the positions of the elements in the sentence. As for the semantic aspect, Biber et.al (1999:154) state that passive voice involves much more than an order variation with SVA. It involves a structural organization of the clause and it can be described as a systematic means of choosing a participant other than the agent as the starting point of the message without

departing from the normal subject initial word order. Thus, with accordance with these two different meanings, one can conclude that the benefits of passive voice varied, consequently. In other words, the uses of passive voice are not random. Besides, passive voice, as a process does not represent a mere recast of the original active sentence to a passive one whether agentive or agentless. Instead, there are rules for its usages and a lot of uses for its linguistic utilization.

Accordingly, the following paper will study and consider the different uses and usages of passive voice. Furthermore, it will go through the differences between the active and passive construction, and finally, it will give a hint to the main differences between active and passive constructions in both Arabic and English for the purpose of gaining better understanding and clarification of the passive voice in English.

1. The Uses and Usages of the Passive voice

Passive voice constructions are not used randomly. Instead, there are certain rules for its usages. Some of these rules are syntactic, others are stylistic. Under the former heading, one can mention the following:-

1. Long (1961:115-116) states that passive voice indicates an awareness that the basic direction has been reversed, and a feeling that responsibility for what is predicated is assignable to someone or something distinct from the subject, as in:-

1. The chairman began the meeting promptly.

-The meeting began promptly.

-The meeting was begun promptly.

In the second, sentence there is no hint of an awareness of an active agent; apart from the meeting itself is responsible for the 'meeting's beginning';

2. It is used when who or what causes the action of the sentence is unimportant or is only vaguely identifiable [or unspecified as Palmer (1965:65) states], as in:-

2. The old house has been torn down.

3. We have been looked out again.

4. The figure is said to represent the rain god. (Ibid.:118)

In light of this point, Biber et al (1999:477) add that news has somewhat different reasons for the use of the passive, especially, the short passive, where the focus of the story involves an event involving an affected person or institution and the agent of this event may be easy to infer, or uninteresting, or already mentioned, as in the example taken from an internet essay entitled "Why Use the Passive?":-

5. The new students' centre was completed last week. (i.e., the people who built the centre are unnecessary information for the meaning of the sentence)

3. Long (1961:119) states that passive voice is used when the passive is an infinitive or gerundial, sometimes its use eliminates awkward subject constructions; as in:-

6. Everyone likes to be liked.

7. We resented being treated by that.

8. We got out without being seen.

4. It is used when the subject of the sentence is a clause, as in:-

9. I was surprised that so much had changed so quickly;

Where 'by- agent' is omitted here because a that –clause can not be a complement of a preposition.

5. Allen (1959:283) adds that the passive voice is used when the main interest of the speaker or writer is on the predicate, i.e., on the verb activity itself rather than on the active subject. In other words, when there is a desire to express the idea first. Since what concerns the speakers or writers of English is to speak or write the English not the vague subject, as in the example given by Huddleston (1983; cited in an internet essay entitled: Eng. 595 Linguistic Principles of English Grammar;2006):-

10.

The enemy opened fire and five of our men were killed instantly

active passive

The first clause in this sentence is active, but its second clause is passive. The reason behind the use of the passive in the second clause signals a shift in perspective. Having begun by acknowledging the enemy as the agent, the speaker then, presents the situation in terms of what happened to the men rather than what the agent did.

6. Allen (1959:287) maintains that another good use of the passive voice is to save changing the substance of a sentence, as in:-

11. He spoke at a great length; people asked him many questions at the end, which he answered satisfactorily.

This sentence is more concisely expressed with the help of the passive voice, as in:-

- He spoke at great length, was asked many questions at the end, and answered them all satisfactorily.

7. Payne (2006:Int.) states in an internet essay, entitled "Why Use the Passive?", that the passive voice is used to connect ideas in different clauses more clearly:

12. Pharmacologists would like to study the natural ‘pharmacy’ known as the rainforest, if this can be done before clear-cutting destroys it.

In this sentence, keeping THIS near the first clause makes the meaning of the sentence clearer.

13. The music was being played too loud by the students, who were finally being asked to turn it down.

8. Another good use of the passive voice is mentioned in an internet essay entitled *Uses of the Passive Voice* (1996), is to make smooth transition. Here is a passage in which the astronomer Robert P. Kirschner discusses what happens to an aging star:-

14.

....In some [very old] stars ,carbon-rich matter from the core is dredged up by convention .The freshly synthesized matter, then escapes, from a sooty cocoon of graphite .Eventually , fuel runs out, and the inner core of the red giant congeals into a white dwarf.

A white dwarf is protected from total gravitational collapse not by the kinetic pressure of gases; the carbon and oxygen in its interior are in an almost crystalline state. The star is held up by the quantum repulsion of its free electrons.

Let's see how the same passage would read if the second paragraph were written with active verbs:-

....Eventually the fuel runs out, and the inner core of the red giant congeals into a white dwarf.

It is not the kinetic pressure of gases that protects a white dwarf from total gravitational collapse; the carbon and oxygen in its interior are in an almost crystalline state. The quantum repulsion of its free electrons holds that star up.

The subject of discussion-the white dwarf- now seems secondary. The chemical and physical processes inside the star take precedence. As a result, the essay rather than the star is in danger of collapsing. (ibid.)

9. It is also mentioned (ibid.) that passive voice serves the coherence of writing. Suppose that you are discussing a certain topic –immigrant labour in Europe, for example- from the point of view of an economist. Your subject, then, is how the economies treat workers who come from other countries and are not citizens .Here, is one economist, John Kenneth Galbraith , discusses this subject:-

15.

In the last fifty years, in Germany, France and Switzerland, and in lesser measure, Astralia and Scandinavia, the provision of outside workers for the task for which indigenous laborers are no longer available has been both accepted and highly organized .The factories of the erstwhile German Federal Republic are manned, and a broad range of other work is performed by Turks and Yugoslavs. Those in France are similarly supplied by what amounts to a new invasion of the moors- the vast influx from the former North African colonies. (ibid.)

10. Passive voice is rare in the progressive than with the perfect or models (and this may account for the near impossibility for the passive perfect progressive). (See Palmer; 1987:84)

11. Grammatically speaking, passive constructions help to defocus the agent of the active sentences, as in:-

16. They forecast snowy winter this year.

-A snowy winter was forecast this year.

The exact identity of the agent is unimportant. Thus, the discourse function of nonanaphoric 'they' can be said to overlap partially with the agentless passive. (See Celce – Murcia and Diana; 1999:354)

Thompson (1987; cited in Celce–Murcia and Diana; 1999:353) adds that passive voice is used when the agent is not mentioned because: - it is redundant, or easy to supply, as in:-

17. Pineapples are grown in Hawaii.

Under the stylistic heading, one can mention the following:-

1. Passive forms are quite effective; (See Long; 1961:118-119)

2. Sometimes, the subject is important and is included in the clause, but for rhetorical reasons it seems better as complement of agency than as a subject, as in:-

18. The college was founded by two frontier preachers.

19. He will always be dominated by his wife. (ibid.:119)

Crystal (1997:413-414) mentions that passive voice shows differences in emphasis or styles, which will affect the speaker's choice, but the factual content remains the same. In this respect, Leech & Jan (1994:209) add that

passive forms give the active sentence end –focus, or end- weight, where would be awkward because of a heavy subject, as in:-

20. The president was misunderstood by most of the radical and left wing politicians in the country.

4. Passive voice is not very common in informal speech , but is a regular feature in formal, especially, scientific written texts, as in the following extract from a paper on deontology:-

21.

It is generally accepted that when it is exposed in the oral activity, any natural or artificial solid surface will quickly be covered by thin organic films. It has been shown in several studies that those films contain materials on salivary origin. (See Biber et.al; 1999:329)

They (ibid.:330) add that the passive voice is usually associated with impersonal style, such as scientific and artificial writing. Here, the question of who is the agent i.e., who performs the action described by the verb is unimportant and need not to be stated, as in:-

21. The question will be discussed at a meeting tomorrow.

In the light of this point Huddleston (1971) & Shintani (1979) (cited in Celce–Murcia and Diana; 1999:354) provide the following diagram, specifying the percentage of the uses of passive voice in different fields:-

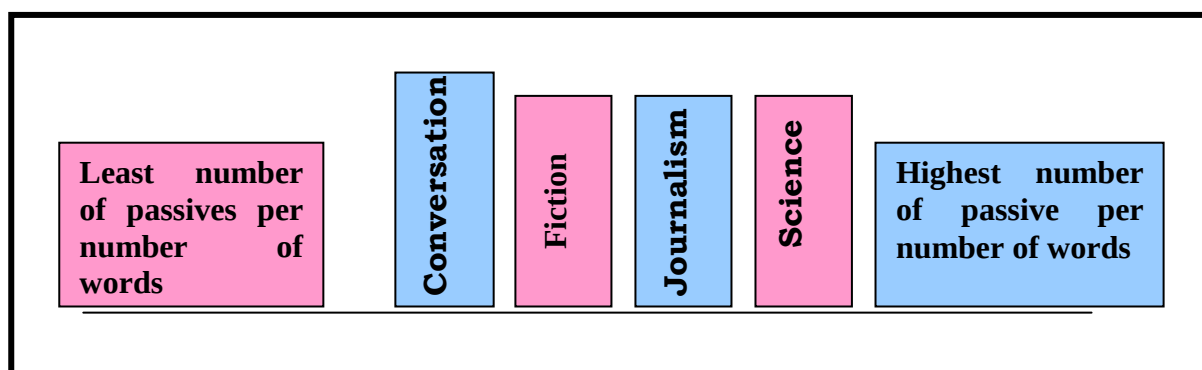


Diagram (5.1): The Uses of Passive Voice in Different Fields

(See Huddleston ;1971 & Shintani ;1979; cited in Celce–Murcia and Diana; 1999:354)

5. Biber et.al (1999:477) maintain that it is used also in journals as a means of saving space and of maximizing what is novel .So, it is natural to omit the agents, e.g., references to the police are omitted, especially, the precise agents for legal reasons as in the following extracts, respectively:-

22. Doherty was asserted in New York in June.

23. The officer was beaten and repeatedly kicked in the head. (ibid.)

Palmer (1987:83) adds that another, but more problematic function is that of the thematization, i.e., placing of a certain NP in subject position for the purpose of prominence. This is particularly useful in narrative to retain the same subject in successive sentences with coordinate clauses, as in:-

24. John came in .He was immediately welcomed by the committee.

24. John came in and was immediately welcomed by the committee. (ibid.)

26. George and I were placed in the same class. (See Close;1975:15)

According to Close' (ibid.) explanation to such sentences, what happened to 'George and I' is given greater prominence than who caused it to happen, either because who caused it to happen is unknown or is felt by the speaker to be

relatively unimportant or perhaps because the speaker prefers not to mention the cause, as illustrated by the example given by McNerney (2003:Int.):-

27. Maria washes the tomatoes on Sundays.

Here, one would be more interested in Maria than the fact the tomatoes are washed on Sundays. The passive voice then, conveys information about the rhetorical priorities of the writer.

Biber et.al (1999:477) maintain that passive voice is used in academic discourse with generalizations, rather than with specifying the individuals who carry out the action. Thus, passive voice might be regarded simply as the expected style typical of much academic writing, and if expressed, the agent would be a generic pronoun or NP, as in the following examples:-

28.....can be restored by us

29. One/ researchers /laboratory workers, etc... . (ibid.:938)

In light of this, Blue (2002:Int.) states that sometimes textual conventions governing lab reports do not permit the use of the first person (I, or we) and in fact any mention of the researchers, even in the third person is frowned upon.

Biber et.al (1999: 937) add that Long passives are not commonly used in news and academic prose. Eastwood (1999:134) adds that passive voice is used both in speech and writing, but it is more common in writing. It is seen, especially, in textbooks and reports, and it is used to describe activities in industry, science, and technology, and also for official rules, as in:-

30. Bananas are exported to Europe.

31. The liquid is heated to boiling point.

32. Payment can be made at any post office.

33. Cars left here will be towed away.

Payne (2006:Int.) states that passive voice allows speakers and writers to keep discourse topics in the subject position over successive clauses while adding new information in the remainder of the clause, as in:-

34.

I had just finished paying off my new car when it was towed by the police. Then, on the way to the towing compound, it was rammed by a truck and demolished.

35.

The first electronic computer was built in Britain during World War II. It was used to decipher Hitler's confidential messages to his generals .After the war, it was destroyed so that the world would not learn how the British broke codes.

6. Biber et.al (1999:940) maintain that the use of the passive is affected by the length of the subject verb agent phrase and givenness of subject verb agent phrase. In light of this, Palmer (1987:84) mentions that it is common when the agent is long (in terms of words, and, especially, when the agent is coordinate with and.

7. Primarily, the passive serves the discourse functions of:-

Cohesion and contextual factors which fit through :-

Ordering of information ; and

Omission.

Weight management ,especially, long passive.(ibid.:935)

8. They (1999:477) indicate that the extensive use of passive voice conveys an objective detachment from what is being described, as required by the western scientific tradition.

Banks (1997; cited in Celce – Murcia and Diana; 1999:353) argues that scientists choose to use the passive so much due to their desire to sound objective as to the fact that the theme of scientific writing deals with the apparatus or results of a study rather than the person conducting the investigation, as shown by the example given by McNerney (2003:Int.):-

36. Twenty cc of acid is/was poured in the breaker.

9. In conversation, having a human concern centred with people's actions, thoughts, and stances, the subject or the speaker is usually not mentioned. (See Biber et.al; 1999:477)

10. Thompson (1987; cited in Celce – Murcia and Diana; 1999:353) adds that it is used when:-

a. It is unknown, as in:-

37. The bank was robbed yesterday.

b. It is very general. (Example from Hayes; 1992; cited in Celce – Murcia and Diana; 1999:353):-

38. By the end of the 1960s, the United States could no longer be described as a white, Anglo Saxon, Protestant nation.

c. The speaker /writer is being tactful, as in:-

39. Margaret is given some bad advice about selecting courses.

d. The speaker is being evasive, as in:-

40. An error was made in the budget.

11. Thompson (1987; cited in Celce – Murcia and Diana; 1999:353) maintains that the nonagent is more closely related than the agent to the theme of the text, as in:-

41.

I was a young Columbia man while I worked in a cafeteria from 6:30 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. I was much respected by the management, even though I drove the people I worked with insane, because I had standards they couldn't cope with.

The non-agent 'I' in the italicized clause is more thematic than the agent 'the management'. In other words, the passive topicalizes the patient or the receiver/undergoer of the action.

12. Small (2002:Int.) adds that passive voice has the potential to confuse, mislead and frustrate the audience. It does not fulfill the concise, straight-forward style, that is, the goal of good business and teaching writing.

13. In an Internet essay, entitled "Why Use the Passive?" it has been mentioned that the passive voice is used when:-

a. When the agent of the action is obvious from the context:

42. I was born in March of '55. (i.e., everyone knows that it was my mother bore me then).

b. To make generic statements, announcements, and explanations:

43. Something should be done about the traffic jams in this town.

44. Patrons are asked not to smoke.

45. It's said that it's going to rain tonight. (i.e., often, people will say that it's going to rain tonight, the 'they' is the weatherman.)

14. In the same essay, it has been said that passive voice constructions allow emphasizing a modifying adverb, as in:-

46. My remarks have been grossly distorted in the press.

15. Biber et.al (1999 :499-500) said that passive voice with models is rare in conversation and fiction, but is relatively common for some model verbs in academic prose, such as: can and shall are particularly common, could and must are also fairly common. The permission, possibility models: might/may and the obligation/necessity models must/ should are the most common models with the perfect. Will, shall, would are rare with the passive voice because they often mark volition/ prediction and often overtly express the agent of the main verb. This is especially, the case with shall, which is used most of the time to mark personal volition with the human agent expressed as the subject of the verb (usually: I, we). In contrast, the models can and could commonly occur with passive voice expressing a kind of logical possibility. These constructions are of two types: short agentless passive or passive with nominalized process given in the by-phrase. In both cases, the use of can and could with passives avoid overt identification of the human agent of the main verb, i.e., the person who is able to carry out the reported fiction. As a result, the understood meaning is that the reported action or situation is logically possible. Must and should are commonly used with passive voice in academic prose to express or mark obligation, i.e., these models are used to express a kind of collective (personal) obligation , but the passive voice is used to avoid explicit identification of the person who is obliged to act:-

47. Care must taken to ensure that the diffusion in the stator is kept to a reasonable level.

Finally, they (ibid.) add that perfect aspect with models is most common in fiction.

5.2 Semantic Constraints on Using the Passive

Celce – Murcia and Diana (1999:347) indicate that though the passive requires a transitive verb, it is not acceptable for every transitive verb sentence to have passive form. Langacker (1987; cited in Celce – Murcia and Diana; 1999:347-348) shows that the acceptability of passive sentence is influenced by several factors:-

The more definite the subject is , the more acceptable the sentence in passive form is:-

48. The poem was written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

-* Poems were written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

With stative verbs , the more indefinite the subject in the by- phrase is, the more likely it is to be acceptable in its passive form:-

49. Arthur Ashe was liked by everyone.

-* Arthur Ashe was liked by me.

50. The movie has been seen by everyone in town.

-* The movie has been seen by him.

The more the verb denotes a physical action , as opposed to a state , the more acceptable its use in a passive sentence:-

51. The ball was kicked over the goalpost.

-*The ball was wanted by the other team.

Notice, though, if factors 1 and 2 are honored, then a stative verb like 'want' can more easily be used in the passive voice.

52. This old jalopy of mine must be wanted by somebody!

Presumably, the first two observations can be accounted for by recognizing that the information status of constituents appearing in initial

position and in predicate position in English sentences is different. As it is seen, the subject NP is typically more definite than any predicate NP because it presents given information –what the predicate is about. The third observation stems from the fact that the subject of a passive sentence needs to be somehow affected by the subject of the verb. Thus, certain transitive verbs, when used stativity, are not likely to occur in the passive voice .This is true of the following verbs:-

Verbs of containing (e.g., contain, hold, comprise):-

53. Two gallons of water are held by the watering can.

Verbs of measure (e.g., weigh, cost, contain , last):-

54. Five dollars is cost by the parking fine.

Reciprocal verbs (e.g., resemble, look like, equal):-

55. Lori is resembled by her father.

Verbs of fitting (e.g., fit, suit):-

56. He is suited by the plan.

Verbs of possession (e.g., have, belong):-

57. A car is had by him. (ibid.: 347-348)

2. The Differences between the Active and the Passive Sentences

Stylistically speaking, active sentences differ from the passive ones in the following points:-

1. The active sentence is more accurate and revealing than the latter and is; therefore, to be preferred. (See Bakiv; 1989:44)

2. The active voice is a stronger, more direct, more straightforward way of saying the thing, while the passive is roundabout, weak and wordy (See Roberts;1968:163)

3. Passive voice is the marked voice [+ Passive], and the active voice is the unmarked or default voice: [-Passive]. In the grammatical prepositional structure, voice like tense and mood is an operator and is represented as [Voice $\pm$] < VP >. (See Voice and Raising; 2006:Int.)

4. Biber et.al (1999:943) mention that the active construction is a more frequent choice in describing a situation involving an agent, an action and affecting participants, presumably, because it represents a natural way of viewing things from originator to goal.

5. In an internet essay entitled: Passive Voice: Why it is Evil and How to Recognize it, it has been mentioned that passive voice requires more "weak" words. Abstract words like is/am/are/was/were/being/been, the demonstrative article 'the,' and prepositions like 'by' and 'of' are dull and colorless in comparison to 'strong' words, like: concrete nouns, powerful verbs, and vivid adjectives.

6. In another internet essay entitled Wikipedia: Passive Voice (2006), there it is mentioned that passive voice is considered a normal rather than a sign of deception .However, contemporary scientific writings are increasingly using the active voice , specifically 'we' as the subject. There is also a trend to reduce the use of the passive in law, particularly in document meant for public consumption, such as: software licenses, journalism, and schools currently teach to avoid passive voice whenever possible, to the point where each sentence in the passive voice can earn students a drop in one letter grade.

3. The Differences between the Passive in Arabic & English

The below- stated table is put to show the main differences between the active-passive voice relationship both in Arabic and English:-

o.	Arabic Active-Passive Transformation	English Active-Passive Transformation
.	Passive voice occurs with transitive and intransitive verbs .If it is intransitive, one of two things may represent or come instead of the deleted subject and the absence of the object : Prepositional phrase or adverb phrase, as in : ٥٨ .حكم بالعدل. ٥٩ .مشيَّ يوم كامل. (See Al -Azawi et.al; 2003:20)	Occurs with transitive verbs only.
.	The passive voice transformation involves two steps: the verb and the subject which is omitted and the object.(See Aziz;1989:269)	The passive voice transformation involves three steps: the verb; the subject and the object; and the word- order. .
.	Passive voice transformation involves morphological change. (ibid.)	It involves syntactic change.
.	The agent is never mentioned.(ibid.)	The agent may or may not be mentioned.
.	There are some verbs that should be in the passive form ,as in : ٦٠ .يوجد، توفي ، يُحتمل ، (Ibid.:270) يُمكن. الخ	There are some verbs that should appear in the passive form, as it is mentioned in chapter two, p.21.
.	There is a middle voice ,represented by verbs , such as : ٦١ . تكسرت ، انغلق ، امتلا...الخ.	There is middle voice, as is mentioned in chapter one, p.3.
	The passive is used only when the gent is unknown or irrelevant. (ibid.:269)	There are a variety of uses and usages, as mentioned in chapter five, p.7٢.
.	There is a pronunciation change in the verb due to the morphological change.	There is a pronunciation change of the verb due to the syntactic change of the verb.
.	The verb shows gender distinction.(See Al-Salami;2003:46)	The verb does not show gender distinction.
0.	The verb remains singular even though the representative subject (object) is plural.(ibid.)	The verb is in concord relation with its representative subject (object).
1.	The representative subject may be explicit or implicit., as in :- ٦٢ . جرح في المعركة.	The representative subject must be explicit.

Conclusions

They present paper leads to the following conclusion:

Passive voice is a grammatical construction with both syntactic and stylistic uses.

Passive constructions are not a mere recast of an active sentence.

Passive voice is not randomly used .Instead; there are certain rules for its usages to gain certain uses.

Not every verb can have a passive voice.

Using passive voice in places where active seems better will weaken the structure and vice versa.

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