

## **Passive Voice in English – A Comparison with Ways of Expressing Passive Voice in Hindi**

Priyanka Tiwari

*Assistant Professor Suresh Gyan Vihar University, Jaipur*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Language is a complex entity. And learning a language is a complex process. Moreover, if it is not one's mother tongue then it becomes more complex for him to learn it properly. If I say that 'the languages are the representatives of the respective cultures', it would not be a hyperbole because every specific event like birth, death, marriage, and the festivals have a specific vocabulary of its own in different cultures. Though every language bears some regional characteristics, and holds specific grammar, sentence structure and vocabulary, still there is room for some similarities and contrasts with other languages. English and Hindi are also very different in their structure, grammar and obviously in vocabulary too. Because the former, written in Roman script, belongs to European family and the latter is a descendent of Indo-Aryan (Sanskrit) family and is written in *Devanaagari* script. A crucial problem for language learners is to recognize how properties of argument structure are realized morph syntactically in the particular language they are learning. One such case involves the passivisation of some active sentences.

In the first two parts of this paper, we will find out the function and the form of passive voice used in English and in Hindi to get the basic knowledge of the two kinds. Then, in the third part, we will focus on the use of passive voice in English, comparing with Hindi, indicating the similarities and the differences, which will conduct the teaching of English passive voice to Hindi Speakers.

### **II. DEFINITION OF PASSIVE VOICE**

What is passive voice? The passive voice is a grammatical voice in which the subject receives the action of a transitive verb. Emphasis in passive voice is on the process rather than on the performer of the action. A verb is said to be in active voice when the subject is thought of as the doer, rather than the receiver, of the action. In English, a passive verb is periphrastic; that is, it does not have a one-word form, but consists of an auxiliary verb plus the past participle of the transitive verb.

- (1) a. Passives are agent-defocusing; this entails Agent suppression and (Direct) Objectorientation and reduction by one valence place: e.g., detransitivization;
- b. Passivization entails predicative stativization (under a perfective resultative perspective and marked verbal morphology);
- c. Passivization entails subjectivization of a non-Agent (Patient/Recipient,
- d. Passivization entails topicalization of a non-Agent (e.g., for more adequate context fit with respect to thema continuation);
- e. Passivization presupposes the affectedness of the surface subject (implied by Agent loss and Patient promotion);
- f. Passivization may be sensitive to perfective aspect (e.g., where the object referent in the passive accusative allows for no reading other than result, while the finite verb *furon* "(they) become" must still have full lexical verb status, i.e., it is not an auxiliary; the predicative, accusative marked resultative participle
- g. Passives never go without special morphological marking: either from a separate passive or medial paradigm by Aux+verbal Anterior (participial form), or by virtue of reflexive suffixation – in certain languages even as an unbound reflexive morpheme.
- h. Passives are detransitivizers both in terms of designated theta roles and as syntactic valence determinants. In other words, passives reduce the valence of a predicate by the designated external, or subject, argument. The fact that the internal argument next in designated line/numeration promotes to obtain the subject function in the syntactic passive or the lexical decausative follows from general clause-formation principles (e.g., the 'Extended Projection Principle' in Generative Grammar): Clauses and verb valences without (designated nominative)

The derivation of what is generally called Passive is not a uniform construction across languages. Apart from the fact that not all languages have a straightforward passive morphology it is morphologically simple – i.e., suffixal – in some languages, but periphrastic in others as in many Indo-European languages. Furthermore, in some languages, there are two different passive forms (periphrastic, reflexive) with slightly different

meanings and functional uses. there are links between passive diathesis and perfective aspect, what are the exact linking steps that lead from aspect to verbal gender, and what the diachronic scale looks like on which the different languages locate their passive-emergent characteristics?

### III. PASSIVE VOICE IN ENGLISH:

A verb – by that I mean a transitive verb – is said to be in active voice when the subject of the verb is the agent or doer of the action indicated by the verb. It is said to be in passive voice when the subject of the verb is the receiver of the action indicated by the verb. The two forms, the active and the passive, mean roughly the same but only roughly. There is a difference in emphasis, as we see presently in the following examples.

1. Pawan takes food. (active) / Food is taken by Pawan. (passive)
2. We were taking steps. (active) / Steps were being taken. (passive)

#### *1. Use of passive voice:*

The active and passive forms are not freely interchangeable. It is necessary to learn change active to passive and vice-versa. However, it is not correct to equate the active with the passive as though we could use one form or the other freely. Basically, the choice of form, active or passive, would depend on what we wish to communicate. If we wish to say that it was Columbus who discovered America, we wish to focus on Columbus and make 'Columbus' the subject of the sentence and say:

Columbus discovered America. (Active voice)

If, on the other hand, we want to focus on the discovery of America, the event of the discovery rather than the identity of the discoverer, we should say:

America was discovered by Columbus. (Passive voice)

We use the passive voice:

- (a) When we wish to draw attention to the receiver, rather than the doer, of the action. Ex. Amir Khan was admired a lot for making '*Satyameva Jayate*'. Here, the focus is on the superstar Amir, rather than the admirers.
- (b) When the doer of the action is unimportant, is not known, or is too well known to require mention. Ex. All the posts were distributed on time. Here, distributor, the postman is well known. Or Their house was burgled yesterday. ( the doer, the burgler , not known)
- (c) The passive construction occurs quite frequently in newspaper stories, since the emphasis in such stories is usually on the newsy event, on what happened to X rather than on what Y did.
- (d) The passive construction is fairly common in scientific/ technical writings in which the emphasis is on the event, the thing, or the process being described: The first thermonuclear weapon, or hydrogen bomb, as it is often called, was exploded in a test by the United States in 1952.

According to Mr. Martin Parrott, passive voice is used when the focus is on the action. It is not important or not known; however, who or what is performing the action (2000, p.287)

Example: *My bike was stolen. (Meri Motorcycle chori ho gayi.)*

In the example above, the focus is on the fact that my bike was stolen. I do not know, however, who did it.

In the case of the passive voice we can notice that the agent can totally disappear from the sentence and the patient takes the front position. This has two effects:

- First, the patient becomes the topic of the sentence.
- Second, because the actor is not mentioned, the action itself gets the focus of the information.

In our daily world we can mainly find two reasons why the actor is not mentioned in a sentence. It is either unknown or unimportant.

The first case is totally clear.

When we leave our house in the morning and can't find our car we will probably call the police and say something like:

*My house has been looted. (Mere ghar me chori ho gayi hai.)*

Of course we could also say:

*"Somebody has looted My house". (Kisi ne mere ghar me chori ki hai.)*

But that would not provide any new information because that somebody is very unspecific. The real actor is unknown and that's why it will often be left out of the sentence.

The second case is also not very complicated.

We take your car to the garage and tell our colleagues during our breakfast talk:

*"My bike is being repaired". (Meri motorcycle ki marammat ki ja rahi hai. ) {Passive}*

We get a general murmur of acknowledgement. Of course we could also say:

"Mr Sandeep, the nice mechanic in that neat blue overall, is repairing my bike". (Neeli vardi pehne hue ek acha mechanic Sandeep meri motorcycle ki marammat kar raha hai.) {Active}

However, our colleagues will frown at us because they are simply bored by such detailed information and they will also start wondering what sort of special relationship we have to that mechanic in the neat blue overall. (Too much information can be harmful!) Moreover, it will usually be unimportant which of the mechanics repairs our bike at the garage and thus won't be mentioned at all. Thus, we see using Passive voice is more suitable as compared to Active voice in such cases.

Other very obvious examples of situations in which the actor is unknown are general descriptions or technical manuals. There we normally do not describe *who* performs an action but *what* actions must be performed.

Sometimes a statement in passive is more polite than active voice, as the following example shows:

Example: *A mistake was made.* (Galati ho gayi.)

In this case, I focus on the fact that a mistake was made, but I do not blame anyone.

E.g: *You have made a mistake.* (Tumne galati ki hai.)

In the following examples, the verbs in the Passive Voice are underlined.

E.g: *The ball was struck by the boy.* (Geind ko laDke ne mArA.) / *LaDke dwara geind mari gayi.*

*Gold has been found by the explorers.* (Khojkartaon ne sona dhudh liya.) . *khobjkartaon dwara sona dhudh liya gaya.*

In these examples, the verbs "was struck" and "has been found" are in the Passive Voice. The subjects "ball" and "gold" refer to things receiving the actions described by the verbs.

Here 'ne' is the subjective Active case marker, 'ko' is the objective case marker, and 'ke dwara' is the subjective passive case marker.

## 2. Form of passive voice:

Subject + finite form of *to be* + Past Participle (3rd column of irregular verbs)

Example: *A letter was written.* (Patra likha gaya.)

*This house was built in 1486.* (ye makaan 1486 me banwaya gaya.)

When rewriting active sentences into passive voice, note the following:

- the object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence
- the finite form of the verb is changed (*to be* + past participle)
- the subject of the active sentence becomes the object of the passive sentence (or is dropped)

### Examples of Passive

Tense		Subject	Verb	Object
Simple Present	Active:	Garima	Writes	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	is written	By Garima.
Simple Past	Active:	Garima	Wrote	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	was written	By Garima.
Present Perfect	Active:	Garima	has written	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	has been written	By Garima.
Future I	Active:	Garima	will write	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	will be written	By Garima.
Modal verb (Present)	Active:	Garima	can write	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	can be written	By Garima.

### Examples of Passive

Tense		Subject	Verb	Object
Present Progressive	Active:	Garima	is writing	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	is being written	by Garima.
Past Progressive	Active:	Garima	was writing	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	was being written	by Garima.
Past Perfect	Active:	Garima	had written	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	had been written	by Garima.
Future II	Active:	Garima	will have written	a letter.
	Passive:	A letter	will have been written	by Garima.

<b>Conditional I</b>	<i>Active:</i>	Garima	would write	a letter.
	<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	would be written	by Garima.
<b>Conditional II</b>	<i>Active:</i>	Garima	would have written	a letter.
	<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	would have been written	by Garima.

### Passive Sentences with Two Objects

While rewriting an active voice sentence with double objects into passive voice, one of the two objects functions as the subject and the other one remains in place of object. Which object should be transformed into a subject depends on which one we wish to put the more focus on.

	Subject	Verb	Object 1	Object 2
<i>Active:</i>	Garima	Wrote	a letter	to me.
<i>Passive:</i>	A letter	was written	to me	by Garima.
<i>Passive:</i>	I	was written	a letter	by Garima.

As we can see in the examples, adding ‘by Garima’ does not sound very elegant. That’s why it is usually dropped.

- 1(a). Prepare yourself for the worst. {Active}
- 1(b). Be prepared for the worst. {Passive}
- 2(a). It is impossible to do this. {Active}
- 2(b). This can’t be done. {Passive}

## IV. SIMILAR MEANS OF EXPRESSING PASSIVE VOICE IN HINDI

**Active form:** Subject + object + verb main + finite form of the verb to be

**Passive Form:** Subject + ‘ke dwara’ + object + predicate + past participle of main verb

OR

Object + subject + ‘ke dwara’ + predicate + past participle of the main verb

Due to the relatively free word- order in Hindi, Hindi learners of English might find passive structures useless in English; consequently they might avoid using them or might form incorrect constructions. The problem seems to be that they do not sense the difference between the two languages regarding focus and topic positions: they fail to recognize that in Hindi the focus is in preverbal position, while in English it is at the end of the sentence.

The issue is even more important, if the mother tongue has, indeed, influence on second language acquisition (SLA), and this is true in the case of passive / passive-like constructions, L1 speakers of Hindi are expected to commit mistakes, at least in the initial stages of learning English.

The paper provides empirical evidence that practice of certain structures could help children understand and use correctly structures absent in Hindi. We hypothesize if they understand that the Hindi counterpart of an English passive construction can be an active sentence, where the direct object is in topic position (e.g., *kAr ki marammat ho gayi*. ‘The car has been mended.’), furthermore, if they understand that the focus position in English is in the *by*-phrase at the end of the sentence, while in Hindi the focus is on the pre-verbal position (e.g., *Shirt meri maa ne dhuli*. vs. ‘The shirt was washed *BY MY MOTHER*.’), they will use correctly the English passive construction. Consequently, my hypothesis is that explaining all these characteristics and practicing these structures will lead to a proper use of the English passive voice.

### I. Similarities, differences and implication in teaching English to Hindi students.

First, I would like to talk about the similarities of passive voice in the two languages, which seem major compared to the differences. In English, as well as in Hindi, passive voice has the same function. It emphasizes the patients of the action and the information given about that action, which it doesn’t care who causes. The differences seem minor.

From the knowledge above we have in our mind the idea that “ke dwara” in Hindi is totally similar to “by” in English, which intrinsically has a compulsory form. “ke dwara” in Hindi is not such obligatory to express passive meaning. Take a look at the following examples:

- a. *Mujhe darr lag raha hai.* → *Main darr raha hu.*  
(I am afraid.)
- b. *Bachche ne janma liya.* → *Bachche ka janma hua.*  
(A baby was born.)
- c. *Main thak raha hu.* → *Mujhe thakaan ho rahi hai.*  
(I am getting tired.)
- d. *Pappu pariksha me pass ho gaya hai.* → *Pappu ke dwara pariksha pass kar li gayi hai.*  
(The examination has been passed by Pappu.)
- e. *LaDko ke dwara cricket khela ja raha tha.*  
(Cricket was being played by the boys.)
- f. *Mohan ne dhokha khaya.* (Mohan was deceived.)

We can see that “ke dwara” can be present, can be absent but the passive meanings are unchanged (As in **d**). “Ne” in Hindi is generally an indicator for subject but here in **b** and **f**, it does not have any importance as both the sentences are in passive voice.

Similarly, in English, passive structure always expresses passive meaning and it is mandatory. When we omit “by” in passive sentence, its meaning will be unchanged.

- E.g: 1. *A toy car was bought by Tanu yesterday.*  
2. *I was given a bicycle.*  
3. *I was bitten by the dog.*

When we omit “by” in the above sentence, the meaning does not change. Actually, this is a rare mistake. Students are smart and flexible enough to use “by”. Besides, Hindi students tend to translate “by” into “ke dwara” when they meet passive structure and vice versa.

Eg: *Mujhe chaaku ke dwara chot lag gayi.*

~~*I was hurt by a knife.*~~ / *I was hurt with a knife.*

This is the common mistake which Hindi students often make when they translate Hindi passive structure into English. It’s the duty of teacher to explain the problem clearly to his/her students so that they can choose when to use “by” suitably.

## V. CONCLUSION

So far we have revised the structure and meaning of passive voice in English and similar ways to express it in Hindi. We also discussed the difference between passive voices in English and Hindi, which cause the common mistakes that students get when they learn English as a foreign language. In general, the ways to express passive meaning of the two languages are quite different, despite of the minor similarity. In my opinion, the best way to help students to master their passive voice in English is to have a profound knowledge of passive sentence in Hindi. Teacher should repeat what students have forgotten and correct the mistakes right on time so that they can remember and avoid making them again.

## REFERENCES

- [1]. Swan, Michael. (2005). *Practical English Usage* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Oxford University Press.
- [2]. Quirk and Greenbaum. (2010). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Pearson Education Ltd.
- [3]. Parrot, Martin. (2000). *Grammar for English Language Teachers*. Cambridge university press.
- [4]. Enikő TANKÓ. University of Bucharest. *Facing Difficulties in the Acquisition of the English Passive by L1 Speakers of Hungarian*
- [5]. Narayanswamy, K R. *A Teacher’s Grammar of English*. Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd. 2008.

IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Priyanka Tiwari. "Passive Voice in English – A Comparison with Ways of Expressing Passive Voice in Hindi." *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* 22.7 (2017): 53-57.