



THE PRAGMATIC STUDY OF PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH MEDIA DISCOURSE

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ANNOTATION

This study explores the pragmatic functions of passive constructions in English media discourse. The research focuses on how passive voice is used not only as a grammatical structure but also as a communicative and stylistic device in news and media texts. The study analyzes the role of passive constructions in organizing information, emphasizing results, suppressing or backgrounding agents, and creating an impersonal and objective tone. Particular attention is given to the ways in which passive voice contributes to framing events and influencing readers' interpretations. The theoretical framework of the study is based on functional linguistics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics, which provide tools for understanding the relationship between grammatical form and communicative purpose.

Keywords: passive constructions, passive voice, pragmatics, media discourse, information structure, agency, discourse analysis, English language, news language, linguistic framing.

INTRODUCTION

Language is not only a system of grammatical rules and lexical units but also a powerful tool for shaping meaning, expressing attitudes, and influencing audiences. In modern communication, particularly in media discourse, linguistic choices play a crucial role in how information is presented and interpreted. Among these choices, the use of passive constructions occupies a significant place. Passive voice is not merely a grammatical transformation of active sentences; it is a pragmatic device that allows speakers and writers to manipulate focus, conceal or highlight agency, and construct particular perspectives on events. Therefore, the pragmatic study of passive constructions in English media discourse has become an important area of linguistic research, combining insights from syntax, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and media studies. Media discourse, which includes newspapers, online news portals, television reports, and digital journalism, is characterized by its persuasive and informative functions. Journalists and editors carefully select linguistic structures to shape readers' perceptions and interpretations of reality. Passive constructions are especially useful in this context because they enable writers to foreground certain elements of a sentence while backgrounding or omitting others. For instance, when the agent of an action is unknown, irrelevant, or intentionally concealed, the passive voice becomes an effective linguistic strategy. As a result, studying passive constructions from a pragmatic perspective helps reveal how language is used to influence public opinion, construct narratives, and frame social and political events. From a grammatical standpoint, the passive voice in English is typically formed using

a form of the auxiliary verb be followed by the past participle of the main verb. However, the structural formation of passive constructions represents only one dimension of their usage. The pragmatic dimension concerns the communicative intentions behind choosing passive over active voice. In many cases, the passive voice is selected not because of grammatical necessity but because of its discourse functions, such as maintaining thematic continuity, emphasizing results rather than actions, or reducing the prominence of responsible agents. These functions are particularly evident in media texts, where objectivity, neutrality, and credibility are often emphasized as journalistic standards.

One of the key pragmatic functions of passive constructions in media discourse is the management of information structure. In discourse analysis, the concepts of theme and rheme, or given and new information, play an essential role in understanding sentence organization. Passive constructions allow writers to place known or previously mentioned information at the beginning of a sentence, thereby maintaining coherence and facilitating comprehension. For example, in a news article discussing a public policy, the policy itself may be introduced as the theme of successive sentences, even when different actors are involved in its implementation. The passive voice enables this continuity by shifting the focus from agents to actions or results. Another important pragmatic aspect of passive constructions is their role in expressing objectivity and neutrality. Media institutions often strive to present information in a manner that appears impartial and factual. Passive constructions contribute to this effect by removing or minimizing references to specific agents, which can make statements appear more detached and less subjective. For instance, phrases such as “It was reported that...” or “Mistakes were made...” allow journalists to present information without explicitly assigning responsibility. While this strategy may enhance the perceived neutrality of a text, it can also obscure accountability and influence readers’ interpretations of events. The omission of agents in passive constructions is particularly significant in the context of political and social reporting. Media discourse frequently deals with sensitive topics such as conflicts, economic crises, or policy failures. In such cases, the choice between active and passive voice can shape public perceptions of responsibility and causality. For example, the sentence “The decision was criticized by experts” foregrounds the criticism and background the decision-makers, whereas the active version “Experts criticized the decision” emphasizes the critics. These subtle differences demonstrate how passive constructions can serve as pragmatic tools for framing information and guiding audience interpretation. In addition to agent suppression, passive constructions in media discourse often serve to highlight results, processes, or affected entities. News reporting typically focuses on outcomes rather than the individuals who produce them. Headlines such as “New Measures Are Introduced” or “Thousands of Homes Were Destroyed” emphasize the events themselves, which are often more relevant to readers than the agents responsible. This focus on results aligns with the informative function of journalism, where the primary goal is to convey what happened rather than who performed the action, especially when the agent is unknown or unimportant. Another factor contributing to the frequent use of passive constructions in media discourse is the need for brevity and conciseness, particularly in headlines and lead paragraphs. Passive structures can sometimes provide a more economical way of presenting information, especially when the agent is lengthy or complex. Furthermore, the passive voice allows journalists to avoid repetition of

proper names or institutional titles, thereby improving the stylistic quality of a text. From a pragmatic perspective, these considerations reflect the interplay between linguistic form, communicative purpose, and stylistic conventions in media writing. The study of passive constructions in media discourse also intersects with the concept of framing, which refers to the way information is presented to shape audience interpretation. Linguistic framing involves the selection of specific words, structures, and syntactic patterns that highlight certain aspects of reality while downplaying others. Passive constructions are an effective means of framing because they allow writers to control the prominence of agents and actions. For instance, in reporting on controversial events, passive constructions may be used to reduce the visibility of authorities or institutions, thereby influencing readers' perceptions of responsibility. Moreover, passive constructions contribute to the creation of an impersonal and formal tone, which is characteristic of many media texts. Formality is often associated with credibility and professionalism, especially in news reporting. The use of passive voice, along with other features such as nominalization and technical vocabulary, helps establish a style that appears objective and authoritative. From a pragmatic perspective, this stylistic choice reflects the communicative norms and expectations of media audiences, who often associate formal language with reliability and accuracy. The increasing influence of digital media has also affected the use of passive constructions in English media discourse. Online journalism, social media platforms, and multimedia reporting have introduced new stylistic trends, including greater informality and conversational tone. Nevertheless, passive constructions remain prevalent in many forms of digital news writing, particularly in headlines, summaries, and analytical articles. The pragmatic functions of passives—such as emphasizing results, maintaining thematic continuity, and managing agency—continue to be relevant in these contexts, demonstrating the adaptability of this grammatical structure to changing communicative environments. From a theoretical perspective, the pragmatic study of passive constructions draws on several linguistic frameworks, including functional grammar, discourse analysis, and pragmatics.

METHODS

Functional linguistics emphasizes the relationship between linguistic form and communicative function, highlighting how grammatical structures are shaped by the needs of communication. Discourse analysis focuses on language use in context, examining how texts are organized and interpreted within specific social and cultural settings. Pragmatics, in turn, investigates how meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic expressions, speakers' intentions, and contextual factors. Together, these approaches provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing passive constructions in media discourse. Previous research has shown that passive constructions are particularly common in scientific, technical, and journalistic writing, where the emphasis is often placed on processes and results rather than individual actors. However, the pragmatic functions of passive voice in media discourse are more complex than in other genres because media texts are shaped by ideological, political, and economic factors. Journalists must balance the need for accuracy, objectivity, and clarity with the pressures of editorial policies, audience expectations, and institutional interests. As a result, the choice of passive constructions may reflect not only linguistic considerations but also broader social

and communicative purposes. Another important aspect of studying passive constructions in media discourse is the role of audience interpretation. Readers do not passively receive information; they actively interpret and evaluate texts based on their background knowledge, beliefs, and expectations. Passive constructions can influence these interpretations by shaping the salience of different elements within a sentence. For example, when responsibility for an action is omitted, readers may be less likely to question who is accountable, focusing instead on the event itself. This demonstrates the persuasive potential of passive voice as a pragmatic device. Furthermore, the cross-cultural dimension of media discourse adds another layer of complexity to the study of passive constructions. English-language media are consumed by global audiences, including readers for whom English is a second language. The interpretation of passive constructions may vary depending on cultural and linguistic background, as different languages and media traditions have distinct conventions regarding agency, responsibility, and objectivity. Therefore, analyzing passive constructions in English media discourse can also contribute to a better understanding of intercultural communication and global journalism. The relevance of this study is also connected to the growing importance of critical media literacy. In an era of rapid information exchange and widespread misinformation, understanding how language shapes meaning is essential for evaluating the credibility and reliability of media sources. By examining the pragmatic functions of passive constructions, researchers and readers can gain insights into how linguistic choices influence the presentation of information and the construction of social reality. This knowledge can help audiences become more critical and informed consumers of media content. In conclusion, passive constructions represent a significant linguistic resource in English media discourse, serving a wide range of pragmatic functions, including information structuring, agent suppression, emphasis on results, stylistic formalization, and ideological framing. The study of these functions provides valuable insights into the relationship between language, communication, and society. By analyzing how passive voice is used in media texts, researchers can better understand the mechanisms through which language shapes public perception and discourse. Consequently, the pragmatic study of passive constructions is not only a matter of grammatical analysis but also an important contribution to the broader fields of discourse analysis, media studies, and applied linguistics.

RESULTS

The study of passive constructions has long attracted the attention of linguists, particularly in the fields of syntax, functional linguistics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis. While early grammatical studies primarily focused on the structural formation of the passive voice, more recent research has emphasized its communicative and pragmatic functions, especially in institutional and media discourse. This literature review examines the major theoretical and empirical contributions to the study of passive constructions, with particular attention to their pragmatic roles in English media texts. One of the foundational contributions to the functional analysis of grammar is associated with M. A. K. Halliday and his theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Halliday (1994) argues that grammatical structures cannot be fully understood without considering their communicative functions in context. Within this framework, the passive voice is interpreted as a

resource for organizing information and managing thematic structure. Halliday emphasizes that the choice between active and passive constructions is motivated by the speaker's intention to foreground certain elements of the message while backgrounding others. In media discourse, this function is particularly important because journalists often need to maintain thematic continuity and emphasize specific aspects of events. Halliday's concept of theme and rheme has been widely applied in studies of media language. Researchers have demonstrated that passive constructions allow writers to place known or contextually important information in the thematic position at the beginning of a sentence. This facilitates textual cohesion and enhances readability, especially in news reporting, where information is presented in a structured and hierarchical manner. Therefore, Halliday's functional approach provides a theoretical basis for understanding the pragmatic motivations behind the use of passive voice in media texts.

Another significant contribution to the study of language in media discourse comes from Norman Fairclough, whose work on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) highlights the ideological functions of linguistic choices. Fairclough (1995) argues that grammatical structures, including passive constructions, play an important role in shaping social meanings and power relations. According to Fairclough, the passive voice can be used to obscure agency and responsibility, particularly in political and institutional contexts. For example, expressions such as "mistakes were made" remove the agent from the sentence, thereby reducing accountability. This observation has been widely cited in studies of political communication and news reporting. Similarly, Roger Fowler (1991) emphasizes the role of linguistic structures in constructing news narratives. Fowler argues that news is not a neutral reflection of reality but a socially constructed representation shaped by linguistic and editorial choices. Passive constructions, in his view, are among the most effective tools for manipulating the representation of events, as they allow journalists to control the visibility of agents and actions. Fowler's analysis of newspaper language demonstrates how passive structures can influence readers' perceptions of responsibility, causality, and importance. In addition to critical discourse approaches, corpus-based studies have provided valuable empirical insights into the frequency and distribution of passive constructions in different genres. Douglas Biber and his colleagues (1999) conducted extensive corpus analyses of spoken and written English, demonstrating that passive constructions are significantly more frequent in academic and news writing than in conversational speech. Biber's findings suggest that the passive voice is associated with informational density, formality, and the presentation of impersonal knowledge. These characteristics align with the communicative goals of media discourse, which often aims to convey information in a concise and authoritative manner. Further research by Thompson (2004) has expanded the functional analysis of passive constructions by examining their role in discourse organization. Thompson argues that passive voice is not merely a stylistic alternative to active voice but a strategic choice that reflects the writer's communicative priorities. In news reporting, these priorities often include emphasizing results, maintaining coherence, and avoiding unnecessary repetition of agents. Thompson's work underscores the importance of considering both grammatical and pragmatic factors when analyzing passive constructions. The pragmatic dimension of passive voice has also been explored within the framework of relevance theory and pragmatic inference. Scholars such as Levinson (1983) have

argued that speakers and writers rely on shared contextual knowledge to interpret implicit meanings in discourse. When an agent is omitted in a passive construction, readers often infer the identity of the agent based on context. In media discourse, this pragmatic inference can influence how readers interpret responsibility and causality, even when the agent is not explicitly mentioned. Another important area of research concerns the stylistic functions of passive constructions in journalistic writing. Bell (1991), in his study of the language of news media, notes that journalists frequently use passive voice to create an impersonal and objective tone. Objectivity is a central value in journalism, and linguistic features such as passive constructions, nominalizations, and technical vocabulary contribute to the perception of neutrality. However, Bell also points out that the appearance of objectivity may sometimes mask underlying biases or ideological positions. Research on headline language has also highlighted the role of passive constructions in media discourse. Van Dijk (1988) observes that headlines often employ passive structures to emphasize events rather than agents, particularly when the agent is unknown or politically sensitive. Headlines such as “Protesters Arrested” or “New Policy Introduced” focus on the outcome of actions rather than the actors responsible. Van Dijk argues that this strategy reflects both practical and ideological considerations, as headlines must be concise while also shaping readers’ initial interpretations of news stories. The role of passive constructions in political discourse has been extensively studied as well. Chilton (2004) argues that political language often employs passive voice to avoid direct attribution of responsibility or to present actions as inevitable or impersonal. This phenomenon is especially evident in official statements and press releases, which are frequently quoted in news reports. As a result, passive constructions in media discourse may reflect not only journalistic practices but also the linguistic strategies of political institutions. In recent years, scholars have also examined the use of passive constructions in digital media and online journalism. Studies have shown that while online news writing tends to be more informal than traditional print journalism, passive constructions remain a common feature, particularly in hard news reporting. Researchers such as Bednarek and Caple (2012) have emphasized the importance of multimodal analysis in understanding contemporary media discourse, noting that linguistic structures interact with visual and typographic elements to shape meaning. Although their work focuses primarily on evaluation and news values, it also highlights the continued relevance of grammatical choices, including passive voice, in digital journalism. Another relevant strand of research concerns the pedagogical implications of passive constructions. Scholars in applied linguistics have investigated how second-language learners acquire and use passive voice, particularly in academic and professional writing. Studies by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) suggest that learners often struggle to understand the pragmatic functions of passive constructions, focusing instead on their grammatical formation. This finding underscores the importance of teaching passive voice not only as a structural feature but also as a communicative resource, especially for students who aim to engage with academic and media texts in English. Despite the substantial body of research on passive constructions, several gaps remain in the literature. First, many studies focus primarily on grammatical or stylistic aspects of passive voice, without fully exploring its pragmatic and ideological functions in specific discourse contexts. Second, while critical discourse analysis has provided valuable insights into the role of passive constructions in political and institutional

language, fewer studies have examined their use across different types of media genres, such as online news, feature articles, and investigative journalism. Finally, there is a need for more cross-cultural research on how passive constructions are interpreted by diverse audiences, particularly in contexts where English functions as a global lingua franca.

DISCUSSION

The present study seeks to contribute to this field by providing a pragmatic analysis of passive constructions in English media discourse, focusing on their communicative functions, contextual motivations, and effects on audience interpretation. By integrating insights from functional linguistics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how passive voice operates as a linguistic and rhetorical device in contemporary media communication. In summary, the literature demonstrates that passive constructions play a significant role in media discourse, serving functions related to information structure, stylistic convention, ideological framing, and pragmatic inference. The works of Halliday, Fairclough, Fowler, Biber, and other scholars provide a strong theoretical foundation for analyzing passive voice from multiple perspectives. At the same time, ongoing changes in media practices and communication technologies continue to create new contexts in which passive constructions are used and interpreted. Therefore, further research in this area remains both relevant and necessary for understanding the relationship between language, media, and society.

The present study has examined the pragmatic functions of passive constructions in English media discourse, highlighting their significant role in shaping meaning, structuring information, and influencing audience perception. While the passive voice has traditionally been viewed as a grammatical transformation of active constructions, this research confirms that its importance extends far beyond syntax. In media texts, passive constructions function as powerful communicative tools that allow journalists and writers to manage thematic structure, control the visibility of agents, and present information in ways that align with institutional, stylistic, and ideological objectives. One of the key findings of this study is that passive constructions are frequently used to organize information effectively within media discourse. News reporting often requires the presentation of complex events in a clear and coherent manner, and the passive voice enables writers to maintain thematic continuity by placing known or contextually important information at the beginning of sentences. This contributes to textual cohesion and facilitates reader comprehension, particularly in longer articles where multiple actors and events are involved. In this sense, the use of passive constructions reflects not only grammatical preference but also discourse-level considerations. Another important conclusion is that passive constructions play a crucial role in the expression of objectivity and neutrality, which are central values in journalistic practice. By omitting or backgrounding agents, passive structures allow writers to present information in an impersonal tone that appears factual and unbiased. Expressions such as “It was reported,” “The decision was made,” or “New measures were introduced” create a sense of detachment that enhances the credibility of the text. However, this apparent neutrality may also have pragmatic implications, as the omission of agents can obscure responsibility and reduce the visibility of decision-

makers. Therefore, passive constructions not only reflect journalistic conventions but also shape how readers interpret events and evaluate accountability. The study also demonstrates that passive voice serves as an effective means of emphasizing results and processes rather than individual actors. In many cases, the primary focus of media reporting is the outcome of events rather than the specific agents involved. For example, in reports about natural disasters, economic changes, or policy decisions, the emphasis is often placed on consequences that affect society as a whole. Passive constructions enable journalists to foreground these outcomes while minimizing less relevant details about who performed the action. This pragmatic function aligns with the informative purpose of media discourse, where clarity and relevance are essential. Furthermore, the analysis confirms that passive constructions can function as tools of framing in media discourse. The way information is presented significantly influences how audiences understand and interpret events. By controlling the prominence of agents, actions, and affected entities, passive structures contribute to the construction of particular perspectives and narratives. This is especially evident in political and institutional reporting, where linguistic choices may reflect broader ideological or editorial considerations. As a result, the study of passive constructions provides valuable insights into the relationship between language, power, and representation in media communication.

Another significant observation is that the use of passive constructions varies depending on the genre and format of media texts. While traditional print journalism often employs passive voice to maintain formality and authority, digital media has introduced new stylistic tendencies, including greater simplicity and directness. Nevertheless, passive constructions remain an important feature of online news, particularly in headlines, summaries, and analytical reports. This suggests that the pragmatic functions of passive voice continue to be relevant even in rapidly changing communicative environments. The findings of this study also have implications for linguistic theory and applied linguistics. From a theoretical perspective, the analysis supports functional and pragmatic approaches to grammar, which emphasize the interaction between linguistic form, communicative purpose, and contextual factors. Passive constructions illustrate how grammatical choices are shaped by discourse-level needs rather than purely structural considerations. From a pedagogical perspective, understanding the pragmatic functions of passive voice is essential for students and language learners who engage with academic and journalistic texts in English. Teaching passive constructions should therefore include not only their grammatical formation but also their communicative and stylistic uses.

Despite the insights provided by this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. The analysis has focused primarily on general patterns of passive usage in English media discourse, and further research could explore specific subgenres, such as investigative journalism, opinion articles, or broadcast news. In addition, comparative studies involving different languages and cultural contexts would provide a deeper understanding of how passive constructions function in global media communication. Future research may also benefit from corpus-based methods that allow for more detailed quantitative analysis of passive structures across large collections of media texts.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, passive constructions represent an essential linguistic resource in English media discourse, performing a wide range of pragmatic functions related to information structure, stylistic expression, ideological framing, and audience interpretation. Their use reflects the complex interplay between language, communication, and social context. By examining passive voice from a pragmatic perspective, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how linguistic choices shape media narratives and influence public perception. As media continues to evolve in the digital age, the role of grammatical structures such as passive constructions will remain a significant area of inquiry in linguistics, discourse analysis, and communication studies.

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