



FORMAL AND SYNTACTIC ASPECTS OF THE PASSIVE VOICE

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Abstract

The present article focuses on the formal and syntactic aspects of the passive voice in translations from English into Russian and vice versa. The research is based on the examination of selected examples included in the parallel with the ideas and points of view of famous linguists.

Keywords: an active clause, passive clause, participle, be passives, get-passives, formal aspects, syntactic aspects, statal passives.

Introduction

Voice is a linguistic category that defines the relationship “between the participants and the event indicated in the verb” [1.1]. In an active clause, the subject is the agent responsible for performing the action, whereas in a passive clause, the subject is an affected entity, and the agent may or may not be specified [2.1]:

He sold the car. X The car was sold (by him).

The system of the passive voice proper is quite complicated both in English and in Russian; what is more, individual linguists apply different classifications of the passive. First, it thus has to be stated what will be regarded as a passive voice form in the present thesis.

Materials and Methods

As Svartvik claims, “there is no agreement among grammarians as to what constitutes an English passive” [4.1]. However, the basic pattern of the English passive has been agreed on – it consists of a form of the verb be and the past participle form of another verb. Yet, not all passive clauses contain be, some have get (become, grow, stand, etc.) instead and there are also passives that contain neither of these verbs. These passive constructions are called bare passives [5.1]:

He saw Kim mauled by our neighbour’s dog.

The guy mauled by our neighbour’s dog is in intensive care.

In the present thesis, only be- and get-passives will be included into the analysis. Be passives are the basic and thus the most common passive forms; they substantially prevail over the other forms. Get-passives, on the other hand, are not so common and





are claimed to be avoided in formal style and they are restricted to dynamic verbs in their use [5.2].

*It was/*got believed that the letter was a forgery.*

He got arrested

Yet, they correspond to the passive in Russian and have to be taken into account [3.1]. The bare passives and constructions with past participles preceded with other verbs than be and get are not taken into consideration as they are altogether rare; they are restricted to special uses [3.2]. Besides, they are not regarded as passive constructions in several grammar books [6.1].

Research and Discussion

The difference between be- and get-passives is predominantly semantic: “Other things being equal, get tends to be preferred over be when the subject-referent is seen as having an agentive role in the situation, or at least having some responsibility for it” [5.3]:

She managed to get transferred to the finance department.

In Russian, the passive voice can take two different forms – the periphrastic form and the reflexive form. The periphrastic form is equivalent to the English be + past participle form as it consists of a form of the verb *быть* and a passive participle. The reflexive passive is denoted by a reflexive form of the verb (verb + *se*). Both forms of the passive in Russian will be included into the analysis for they are equally important and sometimes can be used interchangeably:

Было изготовлено пять тонн шоколада.

Было произведено пять тонн шоколада.

There are certain differences in the use of the two forms. The reflexive form denotes an activity and is used especially with imperfective verbs. In the periphrastic form, on the other hand, the state as a result of an activity comes into the foreground. This form is therefore common with perfective verbs.

Adjectival Forms

Both in English and Russian, there is a partial overlap between verbal adjectives and past participle forms of verbs, which often leads to a certain ambiguity between a verbal statal passive and a complex-intransitive clause containing an adjectival form as a predicative complement. Therefore, both in English and Russian, instances of statal passives were sorted out and the adjectival forms were excluded from the analysis as they are not passives in the strict sense as “passives in the strict sense are always verbal” [5.4].



Unlike in Russian, in English, there are no formal indicators, which might signal an adjectival complement and the distinction between state and action is thus determined by the context [3.3]. As Dushkova claims, statal passives are included among passives “if their subject can operate as object in the active” as in:

His bills are paid regularly. => *He pays his bills regularly.*

Yet, this is not always a sufficient test and thus another grammatical test, recommended both by Huddleston and Pullum and Dushkova was applied to exclude instances of adjectival complements. Adjectives, unlike verbs, can be modified by very, rather, too etc., like in the following examples:

He was very drunk. **It was very sold.*

Furthermore, adjectival complements are not restricted to occurrence with be. With adjectival complements, be can be replaced by other verbs, e.g. seem, look, prefer. This is not possible with verbs [5.5]:

They seemed very worried. **The kitchen window seemed broken by the thieves.*

Similarly, both verbs and adjectives can follow the verb get. The same rules can be applied to distinguish the get-passives proper from the adjectival forms:

They got killed by the hijackers. X *They got very frightened.*

In Russian, there is a similar ambiguity concerning the periphrastic passives of the perfective verbs and the predicates with verbal adjectives, especially in the present tense. According to Dushkova, passive forms are those that “can be substituted with a corresponding active construction” [3.4]. Such instances have been included into the analysis:

Книга распродана. => *Книготорговцы распродали книгу.*

In such instances, the passives have resultative meaning; the resulting state should be perceived as a result of the previous activity. For the adjectival expression of state, Russian has a special form of verbal adjectives. Such instances have been ruled out:

Книга распродана.

In some instances, the distinction becomes blurred as the previously mentioned form indicating an adjective (adjective with a long final vowel) is not used.

Conclusion

To conclude, it has to be stressed that in order to gain some reliable results concerning the general tendencies of the passive voice treatment in translation, a much more extensive sample of original novels and translations would have to be examined. Although the sample researched in this thesis was very limited, it suggests that, since the category of fiction is very diverse, there are quite remarkable differences in the use of the passive voice both in the original and the translated works in both languages.



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