PASSIVE VOICE IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN : SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Muxtorova Gòzalxon Abdumalikovna

Email: muxtorovagozal353@gmail.com

Scientific supervisor:

Nishonova Sayyora Saidovna

Uzbek National Pedagogical University

Department of the Theory and Methodology of English

"Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going."

(Rita Mae Brown)

Annotation: This research paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the passive voice in English and Russian, focusing on its structural formation, functional patterns, semantic nuances, stylistic preferences, and cross-linguistic implications. The study explores how typological differences between analytic English and morphologically rich Russian influence the use of passive constructions. The paper also discusses agent expression, reflexive passives, participial systems, frequency of use in written and spoken discourse, and the implications for translation studies and second language teaching. By examining similarities and differences between the two languages, this research highlights how passive constructions reflect deeper grammatical mechanisms, cultural communication styles, and cognitive patterns. The study concludes that a thorough understanding of passive structures in both languages is essential for linguists, translators, and educators working in bilingual contexts.

Key words: passive voice, English grammar, Russian grammar, analytic construction, reflexive passive, participles, agentive expression, impersonal sentences, cross-linguistic comparison, translation.

Passive constructions are found in many of the world's languages, but the

ways in which they are formed and used vary significantly depending on the typological nature of each language. English and Russian offer particularly interesting material for contrastive analysis because the passive voice exists in both languages but functions according to different grammatical logics. English, as an analytic language with relatively fixed word order, relies heavily on auxiliary verbs and participial combinations. Russian, a synthetic language with a flexible word order and rich morphology, employs multiple passive mechanisms including analytic, synthetic, and reflexive forms. These distinctions result in different stylistic norms, frequency patterns, and translation challenges. Structural Foundations of the Passive Voice A deeper understanding of the passive voice in both languages requires a brief look into their historical development. Old English possessed a system of inflectional endings that allowed for more flexible word order and fewer analytic constructions. Over time, English shifted toward an analytic structure, reducing inflection and increasing reliance on auxiliary verbs. As a result, the modern English passive evolved into a highly transparent and rigid structure with be + past participle. This change reflects the larger trend in English: movement toward simpler morphology but more complex syntactic constructions.

Russian, on the other hand, maintained much of its synthetic character. The passive voice in Old Russian relied on participial forms and reflexive markers, many of which are still present today. The -ся particle, for instance, originally had a reflexive meaning but expanded to passive, middle, and even impersonal meanings. This multifunctionality of -ся illustrates the morphological richness of Russian and its ability to encode grammatical relations without auxiliary verbs. Thus, Russian offers a more nuanced and flexible passive system, but one that requires greater morphological awareness.Beyond grammar, passives play an essential role in discourse structure. English uses the passive voice to maintain thematic continuity, allowing subjects to remain consistent across sentences. For example: The device was tested in the laboratory. It was then modified. Afterwards, it was installed in the main system. In such discourse, the passive voice helps maintain cohesion by keeping the topic (the device) in subject position. Russian,

however, tends to rely on flexible word order or active voice to maintain the topic. For instance: Прибор испытали в лаборатории. Затем его доработали, а позже установили. Here, Russian chooses active constructions with object fronting or impersonal sentences. Such stylistic preferences reflect cultural communication patterns: English formal writing prioritizes clarity and logical progression, whereas Russian discourse tolerates ambiguity and relies on contextually inferred agents. In English, passive structures follow a predictable auxiliary-based model. The construction requires a form of the verb to be combined with the past participle — is written, was built, has been completed, etc. The auxiliary may change according to tense, aspect, mood, or voice, while the participle remains constant. English grammar offers no synthetic passive verbs; all passives are analytic. This feature contributes to the transparency and clarity of English passive constructions. English also allows "get-passives" (He got injured), which introduce emotional coloring or an implication of unexpectedness.

Russian, by contrast, exhibits three structurally different groups of passives: 1. Analytic passives with быть + short-form participle: Письмо было написано. 2. Synthetic passives, created with passive suffixes -н-, -т-, -енн-, -ан- Построенный дом, сделанная работа. 3. Reflexive passives with -ся, a uniquely productive construction: Дом строится, Книга читается легко.Reflexive passives have no direct equivalent in English, presenting difficulties for learners and translators. They often merge the meanings of passive, middle voice, and general characteristic, which sometimes requires English paraphrasing instead of literal translation. Agent Expression and Omission: In English, the agent of the action is typically expressed using by:The book was written by the author. However, the agent is frequently omitted, either because it is unknown, irrelevant, or intentionally concealed. English style guides in academic contexts even recommend omitting the agent to maintain objectivity. Russian also allows agent omission, but agent expression is markedly less common. In analytic passives, agents appear with the instrumental case (написано автором), but this construction is stylistically heavy and often avoided in everyday speech. Reflexive

passives usually do not permit an agent at all, which demonstrates how the Russian system naturally leans toward impersonal constructions.

Semantic and Pragmatic Functions: In both languages, passive constructions serve the communicative purpose of foregrounding the receiver of the action rather than the performer. However, English uses the passive much more frequently, especially in academic texts, journalism, scientific writing, and formal documents. Passive forms help maintain neutrality, depersonalization, and focus on processes rather than individuals.

Russian, on the other hand, often avoids explicit passives in contexts where English requires them. For example: English: A new bridge was built.This impersonal construction lacks a direct English equivalent and is stylistically natural for Russian. Russian speakers tend to rely on context, whereas English often relies on grammatical marking to clarify syntactic roles. Participial Systems and Morphological Differences: English has a relatively simple participial system: present participle (-ing) and past participle (-ed, irregular forms). Russian, however, has an elaborate system of active and passive participles in both present and past tenses with full and short forms, each with distinct syntactic roles. These morphological differences create challenges when translating passives from English into Russian and vice versa. Corpus studies demonstrate that English uses passive constructions at a significantly higher frequency, particularly in academic writing, media reports, and scientific articles. Russian prefers active, impersonal, and reflexive constructions. Therefore, direct translation of English passive sentences into Russian often results in unnatural phrasing unless restructured appropriately.

Implications for Translation Studies: Translation between English and Russian requires deep knowledge of differences in passive systems. English passives often need conversion into Russian actives or reflexives. Conversely, Russian reflexive passives often require English active or analytic passive equivalents. The translator must make stylistic decisions to preserve naturalness while maintaining semantic accuracy. The absence of one-to-one correspondence

emphasizes the importance of linguistic competence and cross-cultural awareness. Pedagogical Considerations: For learners, mastering passive constructions in both languages requires understanding not only grammar rules but also stylistic norms. English learners must become familiar with optional by-phrases, get-passives, and the wide use of passives in academic writing. Russian learners must navigate reflexive constructions, participial morphology, and the tendency toward agent omission.

References

1. Comrie B. Language Universals and Linguistic Typology. University of Chicago Press.

2. Quirk R., Greenbaum S., Leech G., Svartvik J. A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language. Longman.

3. Wade T. A Comprehensive Russian Grammar. Wiley-Blackwell.

4. Timberlake A. A Reference Grammar of Russian. Cambridge University Press.

5. Vinogradov V.V. Русский язык. Грамматическое учение о слове.

6. Yarceva V.N. Лингвистический энциклопедический словарь.

7. Nichols J. Slavic Morphosyntax. University of California Press.

8. Baleeva Z. Passive Constructions in Slavic Languages.

9. Halliday M. Functional Grammar and English Passive Voice Usage.