Chapter V

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This chapter discusses the voice system of English and Manipuri. The traditional grammarians of Manipur assume that Manipuri has passive voice. By showing that Manipuri word order is flexible and the object can be placed at the initial position of a sentence like that of passive sentences of English the above mentioned assumption will be countered. The present chapter will concentrate on the passive voice of English and how object emphasized sentences in Manipuri compensate for the lack of passive.

5.1 Introduction

Grammatical voice refers to a category of the verb. It is manifested in systems in which alternations in the shapes of verbs signal alternations in the configurations of nominal statuses with which verbs are in particular relationships (Klaiman, M.H. 1991). Voice-distinctions apply to verbs, and have to do with the relationship between the subject and the verbs, the verb and its object, or the verb and some other noun tied to it in an intimate way. (Hocket, 1976)
Active is the one that is said to encode the doing of an action. It is because the action notionally devolves from the standpoint of the most dynamic, or active, typically the agent. Passive voice encodes action which notionally devolves from the standpoint of a non-dynamic, typically static participant in the situation, such as the patient of a transitive verb. It is called passive because the verb is portrayed as “signifying the state of ‘being acted upon’ or suffering the effects of the action” (Lyons, 1968).

The middle voice seems to display characteristics of both the active and the passive. In a middle construction, the viewpoint is active in that the action notionally devolves from the standpoint of the most dynamic participant in the depicted situation. But the same participant has patient like characteristics as well, in that it sustains the action’s principal effects.

5.2 Voice in English

English has two voices for verbs: the active and the passive. The basic form is the active verb, and follows the SVO pattern. The passive voice is derived from the active by changing the verb to its passive form, exchanging the subject and direct object, and marking
the former subject with by. The former subject changes to objective case and becomes optional.

active: I heard the music.

passive: The music was heard (by me).

5.2.1 Passive voice

As proposed by Bresnan (1982), the passive lexical rule changes a transitive lexical form to a grammatically intransitive one operating on the underlying predicate argument structure and demoting the initial subject with concomitant promotion of the underlying object. These differences are reflected in the changed verb morphology, a passive verb phrase containing a personal inflected form of the auxiliary verb be and the passive participle of the main verb, thus forming a periphrastic construction. The object of the active clause appears as the subject of the passive clause.

It is assigned nominative case and triggers verbal agreement. The thematic roles remain unchanged. This pattern is illustrated in the following examples:

(1a) Shakespeare wrote Tempest.

(1b) Tempest was written by Shakespeare.

As Saeed (1997) points out, the active-passive alternation
affords speakers with certain flexibility in viewing thematic roles, so that a given situation can be described from the point of view of the patient rather than that of the agent. In other words, patient role is fore-grounded while the agent role can be more or less back-grounded. Passive in English can be studied under: (i) Long and short passive, and (II) Get-passive.

I Long and short passives

Long passives are those that contain the by prepositional phrase, while short passives do not. This prepositional phrase is termed internalized complement (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002).

In few cases internalised complements are not omissible, notably when they contain the verbs precede or follow used in a temporal sense, like in (2):

(2) His remark was followed by a long silence.

In the cases when this complement is used the information of the corresponding active is preserved, only the viewpoint is changed. A major constraint on the use of the internalised complement is that the passive subject must not be less familiar in the discourse than the internalised NP.
(3a) The head master's term of office expires next month. *He will be succeeded by W. Tomchaw.

(3b) W. Tomchaw will take office next month. *The current head master, K. Ibobi, will be succeeded by him.

II Get-passives

English has periphrastic passives with the auxiliary get. It is generally avoided in formal style and is much less frequent in colloquial style as well. It is only found with dynamic verbs and the use in (4b) is ungrammatical:

(4a) Obviously, the manager is feared by most of his staff.

(4b) *Obviously, the manager gets feared by most of his staff

(Huddleston and Pullum 2002).

Therefore, the usual ambiguity between dynamic and stative reading of be passives normally does not arise with get-passives. Furthermore, the substitution of be with get often leads to disambiguation, allowing only the dynamic reading.

(5a) The mirror was broken. (ambiguous)

(5b) The mirror got broken. (verbal and dynamic)

Get-passive is usually used in short passives, without an expressed agent phrase, though occurrences with it are also possible.
As Quirk et al. (1985) suggest, the tendency of avoiding the agent phrase might be accounted for by the fact that *get* normally places special emphasis on the subject referent's condition in a situation.

(6) He got sacked.

As Huddleston and Pullum (ibid.) point out, the *get*-passive tends to be preferred to the *be*-passive when the subject-referent can be construed as having an agentive role in or some responsibility for the situation. As they further state, *get* is predominantly used in passives which imply that a situation has either an adverse or beneficial effect on the subject referent.

For purely neutral situations *be* is preferred:

(7a) My necklace got stolen.
(7b) The bread was bought yesterday.
(7c) *The bread got bought yesterday.

5.2.2 Constraints on passivization in English

According to definitions the prerequisite for passivization in English is the existence of the direct object, i.e. the verb undergoing passivization has to be transitive. Although English for the most part fits this pattern, there are certain inconsistencies.
Direct objects in the form of subordinate clauses are more or less restricted in use (Quirk et al. 1985) though sometimes it is possible to externalise them.

(8a) Tim complained that it was too noisy.

(8b) *That it was too noisy was complained by Tim.

Huddleston and Pullum (2002), and Huddleston (1984) suggest that there are pragmatic constraints which make passives like (9a) felicitous and those like (9b) not. Namely, they are only felicitous if it is implied that the subject-referent has been significantly affected by the process denoted by the VP.

(9a) The hat has been sat on.
(9b) *The tree has been sat under.

Another possible constraints are those regarding transitive verbs, which nevertheless resist passivization. This can be seen from the following examples, none of which can passivize:

(10a) The book costs seven pounds.
(10b) The bag weighs twenty kilos.
(10c) That dress fits you perfectly.
(10d) Such attitude does not become you.
(10e) This detail always escapes me.
(10f) This packet contains nuts.
(10g) He has two children.
Enumerating similar examples, Huddleston and Pullum (2002) comment that since the objects in these clauses cannot be externalised, they cannot be regarded as prototypical objects. They go on to state that in spite of this it cannot be claimed that they are not objects.

5.2.3 Usage of passive

Many usage guides and teachers of English discourage the use of the passive voice because it is believed to obscure the agent or to create unnecessary ambiguity.

The passive voice may lead to vagueness, or it may obscure the cause but not the effect: e.g., *Mistakes were made* instead of *I made mistakes*. In other cases, the passive voice is less awkward and the active voice would rarely be used, possibly because the agent is implied (*He was born on August 1* rather than *his mother gave birth to him on August 1*). Sometimes, the passive voice is preferable because a writer wishes to place or maintain emphasis on the patient of the action, not for purposes of deception or concealment, but simply as a matter of style. In such cases, the agent may also be obvious, or explicitly supplied with a *by X* construction later on.
The passive voice is still commonly used in formal and business communications. Particularly in journalistic writing, science writing and law, some people consider the passive voice normal rather than a sign of deception. On the other hand, in science writing it is sometimes more convenient to use the passive voice with an implied agent, for example: *The error was found to result from contamination* instead of *We found the error to result from contamination.*

5.3 Voice in Manipuri

Unlike English, Manipuri has no passive construction. In fact, the lack of passive in Manipuri can be seen as a consequence of the fact that the semantic roles that a verb subcategorizes for are fixed and cannot be manipulated by the syntax (Chelliah, 1997).

The passive voice is preferred to place or maintain emphasis on the patient of the action. Manipuri uses fronting to achieve a similar effect. The object may be placed in the initial position as the speaker utters thing that is uppermost in his mind first as in (11b).

(11a) tombøne ram phuy

Tomba-ERG. Ram-ABS. beat-SIM.ASP.

Tomba beats Ram.
Traditional grammarians opined that Manipuri has passive voice. It is said that sentence (12a) and (12b) are passive:

(12a) the moon see-PERF.ASP.

I saw the moon.

(12b) the thief caught-PERF.ASP.

Police or the people caught the thief.

In this regard, Manipuri is a pro-drop language. The sentences (12a) and (12b) are examples of such pro-drop sentences. As the verbs are not detransitivised, the sentences (12a) and (12b) are not in passive. Traditional grammarians changed the voice in the following way:

(13) Active:

ramnø rabøn hatkhi

Ram-ERG. Ravan kill-PERF.ASP

Ram killed Ravan.
Passive:

rabənni     ramnə     hatkhibə

Ravan-COP. Ram-ERG. kill-PERF.-NZR.

It is Ravan that Ram killed.

Such sentences are described as passive by the traditional grammarians. But it is not a good observation. Firstly, the sentence they called passive is a complex sentence whereas its active is simple. Secondly, there is no passive marker in the sentence. Thirdly, Ram is still the subject of the verb hat “kill”. Therefore, such sentences are not passive.

5.3.1 Causative voice

If the morphological causative form acts as a valency increasing operation we can say that there is causative voice. In Manipuri, it is taken as voice since it is derived from ordinary verbs regularly and these derivative verbs change the rules for cases.

(14) Active:

tombe-Ø     layrik-Ø     pare

Tomba-ERG. book-ABS. read-PERF.ASP.

Tomba read the book.
Causative:

tombəde layrik-Ø pa-hən-le

_Tomba-DAT. book-ABS. read-CAUS.-PERF.ASP._

_(They) made Tomba read the book._

When the causative voice is applied to a verb, its valency increases by one. It is the voice operation where one of the arguments is demoted to an oblique argument.

(15a) Active:

tombe-Ø phi-Ø suri

_Tomba-ERG. clothes-ABS. wash-PROG.ASP._

_Tomba is washing the clothes._

Causative:

tombəde phi-Ø su-han-li

_Tomba-DAT. clothes-ABS. wash-CAUS.-PROG.ASP._

_(They) are making Tomba wash the clothes._

(15b) Active:

øy-Ø cak-Ø thɔŋŋi

_I-ERG. meal-ABS. cook-SIM.ASP._

_I cook meal._
Causative: eyJno29nde  cak-∅  thoŋ-han-li

I-PP.-DAT.  meal-ABS.  cook-CAUS.-SIM.ASP.

They make me cook meal.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the systems of the voice in English and Manipuri are presented. The descriptions throw some light on the similarities and differences between the two systems. Some main differences are again discussed here.

The English passive voice is used in formal and business communications. In science writing it is sometimes more convenient to use the passive voice with an implied agent. By contrast, Manipuri does not have passive construction. It emphasized the object by placing it to the initial position without detransitivising the verb.

(16a) English: Ram was beaten

(16b) Manipuri:

ram-bu  phubire

Ram-EMPH.  beat-PERF.ASP.

Someone beat Ram.
An intransitive verb that appears active but expresses a passive action characterizes the English middle voice, although, it is not a grammatical voice.

(17a) Mango sold here.
(17b) The casserole cooked in the oven.

*Sold* and *cooked* are syntactically active but semantically passive, putting it in the middle voice.

There is no such voice in Manipuri.

(18a) u yanle
tree cut-PERF.ASP.

Someone cut the tree.

(18b) dhuk cakle
incense stick burn-PERF.ASP.

(Fire) burned the incense stick.

The sentences (18a) and (18b) seem to be in the middle voice. But, as Manipuri allows subject to be dropped, these sentences are same as other subject dropped sentences.

Subjects are the obligatory feature of English sentences. On the other hand, being a subject-optional language, Manipuri allows several subject dropped constructions. Manipuri uses fronting that is
placing the subject in the initial position. It maintains emphasis on the patient of the action and compensates for the ‘deficiencies’ of the passive system.

There is no causative voice in English. The causitivity in English is lexical. By contrast, Manipuri has both the lexical and morphological causitivity. The morphological causitivity can be discussed as voice as done in this thesis.