

## The Passive Voice in German and its Semantic Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

*The article discusses the degree of the passive voice of a German verb through a semantic analysis, addressing its formation and syntactic functions in a sentence. The category of degree of a verb in the German language is one of the problematic issues that has attracted the attention of linguists. The degree category of the verb in German is divided into Active and Passive. The exit of an action from the subject and its direction to the object, or vice versa, the performer of the action remains outside the main focus, and the connections between action and object are analyzed.*

**Keywords:** Subject, object, predicative relation, active, passive, stative.

### INTRODUCTION

When describing an event or phenomenon in the real world and providing information about it, the primary focus is on the realization of the action, the subject of the action, and the object associated with the action. In language, such subjective, objective, and predicative relationships are expressed through lexical units used to express the speaker's own thoughts and attitudes regarding an event are expressed in two forms: active and passive construction.

When we familiarize ourselves with the views of German linguists on the category of degree of a verb, we can see that, despite the fact that this issue has a history of deep study in

German linguistics, there is still no consensus on this linguistic matter, and different opinions have been expressed regarding it. For example, in an active sentence, verb actions play a significant role in the relationship between the subject and the object. In passive sentences, on the contrary, the main focus is on the event, while the subject and the object involved in the action take a secondary role, and sometimes they are not even mentioned" [1], W. Flämig, however, suggests that in passive sentences, linguistic phenomena are not related to the performer of the action in the event or are reflected independently of their participation [2]. In E. Schendels's monograph titled "Passive and Stative Positions," dedicated to the study of German grammar, the degree category of a verb is divided into three categories (Active, Passive, Stative) based on the relationship between the subject and the object of the action [4].

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Thus, in the German language we aim to analyze, the degree category of the verb is mainly divided into active, passive, and stative (in some sources it is called Zustandspassiv or sein+Partizip II Passiv). In an active sentence, the action originates from the subject, meaning that the subject of the verb is the performer of the action. In a passive sentence, attention is focused on the result of the action's execution, and the object's reaction to the action is determined by its impact.

For example:

**Active:** *Der Junge liest das Buch.*

**Passive:** *Das Buch wird vom Jungen gelesen.*

**Stative:** *Das Buch ist vom Jungen gelesen.*

As can be seen from the examples, in the Active construction, the subject is the main operator of the verb, and *das Buch*, used in the accusative case, denotes the object. In the passive construction, on the contrary, the object affected by the action in the active sentence, *das Buch*, acts as the subject, while the active-level subject, *der Junge*, becomes the object of the passive

sentence by being used together with the preposition *von* (*vom Jungen, mit, durch, or von*).

In sentences presented in the Stative (Zustand) form, the subject and object remain outside the conversation participants' attention, with the main focus being on the state of action.

Although the active and passive constructions in German, which we intend to study through morphosyntactic analysis, describe the same event, we can clearly see their distinctive differences in their syntactic and semantic structure. That is, in the Active construction, the subject is the performer of an action directed at the object (*Der Junge liest das Buch*). In the Passive construction, in the sentence *Das Buch wird von dem Jungen gelesen*, the object is influenced by the action initiated by the subject. Although it functions as the subject of the sentence, it cannot express the role of the subject performing the action.

#### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In scientific sources, we can see opinions suggesting that the Passive is considered a secondary phenomenon compared to the Active. For example, according to S. D. Katsnelson, a passive construction is not only syntactically manifested as a transformation of the Active but can also be explained by the presence of an active relationship. He emphasizes the need to minimize structural changes in the language when subjectively evaluating passivity within the language system [7].

Studying the degree category of a verb in Old Russian, the renowned Russian linguist T. P. Lomtev states that "The subject and object within a sentence, influenced by verb-predicate relationships, express the content of an action directed in opposite directions, but the sentence structure remains clear and understandable. This demonstrates that active and passive constructions syntactically complement each other and share the same semantic meaning" [8].

A. V. Desnickaya and S. D. Katsnelson, paying special attention to the subject-object relationship in case rules, emphasize that these relationships are context-dependent. In their opinion, the functions of the subject and object often stem from

the context. For example, in a passive construction the primary position of the subject changes. Although the lexical meaning of the verb does not change when transitioning to an indefinite construction, semantic changes in subject-object functions are noticeable [6].

A. V. Desnitskaya and S. D. Kanselson classify the semantic content of subject-object relations as a morphological category. Because the very concept of “subject-object connection” proves that this verb category belongs to syntax.

A. V. Desnitskaya, who devoted her main scientific research in linguistics to studying the relationship between objects used in the accusative case in the Albanian language and the subject, writes that the event expresses specific positions of action - this is the degree category of the verb. In particular, in her opinion, this case, as a direct object, embodies the degree category of the verb, along with the categories of transitive and intransitive verbs. The accusative case, the transitive/affirmative category of the verb, and the category of degree appear as grammatical systems that complement each other's meanings, and their semantic meanings are only interconnected [5].

As is customary in traditional linguistics, in German, the accusative case usually governs direct objects used with transitive verbs. That is, the transitive verb requires a direct object in the accusative case, and when a sentence in an active construction is transformed into a passive construction, the direct object becomes the subject in the nominative case. However, in the scientific work *Entwicklung der verbalen Genuskontraste in den germanischen Sprachen*, published by M. M. Kuhmann in 1983, the accusative case, together with the direct object, conveyed the meanings of the adverbial modifier in his scholarly works on ancient Indo-European and Greek languages. Later, a verb governance system developed in the language where the accusative case served exclusively as a direct object. As a result of this governance system, a sentence in the active voice can be transformed into a passive voice, and vice versa. By transforming the object of a sentence in the active voice, we can turn it into the subject of a passive sentence [3].

Similar hypotheses about the direct object and subject of verbs in Indo-European languages can also be seen in North Germanic-Scandinavian languages. In the ancient period of these languages, the accusative case was shown to function not as a direct object, but as an adverbial modifier of the sentence. For example, in ancient Icelandic, the accusative case was used to express various forms of adverbial modifiers such as direction (*alla-vega* - from all sides), duration in time, and location (*kann for dag ok nott* - he walked a lot, but walked profusely), and so on. Later, the differential representation of relationships between words in Scandinavian languages (Icelandic, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, and Faroese) led to the creation a new system for expressing syntactic relations. Based on the fact that the accusative case governs the direct object, the nominative case in Germanic languages, including Scandinavian, differs from its current form of articulation. The question of degree of indefiniteness has not been fully developed and has only served to denote the subject of the action.

#### CONCLUSION

Thus, as a result of familiarizing ourselves with the scientific literature devoted to the in-depth study of linguistics, we observe the expansion of the functional scope of the nominative case. It is used to denote both the subject and the object of the nominative case. Based on in-depth research conducted by linguists in the field of historical-comparative linguistics, the idea that direct object, which traditionally governed the accusative case, also performs the function of an adverbial modifier has been refuted, and we can see that the accusative case forms a verb governance system, serving exclusively as a direct object.

From the above points, the categories of “active” and “passive” allow the narrator of an event to reflect the action in various ways. While the active sentence provides precise information about the participant in the event (the performer of the action, the agent carrying it out), the passive sentence emphasizes the process of the event (the result of the action). For

this reason, in some sources, we can see that the German word "*werden* is also called "process passiv."

Thus, the Passive category is a type of approach that focuses on how the action describing the event occurred or was implemented when the performer of the action is either considered unimportant or deliberately left unnamed.

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