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Vũ Thị Ngọc Mai

SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATION

S	Subject
O	Object
V	Verb
V _{intens}	Intensive verb
V _{monotrans}	Monotransitive verb
V _{complex trans}	Complex transitive verb
V _{ditrans}	Ditransitive verb
V _{intrans}	Intransitive verb
O _i	Indirect object
O _d	Direct object
A _{place}	Place of adverb
C _s	Subject complement
C _o	Object complement
V _{act}	Active verb
V _{pass}	Passive verb
Egg	Example

Square bracket [] round the number indicates the number of the reference books listed in the references. When there are two numbers in the square bracket separated by a semicolon, egg: [1986:243], the former number indicates the year that the book was published, the later indicates the page.

The symbol / (oblique stroke) is used to separate alternative words, phrase or term.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

With the development of human being, a means of communication should be set to connect people closer. English has become an international communication. The fact that the English language is widely spoken all around the world draws the attention of many linguists, to become fluent in which the language now is one of the essential demands of most English learners. However, it is not easy to achieve this because the language can sometimes cause them a lot of trouble with its grammar, structures, vocabularies, and pronunciation, etc. I think that English grammar is of great importance and difficulty and that one does not know much of it, he can not use English to communicate easily.

Realizing and thinking highly of the importance of English grammar, I decided to pick it out for the study of my graduation paper. However, due to the limitation of time and knowledge, I will just spend time concentrating on the study of an issue of English grammar called “The passive voice”.

I hope that it will become useful for those who study English Grammar in general and the passive voice in particular.

2. Aims of the study

The study “A study on passive voice in English and in Vietnamese” attempts to:

1. Introduce passive voice and the way to change active into passive.
2. Give the list of their usage.
3. Present and classify some special forms of the passive voice in English.

4. Find out the similarities and differences in structure, function and meaning of the passive voice in English and its Vietnamese equivalent.
5. Anticipate some problems that may lead to difficulties likely to be expressed by Vietnamese learners and confusion made by Vietnamese learners in studying English and reading their course books.
6. Suggest some sorts exercises with the hope to prevent the errors and overcome the consequence of interference.

3. Methods of the study

The main purpose of this study is to find out the passive voice in English and in Vietnamese. The result of this study will help to make language learning and teaching more effective. To realize this, the writer has used the collecting and analyzing methods in this study.

Firstly, collecting method is used to find out all the passive voice from a variety of books and valuable resources such as internet, graduation papers, etc.

Secondly, examples are used to illustrate given information which are extracted from a variety of textbooks and resources.

In addition, comparison is indispensable method to point out similarities and differences of passive voice in English and in Vietnamese.

4. Scope of the study

Due to limitation of time, I can not cover all the points relating to the passive voice in English and in Vietnamese. Therefore, I decide to raise these following questions to discuss:

1. What is the form of passive voice? How does active change into passive voice?
2. How can the passive voice be used?
3. How many special kinds of passive voice?

4. What are the errors made by learners when using passive voice?
And how are these errors eliminated?

The first question is concerned with the form of the passive voice and the way to change active into passive voice.

The second question is concerned with the use of passive voice.

The third question is concerned with the some special forms with passive meaning.

The last question is concerned with the way to use passive voice correctly.

5. Design of the study

My study is divided into three main parts:

Part one is the introduction, which gives the reason for choosing the topic of this study, pointing out aims of conducting the study, making out the methods applied, limiting the study and giving out the design of the study as well.

Part two refers to the main content that consists of three chapters:

Chapter I discusses the theoretical preliminaries in which attention is paid to the comparison between passive and active voice, the relation between transitivity and voice, tense, aspect and mood, semantic differences between active and passive voice and kinds of verb.

Chapter II is the main part of the study. It describes the way to change active into passive, the forms and the use of the passive. Some special forms and voice restrictions are also presented.

Chapter III, the passive voice in English through contrastive analysis with Vietnamese, consists of some problems such as: frequency of usage, some remarks on Vietnamese, the differences and the similarities between two languages.

Chapter IV, some mistakes made by Vietnamese learners and suggested ways of overcoming these mistakes.

Part three offers the overview of the study and gives conclusion.

PART TWO: DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

I.1. Sentence

I.1.1. Definition

To deal with the notion of sentence, there are many grammarians giving their own ideas.

“A sentence is a complete unit of meaning. When we speak, our sentences may be extremely involved or even unfinished, yet we can still convey our meaning through intonation, gesture, facial expression, etc. When we write, these devices are not available, so sentences have to be carefully structured and punctuated. A written sentence must begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop (.), a question mark (?) or an exclamation mark (!).

[Alexander,1988:2]

According to Modern English, sentence consists of two immediate constituents: subject and predicate.

[Rayevska, 1976:172]

In linguistics, a sentence is an expression in natural language – a grammatical and lexical unit consisting of one or more words, representing distinct and differentiated concepts, and combined to form a meaningful statement, question, request, command, etc.

[[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sentence_\(linguistics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sentence_(linguistics))]

Personally, the researcher is in favor of Rayevska's definition about sentence because it seems to refer to her study in passive voice in English and explain why she introduces sentence.

I.1.2. Classification of sentence

According to syntactic, sentence can be divided into four major classes:

- STATEMENTS are sentences in which the subject: is always present and generally precedes the verb:

Egg: *John will speak to the boss today.*

- QUESTIONS are sentences marked by one or more of these three criteria:

The placing of the operator immediately in front of the subject:

Egg: *Will John speak to the boss today?*

The initial positioning of an interrogative or wh-element:

Egg: *Who will you speak to?*

Rising intonation:

Egg: *You will speak to the boss?*

- COMMANDS are sentences which normally have no overt grammatical subject, and whose verb is in the imperative:

Egg: *Speak to the boss today.*

- EXCLAMATIONS are sentences which have an initial phrase introduced by what or how, without inversion of subject or operator:

Egg: *What a noise they are making!*

[Quirk,1985:190]

According to elements, we can usefully distinguish seven clause types:

(1) SVA S V_{intens} P_{alace}
 Mary is in the house

(2) SVC S V_{intens} C_s
 Mary is kind

(3)SVO S V_{monotrans} O_d

Somebody caught the ball

(4) SVOA S V_{complex trans} O_d A_{place}

I put the plate on the table

(5) SVOC S V_{complex trans} O_d C_o

We have proved him a fool

(6) SVOO S V_{ditrans} O_i O_d

She gives me expensive presents

(7) SV S V_{intrans}

The child laughed

[Quirk,1985:166]

I.2. Passive and active voice compared

Rayevska, L.M. et al [1976:118] suggested that: “ languages differ greatly in their idiosyncrasies, it means, in the form which they have adopted, in the peculiarities of their usage’s in the combinative power of words and idiomatic forms of grammar peculiar to that language and not generally found in other languages”. From this point of view the category of voice presents a special linguistic interest. As a grammatical category, voice is the form of verb which shows the relation between the action and its subject indicating whether the action is performed by the subject or passes on to it. Thus, there are two voices in English: the active and the passive. The active and the passive relation involve two grammatical “levels”: the verb phrase and the clause.

In comparison between active and passive voice clauses, according to Jacobs Roderick A. [1995:160], there are three major differences of interest to us.

The first is in the form of the verb. The verb in the active voice clause is its ordinary past tense form whereas in the passive voice clause the verb unit is a sequence of a form of the copular verb “*be*” plus the past participle form. In the

passive clause, the verb includes within itself the information that there is an agent. Prepositional phrases are useful containers for the agent because they are most always optional constituents.

The second difference is the possibility of omitting the agent argument when it occurs in a prepositional phrase.

The third way in which passive clauses differ from active clauses is the order of the constituents. In the passive clause the theme noun phrase comes before the verb when it is the subject, but in active clause the theme comes after its verb since it is the object.

The marked passive form is said to derive from the active by means of a transformation

These changes can be presented as follows:

Active: *I wrote a letter.*

Passive: *A letter **was written** by me.*

Transformational relations for voice may be symbolized as follows:

$$N_1 + V_{act} + N_2 \leftrightarrow N_2 + V_{pass} + by + N_1$$

The choice of the passive construction is often because of the fact that the agent is unknown or the speaker prefers not to speak of him. The verb must be transitive and be followed by a grammatical object for passive voice to be used. This means that if you do not know the actor (who did it) or the agent (who caused it) of the process represented by the verb phrase of the predicator, or wish to avoid saying who or what it was, you can do so by using a passive clause. Many passives occur in texts without the prepositional phrase with “by”.

The similarity between passive and active voice is thought to be semantic one the sentences are paraphrases in as much as it would.

[Rayevska, 1976:119]

I.3. Tense, Aspect and Mood

I.3.1. Tense

Time is universal, non linguistic concept with three divisions: past, present and future. By *tense* we understand the correspondence between the form of the verb and our concept of time.

[Quirk, 1985:39]

In modern English, as well as in many other languages, verbal forms imply not only subtle shade object of time distinction but serve for other purposes, too. They are also often marked for person and number, for mood, voice and aspect.

[Rayevska, 1976:99]

Uses of tense:

- At the most basic level, past tense marks situations as distanced either in time or reality from the speaker or writer, while present tense (the absence of past tense) indicates the absence of such distancing.
- The difference between the present and past tense forms of the questions is not one of the time distance but of the social distance. The past tense indicates greater social distance, making the question seem less confrontational.

[Jacobs, 1995:192-193]

We generally distinguish *finite* and *non-finite* forms of the verb:

- The grammatical nature of the finite forms may be characterized by the following six with reference to:

	Person	I read : : He reads
	Number	She reads : : They read She was : : They were

	time relations	I write : : I wrote
	mood	If he knows it now : : If he knew it now.
	the aspect character of the verb	She was dancing for half an hour <durative aspect> : : She danced
	voice distinction	We invited him : : He was invited I asked : : I was asked.

The non-finites are: the infinitives, the gerunds and the participles. The following, for instance, is non-finites of the regular verb: *to paint*

Non-progressive infinitive	Active	to paint
	Passive	to be painted
	Active perfect	to have painted
	Passive perfect	to have been painted
Progressive infinitive	Active	to be painting
	Active perfect	to have been painting
Gerund	Active	painting
	Passive	being painted
	Active perfect	having painted
	Passive perfect	having been painted
Participle: Present	Active	painting
	Passive	being painted
	perfect Active	having painted
	Passive	having been painted
past	-----	painted

[Rayevska, 1976:100]

I.3.2. Aspect

English has two such aspects, perfect and progressive. Perfect aspect is shown in the verb phrase by means of the verb *have*. When *have* is used to indicate aspect, the verb immediately following it must be in its past participle form, the so-called *-en* form. Perfect aspect was shown like this:

Tense		have (be) V-ed
modal		

Egg: *The two schools **have merged**.*

Progressive aspect is shown in the verb phrase by means of the verb *be*, which, when used to indicate aspect, requires the verb immediately following it to be in its present participle form, the so-called *-ing* form. Progressive aspect was shown like this:

Be

<-ing>

Egg: *Joyce Smaby **was eating** the pumpkin.*

Let's see what happens when the two aspects occur together. The possible combinations of tense, aspect, and voice shows the perfect aspect always preceding progressive aspect, as well as passive be <-en>:

TENSE		have	(be)	(be)	V...
modal					
to					

This allows such combinations as the following, with a modal and perfect and progressive aspects:

*Joyce Smaby **may have be** be very careful about the publicity.*

<-en> <-ing>

Since a modal requires the infinitive without *to* to follow it, the perfect aspect have remains have, while the <-en> converts progressive be into been and the <-ing> converts the main verb be into being:

Joyce Smaby may have been being very careful about the publicity.

[Jacobs, 1995:200]

I.3.3. Mood

The most common view is that in Modern English, there are three moods, Indicative, Subjunctive and Imperative which keep distinct in English in the same clear way as in many other languages.

- a. Indicative Mood: are used to present predication as reality, as a fact. This predication need not necessarily be true but the speaker presents it as being so. It is not relevant for the purpose of our grammatical analysis to account for the ultimate truth or untruth of a statement with its predicate expressed by a verb. The form of verb of Indicative mood is used in declarative sentences or in questions

He arrived home two days ago.

- b. Imperative Mood: serves to express request which in different contexts may range from categorical order or command to entreaties. Imperative Mood is used only in the second person singular and plural. The Imperative Mood may take over the function of the Subjunctive Mood.

Say what you will, I shall have my own way.

Say what you would, I should have my own way.

- c. Subjunctive Mood: The formal mark of the Subjunctive is the absence of inflection for the third person singular except in the verb to be, where it has full conjugation. In Modern English the subjunctive is almost out of use except a few well-established phrases such as:

Long live peace and friendship among nations!

[Rayevska, 1976:110]

God save the Queen !

[Quirk, 1985:50]

Mood, closely related to the problem of modality, is a grammatical category which expresses the relation of the action to reality as stated by the speaker.

There is the fact that the category of mood is one of the most controversial problems of English theoretical grammar – the distinction between the real and the unreal expressed by the corresponding form of the verb.

[1976:108]

I.4. Semantic differences between active and passive voice

So far, we have assumed that active and passive voice clauses and their passive counterparts have the same meaning or at least the same propositional content. But for some certain active-passive clause pairs, this consumption is not correct. The first difference is evidently the result of the relative order of the two quantifiers <five> and <three> in two sentences below, not the active-passive distinction itself.

1. *Five students in that room spoke three languages.*

2. *Three languages **are spoken** by five students in that room.*

In (1), the active clause easily allows an interpretation in which up to fifteen different languages were known by the five students; on the other hand, in (2) it is more easily interpreted as being about just three specific languages.

There are also differences in the interpretation of active and passive pairs which contain the negative form of some modal verbs such as: “*will*” and “*can*”. The modal “*will*” and its negative form *won't*”, can express prediction or volition in the active form. In contrast, the passive counterpart of the active clause has the prediction interpretation, but can not be understood as indicating that it is subject refusal. It seems that the refusal sense can only be predicated of the subject argument. What about “*can*” and “*can't*”? These modals include permission and ability. So the clause: “Mary can't paint the door” can mean

either that Mary doesn't have permission to paint the door or that Mary lacks the ability to paint the door. Consider the passive counterpart: "*The door can't be painted by Mary*". This can mean that permission and possibility but in a passive sentence it is used to express the possibility: The road may be blocked. Sometimes there are shifts in the range of meaning as in:

I shall read the book tonight.

The book shall be read tonight.

In short, the passive voice clause and their active counterparts have the same propositional content. The choice between them normally depends on many factors like the topic organization of the discourse and the speaker's beliefs about what the addressee already knows.

[Jacob, 1995:169]

I.5. Kinds of the Verb

I.5.1. Dynamic and Stative Verb

The system of English verb is considered to be the most complex grammatical structure of the language.

[Rayevska, 1976:99]

According to Quirk [1985:45], dynamic verbs have 5 subclasses namely:

1. Activity verbs: *abandon, ask, beg, call, drink, eat, help, learn, listen, look at, play, rain, read, say, slice, throw, whisper, work, write, etc.*
2. Process verbs: *change, deteriorate, grow, mature, slow down, widen, etc.*

Both activity and process verbs are frequently used in progressive aspect to indicate incomplete events in progress.

3. Verbs of bodily sensation (*ache, feel, hurt, itch, etc*) can have either simple or progressive aspect with little difference in meaning.

4. Transitional event verbs (*arrive, die, fall, land, leave, lose, etc*) occur in the progressive but with a change of meaning compared with simple aspect. The progressive implies inception, i.e. only the approach to the transition.
5. Momentary verbs (*hit, jump, kick, knock, nod, tap, etc*) have little duration, and thus the progressive aspect powerfully suggests repetition

There are two subclasses of stative verbs:

1. Verbs of inert perception and cognition: *abhor, adore, astonish, believe, desire, detest, dislike, doubt, fell, forgive, guess, hate, hear, imagine, impress, intend, know, like, love, mean, mind, perceive, please, prefer, presuppose, realize, recall, recognize, regard, remember, satisfy, see, smell, suppose, taste, think, understand, want, wish, etc.* Some of these verbs may take other than a recipient subject, in which case they belong with the activity verbs.
2. Relational verbs: *apply to (every one), be, belong to, concern, consist of, contain, cost, depend on, deserve, equal, fit, have, include, involve, lack, matter, need, owe, own, posses, remain (a bachelor), require, resemble, seem, sound, suffice, tend, etc.*

The state versus nonstate distinction is a very significant one for English predicates. Like their active voice counterpart, many passive forms reveal the stative – dynamic distinction. The passive is sometimes described as typically emphasizing the state resulting from some prior action, but this description is inadequate for the following passive:

*The village **was surrounded** by coniferous trees.*

*The village **was (quickly) surrounded** by the guerrillas.*

*The area of settlement **was separated** from the rest of the region by a mountain range.*

*The area of settlement **was separated** from the nucleus by physicists using laser beams.*

The first sentence in each pair contains a stative passive, one that refers to a state not resulting from any prior action, while the second contains a dynamic passive, referring to both the state and the prior action.

The passive differ in word order from their active voice counterparts. There are, however, a few verbs that, when used statively, allow their noun phrases to stay in the same slots whether they are active or passive:

*The kneebone **connects** to the thighbone.*

*The kneebone **is connected** to the thighbone.*

In isolation the passive voice forms of such predicates are ambiguous between the stative and a dynamic interpretation. This insertion of *by* followed by an agent argument forces the dynamic interpretation.

*The kneebone **was connected** by the surgeon to the thighbone.*

But the active voice forms, which do not permit a *by* agent have only the stative interpretation.

[Jacob, 1995:164-165]

I.5.2. Intensive and Extensive Verb

Basing on the relationship between the verbs and other elements in the clause we distinguish the verbs into intensive and extensive verbs.

- Intensive verbs: are the verbs that take subject complement or obligatory adverbial.

*He **is** good.*

*He **is** in Hanoi.*

- Extensive verbs: are the verbs that do not take subject complement or adverbial.

*John **heard** the explosion.*

I.5.2.1. Transitive and Intransitive Verb

Verbs carry the idea of being or action in the sentence.

*I **am** a student.*

*The student **passed** all their courses.*

As we will see on this page, verbs are classified in many ways. First, some verbs require an object to complete their meaning: “She gave ____?” Gave what? She gave money to the church. These verbs are called *transitive*. Verbs that are *intransitive* do not require objects: “The building collapsed”. In English, we can not tell the difference between a transitive and intransitive verb by its form; we have to see how the verb is functioning within the sentence. In fact, a verb can be both transitive and intransitive: “ The monster collapsed the building by sitting on it”.

[<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/verbs.htm>]

I.5.2.2. Monotransitive, Ditransitive and Complex Transitive Verb

1. Monotransitive

A monotransitive verb is a verb that takes two arguments: a subject and a single direct object, such as *buy, bite, break, eat*, etc.

The following examples show monotransitive verbs in sentences:

*He **broke** the toothpick.*

*The chef **ate** his own watermelon soup.*

[<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monotransitive>]

2. Ditransitive

In grammar, a ditransitive verb is a verb which takes a subject and two objects. According to certain linguistics considerations, these objects may be called direct and indirect, or primary and secondary. This is in contrast to monotransitive verbs, which take only one direct object.

*He **gave** Mary ten dollars.*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ditransitive_verb]

3. Complex transitive

A verb that takes a direct object plus an object complement.

Egg: A verb in an SVOC structure:

*Let's **paint** the town red.*

*They **made** him leader.*

[<http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1O28-complextansitiveverb.html>]

I.5.2.3. Copulative Verb

A linking verb (sometimes referred to as a copulative verb by grammarians) is a special class of intransitive verbs. It is a verb used to equate, identify, or join together one interchangeable substantive with another. It connects the subject of the sentence with a coordinating (or complementary) predicate. As with other intransitive verbs, there is no direct object since there is no action transferred. An example of linking verbs would be any form of the words “is” or “become”.

There are some types of copulative verbs:

1. Verbs of the senses: *feel, smell, taste, etc.*

*The cake **tastes** delicious.*

2. Verbs of appearance: *appear, look, seem, etc.*

*Anna **appears** to be happy.*

3. Verbs of action: *grow, turn, etc.*

*George **grew** tall gradually.*

4. *Become*

*John **became** subject doctor.*

5. *Stay and remain*

*George **stayed** president for one year.*

CHAPTER II: PASSIVE VOICE AND PASSIVE CONSTRUCTION

II.1. The way to change active into passive

According to Martinet & Thomson [1997:263] “The passive of an active tense is formed by putting the verb *to be* into the same tense as the active verb and adding the past participle of the active verb. The subject of the active verb becomes the *agent* of the passive verb, when it is mentioned it is preceded by “by” and placed at the end of the clause”.

Passive voice = to be + past participle (P_{II})

Egg: Active: they destroyed the building.

Passive : The building *was destroyed*.

We can see that the object “*the building*” of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive one. And the verb “*destroyed*” in the active sentence becomes “*was destroyed*” in the passive one. So why can the verb be changed like this? In the passive sentence, the form is “*be + past participle*”. The verb “*be*” must be “*was*” because the subject “*the building*” is singular and the tense is the past. Thus, the past participle of “*destroy*” is “*destroyed*”. It is the reason why that the verb has to be changed into “*was destroyed*”.

II.2. Forms of the passive

II.2.1. The affirmative form

A passive verb has a form of *be* and a past participle. “*Be*” is in the same tense as the equivalent active form.

a. Simple tenses (simple form of *be* + past participle)

Egg: *Large numbers of people are killed on the roads.*

b. The perfect (perfect of *be* + past participle)

Egg: *The drugs had been loaded onto the ship in Ecuador.*

c. The continuous (continuous of *be* + past participle)

Egg: *Three men were being questioned by detectives last night.*

d. Will and be going to (future of *be* + past participle)

Egg: *The drugs **will be destroyed**.*

*The men **are going to be charged with importing cocaine**.*

[Eastwood, 1994:135]

In general, we do not use future progressive and perfect progressive to form passive voice. We usually avoid saying “be-being”. So they are rare and impossible.

• Other pattern forms:

- Conditional form: would be + P_{II}

*I wish the phone **would be answered**.*

- Perfect conditional: would have been + P_{II}

*The work **would have been done** if I had had enough time.*

- Present infinitive: to be + P_{II}

*He hates **to be criticized**.*

- Perfect infinitive: to have been + P_{II}

*The newsagent's subject **has been broken into**.*

- Perfect participle/gerund: being + P_{II}

*He **may be being interviewed** at this very moment.*

- Perfect participle: having been + P_{II}

*Money was admitted **having been stolen**.*

[Alexander, 1988:242]

II.2.2. The negative form: is built up in the same way as in active sentence, in the negative “not” come after the (first) auxiliary.

[Eastwood, 1994:135]

Egg: *Rome **was not built** in a day.*

II.2.3. The interrogative form: is built up by placing the (first) auxiliary verb before the subject of the sentence.

Yes- No question

Egg: *Has the law **been changed**?*

[Eastwood, 1994:135]

Wh- question

Egg: *Who **was it painted** by?*

[Thomson, 1986:265]

II.3 The use of the passive

II.3.1. The topic

Let's consider the following examples:

- *Thomson discovered the electron.*
- *The electron **was discovered** by Thomson.*

It can be easy to know that the two sentences above have the same meaning, but they have different topic: they are about different things. The topic of the first sentence is "Thomson", and the topic of the second is "the electron". In active voice, the focus of interest is on the agent or the doer/performer of the action (Thomson), but in passive voice the focus of interest is on the action or the receiver of the action (the electron).

[Eastwood, 1994:132]

II.3.2. New information

A sentence contains a topic and also new information about the topic. The new information usually come at or near the end of the sentence and is the point of interest.

[1994:132]

Egg: *I was surprised by the news.*

[Hewings,1999:58]

In passive sentence the point of interest can be other information such as time, place, manner or instrument.

Egg: *The gas should be lit with a match.*

[1994:132]

II.3.3. Passive sentence without an agent

In a passive sentence we mention the agent only if it is important information. There is often no need to mention it.

Egg: *Nine million cigarettes are smoked.*

There is no need to say that nine million cigarettes are smoked by smokers all over the world. So we do not need use “by + agent”.

[1994:132]

Sometimes we don't know, or don't know exactly, or have forgotten who did the action.

Egg: *The minister was murdered.*

[Thomson, 1986:266]

In spoken English we often use a subject such as people, somebody, they, we or you even we don not know who the agent is. In formal English, particularly writing, we often prefer to use a passive.

Egg: *The new computer system is being installed next month.*

[Hewings, 1999]

II.3.4. Typical contexts for the passive

We can use the passive in speech, but it is more common in writing, especially in impersonal style of textbook and reports.

[Eastwood, 1994:133]

- Formal notices and announcements

Egg: *Candidates **are required** to present themselves fifteen minutes before the examination begins. They **are asked** to be punctual. Passengers **are requested** to remain seated until the aircraft come to a complete stop.*

- Press report

Egg: *The search for the bank robbers continues. Meanwhile, many people **have been questioned** and the owner of the stolen get away car **has been traced**.*

- Headlines, advertisements, notices, act.

Egg: ***KENEDY ASSASSINATED! TRADE AGREEMENTS BROKEN! PRICES SLASHED! ALL GOODS REDUCED! PETROL COUPONS ACCEPTED***

- Scientific writing (to describe process)

Egg: *The mixture **is placed** in a crucible and **is heated** to a temperature of 300⁰C. **It is then allowed** to cool before it can analyze.*

[Alexander,1988:246]

II.4. Some special forms with passive meaning

II.4.1. Modal verb in the passive

We can use the passive with a modal verb (or an expression like have to). The pattern is:

Modal verb + be+ past participle

[1994:136]

Egg: *The doors **must/should be shut**.*

[Thomson, 1986:263]

A modal verb can also go with the perfect and the passive together. The pattern is:

Modal verb + have been + past participle (P_{II})

Egg: *The plane **might have been delayed** by the fog.*

[Eastwood, 1994:136]

II.4.2. The passive with *get*

In colloquial speech *get* is sometimes used instead of *be*:

Egg: *You'll **get** (=be) **sacked** if you take any more time off.*

[Thomson, 1986:265]

We use the passive with *get* mainly in informal English, and it has a more limited use than *be*. The passive with *get* expresses action and change, not a state. It often refers to something happening by accident, unexpectedly or incidentally.

NOT: *Wembly Stadium **got built** in 1923.*

[1994:136]

Besides that, we use “get” when:

- We do something to ourselves

Egg: *I **got dressed** as quickly as I could.*

- We manage to arrange something in our favor. Reflexive pronouns can often be used in such cases.

Egg: *I **was not surprised** when she got elected after all the efforts she made.*

- something often unfavorable happens beyond our control.

Egg: *We **got delayed** because of the holiday traffic.*

[Alexander,1988:245]

II.4.3. The passive with verbs of reporting

- Let me take note the following example:

Active: *They say that elephants have good memories.*

Passive: ***It is said that** elephants have good memories.*

*Elephants **are said** to have good memories.*

- There are four patterns with verbs of reporting

(1) It + passive verb + finite clause

This pattern is often used in news reports where there is no need to mention the source of the information.

[Eastwood, 1994:138]

Egg: *It is said that there is plenty of oil off our coast.*

It is feared that many lives have been lost in the train crash.

[Thomson, 1986:245]

In this pattern we can use these verbs:

Admit	Declare	Hope	Propose	Show
Agree	Discover	Intend	Prove	State
Allege	Establish	Know	Recommend	Suggest
Announce	Estimate	Mention	Regret	Suppose
Assume	Expect	Notice	Report	Think
Believe	Explain	Object	Request	understand
Claim	Fear	Observe	Reveal	
Consider	Feel	Presume	Say	
decide	Find	Promise	see	

(2) Subject + passive verb + to-infinitive

An alternative to it + passive verb + That-clause is to use subject + passive verb + to-infinitive.

Egg: *It had been thought that the chemicals convey important information to the brain.*

=> *The chemicals had been thought to convey important information to the brain.*

[Hewings, 1999:32]

In this pattern, we can use these verbs:

Allege	Declare	Feel	Observe	Show
Assume	Discover	Find	Presume	Suppose
Believe	Estimate	Intend	Reveal	Think
Claim	Expect	Know	Say	Understand
Consider	Prove	Report	see	mean

Egg: *Turner **was considered** to be a genius even in his lifetime.*

*Homeopathic remedies **are believed** to be very effective.*

[Alexander,1988:246]

The infinitive can also be perfect or continuous, or it can be passive.

Egg: *The army **was reported** to be crossing the frontier.*

*The prisoner **is known** to have behaved violently in the past.*

*Stonehenge **is thought** to have been built over a period of 500 years.*

[Eastwood, 1994:138]

- **Suppose** in the passive can be followed by the present infinitive of any verb but this construction usually conveys an idea of duty and is not therefore the normal equivalent of **suppose** in the active:

Egg: *You **are supposed** to know how to drive.*

[Thomson, 1986:268]

(3) It + passive verb + to-infinitive

We can use this pattern only with the verbs *agree*, *decide* and *propose*.

Egg: Active: *The committee **agreed** to support the idea.*

Passive: ***It was agreed** to support the idea.*

[Eastwood, 1994:139]

(4) There + passive verb + to be + complement

This pattern can be used with limited selection of verbs:

Acknowledge	Consider	Know	Say	Understand
Allege	Fear	Presume	Think	
believe	Feel	Report	Suppose	

Egg: *There is said to be plenty of oil off our coast.*

There are known to be thousands of different species of beetles.

[Alexander, 1988:245]

II.4.4. The passive with verbs of giving

In the active, give can have two objects.

Egg: Active: *The nurse gives the patient a sleeping pill.*

Either of these objects can be the subject of passive sentence.

Passive: *A sleeping pill is given to the patient.*

The patient is given a sleeping pill.

[Eastwood, 1994:137]

A book was given to him. (the direct primary passive)

He was given a book. (the indirect secondary passive)

The indirect (secondary) passive is not infrequent in verb phrase with the verb to give, such as: to give credit, to give command, to give an explanation, etc.

He was given a good chance to argue.

She is given an opportunity to go to the South in summer.

There are many verbs in English which take a direct and an indirect object in the active construction, but they admit only one passive construction – the direct passive.

Suppose, you **are given** a choice. What would you prefer ?

[Rayevska, 1976:121]

We can use these verbs in the passive pattern:

Allow	Deny	Leave	Promise	Tell
Ask	Feed	Lend	Refuse	Throw
Award	Find	Offer	Send	Show
Bring	Grant	Owe	Sell	teach
Buy	charge	pass	pay	hand

[Eastwood, 1994:137]

II.4.5. The passive with *have* and *get*

Form: have|get + object + past participle

This pattern means “cause something to be done”. It may describe situations where we want someone else to object something for us.

Eg: *I **had/got** the machine **repaired** only last week.*

[Eastwood, 1994:140]

If the verb refers to something negative or unwanted, it has the same meaning as a passive sentence:

Egg: *Jim **had** his car **stolen** last night.*

The construction can refer to the completion of an activity, especially if a time expression is used.

Egg: *We'll **get** the work **done** as soon as possible.*

Both *have* and *get* are ordinary verbs which can be continuous and which can take the auxiliary. *Get* is more formal than *have*.

Eg: *We're **having/getting** a new kitchen **fitted**.*

[Eastwood, 1994:140]

II.4.6. Prepositions with passive verbs

When a verb + preposition + object combination is put into the passive, the preposition will remain immediately after the verb:

Egg: Active: *You can play with these cubs quite safely.*

Passive: *These cubs **can be played** with quite safely.*

Similarly with verb + preposition/adverb combinations:

Egg: Active: *They threw away the old newspapers.*

Passive: *The old newspapers **were thrown away**.*

[Thomson, 1986:267]

The prepositional passive is not used with verbs which take two objects, direct and prepositional: *to explain something to somebody, to point out, to announce, to dedicate, to devote, to say, to suggest, to propose, etc.* They can have only a direct construction.

Egg: *The difficulty **was explained** to them.*

*The mistake to the rule **was pointed** out to the man.*

The prepositional passive is not very frequent in occurrence. Its use is common with rather limited number of verbs, such as:

1) Verbs of saying: *to speak about (of, to), to talk about (of), to comment on, etc.*

Egg: *The new play **was much spoken of**.*

2) Verbs expressing scorn or contempt: *to frown at, to laugh at, to mock at, to jeer at, to sneer at, etc.*

Egg: *He could not understand why his words **were laughed at**.*

3) A miscellaneous group of verbs, such as: *to look at, to look upon (on), to look after, to look for, to approve (disapprove) of, to account for, to send for, to rely on, etc.*

Egg: *Here is Irene to be thought of.*

[Rayevska,1976:122]

II.4.7. Pseudo-passives:

Pseudo-passive have a copular verb followed by a predicate adjective that looks similar or identical to the past participle. They refer to states without reference to past events that brought about the states. In fact, some of these adjectives were participles in earlier stages of English. *Rotten* is one such adjective, the past participle function is now filled by *rotted*.

1. “*The rope had been rotted by damp salty air*”.

But not this:

2. “*The rope had been rotten by the damp salty air*”. The 1st sentence with the participle *rotted* specifies a result as well as the state of *the rope*, and a process of rotting caused by the dampness. The adjective *rotten*, however, refers only to the state that is why it can not occur with the *by* phrase.

The door was opened.

The door was open.

In the example above, it is easy enough to distinguish between the passives and sentences with adjectives because the participles are at past participle and the adjective are identical.

The door was shut by the butler.

The door was shut.

The factory was closed by the inspectors.

The factory was closed.

The first sentence of each pair refers to the actual event of *door shutting* or *factory-closing*. The second sentence of each pair however is

ambiguous. If shut and closed are interpreted as adjectives *the door* and *the factory* are just not open. But these words could be past participles, in which case the sentence would refer to the event, the action of closing.

[Jacob, 1995:166]

II.5. Voice restrictions

There are some certain restrictions in their use conditioned by the grammatical organization of the sentence:

1. The passive construction is impossible when the direct object is expressed a reflexive pronoun or a noun with a possessive pronoun referring to the same person as the subject of the sentence.

He hurt himself.

2. There is no passive form in such phrasal verbs:

To take part, to take courage, to take flight, to lose heart, to take heart

For example:

*No responsibility **is taken** for the loss of personal properties.*

3. There are some stative verbs which do not refer to action, often have no progressive form can not be used in the passive voice.

For example: *to fit, to have, to resemble, to hold, to last, to possess*

He has a lot of money.

He resembles his father.

4. There is a problem with noun phrase indicating quantity that can not occur as the subject of the passive as below:

A box weighed two dollars.

*Two dollars **were weighed** by the box*

But

He weighed the box.

Can be put into the passive:

*The box **was weighed** by him.*

CHAPTER III: THE PASSIVE VOICE IN ENGLISH THROUGH CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS WITH VIETNAMESE

III.1. Frequency of usage

As we have seen, using the passive is one way to have the theme argument in subject position at the front of its clause. If the theme argument is also the sentence topic, then the subject slot is a good place for it.

In some situations the passive voice is used not because the agent is unimportant, but, on the contrary, because the agent is new information that readers would need or want to know.

Another good use of the passive voice, which is more often, found in the written language than in speech, is a device to save changing the subject of a sentence, and using passive voice in some contexts may be stylistically superior to its active counterpart.

In other words, the passive voice can be used whenever it seems undesirable or unnecessary to specify the agent. This means that the occurrence of the passive is in part determined by the larger context in which it would be used.

[Jacob, 1995:170-171]

III.2. Some comments on the Vietnamese language

Before making a comparison, the researcher would like to take time to understand more theory of Vietnamese passive voice. In fact, many Vietnamese grammatical and linguistic researchers do not agree that there is passive voice in Vietnamese. Mr. Ban [1992:149] stated that from the view of linguistic, there is not passive voice in Vietnamese grammar; yet, Vietnamese use the following means to express passive meanings of speech. The lexical means and grammatical means.

In Vietnamese “bị”, “được”, “phải” are used in sentence to express passive meaning. According to Mr. Thai [1994:173]: “In the position of verb, passive meaning of speech is undertaken by the verb “bị” – “được” – “phải”. But in

modern Vietnamese “phải” is used less and dominated in some certain cases. “bị” – “được” both express passive meaning of speech, however “bị” undertakes negative and unlucky meaning whereas “được” undertakes positive and lucky meaning”.

Egg: - Tôi **được** mời đến dự tiệc. -> *I was invited to the party.*

(positive and lucky meaning)

- Tôi **bị** phạt. -> *I was punished.*

(negative and unlucky meaning)

What have been mentioned above are basic and general meaning of Vietnamese passive voice? Now the researcher gives some remarks on similarities and differences between two languages. Due to limited time, she only touches upon the meaning and the use of passive voice. Hopefully, it will be useful for learners.

III.3. Passive construction through contrastive analysis with Vietnamese

III.3.1. The similarities

When learning foreign language, we often compare our mother language with the target one. In fact, the English passive voice is quite different from the Vietnamese passive. The main similar point is that the agent of the active sentence can be omitted in the corresponding passive one.

Egg: Nam **bị** (cô giáo) **phạt**.

(“cô giáo” can be omitted)

➔ *Nam is punished by his teacher.*

(“by his teacher” can be omitted)

- The agent is only expressed when it is important to mention who or what something is done by:

Eg: *The window was broken by a slate that fell off the roof.*

[Alexander,1988:244]

- In the English passive as well as in the Vietnamese, the active – passive relation is similar to each other. The object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive one.

Egg: *A hungry rhinoceros ate the bamboo shoots*

→ *The bamboo shoots **were eaten** (by a hungry rhinoceros).*

[Jacob, 1995:159]

Egg: *Mẹ rửa chân cho em bé.*

→ *Em bé **được** mẹ **rửa chân** cho.*

[Ban, 1992:151]

- Like English, in Vietnamese, only the transitive verbs can have the passive forms, and the intransitive verbs can not

Egg: *They have a house.* -> no passive equivalent.

Tôi có một căn nhà.

Can not be written : *Một căn nhà có được tôi.*

Một căn nhà có được tôi.

III.3.2. The differences

- The first difference lies in the word order. In the passive voice in English it is more usual to put an adverb of manner immediately in front of the past participle

*This chair **is well made.***

1 2 3 2

Whereas in Vietnamese we have:

*Cái bàn này **được làm** cẩn thận.*

1 2 3

Students will find helpful to remember that from the point of view of adequate translation into Vietnamese.

- Passive voice may be translated by means of active verbal form.

*You **are wanted** on the phone.*

Có người gọi điện cho anh đấy.

***Were you told** to wait?*

Người ta bảo anh chờ à?

- Some adjectives ended in “able”, “ible” are generally passive in English but in Vietnamese we use another words called “additional words” like: “bị, được...”

This water is drinkable.

Nước này uống được.

“Được” here does not carry the passive meaning.

- Moreover, in Vietnamese we often say:

Tôi chụp bức ảnh này.

Yet, in English, active sentence in this case is difficult to find out. They find it strange to say:

I take this picture.

They normally say:

*This picture **was taken** by me.*

But in Vietnamese, it is very difficult for us to say:

Bức ảnh này được tôi chụp.

In conclusion, it is obvious that passive voice in English is different from passive voice in Vietnamese when studying English, learners have to identify carefully the uses as well as the semantic features of them.

CHAPTER IV: SOME MISTAKES PROBABLY MADE BY VIETNAMESE LEARNERS IN LEARNING PASSIVE VOICE AND SUGGESTED WAYS OF OVERCOMING THESE MISTAKES

IV.1. Some mistakes probably made by Vietnamese learners in learning passive voice

IV.1.1. In translation

In translation, Vietnamese students often translate the source language into the target one word by word and vice versa. Yet, in most cases, word by word translation does not suit. Students sometimes do not care the meaning of the sentences, they only care the voice of sentences.

Egg: *Hôm qua tôi bị mất một quyển sách tiếng Anh.*

Some Vietnamese students translated:

I was lost an English book yesterday.

This sentence must be translated:

I lost an English book yesterday.

Because in English, some active sentences contain passive meaning, this case is a typical one.

Moreover, students often got confused the tense. In some cases, the tense in Vietnamese sentences are not equivalent to the tense in English ones.

Egg: *Học kỳ vừa qua anh ta được điểm tốt.*

Some students rendered:

Last term, he has got good marks. (wrong)

Last term, he got good marks. (right)

Sometimes, mistakes made created funny sentences. However, word by word translation was also applied when students translated in this situation:

Egg: *Hôm qua tôi được xem Akira Phan biểu diễn.*

Yesterday, I was seen Akira Phan's perform.

IV.1.2. In changing the active sentence into the passive one

It is noted that some students commit mistakes as changing the active verbs into past participles. Besides that students also encounter difficulties as they change the active questions into passive ones.

Egg: *Who wrote this story?*

Wrong -> *It **was written** by who?*

Right -> *By whom **was it written**?*

In this case, students follow all the principles of changing the active into the passive but do not know how to make a passive question.

They also make mistake when changing the tenses of the active sentences into passive one.

Egg: *People say she was killed with a sharp knife.*

Wrong: -> ***She is said to be killed** with a sharp knife.*

Right: -> ***She is said to have been killed** with a sharp knife.*

Moreover, many of them get confused when they have to deal with the active sentence with complex object or hidden object.

Egg: *I love Mary who was my teacher.*

Wrong: -> *Mary **was loved** who was my teacher.*

Right: -> *Mary, who was my teacher, **was loved**.*

In addition, they do not know how to change the active sentences into passive ones when those sentences include sentences with infinitive, gerund, modal auxiliaries.

Egg: *We often see them kiss each others.*

Wrong: -> *They kiss each others **are often seen** by us.*

Right: -> *They **are often seen** to kiss each others.*

Sometimes, they get confused when rewrite the reflexive passive.

Egg: *Don't let Tom teased you.*

Wrong: -> *Don't let you **be teased** by Tom.*

Right: -> *Don't let **yourself be teased** by Tom.*

Lastly, they do not change the subject of the passive one if the object of the active are nobody, anything, etc.

Egg: No one can do anything.

Wrong: -> *Anything can be done by no one.*

Right: -> *Nothing can be done.*

IV.2. Suggested ways of overcoming these mistakes

In order to master English in general and passive voice in particular, students should practice changing active structures in passive structures regularly. I think we should give students different kinds of exercises such as: translation, rearrange, finding out passive structures, etc from elementary to advanced level. Moreover, teachers should analyze their mistakes to find out the reasons. Students hardly find their errors so the teacher's task is to help them and give them the best method to study.

It is also recommended that students should practice finding passive structure in their textbooks and in press. It is quite obvious that they will make progress in reading skills with the habit of revising their lessons, and by the way, learning passive voice.

PART THREE: CONCLUSION

William Zinsser writes “*Unless there is no comfortable way to get around using a passive verb. The difference between an active-verb style and a passive-verb style –in pace, clarity and vigor –is the difference between life and death for a writer*” [Jacob, 1995:159]. From the point of view we understand that using passive voice causes some difficulties for the non-native speakers – Vietnamese learners. The Vietnamese language is an isolating language so the learners have many problems with it because passive voice is clumsier and less clear than active voice. For this reason, in my paper I want to present all cases of passive voice with its semantic differences in order to give learners a vivid way of using the passive, the way to change active into passive and some special forms of the passive voice.

Comparing and contrasting between two languages are an effective method to help learners avoid producing meaningless sentences due to their negative transfer. We ought to stress the fact that the passive voice has an important and special place in language. Most sentences that are good in the active are just grotesque curiosities when put into the passive voice. That is why the proper uses of the passive voice have been carefully pointed out.

It is certainly not adequate and detailed as I wished, I do hope that it will be seen as my little contribution to the learners and it can help them in some way to know well and to grasp the matters of the English passive.

However, my thesis is just a part of a large topic, and certainly, there are still a lot of opinions and extra reasons to widen the problem in my paper.

This paper may be considered my first step in language research, and due to the short time as well as limited knowledge, mistakes and errors are unavoidable. So the thesis has left much room for further discussion, criticism and improvement by those who concern. All remarks, comments, suggestions and contribution are deeply welcome and highly appreciated.

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