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PASSIVE VOICE IN POLITICAL NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Nataša Stojan

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split, Croatia
nstojan@ffst.hr

Sonja Novak Mijić

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split, Croatia
sonja.novak2@gmail.com

Abstract

The passive voice is a very challenging part of English grammar. The aim of this paper is to examine the function, frequency and structure of the passive voice in written language production. The study is carried out on a sample of twenty newspaper articles dealing with the US presidential campaign; ten articles are taken from the New York Times and ten articles from USA Today published in February and March 2016. The analysis of the articles from both newspapers includes the language of journalists and politicians. Furthermore, this paper provides a theoretical review of the passive voice according to traditional view of grammar, but it also outlines features of the passive voice within the framework of Cognitive Grammar. The findings have shown that the passive is commonly used in political newspaper articles and that it is not always possible to determine with certainty the function of the passive voice in short passive structures, be it that the agent is omitted because it is unknown, unimportant or obvious or whether the action is more important than the agent. Therefore, another aim of this paper is to investigate if some of the uncertainties regarding the functions of the passive voice can be tackled and explained better within the theoretical framework of Cognitive Grammar since it offers an interesting alternative to traditional grammatical analysis. In this way, the paper can contribute to the further study of this challenging

linguistic field and provide incentive for similar studies comprising more examples from political or some other discourse.

Keywords

Passive Voice, Political Newspaper Articles, Cognitive Grammar

1. The Passive Voice

The passive voice is a very complex topic and it has been an object of many discussions. Grammarians often criticize the passive voice considering it static and evasive, and considering active more direct and vigorous. As Garner (2000) points out, many writers talk about passive voice without knowing exactly what it is and many associate it only with the verb *be* and past participle. According to Quirk et al. (1985) and Pullum (2014), in order to construct general description of the passive voice we need to focus, not only on the verb, but on the larger units, especially the verb phrase and the clause.

1.1 Forming Passive Structures

A general rule for forming passive structures is given in most English grammar books. According to Quirk et al. (1985: 159) the distinction between active and passive voice includes both the verb phrase and the whole clause. The passive voice is formed by putting the verb *to be* (or *to get*) into the same tense as the active verb and adding the past participle of the active verb. At the level of the clause, the subject of the active verb becomes the passive agent. The object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive counterpart. The agent is not always included in the sentence, but when it is included, it is preceded by the preposition *by* and placed at the end of the sentence (Quirk et al. 1985: 159). The following are examples of active sentences and their passive counterparts (Quirk and Greenbaum 1990: 45, 416.)

Active: *The butler murdered the detective.* Passive: *The detective was murdered (by the butler.)*

They awarded Marion the prize. *Marion was awarded the prize.*

Depending on the presence or absence of the agent, Huddleston et al. (2002: 1428) distinguish between long and short passives, pointing out the fact that short passives have no exact active counterpart. Both long and short passive structures can be formed with finite or non-finite verb phrases. Passive clauses with non-finite verb phrases are called bare passives, and they always function as subordinate clauses.

Quirk et al. (1990: 45) state that passive sentences formed with the verb *to get* are mostly used in informal English. Furthermore, this verb implies that the referent of the passive subject is somewhat responsible for the action that s/he suffers, which is also confirmed by the fact that these constructions are frequently used without an agent, e.g.: *get caught, get dressed, get run over*.

In the analysis of passive structures in relation their active counterparts, Quirk et al. (1985: 167) propose a gradient or scale to distinguish between different categories of passive. The passive gradient includes central passive, semi-passive and pseudo-passive sentences. Sentences that are described as central passives express a direct active-passive relation, they have active counterparts and participle has strong verbal properties. Examples are: *This violin was made by my father. My father made this violin*. Semi-passive sentences contain participle that has both verbal and adjectival characteristics. They are considered verbs because they have active counterparts. E.g. *We are encouraged to go on with the project. (The results) encourage us to go on with the project*. On the other hand, according to Quirk et al. (1985: 168), their adjectival characteristics allow them to be coordinated with an adjective, modified with *quite, rather, more, etc.*, and the verb *to be* can be replaced by a lexical verb such as *feel* or *seem*. E.g. *We feel rather encouraged and content*. Pseudo-passives are considered passives solely on the basis of their form which includes verb+ *-ed* participle. They do not have an active counterpart, nor do they have the possibility of including an agent. Participles have strong adjectival characteristics, that allow the verb *be* to be replaced by other copular verbs such as *feel, seem, become, remain, etc.* E.g.: *The building is already demolished. The modern world is getting more highly industrialized and mechanized*. (Quirk et al. 1985: 169)

Huddleston et al. (2002) and Pullum (2014), on the other hand, give more detailed analysis of other types of passive constructions. Besides the one which is formed simply with the verb *to be* or rarely *to get*, and a past participle, and adjectival passives, which are called semi- and pseudo passives by Quirk et al. (1985), they include some other passive structures:

a) In prepositional passives the subject in the passive structure corresponds to the object of a preposition in the related active structure (*He was laughed at by his friend. His friends laughed at him.*)

b) Bare passive clauses contain only a subject and the past participle of the verb, thus the verb phrase is non-finite. This structure restricts them to dependent position in a sentence. (*My house wrecked by a tornado is something I don't ever want to see.*)

c) Embedded passives refer to the passive structures embedded in active clauses (*The government had the case investigated by the police. I had a cake made by my friend.*)

d) Concealed passives refer to passives with gerund instead of past participle as head (*This house needs painting.*)

1.2 Uses of the Passive Voice

As Hewings (2001) points out, the choice between an active and passive sentence allows us to present the same information in two different orders. According to Quirk et al. (1985: 160, 165) although the meaning relations between sentence elements remain the same in the two structurally different sentences, active and passive sentences do not always express the same propositional meaning. For example, different meaning can include the scope of negatives and quantifiers:

Every schoolboy knows one joke at least. One joke is known by every schoolboy.

Interpretation of the first example can be *Each schoolboy knows at least some joke or other*, and of the latter *There is one particular joke which is known to every schoolboy*.

Huddleston et al. (2002: 1444) state that in long passives subject should not be less familiar in the discourse than the agent expressed with *by-phrase*, thus bringing to our attention a pragmatic constraint of the long passives. E.g.

The mayor's term of office expires next month. She will be succeeded by George Hendricks.

*George Hendricks will take office next month. *The current mayor, Angela Cooke, will be succeeded by him.*

In the first example, the subject in the passive sentence is discourse-old, while the agent *George Hendricks* is discourse-new information. But in the second example the subject is discourse- new information and the agent is discourse-old, which makes the sentence pragmatically unacceptable. Instead the active counterpart *He will succeed the current mayor, Angela Cooke* would be acceptable.

In relation to the agent *by-phrase* being generally optional, Quirk et al. (1985: 165) state that the agent is omitted when it is not known, irrelevant or redundant (*The Minister was murdered. She is being treated in hospital.*). On the other hand Thomson and Martinet (1994), in addition to these, provide more reasons that cause the agent not to be included in the passive sentence:

a) When we wish to omit the agent in factual writing (*The most dangerous nuclear waste can be turned into glass.*).

b) When the subject of the active sentence would be *people* (*They are supposed to be living in Paris.*).

c) When the emphasis is on the action rather than the agent (*The house next door has been sold.*).

d) When the subject of the active sentence is the indefinite pronoun *one* (*This sort of advertisement is seen everywhere.*).

e) When we wish to avoid awkward or ungrammatical sentence (*When he arrived home he was arrested by a detective*, instead of *When he arrived home a detective arrested him.*).

Another reason for excluding the agent from a passive sentence is provided by Huddleston et al. (2002: 1446), who state that the short passive can be used to avoid referring to the person responsible for the situation expressed in a sentence.

1.3 Active vs Passive Voice

The use of active and passive was discussed back in George Orwell's time. Orwell (1946) suggested never to use the passive where you can use the active voice. As Pullum (2014) points out, some linguists consider passive structures dull and static, rather than lively and dynamic. Moreover, some of them claim that the passive voice can hide who or what is responsible for an action and it is therefore often seen as sneaky and evasive. Pullum (2014) claims that these allegations are unsupported and cannot be taken as a rule. His example of the assassination of the president Kennedy clearly shows the passive is the best option and it makes the event more vivid (*President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas...*). As for the sneaky and evasive characteristics of the passive, the author does not completely agree. In many cases it is not necessary to specify an agent (*When the person was first diagnosed with cancer.*).

According to Garner (2000), there are three problems with using the passive voice. The first problem is adding unnecessary words (*The deadline was missed by the applicant*). The second one is that it fails to say squarely who has done what if the unnecessary words are avoided. It is possible to avoid the agent, however, it is the prime source of unclarity (*The deadline was missed. Who missed the deadline?*). *By- phrase* is necessary to show the actor. The third problem is when the passive subverts the normal word order for an English sentence thus making it harder to process the information (*The award was given to the students last night by the president*). The author concludes it is better to avoid the passive voice when possible. Active voice saves words and it says directly who has done what (*The president gave the awards to the students last night.*).

As far as political discourse is concerned, Orwell (1946: 252-264) criticized the "ugly and inaccurate" written English of his time. He examined the connection between the political

orthodoxies and the debasement of language. His essay was focused on political language, which he thought was designed to make lies sound truthful. In his opinion, the language was vague and the purpose was to to hide the real truth and avoid a doer. According to Orwell (1946), one of the ways to hide the truth or to avoid the clarity of the statement was using the passives.

Today, Guerra (2013) points out, based on her recent study that passive structures are mainly used for negative messages and the agent represents the origin of the problem in most cases. The author does not want to emphasize the authorship (*We were attacked by an al Qaeda network*). Guerra concludes that the passive can often make a sentence difficult to understand because it hides responsibility.

2. The Cognitive Grammar Approach to Passive

Linguistics started to develop in an ingenious manner influenced by psychology and cognitive theory. Consequently, the objects of study apart from linguistic structures included language users. Some of the research questions began dealing with the ways in which language is represented in human mind or how people create as well as understand verbal utterances (Langacker 1991).

One of the basic tenets of Cognitive Grammar is the belief that language reflects human mind, therefore grammatical structures are analyzed in correlation with human mind. According to Langacker (2008: 4), apart from being an essential part of cognition, grammar enables us to understand cognition. We agree with Tabakowska (2005) who claims that Cognitive Grammar challenges formalist theories in an interesting way by using certain tenets of conceptualist semantics, which is based on human experience, schematized patterns of conceptual structuring and symbolization (Stojan 2013). Cognitive linguistics challenges traditional understanding of meaning by basing it on human experience thus making mental processes essential for both semantics and grammar.

Langacker (2008: 29-30) claims that semantic and grammatical categories are based on conceptualization, generated by human mind, thus emphasizing dynamic nature of meaning. He (Langacker 2008: 66, 70, 72) argues that basic instruments for linguistic analysis are imagination, mental constructions and construal. An expression's meaning consists not only of conceptual content, but of the way a speaker construes that content. The term construal refers to our ability to understand and present one situation in two different ways, which is particularly important in relation to active and passive structures (Stojan 2013). There are four broad dimensions of construal phenomena: specificity, focusing, prominence

and perspective (Langacker 2008: 55). For the purpose of analyzing passive voice, apart from construal, prominence is the key conceptual phenomenon. Two kinds of prominence need to be distinguished: profiling and trajector/ landmark alignment. These semantically based concepts both include focusing of attention and are used in grammatical description (Langacker 2008). A part of conceptual content that is relevant for an expression's meaning becomes its conceptual base. Profile is described as particular element of conceptual content, to which speaker's attention is directed. Thus, an expression's profile becomes the specific focus of attention. In a profiled relationship¹ participants have different degrees of prominence. The most prominent participant in a profiled relationship is called trajector. It is an entity that is located somewhere, evaluated, or described, and it is also described as primary focus of a profiled relationship (Langacker (2008: 70). Often another participant is made prominent as secondary focus, and it is called landmark. Consequently, as Langacker (2008: 70) points out expressions can have the same content and profile the same relationship, but they have different meanings because they make different choices regarding trajector and landmark. They are defined in terms of primary and secondary focal prominence.

In grammatical description clause is a basic device for verbal interaction. A transitive clause with two participants, which describes the canonical event model, is a basic type of clause in English. It usually involves an agent that performs an action on a patient thus causing a change of state (Stojan 2013). This is represented in figure 1a² (Langacker 2008: 357)

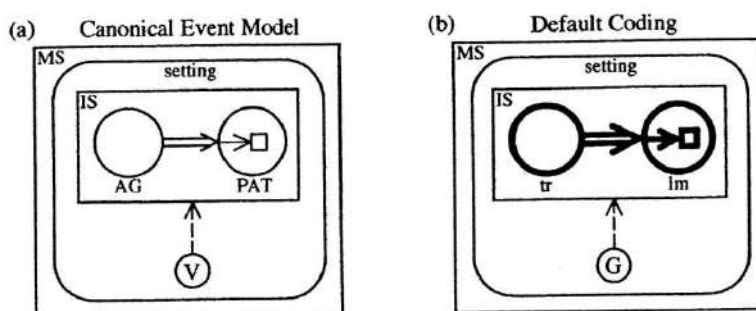


Figure 1: *Transitive clause*

¹ The terms relationship and thing are used in abstract, technical sense. Thing is not restricted to physical objects, but it includes abstract objects as well. Therefore, a noun is defined as an expression that profiles a thing. Verb and other grammatical categories (adjective, adverb, preposition and participle) profile relationship with the distinction of the type of relationship. Verb is an expression that profiles a process relation (it develops through time), and other categories profile nonprocessual relationships (atemporal). (Langacker 2008).

² Figure 1a represents canonical event model. *MS* refers to maximal scope of predication, *IS* to immediate scope of predication. *AG* refers to agent, and *PAT* to patient. *V* stands for viewer whose focus of attention is the event within the immediate scope of predication.

Our attention is usually directed at agent and patient who are held to be intrinsically salient (Stojan 2013). Figure 1b³, which shows that the agent is identified as trajector and the patient as landmark, represents a very basic coding strategy. Coding refers to connecting conceptual and linguistic structures. According to Langacker (2008: 358) in the default coding clausal elements have their prototypical semantic roles, so subject is prototypically an agent, and object a patient.

‘‘A two-participant transitive clause is just one basic type and each language provides a range of different grammatical structures such as passive, middle, ergative, existential etc.’’ (Stojan 2013: 7). Different languages use different coding strategies. Cognitive grammar postulates semantically based definition of grammatical functions, which differs from traditional, mostly language specific definitions.

Subject and object, according to Langacker (2008: 363-365) have conceptual characterization, and they are defined through meaning, discourse status, and grammatical behaviour. In this respect, subject is a nominal whose profile corresponds to the trajector of a profiled relationship, and object is a nominal whose profile corresponds to the landmark of a profiled relationship. Trajector/ landmark alignment is related to focal prominence, thus trajector and landmark are primary and secondary focal participants in a profiled relationship. Grammatical behaviour of subject and object is the result of their referents being focused participants in a profiled relationship. As Langacker (2008: 366) points out participants have clearly defined roles in a profiled occurrence; therefore a change in their status triggers different conception.

A distinction is made between role asymmetries and prominence asymmetries. The first belong to the level of conceptual content, and the latter are imposed by linguistic coding and are related to construal. Trajector/ landmark alignment includes focusing of attention for the purpose of linguistic presentation. Thus, in the examples *The man bit a dog*, and *The dog was bitten by a man* a conceived event is the same, but it is construed differently. In passive sentence, trajector status is assigned to a nominal that has landmark status in the active sentence.

3. Methodology

3.1 Corpus and Procedure

³ Figure 1b represents default coding. *Tr* stands for trajector, *lm* for landmark. *G* stands for ground which is identified with the viewer.

Two American daily newspapers, The New York Times and USA Today, were studied in February and March 2016, during the presidential campaign. They are among the most popular American daily newspapers. The study was carried out on a sample of twenty newspaper articles dealing with the US presidential elections. The analysis was done on ten articles from The New York Times and ten articles from USA Today. The articles from both newspapers include the language of journalists and politicians. Total of 22, 723 words were analyzed, all sentences containing passive structures were noted down, all passive structures were analysed in order to determine the structure, frequency and functions of the passive voice in the selected articles. Furthermore short passives are grouped according to their function with reference to English grammars (Quirk and Greenbaum (1985), Huddleston and Pullum (2002), Thomson and Marinnet (1994), Hewings (2001)).

4. Data analysis

4.1 Structure and Frequency

The analysis showed that nine hundred and thirty-seven transitive verbs were used in ten selected articles of The New York Times. One hundred and two transitive verbs (10.88%) were used in the passive and eight hundred and thirty-five transitive verbs (89.11%) were used in the active voice. Sixty passive structures (58.82%) were formed with the auxiliary verb *be* and a past participle form of the verb. Out of sixty passive structures agent was overtly expressed in twelve examples. There were sixteen adjectival passives (15.68%). Twenty-two passive structures (21.56%) did not contain auxiliary verb, they are formed with non-finite verb phrase, and are termed bare passives. Out of twenty-two bare passive structures ten had overtly expressed agent. There were three prepositional passive structures (2.94%), one had overtly expressed agent, and one passive structure was formed with the verb *get* (0.98%). Altogether there were twenty-four long passive structures, (23.52%) i.e. agent is overtly expressed in those examples.

The analysis of ten articles of USA Today showed that there were eight hundred and seventy-one transitive verbs. Eighty-five transitive verbs (9.76%) were used in the passive and seven hundred and eighty-six verbs (90.24%) were used in the active voice. Fifty-four passive structures (63.52%) were formed with the auxiliary verb *be* and a past participle form of the verb. Agent is overtly expressed in seventeen examples. There were twelve adjectival passives (14.11%). Fifteen passive structures did not contain auxiliary verb, they were formed with non-finite verb phrase, and are termed bare passives (17.64%). Out of fifteen bare passive structures eight had overtly expressed agent. There were two embedded passives

structures (2.35%), they both had overtly expressed agent, and two passive structures formed with the verb *get* (2.35%). Altogether there were twenty-eight long passive structures, (32, 94%) i.e. agent is overtly expressed in those examples.

4.2 Function of the Passive Voice

The sentences containing short passive structures were classified according to three categories: 1) the agent is not known, unimportant or obvious; 2) the emphasis is on the action and not on the agent; 3) subject of the active verb would be people. For the sake of space, not all the examples could be included in the paper.

1) The agent is not known, unimportant or obvious.

Examples - The New York Times (28)

... according to a recording of the session provided by a reporter who was allowed to attend.

A third group, Our Principles PAC, which was created to defeat Mr. Trump.

Still, members of the Republican establishment have been left to grapple with what was once unthinkable: rallying around Mr. Cruz, a senator who built his reputation bashing them.

One of Mrs. Clinton's most uncomfortable moments came when she was asked about her comments in a 1996 speech about crime.

The victory in Puerto Rico came a day after Mr. Rubio was shut out of first-place finishes in all four of Saturday's Republican nominating contests.

On Sunday night, the Democratic debate was held in Flint.

66 delegates will be awarded winner-take-all on Tuesday.

On Sunday, Mr. Trump said he would consider paying the legal costs for a man who was charged last week with assaulting a protester.

If Mr. Kasich is defeated in Ohio...

They were optimistic about winning Florida and North Carolina, where black, Hispanic and older voters were expected to give Mrs. Clinton a healthy edge in the race for delegates.

Mr. Trump, by then, had gained the kind of status he had long been denied.

He was brought into the interview without my knowledge," Mr. Trump said.

Reporters from The Times, BuzzFeed News, CNN, The Los Angeles Times, Politico, the BBC and The Huffington Post were among those shut out of the briefing.

When the father of a young girl injured in a recent shooting in nearby Kalamazoo asked what the candidates would do about gun control...

Over the next few months, Mr. Trump met quietly with Republican pollsters who tested a political message and gauged his image across the country, according to people briefed on his efforts.

Examples- USA Today (27)

Instead, they're expected to make clear the race will be a slog for many weeks.

Delegates are awarded proportionally.

While many dispersed after the rally was canceled, hundreds of people protested outside.

"This is ridiculous," Tom Keevers, a Trump supporter from the city's North Side, said after the cancellation was announced over the loudspeaker.

Primaries were held in Florida, Ohio, Illinois, North Carolina and Missouri.

When Republican voters' first and second choices are combined, giving a sense of what might happen is the field winners, the trio's advantage at the top gets bigger.

In speeches on Sunday and Monday, Bill Clinton addressed the Granite State and, reported USA TODAY, told crowds that it's ironic that his wife is being cast as an establishment politician.

To that end, Trump laid down a marker for how he thinks the nomination should be decided, regardless of whether someone gets secures a majority 1,237 through the primaries, which he called "a very random number."

Super Saturday was held this weekend.

Trump rally was covered Friday night after tensions.

On average, 90 people a day are killed by gun violence in our country.

Police officials did not detail charges or release names of the individuals taken into custody.

When asked about violence among his supporters, Trump insisted that anti-Trump demonstrators were instigating incidents at his campaign events.

"Trump would kind of make a mockery out of America," worries Cameron Lee Craig, 25, a stay-at-home mom from Amelia, Ohio, who was among those surveyed.

The nationwide survey, taken Thursday through Monday, underscores how formidable an opponent the 74-year-old democratic socialist has become against one of the Democratic Party's most established figures.

2) The emphasis is on the action and not on the agent.

Examples - The New York Times (11)

Let their name be put out there.

Mr. Spicer's small-group Friday session, known as a gaggle, was scheduled as an off-camera event...

...less formal than his usual briefings that are carried live on cable news

So anything that could be changed, I want them to look at it.

...people should be fired.

When each candidate was asked about racial blind spots...

Mr. Trump recorded a video to be played on the first day of the convention, but the whole day's events were canceled because of bad weather.

Stuart Stevens, a senior strategist for Mr. Romney, believed that Mr. Trump had been strictly corralled.

If there has been one constant in the tempestuous presidential campaign of Donald J. Trump, it is his mantra of a "great, great wall" to be built on the United States–Mexico border.

"In 2013, when the Gang of Eight fight was being fought, where was Donald?"

Criticized over the welfare changes, Mrs. Clinton mentioned the rousing job growth of the 1990s.

Examples - USA Today (9)

What Tuesday's contests could mean, though, is that Clinton will be forced to spend significantly more time fending off attacks from Sanders.

"Her record has been really distorted on this," Kristina Schake, a Clinton communications director, said Monday on MSNBC.

The Chicago Police Department said late Friday that four men and a woman were arrested at the rally.

When attendees at an event in November kicked a Black Lives Matter activist, Trump said, "Maybe he should have been roughed up," according to The Washington Post.

Is it any surprise that journalists have been harassed at Trump events?

The overall poll results then were weighted to reflect the makeup of the nation's population.

That's because in her concession speech she vowed that "Wall Street can never be allowed to once again threaten Main Street."

To get things done, she believes, one must work the system.

And we've learned that it's not whether you get knocked down that matters, it's whether you get back up.

3) Subject of the active verb would be "people".

Examples- The New York Times (7)

"I realized that unless I actually ran, I wouldn't be taken seriously," he said.

And he urged people not to be taken in.

There is nothing to be gained from the White House restricting the public's access to information.

He could be at a disadvantage if he is forced into a protracted slog for delegates.

The 23 delegates awarded to Mr. Rubio from Puerto Rico still leave him trailing far behind Mr. Cruz and Mr. Trump.

Repeatedly underestimated as a court jester or silly showman, Mr. Trump muscled his way into the Republican elite by force of will.

Mr. Sanders spoke of friends who were discriminated against decades ago...

Examples- USA Today (6)

"If he were put in office, he would be able to straighten out the economy."

"A couple of months ago we weren't expected to win this one," Trump told shouting supporters at the Treasure Island casino.

When the ballots were tallied in New Hampshire on Tuesday night, Clinton had lost the Granite State to Bernie Sanders by 22%.

You'd be forgiven if you assumed Thursday's debate would be something akin to a professional wrestling cage match.

If he were elected and attempted to carry out his campaign promises, the social unrest of the past several days would seem tame by comparison.

Clinton's remarks were met with widespread criticism.

4.3 Analysis of the Passive Voice within the Framework of Cognitive Grammar

In agent oriented languages, like English, the active is prototypical voice and the passive is used to focus the patient. The situation itself provides motivation for choosing the subject or the trajector in the process of connecting conceptual and linguistic structures. Aligning trajector with agent is canonical in these languages. On the other hand, in long

passive structures, the patient is focused as trajector, or as primary focal participant, and the agent is made prominent as secondary focus or landmark.

Examples- The New York Times

The Obama White House was harshly criticized by members of the press corps.

Another, John McLaughlin, who had been recommended to Mr. Trump by the former Clinton adviser Dick Morris, drew up a memo that described how Mr. Trump could run as a counterpoint to Mr. Obama in 2012.

The show has been cited by groups such as the Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center for fomenting hate and promoting white ascension, as well as anti-Semitic views.

But Mr. Edwards insisted on his website that the interview took place and that he is being mistreated by the media.

Examples- USA Today

Fritz said he and his friend were then surrounded by other anti-Trump protesters.

In January's poll and the new one, he was supported by 26% of Republicans and independents.

The Vermont senator, who has built his campaign on money from small donors, also is being helped by super PACs.

The Texas senator, who has been criticized by Trump and Rubio for questionable campaign tactics, said Tyler made "a grave error."

According to traditional grammar, the active and the passive express the same meaning relations. An important question arises regarding the function of the passive voice with reference to the agent as well as to the whole sentence particularly action expressed by the verb. English grammars mostly deal with short passive structures, and they do not thoroughly describe the function of long passive structures.

Cognitive grammar enables us to analyze both long and short passive structures in a comprehensive way. In all the examples of long passive structures, the emphasis, although strongest on the patient, is also placed on the agent, through secondary focal prominence, as well as on the action that is evoked and profiled by the verb, but with lower intensity. Conceptualization of the action, which starts with the patient and is directed toward the agent, determines our perspective and comprehension of the whole event, causing passive coding of the event, thus offering different meaning relations in comparison to active sentences.

In the analysis of short passive structures according to the traditional approach, there are examples of sentences which make it difficult to decide whether the agent is not overtly expressed because it is irrelevant, unknown, or obvious, or whether the emphasis is on the action.

Examples- The New York Times

Later, in the briefing from which the Times was excluded...

Whether voters like the ideas or not, they are at least being discussed.

These would be in violation of international trade rules, and retaliation would be taken against American goods.

Reporters from The Times, BuzzFeed News, CNN, The Los Angeles Times, Politico, the BBC and The Huffington Post were among those shut out of the briefing.

With Ohio a perennial swing state in presidential elections, and its racially and economically diverse voters fiercely fought over...

Stuart Stevens, a senior strategist for Mr. Romney, believed that Mr. Trump had been strictly corralled.

Examples- USA Today

“There’s not a corner of this state that hasn’t been touched.”

In speeches on Sunday and Monday, Bill Clinton addressed the Granite State and, reported USA TODAY, told crowds that it’s ironic that his wife is being cast as an establishment politician.

Police officials did not detail charges or release names of the individuals taken into custody.

According to Cognitive Grammar, the primary focus is on the patient, who is profiled as trajector, but although the agent is not overtly expressed, there is always the feeling that the action has been carried out by somebody. This is represented in figure 2b (Langacker 2008: 385). Figure 2a shows the configuration most typical for an active transitive construction.

(a) Active transitive (b) Passive

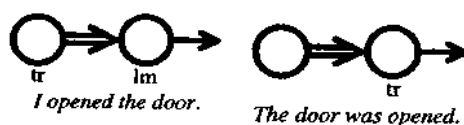


Figure 2: Active transitive and passive clause

In an active transitive clause (figure 2a) both an agent's use of force, profiled as trajector, and the process an agent causes are profiled, as well as the relationship between the agent and the patient (Stojan 2013). In a passive construction (figure 2b) the patient is focused as trajector, and agent, if expressed, is distinguished as secondary focus, or landmark. An action is always evoked and profiled in passive constructions, with or without reference to an agent (Stojan 2013).

According to the tenets of the Cognitive Grammar, the force of the agent is an essential part of the basic conceptual content evoked and profiled by the passive structures although the agent is omitted from the sentence. In all the examples of short passives patient has the status of primary focal participant. Agent, on the other hand, is not overtly expressed because it is less prominent than, not just the patient, but the action that is evoked and profiled. The patient- agent interaction is not made prominent in short passive structures. This interaction, on the other hand is profiled in long passive structures.

5. Conclusion

The results of the analysis of the frequency of passive structures in relation to transitive verbs in the active, found in the selected articles showed that the frequency was somewhat higher in The New York Times with 10.88% of passive structures, as opposed to 9.76% of passive structures in USA Today.

Regarding the structure, there were 58.82% of the passive structures formed with the auxiliary verb *be* and a past participle form in The New York Times, 21.56% of bare passives, 15.68% of adjectival passives, 2.94% of prepositional passive structures, and just one passive formed with the verb *get* (0.98%).

In USA Today, 63.52% were formed with the auxiliary verb *be* and a past participle form of the verb, there were 17.64% of bare passives, 14.11% of adjectival passives, 2.35% of embedded passives, and 2.35% were formed with the verb *get*.

The percentages of passive structures were similar in the two newspapers, except for the fact that in The New York Times there were no embedded passives, and in USA Today there were no examples of prepositional passive. By far the most frequent structure in both newspapers was passive formed with the verb *be* and a past participle form of the verb.

Out of one hundred and two passive structures in The New York Times there were twenty- four long passives, (23.52%) i.e. agent was overtly expressed in those examples. In USA Today, out of eighty-five passive structures, there were twenty- eight long passive

structures (32.94%). The results showed that more passive structures had overtly expressed agent in the articles of USA Today than of the New York Times.

Short passive structures found in the selected articles were grouped according to their function with reference to English grammars: a) the agent is not known, unimportant or obvious; 2) the emphasis is on the action and not on the agent; 3) subject of the active verb would be people.

In The New York Times there were twenty-eight passives (42.42%) in which the agent was omitted because it was unknown, unimportant or obvious. The emphasis was on the action and not on the agent in eleven sentences (16.66%). Seven sentences (10.6%) contained the passive voice in which the subject of an active verb would be people. There were approximately twenty passive structures (30.3%) in which it was difficult to distinguish precisely whether the agent was not expressed because it was unknown, unimportant or obvious or whether the action was more important than the agent.

In ten analyzed articles of USA Today twenty-seven sentences (47.36%) contained short passive structures with an unknown, unimportant or obvious agent. The emphasis was on the action and not on the agent in nine sentences (15.75%). There were six sentences (10.52%) in which the subject of an active sentence would be people. In approximately fifteen sentences (26.3%) it was difficult to distinguish precisely why the agent was not expressed.

In both newspapers the passive voice was mostly used with an unknown, unimportant or obvious agent. There was a high percentage of short passive structures, in both newspapers, in which it was difficult to distinguish precisely the function of the passive voice regarding the first two categories: when the agent was unknown, unimportant or obvious and when the action was more important than the agent. This paper has shown that some of the uncertainties regarding the functions of the passive voice can be tackled and explained within the theoretical framework of Cognitive Grammar. In the traditional approach to the passive, it is stated that the agent is omitted when it is unknown, irrelevant or obvious, when the subject of the active sentence would be people, without referring to the action expressed by the verb, or it is claimed that passive structures are used when the emphasis is on the action rather than the agent.

We find it debatable that in the examples in which the emphasis is on the action, the reason for omitting the agent is not mentioned. We argue that the traditional approach is not always appropriate or adequate in the analysis of passive because in some examples it cannot be decided why the agent is not included in the sentence. Instead of separating functions of short passive according to the agent's irrelevance, redundancy or non-recognition, or

according to the emphasis on the action, we claim that, according to the Cognitive Grammar approach, in all the examples of short passives, the primary function of passive, besides making the patient primary focal participant, is to place emphasis on the action which is evoked and profiled in the passive sentence.

The passive voice is commonly used in the articles of both newspapers by journalists and politicians in their texts, statements, speeches and debates. We do not agree with Garner (2000) who claims that the passive makes it harder to process the information by subverting the normal word order of an English sentence. On the contrary, passive structures make language more versatile and richer.

We do not agree with Orwell (1946), who says that the purpose of the passive is to hide the truth or to avoid the clarity of the statement, or with Guerra (2013) who says that passive structures are mainly used for negative messages and the agent represents the origin of the problem in most cases.

Our examples show that short passive structures are mostly used when the agent is unknown, unimportant or obvious and the messages are certainly not mostly negative. The passive voice has always been a valuable rhetorical tool in political discourse. Often cited example is former president Ronald Reagan's statement "Mistakes are made", the sentence commonly used as rhetorical device in order to place emphasis on the action expressed by the verb, but we are not told who made the mistakes.

The corpus of this paper consists of twenty articles dealing with politics, ten articles from The New York Times and ten from USA Today. In order to get more precise results about the frequency, structure and the function of the passive voice more articles should be analyzed over a longer period of time. However, this paper can contribute to a further study of this interesting field and provide incentive for similar studies comprising more examples from political or some other discourse.

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