A SYNTACTIC STUDY OF THE PASSIVE VOICE IN MODERN STANDARD ARABIC (MSA)

Dr.Aisha Alhussain

Princess Nora Bint Abdul Rahman University, Riyadh. K.S.A

ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this paper is to explore the syntactic features of the passive in Modern Standard Arabic. The paper consists of two parts: in the first part, the relationship between active and passive sentences is briefly discussed at the level of the verb phrase and the level of the clause. The second part explains in details the derivation process from active sentences with particular reference to the transformational theory.*

KEYWORDS: Passive Voice, Standard Arabic, Syntactic Features of Arabic, Transformational Theory, Passive, Voice Definition.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic belongs to the Semitic languages which have a rich and diverse verbal system. One of these systems is forming the passive voice. The passive has been studied under the term voice that is used to describe a major verb category, which distinguishes an active verb phrase (e.g. eat) from a passive one (e.g. eaten) (Quirk et. al., 1985). Voice means the relation between the verb and its subject in a sentence (Al-Hamash, 1976:312).

Arabic language has two main voices: active (as in 1.a) and passive (as in 1.b):

(1)   a.   / ḍaraba al-waladu al-binta /
               Hit the boy the girl.
               "the boy hit the girl."
             b.   /ḍuribat al-bintu/
               Was hit the girl.
               "the girl was hit."

Arab grammarians define the active voice in various ways, including:

a.   the mold or form of the agent   [ṣiġat al-fāᶜil].
b.   the build of the agent   [binā ? al-fāᶜil
c.   the category of the agent   [bāb al-fāᶜil]
d. the action of the agent   [fiᶜlu al-fāᶜil]

Likewise, the passive voice has been defined in many ways:

a.   Ibn khalawayh (1941: 190). The action (or verb) put into that form of which the agent is the subject [al-fiᶜlu al-majhūlu fāᶜiluhu].
b.   Al-muubarrad (1968:50). The category of the patient of which the agent hasn't been named [bābu al-mafᶜūl al-laḍi lam yuḍkar fāᶜiluhu].
c.   Al-ssywti (1975:268). The action of which the agent is unknown [al-fiᶜlu al-majhūlu fāᶜiluhu].

d.   Ibn al-saraaj (1985:76). A verb has been molded or formed to passive participle [fiᶜlun buniya lil-mafᶜūl].

e.   Al-khalil (1985:118). The passive is the doing, or being done, of that, of which the agent hasn't been named [mālam yuḍkar fāᶜiluhu].

Passivization in Arabic is highly productive and regarded as syntactic (Horvath and Siloni 2005, Laks 2007 a &b). The formation of MSA passive is free because there are no morph-phonological, syntactic or semantic constraints that block its formation, passive verbs can be formed from any transitive verbs. The morphological component of the grammar has no role concerning the template of active transitive verbs. The mechanism is free that can change the vowels of any transitive verb and form a passive counterpart.

The relationship between active and passive sentences at the verb phrase level:

Passive verbs are formed productively in Modern Standard Arabic. It is typically used when the agent is either unknown; for example, as in:

> [waqad fuqidat mithlu haadihi ilmawaadd}
> "Such material has been lost."
> Or when it is obvious; for example, as in:
> [sayudkaru sahru maars]
> "Mars will be remembered. "

It is possible to form passive counterpart for each transitive verb. The mechanism used is called melodic overwriting, in which pophonic vowels are introduced into a transitive verb. Pophonic vowels [u-i] are added to the perfective forms (4a) whereas the vowels [u-a] are introduced in the imperfective forms (4b). Another technic used is by adding the prefix in-, for example:

> Kasar 'it broke' ⟶   inkasar   ' it was broken.'

(4)   MSA Passivization

| Base	Derived Form	
a. Perfective form		
hamal	humil	' carried.'
rabat	rubit	' tied.'
darab	durib	' hit.'
tanaawal	tunuuwil	' handled.'
ᵓintaxaba	ᵓuntuxib	' elected.'
ᵓistaqbal	ᵓustuqbil	' met.'
b. Imperfective form		
Yahmil	yuhmal	' carried.'
Yarbid	yurbad	' tied.'
Yadrib	yudrab	' hit.'
yatanaawal	yutanaawal	' handle.'
Yantaxib	yuntaxab	' elect.'
Yastaqbil	yustaqbal	' meet.'

When the verb is more than the minimal word size, Laks(n.d.) states that the last vowel of the root turns to /i/ and the following one to /u/ one of the vowels of the passive spreads to the rest of the syllables. In the perfective form, the last vowel of the stem changes to */i/* and the preceding one to */u/* and spreads to the preceding syllable in the perfective form as in example (5).

(5)   MSA   perfective forms: Melodic Overwriting

ˀis   ta   ham   'showered '   ˀustuhim   'was showered.'
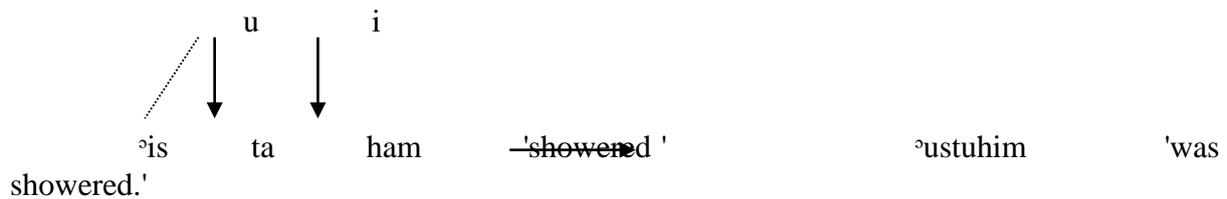
Whereas, the first vowel of the stem changes to /u/ and the second vowel and rest of the word to /a/ in the imperfective form as in example (6)

(6)   MSA imperfective forms: Melodic Overwriting

yas   ta   him   'shower'   yustaham   ' is showered.'
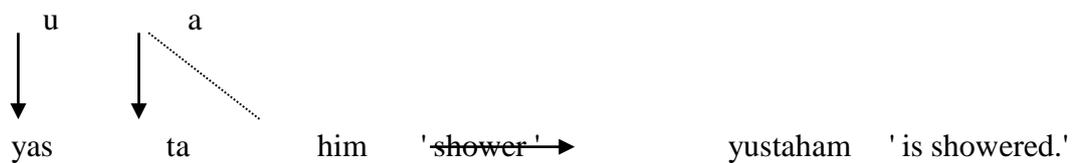
The relationship between active and passive sentences at the clause level:

At the clause level, the passivization process involves the following: -

(i)   the agent (the subject of the active in the nominative case) is omitted in the passive.

(ii)   The patient (the object of the active in the accusative case) becomes the subject (or, more accurately) the " deputy of the subject " in the passive, taking the nominative case and the other features of the subject (e.g. gender agreement with the verb).

The process of active-passive transformation for a monotransitive sentence can be represented diagrammatically in Figure 1.
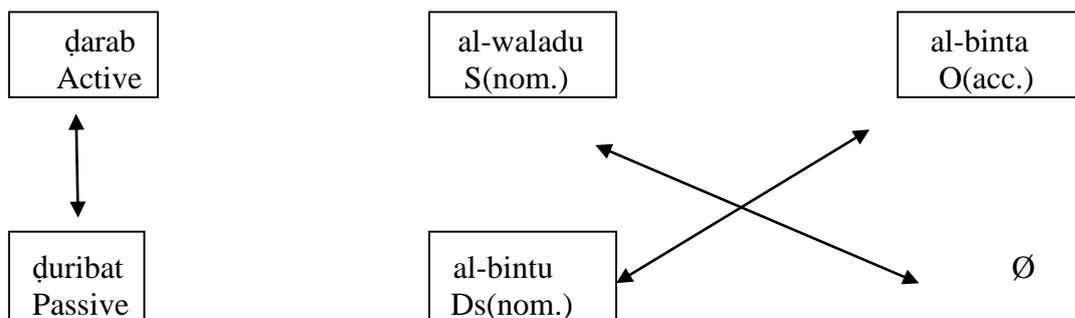
ḍarab Active	al-waladu S(nom.)	al-binta O(acc.)
ḍuribat Passive	al-bintu Ds(nom.)	Ø

Figure 1: the active / passive relation in mono transitive Arabic sentence

Alternatively, the voice transformation can be expressed as follows:

Active verb phrase + NP_1 (nom.) + NP_2(Acc.) $\Longrightarrow$ passive verb phrase + NP_2(nom.)

The active-passive relation: A transformational view

The first treatment of Arabic passivization within the framework of the transformational approach is provided by Snow. He (1965) proposes two separate optional transformations. The first optional transformation is called T– 1. It is used for the derivation of ordinary passive. The other optional transformation is called T – 2, which derives impersonal passive sentences from their active counterparts.

T-1 can be applied to sentence 2. a to produce sentence 2.b as follows:

(2)   a.   /al-šāᶜiru yanẓimu al-qaṣidata/
  The poet(nom.) composes the poem(acc.)
   "the poet composes the poem ."
   b.   /al-qaṣidatu tunzamu /
  the poem(nom.) is composed.
 "the poem is composed."

As can be noticed in sentences 2.a and 2.b, T-1 has some special features that can be summarized as follows:

(i)   Deletion of the subject of the active sentence al-šāᶜiru " the poet" leaving behind the nominative case ending / - u /

(ii)   Assign the passive form of the verb.

(iii)   Moving the object over the verb.

On the other hand, T-2 has the effect of deriving sentence 3.b from 3.a below

(3)   a.   /al-rijalu yaḍhabuna ? ilā al-masjidi/
  The men (nom.) go to the mosque (gen)
  "the men go to the mosque."
   b.   /yuḍhabu ?ilā al-masjidi/
   is gone to the mosque(gen.)
   "it is gone to the mosque."

The above T-2 has the following features:

(i)   Deletion of the subject.

(ii)   Deletion of number agreement.

(iii)   Assign the third person masculine singular to the passive verb.

In fact, Snow's passive transformation fails to account for the passivization process in Arabic for many reasons, among them is that there is no adequate justification for applying an SV

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word order to a language which is primarily a VSO language. Furthermore, Snow's analysis fails to give adequate explanation for very important phenomenon in Arabic passivization, namely those non-passivizable verbs such as šabaha "to resemble "and kalafa "to cost."

Lewkowicz(1967) deals with Arabic passivization in a brief way. According to her, intransitive verbs (the verbs that don't occur in the passive) are assigned the feature [+ Active] but transitive verbs, which occur in active and passive, are assigned the feature [± Active]. She also uses the mark [+ Active] for those verbs which don't undergo passivization in Arabic such as šabaha type.

According to many grammarians such as Saad (1982), and Al – Shalan (1983), Lewkowicz's analysis of the Arabic passive fails even more than Snow's analysis because of the following reasons:

    (i)   Lewkowicz's analysis of the passive construction assumes an SVO order.

    (ii)   She doesn't give an adequate account for non-passivizable verbs.

    (iii)   She doesn't provide any justification for crossing the subject over the verb to replace the original subject.

Al-shalan (1983) states that "transformation "involves the structural description (SD) and the structural change (SC). The former specifies what type of trees are to be affected by the rule (the input tree), whereas the latter associates each input tree with an output one, i.e. the tree which has undergone the rule.

To illustrate, consider the following pairs of active sentences and their passive counterparts:

(4)   a.   / kasara hasanun al-qalama /
        broke Hasan (nom.) the pen (acc.)
        " Hasan broke the pen ."
    b. /kusira al-qalamu /
       was broken the pen (nom.)
      "the pen was broken ."

(5)   a.   /mazaqa hasanun al-waraqata /
        tore Hasan (nom.)the paper (acc.)
        " Hasan tore the paper ."
    b. / muziqat al-waraqatu /
       Was torn the paper (nom.)
      " the paper was torn ".

(6)   a. / fataha al-waladu al-baba /
       opened the boy (nom.) the door (acc.)
       " the boy opened the door " .
    b. / futiha al-babu /
       was opened the door (nom.)
       " the door was opened ."

(7)   a. / yaftahu al-waladu al-nafidata /
       opens the boy (nom.) the window (acc.)
       " the boy opens the window."
    b. / tuftahu al-nafidatu /
       is opened the window (nom.)

" the window is opened ."

The syntactic structure of the active sentences above can be represented in a tree-diagram form (Figure 2).

S

V   NP   NP

4.a [kasara]   ḥasanun   [al-qalama]
5.a [mazaqa]   [al-waraqata]

6.a [fataḥa]   al-waladu   [al-bāba]
7.a [yaftaḥu]   [al-nāfiḍata]

Figure 2: Tree-diagram showing syntactic structure of monotransitive sentences in Arabic

The passive transformation can be applied to the input tree in figure 2 (SD) to produce the output tree showing the structural change (SC) which has come about as a result of generating the passive sentences (figure 3).

S

V   NP

4.b [kusira]   [al-qalamu]
5.b [muziqat]   [al-waraqatu]

6.b [futiha]   [al-bābu]
7.b [tuftaḥu]   [al-nāfiḍatu]

Figure 3: Tree – diagram showing syntactic structure of monotransitive passive sentences in Arabic

The transformational passive rule which generates the passive sentences above from their active counterparts can be stated as follows:

V	NP	NP ⟹	1	Ø	3
+ active	+ nom.	+ acc.	(+ pass.)		(+ nom.)

The main features of this rule can be summarized as follows:

(i)   Assigning the feature +passive to the verb.

(ii)   Deletion of the subject in the active (+ nom).

(iii) Changing the case marking of the remaining NP (deputy of the subject in the passive) to the nominative case. The other features of the original subject (e.g. gender agreement with the verb) are now taken by the deputy of the subject.

To account for passivizable active sentences which don't have an object (typically having a prepositional phrase functioning as an adverbial), Al-shalan (1983) proposes a different passive transformation. To illustrate, consider the pairs of active sentences and their passive counterparts below:

(8)   a.   / dahaba zaydun ?ilā al-madrasati /
               went Zayd (nom.) to the school (gen.).
               " Zayd went to the school."
         b.   /duhiba ?ilā al-madrasati /
               was gone to the school (gen.).
               " It was gone to the school."
(9)   a.   / laᶜiba ᶜumarun fi al-ḥadiqati /
               Played Omar (nom.) in the garden(gen.).
               "Omar played in the garden "
         b.   / luᶜiba fi al-hadiqati /
               was played in the garden (gen.).
               "It was played in the garden ."

The active sentences above can be represented in figure 4
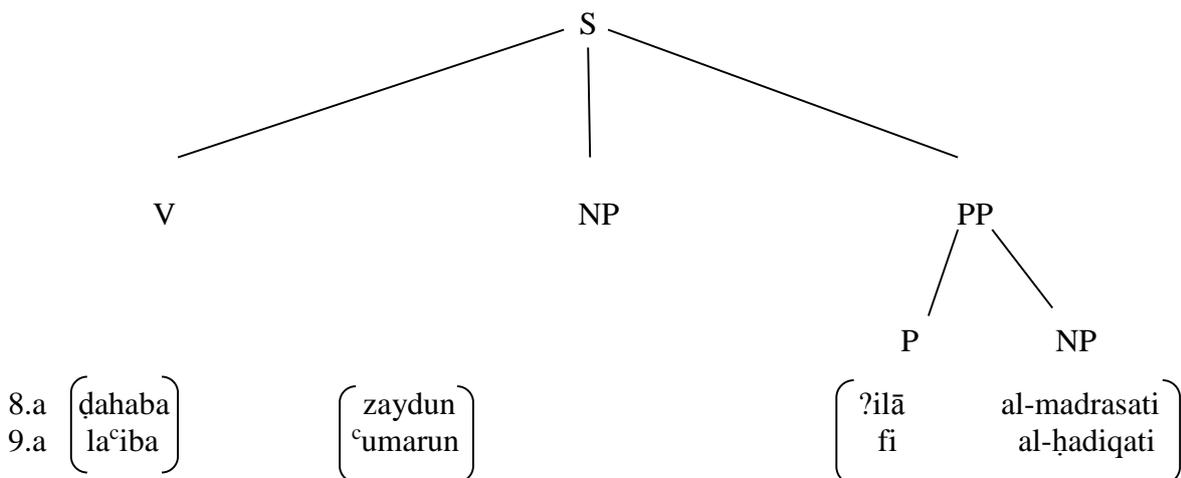
Figure 4: Tree-diagram showing syntactic structure of V + NP + PP Arabic active sentences

The following passive transformation is proposed to generate the passive counterparts of the active sentences above:

V ——— NP ——————— (prep.) ———————— NP

1   2   3   4 $\Longrightarrow$ 1 ——— Ø (3)   4
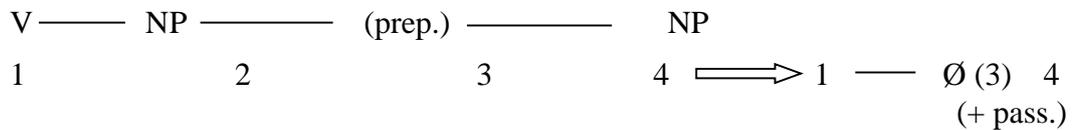
                                                               (+ pass.)

When this transformation is applied to the above tree-diagram, it produces a tree-diagram (figure 5), showing the syntactic structure of the passive sentences:
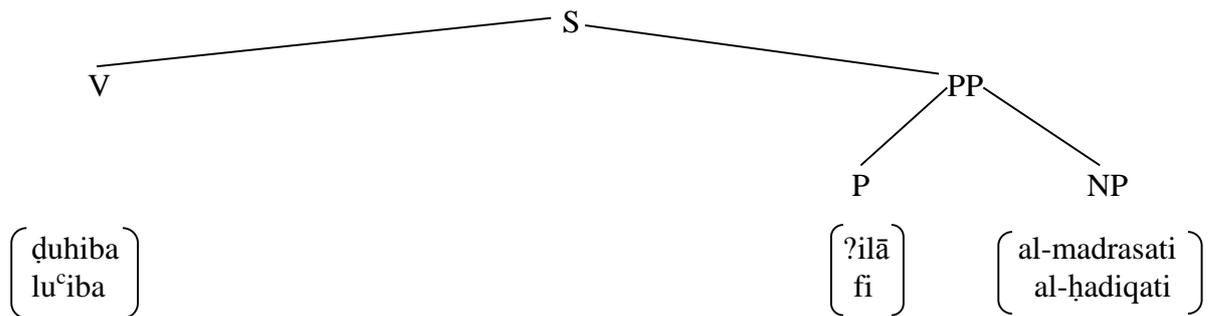

Figure 5: Tree-diagram showing syntactic structure of impersonal passives in Arabic

The features of the above transformational rule can be summarized as follows:

    (i)   Marking the verb as passive.

    (ii)   Deletion of the Np.

Abu Absi (1972) assumes that the passive is an optional reordering transformation, and the directionality of the passive transformation is to be formulated as Active-passive, rather than vice versa. In fact, the derivation of the passive from the active construction is because some active sentences have no passive equivalent, but not vice versa.

Generally speaking, Saad (1982) agrees with Abu Absi that Arabic passive constructions are syntactically derivable from active constructions, and for more illustration; he suggests the following derivation which consists of a passive transformation and truncation transformation similar to those suggested in the literature for English:

    (10)   a. Someone hit Mary.   [underlying form]
                b. Mary was hit by someone.   [passive transformation]
                c. Mary was hit.   [truncation transformation]

Saad adds that some passive sentences in Arabic don't have corresponding actives as in the following examples:

    (11)   / junna zaydun /
            " Zayd was possessed; maddened ".
    (12)   /buhita al-ladi kafar /
           " The atheist was embarrassed".
    (13) / ?uġmiya ᶜalayhi /
            " He has been fainted "/ " he got fainted".
    (14) / ?uliᶜa bihā /

" He was admired her ."

(15) / sulla al-rajulu /

"The man was afflicted with tuberculosis."

Some grammarians consider the verbs in the above sentences as stative verbs which are passivized as a result of their translation in English, but Saad contradicts his opinion and considers these verbs as a passive participle. The stative meaning of these verbs can be expressed by using the past tense of "kāna" (it was) as in the following examples:

(16) / kāna al-rajulu maslulan /
" The man was affected with T.B."
(17) / kāna al-kāfiru mabhutan /
" The atheist was embarrassed ."
(18) / kāna al-rajulu maġmiyan ᶜalayhi /
" The man was fainted ."
(19) /kāna zaydun mulaᶜan bihā/
" Zayd was captivated with her ."

It is worth mentioning that all the above verbs imply understood agency, but to the people who use them, the agent is a hidden force. This force can be God, the devil, evil spirits, angels.

Moreover, some transitive verbs may or may not be considered as passive. For more illustration, let's consider the following examples:

(20) / dukira liᶜan gulamin /
" I was reminded of a lad ."
(21) / wa-yuxraju lahu yawma al-qiyāmati kitāban /
" And a book will be brought to him on the day of Resurrection ."

The above two sentences are characterized by having a verb in the passive form which is in the third person masculine singular. Furthermore, these two sentences are considered subject less because they don't have a subject both in the surface and deep structures.

By defining the passive as construction in which the object of a transitive verb is the subject, these two sentences can't be considered as passive constructions, because both of them don't have a subject at all. But if the passive is defined as a construction without the actor of the verbal process occurring as surface subject, consequently, they should be considered as passive sentences.

To sum up, the transformation of active sentences into passive sentences in Arabic involves the following changes:

(i)   The promotion of the object in the active sentence to the status of the subject in the derived passive sentence and consequently assigning the nominative case ending.
(ii)   Marking the verb as passive by changing the internal vowels of the active verb.
(iii)   The passive verb agrees with the resulting surface structure subject in person, number, and gender.

The third point above needs more illustration:

(22)   a.   / daraba zaydun ᶜamran /

Hit Zayd(nom.)Amr(acc).
" Zayd hit Amr".
b. / duriba ᶜamrun /
was hit Amr(nom.).
" Amr was hit ."

(23) a. / daraba zaydun hindan /
Hit Zayd(nom.)Hind(acc.).
"Zayd hit Hind."
b. / duribat hindun /
was hit Hind (nom.).
"Hind was hit ."

In 22 b the verb and the surface, the subject has the same number (singular), the same person (third person), and the same gender (masculine). The same is the case concerning the verb and the surface subject in 23. In 23.a, both are singular, third person, masculine. In 23.b, both are singular, third person, feminine. Note that when the subject is feminine (Hindun) , the verb is also feminine as (23.b)

Salih (1987) states that in the impersonal passives, the verb agrees with a dummy subject which is assumed to be a third person masculine singular as in 24 below:

(24) / nima fi al-ḥujrati /
Was slept in the room (gen.)
" It was slept in the room."

The verb nima is marked with the third person singular masculine suffix – a.

If the agreement is marked otherwise, the clause would be ill-formed as can be noticed in the following example:

(25) */ nimat fi al-hujrati /
Was slept in the room (gen.).
" It was slept in the room."

Haywood et al. (1990) mention that in the Arabic language the particle ?*anna* is used with the passive to indicate an impersonal manner as *dukira* (It has been mentioned), *qiila* (it has been said), ᶜ*ulima* (it has been known). In such cases the verb also agrees with the third person masculine singular:

(26) / ḍukira ?anna al-xawfa ġalabahu /

" It has been mentioned that fear had overcome him ."

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