

# Passivization in Translation: Transformation and Pragmatic Implications

Ramadan Ahmed Almijrab

Department of English Translation, Faculty of Languages, University of Benghazi, Benghazi, Libya  
Email: ramahmadmegrab@yahoo.com

**How to cite this paper:** Almijrab, R. A. (2026). Passivization in Translation: Transformation and Pragmatic Implications. *Advances in Literary Study*, 14, 189-203. <https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2026.144014>

**Received:** July 10, 2026

**Accepted:** September 27, 2026

**Published:** September 30, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.  
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

## Abstract

Translation, as a means of conveying information, is more intricate than it may initially appear, especially when dealing with the passive voice in English and Arabic. This complexity becomes evident in Arabic-English translation, where passivization involves distinct structural and functional differences that directly affect translation choices. Translating the passive requires careful handling of agentivity, emphasis, and style, as direct equivalent forms do not always exist between the two languages. Since Chomsky's (1957) syntactic analysis of passive transformations in English is characterized by the auxiliary "be" and the preposition "by", the linguistic rationale behind these passive constructions has been widely studied. Such transformations aim to convert active sentences into passive ones, often to foreground the patient or topic and achieve grammatical and stylistic economy. However, Arabic does not employ "be" or "by" in passive constructions; instead, it relies on specific verb patterns and often suppresses or omits the agent, which accounts for the relative rarity and functional specificity of the passive in Arabic. This study is a conceptual-theoretical review that examines the contrastive form, function, and pragmatic effect of the passive voice in English and Arabic, and surveys the translation strategies most often invoked to handle English passives when rendering them into Arabic. Rather than reporting an empirical assessment of a defined translator sample, the paper clarifies the structural and functional contrasts in passivization between the two languages and identifies common strategies—including active-voice conversion, nominalization, agent omission, and patient promotion—together with the contextual conditions that favor each. The aim, accordingly, is to enhance translators' awareness of how choices in passivization influence meaning, rhetoric, and readability, and to support more accurate, context-sensitive translation practices that respect the grammatical and pragmatic norms of both languages.

## Keywords

Passivization, English-Arabic, Transformation, Pragmatic Implications

## 1. Introduction

The structural divergence between Arabic and English regarding the formation of the passive voice is fundamental; however, their functional and semantic applications exhibit significant convergence. In Arabic, passivization is primarily a morphosemantic process achieved through apophony (internal vowel shifts) rather than auxiliary verbs. Historically, the codification of these shifts is attributed to the leading Arab grammarian Alfarahidi, who established the four primary Arabic diacritics: *fatha* (accusative), *damma* (nominative), *kasra* (genitive), and *sukun* (jussive). In the context of the passive voice, the first three are of paramount importance. For instance, the active trilateral verb هزم (*hazama* defeated) undergoes a phonetic transformation into the passive هُزم (*huzima*). *Damma* is applied to the initial radical and *al-kasra* to the penultimate. In the present tense, the transformation occurs where the penultimate radical receives *al-fatha*. Conversely, English utilizes a periphrastic construction, employing the construction of the passive voice, which, according to Arabic grammar, is derived from a corresponding active construction. The process of passivization involves the elimination of the subject from the verb in an active construction; consequently, the verb takes on the passive form, and the previous object becomes the subject in the passive sentence, receiving the nominative surface case ending. For instance, كتب الطالب الدرس (the student wrote the lesson) changes to كُتِبَ الدرس (the lesson was written). As previously mentioned, the object is transformed into the subject in the passive construction. The second object of certain verbs that can accommodate two accusative objects, أهديت صديقي قلما (I gave my friend a pen as a gift), is altered to أهدى صديقي قلما (my friend was given a pen as a gift). Some transitive verbs require a direct object but are not amenable to passivization; conversely, some intransitive verbs that do not necessitate a direct object are also not suitable for passivization.

## 2. Research Questions

In this context, four research questions need to be addressed:

- 1) How do English agentive and agentless passive, each interpret their theme-rheme structure, and on which dimensions do they diverge from canonical Arabic passive constructions?
- 2) What target-language translation strategies are available when rendering each English passive into Arabic, and what contextual condition makes each strategy preferable?
- 3) To what degree can the pragmatic implications of the English passive voice be maintained in Arabic, and in which areas must they be relinquished?
- 4) How does the selection of Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, me-

dia/translated Arabic, or Qur'anic usage influence the acceptability of an explicit agentive construction borrowed from English?

### Functional Sentence Perspective

Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) is a linguistic theory developed by the Prague School of Linguistics, led by Mathesius, which examines the organization and communication of information within a sentence and throughout a text. It emphasizes the distribution of information through the concepts of theme (known information) and rheme (new information), alongside the notion of communicative dynamism (CD), which posits that the element contributing most significantly to communication possesses the highest CD. FSP serves as a theoretical framework originating from the Prague School of Linguistics, concentrating on the organization and allocation of information within sentences to foster meaning and coherence.

This study adopts Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) treatment of Theme and Rheme as its operative framework (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), in the form established for translation studies by Hatim (1990) and Hatim and Mason (1990, 1997). In this framework, Theme is the element that occupies the first position in the clause and serves as the point of departure for the message. It combines three parameters: position (initial), information status (typically given), and syntactic role (typically subject or a marked fronted element). Rheme is everything that follows the Theme and is predicated of it. An unmarked Theme coincides with the grammatical Subject (My father/أبي), while a marked Theme is signaled by a fronted element that is not the Subject (e.g., A new job [did] my father start) and carries focus.

Since Theme combines position and information status, the English passive (*The lesson was written by the student*) shifts the unmarked Subject-Thematic position from "the student" (agent) to "the lesson" (patient) at the cost of markedness, and the *by*-phrase is treated as a Rhematic adjunct. Arabic, lacking a syntactic *by*-phrase, realizes the same shift by means of a morphologically marked verb (كُتِبَ) plus an appositional agent (الطالبُ كَتَبَ الدرسَ), and Theme resides with the patient موضوع unless contrastively marked.

In simple terms, this theory underscores the interaction between sentence elements and their contextual background, centering on a key concept that assesses how effectively each component aids in advancing the message. FSP differentiates between the theme and the rheme. Passivization denotes the process by which speakers modify the topics of their sentences. The topic, also known as the theme, represents what is addressed in the remainder of the sentence, referred to as the comment or the rheme. Essentially, the structure of a sentence, whether in active or passive voice, is divided into two main components: theme and rheme. The theme acts as the starting point of a message, while the rheme demonstrates how the message develops and concludes. For instance: *My father started a new job*. My father serves as the theme (topic) providing old information, the verb started (transition), and a new job represents the rheme (comment) (new information).

The morphosyntactic canonical passive of Arabic, as codified by *Sībawayh* (1988) and his successors, does not contain an obligatory agentive element analogous to the English *by*-phrase; the agent is normally suppressed unless it is pragmatically permitted to surface in apposition for instance *زَيْدٌ فَعَلَ كَذَا* (Zayd did such-and-such). This generalization, however, requires qualification across varieties of the language: Classical Arabic prose (e.g., *Al-Jāḡiz*, 1998; *Al-Mubarrad*, 1986) tolerates appositional agents and, less commonly, prepositional recoveries (على, *ʿalī*, on, at) but it does not have a productive syntactic slot for *by*-agents.

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in contemporary formal writing preserves the same restriction. The agent of a canonical passive is left implicit unless discourse-old and contrastively focal. Media and translated Arabic, under sustained contact with English, increasingly deploys periphrastic agentive markers modelled on English: *بـ* + agent noun *بواسطة* (by means of...), *على يد* + agent (by the hand of...), and the verbal template *قام فلان بـ* + verb. Arab linguists (e.g., Ḥasan ‘Abbās, al-Anṣārī) regard these as register-bound calques rather than additions to the canonical passive paradigm. Qur’anic usage offers a fifth register: the agent is typically suppressed when it is unknown, generic, or pragmatically undesirable to name, although a small set of verses does surface an agent through contextual inference rather than syntactic position. The accurate generalization, therefore, is that Arabic lacks a productive syntactic agentive passive, not that it lacks any agentive construction whatsoever; and it is the translator’s task to choose which periphrastic recovery, if any, is registered as appropriate.

The preference of the canonical Arabic passive for the agentless construction has been observed in Qur’anic linguistic scholarship for over a millennium. (*Sībawayh*, 1988 *al-Kitāb, bāb al-mabnī lil-majhūl*) notes that the agent of a passive verb is suppressed when the agent is self-evident, redundant, or unpresentable to mention. This is restated by Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī (*Bahr al-muhīt*, vii, and *al-Tadhkira*) and by *Al-Zamakhsharī* (1891) (*al-Kashshāf*), and systematized in *Al-Suyūṭī’s* (2003) survey of *al-maḡāsin al-balāghiyya fī al-Qur’ān* in *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān* (chap. 53 on *maḡāsin al-kalām*). Modern treatments include ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf (2001, Ch. 3 on voice and agency), al-Awā (2006, on the suppressed agent and Qur’anic discourse), and Versteegh (1997, ch. 3 on the Arabic grammatical tradition). Four illustrations may be cited:

*Agentless verdictive passive describing a meta-textual event*: Q 18:49—وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ (‘The Book will be laid down, and you will see the guilty fearful of what it contains’). The agent (‘God’) is suppressed but inferable; al-Zamakhsharī comments on this in *al-Kashshāf* under this verse. *Passive used for an undesirable action whose agent is left general*: Q 5:62—وَتَرَى كَثِيرًا مِنْهُمْ يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَأَكْلِهِمُ السُّخْتِ discusses the suppression of agent for blameworthy actions, and Q 2:174 passive constructions of concealment of haram acts follow the same tendency. *Alternation between active and passive to manage evaluation of the agent*: Q 8:17—فَلَمْ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ قَتَلَهُمْ وَمَا رَمَيْتُمْ إِذْ رَمَيْتُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ رَمَى—alternately affirms and suppresses the human agent; classical commentators read this

as Thematically distancing the human agent from the deed.

*Passive of natural/cosmic events.* Q 46:25—تُدْمِرُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ بِأَمْرِ رَبِّهَا (“destroying everything by the command of its Lord”) shows a passive of an event whose agent is named in a post-verbal prepositional phrase (بأمر ربها) rather than in the canonical *by*-phrase slot. These examples support the generalization that suppression of the agent in classical Arabic passive is *pragmatically motivated*, not merely *optional*, and they provide translators with a cultural-rhetorical model for Arabic prose when the source-language passive is similarly motivated. Verify every citation from your English-language primary sources as well: ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf’s *Qur’ānic Stylistics* (London: Ta-Hā, 2001), Versteegh’s *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought III* (London: Routledge, 1997), and the standard editions of Al-Zamakhsharī (1891) and Al-Suyūṭī (2003).

Due to this topic-comment (theme-rheme) distinction between the two languages, the context suitable for each is different. Conversely, translating an English sentence such as “The car was stolen by the bandit” into an Arabic active sentence would similarly disregard the functional significance of the theme-rheme structure, as this translation alters the order of the relevant noun phrases. In light of such a scenario, what options do translators have? They would prefer to maintain the order of the receiver/agent as in the English passive but demote the agent.

- 1) اليهود اقتحموا غزة The *Jews invaded Gaza*. This is unmarked and natural.
- 2) غزة اقتحمت، اقتحمها اليهود *Gaza was invaded, invaded by the Jews*. This is natural but archaic.
- 3) غزة اقتحمت من قبل اليهود *Gaza was invaded by the Jews*. This is marked and unnatural.

Sentences like the second may offer solutions to the translation difficulties that arise from the differences between Arabic and English passive constructions. Ultimately, structural changes are essential if we aim to maintain functional equivalence and naturalness. Translating into a topic-comment nominal sentence structure (noun and predicate) retains the informational content concerning actions and participants while also preserving the rhetorical word order. Furthermore, it appears very natural in Arabic.

In both English and Arabic, the passive voice often fulfills different roles, and the context typically elucidates this distinction. However, influenced by foreign languages such as English, modern standard Arabic readily accepts the use of “be” and “by” phrases like من قبل، عن طريق، and بواسطة (on the part of). For example, Iran was invaded by the USA. تم غزو إيران من قبل الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية. Nowadays, this trend has become standard in Arab media and educational institutions. “This variation in theme-rheme structure leads to different contexts appropriate for each sentence, as long as coherence and proper text progression are maintained” (Baker 1992: p. 131). Consequently, the sentence *The USA invaded Iran* emphasizes the nominal expression, placing greater communicative focus on the noun phrase rather than on the subsequent verb; in contrast, the construction that begins with the passive verb, as demonstrated in the sentence, assigns greater infor-

mational weight to the action.

### 3. Pragmatic Implications

Siewierska (1984) examines the pragmatics of the passive voice from various perspectives. She cites the Palestinian functionalist Givón (2001), a pioneer of “West Coast Functionalism,” who categorizes the functions of the passive into topicalization and personalization. However, the criteria for utilizing the passive voice differ across languages. This variation largely hinges on the intrinsic characteristics of the passive and its capacity to convey its functions. In most languages, topicalization constructions are generally regarded as unmarked. Unmarkedness pertains to a sentence where new information follows known or given information. Given information is assumed to reside in the listener’s mind, while new information is unfamiliar and does not exist in their cognition. For example, **a.** Who did John speak to? **b.** He spoke to Marie. Example **a.** is deemed marked, while example **b.** is considered unmarked. The unknown information appears first in example **a.**, whereas the known information appears first in example **b.** Siewierska (1984) contends that new information encompasses two pragmatic functions: topic and focus. The topic is referred to as the theme by linguists. The topic or theme serves as the starting point of a sentence or given information. Given information is emphasized only if there is something new to discuss, such as for contrast or emphasis.

To keep the thematic structure, the active sentence *Israel attacked Iran* is rendered into Arabic: إسرائيل هاجمت إيران. When transformed into passive voice in English, it becomes *Iran was attacked by Israel*. However, when translating back into Arabic, the active form tends to be preferred, since Arabic convention often favors active constructions when the subject is explicitly stated. As a result, the Arabic version highlights *Israel* as the starting point (theme), followed by *Iran* (rheme), whereas the English passive shifts focus on *Iran* as the theme. This contrast in theme-rheme organization between the two languages affects the suitability of each version in different contexts. Translating directly from the English passive can disrupt this functional structure, altering the original emphasis by reordering the noun phrases. Faced with this challenge, translators may opt to maintain the receiver of action, Iran, at the beginning of the sentence. One effective strategy is using the Arabic nominal sentence structure, topic and comment. For example, saying ایران غزتھا إسرائيل (Iran—Israel attacked her) preserves the intended emphasis and sounds natural.

Alternatively, a literal equivalent like ایران هوجمت من قبل إسرائيل (Iran was attacked by Israel) mirrors the English passive but feels awkward and unnatural in Arabic. This is because the definition of passive voice in Arabic is defined as follows: “The passive verb is the verb whose agent is not named; instead, the object takes its place and the verb is ascribed to it. For this reason, it is called the passive verb, just as it is termed “that whose doer is not named”. Thus: its object substitutes for its agent.” Ibn ‘Āshir (2020) (The passive voice is disallowed when the

subject is known, as the Arabic definition of the passive voice implies an unknown subject). Furthermore, the Qur'an does not use the passive voice when the subject is present. However, the passive voice is permissible when there is fear of the actor or to prevent harm. A more elegant solution draws from classical Arabic patterns, leveraging the flexibility of verbal sentences to avoid mimicking English syntax. In this approach, the English "by + agent" structure can be preserved thematically. For instance, هوجمت إيران هاجمتها إسرائيل (Iran was attacked—she was attacked by Israel) maintains the focus on *Iran* as the theme, replicating the original emphasis. Yet syntactically, this construction contains two accusative elements: *Iran* as the fronted object and غزته (a past verb with an attached pronoun also referring to the same entity, Iran), which may be seen as structurally ambiguous.

#### 4. Passivization in the Holy Qur'an

Translating a religious text like the Qur'an involves grappling with complex issues related to its rhythmic structure and the equivalence of vocabulary in translation. The Qur'an is intended for comprehension, as highlighted in Surah 4 Ayah 82, which poses the question, أَفَلَا يَتَذَكَّرُونَ الْقُرْآنَ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلَافًا كَثِيرًا {Do they not consider the Qur'an (with care)? Had it been from other than God they would surely have found therein much discrepancy}. {Do they not reflect on the Qur'an?} (Almirab, 2025: p. 27). The passive voice is utilized in the Holy Qur'an for multiple reasons, including the ambiguity of the agent, a disregard for the agent, or the recognition of the agent without the need to specify Almighty Allah. In the Qur'an, the passive voice is not overtly stated but is described as 'an action.' Scholars maintain that each word in the Holy Book holds a distinct position and fulfills a particular role, and that changes in wording lead to changes in meaning. Understanding these subtle differences deepens our appreciation of the miraculous nature of the Qur'an. According to Arabic grammar, the passive voice is formed from a corresponding active voice. Another linguistic aspect can be observed in the shifts of the verbal form between active and passive constructions in Qur'anic recitations, where a notable linguistic feature is the employment of verbs in both active and passive forms. Within a single verse, one can witness a shift in the verbal form; in one interpretation, the agent (subject) is explicitly stated, attributing the action to them, while in another interpretation, the agent is omitted for the sake of conciseness. It is widely recognized that the passive construction necessitates the omission of the agent and this omission is not arbitrary; rather, it is motivated by specific reasons that lead the speaker to exclude it. According to Babtī (1992), these reasons are diverse, yet they fundamentally arise from either verbal or semantic motivations:

1) Among the verbal motivations for the demotion of the agent is the objective of الإيجاز (brevity) in expression, as demonstrated in the verse from Surat Nahl: وَإِنْ عَاقَبْتُمْ فَعَاقِبُوْا بِمِثْلِ مَا عُوقِبْتُمْ بِهِ {And if you do catch them out, catch them out no worse than they catch you out}. This implies the same measure as the aggressor punished you. Given that there is contextual evidence indicating the agent, elo-

quence demands its omission to preserve brevity and to appropriately position the object.

2) Concealment: **الايهام** This is when you know who the perpetrator is but choose to conceal and protect them out of concern for their safety; for example, saying 'John was killed' without naming the killer because they are a relative of yours and you fear for their safety.

3) Exalting or belittling the subject. In contexts where mentioning the subject would diminish its status, the subject is omitted to honor and protect it. For example: "The pig was created," where the name "Allah" is omitted from the previous sentence in reverence to Him. Similarly, the subject may be omitted to belittle it by neglecting and diminishing its importance, as in the phrase: "The street was cleaned," belittling the one who cleans it. It should be noted that the glorification of the subject can be achieved by omitting it in certain contexts, but in other contexts, it can be achieved by mentioning it, such as in the verse: "Do you want to guide one whom Allah has led astray?" The purpose behind mentioning Allah here is to imply that no one can change His will, and in this, there is glorification of Him. In general, the Quranic expression is a good example of omitting the subject or refraining from omitting it to glorify it. We find that when mentioning blessings and good, the subject God is usually mentioned. Conversely, when talking about evils, the action is usually rendered in the passive voice, and the subject is omitted, to purify God from them.

4) Passivation is also employed in both prose and poetry as suprasegmental to enhance the aesthetic quality of the text. The saying **من طابت سيرته حمدت سيرته** (Whoever possesses a virtuous character, their reputation is esteemed).

## 5. Substitution of the Agent

What can replace the absence of the agent? Arabic grammarians, including **Ibn Hishām al-Anṣārī (2019)** (in **Montgomery, 1968**), identify four alternatives. They recognize four parts of speech that can serve as substitutes for the agent:

1) The object: It is the most likely candidate to take the place of the subject. First: The object is deemed more suitable to assume the role of the subject. However, Arabic grammarians have categorized verbs based on whether they require an object or not, as well as those that take one, two, or three objects concerning the agent's substitution as follows: **a. Al-Akbari (1986)** states that the intransitive verb of the two primary Arab schools of grammarians **الكوفيون** (Kufans) and **البصريون** (Basrans) represent the two foundational schools of Arabic grammar and linguistics, emerging in the 8<sup>th</sup> century in the Iraqi towns of Kufa and Basra, respectively. These schools were instrumental in codifying the Arabic language, interpreting the Quran, and preserving pre-Islamic poetry. While sharing a common objective, they differed significantly in their approaches. When a verb is transformed into the passive voice, the direct object is converted into the subject (in the nominative case). **b.** For instance: Active **كسر الولد الزجاج** (the boy broke the glass). In this case, *the boy* serves as the agent while *the glass* is the object.

Passive voice: كُسِرَ (the glass was broken). Here the glass assumes the role of اسم الفاعل, (the deputy subject), transitioning from the accusative to the nominative case.

2) The Adverbial Phrase الظرف / المفعول فيه Adverbs indicating time or place can serve as substitutes when there is no direct object present in the active sentence. For example, صام الناس يوما (the people fasted for a day). In this instance, the people are the agents, while يوما (a day) functions as an adverb of time. In the passive voice, this becomes صِيِمَ يَوْمٌ (a day was fasted). Here, يَوْمٌ (a day) acts as the substitute for the agent, moving from the accusative adverb position to the nominative subject position.

3) The Specific Adverbial Phrase الجار والمجرور. This term refers to a prepositional phrase, which is the most common substitute when a sentence lacks a direct object. For example, the active sentence is جَلَسَ المُدَرِّسُ عَلَى الكُرْسِيِّ (the teacher sat on the chair). In this case, the teacher is the agent, and عَلَى الكُرْسِيِّ (on the chair) is a prepositional phrase. In the passive voice, this becomes جُلِسَ عَلَى الكُرْسِيِّ (the chair was sat upon). Here, عَلَى الكُرْسِيِّ remains a prepositional phrase, but it now takes on the grammatical role of the substitute for the agent. In this scenario, the preposition retains its case (genitive), while the entire phrase occupies the subject position.

4) The Specific Infinitive المصدر. This term refers to the infinitive (the verbal noun) that functions as an object, often to emphasize the action or specify its nature. It is sometimes referred to as the absolute object (المفعول المطلق). For example, Active: ضَرَبَ الرَّجُلُ ابْنَهُ ضَرْبًا (the man hit his son severely). In this case, الرَّجُلُ (the man) is the agent, and ضَرْبًا (a hitting) is the infinitive (absolute object).

## 6. Salience

Taking into account the structure of passive voice in both English and Arabic, along with the potential modifications that may arise between these two distinct languages due to their differing grammatical systems, which can affect the meaning during translation, I find it crucial to elucidate the importance of both the theme and the rheme in each language. As noted by Cruse (2004: p. 55), “things that are salient stand out from their background in some way and have a superior power of commanding attention.” In other words, elements that are prominent distinguish themselves from their surroundings in a specific way, possessing a greater capacity to draw attention. Two types of salience interrelationships can be identified: foregrounding and backgrounding. This could be due to the homograph challenge in the digital age; the *unvoweled* nature of Arabic is a major hurdle for AI and translation memory tools. This is because Arabic is facing the homograph challenge where letters are written without diacritics; an AI might read كَتَب as “*kataba*” (active) instead of “*kutiba*” (passive). Professional translators encounter two distinct translation strategies: activation versus nominalization. In this regard, it is essential to highlight five main strategies that should be considered.

| Strategy                                                                                        | Preferred contextual condition                                                                                                  | Sketch of the ailment                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Active-voice conversion الفعل المبني للمعلوم؛ إعادة صياغة فعلية فاعلة                         | The agent is discourse-old, narratively focal, or contrastively emphasized against another agent.                               | The thief was apprehended by the police<br>ألقت الشرطة القبض على اللص                         |
| 2 Canonical Arabic passive, agentless فعل ماضٍ مبني للمجهول بدون ذكر الفاعل                     | The agent is unknown, generic, self-evident, or pragmatically suppressed for stylistic/referential reasons.                     | The window was broken<br>كُسرت النافذة                                                        |
| 3 Canonical passive plus appositional agent البناء للمجهول مع ذكر الفاعل عطفت بيان              | The agent is discourse-prominent but the patient remains the Topic; classical and Qur'anic-style usage.                         | The lesson was written<br>كُتِبَ الدرس، كتبه الطالب                                           |
| 4 Nominalization of the event / المصدر الاسم المشتق                                             | The event is being framed as a state, accomplishment, or topic of academic/formal register; tense deixis is to be backgrounded. | His resignation was announced<br>أُعلن عن استقالته / تم الإعلان عن استقالته                   |
| 5 Periphrastic agentive borrowing under English influence + verb; قام فلان بـ<br>بوساطة: على يد | Formal media or translated-journalistic register; the agent is contrastively focal and the reader expects explicit attribution. | (Marked register)<br>تم القبض على اللص عن طريق الشرطة<br>The thief was arrested by the police |

## 7. Foregrounding

Foregrounded Action (Central Proposition): The concepts of foregrounding and backgrounding are vital in the domains of linguistics and literary stylistics, as they help to clarify how authors emphasize certain information while placing other aspects in context. Foregrounding is a linguistic strategy that accentuates specific elements within a text, capturing the reader's focus. It entails shifting the reader's attention from the content to the manner of expression, often to foster a deeper interpretation, slow down the reading process, or create a unique aesthetic effect.

Halliday (1978) offers a different viewpoint on foregrounding within systemic functional linguistics: this process relies on a similar mechanism, where specific components of the core meaning are expressed linguistically at various levels not solely through the semantics of the text but also through the ideational and interpersonal meanings represented in the content and the author's selected role, as well as through direct representation in the lexicogrammar or phonology.

## 8. Backgrounding

Background Information (Elaboration/Stylistic Effect): In this context, Cruse (2004) observes that a distinction can be made regarding the use of verb aspect in English; the continuous aspect is often utilized to create a backdrop against which the information conveyed by a singular verb is highlighted. Backgrounding refers to the clauses, phrases, or propositions within a text that provide contextual, supplementary, or elaborative details. This information is generally considered less central or of lesser importance to the immediate advancement of the primary narrative or plot point. It assists the reader in understanding the "what" (the foregrounded action) by offering the *when*, *where*, *why*, or *who*. For example: *Mary phoned her friend while she was watching the film. Mary watched the film while*

*she was phoning her friend.* In this situation, the foregrounding information is assumed, i.e., presupposed, while backgrounding is not included in the scope and can be negated. Syntactically speaking, foregrounding typically uses main, independent clauses to stand out, whereas background information is often found in relative clauses, adverbial clauses, or descriptive participial phrases.

## 9. Rhematic Connection

The field of linguistics has recently undergone significant expansion. Most linguists no longer confine their analysis to the sentence, which for a long time was considered the largest grammatical unit. They have begun to investigate units that exceed the sentence. This broadening of the linguistic scope can be attributed to two main reasons: firstly, many aspects of a sentence can only be comprehended by examining what precedes and follows the sentence in question. Secondly, larger units than a sentence display their own structural and functional characteristics, which are more intricate than those of a sentence; yet, they remain deserving of exploration by linguists (Neubert, 1981: p. 132). A paragraph typically comprises a collection of sentences and possesses its own structure. One method for analyzing paragraph structure involves elucidating how the theme and rheme of consecutive sentences are interrelated and coalesce into a macro-pattern. Nevertheless, several difficulties in defining the thematic elements are identified. A paragraph generally consists of a series of sentences and has its own distinct structure. One approach to analyzing paragraph structure is to clarify how the theme and rheme of successive sentences are connected and merge into a macro-pattern. However, numerous challenges are related to delineating the thematic elements of a sentence, which must be clarified initially.

Two primary methods for identifying the theme of a sentence are recognized: the Hallidayan approach and the Prague theory. In English, this function is typically realized by the initial elements of a sentence. Furthermore, Halliday (1978) differentiates between theme-rheme and given-new as two distinct concepts. In the unmarked pattern, the theme is associated with given information, while the rheme pertains to new information. The following example reads John purchased a new book, according to Halliday (1978): John (theme) bought (rheme).

## 10. Thematization in English

Most theories of grammar acknowledge that grammatical units are arranged hierarchically based on their size. This hierarchy is referred to as a rank scale (Simpson, 2004). As indicated in the arrangement below, the rank scale organizes units in a relationship that progresses from the largest to the smallest: sentence (or clause complex), clause, phrase, word, morpheme. Within the clause, which is the most fundamental of all, there are four essential components of clause structure: the subject (S), the predicator (P), the complement (C), and the adjunct (A). The largest clause exhibits the four SPCA patterns. For example, “The man goes to the gym regularly.” The smallest pattern is “the car stopped.” In contrast to English,

which is predominantly nominal, the Arabic language shares similarities in structural patterns with English, as the clause can be both nominal and verbal. However, the verbal form is the norm and is generally more accepted than its nominal counterpart. “جاء سامي” (came Sami) is more acceptable than “سامي جاء.” (Sami came).

Concerning the Arabic language, Firbas (1972) identifies four essential factors that influence the theme, rheme, and transition of an Arabic sentence. These factors include grammatical and semantic relationships, context, the purpose of communication, and linearity. The semantic field created by sentence predication forms the foundation for theme-rheme organization; Arabic sentences are typically divided into two categories: verbal and nominal. The verbal category contains a verbal component (V) in its predication, as illustrated in the following sentence, which adheres to the structure of verb V, subject S, and object O: قرأ الطالب الدرس (The student read the lesson). In this instance, the theme and rheme can be clearly identified, with the student serving as the theme and the lesson as the rheme.

The second category consists of an adjective or a noun complement C that is predicated of another nominal element acting as the subject (S), without a verbal copula. For example, C: The soldier S is brave C. In a two-element sentence, the verb generally carries the primary stress in the unmarked interpretation, thereby creating a rheme, while the nominal element subject functions as the theme in حضر سامي (Theme) Sami (Rheme) came—(came Sami): Sami came. In a VSO sentence that contains three or more elements, the verbal element typically acts as the transitional subject theme, while the rest of the sentence includes the object O, adverbial A, and complement C rheme. These general observations are applicable to the unmarked pattern, as demonstrated by this example (O, rheme). My friend (S, Theme) bought V a house O. This is due to the fact that the English language thematizes the subject, whereas in Arabic nominal sentences, the theme is connected to the subject of the sentence, while the rheme is associated with the predicate. A nominal sentence typically lacks transition when it does not indicate a specific time. However, a form of verb may be employed to indicate the past or the future. In the subsequent sentence, the verb form of كان (a defective verb) typically serves as a transition:

(C, rheme) جنديا (S, them) علي (v) كان. *Ali was a soldier.* In all the instances mentioned above, it seems that the theme is linked to the grammatical subject, while the transition is connected to the verb; conversely, the rheme relates to the other components, namely the object and adverbial. However, there is no direct one-to-one correspondence between the grammatical categories and thematization, as these are two distinct levels.

Furthermore, the arrangement of theme and rheme is influenced by additional factors beyond the grammatical and semantic structure of a sentence.” (Aziz, 1998: p. 119, 120). In all the instances mentioned above, it appears that the theme is associated with the grammatical subject, while the transition pertains to the

verb; conversely, the rheme is connected to the other elements, specifically the object and adverbial. “However, there is no direct one-to-one correspondence between the grammatical categories and thematization, as these represent two separate levels. Furthermore, the arrangement of theme and rheme is affected by additional factors beyond the grammatical and semantic structure of a sentence. A sentence serves as a carrier of messages, which can be examined from two primary perspectives: how the message is structured into theme-rheme and how given and new information is allocated among the various components of a sentence. The theme is positionally defined as the initial element of a sentence; information is phonologically realized through stress and intonation. Given and new elements are determined by the context of the sentence.

English and Arabic sentences convey the same message in different ways. For example, جاء المعلم, *the teacher came*. In English, the subject is thematized, whereas in the Arabic sentence, the verbal element is thematized. “In both English and Arabic, the new information is conveyed by the verb. This is understandable within the context of the situation where the teacher is given, and the arrival of the teacher holds news value.” (Aziz, 1998: p. 6). Another distinction between the two languages is that in English, the focus is placed on the last element and favors the pattern of adverbials of place followed by adverbials of time, while Arabic prefers the reverse order, with adverbials of time preceding adverbials of place. For instance: The Prophet Muhammad was born in 571 in Mecca. ولد الرسول محمد في مكة سنة 571 (The Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca in 571). An unmarked interrogative sentence in English is formed by the operator followed by the subject; in Arabic, the particle (the question word) “هل” is used. Has the student left? هل غادر الطالب؟ Additionally, the Arabic question may be posed without the particle, but this does not influence the thematic or informational organization.

## 11. Conclusion

In both English and Arabic, the passive voice frequently fulfills various roles. However, the context usually clarifies this differentiation. Moreover, the agentive passive in English can be rendered into Arabic through either of the following two constructions: First, a format comprising two informational units is introduced, with the initial unit articulated in the passive voice and the subsequent one in the active voice; for instance, “The lesson was written by Mary” translates to كتب الدرس كتبه ماري (the lesson was written, written by Mary). Next, an active construction is employed that affects the flexible word order in Arabic to achieve the desired distribution of information and communicative dynamism, as illustrated in the nominal sentence الدرس كتبه ماري (*the lesson was written by Mary*). Natural equivalence in translation encompasses not only the content of the message but also, to the extent possible, its form. This concept aids in providing a clearer understanding of meaning.

In this regard, everything conveyed by the linguistic signal contributes to that meaning, whether it pertains to the ideational or informational content or the ex-

tent to which form conveys meaning. Indeed, the standard technical term for “passive” in Arabic is المجهول, an elliptical form of المجهول فاعله, which indicates that the agent remains unidentified. It is accurate to assert that a new trend has emerged where the agent is cited, preceded by من قبل or its synonyms. Nevertheless, this is a recent development and does not sound natural, particularly since colloquial dialects still demote the agent. In Arabic, the use of passives is less prevalent than in English. Furthermore, even when utilized, Arabic passives fail to identify the agent of the action. Consequently, when translating an English sentence that contains the agent, it is advisable to use an active construction in Arabic for two primary reasons: firstly, the widespread reluctance to employ the passive voice, and secondly, the inability to specify the agent. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, this transition from English passive to Arabic active influences the theme-rheme salience, meaning that the foregrounding shifts to backgrounding, which impacts the meaning in terms of emphasis.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

## References

- ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf, H. (2001). *Qur’ānic stylistics*. Ta-Ha Publishers.
- Al-Akbari, A. (1986). *The Clarification of the Doctrines of the Basran and Kufan Grammarians*. Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami.
- Al-Awā, M. S. (2006). *Al-haq fi al-ta’bīr: Dirāsah fi al-mujtama’ wa-al-lughah wa-al-qānūn [The Right to Expression: A Study in Society, Language, and Law]*. Dar al-Sharuq.
- Al-Jāhīz, A. U. A. B. (1998). *Kitāb al-Bayān wa-al-Tabyīn* (‘A. M. Hārūn, Ed.; Vols. 1-4). Maktabat al-Khānjī.
- Almiḡrab, R. (2025). The Interplay of Linguistic and Cultural Factors in Translating Sensitive Texts. *International Journal of Cultural Research and Studies*, 8, 26-32. <https://www.al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/ijcrs>
- Al-Mubarrad, A. A. M. Y. (1986). *Al-Kāmil fī al-Adab* (M. A. al-Dālī, Ed.; Vols. 1-4). Mu’assasat al-Risālah. (Original Work Written c. 9th Century)
- Al-Suyūṭī, (2003). Maḥāsīn al-kalām [The Beauties of Speech] (Chap. 53). In *Al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān [The Perfect Guide to the Sciences of the Qur’an]* (4th ed., Vol. 2). Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah.
- Al-Zamakhsharī, M. I. ‘U. (1891). *Al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl wa-‘uyūn al-ghawāmiḡ fī wujūh al-ta’wīl [The Revealer of the Truths of Revelation]* (Vols. 1-2). al-Maṭba‘ah al-Amīriyyah.
- Aziz, Y. (1998). *Topics in Translation with Special Reference to English and Arabic*. University of Garyounis Press.
- Babṭī, A. (1992). *Al-mufasssal fī qawā’id al-lughah al-‘arabiyya [The Detailed Dictionary of Arabic Grammar]*. Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya.
- Baker, M. (1992). *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203327579>
- Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic Structures*. Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112316009>

- Cruse, A. (2004). *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.
- Firbas, J. (1972). On the Interplay of Prosodic and Non-Prosodic Means of Functional Sentence Perspective. In V. Fried (Ed.), *The Prague School and the Language of Linguistics* (pp. 77-94). University of North Carolina Press.
- Givón, T. (2001). *Syntax: An Introduction* (vols. 1-2). John Benjamins.  
<https://doi.org/10.1075/z.syns>
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1978). *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*. University Park Press.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1994). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (2nd ed.). Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Hatim, B. (1990). *Discourse and the Translator*. Longman.
- Hatim, B., & Mason, I. (1990). *Discourse and the Translator*. Longman.
- Hatim, B., & Mason, I. (1997). *The Translator as Communicator*. Routledge.
- Ibn 'Āshir, A. W. (2020). *Al-Murtaqā fī al-naḥw wa-l-taṣrīf [The Ascent in Grammar and Morphology]* (Ed. by Markaz al-Qarawiyyin). Dar al-Hadith.
- Ibn Hishām al-Anṣārī, J. D. (2019). *Mughnī al-labīb 'an kutub al-a'ārīb [The Sufficient Guide for the Intelligent Regarding the Books of Parsing]* (4th ed.). Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah.
- Montgomery, W. (1968). *Ibn Hishām. Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed., Vol. 3, pp. 798-799). Brill.
- Neubert, A. (1981). Translation, Interpreting, and Text Linguistics. *Studia Linguistica*, 35, 130-145. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9582.1981.tb00706.x>
- Sībawayh, 'A. (1988). *Al-Kitāb* ('A. Hārūn, Ed.; 3rd ed., Vol. 1). Maktabat al-Khānjī. 7th Edition.
- Siewierska, A. (1984). *The Passive: A Comparative Linguistic Analysis*. Croom Helm.
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics: A Resource Book for Students*. Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203496589>
- Versteegh, K. (1997). *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought III: The Arabic Linguistic Tradition*. Routledge.