TEMA

27

The Passive Voice. Forms and Functions

La voz pasiva. Formas y funciones.

§ NOVIEMBRE DE 2026

Material de elaboración propia a partir de las fuentes oficiales que se citan al final del tema. No es un temario oficial ni sustituye a la normativa publicada.

Índice

1. INTRODUCTION

2. THE PASSIVE VOICE: DEFINITION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- 2.1. Voice and transitivity
- 2.2. The passive in the major reference grammars
- 2.3. Which verbs can be passivised

3. FORMS OF THE PASSIVE

- 3.1. The be-passive
- 3.2. Verbs with two objects
- 3.3. Phrasal and prepositional verbs
- 3.4. The get-passive
- 3.5. Reporting passives and impersonal constructions
- 3.6. Constructions near the passive

4. FUNCTIONS OF THE PASSIVE

- 4.1. Why choose the passive?
- 4.2. The agent is unknown, obvious or unimportant
- 4.3. Information structure and end-focus
- 4.4. Register: science, news, law and instructions
- 4.5. Stylistic and rhetorical uses

5. THE PASSIVE VOICE IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH: CONTRASTS AND TYPICAL ERRORS

- 5.1. Spanish resources
- 5.2. Typical contrasts
- 5.3. Typical errors of the Spanish-speaking learner

6. PEDAGOGICAL AND DIDACTIC IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. The passive in the curriculum
- 6.2. Principles for teaching the passive
- 6.3. Classroom proposals

7. CONCLUSION

Fuentes

1. INTRODUCTION

"Never use the passive where you can use the active," wrote George Orwell in 1946, in the fourth of the six rules he proposes towards the end of his essay "Politics and the English Language". Generations of writers have repeated the advice, yet the sixth rule of the same list says: "Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous." That tension is the best possible way into Topic 27: The Passive Voice. Forms and Functions. The passive is neither a vice nor a virtue. It is a grammatical resource that lets a speaker decide which participant of an event comes first, and a teacher of English must know both how it is built and why it is chosen.

In order to address this topic, I will divide it into five main sections. Firstly, I will define the passive voice and place it within the system of voice, transitivity and information structure. Secondly, I will examine its forms: the be-passive in all its tenses, the get-passive, the causative with have and get, and the less central constructions that grammarians place near the passive. Thirdly, I will analyse its communicative functions and its distribution across registers. Fourthly, I will compare the English passive with the Spanish resources that correspond to it, and describe the typical errors of Spanish-speaking learners. Finally, I will reflect on the pedagogical and didactic implications of this content within our current educational framework, before drawing some conclusions.

Before moving on, I would like to mention the sources consulted for the preparation of this topic. These include: Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik's A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language, Huddleston and Pullum's The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language, Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan's Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English, and Swan's Practical English Usage, as well as the online reference grammar of the British Council's LearnEnglish website. I have also drawn on the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and its Companion Volume of 2020, and on the LOMLOE (Organic Law 3/2020), Real Decreto 217/2022 and 243/2022, and Decreto 110/2022 and 109/2022 of the Autonomous Community of Extremadura.