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Transformational Relations as Elegant Variation in Writing

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Abstract

Transformational relations or relations of grammatical paraphrase describe contrasting syntactic structures possessing the same referential object and expressing the same sense. The grammatical category, voice, exemplifies transformations through its streamlined active-passive constructions. The predominance of the active expression makes many budding scholars ignorant of the alternative passivization. The formation of transformations, the verbs involved in transformation, the reasons for adopting passive constructions, the relevance of the expressions in fields of discourse are elucidated in detail as requisite skills for writing and speaking competently. In addition, transformational relations as sentential synonymy examine sentences with different structural frameworks as synonymous for embracing the same truth conditions: the same referent, the same sense or meaning, and the same event in the real world. Generally, sentences that have the same necessary and sufficient conditions for determining their truth or falsity are paraphrase.

*Some speak (or write) in tongues;
Some understand the media of these tongues.
These are gifts (skills) to be possessed
To speak, write, listen and read well.*

- Ephraim A. Chukwu

Transformational Relations

The English axiom: *Variety is the spice of life* with the Igbo saying: *Proverb is the palm-oil with which words are eaten* advocates embellishing writings and talks with existing alternative structures having the same goal of presenting intended experiential thought. Phrase components of certain propositions are substituted by word replacives:

The rich people should aid the poor people.

Or

Those who are rich should aid those who are poor.

Or

Those rich people should aid those poor one.

The normal expressions occupying the subject slots and those at the object positions are substituted by the shorter forms:

The rich should aid the poor.

Phrase-word replacives aside, sentential alternatives for stating utterances having the same referent and sense or meaning are also in the language:

I have advised you to turn over a new leaf.

You have been advised to turn over a new leaf.

Alternative ways of expressing a fact or reality are also offered in pragmatics. Face-saving and face-threatening acts of linguistics politeness are pragmatics features for expressing feelings: *Get out from here!* and *May you leave that place?* are alternative expressions. Both have an intention to be obeyed, but it is presented in different structural frameworks. The former is a face-threatening act encoded in imperative expression suggesting superiority; the latter is a face-saving act encapsulated in request radiating regard. The personality of the recipient of the action 'get' is disregarded, but it is considered by the auxiliary "may" of the second expression.

Transformational relations are the affinity between and/or among alternative structures serving referential functions and preserving the sense or meaning of the real events in the world. However, the relation of grammatical paraphrase discussed is technically called voice.

Elegant Variation

Some grammatical elements substitute for larger groups to eschew repetitions and create economy in word usage: pronouns substitute nouns and noun phrases; the verb 'do' replaces many verb phrases; the place and time adverbials replace adverb phrases. These syntactic elements are rightful tools for writing intelligently and endearingly. Variation of the largest unit, the sentence, is also indispensable in making pieces of writing enduring, exciting and potent.

Active and passive constructions properly used foreground a writer's competence. The elegance injected by knowing when and how to use active-passive constructions is pungently expressed in many fields of discourse:

Legal Profession

- a) I sentence you to two years in prison. — active
- b) You are sentenced to two years in prison. _ passive

Civil Service

- a) The Vice-Chancellor has recommended for your promotion. — active
- b) You are recommended for promotion. — passive

Group A expressions are in the active constructions; group B in the passives called passivization. Written or spoken, accepting and shirking responsibility is expressed in these sentences. The knowledge of the formulations of these alternative expressions, arming oneself with the reasons for adopting passivization, and the need to lace writings with these distinctive parallel structures, when necessary, are veritable vade mecum for depicting elegance in writing.

Voice

This is a grammatical category which shows the contrast between two sentences. This contrast does not change the message conveyed; rather it changes the structural patterns of the two sentences reporting the fact:

- (a) Cynthia divorced Job.
- (b) Job was divorced by Cynthia.

The contrast between these sentences is that sentence (a) is active, while (b) is passive. The relationship between active and passive sentences is observed in two grammatical units: the verb phrase unit and the clause unit.

The Verb Phrasal (VP) Unit

	Active	Passive
Present:	slaughters writes	-is slaughtered -is written
Past:	slaughtered wrote	-was slaughtered -was written
Modal	can slaughter can write	-can be slaughtered -can be written
Perfective	has slaughtered has written	-has been slaughtered -has been written
Progressive:	are slaughtering are writing	-are being slaughtered -are being written
Modal + perfective	may have slaughtered Could have written	-may have been slaughtered -could have been written

Sentence Illustration

Active

Passive

Present:	Okafor slaughters goats. Okafor writes letters.	Goats are slaughtered by Okafor. Letters are written by Okafor.
Past	Okafor slaughtered a goat . Okafor wrote a letter.	A goat was slaughtered by Okafor. A letter was written by Okafor.
Modal	Okafor can slaughter a goat. Okafor can write a letter.	A goat can be slaughtered by Okafor. A letter can be written by

		Okafor.
Perfective	Okafor has slaughter a goat. Okafor has written a letter.	A goat has been slaughtered by Okafor. A letter has been written by Okafor.
Progressive	The butchers are slaughtering goats. The students are writing letters.	Goats are being slaughtered by the butchers. Letters are being written by the students.
Modal + Perfective	The butchers could have slaughtered goats	Goats could have been slaughtered by the butchers.

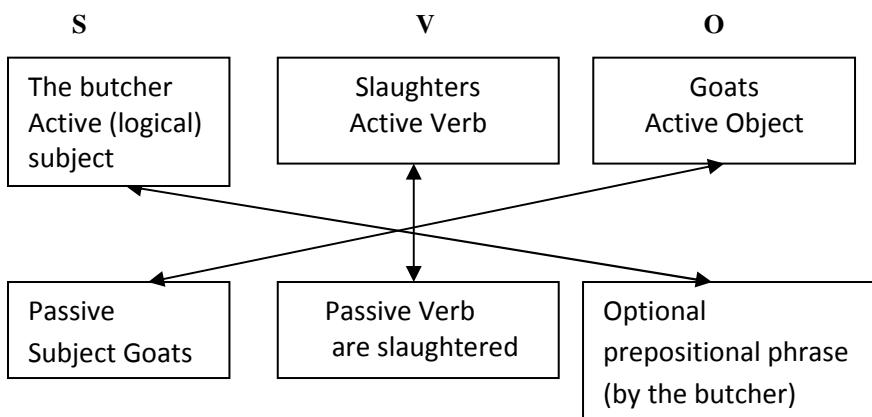
The noticeable contrast between the active and passive categories is the addition of the auxiliary verb BE and the 'ed' form of the past participle of the main verbs.

The Clausal Unit

Passivization at this level involves the movement of two grammatical elements and the introduction of a prepositional 'by' phrase. This arrangement and addition take these processes:

- i) The logical subject (i.e. the active subject or the agent initiating the action) leaves its normal position to become the optional passive agent,
- ii) The active object of this monotransitive sentences assumes the passive subject position, and
- iii) The introduction of the preposition 'by' to govern the passive noun or noun phrase agent the real initiator of the action of the sentence. The 'by' prepositional phrase described as the adjunct (A) element is optional: it can be added when necessary; otherwise it is eliminated.
- iv) A schematic representation of making an active sentence with a single object a passive one.

A Schematic Representation of Making an Active Sentence with a Single Object a Passive One



Transformational Relations (A Description)

	Active	Passive
1. Subject	-logical -grammatical	-passive -grammatical
2. Subject	precedes the verb	precedes the verb
3. Object	present	not present (becomes passive present)
4. Verb	Active Object	Passive 'by' prepositional phrase Compliment
5. Structure	subject+verb+ object (SVO) ; subject + verb + object ₂ + object ₁ (SVOO)	subject + verb+ adjunct (SVA) ; subject + verb + object + adjunct (SVOA)
6. Clausal elements movements	active object moves	to optional agent slot (adjunct)
	active object moves	to (passive) subject slot

Division of Voice

1. Active

“In sentences where the subject performs the action, the verb is said to be in the active voice”, Tracy (1980). In a normal sentence structure the usual sequence is SV along with other elements. This linear arrangement, where the subject precedes the verb, makes the subject the logical subject of the group, the grammatical subject as well as the agent initiating the action. These qualities marking out the subject in S - V order set a sentence out as active. Again, a sentence is in the active if the agent is the direct initiator of the verb or phrase.

Active Sentence Illustration

- S.V.: Jesus wept.
S.V.O.: Jesus preached the gospel.
S.V.O.O.: Jesus fed the people bread.
S.V.C.: Jesus became thirsty.
S.V.C.A.: Jesus became man to save mankind.
S.V.A.: Jesus cried bitterly.

2. Passive

In sentences where the active object is moved to become the passive subject as well as the grammatical subject, the sentences are said to be in the passive voice. The subject is considered passive because it does not initiate the action; it is also grammatical because it occupies the subject slot and precedes the passive verb phrase. “The passive voice makes use of formula ‘be’ + ‘past participle’, Tracy (1980).

Examples of Passive Constructions

- S.V.A.: The gospel was preached by Jesus.
S.V.O.A.: The people were fed bread by Jesus.
S.V.O.A.: He was elected president by them.
S.V.A.: The chief was disrobed by the government.

Verbs for Passivization

Two types of verbs – transitive and intransitive-exist. Transitive verbs govern objects in the active construction, i.e. the action is transferable to a noun object. The noun object can be a noun, a noun phrase, a pronoun, or verbal nouns gerunds and full infinitives. The intransitive verb does not govern any object and so, the action is not transferable; rather it is retained by the subject initiating it. So, in passive transformations, the logical subject of the active sentence and active object also of the active sentence are moved from their normal positions to occupy different slots. This movement is the transformation of the active construction to a passive one. It is only the transitive verbs that are involved in these conversions.

Exemplifications

Transitive

Active: He kills goats

Passive: Goats are killed by him. (No passive)

Intransitive

He sleeps calmly

Active: John loved the girl. He was quite curious

Passive: The girl was loved by John (No passive)

Active: The teacher was teaching Satan became a the class sting on our flesh

Passive: The class was being taught by the teacher. (No passive)

Why and When Do We Use Passive Constructions

Certain contexts and situations make it necessary to use passive constructions. Tracy (1980) supplies three reasons for passivization:

- (a) The passive voice is used to emphasize an action that is more important than its performer (i.e. when the performer of action is known but considered unnecessary to be mentioned)
Bracketed elaboration mine:

- The results will be announced soon.
- He was cheated out of his money.

- (b) It is also used when the performer's identify is unknown (i.e. when the performer of actions is unknown), addition mine:
 - He was given a push from behind
 - He was killed in the war. -(mine)
- (c) The performer may be identified only if it is absolutely necessary for the completion of the sentences:
 - The pen was given to me by my uncle.
 - They were aided by the government.

These three different reasons for passive constructions demonstrate three structural messages: the 'by' prepositional phrases are eliminated in A and B; thus attention is concentrated on the factual information. However, the retention of these 'by' phrases in C are inevitable for the completion of the meaning of the expressions. Their removal will make the sentences hanging or incomplete until the missing words are added.

In addition to the aforementioned, passive voice is used for various other purposes:

- (d) It is used to shirk responsibility for action taken. The logical subject is unexpressed. This is the official language of the civil service. It makes one non-committal:
 - You're advised to vacate your office.
 - You're requested to supply ten bags of rice.

Those advising and requesting are not mentioned. So, no one has committed oneself to the actions.

Kuiper and Allan (1996) explain that this aspect is "often used in political speech or writing when the speaker or writer does not wish to say who is responsible for something.... Politicians and government officials are a good source of such sentences" lacking unexpressed logical subjects "used as a tactic for evading responsibility or for not fully answering the question" put at them.

- (e) The passive is used "in informative texts especially academic and scientific one", Eyisi (2006). Such texts as project reports, expository writings and accounts of laboratory reports are

preferably expressed with passive constructions. These expressions depersonalize or make the writings impersonal. “Precisely, in this case, the interest of the reader is focused on events and processes; the action is considered more important than the performer”, Eyisi.

Sentence Examples from Eyisi

- (a) An atom which carried a charge, either positive or negative, is called an ion.
- (b) A positively charged ion is called a cation and a negatively charged ion is called an anion.
- (c) When calcium trioxocarbonate (iv) is heated, it decomposes and forms calcium oxide and carbon dioxide.
- (d) Human body is made up of various parts.

Relevance of Transformational Relations (Passivization)

- (1) Passivization marks out sentences that can undergo transformations. This makes possible the delineation between transitivity and intransitivity. Quirk and Greenbaum (2000) corroborate this significant role. According to them, “one way of distinguishing the various clause types is by means of ‘transformational’ relations, or relation of grammatical paraphrase”. They explain that clauses containing a noun phrase as object are distinguished by the ability to be converted into passive clauses, the object noun phrase assuming the function of subject (V_{pass} = passive verb phrase), the subject appearing (if at all) in an optional by-phrase symbolized as [A]:

Many critics disliked the play (S.V.O_d) \longleftrightarrow

The play was disliked (by many critics) S.V_{pass} [A]”.

There was no change in the fact reported by both sentences. The transformational relationship is made possible by the presence of a transitive verb ‘dislike’.

- (2) Passivization reverses the positional or structural possibilities of words of certain sentences; and, by so doing, makes the sentence elements adjust themselves in different syntactic environments. This

introduces in writing variations from one category (active) to another (passive).

- (3) Passivization introduces compression and economy in sentence construction. The elimination of the optional by-phrase (when necessary) injects brevity of expression and limitedness in the number of words used in constructing the expression.
- (4) Passivization suggests that ideas or pieces of information can be conveyed in two different syntactic structures without altering the messages intended. One can opt for sending written messages in the active or passive forms.
- (5) Expertise in the use of passive voice suggests knowledgibility in the grammar of English. Switching effortlessly from one form to the other endears one's speech and writing to one's audience or readers.

Double Passives (Ditransitive)

The examples given above are monotransitive transforms, in other words, one transitive verb and one direct object. Double passives involve the presence of two objects – one direct; the other, indirect – in an active sentence which undergoes passivization. Both objects can occur as the passive subject constructions. This implies that two passive expressions are derived from the active or ditransitive one.

Active A:	Jesus	fed	the people	bread	
	S	V	O ₂	O ₁	
Passive A:	Bread	was fed	to the people	by Jesus	
	S	V	A	A	
Passive B:	The	people	were fed	bread	by Jesus
		S	V	O	A
Active:	James	buys	the brothers	books	
	S	V	O ₂	O ₁	
Passive A:	Books	are bought	for the brothers	by James	
	S	V	A	A	
Passive B:	The brothers	are bought	books	by James	
	S	V	O	A	

In the active sentences, the direct objects – bread and books – have ‘1 (one)’ attached to them; the indirect ones – the people and the brothers – have “2”

on them. The choice of making one a passive subject creates a syntactic structure different from the other.

The passive of the first sentences have these structures:

A: S V A A

B: S V O A

and those of the second have also:

A: S V A A

B: S V O A

Transformational Relation: A Prototypical Example of Sentential Synonymy

Transformational relations or relations of grammatical paraphrase have distinctive syntactic structures. These structures, however, “describe the same basic event in the world with the same basic participants” Carnie (2007). In other words, they furnish the same thematic information “called the truth conditions of the sentences(s)” Fromkin et al (2003). This means that the truth of an active constructions presupposes the truth of the passive construction, and falsity of the active type presupposes the passive one. Illustrating instances:

	Active	Passive
i)	The wrestler threw his opponent	His opponent was thrown by the wrestler
ii)	The teacher flogged the offender	The offender was flogged by the teacher
iii)	The thief steals animals	Animals are stolen by the thief

The themes of these sentences are *opponent*, *offender* and *animals* who undergo the actions of *throw*, *flog* and *steal* in spite of the syntactic slots occupied by the word-classes in the structures. Again, the referential functions as well as the truth conditions of the active expressions are the same as those of the passive structures.

Further instances of relation of grammatical paraphrase bearing the same thematic roles, retaining the same meaning, but being encoded in different structural constructions are enunciated in Fromkin et al (2003):

It is easy to play sonatas on this piano.
This piano is easy to play sonatas on.
On this piano it is easy to play sonatas.
Sonatas are easy to play on this piano.

Booth assassinated Lincoln.
It was Booth who assassinated Lincoln.
It was Lincoln who was assassinated by Booth.
The person who assassinated Lincoln was Booth.

The students gave money to the Beggar.
The students gave the beggar money.

These sets of sentences relate through transformations. Their thematic roles are the same and they tend to preserve similar truth conditions called meaning or sense, i.e. referring to events in the world as they are known.

In addition to sentential paraphrase involving vocabulary shifts, paraphrase may be expressed through the auxiliary verbs to exemplify certain semantic concepts as ability, permission and obligation; through phrasal expression and phrase substitutions.

i) Auxiliary verbs illustrating *ability*, *permission* and *obligation*.

He can go.

He may go.

He must go.

ii) Phrasal Expression

He is able to go. – He has the ability to go.

He is permitted to go. – He has permission to go.

He is obliged to go. – He has obligation to go.

iii) Word substitution of a phrase.

John saw Mary.

John perceived Mary using his eyes.

The professor lectured the class.

The professor delivered a lecture to the class.

The first group has different conditions for uttering them. Such conditions observe real events in the world. The second and the third alternative paraphrases do not affect the truth conditions, or what is called the senses or meanings of the juxtaposed sentences.

Conclusion

Transformational relations introduce elegant variations in writing. These structural alternants differ from sentence variations which consider the admixture of the patterns of simple, complex, compound, compound-complex and multiple sentence in writing; rather, paraphrase provides alternative ways of structuring words to effect communicative-competence.

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