

# THE PROBLEM OF THE VOICE AS GRAMMATICAL CATEGORY IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines the problem of the voice as a grammatical category in contemporary English. The research was conducted through theoretical and bibliographic analysis, generalization of literature, comparison and synthesis.*

**Keywords:** *voice, grammatical category, the Active Voice, the Passive Voice, the Middle Voice.*

**Introduction.** The question of determining the category of Voice is one of the most controversial in contemporary linguistics. It is to be noted that there is nothing more supremely distinguishing in modern English, especially in its later periods, than the fact of developing the use of passive formations. Linguists point out that the category of Voice has a peculiar place among other verbal categories. Unlike tense, aspect and mood, which are also characteristics of the verb, the Voice regulates the subject-object position in the sentence.

The object of the research is the Voice as grammatical category in contemporary English. The subject of the research is the characteristics of the Voice and the problems associated with the Voice as grammatical category. The following methods were used in the research: theoretical and bibliographic analysis and generalization of literature, comparison, synthesis. The structure of the research: the work consists of introduction, three sections, conclusion and list of references. The introduction is about the relevance of the research, setting goals and objectives, defining the subject and object. The first paragraph is about existence of possible definitions of the Voice as grammatical category. The second section is about the possible types of the Voice allocated in English. The third section is about the features, issues and difficulties of use of the Voice in contemporary English. The results presented in this research can be used in teaching English as a foreign language.

*The Definition of the Voice as Grammatical Category.* Interest in the category of Voice has noticeably revived since the beginning of the XIX century due to the presence of a number of complex issues. There are several approaches to the definition of the category of Voice. The difference appears in the way of how grammarians and linguists consider the nature and direction of relations between the action, its agent and the object. According to one of the approaches this category expresses the relation between the subject and the action or, in other words, the category of Voice expresses in the verbal form the relation of the action to its subject.

In English Grammar by M. Blokh the verbal category of voice shows the direction of the process as regards the participants of the situation, the relationship between the action expressed by the verb and the person or non-person denoted by the subject of the sentence [2, p. 176]. Being a grammatical category, the category of Voice presupposes a grammatical opposition in which different verb forms are associated with changes in the syntactic roles of units related to them. Of importance here is the linguists' understanding that voice shows the direction of the process, though this understanding does not find its verbal expression in the above-mentioned definition. This idea sounds clear in the definition of the category of Voice given in: the category of voice expresses the direction of the action towards its agent [1, p.145]. From the point of view of the form, the Voice is a morphological category, which is expressed by changing the forms of the verb and is formed on the basis of the relations of its main members – subject – predicate – object. From the point of view of content, this is a syntactic category, since it indicates certain relations between the members of the sentence – subject (or agent) – predicate – object. However, the Voice expresses not just syntactic relations between the members of the sentence, but the relation of the subject and the object with their semantic roles in a certain situation. The category of Voice can be represented lexically when the concept of Voice influences the semantic meaning of words (*to perform – to undergo*).

*The Types of Voice Allocated in Contemporary English.* Speaking about the problem of the number of Voices existing in the English language, linguists cannot come to a consensus. The vast majority of the authors of English Scientific Grammars seem to recognize only two Voices in English: **the Active** and **the Passive**. Nevertheless, not all the grammarians share this opinion. Thus the total number of Voices in different systems varies from 0 to 4, 5, or even 6. If A.I.Smirnitsky distinguishes only two Voices in English (the Active Voice and the Passive Voice), N.A.Kobrina distinguishes six Voices in contemporary English: the Active Voice, the Passive Voice, the Reflective Voice, the Reciprocal Voice, the Medical or Middle Voice and the Causative Voice.

In English, each transitive verb can take the form of The Active Voice and The Passive Voice. The Active Voice indicates that the action is directed from the subject or issues from the subject thus the subject denotes the agent of the action.

For example, *I go to school every day. My brother gave me a book.*

Active and Passive Voices are a reflection of the same described situation and are usually considered together. For example, *I heard the song. – The song was heard by me.* If the subject is the object of the action (the subject or the person to whom the action applies), the transitive verb is in the form of a passive voice.

In addition to the analytical forms of the passive voice with the auxiliary verb to be, the meaning of passivity in modern English can be conveyed by combinations of other copula verbs (*to get, to remain, to look, to stand, etc.*)

The Middle Voice occurs when the subject of a sentence is a noun or a noun phrase that is affected, but there are no attributes of the passive, such as the auxiliary verb "to be" and a side phrase. As it was previously written, transitive verbs can move from the Active to the Passive Voice. There is a special kind of ergative verbs which conventionally take place in the Middle Voice.

The Reciprocal voice is usually expressed by the words «each other, one another» to show mutuality of action. This grammatical structure consists of verb and reciprocal pronoun. For example, *They met each other at the station.*

We use The Causative Voice when we know that the subject did not do the action on their own. Actually, the subjects in causative sentences lead someone else to do the action. For example, *He made me mow the lawn.*

The problems are raised in connection with the second constituent, i.e. Participle II. The fact is that Participle II has a passive meaning not only when used with *be*, but also when used alone. Thus, Participle I seems to have 2 passive opposites: *writing, being written, written*. Participle II has also a perfective meaning. There is also the distinction between passive of action and passive of state. Analyzing the constructions under consideration M.Y. Blokh also points to the role of context that can have the “tantalizing” and “processual zing” effect.

For example, *I was mistaken. I was often mistaken for my friend Otto.*

Context also plays an important role in such cases. The predicate (the Voice form) has a verbal characteristic or it describes a certain state of the subject. It can also express an action or a qualitative characteristic of the object.

**Conclusion.** In general, as we can see, meanings of the Voice cannot be considered only within the framework of grammar, since similar relations of an action with its subject and object can be expressed using word-forming means and semantic definitions. However, the erroneous opinion is that the Voice forms in the English language, having passed a long and difficult way of formation, have finally stopped in their development. And at the present stage, in any living language, many linguistic phenomena are being controversial, which implies the search for new ways of expressing already seemingly formed concepts and categories. This is especially true for the English language as an international language with its significant dynamism. At the same time, the verb as the most «mobile» part of speech undergoes probably the most extensive changes: not only the content of verbal categories changes, but also the ways of its formal expression. In this regard, the category of the Voice in English is no exception — its formation is still in the process, and many issues and problems related to this, respectively, require detailed scientific consideration.

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