The Use of Passive Voice in Political Newspaper Articles:
A Descriptive Analysis of Its Frequency and Functions

Nita Sitta Rachma[1], Anwar Fadila[2], Desy Awal Mar'an[3], Tarina Dashela[4]
[1,2,3] Universitas Lampung, Indonesia
[4] Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika Pontianak, Indonesia
Email: nitasitta@fkip.unila.ac.id[1], anwarfadila@fkip.unila.ac.id[2],
desyawal@fkip.unila.ac.id[3] tarina.tdl@bsi.ac.id[4]

Abstract
In written English production, using passive voice is one of the most challenging aspects to master. This study aims to analyze the frequency, structure, and functions of passive voice in written English, especially in political newspaper articles. A descriptive qualitative approach was used for this study, with data collection techniques in the form of document studies on four samples of newspaper articles regarding political issues that happened in Indonesia in early 2025; two articles were taken from The Jakarta Post, and two others were from ANTARA, published around January to February 2025. The result obtained from 4 political news articles shows that of the total 82 sentences analyzed, 26 sentences (31%) are passive voices. Two main types found were: "to-be" passive form (formal passive), 75%, and "to get" passive 25%. This indicates that passive sentence usage in political news articles is quite common. The passive form, with or without phrases, is used by the writers to emphasize some truths to be involved in an event or incident and express their opinion to influence the reader's mind.
Keywords: *News Article, Passive Voice, Written Language.*

INTRODUCTION

Most of students in final level experience have problems when working on their final assignment or usually known as undergraduate thesis. Undergraduate Thesis as known as *Skripsi* is a scientific paper composed by undergraduate students of any study program based on the result of field study or library study (*Pedoman Penulisan Skripsi*, 2020). The process of writing the undergraduate thesis is the last phase in carrying out education for students. This undergraduate thesis is structured as a graduation requirement for students and to obtain a bachelor's degree. Jamaris (2004) stated that learning difficulties are a condition that has a heterogeneous nature and fundamental psychological functions.

Among several grammatical strategies, the passive voice presents a unique space, often functioning as a tool or medium for obfuscation, emphasis shift, or agency suppression. In contrast to the general active structure in which the subject does an action, passive sentences foreground the recipient of the action, often leaving the agent implied or overlooked. In describing a transitive event, the English language allows a choice of two voices, such as canonical and non-canonical. The canonical form is the active voice, and the alternative is the passive voice, which offers its semantics and syntactic functions. Moreover, the passive voice can also be broken down into two further types: "to-be" passive and "to-get" passive. Theories are numerous, and literature from both linguistics and psychology has a row in describing the function and uses of these two forms.

In English, an event can be described in either the active or passive form. While the active is the canonical or common form, the passive has specific functions, such as placing the focus on the patient or forcing the agent into the background (Keenan and Dryer, 2006). Additionally, transitive events consist of two participants: the agent, who is also the doer of the action, and the patient, who is the person or thing that "undergoes" the action. The passive voice is further subdivided, providing the options of "to-be" passive and "to-get" passive. Many people consider these two versions to be the same, both syntactically and semantically. However, literature from the fields of linguistics and psychology suggests that these two types of passives have different usages, structures, and connotations.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to explore more deeply the use, frequency, and structure of the passive in written language production. This study was conducted on a sample of four newspaper articles; two articles taken from the Jakarta Post and two others from ANTARA, discussing political issues that occurred in Indonesia during the first and second months of 2025.

Speaking about passive voice is a very complex topic, and it has been the object of many discussions. Some experts of grammar often criticize the passive voice, considering its static and evasive, and considering the active voice more direct and vigorous. As Garner (2000) points out, many writers talk about passive voice without knowing exactly what it is, and many of them associate it only with the verb "be" and "past participle". According to Pullum (2014), to construct a general description of the passive voice, we need to focus not only on the verb but also on the larger units, especially the verb phrase and the clause.

A. Forming Passive Structures

Most English grammar books have extensively discussed and provided general rules for forming passive structures. As is well known, the passive form is formed by placing the verb "to be" (or to get) into the same verb form as the active verb and adding the past participle of the active verb. Furthermore, at the clause level, the subject of the active verb becomes the agent in the passive sentence, and vice versa, the object of the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive equivalent. It should be noted that the agent is not always included in the sentence, but when it is, it is preceded by the preposition "by" and placed at the end of the sentence. The following are examples of active sentences and their passive equivalents.

Active	Passive
Someone broke the window.	The window was broken (The agent "someone", is often omitted).
The company released a new product.	A new product was released by the company.

Huddleston et al. (2002) between long and short passives depending on the presence or absence of an agent by pointing out the fact that the short passive does not have an exact active counterpart. Both long and short passive structures can be formed with finite or non-finite verb phrases. Furthermore, passive clauses with non-finite verb phrases are called empty passives, and they always function as subordinate clauses. It is said that passive sentences formed with the verb to get are mostly used in informal English. This verb implies that the referent of the passive subject is not responsible for the action it suffers, which is also

confirmed by the fact that this construction is often used without an agent, for example: get caught, get dressing, get run over. On the other hand, Huddleston et al. (2002) and Pullum (2014), provide a more detailed analysis of other types of passive constructions. In addition to those already described above, which are formed only with the verbs "to be" or "to get", and past participles, and passive adjectives, these passive constructions include several other passive structures:

1. In prepositional passives, the subject in the passive sentence remains the same as the object of the preposition in the active sentence (Ex: The couch has played on. The couch has been played on)
2. Bare passive clauses contain only a subject and the past participle of the verb, thus the verb phrase is non-finite. This structure restricts them to a dependent position in a sentence. (Ex: It had been stolen when she ran into the store to buy some milk).
3. Embedded passives refer to passive structures embedded in active clauses (Ex: The government had the case investigated by the police. I had a cake made by my friend.)
4. Concealed passives refer to passives with a gerund instead of the past participle as head. ("The report requires editing." (Implies someone needs to edit the report.)

A. Uses of the Passive Voice

As mentioned earlier, the passive voice has long been a subject of scholarly interest in both grammatical and discourse-oriented studies. Traditionally described as an active clause transformation in which the object takes the subject position (e.g., The official rules have been commanded by the President), the passive construction is often marked by the use of an auxiliary verb (usually be or get) followed by a past participle. The choice between an active and passive sentence allows us to present the same information in two different orders (Hewings, 2001). Active and passive sentences do not always express the same propositional meaning, even though the meaning relations between sentence elements remain the same in the two different sentences structurally.

In political communication and news reporting, the passive voice is commonly used to disguise agency, deflect blame, or promote institutional authority. A study by Hart (2010) shows how journalists and political actors use passive structures to construct particular views of events and responsibilities. For example, saying "the protesters were dispersed" avoids mentioning who carried out the action, thus softening the depiction of state violence or controversial decisions.

METHOD

This research used a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate the use of passive voice in Political newspaper articles with data collection techniques in the form of document studies on four samples of newspaper articles discussing Indonesian politics in early 2025; two articles were taken from The Jakarta Post and two others from ANTARA News published in January to February. It was said by Sugiyono (2010) that research is generally interpreted as a scientific way to obtain data with certain goals and uses. In conducting research, it is necessary to first determine the research method that is appropriate to the research to be studied. In this study, the methodology is designed to identify, classify, and interpret instances of passive constructions and how it is used in shaping the political frame.

All passive sentences found in the news articles will then be analyzed to interpret the function of their use in those political newspaper articles.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Structure and Frequency of the Passive Voice

Based on the data analysis obtained from 4 political news articles show that from the total 82 sentences analyzed, 26 sentences (31%) belong to passive voices. Additionally, two main types of passive construction were found: "to be" passive form (formal passive) dominates the use of passive sentences with 75%, for example: "*Home Affairs Minister suggested these scenarios in light of possible disputes and delays in the inauguration process.*",
and pseudo passive (to get): as much as 25%, for example: "*The mistake was missed in the evaluation process.*"

Most of the passive voices found in the four newspaper articles are agentless, meaning that the subject of the perpetrator is not explicitly mentioned. Only about 37% used the perpetrator with the phrase "by...". This, however, indicates that passive sentences are quite often used in political newspaper articles. Although its use is quite extensive in newspaper texts, the distribution of passive voice usage is still not fully covered in the text. After having deeper analysis, passive sentences are often found in the middle of the news, especially in paragraphs explaining policies, government decisions, or events involving popular figures, ministers or state leaders such as the President. Again, this fairly high frequency proves that passive sentences are not just a variation of style in writing, but rather a strategic element in the preparation and delivery of political information.

Functions of the Passive Voice

The results of the analysis related to the function of sentences containing short passive voices used in political newspaper articles, which were also found in the four articles, can be classified into three categories, those are: (Not all examples can be included in the paper for the sake of space efficiency.)
1) The agent is unknown. For example:

"The promotion was outlined in the Decree of TNI Commander Number Kep/1545/XII/2024, which was signed on December 6, 2024." (Article 4, ANTARA)

In the example above, the passive form *"The promotion was outlined*" is used because the doer of the action is known obviously. In other words, the current commander of TNI of Indonesia (Subiyanto) was the one who signed the Decree. Thus, the use of the passive form rather than the active form in this sentence is a suitable option.

"... disputes late last week and is scheduled to wrap up the process in mid-February." (Article 1, The Jakarta Post)

"...the scheme was rolled out with little fanfare on Monday, with no official launch and just 190 kitchens involved in preparing the first meals" (Article 2, The Jakarta Post)

2) the focus is on the action and not on the agent; and 3) the subject of the active verb is a person.

"President Prabowo Subianto plans to hold another military-style retreat for all the regional heads who were elected into office in the November 2024 regional election." (Article 1, The Jakarta Post)

"... so that they will have the same perception on how to deal with problems currently faced by the government," (Article 1, The Jakarta Post)

"Dedek said milk would be given, but not every day. Indonesia has imported dairy cows from Australia to boost milk production." (Article 2, The Jakarta Post)

In the example above, the passive with modals is also used" *would be given".* The writer uses the modal *would be with* the passive form to express the possibility ofmilk distribution. The writer attempts to express his opinion about free meal program. In other words, the writer tries to change readers' minds about the implementation of the program by using the passive construction "would be called into question".

"Option 3 addresses regional heads who have received dismissal decisions from the Constitutional Court, which could be issued between February 13 and 15, 2025, leading to a possible inauguration in March 2025." (Article 3, ANTARA)

"Budi was earlier promoted to the post of the BSSN head,..." (Article 4, ANTARA)

In the above sentence, the writer tries to shift the attention of the readers from the doer of the action to the action itself. In this sentence, nothing is said about Budi; it focuses more on the promotion. Such use of passive voice immerses the reader in details while neglecting the doer of the action, which is understood.

"The post was held by Hinsa Siburian until Budi's inauguration on Wednesday." (Article 4, ANTARA)

In the last example above, the writer uses the passive form because he wants to focus the reader's attention on the action rather than the agent of the action. The news about Budi's inauguration is more significant and are prioritized over the identity of those who support such claims.

CONCLUSION

As this study primarily aims to identify the frequency and structure of passive voice as non-canonical syntax in written English, especially in political newspaper articles, the result obtained from 4 political news articles shows that of the total 82 sentences analyzed, 26 sentences (31%) are passive voices. Two main types found were: "to be" passive form (formal passive) 75%, and pseudo passive, as much as 25%. This study also seeks to explore the functions of passive voice. The results of the analysis show that the use of passive sentences in political news is very common. This is the starting point when the writer wants to be

involved in an event or incident and express their opinion to influence the reader's mind. This is in accordance with Qasem (2016, p. 164), who argues that "Journalists in writing news reports not only convey information, but also express their point of view, such as the necessity of must, or the possibility of can, or predictions using will, or probability such as may". The passive form, with phrases and sometimes without phrases, is related to the journalist's desire to emphasize some truths and disguise others. For example, when the passive sentence is with "by", it directs the reader to the perpetrator of the action and not the action itself, and when the phrase "by" is omitted, the action is the focus. The use of the phrase by in the passive form is intended to change the behavior or opinion of the reader by focusing on one thing and ignoring others. Eventually, the use of passive voice in written texts remains a subject with considerable scope for further exploration." This study may provide a basis for subsequent research across political and other discourse domains.

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