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The Use of Passive Voice in Journalistic Discourse: A Syntactic Analysis of The Jakarta Post's Culture Column

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the usage patterns of passive voice in the culture column of *The Jakarta Post*, focusing on the syntactic forms and communicative functions in journalistic information presentation. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected from six articles published in the culture column between June and October 2024. The passive voice was analyzed based on Pullum's (2014) taxonomy of passive constructions, which includes be-passive, bare passive clause, get-passive, prepositional passive, embedded passive, adjectival passive, and concealed passive. The analysis reveals two major findings. First, six types of passive voice are identified: be-passive (64%), embedded passive (14%), adjectival passive (8%), bare passive clause (5%), prepositional passive (5%), and get-passive (4%). Be-passive dominates because it is the most grammatical and widely accepted form in formal journalistic writing. Second, the communicative functions of passive voice fall into three categories: the receiver of the action is important (29%), the agent is unknown (5%), and the agent is irrelevant (66%). The most dominant function is the irrelevance of the agent, reflecting the journalistic tendency to focus on events and results rather than perpetrators. This study concludes that passive voice in journalistic discourse serves not merely as a grammatical variation but as a strategic communicative choice to maintain objectivity, neutrality, and topic focus. These findings contribute to the understanding of passive voice usage in media language and offer pedagogical implications for English language teaching.

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1. Introduction

Learning English is essential in today's globalized world, and every school must introduce English from the basics. To be proficient in this language, learners must master reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills (Muziatun, Malabar, & Mustapa 2022). One of the fundamentals for starting English is reading—from the smallest to the largest words, understanding word by word until they form coherent English. Media that can be used include magazines, online platforms, or newspapers. Among the many newspapers published in Indonesia, one of the most well-known is *The Jakarta Post* (Razja Siregar, F., Ismu Purwaningsih, D., & Nizarrahmadi, 2026)), an Indonesian newspaper that uses English and provides information about current issues on various topics.

Effective reading teaching builds on students' past knowledge and experience when using newspapers as learning material to help them improve their comprehension skills, especially grammar. In this context, grammar analysis—particularly of passive voice—is highly relevant. In active voice, the subject performs the action; in passive voice, the subject receives the action (Gunderman & Steinmeyer, 2015). For example, "Jack ate some of the

bread" (active) becomes "Some of the bread was eaten by Jack" (passive). The difference between active and passive sentences lies in the positioning of the actor and the recipient of the action. In the active sentence, the actor (Jack) comes before the verb (eat); in the passive sentence, the recipient of the action (some bread) appears before the verb (was eaten), and the actor (Jack) follows as a prepositional phrase (by Jack) (Lubis, Miranti, & Lubis, 2024).

According to Pullum (2014), there are seven kinds of passive voice: passive with be, bare passive clause, get passive, concealed passive, embedded passive, adjectival passive, and prepositional passive. Passive voice is intended for various types of writing or analysis according to grammatical variants. However, the implementation of passive voice is difficult, and many students do not know it because not all passive sentences are frequently used in writing. Therefore, passive voice needs to be explored in more depth to make sentences appropriate for real academic writing (Giri Ratih, Artawa, Indrawati, 2018). Passive voice can also be analyzed depending on its communicative function. For instance, "The dog was kept by a homeless person" and "The plane door was closed" demonstrate that the first example is a be-passive, while the second can be identified as an adjectival verb (Bili, 2021). It can be concluded that there are many passive voices in *The Jakarta Post*.

Previous studies have mostly concentrated on the distribution of passive voice in various types of texts, including academic, journalistic, and conversational. Researchers have recognized how often passive voice structures are used in news articles. This research aims to analyze all passive sentences in *The Jakarta Post* to distinguish which sentences carry out the action and which subjects receive the action as good use of grammar. Therefore, the researcher is interested in conducting research on passive voice usage patterns in the culture column of *The Jakarta Post*.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher formulates two main problems: (1) What are the kinds and forms of passive voice used in the culture column of *The Jakarta Post*? (2) What are the communicative functions of passive voice used in the culture column of *The Jakarta Post*? In line with these problems, the objectives of the study are: (1) To find out the kinds and forms of passive voice used in the culture column of *The Jakarta Post*; (2) To know the communicative functions of passive voice used in the culture column of *The Jakarta Post*.

This study only examines articles in *The Jakarta Post* regarding the culture column from June to October 2024. The research analyzes news articles whose use of passive sentences is based on grammatical structure without accepting opinions from readers or influencing writing style. Data were collected based on qualitative content analysis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Passive Voice

English grammar is sometimes quite difficult, especially in identifying sentences that differentiate between active and passive voice. To change active to passive voice, the object from the active voice becomes the one receiving the action. Understanding passives is easier if one can analyze them according to the formula and type. According to Pullum (2014), the subject receives the action expressed by the verb in passive form. In passive sentences, the subject of the active sentence is a complement that is preceded by and can follow the preposition by Huddleston and Pullum (2005) provide a comprehensive account of passive constructions in English, which serves as the foundation for the taxonomy used in this study. The rules for choice of tense are the same in passive as in active sentences, as in the following: "Mr. John teaches us grammar" becomes "Grammar is taught by Mr. John." It will be noticed that when the verb is changed from active voice to passive voice, the object of the

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transitive verb in the active voice becomes the subject of the verb in the passive voice (Omenogor, 2021).

According to Swan (2017), the object of a verb in the active voice becomes the subject of the passive form; it follows that only transitive verbs can be used in the passive voice, because an intransitive verb has no object. Examples of intransitive verbs are "like," "die," and "arrive." The verb in passive sentences is the past participle. Whatever the form of the passive voice, the verb must be a past participle. Active and passive sentences are sentences that have only slightly different formulas. This means that if one puts it in the wrong place—like a verb—not only will the writing be wrong, but the meaning of the sentence itself will also be misinterpreted (Alexander, 2019).

Furthermore, passive voice plays an important role in journalistic discourse because it allows writers to emphasize events, actions, and affected participants rather than the individuals performing those actions. In newspaper articles, passive constructions are frequently used when the agent is unknown, considered unimportant, or deliberately omitted. This grammatical choice can influence how information is presented and how readers interpret responsibility and agency within a particular event. In the context of The Jakarta Post's Culture Column, analyzing passive constructions can reveal how syntactic structures contribute to the presentation of cultural events, artistic activities, and public figures. Therefore, examining passive voice from a syntactic perspective involves not only identifying its grammatical patterns but also understanding how these constructions function within journalistic writing to achieve clarity, maintain objectivity, and emphasize particular aspects of the reported information.

2.2 Kinds of Passive Voice

According to Pullum (2014), there are seven types of passive voice: passive with be, prepositional passive, bare passive, embedded passive, adjectival passive, get passive, and concealed passive.

a. Be-passive. The main subject has a *be* clause and a past participle as a complementary verb form. The noun phrase in the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive part. The change from active to passive must be followed by a *be* clause and past participle. The subject of the active voice becomes a complement in a prepositional phrase. For example: "Everyone in the department admires Anne's scholarship" becomes "Anne's scholarship is admired by everyone in the department."
b. Get-passive. There are two types of passives that use intransitive verbs, namely *be* and *get*; they do not use auxiliary verbs. The difference is that *be* is more formal than *get*. The intransitive verb *get* is a grammatical development of the passive type. For example: "Sushi got cooked by a chef."
c. Bare Passive Clause. A bare passive consists only of a subject and past participle; it has no verb tense. The verb appears as an adjunct, not a full sentence. For example: "One of its missions shows a soldier, with work completed, walking in victory."
d. Embedded Passive. Passive clauses are also attached to active clauses. Types of transitive verbs that are causative, inchoative, or perception without a subject. For example: "The government had the police investigate the case" becomes "The government had the case investigated by the police."
e. Adjectival Passive. Adjective phrases are often applied with predicative adjective phrases. The adjective derives from the past participle of the verb. For example: "The window was opened." As a be-passive, it expresses an action when someone locked a

window, and as an adjectival, it describes the state of the window for some period of time.

f. Concealed Passive. This passive is a construction with an active verb and a passive meaning followed by a gerund. Such verbs include *need*, *want*, *require*, and *take*. For example: "This bag needs washing."
g. Prepositional Passive. This passive can be formed systematically with many verb + preposition combinations. For example: "Someone has sat in this chair" becomes "This chair has been sat in."

2.3 Changing from Active into Passive

a. The Receiver of Action is Mentioned. The object of the active voice must be known to know who is receiving the action. As a subject, one must also know who is carrying out the action. This should be marked so that it is easy to change active to passive based on who the subject is. For example: "Alexander Graham Bell discovered the telephone" becomes "The telephone was discovered by Alexander Graham Bell."
b. The Agent is Unknown**.** The subject of the active voice sometimes does not need to be mentioned if the action is not relevant or important. In this case, only the passive form can eliminate the perpetrator of the action. When the action is not implied from context or expressed with words like *people*, *somebody/someone*, or *they*, the agent is omitted. For example: "Someone took my dictionary last night" becomes "My dictionary was taken yesterday" (unknown agent).
c. The Agent is Irrelevant. For example: "Someone cleaned the living room this morning" becomes "The living room was cleaned this morning." The agent is irrelevant because the focus is on the action and its result, not on who performed it.

2.4 The Jakarta Post

The Jakarta Post is a local newspaper that has spread to various countries. It has two languages with the aim of providing foreigners or overseas students with a reference for finding out news in Indonesia. *The Jakarta Post* was first developed on April 25, 1983, by Minister of Information Ali Murtopo. Since 2013, the Post has claimed to be a national institution. They directly fight for a more democratic Indonesia by flipping through old and new editions so that readers can find the common thread in their articles. *The Jakarta Post* contains a lot of news about education, lifestyle, culture, politics, and entertainment in Indonesia.

The Jakarta Post, which provides English writing in the context of news, can provide many lessons such as vocabulary, terms, and dialect that can bring benefits to its readers. *The Jakarta Post* provides a more global perspective that easily brings it to the international scope. In the digital era, *The Jakarta Post* publishes online. With the increasing number of readers, they also implemented a premium news system in 2018. *The Jakarta Post* receives many awards as a newspaper that adheres to journalism ethics and standards. This is the reason for making *The Jakarta Post* the object of research (Puspitasari, Beratha, & Wandia, 2019). Previous studies have analyzed various linguistic features in *The Jakarta Post*, including modality in editorials (Nurjannah, 2020).

3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design. According to Creswell (2003), descriptive qualitative research is used to understand the meaning given by individuals or groups to a social phenomenon or problem. This research was developed based on data obtained from the field. The analysis was carried out to describe, explain, and study the

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phenomenon. Therefore, data are descriptive, such as document analysis, interviews, or observations. This research collected data from news articles published in *The Jakarta Post*, focusing on texts that display passive sentence constructions. This research approach ensures that researchers interpret data according to the context of the language and consider the broader linguistic form and communicative function. By analysing these documents or news articles, the researcher systematically categorized and analysed the occurrence of passive voice.

Data collection used documentation techniques. According to Creswell (2003), data collection techniques using documentation are divided into two categories: public documentation and personal documentation. Public documentation includes government reports, statistical data, news articles, or magazines. Personal documentation includes journals, letters, and emails. This research used public documents, namely articles in *The Jakarta Post*, especially the culture column. News articles are known as public documents that represent important forms of communication, especially in understanding public discourse on communication and culture. Collecting data from *The Jakarta Post* articles involved converting them into an analysable format (a copy of the text), reading them as a whole to get a general understanding, giving labels or codes (e.g., passive sentences, without agents, with by-phrases), and grouping codes into main themes (e.g., passive function for objectivity, agent omission). This makes this data source ideal and easily accessible for analysing linguistic features such as passive voice. Therefore, *The Jakarta Post* is the right source for analysing language patterns in a public context.

Data analysis techniques through documentation were carried out by conducting in-depth analysis, identifying important patterns in the data, and using tables to strengthen the research findings. This analysis is based on the theory of Geoffrey K. Pullum (2014), which focuses on the structure and function of passive sentences in news articles.

4. Discussion

This study analyses the use of passive voice formulas in *The Jakarta Post*. The articles that have been sorted and analysed were examined to determine what types of passive voice are present. The researcher conducted research on each article and then determined the type and form of the passive voice, combining each type that is the same. This finding is categorized based on patterns that have been identified based on corpus data. This research is based on the theory of Huddleston, and Pullum (2005), who clarified the passive voice as a passive construction involving the verb form *be* followed by the verb past participle, which is classified into various types. According to their theory, passive also includes constructions without agents or additional phrases, and can appear in various word forms and structures.

4.1 Specific Findings of Kinds and Forms

This study found the use of formulas in passive voice in *The Jakarta Post* newspaper. To identify the specific types and forms of passive sentences, one needs to know the basic form of the passive voice itself. In passive voice, the subject of the sentence receives the action rather than doing it. The structure of passive voice is [Subject] + [form of "to be"] + [past participle] (+ by agent, optional). This research found passive voice usage patterns in the culture column: embedded passive, passive be, adjectival passive, bare passive clause, prepositional passive, and get passive. Embedded passive is a passive form that is in a subordinate clause. Be-passive explicitly mentions the agent. Adjectival passive indicates a state, not an action. Bare passive clause usually appears with certain verbs (*want, need, expect, be going to, have to, be supposed to*). Prepositional passive usually has the object of the preposition become the subject of the sentence, and get passive is used in informal forms.

Table 1
The Percentage of the Kinds of Passive Voice

No.	Kinds of Passive Voice	Numbers	Percentage (%)
1.	Passive be	23	64
2.	Embedded Passive	5	14
3.	Adjectival Passive	3	8
4.	Bare Passive Clause	2	5
5.	Prepositional Passive	2	5
6.	Get Passive	1	4
Total		**36**	**100**

The table above shows that the passive be is most dominant.

4.2 Specific Communicative Function of Passive Voice

The use of communicative function in the passive voice has a communicative purpose in its context. This aims to focus on emphasizing the results or objects of an action, a more objective language style, and maintaining formality. By focusing an event on its object, it can place the focus on things that are considered relevant to the context of the discussion. In other words, the passive form is not only a grammatical variation but also a strategic choice in communication. This research found communicative functions of passive voice in *The Jakarta Post*, namely: the receiver of the action is important, the agent is unknown, and the agent is irrelevant.

Table 2
The Percentage of the Communicative Function of Passive Voice

No.	Communicative Function of Passive	Numbers	Percentage (%)
1.	The receiver of action is important	11	29
2.	The agent is unknown	2	5
3.	The agent is irrelevant	25	66
Total		38	100

The table shows that the receiver of the action is the most dominant among the communicative functions of passive voice.

1. The Receiver of Action is Important.

The recipient of the action is important to mention because it is the main focus of the information. For example, in "A poetry book curated by Tiffany Darmosusilo," the recipient of the action is a poetry book, the action is *curated*, and the agent is Tiffany Darmosusilo. In the context of this sentence, the agent must be mentioned because her contribution is important for the audience. Similarly, in "The data we collected was then discussed in class," the recipient of the action—the data we collected—received the action *was discussed*. It has an important role because it is concrete and relevant to the context. In "The group, which was founded by students Joan Emmanuella and Joanna Thalia," the subject *the group* received the action *was founded*, focusing on the subject who founded the group.

2. The Agent is Unknown.

The focus is not only to ignore the perpetrator but also to consider language style, information focus, and communication strategy. In journalistic writing, the text should not contain subjective elements that give the impression of being biased and not neutral. In this

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context, mentioning an agent who is not yet certain will cause problems. For example, in "This product is expected to have a positive impact by introducing delicious and healthy food while providing the right stimulation for ADHD children," the agent of the verb *is expected* is not stated—the subject *this product* receives the action of someone's expectation, but it is not stated who is expecting it. Similarly, in "Red velvet beans which is long known as a traditional food ingredient in various countries, including Indonesia," the subject *red velvet beans* receives the action from *known*, and who knows it is not known because the sentence only explains that red velvet beans are widely known.

3. The Agent is Irrelevant.

Passive sentences are used when the agent is irrelevant to emphasize the results or main points and maintain objectivity. The perpetrator wants to highlight what happened, not who did it. Passive sentences without an agent are not individual or a particular group. Therefore, this communicative function is closely related to the journalistic context so that readers are more focused on reading the news with the main focus on the incident, not who did it. For example, in "Friendship by Nyoman Nuarta, depicts two human figures being swept by enormous waves," the subject *two human figures* receives the action *being swept*. The main focus is on the condition of the two human figures, not who is doing the action. In "This artwork, part of a series that has not been exhibited since 2008-2010," the artwork receives the action, but the important thing is that the artwork was not exhibited—not who did not exhibit it. In "The innovation developed by William is billed as a breakthrough in addressing the limitation," the subject *the innovation* receives the action *is billed*. The agent of the billing action is not mentioned because the focus is on the innovation being considered a breakthrough, not on who considers it so.

In this study, passive voice is very useful for focusing more on and emphasizing the results or actions themselves rather than who did them. In scientific research or news articles, passive voice is more often used because it can avoid subjectivity that can arise if the focus is too much on the agent. This makes it more relevant because passive voice prioritizes emphasizing results or objects. Moreover, in news articles containing major events, investigation results, and disasters that are required to focus on what happened, not who was involved, journalists can focus more on conveying information neutrally and objectively without mentioning the individuals or groups involved.

4.3 Findings

Based on the analysis of six articles in the culture column of *The Jakarta Post*, there are around ninety-three sentences, and thirty-eight of them are passive sentences. This shows that passive sentences are quite significantly used with a figure of around 40.86% of all sentences analysed. The average number of sentences in these articles is 15 sentences, which shows that these articles are short and concise. Although not dominant, passive sentences occupy an important position in conveying information objectively and factually. The dominant type of passive is be-passive (64%), followed by embedded passive (14%), adjectival passive (8%), bare passive clause (5%), prepositional passive (5%), and get passive (4%). This data shows that be-passive is a passive sentence that is often used by writers in compiling cultural articles. The most common structure is be-passive, which consists of subject + auxiliary verb (be) + past participle with or without an agent. Be-passive followed by an agent is called long passive, while be-passive not followed by an agent is called short passive. Long passive is the object and active sentence that appear as the subject of the passive followed by the agent, while in short passive the by-phrase is lost because the perpetrator of the action is considered unimportant or unknown. In the news articles of *The*

Jakarta Post's culture column, more short passives were found because the media tends to focus on results or actions and avoids subjective sentences. There are various types of passive forms in the be-passive result type category, namely present passive, past simple passive, present continuous passive, present perfect simple, simple future passive, and modal verb passive. Be-passive is the most formal form in academic writing or media such as *The Jakarta Post*. Editorial style in international media such as *The Jakarta Post* follows formal English writing conventions.

Based on the analysis of six articles in the culture column of *The Jakarta Post*, passive sentences have specific communicative functions. In the passive communicative function in the culture column of *The Jakarta Post*, there are 38 passive voice communicative functions with their respective categories. Among them are eleven for the receiver of action is mentioned, two for the agent is unknown, and twenty-five for the agent is irrelevant. First, the recipient is important to mention because the recipient is the main focus of the information. For example, "A poetry book curated by Tiffany Darmosusilo." It can be seen that the recipient of the action is a poetry book, the action is *curated*, and the agent is Tiffany Darmosusilo. In the context of this sentence, the agent must be mentioned because her contribution is important for the audience. The agent is unknown; the focus is not only to ignore the perpetrator but there are several things that must be considered such as language style, information focus, and communication strategy. In journalistic writing, the text should not contain subjective elements that give the impression of being biased and not neutral. In this context, mentioning an agent who is not yet certain will cause problems. For example, "The innovation developed by William." It can be seen that the agent William receives the action from *developed*, which describes the development process carried out by William. Passive sentences are used when the agent is irrelevant to emphasize the results or main points and maintain objectivity. The perpetrator wants to highlight what happened, not who did it. Passive sentences without an agent are not individual or a particular group. Therefore, this communicative function is closely related to the journalistic context so that readers are more focused on reading the news with the main focus on the incident, not who did it. One example in this article is "The innovation developed by William is billed as a breakthrough in addressing the limitation." It can be seen that the subject of the innovation receives the action from *is billed*. The agent of the billing action is not mentioned because the focus is on the innovation being considered a breakthrough, not on who considers it so.

5. Conclusion

This research finds the kinds and communicative functions of passive voice in *The Jakarta Post*. There are seven passives according to Pullum (2014): passive be, bare passive clause, passive get, prepositional passive, embedded passive, adjectival passive, and concealed passive. However, in this study, the researcher only found six passives: passive be, bare passive clause, passive get, prepositional passive, embedded passive, and adjectival passive. Passive must consist of the verb *be* and past participle followed by a by-phrase.The bare passive clause has a subject that is not explicitly known and appears after a certain verb. Get passive uses the verb *be* as a substitute and is more informal. Prepositional passive is where the passive subject is the prepositional object. Embedded passive is a passive sentence embedded in another sentence structure. Adjectival passive consists of the verb *be* and past participle, but the verb phrase functions as an adjective that describes a state.

Passive voice is a sentence that emphasizes the result or object of an action, not who does it. In general, passive is used in three communicative functions. First, passive is used when the receiver is important to mention, which indirectly focuses more on emphasizing the results of an action without needing to know who did it, especially in news articles that aim for readers to see factually and neutrally. Second, the agent is unknown, which functions in

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the passive voice used by journalists in news articles to maintain the accuracy of the text and maintain objectivity. Third, the agent is irrelevant, which is more dominantly used in news articles because the news is written concisely and densely. If the agent does not add value to the information, then mentioning it will burden the text.

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