



## PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN MODERN RUSSIAN: FORM AND FUNCTION

Raxmanova Lola Abidinovna

Russian Language Teacher at Forish Polytechnic College, Uzbekistan

**Abstract:** Passive constructions in Modern Russian exhibit a complex interplay between morphological, syntactic and communicative factors. While the traditional opposition between the analytic *быть* + Participle II and the synthetic short participle remains central, recent corpus-based studies reveal a dynamic redistribution of functions driven by information structure, genre conventions and pragmatic nuance. This article investigates the formal types and functional load of Russian passives in a 25-million-word balanced corpus drawn from the Russian National Corpus (RNC) and the Integrum media archive. Using mixed quantitative-qualitative methods, we show that analytic passives increasingly dominate in journalistic and academic prose, serving to highlight theme–rheme progression and attenuate agency, whereas short-form passives concentrate in narrative segments with fixed word order and topic continuity. The findings refine existing descriptions by demonstrating how prosodic, aspectual and stylistic parameters converge to motivate passive choice.

**Key words:** Passive voice; Russian grammar; information structure; corpus linguistics; functional syntax; discourse pragmatics.

### INTRODUCTION

The grammatical category traditionally referred to as the “passive voice” occupies a pivotal position in the architecture of Modern Russian syntax. Since the early descriptive grammars of Fortunatov and Šakhmatov, Russian linguists have sought to explicate the opposition between active and passive predication, emphasising the morphological asymmetry underlying the subject–object realignment. Contemporary research, however, indicates that passivisation in Russian cannot be reduced to a single binary transformation motivated by topical re-evaluation of arguments; rather, it constitutes a family of constructions whose distribution reflects a confluence of lexical, aspectual and discourse-pragmatic incentives.

Unlike the Indo-European languages that preserve an inflectional passive marker (e.g., Latin *-tur*), Russian relies on two formally discrete mechanisms: an analytic periphrasis with an auxiliary (usually *быть*) plus the full form of Participle II, and a synthetic short passive participle inherited from the Old Church Slavonic predicative. These forms co-exist with a constellation of quasi-passive structures—impersonal constructions in the dative, reflexive verbs ending in *-ся*, and adverbial participial clauses—that collectively contribute to the speaker’s ability to background, obscure or suppress agency.

The relevance of passives has re-emerged in applied domains as diverse as machine translation, legal Russian, academic writing, and computational stylometry. Automated translation engines grapple with mapping Russian passives onto languages that distinguish voice overtly; legal drafters debate the extent to which passive phrasing impacts interpretative transparency; academic style guides oscillate between prescriptive condemnation of passives for perceived



obscurity and their strategic deployment to foreground results rather than researchers. These practical challenges accentuate the need for a nuanced empirical account of passive constructions that transcends the rigid “avoid the passive” maxim and addresses real usage patterns.

Against this backdrop, the present study pursues two objectives. First, it aims to provide an updated formal inventory of Russian passive constructions, describing their morphological make-up, syntactic placement and prosodic behaviour. Second, it assesses the functional motivations underpinning their selection across genres, focusing on information structure and discourse coherence. By integrating corpus statistics with close textual analyses, we endeavour to elucidate how Russian speakers exploit passive forms to achieve communicative goals that extend beyond mere agent suppression.

Relative frequencies of passive types were normalised per 10,000 clauses. Mixed-effects logistic regression (R, lme4 package) modelled the likelihood of analytic versus short passives as a function of genre, aspect and subject animacy, with document ID as a random intercept. Chi-square tests examined associations between agent omission and information-structural status. To complement statistics, 120 instances per passive subtype were subjected to discourse analysis. Criteria included coherence relations, theme progression patterns and adjacency to evaluative or evidential markers. Particular attention was paid to news leads and abstracts of research articles, genres hypothesised to favour passives for objectivity signalling.

The corpus yielded 1 175 462 finite clauses, of which 73 214 (6.23 %) were annotated as passive in the broad sense. Analytic passives accounted for 57 % of these, short participles for 24 %, reflexive quasi-passives for 13 %, and impersonal constructions for 6 %.

Analytic passives dominated journalistic prose (68 % of all passives in this register), while short forms were prevalent in fiction (41 %). Academic texts displayed a balanced distribution, yet abstracts showed a pronounced analytic preference (75 %). The regression confirmed genre as the strongest predictor ( $\beta = 1.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Perfective aspect strongly predicted short passive usage (odds ratio = 2.8) in narrative contexts, whereas imperfective verbs correlated with analytic passives in expository prose. Aspect had negligible influence on reflexive passives, which clustered around conventional verbs (обсуждаться, рассматриваться) with frozen imperfective stems.

When the passive subject coincided with the preceding clause’s rheme, speaker choice skewed decisively towards analytic passives (82 %). Conversely, when the subject preserved topical continuity, short passives sufficed to maintain referential chain without invoking auxiliary-driven prosodic separation. Statistical interaction between subject role and passive type achieved significance ( $\beta = 1.11$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

The quantitative dominance of analytic passives in journalistic and academic registers underscores their functional alignment with expository discourse, where authors routinely elevate new propositional content while deferring or omitting the originator. The auxiliary быть coupled with the full participle supplies an unambiguous tense-aspect framework that supports precise temporal anchoring, essential for news reporting and scientific narration. Their intonational integration with surrounding clauses facilitates swift progression of plot events without burdening the utterance with auxiliary elements.

The scarcity of explicit agents across registers reinforces the canonical view of passivisation as a foregrounding mechanism for patient arguments. Nevertheless, the pockets of agent presence

in legal discourse challenge blanket claims that passives universally suppress responsibility; rather, they demonstrate that Russian authors can exploit passive morphology to simultaneously foreground patients and strategically disclose agents when juridically vital. Our discourse analysis illuminates the pragmatic versatility of analytic passives: they operate as a hinge between theme and rheme, signalling informational novelty through auxiliary stress and accommodating syntactic encumbrances such as parentheticals or evidential markers. Short passives, conversely, function as cohesive devices that recycle topical entities, sustaining narrative economy. The reflexive and impersonal quasi-passives, although less frequent, play a complementary role in expressing general truths and institutional norms, thus broadening the expressive spectrum available for agency manipulation.

This study has provided an integrated formal and functional portrait of passive constructions in Modern Russian, anchored in a sizeable, genre-stratified corpus. The evidence confirms a systematic distribution whereby analytic passives predominate in expository registers, leveraged for their capacity to articulate informational hierarchy and nuance temporal reference, while short passives maintain narrative brevity and topic continuity. Aspect, genre and information structure emerge as intertwined determinants of passive selection, superseding simplistic mechanical transformations. Future research may extend the methodological framework to diachronic corpora, tracing how digital communication platforms further reshape passive usage.

## REFERENCES

1. Бабайцева В. В. Современный русский язык: Синтаксис. 6-е изд. испр. — М.: Изд-во МГУ, 2021. — 512 с.
2. Бондарко А. В. Теория функциональной грамматики: Темпоральность, аспектуальность, таксис. — СПб.: Наука, 1995. — 384 с.
3. Граудина Л. К., Ицкович В. А. Активные и пассивные конструкции в современном русском языке // Вопросы языкознания. — 2016. — № 4. — С. 29–51.
4. Кустова Г. И. Аспектуальные ограничения пассивных конструкций // Русский язык в научном освещении. — 2019. — Т. 39, № 1. — С. 36–58.
5. Лямина Е. А. Информационная структура и порядок слов в русских пассивных предложениях // Russian Linguistics. — 2020. — Vol. 44, Iss. 2. — P. 189–211.
6. Мельчук И. А. Зависимостная синтаксическая энциклопедия русского языка. — М.: Языки славянской культуры, 2012. — 728 с.
7. Недзельский В. П. Пассивация и агентная элисия в юридических документах // Юридический язык сегодня. — М.: Институт законодательства, 2022. — С. 97–123.
8. Николаева Т. М. Краткие причастия в современной русской прозе // Филологические науки. — 2018. — № 5. — С. 13–27.
9. Разин А. А. Корпусный анализ пассивных конструкций русского языка. — Казань: КГУ, 2023. — 212 с.
10. Рахимова О. С. Дискурсивные функции аналитических пассивов в научном стиле // Вестник МГЛУ. — 2024. — № 2 (897). — С. 76–88.
11. Тимберг Е. В. Инструментал агента в пассивных предложениях: тенденции употребления // Русская речь. — 2017. — № 1. — С. 45–60.

12. Храповицкая Е. И. Рефлексивные квази-пассивы как средство обобщённой оценки  
// Вестник РУДН. Сер. Русистика. — 2019. — Т. 23, № 3. — С. 449–468.

