



## **PASSIVE CLAUSES IN TURKISH ACADEMIC DISCOURSE\***

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### **STRUCTURED ABSTRACT**

This study aims at describing the structure of passives in research articles in terms of the properties of agents and patients to see whether they present genre specific features. The corpus used in this study contains 9 research articles in Turkish from Dilbilim Araştırmaları, published in 2005 and 2009. The corpus used in this study consists of 10 research articles (RA) published in Dilbilim Araştırmaları Dergisi (DA) 2005 and 2009. Since all the articles are in linguistics, the results of the study are limited to this discipline.

The findings show that *a typical agent* in active clauses is [-human] and [-animate]. There are two forms of agents in active clauses: Full nouns referring to the other researchers and the first person plural. Hence, all the agents are human subjects. The percentage of pseudo agents in active clauses is very significant (74%) when compared to the human agents (%21). This shows us a metaphorical feature of agency in RAs. The authors map the human features to abstract entities, which leads to a sort of *personification*. This can also be a sign of our perception of language as linguists: A living human like entity. Considering this great amount of their existence in RAs, pseudo agents appear to be representative feature related to passivization in scientific discourse of linguistic studies. Another finding is that patients, too, mostly refer to abstract entities unlike the patients of narratives. This can be either a property of a specific genre or specific fields, since most works in linguistics involve/deal with/investigate abstractions related to natural languages.

The most remarkable result here is the high percentage of abstract entities. In Tomlin's terminology, what is attentionally detected by the authors is the abstract terms related to the field of linguistics. We can claim that this finding can be a genre specific feature when compared to the typical agents and patients in narratives, or it can field specific. It is necessary to describe the patients in RAs of other disciplines such as economics, philosophy, education, etc. to show to conclude that this is a field specific indicator

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Passivization results in a change in the positions of the agent and the patient. Patients are said to be “promoted” since they are moved to sentence initial position and agents are demoted from subject to oblique. They may even be removed from the surface structure and left implicit when the agent is unspecified as in *someone had stolen my wallet* “cüzdanım çalınmış” or has [-human] being simply the causer as in *the door was closed* “kapı kapandı” (by the wind or someone). Since the most accessible entities in discourse are presented at subject position, grammatical subjects are considered to be the topic, and object to be the focus (Givon, 2002). Hence, topicalization is considered to be one of the functions of passive voice. Are patients in RAs promoted and topicalized? The distribution of the patients promoted and left at the pre-verbal position show that objects are not highly promoted. The number of the objects promoted to clause initial position is low when compared to those left in the pre-verbal or middle positions. Clause initial positions are mostly occupied by locatives in Turkish “Türkçede”, in this research “bu çalışmada”, in the example below “aşağıdaki örnekte”; instruments *with the program X* “X programı ile”; post positional phrases showing a purpose or a cause relation *in order to obtain a critical analysis* “metnin eleştirel çözümlemesi için”, *for this reason* “bunun için”; and long relative clauses modifying the subject. This indicates that the prominent function of passive clauses is not topicalization in RAs. Considering that the abstract objects express procedures or findings, the authors represent the parameters, variables, and the circumstances to ensure that the reader would not misinterpret the results or what is presented. The high amount of “authors as implicit agents” in general shows us that the authors try to hide themselves to create a discourse stance for scientific objectivity. However, this is not the only reason. Recall that reference to generic entities in claim structures also resembles a considerable amount. This increases the validity of the authors’ arguments. Therefore, the function of passives in such contexts seems to be hedging.

**Key Words:** Turkish, passivization, academic discourse, agency, patient, topicalization

## TÜRKÇE AKADEMİK SÖYLEMDE EDİLGEN SÖZCELER

### ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı akademik söylemde edilgenleştirilen sözceleri anlamsal olarak ‘edici’ ve ‘etkilenen’ rollerini üstlenen özne ve nesnelere türleri açısından betimlemek ve genel olarak edilgenleştirilmenin metinlerdeki sonuçlarını ortaya koymaktır. Bu amaçla, Dilbilim Araştırmaları Dergisi (DA) 2005 ve 2009 yıllarında yayınlanan makalelerden 10 tanesiyle bir veri tabanı oluşturulmuş ve edici ve etkilenen öğelerin türleri ve metinlerdeki dağılımları saptanmıştır. Çalışmanın sonuçları yazar araştırmacıların etken ve edilgen çatıdaki sözcelerde edici olarak soyut adlarla [+insan] özelliği gerektiren eylemleri seçtiklerini göstermektedir. Bu tür özneler çalışmada “sözde-edici” olarak adlandırılmıştır. Çalışmanın diğer bulgusu da edilgen sözcelerde yükseltelen nesnelere çoğunlukla soyut adlardan oluştuğunu, daha az

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oranlarda ad tümceciklerinin “olgu” ve “eylem” aktarmak için kullanıldığını göstermektedir. Son olarak, dilbilim metinlerinde edilgenleştirmenin yaygın olarak iddia edildiği gibi nesnenin sözce başı konumuna getirilerek konulaştırıldığı durumların az olduğu, sözce başı konumunda daha çok yer, araç, amaç bildiren öbeklerin yer aldığı gözlenmiştir. Bu sonuçtan hareketle, edilgenleştirmenin konulaştırmadan çok bakış açısı yansıttığı ve edicilerden çok etkilenenleri öncelikle işleviyle kullanıldığı ortaya çıkarılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Edingenleştirme, akademik söylem, edici, etkilenen, konulaştırma

## 1. Introduction

Imagine that you are reading a research article starting in the following manner:

*'I aim at describing the functions of passive voice in scientific discourse as a distinct genre. I will base my discussions on two basic functions of passivization: reduction of different kinds of agents and perspectivising in discourse. For this purpose, I made a corpus including 1223 clauses from the research articles that they published in Dilbilim Araştırmaları 2005 and 2006. then I...'*

It sounds as if we are reading *a story of passivization* rather than a research article. 'I' is the starring actor/agent, not the study itself. Further, the introduction is vague since it is not possible to establish a certain referent for 'they'. What makes this piece of discourse more appropriate for a research article is the act of passivization.

Passive voice is considered to be one of the distinctive features of scientific texts since it is the grammaticalization of expressing an “objective” point of view in discourse. Hence authors have been noted to use a high percentage of passive clauses to avoid a subjective point of view. One reason underlying this assumption is that passivization is a process of reducing transitivity and agency, therefore it enables the authors to hide their identity as agents and make the reader focus on the subject matter. Passivization also increases the validity of “what is claimed” or “done” as illustrated in (1) and (2):

1. ‘...Sonuç olarak bu iki biçim arasındaki tercih, konuşmacı için özgül bir öznenin olup olmamasıyla **açıklanabilir**...’

2. ‘...Yine de bu çalışmanın bütüncesi çerçevesinde %36,7’lik bir oranla en sık kullanılan ayırık türü olan *Karşıtsal-Ayrıklar* Türkçede 'temel' ayırık yapılar olarak **kabul edilebilir**...’

Though “the scientific objectivity view” seems to be an adequate theory of explaining the passive voice in scientific discourse, it is limited to the cases that the authors avoid to refer to themselves as agents. However, it is possible to find many passivized clauses whose agents refer to someone else other than the author. Take the examples given in (3) and (4). Though the agents in (3) are explicitly given, the author still prefers the passive form. (4) has an anonymous agent whom we can describe as “language users”.

3. ‘*Çoktan*'ın İngilizce karşılığı *already* **Traugott & Waterhouse** (1969), Almanca karşılığı *schon* ise **Hoepelman & Rohrer** (1981) tarafından **ele alınmıştır**...’

(The corresponding adverb already was studied by Traugott & Waterhouse....)

4. ‘...Ancak İngilizce'de başta kullanılan 'there' ögesiyle oluşturulmakta olan bu yapılar, Türkçe'de 'var' 'I yok' ögeleriyle **kurulmaktadır**...’

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( Var and yok predicative adjectives **are used** for existential sentences in Turkish)

The last example comes from the imaginery text that was given at the beginning of this article. The passive form ‘published in 2005’ is not a stylistic genre based choice. It is obligatory since giving the agents is obviously irrelevant to the topic and makes the text incoherent.

All these early observations show us that a theory of passivization in a specific genre should be able to account for the reduction of all kinds of agents. Drawing on this line, this study aims at describing the structure of passives in research articles in terms of the properties of agents and patients to see whether they present genre specific features. The corpus used in this study contains 9 research articles in Turkish from Dilbilim Araştırmaları, published in 2005 and 2009.

## 2. Passivization and agency in discourse

There are many studies in the literature describing passive voice in Turkish from different aspects (Karabulut, 2010; Sebzecioğlu ve Oktar, 2010; Gürlek, 2013). In very general terms, passivization can be defined as an act of turning active sentences into passive (not in all frameworks-the term “turning” assumes a theory in which the underlying structure is active). But there are also frameworks in which both active and passive structures are assumed to be basic, i.e. there is no process that relates the two. Consider the pair of sentences in Turkish given below:

5. a. Emrah **camı** kırdı.

Subject Emrah-Object the window Verb broke

(Emrah broke the window)

b. **Cam** (Emrah tarafından) kırıldı.

(The window was broken (by Emrah))

Although the passive form in (5b) seems to be the derived form of (5a) and shares the same logical structure, it differs from (5a) in terms of the view point it reflects. In (5a), the view point of the speaker is neutral in terms the agent and the patient. On the other hand, in (5b), the speaker reflects the event from the point view of the patient and focuses on ‘what happened to the window’ rather than “who did it”. “Cam” is said to be the *grammatical subject* and “Emrah” is the *logical subject* of (5b).

Functionalist theories consider passivization in terms of two functions in discourse: *Perspectivizing* and *topicalization*. Most researchers take the grammatical subject as an indicator of perspective. Kuno (1987) uses the term “empathy” to explain the perspective reflected in sentences. The term empathy is a metaphor of a camera angel approaching the participants of a scene. It is a distance between the speaker and the participants of a sentence. Speakers unconsciously make decisions about where to place themselves with respect to the events and states described in their sentences. The unmarked way of expressing the distance for the speaker is active voice. When the speaker wants to place herself closer to the patient, she chooses the marked way, passive voice. Dik (1989) also views passivization as a way of reflecting point of view in discourse. He suggests that speakers can establish their “point of view” on a state of affairs in a clause using both lexical (verbs follow and precede, etc.) and grammatical terms (active and passive voices).

Tomlin (1997) and Langacker (1987) describe passivization on cognitive grounds. Tomlin uses the term “attentionally detected subjects” and Langacker “prominency of subjects” to explain the absence or presence of agents in a clause. What makes an entity more prominent or attentionally detected is their saliency in discourse. The more prominent entities are selected as the grammatical

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subject of a clause, and the use of passive clause indicates that the patient is more salient, or attentionally detected in respect to the agent.

Despite the differences among the terms offered in functionalist views, they all agree that grammatical subjects are also the topical items of a clause. In the active clause “Emrah camı kırıldı” Emrah is the topic in terms of accessibility (Givon, 2001), and “cam” is the focus. The passive counterpart “Cam Emrah tarafından kırıldı” results in a change in their positions: The patient becomes the topic and the agent is the focused element in the clause.

The common tendency of the theories cited above is to describe passive voice in respect to the structure of active voice and agency. In other terms, our perception of agents and its relation to patient in a state of affairs expressed governs our use of passivization. Drawing on this line, Cornelis (1997) argues that passivization is a process of reduction of agents (causers), and although they are reduced, they remain implicit in our perception. In clauses such as “cam kırıldı” “dükkanlar kapandı” we know that there are agents responsible for these actions, but they are not prominent.

Another common point is that all these theories consider passivization as a pragmatic issue. It does not seem to be possible to explain why patients are presented as grammatical subjects without a context. Note that our observations would even depend on text type and mode of discourse that the passive clauses occur. For example, the basic function of passive clauses in a narrative text is to present background information, and they do not contribute to the storyline (Fabb, 1997). Hence it is a marked form in terms of its frequency in narration. On the other hand, passive clauses are highly used in scientific texts. The results of this study also show that there is a considerable amount of passive clauses when compared to active clauses, almost in equal numbers, which makes us conclude that both forms are unmarked in research articles in terms of representation of states and events (see section 5 for a detailed discussion).

### 3. The corpus

The corpus used in this study consists of 10 research articles (RA) published in Dilbilim Araştırmaları Dergisi (DA) 2005 and 2009. Since all the articles are in linguistics, the results of the study are limited to this discipline. The research on RAs shows that a field of study is a variable in reflecting an epistemic stance. For example, Pique et al (2001) found that there is a high amount of lexical epistemic markers in philosophy RAs when compared to the ones in linguistics. Poudat and Loiseau (2005) also conclude that RAs written in the field of linguistics are more regulated than philosophical essays and more author-centered.

The corpus contains 1233 clauses. There are 927 verbal and 306 nominal clauses used. The corpus is analyzed in terms of the semantic features of explicit and possible implicit agents, the types of items topicalized in passive clauses and the frequency of their occurrence in introduction, theoretical background, findings and discussion and the conclusion parts. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the types of clauses found in the corpus:

Nominal		Types of clauses				Total N
		Active		Passive		
N	%	N	%	N	%	
306	24.8	493	53.1	434	46.8	1233

Table 1: The distribution of types of clauses in linguistics corpus

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## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Agency in RAs

The findings show that *a typical agent* in active clauses is [-human] and [-animate]. There are two forms of agents in active clauses: Full nouns referring to the other researchers and the first person plural. Hence, all the agents are human subjects. I call the rest of the subjects as “pseudo agents” because they are used with action verbs that typically require human subjects such as *to interrogate*–“sorgula-” *to take the focus on one self* “kendi üzerine çek-” *to describe* “betimleme yap-”. However, pseudo agents refer to an abstract entity such as *findings* “bulgular”, *recursive structures* “yinelenen yapılar”, *the studies* “çalışmalar”, *political discourse* “politika söylemi”, *coherence* “bağdaşıklık” etc., and they are [-human] subjects as illustrated in the examples given from (6) to (8).

6. Ayrıca (14)'te görüldüğü üzere *dikkatle* gibi durum ya da olayın gerçekleşme biçimini gösteren belirteçlerin tersine **çoktan** olumsuzluğu **kendi üzerine çekmez**.

(As illustrated in 14, contrary to manner adverbs such as *dikkatle*, **çoktan does not take the scope...**)

7. Bu açıdan bakıldığında dilbilgisi, söylemde sürekli yinelenen yapılardan oluşur ve **bu yinelenen yapılar dilbilgisini şekillendirir**.

(...**the recursive structures shape the grammar** of a given language)

8. **Söylem dilbilgisi çalışmaları**, dillerde ezgi birimlerinin uzunluğu, ezgi birimi dilsel birim (sözdizimsel yapı) arasındaki ilişki, ezgi birimlerinde bilgi yapısı, konu sürekliliği ve artgönderim üzerine **betimlemeler yapmakta**, farklı diller üzerine yapılan bu betimlemelerin evrensel boyutunu **sorgulamaktadır**.

(**Studies in discourse grammar describes the length of prosody units....**)

There are also nominal clauses used as a grammatical subject. The distribution of percentages of these subjects in active clauses is given in Table 2 below:

Types of grammatical subjects in active clauses						
Agents [+human]	Pseudo agents [-human]		Noun clauses		Total	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N
104	21	366	74	23	04	493

Table2: Distribution of types of grammatical subjects in active clauses

The percentage of pseudo agents in active clauses is very significant (74%) when compared to the human agents (%21). This shows us a metaphorical feature of agency in RAs. The authors map the human features to abstract entities, which leads to a sort of *personification*. This can also be a sign of our perception of language as linguists: A living human like entity. Considering this great amount of their existence in RAs, pseudo agents appear to be representative feature related to passivization in scientific discourse of linguistic studies.

### 4.2. Implicit agents of passive clauses

As Cornelis (1997) argues, agents of passive clauses are reduced, but not deleted most of the time. The corpus provides evidence to his view of implicit agents. Most of the passive clauses contain clues that enable the reader to infer whom the author refers to. There are five kinds of implicit agents

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found in RAs: The authors as researchers (AR), other researchers (OR), anonymous native speakers (NS), generic (G) and readers(R). Table 3 illustrates the distribution of percentages of implicit agents in RAs.

Types of implicit agents in passive clauses										
AR		OR		NS		G		R		Total
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
216	49.7	50	11.5	59	13.5	92	21.1	17	0.39	434

Table 3 :The distribution of percentages of implicit agents in passive clauses

The highest percentage of implicit agents in RAs is the ‘authors as researchers’ (49.7%). Authors as researchers can be inferred from the context by deictic expressions such as *in this research* “bu çalışmada, bu araştırma”, *this result* “bu sonuç” and the use of possessive marker *in our study* “çalışmamızda”, *in our research* “araştırmamızda”, *in our corpus* “veri tabanımızda”, or a reference to a phase of the research *while analyzing the findings* “veriler incelenirken”. These markers are related to research process. There are also markers that sign the implicit agent is the author(s) who organized the text. Reference to the parts of the text ‘..örnekler’ ‘tablo1’ ‘aşağıdaki çizelge’ ‘(1a-c)’de’ ‘ikinci bölümde’ ‘(x) nolu tümce/örnek’ following a passivized predicate ‘verilmiştir, sunulmuştur’ is the sign of the authors as agents.

The amount of generic entities is also remarkable with 21.1 %. It is also remarkable that 74 of total 92 implicit generic agents were found in claim structures including a consequence. A generic implicit agent corresponds to an unspecified human entity such as ‘*anyone* who can arrive at the same result with the researcher’ as illustrated in (1) and (2):

9. “...Sonuç olarak bu iki biçim arasındaki tercih, konuşmacı için özgül bir öznenin olup olmamasıyla **açıklanabilir**...”

(As a result, the choice of the form **can be explained** in terms of the specificity status of the subject’.

10. “..Yine de bu çalışmanın bütüncesi çerçevesinde %36,7’lik bir oranla en sık kullanılan ayırık türü olan *Karşıtsal-Ayrıklar* Türkçede ‘temel’ ayırık yapılar olarak **kabul edilebilir**...”

(The contrastive clefts **can be accepted** as the basic form of cleft structures in Turkish..)

Note that the passivized predicate is conjugated to the morphemes –Abil, the marker of epistemic modality and –Ar, the aorist. Both (1) and (2) state a consequence. Using the passive voice, the authors make the generalization that ‘anyone considering the same evidence would rationally come to the same conclusion and take the same position’ (Wilkinson,1992:322). Hence, passivization is an act of sharing the responsibility of the process or state described.

### 4.3. Patients not promoted

The grammatical subjects of passive clauses are the objects in their active counterparts. The objects in passive clauses are ‘patients’ semantically, since they undergo a process of change. There is a tendency among the researchers to describe the patients as concrete entities in functional perspectives (Kuno,1987; Tomlin,1987; Cornelis,1997). In fact, this seems to be the case in narratives. People mostly narrate events about concrete subjects and objects (Herman, 2000). The findings of this study, on the other hand, reveal that the grammatical subjects of passive clauses

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mostly refer to abstract entities (AE) referring to concepts, ideas, numbers, such as ‘eylem öñü pozisyonu, retorik, odak, anlam, oran, etc’. There are also nominal clauses referring to acts and facts: Table 4 illustrates the types of objects promoted in passive clauses and their distributions:

Types of objects promoted								
Abstract Entity		Concrete Entity		Noun Clause				
				Fact		Act		T
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
310	77.5	12	0.3	69	17.2	28	0.7	419

Table 4: distribution of types of objects promoted in passive clauses in RAs

The most remarkable result here is the high percentage of abstract entities. In Tomlin’s terminology, what is attentionally detected by the authors is the abstract terms related to the field of linguistics. We can claim that this finding can be a genre specific feature when compared to the typical agents and patients in narratives, or it can field specific. It is necessary to describe the patients in RAs of other disciplines such as economics, philosophy, education, etc. to show to conclude that this is a field specific indicator

Passivization results in a change in the positions of the agent and the patient. Patients are said to be “promoted” since they are moved to sentence initial position and agents are demoted from subject to oblique. They may even be removed from the surface structure and left implicit when the agent is unspecified as in *someone had stolen my wallet* “cüzdanım çalınmış” or has [-human] being simply the causer as in *the door was closed* “kapı kapandı” (by the wind or someone). Since the most accessible entities in discourse are presented at subject position, grammatical subjects are considered to be the topic, and object to be the focus (Givon, 2002). Hence, topicalization is considered to be one of the functions of passive voice.

Are patients in RAs promoted and topicalized? The distribution of the patients promoted and left at the pre-verbal position show that objects are not highly promoted. The number of the objects promoted to clause initial position is low when compared to those left in the pre-verbal or middle positions. Clause initial positions are mostly occupied by locatives *in Turkish* “Türkçede”, *in this research* “bu çalışmada”, *in the example below* “aşağıdaki örnekte”; instruments *with the program X* “X programı ile”; post positional phrases showing a purpose or a cause relation *in order to obtain a critical analysis* “metnin eleştirel çözümlemesi için”, *for this reason* “bunun için”; and long relative clauses modifying the subject. This indicates that the prominent function of passive clauses is not topicalization in RAs. Considering that the abstract objects express procedures or findings, the authors represent the parameters, variables, and the circumstances to ensure that the reader would not misinterpret the results or what is presented. Then why are passives used excessively if the purpose is not to topicalize the patients? The high amount of “authors as implicit agents” in general shows us that the authors try to hide themselves to create a discourse stance for scientific objectivity. However, this is not the only reason. Recall that reference to generic entities in claim structures also resembles a considerable amount. This increases the validity of the authors’ arguments. Therefore, the function of passives in such contexts seems to be hedging.

## 5. Conclusion

Findings of this research reveal that implicit agents and patients have genre specific features. One of them is the use of pseudo-agents in active clauses. Authors have an obvious tendency to use pseudo-agents referring to non-human and non-animate entities with verbs that typically require human subjects such as ‘to question, to shape something, to select, to behave etc’. This can be considered as a metaphorical mapping from human subjects to non human ones. Another finding is

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that patients, too, mostly refer to abstract entities unlike the patients of narratives. This can be either a property of a specific genre or specific fields, since most works in linguistics involve/deal with/investigate abstractions related to natural languages.

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