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## The Use of the Passive by Female and Male Indian Speakers of English: Are Female Speakers of Indian English Less Formal?

Rohit Kawale, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

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### Abstract

The passive voice in English has attracted the attention of a number of grammarians. Especially, the frequency of the passive in English has been studied extensively by some grammarians, like Svartvik (1966). Based on the model of the study of the passive in English used by Svartvik (1966), the use of the passive in Indian English was analysed. The analysis was based on data collected from the two corpora of Indian English.

The study was focused on the form, function and frequency of the passive in Indian English. For analysing the use of the passive, texts from various registers in spoken and written English were selected.

While analysing the data collected from conversations, it was found that the passive is used less frequently in conversations in English among only female Indian speakers, compared with conversations among only male speakers of English.

This paper aims at giving the findings regarding the use of the passive by female and male Indian speakers of English and also connecting it with the formality scale. It may be

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12 : 1 January 2012

Rohit Kawale, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

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concluded that the frequency of the passive is indicative of the amount of colloquiality. Therefore, it implies that female Indian speakers are less formal than male speakers in their conversations in English.

## **Introduction**

The passive voice (usually referred to as the passive) in English has attracted the attention of many grammarians. Svartvik (1966) made the first corpus-based study of voice in English, particularly of the passive voice. One of his main findings was about the overall frequency of the passive and the frequency of the various types of the passive in English. Using his classification of the types of passive, the types of passive verb phrase etc, the passive in Indian English was studied to find out the overall frequency of the passive in conversations, various kinds of writing etc.

Instances of the passive were extracted from two corpora of Indian English – *The Kolhapur Corpus of Indian English* and *ICE-IND* (the Indian component of *The International Corpus of English*). All the instances of the passive were taken from those texts in the corpora, which were selected for the study.

Therefore, it was possible to draw reasonably valid conclusions about the frequency of the passive in Indian English. The form, functions and frequency of the passive in Indian English was studied. The types of passive, the types of passive verb phrase and the types of passive clause were studied, and the relative frequencies of all these in various registers were also measured. Using the method employed by Svartvik (1966), the frequency of the passive was counted in terms of the number of passive clauses per one thousand words. Instances of both finite and non-finite passives were selected from both the corpora of Indian English. The following are examples of finite and non-finite passives respectively.

1. In the non-radiative transfer, the coupling *is brought about* by the phonon field of the crystalline matrix. (*Kolhapur Corpus*, J 02, 1340-1360)
2. It can't be categorised as wrong English, it is *to be categorised* as Indian English. (*ICE-IND:S1A-028#45:1:B*)

One of the features of the passive in Indian English that were studied was the frequencies of the passive used by male and female speakers of English.

## **Passives Used by Male and Female Speakers of Indian English**

Fifty direct conversations from *ICE-IND* were analysed in the present study. As the personal information about every speaker taking part in conversations is given in the corpus such as age, sex, educational qualifications, it was possible to find out if the speakers taking part in every conversation were male or female. It was found that out of fifty conversations analysed for the present study, there were twenty conversations with only female speakers taking part in them,

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12 : 1 January 2012

Rohit Kawale, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

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twenty-two with only male speakers in them, and the remaining eight conversations with male as well as female speakers in them.

<b>Table 1: The frequency of the passive in conversations by male and female speakers in ICE-IND</b>					
<b>The passive used by female speakers</b>		<b>The passive used by male speakers</b>		<b>The passive used by female &amp; male speakers</b>	
<b>No. &amp; frequency of finite passives</b>	<b>No. &amp; Frequency of non-finite passives</b>	<b>No. &amp; frequency of finite passives</b>	<b>No. &amp; frequency of non-finite passives</b>	<b>No. &amp; frequency of finite passives</b>	<b>No. &amp; frequency of non-finite passives</b>
231 <b>5.77</b>	32 <b>0.80</b>	297 <b>6.75</b>	73 <b>1.65</b>	123 <b>7.68</b>	30 <b>1.87</b>

**Table 1** shows the frequency of finite and non-finite passives used by these speakers in their conversations. It was found that both finite and non-finite passives were used more frequently by male speakers than female ones. In individual pieces of conversations this consistency was found to a large extent. The frequency of finite passives in the conversations by only female speakers was 5.77 per thousand words. The frequency in the conversations by only male speakers was 6.75. In conversations involving both male and female speakers, the frequency was 7.68. The frequencies of non-finite passives were 0.80, 1.65 and 1.87 respectively.

The frequency of both finite and non-finite passives in conversations involving male and female speakers was more than the frequency in conversations of only female and only male speakers. In general, the frequency of both finite and non-finite passives was lower than in most of the other registers, not only of written English, but also of spoken English. Especially, the frequency of non-finite passives was consistently very low. It was the lowest in the conversations of only female speakers. It was less than half of the frequency in the conversations of only male speakers. There was not so much difference in the frequencies of finite passives, but their frequency was also lower in the conversations of female than in those of male speakers.

The data shows that female speakers of Indian English use the passive voice less frequently than male speakers and that they especially use non-finite passives with a very low frequency. Of course, this observation applies *only* to conversations in English.

### **Functions of the Passive: Possible Reason for the Difference in Frequencies of the Passive**

In the study of the passive in Indian English, the functions of the passive were also studied. One of the functions that was found was that the use of the passive is related to the arrangement of given information and new information in a clause. But it was also found that the use of the passive is related to the amount of colloquiality in the text.

Following the theory of Granger (1983), it was found that the frequency of the passive is linked with the formality scale. The more formal the text, the more frequent is the passive; and the more colloquial the text, the less frequent is the passive.

It was found in the study of the passive in various registers in Indian English that non-finite passives are used more frequently in registers of formal or academic nature, such as business correspondence or academic writing. Therefore they are used with low frequency in all conversations, but with the lowest frequency in the conversations of only female speakers. This can imply that the female Indian speakers are less formal in their conversations in English, as far as what the use of the passive indicates.

If this view is carried further, it can also be deduced that conversations in English by male Indian speakers can be formal and they can be very formal if they involve both female and male speakers.

As shown in **Table 1**, the frequency of both finite and non-finite passives is more in the conversations involving female and male speakers than in those of only female and only male speakers.

### **Conclusion**

It can, therefore, be concluded that male Indian speakers use passives more frequently than female ones in their conversations in English. As the frequency of the passive is in direct proportion with formality in communication, it can also be concluded that at least in their conversations in English, female speakers are less formal than male speakers, and that conversations in English involving female and male Indian speakers are most formal.

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Rohit Kawale, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.  
Associate Professor & Head  
Department of English  
Sangamner College  
Sangamner  
Maharashtra 422605  
India  
[rohit.kawale@gmail.com](mailto:rohit.kawale@gmail.com)

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