

■ Types of Passive Sentences

Passive sentences are divided into the direct passive and the indirect passive.

● Direct Passive

A direct passive sentence can be formed by directly converting an active sentence. Example: *inu ga kodomo o tasuketa* ‘a dog saved the child’ (active) → *kodomo ga inu ni tasukerareta* ‘the child was saved by a dog’ (passive). This is done with active sentences where the object is marked by *o*, as well as active sentences that include a component marked by *ni* (e.g. *inu ga kodomo ni kamitsuita* ‘a dog bit a child’), and *kara* (e.g., *inu ga kodomo kara bōru o totta* ‘a dog took the ball from a child’). To form a passive sentence, the agent of the active sentence is removed from the subject’s position, a component other than the original case *ga* is placed in the subject position instead, and the *-(r)areru* is attached to the verb stem to form the predicate. The direct passive is also called “the normal passive.”

There are direct passive sentences where the subject is inanimate. Examples: *hashi ga kakerareta* ‘a bridge was built,’ *bīru wa mugi kara tsukurareru* ‘beer is made from barley,’ and *kono chihō de wa doitsugo ga hanasareru* ‘German is spoken in this region.’ This type of passive is called the “insentient passive” because the subject is insentient. In this type of passive, the agent often does not come into question. If it is necessary to explicitly mention the agent, usually it is marked by *ni yotte*, as in *shi ni yotte hashi ga kakerareta* ‘the bridge was built by the city.’

● Indirect Passive

In the indirect passive, what is in the position of the subject is not a case component in the active sentence from which the passive sentence is formed. Example 1: *Karasu ga gomi o arashita* ‘Ravens tore into the garbage’ (active) → *Jūmin* (‘The residents,’ subject) *ga karasu ni gomi o arasareta* ‘The residents had their garbage torn into by ravens’ (passive). From this, back formation into an active sentence, such as **Karasu ga jūmin ni gomi o arashita*, is not possible. Example 2: *Dareka ga e o sakini katta* ‘Someone bought the painting first’ (active) → *Ane wa dareka ni e o sakini kawareta* ‘My sister had someone buy the painting (before she could)’ (indirect passive). First there was a situation which is described in the active sentence, where someone bought the painting. When the speaker understands that her/his older sister was affected by the situation, the speaker comes up with the indirect passive sentence. Example 3: *Haha ga genkan no kagi o kaketa* ‘My mother locked the front door’ (active) → *Chichi wa haha ni genkan no kagi o kakerareta* ‘My father was inconvenienced when my mother locked the front door’ (indirect passive). First there was the situation where my mother locked the door. Once the speaker understands that this situation inconvenienced his father, s/he comes up with the indirect passive sentence. In the last two examples, the agents in the active sentences (“someone” and “my mother”) do not directly affect the subjects in the passive sentences (“my older sister” and “my father”).

In other instances, part of the subject, what the subject owns, or the subject’s in-group member, becomes the object of the action, as in “(Hanako’s) foot” in *Hanako ga jōkyaku ni ashi o fumareta* ‘Hanako had her foot stepped on by a passenger,’ “(Taro’s) wallet” in *Tarō ga dorobō ni saifu o nusumareta* ‘Taro had his wallet stolen,’ and “(the mother horse’s) colt” in *Hahauma wa bokujōnushi ni ko o tsurete ikareta* ‘The mother horse had her colt taken away by the rancher.’

These are also indirect passive sentences, and are called “the owner passive.” Intransitive verbs, such as *shinu* ‘die’ and *sawagu* ‘become boisterous’ also form passive sentences, as in *Aiken ni shinareta* ‘My dear dog died (and it caused me great pain)’, and *Kankyaku ni sawagareta* ‘The spectators became boisterous (and it troubled the speaker)’. These are called the “intransitive verb passive.”

The indirect passive often denotes that the subject suffers or is inconvenienced as a result, and is thus often called “the adversative passive,” as well as the “the third party passive,” because a third party which does not show up in the original active sentence is the one who is inconvenienced.

Indirect passive sentences sometimes do not express adversity when the clause ends in the 中止形 *chūshi-kei*, continuative form, and not in the terminal form, as in *Hahaoya ni te o hikarete mon o kugutta* ‘I went through the gate as my mother led me by the hand.’

- Is It Insentient Passive or Indirect Passive?

Whether to use the particle *o* or the particle *ga* may make a difference in the type of passive sentence one creates. Examples: *Manshon ga taterareta* ‘The condo was built’ vs. *Manshon o taterareta* ‘We had a condo built (near us)’. *Manshon ga taterareta* is a direct and insentient passive sentence with an inanimate subject. It simply states the fact that a condo has been built. *Manshon o taterareta*, on the other hand, is an indirect passive sentence that possibly has a person, who does not appear in the sentence, in the position that accompanies *ga*. The subject who may be affected by the construction of the condo exists elsewhere, and it is implied that the subject was affected by what happened.

Similarly, *Chiji ni yotte kusudama ga warareta* ‘The decorative paper ball was broken open by the governor’ is a direct passive sentence, and *Chiji ni kusudama o warareta* ‘The governor went and break open the decorative paper ball (e.g., before the ceremony started)’ is an indirect passive sentence implying adversity. *Kanojo ni yotte kadan ga tsukurareta* ‘The flower bed was put in by her’ is a direct passive sentence, and *Kanojo ni kadan o tsukurareta* ‘She went and put in a flowerbed (on our land)’ is an indirect passive sentence implying adversity.

→ ヴォイス Voice (2-E), 受動文の諸特徴 Various Characteristics of Passive Sentences (2-E), 受動文の歴史 History of Passive Sentences (6-A)

- References

Suzuki, Shigeyuki (1972) *Nihongo bunpō, keitairon* (Japanese Grammar: Morphology). Mugi Shobo.

Teramura, Hideo (1982) *Nihongo no shintakusu to imi I* (Japanese Syntax and Meaning I). Kurosio Publishers.

(Nakahata Takayuki)