**The Passive Voice**

The passive voice in Arabic, like in English, is used to the subject of the sentence the receiver of the action, rather than the doer. Note the difference in the two sentences below:

*He broke the window.* (Active)

*The window was broken.* (Passive)

Both sentences are describing the same incident, but in the active sentence, “He” is the subject and the verb is active. In the second, the window is the subject and the verb is passive. The difference in the verbs is the most important point. Passive verbs can be past, present or future. In case you have any doubts, try the examples below. Are the sentences active or passive?

1. *Samir and Marwa went to the movies. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*
2. *Muhammad was promoted to manager. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*
3. *Najib Mahfuz is considered the greatest modern Arab writer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

It should be clear that only in sentence a are the subjects doing the action. In the other two examples, the action is being done to them.

The passive has the same effect in Arabic, but there are two important differences:

1. In Arabic, the doer cannot be mentioned . Notice that in all the examples above, we are not told who performed the action (promoted Muhammad, considers Mahfuz a great writer, etc.) English has a strange form of the passive in which the doer is mentioned:

*The window was broken by James*

this type of sentence is highly discouraged in English grammar, but is not allowed at all in Arabic.

1. In Arabic, the passive is formed by changing the vowels on the verb. English uses a compound of the verb “to be” and the past tense of the main verb (e.g. “was broken”). This means in most unvoweled texts, you cannot tell by looking whether the verb is passive or active. In speaking it is clear. The most important difference is that the passive has a short vowel ُ on the first letter.

consider this example that you already know:

وُلِدْتُ في مصرI was born in Egypt

وَلَدْتُ في مصرI gave birth in Egypt

the rest of the conjugation is the same.

**Passive Conjugations**

Passive conjugations are differentiated from active conjugations by internal vowel changes. You can see from the conjugations above that the vowel on the first consonant is always a dhamma and that the stem vowel is always a kasra. These are the only differences. The suffixes are exactly the same as for the active voice. If you write out these passive conjugations without the short vowels, they will look just like active conjugations. Therefore context is what will tell you what is going on.

Below are the passive voice conjugations for the verb يَفْحَصُ , فَحَصَ (“to examine”) in the past tense.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Plural | | Dual | | Singular | |
| فُحِصْنا | نَحْنَ | فُحِصْتتُما | أنتُما | فُحِصْتُ | أنا |
| فُحِصْتُمْ | أنتُم | فُحِصا | هما (M) | فُحِصْتَ | أنتَ |
| فُحِصْتُنَّ | أنتُنَّ | فُحِصَتا | هما (F) | فُحِصْتِ | أنتِ |
| فُحِصوا | هم |  |  | فُحِصَ | هو |
| فُحِصْنَ | هنَّ |  |  | فُحِصَتْ | هي |

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Now we will see how the passive is used and what it means. Let’s use “I studied the book” as a model sentence. This sentence is in the active voice. It is also a very boring sentence. Anyway, if we wish to convert this sentence to the passive voice in English we would say, “This book was studied by me.” (This is a gross barbarism in English, but such sentences do occur.) Now let’s look at the Arabic versions of these sentences.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1. I studied the book.** | **١. دَرَسْتُ الكتابَ** |
| **2. The book was studied.** | **٢.  دُرِسَ الكتابُ** |

*In real life, some verbs are almost always used in the passive, while others are typically active. “To be born” is an example. “To be calledيسمّى),( used in this lesson’s interview, is another one.*

1. the verb – قُتِلَ. is passive meaning “was killed.” The active verb قَتَلَ means “to kill.” Here, the vowel pattern has been changed to make the verb passive – “to be killed.” . While English expresses this by using additional words, Arabic does it by changing the vowel pattern. This is why attention to the vowel sounds is very important.

What do the following mean?

ضَرَبَ (to hit) - ضُرِبَ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

كَتَبَ (to write) - كُتِبَ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

دَرَسَ (to study) - - دُرِسَ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Create the passive form of the following verbs:

عَرَفَ (to know) - \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

لَعَبَ (to play) - \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

وَجَدَ (to find) - \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Passive verbs will conjugate just like any other. You use this pattern already when you say “I was born” وُلِدْتُ

ضُرِبْتُ I was hit –

وُجِدْنا We were found –