



The Occurrence of Voices in Translation

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Abstract

Voice is a grammatical aspect, which is divided into active and passive. However, it occurs in languages and in translation with different surface structures. The present paper is a descriptive study that attempts to describe the behaviour of active and passive voices in translating from Arabic into English and French, to compare differences and similarities, and to establish the effects of this linguistic factor on the modeling of translation. The analysis is done on some existing literary translations from Arabic into English and French and data reflective to the problems and occurrences of voices are collected throughout the texts under study. Then, the data are identified, categorized, and analyzed in the source texts and target texts. The results indicate that passive occurrences are more in the English text than in the French and Arabic texts and that there are a lot of similarities between Arabic and French as far as voice is concerned. The conclusion is reached that the active and passive voices are determined by these factors: language peculiarity in terms of structural constraints, tendency, and translator's latitude in terms of norms, which the translator must pay attention to for a better functionality in translation.

Keywords: Active voice, Passive voice, Language peculiarity, Translation, Comparativeness, Translation modeling

1. Introduction

Translation is a discovering activity that discovers language aspects from language to language, from country to country, from age to age, and from world to world (Cary, 1963, p.43). Mundy (2001) states that translation has helped to fill the gap between theory and practice since the 20th century thanks to Holmes' theory on translation studies. This has turned translational processes to new approaches which describe meanings systematically and "put together systematic taxonomies of translation phenomena." (P.17-29)

Moreover, Toury (1985) classifies comparative studies in translation into (a) comparative studies of different target translations of one source text (ST) into one target language (TL), (b) comparative study on different phases, and (c) comparative study of one ST into different languages (p. 24). It follows that Toury (1995) calls for systematic descriptive studies of translations, whose findings lend themselves to comparativeness of ST and TT in terms of shifts (p.10). This paper, therefore, deals with a comparative study of one source text into different target languages. It compares Arabic, English and French. That is, translations produced from one source language, Arabic language; this study is a product-oriented descriptive translation (DTS) on one grammatical category, voice: active voice and passive voice.

Due to specificities of languages and norms in translation, the objectives of this paper are:

- i. To describe the behaviour of active and passive voices in translating from Arabic into English and French.
- ii. To compare differences and similarities.
- iii. To establish the effects of linguistic factors on the modeling of translation for the languages under study.

This paper is intended to show translators, interpreters, and linguists how voices function and how they can be handled in translation. The findings are expected to be reflexive to other genres. This research is a qualitative research. It focuses only on the translation quality as far as the occurrence of voice is concerned. Some data analyses apropos of voice, which have already been done in the researcher's PhD thesis, Moindjie (2006) are used to show the behaviour of voice in translation. Arabic source text is abbreviated AST, English target text is abbreviated ETT, French target text is abbreviated FTT, and target texts are abbreviated TTs. The analyses are carried out, following the comparative perspective of translation set by by Toury (1985) on translation modeling.

The corpora used are novels. They are chosen for convenience. They consist of two novels entitled *Zukāq el-Midaq*(1947/1990) [1], translated *Midaq Alley* (1975) [2], and *Passage des Miracles*(1970) [3]; *Mawsim el-Hiġra ilā ash-Shamāl* (1967) [4], translated *Season of Migration to the North*(1969) [5], and *Saison de la Migration vers le Nord* (1983) [6]. Two different novels are used in order to justify and consolidate the findings. The appendices contain the pages of the occurrences of the texts, AST, ETT, and FTT.

2. Literature Review

Both active and passive voices represent the “same conceptual content or proposition” despite different surface structures depending on the encoder preference of the use of theme/topic or rheme/comment structures (Gutknecht and Röle, 1996, pp. 112, 123). Like English and French, Arabic language has two voices: (a) active voice, مبني للمعلوم and passive voice, مبني للمجهول. The difference is that, as Haywood and Nahmad(1965) point out, the passive is formed in Arabic by “merely changing the vowel of the active”, and the subject of the passive is termed differently as the deputy or representative of the doer, نائب الفاعل (pp. 142-144). Moreover, in Arabic the passive cannot be used if the doer of the action is mentioned in the sentence, a case in which Indo-European languages term the doer as agent. In this case the active voice must be used. To put it more clearly, the form of the passive is not like English Language and French language in that the voice does not require the verb ‘to be’. It is formed from the active voice by changing some vocalization vowels. Therefore, active voice = subject + verb+ object; and passive voice= object (subject) + verb. Unlike English language and French language, passive voice in Arabic does not accept an agent, for example:

ضرب The boy was beaten (by someone). Back translation: ضرب شخص الولد. The back translated Arabic sentence is active due to a peculiarity requirement of the Arabic language.

English language has also two voices: active and passive. It is formed by putting the verb to be into the same tense as the active verb and adding the past participle of the active verb, i.e. active voice = Subject + verb + object; and passive voice = object (subject) + be + past participle + (by + agent), e.g. the cat ate the fish. The fish was eaten (by the cat).

Dixon (1991) states that a speaker of English language will have a preference for using the active voice compared to the passive voice. However, English language has more circumstances where passive voice may be used. These circumstances are: (1) to avoid mentioning the subject; (2) to focus on the object rather than the subject; (3) to place a topic in subject relation; and (4) to satisfy syntactic constraints; and (5) to focus on the result of the activity (pp.298-305). Quirk, Greenbaum et al. (1985) discuss that voice is a grammatical category that can transform the sentence into two different ways without changing the fact or meaning. They argue that the frequency and infrequency of voice in a given text depend on text type, and objective impersonal style. They state that active and passive voices are not sometimes in systematic correspondence due to some constraints (pp.159- 167).

French language has also two voices, active and passive. Both of them are formed exactly like the English ones. The only difference is that the past participle in French language must agree in gender and genre with the subject in the passive voice (Vinay and Darbelnet(1995). The passive is formed by putting the verb to be , *être*, which should take the tense of the active verb, and then changing the active verb into the past participle, and followed optionally the agent, i.e. active voice = subject + verb + object; whereas *voix passive* =*COD (sujet) + être + participe passé + (par/ de + complement d' agent)*, for example. *Kaim a marié cette femme. Cette femme a été mariée par Kaim*. Backtranslation: Kaim has married this woman. This woman has been married by Kaim. Moreover, Wagner and Pinchon (1962) mention that the reasons for using the passive voice in French language are only stylistic (p.280).

However, Byrne and Churchill (1986) argue that there is preference of using on, and reflexive verbs, e.g. *on dit que*, it is said that; *cela se comprend*, that is understood instead of the passive voice (p. 286). Correspondingly, Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) mention that English prefers the use of passive voices whereas French prefers the use of active voice. The frequent use of passive in English reflect the nature of English language and its attitude towards reality, and reluctance of definiteness in opinions and judgement (objectivity); the English speaker or writer has a tendency to report the situation. However, the frequent use of active voice may reflect the nature of French language on the use of pronominal constructions, and that indicates that the French speaker/writer/translator may be less circumspect and choose the level of abstract expression (pp. 138- 141).

3. Results

The results reveal the following structures and methods as occurrences of voices in the translation activity from Arabic into English and French.

3.1 Midaq Alley

3.1.1 Active (AST), passive (ETT) and active (FTT). Category 1

AST	AST peculiarity	ETT peculiarity	Translation method	FTT peculiarity	Translation method
-abstract nouns	-abstractness	Passive preference	Modulation	Active preference	transposition
-active participles	implicitness				

3.1.2 Passive (AST), passive (ETT) and passive (FTT). Category 2

AST	AST Peculiarity	ETT Peculiarity	Translation method	FTT peculiarity	Translation method
Passive	-implicitness	No peculiarity	Literal	No peculiarity	Literal

3.1.3 Active (AST), passive (ETT) and passive (FTT). Category 3

AST	AST Peculiarity	ETT Peculiarity	Translation method	FTT peculiarity	Translation method
-Passive participles -Verbs derived from quality nouns	Structure	Structural perception	Modulation	Structural perception	modulation

3.1.4 Active (AST), active (ETT), and passive (FTT). Category 4

AST	AST Peculiarity	ETT Peculiarity	Translation method	FTT peculiarity	Translation method
Active	No peculiarity	No peculiarity	Literal Translation norms in terms of translator's choices and decisions	No peculiarity	Modulation Translation norms in terms of translator's choices and decisions

3.1.5 Passive (AST), passive (ETT), and active (FTT). Category 5

AST	AST Peculiarity	ETT Peculiarity	Translation method	FTT peculiarity	Translation method
Passive	No peculiarity	No peculiarity	Literal Translation norms in terms of translator's choices and decisions	No peculiarity	Modulation Translation norms in terms of translator's choices and decisions

3.1.6 Passive (AST) active (ETT), and active (FTT). Category 6

AST	AST peculiarity	ETT peculiarity	Translation method	FTT peculiarity	Translation method
Passive	- implicitness	Structural perception	Modulation	Structural perception	modulation

3.2 *Season Of Migration To The North*

3.2.1 Active (AST), passive (ETT) and active (FTT). Category 1

AST	AST peculiarity	ETT peculiarity	Translation method	FTT peculiarity	Translation method
-abstract nouns -active participles	-abstractness implicitness	Passive preference	Modulation	Active preference	transposition

3.2.2 Passive (AST), passive (ETT), and passive (FTT). Category 2

AST	AST Peculiarity	ETT Peculiarity	Translation method	FTT peculiarity	Translation method
Passive	-implicitness	No peculiarity	Literal	No peculiarity	Literal

3.2.3 Active (AST), passive (ETT), and passive (FTT). Category 3

AST	AST Peculiarity	ETT Peculiarity	Translation method	FTT peculiarity	Translation method
-Passive participles -Verbs derived from quality nouns	Structure	Structural perception	Modulation	Structural perception	modulation

3.2.4 Active (AST), active (ETT), and passive (FTT). Category 4

AST	AST Peculiarity	ETT Peculiarity	Translation method	FTT peculiarity	Translation method
Active	No peculiarity	No peculiarity	Literal Translation norms in terms of translator's choices and decisions	No peculiarity	Modulation Translation norms in terms of translator's choices and decisions

3.2.5 Passive (AST), passive (ETT), and active (FTT). Category 5

AST	AST Peculiarity	ETT Peculiarity	Translation method	FTT peculiarity	Translation method
Passive	No peculiarity	No peculiarity	Literal Translation norms in terms of translator's choices and decisions)	No peculiarity	Modulation Translation norms in terms of translator's choices and decisions

3.2.6 Passive (AST), active (ETT), and active (FTT). Category 6

AST	AST peculiarity	ETT peculiarity	Translation method	FTT peculiarity	Translation method
Passive	- implicitness	Structural perception	Modulation	Structural perception	modulation

4. Discussion

4.1 Midaq Alley

4.1.1 Active (AST), passive (ETT) and active (FTT)

In the AST, words and phrases like منحصر; خفية الأعين are modulated into passive in the ETT. The passive modulation in the ETT is found to have to do with abstract nouns like العذاب; خفية; تهيجية; and the active ر. This shows that these grammatical aspects, i.e. abstract nouns, and active participles in Arabic embody implicitly a semantic aspect of voice, which the translator can deal with. Due to the fact that these occurrences in the AST cannot be translated word for word into English, the translator modulated them into the passive voice. Moreover, some statements in this structure category are in the active voice like فلاح لعينيه مرخاً خفية الأعين. If this is translated word for word as 'it appears to his eyes happily fearing the eyes,' it would sound strange to the English decoder. The same happens with active participle انه منحصر. It is, therefore, modulated not because the English language has a preference and tendency to use the passive voice but because of structural problems relative to language specificity and translation unit. By comparison, in the French text, the active voice is used and translated, *il lui parut gai...par crainte du qu'en-dira-t-on;l'impasse du Mortier s'enveloppait*. In this category, the French translator used a transposition procedure because he did not change the point of view. He changed only the parts of speech. That is, the abstract nouns: خفية and the active participle, منحصر are changed into verbs in the active. This case occurs on the pages indicated in the appendices.

4.1.2 Passive (AST), passive (ETT) and passive (FTT)

This category shows literal occurrences that systematically occur in the AST, ETT, and FTT; but they are few compared to the other categories. In the AST, كان التدخين قد حُرِّمَ عليه, the passive voice is used. Following the nature and peculiarity of the Arabic language the passive cannot take an agent. In these utterances the real doer of the actions or the agent is not mentioned in the AST. If the translator in this case tries to provide an agent he will commit himself. Again it is difficult to change the sentences into active voices since the agent is unknown or implicit. This indicates that the translator has to abide by a literal translation procedure as far as this category of passivization is concerned. It is a servitude pattern in translating from Arabic. Therefore, the passive voice is rendered literally in the ETT as smoking is forbidden and in the FTT as *il est interdit de fumer*. Like the English translator, the French translator has to render the passive voice into the target text. This is not because there is a structural problem in the French language. It is because the translator is compelled to put it in the passive since the agent is unknown in order to avoid commitment and unfaithfulness to the source text whose passive peculiarity does not give a room for the translator's choice. These cases occur on the pages indicated on the appendices.

4.1.3 Active (AST), passive (ETT) and passive (FTT)

In this category, modulation is used in both ETT and FTT. In the Arabic the sentences are in the active voice. For example: إن حميدة مخطوبة; وتأثر السيد بقول ابنه. The active voice in the Arabic text occurred in two structures. One is in sentences like إن حميدة مخطوبة and وتأثر السيد بقول ابنه. The passive participle, مخطوبة cannot be considered a passive voice because it does not follow the Arabic passive voice structure. Semantically, the Arabic passive participle gives a passive sense even though the structure is not passive. In translating these two structures a modulation is used; it stems from the fact that the active voice of this category is represented in the AST by intransitive verbs and passive participles, whereas in the ETT and FTT the verbs that correspond to these verbs and passive participles are transitive verbs. So the passivization in this category in the ETT and FTT it is due to structural problems between Arabic on the one hand and English and French on the other hand. This allows the translators to use the passive voice instead of the active voice. The sentences are modulated in the ETT, for example Hamida is engaged. Salim A. was very impressed by what his son said. The same happened in the FTT, for example: *Hamida était fiancée. Sélim Alwâne fut troublé par les propos de son fils*. This category is not a translator's choice but a language conceptual peculiarity. Such cases occur on the pages indicated on the appendices.

4.1.4 Active (AST), active (ETT), and passive (FTT)

In this category, the occurrences of the voice in the AST are active,

for example: وهذا لعمرى ما ألمنى أشد لألم. The active voice has been rendered in the ETT as This is what has distressed me. However, the passive voice has been used in the FTT instead of the active voices used in the AST and ETT. For instance, *J'ai été peiné de voir*. The use of the passive in the FTT is a translator's choice because these kinds of sentences could be put in the active without causing impact on the meaning or frenchness, for example: *Et ça m'a beaucoup fait du mal*. This case happens on the pages indicated on the appendices.

4.1.5 Passive (AST), passive (ETT), and active (FTT)

In this category, the passive voice is used in the AST, for example: أُغْلقت دكاكينه. The passive voice is literally rendered in the ETT, for example: All the shops were closed. In contrast, in the FTT the passive voice is modulated to active voice, for example: *Les boutiques avaient déjà fermé*. In the French text, the sentence is modulated into active voice structure. It is not put in the passive like the case in the AST and ETT. In the FTT, the active voice is used. The use of the active voice in the FTT is mostly translator's choice because the sentence will still sound French if it occurs in the passive form as *ses boutiques étaient fermées*. This case occurs on the pages indicated on the appendices.

4.1.6 Passive (AST) active (ETT), and active (FTT)

In this category, the sentences in the AST: بورك فيك يا عم كامل are in the passive voice. They are translated in the ETT as that is very kind of you and in the FTT as Dieu te bénisse, père Kâmil. Therefore, Instead of the passive voice, the active voice is used. The use of the active voice in the TTs instead of the passive voice used in the AST is not a choice but a different way of conceptualizing the verb because if it is in the passive voice it would sound strange, for example: You are blessed in you, Am Kamil. The same happens in French if the passive is used, for example: *Ammu Kamil, il est beni dans vous*. This literal translation with the passive voice sounds artificial compared to the active voice used in this category in the ETT and FTT. These cases occur on the pages indicated on the appendices.

4.2 Season Of Migration To The North

4.2.1 Active (AST), passive (ETT) and active (FTT)

This category occurs frequently. The active voice is more used in the AST and FTT. In the AST the active voice occurred in sentences with verbs like تحولت الرجفة الى يقظة, and sentences with abstract noun like لا هوادة فيها ولا رحمة, and an active participle, ابتسامتها مفعمة. According to the Arabic specificity these sentences cannot be changed to the passive voice in Arabic because the verbs are intransitive and the nouns and the active participle are without active verbs.

In the English text, these structures are modulated into the passive voice in this way: the shudder was transformed. No quarter was given. Her lips were formed. The use of the passive voice is obligatory in the ETT because this kind of structures of the active voice in Arabic cannot be translated structure by structure into English. So the problem here as far as this category is concerned is structural. In this category, it can be noticed that the use of the passive makes the object more important than the doer of the action in the ETT. By contrast, the subject or the doer of the action is made more important than the object in both AST and FTT by using the active voice.

In the French text, the voice used is the active voice. There are two structures used to bear the voice. Sentences containing verbs, for example: Un frison qui se transforma ensuite en vigilance. (une quartier qui est) Sans répit ni merci. La sourire débordant (la sourire qui déborde). This indicates the degree of similarity between Arabic and French as far as this category is concerned. These cases are found to occur on the pages indicated on the appendices.

4.2.2 Passive (AST), passive (ETT), and passive (FTT)

The voices in this category are literal. It can be noticed that the doer of the action or agent is not mentioned in the AST, for example: دعيت لحضور اجتماع. This sentence is a passive sentence but the agents of these passive voice is not mentioned.

In the ETT, the passive voice is rendered literally, for example: I was invited. Unlike Arabic, the agent can surface but the translator could not do that to avoid semantic commitment. Like the ETT, the passive voice is rendered literally to the FTT, for example: Je fus prié d'assister. The translator also did not use an agent not because it is an optional pattern but because it has not surfaced in the AST. So the translator has no choice here. He must use literal translation because he would commit himself since the real doers of the actions are not mentioned in the AST. This happens on the pages indicated on the appendices.

4.2.3 Active (AST), passive (ETT), and passive (FTT)

This category occurs rarely. Any how a modulation procedure is used by turning the active voice of the AST into the passive voice. The active voice is represented by verbs in sentences like فانه يخامرني ذلك الإحساس, by passive participles like البلد الآن ليس معلقاً, and by active participle like وكانت مدهنة ومملكة جلده. The active voice in these sentences cannot be put literally because there is verbs conceptual difference. In the Arabic text the sentences grammatically perceived as active. The active voice is represented by verbs like يخامرني, it comes to me or nouns like مدھنة ومملكة, rubbed and massaged, and معلقاً, suspended.

However, in the ETT and FTT the active voice is modulated to passive voice, for example: I'm sometimes seized by the feeling. The village was not suspended. She had been rubbed all over with oil. The same happens in the FTT, for example: Il m'arrivait d'être visité par sensation. Le village n'était plus désormais suspendu. Elle était pommagée. Using the passive voice in both ETT and FTT has foregrounded the object as more important than the subject. These occur on the pages indicated on the appendices.

4.2.4 Active (AST), active (ETT), and passive (FTT)

In this category, literal translation has been used in the ETT. However, message modulation procedure is used in the FTT. That is, the passive voice is used instead of the active voice and sentences with intransitive verbs are used in the AST. For example: فأحس بالطمأنينة. The same voice is rendered literally in the ETT, for example: I experienced a feeling of assurance. By contrast, the use of the passive in the FTT cannot be said that it is a language peculiarity because the structures can also be translated literally and they will still sound French, for example: Je me sens en sécurité instead of je fus pénétré d'une profonde sécurité. Therefore, it is noticed that the translator of the FTT used passive structures for stylistic purposes. This happens on the pages indicated on the appendices.

4.2.5 Passive (AST), passive (ETT), and active (FTT)

In this category, the passive voice is used in the AST. The passive structure is without an agent as the agent is not used in Arabic. That is, the real doer of the action is unknown or not mentioned, for example: يقال; والحق يقال; ثم جرى بالشاي. The same happens in the ETT, for example: Tea was brought. If the truth be told. It is said. However, in the FTT, a message modulation is used in that the active voice is used, but still the doer of the actions is unknown. The use of 'on' as subject and the infinitive 'dire' in the expression à vrai dire gives a sense of abstractness. This is found not to affect the meaning of the utterances. The above sentences can be put in the passive and still sound French and thus read, Le thé était apporté. Que la vérité soit dit. Il est dit. Therefore, the translator has a choice as far as this structure is concerned. This occurs on the pages indicated on the appendices.

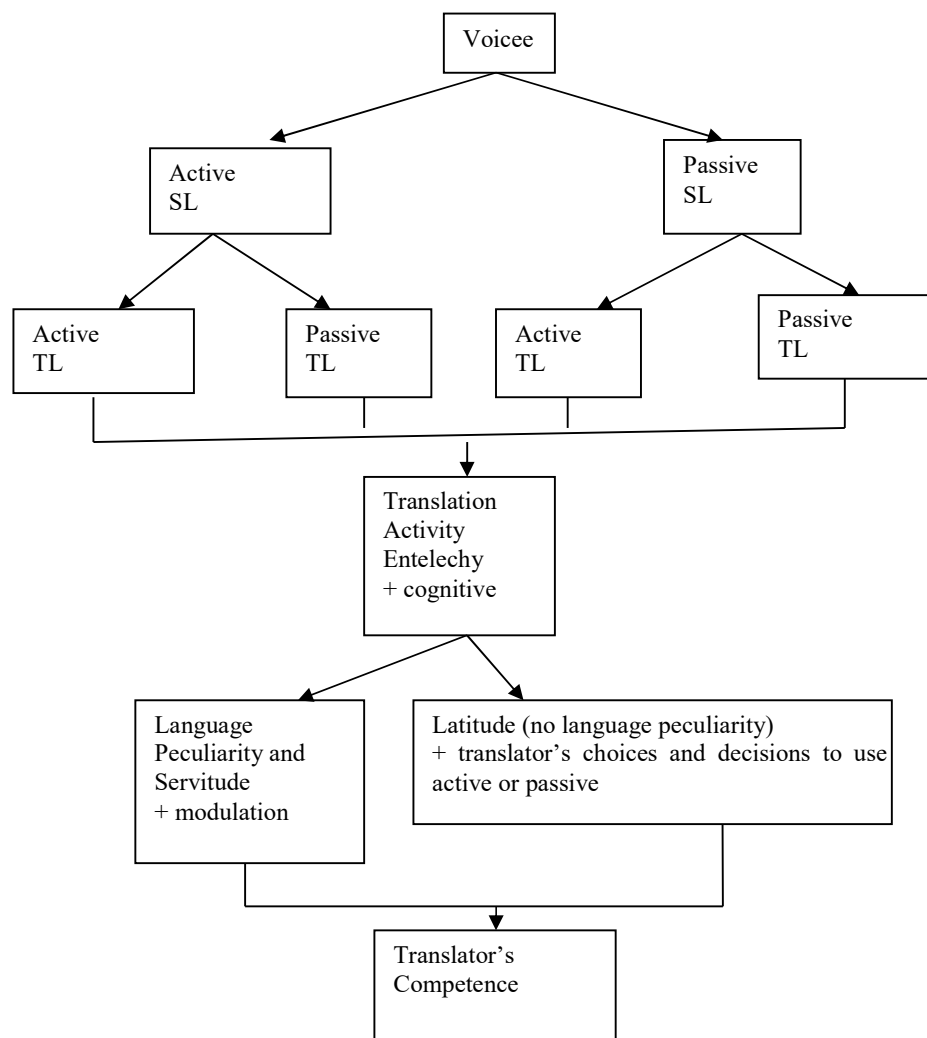
4.2.6 Passive (AST), active (ETT), and active (FTT)

In this category, the Arabic examples are in the passive. For example: خسارة لا تعوض; ... لا توجد لذة; بشكل لا يوصف. By contrast, the ETT and the FTT, a message modulation is applied, for example: All this whetted my imagination in an extraordinary manner. There is no pleasure like that of fornication. His death was an irreparable loss. The same happened in the FTT: Tout cela m'excita. Il n'est pas de plus grand plaisir que de jouir d'une femme. Sa mort a été une perte irréparable.

The modulation in both ETT and FTT is due to verbs conceptual differences; the conceptualization of the verbs in English and French are different from the Arabic one. This occurs on the pages indicated on the appendices. If literal translation is used here, the sentences would sound strange, For example. In a manner that is not described. Pleasure is not found like that of fornication. His death was a loss that cannot be compensated. The same would happen in French, for example: D'une manière qui n'est pas décrit. Un grand plaisir n'est pas trouvé comme le plaisir du mariage. Sa mort a été une perte qui n'est sera pas compensé. The use of literal passive structures in the ETT and FTT make the sentences sound unnatural even though they are grammatically correct. This is because they are not communicative in the sense that they would be difficult to be accepted by the French and English readerships. Therefore, modulation should be applied due to language peculiarity.

5. Voice Translation Model

According to the results, and discussion of this research the following translation model is constructed. The model is constructed from literary texts, but it can be tested and applied in other genres since the findings are language related. This is the model:



6. Conclusion

The research reveals that passive occurrences are more in the ETT than in the AST and FTT, whereas active occurrences are more in the AST and FTT than in the ETT. It is found also that the voice, be it passive or active, is determined by language peculiarity relative to structure, conceptualization, and preference like the structure of category 1, category 2, category 3, and category 6, which depend on the translation procedure of modulation. Both voices are found to enhance translation if they respect language peculiarities in their application. Other voice occurrences depend on the translator's choice like the structure of category 4 and structure category 5. The formation of the active and passive voices in the ETT and FTT are found to stem from AST active voice, passive voice, active participle, passive participle, and abstract nouns.

Passive literal translation occurs in structure category (2), and that mostly happens with passive occurrences in the AST without an agent. However, few passive occurrences in the AST have been modulated into non-passive sentences due to language conceptual differences, which would sound strange if they are literally translated. The translator's choice is found to be with active occurrences, and passive occurrences that are not related to language peculiarities.

The research shows that Arabic language is more similar to French than English as far as the active and passive voices are concerned. However, the translator who translates from Arabic into English and French and vice versa has to apply more modulation and transposition procedures than a literal translation procedure in dealing with active and passive voices. The translator's challenge is that sometimes sentences without intransitive verbs, i.e. verbs that do not take objects need to be modulated into passive transitive verbs, and vice versa. The translator's knowledge and competence of the language peculiarities and scope of the translator's latitude would produce a qualitative translation effects in terms of functionality and communicativeness, which can be used as a model in the translation activity.

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Notes

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Zukāq el-Midaq

Structure category 1

AST	ETT	FTT
7- 166.	2- 166	10- 169

Category 2

AST	ETT	FTT
18- 200	12- 168.	19- 171

Category 3

AST	ETT	FTT
662- 766	3- 230	11- 330.

Category 4

AST	ETT	FTT
642- 768	3- 239	11- 342

Category 5

AST	ETT	FTT
641- 771	2- 245	10- 350

Category 6

AST	ETT	FTT
649- 752	18- 213	32- 303

Appendix 2. Mawsim el-hiġra ilā ash-shamāl

Category 1

AST	ETT	FTT
7- 166	2- 166	10- 169

Category 2

AST	ETT	FTT
18- 200	12- 168	19- 171

Category 3

AST	ETT	FTT
46, 62, and 93	46, 48, and 74	52, 54, and 78

Category 4

AST	ETT	FTT
6- 193	2- 162	10- 165

Category 5

AST	ETT	FTT
18, 14, and 74	7, 9, and 58	15, 16, 63

Category 6

AST	ETT	FTT
26, 28, 42, 97, 124, 177, and 197	18, 20, 31, 58, 78, 101, 148, and 166	25, 27, 38, 63, 82, 104, and 169