Active and Passive Constructions in Shaping Meaning: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This research aims to describe the use of active and passive construction in building meaning in news texts with the main topic of the Megathrust earthquake in Indonesia. The method used is descriptive qualitative with data taken from two news texts related to this issue. Analysis was carried out using Roger Fowler's (2013) theoretical framework. The research results show that active sentences are more dominant than passive sentences, reflecting a direct and firm language style to convey information clearly and urgently. Meanwhile, the passive voice, although used less frequently, is still relevant in certain contexts, especially to highlight the impact or results of an event without the pressure of the perpetrator's actions.

Keywords: *Active and Passive Constructions; Critical Discourse Analysis; Language Meaning*

Introduction

Analysis of active and passive construction has been done by many experts (e.g., Batubara, 2020; Hadi, 2021; Salman, 2019). Salman (2019), for example, analyzes the types of errors made by junior high school students in Depok in using active and passive sentences in narrative texts. Although Almahameed (2022) studied passive voice use in news articles, it only focuses on political news discourse and its impact on readers' perceptions. This paper aims to describe active and passive construction in shaping meaning in news text with the main topic of *The issue of the Megathrust Earthquake in Indonesia*.

In an era of information that is increasingly developing rapidly, mass media has a very crucial role in shaping public discourse. Through various news texts, the media not only conveys factual information, but also contributes to the formation of meaning of society towards developing issues. In this context, language use especially in sentence structure, is a very important aspect to pay attention to. Two types of sentence structures that are often used in media texts are active and passive sentences. The choice between these two structures does not only influences the meaning conveyed, but also its impact on the way the reader understands and responds to the information received.

The active voice places the subject as the main actor in the action, thereby placing clear emphasis on who is doing the action (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2022). For example, in the sentence Journalists report

news quickly, the reader's focus is immediately directed to the journalist as an active actor. This structure is often used in news text to give a sense of urgency and power to the action being reported. On the other hand, passive sentences tend to divert attention from the perpetrator of the action, placing emphasis on the object or result of the action (Swan, 2005). The sentence *The news was reported by journalists quickly* places more attention on the news itself than on the journalists. The use of passive structures often indicates helplessness in that it can even be used to hide the perpetrator of the action which can have implications for how information is understood by the audience.

This difference in sentence structure has significant implications for the discourse that is formed. In a news context, the choice between active and passive sentences can influence the narrative that is constructed, as well as how readers respond to the information presented. In many cases, the use of passive sentences can give the impression of objectivity and neutrality, while active sentences can create an impression of closeness and involvement. Therefore, understanding the use of these two structures is important for critical analysis in media texts discourse.

This paper explores active and passive roles in media texts, with a special focus on news related to *The Issue of the Megathrust Earthquake in Indonesia* case which is currently hotly discussed. By understanding the active and passive roles in media texts, the readers can be more critical in responding to the information being received and this can help to improve their analytical skills regarding the messages conveyed by the media.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis

According to Gee (2011), discourse analysis is a scientific discipline that focuses on studying the use of language in real communication contexts, both verbally and non-verbally. The main goal of discourse analysis is to understand how language functions in social contexts and everyday communication, not just as a grammatical structure, but as a tool that reflects intentions, ideas and relationships between individuals. Discourse analysis looks at how language elements such as words, sentences and other language structures are used to produce meaning in contextual communication. This includes analyzing pragmatic aspects, such as the speaker's intention, interpretation by the listener, as well as the influence of social and cultural context on language use. Examples of the application of discourse analysis can be seen in the analysis of daily conversations, interactions on social media, news texts, speeches, or even advertisements, where language does not only functions as a means of conveying information but also create certain effects in a social context.

In addition, Ratnaningsih (2019) stated that Critical discourse analysis is an effort to understand discourse in depth by viewing it as a social practice, not just a text, because discourse is produced with certain goals or purposes that reflect or influence the social context. This approach highlights how word choice, sentence structure, and discourse context can be used to build opinion, direct public opinion, maintain power, or oppose injustice. By understanding discourse as an active tool in creating and changing power relations, Critical Discourse Analysis seeks to reveal the specific intentions behind the production of discourse and how this discourse reflects or challenges the existing social structures.

According to Van Dijk (2015) critical discourse analysis have three important levels, namely macro structure, superstructure and microstructure, each of which helps understand discourse from various aspects. The focus in this study is on microstructure, namely an in-depth analysis of small elements in the text that play an important role in forming meaning and influencing the reader's perception. For example, the microstructural elements are sentence forms. On these elements, this study focuses on how active sentences and passive sentences play an important role in forming meaning and influencing readers' perceptions.

Active and Passive Constructions

Setiani (2021) identifies several types of vocabulary in media discourse that can influence audience perception and understanding. These types of vocabulary include: classifying vocabulary, passive vocabulary, active sentences, and vocabulary that limits views. In active sentences, the subject is placed as the main actor, thereby placing clear emphasis on who is doing the action. As explained by Albawendi (2024), active sentence structures are often used in news to give an impression of urgency and decisiveness to the action being reported, because readers immediately understand who is acting. For example, in the sentence *The police arrested the suspect,* the subject (the police) clearly performed the action (the arrest), which makes the sentence feel direct and powerful.

On the other hand, passive sentences emphasize the object or result of an action, not the perpetrator. According to Swan (2005), the use of passive sentences can divert attention from who is doing the action. In the example *The suspect has been arrested*, the reader's attention is directed to the outcome (the arrest of the suspect) without mentioning who carried out the action. Passive structures are often used when information about the perpetrator is unimportant, unknown, or deliberately hidden. The use of passive voice has different implications in conveying information. Passive voice can create an impression of helplessness or neutrality because it reduces the emphasis on the perpetrator. For example, in political contexts or sensitive news, passive structures can be used to obscure the perpetrator of the action, which can affect how the information is understood by the audience. This means that the choice between active and passive sentences is not just a matter of language style, but also a matter of how the message is intended to be received and interpreted by the audience.

Method

This research adopts in-depth critical analysis to examine how active and passive sentence constructions are used in news reports, with the aim of understanding the reasons behind the choice of these sentence structures in reporting and creating meaning. This approach was carried out through qualitative analysis. In this context, qualitative analysis means that certain phenomena are explored directly. In this case, the use of active and passive sentences is to capture the meaning and purpose underlying the language choice. A qualitative approach requires researchers to dive into the data carefully, look at the context of use, and analyze in depth why active or passive sentences are chosen in the reporting context. Thus, this research sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of how different sentence structures can be used to convey certain meanings in news, and how this influences the audience's interpretation of the information presented.

The object in this study is news discourse about *The Issue of the Megathrust Earthquake in Indonesia*. The news was taken from

Table 1. Data Sources

No.	Code	News title	Media	Link
1.	DS 1	'Just a matter of time' megathrust earthquake hits Indonesia, as government agency urges mitigation efforts	CNA	https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/indonesia-megathrust-earthquake-mentawai-matter-time-japan-nankai-kyushu-4563476
2.	DS 2	Getting To Know Megathrust, A Potentially Powerful Earthquake Occurs In Indonesia	VOI	https://voi.id/en/bernas/412630#google_vignette

Data collection techniques are methods used to collect information or facts in the field. In this research, researchers used documentation techniques. There were several steps that must be taken in collecting critical discourse analysis data, including: (1) Reading news discourse repeatedly. (2) Record data obtained from reading online news discourse on Chanel News Asia and Voice of Indonesia. (3) Analyzing the data that has been obtained by identifying the parts related to Roger Flowler's (2013) critical discourse analysis, namely active and passive construction. The instruments used in data collection techniques were the researchers themselves by observing, reading and collecting data. The final step was drawing conclusions and verifying the data. The conclusions drawn were the result of the analysis process which produced a description of critical discourse analysis in the news.

Results and Discussion

News text 1

Active Constructions

> *Local governments should prepare mitigation measures including spatial planning on earthquake-proof buildings.*

It is very in this sentence that the subject *Local government* is emphasized directly as an actor who must act. The use of the word *should* emphasize the urgent *necessity*. This sentence directs attention to the importance of local government preparedness in facing the threat of an earthquake, in which reinforcing the perception that concrete action is urgently needed.

> *The BMKG has put in place monitoring, processing and information dissemination systems.*

BMKG is mentioned directly as a subject that had taken specific actions to anticipate earthquakes. This shows the active action of the institution. The use of active sentences here emphasizes BMKG's capability and readiness, instilling public confidence that this institution is proactively carrying out its role.

> *House of Representatives member Daniel Johan said the potential of a megathrust earthquake in Indonesia should be of serious concern to the government.*

This sentence highlights the opinion of a member of the DPR who actively conveys the importance of the government's attention. This sentence shows political pressure on the government to act on potential threats, while also showing support from the legislature.

> *The team will also counsel and brief residents regarding disaster response and evacuation preparedness.*

This sentence exemplifies that through the use of active sentences, the team's actions become very visible and specific, which gives the impression that the team goes directly into the field to interact with the community. With a team that actively provides direction and counseling, this sentence can create a sense of security for readers or the public, because there is direct intervention from the authorities. Active construction emphasizes the team's readiness and proactive role in organizing the community, which can increase public confidence in disaster mitigation efforts.

Passive Constructions

> *According to an earthquake hazard source map released by BMKG in 2017.*

The passive phrase *released by BMKG* emphasizes the information that is already available, but there is no emphasis on who initiated this action. With passive use, readers focus more on the scientific data provided rather than BMKG actions, thereby increasing the impression of objectivity and legitimacy of the data.

> *The release of earthquakes in these two segments can be said to be 'a short time'*

With the phrase *can be said* there is no subject who directly claims the statement, so it sounds like a general statement or scientific consensus. This passivity creates the impression that the statement is already widely acknowledged, increasing the perception of scientific certainty about the future threat of earthquakes.

News text 2

Active Constructions

> *The Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency (BMKG) detected an earthquake of 5.8 magnitudes rocked Gunung Kidul, Yogyakarta Special Region*

This active sentence emphasizes the credibility and professionalism of BMKG in detecting earthquake activity, forming a public perception that this institution is a reliable source of information. With specific data regarding the strength of the earthquake and its location, readers are encouraged to understand that earthquake events are something real and require serious caution.

> *BMKG estimates that the Sunda Strait Megathrust could trigger a catastrophic earthquake with a maximum strength of M 8.7 and Megathrust Mentawai-Siberut M 8.9.*

This sentence uses an active construction with BMKG as the subject that "estimates" the potential for a large earthquake, reinforcing the perception that BMKG is an institution that has the scientific and technological capabilities to make estimation regarding earthquake threats. Readers will probably see BMKG as a reliable and competent source in monitoring and anticipating disasters, because these estimations come from authoritative institutions.

> *The remaining energy from the collision process between plates will cause faults on land or oceans in several Indonesian islands and seas.*

The use of an active phrase *will cause* places emphasis on the certainty of the impact of the remaining energy, so readers may view this statement as a serious warning about the risk of widespread damage.

> *Scientists are getting closer to uncovering the complex behavior of this earthquake.*

This active sentence builds up the reader's perception that earthquakes are a complex and dangerous phenomenon. By emphasizing the efforts and expertise of scientists, this sentence creates a sense of optimism and trust in science's ability to provide solutions. Here, readers are directed to feel that this research is important, relevant, and has the potential to have a positive impact on mitigating earthquake risk in the future.

Passive Constructions

> *One of the sources of the earthquake that has been clearly identified is the active subduction zone.*

Readers likely accept this information as credible fact, because the passive form removes focus on who identified the source, thereby creating the impression that the identification is the result of scientific consensus or objective study.

The table below shows the frequency of use of active and passive constructions in two news texts.

Table 2. Frequencies

Categories	Frequencies	
	DS 1	DS 2
Active Construction	58.33%	74.42%
Passive Construction	41.67%	25.58%

Based on the table above, it can be seen that Active Construction is more dominantly used compared to Passive Construction in both news texts. In DS 1, the percentage of active sentences used reached 58.33%, while passive sentences were 41.67%. Meanwhile, DS 2 shows greater dominance in the use of active sentences with a percentage of 74.42%, while passive sentences are only 25.58%.

Conclusion

This research analyzes the use of active and passive sentences in news texts about the Megathrust earthquake in Indonesia. The results of the analysis of the data show that active sentences are used more dominantly than passive sentences. The dominance of active sentences reflects language choices that tend to be direct and firm, aimed at conveying information clearly and urgently. In other words, the use of active sentences in news texts influences audience perception in the following ways:

1. Active sentence increases the sense of urgency in that it makes the information is more realistic and urgent, by which readers realize the importance of the issue more quickly.
2. Focusing on responsibility in which active sentences often highlight the perpetrator or subject of the action, for example the government, experts, or affected communities, so that readers can more easily identify who acts or who is affected.
3. Strengthens emotional involvement in the sense that an active and dynamic writing style helps readers feel more connected to the events being reported.

However, the use of the passive voice, although less frequent, is still relevant for certain situations, such as when the readers want to highlight the impact or results of an event without placing too much emphasis on the perpetrator of the action. This can provide balance in presenting complex news. Thus, the preference for using active sentences in news texts about the Megathrust earthquake in Indonesia does not only have an impact on the linguistic structure, but also on the way the audience processes and understands the information being conveyed.

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