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BSc Degree

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English-II (Advanced English)

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Passives in English

Welcome to the class. Today, we will talk about passive sentences in English. It is a very simple construction, very simple sentence. And we often use this when we speak or write. We want to understand how this works and how we learn it. As you know, if we understand the way it works in natural learning, that is acquisition, that is how children learned, how children acquire this structure. And also how they acquire the functional uses of this construction.

Once we know these things, it becomes so easy, it becomes lucid and automated, for us to use these things. When we understand the subconscious computation, it flows freely. We do not have to learn or memorize anything; we see the direct impact it yields on how we speak. Therefore, we are going to look at it. We are going to look at the underlying mechanism of how these sentences are instructed in the human mind. In other words, how the human mind constructs, receives and put them together. Let us look at this part.

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Some examples ...

- The passive voice is used frequently.
- The house was built in 1975.
- The road is being repaired.
- The building has been inaugurated.



We begin with a few examples of some of these sentences. The passive voice is used frequently. This is a sentence in passive. Well, all these sentences are in passive. The house was built in 1975; the road is being repaired; the building has been inaugurated. Now, if you understand the meaning of these sentences, the first thing that I suggest you do, before we, getting into all the details, and I will take you through all these details.

Before we get into these things, what I want you to understand is, what are the intentionalities underlying these sentences. Speak these sentences to yourself. And think about them. Why would someone say this way, 'The house was built in 1975'. And it will help if you can reconstruct the active counterpart of these sentences also. I will, I will do that for you for some of the sentences, but it just helps if you reconstruct the active counterpart as well.

But let me tell you right in the beginning, as far as the sentence construction is concerned, active and passive are two different types of sentences; they are two different sentences, there may be some correspondence there. There is some connectivity, but it is not like we make one out of the other. That is, it is not like we derive passive from active sentences. In most literature, in most learning, in most places you have heard about passive sentences, you hear active and passive together; I am also talking about active and passive sentences together.

However, I do want you to know that these two types of sentences are two different things; they are not related to one another as far as the sentence is concerned. For the purpose of sentences, they are two different things. And you know what I mean by sentences. Sentence simply means that every sentence is independent; every sentence has a subject and a predicate. This is the basic of any language learning that we will need to understand.

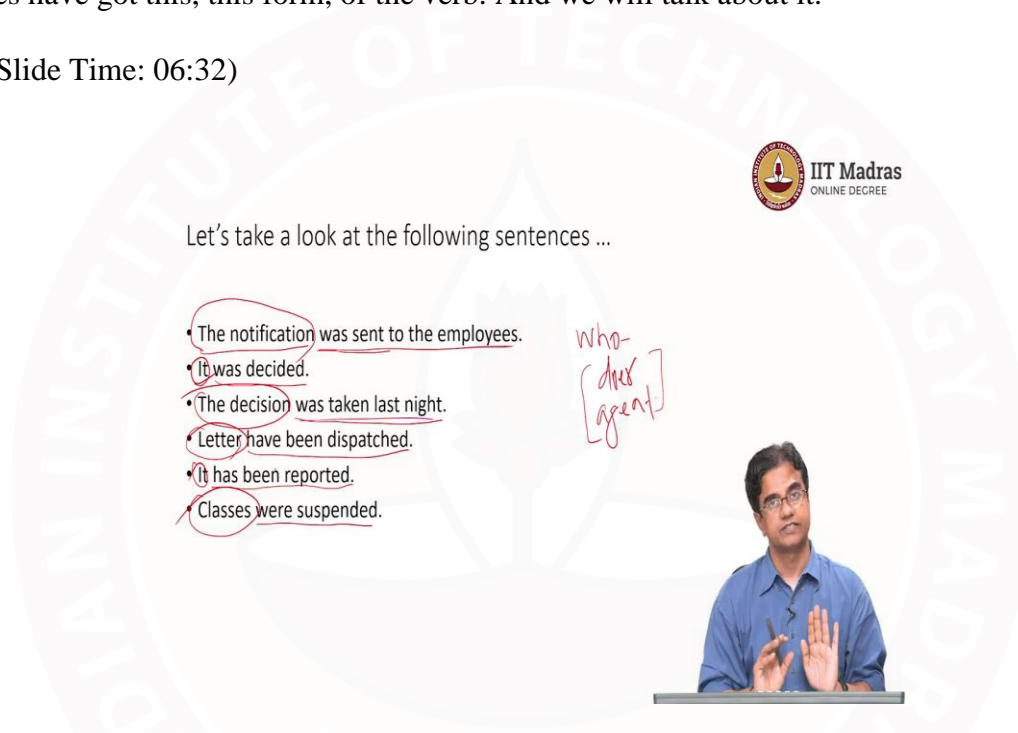
The basic fundamental unit of language is sentence. There are other units as well, like there are units that, that help us construct a sentence, but we are talking about the fundamental unit of language. The fundamental unit of language is sentence, and every sentence is independent, construction-wise. In a discourse we create, there are several sentences that come together, and they create a discourse, but for the purpose of, for the sentence specific discussion, every sentence is independent.

And what, why are we saying independent, because every sentence will have a subject and a predicate, every sentence will have a verb in the predicate. So, active and passives are two

different sentences; we will come back to this, we will think about it, we will discuss these things in greater detail with examples. So, what could be the intentionality of these sentences? I have underlined, I have coloured the passive part; what is making this sentence passive?

I have coloured them, the verb part is in red, but I am asking you a question about uses, which is why such sentences, what could be the purpose of this sentence, think about it, write it down in the corner of your notebook, and we are going to talk about that. So, so look at this, all passive sentences have got this, this form, of the verb. And we will talk about it.


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Let's take a look at the following sentences ...

- The notification was sent to the employees.
- It was decided.
- The decision was taken last night.
- Letter have been dispatched.
- It has been reported.
- Classes were suspended.

who-
[does]
[agent]



Let us look at more examples. In the notification and in this one, I have not underlined anything, not coloured, because, based on the previous examples, I want you to pause here and colour the passive part of these sentences. So, see, the notification was sent to the employees. It was decided, the decision was taken last night, later, letters have been dispatched. It has been reported, classes were suspended.

So, look at this; it is following the same pattern. Again, if you want, you can underline that this entire part is part of passives, this is part of passive, this is part of passive, this is part of passive, this is passive. And in the first one only, you have only this much as passive. So, when, we come back to the form, when we read these sentences, it seems like we do not want to talk about the agent of the action. In other words, the doer of the action, what is the agent in this sentence?

So, let us look at from here. The house was built in 1975. We are talking about building, we are talking about the house, but we are not talking about the builder. The road is being repaired, we are talking about road, we are talking about repairing, but we are not talking about the agent of repair. Some people are repairing that; we do not want to talk about them. The building has been inaugurated, that we are talking about the building, and we are talking about inauguration, but we are not talking about who inaugurated the building.

Same way, when we say notification was sent to the employees, we are talking about notification, we are talking about the action of sending, we are talking about who these notifications were sent to, but we are not talking about who sent it. So, 'who' that is doer or agent is not important in passive. In other words, there is a clear intention, in a passive sentence that we want to suppress agency. We wanted to suppress information about the doer.

Now, at this point, it is important to know that there is a correspondence between the subject of the sentence and the doer, doer part, that is the agent part. But they do not have to be the same all the time; we will discuss that part as well. Meaning, the subject is most of the time, the doer of the action also, the subject is also the agent. So, what happens is we want to remove the agency.

This is the main function of a passive sentence that we do not want to talk about who did something. So, we convert the sentence into something else. Also, please keep in mind that we have talked about a sentence so far, as subject and predicate. We have talked about the subject being very important thing in a sentence, we have also said, the subject is an essential part of a sentence, it is, this is the only thing that remains outside the predicate.

So, there are only two parts of the sentence, subject and predicate. The subject is outside the predicate. In that sense, it is one part of a sentence, such is the significance of the subject. We have also talked about, the fact that it has to be connected with the predicate, we have discussed all these things. Today, what we wanted to add to that is, whatever comes in the subject position in a sentence, that becomes the focus, that becomes the centre of attraction, attraction, centre of focus.

So, in a way, the subject is the focus position, also in a sentence. The point is, whatever comes first, we in, in natural language, when we speak, we put the focus there. So, please keep this in mind. So, what happens is when we want to remove the agency, we want to, in that place, we

want to bring in something, which we want to focus. So, we remove the focus from the doer, and we bring the focus to what was done.

This is another aspect of passive, another thing that we achieve through the passive sentence. So, so far, I am only talking about, what we do with passive sentences, what are the intentions underlying a passive sentence? Why do we use a passive sentence? Now, I wanted to show you; I will come back to this part one more time and connect it together. Now, I want to show you how passive sentences are made.

So, look at this, when we say classes were suspended, as we have seen in the previous examples, that when we say the notification was sent to the employees, we are not saying who sent, we are bringing the notification into the focus. What is important here in this sentence is we want attention on notification, not who sent it. In other words, we want hearer to understand, it is not important for you to know who sent it. What is important for you to know is notification.

It was decided; suppose something gets decided. So, who decided is not what we, where we want to focus on. So, think about it, whenever we say it was decided, if something has been decided, then there must have been somebody who decided that. But we do not want focus there. So, we say, we bring it to the focus to it, whatever it refers to, we want focus on that part.

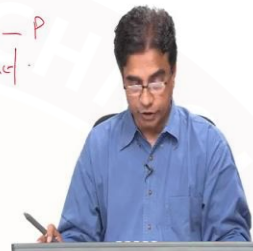
The decision was taken last night; what we want in focus is the decision, not who took the decision. Letters have been dispatched, who dispatched the letter again, not important, what is important is, letter. It has been reported, what is important is it and classes were suspended. So again, who suspended the classes, not important; what is important is classes. So, all these things that I have circled, they are, they become the subject, they are the subjects of passive sentences. So, keep that in mind, and the rest of the thing are predicates for passive sentences. This, this part, we need to know.

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Comparative picture ...

- Classes were suspended. (←)P
 - The principal suspended the classes (by the principal). — A
 - The owner sent notifications to the employees. — A
 - The notification was sent to the employees (by the owner). — P
- Adjunct



Now, when we move further, we see, like I said, making active counterpart to see. When we say classes were suspended. This is a passive sentence. The active counterpart of this is the principal suspended the classes. Look at this, here the subject is the 'principal', 'suspended' is the verb and this as we know, this whole thing is the a, is the predicate, where 'the classes' is the object of this verb suspend. And it is in the past tense.

Same thing, the owner sent notifications to the employees; this is the active sentence. And the notification was sent to the employees; this is a passive count, the passive counterpart. So, what, what is happening here is the following. Look at this, when we say the principal suspended the classes, this is an active sentence. And what we want you to know is, in, when we say classes were suspended, we mean this is a passive sentence.

What, where we want to remove the focus from the fact that it was suspended by the principal out. Notifications were sent to the employees by the owner. So, we can bring, we can bring it here, we can put it at the end of the sentence. But even if we do not put, it is not required because we do not want this either to be in the focus. So, removing the focus, we put it at the end of the sentence, or we can decide to drop it also.

So, in a way this becomes an adjunct. This is why I have put it here. So, we know that the subject is the principal in active sentence. So, classes were suspended, when we bring classes to the

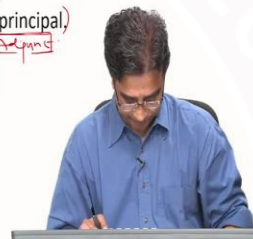
focus, we can bring this by the principal here, or we can drop it from here also; it is not important part. This is an important thing that we need to understand about active and passive correspondence between these two types of constructions.

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Sentence

- Subject + Predicate
- Predicate = Verb (objects) (adverbs)
- Active sentence: ① The principal suspended the classes.
 S/Agent PST
- Passive sentence: ② The classes were suspended by the principal.
 Subj *Agent Tense + be + V? Agent



Now, let us see, as I said, both active and passive are two different types of sentences. One is, they as far as sentence is concerned, they are sentences. But there are two different sentences, for both, we have a subject and predicate. In the predicate, we have verb and we have objects and adverbs as we know, sentences. So, now look at, looking at active sentence, the principal suspended the classes.

When we see the principal suspended by classes here, in this one, we have seen 'principal' is the subject, 'suspend' is the verb and 'the classes' is the object. Where this 'ed' tells you that this is the past tense marker. In the passive counterpart, this is the subject, and this is the passive predicate. And we can say 'by the principal', but this is an adjunct, not needed. We can put it at the end of the sentence for additional information, but not really needed, because the entire purpose of a passive sentence is to remove focus from the doer.

This simply helps you understand, even as an adjunct that, this is the doer. So, this happens to be the agent. In the active sentence, 'the principal' is the agent. The subject, this is the subject, and this is also the agent. In the passive sentence, the classes is the subject of the sentence, but this is

not the agent of this, of the action. That is, the action is not being done by the subject in the passive sentence. This is an important part we need to understand.

So, this is what I meant when I said agency is removed. Now, so for active sentence, principal is the subject, for passive sentence classes is the subject. In some traditional literature, you would see, there is a description given, which says, in active, in a passive sentence, the object of the active verb becomes the subject. Hear me out one more time, the object becomes the subject, and the subject becomes the object; this is one of the most common things you will hear about passives.

I would like to make an attempt here, to help you understand that, it is not true. If we understand sentences properly, we know the function of a subject, we know the function of an object, something that is an object, which is a required element by the verb cannot become a subject. At the same time, something that is a subject cannot become an object. As you see here, if, if we take that as true, by the principle is not the object of this passive sentence.

It is an adjunct in the passive sentence. So, what was the subject in the active sentence is not becoming the object in the passive sentence. One more time, the subject of the active sentence is not becoming the object of the passive sentence. This is one correction that we need to understand, need to do because that is not how this computation works. However, it seems like, here, the object, the classes are the object of this verb.

And this is becoming the subject, and this is what helps us understand that no, there is no becoming. In, in sentence number 1, which is active, classes are object and principal is the subject. In sentence number 2, which is passive, the classes are subjects and the, by the principal is adjunct period. No, no more, on that the correspondence between these two sentences is semantic in nature, functional in nature. Semantic meaning, the doer is not important for a passive construction.

What is brought to the focus is something else and that happens to be the subject, that gets into the subject position. Second purpose is agency is suppressed in a, in a passive sentence, agency is suppressed. So, basically they are the same, same thing, but the important part is, the semantics, the meaning, the uses and the function, not the grammatical construction,

grammatically construction wise active sentences are independent of passive sentences, because in a sentence scheme, something that is subject cannot become the object.

Having talked about that, let us talk about what happens in passives. And that is also, is important for us to understand. We have, we, we have the passive morphology is very simple, we have to have tense, and then we have to have be, and then we have verb 3 forms. This is the passive morphology. In other words, suspended, in the active sentence is a transitive verb, in the past form. Suspended in the passive, is not a transitive word, not past form. It is participial form, and as we know, participles do not take objects; evidence comes from the following.

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Passive

- Active sentence: The principal ^{tv}suspended the classes.
- Passive sentence: The classes were suspended ^{- past} by the principal.

V1 ^{Pres}	V2 ^{Pst}	V3 ^{Participle}
Suspend	suspended ^{+y}	suspended
Passive: be+en+v3		were (be)



Look at that, we know that verbs have 3 different forms. For example, verb from suspend, 2; suspended, and 3 also suspended. There is a direct resemblance between v two and v three. This is why sometimes v one is called present, v two is called past, and v three is called past participle because it looks like past, we will call it participle, this is the important part. So, what is the difference between past form of the verb and the participle form of the verb?

The difference is, it is only present or past, which can be either transitive or intransitive. Participle form are not transitive or intransitive. So, hence, what we see here, suspend as the past form is a transitive verb, and therefore, it can take an object. Suspended here, is a participle form,

and participle forms do not take an object. Hence, classes cannot be the object of the verb, suspended in a passive construction.

One more time, classes cannot be the object of the verb suspended because it is in participle form. This is the construction. This is what we need to know as about construction. What I am, what, what I want to connect here with what I started is all this information, is there in our mind. This is how we learn. In our mind, there is no confusion that classes has become subject; it is the subject, because the passive verb suspended in this passive sentence cannot take an object.

However, in its active counterpart, classes is the object of the verb suspended. So, the principal suspended the classes, active sentence. Where all information is intact, the principal is the doer of the action of suspension. And what he does, is suspending classes. But, in active, in a passive sentence, as we know the function of the passive sentence, the main function is to remove the focus from the agent, to remove agency.

So, we take it out; it can be taken as, in a sentence as an adjunct, which is not important for focus. And where we want to draw the focus is what was done. So, classes, what was done? Classes were suspended. So, we want, we bring classes were suspended. So, we are retaining the past tense because this is past tense. We are retaining the past tense, but we are using the participle form of the verb here, which does not take an object.

So, we understand as the passive as be plus en plus v3. I will talk about this en form. It, it is very simple. Any verb, so you see 'were' is also a 'be' form of the verb. So, an 'en' gets added to the verb form and then we have the participle form. So, when we take more examples, we see this with a lot of clarity. So, there is no confusion about this.

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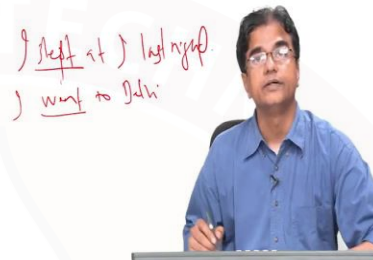
Passive

- Only transitive verbs participate in the passives.

- Raju has been told.
- These letter have been written a long time ago.
belongs to v3.

- Subjects = Agents [not true all the time]

- Raju wrote the letters.
- Letter were written.
- The book arrived in the parcel.



So, but, but, since we talked about transitivity, it is important for us to understand, that only transitive verbs participate in a passive construction. In English, non-transitive verbs that is intransitive verbs cannot be, cannot have passive counterparts. So, if I say I slept at nine last night, this sentence verb as 'sleep' cannot be passivized. When I say I went to Delhi last week, this sentence cannot be passivized because this has an intransitive verb.

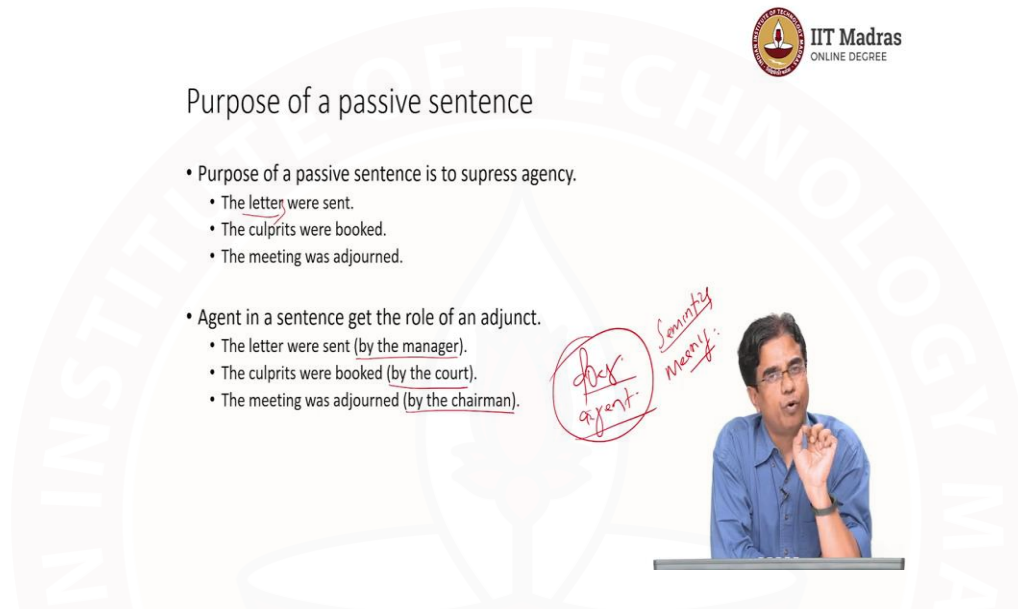
Because only, only transitive verbs get into passive construction. And I want to leave this question open for you to think, why? You get the answers to these questions; you get the construction right, there is it, it becomes very clear to you that is, the way it gets computed in our subconscious becomes clear to you. And then when you use them, you make no mistake. Your language becomes flawless; your uses becomes flawless, accurately flawless.

So, it is accurate, flawlessly accurate, and then you become fluent. So, flawless fluency is, what can actually give us confidence, and that is what we are working on. So, Raju has been told, look at this, this is a verb tell; it is a transitive verb. Where is the object of this verb? This is a good sentence, Raju has been told. The letters have been written a long time ago. Look at this; this is where I was talking about be plus en plus v3.

Written is the third form, here you have en, be and this is the passive morphology, have been written. Raju wrote the letters, active sentence. Letters were written, we bring the focus to the

letters, who wrote the letter, is not important here in passive sentence. And be plus en plus v three is important in passive. Books arrived in the parcel; the books arrived in the parcel, look at this. Here, the v3 form and then we get the passive construction with clarity.

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Purpose of a passive sentence

- Purpose of a passive sentence is to suppress agency.
 - The letter were sent.
 - The culprits were booked.
 - The meeting was adjourned.
- Agent in a sentence get the role of an adjunct.
 - The letter were sent (by the manager).
 - The culprits were booked (by the court).
 - The meeting was adjourned (by the chairman).

Handwritten notes:
 - A circle around "agent" with the word "agent" written inside.
 - "Semantics" written above "meaning".
 - "meaning" written below "Semantics".

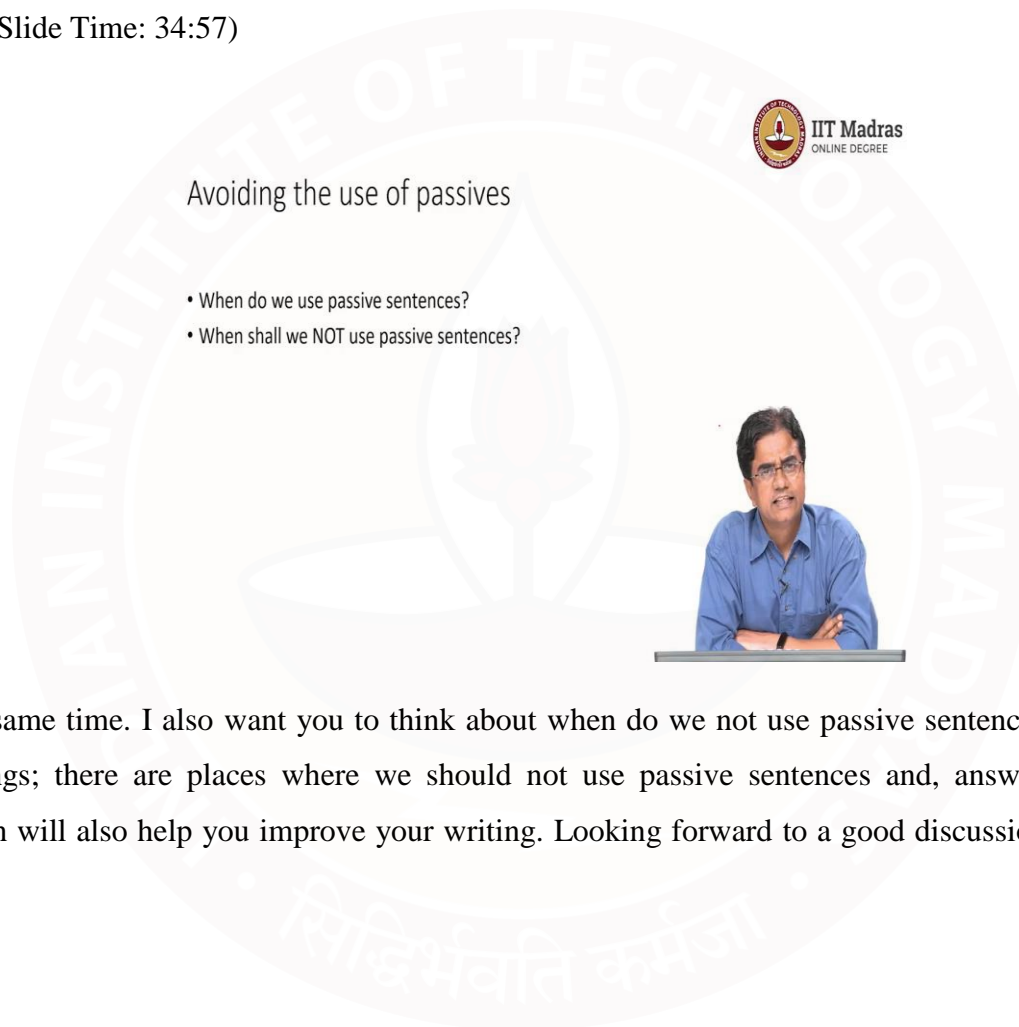
Video inset: A professor in a blue shirt speaking.

So, again, the purpose of the passive sentence is to suppress agency; the letters were sent, the letter has been brought to the focus, letters were sent. Culprits were booked, the meeting was adjourned. Agent in the sentence gets the role of an adjunct. So, we can put agent at the end of the sentence as an adjunct for additional information, but not required. Therefore, I am putting them in parentheses, the culprits were booked by the court, and the meeting was adjourned by the chairman.

We can drop them because the whole purpose is not to reveal information about the doer, about the agent. So, doer and agent are important for us to understand for passive constructions. And so, this is, this is related to semantics. Semantics simply means meaning. So, two parts are important, structure and function. We can get the complete picture of passive sentences, the way it gets imputed in our mind, the way we acquire these constructions in our mind, as a child, as a learner, who learns effortlessly.

And once we understand that part, we get it right. We get it, we, we clarify our understanding, we use them flawlessly. We build good confidence of using flawless and accurate sentences in the target language, namely English here. I hope this makes sense. I want you to look at passive sentences, and then I want you to look at the context in which they are used. Do these exercises, pause and think at the places that I have indicated here, and we will have a good discussion on this.

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Avoiding the use of passives

- When do we use passive sentences?
- When shall we NOT use passive sentences?

The slide features a large, faint watermark of the IIT Madras logo in the background. In the top right corner, there is a small IIT Madras logo and the text 'IIT Madras ONLINE DEGREE'. In the bottom right corner, there is a video frame showing a man with glasses and a blue shirt, sitting at a desk with his arms crossed, speaking.

At the same time. I also want you to think about when do we not use passive sentences? There are things; there are places where we should not use passive sentences and, answer to this question will also help you improve your writing. Looking forward to a good discussion. Thank you