

## Asymmetry between Thai and English passives in L1 Thai learners

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### Abstract

The present study investigated the production of English passive constructions among Thai learners as syntactic asymmetry of the construction in question in Thai and English can be attested. In this study, English verbs were categorized into two types: Verb Type 1 and Verb Type 2. The former refers to those that can naturally occur in Thai *thùuk* passives while the latter includes those that sound unnatural when used with the same marker. Forty undergraduate students, including 20 advanced and 20 intermediate learners, were asked to complete sentences, each of which consisted of at least three given words: one noun placed as the subject, one verb, and another noun. Results showed that it can be assumed that language transfer is a factor leading to high and low numbers of passivization with Verb Type 1 (positive transfer) and Verb Type 2 (negative transfer), respectively, regardless of their groups. Learners' proficiency levels play a vital role in the number of passive sentences produced in both verb types, showing statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ). The differences between the verb types, conversely, are not statistically significant across the two groups.

## 1. Introduction

The passive construction has been deemed problematic for learners of English with different L1 backgrounds due to its syntactic complexity compared to the active construction. It has, consequently, been long and widely studied in the area of SLA. Wang (2010) reviewed several studies on SLA and the passive construction focusing on Chinese learners as it is believed that learners whose L1 is topic-prominent like Chinese and Thai might find this structure difficult.

Previous studies on the English passive construction and L1 Thai speakers (Simargool, 2008; Somphong, 2013; Timyam, 2014) have mainly investigated learners' production via writing tasks. In these studies, language transfer is used to help explain non-nativelike production. Even though these previous studies mentioned the effects of language transfer, their main focus was on the syntactic features of the passive construction that differ in Thai and English. Some aspects are, as a result, in need of investigation.

This present study, consequently, aims to fill the gap in those pioneering works by investigating the English passive construction produced by L1 Thai learners from the perspective of the naturalness of English sentences in its equivalent Thai *thùuk*-passives. Since, in Thai, the passive construction with *thùuk* is mostly used in adversative and neutral contexts (Prasithratsint, 2001), verbs with beneficial meanings might sound unnatural or unacceptable. On the other hand, transitive verbs in English do not have such contextual restrictions for the passive construction. Following this, the main objective of the research is to examine the use of the English passive construction by L1 Thai learners through the lens of the differences in contextual restrictions between the native language (NL) and the target language (TL). That is, of particular interest is whether the differences in the contextual usage between Thai and English passive constructions can pose difficulties in acquiring the passive construction in L1 Thai learners. Following Kim and Kim (2013), this study categorized English verbs into two groups. The first (Verb Type 1) covers those that can naturally appear in Thai *thùuk*-passives while the second (Verb Type 2) includes those that sound unnatural when used in *thùuk*-passives.

Even though there are three main passive markers in Thai- *thùuk*, *doon* and *dâjráp* (Prasithratsint, 2010)- this study focuses only on *thùuk* as it is considered the most general marker (Prasithratsint, 2001). It can be used in adversative and neutral contexts, with animate and inanimate subjects, and in both spoken and written language (Pothipath, 2018). Moreover, Choomthong (2011) found that some learners applied translation strategies by using the *thùuk* marker in Thai passive construction to form English passive sentences during their thinking process. As such, it can be claimed that Thai learners are most familiar with *thùuk* than with other markers and, for them, Thai *thùuk*-passive sentences are equivalent to English passive sentences.

This article contains six sections. The first section introduces the present study and its scope. Following that is a review of the literature on Thai and English passive construction as well as that on research on L1 Thai learners. Research questions, methodology, and results are then presented in Sections 3, 4, and 5, respectively. The conclusion is lastly delineated along with the current study's limitations, pedagogical implications, and suggestions for further investigations.

## 2. Literature Review

In the field of SLA, language transfer, or crosslinguistic influence, has been widely recognized as one of the most important factors affecting second language learning. This phenomenon describes the influence of a language on another language (Ellis, 2015), but does not always refer to the influence of previously known languages, e.g., L1 or a native language (NL) on L2 or a current target language (TL). Sometimes, additional languages can also affect L1 or previously known languages as well.

Language transfer is generally divided into two types: positive transfer and negative transfer, also known as interference. The former refers to cases in which NL and TL share similarities (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017), so that similar linguistic features in the two languages can facilitate the process of language learning. However, when the two languages differ in their linguistic systems, negative transfer can be attested. That is, differences between NL and TL lead to difficulties in language learning. In this way, negative transfer has been of great interest, and research in this area may be used to predict L2 learners' errors as well as to prepare teaching materials. This idea is expected to help explain results from the

present study as there exist differences between Thai and English passives, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The passive construction in Thai requires a passive marker in a periphrastic form (Siewierska, 2005). As Thai is an isolating language, addition of only a passive marker is sufficient, unlike in English in which inflections are added to both the auxiliary and the main verb.

Thai has three main passive markers, each of which can also function as lexical verbs: *thùuk*, *doon*, and *dâjráp*. *Thùuk* and *doon* mean ‘to touch something’ while *dâjráp* means ‘to receive’. Historically, they were grammaticalized from lexical verbs into passive markers (Pothipath, 2018; Prasithratsint, 2006). Presently, each of them still retains both their grammatical function as passive markers and their lexical function as verbs.

These three markers, however, have different usages depending on context. *Thùuk* and *doon* are generally used in adversative contexts, while *dâjráp*, the least frequent marker of the three (Prasithratsint 2010), is normally found in favorable contexts. Studying *thùuk*-passive and *doon*-passive constructions, Prasithratsint (2001; 2004) argued that, since the adversative passive is an areal feature of East Asian and Southeast Asian languages, Thai must also have the adversative passive; however, *thùuk*, having been neutralized, is used in both favorable and unfavorable contexts due to influences from English (Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom, 2009; Prasithratsint, 2001). However, many scholars, especially in the translation field, approve of its adversative usage only. This might reflect a linguistic reality of conflicts between prescriptive and descriptive viewpoints. Examples are shown in (1), (2), (3) and (4) and include an active sentence and three passive sentences with three different markers, respectively, in an adversative context.

(1) ตำรวจ                      จับกุม                      ฆาตกร  
tam rû:at                      tɔ̀ap kum                      kʰa: ta kɔ:n  
Police                      arrest                      criminal  
“The police officer(s) arrested the criminal.”

(2) ฆาตกร                      ถูก                      ตำรวจ                      จับกุม  
kʰa: ta kɔ:n                      tʰù:k                      tam rû:at                      tɔ̀ap kum  
Criminal                      PASS                      police                      arrest  
“The criminal was arrested by the police officer(s).”

(3)	ฆาตกร	โดน	ตำรวจ	จับกุม
	k <sup>h</sup> a: ta kɔ:n	do:n	tam rû:at	tɕàp kum
	Criminal	PASS	police	arrest
	“The criminal was arrested by the police officer(s).”			
(4)	?ฆาตกร	ได้รับ	ตำรวจ	จับกุม
	k <sup>h</sup> a: ta kɔ:n	dâjráp	tam rû:at	tɕàp kum
	Criminal	PASS	police	arrest
	“The criminal was arrested by the police officer(s).”			

Passive sentences in Thai can be structured in two different ways. The default syntactic pattern is NP2 + a passive marker + (NP1) + V, while the foreign pattern, considered novel and influenced by English (Prasithrathsint, 1988), can be formed as NP2 + a passive marker + V (+ *dooj* + NP1). Note that NP2 and NP1 refer to the object and subject of the active counterparts, respectively. The latter pattern is deemed foreign because the *dooj*-phrase is equivalent to the *by*-phrase and both function as prepositional agentive phrases introducing agent-like arguments. Prasithrathsint (2006) argued that data from present-day Thai show that most passive sentences are formed with *dooj*-phrases, following the foreign pattern. The syntactic structures of the two patterns, (6) and (7), are demonstrated below along with their active counterpart (5).

(5)	แมว	ไล่จับ	หนู	
	mɛ:w	lâj tɕàp	nǎ:	
	cat	chase	mouse	
	“The cat chased the mouse.”			
(6)	หนู	ถูก	(แมว)	ไล่จับ
	nǎ:	t <sup>h</sup> ù:k	mɛ:w	lâj tɕàp
	mouse	PASS	(cat)	chase
	“The mouse was chased by the cat.”			
(7)	หนู	ถูก	ไล่จับ	(โดย แมว)
	nǎ:	t <sup>h</sup> ù:k	lâj tɕàp	dooj mɛ:w
	mouse	PASS	chase	(by cat)

“The mouse was chased (by the cat).”

Like Thai, the English passive construction is also considered periphrastic. However, the periphrastic form of the English passive construction requires two morphological processes, insertion of an auxiliary *be* and conjugation of a lexical verb in the participial form. In other words, it is obligatory that, in the English passive construction, two morphological markers must be added together to syntactically form the construction and convey the passive meaning (Tallerman, 2015).

English contains two passive markers: *be* and *get*. English passive sentences with *be* are considered basic passives, while those with *get* are called non-basic passives (Timyam, 2014). Additionally, *get*-passives are claimed to mostly occur in unfavorable contexts (Downing, 2015), though some researchers might counter-argue that *get* can be used in the passive construction in both favorable and unfavorable contexts with different implications (Coto Villalibre, 2015). *Be*, for its part, can be used in both adversative and non-adversative contexts. The two English passive markers also appear in different registers, with *be* usually found in formal and written language and *get*, as it is more colloquial, used in spoken language (Downing, 2015).

The syntactic schema of the passive construction in English is similar to the active construction in that it occurs with the same S V (O) syntax. As mentioned above, English passives require the insertion of a passive marker, either *be* or *get*, and the conjugation of a lexical verb in its past participial form. If a *by*-phrase, or an agentive phrase, in a passive sentence is omitted, such a sentence is called a *short passive* or *agentless passive*. In contrast, if the agentive phrase exists, that passive clause is considered a *long passive*.

The English passive construction is usually used in formal, academic texts, especially scientific texts (Crystal, 2003; Hinkel 2002). This construction is, additionally, employed when a speaker would like to emphasize or pay more attention to the patient-like argument in an utterance. Some might use passive sentences when they wish to modify the agent with a chunk of words such as a relative clause (Downing, 2015), as using the active construction could make the subject too long and place the head noun too far from other elements, such as the verb.

A large number of SLA studies on the English passive construction have examined learners whose L1s are not Indo-European, specifically

Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Thai. Several Thai researchers have examined the English passive construction and L1 Thai learners with different emphases and methods, e.g., errors (Somphong, 2013; Voun, Intanoo & Prachanant, 2017), developmental stages (Simargool, 2008), the use of passive voice (Poonsawad, 2013; Timyam, 2015), and avoidance (Chotiros & Pongpairroj, 2012). Most of this work has concluded that English passive sentences produced by L1 Thai learners are non-nativelike because of the syntactic differences between NL and TL which cover the addition of an auxiliary and its conjugation as well as past participial forms of English verbs. Simargool (2008) mentioned the differences in use between the two languages, claiming they are mainly about adversity (as mentioned in the previous section), but not in detail. That is to say, from this perspective, the differences in terms of contextual restrictions are lacking, a gap the present study aims to fill.

### 3. Research Question and Hypothesis

The study attempts to examine how verb types categorized by their naturalness in Thai *thùuk*-passive constructions influence in a writing task L1 Thai learners with different levels of proficiency. That is, verb type and language proficiency are the two variables of interest in this work where it is conjectured that advanced learners can successfully produce English passive sentences regardless of the verb types. Intermediate learners will, on the other hand, underperform the English passive construction with Verb Type 2, verbs that are not natural or acceptable in Thai *thùuk*-passives, due to language transfer.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Norming Survey

To confirm that the verb categorization was not solely dependent on the researcher's linguistic competence as a Thai native speaker, a norming questionnaire was conducted online.

#### 4.1.1 Task Design

The survey contained a total of 138 Thai sentences, or 48 *thùuk*-passive sentences and 90 fillers. Participants were asked to rate whether the sentences sounded natural using the ranking system: 5 = very natural, 4 = natural, 3 = not sure, 2 = unnatural, 1 = very unnatural. Online data collection was conducted through Google Forms.

#### **4.1.2 Participants**

Respondents are 33 native Thai-speaking undergraduates from the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

#### **4.1.3 Results**

The target items were ordered according to their scores. Verb Type 1 included those that gained high scores for their naturalness in Thai *thùuk*-passive sentences, while Verb Type 2 covered those with low scores for their naturalness. This categorization was based on the fact that *thùuk*-passives are naturally and innately adversative. Sentences with higher naturalness are, accordingly, inferred to be associated with adversativity while those with lower naturalness in the norming survey have lower association with adversative events. Seven verbs from each type were selected and translated to English for the writing task.

### **4.2 Writing task**

The main task used to elicit data in this study, adapted from Simargool (2008), comprised 14 target items and 21 fillers. The former type covered seven items of Verb Type 1 and seven items of Verb Type 2. Based on their high scores in the norming survey, Verb Type 1 consisted of adversative and neutral verbs, which are natural in Thai *thùuk*-passives due to the adversative nature and the neutralization of the marker. On the other hand, Verb Type 2 contained both neutral and beneficial verbs, which sound unnatural in Thai *thùuk*-passives<sup>1</sup>. Listed in Table 1 are all target verbs. All test items including three words for each instance appear in Appendix A.



**Table 1**

*Verb Type 1 and Verb Type 2 Categorized by Their Naturalness in thàuk-Passives*

Verb Type 1	Verb Type 2
Tease	Like
Arrest	Accept
Scold	Submit
Punish	Admire
Interview	Recognize
Ask	Receive
Prepare	Celebrate

#### ***4.2.1 Task Design***

The writing task was adapted from Simargool's study (2008). Participants were asked to write 35 sentences in total. Presented in each sentence are two nouns and one verb. One NP was placed as a subject and the participants needed to complete the sentence with the given subject, another NP, and a verb. They could optionally add more words to the sentence, but were required to use each of the three words given. Aside from the subject NP, the two given words were not aligned as VP/NP but NP/VP instead so that learners would not be primed with the default schema of the active construction (SVO). An example is shown below.

#### ***4.2.2 Participants***

Forty participants, all undergraduate students, were divided into two groups according to their English proficiency levels based on the Chulalongkorn University Test of English Proficiency (CU-TEP). The first group included students whose CU-TEP scores range from 99 to 120, and the latter included those with CU-TEP scores between 35 and 69. In this way, the two groups were equivalent to C1 and B1 levels of CEFR, respectively. Throughout this article, they will be referred to as advanced (C1) and intermediate (B1) learners. The advanced learners in this study have CU-TEP scores ranging from 99 to 102, and their average score is 104.

The intermediate learners' scores are between 41 and 69, with an average score of 54.

## 5. Results

Firstly, both groups of participants took around 20 to 30 minutes to complete the writing task, though the advanced learners tended to form long, complex sentences with adjuncts, such as adverbs and prepositional phrases, a more time-consuming process. The other group, conversely, provided simpler, shorter sentences.

For the coding process, only sentences portraying passive meaning were included. As this work, moreover, employs the notion of interlanguage (IL) devised by Selinker (1972), errors produced by L1 Thai learners were not emphasized. Instead, coded items included both grammatical and ungrammatical sentences that conveyed the passive meaning. The coding criteria were as follows:

- (a) Long passives (be/get + PP + by + agent)  
e.g. The suspect was arrested by the police officers.
- (b) Long passives but incorrect agreement of S & V  
e.g. The children was scolded by their teacher.
- (c) Long passives but incorrect conjugation of a PP  
e.g. The Korean singer is interview by the MC.
- (d) Passives with other prepositions  
e.g. My friend was accepted to a famous school in Bangkok.
- (e) Lacks be/get but still have a PP and a by-phrase  
e.g. The Korean singer interviewed by the MC.
- (f) Use of -ing instead of -ed but still have be/get and a by-phrase  
e.g. New Year's Day was celebrating by people in Bangkok on 1<sup>st</sup> January.
- (g) Reduced relative clauses (past participial phrases)  
e.g. The dinner prepared by the chefs is amazing.

Instances that fulfill any kind of construction with a passive meaning ranging from (a) to (g) were labeled as "PASSIVE" and later analyzed. All of the seven types were intended to convey passive meanings. (a), (b), and (d) were structured as passive sentences, despite (b) showing incorrect subject and verb agreement attested through the

auxiliary. (c) was considered passive because, even though the passive participle is incorrectly conjugated, there is an auxiliary and a by-phrase. I and (f) also included a by-phrase. For I, it is difficult to judge whether the conjugated verb is in its past form or passive participial form, and as such, a *by*-phrase is the main indicator (equivalent to *dooj*-phrases in Thai) of passive meaning. The use of *by*-phrases as an indicator was also present in (f). Here, it was assumed that *by*-phrases are the most important characteristic learners use to express passive meanings as they indicate the agent of a sentence, suggesting knowledge of how to demote the agent to achieve passive meaning. Regarding (g), the use of passive reduced relative clauses was found in advanced learners able to construct complex sentences. On the contrary, active sentences and passive sentences with other verbs in the main clause (the given verb was not used in the passive construction) were excluded. Examples of the latter case are shown in (h) and (i).

- (h) Active sentences  
e.g. The students punish the headmaster.
- (i) Passive sentences with other verbs  
e.g. The gift was sent to his uncle who received 2 day later.

As those coded as “PASSIVE” were given a score of 1 and there were twenty participants in each group, the full score for each verb is 20 (40 in total for both groups). Each verb type consisted of seven verbs. Therefore, the full score for each verb type and all test verb types was 140 and 280, respectively (Table 2). The results reported below will start with the overall picture (the two verb types), followed by each verb type, and end with the results of each verb.

**Table 2**

*The Total Score of All Scales in Each Group of Learners*

<b>Each verb</b>	Out of	20	<b>20</b>
<b>Each verb type</b>	Out of	20*7	<b>140</b>
<b>Two verb types</b>	Out of	20*7*2	<b>280</b>

Overall, advanced learners could produce the target items from both Verb Type 1 and Verb Type 2 in the English passive construction

(89.29%) more than intermediate learners (72.86%). On the other hand, active sentences with the target verbs, which should be passivized, were more productive in intermediate learners (27.14%) than the other group of learners (10.71%) (Table 3). Taking only the active sentences into consideration, it can be observed that the two groups of participants produced the active construction with Verb Type 2 (15.71% and 31.43% by advanced and intermediate learners, respectively) more than with Verb Type 1 (5.71% and 22.86% by the advanced and intermediate learners, respectively) (Table 4). To put it differently, they avoided passivizing Verb Type 2, which covered verbs that cannot occur in Thai *thùuk*-passives.

**Table 3**

*The Production of the Target Verbs in Passives and Actives from the Two Groups*

Proficiency		Target items	%
<b>Advance learners (N=20)</b>	Active sentences	30/280	10.71
	Passive sentences	250/280	89.29
<b>Intermediate learners (N=20)</b>	Active sentences	76/280	27.14
	Passive sentences	204/280	72.86

**Table 4**

*The Production of the Target Verbs in Actives from the Two Groups*

Proficiency	Target items in active sentences		%
<b>Advance learners (N=20)</b>	Verb Type 1	8/140	5.71
	Verb Type 2	22/140	15.71
<b>Intermediate learners (N=20)</b>	Verb Type 1	32/140	22.86
	Verb Type 2	44/140	31.43

For the verb types, Verb Type 1 was more productive in English passive constructions than Verb Type 2 in L1 Thai learners of English (Table 5), according to the observation above in which they used the latter type in the active counterpart instead. That is, verb type was a potential factor in the production of English passive construction, and one that could be further explained by language transfer as verbs in Verb Type 2 were

unnatural in Thai *thùuk*-passive construction while Verb Type 1 sounded natural in this same construction.

**Table 5**

*Overall Results of the Passive Sentences in Verb Type 1 and Verb Type 2*

Proficiency	Target items in passive sentences		%
<b>Advance learners (N=20)</b>	Verb Type 1	132/140	94.29
	Verb Type 2	118/140	84.29
<b>Intermediate learners (N=20)</b>	Verb Type 1	108/140	77.14
	Verb Type 2	96/140	68.57

Focusing on the sentences coded as “PASSIVE”, Table 6 illustrates descriptive statistics of the results and the mean scores. A two-way ANOVA analysis was conducted to prove the effect and interaction between the two factors: verb type and proficiency. Statistical results indicate that, across groups, only proficiency levels demonstrated significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) (Table 7). A t-test analysis was later conducted to investigate whether there was any effect of verb type within each group (Table 8). Results from the t-test analysis show that, within groups, verb type also had no statistically significant effect ( $p > .05$ ).

**Table 6**

*Descriptive Statistics and Mean Scores*

Verb Type	Proficiency	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
<b>1</b>	Advanced	18.8571	1.46385	7
	Intermediate	15.4286	3.99404	7
	Total	17.1426	3.39359	14
<b>2</b>	Advanced	16.8571	2.41030	7
	Intermediate	13.7143	2.75162	7
	Total	15.2857	2.97240	14
<b>Total</b>	Advanced	17.8571	2.17882	14
	Intermediate	14.5714	3.41297	14

Table 7

Summary of the Two-Way ANOVA Analysis

	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Effect size
Verb types	1	24.143	3.068	.093	.113
Proficiency	1	75.571	9.604	.005	.286
Interaction (Verb types*Proficiency)	1	.143	.018	.894	.001

Table 8

Summary of the T-Test Analysis

Proficiency	Verb Type	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Advanced	1	7	18.8571	1.46385	1.876	.085
	2	7	16.8571	2.41030	1.876	
Intermediate	1	7	15.4286	3.99404	.935	.368
	2	7	13.7143	2.75162	.935	

For Verb Type 1, the results in Table 9 indicate that, overall, both groups of learners could passivize this verb type, possibly due to language transfer; that is, these verbs can be passivized with the *thùuk* marker in Thai passive constructions. *Scold*, however, was underpassivized. This can be explained in two ways. First, it is the least frequent verb found in the corpus, so learners may be least familiar with this verb in any construction (enTenTen15). Second, the two given nouns and the particular verb used in this instance made the sentences highly reversible, allowing for the possibility of both active and passive sentences. However, though both are possible, they differed in terms of the real-world scenarios that may be portrayed. To elaborate, passive constructions can generally portray real-world scenarios, while such scenarios with active constructions might be unacceptable or rare. Instances of plausible reversible sentences will be mentioned in detail later.

Verb Type 1 consisted of four adversative verbs- tease, arrest, scold, and punish- as well as three non-adversative (neutral) verbs- interview, ask, and prepare. As there was no major difference attested between the two subtypes of Verb Type 1, the results plausibly reflect that the Thai *thùuk* passive marker has been neutralized as, suggested by

Prasithratsint (2001), leading to positive transfer for the two subcategories.

**Table 9**

*Results of the Passive Sentences Containing Verb Type 1*

	Tease	Arrest	Interview	Ask	Prepare	Scold	Punish
<b>Advanced</b>	20	20	19	19	20	16	18
<b>Intermediate</b>	16	18	18	14	18	7	17

Verbs of Type 2, were typically found to be more productive in English passive constructions in advanced learners than in the other group of learners (Table 10). However, two verbs, *submit* and *receive*, showed underpassivization in advanced learners. Instead, these learners employed active constructions when presented with the two verbs above, using them in relative clauses to modify the subject NPs, such as in, 'The homework assignment that the students submitted is difficult' and 'The gift that he received is from his uncle.' Such underpassivization could be said to be brought on by many potential causes. For example, the advanced learners might have found these verbs unfamiliar in the passive construction, while intermediate learners were not aware of the frequency and familiarity but of the structural plausibility only. Furthermore, these two verbs are different from the other verbs in Verb Type 2 in that they portray directional action or motion. For future research, it would, therefore, be interesting to investigate whether these verbs could be less passivized by L2 learners.

**Table 10**

*Results of the Passive Sentences Containing Verb Type 2*

	Like	Accept	Submit	Admire	Recognize	Receive	Celebrate
<b>Advanced</b>	15	20	16	18	19	13	17
<b>Intermediate</b>	12	10	18	13	15	16	12

Taking animacy into account, the results show that, when the two given nouns are both animate, intermediate learners tended to use the active construction, even though, in some cases, it did not adhere to real-

world events. This can be explained by competition between actives and passives in sentences with animate subjects. The subject of passive sentences is normally expected to be more patient-like due to the fact that it is affected by the action. Here, the subjects should be inanimate, as animate subjects, prototypically, are more agent-like given that they possess the volition to take action rather than merely being affected. When an animate noun takes the subject position, it is possible that learners interpret that the noun is more agent-like, making the active construction available as well in order to convey that it is this noun performing the action. However, in fact, either an animate or inanimate noun can be the subject in a passive construction based on the context; that is, animate nouns do not always follow the prototypical pattern of semantic roles. Furthermore, the reason why intermediate learners employ the active construction when there is competition between actives and passives is simplicity: it is structurally simpler than its passive counterpart. On the other hand, in the current study, advanced learners clung to both contexts and structures. As animacy was not controlled, sentences with two animate nouns, additionally, posed difficulties in collecting data. These sentences can be reversible, as mentioned above, creating possible competition between actives and passives. Sentences (9) – (12) demonstrate four reversible sentences likely to be produced by (a) advanced learners and (b) intermediate learners.

- (9) a. The children were scolded by their teachers.  
(reversible-passive)
- b. The children scolded their teachers.  
(reversible-active)
  
- (10) a. The students were punished by the headmaster.  
(reversible-passive)
- b. The students punished the headmaster.  
(reversible-active)
  
- (11) a. The handicapped kid was teased by gangsters.  
(reversible-passive)
- b. The handicapped kid teased gangsters.  
(reversible-active)



- (12) a./b. The Korean singer is interviewed by the MC.  
(reversible-passive)

Here, (9) – (11) were produced as reversible-active sentences by intermediate learners as the sentences contained two animate noun arguments. Surprisingly though, in (12), both advanced and intermediate learners produced reversible-passive sentences. It is, therefore, predicted that lexical meaning and argument selection of verbs also influence learners' choice of construction. The noun *the MC* seems to be more responsible for the action, *interview*, than *the Korean singer*. On the other hand, despite the fact that, in other sentences, it is clear which argument should be patient and which should be the agent, it is still more plausible to reverse these than it is for (12). In sum, in cases in which both nouns are animate, advanced learners employed syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic strategies; form, function, and context, it seems, were important for this group of learners. Conversely, intermediate learners only depended on syntactic strategies and employed simpler structures regardless of meaning, context, and the feasibility of an event occurring in the real world.

## 6. Conclusion

Overall, advanced learners outperformed intermediate learners as observed in the large number of passivized target items. When compared to Verb Type 1, which was highly passivized, Verb Type 2 was used less frequently in passive sentences. Even though Verb Type 2 seemed to be less passivized than Verb Type 1 in intermediate learners as hypothesized, advanced learners were also influenced by verb type, disproving the prediction that they would be able to passivize all target items regardless of verb type. As such, it appears that the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 affected the production of English passive constructions in both groups of Thai learners. If an English verb, therefore, is passivized and it is possible to naturally passivize its translated equivalent in Thai *thùuk*-passive constructions as well, learners tended to produce English passive construction, arguably due to the similarities between L1 and L2. However, the statistical analysis here shows that there is no statistical significance for verb type. Only proficiency level played a

statistically significant role in the production of passive sentences of the target items. Nevertheless, the results suggest that both proficiency of English and verb type should be considered possible factors affecting the productivity of English passive sentences in Thai learners, although the latter is not statistically significant. Furthermore, the more proficient a learner is in English, the more passivized verbs of both types were produced. This reflects the development of Thai learners' IL. Notice that, as suggested by the greater number of passive sentences in Verb Type 2, even though their IL has become more native-like, these learners still cannot fully produce verbs of this type. Cross-linguistic influence or language transfer seems to have an impact on all learners regardless of their proficiency level.

### 6.1 Limitations

The frequency of each verb in its passive form should be checked via language corpora. Some verbs might appear in the passive construction frequently, thus affecting learners' language input. If they are hardly or not at all exposed to the passive form of a verb, they might avoid passivizing it due to their lack of familiarity. Furthermore, as the animacy of noun arguments in each item was not initially taken into consideration as a potential variable, it was not controlled for and led to reversible sentences that could be used in actives as well as passives. Despite the context being quite restricted, the plausible and reversible sentences still posed difficulties in eliciting data for some items, e.g., scold. As a consequence, it is advisable that future research control for animacy of nouns in order to avoid plausibly reversible active-passive sentences.

Even though the results show that the advanced learners were able to passivize the target items more successfully than those in the intermediate group, the numbers of passivized items from the two groups are not significant. This is possibly due to the fact that the writing task used in the present study forced participants to produce passive sentences structurally. As a result, they may have focused more on a structure that better fits the structural context, the passive, without resorting to usage differences between Thai and English passives. Suggestions regarding this

issue will be offered in the following section (6.3 Suggestion for future research).

## 6.2 Pedagogical implications

The results of this study clearly demonstrate language transfer caused by syntactic and pragmatic availability between NL and TL. In other words, the fact that some verbs are unnatural in Thai *thùuk*-passive constructions (Verb Type 2) does not imply that those verbs cannot be used with equivalent meaning in English passives. Teaching materials and instructors should not, therefore, exemplify English passive sentences with only adversative or neutral verbs. They should, rather, include verbs of Verb Type 2 in passive form so that L1 Thai learners of English will not equate English passive construction's occurrences with Thai *thùuk*-passive construction. Another problem generally observed is that, commonly, the construction be + PP is directly translated into *thùuk*. A number of teachers even emphasize that they are equivalent. One-by-one translation used in teaching materials and English classrooms is also not recommended. For example, the sentence, 'He was respected,' can be translated into เขาถูกเคารพ (*k'hǎw t'hù:k k'haw róp*), which might sound unnatural to Thai speakers if we assume that English passive sentences are equivalent to Thai *thùuk*-passive construction. Therefore, L1 Thai learners may find both Thai and English versions odd and subsequently avoid using this kind of verb in the passive form, though it is acceptable in English. Other markers or translated versions with analogous meaning should be used instead, e.g., เขาเป็นที่เคารพ (*k'hǎw pen t'hî: k'haw róp*) and เขาได้รับความเคารพ (*k'hǎw dâj róp k'ha:m k'haw róp*). The one-by-one translation is useful for learners to comprehend the form and concept of the passive construction, but it could lead to difficulties in discerning meaning. If language teachers wish to use Thai *thùuk*-passive constructions as an equivalent structure of English passive constructions because learners can easily comprehend the concept of this construction, they should also present the more natural translated versions, especially those containing verbs of Type 2, with other markers or syntactic structures.

### 6.3 Suggestions for future research

As this study has shown limitations, further research might fill the present gaps by controlling verb frequencies, especially in passive constructions, present in the relevant corpora and by regulating animacy of noun arguments. A control group of native speakers of English should be included as well to help strengthen the credibility of the items and task.

Like other studies on SLA and the English passive construction by L1 Thai learners, this research employed a production task. To help explore this issue from different perspectives, other methods of eliciting data should be considered, as different methods and tasks may yield novel, insightful results. Furthermore, given that, as mentioned above, the task here seemed to concentrate on eliciting structural data, other methods for eliciting both production and perception data could help prove whether verb type plays a role in L2 acquisition of English passive constructions or not. Oral tasks, such as speaking or interviewing, could also be utilized in order to investigate spontaneous production of passive sentences. Of particular interest are psycholinguistic techniques such as self-paced reading tasks and eye-tracking methods. As these techniques can reflect L2 processing, more insightful details about how L1 Thai learners' interlanguage develops could be attested.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> However, some beneficial verbs not included and some neutral verbs included in Verb Type 1 might sound natural in the construction because of the neutralization. That is, we cannot firmly state that all beneficial verbs are unnatural and all neutral verbs are natural in the aforementioned construction. The verbs categorized in this study, as a consequence, needed to be verified by the norming survey for each particular case instead of automatically classifying the former set and the latter set into Verb Type 2 and Verb Type 1, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> The present research is a preliminary study of a Master's thesis titled "Processing of English passive construction in L1 Thai learners".

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## Appendix A

Listed below are the test items for Verb Type 1 (No. 1-7) and Verb Type 2 (No. 8-14).

1. Gangsters/tease  
The handicapped kid \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The police officers/arrest  
The suspect \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The MC/interview  
The Korean singer \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Our customers/ask  
This question \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The chefs/prepare  
The dinner \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Their teacher/scold

- The children \_\_\_\_\_.
7. The headmaster/punish  
The students \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Many users/like  
iPhoneX \_\_\_\_\_.
9. A famous school/accept  
My friend \_\_\_\_\_.
10. All of the students/submit  
The homework assignment \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Many tourists/admire  
The Temple of Emerald Buddha \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Specialists/recognize  
This painting \_\_\_\_\_.
13. His uncle/receive  
This gift \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Many people in Bangkok/celebrate  
New Year's Day \_\_\_\_\_.