

Interlanguage Passive Construction

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Because the appearance of the passive construction varies cross-linguistically, differences exist in the interlanguage (IL) passives attempted by learners of English. One such difference is the widely studied IL pseudo-passive, as in **new cars must keep inside* produced by Chinese speakers. The belief that this is a reflection of L1 language typology has led to the study of passive constructions produced by Thai speakers. It was, however, discovered that only a small number of IL pseudo-passives have emerged in the data. Instead, most problematic passives concerned malformed past participles. These unexpected results are likely due to the language proficiency of the Thai subjects and the differences between Thai and Chinese.

Key Words: interlanguage, second language acquisition, passivization, syntactic analysis

1 Introduction

Due to the fact that the passive construction differs from language to language, especially between Indo-European and non-Indo-European languages, it has been widely studied in the field of SLA. One of the interlanguage (IL) passive constructions that many scholars have explored is the *IL pseudo-passive* produced by Chinese speakers. The IL pseudo-passives are ungrammatical sentences that have theme subjects followed by transitive verbs in active forms. The construction exhibits morpho-syntactic difficulties that the learners experience, as shown in **new cars must keep inside* and **these ways almost classify two types* (Yip & Mathews, 1995, pp. 17, 22). These structures are English sentences produced by Chinese speakers. They are termed *pseudo-passives*¹ because their intended English structure is believed to be the passive. IL pseudo-passives, like the above examples, are considered typical in the English IL of Chinese speakers (Han, 2000; Rutherford, 1983; Schachter & Rutherford, 1979; Yip, 1995; Yip & Mathews, 1995). Such constructions raise the question of which English sentence structure the learners intended to produce. Although its surface structure and semantic interpretation are

¹ This construction was originally called the *pseudo-passive* construction (Han, 2000; Rutherford, 1983; Schachter & Rutherford, 1979; Yip, 1995; Yip & Mathews, 1995). However, since the term overlaps with the grammatical *pseudo-passive construction* in English (Riddle et al., 1977), as in *this bed has been slept in by Napoleon*. (Riddle et al., 1977), this paper will call the structure the *IL pseudo-passive construction*.

similar to the middle (e.g. *the book sells well*) and ergative constructions (e.g. *the grass grows*), it has traditionally been interpreted as a malformed passive. However, Yip (1995), applying the *Government and Binding Theory* (Chomsky, 1981), argued that, instead of being intended as a passive, the construction is supposed to be an active sentence where, in order to introduce old information, the object is topicalized to the beginning of the sentence. This reflects a pragmatic word order (PWO) sentence structure (Thompson, 1978), a property of the learners' L1 language typology. Despite different theories, Schachter and Rutherford (1979) and Han (2000) also arrived at the same conclusion that the IL pseudo-passive reflects the L1 typology.

The above theories and analyses lead to the question of whether similar constructions occur with L1 speakers of other PWO languages. The current study investigates this question by examining the English passive constructions produced by Thai students to see if IL pseudo-passive constructions arise. This study operates under the hypothesis that similar constructions may occur because both Chinese and Thai are PWO, so it is likely that the same L1 transfer will emerge in the Thai data. The language typology of the L2 learners' native language is believed to inhibit their ability to form English passive sentences because passive constructions vary cross-linguistically and, in many languages, do not occur as often as they do in English. Some languages, for instance, limit the passive to specific contexts. In Japanese, the passive only occurs as an adversative passive (Masuko, 1996)². There are also languages in which the passive does not exist at all, namely, Lahu and Lisu (Li & Thompson, 1975).

As a background to the study of the passive construction produced by Thai students, the following discussion encompasses information on Thai sentence structure and a comprehensive literature review on theories and analysis of the IL pseudo-passives.

2 Thai as a PWO language

Thai language has properties of a PWO language, which are namely, the lack of articles and dummy subjects, and the dearth of the subject-creating constructions (e.g. passive and raising constructions) (Thompson, 1978). Thai sentential arguments can not only be arranged in the SVO order like English, but it can also be arranged according to whether they are known or unknown information (i.e. topic or comment) (Simargool, 2005; Thompson, 1978). Like Chinese topics, Thai topics are in the initial position. The following structures are common for Thai speakers.

- (1) a. Orn sɔ̌: som tʰi: tɔ̌a:d (SVO)
Orn buy orange at market
'Orn bought some oranges at the market.'

² The adversative effect is considered unfavorable for the structural subject.

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- b. ratt^həban t^hay lod k^ha ɲən ba:t (SVO)
 Government Thai reduce price money baht
 ‘Thai Government reduces the price of Thai baht.’
- (2) a. rot may + tɔŋ jod k^həŋ-nay (TOPIC + COMMENT)
 Car new + must park inside
 ‘New cars must be parked indoors.’
- b. kəbk^hau + t^ham læw rə yaŋ (TOPIC + COMMENT)
 Food + make already or not yet
 ‘Has the food been cooked?’

In addition to the coexistence of the above constructions, Thai also has passive constructions which traditionally have been described to have adversative meanings, since the consequence of the action is unfavorable to the structural subject. The passive particles *do:n* and *t^hu:k + verb* generally mean (*unfavorable*) *get + verb* (Prasithratsint, 1988, p. 366), as shown in (3).

- (3) a. rot t^hu:k čon
 car PASS hit
 ‘The car was hit.’
- b. k^həmo:y do:n təmruat jab
 Robber PASS police catch
 ‘The robber was caught by the police.’

Due to the influence of written English on Thai, the use of passive constructions in Thai writing expands to non-adversative context. That is, in Thai writing, the passive construction becomes more like the English passive construction in the sense that it is used in a wider variety of contexts not just to express adversative meaning. However, the construction has been labeled as “foreign” (Prasithratsint, 1988, p. 366) by Thai linguists.

- (4) ?sombat t^hu:k k^hon-p^hob doy čau-ba:n
 treasure PASS discover by villager
 ‘The treasure was discovered by the villagers.’

Like Chinese, topics in Thai coindex with the deleted constituent in the comment.

- (5) a. ton-ma:y nan_i bay yay čan may čɔ̃ p t_i
 tree that_i leave big I don’t like t_i
 ‘That tree, leaves are big, I don’t like [it].’

- b. kənba:n_i yaŋ may day t^ham t_i
Homework_i yet not PAST do t_i
Homework [I] have not done [it] yet.

The interpretation of the null subject in (5) depends on the discourse. There are no constraints in Thai on what is chosen to be the topic. Such structures as (2) and (5) are not allowed in English. According to previous studies, it is likely that the speaker of PWO languages, which allow the above structures, will transfer them to their English language sentences. The discussion below elucidates the theories and analysis on such phenomenon.

3 Theories and analyses of the IL pseudo-passive construction

3.1 Middle and ergative interpretation

Superficially, IL pseudo-passive constructions resemble the English middle construction, as in *this car drives smoothly* (Simargool, 2005; Yip, 1995) or *bureaucrats bribe easily* (Keyser & Roeper, 1984). The IL pseudo-passive construction is similar to the English middle construction in that the theme³ surfaces as a structural subject without any change in verbal morphology. Despite these similarities, Yip (1995) argues that acquisition of the middle construction is difficult for learners for two reasons: (1) it differs from English basic sentences in which the agent is the structural subject, and (2) because there is no morphological marking on the verb, the middle construction is “crosslinguistically unusual” (Yip, 1995, p. 106). Further complicating the issue, the middle construction is infrequent in the L2 input because it is likely to appear only in certain registers, such as advertising (Simargool, 2005; Yip, 1995) and bureaucratic language (Keyser & Roeper, 1984).

The IL pseudo-passive construction is also similar to an ergative construction, as in *the glass broke*. The two are similar in that the theme surfaces as a structural subject, and the verb does not change morphologically. It may be possible that the learners overgeneralize the ergative construction by placing a theme in the subject position of a transitive verb. However, Yip (1995) has shown that advanced learners have difficulty with ergative constructions. Thus, both the middle and ergative interpretations of the IL pseudo-passive construction are not considered the L2-targeted constructions. Nevertheless, several tenable interpretations of the IL pseudo-passives still exist.

3.2 The traditional interpretation

³ The theme is a thematic role. Thematic roles (θ-roles) are semantic functions of sentential arguments (Fillmore, 1968; Gruber, 1965; Jackendoff, 1972 in Radford, 1988, p. 372), where each argument is assumed to bear a specific θ-role. Common θ-roles that are relevant to this study are *agent/actor, patient, theme, and experiencer*.

Traditionally, IL pseudo-passives have been interpreted as malformed passives by English speakers (Yip, 1995) and most ESL teachers (Schachter & Rutherford, 1979; Rutherford, 1983), hence the term *pseudo-passives* or *putative passives* (Han, 2000). This is because there is only one surface difference between the passive and the IL pseudo-passive. In the passive construction, there is a morphological change in the verb and the argument in the structural subject position is not an *agent/experiencer* (henceforth, agent), but instead is a *theme/patient* (henceforth, theme). The IL pseudo-passive is different from the passive only in the verb, which is not marked for passive. As a result, the initial NP in the IL pseudo-passive is likely to be parsed as the theme subject of the passive by native speakers and ESL teachers (Yip, 1995). Thus, the IL pseudo-passive *new cars must keep inside* is interpreted as *new cars should be kept indoors* (Yip, 1995 in Han 2000, p. 84). The lack of morphological marker has led to the sentence being considered a malformed passive. Such a structure is assumed to result from a failed acquisition of English passive morphology. In this interpretation, the IL pseudo-passive represents a case of undergenerating the passive construction, where the IL grammar fails to generate the full range of the passive construction in the target-language (Han, 2000; Yip, 1995). Schachter and Rutherford (1979) and Yip (1995), however, have reached a different conclusion. Despite different approaches, they all argued that the construction is not a passive, but a topicalized active sentence.

3.3 The topic-comment interpretation

Influenced by Li and Thompson's (1975) and Thompson's (1978) language typology, several scholars have come to the conclusion that the pseudo-passive construction is a reflection of the typology of the learner's L1, Chinese. Schachter and Rutherford (1979) were first to notice the IL pseudo-passive construction in the IL production of Chinese and Japanese speakers. By analyzing written English samples produced by ESL students, S&R concluded that the IL pseudo-passive is a carryover of native language *function-form* characteristics, a type of discourse-syntactic transfer. In this type of transfer, the learner transfers an L1 discourse function to a syntactic expression in the L2 (Han, 2000), as illustrated in (6).

- (6) L1 Topic ---- Comment
L2 NP (topic) ---- [null subject] + VP (adapted from Han, 2000, p. 84)

S&R explained that the IL pseudo-passive is the application of the topic-comment structure, the sentence structure of Chinese, with "the suppression of the non-essential subject and deletion of co-referential pronominal topic" (Han, 2000, p.103), as in (7a).

- (7) a. IL pseudo-passive (Chinese L1 speaker):
[Most of food which is served in this restaurant], have cooked already.

b. Interpretation:

Most of food which is served in this restaurant, [they] have cooked [it] already. (Yip, 1995 in Han, 2000, p. 85)

According to S&R, the initial NP in (7a) functions as topic rather than the subject because, unlike the subject, it is not grammatically related to the following verb. The initial NP also shares its identity with the deleted object (Han, 2000; S&R, 1979; Yip, 1995), which is omitted because it co-references with the topic. The structural subject of (7a), on the other hand, is omitted because it is the non-essential subject or the null subject which is discourse related (Han, 2000). The above analysis of (7a) shows that the structure is a reflection of the speaker's L1 topic-comment structure.

Through her syntactic approach, Yip (1995), came to the same conclusion. She stated that interpreting the sentence **new cars must keep inside* as a passive would violate the Government and Binding Theory (Chomsky, 1981). In a passive sentence, the verb is morphologically marked as passive, resulting in the loss of its agent θ -role and *accusative case*⁴ for the theme (Burzio's Generalization) (Haegeman, 1991). The theme has to move to get case in the subject position of the passivized sentence (Haegeman, 1991). This movement cannot apply to the IL pseudo-passivization because the verb in the IL pseudo-passive construction is not morphologically marked as passive; as a result, it has both the agent θ -role and accusative case. If the theme already has case in its original position, it does not have to move because if it does move to the subject position in passivization, it will violate both the *Case Filter* and the *Theta-Criterion*⁵ (Haegeman, 1991) by receiving case twice and bearing two θ -roles.

The IL pseudo-passive construction is similar to a topicalized sentence because the verb is not marked as passive. In an English topicalized sentence, the theme moves to the initial position of the sentence preceding the structural subject for special emphasis, and leaves a trace at its original position. The topic and the empty object thus share an identity (Ouhalla, 1999), as in [*This problem*]_i, *I can solve t_i* (Ouhalla, 1999, p. 65), where *this problem* is the topic, which is moved to the initial position for emphasis and shares an identity (_i) with its trace (*t*). The IL pseudo-passive is even more similar to Chinese topicalization, as in (8), which lacks a passive marker and a null subject⁶.

⁴ The term *case* above refers to *abstract case*, which is distinct from *morphological case* (Haegeman, 1991).

⁵ θ -role assignment follows the *Theta-Criterion*, which states that a θ -role can be assigned to only one argument, and an argument bears only one θ -role (Haegeman, 1991).

⁶ The interpretation of the null subject can either co-reference the discourse topic or a generic subject. If the subject refers to the discourse topic, its identity can be recovered; however, if it is generic, its actual identity is left unspecified and is assumed to be *someone* or *they* (Yip, 1995). In languages with topic-comment sentence structures, a null or covert subject is allowed (Li & Thompson, 1975).

- (8) xin che ting-zai zhe-li
new car park here

The above sentence is similar to the IL pseudo-passive in **new cars must keep inside*. On the other hand, the IL pseudo-passive construction has fewer similarities with the Chinese passive, as in (9).

- (9) Wang Li bei (Mei Hua) si le
Wang Li PASS (Mei Hua) kill already
'Wang Li was killed (by Mei Hua).'

Chinese does not have passive verb morphology. Passivization is indicated by the word *bei*, which immediately precedes the verb in the Chinese passive construction, as in (9). Like the English *by*-phrase, the object of *bei* is optional (Yip, 1995). This comparison shows that, by lacking the passive marker, the IL pseudo-passive is similar to English topicalization and by both lacking the passive marker and having the null subject, is even more similar to Chinese topicalization.

In her study with the Chinese subjects, Yip (1995) discovered that both higher and lower-level ESL learners considered IL pseudo-passives grammatical and having a suppressed agent. The finding was proven by a task with IL pseudo-passives embedded in tag questions, as in **the shirts must clean immediately, mustn't you?* (Yip, 1995, p. 218) where the tag question signals the suppressed agent corresponding to the null subject in topic-comment sentences.

3.4 The discourse-syntactic approach

Like Yip (1995) and S&R, Han concluded that the IL pseudo-passive construction reflects L1 topic-comment structure and the null subject. However, she reached her conclusion through an approach she called the *discourse-syntactic approach* (Han, 2000), which examined the structures in question as they appeared in their actual contexts which facilitate the interpretation of the structures. The objective of this approach was to uncover the nature of the suppressed agent and the intended L2 structure of the IL pseudo-passive construction.

Han's studied two informants both of whom were Taiwanese L1 speakers and advanced English L2 speakers. Her motive for choosing advanced ESL speakers was to investigate whether they had been freed from L1 pragmatic influence (Han, 2000), which plays a role in the early stages of L2 acquisition (Rutherford, 1983 in Han, 2000).

The data were from three sources: spontaneous writing in various discourse contexts and two supplementary tasks: translation and grammaticality judgment. The translation task investigated the status of the initial NP in the IL pseudo-passive construction. The results showed that the informants identified the topics in their L1 sentences with the subjects of their L2 passive sentences, and the Chinese overt

subject topic-comment construction was identified with the English active SVO structure, as in (10).

- (10) na ben shu wo yijing ji zou le
that CL book I already post away already
'I have already mailed out that book.' (Han, 2000, p. 92)

The grammatical judgment task was designed to test whether there is a link between the IL pseudo-passives and target-like passives. The ungrammatical sentences consisted of IL pseudo-passive structures with other structures as distracters. Both informants made corrections to the ungrammatical structures, changing the pseudo-passives into real passives. This shows that the informants did not allow the IL pseudo-passive construction in their English sentence structures and that the informants did not have problems with the English passive construction. Nevertheless, the pseudo-passives emerged together with the target-like passives in the spontaneous writing. The target-like passives found were very similar to the IL pseudo-passives in that all the subjects were known information; and the suppressed agent could be inferred from the context.

The findings led Han (2000) to the conclusion that there is a relationship between the pseudo-passive and the target-like passive. The target-like passive is an L2 version of the topic-comment structure since the agent is suppressed in both constructions, and the theme, which can also be the topic, occupies the initial position of the sentence. In the spontaneous writing, when the informants focus more on the function rather than the form, the pseudo-passive thus emerged. The pseudo-passives can be considered reflections of "IL competence influenced by L1" (Han, 2000, p. 98).

The above studies have found that the English passive construction causes difficulties for L2 learners from PWO L1s, such as Chinese and Japanese, because the passive morphology can be undergenerated, as in the IL pseudo-passive construction. This construction has given rise to four theories and analyses. The malformed passive analysis (Bunton, 1989) focuses on the surface structure; the typological approach (S&R, 1979) introduces the notion of language typology to the analysis; the syntactic approach (Yip, 1995; Yip & Matthews, 1995) applies generative grammar to the typology-oriented analysis; and the discourse-syntactic approach (Han, 2000) introduces the use of discourse to the generative syntax and language typology-oriented analyses. Regardless of the different approaches, the last three analyses arrived at the same conclusion that the IL pseudo-passive construction arises from the transfer of the L1 topic-comment structure to the English passive construction. Inspired by the above theories and analyses on L1 pragmatic transfer, the current study investigates the topic-comment features of the passive produced by Thai students.

4 IL passivization by Thai students

This research was conducted as a preliminary study to investigate whether the IL pseudo-passive occurs in the interlanguage of Thai L1 speakers. The hypothesis is that L1 speakers of Thai, a PWO language, are likely to transfer their L1 topic-comment structure to the English passive construction. The following sections report the data collection and the findings of this study.

4.1 Data collection

Unlike the data in the previous studies, which came from translation tests (Han, 2000), grammaticality judgment tests (Yip, 1995), and collections of ESL writing (Han, 2000; S&R, 1979), the data in this study come from a written test. The passive constructions elicited by the test are investigated for instances of the IL pseudo-passive.

The test was completed by 38 third-year Thai students majoring in international business, marketing, accounting, and finance at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand⁷. All participants speak Thai as their L1 and, at the time of the test, had taken five English classes offered by the university. The participating students were those present on the test dates and were from two sections of the course Advanced Business Oral Communication (ABOC), the final ESL course required for students with the above majors regardless of their levels of proficiency. The arrangement of each section is random; that is, in one section, there can be students of various majors and proficiencies; their grades for the course vary from A to C (Appendix B). The number of students and their grades are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of students (SS) and their grades for ABOC

ABOC GRADES	A	B+	B	C+	C	TOTAL SS
Number of SS	5	11	12	4	6	38

Among the 38 students participating in this study, the majority of them are B students (12 students) and B+ students (11 students), the rest are C (6 students), A (5 students) and C+ (4 students).

For the test session, the students were provided 20 minutes prior to the end of a class to do the test. The test comprises 25 pairs of nouns and verbs (Appendix A). In order to elicit the passive sentences, 10 pairs are transitive verbs with the nouns that can be theme subjects. To divert the students’ attention from the targeted construction, the verbs provided, ordered randomly, include not only transitives (*read, drive, push, hit, write, paint, win, sing, find, steal*), but also unaccusatives (*happen, fall, expire, occur, arrive, arise, appear, disappear, rise*) and unergatives (*walk, sleep, die, fly, stand*). To avoid students’ difficulties with the vocabulary, the selected words are those taught in high school. This is verified by a high school English specialist from the Ministry of Education of Thailand.

⁷ Prior to the test, all subjects had signed the *Informant Consent Forms* produced by the Division of Research, Chulalongkorn University Language Institute.

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The expected constructions are 10 passives, 10 unaccusatives, and 5 unergatives. No terms referring to the targeted constructions are mentioned in the test. To ensure the occurrence of the passive constructions, the students were instructed to form sentences with all of the given nouns as subjects. The instruction and the examples of the attested results appear in (11) and (12) respectively.

- (11) Write complete sentences from the subjects and the verbs given.

Examples:

- | | |
|--------------|---------------------|
| 1. Girl, cry | The girl cried. |
| 2. Cake, eat | The cake was eaten. |

- (12) a. accident, happen The accident was happened.
b. book, read The book was read.
c. boy, walk The boy walked.

4.2 Findings

The results are divided into 5 categories: well-formed passives (WP), malformed passives (MP), actives (Act.), possible pseudo-passives (PP), and other constructions (Oth.). The well-formed passives refer to native-like passives as in *my watch was stolen*, while the malformed passives are the ones with agreement errors as in **the car were driven* and those with errors in past participle markers, as in **the picture was paint by Michael*. The active sentences are those with agent subjects and active verbs, as in *I push the cart*, whereas the possible pseudo-passives are the ones that are similar to the IL pseudo-passives with the theme subjects, the active verbs, and the null subjects, as in **the cart is pushing inside*. The ‘other constructions’ are non-sentences like the noun phrase, **the picture painted by Pigasso*, or ungrammatical sentences that cannot be connected to any of the above, as in **she is win the prize*, which seems like an active sentence except for the presence of the auxiliary *be*. Since the purpose of the task is to test the knowledge of passivization, the spelling, as in **the letter was writen*, is not taken into account. The results are shown in Appendix B and summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Results from the ten given transitive verbs

Constructions	Instances	Percentage
Well-formed passive (WP)	255	67.11
Malformed passive (MP)	51	13.42
Active (Act.)	59	15.53
Possible pseudo-passive (PP)	3	0.79
Others (Oth.)	12	3.16
TOTAL	380	100.01

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From the 10 transitive verbs given to the 38 students, 380 instances of passive sentences were expected. The actual data, however, exhibit 255 (67.11%) passives, 51 (13.42%) malformed passives, 59 (15.53%) actives, 3 (0.79%) possible pseudo-passives, and 11 (2.89%) other constructions. Students also over-generated passives for 80 (30.77%) of the expected unaccusatives and ergatives (Simargool, 2007).

Most students were able to produce the well-formed passives, and the majority was able to do so accurately. Table 3 below summarizes the number of students producing each construction.

Table 3. The number of students (SS) producing each construction

Constr. (Total)	0-4 instances					5-7 instances				
	A	B+	B	C+	C	A	B+	B	C+	C
WP (255)	1	3	1	3	1	1	3	4	1	2
MP (51)	5	11	12	2	4	-	-	-	2	1
Act. (59)	4	8	11	3	5	1	3	1	1	-
PP (3) ⁸	5	11	12	4	6	-	-	-	-	-
Oth. (12)	5	11	12	4	6	-	-	-	-	-

Constr.	8-10 instances					TOTAL STUDENTS
	A	B+	B	C+	C	
WP	3	5	7	-	3	38
MP	-	-	-	-	1	38
Act.	-	-	-	1	-	38
PP	-	-	-	-	-	38
Oth.	-	-	-	-	-	38

With regards to the 255 well-formed passives (WP), the majority of the students, which is 18 of them, could produce 8-10 instances, 11 students, 5-7, and 9 students, 0-4. Approximately half of A, B+, B, and C students could produce 8-10 well-formed passives. Students at all levels were found to produce the malformed passives (MP), actives (Act.), and other constructions (Oth.). 0-4 instances of pseudo-passives were produced by two B and one B+ students who produced three 3 pseudo-passives, while the others did not produce any pseudo-passives (Appendix B).

Students who produced the most malformed passives are one C student with 8-10 malformed passives and two C+ and one C students with 5-7 malformed passives.

Students at most levels, except for the C students, produced 5-7 and 8-10 instances of active sentences. None of the students produced 5-7 and 8-10 instances of the pseudo-passive and other sentences.

4.2.1 Well-formed and malformed passives

From Table 2, 255 (67.11%) well-formed and 51 (13.12%) malformed passives contribute to the total of 306 (80.53%) instances of passive constructions produced

⁸ 1 instance from a B+ student, 2 instances from two B students, and 0 instance from others

in the data. The 80.53% passive sentences imply the students' awareness of the construction, while the 67.11% reflects the students' accuracy in passive formation.

The 51 malformed passive instances are counted as passives because of their structures, theme-subject + *be* + verb. The designation 'malformed' comes from subject-verb agreement and the past participle errors. All forms of past participles, including irregular verbs and ones with *-ed* and *-en* endings, were problematic for the students. Examples from the data are shown in (13) and the numbers of problematic instances per type of past participles are displayed in Table 4.

- (13) a. *My watch was steal by the boy.
- b. *The car is push.
- c. *The wallet was founden.

Table 4. Numbers of problematic instances per type of past participle

Types of past participle	Verbs given in the test	Problematic past participles
1. <i>-ed</i> ending	push, paint	15
2. <i>-en</i> ending	drive, write, steal	18
3. irregular verbs	read, hit, sing, find, win	15

The highest problematic instances concern the *-en* past participle. The frequencies of each problematic past participle are illustrated below in Table 5.

Table 5. Frequencies of the problematic past participles

Verbs	pushed	written	painted	stolen	driven
Instances	9	6	6	6	6
Verbs	sung	found	hit	read	won
Instances	6	4	3	3	1

Among the malformed passives in the data, *push* is the most difficult, and *won*, the least difficult. Also included in the category of malformed passives are those with subject-verb agreement error, as in **the car were driven* and **the gate were hit*. 9 instances of problematic subject-verb agreements were produced by one C (8 instances) and one B students (1 instance).

4.2.2 Possible pseudo-passives and the over-generated passives

Only 3 instances similar to the IL pseudo-passive occurred, as shown in (14).

- (14) a. *The car is pushing inside.
- b. *The picture was painting.
- c. *Whose picture was painting?

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The above examples are very close to previous studies' IL pseudo-passive with their theme subjects, active verb forms, and null subjects. They can also directly be translated into Thai topic-comment sentences.

On the contrary to the undergenerated passive morphology in the above examples, many students over-generated passive markers by passivizing not only transitive verbs, but also unaccusative verbs (e.g. *happen*, *appear*, *occur*) (Simargool, 2007). This resulted in 80 passivized unaccusative constructions, three of which are shown in (15).

- (15) a. *The accident was happened since years ago.
- b. *The stranger is disappear.
- c. *The shadow is appeared.

Passive markers were also over-generated for the unergative verb *die*, as in (16). (16e), however, shows that it is likely that the students were confused by the forms of the adjective *dead* and the past participle *died*. (16c) and (16d) were likely to be the targeted construction.

- (16) a. *The dog was died. (3 instances)
- b. *My dog was died last years ago.
- c. The dog was dead.
- d. The dog is dead.
- e. *The dog has dead.

4.2.3 Active and other constructions

In spite of the instructions, many students produce the active sentence with the given nouns as objects, as in (17) below.

- (17) a. I am reading a book.
- b. *Don't push cart.
- c. I drive a car.

The other constructions which are non-sentences and unidentifiable constructions are exemplified in (18).

- (18) a. The picture painted by Pigasso.
- b. *The picture is painting by Jenny.
- c. *The prize win/won. (3 instances)
- d. *She is win the prize. (2 instances)

Examples (18a) and (18b) are partly similar to the IL pseudo-passive because the theme subjects and the active verb form; however, they lack the null subjects which are supposedly agents, and the agents surface after *by*. Example (18a) is an English noun phrase, while examples (18b) to (18d) are neither English nor Thai

constructions. The constructions in (18), therefore, are ruled out as IL pseudo-passives, passives, or actives.

5 Discussion

The results of the IL passivization reported in the preceding section are quite unexpected for third-year international business, marketing, accounting, and finance majors at Chulalongkorn University because they have already completed five English courses in addition to high school English classes. One factor that contributes to the results may be the time constraint since the students were given only 20 minutes to complete the test; the weak ones might require more time. The advantage of the limited time, however, is that the results are less monitored.

5.1 The passive constructions

The total number of the well-formed and the malformed passives, which is 306 (80.53%) instances, together with the number of the students who could produce well-formed passive constructions, which is most students participating in this study, imply the students' knowledge of the passive (Appendix B). These numbers show that the students are familiar with the construction regardless of their proficiency levels. However, when it comes to accuracy, only 255 (67.11%) well-formed passives were produced and only 18 (47.37%) students could produce 8-10 well-formed constructions.

The numbers above lead to the conclusion that the students' spoken English proficiencies, as seen from their grades from the course, somewhat reflect their ability to construct passive sentences because the majority of A students were quite accurate in their passive formation and all A, B+, and B students produced only 0-4 malformed passives. However, only about half of B+ and B students could form 8-10 well-formed passive; and one A and three B+ students were among those who produced only 0-4 well-formed passives. Surprisingly, three C students could form 8-10 well-formed passives. The A and B+ students who had difficulties with the passive and the three C students who could produce accurate passives are evidence to the fact the proficiency in L2 speaking and grammar do not always increase in tandem with each other.

5.2 Malformed passive constructions

Although most of the students know how to form the English passive, 13.42% of their passive constructions in this study are malformed because of errors in past participles and/or errors in agreement. The students had difficulties with all types of past participles, including irregular verbs (e.g. *win-won*, *find-found*) and participles ending with *-ed* and *-en*. The cause can be morphological and/or phonological.

Thai is an uninflected language, that is, there are no morphological markers which can lead to the phenomena of L1 transfer and incomplete acquisition. In the case of this research, the latter is more likely. L1 transfer is frequent at the early

stage of acquisition when there are discrepancies between L1 and L2 (Winford, 2003). If L1 has no morphological markers and L2 does, such L1 feature is likely to reflect in IL. Incomplete acquisition of L2 morphological structures, on the other hand, occurs later in the acquisition when the L2 learner has not fully acquired the L2 feature resulting in some un/misinflected words in the IL. The results on the well-formed and the malformed passives indicate that the malformed past participles in the data are likely to result from the fact that the IL grammar fails to fully generate the L2 passive construction leading to incomplete acquisition (Yip, 1995). The ability/inability to mark past participles correctly could be due to how often the verbs in question appear in the students' input and whether the verbs have been rote-memorized by the students (Adamson et al., 1996; Wolfram, 1985).

Despite the fact that the study of transfer from spoken to written language has not been found, it may be possible to hypothesize that the L2 learners have a tendency to transfer their pronunciation to their writing especially when time is limited. The students' difficulty with *pushed* reflects the fact that some *-ed* ending participles in English, such as *pushed* [pʊʃt] and *stopped* [stɒpt], have final consonant clusters, which do not exist in Thai; therefore, when the words are pronounced by Thai ESL students, the final consonant of the clusters tend to be omitted (Simargool, 1998). This omission could transfer to writing. The frequency of the past participle marking in this study supports the above phonological hypothesis. The students in this study had the most difficulties with *pushed* because it ends with double consonant clusters. The influence of their L1 syllable structure caused them to leave out the final consonant of the cluster; hence, *push* occurred in stead of *pushed*. Moreover, the difficulties with *-ed* [-Id] and the *-en* markers could result from the fact that the markers are unstressed syllables.

The lack of participle markers in the written test agrees with previous studies on past tense markers by Simargool (1998) who found that in spoken narratives only 28% of the past tense verbs were marked with past tense. The irregular verbs were marked the most, while the ones with *-ed* suffixes were not marked. The conformity of the findings from IL writing and speaking data, therefore, implies that the writing performance of the students can be influenced by their pronunciation ability.

With regards to the problematic subject-verb agreement, most of the students did not have such difficulty in the agreement between the passive subject and the verb *be* except one student. This student used auxiliary *were* for most her passive constructions, as in **the car were drived*, while, interestingly, she used the auxiliary *was* with her unaccusative sentences, as in **the accident was happened*. This student seems to form a system of her own, realizing the difference between the passive and the unaccusative; she distinguished them with auxiliaries (Simargool, 2007).

5.3 IL pseudo-passive constructions

The possible IL pseudo-passives found in this study, **the car is pushing inside*, **the picture was painting*, and **whose picture is painting?*, are superficially similar to

the progressive ergative (e.g. *the ship is sinking*), the progressive middle, (e.g. *the book is selling well*), and the archaic progressive passive constructions (e.g. *the book is printing*) (Denison, 1993; Simargool, 2005). Considering the verbs in the sentences above, the students were not likely to target at the ergative constructions because those verbs are not ergative verbs. L2 students also were found to have difficulties with ergative constructions (Simargool, 2007; Yip, 1995). As for the middle and the archaic progressive constructions, such analyses, however, will not be entertained here because the students are likely to have been exposed to neither constructions due to their scarcity in both the students' input and grammar texts (Simargool, 2005; Yip, 1995). Moreover, the middle construction is difficult for L2 learners in that it differs from English basic sentences which have agent subjects with verbs in the active forms (Yip, 1995). By eliminating the above analyses, the constructions can be analyzed as the IL pseudo-passives, the consequence of L1 transfer of topic-comment construction with the null subject.

The findings of the IL pseudo-passives of this study are different from the previous studies not only because of the very small number of the instances, but also and the slight different in the surface structure. Han (2000) and Yip (1995) found the pseudo-passives to generally be in the form of NP+MODAL/HAVE+VP, as in **new cars must keep inside* and **most food ... have cooked already* (section 3.3) respectively. However, the pseudo-passives in this study, as shown above, are in the form of NP+BE+V-*ing*. Despite the slight difference from her findings, Yip's (1995) analysis might be able to shed some light in the case where the intended structure of the Thai students is the progressive passive, as in *the cart is being pushed*. Yip stated that the complex structure of the English VP may be cognitively heavy for the L2 learners who might decide to omit the second verb *be*, in this case, one of the verb *be*'s. Yip's explanation can be supported by the historical development of the progressive passive in Denison (1993). As indicated above, the archaic progressive passive, as in *the book is printing*, is the earlier version of *the book is being printed* due to the complexity of the latter (Denison, 1993).

A simpler explanation for the IL **the cart is pushing* can also be that the students were aware that there is the verb *be* in the intended construction and that it can be followed by the past participle in the passive or the present participle in the progressive. In these three rare cases, due to the time constraint, they thus opted for the latter.

The rare findings of the pseudo-passives can be due to the high proficiency of the students, the type of the data, and the students' L1. The students in this study were those who have been exposed to English in classes for at least nine years. The L1 influence, therefore, may not be as strong as expected. If the subjects were in early stages of L2 acquisition, L1 pragmatic influence could have emerged (Rutherford, 1983 in Han 2000). Moreover, if the data were from spontaneous sources, such as unproofread messages or natural English conversation, more IL pseudo-passives might emerge.

The last reason for the dearth of pseudo-passives is rooted in the language typology of Thai and Chinese. Although the two languages can be considered PWO languages because they have most PWO properties, there could be some differences

between them. Namely, they may be in different places on the PWO-GWO continuum because they have differing degrees of PWO and GWO properties. That is, Thai might be closer to a GWO language than Chinese, causing Thai students to have more familiarity with the passive, which is a GWO property (Li & Thompson, 1976; Simargool, 2005; Thompson, 1978). The passive in Thai was originally used in adversative contexts like in Japanese; however, after extensive contact with English, especially through English-Thai translations, the passive has been generalized to non-adversative contexts. This could explain why the majority of Thai students are not likely to transfer Thai topic-comment constructions to the English passive.

5.4 Passive unaccusative constructions

Despite the fact that Thai university students are familiar with the passive in English, their performance is still problematic. Familiarity with the passive caused many students to overgeneralize passive markers with unaccusatives (e.g. **the accident was happened*). The fact that many of the unaccusatives were passivized is not due to L1 influence because Thai unaccusative verbs are parallel to English unaccusative verbs. It was found that students have overgeneralized the passive, believing that any sentence with a theme subject should be passivized because it should have an underlying agent (Simargool, 2007). This finding is supported by Zobl (1989), who explains that L2 students who passivize the unaccusatives are likely to analyze that the construction, like the passive, has an implicit agent.

5.5 Active and other constructions

The fact that many students were found to place the given nouns in the object position regardless of the instruction may be due to a few possible factors. First, the students might not understand the instruction clearly. One C+ student did not form the passives from any of the 10 targeted passive verbs; however, the fact that he did not know the construction could not be the case since he passivized the unaccusatives. Second, the active forms could also be the effect of the surrounding distracters, the unaccusatives and unergatives. The last explanation for the active forms could be the students' unfamiliarity with the given nouns and verbs in the passive form. At their level of education, they are expected to know the words provided; however, they might not be familiar with some of them in the passives. As a result, they resorted to the most accessible construction for them at the moment, the active.

The last two factors leading to the active forms can further apply to the unidentifiable instances involving the pair *prize, win*, as in **the prize win/won*, and **she is win the prize*. Seven problematic instances arising from the pair *prize, win* confirm the above assumption regarding the students' difficulty in applying the words to the passive form. This could be because the English sentence *the prize was won* can never be directly translated into the passive form in Thai. The difficulty in the application of the given words into the passive form arises from the

influence of L1, where the passive does not occur often, and therefore, leads to the difficulty in the passive formation.

The two instances of **she is win the price* are interpreted in Mayo et al (2005) as results of the attempt to form an active sentence with the verb *be* as a *placeholder*. They have found that some L2 learners whose L1 lacks subject-verb agreement tend to employ the verb *be* to mark the agreement. In this case, the auxiliary *is* was used as an agreement marker in place of the morpheme *-s* on *win*. The above assumption is confirmed when it is found that the majority of the instances produced by the same students have the verb *be* preceding the given verbs.

With regards to the other constructions, the noun phrase *the picture painted by Pigasso* and the unidentifiable construction **the picture is painting by Jenny* are very close to the passive in their theme-subject and the emerged agent; however, the difference is in the verbs that were unmarked for passive. The cause of the above constructions, again, could not be the students' inability to form the passives because they are B students who could form 8 and 7 well-formed passives. Such constructions might be caused by the time constraint that led to the students' best attempt to reach for any construction that seemed possible for them at the time given, in this case, a noun phrase and a construction that have some similarities with the passive.

5 Conclusion

The current study not only reviewed the literature on IL pseudo-passive constructions (e.g. **new cars must keep inside*) by the speakers of Chinese, a PWO language, but it also investigated whether similar constructions were produced by the speakers of Thai, another PWO language. IL pseudo-passives are claimed in previous studies to be a structure transferred from a PWO L1. This means that the L1, as a PWO language, requires its sentences to have topic-comment structures. In the IL pseudo-passive construction, a topic-comment structure manifests a null subject and the initial NP, which can be a non-agent.

Like Chinese, Thai is also considered a PWO language and has most PWO properties (Simargool, 2005; Thompson, 1978); thus, the IL pseudo-passive was hypothesized to occur in Thai data. In this study, the data from Thai students are from a written test, which instructed the subjects to construct sentences from 25 pairs of nouns + transitive, unaccusative, and unergative verbs given. To elicit the passives, the students were instructed to put the given nouns in the subject position.

It was discovered that L1 influence is at play in several aspects. Even though the results differ from the Chinese data because only 0.79% of the sentences are IL pseudo-passives, all of them can be directly translated into Thai topic-comment sentences with null subjects. The reason for the rare instances may be due to the nature of the test, the high proficiency of the students, and/or the different degrees of PWO properties between Thai and Chinese. Different data collection method may yield different results.

Another result reflecting the L1 PWO language typology is in the students' difficulty with the pair *price, win*. The problematic instances with *price, win* is

evidence to the dearth of Thai passives since these words will never be passivized in Thai.

More results caused by L1 are from L1 phonological transfer. Past participles can be omitted because of the lack of final clusters in Thai, so *pushed* was replaced with *push*. They can also be omitted if they are in unstressed syllables, as when *painted* was replaced with *paint*. However, since the study on the transfer of spoken language to written language has not been found, further research on the issue is required to confirm the results.

The malformed passives can also come from the incomplete acquisition of the L2 passive morphology. L1 morphological transfer is unlikely the case because the students' performance on the passives is evidence to their awareness of the construction. Other causes of the difficulties in the production of past participles concern the frequency of the verbs and rote memorization. Additionally, it has been found that the passive forms were overgenerated to the unaccusative verbs (e.g. **the accident was happened*), which is due to the perception of the students towards the argument structure of the verbs.

Even though only a small number of pseudo-passives were found in the Thai data, it does not mean that the theories and analyses arising from the previous studies are language specific. The discrepancies in this study could be due to differences in data collection or to the language typology of Thai and Chinese. Although the two are PWO languages, there are likely to be differences in the PWO and GWO properties in the two languages. In other words, Thai may have more GWO properties than Chinese. More detailed comparative studies between the two languages are required in order to clarify this point. Finally, if the subjects of the study were at lower levels of L2 proficiency, it is likely that more IL pseudo-passives might emerge.

Despite the unexpected results, the current study and the previous studies are similar in their conclusions. Both have found that the constructions in question, whether they be IL pseudo-passives or malformed passives, are due to L1 transfer. While the Chinese speakers transfer the Chinese topic-comment sentence structure to their L2, Thai speakers transfer both L1 topic-comment structure and L1 phonology. To support these findings on the IL passive construction, more research should be conducted with speakers of other PWO languages or languages that lack morphological markers.

In spite of the shortcomings, it is hoped that this study will not only offer useful insights on the influence of L1 on the English passive construction, but will also lead to further studies that will improve the study of both the IL pseudo-passive and the passive constructions.

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Appendix A. Test paper

Name: _____ Major: _____ Age: _____

Write complete sentences from the subjects and the verbs given.

Examples:

1. Girl, cry **The girl cried.**
2. Cake, eat **The cake was eaten.**

1. accident, happen
2. book, read
3. boy, walk
4. car, drive
5. cart, push
6. cat, sleep
7. dog, die
8. gate, hit
9. leaves, fall
10. letter, write
11. milk, expire
12. mistakes, occur
13. passengers, arrive
14. picture, paint
15. plane, fly
16. prize, win
17. problem, arise
18. shadow, appear
19. song, sing
20. stranger, disappear
21. student, stand
22. sun, rise
23. thief, run
24. wallet, find
25. watch, steal

Interlanguage Passive Construction

Appendix B. Record of the findings

Student	WP	MP	Act.	Oth.	PP	Grade
1	7	-	1	2	-	B
2	7	1	2	-	-	B+
3	8	-	1	1	-	B
4	2	1	7	-	-	B
5	4	-	6	-	-	B+
6	9	-	1	-	-	B+
7	7	1	1	1	-	B+
8	10	-	-	-	-	B+
9	8	2	-	-	-	C
10	3	-	7	-	-	B+
11	9	1	-	-	-	B+
12	6	1	2	-	1	B+
13	3	5	1	1	-	C+
14	0	-	10	-	-	C+
15	9	1	-	-	-	B+
16	4	-	6	-	-	B+
17	7	3	-	-	-	B
18	1	8	1	-	-	C
19	5	5	-	-	-	C
20	9	1	-	-	-	B+
21	6	3	-	1	-	C+
22	6	1	2	1	-	C
23	6	-	4	-	-	A
24	5	3	1	-	1	B
25	9	1	-	-	-	A
26	9	1	-	-	-	B
27	9	1	-	-	-	B
28	8	2	-	-	-	C
29	4	5	-	1	-	C+
30	8	1	-	-	1	B
31	10	-	-	-	-	A
32	9	-	-	1	-	B
33	9	-	-	1	-	B
34	9	-	1	-	-	A
35	4	-	5	1	-	A
36	10	-	-	-	-	B
37	7	3	-	-	-	B
38	9	-	-	1	-	C
TOTAL Instances	255	51	59	12	3	