
What Is Happening to *What Was Happened*?

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Abstract

Unaccusative verbs such as *happen*, *occur*, and *appear* are intransitive verbs that have theme subjects and are particularly prone to passivization by EFL learners. Some scholars attribute this to L1 influence, some attribute it to learners not distinguishing between transitive and unaccusative verbs, and others attribute it to the absence of an agent or the presence of a theme object. Like other research, this study shows that Thai students produce passive unaccusative constructions for more than one reason.

1. Introduction

Unaccusative verbs, such as *happen*, *occur*, *disappear*, and *arrive* are a type of intransitive verb. Since they are intransitive (i.e. having only one argument), these verbs are unable to passivize. Many scholars (e.g. Zobl, 1989; Yip, 1995; Masuko, 1996; Balcom, 1997; Oshita, 2000) have discovered, however, that EFL learners tend to passivize unaccusative verbs, as in (1).

(1)

- a. *The most memorable experience of my life was happened 15 years ago. (Arabic L1)
- b. *Most of people are fallen in love and marry with somebody. (Japanese L1)
- c. *The World War III would be happened. (Chinese L1)
(Zobl, 1989 & Yip, 1995)

The above sentences have led to several theories and analyses of the acquisition of English unaccusative verbs by EFL learners. Richards (1973, cited in Oshita, 2000), Zobl (1989), and Masuko (1996) claim that the passivization of the unaccusatives is due to first language (L1) influence, while Hubbard & Hix (1988), Hubbard (1994, cited in Oshita 2000), Yip (1995), and Balcom (1997) claim that it is because the learners are not distinguishing between the unaccusative and the transitive. Zobl (1989) associates the presence of *be+en* with the lack of an agent, whereas Oshita (2000) assumes that *be+en* indicates that the theme is a subject. This variety of theories is likely to be due to the variety of L1s. Richards' (1973) claim seems to be based on Italian, French, and German L1s. Masuko & Zobl's theories are based on Japanese students, while Hubbard & Hix, Hubbard, Yip, Balcom, and Oshita base their theories on Chinese students of English.

Despite the many studies and the diversity of L1s, none of the studies analyze the IL unaccusative construction by Thai students of English. Studying unaccusatives produced by 38 Thai students, I investigate whether Thai students have similar problems with unaccusatives similar to Chinese students and whether any of the theories mentioned above apply to Thai students. My hypothesis is that Thai students, like Chinese students, will passivize unaccusative verbs because, even though Thai and English unaccusative verbs are similar, the students do not know the distinction between the unaccusative and the transitive. Another possible explanation is that the students associate *be+en* with a theme subject or a missing agent.

In order to present a comprehensive discussion of the IL unaccusative construction, the concepts and the issues surrounding the construction are covered. The discussion starts with the concept of thematic roles and then moves to a contrastive analysis of different types of intransitive verbs. Thematic roles help distinguish different intransitive verbs, whereas comparing and contrasting them helps define the unaccusative construction. After the definition of the unaccusative is clarified, a literature review of the IL unaccusative is presented, followed by a study of the use of IL unaccusatives by Thai students.

2. Thematic roles

Thematic roles are semantic functions of sentential arguments (Gruber, 1965; Fillmore, 1968; Jackendoff, 1972, cited in Radford, 1988, p. 372), where each argument is assumed to bear a specific thematic role. The thematic roles that are commonly assumed and that are relevant to this study are listed in (2).

(2)

- a. *Agent/Actor*: the one who intentionally initiates the action expressed by the predicate. (Haegeman, 1995, pp. 49-50)
e.g. *John* hit *Mary*.
- b. *Patient*: the person or thing undergoing the action expressed by the predicate. (Haegeman, 1995, pp. 49-50)
e.g. *John* hit *Mary*.
- c. *Theme*: the person or thing undergoing change. (Roberts, 1987)
e.g. *John* ironed *the shirt*.
- d. *Experiencer*: the entity that experiences some (psychological) state expressed by the predicate. (Haegeman, 1995, pp. 49-50)
e.g. *John* feared the dog.

The above thematic roles are applied to the discussion below.

3. Unaccusative, ergative, and unergative verbs

Unaccusative (i.e. *happen, appear, occur*), ergative (i.e. *grow, melt, sink*)¹, and unergative (i.e. *sleep, die, smile*) verbs are traditionally called intransitive verbs. Because their properties are

¹ The terms *ergative* and *unaccusative* in this paper follow Haegemann (1995); they are, however, used differently in other studies. *Unaccusative* is used as *ergative* in various literature including Zobl (1989) and Yip (1995). The unaccusatives and the ergatives in this paper and in Haegeman correspond to Yip's (1995) *unpaired-ergatives* and *paired-ergatives* and Oshita's (2000) *alternating unaccusative* and *nonalternating unaccusatives* respectively. *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics* (Bussman (Ed.), 1996) defines the unaccusatives and the ergatives as the same type of verbs. According to Haegeman, "the classification of the unaccusatives and the ergatives is the matter of ongoing research" (Haegeman, 1995, p. 337). Thus, to maintain consistency in this paper, the ergative refers the intransitive that has a theme subject and pairs with the transitive, whereas the unaccusative is an intransitive that has a theme subject, but does not pair with the transitive.

distinct, they are referred to in the above terms. Unaccusative² verbs have a theme in the subject position, as in *the girl disappeared*, where *the girl* is the theme. Like unaccusatives, ergatives also have a theme subject; however, unlike unaccusatives, ergatives pair with transitives, as in (3).

(3)

- a. Ergative: The grass grew.
- b. Transitive: Tom grew the grass.
- c. Unaccusative: The problem arose.
- d. *Transitive: Tom arose the problem.

The ergative in (3a) differs from the transitive in (3b) in that the subject of the ergative is a theme, while the subject of the transitive is an agent. In other words, the ergative has no agent, but the transitive has an agent.

Like the unaccusative and the ergative, the unergative has one argument, but it is similar to the transitive in that its argument is an agent or an experiencer. Table 1 displays how the verbs are classified in this study.

Table 1: Classification of verbs according to their argument structures

VERBS			
AGENTIVE		NON-AGENTIVE	
Transitive	<i>Ergative</i> (intransitive)	<i>Ergative</i> (intransitive)	<i>Unaccusative</i> (intransitive)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John ate the cake. • Marco drew the picture. • Paul teaches English. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John smokes. • Marco died. • Paul swam. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The grass grows. • The vase broke. • The rain drops. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The accident happened. • The lightning occurred. • The sun rises.

² The term unaccusative refers to the fact that the verb does not have accusative case to assign (see *abstract case* in Haegeman, 1995)

The above table not only distinguishes the four types of verbs, but it also explains why the traditional term *intransitive* is not used in this study. Having one argument, the ergative and the unaccusative are superficially identical to the *unergative*, another type of intransitive verb; however, the subject of the unergative is not a theme, but an agent/experiencer. This property of the unergative subject makes it similar to the transitive, whose subject is also an agent/experiencer.

The ability to have agent subjects enables the transitive and the unergative to passivize, as demonstrated in (4) and (5).

(4) Transitive

- a. Active: Marco drew a picture.
- b. Passive: A picture was drawn (by Marco).

(5) Unergative

- a. Active: The cat slept a good sleep.
- b. Passive: A good sleep was slept.

In (5a) *the cat* is the experiencer of *sleep*. Since *sleep* can be followed by a cognate object NP, (Wanner, 2000)³, the construction can be passivized, as in (5b).

Having no agent, both the ergative and the unaccusative are unable to passivize, as in (7b), (7d), and (8b).

(6) Transitive

- a. Active: Anne dropped the cake.
- b. Passive: The cake was dropped (by Anne).

(7) Ergative

- a. Active: The cake dropped (because the table collapsed).
- b. Passive: *The cake was dropped (by the table⁴).
- c. Active: The rain dropped.

³A cognate object is not considered an argument (Wanner, 2000), but is more likely to function as a modifier of the verb since it does not provide new information. It only elaborates on the condition of the action.

⁴In this case, *by the table* is the passive *by*-phrase, which the noun following *by* is an implicit agent. The passive *by*-phrase is different from a propositional phrase, which indicates location, as in *the cake was dropped by/near/on the table*.

d. Passive: *The rain was dropped.

(8) Unaccusative

a. Active: The accident happened.

b. Passive: *The accident was happened.

Even though the passive in (7b) **the cake was dropped*, seems grammatical without the passive *by*-phrase, it does not convey the same semantic interpretation as its transitive counterpart in (6b). The ungrammaticality of (7b), (7d), and also (8b) is for the same reason: it lacks an agent. That is to say that *the cake* in (7a) and *the rain* in (7c) dropped on their own and that no one caused them to drop. The same analysis applies to *the accident* in (8), which also has no agent. Thus, examples (6)-(8) lead to the conclusion that the ergative and the unaccusative are similar in that they cannot be passivized with no agent. They differ, however, in that only the ergative has a transitive counterpart with similar verb forms. In addition to the ergative *drop* (7), other ergative verbs are *sink*, *break*, *melt*, and *grow*.

Other distinctive properties of unaccusative verbs are that they can have existential *there* in the subject position, as in (9).

(9)

- a. ...there occurred another incident...(attested)⁵
- b. ...there appeared to be a real danger...(attested)
- c. There arose a big outcry (Haegeman & Guéron, 1999, p. 244).

4. Review of literature on IL unaccusative constructions

In spite of its ungrammaticality, passivizing English unaccusative constructions is common amongst EFL speakers from different language backgrounds, as shown in (10).

(10)

- a. *The most memorable experience of my life was happened 15 years ago. (Arabic L1)

⁵ The attested examples are from Francis and Kucera (1960s).

- b. *Most of people are fallen in love and marry with somebody.
(Japanese L1)
- c. *The World War III would be happened. (Chinese L1)
(Yip, 1995; Zobl, 1989)

These structures have led to three major camps of theories and analyses about the root of the passivization, (i) influence from the L1, (ii) association of the unaccusatives with passivization, and (iii) association of *be+en* with a theme subject or an absent agent subject.

4.1 L1 influence

Richards (1973, cited in Oshita, 2000) claims that the passive unaccusative construction results from the difference in *auxiliary + past participle* system between L1 and L2, since this system is different in many languages such as Italian, French, and German. Oshita (2000) argues, however, that the structure has been found mostly in the interlanguage (IL) of Korean, Japanese, and Chinese speakers, whose L1s do not have the *auxiliary + past participle* combination. In a study with Japanese subjects, Masuko (1996) discovered that the production of the passive unaccusative by Japanese L1 speakers could be traced to an adversative passive construction⁶ in the L1. This study shows that in the English writing of Japanese L1 speakers, unaccusatives are passivized in adversative contexts, as in (11).

(11)

- a. The earthquake was occurred in Hokkaido.
 - b. The accident was happened last Sunday.
- (Masuko, 1996)

A different conclusion is drawn by Zobl (1989), who studied subjects from various backgrounds. Zobl (1989) concludes that the passive unaccusatives produced by Japanese speakers are due to some unaccusative verbs in English being ergative verbs in

⁶ Japanese adversative passive constructions are passive constructions that apply to events with unfavorable results, such as *the boy was hit*, *the thief was caught*, and *the garbage was dumped*.

Japanese. His conclusion is supported by Hirakawa (1995), who found that EFL learners who speak Japanese as their L1 tend to accept passivized English unaccusatives that are ergatives in Japanese.

4.2 Association of unaccusatives with passivization

Zobl's analysis does not apply to Chinese L1 speakers, since Chinese unaccusatives and ergatives are parallel to those in English. Instead, the passivization of unaccusatives by Chinese L1 speakers can be traced to their not distinguishing between the unaccusatives and transitives (Balcom, 1997; Yip, 1995). In this instance, the researchers take two main positions on how unaccusatives and passivization are related: (i) unaccusatives are overgeneralization of adjectival passives⁷ and (ii) passivized unaccusatives are passivized transitive verbs.

The overgeneralization of the English adjectival passive has been suggested as a potential cause of passive unaccusatives (Hubbard, 1994; Hubbard & Hix, 1988, cited in Oshita 2000). This was suggested because the passive unaccusative is similar to the passive without a *by*-phrase, which is the adjectival passive, as in (12) and (13).

(12) Adjectival passive: The island is unoccupied. (Ouhalla, 1999)

(13) Unaccusative passive: *The World War III would be happened. (Yip, 1995)

Oshita (2000) argues that unlike adjectival passives, passive unaccusatives do not carry out the adjectival property of modifying a noun phrase. The phrase *the unoccupied island* is possible for the adjectival passive, while the phrase **the happened World War III* is

⁷ Adjectival passives, as in *the island was uninhabited*, are constructions where the internal arguments surface as structural subjects, as in the verbal passive construction, *the picture was painted*. The difference is that the verbs in adjectival passives become adjectives since "they display properties usually associated with adjectives" (Ouhalla, 1999, p. 170). Being adjectival passives, the verbs can take the prefix *un-*, which is usually an adjectival prefix. The verbs in adjectival passives can modify nouns like adjectives, as in *the uninhabited island* (Ouhalla, 1999).

unlikely. Also adjectival unaccusatives have never been found in the IL.

The treatment of passivized unaccusatives as passivized transitives is more convincing. Evidence comes from Yip (1995), who tested whether learners treat unaccusatives as passivized transitives and whether learners have knowledge of unaccusatives. To do this, she gave a grammaticality judgment task with unaccusative and passive constructions to 20 Mandarin L1 speaking EFL students. The learners considered the passives correct and the unaccusatives incorrect. They also rewrote the unaccusatives into passive unaccusatives. This task provides strong evidence that the learners did not have knowledge of unaccusatives; therefore, they could not distinguish between the unaccusatives and the transitives. One of the learners explained that the unaccusative structure was not taught in his home country, Taiwan. He did not know that there was a structure where the subject was a theme and the verb was not morphologically changed. He had been taught that whenever the theme was in the structural subject position, passive morphology would be needed.

Yip's findings are supported in Balcom (1997), whose subjects are 38 L1 Chinese speaking university students, who were given a grammaticality judgment task and a cloze test. She found that the form *be+en* was widely accepted with unaccusatives, ergatives, and transitives (Balcom, 1997) and that the subjects interpreted passive unaccusatives as a variation of unaccusatives. The cloze test also revealed that unaccusatives were frequently used with the form *be+en*.

The analysis that EFL learners interpret unaccusatives as transitives has wide support in previous research (Balcom, 1995; Hirakawa, 1995; Shomura, 1996; Montrul, 1997; Yip, 1994, cited in Oshita, 2000). It is possible that passivized unaccusatives result from the fact that the learners are interpreting unaccusatives as underlyingly transitive, because constructions that treat unaccusatives as transitives, as in (14), are found (Yip, 1995).

(14)

- a. *This construction will progress my country.
- b. *She has been suffered the pain of tangled legs.

(Yip, 1995)

4.3 Association of *be+en* and a theme subject or an absent agent

Zobl (1989) believes that learners associate a lacking agent with the *be+en* construction. Yip (1995) agrees with Zobl that learners discover that unaccusative verbs and passive verbs are similar in that they have no agents but have themes in the subject position. Thus, they identify the two structures as the same. The passive morphology *be+en* is selected for both verbs to mark the lack of an agent.

Oshita (2000), however, believes that instead of identifying *be+en* with the having no agent, it is more likely that learners identify *be+en* with the theme being in the subject position. In other words, in the IL, *be+en* is overgeneralized as an indication of a theme subject in passive unaccusative constructions. Oshita's data comes from "the *Longman Learners Corpus* (Version 1.1, March 1993), which is a large computerized database of primarily written English produced by native speakers of various L1s" (Oshita, 2000, p. 306). Oshita chose the data produced by Italian, Spanish, Japanese, and Korean speakers. Japanese and Korean speakers have been found to produce the most passive unaccusatives (Oshita, 2000). The sentences with unaccusative verbs were extracted with their immediate contexts to provide a clear interpretation of the uses of the verbs.

In the discussion above, passive unaccusatives have been analyzed as an overgeneration of *be+en* regardless of L1 language background. At least three major analyses arise from the study of the passive unaccusatives. The analyses that have not been opposed include, interference from the L1 ergative construction; a lack of a distinction being made between unaccusatives and transitives; and the identification of underlying object movement and *be+en*.

5. Passive unaccusative construction by Thai students

This section discusses the study of passive unaccusative constructions by Thai students. The aim of this discussion is to investigate whether the results conform to the findings from the literature review and whether any previous theory applies. Despite

the many studies on the IL unaccusative construction, only example from a Thai student is included. This appears in Zobl (1989), repeated here as (15).

(15) **My mother **was died** when I was just a baby. (Thai L1).*

The above example is invalid for the study of the unaccusative verb in IL because the verb *die* is an unergative verb not an unaccusative verb. The subject of *die* is an experiencer and the verb can take a cognate object, as in *my mother died a peaceful death* (section 2).

Moreover, there are two possible interpretations for (15). First, the construction can be interpreted as the passivization of an unergative verb. The other interpretation is that *be* in sentence (15) can be interpreted as the main verb, which introduces the adjective *dead*. It is possibly that the learner who produced (15) wished to use the main verb *be+ dead* instead of the auxiliary *be+ died*. The learner might have confused *died* and *dead* or they might not have realized that there was a distinction between the two words, which have similar spellings, pronunciations, and meanings. Similar data are found in my current study as shown in (16).

(16)

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

The examples support the assumption that the target sentence is likely to be (16c) or (16d). The subjects were asked to write a sentence with the words *dog* and *die* (section 5.1). Seven of the 38 students produced one of the sentences in (16), while the others used the verb *die* correctly. Example (16e) also reveals confusion with the forms of the adjective *dead* and the past participle *died*.

Since example (15) is invalid, it is assumed that no study of Thai speakers' English unaccusative verb has been done. Thus, this study investigates the use of English unaccusative verbs by Thai students to see if any of the theories and analyses from the previous studies (section 3) apply. The hypothesis is that Thai

students, like the Chinese students from past studies, will passivize unaccusative verbs.

5.1. Data collection

The data collected were from a written test completed by 38 third-year Thai students at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. Their majors were international business, marketing, accountancy, and finance. At the time of the test, these students had taken all six English classes required to graduate. Their levels of proficiencies ranged from pre-intermediate to advanced intermediate.

The test was designed to target the passive and the unaccusative constructions. It comprises 25 pairs of nouns and verbs. The verbs given were not only unaccusatives (e.g. *happen, occur*) and transitives (e.g. *push, paint*), but also unergatives (e.g. *die, sleep*). The latter were given to divert the attention of the students from the targeted constructions. ten transitive, six unergative, and nine unaccusative verbs were ordered randomly; thus, it was expected that the subjects would produce ten passives, six unergatives, and nine unaccusatives. None of the terms referring to the targeted constructions were mentioned. In order to elicit only the expected constructions, the students received the instructions in (17). The examples of results are shown in (18).

(17)

Write complete sentences from the subjects and the verbs given.

Examples:

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

(18)

a. accident, happen *The accident was happened.

- b. book, read The book was read.
 c. boy, walk The boy walked.

Examples in (18) are produced by the Thai subjects. (18a) is an ungrammatical passive unaccusative construction, whereas (18b) and (18c) are passive and unergative constructions, respectively.

5.2 Findings

Only 11 students (28.95%) had no problem with unaccusative verbs. The rest of the students passivized the unaccusative verbs. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Passivization of unaccusative verbs by Thai students

Unaccusative verbs	Passive unaccusative
1. happen	18
2. expire	11
3. occur	11
4. arise	12
5. appear	9
6. disappear	9
7. fall	5
8. arrive	3
9. rise	0

Table 2 shows that the majority of the students passivized the verb *happen*, while none of the students passivized the verb *rise*. Although the same number of students passivized *appear* and *disappear*, one did not influence the other. This could be

determined because not all students who passivized *appear*, passivized *disappear*, and vice versa. Examples are shown in (19).

(19)

- a. *The accident was happened since years ago.
- b. *The stranger was disappeared.
- c. *The shadow is appeared.
- d. *The mistakes were occurred.

5.3 Interview

Nineteen students were interviewed about the grammatical and ungrammatical unaccusatives they had produced (i.e. passive unaccusatives). When asked why they had chosen the form that they did, four of those who produced one or two ungrammatical forms realized their mistakes and corrected them; unfortunately, two of the students who had produced only grammatical unaccusatives changed some of their answers to ungrammatical forms.

5.3.1 Ungrammatical unaccusatives

Fourteen students thought that constructions such as that in (19) were grammatical because the subject could not initiate the event expressed by the predicate; they believed that there had to be an initiator. For example, an accident could not happen by itself and a stranger could not disappear by himself. Some of them added that the sentence subject was affected by the action. This finding implies that these students realized that the semantic function of the unaccusative subject is a theme, yet they still believed that the event required an agent (section 2).

Other reasons for **the accident was happened* also came to light. One student said that she produced the sentence because she thought that the verb *happen* always occurred with *was*, as in *what's happened*. Similarly, another student who produced the same ungrammatical sentence insisted that she was familiar with **...was happened*.

5.3.2 Grammatical unaccusatives

As for the grammatical unaccusatives, four students said they thought the active form was correct because the event described in the sentence could happen to the subject without an agent initiating it. Thus, mistakes could occur on their own, leaves could fall naturally, and a shadow could appear naturally. Like the 14 students who produced the ungrammatical unaccusatives, these students also intuitively realized that the unaccusative subject is a theme; they did not believe, however, that an agent was required to initiate the event.

Only one student among those who produced the grammatical forms said that she was familiar with unaccusatives because she had been taught that the given unaccusative verbs were intransitive.

5.3.3 Summary

From the interview, two parallel reasons were given for both the grammatical unaccusatives and the ungrammatical unaccusatives, as listed in (20) and (21).

(20) Students' reasons for the ungrammatical unaccusative:

- a. The sentence subject could not be part of the event without an agent.
- b. Familiarity with ungrammatical forms

(21) Students' reasons for the grammatical unaccusative:

- a. The sentence subject could be part of the event without an agent.
- b. Familiarity with grammatical forms

6. Discussion and conclusion

Like subjects in previous studies, the Thai students in this study were likely to produce passive unaccusatives. Zobl (1989) and Hiragawa's (1995) theory on the transfer of L1 (section 3.1) is invalid for this study because Thai unaccusatives are parallel to English unaccusatives, as exemplified in (22).

(22)

- a. oubatihet kerd-kun
accident happen/occur
'The accident happened/occurred.'
- b. bai-mai ruang
leave fall
'Leaves fall.'

Excluding the theory of L1 influence, all theories presented in section 3 are applicable in the current study.

6.1 Passivization as an indication of a theme subject and an implicit agent

Both Zobl (1989) and Oshita's (2000) theories are applicable to most of the passive unaccusatives produced by the Thai students. Zobl claims that the passive marker signals a lack of an agent at surface structure, while Oshita argues that the passive marker signals that the theme is in the subject position (section 3). According to the interview, most students passivized the unaccusatives because they thought the unaccusative subjects were unable to initiate the event. Some of them added that the subjects were affected by the action. This reveals that the students realized that unaccusative subjects are themes of transitive verbs, which require an agent to initiate the event (section 2). *Be+en* was, therefore, overgeneralized to indicate both the theme subject and the lack of an agent.

As further explanation for the students' interpretation of unaccusatives, Oshita believes that the learners' motivation to signal the theme subject follows Kellerman's (1983, cited in Oshita, 2000) *Reasonable Entity Principle*. In this principle, Kellerman (1983) states that learners tend to treat the L2 rule as if it were reasonable. If specific knowledge about the L2 is absent, they generalize the rule that they think is logical.

Kellerman's principle is tenable for the data of the current study because the majority of the students seemed to lack knowledge of unaccusatives. They, thus, attempted to generalize

the rule that is logical to them. Those who constructed the grammatical *the stranger disappeared...* reasoned that the sentence subject could be part of the event on its own. On the other hand, those who constructed the ungrammatical **the stranger was disappeared...* reasoned that the sentence subject could not be part of the event without an initiator. The latter reasoning arose from the students' confusing unaccusatives with transitives because they thought unaccusatives were passivizable like transitives (Balcom, 1997; Yip, 1995). However, the alternations from ungrammatical to grammatical forms and vice versa during the interview imply that the students lacked confidence in their reasoning.

6.2 Overgeneralization of the adjectival passive

Hubbard (1994) and Hubbard & Hix's (1988) analysis (in Oshita 2000) of the overgeneralization of the adjectival passive can also apply to some of the data in this study. Their analysis states that **the accident was happened* can be an overgeneralization of an adjectival passive, as in *the island was occupied*. In this instance, verbs with *-ed* not only function as passivized verbs, but also function as adjectives (section 3.2). This analysis can apply to *the milk was expired* and to its variations in the data. **The milk was expired* is ungrammatical when analyzed as a passive because *expire* cannot be passivized. This ungrammaticality, according to Hubbard (1994) and Hubbard & Hix's (1988), is due to an overgeneralization of the adjectival passive. *The milk was expired*, however, is actually grammatical when *expired* is interpreted as an adjective, but not when it is interpreted as a passivized verb. Unlike other unaccusative verbs, *expired* can function as both an adjective and as an unaccusative verb, as in *the milk expired*. In spite of the dual functions in the data, however, it is likely that the students intended to construct **the milk was expired* as a passive with *expired* functioning as a verb. This conclusion can be drawn from the fact that students who produced sentences with the verb *be* + *expired* insisted that the milk cannot expire on its own and that there has to be something initiating the expiration.

6.3 Input factor

One factor contributing to the production of the ungrammatical unaccusatives that has not been included in previous studies is the influence of input. The students could interpret the input *what's happened* to mean **what was happened* instead of *what has happened*. This, in turn, could result in the output **...was happened*. Another possible explanation for ungrammatical unaccusatives that arises from the input *what's happened* concerns the students' pronunciation of *what's happened*. The students' L1 makes their pronunciation of *what's* and *was* similar. Double final consonant clusters, such as [ts] in *what's* [wəts] and the consonant sound [z], as in *was* [wəz] do not exist in Thai. Consequently, when the students pronounce *what's*, they are likely to omit one consonant from the final cluster, in this case, [t], resulting in [wəs] for *what's* [wəts]. Meanwhile, their pronunciation of *was* [wəz] becomes [wəs] due to the lack of [z]. Therefore, the Thai students' pronunciation of *what's* and *was* is likely to be [wəs], which is one reason why Thai students' confuses *what's happened* with **was happened*.

The analyses of the input, the students' theme-agent generalizations, and the adjectival function of the past participle reveal that students rarely, if ever, receive formal instruction on the unaccusatives. This is underscored by the fact that only one student mentioned learning about the unaccusatives in class. This finding echoes Yip (1995), who found that her Taiwanese sample was never taught the unaccusative construction.

6.4 Conclusion

Passive unaccusatives, as in **the accident was happened* and **the shadow was appeared* produced by Thai students can occur for four reasons. First, the construction can come from the students' attempt to signal that the sentential subject is a theme and that the event requires an agent. Second, it can stem from the inability of the students to distinguish between the transitive and the unaccusative. Third, in the case of *the milk is expired*, it is likely due to an overgeneralization of the past participle as an adjective. Finally, the students might rely on their own

interpretations of pronunciation input. This is the case with *what's happened*, which influences **...was happened*. These findings also imply that classroom instruction has not played a prominent role in the acquisition of unaccusative constructions.

This study shows that, despite the fact that the students have taken all the English courses required to obtain their bachelor's degree, most of them are still unable to construct grammatical unaccusative sentences. It is hoped that the findings of this study will raise awareness about unaccusatives, which will lead to more focus being placed on this construction in the instruction of English.

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