

## Grammatical Constructions Written by Thai EFL Learners in a National Competition Context

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### Article information

#### Abstract

This study examined the ability of Thai EFL learners to use grammatical constructions to report facts in descriptive writing. The context of the study is different from previous studies as the context was a national written competition in which the participants took part in the activities willingly. The conceptual frameworks for observations followed Radford's (2023) Generative Model of English Syntax, Kearns' (2011) Semantic Principles of Compositionality and Kreidler's (2024) Factivity. These frameworks were useful to study form and meaning as they are based on rules regarding how words combine together. The text analysis showed four grammatical constructions including passive constructions, subjective complements, existential *there* constructions and transitive complements. The research study was a quantitative analysis of texts written by Thai students. The participants were 67 Thai senior high school students in Thailand, participating in a national English writing competition held by a Thai university with the support of the Thai Ministry of Culture in 2024. The participants were assigned to write descriptive essays. The grammatical constructions were manually coded and entered into SPSS version 29. The analysis revealed a statistically significant association between senior high school students' English writing performance and their use of grammatical constructions for reporting factual information ( $p = 0.001$ ). When comparing the results of Thai senior high school

	students with a previous study of American senior high school students, it found that that both groups showed a similar result relating to grammatical constructions in English. However, the difference between the two groups was the pragmatic discourse of given and new information. Cohesion was reported as a major problem among Thai senior high school students. The results of this study may be helpful for Thai classrooms by highlighting issues related to the form and function of language use. Thai schools and stakeholders may consider how cohesion and coherence can be taught to help strengthen students' communicative competence and writing in English.
<b>Keywords</b>	descriptive writing, factivity, grammatical constructions, principle of compositionality, Thai EFL learners
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## 1. Introduction

Writing is an important skill in English. From the perspective of a language teacher, most EFL learners mention that developing writing skills is difficult because it requires a wide range of knowledge to complete a writing task (Mohammad, et al., 2020). When writing in English, EFL learners are required to have knowledge of paragraph components, linguistic knowledge and world knowledge, which guide what they describe. The interesting point is that EFL learners acquire each piece of knowledge separately, such as through a class on writing, a class on language and their own experience of world knowledge. It isn't until one day that they are instructed to combine everything together into a piece of writing—such is likely to be a difficult experience.

Different text varieties are likely to have different orientations of grammatical constructions. The passive voice is common in methodology as the agent is widely known as the researcher(s) (Wongkittiporn, 2025a). For example, in the sentence, “the data analysis in this study was calculated by SPSS version 29,” spelling out *the researcher* repetitively makes the section appear unprofessional. However, *verbless adverbial phrases* such as in ‘fry until golden,’

are preferred in cookbooks as temporality is important in cooking. Accordingly, the two mentioned structures show that each genre has its own stylistics of grammatical constructions for learners to learn.

In English, not only are grammatical constructions divided into independent clauses and dependent clauses (Swan, 2016), but they are also used to report *objectivity* and *subjectivity* (Nuyts, 2015). Independent clauses are the main clauses which can stand alone grammatically. For example, the independent clause “Jerry was hit by Tom” is in the passive voice. The movement of the DP ‘Jerry’ in the passive voice is a contextually pragmatic dependency, such as in pragmatic discourses of givenness (Wongkittiporn, 2025a).

However, dependent clauses cannot stand alone (Swan, 2016), such as that of adjective clauses and adverbial clauses. Otherwise, such dependent clauses lead to ungrammaticality (Radford, 2023). For example, saying “if I study hard” is ungrammatical, so the dependent clauses are the context to support the textual analysis in this study.

Related previous studies have paid attention to the study of grammatical constructions to report facts among USA senior high school learners. One interesting study observed how US high school students’ writing used grammatical constructions for factual reports (Fang, et al., 2020). The students in this study were instructed to write a piece of descriptive writing on crocodilians. The results showed that the participants employed various grammatical constructions in their descriptive writing, such as subjective complements, existential *there* constructions and passive voice in English.

(1a) To get out of the egg, they use *what is called egg tooth*. (Transitive Complement)

(1b) Another way they sleep is *by sticking there [their] snout out of the water and just float there until something wakes it up*. (Subjective Complement)

(1c) There are *some alligator farms where alligators are raised to be killed for food and their skin*. (Existential *there* Construction/ Passive Voice)

(Fang, et al., 2020, pp. 6-7)

Examples (1a)-(1c) show grammatical constructions to report facts. The existential *there* construction is applied to report the objective of feeding alligators, such as those for commercial purposes and staples. This study revealed that American high-school students were concerned about the study of grammatical constructions in their descriptive writing. In the context of Thai learners, researchers Thongchalem and Jarunthawatchai (2020) incorporated news media to develop a group of students' writing skills. Forty-four undergraduate students majoring in English were instructed to study various grammatical constructions of authentic texts from various news sections. Then, they were given a writing test. The students writing on factual reports had improved with statistical significance when their work was compared to their written pretests. Moreover, Ishikawa (2016) found that Thai EFL learners frequently used noun clauses with reporting verbs, such as *address* and *inform* to report facts. Although reporting factual information in writing is necessary, it seems that Thai EFL learners' knowledge of grammatical constructions is limited (Phoocharoensil, 2011; Timyam, 2014). The gap in this study is that less attention has previously been paid to the study of grammatical constructions used to reports facts as produced by Thai senior high school students. This leads to the following research questions:

1. What grammatical constructions are written by Thai EFL senior high school students?
2. What is the relationship between grammatical constructions produced by Thai EFL senior high school students and the grammatical constructions in a US tourism website?

## 2. Literature Review

This section reviews the theory underlying the study and related previous research. Generative grammarians proposed that every language has a system. If not, it leads to ungrammaticality (Radford, 2023). Furthermore, functional linguists believe that language is constrained by functions. The functions of language in this sense refer to its use. English language writers should place contextual information before writing a new piece of information to create cohesion and coherence in writing (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

## 2.1 Model of Generative Linguistics

Generative grammarians believe that language is systemic and explanatory. The users of a language can explain whether a sentence is grammatical or not (Culicover, 2021; Lyons, 1978; Radford, 2023). Generative grammarians point out two types of structures: *deep structures* and *surface structures*. The deep structure is conceptualized in the speakers' linguistic competence. The surface structure is what is spoken or written. According to Radford (2023), the English language has a *non-null subject parameter*. Omitting the subjects in English lead to ungrammaticality. For example, the DP subject in the passive voice is moved to the subject position, receiving a nominative case, thus becoming the subject of the sentence. Thus, the DP subject in the passive voice is analysed as movement. However, the expletive *there* subject is the subject that remains in situ. It is added to fulfill the extended projection principle (EPP), so all clauses in English need a subject. Raised DPs and those remaining in situ have different purposes. The DP movement in the passive voice is used for cohesion—to link the given and new information (Smolka, 2017). For example. *Jerry was hit by John. Then, he laughed at him.* Although the word *then* is a cohesive connector, the pronoun *he* is assigned the nominative case mark as being tied to the pronoun *John* from the previous sentence.

## 2.2 Semantic Principle of Compositionality

Not only can a speaker of a language judge the grammaticality of a sentence, but they can also judge its meaningfulness. Kearns (2011) points out that language is used to express information about reality. Thus, the concept of 'meaningfulness' refers to words and expressions. For example, the descriptive word *dogs* show the denotation of the entity it describes. The word *dog* has its denotations as a set of dogs. The word *dog* is applied to all dogs in the world. Words and the objects in the real world are interconnected.

The *Principle of Compositionality* refers to the meaning of sentence structures according to its constituent expressions how words are combined (Kearns, 2011). This principle is based upon word orders and sentence structures. As such, the meaning of a sentence comes from the derivations of the meaning of words. Thus, the principle allows us to understand the interaction of entities in the real world.

The *Principle of Compositionality* also includes certain semantic aspects, such as truth condition, tense and mood. The mood of the sentence “Tom hit Jerry” is one of a declarative statement. Example (2) shows the relationship between the meaning of the whole sentence and its connection with the real world, known as *factivity* (Kreidler, 2014).

(2) Chulalongkorn University was the first university in Thailand.

The expression in this sentence is true since Chulalongkorn University exists in the real world. It is also true that it was the first university in Thailand. The sentence has a truth value as it is true in the actual world.

Sentence: Chulalongkorn University was the first university in Thailand.

Extension: Truth value in the actual world.

Intension: The set of all possible worlds in which Chulalongkorn University is the first university in Thailand.

The intention of a sentence is “the set of all possible worlds in which that sentence is true” (Kearns, 2011, p. 8). When the intention of a sentence is written down, it is referred to as the truth set for that sentence. Kearns’ (2011) truth-conditional theory of meaning is semantically applied in this study.

(3) Thailand is a Southeast Asian country.

Thailand is a country in the world, so sentence (3) has truth value. Thailand is located in Southeast Asia, so the denotation in sentence (3) also has truth value. However, the *semantic denotations* of having a truth value can be reported by a variety of grammatical constructions, such as (4).

(4a) Thailand is the country in Southeast Asia. (Subjective complement)

(4b) Southeast Asia includes Thailand. (VP complements)

(4c) There is a country called Thailand in Southeast Asia. (Existential *there*)

(4d) Thailand is located in Southeast Asia. (Passive constructions)

The semantic denotations in examples (4a) to (4d) have the same truth value. However, they possess different grammatical constructions in English. It is

intriguing to investigate which grammatical constructions are used to report fact by Thai EFL learners.

### **2.3 Related Previous Studies**

This section reviews related previous studies. For example, USA high-school students report facts by combining different grammatical constructions.

(5) There are *some alligator farms where alligators are raised to be killed for food and their skin*.

(Fang, et al., 2020, p. 9)

Some people might think that American students can use grammatical constructions in a more complex way. However, different genres of writing have different preferences for grammatical constructions in writing. The genre of this writing is online websites about tourism.

Although online websites do not have space limitations, it is unlike an academic genre where complex and dense information are preferred. On online websites, the visitors want to absorb information as quickly as possible (Goddard, 2002) to decide whether they would like to visit the place or not.

In study by Wongkittiporn (2022), passive constructions in Australian, American and British newspapers were explored. The use of passive constructions to report facts in American, British and Australian business newspapers are 81.51, 70.86, and 59.19% respectively. The passive constructions in American business news are mostly used for factual reports, such as (6).

(6) Projects were completed ahead of schedule.

In example (6), we see that the use of the passive voice in American business news is systemic. For instance, after the projects were developed, the company plans what they are going to do next (e.g., an advertising campaign to attract their target audience is launched).

Wongkittiporn (2023a) explored applied linguistics research articles in the SCOPUS database to study passive constructions. The articles from

Wongkittiporn (2023a) taken from *PASSA*, *rEFLECTIONS* and *LEARN* journals were written by Thai academic researchers who were Thai lecturers and professors. The semantic denotations of passive voice in these articles were factual reports. The structures were used in the section of methodology to address how the data were analyzed and validated.

(7) [...] the questionnaire was found to be reliable according to Cronbach Alpha value (23 items;  $\alpha = .715$ ).

(Sakulprasertsri, 2022, p. 130 as cited in Wongkittiporn, 2023a, p. 60)

The passive voice in example (7) was used to report factual information concerning the numerical data used in data validation.

Regarding error analysis, Septianasari (2019) studied Thai EFL learners' errors to transform their written active voice into the passive voice. The most frequent error type among this group of participants was omission errors (45%), such as omitting the word *by* and the copular *be*. Timyam (2014) reported that the use of existential *there* constructions among Thai EFL learners was rather consistent. Phoocharoensil (2011) reported that, as a result of L1 transfer, Thai EFL learners dropped the prepositions that collocate with transitive verbs, such as *\*listen music*. Together, these studies showed that Thai EFL students struggle with the use of grammar in English writing. Thus, targeted instructions in these areas may be necessary to strengthen students' overall grammatical accuracy.

## 2.4 Context of the Study

The context of the present study differs from earlier research studies (Septianasari, 2019; Mohammad; 2020; Langford, 2024) because it examined a written national competition in Thailand, in which participants voluntarily registered and demonstrated a clear willingness to compete. In this study, grammar was treated as one of the most important elements of writing, serving as a key variable for assessing students' scores and their overall English language competence. The findings offer pedagogical implications for supporting Thai EFL learners in developing stronger writing proficiency.

Furthermore, this study followed a theoretical framework called Kreidler's (2014) factivity in writing. The framework was proposed by a US semanticist to



explain how factual information was reported through grammatical constructions in English. According to this theoretical concept, grammatical constructions that were used in authentic contexts such as that of on the US government tourism website were further examined. The focus of the website was tourism as it complied with the written competition.

The criteria for selecting the website were based upon the popularity of USA tourism destinations. Insightful information concerning specific samples could be gained from in-depth analysis. The official website of the Tourism Authority of American Tourism is [www.visitidaho.org](http://www.visitidaho.org), which belongs to the Idaho Department of Commerce and Tourism Development. The government website was selected for its reliability, the authority of its data sources, and the accessibility of its reports to the public. It also had a print version as written by Fanselow (2022). Thus, the information used in this study was reliable, current and publicly available.

Based on the textual analysis of the information on the website, the texts on the American tourism website were examined as references for grammatical constructions used in the descriptions of places. The writings on place descriptions were examined on the website for a total of one hundred sentences. Observations were capped at 100 sentences once pattern saturation was reached.

Before visiting the websites, the researcher was required to have a model of generative syntax (Radford, 2023), principles of compositionality (Kearns, 2011) and factivity (Kreidler, 2014).

**Table 1**

*Grammatical Constructions in English*

Grammatical Constructions	Examples
Subjective Complement	Thailand is a country in Southeast Asia.
Passive Construction	Thailand is located in Southeast Asia.
Existential <i>there</i> Construction	There is a country called Thailand in Southeast Asia.
Transitive Construction	Southeast Asia consists of Thailand.

Table 1 shows independent clauses to report facts in English. The data were analyzed semantically, based upon the semantic approaches to ascertaining truth values (Kearns, 2011; Kreidler, 2014), such as (8).

(8)	Subject	Predicate
	Thailand	is a country in Southeast Asia.

*Thailand* exists in the real world. It has a semantic truth value. The predicate “is a country in Southeast Asia” also has truth value. Therefore, the truth value of example (8) is true. The statement is true because the sentence expresses something that exists in the real-world (Saragih & Siti, 2017; Wardiman et al., 2008).

When we integrate concepts from the works of Radford (2023), Kearns (2011) and Kreidler (2014), the steps of documentary research become systematic as in (9).

(9a) Ayutthaya is a province in Thailand.

(9b) Ayutthaya is the most beautiful province in Thailand.

Example (9a) is factual as it is true that Ayutthaya is a province in Thailand. In contrast, example (9b) is subjective as not everyone considers Ayutthaya to be the most beautiful province in Thailand. Hence, the tokens with subjectivity were not considered in the textual analysis.

The textual analysis of the information on the government tourism websites revealed four grammatical constructions used to report facts: subjective complements, passive voice, existential *there* constructions and transitive complements. The grammatical construction used to report facts in tourism advertisements on the US government website that had the highest percentage was that of the passive voice at 44%. The second highest ranking was that of subjective complements at 29%. The existential *there* constructions were in third place at 16%, while transitive complements were in fourth place 11%. These grammatical constructions were used as authentic references for examining grammatical constructions in this study.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Ethical Consideration**

This study was approved by the IRB and has taken into account ethical considerations. The participants were informed about the objectives of the study and the positive benefits they would gain at the competition. They were verbally informed that their written essays would then be anonymously used for further research. If any of the participants was not willing to take part in the study, participants could withdraw themselves from the study at any time.

#### **3.3 Research Design**

To follow the objective of the study, it is suitable to use a quantitative research design (Pajo, 2018) to answer the research question. The textual analysis of the information on the website was used as references of grammatical constructions. Then, the data were gathered from Thai EFL learners. The results of Thai high school students in this study were compared with a previous study of American high school students as mentioned in the literature review.

The references for the grammatical constructions used to report facts were from authentic texts. The results of the study will show whether Thai undergraduate students can apply grammatical constructions accurately. The variables of grammatical constructions would lead to precise measurement, scores, and the assessment of the students' English proficiency at an appropriate level.

##### **3.3.1 Participants**

The participants in this study were Thai senior high school EFL students, known as *Mattayom students*. The 67 students selected (both male and female) made up 45 students from public schools and 22 students from private schools. Since this study took place during a national competition, the students were willing to participate in the competition themselves as supported by their school. It was assumed that the levels of English proficiency of these participants were above average when comparing with other Thai high school students.

On competition day, a staff member from a Thai university with the support of the Thai Ministry of Culture organized a national competition for those

who wanted to use the English language. One part of the competition was an essay writing section. Before the competition started, the information was posted on the faculty website and Facebook. Those who were interested in the competition could voluntarily join the competition. The competition took place on January 2024, from 9.30–11.30 am. The participants were required to be on university campus at the time of the competition.

### 3.3.2 Instrument Validation

The instrument in this study is the written topic *A Travel Destination in Thailand*.

Instructions:	Describe a Travel Destination in Thailand
Objective:	To describe a travel destination in Thailand
Word Count:	180-200 words (120 minutes)

The researcher asked three English lecturers from Thai universities to be expert reviewers. The experts considered the topics using an IOC whether it was suitable to the participants in this study. Based on the IOC, the three experts all unanimously agreed that the writing topic “A travel destination in Thailand” was not only suitable to the learners’ level, but that it was also pertinent to the Thai government’s national policy to promote tourism in Thailand.

### 3.3.3 Data Collection

The data collection process was carefully conducted as it involved a competition and a trophy from the Thai Ministry of Culture. The competition was carried out in a computer room with a total of 67 seats, but without internet accessibility. Each participant was carefully screened before entering the competition room for electronic devices to avoid cheating. The instructions were then carefully explained to the participants. The writing prompt was presented using pictures of travel destinations in Thailand, such as temples, mountains and beaches. The participants needed to relate these pictures to the concept of tourism, which was the Thai government’s national policy in 2024. The room where the data were collected was proctored by five research assistants to avoid cheating. Finally, the data were saved in the computer to avoid the loss of data and they were sent for the process of data analysis. The participants’ level of English proficiency in this competition was not known, which is a limitation for this study. However, it is assumed that schools had sent their most proficient

students to compete in this English writing competition. Because the written work was produced in an official competition reflecting both the students' and schools' reputations, the data were considered strong and reasonably representative of the students' actual writing.

### 3.3.4 Data Analysis

This quantitative study employed Pearson's product-moment correlation, with all of the data analyzed using SPSS Version 29. The patterns of grammatical constructions followed Radford's (2023) generative grammar. The principles of compositionality followed Kearns (2011) and Kreidler (2014). The components of descriptive writing followed Wardiman et al. (2008) and Saragih & Siti (2017). The method of data coding in this study is explained in Table 2. When the participants reported facts using grammatical constructions, this was considered *objectivity* in this study. However, if the sentence structure of subjectivity contains personal opinions and attitudes, it was excluded from this current study.

**Table 2**

*Coding Schema*

Condition A: Objectivity	Condition B: Subjectivity
If the grammatical constructions of subjective complements, passive voice, existential <i>there</i> constructions and transitive complements in the participants' descriptive writing were objective, code 1 was given.	If the grammatical constructions of subjective complements, passive voice, existential <i>there</i> constructions and transitive complements in the participants' descriptive writing were subjective, code 2 was given.

With this coding schema, the data were coded for inferential statistical analysis using Pearson correlation.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 RQ 1: What grammatical constructions are written by Thai EFL senior high school students?

There are four grammatical constructions found in the participants' writing. These are subjective complements, passive constructions, existential *there* constructions and transitive VP complements.

#### 4.1.1 Subjective Complement

The *subjective complement* is the additional information about a subject. The determiner phrase or DP in the subject position and the DP as the copular *be* complement can be interchanged. This movement does not affect the grammaticality of the sentence as in “Thailand is a country” or “a country is Thailand.” The examples in (10) are subjective complements to report facts.

(10a) Thailand is the country in Southeast Asia.

(10b) Tuk Tuk is a three wheels vehicle with a back seat like the car.

(10c) Painted umbrellas are examples of great skills that are passed from generation to generation.

The subjective complement is used to present the meaning of the location of Thailand. It is also used to describe a kind of transportation and the object a tourist should see when visiting a place.

#### 4.1.2 Passive Constructions

Passive constructions involve the movement of DP entities from the object position to the subject of a sentence. The agent can be omitted if needed. Examples of the passive voice to report descriptive writing are shown in (11).

(11a) Thailand is known by many names; Kingdom of Thailand, Venice of the East or Land of Smiles.

(11b) Tuk-tuk has been recognized as signature of Thailand.

Passive constructions in English report similar ideas. For example, it is used to describe Thailand and its location. It is also used to report on transportation for tourists to travel to places. It seems fair to note that the information about Thailand, transportation, places to visit and food are described using the passive voice.

#### 4.1.3 Existential *There* Constructions

The existential *there* construction is a subject movement to the right position after auxiliary *be*, while the expletive *there* with zero meaning semantically is filled in as in (12).

(12a) Nowadays, there are many tourists travelling to Thailand.

(12b) There are a lot of temples in Thailand.

(12c) There are a variety of Thai food here, such as Pat Thai and Tom Yum Kung.

Like subjective complements and passive constructions, existential *there* constructions are used to report the same ideas, such as Thailand, modes of transportations and food.

#### 4.1.4 Transitive VP Constructions

The transitive VP is a grammatical construction in which the complement follows the verb to complete its meaning, as in *has and contain*.

(13a) The temples here have unique characteristics.

(13b) People travel here by Tuk Tuk, which is a three-wheel mini car with open.

VP Transitive complements are used to address places to visit and modes of transportation. To sum up, these four grammatical constructions are used to report the same facts, such as Thailand, locations to visit, transportation and food.

#### 4.2 RQ 2: What is the relationship between grammatical constructions produced by Thai EFL senior high school students and the grammatical constructions in a US tourism website?

The statistical analysis of grammatical constructions written by the participants are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Correlations of Thai Senior High School Students' Descriptive Writing and Grammatical Constructions to Report Facts*

Correlations			
		Tokens	Facts
Grammatical Constructions	Pearson Correlation	1	.319**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	109	109

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results show a statistically significant relationship between Thai senior high school students' use grammatical constructions to report facts, such as the passive construction, the subjective complement, the existential *there*, and the transitive complement. The  $p$ -value was reported at 0.001.

The grammatical constructions of subjective complements that were used to report facts from the participants' writing were found at 60 sentences. The results show a statistically significant relationship between the participants' grammatical constructions and subjective compliments to report facts. The  $p$ -value was reported at 0.01.

The grammatical constructions of passive voice used to report facts from the participants' writing on Thai tourist destinations were found to be at 27 sentences. The results show a statistically significant relationship between the participants' grammatical constructions and passive constructions. The  $p$ -value was reported at 0.01.

The existential *there* construction used to report facts related to Thai tourist destinations, as produced by senior high school students, were found to be at 11 sentences. The results show a statistically significant relationship between the participants' grammatical constructions and their existential *there* constructions. The  $p$ -value was reported at 0.02.

The grammatical constructions of transitive complements as produced by senior high school students were found to be at 11 sentences. The results show that there was a statistically significant relationship between the participants' grammatical constructions and the existential *there* to report facts. The  $p$ -value was reported at 0.02.

## 5. Discussion

This section is the discussion of the study. It explains Thai senior high school participants' linguistic competence concerning the use of grammatical constructions to report facts in English.



## 5.1 Generative Model

### 5.1.1 Null Subject Parameter

The existential *there* constructions between US tourism websites and senior high school students' writing of Thai tourist destinations were at 11% and 10.09%, respectively. This percentage shows that existential *there* on the USA tourism website seems to be almost the same as the Thai senior high school students' writing. This similarity is explained by the *null subject parameter*. Normally, the English language is a non-null subject parameter. However, the Thai language is a null subject parameter (Radford, 2023). This means that the subject in English is required in all clauses while the subject in the Thai language is not always required. The DP subjects in existential *there* in English are moved to be landed as VP postmodifiers. This movement fits with the parameter in the Thai language in (14b).

(14a) There are a lot of temples in Thailand.

(14b) ∅ มี วัดมากมายในประเทศไทย

Although the expletive *there* in English is added to support the EPP feature as English is a non-null subject parameter (Radford, 2023), the topic moving to the same position makes existential *there* common among Thai EFL learners. However, example (14b) is evidence to show that Thai is a null subject parameter. Due to having different parameters, this may interfere with Thai EFL learners' use of existential *there* in English.

### 5.1.2 Sentential Order

The similarity between the informational structure of the English language and the Thai language is SVO. If one analyzed the syntactic representation of this information structure between Thai and English, they are the same. Disregarding morphological features, the syntactic representations in this discussion follow Radford (2023). Universal grammar can be explained by this phenomenon. The information structure and grammatical constructions between English and Thai share the same syntactic features. For example, S has become NP and VP (Fromkin, et al. 2014).

## 5.2 Functionalism

### 5.2.1 Theory of End-Weight Principle

This section outlines different theories of information structure to explain why secondary school participants employed different grammatical constructions to report facts in their descriptive writing. To begin with, the theory of end-weight principle is one reason to explain the existential *there* in English. The theory of end-weight principle refers to placing the longer part of information in the final position of the sentence. (Jiménez-Fernández 2020; Smolka, 2017). The grammatical construction of existential *there* is an appropriate construction for this purpose, such as (15).

(15a) There are many tourists that come to Thailand.

(15b) There are many places in Bangkok to visit, such as a temple or a restaurant.

When using existential *there*, the writers integrate them with dependent clauses. Examples of adjective clauses are shown in (15a) while control constructions can be seen in (15b).

This theory is partially applied with VP complements. The percentage between the two constructions are exactly the same because they use the same hidden purposes as in (16).

(16a) *People travel here by Tuk Tuk*, which is a three-wheel mini car with open.

(16b) Each region has its own cultural interpretation *which illustrates their uniqueness*.

The transitive verb requires a DP complement (Radford, 2023). When they are DP objects, post-modifications are allowed. This is the reason to explain why CP dependent clauses could be applied in this position to elongate the sentence. The DP postmodifier in (16a) is an adjective clause, which denotes a description. In contrast, the adjective clause in (16b) gives the meaning of culture.

### 5.2.2 Pragmatic Discourse of Given and New Information

The grammatical constructions of passive constructions, which are used by senior high school students in Thailand, are explained by the pragmatic discourse of givenness. *Discourse of givenness* refers to providing given information in the subject position so that it is linked with the previous discourse. This practice leads to cohesion in writing (Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Kim, 2015; Sanders & Canestrelli, 2012; Smolka, 2017), such as (17).

(17a) One of the most popular landmarks in Thailand is beautiful *temples*.  
*Temples* were built in Thailand many centuries ago as a representation of Buddhism.

(17b) Another ancient place is *Pra Pathom Chedi*. *Pra Pathom Chedi* is located in Nakhon Pathom province.

The word *temples* in the subject position in (17a) was raised to the Spec T as the raised DP because the writer linked this piece of information as the given information leading to the effect of cohesion between sentences. This is also similar to example (17b) where the DP proper name *Pra Pathom Chedi*, a place to visit, is adjoined with its previous discourse.

Although passive constructions are the structures to describe facts, the lower frequency of passive constructions in English is explained by the *theory of markedness*. The theory of markedness is not a new theory, but it explains this phenomenon. The theory of markedness refers to marked and unmarked features. Marked features are uncommon features. However, unmarked features are common features (Andersen, 2001; Andrew, 1990). For example, the past tense with the inflectional morpheme *-ed* is an unmarked feature as it is a common form. The uncommon form is idiosyncratic, such as *went*.

Linguistic theory is also applied to grammatical constructions in English. Compared against other grammatical constructions, the passive voice is classified as a marked structure in English due to the raised DP or argument movement. The DP object is moved into the subject position. Subject movement is not a common practice in English. Moreover, forming the passive voice requires writers to understand the other several processes involved. The *by*-phrase agents can be omitted if necessary. There are four ways of omitting *by*-

phrase agents, which are widely-known agents, concealed agents, unimportant agents and unknown agents, such as (18).

(18a) One of the most popular landmarks in Thailand is beautiful *temples*. *Temples* were built in Thailand many centuries ago as a representation of Buddhism.

(18b) Another ancient place is *Pra Pathom Chedi*. *Pra Pathom Chedi* is located in Nakhon Pathom province.

The writer used the passive voice to talk about historical places established a long time ago. So, the *by*-phrase agents are omitted because the writer does not have this factual information. That is why it is the right structure to use.

Due to the unmarked feature and complexity of passive constructions in English, the writers selected other constructions called *subjective complements*. The subject complement is similar to passive constructions in that they support pragmatic discourse of givenness (Wongkittiporn, 2025a). However, the subjective complement is less complicated and supports the movement with the least effort of requirement cognitively. The syntactic structures of subjective complements comply with the pragmatic discourse of givenness, such as (19).

(19a) *Thailand* is the country in Southeast Asia.

(19b) *The answer* is Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand.

(19c) *Tuk Tuk* is a three wheels vehicle with a back seat like the car. generations to generation.

The subject in (19) links the information in the previous discourse. Moreover, the DPs on either side of the copular *be* in subjective complements are interchangeable, such as (20a), while example (20b) is the modified version.

(20a) *Thailand* is the country in Southeast Asia.

(20b) The country in Southeast Asia is *Thailand*.

Example (20a)–(20b) are semantically the same, because it reports the factuality of the location of Thailand. However, they are different pragmatically.

One of the uses complies with the pragmatic aspect of the theory of end-weight principle. The writers use subjective complements to place long information at the final position as in (21).

(21a) Thai temple is *the place that have been with Thailand for a long time*.

(21b) Tuk Tuk is *a three wheels vehicle with a back seat like the car*.

The first reason is the theory of end-weight principle. In examples (21a)–(21b), the DP longer pieces are the elaboration of *Thai temples* and *Tuk Tuks*.

### 5.3 Error Analysis of Avoidance

Subjective complement to give factual report were used correctly, but they are used with a lower frequency.

**Table 4**

*Grammatical Constructions to Report Facts between Thai Senior High School Students' Descriptive Writing and USA Tourism Websites*

	USA Tourism Website Frequency %	Thai Senior High School Students' Writing Frequency %
Subjective complements	29 29	60 55.05
Passive voice	44 44	27 24.77
Existential <i>there</i> constructions	11 11	11 10.09
Transitive verbs	16 8.66	11 10.09
	104	109
Total	100	100

Table 8 shows grammatical constructions used to report facts between senior high school students' writing and USA tourism websites. The percentages

of passive voice showed some differences. However, the differences seem much larger in the use of subjective complements. The higher frequencies of subjective complements can be explained by Thai senior high school students who use subjective complements for two reasons, namely the theory of end-weight principle and the pragmatic discourse of givenness. This affects the lower frequency of passive constructions produced by Thai EFL senior high school students. This phenomenon can be explained by *avoidance*.

*Avoidance* in applied linguistics refers to the decision to use one language feature over another to avoid producing an error (Kleinmann, 1977; Laufer & Eliasson, 1993). Sometimes, the language user lacks sufficient knowledge of grammatical rules. They tend to avoid certain forms by using another form (Elyildirim, 2017). The writing program in this study involves students participating in a national competition and vying for a national trophy from the Thai government, so there was no room for mistakes. Due to this reason, to ensure accuracy, the subjective complement was used in substitution of the passive voice. Doing so enables the same linguistics features, in that the DP can be raised to the Spec T position to comply with the pragmatic discourse of givenness to report facts. The passive voice is a marked structure in English. It is not an in situ structure like SVO. However, the DP subject in the active voice is required to be moved to the subject position. The DP subject in the active voice is transformed into the *by*-phrase agent and the writer requires semantic knowledge to add or delete this function, such as in cases of unknown agents. To avoid complexity, subjective complements are used instead.

#### **5.4 EFL Learners and Descriptive Writing**

Descriptive writing on a topic about tourist destinations is viewed as an effective topic for students to use language to express truths about the world. According to Kearns (2011), real-world objects and the language we use are interconnected. For example, the Thai language has only one word to represent snow call *hima* because Thai people do not have this phenomenon in their geographic location. Nevertheless, Polish has three words to mean snow because half of the year there is winter. In the study, the Thai tourist destinations that the participants always described were temples, palaces and pagodas. The mode of transportation often mentioned was the *tuk tuk*. This reflects a truth about the world that is familiar to the participants. When assigning composition activities that are genre-based, such as descriptive writing and compare-and-contrast

writing, English teachers must consider their students' background knowledge and the truths that are familiar to them.

### 5.5 Comparison with Previous Studies

While previous studies have mentioned various errors made by EFL learners as explanations for ungrammaticality (Elyildirim, 2017), the participants in this study were not high school students with low English proficiency. Avoiding the use of complex sentences might not be because they did not have certain grammatical knowledge. However, it can be said that the participants may have written more conservatively to avoid making mistakes in their writing because they were trained by their schools in this way. The sentence structures used to report facts in English written by the participants were similar to that of US high school students. They were able to employ the four structures effectively (Fang, et al., 2020).

(22a) Alligators are born from eggs. (Passive Voice)

(Fang, et al., 2020, pp. 6-7)

(22b) Thailand is located in South East Asia. (Passive Voice)

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According to example (22), the two groups of participants could use the passive voice correctly. However, the complexity of usage is sometimes different.

(23a) [...] they use *what is called egg tooth* [...]

(Fang, et al., 2020, pp. 6-7)

(23b) Some menu contains *herbs and flowers*.

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It was found that noun clauses are often used by US high school students as the preferred complement of transitive verbs. In contrast, it was found that Thai high school students often used a noun phrase as the preferred VP complement.

Compared to the findings in Wongkittiporn's (2022) study of passive constructions in American news, the semantic interpretations of sentence structures written by the participants in this research appeared to be similar. Passive constructions in American news were mostly used to report facts at

81.51%. More importantly, the semantic denotations of passive constructions were developments and locations, which the participants in this study could apply them correctly, such as (24).

- (24a) Padthai *was invented* in the 1930s in the order of Field Marchal  
Plaek Phibunsongkram. (Development)  
(24b) Thailand *is located* in South East Asia. (Location)

The participants could use the same grammatical constructions and semantic denotations in the same way as American journalists. Despite having similarity in regard to form and meaning, the linguistic aspect that Thai high school students lack is that of discourse, especially in cohesion. Each single grammatical construction was filled in with the right semantic denotations. However, the cohesion from one sentence to another was lacking.

- (25) The temple here were built since the start of Rattanakosin era. The next thing that tourists like to try is *Tuk Tuk*.

Example (25) shows that the participants lack knowledge of cohesion in their writing. When considering the first sentence and the second sentence, they are individually grammatical and meaningful (Kearns, 2011; Radford, 2023). However, they lack cohesion between *the temple* and *Tuk Tuk*. So, it can be said that they lack knowledge of pragmatic discourse of givenness (Jiménez-Fernández, 2020). This linguistic aspect makes the participants in this study different from US high school writers. Aside from the cohesion between sentences, they avoid using pronouns to link the given information with the previous discourse as in (26).

- (26) Another ancient place is *Pra Pathom Chedi*. *Pra Pathom Chedi* is located in Nakhon Pathom province.

The proper name *Pra Pathom Chedi* can be replaced by the pronoun *it*. However, it cannot be concluded that the participants avoid using the pronoun *it* to replace the proper name in the previous discourse. Wongkittiporn (2023) found that proper names, terminology and abbreviations in applied linguistics articles are often not replaced by pronouns.



(27) However, without any FMPs, the formality of an utterance is treated as casual but not informal. FMPs are also considered to actively code the speech formality more than personal pronouns [...]

(Sukgasi, 2022, as cited in Wongkittiporn, 2023b, p. 236)

Example (27) shows that it is possible for the abbreviation of FMPs in the second sentence as shown above to be replaced by the pronoun *they*. However, the author of the example sentence does not do it. Wongkittiporn (2023b) interpreted that the keyword is an important term of the research article. In this way, the readers of research articles search to read only words or concepts relevant to their own research. If this interpretation is true, the pronoun *it* which could be an error regarding the *ignorance of the rule restriction*. This is because *Pra Pathom Chedi* may be the main topic of the writer's story which the writer could have wanted to place emphasis on. Therefore, interpretations of pronoun replacements have not been yet concluded by Wongkittiporn (2023b).

As the researcher in this study does not have direct experience being a senior high school teacher, how much emphasis on cohesion and coherence is made in Thai high school English writing classrooms is uncertain. If the emphasis on discourse cohesion is often not made in English classrooms, it is suggested that English teachers at Thai senior high schools should teach this linguistic aspect to their students.

## **6. Conclusion and Pedagogical Recommendations for Thai Senior High School's Policies**

Based on this study's analysis of Thai senior high school students' writing that textually analyzed a US tourism website, a significant relationship between grammatical constructions used to report facts and various grammatical constructions was evident. The results of this study show that grammatical constructions and semantic denotations of senior high school students' descriptive writing is closer to US native speakers. However, this study reveals that Thai students avoid certain complex structures, such as the passive voice where they could use the subjective complement instead. This arguably would affect students' communicative competence in the long run.

In terms of the pedagogical implications, it is suggested that teachers engage their students with various questions about how they might form grammatical constructions in their writing. The following three questions are recommended for teachers to ask their students:

1. Is what is written factual or subjective, or both?
2. Is what is written in the previous sentence?
3. What is the genre of the text? (i.e., academic prose)

The grammatical constructions used when giving facts, providing opinions or evaluating are all different. When the teachers suggested the learners to combine two sentences together, adding the knowledge of cohesion would help them link sentences smoother. Different genres have their own preferences for form, function and use (Wongkittiporn, 2025b).

Finally, Thai senior high school schools should add teaching sessions and activities to boost their students' pragmatic knowledge of cohesion and coherence in related English subjects. For example, writing classrooms should include sessions concerning the functions of language in addition to form and meaning. It is urgent to promote Thai EFL learners to have skills that engage pragmatic discourses of givenness and to teach learners how to link a sentence with one that precedes it. This would allow Thai EFL learners to become more successful in their English academic writing.

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