

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This chapter is organised into 2 sections, to address the two questions posed in Chapter 1(p. 12).

#### **Research Question 1:**

Did the students' use of the simple be-passive to write a description of a process improve at the end of the study?

The improvement mentioned in Question 1 was gauged in terms of the accuracy of the students production of the simple be-passive structures. An overview of this was established by comparing the number of errors students made in their Attempt 1a at the beginning of the study and Attempt 2 which was written at the end of the study.

The second part to the answer to this question was answered by examining the students' performance in each of the five aspects of the be-passive structure which had been brought to the student's attention during the lessons carried out.

### Students' Overall Performance

Table 1 presents a tabulation of the number of errors students made in Attempt 1a and Attempt 2:

**Table 1**  
Breakdown of Students by the Number of Errors they  
Made in Be-Passive Structures in their  
Attempt 1a and Attempt 2

No. of Errors	Attempt 1a	Attempt 2
	No. of Students	No. of Students
No Error	6	24
1-3 Errors	13	7
4-7 Errors	10	1
Unable to fulfill task	3	-

Table 1 clearly shows that the students' ability to produce be-passive sentences improved tremendously at the end of the study. 24 students were able to monitor their be-passive structures so well they did not make any of the five errors they were "taught" to avoid compared to only six at the beginning. Seven students made between one to three errors and only one made between four to seven errors in their Attempt 2 compared to 13 who made one to three errors in Attempt 1a and ten who made four to seven errors in Attempt 1a.

Student 6c, (one of the three who were categorised under those unable to fulfill the task at the beginning of the study) made numerous grammatical errors in her Attempt 1a and as a result badly distorted her piece of writing. The other two students categorized under this group had written their description in the imperative voice.

Even though the main focus of this study was on the form of the be-passive, these three students successfully picked up the overall nature and intent of the task. By the end of the study, they knew that it was not appropriate to describe the process in the imperative and had written their Attempt 2 in the passive voice; an achievement, even if they had not mastered it completely.

Looking at Table I, one can conclude that the students' use of the be-passive to describe a process improved as a result of the intervention that occurred in this action research.

However, it would also be useful to identify which of the five errors the students made most of and check if the students were equally successful at rectifying each of the five types of errors highlighted in this study.

Table 2 on the next page shows the number of errors students made or failed to correct in the five aspects of the be-passive sentences to describe processes in their Attempt 1a, Attempt 1b, Attempt 1c, Handout 6 and Attempt 2.

TABLE 2 : Number of Errors Students Made or Failed to Correct in the Five Aspects of the Be – Passive Sentences to Describe Processes In Attempt 1a, Attempt 1b, Attempt 1c, Handout 6 and Attempt 2

Grp1	P.P. Verb Not Used					Auxiliary Missing					Subject/Aux. Agreement					Inappropriate Form					Inconsistent Tenses				
	a	b	c	d/10	e	a	b	c	d/2	e	a	b	c	d/4	e	a	b	c	d/1	e	a	b	c	d/5	e
1a	2													2											
1b				9	1				2					4					2	2	1				5
1c				3	1					1				2											
1d			3	3	8						1	1		2	2				1	1					2
1e														1											
Grp2																									
2a	4	4																							
2b	3																								
2c	1	1	1	6																					
2d										1															
2e	1	1		3					1					3					2	2	1				1
Grp3																									
3a																									
3b																									
3c																									
3d				2	1									2					2	1	1				2
3e				3						1				2					1	1					
3f										2				4											1
3g				7					2					3	4	*			1	2					
Grp4																									
4a					2																				
4b				4										3		1			1						3
4c	4	4		1										3		1									5
4d														4		2	1	1	1						
4e				2										2		1									
4f				3	1	2								4					1						5
4g																			1						4
Grp5																									
5a				1										4		*	1	1	1						2
5b				10						2				4		2	2	2	1						1
5c				1																					
5d	3	3	3	7						2				4		1	1	1	1						5
5e	1	1	1	3						2				4		2			1						4
Grp6																									
6a																									
6b	1	1								1				2			1								
6c	6	6		2	1					2				3			1	1	1						1
6d																									
6e	5	6		6						2				2					1						2
6f	1	1		1						2				3		1	1	1							
T	15	12	7	24	5	1	1	1	20	2	1	1	1	26	3	13	13	12	16	1	1	-	-	-	18

a. Attempt 1a

b. Attempt 1b

c. Attempt 1c

d. Handout 1d

e. Attempt 1e

T: Total number of Students

P.P. Past Participle

Students are coded: e.g. 5a: Student "a" from Group 5

e.g. d/10: means there are 10 errors in this aspect in Handout 6

e.g. d/10: means there are 10 errors in this aspect in Handout 6

Students are coded e.g. 5a: Student "a" from Group 5

a: Attempt 1a b: Attempt 1b c: Attempt 1c d: Handout 6 e: Attempt 2

\*: Inherent of task unutilized T: Total number of Students P.P. Past Participle



## **Students' Performance in the Five Aspects of Be-Passive**

Table 2 is a simple frequency count of the number of errors the students made or missed correcting in their five pieces of output; Attempt 1a, Attempt 1b, Attempt 1c, Handout 6 and Attempt 2. It charts the progress or lack of progress of the students in the five aspects of the be-passive focused upon in this action research. The five aspects mentioned refer to the use of the past participle verb, presence of the auxiliary, subject-auxiliary agreement, appropriacy of form and consistency of tenses.

These five aspects of the construction of the simple be-passive were singled out for special focus because unless students master these they will not be able to produce a comprehensible be-passive sentence. Due to the limited scope of this action research errors unconnected to these five were ignored.

From Table 2, it was evident that many students who had problems with the construction of the simple be-passive were unable to differentiate between the active and passive structures. Many neglected to use the past participle form of verb.

Only 1 student, 5b, left out the auxiliary "be" in three of his simple be-passive sentences in his Attempt 1a.

Under subject-auxiliary (usually known as subject-verb) agreement, one student, 4f, was noted to have made one such error in his Attempt 1a.

None of the students had inconsistent tenses in their description of the recycling of aluminium cans(Attempt 1a).

The following is a more detailed account of how the students fared in each of the five types of error and where possible, case studies of students who made the error is given to throw more light into how the students improved or digressed:

a. Past Participle Verb Not Used

The errors concerning the use of the past participle verb was extracted from Table 2 and presented in Table 3 on the next page.

Out of the class of 32 students, 16 were noted to exhibit difficulties in this area in their Attempt 1a (and one only began to show he had difficulties in the form of verb in his Attempt 1b; he had earlier written his Attempt 1a in the imperative) Between Attempt 1a and Attempt 1c, half of them had successfully changed all their erroneous verb forms into the past participle.

In Handout 6 when they were asked to identify and rectify errors in the description of a process; ten of the main verbs in be-passive sentences which were supposed to be in the past participle were not in their correct form, 11 of these 16 students failed to rectify all of them; seven of them managed to rectify between nine to seven of the main verb form into the past participle while the nine failed to rectify more than half the errors. Only five managed to rectify all the ten errors in this aspect.

Interestingly though, only two students failed to use the past participle form of verb in their be-passive sentences in Attempt 2. (The students wrote an average of about 15 sentences when describing how bottles are recycled in Attempt 2. Between 10 to 12 of these sentences were simple be-passive.) Table 3 very clearly

shows that these two students had made only one error each in this aspect of the simple be-passive.

**Table 3**

Progress of Students Who Had Initially Not Used Past Participle Verbs In Terms of The Number of Errors Made In their Attempts

Student	At.1a	At.1b	At.1c	Hd.6	At.2
1a	2				
1d		3	3	8	
2a	4	4			
2b	3			1	
2c	1	1	1	6	
2e	1	1		3	
3c	2			2	1
4b	4	4	4		
4c	4		1		
4e	3	3	1	2	
5d	3	3	3	7	
5e	1	1	1	3	
6a	1	1			
6b	6	6		2	1
6d	5	6		8	
6e	1	1		1	
Total Number of Students:					
16	15	12	7	11	2

In short, despite the students dismal display in their ability to identify and correct errors in the form of the main verb in Handout 6, they were very successful in terms of monitoring their own sentences in the be-passive structures in Attempt 2.

There are many possible reasons for this phenomena. I would like to think that the students had benefitted from their group discussion of Handout 6. However, it could perhaps be that these students were unsure of the spelling of the past participle form of many of the verbs in Handout 6 and as a result could not rectify them. Or, there might be other more complex issues involved here. Rather overwhelmed by the many complexities of handling the action research, I had not stopped to ask these questions.

Whatever the reason may be, the point is that their awareness of the need to use the past participle form of verb in a be-passive construction had been greatly improved.

FAKULTAS HUMANIA UNIVERSITAS BINA WISATA

#### b. Missing Auxiliary

Table 4 on the next page show that one student did not insert an auxiliary "be" before the past participle verb in his be-passive sentences in Attempt 1a.

**Table 4**

Number of Missing Auxiliary in Student 5b's Be-Passive  
Sentences in His Five Pieces of Output

Student	At. 1a	At. 1b	At. 1c	Hd. 6	At. 2
5b	3	3	3	2	2

Only one student, 5b, was noticed to have problems in this area. He made 3 such errors in his Attempt 1a. Since there was only one student who exhibited problems in this area, I will chart his progress as a case study. Below is one of the three errors he made in Attempt 1a:

"Then a wrench used to remove the big screws from each end to inspection the pipe."

where he did not realize that he should have inserted the auxiliary "is" between "wrench" and "used". The other error he made, using the word "inspection" when "inspect" would have been more appropriate, is overlooked in this action research since it is not related to the simple be-passive studied here.

In Handout 2, he wrote that he "discovered that in a description the sentences used the passive voice and recipient of action put in front". He seemed to have a general sense of a certain difference between the active and passive voice but had not mastered the details that made the difference. 5b was however absent later on and did not attempt Handout 3 and 4. As a result, he failed to spot

or rectify the 3 errors in his Attempt 1b and 1c.

He failed to identify the 2 places where the auxiliary "be" should have been inserted in Handout 6. The only mention he made of having become aware of anything about the be-passive was in Handout 6 after the group discussion, "In the pasif[passive] voice, I must use the past participle". This is understandable, he had failed to correct all 10 mistakes pertaining to the form of the passive verb.

However, he made the giant leap of correctly constructing 11 simple be-passive sentences describing how bottles are recycled in his Attempt 2. He only neglected to add in the auxiliary in 2 simple be-passive sentences. It is very interesting to note that in these two instances, the error he made was in fact less serious compared to the ones many students made when constructing the same sentences.

Many students in this action research, wrote sentences such as these:

"Then the bottles are sent to the boiler and steriliser machine to boil and sterilise the bottles".

and

"The bottles are sent to a labelling machine to print labels on the bottles".

5b however, wrote:

"Then the bottles are sent to the boiler and steriliser machine. It used to boil and sterilise the bottles".

and

"The bottles are sent to a labelling machine. It used to print labels on the bottles."

While the sentences "...to boil and sterilise..." and "...to print labels..." imply that the bottles are the ones doing the boiling and printing, which is erroneous, 5b's sentences, despite the missing auxiliary, made it clear that the "It" which "boil and sterilise the bottles" refers to the "boiler and steriliser" of the first sentence. Similarly, the "It" in the second example refers to the "labelling machine" and not the bottles.

At which point 5b became aware of the necessity of placing an auxiliary before the passive verb in a simple passive sentence is not very clear but the fact is that he had begun to show that he knew how to use it.

As a concluding remark, only one student made the error of consistently not putting in an auxiliary before the main verb of a be-passive sentence but it was largely overcome by the end of the study.

### c. Subject-Auxiliary Agreement

Table 5 which was extracted from Table 2 charts the progress of Student 1d who was the only one with a subject-auxiliary agreement error in his Attempt 1a.

**Table 5**

Progress of Students Who Had Initially Made Errors in Subject-Auxiliary Agreement in Terms of the Number of Errors Made in this Aspect

Student	At. 1a	At. 1b	At. 1c	Hd. 6	At. 2
1d	1	1	-	2	2

Student 1d made one error in subject-auxiliary agreement in Attempt 1a but rectified it in Attempt 1c. The error Student 1d made was in the following sentence:

Error in Attempt 1a:

"A wrench is used to remove the big screws that is at each end of the inspection pipe".

The "is" after "the big screws that" does not function as an auxiliary in this sense. It is more a problem with subject-verb agreement.

After attempting Handout 5, he wrote that he realised that "all the verb 'be' must change to plural(depends on R/A[recipient of action])".

Consequently, in his Attempt 1c he rectified it by changing it into a be-passive structure:

"The big screw that is at each end of the inspection pipe is remove[removed] using a wrench".

In Handout 6, Student 1d could only identify and rectify two of the four errors in this aspect which were inserted into the description.

However, the majority of the students in this class, 22 out of the class of 32, were unable to identify all the four errors of this nature which I had inserted into Handout 6. (See Table 2, p.53) Out of this 22, eight students could not identify and correct all four of the errors. Only five students managed to identify and correct all four of the errors in Handout 6.

In Attempt 2 however, only two students, Student 1d and Student 3f had errors in subject-auxiliary agreement; the rest of the class did not make this error.

Despite having become aware of and exhibiting the ability to rectify such



error, Student 1d lapsed and made two errors in subject-auxiliary agreement in his Attempt2.

It was due to carelessness on his part. I say this because the other eleven sentences in his Attempt 2 had correct subject-auxiliary agreement.

Student 3f was one of the three students who was unable to fulfill their task in their Attempt 1a. He wrote the description of how aluminium cans are recycled in Attempt 1a in the imperative voice. Since he did not construct any be-passive sentences, no errors in the construction of simple be-passive sentences could be tabulated. In short, the absence of errors in his Attempt 1a, Attempt 1b and Attempt 1c(he was absent from school when Attempt 1b and Attempt 1b were done by the others) did not mean that he was able to construct be-passive sentences correctly.

Student 3f was in fact weak in the English Language and it came as no surprise that he was unable to detect the four errors in subject-auxiliary agreement in Handout 6. In Attempt 2, he made an effort to write the description in passive sentences. It was far from error-free but it had begun to have a resemblance of a description of a process using simple be-passive sentences.

Nothing conclusive can be said about this type of error. The one student who made an error in subject-auxiliary agreement in his initial piece of work, Attempt 1a, successfully corrected it in his Attempt 1c but continued to make errors in this in his Attempt 2.

d. Inappropriate form

By "inappropriate form" I have in mind here the wrong type of sentence structure students used in their description of a process.

For instance, while it would be appropriate to use the passive structures and even the simple present or simple past, it would be inappropriate for students to describe a process using, for instance, the imperative form which is more suitable for giving instructions.

Even though the main objective of the tasks in this action research was to promote accuracy of the students' be-passive structures, the over-riding concern was still to enable the students to fulfill the communicative intent of describing a process in an acceptable and appropriate form. Appropriacy of choice of sentence structure, which is part of grammatical accuracy was also examined in this study.

Table 6 on the following page charts the progress of students who used inappropriate sentence structure or form to describe processes.

**Table 6**

Progress of Students Who Had Initially used Inappropriate Sentences In Terms of the Number of Errors Made in this Aspect

Student	At.1a	At.1b	At.1c	Hd.6	At.2
1b	2	2	2	1	
1d		1	1		
2d	2	2	1	1	
2e	2	2	2	1	
3a	1				
3c	2	1	1		
3d		1	1	1	
3f	*	*	*	1	2
4a	1			1	
4b	1				
4c	2	1	1	1	
4d	1	1			
5a	*	1	1	1	
5b	2	2	2	1	
5d	1	1	1	1	
5e	3			1	
6e	1	1	1		
T: 17	15	13	12	11	1

T : Total Number of Students

\* : Use of Imperative sentences throughout the description

15 students muddled up their descriptions, using between one to three imperative sentences to describe how a process is carried out in Attempt 1a instead. However, 6 of these students corrected this error and changed the active sentences into the passive in Attempt 1b or Attempt 1c. There were 12 students, however, who by the time they came to Attempt 1c still failed to correct them.

This was probably connected to the fact that prior to this action research, the students learnt to use the imperative to give instructions on how to fix things. Furthermore, the first piece of exercise they did (Attempt 1a) was to transform a set of instructions which was written in the imperative voice into the passive.

One active sentence, using the imperative voice was inserted into Handout 6. 11 students failed to spot and correct it. Most of them cite carelessness as their reason for the oversight. In Attempt 2, only Student 3f (who used the imperative to describe in Attempt 1a) made the mistake of using imperative sentences (2 sentences) in the description of how bottles are recycled. The rest of the class did not make this mistake.

The following is a case study of Student 5e who used inappropriate type of sentence structure to describe how aluminium cans are recycled in Attempt 1a:

The following is the description he wrote in Attempt 1a:

1. If you pipe is stucked, the pipe had to clean up.
2. First, a bucket is put under the U-bend of outlet pipe which is under the sink. (This sentence was provided by me earlier as an example for the student, with the "the" before "outlet pipe" of course.)
3. Remove the big screws from each with a wrench.
4. The blockage is scrape out with a blunt instrument.

5. Then, replace the inspection pipe and screw it tightly.

6. Finally, the bucket can be removed.

At first glance the inappropriate sentences appeared to be Sentence 1, 3 and 5. However a closer examination of Sentence 1 will prove it to be otherwise. There is a two part error in Sentence 1.

The first half, "If you pipe is stucked" has two errors, the pronoun "you" which should be "your" (a non be-passive error which is not tabulated in this study) and "stucked" which should be spelt "stuck". His past participle form of "stuck" is wrong but he was clearly aware that the verb should be in the past participle as demonstrated by the "ed" he added to it. He must have thought that the past participle form of "stuck" is "stucked". The first part of the sentence was therefore not tabulated as "inappropriate form" though the second could be considered as one.

If one were to modify sentence 1 into a passive structure, one would probably say it this way: "If your pipe is stuck, it will have to be cleaned up". The second part of this sentence "will have to be cleaned" is a much more complicated passive structure than the simple be-passive structure the students were being made aware of at that moment. It would be unfair to tabulate this as an error under "Inappropriate Form" in this action research.

For these reasons, Sentence 1 was not counted in as one of the errors in inappropriate form.

In his Attempt 1b, he successfully rectified sentence 3 and 5: but not Sentence 1.

1. If you pipe is stucked, the pipe had to clean up.
2. First, a bucket is put under the U-bend of outlet pipe which is under the sink.
3. The big screws are removed from each end with a wrench.
4. The blockage is scrapped out with a blunt instrument.
5. Then, the inspection pipe is replaced and screw tightly.
6. Finally, the bucket can be removed.

Student 5e was one of the many who overlooked the active sentence in Handout 6 but he did not use any imperative structures in his Attempt 2.

e. Inconsistent Tenses

From experience, I had anticipated this problem to crop up but not a single student erred in this in Attempt 1a and therefore none was recorded in Attempt 1b and Attempt 1c.

Nevertheless, I decided to go ahead and use Handout 5 which I had earlier planned on using. In Handout 5, I had muddled up the tenses of most of the sentences, both in simple be-passive sentences as well as the simple present ones. I wanted to ensure that the students were aware of the need to be consistent in the tenses of one's description of a process.

*The students were able to detect the errors and correct them. However, instead of coming to the conclusion that "one must be consistent in one's tenses within a description of a process", as I had thought they would, all the students concluded that when describing a process, one should only use the present tense.*

Therefore, in the simple be-passive sentences one uses, the auxiliary should be in the present tense.

I had no choice but to inform them later that it was not necessarily so. They could also use simple past be-passive sentences as long as they kept to that tense throughout the description.

In Handout 6 however, I inserted five such errors. 18 students did not rectify all the errors. Five students failed to detect all five of these errors. However, in Attempt 2, only 2 students were detected to have made one error in inconsistent tenses each. (See Table 2, p.53)

To sum it up, the students, regardless of whether they had begun with a clear or vague notion of how the simple be-passive structure is constructed had all gained from this approach of teaching the simple be-passive. A dramatic decrease in errors was noted when comparisons between the students Attempt 1a and Attempt 2 were made.

Having said that, the question arising would be whether the students' improved performance in the construction of simple be-passive sentences was a direct result of the tasks designed. If they had helped, then, how had they helped?

## Research Question 2:

Did the tasks help or hinder students from gaining further insights on the use of the be-passive? How?

This action research aimed to find out if tasks designed to help students develop insight into the structure, rules and usage of the be-passive was successful in doing so. The tasks would have fulfilled its function if the students were able to:

- a. monitor their own output with the knowledge of the be-passive
- b. and transfer this knowledge to other written tasks at the end of the action research.

The evidence given in answer to Question 1 clearly substantiated the fact that the students gained insights on the use of the be-passive from the tasks. When told to write a description of a process in Lesson 9(Attempt 1a), the students used the be-passive structures they had been exposed to to describe the process. Most of them produced between eight to twelve be-passive sentences in their Attempt 1a. Their formal accuracy in this type of structure also improved tremendously. There was a big drop in the number of errors they made in their Attempt 2 compared to their initial attempt, Attempt 1a.(See Table 1, p.52).



## How the Tasks Had Helped

The question of how the tasks had helped can however only be answered by analysing the students' group discussion to see how the tasks had affected them and caused them to gain insights on the be-passive structure and usage. A study of several excerpts of Group 6's discussions and one from Group 3 while performing the tasks would I believe, help throw light onto how the tasks had helped the students gain insights on the be-passive.

In the following excerpt, the students had just answered Question 1 in Handout 1. They all agreed that the sentence pattern mainly used in the passage was the passive structure. The following is the students attempt to answer Question 2 which read, "How would you describe this structure to a friend?" They were unsure at the beginning if "the structure" referred to the sentence structure or the structure of the whole passage. However, this was later clarified with the teacher. Student 6d translated "sentence structure" into Bahasa Malaysia to help his friend understand what the task required.

Excerpt 1:

6d: The question is want you to explain how the passive sentence is made.

6a: Ah!

6d: So you have to explain to your friend lah.

6e: Eh!

6d: How to explain - itu - binaan ayat.

6e: The sentences -

6a: There will be - describe -

6d: Describe lah! How to describe the structure to a friend lah.

6e: The subject -

6a: For example?

6d; Example, use sentence more easy to understand.

6c: The cans are collected from rubbish sites.

How do you say "terdiri" in English?

6d: I don't know how to explain.

6e: How to say "terdiri" in English? *Say it this way* - The passive sentence is terdiri daripada subjek and prediket.

6a: *But there isn't any subject.*

6e: *Yes there is.* The cans! *The predicate has those you add "ed" to the back.* Use past participle.

6d: Guna bahasa lah. Tin, tin, tin, tin(in a sing-song manner) Tin-tin dikutip daripada, daripada

6a: Its 'dari'.

6e: Dari lapangan sampah.

6d: Dari lapangan sampah, kantin, kedai kopi -

6c: Contoh-contoh.(examples)

6d: Dikutip oleh, oleh -(collected by, by)

6e: Oleh lah - pedlars.

6d: Subjek, prediket dimana?

6e: Prediket in front of subjeklah!

(At this point, I intervened to inform the students that they only need to answer questions they could answer. 10 sentences later:)

6e: *Hey, speak!*

The sentence of passive voice is terdiri daripada prediket dan subjek.

When confronted by the problem of having to describe the structure of the be-passive, the students employed several strategies. First, they took one sentence from the passage as evidence and studied it. Secondly, they employed grammatical rules and metalanguage from Bahasa Malaysia, "subjek" and "prediket" to explain the structure of the be-passive sentence. They even took it a step further, they translated the sentence into Bahasa Malaysia to analyse it: "Tin-tin dikutip dari lapangan sampah...". They obviously had a better grasp of Bahasa Malaysia sentence structures and tried to transfer this knowledge into the English language context. Similar strategies were employed five minutes later while trying to ascertain which was the subject and which the predicate:

Excerpt 2:

6d: From these sentences, we know that the subject is what?

We know that the subject is -

6a: Is the cans.

6e: *No. The subjects are pedlars!*

6d: The subject is pedlars. Pedlars collecting the cans. Pedlars lah. We know that the subject is pedlars.

(3 sentences later)

6e: Ei! *Let me tell you this, say:* terdiri daripada subjek, terdiri daripada prediket dan subjek. Subjek *at the back of* predicate.

6a: Let me ask you: Buku dibaca oleh Ali.

6d: Ali is subjek. Buku -

6e: Is prediket.

6d: Buku dibaca is prediketlah.

6e: *Write, the predicate is put in front of the subject.*

6d: We know that the predicate, we know that the predicate what?

6e: Is in front of the subject.

No doubt the students arrived at the "wrong" conclusion. The "cans" which was the object of the active sentence had become the subject of the passive sentence. It is not the "predicate". However, from the discussion, they were very clear about the fact that the "recipient of action" was always in front of the passive sentence. The metalanguage used, though inaccurate, did not impair the validity of the structure of the be-passive sentence they had noticed; that the recipient of action is always in front and the doer at the back of a passive structure.

The students had used Bahasa Malaysia and not Chinese, their mother tongue, because Bahasa Malaysia is more akin to English and both share similar metalanguage e.g. "subject" and "predicate".

When confronted by the problem of having to describe the structure of the be-passive sentence, the students had resorted to translating the sentence under examination into a language they were more proficient in, Bahasa Malaysia, and using their knowledge of sentence structures from Bahasa Malaysia to help them

get a clearer picture of the be-passive sentence structure.

The tasks also forced upon the students attention, many examples of the target sentence structure I had hoped to bring to their awareness. The next excerpt is an example of what the students did when confronted by a sentence structure that is correct but dissimilar to their incorrect notion of how a passive sentence should be worded.

The students were working on Handout 3 and had successfully rectified the erroneous auxiliaries which I had inserted to help the students see the need for the auxiliary to agree with the subject. They came across the sentences: "Then the aluminium sheets are sent through cutters to be cut into a size suitable for making cans. From here, the cut pieces are conveyed to another machine..." and were baffled by the term "the cut pieces":

Excerpt 3:

6c: ...through the cutters...the cut pieces.

6b: Oh! Oh! *Something wrong here!*

6d: The cutting pieces ah?

6a: The cut pieces or the cutting pieces?

6c: The cutting pieces.

6c: The cutting pieces.

6d: The cut, cut pieces ah?

6a: The cutting pieces!

6d: The cutting pieces! The cut pieces? The cutting pieces. The cut pieces?

6a: The cut of pieces?

6b: The cut pieces.

6d: From here the cut pieces -

6a: *Its correct.* Pieces which have been cut conveyed to another -

6d: The cut pieces. The cut of pieces? *Correct?*

6c: The pieces cut.

6a: *There's no such thing.*

6e: The cut pieces. *Its already correct.*

6a: *Its correct.*

6e: *Its correct.*

6d: *Cut is a verb. I think its not correct. Pieces are nouns.*

6c: The cut of pieces.

6d: The cut by pieces lah!

6a: *No! Cutting - its happening at the moment.*

6d: The cutted, the cutted lah

6a: The cut pieces.

6d: Whats the word for it if it has already been done?

6a: Cut.

6d: The cutted pieces lah! *Why can't it be in the past?*

6c: The what ah?

6a: *Its not "cutted". Whether its in the present tense or the past tense,  
its still "cut".*

6d: *Oh yes! Then its correct. Its cut, cut, cut, Its the same for past and  
present tense. Then its already correct.*

6b: *Its correct. No correction is needed.*

6c: Hah?

6d: *"The cut" is correct. Cut, cut, cut. We usually change the form for simple present tense, past tense and past participle.*

6c: Aha?

6d: *So its correct. But there's no change here, no change lah!*

In Excerpt 3, the students were troubled by the reference made to "the pieces which had been cut", which was changed to the subject "the cut pieces" consequently.

It had sounded incorrect to them but they were unsure how it should otherwise sound. The students pitted all kinds of variations against the "incorrect" form to check if there was one which sounded more correct. They were hoping to rely on their intuitions to arrive at the "correct" form.

Finally, they resorted to grammatical reasoning. They reasoned that since it referred to an action which had past, the aluminium sheets had been cut, it should thus be in the past tense. Student 6a informed them that "cutted" cannot be used because "cut" is an irregular verb that does not change its form. In this way they managed to arrive at the right conclusion and realised that "the cut pieces" was perfectly correct. I am sure the struggle they went through before arriving at this conclusion had given them insight into how the subject is formed in the be-passive structure.

The task of having to state what they had discovered at the bottom of each handout also drove them to delve below the superficial and mechanical task of

correcting the errors alone. In the task below, after Group 6 had corrected the auxiliary-subject agreement errors in Handout 3, they tried to put down what they had learnt and in so doing, arrived at the rule; that the auxiliary to be used in the be-passive structure depended on the subject before it:

Excerpt 4:

6d: Kesalahan yang kita dapati ialah -

6a: is, are, is, are, is, are (laughter)

6d: We just want a word. A word.

6a: Ah, how to say the problem.

6d: What you mean, I don't know. What you mean?

6a: Kesimpulan lah.

6b: Kesimpulan ialah apa? (6b,pretending to be ignorant asked what was the meaning of kesimpulan" (conclusion) )

6d: (annoyed) Diam lah! (shut up!)

6a: We just need a word to say -

6d: Ah! So - when we meet the, the plural, we use are lah. When we meet singular word, we use is lah! Ah! Understand?

G : Understand.

6d: Singular and plural lah. Just singular and plural lah. "Like the cans is" -

G : Plural.

6d: Plural, so we use "are"lah.

6b: So we use "are" lah.



6d: "The can is" - singular.

G : Singular.

6d: So we use "is" lah.

G : Ah!

Once Student 6d was successful at arriving at the rule, he explained it to the rest of the members. The task had therefore also encouraged peer-tutoring. The students not only sharpened each other's awareness, they also learnt from each other.

Group 6 ran into many difficulties while performing the tasks, they had difficulties putting down their "awareness" on paper. In the process of searching out patterns in and reflecting on the be-passive sentences, they discovered its features and usage. The tasks also forced them to examine the sentences more closely and in the process, they came across phrases and words which sounded incorrect. In the quest of resolving the contradictions, they sometimes used the wrong metalanguage to express their thoughts but they nevertheless arrived at more insights of the be-passive structure.

Let us now take a look at how Group 3 responded to the tasks of having to correct subject-auxiliary agreement in Handout 3.

In the following excerpt, the members in Group 3 were reading Handout 3. I had inserted errors in subject-auxiliary agreement into the passage. They sensed something was amiss when they read the first sentence in the second paragraph but could not quite place what it was. In the process, they toyed with the phrase until

they could figure out the source of the problem:

Excerpt 5:

3e: The cans collected is later sold to the collection centre is very funny.

3c: (laughs)

3a: The collected cans

3c: - is later sold -

3e: - sold later to the collection centre.

(Teacher interrupts - four sentences later)

3e: The collected cans is sold later to collection centres-

3a: No, is -

3b: - is later sold -

3c: The collected cans -

3a: The collected can - the can collected -

3b: ARE later sold. Here they are-

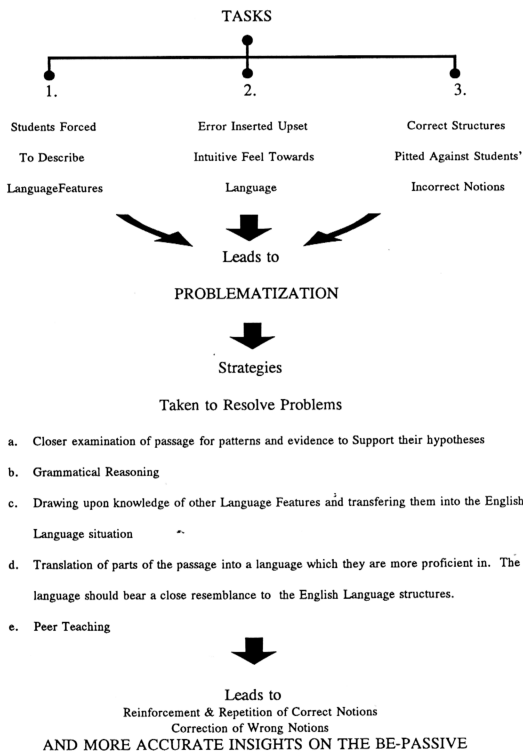
By being able to work out the error and rectifying it, their senses towards subject-auxiliary agreement was heightened. Consequently, they were able to notice and rectify all the other subject-auxiliary agreement errors sprinkled generously throughout the passage. The repetitive nature of having to rectify this error many times also served to reinforce their awareness towards this aspect of be-passive structures.

To summarise the findings from the excerpts, the following chart (Chart 2) maps out how the students had learnt from the tasks. I would like to suggest here that the tasks had problematized the features of the be-passive which I had hoped to bring to their awareness.

Challenged by the problems they faced in accomplishing the tasks, they had resorted to many strategies to resolve them and it was the process of arriving at the answer or solution that brought them insights on the be-passive.

**Chart 2**

How Students Gained Insight on the Be-Passive:  
Tasks Which Led to Problematization and The Strategies  
Students Took to Resolve Them



## **Instances When the Tasks Had Not Helped and Why**

Despite the overall success of the tasks in helping students to gain insight on the be-passive, there were shortcomings in it which, with the advantage of hindsight, I can now see:

### **a. Insufficient Input**

In Handout 5, I inserted several past tense auxiliaries into the passage. I had thought that by doing so, the students would in detecting and correcting the errors, come to realise that consistency in tense is important in describing a process so as not to confuse the reader. However, all the students came to the conclusion that in describing a process one **MUST** use the present tense. By then they had become so used to grammatical reasoning, they gave me an excellent and very acceptable reason why processes should be written in the present passive.

The gist of their argument was that if the process described was still carried out in very much the same way; its process had not changed, it should be described in the present passive. If one used the past passive to describe a process, it meant that the process was one that was in the past, that it was no longer processed that way anymore.

The task set forth in Handout 5 was thus inadequate to give the students enough input for them to see that processes can be described using the past tense. In short, Task 5 did not help the students gain further insight into the usage of the be-passive. More sample passages of description of processes which uses the different tenses ought to be included in future tasks of this nature.

## b. Recursive Correction

I had kept the students Attempt 1a in which they wrote their first piece of description of a process and returned it to them to be modified after they had attempted Handout 1 in Lesson 4 to check if they had gained any insight into the be-passive. By examining the modifications they made, I would be able to gain insight into what they had learnt from Lesson 3 and 4. The students too would get to pitch their new knowledge they might have garnered against errors they themselves had generated.

The students did not complain, but were quite happy to modify Attempt 1a the first time round. However, the second time I gave it to them after they had completed Handout 5 and consolidated all that they had learnt of the be-passive, they seemed tired to see the same old piece of work returned to them again. Some students who "saw errors" in their Attempt 1b modified them. There were many who wrote "no corrections" on their Attempt 1c because they were too lazy to look at their Attempt 1b or rewrite the wrong sentences.

As unavoidable as this recursive exercise is, I believe things could have been improved if I had allowed them to correct the error/s on Attempt 1a each time, perhaps with a different coloured pen(to enable me to chart their progress) instead of asking them to rewrite the whole sentence where the error was. Students who made so many errors they had to rewrite the whole description(even though it was actually very short) would avoid having to do so by saying they had no corrections to make.

Despite all the weaknesses inherent in this exercise, on the whole, the tasks had helped the students gain insights on the be-passive. By the end of the study, the students were able to write be-passive sentences to describe a process well. They also made fewer errors in the construction of their be-passive sentences.

The tasks had aided because the features of the be-passive which I wanted the students to be aware of were problematized. The students were forced to resort to various strategies to resolve the difficulties faced. They had to examine and analyse the input given to find common grammatical patterns in the structure. While doing so, they also had to interact with other members in their group and help clarify each others' understanding of linguistic concepts or metalanguage. The better students had to explain and teach their peers. The tasks also forced some of them to resort to translating the be-passive sentences into Bahasa Malaysia for closer scrutiny. The use of Bahasa Malaysia was found to be an enabling factor. The tasks also highlighted features of the be-passive they had not paid attention to. This whole exercise probably helped to destabilize their interlanguage, making it possible for correct features to be learnt. Having "discovered" the features, rules and usage of the be-passive for themselves, they would probably remember them better and were thus able to internalise them better resulting in their ability to produce improved be-passive sentences in their final piece of output, Attempt 2.