ENGLISH MEDIO-PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS:
ONE OF THE ENGLISH STYLES, BUT PROBLEMS FOR MOST EFL LEARNERS IN INDONESIA

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Abstrak

Pola gramatikal konstruksi aktif dan pasif dalam bahasa Inggris telah dikenal oleh sebagian besar pembelajar bahasa Inggris di Indonesia. Meskipun demikian, konstruksi mediopasif cenderung kurang dikenal dan tidak menjadi perhatian sungguh-sungguh dalam pembelajaran sehingga sering menimbulkan masalah ketatabahasaan dan akademis di kalangan pembelajar bahasa asing itu. Makalah, yang merupakan telaah lanjut dari bagian hasil penelitian yang dilakukan tahun 2011, ini membahas hakikat dan keberadaan salah satu konstruksii stilistika dalam bahasa Inggris, yaitu konstruksi mediopasif, dan bagaimana konstruksi tersebut banyak menimbulkan masalah ketatabahasaa dan akademis bagi pembelajar di Indonesia. Data dikumpulkan melalui penelitian kepustakaan dengan sumber data tesis-tesis mahasiswa S2 Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Program Pascasarjana Universitas Negeri Padang.

Key words: *English mediopassive, EFL learner, voice, active, passive, grammar*

A. INTRODUCTION

The studies on human languages may be scientifically interesting and challenging. But in other side, those can be highly confusing and problematic. They become interesting and fascinating since human languages reflex many socio-cultural properties and the abstract capacities of humans. The linguistic studies are problematic and confusing because human languages are not simple; they are highly complicated, complex, and full of linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena. Linguists have been learning and analyzing human languages from many sides based on particular philosophical bases and theories. Linguists and others who are interested in the phenomena of languages, of course, never stop studying and researching them in order to answer the question: *what is the nature of human language?*

It has not been questioned anymore that linguistic studies and findings are really needed to construct and to develop linguistic theories and to supply linguistic and grammatical data for the programs of language teaching. Language data and linguistic features are practically used in any language teaching and learning processes. Following Valdman's, Corder's, and Spolsky's, Stern (1994:174) states that a linguist may seek validity in a coherent and consistent linguistic theories, while a language teacher judges a theory for its usefulness in the design of materials, in curriculum development, or in instruction. Different linguistic theories may offer different perspectives on language, and they can be treated as equivalent resources. Then, it can be claimed also that the descriptions of language made by linguists can be academically 'applied' in the sense that they provide the data needed for writing teaching grammar, course book, dictionary, and other materials for language teaching.

The programs of linguistic studies and those of language teaching should mutually work hand in hand in order to have their better results. Academic and theoretical foundations of language teaching need data and information provided by linguists as the products of their works. Linguistic data and information supplied by various studies of linguistics reveal that grammatical features of human languages convey different semantic and pragmatic messages. Those are not only universal, but also unique and specific. Therefore, learning a language, moreover learning a second language (L2) or a foreign language (FL) should concern serious attention to grammatical features of the learnt language.

Among others, voice system in one particular language is one of so many linguistic phenomena which need serious attentions in order to know specific grammatical features of the language. Theoretically, as it is a nominative-accusative language, English has active and passive clause constructions as the grammatical constructions based on voice system. The learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia have already been introduced that English grammatically differentiates between active and passive constructions. It has been academically known that the passive clause construction in English is grammatically indicated by the formula: *BE + Past Participle*. However, the following active constructions must be semantically understood as the passive ones:

(1) *It <u>happens</u> everyday, sir.*
(2) *Your idea <u>sounded controversial</u>, but we were …*
(3) *It <u>seems</u> that you are not ready for that moment.*
(4) *The golden window <u>opened</u> only twice a year.*
(5) *Reservoir <u>fills with</u> tap water like in the left position.*

It is frequently found, both in speaking and writing, EFL learners in Indonesia use the following constructions, instead.

(1*) *It <u>is happened</u> everyday, sir.*
(2*) *Your <u>idea was sounded</u> controversial, but we were …*
(3*) *It <u>is seemed</u> that you are not ready for that moment.*
(4*) *The golden window <u>was opened</u> only twice a year.*
(5*) *Reservoir <u>is filled</u> with tap water like in the left position.*

The English clause constructions (1) – (5), which are linguistically called by some linguists as mediopassive constructions, are not seriously introduced and discussed in EFL classroom. The constructions do not follow the grammatical rules of passive voice, but they are semantically comprehended as passive ones. This is one style found in English (see Hundt, 2007).

In other side, the constructions like (1*) – (5*) are not naturally accepted in English, although they "formally" follow the formula of English passive voice. They are commonly appeared as the "passive sense" expressed by Indonesian learners of EFL. It occurs naturally as the consequence of language interference from bahasa Indonesia into EFL. The phenomena of mediopassive constructions are the English style, but they become academic problems faced by EFL learners in Indonesia at almost all levels.

If it is the case, the linguistic and academic problems faced by most EFL learners in Indonesia in understanding and using the mediopassive constructions such as (1) – (5) should not be regarded as a "small learning problem" of EFL. That English has the so-called mediopassive constructions is the nature of its grammar; it is a style of English. Thus, the less grammatical and academic attentions given to this type of constructions may bring serious problems in using English communicatively. In accordance with this, it is necessary to know: (i) the nature of the mediopassive constructions in English; (ii) how EFL learners make mistakes in their English;

and how the mediopassive constructions may bring about academic and communicative problems for many EFL learners in Indonesia. Therefore, this paper specifically discusses: (i) the nature of English mediopassive constructions; and (ii) how the EFL learners, in this case Post-graduate students of English Department of Pascasarjana Universitas Negeri Padang, make mistakes on mendiopassive constructions; and (iii) how the mediopassive constructions may bring about linguistic and academic problems for many EFL learners in Indonesia.

The data and information presented in this paper are those collected through a library research conducted in 2012 (see Mukhaiyar and Jufrizal, 2012). The sources of data are 40 theses written by English Department students of Pascasarjana Universitas Negeri Padang. The theses were chosen randomly out of 363 theses available in Program Pascasarjana Library. Therefore, the data were only written expressions of passive and/or mediopassive constructions found in the EFL learners' theses.

B. DISCUSSION
The Mediopassive Constructions in English

Traditionally, the term voice refers to the name for a verbal form according as it primary expresses the action or state with regard to its subject, which may be represented as acting (active voice), undergoing (passive voice), or affected by its own action (reflexive [middle] voice). Whereas this and other traditional views see the opposition between active and passive in terms of whether the subject represents an actor, or agent, or an undergoer, or patient, consideration of the so-called impersonal passives would require a slightly broader view of the passive category if it were to embrace both personal and impersonal passives, both which in fact stand in opposition to active forms (Shibatani in Kulikov and Vater (eds.), 1998:117; see also Shibatani in Shibatani (ed.), 1988:3). The fundamental opposition of the three categories of voice system in human languages cross-linguistically can be illustrated as:

(i) *active category*   : action occurs under the subject's control
(ii) *passive category*   : action occurs not under the subject's control but under that of another entity apart from the subject.
(iii) *middle category*   : action occurs under the subject's control and its development is confined within the sphere of the subject.

Most linguists use these three voice system categories (active voice, passive voice, and middle voice) to indicate the types of clause constructions typologically, especially grammatical typology. These three types of voice are naturally possessed by nominative-accusative languages, such as English. These grammatical features belong to the formal style of language. In other side, non-formal style of language may have the same grammatical construction as one of the three voice systems but it has different semantic sense. That is the case that different language styles can influence semantic and pragmatic meanings of language. It is caused by the phenomena that style in the use of language is an intuition of the speakers. Darbyshire (1971:11) explains that the intuition is simply that there are varieties of language-uses which are felt, but not made explicit, in some vaguely social and non-linguistic way; speakers use language in a different way from that which they would use in ordinary conversation.

The examples (1 – 5) introduced in part A above are the 'deviation' of grammatical constructions and its semantic senses; the grammatical constructions are in active voice but semantically it has passive senses. This type of clause constructions may have something to do with language styles and practical uses socio-cultrually. These "fascinating" constructions are simply called by linguists as the mediopassive constructions (see Hundt, 2007). According to

Hundt (2007:1 – 3), mediopassive constructions in English can be fascinating and stylistic. The fact is that a verb in the active voice without any additional morphological marking can be used a functional notion that is neither clearly active nor a straightforward passive. In addition, mediopassive constructions are also of interest because they are a potential source of variation between different national varieties of English. For examples, New Zealanders and Australians often say that a television programme *screens*, Americans prefer to say *air*, and British speakers tend to use *show*. Following Legenhausen's, Hundt (2007:3) furthermore says that mediopassive construction is described as a marginal structural type, which flourishes mainly in special registers. It is liable to show varying degrees of conventionalization, pattern irregularities and individual idiosyncrasies.

The linguistic and theoretical discussions and analyses on medipassive constructions are relatively difficult and problematic for pedagogical goals, such as in the teaching-learning processes of EFL. The mediopassive constructions are theoretically related to the phenomena of voice systems in general, and have complex relationships with active, passive, and middle-passive voices. Then it also has semantic relations with the ergative constructions, the basic clause constructions in ergative-absolute languages. So that, this paper does not theoretically discuss all aspects of mediopassive constructions as linguists do, but it just introduces the basic-general views of the mediopassive constructions in English as the bases for the discussion of the nature of these constructions in English and how they bring about the linguistic and academic problems for many Indonesian learners of EFL.

According to Hundt (2007:7), syntactic aspects that are important for the description of mediopassives include transitivity and voice, (adverbial) modification, aspectual restrictions, and the relation between mediopassive and reflexive constructions. Typically, the object of the transitive pattern occurs in subject position in a mediopassive construction. Another important characteristic of mediopassive constructions is that they are morphologically active but semantically passive-like. They are not straightforward passives semantically because the subject-NP in mediopassive typically shares in the responsibility for the action expressed by the verb: often, a property inherent in the subject-NP facilities the action. What are dealing with it is thus not only simply a question of morphology or syntax but an aspect at the interface between syntax and semantics.

Dealing with these basic-theoretical foundations of mediopassive constructions, the followings are other examples of those "fascinating-stylistic" constructions in English (quoted and simplified from Hundt (2007).

(6) Sealed <u>controls</u> wipe clean easily.
(7) Morton's newest product <u>turns out</u> to sell as well as its stock did.
(8) Windows can be closed and locked since the feeder <u>does not install</u> between the sill.
(9) After almost four years in the Senate, Barbara Boxer <u>doesn't shock</u> easily.
(10)   … the bed cloth <u>cleans</u> easily with soap and water.
(11)   Continuous-cleaning side oven <u>cleans</u> itself as you bake.
(12)   The book <u>reads</u> well.
(13)   Heat-sensitive material <u>molds</u> to your body shape.
(14)   Uses body <u>heat to</u> mold itself to fit your shape exactly.
(15)   *The turtleneck collar <u>cuddles up</u> warmly beneath the chin.*

The examples of mediopassive constructions above show that they are grammatically constructed in active voice clauses, but their meanings tend to be understood as passive-like ones. Linguistically, the term passive-like is preferred because the meaning are not the real

passive ones; the senses active are still semantically inside. Naturally, this type of constructions is influenced much by the conventional-cultural style and practical-made constructions of language uses. It can be seen and assumed that those constructions are less formal and commonly used for certain registers. But it does not mean that they are used limitedly. They are, in fact, semantically and pragmatically productive constructions in English.

Foreign Language Learning and Language Interference

The terms first language (L1), second language (L2), and foreign language (FL) are frequently appeared and used in Sociolinguistics and language teaching. Linguists and language teaching methodologists have some theoretical and practical definitions on the terms. Simply, Stern (1994:9 – 18), for instance, explains that L1 is the language naturally and firstly acquired and used since childhood. It is the language someone has in the first environment and develops in such a way as the natural processes. Second language is the language possessed and used after the L1 through learning in bigger environment. Then, FL is the language possessed by someone through academic learning and particular purposes after L1 and/or L2. Based on these simple ideas, language teaching and learning should be related to the phenomena of L1, L2, and FL in nature.

Stern (1994:19 – 21) adds that language learning includes all kinds of language learning for which no formal provision is made through teaching; language learning takes place all time. This is the definition about language learning as the natural processes. In academic point of view, language learning should be related to the concept of language teaching. Language teaching, in other side, can be defined as the activities which are intended to bring about language learning. In this sense, it can be said that language teaching widely so as to include all activities to bring about language learning. Foreign language teaching and learning, of course, need some planned and programmed activities in order to assign and provide learners with the FL features.

The teaching and learning of English as a foreign language are more complicated than those of L2 and L1. EFL is learned by people who already use at least one other language and who live in a community in which English is not normally used. This community is inevitably influenced by norms that are not those of English-speaking countries and those norms influence the teachers' and learners' expectations of the language learning processes (see Tomlinson in Hinkel (ed.), 2005:137). The condition may cause linguistic and socio-cultural problems in many EFL learning programs. Among the others, the phenomena of language interference, inter-language communication, and pragmatic transfer are commonly found.

Language interference, the rearrangement of patters that result from the introduction of foreign elements into the more highly structured domains of language learnt. It is a common-sense notion that L2 and FL learners use elements or structures of their native language in speaking and writing in the language they are learning. The language interference phenomena can come to all levels of language because of linguistic and non-linguistics factors. That is why it is easy to find EFL learners in Indonesia, for example, use Indonesian and/or their local language features when they speak or write (see further Appel and Muysken, 1988; Stern, 1994; Tomlinson in Hinkel (ed.), 2005).

The Nature of Mediopassive Construction in English

As mentioned above, mediopassive constructions are the 'deviation' constructions of traditional voice system, active and passive voice construction. According to Legenhausen as

quoted by Hundt (2007:3), the mediopassive construction is described as "a marginal structural type, which flourishes mainly in special registers, is liable to show varying degrees of conventionalization, pattern irregularities and individual idiosyncrasies. The mediopassive construction belongs to 'specific' grammatical construction that has stylistic uses and meanings. This is very important to know that it needs socio-cultural behavior in English uses in several English speaking-countries; different countries may have different form of mediopassives.

Linguistically, English mediopassive constructions concern with morphosyntactic aspects and voice system. Typically, the object of the transitive pattern occurs in subject position in a mediopassive construction. They are morphologically active but semantically passive-like. They are not straightforward passives semantically because the subject-NP in mediopassives typically shares in the responsibility for the action expressed by the verb; often, a property inherent in the subject-NP facilitates the action. In this case, mediopassives are not simply a question of morphology and syntax, but also an aspect at the interface between syntax and semantics (Hundt, 2007). If it is so, non-native speakers of English as well as EFL learners have to be in socio-cultural awareness of English uses.

In clear-cut cases of mediopassive constructions, the verb is modified either by an adverb (like in (16)) or by a modal verb (like in (17)). Negation (like in (18)) is a third way of focusing on inherent properties or 'design features' of the subject-NP (see Hundt, 2007:7 – 8).

(16) *Morton's newest product turns out to sell as well as its stock did*.
(17) *Scraps of fleece may combine to make a multi-colored fleece hat*, …
(18) … *Barbara Boxer doesn't shock easily*.

Then, medipassive constructions are similar to ergative ones, but of course they should not be grammatically treated as the same onstructions. Ergatives can be used intransitively without modification and in non-generic contex; they are not usually do not imply an exrernal agent. The followings are the examples of ergative constructions in English (see Hundt, 2007:12 – 16).

(19) *The door opened*.
(20) *The vase broke*.
(21) *The cat was drowning*.

Mediopassive constructions, on the other hand, (i) need for (adverbial) modification (22); (ii) need for temporal-aspectual restrictions (23); and (iii) need the implication of an external agent (24).

(22) *Keep the finger in for a longer time and it will "freeze"*.
(23) *According to Ian, the work finished satisfactory at the end of February*.
(24) *The boat sank all by itself*.

As the data presented, the mediopassives are morpho-syntactically active, but they should be semantically understood as passive ones. Accordingly, the mediopassives are more on a language style rather than grammatical features. The English native speakers create and use the constructions as they like, and then socio-culturally accepted as a language style. In reality, British English may have different forms and particular verbs used as mediopassives compared with those commonly used in American or in New Zealand. In this case, the mediopassives should be 'acquired' as they are appeared in language uses.

English Mediopassive Constructions: Problems for EFL Learners in Indonesia

In fact, the mediopassive constructions are commonly found and used in English. As mentioned above, the mediopassives are the stylistic constructions because they are commonly

used as speakers' constructions and the cultural ways of speaking. For many Indonesian learners of EFL, the phenomena of mediopassive constructions bring about serious linguistic and academic problems. The constructions such as (1*) – (5*) are frequently found in students' writings and heard in their spoken language. Furthermore, such types of ungrammatical constructions are also appeared in students' translations and other language features.

The followings are more examples of English clause constructions written by EFL learners as they are found in their theses (see also Mukahiyar and Jufrizal, 2012).

(25) *Secondly, it is implied that …
(26) *Each cycle was consisted of plan, action, observation, and reflection.
(27) *This research was focused on the implementation …
(28) *The questions were related to the topics …
(29) *The research was aimed at improving …

The native speakers of English tend to use active constructions for (25) – (29); therefore the followings are semantically acceptable in English.

(30) *Secondly, it implies that …*
(31) *Each cycle consisted of plan, action, observation, and reflection.*
(32) *This research focused on the implementation …*
(33) *The questions related to the topics …*
(34) *The research aimed at improving …*

It can be linguistically seen that these constructions appeared in students' writing and speaking caused by the "direct" transfers of Indonesian (or Malay) 'sense' of passive meanings into English. It can be categorized as grammatical transfer of the first language or a kind of language interference, particularly on grammatical interference. This type of language interference is natural and frequently seen, moreover when the EFL learners in Indonesia are at elementary level. Sometimes, it is still "allowed" at intermediate level when they do not frequently occur.

If it is still allowed at advanced level of EFL learning and no suitable corrections given, it becomes negative grammatical transfer. In addition, it is a type of "negative" fossilization possessed by Indonesian learners of EFL. This unexpected language interference may cause academic linguistic and communicative problems for EFL learners, especially in academic writing. Scientific papers and references written in English by Indonesian learners probably rejected if there are so many inappropriate sentential constructions in their writing. In this sense, the EFL learners at the English Department of Pascasarjana Universitas Negeri Padang may not do such kind of problems anymore.

How do the mediopassive constructions in English bring about linguistic and academic problems for many Indonesian learners of EFL? Let's firstly see from linguistic views. At least, there are three linguistic factors assumed as the sources of problems for EFL learners. Firstly, mediopassive construction has complicated and complex theoretical bases; it relates to the grammatical combinations of active and passive voice, ergative constructions, and the interface between syntax and semantics, as well. Elementary and intermediate students are not in fine "understanding" of theoretical explanations on the constructions yet. They have not been ready enough to comprehend the nature of the 'stylistic constructions'. This condition practically leads students to have direct transferring of grammatical feature of their mother tongue.

Secondly, such construction is more on language style rather than grammatical regulations. Mediopassive constructions are stylistic and marginal constructions which appear as the speakers' creativity in language uses and cultural senses of the speakers. To comprehend and to be able to use the constructions communicatively, the learners not only need to study the

descriptive grammar, but they should study the cultural-stylistic factors of language also. Language style and cultural meanings of human languages cannot be understood in short time, but it needs socio-cultural processes, in fact. These facts should be comprehended by the EFL learners in Indonesia through the case of language interference.

The third factor which makes the English mediopassive constructions are problematic for many Indonesian learners is that the language style and speakers' creativities are not static. Language styles and socio-cultural background of language uses and its meanings tend to change at any time naturally. These facts may cause other problem for EFL learners in Indonesia because it is very hard for them to follow the evolutionary changes intensively. The teaching-learning processes of English are not in natural environment and it is hard also to manage and set the grammatical features up in classroom activities, then.

Then, how do the mediopassive constructions bring about the academic problems for EFL learners in Indonesia? It can be argued in this paper that there are, at least, three causes of academic problems concerning with this constructions in English, as well. Firstly, most EFL learners do not want to know in details about the nature English grammar. As the result, they tend to be in the position that the mediopassive constructions are not really necessary English; they are just small parts of English grammar. This causes serious problem for academic goals at schools and ideal purposes of the EFL teaching-learning processes in Indonesia. Secondly, frequent grammatical problems on the uses of mediopassive constructions, both in writing and speaking may cause inappropriate expressions in the foreign language, especially in writing. It causes low achievement of academic writing. Thirdly, less understanding on mediopassive constructions may lead learners to speak and to write as they like. Academically, they will not be the successful students of EFL. Once again, their academic scores and pedagogical program will be in problem.

C. CONCLUSION

The linguistic phenomena of English mediopassive constructions are interesting and challenging to be studied linguistically. That English has mediopassive constructions should be realized by the English teacher, especially at intermediate and advanced levels. Less attention given to the stylistic constructions may cause unexpected results of EFL teaching-learning program in Indonesia. So that, the English mediopassive constructions should be a part of the EFL teaching programs. Moreover, the development of language styles, like the mediopassive construction, tends to develop quickly. The teachers and instructors of EFL grammar need to realize the language development.

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