

The Use of English and Chinese Predicates by Thai University Students

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how well Thai university students could cope with English and predicates, and to investigate the possible causes of difficulties in English and Chinese predicates. Nineteen university students took a predicate test, and among the 19, six students participated in a structured interview session. The statistical findings reflected and showed no difference in their performance in both languages. To be more precise, their performance on the test did not provide a clear-cut answer on which language students performed better ($p > .05$). The interview was employed to elicit the information with regards to why certain structures posed some difficulties on the Thai learners. The findings revealed that in English, their body of knowledge on parts of speech and sentence structure such as imperative sentences and the complex sentences were inadequate. In Chinese, a lack of understanding of certain Chinese predicate structures and lexical items caused them to misidentify which one was a phrase or a complete sentence on the test. Instructors in both languages should pay closer attention to these problematic areas and find appropriate teaching lessons and materials to enhance their students' language performance.

Keywords: English; Chinese; Predicates; Thai University Students

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1. Introduction

This study is a collaboration between two researchers in the field of foreign language teaching. It is a well-known fact that the ability to speak more than one language not only provides benefits but also becomes a challenge to language learners. Based on the researchers' teaching experience and observation, university students had some difficulty constructing correct sentence structures in English and Chinese languages. In terms of English, some students produced fragments and run-on sentences when writing terms paper, presenting assigned projects, and answering exam questions. To illustrate, students claimed that the following statement is a complete sentence "*Somchai, who want to see you now*". In fact, it is a fragment since no main verb exists. Here is an example of a run-on sentence: "*Thailand is a land of smile, people are very friendly and kind-hearted*". It is grammatically incorrect because English does not allow two complete sentences stay together without a conjunction or have a comma splice. Chinese is not an exception. Students were very confused on how to produce some sentence structures. Sometimes when they did a translation task, they added more terms/words in the sentence. For instance, they translated "He is thirty-years old." into "他是三十岁。tā shì sānshí suì." "是 shì-to be" should not be in the sentence. The other example was the translation from Chinese to English. they translated "她很漂亮。Tā hěn piàoliang. -She is very beautiful." into "She very beautiful." The copular verb "is" should be added in the part of predicate in the sentence. These inspired the researchers to investigate whether Thai university students understood a basic structure of predicates in the two languages or not and what would be the possible causes for those language errors. The findings could raise instructors' awareness of the problems and motivate them to pay special attention to the problematic areas. The instructors can either find or develop appropriate teaching materials/lessons to help students to understand predicates in both languages.

Research Objectives

First, to examine students' performance on English and Chinese predicates.

Second, to investigate the possible causes of English and Chinese predicate misidentification.

Research Questions

First, to what extent do Thai university students understand English and Chinese predicates?

Second, what are the causes of difficulty when Thai university students identify the sentence and phrase in English and Chinese?

2. Review of Related Literature

This part is divided into two sections. The first part covers a conceptual framework; the second one deals with previous studies.

2.1 A conceptual framework

Since this study focuses on two languages, our conceptual framework had two major parts: English and Chinese.

In terms of English, the study employed a phrase structure rule from Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999: 98). They claim that a phrase structure rule consists of many elements: a noun phrase, a verb phrase, a prepositional phrase, and the like in human mind. In a verb phrase, structure possibilities are below.

$$VP \rightarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Aux verb + verb} \\ \text{copular verb} \\ V \end{array} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{NP} \\ \text{AP} \\ \text{PP} \\ \text{(NP)} \end{array} \right\} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \\ \text{(PP)} \end{array} \right\} \right\}$$

Figure 1 Structural possibilities of English predicates

In this study, we treated the English verb phrase as a predicate or the most important part of a sentence. In Figure 1, a verb phrase begins with either a copular verb/ a ‘be’ verb or other types of verbs—auxiliary verbs, finite verbs, non-finite verbs, etc.—followed by a noun phrase, adjective phrase, and prepositional phrase. See a few examples below. The bold letters are the predicates.

- (1) They **will come to visit you soon.** an auxiliary verb + a verb + infinitive to, + etc
- (2) I **am a teacher** a copular + a noun phrase
- (3) He **likes Thai food** a verb + a noun phrase

As mentioned earlier, the predicate is the most important part of an English sentence. In other words, it must exist in a sentence. However, the sentence subject can be omitted, particularly in an imperative sentence in which the subject “you” is omitted. For instance, “Do your homework now” the subject “you” is omitted, but it is still regarded as a complete sentence.

In terms of Chinese, the researchers employed a predicate structure from a number of scholars, namely Li & Cheng, 1994; Ren, 2015; Ross, 2009; Shei,

2014; and Yang, 2006 a, b. It has been found that the Chinese predicates have approximately 21 types (Rungruang & Mu, 2020). Below are a few examples of Chinese predicates from Li & Cheng (1994). Again, the bold letters are the predicate part.

Verb:

(4) 老师 教 学生 学
 lǎoshī jiāo xuéshēng xué
 teacher teach student learn
 The teacher teaches. The student learns. (1994: 242)

Adjective:

(5) 那个 故事 很 可笑
 nàge gùshi hě kěxiào
 that story very funny
 That story is very funny. (1994: 242)

Noun:

(6) 明天 新年
 míngtiān xīnnián
 tomorrow new year
 Tomorrow is New Year's Day. (1994: 242)

Numerals:

(7) 他 三十
 tā sānshí
 he 30
 He is 30 years old. (1994: 242)

Pronouns:

(8) 他 的 发音 怎么样?
 tā de fāyīn zěnmeyàng
 he possessive marker pronunciation question pronoun
 How is his pronunciation? (1994: 243)

Coordinative phrases:

(9) 那个 孩子 活泼 可爱
 nàge háizi huópō kě'ài
 that kid active adorable
 That kid is active and adorable. (1994: 243)

A coordinative phrase refers to a sequence of two words that share the same part of speech. In (9), both bold terms are adjectives.

Subject-predicate phrases:

A predicate consists of a subject-predicate structure. Some scholars call it a topic-comment structure.

- (10) 她 眼睛 很 大
t ā y ǎ n j ī n g h ě n d à
she eye very big
Her eyes are very big. (1994: 243)

These are only some of the 21 predicate types we have gone through from the previous studies. See more details in Rungruang & Mu (2020).

2.2 Previous studies

To comprehend how Thai EFL learners deal with English errors, most studies focus attention on writing to investigate the types of errors. The findings reveal different types of errors from Thai learners. For instance, Kampookaew (2020) analyzed and found that the most frequently found errors were nouns, articles, verbs, word classes, and prepositions. These areas were further put under in-depth analysis and she found that wrong use of singular and plural nouns, omission of the article ‘the’, and subject-verb disagreements were the most widely found grammatical errors for Thai students. Another study was from Amnuai (2020)’s on the basis of sentence level, word level, and mechanics aspect. Five widely found errors from the most frequent to least frequent were word choice, preposition, sentence construction, singular or plural forms, and quotation marks. The other one was from Waelateh, Boonsuk, Ambele, and Jeharsae (2019)’s study; they found that written errors were associated with different analytical levels, namely syntactic (the most frequent error), lexical (the second most frequent error), and morphological and discourse levels.

To go beyond the error perspectives, a number of studies examined not only error types but also the causes or sources of errors. Some of them were: Promsupa, Varasarin, and Brudhiprabha (2017) who claimed that the three most frequently found errors were singular/plural, articles, and prepositions, respectively. The sources of error came from both interlanguage errors (the difference between English and Thai) and intralingual errors (the difficulties and problems in English itself). By the same token, Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013) paid special attention to errors and the influence of the mother tongue (interlanguage errors). They suggested that different genres (narration, description, and comparison/contrast) had different types of errors. Nonetheless, the widely found errors were articles, sentence structure, word choice, singular/plural form,

prepositions, and subject-verb agreement. L1 interference did have an influence on errors; that is, the learners employed Thai language structures and rules to write English sentences.

Previous studies on the Chinese language widely vary, from four language skills, linguistic perspectives, to Chinese teaching situations in Thailand. Overlapping among these areas have been found as well. Some of them are error analysis studies on Chinese writing related to linguistic perspective such as prepositions (Petcherdchoo, 2010); Chinese verbs (Chavanatnusorn, 2019); and Chinese near-synonymous verbs (Wattanakamolkul, 2020). Certain Chinese parts of speech (or word choice) have been carried out by Thai scholars as well. To illustrate, two Chinese adverbs—“忽然 hū r á n” and “突然 t ū r á n”—were investigated whether Thai learners could make a difference between the two (Rakkiattiyod, 2019). Speaking and listening skills were also conducted in the sense of pronunciation errors (Vongkrachang, 2008) and factors influencing listening skills (Suttiphan, 2017). Beyond language skill perspective, studies on Chinese teaching in different educational levels have been conducted, namely a Thai vocational college, and higher education (Taichan, 2015; Wasinanon, 2019; Wuttiphan, 2013). Surveys on teaching Chinese language either in different parts of Thailand or the whole nation also gain attention from non-Thai and Thai scholars (Xie, 2018; Wang, & Li, 2019; Kanoksilapatham, 2011). However, not much comparative research between the two languages has been found. Some of them are: Tangpakorn (2020) conducted a study between a Chinese modal particle “吗 ma” and some question particles in Thai, namely maj²⁴ไหม, maj⁴⁵มั๊ย, rx:²⁴หรือ, and rui²⁴หรือ. Yamwong (2021) carried out a study on Chinese and Thai order of modifiers. It looks like there is still more room for comparative studies to expand. Thus, the present study would fill the gap by examining the predicate part between the two languages.

3. Research Methodology

This part covers participants, research tools, data collection procedure, and data analysis.

3.1 Participants

Participants were nineteen third-year students whose majors were Human Resource Management, International Business Management, International Tourism and Hospitality Management, and English for Business Communication at an international college in Thailand. At the age of 20-22, they had at least 10 years of English learning. This group of students was selected since they had

taken Chinese courses at least three courses (Chinese I, II, and III) from their second to the third year of study. All courses they took during their study at the university were employed English as a major medium of instruction except Thai language courses (as a basic course requirement). In terms of Chinese courses, the instructor who was a native speaker from mainland China used English and Chinese as a medium of instruction to explain the contents with Chinese textbooks.

3.2 Research instruments

This study employed two major research instruments. One was a predicate test; the other was a structured interview.

A predicate test was divided into two parts. One was related to the English language; the other was the Chinese language. Each part had 25 questions; the total number of items from the two parts was 50. What the participants had to do was to identify individual items whether it was a phrase or a sentence. If a particular item was not a sentence, they needed to write the explanation in Thai why it was not a complete sentence. The reason to have the participants do this was to elicit their language competence on the differences between phrases and complete sentences in the two major languages. It took the participants 25 minutes to complete the test. Each question item is counted as one point. Since both languages had 25 questions, their total score was 25 in English and 25 in Chinese. Below is an example from the English part. See Appendix for a complete test used in this study.

Table 1 A sample of test item

Item number	Mark “√” if it is a complete sentence. Mark “X” if it is not.	Provide an explanation if it is not a complete sentence.
1) Over my head		
2)		
3)		

A structured interview was carried out after the participants completed the test in the following week due to memory prevention. Six volunteer participants among the 19 took part in the interview session. One of the researchers set up the time to meet individual interviewees. Before the interview began, the researcher asked for permission to do the tape recording of the interview session. Then, the interview covered seven or eight questions related to English and the other eight questions related to Chinese on the test they took a week before. The main

objective of the interview was to elicit their answers again with an explanation of why they thought a particular item was a phrase or a sentence. Individual interviewees spent 25-30 minutes completing the interview session.

3.3 Research validity

In terms of the predicate test, all question items were examined by two English teaching experts in the English Department and by two Chinese native instructors in the Chinese Department through an IOC table (IOC: Item Objective Congruence Index). The values in each item were over 0.5. Then, the test was piloted to another group that shared the same characteristics as the sample group to ensure that all items were understandable. In terms of interview questions, selected question items were chosen and tried out with two students who were not in the target group. Thus, test item examination by the experts and a pilot study established content validity in this study.

4. Findings

The findings cover two main sections. One is a quantitative section to answer the first research question. The second part is the qualitative section to answer the second research question.

4.1 Quantitative Section

A quantitative data set comes from the first research question: *To what extent do Thai university students handle English and Chinese predicates?*

To answer the first research question, a non-parametric statistic test, specifically Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test, was employed since the sample group was small (N=19). Below is a statistic finding.

Table 2 A statistic result from the test

	Chinese - English
Z	-.057
P-value	.955

N= 19; p > .05

The test result shows that there was no statistically significant difference between the two languages. In other words, the participants' performance between English and Chinese was not different. That is, we cannot identify whether their performance in the English predicate was outperformed in the Chinese predicate, and vice versa.

In Table 3, details on the statistical findings—median, maximum/minimum scores—were shown.

Table 3 Median score, maximum and minimum scores from the two languages

	Scores		
	Median	Min	Max
English	17 (25)	9	24
Chinese	18 (25)	6	23

The numbers in parenthesis refer to the total score in each part.

From the total score of 25 in each part, the median scores English and Chinese were 17 and 18, respectively. The minimum scores between the two languages were slightly different. That is, English was higher than Chinese (9 and 6). The maximum scores were nearly the same (24 and 23).

4.2 Qualitative Section

A qualitative data set is from the second research question: *What are the causes of difficulty when Thai university students identify the sentence and phrase in English and Chinese?*

Through a structured interview, six individual students attended the interview session. It took each of them approximately thirty minutes to complete this session. The researchers asked them to select English questions based on the predicate test, as in Table 4.

4.2.1 English part

Table 4 A summary of selected item answers from 6 interviewees

Item No.	Content	Sentence or phrase	Correct answer	Incorrect answer
3	I knew what happened.	sentence	6	0
10	The most beautiful girl in the land.	phrase	3	3
14	A happy and somewhat silly place full of very silly people.	phrase	2	4
15	My friend Somchai, who is interested in all types of food.	phrase	1	5
16	Do your homework now.	sentence	1	5

23	I marked the reference with a purple flag that I investigated ostrich farms.	sentence	6	0
24	Free access to the Internet at the public library near my apartment.	phrase	1	5
25	The three-inch-square, yellow self-stick notes	phrase	5	1

In Table 4, items No 3 and No 23 were the easiest ones for them since they could identify the two items correctly. Item No 25 became the second easiest one; only one interviewee misidentified it. At the extreme opposite, items No.5, 16, and 24 were overly difficult ones since only one interviewee knew the correct answer.

Table 5 shows selected Chinese questions based on the predicate test.

4.2.2 Chinese part

Table 5 A summary of selected item answers from 6 interviewees

Item No.	Content	Sentence or phrase	Correct answer	Incorrect answer
3	便宜点 piányi diǎn	sentence	1	5
4	太贵了 tài guì le	sentence	4	2
5	中国人 Zhōngguó rén	phrase	6	0
6	你的朋友 nǐ de péngyou	phrase	2	4
15	现在 xiànzài	phrase	2	4
16	好朋友 hǎo péngyou	phrase	6	0
19	明天新年 míngtiān xīnnián	sentence	1	5
20	他三十岁 tā sān shí suì	sentence	1	5
23	他北京人 tā Běijīng rén	sentence	1	5
24	这件衣服三十块 zhèjiàn yīfu sānshí kuài	sentence	1	5

In Table 5, it is evident that items No.5 and 16 were easy for them since all interviewees could identify them correctly. The rest were quite difficult, particularly item No. 4; no interviewees could identify them as a sentence. In other words, all six interviewees believed that item 4 was a phrase.

5. Discussion

Since the predicate test provided only the quantitative data set to reflect the overall performance, to further an in-depth analysis the discussion part should be placed on the quantitative data set. Consequently, this part covers what possibly went wrong with their answers. Excerpts from the interviewees are presented. The numbers (1-6) were attached at the end of the term “interviewee” to signify who said a particular statement. The final part is a summary of the difficulty causes.

5.1 English Part

In terms of the English language, most interviewees did not understand the basic structure of English sentences. To be more precise, five out of six interviewees believed that a complete sentence must have a subject, a verb, and an object. Only one interviewee claimed that an object can be optional. For instance, when the researcher asked interviewee 3 to make a complete sentence without an object, she said “She is running” or “I am hungry”. But when she had to analyze item No. 16 on the test (*Do your homework now*), she claimed that it was not a complete sentence since it had no question mark. This reflects that she did not understand that in an imperative sentence the subject “you” can be omitted. This type of sentence is used as a command, instruction, request, or advice. It ends with either a period or an exclamation mark. Below are excerpts from the other two interviewees when they were asked to identify whether item No.16 was a phrase or a complete sentence.

“I do not think it is a complete sentence. It looks like a question, but it does not have a question mark. So, I think this is a phrase not a complete sentence at all”. (Interviewee 3)

“I think it is a command to tell one to do something, but it cannot be a sentence since we do not know who said that or commanded people to do thing”. (Interviewee 2)

There was another interviewee who could identify this item correctly, but she provided a very unique explanation.

“I think it is a sentence. The reason is that as long as I can understand the meaning, it is a complete sentence, not a phrase.” (Interviewee 4)

These reactions did not reflect the type of sentence, namely the imperative sentence. Since they did not understand the basic principle of sentence structure, they could not identify a subordinate clause and the main clause. Item 15 (*My friend Somchai, who is interested in all types of food*) is a good example to support

this claim. Five out of six interviewees claimed that item No. 15 was a complete sentence.

“I think this is a complete sentence since it tells us who does what, and the meaning is very crystal clear” (Interviewee 3)

His/her explanation shows that as long as a “be” verb exists in a statement, a complete sentence should exist. In addition, since s/he understood the meaning of Item No.15, s/he misjudged it as a complete sentence.

Interestingly, even though only one interviewee could identify item 15 correctly, her/his answer was questionable. Below was her reaction.

“I think ‘who is interested in all types of food’ is a conjunction to tell that Somchai is interested in food.” (Interviewee 4)

We were not certain whether the interviewee misused the term conjunction or not but she knew the function of this subordinate clause (*who is interested in all types of food*). The problem with relative clauses was not new. Previous studies also confirm this issue in the sense of either fragment (Kampookaew, 2020) or issues with relative clause problems (Promsupa, Varasarin, & Brudhiprabha, 2017; Waelateh, Boonsuk, Ambele, & Jeharsae, 2019; Amnuai, 2020; Khumphee & Yodkamlue, 2017).

We assume that when the interviewees were asked to identify a selected item whether an individual item was a phrase or a complete sentence, it is possible that a sentence had a complete and clear meaning. Thus, a phrase was an incomplete statement so the meaning was neither clear nor reasonable. Not surprisingly, when all six interviewees were asked to identify item No. 10 (*the most beautiful girl in the land*), three of them asserted that it was a sentence since it provided a complete meaning. They understood the meaning of this statement. Besides sentence structure knowledge, they struggled with the parts of speech (or word choices) as well. That is, being able to identify nouns, verbs, adjectives, and the like could be a good criterion to judge selected items. To illustrate, item No.24 (*Free access to the Internet at the public library near my apartment*) confused them. Five out of six interviewees misidentified it as a complete sentence. They posited that the term “access” is a verb.

In fact, it is a noun, since it has the adjective “free” as a noun modifier and as a result then, it is a phrase. However, one interviewee claimed that it was a phrase since the term “access” was not a verb, but s/he could not identify its part of speech. When asked to identify the term “free”, s/he was not sure whether it was a noun or not. In terms of correct answers, items No.3 and No.23 had perfect

scores. For one thing, they could identify the subject and verb in the two items, and another is that they understood the meaning. In item No.25, as a phrase, five out of the six interviewees could identify it and provided the reason that the main verb did not exist. This problem is comparable with the studies of Kampookaew (2020) and Watcharapunyawong & Usaha (2013) who regarded it as a problem of word classes, and word choices, respectively.

To sum up, it can be concluded that the causes to make them misidentify selected items are shown below.

First, inadequate knowledge of sentence structure is a key element to complete the task successfully. They should have known that the most important part of an English sentence is a verb or a predicate. The subject part can be omitted in certain structures, namely in an imperative sentence. In terms of complex sentence structure, they were expected to acknowledge that a complex sentence consists of a main clause (independent clause) and a subordinate clause (dependent clause). Without this body of knowledge, they would misidentify the selected items.

Second, placing too much on meaning leads to misidentify the selected items. Many of them believe that if they understood the meaning, it should be a complete sentence. This reflects the first cause in that they did not have enough knowledge on sentence structure. Thus, they looked for some other elements to help them do the phrase/sentence identification task.

Finally, inadequate knowledge on parts of speech derails the participants to differentiate between a phrase and a sentence. It is true that parts of speech play a crucial role to form different parts of the sentence. For example, a sentence subject must be a noun and pronoun. This is a basic rule even though a sentence subject can be in other forms such as a noun clause: what I want is your money. A predicate consists of a verb and others—a prepositional phrase, a noun phrase, etc.

5.2 Chinese Part

The six interviewees employed the same pattern as English to analyze Chinese phrases and sentences. That is, they believed that Chinese sentences consisted of a subject, a verb, and an object. In addition, the meaning was another key of analysis. As long as they understood the meaning, they would judge it as a complete sentence. However, things did not go as straightforward as they expected because the Chinese predicate part is very unique and could confuse them. For example, item No 3 (便宜点 piányi diǎn?—Could you reduce the price a bit?) became an uphill task for them since 5 out of 6 did not know the meaning

of piányi (cheap/inexpensive). However, most of them could handle item No 4 (太贵了 tài guì le—This is too expensive) even though it shares the same structure as item No 3. That is, adjectives 便宜 piányi -cheap and 贵 guì-expensive (function as a predicate). Thus, our assumption is if they had known the meaning, some could have identified the item correctly, as in a reaction from Interviewee 1.

“I do not know the meaning in item 3, but I know the meaning in item 4. The term “贵 guì” means expensive. So, I know the meaning and I think item 4 should be a sentence”.

Interestingly, Interviewee 5 could provide the correct answer in item 3, but s/he still insisted that item 4 was a phrase even though the researcher provided his/her the Thai meaning during the interview session. S/he claimed that the subject of the sentence was unknown. Thus, it should be a phrase. Notice that item No.3 did not have a subject either. In this case, we propose that Interviewee 5 did not understand that Chinese allowed a subjectless sentence. In addition, an adjective can function as a predicate to describe or evaluate someone/something (Yang, 2006a).

Item No.5 (中国人 Zhōngguó rén—Chinese people) shares the same reaction from the interviewees. That is, if they came across familiar and known the terms, they could do the task correctly. In this case, all six interviewees could identify it as a phrase. But item 6 (你的朋友 nǐ de péngyou –my friend) turned things around. Most of them were confused even though they knew the meaning. It is very possible that they were not certain whether a possessive marker “的 de” could function as a verb or not.

Item No.19 (明天新年 míngtiān xīnnián Tomorrow is New Year) confused interviewees since they claimed that no verb existed here. In fact, a nominal phrase can function as a predicate in Chinese. As a result, item No.19 was a complete sentence. Likewise, item No.20 (他三十岁 tā sān shí suì—He is 30 years old) is a sentence but 5 out of 6 believed that it was a phrase because the term “是 shì—is” did not exist. Here is the reason for the one who claimed that item 20 was a sentence, as in an excerpt below.

Interviewee 4 explained that *“I think this is a sentence because it makes perfect sense to me”.*

When the researcher asked his/her to identify the predicate, s/he could not explain clearly whether the numerical number could function as a predicate, but she mentioned that it was acceptable in Chinese not to have a verb to function as a predicate. In terms of clear and less complicated items to identify, items No.5

and No.16 were quite easy since they all knew the meaning and spent a few seconds identifying them as phrases. Again, knowing the meaning of the terms plays a crucial role to help them identify the term.

In short, it can be concluded that a few causes of difficulties in Chinese are:

First, the interviewees did not understand certain Chinese sentence structures. Since they had studied English for over ten years and took all courses at the university in English, they employed the English sentence structure to analyze Chinese sentence structure. They should have been aware of some unique Chinese structures.

Second, their vocabulary knowledge was too limited. At least, they should have known basic Chinese words, particularly in everyday conversation. To make it tangible, they should be at least familiar with vocabularies in HSK 1 and 2. They would feel more comfortable doing the predicate test. Note: HSK is a Chinese standardized test, ranging from 1-6. Levels 1 and 2 require the test takers to be able to have a basic capacity to communicate with the use of words in easy sentences.

6. Conclusion and Suggestion for Further Studies

The present study has provided empirical evidence on a predicate identification made by Thai university students at an international college in Thailand. Statistical findings from the test answered the first research question in that Thai university students' performance in both languages had no difference. The interview session provided a qualitative data set to answer the second research question. Lack of a solid body of knowledge on types of English sentences cause some difficulty for them. To be more precise, many were not aware that in an imperative sentence the subject can be omitted. The English complex sentence structure was another difficulty for them. In Chinese, building vocabulary knowledge should be taken into consideration. A limit of vocabulary knowledge could lead to a feeling of shyness to classroom participation, discourage them to learn Chinese, and finally, affect their low self-confidence to use the language. More in-depth analysis of these errors also showed that the students struggled with Chinese sentence structures. In other words, they showed a sign of difficulty in differentiating between phrases and sentences.

Although the results of the present study probably cannot be generalized to all Thai university students who study English and Chinese across Thailand, this definitely sheds light on some problematic areas and raise awareness to not only the instructors but also the learners. This requires ways to prevent oversight

on these problems in the two languages by focusing more attention on the problematic areas. That is, instructors have to put more energy and effort to assist students to deal with the problem areas. To make it tangible, the instructor can have a focused lesson on English sentence structure, particularly complex sentences. A few intensive lessons on some Chinese predicate structures such as numerals, co-ordinate phrases, subject-predicate phrases, adjective as the predicate, etc. should be put into action to bring students' awareness of what native speakers employ in reality. In addition, instructors can emphasize on the parts of speech of Chinese when teaching the new words in each lesson.

7. Limitation

We found that items on the predicate test which were also used to elicit information in the interview session had elicited certain specific responses from the participants. To elaborate on this point, the findings reflected only two major problem areas in the two languages. That is, one was sentence structure; the other was word choices or parts of speech. Future studies should employ more research tools to provide more grammatical perspectives. For instance, having a translation task can elicit their competence in how much they understand English and Chinese predicates. The researcher might use random both phrases and sentences in Thai and have the test takers write those in English and Chinese. With this, the produced response from them mirrors how much they understand the predicates in the two languages. To have a multiple-question test is another way to reflect their genuine competence, but it should not be the only tool to employ. The reason is that their correct answers might come from their guessing, not from their own understanding.

In addition, the number of the participants was small (19 students). The results probably cannot be generalized to all Thai university students who study English and Chinese across Thailand. Future studies should employ larger number of participants.

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Appendix

ชื่อ _____ นามสกุล _____ ชั้นปี _____

Part 1

ให้ระบุว่าต่อไปนี้เป็นประโยคหรือไม่ ถ้าใช่ให้ใส่เครื่องหมาย (✓) ถ้าไม่ใช่ให้ใส่เครื่องหมาย (x) หากไม่เป็นประโยคให้ระบุเหตุผลเป็นภาษาไทย

English

English	ใช่ (✓) ไม่ใช่ (x)	เหตุผลที่ไม่ใช่ประโยค
1) Over my head.		
2) I didn't get very much sleep last night.		
3) I knew what happened.		
4) Sitting by the broken plate licking the crumbs		
5) Earplugs would be a good tool for this project.		
6) The next day		
7) I forgot to lock the door of my car		
8) Walking into the parking garage		
9) Did you ever get a strange feeling that someone was around you?		
10) The most beautiful girl in the land.		
11) Her 21st birthday was approaching.		
12) A very cruel and unkind man.		
13) She ran until she reached the finish line.		
14) A happy and somewhat silly place full of very silly people.		
15) My friend Somchai, who is interested in all types of food.		
16) Do your homework now.		
17) Extremely rich and famous.		
18) Screamed loudly.		
19) As a reminder of my own possible intellectual growth in this topic.		
20) Education, above all, should be challenging and inspiring.		
21) Always looking for interesting or fascinating topics and ideas.		
22) The red flags for these creative topics.		
23) I marked the reference with a purple flag that I investigated ostrich farms.		
24) Free access to the Internet at the public library near my apartment.		
25) The three-inch-square, yellow self-stick notes		

Part 2

ให้ระบุว่าต่อไปนี้เป็นประโยคหรือไม่ ถ้าใช่ให้ใส่เครื่องหมาย (√) ถ้าไม่ใช่ให้ใส่เครื่องหมาย (x) หากไม่เป็นประโยคให้ระบุเหตุผลเป็นภาษาไทย

Chinese

Chinese	ใช่ (√) ไม่ใช่ (x)	เหตุผลที่ไม่ใช่ประโยค
1. 我听不懂 wǒ tīng bù dǒng		
2. 厕所在哪里 cè suǒ zài nǎ lǐ?		
3. 便宜点 piányi diǎn?		
4. 太贵了 tài guì le		
5. 中国人 Zhōngguó rén		
6. 你的朋友 nǐ de péngyou		
7. 小高：谁呀 shéi ya 王朋：是我 shì wǒ →วิเคราะห์ประโยคนี้		
8. 这个咖啡很热 Zhège kāfēi hěn rè		
9. 中国在泰国北边 Zhōngguó zài Tàiguó běibian		
10. 我的生日一九九七年六月三十日 wǒde shēngri yījiǔjīuqī nián liù yuè sānshí rì		
11. 不要吃了 bú yào chī le		
12. 好久不见 hǎo jiǔ bú jiàn		
13. 跟我来吧 gēn wǒ lái ba		
14. 在这儿 zài zhèr		
15. 现在 xiànzài		
16. 好朋友 hǎo péngyou		
17. 一个人 yí ge rén		
18. 玛丽很可笑 hěn kěxiào		
19. 明天新年 míngtiān xīnnián		
20. 他三十岁 tā sānshí suì		
22. 我们已经复习了 wǒmen yìjīng fùxí le		
23. 她眼睛很大 tā yǎnjīng hěn dà		
24. 他北京人 tā Běijīng rén		
25. 这件衣服三十块 zhèjiàn yifu sānshí kuài		
26. 我爱你 wǒ ài nǐ		