Investigating Iraqi EFL Learners' Mastery of Passive Constraints in English

تحري اتقان الطلبة العراقيين الدارسين لصيغة المبني للمجهول المقيد في اللغة الانكليزية

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Abstract

Voice is a grammatical category which makes it possible to view the action of a sentence in either of two ways active or passive, without a change in the fact reported. In many cases, active sentences can be easily transformed into passive. However, there is a limited number of cases in which active cannot be changed into passive. This paper tackles specifically the phenomenon of passive constraints in English, i.e. the cases in which active can never be changed into passive. The study aims at shedding light on the cases of passive constraints such as: verb constraints and prepositional verbs constraints, object constraints, agent constraints, and meaning constraints as well as the students' ability to recognize those constraints. Thus, other types of passive are excluded out of this study. The study is confined to fourth year students who are expected to be aware of the cases of passive constraints and therefore try to change any possible active sentence into passive. By doing so, they consequently produce ungrammatical sentences. The question raised by the present study is: Are Iraqi 4th-year college students aware of the passive constraints in English or not? The most important conclusion the study came out with is that most students could not recognize prepositional verb constraints and, though cannot be changed into passive, changed them

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incorrectly into passive. The procedure and data analysis of the study were implemented on forty 4th -year-college students from University of Mosul/ Department of English/for the academic year 2021-2022 who were the subjects of the present study.

Keywords: Passive Constraints, Grammatical category, Meaning Constraints, EFL.

المستخلص

البناء هو فئة نحوية تجعل من الممكن عرض الجملة بطريقتين دون التغيير في الحقيقة المبلغ عنها . في عدة حالات, الجملة المبنية للمعلوم من الممكن تحويلها الى المبني للمجهول. و مع ذلك هنالك عدد محدود من الحالات التي لا يمكن فيها تغيير الجمل من المبني للمعلوم الى المبني للمجهول. تتناول الدراسة على وجه الخصوص ظاهرة المبني للمجهول المقيد في اللغة الانكليزية, بمعنى الحالات التي لا يمكن فيها مطلقاً تغيير المبني للمعلوم الى المبني للمجهول. تهدف الرسالة الى تسليط الضوء على انواع المفعول به المقيد مثل: الفعل المقيد بنوعيه , المفعول به المقيد, المعنى المقيد, العامل المؤثر المقيد و كذلك قدرة الطلبة على الادراك لتلك القيود.حيث ان, بعض انواع المبني للمجهول الاخرى ستكون خارج نطاق الدراسة. خصصت الدراسة لطلبة المرحلة الرابعة و الذين من المفترض ان يكونوا على دراية بانواع المبني للمجهول المقيد. من خلال القيام بذلك فهم سينتجون جمل غير صحيحة. تثير الدراسة الحالية السؤال التالي, هل ان الطلبة العراقيين للمرحلة الرابعة على دراية بحالات المبني للمجهول المقيد في الانكليزية او لا؟ اهم ما توصلت اليه الدراسة هو ان اغلب الطلبة لم يستطيعوا ادراك فعل الجار و المجرور المقيد, و على الرغم من عدم تحويله الى المبني للمعلوم , الا ان اغلب الطلبة قاموا بعملية التغيير بطريقة غير صحيحة. تم اجراء الدراسة على طلبة المرحلة الرابعة ,جامعة الموصل, كلية الاداب,قسم اللغة الانكليزية , للسنة الدراسية 2021-2022.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المبني للمجهول المقيد,صنف نحوي , المعنى المقيد, الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية.

1- Definition of Voice:

Quirk et al (1985:159) define voice as a grammatical category which makes it possible to view the action of a sentence in either of two ways, without a change in the fact reported, as in:

1.a- Jack murdered the employee.   (active)

   b-The employee was murdered by Jack. (passive)

According to Quirk et al (1985:159) the active-passive involves two grammatical levels as shown in (1a and b): the verb phrase and the clause. In the former, a passive verb phrase contrasts with an action verbal phrase, which is simply defined as one which does not contain that construction. In the verb phrase, the difference between the two voice categories is that the passive adds a form of the auxiliary (Be) followed by the past participle (-ed participle) of the main verb.

The passive forms of English tenses and the aspects besides the passive of model auxiliaries are shown in the table: No.1.

Table No: 1 Active /Passive Formulas in relation to Tense and Aspect

	Active	passive
Present simple	Play	is played
Past simple	Played	was played
Model	may play	may be played
Perfective	has played	has been played
Progressive	is playing	is being played
Model + perfective	may have played	may have been played
Model + progressive	may be playing	may be being played
Perfective progressive	has been playing	has been being played
Model + perfective + progressive	may have been playing	may they have been being played

According to Aziz (1989: 263) voice is a grammatical process which helps to view the action of a sentence in two ways while keeping the basic (propositional) meaning.

These two ways are: first, an agent involved in an action resulting or affecting something. This is the active voice. Secondly, the action affecting or resulting in something. This is the passive voice as in sentence (2a and b).

2- a- Jane has painted the house.

   b- The house has been painted.

McCarthy (2021:36-37) distinguishes between the grammatical subject and the psychological subject or real subject of the passive sentence:

Thus, in a sentence like (3):

3-<u>Nelson</u> broke the toys.

"Nelson" is the grammatical subject whereas in a sentence like (4):

4-The toys were broken <u>by Nelson</u>.

Indeed, the psychological subject is the agent phrase, "by Nelson" who broke the toys.

2- <u>Structural Differences between Passive and Active</u>:

Quirk et al (1985: 159) and Broughton (1990:3) say that the subject of the passive (agent) may be dropped in the passive, to achieve passive transformation. The object of the active form becomes the subject of the passive form. The passive of the sentence consists of verb "be" plus the past participle of the main verb. The agent may appear in the passive form as an optional "by phrase", as in sentence (5).

5 -a- I cannot understand the speech of this child.   (active)

   b-The speech of this child cannot be understood.   (passive)

3- <u>The Semantic Differences between Passive and Active Forms</u>.

Broughton (1990:114) points out that the focus of information of the sentence lies is the new information on the second part of the sentence. The passive can be used to give end-focus on the subject or verb of a corresponding active sentence. When the active form is changed into passive form, the focus of information is also changed, where the focus is on the new information. But, when the active changes into the passive, the focus is changed to be on the agent 'by Mathew' as in sentence (6).

6.a- Mathew broke the window.   (active)

   b-The window was broken (by Mathew).   (passive)

See (Palmer, 1974:134, and Quirk et al, 1985:165).

4- <u>Uses of Passive</u>:

Praninska (1957:298) and Greenbaum and Quirk (1990:45-46) agree that in sentences when the choice is between active and passive the active is the norm. Speakers or writers use the passive for the following seasons. These reasons which illustrate the use of passive without the agent (by phrase), which is commonly omitted, are (Greenbaum and Nelson,2002:58):

A- They do not know the identity of agent of the action.

7- Many lifeboats were launched from the Titanic only partly filled.

B-They want to avoid identifying the agent because they do not want to assign or accept the responsibility.

8-A mistake has been made in calculating your change.

C-They feel that there is no reason for mentioning the agent because the identification is unimportant or obvious from the context.

9- Nowadays sleeping sickness can usually occur if it detected early enough.

D-In scientific and technical writing, writers often use the passive to avoid the constant repetition of the subject "I" or "we" and to put the emphasis of a processes and procedural procedures. This use of the passive helps to give the writing the object tone that the writers wish to convey.

10- The subject was blindfolded and the pencil was placed in the left hand.

E- To put emphasis on the agent of the action.

F- To avoid what words otherwise be along active subject.

G- To retain the same subject and later parts of the sentence.

The following sentences exemplify a combination of all the final three reasons for using the passive.

11- As a cat moves, it is kept informed of its movements not only by its eyes but also by messages from its pads and elsewhere in its skin, its organs of balance and its sense organs of joints and muscles.

Quirk et al (1985:162) note that despite being a general rule that transitive verb sentences can be either active or passive, there are a number of

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exceptions where there is no one to one correspondence between the two sentences' types. They mention four kinds of voice constraint pertaining, respectively to the verb constraints and prepositional verbs constraints, the object constraints, the agent constraints, and meaning constraints.

5-The Concepts Theme and Rheme:

Halliday (1994:83) mentions that the theme of the sentence is the starting point of a message and the rheme is how the message develops and consequently is brought to completion. In English, the normal pattern is of an independent declarative clause is that in which a constituent functions as the subject of the clause and takes the first position. In this case the normal point of departure is the rheme. As for given and new notions, Halliday (1967:211) declares that given information is treated by the speaker as recoverable either anaphorically or situationally.

Chafe (1970:210) considers given information as shared "information" i.e. the knowledge which the addresser assumes to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of speaking or writing, while new information is what the addresser assumes s/he is introducing into the addressee's consciousness by what s/he says(ibid,1967:30). In this respect, a sentence like (12):

   Given   new

12-McCarthy   played tennis.

   Given   new

13-Tennis was played   <u>by McCarthy</u>.

Sentence No. (12), the active subject "McCarthy" represents the given information whereas the verb phrase represents the new information. On the other hand, sentence No, (13) which is the passive sentence, the new subject represents the given information whereas the verb phrase represents the new information.

The given element is the information that the speaker presents as recoverable by the hearer either from the linguistic context that is by what has been said before or it can be taken as "known" from the context of situation. On the other hand, the new element is concerned with whatever information

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the speaker presents as not recoverable by the hearer (Downing and Locke,2006:122).

6-Passive Constraints:

The idea of having or getting passive when there is an object does not happen simply or always. In some specific cases, one cannot change the sentence into passive. In fact, there are four cases which represent passive constraints in English. The four cases are:

6-1-Verb Constraints:

Palmer (1974:85) and Quirk et al (1985:162) show that one of the main constraints on the passivization of transitive verbs may involve the verb. Thus, some verbs do not come in the passive. Consider the following points:

A-Active Only:

The restriction on the verbs in the case of having passive is very great. Thus, middle verbs which have objects cannot be changed into passive. [The verbs are: have, lack, hold, become, resemble and suit]. Biber et al (2002:172) add the following verbs: [quit, reply, correspond, hesitate, glance, and pretend]. Consider the following examples:

14-They have a nice house.   *A nice house is had by them.

15-Sara lacks freedom.   *Freedom is lacked by her.

16-Jacy resembles her mother.   *Her mother is resembled by her.

These verbs belong to the stative class of verbs. Unlikely, other stative verbs like those of 'volition' or 'attitude' can occur freely in the passive voice.

17- The police want him.   He is wanted by the police.

The reason behind the impossibility of the passivization of such verbs is due to the fact that they denote a "state" rather than an action (Ganim,2000:19).

B-<u>Passive Only:</u>

In some cases, some verbs or verb constructions can occur only with the passive. Consider the following examples.

18-Jack was said to be a good teacher.   *They said him to be a good teacher.

In addition, the verbs "be born" (with an irregular past tense) and "be drowned" (in cases where no agent is implied):

19-She was born in Egypt.   Her mother bore her in Egypt.

20- The wanted man fell into the water and was drowned …..and some drowned him.

Huddleston (1984:440) and Quirk et al (1985:162).

6-1-1-<u>Prepositional Verbs</u>:

Quirk et al (1985:163) mention that prepositional verbs can occur not freely in the passive as in the active. In fact, these verbs are verbal idioms consisting of a lexical verb followed by a preposition. Thus, the idiomatic use is the clear cut between the usage of prepositional verbs. Biber et al (2002:129) add that prepositional verbs are verbs taking a prepositional object. They give the following verbs: [compete with, cop with, agree to, laugh about, and listen to.tc. Consider the following examples:

21-The engineers went very carefully into the (problem, tunnel).

-a-The problem was very carefully gone into by the engineers.

*b-The tunnel was very carefully gone into by the engineers.

22-They eventually arrived at the [expected result, splendid stadium].

a-The expected result was eventually arrived at.

*b-The splendid stadium was eventually arrived at.

The acceptability in terms of concrete and abstract passive subjects can

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differentiate between the active and the passive. In the abstract figurative use [look into, arrive at, going into and other verbs.

One can construct contexts when such verbal expressions will occur in the passive even when they are not used abstractly or idiomatically as:

23-This private drawer of mine has been gone into and rummaged so many times that is totally disarranged.

Thus, the distinction between prepositional verbs and non-idiomatic combinations of verbs and preposition does not entirely determine the possibility of a passive.

Biber (2002:130) add that the structure of a prepositional phrase can be analyzed into two ways. On the one hand, the prepositional phrase can be considered as a single word –lexical verb which is followed by a prepositional phrase which might be considered as an adverbial. On the other hand, it can be considered as a single word. Thus, the word has idiomatic meanings that cannot be derived from the meanings to two parts. We can use a single verb. Consider the following verbs: [thought about it=consider; stand for it=tolerate. etc.].

6-2- **Object Constraints:**

Sometimes, the object is considered as one of the passive constraints in English. For example in the case of having a noun phrase, it is so normal to have a passive construction (Quirk et al, 1985:163). Consider the following example:

24-Jack loves Luna.   Luna is loved (by Jack).

But in a case of having a clause, there are some restrictions in constructing a passive. For instance:

1-**Finite Clause:**

In this case, one cannot change the sentence into passive:

25-Jacy thought that he was good.

?* That he was good was thought (by her).

2-Non Finite Clause:

A-Infinitive:

26-John hoped to see her.   * To see her was hoped (by John).

B-Participle:

27-John enjoyed seeing her.   *Seeing her was enjoyed (by John).

In the case when the object is a finite clause and extraposed by "it", there will be a passive sentence, for instance:

28-It was thought that she was attractive.

Or if the subject of the object clause is made as the subject of a passive subordinate clause.

29-She was thought to be attractive.

The construction with anticipatory "it" never occurs with participle clauses as subject, and is only sometimes acceptable with infinitive clauses:

30- It was desired to have the report delivered here.

Cooray (1967:205) and Lyons (1977:361-362) mention that a reflexive construction is one in which the subject and object refer to the same person(thing). Many languages, like English, have a set of reflexive pronouns distinguished for person and number (myself, yourself, himself, etc.). In such a case of having a co-reference between the subject and the object in the clause, one will get a constrained passive as in:

A-Reflexive Pronouns:

31-Darcy could see himself in the mirror.   *Himself could be seen in the mirror.

B-Reciprocal Pronouns:

32-We could hardly see each other in the fog.   *Each other could hardly be

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seen in the fog.

C-<u>Possessive Pronouns</u>:

In the case when possessive pronouns are in co-referential to the subject.

33-The woman shook my hand…her hand.

  -a-My hand was shaken (by the woman).

  *-b-Her hand was shaken by the woman.

They continued to discuss that firstly the passive of the sentence with reciprocal pronoun can be made acceptable if the pronoun is split into two parts as follows:

34-Each could hardly be seen by the other.

    Secondly, since reflexive and reciprocal pronouns are in the objective case replacement, one would in any case not accept them to take subject position in a passive sentence, or for that matter in any other sentence. Thirdly, the passive is not possible for many idioms in which the verb and the object form a clause unit.

35- The ship set sail. *Sail was set.

36-We changed buses. * Buses were changed.

6-3-<u>Agent Constraints</u>.

   O'grady et al. (1997:233) and Quirk et al. (1985:164-165) agree on the idea that the use of agent is normal in passive construction but sometimes one cannot mention the agent for some reasons or the agent may not be mentioned for specific reasons as in:

37- The boy broke the window.

38- The window was broken.

Here, either we do not know the doer of the action or the doer must be neglected for some purposeful reasons.

Sometimes, the omission of the agent is redundant.

39- Jack fought Lina last night, and Jack was beaten.

Thus, it is fully unacceptable to have a sentence just like the above with an agent in this context.

In some cases, the agent phrase cannot be recoverable or postulated. Consider the following examples:

40- Order had been restored without bloodshed.

a-Colonel Laval (?) had restored order without bloodshed.

b-The administration (?) had restored order without bloodshed.

c-The army (?) had restored order without bloodshed.

The problem of the above sentences is that one cannot detect or specify or know the real agent phrase.

(See also Palmer,1974:83)

In some cases, the agent is not optional. It must be mentioned because the sentence will be informationally vacuous as in:

41-A short interval followed the music.

-a-The music was followed by a short interval.

*-b- The music was followed …

42- The rebels were actuated by both religious and political motives.

*-a-The rebels were actuated…….

6-4- <u>Meaning Constraints:</u>

The propositional meaning is quite different between the active and passive the sentence. Since fronting the object of the passive sentence to the initial position of the passive sentence has different meaning, one can easily recognize the difference in emphasis (Quirk et al, 1985:165-166) and (Aziz and Yamoor,1995:12). Consider the following sentences:

43- Every school boy knows one joke at least.

44-One joke at least is known by every school boy.

Indeed, the interpretation of [39] and [40] is quite different. [39] emphasizes 'every school boy' whereas [40] emphasizes "one joke" which comes at the beginning of the sentence.

Moreover, in the case of having a modal, the shift of modal may accompany a shift of voice in verb phrase containing modal auxiliaries, as in:

45- John can do it.

46-It can be done (by John).

In [45] "can" means ability whereas in [46] "can" means possibility.

47-John cannot be taught. [It is impossible to teach him or he is unable to learn].

48-She cannot teach John. [She is unable to teach John].

One can add that the change from active into passive may change not only the meaning of the modal sentence but also the perfective aspect. For example:

49-Winston Churchil has twice visited Harvard.

50-Harvard has twice been visited by Winston Churchil.

Some differences may be noted between the following sentences in the case of changing the sentence from active into passive.

51-Bevears build dams…? Dams are built by beavers.

52-Excessive drinking causes high blood pressure.

53-? High blood pressure is caused by excessive drinking.

The difference occurs in the case when the subject of the active sentence gives the meaning of universality whereas in the passive sentence the universal meaning disappears.

The use of active voice is more frequent and common than the passive. Thus, the passive is more common in the written form specially in the prose, scientific articles and news reporting for rhetoric and stylistic reasons (Quirk et al, 1985:166-167) and (Aziz and Yamoor,1995:12).

7-The Procedure and Data Collection:

7.1. Statement of the Problem:

As it has been said before, students continue to change the passive sentences freely though there are some exceptions in which passive is constrained. Thus, these exceptions have negative effect on the students' mastery of transforming active sentences into passive correctly. They are unaware of the cases in which active sentences cannot be changed into passive.

7.2. Hypotheses:

The study hypothesizes the following points:

1-Some students commit mistakes in changing the sentences from active into passive.

2-Individual differences have a vital and clear effect on the students when they come to transform any sentence from active into passive.

3-Not all the four passive constrained have the same level of correctness when answered by the students.

7.3. Research Questions:

The present study tries to answer the following research questions:

1-Are all the students aware of the passive constraints in English?

2-Are individual differences have a clear effect on the students?

7-4- The Methodology:

Forty 4th -year –college students from University of Mosul, Department of English for the academic year 2021-2022 have been chosen to be the subjects of the present study. They have been given fourteen selected active sentences and will be asked to change them into passive. The participants' responses were checked and analyzed statistically, illustrated by a means of a table that will explain the results obtained. The answers will be checked and analyzed and the results will be discussed. On the basis of the results obtained, the conclusions will be made. As an instrument, the participants were asked to change the sentences from active into passive. The study is limited to the types of passive constraints like: verb constraints and prepositional verbs constraints, object constraints, meaning constraints, agent constraint. It will follow Quirk et al.'s model of 1985. Finally, a table will be considered to show the percentages of correctness and incorrectness accurately.

8- Findings and Discussion:

The Number of Students and the Percentages of their Correct and Wrong Responses

Table No.2(the percentages of correct and incorrect responses)

	Sentences	Type of Passive Constraints	Correct	Incorrect
1.	They have a strong boat.	verb	35 (92%)	5 (8%)
2.	She resembles her mother.	verb	32 (80%)	8 (20%)
3.	The engineers went carefully into the problem	Prepositional verb	15(38%)	25 (62%)
4.	The eventually arrived at the splendid stadium.	Prepositional verb	12(30%)	28(70%)
5.	Sam thought that he was clever.	object	30(75%)	10(25%)
6.	He likes to play tennis.	object	32(80%)	8(20%)
7.	John enjoyed seeing her.	object	25(70%)	15(30%)
8.	The woman shocks her hand.	object	20(50%)	20(50%)
9.	Jane saw herself in the mirror	object	32(80%)	8(20%)
10.	The boys could hardly see each other in the mirror.	object	18(45%)	22(55%)
11.	Jack fought Lina and Jack	agent	10(25%)	30(75%)

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	was….			
12.	A short interval followed the music.	agent	30(75%)	10(25%)
13.	Darcy can do it.	meaning	25(62%)	15(38%)
14.	Every schoolboy knows one joke at least.	meaning	8(20%)	32(80%)

The above table shows the number of the sentences and the students. It also shows the passed and failed students' answer and failed percentages of the students. It shows the errors which were committed by the students in changing the sentences.

The table shows that there are various percentages of correct and incorrect answers concerning the students' answers in changing the sentences from active into passive. This fluctuation in percentages reflects the various levels of students' awareness of passive constraints. These different frequencies come from the fact that there are different levels for the students in mastering and answering the sentences. The findings indicate that the calculated frequency of right choices is low in some cases while in other cases there is a high frequency of errors and in favor of prepositional verbs constraints. In other cases, it is indicated that the calculated frequency of errors is low in some cases while in other cases there is a high frequency of errors and in favor of prepositional constraints. High percentages of correctness in some cases are due to the fact that the students have already studied this topic last in the third year whereas the high errors in other cases is attributed to the different levels of students in mastering the subject of passive constraints.

It has been noticed that sentence No. (1), (35) students (92%) could answer it correctly whereas just (5) students (8%) did not change it correctly. This is due to the fact that some students are aware of the passive constraints whereas others who wrongly changed the sentences thought that the verb "have" can be changed into passive.

It has been found that sentence No. (2), (32) students (80%) knew that the sentence cannot be changed into passive. On the other hand,

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(8) students (20%) changed it wrongly. Most students could change the sentence correctly because they have been taught this subject last year.

Concerning sentence No. (3), (15) students (38%) never changed it correctly, in contrast (25) students (62%) changed it wrongly. In fact, the students were misled by the presence of a prepositional verb.

As to the sentence No. (4), (12) students (30%) left it unchanged, whereas (28) (30%) students changed it wrongly. Indeed, this high frequency of wrong answers is due to the fact that the students do not know that concrete subjects of the passive sentence cannot be changed into passive though they have already studied this subject last year.

With regard to sentence No. (5), (30) students (75%) were aware that it is a case of passive constraint, while (10) students (25%) answered it wrongly. This high frequency of correctness is due to the fact the most students know that "finite that-clause" cannot be transformed into passive in this way.

As regards to sentence No. (6), (22) students (55%) managed to leave it in the active form, while (18) students (45%) answered it wrongly. The problem here is that some students believe that a "to infinitive-object" can be changed into passive.

Concerning sentence No. (7), (25) students (62%) could answer it correctly while (15) students (38%) answered it wrongly. Though the students know that having a participle object in the sentence makes it impossible to change the sentence into passive, some students changed the sentence into passive wrongly.

As to sentence number (8), (20) students (50%) were grammatically aware of this case of passive constraint, while the other

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half of the students (50%) answered it wrongly. This percentage shows how the students are not fully aware of the process of passive constraints in English.

It has been found that sentence No. (9), (32) students (80%) could answer it correctly while (8) students (20%) answered it wrongly. In fact, it is very noticeable that awareness is highly prominent among students in this type of sentences.

As to sentence No. (10), out of (40) students, (15) students (38%) were fully aware of the case of passive constraint, while (25) students (62%) answered it wrongly. Here, the students committed a mistake when they changed the sentence into passive.

Concerning sentence No. (11), out of (40) students, (10) students (25%) knew well that the sentence cannot be changed into passive, while (30) students (75%) answered it wrongly. Here, the students committed a mistake when they changed the sentence into passive and put an agent to the sentence though the agent is obvious from the context.

Regarding the sentence No. (12), out of (40) students, (30) students (75%) could answer the sentence correctly while (10) students (25%) answered it wrongly. Here, the students committed a mistake when they changed the sentence into passive and omitted the "by phrase" in which the agent phrase must be mentioned.

As to the sentence No. (13), out of (40) students, (25) students (62%) did not make a mistake by changing the sentence into passive, while (15) students (38%) answered it incorrectly. Here, the students committed a mistake when they changed the sentence into passive. Thus, most students stopped changing the sentence into passive claiming that any change from active into passive will change the meaning of the modal used in the sentence.

Concerning sentence No. (14), out of (40) students, (8) students (20%) were not deceived by the structure of the sentence and knew that changing it into passive will entirely affect the whole meaning. In contrast, (32) students (80%) answered it wrongly. Here, the students committed a mistake when they changed the sentence into passive since any changing will lead to a change in the meaning and in the information focus.

9-Conclusions:

In spite of the long period spent in studying English grammar, students repeatedly make some grammatical errors due to their individual differences. The study concludes that students make more errors in some grammatical structures when they come to change any sentence from active into passive. It is also clear throughout the study that some learners have used their grammatical background in changing the sentences from active into passive. The most occurrence of errors is in the area of verb constraints and prepositional constraints, object constraints, meaning constraints, and agent constraints with different percentages of errors and right.

Most of the errors are due to the fact that Iraqi EFL learners think that all English sentences can definitely be changed into passive which is not true. This made them change many sentences without taking into consideration that there are some cases in which active sentences cannot be changed into passive freely due to certain constraints. It has been concluded that most students faced difficulty in changing the sentences from active into passive in some situations as it is the case with prepositional verbs constraints due to their individual differences.

The findings revealed that (70%) of the students where fully aware of the cases of passive constraints. Also results show how students commit errors in in changing some sentences from active into passive simply due to their individual differences. Thus, some students changed the sentences with a prepositional verb.

The study concludes that passive constraint is of many types like: verb constraints, prepositional verbs constraints, agent constraint, and meaning constraints. Most students fail in finding the correct answer for some types of passive constraint as it is the case with prepositional verb constraints. Many students cannot distinguish between the object of the sentence and the adverbial realized by the prepositional phrase which cannot be changed into passive.

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