

Pragmatic Discourse of Givenness through A-Movement Constructions of Thai EFL Learners

Abhinan Wongkittiporn

English Language Department, College of Liberal Arts, Rangsit University, Thailand

abhinan.w@rsu.ac.th

Received 05 February 2024 | Received in revised form 21 February 2024 | Accepted 02 March 2024

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: <i>A-movement constructions, pragmatic discourse of givenness, Thai EFL learners, writing</i> DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v9i1.1670 How to cite: Wongkittiporn, A. (2024). Pragmatic Discourse of Givenness through A-Movement Constructions of Thai EFL Learners. <i>Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics</i>, 9(1), 107-119	The current study examined Thai EFL Mattayom learners' pragmatic discourse of givenness via A-movement constructions. While previous studies focused on Thai undergraduate students and their error production in passive voice, this study innovatively contributes to the field by selecting a different group of participants. The participants in this study were 67 Mattayom students in Thailand, of which 45 were from public schools and 22 were from private schools. The participants were asked to write an academic essay on the topic of <i>Thai Soft Power</i>, which is the Thai government's campaign for tourism and culture from 2023 to 2024. The data analysis follows the principle of pragmatic discourse of givenness. The SPSS version 29 was used for the data analysis to seek a correlation between the production of passive voice by EFL learners and pragmatic discourse of givenness via A-movement constructions. The study showed that there is no statistically significant relationship between the production of passive voice by EFL Mattayom learners and pragmatic discourse of givenness where the p-value is reported at 0.79. It seems that Thai EFL Mattayom learners have not yet acquired the pragmatic discourse of given and new information in producing A-movement constructions in English. The discussion is given in the scope of a lack of experience of writing passive voice with other discourses. In addition, the traditional styles of teaching active and passive voice as interchangeable structures in Thai schools do not support the actual use of A-movement constructions in practicality. It is recommended that pragmatic discourse of givenness via A-movement constructions should be built into the curriculum for Thai EFL learners to develop cohesion in writing academic texts.

1. Introduction

The head parameter is the core principle in English syntax (Radford, 2009; Radford, 2023). Structurally, the DP under the Spec T in English is obligatory. In practice, the English language is usually taught with the structure of S+V+O (subject+verb+object), as in *Jane hit students*. Accordingly, the DP argument in English is formed in situ and is called a *non-movement approach*, whilst the grammar of A-movement constructions in English is *irregular*¹.

Even though A-movement constructions are not the core of the Spec T formation in English, they are a generative approach for the analysis of raising constructions and passive constructions (Radford, 2018). Therefore, A-movement constructions are defined as passive and raising constructions, as in (1).

(1) Students were hit.

According to example (1), it is believed that passive voice is formed due to the speakers' certain intentions. Since the regular sentential formation in English is S+V+O, forming the sentence structure in this way cognitively supports the *economy principle* or least effort of requirement (Radford, 2009). However, A-movement in example (1) is irregular, so it must be *explanatory* as to why it is used in a circumstance. It is true that A-movement constructions are not frequently used in everyday life. Wongkittiporn (2022) supported this claim in that it is common for passive constructions to be used in scientific reports, criminal documents, medical documents and business texts. Nevertheless, students need to use them, especially in the genres of academic writing, research reports and literature reviews. Therefore, it is necessary for them to learn how to use A-movement constructions correctly and appropriately.

While previous studies used different materials to study A-movement constructions, such as English novels and academic research articles, this construction is also frequently studied by EFL learners in different countries.

To begin with, Wu & Chitrakara, (2020) studied the passive voice in *National Geographic* and *The Da Vinci Code*. Most passive voice sentences found in the data were agentless, or written without *by-* phrase agents, as in *this photo was taken less than an hour ago* (Wu & Chitrakara, 2020, p. 138). This is explained by the reason of pragmatic discourse of givenness where the DP *this photo* is raised to become the given information in the position of Spec T in order to connect with the previous discourse.

Wongkittiporn's (2023) results complied with Wu and Chitrakara (2020) in that the DP in the Spec T is moved to be landed for the compliance with the pragmatic discourse of givenness. However, he further found that the DP will be transformed into a pronoun such as *he* or *she* in novels, while it remains as the same technical term in research articles, such as *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT).

In a subsequent study, Wongkittiporn (2023) studied passive voice in applied linguistics research articles as indexed in Q1 SCOPUS database. The results showed that A-movement in this genre is used due to topic comments where the predicate provides evaluation or

¹ In English syntax exams, linguistics students may be instructed to respond to the following question: Is A-movement in English syntax regular or irregular? Explain and support your answer with clear examples.

subjective comments about the topic at 43.13 percent. For example, instructors must be trained professionally in giving feedback.

Zheng & Zhang (2024) reported that Chinese EFL learners have problems distinguishing the difference between active voice and passive voice. The data was collected from *Chinese Learner English Corpus* in order to examine their use of the words *advise* and *suggest*. Chinese students were confused between the patterns of *someone suggesting something*, and *someone is suggested something*. They think that these different forms report the same meaning.

Sakhaei, et al. (2024) investigated Iranian EFL learners' passive voice via pre-test and post-test by dividing them into different groups. With the first group, passive voice was taught and practiced via common teaching materials, such as gap fill and sentence transformation via active voice and passive voice. The second group was taught via activities, such as reading in context. Then, they were given exercises to practice. Those who were provided context learned how to produce passive voice significantly more correctly. This implies that the traditional way of learning passive voice by transforming active voice to passive voice might not support EFL students when it comes to actual usage.

Sali (2023) studied the error analysis of passive voice produced by grade 12 Indonesian students. The researcher studied different types of errors, such as omission, misinformation, and misordering. Interestingly, the results of this study showed that misinformation is a prominent practice among this group of EFL learners, followed by omission. The error percentages of misinformation and omission were 38 percent and 29 percent, respectively. These errors in passive voice came from a lack of knowledge concerning the movement of the object to be the subject. When students do not know what to move and what they can omit, errors are likely to occur.

Duklim & Maneechote (2021), who examined Thai undergraduate students' problems with passive voice numerically, found that Thai students did not understand the word order of passive voice or when to use passive voice at 55.2 percent and 44.8 percent, respectively. In addition, most students pointed out that good grammar textbooks for them to study passive voice at school were insufficiently provided. Therefore, Mattayom students were reported to have higher problems with passive voice in comparison to university students.

Voun, et al. (2013) investigated the production of passive voice among Thai EFL learners. They found that approximately 70 percent of Thai EFL learners placed the subject and the object of passive voice in the wrong positions since they did not understand the movement of agents. This reflects that A-movement construction in English is an irregular structure. It can confuse Thai EFL learners with the consequences of error production.

Rosalina et al. (2023) explored EFL learners' use of passive voice in their job applications. EFL learners tried to avoid using impersonal pronouns and apply the passive voice in their writing. The researchers in this study comment that it makes the job application harder to read, and there is no specific reason why they need to use passive voice in their job application.

Thai Mattayom students are currently experiencing difficulty in using passive voice in sentence structures. It seems that they do not know when and why passive voice needs to be used. Most previous studies focused on Thai EFL Mattayom learners' use of passive voice

concerning form, formation, word order, and formality because English teachers want their students to form passive voice accurately. However, they seem to ignore the use of passive voice. This study fills the gap by investigating Thai EFL Mattayom learners' use focusing on pragmatic discourse of givenness via A-movement constructions in their writing. The objective of the study was to examine the pragmatic discourse of givenness via A-movement constructions by Thai EFL learners' writing in English. The hypothesis of the study was that there was no statistically significant relationship between pragmatic discourse of givenness via A-movement constructions and Thai EFL learners' writing in English.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pragmatic Discourse of Givenness

The theory of pragmatic discourse of givenness was first theorized by Halliday and Hasan (1976). The pragmatic discourse of givenness is defined as the informational structure between the given information and the new information in or between sentences. The given information is sometimes known as the old information of the previous discourse (Sanders & Canestrelli, 2012). According to the principle of informational structure, the given information is written at the beginning of the sentence or the matrix subject before the new piece of information is provided at the predicate (Cutting & Fordyce, 2020).

- (2) Jane went to the library to seek **a book**. **The book** could not be borrowed because it was on the waiting list.

Example (2) presents the two determiner phrases (DP) between the two discourses in an adjacent area. The DP *a book* in the first sentence is the new information. However, it has become the given information in the second sentence.

2.2 A-movement Constructions

A-movement constructions in generative grammar are the movement of arguments to be landed in the paradigm of Spec T or the subject position (Radford, 2023). There are two well-known constructions in English that employ the conceptual framework of A-movement, which are passive constructions and raising constructions (Fernández-Salgueiro, 2023; Radford, 2009). Passive constructions have A-movement where the object of the sentence is moved to be landed in the subject position, as in (3).

- (3) **The book** was brought t from the shop yesterday.

The determiner phrase DP *the book* was initiated as the object of the transitive verb *brought* where the trace t was left. It is moved to be landed in the Spec T position. The same analytical framework is used with raising constructions in English, such as (4).

- (4) **This book** seems t difficult to read.

The DP originated as the subject in the lower clause *difficult to read*. After that, it was raised as the subject in the matrix clause. Accordingly, the features of A-movement in passive constructions and raising constructions have traces t left as a signal of the original subject (Fernández-Salgueiro, 2023). Therefore, these two structures are irregular structures in English as the subject requires movement.

2.3 Thai EFL Learners

According to World Englishes, English in Thailand is an expanding circle (Melchers et al., 2019). English is not used as the official language, which is Thai. So Thai people, in general, do not communicate with each other in English in everyday life unless one studies in international schools or works for international organizations. English is only taught inside the classroom, while Thai is used in everyday life, and it is spoken with their friends, family, and throughout the society (Hayes, 2016). Most previous studies have gathered information from university students to study their grammar and error analysis. Few studies focused on Mattayom students. This study fills the gap by concentrating on Mattayom students' writing in English.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design in the current study is a quantitative design. The significant value or p-value was tested by the inferential statistical data. Some qualitative support via empirical evidence and examples are given. McKim (2017) suggested that the quantitative method is beneficial as factual information can be presented to gain external validity. However, this study also provides examples and insightful notions gained to help support the reader's better understanding of a certain topic. This study adopted *Pearson Correlation* between Thai EFL learner and their usage of A-movement constructions in English. The accuracy and error found in their essay could be depicted via their qualitative data.

3.2 Participants

To test the hypothesis above, this study selected a non-probable sampling method called *convenience sampling method*. The participants in this study were 67 Mattayom 1-6 students, from public and private schools in Thailand. There were 45 students from public schools and 22 participants from private schools. The participants consisted of male and female students. They were representatives from their school to participate in an academic writing contest as organized by a private university in Thailand. It was called the convenience sampling method because the date and time of the competition were specific, and the participants were required to write on the date and at the given time only. They were willing to join the competition to compete for a trophy from the Ministry of Culture, Thailand. However, those who did not win the competition received a certificate of participation. Being representatives of their respective schools and being willing to join the competition, it was believed that their attention to academic writing was considered to be high.

3.3 Instruments

The participants were asked to write an essay between 150 and 200 words on the topic of "Thai Soft Power". This topic was based upon the Thai government's policy (thaigov.go.th) to encourage soft power in Thailand. The concept of soft power is rather broad and abstract, so Thai students' ideas of soft power were reflected through their academic writing in the format of essays. Later, the essays could be reported to the Ministry of Culture, Thailand. This would allow the ministry to determine whether or not the Thai

people and the Thai government were aligned in their ideas relating to the policy of soft power.

3.5 Data Collection

The participants were asked to sit in a computer room where the internet could not be accessed, and paper dictionaries were not allowed to be used. The participants were asked to type their responses to the given topic in the format of an essay. The time allocation was 120 minutes. Five proctors controlled the room where the competition took place. At the end of the writing session, the written essays were printed out. It is important to note that the participants did not know the topic of their essay beforehand. The topic was informed at the start of the writing contest. A total of approximately 13,500 words contained 31 tokens of A-movement constructions in EFL writing in English.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedures

This study is a quantitative analysis. The researcher and statistical data analysis manually sought the passive constructions, and the raising constructions were applied subsequently. The data analysis of the pragmatic discourse of givenness via A-movement constructions follows Radford (2009). The A-movement is divided into two constructions, which are passive voice and raising constructions, as reproduced in Table 1.

Table 1 Coding Schema

Condition A/ Code 1 Follow Information Structure of Pragmatic Discourse of Givenness via A-movement	Condition B/ Code 2 NOT Follow Information Structure of Pragmatic Discourse of Givenness
Jane went to the library to seek a book . The book could not be borrowed because it was on the waiting list.	Jane went to the library to seek a book . She could not borrow the book as it was on the waiting list.
Jane went to the library to seek a book . The book seems difficult to read.	Jane went to the library to seek a book . It seems that the book is difficult to read.

Table 1 reveals the data analysis of the pragmatic discourse of givenness via A-movement in this study. Condition A was analyzed with A-movement, so code 1 was given. Condition B was analyzed without A-movement, so code 2 was given. After that, SPSS version 29 was used to establish the Pearson correlation between pragmatic discourse of givenness via A-movement constructions in Thai EFL learner's writing in English. This information leads to the results of the study.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Results

This section presents both quantitative results and qualitative results of the study. The quantitative results of the study are presented in Table 2. The hypothesis in this study was accepted.

Table 2 Correlation between A-Movement Constructions and Pragmatic Discourse of Givenness

Correlations		Pragmatic Discourse of Givenness	
Tokens	Pearson Correlation	1	.079
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.671
	N	31	31
Pragmatic Discourse of Givenness	Pearson Correlation	.079	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.671	
	N	31	31

If the p-value is less than 0.05, it is judged as significant.

Table 2 reported that there is no correlation between pragmatic discourse of givenness in A-movement constructions and Thai EFL Mattayom students' writing of A-movement constructions in their academic essay writing in English. Therefore, the hypothesis in this study was proved accepted.

Table 3 Accuracy of A-movement Constructions between Public Schools and Private Schools in Thailand

Schools	Number of Schools	Raw Frequency	Raw Frequency of Accuracy	Percentage of Accuracy (%)
Public	45	18	11	61.11
Private	22	13	7	53.84

Table 3 shows insightful information of the accuracy of A-movement constructions between public schools and private schools in Thailand. The percentage of accuracy of A-movement constructions in public schools is slightly higher at 61.11 percent. However, the percentage of accuracy of A-movement constructions of private schools is just above average at 53.84 percent.

4.2 Qualitative Results

In addition to the quantitative results of the study, this section provides examples of A-movement constructions as produced by Thai EFL Mattayom students, as in (5).

(5)

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

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

(c) Furthermore, another delicious food is **Pad Thai**. **Pad Thai** was invented in the 1930s by the order of Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram.

Even though the participants can use A-movement constructions correctly, they used lexical repetition instead of pronoun substitution. However, most A-movement constructions in Thai EFL learners' writing were written because of arbitrary reasons, as in (6).

(6)

- (a) However, one of them is actually **a row boat** which can sail you along the floating market or sell you all kinds of Thai food. It is likely that fruits, longans and mangosteens can be found on **those boats** as well.
- (b) Some famous Thai dishes are Tom Yum and Som Tum, which can be found in almost every part of Thailand. **Mango sticky rice** is known by people around the world.
- (c) Foods are made spicier for cool climate regions, so people can withstand the coolness. **Temples** are made differently to fit each region's transportation.

In (6a), *a row boat* was presented for the first time as a new piece of information; however, *those boats* were presented as a new piece of information again in the second discourse. In (6b), although the writer talked about Thai food in the previous discourse, the sudden shift from *the main dish to desert* lacks cohesion. In (6c), there is nothing relating to temples from the previous discourse. The writer suddenly shifted from the topic of spicy food to temples via the use of passive voice.

5. Discussion

5.1 Comparison with Previous Studies

Syntacticians such as Wu & Chitrakara (2020) and Wongkittiporn (2023), agreed that the A-movement of passive constructions is not only a story of form or formation. In addition, passive voice is not an interchangeable structure with active voice. The construction of passive voice is irregular, and it is used for certain reasons, such as topic comments and the pragmatic discourse of givenness. This reflects that English teachers who focus only on the accuracy of form in marking students' written essays will affect students' use of passive voice in their real life.

The errors in the passive voice in Thai EFL learners of both public and private schools in this study go along the same lines as Chinese learners, Indonesian learners, and Iranian learners (Duklim & Maneechote, 2021; Sakhaei et al., 2024; Sali, 2023). The common error shared among these groups of learners is that passive voice is used without reason. They don't know why the DP subject requires movement. Passive voice is a tool of luxurious decoration to make their academic essay become highly formal. To further support the statement made by Rosalina et al. (2023), the passive voice of EFL learners regularly appears in their job applications. Actually, the A- movement should support three reasons: placing emphasis, pragmatic discourse of givenness, and economic principle (Wongkittiporn, 2022).

5.2 A Lack of Experience of Using Passive Voice with Other Discourses

The results of this study go along the same lines as a number of previous studies (Duklim & Maneechote, 2021; Voun et al., 2013). Thai EFL learners have problems with producing passive voice as it seems that they do not know when they should use it. This implies that Thai EFL learners lack experience in using passive voice. Although Voun, Intanoo, and Prachanant (2013) reported that Thai EFL learners had problems with misordering the passive voice between the subject and the object, this was not found to be a problem in this study. The participants in this study know exactly how to form passive voice and the tense of passive voice can be produced correctly, such as (7).

(7)

(a) My grandfather was born in 1965. He loved to tell a story about his life when he was born.

(b) We have to look back to the initial era of Thai's kingdom. In the first period, we were influenced by Indian and nearby empires.

In (7a)-(7b), the participants know how to use passive voice with the past tense correctly. In addition, Duklim and Maneechote (2021) pointed out the problems of passive voice among Thai EFL students. The groups of participants were divided into university students and Mattayom students where 44.8 percent answered that they did not know when to use passive voice. This is understandable as Thai EFL learners usually use passive voice without reason. To sum up this point, the participants in this study did not have problems with the formation of passive voice. However, it seems that they have problems with cohesion regarding how to link their passive voice with previous sentences. Why does this happen? Usually when Mattayom students are asked to write down a passive sentence, they are instructed to write sentence by sentence. If they are instructed to write only one passive sentence, Thai students may not have a problem achieving the grammaticality and meaningfulness of their passive voice. However, when the passive voice needs to be written with other sentences or to link with other sentences, the students are faced with difficulty. This is because students seem to lack the knowledge to have a seamless link between their passive voice and the previous discourse.

5.4 Formality

Since the format of a writing contest is formal, it is the genre that requires a high level of formality in vocabulary and grammatical structures (Liardét et al., 2019). For this reason, the participants attempt to use a structure that encourages formality in their written text. Often, the passive voice is not used with proper reason as reproduced in (8).

(8) **Foods** are made spicier for cool climate regions, so people can withstand the coolness. **Temples** are made differently to fit each region's transportation.

Example (8) shows that the writer tried to use passive voice to give prominence to the sentential topic, as in *foods* and *temples*. However, there is no cohesive connection as to why they are used in the subject position.

5.5 Misconceptions of Passive Voice among Thai EFL Learners

Thai teachers usually teach passive voice as the interchangeable structure of active voice because of their meaning, but they are used with different purposes.

(9)

(a) Mango sticky rice is known by people around the world. (Passive Voice)

(b) People around the world know mango sticky rice. (Active Voice)

Example (9a) represents a passive voice. However, example (9b) represents active voice. Although both are semantically the same, they are syntactically and pragmatically different.

In Mattayom schools, Thai teachers who teach prescriptive grammar usually address four steps of changing active voice to passive voice (Swan, 2016). The first step is that the object

of the active voice, such as *Mango stick rice*, becomes the subject in the passive voice. The second step is that the auxiliary *be* is added according to the tense of the matrix verb in the active voice. The third step is that the finite verb in active voice is changed into the past participle such as *known*. The last step is that the by-phrase agent is added if needed. With this teaching approach, Thai students know how to formulate a passive voice. Consequently, they think that they are interchangeable structures. However, the error of using passive voice by Thai EFL Mattayom students is due to a lack of pragmatic competence in the informational structure of given and new information. This means that the subject of the second discourse is moved to the Spec T as old information. The Thai EFL learners in this study appear not to know how to use the cohesion of A-movement structure in passive voice. The sudden use of passive voice between sentences reflects the smoothness of written texts, as in (10).

(10) Foods are made spicier for cool climate regions, so people can withstand the coolness. **Temples** are made differently to fit each region's transportation.

The problem in (10) is the abrupt topic shift from *food* to *temples*. Writing this way could impact the readers' understanding. In example (10), the readers would expect to read further about the examples of Thai spicy food, such as *Tom Yum*, *Som Tum* and *Naam Prick* or Thai Chili Paste.

5.6 Study Materials

As mentioned by Hafiz, Wijaya, and Rusdin (2023), Sharia EFL learners have problems with writing passive voice due to disordering due to first language interference. This problem is also common among Thai EFL learners when they use passive voice. Thai EFL learners do not use passive voice because of informational structure; however, they seem to use passive voice as the interchangeable structure of active voice. When observing the grammar books of Mattayom students in Thailand, the reasons for the use of passive voice are not explained clearly. However, students are taught to use passive voice and active voice interchangeably.

5.7 A Higher Frequency of A-movement Constructions by Public Schools

The results of this study show that students from public schools are likely to have fewer errors of the pragmatic discourse of givenness via A-movement constructions. Although the data collection was quite limited, further studies to interview English teachers in both kinds of schools should provide exact answers. It could be because of either the styles of teaching or the different materials that teachers select to teach. In addition, it could come from the private tutorial classes that students attend. However, one reason that can possibly explain this is language acquisition and development. When going back to check the participant's ages on their registration forms, the participants from public schools were mostly senior high school students who were studying at Mattayom 4 to Mattayom 6 level. If we believe that A-movement constructions are irregular, the acquisition or irregular forms will be later when compared with regular forms (Ramscar & Yarlett, 2007). The participants from public schools with older ages have acquired A-movement constructions. Since it is too soon to reach a conclusion on this point, further study on this topic may need to divide participants into two groups, which are Mattayon 1-3 and Mattayon 4-6.

7. Pedagogical Implications

The results and discussion of this study could be useful to Thai EFL learners and Thai teachers who teach English as a Foreign Language. Although passive voice is difficult to use and the opportunities to use passive voice by Thai Mattayom students is rather low, when it comes to the lessons of passive voice, teachers should encourage students to practice writing passive voice with other sentences. So, the students learn how to use passive voice in context as in (11).

(11)

(1) Peter went to the university library to borrow a historical book. (2) The librarian did not allow him to borrow the book because it was on the waiting list.

According to the example above, students may be instructed to modify the second sentence into a passive voice. Not only is this practice done in context, but the students also acquire the pragmatic competence of pragmatic discourse of givenness. This kind of exercise helps prepare Thai EFL learners to use passive voice in the academic format of paragraph, essay, and their own individual study in the future. This includes the grammatical exercises of passive voice in grammar books. It is recommended that grammarians give examples of passive voice in context. The examples of passive voice in isolation do not support students in creating their academic writing when needed.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated Thai EFL Mattayom students' pragmatic discourse of givenness via A-movement constructions. The main results in this study elucidated that Thai EFL mattayom learners lack pragmatic discourse of givenness on A-movement constructions. This problem is believed to be rooted in two main reasons. The first one is that Thai Mattayom students are taught to use active and passive voices in an interchangeable way. This way of teaching has a consequence when it comes to its usage as it is not actually interchangeable. The second problem is that students are rarely given practice to write passive voice in connection to adjacent sentences. Students lack the experience to learn the aspect of cohesion between the given and new information. So, a cohesion approach should be used when teaching passive constructions in English. Due to the limited data collection, generalizing the results of this study to gain external validity might not be possible. For future research papers in the field of this study, the researchers may divide students into groups, such as Mattayom 1-3 and Mattayom 4-6, which would lead to insightful information.

Acknowledgment

The English Language Department, College of Liberal Arts, Rangsit University, Thailand would like to express our gratitude to the Ministry of Culture, Thailand, for providing the trophy for the winner and runners-up in RSU English Language Academic Contest 2024. The winner, first-runner up and second runner-up of the essay contest in 2024 (Thai Soft Power) were Rachineeburana School, Saint Dominic School and Ongkharak Demonstration School, respectively.

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