On the relationship
between middles and passives
A polyfunctional analysis of -eci
in Contemporary Korean

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Previous studies using diachronic data from the Sejong Historical Corpus have traced the semantic extension of voice marker -eci from middle to passive uses (e.g. Ahn & Yap 2017). In this study, based on data from the Sejong Contemporary Spoken Corpus, we further examine the relationship between middle and passive uses of -eci constructions, with special attention to the neutralization of adversative readings that give rise to generalized (in addition to adversative) middle and passive -eci constructions. Our analysis reveals that judgments about adversative readings in Contemporary Korean are not emergent solely from the semantics of the verb or adjective preceding -eci but additionally are emergent and grounded in the interaction between discourse participants. The distributional characteristics of -eci also show a strong interaction between voice and tense-aspect-mood (TAM). There is also some interaction effects from register and text type/genre, particularly in the usage frequency distribution of spontaneous and passive -eci constructions. In addition, contrary to the traditional notion that -eci is essentially a passive marker, in real usage, -eci is still far more frequently used as a middle marker than a passive marker.

Keywords: middle voice, spontaneous, inchoative, facilitative, subjectification, tense-aspect-mood, adversative semantics

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