

An Implicit Agent in Middle Constructions

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This paper focuses on the syntactic and semantic status of an implicit agent and modification relation in middle constructions. An implicit agent refers to an element with no phonetic form. There is a controversy on its status. In this paper, we will deal with middle constructions in terms of an implicit agent in the following three points.

First, Keyser and Roeper (1984) claim that there is an implicit agent in middle constructions with a syntactic function. However, a closer examination shows that there is no syntactic agent in middle constructions. To make a distinction between middle and unaccusative constructions, it follows that only the former have an agent. Thus, an implicit agent, if any, serves only semantically.

Secondly, it has been pointed out that middle constructions require modification relation, i.e., adverbs, negatives and so on. Adverbs in middle constructions have been considered to modify an implicit agent, i.e., manner adverbs. However, the fact that agent-oriented adverbs cannot occur in middle constructions proves that modifiers do not modify an agent but a theme. Additionally, verbs in middle constructions still have an event reading.

Finally, a comparison between English middle constructions and Japanese related constructions is discussed in terms of agency. Both of them have a semantic implicit agent in the LCS or theta-grid of verbs, which is not overtly realized.