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Author(s): Ki-Sun Hong
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The Passive Construction and Case in Korean*

Ki-Sun Hong
Stanford University

0. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is twofold: one is to isolate the primary semantic factor which distinguishes two kinds of Korean passive, and the other is to show that different case marking patterns in the two constructions directly follow from this semantic difference.

The lexical passive is formed by -i/hi/li/ki affixation (henceforth, HI passive), and the phrasal one is formed by the ci auxiliary (henceforth, CI passive), as in (1-2). They exhibit an interesting contrast in case marking: complements (e.g., 'hand') are marked either nominative (NOM) or accusative (ACC) in the former, but only nominative (NOM) in the latter (Kang 1986, Gerdts 1986, Maling 1989, Y. Kim 1990, among others). This raises a problem, as only one pattern would be generally expected.

    nom dat hand-nom catch-HI-past-indicative
    'John's hand was caught by Mary.'

    acc

    nom by hand-nom catch CI-past-indicative

    b.*John-i Mary-eyuihaye son-ul capa ci-ess-ta.
    acc

First, I will review Y. Kim's approach (1990) to this problem. Second, I will introduce the semantic notion of a determinant, which I will argue to be relevant to the nominative/accusative case alternation in Korean. Third, I will argue that this notion distinguishes the HI passive and the CI passive. Last, it will be observed that distinct case patterns in the two constructions result from the semantic difference. Along the way, we will observe that this semantic distinction also accounts for other related facts.


Y. Kim (1990) proposes case marking rules in Korean which dictate that ACC is assigned to verbal arguments by [+agentive] predicates, projecting an external argument. A [+agentive] predicate has a DO or a CAUSE clause in its Lexical-Conceptual Structure (Jackendoff 1987). Her proposal accounts for the case marking of the CI passive, as in (2). Passive predicates lack the highest DO or CAUSE clause, and thereby, are [--agentive] and cannot project an external argument; hence, no ACC marked complement is sanctioned. HI passive predicates raise a problem for her approach, since they lack the highest DO or CAUSE clause, and thereby, do not project an external argument, but can assign ACC, as (1b) demonstrates. To explain (1b), Y. Kim (1990;217) distinguishes two kinds of complex verbs: one consists of "Vstem+V"(e.g., CI passive form), and the other is "Vstem+affix" (e.g., HI passive form). And in the second case, the [+agentive]
feature of the verb stem percolates up, and makes the whole verb an ACC assigner. For (1a) which has a NOM marked complement, she relies on a structural difference. The 'hand' in this case is an adjunct, which cannot be assigned ACC; hence, NOM by default. In so doing, Y. Kim has to modify her original proposal that a verb's projection of external argument and its case marking ability always go together (see Burzio's generalization, Burzio 1986; 178).

This proposal accounts for the given facts, but leaves some problems. First, Korean has a lexical causative construction which is also formed by -i/hi/li/ki affixation like HI passive, as in (3).

(3) a.*John-i mul-i el-li-ess-ta.
   nom water-nom be frozen-causative-past-indicative
   'John froze the water.'

   acc

In (3), the 'water' must be marked only with ACC. When we consider that the whole causative verb (i.e., elli- 'freeze') is [+agentive], and the verb stem (i.e., el- 'be frozen') is not, this case marking indicates that the case assignment is determined by the whole verb, not by the verb stem, as claimed by Y. Kim. Then, it needs to be explained why the [-agentive] feature of the stem cannot percolate up, that is, why only the [+agentive] feature has such a privilege. This leads us to a more fundamental question. The HI passive is the only case which requires a special interpretation of her theory in Korean grammar. To resort to such a stipulation on one kind of passive is an ironic result, since it is naturally expected that the passive construction (i.e., which suppresses the agent) should provide crucial evidence for such a proposal, expressed in terms of [+agentivity]. Second, it is still disputable whether (1a) and (1b) really have different structures, especially considering the counter-evidence proposed by Yoon (1990) and Maling and S. Kim (1990).

In the next section, I will propose the semantic notion of a determinant, which I will argue to provide a more unified account for the given data and for some related facts which have been considered unrelated (Y. Kim 1990).

2. Determinant and Case

A "determinant"¹ is defined as "one who can determine whether to bring about the sententially denoted situation or not", and therefore, "one who is in control of the situation" (for similar notions, see C. Lee 1973, Fodor 1974, Givon 1975, K. Lee 1987, Klaiman 1988, Farkas 1988, Kroeger 1990, among others). This definition addresses heterogenous entities: one who is volitional, sentient, causing an event, or mobile (see Dowty 1988). These are independent characteristics, but all of them share the ability of determining a situation.² For instance, when a running car hits me, the car is a determinant. But when I am walking and bumped onto a car which is parked, I am responsible for the event. A potential determinant is one who is compatible with being a determinant, in other words, one who can exert control over the situation if one chose, although one does not in the actual situation denoted by the predicate.³

There are some tests to pick out a determinant, including those suggested by Farkas (1988) and Y. Kim (1990). First, it may cooccur with such adverbs as
ilpule ‘on purpose’, uitocekulo ‘intentionally’, capalcekulo ‘voluntarily’. Second, it may co-occur with -lyeko 'in order to' rationale clauses, since only a determinant can plan to bring about a situation in order to satisfy his own purpose. Third, a determinant may be the subject of such a predicate as hwuhoiha- 'repent', as we repent only what we are responsible for. Fourth, it may be the addressee in the sentences of the imperative or propositive mood. This is based on conversational implicature. It is not felicitous to order or propose to somebody to do something in the situation where they do not have any control. Fifth, it may be the causee of a coercive (e.g., siki ‘force’) or a manipulative predicate (e.g., selectukha ‘persuade’), based on the same reasoning. Pragmatically, we can force or persuade somebody to do something, only when they are capable of it. Last, the determinant can be the subject of equi control predicates (e.g., ha 'try', nolyekha 'endeavor', sitoha 'attempt'), as it does not make any sense to try to do something when we are not in control.4

The notion of a determinant is related to animacy. First, due to its definition, an inert thing is hardly ever interpreted as a determinant (except as a causer in lexical causative sentences), compared to an animate being or a mobile thing. Second, Korean seems to have a preference condition which requires that a subject denoting an animate being or a mobile thing should not be interpreted as being controlled by some other determinant. We will see shortly that this condition is necessary to account for some CI passive sentences.

Hong (1991) argues that the semantic notion of a determinant is relevant to the NOM/ACC case alternation. Korean has two kinds of dyadic predicates denoting psychological process: one assigning ACC to its object, and the other assigning NOM, as (4) demonstrates.

    nom acc like-indicative
    'John likes Mary.'

    nom nom be likable-indicative
    '(lit.) Mary is likable to John.'

Although the subjects of both predicates bear the experiencer thematic role, they are distinguished in the determinant relationship: the subject of (4a) is a potential determinant, whereas that of (4b) is not, as (5-6) demonstrate. In other words, John can bring about the situation expressed in (4a), whereas he does not have any control over the situation in (4b).

    nom intentionally acc like-indicative
    '(lit.) John intentionally likes Mary.'

    nom the event-acc forget-in order to acc like-indicative
    '(lit.) John likes Mary, in order to erase the event from the memory.'

    acc like-adjectival fact-acc repent-indicative
    'John repents that he has liked Mary.'
d. Mary-lul cohaha-yela.
   acc like-imperative
'(lit.) Like Mary.'

   I-nom dat acc like-to force-past-indicative
'(lit.) I forced John to like Mary.'

   nom acc like-to try-indicative
'John tries to like Mary.'

(6) a.*John-i uitocekulo Mary-ka coh-ta.
   nom intentionally nom be likable-indicative

   nom the event-acc forget-in order to nom be likable-indicative

   nom nom be likable-adjectival fact-acc repent-indicative

d.*Mary-ka cohu-la.
   nom be likable-indicative

   I-nom dat nom be likable-to force-past-indicative

f.*John-i Mary-ka cohu-lyeko nolyekha-nta.
   nom nom be likable-to try-indicative

Based on this observation, I have proposed that the ACC marked object is sanctioned only when the predicate selects for a subject which denotes a potential determinant. NOM is given by default (Kang 1986, Y. Kim 1990). This rule is, in fact, applicable not only to objects but any complement of the predicate, as we will see shortly. So the rule is generalized as in (7).

(7) Case marking rules in terms of a determinant:
   a. Accusative marked complements are sanctioned, only when there is
      a potential determinant argument which is "syntactically expressed
      (i.e., not suppressed (demoted))".\(^5\) Nominative case is given by default.
   b. An inert thing is hardly ever interpreted as a determinant. It is preferred
      that the subject denoting an animate being or a mobile thing should not be
      interpreted as being controlled by some other determinant.

In the next section, we will observe that the notion of a determinant explains a semantic difference between the two kinds of passives (K. Lee 1987, Klaiman 1988).\(^6\)
3. Two Kinds of Passive Constructions

Let us first consider the HI passive. In each pair of (8-9), (a) shows an active sentence, and (b), a corresponding HI passive sentence.

    policeman-nom  acc  catch-past-indicative
    'The policeman caught John.'

        nom  policeman-dat  catch-HI-past-indicative
        (i) 'John got himself caught by the policeman.'
        (ii) 'John was caught by the policeman.'

    dog-nom  acc  bite-past-indicative
    'A dog bit John.'

        nom  dog-dat  bite-HI-past-indicative
        (i) 'John got himself bitten by a dog.'
        (ii) 'John was bitten by a dog.'

In an active sentence such as (8a), 'the policeman' is clearly a potential determinant of the situation, and passes all of our tests as in (10). In comparison, in the corresponding HI passive sentence (8b), 'the policeman' is not interpreted as a determinant, as (11) shows. Instead, (8b) is ambiguous: in one reading, 'John' is a potential determinant who may intentionally bring about the situation (ex. (12)), and in the other, there is no determinant in the situation: hence the sentence says that such a situation just happens. The same account applies to (9). In either reading, what is important is that the demoted agent is not a determinant: so the precise English translation is, in fact, unavailable. Also in many cases, the HI passive is interpreted more like a middle construction, by having a non-determinant agent, as is expected under my proposal.

(10) a. swunkyeng-i  uitocekulo  John-ul  cap-ass-ta.
        intentionally
        'The policeman caught John intentionally.'

        inspection-acc  make-in order to
        'The policeman caught John, in order to make an inspection.'

        adjectival  fact-acc  repent-indicative
        'The policeman repents that he caught John.'

    d. John-ul  capa-la.
        imperative
        'Catch John.'
I-nom policeman-dat acc catch-comp force-past-indicative
'I forced the policeman to catch John.'

f. swunkyeng-i John-ul capu-lyeko ha-nta.  
to try-indicative
'The policeman tries to catch John.'

nom intentionally policeman-dat catch-HI-past-indicative
'John was caught by the policeman intentionally (the policeman's).' 

inspection-acc make-in order to
'John was caught by the policeman, in order to make an inspection.'

nom intentionally policeman-dat catch-HI-past-indicative
'John was caught by the policeman intentionally (John's).'</p>

acc save-in order to
'John was caught by the policeman, in order to save Mary.'

adjetival fact-acc repent-indicative
'John repents that he was caught by the policeman.'

d. swunkyeng-eykey cap-hi-ela.  
imperative
'Be caught by the policeman.'

I-nom dat policeman-dat catch-HI-comp force-past-ind.
'I forced John to be caught by the policeman.'

to try-indicative
'John tries to be caught by the policeman.'

Next, (13-14) exemplify CI passive sentences.

nom desk-acc make-past-indicative
'John made a desk.'

desk-nom by make CI-past-indicative
'A desk was made by John.'
Unlike the HI passive, (15) demonstrates that the suppressed agent is interpreted as a potential determinant. Thus, the CI passive means that a sententially denoted situation may be intentionally brought about by the suppressed agent, and the subject cannot exert any power over the situation.

desk-nom by intentionally make CI-past-indicative  
'A desk was made by John intentionally.'

desk-nom by dining table-as use-in order to make  
CI-past-indicative  
'A desk was made by John, in order to use it for a dining table.'

In sum, the CI passive construction has a non-determinant subject, whereas the HI passive construction either has a determinant subject or no determinant at all.7

4. Passive and Case

If our distinction of the two passive constructions in terms of a determinant is correct, we can predict various case facts as in (16), based on (7).

(16) a. Either ACC or NOM will be possible in the HI passive, which is ambiguous, due to (7a).

b. The CI passive can never have ACC marked complements due to (7a), as it does not have any determinant argument which is syntactically expressed: the agent is the only determinant, but it is suppressed.

c. Even in the HI passive, no ACC marking will be possible with a subject denoting an inert thing, due to (7b) which dictates that an inert thing is hardly ever interpreted as a determinant.

d. CI passive sentences will sound awkward with subjects denoting animate beings, due to (7b).8

All of these predictions are borne out. First, with such dyadic predicates as catch, tear, there is nothing much to say; the only syntactically expressed argument is marked NOM by default, in either passive construction. (17c), a CI passive with the subject denoting an animate being, sounds awkward as we predicted in (16d). In contrast, (18c), a CI passive with an inert subject, is perfect, as it does not violate (7b).
    nom acc catch-past-indicative
    'John caught Mary.'

       nom dat catch-HI-past-indicative
       'Mary was caught by John.'

       nom by catch CI-past-indicative

    nom the book-acc tear-past-indicative
    'John tore the book.'

       the book-nom dat tear-HI-past-indicative
       'The book was torn by John.'

       the book-nom by tear CI-past-indicative

Differences emerge when we consider dyadic predicates with adjuncts. In Korean, an adjunct agrees in case with an argument, when a whole-part relationship holds between the two (Y. Kim 1990, among others). Following Yoon (1990) and Maling and S. Kim (1990), I simply assume that the real arguments of the verbs in (19) are 'the hand, the title page', while 'Mary, the book' are adjuncts.

    nom acc hand-acc catch-past-indicative
    'John caught Mary by the hand.'

       nom the book-acc title page-acc tear-past-indicative
       'John tore the title page of the book.'

First, let us consider the two kinds of passives of (19a). As mentioned above, the HI passive is ambiguous. When the subject, Mary, is interpreted as a determinant, it sanctions ACC marking on the complement, as in (20a). In the other reading in which nothing is a determinant, no ACC marking is possible; hence NOM by default, as in (20b). In the CI passive (ex. (21)), the suppressed agent, but not the grammatical subject, is a determinant. Thus, no ACC marked complement is allowed in this construction, as predicted in (16b).

    nom dat hand-acc catch-HI-past-indicative
    'Mary was caught by the hand by John.'

       nom
Second, let us consider passives of (19b), which has an inert subject. The same account applies to the CI passive, shown in (23): its subject is not a determinant, so there can be no ACC marking, as (23a) demonstrates. With the HI passive, we find one difference from (20): a subject denoting an inert thing cannot sanction ACC marked complements, as in (22a). It is exactly as we predict in (16c): inert things are hardly ever interpreted as a determinant in Korean.

(22) a.*ku chayk-i John-eykey phyoci-lul ccic-ki-ess-ta.
    the book-nom dat title page-acc tear-HI-past-indicative
    'The title page of the book was torn by John.'

      nom

    the book-nom by title page-acc tear CI-past-indicative

      nom

We get the same result, even in a construction with multiple adjuncts, as in (24). Either ACC or NOM marking is possible in the HI passive as in (25), due to its semantic ambiguity. In contrast, in the CI passive, only NOM marking is possible, as in (26).

    nom acc hand-acc right one-acc finger-acc catch-past-indicative
    'John caught Mary by the fingers of the right hand.'

    nom dat hand-acc right one-acc finger-acc catch-HI-past-indicative
    'Mary was caught by the fingers of the right hand by John.'

      nom nom nom

(26) a.*Mary-ka John-eyuihaye son-ul olunccok-ul sonkalak-ul
    nom by hand-acc right one-acc finger-acc
    capa ci-ess-ta.
    catch CI-past-indicative

      nom nom nom

    nom by hand-acc catch CI-past-indicative

      nom
Let us move onto triadic predicates, as exemplified in (27).

    nom from money-acc take away-past-indicative
      'John took away money from Mary.'

    nom dat money-acc take away-HI-past-indicative
      'Mary's money was taken away by John.'

      nom

    nom by money-acc take away CI-past-indicative

      nom

As repeatedly shown, the CI passive allows no ACC marked complement, as in
(29a). (29b) sounds awkward, due to (7b). With the HI passive, either ACC or
NOM should be grammatical, but the latter (ex. (28b)) evades our prediction. I do
not have any explanation for this now. My speculation is that these specific
predicates should always select for a determinant subject, considering that they
cannot have subjects denoting inert things.

Only the CI passive is possible with cwu- 'give'. When the goal argument,
Mary, takes a dative argument as in (30b), there is only one possibility: the only
syntactically expressed argument (i.e., 'the book') is marked NOM by default.
When both 'Mary' and 'the book' are marked ACC in (31a), the corresponding
passive sentence is not (31b) with ACC on 'the book', but (31c) with NOM, as
predicted in (16b). (31c) sounds awkward due to (7b), which generally prohibits a
subject denoting an animate being in a CI passive sentence.

    nom dat book-acc give-past-indicative
      'John gave a book to Mary.'

      book-nom by dat give CI-past-indicative
      'A book was given to Mary.'

    nom acc book-acc give-past-indicative
      'John gave Mary a book.'

      nom by book-acc give CI-past-indicative
      'Mary was given a book.'

  c.?Mary-ka John-eyuiahaye chayk-i cwue ci-ess-ta.
      nom
Now, we can easily predict what will happen in a triadic predicate with a subject denoting an inert thing, as in (32a). Like (31b), (32b) will be ruled out, since no ACC marking is possible in the CI passive. However, unlike (31c), (32c) will be perfect, since it does not violate (7b).

    nom the table-acc table cloth-acc cover-past-indicative  
    'John covered the table with the table cloth.'
    
       the table-nom by table cloth-acc cover CI-past-indicative  
       'The table was covered with the table cloth by John.'
    
       the table-nom by table cloth-nom cover CI-past-indicative

One last observation deserves a word. The suppressed agent is marked by eykey 'DAT' in the HI passive, and eyuihaye 'by' in the CI passive. I think that this is also relevant to the semantic notion of a determinant. DAT marks an agent which is a non-determinant, whereas 'by' marks one which is a potential determinant. That is why they show roughly complementary distribution (K. Lee 1987). Also it is preferred that the host of 'by' should denote an animate being, due to (7b).

5. Conclusion
In this paper, I have attempted to show that there is a primary semantic factor which distinguishes HI passives and CI passives, and that their distinct case patterns directly follow from this semantic difference.

Notes
*I am grateful to Joan Bresnan and Peter Sells for their valuable discussions and comments. I have also received valuable suggestions from Joan Maling, Jeong-Woon Park, and Tae-Hwa Yoon.

1. The two available notions which are closest to a determinant are the "responsibility relation" (Farkas 1988;36) and "control" (Dixon 1979). I do not adopt the first one, since I, unlike Farkas, do not consider that a determinant is always an initiator. I avoid using the second one, since it has been associated with only an actual determinant or a volitional entity in many works.

2. Hong (1991) demonstrates that a determinant is distinguished from the agentive thematic role.

3. In most cases, we can figure out which one is the "potential determinant" by using the tests. For instance, John is uncontroversially a determinant in a specific situation of (1a), when it is clearly marked by such an adverb as 'intentionally' which is one of our tests. When there is no such explicit marking as in (1b), we can apply our tests, as what will be done throughout this paper: if they work, John is a "potential determinant".

    nom intentionally leave-past-indicative  
    'John intentionally left.'
    nom leave-past-indicative
    'John left.'

This way of interpretation does not work in such cases which have explicit expressions which are incompatible with any of our tests. 'Accidentally' or a specific modality marker, ess, cannot cooccur with 'intentionally'.

    nom accidentally window-acc break-past-indicative
    'John accidentally broke the window.'

    topic soon foot-acc bite-HI-speaker's bet-indicative
    'I bet that John's foot would be bitten soon.'

(T. Yoon, personal communication)

However, case facts require that John in (2) should be also interpreted as a potential determinant in some sense. I think that DeLancey's (1985;6) account, which was originally intended for a "potential agent", provides us with a way to include these cases as our potential determinant. He proposes that, even in these cases, the speaker imputes primary responsibility for the event to John. (2a) would be quite strange as a report of an event in which John has been pushed or thrown against the window by another external force. Thus, an entity, whether intentional or not, counts as a determinant ("agent" in DeLancey), when it and nothing else can be identified as the cause of the event. This way of interpretation, however, leaves us with no possible test, as it mainly relies on the speaker's discretion.

4. It is not the case that a predicate which selects for a determinant subject should pass all the tests. Depending on other factors, some predicates may pass only subsets of them. For example, talm 'resemble' passes only tests from the 3rd to the 6th, and po- 'see' fails the 4th test. The former seems to be due to tense/aspect, and the latter due to a morphological blocking from having another lexical item (i.e., po- 'look at').

5. Hong (in progress) argues that a "potential determinant which is syntactically expressed" is always mapped onto a grammatical subject in Korean. Here, I avoid formulating the rule in terms of a subject, to simplify my argument. Also I try to minimize appeal to grammatical functions in this paper, if not crucial for my argument.

6. K. Lee (1987), from which the present paper gets much insight, claims that the HI passive denotes a "spontaneous" situation and its subject is considered to be "responsible" for the situation, whereas non-spontaneity and a "hidden agent" characterize the CI passive. This generalization works, insofar as we deal with HI passive sentences which are interpreted like a middle construction, and thereby cannot be expressed in terms of a CI passive as in (3).

(3) wun-i yel-li-ess-ta.
    fortune-nom open-HI-past-indicative
    'We are in fortune's way.'

However, the three notions, i.e., spontaneity, responsibility, and lack of another agent, do not always point to the same thing. (4) demonstrates that responsibility
should be distinguished from the other two notions. The situation is not spontaneous, as the event was produced by an external agent (i.e., 'policeman'). But the subject, John, is still responsible for the situation, since we can say "John was intentionally caught by the policeman'.

(4) John-i swunkyeng-eyikey cap-hi-ess-ta. nom policeman-by catch-passive-past-indicative

'John was caught by the policeman.'

My notion of a determinant is intended to pick out the one who is "responsible" for the situation.

7. As Van Valin has pointed out (personal communication), we can have a passive form "V_stem+HI+CI".

(5) John-i swukyeng-eyuihay e phal-i cap-hie ci-ess-ta. nom policeman-by arm-nom catch-HI CI-past-indicative

'John's arm was caught by the policeman.'

The meaning of this passive is the same as simple CI passive: the suppressed agent, but not the subject, is interpreted as a potential determinant, as the meaning of the head (i.e., CI) matters.

8. This preference condition depends on the meanings of predicates.

(6) a. aki-ka emma-eyuihay anci-hie ci-ess-ta. baby-nom mother-by sit-causative CI-past-indicative

'The baby was made to sit by his/her mother.'

b. hwanca-ka kanhowen-eyuihay e chimtay-ey nwup-hie ci-ess-ta. patient-nom nurse-by bed-in lie-cause CI-past-indicative

'The patient was made to lie in bed by a nurse.'

Although there are idiolectal differences, (6), where the causee of the lexical causative construction becomes the subject of the CI passive, sounds much better than (7c). This is exactly what we predict. The condition seems to be based on the semantic conflict between animate beings which are more likely interpreted as a determinant and the CI passive which does not allow a determinant subject. This semantic conflict does not arise in (6), as the causee is interpreted as having no controllability in the lexical causative construction (H.S. Lee 1985).

9. For arguments against the case agreement view which are mainly based on dative case, see Maling and S. Kim (1990). I agree that we need a broader principle which subsumes this apparent case agreement fact, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

10. This (i.e., an adjunct phrase being mapped onto the subject) actually suggests that the HI passive is not a passive in a strict sense (Klaiman 1988, Hong in progress).

11. We can find some cases where a suppressed agent is marked 'by' in the HI passive. This 'by' is different from that in the CI passive: the former does not mark a determinant, whereas the latter does. I think that its meaning is more like 'because of'.

nom policeman-by hand-acc catch-HI-past-indicative

'John's hand was caught by the policeman.'

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