Valency decreasing operations

Operations that decrease valency by “combining” the 2 core arguments of a transitive clause…

- Reflexives
- Reciprocals
- Middle construction

Not all of these are “operations” involving morphology or syntax. Some of them are lexical, meaning they rely on the meaning of the verb.
Middle constructions

- Also called anticausatives or middle voice.
- Found in languages such as Albanian, Bengali, Fula, Tamil, Sanskrit, Icelandic, Swedish and Ancient Greek.
- Involve a reduction in valency from their active counterparts.
- The term middle refers to the fact that they are neither active nor passive. They are in between or middle.
- Expresses a semantically transitive situation in terms of a process undergone by a patient.
Lexical middle verbs

Verbs used in the middle sense but without any special morphology.

(agent) John sank the ship.

(patient) The ship was sunk (by John).

(patient) The ship sank.
(Intransitive sentence with a patient subject)

What is the difference between a middle and a passive?
Entailment

- Sentence A entails sentence B if whenever A is true, B must be true.

Sideshow Bob killed Bart.  
Bart is dead.

Willy is a wearing blue overalls.  
Willy is wearing overalls.

Kent is pointing his finger.  
Kent is pointing.
Middle vs. passive

(2) The ship was sunk.
Sentence (2) entails that sentence (3), but also entails that some agent cause the ship to sink.

You can add an agent.

(4) The ship was sunk by John.
Sentence (3) has no such entailment.

(3) The ship sank.

(5) *The ship sank by John.
Middle vs. passive

- You can add an agentive manner adverb to a passive. But not to the middle construction.

(6) The ship was sunk deliberately.
(7) *The ship sank (*deliberately).
Middle morphology

- Some languages employ morphology to express the middle (English does not).
- The middle morphology may be identical to passive morphology.

(8) Quecha
  Punku kiča-ka-rqa-n
  door open-MID-PAST-3
  ‘The door opened.’

(9) Čuku apa-ka-rqa-n.
  hat take-PASS-PAST-3
  ‘The hat was taken.’
Middle morphology

- Middle morphology may be distinct from passive morphology

(10) ‘to keep’ Panare (Venezuela: Cariban, South Amazonian)
  active    amaika    ‘keep’
  passive   amaikasa  ‘be kept’
  middle    samaika   ‘stay/sit/remain’

Does a language you know have a middle voice?