The expression of three-participant events in Movima

In Movima (isolate, lowland Bolivia), transitive clauses are organized not according to semantic roles, but according to a referential hierarchy (1 > 2 > 3, 3 topical > 3 nontopical). The high-ranking argument expression is phonologically attached to the predicate (see the pronouns in (1) and (2)), the lower-ranking one is phonologically independent (see the NPs in (1) and (2)). Semantic roles are indicated by direct (1) and inverse (2) marking on the predicate.

(1)   *ew-na='ne   is   la:so*
       hold-DR=3F   ART.PL   lasso
       'She held the lasso.'

(2)   *ew-kay-a='ne   os   alamre*
       hold-INV-LV=3F   ART.N.PST   wire
       'A wire held her back.'

The core of a Movima clause contains maximally two argument expressions, which are morphologically unmarked (see above examples). In a clause expressing a three-participant event, one of the two non-agent arguments is encoded as a core argument, the other one as adjunct. The choice which of the arguments, T or G, is represented as a core argument and which is marked as oblique, depends on the predicate. With the verbs denoting prototypical three-participant events (e.g. transfer, deprivement), G is encoded as core argument and T as oblique, as shown in (3) (note that the oblique argument is not obligatorily expressed and often omitted). This pattern, which can be classed as a case of "secundative alignment", is intuitively the expected one given that in Movima, argument encoding is based on referential factors.

(3)   *kay<a>łe=is   kus   alwaj **ni-**kis   wa:ka*
       give<DR>=3PL.AB   ART.M.AB   spouse OBL-ART.PL.AB   cow
       'They give my husband cattle.'

In other cases, however, it is T that is encoded as core argument, e.g. with the verb 'sell'. Notably, the corpus contains no example of this verb where the recipient is overtly expressed.

(4)   *rim<a>łe='ne   os   wa:ka*
       sell<DR>=3F   ART.N.PST   cow
       'She sold a cow.'

In this talk I will depart from the hypothesis that while in Movima, two-participant constructions are reference based, while three-participant constructions are entirely role-based, the selection of the non-A core argument depending on the verb. I will relate this to the function of oblique marking by carrying out an initial corpus study that looks at the overt expression of oblique arguments with different semantically ditransitive verbs. The aim is to find out whether the choice is indeed purely lexical, or whether semantically ditransitive verbs can be subdivided into distinct morphosyntactic classes (monotransitive and ditransitive). Morphologically derived ditransitives (applicative and causatives) will be taken into account as well.