

## On discourse-semantic prominence, syntactic prominence, and prominence of expression:

### the case of Movima

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#### Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between three types of linguistic prominence. The first type, discourse-semantic prominence, encompasses features pertaining to a discourse referent at a given moment, like topicality, person, animacy, or agentivity. The second type, syntactic prominence, is reflected by syntactic privileges of an argument. The third type, prominence of linguistic expression, occurs when a linguistic unit stands out through e.g. length and complexity. Cross-linguistically, a discourse-semantically prominent referent tends to be syntactically prominent but is encoded by a nonprominent linguistic expression (e.g. an unstressed pronoun).

In Movima (isolate, Bolivia), a language with a direct-inverse system, the way the two arguments of a transitive clause are encoded depends on the relative discourse-semantic prominence of their referents. Interestingly, the argument representing the *less* prominent referent is syntactically privileged, having access to extraction constructions. This unexpected mismatch between discourse-semantic and syntactic prominence can be explained by the fact that extraction creates a prominent form of linguistic expression, which therefore applies more naturally to an argument with a discourse-semantically nonprominent referent. The Movima findings thus show that discourse-semantic and syntactic prominence do not necessarily correlate, while supporting the assumption that discourse-semantic prominence universally correlates with low prominence of expression.

Keywords: discourse-semantic prominence, animacy, direct/inverse, relativization, extraction, discourse topic

#### 1 Introduction: Three types of prominence

Prominent entities are entities that are “standing out for whatever reason” (Matthews, 1997:299) or “situated so as to catch the attention” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2016). In linguistics, the notion of prominence has been employed on different levels of analysis. The term is sometimes used in order to explain why, on the discourse level, a particular referent is encoded e.g. by a pronoun rather than by a noun phrase: The speaker assumes that the referent is identifiable because the hearer’s attention is already directed at it, for instance because of some of its inherent features or because it is already an established protagonist. On the syntactic level, prominence is associated with the privileged status of one syntactic argument, typically the subject. In prosodic analysis, prominence is a well-established concept, used to describe e.g. a syllable that stands out among others due to its acoustic properties (pitch, duration, etc.; see Crystal 2008).

These three types of linguistic prominence are not equivalent, and they are usually kept apart terminologically. The first, which I label here ‘discourse-semantic prominence’, is a cognitive category:

Which discourse referent is considered prominent by a speaker can only be inferred through secondary evidence, e.g. through an analysis of the choice of referential expressions the speaker makes, or through neurolinguistic experiments (see Bornkessel-Schlesewsky and Schumacher, 2016). Syntactic prominence, i.e. the privileged status of an argument, is reflected by the grammatical properties of a nominal constituent and can often only be revealed through syntactic tests.<sup>1</sup> Prosodic prominence is the most straightforward type in that it involves acoustically perceivable and, in part, technically measurable features. The notion of prominence, therefore, may at best be seen as a useful tool to refer to clusters of features on different levels of description, without assuming a connection between these levels.

However, the three levels are not unrelated. On the one hand, discourse-semantic prominence and syntactic prominence tend to correlate positively. It has often been observed that discourse-semantically prominent referents are expressed by a privileged grammatical relation if there is one (see e.g. Aissen, 1999; Arnold, 2008:501; Chafe, 1994:85; Kibrik, 2011:55-57; Siewierska, 2004:46). For instance, Kuno's (1987:232) "Syntactic Prominence Principle" states: "Give syntactic prominence to a person/object you are empathizing with"; and Talmy (2007:275) observes that "greater attention tends to be focused on the entity mentioned as subject".

On the other hand, the discourse-semantic prominence of a referent correlates negatively with the prominence of a linguistic expression: It seems that universally, discourse-prominent referents are expressed with lighter linguistic material (e.g. Ariel, 1990; Arnold, 2008:495; Chafe, 1976; Chafe, 1994:75-76; Givón, 1983:18; Gundel et al., 1993; Kibrik, 2011:46; Prince, 1981), as do semantically prominent referents such as humans (see Haig and Schnell, 2016). Possibly the first published statement in this regard was made by John Walker (1781:15): "Those things with which we suppose our hearers to be pre-acquainted, we express by such a subordination of stress as is suitable to the small importance of things already understood".<sup>2</sup> Prominence of expression does not only involve prosody in terms of pitch accent or lexical stress, but can be extended to the length or complexity of a linguistic expression in general, as is also pointed out by Jasinskaja et al. (2015:144): "The lexical and descriptive material is considered to be inverse to the prominence of the discourse referent". Therefore, the use of lighter linguistic material can be taken as an indicator for the discourse prominence of a referent.

Since in most languages discourse-semantic prominence and syntactic prominence go together, prominence of linguistic expression correlates negatively with syntactic prominence as well. This is reflected, for instance, by the cross-linguistic preference to express the subject of a transitive clause by a pronoun rather than a noun phrase ("avoid lexical A", DuBois, 1987). Figure 1 presents the three types of prominence schematically, with their cross-linguistically common positive or negative correlations indicated by simple vs. barred arrows.

The present study shows, however, that the connection between discourse prominence and syntactic prominence is not universal. In Movima, a linguistic isolate of the Bolivian Amazon area, the

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<sup>1</sup> Note that some authors use the term "syntactic prominence" to refer to clause-initial or left-dislocated constituents (e.g. Falk 2014; Moravcsik and Healy 1998). This is not what is meant here.

<sup>2</sup> I owe this reference to Martine Grice (p.c.).

cross-linguistically typical positive correlation between discourse-semantic and syntactic prominence is absent. Here, the argument with the discourse-semantically prominent referent is syntactically nonprominent; and the syntactically prominent argument is encoded by a prominent linguistic form. In Figure 1, the correlations found in Movima that diverge from the cross-linguistically common pattern are displayed by encircled arrows.

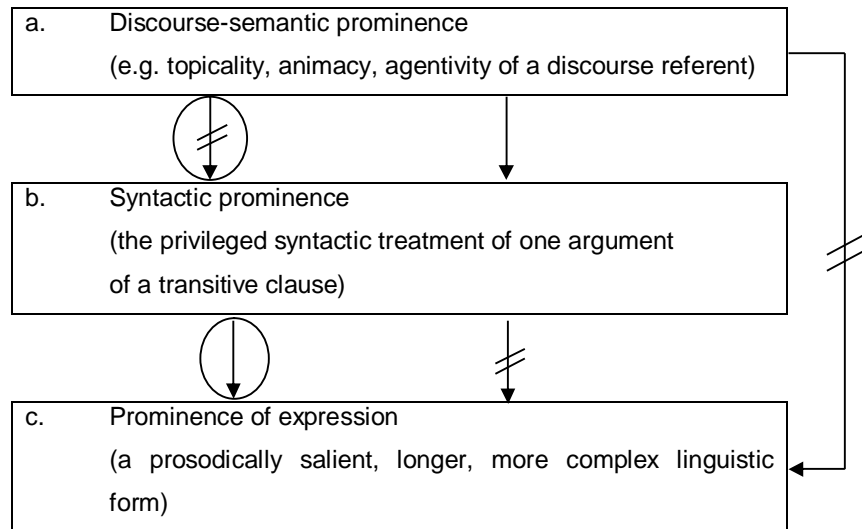


Figure 1. The correlation between discourse-semantic prominence, syntactic prominence, and prominent expressions (barred arrow = negative correlation; circles: the divergent correlations in Movima)

The remainder of this article illustrates these points in more detail. Section 2 provides an overview of some of the factors that contribute to discourse-semantic prominence (§2.1) and illustrates how they affect argument encoding in Movima transitive clauses (§2.2, §2.3). Section 3 describes the structural similarity of the argument that encodes the discourse-semantically nonprominent referent and the single argument of intransitive clauses (§3.1). The syntactically privileged status of this argument is demonstrated with headed relative clauses (§3.2.1), fronting (§3.2.2), and *wh*-question formation (§3.2.3). Conclusions are drawn in Section 4: It is argued that the constructions which lend syntactic privileges to the argument with the discourse-semantically less prominent referent are linguistic forms of high prominence of expression, which are therefore well suited to refer to a discourse referent that is not prominent in the first place.

## 2 Discourse-semantic prominence and its manifestation in Movima

### 2.1 Discourse-semantic prominence

A discourse referent is prominent when the speaker assumes that the hearer's attention is already directed towards this referent, so that the hearer is able to identify the referent without major effort.<sup>3</sup> Some properties attract the attention more easily than others and can render a referent easily identifiable: Speech-act participants are inherently prominent because they participate in the speech situation; animate, especially human, referents are more prominent than inanimate ones because, as many studies have shown (see Gildea, 2012, for discussion), this is where humans tend to direct their attention; moving entities are likely to be prominent since they attract more attention than static ones, and in a two-participant event, the entity that acts upon the other one attracts more attention (see e.g. DeLancey, 1981; Dixon, 1994:84-85; Himmelmann and Primus, 2015; Talmy, 2007; Van Valin and LaPolla, 1997:305). These properties are prototypical features of a topical discourse participant, i.e. of the protagonist that is central to a text or paragraph (cf. Clancy, 1980:178).<sup>4</sup> However, a discourse topic can obviously also lack one or all of these ingredients: A speaker is free to establish as the discourse topic an entity that is, for instance, inanimate and acted upon. In that case, the referent is discourse-prominent even though it lacks the semantic or deictic prominence features typical of discourse topics.

Figure 2 is a schematic representation of what was said above. It shows how deictic-semantic features feed into discourse topicality, and also how each feature can independently contribute to the discourse-semantic prominence of a referent as well.

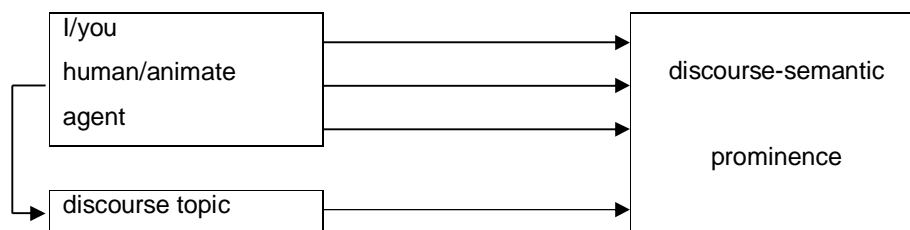


Figure 2. Deictic, semantic, and discourse features contributing to discourse-semantic prominence

As mentioned above, discourse-semantically prominent entities tend to be referred to with less linguistic material (or “reduced referential devices”, Kibrik, 2011), e.g. with an unstressed pronoun or even without an overt linguistic expression. Nonprominent entities, in turn, tend to be referred to with a

<sup>3</sup> Therefore, this type of prominence has also been termed “inherent prominence” (Schultze-Berndt, 2018) or “hearer salience” (Chiarcos, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Comrie’s (1989: 198) notion of “topicworthiness”, which links animacy to discourse topicality, and Klaiman’s (1991: 162) “ontological salience”, which encompasses both discourse factors and the ontological properties of a referent.

noun phrase (or “full referential device”, Kibrik, 2011), which may also contain additional modifiers or relative clauses. It is probably due to their inherent cognitive prominence that human referents have a higher tendency to be referred to by a pronoun than non-human ones (see Dahl and Fraurud, 1996), similar to agents in transitive clauses (DuBois, 1987). Also, it is probably due to their importance in discourse that speech-act participants are more likely to be expressed by a dependent person marker than by a free pronoun, as suggested by Siewierska (2004:46).

All these probably universal phenomena can be observed in Movima as well: A discourse topic is typically animate and the agent in a two-participant event; the first person is a common discourse topic; discourse topics tend to be expressed by an unstressed bound pronoun rather than by a noun phrase. In addition to this, one argument slot in the Movima transitive clause is reserved for the argument whose referent is more prominent in terms of person, discourse topicality, animacy, and/or agentivity.<sup>5</sup> Hence, when uttering a simple transitive clause, a speaker of Movima does not only choose whether to use an NP or a pronoun, but s/he must decide which referent is prominent enough to be encoded in this particular syntactic position. This is addressed in §2.3, after argument encoding in Movima transitive clauses is introduced in §2.2.<sup>6</sup>

## **2.2 Movima transitive argument encoding and the person hierarchy**

A basic Movima clause (i.e. of the most frequent, pragmatically unmarked type) is predicate-initial and maximally monotransitive, i.e., it may contain at most two core arguments. Additional event participants are encoded as adjuncts, marked by an ‘oblique’ prefix. In a transitive clause, one argument is represented by an element (pronoun or NP) in a position internal to the predicate phrase, while the other one is represented by an element in a position external to the predicate phrase. This is depicted in Figure 3. Quite idiosyncratically, the two arguments are labelled ‘PROX’ and ‘OBV’, for the following reasons, which will be fleshed out in the remainder of this section: The argument positions are not linked to semantic roles. When the verb is marked as ‘direct’, PROX represents the Agent (i.e. agent, causer, experiencer, etc.) and OBV the Patient (i.e. patient, recipient, theme, stimulus, etc.), and when the verb is marked as ‘inverse’, it is the other way round. Therefore, terms like ‘subject’ or ‘internal/external argument’ are likely to raise confusion.<sup>7</sup> The choice of the terms ‘PROX(imate)’ and

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<sup>5</sup> Other factors that might be relevant as well (see Zúñiga, 2014), e.g. possession, or the presence/absence of a referent as encoded by the Movima referential elements (see Table 1), do not seem to play a role for Movima argument encoding.

<sup>6</sup> The investigation is based on an annotated 30-hour corpus (i.e. approximately 26,200 clauses or 130,000 words) of spontaneous speech produced by over 30 speakers, collected during yearly field trips to Santa Ana del Yacuma (Bolivia) between 2001 and 2012. The corpus contains mainly personal and nonpersonal narratives, dialogues, descriptions, and procedural texts. The material is archived at The Language Archive (TLA) of the Max-Planck-Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen.

<sup>7</sup> There are strong indications that the two core arguments can indeed be analyzed as “internal” vs. “external” to the verb phrase, following Williams (1981); however, these positions are linked to

‘OBV(iative)’ is borrowed from the Algonquianist tradition (see Hockett, 1966) and based on the fact that the former tends to host expressions referring to topical discourse referents (as well as to those ranking high on scales of person and animacy), while the latter hosts expressions referring to entities that are nontopical and rank low on the different referential scales. In Figure 3 this is indicated in the columns under the slots of the nominal constituents (where ‘+’ should be read as ‘more likely’ and ‘-’ as ‘less likely’; details follow below).

|                          |            |            |            |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Basic transitive clause: | [PREDICATE | [PROX] ]   | [OBV]      |
| Person (1>2sg>2PL>3):    |            | 1/2        | 2PL/3      |
| Topicality:              |            | 3 +TOP     | 3 -TOP     |
| Animacy:                 |            | 3 +ANIMATE | 3 -ANIMATE |
| Agentivity:              |            | 3 +AGENT   | 3 -AGENT   |

Figure 3. The structure of the basic transitive clause and the discourse-semantic properties of the elements occurring in the argument slots

The nominal constituents of the transitive clause are not only distinguished by their structural position, but also by their morpho-phonological connection to the predicate (phrase). The phrase representing the PROX argument is connected with the predicate through a particular type of cliticization, which influences the stress pattern of the word and requires a preceding vowel. Furthermore, this constituent is obligatorily overtly expressed: The absence of an overt element represents a zero morpheme encoding the first person singular. A pronoun representing the OBV argument, by contrast, is attached in a way that does not cause stress shift (see below), an OBV NP is not attached at all, and OBV may remain unexpressed.

First and second person must be encoded as PROX. The examples in (1) show transitive clauses with a first person PROX and no overt OBV argument. When PROX is the Agent, as in (1a), the verb is marked as direct (DR), and when PROX is the Patient, as in (1b), the verb is marked as inverse (INV); the direct and inverse markers are given in boldface. Furthermore, in this section, lexical stress (usually not represented orthographically), is indicated by an accent. In (1), it can be seen that the verb is stressed on the penultimate syllable (here, the first), which is the canonical stress position of Movima lexical items.<sup>8</sup>

semantic roles and are therefore not well-suited for the ergative structure of Movima direct-marked clauses.

<sup>8</sup> The symbols and abbreviations used in the examples are: = internal cliticization; -- external cliticization; < > infixation; 1, 2, 3 = first, second, third person; AB=absential; AG=agentive voice; ART=article; CAUS=causative; CLF=classifier; CO=co-participant; COP=copula; DEF=definite; DEM=demonstrative; DET=determiner; DETR=detransitivizer; DR=direct; DUR=durative; DSC=discontinuous; EPIST=epistemic; EV=evidential; EVT=event; F=feminine; FUT=future; IMM=immediately; INV=inverse; LV=linking vowel; M=male; MD=middle; MOV=moving; N=neuter; NEG=negative; NMZ=nominalizer; NTR=neutral; OBL=oblique; OBV=obviative; OPT=optative; PL=plural;

- (1) a. *Sál-na=Ø*.  
look\_for-DR=1SG  
'I looked for (you/him/her/it/them).'
- b. *Sál-kay=Ø*.  
look\_for-INV=1SG  
'(You/him/her/it/them) looked for me.'

When one or more speech-act participants (henceforth: SAPs) are involved, the referent of OBV, whether overtly expressed or not, must rank lower than PROX in the person hierarchy 1 > 2 > 2PL > 3. Therefore, when PROX is the second person, as in (2), OBV can only be a third person, but not the first (and reflexive verbs are intransitive). This is shown by the translations in parentheses. When a first and second person interact, this is expressed by one of the forms in (1) above, and the second person either remains implicit or is expressed by a free pronoun (not illustrated here; see Haude, 2011a, for details on SAP encoding). In (2b), we furthermore see two defining features of internal cliticization: Unlike suffixation, this process requires a preceding vowel, so that on consonant-final hosts (as created here by the inverse suffix *-kay*), the epenthetic vowel *-a* is inserted. This addition changes the syllable structure of the host, and stress shifts to the right.

- (2) a. *Sál-na=n*.  
look\_for-DR=2  
'You looked for (him/her/it/them).'
- b. *Sal-káy-a=n*.  
look\_for-INV-LV=2  
'(He/she/it/they) looked for you.'

Before turning to the encoding of third-person arguments, consider Table 1, which lists the bound third-person pronouns and the articles that mark an NP. As the table shows, the two sets have similar forms, but are distinguished by their deictic properties. The article does not mark definiteness (definiteness can be explicitly indicated by the demonstrative adverb *ney* 'here', glossed as 'DEF' in this function); in the examples below, the translation with a definite or an indefinite English article is based on the context.

Table 1. Bound third-person pronouns, and articles

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PRO=free personal pronoun; PST=past; REAS=reason; REFL/RECP=reflexive/reciprocal; REL=relativizer; REM=remote past; SG=singular; ST=state. The sources of examples stemming from the text corpus are marked with their source indices in square brackets. Since tense is not consistently overtly marked in Movima, the tense of the translations is chosen arbitrarily or according to the context.

|                            | bound pronouns |                | articles (ART) |                |               |
|----------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
|                            | presential     | absential (AB) | presential     | absential (AB) | past (PST)    |
| human male (M)             | <i>u'</i>      | <i>us</i>      | <i>us</i>      | <i>kus</i>     | <i>us</i>     |
| human female (F)           | <i>(i)'ne</i>  | <i>(i)sne</i>  | <i>(i)'nes</i> | <i>kinos</i>   | <i>isnos</i>  |
| non-human (N) <sup>9</sup> | <i>a'</i>      | <i>as</i>      | <i>as</i>      | <i>kos</i>     | <i>os</i>     |
| plural/mass (PL)           | <i>i'</i>      | <i>is</i>      | <i>is</i>      | <i>kis</i>     | <i>is(os)</i> |

In (3), the third-person PROX is represented by a bound pronoun. Since third-person pronouns are syllabic, the stress shift here also occurs with the direct verb form. Due to the person hierarchy, when PROX encodes a third person, the referent of OBV must be a third person as well.

- (3) a. *Sal-ná=is.*  
look\_for-DR=3PL.AB  
'They looked for (him/her/it/them).'
- b. *Sal-kay-á=is.*  
look\_for-INV-LV =3PL.AB  
'(He/she/it/they) looked for them.'

In (4), PROX is a noun phrase (NP), consisting of an article and a content word. The article is cliticized in the same way as a bound pronoun, causing stress to shift to the last syllable of the host. The fact that determiners, which form a syntactic unit with the following content word, are attached to the predicate in the same way as pronouns, is a central argument for analyzing the process as cliticization rather than suffixation. Again, the unexpressed OBV must be a third person. PROX NPs are extremely rare in the inverse construction (see §2.3.1 below), which is why only the direct construction is given here.

- (4) *Sal-ná=kis*                      *kwe:ya.*  
look\_for-DR=ART.PL.AB    woman  
'(The) women looked for (him/her/it/them).'

The following examples illustrate the encoding of the OBV argument. When OBV is represented by a bound pronoun, the pronoun is attached through what is called 'external cliticization' (represented by a double hyphen, '--'). This type of cliticization triggers no stress shift. Compare (5a), where the third-person plural OBV pronoun is externally cliticized to a predicate with a zero-marked first-person PROX, with (3a) above, where the same pronoun is internally cliticized, representing PROX: The difference is indicated only by the stress pattern. Furthermore, the host of an external enclitic may be

<sup>9</sup> The 'presential' forms include reference to entities present at the speech situation as well as to fixed locations (see (16), (21)), and also generic reference (see (20)); the 'non-human' forms can be used for non-specific or derogatory reference to humans (see (25); see Haude, 2004, for further details).



consonant-final, as can be seen in (5b). External enclitics then take the host-final consonant as their onset, as illustrated by the phonological representation. This resyllabification is an exclusive feature of external cliticization, not found with any other morphological process: In all other environments, vocalic onsets are preceded by a glottal stop (see (7) below).

- (5) a. *Sál-na=Ø--is.*  
 look\_for-DR=1SG--3PL.AB  
 'I looked for them.'
- b. *Sál-kay=Ø--is.*  
 look\_for-INV=1SG--3PL.AB  
 /ʋsal.ka.jis/  
 'They looked for me.'

Within the SAP domain, the second person plural is the only person that can be encoded by an external enclitic. Due to the person hierarchy, this is only possible in combination with the first person, as shown in (6). (Pronouns of 1PL, 2PL, and feminine forms contain an initial *i-* when following a consonant, as in (6b).)

- (6) a. *Sál-na=Ø--y'bi.*  
 look\_for=1SG--2PL  
 'I looked for you (pl.).'
- b. *Sál-kay=Ø--iy'bi.*  
 look-for=1SG--2PL  
 'You (pl.) looked for me.'

External cliticization is restricted to pronouns. When OBV is expressed by an NP, as in (7), the NP forms an independent prosodic unit. When the article is vowel-initial, it is preceded by a glottal stop, as shown by the phonological representation.

- (7) *Sál-kay=Ø            is            kwé:ya.*  
 look\_for-INV=1SG    ART.PL    woman  
 /ʋsal.kaj.ʔis.ʋkʷe:.ja/  
 '(The) women looked for me.'

When two third-person pronouns co-occur, the OBV enclitic is preceded by a *k-*, which is only found when PROX is or contains a 3<sup>rd</sup> person. It is therefore analyzed as an obviative marker, which, however, is redundant, as obviation is already signalled by the structural position of the argument.

- (8) *Sal-ná=is--k-is.*  
 look\_for-DR=3PL.AB--OBV-3PL.AB  
 'They looked for them.'

Summing up, PROX is encoded by a form that is more tightly attached to the predicate, and the form encoding OBV is more loosely attached, or (if NP) not attached at all. Furthermore, which person is encoded in which argument position depends on the person hierarchy  $1 > 2 > 2pl > 3$ , with PROX hosting the higher-ranking person. The semantic roles of the arguments are indicated by the direct/inverse alternation.

### 2.3 The assignment to PROX in the third-person domain

When two third persons interact (henceforth '3>3 scenarios'), the default is that PROX hosts the Agent argument (see §2.3.3): 94% of the transitive constructions with two third-person participants contain a direct-marked predicate.<sup>10</sup> Other factors, which account for the use of the inverse construction in this domain, are discourse topicality (§2.3.1) and animacy (§2.3.2). The relative ranking of these three parameters is hard to pin down, but in any case the findings show that PROX encodes the event participant whose referent is discourse-semantically most prominent, having at least one of the prominence features shown in Figure 2 above.

#### 2.3.1 Discourse topicality

The role of discourse topicality for PROX assignment is apparent from the fact that in 93% of the transitive clauses describing 3>3 scenarios, PROX is a pronoun. Furthermore, even in the remaining 7%, in which PROX is an NP, it is often possible to show that PROX is the discourse topic. In order to demonstrate the effect of discourse topicality on Movima argument encoding, this section focuses on events whose participants rank equal in animacy. Since NPs are not marked for definiteness, so that the only formal indication of a difference in discourse status is the choice between an NP, a pronoun, and – in the case of OBV – the omission of the argument expression.

The text passage in (9) is the beginning of a narrative text in which three animals, a fox, a jaguar, and later a vulture, are equally important protagonists. In (9a), the fox and the jaguar are introduced with full NPs. In (9b), an intransitive clause, the narration zooms in on the fox, which is first referred to by a left-dislocated NP and then taken up with a bound pronoun (--as; on argument encoding in basic intransitive clauses see §3.1 below). The transitive clause in (9c) states that the fox sees a deer. Here, the fox, being the topic of the passage, is referred to with a PROX pronoun, while the deer is introduced with an NP in OBV position. This constellation – a PROX pronoun and an OBV NP – is

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<sup>10</sup> The numbers given in this paper are based on a sample of 1270 transcription units, extracted from the corpus mentioned in fn. 6, which usually contain one (sometimes two) basic transitive clauses with two third-person arguments; see Haude (2014) for a more detailed discussion of the quantitative data.

quite common, found in 55% of the sample, and can be considered the canonical form of a basic transitive clause with two third-person arguments.<sup>11</sup>

- (9) a. *Oso' os fat kwil rulrul che os pa:kona:nak (...).*  
 DEM.N.PST ART.N.PST EV REM jaguar and ART.N.PST fox
- b. *Jayna fat os pa:kona:nak, joy-chet--as*  
 DSC EV ART.N.PST fox go-REFL/RECP--3N.AB  
*n-os bet'i (...).*  
 OBL-ART.N.PST grassland
- c. *Dewaj-na=as [os ney dawjes] (...).*  
 see-DR=3N.AB ART.N.PST DEF deer  
 'A long time ago, there were a jaguar and a fox. (The fox, he was the jaguar's nephew.)  
 So, the fox went to the grassland (with cattle on it. He climbed an anthill and watched the  
 herds. There were all kinds of animals, cows and deers.) He saw this deer (, a big male  
 deer with large antlers).' [HRR\_2009\_tape1A\_004-013]

Example (10) illustrates the inverse construction, used when PROX encodes the Patient and OBV the Agent. In this passage, which occurs later in the same story, the fox is again the topical participant, as is reflected by the use of a bound pronoun in the intransitive adverbial clause (10a). Accordingly, when the vulture, which had not been mentioned for a while, comes up to the fox, the fox is referred to by a PROX pronoun in the transitive clause (10b), while the vulture is re-introduced by an NP. Since the discourse topic is the Patient here, the English translation with a passive reflects well the pragmatic effect of the inverse.

- (10) a. *Jayna fat n-os buka' iloni-wa=as*  
 DSC EV OBL-ART.N.PST DUR.MOV walk-NMZ.EVT=3N.AB  
*n-os bet'i*  
 OBL-ART.N.PST grassland
- b. *ba:lowes-kay-a=as fat [os tuspak].*  
 reach-INV-LV=3N.AB EV ART.N.PST vulture  
 'Then, as he (= the fox) was walking through the grassland, he was reached by the  
 vulture.' [HRR\_2009\_tape1\_B 122-123]

In (11) and (12), which contain the immediate continuation of (9), we see features that do not correspond to the canonical pattern seen so far. In (11), the argument referring to the fox is still in PROX function, but it is now expressed as an NP. Possibly, the use of an NP marks a new passage in

<sup>11</sup> For reasons of space, some text segments are omitted and replaced by '(...)'. Their contents are given in parentheses in the translation. Square brackets mark the OBV argument of a transitive clause, also when unexpressed.

the text, in which the jaguar joins in (see (12) below). The OBV argument referring to the aforementioned deer, in turn, is not overtly expressed (as indicated by the underscore between brackets). The pattern in (11) therefore seems to contradict the general preference for discourse topics to be referred to by pronouns and of nontopics to be referred to by an NP – the deer is not a central character in the story at all and is hereafter only mentioned briefly in a dialogue between the jaguar and the fox.

- (11) *Jaysot pachot-na=os pa:kona:nak [ \_\_ ],*  
 seem observe-DR=ART.N.PST fox  
 ‘The fox seemed to be observing [it],’

In fact, the omission of an overt OBV expression is quite common, occurring in 33% of the clauses describing 3>3 scenarios. Usually, the referent of the unexpressed OBV is not the main protagonist of the text and was referred to immediately before, so that it is retrievable from the immediately preceding context, as in (11) above, which directly follows (9). Thus, the example shows that even in those cases where discourse topicality is not reflected by the use of a full vs. reduced referential device, the assignment to the PROX or OBV function follows the relative discourse topicality of the referents.

In (12), which belongs to the paragraph that started in (11), a topic shift takes place. In (12a)-(12b) it is described how the jaguar comes up, re-introduced by an NP.<sup>12</sup> In the transitive clause (12c), the jaguar is referred to by a PROX pronoun and the fox by an OBV NP. Again, this seems to contradict the general pattern, since so far, the fox was the discourse topic and one would expect it to be referred to by a pronoun. However, first of all, a disambiguation between the two protagonists is necessary in order to indicate who surprises whom. Furthermore, the use of a pronoun to refer to the jaguar confirms the topic shift, which is also evident from the fact that the jaguar persists as a discourse topic in the subsequent sentence, (12d), and beyond.

- (12) a. *ka'de os joyaj-wa=os rulrul.*  
 until ART.N.PST arrive-NMZ.EVT=ART.N.PST jaguar  
 b. *Jo'yaj os rulrul,*  
 arrive ART.N.PST jaguar  
 c. *tet-a-poj-a=as [os pa:kona:nak].*  
 fear-DR-CAUS-LV=3N.AB ART.N.PST fox  
 d. *Bisapa=n Anto:ni, tat jankwa=os rulrul.*  
 done\_thing=2 Antonio EV said\_thing=ART.N.PST jaguar  
 ‘... when the jaguar arrived. The jaguar arrived, he surprised the fox. “(What) are you doing, Antonio?”, the jaguar said.’ [HRR\_2009\_tape1A\_014-017]

<sup>12</sup> Note that (13a)-(13b) represent a case of tail-head linkage, a cross-linguistically common strategy to signal discourse coherence (see Guillaume 2011). However, this phenomenon has not been investigated systematically in Movima yet.

The following examples illustrate the case where PROX and OBV are represented by equivalent referential expressions. When OBV is encoded by a bound pronoun, it is cliticized externally and, in a 3>3 scenario, preceded by a *k-* (see also (8) above). The combination of two third-person pronouns is rare, occurring in only 7% of the sample. Usually, PROX is a pronoun as well in this case (there are only three counterexamples, in which PROX is an NP; see Haude, 2014). Which participant is encoded as PROX and which one as OBV seems to depend on the same criteria as when OBV is omitted (see (11)): The referent of OBV is not the main discourse topic, but is retrievable from the immediately preceding context.

The combination of two third-person pronouns in the direct construction is shown in (14). The example shows that the presence or absence of a referent, though indicated by the pronouns, does not influence the encoding of an argument as PROX or OBV: Here, the absential pronoun, referring to a person not present at the moment of speaking, is in PROX position (=us) and the presential pronoun, referring to a person who is present, is in OBV position (--*k-i'ne*).<sup>13</sup>

- (13) a. *Jayna jop<a:>ye=Ø us majni=Ø di' tochik oveniwankwa. (...)*  
 DSC send<DR>=1SG ART.M son=1SG REL small young\_man  
 b. *Joy-chet--us, jiwa#e-na=us[--k-i'ne].*  
 go-REFL/RECP--3M.AB come-CO-DR=3M.AB--OBV-3F  
 'Then I sent my son, who was a young boy. ("Go over there to your aunt!" I said. "Bring [her]!") He went, he brought her.' [Cbba 114-116]

The combination of two pronouns is also found in the inverse construction, as in (15c), which describes a situation with two human participants. The PROX pronoun in (15c), =*is*, shares its referent with the S pronoun of the intransitive verb in (15a), --*is*. This pronoun represents the topic of the text passage, the Movima people. The OBV pronoun in (15c), --*k-us*, in contrast, refers to a participant that was introduced later – the priest – and whose perspective is not taken in this text; accordingly, it is referred to by an NP in (15b). Hence, the referent of the OBV pronoun is identifiable due to the immediately preceding context, but it is not the discourse topic. Since this participant is the Agent, the verb is marked as inverse.

- (14) a. *Jayna ji<wa: ~>wa--is,*  
 DSC come<MD~>--3PL.AB  
 b. *jayna n-os joyaj-wa=us pa:'i,*  
 DSC OBL-ART.N.PST arrive-NMZ.EVT=ART.M priest  
 c. *jayna itloba-kay-a=is[--k-us] ney.*  
 DSC reassemble-INV-LV=3PL.AB--OBL-3M.AB here

<sup>13</sup> The unmarked masculine articles (*us*) in (13)a and (14)b, must be interpreted as past-tense forms because in each case, the referent was not present at the speech situation and the narrated events took place a long time ago (see Haude 2004).

‘Then they came, then when the priest arrived, then he gathered them here (in the village).’ [HRR\_120808-tigregente 031-032]

The combination of two NPs is even less common than the combination of two pronouns. It occurs in only 4% of the sample, and only in the direct construction. Example (15) is again from the story of the fox and the jaguar. The use of the bound pronoun referring to the jaguar in the intransitive sentence (15a) indicates that the jaguar is topical in this passage. There may be rhetorical reasons for why two NPs are used in the following transitive clause, (15b): This sentence expresses an unexpected situation, in which the jaguar, considered the strongest of all animals, is intellectually outmatched by a physically inferior animal.

- (15) a. *Ka=s            rey        pakuk-te=as.*  
          COP.NEG=DET   EPIST   intelligent-NMZ.ST=3N.AB  
       b. *Jul<a>ra=os        pa:kona:nak        [os        rulrul]!*  
          outwin<DR>=3N.AB   fox                   ART.N.PST   jaguar  
          ‘He (i.e. the jaguar) wasn’t intelligent. The fox outwon the jaguar!’  
          [HRR\_2009\_tape1\_A 416-417]

### 2.3.2 Animacy

Discourse topics are usually human or at least animate, and so, in a corpus of spontaneous spoken discourse it is difficult to measure the impact of animacy independently of discourse topicality. However, there are signs that an animacy hierarchy (human > animate non-human > inanimate) is also a factor influencing the assignment of an argument to PROX status in Movima. For instance, when a situation is described in which a human acts on a non-human entity, it is always the human that is encoded as PROX; and when an inanimate acts on a human, invariably the inverse construction is used (see Haude, 2014). Furthermore, there are examples in which the event participant that ranks lower in animacy can be interpreted as the discourse topic, but in which the PROX position is nevertheless occupied by the participant ranking higher in animacy. One of them is (16), which is from a text about a hen that has escaped. The hen is the topic, referred to by a bound pronoun in (16a) and (16c); nevertheless, the people who are going to catch it, although not introduced previously, are encoded by a bound PROX pronoun in the transitive clause (16b). (See Haude, 2014:309 for further discussion and an example involving the inverse.)

- (16) a. *Jayna   jayte   sal-et-kat-a=a            n-as        chapmo.*

- DSC then look\_for-AG-IMM-LV=3N OBL-ART.N bush
- b. *Jayte ney yok-na=i[-k-a'a]*,  
then here catch-DR=3PL--OBL-3N
- c. *bo as jam-te-wa=a bo as jot-wa=a nosdé.*  
REAS ART.N tie-CO-NMZ.EVT=3N REAS ART.N egg-NMZ.EVT=3N there  
'Then it went at once to look (for a place) in the bush. So now they will catch it, so that it  
be tied fast so that it lay eggs there.'  
[EAO\_Huevo 012-013]

Example (17) is one of the rare cases in which an inanimate entity can be interpreted as a discourse topic, which acts on a human. It is a short joking dialogue about a chair with a broken seat. In (17a), the first speaker introduces the chair, using a left-dislocated NP. The chair is the Agent in the transitive construction, and the Patient is a human; the chair is encoded as OBV, the human is encoded as PROX, and the inverse is used (translated as a passive). That the chair can be considered the discourse topic is confirmed by the reaction of the second speaker in (17b) (an intransitive clause): Her reaction shows that what is funny here is the idea that a chair could bite, not the effect that this may have on the human. Hence, this example suggests that in a human-inanimate scenario, the human must be PROX. On the other hand, the human Patient is referred to by a bound pronoun as well, reflecting the fact that she had been the discourse topic over a larger stretch of discourse already, and therefore may be privileged for PROX encoding. This shows that the impact of animacy on argument encoding as opposed to topicality can not easily be assessed on the basis of spontaneous discourse data. (In extraction, however, there seem to be animacy-based restrictions to the use of the inverse; see §3.2.1).

- (17) a. *As rey si:ya jayna rey po:raka lap-kay-a='ne* [ \_\_ ],  
ART.N EPIST chair DSC EPIST immediately bite-INV-LV=3F  
*jankwa='ne.*  
said\_thing=3F
- b. *Jaja! Lap-ete as si:ya!*  
(laughter) bite-AG ART.N chair  
'The chair, you see, in a second she gets bitten by [it], she says. – Ha ha! The chair  
bites!'  
[CVM\_020906\_1 238-240]

### 2.3.3 Agentivity

It was already mentioned above that the direct construction is the default, occurring in 94% of the sample, including cases where this goes against the expectations regarding topicality and animacy (see (15), (16)). This is not a surprising fact, since agentivity is universally seen as a prominence

feature (see Himmelmann and Primus, 2015), and the phenomenon is seen in other direct-inverse systems as well. In Plains Cree, for instance, “the direct form is by far the more frequent, and may be considered the unmarked choice” (Dahlstrom, 1986:72).

For instance, as was stated above, whenever PROX is an NP, the construction is direct (with only three counterexamples in the corpus). Furthermore, of the 45 clauses in the corpus describing a scenario with an animal acting on a human, 31 (i.e. 63%) are direct, with the animal as PROX – sometimes even if the human was the discourse topic before. One of them is (18), which is particularly striking. Here, PROX is an NP referring to fishes, which cannot be considered topical in the story. The referent of the non-expressed OBV, in contrast, is not only human, but also the main protagonist of the story.<sup>14</sup>

- (18) a. *Jayna isnos tolkosya jayna ka,*  
DSC ART.F.PST girl DSC COP.NEG  
b. *jayna jom<a>ni=is bi:law [ ] jayna.*  
DSC devour<DR>=ART.PL fish DSC  
‘The girl wasn’t (there) anymore, the fishes had devoured [her] already.’  
[JGD\_130907-06 274]

To sum up, both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of corpus data show that the PROX function in a Movima transitive clause encodes the argument whose referent is more prominent in terms of person, discourse topicality, animacy, or agentivity. Only the factor person (SAP>3) is grammatically fixed. The other factors, which only play a role in the third-person domain, tend to go together in spontaneous discourse; when they do not, it is hard to say if there is a ranking among them or if they are in competition with each other. In any case, in the third-person domain the speaker can choose which participant to encode as prominent; the choice may at worst seem awkward to other speakers (as is sometimes apparent from their comments during annotation sessions), but is usually not rejected as ungrammatical.

The following section shows that the argument encoded as PROX, which encodes the discourse-semantically prominent referent, does not have any syntactic privileges (see Haude, 2009a; Haude, to appear a; Haude, 2012). OBV, by contrast, which encodes the less prominent referent in discourse-semantic terms, aligns with the single argument of intransitive clauses (S) and shares with this argument the ability to participate in relativization, fronting, and wh-question formation.

<sup>14</sup> These clear counterexamples are often found in sentences that describe a central and sometimes shocking event in a text – fishes eating a girl, a snake biting the speaker’s child, a jaguar attacking a boy, a fish pulling the fisherman into the water etc. (see also (15) above for a potentially similar case). Further research may show that the use of the direct voice here is a means to focus on the event rather than on the effect on the victim. However, the use of the unexpected direct voice is not restricted to verbs of physical impact.



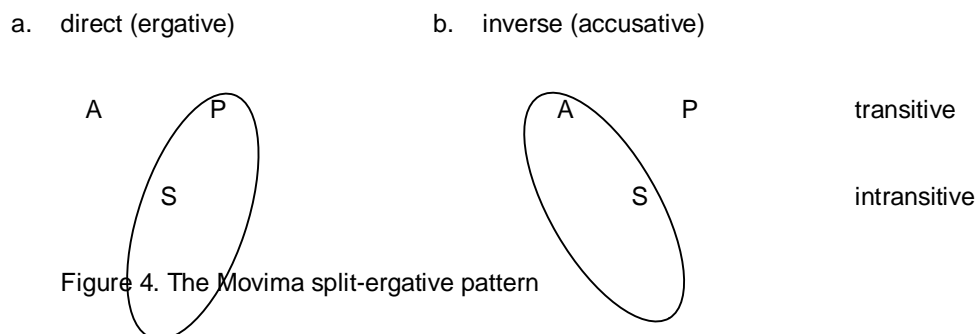
### 3 Syntactic prominence of OBV

#### 3.1 Alignment of OBV and S

The single argument of an intransitive main clause, S, has the same coding properties as the OBV argument of a transitive clause: S may remain unexpressed, as in (19a); when expressed by a bound pronoun, as in (19b), the pronoun is encliticized in a way that causes resyllabification but no stress shift, as shown by the phonological representation; finally, when S is expressed by an NP, as in (19c), the article is phonologically independent.<sup>15</sup>

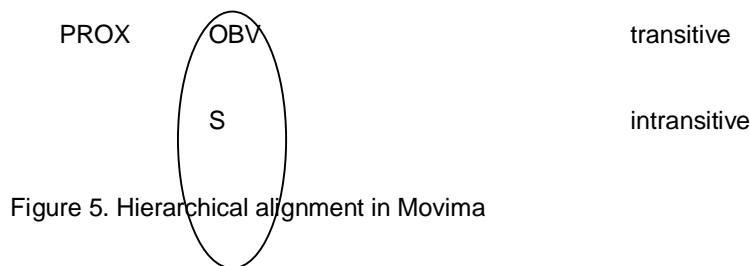
- (19) a. *Jó'yaj*  
arrive  
'(I/we/you/he/she/it/they) arrived.'
- b. *Jó'yaj--is.*  
arrive--3PL.AB  
/ʋhoʔ.ja.his/  
'They arrived.'
- b. *jó'yaj is kwe:ya*  
arrive ART.PL woman  
/ʋhoʔ.jah.ʔis.ʋkʷe:.ja /  
'(The) women arrived.'

When the assignment of semantic roles through direct and inverse marking is taken into account, this leads to a split-ergative pattern, shown in Figure 4: The direct construction, in which the argument that aligns with S is the Agent (here: A), patterns ergatively, and the inverse construction, in which the argument that aligns with S is the Patient (here: P), patterns accusatively (see Haude, 2010).



<sup>15</sup> The intransitive constructions in many of the examples above seem to contradict this pattern, since S is represented by an internally cliticized element. This is because most of these clauses involve nominalization, where the argument is encoded like a possessor, i.e. internally cliticized.

However, given the fact that, as argued above, argument encoding in transitive clauses is based not on semantic roles alone, but also on other semantic and discourse-pragmatic properties of the referent, the pattern can be represented more simply, as in Figure 5: OBV aligns with S, whatever its semantic role. (This pattern was termed “hierarchical alignment” in Haude, 2009a, since the encoding of an argument as either PROX or OBV can be described as depending on the position of its referent in a referential hierarchy.)



### 3.2 Syntactic privileges

Apart from the formal features shared with S, some constructions in Movima can only be accessed by the S or OBV argument, but not by PROX (see Haude, to appear a). These constructions are relativization (§3.2.1), pronoun fronting (§3.2.2), and wh-question formation (§3.2.3). They can all be subsumed under the term ‘extraction’, which is used as a purely descriptive tool here: One can think of the OBV (or S) argument as being removed from its clause-final position and represented instead by an NP (in the case of a relative clause), by a free pronoun (in the case of pronoun fronting), or by a wh-question word (in the case of question formation) before the predicate.<sup>16</sup> In order for the PROX argument to get access to these constructions, a detransitivizing operation has to be used (see §3.2.1), which turns the PROX argument of a transitive predicate into S of a detransitized predicate and demotes the former OBV to adjunct status.

#### 3.2.1 Headed relative clauses and the detransitivizing operation

Headed relative clauses follow the NP they modify and are introduced by the relativizing particle *di'*. There is no grammatical distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses, but the former are by far more common. The relativized argument is gapped, i.e. not repeated inside the relative clause. Only S and OBV can be relativized. Example (20) shows a relative clause with an intransitive predicate (*jo'ya*) whose S argument (*kis juyen*) is relativized. To illustrate the parallels between relative clauses and basic clauses, the bracketed elements in these examples represent the ‘extracted’ S/OBV argument.

<sup>16</sup> Alternative accounts might be framed in terms of relativization or nominalization (see Haude, to appear b); however, the theoretical status of these constructions is not relevant for the present study.

- (20) [kis juyeni] di' jo'yaj nosdé n-as aldi  
 ART.PL.AB person REL arrive over\_there OBL-ART.N other\_side  
 '(the) people who arrived over there on the other riverbank'  
 [ERM\_140806\_2 149]

Example (21) illustrates a relative clause with a transitive verb, whose direct marker indicates that the relativized NP (*as sawi:pa*) refers to the Patient; (22) shows a relative clause with an inverse-marked verb, where the relativized NP (*kis senyo:ra*) represents the Agent.

- (21) [as sawi:pa] di' ew-na=is machite:ro  
 ART.N machete REL grab-DR=3PL machetero  
 'the/a machete that the *macheteros* hold'  
 [JGD\_160808-Fundacion-01 545]
- (22) Kiro' [kis senyo:ra] di' vel-kay-a=sne.  
 DEM.PL.AB ART.PL.AB lady REL watch-INV-LV=3F.AB  
 'There are women who will look after (lit.: watch) her.'  
 [EAO\_Asilo 004]

As (22) above suggests, the inverse can be a means to provide the Agent with access to relativization. However, the inverse is found in relativization only when the Agent is of lower discourse-semantic prominence than the Patient. In (22), for instance, both event participants are human, but the Agent (*kis senyo:ra*) is newly introduced into the discourse, as reflected by the demonstrative predicate that marks an existential clause (see Haude in press a), and therefore not the discourse topic.

A more productive method to relativize the Agent is to apply a detransitivizing operation, shown in (23). This operation, marked by the particle *kwey* (*kaw* in the speech of some), promotes the PROX argument to the status of S, while OBV is demoted to adjunct status (marked by the oblique prefix *nV-*; see e.g. (20) above). The direct marker on the verb is retained, indicating that the relativized argument is the Agent; due to the detransitivization, however, the predicate cannot take a PROX enclitic. In spontaneous discourse, the detransitivizing operation only occurs with direct-marked predicates, where it functions as an antipassive.<sup>17</sup>

- (23) [i'nes senyo:ra] di' **kwey** vel-na nosdé **no-kos** asna=Ø

<sup>17</sup> This is probably because the direct construction can be used to describe events with a lower-ranking agent. Unfortunately, there are no examples of a relative clause or other extraction construction describing events with an inanimate entity acting on a human, which in basic clauses are always expressed in the inverse.

ART.F lady REL DETR watch-DR over\_there OBL-ART.N.AB house=1SG  
 ‘the woman who looks after my house over there’ [EAO\_Cbba 243-244]

### 3.2.2 Pronoun fronting

OBV can be represented by a free pronoun before the predicate, a construction I label ‘fronting’ here – again, using a technical term for purely illustrative purposes.<sup>18</sup> Table 2 lists the free third-person pronouns. As can be seen, the free forms are generally longer than the bound forms (cf. Table 1 above; the feminine bound pronouns are disyllabic only when following a consonant). While bound pronouns do not bear stress, the free pronouns bear stress on the penultimate (i.e. first) syllable, in line with the general stress rules of independent words.

Table 2. Movima free pronouns of third person

|                  | presential  | absential (AB) |
|------------------|-------------|----------------|
| human male (M)   | <i>u’ko</i> | <i>usko</i>    |
| human female (F) | <i>i’ne</i> | <i>isne</i>    |
| non-human (N)    | <i>a’ko</i> | <i>asko</i>    |
| plural/mass (PL) | <i>i’ko</i> | <i>isko</i>    |

A fronted pronoun typically refers to a discourse participant that was newly introduced immediately before, thereby excluding the discourse topic from its referential scope; this is reminiscent of the “anaphoric demonstratives” in Germanic languages (Comrie, 1997). However, unlike anaphoric demonstratives, pronoun fronting does not involve a topic shift: Usually, the referent only pops up briefly and does not persist in the subsequent discourse (see Haude, in press b).

Illustrations are given in (24) and (25). Each example contains two sentences; in the first (a.), a referent is introduced for the first time in the text, and in the second (b.), it is taken up by a fronted free pronoun. In accordance with the semantic role of the argument represented by the free pronoun (Patient in (24b), Agent in (25b)), the transitive predicate is marked as direct in (24) and as inverse in (25). In neither case is the referent of the free pronoun maintained as a discourse topic, as the continuation in the translation shows.

- (24) a. *Kaw-ra* is *mari:ko* *di’* *plastiko*.  
 much-CLF.NTR ART.PL bag REL plastic  
 b. *Dis* [*isko*] *beya’ka* *bat-na=sne* *n-os* *kwante=i*.  
 OPT PRO.3PL.AB at\_least put-DR=3F.AB OBL-ART.N.PST top\_of=3PL

<sup>18</sup> Syntactically, this construction is a cleft: syntactic tests show that the fronted pronoun in this construction is the main predicate, while the lexical predicate is a headless relative clause. However, the free pronoun, i.e. the clefted constituent, is not prosodically accentuated, and the construction does not have a dedicated focus-marking function (see Haude, in press b).

‘(There are) many plastic bags. She should at least have put those on its top (i.e. of the manioc mass. Then it would have fermented well.)’ [Tuncho 009-010]

- (25) a. *Yey-na=sne*      *os*      *so:t-e*      *di'*      *itila:kwa,*  
 want-DR=3F.AB      ART.N.PST      other-CLF.person      REL      man  
 b. *che [asko]*      *joy-te-kay-a=sne.*  
 and      PRO.3N.AB      go-CO-INV-LV=3F.AB  
 ‘She fell in love with another man, and that one took her with him. (So I had to look for another wife.)’ [NAO\_FSG\_300706\_1 334]

In the same way as with relativization (§3.2.1), only S and OBV can be represented by fronted pronouns.<sup>19</sup> In order to provide the referent of PROX with access to this construction, the detransitivizing operation is applied. As with headed relative clauses, the detransitivizing operation is only found with direct predicates describing situations where the Agent ranks equal with or higher than the patient. In (26), from a text about pottery which contains direct speech, the basic intransitive clause in (26a) first introduces a new referent (a cloth), and in (26b) this referent is taken up by the free pronoun. Since the fronted pronoun represents the Agent here, the detransitivized construction is used.

- (26) a. *kos*      *ney*      *dokwenojbet*      *di'*      *alchoť-a=kos*      *bubutkwa*  
 ART.N.AB      DEF      cloth      REL      side-LV=ART.N.AB      mud  
 b. *[asko]*      *kwey*      *ew-na*      *n-as*      *bubutkwa*  
 PRO.3N.AB      DETR      grab-DR      OBL-ART.N      mud  
 ‘(She lifted it with a cloth because I had told her:) “That cloth which is next to the loam, that (is what) grabs the loam.”’ [CCT 120907\_3 062-063]

### 3.2.3 Wh-questions

In a Movima wh-question, the question word is the predicate, and the questioned entity is expressed as the argument. As in the other extraction constructions, only S and OBV can be the target of a wh-question, whose semantic role is specified by direct or inverse marking on the verb. This is shown in

<sup>19</sup> A free pronoun cross-referencing PROX, which is simultaneously represented by the obligatory internal enclitic, can occur before the predicate as well. However, this construction has a different function and different structural properties, and can be analyzed as left dislocation (see Haude, to appear a).

(27) and (28), respectively. The question word is marked by square brackets since it asks for the OBV argument of the verb.<sup>20</sup>

- (27)    *[tʰɛ̃a]*        *kos*            *dewaj-na=nkwet*  
          be\_what   ART.N.AB       see-DR=2PL  
          ‘What did you see (lit.: What was [the thing] you saw)?’            [HRR\_120808-tigregente 519]

- (28)    *[tʰɛ̃a]*        *kos*            *tarat-kay-a=nkwet*  
          be\_what   ART.N.AB       heal-INV-LV=2PL  
          ‘What (was it that) healed you (pl.)?’            [ERM\_140806\_1 0938]

In order to question a high-ranking Agent, again, the detransitivizing construction is used, shown in (29). The example contains the question word *e:ʔe* ‘who’, which asks about a human referent.<sup>21</sup>

- (29)    *[e:ʔe]*        ***kaw***        *nokwa*        *vel-na*        *n-a’ko*  
          who\_is       DETR       FUT            watch-DR       OBL-PRO.3N  
          ‘Who is going to look after (lit. watch) it?’            [GBM\_Ganado-01 050]

#### 4 Conclusion: Syntactic prominence for prominent expressions

Table 3 shows the results presented above concerning the properties of the two arguments of a Movima transitive clause. The upper segment sums up the tendencies for assigning an argument to the PROX function described in §2.3, while the lower segment shows the syntactic possibilities of each of the argument functions described in §3. There is an obvious discrepancy between the fact that PROX hosts referents of high discourse-semantic prominence, i.e. SAPs, humans/animates, and discourse topics, on the one hand, and the impossibility of this argument to participate in extraction processes.

<sup>20</sup> Actually, this construction is slightly more complex since the NP itself – ‘what you saw’ – represents the S/OBV argument (see Haude, to appear b, on NPs containing a verb). The S/OBV bias involves the referent of this NP rather than the question as a whole, in which the question word is the predicate of an equational clause.

<sup>21</sup> *kaw* is a speaker-dependent alternative pronunciation of the particle *kwey*. I have at present no explanation why there is no article here.

Table 3. Discourse-semantic vs. syntactic prominence of PROX and OBV

|                |                          | PROX | OBV |
|----------------|--------------------------|------|-----|
| referent is:   | SAP (> 3 <sup>rd</sup> ) | +    | –   |
|                | discourse topic          | +    | –   |
|                | human/animate            | +    | –   |
|                | Agent                    | +    | –   |
| has access to: | relativization           | –    | +   |
|                | pronoun fronting         | –    | +   |
|                | wh-question              | –    | +   |

Thus, syntactic prominence, which in Movima surfaces in the possibility of extraction, stands in opposition to the discourse-semantic prominence of an argument's referent; in other words, the argument whose referent has less discourse-semantic prominence features is syntactically privileged. This phenomenon is reminiscent of what is found in so-called syntactically ergative languages (Dixon, 1994), where the argument that encodes the patient is syntactically privileged. The difference is that in Movima, the line is not drawn along semantic roles, but along discourse-semantic prominence more generally (see Figure 5).

The coexistence of two or more transitive construction whose choice is based on the relative discourse prominence of the event participants is known from other direct-inverse systems, as well as from symmetrical-voice systems like that of e.g. Tagalog (see Haude and Zúñiga, 2016, for an overview); especially the latter also show a clear argument asymmetry, in which the syntactically privileged argument is selected according to the discourse-pragmatic properties of its referent. At the same time, Movima goes one step further in that its argument asymmetry also involves the factors person and animacy.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, in those languages in which a direct-inverse system interacts with grammatical relations, it is assumed that the argument with the higher-ranking referent should have the privileged syntactic status (see Zúñiga, 2016:106); however, as we have seen, the contrary is the case in Movima. Thus, the Movima data challenge the expectation that discourse-semantic prominence and syntactic prominence should correlate.

The typologically unusual discrepancy between discourse-semantic prominence and syntactic prominence in Movima make sense, however, if one looks more closely at the functions of the constructions that privilege the S/OBV argument. In a number of languages, relativization is restricted to one single grammatical relation and is then taken by typologists as an indicator of the privileged syntactic status of one argument (see e.g. Keenan, 1976; Dixon, 1994:169–170; Bickel, 2011), similar to conjunction reduction and other argument deletion rules. However, relativization (especially

<sup>22</sup> As argued in Haude (2009b, 2010), the asymmetry between PROX and OBV may be due to a fundamentally intransitive structure of Movima clauses, transitive predicates being analyzable as nominal forms with a possessor (PROX) and only one single argument (OBV).

restrictive), pronoun fronting, and wh-question formation have one fundamental property in common, which distinguishes them from argument deletion rules: They establish or increase the identifiability of a discourse referent, as outlined in what follows.

A restrictive relative clause is a means to render a referent identifiable and available for the subsequent discourse. As Fox (1987:861) puts it: “[R]elative clauses serve to situate the referent that is being introduced as a relevant part of the ongoing discourse; in a sense, they justify the introduction of the referent in the first place”. Accordingly, the patient argument, with its *a priori* nonprominent character, is a common target of relativization also in nominative-accusative languages (see Bickel, 2011:428–429; Fox, 1987; Ganenkov, 2016; Gordon and Hendrick, 2005; Van Valin and LaPolla, 1997:306-307). That in Movima transitive clauses only the OBV argument has access to relativization is coherent with this tendency: OBV encodes the discourse-semantically less prominent referent, and relativization provides this referent with a prominence feature that it does not originally possess, namely better identifiability. SAPs and other discourse-semantically prominent referents that are referred to with pronouns are identifiable, which is why relativization is usually not an option for them.

Pronoun fronting shares with relativization the pragmatic property that “the clause in which the displaced NP functions is always *about* the referent of the NP” (Van Valin and LaPolla, 1997:627), i.e., the fronted pronoun and the relativized NP represent the sentence topic. In Movima, the fronted free pronoun explicitly singles out the last-mentioned referent as the sentence topic, about which the predicate then provides the comment (see Haude in press b). In this way, the free pronoun has a reference-tracking function, which helps the hearer to identify the referent about which the comment is made. Importantly, unless the detransitivizing operation is applied, the referent of the free pronoun is *not* the discourse topic (which is why relativization is restricted to the OBV function), and this may explain why there is a fronting construction to render this referent identifiable.

Questions (and answers) differ from both relativization and fronting in that they are focus constructions. However, asking a question regarding the identity of an event participant is a way to render a referent prominent, too: The question guides the hearer’s attention to an entity whose identity the speaker does not know or is not sure about. Ideally, the hearer will be able to provide this information, thereby rendering the referent identifiable; both attention and identifiability are features of discourse-semantic prominence. In sum, the constructions that single out the OBV argument in Movima render cognitively prominent a referent that is not prominent in the first place.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from their pragmatic prominence-lending function, the constructions that privilege OBV are prominent structurally, i.e. they are prominent expressions. They are complex, being the result of an extraction process. They also involve more physical, i.e. acoustic, material than basic clauses. A relative clause creates a long and complex NP. Fronting, while simple on the surface, involves a pronoun that occurs in non-canonical, initial position and that is prosodically heavier (disyllabic, stress-

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<sup>23</sup> On the prominence-enhancing property of both topic and contrastive focus, see Cowles et al. (2007), who account for this similarity by stating that contrastive focus, unlike informational focus, implies the presupposed existence of the referent. However, I do not see why this reasoning should exclude informational focus, since when a speaker asks a wh-question about a referent, s/he also presupposes the existence of this referent.



bearing) than its bound counterpart; furthermore, the initial position of the pronoun is inherently prominent due to its “edge placement” (Himmelmann and Primus, 2015:50). A question, finally, requests an answer, thereby interrupting the ongoing flow of discourse and potentially triggering additional linguistic material. Hence, the fact that the argument with the discourse-semantically nonprominent referent has access to these constructions is in line with the universal negative correlation between discourse-semantic prominence of a referent and a linguistic form of high prominence of expression (see Figure 1): Not only is a discourse-semantically prominent referent expressed by a linguistic form of low prominence of expression, but also vice versa, a nonprominent referent can have privileged access to a linguistic form of high prominence of expression. If, as Talmy (2007:282) puts it, “a longer form attracts more attention to the concept, while a shorter form attracts less attention,” then longer forms are more adequately applied to concepts that are not prominent in the first place.

Thus, the fact that the discourse-semantic prominence of a referent and the syntactic prominence of the argument by which it is encoded are opposed to each other in Movima is not just a puzzling idiosyncratic property of this language. On the contrary: In a grammar that pays much attention to the relative discourse-semantic prominence of the participants in a two-participant event, it makes sense that the participant with less prominence features is more likely to figure in constructions whose function is to describe an entity in more detail (like a relative clause), to single it out as a sentence topic (by pronoun fronting), or to identify its referent (as is asked for in a question). In other words, the Movima findings support and reinforce the idea that prominent referents are likely to be expressed in a non-prominent way, while nonprominent referents require a more explicit description that stands out among the surrounding discourse. Whether syntactic prominence correlates with the discourse-semantic prominence of a referent or not is a different matter: This depends on the syntactic domains in which syntactic prominence shows up. Deletion in coordination most probably tends to go hand in hand with discourse-semantic prominence; syntactic prominence showing up in the possibility to be relativized or otherwise ‘extracted’, however, are functionally quite different and are more likely to be dissociated from discourse-semantic prominence.

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