Let’s give hands – and arrows: (in)alienable possession in Amazonian languages and beyond

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28/09/2020 @ Collegium de Lyon
1. Introduction: Why?

• This project straddles two disciplines within linguistics:
  • Language description, focusing on Harakmbut
  • Linguistic typology

• These disciplines which have always mutually enriched each other:
  • LD → LT: The more languages we know through language description, the more linguistic diversity we find, and the more insights we get into possible ways of conceptualizing the world around us
    [every language is a repository of cultural knowledge as well as the only access to that knowledge]
  • LT → LD: The better we know what we can expect to find in specific languages on the basis of comparative work, the better we can understand and describe language-specific phenomena.

• Shared goal: linguistics aims to understand the essence of language = communication mode that distinguishes humankind from the rest of the animal world
1. Introduction: Topic

- This project focuses on **inalienable possession**, a topic where cognition and grammar seem to intertwine.
- Alienability contrasts show up in the expression of **adnominal possession** (e.g. Nichols 1988; Haspelmath 2017), e.g. (1)

\[(1a) \quad ji \quad syim \\
1SG \quad arm \\
‘my arm’\]

\[(1b) \quad ji \quad bi \quad nggwe \\
1SG \quad POSS \quad garden \\
‘my garden’\]

Abun, West Papuan (Berry & Berry 1999: 77–78)

- The difference in morpho-syntactic marking between (1a) and (1b) has been explained in terms of alienability, with juxtaposition being used for inalienable possession (1a) and the linker construction for alienable possession (1b)
• The difference in morpho-syntactic marking between (1a) and (1b) has been explained in terms of alienability (cf. Chappell & McGregor 1996a: 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>inalienable possession</th>
<th>alienable possession</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>inextricable, essential or unchangeable relations between possessor and possessum</td>
<td>less permanent and less inherent associations between possessor and possessum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivated by our human condition of being born within a body – consisting of parts that we normally do not separate from – and into a kin network</td>
<td>motivated by how we interact with material possession</td>
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</table>
Outline

1. Introduction
2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns
3. Alienability contrasts beyond Amazonian languages
4. Psycholinguistic excursion
5. Conclusion
2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns

• Harakmbut is a language from the Peruvian Amazon, Madre de Dios and Cusco

• Genetic affiliation:
  • isolate/unclassified language (cf. Wise 1999: 307; WALS)
  • Adelaar (2000, 2007): genetically related to the Brazilian Katukina family

• Areality:
  • Some grammatical features are shared with languages from Guaporé-Mamoré linguistic area (Crevels & van der Voort 2008)
Harakmbut live in ‘native communities’: patches of land entitled to them by the government

subtropical climate

around tributaries of the Madre de Dios River, which eventually flows into the Amazon River;
- About 1000 speakers left; distinct dialects
- Previous linguistic work: focus on Arakmbut/Amarakaeri dialect (Hart 1963; Helberg 1984, 1990; Tripp 1976ab, 1995)
San José del Karene
2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns

2.1 Bound versus independent nouns
2.2 Noun modification
2.3 Noun incorporation
2.4 N-N compounding
2.5 Conclusion

- Two unrelated languages of Western Amazonia (Rose & Van Linden 2017):
  - Harakmbut (isolate, Peru) ▲
  - Mojeño Trinitario (Arawak, Bolivia) ▲
2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns

2.1 Bound versus independent nouns

- common nouns divide into two morphologically defined classes: **potentially free** vs. **obligatorily bound nouns**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent nouns</th>
<th>Bound nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>may occur as nominal heads without morphology</strong></td>
<td><strong>never occur as nominal heads without morphology</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harakmbut</th>
<th>Bound nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>widn</td>
<td>ndoʔ-edn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stone</td>
<td>1SG-GEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘stone’</td>
<td>‘my stone’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wa-ndik</td>
<td>ndoʔ-edn-ndik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPF-name</td>
<td>1SG-GEN-name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘name’</td>
<td>‘my name’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mojeño Trinitario</th>
<th>Bound nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wiye</td>
<td>n-wiye-ra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ox</td>
<td>1SG-ox-PSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘ox’</td>
<td>‘my ox’ (Rose 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jma-re</td>
<td>n-juma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sickness-PSD</td>
<td>1SG-sickness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘sickness’</td>
<td>‘my sickness’ (Rose 2015)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns
2.1 Bound versus independent nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>potentially free nouns</th>
<th>obligatorily bound nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morphological status</td>
<td>can stand on their own as a word form</td>
<td>require a noun prefix to obtain independent nominal status (<em>wa-</em> or <em>e-</em>).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantics</td>
<td>Semantically heterogeneous</td>
<td>refer to parts of entities, such as body parts, plant parts, and landscape parts (cf. the class of <em>e</em>-nouns in Cavineña as described by Guillaume (2008: 409-416)), as well as basic shapes or qualities of entities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With prenominal modifiers</td>
<td>One construction type: two prosodic words</td>
<td>Two construction types: (i) two prosodic words (with noun prefix) (ii) one prosodic word (without noun prefix)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun incorporation</td>
<td>Generally not incorporable into the verb (2 exceptions; NI type I only)</td>
<td>incorporable into the verb (all four types of NI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word formation</td>
<td>Rarely N2 in N-N compounds</td>
<td>typically N2 in N-N compounds</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns
2.1 Bound versus independent nouns

(a) Morphological status:

• *wa*- and *e*- are semantically empty noun prefixes that derive independent nouns from bound ones

(AREALITY: less frequent prefix *e*- has the same form and function (in noun-based nominalization) as the dummy noun prefix *e*- in Cavineña and other Tacanan languages (Guillaume 2008: 409-416); cf. also semantically empty root *e*- in Kwaza, which serves as “a noun formative to lend independent status to classifiers” (Van der Voort 2005: 397))

• *wa*- and *e*- also serve in verb-based nominalization, e.g. (2)

(2)  
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{*wa-wedn*} & \text{NMLZ-} \text{lie} \\
\text{‘bed’} & \\
\end{array}
\]

• In (3), bound root -*mba?* gives rise to two distinct independent nouns whose referents show a similarity in shape and form an upper extremity of a living body (cf. Helberg 1984: 254, 437).

(3)  
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{(a) *wa-mba?*} & \text{(b) *e-mba?*} \\
\text{NPF-hand} & \text{NPF-hand} \\
\text{‘hand’} & \text{‘leaf’} \\
\end{array}
\]
2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns

2.2 Noun modification

(b) Morphosyntactic behaviour in prenominal modifier constructions:

- when combined with adnominal modifiers that obligatorily precede the nominal head when fully integrated in the NP (i.e. excluding discontinuous NPs):
  - free nouns show a single construction type: modifier and head noun form two prosodic words
  - bound nouns show two construction types:
    (i) one in which they attach to a noun prefix and follow the modifier like free nouns
    (ii) one without a noun prefix, in which they form one prosodic word with the modifier

- Interrogative modifier, e.g. *Which food?*
- Numeral modifier, e.g. *two dogs*
- Possessive modifier, e.g. *my stone*
2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns

2.2 Noun modification

- bound nouns show two construction types:
  (i) one in which they attach to a noun prefix and follow the modifier like free nouns
  (ii) one without a noun prefix, in which they form one prosodic word with the modifier

E.g. with interrogative modifier *kate?*, cf. (4)-(5)

(4)  
\begin{align*}
  \textit{kate} & \quad \textit{gypo} & \quad \textit{i?-pak-ika-Ø}?
  \text{what} & \quad \text{food} & \quad 2\text{SG-want-HAB-DUB}
  \text{‘What sort of food do you (sg) like?’}
\end{align*}

(5)  
\begin{align*}
  \text{(a)} & \quad \textit{kate} & \quad \textit{wa-ndik} & \quad \textit{i?-ē-Ø}?
  \text{what} & \quad \text{NPF-name} & \quad 2\text{SG-be-DUB}
  \text{‘What is your name?’}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
  \text{(b)} & \quad \textit{kate-ndik} & \quad \textit{i?-ē-Ø}?
  \text{what-name} & \quad 2\text{SG-be-DUB}
  \text{‘What is your name?’}
\end{align*}
2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns

2.2 Noun modification

- bound nouns show two construction types:
  
  (i) one in which they attach to a noun prefix and follow the modifier like free nouns
  
  (ii) one without a noun prefix, in which they form one prosodic word with the modifier

  e.g. with **numeral modifier** *mbotta* 'two', cf. (6)-(7)

  (6)   *lh-yok-i*     *mbottaʔ kuwa*     *Luis-ta*
        1SG-give-1.IND two dog Luis-ACC
    ‘I give two dogs to Luis.’

  (7)   (a)   *ǐh-tō-ē-ŷ*     *mbottaʔ wa-mbaʔ*
        1SG.IND-SOC-be-1.IND two NMLZ-hand
    ‘I have two hands’

  (b)   *mbottaʔ-mbaʔ*     *ǐh-tō-ē-ŷ*
        two-hand 1SG.IND-SOC-be-1.IND
    ‘I have two hands’
e.g. with possessive modifiers, cf. (8)-(9)-(10)
attributive possession is reflected by dependent marking: (pro)nouns denoting the possessor are
marked for genitive case; the possessed noun is unmarked

(8)  
\[ ndoʔ-edn \quad \text{nāŋ} \]  
\[ 1\text{SG-GEN} \quad \text{mother} \]  
‘My mother’ [independent noun in spite of being inalienably possessed!]

(9)  
\[ ndoʔ-edn \quad wa-ndo-po \]  
\[ 1\text{SG-GEN} \quad \text{NPF-fruit-CLF:round} \]  
‘My belly’

(10)  
(a)  
\[ arakmbut-en-ndik \]  
\[ \text{people-GEN-name} \]  
‘native lexical item’ (‘name of the people’)

(b)  
\[ arakmbut \]  
\[ \text{people;person} \]  
‘people’, ‘person’

(c)  
\[ wa-ndik \]  
\[ \text{NPF-name} \]  
‘name’
2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns

2.3 Noun incorporation

Type I (lexical compounding)
• Noun becomes part of the verb form: incorporation into the verb
• found with many bound nouns, and only one free noun: (h)ak ‘house’ (cf. (11))

(11)  
wa-mationka-eri  o-ak-yoŋ-me  
NMLZ-hunt-ANIM  3SG.IND-house-destroy-REC  
‘The hunter hut-destroyed.’

transitive verb stem -yoŋ + free noun (h)ak ‘house’ = intransitive verb that denotes a “name-worthy” activity of hunters (Mithun 1984: 849)

• Type I NI with incorporated body part noun, cf. (12)

(12)  
ndoʔ-ɛdn  wa-nda-po  ō-mēʔ-aʔ  
1SG-GEN  NPF-fruit-CLF:round  3SG.IND-liver-say  
‘My belly is making noise.’ (lit. ‘liver-says’)
2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns

2.4 N-N compounding

N-N compounds
• N1+N2, e.g. *door + step = doorstep*
• N2 is rarely an independent nouns; N2 is typically a bound noun
• N1 is semantically subordinate; N2 is the formal and semantic head of the compound

Harakmbut

N1-N2
*kaimāri- mbogn*
zungaro-lip
‘lip of a zungaro fish’

Mojeño Trinitario

N1-N2
*su kasiki-yeno*
ART.F cacique-wife
‘a cacique’s wife’
2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns

2.5 Conclusion & outlook

- Distinction between bound and independent nouns: morphological phenomenon based on alienability semantics
- Distinct behavior exceeds the grammatical environment of adnominal possession [slide 3]:
  - Different types of adnominal modifiers
  - Noun incorporation
  - N-N compounding
  - Diachronic source of classifiers (Rose & Van linden 2017)

- Work to be done: how do bound nouns behave in spontaneously produced language?
  - Transcription of recordings made in the field
  - Concordances on nouns in these texts (methods from corpus linguistics)
  - Discourse motivations for competing morphosyntactic patterns
Bye bye Harakmbut
3. Alienability contrasts beyond Amazonian languages

Figure 1: Possessive classification in a 243-language sample (Nichols & Bickel 2013)

Alienability contrasts in yellow dots: fairly common in the languages of the world except in Eurasia
3. Alienability contrasts beyond Amazonian languages

Alienability contrasts in grammar:

• Word-level
  • Noun classes
  • Binominal lexemes
  • Incorporation of nouns into adjective roots, e.g. in Anindilyakwa (Leeding 1996)

• Phrase-level
  • Adnominal possession
  • Proprietary markers, e.g. in Warrungu (Tsunoda 1996)

• Clause-level
  • Dative of involvement constructions, e.g. in Middle Dutch (Burridge 1996)
  • Body part locative constructions, e.g. *Sam kissed Joe on the cheek*
  • Incorporation of nouns into verb roots
  • Predicative possession, e.g. in Japanese (Tsunoda 1996)
  • Double non-subject (object/locative/dative) constructions, e.g. in Warlpiri (Hale 1981)
  • Double subject intransitives (‘My face am burning!’), e.g. in Yawuru (Hosokawa 1996)
  • Quasi-passive, e.g. in Yawuru (Hosokawa 1996)
3. Alienability contrasts beyond Amazonian languages

• Phrase-level
  • Proprietary markers: ‘having’; ‘with’
  • Frequent in Australian Aboriginal languages
  • Occur on body parts, inherent attributes, clothing and kin terms
  • Do not occur on other nouns

• Warrungu (Pama-Nyungan): -tyi/-yi (Tsundoda 1996: 616)

(1)  
pirngka-\textit{yi}-tu \quad \textit{kamu-}\empty \quad \textit{pitya-lku} \quad \textit{pama-ngku}  
grey:hair-HAVING-ERG \quad \text{water-ABS} \quad \text{drink-PURP} \quad \text{man-ERG}  
‘The grey-haired men (that is, old men) want to drink water.’

(2)  
murr\textit{an-tyi-}\empty \quad \textit{nyula} \quad \textit{wun-an}  
ilness-HAVING-ABS \quad \text{3SG:NOM} \quad \text{lie-PAST/PRES}  
‘She is lying ill.’

(3)  
\textit{nyula} \quad \textit{tyakuli-n} \quad \textit{tyulpun-tyi-ku}  
\text{3SG:NOM} \quad \text{be sorry-PAST/PRES} \quad \text{spouse-HAVING-DAT}  
‘He felt sorry for the married person (literally: one with a spouse).’
3. Alienability contrasts beyond Amazonian languages

Alienability contrasts in grammar:
   → cross-linguistic survey of alienability phenomena at different levels of grammar
   → drawing up a questionnaire for fieldworkers
3. Alienability contrasts beyond Amazonian languages

Alienability contrasts in **lexicon:**

- **Interaction grammatical & lexical typology:**
  Inventories of lexical items that are treated as inalienable in grammar
  → Where do individual languages have their “cut-off point” in the lexicon, i.e. to what extent is it culturally determined which items are grammatically treated as inalienably possessed?

  **Harakmbut:**
  - `wã-wẽ` ‘liquid; river’
  - `wã-õŋ` ‘powder’
  - `wã-ẽkõŋ` ‘cavity, hole’
  - `wa-kupo` ‘hill’
  - `wa-ndagŋ` ‘path’

- **“traditional” lexical typology:**
  Patterns of polysemy of inalienably possessed nouns?
  → pre-established list needed of inalienably possessed items

  Tsunoda’s (1996: 576) **Possession cline:**
  Body part > inherent attribute (e.g. name) > clothing > (kin) > pet animal > product > other possessee
3. Alienability contrasts beyond Amazonian languages

• Theoretical issue: **motivation** for alienability contrasts?

• Competing proposals for adnominal possession:
  • **iconicity**: the formal distance between the item denoting the possessor and the item denoting the possessum in the linguistic structures reflects the cognitive distance between the possessor and possessum (Haiman 1983)
  • **Predictability/frequency**: inalienable nouns like ‘hand’ occur far more often in adnominal possession constructions than alienable nouns like ‘arrow’ → less predictable possessive construction need additional marking compared to highly predictable ones (Haspelmath 2017)

• Predictability account is in principle **empirically verifiable** (is it?) → corpus study on existing text collections in collaboration with DDL members

• Motivations for other grammatical phenomena?
4. Psycholinguistic excursion

- Theoretical issue: status of alienability contrasts?
  - Purely lexical property of nouns? (Nichols 1988: 574)
  - Conceptual in nature and hence universal? (Lévy-Bruhl 1914)
  - Culturally determined and hence language-specific? (Chappell & McGregor 1996a: 9)

- Do speakers have mental representations of nouns treated as inalienable in grammar different from those of nouns treated as alienable?
- How can we set up experiments in the field? Remote experiments, Covid-19-proof?
5. References


5. References


5. References


5. References

• Rose, Françoise & Van linden, An. How to distinguish between nouns and classifiers in Binominal Naming Constructions? Answers from two Western Amazonian languages. SLE50, University of Zürich, 10–13 September 2017.


