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

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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)	*ji*	*syim*		(1b)	*ji*	*bi*	*nggwe*
	1SG	arm			1SG	POSS	garden
	'my arm'				'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)

1. Introduction: Topic

- The difference in morpho-syntactic marking between (1a) and (1b) has been explained in terms of alienability (cf. Chappell & McGregor 1996a: 4)

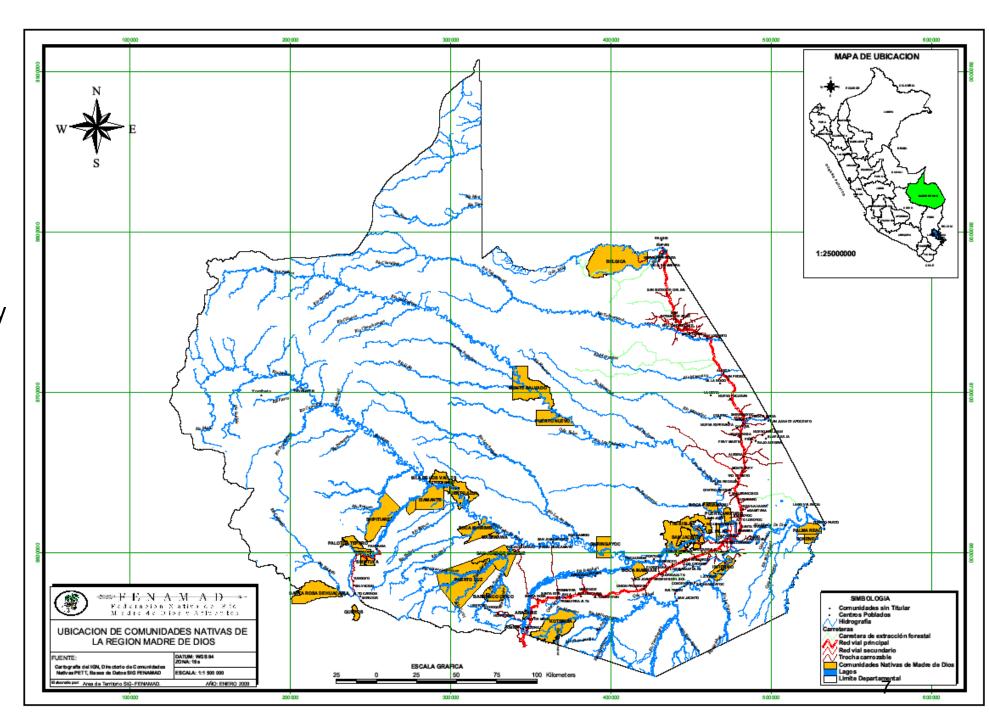| inalienable possession	alienable possession
inextricable, essential or unchangeable relations between possessor and possessum	less permanent and less inherent associations between possessor and possessum
motivated by our human condition of being born within a body – consisting of parts that we normally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

Outline

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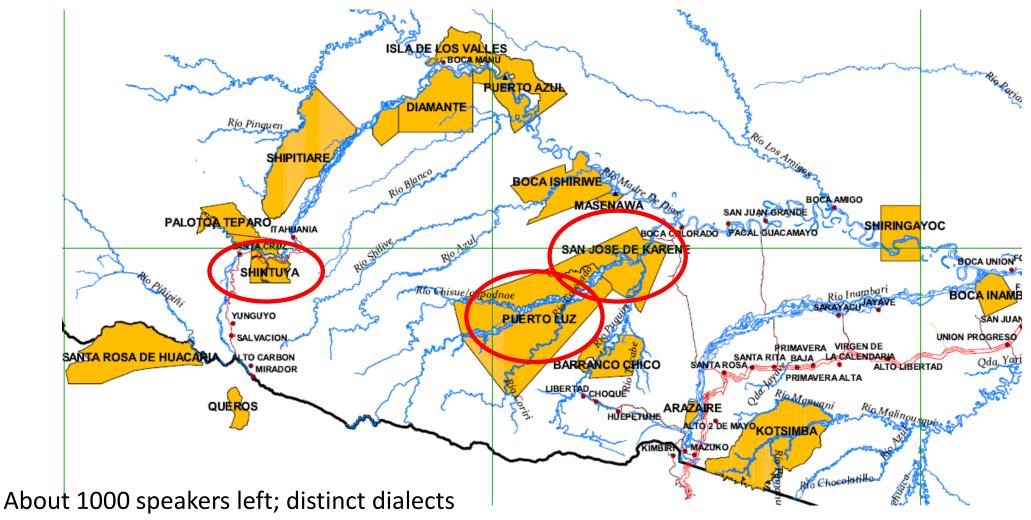4. Psycholinguistic excursion
5. Conclusion

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;

UBICACION DE COMUNIDADES NATIVAS DE LA REGION MADRE DE DIOS

- About 1000 speakers left; distinct dialects
- Previous linguistic work: focus on Arakmbut/Amarakaeri dialect (Hart 1963; Helberg 1984, 1990; Tripp 1976ab, 1995)
- 3 fieldwork stays in Puerto Luz, San Jose de Karene and Shintuya (Jul-Aug 2010, Aug-Sept 2011, Aug 2016) → Arakmbut/Amarakaeri variety

8

Puerto Luz

San José del Karene

Shintuya

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**

Independent nouns

may occur as nominal heads without morphology

Harakmbut

widn	*ndoʔ-edn*	*widn*
stone	1SG-GEN	stone
'stone'	'my stone'	

Mojeño Trinitario

wiye	*n-wiye-ra*
ox	1SG-ox-PSD
'ox'	'my ox' (Rose 2015)

Bound nouns

never occur as nominal heads without morphology

Harakmbut

wa-ndik	*ndoʔ-edn-ndik*
NPF-name	1SG-GEN-name
'name'	'my name'

Mojeño Trinitario

jma-re	*n-juma*
sickness-NPSD	1SG-sickness
'sickness'	'my sickness' (Rose 2015)

15

2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns
2.1 Bound versus independent nouns

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

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)   *wa-wedn*
          NMLZ-lie
          'bed'

- 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)   (a)   *wa-mba?*   (b)   *e-mba?*
                  NPF-hand   NPF-hand
                  'hand'   'leaf'

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)   *kate*   *aypo*   *iʔ-pak-ika-Ø?*
          what   food   2SG-want-HAB-DUB
          'What sort of food do you (sg) like?'

(5)   (a)   *kate*   *wa-ndik*   *ĩʔ-ẽ-Ø?*
                  what   NPF-name   2SG-be-DUB
                  'What is your name?'
      (b)   *kate-ndik*   *ĩʔ-ẽ-Ø?*
                  what-name   2SG-be-DUB
                  'What is your name?'

2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns
2.2 Noun modification

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    (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)   *Ih-yok-i*   *mbotta ? kuwa*   *Luis-ta*

         1SG-give-1.IND   two   dog   Luis-ACC

         'I give two dogs to Luis.'

(7)   (a)   *ĩh-tõ-ẽ-ỹ*   *mbotta ? wa-mba ?*

              1SG.IND-SOC-be-1.IND   two   NMLZ-hand

              'I have two hands'

     (b)   *mbotta ?-mba ?*   *ĩh-tõ-ẽ-ỹ*

              two-hand   1SG.IND-SOC-be-1.IND

              'I have two hands'

2. Alienability contrasts in Harakmbut: Bound nouns
2.2 Noun modification

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)   *ndo?-edn*   *nãŋ*

1SG-GEN   mother

'My mother' [independent noun in spite of being inalienably possessed!]

(9)   *ndo?-edn*   *wa-nda-po*

1SG-GEN   NPF-fruit-CLF:round

'My belly'

(10)   (a)   *arakmbut-en-ndik*

people-GEN-name

'native lexical item' ('name of the people')

(b)   *arakmbut*   (c)   *wa-ndik*

people;person   NPF-name

'people', 'person'   'name'

21

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-edn*   *wa-nda-po*   *õ-mẽʔ-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

kaimãri-mbogŋ

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
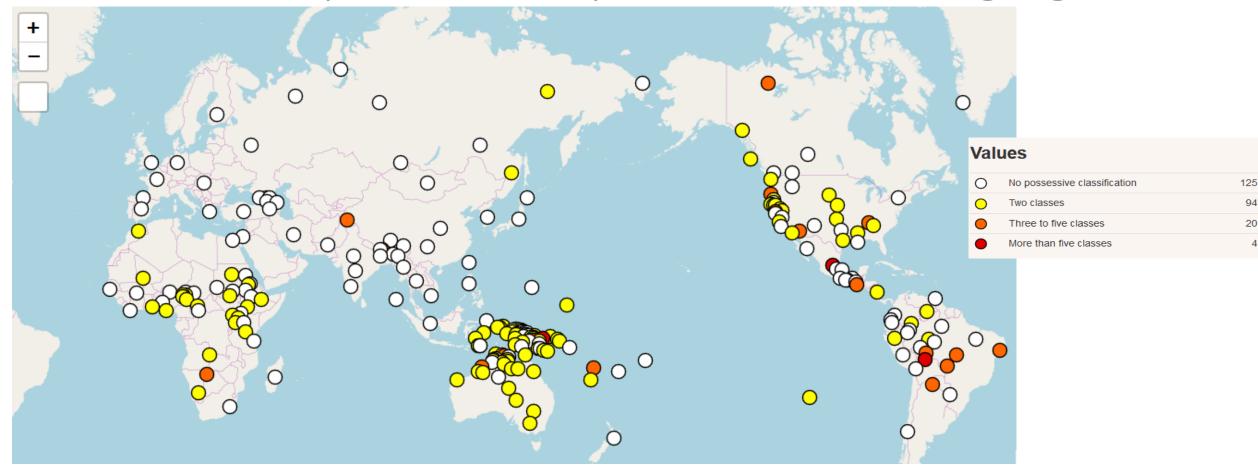

Figure 1: Possessive classification in a 243-language sample (Nichols & Bickel 2013)
→ Alienability contrasts in yellow dots: fairly common in the languages of the world except in Eurasia

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
    - Proprietive 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
  - Proprietive 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 (Tsunoda 1996: 616)

(1)   pirngka-yi-tu   kamu-Ø   pitya-lku   pama-ngku
      grey:hair-HAVING-ERG   water-ABS   drink-PURP   man-ERG
      'The grey-haired men (that is, old men) want to drink water.'

(2)   murran-tyi-Ø   nyula   wun-an
      illness-HAVING-ABS   3SG:NOM   lie-PAST/PRES
      'She is lying ill.'

(3)   nyula   tyakuli-n   tyulpun-tyi-ku
      3SG:NOM   be sorry-PAST/PRES   spouse-HAVING-DAT
      'He felt sorry for the married person (literally: one with a spouse).'

3. Alienability contrasts beyond Amazonian languages
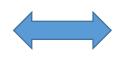
Alienability contrasts in **grammar**:

→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'

Tsunoda's (1996: 576) **Possession cline**:
Body part > inherent attribute (e.g. name) > clothing > (kin) > pet animal > product > other possessee

• "traditional" lexical typology:
  Patterns of polysemy of inalienably possessed nouns?
  → pre-established list needed of inalienably possessed items

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?

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