



# Bound nouns but no alienability split: Assessing the explanatory power of the alienability contrast for Harakmbut

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# 1. Introduction

- This talk focuses on **bound nouns** in Harakmbut (isolate/unclassified, Peruvian Amazon)
- Starting point: morphological distinction between independent and bound nouns

## Independent nouns

may occur as nominal heads without morphology

<i>pĩã</i>		<i>ndoʔ-edn</i>		<i>pĩã</i>
arrow		1SG-GEN		arrow
'arrow'		'my arrow'		

## Bound nouns

never occur as nominal heads without morphology

<i>wa-ndik</i>		<i>ndoʔ-edn-ndik</i>
NPF-name		1SG-GEN-name
'name'		'my name'

- Describe the morphosyntactic behaviour of common nouns at word/phrase/clause levels
  - bound nouns
  - independent nouns
  - deverbal nouns
- Assess the explanatory power of the **alienability contrast** to account for this

# 1. Introduction

The **alienability contrast**: different interpretations

- **Semantic/conceptual distinction** between alienable and inalienable possession (e.g. Chappell & McGregor 1996: 4)

inalienable possession	alienable possession
“either inextricable, essential or unchangeable relations” between possessor and possessee (possessors have little or no <b>choice</b> or <b>control</b> )	less permanent and less inherent associations between “possessor” and “possessee”

- Semantic contrast invoked as **functional motivation** for coding split in adnominal possession as of Lévy-Bruhl’s (1914: 96) study of Oceanic lgs (‘my head’ vs. ‘my garment’); also in North American languages (Nichols 1988: 561)

(1a) *ji*        *syim*  
1SG        arm  
‘my arm’

(1b) *ji*        *bi*        *nggwe*  
1SG        POSS        garden  
‘my garden’

Abun, West Papuan (Berry & Berry 1999: 77–78): juxtaposition for inalienable possession (1a) and the linker construction for alienable possession (1b)

# 1. Introduction

The **alienability contrast**: different interpretations

- **Formal contrast**: binary pattern of linguistic organization, itself in need of explanation
  - Classes of **nouns**: alienable vs. inalienable nouns (closed set) (Nichols 1988: restricted to head-marking languages)
  - Types of **construction**: alienable vs. inalienable possessive cxns (= alienability split) [“[t]he choice between inalienable and alienable constructions is seldom predictable from such general definitions” (Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm 1998: 38-39)]
  - Haspelmath (2017):
    - “in general the difference between alienable and inalienable possession [like in (1a) vs. (1b)] is simply a constructional split, with no clear semantic implications” (2017: 198-199)
    - Universal: “Possessive constructions with inalienable nouns tend to show zero coding, short coding, bound coding, and/or obligatoriness, while possessive constructions with alienable nouns tend to show overt coding, long coding, free coding, and/or impossessibility” (2017: 218)

**Reflexes** of the alienability contrast: not limited to noun classes or adnominal possession, also other phenomena at word, phrase and clause level (e.g. N-N compounding, proprietive markers, external possession, noun incorporation)

# Outline

## ~~1. Introduction~~

- |  |                |
|--|----------------|
| 2. Bound, independent and deverbal nouns | [word]         |
| 3. Adnominal possession                  | [phrase]       |
| 4. Other types of adnominal modification | [phrase]       |
| 5. Beyond adnominal modification         |                |
| 5.1 N-N Compounding                      | [complex word] |
| 5.2 Noun incorporation                   | [clause]       |
| 6. Conclusion                            |                |

## 2. Bound, independent and deverbal nouns

Common nouns: two morphologically distinct classes, viz. bound and independent nouns

→ reflex of the alienability contrast in terms of the semantic domains they cover?

- Unlike independent nouns, bound nouns do need a **noun prefix** in their citation form, viz. *wa(?)*- or *e(?)*- → these prefixes derive independent nouns from bound ones → “absolutivization” function (Nichols 1988: 597)
- Typically, one NPF per bound N root/stem (*wa-ndik*), but exceptionally also same root with with *wa-* & *e-* (2)-(3); referents of (a) & (b) show similarity in shape (cf. Van linden, Forthc.)

(2)	(a)	<i>wa-mba?</i>	(b)	<i>e-mba?</i>
		NPF-hand		NPF-hand
		‘hand’		‘leaf’
(3)	(a)	<i>wa-pidn</i>	(b)	<i>e-pidn</i>
		NPF-rib		NPF-spine
		‘rib’ (Tripp 1995: 127)		‘spine, thorn’ (Tripp 1995: 51)

[generalization: referents of bound nouns with *e(?)*- belong to the world of vegetation → derivation]

Semantic domains	Bound nouns	Independent nouns
animal	<i>wa-koy</i> ‘cormorant’ (T119); <i>wa-kuwẽŋ</i> ‘specific frog species’ (T120)	<i>sũwĩt</i> ‘hummingbird’; <i>kẽmẽ</i> ‘tapir’
attribute	<i>wa-ndari</i> ‘native land’; <i>wa-ndik</i> ‘name’	—
body part	<i>wa-ayʔ</i> ‘bone’; <i>wa-ʔidn</i> ‘tooth’; <i>wa-kupi</i> ‘horn’	—
bodily emanation	<i>wa-nokĩrẽŋ</i> ‘shadow of a person’	—
bodily excretion	<i>wa-ndawẽ</i> ‘semen’	<i>iŋkusĩʔwẽ</i> ‘saliva’ (T339)
kinship	<i>wa-mambuy</i> ‘same.sex.sibling’; <i>wa-siʔpo</i> ‘child’; <i>wã-ỹẽ</i> ‘mother’	<i>nãŋ</i> ‘mother’; <i>pagn</i> ‘father’
landscape part	<i>wa-kumbogn</i> ‘ravine’; <i>wa-kupo</i> ‘hill’; <i>wa-ndagn</i> ‘path’; <i>wã-wẽ</i> ‘river’	<i>mbayako</i> ‘pool, lagoon’; <i>ndumba</i> ‘forest’; <i>widnmba</i> ‘pebble beach’
non-physical part	<i>wa-nokĩrẽŋ</i> ‘spirit of a person’	—
other part	<i>wa-ktaʔpe</i> ‘half’; <i>wã-ẽ(kõŋ)</i> ‘hole’	—
plant part	<i>e-mbaʔ</i> ‘leaf’; <i>eʔ-mbih</i> ‘liana’ (generic term); <i>e-pidn</i> ‘thorn’; <i>wa-mbuh</i> ‘manioc root’; <i>wa-ʔiwit</i> ‘root’; <i>wa-kidn</i> ‘seed’; <i>wa-tioʔpi</i> ‘branch’	—
shape	<i>wa-po</i> ‘something round’; <i>wa-puʔ</i> ‘tube’	—
social relation	<i>wa-iri</i> ‘chief’; <i>wa-ndi</i> ‘friend’ (T32); <i>wa-nindi</i> ‘romantic partner’	—
spatial relation	<i>wa-kĩrẽŋ</i> ‘interior’; <i>wa-topen</i> ‘below’ (T149)	—
substance	<i>wã-õŋ</i> ‘powder’; <i>wã-wẽ</i> ‘liquid’	—

## 2. Bound, independent and deverbal nouns

Semantic domains covered by bound nouns:

bound nouns **predominantly** denote entities that are – in conceptual terms – inalienably possessed (body parts, plant parts, landscape parts, kinship terms, social and spatial relations, attributes, basic shapes, substances, and other parts of wholes)

→ Support for Nichols's (1988: 572) implicational hierarchy for membership of the 'inalienable' noun class: kin terms and/or body parts > part-whole and/or spatial relations > culturally basic possessed items (the latter: invariably lexicalized as independent nouns in Harakmbut)

**Quirks** (support Nichols' (1988: 574) claim that inalienability is lexical category rather than semantic property):

- Animals: in some languages treated as non-possessible (see Lehmann (1998) for wild animals in Yucatec Maya; in Harakmbut independent nouns far outnumber bound nouns)
- Kinship terms: independent nouns in table are terms of address which have come to be used as reference terms (see Tripp 1995: 175-185) (cf. Brill (ms) on Kanak languages)
- Landscape parts: bound nouns for elements determining the physical shape of a landscape; independent nouns for types of soil cover

By and large **semantically coherent class** → two noun classes: **reflex of the alienability contrast surfacing at word level, albeit not a perfect one**



## 2. Bound, independent and deverbal nouns

- *wa(?)*- and *e(?)*- also serve in verb-based nominalization (Van linden 2019), e.g. (4)-(5) [≠ bound nouns!]
- Nominalization with *wa(?)*-: participant nominalization, viz. instrumental (4) and objective nominalization (5) (cf. Comrie & Thompson 2007: 338-342), primarily used to produce nouns for NP-use (Van linden 2019: 465-467)

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

(5) *wa?-a?*  
NMLZ-say  
'speech, word, language'

- Nominalization with *e(?)*-: event nominalization and participant nominalization, viz. objective nominalization (6) (see Van linden 2019: 468-484)

(6) *e?-mba?a?*  
NMLZ-work  
'work, job'

- In terms of semantic domains:
  - instrumental nominalizations will typically denote alienably possessed items (artefact in (4))
  - objective nominalizations are often inalienably possessed (attributes in (5)-(6))
- **Deverbal nouns** have same prefixes, but verb root and distinct behaviour from bound nouns

# 3. Adnominal possession

Also alienability at work at phrase level?

## Independent nouns

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Comparing the adnominal possession cxns: looks like alienability split:

Two-word strategy for independent nouns; one-word strategy for bound nouns

→ a tighter morpho-syntactic bond between the (human) possessor and possessee for inalienable possession

→ BUT THIS IS NOT THE FULL PICTURE → no alienability split!

### 3. Adnominal possession

Semantically alienable possession → possessors are independent nouns or **deverbal nouns**

**Human** possessors: genitive marked; no pronoun/noun split

(8) *Lupeʔ-edn*      *kurukuru-mbaʔ*  
Lupe-GEN      bijao-leaf  
'Lupe's bijao leaves'

(9) *ndoʔ-edn*      *kõsõ*  
1SG-GEN      pot  
'my pot'

**Animal** possessors: also genitive marked

(10) *apetpet-edn*      *hak*  
jaguar-GEN      house  
'the jaguar's den'

**deverbal** nouns:

- No pronoun/noun split
- two-word strategy only!

*Maribel-en*      *wa-wedn*  
Maribel-GEN      NMLZ-lie  
'Maribel's bed'

*ndoʔ-edn*      *wa-wedn*  
1SG-GEN      NMLZ-lie  
'my bed'

\**Maribel-en-wedn*  
Maribel-GEN-lie  
'Maribel's bed'

# 3. Adnominal possession

Semantically **inalienable possession** → possessors are bound nouns or **deverbal nouns**

**Human** possessors: genitive-marked, no pronoun/noun split

(11)(a) *Lupeʔ-edn-ku*      OR (b)    *Lupeʔ-edn*      *wa-ku*  
Lupe-GEN-head                      Lupe-GEN                      NPF-head  
'Lupe's head'                                      'Lupe's head'

(12)(a) *on-en-ku*                      OR (b)    *on-en*    *wa-ku*  
2SG-GEN-head                      2SG-GEN NPF-head  
'your (sg) head'                                      'your (sg) head'

**Animal** possessors: N-N compounding

(13)    *mbawi-ku-pi*  
deer-[head-CLF:stick]<sub>horn</sub>  
'a/the deer's horn'

**Inanimate** possessors: N-N compounding (word formation)

**deverbal** nouns:

- No pronoun/noun split
- two-word strategy only!

*Maribel-en*                      *eʔ-a-pak*  
Maribel-GEN                      NMLZ-say-VBZ  
'Maribel's voice'; 'what M. said'

*ndoʔ-edn*                      *eʔ-a-pak*  
1SG-GEN                      NMLZ-say-VBZ  
'your voice'; 'what you said'

\**Maribel-en-a-pak*  
Maribel-GEN-say-VBZ  
'Maribel's voice'; 'what M. said'

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'Lupe's head'                                      'Lupe's head'

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'your (sg) head'                                      'your (sg) head'

**Animal** possessors: N-N compounding

(13)    *mbawi-ku-pi*  
deer-[head-CLF:stick]<sub>horn</sub>  
'a/the deer's horn'

Possessor-governed  
split for bound-noun  
possesseees

**deverbal** nouns:

- No pronoun/noun split
- two-word strategy only!

*Maribel-en*                      *eʔ-**a**-pak*  
Maribel-GEN                      NMLZ-say-VBZ  
'Maribel's voice'; 'what M. said'

*ndoʔ-edn*                      *eʔ-**a**-pak*  
1SG-GEN                      NMLZ-say-VBZ  
'your voice'; 'what you said'

\**Maribel-en-**a**-pak*  
Maribel-GEN-say-VBZ  
'Maribel's voice'; 'what M. said'

**Inanimate** possessors: N-N compounding (word formation)

### 3. Adnominal possession

ALIENABLE CONSTRUAL of semantically inalienable possession → possessors are bound nouns only

**Animal** possessors: genitive-marked possessors vs. N-N compounding

- (14)(a) *wadpiʔ-edn-sindak* ↔ (b) *wadpiʔ-sindak*      \**wadpiʔ-wa-sindak*  
ocelot-GEN-skin  
‘the ocelot’s skin, removed from corpse’  
(infrequent use)      ocelot-skin  
‘the ocelot’s skin’ (still on the animal, dead or  
alive, or removed from its corpse)
- (15)(a) *mokas-en-kutipo* ↔ (b) *mokas-kutipo*      \**mokas-wa-kutipo*  
collared.peccary-GEN-thigh  
‘the collared peccary’s thigh, removed’  
collared.peccary-thigh  
‘the collared peccary’s thigh’ (still on the  
animal, dead or alive, or removed from its corpse)

**Inanimate** possessors: N-N compounding is only possible construal, but no adnominal possession

- (16) *kumo-iwit*  
barbasco-root  
‘the root of barbasco’ (possessor is not referentially distinct)

### 3. Adnominal possession

ALIENABLE CONSTRUAL of semantically inalienable possession → possessors are bound nouns only  
Human possessors

- (17)(a) *Lupeʔ-edn-ku-wih*      ↔      (b)      *Lupeʔ-edn*      *wa-ku-wih*  
Lupe-GEN-head-hair      Lupe-GEN      NPF-head-hair  
'Lupe's hair, still on her head'      'Lupe's head, still on her head' OR  
'Lupe's head, cut off'
- (18)(a) *Maribel-en-okpo*      ↔      (b)      *Maribel-en*      *wa-kpo*  
Maribel-GEN-eye      Maribel-GEN      NPF-eye  
'Maribel's eye, well in place'      'Maribel's eye, well in place' OR  
'Maribel's eye, removed in an attack'

- The construal involving fusion is dedicated to inalienable possession ('in-situ' body-parts)
- So to refer to disembodied body-parts (not in their normal place anymore), speakers use the only construal available for independent-possessee nouns
- The two-word construal is ambiguous between alienable and inalienable possession

### 3. Adnominal possession

Rather than an alienability split: possessor-governed coding split for bound-noun possessives

Possessor\possessee	Body-part possessee		Kin-term possessee
	Alienable interpretation	Inalienable interpretation	
Animal possessor	Genitive-marked one-word structure	Noun-noun compounding	Genitive-marked one-word structure
			Genitive-marked two-word structure (Noun-noun compounding)
Human possessor		Genitive-marked one-word structure	Genitive-marked one-word structure
	Genitive-marked two-word structure		Genitive-marked two-word structure

→ lack of dedicated strategies for alienable and inalienable interpretations, for both animal and human possessors



### 3. Adnominal possession

Semantically inalienable possession → possessives are bound nouns only

Human possessors: genitive-marked, no pronoun/noun split

- (19)(a) *ndoʔ-edn-siʔ-po*  
1SG-GEN-(peel-CLF:round)<sup>child</sup>  
'my child'
- OR (b) *ndoʔ-edn wa-siʔpo*  
1SG-GEN NPF-(peel-CLF:round)<sup>child</sup>  
'my child'

But other bound kinship terms do not seem to allow the one-word strategy!

- (20)(a) *\*ndoʔ-edn-mambuy*  
1SG-GEN-same.sex.sibling  
'my sister (of female ego)'
- (b) *ndoʔ-edn wa-mambuy*  
1SG-GEN NPF-same.sex.sibling  
'my sister (of female ego)'

→ Not all bound nouns behave similarly in a single syntactic domain

### 3. Adnominal possession - conclusion

- Harakmbut has no alienability split, but coding split according to humanness, restricted to body-part possessors
- deverbal nouns – in spite of sharing same prefixes (and in some cases also inalienable semantics) with bound ones – pattern identically to independent nouns rather than bound ones in adnominal possession
- Pertaining to head vs. dependent marking: Harakmbut data form exception to Nichol's (1988: 576) finding that there is no language that “has only dependent-marked possession and manifests an alienability opposition” (see also Bugaeva et al. 2021).

# 4. Other types of adnominal modification

- coding strategy exclusive to bound nouns in adnominal possession, i.e. the one-word, prefixless strategy, is also observed for other types of adnominal modifiers
- further evidence for absence of alienability split:
  - bound nouns show the same two coding strategies as observed for possessive modifiers when combined with other modifiers that obligatorily precede the nominal head in continuous noun phrases:
    - (i) they either attach to a noun prefix and follow the modifier in a separate word, or
    - (ii) they directly attach to this modifier, dropping the noun prefix
- Independent nouns and deverbal nouns will always use two-word strategy with adnominal modifiers
  - Interrogative modifier, e.g. *Which food?*
  - Numeral modifier, e.g. *two dogs*
  - Quantifier, e.g. *all day*
  - Demonstrative modifier, deictic adjectives 'other', 'same', ...

## 4. Other types of adnominal modification

e.g. with **interrogative modifier** *kate?* ‘what (sort of)?’, cf. (21)-(23)

- (21)    *kate*    *aypo*    *iʔ-pak-ika-∅?*  
what    food    2SG-want-HAB-DUB  
‘What sort of food do you (sg) like?’
- (22)    *kate*    *wa-wadn*    *iʔ-pak-ika-∅?*  
what    NMLZ-sit    2SG-want-HAB-DUB  
‘What sort of seat do you (sg) like?’
- (23)    (a)    *kate*    *wa-ndik*    *ĩʔ-ě-∅?*  
what    NPF-name    2SG-be-DUB  
‘What is your name?’  
      (b)    *kate-ndik*    *ĩʔ-ě-∅?*  
what-name    2SG-be-DUB  
‘What is your name?’

# 5. Beyond adnominal modification

## 5.1 N-N compounds

- N1+N2, e.g. *door + step = doorstep*
- N2 is rarely an independent nouns; N2 is typically a **bound noun**, invariably WITHOUT noun prefix
- N1 is semantically subordinate (modifier); N2 is the formal and semantic head of the compound

N1-N2

*kaimãri-mbogn*

zungaro-lip

'lip of a zungaro fish'

*wa-mbagn-pidn*

NPF-shoulder.blade-rib;spine

'tip of the shoulder blade'

**ALSO deverbal nouns in N2: drop prefix!**

*siro-mba-pe?*

metal-VPL-eat

'metal plate' (something to eat from in metal)

*arakmbut-(h)a-te*

person;people-say-LOC

'in the language of the people; in harakmbut'

# 5. Beyond adnominal modification

## 5.1 N-N compounds

- N1+N2, e.g. *door + step = doorstep*
- N2 is rarely an independent nouns; N2 is typically a bound noun, invariably WITHOUT noun prefix
- But, skewed distribution of N2 nouns over semantic fields
  - Typically body parts and plant parts in N2
  - landscape parts in N2 → may yield proper names (*Karene-wě*: Colorado River)
  - hardly any kinship terms in N2
- Also often shapes or substances in N2 (CLF) → ‘attribute-like’ relation (Rose & Van linden 2017, Forthc.)

<i>peraʔ-po</i>	[rubber-CLF:round]	‘plastic ball’ (Hart 1963: 5)
<i>siro-po</i>	[metal-CLF:round]	‘tin can’ (Hart 1963: 1)
<i>aymõrõ-po</i>	[honey-CLF:round]	‘bee’
- these observations cannot be meaningfully related to the alienability contrast

# 5. Beyond adnominal modification

## 5.2 Noun incorporation

- morphological boundness is the formal prerequisite for nouns to be incorporable (except for *hak* ‘house’)
- Bound nouns drop their prefix; deverbal nouns are not incorporable
- But not all bound nouns are found in all 4 types of noun incorporation (Mithun 1984):

Type II: manipulation of case relations → e.g. bodyparts (24)

- incorporation of noun “permits another argument of the clause to occupy the case role vacated by the IN” (Mithun 1984: 859)

(24)      *Pomelo-a*                                  *o-ku-ti-kot-ay*                                  *Joeri-ta*  
            grapefruit-NOM                                  3SG.IND-head-SPAT:up-fall-AVRT                                  Joeri-ACC  
            ‘A grapefruit almost fell on Joeri’s head.’

[possessor is advanced to object status, which position is vacated by the incorporated body part *ku-* (cf. Mithun 1984: 857–858); non-incorporated counterpart would have *Joeri-en-ku* as direct object]

# 5. Beyond adnominal modification

## 5.2 Noun incorporation

Type IV: classificatory noun incorporation → e.g. shapes (25)-(26)

- N + V **accompanied by a more specific external NP** which identifies the argument implied by IN (Mithun 1984: 867); these nominals are classified according to the N stem that is incorporated to qualify Vs directed at them
- In Harakmbut: only bound nouns that indicate shape/quality of substance (no body-parts, unless they have acquired a more general meaning)

(25)     *mbaso*                    *o-pu?-sak-on-ate*  
          glass                   3SG.IND-CFL:cylindrical.hollow-break-PFV.NVOL-INDIR.EVD  
          ‘The drinking glass broke.’

(26)     *men*     *kõsõ*     *ya-po?-sak-on?*  
          which    pot     3SG.DUB-CLF:round-break-PFV.NVOL  
          ‘Which pot is breaking?’

IN specifies the shape of the S-argument (broken object) in (25)-(26)



# 5. Beyond adnominal modification

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- morphological boundness is the formal prerequisite for nouns to be incorporable (except for *hak* 'house')
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Semantic fields	Type I NI (lexical compounding)	Type II NI (manipulation of case)	Type III NI (manipulation of discourse structure)	Type IV NI (classificatory NI)
Body parts	✓	✓	(✓)	✗
Attributes	✓	✓	(✓)	✗
Plant parts	✓	✓	(✓)	✗
Landscape parts	✓	✓	(✓)	✗
Kinship terms	'child' / ✗	✗	✗	✗
Shapes	✗	✗	✓	✓
Substances	✗	✗	✓	✓

# 5. Beyond adnominal modification

## 5.2 Noun incorporation

- morphological boundness is the formal prerequisite for nouns to be incorporable (except for *hak* 'house')
  - But not all bound nouns are found in all 4 types of noun incorporation (Mithun 1984)
  - difference in incorporability of common nouns in verbs can be explained by the conceptual distinction between alienable and inalienable possession just as much as the simple-word level phenomenon of the two-way noun class system can
- it is not a perfect explanation because of the independent-noun exception and the skewed distribution of nouns across semantic domains; not all inalienably possessed entities get incorporated (e.g. animals)

## 6. Conclusion: Explanatory potential of alienability contrast?

- [word] two-way noun class system: membership of common nouns to a great extent motivated by the conceptual distinction between inalienably and alienably possessed items, But exceptions → evidence for Nichols's (1988: 574) position that inalienability is a lexical category rather than a semantic property (see also Nichols & Bickel 2013)
- [phrase] alienability contrast is irrelevant to adnominal possession and non-possessive adnominal modification  
coding split according to humanness for a set of bound nouns (i.e. body parts)  
**deverbal** nouns // independent nouns
- [complex word] only statistical differences between bound and independent nouns in N1 and N2 in N-N compounding; **deverbal** nouns // bound nouns
- [clause] Inalienable semantics could be argued to determine the incorporability of nouns, but there are also exceptions  
**deverbal** nouns // independent nouns

## 6. Conclusion: Explanatory potential of alienability contrast?

- although a language may manifest alienability oppositions at the lowest level of organisation, viz. the word, this does not necessarily entail the presence of an alienability split in adnominal possession
- Rather the relevance of the alienability contrast in Harakmbut seems to be limited to have motivated the morphological distinction between bound and independent nouns, which in turn motivates the distinct behaviour of bound and independent nouns in various grammatical environments

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