Comparative Constructions in Murui  
(Witotoan, Northwest Amazonia) 

Katarzyna I. Wojtylak  
(Language and Culture Research Centre, James Cook University)

This paper focuses on the forms and functions of various comparative constructions found in Murui, a Witotoan language of Northwest Amazonia (Colombia, Peru). It analyses different types of comparative construction, their forms and semantics. This includes a set of special markers that express comparison, as well as those forms that are used in equative and similative constructions.

1 Introduction

Murui (also called Búe, Huitoto, or Witoto) is spoken by people that inhabit the areas along the banks of the Cara-Paraná River in Colombia and Ampiyacu and Napo Rivers in northern parts of Peru (OIMA, 2008) (see Map 1). In the literature, the term ‘Witoto’ refers to a single language belonging to the Witotoan linguistic family (together with two other languages, Ocaina and Nonuya). In fact, ‘Witoto’ is a collective umbrella term that encompasses four different ethnic groups that speak four mutually intelligible dialects: Murui, Mika, Minika, and Nipode (Wojtylak forthcoming-a). All these groups recognise their common ancestry but consider themselves to be separate social groups speaking different languages. In this paper, I refer to Murui as a language in the political sense although linguistically it is clearly one of the dialects. The Murui people (similarly to other Witotoan groups) have been in an intense contact with the western culture for over 100 years now, especially after the tragic consequences of the Rubber Boom period in the Amazon (see among others, Hardenburg 1912, Echeverri 1997, Pineda Camacho 2000). Fabre (2005) is a source of references on all the Witotoan languages.

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1 Information on Murui was obtained during an immersion fieldwork of 12 months on the Cara-Parana river in Colombia, conducted between July 2013 and April 2016 to collect data for the reference grammar of Murui (Wojtylak forthcoming-a). The corpus was assembled from recordings of narrative texts (that deal with the group’s everyday activities, mythology, past memories, etc.) and spontaneous language production (following methods of the Basic Linguistic Theory approach, Dixon 2010a-b, 2012), and includes over 700 pages of analysed and glossed texts, as well as over 1200 pages of field notes. Thanks to the Murui people for their patience and to the participants of the workshop ‘Comparative and Superlative Constructions: Typology and Diachrony’ (Amsterdam, 16-17 June 2015), as well as Alexandra Aikhenvald and Yvonne Treis for their helpful comments on the material.

2 Some scholars consider the Witotoan languages to be related to the neighbouring Boran language family (see Aschmann’s work (1993) on ‘Proto-Witotoan’). Currently, Aschmann’s account is treated as a working hypothesis.
Map 1. Location of the Witoto-speaking groups in Northwest Amazonia (author’s map)
The current sociolinguistic situation of the Murui people is characterised by a rapidly progressing language shift towards Spanish. The official records estimate the number of speakers of the Murui language at c. 2,000, but, based on the author’s fieldwork, in reality this number is much less than this. The language is rapidly falling into disuse especially among younger speakers.

I start with a brief typological profile of the Murui language in section 2, focusing on word classes and their morphological and syntactic properties as relevant for the status and characteristics of comparative constructions. In section 3, I consider Murui comparative constructions focusing on their types and structure. This is followed by a discussion of Murui superlative strategies in section 4 and an analysis of the expression of equality and the similitative -ze in section 5. The last section offers a brief summary.

2 The Murui language

Murui, a nominative-accusative language, is agglutinating and predominantly suffixing. Murui favours verb-final constituent order (AOV, SV) but in many cases it is pragmatically based. Grammatical functions are expressed through case markers. Marking of core arguments is subject to differential case marking, and is related mainly to focus and topicality. Marking of peripheral arguments (locative, ablative, instrumental, benefactive-causal, privative) is mandatory. There is only one cross-referencing position on the verb, the subject S/A. Murui has three open lexical word classes: nouns, verbs, and adjectives. There are ten semi-closed and closed word classes that include place and manner adverbs, time words, number words, quantifiers/intensifiers, pronouns, demonstratives, interrogative content words, connectives, adpositions, and interjections. A few adjectives (such as e.g. mare ‘good’) form a closed set of words (see Wojtylak forthcoming-a).3

Verbs and nouns are distinctly different in their morphosyntactic features. For instance, nouns occur primarily as heads of NPs that can further function as heads of intransitive predicates (for first and second person), as in (1), or as arguments of verbless clauses (for third person), as in (2):4

| (1) | ri-ñó-di-kue_PRED |
| --- | ----------------- |
| woman-CLF:DR,F-LK-1sg | ‘I am a woman.’ |

3 A subject of transitive verb, ABL ablative, AN animate, ANA anaphoric, ATT attributive, AUDIT auditory, CERT certainty, CLF classifier, COLL collective, DR ‘derivational’, DES desiderative, ENDEAR endearment (term), EMPH emphatic, E oblique core argument, EVENT event (nominalisation), F feminine, G general, GR group, GEN genitive, HAB habitual, IMMAT immature, IMP imperative, KIN kinship, lit. literally, LK linker, LOC locative, LOCAL locative oni, M masculine, NEG negation, NEUT neutral classifier, NMLZ nominalization, NP noun phrase, N.S/A topical non-subject, NSP non-specific, O object of transitive verb, P-MARK parameter marker, PERF peripheral (argument), pl plural, PRED predicate, PR ‘pronominal’ classifier, PRIV privative, Q question word, QUANT quantifier, RAPID rapid action, REM remote, S subject of intransitive verb, sg singular, SMLF semelfactive, S-MARK standard marker, SP specific, Sp. Spanish loanword, UNCERT uncertainty, VCC verbless clause complement, VCS verbless copula subject, VS verbless subject, TH thematic affix

4 For phonetic symbols, the following conventions are used throughout this paper: <f> represents the voiceless bilabial fricative, <v> is the voiced bilabial fricative, <z> is the voiceless dental fricative, <r> is the flap, <ch> and <y> are the voiceless and voiced lamino-palatal affricates, and <j> is the voiceless glottal fricative.
Intransitive and transitive verbs are fully inflected for verbal morphology (tense, aspect, mood, evidentiality, directionality, as well as pronominal subject marking). (3) shows the transitive verbal root \( \text{fa} \)- ‘hit’:

| (3) | due-re-di-kue\textsubscript{PRED} | nai-\textit{nai}no\textsubscript{A} | kue-na\textsubscript{O} | fa-t-e\textsubscript{PRED} |
|-----|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| poor-ATT-LK-1sg                  | ANA.SP-CLF:PR.F                | 1sg-N.S/A.TOP   | hit-LK-3         |

‘Poor me (lit. I am poor). She hit me.’

Murui adjectives can function as predicates of intransitive clauses, as in (4), or can be used as arguments in verbless clauses, as in (5). The semantic difference between (4) and (5) is related to temporality. In (4) the attribution is ‘temporal’ (non-time-stable reference)—the place is dirty or ugly because someone did not clean it in the right way. In (5) it is ‘timeless’ (time-stable reference)—the fruit cannot revert to becoming ‘not dirty, not ugly’. In both cases (4) and (5), \( \text{naino} \) ‘that (place)’ and \( \text{jeak} \) ‘dirty, ugly (fruit)’ have to be referential, as indicated by the demonstrative \( \text{bik} \) ‘this (fruit)’.

| (4) | nai-no\textsubscript{S} | eo          | jea-re-d-e\textsubscript{PRED} |
|-----|-----------------|-------------|---------------------|
| ANA.SP-CLF:SP.PLACE          | very         | dirty.ugly-ATT-LK-3|

‘That place is very dirty, ugly (lit. that place has a property of being dirty, ugly).’

| (5) | bi-ki\textsubscript{VCS} | jea-ki\textsubscript{VCC} |
|-----|-----------------|---------|
| this-CLF:SMALL.ROUND         | dirty.ugly-CLF:ROUND |

‘This fruit is dirty, ugly (lit. this fruit - dirty, ugly fruit).’

Murui verbs, adjectives, and nouns are different in their morphosyntactic attributes from other word classes, and in the structural positions available for them. For instance, adjectives cannot take many of the aspectual markers such as the semelfactive \(-\text{no}\); verbs cannot co-occur with the inchoative ‘become’ \(-\text{na}i, -\text{tai}, \) and \(-\text{rui} \) markers; neither verbs nor adjectives can be marked with nominal morphology (unless they take classifiers) (see Wojtylak forthcoming-b). The syntactic properties of Murui open word classes are given in Table 1 below.
Table 1. Murui open word classes and their functional slots

| Parameters                        | Verbs         | Adjectives            | Nouns                  |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| head of intransitive predicate    | yes           | yes                   | yes                    |
| head of transitive predicate      | yes           | no                    | no                     |
| head of NP                        | yes (when occur with classifiers) | yes (when occur with classifiers) | yes |
| modifier in NP                    | no            | yes                   | yes                    |
| modifier to verbs                 | no            | yes (when occur with attributive markers) | no |

Similar to other neighbouring languages spoken in the vicinity of the Vaupés linguistic area, Murui has a large multiple classifier system which has quite complex derivational functions. Murui classifiers are suffixes that can be defined as sets of morphemes which are used in various morphosyntactic contexts forming full lexical nouns (Wojtylak 2016). These contexts include: a) nouns (free and bound roots), b) verbs, c) adjectives, d) number words, e) pronouns, f) demonstratives, g) interrogative content words, and h) quantifiers. An example of the functions c) and f) is presented in (6):

(6) bi-foro\textsubscript{VCS} aiyo-foro\textsubscript{VCC} ebi-foro\textsubscript{VCC}

| this-CLF:FEATHER.SHAPED | big-CLF:FEATHER.SHAPED | nice-CLF:FEATHER.SHAPED |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| ‘This palm leaf is big and beautiful (lit. this (feather shaped) - big (feather shaped) - nice (feather shaped)).’ |

Murui predicates are typically marked for third person with the pronominal S/A subject marker -e for singular, dual, and plural numbers. Optionally, for highly animate referents, the nonsingular number of S/A arguments can be marked on the predicates by the bound pronominal subject marker -mak. Similarly, nouns can remain unmarked; plural, kinship plural, and collective number marking is optional. Although the non-singularity of nouns is usually determined by context, number marking tends to be expressed when the nouns are pragmatically salient and/or have human referents (see also Smith-Stark 1974). In (7), jito ‘son’ could refer to any number of sons.

(7) jito\textsubscript{s} uri i-t-e\textsubscript{PRED} anane-ko-mo\textsubscript{PERF}

| son     | calm | exist-LK-3 | maloca-CLF:COVER-LOC |
|---------|------|-------------|----------------------|
| ‘Son(s) is (are) quiet in the communal roundhouse (Sp. maloca).’ |

Unlike other classifier systems in Amazonia (Aikhenvald 2003), Murui classifiers do not mark a full agreement within an NP. Modifying elements, such as demonstratives, do not agree with the head noun in classifiers, and are always marked with the general classifier -e (or -je)

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5 Multiple classifier systems are an areal phenomenon characteristic to languages located in the vicinity of the Vaupés linguistic area including Tariana, Baniwa and Palikur (Arawak), Bora and Miraña (Boran), Yagua (the only surviving language of the Peba-Yagua family) and East Tucanoan languages (see e.g. Aikhenvald 2003, 2012, Petersen de Piñeros 2007, Ramirez 1997, Seifart 2007, Seifart and Payne 2007).
regardless of their semantics or number, e.g. *bie riño* ‘this woman’, *bie jofo* ‘this house’. Agreement in Murui is indicative of the distinction between an NP and a clause: classifiers occur obligatorily as agreement markers only in equational clauses. Example (8) is a full sentence in Murui—it consists of a verbless clause which contains two juxtaposed NPs, and the classifiers are ‘matched’. (8b) is an NP.

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|}
\hline
(8a) & \text{*ñeki-na}_{NP} & \text{aare-na}_{NP} \\
\text{chambira.palm-CLF:TREE} & \text{tall-CLF:VERTICAL} \\
\hline
& \text{‘(The) chambira tree is tall (lit. chambira (tree) - tall (tree).)’} \\
\hline
(8b) & \text{[bai-e \ñeki-na]}_{NP} & \text{that-CLF:G} \\
& \text{tall-CLF:TREE} \\
& \text{‘that chambira (tree)’} \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

Murui has no copula verb. There is a verb *i(te)* which translates as ‘exist, be, live’. It behaves as any other intransitive verb in the language, and can be used to express possession. In (9) *i(te)* marks a type of ownership:

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
(9) & \text{kue-mo}_{PERF} & \text{uru-iai}_{S} & \text{i-t-e}_{PRED} \\
& 1sg-LOC & \text{child-CLF:G.PL} & \text{exist-LK-3} \\
\hline
& \text{‘I have children.’ (I am responsible for them, they are not necessarily mine)} \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

Murui has a classifier -*fe* meaning ‘side’, as in (10), that can also function as a linker of sorts followed by classifiers, as in (11). Murui number words also take -*fe*, as in (12):

\[
\begin{array}{|c|}
\hline
(10) & \text{ana-fe} \\
& \text{below-CLF:SIDE} \\
& \text{‘downside, lowland’} \\
\hline
(11) & \text{foo-fe-be-ji} \\
& \text{inside-CLF:SIDE-CLF:LEAF-CLF:WATERY} \\
& \text{‘on the inside of the water’} \\
\hline
(12) & \text{na-ga-fe-be-kuire} \\
& \text{ANA.SP-QUANT-CLF:SIDE-CLF:LEAF-CLF:PEEL} \\
& \text{‘ten (lit. all sides of leaf peels)’} \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

Murui has no morphological derivations such as augmentative or diminutive. Such concepts are expressed in the language by means of classifiers, such as -*ki* ‘round (smaller)’ vs. -*gi* ‘oval (bigger)’.
3 Murui Comparative Constructions

Murui has a number of dedicated comparative constructions that are characterised by the occurrence of special forms of STANDARD MARKERS, as well as by their specific structure. All Murui comparative constructions will commonly include the structural elements outlined in Table 2. For the terminology used throughout this paper see the introduction (Treis, this volume).

Table 2. Syntactic status of elements of Murui comparative constructions

| Element                    | Status                                           |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| COMPAREE                   | pronoun, noun                                    |
| STANDARD                   | pronoun, noun                                    |
| PARAMETER                  | adjective, noun, verb                            |
| STANDARD MARKER (S-MARK)   | noun (adverb/adverbial demonstrative followed by-je (CLF:SIDE) and -mo (LOC)) |
| PARAMETER MARKER (P-MARK)  | intensifier eo 'very'                            |

As mentioned in section 1, adjectives (followed by classifiers) can be used as an argument of a verbless clause, such as ebikai 'beautiful (fingers)' in (13), or as a head of an intransitive clause, such as ebirede '(they) are beautiful' in (14). The semantic difference between (13-14) relates to the temporality of attribution (see also examples (4-5) in §2).

(13) oo-kai-ai_{VCS} ebi-kai-ai_{VCC} verbless clause - 'timeless'

2sg-CLF:STEM-PL nice-CLF:STEM-PL

‘Your (fingers) are beautiful (lit. your fingers - nice fingers).’ (e.g. they are long and straight)

(14) oo-kai_{VCS} ebi-re-d-e_{PRED} intransitive clause - 'temporal'

2sg-CLF:STEM nice-ATT-LK-3

‘Your (fingers) are beautiful (lit. your fingers have a property of being nice).’
(e.g. they are decorated with rings)

A similar two-fold division can be made for the comparative constructions. Those comparative constructions that involve verbless clauses with adjectives that have grammatical properties similar to nouns (and refer to ‘timeless attribution’), as in (13), I will call ‘type 1’. Those that involve adjectives functioning as intransitive predicates (and refer to ‘temporal attribution’), as in (14), I will call ‘type 2’. Constructions of those types are most commonly used for comparison. This is illustrated by the set of examples in (15) and (16) below. In (15), the adjective root jano- 'small' followed by a classifier functions as a verbless copula complement (see also section 4 on superlative strategies). (16), with the STANDARD kue 'I' and the S-MARK baaifemo 'ahead (of)' is a comparative construction of type 1.

(15) nai-ñaiño_{VCS} (eo) jano-ñaiño_{VCC}

ANA.SP-CLF:PR.F very small-CLF:PR.F

‘She is very small (lit. she - very small (female).’

(16) nai-ñaiño_{VCS} (eo) jano-ñaiño_{VCC}

ANA.SP-CLF:PR.F very small-CLF:PR.F

‘She is very small (lit. she - very small (female).’

7
Murui has several means for expressing comparison. All are monoclausal. The PARAMETER is stated only once; the STANDARD and the S-MARK of comparison are peripheral elements. The COMPAREE in Murui functions as either as verbless copula subject (VCS) or subject of intransitive clause. Murui comparative constructions can be distinguished by:

1) forms of the S-MARK, which can be either 1) an adverb or an adverbial demonstrative followed by -fe-mo (-CLF:SIDE-LOC), 2) emodo-mo ‘over’ (over-LOC), or 3) an argument followed by the locative -mo.

2) grammatical properties of the PARAMETER of comparison, which can be expressed either as an argument of a verbless clause (type 1) or a head an intransitive predicate (type 2).

There is a strong tendency for the PARAMETER to be an adjective; in addition, nouns, and verbs can function as the PARAMETER as well. The optional P-MARK, eo ‘very, a lot’ is a intensifier. The comparative constructions with -femo (§3.1) are common; those with emodomo (§3.3) are used less often, and those that involve the locative -mo (§3.4) are rare in everyday discourse. Murui comparative constructions with -femo are illustrated in Tables 3-5. Each table displays the most common ordering of structural elements for a given comparative construction, as well as their frequency of usage in everyday conversations. Forms of the S-MARK -femo are shown in Table 6 in §3.2.

| (16) | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER | STANDARD | S-MARK |
|------|----------|--------|-----------|----------|--------|
| nai-ñaiño<sub>VCS</sub> | (eo) | jano-ñaiño<sub>VCC</sub> | [kue] baaí-fe-mo<sub>NP:PERF</sub> |
| ANA.SP-CLF:PR.F | very | small-CLF:PR.F | 1sg | ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC |

‘She is smaller than I am (lit. she - very small (female), ahead of me).’
Table 3. Comparative constructions with S-MARK *-femo* and their usual structural slots (discussed in §3.1)

| Type and meaning | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER | STANDARD | S-MARK | USAGE |
|------------------|----------|--------|-----------|----------|--------|-------|
| type 1 ‘timeless’ | VCS      | PARAMETER preceded by optional intensifier *eo* ‘very’ | VCC | NP | oblique NP | common |
| type 2 ‘temporal’ | S        | PARAMETER preceded by optional intensifier *eo* ‘very’ | intransitive predicate | NP | oblique NP | common |

Table 4. Comparative constructions with the S-MARK *emodomo* and their usual structural slots (discussed in §3.3)

| Type and meaning | COMPAREE | STANDARD | S-MARK | P-MARK | PARAMETER | USAGE |
|------------------|----------|----------|--------|--------|-----------|-------|
| type 1 ‘timeless’ | VCS      | NP       | oblique NP | PARAMETER preceded by optional intensifier *eo* ‘very’ | VCC | occasional |
| type 2 ‘temporal’ | S        | NP       | oblique NP | PARAMETER preceded by optional intensifier *eo* ‘very’ | intransitive predicate | occasional |

Table 5. Comparative constructions with the S-MARK *-mo* and their usual structural slots (discussed in §3.4)

| Type and meaning | STANDARD | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER | USAGE |
|------------------|----------|----------|--------|-----------|-------|
| type 1 ‘timeless’ | oblique NP | VCS | PARAMETER preceded by optional intensifier *eo* ‘very’ | VCC | rare |
3.1 Comparatives with -femo

Comparative construction with the S-MARK -femo involve two construction types, those of type 1 and type 2. Those of type 1 involve verbless clause constructions, where the COMPAREE, STANDARD, and PARAMETER of comparison are nouns and refer to ‘timeless attribution’ of a referent, as in (17). Constructions of type 2 involve adjectives that function as heads of intransitive predicates (occasionally, also verbs and nouns), and refer to ‘temporal attribution’, as in (18). The STANDARD and the S-MARK always form an NP.

(17) | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER | STANDARD | S-MARK |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| [bi-e | iii-miVCS | eo | aiy-o-miVCC | [bi-mi | baa-i-fe-mo]PERF |
| this-CLF:G | man-CLF:DR,M | very | big-CLF:PR,M | this-CLF:PR,M | ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC |

‘This man is bigger than this man (lit. this man very big man, ahead of this man).’

(18) | COMPAREE | STANDARD | S-MARK | PARAMETER |
|---|---|---|---|
| kue₁ | [oo | ana-fe-mo]PERF | ia-mi-dii-kuePRED |
| 1sg | 2sg | below-CLF:SIDE-LOC | short-CLF:PR,M-LK-1sg |

‘I (male) am smaller than you (lit. I - you on the down side, I am small).’

In (19), the PARAMETER of the comparative construction type 1 is a noun uaiikima ‘old man’. (20) is its negated counterpart where the noun is used as a head of a negated intransitive predicate. Examples such as (20) are not common; usually the STANDARD and S-MARK are not expressed when the comparative constructions are negated.

(19) | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER | STANDARD | S-MARK |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| JoseVCS | eo | uaiiki-maVCC | [Caro | baa-i-fe-mo]PERF |
| Jose | very | aged-CLF:DR,M | Carlos | ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC |

‘Jose is older than Carlos (lit. Jose very aged (man), ahead of Carlos).’

(20) | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER | STANDARD | S-MARK |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jose₁ | uaiiki-ma-ñ-e-d-ePRED | [Caro | baa-i-fe-mo]PERF |
| Jose | aged-CLF:DR,M-NEG-LK-3 | Carlos | ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC |

‘Jose is not older than Carlos (lit. Jose is not aged (man), ahead of Carlos).’

The S-MARK of comparison is a noun formed from an adverbial demonstrative (i.e. baa ‘ahead, over there’) or adverbs of place, such as foo ‘inside’ (see §3.2 on forms of S-MARK). It can have various forms whose meanings are related to distance, interiority, and vertical position, as in examples (21-22):

(21) | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER | STANDARD | S-MARK |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| nai-ñaiñoVCS | eo | jano-ñaiñoVCC | [kue | baa-i-fe-mo]PERF |
| ANA.SP-CLF:PR,F | very | small-CLF:PR,F | 1sg | ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC |

‘She is smaller than me (lit. she very small, ahead of me).’

(22) | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER | STANDARD | S-MARK |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| nai-ñaiñoVCS | eo | jano-ñaiñoVCC | [kue | foo-fe-mo]PERF |
| ANA.SP-CLF:PR,F | very | small-CLF:PR,F | 1sg | inside-CLF:SIDE-LOC |

‘She is smaller than me (lit. she very small, me on the inside).’ (I bigger than her)
Sometimes, in the constructions of type 1, the \textit{PARAMETER} can be postposed to the \textit{STANDARD}. In (23), the \textit{STANDARD} of comparison, the noun \textit{aiyo-kae} ‘big (canoe)’ and the \textit{S-MARK} \textit{baai-fe-mo} ‘ahead (of)’, are followed by the \textit{PARAMETER} \textit{aiyue} ‘big’ in the VCC function. The \textit{COMPAREE} is the NP \textit{aiyue raya} ‘big boat’. Such ordering of constituents in the sentence is always pragmatically conditioned and occurs when there is an extra emphasis on the \textit{STANDARD}.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{COMPAREE} & \textbf{STANDARD} & \textbf{S-MARK} \\
\hline
\textit{aiyue} & \textit{aiyo-kae} & \textit{baai-fe-mo} \\
\textit{ra-ya} & \textit{big-CLF:G} & \textit{thing-CLF:CRAFT} \\
\textit{baa} & \textit{big-CLF:REP:CANOE} & \textit{ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC} \\
\textbf{P-MARK} & \textbf{PARAMETER} & \\
\hline
\textit{eo} & \textit{aiyue} & \\
\textit{very} & \textit{big-CLF:G} & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

‘Big boats are bigger than big (canoes) (lit. big boats - ahead of big (canoes) - very big).’

In comparative constructions of type 2, adjectives, nouns, and verbs function as heads of an intransitive predicate. In (24), the \textit{PARAMETER} of comparison is an intransitive predicate \textit{mokorede} ‘(it) is green’ modified by the \textit{P-MARK} \textit{eo} ‘very’:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{COMPAREE} & \textbf{P-MARK} & \textbf{PARAMETER} & \textbf{STANDARD} \\
\hline
\textit{[bi-e kue-ra]} & \textit{eo} & \textit{moko-re-d-e} & \textit{jiia-rue} \\
\textit{this-CLF:G} & \textit{write-CLF:NEUT} & \textit{very} & \textit{green-ATT-LK-3} \\
\textit{baa} & \textit{ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC} & \\
\hline
\textbf{S-MARK} & \\
\textit{baai-fe-mo} & \textit{very} & \textit{green-ATT-LK-3} & \textit{other-CLF:THINGS} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

‘This pen is more green than the other one (lit. this pen has a property of being very green, ahead of another).’

In (25), the \textit{PARAMETER} \textit{mare-ñaiño-di-kue} ‘I’m (a) beautiful (female)’ is a nominalised adjective \textit{mare} ‘good, beautiful’ followed by the animate classifier \textit{-ñaiño} that functions as a head of an intransitive predicate. The \textit{STANDARD} of comparison is the third person pronoun followed by the \textit{S-MARK} \textit{baaiifemo} ‘ahead (of)’:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{COMPAREE} & \textbf{P-MARK} & \textbf{PARAMETER} & \textbf{STANDARD} \\
\hline
\textit{kue} & \textit{eo} & \textit{mare-ñaiño-di-kue} & \textit{bai-ñaiño} \\
\textit{1sg} & \textit{very} & \textit{good-ATT-CLF:PR.F-LK-1sg} & \textit{that-CLF:PR.F} \\
\textit{baai-fe-mo} & \textit{ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC} & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

‘I am more beautiful than her (lit. I am very good/beautiful, ahead of her).’

Similar is (26), where the \textit{PARAMETER} of comparison, the noun \textit{ukube} ‘money’, functions as a predicate head followed by the \textit{STANDARD} and the \textit{S-MARK}:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{COMPAREE} & \textbf{P-MARK} & \textbf{PARAMETER} & \textbf{STANDARD} \\
\hline
\textit{ukube} & \textit{eo} & \textit{mare-ñaiño-di-kue} & \textit{bai-ñaiño} \\
\textit{1sg} & \textit{very} & \textit{good-ATT-CLF:PR.F-LK-1sg} & \textit{that-CLF:PR.F} \\
\textit{baai-fe-mo} & \textit{ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC} & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{6} Such ‘self-praising’, as in (25), is not a usual practise among the Murui. This has to do with the cultural aversion against individualisation, the ‘me’ \textit{kue} (1sg) vs. the ‘we’ \textit{kai} (1pl). The traditional Murui speakers always talk in pluralistic terms recognising the contributions of the people i.e. \textit{kai}, and never promoting the individual i.e. \textit{kue}.}}

\textit{\textbf{\textsuperscript{7} The adjective \textit{mare} ‘good’ can also mean ‘beautiful’, especially when referring to persons.}}
The following examples illustrate the intransitive verbal root kio- ‘see’ and the transitive roko- ‘cook’ in the PARAMETER function. Note the optionality of the P-MARK in (27), as opposed to (26) above. In (28) the COMPAREE is a pronominal S/A subject marker -kue (1sg).

| COMPAREE | PARAMETER | STANDARD | S-MARK |
|----------|-----------|----------|--------|
| nai- hãaiño₃ | raize | [kio-d-e]₃| [kue] baai-fe-mo|PERF|
| ANA.SP-CLF:PR.F | well.ATT | see-LK-3 | 1sg | ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC |

‘She sees better than I do (lit. she sees well, ahead of me).’

| STANDARD | S-MARK | P-MARK | PARAMETER/COMPAREE |
|----------|--------|--------|-------------------|
| [[kue ei]₃ | baai-fe-mo|PERF | eo | sopā-na | roko-di-kue|PERED|
| 1sg | mother | ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC | very | soup.Sp-N.S/A.TOP | cook-LK-1sg |

‘I cooked more soup than my mother (lit. ahead of my mother, I cook much soup).’

The COMPAREE and the STANDARD of comparison can be further modified by means of dependent clauses, as in (29). The non-singular reading of baiko ‘these (dogs)’ is contextual.

| COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER |
|----------|--------|-----------|
| [bi-e jiko]₃ | [beno-mo i-t-e]₃ | eo | aime-tai-t-e|PERED|
| this-CLF:dog | HERE.CLF:SP.PLACE-LOC | exist-LK-3 | very | hungry-BECOME₂-LK-3 |

‘This dog that is here is more hungry than that dog (over there) (lit. this dog that is here is very hungry, ahead of that dog).’

3.2 The standard marker -femo

In comparative constructions with -femo (see §3.1), the S-MARK of comparison is a noun formed with the adverbial demonstrative baai ‘ahead, over there’ or a restricted set of place adverbs always followed by the word class changing classifier -fe and the locative -mo. The forms of S-MARKs are outlined in Table 6. There is a parallel marking pattern for superiority and inferiority. By far, the most common form of the S-MARK -femo is baai-femo ‘ahead (of)’ expressing relative superiority ‘more’, and its ‘negative’ equivalent foofemo ‘on the inside (of)’ used for expression of relative inferiority ‘less’.

8 ‘Superiority’ and ‘inferiority’ are understood here in terms of the position in space, rather than expressing ‘more’ and ‘less’. That way, the forms of the S-MARK mark ‘higher degree of a property’, which can be either superior or inferior. For instance, when the inferiority S-MARK foofemo ‘on the inside (of)’ occurs with the adjective ‘small’, it expresses ‘higher degree of smallness’, rather than simply ‘less small, lower degree of smallness’. 
The meanings of the -femo forms relate to distance (‘ahead’), interiority (‘inside’ and ‘outside’), and vertical position (‘low’ and ‘high’). Such a semantic division of the S-MARK indicates the importance of object’s physical properties in terms of their shape and position in space for the Murui. For instance, Murui nouns formed with the classifier -bogɨ for ‘big ball-like objects’ are referred to with the S-MARK jino-femo ‘wider (lit. on the outside)’ when compared with -dozi ‘thin stick’ (see Diagram 1 further this section).

Table 6. Forms of the S-MARK -femo in Murui comparative constructions

| MARK     | Gloss          | Literal meaning                          | Reading       |
|----------|----------------|------------------------------------------|---------------|
| baa-i-fe-mo | ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC | ‘ahead (of), on the ahead side (of)’³⁰ | ‘more’        |
| foo-fe-mo     | inside-CLF:SIDE-LOC | ‘on the inside (of)’                  | ‘less, slimmer’ |
| aa-fe-mo     | above-CLF:SIDE-LOC | ‘on the top side (of)’                  | ‘higher’      |
| ana-fe-mo     | below-CLF:SIDE-LOC | ‘on the down side (of)’                 | ‘lower’       |
| jino-fe-mo    | outside-CLF:SIDE-LOC | ‘on the outside (of)’                  | ‘wider’       |

Nowadays, all five forms of the S-MARK are almost exclusively used only by elder speakers of the language. Among younger speakers, baaifemo ‘ahead (of)’, and, to an extent, foofemo ‘on the inside (of)’, are robustly productive; other forms are falling out of use.

The roots of the S-MARK are not unique to comparative constructions, and elsewhere in the language they can be used as demonstratives and adverbs with locational meanings, as illustrated in the examples (30-35) below. They are independent forms which cannot be case-marked unless they take the classifier -fe (see Wojtylak forthcoming-a for details). Examples of this are given in (30-35). Nouns formed with -fe can be followed by other (physical property) classifiers, as in (33).

(30) baa-i- dino i-t-e_pRED
    ahead=AT.CLF:SP.PLACE exist-LK-3
    ‘(A person) is over there (ahead of you in that place).’

(31) baa-i-fe i-ñe-d-e_pRED
    ahead-CLF:SIDE exist-NEG-LK-3
    ‘(It) does not have an end (lit. the point ahead doesn’t exist).’

(32) uzu-ma_s kaima-re foo bi-t-e_pRED
    grandparent-CLF:DR.M happy-ATT inside come-LK-3
    ‘The grandfather happily came inside.’

(33) foo-fe-be-niai inside-CLF:SIDE-CLF:LEAF-COLL
    ‘interior side (of leaves, of paper sheets, etc.).’

³° The S-MARK foofemo ‘on the inside (of)’ has a form of jo-fo-fe-mo (with the unanalysable element jo- in Minika, another variety of Witoto). The form jo- is possibly related to the 1sg pronoun kue (cf. xò in Ocaina and jo‘é in Nonuya). All Witotoan languages have the classifier -fo ‘hole-like, cavity’ which is related to the adverb foo ‘inside’.

¹⁰ Throughout this paper I chose to translate baaifemo ‘lit. on the ahead side’ as ‘ahead (of)’. 
The semantics of the S-MARK forms allow a division between two parallel types of comparative constructions: those that express superiority, and those which convey the notions of inferiority, as illustrated in Diagram 1 below. The S-MARKS expressing superiority make more formal distinctions than those expressing inferiority. 11

Diagram 1. Semantics of the S-MARK -femo in Murui comparative constructions

I. COMPARISON OF SUPERIORITY – comparison of superiority in Murui relates to the notions of vertical position (‘higher’ < above’), distance (‘more’ < ahead, over there’), and interiority (or measurement: ‘wider’ < ‘outside’). The most prevalent S-MARK referring to superiority involves distance, and it is formed with the adverbial demonstrative baai ‘ahead, over there’ followed by the classifier -fe and the locative -mo. In the speech of Murui elders, baai[femo marks only those types of comparison that refer to distance; among younger speakers, it is also used for expressing interiority and vertical position. Throughout the paper, I give various examples of comparative constructions with baai[femo, including comparison of quality, as in (21, 25), quality, as in (27), and quantity, as in (28).

In traditional Murui, interiority and vertical position are important parameters that define the form of the S-MARK. The form aafemo ‘higher (lit. on the top side)’ describes superiority of an object’s quality on a vertical plane. Examples are given in (36-37):

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11 This is somewhat different from Yalaku (Aikhenvald, this volume). In addition to biclausal constructions, Yalaku also uses a strategy involving directional verbs. While there is only one verb used to express superiority (‘go up’), expression of inferiority involves two distinct verbs (‘go down’ and ‘go down slope’).
Marking of interiority in comparative constructions indicates that an object is seen from either outside (i.e. viewed as being ‘superior’, for which jinofemo ‘wider (lit. on the outside)’ is used) or inside (viewed as being ‘inferior’, which is marked with foofemo ‘less, slimmer (lit. on the inside)’). The S-MARK jinofemo is used to refer to an object that is physically wider (horizontally, in terms of its size), as illustrated in (38-39):

Since the use of S-MARKS referring to vertical position and interiority almost exclusively is a feature of the speech of Murui elders, could be indicative that in the past, comparative constructions involved an extensive use of different types of markers of comparison.12

II. COMPARISON OF INFERIORITY – comparison of inferiority involves interiority (‘inside’) and vertical position (‘low’). By far, interiority is the most prevalent notion expressing ‘less’ in the language. Among younger speakers, the S-MARK foofemo (formed with foo ‘inside’) is used to refer to all types of comparison of inferiority, as in (40-42) below:

12 Such as the Murui topographic adverbs of place afai ‘upstream’ and fui ‘downstream’.
16

When referring to objects located in space and expressing ‘y less than x’ meanings, Murui elders tend to use the S-MARK *anafem*o for ‘lower’, as exemplified in (43). This is unlike young Murui speakers, who employ *foofem*o ‘inside (of)’ at all times.

3.3 Comparatives with *emodomo*

Another type of Murui comparative constructions involves the S-MARK *emodomo*, and is used for comparison of superiority. Unlike the comparatives involving S-MARK *-fem*o (see §3.1), comparatives marked with *emodomo* are used only occasionally. Similarly to comparative constructions involving *-fem*o, comparatives with *emodomo* are monoclausal, and distinguish between clauses with ‘temporal’ and ‘timeless’ semantics. In such constructions, COMPAREE and STANDARD are expressed by NPs, and adjectives, verbs, and nouns that function as heads of intransitive predicates are PARAMETERS. The S-MARK of comparison is *emodomo* is best interpreted as ‘over, top, above’; it is formed with the noun *emodo* referring to ‘back, backside’ (cf. (47) at the end of this section) followed by the locative *-mo*. The P-MARK *eo ‘very, a lot’ is optional. This is illustrated in (44-45) below:

For more emphasis, the ordering of the COMPAREE and STANDARD can be reversed, and the STANDARD is preposed to the COMPAREE. Such types of comparative constructions are used
relatively often in the everyday conversations. They are found mostly when comparing inanimate objects. An example is given in (46):

| (46) | COMPAREE | STANDARD | S-MARK | PARAMETER |
|------|----------|----------|--------|-----------|
| Jose | Pedro    | emodo-mo | aare-mie | vcc       |

José is taller than Pedro (lit. José, over Pedro, long (male)).

The S-MARK *emodomo* is not unique to comparative constructions. In (47) *emodo* followed by the locative *-mo*, means ‘on the back’:

| (47) | [kue] | emodo-mo | kiri-tiko | yitii-ya |
|------|-------|----------|-----------|----------|
| 1sg  | back-LOC | basket-CLF:SMALLER | grab-EVENT:NMLZ |

‘I carry a small basket on my back.’

Elsewhere in the grammar, *emodomo* is also used for counting, e.g. *da-be-kuiro emodo-mo mena* (one-CLF:LEAF-CLF:PEEL over-LOC two) for ‘seven (lit. one leaf peel over two)’ (Wojtylak forthcoming-a).

The difference between those comparative constructions involving -*femo* and those marked with *emodomo* is semantic, as well as pragmatic. People usually interpret *emodomo* ‘over’ as having a transparent meaning (referring to one’s back), and being ‘somewhat stronger’ than -*femo*. Others prefer not to use it, indicating that such constructions are not Murui, but Minika in origin (another Witoto variety spoken at the Igara-Paraná River in Colombia, see Map 1).  

3.4 Comparative with locative -*mo*

In addition to the comparative constructions with -*femo* (§3.1) and *emodomo* (§3.3), Murui has a marginally occurring monoclausal construction that involves a juxtaposition of two NPs; the first NP is always marked with the locative -*mo*. Its readings impute opposite properties to two participants. They are reminiscent of other comparative construction types in use of the locative -*mo*, and can only have inanimate objects as referents. Notably, comparative constructions with the locative -*mo* are rarely used. The intensifier *eo* ‘very’ is optional. An example is given in (48):

| (48) | STANDARD | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER |
|------|----------|----------|--------|-----------|
| [bi-be] | jano-be-mo | bai-be | eo | aiyoe-be |

This leaf is smaller than that leaf (lit. this (leaf), that (leaf), very big (leaf)).’

4 Superlative strategies

Murui has two independent strategies to indicate superlative readings. One is contextual, where a simple use of an adjective, a noun, or a verb preceded by the intensifier *eo* ‘very’ is interpreted as

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13 The distribution between those comparative constructions marked with -*femo* and those involving *emodomo* is an issue for further study.

14 They might in fact be a type of an incipient comparative construction where the existing S-MARKS undergo reduction and are represented solely by the locative -*mo*. 
having superlative meanings. The second strategy involves modification of nouns to indicate a set of referents.

I. SUPERLATIVE INTERPRETATION—depending on the situation and context, non-comparative constructions that involve the intensifier *eo* (cf. (4-5) in §2) can have implicit superlative readings (see Vuillermet, this volume, for a similar strategy in Ese Eja). This is illustrated in (49-50):

| (49) | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER |
|------|----------|--------|-----------|
| [kue ñoo]VCS | eo | mare-ñaiñoVCC |
| 1sg CLF:DR:F.ENDEAR | very | good.ATT-CLF:PR:F |

‘My daughter is the most beautiful one (lit. my daughter, very good (female)).’ (a proud mother discussing a picture of her daughter dancing with other girls)

| (50) | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER |
|------|----------|--------|-----------|
| [bi-e ra-dozi]VCS | eo | ia-doziVCC |
| this-CLF:G thing-CLF:STICK | very | short-CLF:STICK |

‘This stick is the smallest (lit. this stick, short (stick)).’ (when holding a bunch of sticks of various lengths)

Often, such constructions are additionally accompanied by an oblique argument marked with the ablative *-mona* to specify/emphasize the author of a statement. This is illustrated in (51-53):

| (51) | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER |
|------|----------|--------|-----------|
| nai-mieVCS | eo | aiy-o-mieVCC | oo-monaPERF |
| ANA.SP-CLF:PR.M | very | big-CLF:PR.M | 2sg-ABL |

‘As for you (you think that), he is big.’ or ‘As for you, he is the biggest.’

| (52) | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER |
|------|----------|--------|-----------|
| Maria-monaPERF | eo | uiño-di-oPRED |
| Maria-ABL | very | know-LK-2sg |

‘As for Maria (Maria thinks that), you know a lot.’ or ‘As for Maria, you know the most.’

| (53) | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER |
|------|----------|--------|-----------|
| nai-maki-monaPERF | eo | mare-ñaiño-di-oPRED |
| ANA.SP-CLF:PR.GR.AN-ABL | very | good.ATT-ANA.SP-CLF:PR.F-2sg |

‘As for them (they think that), you’re very a beautiful (female).’ or ‘As for them, you’re the most beautiful (female).’

The frequent usage of constructions with the ablative marker expressing the meaning ‘as for’ could possibly be the origin of sentences such as in (54) below. They are common among young speakers of Murui but not among elders. Note that the reading of (54) is not ‘as for those children (those children think that)’; rather, the ablative marker specifies a set of referents:

| (54) | STANDARD/S-MARK | COMPAREE | PARAMETER |
|------|------------------|----------|-----------|
| [bi-e uru-iai-mona]PERF | da-za | gui-aka-ñe-d-ePRED |
| this-CLF:G child-CLF:PL-ABL | one-CLF:IMMATURE | eat-DES-NEG-LK-3 |
| eo | ira-re-d-ePRED |
| very | sick-ATT-LK-3 |

‘Of those children, one doesn’t want to eat. He’s sick.’
The use of such constructions in Murui might be influenced by the Spanish superlative constructions involving *de* ‘of, from, about’, as in a sentence *ella es la más linda de todas* ‘she is most beautiful of all’ or *de todos los niños, uno no quiere comer* ‘of all the children, he is the only one who doesn’t eat’, as in (54).

II. Modification of a noun to indicate a set of referents – Murui comparative constructions with the S-MARK *baaifemo* can have superlative readings; in such instances, the STANDARD is specified as a large set of referents against which the COMPAREE is compared, as in (55-56). They are used by young speakers and are reminiscent of Spanish superlative constructions, where the STANDARD is expressed by a noun referring to as a set of referents, as in *el abuelo más anciano de todos que están aquí* ‘the oldest elder out of those who are here’. In such constructions in Murui, the COMPAREE is always marked for number (note that elsewhere Murui has optional number marking on the NP, see section 2). Such constructions are illustrated in (55-56) below:

| COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER | STANDARD |
|----------|--------|-----------|----------|
| kue₁sg  | eo     | mare-ñaiño-di-kue₁sg | [ua nana ri-ño-niai] |
| S-MARK   | very   | good.ATT-CLF:PR.F-LK-1sg | really ALL woman-CLF:DR.F-COLL |
| *baaifemo*¹PERF | ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC | ‘I am the most beautiful out of all women (lit. I am very good, ahead of all the women).’ |

(56) | COMPAREE | STANDARD | S-MARK | P-MARK | PARAMETER |
|-------|----------|---------|--------|--------|-----------|
| KataᵥCS | [jiai-ñaiñau] | *baaifemo*¹PERF | eo | aiy-ñañoᵥCC |
| Kata | other-CLF:PR.F.PL | ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC | very | big-CLF:PR.F |
| ‘Kata is the biggest of all (lit. Kata, over other females, very big (female)).’ |

5 Comparison of equality and similitative meanings

In prototypical equative and similitative constructions two entities (the COMPAREE and the STANDARD) are ascribed to the PARAMETER to the same or similar extent. Murui equative and similitative constructions are discussed in turn.

5.1 Equative constructions

Murui equative constructions are expressed by verbless and (extended) intransitive clauses, where the STANDARD is followed by either the postposition *izoi* ‘similar’, as in (57), or the root *izoi*-followed by verbal morphology, as in (58). The intensifier *eo* ‘very’ is often used.

| COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER | STANDARD |
|----------|--------|-----------|----------|
| nai-ñaiñoᵥCS | eo | mare-ñaiñoᵥCS | [kue izoi] |
| ANA.SP-CLF:PR.F | very | good.ATT-CLF:PR.F | 1sg similar |
| ‘She is as beautiful as me (lit. she very good, similar to me).’ |

(58) | COMPAREE | P-MARK | PARAMETER | STANDARD |
|--------|--------|-----------|----------|
| [kue niña]₁sg | ria-ño₁sg | izoi-d₁sg | |
| 1sg child.Sp.F | nonWitoto-CLF:DR.F | similar-LK-3 |
| ‘My child is like a white woman (lit. my child is similar to a white woman).’ |
Verbless clauses and intransitive clauses can co-occur. This is illustrated in (59):

(59) [bi-e jo-fo]\textsubscript{VCS} aiyue\textsubscript{VCC} [jiai-e jo-fo]\textsubscript{E} izoi-d-e\textsubscript{PRED}

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textit{this\textendash CLF:G} & \textit{house\textendash CLF:CAVITY} & \textit{big\textendash CLF:G} & \textit{other\textendash CLF:G} & \textit{house\textendash CLF:CAVITY} \\
\hline
\textit{\textquote{This house is as big as the other house (lit. this house - big house, similar to the other house).}}
\hline
\end{tabular}

The context can play an important role in interpretation of \textit{izoi(de)} ‘be similar’. The verb is homophonous with the intransitive verb \textit{i-t-e} (exist-LK-3) ‘exist, be, live’ when it is marked with the remote habitual -\textit{zo}, as in (60). From the synchronic perspective, \textit{izoi-} and \textit{i-} are not related.

(60) [kue moo mikori]\textsubscript{S} iyai-ma-na\textsubscript{S} i-zoi-d-e\textsubscript{PRED}

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textit{1sg} & \textit{father} & \textit{deceased} & \textit{chief\textendash CLF:DR.M.N.S/A.TOP} & \textit{exist\textendash REM.HAB-LK-3} \\
\hline
\textit{\textquote{My deceased father used to be a leader.}}
\hline
\end{tabular}

Ordering of elements in equative constructions is similar to that of comparative constructions. Generally in Murui, there is a certain flexibility in constituents patterns, where the position of the oblique argument can be subject to change (i.e. focus). In (61) the \textit{STANDARD} is preposed to the \textit{PARAMETER}:

(61) nai-\textit{\textsubscript{ANA.SP-CLF:PR.F} naiño} [kue izoi]\textsubscript{E} raize ro-t\textsubscript{PRED}

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textit{1sg} & \textit{similar} & \textit{well.SIMIL} & \textit{sing\textendash LK-3} \\
\hline
\textit{\textquote{She sings as well as me (lit. she, similar to me, sings well).}}
\hline
\end{tabular}

Murui has also a number of lexical verbs which express transformative-like meanings: \textit{jaai(de)} ‘go, become (in shamanic practices)’, \textit{janai(de)} ‘behave in a similar fashion’, and \textit{i(te)} ‘exist’ (as in (60) above). They are most frequently used in the context of physical and spiritual transformations. The object of transformation is always obligatorily marked with the topical non-subject marker -\textit{na}. This is illustrated in (62-63):

(62) uzu-ma\textsubscript{A} janayari-na\textsubscript{O} jaai-d-e\textsubscript{PRED}

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textit{grandfather\textendash CLF:DR.M} & \textit{jaguar-N.S/A.TOP} & \textit{go-LK-3} \\
\hline
\textit{\textquote{Grandfather became a jaguar.} (meaning: he transformed into a jaguar)}
\hline
\end{tabular}

(63) Alexis\textsubscript{A} iyai-ma-na\textsubscript{A} janai-d-e\textsubscript{PRED}

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textit{Alexis} & \textit{chief\textendash CLF:DR.M.N.S/A} & \textit{behave.similar-LK-3} \\
\hline
\textit{\textquote{Alexis behaves like a chief.} (meaning: Alexis behaves like a chief, but he is not a leader)}
\hline
\end{tabular}

5.2 Similative -\textit{ze} with \textit{\textquotemany size} meanings

Murui has a category which expresses the notion of ‘\textit{Y} like/as \textit{X} in terms of object’s size’. The occurrence of the similative -\textit{ze} is limited to nouns, demonstratives, the question word \textit{ni-}\textsubscript{CLF:G} ‘which (one)’, and the connective \textit{ie}. For example, \textit{ananeko ‘maloca} (traditional communal
roundhouse’ marked with -ze means ‘an object Y being like/as a maloca, having the size of a maloca’.15 Examples are given in (64-65):

(64) 

|       | ua     | nokae-ze | bai-re-d-e$_{\text{PRED}}$ | kue-mo$_{\text{NERF}}$ |
|-------|--------|----------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| really| canoe-SIMIL,EQUAL,SIZE | find.be.visible-ATT-LK-3 | 1sg-ABL |

‘As for me, it seems like a canoe (in terms of size).’

(65) 

|       | [kai] | uai$_{\text{J}}_0$ | kue-no$_{\text{PRED}}$ | [ana] | bi-e |
|-------|-------|------------------|----------------------|-------|-------|
| 1pl   | word  | write-SMLF       | below                | this-CLF:G |
| ra-be-nigi-ze | | | | |
| thing-CLF:LEAF-CLF:LONG,THICK-SIMIL,EQUAL,SIZE |

‘Write down our language (lit. words) like this thick book (in terms of size) down here.’

The Murui simulative ‘equal size’ marker occurs with all types of nouns, regardless of their animacy. For instance, Katarina-ze refers to an object size in terms of the size of Katarina (whether big, small, etc.). The simulative cannot be followed by nominal morphology, such as case or number. It can, however, head intransitive predicates. In (66), a speaker was comparing the size of a tree to the size of a house.

(66) 

|       | [bi-e] | ame-na$_{\text{K}}$ | jo-fo-ze-ni-e-d-e= di$_{\text{PRED}}$ |
|-------|-------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| this-CLF:G | wood-CLF:TREE | house-CLF:CAVITY-SIMIL,EQUAL,SIZE-NEG-LK-3=CERT |

‘This tree is not like a house.’

Elsewhere in the grammar, the readings of -ze are clearly simulative in nature, and do not involve ‘equal size’ meanings. This is the case with demonstratives, such as in bai-e-ze (that-CLF:G-SIMIL) ‘like that’, aki-e-ze (AUDIT-CLF:G-SIMIL) ‘like that (as heard)’), the question word nɨ-e-ze (Q2-CLF:G-SIMIL) ‘how’, and the connective ie-ze (CONN-SIMIL) ‘like that’. Additionally, two independent manner adverbs – raizewell, correctly’, as in (67), and feekuize ‘slowly’ – contain the formative -ze. Examples are given in (67-69):

(67) 

|       | raizewell,SIMIL | ñai-no!$_{\text{PRED}}$ |
|-------|----------------|------------------|
| speak-IMP |

‘Speak well!’

(68) 

|       | ni-e-ze | i-ti-o?$_{\text{PRED}}$ |
|-------|---------|------------------|
| Q2-CLF:G-SIMIL | exist-LK-2sg |

‘How are you (lit. how do you exist)?’

(69) 

|       | mare | mei | kai | bi-e-ze | i-ya$_{\text{PRED}}$ |
|-------|------|-----|-----|---------|-------------------|
| good,ATT | so | 1pl | this-CLF:G-SIMIL | exist-EVENT,NMLZ |

‘(It’s) good to live like that.’ (not in terms of size, but the way of life)

The exception is the demonstrative die- ‘that’. Die- is unusual in that it is obligatorily marked with -ze, and has simulative-like meanings, relating to ‘equal size’. As such, di-eze can be interpreted as

15 Murui simulative marker is comparable to the simulative in the Cariban languages. In Trio (a Cariban group the Witotoan people were in contact with), the simulative -me has adverbal functions; it is a ‘depictive’ marker, a marker of ‘secondary predication’, and has grammaticalised aspeccual meanings (Carlin, 2007:328).
‘that much’, and when used, it is always accompanied by a gesture indicating size. In (70) *dieze* refers to the size of the store:

| (70) | [bai-mie] | [ra-niai] | [tieda] | [die-ze] | joone!fRED |
|------|-----------|-----------|---------|----------|------------|
| that-CLF:PR,M | thing-COLL | store.Sp | THAT.CLFLG-SIMIL.EQUAL.SIZE | put.TH.IMP |
| ‘Pile up his things like a store (size/form of things that are usually piled up in stores).’ |

The similative -ze might possibly be related to the postposition *izoi* ‘similar’ (§5.1). Among Murui speaker, there is a certain interchangeability of the expressions in (71). They are interpreted as ‘this is the story’, and are customarily used to end narrations.

| (71) | a. aki-e-ze | i-t-e |
|------|--------------|------|
| AUDIT-CLFLG-SIMIL | exist-LK-3 |

| b. aki-e | izoi | i-t-e |
|---------|------|------|
| AUDIT-CLFLG | similar | exist-LK-3 |

6 Summary

This paper focused on comparative construction in Murui, a Witotoan language spoken in Northwest Amazonia. Murui comparative constructions are similar in their structure. They involve an overtly expressed standard marker which contains the locative -mo. The meanings of the standard marker refer to distance, interiority, and vertical position, and distinguish between superiority (formally more marked) and inferiority (less marked). None of the structural elements of Murui comparative constructions have ‘special’ forms; all constituents have additional roles in the grammar. Murui has no dedicated superlative. Superlative readings are contextual, and are achieved by employing adjectives, nouns, and verbs preceded by the intensifier eo ‘very’, and modifying nouns to indicate a set of referents. Expressing equality involves *izoi* ‘(be) similar’. The notion of ‘Y like/as X in terms of object’s size’ is expressed with the similative -ze on nouns and on the demonstrative *die*- ‘that’; elsewhere, the similative -ze has no ‘equal size’ readings.
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