

# Comparative Constructions in Murui (Witotoan, Northwest Amazonia)

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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 similitive constructions.

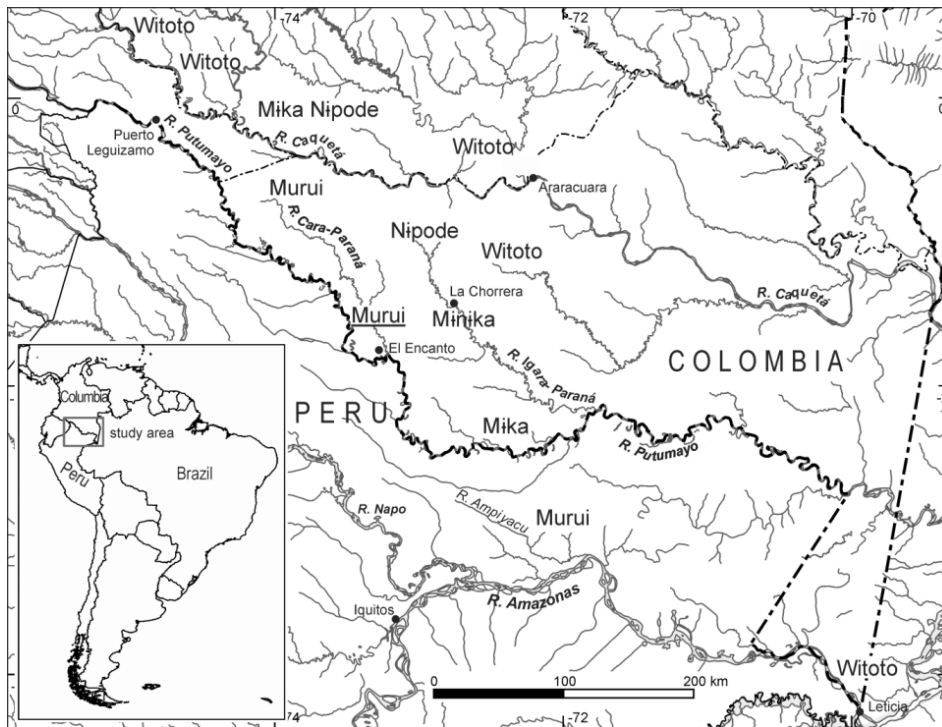
## 1 Introduction

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).<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> In fact, ‘Witoto’ is a collective umbrella term that encompasses four different ethnic groups that speak four mutually intelligible dialects: Murui, Míka, Mínika, and Nípode (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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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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 similitive *-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).<sup>3</sup>

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):<sup>4</sup>

(1)	ri-ño-di-kue <sub>PRED</sub>
	woman-CLF:DR.F-LK-1sg
	‘I am a woman.’

<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>4</sup> 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.

(2)	<b>bai-e</b> <sub>VCS</sub>	<b>jiko</b> <sub>VCC</sub>
	that-CLF:G	dog
	‘That is a dog (lit. that - dog).’	

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 *fa-* ‘hit’:

(3)	<b>due-re-di-kue</b> <sub>PRED</sub>	<b>nai-ñaiño</b> <sub>A</sub>	<b>kue-na</b> <sub>O</sub>	<b>fa-t-e</b> <sub>PRED</sub>
	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), *naino* ‘that (place)’ and *jeaki* ‘dirty, ugly (fruit)’ have to be referential, as indicated by the demonstrative *biki* ‘this (fruit)’.

(4)	<b>nai-no</b> <sub>S</sub>	<b>eo</b>	<b>jea-re-d-e</b> <sub>PRED</sub>
	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)	<b>bi-ki</b> <sub>VCS</sub>	<b>jea-ki</b> <sub>VCC</sub>
	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 *-no*; verbs cannot co-occur with the inchoative ‘become’ *-nai*, *-tai*, and *-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.<sup>5</sup> 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 <sub>VCS</sub>	aiyo-foro <sub>VCC</sub>	ebi-foro <sub>VCC</sub>
	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 *-maki*. 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 <sub>S</sub>	uri	i-t-e <sub>PRED</sub>	anane-ko-mo <sub>PERF</sub>
	son	calm	exist-LK-3	maloca-CLF:COVER-LOC
	‘Son(s) is (are) quiet in the communal roundhouse (Sp. <i>maloca</i> ).’			

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*)

<sup>5</sup> 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. *biē riño* ‘this woman’, *biē 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.

(8a)	ñeki-na <sub>NP</sub>	aare-na <sub>NP</sub>
	chambira.palm-CLF:TREE	tall-CLF:VERTICAL
	‘(The) <i>chambira</i> tree is tall (lit. <i>chambira</i> (tree) - tall (tree).)’	
(8b)	[bai-e	ñeki-na] <sub>NP</sub>
	that-CLF:G	tall-CLF:TREE
	‘that <i>chambira</i> (tree)’	

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:

(9)	kue-mo <sub>PERF</sub>	uru-iaī <sub>s</sub>	i-t-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	1sg-LOC	child-CLF:G.PL	exist-LK-3
	‘I have children.’ (I am responsible for them, they are not necessarily mine)		

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):

(10)	ana-fe
	below-CLF:SIDE
	‘downside, lowland’
(11)	foo-fe-be-ji
	inside-CLF:SIDE-CLF:LEAF-CLF:WATERY
	‘on the inside of the water’
(12)	na-ga-fe-be-kuiro
	ANA.SP-QUANT-CLF:SIDE-CLF:LEAF-CLF:PEEL
	‘ten (lit. all sides of leaf peels)’

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 <i>-fe</i> (CLF:SIDE) and <i>-mo</i> (LOC))
PARAMETER MARKER (P-MARK)	intensifier <i>eo</i> ‘very’

As mentioned in section 1, adjectives (followed by classifiers) can be used as an argument of a verbless clause, such as *ebikaiai* ‘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)	<i>oo-kai-ai</i> <sub>VCS</sub>	<i>ebi-kai-ai</i> <sub>VCC</sub>	<i>verbless clause - ‘timeless’</i>
	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)	<i>oo-kai</i> <sub>VCS</sub>	<i>ebi-re-d-e</i> <sub>PRED</sub>	<i>intransitive clause - ‘temporal’</i>
	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)	<i>nai-ñaiño</i> <sub>VCS</sub>	( <i>eo</i> )	<i>jano-ñaiño</i> <sub>VCC</sub>
	ANA.SP-CLF:PR.F	very	small-CLF:PR.F
	‘She is very small (lit. she - very small (female)).’		

(16)	COMPAREE	P-MARK	PARAMETER	STANDARD	S-MARK
	nai-ñaiño <sub>VCS</sub>	(eo)	jano-ñaiño <sub>VCC</sub>	[kue	baai-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).’				

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.



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 <i>eo</i> ‘very’	VCC	NP	oblique NP	common
type 2 ‘temporal’	S	PARAMETER preceded by optional intensifier <i>eo</i> ‘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 <i>eo</i> ‘very’	VCC	occasional
type 2 ‘temporal’	S	NP	oblique NP	PARAMETER preceded by optional intensifier <i>eo</i> ‘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 <i>eo</i> ‘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	ïï-ma] <sub>VCS</sub>	eo	aiyo-mie <sub>VCC</sub>	[bi-mie	baai-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>
	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
	kue <sub>s</sub>	[oo	ana-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>	ia-mie-di-kue <sub>PRED</sub>
	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 *uaikima* ‘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
	Jose <sub>VCS</sub>	eo	uaiki-ma <sub>VCC</sub>	[Caro	baai-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>
	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	PARAMETER	STANDARD	S-MARK
	Jose <sub>s</sub>	uaiki-ma-ñe-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>	[Caro	baai-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>
	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. *baai* ‘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-ñaiño <sub>VCS</sub>	eo	jano-ñaiño <sub>VCC</sub>	[kue	baai-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>
	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-ñaiño <sub>VCS</sub>	eo	jano-ñaiño <sub>VCC</sub>	[kue	foo-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>
	ANA.SP-CLF:PR.F	very	small-CLF:PR.F	1sg	inside-CLF:SIDE-LOC
	‘She is smaller than me (lit. she is very small, me on the inside).’ (I bigger than her)				

Sometimes, in the constructions of type 1, the PARAMETER can be postposed to the STANDARD. In (23), the STANDARD of comparison, the noun *aiyo-kae* ‘big (canoe)’ and the S-MARK *baaifemo* ‘ahead (of)’, are followed by the PARAMETER *aiyue* ‘big’ in the VCC function. The COMPAREE is the NP *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 STANDARD.

(23)	COMPAREE		STANDARD	S-MARK
	[aiyue	ra-ya] <sub>VCS</sub>	[aiyo-kae	baai-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>
	big-CLF:G	thing-CLF:CRAFT	big-CLF.REP:CANOE	ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC
	P-MARK	PARAMETER		
	[eo	aiyue] <sub>VCC</sub>		
	very	big-CLF:G		
	‘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 PARAMETER of comparison is an intransitive predicate *mokorede* ‘(it) is green’ modified by the P-MARK *eo* ‘very’:

(24)	COMPAREE		P-MARK	PARAMETER	STANDARD
	[bi-e	kue-ra] <sub>s</sub>	[eo	moko-re-d-e] <sub>PRED</sub>	[jiai-rue
	this-CLF:G	write-CLF:NEUT	very	green-ATT-LK-3	other-CLF:THINGS
	S-MARK				
	baai-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>				
	ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC				
	‘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 PARAMETER *mare-ñaiño-di-kue* ‘I’m (a) beautiful (female)’ is a nominalised adjective *mare* ‘good, beautiful’ followed by the animate classifier *-ñaiño* that functions as a head of an intransitive predicate. The STANDARD of comparison is the third person pronoun followed by the S-MARK *baaifemo* ‘ahead (of)’:<sup>6</sup>

(25)	COMPAREE	P-MARK	PARAMETER	STANDARD	S-MARK
	kue <sub>s</sub>	eo	mare-ñaiño-di-kue <sub>PRED</sub>	[bai-ñaiño	baai-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>
	1sg	very	good.ATT-CLF:PR.F-LK-1sg <sup>7</sup>	that-CLF:PR.F	ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC
	‘I am more beautiful than her (lit. I am very good/beautiful, ahead of her).’				

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

<sup>6</sup> 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’ *kue* (1sg) vs. the ‘we’ *kai* (1pl). The traditional Murui speakers always talk in pluralistic terms recognising the contributions of the people i.e. *kai*, and never promoting the individual i.e. *kue*.

<sup>7</sup> The adjective *mare* ‘good’ can also mean ‘beautiful’, especially when referring to persons.

(26)	COMPAREE			P-MARK	PARAMETER
	[bi-e	feka-ra-ko	naama= di] <sub>s</sub>	eo	uku-be-re-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	this-CLF:G	divide-CLF:NEUT-CLF:COVER	owner=S/A.TOP	very	plant-CLF:LEAF-ATT-LK-3
	STANDARD		S-MARK		
	[jiai-mie	baai-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>			
	other-CLF:PR.M	ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC			
	'This store owner is richer than the other one (lit. this store owner has a lot of money, ahead of the other male).'				

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).

(27)	COMPAREE	PARAMETER		STANDARD	S-MARK
	nai-ñaiño <sub>s</sub>	raize	[kio-d-e] <sub>PRED</sub>	[kue	baai-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>
	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).'				

(28)	STANDARD	S-MARK	P-MARK	PARAMETER/COMPAREE		
	[[kue	ei] <sub>NP</sub>	baai-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>	eo	sopa-na	roko-di-kue <sub>PRED</sub>
	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.

(29)	COMPAREE			P-MARK	PARAMETER	
	[bi-e	jiko	[beno-mo	i-t-e] <sub>RC</sub> <sub>s</sub>	eo	aime-tai-t-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	this-CLF:G	dog	HERE.CLF:SP.PLACE-LOC	exist-LK-3	very	hungry-BECOME <sub>2</sub> -LK-3
	STANDARD		S-MARK			
	[bai-ko	baai-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>				
	that-CLF.REP:DOG	ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC				
	'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.<sup>8</sup> By far, the most common form of the S-MARK *-femo* is *baaifemo* 'ahead (of)' expressing relative superiority 'more', and its 'negative' equivalent *foofemo* 'on the inside (of)' used for expression of relative inferiority 'less'.

<sup>8</sup> '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').<sup>9</sup> 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 *-bogi* for 'big ball-like objects' are referred to with the S-MARK *jinofemo* '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
<i>baai-fe-mo</i>	ahead-CLF:SIDE-LOC	'ahead (of), on the ahead side (of)', <sup>10</sup>	'more'
<i>foo-fe-mo</i>	inside-CLF:SIDE-LOC	'on the inside (of)'	'less, slimmer'
<i>aa-fe-mo</i>	above-CLF:SIDE-LOC	'on the top side (of)'	'higher'
<i>ana-fe-mo</i>	below-CLF:SIDE-LOC	'on the down side (of)'	'lower'
<i>jino-fe-mo</i>	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)	<b>baai=</b> dino	i-t-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	ahead=AT.CLF:SP.PLACE	exist-LK-3
	'(A person) is over there (ahead of you in that place).'	

(31)	<b>baai-fe</b>	i-ñe-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	ahead-CLF:SIDE	exist-NEG-LK-3
	'(It) does not have an end (lit. the point ahead doesn't exist).'	

(32)	uzu-ma <sub>s</sub>	kaïma-re	<b>foo</b>	bi-t-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	grandparent-CLF:DR.M	happy-ATT	inside	come-LK-3
	'The grandfather happily came inside.'			

(33)	<b>foo-fe-be-niaï</b>
	inside-CLF:SIDE-CLF:LEAF-COLL
	'interior side (of leaves, of paper sheets, etc.)'

<sup>9</sup> 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. *xõ* 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'.

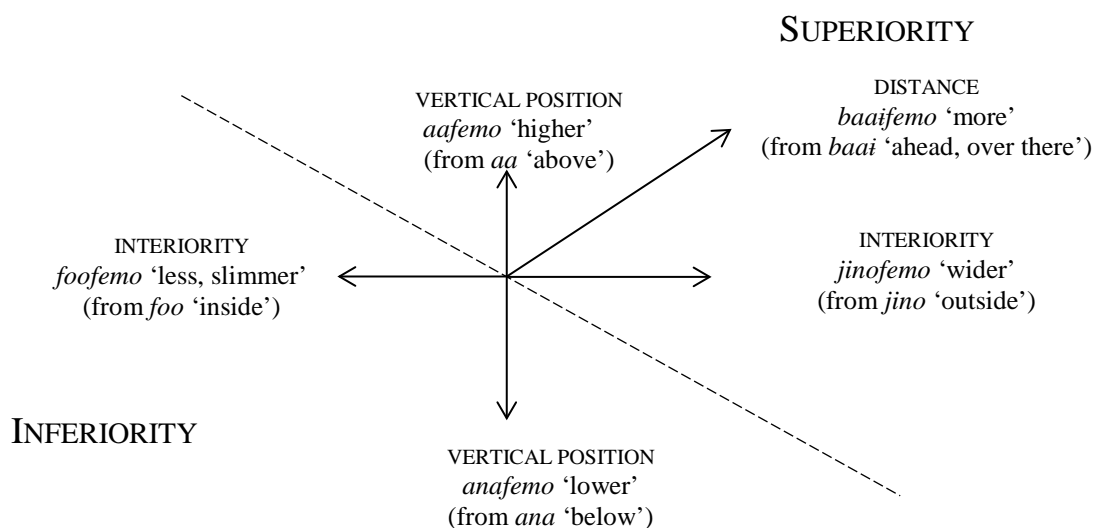
<sup>10</sup> Throughout this paper I chose to translate *baaifemo* 'lit. on the ahead side' as 'ahead (of)'.

(34)	[ana-fe	dine-na]	aa	ñuita! <sub>PRED</sub>
	below-CLF:SIDE	AT.CLF:NSP-ABL	above	push.IMP
	'Push from the side below upwards!'			

(35)	jino	jaai-ño-kai! <sub>PRED</sub>
	outside	go-IMP-RAPID
	'Go outside quickly!'	

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.<sup>11</sup>

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, *baaifemo* 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 *baaifemo*, 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):

<sup>11</sup> 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').

(36)	COMPAREE	P-MARK	PARAMETER	STANDARD	S-MARK
	kue <sub>s</sub>	eo	aare-ñaiño-di-kue <sub>PRED</sub>	[nai-maki	<b>aa-fe-mo</b> ] <sub>PERF</sub>
	1sg	very	long-CLF:PR.F-LK-1	ANA.SP-CLF:PR.GR.AN	above-CLF:SIDE-LOC
	'I am taller than them (lit. I am very long, they on the top side).'				

(37)	COMPAREE		STANDARD	S-MARK	PARAMETER
	[kai	jo-fo] <sub>VCS</sub>	[oo-ie	<b>aa-fe-mo</b> ] <sub>PERF</sub>	aare <sub>VCC</sub>
	1pl	house-CLF:CAVITY	2sg-GEN	above-CLF:SIDE-LOC	long
	'Our house is taller than yours (lit. Our house, yours on the top side, long).'				

Marking of interiority in comparative constructions indicates that an object is seen from either outside (i.e. viewed as being 'superior', for which *jino femo* '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 *jino femo* is used to refer to an object that is physically wider (horizontally, in terms of its size), as illustrated in (38-39):

(38)	COMPAREE	STANDARD	S-MARK	PARAMETER	
	ria-ma <sub>VCS</sub>	[kai	<b>jino-fe-mo</b> ] <sub>PERF</sub>	fare-bogi <sub>VCC</sub>	
	nonWitoto-CLF:PR.M	1pl	outside-CLF:SIDE-LOC	fat-CLF:BIG.ROUND	
	'The white man is bulkier than us (lit. White man, us on the outside, fat (ball-like)).'				
(39)	COMPAREE		STANDARD	S-MARK	P-MARK
	[jo-fo	naa-ño] <sub>VCS</sub>	[Kata	<b>jino-fe-mo</b> ] <sub>PERF</sub>	eo
	house-CLF:CAVITY	owner-CLF:PR.F	Kata	outside-CLF:SIDE-LOC	very
	PARAMETER				
	aiyo-ñaiño <sub>VCC</sub>				
	big-CLF:PR.F				
	'The (female) owner of the house is bigger than Kata (lit. The (female) house owner, Kata on the outside, big (female)).'				

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.<sup>12</sup>

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:

(40)	COMPAREE	PARAMETER		STANDARD	S-MARK
	nai-ñaiño <sub>s</sub>	jano-re	kio-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>	[kue	<b>foo-fe-mo</b> ] <sub>PERF</sub>
	ANA.SP-CLF:PR.F	small-ATT	see-LK-3	1sg	inside-CLF:SIDE-LOC
	'She sees less than me (lit. She sees little, me on the inside).'				

<sup>12</sup> Such as the Murui topographic adverbs of place *afai* 'upstream' and *fuiiri* 'downstream'.

(41)	COMPAREE	STANDARD	S-MARK	PARAMETER
	pila-jì= di <sub>s</sub>	[mechera	<b>foo-fe-mo</b> ] <sub>PERF</sub>	jano-re-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	battery.Sp-CLF:SMALL.ROUND=S/A.TOP	lighter.Sp	inside-CLF:SIDE-LOC	small-ATT-LK-3
	'The battery is smaller than the lighter (lit. The battery, the lighter on the inside, is small).'			

(42)	[nai-e	dìo-kai] <sub>s</sub>	raize	aa
	ANA.SP-CLF:G	tobacco-CLF:STEM	well.SIMIL	above
	raai-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>	[pila= di	<b>foo-fe-mo</b> ] <sub>PERF</sub>	mee-ni-d-e= za <sub>PRED</sub>
	sit-LK-3	battery.Sp=S/A.TOP	inside-CLF:SIDE-LOC	heavy-NEG.ATT-LK-3=UNCERT
	'The cigarette is less steady than the battery as (the cigarette) is not heavy (lit. The cigarette sits well up there. The battery on the inside. (The cigarette) is not heavy).'			

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

(43)	COMPAREE	PARAMETER	STANDARD	S-MARK
	kue <sub>s</sub>	ia-ñaiño-di-kue <sub>PRED</sub>	[Sandriela	<b>ana-fe-mo</b> ] <sub>PERF</sub>
	1sg	short-CLF:PR.F-LK-1sg	Sandriela	below-CLF:SIDE-LOC
	'I am shorter than Sandriela (lit. I am short, Sandriela on the down side).'			

### 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 *-femo* (see §3.1), comparatives marked with *emodomo* are used only occasionally. Similarly to comparative constructions involving *-femo*, 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:

(44)	COMPAREE	STANDARD	S-MARK	PARAMETER	
	[bai-e	anane-ko] <sub>s</sub>	[bi-e	<b>emodo-mo</b> ] <sub>PERF</sub>	maraiñe-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	that-CLF:G	maloca-CLF:COVER	this-CLF:G	over-LOC	good.ATT.NEG-LK-3
	'That <i>maloca</i> is not better than this one (lit. That <i>maloca</i> , over this (one), is not good).'				

(45)	COMPAREE	STANDARD	S-MARK	PARAMETER		
	[bi-e	raai-ra-ko] <sub>VCS</sub>	[oni	bi-e	<b>emodo-mo</b> ] <sub>PERF</sub>	aiyue <sub>VCC</sub>
	this-CLF:G	sit-CLF:NEUT-CLF:COVER	LOCAL	this-CLF:G	over-LOC	big.CLF:G
	'This seat is bigger than this seat here (lit. This seat, over this one here, big (one)).'					

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 <sub>VCS</sub>	[Pedro	emodo-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>	aare-mie <sub>VCC</sub>
	Jose	Pedro	over-LOC	long-CLF:PR.M
	'Jose is taller than Pedro (lit. Jose, 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] <sub>PERF</sub>	kiri-tiko <sub>o</sub>	yiii-ya <sub>PRED</sub>
	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).<sup>13</sup>

### 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.<sup>14</sup> The intensifier *eo* 'very' is optional. An example is given in (48):

	STANDARD		COMPAREE	P-MARK	PARAMETER
(48)	[bi-be	jano-be-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>	bai-be <sub>NP:VCS</sub>	eo	aiyo-be <sub>VCC</sub>
	this-CLF:LEAF	small-CLF:LEAF-LOC	that-CLF:LEAF	very	big-CLF:LEAF
	'This leaf is smaller than that leaf (lit. In 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

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

<sup>14</sup> 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] <sub>VCS</sub>	eo	mare-ñaiño <sub>VCC</sub>
	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] <sub>VCS</sub>	eo	ia-dozi <sub>VCC</sub>
	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)	nai-mie <sub>VCS</sub>	eo	aiyo-mie <sub>VCC</sub>	oo-mona <sub>PERF</sub>
	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)	Maria-mona <sub>PERF</sub>	eo	uiño-di-o <sub>PRED</sub>
	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)	nai-maki-mona <sub>PERF</sub>	eo	mare-ñaiño-di-o <sub>PRED</sub>
	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-iaí-mona] <sub>PERF</sub>	da-za <sub>s</sub>	gui-aka-ñe-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	this-CLF:G	child-CLF:G.PL-ABL	one-CLF:IMMATURE	eat-DES-NEG-LK-3
	eo	ira-re-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>		
	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 mas 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:

(55)	COMPAREE	P-MARK	PARAMETER	STANDARD		
	kue <sub>s</sub>	eo	mare-ñaiño-di-kue <sub>PRED</sub>	[ua	nana	ri-ño-niai
	1sg	very	good.ATT-CLF:PR.F-LK-1sg	really	ALL	woman-CLF:DR.F-COLL
	S-MARK					
	baai-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>					
	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	
	Kata <sub>VCS</sub>	[jiai-ñainuai	baai-fe-mo] <sub>PERF</sub>	eo	aiyo-ñaiño <sub>VCC</sub>	
	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 similitive meanings

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

(57)	nai-ñaiño <sub>VCS</sub>	eo	mare-ñaiño <sub>VCC</sub>	[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)	[kue	niña] <sub>s</sub>	ria-ño <sub>E</sub>	izoi-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	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] <sub>VCS</sub>	aiyue <sub>VCC</sub>	[jiai-e	jo-fo] <sub>E</sub>	izoi-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	this-CLF:G	house-CLF:CAVITY	big-CLF:G	other-CLF:G	house-CLF:CAVITY	similar-LK-3
	'This house is as big as the other house (lit. this house - big house, similar to the other house).'					

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

(60)	[kue	moo	mikori] <sub>S</sub>	iyai-ma-na <sub>E</sub>	i-zoi-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	1sg	father	deceased	chief-CLF:DR.M-N.S/A.TOP	exist-REM.HAB-LK-3
	'My deceased father used to be a leader.'				

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 STANDARD is preposed to the PARAMETER:

(61)	nai-ñaiño <sub>S</sub>	[kue	izoi] <sub>E</sub>	raize	ro-t-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	ANA.SP-CLF:PR.F	1sg	similar	well.SIMIL	sing-LK-3
	'She sings as well as me (lit. she, similar to me, sings well).'				

Murui has also a number of lexical verbs which express transformative-like meanings: *jaai(de)* 'go, become (in shamanic practices)', *janai(de)* 'behave in a similar fashion', and *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 *-na*. This is illustrated in (62-63):

(62)	uzu-ma <sub>A</sub>	janayari-na <sub>O</sub>	jaai-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	grandfather-CLF:DR.M	jaguar-N.S/A.TOP	go-LK-3
	'Grandfather became a jaguar.' (meaning: he transformed into a jaguar)		

(63)	Alexis <sub>A</sub>	iyai-ma-na <sub>O</sub>	janai-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>
	Alexis	chief-CLF:DR.M-N.S/A	behave.similar-LK-3
	'Alexis behaves like a chief.' (meaning: Alexis behaves like a chief, but he is not a leader)		

### 5.2 Similitive *-ze* with 'equal size' meanings

Murui has a category which expresses the notion of 'Y like/as X in terms of object's size'. The occurrence of the similitive *-ze* is limited to nouns, demonstratives, the question word *ni-e* (Q<sub>2</sub>-CLF:G) 'which (one)', and the connective *ie*. For example, *ananeke* 'maloca (traditional communal

roundhouse)’ marked with *-ze* means ‘an object Y being like/as a *maloca*, having the size of a *maloca*’.<sup>15</sup> Examples are given in (64-65):

(64)	ua	<b>nokae-ze</b>	bai-re-d-e <sub>PRED</sub>	kue-mona <sub>PERF</sub>
	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] <sub>o</sub>	kue-no <sub>PRED</sub>	[ana	bi-e
	1pl	word	write-SMLF	below	this-CLF:G
	<b>ra-be-nigi-ze]</b>				
	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] <sub>s</sub>	<b>jo-fo-ze-ñe-d-e= di</b> <sub>PRED</sub>
	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 *ni-e-ze* (Q2-CLF:G-SIMIL) ‘how’, and the connective *ie-ze* (CONN-SIMIL) ‘like that’. Additionally, two independent manner adverbs – *raize* ‘well, correctly’, as in (67), and *feekuize* ‘slowly’ – contain the formative *-ze*. Examples are given in (67-69):

(67)	<b>raize</b>	ñai-no! <sub>PRED</sub>
	well.SIMIL	speak-IMP
	‘Speak well!’	

(68)	<b>ni-e-ze</b>	i-ti-o? <sub>PRED</sub>
	Q2-CLF:G-SIMIL	exist-LK-2sg
	‘How are you (lit. how do you exist)?’	

(69)	mare	mei	kai	<b>bi-e-ze</b>	i-ya <sub>PRED</sub>
	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, *dieze* can be interpreted as

<sup>15</sup> 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 adverbial functions; it is a ‘depictive’ marker, a marker of ‘secondary predication’, and has grammaticalised aspectual 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] <sub>o</sub>	[tieda	die-ze] <sub>PERF</sub>	joone! <sub>PREP</sub>
	that-CLF:PR.M	thing-COLL	store.Sp	THAT.CLF:G-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 simulative *-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-CLF:G-SIMIL	exist-LK-3
	b.	aki-e	izoi
		AUDIT-CLF:G	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 simulative *-ze* on nouns and on the demonstrative *die-* ‘that’; elsewhere, the simulative *-ze* has no ‘equal size’ readings.

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