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1. Introduction

The Murui people are located in southern Colombia (the Putumayo and Amazonas departments, Caraparaná, Igaraparaná, and Caquetá Rivers) and northern Peru (Ampiyacú and Napo Rivers) (see Map 1) (Wojtylak 2017).[1] Murui, with the ethnic population of approximately 2,000, is a dialect of Witoto[2], and it is currently spoken by about 1,000 people. Witoto belongs to the Witotoan language family, one of the smaller linguistic families in the Northwest Amazon, which consists of two other languages from the same geographical area: Ocaina (spoken by about 90 people) and Nonuya (a moribund language with six semi speakers) (Echeverri, Fagua, and Wojtylak forthcoming).

The Witoto people form a part of a cultural area that spans the Caquetá and Putumayo River Basins (hereafter referred to as 'CP')

[2] In fact, the word *witoto* is an exonym from Karijona (a Carib language spoken to the north), meaning 'enemy', that was employed by early missionaries and rubber traders, cf. Petersen de Piñeros and Patiño Rosselli (2000: 219). See also Agga Calderón 'Kaziya Buinaima', Wojtylak, and Echeverri (2019) on the origin story of the Murui and Minɨka peoples.

Map 1. Approximate location of the Murui speakers, as well as other Witoto-speaking groups (author's map)

(Wojtylak 2018, Aikhenvald forthcoming, Epps forthcoming). In the literature, the CP peoples are also known as the 'People of the Centre', an autonym that makes reference to their common origin — the *Komɨmafo* or the 'Hole of Humanity' (Echeverri 1997, Agga Calderón 'Kaziya Buinaima', Wojtylak, and Echeverri 2019).[3] The CP area is comprised of seven ethnolinguistic groups that belong to three distinct language families (Witotoan—Witoto [with the Murui, Minika, Mika, and Nipode dialects], Ocaina [with Ibo'tsa and Dukaiya dialects], Nonuya; Boran—Bora [with Miraña dialect], Muinane; and Arawak—Resígaro), and the Andoke linguistic isolate. Traditionally, they were hinterland groups who inhabited remote areas away from the banks of major rivers. Having lived in close proximity to each other and being connected through trade networks, these groups have been in close contact for a lengthy period of time. They also display a certain level of cultural homogeneity, relatively different from neighboring groups. This includes shared kinship system, intermarriage, the use of drum communication, as well as common ritual activities, such as consumption of pounded coca and liquid tobacco, which is licked by men but not inhaled like among groups to the north, or smoked as among the groups to the west, east, and south (Echeverri 1997, Fagua and Seifart 2010, Wojtylak 2018, Wojtylak 2019). They also share avoidance speech styles, such as the Witoto hunting register (Wojtylak 2015).

This paper is structured as follows. In §2, I discuss the worldview of the Witoto, including practices and cultural taboos. In §3, I briefly focus on the intonation patterns found in the Witoto language (specifically, the Murui dialect), which are relevant for the discussion of the jungle-at-night register. §4 is a description of the register itself, including an example of a dialogue exchange. The characteristics of the register in §5. The last section 6 offers conclusions and a brief discussion.

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[3] Central to the origin myth is the secret place referred to as *Komɨmafo* that translates as 'Hole of Humanity'. According to the myth, before the creation, nothing existed on Earth. One day, the omnipotent deity *Juziñamui* (see §2) opened the hole and let all the beings inside come out. *Juziñamui* began to cut their tails off (which later would turn into stems of sugar cane), and the beings, now without tails, became people. By the end of the day not everybody had left the Hole. Those who came out after the sunset, kept their tails and remained monkeys (Agga Calderón 'Kaziya Buinaima', Wojtylak, and Echeverri 2019).

2. The worldview of the Witoto

The Witoto religious worldview was traditionally based on animism, where non-human beings, such as animals, insects, plants, and rocks have agency; in the Witoto mythology[4] they were perceived as animated and alive. Over the last century, Christian ideas replaced much of the Witoto knowledge. Most of 21st century Murui are Catholics and Evangelicals, whose worldview exhibits some elements of the traditional belief systems.[5] The Murui I lived with during my fieldwork in the Putumayo department (Caraparaná River, a tributary of the Putumayo River), were church-goers who feared forest spirits (called taⵙfue or taⵙfueño in Murui or duende in Spanish).

The Catholic order of Capuchins established a first orphanage in the Witoto (Minika) village of La Chorrera (Igaraparaná) in 1933. There is, however, evidence that Capuchins were present in the Putumayo and Caquetá area already in the 1890s (Davis 1996, Echeverri 1997). In the 1940s, the La Chorrera orphanage founded by Capuchin Father Estanislao de Les Corts became a boarding school and it is now one of the oldest established boarding schools in this part of the Amazon Basin (Echeverri 1997: 87). Between the 1960s and 1980s, Bible translations done by SIL missionaries became widely available for the Witoto, such as the translations of Genesis 1 (Burtch 1974) and the New Testament (Burtch 1978). The belief system of the Witoto of today is characterized by religious syncretism, whereby various elements of Catholicism (e.g. the figures of God the Father and God's Son) became incorporated into the traditional worldview.

2.1 The Witoto world

The Witoto mythological narratives are characterized by nonlinearity, where elements are portrayed out of chronological order. The narrative does not follow the direct causality patterns of the plot-line. The Witoto narratives depicture many protagonists who are mythological heroes (such as the Orphans of the Sun, Jitoma and Kechatoma, children of Monairue Jitoma — Sun of the Dawn, see Candre and Echeverri 2015) or anthropomorphized animals (such as BEETLE-MAN) or objects (such as YUCCA-WOMAN).[6]

In the Witoto worldview, whose elements are still much alive today, supernatural forest beings are the malevolent *taife* who are always active and must not be called upon; invoking the *taife* in any form could cause grave harm to a person. *Taifeño*[7], less powerful than the

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[4] Mythical narratives of this sort belong to the genre of *ɨigaɨ* or *jagaɨ* meaning 'basket of ancient times' (Agga Calderón 'Kaziya Buinaima', Wojtylak, and Echeverri 2019).

[5] See for instance Bonilla (1972). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Caquetá-Putumayo area was hit by the excesses of rubber exploitation that drastically reduced the number of indigenous population (Hardenburg 1913), contributing thus greatly to the language and culture decay (Burgos 1994).

[6] Another figure of the Witoto mythology, the deity *BUINAIMA*, the Creator of the people, inhabited the Underworld; his name was associated with water (the verbal root *buui-* means 'to sink, to go under water'). His rival was *JUZIÑAMUI*, the only deity that lived in the Amazonian hills. *JUZIÑAMUI* was believed to have provided the people with the narrations and fire upon their creation. As a fighter, *JUZIÑAMUI* was also 'a cannibal' whose name meant 'the insatiable fighter' (Echeverri 1997: 106). The Catholic missionaries adopted this name to designate the Christian God; *BUINAIMA* was appropriated as the Son of God.

[7] Cf. *taife* followed by the feminine classifier *-ño*.

taife itself, is a term that referred to any malevolent spirit; they are able to materialize and steal women and children. Traditionally, one averted the danger by obeying taboos and adhering to rituals. Today, the Murui of Caraparaná still respect the *taifue* and *taifueño* spirits; for instance, they are never called upon. So are the true names of spirits tabooed; they are not to be uttered. An example of this is *janayari*, the generic name for jaguar, that is conventionally replaced by the word *jiko* meaning 'dog, cat'.

The Witoto fear the power of shamans who exist today, although, admittedly, they have become of healers. There are two major types of shamans: *aima*, a shaman who knows secrets of spirits, and *nimaimaima*, the one who is a 'wise-man' (referred to as *sabedor* in Spanish) and a protector of the tribe against evil spirits. During his lifetime, shaman can transform himself into a jaguar-form and do great harm; when he dies, he returns in the form of a jaguar.

The Witoto have numerous types of prohibitions that traditionally were subject to linguistic taboo. These include personal names (Wojtylak 2017). Even today, when addressing one another, nicknames (describing some characteristics of a person) and kinship terms are used instead, such as *Flaco* (instead of an actual name of the person, making reference to one's body physique, from Spanish *flaco* 'skinny'), *ei* (Witoto for 'mother'), *moo* ('father'), and *uzuma* ('grandfather'). Another instance of this linguistic prohibition is the hunting speech style. When preparing for a hunt, Witoto men use a special vocabulary that is meant to 'disguise' true names of animals that are to be hunted. This avoidance speech style is a system of lexical substitution where animal spirits are 'deceived' provided that they do not 'understand' avoidance names uttered by the hunters. Pronouncing the 'real' name of an animal would result in an unsuccessful hunt: animal spirits would 'overhear' they are to be hunted and would escape the hunter. Animals are thus renamed: their real names are substituted with words that designate plant-(related) species. For instance, when planning to hunt a *mero* (peccary, a medium-sized pig-like hoofed mammal), a Witoto man would say that he is going to collect an *obedo*—a 'black *umarí* fruit'. This is based on an impressionistic association between the peccary and the *umarí*, whereby the fruit has a specific scent which, like peccaries, attracts mosquitoes (Wojtylak 2015). The transformations between animals and plants found in the hunting speech style appear to have been derived from the Witoto *rafue* discourse — a performative abstract genre that designates the ritual as a whole. *Rafue* talks about the formation of the body, and offers norms and instructions how to live well (Echeverri 1997, Echeverri and Román-Jitdutjaaño 2013). By evoking things in the world, it is a 'Word that becomes a Thing' (Echeverri 1997: 185).

3. Special intonation contours

Witoto Murui (hereafter referred to as Murui) is characterized by two basic types of intonation contour: falling (used for declarative sentences) and rising-falling (used for questions and commands). There is an additional non-canonical rising intonation patterns, characterized by loud speech, with two subtypes:

i) rising intonation, accompanied by vowel rising, lengthening and high pitch on word-ending syllables,

ii) rising intonation, accompanied by syllabi-fication and high pitch on the whole utter-ance, with no vowel rising or lengthening,

Both kinds of the rising intonation contours can be considered special speech-like registers, conditioned phonologically rather than lexically. They are employed in the 'calling-from-a-distance' register (Wojtylak 2017: 96-99).

The first type of the rising intonation contour is characterized by normal speech tempo. These forms can be used when calling from a distance (for instance, when calling someone back from far away) but commonly they are employed during festivities (to announce one's arrival or acceptance of gifts and such) — that is, in those situations in which there is no need to disguise one's voice (unlike in the other type of the rising intonation, see further in this section).[8] Characteristic of this speech-register feature are: i) a high pitch over the first syllable of the verbal root (marked as ↗); if the word consists of more than two syllables, low pitch (↘) falls over the second syllable, ii) steep rise in pitch (↗↗) of the word-final syllable that contains either the central vowel /ɨ/ (/i, e, a/ > /ɨ/) or back vowel /u/ (/o/ > /u/, and /u/ remains unchanged). The duration of a syllable with a 'raised' vowel can last up to several seconds. Examples are given in (1-2):

(1)   kai-mo_{O:RECIPIENT} jano-re   ↗in↗↗ɨɨɨ!_{PRED}
       1pl-LOC   small-ATT give.IMP.CALLING
       'Give us a little!' (cf. *kaɨmo janore ine!*)

(2a)   ↗jaai-↘ño-↗↗kɨɨɨ!_{PRED}
       go-IMP-RAPID.CALLING
       'Go immediately!' (cf. *jaaiñokai!*)

(2a)   ↗Paul↘u-↗↗uuu!_{PRED}
       name-RAPID.CALLING
       'Paulu!' (cf. *Paulo!*)

Similar vowel rising techniques have also been reported for other Northwest Amazonian languages, such as Tariana (North Arawak) (Aikhenvald 2003).[9]

The second type of the rising non-canonical intonation contour involves a deliberate voice modulation accompanied by: i) slow speech tempo, and ii) high pitch that falls onto every syllable in a phrase. There is no vowel rising. An example of this is given in (3), where *buudɨo?* 'who are you?' has a rising intonation, each syllable bears high pitch, and the phrase is pronounced in a slow manne:

(3)   ↗↗buu-↗↗di-↗↗o?
       who-LINK-2sg
       'Who are you?'

This type of the intonation contour is used for calling-from-a-distance register, when disguising people's voices. This is the topic of the next section..

4. The Murui jungle-at-night register

The jungle, especially at night, is seen by the Murui as extremely dangerous and full of

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[8] These are also used as a customary way of ending certain types of traditional songs, such as the ones of the *Muruikɨ* celebrations.

[9] Cross-linguistically, vowel rising and vowel centralization used for calling from a distance is not uncommon. For instance, 'call-at-distance' messages are shouted out among the Nungon speakers of Papua New Guinea (Sarvasy 2017), and are marked by an alternation of the final vowel of an utterance.

threats. At night, when one is away from the safety of their own settlements (e.g. when walking in the forest or paddling on the river), it is imperative to employ a special register when conversing with someone who cannot be seen. Failure to do so can result in falling victim to malevolent spirits (and transformed shamans) who can appear as e.g. a jaguar or a snake. This register does not have a special name in the language but the Murui refer to it as 'the way you speak if you do not know who or what you are talking to'. It is a way to disguise a person's voice in such a manner that evil beings would not recognize it, and thus harm the person.

I witnessed how the jungle-at-night register is used in 2013, quite accidentally, while on the river at night with a Murui woman in the vicinity of the Murui settlement of Tercera India, Caraparaná, Colombia (I refer to her as 'S' in this paper). While paddling down the river in our canoe, we heard a voice-like sound emanating from the forest. S stopped paddling, put the oars away, and started to listen intensively. She made a gesture to stay quiet, after which, S initiated the following dialogue exchange. ('V' stands for S's interlocutor, the unidentified voice from the jungle).

(4)　　S:　　↗↗uuu!
　　　　　　　INTERJ
　　　　　　　'Hey!'(drawing attention)

(silence)

(5)　　V:　　↗↗uuu!
　　　　　　　INTERJ
　　　　　　　(responding to S's calling)

(silence)

(6)　　S:　　↗↗ni-ne　　　　　　　↗↗jaai-↗↗di-↗↗o?_{PRED}
　　　　　　　which-LOC:NSP　　　　go-LINK-2sg
　　　　　　　'Where are you going?'

(7)　　V:　　↗↗a↗↗ri=↗↗di↗↗ne!
　　　　　　　uphill=AT.LOC:NSP
　　　　　　　'Uphill!' (i.e. in the direction of the El Encanto village)

(silence)

(8)　　V:　　↗↗oo!　　　　　↗↗ni-↗↗ne　　　　　↗↗jaai-↗↗di-↗↗o?_{PRED}
　　　　　　　2sg　　　　　　which-LOC:NSP　　　go-LINK-2sg
　　　　　　　'You! Where are you going?'

(9) S: ↗↗fui↗↗ri=↗↗di↗↗ne!
         downstream=AT.LOC:NSP
         'Downstream!'

(silence)

(10) S: ↗↗ [buu   ↗↗dɨga]   ↗↗jaai-↗↗di-↗↗o?PRED
          who   with   go-LINK-2sg
          'Who are you going with?'

(11) V: ↗↗da-↗↗mas   ↗↗jaai-↗↗di-↗↗kue!PRED
          one-CLF:DR.M   go-LINK-1sg
          'I'm going alone.' [10]

(silence)

(12) S: ↗↗bue-↗↗ñe-↗↗ye   ↗↗jaai-↗↗di-↗↗o?PRED
          what-do-FUT.EVENT.NMLZ   go-LINK-2sg
          'Why (lit. to do what) are you going (there)?'

(13) V: ↗↗ma↗↗ka-↗↗ye-↗↗naPur
          walk-FUT.EVENT.NMLZ-N.S/A.TOP
          'To have a look around (lit. to walk around).'

(silence)

(14) V: ↗↗buu-↗↗di-↗↗o?PRED
          who-LINK-2sg
          'Who are you?'

(15) S: ↗↗ [Ter↗↗ce↗↗ra   ↗↗In↗↗dia   ↗↗i-↗↗ñai↗↗ño]- ↗↗di-↗↗kuePRED
          Tercera.Sp   India.Sp   ANA.NSP-CLF:PR.F-LINK-1sg
          'I am a woman of the Tercera India (settlement).

(silence)

(16) S: ↗↗oo!   ↗↗buu-↗↗di-↗↗o?PRED
          2sg   who-LINK-2sg
          'Hey! Who are you?' (lack of response, followed by silence)

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[10] Here, by using the masculine classifier -ma, the interlocutor reveals that he is in fact a male.

(17) S: ↗↗uuu!
            INTERJ
            'Hey!' (drawing attention back to the conversation)

(18) V: ↗↗uuu!
            INTERJ
            'Hey!' (responding to S's calling)

(19) S: ↗↗buu-↗↗di-↗↗o?PRED
            who-LINK-2sg
            'Who are you?'

(silence)

(20) V: ↗↗ [Ter ↗↗ ce ↗↗ ra   ↗↗In ↗↗ dia   ↗↗i-↗↗mie]
            Tercera.Sp   India.Sp   ANA.NSP-CLF:PR.M
            ' I am a man of the Tercera India (settlement).'

(21) S: ↗↗nai-↗↗no-↗↗moLOC   ↗↗bue?
            ANA.SP-CLF:SP.PLACE-LOC   what
            'What is (there)?'

(22) V: ↗↗gaɨ↗↗ri-↗↗di-ma↗↗kɨ!PRED
            gather-LINK-3pl
            'They are gathering!'

(23) S: ↗↗ni-↗↗ne?
            which-LOC:NSP
            'Where?'

(24) V: ↗↗ana↗↗ne-↗↗ko-↗↗mo!
            communal.roundhouse-CLF:COVER-LOC
            'In the communal roundhouse!'

(silence)

(25) S: ↗↗ni-↗↗ko-↗↗mo?
            which-CLF:COVER-LOC
            'In which one?'

(lack of response, silence)

(26)   S: ↗↗uuu!
               INTERJ
               'Hey!' (drawing attention back to the conversation)

(27)   V: ↗↗ooo!
               INTERJ
               'Hey!' (answering S's calling)

(silence)

(28)   S: ↗↗jaai-↗↗di-↗↗o?_{PRED}
               go-LINK-2sg
               'Are you leaving (lit. going)?'

(29)   V: ↗↗jɨɨ!   ↗↗jai   ↗↗jaai-di-kue_{PRED}
               INTERJ   already go-LINK-1sg
               'Yes! I leave (lit. go) now.' (this is a common way to bid farewell)

(30)   S: ↗↗mai   ↗↗oo   ↗↗jaai!_{PRED}
               well.so   2sg   go.IMP
               'Well, you go!' (a common farewell reply)

(31)   V: ↗↗jɨɨ!
               INTERJ
               'Yes!'

Once the conversation finished, S quickly picked up the oars and started to paddle away. She quietly added in a normal voice:

(32)   S: Kakadɨo   Kata?   Eu   izoi   nai-a_{PRED}
               hear-LINK-2sg name   name   similar speak-EVENT.NMLZ
               'Did you hear, Kata? (He) spoke like Eu...' (Eu is S's nephew)

5. Features of the jungle-at-night register

In this section, I analyze the dialogue exchange (4-31) in §4 in term of its: A. prosodic patterns, B. information structure patterns, and C. 'clues' used to determine who the interlocutor is.

A. Prosodic patterns:

A1. Rising intonation with high pitch — conversational patterns of the dialogue exchange are characterized by rising intonation and a loud vocalization which is higher by at least half or double of the frequency of a normal pitch. There is neither vowel rising; cf. §3 on the rising intonation pattern type i).

A2. Slow tempo speech — each phrase is pronounced in a slower than usual speech tempo, whereby words are syllabified and the high pitch is assigned to each syllable separately.

B. Information structure patterns:

B1. The length of the interaction — the exchange of information is rather brief and usually includes conventional questions inquiring into one's identity and clan's affinity (but not name), as in (14-20), or the location to/from one is going/coming, as in (6-9).

B2. The use of silence — the dialogue exchange abounds in moments of meaningful silence, as for instance, the moments following (4), (5), (7), and (9).

B3. The use of interjections — the speaker urges the interlocutor to reply by using interjections, such as *uuu!* or *ooo!*, as in (4-5), (17-18), and (26-27).

C. Additional 'clues' determining the interlocutor's identity

C1. The voice of the interlocutor — the interlocutors try to detect the person's identity based on their voice (e.g. whether the person is a female, male, elder, adult, or a child).
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C2. The knowledge revealed by the interlocutor — what type of information the interlocutor possesses and shares. This included specific knowledge, such as that about the structure of the Tercera India settlement in (22-25), following S inquiry about the communal roundhouse in the village where people gather in.

6. Conclusions and discussion

The Murui, a Witotoan group from Northwest Amazonia, employ a special jungle-at-night register in contexts of potential affinity in situations of danger, when the interlocutor is unknown and cannot be identified.[11] The register is used during conversational exchanges involving (usually) two interlocutors. As the participants are never certain who (or what) they speak with, they 'test' each other to determine their identity. Such dialogue exchanges are not obligatorily initiated, but, frequently, happen, as engaging in a dialogue-at-distance does not cause physical harm. The jungle-at-

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[11] In this sense, it may be comparable ethnologically to mother-in-law or a son-in-law speech styles of some Arawakan groups (such as Piro and Ashaninka), wherein the speech is high-pitched, the eyes are averted, and the tabooed person is never spoken to directly but always through a third person (cf. the affinal civility registers of Kalapalo (Cariban) and Kamaiurá (Tupí-Guaraní) Central and Northern Brazil). In this sense, the jungle-at-night register could be seen as a politeness strategy of sorts combined with an intentionally 'shy' behaviour preferred when the potential encounter is unexpected (Juan Alvaro Echeverri p.c.).

night register allows the interlocutors to gain control over a potentially risky situation, at the same time obeying and respecting a powerful taboo—the malevolent spirits.

The interaction becomes a sort of a back-and-forth game, whereby both interlocutors weigh in and assess what knowledge becomes disclosed, and what they then can reveal to the other in return. They are always at risk of exposing secret information (such as one's name, which, among the Witoto, is tradition-ally a subject to taboo). To minimize this risk, the exchange is always kept at a minimum and remains vague. The undisclosed information gives the interlocutors the power over one another, and the power is retained as long as the secret is not revealed.

The Murui point out that, even if one's identity is revealed in the course of the inter-action, the interlocutor never ceases using the register, as they cannot ever be certain who, or what, the interlocutor really is, and who, or what, can intercept the conversation.

The interaction teems in moments of signif-icant silence. That silence allows both interlocu-tors to determine one's risk of proceeding with the exchange. The unique voice modulation that accompanies the exchange camouflages interlocutors' voices from revealing their age and sex, and rids it from the fear that one expe-riences when facing a threat. Peculiar is the lack of vowel rising used for calling-from-a-distance technique, which enables a voice to travel greater distances. It is almost as if the dialogue exchange was to be kept secret between the two interlocutors, providing intimate space for the conversation to occur.

The intonation and the pitch are a form of mimicry — the Murui say that such 'speech' resembles that of the malevolent beings. Thus,

by adopting the register, both interlocutors con-sciously undergo a transgressive experience, whereby they both transform into the powerful *taɨfues*.

Abbreviations

1 first person, 2 second person, 3 third person, ANA anaphoric, AT.LOC locative postposition *at*, ATT attributive, CLF classifier, DR 'deriva-tional', EVENT event, F feminine, FUT future, G generic, INTERJ interjection, IMP imperative, LINK linker, LOC locative, M masculine, NMLZ nominalization, NSP non-specific, N.S/A non-S/A subject, pl plural, O object of transitive clause, PR 'pronominal', PRED predicate, Pur purposive, S subject of intransitive clause, sg singular, SP specific, Sp Spanish, TOP topical

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Wojtylak, Katarzyna I. 2019. Traversing language barriers. Murui signal drums from Northwest Amazonia. *International Journal of Language and Culture* 6(1), pp. 195–216 (A special issue *Creativity in Language*, guest-edited by Anne Storch, Andrea Hollington, Nico Nassenstein & Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald).