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Fruits for Animals: Hunting Avoidance Speech Style in Murui (Witoto, Northwest Amazonia)

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Fieldwork Methodology

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Foreword

This monograph contains a number of the talks given at the 41st Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society, held in Berkeley, California, February 7-8, 2015. The conference included a General Session and the Special Session *Fieldwork Methodology*. The 41st Annual Meeting was planned and run by the second-year graduate students of the Department of Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley: Kenny Baclawski, Anna Jurgensen, Spencer Lamoureux, Hannah Sande, and Alison Zerbe.

The original submissions of the papers in this volume were reviewed for style by Anna Jurgensen and Hannah Sande. Resubmitted papers were edited as necessary by Anna Jurgensen and Kenny Baclawski, and then compiled into the final monograph by Anna Jurgensen. The final monograph was reviewed by Spencer Lamoureux. The endeavor was supported by Alison Zerbe's management of the Berkeley Linguistic Society's funds for publications.

The BLS 41 Executive Committee
July 2015

Fruits for Animals: Hunting Avoidance Speech Style in Murui (Witoto, Northwest Amazonia)

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1 Introduction

This paper focuses on the hunting avoidance speech style in Murui, a Witoto-speaking group from Colombia and Peru. Murui men employ a special vocabulary when hunting bigger game. It is a system of lexical substitution meant to ‘deceive’ the animal spirits by avoiding the utterance of the animals’ ‘true’ names. Uttering the names would result in an unsuccessful hunt: animal spirits would know they are to be hunted and would escape. Animals are, therefore, ‘renamed’ to ‘trick’ their spirits. This culturally significant speech register is subject to a high degree of metalinguistic awareness, and is referred to by native speakers as ‘skilled speech’. Many of the avoidance terms and their referents appear to be iconic. They are based on physical similarity between the animal whose name is avoided and some (typically non-faunal) natural objects (commonly fruits), or the animal’s characteristic behavior. Other are based on mythical associations and appear to have ontological origins.

This paper is divided into six parts. The first section briefly introduces the sociolinguistic profile of the Murui language. The following part addresses the typology of avoidance speech styles. Subsequently, section three and four deal with the Murui avoidance speech style and the substitution terms that it employs. The remaining parts of the paper discuss the use of this special register in the Murui hunting discourse, touching upon interpretations of dreams. The final section offers a brief summary and identifies areas that need further research.

1.1 The Witoto People

Northwest Amazonia is home to a great number of ethnic groups, many of which include representatives of larger language families (such as Arawak, Carib, and Tucanoan), smaller families (such as Kakua-Nukak, Peba-Yagua, Bora as well as the Witotoan language family), and a number of language isolates (among them Andoque and Ticuna) (see e.g. Aikhenvald 2012, Aikhenvald and Dixon 1999). Murui, the language of this study, is a member of the Witotoan language family.¹

*I wish to thank the Murui people for their efforts to teach me about the hunting speech style. I would like to thank Alexandra Aikhenvald, Bob Dixon, Juan Alvaro Echeverri, and Luke Fleming for their helpful comments on the material. Thanks to the audience at Berkeley Linguistic Society 41 and the Language and Culture Research Centre in Cairns, Australia, for helpful feedback.

¹The following abbreviations are used in this paper: 1 first person; 2 second person; A subject of transitive verb; CLF classifier; CONJ conjunction; DES desiderative; E event nominalizer; EMPH emphatic; EPIST epistemic; EXCL exclamation; FOC focus; G generic; INCP inceptive; INHER inherent; INTERJ interjection; INTENS intensifier; KIN kinship; LK linker; LOC locative; N.S/A topical nonsubject; NEG negative/negation; NMLZ nominalization; PL plural; PURP purposive; Q question marker *nɪ*; RED reduplication; S subject of

Murui together with three other related language variants constitute in all likelihood a dialect continuum. In the literature, all these groups are referred to as ‘the Witoto people’ who are speakers of a single language, called also ‘Witoto’. In fact, the word *witoto* is an exonym of Carijona (Carib) origin, meaning ‘enemy’, that was employed by early missionaries and rubber traders (Petersen de Piñeros and Patiño 2000:219). Traditionally, the Witoto inhabited the region of the Amazon Basin between the Putumayo and Caquetá Rivers in south-eastern Colombia.² Nowadays, they also live in northern parts of Peru.³

All the Witoto people share a number of cultural traits with other unrelated groups in Northwest Amazonia. Together, they are considered to form a cultural area (or a ‘network’), called the ‘People of the Center’. It encompasses seven ethnolinguistic groups spoken in south-eastern Colombia and northern Peru (Echeverri 1997:27). Nowadays, this cultural network numbers approximately 10,000 people (DNP 2010). The groups are representatives of the following languages and language families:

- Witotoan language family with Ocaina, Nonuya, and Witoto,
- Bora language family with Muinane, Bora (and Miraña, a dialect of Bora),
- Arawak language family with Resígaro, and
- Andoqué, a linguistic isolate.

The cultural traits that the People of the Center share, separate them from other indigenous groups that inhabit the same area: the Carijona (Carib) to the north, the Siona, Secoya, and Coreguaje (West Tucanoan) to the west, Orejón (or Máihiki) to the south, and the speakers of Arawak and East Tucanoan languages to the north-east (see Figure 1).⁴ Even though the People of the Center are scattered across a vast ground area, they all share a similar social organization where patrilineal filiation determines one’s lineage.⁵ Traditionally, the People of the Center resided in multi-family *malocas* (i.e. communal dwellings of a circular shape), with larger villages consisting of multiple communal units. All these groups used pairs of slit wooden drums called *manguaré* (*juai* in Murui) for long-distance communication of up to 20 kilometers throughout the forest (see e.g. Thiesen 1969). The People of the Center have numerous cultural customs in common. Perhaps the most characteristic is the ritual of *mambe* (*jibibirí* in Murui) that involves ingesting the green (pulverized) powder of processed coca (*jibie*) leaves mixed with *yarumo* leaves, and licking of *ambil* paste (processed tobacco mixed with ash-salt from the forest). The consumption of tobacco by licking among these groups is a unique phenomenon in this part of Northwest Amazonia (see Wilbert 1987:40 in Echeverri 1997:50). The People of the Center share similar ritual discourses as well as they partake in the exchange of ritual dance masters and singers of different linguistic backgrounds (Echeverri 1997, Gasché 1977, 2009, Seifart 2005, 2013, Seifart and von Hildebrand 2009).

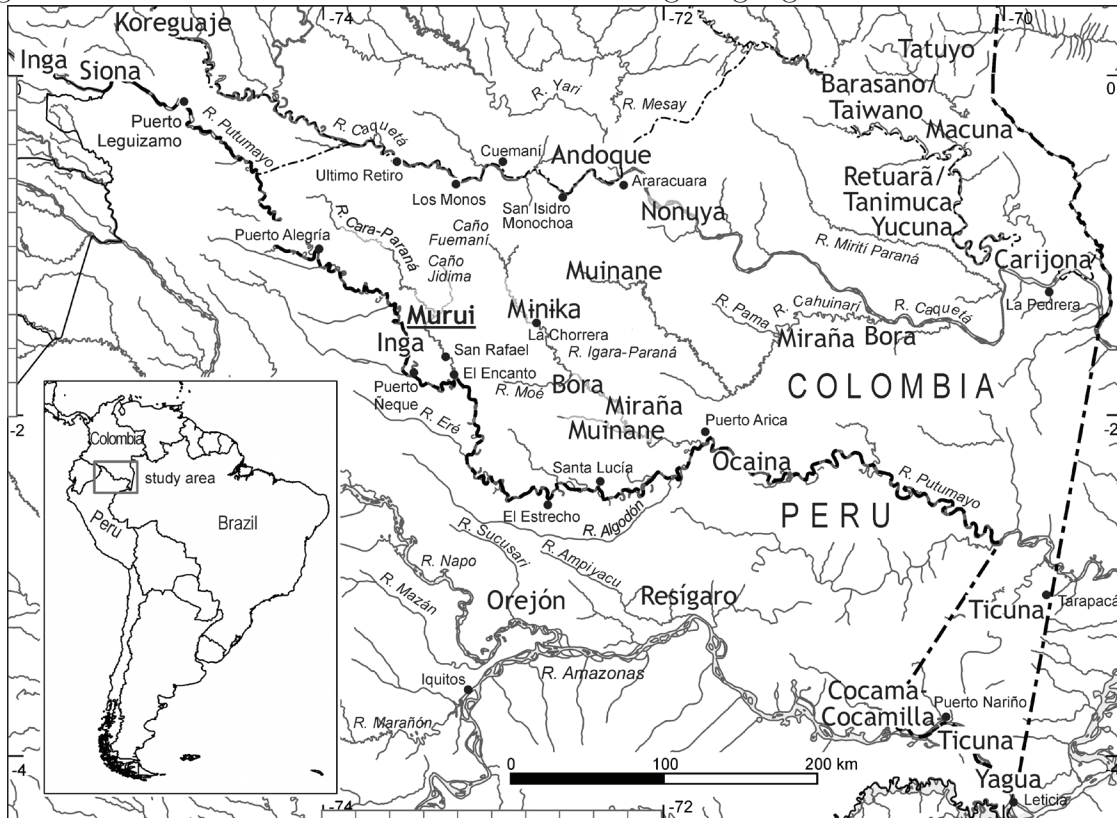
²In Brazil, the Caquetá and Putumayo Rivers are called Japurá and Içá.

³This paper is a work in progress, reporting on research that is currently underway on Murui (an extensive reference grammar of the Murui that the author has in an advanced stage of preparation).

⁴The maps presented in this paper are author’s own estimations, based on the careful examination of the current literature and my field notes.

⁵Among the Witoto, kinship is ‘bilaterally transmitted through both the paternal and maternal sides’ (Echeverri 1997:80).

Figure 1: Location of Murui and other surrounding languages in Northwest Amazonia



In the past, the People of the Center must have had some contact with other groups. For instance, the Witoto people have a traditional ‘Carijona’ dance called *riai ruu*. Although the West-Tucanoan Secoya consider the Witoto people their traditional enemies, they seem to have borrowed from the Witoto manioc squeezers (Sp. *tipiti*) as well as bitter manioc (Gasché p.c.). The Bora people, close neighbors of the Witoto, have also borrowed dances from other neighboring groups. Resígaro (Arawak) has restructured its verbal morphology under the influence of the unrelated Bora (Aikhenvald 2001:182-188, Seifart 2011:5).

The People of the Center share a tragic history of atrocious exploitations of indigenous population, their enslavement, forced displacements, and subsequent spread of diseases (Casement and Mitchell 1912 [1997]). The period between 1879 and 1910 in Amazonia is referred to as the *Rubber Boom* during which the ‘Peruvian Amazon Company’ (called *Casa Arana*), led by rubber baron Júlio Cezar Arana, was responsible for tens of thousands of indigenous deaths (Hardenburg 1912, Pineda Camacho 2000). With the gradual collapse of the Rubber Boom, the barbaric exploitation of indigenous population ended by about 1920’s.

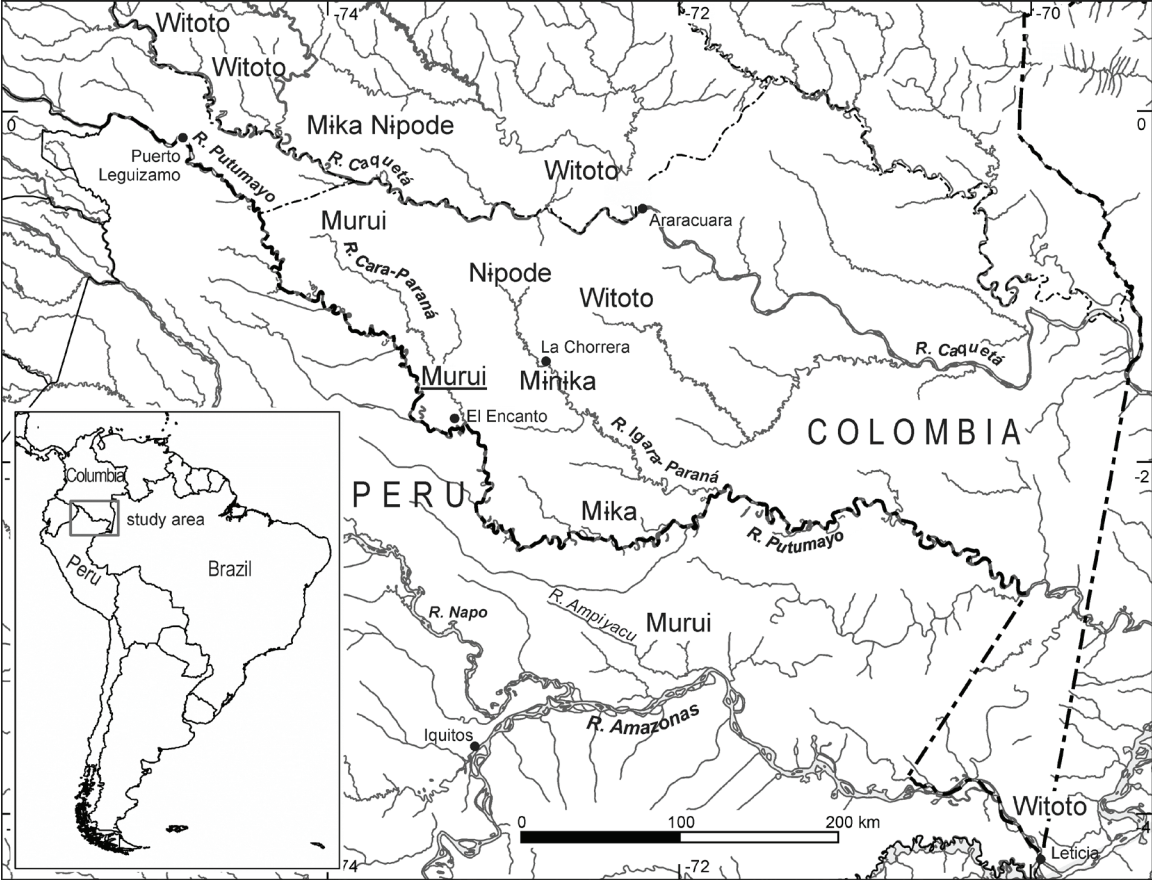
1.2 The Murui Language

The ‘Witoto language’, commonly used as a collective umbrella term, encompasses four mutually intelligible dialects: Murui, Minika, Nipode, and Mika.⁶ Differences between these

⁶The unclassified Binika is possibly a variation of Minika, spoken by one family in La Chorrera (Petersen

language variants lay mainly in their phonology and morphology. Figure 2 shows approximate locations of the Murui, Minika, Nipode, and Mika speakers in Colombia and Peru (communities where more than one Witoto variant is spoken, are marked as ‘Witoto’).

Figure 2: Approximate locations of the Witoto-speaking groups in Northwest Amazonia



The Witoto recognize their common mythological origin but consider themselves to be divided into separate social groups that speak ‘different languages’. That is why, I refer to Murui as a ‘language’ in the political sense, although linguistically, it is merely one of the Witoto variants. The internal classification of the entire Witotoan language family (with Ocaina and Nonuya) is illustrated below:

Nonuya (moribund with a few speakers, Ethnologue code NOJ)

Ocaina (moribund with about 50 speakers, Ethnologue code OCA)

Witoto (all together approximately 6,000 speakers)

- Minika (Ethnologue code HTO)
- Nipode (Ethnologue code HUX)
- Mika (lacking code)
- Murui (Ethnologue code HUU)

In terms of the language structure, Murui is nominative-accusative with both head and dependent marking.⁷ The language is agglutinating with some fusion and predominantly suffixing. Typical clause structure is predicate final (SV/AOV) but ordering can be determined by pragmatic factors. Syntactic functions are expressed through case markers where marking of core arguments is related to focus and topicality. The most salient characteristic of Murui is a large multiple classifier system. Its principal function is the enrichment of the lexicon by formation of new words (Wojtylak in prep.).⁸

2 Special Speech, Avoidance, and Linguistic Taboo

Cross-linguistically, a prevalent speech register type is one in which everyday words are pragmatically marked in contexts of risk-prone activities, such as uttering a name of a respected person or deceased person. To avoid the potential danger, such words are replaced by substitute lexemes or avoidance terms.

Best documented are undoubtedly the ‘mother-in-law languages’ of Aboriginal Australia (such as Dyirbal) with elaborate substitute vocabularies employed in affinal co-presence (Dixon 2015). Such registers are used whenever anyone in an avoidance relationship, such as mother-in-law or a son-in-law, is close-by (Dixon 2002). Almost all Australian languages traditionally had such an avoidance speech style. Dyirbal, a language spoken in north-west Queensland, has been described as having two styles: *Guwal*, the everyday language style, and *Jalnguy*, a special style used in the presence of ‘avoidance kin’. *Jalnguy* has an elaborate lexicon of generic avoidance terms where every lexeme appears to be different between everyday and avoidance styles (Dixon 2015).

Beyond Australia, such context-dependent avoidance speech registers are most commonly found in contexts of subsistence activities such as hunting, fishing, mining, and harvesting. For instance, fishing registers have been reported to be used by Sangir speakers and Tetun of Timor (Indonesia) (Grimes and Maryott 1994, Therik 1995). A hunting register is used on Buru (Indonesia) (Grimes and Maryott 1994) and among the Semelai on the Malay Peninsula (Kruspe 2004:7-10). As Kruspe put it:

“When the Semelai enter the jungle to hunt, collect forest products, or prepare a swidden, it is imperative to employ this speech style. The jungle is seen as fraught with peril, so in order to avoid the danger of attack from (...) ‘malevolent spirits’, this taboo is used. Failure to do so can result in a range of afflictions including soul-loss. Other consequences are falling victim to a tiger, crocodile, snake, or centipede.”

(Kruspe 2004:7)

⁷Information on Murui was obtained during my original fieldwork in the Murui communities of the Cara-Paraná river (Colombia), conducted between July 2013 and January 2014 to collect data for the reference grammar of the Murui language (Wojtylak in prep.).

⁸For 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,

The Kewa and Kalam in the eastern Papua New Guinea Highlands have a special harvesting avoidance register used when collecting pandanus nuts (Franklin and Stefaniw 1992). It is prohibited to use the ‘pandanus language’ outside the area where the trees grow. Among the Ma Manda people, a Finisterre-Huon-speaking group from Papua New Guinea, there are certain concepts which cannot be talked about when being away from the safety of people’s own villages. When the Ma Manda are out in the jungle, they fear that certain words or phrases will attract the attention of evil spirits. There is a lexicalized linguistic taboo for ‘water’ that is replaced with ‘come-go’ in all the contexts (Ryan Pennington p.c.).⁹

Amazonia has numerous speech styles as well as linguistic taboos. For instance, the Matis, a Panoan-speaking group, employ a special vocabulary when preparing poison for arrows called *curare*. Certain words cannot be uttered during this activity, otherwise they would render the poison used for the arrows weak (Fleck and Voss 2006). Another example are the Tariana (North Arawak from Brazil). The Tariana have a specific word taboo: words which resemble the root *piri* ‘Yuruparí flute’ cannot be pronounced in front of women (Aikhenvald 2013:64). In the Tariana mythology, women once owned the secret flutes but lost them to men.

Other tabooed terms in Amazonia are secret names given at birth. Such name taboos are found among e.g. the Trio in Suriname (Carlin 2004) and many Panoan groups (Fleck 2013). From the point of view of the Witoto people, a man’s name, as much as his limbs, is identified with his soul. Should one possess it, they are able to perform evil magic against the person. Therefore, real names are kept secret and their substitutes, such as kin terms or indirect forms, are employed in ordinary life (Whiffen 1915:153).

In Amazonia one also finds various speech styles that relate to specific types of avoidance. For instance, the Kalapalo (Carib-speaking group from Central Brazil) and Kamaiurá (Tupí-Guaraní from Northern Brazil) have distinct affinal civility registers similar in characteristics to Australian ‘mother-in-law’ speech styles (Basso 2007, Seki 2000). Yanomami groups of Venezuela and Brazil have a special language called *Wayamo*. *Wayamo* was used by Yanomami men under specific circumstances such as during intertribal feasts in communal houses, fight challenges, burning of the dead body of a relative, puberty rite parties, and shamanic chants (Aikhenvald 2012:369). Another example are various synonym sets found in the lexicons of the Panoan-speaking groups. In Matses, animals can be referred to by various synonymic terms, e.g. ‘lowland paca’ [*Cuniculus paca*] has at least three ‘archaic’ synonyms and three other additional terms (Fleck and Voss 2006). Such a variety of terms could perhaps be explained by traditional raids that brought women as wives from other related and unrelated tribes (Aikhenvald 2012:361).

Amazonian peoples do not lack specific avoidance speech styles that were used in the context of subsistence activities such as hunting. Traditionally, the Palikur (Arawak-speaking group from Northern Brazil) used to employ a special vocabulary to ‘trick’ evil spirits when fishing (Diana Green in Aikhenvald 2012:365). Nowadays, such avoidance speech styles are becoming obsolete. In the case of the Palikur people, their fishing register is now gone, as

⁹This practice stems from a story which describes how a young girl tells her father that she was really thirsty, and then a spirit came in the night and cut her neck to fill her with water (Ryan Pennington p.c.). For other studies relating to the topic of special speech, avoidance, and linguistic taboos see also Aikhenvald 2009, Allan and Burridge 2006, Diffloth 1980, Emeneau 1948, Foley 1986, Fox 2005, Hale 1971, Herbert 1990, Treis 2005, Sapir 1915, Simons 1982, and Stasch 2008.

the Palikur were ultimately Christianized and they do not fear evil spirits anymore. I turn now to yet another such avoidance register from Amazonia - the hunting avoidance speech style as used by the Murui people.

3 Hunting Avoidance Speech Style of the Murui

Among the Murui, hunting is a male enterprise and it is still widely practiced. Although nowadays, many Murui people live on river banks and rely on fish as their primary animal protein source, culturally, hunting was regarded as more important than fishing. When hunting, the most important game is that of mammals; birds and reptiles are of secondary concern. Traditionally, Murui men used to hunt with blow-pipes, spears, and wooden traps (Whiffen 1915:108, Minor 1973:29).¹⁰ Today, hunting with a shotgun has been widely adopted by all the Witoto groups, the Murui among them.

When hunting, Murui men use a special vocabulary; this vocabulary is meant to ‘disguise’ true names of animals that are going to be hunted. This avoidance speech style is a system of lexical substitution where animal spirits are ‘deceived’ as they do not ‘understand’ avoidance names uttered by Murui men. 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 ‘true’ names are substituted with words that designate plant-(related) species (mainly fruits). For instance, when willing to hunt a peccary, a Murui man would say that he is going to collect an ‘*umarí* fruit’.

3.1 Characteristics of the Hunting Speech Style

The hunting speech style has a very prestigious status among the Murui men. It is subject to a higher degree of metalinguistic awareness: the native speakers easily reflect on this unusual use of vocabulary. They refer to it as a type of ‘skilled speech’ (Sp. *palabra catedrática*) that is unintelligible to women as well as to those men who have a limited knowledge of the Murui culture.¹¹ Traditionally, boys acquired substitution terms as part of their general upbringing and the initiation rituals; nowadays, some do so at night by listening to elder men in communal roundhouses, the *ananeke* (Sp. *maloca*).

The use of the Murui avoidance speech style is determined by sociolinguistic parameters. Avoidance terms are used only between men who gather at night in the *ananeke* before they set off for a hunt, consume coca and tobacco, and conduct the verbal ‘power-discourse’ called *rafue* (*ra* ‘thing, power’, *-fue* mouth CLF:STORY). *Rafue* belongs to the *jibibiri uai* (coca-CLF:GATHERING word) genre, called ‘language of the yard and coca’ (Echeverri and Román-Jitdutjaaño 2013:3). It is an abstract genre that is common to the Witoto. It has been interpreted as a ‘Word that becomes a Thing’ that ‘evokes’ things in the world

¹⁰In 1973, Dorothy Minor, an SIL missionary who worked on the Minika language, together with her husband, Eugene Minor, gave the following account: “(...) the blowpipes (*obillakai*), war clubs made of hard wood (*bigi*), spears (*dukirada*), archers (*zikuirira*), and arrows (*zikuirada*) appear in Witoto legends, and only elders remember what they were like.”] (Minor 1973:29, my translation).

(Echeverri 1997:185). According to Echeverri (1997:30), *rafue* has a ‘performative’ function and represents more than the normal ‘ethnic discourse’ - *rafue* goes beyond the Witoto mythology, the Witoto ethnocentric view of the world, and the linkage to their ancestral territory. *Rafue* is unlike other Witoto genres, such as *bakaki* (mythological narrations) or *ruaki* (songs). Non-*rafue* genres are generally ‘about things’ and do not evoke anything in the world.

Some of the transformations between animals and plants discussed in this paper appear to have been derived from the ‘original’ *rafue* (which evokes the ‘history of Creation’). Those transformation manifest themselves as certain association sets used also in the hunting speech style (and extend into the dream world). This makes the hunting speech style an integral part of the *rafue* discourse (see Echeverri 1997).¹² *Rafue* has also other subtypes, such as the so-called ‘*rafue* of ash-salts’ described for Minika (Echeverri and Román-Jitdutjaaño 2011, 2013). In ‘*rafue* of ash-salts’, plant species of ash-salt substitute names for other plants, animals, insects and parts, organs, affects, capacities of the body and objects, and institutions and activities of the human world (Echeverri and Román-Jitdutjaaño 2013:5). Such substitution terms are based on semantic associations similar to the ‘animal-plant’ synonym sets used in the hunting avoidance speech style. ‘*Rafue* of ash-salts’ is used for sexual education and, as it is conducted, it re-enacts the history of creation.

Substitution terms found in the Murui hunting avoidance speech style are also typical of other *rafue* registers (cf. Echeverri and Candre, 2008, Echeverri and Román-Jitdutjaaño, 2013). Nevertheless, the correspondences between animals and plants in the hunting register are one-to-one, where one animal is generally associated with one plant. In the ‘*rafue* of ash-salts’, there are one-to-many correspondences, where one plant, from which ash-salts are extracted, can have various associations, not just one. For instance, the species of the *jimena* tree [*Bactris gasipaes* (*Areceae*)] is associated with underwater beings, anteater, and throat (Echeverri and Román-Jitdutjaaño 2013:7).

As an integral part of the wide Witoto *rafue* discourse, the form and the use of terms employed in the hunting avoidance speech style appear to have been ‘inherited’ from perhaps what was a Proto-Witotoan mythology. Not only Murui but also Míka, Minika, and Nípede share this type of hunting avoidance register. In terms of variations between different association sets across the Witoto variants, lexical replacements are fairly similar - that is, the same plants are used for the same animals in Murui as well as e.g. in Minika. Occasional differences in forms of classifiers seem to be related to morphophonological variations between the Witoto languages, rather than the hunting style itself.

The homogeneity of the avoidance terms used for hunting big game, the one-to-one formal and semantic correspondences between the animal’s everyday names and the substitution terms, as well as their unique sociolinguistic manifestations reinforced by the metalinguistic awareness of the Murui speakers (men, as opposed to women), allow us to treat the Murui hunting register as a special speech style in its own right.

We now turn to the relationships between everyday terms and their avoidance substi-

¹²The issue of ontological implications of such practice is an intriguing one. As it is not yet usefully explored by the author, it will not be discussed in this paper. Interested readers should refer to the anthropological works of Echeverri (1997), Echeverri and Román-Jitdutjaaño (2013), and, the most important works by Preuss (1921-1923), who provides the exceptional descriptions of the religion and mythology of the Witoto people.

tutions, based on a selection of Murui avoidance names. A number of ritual discourses on hunting were produced by elders in the traditional Murui community of Tercera India, Colombia, and were recorded at night in the *ananeko* while men were gathering to consume coca and lick the tobacco paste, and prepare for hunting. They were addressed to *Mo* ‘the Father, the Creator’ while women and children listened on the side. The texts were transcribed and translated with men. A textual excerpt of one such hunting discourse in which a request is made to the Creator asking to be granted a successful hunt, is presented in §5. The Murui elders who I worked with were eager to share the material recorded on the hunting speech style as a matter of scientific record.

4 Substitutions

The Murui hunting speech style employs the same grammar as the regular everyday speech style. The phonology, morphology, and syntax are the same as in the normal everyday speech. What differs is the lexicon. This ‘avoidance lexicon’ has a fairly limited vocabulary. During my fieldwork, I collected some 20 identifiable lexical items.¹³ These substitution terms appear to be stable as there is almost no formal or functional variation among them between Murui speakers. Everyday terms and replacement terms have one-to-one correspondences, where one animal has typically only one substitution term. Since perceivable associations (e.g. similarity of form) between ‘real’ names of animals and replacements used in their stead can justify their connections, I identify the following four types of animal-plant associations: behavioral, impressionistic, formal, and mythical. I will discuss these in turn, starting with behavioral associations.¹⁴

4.1 Behavioral Associations

The animal-fruit associations are relations between everyday terms for animals and substitution terms for plants that are a result of the existing connection between those animals and plants in terms of animal’s behavior, such as its feeding habits, and possibly, its usual habitation. For instance, the connection between a woolly monkey *jemi* (Sp. *churuco*) and the *ikiki* fruit (Sp. *juansoco*) arrives from the fact that the *ikiki* fruit is greatly favored by the woolly monkey *jemi*. Another example is the everyday term *ime* ‘agouti rodent’ and its avoidance term *mizeyi*, the ‘*maraca* fruit’. The explanation for this specific association is that the ‘*maraca* fruit’ is a favorite food source for agouti rodents. Although I have not yet found any instances of behavioral associations in terms of animal’s usual dwelling place, Echeverri and Román-Jitdutjaaño (2013:8) give the following example from the Minika ‘*rafue* of ash-salts’:

¹³For ‘*rafue* of ash-salts’ in Minika, Echeverri and Román-Jitdutjaaño (2013) collected 208 items over the period of four years.

¹⁴Such connections defined otherwise as ‘indices’ in Echeverri and Román-Jitdutjaaño (2013), after Peirce (1998 [1909]), have been categorized as existential, symptomatic, and designative. I loosely follow this approach. In his approach, Peirce (1998 [1909]) places his ‘indices’ as markers of ‘real connections’. In

“(…) the connection between the *jaitaikurungo* beetle (indet.) and the *Oenocarpus bacaba* palm [is] because the beetle lives in the palm.”
(Echeverri and Román-Jitdutjaaño 2013:8)

The similar (and perhaps also other) principles are likely to occur in the Murui hunting avoidance speech style as well. Murui behavioral associations between animals and plants are summarized in Table 1.¹⁵

Table 1. Behavioral associations between regular and avoidance terms

Regular term	Avoidance term	Relation terms
<i>ime</i> ‘agouti, rodent species’ [<i>Agouti paca</i>] (Sp. <i>boruga</i>)	<i>mizeyi</i> ‘the <i>maraca</i> fruit’ [<i>Theobroma bicolor</i>]	the <i>maraca</i> fruit is favored by agouti rodents
<i>jemi</i> ‘species of primates, a woolly monkey’ [<i>Lagothrix lagotricha</i>] (Sp. <i>churuco</i>)	<i>ikiki</i> ‘the <i>juansoco</i> fruit’ [<i>Couma macrocarpa</i>]	the <i>juansoco</i> fruit is greatly favored by woolly monkeys

4.2 Impressionistic Associations

Another mechanism of associations reflects sensory properties animals and plants share. In this spirit, names of animals are replaced according to a resemblance between an animal and a plant. Such resemblance can be based on some visual or olfactory property. For instance, a jaguar (*janayari* in Murui) is replaced with *uibiyi*, a type of fruit. The reason for such ‘transformation’ appears to be based on the physical resemblance between the *uibiyi* fruit and the shape of the jaguar’s paw. Similarly, *mero*, a peccary, is replaced with *obedo*, a ‘black *umarí* fruit’. This association has been explained in terms of olfaction: the *obedo* fruit appears to have a specific scent which, just like peccaries, attracts mosquitoes. Murui impressionistic associations are exemplified in Table 2.

Table 2. Impressionistic associations between regular and avoidance terms

Regular term	Avoidance term	Relation terms
<i>janayari</i> ‘jaguar’ (<i>Panthera onca</i>) (Sp. <i>tigre mariposo</i>)	<i>uibiyi</i> ‘type of fruit’ (<i>Batotocarpus amazonicus</i>) (Sp. <i>árbol del pan</i>)	the <i>uibiyi</i> fruit has a shape that is similar to the shape of the jaguar’s paw
<i>jigadima</i> ‘tapir’ (<i>Tapirus Terrestris</i>) (Sp. <i>danta</i>)	<i>zañarai</i> ‘decomposed wood’	the smoked meat of tapir looks like decomposed wood
<i>oño</i> ‘frog type’ (Sp. type of <i>zapo</i>)	<i>ibegirai</i> ‘decomposed leaves’	the frog looks like decomposed leaves
<i>mero</i> ‘type of peccary’ (<i>Tayassu Tajacu</i>) (Sp. <i>cerillo</i>)	<i>obedo</i> ‘black <i>umarí</i> fruit’ (<i>Poraquiba Sericea</i>) (Sp. <i>umarí negro</i>)	the fruit has a specific scent which, like peccaries, attracts mosquitoes

¹⁵Latin names for Murui plants and animals have been adopted from Echeverri and Candre (2008) and Seifart and von Hildebrand (2009). An extensive study of Witoto plants has been done by Maria Cecilia

4.3 Formal Associations

Murui animal-plants substitutions can correspond to sharing phonologically similar linguistic forms (such as verbal or nominal roots). This appears to be the most frequent association type found in the hunting avoidance speech style. An example of this is the connection between a type of lizard called *turaki* which is associated with *turao*, a type of vine. Both lexemes are related in form, in that they contain the same nominalized verbal root *tu-* ‘disperse, scatter’ but differ in terms of their classifiers. The lizard *turaki* contains the classifier *-ki* (CLF:INHER) with overtones of some kind of possession or inherent feature; the *turao* vine is derived with the classifier *-o* (CLF:FLEX) which denotes long and flexible forms.

Murui men who have limited knowledge of the Murui culture, as well as women (who are not supposed to ‘know’ hunting substitution terms), intuitively draw connections between lexical sets which share similar phonological forms. Interestingly, they do not have such intuition for other associations types (i.e. behavioral, impressionistic, and mythical). If they do not know the ‘real reason’ for the association, they explain such synonym sets in terms of behavioral or impressionistic associations. Other times, they interpret them to have some kind of a ‘possession’ relation. And often, both explanations are given at the same time. For instance, I was told by a young Murui man that, in case of the *turaki* lizard and the *turao* vine, the vine is somewhat ‘similar’ in shape to the lizard. As an afterthought, he concluded that the lizard and the vine do not share any physical resemblance, therefore, the *turao* vine must somehow ‘belong’ to the *turaki* lizard. According to Murui elders and other knowledgeable speakers of Murui, the connection is much more profound. The *turaki* lizard and the *turao* vine are similar in that both are both very hard to catch (that is, ‘they disperse’). A number of regular and avoidance terms that share phonological forms in Murui are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Impressionistic associations between regular and avoidance terms

Regular term	Avoidance term	Relation terms
<i>fekoda</i> ‘type of edible worm’ (Sp. <i>suri</i>)	<i>fekorai</i> ‘type of plant’	the <i>fekorai</i> leaf is similar to the shape of the <i>fekoda</i> worm; a plant belonging to worms
<i>jedo</i> ‘opossum’	<i>jedo iaiña</i> ‘type of plant’	the plant ‘belongs’ to opossums
<i>turaki</i> ‘type of lizard’	<i>turao</i> ‘type of liana’	both are hard to catch

4.4 Mythical Associations

The last type of animal-plant associations reflects their connections from within the Witoto mythology. Perhaps, these are the ‘original’ connections on which all previously discussed associations types were based (in terms of the ontological origins of all Murui synonym sets).

The hunting avoidance speech style seem to have a limited set of mythical associations. So far, I have encountered only one example of what could be considered to be a ‘mythical association’. The Murui everyday term for ‘giant anteater’ [*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*] (Sp. *oso hormigero*) is *ereño*. Its avoidance term is *buinaireño* ‘the anteater ancestor’. Both terms

appear to have a totemic relation: *buinaireño* is the totem or the ‘power’ of the Anteater clan (the *Ereiaí* clan). Further research needs to examine more closely if the hunting avoidance speech style ‘assists’ to develop a mechanism to hunt totemic animals, that are normally tabooed and depend on clan’s totem, such as an anteater among the members of the Anteater clan. It may be that changing a name of clan’s totemic animal could remove the prohibition on hunting this animal. Such avoidance terms may vary among different Murui clans.

5 Discourse

The usage of the avoidance terms in the ritual discourse illustrates a number of unique characteristics of the hunting speech style. Consider the following textual example from *Momo Jikakaza*, an ‘Appeal to the Father’, in which the Creator is asked to grant a successful hunt:

- (1) oka rana uiñotio

o -ka ra -na uiño -ti -o
2SG -FOC thing -N.S/A.FOC know -LK -2SG

‘You... You know things!’

- (2) kiodo, maijiakadikue iadi riye iñena

kio -do, maiji -iaka -di -kue iadi ri -ye i -ñe -na
see -LK+2SG work -EMPH+DES -LK -1SG CONJ eat.meat -PURP be -NEG -E.NMLZ

‘You see, I want to work and there is no food!’

- (3) jae ua uzutiai jaijaikaiya mei ifo ninomo **obedo** *uaide*

ja -e ua uzu -tiai jai -jai -kai -ya mei ifo ni
past -CLF:G INTENS grand.parent -PL.KIN go -RED -INCP -E.NMLZ INTERJ head Q2
-no -mo **obe** **-do** *uai -d -e*
-CLF:SP.PLACE -LOC umarí.black -CLF:POINTED fall -LK -3

‘In the past, our ancestors used to go where black *umarí* fruit falls.’

- (4) **obedona** ore mo kue itoza

obe **-do** -na ore mo kue i -to -za
umarí.black -CLF:POINTED -N.S/A.FOC EXCL father 1SG give -LK+2SG -EPIST

‘I ask you Father, give me black *umarí* fruits!’

- (5) kue uruki kue ekayeza

kue uru -ki kue eka -ye -za
1SG child CLF:INHER 1SG feed -PURP -EPIST

Consider the *obedo* ‘black *umarí* fruit’, marked in bold in the lines (3) and (4). As it was shown in section on impressionistic associations in §4.2, *obedo* is the avoidance term for *mero* ‘peccary’ (the association is explained in terms of an unpleasant smell black *umarí* fruits and peccaries share). In this ‘appeal to the Father’, the hunter is not asking for black *umarí* fruits. He is in the *ananeko*, consuming coca and liquid tobacco, preparing for hunting. He is using avoidance terms because he wants to assure that he will feed his family with the peccary meat.

This textual excerpt also exemplifies another salient characteristic of the usage of avoidance terms in the hunting discourse, that is, names of the avoided animals are used in a figurative way. In line (3), the verb that describes actions of the *obedo* is *uaide* ‘to fall’. This clearly illustrates conventional metaphors referring to fruits and their actions: the black *umarí* fruit (which is *de facto* a peccary) does not ‘move around’ or ‘run’ like an animal but literally falls off the *obe-rai* (*umarí.black-CLF:TREE.TYPE*) tree.

6 Meanings in Dreams

The Murui hunting goes beyond the acquisition of food. Curiously, people also employ certain everyday terms and avoidance terms when interpreting dreams. In those contexts, plants indicate which animals will become hunter’s prey. This is illustrated by a hunter dreaming about *nekazi* ‘green *umarí* fruit’ [*Poraqueiba sericea*] (Sp. *umarí verde*). The significance of such dreams is straightforward: the hunter’s prey is going to be a *zuruma*, a large herbivorous mammal called ‘tapir’ (Sp. *danta*). Likewise, when a hunter dreams about the *coco del monte* fruit, he is going to kill a wild pig (Sp. *puerco*). As Echeverri and Candre (2008:65) put it:

“All is the result of tobacco and coca hunting. (...) this means, hunting of people. And this way, what is to be hunted comes to us in dreams in the form of fruit.”
(Echeverri and Candre 2008:65, my translation).¹⁶

The actual big-game hunting takes place in dreams. There, the animals have to be defeated first before they are defeated in the physical world of the everyday life:

“What happens ‘right here’ (*beno*) - bad feelings, accidents, problems - is reflected ‘out there’ (*jino*) as animals. Just to set traps out there is not enough. Those feelings (animals) first have to be defeated right here. The actual hunting takes place in dreams, then an animal will go to fall into the trap outside. This way of turning feelings and dreams into animal bodies is called *monáitate* ‘to make dawn’. The ability to make that happen is called *diona máirie* ‘tobacco power’. This power is acquired through tobacco discipline, or *yetárafue*.”
(Echeverri 1997:154)

¹⁶“(…) Todos son cacería de tabaco y coca, es decir *cacería de gente*. Y asimismo en los sueños esa cacería aparece representada en la forma de esos frutales.”

“(…) ‘Tobacco hunting’ consists of making dawn [*monáitate*] in the body of animals that which first manifests itself as illness, rage, negligence, quarrelling, and so forth. Food is only a by-product of this sort of hunting. As such, the preparation of tobacco and coca are as closely related to hunting as are the setting up of traps. Tobacco and coca are actual hunting weapons.”
(Echeverri 1997:129)

In other Witoto genres, such as ritual songs *ruaki*, names of the animals are commonly uttered. For instance, in songs sung during celebrations in the Murui *ananeko*, the ‘real’ animal names are freely used for the Muinane people, e.g. *eizaikai biya* from a Muinane song can be roughly translated as “peccary came”, where the referents of ‘peccary’ are the Muinane people.

7 Summary

The Murui people, a Witoto-speaking group from Northwest Amazonia, have a special prestigious speech style used by men that relates to hunting game. It is a system of lexical substitution that shifts from faunal terms to floral terms, and it is employed to ‘deceive’ animal’s spirits ‘assuring’ a successful hunt. Associations between everyday terms (that is, animals) and avoidance terms (plants) have behavioral, impressionistic, formal, and mythical connections. They reveal certain ways in the Murui people organize their natural surroundings and are important for indigenous taxonomies of fauna and flora. The hunting avoidance speech style employs figurative expressions for avoided animal’s names. It is also used in interpretations of dreams, where hunting takes place in the spiritual sphere. It forms part of a much larger Witoto register, called *rafue*. Nowadays, with the decreased importance of spirits among the Murui, the hunting avoidance speech style is on the wane.

Further research that goes beyond the mere description of the avoidance speech style would be of great help. One could venture into the realms of pragmatics, ideology and, more importantly, the ontological bases of such practice. One may also ask how the change from animal to plant names reflects a local division of labor (e.g. hunting versus gathering) and how it relates to territorial and seasonal based prohibitions.

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