

Marúbo Language Profile
Vidhya Elango
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1 Introduction

Marúbo is a Panoan language, classified by Fleck (2013) as being part of the Mainline branch. The Marúbo mostly live on the headwaters of the Ituí and Curuçá rivers, in the Javari basin, close to the Peruvian border in Amazonas. Population estimates range from 1,000 (Fleck 2007), 1,250 (Ethnologue, n.d., “Marúbo”) and 2,000 (Instituto Socioambiental [ISA], n.d., “Marubo”). In all three cases, it is not clear whether the estimates are also accurate for the number of speakers. Ethnologue classifies Marúbo as “vigorous” (Ethnologue, n.d., “Marúbo”) (the language is being used by members of all generations), so it is likely that the number of speakers is close to the number of individuals in the group. The group is likely the amalgamation of several, similar indigenous groups that were weakened due to the colonization of the region (ISA, n.d. “Marubo – History of Contact”).

2 History

The history of European contact in the upper Amazon region starts with the Jesuits in the mid 17th century (Ruedas, 2001, pp. 11). Due to the isolation of the Javari basin, there was no direct contact between the missionaries and any Javari basin peoples, but Ruedas (2001) speculates that, since missionaries controlled access to metal goods, they disrupted “[t]he balance of power” (pp. 12) between indigenous groups. Javari basin peoples would have had connections to other indigenous groups with more contact with the Europeans, and thus, were likely affected.

After the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spanish colonies in 1769, non-indigenous people infrequently went to the Javari basin until the beginning of the rubber boom, beginning in 1870 (*Ibid*). The rubber boom lasted until 1911, and was “devastating” (*Ibid*) for the indigenous peoples, as rubber tappers occupied the basin and were very exploitative (ISA, n.d., “Marubo – History of contact”).

Many indigenous people fled into isolated areas of the basin, where they continued to stay during the decline of the rubber trade from 1911-1945 (Ruedas 2001, pp. 13). The 1930s and 40s is likely when ethnic groups who spoke different languages formed a reorganized society (ISA, n.d., “Marubo – History of contact”). According to oral histories, the groups which make up the modern Marúbo spoke three different languages, but now the language that they speak is that of Shaináwavo (Chaináwavo) (Ruedas, 2001, pp. 711). Shaináwavo is, in fact, one of their former matrilineal clans (ISA, n.d., “Marubo – Name and language”).

After 1945, the Marúbo sought contact with non-indigenous peoples for trade, and there had been an increase in non-indigenous presence due to logging in the area. The New Tribes of Brazil Mission established itself on the Javari during this period (ISA, n.d., “Marubo – History of contact”). FUNAI also established a post in the Javari basin in 1969 (Ruedas, 2001, pp. 384). In 1992, the Marúbo, along with other indigenous groups of the Javari basin, created the CIVAJA (Conselho Indígena do Vale do Javari Civaja), a multi-ethnic indigenous political group. In 1998, the Javari Basin Indigenous Area was established (Ruedas, 2001, pp. 13).

3 Language Family

3.1 Description of Panoan Family

The Panoan languages, to which Marúbo belongs, are distributed through Eastern Peru, Western Brazil, and Northern Bolivia. There are 32 known languages, of which 18 are still spoken. 6 of these 18 are not currently spoken as every day languages. (Fleck, 2013, 9). There are between 40 000 to 50 000 speakers, making it the fifth largest South American language family (behind Arawakan, Cariban, Tupian, and Jê). While Shipibo-Konibo has 30 000 – 40 000 speakers, most remaining Panoan languages are severely endangered and have “incomplete[e] description” (Fleck, 2013, pp. 9). However, Marúbo, along with other Panoan languages with more than 1000 speakers (Matses, Kashinawa of the Ibaçu river, Yaminawa, Kashibo, Chakobo) are “viable speech communities” (Fleck, 2013, pp. 9). In addition to the known languages, there are uncontacted groups in Western Brazil and Eastern Peru that are likely Panoan (Fleck 2013, pp. 10).

Panoan languages share features common to many Amazonian languages, such as ergativity, evidentiality, and the high central vowel, /i/ (Fleck, 2013, pp. 24). They are highly synthetic, using verbal suffixes to “express ... causation, associated motion, direction, evidentiality, aspect, plurality, and repetition” (Fleck 2013, pp. 33). Fleck has provided a classification of all known Panoan languages, though he is careful to note that it is *not* a genetic classification, done through reconstruction of proto-Panoan, as the data currently available is not sufficient. Rather, it is “classification of relative similarity” (Fleck, 2013, pp. 10).

3.2 Linguistics literature on the language

No description is available on Marúbo until the late 20th century, likely because the group was so isolated. The New Tribes mission worked with the Marúbo, however, according to Fleck (2013), they “produced mostly readers, and the only linguistic descriptions available ... were never published” (Kennell, 1976, 1978, as cited by Fleck, pp. 39). These works by Kennell were descriptions of phonology and grammar (Glottolog, n.d., “Language: Marúbo”).

Two anthropologists, Julio Cezar Melatti and Delvair Montagner, undertook significant research amongst the Marúbo beginning in the 1970s. They have published extensively both together and separately, describing the social structure of the Marúbo (Melatti, 1977, 1983, their settlement patterns (Melatti, 1977, Montagner and Melatti, 1986) (Ruedas, 2001, pp. 18). They have also written about medicine rituals and eating habits, among other subjects (Glottolog, n.d., “Language: Marúbo”).

Javier Ruedas has continued ethnographic work amongst the Marúbo, having written his doctoral thesis about the political system of the Marúbo (Ruedas, 2001). He had also undertaken a language documentation project (see below).

Much of the linguistic research on Marúbo has been done by Raquel Costa. Her master’s thesis (1992), focused on case marking and stress patterns [“padrões rítmicos”]. Her doctoral thesis (2000) was on non-linear phonology of Marúbo, and she has additionally written papers on specific aspects of the language, such as ergativity (1998) and possession (2005). Other linguists have also written on Marúbo, as well, often comparing its aspects to other Panoan, or Brazilian languages.

For example, Peixoto (2011) compared pronominals in Marúbo with that of Matsés, Shipibo-Konibo, and Kaxinawá. Soares (1996, 1997) has written about the syntax and phonology of Brazilian languages, using Marúbo as an example.

4 Documentation Projects

While there has not been a large-scale, funded language documentation project on Marúbo, Javier Ruedas had undertaken a documentation and archiving project in 2009. His documentation was specifically on specialized discourse genres such as “ceremonial dialogues, shamanic songs, and sung myths called *saiti*”. They are “performed using a specialized register called *Asãkiki*, which include distinct lexical items, grammatical constructions, and metaphoric double meanings” (Ruedas 2010, para. 1). He conducted fieldwork in 2009, and was able to record ceremonies and digitize transcripts of *saiti*, and return them to the Marúbo (Ruedas 2010). On his website, he has written that there is still much to be done, and that he hopes to continue the work, but it is unclear whether that has occurred (Ruedas 2010, para. 9)

5 Linguistic aspects of the language

5.1 Phonology

The phonemic inventory of Marúbo consonants and vowels are presented in the tables below.

Consonants	Labial	Alveolar	Alveo-palatal	Palatal	Velar
Stop	p	t			k
Nasal	m	n			
Fricative	v	s	ʃ		
Affricate		tʃ	tʃ		
Tap		r			
Approximant	w			j	

Modified from Costa, 1998, pp. 95.

Vowels	Front	Central	Back
High	i	ɨ	u
Low		a	

Modified from Costa, 1998, pp. 95.

There are, of course, other sounds that exist in Marúbo, that are allophones of the phonemes shown here.

5.2 Morphology, Syntax, and Semantics

5.2.1 Plurals

Marúbo has two collective morpheme, rather than true plural markers. The first, /-rasin/, is a suffix that attaches onto nouns. It is also part of the 3rd person plural pronoun (*arasin*) (Peixoto, 2011, pp. 291).

(1) a'invu-rasin

woman-collective

“women” or “group of women” [*mulherada* in the original Portuguese translation]

Data from Peixoto, 2011, pp. 291

In the example above, we can observe that adding the collective suffix to the count noun *a'invu* creates the meaning of a “group of women,” as opposed to just “many women”. Peixoto (2011) notes that /-rasin/ serves to encode the notion of number onto the NP in Marúbo (pp. 291).

From the data available, it is not clear whether plural sense can be obtained without any marking.

(2) 'takari 'takari-n 'wakapaja-∅ 'a-ka

chicken chicken-ERG water-ABS AUX(T)-PRES/IM.PAST(=drink)

‘The chicken(s) is/are drinking water.’

Data from Costa, 1998, pp. 56

In example (2), *'takari* is unmarked for number and it appears to be ambiguous whether there are many chickens or just one chicken. However, other unmarked nouns in the same paper are all translated as unambiguously singular (Costa 1998).

There was unfortunately no data available that indicated whether /-rasin/ could attach to a mass noun.

The second collective morpheme, /-vu/, “indicates indefinite plural or generalization of a class or group of elements defined as a set” (as an example, *yuinivu*, meaning “all the animals”) (Costa, 1998, pp. 59). The morpheme can also attach to verbs (see example (3) below), but is in complementary distribution with the third person plural pronominal clitic (Peixoto, 2011, 291) (see 5.2.4 for more information about the pronominal clitic.)

- (3) a'invu-rasin aʃka-si ku'ka iki-vu
 woman-collective all-mood sing aux.-collective
 “the group of women are singing”

Modified from Peixoto, 2011, pp. 293

5.2.2 Quantifiers

The materials consulted did not yield specific discussion about quantifiers, however, as follows are the Marúbo words for ‘much’ and ‘not much’:

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| (4) 'antsa-ka | (5) 'antsa-ma |
| muito-PERM | muito-NEG |
| ‘muito’ | ‘pouco’ |
| ‘much’ | ‘not much’ |

Data from Costa 2002, pp. 20

The only example of a quantifier within a sentence in the materials consulted is:

- (6) 'vaki ra'viin'takima 'pustu 'anika- 'tun-nan 'atsa-∅ antsaka
 child three belly big-ERG-FOC cassava-ERG a lot
 pi-a
 eat-PRES/IM.PAST

'The three big belly boys have eaten a lot of cassava.'

Data from Costa 1998, pp. 58

The translation does not indicate that the sentence is describing many cassava roots, so cassava is a notional mass noun here. The quantifier '*antsaka*' is then quantifying the volume of cassava. It remains to be seen whether '*antsaka*' could be used with notional count nouns to yield an interpretation of number. It also remains to be seen which types of nouns that the quantifier '*antsa-ma*' can combine with.

5.2.3 Noun morphology

In Marúbo, nouns are morphologically rich. From the materials available, we know that Marúbo nouns are able to bear ergative case marking, pronominal clitics, possessive marking (see 5.2.9), collective marking (see 5.2.1), and focus marking (Costa, 2002, pp.3).

Marúbo has a split ergative system, meaning that it has two systems of case-marking. The first is ergative-absolutive. To illustrate, below are two examples. The first is an intransitive sentence, and the second is transitive.

(7) 'vaki-∅ nu'ku-ai
child-ABS arrive-PRES/IM.PAST
'The boy has arrived.'

(8) 'vaki-n 'isu-∅ 'yamama-'katsai
child-ERG monkey-ABS kill-FUT
'The boy will kill the monkey.'

Data from Costa, 1998, pp. 54

In (7), S, the subject of intransitive sentence is not marked. It is treated the same as O, the direct object of the transitive sentence in (8). Only A, the subject of the transitive sentence is marked with ergative case.

Ergative case markings vary based on the amount of syllables and the lexical stress of the noun being marked (Costa, 1998, pp. 54-58). Pronouns also carry ergative marking (Costa, 1998, pp. 59).

Marúbo also has a split-S system of pronominal clitics that “mark the Agent or the Experiencer of transitive verbs and the Agent of intransitive active verbs” (Costa 1998, pp. 67). In other words, the pronominal corefers to A or S_A, and marks the person and number of the subject. S_O and O are not marked. S is split into S_A and S_O based on the semantic properties of the verb.

For example:

- (9) puya-∅ 'aska'tai an-pa'ki-rivi
 PN-ABS onpurpose 3S.-SG-fall-EMPH
 ‘Puya has fallen on purpose’

Data from Costa, 1998, pp 69

an is the third person singular pronominal clitic. It marks person and number of the noun, *Puya*. Here, the pronominal clitic attaches to the left of the verb, but in other cases can attach to the left of O. The clitic attaches to the left of either the verb or O due to phonological reasons (Costa, 1998, 71). The clitics are also interchangeable with free (pro)-nominals, but both can also occur together (as seen in the example above).

This “split-S” system co-occurs with the ergative system of case marking (Costa, 1998, pp. 71).

5.2.4 Numerals

The only example of a numeral within the materials consulted is:

- (10) 'vaki ra'vɪɪn'takɪma 'pustu 'anika- 'tun-nan 'atsa-∅ antsaka
 child three belly big-ERG-FOC cassava-ERG a lot
 pi-a
 eat-PRES/IM.PAST
 ‘The three big belly boys have eaten a lot of cassava.’

Data from Costa 1998, pp. 58

The numeral combines directly with the count noun *'vaki*, which does not show plural morphology, though it is a count noun. It is not clear whether the numeral would combine directly with mass nouns without a measure phrase, or what the interpretation would be.

5.2.5 Small lexicon

Note: Wordlists were not available, so these nouns are taken mostly from glosses of sample sentences.

Category	English	Portuguese	Marúbo
Notional count nouns	child	criança	'vaki ¹
	man	homem	vini ² 'yura ³ (this is sometimes translated as person, sometimes as man)
	woman	mulher	a'invu
	monkey	macaco	'isu ⁴
	snake	cobra	'runu ⁵
	jaguar	onça	ka'man ⁶
	bowl	tigela	man'sin ⁷
	canoe	canoa	'nunti ⁸
	pineapple	abacaxi	kan'ka ⁹
Notional mass nouns	cooked banana porridge	mingau [just porridge, not the specific type of porridge meant by	manimotsá ¹⁰

¹ Costa 2002, pp. 19

² Costa 2002, pp. 19

³ Costa 1998, pp. 89

⁴ Costa 1998, pp. 54

⁵ Costa 1998, pp. 83

⁶ Costa 1998, pp. 58

⁷ Costa 1998, pp. 80

⁸ Costa 1998, pp. 85

⁹ Costa 2002, pp. 19

¹⁰ Ruedas 2001, pp. 19

		the Marúbo]	
	water	água	'wakaɓaɓa ¹¹
	rain	chuva	u'i ¹²
	meat	carne	'nami ¹³

5.2.6 Word Order

The basic word order is SOV.

For example, we can observe the following basic transitive sentence:

(11) yur'a-n a'invu-∅ 'riɓki-ai
 man-ERG woman-ABS hit-PRES/IM.PAST

"The man has hit the woman."

Data from Costa, 1998, pp. 88

However, Costa (1998), furnishes data showing that word order can be changed so as to focus on O rather than A. Since the ergative marking is maintained, it is possible to switch the word order (pp. 87-88).

For example:

(12) a'invu-∅ 'yur'a-n 'riɓki-ai
 woman-ABS man-ERG hit-PRES/IM.PAST

"The woman, the man has hit." / "The woman was hit by the man"

Data from Costa 1998, pp. 88

Here, we are focusing on O, the woman, by changing the word order, creating a passive-like construction. The basic word order is shifted, but the sentence is still grammatical, due to the case markings.

¹¹ Costa 1998, pp. 56

¹² Costa 1998, pp. 63

¹³ Costa 1998, pp. 78

5.2.7 Gender

Gender is not encoded in pronouns in Marúbo (Peixoto, 2011, pp. 302). Nouns, including semantically gendered nouns, such as the word for “woman”, do not appear to make adjectives, demonstratives, or verbs mark gender.

5.2.8 Adjectives

There is little description of adjectives in the available materials on Marúbo. However, from the data available, it appears that adjectives do not bear morphology agreeing in gender or number with the noun that it modifies.

For example, we see the same adjective in two different positions (predicative and attributive):

- (13) *mia-∅ ifna-ka*
you-ABS bad-PRES-PERM
'You are bad.'

Data from Costa 1998, pp. 68.

- (14) *fɪni-witsa ifna*
old-someone bad
'bad old man'

Modified from Costa 1998, pp. 83

While *ifna* seems to behave as a verb in a., carrying verbal TAM markers, in neither example does the adjective appear to change based on gender or number of the noun.

5.2.9 Possessives

Possessives can be marked in two ways: (1) by the genitive-possessive case marker /-N/ and word order (see (15) for an example); and (2) by postposition *'na* (see (16) for an example)

(15) i'su-N 'ina

'isu-GEN tail

'monkey's tail' ['isu means 'monkey']

(Data from Costa 2002, pp. 8)

The word order “express[es] a “possessor-possessed relation”. Genitive case marking also encodes possession (Costa 2000, pp. 7).

(16) na-'kaNti-∅=na

'tʃanu 'na

DEM-bow-ABS-FOCUS

proper noun of

'This bow is of 'tʃanu”

(Data from Costa 2002, pp. 7)

We can observe here that it is 'na, which creates the possessive relationship between the bow and 'tʃanu.

5.2.10 Agreement

As mentioned previously, adjectives do not seem to agree in gender, number, or person with the nouns that they modify. Gender is not encoded in pronouns and does not seem to trigger agreement.

The only structure that looks like agreement that occurs in Marúbo is that of pronominal clitics. As mentioned previously, pronominal clitics attach to the verb or to O, and co-refer with either the S (in intransitive sentences) or the A (in transitive sentences).

For example:

(17) 'arasini-

'ni

atu

juʃini-a'ka

3p.collective-ERG

bush-locative

3p.PL

bug-take

'They catch bug in the bush' ['Eles pegam bicho no mato.']

Data from Peixoto, 2011, pp. 294

As we can see in (17), *atu*, the pronominal clitic agrees in person and in number with the free pronominal 'arasini. However, despite the fact that this system looks like agreement, it is not. According to Costa (1998), this does not “constitut[e]

an agreement system” (pp. 70), due to the fact that the clitics are not obligatory and are interchangeable with free (pro)nominals (pp. 71).

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