

# On the Status of Afro-Bolivian Spanish Features: Decreolization or Vernacular Universals?

Sandro Sessarego  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Afro-Bolivian Spanish (ABS) is an Afro-Hispanic vernacular spoken in the region of Los Yungas, Department of La Paz, Bolivia. This language has only been recently brought to the attention of linguists by John Lipski (2006a,b, 2008), who provided a detailed description of its grammatical features. The exact origin of ABS is not yet completely clear. Lipski suggests that the traditional ABS might have been the result of the nativization of an earlier pidgin and adds that “in absence of any other viable scenario, *Afro-Yungueño Spanish must be viewed as the descendant of a colonial Afro-Hispanic pidgin* (2008:186)”. In fact, by looking at the “radically simplified VP and NP of the basilectal Afro-Yungueño dialect”, Lipski (2006a:37) hypothesizes a possible creole origin for this vernacular, which after undergoing a process of decreolization due to contact, would now be in one of its final stages, closer to more prestigious regional Bolivian Spanish. Such a process would have taken place during the last 50-60 years, immediately after the Land Reform of 1952<sup>2</sup> which freed Afro-Bolivians from forced peonage. Nevertheless, the author recognizes the lack of reliable sociodemographic data; for this reason, he does not discard the hypothesis of a stable but not creolized variety of Spanish, which co-existed with highland Bolivian Spanish since its inception.

In this paper, the available sociohistorical and linguistic evidence is examined. An alternative explanation will be explored to determine whether the grammatical elements reported by Lipski could be due to different phenomena, not necessarily linked to a previous Afro-Hispanic pidgin stage. In particular, the presence of these features in ABS is analyzed as the result of intermediate and advanced second language acquisition processes and only partial restructuring, which left room in this dialect for much of the morpho-syntactic patterns encountered in Spanish. The development and crystallization of this contact variety took place in isolated rural communities, unaffected by standardization processes imposed by urban society and linguistic norm. The outcome is a vernacular, understandable by the monolingual standard Spanish speaker, which carries the undeniable trace of second language learners’ strategies. The model here proposed for ABS not only considers the importance of social factors in patterning the presence of certain linguistic elements into this dialect; it also attempts to explain why certain constructions might have emerged as a result of universal processing constraints on learnability imposed by the human mind. This work, in line with studies on Afro-Hispanic contact varieties in the Venezuelan region (Díaz-Campos & Clements 2005, 2008), indicates that also in the Bolivian area, the sociohistorical conditions were not favorable for a creole language to develop.

The present research deals with concepts which have been largely addressed by the linguistic literature on creole formation, second language acquisition and sociolinguistics. Section 2 presents the

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<sup>2</sup> Slavery was formally abolished in Bolivia in 1826, reestablished in 1830, and abolished again in 1831. However, until 1952, when the Land Reform took place, Afro-Bolivians have been employed in Los Yungas as peons in *haciendas* (Crespo 1976), where they were forced to work three days a week for the landowner.

theoretical framework on which the following discussion will be based. Section 3 is a description of the ABS ‘creole-like’ features. Section 4 provides a socio-historical overview of African slavery in Bolivia. Finally, section 5 concludes.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### *2.1. What is a creole?*

Before proceeding further with this study, I would like to point out that there is not common consensus among linguists on what a ‘creole language’ is and on how the words ‘creole’ or ‘creoleness’ should be used. In fact, some proposals describe these varieties entirely in term of their cultural and social history (Mufwene 1997; DeGraff 2005). Other accounts focus on their stages of formation, indicating that creoles are the byproduct of a break in transmission of a native language to following generations (Thomson and Kaufman 1988), or highlighting that these vernaculars should be seen as nativized forms of early pidgins (Romaine 1988; Muhlhausler 1997). Some definitions attempt to classify creole languages according to their structural features (Bickerton 1981; Seuren and Wekker 1986; McWhorter 1998). Also, comparative cross-linguistic analyses based on presence/absence of linguistic features and relative distance from the lexifier languages gave birth to new terms such as ‘semi-creoles’ (Schneider 1990; Holms 1992), ‘intermediate creoles’ (Winford 2000) and ‘partially restructured languages’ (Holms 2004), varieties which would be placed somewhere on a linguistic continuum going from ‘radical creoles’ to their lexifiers.

Due to this wide range of definitions, I will have to put aside terminological debates and adopt for convenience Lipski’s (2008) structural account. In fact, even though the author does not deny the importance of social, historical and cultural factors in creating and shaping creole languages, he provides a feature-based account (reported in section 3) to determine where to place ABS with respect to other contact varieties and speculates on whether ABS might have developed from a colonial Afro-Hispanic pidgin.

As I said, I would like to propose a different hypothesis. In my view, ABS should be seen as the result of imperfect processes of second language acquisition which were able to crystallize in an environment far from the pressure posed by the linguistic norm and language standardization. In order to back this claim, before providing the sociohistorical and linguistic evidence in support of my point, I will briefly introduce Processability Theory (Pienemann 1998, 2000), the Interlanguage Hypothesis (Plag 2008a,b, 2009a,b) and the theory of Vernacular Universals (Chambers 2001, 2003), three frameworks which will establish the theoretical basis on which to build our following discussion.

### *2.2. Processability Theory and the Interlanguage Hypothesis*

Processability Theory (Pienemann 1998, 2000) is a second language acquisition (SLA) theory that strives to explain one of the fundamental puzzles in SLA research: why is there a well-defined universal path in the development of second languages? In order to answer this question, the theory recurs to psycholinguistic models of speech production as those developed by Levelt (1989) and Kempen & Hoenkamp (1987). The central claim of Processability Theory is that the processing procedures follow a hierarchy of activations in language generation, which, in turn, drives their sequence of acquisition. Pienemann (2000) presents the processing hierarchy with data from English. In fact, it has been observed that second language learners of English universally follow the developmental path illustrated in Figure 1. They begin with one-word utterances to gradually develop more complex constructions in a hierarchical order. Eventually, some of the most advanced learners achieve a target-like proficiency and become able to produce very complex structure, like the canceling of inversion in subordinate interrogative clauses.

**Figure 1. Developmental stages in English interlanguage syntax (Pienemann 2000)**

Development	Structure	Example
Initial state	One-word utterance	<i>Ball</i>
↓	Canonical Word order	<i>Bon kick ball (SVO)</i>
	Neg + V	<i>He no like coffee</i>
	Adverb fronting	<i>Then Bob kick ball</i>
	Topicalization	<i>That I didn't like</i>
	Do-Fronting	<i>Do you like it?</i>
	Yes-No Inversion	<i>Has he seen you?</i>
	Copula Inversion	<i>Where is John?</i>
	Particle Verbs	<i>Take the hat off</i>
	Do/Aux 2nd	<i>Why did he sell that car?</i>
		<i>Where has he gone?</i>
	Target	Cancel Inversion

Recently, Plag (2008a,b; 2009a,b) has incorporated Processability Theory to his Interlanguage Hypothesis of creole formation. According to the Interlanguage Hypothesis, creoles should be seen as conventionalized interlanguages of an early stage. Plag tries to account for many aspects of creole grammar: loss of inflectional morphology, the allegedly unmarked nature of many syntactic structures across creoles, the make-up of creole phonological inventories -most prominently the conflation of phonological categories and the emergence of unmarked structure- and several cases of word-formation, such as cases of circumlocutions, which are also typical of interlanguages. Our goal is not so broad. This study will be focused on providing an account for the features classified by Lipski as potential indicators of creolization. In the rest of this article I will try to convince the reader that the “creole-like” features reported for ABS are not exclusive for an interlanguage of an early stage; rather, they are commonly encountered in intermediate and advanced interlanguages and sometimes also in non-standard Spanish and Portuguese dialects.

### 2.3. Vernacular Universals

A comprehensive account of the ABS creole-like features should not only be limited to the SLA/processing aspects of their development; for this reason, I will also provide a sociolinguistic framework able to explain why these features crystallized and survived in ABS in the way we know them today. A theoretical model, which I think can complement my hypothesis on the nature of these features, is the framework provided by Chambers’ (2001; 2003) Vernacular Universals. In Chambers’ view, a small number of phonological and grammatical processes seem to recur in vernaculars wherever they are spoken. Chambers (2003: 266-70) characterized these recurring natural processes as “vernacular roots”.

The theory of Vernacular Universals rests squarely on the assumption that basilectal forms are in some demonstrable sense more ‘natural’ than standard forms (see also Weiss 2001). Chambers takes a radical position on this issue and claims that they are the natural outgrowths of the language faculty, that is, the species-specific bioprogram (or UG) that allows normal human beings to become *homo loquens* (Chambers 2004). I do not believe that these vernacular roots should be considered as the principles of UG. The way in which Chambers formulates his claim is reminiscent of Bickerton’s (1981) Bioprogram Hypothesis, which has long been proven to provide a misleading picture of pidgins and creoles genesis. On the other hand, I believe that Chambers’ observation that pidgins, creoles and second language varieties tend to share some common features might be reinterpreted from a SLA perspective by simply saying that constructions requiring less processing are mastered before constructions requiring more processing, so that elements which are hard to process will not be encountered in the initial stages of these developing grammars.

Demonstrating naturalness seems relatively easy for phonological processes compared to grammatical ones. For example, consonant cluster simplification (CC) represents economies in articulatory (motor) gestures that are quantifiable (Chambers 2003: 258-259). Principles that might underlie natural grammatical processes are never so concrete, and I think they could –and should– be questioned. For example, some doubts might be cast on whether Chamber’s universal “double

negation in English” is really more natural than single negation (cf. Chamber 2003: 129). It is true that it seems to appear in the majority of English vernaculars, but to claim that it represents a more natural form, some additional linguistic evidence should be provided, e.g. analyzing whether it is really easier to process or easier to acquire in L2.

In the next section, I will present and analyze the “creole-like” elements found in ABS in order to determine whether they should be viewed as traces of a pidgin nativization or could simply be ascribed to intermediate and advanced second language strategies that fossilized in a language, which, until recently, was not affected by the standardization pressure imposed by society.

### 3. Afro-Bolivian Spanish “creole-like” features

After extensive fieldwork in the Afro-Bolivian communities, Lipski was able to identify the most conservative features characterizing the traditional dialect. His work must not have been easy, on the grounds that, as he says, “full active competence [in the traditional vernacular] is probably limited to at most a few hundreds [elderly] individuals, possibly even fewer” (2007:178). In fact, as a consequence of the recent process of linguistic approximation to Spanish, many of the characteristic features of this language are partially or totally absent from the speech of the youngest generations. Table 1 presents some of the most traditional ABS features, those selected by Lipski (2008) as potentially salient for the creole hypothesis.

**Table 1. Examples of Afro-Bolivian traditional features, salient for the creole hypothesis**

Phenomenon	Example
Elimination of definite articles in subject position	<i>Ø perro ta flojo [los perros están flojos]`dogs are worthless’; Ø patrón huasquiaba Ø mujé [los patrones huasqueaban a las mujeres]`the landowners beat the women’;</i>
Use of the Spanish 3 <sup>rd</sup> person singular as invariant verb form for all persons and numbers	<i>Nojotro tiene [nosotros tenemos]`jrutita`we have fruit’; yo no conoció hacienda [yo no conocí hacienda]`I never knew the haciendas’; yo miró jay [yo miré]`I saw [it]’</i>
Constructions based on invariant <i>ta(ba)</i> + INFINITIVE instead of conjugated verbs	<i>¿Quién ta comprá? [¿quién está comprando?]`who is buying [coca]?’</i>
Constructions based on invariant <i>ya</i> + INFINITIVE instead of conjugated verbs	<i>Furlano ya murí [murió]`so and so just died’ Ya viní [vino] temprano tia Francisca`Francisca came early’</i>
Constructions based on invariant <i>va</i> + INFINITIVE instead of conjugated verbs	<i>Nojotro va trabajá [nosotros vamos a trabajar]`We are going to work’ Yo va recogé mi lena [Yo Voy a recoger mi lena]`I’m going to get my firewood’</i>
Non-inverted questions	<i>¿Cuánto hijo pue oté tiene? [¿cuántos hijos tiene usted?]`How many children do you have?’; ¿ande pue oté viví? [¿dónde vive usted?]`where do you live?’</i>
Suspension of grammatical gender in nouns and adjectives	<i>Tudu un [toda una] semana`a whole week’; nuestro cultura antiguo [nuestra cultura antigua]`our traditional culture’</i>
Use of <i>nuay</i> [Spanish <i>no hay</i> `there is/are not’] and <i>nuabía</i> [Spanish <i>no había</i> `there was/were not’] instead of <i>no tener</i> `to not have’	<i>Yo nuay cajué [no tengo café]`I don’t have any coffee’; Ele nuay ningún marido nada [ella no tiene ningún marido]`she does not have any husband at all’</i>
Use of <i>tener</i> `to have’ instead of <i>haber</i> `to exist’ to express existence	<i>Tiene un negrita qui taba aquí [había una mujer negra que estaba aquí]`there was a black woman who lived here’; Tenía un señora, un negra [había una señora, una negra]`there was a woman, a black woman’</i>
Occasionally, double negation with <i>nada</i> `nothing’	<i>Ningun misa nada [ninguna misa (para nada)]`no mass at all’ Yo no va i nada [yo no voy a ir (para nada)]`I am not going at all’</i>

To determine the status of Yungueño Spanish, in Table 2, Lipski compares the same Afro-Bolivian traditional features with those encountered in other Spanish/Portuguese ‘creoles’ (2008:184).

**Table 2. Key structural features of Yungueño Spanish and selected creole languages**

	Yungueño	Helvecia	Palenquero	Papiamentu	Chabacano	Gulf of Guinea	Cape Verde
<b>Null def. art.</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Invariant verb form for person and number</b>	Yes	Some	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>TMA particles</b>	Maybe	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Non-inverted questions</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Pluralizing particle/3 pl.</b>	No	No	<i>Ma</i>	3 pl. ( <i>nan</i> )	<i>Mga</i>	Some 3 pl.	No
<b>No gender concord in NPs</b>	Yes	Some	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Subject pronouns as object</b>	No (except <i>yo</i> after prep.)	Yes (except 1s.)	Yes (except 1s.)	Yes	No	Some	No
<b>'to have' as existential verb</b>	Some	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, in affirmative	Yes	Yes
<b>Negation</b>	Preposed (occasional double NEG with <i>nada</i> )	Double NEG	Postposed	Preposed	Preposed	Double NEG/postposed	Preposed
<b>NEG derived from no/não</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	<i>Hendeq</i> and <i>no</i>	<i>Na ... f(a)</i>	Yes
<b>Postposed NP as possessive</b>	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
<b>Serial verbs</b>	No	No	No	Some	No	Yes	Few
<b>Predicate clefting</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

Lipski concludes that “at least impressionistically, Afro-Yungueño Spanish is more creole-like than Helvecia (Brazilian) Portuguese dialect. At the same time, Afro-Yungueño Spanish seems less ‘deep’ than the creoles of Palenque (Colombia), São Tomé or the heavily substrate-influenced Chabacano varieties of Philippine Creole Spanish” (2008:183).

I will now proceed with a closer analysis of the Afro-Bolivian features presented in Table 1. Even though Yungueño Spanish seems more ‘creole-like’ than Helvecia, it is worth pointing out that many of the key features mentioned as prototypical of Spanish and Portuguese creoles can often be found in advanced second language varieties and non-standard dialects of Spanish and Portuguese, for which a creole origin is not feasible. Let us have a closer look at the ‘creole-like features’ encountered in Afro-Yungueño.

Null definite article, a feature considered key in the evolution of creoles by some linguists, e.g. Bickerton (1981), can also be encountered in other Spanish/Portuguese dialects, such as Chota Valley Spanish (Lipski 1982) and Brazilian Portuguese (Guy 1981; Munn and Schmitt 2001; Schmitt and Munn 2003; Müller 2003), which could hardly be classified as creoles<sup>3</sup>. According to Bickerton, prototypical creoles have an article system with “a definite article for presupposed-specific NP; an indefinite article for asserted-specific NP; and zero for nonspecific NP” (1981:56). This description does not capture the features of the Afro-Yungueño article system. In this vernacular, in fact, there are three definite articles (*el, la, lu*), agreeing with the noun in gender and number, and two indefinite ones (*un, unos*), agreeing only in number. Their distribution resembles the one of standard Spanish with the exception that bare nouns can take on either plural/singular, specific/non-specific/generic readings, given the proper pragmatic contexts, see Gutiérrez-Rexach and Sessarego (2010) for a detailed account. Such a distribution parallels, for the most part, the one encountered in Brazilian Portuguese (cf. Munn and Schmitt 2001; Müller 2003). Moreover, it is well known that second language speakers, coming from a first language with a different article system, or with no article system at all, can present bare nouns and article mismatches even at intermediate and advanced levels (Sánchez and Giménez 1998, Leonini 2006).

The use of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular as the invariant verb form is notoriously common among L2 speakers of Spanish and in child language (Bybee 1985). It has also been extensively reported for transitional Spanish-English bilinguals throughout the United States (Lipski 1996). Obviously, if corrected through formal instruction, more advanced students tend to present wider conjugation patterns; nevertheless, in the Spanish of Equatorial Guinea, where Spanish is taught at schools and is widely spoken as a second language- frequent gravitation to the third-person singular as the default unmarked verb form is common, despite the fact that Guineans routinely attempt to conjugate verbs correctly (Lipski 1985). Given that the sociohistorical scenario in which Afro-Yungueño emerged has never been characterized by formal education, it is not completely surprising to encounter the presence of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular as the invariant verb form. In addition, it must be said that ABS verb forms clearly inflect for tense and aspect (e.g. *cantó* ‘he sung’ and *cantaba* ‘he was singing’), while more radical creoles tend to employ an invariant verb form for all persons, numbers, tenses, moods and aspects.

The TMA (Time, Mood and Aspect) features claimed for Afro-Bolivian Spanish seems to have been directly derived from Spanish where they are used in the same way. Besides, Lipski acknowledges that “Afro-Bolivian speakers effectively regard the use of *ta + verb* as a performance phenomenon, and indeed a comparison with the rest of the Afro-Yungueño corpus points to phonetic erosion [of the gerundive form] and unguarded speech as the origin of this construction. As such, it cannot be considered an integral part of the verb system of their dialect” (2008: 123). In addition, the analysis of *ta* as a creole preverbal marker should always be considered with caution. Unless we can document for ABS *ta* functions which are significantly divergent from Standard Spanish *está* ‘he/she is’ - and for ABS this is not the case - the creole TMA status of this element can be questioned because of its close relation to aspiration and deletion of syllable-final /s/.

Constructions with *ya* as a perfective particle are ambiguous and not systematic. Lipski could only find few examples. The cases that he provided, reported in Table 1 and here in (1-2), correspond to similar sentences in standard Spanish.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that this is my personal opinion. In the literature, it has also been suggested that Brazilian Portuguese was a creole which decreolized. According to this view, bare plurals in this language would be the direct result of substratal influence (Guy 2004; Lipski 2006b). On the other hand, Naro & Scherre (2000) do not agree with this hypothesis and consider the differences between Brazilian Portuguese and Peninsular Portuguese to be just the result of ‘normal’ -internally motivated- language change (cf. Schwegler 2010:30-31 for an overview of this debate and cf. Baptista & Guéron (2007) for a general overview of bare nouns in creoles). Armin Schwegler (PC) has also pointed out to me that he collected data from the village of El Chota which differ drastically from standard Spanish. In light of this fact, he suggests that the hypothesis of previous creolization for Chota Valley Spanish should not be completely excluded. I do not know the nature of Schwegler’s data and I will not enter in a discussion concerning either the origins of Brazilian Portuguese or those of Chota Valley Spanish. Nevertheless, I remain of the idea that clear sociohistorical and diachronical data should be provided to build a convincing theory of (de)creolization. Basing our hypotheses on data from synchronic black speech may be misleading, as many of the features encountered in these varieties can also be found in L2 varieties and in less-educated, non-standard Spanish dialects.

(1) *Furlano ya muri [murio]*  
 ‘So and so just died’

(2) *Ya veni [vino] temprano tía Francisca*  
 ‘Francisca came early’

Lipski says that these sentences might correspond to an infinitive verb form preceded by a modal particle; however, given the similarities between these constructions and the standard ones and the general tendency to simplify verbal paradigms, these few realizations do not prove the status of *ya* as creole-like TMA markers. Lipski himself points out that the possible use of *va* as future/irrealis particle is somehow dubious (2008: 125-127). Since all dialects of Spanish use periphrastic future constructions based on *ir* ‘go’ + *a* ‘to’ + infinitive with future reference, and the preposition *a* is absorbed phonetically by the 3s. verb *va* (< *va a*), the only feature which distinguishes Afro-Bolivian Spanish from other non-contact varieties is the lack of subject-verb agreement, which is commonly found, as previously shown, in SLA. Finally, after presenting his corpus data on the nature of these particles, Lipski concludes: “There is no evidence that *ta*, *va* and *ya* once had particle status” (Lipski 2008: 127). In light of this claim and the attested data, I think that it would be a mistake to consider TMA particles as a feature of Yungueño Spanish.

Non-inverted questions have also been linked to a possible creole hypothesis. Lipski (2005) maintains that non-inverted questions seem to appear in Spanish varieties in contact with creoles, such as the case of the eastern Guiria Peninsula area in contact with Trinidad creoles; nevertheless, non-inverted questions appear also in non-creolized Caribbean Spanish dialects such as Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Panamanian, Venezuelan and costal Colombian (Díaz-Campos & Clements 2005, 2008); moreover, non-inverted questions seem to appear cross linguistically also in very advanced stages of SLA (Pienemann 1998, 2000), thus indicating that they are not only indicative of radical creoles.

Grammatical gender represents a major challenge in language acquisition (Hawkins 1998; Bruhn de Garavito & While 2000; Franceschina 2005; Leonini 2006); lack of gender agreement is not an exclusive feature of radical creole languages. It can be observed not only in the speech of advanced students learning Spanish, but in the speech of all advanced students learning a L2, especially if coming from a L1 lacking ‘gender’ as a feature (Franceschina 2002). It can also be encountered in the native language of many speakers of contact varieties for which a creole hypothesis is not suitable but a crystallized second language variety seem more plausible, such as Chota Valley Spanish (Lipski 1982).

Moreover, it must be said that Yungueño Spanish does not lack gender agreement. All Yungueño Spanish speakers, even the eldest informants, can clearly distinguish between masculine and feminine nouns. The main distinction between Yungueño Spanish and standard Spanish concerns the DP elements specified for agreement. In fact, while in standard Spanish adjectives, articles, demonstratives and quantifiers all agree in gender with the noun, the operation Agree for this feature is just restricted to definite articles in Yungueño Spanish (Sessarego and Gutiérrez-Rexach 2009 a,b). The limitation of nominal gender agreement to these determiners inherently indicates the presence of the feature ‘gender’ in the dialect. In this respect, Yungueño Spanish diverges quite significantly from the majority of the Romance-based creoles, which are generally supposed to lack gender features.

Distinction between existence and possession is generally maintained between *tener* ‘to have’ and non-auxiliary *haber* ‘to exist’; however, sometimes *nu hay* (Sp. *No hay* ‘there is not’) and *nu había* (< Sp. *No había* ‘there was not’) can be used to express lack of possession:

(3) *Yo nu hay cajúé*  
 ‘I do not have coffee’

The employment of *tener* as existential is only occasional, but may occur:

(4) *En la mesa tiene gallina*  
 ‘On the table there are some chickens’

Lipski suggests that the presence of these forms indicate that in earlier stages the language presented a greater overlap between existential and possessive constructions (2008:181). Confusion between *tener* and *haber* may be indicative of partial-restructuring, however this phenomenon does not seem enough as to claim a creole origin for Yungueño Spanish.

Cases of double negation with *nada* can be encountered, even though they are not very common. Double negation with *nada* can also be heard in other Spanish/Portuguese varieties which seem to be due to recent innovation e.g. Brazilian Portuguese (Schwenter 2005). Moreover, Lipski (2008) points out the presence of such structures also in Puerto Rican Spanish and Venezuelan Spanish (2008:138):

(5) *No es difícil ná*  
 ‘it’s not difficult’ {Puerto Rican Spanish}

Negation derived by *no/não* is present in all Spanish dialects; while the double negation derived by these particles is restricted to a sub-group of them. Afro-Bolivian Spanish does not seem to exhibit double negation based on *no ... no* pattern, e.g. *no me ayuda no* ‘he does not help me at all’. Furthermore, Lipski admits that in his recorded data these cases could rather be of the kind *no me ayuda, no*, with a *no* that serves as an “afterthought”, outside the main clause.

On the other hand, features which are generally assumed to belong to more radical creoles, e.g. postponed NP as possession, serial verbs<sup>4</sup>, and predicate clefting, are completely absent in Afro-Bolivian Spanish.

Summarizing, the features reported in Table 1 and 2 as indicators of previous creolization, only a few can be said to really belong to Yungueño Spanish. Such elements are:

- Presence of bare nouns.
- Use of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verb form for all persons and numbers.
- Non-inverted questions.
- Gender agreement limited to definite articles.
- Some overlap between ‘*tener*’ and ‘*haber*’.
- Some cases of double negation with ‘*nada*’.

In addition, it must be noted that, with exception of these suggestive features, - which however are not necessarily indicative of prior creolization - the majority of the morpho-syntactic patterns encountered in Yungueño Spanish is also found in standard Spanish. If ranking the features found among contact languages in terms of “creoleness” cannot provide us with a precise quantitative result, it can at least give us an idea of where a certain language stands with respect to others. It is clear that Yungueño Spanish is a contact variety presenting several key differences from standard Bolivian Spanish; however, even in its most basilectal variety, this dialect would be perfectly intelligible by any standard Spanish speaker.

The linguistic evidence so far provided does not seem to imply that Yungueño Spanish was once a radical creole derived from an Afro-Hispanic pidgin. However, in order to get a more comprehensive perspective on the origin of this language, in the following section, I will also explore the available sociohistorical data encountered for this Afro-Hispanic variety.

#### 4. A sociohistorical account of slavery in Bolivia

Brockington (2006) divides the black Diaspora to Bolivia in two separate waves. The first one concerns the Africans who arrived in the early times of colonization -during the 16<sup>th</sup> and mid-17<sup>th</sup> centuries (roughly 1530-1650) - with the Spanish settlers. These Africans included both slaves and free men, who served as military personnel or servants in the many campaigns of discovery, pacification

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<sup>4</sup> Note that not all creoles have serial verbs. Serial verbs constructions are encountered in creoles which have usually been highly influenced by the substrate languages. Such structures are not considered as typologically ‘unmarked’, therefore, only if the substrate had it they might have appeared in the creole (See Bruyn 1996 for a more detailed account on this issue).



and settlement<sup>5</sup>. They came mainly from Spain and Latin American territories already colonized and presumably could speak good approximations of Spanish.

Brockington claims that:

“The African slaves and people of African descent were active participants –voluntary or otherwise – in a militaristic, conquering/pacifying, horse-and-gun culture here, as elsewhere in the Spanish Americas at that time. I am convinced that some of them remained [...] as, among other things, slave and free cowboys and ranch hands” (2006:130).

Over time the situation changed. Brockington (2006) suggests that probably those Africans already present in the territory, around the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century formed unions with more recently arrived slaves. The new comers were Africans brought to the colony –by legal means or through smuggling– to substitute the by then reduced Indian workforce available. This was the second wave of the African Diaspora in Bolivia, which would last for almost two centuries, whose members were mainly employed as domestic servants or farmers, with a small number of them used in the mining industry.

#### 4.1. First wave: 16<sup>th</sup> to mid-17<sup>th</sup> century

Bowser (1974) indicates that Africans played a very significant role in the conquest and settlement of the Andean region. Soon after the discovery of Tumbes, Pizarro went back to Spain to enlist additional support for the military expedition; among other things, he was given the right to import 52 African slaves (Mellafe 1984).

For several years during the early times of Bolivian colonization, the Crown granted licenses to trustworthy servants to import black slaves for military purposes and for the building of roads, bridges and public infrastructures. These first blacks to enter the Andean region were not usually shipped directly from Africa, but rather imported from other American colonies or Spain. Only Africans born in the power of Christianity, or who had at least resided with their masters long enough to be baptized, were employed. They had to be docile and obedient; besides, the Spanish Crown and the Roman Catholic Church were committed to Christianizing the New World and were concerned with the introduction into these lands of potential enemies of the Faith. Therefore, as elsewhere in Spanish America (e.g Venezuela, see Díaz-Campos & Clements (2005, 2008)), the Spanish Crown’s monopolization of the slave trading played an important role in constraining the introduction of black slaves into the region, thus keeping the Black/White ratio relatively low.

Africans soon came to occupy an intermediate position between Spaniards and Indians. They often were used to help suppress native rebellions. Many priests and *corregidores de indios*, royal officials who exercised judicial and political authority in Indian areas, had one or more black servants helping them carrying out their work activities. Also this factor indirectly suggests a better acquisition of the language spoken by the masters.

Differently from other European powers, the Spanish Crown almost never encouraged the massive importation of slaves to the American colonies, especially to Bolivia. The Spanish Kings had the monopoly on this activity and were very careful about releasing trading licenses and contracts (*asientos*). Spaniards could not risk carrying with them rebellious African slaves, who might have been potentially dangerous for their colonial enterprise in the Andes, especially after the first uprising having already happened in the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, where on December 26, 1522 a group of twenty Wolofs escaped Diego Colon’s sugar refinery and killed several Spaniards (Troconis de Veracochea 1969:20, see Díaz-Campos & Clements (2005, 2008)).

No official Bolivian census reporting the percentages of Blacks, Whites and Indians exists for the 16<sup>th</sup> century; however, from the legal documents dating back to those years we can understand that several serious constraints were posed to the introduction of African population into this region. In fact, many cases of demand by Spanish settlers for African slaves to the Royal Crown were completely or partially denied in Bolivia (Browser 1974).

Blacks were taken to the Andes through several routes. Until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, slaves were imported from Africa and from the Iberian Peninsula. They were shipped to the port of Cartagena

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<sup>5</sup> Browser (1974:3-5) gives an explanation of the role played by blacks in the first military expeditions led by Pizarro and Almagro.

on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. From there, they were taken to the Caribbean side of the Isthmus of Panama; after traveling over land to the Pacific, they were shipped again to the port of Callao, present-day Peru, or to Arica, present-day Chile. In order to enter the Bolivian territory, slaves had to make their final trek, walking from Callao or from Arica across the Andes (Klein 1999, Wolff 1981, Busdiecker 2006). Such a complicated journey implied that the blacks who were taken to the Bolivian region had to embark on a significantly longer trip than those transported to the coastal regions of Latin America. As a consequence, a higher number of casualties occurred during this particular route (Klein 1999; Busdiecker 2006). By 1580, after the colonization of Tucumán and the Spanish expansion into the region of La Plata, a new route became available, linking Bolivia to Buenos Aires, which was the port receiving slaves coming from Africa and Brazil. This new route significantly reduced the sea voyage but implied a longer land journey (Wolff 1981; Busdiecker 2006).

By whatever route, the introduction of Africans into the Andes was not an easy task; such a transportation barrier was inevitably reflected in a higher price for the slaves sold in Bolivia. For this reason, unlike elsewhere in the New World, in the Bolivian region, it is rare to find massive acquisitions of blacks by a single owner (Busdiecker 2006). Legal documents confirm that a record of a purchase of more than ten slaves at a time was very unusual (Lockhart 1994). Those who had significant numbers of slaves acquired them gradually, buying no more than two or three in a single transaction (Bridikhina 1995a). Africans, in fact, were much more expensive than the local native labor force. This factor is crucial to understand the dimensions of the slave trade to Spanish America, and in particular to Bolivia. This territory was further away from Africa than the Caribbean region or the other coastal colonies, and it was reasonably populated by Indians, who could be exploited as well.

From the beginning of its colonization, the economic structure of the Bolivian region was mainly based on the mining industry, and only partially on the production of agricultural products, especially coca, to support the exploitation of mines. Coca leaves, in fact, are traditionally chewed by Bolivian miners to resist fatigue at high altitudes. Spaniards mainly relied on Indian workforce, organized through the *mita*, a system already employed during the Inca Empire by which certain occupations were to be assigned to different native families on the basis of rotation. No one was required to serve again until all the rest had had a turn. It is unlikely that within the *mita* system a creole language spoken by African slaves could have emerged, at least in the mining centers of the colony. Records of this time show that in such areas blacks were never a significant percentage of the population as shown by the figures of Table 3 (Crespo 1977).

**Table 3. Demographic figures of the city of Potosí, as reported by Crespo (1977)**

Year	Afro-descendant population	Total population	Afro-descendant population (percentage)
1611	6,000	160,000	3.74 %
1719	3,206	70,000	4.58 %
1832	1,142	224,000	0.51 %

A similar picture is the one emerging from data concerning agricultural and farming areas. Brockington quotes a letter of Antonio de Barranca, archbishop of the Mizque-Santa Cruz diocese, which reported the population statistics for baptismal of six of the nine parishes under jurisdiction in 1618, with 250 *negros*, 150 *mulatos*<sup>6</sup> and *zambos*<sup>7</sup>, 2,600 *yanaconas*<sup>8</sup>, 8,500 Indians and 1,800 Spaniards, indicating an overall 3.8 percent African descendant population (2006: 176). Moreover, Brockington's records confirm that the cost of buying a slave was much higher in Bolivia than Argentina. For example, a small slave child was sold at a prize of 200-300 pesos in Mizque, while for the same amount of money an adult slave could be bought in Buenos Aires (2006: 144).

In sum, several factors seem to have constrained the presence of the black population in Bolivia during this first wave of importation (mid-16<sup>th</sup> to mid-17<sup>th</sup> century). We saw that the Royal Crown's monopoly limited the introduction of African slaves, the colony was not a plantation society, and Africans were usually employed as soldiers or domestic servants. The geographic location of Bolivia

<sup>6</sup> Offspring of White and Black parents.

<sup>7</sup> Offspring of Black and Indian parents.

<sup>8</sup> Tribute-paying Indians.

imposed higher costs on the introduction of Africans into the country; for this reason the economic activities (mining and agricultural work) were mainly carried out by the native population employed through the *mita* system. Demographic evidence from Potosí and Mizque-Santa Cruz support this scenario indicating that overall the black population was a small minority.

#### 4.2. Second wave: mid-17<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century

As mentioned before, the Spanish Crown's monopoly of slave trading did not favor the introduction of Africans, the transportation impediments, and the availability of native workforce did not incentivize the employment of black workers as their cost was comparatively higher than the one of Indians. These factors persisted and regulated the dimensions of black slavery in Bolivia also during the "second wave" of forced migration, roughly during 1650-1850.

Even after 1650, when the native population had been presumably reduced by European diseases and the harsh working conditions, African importation in Bolivia did not achieve the levels observed elsewhere in the Americas. Nevertheless, slavery persisted for a very long time: it was officially abolished after the independence from Spain (1827), but only in 1952, with the Land Reform, Afro-Bolivians became free people.

The demographic data reporting the number of blacks in Bolivia are scarce at best. Table 4 provides a rough breakdown of the population of Bolivia from 1650 to 1950 as reported by combining the data indicated by several authors treating this topic (Rosemblat 1954; Crespo 1977; Pizarroso Cuenca 1977; Dalence 1975).

**Table 4. Bolivian population 1650-1950<sup>9</sup>**

	Blacks	Mulattos <sup>10</sup>	Mestizos <sup>11</sup>	Whites	Indians	Total
1650	30,000	5,000	15,000	50,000	750,000	850,000
1846	27,941		659,398		701,558	1,388,897
1940	7,800	5,000	870,000		1,595,000	2,900,000
1950	7,000		5,000	907,709	1,660,467	3,019,031

As can be observed, the demographic data presented in Table 4 are not detailed, they cannot provide us with a clear idea of the evolution of the ethnic groups from 1650-1950. The only idea that can be derived from these data is that overall, in Bolivia, blacks seem to have always been a very small minority during the period considered, and they never outnumbered whites. Moreover, it has to be remembered that after the abolition of slavery in 1851, blacks were no longer officially acknowledged, making the reconstruction of their presence on the territory much more complicated. Recent unofficial estimations of the Afro-Bolivian descendants suggest that the total approximate number should be 15,800, close to 0.18 percent of the whole Bolivian population (see Angola-Maconde (MS) reported in Lipski 2008:30-31).

From mid-17<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the Bolivian economy continued to be mainly based on the mining industry and agriculture. As indicated by the data of table 3 for the city of Potosí, the employment of slaves never reached significant numbers in the mining industry. However, in all of Bolivia's urban centers, by the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, blacks could be found working as domestic servants. Due to their high value in this colony, possessing black slaves was a symbol of economic wealth. Bolivian elite members used to demonstrate their social status, by showing in public ceremonies their African slaves (Crespo 1977). While having black domestic servants was a common practice among the highest class, the percentage of Africans in Bolivia never achieved the levels found in other cities elsewhere in Latin America. A clear case of this is shown by the 1778 census from Oruro, reporting 229 black and mulatto residents, just 0.29 percent of the population; all of them were employed as domestic workers (Busdiecker 2006). Another example is the 18th century La Paz census, where only 350 blacks could be found out of a total population of 40,000. These people were not only employed as

<sup>9</sup> Sources: (Rosemblat 1954; Crespo 1977; Pizarroso Cuenca 1977 for years 1650-1846; Dalence 1975 for years 1940-1950)

<sup>10</sup> Offspring of white and black parents.

<sup>11</sup> Offspring of white and Indian parents.

domestic workers, some of them were free artisans working as shoemakers, knitters, tailors and carpenters (Bridikhina 1994; Busdiecker 2006).

Not suitable for the cold mining highland and employed usually as domestic servants in cities, African slaves were also used for agricultural works in several other regions of Bolivia, mainly in Los Yungas, to produce coca, crucial for the supporting the flourishing mining industry in the highland. In the next section, we will focus on the available sociohistorical evidence to determine the feasibility of a creole hypothesis for this region.

#### 4.3. *Los Yungas*

The date of when African labor was introduced to Los Yungas is not clear. In a document dated 1805 by Francisco Xavier de Bergara, overseer of a Yungan *hacienda*, the *Marquesa de Haro* is mentioned, as the first owner having employed Africans in that area for some time (Crespo 1977: 105). This might indicate that black slaves started being employed significantly in the Yungas no earlier than the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Several documents are reported by Portugal Ortiz (1977) concerning the sale, or purchase of one or two slaves at a time by this period. An example is one of an 18 years old girl, who moved to the Yungas in 1773. In this record it is said that she was originally purchased in Potosí and after residing for a while in Oruro, with her last owner, she was now sold to a new master to work in the tropical valleys. Another case in 1761 is the purchase of a married couple from Angola by a priest living in Chulumani (1977: 78). These small transactions, concerning only a couple of slaves at the time, support Bridikhina's (1995) and Lockhart's (1994) view, regarding the high price of slaves as a powerful constraint on the massive employment of black workforce. According to them, those who possessed several slaves often accumulated them during a long period of time.

The late introduction of black workforce in the area is also in line with Portugal Ortiz's view that by the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Yungas was only partially colonized and in the case of the Coroico area, by 1736 the lands were taken for the first time from the "*enemigos ynfieles*", non-Christianized Indians, to be given to Don Buena Aventura Joseph Rodríguez (1976:76).

Crespo (1977) mentions a document written by the Chirca priest in 1802, where he accounted for the percentages of blacks and Indians in 23 local villages. Of these communities, only 4 were employing black workforce, namely: in Guayraoata 15 *negros* or *mulattos* out of 65 workers; in San Agustín 17 out of 28, in Yacata 23 out of 128, and in Collpar 28 out of 142. Crespo also adds that in 1802, Ocabaya, Yungas had a population of 32 blacks, 80 *mestizos*, 94 Spaniards, and 643 Indians. No other data are available for the Yungas until 1883. For this year comprehensive information concerning the demographics of whites, Indians, *mestizos*, and *morenos* (accounting for *negros*, *mulatos* and *zambos* taken together) is disclosed for two haciendas: Pacallo and Mururata, where the highest concentration of *morenos* is found. Pacallo had 67 whites, 63 *mestizos*, 340 Indians and 56 *morenos*; Mururata numbered 55 whites, 183 *mestizos*, 236 Indians and 324 *morenos*. Mentioned without specific ethnic group separation: Chulumani with 14 *morenos* out of a total of 220 inhabitants; Tajmo, Calupre, Chigno, Chimasi, Tolopala, Suquillo with 49 out of 902; Coroico with 113 out of 5,335; Impata with 252 out of 2465; Coripata with 315 out of 3,867; Chupe with 240 out of 1212; and Lanza with 102 out of 8,255. The data provided for these *haciendas* indicate that overall the black population was a very small minority. Even in Pacallo and Mururata, with the highest concentration of African descendents, the ratios *morenos*: whites+mestizos (who supposedly spoke Spanish proficiently being offspring of a Spanish mother or father), are 56:130 for Pacallo and 324:233 for Mururata. *Morenos* outnumbered whites and *mestizos* only in Mururata. However even here, the feasibility of the creole origin at this time does not hold, as probably the majority of the slaves were made up of *criollos*<sup>12</sup> and the *morenos* not only included blacks, but also *mulatos* and *zambos*.

Besides encountering a small Black/White ratio in this region, data by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century indicate clearly that the Yungan *hacienda* was not a plantation society; rather, it consisted of small and medium properties mainly dedicated to the production of coca (Busdiecker 2006). As Busdiecker (2006:38) points out, Soux (1993) describes the organization of labor in the *hacienda* of Dorado Chico

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<sup>12</sup> As the traffic was declared illegal in 1826 but was completely eradicated during Isidoro Belzús' Government (1848-1855), it is likely that importations decreased significantly during such period of time (Portugal Ortiz 1977).

during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. She clearly shows that slaves were not the only source of labor. Soux explains that three kinds of workers were employed: *mingas*, *peones*, and slaves. *Mingas* could be Indians or freed blacks, they were occasional paid laborers. *Peones*, who were also Indians or freed blacks, were employed in times when extra work was needed; they were given the usufruct on a piece of land, which they could work in order to keep the crop for themselves. They were given free days to work the land assigned. Black slaves were employed for everyday work in the *hacienda*, they received some extra provisions as payment as they could not grow their own food. Due to the unhealthy climate, there were many casualties among the *hacienda* workers. For this reason landowners were forced to bring in new workforce. Sometimes slaves but also free Indians, as the price of blacks was high in the colony, the death of a slave represented a big capital loss (Busdiecker 2006).

Moreover, manumission seems to have been quite common. Crespo (1977) suggests that paying for one's freedom must not have been easy due to the reduced salary received by the slaves. However, Portugal Ortiz shows that this was a quite widespread practice, an example he mentions is the one of Juan José Nieto, who in 1775 paid Antonio Sáez de Tejada (Yungan owner) 400 pesos to free him. As Portugal Ortiz recounts, in order to find the money, Nieto asked Don Pedro Oquendo for a loan, promising him that he would have it paid back within 4 years (100 pesos a year).

The most striking story of manumission is probably the one of Rey Bonifaz, a manumitted slave who, at the time of *hacienda*, was symbolically proclaimed king of the Afro-Bolivian population. He was well known for helping other slaves purchase their own freedom. This symbolic black monarchy is still in place and the present King, Julio Pinedo, still lives in Los Yungas, in the community of Mururata. This and other cases of manumission, provided by Portugal Ortiz (1977), suggest that probably the Bolivian *hacienda* was quite a flexible system if compared with other enslaving societies elsewhere in the Americas.

In sum, the historical evidence collected seems to indicate that Los Yungas was settled and colonized only around the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the introduction of black workers happened gradually: small slave transactions and a relatively reduced Blacks/Whites ratio appear to have characterized the African presence in this area. Moreover, the social conditions encountered in Los Yungas seem to have been less harsh than in other areas of Latin America. In fact, the Yungan *hacienda* was not a plantation society, it was rather organized in small farms; blacks were not always slaves, they were also working as *mingas* and *peones*; finally, manumission was fairly common.

In this socio-historical scenario, where blacks presumably had relatively good access to the language spoken by their masters, it is hard to imagine how a full-fledged creole could have developed. On the other hand, it seems more feasible to think of a linguistic variety approximating quite closely to the Spanish language.

## 5. Conclusions

This work provided linguistic and sociohistorical considerations to investigate the possible origins of Afro-Bolivian Spanish. A closer look at the linguistic features proposed as potential indicators of prior creolization (Lipski 2008) indicates that the grammatical elements found in Afro-Bolivian Spanish can be encountered in advanced second languages or non-standard Spanish and Portuguese dialects for which a creole hypothesis is not feasible. Therefore, the presence of such features in Yungueño Spanish does not imply a prior creole stage for this variety.

The sociohistorical data analyzed do not suggest a creole origin either. Several factors have affected the dimension of African slavery in Bolivia and consequently the presence of black population in the territory from the 16<sup>th</sup> century through the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, the Spanish Crown's monopoly of slave trading, the geographic location of Bolivia and the availability of native workforce affected the cost of Africans, raising their price and, as a result, reducing the number and the dimension of slave transactions. The non-massive introduction of black workforce into the territory favored the acquisition of a closer approximation to Spanish by the slaves.

ABS is a contact language presenting several key differences from standard Bolivian Spanish; however, even in its most basilectal variety, this dialect would be perfectly intelligible by any standard Spanish speaker. ABS is therefore a vernacular which derived much of its structure from Spanish, but which, at the same time, carries on morphological simplifications and regularizations. These elements seem to be the remaining traces of crystallized second language strategies, rather than evidence of a more radical creole existence.

The commonalities between traditional ABS and standard Spanish would hardly be the result of a change that took place in the last 50-60 years, especially because the speakers of this vernacular are older people who were at least 30 years old when the Land Reform (1952) occurred. As a consequence, they did not experience any formal education and spent their entire life in these rural Yungas communities, where they continued to carry out agricultural work. Claiming a decreolization, in this specific case, would imply that these people since the Land Reform had such intensive contact with standard Spanish that they learned a very close approximation to it at an already advanced age and, at the same time, abandoned almost completely their creole-like mother tongue. This is not a likely scenario.

The core of Chambers' theory maintains that "the standard dialect differs from other dialects by resisting certain natural tendencies in the grammar and phonology" (Chambers 2003: 254). Chambers pushes the model so far as to say that "the basilectal form is primitive, part of the innate bioprogram, and the standard form is learned, an experiential excrescence on the bioprogram" (2003:286). I am not sure of whether in cases of standard L1 acquisition such a radical view can account for all the features that he indicates as 'vernacular roots' (cf. Chambers 2003:129); however, for the case of contact varieties like ABS, we can say that certain forms are easier to learn/process than others, and unless social pressure rules them out, there should be no reason why they could not normally crystallize becoming part of the core grammar of the language natively acquired by following generations.

Los Yungas provided the perfect place for such a crystallization to take place, as they were isolated, rural valleys far from the social pressure posed by formal education, standardization and the linguistic norm. Note that my claim does not imply that after the Land Reform ABS did not experience a process of approximation to the standard variety. This is something that I am not questioning, and that is clearly visible by looking at the evolution of inflectional morphology across generations (Sessarego 2009a,b ; Sessarego and Gutiérrez-Rexach 2009a,b; Sessarego and Delicado-Cantero 2009; Delicado-Cantero and Sessarego 2009). What appears to be less convincing is that Afro-Bolivian Spanish could have been a radical creole before 1952, which underwent a drastic decreolization since that date.

This recent approximation to standard Bolivian Spanish is further supporting the claim of Vernacular Universals. In fact, when the factors preserving the traditional dialects came to disappear – essentially after 1952–, the pressure, imposed by standardization and the linguistic norm, pushed Afro-Bolivians towards dropping the traditional dialect, in favor of more prestigious Spanish variety. Sociohistorical and linguistic evidence suggests that ABS was not the descendant of an Afro-Hispanic pidgin, it probably was a vernacular which approximated quite closely to Spanish from its inception, and where processes of second language acquisition left an undeniable trace.

The present study not only contributes to shedding light on the origins of ABS, it also helps clarify the controversial puzzle concerning the genesis of Spanish creoles. In line with Díaz-Campos & Clements (2005, 2008) for the Venezuelan area, it shows that the hypothesis of creolization as nativization of an early pidgin in a plantation setting is also not a probable one for the Bolivian highlands.

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