

Habitual Aspect Marking in Palenquero: Variation in Present Temporal Reference

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1. Introduction*

The present study analyzes the variable expression of habitual aspect in the Spanish-lexified creole, Palenquero (or *Lengua*), spoken in the Afro-Hispanic community of San Basilio de Palenque, Colombia. Under investigation is whether tense-aspect expressions in Palenquero function as grammatical markers. Specifically, to what degree is *asé* a habitual ‘marker’? Can the variation be accounted for in a principled way? To tackle these questions, I utilized the variationist method (Labov 1966) to uncover distributional patterns in the variable use of *asé*, as well as typological insights from grammaticalization theory (Bybee, Perkins, & Pagliuca 1994).

These preliminary data reveal that the coding of habitual aspect in Palenquero is not captured by a one-to-one mapping of form and meaning. In fact, not only does *asé* encompass more than habitual aspect, but habitual meaning can be expressed by other means, most often by zero coding. Finally, tense-aspect asymmetries in Palenquero can be neatly accounted for by grammaticalization theory.

The paper is organized as follows: In section 2 below, I provide a sketch of the relevant aspects of tense-aspect marking in creoles, their crosslinguistic development and the role of zero marking. Relevant to this discussion is Bickerton’s Bioprogram Hypothesis (1975, 1981, 1984), which provides testable predictions regarding the use of zero-marked forms in creoles based on the stativity of the predicate. Section 3 offers a general description of habitual aspect, and in particular, of the *asé* marker, as found in prior literature. Section 4 illustrates how the variationist method is a useful approach to the study of tense-aspect expression in creoles. Section 5 presents the data and describes the coding used in this study. Finally, I discuss the results of my analysis and some conclusions drawn from them.

2. Tense-aspect marking in creoles

2.1. Overview of tense and aspect marking

Typologically, tense and aspect, like many grammatical categories, can vary widely in their formal expression. They can be expressed morphologically (inflection), syntactically (pre- or post-verbal markers), lexically (using an adverbial expression), or not at all (contextually) (Bakker, Post, & van de Hoort 1995:247).

Tense-mood-aspect (TMA)¹ expressions play a central role in creole studies. Since they are generally represented by preverbal particles and auxiliaries, and often appear in the same order (cf. Davis 1997:104-105 on Palenquero TMA order), it is generally assumed that TMA forms may be a defining characteristic of creoles. Bakker et al. (1995:253) state that most creole TMA systems “do not conform to the ideal pattern,” but represent a combination of adverbial expressions, auxiliaries and preverbal markers. To put it another way, there is variation. The Palenquero system is a combination of preverbal particles, adverbs and suffixes.

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¹ This paper is primarily concerned with tense-aspect expression. Where authors include mood in their descriptions, I will follow suit by using “TMA”. Otherwise, mood is not central to this discussion.

2.2. *The development of tense-aspect expressions*

Croft has offered the following view on the relationship between the linguistic present and past: “The vast majority of languages do not offer direct historical evidence of diachronic processes. Instead, diachronic processes must be inferred from synchronic states...One can compare language states in their full range of internal variation and, if the data are orderly, rank them in a sequence of gradual linguistic change. The [typologist]...uses the language-internal variation and knowledge of directionality of change in order to extrapolate historical language processes” (2003:272).

In using synchronic variation to infer diachronic processes, one must have some principled basis for doing so. According to Croft (2003:272), the processes associated with grammaticalization offer just such a principled basis. If the generalizations provided by grammaticalization theory² are correct, *and* if the unidirectionality hypothesis is taken seriously, insofar as there have been relatively few counterexamples (see Bybee 2010:112-114, Heine & Kuteva 2002:4), then the typological insights gained from grammaticalization can be used as one *diagnostic tool* to adjudicate between language-internal phenomena and externally-induced ones. With regard to creoles, by “working under the assumption that language-internal developments must accord to the principles of grammaticalization theory,” violations of these principles may be interpreted as caused by external factors (Plag 2002:6).

For instance, repeated observations of tense-aspect marking have revealed striking crosslinguistic tendencies for particular tense and aspect constructions to develop out of particular and specifiable lexical and phrasal antecedents (Pagliuca 1994:ix), and along specific grammaticalization paths (Heine & Kuteva 2002, Bybee et al. 1994, Heine & Reh 1984:269-81, Lehmann 1982/1995:Chapter 3). “For tense-aspect-mood constructions, a major source of the [synchronic] variation is grammaticalization, the diachronic process whereby grammatical constructions gradually develop out of discourse patterns” (Torres Cacoullos 2011:148, cf. Bybee 2006:719-721, Sankoff & Brown 1976). Synchronically, forms may retain residue from earlier meanings while acquiring new ones (Hopper 1991, Bybee & Pagliuca 1987), or one function may be expressed by several forms (Hopper 1991). Since verbal inflection is rarely transferred to creoles, tense-aspect morphemes may emerge through grammaticalization (Arends & Bruyn 1995:116; cf. Plag 2002)³.

It is important to note that the claim here is not that grammaticalization has occurred in Palenquero; but rather, given strong crosslinguistic tendencies for grammatical material to develop via specific grammaticalization paths, then grammaticalization theory can be employed as one heuristic *to test whether the formal expression of tense and aspect in Palenquero aligns with what has been observed in many world languages*. For instance, habitual markers develop from expressions with frequentative meaning or from verbs congruent with habitual meaning. Progressives can generalize into imperfectives or general present tenses (encompassing habitual meaning) (Bybee et al. 1994, Heine & Kuteva 2002). These crosslinguistic trends have been observed to produce synchronic asymmetries in the expression of tense and aspect. In other words, it would not be surprising to see a progressive morpheme in a habitual context if the more specific progressive has begun to generalize along a path toward imperfectivity. However, we should not expect to find a habitual morpheme in progressive contexts *if* language-internal change has occurred, since such reversals are rarely attested (Heine & Kuteva 2002:4) and are seldom uncontroversial (Bybee 2010:112-114).

2.3. *Zero coding in creole tense-aspect expression*

Bickerton (1975:26) claims that the zero-coded, or “stem forms” of creole verbs have “several different and quite distinct functions” from overtly-coded forms, such that zero indicates a meaning separate from that of overtly-coded predicates (but see Sankoff 1990:298-299). Stativity plays a crucial role in the formulation of Bickerton’s hypothesis, yielding four outcomes for three tenses—present, past, and anterior.

² Not all agree that grammaticalization is a “theory” (e.g., Newmeyer 1998:240). For arguments in support of grammaticalization theory and responses to Newmeyer, see Heine & Kuteva (2002:2-5) and Bybee (2010:114).

³ The nature of grammaticalization as it pertains to creoles is controversial. That discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. For fuller discussions, see Baker & Syea (1996), Plag (2002) and Mufwene (2008).

1. For stative predicates, a zero-coded or “stem form”, indicates non-past, or present tense.
2. Overtly-coded stative predicates yield a past tense interpretation.
3. For zero-coded dynamic predicates, there is a past tense interpretation.
4. Finally, for overtly-coded dynamic predicates, there is a past-before-past interpretation, which Bickerton calls *anterior*.

With regard to aspect marking in creoles, Bickerton (1981:87, 88) claims that “*in all such systems*” (emphasis mine), present reference stative predicates are nonpunctual; therefore, by definition they cannot take nonpunctual [progressive-habitual-iterative] marking. On the other hand, “present reference nonstatives are *obligatorily* (emphasis mine) marked with the nonpunctual morpheme.” *Asé* in Palenquero has been classified as a habitual marker (e.g., Patiño Roselli 1983, Schwegler 1992, Schwegler & Green 2007). Bickerton’s Hypothesis (Bickerton 1975, 1981, 1984) thus predicts that *asé* should obligatorily appear with dynamic predicates in present temporal reference but that it should never appear with stative predicates.

According to Bybee, “zero morphemes develop because an opposing morpheme has grammaticalized, leaving zero to indicate its opposition” (Bybee 2010:176, cf. Bybee 1994). It is important to note that the mere absence of morphological coding is not the same as zero marking (Bybee 1994:236-238). As with overt marking, morphemes are “marked” with zero when their meaning is obligatory and predictable, i.e., it is used every time to express a particular meaning (cf. Bybee 1985:27), (as opposed to zeros with open meaning). This happens rather late in the grammaticalization process. Thus, Bickerton’s (1975, 1981, 1984) observation about zeros may represent a late stage in the diachronic development of zero marking (Bybee 1994).

Sankoff’s (1990) examination of texts in Tok Pisin and Sranan adduced evidence for there being no privative opposition in creole TMA systems; rather, zero coding was present in all tenses (cf. Walker 2010:98). Instead of a one-to-one mapping of form and meaning, her data revealed variation such that zero and non-zero forms can cover a range of (overlapping) meanings. She concluded that the patterns found were the result of their unique histories as creoles where certain inflectional morphemes were not transferred from the superstrate and the oppositions had not had enough time to develop gradually.

Studies on Bequia, an English-based creole, (Walker 2010, cf. Walker 2000 and Meyerhoff, Walker, & Daleszyska 2009) addressed the factors contributing to bare verbs in three villages. In one of the villages studied, Hamilton, temporal reference was not significant for zero-coded statives, but zero-coded non-statives were favored in the environment of past temporal reference. Walker (2010) concluded that the last result provides some probabilistic support for Bickerton’s hypothesis, and that the coding of stativity was important in determining that one village was more “creole-like” than the other two.

3. Habitual aspect

3.1. A brief sketch of habitual aspect

Working within a diachronic framework, Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca’s (1994) study of tense, mood and aspect in the world’s languages examines the forms and functions of present temporal reference aspectual categories as well their lexical sources (Chapter 5). The functional domains that typically inhabit the present are: habitual, progressive, gnomic and states. The inherent meaning of habitual is congruent with the imperfectivity of the present tense. Therefore, habitual may be a “default aspectual reading of present tense” (Bybee et al. 1994:151); whereas, in the past tense, the default aspectual reading is perfective.

A habitual situation is defined as one that occurs when “the situation is customary or usual, repeated on different occasions over a period of time” (ibid:316). “[Habituals] describe a situation which is characteristic of an extended period of time, so extended in fact that the situation referred to is viewed, not as an incidental property of the moment but, precisely, as a characteristic feature of a whole period” (Comrie 1976:27-28).

Crosslinguistically, habituals typically occur more often with dynamic verbs than with stative verbs (Bybee et al. 1994:152) due to the inherent semantics of the predicates. They may develop from frequentatives, progressives and semantically-related predicates meaning *live*, *know*, *be accustomed to* (Bybee et al. 1994:141, 160, 166), and they, in turn, can generalize into presents, imperfectives

(ibid:158) and future tense markers (Bybee & Pagliuca 1987:20). In English-based creoles, however, it is common for them to develop from a verb meaning *does* (Holm 1988:158-161).

3.2. *Palenquero—the asé marker*

Habitual aspect in Palenquero is usually described as being marked by the preverbal particle *asé*, as in example (1) below. It is generally assumed to derive from the Spanish etymon *hacer* ('do') (Bickerton & Escalante 1970:258, Lewis 1970:114, Schwegler 1992:224, but see Patiño Roselli 1983:118). Although it is not uncommon in non-creole languages that *do/make* verbs “are grammaticalized to auxiliaries denoting tense or aspect functions” (Heine & Kuteva 2002:119), the fact that Palenquero has a habitual with ‘does’ as its lexical source, as do English-based creoles, is described by Holm as “a puzzling fact” (1988:161). There is not complete consensus, however, about the origin of *asé*⁴ (see Davis 1997:27-30 for discussion). *Sabé* is also said to function as a habitual, although not as frequently as *asé* (Schwegler & Green 2007:279, Schwegler & Morton 2003:145, Schwegler 1996:39). To what extent, then, are these tense-aspect expressions in Palenquero, namely *asé* and zero, *markers*? In other words, is habitual meaning expressed only by *asé*, and is *asé* limited only to the expression of habitual meaning, as illustrated in example (1)?

- (1) Ahora nu. Majaná asé salí ku sei u siete u ocho
 majaná.
 Today NEG. Kid HAB go out with six or seven or eight
 kid.
 ‘Not these days. Kids go out with six or seven or eight kids’. (Female 61, Recording 1, 4:10)

4. The variationist method

As all spoken language, creoles are characterized by inherent variability (Weinreich, Labov & Herzog 1968), as illustrated in the Palenquero examples in (2) below, where habitual present in Palenquero is expressed by preverbal *asé* and zero (2a) as well as preverbal *ta* (2b). Following Schwegler 2011, these preverbal forms will be glossed as follows: *asé* as HAB = Habitual, *a* as PAST, *ta* as PROG = Progressive. (These labels indicate the forms, not necessarily their meanings).

Note that in (2a), where the preceding discourse makes clear that the speaker is referring to a customary situation, (the speaker was asked how a particular local celebration is typically observed), *asé* and zero co-vary in the same habitual context. In (2b), where habitual meaning is indicated by the co-occurring temporal clause beginning with *kuando* ‘when’, we have a third variant, *ta*.

- a. Ma jende asé komblá kotia, y ma jende Ø asé un poko kumina.
 PL people HAB buy ribs and PL people make a little food.
 ‘People buy ribs and the people make a little food.’ (Male 54, Recording 6, 5:32)
- b. Kuando Ø kaminá jende ta saká revóve.
 When walk people PROG take-out revolvers.
 ‘When people go out they pull out pistols.’ (Male 69, Recording 2, 16:00)

The variationist hypothesis is that grammatical “structure can be discerned from the distribution and conditioning of variant forms” (Poplack 2011:212); that is, structure is manifested quantitatively. The **variable context** (or envelope of variation)—the broadest domain in which speakers have a choice between two or more forms—is defined in order to apply the principle of accountable reporting, which requires that we count not only occurrences of the form of interest, such as *asé* in (2a), but also cases where the form could have occurred but did not, as in (2b) (Labov 1972:72).

For example, in their study of past temporal reference in Nigerian Pidgin English, Poplack & Tagliamonte (1996) tested the claim that the preverbal form *bin* marks anterior/remote past. While

⁴ Some scholars disagree with the claim that *asé* derives from Sp. *hacer* (e.g., Patiño Roselli 1983:118, Simarra Reyes & Triviño Doval 2012:62). These scholars claim that *asé* is actually two markers—*a* and *sé*.

multivariate analysis confirmed that the probability that *bin* would be selected in anterior contexts was very high, *bin* itself was extremely rare. “Only once *bin* was situated with respect to the six other variants with which it competes (the cases where it “could have occurred but did not”), and the combined effect of frequency and probability of occurrence taken into account [...] could it be seen to be less likely to occur in this context than [most of the] other variant[s],” thus revealing “that anteriority was overwhelmingly *not* expressed by *bin*” (Poplack 2011:213, emphasis in original). This is the approach that will be adopted here to determine whether the *asé* form is a grammatical *marker*.

There are two envelopes of variation in this study, one exploratory (cf. Poplack & Tagliamonte 1996:78) and the other arrived at inductively. The first variable context for this study is **present temporal reference**, which includes habituais, gnomics (generics), progressives and states. Since all of these aspectual notions interact both diachronically and synchronically (Bybee et al. 1994:Chapter 5), and because it is not always possible for the analyst to identify *a priori* the function of a form since a form may have retained older as well as acquired newer meanings, (Schwenter & Torres Cacoullous 2008:11), *the appropriate envelope of variation here is the sum total of aspectual meanings along the imperfective grammaticalization path* (Schwenter & Torres Cacoullous 2010:24, Bybee et al: Chapter 5). The second envelope of variation is ***asé* vs. zero** with dynamic verbs only, because as we will see, statives do behave differently and a first round of analysis based on the broad present temporal reference variable context revealed that *asé* and zero are equally favored in the environment of habitual.

5. Data and Coding

The data for the current study were taken from sociolinguistic interviews and conversations with 18 speakers during July 2010, May 2011 and May 2012 in San Basilio de Palenque, Colombia.⁵ The recordings were of male and female participants, ranging from young adult to elderly. The tokens were extracted from transcriptions of the audio recordings. All morphological forms in present temporal reference (Total N=1206) were extracted from the data. All tokens were coded for the following factors, which operationalize hypotheses about tense and aspect:

- Aspectual form: *asé*, *a sabé*, *ta*, *a*, zero⁶
- Aspect: Habitual, Frequentative, Progressive, Gnomic, State,⁷
- Stativity: Stative verbs vs. Non-stative verbs
- Lexical Type: The lexical identity of each verb
- Temporal adverbial: *kuando*, *a bese*, *ahora*, Other temporal adverbial, None
- Polarity

5.1. Aspectual form

Since previous empirical research has turned up non-canonical marking in all tenses in creole languages (e.g., Walker 2010, Sankoff 1990), within the broad domain of present temporal reference, I coded the following tense and aspect forms: ***asé*** (habitual), ***a sabé*** (habitual), ***ta*** (progressive or imperfective), ***a*** (preterit or present completive) and **zero**.

These designations are those that have appeared in the literature on Palenquero marking (e.g., Schwegler 2011, Schwegler & Morton 2003), although not all scholars agree about the designations.

⁵ Eight of the recordings were made in July 2010 by John Lipski, Amelia Dietrich and Colleen Balukas. The remaining ten were conducted by the author in May 2011 and May 2012.

⁶ *Sabé* (Sp. *saber* ‘know’) is listed as an option for habitual marking in Palenquero (Schwegler 1996:39), but apparently is not as frequent as *asé* (Schwegler & Morton 2003:145). Interestingly, ‘know’ is an attested lexical source for habituais (Bybee et al. 1994:154-155). In my data, the collocation *a sabé* (not merely *sabé*) is categorical, so it will henceforth be referred to as *a sabé*. Regarding provenance, could *asé* be a phonetically reduced form of *a sabé*, given the tendency for habituais to develop from ‘know’ verbs? In order to establish the provenance of *asé* in Palenquero (*hacer* vs. *a sé* and *a sabé*), a comparative analysis should not only be made of surface forms, but of their relative frequencies and the constraints on their use in the variable contexts.

⁷ I found no instances of present tense forms with Continuative or Iterative meanings in my data (Bybee et al. 1994:160, 164). Habitual meaning is not necessarily occasioned by iterativity (see Comrie 1976:27).

For example, Palenquero *a* has been described as a past tense marker (Patiño Roselli 1983:115), and a present completive (Lewis 1970:116), among other things. Schwegler (1992:225) agrees that *a* is not always a preterit, but has an unidentified role in non-past reference (Schwegler & Green 2007:275). My data bear this out, so it has been included in the variable context. Notice in example (3) that *a* is used in a present temporal reference context, co-occurring with the temporal adverbial *awe* ‘today’.

- (3) <Asi ke>⁸ bo **a** kelé chitiá ku mi **awe**?
 So that you **PAST** want talk with me **today**?
 ‘So, you want to talk with me today?’ (Male 21, Recording 13, 1:02)

5.2. Aspect: coding present temporal reference

5.2.1. Habitual

As previously mentioned, this study is exploratory in that it probes by what means habitual aspect in Palenquero is morphologically expressed. Therefore, I coded as habitual⁹ any event that was characteristic of an extended period of time or that was repeated on different occasions over a period of time, as in (2a, b) and (4):

- (4) En la tadde jende **asé** komblá ma aló.
 In the evening people **HAB** buy PL rice.
 ‘In the evenings people (usually) buy rice’. (Male 56, Recording 3, 0:57)

5.2.2. Frequentative

Frequentative is an action that “occurs frequently, not necessarily habitually, nor necessarily on one occasion” (Bybee et al. 1994:317), as in (5). The frequentative can be viewed as a subset of habitual, just a more specific one. The more specific frequentatives can develop into more general habituals through grammaticalization (Bybee et al. 1994:166). If *asé* is favored in frequentative over habitual contexts, then *asé* may be a young (emerging) habitual.

- (5) **A bese** suto **asé** kumé nyame ku pekao tambié.
At times we **HAB** eat ñame with fish too.
 ‘Sometimes we eat ñame with fish too’. (Male 56, Recording 3, 0:40)

5.2.3. Progressive

A progressive situation occurs simultaneously with the moment of reference (Bybee et al. 1994:317) and is incongruous with habitual meaning and stative verbs (Comrie 1976:33, 35), as in (6). Nevertheless, (erstwhile) progressives can develop into general imperfectives or presents (locative>progressive>imperfective), encompassing habitual meaning. A prediction that follows from this grammaticalization path is that there should not be any habitual markers in the progressive domain, but a progressive marker in other present domains is possible if the progressive is far enough along on a cline toward imperfectivity.

- (6) Ablá. I **ta** kuchá bo.
 Speak. I **PROG** listen you.
 ‘Speak. I’m listening to you.’ (Male 55, Recording 14, 2:56)

⁸ Following Schwegler & Green (2007:275), code-switched Spanish segments will be indicated by “<...>”.

⁹ I combined the few gnomics in the data (N=11) with the habituals, as they may be considered habituals that have generic subjects (Bybee 1994:237).

5.2.4. States

States are inconsistent with both habitual and progressive meanings, although they are all to some degree “imperfective”. Since habituals relate to repeated activities and progressives relate to ongoing activities, then by definition a perpetual state would not be congruent with progressive or habitual meanings. States, as such, typically do not have a habitual/progressive opposition (Bybee et al. 1994:238), although they can be subject to construal (Croft 1998). Some quantitative studies have justifiably subdivided the ‘states’ category into states of limited vs. extended duration (e.g., Torres Cacoullos 2011:6), but I kept the category whole, since the main preoccupation of this study is essentially within the non-stative domain. Since there has been no consensus on whether the entire proposition or only the lexical aspect of the predicate, or *Aktionsart* (see 5.3 below), should be coded, I coded both, following Walker (2010:99,105).

- (7) Pogke ahora **ten** repeto nu.
 Because today have respect NEG.
 ‘Because these days they don’t have any respect.’ (Female 76, Recording 5, 6:46)

5.3. Stativity of the predicate

Bybee (1994:238) states that the habitual/progressive distinction cannot be discerned in statives or it is simply not relevant. Nevertheless, it has been claimed that stativity plays a direct role in creole TMA marking (Bickerton 1981:51). Bickerton’s claims on stativity and TMA marking in creoles have been challenged by empirical data (e.g., Sankoff 1990, Singler 1990). Some scholars have suggested that Bickerton’s privative opposition may be more probabilistic than deterministic (Walker 2010:104, cf. Davis 1997:104). All verbs were classified as either stative or non-stative based on the lexical aspect of the predicate or auxiliary, when present.

5.4. Co-occurring temporal adverbial

Given the semantic interaction of adverbs with tense and aspect, I coded co-occurring temporal adverbials like *kuando* ‘when’ and *a bese* ‘sometimes’. Although *a bese* occurs with frequentatives, *kuando* can co-occur with both habituals and progressives. Progressives should also be favored by *ahora*, if *ahora* signals the moment of speaking. If it means ‘nowadays’, then that may indicate habitual meaning. I made no distinction in this study between a co-occurring *kuando* clause, as in (8), and the token occurring within the adverbial clause, as in (9).

- (8) Suto komblá-lo **kuando** suto tené pes-ito.
 We buy-DO when we have money-DIM.
 ‘We buy it when we have money.’ (Male 56, Recording 3, 3:52)
- (9) **Kuando** jende asé nasé, jende ke asé yolá.
 When people HAB born people that HAB cry.
 ‘When people are born, people cry.’ (Male 54, Recording 6, 2:55)

5.5. Polarity

Some scholars (e.g., Patiño Roselli 1983:118, Simarra Reyes & Triviño Doval 2012:62, but see Schwegler & Green 2007:280) have suggested that *asé* is really two markers, *a* and *sé*. In particular, Simarra Reyes & Triviño Doval (2012:63) claim this is so because the *a* marker is deleted in the presence of the negative particle *nu* in present habitual negative contexts. In order to test this claim, all instances of Palenquero *nu* and Spanish *no* were coded.

6. Results

6.1. Overall rates

As shown in Table 1, **zero** was the most robust variant, making up 47% (N=562/1197) of the data overall (cf. Schwegler & Green 2007:275), while **asé** made up 17% (N=206/1197). The remaining 36% was shared between, **ta**, **a**, and **a sabé**.

Table 1. Present temporal reference markers in Palenquero (N= 1197)¹⁰

	<i>zero</i>	<i>asé</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a sabé</i>	
Totals	562	206	89	300	40	1197
Total %	47%	17.2%	7.4%	25.1%	3.3%	100%

6.2. Stativity

As shown in Table 2, the distribution of tense-aspect marking is sensitive to the stativity of the predicate. **Statives** are mostly zero marked (58%, N=374/642), but over 1/3 of the cases are *a* marked (37%, 237/642). With respect to the aspectual meaning of the stative predicates, 96% (N=618/642) of the time it is, unsurprisingly, that of a state (5.2.4).¹¹ For **non-stative** predicates, a smaller proportion, 35%, are zero marked and *asé* occurs with virtually the same frequency as zero (33%). We turn now to examining the association between the variants and aspectual meanings.

Table 2. Present temporal reference markers by stative vs. non-stative verbs (N = 1206)

	<i>zero</i>	<i>asé</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a sabé</i>	
Stative	374	18	4	237	9	642
	58.3%	2.8%	0.6%	36.9%	1.4%	53.2%
Non-stative	195	188	85	65	31	564
	34.6%	33.3%	15.1%	11.5%	5.5%	46.8%
Total N	569	206	89	302	40	1206
Total %	47.2%	17.1%	7.4%	25%	3.3%	100%

6.3. Aspectual readings and distribution of aspectual forms

Form-function asymmetry is confirmed in Table 3 below. The distribution of these variants by aspectual context suggests that tense-aspect marking in Palenquero, in particular habitual marking, is not captured by a one-to-one mapping of form and meaning.

Asé can code habitual and frequentative meanings, where frequentative means ‘often’, or that the action occurs frequently, as illustrated in example (5) above, which is not habitual, but ‘sometimes’ (*a bese*). It appears that the association of *asé* may be stronger with a *frequentative* function, with which it occurred **65%** (N=13/20) of the time, than with a *habitual* one, which it expressed only **39%** (N=178/456) of the time. This is consonant with predictions made in grammaticalization theory, that habitual meanings often develop out of frequentative ones (Bybee et al. 1994). Again, no claim is being made that such a change *has occurred* in Palenquero, since we do not have a touchstone for comparison; however, given that synchronic “retention” is a concomitant feature of grammaticalizing expressions (Hopper 1991, Bybee & Pagliuca 1987), *asé* expressing both frequentative and habitual

¹⁰ Nine tokens coded as “indeterminate” for aspect were excluded, leaving a total of 1197 in this factor group.

¹¹ The factor groups Stativity and Aspect were cross tabulated to probe whether *a* means something different than zero with statives. The data reveal that *a* occurs 56% (N=9/16) of the time in habitual contexts, suggesting that the *a* marker may be more closely associated with habitual for statives.

meanings is consistent with what has been observed in other languages, “suggesting a link between these two meanings” (Bybee et al. 1994:170).

In addition to *asé*, habitual meaning can be expressed by other means. Dynamic verbs expressing habitual aspect are *zero coded over one-third* (36%, N=164/456) of the time. Habitual present was less frequently expressed by the mostly progressive marker *ta*, the so-called preterit marker *a*, and *a sabé*. As predicted by grammaticalization theory (e.g., Bybee et al. 1994:Chapter 5), but despite claims to the contrary (e.g., Schwegler & Green 2007:280, though see Lipski 1993:218-219), *ta* occurs with habitual readings, (possibly suggesting generalization), but *asé* never occurs with progressive meaning (incidentally, neither does *a sabé*), which would violate the unidirectionality principle.

Sabé is also attested as a habitual, although not as frequently as *asé* (Schwegler & Green 2007:280, Schwegler & Morton 2003:145, Schwegler 1996:39). Nevertheless, Schwegler & Green (2007:279) state that *sabé* “is far less frequent [than *asé*] though not uncommon”, while Schwegler (1992:225) claims that it plays “a significant role in everyday speech”. These data reveal that *a sabé* makes up only 7% (N=30/456) of all habitual contexts.

Table 3. Distribution of aspectual distinctions by their forms (N = 1197)

	<i>zero</i>	<i>asé</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a sabé</i>	<i>Total N</i>
States	373 59.7%	15 2.4%	1 0.2%	227 36.3%	9 1.4%	625 52.2%
Habitual	164 36%	178 39%	19 4.2%	65 14.3%	30 6.6%	456 38.1%
Progressive	23 24%	0 0%	68 70.8%	5 5.2%	0 0%	96 8%
Frequentative	2 10%	13 65%	1 5%	3 15%	1 5%	20 1.7%
Total N	562	206	89	300	40	1197
Total %	47%	17.2%	7.4%	25.1%	3.3%	100%

6.4. Isolating *asé* and *zero*

When we examine non-stative predicates separately, we find that the rate of *asé* is 33% (N=188/564), that is, dynamic verbs with present temporal reference appear with *asé* approximately one-third of the time. In comparison, as we saw in Table 2, *asé* is rarely used with statives (under <3%). Interestingly, the copula verbs *é* ‘be’ (N=101) and *hue* ‘be’ (N=23) were zero marked 100% of the time and *ta* ‘be’ was zero marked 71% of the time (N=89/125). We find that of the more frequent non-stative verbs, there was only a slightly higher than average rate of *asé* with *ablá* ‘speak’ (38%, N=18/48) and *mini* ‘come’ (37%, N=10/27), compared to the overall rate of 33%. The rate of *asé* with non-frequent verbs is at 34%, (N=149/434), showing its productivity in that it is used with a variety of different verbs. Finally, we note that the main verb *asé* ‘do’ appears to disfavor the preverbal particle *asé* (20%, N=11/54), which would be consistent with an early stage of grammaticalization of the *asé* marker, if it is a reflex of Spanish *hacer*, and if there has been retention of ‘do’ meaning of habitual *asé* (cf. Poplack & Malvar 2007:138-139, Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001:230-231).

Regarding co-occurring **temporal adverbials**, *asé* seems to be favored with *kuando* ‘when’ (36%, N=19/53) and, especially, by *a bese* ‘sometimes’ (73%, N=8/11).¹²

Since the *asé* marker never occurs with progressive readings (i.e., in progressive contexts), and since states are expressed with *asé* only 2.4% of the time, all progressive and state contexts were excluded from the remaining analysis. In this second variable context, we examine *asé* vs. zero variation. Here, **only frequentative and habitual aspects were included with polarity as predictors of speakers’ choice of *asé* vs. zero (N=383)**. We use multivariate analysis with Goldvarb Lion (Sankoff, Tagliamonte, and Smith 2012).

¹² There is an interaction between frequentative and *a bese*, since by definition, *a bese* signals a frequentative reading.

As indicated by the ‘input’ in Table 4 below, the overall likelihood of *asé* to occur as opposed to zero with dynamic verbs is 49%. In the environment of frequentative, the rate of *asé* is well above the mean with a factor weight of .91, while sharing the habitual space with zero. *Asé* is also more favored in affirmative than in negative contexts.

The greater favoring of *asé* in frequentative over habitual contexts and with affirmative contexts over negative ones, is predicted in a grammaticalization framework; i.e., that the newer expression *asé* (vs. zero) would have more specific meaning (Bybee, and others) and that it would be used in affirmative before negative contexts. On the latter: Givón (1979:121-122) stated that “languages tend to innovate tense-aspect elaboration in the affirmative, then slowly spread them on to the negative”. Swahili, for example, developed a progressive-habitual distinction in the present tense which “occurred in the affirmative, [but]...has not occurred in the negative”. Additionally, Torres Cacoullós’ (2012:106) finding that the grammaticalizing Spanish Progressive is disfavored in negative contexts hypothesizes that “negatives are more neutral to tense-aspect distinctions”, given that the situation described by the verb is not happening.

Finally, these data do not provide support for the claim that *asé* consists of two markers, one of which is deleted in negative polarity contexts. Instead, it was revealed that *asé* is overwhelmingly present where there is a co-occurring negative particle *nu* (91%, N=21/23), as in example (10). This finding by itself does not negate the fact that there may be two markers, however, since fusion is a possibility; rather, there is no robust evidence for a deletion in the presence of *nu*.

- (10) Suto asé kantá nu kuando monacito <nace>.
 We HAB sing NEG when babies born
 ‘We don’t sing when babies are born.’ (Female 60+, Recording 18, 5:04)

Table 4. Variable-rule analysis of factors contributing to selection of *asé* vs. zero in present temporal reference in Palenquero creole (dynamic verbs only)

N=383; Input=.51 (49% (188/383))

	Prob	% <i>asé</i>	N
ASPECT			
Frequentative	.91	93%	14
Habitual	.48	52%	338
POLARITY			
Positive	.51	50%	337
Negative	.44	41%	46

7. Conclusions

In summary, we find that *asé* can be found in both habitual and frequentative contexts and that habitual is equally expressed by *asé* and zero, thus confirming form-function asymmetry. It was revealed that although the rate of occurrence of *asé* in habitual contexts is only 39%, *asé* and zero are the prime choices that speakers make for habitual meaning. The variation of tense and aspect in Palenquero is orderly, such that the progressive form *ta*, appears in habitual contexts, but *asé* does not encroach upon the space delimited by the progressive. Also, the greater favoring of *asé* in frequentative over habitual contexts and of *asé* in affirmative over negative polarity contexts, is consistent with a grammaticalization framework. Given these findings, it is possible that *asé* is an incipient habitual, although not obligatory. I submit that a *prima facie* case has been established to investigate more thoroughly the matter of *whether grammaticalization has taken place* with Palenquero tense-aspect expressions.

Since all forms, including zero, are inherently variable, it is not possible for the analyst to determine *a priori* which form, if any, zero is a variant realization (Poplack & Tagliamonte 1996:79).

The Palenquero data reveal that there are discourse-pragmatic preferences for zeros such as with copula verbs, statives and in habitual contexts with non-stative verbs, respectively. Zero, though, is not the opposition of any overtly-coded meaning. This underscores that it is not necessarily the form (or lack thereof), but the patterning and the behavior of those forms in the variable contexts, that will uncover the degree and extent to which there is marking. As shown here and elsewhere, this can only be discovered by an accountable reporting of both realized and unrealized variants of forms. Thus, it is hoped that this study contributes to countering categorical perception and to demonstrating the systematicity of creoles in the structure of linguistic variation.

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