

Notes on the History and Morphosyntactic Characteristics of Spanish in Northern Belize

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The current descriptive analysis provides a sociohistorical overview of Northern Belizean Spanish (NBS), and it elaborates on salient morphosyntactic features of this understudied contact variety, as evidenced in the naturalistic discourse of bilinguals/trilinguals from Orange Walk, Belize. In particular, we focus on ‘determiner + *uno*’ constructions, bilingual compound verbs and gender assignment and agreement in NBS. Given the change in the status and use of Belizean Kriol among Mestizos, this paper makes a call for further research on these grammatical structures. Future work on NBS will help us not only to better understand the potential cross-linguistic influence of Kriol on contemporary NBS, but it will also contribute to our understanding of grammatical outcomes in non-classic code-switching contexts, where bilingual/trilingual code-switching occurs alongside the pervasive use of a high prestige English-based Creole.

Keywords: Northern Belizean Spanish, code-switching, Belizean Kriol, morphosyntax

1. Introduction

The linguistic situation of Northern Belize in Central America is one which for decades has been neglected in Hispanic linguistics despite its individuality and proximity to important contact zones in Spanish-speaking Latin America (Balam, 2013b; Hagerty, 1979). Although Belize has maintained closer sociopolitical ties with the Anglophone Caribbean, it is at the heart of Mesoamerica. Bordering Mexico’s Southeastern state of Quintana Roo, Northern Belize constitutes a Spanish/English contact area which shares both striking similarities and differences with bilingual communities along the U.S./Mexico border. Whereas code-switching¹, or the alternation between two or more languages, is commonplace to both regions, the status of language varieties differ (for relevant discussion, see Balam, 2013a). Crucially, an important parallel Northern Belize has with other regions in Central America is the use of Spanish alongside Kriol, as English-based Creoles are also spoken in coastal provinces of Honduras, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama (see Holm, 1989 and references therein). Thus, geographically, Northern Belize is at the cross-roads of several linguistic and cultural worlds.

Despite being an underexplored linguistic terrain, the Northern Belize contact situation warrants further scholarly attention for several reasons. We stand to learn from Northern Belize, as sociolinguistic conditions differ considerably from those in other Spanish/English and Spanish/Creole situations in Latin America and the U.S. Hispanophone context. For example, bilingual/trilingual code-switching (CS) is not only unmarked in Belize, but it is also ascribed

¹We adopt Muysken’s (2013) definition of CS; thus, insertion (i.e. borrowing), alternation, congruent lexicalization and backflagging are analyzed as different optimization strategies of CS.

a positive value, especially among post-adolescent speakers (Balam, 2103a). Additionally, community attitudes toward language varieties and linguistic purism in Northern Belize generally seem to be lax in comparison to attitudes in the U.S. context (for insights on attitudes toward CS in the U.S. context, see Valdés et al., 2003; Rangel 2013). Although English is the official language of Belize, Spanish is the language of the majority, and Belizean Kriol enjoys national prestige as the country's lingua franca (Ravindranath, 2009; Balam, 2013a). Thus, the confluence of these factors affords linguists an opportunity to study the grammatical outcomes of Spanish in a 'non-classic' CS context with a rich, sociolinguistic tapestry that is rather singular in nature. By non-classic, I mean unlike Myers-Scotton's (2002) conceptualization of classic CS, where there is stable bilingualism. The presence of a high prestige Creole alongside bilingual/trilingual CS distinguishes the Northern Belize context from other bilingual and/or bidialectal communities in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and Latin America. In a context like Northern Belize, we are able to examine the multiple manifestations of language contact, including CS, linguistic convergence and creolization. The current paper contributes to the literature on grammatical outcomes in Northern Belize by taking a closer look at the sociolinguistic history of Spanish in Northern Belize and the salient grammatical features of this variety of contact Spanish.

This paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, I elaborate on the sociolinguistic history of Spanish in Northern Belize. Section 3 provides a brief description of the data examined. Section 4 summarizes salient morphosyntactic characteristics of Belizean Spanish. Section 5 examines 'determiner + *uno*' constructions and bilingual compound verbs in Northern Belizean Spanish. Section 6 briefly examines gender assignment and agreement phenomena. Lastly, I offer some concluding remarks in section 7.

2. Background: contact Spanish in Northern Belize

Historical records suggest that Spanish in Belize may have been present as early as the mid 1600's. There is evidence that Mayans in some villages of Western and Southern Belize were already using Spanish first names during this era (Scholes & Thompson, 1977). It remains unresolved, however, to what extent Spanish was used in these early Mayan settlements. It could be that Mayan monolingualism was still the general norm in these early settlements of Belize.

Today, researchers concur that the presence of Spanish in Belize only became prominent after 1847, when the Caste War of Yucatán began in Mexico (Barry & Vernon, 1995: 76; Camille, 1996; Church et al., 2011; Dobson, 1973; Reed, 1964; Shoman, 2010, *inter alia*). During this time, more than 7,000 Mayan and Mestizo² refugees fled their homeland, searching for a new beginning. They settled in the Northern districts of Corozal and Orange Walk (see Figure 1). By 1850, Reed estimates that more than 10,000 Mexican refugees from the Yucatán and Quintana Roo had settled in Northern Belize (cited in Hagerty, 1979: 21). In the census of 1861, more than 50% of the colony's 25,365 inhabitants were immigrants living in Northern Belize, who had been born either in Yucatán or Central America (Bolland, 1977; Camille, 1996; Dobson, 1973; Woods, Perry, & Steagall, 1997). Thus, by the time Belize was declared the colony of British Honduras in 1862, these Mayan-speaking and Spanish-speaking refugees had

²*Mestizo* refers to a person of mixed Spanish and indigenous Mayan ancestry. In Belize, the term "Latino" or "Hispanic" is not used often to refer to Spanish-speaking Belizeans. The term does not have a derogatory connotation in Belize.

already started to transform the demographic composition of Belize. This pattern of migration continued, and later became especially pronounced once again in the 1980's, when Salvadoran, Guatemalan and Honduran refugees established communities in Belize.

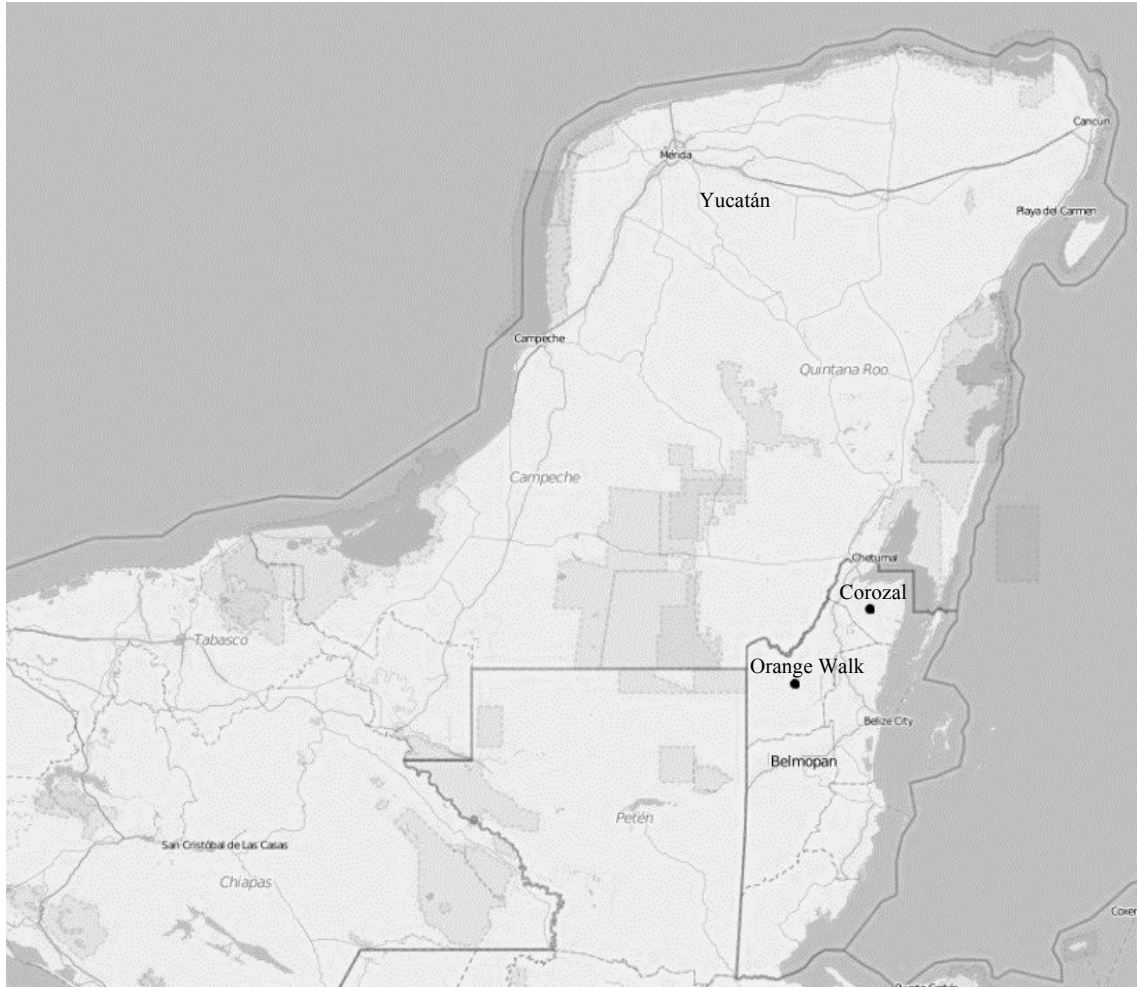


Figure 1: Map of the Yucatan Peninsula and Belize. © OpenStreetMap contributors, CC-BY-SA

These two main waves of migration contributed to the present widespread use of Spanish in Belize. They also demarcated a dialect boundary, which is present up to today. In the case of Northern Belize, within the span of about 160 years, Spanish has undergone a rapid transition from Maya/Spanish contact to Spanish/English and Spanish/English/Kriol contact. Importantly, although Spanish in Northern Belize has been in contact with English and Belizean Kriol for more than a century, this contact did not become intense until recently. Up to the 1930's and early 1940's, main towns in Belize were isolated from Belize City. Given the lack of highways and roads connecting main municipalities, communication and mobility between towns and the city was rather limited (Hagerty, 1979: 9; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985: 183). This is not to say, however, that bilingualism/trilingualism was non-existent in remote, rural areas of colonial Belize. Archaeological evidence suggests that as early as the 1930's and even in prior decades, English was already being used as a medium of language instruction in Mayan/Mestizo

communities in Northwestern Belize (Church et al., 2011: 190). Church et al. reported finding inkwell fragments and remnants of toys and porcelain dolls, associated with nineteenth century educational discourse practices, in San Pedro Sirís, one of the earliest Mayan/Mestizo settlements established in Belize following the Caste War.

What is clear is that Spanish seems to have had less contact with Belizean Kriol prior to the 1940's. Pertinent to point out is that up to the mid-1940's, the timber industry had dominated the colonial economy, with forest products accounting for more than 90% of the country's exports (Dobson, 1973: 265). A salient aspect of the forestry industry was that the men would usually work as permanent or seasonal laborers in logging camps felling mahogany or extracting *chicle*³, while the women would stay in the villages (Camille, 1996; Thompson, 1988). It is in these camps that we can conjecture contact between Spanish and Belizean Kriol may have begun among the crews of Mestizo and Creole men. An interesting phenomenon is that sometimes the Creole men were more proficient in Spanish rather than Spanish-speaking men more proficient in Kriol. Often times, Creole men would switch to Spanish when speaking to foreigners (cf. Thompson, 1988: 230). Subsequent research confirmed that indeed competence in Kriol was limited among Mestizos in Northern Belize (Brockmann, 1979).

Even though some younger Mestizos spoke Kriol in the 70's, note that the Spanish variety spoken in Northern Belize had a higher status than Kriol (Koenig, 1975: 110), and this may account for some Spanish-speakers' initial reluctance to embrace and use Kriol, which archaeologists such as Thompson (1988: 230) described as "extremely difficult to understand." But Belizean Kriol did not stay for long as a stigmatized dialect. In fact, there is evidence that even in the 70's, it had covert prestige and was already displacing the Spanish language in some areas of Western Belize (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985: 172). More recently, status planning efforts launched by the National Kriol Council of Belize, established in 1995, have helped not only to change people's attitudes toward Creole, but it has solidified 'Bileez Kriol' as an important national language (Ravindranath, 2009: 151). The overt prestige which 'Bileez' or Belizean Kriol has gained is especially evident today in the country's mass media⁴ and the younger generation's preferential use of Belizean Kriol over their native languages (cf. Balam, 2013a; Ravindranath, 2009).

Thus, whereas the abandonment of the Yucatec Maya language for Spanish became prevalent among many Maya/Mestizo families in the 1940's (Koenig, 1975: 82), the late 1990's and early 21st century are characterized by a marked decrease in the use of NBS among younger Mestizos in urban areas of Northern Belize. The last two decades have also opened way for a more regularized or 'focussed' (in the sense of Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985) linguistic situation vis-à-vis Belizean Kriol. Note that previous scholars such as Kernan et al. (1976) described the Creole spoken in Belize as a continuum (i.e. Standard Belizean English, Non-standard Belizean English, City Creole and Broad Creole; also see Escure, 1982). Given the increased access to higher education in Belize, coupled with an increased exposure to both Kriol and standard English input in the mass media; and the birth of 'Bileez Kriol' as a national 'language' with its distinctive grammar (Decker, 2005; Greene, 1999; Young, 1973), we may now need to start investigating English and Belizean Kriol as two separate linguistic systems. This development certainly marks an important turning point for the future of Spanish in Belize, as the contact

³*Chicle* was used in the manufacturing of chewing gum. The latex, obtained by bleeding the sapidilla tree, was boiled until hard blocks were formed (Dobson, 1973: 265).

⁴Belizean Kriol is commonly used in radio advertisements, local TV commercials and locally produced television shows and music videos.

between Spanish, Belizean Kriol and English will become increasingly more intense.

As a consequence of these recent developments in Belize, an important question raised is how the changes in the status and use of Belizean Kriol have impacted CS patterns in Northern Belize. We know that languages are not static; across time, they continuously evolve vis-à-vis changes in the sociolinguistic context. To date, whereas several studies have examined different aspects of Belizean Kriol, no study has documented or examined the incorporation of Belizean Kriol in Northern Belize code-switched discourse. To fill this gap, in the ensuing sections, we elaborate on salient morphosyntactic features of NBS, and we further examine the incorporation of Belizean Kriol in CS, particularly as illustrated by bilingual compound verbs (henceforth BCVs).

3. Data

Data for the present paper is based on fieldwork conducted in December 2011 and June 2012 in Orange Walk, Belize. Examples provided were extracted from elicited oral production data from 10 adolescent speakers and naturalistic oral production data collected via semi-structured interviews with 25 adolescent consultants and 18 post-adolescent consultants. All consultants were native Spanish/English and/or Spanish/English/Kriol code-switchers from Northern Belize (see Balam, 2013b and Balam, Prada Pérez, & Mayans, 2014 for further details on speakers' linguistic profiles and patterns of language use).

4. Salient morphosyntactic characteristics of Belizean Spanish

Given the general paucity of knowledge on NBS in the Hispanic linguistics literature, we first take a look at the morphosyntactic features that have been reported for Belizean Spanish. In his brief descriptive analysis, Hagerty (1996) identifies several characteristics that are common in the variety of Spanish spoken in Belize (see Table 1). Note, however, that Hagerty does not discuss the frequency of these characteristic features in relation to dialectal regions in Belize. Of relevance to the current paper are the last three phenomena in Table 1; namely, 'determiner + *uno*' constructions, bilingual compound verbs and grammatical gender assignment/agreement.

The first two features are particularly noteworthy, as they are not common in other Spanish contact situations. Unlike pronominal subject expression, which can lend itself to analyses based on developmental changes that are internal to the language rather than contact-induced (for further discussion, see Torres-Cacoullos & Travis, 2010), the case of 'determiner + *uno*' and '*hacer* + V' are contact phenomena that do not arise in monolingual Spanish-speaking contexts, thus constituting cases of grammatical structures that are unequivocally contact-related.

In the case of grammatical gender, although gender assignment has been extensively studied in Spanish/English contact situations, (cf. Montes-Alcalá & Lapidus Shin, 2011; Otheguy & Lapidus, 2003 and references therein), a crucial question that arises in relation to gender assignment and gender agreement in Northern Belize is whether canonical or non-canonical patterns are more prevalent. This is an interesting question, especially in light of the fact that bilinguals/trilinguals in Northern Belize engage in the pervasive use of CS and Belizean Kriol. In current discussions on gender assignment in bilingual discourse, there is still debate as to what ultimately motivates the predominant use of the masculine gender in code-switched speech. In view of gender agreement in varieties of contact Spanish, it is pertinent to point out that there

have been few empirical attempts to specifically examine gender agreement in the monolingual Spanish discourse of Spanish/English code-switchers.

Phenomenon	Examples
Substitution of <i>ha</i> for <i>he</i>	<i>Yo ha visto</i> instead of <i>Yo he visto</i> ‘I have seen’ (Hagerty, 1996: 137)
Overuse of subject pronouns	<i>Si tú lo tienes, tú vas a saber</i> ‘If you have it, you will know.’ (Hagerty, 1996: 137)
Frequent use of <i>hasta</i> ‘until’	<i>El dentista viene hasta las cuatro</i> ‘The dentist comes till 4 o’clock.’ (Quesada Pacheco, 2013: 62)
Present subjunctive to express immediate wish	<i>Ojala llueva</i> instead of preterite imperfect form <i>ojala lloviera</i> ‘I hope it rains.’ (Quesada Pacheco, 2013: 62)
Determiner + <i>uno</i>	<i>este uno</i> ‘this one’, <i>estos unos</i> ‘these ones’ (Hagerty, 1996: 137)
Bilingual compound verbs (<i>hacer</i> + V)	<i>El padre lo hizo</i> bless ‘The priest blessed it.’ (Hagerty, 1996: 136). <i>Tiene miedo que se haga</i> drop down ‘She’s afraid that he’ll fall.’ (Fuller Medina, 2005: 6) <i>Hicieron</i> rent <i>un</i> golf cart ‘They rented a golf cart.’ (Balam, Prada Pérez & Mayans, 2014: 245)
Non-standard gender assignment	<i>el primer vez</i> ‘the first time’, <i>la problema</i> ‘the problem’, <i>el gente</i> ‘the people’ (Hagerty, 1996: 137)

Table 1: Reported morphosyntactic features of Belizean Spanish

In the ensuing sections, we first examine some cases of ‘determiner + *uno*’, a potential syntactic calque in NBS. We subsequently analyze bilingual compound verbs, a distinctive dialectal feature of NBS, and we pay closer attention to BCVs in Spanish/Belizean Kriol CS. Finally, we briefly explore the unresolved issue of grammatical gender in NBS.

5. Salient morphosyntactic characteristics of Northern Belizean Spanish

5.1. ‘Determiner + *uno*’ construction

A search in the Davies’ *Corpus del Español*, containing a million words from more than 20,000 texts from the 13th to the 20th century, revealed that occurrences of *uno* constructions with demonstrative pronouns were highly infrequent (i.e. *este uno* ‘this one’: 4 tokens; *ese uno* ‘that one’: 8 tokens; *estos unos* ‘these ones’: 1 token; *esos unos* ‘those ones’: 1 token). The few examples that were attested were embedded in canonical expressions as in *ese uno por ciento* ‘that one per cent’ or in syntactic constructions as in (1), where the *uno* ‘one’ clearly had a different referent from *ese* ‘him’. In a few occurrences from the 18th and 19th centuries, *este uno* ‘this one’ was used for referential purposes with animate agents, but specifically when the word *uno* was used in the preceding utterance, as in (2). These examples are clearly different from the use of *uno* in NBS, as in (3), where the demonstrative adjective *ese* ‘that’ and the indefinite

pronoun *uno* ‘one’ form an English-like noun phrase, with no mention of *uno* in the immediately preceding sentential context.

- (1) *Con individuos como ese uno se va a tropezar.*
‘With people like him, one will come across.’

[Habla culta: San Juan, PR (n.d.)]

- (2) *Todos dije, y dije mal: todos menos uno. Este uno se llamaba Simón Ceroj.*
‘I said everyone, and I was wrong: all but one. This one was named Simón Ceroj.’

[Pereda, 1870]

- (3) *Yo voy a hacer push pa ese uno también.*
‘I will strive for that one too.’

[PA18, female, 14:20-14:23]

Also consider the following examples from NBS data, where *uno* is employed in non-canonical contexts. In (4), the *uno* is used to refer to an inanimate event. In (5), speaker F3 recounts the tale of the “Three Little Pigs” and describes what the first little pig sees upon walking out of his mother’s cottage. In both cases, no mention is made of *uno* in the preceding utterance. In (6), speaker PA15 uses the *uno* construction to refer to herself, whereas in (7), the noun phrase *los unos* ‘the ones’ has a generic reference. Although a reviewer aptly points out that the use of *los unos* ‘the ones’ in (7) may be acceptable in certain varieties of monolingual Spanish, what differentiates this construction is the presence of a one-word switch, and the absence of *los otros* ‘the others’ in the utterance immediately following this sentence. Typically, in monolingual Spanish varieties, felicitous ‘determiner + *uno*’ constructions occur specifically when a comparison is emphasized between two plural animate agents (e.g. *Los unos....los otros*). Thus, there is no doubt (4) – (7) also exhibit the use of a determiner alongside the indefinite pronoun *uno* in a single syntactic unit, which is not semantically connected and/or bound to an adjacent utterance.

- (4) *Me estoy recordando cual uno [incident]...*
‘I am trying to remember which one...’

[PA16, female, 26:49-26:51]

- (5) *El primer uno vio un hombre que tenía bastante palos*
‘The first one saw a man who had a lot of pieces of wood.’

[F3, male, 01:22-01:28]

- (6) *Yo no era la una que comenzó el fight.*
‘I wasn’t the one who started the fight.’

[PA15, female, 03:51-03:53]

- (7) *Los unos que consiguen scholarship son poquitos.*
‘The ones who get scholarships are few.’

[PA15, female, 12:46-12:49]

Although this seeming neoplasm would more than likely sound ungrammatical to native speakers of monolingual varieties of Spanish, we have to analyze this construction in light of the Spanish/English contact in Northern Belize, where CS is both unmarked and prevalent (Balam, 2013a). Akin to other well-known ‘grammatical’ calques (Montes Giraldo, 1985: 48) in the Spanish/English contact literature such as the use of null complementizers in structures such as *Yo creo Ø inventaron el nombre* ‘I think they invented the name’ (Escobar, 2010: 478), it may be that these *uno* constructions are structurally modelled on corresponding English structures, thus revealing a possible case of grammatical convergence in NBS. Despite their morphosyntactic salience in quotidian speech, these *uno* constructions are not reported as a distinctive feature of Yucatán Spanish (e.g. Lope Blanch, 1979; Suárez Molina, 1996; Michnowicz, 2006). Thus, although Yucatan Spanish and NBS share commonly used lexical items derived from Mayan (e.g. *chichí* ‘grandmother’, *han* ‘quickly’, *mulix* ‘curly’, *tuch* ‘navel’, *tux* ‘dimple’, *xoy* ‘stye’, etc.), the *uno* construction seems to be a feature of NBS that was not imported from the Yucatán region. Thus, it is a phenomenon that may have emerged among first and second generation Hispanic Belizeans, descendants of the Mexican refugees who once established communities in Northern Belize.

5.2. Bilingual compound verbs

In contrast, consider the case of BCVs, another distinctive feature of NBS. As (7) exemplifies, BCVs are bilingual constructions where the Spanish light verb *hacer* ‘do/make’ is the carrier of number, tense, aspect and mood features, whereas the lexical verb is the bearer of the semantic content. Although BCVs constitute a potential universal property of CS (Edwards & Gardner-Chloros, 2007), in Spanish/English contexts, these structures have only been attested in Southwest U.S. Spanish (Jenkins, 2003; Vergara Wilson, 2013) and Belizean Spanish (Fuller Medina, 2005; Balam, Prada Perez & Mayans, 2014). Noteworthy is that ‘hacer + V’ was an existing phenomenon in Yucatan Spanish (e.g. ‘*hacer* + Mayan V’ as in *hacer chi-chís* ‘to sleep’), which suggests that subsequent generations of Spanish/English/Kriol speakers in Northern Belize simply capitalized on a pre-existing Spanish/Maya structure, whose use became markedly more ubiquitous and creative in the new contact situation (Balam, Prada Pérez & Mayans, 2014: 258).

- (8) *Hay unos word que hago medio* understand⁵
 There be.3PL some.PL word.SG that (I) do kind of understand.INF
 ‘There are some words that I kind of understand.’

[AD14, female, 08:38-08:40]

⁵ Key to glosses: 1SG, 2SG, 3SG = 1st, 2nd and 3rd person singular; 1PL, 2PL, 3PL = 1st, 2nd and 3rd person plural; CL = clitic; F = feminine gender IMP = imperfect tense; INF = infinitive; M = masculine gender; PRES = present tense; PRET = preterite tense; PROG = progressive tense.

Noteworthy is that in contrast to Spanish/Maya CS, where the semantic slot in BCVs could be filled by nouns (Suárez Molina, 1996), in the Northern Belize context, the semantic slot is primarily occupied by verbs. Crucially as well, BCVs have extended to a variety of syntactic contexts in NBS, more varied than what has been attested in New Mexican Spanish (e.g. see Vergara Wilson, 2013; Vergara Wilson & Dumont, 2014), suggesting that ‘hacer + V’ has become more grammaticalized in Northern Belize (for an analysis of acceptability judgments and use of 553 BCVs in Northern Belize, see Balam et al., 2014) than in other Spanish/English bilingual communities in Southwest U.S. The ubiquitous use of BCVs in NBS is evidenced not only in a wide variety of verb type contexts (i.e. dynamic, stative, psychological, etc.), but with different argument structures (i.e. transitive, ditransitives, passives, etc.), and different kinds of adverbial subordination (Balam & Prada Pérez, Submitted). Diachronically, this trend is in line with other bilingual situations where cross-generationally, it has been observed that patterns in the use of BCVs change across time, initially co-occurring with nominal elements and in subsequent generations, primarily with verbs (for further discussion on the Turkish/Dutch case, see Backus, 1996).

As a distinctive morphosyntactic feature of NBS, the use of BCVs is notable, as switching within the verbal domain is not as common as in other domains. In several corpora, it has been shown that nouns are the most frequently borrowed and/or switched items in bilingual speech (e.g. Aaron, 2014; Lindsey, 2006: 13; Pfaff, 1979: 308), whereas CS in the verbal domain is less common. Thus, this characteristic of NBS is striking in light of Lipski’s (2005: 2) contention that intrasentential CS occurs at a higher frequency and density among speakers of U.S. varieties of Spanish than among speakers of contact Spanish varieties in Gibraltar and Belize. Particularly in the case of Belize, recent findings suggest otherwise (see Balam, 2013a; Balam et al., 2014). The use of BCVs seems more conventionalized and ubiquitous in Northern Belize rather than in other Spanish/English communities in New Mexico and Texas. If there is indeed a correlation between the number of bilingual intonational units and the frequency of BCVs, hence intra-sentential CS at the verbal level (cf. Vergara Wilson & Dumont, 2014), then we can conjecture that CS in general is more ubiquitous in Northern Belize, where BCVs are richer in productivity and innovation.

Furthermore, given the more positive predisposition to the use of CS in Northern Belize, and the lax attitudes toward linguistic purism (Balam, 2013a), CS is by all means expected to occur with a higher frequency and density in Northern Belize rather than in most U.S. bilingual Spanish/English communities where negative attitudes toward CS are still largely prevalent. In future research, a systematic comparison between Northern Belize CS and CS varieties in the U.S. could prove very enlightening and informative vis-à-vis pertinent issues not only to CS in the verbal domain, but to the social factors that ultimately drive the prevalence of CS behaviors in speech communities where there are similar language pairings but different sociolinguistic conditions.

In the following section, we build on Hagerty’s work by examining cases where Kriol is incorporated in BCVs in Northern Belize code-switched discourse. In contrast to previous studies which have not investigated NBS as a variety of its own (Hagerty, 1996; Quesada Pacheco, 2013), we particularly focus on NBS, as this is the Spanish variety which is noted for linguistic innovations (Balam, 2013b; Hagerty, 1979).

5.2.1. Belizean Kriol and bilingual compound verbs

Overall, the NBS data revealed that lexical verbs in BCVs are typically English rather than Kriol. It must be highlighted, however, that determining whether a lexical verb is either English or Belizean Kriol is not an easy task as there are lexical and phonological similarities between the two linguistic systems. Albeit infrequently, there are cases when Kriol lexical verbs are incorporated. In 9) – 11) below, we see examples where the lexical verbs are phonologically in Belizean Kriol rather than English. In 9), the front vowel [e] is used in place of the canonical English [ej] sound in ‘mek’, whereas in 10), the nasalized front [ẽ] is used in place of the more standard [æ] form in ‘heng’. In the case of 11), the central vowel [ɑ] is used in place of the more canonical back vowel [ɔ] in the verb ‘nak’. Although a phonetic analysis of vowels in BCVs is beyond the scope of this paper, it is nonetheless pertinent to highlight that there are cases when Kriol lexical verbs can be distinguished from their English near-equivalents. In light of the aforementioned sociohistorical facts of the Northern Belize contact situation, however, it is more than likely the case that the vast majority of lexical verbs in BCVs do in fact conform to the phonology of Belizean English rather than Kriol, even at the suprasegmental level.

(9) *Hay unos songs que no hacen mek no sense.*
 There be.3PL some songs that no do.3PL make.PRES no sense.
 ‘There are some songs that make no sense.’
 [PA15, female, 24:03-24:07]

(10) *No estaba el reason para que estemos haciendo heng...*
 No be.IMP the reason for that be.3PL.SUBJ do.PROG hang out.INF
 ‘There was no reason for us to be hanging out...’
 [PA18, female, 08:06-08:10]

(11) *Yo voy a hace nak drum con CDC.*
 I go to do.PRES play.INF drums with CDC (Central Drum Corp).
 ‘I go to play drums with CDC.’
 [AD18, male, 04:40-04:42]

Moreover, there are some cases where we can see syntactic patterns in BCVs that align with the structure of Belizean Kriol. These examples, particularly attested in control structures, seem to be restricted to speakers who use Kriol extensively along with bilingual/trilingual CS. In 12), for instance, whereas the control verb ‘try’ could arguably be either English or Kriol, the phonological identity of the lexical verb ‘taak’ is clearly Belizean Kriol. Syntactically, the particle ‘to’ does not precede the infinitive verb as it does in normative English structure, whereas non-inflection (e.g. Ah waahn goh hoam... ‘I want to go home’) is a well attested feature of Belizean Kriol (Decker, 2005:104).

(12) *En veces, like, hago try taak Spanish*
 Sometimes, like, do.1SG.PRS try.INF to speak.INF Spanish
 ‘Sometimes, like, I try to speak Spanish.’
 [AD14, female, 08:54-08:56]

In the case of (13), however, we can see the incorporation of a Belizean Kriol pre-verbal marker. In Belizean Kriol, the pre-verbal marker *fu* (sometimes pronounced as *fi* or *fo*) is sometimes used as an infinitive marker (Decker, 2005: 66). In this case, the presence of Belizean Kriol is not only phonological but morphological as well. These constructions are interesting as they show that CS patterns in Northern Belize, little by little, are evolving vis-à-vis developments in the sociolinguistic context. Whereas the previous generation of the 70's primarily switched between Spanish and English, code-switchers in contemporary Northern Belize now add another linguistic dimension to their repertoire, which enriches the possibilities of syntactic innovation in code-switched discourse.

- (13) *Aquí los* witnesses *no hacen* decide **fu taak**
 Here the.M.PL witnesses no do.3rdPL decide.INF to talk.INF
 'Here the witnesses don't decide to talk.'

[PA18, female, 15:20-15:22]

In the following section, we briefly look at cases of non-canonical gender assignment and agreement, and non-canonical number agreement, features that are also notable in NBS.

6. Grammatical gender in Northern Belizean Spanish

In the data, non-canonical patterns in grammatical gender concord and even number agreement were also salient. Whereas Hagerty (1996: 137) noted that it is "common for Belizean Spanish speakers to use non-standard gender assignment (e.g. *el*_{masc} *primer vez*_{fem} 'the first time', *la*_{fem} *problema*_{masc} 'the problem', *el*_{masc} *gente*_{fem} 'the people'), Quesada Pacheco (2013) reports that Belizean Spanish follows canonical patterns of gender assignment and number agreement. Data from recent fieldwork revealed that overall, adolescent and post-adolescent speakers (between ages 14 – 26) employ canonical patterns of gender assignment, in line with Quesada Pacheco. However, the data did reveal that Kriol dominant trilinguals do exhibit some inconsistencies with gender assignment.

In a previous study, Balam (2013b) found that Kriol dominant trilinguals displayed a tendency to have more difficulty maintaining the intervocalic rhotic contrast (i.e. tap/trill or tap/retroflex approximant contrasts). Crucially, these same speakers were also found to have more difficulty with gender assignment in monolingual Spanish stretches of discourse, producing some non-canonical forms such as *había un*_{masc} *vez*_{fem} 'once upon a time' and *un*_{masc} *quemazón*_{fem} 'a fire'. Given that most nouns were in switched nominal phrases (e.g. *un*_{masc} mouse 'un raton'), the prevalence of the masculine gender was attested. In a total of 213 mixed nominal phrases (i.e. Span Det + (Adj) + English N) from 10 adolescent speakers of NBS (Balam, 2013b), the masculine default was used 99% of the time, regardless of the gender of the translation equivalent (e.g. *un*_{masc} party/*una*_{fem} *fiesta*_{fem} 'a party'; *el*_{masc} city/*la*_{fem} *ciudad*_{fem} 'the city'). Only two mixed NPs employed the feminine (biological) gender (i.e. *una*_{fem} nurse 'a nurse'; *la*_{fem} nurse 'the nurse').

More striking in this data was that the use of the masculine gender was also extended to adjectival contexts in monolingual Spanish stretches of speech, thus leading to the lack of canonical gender concord in phrases, as in 14), where the adjective *morado* 'purple' is incongruent with the overtly marked feminine gender of the head noun *rana* 'frog'. In 14), the masculine gender is also used in the adjectival complementizer phrase.

- (14) *Encontró una rana morado que estaba sentado en un shell*
Find.3SG.PRET a frog.F purple.M that was sitting.M on a shell.
'He found a purple frog sitting on a shell.'

[S5, male, 06:02-06:09]

This morphosyntactic phenomenon has particularly been attested among speakers of Spanish Creoles (Baptista & Guéron, 2007; Holm, 2000; Lipski & Schwegler, 1993) and Afro-Hispanic varieties (Lipski, 2006; Sessarego, 2013), but not among fluent Spanish/English speakers in the U.S. (Lipski 1993) or native speakers of Yucatán Spanish (Suárez Molina, 1996). It is interesting that although there was limited Afro-Hispanic presence both in Yucatán and Northern Belize, NBS seems to align in certain ways with Afro-Hispanic varieties. The extended use of the masculine gender attested in the data is consonant with the preferential use of the masculine diminutive form *manito* 'little hand' versus *manita* 'little hand' that Quesada Pacheco (2013) observed among speakers of Northern Belize. On the other hand, the use of the gender default in code-switched speech is also in line with previous work (e.g. Otheguy & Lapidus Shin, 2003). What remains unresolved, however, is to what extent NBS retains canonical and non-canonical patterns of gender assignment and agreement in monolingual modes of discourse. Also unclear is whether in a larger corpus, the masculine gender would also be overwhelmingly used in switched determiner phrases. Given that Northern Belize differs in terms of sociolinguistic conditions from most Spanish/English communities in the U.S. and Latin America, we can expect that future work will reveal grammatical outcomes which are in some ways quite different.

Also of interest in the oral production data were cases of variable number agreement. Speakers produced forms such as unos word 'some words', dos basketball court 'two basketball courts', dos team de muchachas 'two girls' teams', los phone 'the phones', etc. Quesada Pacheco (2013) also reported this phenomenon (i.e. *dos café* 'two cups of coffee') for Spanish monolingual phrases. Noteworthy is that phonologically, /s/ lenition is not characteristic of NBS, in line with Mexican Spanish varieties, renowned for maintenance of the /s/ (Hualde et al., 2010). In contrast, Belizean Kriol plural nouns are generally not inflected, as in chree gyal 'three girls' (Decker, 2005: 74). Thus, it may be that this innovative feature is one which is being partly influenced by Belizean Kriol. Alternatively, it could be a linguistic remnant of Yucatec Maya. Further research is necessary to further understand these understudied phenomena, as it remains unclear whether dialectal patterns in Northern Belizean Spanish are slowly converging toward standard Spanish norms, as it has been found for its sister dialect Yucatán Spanish (cf. Michnowicz 2006) and other contact varieties of Spanish. More research must be carried out to have a better understanding of grammatical outcomes in NBS.

7. A case to unravel

The current paper is not an attempt to provide an exhaustive analysis of the morphosyntactic features of NBS. It contributes to the understanding of NBS, by looking at the sociohistorical context where this variety was born, and by outlining salient features of NBS, as evidenced in the code-switched discourse of native speakers of NBS. More than anything, this paper raises many questions that future investigation needs to further explore and investigate. More research is necessary to understand the existing Mayan and/or emerging effects that Kriol is having on NBS, both in its morphosyntax and phonology. There is the possibility that we will find more cross-linguistic influence from Kriol in the Spanish spoken by the youngest generation in Northern

Belize, where the most positive attitudes to Belizean Kriol are most likely to be found. Thus, BCVs produced by younger speakers may exhibit a richer degree of innovation and convergence toward Belizean Kriol structure. It could also be that the loss of gender and number concord in NBS is more prevalent among younger Spanish/English/Kriol trilinguals than among older Spanish/English bilinguals. The nature of these phenomena in relation to the age of NBS speakers is interesting as this could reveal interesting dialectal patterns. It may be that in terms of diachronic development, NBS and Yucatan Spanish are sister dialects that are moving in very different directions. Whereas non-standard regional forms in Yucatan Spanish are increasingly being replaced by standard Mexican Spanish forms (Michnowicz, 2006), it could be that NBS is becoming increasingly non-standard, particularly now that Belizean Kriol, as a prestige variety, has added another dimension to the linguistic landscape of contemporary Northern Belize. Studies on NBS could also reveal interesting findings in relation to Spanish contact outcomes in the U.S. Spanish/English context, particularly in the Southwest U.S., where CS is also prevalent. Given its proximity to Latin America, the Caribbean and the U.S., Northern Belize is a contemporary linguistic and cultural frontier that warrants further attention as it will certainly contribute to our understanding of grammatical outcomes in non-classic code-switching contexts where bilingual/trilingual CS occurs alongside creolization.

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