The Afro-Bolivian Spanish Determiner Phrase

Sessarego, Sandro

Published by The Ohio State University Press

Sessarego, Sandro.  
The Ohio State University Press, 2014.  
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/36171.

⇒ For additional information about this book  
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/36171

🔗 For content related to this chapter  
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1384493
Afro-Bolivian Spanish (ABS) is a dialect spoken in the region of Los Yungas, Department of La Paz, Bolivia. The first linguist to conduct extensive fieldwork on this language was John Lipski (2006a, b; 2008), who provided a thorough account of its grammatical features. Nevertheless, the exact origin of ABS is not yet completely clear. The present chapter will try to cast light on this issue. Lipski proposes that traditional ABS might have derived from an earlier pidgin and adds that “in the 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 DP of the basilectal Afro-Yungueño dialect,” Lipski (2006b: 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 fifty to sixty years, immediately after the Land Reform of 1952, 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 that co-existed with Highland Bolivian Spanish since its inception” (Lipski 2006b: 37).
In this chapter, 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 morphosyntactic 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 norms. The outcome is a vernacular, understandable by monolingual standard Spanish speakers, which carries the undeniable trace of second language learning strategies. The model proposed here 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 function of universal processing constraints on learnability imposed by the human mind.

2.1. Terminological Clarifications

Even though the study of creole languages has grown substantially during the last few decades, it is important to remember that there is no consensus among linguists on what a ‘creole language’ is and on how the words ‘creole’ or ‘creoleness’ should be used. In fact, some scholars have tried to classify creoles according to their structural features (Bickerton 1981) or as a typological class (Seuren & Wekker 1986; McWhorter 1997, 1998, 2001; Bakker et al. 2011). Others have adopted a comparative structural approach that attempts to classify these vernaculars according to the relative distance from their lexifier languages, thus leading to more terms, such as ‘semi-creoles’ (Schneider 1990; Holm 1992) and ‘intermediate creoles’ (Winford 2000). Other linguists have instead suggested that ‘creoleness’ cannot be quantified (Muysken & Smith 2005), and therefore there are no linguistic parameters to define creole languages (DeGraff 2003, 2004). For this reason, some definitions prefer to depict these varieties as the by-product of their shared sociocultural history, often related to slavery (Mufwene 1997; DeGraff 2005), while others focus on their stages of development, suggesting that creoles are the result of a cross-generational break in language transmission (Thomason & Kaufman 1988), or indicating that these vernaculars should be seen as
nativized pidgins (Romaine 1988). Finally, in a recent article on pidgin and creole studies, Schwegler (2010: 438) stated that it is the “combination of internal linguistic features and shared external history that gives creoles exceptional status.” In his view, this is why “conceptual terminology such as ‘creole,’ ‘creolist,’ ‘creolistic,’ ‘creolization’ and so forth continues to be applied without hesitation by most creolists, including those who reject the possibility of defining ‘creole’ as a class” (2010: 438).

Because of 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 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 stated previously, I would like to propose a different hypothesis. In my view, ABS should be seen as the result of fossilized processes of second language acquisition, which crystallized in an environment removed 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, 2005), the Interlanguage Hypothesis (Plag 2008a, b; 2009a, b), and the theory of Vernacular Universals (Chambers 2003, 2004), three frameworks that will establish the theoretical basis on which to build the following discussion.

2.2. Processability Theory and the Interlanguage Hypothesis

Processability Theory (Pienemann 1998, 2000, 2005) is an SLA theory that attempts to account for the well-known fact that second language speakers acquire an L2 along a specific developmental path, in a systematic way. In order to explain why this is the case, the theory recurs to psycholinguistic models of speech production, as those designed by Levelt (1989) and Kempen & Hoenkamp (1987). Processability Theory rests squarely on the assumption that language processing procedures are activated according to a specific hierarchical sequence, which, in turn, drives their order of acquisition. Pienemann (2000) presents such a sequence by providing English data. In fact, research on English SLA has extensively shown that speakers tend
to universally follow the acquisition path reported in Table 2.1. They begin by pronouncing one word at a time; then they systematically develop more complex structures in a hierarchical order until reaching—in some cases—a target-like proficiency (see Plag 2008a:123–124).

Recently, Plag (2008a, b; 2009a, b) has incorporated Processability Theory into his Interlanguage Hypothesis of creole formation. According to the Interlanguage Hypothesis, creoles should be seen as “conventionalized interlanguages of an early stage” (Plag 2008a: 115). Plag, in fact, tries to account for many aspects of creole grammar: loss of inflectional morphology, the supposedly unmarked nature of a variety of syntactic constructions, phonological simplifications, 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 chapter, I will try to show that the “creole-like” features reported for ABS are not exclusive of 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.

Table 2.1
Developmental Stages in English Interlanguage Syntax (Pienemann 2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial State</td>
<td>One-Word Utterance</td>
<td>Ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canonical Word Order</td>
<td>Bob kick ball (SVO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neg + V</td>
<td>He no like coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adverb Fronting</td>
<td>Then Bob kick ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Topicalization</td>
<td>That I didn’t like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do-Fronting</td>
<td>Do you like it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes-No Inversion</td>
<td>Has he seen you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Copula Inversion</td>
<td>Where is John?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Particle Verbs</td>
<td>Take the hat off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do/Aux 2nd</td>
<td>Why did he sell that car?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Where has he gone?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Cancel Inversion</td>
<td>I wonder why he sold that car</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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’ (2003, 2004) Vernacular Universals. In Chambers’ view, a limited number of phonological and morphosyntactic phenomena seem to persist in vernacular varieties wherever they are spoken. Chambers (2003: 266–270) classified these recurring natural elements as “vernacular roots.”

The theory of Vernacular Universals assumes that these vernacular features are in some 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 by-products of the language faculty, that is, the mental bioprogram (or UG) that differentiates humans from other beings (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 since been proven to provide a misleading picture of pidgin and creole genesis. On the other hand, I believe that Chambers’ observation that pidgins, creoles and second language varieties tend to share some common features that can be reinterpreted from a SLA perspective by simply saying that constructions requiring less processing are mastered before constructions requiring more processing, so that elements that are hard to process will not be encountered in the initial stages of these developing grammars.

Demonstrating naturalness for phonological processes appears to be easier than for syntactic ones. For example, consonant cluster reductions may be seen as the result of more economic motor-articulatory operations (Chambers 2003: 258–259). On the other hand, analyses that might account for more natural syntactic processes are more difficult to evaluate, 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 (see 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 an 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 seen as traces of a previous stage of radical creolization or whether they could simply be ascribed to intermediate and advanced second language strategies that happened to fossilize in a language, which, until recently, was not affected by the standardization pressure imposed by society.

2.4. Afro-Bolivian Spanish Traditional 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 hundred [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 2.2 presents some of the most traditional ABS features, those selected by Lipski (2008) as potentially salient for the creole hypothesis.1

In Table 2.3, Lipski compares the same Afro-Bolivian traditional features with those encountered in other Spanish/Portuguese ‘creoles’ (2008: 184), to determine the status of Yungueño Spanish with respect to them.

Lipski suggests that “at least impressionistically, Afro-Yungueño Spanish is more creole-like than the Helvécia (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” (Lipski 2008: 183).

In the rest of this section, we will take a closer look at the features presented in Tables 2.2 and 2.3 to understand to what extent they may be taken as indicators of a previous creole stage. As I will try to show, these grammatical elements can often be found in advanced second languages and in substandard Spanish and Portuguese dialects, which did not derive from earlier creoles.

It is true that while null articles in subject position are not generally allowed in Romance languages (see Contreras 1986), they have been extensively

1. More recently, Pérez Inofuentes (2010) has also proposed a creole hypothesis to account for the origin of ABS.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenon</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elimination of definite articles in subject position</td>
<td>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’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of the Spanish third person singular as invariant verb form for all persons and numbers</td>
<td>Naijotro 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]’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructions based on invariant ta(ba) + infinitive instead of conjugated verbs</td>
<td>¿Quién ta comprá? [quién está comprando?] ‘who is buying [coca]?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructions based on invariant ya + infinitive instead of conjugated verbs</td>
<td>Furlano ya muri [murió] ‘so and so just died’; Ya vini [vino] temprano tia Francisca ‘Francisca came early’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructions based on invariant va + infinitive instead of conjugated verbs</td>
<td>Naijotro 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’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-inverted questions</td>
<td>¿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?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension of grammatical gender in nouns and adjectives</td>
<td>Tudu un [toda una] semana ‘a whole week’; nuestro cultura antigo [nuestra cultura antigua] ‘our traditional culture’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of nuay [Spanish no hay ‘there is/are not’] and nuabía [Spanish no había ‘there was/were not’] instead of no tener ‘to not have’</td>
<td>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’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of tener ‘to have’ instead of haber ‘to exist’ to express existence</td>
<td>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’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally, double negation with nada ‘nothing’</td>
<td>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’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature</td>
<td>Yungueño</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Null def. art.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invariant verb form for person and number</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMA particles</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-inverted questions</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluralizing particle/3pl.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No gender concord in NPs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject pronouns as object</td>
<td>No (except yo after prep.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘to have’ as existential verb</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negation</td>
<td>Preposed (occasional double NEG with nada)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEG derived from no/não</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postposed NP as possessive</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serial verbs</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicate clefting</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Schwegler points out that Palenquero negation system is actually more complex than what indicated in the table; it consists of NEG1 (preposed), NEG2 (embracing NEG), and NEG3 (postposed) (cf. Schwegler 1991).
reported in their derived creole varieties (e.g., on Cape Verdian, see Baptista 2007; on Palenquero, see Schwegler 2007). However, it must be said that they can also be found in Spanish and Portuguese dialects, which could hardly be classified as creoles, for example, in Chota Valley Spanish (Lipski 1992; Sessarego 2013) and Brazilian Portuguese (Guy 1981; Munn & Schmitt 2001; Schmitt & Munn 2003; 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 (Leonini 2006; Sánchez & Giménez 1998). Bickerton (1981) provides a description of how bare nouns should behave in prototypical creoles. In his view, these languages tend to present 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). Bickerton’s analysis does not account for the features of Afro-Bolivian Spanish. In this dialect, 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 is for the most part like the one of Spanish with the difference that bare nouns can take on either plural/singular, specific/non-specific/generic readings, given the proper pragmatic contexts (see Gutiérrez-Rexach & Sessarego 2011 for a detailed account). ABS bare nouns closely resemble Brazilian Portuguese ones (see Munn & Schmitt 2001; Müller 2003).

Verb forms showing invariable third person singular morphology are commonly encountered in L2 varieties (Slabakova 2009) and are often only mastered after intensive formal instruction. Since formal education has entered Los Yungas more recently (after 1952), it is not completely surprising to encounter the presence of these verb forms in the speech of the oldest Afro-Bolivian informants. Moreover, it is important to stress that ABS verb forms clearly inflect for tense and aspect (e.g., tomó ‘he drank’ and tomaba ‘he was drinking’), while more radical creoles usually show invariant verb stems preceded by TMA (Tense, Mood, and Aspect) markers.

On the other hand, the grammatical particles identified as potential TMA elements for Afro-Bolivian Spanish seem to have been directly derived

2. Note that this is my personal opinion (see Sessarego 2013 for Chota Valley Spanish). In the literature, it has also been suggested that Brazilian Portuguese was a creole that decreolized. According to this view, bare plurals in this language would be the direct result of substrate influence (Guy 2004; Lipski 2006a). On the other hand, Naro & Scherre (2000) do not agree with this hypothesis and consider the differences between Brazilian Portuguese and Peninsular Portuguese as the result of ‘normal’—internally motivated—language change (see Schwegler 2010 for an overview of this debate).
from Spanish where they are used in the same way. Moreover, Lipski recog-
nizes that “Afro-Bolivian speakers effectively regard the use of tá + 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). Furthermore, the analysis of tá as a creole preverbal marker should always be considered with caution. Unless we can document for ABS tá functions that are significantly divergent from Spanish está ‘he/she is’—and this is not the case—the creole TMA status of this element should be questioned because of its close relation to /s/ weakening.

The analysis of ya as a TMA perfective marker is dubious too. Lipski (2008: 125) could report only a few instances, which closely resemble their Spanish counterparts:

(2) Fulano ya murí [murió]  
Fulano already die-INF [die 3-SG.PAST]  
‘So and so just died’

(3) Ya vení [vino] temprano tía Francisca  
Already come INF [come 3-SG.PAST] early aunt Francisca  
‘Francisca came early’

The author indicates that these examples might consist of TMA markers followed by infinitive verb forms; nevertheless, given the similarities between these sentences and the Spanish ones and the lack of people’s judgments on their grammaticality, we do not have enough evidence to classify them as TMA particles. Lispki himself casts some doubts on the possible use of va as future/irrealis marker (2008: 125–127). In fact, all Spanish dialects possess constructions of the kind ir ‘go’ + a ‘to’ + infinitive, where the prepo-
sition a may be absorbed phonetically by the third person singular form va (< va a). For this reason, the only difference between ABS and standard Spanish in this respect is the lack of person and number morphology on the verb form, which, as we saw, is a common feature of L2 varieties. Finally, Lipski also suggests that “there is no evidence that tá, va and ya once had particle status” (2008: 127).

3. Schwegler (personal communication) points out that, in line with Palenquero, where ‘a’ acts as a TMA marker, examples (2) and (3) could actually be as follows: (2) Fulano ya a muri and (3) Ya a veni temprano tia Francisca.
Non-inverted questions, consisting of a fronted operator followed by a preverbal subject \((wh-S-V)\), are not only found in creole languages; rather, they are also well attested in non-creolized Spanish dialects such as Cuban, Dominican, Puerto Rican, etc. (Lipski 1994). Furthermore, \(wh-S-V\) questions are found cross-linguistically also in very advanced L2s (Pienemann 1998, 2000), thus showing that they are not only indicative of creoles.

Full gender agreement operations are mastered late during the second language acquisition process (Bruhn de Garavito & White 2000; Franceschina 2005; Hawkins 1998; Leonini 2006); phi-feature agreement mismatches are quite common in L2s, especially if the learner speaks an L1 that lacks ‘gender’ as a feature (Franceschina 2002). Additionally, it should be pointed out that all ABS speakers, even the eldest members of the community, can clearly identify masculine and feminine nouns. Therefore, what differentiates ABS from standard Spanish is not the presence/absence of gender features, but rather the DP elements specified for agreement with the noun. In fact, while in 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 & Gutiérrez-Rexach 2011). The limitation of nominal gender agreement to these determiners inherently indicates the presence of the feature ‘gender’ in the dialect. In this respect, ABS is quite different from the majority of the Romance-based creoles, which are generally supposed to lack gender features.

The verbs \textit{tener} ‘to have’ and non-auxiliary \textit{haber} ‘to exist’ are usually respectively employed to express possession and existence; nonetheless, occasionally \textit{nu hay} (Sp. \textit{No hay} ‘there is not’) and \textit{nu había} (< Sp. \textit{No había} ‘there was not’) can be used to express lack of possession:

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(4)] Yo nu hay cajué
  
  I no have coffee
  
  ‘I do not have coffee’
\end{enumerate}

The employment of \textit{tener} as existential is only occasional, but may occur:

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(5)] En la mesa tiene gallina
  
  in the table have chicken
  
  ‘On the table there are some chickens’
\end{enumerate}

Lipski proposes that the overlap between these two verbal forms may have
been greater in the past (2008: 181). This phenomenon may well be an indicator of partial restructuring; however, it does not imply any previous creole stage.

Lipski (2008: 138) presents some instances of double negation with nada and indicates that they are only occasional (6). Nevertheless, they should not be taken as creole-like features since they are also encountered in other Spanish and Portuguese dialects, which would hardly be labeled as creoles: e.g., Brazilian Portuguese (Schwenter 2005), Puerto Rican and Venezuelan Spanish (Lipski 2008: 138–139).

(6) Oté no fue escuela nada
You no went school nothing
‘You did not go to school at all’

In summary, only a few features of those indicated in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 as indicators of previous creolization can be said to really belong to ABS. Such elements are the following:

- Presence of bare nouns
- Use of the 3rd 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’

Moreover, we should stress that besides these elements, which are suggestive but not necessarily evidence of the nativization of an early pidgin, the majority of the morphosyntactic patterns encountered in ABS are also found in Spanish. If we cannot obtain a precise picture of a language by ranking it in terms of “creoleness,” we can at least get a general idea of where it stands with respect to other varieties. It is obvious that ABS is a contact variety presenting several key differences from standard Spanish; however, even its most traditional dialect can be understood without major problems by any standard speaker.

A close analysis of ABS linguistic features does not seem to suggest that this language was a creole. However, in order to offer a more comprehensive picture of the issue, a sociohistorical analysis of ABS will also be provided.
The rest of this chapter is divided in two main sections. The first section consists of a sociohistorical overview concerning the evolution of Afro-Hispanic languages in the Americas. The second section analyzes exclusively the Bolivian region and, in this way, tries to cast light on the origin of Afro-Bolivian Spanish.

2.5. On the Scarcity of Spanish Creoles in Latin America

The paucity of Spanish-based creoles in the Americas has long been a hot topic of discussion in contact linguistics. In fact, if we consider the territories colonized by Spain in the “New World” and weigh them against those belonging to other European powers (e.g., French, English), we notice immediately that the density of creole languages is comparatively much lower than that found in former French and British colonies. There are only two languages that have been traditionally classified as Latin American Spanish creoles: Palenquero, spoken by the inhabitants of San Basilio de Palenque (Colombia), and Papiamentu, found in Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao (Dutch Antilles). Furthermore, it must also be said that also for these two languages the debate concerning their origin is far from over, since several scholars have argued that these languages should not be seen as Spanish creoles, but rather as Portuguese-derived varieties, which were subsequently relexified with Spanish lexicon (for a detailed account, see Goodman 1987; Jacobs 2008, 2009a, b; Martinus 1989; McWhorter 2000; Schwegler 1993).

The rest of the contact varieties that developed from the African Diaspora to Spanish America in colonial times did not give birth to creoles; rather, these languages resemble Spanish quite closely, and even if they are usually highly stigmatized from a social point of view, their grammars do not deviate radically from the standard language.

A variety of models have been proposed to account for the lack of Spanish creoles in the Americas. Some linguists have suggested that Spanish creoles did not develop, in contrast with other European varieties, because the social structure encountered in Spanish America was radically different from the one found in the French and British empires. In particular, the master-slave relation was by far less harsh: working conditions were presumably less strenuous; manumission was easier to obtain; and interracial relations were much more common.4 These factors would have provided easier access

---

4. Schwegler (personal communication) disagrees with the idea that the slave-master
to the language spoken by the masters so that the acquisition of Spanish by slaves could take place without much difficulty (Laurence 1974, Mintz 1971).

Another common reason offered to account for the lack of Spanish creoles, at least in the Spanish Caribbean, is that the islands conquered by the Spaniards did not develop a large-scale plantation economy until the nineteenth century, so that the ratio between Europeans and Africans remained low for several centuries, which allowed for the acquisition of Spanish by the enslaved group. Only after the nineteenth century, the presence of blacks in these regions is more significant, but at that point the Spanish language was well in place in the colonies and could be acquired by the newly imported Africans (Chaudenson 1992, 2001; Laurence 1974; Megenney 1985; Mintz 1971).

Mintz (1971) clearly indicates that the reason for the non-creolization of Spanish in the Caribbean, in contrast with the creolization of English and French in the same region, has to do with the different ways in which social structure had been designed by the colonial authorities. He compares Spanish Cuba to French Haiti in the following way (1971: 488):

In such colonies as Cuba, where one may suppose that a pidgin language did exist, at least briefly and in those periods when the influx of multilingual slave shipments was considerable, Spanish would provide a continuing medium of communication for culturally creolized slaves and freemen of all physical types. For the greater part of Cuba’s and Puerto Rico’s post-conquest history—that is, from the Discovery until at least the eighteenth century—the relative proportions of slaves to freemen were low, and the rates of manumission apparently high. In such colonies as Saint Domingue, where the importation of slaves after 1697 was both massive and rapid, the stabilization of a pidgin and the emergence of a creole language thereafter would be expectable, even though manumission was common, relation in Spanish America radically differed from what was encountered in other European territories in the Americas. Nevertheless, I have to say that sociohistorical evidence seems to confirm this traditional distinction (see Andrés-Gallego 2005). In Sessarego (n. d.), I elaborate further on this idea. The analysis is based on legal data. The Spaniards, in fact, inherited the institution of slavery from the Roman Corpus Juris Civilis and elaborated on it over time, thus shaping the institution of slavery into a model much more flexible than the original Roman one. On the other hand, England, France, and Holland did not receive the institution of slavery in ancient times; there were no slaves in these European countries by the time the Americas were discovered. As a result, these colonial powers had to create a slave law from scratch, and oftentimes they borrowed directly from Roman law. As a consequence, their slave laws were much harsher than the one implemented in the Spanish colonies (see Watson 1989).
and the growth of an intermediate and economically influential free mulatto class—probably bilingual—was swift. Revolution and independence at the close of the eighteenth century, and the substantial elimination of the French colonists, may have contributed powerfully to the full stabilization of the Haitian Creole thereafter.

Laurence (1974) provides a similar account. The author offers a general description of slave life in the Caribbean regions belonging to Spain, France, and England. Laurence concludes that overall the Hispanic slave enjoyed much higher living standards. She indicates a list of elements that were in place in Spanish Caribbean but absent in the other colonies under investigation (i.e., French Haiti and English Jamaica): (1) Africans did not outnumber the Europeans; (2) manumission and interracial marriages were common; (3) for several centuries the economic structure of these regions was based on small-scale farms, where oftentimes poor Spaniards and free blacks worked side by side with the enslaved population.

Lipski (1987, 1993, 1998, 2000) also appears to support the idea that Spanish did not creolize in the Caribbean because of the socioeconomic characteristics of the region. He indicates that probably after the sugarcane boom of the nineteenth century the conditions for a creole language to emerge were in place in some of the biggest estates; however, the recently arrived slaves did not creolize the language already in place in the colony, so that the following generations learned Spanish natively.

McWhorter (2000) admits that these hypotheses may justify the lack of a full-fledged Spanish creole in the Caribbean; nevertheless, he argues that the aforementioned sociohistorical description cannot be applied to Spanish mainland colonies (e.g., Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Venezuela), where—in his view—large-scale haciendas were in place and harsh working conditions were well attested (Blackburn 1997). McWhorter (2000) proposes that the lack of access to the lexifier language could not have been the reason for the development of creoles in the “New World,” in contrast with Chaudenson’s (1979, 1992) and Mufwene’s (1996) analyses. In fact, if that were the case, we would then expect to find creoles in many former Spanish colonies, such as the Department of Chocó (Colombia), Chota Valley (Ecuador), Veracruz (Mexico), Lima (Peru), and the Mocundo hacienda (Venezuela), but this is not what happened. Conversely, McWhorter suggests that the real reason behind the lack of Spanish creoles has to do with the fact that Spanish was the only European power without a colony in Africa from which to extract an enslaved labor force. In his view, creoles
developed from pidgins, and should not be seen as transformed varieties of their European lexifiers. Therefore, since Spanish did not pidginize in Africa, there could not possibly be Spanish creoles in the “New World.”

Lipski (2005, n. d.) does not share McWhorter’s view on this issue. He claims that McWhorter’s account does not explain why, if the socioeconomic scenario he describes is correct, a pidgin did not develop in such Spanish territories overseas, or why a Portuguese pidgin previously formed in Africa did not relexify and develop into a Spanish creole, as supposedly happened in the case of Papiamentu and Palenquero.

As for Venezuela, Díaz-Campos & Clements (2008) provide a sociohistorical picture of slavery that greatly diverges from the scenario described by McWhorter. The authors indicate that McWhorter uses the word ‘Africans’ to describe mulattoes and other racially mixed individuals who were born in Latin America and could speak Spanish natively. They also stress the importance of the Spanish Crown’s monopoly on slave trading. In their view, this last factor greatly constrained the introduction of African slaves into the colony. For this reason, the bozal sector of the population was never the majority, and a Spanish creole was not likely to develop in the region.

Conversely, other scholars have suggested that Spanish creoles did exist in the Americas (Bickerton & Escalante 1970; Granda 1978; Schwegler 1993, 1996), but over time they decreolized and disappeared almost everywhere, thus surviving only in San Basilio de Palenque and in the Dutch Antilles. However, it seems unlikely that such a language was once used so widely and then disappeared entirely, without leaving more substantial traces (Laurence 1974; McWhorter 2000).5

A linguistic feature that has been identified as a potential creole indicator for an Afro-Hispanic dialect is the grammatical element ele, found in Chota Valley Spanish (CVS). Schwegler (1999), in fact, suggested that ele should be analyzed as a Portuguese third person pronoun. In his view, ele offers undeniable evidence of a previous Afro-Portuguese creole stage for this language. However, this hypothesis has been challenged by Lipski (2009), who provides linguistic data indicating that Chota Valley Spanish ele might

---

5. Schwegler (personal communication) points out that his analysis of Palenque indicates that this might not have been the case. In fact, as Schwegler & Morton (2003) have shown, Black Spanish (as found in Palenque) does not contain the expected creole features. That is, speakers, in spite of three centuries of bilingualism and intense code-switching, have not transferred creole features into their Spanish. This fact, according to the authors, indicates that a creole language could have been spoken in other regions of the Americas without leaving behind any trace.
not have been derived from a Portuguese pronoun; rather, it would be the result of a paragogic process encountered also in other CVS words (ayer à ayere ‘yesterday’; ser à sere ‘to be’). Furthermore, the sociohistorical evidence also seems to suggest that the creole hypothesis for CVS is rather unlikely (Sessarego 2013).

A potential creole root has also been claimed for Barlovento Spanish by Álvarez & Obediente (1998). The authors, in fact, suggest that this Afro-Venezuelan dialect presents some grammatical features that could hint at a previous creole stage (e.g., deletion of the copula verb, non-inverted order in questions, etc.). The basis for this claim would be that these phenomena are not generally encountered in Spanish sub-standard dialects, and that they should therefore be attributed to decreolization. Díaz-Campos & Clements (2008) have argued against this hypothesis by showing that the sociohistorical and linguistic data available for Barlovento Spanish do not seem to support a creole hypothesis for this dialect. First of all, they show that blacks were not sufficiently numerous in the area for a creole to emerge. Secondly, they provide an alternative account for all the features classified by Álvarez & Obediente as potentially inherited from the creole, by indicating that they are actually better explained in terms of imperfect second language acquisition, in a context in which the superstrate language was relatively available to the African slaves.

More recently, Lipski (2006a, b; 2007; 2008) has proposed that Afro-Bolivian Spanish (ABS) might be seen as the result of a decreolization process. As we mentioned in the introduction, Lipski indicates that ABS could be the descendant of a colonial Afro-Hispanic pidgin (2008: 186). In fact, he (2006b) suggests a possible creole origin for this vernacular. Lipski, however, recognizes that this claim is not supported by robust sociodemographic evidence, and for this reason, he does not reject a priori the hypothesis that ABS represents “a stable but not creolized variety of Spanish that co-existed with Highland Bolivian Spanish since its inception” (2006b: 37).

6. It must be said that Schwegler (1999) also provides data for Palenquero and nineteenth-century Cuba/Puerto Rico Bozal Spanish, where ele and elle are found respectively. The author maintains that these pronouns cannot possibly have been derived from their corresponding Spanish forms. To the skeptics who may consider ele as a simple paragoge of Spanish él > ele, he answers that plural ele in Palenquero provides evidence that the Spanish hypothesis is flawed, since paragoge of Spanish ellos/ellas ‘they’ could not give rise to Pal. ele (Schwegler 1999: 243–245). As far as the origin of Cuba/Puerto Rico Bozal elle is concerned, Schwegler indicates that it would be the result of a ‘blend’ between Afro-Portuguese ele and Span. ella, ellos, and ellas (1999: 250). Because of space limitations, I will not discuss this issue further here. Sessarego (2013) provides a more detailed account on the nature of ele in Chota Valley Spanish and a sociohistorical and linguistic analysis testing the feasibility of an Afro-Portuguese creole spoken in colonial Spanish America.
In the rest of this chapter, I will try to cast light on this issue. The socio-historical and linguistic data I was able to collect do not appear to indicate that ABS was once a creole that went through a decreolization process. On the contrary, the evidence collected seems to support the idea that it never creolized. This analysis tries to locate Afro-Bolivian Spanish in space and time with respect to the colonization of Spanish America. In doing so, it will also provide a detailed account of the sociohistorical conditions that led to the development of this Afro-Hispanic contact variety.

2.6. Black Slavery in Bolivia

Black slavery lasted in Bolivia for almost four centuries. It was introduced in the region with the Spanish conquest, in the first decades of the sixteenth century, and remained there until 1826, when immediately after the war of independence slaves were declared free. Nevertheless, the formal abolition of slavery, in practice, did not provide freedom to Afro-Bolivians. In fact, former slaves had to live on the lands belonging to the plantation and continued working there for a minimal wage until the Land Reform, which took place in 1952. This system was called peonaje; the salary provided to peons was so low that workers had to borrow money in order to survive; the debt was passed down from generation to generation, so that the socio-economic conditions of blacks did not improve and forced labor persisted. Only after the Land Reforms did Afro-descendants become free people and acquire the right to vote and to receive an education (Crespo 1995).

Brockington (2006) describes the black Diaspora to Bolivia as a forced migration that took place in two main phases. The first phase (roughly 1530–1650) was characterized by the arrival of black slaves and freemen, who participated in the many Spanish campaigns of invasion and conquest during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. These people proceeded primarily from Spain and from other American colonies under Spanish control (e.g., the Caribbean). These first blacks to enter the Andean territory were typically identified with the term ladinos, which meant they had learned the Spanish customs, were Christians, and could speak Spanish fairly well. Over time, the situation changed. The second phase (1650–1830) saw an increase in the number of bozales introduced into the region. The newcomers were people imported to replace the shrinking native labor force. They were mainly used as domestic servants, farmers, and occasionally miners.
This chapter analyzes these two phases with the goal of shedding light on the currently unclear origins of ABS. Even though Afro-Bolivian slavery appears to have been a highly controversial and variable business, at least from a legal point of view, certain features of this tragic historical period seem to have been fairly constant across the centuries throughout the Bolivian territory.

In fact, black slavery in this Andean region was characterized by several elements, which indirectly provide us with key information about the possible means of communication adopted by the slaves. The linguistic picture emerging from the analysis of these sociohistorical facts seems to suggest that an Afro-Bolivian creole was not likely to develop and that the black population encountered in the territory could speak Spanish—or a good approximation of it—as a result of relatively good access to the language spoken by their masters. Such features can be briefly summarized as follows:

a. The slave trade was monopolized by the Spanish Crown, which kept the black/white ratio relatively low (Díaz-Campos & Clements 2008).  

b. The location of Bolivia, in the heart of South America, made the introduction of African slaves into this region a particularly difficult endeavor. The higher cost of slaves, deriving from such a geographical barrier, severely limited their importation (Klein 1986; Wolff 1981).

c. Spaniards in Bolivia did not need as much of an African workforce as elsewhere in the Americas. The indigenous population could be forced to work for a minimal wage, a scenario that was economically more profitable for the owner than investing in expensive African slaves (Bowser 1974; Mellafe 1984).

d. The combination of (a), (b) and (c) strongly constrained the introduction of Africans to the territory. As a consequence, massive importation was never reported, and rare were purchases of more than ten slaves at a time (Bridikhina 1995a; Busdiecker 2006; Crespo 1995; Lockhart 1994).

These are the main elements that characterized black slavery in the Bolivian region for a period of almost four centuries. The following sections

---

7. As we will see, a low black/white ratio was the general tendency. However, this does not exclude the possibility that in certain regions at certain points in time Afro-descendants might have been the majority of the population.
will focus on the two phases of the African Diaspora to the Bolivian territory to provide a better account of the potential genesis and evolution of this Afro-Hispanic language.

2.6.1. FIRST PHASE: 
FROM THE SIXTEENTH TO THE MID-SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The territory of the South American region now known as Bolivia was colonized by Spain during the sixteenth century. The conquest took place on two different fronts. The Spaniards penetrated the territory from both the west (via Peru) and the east (via Paraguay). Colonization, from the Peruvian side, can be schematically summarized as follows: in 1528, the Spanish conqueror Francisco Pizarro arrived by boat in Tumbes. By 1532 Spaniards reached Cajamarca and killed the Inca emperor Atahualpa. In 1533 they took Cuzco, the capital of the Inca Empire (Lockhart 1994). In 1538 they founded La Plata de la Nueva Toledo, now known as Sucre. In 1542 they settled Cochabamba, and by 1546 Potosí, the richest silver mines of Latin America. In 1548 they founded La Paz.

From the Paraguayan side, the conquest took place in a similar way. By 1537, Asunción, the current Paraguayan capital, was settled by the conqueror Juan de Ayola. Several explorations followed; in 1548 Spaniards settled Guay, and a year later the Spanish captain Nuflo de Chávez reached the already settled city of La Plata de la Nueva Toledo. The same captain founded the city of Santa Cruz in 1561, and in 1565 the explorer Diego de Villarol founded Tucumán, in present-day Argentina (Klein 1999).

By 1559, La Plata de la Nueva Toledo (Sucre) became the capital of the Audiencia of Charcas, which had jurisdiction over the region roughly corresponding to present-day Bolivia, Paraguay, and northern Argentina. This was the provincial court that administered the large silver mines at Potosí. It belonged to the Viceroyalty of Peru until 1776, when it became part of the newly created Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata.

Africans played an important part in the conquest, pacification, and settlement of the Andean region. In the early reports of the conquest of the Andes, black servants appear on several occasions. Soon after discovering Tumbes, Pizarro returned to Spain to seek military and financial support for his conquering enterprise. In 1529, he was granted royal support and, among other things, received fifty-two black slaves free from duty charges (Bowser 1974: 4). Several other conquerors and settlers were given similar
permissions to import a certain number of blacks. According to Bowser (1974), between 1529 and 1537 the kings released at least 363 import licenses, of which 258 were given to Pizarro and his relatives.

During this early colonial phase, the Spanish kings provided importing licenses to trustworthy settlers to import black slaves for military purposes and for the building of roads, bridges, and public infrastructures. These early black slaves who entered the Andean region were for the most part ladinos, professed the Catholic religion, spoke Spanish, and were familiar with the European ways. Usually they came from Spain or from already settled Spanish colonies (Bowser 1974: 3). The Spanish Crown and the Roman Catholic Church were committed to Christianizing the New World and were concerned with the introduction of potential enemies of the faith.

In these early times, before the New Laws of 1542–43, which established that Indians could not be made slaves, some Central American natives were taken as servants to Bolivia. However, even though these Indian slaves were not from the Andes, they could blend more easily and socialize with the local populations than blacks. African descendants, on the other hand, have always been perceived by the Indians as foreigners; they could not integrate easily into the local context, and for this reason they often identified more with their masters. This situation led to a reciprocal hostility between the Indians and the Africans, which turned out to be greatly beneficial to the Spaniards—and also partially to the blacks. Bowser (1974: 7) comments on the fact that blacks soon came to occupy an intermediary social position between the Spanish colonizers and the natives. Blacks were often used to repress Indian uprisings or to help local priests and corregidores de indios; moreover, since they were expensive, they came to symbolize economic wealth and many Spaniards wanted to possess them as domestic servants to show economic status and acquire prestige in society (see Lockhart 1994).

Differently from other European powers, the Spanish Crown almost never encouraged the massive importation of slaves to the American colonies, especially to Bolivia. Slave trading dynamics in Spanish America were not regulated by a free market economy; conversely, the Crown highly constrained this business by granting only a few asientos ‘import licenses’ to a few trading companies and by charging buyers almorjarifazgos ‘import taxes’ and alcabalas ‘sales taxes on following slave transactions.’ Such a strict regulation played an important role in limiting the introduction of Africans into Spanish America. This kept the ratio between the black and the white

---

8. Spanish public officers who had legal power over Indian communities.
populations relatively low in several mainland colonies (see, for example, Díaz-Campos & Clements 2008 for Venezuela; Sessarego 2011 and 2013 for Bolivia and Ecuador).

There are no government censuses providing an account of the black population in Bolivia for the sixteenth century; nevertheless, from the letters sent by Spanish settlers to the Crown we can infer that many restrictions were in place regarding the introduction of African slaves into the region. In fact, in several instances the kings refused to grant *asientos*; often times this happened for financial reasons (Bowser 1974). A clear example is that of Pedro Cornejo de Estrella, a Spaniard who settled in Potosí. De Estrella urged the Crown to provide him with the licenses to import 150 black slaves free from royal taxes. He explained to the Crown that these workers would be fundamental to the exploitation of the gold resources of the Carabaya region, in line with a mining plan that he had specifically designed for such mines. However, the kings replied to De Estrella that he could introduce one hundred slaves at most into the region, and only half of them would be free from charges.

In other cases, the *asientos* were never conceded. For example, Viceroy Marqués de Cañete in 1556 asked the Crown to ship three thousand blacks to the colony. In order to recover the financial costs, he proposed that some of the slaves be sold to private miners. The remaining group would be used in the Chachapoyas mines. The Crown refused to send the slaves because this would have implied a costly and risky operation. Cases like this are crucial in understanding the dimensions of the slave trade in Spanish America, and particularly in Bolivia. In fact, this territory was farther away from Africa than the Caribbean region or the other coastal colonies, and it was reasonably populated by Indians, who could be exploited without having to take financial risks.

The journey that slaves were forced to undertake to get to Bolivia was extremely strenuous. In fact, slaves were sent from Africa and from Spain to the most important mainland harbor of Spanish America, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. From there, they were resent by boat to the Atlantic coast of Panama. Once in Panama, they were forced to cross the isthmus to reach the Pacific side of the country. From the Pacific coast, they were shipped again, and after a long sea journey they reached the port of Callao, Peru, or Arica, Chile. Before getting to Bolivia, slaves had to walk from these two cities across the Andes (Busdiecker 2006; Klein 1986; Wolff 1981). The geographical barriers related to this strenuous journey implied that the slaves taken to Bolivia had to go through a significantly longer trip than those
transported to the Latin American coastal regions. This element in all likelihood resulted in a higher number of black deaths (Busdiecker 2006; Klein 1986).

In the last decades of the sixteenth century, slaves started being introduced into the region through a route linking La Paz to Tucumán and Buenos Aires (Argentina). This last city, in fact, received slaves proceeding from Africa and Brazil. This second route was illegal and thus free from royal duties; merchants managed to introduce slaves from Argentina by corrupting local government officials (Bridikhina 1995a; Busdiecker 2006; Wolff 1981).

It can be said that the introduction of Africans into the Andes was not an easy task; these logistical problems inevitably resulted in a higher price for the slaves sold in Bolivia. In this Andean region, it is rare to find massive acquisitions of blacks by a single buyer (Busdiecker 2006). Legal documents confirm that a purchase record of more than ten slaves at a time was very unusual (Crespo 1995; Lockhart 1994). Owners who possessed many slaves acquired them progressively, usually purchasing only a couple of them at a time (Bridikhina 1995a; Busdiecker 2006).

Spain saw huge potential for exploiting Bolivian mineral resources from the very beginning of its conquest. For this reason, from early times, the economic structure of the region relied heavily on the mineral sector, and only in part on the agricultural one. In particular, Spaniards understood the importance of producing coca leaves, a product that for centuries has been used to help miners resist fatigue at high altitudes.

The conquerors mainly relied on the native labor force by adopting the mita, a pre-Colombian working system, according to which each Indian man would be assigned a certain task in line with a specific revolving schedule. In this way, all members of the community participated in the system, and once they had worked their designated shift, they were not required to work another one until all members completed their turn.

The mita was particularly demanding for the natives. On several occasions the royal administrators tried to reduce the workload on the Indians by suggesting that blacks substitute for them; however, these attempts were almost never successful. The massive employment of Indians in the mines was implemented during Viceroy Toledo’s government (1569–80). In the case of Potosí, in 1578, it was established that 14,248 men would serve each year in the cerro rico mines (Bowser 1974). 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 the time show that in such areas
blacks were never a significant percentage of the population, as indicated in Table 2.4 (Crespo 1995).

Brockington reports a document written in 1618 by Antonio de Barranca, the archbishop of the Mizque-Santa Cruz diocese. The religious man describes the population statistics for baptismal data of six parishes under his administration. He indicates the presence of 250 negros, 150 mulatos,⁹ and zambos,¹⁰ 2,600 yanaconas,¹¹ 8,500 Indians, and 1,800 Spaniards. These data show an overall 3.8 percent Afro-descendant population (Brockington 2006: 176). Brockington also points out that the cost of buying a slave was much higher in Bolivia than Argentina. For example, a small slave child was sold at a price of 200–300 pesos in Mizque, while for the same amount of money an adult slave could be bought in Buenos Aires (Brockington 2006: 144). Therefore, also in several agricultural regions like Mizque-Santa Cruz, by this time, the probability of creole formation is quite slim.

In summary, several factors seem to have constrained the presence of black population in Bolivia during this first wave of importation (mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth 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 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 supports this scenario, indicating that overall the black population was a small minority.

Table 2.4
Demographic Figures for the City of Potosí (Crespo 1995: 26–29)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Afro-Descendant Population</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Afro-Descendant Population (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1611</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>160,000</td>
<td>3.74 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1719</td>
<td>3,206</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>4.58 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>1,142</td>
<td>224,000</td>
<td>0.51 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁹. Offspring of white and black parents.
¹⁰. Offspring of black and Indian parents.
¹¹. Tribute-paying Indians.
2.6.2. SECOND PHASE: 
FROM THE MID-SEVENTEENTH TO THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

As we observed for the previous phase, several factors limited the introduction of a black workforce into the Bolivian region: the Spanish Crown’s monopoly of slave trading did not favor the importation of Africans, the geography presented logistical barriers, and the availability of Indians did not incentivize the employment of black workers, as they were comparatively more expensive. These elements affected the dimensions of the African Diaspora in Bolivia also during the second phase, which lasted approximately another two hundred years (1650–1850).

Even during this second phase, when the Indian sector of the population had drastically shrunk as a result of European diseases and strenuous working conditions, the number of blacks introduced into the colony never achieved the levels observed in other American regions. Slavery, however, lasted for a very long time: it was officially abolished after the independence from Spain (1827), but only in 1952, with the Land Reform, did Afro-Bolivians become free people.

There are not precise demographic figures, offering an accurate picture of the evolution of the Afro-population in the territory over time. However, Table 2.5 can provide us with a rough breakdown of the Bolivian population during the years 1650–1950 (see Rosemblat 1954; Crespo 1995; Pizarroso Cuenca 1977; Dalence 1975).

The data presented in the Table 2.5 cannot give us a perfect analysis of the evolution of the different ethnic groups. Nevertheless, they can at least offer us a general idea. Data appear to suggest that the Afro-descendant population has always represented a small minority, and its members 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 in 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 entire Bolivian population (see Angola-Maconde n. d., reported in Lipski 2008: 30–31).

During this second phase, the Bolivian economy continued to rely in good part on the mining activities and only partially on the agricultural sector. As we noticed in the previous sections, the Afro-descendant population of the mining centers was a very small minority. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that during this period, blacks could commonly be found in the main Bolivian urban centers. In fact, because of their high value, Afro-
descendants came to symbolize economic wealth. As a consequence, the richest members of the society purchased some slaves, who were systematically shown in religious ceremonies or in other public celebrations to the rest of the community (Crespo 1995). Even though having black domestic servants was a common practice among the highest class, the percentage of Africans in Bolivian towns never achieved the levels found in other cities throughout Latin America. A clear case is offered by the 1778 census from Oruro, which reports 229 Afro-descendants, less than the 0.3 percent of the population. Another example is a census from eighteenth-century La Paz, where out of a total population of 40,000, only 350 were listed as blacks (less than 0.9 percent). (Busdiecker 2006).

Being unsuitable for the cold mining highlands, African slaves not only were used as domestic servants in cities; in some cases, they were employed for agricultural and livestock work in several rural regions of Bolivia. In particular, they were used in Mizque to produce wine and sugar, and in Los Yungas, where they were used to produce coca, crucial for the support of the flourishing mining industry in the highlands. In the next two sections, we will focus on the available sociohistorical evidence to determine the feasibility of a creole hypothesis for these two regions.

### 2.7. Black Slavery in Mizque

Brockington (2006) casts light on new data regarding a Jesuit *hacienda* in the province of Mizque in 1767. The agricultural enterprise used 134 black
slaves. They were divided in two different groups: the married (including children) and the bachelors. The first group consisted of 110 slaves, who formed 29 households. The second one was composed by twenty-four adult men. Almost half of the slaves were bozales, while the rest were criollos. The bozales proceeded from Sierra Leone (67 percent), from Congo and central-south Africa (28 percent), and from west Africa-Dahomey and Senegambia (5 percent). Several elderly people are indicated in the Jesuits’ reports. Brockington (2006) suggests that probably, when slaves became too old to work, they were manumitted to avoid paying property taxes. Interestingly, several slaves were older than forty-eight and one was recorded as being seventy-one.

From the available data, it is impossible to draw clear conclusions about the language spoken by these slaves. In fact, we do not know how many Jesuits and Indian workers were present on the hacienda. The presence of some older individuals, and the existence of many nuclear families, could indicate an environment with less harsh treatment and where local demographic reproduction was incentivized, as typical of Jesuits’ plantations (see Macera 1966 for Peru; Bouisson 1997 for Ecuador).

We do not possess a detailed account of the different ethnic groups living and working in the aforementioned hacienda. In order to obtain a better understanding of the local situation, we may rely on the demographic figures provided by Francisco de Viedma, the governor of the province Cochabamba-Santa Cruz in 1788. The data in Table 2.6 indicate that the Afro-descendant sector of the population rose from 3.8 percent in 1618 to 6.4 percent in 1788, but never outnumbered the white-mestizo population (48.5 percent).

The town of Valle Grande hosted the largest mulato-negro group, 38.7 percent (3,243); followed by Cochabamba, 7.9 percent (1,775); Santa Cruz, 6.6 percent (150); Cliza, 6.3 percent (2,386); Mizque, 22 percent (672); Tapacari, 3.8 percent (1,013); Sacaba, 3.5 percent (270); Ayopapa, 1.9 percent (249); and Arque, 1.4 percent (519) (see also Brockington 2006: 177–179).

Viedma’s census does not provide us with data concerning the black population in the Yungas at that time. However, an important piece of information about this tropical region is encountered in the Jesuit document presented by Brockington (2006). The Yungan valleys are mentioned as a possible destination for three slaves that used to be employed by the Jesuits.

12. The territory covered by the 1618 baptismal statistics (by Antonio de Barranco) for the Mizque-Santa Cruz dioceses coincides almost entirely with the governmental province Cochabamba-Santa Cruz.
### Table 2.6
Racial Distribution of the Population of the Provinces of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz in 1788

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Mestizo</th>
<th>Cholo&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Mulatto</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cochabamba</td>
<td>22,305</td>
<td>6,368</td>
<td>12,980</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,182</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacaba</td>
<td>7,614</td>
<td>1,249</td>
<td>2,290</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3,805</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapacarí</td>
<td>26,937</td>
<td>3,277</td>
<td>6,280</td>
<td>1,597</td>
<td>14,770</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cliza</td>
<td>37,615</td>
<td>6,682</td>
<td>12,192</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16,355</td>
<td>2,366</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mizque)</td>
<td>(3,031)</td>
<td>(643)</td>
<td>(825)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(891)</td>
<td>(672)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arque</td>
<td>22,137</td>
<td>1,238</td>
<td>3,936</td>
<td>1,286</td>
<td>15,158</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayopapa</td>
<td>8,637</td>
<td>1,275</td>
<td>1,493</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5,620</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valle Grande</td>
<td>8,373</td>
<td>2,995</td>
<td>1,918</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>3,215</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>10,578</td>
<td>4,303</td>
<td>1,376</td>
<td>2,638</td>
<td>2,111</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>144,250</td>
<td>27,387</td>
<td>42,465</td>
<td>5,521</td>
<td>59,218</td>
<td>9,189</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Source: Descripcion geografica, AGN, Sala 9, Intendencia, 5.8.5, Aug, 10, 1793. This is the original manuscript on which the subsequent Bolivian publication was based and where several of the population figures were printed incorrectly (Larson 1998: 175).

<sup>b</sup> Officially defined as a person of one-quarter white ancestry and three-quarters Indian ancestry.
To conclude, we explored the available information concerning slavery in the Mizque region around the eighteenth century. The records that we have for the Jesuit hacienda in 1767 indicate that a substantial number of slaves were used in the region. However, these data do not imply that a creole language was employed in the plantation, especially if we analyze them keeping in mind Viedma’s census, which suggests that the overall percentage of Afro-descendants for the region was probably too low for a full-fledged creole to develop.

2.8. Black Slavery in Los Yungas

After having provided this general account of black slavery in Bolivia, we now will describe the valleys where ABS is still spoken: Los Yungas, in the Department of La Paz. A precise reconstruction of when African slavery was introduced in this region has never been provided. However, several historical hints appear to suggest that the first significant black presence in this area probably appeared sometime in the early nineteenth century. For example, in an accounting report dated 1805, an overseer of a Yungan hacienda, Francisco Xavier de Bergara, states that the Marquesa de Haro was probably amongst the first landlords who used blacks in the region (Crespo 1995: 123–27).

Portugal Ortiz (1977: 78) mentions numerous documents concerning small slave transactions for this period. His data suggest that it was common for local owners to sell or purchase no more than one or two slaves at a time. An example is the case of an eighteen-year-old girl, who moved to Los Yungas in 1773. In this record it is said that she was originally purchased in Potosí, and after residing in Oruro for a while, 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 (1995a), Crespo’s (1995), and Lockhart’s (1994) view regarding the high price of slaves as a powerful constraint on the massive employment of a black workforce (see also Busdiecker 2006). According to them, masters who possessed several slaves often accumulated them over a long period of time. This could be the case for Don Antonio de Tejada, who at the time of his death (1806) owned forty-one slaves in a Yungan hacienda (Portugal Ortiz 1977: 80–81).
Pizarroso Cuenca (1977: 74) retells the local story of “King Bonifacio,” who apparently sometime around the beginning of the seventeenth century was proclaimed king of the black community by the slaves of the Mururata hacienda. According to this story, after the arrival of a new group of slaves at the plantation owned by the Marqués Pinedo, some of the blacks already working there realized that one of the newcomers was the king of their African tribe. They could not tolerate such a humiliation for their king. For this reason, they agreed with Marqués Pinedo to work extra hours to free him. The slaves also built him a house, and the freed slave came to be known as King Bonifacio Pinedo or Negro Bonifaz. We cannot tell for sure if this story really happened; however, the coronation must have taken place, since this black monarchy is still in place in the Afro-Bolivian community. The part of the story that may raise some doubts is not if the coronation happened, but rather when. In fact the date indicated as 1600 could have been reported wrongly since neither documents nor records of any kind indicate significant African presence in Los Yungas by that time. Besides, Portugal Ortiz notes that, by the eighteenth century, the Yungas was only partially colonized. The Coroico area was taken for the first time from the “enemigos ynfieles”\(^\text{13}\) to be given to Don Buena Aventura Joseph Rodríguez, in 1736 (Portugal Ortiz 1977: 76). As the Mururata hacienda borders Coroico, and the distance between the two villages is no more than an hour’s walk, it is unlikely that one could have been colonized more than 136 years before the other.\(^\text{14}\)

The first available piece of documentation reporting the existence of black slavery in Los Yungas is a church record concerning the death of a mulato in 1703 in the village of Chicaloma. Leons (1984) indicates that the limited availability of documents reporting Afro-descendants records until the beginning of the nineteenth century is due to the limited number of slaves in the region until that point. The first document providing concrete information on the black population in the Yungas is from the early nineteenth century. Crespo (1995: 96) raises a question about the relative proportion of black labor employed in agriculture and provides the following answer:

Talking about Yungan haciendas in the Department of La Paz, not all of them used this kind of workforce, and at least in some regions of this area, those that employed it were a minority.

\(^{13}\) Non-Christianized Indians.

\(^{14}\) Moreover, if the colonization proceeded from La Paz, Mururata would hardly have been conquered before, because it is located after Coroico.
Crespo (1995: 96) quotes a letter written by the Chirca priest in 1802, where he accounted for the percentages of blacks and Indians in twenty-three local haciendas. Of these chacras, only four were employing a black workforce; that is, in Guayraoata 15 negros or mulatos out of 65 workers; in San Agustin 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 (a term that includes negros, mulatos, and zambos) 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. Moreover, without specific mention of 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 2,465; Coripata with 315 out of 3,867; Chupe with 240 out of 1,212; and Lanza with 102 out of 8,255.

The overall information available for these last haciendas suggests that the black population was not the majority. Even in Pacallo and Mururata, where the highest concentrations of Afro-descendants is found, the ratios of morenos to whites and mestizos combined (who supposedly spoke Spanish proficiently, being offspring of a Spanish mother or father) are 56:130 for Pacallo and 324:233 for Mururata. Morenos outnumber whites and mestizos only in Mururata. However, even here, the feasibility of a creole origin does not hold, as the majority of the slaves were probably made up of criollos, and the morenos not only included blacks, but also mulatos and zambos.16

Reports dating from the late eighteenth century show that Los Yungas did not host large-scale plantations; on the other hand, the most common cultivations were of a small and medium nature (Busdiecker 2006). Busdiecker (2006: 38) summarizes Soux’s (1993) account of the labor force used in the Dorado Chico hacienda during that period. Apparently, not all the workers of Dorado Chico were slaves; rather, some were classified as mingas and some as peones. Mingas received a salary and were employed only when

---

15. Small pieces of land used for agriculture.

16. As the traffic of blacks was declared illegal in 1826 but was completely eradicated by 1848, it is likely that importations decreased significantly during this period of time. In this case, I agree with Singler (1992: 326), who argues that the faster the locally born population emerges, the more the resulting contact variety is influenced by the lexifier (see Arends 2008 for a detailed account on the role of demography in creole formation).
extra help was needed. *Peones*, on the other hand, did not receive money for the work they did in the *hacienda*; however, they were provided with a parcel of land and three days off a week to cultivate their own products. Finally, there were enslaved workers, who usually were not provided with land; they had to work for free and were given food, clothes, and wood, since they had no material means to achieve such provisions by themselves (see also Crespo 1995).

Health conditions for Yungueños have always been an issue: lack of hygiene, insects, and a variety of tropical diseases often caused the death of many workers. This fact represented huge problems for the local landlords, for whom the death of a slave consisted of a complete capital loss (Busdicker 2006). For this reason, whenever possible, planters would prefer to employ Indian labor. These considerations concerning the use of black slaves and free workers are reported by the *hacienda* overseer mentioned above, Francisco Xavier de Bergara. In an analysis called *Demonstraciones matemáticas* ‘Quantitative evidence,’ de Bergara tries to show that using enslaved workers was not financially convenient and that relying on free Indians would have been more lucrative. The overseer mentioned a list of factors that were at the root of this situation. His final objective was to persuade the *hacienda* proprietor, Don Antonio Sáez de Tejada, to sell his slaves and replace this labor force with natives. Bergara’s observations indirectly provide us with a good idea of the social patterns encountered in the Yungas at that time. Masters had to feed and clothe their slaves; moreover, they had to provide them with an accommodation and Christian education.

De Bergara estimated a cost per-capita of 1.5 reales¹⁷ a day. In addition, the master also had to pay for Church rites, including weddings (12 pesos) and funerals (12 pesos). Moreover, blacks were more likely to rebel, and therefore extra overseers were needed to control a group of them. Catching a runaway slave could cost anywhere from 25 to 100 pesos, while the death of one of them, often from diseases, would have represented the loss of the total investment. Apparently, in Sáez de Tejada’s *hacienda* workers received the same daily wage independently of whether they were African descendants or Indians: three reales for the men and two reales for the women and the children. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that slaves implied an initial capital investment (360 pesos per man and 410 per woman), while native workers did not imply such a cost because they were free.

---

¹⁷ One peso consists of eight reales.
As Busdiecker (2006: 38) points out, in Dorado Chico all workers (*mingas*, *peones*, and slaves) were supposed to receive equal payment. In practice, however, only *mingas* received money; the rest were generally given provisions (e.g., corn, potatoes, etc.) (see also Soux 1993). According to de Bergara, part of the issue with using enslaved workers had to do with the many days off slaves had: seventy-nine a year, including Sundays and Catholic holidays. Besides, periods of pregnancy, illness, or just childhood would have implied lower production, which did not free the owner from feeding and clothing the slaves.

By analyzing de Bergara’s description of Yungueño slavery, we immediately understand that black slaves were exploited for profit by their owners; however, the conditions in which they lived were probably not as harsh as those experienced by many other blacks in other enslaving societies in the Americas. This might have had to do with their higher prices in the region and to the fact that owners wanted to protect their costly investments. Also, two additional crucial aspects of African slavery in Spanish America, which differentiated it from black slavery in other European colonies, were the legal rights slaves could enjoy and the importance given by the Crown to the religious sphere of everyday slave life. Masters had to baptize their slaves and provide them with Christian education. By law, slaves could not work on Saturdays and during the religious festivities. If masters were caught violating such a requirement, they were forced to pay high fees (Watson 1989).

With that being said, some cases of mistreatment can be found. For example, legal documents of the seventeenth century record the case of a group of slaves that escaped from an owner in Potosí. When they were captured, the tribunal established that the reason for their flight was hunger and the poor treatment endured by the slaves. However, the court decided to punish the blacks with fifty whippings, even though it could be proven that they did not steal anything from their master (Crespo 1995: 21–26). Another case is that of a six-year-old girl from La Paz whose owner damaged her eye and broke her arm (Bridikhina 1995b: 60).

Cases of violent black resistance were rarely encountered in Bolivia. A slave rebellion took place in Mururata in 1795, and the *hacienda* owner, Ignacio Pinedo, had to call army troops to suppress the uprising. A similar act of resistance happened again in Mururata in 1805; while in 1809 Santa Cruz experienced another case of collective revolt (Busdiecker 2006).

Busdiecker (2006: 41) indicates that even if violent uprisings were not common, blacks usually tried to pursue freedom in other ways. For example, they resorted to legal means to change owners in case of mistreatment.
Crespo (1995) suggests that paying for one's freedom must not have been easy because of the reduced salary received by the slaves. However, Portugal Ortiz (1977: 78) shows that this was a widespread practice. An example he mentions is that of Juan José Nieto (1795), who paid Antonio Sáez de Tejada (Yungan owner) 400 pesos to free him. Portugal Ortiz relates that, in order to find the money, Nieto asked Don Pedro Oquendo for a loan, promising him that he would have paid it back in four years (100 pesos a year). This and other evidence provided by Portugal Ortiz, in addition to the story told about Rey Bonifaz (Pizarroso Cuenca 1977), suggest that the Bolivian hacienda was probably a fairly flexible system if compared with other enslaving societies elsewhere in the Americas.

In summary, the historical evidence collected seems to indicate that Los Yungas were settled and colonized only around the eighteenth century. The only clue that may suggest a previous settlement is the orally-told story of King Bonifacio. In fact, as reported by Pizarroso Cuenca (1977), the legend would indicate that a significant African workforce had already been introduced in the Yungas by 1600. However, no data reporting African presence in the Yungas by that time is known. On the other hand, historical documents confirm that by 1736 the region had yet to be completely colonized and the employment of black workers was not massive: small slave transactions and a relatively small ratio between blacks and whites appear to have characterized the African presence in this area. Moreover, Bonifacio’s coronation indirectly indicates that manumission was possible in the Yungan community. It also has to be stressed that the social conditions encountered in Los Yungas seem to have been less harsh than those found in many other regions in the Americas. In fact, the Yungan hacienda was not a large-scale plantation society; rather, it was organized into small and medium farms; blacks were not always slaves but rather mingas and peones. Slaves represented a costly investment to slave owners, and the Spanish legal system provided slaves with a variety of civil rights. For these reasons black Yungueños were probably treated less brutally than many other slaves in other American colonies. Finally, manumission was relatively common.

2.9. Conclusion

This chapter has 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 (Lip-
ski 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 sixteenth century through the middle of the twentieth century. In fact, the Spanish Crown’s monopoly of slave trading, the geographic location of Bolivia and the availability of a 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 a 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 that 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 the 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 fifty to sixty years, especially because the speakers of this vernacular are elderly people who were at least thirty 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 Yungan 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 an intensive contact with standard Spanish that they could learn a very close approximation to it at an already advanced age and, at the same time, abandon 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 as 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 biopro-
gram” (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’ (see 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 (Delicado-Cantero & Sessarego 2011; Sessarego 2009; Sessarego & Gutiérrez-Rexach 2011, 2012). What appears to be less convincing is that Afro-Bolivian Spanish could have been a radical creole before 1952 that underwent a drastic decreolization after that date.

This recent approximation to standard Bolivian Spanish further supports the claim of Vernacular Universals. In fact, when the factors preserving the traditional dialects began 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 the more prestigious Spanish variety. Sociohistorical and linguistic evidence suggests that ABS was not the descendant of an Afro-Hispanic pidgin; rather, it should be seen as a vernacular, which carries the undeniable traces of second language acquisition processes, and from its inception resembled Spanish quite closely.