

The Habitual ‘*Saber + Infinitive*’ in South American Spanish

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Abstract

The present paper aims to describe both synchronic and diachronic distributions of the habitual aspectual periphrasis ‘*saber + infinitive*’ in the varieties of Spanish spoken in the South American continent. The data used for the present analysis come from the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* and the *Corpus del Español del Siglo XXI*.

Keywords: *Saber*, Habitual aspect, Verbal periphrasis, South American Spanish

1. Introduction

This paper describes the habitual use of the periphrasis ‘*saber + infinitive*’ (1) in the South American varieties of Spanish. Specifically, it considers the varieties spoken in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay.

(1)

Antes sab ú llover poco en esta zona (Di Tullio, 2006, 273)

‘Before it used to rain little in this area’

Aspect is a verbal category that depicts the internal development of an event, in other words, it signals the way in which an action occurs, extends, or repeats over time. The habitual aspect, in turn, indicates the discontinuous repetition of an event within a specified time frame (Di Tullio, 2006, 270).

According to Gómez Torrego (1999), Spanish expresses the habitual aspect through tenses, such as the present and imperfect of the indicative mood, and verbal periphrases, such as ‘*soler + infinitive*’ (Peninsular and American Spanish) and ‘*acostumbrar (a) + infinitive*’ (American Spanish).

The *Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española* (RAE, 2009, 3367) takes a step forward from this first normative description and points out the habitual use of ‘*saber* + infinitive’ in the popular speech of a few South American varieties of Spanish. Moreover, it signals that the main difference between the habitual ‘*saber* + infinitive’ and ‘*soler* + infinitive’ lies in the fact that the former accepts the conjugation of *saber* in the simple past (Sp. *pretérito perfecto simple*), while the latter does not.

Most research on the aspectual use of ‘*saber* + infinitive’ predates the description of the RAE grammar, several studies (Kany, 1945; Lida de Malkiel, 1948; Vázquez, 1980; Di Tullio, 2006; Zielinski, 2017) addressed the topic from both empirical and theoretical perspectives (Kany, 1945; Lida de Malkiel, 1948; Vázquez, 1980; Mendoza, 1991; Di Tullio, 2006; Zielinski, 2017). The present paper aims to show another piece of knowledge about such a phenomenon and provides the first approximation to the quantitative distribution of the habitual ‘*saber* + infinitive’ in the South American Spanish varieties. Thanks to the data extracted from the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* (henceforth CREA) and the *Corpus del Español del Siglo XXI* (henceforth CORPESXXI) (Note 1), I will show the synchronic distribution of ‘*saber* + infinitive’ in these territories. I will also provide an approximation of the evolution of its use from 1975 to the present day. The analysis will be accompanied by a series of qualitative evaluations that will provide more insights into the use of the periphrasis.

The remainder of the present paper is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the relevant related literature. Section 3 is dedicated to the discussion of the methodology including both data extraction and analysis. Section 4 is devoted to the presentation of the synchronic and diachronic results. Finally, in Section 5, I discuss the results of the analysis and, in Section 6, I draw some final remarks and suggestions for future research.

2. The State-of-the-art

The RAE dictionary defines *saber* ‘to know’ as the verb that indicates the ability of an animated being to perform an action. When it is used with this meaning, the verb occurs within the semi-modal periphrastic construction ‘*saber* + infinitive’ (Note 2) in which the conjugated verb conveys information about TAM and the infinitive verb specifies the action that the subject is capable of carrying out (henceforth *saber₁*).

(2)

[...] —*Es que no sé mentir, señor juez— balbuceó Gumercindo Tello, entre hipos —Estoy dispuesto a sufrir lo que sea, insultos, cárcel, deshonor. ¡Pero no puedo mentir! ¡Nunca aprendí no soy capaz!* [...] (CREA, Peru)

‘—I cannot lie, Judge— Gumercindo Tello mumbled while sobbing —I am willing to suffer anything, insults, jail, dishonor. But I cannot lie! I have never learned. I am not able!’

According to typological studies on grammaticalization (Heine & Kuteva, 2002), there is semantic proximity between ‘knowing how to do something’ and ‘doing this something frequently’ (see example 3). The grammaticalization path TO KNOW > ABILITY > HABITUAL, here discussed in Spanish, is also observed in other languages. In Moré(4), for

instance, the verb *mi* ‘to know’ is also used to mark the habitual aspect (Heine & Kuteva, 2002, 187).

(3)

[...] *Aqu ísabemos perder, estamos acostumbrados* [...] (CORPESXXI, Venezuela)

‘Here we know how to lose, we are used to it’

(4)

Mor é (Chapacura-Wañam, Bolivia)

F ka mi fwi

‘You know nothing’

A mi n loda ka

‘He usually passes here’

At the end of the first half of the last century, Kany (1945, 205-209) noticed the habitual use of ‘*saber* + infinitive’ in both Central and Southern American Spanish varieties. Since then, few studies have been conducted on the topic.

During the second half of the same century, the discussion on the origins of the habitual ‘*saber* + infinitive’ (henceforth *saber*₂) polarized. Lida de Malkiel (1948) traced it back to the Latin tradition, whereas Vázquez (1980) pointed out that the periphrastic construction was the result of the contact between Spanish and Kichwa (Note 3). In this latter language, the verb *yacharina* (from *yachana* ‘to know’) means ‘to be accustomed to something’.

More recent studies (Zielinski, 2017) questioned the reliability of both hypotheses. Zielinski (2017) proposes that the origin of *saber*₂ is to be sought in the popular Ibero-Romance spoken during the thirteenth century. In contrast with Lida de Malkiel’s hypothesis, the scholar (2017, 221) states that there are no clear instances of *saber*₂ in both classical and medieval Latin, whereas it is possible to find them in the *Libro de Alexandre* (Note 4). Zielinski (2017) assumes that the period of maximum spreading of *saber*₂ ended around the fifteenth century when the habitual periphrasis ‘*soler* + infinitive’ began to gain ground and replaced it. In the light of the chronological overlap between the decline in the use of *saber*₂ and the discovery of the Americas, the scholar formulates two hypotheses to explain the spreading of *saber*₂ in American Spanish: (i) although declining in the written sources, the habitual periphrasis persisted in the oral speech for a longer period and, consequently, was present in the speech of the first waves of Spanish settlers; and (ii) the expression of the habitual aspect in Kichwa, and maybe in other South American Indigenous languages, played an important role in keeping *saber*₂ in use in the South American varieties of Spanish.

For the purposes of this study, the literature on *saber*₂ can be divided into two major strands. As previously discussed, some studies have focused on investigating the origins of the phenomenon. While others have ascribed the use of the form to a specific South American variety of Spanish. Thus, Mendoza (1991), Coello (1991), and Callisaya Apaza (2012) consider *saber*₂ as a specific feature of La Paz Spanish (Bolivia), while Di Tullio (2006) and

Giammatteo, Marcovecchio & Albano (2011) suggest that it is prominently an Argentinian phenomenon. As far as I know, there are no specific studies related to the use of *saber*₂ in other varieties of South American Spanish.

The description provided by Kany (1945), so, turns out to be the first and only diatopic representation of *saber*₂ at our disposal. The scholar displays examples of the construction coming from all the South American Spanish varieties. Still, he does not describe the quantitative distribution of these examples within their respective varieties, providing an unclear representation of the whole phenomenon.

The present study aims to fill this empirical void and, for this reason, proposes the first approximation to the description of the quantitative distribution of *saber*₂ in the varieties of South American Spanish.

For the sake of completeness, it is also worth signaling that the aspectual use of the periphrasis ‘*saber* + infinitive’ in Spanish is not restricted to the habitual one. In this regard, there is at least a further use that deserves to be mentioned here, I refer to the perfective aspectual periphrasis ‘*saber* + infinitive’ (henceforth *saber*₃). The semantic shifting of the verb *saber* ‘to know’ from stative to achievement is a well-known phenomenon in Spanish grammatical studies (cf. Bello, 1951; Godoy & Soto, 2017). Scholars (Di Tullio, 2006; Godoy & Soto, 2017) agree that this perfective value of *saber* mainly occurs when the verb is conjugated in the simple past (Sp. *pretérito perfecto simple*). In example (5), for instance, the verb indicates the gradual achievement of the state ‘being followed by a huge audience’.

(5)

Este programa supo ser seguido por una enorme audiencia (Di Tullio, 2006, 274)

‘This program came to be followed by a huge audience’

The study of *saber*₁ and *saber*₃ lies outside the scope of the present work. However, the knowledge of the main features of these two periphrases has been necessary for the identification of the cases of *saber*₂ as will be detailed in Section 3.

3. Method

The data extraction and analysis of *saber*₂ were developed based on Di Tullio’s (2006, 274) description. The scholar points out the semantic and grammatical features that allow distinguishing the three periphrases of *saber* discussed in Section 2:

1. Neither *saber*₂ nor *saber*₃ attribute to the subject the ability to perform an action.
2. Unlike *saber*₁, whose use is restricted to animate subjects, *saber*₂ and *saber*₃ can occur with both animate and inanimate subjects.
3. The infinitive of both *saber*₂ and *saber*₃ can be a stative verb.
4. *Saber*₂ occurs above all with *saber* conjugated in present and imperfect, while *saber*₃ mostly occurs with *saber* conjugated in simple past.

The data extraction was done by taking into consideration the above-mentioned point 4, i.e., I only extracted the cases in which the verb *saber*, followed by another verb in the infinitive (present or perfect), was conjugated in the present and imperfect of the indicative mood. This first step allowed me to discard most of the cases of *saber*₃. Thanks to the search engine of the two annotated versions of the corpora consulted, CREA and CORPESXXI (Note 5), it was possible to classify the data by country, tense used for conjugating *saber* (present or imperfect), and type of infinitive (present, perfect or passive). Image (1) displays the search entries selected for this operation.

Figure 1. The data extraction

The results of the study are presented concerning to two parameters: frequency and percentage. Frequency indicates the number of *saber*₂ that occurs in each geographical sub-corpora (see Image 1) in absolute terms. Relative frequency displays the ratio between the absolute frequency of the periphrasis in a specific geographical area and the total number of observations made. It is always shown as a percentage.

Concerning the classification of the *aktionsart* of the infinitive verbs, given the reduced number of cases, I preferred to formulate a dichotomous distinction between stative and action verbs, rather than the quadripartite one proposed by the RAE (2009). Thus, the group ‘action verbs’ includes the verbs indicating activities, accomplishments, and achievements. In addition, all the verbs have been classified according to the type of action they describe.

4. Results

Data do not feature instances of *saber* conjugated in the present or imperfect followed by a perfect or passive infinitive (6), as reported in other studies (Di Tullio, 2006).

(6)

Este programa sabe ser escuchado por los jóvenes (Di Tullio, 2006, 274)

‘This program is usually listened by young people’

The two corpora provide 7 089 tokens of ‘*saber* + present infinitive’. Out of this number, 5 571 tokens come from the CORPESXXI (78.6%) and 1518 come from the CREA (21.4%). In 4 830 cases, the periphrasis appears with the verb *saber* conjugated in the present tense and, in 2 259

cases, in the imperfect. To better appreciate the absolute frequencies of the periphrasis in the data, see Table 1:

Table 1. Distribution of ‘*saber + infinitive*’ by country, corpus, and tense

	CREA		CORPESXXI		TOT
	PRESENT	IMPERFECT	PRESENT	IMPERFECT	
BOLIVIA	35	9	142	54	240
PERU	109	39	475	158	781
ECUADOR	15	5	177	44	241
URUGUAY	44	15	270	85	414
PARAGUAY	7	8	228	72	315
ARGENTINA	424	152	1001	438	2015
CHILE	178	100	547	215	1040
COLOMBIA	112	57	750	349	1268
VENEZUELA	170	39	420	146	775
TOT		1 518		5 571	7 089

As already mentioned, in Spanish the habitual ‘*saber + infinitive*’ coexists with two other aspectual periphrases, i.e., ‘*soler + infinitive*’ and ‘*acostumbrar (a) + infinitive*’. Table 2 shows the distribution of ‘*soler + infinitive*’ and *saber₂* in the two corpora (Note 6).

Table 2. Distribution of the Spanish habitual periphrases by country and corpus

	<i>Soler + infinitive</i>		<i>Saber₂</i>	
	CREA	CORPES	CREA	CORPES
BOLIVIA	36	501	6	14
PERU	278	1640	3	14
ECUADOR	80	659	1	13
URUGUAY	75	1074	2	1
PARAGUAY	30	792	0	6
ARGENTINA	2350	5892	13	48
CHILE	436	2218	7	5
COLOMBIA	258	2080	0	15
VENEZUELA	333	1467	0	5
TOT	3876	16323	32	121

Finally, Table 3 displays the relative frequencies of *saber₂* by country and corpus in relation to the respective absolute frequencies of the general periphrasis ‘*saber + infinitive*’.

Table 3. Frequencies by country and corpus

	Absolute frequency <i>Saber + infinitive</i>		Relative frequency <i>Saber₂</i> (%)	
	CREA	CORPES XXI	CREA	CORPES XXI
BOLIVIA	44	196	13,64	7,66
PERU	148	633	2,03	2,21
ECUADOR	20	221	5	5,89

URUGUAY	59	355	3,39	0,28
PARAGUAY	15	300	0	2
ARGENTINA	576	1439	2,26	3,34
CHILE	278	762	2,52	0,66
COLOMBIA	169	1099	0	1,36
VENEZUELA	209	566	0	0,89

Tables 2 and 3 show that, although with different distributions, *saber*₂ is observed in all the South American varieties of Spanish (Note 7). The following examples show the habitual use of the periphrasis in each variety analyzed:

(7)

[...] *¡Aquí hay un pueblo encantado! —dijo José—. Ahora me acuerdo, mis abuelos me **sabían contar**...* [...] (CORPESXXI, Bolivia)

‘Here is an enchanted village!— José said —Now I can remember, what my grandparents used to tell me’.

(8)

[...] *El doctor Juan Berastain García [...] sostiene que un buen número de pacientes no sólo no **saben cepillarse** los dientes después de cada comida, sino que lo hacen mal, sin ayuda del hilo dental [...]* (CREA, Peru)

‘Dr. Juan Berastain García claims that a good number of patients not only do not usually brush their teeth after each meal, but they do it poorly, without the dental floss’.

(9)

[...] *Yo **sé levantarme** a las 5 de la mañana y **sé hacer café** para irme tomando a las 6 de la mañana con mi mamá [...]* (CORPESXXI, Ecuador)

‘I usually get up at 5 in the morning and I make coffee to drink it at 6 with my mom’.

(10)

[...] *Algunas mujeres se acercaron a consolarme. La *ceceosa* me preguntó si **sabía leer** novelas. Le contesté que sí [...]* (CREA, Uruguay)

‘Some women came up to comfort me. The *ceceosa* asked me if I used to read novels. I said yes’.

(11)

[...] *En la guerra del Chaco, los bolivianos llamaban a los paraguayos "pata pila", porque les encontraban con las patas peladas. No **sabían usar** las botas del uniforme [...]* (CORPESXXI, Paraguay)

‘During the Chaco War, Bolivians called Paraguayans *pata pila* because they found them bare feet. They did not use to wear the boots of the uniform’.

(12)

[...] *Casi todos los hombres sensibles de Flores conoc ún a Luciano, el volador. Sab ú atender un puesto de diarios en la esquina de Boyac á y la avenida [...]* (CREA, Chile)

‘Almost all Flores’ sensitive men knew Luciano, the flyer. He used to run a newspaper stand on the corner of Boyac á and the avenue’.

(13)

[...] *Muerto dos: No soy inmigrante, nac íaqu í esta es mi identificaci ón, que alguien me atienda, me duele donde no sab ú dolerme [...]* (CORPESXXI, Colombia)

‘Dead two: I am not an immigrant, I was born here, this is my identification, someone can help me, it hurts where it did not use to do it’

(14)

[...] *Ahora, debemos depender de nosotros mismos y es muy importante volver a ejecutar los que sab úmos hacer durante mucho tiempo [...]* (CORPESXXI, Venezuela)

‘Now, we must depend on ourselves and it is very important to re-execute what we have been used to doing for a long time’

(15)

[...] *Luego marque en las paredes, con lápiz, dos puntos a la altura requerida que generalmente sabe ser a 50 cent ímetros del cielorraso [...]* (CREA, Argentina)

‘Then, mark with a pencil two points on the walls, at the required height, which usually is 50 centimeters from the ceiling’.

Regarding the *aktionsart* of the infinitive verbs that co-occur with *saber*₂, the analysis reveals that the habitual reading is not quantitatively related to the stative aspect of the infinitive verb. In this sense, the number of occurrences of *saber*₂ with action verbs corresponds to four times that with stative verbs.

Table 4. Types of infinitive verbs

	STATIVE VERBS					ACTION VERBS		
	Feeling	Existence	Sense	Possession	Other	Speaking	Motion	Other
BOLIVIA	2	0	0	0	1	6	3	8
PERU	0	2	1	3	0	2	3	6
ECUADOR	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	12
URUGUAY	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
PARAGUAY	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	4
CHILE	0	0	1	0	1	1	4	5
COLOMBIA	1	3	1	0	0	2	0	8
VENEZUELA	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
ARGENTINA	0	7	2	1	2	10	6	33
	4	12	5	4	5	24	18	81
TOTAL			30				123	
					153			

5. Discussion

5.1 *The Discarded Cases, Some Qualitative Considerations*

The identification of the cases of *saber*₂ is the result of an interpretative analysis, which was developed from points 1-3 of Di Tullio's parameters mentioned in Section 3. The analysis brought to light a series of doubtful cases that I will discuss in detail in the remainder of this section.

Firstly, the semantic proximity between ability and habituality determines many instances in which the interpretation of the periphrastic construction could be twofold.

(16)

[...] *La pregunta es tajante. ¿Qui én de ustedes **sabe utilizar** el condón? La interrogante de Milton Vasco no tuvo respuesta inmediata [...]* (CORPESXXI, Ecuador)

'The question is sharp. Which one of you knows how to / usually uses condoms? Milton Vasco's question did not have an immediate answer'

(17)

[...] *Tal vez porque est án convencidas de que un hombre no **sabe sufrir** por peque ñeces o por algo menos grave [...]* (CREA, Peru)

'Perhaps because they are convinced that a man cannot / usually does not suffer for little things or something less serious'

In examples (16) and (17), it is difficult to understand whether the verb *saber* 'to know' refers to the ability of the subjects to act or to the frequency with which they perform the action. In this sense, the absence of a clear temporal specification plays an important role. I considered these occurrences as 'bridging contexts' (Evans & Wilkins, 1998), that is, contexts that trigger an inference that led to a further interpretation of the utterance (Heine, 2002), but in which the maintenance of the original meaning and the development of another value from it are not mutually exclusive (cf. Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca, 1994). Given the impossibility of separating the semi-modal from the habitual interpretation and, consequently, identifying the latter, these doubtful cases were discarded from the count of *saber*₂.

Secondly, although, according to Di Tullio (2006), only *saber*₂ and *saber*₃ may occur with inanimate subjects, the analysis has displayed uses of *saber*₁ in such contexts. In many instances, I notice the anthropomorphizing of an inanimate subject, which is attributed the capability of performing actions.

(18)

[...] *La escritura tal como la conocemos desde los sumerios desaparecer á Ya lo dijo Borges: «La literatura es un arte que **sabe profetizar** aquel tiempo en que habr á enmudecido [...]* (CORPESXXI, Venezuela)

‘Writing, as we have known it since the Sumerians, will disappear. Borges already said it: «Literature is an art that knows how to prophesy the time in which it will be silent’.

(19)

[...] *Era una de esas noches húmedas, irrespirables, que sólo el verano de Buenos Aires sabe deparar* [...] (CORPESXXI, Argentina)

‘It was one of those humid, unbreathable nights that only the summer of Buenos Aires knows how to give’

In example (18), the ability to prophesy is transferred from the authors who produced literary texts to the art deriving from their work, that is, literature. While, in example (19), the summer of Buenos Aires is anthropomorphized and given the ability to create unique climatic situations.

Thirdly and lastly, concerning the use of *saber* with stative verbs, also in these cases, the habitual reading of the periphrasis cannot always be *a priori* preferred to the semi-modal one.

(20)

[...] *La señora Régine sabe apreciar el talento, la buena calidad, el exotismo. El macho llegado del otro lado del océano, la verga intelectual* [...] (CREA, Uruguay)

‘Madame Régine knows how to appreciate talent, good quality, exoticism. The male arrived from the other side of the ocean, the intellectual cock’.

(21)

[...] *Muy sensual y hedónico, su firme voluntad disciplinaba la tendencia al placer y le preservaba de vicios. Sab á ser sobrio en la mesa y normalmente se absten ú de beber* [...] (CREA, Chile)

‘Very sensual and hedonic, his firm willpower ruled his tendency to pleasure and preserved him from vices. He knew how to be sober at the table and usually refrained from drinking’.

(22)

[...] *Me refiero, simplemente, a aquellas que sin complejos y temores saben ser mujeres* [...] (CORPESXXI, Colombia)

‘I am simply referring to those who, without complexes and fears, know how to be women’.

In (20), although the verb ‘to appreciate’ is a stative verb, the periphrasis *sabe apreciar* refers to a sort of training path which has determined the achievement of a skill, i.e., the ability to appreciate talent. This use of *saber* recalls, to some extent, the semantics of *saber*₃. Nevertheless, in this case, the perfective reading is less evident given the absence of the conjugation in the past tense and the fact that the subject is attributed the capacity to do something. On the same line, in many instances *saber* co-occurs with the verb *ser* ‘to be’, in these cases the semantic of the periphrastic construction corresponds to ‘knowing how to be

something' (see examples 21 and 22). The cases, related to those previously mentioned, were excluded from the final count of *saber*₂.

Other occurrences excluded from the final count are those in which the verb *saber* seems to be used with an emphatic function (23). In these cases, the verb does not seem to be used with its meaning rather it emphasizes the action expressed by the infinitive verb.

(23)

[...] *En aquel 2000 se dio cuenta que los cambios son necesarios cuando se **saben dar** a tiempo*
[...] (CORPESXXI, Argentina).

'During 2000, he realized that changes are necessary when they happen on time'

5.2 The Quantitative Results

In contrast with previous studies on Rioplatense Spanish (Giammatteo, Marcovecchio & Albano, 2011; Di Tullio, 2006), but in line with the descriptions of the other Spanish habitual periphrases (Gomez Torrego, 1999, 3377-3378), the results of the present study display that *saber*₂ does not appear with either the perfect infinitive or the passive infinitive. Although this first result does not deny the possibility of such a co-occurrence, on the one hand, it reveals that these two uses of *saber*₂ are not generalized, and on the other hand, it leads to questioning the representativeness of the two corpora. This lack, indeed, might be due to the low representation of the registers, i.e., the colloquial and popular ones, to which *saber*₂ belongs (RAE, 2009, 3367).

Data features 153 cases of *saber*₂ that represent 2% of the total occurrences of '*saber* + infinitive'. The analysis shows two relevant quantitative results. Firstly, the relative frequency of *saber*₂ (see Table 2) points out that the use of the habitual periphrasis is reduced in most of the varieties analyzed. Secondly, the numerical comparison between the occurrences of the two habitual periphrases considered displays an impressive disproportion between their absolute frequencies.

Despite the reduced number of occurrences of *saber*₂, the findings show that the phenomenon is present in all the varieties analyzed. This result is of particular interest since it shows that the use of *saber*₂ cannot be ascribed to a specific variety, such as the Andean or the Rioplatense (RAE, 2009, 3367). In some varieties of these two macro-varieties, the use of the form is currently more frequent than in others.

The normalization of the quantitative results allows me to better compare the distribution of the periphrasis. The periphrasis is more frequent in Bolivian and Ecuadorian Spanish. In both varieties, the use of the habitual periphrasis represents percentages greater than or equal to 5%, reaching 13.64% in the sub-corpus CREA-Bolivia. Lower percentages are observed in all the other countries.

The analysis of relative frequencies also displays a diachronic difference in the use of *saber*₂ between the two corpora. In Bolivia, Uruguay, and Chile there is a significant decrease in the use of the periphrasis (higher in CREA than in CORPESXXI) by 44%, 91% and 74%,

respectively. In these countries, the use of periphrasis has decreased in the last 50 years. Instead, in Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay, and Venezuela, a significant increase can be observed (higher in CORPESXXI than in CREA). The use of *saber*₂ has increased over time by 47,8 % in Argentina, 89% in Venezuela, 136% in Colombia, and 200% in Paraguay. Finally, also in Ecuador and Peru, the use of *saber*₂ has increased, but to a lesser extent. The data reveal an increase of 8.9% in Peru and 18% in Ecuador. The increase or decrease in the use of the periphrasis could be linked to specific socio-political factors concerning the individual countries. Studies, in this regard, should be conducted to ensure a better understanding of the phenomenon.

The results of the analysis related to the type of the infinitive verb used with *saber*₂ show that, among stative verbs, the habitual reading is more frequent with existence verbs (see example 24).

(24)

[...] **Sab ú haber** Reus para el lado de Mendoza. Ac áno sab ú [...] (CORPESXXI, Argentina)
'There used to be Reus on the Mendoza side. There was none here'.

For action verbs, *saber*₂ co-occurs frequently with speaking and motion verbs. Except for Paraguay, it co-occurs with speaking verbs in all the other countries and, except for Uruguay, Paraguay, and Colombia, it co-occurs with motion verbs in all the other countries.

(25)

[...] *Y un otro obrero, por ejemplo, que nunca se met ú en nada, ni a asambleas sab ú ir, estaba all ía la puerta de su vivienda [...]* (CREA, Bolivia)

'And another worker, for example, who never got involved in anything, nor usually went to assemblies, was there at the door of his house'.

(26)

[...] —¡Por Dios!— **sabe decir** mi t ú Pichusa —no molestarán a la Aurorita [...]
(CORPESXXI, ECUADOR)

'—For God's sake! —My aunt Pichusa usually says—, you won't bother Aurorita'

With action verbs, the habitual reading is favored by the context in which *saber*₂ occurs. In the case of examples (7), (9), (11), (25), and (26), the actions described by the verbs 'to tell', 'to get up', 'to use', 'to go', and 'to say' do not presuppose the possession of any capacity on the part of the subject. It is precisely this last element that allows preferring the habitual reading to the semi-modal one. In other cases, the habitual reading is due to the violation of the semantic restrictions that the infinitive verb has in the semi-modal periphrasis. To this group belong verbs such as *leer* 'to read' and *atender* 'run' in the examples (10) and (12). In the case of *leer* 'to read', for example, the semi-modal interpretation is possible for a sentence like *S é leer el ingl é* 'I can read English', but not for a sentence like *S é leer novelas* 'I can read novels'. Finally, in a good number of cases, it is only the discursive context that triggers the habitual interpretation that, otherwise, would not be possible to identify. This is the case in examples (8) and (14).

6. Conclusions

In summary, the present work has provided a first approximation to the quantitative analysis of the use of the habitual periphrasis ‘*saber* + infinitive’ in the varieties of Spanish spoken in the South American continent.

The findings of this study, on the one hand, demonstrate that *saber*₂ has to be analyzed as a South American phenomenon, given its presence in all the varieties analyzed, and on the other hand, lead to question the dimensions of the phenomenon, by considering the possibility of a sub-representation within the two corpora of the registers to which it belongs.

Furthermore, the results for the Andean region are particularly suggestive concerning the hypothetical role (See Vázquez, 1980 and Zielinski, 2017) of Andean indigenous languages in the maintenance of the Ibero-Romance habitual periphrasis *saber*₂. In this sense, new studies should be carried out in Bolivia and Ecuador in order to investigate the use of *saber*₂ in the monolingual and bilingual (Spanish-Indigenous language) varieties of Andean Spanish. Such an investigation would make it possible to shed light on the possibility that the phenomenon is related to language contact.

Research on American Spanish needs to continue in all the fields of linguistic interest. Specifically, in relation to the topic of this paper, I consider that further research should be conducted on *saber*₂ by considering specific data from popular and colloquial registers. New investigations should also consider the forms of the verb *saber* ‘to know’ that have been excluded from the present paper, such as the past simple (Sp. *pretérito perfecto simple*) and the present perfect (Sp. *pretérito perfecto compuesto*).

Finally, other works should investigate whether uses similar to those described in this article are observed in the Central American varieties of Spanish, as already described by Kany (1945, 209).

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Notes

Note 1. The CREA is composed of written and oral texts produced in all Spanish-speaking countries from 1975 to 2004. The CORPESXXI consists of written and verbal texts produced in all Spanish-speaking countries between 2001 and 2021.

Note 2. Concerning the periphrastic nature of ‘*saber* + infinitive’, see and compare Bosque (1999) and Gómez Torrego (1999).

Note 3. Kichwa is the second most widely spoken language of the Quechua language family. Today, it is spoken in Ecuador, Colombia and Peru by approximately 800 thousand people. It is a co-official language with Spanish in all three countries.

Note 4. The *Libro de Alexandre* is an epic poem about Alexander the Great written between 1178 and 1250.

Note 5. The annotated version of the CREA does not contain oral texts, while the annotated version of the CORPESXXI contains both oral and written texts.

Note 6. Given the existence of two formally similar but semantically different constructions, the habitual periphrasis ‘*acostumbrar* (*a*) + infinitive’ and the construction with the verb ‘*acostumbrar* + *a* + infinitive clause’ which means ‘to acquire a habit’, I preferred to exclude the cases of ‘*acostumbrar* (*a*) + infinitive’ from Table (2).

Note 7. The data extraction tools of the two corpora do not allow to extract more than 1001 examples. The Argentinian sub-corpus of the CORPESXXI features 1120 tokens of *saber* conjugated in present and 438 of *saber* conjugated to the imperfect, for a total of 1558 cases. However, given the limits due to the data extraction tool, only 1001 tokens of *saber* conjugated in present could be analyzed.

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