

## Aspectual uses of *saber* + infinitive in South American Spanish varieties: a corpus-based study

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In addition to its well-attested modal meaning (ability), the construction *saber* ‘to know’ + infinitive can exhibit aspectual meanings in certain American Spanish varieties (cf. Kany 1945, Di Tullio 2006, Pfänder 2009, Duque Enríquez 2021). Thus, it can be used to express present or past habituality (1) or, in the preterite form, encode completed events (2).

- (1) a. (*El perro*) *En la calle sabe estar todos los días, salta a las personas, molesta.*  
‘(The dog) is usually in the street every day, it jumps on people, it annoys them.’  
b. *A veces sabía entrar a las 9:00 de la mañana y salía a las 3:00 de la mañana.*  
‘Sometimes I used to come at 9:00 in the morning and leave at 3:00 in the morning.’
- (2) *el barrio albaicín que supo ser asiento de las cortes de los monarcas ziríes en el siglo xi*  
‘the Albaicín neighborhood that was once the seat of the courts of the Zirid monarchs in the 11<sup>th</sup> century’

It is not well understood to what extent the grammaticalization processes leading to (1) and (2) can be considered independent or whether they are interrelated. Likewise, some scholars have assumed the meaning change illustrated in (1) to be induced by contact with Quichua, where the verb *yachay* has both the meanings of ‘to know’ and ‘to be used to’ (cf. Vázquez 1991, Duque Enríquez 2021). This study approaches these questions by comparing four American Spanish varieties (Argentinian, Uruguayan, Bolivian and Ecuadorian Spanish), all of which possess aspectual uses of *saber*.

We conduct a quantitative analysis of  $n = 6,000$  occurrences of *saber* + infinitive in the esTenTen, a synchronic corpus of blogs and newspapers (Kilgarriff & Renau 2013). Using logistic regression analysis, we demonstrate that the functions of *saber* + infinitive can be predicted from a set of contextual properties, namely semantic features of the subject, predicate type and type of adverbial modification. While these proxies predict both habituality and completion readings, their effect is moderated by whether *saber* is inflected for imperfective or perfective aspect. Crucially, many of these examples, such as (3), can also be taken to express participant-external possibility, i.e. a possibility that does not depend on the agent, but on external circumstances.

- (3) *en la estancia la ema se saben ver (estos animales)*  
‘at the farm la ema one usually sees/can see [= it is possible to see] (these animals)’

Our analysis shows that there are differences in the degree to which the grammaticalization processes leading to (1) and (2) have been implemented in the varieties under study. Thus, while in some dialects (Argentinian, Uruguayan) both habituality and completion readings are attested, in others (Ecuadorian, Bolivian) habituality readings predominate. These findings allow us to postulate the grammaticalization cline in (a), i.e. that the semantic extension of *saber* from the expression of participant-internal to participant-external modality constituted a decisive step in the development of aspectual values, and (b) that the development of habituality and completion readings then followed different grammaticalization paths. The results also suggest that the development of habitual *saber* in Ecuador and Bolivia has been facilitated by contact with Quichua.

- (a) participant-internal possibility (ability) > participant-external possibility > aspectual values

## Corpus:

SkE. Sketch Engine: Corpus query system. Corpus: esTenTen18. <https://www.sketchengine.eu/estenten-spanish-corpus/>

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