

The use of *agarrar* ‘grab, take’ verb constructions in Belizean Spanish: An intergenerational analysis

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Abstract

This exploratory study sheds new light on the use of two types of *agarrar* ‘grab, take’ verb constructions that remain virtually unexamined in studies of language contact between Spanish and English; namely, ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions and *agarrar* y ‘take and’ pseudocoordination. An intergenerational analysis of 313 verb constructions, extracted from interviews, reveals that within the last four to five decades there has been an increase in the production of bilingual *agarrar* verb constructions among younger age groups in Northern Belize. The verb *agarrar* co-occurs mainly with abstract nouns and is conducive to Spanish/English code-switching. Notably, *agarrar* has been generalized along the lines of the English verb ‘take’ rather than ‘get’, as in the case of Texas Spanish. This suggests that *agarrar* has the grammatical status of a light verb when it co-occurs with nominal complements, contrary to other varieties, which use other verbs of the same semantic family. In contrast to ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions, *agarrar* y pseudocoordination is less

conventionalized, infrequent, and favoured particularly in the preterite and present. Our findings suggest that *agarrar* is in an advanced stage of grammaticalization in Northern Belizean Spanish compared to other varieties.

Keywords: Belizean Spanish, *agarrar* ‘grab, take’ verb constructions, pseudo-coordination, Spanish/English code-switching, light verb constructions

1. Introduction

In the Spanish language, the verb *agarrar* ‘grab, take’ is derived from the noun *garra* ‘claw’, which has been proposed to be of Celtic or Arabic origin. Whereas in the 16th century, it meant ‘to seize forcefully with the hand or claw,’ by the 19th century, this verb was extended to express other meanings such as to contract a disease, to become glued, or to catch, overcome, or surprise (cf. Glover 1966: 128;132-133). The enduring fascination among scholars with the verb *agarrar* in Modern Spanish is that despite its infrequent employment, it can have different uses, depending on the grammatical, semantic, and even sociolinguistic context. Endeavoring to elucidate our knowledge of such uses, we draw upon novel oral speech data from Northern Belize to analyze two types of *agarrar* verb constructions that remain virtually unexamined in studies of language contact between Spanish and English; namely, ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions and *agarrar* y ‘take and’ pseudocoordination. In contrast to previous studies that have investigated these phenomena separately, we provide a more holistic insight into *agarrar* constructions, particularly as they are used in a multilingual community where Spanish/English code-switching is the norm.¹

In monolingual varieties of Spanish, when the lexical verb *agarrar* co-occurs with a noun complement, it canonically denotes the idea of grasping, clutching, or holding a physical object or person (Bullock, Serigos & Toribio 2021; Toribio & Bullock 2016;).² By contrast, in contexts like the Southwest U.S. where Spanish has been in prolonged contact with English, *agarrar* is used to convey a variety of meanings that in monolingual varieties of Spanish typically requires the use of different verbs (Sánchez 1982; Sayer 2008). In (1), for instance, the speaker employs *agarrar* instead of other verbs that are used in this semantic context (i.e., *enfrentar* or *lidiar con*).

- (1) Arizona Spanish, USA (Sayer 2008: 103)
 Porque no quería agarrar sus problemas.
 because not want.PST.3SG grab.INF her problems
 ‘Because she didn’t want to deal with her problems.’

Among U.S. Spanish speakers, there may also be a preference for *agarrar* over similar Spanish verbs, such as *tomar* ‘take’, as (2) illustrates. Noteworthy is that while the use of *agarrar* for means of transportation (rather than *tomar*), as in (2), has been attested in monolingual Spanish varieties (Pastor Milán 1990), the use of code-

¹ We adopt Muysken’s (2013) conceptualization of code-switching as a language contact phenomenon comprising multiple manifestations or optimization strategies (i.e., insertion, alternation, congruent lexicalization, and backflagging) that are differentially employed depending on social, linguistic, and cognitive factors.

² It is noteworthy that *agarrar* is a polysemic verb, whose multiple meanings may vary depending on the Latin American context (for examples, see ASALE 2010).

switching in *agarrar* verb constructions, as in (3), is only characteristic of Spanish varieties that have been in sustained contact with English.

- (2) Texas Spanish, USA (Sánchez 1982: 18)
 Voy a agarrar el bus.
 go.PRS.1SG. to grab.INF the bus
 ‘I’m going to take the bus.’
- (3) Spanish/English code-switching, USA (Toribio and Bullock 2016: 41)
 Y mi bachelor’s lo agarré en criminal justice.
 and my bachelor’s it grab.PST.1SG in criminal justice
 ‘And my bachelor’s I got in criminal justice.’

With respect to the semantically-related Spanish verbs *coger* ‘take’, *tomar* ‘take’, and *agarrar* ‘grab’ classified as TAKE-class verbs (Bravo 2020, and references therein), it has been suggested that the sexual connotation of *coger* in some Latin American contexts likely paved the way for *agarrar* to be preferably used in polite conversation among speakers of Spanish in the Americas (Glover 1966; Pastor Milán 1990; Ross 2021: 96).

Agarrar can also be used as a light verb or as an auxiliary-like verb. As a light verb, as (4) illustrates, it takes a nominal complement as its direct object or internal argument and has a general meaning:³

- (4) Texas Spanish, USA (Bullock, Serigos and Toribio 2021: 617)
- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| a. <i>agarrar trabajo</i> | ‘get work’
(cf., <i>conseguir</i>) |
| b. <i>agarrar experiencia</i> | ‘get experience’
(cf., <i>obtener</i>) |
| c. <i>agarrar ayuda</i> | ‘get help’
(cf., <i>obtener, conseguir</i>) |

Importantly, *agarrar* is not typically listed among the verbs that can function as light verbs in Spanish, both in European and American varieties. Sanromán Vilas (2017: 232) notes that:

Spanish LVs are *tomar* ‘to take’ (*tomar una decisión* ‘to make a decision’), *dar* ‘to give’ (*dar un grito* ‘to give a shout’), *hacer* ‘to do/to make’ (*hacer una pregunta* ‘to ask a question’), *tener* ‘to have’ (*tener respeto* ‘to have respect’), *poner* ‘to put’ (*poner un castigo* ‘to give a punishment’), *echar* ‘to throw’ (*echar un piropo* ‘to give/make/pay a compliment’), *pasar* ‘to pass’ (*pasar hambre* ‘to have/feel hunger’) and *llevar* ‘to carry’ (*llevarse una decepción* ‘to feel disappointment’)

³ Originally introduced by Jespersen (1965), the term ‘light verb’ refers to verbs in ‘V + N’ constructions, in which the verb serves only as a support of predication whereas semantic content is provided by the nominal element. See Bustos (2005), RAE-ASALE (2009: 1.10K), Sanromán Vilas (2017), and references therein for an analysis of Spanish light verb constructions. In Butt’s view (2010), light verbs do not express any of the functions that are characteristic of auxiliary verbs (i.e., tense, aspect, modality, and evidentiality).

As an auxiliary verb, *agarrar* combines with the preposition *a* and an infinitive verb to indicate the beginning of an action or event (Camus 2006). In this case, ‘*agarrar* + preposition + *V_{Inf}*’ is structurally similar to any periphrastic construction in Spanish like ‘*empezar* + *a*’ (e.g., *Cristina empezó a llorar* ‘Cristina started to cry’). Of particular relevance to the present analysis, however, is the use of *agarrar* in pseudocoordination, as in (5) below from Yucatan Spanish. In this case, *agarrar* is employed as an inflected but lexically impoverished verb, which co-occurs with a finite verb that provides semantic content (for pseudocoordination in Spanish, see Bravo 2020; Ross 2021: 95-101, and references therein):⁴

- (5) Yucatan Spanish, Mexico (Suárez Molina 1945: 67)
 Agarré y me fui a verlo.
 grab.PST.1SG and REFL went to see=him
 ‘I (lit. grabbed) and went to see him.’

In Bravo’s (2020: 162) view, *agarrar* y ‘take and’ functions as a focalizer, “which adds an initial sub-event agentively characterized to the eventuality referred to by [the second finite verb]”. Generally associated with colloquial language use (Moliner 1998; Seco et al. 1999; Ross 2014), pseudocoordination may have expressive functions that can vary from annoyance, disappointment, to surprise, among other functions (cf. Bravo 2020; Jaque et al. 2018; Ross 2014, 2021, and references therein). Less agreement exists over its aspectual meaning and even over whether aspect is its main contribution. With respect to the former, Coseriu’s (1966) influential proposal was that the pseudocoordination construction appears to indicate not only the beginning of the action but also its completion as a comprehensive or “global” perspective on the event. With respect to the latter, see Bravo (2020).

A distinctive structural feature of these multiverbal constructions is that the initial verb is not used independently and must be joined with the copulative conjunction *y* ‘and’ to another finite verb. Other Spanish verbs that function similarly to *agarrar* include *coger* ‘take’, *ir* ‘go’, *llegar* ‘arrive’, *venir* ‘come’, and *saltar* ‘jump’ (Coseriu 1966 [1977]; Covarrubias et al. 2020; Ross 2014, 2017, 2021, and references therein). Importantly, these verbs have long generated debate in antecedent work, particularly in relation to their grammatical status and the semantic content they encode.⁵ Whereas some scholars describe the first verb (V1) in pseudocoordination as an expletive (Suárez Molina 1945), others analyze V1 as an interruptive auxiliary (Jaque et al. 2018), a topic auxiliary (Arnaiz and Camacho 1999), a light verb (Soto Gómez 2021), among other analyses (for recent work on pseudocoordination from a cross-linguistic perspective, see Ross 2021; Giusti, Di Caro & Ross 2022, and references therein).

⁴ The grammatical status of the first verb in pseudocoordinated structures is not clear (Bravo 2020: 172, and references therein). These verbs do not properly qualify as auxiliary verbs nor as light verbs, considering the restricted notion that we are using here. For this reason, we refer to *agarrar* in pseudocoordination as an auxiliary-like verb.

⁵ As for the lexical source for the initial verb, *agarrar* as ‘grab’ is somewhat unusual although broadly within the same semantic field as other ‘take’ verbs used widely in European languages in this construction (Ross 2017), and cognate usage is attested in some other Romance languages although alongside default ‘take’ verbs (Ross 2021). A close analog to the situation in Northern Belizean Spanish, where mainly *agarrar* appears to be used in this construction, is Turkish, where the primary verb used in this way is *tutmak* ‘to hold, catch, seize’ rather than the more basic ‘take’ verb *almak* (Csató 2003).

In terms of dialectal variation in the Spanish-speaking world, the frequency of use of *agarrar* differs depending on the type of verb construction. Whereas the use of ‘*agarrar* + NP’ verb constructions has been previously noted as a distinctive feature of Southwest U.S. Spanish and Mexican Spanish (Bullock, Serigos & Toribio 2021; Sánchez 1982), *agarrar* y ‘take and’ pseudocoordination is characteristic of Mexican Spanish, Central American Spanish as well as Rioplatense Spanish (Covarrubias et al. 2020). It is noteworthy that even though *agarrar* as a lexical or light verb co-occurs with both nouns and/or verbs, it is nonetheless markedly infrequent in corpora (Álvarez 1995; Bullock, Serigos & Toribio 2021; Covarrubias et al., 2020; Toribio & Bullock 2016).⁶ This partly explains why, to date, there have been few attempts to investigate *agarrar* verb constructions in bilingual speech, even after four decades of extensive research on Spanish/English language contact phenomena.

In recent work on ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions in Texas Spanish, Bullock, Serigos and Toribio (2021: 630) contend that “higher degrees of contact with English have a stronger influence on the extended use of *agarrar*”. In light of this assertion, a question that arises is how *agarrar* is used in Belize, the only officially English-speaking Central American country where Spanish is in intense contact with English. Another pertinent question is whether the different syntactic status of *agarrar* (lexical verb, light verb, auxiliary verb) tampers or interferes in any way with its potential extension and distribution.

Northern Belizean Spanish offers fertile ground to examine these verb constructions as its linguistic predecessor is Yucatan Spanish, a Mexican Spanish variety that has been previously noted for the use of *agarrar* (Suárez Molina 1996). Thousands of refugees who spoke Yucatan Spanish settled in British Honduras (today Belize) during the Caste War of Yucatán (1847–1901) in the 1800s, an important historical event that solidified the presence of Spanish in Belize (on the history of Belizean Spanish, see Balam 2014).

Within the last four to five decades, Spanish (the language of the majority) has been in increasingly intense contact with English and Belizean Kriol, the country’s lingua franca (Baird 2023; Balam 2016a, 2021). Furthermore, Spanish/English code-switching practices have thrived among Spanish/English bilinguals, especially among younger generations who have positive attitudes towards language mixing and identify with this practice (Balam 2013; Balam & Prada Pérez 2017). To shed new light on the use of *agarrar* in this understudied context, we conducted an exploratory study on the intergenerational use of *agarrar* verb constructions among Northern Belize Spanish/English bi/multilinguals. Before describing the data that we analyzed, in the following section we summarize our current knowledge of *agarrar* verb constructions in Spanish.

2. Previous work on *agarrar* verb constructions in Spanish

There is scant research that draws upon interview or corpus data to cast light on the use of *agarrar* ‘grab, take’ verb constructions in bilingual and monolingual varieties

⁶ A quick search in the sub-corpus Web/Dialects of the *Corpus del Español* (Davies 2016) with the compare tool shows that *agarrar* has a relative ratio of 0.13 (57,185 occurrences) whereas *tomar* has a ratio of 7.85 (444,047 occurrences). Link to the search: <https://www.corpusdelespanol.org/web-dial/?c=span&q=122881130>.

of Spanish. Regarding ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions in Southwest U.S. Spanish, Sánchez (1982) suggested that these expressions constitute a semantic extension in which *agarrar* is employed to express a variety of ideas that in monolingual varieties of Spanish require the use of different lexical verbs such as *detener* ‘stop (someone)’, *tomar* ‘take’, *emplear* ‘employ’, *reclutar* ‘recruit’, and *aceptar* ‘accept’.

Sayer (2008) made similar observations in the use of *agarrar* in the speech of three Mexican American third graders who completed a story retelling task. He underscored that *agarrar* ‘get’ verb constructions are illustrative of calques used by Spanglish speakers who extend the semantic use of *agarrar* to include meanings that are canonically expressed with the English verb *get*, which are not used in monolingual varieties of Spanish (for relevant discussion on different types of calques in U.S. Spanish, see Montes Giraldo 1985; Silva Corvalán 1995, and references therein).⁷

In more recent work, Bullock, Serigos and Toribio (2021) compared ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions from a Texas Spanish corpus and several monolingual Spanish corpora to examine their frequency as well as the linguistic and social factors that favor their usage. They found that in contrast to Argentine and Peninsular Spanish, which evinced a markedly lower usage of *agarrar* constructions, the Mexican Spanish and Texas Spanish corpora showed similar patterns in terms of frequency. Concerning the semantic type of the nominal complement, however, in the non-contact variety of Mexican Spanish, *agarrar* predominantly co-occurred with complements that were concrete (also see Toribio & Bullock 2016). Conversely, over 60% of the Texas Spanish dataset comprised cases in which the complement was an abstract NP (e.g., an achievement or benefit).

Bullock, Serigos and Toribio advance that *agarrar* constructions in Texas Spanish, as (6) illustrates, are equivalent to English ‘get’ constructions in which the thematic role of the grammatical subject is that of beneficiary or experiencer. In these examples, the subject is the beneficiary of an attainment (e.g., scholarships, a job, etc.), which differs from the canonical use of *agarrar* ‘grab, grasp, clutch’ in Mexican Spanish.

(6) Texas Spanish, USA (Bullock, Serigos and Toribio 2021: 617)

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| a. <i>agarrar becas</i> | ‘get scholarships’
(cf., <i>recibir, obtener, ganar</i>) |
| c. <i>agarrar buenas notas</i> | ‘get good grades’
(cf., <i>sacar</i>) |
| d. <i>agarrar mi Bachelor’s</i> | ‘get my Bachelor’s’
(cf., <i>obtener</i>) |

With respect to social variables, speakers born in the U.S., a low self-rated Spanish writing ability, and residing in El Paso (as opposed to cities in East Texas) significantly increase the likelihood of using ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions. Bullock, Serigos and Toribio conclude that *agarrar* constructions are contact-induced

⁷ *Spanglish* is an overarching term that encompasses different phenomena (e.g., calques, code-switching, etc.). In more general terms, Spanglish refers to “the language contact phenomena that naturally arise when Spanish and English, two historically influential global languages, are thrust into intense contact as a result of colonization, annexation, and/or immigration” (Balam & Shelton 2023: 36).

structures in Texas Spanish that “[have] become generalized along the lines of English *get* and *[are]* now available for use as a support verb in specific collocations” (p. 629).

In relation to *agarrar y* ‘take and’ pseudocoordination, previous studies have mainly examined the use of *agarrar* vis-à-vis other similar verbs in monolingual varieties of Spanish. To our knowledge, this phenomenon has not been studied in U.S. Spanish. Álvarez (1995) examined the use of pseudocoordination in the Spanish variety spoken in Caracas, Venezuela. Álvarez found that the light verbs predominantly used in these constructions include *llegar* ‘arrive’, *agarrar* ‘grasp’, *ir* ‘go’, and *venir* ‘come’. The analysis of 74 tokens extracted from corpus data showed that *llegar* (55%, $n = 41$) and *agarrar* (24%, $n = 18$) were the most frequent initial verbs used in pseudocoordination. Furthermore, the use of these constructions was prevalent among younger speakers from low socio-economic backgrounds, particularly women.

More recently, Covarrubias et al. (2020) analyzed data from two corpora (*Corpus del Español del Siglo XXI*, CORPES XXI; *Proyecto Para el Estudio Sociolingüístico del Español de España y América*, PRESEEA) to determine the dialectal distribution of pseudocoordination in eight Spanish dialectal areas. In the CORPES XXI data, Covarrubias et al. found that movement verbs (*ir*, *llegar*, *saltar*, *venir*) are overwhelmingly used across dialectal areas, accounting for 92.1% of instances in the corpus ($n=522$). In particular, *ir* ‘go’ in the Andalusian, Canarian, and Castilian dialectal areas accounted for 83.9% (178/212) of pseudocoordination constructions with movement verbs, while *llegar* ‘arrive’ and *venir* ‘come’ were relatively more frequent in Latin America (even more than *ir* in some dialects).

In contrast, apprehension verbs (*agarrar*, *coger*, *pillar*) are infrequently used, representing only 7.9% ($n=45$) of the data. A similar pattern was attested in the PRESEEA corpus. Thus, both the CORPES XXI data (mainly from written sources) and the PRESEEA data (from oral speech) revealed that movement verbs are primarily used in pseudocoordination. Importantly, Covarrubias et al. found that *agarrar* was highly infrequent as only 39 tokens were found across both corpora. It is noteworthy that in the latter corpus, the use of *agarrar y* verb constructions was only attested in the Mexican, Central American and River Plate dialectal areas.⁸

In addition to their low frequency of use in oral production, pseudocoordination with *agarrar* appears to be restricted in terms of tense. Kany (1945) observed that it primarily occurs in the present tense, the preterite, and imperatives. Other researchers have reported the use of pseudocoordination with other inflections such as conditional and future tense (see Bravo 2020 for a detailed analysis). In an analysis of *ir y* ‘go and’ pseudocoordination in data from *Corpus del Español*, Bravo (2020) concludes that compatibility with different tenses is a key factor in the production of pseudocoordination. It remains unclear, however, to what extent *agarrar* pseudocoordination is restricted in terms of tense in oral speech, an issue we examine further.⁹

Regarding Belize, while previous research has examined bilingual verb constructions with *hacer* ‘do’ (Balam 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2021; Balam & Prada Pérez

⁸ A search in the *NOW/Corpus del Español* of *agarrar y* shows that although this distribution is mostly accurate, *agarrar y* is also found occasionally in other areas, such as Bolivia and Perú.

⁹ Cross-linguistically, other languages are also known to have skewed usage distributions for pseudocoordination or even paradigmatic restrictions based on tense (Hopper 2002; Giusti, Di Caro & Ross 2022: 13-14).

2016; Balam, Parafita Couto & Stadthagen-González 2020; Balam et al. 2024), *estar* ‘be’ (Balam, Parafita Couto & Chen 2021) and *ser* ‘be’ (Balam et al. 2023), no previous study has analyzed the use of *agarrar* verb constructions in this multilingual context where code-switching is the norm (Balam 2016b). In the following section, we describe the methodology we adopted to carry out an intergenerational analysis of *agarrar* verb constructions in Northern Belizean Spanish.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Given our interest in the use of *agarrar* as a lexical, light or auxiliary-like verb, all sentential contexts with *agarrar* verb constructions were manually extracted from sociolinguistic interviews (between 20-30 minutes) carried out in Orange Walk, Belize in 2014 (for relevant discussion, see Balam 2016a). As Table 1 illustrates, the participant sample comprised Spanish-dominant speakers who reported more frequent use of Belizean Spanish and Spanish/English code-switching than English. It is important to note that although English is the official language of Belize, it is generally learnt as a second language in the classroom (Balam 2016a). Speakers were from four different age groups (i.e., three different generations): adolescents (ages 14 – 17, n = 18), post-adolescents (18 – 20; n = 7), adults (ages 21 – 40; n = 27), and older adults (50 – 99; n = 10). Linguistically, these groups are representative of the continuum present in Northern Belize which may range from the use of predominantly monolingual Northern Belizean Spanish practices among older speakers (ages 50+) to dense bi/multilingual speech practices among younger generations.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Number of participants	62
Number of male/female participants	21/41
Mean age in years (range)	28 (14–99)
Self-assessment: Spanish proficiency*	6.2 (SD: 1.1)
Self-assessment: English proficiency*	5.3 (SD: 1.5)
Self-report: frequency of use of Spanish**	6.4 (SD: 0.9)
Self-report: frequency of use of English**	5.6 (SD: 0.8)
Self-report: frequency of use of Spanish/ English code-switching**	6.0 (SD: 1.1)

*On a Likert scale where 1-3 indicated ‘Poor’, 4-5 indicated ‘Average’ and 6-7 indicated ‘Excellent.’

**On a Likert scale where 1 indicated ‘Never’ and 8 indicated ‘Everyday, most of the time during the day.’

In our sample, the employment of Spanish/English code-switching was more prevalent among speakers between the ages of 14 and 40, who have a higher degree of exposure and access to English via schooling and/or the workplace. In contrast, older adult bi/multilinguals (ages 50-99) reported very limited use of English in everyday interactions. It is important to note that while some older adults may be categorized as

monolingual Northern Belizean Spanish speakers, they typically have varying degrees of listening proficiency in English or Kriol and may use lexical items/phrases from both varieties given the societal prevalence of Spanish/English/Kriol bi/multilingualism in Belize (for further details on participants and sociolinguistic interviews, see Balam 2015, 2016a: 236-238, 2016b).

The data from the older adult group were supplemented with tokens extracted from five additional oral history interviews carried out by Christine Kray in 2005 (cf. Kray et al. 2017). These interviews were conducted with Northern Belizean Spanish speakers who were primarily born in the 1920s and had varying degrees of proficiency in Yucatec Maya, Belizean Kriol, and/or English. These interviewees were originally from San José Yalbac, one of the main villages in northwestern British Honduras (now Belize) that were settled by the San Pedro Maya people during the Caste War of Yucatan (for relevant discussion, see Kray et al. 2017; Yaeger et al. 2004). Although few tokens were extracted from these interviews (n = 18), they were nonetheless included as they provide a rare insight into the use of *agarrar* among earlier generations of bi/multilingual Spanish speakers in Northern Belize.

3.2. Data and Analysis

All *agarrar* ‘grab, take’ verb constructions extracted from the interviews were individually coded for language mode (monolingual Spanish versus bilingual/trilingual); age group (1: ages 14–17; 2: ages 18–20; 3: ages 21–40; 4: ages 50–99); and type of *agarrar* verb construction (‘*agarrar* + NP’; pseudocoordination; other). Even though we were primarily interested in examining ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions and pseudocoordination, as in (7a) and (7b), other types of *agarrar* structures (e.g., periphrastic constructions when *agarrar* is followed by a preposition and an infinitive verb) were also included to provide a more holistic insight into the use of these verb constructions:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| (7) a. ‘ <i>agarrar</i> + NP’ | <i>Agarra una hoja.</i>
‘He grabs a leaf.’
<i>Agarré el book.</i>
‘I grabbed the book.’ |
| b. <i>agarrar</i> pseudocoordination | <i>Él agarró y se durmió.</i>
‘He went and fell asleep.’
<i>Yo agarré y yo vine con el idea.</i>
‘I went and I came up with the idea.’ |
| c. other types | <i>Se agarraron a pelear</i>
‘They started to fight.’
<i>Me fui agarrándome de cocinar</i>
‘I started to learn how to cook.’ |

Following Bullock, Serigos and Toribio (2021), in the case of ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions, we coded for nominal complement type (concrete vs. abstract), and we also analyzed the way in which the verb *agarrar* was used (i.e., either as ‘get’ or another English lexical verb). Complements included both nouns and preverbal clitic pronouns, particularly the direct object pronoun *lo* (e.g., *cuando lo agarran...* ‘when

they take it [course]’, *lo vas a agarrar* ‘you will grab it [the chicken]’, etc.). In these cases, contextual information was used to determine the nominal referent.

Additionally, we coded for language of the complement (Spanish or English). Previous research on U.S. Spanish (Sánchez 1982; Bullock, Serigos & Toribio 2021) has documented the co-occurrence of *agarrar* with English noun complements, but the production of bilingual *agarrar* verb constructions has not been examined. Thus, to cast light on the intergenerational use of monolingual versus bi/multilingual *agarrar* verb constructions, we coded both ‘*agarrar* + NP’ and pseudocoordination constructions for language mode (monolingual Spanish versus bilingual/trilingual). Furthermore, we coded pseudocoordination for tense (i.e., present, preterite, etc.) to elucidate the productivity of this infrequent morphosyntactic structure in terms of tense.

3.3. Research questions and hypotheses

This exploratory study was guided by the following two research questions:

RQ1. What are the intergenerational patterns of use of ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions?

Hypotheses. In line with previous findings regarding the use of other bilingual verb constructions in Northern Belizean Spanish (Balam 2015, 2016b; Balam, Parafita Couto & Chen 2021), we anticipated that there would be a marked increase in bilingual ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions among younger generations, particularly post-adolescents and adults. Consistent with antecedent research (Bullock, Serigos & Toribio 2021; Toribio & Bullock 2016), we also anticipated that nominal complements would be predominantly abstract and that there would be an extended use of *agarrar*, a distribution that naturally follows from the fact that light verbs cover broader contexts than lexical verbs and, for this reason, they are more frequent than the corresponding lexical verbs.

RQ2. What are the intergenerational patterns of use of *agarrar* in multiverbal constructions, particularly *agarrar y* ‘take and’ pseudocoordination constructions?

Hypotheses. We hypothesized that the use of *agarrar* in multiverbal constructions would be infrequent and limited in terms of tense. In line with Álvarez’s (1995) finding regarding the predominant use of pseudocoordination among younger speakers, we anticipated that *agarrar y* ‘take and’ pseudocoordination constructions would be mainly found in the speech of adolescents and post-adolescents.

4. Results

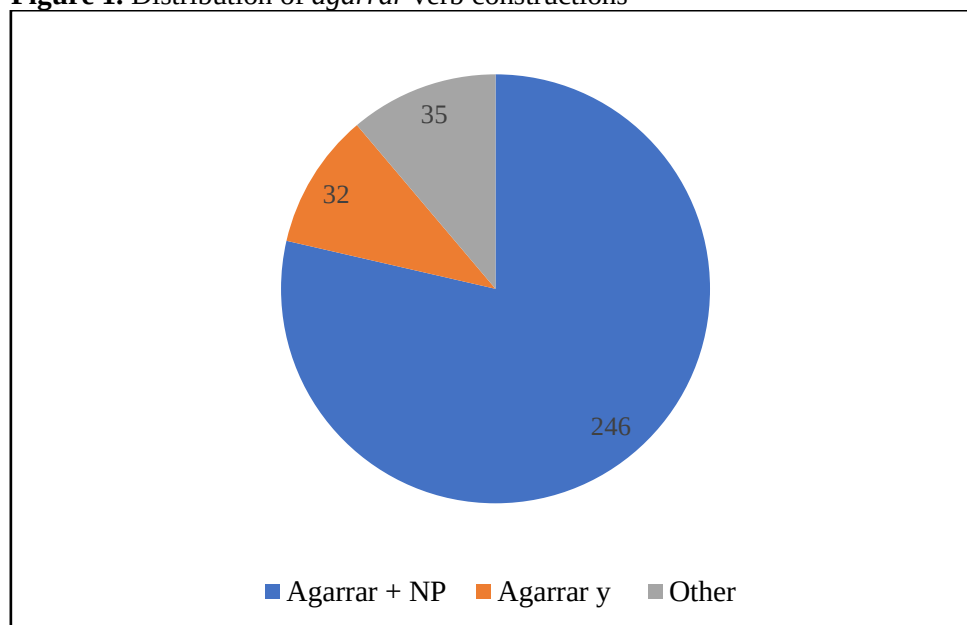
In this section, we first describe the overall distribution of *agarrar* verb constructions in the Northern Belize data.¹⁰ Subsequently, we provide an analysis of ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions and *agarrar y* ‘take and’ pseudocoordination, respectively.

¹⁰ Given that the Northern Belize interviews have not been fully transcribed (Balam 2016a), we do not provide here further insight into the frequency of *agarrar* verb constructions in relation to the entire corpus of oral speech data.

4.1. Distribution of *agarrar* verb constructions in Northern Belizean Spanish

As Figure 1 illustrates, the light verb *agarrar* predominantly co-occurs with nouns or clitic pronouns, comprising 78.6% of *agarrar* verb constructions. It is noteworthy that ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions are more conventionalized in Northern Belize than in Texas. Whereas 87% (58/67) of Northern Belizean Spanish speakers in this sample used this structure, Toribio and Bullock (2016) report that only 9% (3/32) of speakers employed ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions in their Texas Spanish dataset.

Figure 1. Distribution of *agarrar* verb constructions



A chi-square test of independence showed that there is a significant relationship between the four age groups and their production of ‘*agarrar* + NP’ versus *agarrar* multiverbal constructions ($\chi^2 = 16.822$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). The predominance of nominal complements with *agarrar* in Northern Belizean Spanish is unsurprising given that nouns have been shown to be the most frequently borrowed or switched element in bilingual speech (Balam 2016a: 14; Gardner-Chloros 2009: 31). Only 10.2% of the data comprised cases of *agarrar* y ‘take and’ pseudocoordination. The remaining 11.2% of the data comprised other construction types including cases in which *agarrar* was employed reflexively as an intransitive verb, as in (8). In this case, *agarrarse* has an abstract meaning. There were also a couple of exceptional cases in which *agarrar* co-occurred with gerunds, as in (9), in which it was seemingly used as *hacer* ‘do’.

- (8) Se agarraron por medio de la caña.
 CL grab.PST.3PL by means of the sugarcane
 ‘They improved themselves economically through the sugarcane [industry].’¹¹

¹¹ In Northern Belizean Spanish, there is variable use of *agarrar* and *garrar*. Apheresis, or loss, of the low vowel /a/ in word initial position is commonly attested in Northern Belizean Spanish as well as Southwest U.S. Spanish (Sánchez 1982). A direct correlation between having a phonetically reduced form and being more grammaticalized could be expected (see

- (9) Sí garran bullying.
yes grab.PRS.3PL bullying
'They do bully.'

The majority of 'Other' instances, however, were periphrastic constructions in which *agarrar* co-occurred with reciprocal *se* and the infinitive verb *pelear* 'fight' embedded in a prepositional phrase (40%, 14/35). Importantly, *agarrarse a pelear* was a variant of *agarrarse*, in which a similar meaning was expressed without the prepositional phrase, as (10) illustrates. This use of *agarrarse* has been found in literary texts from Mexico (Pastor Milán 1990). This represented one of the main uses of *agarrar* in other types of multiverbal constructions (29%, 10/34), and it was attested across age groups. Lastly, *agarrar* also co-occurred with nouns embedded in prepositional phrases, as in (11), referring to fights between individuals, or with reflexive *se* to describe self-inflicted harmful behaviour, as in (12).

- (10) Se agarraban los chiquitos (a pelear).
CL grab.PST.3PL the children (to fight.INF)
'The children would fight.'

- (11) Se agarraban a ponchazos.
CL grab.PST.3PL to blows
'They would come to blows.'¹²

- (12) Se agarraba con lápiz.
CL grab.PST.3SG with pencil
'She would hurt herself with a pencil.'

In the following section, we shift our focus to the intergenerational use of *agarrar* with noun complements, before turning to finite verbs in pseudocoordination.

4.2. The use of 'agarrar + NP' constructions

Regarding the semantic type of the noun complement, the Northern Belize data reveal that across age groups *agarrar* primarily co-occurs with nouns that are abstract rather than concrete (i.e., 57.7 vs. 42.3%, respectively).¹³ Thus, *agarrar* was not primarily used to denote the canonical idea of physically grasping or holding an object or person, as in monolingual varieties of Spanish. This distribution points towards the hypothesis

Heine 1993, among many others), but it is not the case concerning the pair *agarrar* and *garrar* in this variety.

¹² In Belizean Spanish, the loanblend *ponchazo* (derived from the English noun 'punch' and the Spanish derivational suffix *-azo*) is more frequently used than alternative Spanish words (e.g., *golpe*, *trompada*, etc.).

¹³ Nouns denoting means of transportation (e.g., bus, taxi, etc.), which canonically co-occur with *tomar* or *coger* 'take' (Sanromán Vilas 2017: 245), were conservatively classified as concrete in order to not rely on these intermediate cases to demonstrate a bias for abstract nouns in this construction. Even though these verb phrases do not exactly align with the idea of physically grabbing in its literal sense, the direct object is nonetheless concrete. Following Bullock, Serigos and Toribio (2021), our main concern was the status of the nominal complement (i.e., concrete vs. abstract).

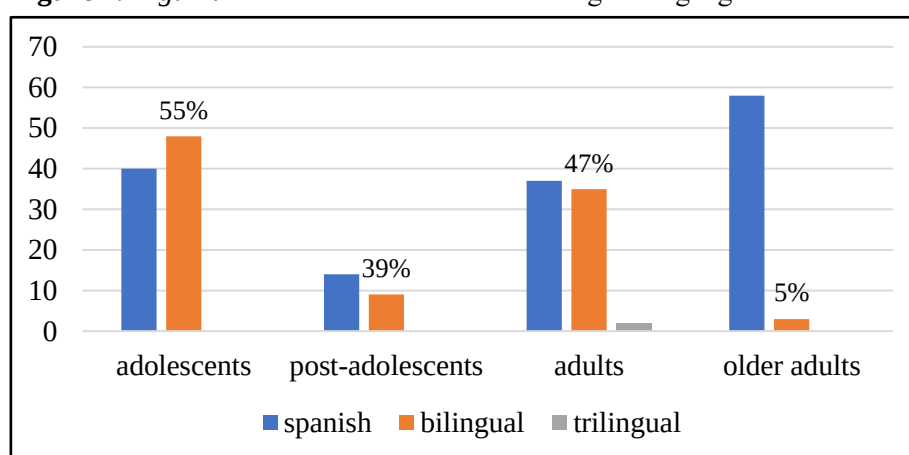
already advanced that when *agarrar* co-occurs with nominal complements, it is functioning in this variety as a light verb. As Table 2 reveals, the distribution of concrete versus abstract noun complements was similar among adolescents and older adults. Among post-adolescents and adults, the production of *agarrar* with abstract nouns was higher. A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the relation between distributions of concrete and abstract nouns and the four age groups. The relation between these variables was significant ($\chi^2 = 9.505$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.023$). Overall, speakers are more likely to produce *agarrar* with abstract rather than concrete nominal elements.

Table 2. Distribution of noun complements across age groups

	concrete		abstract	
	N	%	N	%
adolescents (ages 14 – 17)	44	50.0	44	50.0
post-adolescents (ages 18 – 20)	5	21.7	18	78.3
adults (ages 21 – 40)	25	33.8	49	66.2
older adults (ages 50 – 99)	30	49.2	31	50.8

With respect to the language of the nominal element, *agarrar* mainly occurred with Spanish abstract nouns among post-adolescents (11/18, 61%) and older adults (28/31, 90%). Older adults did not produce any construction in which *agarrar* had an English concrete noun as the nominal complement. Abstract nouns were mainly English among adults (26/49, 53%) and adolescents (23/44, 52%). Chi-square tests of independence showed, however, that the distributions of concrete and abstract nominal elements that were either Spanish or English were independent for adolescents ($\chi^2 = 0.183$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.669$), post-adolescents ($\chi^2 = .002$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.964$), and adults ($\chi^2 = 0.544$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.461$). This suggests that there is no relation between speakers’ production of concrete or abstract nouns and the language of the nominal element (Spanish or English).

Figure 2. ‘*Agarrar* + NP’ constructions according to language mode



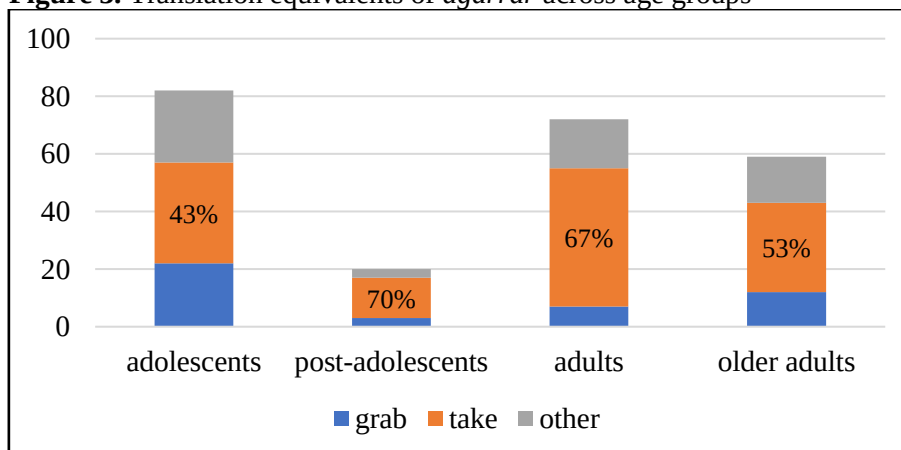
In the dataset, speakers employed *agarrar* productively with both Spanish (e.g., *atención* ‘attention’, *tiempo* ‘time’, *fuerza* ‘strength’, *puesto* ‘position’, *miedo* ‘fear’, etc.) and English (e.g., *attitude*, *culture*, *role model*, *time*, *opportunity*, etc.) abstract nouns. Similarly, *agarrar* co-occurred with both Spanish (e.g., *piedra* ‘stone’,

silla ‘chair, hoja ‘leaf’, etc.) and English (e.g., *spoon, book, walking stick*, etc.) concrete nouns. Considering previous findings regarding differences in the intergenerational use of mixed verbs among Northern Belize bi/multilinguals (Balam 2015, 2016b), a pertinent question is how *agarrar* is used in monolingual versus bi/multilingual verb constructions across age groups. The data revealed that 39% of ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions were bilingual or trilingual. There is a significant relationship between age groups and the production of Spanish versus bi/trilingual ‘*agarrar* + NP constructions’, ($\chi^2 = 42.303$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). As Figure 2 shows, younger age groups more frequently produce bilingual *agarrar* verb constructions.

Contrary to our hypothesis, bilingual ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions were primarily produced by adolescents rather than post-adolescents and adults. In the dataset, there were only two trilingual examples of ‘*agarrar* + NP’ verb constructions, in which the light verb co-occurred with a noun phrase containing the Belizean Kriol diminutive **lee** ‘little’ (i.e., *un lee* slush ‘a little slush’, *mi lee* spins ‘my little spins [around town]’).

In relation to semantic extension, the data showed that *agarrar* has not been generalized along the lines of the English light verb *get*, as it has been shown for Texas Spanish (Bullock, Serigos & Toribio 2021; Toribio & Bullock 2016). There were only two cases in which *agarrar* was used meaning ‘get’. An analysis of the English translation equivalents for each use of *agarrar* revealed that speakers mainly used *agarrar* as ‘take’ (54%, 132/246). The use of *agarrar* as ‘grab’ was most common among adolescents (26%, 23/88) and least common among adults (9%, 7/74). As Figure 3 illustrates, the predominant use of *agarrar* as ‘take’ was attested across age groups, particularly among post-adolescents and adults. The category ‘Other’ included different translation equivalents of verbs that were used typically only once or twice. Verbs that were used more than twice included ‘major in’ ($n = 6$) among adolescents, ‘teach’ ($n = 3$) among adults, and ‘catch’ ($n = 3$) among older adults. Constructions in which *agarrar* was used as other verbs were most frequent among older adults (38%, 23/61).

Figure 3. Translation equivalents of *agarrar* across age groups



Chi-square tests of independence were carried out to analyze the relation between the four age groups and the production of *agarrar* either as grab, take or other translation equivalents. The relationship between these variables is significant between older adults and adults ($\chi^2 = 12.837$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.045$), but not between older adults and adolescents ($\chi^2 = 3.879$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.144$) or post-adolescents ($\chi^2 = 2.616$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.270$). When taking into consideration only speakers (ages 14 – 40) who are

proficient in English, a significant relationship was found only between adults and adolescents ($\chi^2 = 12.126$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.002$). Thus, even though Northern Belizean Spanish speakers generally use *agarrar* as 'take' in oral speech, this pattern is especially prominent in the speech of adults (ages 21-40).

Unconventional uses of *agarrar*, as in (13), were attested in the dataset, but they were largely idiosyncratic and infrequent. It is important to underline that unconventional uses of *agarrar* were not restricted to younger speakers. The highest number of unconventional uses of *agarrar* was found among older adults ($n = 13$; e.g., *employ*, *inhale*, *teach*, *write down*, etc.) and adolescents ($n = 10$; e.g., *do*, *major in*, *study*, *understand*, *keep*, etc.). Among adolescents, unconventional uses were often directly related to formal schooling activities or topics, as (13a) to (13c) exemplify.

- (13) Unconventional 'agarrar + NP' constructions in Northern Belizean Spanish
- a. *Voy a agarrar un scholarship* 'I will get a scholarship.'
(cf., *recibir*, *obtener*)
 - b. *Agarro mi work* 'I do my schoolwork.'
(cf., *hacer*)
 - c. *Yo agarro business* 'I major in business'
(cf. *especializarse*)
 - d. *Agarras el vapor* 'You inhale the vapor.'
(cf., *respirar*, *inhalar*)
 - e. *Me agarró a mí y me crió* 'She adopted me and raised me.'
(cf., *adoptar*)

The examples in (14) illustrate the conventionalized usage of *agarrar* 'take' verb constructions in Northern Belizean Spanish. *Agarrar* here is used to convey ideas that in English would require the employment of 'take' expressions such as to take a taxi, to take classes, to take pictures, to take something seriously, to take something as a joke, to take precautions, to take a step, to take something personally, etc. Thus, in contrast to corpus data from Texas (Bullock, Serigos & Toribio 2021), *agarrar* is generalized along the lines of the English verb 'take', which in monolingual varieties of Spanish oftentimes requires the semantically-related Spanish verb *tomar* (e.g., *tomar un taxi*, *tomar clases*, *tomar fotos*, *tomar algo en serio*, *tomar algo a chiste*, *tomar precauciones*, etc.). This distribution confirms the hypothesis that in contrast to other varieties, *agarrar* predominantly functions as a light verb in this variety:

- (14) *Agarrar* 'take' verb constructions in Northern Belizean Spanish
- a. *Tienen que agarrá el taxi...* 'They have to take the taxi....'
 - b. *Van a tené de agarrá* different action 'They're going to have to take different actions.'
 - c. Two hours *nos agarró* 'It took us two hours.'
 - d. *Estaban agarrando* pictures 'They were taking pictures.'
 - e. *Deben de agarrá ese opportunity para hacé* study 'They should take that opportunity to study.'
 - f. *Agarra tus estudios* seriously 'Take your studies seriously.'
 - g. *Lo garramo* 'de joke 'We take it as a joke.'
 - h. *...que lo garre todo más tranquilo* '...that she take everything easy.'
 - i. *No los agarraban en serio* 'They would not take us seriously.'
 - j. *Él garró mal rumbo* 'He took the wrong path.'

- k. *Agarrábamos* Sociology 101 y 102 ‘We used to take Sociology 101 and 102.’
- l. *Si garras* los precautions... ‘If you take precautions...’
- m. *Lo garran de* habit ‘They take it as a habit.’
- n. *Si es tuyo agárralo, pero si no, no.* ‘If it’s yours take it, but if it’s not, don’t.’
- o. *Era el* last step *que garra el maistro* ‘It was the last step that the teacher takes.’
- p. *Cada uno agarraba su pedazo* ‘Everyone would take their piece (of land).’

As these examples show, *agarrar* is commonly used in bilingual verb phrases, which contribute to the high density of Spanish/English code-switching that has been reported for Northern Belize bi/multilinguals (Balam 2015, 2016b, 2021; Balam & Prada Pérez 2016; Vanhaverbeke & Balam In press).

4.3. The use of *agarrar* y ‘take and’ pseudocoordination

Contrary to ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions, *agarrar* pseudocoordination was infrequent in the dataset. Whereas 87% (n = 58) of bi/multilinguals from Northern Belize produced at least one ‘*agarrar* + NP’ verb construction, only 19% (n = 13) of speakers used *agarrar* pseudocoordination at least once. This distribution correlates with the highly specialized meaning of pseudocoordination constructions in general, which are restricted to conveying an expressive meaning.¹⁴ Contrary to our hypothesis, participants who employed these constructions were mainly adolescents (n = 6) and adults (n = 6). Notably, none of the 15 older adults in the sample produced this verb construction.

In terms of language mode, cases of *agarrar* pseudocoordination were mainly monolingual, as in (15). Only 25% (8/32) of *agarrar* pseudocoordination examples had at least one switch within the V2 phrase, which is lower than the percentage of ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions that were bi/trilingual (39%).

- (15) Yo garré y yo la quedé viendo.¹⁵
 I grab.PST.1SG and I CL kept looking
 ‘I went and I kept looking at her.’

Typically, the verb object was switched, as in (16). There was only one case in which there was a V2 switch, as the complex predicate in (17) shows. The Northern Belize data indicate that although Spanish/English code-switching can occur within

¹⁴ From the point of view of a discourse tradition approach, it would be a construction typical of low formality texts, that is, texts and discourses belonging to the oral register. On the notion of discourse tradition, see Winter-Froemel and Octavio de Toledo y Huerta (2023) and references therein.

¹⁵ Observe that in (15) the subject pronoun is repeated in the second conjunct. This distribution is, as far as we know, not found elsewhere in Latin American Spanish varieties. A quick search of the sequences <yo agarre y yo> and <yo voy y yo> in the NOW corpus of the CDE and in the CORPES renders no results. The second example in (7) shows the same pattern, so it seems that it is not an isolated case but a characteristic typical of Belizean Spanish. Overt pronouns in Spanish are due to two causes: either it is a non pro-drop variety (as Caribbean varieties) or the pronoun has a discourse contrastive function. Both explanations are susceptible to be applied to (7) and (15). This is a fascinating question to study more but beyond the scope of the current paper.

pseudocoordination constructions (specifically within the V2 phrase which contains the finite verb that provides semantic content), these constructions are much less conducive to code-switching than ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions:¹⁶

- (16) Su mamá garró y le compró su *armchair*.
 his mom grab.PST.3SG and CL bought his armchair
 ‘His mom went and bought him his armchair.’
- (17) Yo agarré y solo me hago *dedicate a mi school work*
 I grab.PST.1SG and only CL do *dedicate to my school work*
 ‘[One time] I went and just dedicate myself to my school work.’

Concerning tense, the data revealed that 75% of *agarrar y* pseudocoordination constructions occurred in cases where V1 and V2 matched in the present or preterite, as Table 3 shows. This suggests that these are the two tense combinations that predominantly favor these constructions in Northern Belize. The predominance of the preterite in the use of *agarrar y* pseudocoordination aligns both with examples in the preterite that have been previously reported for Mexican Spanish data in antecedent work (e.g., Pastor Milán 1990; Suárez Molina 1996) and with the characteristic behavior of this construction (see Bravo 2020 and references therein).

Table 3. V1-V2 tense combinations in *agarrar* pseudocoordination

Tense combinations	N	%
V1 present – V2 present	9	28
V1 preterite – V2 preterite	15	47
V1 imperfect – V2 imperfect	1	3
V1 infinitive – V2 infinitive	1	3
V1 preterite – V2 present	4	13
V1 preterite – V2 imperfect	1	3
V1 preterite – V2 past progressive	1	3
Total	32	100

Crucially, there were six examples in which there was a tense mismatch between V1 and V2, as (18) and (19) illustrate.¹⁷ The most common pattern was the combination of a preterite V1 followed by a V2 in the present tense. In three cases, the V2 was the verb *decir* ‘say, tell’ in the present tense. Overall, in *agarrar y*

¹⁶ This resistance on the part of *agarrar y* to code-switching is not surprising. One of the characteristics of pseudocoordination constructions is that V2 has the same morphology as V1, although there are cases in which this situation does not hold (see below in the text). Being this the case, sequences where V2 is code-switched, as in ‘*Agarré y* went out’ are not expected, especially in English, due to its impoverished morphology. In (17), the hybrid complex predicate ‘*hago* dedicate’ allows V2 to copy the morphology of V1.

¹⁷ Pseudocoordination can usually be relied upon to exhibit parallel inflection on both verbs (Giusti, Di Caro & Ross 2022: 15; Ross 2021), although rare, exceptional usage has been reported for Spanish (Bravo 2020: 157-159; Ross 2021: 104). One possibility for such variation could be the use of historical present tense to express past events in narrative usage, in some cases resulting in mixed inflection with the other verb in the construction (see also Rivas Cid 1994: 332 for similar variation in Galician).

pseudocoordination, *decir* (n = 6) was the verb that was most frequently employed as the V2, followed by *dar* ‘give’ (n = 3).¹⁸

(18) Él agarró y me dice, ‘Tú no eres mi mamá.’
 he grab.PST.3SG and CL says you not are my mom
 ‘He goes and tells me, ‘You are not my mom.’’

(19) Solo garra y se quedaba sentada.
 Only grab.PRS.3SG and CL stay seated
 ‘She only goes and would stay sitting down.’

Lastly, another infrequent yet noteworthy pattern in the dataset was the variable use of the conjunction *y* in *agarrar y* pseudocoordination. Although exceptional in Spanish, omission of ‘and’ in pseudocoordination is attested in (especially Brazilian) Portuguese and some other languages (Andrason et al. 2022; Giusti, Di Caro & Ross 2022: 3; Ross 2021). There were four cases in which V1 and V2 did not co-occur with the conjunction *y* ‘and’, as (20) and (21) show.

(20) La nurse solita garró abrió la gaveta.
 the nurse only grab.PST.3SG open.PST.3SG the drawer
 ‘The nurse went opened the drawer.’

(21) Él duende garró llevó, pues robó un chiquito.
 the duende grab.PST.3SG carry.PST.3SG well stole a boy
 ‘The duende went carried way, well stole a little boy.’

This usage highlights the fact that despite limited use in Northern Belizean Spanish, *agarrar y* ‘take and’ pseudocoordination is compatible with Spanish/English code-switching and innovative syntactic patterns; namely, doubling of the subject personal pronoun, lack of tense agreement¹⁹ between V1 and V2, and variable use of the copulative conjunction *y* ‘and’. In the following section, we discuss the implications of our findings in light of our current knowledge of *agarrar* verb constructions in monolingual versus contact varieties of Spanish and mixed verbs in Spanish/English code-switching.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This is the first study that examines the intergenerational use of *agarrar* verb constructions among speakers of Northern Belizean Spanish. In relation to our first research question, we found that there has been a significant increase in the production of bilingual ‘*agarrar* + NP’ verb constructions among younger generations. In contrast to our expectations, however, bilingual ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions were more prevalent among adolescents. This suggests that adolescents in particular make more productive use of these bilingual verb constructions, which are less syntactically

¹⁸ The frequent use of *decir* as a V2 in *ir y* and *agarrar y* pseudocoordination was also found in data from the *CDE:Now* corpus (Bravo 2020).

¹⁹ We also note that in other syntactic contexts variable gender and number agreement are attested in Northern Belizean Spanish (Balam 2014).

complex that *hacer* ‘do’ bilingual verbs in which the light verb co-occurs with verbs instead of nouns (for relevant discussion on the syntactic complexity of *hacer* bilingual compound verbs, see Balam 2016b; Balam & Prada Pérez 2016). Overall, the lexical verb *agarrar* mainly co-occurs with abstract noun complements, in line with results from Texas Spanish (Bullock, Serigos & Toribio 2021). Unlike corpus data from Texas, however, *agarrar* has not been generalized along the lines of the English verb ‘get’ but rather its English translation equivalent ‘take’.

From a structural standpoint, our analysis shows that *agarrar* functions as a light verb in this variety, a phenomenon that deserves a study on its own. As far as we know, this use of *agarrar* as a light verb has not been documented in any other Spanish variety in Latin America. Note that even though *agarrar* is used a light verb in Texas (Toribio & Bullock 2016), it does not appear to be as conventionalized as in Northern Belize, where the majority of speakers employ ‘*agarrar* + NP’ constructions (i.e., 9% vs. 87%, respectively). Secondly, this finding confirms that the different syntactic status (lexical vs. light verb) of *agarrar* does not hamper its usage, a conclusion that is in line with Butt and Lahiri’s (2013) hypothesis regarding light verbs having the same lexical entry as its lexical counterpart and being both of them different from the auxiliary verb, in case there is one. In other words, if *agarrar*-lexical shares its lexical entry with *agarrar*-light verb this is precisely the distribution one would expect: when *agarrar* enters the grammar, the possibility of it being used as a light verb as well as a lexical verb are both there from the beginning. Observe that both patterns coexist at the same time, a distribution that is expected if both develop in parallel out of the same lexical entry.²⁰

In relation to our second research question, results revealed that the production of *agarrar* y pseudocoordination was markedly less frequent than ‘*agarrar* + NP’ verb constructions. As Ross (2017) observes, despite sometimes being remarkably rare, pseudocoordination nonetheless persists in terms of use. The data suggest that even though *agarrar* y pseudocoordination may be rarely used by older adults (between ages 50 and 99), it has nonetheless been transmitted to younger speakers. Furthermore, the production of *agarrar* pseudocoordination constructions in Northern Belize is favoured only by the preterite and present tense. We propose that despite its low frequency, its useful and salient discourse function allows it to spread through a speech community.

A key observation was the extension of the verb *agarrar* to denote expressions that in monolingual Spanish typically require the use of *tomar*. It is important to note that the extension of *agarrar* has long been occurring in monolingual varieties of Spanish (Glover 1966). Alonso Pedraz (1958: 160), for instance, pointed out that *agarrar* is used indiscriminately in some Latin American contexts to mean *tomar* ‘take’ as well as other Spanish verbs such as *coger* ‘grab, grasp’, *pillar* ‘catch’, *adquirir* ‘acquire’ and *cobrar* ‘charge’. We can surmise that intense language contact accelerates this extension. Results from this study lend support to the claim that higher degrees of contact with English results in the extended use of *agarrar* (Bullock, Serigos & Toribio 2021). The nature of this extension, however, may differ across Spanish/English code-switching communities. Even though Spanish is in intense contact with English in Northern Belize, the verb *agarrar* has not been calqued on similar English ‘get’ expressions as in Texas. Instead, it has been generalized along

²⁰ In Butt and Lahiri (2013), light verbs take another verb as its complement. The conclusion still applies to our study as far as light verbs share in both cases the property of conveying a meaning different from that of auxiliary verbs (see also footnotes 4 and 5).

the lines of its English translation equivalent ‘take’. This difference in the use of *agarrar* quintessentially illustrates Muysken’s (2000: 58) postulation that two speech communities where a similar language pair is spoken can differ in terms of how two categories from different languages are recognized. Differences in the recognition of categorial equivalence may be attributed to “frequency of use, degree and kind of bilingualism, and language attitudes”.

Our view is that the high density of Spanish/English code-switching in Northern Belize (Balam 2015, 2016a, 2021; Vanhaverbeke & Balam In press) has further promulgated the structural equivalence between the Spanish verb *agarrar* and the English verb *take*. This has resulted in the more systematic and conventionalized use of *agarrar* as ‘take’ among younger generations. Recall that the token frequency of bi/multilingual *agarrar* verb constructions distinguishes younger age groups (ages 14 – 40) from the older adult group (ages 50 – 99) with limited proficiency in English. The use of *agarrar* as ‘take’ verb constructions among adults in particular is reflective of speakers’ higher proficiency in English and more advanced lexical knowledge and usage of English ‘take’ phrases and collocations (e.g., *to take an opportunity, to take advantage of someone, to take up a job position, to take precautions*, etc.). Toribio (2004: 172) contends that the simultaneous activation of languages in code-switching “favors the searching of parallels between them”. Thus, it follows that the more speakers code-switch the more they enhance and exploit the similarities between their linguistic systems to optimize bilingual discourse; thereby, reducing the cognitive costs required when simultaneously using linguistic resources from different systems.

Importantly, the predisposition towards the use of *agarrar* as ‘take’ was already present among older generations of Spanish speakers with limited or no proficiency in English. This tendency is one that parallels the use of *agarrar* in the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico (Suárez Molina 1945). As an anonymous reviewer rightly suggests, some uses of *agarrar* fall within isoglosses that include monolingual Spanish-speaking Yucatan. In the case of Northern Belize characterized by the intense language contact between Spanish and English, however, there has likely been an enhancement of the interlingual similarities between the semantically-related Spanish verb *agarrar* and its English translation equivalent ‘take’.

It is noteworthy that in Belizean Kriol the verb *tek* ‘take’ is similar to its analogous English form (e.g., *tek yu taim* ‘take your time’, *tek advantij* ‘take advantage’, etc.). It co-occurs, however, with the Kriol variant *kehr* ‘take’ (e.g., *Kehr sohn mango fi dehn* ‘Take some mangoes for them’: Crosbie et al. 2007: 87). Based on this observation and the fact that English is the official language of instruction in Belize, it is more likely the case that *agarrar* has been further generalized along the lines of the English verb *take* rather than the Kriol ‘take’ verbs (i.e., *tek* and *kehr*). In Muysken’s (2013) terms, we could analyze Spanish/English *agarrar* verb constructions in Northern Belizean Spanish as representative of *congruent lexicalization*, which occurs when elements from different languages are used in a grammatical structure that is partly or wholly shared by the base language and the donor language. According to Muysken, low levels of normativity, closely-knit networks and high bilingual proficiency contribute to the development of this code-switching strategy.

The increased use of *agarrar* in Northern Belize may have co-occurred with an overall decline in the use of the verb *tomar*, an issue that merits further investigation. As the examples in (14) show, *agarrar* is often employed in contexts that typically require the semantically-related verb *tomar* ‘take’. It is noteworthy that *tomar* (e.g., *tomé y vinime* ‘we took and we came’), precisely the auxiliary-like verb

that spawned initial observation and documentation of pseudocoordination in Spanish (Valdés 1535: 81, cited in Ross 2014: 122), has fallen into disuse across time (Bravo 2020). Covarrubias et al. (2020) found that in the PRESEEA data, *tomar y* ‘take and’ pseudocoordination was unattested in 7 dialectal areas. Although an analysis of pseudocoordination with other auxiliary-like verbs as V1 verbs is beyond the purview of this paper, a preliminary analysis of the small sub-set of speakers ($n = 13$) in our study who produced *agarrar y* pseudocoordination showed that speakers did not produce any *tomar y* pseudocoordination. Moreover, their production of *ir y* pseudocoordination (e.g., *Fui y lo rempujé* ‘I went and pushed him’) was lower ($n = 7$) than *agarrar y* constructions ($n = 32$).

If *tomar y* pseudocoordination has largely fallen into disuse, it would not be surprising that the decline of other verbal uses of *tomar* could also be further accelerated in situations of intense language contact as in Belize. Collectively, our findings point in the direction of greater extension and further grammaticalization of the light verb *agarrar*. This would align with findings for the light verb *hacer* in bilingual compound verbs (Balam 2015, 2016a; Balam, Parafita Couto & Chen 2021). In our study, the production of *agarrar y* pseudocoordination which lacks the Spanish conjunction *y* or tense agreement between V1 and V2 could be indicative of this more advanced stage of grammaticalization for the light verb *agarrar* in Northern Belize, possibly influenced by the form of serial verb constructions in Belizean Kriol (e.g., *Ih ron gaan lef di baybi* ‘He abandoned the baby’: Decker 2005: 87).

Although this study elucidates the intergenerational use of *agarrar* constructions in Northern Belize, there were limitations. We focused solely on *agarrar* and not on other semantically-related verbs such as *tomar*. The small dataset analyzed limited our ability to employ inferential statistical tests to bolster our conclusions. Furthermore, as an anonymous reviewer pointed out, the adolescent and post-adolescent groups were smaller in comparison to the adult and older adult groups, which may have influenced results. Thus, future work on data from age groups that are more similar in terms of number of participants is necessary to confirm our findings. Based on our analysis, it remains unclear whether the extended use of *agarrar* as *tomar* is characteristic of Northern Belize, or whether a similar pattern is found in other places like Mexico and Argentina also known for frequent use of *agarrar*. More intergenerational studies of these constructions in different communities need to be carried out, as these types of analyses shed light on usage patterns that may not be observed in large-scale corpus studies that are based on *agarrar* verb constructions extracted from different, unrelated sources.

Additionally, comparative research across Spanish/English code-switching varieties could more systematically examine the relative influence of different linguistic and social factors on the use of *agarrar* verb constructions in bilingual speech (for comparative research on code-switching, see Balam, Parafita Couto & Stadthagen-González 2020; Balam et al. 2023; Balam et al. 2024; Blokzijl, Deuchar & Parafita Couto 2017). Regarding pseudocoordination, future work among Kriol-dominant speakers of Spanish could cast light on the potential role of Belizean Kriol on the use of *agarrar*. This analysis is only a preliminary step in the study of *agarrar* verb constructions in Belizean Spanish and Central American Spanish varieties more generally, which as Lipski (2023) underscores, are in some ways among the most archaic Spanish varieties in Latin America (Baird, Balam & Parafita Couto 2023).

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