

# Forms and functions of habitual markers

## A cross-linguistic survey

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# Outline

1 What are habituals?

2 Why and how?

3 Findings so far

4 Conclusions

# Two caveats



This presentation is based on joint work with Eva van Lier.

## Two caveats



... and our research is still very much work in progress! Comments and ideas are highly appreciated.

## Section 1

What are habituals?

## Habituals

- Linguistic forms expressing that something typically or usually happens
  - Often described under the heading of aspect, specifically as a subtype of imperfective aspect (e.g. Comrie 1976)
  - Modify a predicate (like other TMA expressions) and appear in many different guises: affix, clitic, particle, auxiliary, etc.

### Example: Yuchi -ne

- (1) **Yuchi** (isolate, Oklahoma)

a. *sahā:de i h̥e-wa-ne*  
always tobacco 3SG(Yuchi.M).ACT-chew-HAB  
'He chews tobacco all the time.'

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'He chews tobacco all the time.'
  - b. *'i hō-wa =:le*  
tobacco 3SG(Yuchi.M).ACT-chew =EMPH  
'He's really chewing (and chewing) that tobacco!'  
(Linn 2001: 263, 77)

## Example: (older) Dutch *plegen*

## (2) Early Modern Dutch (1637)

*Dit mirakel is des\_te wonderbaerlicker, om\_dat het  
this.N miracle(N) COP.3SG all.the.incredible.CMPN because it  
in Egypten niet en plagh te regenen, noch te hagelen.  
in Egypt not NEG HAB.PST to rain.INF nor to hail.INF  
'This miracle is all the more incredible because it did not  
usually rain or hail in Egypt.'*

(*Statenvertaling*, commentary to Ex 9:18; dnl.org)

## Repeated or characteristic situations?

- One tradition views habitus as inherently involving repetition, i.e. a kind of verbal plurality
    - e.g. Bertinetto & Lenci (2012), Brinton (1987), Bybee et al. (1994: 127), and Krakovskij (1997), among many others

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- One tradition views habituels as inherently involving repetition, i.e. a kind of verbal plurality
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  - According to another school of thought, habituels describe “a characteristic feature of a whole period” (Comrie 1976: 28), not necessarily involving any repetition
    - Why? In some languages, habitual markers may combine with individual-level state predicates (on this term see Carlson 2012)

## English *used to* + individual-level state

- (3) *Simon used to believe in ghosts.*  
(Comrie 1976: 27)

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- Solution by some: English *used to* is not a habitual marker!
  - e.g. Binnick (2005; 2006), Hantson (2005), and Boneh & Jędrzejowski (2019: 11)
  - But cf. e.g. Schulz (2010), Neels (2015), or Hengeveld et al. (2021)

## Other discussions in the literature

- Differences/similarities between habitual and generic (gnomic) statements (Dahl 1985; Bertinetto 1994; Krifka et al. 1995; Langacker 1997; Carlson 2012)
  - *Beavers build dams* (or *The beaver builds dams*)

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- Differences/similarities between habituals and ‘attitudinals’ (Bertinetto 1994; Lin 2003; Bertinetto & Lenci 2012)
  - *She teaches Dutch* (cf. *She is a Dutch teacher*)

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- Differences/similarities between habituals and ‘attitudinals’ (Bertinetto 1994; Lin 2003; Bertinetto & Lenci 2012)
  - *She teaches Dutch* (cf. *She is a Dutch teacher*)
- Habituals as the expression of *habits*?
  - Habituals describe habits or propensities of participants (Brinton 1987; Dik 1997: 236)
  - Habituals characterize situations (e.g. Lyons 1977: 716; Comrie 1976: 27–28; Carlson 2012: 831)

# Working definition for this study

‘Habitual’ – informal working definition

An overt marker or construction expressing that a situation typically occurs.

# Some phenomena not included

- Frequentative or pluractional forms which may receive a habitual interpretation
  - e.g. CVC-reduplication in Squamish/Skw̓xwú7mesh (Salishan; Canada): sometimes translated ‘usually, always’, but used more broadly for situations that happen more than once (Bar-el 2008)
    - *kw'elh-* ‘spill’ → *kw'elh~kw'elh-* ‘always spill’ (bad habit)
    - *7exw-* ‘cough’ → *7exw~7exw-* ‘cough many times’
    - *sak'-* ‘cut’ → *sek'~sak'-* ‘slice’

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- Unmarked tense/aspect forms which may occur in semantically habitual contexts
  - e.g. English simple present (Quirk et al. 1985: 179–183)
- ‘Habitual nouns’ meaning ‘someone who usually does X’, etc.
  - e.g. the habitual nominalizer *tala(g)-* in Matigsalug Manobo (Austronesian, Philippines) (Wang et al. 2006: 32)
    - *suggal* ‘gamble’ → *tala(g)suggal* ‘gambler’
    - *bunù* ‘murder’ → *tala(g)bunù* ‘murderer’

## Two notes on terminology

- ‘Habitual’ very common in the linguistic literature, but may be used with different extensions (cf. Carlson 2012: 842)

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- ‘Habitual’ very common in the linguistic literature, but may be used with different extensions (cf. Carlson 2012: 842)
- Sometimes other terms are found for expressions of typically occurring situations (especially in older sources)

# Alternative terminology

Term	Example references
CONSUETUDINAL	O'Donovan 1845; Bliss 1972
CUSTOMARY	Lipkind 1945; Aikhenvald 2003; Mihas 2015
HABITUATIVE	de Angulo & Freeland 1930; Strange 1973; Hill 1975
NORMAL	Bromley 1981; Louwerse 1988 (alongside other terms)
USITATIVE	Ultan 1967; Parks 1976; Silverstein 1974

Table 1: Some other terms in the literature

## Section 2

Why and how?

# Habituals in the typological literature

- Much work on habituals in (some) individual languages, but few large-scale cross-linguistic surveys
- No chapter on habituals in the WALS (or the Eurotyp volumes)
  - cf. Boneh & Jędrzejowski (2019: 1–2)
- Habituals generally receive less attention than more ‘central’ TMA categories

## Some relevant earlier studies

- Dahl (1985: 95–102) on habitual (and ‘habitual-generic’) markers, part of a larger study of tense and aspect markers
  - 64 languages in the sample, habituals found in about 20

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- Bybee et al. (1994: 151–160) on grammaticalization and lexical sources of TMA markers
  - 94 languages in the sample, data on habituals from 30
- Cristofaro (2004) on the relation between past habituals and irrealis marking
  - Convenience sample of “about two hundred” languages, unfortunately no full list of sources

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- Maurer (2013) on coexpression (or not) of habitual markers in creole languages
  - 76 languages in the APiCS, habitual marking discussed for 59

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- Maurer (2013) on coexpression (or not) of habitual markers in creole languages
  - 76 languages in the APiCS, habitual marking discussed for 59
- Fortuin (forthcoming) on the relation between habituals and the perfective/imperfective distinction
  - 36 languages investigated

# Main research questions

- 1 What kinds of habitual markers are found in the world's languages? (EXPRESSION FORMAT)

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- 1 What kinds of habitual markers are found in the world's languages? (**EXPRESSION FORMAT**)
- 2 What are the (probable) sources of habitual markers?  
(**COEXPRESSION**)
- 3 Which contrasts are expressed in languages with multiple habitual markers? (**SEMANTIC DISTINCTIONS**)

# Uses of a cross-linguistic survey

- Can serve as a guide for descriptive linguists – what might one look for in a given language?

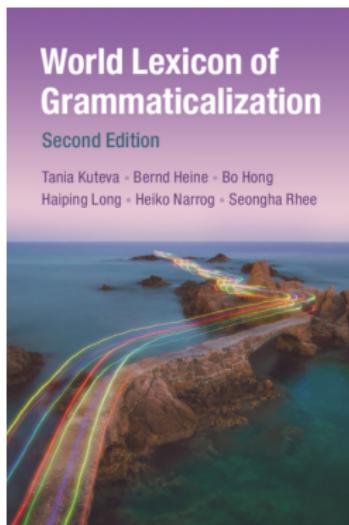
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- Can serve as a guide for descriptive linguists – what might one look for in a given language?
- May help us identify areal patterns in the world's languages
- Tells us about what is common and less common – and hence what may require a special explanation
  - cf. Ziegeler (2020: 274) on Singapore English: “Habitual aspect marked by forms meaning *will* is not a frequent universal pattern of grammaticalization” – but how do we know this?

# A note on grammaticalization



- The observed patterns of coexpression can probably often be described as the result of GRAMMATICALIZATION (cf. Kuteva et al. 2019). However:
  - For most languages in the sample we have little or no historical evidence
  - Not always clear that a habitual marker is ‘grammatical’ (however this is defined)
  - Coexpression may arise in various ways, not just through grammaticalization (cf. Haspelmath 1998)

# A lexical habitual (and its source)

## (4) Danish (Indo-European; Denmark)

- a. *Jeg plej-er at vær-e heldig på casino.*  
I HAB-NPST to COP-INF lucky on casino  
'I'm usually lucky in the casino'

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- b. *Han plej-er sit forhold til fagbevægelse-n*  
he care.for-NPST REFL.POSS.N relationship(N) to labour\_movement-DEF  
'He is caring for his relationship with the labour unions'  
(examples from KorpusDK; cf. Gregersen et al. 2021)

# Future-habitual coexpression in Lezgian

- (5) Lezgian (Nakh-Dagestanian; Dagestan/Azerbaijan)  
[*Ina amuq'-aj-t'a,] čun wahši-jr.i ne-da. Zun*  
here stay-AOP-CND we:ABS wild-PL(ERG) eat-FUT I:ABS  
*xür.ü-z q<sup>h</sup>fi-da.*  
village-DAT go.back-FUT  
'If we stay here, wild animals will eat us. I'll go back to the  
village.' (Haspelmath 1993: 141)

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- (6) Lezgian (Nakh-Dagestanian; Dagestan/Azerbaijan)  
[*Q<sup>h</sup>san xürek-r.i-kaj raxa-da-j-la*] Mizafer.a-n  
good meal-PL-SBEL talk-FUT-PTP-TEMP Mizafer-GEN  
*siw.i-z hamiša c'aran jad qwe-da.*  
mouth-DAT always salivary water come-FUT  
'Whenever there is talk about good meals, saliva always  
comes to Mizafer's mouth.' (Haspelmath 1993: 141)

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comes to Mizafer's mouth.' (Haspelmath 1993: 141)

- No development FUT → HAB acc. to Haspelmath (1993: 130; 1998: 38–39) – FUT–HAB suffix *-da* originally meant ‘nonpast’, but has lost present progressive uses

# Method

- Used the “minimal” diversity sample from Audring et al. (2021)
  - so far 82 languages surveyed
    - Checked descriptive grammars (or other relevant literature) for habitual markers
    - Noted expression format, coexpression patterns, and any other relevant information for each marker

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  - so far 82 languages surveyed
    - Checked descriptive grammars (or other relevant literature) for habitual markers
    - Noted expression format, coexpression patterns, and any other relevant information for each marker
- Supplemented “opportunistically” with information on habituals from c. 50 other languages and dialects
- Languages included in our diversity sample are indicated with **blue** text; additional languages with grey

## Section 3

Findings so far

# How many relevant languages?

	<i>n</i>
One habitual	40
More than one habitual	11
None reported/unclear	31
Total	82

**Table 2:** Languages with reports of habituals

# How are habitual meanings expressed? (RQ1)

	<i>n</i>
Affix(es)	24
Clitic(s)	2
Particle(s)	5
Auxiliary/catenaive verb(s)	4
Serial/compound verb(s)	3
Adnominal construction	1
Multiple strategies	6
Unclear	6
Total	51

Table 3: Expression formats per language

# Summary on expression format (RQ1)

- Habitual markers reported for 51 of the 82 surveyed languages
- Many bound morphemes – 26 out of 51 languages have habitual affixes or clitics
- But this may partly be due to descriptive bias
  - Grammars usually have comprehensive coverage of bound morphemes, whereas periphrastic constructions might be overlooked (especially in sketch grammars)

# Coexpression patterns (RQ2)

Meaning	Languages
BEFRIEND	<a href="#">Wari'</a>
BELONG	Cornish English
CONTINUE	<a href="#">Lavukaleve</a>
CUSTOM	<a href="#">Yimas, Standard Basque</a>
DO	<a href="#">Kwomtari, Tariana</a> , Gullah, Anamuxra, Palenquero
FOR LONG/STILL	<a href="#">Hup</a> , Pennsylvania Dutch English
KNOW	<a href="#">Mosetén, A'ingae</a> , BCS, Tok Pisin, Vitu, Palenquero, Bizkaian Basque
LIKE/LOVE	Lao, Khmu, Mandarin, Saramaccan, Hualapai
LIVE	<a href="#">A'ingae</a> , Abipon, Dhivehi
SIT/STAY etc.	<a href="#">Mosetén, Tariana</a> , Kanakuru
USE	Swedish, Standard English
WALK/GO etc.	<a href="#">Kokama-Kokamilla, Ute</a> , Yace, Sezo
Copula/existential	<a href="#">Mian, Bora</a> , Dumo/Vanimo, Pnar ('be same')
Future	<a href="#">Purépecha</a> , Kristang, Odia
Indefinite object	<a href="#">Misantla Totonac</a>
Nominalization	<a href="#">Yauyos Quechua</a>

Table 4: Coexpression and possible source meanings

# Coexpression: KNOW + habitual

## (7) A'ingae (isolate; Colombia/Ecuador)

- a. *Je'nda pûshesû=ndekhû=khe=ti setha'pue-ñe atesû='fa.*  
then woman=HUMPL=ADD=INT sing-INF HAB=PLS  
'So the women too used to sing?'

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'So the women too used to sing?'
  - b. *Munda=ma fi'thi-ye atesû=mbi=chu a'i*  
peccary=Acc1 kill-INF know=NEG=SUBORD person  
'There was a man who didn't know how to kill  
white-lipped peccary.'
- (Hengeveld 2020)

# FYI: white-lipped peccary



White-lipped peccary, © Mike Peel (mikepeel.net)

# Coexpression: LIKE + habitual

## (8) Khmu (Austroasiatic; Laos)

- a. *kəə kù yɔh m̥an̥\_théey kùu píi*  
he HAB go Thailand each year  
'He usually goes to Thailand each year'

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he HAB go Thailand each year  
'He usually goes to Thailand each year'
  - b. *nɔɔ kù ?wíak pùuc*  
they HAB/like drink wine.  
'They usually drink wine./They like to drink wine.'
- (Svantesson 1994: 272)

# From indefinite object to habitual marker?

(9) Misantla Totonac (Totonacan; Mexico)

- a. *ut šqaa-nan*  
3SG harvest-INDEF.OBJ  
's/he harvests (something)'

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's/he (always) talks'
- (MacKay 1999: 321–323)

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's/he (always) talks'
- (MacKay 1999: 321–323)

- “When translating verbs with /-nan/ out of context [also transitive verbs, SG], speakers almost invariably qualify the meaning of the verb with ‘always.’” (MacKay 1999: 322)

## Multiple habituals (RQ3)

- More than one habitual marker reported for 11 languages in our diversity sample
- Which distinctions are relevant in such cases?

# Multiple habituals (RQ3)

	Language	Source
Polarity	A'ingae POS habituals vs. NEG = <i>masia</i>	Hengeveld 2020
	Berbice Dutch POS <i>justu</i> + <i>das</i> vs. NEG <i>dasn</i>	Kouwenberg 1994
Tense	Ket PST <i>ba</i> /PRS <i>an</i> /FUT <i>as</i>	Georg 2007
	Coastal Marind PST <i>-ma</i> /PRS <i>-made</i> /FUT <i>-motok</i>	Olsson 2021
	Berbice Dutch PST <i>justu</i> vs. neutral <i>das/dasn</i>	Kouwenberg 1994
Frequency	Kwaza 'intensive habitual' <i>-tjarjy</i>	van der Voort 2004
	Lao 'tendency' <i>mak1</i> vs. 'regular' <i>lùajø-lùaj4</i>	Enfield 2007
'Modality'	Tariana 'habitual prescribed' = <i>hyuna</i>	Aikhenvald 2003
Unclear	Maidu PST.HAB <i>-ús</i> vs. 'auxiliary' <i>?isá-</i>	Shipley 1964
	Pawnee 'habitual' <i>-u:ku</i> vs. 'usitative' <i>ut-</i>	Parks 1976
	Moisetén HAB auxiliaries + clitic	Sakel 2004
	A'ingae HAB <i>atesû</i> vs. <i>kanse</i>	Hengeveld 2020

Table 5: Distinctions in languages with multiple habituals

# Tariana ‘customary’ =*kape*

- Customary form “refers to a usual activity or state repeated many times over, most often in the past” (Aikhenvald 2003: 328)

(10) Tariana (Arawakan; Brazil)

- a. *di-ni di-ni=kape=sina diha*  
3SG.NF-do 3SG.NF-do=CUST=REMPST.INFR he  
‘He used to do it (i.e. talk) like that for a long time’  
(during rituals)

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(during rituals)
- matʃa=pu      nu-ñā=**kape=na**                  nuha*  
be.good=AUG 1SG-live=CUST=REMPST.VIS I  
‘I used to live very well’  
(Aikhenvald 2003: 329)

# Tariana ‘habitual prescribed’ =*hyuna*

- Used for “habitual prescribed activity”, in instructions, and for “what is generally done” (Aikhenvald 2003: 326–328)

(11) Tariana (Arawakan; Brazil)

- kare yaphini=nuku pa-sape=hyuna*  
wind thing=TOP.NSBJ IMPERS-say=HAB  
‘One says this to describe what wind does’ (lit. “for thing of wind”)

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wind thing=TOP.NSBJ IMPERS-say=HAB  
‘One says this to describe what wind does’ (lit. “for thing of wind”)
- aseni-ku=ne=mia=na pa-sape=hyuna*  
Tucano-AFF=INS=only=REMPST.VIS IMPERS-say=HAB  
‘(we) spoke only Tucano ...’  
(Aikhenvald 2003: 326, 307)

# Kwaza ‘habitual’ *iʔiṭa-*

- Habitual compound verb *iʔiṭa-* “can be translated as ‘always’, ‘as usual’ or ‘as a habit’” (van der Voort 2004: 453)

(12) **Kwaza** (isolate, Brazil)

- a. *e'ṭay-nahere arūi-'wā tswa are-'dy=iʔiṭa-tja*  
woman-COLL tapir-AN.O man transform-CAUS=always-cos  
‘the women always made the tapir turn into man’

# Kwaza ‘habitual’ *iʔ̄ita-*

- Habitual compound verb *iʔ̄ita-* “can be translated as ‘always’, ‘as usual’ or ‘as a habit’” (van der Voort 2004: 453)

(12) **Kwaza** (isolate, Brazil)

- e'tay-nahere arūi-'wā tswa are-'dy=iʔ̄ita-tja*  
woman-COLL tapir-AN.O man transform-CAUS=always-cos  
'the women always made the tapir turn into man'
  - ŷhŷ'ko a'we=iʔ̄ita-tse*  
here rain=always-DECL  
'Here it always rains'
- (van der Voort 2004: 453)

# Kwaza ‘intensive habitual’ -*tjarjŷ-*

- Habitual morpheme -*tjarjŷ-* “has an intensive connotation ‘always much’” (van der Voort 2004: 454)

(13) **Kwaza** (isolate, Brazil)

- a. *tomā-kore-tja'rjŷ-da-ki*  
bathe-DIR:matutinal-much-1SG-DECL  
‘I always take a morning bath’

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- tomā-kore-tja'rjy-da-ki*  
bathe-DIR:matutinal-much-1SG-DECL  
‘I always take a morning bath’
- awe-tja'rjy-ki*  
rain-much-DECL  
‘it is raining too much [every day]’  
(van der Voort 2004: 454)

# Future habituals

- Dedicated FUT.HAB markers reported for two languages in the sample, **Ket** (Yeniseian) and **Coastal Marind** (Anim)
  - Ket FUT.HAB said to be rare (Georg 2007: 286); for Coastal Marind, Olsson (2021: 384–385) also notes non-habitual uses
- Beyond our sample, a future habitual is also reported in Chichewa (Kiso 2012)

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- Beyond our sample, a future habitual is also reported in Chichewa (Kiso 2012)
- Combinability of separate HAB + FUT markers in several languages, e.g. Isekiri (Omamor 1982), Gungbe (Aboh 2000: 23–24), and Southern Kiwai (Wurm 1977)

# Future habitual in Coastal Marind

- (14) **Coastal Marind** (Anim; South Papua)

*nok ka-mo-na-yad(e)wn,*

1 DIR-FUT:2SG.A-1.DAT-leave<III.u>

*mano-poto-motok                       yah*

FUT:1.A-take.picture-FUT.HAB PTCL

‘You should leave it [a camera] for me, [then] I will be taking pictures.’

(Olsson 2021: 384)

# Future + habitual in Isekiri

(15) Isekiri (Atlantic-Congo; Nigeria)

- a. *Mó ká rè.*  
1SG HAB go  
'I (usually) go' or 'I used to go'
- b. *Mó waá rè.*  
1SG FUT go  
'I will go'
- c. *Mó waá ká rè.*  
1SG FUT HAB go  
'I will make a habit of going'  
(Omamor 1982: 119)

# Future + habitual in Southern Kiwai

- (16) Southern Kiwai (Kiwaian; PNG)

*wi-du-m-a-ri-iarug-uti-ri-go*

2/3-FUT-PL.A-HAB-FUT-say[PL.OBJ]-DISTR-FUT-HAB?

‘They will habitually speak (many things on many occasions)’

(Wurm 1977: 899)

## Section 4

### Conclusions

# Summing up

- Habitual markers are cross-linguistically very common
  - Identified in 51 out of 82 languages in the diversity sample
  - HAB affix(es) in half of these; other strategies include clitics, particles, auxiliaries, and serial verbs (RQ1)

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- More than one HAB marker in several languages
  - Relevant parameters include polarity, tense, frequency/intensity, ‘modality’ – in addition to unclear cases (RQ3)

## Conclusions in light of earlier work

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  - Our results do not contradict this – Dahl has a quite specific (frequency-based) definition of “major TMA category”

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  - Of course, some of these reflect tense or polarity distinctions, not different subtypes of habituality – but not all

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- Kuteva et al. (2019) identify nine sources of habitual markers, e.g. KNOW, SIT, GO, and USE
  - To these we may add at least ten additional possible sources, some of them well attested across languages (e.g. DO and LIKE)

# Plans for the future

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- Expand collection of coexpression patterns with additional languages
  - Including non-standard dialects, which need not use the same marker(s) as the standard variety
  - If anyone in the audience has examples from other languages/dialects, please don’t hesitate to get in touch!

# Habitual *belong* in Cornish English

## (17) Cornish English (Cornwall)

- a. *I am not so ill as I belong to be*  
'I am not so ill as I usually am'
  - b. *I don't belong going to Church, but I will this once.*  
'I don't usually go to church, but I will this once'
- (Wright 1898–1905: s.v. *belong*)

# Habitual *still* in Pennsylvania Dutch English

(18) Pennsylvania Dutch English (Southern Pennsylvania)

- a. *I go to that church still.*  
‘It is my habit to attend that church.’
- b. *He liked pepperoni pizza still.*  
‘He used to like/always did like pepperoni pizza.’  
(Anderson 2014: 35–36)

# Thank you!



South American tapir, © Johan Spaedtke

Comments and questions are always welcome:  
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