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This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:

Pano Alaman, A. (2023). Spatial deixis within political discourse on Twitter. London : Routledge [10.4324/9781003335535-11].

Availability:

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/944735> since: 2024-05-09

Published:

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.4324/9781003335535-11>

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Spatial deixis within political discourse on Twitter

Ana Pano Alamán

Abstract

This chapter presents the results of a qualitative study of spatial deixis within a corpus of messages published by Spanish political leaders on Twitter. Through a corpus-based analysis, and adopting a cyberpragmatic approach, the aim of this study is to contribute to our understanding of the notion of *place* in political discourse on social media. The results show that political leaders move along different physical, mental, and virtual places. They employ mainly the proximal deictic *aquí* (here) for signalling the physical place where they are located and to highlight his/her subjective proximity to that place and its inhabitants. The use of distal deictics is scarce but strategic in this context to confront the adversary's ideological position. Moreover, in the multimodal and complex virtual space of the microblog affordances such as hashtags play an essential role in the discursive construction of place.

Keywords: political discourse, Twitter, space deixis, cyberpragmatics, hashtag

1 Introduction

Social media have become public arenas where political leaders worldwide announce an agreement, launch a slogan or justify a decision, while being in different locations. Such discourses are more and more condensed and fragmented (Pano Alamán 2019), since they are usually produced and accessed through smartphones and, thus, “consumed” on the go, in the *here* and *now* that encourages immediate reactions. Within the narrow spaces of mobile screens and social media spatial constraints, content originated in the physical setting of a public speech or in a previous talk or text published on traditional media, constantly overlaps, challenging the notion of *context* (Parini 2014), the coding of messages, and the meant interpretation inferencing processes (Yus 2011, 2021), which are strictly connected to the persuasive strategies adopted by political leaders. In this regard, spatial deictics play an essential role.

While space deixis has been investigated on political speeches (Gelabert 2006, Khalifa 2018) and on Twitter interaction (Yuan et al. 2013), less attention has been paid to it in political discourse on social media. Most of the works that have addressed deixis in political language are focused on the personal pronominal system and try to analyse how different pronominal representations reflect power schemes, political alliances, and antagonisms. However, in order

to understand the deixis of political language in all its richness, personal, spatial and temporal deixis should be included in the analysis (Zupnik 1994; Chilton 2004; Ivanova 2006).

In this chapter, I address spatial deixis within the convergence of physical and virtual places in Spanish political discourse on Twitter. Through a corpus-based analysis, and adopting a cyberpragmatic approach (Yus 2011), the aim of this study is to contribute to our understanding of the notion of *place* in political discourse on social media. The chapter begins with an overview of theoretical issues connected to the notion of place in social media, and to spatial deixis in Spanish, followed by a description of the methodology and the data, a discussion of the main results, and the final conclusions. Since this is an exploratory study, findings are considered as a testing ground for further inquiry.

2 Theoretical framework

Social Networking Sites are means of transmission from which the political message travels rapidly to other media thanks, among other things, to the possibility of copying and redistributing content in a few seconds. Political actors take advantage of this megaphone to justify a decision, announce an agreement or launch a slogan without the intermediation of traditional journalism (Mancera Rueda & Pano Alamán 2013; Gallardo & Enguix 2016). Moreover, since the articulation of democratic analogical processes, such as parliamentary debates or electoral campaigns, undergo digital communication processes, the political discourse is gradually *displaced* (Kaufmann & Jeandesboz 2017). Indeed, political communication is increasingly characterized by the dramaturgy of online statements and the primacy of live events.

Social media and mobile communication urge political actors to relate what happens in their immediate *here* and *now* or to react without delay, through a retweet or a like, to another message. The time of writing and reading is concentrated in the minutes and seconds in which we connect to the Net, and the production and the reception of content take place on the interfaces of mobile devices, designed for a rapid and discontinuous reading (Yus 2021). Thus, the political message adapts itself to the imperatives of digital media adopting a *pildorized form* (Slimovich 2016: 118) by means of condensation and fragmentation.

Tweets are characterized by fragmentation when they show information in small portions and in different modes, breaking the communicative flow. Likewise, fragments of discourses are extrapolated from different contexts and then juxtaposed in the space of the tweet,

multiplying the discursive paths and challenging the textual coherence and cohesion. Hashtags, mentions, emojis or videos turn the text into a pretext to introduce complementary or different messages within a single tweet. Also, the political discourse fits into the brief space of a tweet through strategies of textual condensation, such as ellipsis. The space of a tweet is partly determined by the 280-character limit and by the small screens on which it is usually read, therefore messages usually seek the synthesis and effectiveness of headlines and slogans (Pano Alamán 2019) aiming at lasting and obtaining positive reactions in the microblog. Compressing and, simultaneously, splitting the political message through hashtags or emojis, for instance, seem to respond to the urgency with which technology, especially mobile technology, calls upon the quick reaction to the message. According to this, Twitter challenges the very notion of textual space. In addition, the study of place in political discourse on Twitter asks for a broader analysis not only of the internal space of the message, where content may be organized in different blocks, but also to the external physical place, where the speaker situates him or herself while “speaking” on Twitter, considering the complex connection between digital technologies and physical space.

According to Yus (2021), even though mobile phones, and digital communication at a large, seem to liberate us from the tyranny of place, smartphone *locative apps* and location-based services or *locative media* tie us to physical places in a pervasive way (see also Coyne 2010). People connect daily to social networks, without needing a delimited physical space to foster interaction. Indeed, “the use of smartphones with ‘always-on’ internet connection has increased the challenge for the management of interactions, intended interpretations, mutuality of information and eventual interpretations” (Yus 2021: 159-160), regardless of our physical location. Terms such as *connected presence* (Licoppe 2004), which refers to the feeling of constant social availability at any moment or place, or *hybrid space*, help understand the convergence between physical location and digital information. *Hybrid space* is “built by the connection of mobility and communication and materialized by social networks developed simultaneously in physical and digital spaces” (de Souza e Silva 2006: 266). Nowadays, we navigate multiple places (hybrid spaces) simultaneously: the physical one, the place we are thinking of, and social networks as virtual spaces (Georgalou 2015).

For instance, spatio-temporal topics on Twitter can be determined on the basis of an activity, a geographical location, and time (Yuan et al. 2013). They do not refer only to certain locations, but also to the users’ experiences at the time and place referred to. Thus, data provided on that place is reconsidered or altered due to user’s comments and tags, which spread a layer of particular information over the objective qualities of the place in question. Indeed, “social

media updates are connected with something that the user is doing in a specific moment or place, or either something that is happening to her, which is generally posted while the event is happening” (Piepers et al. 2021: 105). Moreover, while addressing a spatial-temporal topic, the user assigns positive or negative properties to that event, to the location where it takes place, and also to her first-hand experience of that place.

On the other hand, as Yus states (2021: 162), “users document, archive, and display their experience and mobility within space revealing aspects of their identity to others.” These practices are connected to the concept *spatial self*, which concerns the presentation of the self based on geographic traces of one’s physical activity and the conceptualization of a location as a modality of self-presentation. In this sense, places and identities are closely connected.

2.1 *Spatial deixis in Spanish*

The language of place and space has been intensively studied in relation to grammatical characteristics, cross-linguistic variation, and cognition (see Enfield & San Roque 2017; Maldonado 2021). Research in this field has revealed a range of expressive resources available for talking about places. Schegloff (1972: 96) suggested, among others, place names (*London*); words for settings (*bus stop*); demonstratives (*there, here*), or gestures (*pointing to places*). However, the notion of place is flexible, since people refer to a place selecting their words for specific communicative ends in particular contexts. The speaker “calibrates his or her formulation appropriately with respect to the addressee’s knowledge and to the common ground established between interlocutors” (Enfield & San Roque 2017: 585).

In the classical view, there are three types of deictic modalities: (a) *deixis ad oculos*, which refers to tangible and observable things in the world; (b) *anaphor*, which relates elements in the linguistic context; and (c) *deixis am phantasma*, which depicts abstract or imaginary entities that belong to mental or fictional representations (Bühler 1982 [1934]). The three most basic deictic forms operate as indices of *person or entities* (demonstratives, pronouns, and other deictic adjectives), indices of *location* (adverbs), and indices of *motion* (verbs) (Richardson 1996). This study focuses on indices of location.

In Peninsular Spanish, the variety of spatial deictic forms is subject to various factors (De Cock 2018). First, the ternary opposition *aquí* (‘here’), *ahí* (‘there’), *allí* (‘over there’) is considered locative; it has been described as distance-oriented, but it is also related to the distinction between proximity to the speaker, proximity to the hearer and negative proximity (NGLE 2009: 1313). Second, the binary opposition between *aquí* ‘here’ and *allí/allá* ‘there’

represents a proximal-distal distinction that Gómez Sánchez and Jungbluth (2015: 248) describe as “[foregrounding] the extension of spaces.” *Aquí* pertains to the space of the speaker; *ahí* and *allí* involve instead the space of the hearer, while *allá* may designate a space for a third person, which would exclude both speaker and hearer. However, scholars have suggested that a binary system may be a better representation of the Spanish deictic system (Eguren 1999; Maldonado 2013; NGLE 2009; Alves Stradioto & Maldonado 2018; De Cock 2018). According to this view, *aquí* is proximal or ‘inclusive’, *allí/allá* are distal, while *ahí* would belong to an indeterminate space that covers a wide variety of functions (Sedano 1996; Alves Stradioto 2017) and may overlap with *aquí* and *allí* (Alves Stradioto & Maldonado 2018; Maldonado 2021). Moreover, even though *aquí* is proximal, it involves enough distance to have more objective representations, such as presenting entities that can be pointed out or even to impose distance and abstract limits (De Cock 2018; Maldonado 2021). In contrast, distal markers like *allí* or *allá* may designate not only distance but also exclusion. Thus, beyond their proximal or distance semantic nature, these deictic forms may also “signal the speaker’s subjective (perceptual, mental, emotional) relationship with some referent both in text and extralinguistic environments” (Maldonado 2021: 62).

In the analysis of spatial deictics, one must take into account the subjective dimension of positioning for the choice of a specific adverb in a given situation (De Cock 2018). Indeed, spatial deictics “constitute instructions for the hearer to see an object/event according to the speaker’s view” and contain “relative amount of information that the speaker presumes the hearer to have with respect to the referent” (Maldonado 2021: 62-63). From this perspective, the proximal form *aquí* and the distal one *allí*, are of high focus, while *ahí* designates medium focus, even though they involve further specifications regarding degrees of subjectivity and accessibility. Also, the choice of the spatial deictic adverb is defined by the speaker’s conceptualization of the distance and his/her taking into account the recipient (Enfield et al. 2007; De Cock 2018).

In other words, “certain linguistic forms have direct pragmatic interpretation depending on parameters of the speech situation, rather than a stable semantic value. Specifically, their interpretation is contextually anchored to the identity of the speaker and addressee, their locations, and the time of the utterance” (Yang 2011: 128). The meaning of deictics is therefore a joint construction in interaction (Hanks 2005); they encode a viewpoint in such a way that the speaker and hearer establish joint attention toward some entity either in the extralinguistic context or discourse (Maldonado 2021: 55). For instance, when the speaker refers to a space related to him/herself in a situation where (part of) the *origo* and the speech situation coincide,

he/she usually employs *aquí*. But, spatial deictic such as *allí* or *allá* generally rely on contextual cues and may be followed by specific space descriptions, “which allow narrowing down the interpretation of the spatial deictic adverb” (De Cock 2018: 69).

2.1 *Deixis in political discourse*

According to Gelabert (2006), the iconic load of the physical spaces in which politics takes place gives deictic expressions a fundamental role in political discourse. Deixis has been studied in political communication, “ranging from personal to political, from persuasive to manipulative,” considering “both the context of production and the speaker’s intentions” (Adetunji 2006: 181). Previous research in this field (Zupnik 1994; Blas Arroyo 2000; Chilton 2004; Gelabert 2004; Maalej 2013; Hamdaoui 2015; Ivanova 2016, among others) has focused on the study of personal references and their role to define speaker’s position towards the public. In the Spanish-speaking world, analyses are devoted to the use of person deixis, as “the ambiguous use of pronominal *deixis* is especially relevant in political language” (Blas Arroyo 2000: 4). They also explore the role of first-person plural deictic pronouns (Vázquez Laslop 2019), which have an important persuasive function “since they have the potential to encode group memberships and identifications” (Zupnik 1994: 340).

As for the spatial dimension, Ivanova’s (2016) study shows that the strategic use of deictic spatial references and their collocation patterns aim at constructing a special *rhetorical space*. In particular, her analysis of former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet’s discourse shows a quantitative prevalence of the proximal deictic (*aquí*) items over the distal ones (*allí/allá*). These appeal to the addressee’s working memory. Bachelet creates a *shared mental space* with her audience, in which the speaker and the addressee are co-present at a given point in time and in space (see Yang 2011). Listeners of Bachelet’s speech may decode the deictic references using not only the situational context, but also the *shared episodic long-term memory* (Cornish 2011). Proximization seems to be a typical phenomenon within political discourse, since the predominant inclusiveness in a leader’s speech constitutes a strategy for construing a rhetorical space aimed at involving the broadest audience possible (Ivanova 2016).

But, as mentioned, spatial deictics meaning is contextually anchored to the identity of the speaker and the addressee, their location, and the time of the utterance (Yang 2011). For instance, Khalifa’s (2018) analysis of three speeches by the former President of the United States, Donald Trump, highlights a different use of proximal or distal deictics according to the different contexts and countries from which the speeches are delivered. Trump employs distal

deixis speaking from the United States, in order to locate people and entities distant from him; instead, while being in Saudi Arabia, he employs spatial deictics that indicate closeness (*here*), trying “to bring everything and every entity closer to his audience to direct them get a vision like his own vision” (Khalifa 2018: 64).

Also, in his study of spatial deixis forms adopted in 10 speeches available on YouTube about the general budget of 2017 financial year by Jordanian Parliament representatives, Al-Khalidy (2019) shows that the MPs used more proximal expressions pointing to referents that were close to them at the parliament, but they also employed distal expressions that signalled futuristic issues. These analyses demonstrate that distance along the spatial axis in political discourse is not only geographical, but rather political, cultural and/or emotional (Chilton 2004; Hart 2015).

3 Method and data

The present study aims at exploring the role that *space* and *place* have in the Spanish political discourse on Twitter, filling the gap in research about spatial deixis on social media and in political discourse. It aims at determining whether and how spatial deictics adverbs are employed by Spanish political leaders in the microblog and identifying their pragmatic meaning in this context. The analysis, which takes into account the concepts of *hybrid space* and *spatial self*, is based on a cyberpragmatic approach, a cognitive pragmatics study of Internet-mediated communication that provides the basis to the analysis of how information is produced and interpreted within the Internet environment and how users access contextual information in this context. According to this view, context plays a major role both in the production and interpretation of information in digital environments. The researcher may assume that in this context, “the ‘addresser users’ have communicative intentions and devise their utterances with the expectation that these intentions will end up being relevant to the other users and that their utterances will be interpreted correctly” (Yus 2011: 14). Therefore, the former code their utterances and provide an adequate amount of contextual information to guide his/her addressee users towards the intended interpretation through inferential strategies. Cyberpragmatics helps explore the quality of the user’s access to contextual information, the amount of information acquired, the preferred interpretation, the cognitive effects derived, and the mental effort involved in obtaining these effects.

The analysis, which is corpus-based and qualitative, has been carried out with the corpus management software Sketch Engine, using the wordlist and the KWIC functions. The corpus is made up of 5604 tweets, which were automatically collected through ExportComments, a software that allows extracting tweets through ‘profile’ extraction system. The profiles selected are those of the political leaders of Spanish parties which have a major number of representatives in the Parliament: @sanchezcastejon (Pedro Sánchez Castejón), Prime Minister and leader of the Partido Socialista (PSOE); @pablocasado_, Pablo Casado Blanco, the former leader of the Partido Popular (PP); @Santi_ABASCAL, Santiago Abascal Conde, leader of VOX; and @ionebelarra, Ione Belarra Urteaga, current leader of Podemos. The tweets were published from September 15th, 2020, to February 15th 2022.

Data were annotated automatically with Sketch Engine. Although time-consuming, a manual search of relevant tweets in Twitter’s database allowed for better monitoring of the data by excluding irrelevant content and duplicates. The criteria followed for the annotation and the analysis are closely linked to the research objectives, finding the most frequent deictic expressions and place references employed by these users, as well as the situational context of the interaction, which has been described in previous research on Spanish politics discourse on Twitter (Mancera Rueda & Pano Alamán 2013; Pano Alamán & Mancera Rueda 2014). Data collected may also provide a rich context not only for the analysis of deictics and place references, but also for Twitter multimodal affordances, such as hashtags and emojis; however, space constraints only allow for a brief comment on the tendencies of these two affordances.

4 Results and discussion

In the first place, prototypical spatial deictics in Peninsular Spanish (*aquí, allí/allá, ahí*) have been extracted from the corpus. Figure 1 shows the number of occurrences in each profile:

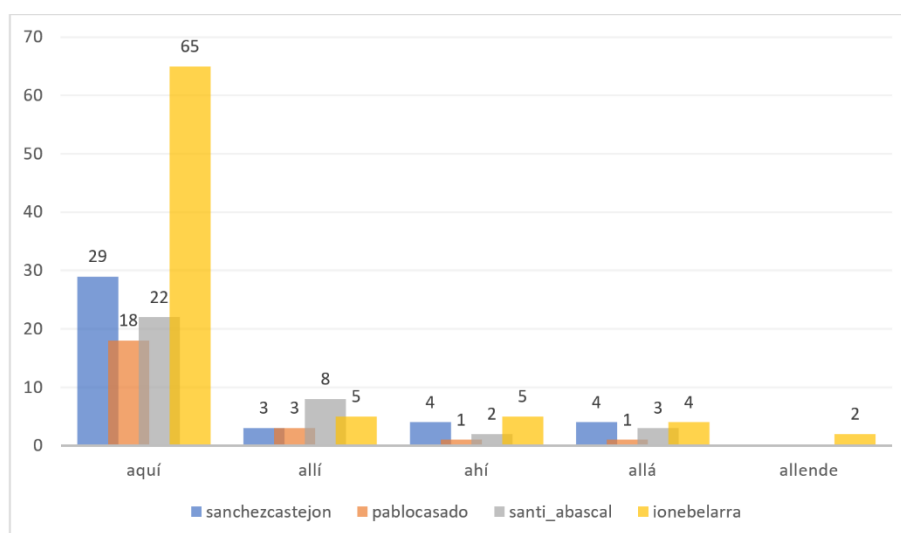


Figure 1. Spatial deictic adverbs. N. of occurrences in the corpus.

The most employed adverb the profiles is *aquí*. Particularly noteworthy is its preponderant use by the leader of Podemos (65 occurrences), followed at a certain distance by the leaders of the PSOE (29), VOX (22), and PP (18). On the other hand, the difference in terms of occurrences with respect to the deictic of distance *allí* and its variant *allá*, and the middle distance *ahí*, is significant. In all cases, these adverbs show a greater presence in Belarra's tweets, except for *allá*, which has 8 occurrences in Abascal's messages. Also, it is worth noting the 2 occurrences of *allende* 'from there' in her tweets, a less frequent formula in contemporary Spanish (Meilán 1994).

These results confirm previous evidence on the predominant use of the proximal deictic with respect to other spatial deictics in political discourse (Ivanova 2016; Al-Khalidy 2019), when it is used to indicate the place where the speaker is at that moment, and at the same time to show closeness towards those who are in that same place. From a qualitative point of view, we see that in most messages of the corpus it generally refers to the place where the political leader is located. For instance, in (1), Sánchez, president of the Spanish government and leader of the PSOE, inserts *aquí* in reference to the La Paz Hospital in Madrid, where one of the vaccines against Covid-19 is being developed. The linguistic context provides adequate information about this specific place and what is done *here*.

(1)



The initial utterance: “He podido conocer la importante labor que realizan [...]” (“I have been able to learn about the important work that they carry out [...]”), and the four photographs embedded in the tweet, where the addressee user sees Sánchez speaking with experts, invites him/her to infer that the government is personally and closely following the research on the vaccine. Also, the locative information provided by the app visible at the bottom of the message (Twitter Web App) certifies that the tweet has been published while Sánchez visits the Research Unit of the Hospital. Thus, the president locates himself in a hybrid space, a physical building in Madrid, and a virtual one, from which he “speaks” to his imagined audience (Marwick and boyd 2010).

The cognitive effects produced by the use of the proximal *aquí* in (1) are similar in the following examples:

(2)



In (2) the deictic refers to Argentina, the country in which Sánchez is located when the message is published, as can be seen thanks to the information provided by the locative app at the bottom of the message, and the explicit mention to the “Embajada de España en Argentina” (“Embassy of Spain in Argentina”). Through the deictic, Sánchez makes explicit reference to the Spaniards who reside in Argentina. The contextual cues provided in the message by words such as “viaje” (“trip”), which denotes movement, and the utterance “compartiendo un rato” (“sharing for a while”), allow the reader of the tweet to infer that he has arrived at this place with the objective, among others, of paying visit to these people. The photographs, which document his meeting with the ambassador and the representatives of Spaniards residing in this country, and the implicit (persuasive) meanings of “compartiendo” (“sharing”) and “nuestros mejores embajadores” (“our best ambassadors”) signal not only his physical proximity with these people, but also his emotional proximity with this community. See also the “relación que nos une a ambos países” (“relationship that unites us to both countries”), which aims at proving that residents in Spain and residents in Argentina are part of a single community, that there is no distance between these two communities. Again, he shows that he can move in a hybrid space made up of a physical place and the microblog, where distance between him and other people -those who meet at the embassy and those whom he reaches through a tweet- are close.

The proximal deictic adverb co-appears frequently in the messages with the utterance “estamos” (“we are”) that politicians employ in the first person plural with an inclusive meaning. In (3), the formula invites the reader to infer that Belarra, leader of Podemos and minister in the Spanish government, speaks mostly on behalf of the institution she represents.

(3)



The video embedded in the message provides evidence of her being physically located at some place in the city that she mentions, Sevilla. However, the place is not explicitly indicated as in (1) and (2); only the reference to the city and to the “Administraciones públicas” (“Public Administrations”) allows the reader of the tweet to access this information and presume two possible options: that she is either at the headquarters of the central government delegation in Andalusia or at the headquarters of the regional government, the Junta de Andalucía. The app provides no data about the location. Thus, in this case, the speaker seems to give lesser importance to the physical place while she assigns *aquí* a more subjective meaning. The contextual cues provided suggest that she is inviting her interlocutors in Andalusia, and her followers on Twitter, to think of a mental space close to women who work in the care services. The intended meaning of the message is that the government places itself on the side of these women, thanks to the agreement she is physically signing in Seville.

In messages (4) and (5), respectively published in the profiles of Casado (PP) and Abascal (VOX), the proximal deictic refers to physical and mental spaces, which are close to those who stay with them at the same place or who have a common political ground with them. It also allows politicians to navigate the hybrid space (physical-virtual) that they share with the recipients of the message:

(4)



As can be seen in (4), the leader of the PP, mentions the toponyms Catalonia, Spain, and Europe, which refer not only to geographical places, but also to places that may activate in the addressee user different (political, cultural, social) meanings. In the same sentence, he uses *aquí*, which is seemingly connected to Catalonia, even though the reference to other toponyms nearby may produce ambiguity. The cues provided by the utterance “Mi compromiso con Cataluña” (“My commitment to Catalonia”) let the reader conclude that the deictic does refer to this region. It is interesting to note that in this tweet *here* does not function as a physical anchor to a place but is related to a geographical and political territory in which “algunos han creado un problema” (“some have created a problem”), and where others (Spain and Europe) do not see a problem. Casado makes an implicit reference here to the so-called “Catalan crisis” provoked by the referendum held in 2017 for the region’s independence. The choice of the proximal deictic leads the addressee to assume that he is physically located in this territory. Indeed, the message does not contain verbal content that allows the physical place from which he speaks to be clearly identified. Only the video embedded in the message let the addressee access this information, when he/she sees Casado speaking at the Cercle de Economía located in Barcelona, therefore, in Catalonia. As in (3), the leader of the PP employs the deictic to signal a subjective (mental and emotional) relationship with a referent in the extralinguistic environment, that is, Catalonia, situating himself on the side of those for whom that territory is not a problem and far from those who have created a problem in the region. At the same time, if there is a problem, he stands with those who seek a solution (see “El PP quiere ser parte de la solución”; “The PP wants be part of the solution”). In this case, the deictic points to the connection between the physical space in which the leader positions himself and the mental space -a certain idea of Catalonia-

that he supposedly shares with his interlocutors in Barcelona and with those who read the tweet within their timeline and have a common political ground with this political leader.

(5)



The leader of VOX clearly indicates in this message where he is, using the hashtag #León. The name of this city in Castilla y León relates to the deictic *here* in the utterance “Hemos venido aquí” (“We have come here”), which contains a verb of movement, that guides to addressee user to interpret the physical proximity of Abascal to this location. It should be noted, however, that from a pronominal point of view he uses the first-person plural (*we*) with a typical inclusive meaning in this context, that stands for the political group he leads. He associates the deictic with León and the co-referents “España vacía” (“empty Spain”) and “provincias olvidadas” (“forgotten provinces”), which in this case seem to indicate both geographical places and subjective spaces that Abascal intends to put back on the national map, as it may be inferred from the metaphor “levantar la bandera” (“raise the flag”) and the emoji with the Spanish flag. Moreover, the video embedded not only provides proof that the leader of that party is physically in that city, but through pictures of monuments and people of these places, he also elaborates on the emotional closeness with people who inhabit those places. These elements and the knowledge that he and his followers share about the regional electoral campaign held at that moment in Castilla y León put the readers’ attention on the proximity between this leader and people residing in this part of Spain. These are space references related to a certain vision of the world that the speaker seeks to share with his ideological ingroup in the microblog. From this perspective, *here* contains information that the speaker presumes the hearer to have with respect to the referent.

As mentioned, *aquí* may also convey a sense of distance. In this case, the deictic establishes a kind of limit between those who are *here* and those who are *not here*, either physically or subjectively. The adverb generally refers to an inclusive area that, however, in other contexts can show distance from certain entities (De Cock 2018). This meaning is frequent in the tweets of the four profiles; however, they are mostly employed by the right-wing leaders Casado and Abascal.

(6)



(7)



In (6), for example, *aquí* leads the addressee user to interpret that Casado speaks of Spain as a place where, contrary to what happens in countries like Italy, the government has not presented the recovery plan that will help face the social and economic crisis caused by the pandemic. In (7), the reader infers that *aquí*, which appears twice, is referred to Spain as opposed to the United States. He compares two different places with the aim of attacking the double standards of his political opponents (the so-called “izquierda progre”, “progressive left”), for whom the assault to the Capitol in January 2021 “les parece mal” (“seems bad”). Thanks to the contextual cue provided by the proximal deictic and to the explicit association between ‘here’ and the Spanish “Congreso” (“Congress”) and ‘here’ and the “Generalidad” (government of Catalonia), Abascal invites his followers to infer that in Spain, which is physically and mentally closer to the potential recipient, the left does not care about situations that could turn out to be more serious. In this way, he establishes a net distance, an abstract limit, between what happens in *this* country and in other countries, as well as between his party, which may be ideologically situated at the extreme right and is worried about the perilous events happening ‘here’, and the left, who, according to his view, does not care about these same events. This tweet does not

contain photographs or videos, but it opens a “thread,” a space in the microblog which allows the user to publish different messages that are thematically connected, thus expanding further on the same topic. In Casado’s tweet, a video is embedded where we see the leader of the PP on television. His words are filled in two spaces that converge on the same tweet.

Regarding *aquí*, it is worth noting too that it frequently has an anaphoric meaning. Bühler (1982 [1934]) used the term *anaphora* to describe the deictic pointing reference to parts of discourse. In the corpus, the adverb has a predominantly anaphoric function in all the profiles, even though it is predominant in the tweets by Sánchez and Belarra. The deictic usually points to an interview, an article or a video which are available through a link or embedded in the message. See, for instance, the link inserted in (8) to a live program on Spanish television (RTVE) in which Sánchez is interviewed, or the text published in elDiario.es, embedded in (9). In the first example, *aquí* appears in a common cataphoric formula used on Twitter: “Podéis seguirlo en directo aquí” (“You can follow it live here”). In the second one, the deictic points to an interview with a member of Podemos, that Belarra synthetically anticipates. It is interesting to note here the use of the emoji of the finger pointing down, which serves as a pointer and contributes to the cohesion and progression in the fragmented message.

(8)



(9)



As pointed out in Pano Alamán (2019), Spanish political parties insert numerous emojis at the top and the bottom space of the messages, with different pragmatic functions: designing place, modalization (intensification), semiotic complement of a picture. They also present a high degree of conventionalization, since they help to access, through a hand, a facial expression or a flag, implicit verbal content contained in the message. In the corpus analysed in this chapter,

the pointing finger is frequently used with a cataphoric function to guide the readers towards content situated ‘outside’ the microblog; thus, it is interpreted as a signal to anaphorically available contextual information (De Cock 2013).

Distal deictic adverbs like *allí* and *allá* present scarce occurrences in the corpus (see Figure 1). The medium distance *ahí* is also very infrequent in all the profiles. From these data, it is possible to affirm that in the microblog political leaders prefer to use the proximal deictic. As mentioned, according to a binary system of the Spanish deictic system, *allí/allá* designate not only distance but also exclusion, while *ahí* belongs to an indeterminate space that may overlap with here and there (Alves Stradioto & Maldonado 2018). Finally, as *allí*, they signal the speaker’s subjective relationship with some referent both in text and in extralinguistic contexts, but, contrary to the proximal deictic, these leave room “for a more subjective representation of the way speakers relate to the referred object” (Maldonado 2021: 56).

In the corpus, the few occurrences of *allí* seem to indicate a geographical place, a city or a country, which is distant from the physical place where the politician speaks, but close from an emotional subjective space. For instance, in (10), the message reproduces the words that Sánchez, as president of the government, says while he is physically in the Congress of Deputies during a control session. Thanks, in particular, to the embedded video and the locative data inserted at the bottom of the video, the reader of the message places the speaker, and his words, in the context of this institutional place. Being said at the parliament and published on the Twitter profile, the message is situated in a hybrid physical-virtual space. The deictic *allí* (“there”), which is placed at the end of a relatively long message, refers anaphorically in the text to the cities mentioned at the beginning: Ceuta and Melilla. The deictic indicates the physical distance between the *he*, who is in Madrid (Congress) and *these places*, which in the mind of the addressee activates a series of presuppositions.

(10)



Knowledge shared between the reader of the tweet and the president about what happens in these two cities located outside the Peninsula concerning immigration and security leads the recipient to interpret the deictic in various ways. The use of *allí* in this context may be risky, since it may be perceived as a remote place, a distant space that the government does not reach. Precisely, the message contains contextual cues that guide the recipient to a different interpretation: that the government will be close to these cities (“deben saber que cuentan con el apoyo,” “they must know that they have the support”) and, above all, that it guarantees the safety of “quienes viven allí” (“those who live there”). Although the semantic value of the deictic is prototypically of distance, in this context it means proximity within a shared emotional space. Through the strategic use of this adverb, Sánchez, speaking as president of the government and being physically in the congress, highlights the closeness of the institution to those places and the people who inhabit them, attacking also the opposition, whose standpoint towards this topic would be not clearly defined.

In other cases, *allí* indicates both a physical and subjective place. The politician connects specific places with his/her memories appealing to the audience’s emotions on Twitter. In (11), the leader of the PP mentions different places in his message: The region of Cantabria and the city of Santander published as hashtags (#Cantabria, #Santander), and a hospital in that same city that the deictic refers to.

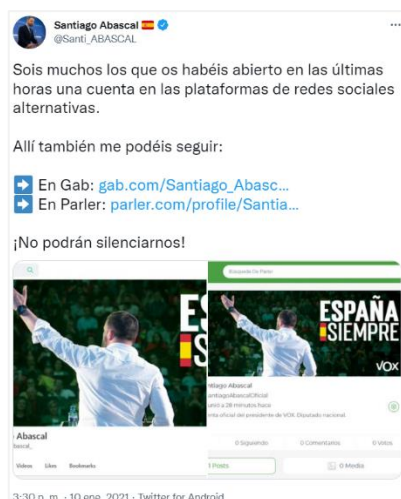
(11)



In this case, the deictic indicates both the hospital, a physical place in the city of Santander, and the distant subjective (emotional) space in which the politician situates some members of his family who worked in that hospital, a place he claims to know well. He builds a bridge between his family, his personal experience, and the institution; by extension, he includes the city and the region in the same space. The use of *allí* immediately evokes a distant subjective space connected to the hospital. However, the memoirs associated to that place are not explicitly shared with the recipients of the tweet. Instead, the message invites to infer that there is an implicit *aquí* (“here”) pointing to the city in which Casado is physically located at the moment where the tweet is published. The utterance “me reúno” (“I meet”) and the embedded pictures help access two possible interpretations of the speaker’s *spatial self*: through the explicit distal adverb, he invites the addressee to join him in a subjective space made of memories of his family working in a hospital in Santander; through the multimodal elements and the verb *reunir* (*to meet*), he provides an adequate amount of contextual information to the same addressee towards the intended interpretation of a physically and mentally closeness of the political leader to this city. From this perspective, he focuses on two spaces that overlap.

The messages published in Abascal’s profile present similar functions. However, in (12) this element acquires another meaning, being the only case in the corpus.

(12)



The adverb *allí* refers to other platforms on the Net. These are the profiles that the leader of VOX calls “plataformas de redes sociales alternativas” (“alternative social network platforms”). The deictic points in this case to a virtual space distant and even alternative or opposed to the virtual space of his Twitter profile. From this place, he addresses the message directly to his followers on Twitter, inviting them to “follow him,” also in a metaphorical sense of movement, to other places accessible through the links provided. At the same time, he designates a place where it is possible to meet and gather with people who share the same ideological and political position. The links and the pictures show that this “new” place in the Net is concrete and ready to take in those who are ideologically close to him. But the utterance “No podrán silenciarnos” (“They won’t be able to silence us!”) at the end of the message adds another implicit meaning to these virtual places. The common knowledge shared by this politician with most of his voters concerning the difficulties for this party to publish messages that may be tagged as hate speech in the main social networks, such as Twitter, guides the reader to infer that those *other* networks are places that guarantee free speech.

As for the deictic *ahí*, this is an intermediate space that may overlap with *aquí* and *allí*. Generally, in the corpus it refers to a physical place where an event takes place, or where something with positive or negative consequences occurs. In the first case, when the tweet is published the speaker may be located far from this place or nearby. In these contexts, the deictic is employed to express desire to be in that place (13) or support for those who are placed there (14).

(13)

(14)



The linguistic context, the multimodal elements (poster, photographs, mentions) and the shared knowledge between sender and recipient, who are in the virtual space of the microblog, make it possible to capture the possible intended meanings of this element: the physical distance, which can be relative; and the emotional proximity between the political leader and the people who stay physically in the places the medium distance deictic signals. See in (13) how Belarra addresses her fellow party members in the Balearic Islands expressing her desire to be close to them, joining the event organized there by the party from the distance. In (14), Sánchez is physically located somewhere in La Palma in a press conference about the disaster caused by the eruption of a volcano on that island, as the video embedded in the tweet and the locative app at the bottom explicitly indicate (“Comparecencia desde La Palma,” “Appearance from La Palma”). However, the use of *ahí* leads to the inference that he is at a certain distance from the volcano, the area the deictic seems to refer to. Also, the presence of the deictic within the utterance “ahí va a estar el Ejecutivo central” (“the government will be there”) invites the addressee to focus on the near future emotional nearness manifested by the government he represents in the form of support and aid to the island, its citizens and its institutions.

Regarding *allá*, it is worth noting that the distance deictic is used in all the cases in the adverbial phrase *más allá* (“far beyond”), indicating the overcoming of a space that constitutes a limit. In (15), Belarra applauds the Energetic project of his party in the Balearic Islands for going beyond the mere dimension of words and for moving on to concrete facts. In (16), Abascal shares with his audience on Twitter an article in order to criticize the fact that the president of the government and his not very well-defined allies (“Sánchez y compañía,”

(“Sánchez and company”) exceed the limits in the management of immigration issues. The statement that opens the tweet mentioning the borders (“fronteras”) and the phrase “van más allá” (“they go beyond”) invite to conclude that, from his perspective, the government does not respect the national borders.

(15)



(16)



4.1 Other spatial adverbs

The automated extraction of the adverbs present in the corpus allows us to observe that the four leaders use similar spatial adverbs to position themselves, physically and subjectively, generally with respect to a place where an event occurs or a political issue. Figure 2 shows the main adverbs used by each leader and the occurrences they present in the corpus.

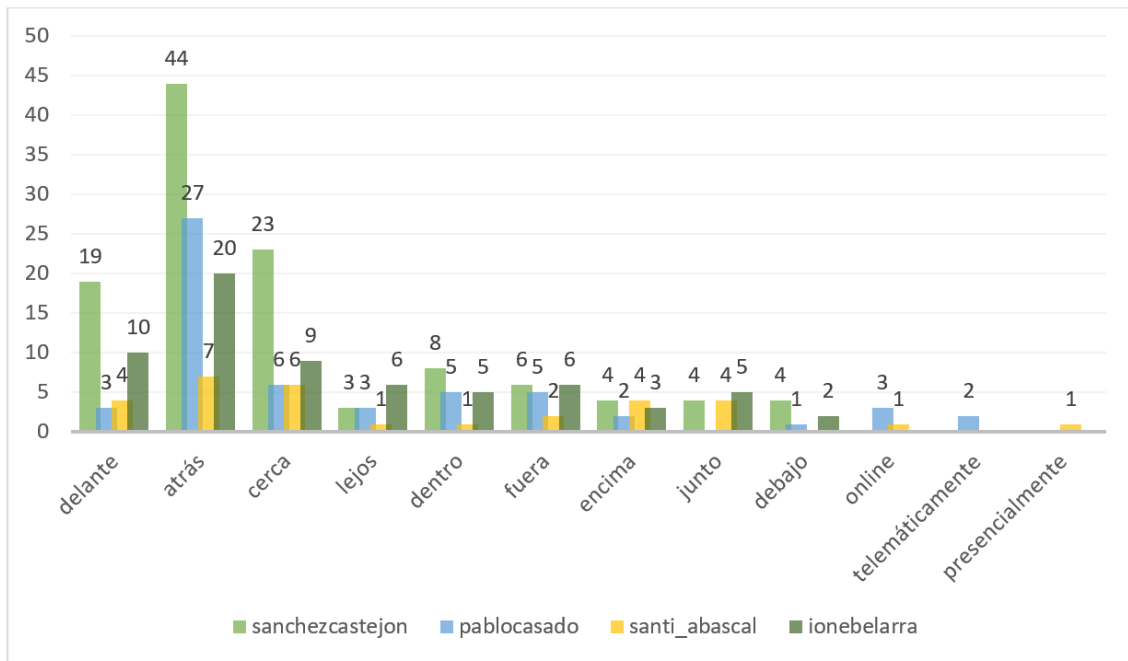


Figure 2. Spatial adverbs. N. of occurrences in the corpus.

We see that, in general, the tweets contain few spatial adverbs. Those who use them mostly are Sánchez, Casado and Belarra, while they have a scarcer presence in Abascal’s tweets. There is a predominant use of *atrás* (“behind”), especially in Sánchez (44 occurrences), who uses it 6 times in the formula “no dejar a nadie atrás” (“leave no one behind”), and 5 times in the hashtag #NiUnPasoAtrás; Casado (27 occurrences) and Belarra (20) use it in their messages employing the first formula too. Another adverb used by all political leaders, although with different frequency, is *cerca* (“close,” 44 occurrences in total), whose meaning is like that of *junto* (“beside” or “together”), which is less frequent (13) and even absent in Casado’s messages. Follow the complementary antonyms *dentro-fuera* (“inside-outside”) and *encima-debajo* (“above-below”). Finally, only Casado and Abascal resort to adverbs denoting a virtual or face-to-face context: *online* (3 occurrences) and *telemáticamente* (“telematically,” 2) in Casado; and *online* (1) and *presencialmente* (“in person,” 1) in Abascal.

In the case of *atrás*, the adverb denotes generally in the tweets “being behind someone or something,” and, in particular, “turning the back to someone or something.” The fact that this adverb often appears in political statements in which it is declared that no one will be left behind guides the addressee user to interpret the meaning of this adverb as being inclusive or exclusive depending on who leaves behind whom. For instance, see the following tweets published in the profiles of Sánchez and Casado, who use the adverb speaking from the shared physical place they occupy in the parliament and from the virtual space of their profiles. While in (17), Sánchez

promises that the government’s agenda does not turn its back on anyone during the crisis, in (18), Casado, who stands before his interlocutor in the congress, takes up the same words to accuse the president precisely of leaving behind the citizens (“ha dejado atrás a millones de personas”). Thus, the intended including-excluding meaning of this spatial adverb in the hybrid space of the parliamentary (antagonist) discourse and the microblog, is highly dependent on the context.

(17)



(18)



Sánchez and Belarra use *delante* (“in front of” or “ahead,” with 19 and 10 occurrences, respectively), more than the other two political leaders. Contrary to *atrás*, *delante* indicates placing oneself before something or someone. In their messages, it predominantly refers to an abstract space before them in which action must be taken to improve the future of the country; indeed, it appears in utterances such as “tener trabajo por delante” (“to have work ahead”). The contextual cues in the messages and the shared knowledge between these representatives of the government and their imagined audience in the microblog help make inferences about the idea of a future place where positive changes for society are within reach.

In other cases, the adverb may refer instead to a specific physical place or space. In (19), Abascal uses the adverb to signal exactly where those he considers guilty of having tried to attack him at a rally organized by VOX in Catalonia in February 2021 should be placed. “Los culpables tendrán que explicarlo delante de un juez” (“The offenders will have to explain it in front of a judge”) leaves no room for doubt that the place he refers to is that of a court. However, the extreme synthesis (i.e. textual condensation) of the message requires a great cognitive effort

on the part of the addressee user to capture the implicit meanings related to the facts that he blames before its imagined audience on Twitter. See the hashtag #15metros (“#15meters”), which alludes to the distance that would have mediated between the political leader and his alleged aggressors. The hypertext space of the hashtag allows the reader to search for other messages associated with it and go back to the initial tweet in which Abascal explains what happened.

(19)



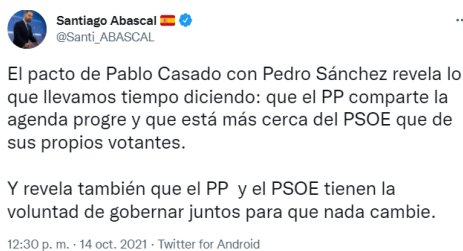
As for *cerca* (“close”) and *lejos* (“far away”), we observe some differences between the leaders. The first adverb is frequent in Sánchez’s tweets, as in (21), in which he speaks being situated - as the video and the locative data explicitly indicate- in the congress of the PSOE in Castilla y León. He presents himself with a double role: general secretary of this party and representative of the State. The adverb points out that the State must be with the citizenry. It designates, then, a subjective emotional space which is close to the citizens. However, the physical place from which he speaks to the public of the congress, the expression “vivan donde vivan” (“wherever they live”), and the periphrasis “debemos descentralizar las instituciones” (“we must decentralize the institutions”) activate a series of implicatures in the mind of the addressee user in the microblog. Thanks to the audience’s knowledge about, among other things, the imminent elections in Castilla y León, they can grasp the more restricted, political, and electoral sense of “being close” to the citizens of that region.

(20)



In (21), Abascal establishes a proximity between the PP and the PSOE due to the similarity of their political agendas, an argument he employs to attack Casado. In this case, it is possible to interpret the meaning of the adverb as “ideologically close”; see also the statement “voluntad de gobernar juntos” (“will to rule together”). The strategy serves to point out that the PP is moving away and distancing from its voters. As in this tweet, these adverbs serve in most cases to accuse the political adversary or the government of adopting decisions harmful for the citizens or dissociating from their needs. Indeed, the use of *lejos* in (22), serves Casado to place the government distant from what he considers the “real” Spain, a mental space that he shares with his followers in the microblog and his potential voters.

(21)



(22)



Regarding *cerca-fuera* (“inside-outside”), a similar political use is observed in all the tweets in which they appear, particularly in those of Casado. It is worth noting too that in some cases they are employed together with an inclusive meaning, especially in the messages published by

Abascal and Belarra. For example, in (23), Belarra refers simultaneously to two spaces (“dentro y fuera de nuestras fronteras,” “inside and outside our borders”) that the reader of the tweet interprets in an all-embracing sense, alluding here to the organizations that work for peace both in Spain and abroad. The expression is vague because it does not provide enough information about the organizations and where they work exactly, but the use of the two adverbs referring to *border* in the context of what she calls “compleja situación en Ucrania” (“complex situation in Ukraine”) evokes in the reader a geographical space referring to Spain and Europe, and an emotional space that may be associated to those territories in the world where they work for peace and dialogue.

(23)



4.2 *Multimodal spatial deictics*

We have seen in some cases that the political leaders use different multimodal elements and typical social media affordances to refer to a physical place, an institution, an event or an element of the text, with an anaphoric value. Indeed, the results show that multimodality (pictures and videos embedded, mentions, or locative information automatically displayed on the message) has an important role in these tweets since it points to specific spatial references in this hybrid space. It is worth mentioning the role of hashtags in these tweets. As it is well-known, the hashtag was established in an early phase of CMC as a channel marker in Internet Relay Chat (IRC) to signal specific channels where people could gather and chat (Heyd & Puschmann 2017). Like in IRC, in Twitter the hashtag generates a *thematic discursive space* where a “conversation” or a delayed discussion thread takes place (Mancera Rueda & Pano Alamán 2015). From a relevance-theoretic perspective, Scott (2015: 8) states that hashtags are

devices that add “a layer of activation to certain contextual assumptions [...] guiding the reader’s inferential processes” (see Parini & Yus, this volume). Accordingly, including a hashtag associated with a place name like in some of the messages analysed in this study supports the process of inference in terms of explicit and implicit meaning related to the place the speaker is physically located and the place he/she has in mind and shares with his/her addressees on Twitter.

Place hashtags associated with cities and regions in Spain are frequent in the messages of Casado and Abascal. They are connected to the recent electoral campaign in Castilla y León (#Ávila, #León, #Zamora), to party rallies (#Tortosa, #SanSebastiandelosReyes), and visits to specific communities and interest groups (#Jumilla, #Santander). The hashtags allow them not only to signal their position, but also to place the tweet within a thread that other users may insert in their tweets to comment on an electoral event taking place in that city, highlight the toponym within the verbal text to focus on this specific place, and even catch the attention of the Twitter users who reside in it. This affordance, which Zappavigna associates with the concept of *searchable talk* (2015), also appears in the formula #CMin (Council of Ministers), in Belarra’s tweets, to collocate her words within this institutional context. Hashtags with a similar meaning are #sesióndecontrol (15 occurrences) or #cumbredemadrid. Finally, it is worth mentioning the use of these emoji: 📍 and 📌, which, as stated before, appear in many tweets pointing to a text, a link, or a video. Generally, they co-appear with the adverb *aquí* which has an anaphoric function and invites the reader “to work out the intended meaning of the text next to which the emoji is placed” (Yus 2021: 60).

5 Conclusions

The aim of this paper is to contribute to a broader understanding of spatial and place reference in the Spanish political discourse on Twitter. The corpus-based analysis carried out corroborates previous findings on the predominant use of the prototypical proximal deictic *aquí* (“here”) in Spanish political discourse (Gelabert 2004; Ivanova 2016).

The intended pragmatic function of this adverb in the tweets of the corpus is that of signalling the physical place where the leader is located, but also, mainly, to highlight his/her subjective (mental, emotional, ideological) proximity with that place and its inhabitants. Occurrences of *aquí* are primarily interpreted as ostensive deixis with a referential function, related to a pointing gesture. They establish the link between the physical interaction situation

and the utterance, placing it in a prominent position. We observe that by means of *aquí*, these politicians not only indicate explicitly or implicitly the place where they are physically located at the moment of publishing the tweet or afterwards, but they also take advantage of the prototypical semantic value of proximity of the deictic to show their closeness or their support towards certain communities, with the intention of creating a shared mental space with the imagined audience, in particular, with their own followers and with the members of the ingroup. This is particular manifest in the case of electoral tweets.

The photographs and videos embedded in most of the tweets strengthen the objectives of creating a certain solidarity between the politician who is physically located *here* and those who are in that same place, as well as building a bridge with his followers or with other users in the virtual *here*. In fact, these multimodal elements, and the microblog affordances, such as the mention or the hashtag, contribute to a greater extent to produce certain cognitive effects in the tweet recipient. The reader interprets *here* as a multiple space that not only refers to an institution or a city, which can be recognized through images in some cases, but also to a *sense of place* (Ozürk 2014) that the politician aims to share with those who are part of the same imagined community. The proximal deictic also emphasizes the relationships between the supporters of that leader, which are constructed upon the words and symbols that explicitly co-appear with the spatial reference in the tweet (see, for instance, the flag emoji).

The less frequent use of the distal markers *allí* and *allá* in these messages may suggest that political leaders avoid expressing distance in the context of the microblog. The distal as well as the medium distance deictic *ahí* approach the leader and his/her followers around certain issues of the political agenda like immigration policies, the pandemic and economic crisis, the Catalan crisis, a natural disaster, among others, both emotionally and ideologically. They allow them to share this subjective space with the members of their ingroup on Twitter, depending largely on the role they assume in each context: president of the government and minister in the cases of Sánchez and Belarra; and leaders of the opposition to the government, as well as principal speakers in electoral campaigning events, like Casado and Abascal. In this case, one may assume that the condensation and fragmentation of contents (Pano Alamán 2019) and the complex multimodal context of the platform (Parini 2014) favour the risk that referents to distant places or spaces go unnoticed or be misunderstood. Indeed, whereas *aquí* mainly relies on physical presence documented throughout videos, photographs, and hashtags, as well as emojis, with an anaphoric function, other deictic adverbs need more contextual cues for the spatial referent to be correctly identified and understood. In addition, they fulfil presentative,

directive, and referential functions, as well as mobile meanings (De Cock 2018) that deserve further exploration in the study of place on social media.

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