Evidence of binarism in Mexican Spanish spatial deixis

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Contrary to the range of studies which affirm that adverbial demonstratives in Spanish is organized in a ternary basis (Alonso 1968; Hottenroth 1982; Anderson & Keenan 1985; Alarco Llorach 2001; RAE 2009), this study presents data suggesting that they operate in a binary manner in Mexican Spanish. The classic opposition, that in which aquí and acá indicate nearby distances or the speaker’s domain, ahí indicates medial distances or the hearer’s domain, and allí and allá indicate far away distances, is refuted by a system wherein ahí is a generic form with access shared by speaker and hearer while other forms are contrasted by proximity and distance.

Using a 3D game displayed on virtual–reality headset Oculus Rift, two experiments were conducted to test the base values of each deictic adverbial form. The test design was based on the dyads of Jungbluth (2005) to analyze distance-oriented and person-oriented deixis. The first experiment checked the interpretation of each demonstrative for interference between physical distance and discourse. The interactions showed that the base value of ahí, as opposed to what had been affirmed in prior studies, is not distance–oriented like aquí, acá, allí, and allá, but rather a locative attenuation was observed in this particle favoring anaphora. The second experiment sought to test if the hearer’s location interferes with adverbial demonstrative selection in Mexican Spanish, a hypothesis that could not be corroborated.

The study allows for the conclusion that the deictic system of Mexican Spanish has a binary base, not a ternary one, extending the external role from adverbial demonstratives to ahí. The binary opposition is distributed with internal variations in distance and focus between the forms aquí, acá, allí and allá. No distinct variation for intermediate distances was observed for this variety of Spanish.

Hottenroth, P. M. 1982. The System of Local Deixis in Spanish. J. Weissenborn & W. Klein (eds.), Here and There: Cross-Linguistic Studies on Deixis and
