

# Locational adverbs in non-spatial settings: The case of *ahí* in Colombian Spanish conversation

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## Abstract

The Spanish ‘locational’ adverb system consists of five terms — *aquí*, *acá*, *allí*, *allá* and *ahí* — traditionally divided into two sets, those ending in *i* and those ending in *a*. They are often analysed as consisting of terms indicating location close to speaker (*aquí*, *acá*), close to hearer (*ahí*), and distant from both (*allí*, *allá*); or as two proximate, one medial and two distal locational terms. However, it has been suggested that, at least in some varieties of Spanish, the distinction between *ahí* and *allí* is not one of distance, but rather relates to semantic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic factors. An analysis of the use of the locational adverbs in a corpus of conversational Colombian Spanish confirms this and reveals that the distance distinction between *aquí*, *ahí* and *allí* is no longer the driving force in the use of *ahí* in Colombian Spanish. *Ahí* has generalised in meaning such that it is overwhelmingly the most frequently used spatial adverb (accounting for 40% of the close to 700 tokens of these five adverbs analysed here). In a spatial sense, it refers not just to medial distance, but also regularly denotes proximal and distal locations. Furthermore, over one third of the tokens of *ahí* in the data occur in non-spatial senses. In this paper we consider in detail the non-spatial uses of *ahí* in spontaneous discourse, and hypothesise the paths by which semantic extension may have lead to the current functions of *ahí*.

## 1. Introduction

This paper presents an analysis of the use of the ‘medial’ locational adverb *ahí* in conversational Colombian Spanish. It demonstrates that *ahí* is falling out of the spatial system in two important ways. Firstly, it does not function as a marker of medial distance. Secondly, although marking spatial relations remains one of its central functions, it also has a range of pragmatic uses in which its meaning has extended so far from the spatial sense that it can no longer be classified as spatial at all. The fact that *ahí* does not function as a purely spatial marker in contemporary Spanish has been noted in the literature (e.g. Sedano 1999), but the non-spatial uses have not been described in detail as yet.

## 2. Corpus

The data for this study are drawn from approximately five and a half hours of conversational Colombian Spanish (21,500 Intonation Units, 50,000 words), collected in the city of Cali, Colombia in 1997 and 2004. The conversations were recorded by two native speakers in spontaneous interactions with their husbands, families and friends. A total of 28 speakers are represented, including 19 women and 9 men, all between the ages of 20 and 60, from the middle class. The data have been transcribed following the method outlined in Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming & Paolino (1993).

## 3. Spanish locational adverb system

The Spanish locational adverb system comprises five terms which are traditionally divided into two sets, those ending in *-i* and those ending in *-a*. They are typically analysed as consisting of terms indicating location close to speaker (*aquí, acá*), close to hearer (*ahí*), and distant from both (*allí, allá*); or two proximate, one medial and two distal locational terms (e.g. Butt & Benjamin 2000, Hottenroth 1982, Sacks 1987, Sedano 1994, Solé & Solé 1977, Terrado Pablo 1990). The two series are talked about as being distinguished by relating to either location (*-i*) or direction (*-a*), or to do with specific locations (*-i*) versus more general locations (*-a*) (Hottenroth 1982, Sedano 1994, Terrado Pablo 1990), although advocates of both theories admit that the distinction is not absolute (see Travis & Curnow 2008 for more details). Furthermore, while the widely studied spatial uses of these terms are not fully understood, even less is known about their uses outside of the spatial realm, where very little research has been done.

All tokens of use of these five adverbs in the data were extracted, giving a total of 652 tokens (following 33 exclusions, due to incomplete or unclear utterances) and the distribution presented in Table 1 was obtained.

**Table 1:** Frequencies of occurrence in the data (total N = 652)

	Proximal	#	Medial	#	Distal	#
<i>i</i> -series	<i>aquí</i>	199	<i>ahí</i>	246	<i>allí</i>	26
<i>a</i> -series	<i>acá</i>	40	—		<i>allá</i>	141
		239		246		167

As this table shows, *ahí* is overwhelmingly the most frequent adverb of this set, accounting for nearly 40% of the total number of tokens (246/652), followed by *aquí* which accounts for 30% of the data (199/652), and then *allá*, which accounts for just over 20% (141/652), while *acá* and *allí* are used quite infrequently. This distribution is very similar to that found by Sedano (1996) for spoken Venezuelan Spanish, a dialect and genre very close to that studied here. Quite different distributions have been found in other dialects and genres, however. In Richardson's (1996) count of these adverbs in two novels from Spain, he finds approximately 16% of these adverbs were *ahí* (and slightly over 50% were *aquí*). Schmidely (2000; cited in Brzozowska-Zburzyńska 2005: 71) finds that *ahí* represented just 4% of these adverbs in novels, a figure that rose to 22% in play-scripts. Clearly, more

research is needed to determine how much of this variation in distribution is due to genre and how much to dialect.

The pronunciation of *ahí* and *allí* is very close in the variety of Colombian Spanish spoken in Cali, the difference being that *allí* occurs with a palatal approximant: *ahí* [a'i] / *allí* [a'ji]. Sedano reports that some of the Venezuelan speakers in her study believe that these two forms are phonetic variants of the same adverb (Sedano 1999: 52), and Moreno (1985: 160) maintains that the two forms are allomorphs in free variation. The very low use of *allí* in our data (26 tokens) suggests that it may be going out of use altogether in this variety, though the limited number of tokens does not allow for a full analysis.

## 4. Functions

The different functions identified for the adverbs in the corpus are given in Table 2, along with their distribution. As can be seen, *ahí* is the only adverb used in a non-spatial sense a substantial amount of the time, with the spatial uses accounting for just 59% of the data, while for *allí*, the spatial uses account for 78% of the tokens, and for *aquí*, *acá* and *allá* the spatial uses are categorical, or near categorical. This renders *ahí* perhaps the most interesting of the adverbs to investigate, and it will be the focus of this study from here on.

**Table 2:** Frequencies and functions of all forms (total N = 652)

	<i>aquí</i>	%	<i>ahí</i>	%	<i>allí</i>	%	<i>acá</i>	%	<i>allá</i>	%
spatial	196	98	136	55	20	77	40	100	141	100
locational/situational	2	1	34	14	2	8	-	-	-	-
situational	0	-	5	2	2	8	-	-	-	-
situational/temporal	1	1	26	11	1	4	-	-	-	-
situational/manner	-	-	19	8	1	4	-	-	-	-
situational/emotive	-	-	11	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
approximative	-	-	15	6	-	-	-	-	-	-
	199	100	246	100	26	100	40	100	141	100

### 4.1 Spatial

As noted above, in a spatial sense *ahí* is traditionally analysed as a medial term. However this does not hold for the majority of its spatial uses in the corpus. *Ahí* is not always distinguished in terms of distance from the proximal term, *aquí*, (1), or the distal term *allí*, (2). It also does not correspond to a location close to the hearer, but can be used for locations close to the speaker, (3), and far from both interlocutors, (4). Thus, in its spatial use *ahí* should be understood as having a very broad meaning, with no restrictions in terms of distance from speaker or addressee.

- (1) A: *Tenía pensado que eso era aquí=,*  
 have-1SG.IMPV think-PART COMP that be-3SG.IMPV here

.. *donde te lavaron el carro.*  
 where 2SG.DAT wash-3PL.PRET the car

*Como ahí fue que te lo quitaron cierto?*  
 since ahí be-3SG.PRET COMP 2SG.DAT 3SG.ACC remove-3PL.PRET certain

Ángela: 'I had thought that it was *aquí* ('here'), where they washed the car.  
 Since *ahí* was where they removed it (the carpet) for you, right?'

[almuerzo 394]

- (2) A: .. *Y en dónde lo echo, allí mismo?*  
 and in where 3SG.ACC put-1SG allí same

M: *Hm?*

hm

A: *Ahí mismo?*  
*ahí* same

Ángela: 'And where shall I put it? Right *allí* ('there')?'

María: 'Hm?'

Ángela: 'Right *ahí*?'

[calima2 138]

- (3) S: *ahí también me chuzé con el pollo.*  
*ahí* also 1SG.DAT jab-1SG.PRET with the chicken

Santi (re marks on his finger, where he pricked himself with part of a chicken bone): '*ahí* also I jabbed myself with the chicken.'  
 [chuzo 304]

- (4) C: *Y ahí en -- en -- en Majagual había un puente.*  
 and ahí in in in Majagual have-3SG.IMPV one bridge

Celia: 'And *ahí* en Majagual there was a bridge.' (Majagual is a city on the coast, two hours from where this conversation was recorded)[almuerzo 2285]

The spatial uses include the notion of both location in a place (including 'textual' space) and movement towards or from a place. The location sense, illustrated in examples (1)–(4) above, accounts for 95% (129/136) of the spatial tokens of this adverb, and the movement sense just 5% (7/136), illustrated in examples (6) and (7) (*de ahí* 'from there') and (11) (*hasta ahí* 'until *ahí*'). Interestingly, it is only with a preposition that *ahí* indicates movement in our data, with all other uses having a locational sense.

We identified three different spatial categories, namely deictic where *ahí* refers to something in the immediate environment of the speaker and addressee(s), anaphoric, where it refers to a place that has been previously mentioned in the discourse, and cataphoric, where there is an explicit textual reference directly following the adverb. It should be noted that these three commonly overlap (for example, when the referent of *ahí* is present in the speech environment, has also been mentioned before in the discourse, and/or is followed by an explicit textual

reference). Further investigation is required to determine whether these categories can indeed be applied at all to spontaneous discourse, or whether new categories should be proposed. Below we discuss some clear cases of each, and leave for future research some of the more complex issues (Travis & Curnow In preparation).

#### 4.1.1 Deictic

When used in a straightforwardly deictic manner, *ahí* refers to things in the environment which are ‘pointed out’ by the speaker. In these cases, *ahí* usually refers to a physical location, as in (5), where the conversation was held in sight of the MAF (distance education) building; but it can also refer to a more abstract idea of place, as in the reference to the recording in (6).

- (5) S: *Ahí es el edificio del MAF,*  
*ahí* be-3SG the building of.the MAF  
 Sara: ‘*Ahí* is the MAF building,’ [Insurance 29]

- (6) M: *Hay que sacarle a Claudito de ahí.*  
 must COMP remove-INF + 3SG.DAT PREP Claudito from *ahí*  
 Mario: ‘You’ll have to take Claudito out of *ahí*.’ (i.e., out of the recording)  
 [bibliotecólogo 649]

#### 4.1.2 Anaphoric

In what we consider to be the anaphoric use, *ahí* refers back to a location that has been mentioned in the preceding discourse, usually within the preceding few intonation units. It may refer back to a specific location, as in the reference to a sofa in (7) and the town of Tumaco in (8), or the referent may be more general or abstract, as in (9), where Patricia is referring to a category of institutes (those which have adult learners) rather than any specific institute.

- (7) J: *No se había levantado de ahí*  
 not 3REF have-3SG.IMPF raise-PART from *ahí*  
 Julia: ‘He hadn’t got up from *ahí*.’ [breakfast 196]

- (8) D: *Tumaco es aseadito. ahí tú ves lo limpio*  
 Tumaco is tidied.up *ahí* you see-2SG the clean  
 David: ‘Tumaco is clean. *Ahí* you can see how clean it is.’  
 [contaminación 478]

- (9) P: .. *Me gustaría enseñarle a adultos,*  
 1SG.DAT like-3SG.COND teach-INF + 3SG.DAT PREP adults  
 ... *en un instituto, porque se supone que* --  
 in one institute because 3REF suppose-3SG COMP  
 .. *La gente está ahí, porque quiere aprender.*  
 the people be-3SG *ahí* because want-3SG learn-INF

Patricia: ‘I would like to teach adults, in an institute, because supposedly the people are *ahí* because they want to learn.’ [colombo 320]

### 4.1.3 Cataphoric

In what we have classified as the cataphoric use of *ahí*, the location is explicitly mentioned almost immediately following the adverb, and is introduced with a preposition (most commonly *en*, as in (10)) or through an entire clause using *donde* ‘where’ as a subordinator, as in (11). The cataphoric use is much less frequent than deictic or anaphoric use in our corpus.

- (10) G: *Llévese esa que tiene ahí en la mano.*  
 take-3SG.IMP + 3REF that.one COMP have-3SG *ahí* in the hand  
 Gloria: ‘Take that one that you’ve got *ahí* in your hand.’ [calima2 746]

- (11) A: *ya íbamos, por decir algo, de aquí, ..*  
 already go-1PL.IMPF for say-INF something from here  
  
*hasta ahí, donde está el -- .. El muro?*  
 to *ahí* where is-3SG the the wall

Ángela: ‘They had already gone, let’s say, from here to *ahí*, where the wall is.’  
 [comida 774]

## 4.2 Locational/situational

In a number of uses, rather than simply the location where something occurs, *ahí* includes a notion of the resulting situation, a kind of metaphorical extension, presumably via inferencing. For example, in (12) Ángela is talking with a friend about conversations on sensitive issues that she had recorded with her husband. Her interlocutor suggested that the husband had not realised he was being recorded; Ángela responds:

- (12) A: *No, él si se daba cuenta.*  
 No he yes REF gave-3SG.IMPF account  
  
*Pero seguíamos hablando ahí*  
 but continue-1PL.IMPF speak-PART *ahí*

Ángela: ‘No, he did realise. But we kept talking *ahí*.’ [arepas 186]

While *ahí* does correspond here to a location where the conversation took place, its central meaning is not the location, but rather the situation: they kept talking even though they were in the situation of recording the conversation.

Similarly, in the following example Santi’s comment can be interpreted at least partly with a sense of location (in that place, the one who is taking advantage is her), but it is more easily interpreted as referring to the situation Santi has been describing in the preceding discourse: ‘in the situation I’ve been talking about, she’s the one taking advantage of it all’.

- (13) S: *Pero ahí, la que está aprovechando de todo, es ella*  
 But *ahí* the that be-3SG exploit-PART of all be-3SG she  
 Santi: ‘But *ahí*, the one who’s taking advantage of it all is her.’ [familia 708]

### 4.3 *Situational*

In the preceding examples, *ahí* could be said to retain an element of the locational meaning, as there is a location corresponding to the situation being referred to. There are other examples where *ahí* denotes more clearly just a situation, and a spatial interpretation is not possible. This can be seen in (14), where *ahí* refers to the situation of being a drug addict, and in (15), where it refers to the process of fixing a computer (as the speaker explicitly states).

- (14) M: *se dejó llevar del vicio,*  
 3REF leave-3SG.PRET take-INF of.the addiction  
*y hasta ahí llegó.*  
 and till ahí arrive-3SG.PRET

Milena: ‘he let himself be taken along by the addiction,  
 and *ahí* is as far as he got.’

[campaign 849]

- (15) N: *ahí estoy, en ese proceso.*  
*ahí* be-1SG in that process  
 Nury: ‘I am *ahí*, in that process.’

[estudios 143]

### 4.4 *Situational/temporal*

In some cases, *ahí* refers to a situation, but with very strong temporal overtones, something like ‘in that situation’ and ‘at the time of that situation’. These tokens all occur in what can be considered set constructions, that is, with other material that contributes to this meaning, namely, *de ahí* ‘from *ahí*’ as in (16), *ahí mismo* ‘right *ahí*’ as in (17), *ahí sí* ‘*ahí* yes’ as in (18), and *ahí vemos* ‘*ahí* we’ll see’, as in (19).<sup>1</sup>

In example (16), both the situational and temporal meanings are clearly evident — the situation in which a tree has begun to produce coconuts, but also the (general, abstract) time when that takes place.

- (16) O: *Un coco comienza a producir sus cocos*  
 one coconut start-3SG PREP produce-INF its coconuts  
*a los ocho años. Y de ahí, eso es constante.*  
 PREP the eight years and of ahí that be-3SG constant

Omar: ‘A coconut palm begins to produce coconuts at eight years.  
 And *de ahí* (‘from *ahí*’), it is constant.’

[contamination 829]

<sup>1</sup> In his work on the Costa Rican particle *diay* (historically from *de ahí*, ‘from *ahí*’), Quesada (1996) proposes that the change from spatial to temporal (and then to causal) meanings has occurred because of the ‘ablative’ nature of *de ahí*. *De ahí* occurs just 11 times in our corpus, eight tokens of which are spatial, one situational and two situational/temporal. Given the low frequency of occurrence of this construction and its primarily spatial use, our data suggest a different grammaticalisation path from space to time for *ahí* in various contexts from that proposed by Quesada for *de ahí* alone. Furthermore, the only other temporal uses of *ahí* in our data are with the approximative *por* ‘around’, as discussed in Section 4.7.2 below.

In example (17), Santi is discussing what happens if you miss a payment on a loan. Again, the utterance is not interpreted purely in terms of the situation — if you miss a payment, under those circumstances you get sued — but includes reference to a temporal relationship between the two events — *as soon as* you miss a single payment, they sue you.

- (17) S: *se cuelga en una letra, .. Y carta ahí mismo.*  
 3REF hang-3SG in one letter.of.credit and letter ahí same  
 Santi: ‘You miss one payment, and you get sued *ahí mismo* (‘right *ahí*’).  
 [familia 549]

Similarly, example (18) is to be interpreted more in a temporal than situational sense — when it was time to go swimming, precisely at that moment the referent went running out.

- (18) A: *y a la hora de irse a -- a bañar,*  
 and PREP the time of go-INF + 3REF PREP PREP swim-INF  
*ahí sí, salió corriendo.*  
*ahí yes go.out-3SG.PRET run-GER*  
 Ángela: ‘and at the time to go swimming,  
*ahí sí* (‘*ahí yes*’) he went running out.’  
 [calima1 248]

Likewise, in (19), in a discussion about childcare, Santi proposes that they would keep any child of theirs at home when he/she is little, and then as the child grows and becomes stronger, at that time (or in that situation), they could decide (literally ‘see’) what to do.

- (19) S: *Con el niño, mientras,*  
 With the child while  
 .. *va cogiendo fuerzita y todo, y pues,*  
 .. go-3SG.PRES grab-GER strength-DIM and all and well  
 A: ... *Sí,*  
 ... yes  
 S: *Ahí vemos como hacemos.*  
*ahí see-1PL.PRES how do-1PL.PRES*  
 Santi: ‘(If you get pregnant then you would stay at home) with the child,  
 while they get stronger and everything, and well’  
 Ángela: ‘Yes’  
 Santi: ‘*ahí* we’ll see what to do.’  
 [almuerzo 1892]

#### 4.5 *Situational/manner*

A further use of *ahí* is to refer to the manner in which an event occurs, essentially ‘in this way’. This notion is most often linked to that of situation, though the notion of situation is present to different degrees.



In example (20), Claudio is discussing a proposal to make English a requirement of all postgraduate degrees, stating that this will ruin his chances of getting a degree. This could be read as either situational ('in such a situation'), or more in terms of a manner reading ('by doing that').

- (20) C: *En todos los posgrados,*  
 in all the postgraduate  
  
*le van a exigir a uno esa vaina de Inglés.*  
 3SG.DAT go-3PL PREP demand-INF PREP one that thing of English  
  
*Y ahí ya me dañaron la --*  
 and ahí already 1SG.DAT damage-3PL.PRET the

Claudio: 'In all postgraduate degrees, they're going to demand that thing about English. And *ahí* they've ruined my --' (his chance at getting a degree)  
 [bibliotecólogo 150]

In (21), Ángela has realised that she put cheese on a pizza in strips, instead of grating it as she had intended. Here the interpretation of *ahí* would appear to be very much one of manner ('the way I did it is fine') rather than a reference to the situation ('being in a situation of having the cheese in strips is fine').

- (21) A: *Ah, pero no importa. ahí quedó bien.*  
 oh but not be.important-3SG ahí stay-3SG.PRET good  
 Ángela: 'Oh, it doesn't matter. *Ahí* it's fine.' [cooking 326]

#### 4.6 *Situational/emotive*

The functions of *ahí* that we have seen thus far have clearly generalised away from the spatial sense, but nevertheless they retain a link to a notion of space. A connection between a place and a situation which occurs in that place, and that situation and the time at which and manner in which it occurs are fairly easy to trace.

However in what we are classifying as the situational/emotive use, *ahí* has moved far from the spatial meaning. Here it is used to express the speaker's emotional reaction to the topic being discussed. Emotive *ahí* occurs most commonly (8/11 tokens) directly following (or as part of) a noun phrase, where it could be considered to play a kind of adjectival role in modifying the noun. The remaining tokens of this function occur following or preceding an adjective, where it has similar emotive tones.

The emotion expressed in this use is always strong, and most commonly negative, leading Sedano (1996: 107) to describe this as a *desvalorizador* 'devaluing' function. This can be seen in (22), where Santi is discussing an actor whom he does not like at all, and (23), where Ángela is discussing how much better it is to have the original book for a course rather than just a photocopied version:

(22) S: ... *un Cubanito ahí* .. *chimbo*. ... *Un actorcito Cubano*.  
 one Cuban *ahí* penis (slang) one actor Cuban  
 Santi: ‘A little Cuban *ahí*. A jerk. A little Cuban actor.’ [breakfast 169]

(23) A: *Y a uno le dan más ganas de mirarlo*.  
 and to one 3SG.DAT give-3PL more desire of look-INF + 3SG.ACC  
*que mirar esas copias ahí*.  
 COMP look-INF those copies *ahí*

Ángela: ‘It makes you want to look at it more than to look at those copies *ahí*.’ [dictionary 686]

While usually negative, we also find in the data some uses of *ahí* in this construction with a strongly positive emotional, or even affectionate, reading, as can be seen in (24) and (25), about the same referent.

(24) N: *él es todo buena gente, ahí*.  
 he be-3SG all good person *ahí*

*Te trata como, por igual, a todo el mundo*,  
 2SG.ACC treat-3SG like by same PREP all the world

Nury: ‘He’s all nice *ahí*. He treats everyone the same way.’ [estudios 1151]

(25) A: *parece como un vampirito. @@ Todo flaquito, ahí*.  
 appear-3SG like a vampire-DIM all skinny-DIM *ahí*  
 Ángela: ‘He looks like a little vampire. @@ All skinny, *ahí*.’ [estudios 1174]

## 4.7 Approximative

The functions we have seen up to now seem to come from a single chain of semantic extensions, relating to the situation in which something takes place (be that its location, time, manner or the speaker’s attitude to it). In what would appear to be an independent extension, *ahí* occurs with the preposition *por* ‘for, around’ to indicate the notion of approximation. This includes some spatial uses (counted as spatial in Table 2), but it has also generalised beyond that.

### 4.7.1 Spatial approximative

One of the functions of the preposition *por* ‘through, around’ in Spanish, in combination with a location, is to indicate something approximate, ‘in the area of’ — this use of a preposition meaning ‘around’ is relatively frequent cross-linguistically (Haspelmath 1997: 48). An example with *ahí* is given in (26).

(26) A: ... *Me pone esto por ahí*.  
 1SG.DAT put-3SG this around *ahí*  
 Ángela: ‘Put this *por ahí* (somewhere around there) for me.’ [breakfast 868]

While the other adverbs also exhibit a similar approximative use with *por* (in particular, *por acá* and *por allá*), it is only with *ahí* that this approximative sense has extended beyond the spatial domain.

#### 4.7.2 Temporal approximative

While it would not be surprising to discover that a spatial deictic adverb expanded its use to temporal meanings (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca 1994, Hopper & Traugott 1993), in fact in our corpus *ahí* is only found in strictly temporal contexts (rather than ambiguous situational/temporal ones) in a set construction with the preposition *por* ‘around’ with an expression of the time, i.e. “*por ahí* + a time” ‘around *ahí* + at time’ (though the elements may occur in either order).

- (27) A: *Yo vengo aquí a las dos, por ahí.*  
 I come here at the two around *ahí*  
 Ángela: ‘I will come here at *por ahí* two o’clock.’ [Colombo 952]

- (28) D: *Muy tarde no será? Porque llegamos allá,*  
 very late not be-3SG.FUT because arrive-1PL.PRES there  
*por ahí a las tres y pico*  
 around *ahí* a the three and a.bit

Diana: ‘Wouldn’t that be very late? Because we will get there,  
 at *por ahí* just after three.’ [Colombo 1007]

*Por* can be used on its own with a noun or noun phrase referring to the time of a particular event to express this notion of temporal approximative — e.g. *por la feria* ‘about carnival time’ (Smith 1997: 562). However speakers do not have this as an option for giving an approximate time (*\*por a las tres*, *\*a por las tres*); the only possibility is in combination with *ahí*, demonstrating that the meaning comes from the construction as a whole, and not the individual elements.

#### 4.7.3 Numeral approximative

*Por ahí* is also used with a number, not explicitly referring to time. This construction is therefore very similar to the temporal use, but in this case it is used to approximate a quantity. While the extension from the spatial to the temporal domain is a common one, an extension into a broader quantitative domain is not as common, although it certainly does occur, as we can see from a parallel use in English, with *around there* (*she’s 24 or around there*). In these cases, once again, the entire construction is what provides this meaning: no other adverb is used in this sense with *por*, and it is not possible to use *por* on its own without *ahí* (*\*vos parecés por veinticuatro*).

- (29) P: *Vos parecés por ahí de veinticuatro.*  
 You appear-2SG.PRES around *ahí* of twentyfour  
 Patricia: ‘You look *por ahí* twenty-four.’ [Comida 112]

(30) A: *Eso no vale más de doscientos mil pesos.*  
 This not worth-3SG.PRES more of two.hundred thousand pesos

S: *Yo creo que <@ sí @>.*  
 I think-1SG.PRES that yes

A: .. *Quinientos.*  
 Five hundred

S: .. *Por ahí, más o menos.*  
 Around ahí more or less

Ángela: 'This isn't worth more than two hundred thousand pesos.'

Santi: 'I think it is.'

Ángela: 'Five hundred.'

Santi: '*Por ahí*, more or less.'

[cooking 568]

#### 4.7.4 Other approximative

There are two tokens in the corpus that occur in the same piece of text where *por ahí* has extended beyond the association with space, time and numbers, and seems to indicate an 'approximation' to a noun. These two tokens can be seen in example (31), where David is explaining a joke by saying that strong currents have been reported to have brought penguins to Colombia from the polar regions. David is suggesting that rather than penguins, maybe what has been brought by the currents is 'nuns or something like that':

(31) D: *O serán por ahí, monjas --*  
 or be-3PL.FUT around ahí nuns

*O serán por ahí, monjas de = --*  
 or be-3PL.FUT around ahí nuns of

David: 'Or might they be *por ahí* nuns --

Or might they be *por ahí* nuns from --'

[contamination 704]

## 5. Conclusion

The role of *ahí* in the locational adverb system of conversational Colombian Spanish cannot be considered one of medial distance or 'close to hearer' as it has been traditionally analysed. As we have seen, the spatial uses account for less than two thirds of the tokens of the adverb, and even in these cases there is no limitation to a notion of 'medial' distance, but rather a more general notion is expressed.

The non-spatial senses of *ahí* represent an interesting set of semantic extensions. We find *ahí* used to refer to the situation in which an event occurs rather than to the location at which it occurs, and hypothesise that from this 'situational' meaning, a temporal, manner and even an emotive meaning have developed.

In many of these uses, the meaning is not attributable to *ahí* on its own, but to certain constructions in which it occurs, such as the temporal use of *de ahí* ‘from *ahí*’ and *ahí mismo* ‘right *ahí*’; the emotive use of N + *ahí*; and so on. Another construction — *por ahí* — has undergone an entirely independent development, where from an approximative spatial sense it has come to be used to mark the closely related notion of temporal approximation, as well as the not so closely related numerical approximation; and then, as an even further extension, a more general approximative sense.

In summary, *ahí* has undergone a number of semantic extensions, taking it far from its original spatial sense. We have shown that previous assumptions about the role of *ahí* are of limited value in explaining how it is actually used by speakers, and that the only way to fully understand its role in discourse is through detailed analysis of its use in natural language. More generally, we have shown how the patterning of a form at one point in time can offer a glimpse of the grammaticisation of that form, as it generalises in use through a combination of inferencing and regular form-meaning pairings that take on functions of their own.

## Abbreviations and transcription conventions

The following abbreviations have been used in the glosses in this paper:

ACC	accusative	GER	gerund	PRES	present
COMP	complementiser	IMP	imperative	PRET	preterite
COND	conditional	IMPF	imperfect	REF	reflexive
DAT	dative	INF	infinitive	SJV	subjunctive
DIM	diminutive	PART	participle	1/2/3	1 <sup>st</sup> /2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup> person
FUT	future	PREP	preposition ( <i>a</i> )	SG/PL	singular/plural

Note that we have not glossed every contrasting feature of Spanish (e.g. gender and number in adjectives and determiners), as these details are not necessary to interpret the utterances or our argument.

The transcription conventions used are from Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming & Paolino (1993):

.	final intonation contour	=	lengthened syllable
,	continuing intonation contour	@	one syllable of laughter
?	appeal intonation contour	<@ @>	words spoken while laughing
--	truncated intonation contour	(( ))	researcher’s comment
...	medium pause (> 0.7 secs)	[ ]	speech overlap
..	short pause (about 0.5 secs)		

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