
“A GALE OF HOPE FOR LATIN AMERICA”: THE CONCEPT OF *ESPERANZA/ESPERANÇA* AS A CULTURAL KEYWORD

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Abstract

The terms *esperanza* (Spanish) and *esperança* (Portuguese) (‘hope’) are frequently used in the political and social discourse of Latin America. In this vast region, plagued by recurrent political and economic crisis and other social challenges, the feeling of hope, but also its counterpart, lack of hope/hopelessness, is present in mass media, social media, the discourse of politicians and other public figures, as well as in the urban landscape, and represents the spirit of people who are not ready to give up on a brighter future. We propose that the terms *esperanza/esperança* are cultural keywords in Latin America. For our analysis, we have chosen two countries, Argentina and Brazil, to carry out a corpus study. We focus mainly on Twitter data, but we also include other written media to identify the most salient semantic and pragmatic features of these words and their importance in these Latin American countries. As part of the analysis, we look into possible differences between Spanish and Portuguese—that is, differences in use in the selected countries.

Keywords: *esperanza/esperança*, hope, Latin America, cultural keywords, natural semantic metalanguage (NSM)

1. Introduction

The quotation that introduces the title of this article refers to a statement by former Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa on the inauguration of the new president of Argentina in December 2019 and represents the frequent use of the Spanish term *esperanza* (‘hope’) and Portuguese term *esperança* in the political and social discourse in Latin America.

In this article we analyze the use of the terms *esperanza* and *esperança*, in Spanish and Portuguese respectively, in the current

context of Latin American countries, with the goal of demonstrating that the concept is central to Latin American people as a shared collective feeling. Within the framework of natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) theory (Goddard 2006, 2018), we propose that the terms *esperanza/esperança* are cultural keywords (Wierzbicka 1997; Goddard 2004; Levisen & Waters 2017) in these societies. Due to the cyclical political and economic ups and downs that follow each other in the region, feelings of *esperanza/esperança* and of lack of *esperanza/esperança* seem to alternate in Latin American people, and this is correspondingly represented in language use, including written media (press, literature, social media, etc.).

In order to analyze these terms and find evidence of their importance in Latin American society, we carry out a corpus study, which allows us to identify the shared cultural values that are hidden behind these terms. As part of the analysis, we search for possible similarities and differences between Spanish (*esperanza*) and Portuguese (*esperança*). In this article, we have limited our corpus to two Latin American countries: Argentina and Brazil, but in successive studies we intend to broaden our scope in order to confirm our hypothesis that *esperanza/esperança* is equally salient in other areas of this region.

The article is organized as follows: In section 2 we include a brief presentation of the theory that constitutes our theoretical and methodological framework—natural semantic metalanguage theory—and we zoom into the theoretical construct of “cultural keyword” as proposed within this theory and into the previous NSM work on emotion terms (as we define *esperanza/esperança* as emotion terms). Section 3 introduces the geopolitical context of our study by delimiting the concept of “Latin America”. Section 4 presents our empirical study, presenting our methodology of data collection and analysis, as well as results and discussion. The conclusion pinpoints our findings and the work that still needs to be done.

2. The theoretical framework: NSM theory

NSM theory stems from the work of Anna Wierzbicka (e.g. 1992a, 1997, 1999, 2006, 2010a, 2010b), later joined by Cliff Goddard (e.g. 2004, 2006, 2010) and a growing number of researchers around the world, including the Nordic countries, as this special issue witnesses. The name “natural semantic metalanguage” refers to the theory’s key methodological tool: a collection of 65 basic, universally shared and

cross-translatable concepts (called “semantic primes”) that can be used to create clear explanations (called “explications”) of complex and culture-specific concepts and communication habits. The theory’s basic assumption is that word meanings and verbal routines are specific to particular languages or cultural groups rather than universal, but that they can be clearly explained through the methodology of “reductive paraphrase” using the semantic primes (Goddard 2010). The *reductive paraphrase* methodology consists in decomposing complex meanings using simpler terms. As these terms (the semantic primes) are not technical, the explications of a concept drafted by reductive paraphrase should be accessible to readers, including people without linguistic training, and they are intended to capture the perspective of the users of the concept, or the “insider perspective” (Wierzbicka 1991). Table 1 presents the English exponents of the semantic primes (similar lists are available in other languages).

I, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY	substantives
KIND, PART	relational substantives
THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE	determiners
ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH~MANY	quantifiers
GOOD, BAD	evaluators
BIG, SMALL	descriptors
THINK, KNOW, WANT, DON’T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR	mental predicates
SAY, WORDS, TRUE	speech
DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH	action, events, movement, contact
BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, HAVE, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING), IS (MINE)	location, existence, possession, specification
LIVE, DIE	life and death
WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT	time
WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE	space

NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF	logical concepts
VERY, MORE	intensifier, augmentor
LIKE	similarity

Table 1. English exponents of semantic primes (Goddard 2018)

2.1. Cultural keywords

Within the NSM framework, different kinds of semantic and pragmatic analyses have been undertaken throughout the years, including work on such varied phenomena as cognitive verbs, discourse markers, religious concepts, visuality and colour terms, and speech act verbs, to name just a few (see e.g. Levisen 2012 for a more complete list). Already from the early stages of the theory, great attention has been placed on the analysis of cultural keywords—words that are heavily loaded with cultural meaning and which have a particular salience for a cultural group (e.g. Wierzbicka 1997). Cultural keywords encapsulate values and their analysis can shed light on certain traits of the group in question. Goddard (2004:148) defined them as “conceptual focal points of entire cultural domains, so that studying them gives us access to a dense complex of cultural values, attitudes and expectations”. Levisen and Waters (2017:5) highlight the fact that cultural keywords are historically situated and arise from discourse, and that, at the same time, they create discursive context, as they guide people’s interpretations and direct their conversations. According to these authors, the rise and fall of cultural keywords are indicative of the shifts in the value system of a community, as cultural keywords reflect cultural values and what is central to everyday life.

Cultural keywords have been identified by focusing on *frequency*, *productivity*, and *centrality*: *how often* these words appear in discourse, whether they *produce* derivatives and set phrases that get entrenched in the language and whether they feature in *central discursive contexts* such as book, song, and film titles, proverbs, slogans, etc. Methodologically speaking, cultural keywords can be identified and analyzed through surveys and interviews with native speaker informants and through corpus studies (Goddard & Wierzbicka 2007)—the latter being the methodology of choice for the present study.

In the context of Latin American societies, there exists some previous NSM-based work on cultural keywords, particularly by Travis (2006) on Colombia, Farrell (2006) and Mattos (2017) on Brazil, Aragón (2017) on Mexico, and Hein (2020) on Argentina.

2.2. Emotion terms

There has been considerable discussion in the English language literature about whether to use the terms *emotion* or *feeling* to refer to the phenomena encapsulated in words such as *joy*, *sadness*, and *hope*, with a preference for *emotion*, which, according to Wierzbicka (1999:2), comprises a reference to feeling, to thought, and to the person's body (bodily processes) (but see Occhi's (2019:126) critique of the division of the feeling body and the thinking mind as deriving from an Euro-American context). Other scholars have also argued in favour of *emotions*, as they are more biologically objective than *feelings* and possess an interpersonal or social basis (Birch (1985), Lutz (1988) and White (1993), all in Wierzbicka 1999). In what follows, we likewise adopt the term "emotion" to characterize *esperanza/esperança* and we lean on previous NSM emotion studies (see Ye 2019 for a detailed list). As *esperanza/esperança* typically translates into English as *hope*, previous NSM explications of the English term serve as a starting point for our own explication of *esperanza/esperança*.

Emotion terms have received attention from different disciplines, and they have been systematically analyzed within the NSM framework, as Wierzbicka (1992b) proposed that they can be rigorously defined "in terms of universal semantic primitives" (p. 539). Most emotion terms are language-specific, as each language classifies human emotional experience in its own way. Language-specific emotion terms are therefore arguably not apt as "culture-free analytical tools" (Wierzbicka 1992b:546), unlike semantic primes. Wierzbicka (1972, 1992b:548) also claims the need of recognizing prototypical scripts or scenarios to which emotions (and other phenomena) can be linked. She explains that, just as colour terms can be linked to certain elements of the human environment (e.g. "red" can be linked to a concept of "blood" in an explication), emotions are linked to mental scenarios (e.g. "joy" can be linked to a scenario where "very good things are happening"). This does not mean that the emotion needs to be caused by the given scenario, but it can be compared to the feeling that arises in that particular scenario. Emotion terms provide "handy abbreviations for scenarios which members of a

given culture see as particularly common and salient” (Wierzbicka 1992b:548). Ye (2019:133) claims that NSM uses two toolkits for the study of emotions: namely, the 65 semantic primes and a definitional technique involving a prototypical scenario.

In her 1999 book *Emotions across languages and cultures*, Wierzbicka classifies basic emotions in six categories, related to the following scenarios: (1) “something good happened”, (2) “something bad happened”, (3) “something bad can/will happen”, (4) “I don’t want things like this to happen”, (5) “thinking about other people” and (6) “thinking about oneself” (p. 49). She includes *hope* in category 1, together with terms such as *joy*, *pleased*, *excited*, or *relieved*. They have in common the fact that they arise from situations where something good has happened, is happening, or will happen and these things generate “good feelings” (cf. e.g. *envy*, which also arises from “something good” but which does not generate a “good feeling”). Wierzbicka’s explication of *hope* from 1999 reads as follows:

[A] *Hope* (X felt *hope*) (Wierzbicka 1999:59)

- (a) X felt something because X thought something
- (b) sometimes a person thinks:
- (c) “I don’t know what will happen
- (d) some good things can happen (some time after now)
- (e) I want these things to happen”
- (f) when this person thinks this this person feels something good
- (g) X felt something like this
- (h) because X thought something like this

Hope is directly opposed to *fear*. *Fear* is an emotion related to “something bad” and a “bad feeling”, and includes, according to Wierzbicka, an element of “wanting to do something”, which *hope* lacks. *Fear* seems to refer to imminent events, whereas *hope* is oriented towards future events (which also distinguishes *hope* from *excitement*) (for the whole explication of *fear* and *excitement* see Wierzbicka 1999:59–60). These differences make *hope* “a more placid, less involved, attitude” (p. 60).

Wierzbicka (2021) returns to the study of *hope*, this time in a religious context, as an alternative to “hell”, “universality”, and “conditional immortality”. In the Christian doctrine, three alternatives

have been posed for what happens to people after death: eternal torment for those who are not saved (“hell”), all are saved (“universalism”), or those who cannot be saved are destroyed and cease to exist (“conditional mortality”). In her article, Wierzbicka proposes a fourth alternative, “hope”. In this very specific understanding, the NSM explication of the word *hope* reads:¹

[B] Hope (Wierzbicka 2021:6)

after people die, it can be like this:

at some time, they will all live with God, they will all live with God forever.

we want it to be like this, we want it very much.

we know that God wants it to be like this.

we don't say: we know that it will be like this.

There are quite some differences between [A] and [B], particularly because of the specific religious kind of hope described in [B], but something that appears in both explications is the idea of not knowing whether “it will be like this” and, of course, the future orientation.

We return to the two toolkits of NSM for emotion terms and to the wordings of [A] and [B] when we present our own explications of *esperanza/esperança* in a Latin American social and political context (see section 4.3).

3. Defining the context: Latin America

We have so far framed the study of *esperanza/esperança* as cultural keywords within the region known as Latin America. Fernández (2021) has postulated that the term *Latin America* itself displays the traits of a cultural keyword. From the very coinage of the word (dating back to the writings of the Colombian thinker José María Torres Caicedo, the Dominican writer Francisco Muñoz del Monte and the Chilean Francisco Bilbao in the decade of 1850—see Quijada (1998) for a detailed account of the term's coinage), it has been understood in the region as designating a community of nations, with similarities and differences, but sharing “the need to offer a common front against external menaces by world powers, due to a shared history of colonial oppression” (Fernández 2021:50). The term *Latin America* is thereby loaded with positive emotional connotations in the region and widely

¹ See Wierzbicka (2021:5–6) for explications of the other three concepts.

represented in both scholarly and lay discourse. The term is an official denomination in a vast number of institutional and transnational contexts and has been the centre of attention of numerous books and essays. At the same time, it is widely used in everyday discourse, featuring in expressions of popular culture and particularly in music.

The term *Latin America* is an elusive one when one tries to delimit which countries and peoples are comprised in the denomination. If we take a closer look at the wording of the name, the adjective “Latin” seems to serve a double purpose. On the one hand, it takes distance from terms like “Spanish” or “Iberian” (which have also been used, and still are, to some degree, in Portugal and Spain: *Iberoamérica*, *America Portuguesa*, or *Hispanoamérica*), which have a negative colonial connotation. On the other hand, it also serves to draw a line between a “Germanic”, Protestant America in the north and a “Latin”, Catholic America in the south. Furthermore, it seems to exclude its population of indigenous and African descent, as well as immigrants of other origins. It would seem fair to assume that all the countries in the American continent in which a Latin-based language is spoken (Spanish, Portuguese, and French) are included in the term, but this does not always seem to be the case, as French-speaking territories are seldom included, and in some contexts (e.g. in the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language, see Fernández (2021)) even Portuguese-speaking Brazil seems to be left out of the equation. Geographically speaking, the picture is equally unclear, as territorial unity is broken by countries which are not normally included, such as Belize, Surinam, Guyana, Haiti, Granada, Jamaica, and other Caribbean islands. This has led Rouquié (1989) to suggest that the denomination alludes to a “cultural” region, with a common denominator: these countries do not belong to the developed centre, but rather to an “extreme West”.

4. The empirical study

The Latin American Center at Aarhus University has been hosting a series of seminars about Latin America with the title *Seminarios de la Esperanza* (‘seminars of hope’). Two such seminars will take place within the Scandinavian Romanist Conference in 2022 (with following titles: *Esperanza I: Justicia social y alternativas políticas* (‘Hope I: Social justice and political alternatives’) and *Esperanza II: Resistencia ambiental y ecología política* (‘Hope II: Environmental resistance and political ecology’). Likewise, the IPRA 2021 conference (from the International Pragmatics Association) featured a

session on the *Pragmatics of Hope* lead by Daniel Silva, a Brazilian scholar. These are but two examples of the centrality of *esperanza/esperança* in the academic discourse on Latin America and a source of inspiration for the present study.

The study of *hope* as a central force in connection with psychological, moral, and social action is not new or restricted to the Latin American context. From the work of the German philosopher Ernst Bloch (published in three volumes over 1954, 1955, and 1959), *The principle of Hope*, through the *Radical hope* proposed by Lear (2006) to explain how an indigenous group from the American Midwest, the Crow people, resisted cultural devastation in the nineteenth century, to the pervasive presence of *hope* in medical studies (e.g. Groopman 2005; Lysaker et al. 2005; Mattingly 2010; Huen et al. 2015), to name just a few, the concept emerges in numerous academic studies. Our empirical study intends to provide a contribution by exploring the use that people make of the Spanish and Portuguese terms for hope in the Latin American social media landscape. We intend to explore how our data reflects the salience of hope as “a pragmatic and metapragmatic resource in which people oppose despair, inequality, and violence by reimagining past harms, current disjunctures, and alternative futures” (Silva 2021). In the following, we present our methodology and results.

4.1. Methodology

4.1.1. Data source

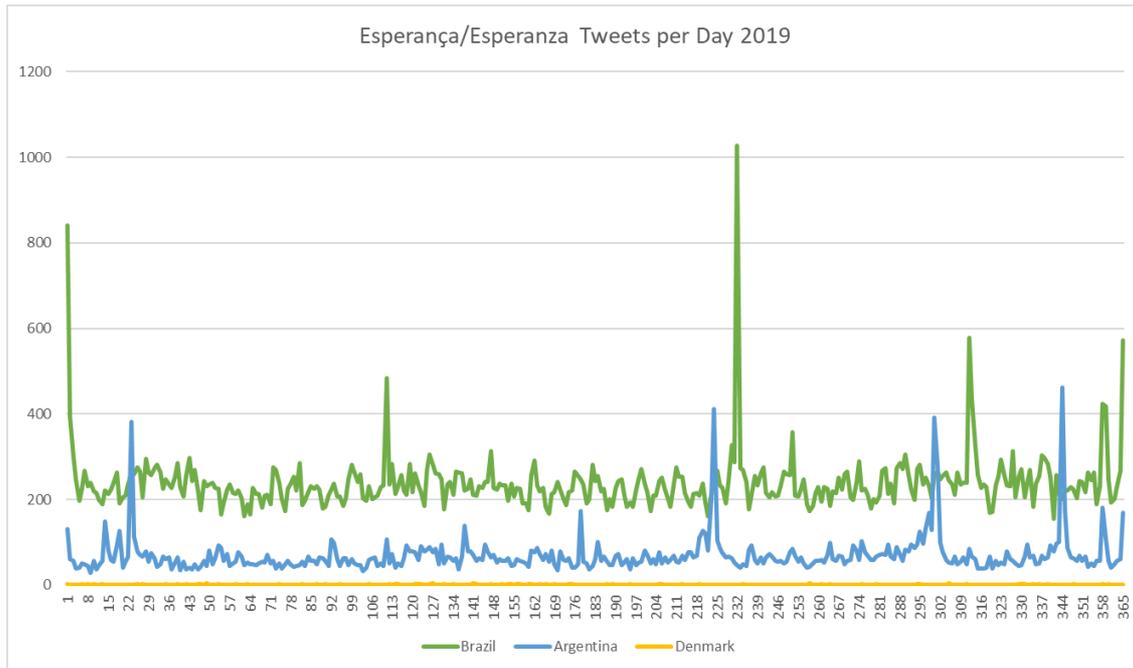
Our main source of data is Twitter; a secondary source is items of popular culture widely known in the region. As with other social media platforms, Twitter represents social observations and reactions to local, national, and international events and is spread across cultures and countries in the world (Zappavigna 2012). This platform allows researchers registered in their system to access public tweets.

Via the Twitter API (application programming interface),² we used a Python script to query the Tweet database (Twarc2)³ to search all the tweets with the words *esperanza*, *esperança*, and *håb* (Spanish, Portuguese, and Danish, respectively), in the year of 2019, in the areas of Argentina, Brazil, and Denmark, respectively (Denmark only for comparative purposes). The total number of tweets including *esperanza*, *esperança*, and *håb* distributed in the respective areas can

² <https://developer.twitter.com/en/products/twitter-api/academic-research>

³ https://twarc-project.readthedocs.io/en/latest/twarc2_en_us/

be seen in Graph 1. It also illustrates the number of tweets per day with the words *esperanza*, *esperança*, and *håb* for all of 2019. We chose the year 2019 to collect our examples in order to avoid having Covid-related tweets (which can be expected from 2020 onwards) overshadow our data and possibly conceal other important topics.



Graph 1. Number of tweets with *esperanza*, *esperança* and *håb* in 2019.

Year	Argentina	Brazil	Denmark
2019	25,371	87,476	284

In Graph 1 it is possible to see a few “peaks” representing the days when the appearance of the words *esperanza* and *esperança*, in Argentina and Brazil, respectively, is noticeably higher than in the rest of the year. Our dataset for this study consists of all the tweets with the terms *esperanza* and *esperança* from the seven days with most tweets containing these words in 2019, that is, the seven prominent peaks for each country. This represents 2,024 tweets with *esperanza* (Argentina) and 3,382 tweets with *esperança* (Brazil). Table 2 shows the date of the seven peaks, the number of tweets for each day, and the event(s) connected to these dates, both in Argentina and Brazil. The

events that coincide in both countries are Christmas Day, New Year’s Eve, and New Year’s Day. Although Easter is also celebrated in Argentina, we do not find a peak of tweets with *esperanza* directly connected with this event as we find in Brazil. The other peaks relate to country-specific events.

Date	Number of tweets		Main related event(s)
	Argentina	Brazil	
01-01-2019	108	727	New Year’s Day Brazil: Inauguration of the new Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro
24-01-2019	334	–	Death of a new-born baby in Argentina due to premature caesarean (abortion law dispute) Social protests in Venezuela
21-04-2019	–	488	Easter Game of Thrones (final season)
12-08-2019	270	–	Primary elections (PASO) of the 11 th of August
21-08-2019	–	393	<i>Criança Esperança</i> (a TV Globo project in partnership with UNESCO)
08-09-2019	–	181	A peak in tweets occurred on the celebration of Independence Day (Sept 7) in connection with <i>Criança Esperança</i>
28-10-2019	479	–	Presidential elections of the 27 th of October

09-11-2019	–	496	Brazil’s former president Lula released from prison
10-12-2019	453	–	Inauguration of the new Argentinian president, Alberto Fernández
25-12-2019	190	475	Christmas Day
31-12-2019	190	624	New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day
Total tweets	2,024	3,384	

Table 2. Tweets containing the terms *esperanza* and *esperança*

We included the query for *håb* ‘hope’ in Danish for comparative purposes, because we believed the use of this word in the Danish context would be much less salient than in the Latin American context. Indeed, *håb* appears to be used less frequently than *esperanza* and *esperança*. The use of *håb* in the Danish dataset is stably low throughout the year, as we find no peaks of tweets containing the word *håb* in the Danish data on any particular dates, not even on international holidays such as Christmas and New Year, which otherwise gave rise to “peaks of hope” in Argentina and Brazil.

4.1.2. Coding

To better understand our data and to verify the similarities and differences between the data in the two countries, we coded each tweet from our dataset, using the following categories:

- 1: New Year
- 2: Music, phrasing, poems, creative combinations
- 3: Government, politics, political figures
- 4: Shared feelings expressed towards the country, people in general, or a group of people.
- 5: Proper names: toponyms, person names, other proper names
- 6: Not specified, very short tweets
- 7: Personal feeling, expressed to a person or individual situations
- 8: Religion/God

9: Sports

10: Christmas

11: Game of Thrones

12: *Criança Esperança*—an annual TV-based social campaign in Brazil by the broadcasting company Rede Globo in collaboration with UNESCO

Only categories 11 and 12 are not coded for the Argentinian data. Game of Thrones (category 11) was salient to the tweets in Brazil during the final season of the American TV series. This event, combined with Easter, resulted in a peak of texts with *esperança* in Brazil, in April 2019, as Table 2 shows. *Criança Esperança* (category 12) refers to a particular event in Brazil.

In general, the data and the coding for the two countries are very similar. *Esperanza* and *esperança* were used in numerous occasions in the same syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic contexts. The main difference is that the Brazilian data contains more tweets related to sports and religion (having hope in God) compared to the Argentinian data. In the next section, we present our analysis, based on these 12 coding categories. As the data are very similar in both countries, we alternate examples in Spanish (Argentina) and Portuguese (Brazil). When there is a relevant difference in the data of these two countries, it is highlighted in the text.

4.2. Results

As stated in section 2.2, it is a well-established procedure in NSM-based cultural keyword studies to look into a word's frequency, productivity, and centrality in discourse. The terms *esperanza* and *esperança* seem to fulfil these three requirements within the Argentinian and Brazilian contexts, as we show below.

4.2.1. Frequency

Frequency is particularly apparent in the peaks that we identified throughout the year, evidencing that certain events or situations call for the added use of this term (cf. the Danish data). Our Twitter data show that major political events, such as elections, the inauguration of a new president, or the release from prison of a former president, promote the appearance of tweets where the words *esperanza/esperança* have a central place. As mentioned in 4.1., the tweets were coded in 12 emerging categories. The coding shows us

that most of the tweets illustrate the fact that *esperança/esperanza* is a highly collective feeling. This becomes clear in categories 3 and 4 (hope related to the government/politicians/election results and hope related to the country or a group of people, respectively). The tweets from these two categories contain either a personal expression of feeling for the future and prosperity of the country and fellow countrymen and -women, or the expression of the fact that people in general, the “country”, feel hope together, as in Examples (1–2) below. The feeling of togetherness is also present in the tweets related to sports (mainly football) and religion/God, as in Examples (3–4). Compared to this overwhelming sense of collectivity, very few tweets reflect a feeling related to one’s own personal wellbeing or a personal situation. Examples (5–6) below depict this more rare, merely individual feeling.

- (1) *La esperanza se percibe y se siente en cada rincón de la Argentina. El sol de TOD  S viene asomando para demostrarnos que podemos construir un país con amor e igualdad. ¡A seguir trabajando, militando y redoblando los esfuerzos para que lxs argentinxs puedan volver a soñar!*
‘Hope is perceived and felt in every corner of Argentina. The sun of EVERYBODY has been rising to show us that we can build a country with love and equality. Keep working, militating and redoubling efforts so that Argentines can dream again!’
- (2) *Sobre as eleições: Esperança! A palavra do dia!*
‘About the elections: Hope! The word of the day.’
- (3) *Para ser vascaíno tem que ter muita coragem e esperança.*
‘To be *vascaíno* (a supporter of the Vasco da Gama football team) [one] must have much courage and hope.’
- (4) *Esteja sobre nós o teu amor, Senhor, como está em ti a nossa esperança.*
‘May your love be upon us, Lord, as our hope is in you.’
- (5) *No pierdo la esperanza de ganar algún sorteo .*
‘I don’t lose hope of winning a lottery .

- (6) *Dia 2 de janeiro e a esperança que o meu ventilador chegue logo ainda floresce dentro de mim.*
'January 2 and the hope that my fan will arrive soon still blooms inside me.'

In the tweets related to Christmas and New Year, people wish each other hope (among other good feelings). In the Brazilian context, there are many Easter and Christmas tweets connected with religion and God, as exemplified by (7). These seasonal wishes also tend to be socially oriented, as the good wishes extend to people in general and are directed towards the well-being of the community or country, as illustrated by (8).

- (7) *A Ressureição de Jesus Cristo é a nossa esperança! Desejo a todos uma #FelizPáscoa! 🙏🙏.*
'The resurrection of Jesus Christ is our hope! I wish you all a #HappyEaster'. 🙏🙏
- (8) *#FelizNavidad para todos y todas! Brindo por todos y cada uno de los que sufrieron en estos 4 años, xq por ellos y ellas #volvimos. Mucha solidaridad y esperanza, que de esta salimos tod@s empujando para el mismo lado. #ArgentinaUnida*
'Merry Christmas to all of you! Here's to each and every one of those who suffered in these 4 years [of right-wing government], because for them we #returned. A lot of solidarity and hope, that we all come out of this by pushing for the same side. #ArgentinaUnited'

It is quite clear from the data that *esperanza/esperança* is particularly salient and present in people's minds in moments that mark a change: a new government being elected or starting in office, a new year starting, or even the renewal symbolized by Christmas or Easter. It is also clearly connected to the idea of being immersed in a negative situation but looking to the future with a positive mind:

- (9) *Hoy es un día especial, después de tanto sufrimiento y dolor sale el sol para Argentina. La Argentina del odio, la revancha y la quita de derechos llega al final, amanece una nueva de esperanza, igualdad de oportunidades y derechos. Volvimos para ser mejores. Vivan los Fernández.*

‘Today is a special day, after so much suffering and pain the sun rises for Argentina. The Argentina of hate, revenge and the removal of rights reaches the end, a new land of hope, equal opportunities and rights dawns. We came back to be better. Long live the Fernandez [elected president and vice president]’.

Esperanza/esperança is usually a positive emotion that takes its point of departure in a challenging current state of affairs. It is sometimes implied that it can be hard to keep hoping. Only a couple of times, the terms are associated in our data with something negative, dangerous, or even a burden, as the tweets in (10) and (11) exemplify:

- (10) *Muito triste, mas não eh só o amor q emburrece as pessoas. A esperança também.*

‘[it is] very sad, but it is not just love that makes people dumb, hope does too.’

- (11) *A esperança pode ser um dom ou um fardo difícil de carregar.*

‘Hope can be a gift or a burden difficult to bear.’

An interesting fact is the frequency of the word as a proper noun. *Esperanza/Esperança* is one of few emotion terms that can act as a person’s name in Spanish and Portuguese. Of the other emotion terms that *esperanza* is combined with in our Twitter data—*alegría/alegria*, *fe/fé*, *felicidad/felicidade*, *amor*⁴ (‘joy, faith, happiness, love’) being the most frequent—only *Esperanza/Esperança* is a person’s (female) name. *Esperanza* is also a component in a number of toponyms present in our data, such as the names of cities, neighbourhoods, and

⁴ When we pair or group examples, separated by a slash, we present the Spanish word(s) first, followed by the Portuguese one(s) in all cases. When there is no slash, the same word exists in Portuguese and Spanish.

cemeteries, and in the names of businesses, sports clubs, and social and development projects (e.g. community centres, sheltered workshops, and, in Brazil, a widely known annual TV charity campaign, *Criança Esperança*). As can be seen in Table 2, *Criança Esperança* triggered a large number of tweets in Brazil and was connected to two of the peaks. The tweets about this event express comments on the participants on the program and their performances, but they can also contain reflections on the importance of hope:

- (12) *Tô chorando e não é pouco com esse Criança Esperança. As vezes eu acho que o mundo tá perdido, mas as vezes dá um tiquinho de esperança que o ser humano ainda tem salvação.*

‘I am crying a lot with the [program] *Criança Esperança*. Sometimes I think there is no solution for the world, but sometimes there is a little bit of hope that human beings can still be saved.’

In the Argentinian context, many tweets (242) containing the word *esperanza* are related to the pro- and anti-abortion debate generated by a baby who bore that name and died in a premature caesarean section (the mother was a 12-year-old victim of rape). An interesting fact about this painful case is the fact that, according to a tweet, the name *Esperanza* was given to this baby by a group of anti-abortion activists, showing the symbolic importance of the term:

- (13) *La beba que falleció en Jujuy no se llamaba Esperanza. Así le pusieron los grupos pro-vida que se manifestaron en la puerta del hospital.*

‘The baby who died in Jujuy [Argentinian province] was not called Esperanza. She was given that name by the pro-life groups that demonstrated in front of the hospital.’

4.2.2. Centrality in discourse

Apart from the already mentioned political contexts from Twitter, *esperanza/esperança* appears frequently in discursive contexts that are normally considered central in NSM “cultural keyword” studies, representing a sign of the high cultural relevance of the term. Apart from academic contexts already presented in section 4, these words

are pervasive in the titles of art expressions, such as film and series titles, including translated titles of films that do not feature an equivalent of *esperanza* in their original titles (e.g. *La esperanza vive en mí*, originally *Reign over me*; or *Amor y esperanza*, originally *If you're gone*); in poems, book titles and songs. A central example is the book *Pedagogia da esperança* 'Pedagogy of hope', about the pedagogy of the oppressed, by the renowned Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire.

Regarding music (an important cultural element that unites Latin America (see Fernández 2021)), *Zamba de mi esperanza*⁵ and *Color esperanza*⁶ are two emblematic Argentinian songs. *Zamba de mi esperanza* is the most popular Argentinian folk song of all time. Although the lyrics are not explicitly political, the song was banned during the military dictatorship of 1976–1982. As we saw in (1–2) and will also see later in the article, there appear to be clear connections between hope and democracy in the Twitter data.

Color esperanza is widely known in Latin America. In 2020, a version of this song performed by several Latin American singers was used to raise money in the fight against the coronavirus. In this connection, the song was described as follows in a UN news site:

Durante casi 20 años, ha empoderado al público de Iberoamérica y la comunidad latina de Estados Unidos, convirtiéndose en un himno de varias causas sociales en pro del cambio

'For almost 20 years, it has empowered audiences in Ibero-America and the Latino community in the United States, becoming an anthem for various social causes for change.' (Naciones Unidas 2020)

The song has a special place in Argentina, as well. It is mentioned a couple of times in the Twitter data and, in 2019, one of its authors, C. Sorokin, stated:

es una canción con 20 años y tristemente vigente, porque quiere decir que las cosas no están bien, que seguimos necesitando fuerzas para seguir.

⁵ By Luis H. Morales, first released in 1964.

⁶ By Cachorro López, Coti Sorokin, and Diego Torres, released in 2001.

‘It is a song that is 20 years old and sadly current, because it means that things are not right, that we still need strength to continue.’ (Clarín 2019)

Comments like these are hints of the widespread centrality of hope in the region, also outside the two Latin American countries in focus. Another hint from our data is the peak of Argentinian tweets related to social protests in Venezuela.

4.2.3. Productivity

Regarding linguistic productivity, *esperanza* and *esperança* appear in a couple of very well-established sayings, which are mentioned several times in the tweets. The most frequent one, both in the tweets and in general, is *La esperanza es lo último que se pierde / A esperança é a última que morre*⁷ ‘Hope is the last thing to be lost’. Other set phrases in the data are *Donde hay vida, hay esperanza / Enquanto houver vida, há esperança* ‘Where there is life, there is hope’.

Esperanza/esperança appears often in the data in the construction “(indefinite article +) noun + de + (definite article +) *esperanza/esperança*”. The range of nouns featuring in the combination is large. A number of them refer to natural phenomena, showing a recurring conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) HOPE IS A FORCE OF NATURE. To this conceptual metaphor belong metaphoric expressions such as: *un viento* (‘wind’) *de esperanza*, *un huracán* (‘hurricane’) *de esperanza / um suspiro* (‘gasp’) *de esperança*, *uma gota* (‘drop’) *de esperança*, *um mar* (‘sea’) *de esperança*. Another recurring related conceptual metaphor is HOPE IS LIGHT as in: *un rayo* (‘ray’) *de esperanza*, *una llama/llamita* (‘flame/small flame’) *de esperanza*, *sol* (‘sun’) *de la esperanza*, *un faro* (‘lighthouse’) *de esperanza / uma luz* (‘light’) *de esperança*, *um quentinho* (‘little warmth’) *de esperança*.

Esperanza/esperança appears very often coordinated to other feelings and to abstract nouns that can denote states, conditions, or behaviours—the great majority of them with a positive charge. The most frequent ones are: *alegría/alegria* (‘joy’), *fe/fé* (‘faith’), *amor* (‘love’), *paz* (‘peace’), and *felicidad/felicidade* (‘happiness’). A

⁷ As in the previous section, the pairs or groups of examples separated by a slash present the Spanish word(s) first, followed by the Portuguese one(s) in all cases. When there is no slash, the same word exists in Portuguese and Spanish.

number of abstract nouns that appear coordinated to *esperanza* refer to democracy, social ideals, and activism: *compromiso/compromisso* ('commitment'), *oportunidades* ('opportunities'), *sacrificio/sacrifícios* ('sacrifice'), *empatía/empatia* ('empathy'), *convicción/convicção* ('conviction'), *unidad/unidade* ('unity'), *crecimiento/crescimento* ('growth'), *lucha/luta* ('fight'), *diálogo* ('dialogue'), *solidaridad/solidariedade* ('solidarity'), *igualdad/igualdade* ('equality'), *inclusión/inclusão* ('inclusion'), *justicia social/justiça social* ('social justice'), *coherencia/coerência* ('coherence'), *militancia/militância* ('militancy'), *respeto/respeito* ('respect'), *derechos/direitos* ('rights'), *valentía/coragem* ('courage'), *certeza* ('certainty'), and *democracia* ('democracy'). On some occasions, *esperanza/esperança* is combined with less positively charged nouns such as *miedo/medo* ('fear'), *ansiedad/ansiedade* ('anxiety'), *ira* ('rage'), *tristeza* ('sadness'), and *decepción/decepção* ('disappointment'), showing the complexity of the feeling.

Esperanza/esperança combines with a large number of verbs that, once again, represent different metaphorical interpretations of the terms. In some cases, *esperanza/esperança* appears to be characterized as a living creature: *nace, muere, vence / renasce, despierta* ('is born, dies, triumphs / is renewed, wakes up'), as a valuable possession or gift: *se regala, se roba, se devuelve, se desea, se pierde, falta / se tem, se dá, se ganha, se doa* ('you give it as a gift, steal it, give it back, wish it, lose it, miss it / you have it, give it, earn it, donate it'), as a moving force or machine: *avanza, está en marcha / invade, está em movimento* ('moves forward, is running / invades, is in motion'), as a disease: *contagia* ('is contagious'), as a basic element like air or water: *nos llena, riega, inunda/ se respira, se bebe* ('it fills you, it waters, it floods / you breathe it, drink it') and, again, as light: *ilumina* ('illuminates')—all metaphors emphasizing the strong value of the feeling.

4.3. Discussion and explication

We claim that dictionary definitions of *esperanza/esperança*, as in (21–22), denoting a state of mind or feeling arising from seeing what is desired as attainable, do not capture the richness of meaning of the terms as presented in our data.

- (21) *Esperanza: Estado de ánimo que surge cuando se presenta como alcanzable lo que se desea.* (Real Academia Española 2021)

(‘State of mind that arises when what is desired is presented as attainable’)

- (22) *Esperança: Expectativa otimista da realização daquilo que se almeja.* (Aulete Digital 2022)
(‘Optimistic expectation of achieving what is desired’)

The same can be said of Wierzbicka’s (1999) explication of *hope*, presented in [A], similarly revolving around the idea of a scenario where “good things can happen”. We believe that this explication cannot be directly applied to *esperanza/esperança*, at least not without the addition of new levels of meaning. Therefore, based on Ye’s (2019) template for emotions, and drawing from [A], we propose the following explication:

[C] *Esperanza/esperança* (X has *esperanza/esperança*)

- (a) X feels something because X thinks like this at this time:
“bad things have happened to many people
bad things have happened to my country [m]
bad things happen here many times
other things can happen now
I don’t know what will happen
some good things can happen (some time after now)
I want these things to happen very much
 I want these things to happen to many people, to my country[m]
 I want to do something because of this”
- (b) because of this, X feels something very good
like people often feel when they think like this
it is very good if a person feels like this,
it is very good if many people feel like this
it is very bad if a person does not feel like this anymore
it is very bad if many people do not feel like this anymore

Section (a) of our explication is the cognitive scenario. Here, the idea that “good things can happen” is present, but we have made explicit that the point of departure is a place where “bad things have happened”. We also specify the social dimension in the sense of “wanting good things for many people” and the political dimension in “my country”. Wierzbicka (1999) considers hope as a “placid, less involved attitude” that does not call for action, but our data on

esperanza/esperança does hint at a call for action, due to the clear links to terms on activism (therefore the line “I want to do something because of this”). Section (b) is the evaluation, including the intensity of the feeling (“very”) and the valency (“good”). Again, the social dimension is added in the line “many people”. The utter necessity of having this feeling, both personally and socially, transpires in the last two lines, which evaluate very negatively the loss of *esperanza/esperança*. This explication does not cover all the uses of the terms in the Latin American context, as more individually oriented uses of the term also exist, but it captures the meaning of *esperanza/esperança* as a collective feeling, as shown in our corpus. It is in this sense that we consider these terms to be regional cultural keywords.

5. Conclusion

The idea for this article arose from our observations and intuitions regarding the importance of the feeling of *hope* in the Latin American region, both in academic and popular contexts, so much so that the terms *esperanza/esperança* should be considered cultural keywords. Through a corpus analysis based on Twitter and with the inclusion of additional cultural references, we have confirmed our hypothesis, especially for Argentina and Brazil, where our main data come from. A few hints in our data point to the fact that this is probably true for other Latin American countries as well, and we intend to undertake further studies to confirm this. Based on our results, we claim that *esperanza/esperança* is a powerful feeling that is socially and politically oriented and an utter necessity for a community who often endures political, economic, and social hardship. Using the NSM approach to semantic analysis, we have created an explication of the term that captures more nuances of meaning than the regular dictionary definitions. We have not found salient differences between *esperanza* and *esperança* (apart from a slightly more religious connection for the latter) and that is why our explication and the cultural keyword status applies to both.

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