

SETTING UP THE BOUNDARIES FOR THE CONATIVE CONSTRUCTION IN SPANISH¹

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ABSTRACT. *This paper attempts to demonstrate that the prepositional structures exhibited by some Spanish verbs like golpear or tocar in, for instance, golpear a/tocar a la puerta, can be considered as instantiations of the conative construction. The main discussion centres around the adequacy of the criteria specified in the work of Levin (1993) and Goldberg (1995) to properly account for the factors that determine the realization of this construction. After reconsidering such criteria from the perspective of recent work done in the field of the Lexical Constructional Model, an alternative view is proposed in which verbs entailing ‘contact’ or ‘motion-plus-contact’ undergo processes of Coercion and Elaboration respectively. These processes are also regarded as part of the overall mechanism of Co-composition propounded within Pustejovsky’s (1998) Theory of Qualia.*

KEY WORDS. *Conative Construction, Spanish verbs, Lexical Constructional Model, Qualia Theory.*

RESUMEN. *Este trabajo intenta demostrar que las estructuras preposicionales que muestran algunos verbos del español, tales como golpear o tocar, en golpear a/tocar a la puerta, pueden considerarse realizaciones de la construcción conativa. La discusión principal se centra en estudiar la validez de los criterios especificados en los trabajos de Levin (1993) y Goldberg (1995) para dar cuenta de los factores que determinan la realización de esta construcción. Después de considerar dichos criterios a la luz de los trabajos más recientes realizados en el campo del Modelo Léxico Construccional, se propone una visión alternativa según la cual los verbos que expresan ‘contacto’ o ‘movimiento-más-contacto’ son objeto de procesos de Coerción y Elaboración respectivamente. Estos procesos son también contemplados como parte del mecanismo global de Co-composición descrito en la Teoría de Qualia de Pustejovsky (1998).*

PALABRAS CLAVE. *Construcción Conativa, verbos del español, Modelo Léxico Construccional, Teoría de Qualia.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we argue for the existence of supportive evidence on the occurrence of the conative construction in Spanish. Insights for the proposal expounded here have been drawn from recent work on meaning construction framed within the Lexical Constructional Model (henceforth LCM) (see Mairal and Ruiz de Mendoza 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal 2008; Butler 2009; Cortés-Rodríguez 2009, *inter alios*).

In the first part of this article, we provide a description of the event structure associated to the verb *golpear* which, as a contact-by-impact verb, can be considered an archetype for conative alternation (see Levin 1993: 148). We proceed to introduce and discuss the main features originally laid out by Levin (1993) and Goldberg (1995) as standard conditions for the realization of the conative construction. The second part of the article is devoted to present a detailed account of the syntactic and semantic structure of the verbs *tocar*, *mirar* and *llamar*. At this stage, we highlight some specific difficulties arising from the inadequacy of some of the proposed criteria for conative realization. We shall finally suggest a restatement of such criteria, particularly as regards the influence of the transitive-conative alternation and of the semantic components ‘motion’ and ‘contact’ on determining this construction.

Most of the data used for this analysis has been collected from two main corpora: the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* (henceforth CREA) and the *Corpus del Español* (henceforth CdE). Where cross-linguistic evidence is needed, we include some English expressions from the *British National Corpus* (henceforth BNC) and *The Corpus of Contemporary American English* (henceforth COCA). Besides, some Spanish samples from the *Corpus Diacrónico del Español* (henceforth CORDE) are used when a look into earlier periods of Spanish seems convenient. In order to compensate for the low-rate frequency of some instances containing the Spanish verbs under inspection, we have also relied on web-extracted examples available through *Webcorp*².

For the sake of clarity, and due to space restrictions, we shall use an elementary and oversimplified version of the enhanced representation system that has been developed in the context of the LCM.

2. A-PREPOSITIONAL OBJECTS IN SPANISH: IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORA SELECTION

One important assumption behind the Lexical Constructional Model is that, in syntactic alternations involving the incorporation of prepositional phrases, the preposition has a meaning-contributing predicative function (see Van Valin and LaPolla 1997: 52; Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal 2009). It is primarily on these grounds that the conative construction in English has been defined as a transitivity alternation in which the prepositional phrase introduced by *at* (sometimes also *on*, particularly in American

English) plays a fundamental role as it marks ‘the intended goal or target’ towards which the action is directed (see Quirk *et al.* 1985: 697; Levin 1993: 41; Goldberg 1995: 63).

On first corpora inspection, the data from Spanish suggest that, in expressions like (1a), which bear strong formal similarities with English conative expressions like (1b), the preposition *a* might be the equivalent candidate for *at/on*³.

- (1) a. Margarita **golpea a la puerta** 3.
 Margaret hit-PRES.3.SG OBJ DEF.F.SG door- F.SG 3.
 [CREA 1975. Grupo Teatro La Candelaria. *Guadalupe años sin cuenta*. Colombia. Bogotá. 1986 p. 153].
- b. When Gazzo **knocked at the back door**, [...].
 [BNC. *The lock*. Gates, Susan. Oxford: OUP, 1990, pp.3691]

However, there is a crucial aspect in which prepositional complementation introduced by *a* in Spanish differs from *at*-complementation in English and which will restrict dramatically the scope of the corpus analysed in this paper.

Consider the following prototypical sentences:

- (2) a. El periodista golpeó **al** presidente con un zapato
 DEF.M.SG journalist-M.SG hit-PST.3SG **at-OBJ/DEF.M.SG** president-
 N.SG INS INDF.M.SG shoe-N.SG
 ‘The journalist hit (at) the president with a shoe’
- a’. El periodista golpeó ***el** presidente con un zapato
OBJ/DEF.M.SG
 ‘The journalist hit the president with a shoe’
- b. El zapato golpeó **al** presidente
 DEF.M.SG shoe-N.SG hit-PST.3SG **at-OBJ/DEF.M.SG** president-N.SG
 ‘The shoe hit (at) the president’
- b’. El zapato golpeó ***el** presidente
at-OBJ/DEF.M.SG
 ‘The shoe hit the president’
- c. La medicina curó **al** herido
 DEF.F.SG medicine- F.SG heal- PST.3SG **at-OBJ/DEF.M.SG** injured
 person-M.SG
 ‘The medicine healed the injured person’
- c’. La medicina curó ***el** herido
OBJ/DEF.M.SG
 ‘The medicine healed the injured person’

In the unmarked transitive cases with animate objects represented by (2a), (2b) and (2c), and regardless of the animacy of the subject, prepositional complementation with *a* is obligatory as a case-mark for objecthood. Since there is no possible alternation between prepositional and non-prepositional constructions in this context, no predicative status can be “unambiguously” assigned to the Spanish preposition *a*. For this reason, non-alternating expressions like those in (2) have been excluded from the basic corpus selected for the present study. Conversely, the main focus of our discussion will be on expressions like (3) below in which the object is inanimate. These expressions appear in diathesis (prepositional and non-prepositional) alternation which indicates, as stated within the LCM, that the presence of the preposition has an impact on the meaning (see Levin 1993: 2; Moriceau and Saint-Dizier 2003; Saint-Dizier 2006: 9 and Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal 2008)⁴.

- (3) a. El presidente golpeó la mesa con un mazo.
 DEF.M.SG president-N.SG hit-PST.3SG DEF.F.SG table-F.SG INS
 INDF.M.SG mallet-MSG
 ‘The president hit the table with a mallet’
 [Mendoza, Eduardo. *La ciudad de los prodigios*. Seix Barral (Barcelona), 1993. p. 75]
- a’. [...] golpea **a** la mesa con las piezas
 DEF.SG hit-P.3SG **OBJ** DEF.F.SG table-F.SG INS INDF.F.PL domino-F.PL
 ‘The president hit (**at**) the table with a mallet’ [From <http://ylacamasinhacer.blogspot.com/2007_06_01_archive.html>]
- b. [...] el primer torpedo golpeó el barco
 DEF.M.SG first-M.SG torpedo-M.SG hit-PST.3SG DEF.M.SG ship-M.SG
 ‘The first torpedo hit the ship’
 [CREA Padilla, Ignacio. *Imposibilidad de los cuervos*. Siglo XXI (México D.F.), 1994]
- b’. Algo golpea **al** submarino
 INDF.SG hit-P.3SG **OBJ**-DEF.M.SG submarine-M.SG
 ‘Something hit (**at**) the submarine’
 [CREA. *Excélsior*, 19/09/2000: Teoría de Juegos; la Caída Venidera. México D.F.]

3. GOLPEAR: EVENT STRUCTURE AND PARTICIPANTS

As illustrated below, a particular salient property of the verb *golpear* is its participation in the so-called “instrument-subject alternation” (see Levin 1993: 80):

- (4) a. La diva [...] golpeando el suelo **con su pequeño pie**_{INSTR}
 DEF.F.SG diva-F.SG hit-PROG DEF.M.SG floor-M.SG **with**_{INS} POSS.SG
 small-M.SG foot-M.SG
 ‘The diva [...] hitting (on) the floor **with her small foot**’
 [CREA. Jodorowsky, Alejandro. *Donde mejor canta un pájaro*. 1994]
- a’. [...] **sus pies**_{SUBJECT} golpean el parquet
 POSS.PL foot-M.PL hit-P.3.PL DEF.M.SG parquet-M.SG
 ‘**Her feet** hit (on) the parquet’
La Vanguardia, 16/07/1995. Ramón Rodó Selles. T.I.S.A (Barcelona), 1995]
- b. [...] sobre cuyo dorso golpeó suavemente **con sus dedos**_{INSTRUMENT}
 LOC POSS.SG back-M.PL hit-P.3.PL soft-MANNER **with**_{INS} POSS.PL
 finger-M.PL
 ‘(on) whose back (he) hit softly **with his fingers**’
 [CdE. Hijo de ladrón. Rojas, Manuel (1896-1973)
 <<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/FichaObra.html?Ref=4018>>]
- b’. Sus dedos_{SUBJECT} golpeaban las teclas
 POSS.PL finger-M.PL hit-PST.NonPRF.3.PL DEF.F.PL key-F.PL
 ‘**his/her fingers hit** the keys’ (Non-perfective action in the past)
 [CREA. Millás, Juan José *Articuentos*. Alba Editorial. Barcelona. 2001. p. 77]
- (5) a. Los pescadores deportivos pescan el salmón **con caña**_{IMPLEMENT}
 DEF.M.PL fisherman-M.PL sport-ATT.M.PL fish-P.3.PL DEF.M.SG salmon-
 M.SG **with**_{COM} fishing-rod-F.SG
 ‘The fishermen fish the salmon **with (by using) a fishing rod**’
 [CdE. *Salmón* http://es.encarta.msn.com/artcenter_/browse.html]
- a’. ***La caña** pesca el salmón
 DEF.F.SG fishing-rod-F.SG fish-P.3.SG DEF.M.SG salmon-M.SG
 ‘**The fishing rod** fishes the salmon’

In Role and Reference Grammar (henceforth RRG), an “implement” like *pie* (foot) in (4a’) and *dedos* (fingers) in (4b’), as opposed to items like *caña* (fishing rod) in (5a), is defined as “second effector” in a causal chain, i.e. it participates as the effector within the caused subevent. Furthermore, since *golpear* is an activity verb, the controller of the action must be the first effector in the causing subevent. However, if the first effector is left unspecified, the second effector can acquire subject status. In such cases, the latter is defined as “instrument” (see Van Valin and LaPolla 1997: 85, 107 and 121; Van Valin 2005: 59).

The realization of the instrument as subject with *golpear* leads us to conclude some fundamental properties of this verb.

First, *golpear*, interpreted as ‘moving one entity in order to bring it into contact with another entity’ (Levin 1993: 150), entails a causal event structure comprising two

subevents, the first being a motion subevent and the second a contact subevent. Below we present this event structure in its schematic layout (cf. Cortés *et al.* 2009; Sosa-Acevedo 2009)⁵:

- (6) $[[x \text{ use } y \text{ in a manner}]_{e_1} \text{ CAUSE } [y \text{ move toward } z]_{e_2} \& [y \text{ touching } z]_{e_3}]$
- MOTION
CONTACT

Second, the participants (y and z) involved in the caused event, take two different positions. Thus, the event structure provided in (6) can be said to express the following:

- (7) i. The first subevent (e_1) denotes that a first effector x uses an object y in a manner. This is expressed as ‘ x use y in a manner’.
- ii. There is a causal chain (encoded by the operator CAUSE) in which the subevent e_1 brings about a caused subevent e_2 expressing “motion” and denoting ‘ y moves towards z ’. In this motion subevent, therefore, y is a second effector.
- iii. There is a final subevent of location/contact e_3 denoting ‘ y touches z ’.

The event structure associated to transitive expressions of *golpear* (e.g. *golpear la mesa*) can therefore be specified as follows:

- (8) *El presidente golpeó la mesa con un mazo*
 ‘The president hit the table with a mallet’

[[presidente use mazo in-a-manner] e_1
 CAUSE
 MOTION [mazo move towards mesa] e_2
 &
 CONTACT [mazo touching mesa] e_3]

4. EXPLORING ON THE CRITERIA FOR THE CONATIVE CONSTRUCTION WITH *GOLPEAR*

The conative construction has been recursively described in terms of four major criteria (see Levin 1993: 7 and 41 ff; Goldberg 1995: 63-64):

- (9) i. The conative construction is part of a transitivity alternation.
 ii. The conative construction occurs with verbs encoding concepts of ‘motion’ and ‘contact’.

- iii. The conative construction conveys the meaning X DIRECTS ACTION AT Y, that is to say, this construction has no entailment about whether the action is finally accomplished or not.
- iv. The conative construction is realised by prepositional complements introduced by *at/on* in English.

Despite Levin's strong argumentation in favour of (9i), it will turn out in later discussion that transitivity alternation does not *per se* determine the occurrence of the conative construction. Let us therefore focus first on discussing the other three criteria. We begin by examining the following sentences in which the verb *golpear* occurs in alternation between *a*-prepositional and non-prepositional structures:

- (10) a. [...] el defensa Dulce **golpeó el balón**
 DEF.M.SG defence-M.SG Dulce hit-PST.3.SG DEF.M.SG ball-M.SG
 'The defence Dulce hit the ball'
 [CREA. ABC Electrónico.05/26/1997:1-1 *Respiro del Oviedo*. Prensa Española. Madrid. 1997]
- a'. [...] el palista **golpea a la bola**
 DEF.M.SG batter-M.SG hit-P.3.SG **at-OBJ** DEF.F.SG ball-F.SG
 'The batter **hits (at)** the ball'
 [CREA. Ussía, Alfonso. *Tratado de las buenas maneras, III*. Planeta (Barcelona), 1995]
- (11) a. El Guapo sigue **golpeando el suelo** con la porra.
 DEF.M.SG ATT.M.SG PROG.3.SG hit-PROG DEF.M.SG floor-M.SG with
 INS DEF.F.SG truncheon-F.SG
 'The handsome-man (keeps) hitting the floor'
 [CREA. Armada, Alfonso. *La edad de oro de los perros*. Antonio Machado (Madrid), 1996. p. 53]
- a'. Antón Martín[...] **golpeando al suelo** [con su puño]
 Antón Martín [...] hit-PROG **at-OBJ**.DEF.M.SG floor-M.SG (crying and lying on the old bed)
 'Antón Martín [...] **hitting (at)** the floor' [with his fist]
 [CREA.Martín Recuerda, José. *El engaño*. Cátedra. Madrid. 1981, p. 190]
- (12) a. La mujer **golpeó la puerta** (y no obtuvo respuesta)
 DEF.F.SG woman-F.SG hit-PST.3.SG DEF.F.SG door-F.SG
 'The woman hit the door' (she got no answer in response)
 [CdE. *Hijo de ladrón*. Rojas, Manuel (1896-1973)
 <<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/FichaObra.html?Ref=4018>>]

a'. Villafán **golpeó a la puerta** del local

Villafán hit-PST.3.SG **at-OBJ** DEF.F.SG door-F.SG GEN.DEF.M.SG
pub_M.SG

'Villafán **hit (at)** the door of the pub' [with his hand]

[CREA. *El País*, 10/04/2001: TERRIBLE- *El asesino demostró...* Montevideo. 2001]

According to the condition in (9ii), while the non-prepositional structure in (10a) designates that the subject *Dulce* eventually touched the ball (let us say, with "his foot", as the most likely instrument), in the prepositional construction (10a'), the ball is identified simply as an "intended" destination which means that the paddle does not necessarily touch the ball. The latter interpretation, whereby the preposition acts as a mark introducing a destination, has been actually vindicated as the basic function of the Spanish preposition *a* with verbs denoting 'motion' (see Morera 1988: 156; Rivano 1997: 104 ff; Mendeikoetxea 1999 and Torrego 1999).

Turning to the eventive representation in (8), it must be noted that the interpretation of transitive constructions with *golpear* integrates, as stated in (9ii), motion (i.e. 'the president *moves* the mallet towards the table') as well as contact (i.e. 'bring the mallet into *contact* with the table'). As for precondition (9iii), observe that the "intended" final location or destination is precisely captured by the contact subevent e_3 . It follows from this that the conative construction with *golpear* in essence triggers indeterminacy about the completion of the expected impact, i.e. about the end-contact between the instrument (e.g. *foot*) and the location (e.g. *ball*).

A similar interpretation holds for (11a) and (11a'): when the object *suelo* (floor) is preceded by *a(l)*, the preposition introduces a motion subevent which enables the occurrence of the conative construction; hence the interpretation 'not necessarily fulfilled contact between *fist* (puño) and *floor* (suelo)' (cf. 11a).

As for sentences like those illustrated (12), their interpretation needs further clarification concerning contextual distinctions between *golpear a la puerta* and *golpear la puerta* which are not always apparent. Compare:

(13) a. La mujer **golpeó la puerta** [y no obtuvo respuesta]

DEF.F.SG woman-F.SG hit-PST.3.SG DEF.F.SG door-F.SG

'The woman hit (**knocked at**) the door' [she got no answer in response]

[CdE. *Hijo de ladrón*. Rojas, Manuel (1896-1973)

<<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/FichaObra.html?Ref=4018>>]

a'. Reb Beryl [...] **golpeó a la puerta** [...] [y no hubo respuesta]

Reb Beryl [...] hit-PST.3.SG **atOBJ** DEF.F.SG door-F.SG

'Reb Beryl hit (**knocked at**) the door' (she got no answer in response)

[From <http://www.mesilot.org/esp/parasha/mishpatim4_imprimir.htm>]

The transitive and the prepositional patterns illustrated in (13) come about in the same context with the meaning ‘to hit at someone’s door to cause someone to open the door after hearing the sound’. As such, this interpretation does not convey, at least in obvious ways, any uncertainty about the completion of the contact ‘touching’ event.

Consider, however, the following examples:

- (14) a. [...] el ladrón **golpeó la puerta** con un candelabro (sacristía)
 DEF.M.SG thief-M.SG hit-PST.3.SG DEF.F.SG door-F.SG with.INS
 INDF.M.SG candelabra-M.SG
 ‘The thief **hit the door** with the candelabra’
 [From <<http://www.revistaeclesia.com/content/view/14942/>>]
- a’. Alguien **golpeó a** la puerta con los nudillos (Ella fue a abrir)
 INDF.SG hit-PST.3.SG **at-OBJ** DEF.F.SG door-F.SG with.INS DEF.M.PL
 knuckle-M.PL
 ‘Someone **hit at (knocked at)** the door with the knuckles’
 [From <<http://literaturaquisqueyana.obolog.com/la-santa-cena-30916>>]
- a’’. El ladrón **golpeó a** la puerta con un candelabro
 DEF.M.SG thief-M.SG hit-PST.3.SG **at-OBJ** DEF.F.SG door-F.SG
 with.INS INDF.M.SG candelabra-M.SG
 ‘The thief **hit at (knocked at)** the door with the candelabra’

In (14a), it is not the case, for obvious reasons, that the thief intends to encourage the people in the sacristy to open the door: thieves do not typically knock at doors!. Thus, the action of *golpear* is expected to bring about a result, i.e. the thief hits the door with the candelabra in order to break the door and walk in. In contrast, in (14a’), there is every indication for a conative interpretation: what prevails in this case is the fact that someone moves the knuckles towards the door intending to make the knuckles touch the door. Observe that one could even suggest an alternating conative expression like (14a’’) with the meaning ‘the thief moves the candelabra towards the door expecting a potential impact between the two objects’ (cf. 14a). The conclusion therefore should be that, despite the apparent syntactic and semantic overlapping between *golpear la puerta* and *golpear a la puerta*, there is concrete evidence that the verb *golpear* participates in conative alternation in other contexts.

Let us now turn to examine in more detail transitive constructions containing inanimate entities as subjects.

The fact that instruments occur as second effectors within the caused subevent has been put forward as a restriction on the realization of the conative construction with instrument-like subjects in English (see Cortés 2007: 125). For example:

- (15) a. The **rock hit** the window.
 a’. The **rock hit *at** the window.

Compare, however, the Spanish samples below⁶:

- (16) a. La **pared** [...] se separó y [...] **golpeó a** la casa (de al lado)
 DEF.F.SG wall-F.SG REFL split-PST.3.SG and-CONJ hit-PST.3.SG **at-
 OBJ** DEF.F.SG house-F.SG (ALL)
 ‘The wall split (up) and **hit (at)** the (contiguous) house’
 [From <www.australvaldivia.cl/prontus4.../20100303000617.html>]
- b. [...] unas **agujitas** [...] **golpean a** una cinta entintada
 INDF.F.PL needle-F.PL hit-P.3.PL **at-OBJ** INDF.F.SG ribbon-F.SG ink-
 ATT.F.SG
 ‘Some needles **hit (at)** the ink-charged ribbon’ [description of an ink-jet
 printer]
 [CREA. Teso, Kosme del. *Introducción a la informática para torpes*.
 Anaya. Madrid. 1995. p. 91]
- c. Cuando **el pistón golpea a** la válvula
 TIME DEF.M.SG piston-M.SG hit-P.3.SG **at-OBJ** DEF.F.SG valve-F.SG
 ‘When the piston **hits (at)** the valve’
 [Castro (de) Vicente, Miguel. *Nueva enciclopedia del automóvil*. 1998. p. 378
 [From <books.google.es>]
- d. Hurst chutó, **el balón golpeó al** larguero
 Hurst shoot-3.SG DEF.M.SG ball-M.SG hit-P.3.SG **at-OBJ**.DEF.M.SG
 crossbar-M.SG
 ‘Hurst shot (the ball), the ball **hit (at)** the crossbar’
 [From http://www.elpais.com/articulo/deportes/Llega/balon/inteligente/elpepudep/20071011elpepudep_3/Tes]

Notice, additionally, that these constructions alternate with transitive constructions. For instance, compare (16a) and (16d) above with:

- (17) a. **Los escombros** [...] cayeron [...] **golpeando** la casa
 DEF.M.PL debris-M.PL fall.down-PST.3.PL hit-PROG DEF.F.SG
 house-F.SG
 ‘Debris fell down **hitting** the house’
 [From <<http://www.sasua.net/estella/articulo.asp?f=hundimiento>>]
 (cf. La **pared** de la casa **golpeó a** la casa de al lado: ‘The wall **hit (at)** the
 (contiguous) house’)
- b. [...] **la pelota golpea** el poste
 DEF.F.SG ball-F.SG hit-PST.3.SG POSS.SG leg-F.SG
 ‘**the ball** hits the post’

[Benedek, Endré and János Pálfi. *600 programas para el entrenamiento de fútbol*, 1999, p. 229. From <<http://books.google.es>>]
(cf. El balón **golpeó al** larguero: ‘The ball **hit (at)** the crossbar’)

In the light of this evidence, and in line with RRG, we contend that, besides first-effector-subject conative constructions (e.g. *el ladrón golpeó a la puerta*), there are *de facto* instrument-subject conative constructions (e.g. *el balón golpeó al larguero*). We also argue that both constructions comprise the same event structure, the difference lying basically in the fact that the causing subevent in the latter is not overtly projected in the syntax because the first effector is left unspecified. As indicated previously, in these cases, the second effector within the causal chain is “outranked” for first effector (see Van Valin and LaPolla 1997: 379)⁷.

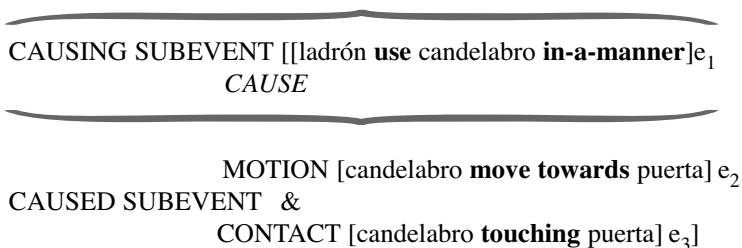
Instrumentality seems to be better understood as part of a gradable continuum for effectorhood which enables us to account for the role of inanimate subjects in conative constructions (cf. Van Valin and LaPolla 1998: 127). In this respect, notice the subjects *martillo* (hammer), *agujitas* (needles), *moto* (motorcycle), etc. in the examples below⁸. We repeat some of the samples already cited, here in alternation with transitive variants:

- (18) a. [...] **el martillo golpea la** campana metálica
DEF.M.SG hammer-M.SG hit-P.3.SG DEF.F.SG bell-F.SG metal- ATT.F.SG
‘The clapper hits the metallic bell’
[Benejam, Juan. La escuela práctica.Universidad de Alicante.Alicante. 2003
From <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/01476196500181673089079/p_0000002.htm>]
- a’. [...] unas **agujitas** [...] **golpean a una** cinta entintada
INDF.F.PL needle-F.PL hit-P.3.PL **at-OBJ** INDF.F.SG ribbon-F.SG ink-
ATT.F.SG
‘Some needles **hit (at)** the ink-charged ribbon’ [description of an ink-jet
printer]
[CREA. Teso, Kosme del. *Introducción a la informática para torpes*. Anaya.
Madrid. 1995. p. 91]
- b. **La moto golpeó el** coche policial
DEF.F.SG motorcycle-M.SG hit-PST.3.SG DEF.M.SG car-M.SG police-
ATT.SG
‘The motorcycle hit the police car’
[From <<http://www.diariodeleon.es/noticias/noticia.asp?pkid=355086>>]
- b’. **Un coche** [...] **golpea a un coche** [...] estacionado
INDF.M.SG car-M.SG hit-P.3.SG **at-OBJ** INDF.M.SG car-M.SG park-PTCP
‘The car **hit (at)** a parked car’
[From <<http://jizundel.wordpress.com/category/cine/>>]

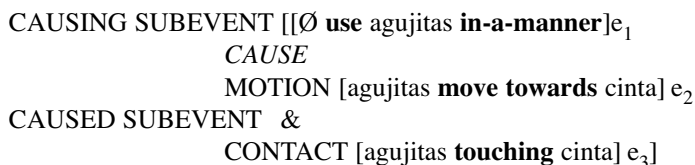
- c. [...] **el primer torpedo golpeó el barco**
 DEF.M.SG first-M.SG torpedo-M.SG hit-PST.3SG DEF.M.SG ship-M.SG
 ‘The first torpedo hit the ship’
 [CREA Padilla, Ignacio. *Imposibilidad de los cuervos*. Siglo XXI (México, D.F.), 1994]
- c’. **Algo golpea al submarino**
 INDF.SG hit-P.3SG **OBJ**-DEF.M.SG submarine-M.SG
 ‘Something **hit (at)** the submarine’
 [CREA. *Excélsior*, 19/09/2000: Teoría de Juegos; la Caída Venidera. México D.F.]

In (20) below, we present the event layout for animate subject constructions. As stated above, when the causing subevent is not syntactically projected, the subject can be an inanimate entity. We indicate this by enclosing the causing subevent within braces in (20):

- (19) E.g. *El ladrón golpeó la puerta con un candelabro*
 ‘the thief hit the door with the candelabra’



- (20) E.g. *Las agujitas golpean a una cinta entintada*
 ‘the small needles hit the ribbon’



What we conclude from this discussion is that, as predetermined by the conditions in (9), *golpear* conveys motion and contact. Besides, the conative construction is associated to the prepositional phrase introduced by *a* and affects the completion of the contact subevent in that it becomes undefined or undetermined. We have also highlighted in this section some issues concerning the role of the animacy of the first and the second effectors in the conative construction.

5. THE CONATIVE CONSTRUCTION ACROSS VERB CLASSES

In what follows, we shall deal with *a*-prepositional complementation for the verbs *tocar*, *mirar* and *llamar*. This will allow us to cross-explore how the conative construction is realized with verb classes whose connections are not always neat and straightforward.

5.1. *Tocar*

The first distinction between *golpear* and *tocar* concerns quantitative evidence drawn from the corpora. While *golpear* occurs in a large variety of prepositional samples, only two expressions, *tocar (a) la puerta* and *tocar el timbre/al timbre*, have been collected as instances of *a* introducing inanimate complementation with *tocar*:

- (21) a. [...] un indio **tocó la puerta**, nos mostró algo
 INDF.M.SG Indian-M.SG hit-PST.3.SG DEF.F.SG door-F.SG us-OBJ.1.PL
 show-PST.3.SG INDF.OBJ
 ‘An indian **touched (knocked at)** the door, (he) showed us something’
 [CREA: Pereda, José María de. *La Puchera*. 1870.
 From <<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/FichaObra.html?Ref=82>>]
- a’. [...] **alguien toca a la puerta**, Nicolás abre,
 INDF.SG hit-P.3.SG **at-OBJ** DEF.F.SG door-F.SG Nicholas open-P.3.SG
 ‘Someone **touches at (knocks at)** the door, Nicholas opens’
 [CREA. *Diario de las Américas*, 07/12/1997: “No conozco otro medio”.
 EE. UU. The America Publishing Company. Miami.]
- b. [...] **toqué el timbre**, esperé, no salió nadie
 hit-PST.1.SG DEF.M.SG doorbell-M.SG wait-PST.1.SG NEG come-
 PST.1.SG INDF.OBJ
 ‘(I) **touched (pressed/rang)** the doorbell, (I) waited, nobody opened’
 [CREA. Kociancich, Vlady. *La octava maravilla*. Alianza. Madrid. 1982.
 p. 205]
- b’. **toqué al timbre** [en la puerta principal]
 touch-PST.3.SG **at-OBJ**.DEF.M.SG doorbell-M.SG
 ‘(I) **touched at (pressed/rang at)** the doorbell’ [at the main door]
 [CREA. Fernández Cubas, Cristina. *Mi hermana Elba*. Tusquets (Barcelona),
 1981. p. 38]

A second very important distinction concerns the semantics of the verb inasmuch as *tocar* is associated to two different interpretations. In (22) below, *tocar* designates a locative state in which two or more inanimate entities (e.g. spots) are in a contiguous spatial relation,

whereas in (23a), typically animate entities (actors) use their bodies (or body-parts: hands, fingers, etc.) as instruments in order to come into contact with one another.

- (22) a. [...] **manchas** [...] **que se tocan en los ángulos**
 spot-F.PL REL REC touch-P.3.PL LOC DEF.M.PL fold-M.PL
 ‘(leaf) spots that **touch/are in contact** in/at (leaf) folds’
 [CREA Tiscornia, Julio. *Plantas de interior*. Albatros (Buenos Aires), 1991, p. 115]
- b. Vivimos en **casas que se tocan por la espalda**...
 1.SG LOC house-F.PL REL REC touch-P.3.PL **at-LOC** DEF.F.SG back-F.SG
 ‘(we) live in houses which **touch/are in contact** by/at (their) back(yard)’
 [CREA. Alba, Víctor. *El pájaro africano*. Planeta (Barcelona), 1975. p. 15]
- (23) a. [...] **algunos de ellos** [actores] **se tocan**
 INDF.M.PL GEN 3.M.PL [actors] REC touch-P.3.PL
 ‘Some of them (of the actors) **touch** one another’
 [CREA Stichomythia. Revista de teatro español contemporáneo, nº 0, 1/2002, *La Memoria del Presente*. Departamento de Filología Española de la Universitat de València. Valencia]

These facts clearly indicate that, in a similar manner to *golpear*, constructions with *tocar* range on a continuum of instrumentality so that activity interpretations are more likely to emerge when instrument constructions are possible. Contrast the following with preceding samples of *golpear* in (19):

- (24) a. Felicísimo **tocó con sus labios la mano** [del] monarca
 Felicísimo touch-PST.1.SG with-INST POSS.3.PL lip-M.PL DEF.F.SG
 hand- F.SG [GEN] monarch-M.SG
 ‘Felicísimo touched with his lips the monarch’s hand’
 [CdE Barreras, Antonio. *El espadachín: narración histórica del motín de Madrid en 1766*. From <<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/FichaObra.html?Ref=1202>>]
- b. [...] **mis labios tocan su piel**
 POSS.1.PL lip-M.PL touch-PST.3.PL POSS.3.SG skin-F.SG
 ‘my lips touch his/her skin’
 [CREA. Llongueras, Lluís. Llongueras tal cual. Planeta, S.A. (Barcelona), 2001, p. 379]

The activity interpretation of transitive *tocar* (i.e. *Felicísimo* uses his lips and these touch the hand) suggests the following structure comprising a locative state

subevent with the meaning ‘*piel* (skin) and *labios* (lips) come to be in contact’ (cf. Van Valin 2005: 47):

- (25) [Felicísimo **use** *labios*]
 &
 CONTACT: [*labios* **touching** *mano/piel*]

For further support of this interpretation, consider the effects of the so-called *Contra* alternation (Levin 1993: 67; Hernando 2002:150 and Morera 1990: 656):

- (26) a. *Manifiestar impotencia* [...] *golpeando el suelo con los pies*.
 Show-INF Helplessness-F.SG (by) hit-PROG DEF.M.SG floor-M.SG **with-INST** DEF.M.PL foot-M.PL
 ‘Show helplessness (by) hitting (on) the floor **with the feet**’
 [From <<http://es.thefreedictionary.com/patear>>]
- a’. [...] *Vázquez Montalbán golpeando los pies contra el suelo*
Vázquez Montalbán hit-PROG DEF.M.PL foot-M.PL **MOTION-LOC** DEF.M.SG floor-M.SG
 ‘Vázquez Montalbán hitting (the) his feet **against the floor**’
 [From <<http://www.letraslibres.com/index.php?art=9218&rev=2>>]
- (27) a. *Tocó la puerta con* [...] *sus* [...] *dedos*
 touch-PST.1.SG DEF.F.SG door-F.SG **with-INST** POSS.3.PL finger-M.PL
 ‘(he/she) touched the door **with his fingers**’
 [From <pacomova.eresmas.net/.../H/harry_pottercap5.htm>]
- a’. **Tocó sus dedos contra la puerta* [non-stative interpretation]

While it is possible to alternate the expressions in (26a) and (26a’), the source corpora do not provide any result for expressions like (27a’). (27a) has a pure locative meaning, i.e. the finger is in contact with the door. The motion-locative, change-of-location interpretation of *contra* (against) in (27a’) would run counter to the stative interpretation of *tocó* (Honrubia 2006: 126; Iwata 2008: 56-57). This analysis concurs with Levin’s (1993: 155) classification of English *touch* as a pure contact verb which means that *touch*, unlike *hit* (golpear), does not entail ‘impact’, and therefore, it cannot possibly involve ‘motion’ as a semantic component.

In principle, these facts should prevent the occurrence of *tocar* in conative construction. As we have noted, however, corpora data challenge this assumption by providing expressions like *tocar a la puerta/al timbre*. Furthermore, and interestingly, prepositional instances like those in (28) occur frequently in the Spanish literature from the 16th to the 19th centuries and, as shown in (29), prepositional and non-prepositional constructions coexisted at the time.

- (28) a. Allí tocó **a un resorte**
 LOC touch-PST.1.SG **at-OBJ** INDF.M.SG spring-M.SG
 ‘There (he/she) touched a (mattress) spring’
 [Bécquer, Gustavo Adolfo. *Leyendas*. (1853).
 From <<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/FichaObra.html?Ref=4>>]
- b. [...] tocar **a un solo de nuestros cabellos**
 touch-INF **at-OBJ** INDF.M.SG single-SG GEN POSS.1.M.PL hair-M.PL
 ‘to **touch (at)** one (single) of our hairs’
 [CdE. Flavio. Castro, Rosalía de. (1861).
 From <<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/FichaObra.html?Ref=1147>>]
- c. Doña Beatriz [...] toca **al hombro a don Félix**
 Doña Beatriz touch-P.3.SG **at-OBJ**.DEF.M.SG shoulder-M.SG OBJ
 mister.M.SG Félix
 ‘Doña Beatriz **touches (at)** the shoulder of mister Félix’
 [Mateos, Juan A. *La monja alférez*. (1872)
 From <<http://www.coh.arizona.edu/spanish/comedia/montalba/monjal.html>>]
- (29) a. [...] consentir que **mis manos toquen a vuestra ropa**
 Allow-INF that-CONJ POSS.1.PL hand-M.PL touch- BJV.P.3.SG. **at-OBJ**
 POSS.2.SG clothes-F.SG
 ‘to allow (that) my hands **touch (at)** your clothes’
 [CORDE. Anónimo 1511. Traducción de Tirante el Blanco de Joanot
 Martorell. Martín de Riquer, Espasa-Calpe. Madrid. P.134]
- a’. No es mucho que **toquen vuestra ropa**
 NEG be-3.SG much-ADV that-CONJ touch-BJV.P.3.PL POSS.2.SG
 clothes-F.SG
 ‘(It) is not much (that) (they) **touch** your clothes’
 [CORDE. 1598. Cabrera, Fray Alonso de. *Consideraciones sobre los Evangelios de los domingos después de la Epifanía*. Sermón. Bailly-Baillièere. Madrid. 1906]

On this basis, we can at least speculate that existing present-day expressions date back to a period in which the conative alternation was a more productive pattern⁹. This, however, does not explain what factors exactly motivate the conative construction with a pure locative (non-motion) verb like *tocar*.

In the analysis above, we have made clear that the preposition *a* marks the destination or location when impact, that is ‘motion plus contact’, is involved. Consequently, we can reasonably assume that, even though the verb *tocar* is basically defined as a contact verb, the preposition *a* in *tocar a la puerta/al timbre* contributes the substantial semantics of the motion subevent which then conflates with the basic meaning “contact” provided by the verb. These conditions thereupon license the realization of the conative construction.

To better understand this, let us consider one more example:

- (30) a. alguien toca **a la puerta**, Nicolás abre
 INDF.3.S touch-P.3.SG. **at-OBJ** DEF.F.SG door-F.SG Nicholas ope-P.3.SG
 ‘someone **touches (at)** the door, Nicholas opens’
 [CREA. *Diario de las Américas*, 07/12/1997: “No conozco otro medio”.
 EE. UU. The American Publishing Company (Miami).
 a’. [...] resbaló y [sin querer ...] **tocó la puerta con la cabeza**
 slip-PST.3.SG andCONJ NEG want-INF touch-PST.3.SG. DEF.F.SG door-
 F.SG **with-INST** DEF.F.SG head-F.SG
 ‘(he/she) slipped (down) and [accidentally] **touched** the door with (his/her) the
 head’
 [From<<http://sts-forbiden-passion.foroactivo.com/fan-fic-s-f18/juego-de-amor-ikki-x-hyoga-songfic-t273.htm>>]

Sample (30a) denotes motion of an instrument (possibly hands or knuckles) which eventually contacts the door. This interpretation, motivated by the presence of the preposition, does not fit the non-prepositional (30a’) in which the head cannot be presented as an instrument manipulated in order to touch and oriented towards the door.

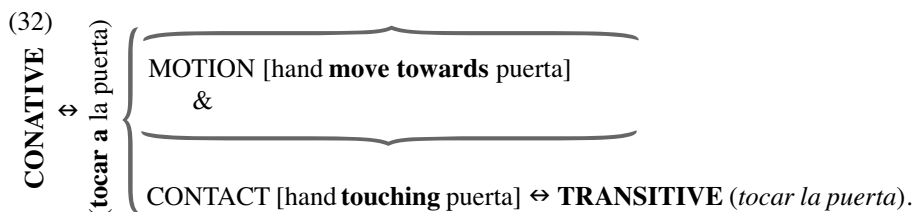
Another piece of evidence sustaining these observations is provided by expressions like (31) which closely resemble *unas agujitas golpean a una cinta entintada* in (16b) above in that pistons are instrument-like items which allow for the conative interpretation in the presence of the preposition *a*:

- (31) a. [...] **los pistones no tocan a los cilindros**
 DEF.M.PL piston-M.PL NEG touch-P.3.PL. **at-OBJ** DEF.M.PL cylinder-
 M.PL
 ‘the pistons do not **touch (at)** the cylinders’
 [CREA. *El País*, 07/11/1980. *Industrias diversas*. *Diario El País*, S.A.
 Madrid. 1980]

All in all, some important points about the realization of the conative construction have been put forward in this section, the most relevant being that a verb like *tocar* differs from *golpear* in one interesting respect: though the semantics of the former may seem not overtly compatible with the conative construction, since it is basically a pure contact verb, the preposition *a* acts as the triggering feature which facilitates the appropriate conditions for the realization of this construction.

In the representation we provide below, we intend to account for the role of the preposition in activating the motion subevent which is thus “foregrounded” (see Pustejovsky 1998: 72 and 192-193). The motion subevent, together with the contact subevent, qualifies *tocar* for the conative realization in *tocar a la puerta*. Conversely,

note that in the transitive non-prepositional realization *tocar la puerta*, the motion subevent remains “in the background” (note the use of braces) thus granting the contact subevent all the prominence (cf. *tocar (a) la puerta*):



We shall address in greater detail in Section 6 how this kind of phenomena can be accounted for in terms of what Pustejovsky (1998: 125 ff.) describes as Co-composition. In addition, we shall discuss the constructionist perspective developed within the LCM according to which such phenomena are more specifically described as a mechanism involving lexical “coercion” (see Michaelis, 2003; Cortés-Rodríguez 2009; Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal 2011): *tocar* can be said to be subject to a process of “lexical-constructural subsumption” whereby, through co-composition between the basic meaning of the verb and the preposition, pure locative meaning of the verb is “coerced” to fit the conative construction.

5.2. *Mirar*

Unlike English *look at*, whose typical pattern is prepositional (see Goldberg 1995: 64), Spanish *mirar a* alternates with non-prepositional expressions:

- (33) a. [...] **nos detuvimos a mirar la luna**
 REFL.1.PL stop-PST.1.PL PURP look-INF DEF.F.SG moon-F.SG
 ‘(we) stopped to **look (at)** the moon’
 [CREA. Díaz, Jesús. *La piel y la máscara*. Anagrama. Barcelona. 1996. p. 206]
- a’. (Mikel) mientras **mira a la luna**, Basili ha entrado
 TIME.DUR look-P.3.SG **at-OBJ** DEF.F.SG moon-F.SG Basili PRF.3.SG
 come.in-PTCP
 ‘(Mikel) while (he) **looks at** the moon, Basili has come in’
 [CREA. Amestoy Egiguren, Ignacio. *Gernika, un grito. 1937. Tragedia actual en ocho escenas, con prólogo*. Fundamentos. Madrid. 1996. p. 50]

Mirar can be defined as “to direct one’s sight towards someone or something to see, i.e. with the intention to perceive or become aware of the existence of someone or something through the eyes” (Faber and Mairal 1999: 237 and 286).

The crucial features of the semantics of this verb thus seem to be determined by two main factors. First, *mirar* does not necessarily imply factual perception since we can

look at (*mirar*) without seeing (*ver*). In (34) the perceiver visually contacts the stimulus (e.g. the small square). However, actual perception is not achieved: he does not become aware of the existence of any stimulus at all (see Levin 1993: 187; Goldberg 1995: 63).

(34) a. **Miró la plazoleta sin verla**

look-PST.3.SG DEF.F.SG small.square-F.SG NEG see-INF.OBJ.F.SG

‘(he/she) **looked** (~~at~~) the small-square **without seeing it**’

[CREA. López, Nila (1954-). *Tántalo en el trópico*.

From <<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/FichaObra.html?Ref=5337>>]

b. [...] **miraron arriba**, aunque [...] **nada se podía ver**

look-PST.3.PL LOC NEG INDF.NEG PASS can-PST.3.SG see.INF

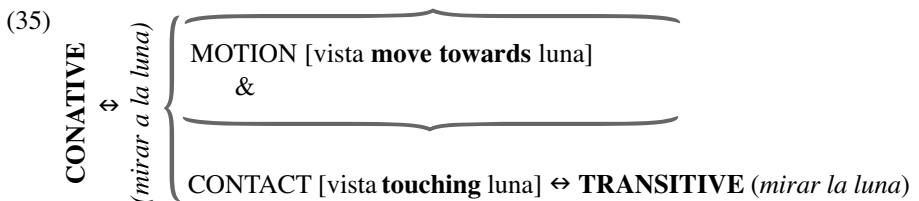
‘(they) **looked** upwards, though nothing could be seen’

[From <http://www.anarda.net/tolkien/relatos/hobbit/las_nubes_estallan.htm>]

Precisely because the culmination of the act of perception may be “undermined” in some contexts, *mirar* appears to be a suitable candidate for conative subsumption: the eyes may be interpreted as being just in visual contact with the stimulus (e.g. the moon, in *mirar la luna*) which means that the verb in this construction does not foregrounds the motion subevent. In contrast, and by virtue of the same account proposed above for *tocar*, the preposition in *mirar a la luna* motivates a conative interpretation by giving prominence to the motion subevent.

Second, in the conative realization, sight (*sentido de la vista*) can be said to act as an implement used by perceivers in the sense that it is oriented in the direction of a stimulus.

The following representations capture the eventual structures corresponding to *mirar* and *mirar a* respectively (cf. Van Valin and LaPolla 1998: 121).



One of the advantages of this kind of interpretation is that it brings to light underlying eventual, semantic and morpho-syntactic properties which characterise the members of distinct verb classes, in this case TOUCH and SEE (see Faber and Mairal 1999: 237). Furthermore, it reveals basic similarities between *tocar* and *mirar*. The existence of such similarities should not surprise us much precisely because these two verbs belong in the same semantic domain of Perception (see Faber and Mairal 1999: 286). One fundamental property clearly derived from the outlines in (34) and (35) is the basic semantic parameter

‘contact’ common to both *tocar* and *mirar*. To a large extent, this commonality is conceptually transparent since all perception modes are preconditioned by prior sensory interaction between the perceiver, or perception organs, and the stimulus: ordinarily, only after detection of the stimulus is accomplished can the stimulus be perceived. Finally, it is interesting to note that, as it seems clear from comparing the above representations, this analysis also identifies properties that cut across different semantic domains such as Contact-by-impact (*golpear*) and Perception (*tocar*). As it will become clear in the next section, the verb *llamar* is likewise connected with the domain of Perception.

5.3. *Lllamar*

Given the fact that *llamar* is a speech verb, rather than a contact verb like *tocar*, or a motion-contact verb like *golpear*, expressions like *llamar a la puerta/al timbre*, as in (36), may seem odd (cf. *golpear/ tocar a la puerta*).

- (36) a. [...] dos hombres **llamaron a la puerta** del convento
 2 man-M.PL call-PST.3.PL **at-OBJ** DEF.F.SG door-F.SG GEN.M.SG
 convent-M.SG
 ‘wo men **called at** the door of the convent’
 [CREA. *El País*, 02/01/1989 : *Oficio de paseantes*. Diario El País, S.A. Madrid. 1989]
- b. Kid **llamó al timbre**. Pandora abrió la puerta
 Kid call-PST.3.PL **at-OBJ**.DEF.M.SG door.bell-F.SG Pandora open-
 PST.3.SG DEF.F.SG door-F.SG
 ‘Kid **called at** the doorbell. Pandora opened the door’
 [CREA. Memba, Javier. Homenaje a Kid Valencia. Alfaguara. Madrid. 1989, p. 217]

In these expressions, we can justify the existence of a motion component which is provided, on account of the conclusions presented in the preceding section, by the preposition *a*. However, the way in which the verb *llamar* entails a component of contact seems less obvious.

Levin (1993: 204-205) classifies verbs of communication like *call* as manner-of-speaking verbs: to call is to use speech as articulated sound in a given manner, for instance, in a loud manner as in *shout*. However, this definition does not seem to fully cover the meaning of *llamar*.

To begin with, expressions like *Alguien ha llamado a la puerta, llaman a la puerta/al timbre* come out as the expected answer to questions like *¿Qué es/ha sido ese ruido?*, which proves that this expression conveys information about the origin of a noise, more precisely, about the sound caused by knocking at a door or ringing (pressing) a doorbell (cf. Ruiz de Mendoza and Díez 2001). In addition, the function of this sound is expanded to communicate a message directed to, and intended to be perceived and

properly interpreted by, the perceptor or addressee. That is to say, what this sentence conveys is a request. Notice, for instance, the “stimulus-response” relationship in:

- (37) *Llamaron a la puerta y corrió a abrir.*
 call-PST.3.PL **at-OBJ** DEF.F.SG door-F.SG and run-PST.3.SG PURP open-
 INF
 ‘(they) knocked at the door and (he) run (towards the door) to open’
 [From <www.ciudadseva.com/textos/cuentos/.../1001-11.htm>]

It must be emphasized that this kind of pragmatic and discursive motivations are in no way *ad hoc*. Actually, they have shown sufficient degrees of conventionalization which has granted them a rightful position within the LCM in which they have been formalized as constraints on different levels of linguistic description, interpretation and expression (see Ruiz de Mendoza and Díez 2001; Mairal and Ruiz de Mendoza 2008a, 2009; Ruiz de Mendoza and Mairal 2008).

The motivating factor behind *llamar* seems to be what is known as the Conduit interpretation of communication, described by means of the metaphor COMMUNICATION IS SENDING (IDEAS). *Llamar* designates transference of information invoking some kind of active response from the listener. This message is encoded, in the unmarked case of verbal communication, through vocal sound. Observe that, by itself, this communication scenario, which naturally involves a subevent of perception, favours a conative interpretation since, though the message is intended to reach (to contact) the listener, there is no guarantee about whether the listener finally receives/perceives it or not. In other words, as pointed out in the preceding sections, the contact subevent, which we have described as a precondition for actual perception, is not necessarily realized (cf. *tocar* and *mirar*).

Although the following representation extremely simplifies the complexity of this construction with the verb *llamar*, it has the advantage of showing how it fits the conative interpretation by using the same kind of formulation we have proposed for all the other verbs analyzed so far (cf. Van Valin and LaPolla 1997: 116 ff.; González-Orta 2003: 77 ff.). In a very schematic way, the representation is built around a SOUND FOR EVENT CAUSING IT metonymic interpretation whereby the sound or noise arising from the impact on the destination (knocking sound) becomes the means conveying the intended message (see Mairal and Cortés 2008: 8; Radden and Kövecses 1999: 43)¹⁰.

- (38) E.g. *Llamar a la puerta*
 ‘knock at the door’

CAUSING SUBEVENT [[someone **use** knocking-sound **in-a-manner**]_e
 CAUSE

MOTION [knocking-sound **move towards** addressee] e₂
 CAUSED SUBEVENT &
 CONTACT [knocking-sound **touching** addressee] e₃]

Now, note that what this analysis clearly suggests is that, instead of a *manner-of-speech* verb, *llamar* behaves as a *message-transfer* verb¹¹. This may seem controversial according to Levin's classification since message-transfer verbs exhibit some specific characteristics, the most representative being their participation in the dative alternation illustrated below through the English examples (see Levin 1993: 202-203):

- (39) a. John asked a question **to Mary**
 a'. John asked **Mary** a question
 b. Juan (preguntó) hizo **una pregunta a María** (John asked a question **to Mary**)
 b'. Juan (preguntó) hizo **a María una pregunta** (John asked **Mary** a question)

As shown by (39b) and (39b'), message-transfer verbs in Spanish do not follow this alternation pattern. The reason is that this verb class is subject to the so-called Latinate restriction which prevents Spanish verbs from occurring in this alternation (see Levin 1993: 203; Krifka 2004).

At first glance, it may also seem problematic that, as the examples in (40) show, this verb class does not occur with *at*-prepositional constructions in English, which in practice means that it cannot possibly participate in the conative alternation (see Levin, 2003). Notice, however, that Spanish represents exactly the reverse case in two ways: first, as it was stated in the introduction, Spanish *a* is obligatory with animate objects as in (40b), and second, with inanimate objects, as illustrated in (40c), a *transfer of message* verb like *preguntar* (ask), much like *llamar*, conveys conative meaning: what (40c) means is that someone "throws out" a question which is not directed to any specific addressee and therefore not necessarily expected to be answered either.

- (40) a. John asked Hellen...
 a'. *John asked at Hellen...
 b. Juan preguntó a Elena
 'John asked Hellen'
 b'. *Juan preguntó Elena
 c. ¿Cocainómano?-**preguntó al aire**
 INT. cocaine.addict-M.SG ask-PST.3.SG **at-OBJ** air-DEF.M.SG
 'cocaine addict? (he) asked (threw out a question to) the air'
 [CREA. Giménez Bartlett, Alicia. *Serpientes en el paraíso. El nuevo caso de Petra Delicado*. Planeta. Barcelona. 2002, p. 63]

6. RECONSIDERING THE CRITERIA FOR THE CONATIVE CONSTRUCTION

Our analysis has particularly challenged some of the agreed general criteria for the conative construction, originally put forward by Levin (1993) and Goldberg (1995). In Section 5, some important weaknesses related to these criteria have been brought to light. First, it appears that considering that the conative construction occurs with verbs denoting motion-contact oversimplifies a more complex scenario (cf. Levin 1993). While a verb like *golpear* conveys “motion” and “contact” as semantic components, other verbs like *tocar*, *mirar* and *llamar* do not include “motion” as a component, but rather as a kind of entailment of their meaning. As stated above, this component is explicitly introduced in the specific conative sentences by means of a compositional mechanism, triggered by the *a*-phrase, in which both the lexical and the constructional levels are involved.

We have already indicated that this mechanism underlying the foregrounding of a given semantic feature can be identified with the notion of semantic co-composition as described in Pustejovsky’s (1998) Qualia Theory. Briefly, co-composition is described as a process involving the conflation of semantic information from the main predicate (the verb) and a secondary predicate like the preposition *a* in these sentences.

Broadly speaking, our analysis agrees with Pustejovsky’s treatment of expressions like *float into the cave* which, much like, for instance, *tocar a la puerta*, contain stative verbs in composition with directional prepositional phrases (Pustejovsky 1998: 122 ff). Below in (41), we give a schematic representation of this process. In Pustejovsky’s view, the preposition in these structures (e.g. *a la puerta/ into the cave*) activates “the motion sense as part of its qualia structure” (Pustejovsky 1998: 126). This is expressed by means of the Telic Quale (QT) associated to the preposition (a_{PREP}) which specifies the direction-plus-location of the activity. It is in composition with the stative verb *tocar*, which designates ‘contact’ and is thus associated to the Formal Locative Quale (QF), that the new sense, i.e. the conative meaning of *tocar a la puerta*, emerges (cf. (32) above):

- (41)
- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p style="margin: 0;">Co-composition:
Coercion
E.g. <i>tocar a la puerta</i></p> | { | <p style="margin: 0;">$tocar_V$ Formal Quale (QF): Locative –Contact subevent (touching)
E.g. <i>tocar la puerta</i></p> <p style="margin: 0;">a_{PREP} Telic Quale (QT): Motion- Motion subevent (move)</p> |
|--|---|--|

From a constructional standpoint, co-composition processes of this type trigger coercion in lexical constructional subsumption. Coercion basically takes place when a given construction “imposes” its structure over a lexical structure. This is formulated in terms of the so-called Extended Override Principle (Cortés-Rodríguez 2009: 258-259):

“If lexical and constructional features conflict, the feature specifications of the lexical element conform to those of the construction with which that lexical item is combined”.

Besides coercion, co-composition can be instantiated through “Elaboration”, i.e. the full matching between lexical and constructional features (see Cortés-Rodríguez 2009: 258). A good example of elaboration is precisely *golpear a*, as in *golpear a la puerta*, since, as we have made clear in Section 3, the semantics of the verb *golpear* (already) contains all the features (motion and contact) that characterize the conative construction. The representation in (42) below shows how, in a clear contrast with the process of coercion outlined in (41), the Telic Quale defined for the verb fully overlaps with the Telic Quale of the preposition *a*:

(42)

Co-composition: Elaboration	{	<table style="border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding-right: 10px;"><i>golpear</i>_V</td> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">{</td> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">Formal Quale (QF): Locative –Contact subevent (touching)</td> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">}</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="padding-right: 10px;">Telic Quale (QT): Motion- Motion subevent (move)</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	<i>golpear</i> _V	{	Formal Quale (QF): Locative –Contact subevent (touching)	}			Telic Quale (QT): Motion- Motion subevent (move)	
<i>golpear</i> _V	{	Formal Quale (QF): Locative –Contact subevent (touching)	}							
		Telic Quale (QT): Motion- Motion subevent (move)								
		E.g. <i>golpear la puerta</i>								
		<i>a</i> _{PREP} Telic Quale (QT): Motion- Motion subevent (move)								

E.g. *¡golpear a la puerta*

One major consequence of our analysis is therefore that what seems to be a *conditio sine qua non* for the occurrence of a given verb in the conative construction is the presence of ‘contact’ as part of the verb’s meaning components, whereas ‘motion’ may be incorporated through lexical-constructional mechanisms activated by the prepositional complement. This salient status of the preposition in the constructional process, both in syntactic and semantic terms, would explain why the conative construction extends to cover verb classes other than *golpear* (English *hit*), such as Perception (*mirar*) and Speech (*llamar*).

Another consequence derived from this analysis is that the transitivity condition (see (9i) above) does not preclude conative realization. Though most of the verbs under inspection here indeed occur in transitive-conative alternation (i.e. *golpear (a) la mesa*; *tocar (a) la puerta*; *mirar (a) la luna*), the verb *llamar* does not fulfil this precondition (cf. **llamar la puerta / llamar a la puerta*).

Given these facts, we finally propose to reformulate the original criteria along the following lines (cf. Levin 1993: 7 and 41):

- (43) i. The conative construction encodes concepts of ‘motion’ and ‘contact’.
 ii. The conative construction is favoured by verbs conveying ‘contact’.

- iii. The conative construction conveys the meaning X DIRECTS ACTION AT Y whereby the realization of the end-contact event is not necessarily implied.
- iv. The conative construction is activated by prepositional complementation: introduced by *at/on* in English and *a* in Spanish.

7. CONCLUSION

The central concern in this paper has been to give support to the recognition of a type of conative construction in Spanish. In so doing, we have followed the perspective propounded within the LCM which provides a suitable framework to keep trace of the processes that lie at the syntax-semantics interface. After examining a considerable amount of data collected through corpora, we have found stable evidence that this construction indeed occurs with some Spanish verbs and we have set out the conditions which determine its realization with some relevant verb classes. We have drawn the general conclusion that, in identifying the conative construction, two important considerations must be taken into account: first, the conative construction can be defined independently from the realization of the transitive-conative alternation and, second, conative meaning is motivated by means of at least two distinct processes of which “elaboration” represents the unmarked case, with motion-contact verbs, and “coercion” is a resourceful device whereby conative meaning is derived from essentially contact verbs.

NOTES

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- 1. Financial support for this study has come from the project “Construcción de una base de datos léxica y construccional inglés-español en el nivel de gramática nuclear” (Ref: FFI2008-05035-c02-02/FILO) funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology.
- 2. In using *Webcorp* as a complementary source, we have followed the guidelines for corpus-based linguistic studies put forward by Pérez and Peña (2009:59-60).
- 3. All examples from Spanish are glossed according to the interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glossing conventions provided by the *Leipzig Glossing Rules* (http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/pdf/LGR09_02_23.pdf).
- 4. Most attempts to characterize the syntactic and semantic status of the Spanish preposition *a* have basically revolved around criteria like the animacy of the subject and the object noun phrases, the definiteness or indefiniteness of the object noun phrases and the semantic class of the verb. For a detailed account of direct object prepositional complementation in Spanish, see Mendeikoetxea (1999) and Torrego (1999).
- 5. This representation adapts aspects of the Lexical Structure for Active Accomplishments propounded in RRG (see Van Valin and LaPolla 1997:121; Mairal 2003). Following the conventions applied within RRG and the LCM, the predicates (*use*, *in.a.manner*, *move towards* and *touching*), which have universal status, are specified, in bold type (see Goddard, 2002: 307; Mairal and Guest, 2005). Besides, CAUSE is an operator introducing the caused subevent in for causal structures.
- 6. Note also the English structures [...] *her hand strikes at Kate's lips*. (see <http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/Miracle-Worker,-The.html>).

7. On experiential grounds, we actually assume that a ball is not expected to move on its own. In this respect, consider the notion of “onset causation” in Croft (1998: 83) and Talmy (2000: 417). A ball is essentially an object ‘to be hit at’ and roll away in the direction towards which some impelling force pushes it i.e. towards a destination. This force is sometimes provided by contextual information as in (16d), where Hurst is the effector in the causing event. Then, after some impelling force has been applied to the ball (e.g. Hurst’s kicking it), it begins to roll in the direction of/towards the crossbar but, whether the ball touches the crossbar or not is neither made explicit nor necessarily inferred from the construction.
8. The subjects in these sentences are neither natural forces (i.e. they are not capable of independent motion) nor prototypical instruments with the verb *golpear*, i.e. used as manipulated tools (cf. (18b’) *to hit a car by using another car). Nevertheless, they are endowed with some autonomy of action; much like balls, engine-powered entities like printers, motorcycles, cars, boats, etc. are manipulated and, at the same time, they are capable of independent motion. These features draw the line with respect to natural forces which are defined as non-manipulable and independent-motion entities, as well as with respect to instruments, which are manipulable but non-independent-motion entities.
9. Some authors contend that this construction appears after the 13th c. Indeed, no record preceding this period has been found in the *CORDE* (cf. González 2006).
10. The participants represented in (40) are the result of the metonymy SOUND FOR EVENT CAUSING IT which, in its turn, motivates the metaphorical projection COMMUNICATIVE ACTION IS EFFECTUAL ACTION according to which “the sound caused by knocking at the door”, instead of “the sound caused by speaking”, is taken as the message-conveyer.
11. Though we shall not give in this paper further details about the interpretation of English *call*, it seems appropriate to mention here that the analysis we propound for Spanish applies to the English verb classification as well: just as *llamar* (cf. *Llamó repetidas veces; Llamó desesperadamente; Por favor, no grites;* etc.), *call* does not merely designate using speech in a given manner. Compare: *John called Melany, She called repeatedly, Please do not shout.* Furthermore, note the similarities between the samples we have studied here and the following sample extracted from the BNC: [...] a *Jehovah’s Witness called at the door earlier. He asked me if I was willing to let Jehovah into my life* [BNC. *Life at the tip: Les Bence on the game.* Grist, Mervin. London: Virgin, 1993. pp. 1-201].

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