What do we give in Spanish when we hit?  
A constructionist account of hitting expressions*

ENRIQUE PALANCAR

O Maria, miserere Johannis

Abstract

This article is a contrastive analysis of how differently hitting events are provided linguistic expression in languages like Spanish on the one hand, and English on the other. However, the emphasis in the analysis is laid on Spanish data. The data are judged to have internal structure by virtue of a special grammatical construction, which I have termed the “hitting construction”. The proposal is innovative in seeing these data for the first time as forming a unified and motivated lexical network. The construction advocated in the article bears both semantic and syntactic structure, and motivates the pervasive hitting semantics found in the items treated throughout. The data come from Peninsular Spanish, although the structural phenomenon applies to Spanish as a dia-system, disregarding dialectal lexical differences.

Keywords: construction; Spanish; dative; hit.

1. Introduction

In this article I introduce a special grammatical construction in Spanish which provides linguistic expression to hitting events.1 This constructionist proposal has wide explanatory power in accounting for a variety of lexical data which, in Spanish, render nuances of hitting actions. That the data form a complex unified phenomenon has long passed unnoticed by linguists. Among the lexical phenomena I have in mind, consider the following:

1. The verbs dar ‘give’ and pegar ‘glue/stick to’ have undergone a diachronic semantic extension and can mean ‘hit’ in current Spanish.
2. There are a huge number of nouns in all dialects of Spanish which express a generic type of hitting action. These nouns do not
originally stem from hitting verbs, and some of them are drawn from unrelated semantic fields, e.g., leche ‘milk’, galleta ‘round biscuit’, torta ‘flat cake’, and castaña ‘chestnut’ can all be also used with the meaning ‘hit’ (nominal).

3. Most of these nouns are formations with the suffixes -azo or -ada, e.g., trompazo ‘great hit affecting the entire body’ from trompa ‘trump’ + -azo, patada ‘kick’ from pata ‘leg’ + ada.

4. The suffix -azo when attached to nouns can render their referents as the instruments of a hitting action, e.g., botellazo ‘great hit with a bottle’ from botella ‘bottle’, hachazo ‘great hit with an ax’ from hacha ‘ax’.

The goal of the article is to show how these data can be accounted for in a unified fashion as being due to a special grammatical construction. The proposal advocated here is novel in two main senses: on the one hand, it introduces for the first time the notion that these lexical phenomena are related and form a unified lexical network; on the other, it provides an explanation in constructionist terms of the way the data have managed to acquire a sense of ‘hitting’ in modern Spanish.

In the next sections (sections 2 to 4 inclusive), I present a general overview of the way hitting events are encoded in both Spanish and English. This introduction is intended to help the reader gain a coherent understanding of the roles involved in hitting events as treated throughout the article. Section 5 is entirely devoted to a detailed account of the Spanish construction advocated in the article. In section 6, I introduce the results of two experiments which were conducted in order to check the semantic productivity of the construction.

2. Hitting events

We form a whole with our body, and bodily experience is basic to us (Johnson 1987). In broad terms, hitting events refer to a fundamental type of basic experience involving the body. In a “hitting event” (H-event) a sentient human being is physically affected, and most often harmed. This state of affairs is reached through the interaction with other human beings who have directed physical force at him/her, or through his/her own physical interaction with other entities in the environment.

In Spanish, as in English, there are two main structural patterns to provide linguistic expression to hitting events: a transitive pattern, as illustrated in (1), and a dative pattern, as shown in (2). Sentences (1b) and (2b) give the closest English equivalents to the Spanish examples.
When reporting a given hitting event, Spanish seems to favor the dative pattern in (2).³ As a fundamental claim of this article, I maintain that this dative pattern has motivated the rise of a special grammatical construction for reporting hitting events. I will refer to this construction as the “hitting construction” (H-construction). I use the term construction here with the sense it carries in construction grammar (Fillmore and Kay 1994; Fillmore et al. 1988; Fillmore 1985, 1988), particularly in the model of Goldberg (1992, 1995). Construction grammar constitutes a unifying approach to the grammar and lexicon of a language. Grammar is seen as an array of constructions which bear both semantic and syntactic structure, and which bestow structure and organization on the lexicon. Not all languages will share the same array of (nonlexical) constructions, and consequently, events will be construed by other structural means. I claim this is the case in the Spanish hitting construction. The construction has evolved as an extension of the dative pattern illustrated in (2a) above, which is also viable in English as a ditransitive pattern—shown in (2b)—although in the latter language it has not yet evolved into a proper, independent construction.

In the next subsection, I introduce the participants and the perspectives involved in the construal of a hitting event. I do this with the intention of creating a unified metalanguage for the rest of the discussion, as this develops in the following sections, up to section 7 where I present my general concluding remarks.

2.1. Perspectives and participants in hitting events

In this section, I treat the participants taking part in hitting events. A hitting event can be conceptually construed from two perspectives. These perspectives emerge from our direct experience of hitting events:

1. The agentive perspective. The hitting event is understood as involving two (typically human) parties in an asymmetrical hitting interaction.
2. The affected perspective. The hitting event involves a single party. This party suffers the hitting event it has brought about through its own physical interaction with the environment.
Let us examine these perspectives in more detail.

2.1.1. **Agentive perspective.** From the agentive perspective, the party initiating and controlling the hitting action is treated as the hitter (HITTER). The hitter is believed (by default) to have initiated the hitting action volitionally. The party who is physically affected by this hitting action is treated as the hittee (HITTEE). In macrorole terms (Van Valin 1991), the hitter is regarded as actor, and the hittee as undergoer. This is illustrated by sentence (3a), in Spanish, and (3b), its English gloss.

(3) a. **HITTER** HIT  **HITTEE**  
María golpeó a Juan.
Mary hit-3SP to John

b. ‘Mary hit John.’

Sentences (3a) and (3b) instantiate a hitting event framed in transitive terms. The participant Mary is construed as the hitter—the actor initiating the hitting action—and gets coded as subject. John is the hittee or the most affected participant in the hitting action. The hittee is treated as object in both languages; occurring after the verb in English, and following the preposition a—an object marker for animates—in Spanish. In both languages the clausal verbs render a generic type of hitting action.

In example (3) the hittee is seen as holistically affected in the event. Some part of the hittee’s body may be saliently affected by the action, and may then be specified in the predication. I will refer to this entity as the hit body part (HIT-BP), which is illustrated in examples (4) and (5).

(4)  **HITTER**  HIT  **HITTEE**  HIT-BP
a. María le golpeó a Juan en la cabeza.
    Mary hit John on the head.

b. ‘Mary hit John’s head against the wall.’

(5) **HITTER**  HIT  **HITTEE**  HIT-BP  SETTING
a. María le golpeó a Juan la cabeza contra la pared.
    Mary hit John’s head against the wall.

The hit body part may be thematically construed as the ground to which the hitting action is applied, and may be coded with a locative PP, as in (4a) and (4b). It may also be seen as the most saliently affected participant, and may thus be syntactically treated as the object, as example (5) illustrates.

The hitter may use a certain body part (or any other object) to direct the hitting action at the hittee. Since this entity is understood within this
agentive perspective as an instrument, I will refer to it generically as the hitting instrument (HITTING-I). Consider for this purpose the role of the hitting instruments—the stick and the right hand—in the events profiled in (6) and (7).

(6)  
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<tr>
<th>HITTER</th>
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<th>HIT-BP</th>
<th>HITTING-I</th>
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<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>María</td>
<td>le golpeó</td>
<td>a Juan</td>
<td>en la cabeza con un palo.</td>
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<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>‘Mary’</td>
<td>hit</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>in the head with a stick.’</td>
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</table>

(7)  
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<tr>
<th>HITTER</th>
<th>HIT</th>
<th>HITTEE</th>
<th>HITTING-I</th>
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<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>María</td>
<td>le golpeó</td>
<td>a Juan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>‘Mary’</td>
<td>hit</td>
<td>John</td>
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</table>

2.1.2. Affected perspective. Construed from the affected perspective, a hitting event involves a single participant, which I term the figure (FIG). This participant is seen as being physically affected by a given hitting action which he/she has provoked through direct physical interaction with the environment. The affected perspective is grammatically framed in terms of the agentive. For this reason, it is structurally irrelevant for the purpose of this study and will not be pursued much further here. Example (8) illustrates an instance of an event construed from this perspective in both languages. Notice that the coreferentiality of the arguments is marked by means of a reflexive pronoun:

(8)  
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<th>FIG</th>
<th>HITTER</th>
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<th>SETTING</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>se</td>
<td>golpeó con la pared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>3RF</td>
<td>hit-3SP with the wall</td>
</tr>
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</table>

In English, an event framed with a reflexive construction as in (8b), stresses the salience of the figure as hittee (Pederson 1991). When this is not relevant for informative purposes, such events are often framed in more transitive terms, as illustrated by sentence (9b), where the hit body part is treated as the hittee and is coded as object. This option is also possible in Spanish where the reflexive is still present, as in (9a):6

(9)  
<table>
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<th>FIG</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>se</td>
<td>golpeó la cabeza con la pared.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>3RF</td>
<td>hit-3SP the head</td>
<td>against the wall.’</td>
</tr>
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</table>
3. Transitive pattern for hitting events

All examples presented in section 2 illustrate what I have treated as the transitive pattern in the framing of hitting events. In this transitive pattern the clausal verb renders the hitting action. Verbs conveying some nuance of hitting will be called “hitting verbs” here. The transitive pattern is largely favored in English, whereas it is marginal in Spanish, with only a few verbs occurring in this frame. Most of the Spanish hitting verbs, those of more frequent use, signify a generic type of hitting action akin to the English verb *beat*. The verbs are presented in List 1:

**List 1**

- *apalear* ‘beat/club’
- *calentar* ‘beat’ (also ‘heat’)
- *canear* ‘beat’
- *golpear* ‘hit/beat’
- *hostiar* / *fostiar* ‘bash/sock’ [slang]
- *tortear* ‘hit/slap’
- *zurrar* ‘beat/flog’

The verbs render hitting events with no apparent specification of manner, referring instead to a generic type of hitting action whose manner is only retrievable from contextual knowledge (e.g., ‘kick’, ‘punch’, ‘lash’, etc.). The verbs construe the action as aspectually iterative. Besides this, the verbs can only be used to refer to events from the agentive perspective, with the exception of *golpear* (and the slang expression *hostiar*). This latter point is illustrated by the infelicity of example (10):

(10) (affected perspective)
*Juan se zurró con la escalera.*
John 3RF HIT/beat-3SP with the stairs
*‘John beat himself with the stairs.’*

Apart from the generic hitting verbs in List 1, there is a different group of verbs which elaborate on some parameter of the manner of hitting. List 2 includes examples of this type of manner-of-hitting verbs:

**List 2**

- *abofetear* ‘slap’
- *azotar* ‘spank/lash’
- *collejear* ‘hit’ [HITTING-I: flat hand; HIT-BP: nape]
- *patear* ‘(iterative) hit’ [HITTING-I: both legs; HIT-BP: the ground or the trunk of HITTEE lying on the ground] (also ‘go tramping around’)
All these hitting verbs construe the hitting action as iterative by default. However, they can also refer to hitting events where there is no overt specification of the number of actions performed by the hitter; any semelfactive interpretation is left to contextual knowledge about the way (Western) people commonly interact in situations involving hitting. The transitive pattern thus imposes an aspectual iterative/non-semelfactive character on the hitting event. This aspectual factor constrains the linguistic application of this pattern onto hitting events which are prototypically seen as noniterative. In this light, it is worth noting that Peninsular Spanish lacks verbs which correspond to English kick or punch, which refer to events with a salient semelfactive component. Such stereotypical semelfactive hitting events are rendered in Spanish by means of the dative pattern (see section 5 and subsection 5.1), as in (11a), which also has its English counterpart, as illustrated by (11b).

(11) a. María le dio a Juan una patada/un puñetazo.
    Mary CL give-3SP to John a kick a punch
    ‘Mary gave John a kick/a punch.’

These hitting verbs are often used to describe events where the hittee is seen as highly and wholly affected by the iterative action profiled by the verb. Example (12) may serve to illustrate such a construal, where the inalienable hit body part is coded as the object and the hittee as a dative participant:

(12) María le zurró las espaldas a Juan.
    Mary CL HIT/beat-3SP the backs to John
    ‘Mary beat John hard (as a way of punishing him).’

4. Dative/Ditransitive pattern for hitting events

The dative/ditransitive pattern is the alternative coding option available in both Spanish and English for the framing of a given hitting event. In English, the pattern is better characterized as ditransitive, since it involves two objects, whereas in Spanish the pattern should be treated as dative, since it involves both a direct and an indirect object. In this section I first introduce how this pattern works in English, and then proceed, in section 5, to show how it applies to the Spanish data in a rather special way. For this purpose, consider example (2b), repeated here as (13):

(13) Mary gave John a kick.

Example (13) instantiates a hitting event metaphorically construed in terms of a transfer (“metaphorical” is used here in the same sense as in Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In other words, the hitting interaction is
conceived of as a transfer (the clausal verb give) where the hitting action (the NP a kick) is the object being transferred. This phenomenon can be accounted for as a case of a more generic metaphorical extension that “… involves understanding actions that are intentionally directed to another person as being entities which are transferred to that person” (Goldberg 1995: 149). Such a metaphor is exemplified in English by sentence (14), where all nouns in the object NP slot refer to different actions:

(14) She gave him a wink/kiss/wave/finger/bow. (Goldberg 1995: 94)

In the ditransitive pattern, the hittee is assigned a different thematic role to that in the transitive pattern. In the former, the hittee is seen as the recipient, towards whom the hitting action is directed, in clear contrast to the transitive pattern where the hittee is treated as a prototypical patient or undergoer. The type of ditransitive construction at work in English is presented in Figure 1 (adapted from Goldberg 1995: 91, 96).

The figure is a formal representation which captures the construction as forming a linguistic unit with two main interactive levels of organization: the semantic (sem) and the syntactic (syn). The relational level (R) allows the incorporation of a given predicate, which in turn receives the argument structure of the construction. In this construction, the theme—or moving entity—is in pragmatic focus, and the recipient is ascribed bene- or malefactive nuances as a result of the transfer. The English sentence (15) elaborates on transfer events, and illustrates this construction. Sentence (16) shows the metaphorical extension under discussion.

(15) Mary gave/offered John a cake as a present.
(16) Mary gave John a kick.

Hitting events which lay special pragmatic focus on the hittee, can be predicated by taking a different focal perspective in the transfer frame (using “frame” as in Fillmore 1985). English verbs like take, receive, and

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<th>Sem Cause/Receive &lt;</th>
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<th>Rec</th>
<th>Theme &gt;</th>
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<tr>
<td>R: PRED &lt;</td>
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<td>Syn V Subj Obj₁ Obj₂</td>
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Figure 1.
get lexicalize on the inverse perspective of the transfer, which proves how well the logic of a transfer scenario is preserved throughout the metaphorical mapping. Sentences (17) to (19) illustrate this inverse perspective—sentences (17) and (18) are taken from Goldberg, but have been remodeled here to include Mary and John:

(17) John took a punch from Mary.
(18) John received a slap/kick/smack from Mary.
(19) John got a punch in the nose.

The nouns punch, slap, kick, and smack in these examples illustrate the fact that most of the hitting nouns found in the ditransitive frame in English are nominalizations of manner-of-hitting verbs. There are, however, a few nonderived hitting nouns, such as blow, which prototypically involves a fist as hitting instrument, or high five, hook, and peck, which pertain to boxing contexts.8

The ditransitive pattern shows some restrictions in English. The pattern may render sentences which can be pragmatically odd when they report events construed under the affected perspective, as in example (20):

(20) John gave his head a smack.

Sentence (20) seem to stress John’s will to hit himself. This is a possible reading, given a suitable context, but one which may nevertheless be regarded as pragmatically odd. It emerges as a result of the ditransitive construction, which stresses volition on the part of the participant treated as subject (perhaps due to pragmatic inheritance from the metaphorical mapping). There are some further lexical restrictions upon the use of nouns in this frame, because not all hitting verbs have a derived noun which can appear in the frame with felicity. This restriction is shown in sentence (21)—in contrast, a transitive pattern, as in (22), would be perfectly fine for these verbs.

(21) Mary gave John a bump/smash/knock in the face.
(22) Mary bumped/smashed/knocked John’s face against the wall.

5. The Spanish hitting construction

In this article I claim that Spanish has a special grammatical construction which I generically term the “hitting construction” (H-Construction). The hitting construction expresses events in which human undergoers are physically affected by (physical) interactions with other agents or with entities in the environment. These physical interactions
are judged to entail a certain (strong) degree of hard impact upon (the physical integrity of) the affected human.

I have applied the term hitting to the definitional profile of the construction, because events involving hitting are most typical in referring to the causal forceful actions expressed by the construction. The construction, however, also serves well in providing linguistic expression to other events which bear no apparent similarity to hitting events proper. These events are seen as less prototypical human physical interactions, but are nonetheless construed as affecting the undergoer in a relevant way. This is illustrated by the following sentences. (In the constructional frame view, the verbs in [23] to [25] convey the forceful component, whilst this reading is provided by the noun telefonazo in example [26].)

(23) *María le soltó* un beso a Juan en medio de la calle.
Mary CL release-3SP a kiss to John in middle of the street
‘Mary gave John a kiss in the middle of the street (unexpectedly).’

(24) *María le pegó* tal grito a Juan
Mary CL stick:to-3SP such shout to John
*que casi se queda sordo.*
that almost 3RF remains-SU deaf
‘Mary let off (such) a yell at John that (it) nearly deafened him.’

(25) *María le metió* un susto a Juan.
Mary CL put:in-3SP a fright to John
‘Mary scared John.’

(26) *María le dio* un telefonazo a Juan.
Mary CL give-3SP a phone-AZO to John
‘Mary gave John a call.’ (slang)

In sentence (23), Mary kisses John, and it seems John did not anticipate Mary’s reaction; it is thus to be expected that John will react to her kissing in some noticeable way or another. In (24), Mary screams at John, perhaps to scold him or to warn him of some danger. John is badly affected by the sound, and would react accordingly. In (25), Mary has John scared for a moment. Finally, in sentence (26) Mary’s phone call is judged to have some effect on John’s daily life, perhaps to remind him of a given date or of something that must be done.

As can be seen in these examples, the construction frames these events so as to imply a “forceful” component that has an effect on the undergoer. If the same event is framed in any other way the forceful causal component is not present; consider for example sentences
(27) and (28) which illustrate other options for the event described in (26):

(27) *María le llamó por teléfono a Juan.*

Mary CL call-3SP by phone to John
‘Mary phoned/called John.’

(28) *María le telefoneó a Juan.*

Mary CL phone-3SP to John
‘Mary phoned/called John.’

Even though sentence (27) may sound a bit more natural than sentence (28), unlike example (26) neither of these two sentences conveys any sense of force exerted upon John. The same is true of other types of physical interaction which in principle do not imply any hard impact upon the undergoer, such as “smiling” or “looking” events. However, when these events are framed with the hitting construction, they are construed as implying a slight forceful component directed at the undergoer. Consider sentences (29) and (30), which are colloquial, as illustrative of this.

(29) *María le soltó una sonrisa a Juan.*

Mary CL release-3SP a smile to John
‘Mary smiled at John unexpectedly/in a provocative way.’

(30) *María le pegó una mirada a Juan que casi se cae del asiento.*

Mary CL stick:to-3SP a look to John
that almost 3RF falls of:the seat
‘Mary looked at John in such a provocative way that she almost knocked him off his seat.’

In both examples Mary has a provocative attitude towards John. In (29) the emphasis is laid on the unexpectedness of the smile. Sentence (30) may sound odd to a native speaker unless a rather provocative scenario is evoked. In this scenario Mary could be taken to have some sexual intention with respect to John, which almost “knocks” him off his seat. Mary expects that by acting provocatively, as she does, John will react in some way or another to her intentions.

In the following sections I will present a number of arguments and evidence to support the claims being made in this article about the existence of this grammatical construction. In subsection 5.1, I argue that the construction first emerged from the dative construction, but soon received an abstract sense of hitting (via metonymy) from the elements occurring in the frame, so that verbs which originally did not express hitting acquired this meaning in later stages. In subsections 5.2 and 5.3,
I show the productive pragmatic use of the construction when the hittee is in focus and the event is construed under the affected perspective. In subsection 5.4, I offer an account of the nouns which are imbued with a hitting sense when they occur within the frame. Most of these nouns fail to specify the manner of hitting, which proves the abstract constructional origin of their meaning. Besides, most of the hitting verbs examined in section 3 are morphologically derived from these nouns. Similarly, further evidence is presented in subsection 5.5, in the form of the special hitting sense which the augmentative suffix -azo has acquired in modern Spanish, which I also claim originated from the semantics associated with the frame.

5.1. Origin of the hitting construction

The hitting construction stems from the Spanish dative construction, which serves to refer to events of transfer. This use is illustrated by sentence (31), which instantiates the dative construction as presented in Figure 2 (the subscript a is the marker of the dative participant).

\[(31) \text{María le dio / ofreció / pidió / vendió a Juan un regalo.} \]

Mary CL give / offer- / ask:for-/ sell-3SP to John a present

‘Mary gave/offered/sold John a present’; ‘Mary asked John for a present.’

In principle, sentences like (32), which include the verb dar and refer to hitting events, could be taken to emerge from a direct metaphorical reading of a transfer scenario, just like the English examples treated in section 4.

\[(32) \text{María le dio a Juan una patada.} \]

Mary CL give-3SP to John a kick

‘Mary gave John a kick.’

However, there are many verbs in Spanish which also render hitting events within this dative frame, but not all of them elaborate on transfers as dar does in (31). This proves that their hitting semantics cannot emerge from a direct metaphorical mapping. To illustrate the point, take

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<tr>
<td>Syn</td>
<td>V Subj (CL) Dat Obj₂ Obj</td>
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Figure 2.
two common verbs capable of expressing hitting, *pegar* ‘stick to’ and *meter* ‘put in’, as in examples (33) and (34):

(33) *María le pegó a Juan un tortazo.*
    Mary CL stick:to-3SP to John a HIT
    ‘Mary smacked John’s face.’
(34) *María le metió a Juan una leche.*
    Mary CL put:in-3SP to John a HIT
    ‘Mary thumped John (in the face).’

These verbs do not designate literal transfer—as shown by the infelicity of example (35)—but have other meanings. The verb *pegar* still means ‘glue’, as in (36), a sense which lies closest to its etymological origin: from the (late) Latin verb *picare*, and from the noun *pix* - *picis > Sp. pez* ‘pitch, glue’ (Moliner 1992 [*DUE*]; Corominas 1954 [*DCELC*]). The verb nowadays also has a prominent spatial meaning, ‘stick X to Y’, ‘move X up against Y’, as shown in sentence (37). The verb *meter* is a causative motion verb, and can be translated as ‘put X into Y’, as shown in (38).

(35) *María le pegó / metió a Juan un regalo.*
    Mary CL stick:to-/ put:in-3SP to John a present
    ‘Mary ‘transferred’ a present to John.’
(36) *María pegó las piezas del jarrón roto.*
    Mary glue-3SP the pieces of:the vase broken
    ‘Mary glued together the pieces of the broken vase.’
(37) *María pegó el armario a la pared.*
    Mary stick:to-3SP the wardrobe to the wall
    ‘Mary moved the wardrobe up against the wall.’
(38) *María metió el vaso en la nevera.*
    Mary put:in-3SP the glass in the fridge
    ‘Mary put the glass in the fridge.’

The verbs, as they occur in sentences (36) to (38), are transitive. The verb *soltar*, which can also express hitting in the dative frame as in (39), has both a nontransfer meaning—as in (40), where it means ‘release’—and a (colloquial) transfer meaning—as in (41), where it designates an unexpected transfer. (For other verbs which can be employed in the construction see Table A in the Appendix.)

(39) *María le soltó a Juan una bofetada.*
    Mary CL release-3SP to John a slap
    ‘Mary slapped John (and he didn’t expect it).’
María soltó a la paloma.
Mary release-3SP to the pigeon
‘Mary set the pigeon free.’

María le soltó un regalo a Juan en medio de la fiesta.
Mary CL release-3SP a present to John in middle of the party
‘Mary gave John a present in the middle of the party (and he didn’t expect it).’

The dative construction in Spanish highlights the spatial directionality of the transfers it expresses. This directional feature can be further specified as describing an allative trajectory from the actor to the recipient, and is evidenced by the use of the same preposition a to mark both an allative path—as in

Nos vamos a la playa.
1PL:RF go-1PL to the beach
‘We are setting off for/to the beach.’

—and the recipient of the transfer (the hittee in the metaphorical extension).9

Following Goldberg (1995) and Lakoff (1987), who claim that constructions inherit structure from other, more basic constructions, I would argue that this allative directional component highlights the dative construction as an optimal candidate to provide structure via metaphor to other nontransfer events presenting a similar allative directionality. This is the case for hitting events. In the conceptual structure of prototypical hitting events, the hitter party (taken as a whole) is construed as initiating a motion event from a given source location towards the target location of the space of the hittee-to-be.10 Framing the hitting event within the dative construction implies highlighting the hitting action as dynamically directional. At a high level of abstraction, Spanish speakers not only regard the hitting action as the object in a given transfer—as is the case in English—but as an object “directed” to somebody in some way or another.

The verbs in the construction elaborate on this “directed” action by means of a directional component which is present in their semantic structure. This is why verbs like pegar, meter, and soltar occur within the frame (see Table A in the Appendix). In other words, in pegar + NP the event is treated as the “directing” of a hitting action by moving it (the hitting action) “up against” the space of the hittee; in meter, as the “directing” and moving of the hitting action “into” the space of the hittee. The case of soltar is more complex: the action is first construed as an object to be “released” from the hitter’s space (the hitter’s psyche is
seen metaphorically as an enclosure) and then “directed” toward the physical space of the hittee.

The verbs reporting the event convey different pragmatic nuances. These nuances may also be accounted for as inheritances from the spatial image-schematic structure of the verbs: of the latter, *dar* is the most neutral choice (for some evidence see subsection 6.2); *pegar* conveys effect upon the hittee, which part in turn is somewhat highlighted in *meter*, since the physical space of the hittee is conceived of as an enclosure; *soltar* indicates unexpectedness from the viewpoint of the hittee with regard to the hitting action (the hitter is seen as having been psychologically struggling with the idea of interacting before deciding to act. The hittee or the observer would only have realized the hitter’s intentions the moment he/she had already acted).

At an early stage, presumably only a few verbs would have occurred in the dative construction, always in combination with nouns conveying hitting meanings. More verbs were incorporated into the frame as the transfer semantics became backgrounded in favor of a more abstract reading which highlighted directionality. I presume that at this stage the frame was evolving into a favored option for encoding forceful causal actions. At some point, speakers would have metonymically associated the “hitting” meaning conveyed by the verbs and nouns in combination to the whole constructional frame, so that it gained abstract “hitting” semantics. As a consequence, the most common verbs occurring in the frame, *dar* ‘give’, *pegar* ‘stick to’, *arrear* ‘harness’, and *cobrar* ‘get one’s money’, acquired the abstract hitting semantics associated with the construction via metonymy. Nowadays, these verbs can render a hitting event without the noun conveying the hitting action, as illustrated by (42) and (43). In (43) the hittee is in focus (see subsection 5.2):

(42)   *María le dio / pegó / arreó a Juan.*
       Mary CL give-/ stick:to-/ harness-3SP to John
       ‘Mary hit John.’

(43)   *Juan cobró*
       John earn-3SP
       ‘John was beaten’, also ‘John got his wages.’

Here, the verbs give expression to a generic type of hitting action with no specification regarding the manner of hitting. Notice that the event in sentence (42) is reminiscent of the transitive pattern treated in section 3. However, the verbs *dar, pegar, and arrear* retain the dative structure from the construction, as illustrated by the standard infelicity of the use
of the (masculine) direct object clitic in (44), as opposed to (45) where the use of this alternative clitic is fine:

(44)  *María *lo / le dio / pegó / arreo a Juan.
      Mary CL: DO/ CL give-/ stick:to-/ harness-3SP to John
      ‘Mary hit John.’

(45)  María lo / le vio a Juan.
      Mary CL: DO CL see-3SP to John
      ‘Mary saw John’, or ‘It was John whom Mary saw.’

The semantic extension of *pegar seems to have taken place in early modern times, since Martín Alonso’s dictionary of Medieval Spanish (*DME*, Alonso 1986) does not include any hitting sense. The extension is nowadays so prominent that the semantic connection to other senses has become obscure to the modern speaker and the meanings are normally regarded as unrelated. This fact makes some lexicographers treat them as separate entries in dictionaries (e.g., *VOX* 1990). I gloss this semantic extension as “HIT/stick:to” when the verb occurs alone.

Other verbs in the construction, such as *soltar* and *meter*, have not undergone this extension and cannot operate as hitting verbs as shown by the infelicity of (46):

(46)  *María le soltó / metió a Juan.
      Mary CL release-/ put:in-3SP to John
      Intended meaning: ‘Mary hit John.’

However, the extension of the verb *meter* has become unstable in the slang of young urban speakers of Peninsular Spanish—a sentence like (47) is grammatical in urban slang, although it may still remain infelicitous for speakers of more standard varieties:

(47)  % María méte-le a Juan!
      Mary HIT/put:in-IMP-CL to John
      ‘Mary, hit John!’ (urban slang)

Figure 3 represents the Spanish hitting construction. In the representation I have broadened out the thematic level in an attempt to incorporate the participants relevant to the semantics of the construction.

5.2. The hitting construction with the hittee in focus

When the hittee is in pragmatic focus, the hitting action is framed through the construction in terms of an acquisition of some sort, just as in the English sentences (17) to (19) discussed in section 4. The verbs
llevar-se ‘take away’ and ganar-se ‘win for oneself’ render such a construal in sentences (48) and (49). Again, the reflexive highlights the involvement of and the effect upon the hittee. The verbs recibir ‘receive’ and cobrar ‘earn’ also occur in this frame, as in (50):

(48) Juan se llevó una patada por molestar a María.  
John 3RF carry:away-3SP a kick for bother-INF to Mary  
‘John got kicked because he bothered Mary.’

(49) Juan se ganó un tortazo por tirar el jarrón.  
John 3RF win-3SP a HIT for drop-INF the vase  
‘John got slapped because he dropped the vase.’

(50) a. Juan recibió unos cuantos palos en la manifestación.  
John receive-3SP a-Pl some HITs in the demonstration  
‘John got hit at the demonstration (several times).’

b. Juan cobró unos cuantos palos en la manifestación.  
John earn-3SP a-Pl some HITs in the demonstration  
‘John got hit at the demonstration (several times).’

In sentences (48) to (50), the hittees are judged to bear some degree of responsibility for being affected by the hitting interaction. This pragmatic nuance is conveyed by the verbs llevarse, ganarse, and cobrar, which give rise to relevant bene- or malefactive readings of the actions they convey. In the case of ganarse ‘win for oneself’ and cobrar ‘earn/get one’s wages’, the hitting action is seen as an acquisition with a certain value awarded to it, as if in some ironic sense the hittee were hit as a reward for his/her own behavior, thus making this his/her responsibility.

5.3. The hitting construction and the affected perspective

The Spanish hitting construction can freely encode a given hitting event within the affected perspective. This possibility contrasts with the English pragmatic restrictions on the ditransitive pattern, as discussed in section 4, example (20). A reflexive pronoun is again needed to mark the
coreferentiality of the hitter and the hittee as figure. Sentences (51) to (54) illustrate this affected construal:

(51) Juan se pegó un trastazo con la mesa.
John 3RF stick:to-3SP a HIT with the table
‘John hurt himself by bumping into the table.’

(52) Juan se arreó una torta con la escalera.
John 3RF harness-3SP a HIT with the stairs
‘John hurt himself with the stairs.’

(53) Juan se dio en la cabeza con la puerta.
John 3RF HIT/give-3SP in the head with the door
‘John hit his head against the door.’

(54) Juan se pegó con la pared.
John 3RF HIT/stick:to-3SP with the wall
‘John hit himself against the wall.’

5.4. The hitting nouns in the construction

The nouns in the construction convey the hitting action, and I refer to them here as hitting nouns. Most hitting nouns have been glossed as ‘hit’ because most of them do not lexicalize on the manner of hitting, and it is thus difficult to find English equivalents. (For some exceptions see Table B in the Appendix.) Manner of hitting is often retrieved from contextual knowledge surrounding the hitting event, but when taken out of context the nouns prototypically evoke an instance of “slapping”. This evocation reflects the prototypical status of this hitting interaction in our culture, which is possibly the first scenario to come to a speaker’s mind. The apparent lack of semantic specificity regarding the manner of hitting is illustrated with the hitting noun torta ‘hit; flat cake/tart’ in (55) and (56):

(55) María le dio a Juan una torta.
Mary CL HIT/give-3SP to John a HIT
‘Mary slapped John (badly).’

(56) Juan se metió una torta con la escalera.
John 3RF put:in-3S:P a HIT with the stairs
‘John hit himself badly with the stairs.’

In (55), the event is viewed from the agentive perspective, and the sentence renders by default a situation in which Mary slaps John’s face. However, in (56)—where the event is seen from the affected perspective—the noun torta renders a generic type of hitting affecting the hittee’s entire body.

Regarding their form, the nouns may be classified as either basic or composite. Basic nouns do not show any apparent morphological
derivation, e.g., torta ‘hit; flat cake’. Composite nouns, however, are forms based on the suffixes -azo (and its allomorph -tazo) or -ada, e.g., guant-azo ‘hit’ from guante ‘glove’; pat-ada ‘kick’ from pata ‘leg’. Composite nouns vary in their degree of morphological transparency: some of them have converted into lexical units with no apparent morphemic boundaries, e.g., trastazo ‘hit’, while others retain some degree of compositionality, e.g., guant-azo ‘hit’ < guante ‘glove’ + -azo.

The nouns render pragmatic nuances which are difficult to gloss in metalinguistic terms, and which often convey a jocular tone. As I have already pointed out in section 5 in discussing the semantic profile of the hitting construction, elaborating on the forceful component of the interaction affecting the hittee seems pragmatically relevant when reporting hitting events. This pragmatic parameter is accomplished by affixing augmentative morphology to basic hitting nouns by means of the suffixes -ón and -azo (allomorph -tazo). This process may reflect a metaphorical mapping from physical quantity (large size) to abstract quantity (big impact). In List 3, I present several of the most common hitting nouns which render a generic type of hitting action, as illustrated by torta.

List 3

(Glosses incorporate a hitting sense (HIT) plus the meanings the nouns have in other semantic fields.)
cachete (cachetazo) ‘HIT; cheek’
castaña (castañazo) ‘HIT; chestnut’
hostía* (hostión*, hostiazo*) ‘HIT; wafer’
galleta (galletón*, galletazo*) ‘HIT; (round) biscuit’
golpe (golpetón, golpazo, golpetazo) ‘hit’
leche ‘HIT; milk’
manporro ‘HIT’
sopapo ‘HIT’
torta (tortazo) ‘HIT; flat cake’
truco ‘HIT’
etc.

Some nouns may present hitting semantics on their own, e.g., golpe, truco, but in other cases hitting semantics arise by virtue of their occurring within the constructional frame, e.g., leche ‘milk’, castaña ‘chestnut’, etc. Similarly, the frame reinforces hitting semantics in other nouns, but one can trace for them other ways in which this semantics emerged via metonymy.

1. Through first referring to the hit body part in the event, and then standing for the hitting action applied to it (e.g., cachete ‘cheek’,
sopapo [etymologically from so- ‘under’ (Latin sub-) and papo ‘cheek’].

2. Through referring metaphorically to the result of the hitting event: the nouns torta ‘flat cake’, *hostia ‘wafer’, and galleta ‘round biscuit’ share the concept of a rounded flat object. The nouns may stand for the ideal shape the hitter wants the hittee’s face to assume after the slapping has taken place.

As shown above, Spanish hitting nouns do not derive from hitting verbs as is the case in English. On the contrary, once they have received hitting semantics, the nouns can be further extended via derivational morphology to function as hitting verbs in the transitive pattern (see section 3). Most verbs in Lists 1 and 2 derive from hitting nouns, e.g., golpear ‘hit/beat’ from golpe; hostiar* ‘bash/sock’ from hostia*; tortear ‘hit/slap’ from torta ‘flat cake’; apallear ‘beat/club’ from palo ‘hit; stick’; similarly, abofetear from bofetada ‘slap’; azotar from azote ‘whack/lash’; collejear from colleja (see Table B in the Appendix). This phenomenon could be taken to represent further evidence for how Spanish favors the dative pattern over the transitive (see also section 6.2).13

5.4.1. The suffix -azo. Most of the hitting nouns occurring in the construction are composite forms based on the suffix -azo. The suffix is a productive augmentative in Spanish, which may render pejorative nuances. In this function it agrees with the grammatical gender of the noun it modifies, e.g., libro ‘book’ (masc.) > libr-azo (masc.) ‘huge book’ vs. ventana ‘window’ (fem.) > ventan-azo (fem.) ‘huge window’. Although this is the general pattern with other lexical items, with hitting nouns the suffix invariably occurs in its masculine form, even though an augmentative reading is still transparent to the speaker (see List 3 for some examples).

Some of the hitting nouns based on -azo have lexicalized, and are no longer transparent morphological derivatives from more basic forms. The nouns in List 4a render a generic hit of great impact, which can be used to express hitting events from within both perspectives, as illustrated with torta in (55) and (56). Nouns in List 4b, however, evoke a hit affecting the entire body of the hittee, and are preferred in the affected perspective. Notice that none of these nouns have other (unrelated to hitting) meanings.

List 4

(a) batacazo
   guantazo ‘HIT: glove-azo’
   trompazo

(b) trastazo
porrazo ‘HIT: truncheon-azo’
guarrazo
leñazo ‘HIT: log-azo’, etc.
huevazo* (guevazo*) ‘HIT: egg-azo’
pepinazo ‘HIT: cucumber-azo’, etc.

For expressive reasons the augmentative suffix was first added to the forms, just as in the transparent cases in List 3. However, through a process of lexicalization, the suffix ended up contributing nuances of great impact to the abstract hitting semantics of the nouns. This process is reminiscent of the account of grammaticalization in terms of the inheritance of image-schematic structure from more concrete to more abstract domains (Sweetser 1988). The nuances of impact rendered by the nouns have jocular pragmatic effects regarding the effect upon the hittee. The nouns are seldom used in formal conversation, or when the speaker is reporting a hitting event which he/she believes has serious consequences for the hittee (see subsection 6.2 for more evidence).

A number of hitting nouns in List 4 still present some transparent reference to objects which could have been originally construed as hitting instruments involved in a hitting event, e.g., porrazo originally derives from porra ‘truncheon’, guantazo from guante ‘glove’, leñazo from leño ‘log’, etc. This phenomenon should be accounted for as a case of metonymic conflation where the hitting instrument in the event was taken to stand for the hitting action it effected. In this process the nouns would presumably have received the hitting semantics associated with the role of the object they designated. However, there is hardly any trace of simple hitting nouns used in Spanish which may evidence this process synchronically, with the sole exception—as far as I know—of three nouns: polo ‘wooden stick’, ‘a (psychological) hit’, paliza ‘group of sticks’, ‘beating’, and leña ‘firewood’, ‘punishing beating’. All these nouns share with leñazo the original woody quality of the hitting instrument to which they refer.

In this light, it seems that during this metonymic conflation the augmentative suffix -azo was almost always attached to the nouns standing for the hitting instrument. This process had two main results.

1. The composite nouns lost their original meaning and became lexical units conveying a generic type of hitting action, which by means of the suffix was rendered as implying a great impact (nouns in List 4).

2. The suffix -azo underwent a semantic extension due to its co-occurrence with the nouns, and adopted via metonymy their semantic function. Throughout this process, however, the suffix
preserved its abstract augmentative meaning. As a consequence, the suffix now attaches to any noun whose referent could possibly be construed as the hitting instrument of a given hitting event. Once applied, the suffix first renders the semantic referent of the noun as playing an instrumental role in the hitting event—hence giving the composite noun a hitting meaning via metonymy—and then it characterizes the hitting action as implying great impact. This use of -azo—as illustrated in (57)—is a typological rarity, and is very productive in all dialects of Spanish:14

(57)  *María le dio a Juan un botellazo en la cabeza.*
Mary CL give-3SP to John a bottle-AZO in the head
‘Mary struck John a heavy blow on the head with a bottle.’
or ‘Mary smashed John’s head with a bottle.’
Literally ‘Mary gave John a bottle-azo on the head.’

The bottle is construed as the hitting instrument serving the hitter to affect the hittee. The -azo suffix attached to the noun botella ‘bottle’ renders the hitting action of great impact effected by the bottle in the frame described. The composite nouns based on this extension of -azo convey manner of hitting via knowledge of the hitting situations evoked by the entity profiled by the nouns, e.g., hachazo ‘hit with an ax’, navajazo ‘hit with a pocket knife’, and picotazo ‘hit with a bird’s beak’ would render different manner readings just as an ax is understood to effect forceful actions in a different way than would a pocket knife or the beak of a bird (see Table C in the Appendix for more nouns of this kind).

Similarly, just as the figure involved in a hitting event is construed as both hitter and hittee, the body part involved in the hitting may also be construed as the hit body part—affected by the hitting—and as the hitting instrument—causing the hitting action. The latter construal is both reflected by the instrumental coding this participant receives, as illustrated in (58), and by the application of the -azo suffix, as in (59). (See Table D in the Appendix for more nouns.)

(58)  *Juan se pegó con la rodilla en la escalera.*
John 3RF HIT/stick:to-3SP with the knee in the stairs
‘John hit his knee badly on the stairs.’

(59)  *Juan se pegó un rodillazo en la escalera.*
John 3R stick:to-3SP a knee-AZO in the stairs
‘John bumped his knee on the stairs.’ or ‘John hurt his knee with the stairs.’
Literally ‘John gave himself a knee-azo on the stairs.’
5.4.2. The suffix -ada. There are a number of hitting nouns which are morphological formations on the -ada suffix. In contrast to -azo, the use of -ada to render hitting semantics is no longer productive in modern Spanish. Historically, the suffix conveyed a semantic scenario which is reminiscent of -azo: it rendered the action effected by a given hitting instrument. However, the suffix does not convey nuances of great impact (this is to be expected as -ada is not an augmentative morpheme). It has left behind a number of hitting nouns specifying manner of hitting, lexicalized as the suffix ceased to be semantically transparent. Some of the most frequent nouns are illustrated in List 5.

List 5

bofetada ‘slap’
cabezada ‘HIT with head’ (head-ada)
cuchillada ‘stab’ (knife-ada)
estocada ‘stab with sword’ (rapier-ada)
guantada ‘slap’ from (glove-ada)
patada ‘kick’ (animal leg-ada)
pedrada ‘blow with a stone’ (stone-ada)
puñada ‘punch’ (fist-ada)
topetada and cornada (horn-ada).

5.5. Aspectual notions in the hitting construction

In Spanish the hitting construction functions as the most frequent structural choice to report a hitting event. As with the ditransitive pattern in English, the action is often treated as aspectually semelfactive. However, if the action is not construed as semelfactive, the speaker may opt to specify the number of hitting actions, as in (60). This numerical specification may remain approximate. Expressions such as (61) which involves the number two, actually profiles an unspecified number of hitting instances. The same approximate reading may apply to expressions involving the number 4—as in (62)—but this may differ across speakers. Partitive or grouping phrases render the hitting event as involving iterative acts, as illustrated by (63) and (64):

(60) María le dio a Juan tres tortas.
Mary CL give-3SP to John three HITs
‘Mary slapped John three times.’

(61) María le metió un par de leches.
Mary CL put:in-3SP a pair of HITs
‘Mary slapped him enough.’
6. Testing the construction on speakers

A further indication of constructional meaning arises from speakers’ spontaneous interpretations of nonsense words in this pattern. In this section I will introduce the results of two experiments conducted in order to check the validity of the claims about the existence of a hitting construction in Spanish. In these experiments I collected data from 51 informants: 20 in experiment 1 (EX-I) and 31 in experiment 2 (EX-II). The informants were university students aged between 20 and 25. They were given a sheet of paper containing a sentence with a nonsense verb and direct object, and were asked to provide its possible meaning. The task was introduced with the following speech act situation:

Suponte que tienes la radio puesta mientras estás ocupado/a en hacer otras cosas. En principio no le estás prestando mucha atención al programa, pero de repente oyes que alguien dice algo así como lo siguiente... [Imagine you have the radio on while you’re busy doing other things. You’re not paying much attention to the program, but all of a sudden you hear somebody saying something like the following].

The elicitation sentence and the question would then follow.

Informants were given only one sentence each, so as to avoid any biased interpretation of other sentences. Four sentences were tested in experiment 1, each by five informants; these are shown in (i). Underlined items are nonsense words.

(i)  a. le zambuquearon un biazo
    CL V:(?)-3P1P a N:(?)-AZO

     b. le zambuquearon un biazo en los morros
    CL V:(?)-3P1P a N:(?)-AZO in the snout(s)

     c. se metió un biazo
    3RF put:in-3SP a N:(?)-AZO
d. *se farreó un biazo con la escalera*

3RF V:(?)-3SP a N:(?)-AZO with the stair

Sentences (ia) and (ib) were intended to check the agentive perspective and (ic) and (id) the affected one. I realized later that the nonsense noun *biazo* was not a fortunate choice: such a noun could never become a real hitting noun in Spanish because the monosyllabic unit *bi-* is too short for morphological formations based on *-azo* (all other nouns have at least two syllables in the stem, see subsection 5.4.1). Unaware of the results of experiment 1, I feared informants would for this reason block a possible hitting sense, and I ventured to make up some other alternatives for experiment 2: *jagoletazo* in (iia), *iparraldazo* in (iib), and *estorquinazo* in (iid) and (iie). Similarly, a new nonsense noun formed on the basis of the suffix *-ada* was included in experiment 2, so as to check the construction with this suffix. This made a total of five sentences, listed in (ii), to be tested by a minimum of four speakers each:

(ii) a. *le zambuecaron un jagoletazo*

CL V:(?)-3P1P a N:(?)-AZO

b. *le zambuecaron un iparraldazo en los morros*

CL V:(?)-3P1P a N:(?)-AZO in the snout(s)

c. *le parrearon una zafranada*

CL V:(?)-3P1P a N:(?)-ADA

d. *se metió un estorquinazo*

3RF put:in-3SP a N:(?)-AZO

e. *se farreó un estorquinazo con la escalera*

3RF V:(?)-3SP a N:(?)-AZO with the stair

6.1. *The results*

Surprisingly, both experiments turned out to give strong evidence in favor of the existence of the hitting construction. In experiment 1, 18 of the total of 20 informants (90 percent) construed their sentences as having a hitting meaning. Even more markedly, experiment 2 gave similar results with 30 out of a total of 31 informants (97 percent). These results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Sentences (ia), (iia), and (iic) are, in my opinion, the most relevant in the experiment because they lack another participant in the hitting event, so as not to bias in favor of a hitting interpretation. The presence of another participant may have played a role in the interpretation of (ib) and (iib), where a hit body part is profiled, in (id) and (iie) where a setting is given, or even in (ic) and (iid) where the conventional verb *meter* is provided.
Informant 15 interpreted *biazo* in (ic) with a figurative meaning close to that of the noun *patinazo* which in a motion scenario translates as ‘skid’ and in metaphorical terms as ‘boob, blunder’. More generally, interpretations were based mainly on similarities perceived between the phonological content of the nonsense word and other more familiar lexical items. We may observe three main patterns.

1. For the nonsense verb *parrear* in (iic), informant 37 made up a new hitting verb with the meaning ‘hit with grapevine branches’, from the noun *parra* ‘grapevine’ (notice that a similar phenomenon applies to hitting verbs in section 3, as seen in subsection 5.4).

2. Six informants identified the nonsense noun as a novel hitting noun, but also as a variant of a more familiar lexical item. In (iia), two out of six informants (21 and 25; 33 percent) construed the sentence as referring to a goalscoring event in soccer. In Spanish, when a team scores fans frequently refer to this as a *golazo*, which is a (hitting) noun made from *gol* ‘soccer score’ (Eng. *goal*) plus -azo. The two informants identified the sequence

<table>
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<th>Structure</th>
<th>Informants</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Agentive perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) <em>le zambuecaron</em></td>
<td>CL V:(?)</td>
<td>5 (1–5)</td>
<td>5 – 0</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>un biaze</em></td>
<td>N:(?)-azo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) <em>le zambuecaron</em></td>
<td>CL V:(?)</td>
<td>5 (6–10)</td>
<td>5 – 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>un biazo</em></td>
<td>N:(?)-azo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>en los morros</td>
<td>HIT-BP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(c) <em>se metió</em></td>
<td>RF HIT:V</td>
<td>5 (11–15)</td>
<td>3 – 2</td>
</tr>
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<td>N:(?)-azo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) <em>se farreó</em></td>
<td>RF V:(?)</td>
<td>5 (16–20)</td>
<td>5 – 0</td>
</tr>
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<td>N:(?)-azo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>con la escalera</td>
<td>SETTING</td>
<td>‘with the stairs’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90 – 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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goletazo in jagoletazo, which also points to a novel formation of gol plus the allomorph -tazo. I have included informant 25 within those giving a hitting sense because (s)he renders jagoletazo as ‘un gol con mucha fuerza [a score with great force]’. In (iid) and (iie), four out of thirteen informants (44/47/49/50; 30 percent) construed the nonsense noun estorquinazo as meaning ‘a great hit against a corner of something’, identifying the word esquina ‘corner’.

3. One informant from five (14) interpreted biazo in (ic) as if (s)he had misheard the hitting noun balazo ‘hit with bullet’ (bullet-azo).

Finally, sentence (iic) containing the nonsense noun zafranada with the suffix -ada offers curious results: seven out of eight informants (31/32/33/34/35/36/38; 75 percent) offered a sentence with the hitting noun paliza ‘a beating’ which conveys a non-semelfactive hitting action as an equivalent. I interpret these results as being due to a possible semantic distribution between the suffixes -ada and -azo. The suffix -azo has a productive hitting sense and renders a single instance of hitting with great impact. In contrast, the suffix -ada is no longer productive (of a hitting sense) in Spanish. When speakers are confronted with a nonsense word ending in -ada, I predict they rely first on the verb. If the

Table 2.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elicitation sentences (ii)</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Informants</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hitting</td>
<td>Hitting + other</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agentive perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) le zambuearon</td>
<td>CL V:(?) 6 (21–26)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un jagoletazo</td>
<td>N:(?)-tazo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) le zambuearon</td>
<td>CL V:(?) 4 (27–30)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un iparraldazo</td>
<td>N:(?)-azo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en los morros</td>
<td>HIT-BP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) le parrearon</td>
<td>CL V:(?) 8 (31–38)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>una zafranada</td>
<td>N:(?)-ada</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affected perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) se metió</td>
<td>RF HIT:V 7 (39–45)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un estorquinazo</td>
<td>N:(?)-azo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>en los morros</td>
<td>HIT-BP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) se farreó</td>
<td>RF V:(?) 6 (46–51)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un estorquinazo</td>
<td>N:(?)-azo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>con la escalera</td>
<td>SETTING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
verb renders a clear hitting sense—as the nonsense verb *parrear* presumably does for the informants—speakers then opt to give to the nonsense -*ada* noun a biased non-semelfactive hitting reading, as if motivated by the distribution of the single-hit reading conveyed by -*azo*.

6.2. *Choosing verbs and nouns to express hitting*

When the informants construed a hitting sense for the elicitation sentence they chose to express this meaning by means of one or more sentences. I have been able to trace as many as 48 of these sentences containing an equal number of verbs. Of these 48 sentences, 42 are framed by the construction (87.5 percent of the total) while six show the transitive pattern (12.5 percent). However, of these six sentences, three include the verbs *dar* and *pegar*, whilst only two make use of the verb *golpear* and one of the verb *sufri* as in *sufri* un golpe ‘he/she suffered a hit’. These results could be taken to indicate that the dative pattern, once activated through the elicitation sentence, remains active so as to give rise to other semantic equivalents. Besides, the results could also be taken as further evidence for the claims being made in this article about the productivity of the hitting construction in Spanish. Table 3 lists the items occurring in the 42 sentences which exhibit the constructional frame.

As shown in this Table, the verb *dar* outranks the rest in frequency (57 percent), followed by *pegar* (21 percent). The verb *meter* (7 percent) should not be taken as statistically relevant here, mainly because in the three cases in which it occurred it was also used in the elicitation sentence. Among the 42 nouns, *golpe* ‘hit’ is by far the most frequent (42 percent of the total). Significantly, the noun occurs fourteen (out of eighteen) times in combination with the verb *dar*. This may point to the fact that within a formal context (such as that of the experiment) informants are likely to opt for as neutral a semantic equivalent as possible in pragmatic terms. In this light, the construct *dar un golpe* ‘give a hit’ would serve as the best option for this purpose. Notice that this pragmatically “neutral” option occurs in 13 out of a total of 14 cases (92 percent) when reporting a hitting event from the affected perspective, as if informants were in this way showing some respect for the hittee.

7. **Concluding remarks**

In this article I have introduced the notion of a “hitting construction” in Spanish to account for the wide range of lexical phenomena presented throughout the article which bear some nuance of a hitting meaning. The construction emerges as an extension from the dative pattern, and
Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[V + NP]</th>
<th>dar ‘give’</th>
<th>pegar ‘stick to/hit’</th>
<th>meter ‘put in’</th>
<th>arrear ‘harness/hit’</th>
<th>propinar ‘tip/hit’</th>
<th>atizar ‘poke fire/hit’</th>
<th>soltar ‘release/hit’</th>
<th>llevar ‘carry (away)’</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>golpe ‘hit’</td>
<td>AG AFF</td>
<td>AG AFF</td>
<td>AG</td>
<td>AG</td>
<td>AG</td>
<td>AG</td>
<td>AG</td>
<td>AG AFF</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>torta ‘HIT’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>golpetazo ‘hit + AUG’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guantazo ‘HIT’</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puñetazo ‘punch’</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tortazo ‘HIT + AUG’</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trompazo ‘great HIT’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trastazo ‘great HIT’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bofetón ‘HIT + AUG’</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>paliza ‘beating’</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Vs</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
serves nowadays to provide linguistic expression to events of physical interaction where a human participant is seen as being saliently affected. The construction explains in a unified fashion why verbs like *dar* ‘give’ or *pegar* ‘glue/stick to’ (even *meter* ‘move/put in’ in some slang dialects) come to mean ‘hit’. It can also account for the suffix -azo conveying a hitting sense in current Spanish, and for the wide range of nouns designating a generic type of hitting action. This novel proposal, which regards these lexical data as forming a unified and motivated whole, presupposes the probable existence of similar constructions in other languages which have not yet been discovered, and which fully deserve, in my opinion, all our attention.

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Appendix

Abbreviations used in appendix

AG: agentive perspective; AFF: affected perspective; AFF: not used in affected perspective; AUG: augmentative; -EE: focus on hittee; -ER: focus on hitter; MOT: motion; TRANS: transfer; V: verb; “=”: realizable as; “>” has become X; “≠” has not become X.

Table A. Verbs occurring in the hitting construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Transfer verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>administrar</em> ‘administer, give out in adequate portions’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG: -ER/AFF, [V of TRANS ≠ V of HITTING], formal register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>cobrar</em> ‘earn, get one’s salary’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG: -EE/AFF, [V of (economic) TRANS &gt; V of HITTING: ‘hit’]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>dar</em> ‘give’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG: -ER/AFF=V + REFL, [V of TRANS &gt; V of HITTING: ‘hit’]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ganarse</em> ‘win (for one’s own benefit)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG: -EE/AFF, [V of (economic) TRANS ≠ V of HITTING], responsibility on the HITTEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>llevar</em> ‘take away, carry away’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG: -EE/AFF, [V of TRANS ≠ V of HITTING], responsibility on the HITTEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>procurar</em> ‘provide’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG: -ER/AFF, [V of TRANS ≠ V of HITTING], formal register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>propinar</em> ‘invite, tip’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG: -ER/AFF, [V of (economic) TRANS ≠ V of HITTING], formal register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>recibir</em> ‘receive’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG: -EE/AFF, [V of TRANS &gt; V of HITTING: ‘hit’]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>repartir</em> ‘administer, give out’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG: -ER/AFF, [V of TRANS ≠ V of HITTING], formal register</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A. (Continued)

2. Motive verbs

**arrimar** ‘move X close to Y’
AG: -ER/AFF, [V of MOT ≠ V of HITTING], archaic

**encajar** ‘fit X in Y’
AG: -ER/AFF, [V of MOT ≠ V of HITTING], colloquial

**meter** ‘put X in Y’
AG: -ER/AFF=V+REFL, [V of MOT > V of HITTING, (already > V of HITTING in Peninsular urban slang)]

**pegar** ‘glue, stick to Y’, ‘move X up to Y’
AG: -ER/AFF=V+REFL, [V of MOT > V of HITTING + dative structure: ‘hit’]

**soltar** and **largar** ‘release, let go, loose’
AG: -ER/AFF, [V of MOT ≠ V of HITTING], the verbs have a force dynamic component (Talmy 1988): “X (HITTER) finally permits Y (HIT) to move on and follow its own tendency”, the HIT is judged sudden and unexpected

3. Verbs with a hitting component in the source scenario

**arrear** ‘harness, urge on a beast (by hitting)’
AG: -ER/AFF=V+REFL, [V > V of HITTING], evolved via metonymy from prototypical scenarios where people harness a beast by hitting it, jocular effects

**atizar** ‘poke fire’ from **tizón** ‘burning piece of wood’
AG: -ER/AFF, [V > V of HITTING]

**asestar** ‘direct a weapon to’
AG: -ER/AFF, [V ≠ V of HITTING]

4. Other

**comer.se** ‘eat up (for one’s own benefit)’
[V ≠ V of HITTING], the verb renders the HITTEE as highly affected, due to a construal where the HITTEE is seen as integrating the hitting into his/her body

**enlñar** ‘hit’
AG: -ER/AFF=V+REFL, [V of HITTING]

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Table B. Some hitting nouns specifying manner of hitting

**azote** ‘spank, lash’

**bofetada** ‘slap’, ‘HIT: HITTING-I: flat surface/HIT-BP: cheek of the face’, e.g., *se ha pegado una bofetada con la puerta* ‘REFL has struck a slap with the door’

**capipotazo** like **toba** below

**capón** ‘HIT: HITTING-I: second phalanx of index finger (with hand in fist and index advanced)/HIT-BP: skull’

**colleja** ‘HIT: HITTING-I: flat hand/HIT-BP: nape’

**coscorrón** like **capón** or **croque**

**croque** ‘HIT: HITTING-BP: head’

**empujón** ‘shove’ < n. **empuje** ‘act of pushing’ + AUG -ón

**palo** both ‘stick’ and ‘HIT: HITTING-I: stick’, the noun **palo** refers nowadays to a psychological shock

**puntapié** ‘kick’, ‘HIT: HITTING-I: toes’ < **punta** ‘edge’ and **pie** ‘foot’

**toba** ‘HIT: HITTING-I: index finger propelled from thumb/HIT-BP: back of ear’
Table C. *Hitting nouns based on -azo*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>balazo</td>
<td>bullet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balonazo</td>
<td>ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cañonazo</td>
<td>cannon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>derechazo</td>
<td>right hand (boxing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flechazo</td>
<td>arrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cachazo</td>
<td>ax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>latigazo</td>
<td>lash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>martillazo</td>
<td>hammer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>melonazo</td>
<td>melon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pitonazo</td>
<td>bull: horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>porrazo</td>
<td>truncheon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raquetazo</td>
<td>racquet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sablazo</td>
<td>saber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vasazo</td>
<td>glass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zarpazo</td>
<td>claw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zurdazo</td>
<td>left hand (boxing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aThey render ‘HIT + high impact + HITTING-I’ or ‘(a) heavy blow with X’.

Table D. *Hitting nouns based on -azo (-tazo)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cabezazo</td>
<td>head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>codazo</td>
<td>elbow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>culetazo</td>
<td>ass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manotazo</td>
<td>hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>punetazo</td>
<td>fist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rodillazo</td>
<td>knee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aThey render ‘HIT + high impact + HITTING-I’ or ‘(a) heavy stroke with/upon X’.

Notes

* The author can be contacted at the Dept. de Filología Inglesa, Facultad de Filología A, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid 28040, Spain. E-mail: palancar@eucmos.sim.ucm.es

1. I thank Rolf T. Endresen for his support and for inspiringly suggesting that I use construction grammar as the most suitable framework for my analysis. I am also indebted to Matthew Juge for all his comments, and for helping me with my English; to Kevin Ezra Moore for his help and ideas on an earlier draft; and to Michael White for being so kind as to proofread the manuscript at the last moment. I am deeply grateful to Manuela Romano and Marzena Mioduszewska for conducting the experiments while I was in absentia. Finally, I want to thank my two anonymous referees from Cognitive Linguistics for all their invaluable comments. All errors and deficiencies are only my responsibility.

2. Abbreviations for the interlinear glosses include: AUG: augmentative; CL: third-person singular dative clitic; IMP: imperative; INF: infinitive; M: masculine; Pl: plural; P: simple past; RF: reflexive; S: singular; SU: subjunctive mood; 1 and 3: persons; ‘–’/: morphemic boundary; ‘;’/: nonmorphemic boundary in source.
3. The extensive data presented in this paper are entirely from Peninsular Spanish, in particular from the variety spoken in Madrid. The data were taken both from common dictionaries and from native informants.

4. This nuance of volition can also be lexicalized in the verb which render the hitting action, e.g., the difference between hit and beat in English, where the latter is clearly marked for volition in contrast to the former where it is unspecified.

5. This is a neutral option of framing such an event from within the agentive perspective. However, there are other grammatical structures which render the event by shifting focalization to the participants involved. These involve passive voice, preferred in English when the HITTER ranks low as topic (Rice 1987), as in John was hit by a car, where the car is both an indefinite and nonhuman hitter; or antipassive construals, where the hitter seems to be in focus and the hittee is not seen as fully affected by the action, as in Mary hit at John.

6. The use of the reflexive points to the hit body part as being an inalienable possessed object. It also renders subtle nuances about the figure being directly affected by the action (Pederson 1991).

7. The term *semelfactive* refers to “(a) naspect category expressing an action or event which is perceived as happening exactly once, as in one reading of the example Lisa sneezed” (Trask 1993: 250).

8. M. Juge (p.c.) has informed me that peck can also refer to a quick casual kiss.

9. This directionality is also present in the English dative construction, as in I gave the present to John. This alternative construction, however, is very seldom used metaphorically, and only when the hittee is in pragmatic focus, as in when your father comes home, he’s going to give it to you (Goldberg 1995: 97).

10. The directionality ahead is also reflected in the gestures which often synchronize with the predication of a hitting event. For the relevance of gesture with respect to conceptual structure see McNeill (1992).

11. Maria Moliner’s (1992) *Diccionario de Uso del Español* (DUE) offers an account for the genesis of the hitting sense of pegar by claiming that from its prior sense as ‘glue’ the verb came to mean ‘apply one thing onto another’, and from there it moved to its modern sense where the thing applied is seen as a hit. This explanation is rather intuitive, but fails, however, to explain why the verb gained a hitting sense and not any other.

12. The noun truca* is Madrid slang. M. Juge (p.c.) has informed me that in Catalan there is the cognate verb trucar ‘to knock, to telephone’, along with the noun true.

13. My second referee made me aware of this phenomenon as being an intriguing possibility, and it is a worthy topic of further study. The phenomenon shows up in other domains, e.g., the dative marker a in Spanish marks animate undergoers in the transitive construction, or the clitic le which in principle cross-references masculine nouns in the dative function, but also serves in the standard to refer to animate masculine nouns in object position, while in colloquial usage it extends to all masculine nouns.

14. I want to thank my first referee for making me aware of the important role of metonymy in these semantic processes.

15. I owe this idea to the second referee.

16. There were in fact 54 informants, but three of them did not understand the task, and their answers are thus irrelevant here.

17. The verb farrear in (id) turned out to be a valid verb in some dialects of Spanish with the meaning ‘to make merry’. The verb derives from the noun farra(s) ‘spree, party’ which in Peninsular Spanish co-occurs in the idiomatic expression irse de farras ‘to go on a spree’. As with biazo, I also feared informants would activate this meaning and
block any other hitting sense. This is the reason why I tentatively chose the nonsense word *parrear* in (iii) as a better alternative.

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