

# *¡Ahora sí que me has tocado las narices!* and other tactile perception metaphors: a cognitive and contrastive analysis<sup>1</sup>

Beatriz Martín-Gascón - Universidad de Córdoba  
z82magab@uco.es

Rebut / Received: 27/02/20

Acceptat / Accepted: 01/05/20

**Resum.** *¡Ahora sí que me has tocado las narices!* i altres metàfores perceptives de tacte: una anàlisi cognitiva i contrastiva. Aquest estudi té com a objectiu analitzar des d'una perspectiva de la lingüística cognitiva un conjunt de 23 construccions espanyoles freqüents i els seus equivalents en anglès amb el verb tàctil prototípic relacionat amb les emocions positives i negatives. Mitjançant l'examinació de l'abast metafòric de les expressions de percepció tàctil seleccionades, elaborem una taxonomia conceptual basada en els mapatges metafòrics i metonímics subjacents. Els nostres resultats corroboren la hipòtesi que les extensions conceptuals dels verbs de percepció són un fenomen intercultural. Es preveu que la classificació proposada servirà de base per la creació d'un material de tipus cognitiu que millorarà el procés d'ensenyament-aprenentatge d'ELE fent més significativa l'assimilació i la retenció d'expressions.

**Paraules clau:** lingüística cognitiva, emocions, percepció tàctil, ensenyament-aprenentatge d'ELE, disfemisme.

**Abstract.** *¡Ahora sí que me has tocado las narices!* and other tactile perception metaphors: a cognitive and contrastive analysis. The present study aims at analyzing from a Cognitive Linguistics perspective a set of 23 frequent Spanish constructions, and their English equivalents, with the prototypical tactile verb *tocar* related to positive and negative emotions. By examining

---

1. The author has conducted this research with financial support from the Spanish Government (FPU17/04542). A special thanks goes to Prof. Antonio Barcelona for his insightful comments on a previous draft, and to Dr. Olga Blanco for her guidance. The author is also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their additional comments.

the metaphorical scope of the target tactile perception expressions, we elaborate a conceptual taxonomy based on the underlying metaphorical and metonymic mappings. Our findings corroborate the hypothesis that conceptual extensions of perception verbs are a cross-linguistic phenomenon. It is expected that the proposed classification will serve as a basis for a cognitive-based material that will enhance the process of ELE learning-teaching by rendering the assimilation and retention of these expressions more meaningful.

**Keywords:** cognitive linguistics, emotions, tactile perception, ELE teaching-learning, dysphemism.

## 1. Introduction

Cognitive Linguistics (CL) postulates the interaction and interdependence between language, body, and mind. This principle is developed in great detail by Lakoff and Johnson (1999), who challenged the foundations of Western philosophy by claiming that cognition is grounded in physical experience and embodied metaphorical thought. According to the authors, “the mind is inherently embodied, thought is mostly unconscious, and abstract concepts are largely metaphorical” (p. 3). Hence, through bodily and perceptual experience, humans interact with the environment and absorb stimuli in various ways. Our senses allow us to comprehend the world, each offering access to specific physical perceptions. Language, based on those perceptual specificities, applies them to our internal emotional sensations, leading, as a result, to pervasive metaphorical and metonymic expressions. There is a metonymic principle that claims that physiological effects experienced during an emotional state epitomize that emotion (Lakoff & Kövecses, 1987). That assumption permits us to comprehend how metaphoric projections are formed.

The present paper aims to examine from a cognitive perspective 23 linguistic expressions related to the sense of touch in Spanish. More specifically, we focus on frequent constructions containing the perception verb *tocar* which convey the experiencer’s emotional reaction (ER) towards an event. Furthermore, a Spanish-English contrastive and cognitive analysis is conducted in order to first examine the metaphorical scope of this tactile verb and to elaborate a conceptual taxonomy based on the underlying metaphorical and metonymic mappings<sup>2</sup>, and second, to show the extent to which these mappings are cross-linguistic. It is expected that the classification of the constructions will contribute to enhancing the assimilation and retention of these expressions by English-speaking learners of Spanish as a foreign language (ELE in the target-language acronym).

---

2. According to Barcelona (2000), many metaphorical mappings are motivated by a conceptual metonymy.

To achieve such purposes, we will first review the existing literature on perception verbs and metaphor in relation to emotions. Then, we will follow a corpus-driven approach to identify the most frequent concepts that co-occur with the prototypical verb for touch *tocar* and which are related to the expression of emotion (e.g. irritation and anger, as in *tocar las narices*). In an attempt to shed light into the metaphorical and metonymic mappings shared by these two languages, we will present the results of the contrastive and cognitive analysis of the target Spanish units and the English equivalents. Finally, we will provide a taxonomy of the constructions that proves to be operative in the process of learning-teaching ELE. This is, to our knowledge, the first Spanish-English contrastive study that systematically analyzes metaphorical and metonymic constructions for touch expressing emotion.

## 2. Verbs of perception and metaphor

Perception verbs, due to their intricate polysemy and the resulting variety of constructions that this implies, have been in the last few decades the subject of study from different perspectives. Lexico-semantic studies, on the one hand, have classified perception verbs regarding the semantic roles of the subject, that is, focusing on whether the experiencer is a passive observer, an active agent in the process or the stimulant (Rojo & Valenzuela, 2005; Viberg, 2015). In her doctoral thesis, Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999) further investigates three senses that had been so far neglected: smell, taste, and touch. This latter will be our focus of study.

Other works within the framework of CL have studied the semantic extensions of perception verbs showing their highly polysemous and motivated nature (e.g. Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2007; Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2002; Sweetser, 1990). Sweetser (1990) suggests a semantic connection to explain the tendency to borrow concepts from the physical world to refer to the more abstract world of emotion. This association between mind and body is what she coins as the MIND-AS-BODY metaphor. This correlation can be considered a conceptual metaphor (CM) –in Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) terms– for it is motivated by a set of systematic correspondences between the bodily and internal experience of emotional states, and therefore, it involves conceptualizing one large area of experience (the mind) in terms of another (the body).

According to Sweetser’s (1990) classification of the structure of perception metaphors and with regard to perception verbs for touch (‘feel’-*tocar*) and taste (‘taste’-*degustar*),<sup>3</sup> the vocabulary of physical perception (source domain) maps onto that of the internal self (target domain), which is subjective and emotional as compared to the other objective senses. In this line, Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999, 2002, 2005, 2008) broadens the metaphorical scope of these verbs and proposes a taxonomy of CMs in the perceptual

---

3. Following Fernández-Jaén’s (2006) proposal of *degustar* as prototype for the sense of taste.

domain under the more general and primitive MIND-AS-BODY CM. The network of metaphorical mappings that she offers in relation to experiencing an ER which is within the scope of our investigation can be reduced to three and concerns the senses of sight, touch and taste (Table 1).

TABLE 1. METAPHORICAL MAPPINGS WITH ER AS TARGET DOMAIN<sup>4</sup>

SIGHT	suffering is seeing
TOUCH	affecting is touching
TASTE	producing a feeling is tasting

One of the fundamental principles proposed by CL is the motivated nature of semantic meaning. Any linguistic unit presents an indissoluble connection between its form and meaning. This relation is based on human sensorimotor and socio-cultural experience, and it is therefore motivated and embodied (Johnson, 1987). One of the clearest linguistic reflections of this embodiment are somatic expressions of emotions. Emotional states are conceptualized through the physiological effects experienced by the subject. Both our body and emotions are the first physical and conceptual spheres humans encounter when they are born. In line with this, x-phemistic phenomena, and more particularly, the use of dysphemism, is intended to threaten the face of the participants (Allan & Burridge, 2006) (see Section 4.2., for a definition of “dysphemism” and “face-threatening”). Crespo-Fernández (2016) highlights the cognitive dimension of metaphorical dysphemisms, as they rely on *contrast* of meanings, *neutralization* of certain semantic aspects and *displacement*, and contends that the correct interpretation of a dysphemism is an inferential process with the hearer playing an acting role.

Sense perception has for long been related to the semantic field of emotions and feelings.<sup>5</sup> Expressions such as *me sentí tocada*, “how touching!” or “her sympathies were touched” are pervasive in Spanish and English (CREA, Wilkinson, 2013, p. 555). Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999) supports this mapping of tactile perception onto the domain of emotions by citing Buck (1949), who contends that the etymology of verbs meaning ‘feel’ in West-Germanic languages referred to emotional and physical perception. Although research has primarily focused on senses connected to the intellect, such as sight (Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2008; MacArthur, Krennmayr, & Littlemore, 2015), Kurath (1921) already claimed nearly a century ago that “the kinesthetic, the visceral,

4. The cognitive models of emotion are both metaphorically and metonymically much richer, for they are motivated by an array of metaphors and metonymies that go beyond those with a sensory domain as source.

5. For seminal works addressing how speakers represent linguistically and conceptually emotions in different languages (King, 1989 in Chinese; Bokor, 1997 in Hungarian; Barcelona & Soriano, 2004 in English and Spanish or Barcelona’s study on depression (1986) and love (1992), among others.

and the tactual perceptions have a relatively stronger tone (for emotional terms) than those of hearing and especially of sight” (p. 31). Decades later, Sweetser (1990) likewise observed that physical perception cannot be easily separated from emotion. Hence, the motivation for mapping physical conditions onto internal states is a compelling one.

### 3. Corpus and methodology

Regarding the Spanish linguistic material, the 23 expressions under analysis (Appendix) were extracted from the “Web and Dialects” *Corpus del Español* (CE), created by Davies, which contains nearly two billion words with data from 21 Spanish-speaking countries. Prior to narrowing down our analysis to the most frequent constructions eliciting ERs with the tactile verb *tocar*, we followed a corpus-driven approach.

First, we looked at the Curricular Plan of Instituto Cervantes, which is a guideline instrument that guarantees homogeneity and coherence in the academic world of ELE teaching-learning. In line with Ibarretxe-Antuñano’s (2013) analysis of perception verbs (*ver, oír, tocar, oler, usar el gusto*), we examined all the expressions conveying any type of emotion with these *prototypical* verbs, as Ibarretxe-Antuñano refers to them.<sup>6</sup> Yet, considering Sweetser’s (1990) structure for perceptual metaphors, where she only links touch to emotions, and in order to have a deeper insight into how we conceptualize emotional states, we focused on *tocar*. Only three constructions were found: *le tocó la lotería, toco madera* and *tocarse las narices*, and they were all included from B2 level onwards. We then examined the CE to gather a bigger sample of expressions. Only collocates which tended to co-occur with the verb *tocar* and served to express positive or negative ERs were considered.

As for the English equivalents, they were collected from different sources as a means of data triangulation: i) online dictionaries (OD) (Collins Cobuild, Cambridge Dictionary, Merriam Webster and Urban Dictionary), ii) Wilkinson’s (2013) Thesaurus of Traditional English Metaphors (TEM) and Sommer and Weiss’ (2001) Metaphors dictionary (MD), iii) four bilingual informants (a British speaker, two Americans and an Australian) (INF) and iv) two linguistics experts (LE). The reason why we only looked at a big-sized corpus for Spanish and not for English was that the target language is ELE, and therefore, frequency rates and context are crucial for pedagogical reasons. On the other hand, a contrastive and cognitive study with English was essential to test Sweetser’s (1990) hypothesis of metaphorical extensions of perception verbs being a phenomenon across languages.<sup>7</sup>

---

6. E.g. the following expressions were identified for the sense of *sight*: *A ver si nos vemos* (B1), *No veo el momento* (C2) (wishes), *Lo veo todo negro* (C1) (affliction), *Veo las estrellas* (C2) (physical sensation: pain), *Hay que ver* (C2) (surprise).

7. And, since the target population of a follow-up study will be English-speaking learners of ELE, it was important that students could establish connections to their L1.

### 3.1. Results from the corpus

Findings from the CE evinced the high frequency and, thus, great polysemy of the verb *tocar*, this being in line with previous studies (e.g. Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 1999, 2002). Although some of the most frequent collocates belonged to the domain of music, with the meaning “to play a musical instrument” or “to perform music”, a list of frequent co-occurrences between *tocar* and different human body parts referring to causing feelings or eliciting an ER was found. Apart from the somatic expressions (marked with an asterisk), results showed other relatively idiomatic constructions with *tocar* (Table 2).

TABLE 2. EXPRESSIONS MEANING TO ELICIT AN ER

Constructions with <i>tocar</i>	N. of cases
Tocar fondo	2159
Tocar (el/los) corazón(es)*	1999
Tocar (la/s) fibra(s)*	1240
Tocar el cielo (con las manos/los dedos)	1013
Tocar cojones*	796
Tocar narices*	708
Tocar madera	547
Tocar huevos*	450
Tocar (el/las) alma(s)*	424
Tocar de cerca	414
Tocar pelotas*	287

In order to have a taxonomy that will render the teaching-learning practice simpler and more meaningful, the target constructions were classified conceptually according to the experiencer's ER when producing such utterances and to frequency. The number of cases shown in Figure 1 are the resulting ones after manual codification, since the corpus did not discriminate literal from figurative meaning (e.g. *tocó 3 pelotas*, *puso un pase*). Hence, prior to the cognitive and contrastive analysis, the Spanish expressions were classified into positive and negative ERs. As we can infer from Figure 1, the most frequent positive expressions with *tocar* conveyed the experiencer's affect and empathy and collocated with the themes *el corazón* ( $n=1565$ ), *la fibra* ( $n=777$ ) and *el alma* ( $n=383$ ) (experiencer and themes are terms used following Fillmore's, 1977 'case frames' account). Variations of these somatic themes were also found in the plural form: *tocar los corazones* ( $n=366$ ), *tocar corazones* ( $n=68$ ), *tocar las fibras* ( $n=356$ ), *tocar fibras* ( $n=107$ ), *tocar las almas* ( $n=34$ ), *tocar*

*almas* (n=7).<sup>8</sup> The expression *tocar de cerca* (n=81), which implies conceptual proximity, was also included under this category. Yet, since ‘touch one closely’ (*tocar de cerca*) refers to directly *affect* someone, this affection can be either positive or negative depending on the context. Hence, it was also considered as a formal representation of negative affect (n=333). Happiness and satisfaction were emotions conceptualized through the linguistic representation *tocar el cielo* (n=694), which co-appeared in a total of 279 cases with the instrument *manos*-hands and 40 with *dedos*-fingers. Last but not least, the ER of hope and empathy was shown to co-occur 547 times (*tocar madera*).

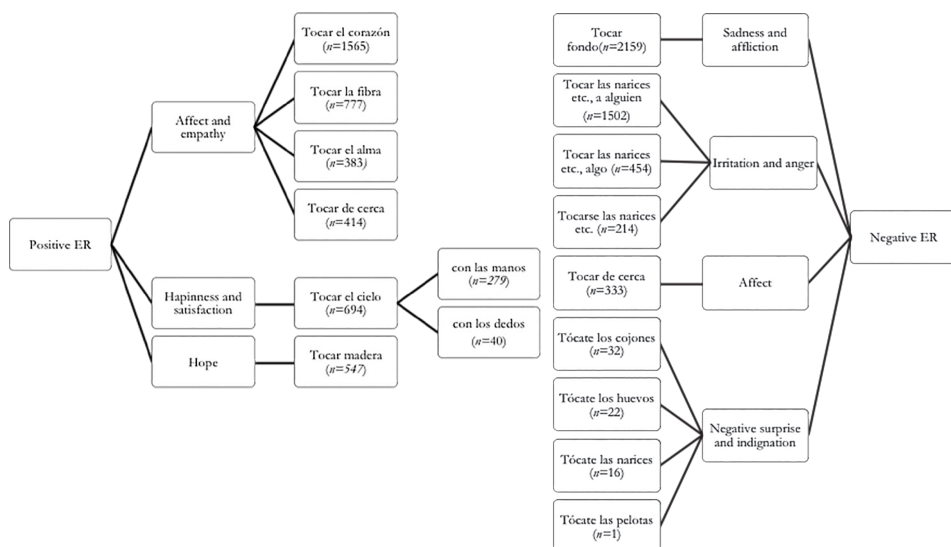


FIGURE 1. EXPRESSIONS AND NUMBER OF CASES DENOTING POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ERs.

Regarding negative ERs, the idiomatic construction *tocar fondo* was found in 2159 cases in the corpus. Apart from sadness and affliction, there were two emotions, irritation and anger, expressed linguistically with *tocar+narices/huevos/pelotas/cojones*. Collocates *cojones*, *narices*, *huevos* and *pelotas* were also manually annotated and analyzed

8. Following a spatial operative and cognitive account for the articles (Castañeda & Alonso, 2009; Montero, 2011), where the category “article” is identified with three formal representations (zero -*tocar fondo*, *tocar madera*, *tocar fibras*-, definite -*tocar las fibras*, *tocar las narices*- or indefinite article). These three possibilities, as highlighted in Alonso (2013), are reorganized according to the formal stimuli that can be potentially activated, that is, depending on the speaker’s perception towards that object. This perception can be thus virtual (zero article, ∅), positive (definite article) or approximate (indefinite article).



into categories according to their different conceptualizations based on formal changes. *Cojones*, *huevos* and *pelotas* are dysphemistic terms that violate the sexual taboo (male's intimate body parts) and are used for a specific communicative purpose (expressing negative ERs such as anger, irritation, negative surprise or indignation), whereas *narices* is used as a euphemism of the former. Such constructions evinced different meanings depending on the relationship between the semantic and the syntactic role. As a result, the most frequent expressions were the ones conceptualizing the experiencer as an object: *tocar las narices* ( $n=547$ )/*los cojones* ( $n=414$ )/*los huevos* ( $n=315$ )/*las pelotas* ( $n=226$ ) *a alguien*. These were followed by the constructions that also presented the experiencer as object, but whose subject was an external stimulus. The expressions and number of cases found were as follows: *tocar los cojones* ( $n=295$ )/*las narices* ( $n=101$ )/*los huevos* ( $n=38$ )/*las pelotas* ( $n=20$ ) *algo a alguien*. Constructions that have a pronominal value such as *tocarse los huevos* ( $n=75$ )/*los cojones* ( $n=55$ )/*las narices* ( $n=44$ )/*las pelotas* ( $n=40$ ), where the experiencer was the subject, were the least frequent ones. These expressions can pragmatically activate positive connotations associated with pleasure and relaxation, derived from its inactivity or leisure nuances. Yet, this positive implication was not considered, for results from the analysis of the corpus showed a quasi-inexistent presence of pronominal expressions with a positive meaning. Lastly, negative surprise and indignation were expressed by means of the idiomatic expression *tócate+los cojones* ( $n=32$ )/*los huevos* ( $n=22$ )/*las narices* ( $n=16$ )/*las pelotas* ( $n=1$ ).

#### 4. Contrastive and cognitive analysis

The main aim of the study was to analyze the semantic extensions taking place in the semantic field of tactile perception. In order to do so, we looked at the metaphorical scope of the target Spanish constructions and explored whether the mappings occurred cross-linguistically, which would favor their assimilation by ELE learners. The language contrasted with Spanish was English –also an Indo-European language, yet with a different origin (mostly Germanic)– because of the target population. Once the contrastive and cognitive analysis was conducted, we grouped conceptually the target expressions in an attempt to make future learners aware of their metaphorical and figurative nature.

##### 4.1. *Tocar and positive ER*

The somatic expressions *tocar (el/los) corazón(es)*, *tocar (la/s) fibra(s)*, *tocar (el/las) alma(s)*, meaning to stimulate or make someone feel sympathy, were found to be identically conceptualized and linguistically represented in English: ‘touch one’s heart’, ‘touch one on the raw’<sup>9</sup> and ‘touch one’s soul’. These constructions are clear instantiations

---

9. Results from (online) dictionaries, informants and experts showed other ways of conveying *tocar la fibra*: ‘strike a chord with someone’ and ‘tear or pull at one’s heartstrings’. Here, ‘chord’ (simultaneous notes) and



of how the tactile verbs *tocar* in Spanish and ‘touch’ in English map onto the experiential domain of emotions. Hence, the first mapping was AFFECTING IS TOUCHING, which is based on the primary or basic-level MIND-AS-BODY CM, as illustrated in the examples below:<sup>10</sup>

- (1) Hay millones de fans de Rammstein y que su  
 There are millions of fans from Rammstein and that their  
 música *toca* *o*razones  
 music *touches* *hearts*

‘There are millions of Rammsteinians and whose music touches hearts’ (INF)  
 ‘You touched my heart’ (OD)

- (2) Uno de esos que te *tocan* *la fibra sensible*, que te aprietan  
 One of those who you.IO *touch* *the fiber sensitive*, that you.IO *queeze*  
 el alma  
 the soul

‘One of those who touch you on the raw, who touch your soul’ (TEM, p. 233)

- (3) Eso *me tocó* *el alma*, porque lo apreciaba mucho  
 That *me.IO touched* *the soul*, because him.DO appreciated much  
 ‘That *touched my soul*, because I appreciated him very much’ (EX)

‘The hot-blooded heartbeat of this passionate and mercurial city touches my soul (MD, p. 68)

Yet, this metaphorical mapping is also grounded on the metonymy EFFECT FOR CAUSE (Barcelona, 2000, 2012; Radden, 2000, 2002), where the effect is the ER of affect and empathy and the cause is the action of ‘touching something’, which metaphorically corresponds to the event causing that emotional response. What is being metaphorically “touched” (the heart, raw (wound), soul) is a sensitive part of the body (source or donor domain), which, at the same time, alludes to the experiencer’s emotional side (target domain) as being affected. These constructions are, therefore, also instantiations of the PART FOR WHOLE metonymy, more specifically to BODY PART FOR PERSON, where the PART is assigned to (abstract) body organs and the WHOLE refers to the person. Furthermore, *fibra* refers to the heart, for the heart is a muscular organ composed by muscle fibers, and thus, constitutes another PART FOR WHOLE metonymy.

---

‘(heart)strings’ (e.g. the sound of stringed instruments is produced when the strings are touched) draw on the experiential domain of music to conceptualize the deepest affections. Hence, when playing (in Spanish *tocar*) a chord or touching the strings, we resonate with one’s feelings (EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy).

10. All Spanish examples were retrieved from the CE.

Although it is beyond the scope of this study, we wanted to contrast the theory with empirical data<sup>11</sup>. In order to do so, we asked the bilingual informants to mimic the gestures for the above-mentioned expressions. As a result, they placed their hands on the chest and made an empathetic facial expression, this being in agreement with the metaphorical mappings and metonymies.

The English equivalents for the remaining constructions eliciting positive emotions, such as happiness and satisfaction –*tocar el cielo (con las manos/llos dedos)*–, hope –*tocar madera*–, and empathy –*tocar de cerca*– showed similar conceptualizations in both languages. Hence, results from the data triangulation evinced a uniformity in their linguistic representation: *touch the sky (with your hands/fingers)*,<sup>12</sup> *touch wood* or *knock on wood*, and *touch one closely* or *be close to one's heart*. The first construction (example 4) alludes to reaching a state of absolute happiness and satisfaction.

- (4) Sentí *tocar el cielo con las manos*  
 Felt *touch the sky with the hands*  
 'I felt as if I touched the sky with my hands' (INF)  
 'I can touch the sky with you' (OD)

In this case, the collocate *el cielo* ('Heaven') is used as the superlative of good, as in *es un cielo de persona*– 'she/he is an angel' or *sabe a gloria*– 'it tastes heavenly/divine' (Buitrago, 2005). These are good examples of hyperbole understood as the most basic form of overstatement and treated as a cross-domain mapping of the same nature that is postulated for metaphor. Hyperbole cooperates thus with metaphor to produce an enhanced meaning effect (Ruiz de Mendoza, 2011, 2020). Considering Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) orientational metaphors this expression results in a mapping of places in space onto abstract ideas that do not have an actual location. As a consequence, the resulting spatialization metaphors underlying these utterances are GOOD IS UP and HAPPINESS IS UP.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the second construction *tocar madera*, and the corresponding English expressions, *touch wood* and *knock on wood* (example 5), they mean (a) to wish for good luck or to want a good situation to continue; (b) to avoid bad luck; or (c) to hope for the best. The utterance tends to be accompanied by a gesture of touching a wooden object, as corroborated the pilot experiment with the informants.

11. We intend to continue with experiments examining non-verbal communication (gestures) for these expressions in a follow-up study.

12. The English expressions were not found/judged to be that common with the instruments 'hands' and 'fingers' (according to the 'frame cases' account).

13. Like SADNESS IS DOWN, these metaphors are a decontextualization or generalization of metonymy, which is one of the two types (the other one being correlation-abstraction) of metonymic motivation of metaphor discussed in Barcelona's (2000).

- (5) a) Es un problema tremendamente serio, yo (*toco madera*) no lo  
 Is a problem tremendously serious, I (*touch wood*) not it  
 tengo  
 have  
 'It's a very serious problem, I (touch wood) don't have it' (EX)  
 b) 'I've never gotten the flu, touch wood' (British INF)  
 c) 'I seem to feel better, knock on wood' (American INF)

The CMs underlying this idiomatic expression can be more straightforwardly identified if we consider some of the cultural associations established with wood. Some old traditions in Celtic Ireland related wood to seeking for protection, for trees were believed to be Gods' earthly homes. Furthermore, one of the meanings of *tocar* is 'to strike or *knock*' on a surface, normally on a door, waiting to be let in a safer place. Hence, wood could be conceived as a MATERIAL FOR OBJECT metonymy, where wood stands for tree or door, these latter being at the same time a PART FOR WHOLE metonymy, where the whole refers to the home or house. In line with this, HOUSE is a concept with a wide network of associations, e.g. it protects living beings from unpleasant weather conditions. Hence, this HOUSE-AS-A SAFE PLACE metaphor leads us to WISHING GOOD LUCK IS KNOCKING ON WOOD.

The last positive EM, *tocar de cerca* ('touch one closely' or 'be close to one's heart'), not only is a clear example of AFFECTING IS TOUCHING, but it also represents the cross-linguistically widely found BEING NEAR IS TOUCHING metaphor (*de cerca*, 'closely', 'be close to') (Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2000). When an event is near or close to you or to your heart (PART FOR WHOLE metonymy), it emotionally touches or affects you (see example 6).

- (6) Ese tema le *tocaba de cerca* y le indignaba cómo  
 That subject him.IO *touched from close* and him.IO annoyed how  
 se trataba  
 was treated  
 'That subject touched her/him closely' (EX)  
 'His loss touched me closely' (OD)  
 'Those days (childhood times) are very close to my heart' (INF)

#### 4.2. *Tocar and negative ER*

As opposed to happiness, which is conceptualized through upward movement, the metaphorical expression *tocar fondo* that concerns the domain of sadness and affliction conceptualizes these emotions as going down. Expressions with *fondo* that exploit the meaning of 'base or ground' do not carry the article and are formally represented with the Ø article (see example 7). According to Delbecque (2012, p. 252), for this

type of lexicalizations the mobility along a vertical scale is contained from below and the subsidence implies an abrupt decay. Hence, when someone ‘touches bottom’, or ‘reaches/hits rock bottom’, they are hitting the lowest level. Hence, besides the experiential domain of tactile perception mapped onto that of affecting or reaching deep (REACHING IS TOUCHING), the downward-oriented bodily position experienced is drawn to that feeling of affliction (the SADNESS IS DOWN metaphor), which is in line with Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) idea that a “drooping posture typically goes along with sadness” (p. 15).

(7) Prefiero que las canciones me hagan *tocar fondo*  
 Prefer that the songs me.IO make *touch bottom*

‘I prefer to touch bottom with the songs’ (INF)

‘Touch bottom: Reach the lowest depth of suffering, squalor, depravity, etc.’ (TEM, p. 148)

‘When my girlfriend left me, I hit rock bottom’ (OD)

Regarding the constructions conveying the experiencer’s irritation and anger, the English counterparts were also found to associate annoyance with being in contact with the experiencer’s body parts (AFFECTING IS TOUCHING and MIND-AS-BODY metaphors), as illustrated in the following examples:

(8) *Me estás tocando mucho las narices*  
 Me.IO are touching much the noses

‘You’re breaking/touching my balls’ (EX)

‘You’re such a pain in the ass’ (OD)

‘Don’t touch my balls’ (INF)

‘You’re getting on my nerves’ (OD)

‘Stop pissing me off’ (INF)

(9) *Me toca las narices que estos trastos(patinetes) vayan por las aceras*  
*Me.IO touches the noses that these pieces of junk go on the pavements*

‘Riding electric scooters on sidewalk really gets up my nose’ (INF)

‘This loud music is getting on my tits’ (OD)

(10) *Es más fácil ir a un programa a tocarse las narices*  
 Is more easy go to a program to *touchREFLEX.VERB the noses*

‘It’s easier to scratch your balls in a TV program’ (INF)

‘He’s always bumming around’ (INF)

‘Stop sitting around twiddling your thumbs’ (OD)

Y luego encima el trol soy yo... ¡tócate las  
 And then on top of that the troll am I... ¡touch.REFLEX.VERB the  
 narices!  
 noses!  
 ‘Then on top of that I’m the bad guy, scratch my balls!’ (INF)  
 ‘That’s bollocks!’<sup>14</sup> (OD)

In the case of the reflexive *tocarse*, it is a slang expression indicating “unproductive behavior”. The motivation is obvious: when people engage in that sort of unproductive activity, they have their hands busy, hence not working. Whereas in Spanish the affected parts are the nose and testicles (*pelotas, huevos, cojones*), in English, attention is also given to the breast (*tits*), fingers (*thumbs*) and bottom (*ass, bumming, sitting*), with ‘bumming’ and ‘sitting’ referring to the part of the body that you sit on or the action of being supported by one’s buttocks. In the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, especially among Germanic peoples, including those who invaded Spain and conformed some of its traditions, *tocarle/mesarle las barbas a alguien* was interpreted as a direct offense causing anger and requiring retribution (Suazo-Pascual, 1999). Therefore, the underlying CMs are BOTHERING/SHOWING INDIGNATION IS TOUCHING ONE’S CULTURALLY PRIVATE BODY PART, in which “private” body part is an intimate or otherwise felt as representing one’s dignity, so that touching it by someone else is perceived in a given culture as “face-threatening”.

The concept of “face-threatening” is to be found in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory. Their definition of face reflects a dual view, for it distinguishes positive from negative face. The former is defined as “the want of every member that his/her wants be desirable to at least some others (p. 62)” and the latter is “the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others (p. 62)”. Allan and Burridge (2006) characterized the processes of euphemism and dysphemism by reference to this notion of face and considered dysphemistic expressions as instantiations of face-threatening speech acts. This is in line with Crespo-Fernández’ (2016) view of dysphemism as the only source of face-threatening expressions. The author defines dysphemism as the process in which the pejorative traits of the taboo are highlighted to the addressee or to the concept itself with an offensive purpose. The role of metaphor in creating dysphemistic expressions is, therefore, crucial, for it creates a specific perspective on the taboo concept. The above-mentioned metaphors, like HAPPINESS IS UP and SADNESS IS DOWN, are due to the decontextualization of a CAUSE (A TOUCHING B’S ‘SENSITIVE’ OR INTIMATE BODY PARTS WITH AN OFFENSIVE PURPOSE) FOR EFFECT (B FEELING OFFENDED BY A, AND IRRITATED AND ANGERED TOWARDS A).

---

14. ‘Bollocks’ is again a dysphemistic word and a violation of the taboo of male intimate parts that is used for expressing anger.

The construction ‘be a pain in the ass/neck’ can be expressed as merely ‘being a pain’, where ‘pain’ literally refers to an unpleasant sensation caused by illness, and metaphorically, to be a nuisance. There are other expressions that map the domain of diseases onto that of people’s behavior: ‘he’s the pest’ or ‘toxic people are cancer’. This ANNOYING PEOPLE ARE DISEASES metaphor is clearly instantiated in the language used by Agent Smith from Matrix when talking about humans: “There is another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern. Do you know what it is? A virus. Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet. You’re a plague”. This PEOPLE ARE DISEASES metaphor is further examined in Musolff’s (2010) study, as the author explores the anti-Semitic concept of BODY-PARASITE and the BODY-STATE metaphor built on by the Nazis during the Holocaust. In this regard, Musolff (2010) supports a Hitler’s BODY-PARASITE scenario as political-semantic innovation, for he claims the motivation of an anti-Semitic imagery by recourse to cognitive strategies such as blending of certain conceptual inputs to be based on achieving a semantic innovation in the form of strategic scenarios (p. 76). Likewise, the origin of the PEOPLE ARE DISEASES conceptual metaphor might be found in the blended concept of computer virus (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). According to this view, people are conceptualized here in line with how we construct our reality, from the social sphere (people) to the scientific (diseases, virus) one. Yet, contrary to the concept of computer virus, people, like biological viruses, are alive.

The expression ‘get on one’s nerves’ represents linguistically one way of metaphorically conceptualizing displeasure and anger. The experiencer’s nerves are affected by the offender’s behavior. The metonymy at work seems to be effect (a affecting b’s nerves) for cause (b’s anger at a’s annoying behavior), which is the metonymic motivation for the angering someone is affecting her/his nerves CM. Lastly, ‘pissing one off’, which is another example of dysphemistic language, is constituted by the verb ‘piss’ (urinate) and features the constituent particle ‘off’. The meaning of this phrasal verb stems from the spatial configuration of separating one part (figure) from the whole (ground), which underlies the semantics of ‘off’, for the experiencer experiences anger, which turns him/her away from the offender. This is again due to a metonymy that maps one of the effects of pissing someone (metaphorically offending, displeasing) namely moving away from the “pisser”, onto a behavioral effect of anger (avoiding contact with the offender).

### 1.3. Taxonomy

Based on the underlying metaphors and metonymies, we proposed a conceptual classification in Table 3. Such a taxonomy based on shared and language-specific metaphors and metonymies in English and Spanish can be a useful tool for developing didactic content aiming at the proper assimilation of tactile expressions at an instructional ELE context.

TABLE 3. CONCEPTUAL CLASSIFICATION FOR THE TARGET CONSTRUCTIONS

Metaphors and metonymies	Target constructions	Spanish	English
AFFECTING IS TOUCHING (MIND-AS-BODY)	1-9	yes	yes
REACHING IS TOUCHING	2, 5	yes, yes	yes, yes
BEING NEAR IS TOUCHING	4	yes	yes
GOOD IS UP	2	yes	yes
HAPPINESS IS UP	2	yes	yes
SADNESS IS DOWN	5	yes	yes
HOUSE-AS-A SAFE PLACE	3	yes	yes
ANNOYING PEOPLE ARE DISEASES	6, 7	no, no	yes, yes
WISHING GOOD LUCK IS KNOCKING ON WOOD	3	yes	yes
BOTHERING IS TOUCHING ONE'S CULTURALLY PRIVATE BODY PART	6, 7	yes, yes	yes, yes
BEING LAZY IS TOUCHING ONE'S CULTURALLY PRIVATE BODY PART	8	yes	yes
SHOWING INDIGNATION IS TOUCHING ONE'S CULTURALLY PRIVATE BODY PART	9	yes	yes
ANGERING SOMEONE IS AFFECTING HER/HIS NERVES	6, 7	no, no	yes, yes
MATERIAL FOR OBJECT	3	yes	yes
PART FOR WHOLE	1, 3, 4, 6, 7	yes, yes, no, yes, yes	yes, yes, yes, yes, yes
BODY PART FOR PERSON	1	yes	yes
EFFECT FOR CAUSE	1, 6, 7	yes, no, no	yes, yes, yes
CAUSE FOR EFFECT	2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes	yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes
<p>1. <i>Tocar el corazón/la fibra/ el alma</i>; 'touch one's heart', 'touch one on the raw', 'strike a chord with someone', 'tear or pull at one's heartstrings', 'touch one's soul'</p> <p>2. <i>Tocar el cielo (con las manos/los dedos)</i>; 'touch the sky'</p> <p>5. <i>Tocar fondo</i>; 'touch bottom', 'hit/reach rock bottom'</p> <p>3. <i>Tocar madera</i>; 'touch wood', 'knock on wood'</p> <p>4. <i>Tocar de cerca</i>; 'touch one closely', 'be close to one's heart'</p> <p>6. <i>Tocar las narices, etc. a alguien</i>; 'break/touch one's balls', 'get on one's nerves', 'get on one's nerves', 'piss one off'</p> <p>7. <i>Tocar las narices, etc. algo</i>; 'get up one's nose', 'get on one's tits'</p> <p>8. <i>Tocarse las narices, etc.</i>; 'scratch one's balls', 'bum around', 'sit around twiddling one's thumbs'</p> <p>9. <i>Tócate los/las cojones/huevos/narices/pelotas</i>; 'scratch my balls', 'that's bollocks'</p>			



## 5. Conclusions

As this contrastive and cognitive study has evinced, our perception and physical interaction with the world has an influence in how we express linguistically our emotions. Even though these latter are highly abstract, they are grounded in our sensory-motor experience. Findings from our analysis prove the assumption that CMs are motivated by or grounded in our bodily, perceptual and social experience. By experiencing the interconnectedness between two domains of experience (their structural similarities or correspondences), we conceptually link both domains and verbalize our emotional states based on that perceptual and physical interaction with the surroundings. That is, language is embodied and serves as a connecting bridge between our body and mind, presenting both as one single unit.

If CL studies how different aspects of language (concrete representations) replicate aspects of human cognition (abstract representations), metaphor and metonymy are one of the clearest examples of this relationship. As Stepien (2007, p. 393) contends, the metaphorical basis of thought (which, at the same time, has a metonymic motivation) and the physical basis of cognition, along with semantic and conceptual structure are crucial to language. Hence, a cognitive categorization of expressions not only helps gain a deeper insight into how language works, but also, and most importantly, becomes a motivated and motivation tool for ELE teachers and learners. The cognitive-based material that can potentially be designed based on this contrastive study can help native speakers of English become aware and establish connections between their mother tongue and Spanish, enhancing their metaphorical and figurative awareness and, thus, competence. As a result, the analysis of the wide-ranging target metaphors presented here will assuredly be highly useful for the ELE teaching-learning process, for developing the ability to understand conceptual metaphors and use their metaphorical linguistic representations is crucial for successful foreign language learning.<sup>15</sup>

## References

- Alonso, G. S. (2013). La enseñanza significativa del artículo en español. *Revista Nebrija de Lingüística Aplicada a la Enseñanza de Lenguas*, 13, 1-2.
- Allan, K., & Burrige, K. (2006). *Forbidden words. Taboo and the censoring of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barcelona, A. (1986). On the concept of depression in American English: A cognitive approach. *Revista canaria de estudios ingleses*, 12, 7-34.

---

15. This contrastive analysis serves as a basis for the design of a cognitive-based didactic material that will be implemented in an empirical follow-up study with English native speakers who are ELE learners at the University of Columbia (New York).

- Barcelona, A. (1992). El lenguaje del amor romántico en inglés y en español. *Atlantis*, 14(1), 5-27.
- Barcelona, A. (Ed.). (2000). *Metaphor and metonymy at the crossroads: A cognitive perspective*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Barcelona, A. (2012). "Metonymy in, under and above the lexicon". In S. Martín Alegre, M. Moyer and E. Pladevall (Eds.), *At a time of crisis: English and American studies in Spain* (pp. 254-271). Barcelona: UAB.
- Barcelona, A., & Soriano, C. (2004). Metaphorical conceptualization in English and Spanish. *European Journal of English Studies*, 8.3, 295-307.
- Bokor, Z. (1997). *Body-based constructionism in the conceptualization of anger* (C.L.E.A.R. Series, No. 17). Budapest: Department of English, Hamburg University and the Department of American Studies, ELTE.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S.C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Buck, D. (1949). *A dictionary of selected synonyms in the principal Indo-European languages*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Buitrago, A. (2005). Diccionario de dichos y frases hechas (DDFH). Madrid: Espasa. *Cambridge Dictionary*. Available in: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us>. Access: 15/12/2019.
- Castañeda, A., & Alonso, R. (2009). La percepción de la gramática. Aportaciones de la lingüística cognitiva y la pragmática a la enseñanza de español/LE. *Marco ELE. Revista de Didáctica Español Lengua Extranjera*, 8, 1-33. *Collins Cobuild*. Available in: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/es/diccionario/ingles>. Access: 13/12/2019.
- Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* (CREA). Available in: <http://www.rae.es>. Access: 06/10/2019.
- Crespo-Fernández, E. (2016). *Sex in language. Euphemistic and dysphemistic metaphors in Internet forums*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Davies, M. (2018). *Corpus del Español. Webs and Dialects*. Available in: <https://www.corpusdelespanol.org>. Access: 11/12/2019.
- Delbecque, N. (2012): "En el fondo: polifuncionalidad y polifonía de la localización interna". In T. E. Jiménez Juliá et al. (Eds.), *Cum corde et in nova grammatica: estudios ofrecidos a Guillermo Rojo* (pp. 247-263). Universidad de Santiago de Compostela.
- Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Fernández-Jaén, J. (2006). Verbos de percepción sensorial en español: una clasificación cognitiva. *Interlingüística*, 16, 1-14.
- Fillmore, C. J. (1977). The case for case reopened. In P. Kule and J.M. Sadock (Eds.), *Grammatical relations* (pp. 59-81). New York: Academic Press.
- Geeraerts, D., & Cuyckens, H. (Eds.). (2007). *The Oxford handbook of cognitive linguistics*. Oxford University Press.

- Ibarretxe-Antuñano, I. (1999). *Polysemy and metaphor in perception verbs: A cross-linguistic study* (Phd Thesis). University of Edinburgh.
- Ibarretxe-Antuñano, I. (2000). ¿Es la metáfora el único proceso que interviene en el cambio semántico? *Revista española de lingüística aplicada*, 1, 409-418.
- Ibarretxe-Antuñano, I. (2002). Mind-as-body as a cross-linguistic conceptual metaphor. *Miscelánea. A Journal of English and American Studies*, 25(1), 93-119.
- Ibarretxe-Antuñano, I. (2005). Limitations for cross-linguistic metonymies and metaphors. *Cognitive and discourse approaches to metaphor and metonymy*, 19, 187.
- Ibarretxe-Antuñano, I. (2008). Vision metaphors for the intellect: Are they really cross-linguistic? *Atlantis*, 30(1), 15-33.
- Ibarretxe-Antuñano, I. (2013). The relationship between conceptual metaphor and culture. *Intercultural pragmatics*, 10(2), 315-339.
- Johnson, M. (1987). *The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- King, B. (1989). *The conceptual structure of emotional experience in Chinese*. Ohio State university. PhD Diss.
- Kurath, H. (1921). *The semantic sources of the words for the emotions in Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and the Germanic languages*. Menasha: George Banta Publishing.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). The metaphorical structure of the human conceptual system. *Cognitive science*, 4(2), 195-208.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the Flesh* (vol. 4). New York: Basic books.
- Lakoff, G., & Kövecses, Z. (1987). The cognitive model of anger inherent in American English. In D. Holland and N. Quinn (Eds.), *Cultural models in language and thought*, Cambridge University Press, 195-221.
- MacArthur, F., Krennmayr, T., & Littlemore, J. (2015). How basic is “UNDERSTANDING IS SEEING” when reasoning about knowledge? Asymmetric uses of sight metaphors in office hours consultations in English as academic lingua franca. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 30(3), 184-217.
- Merriam Webster*. Available in: <https://www.merriam-webster.com>. Access: 11/12/2019.
- Montero, S. (2011). El artículo y otros fantasmas del nombre. *redELE: Revista Electrónica de Didáctica ELE*, 21, 5.
- Musolff, A. (2010). *Metaphor, Nation and the Holocaust: The Concept of the Body Politic*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.
- Plan curricular del Instituto Cervantes. *Niveles de referencia para el español Instituto Cervantes-Biblioteca nueva*. Available in: [http://cvc.cervantes.es/ensenanza/biblioteca\\_ele/plan\\_curricular/](http://cvc.cervantes.es/ensenanza/biblioteca_ele/plan_curricular/). Access: 08/10/2019.
- Radden, G. (2000). How metonymic are metaphors. In A. Barcelona (Ed.), *Metaphor and metonymy at the crossroads: A cognitive perspective* (pp. 93-108.), Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

- Radden, G. (2002). How metonymic are metaphors. In R. Dirven and R. Pörings (Eds.), *Metaphor and metonymy in comparison and contrast* (pp. 407-434), Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Rojo, A., & Valenzuela, J. (2005). Verbs of sensory perception: An English-Spanish comparison. *Languages in Contrast* 5(2), 219-243.
- Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, F. J. (2011). Metonymy and Cognitive Operations. In R. Benczes, A. Barcelona and F. J. Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez (Eds.), *Defining Metonymy in Cognitive Linguistics: Towards a Consensus View* (pp. 103-124). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, F. J. (2020). Understanding figures of speech: Dependency relations and organizational patterns. *Language and Communication*, 71, 16-38.
- Sommer, E., & Weiss, D. (2001). *Metaphors dictionary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stepien, M. A. (2007). Metáfora y metonimia conceptual en la fraseología de cinco partes del cuerpo humano en español y polaco. *Anuario de estudios filológicos*, 30, 391-409.
- Suazo-Pascual, G. (1999). *Abecedario de dichos y frases hechas* (vol. 19). Madrid: Edaf.
- Sweetser, E. (1990). *From etymology to pragmatics: Metaphorical and cultural aspects of semantic structure* (vol. 54). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Urban Dictionary*. Available in: <https://www.urbandictionary.com>. Access: 11/12/2019.
- Viberg, Å. (2015). Sensation, perception and cognition: Swedish in a typological-contrastive perspective. *Functions of language*, 22(1), 96-131.
- Wilkinson, D. (2013). *Concise thesaurus of traditional English metaphors*. London: Routledge.

### Appendix: List of expressions

Tocar (el/los) corazón(es); Tocar (la/s) fibra(s); Tocar (el/las) alma(s); Tocar el cielo (con las manos/los dedos); Tocar madera; Tocar de cerca; Tocar fondo; Tocar las narices (a alguien); Tocar los cojones (a alguien); Tocar los huevos (a alguien); Tocar las pelotas (a alguien); Tocar los cojones algo a alguien; Tocar las narices algo a alguien; Tocar los huevos algo a alguien; Tocar las pelotas algo a alguien; Tocarse los huevos; Tocarse los cojones; Tocarse las narices; Tocarse las pelotas; Tócate los cojones; Tócate los huevos; Tócate las narices; Tócate las pelotas.