

Article

Tactile Verbs and the Expression of Chance Events in Latin and Italian

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Abstract

In studies on the polysemy of tactile verbs, there is a semantic field that has hitherto received scant attention: the expression of “chance events”. In an effort to partially fill this gap and lay the foundations for future research, this paper has two interrelated aims: (a) to clarify what constitutes a chance event when Latin *contingo*, *obtingo*, and, in particular, Italian *toccare* convey this type of meaning; and (b) to identify the semantic motivation and the conceptual mechanisms that underlie such use. To this end, using a corpus-based, largely qualitative analysis, occurrences of the Latin and Italian verbs will be examined, focusing on their constructions and the semantics of their arguments. Data will be collected from dictionaries, other lexicographical sources, and digital corpora. The theoretical approach adopted is that of Cognitive Linguistics. In conclusion, the analysis will evidence that verbs related to the meaning ‘to touch’, when used to express chance events in Latin and Italian, involve similar constructions that are explicable from a cognitive perspective. Ultimately, it will be suggested that the “bipolarity of touch” and other related characteristics help explain why tactile verbs can express chance events. This is consistent with Fernández Jaén’s 2014 classification.

Keywords: tactile verbs; chance events; polysemy; Latin; Italian; cognitive linguistics

1. Introduction

In some Western Indo-European languages, among the expressions denoting “chance events” are words that relate in various ways to the meaning ‘to touch’. The realm of “chance” is complex and heterogeneous; it is deeply rooted in the culture of a community and is generally of great importance, since—among its possible functions—it serves to categorize everything that cannot be explained rationally and is thus attributable to the “divine” or to something beyond human control¹. It is therefore not surprising that the concept of “chance” has been the subject of reflection and study since ancient times; even today, chance events are considered difficult to define, above all because they are highly idiosyncratic (see, for example, [Shanahan & Porfeli, 2006](#)). Given the diversity and complexity of the realm of “chance”, I will adopt a basic definition of these events, considering them as chance occurrences that befall a person; in other words, good or bad events that are typically beyond the control of the individuals involved, events that are unpredictable and often unexpected and sudden. The definition I suggest, based on various lexical entries², refers to characteristics that are typical of different types of chance events; these events, in turn, do not share these characteristics in the same way or to the same degree, with some examples being more typical than others. In line with a fundamental principle of Cognitive Linguistics, I therefore propose that chance events



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constitute a “prototypical category” (see [Taylor, 1995](#), among others). This is an internally structured category with prototypical or central members, which have all the typical characteristics of the category, and progressively more peripheral members with a gradually decreasing number of these characteristics. From this perspective, typical examples of chance events are accidents that are usually beyond the control of the individual: they can be unpredictable, unexpected and sudden. In contrast, a drawing of lots is an event whose outcome is beyond the control of those involved and is unpredictable, but not sudden. Consequently, the latter type of chance event can be considered a less central/more peripheral member of the category.

At the level of linguistic and, in particular, semantic analysis, the relationship between chance events and words linked to the meaning ‘to touch’ can be considered from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. In synchrony, this relationship is evident in polysemous words, that is, word forms associated with multiple related meanings that have ‘to touch’ as their main, prototypical meaning. Some of these items will be examined in this paper. On the other hand, as an example of a diachronic relation, we can consider English *contingent* and *contingency*, whose various meanings, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*³, include ‘happening or coming by chance’, ‘accidental’, ‘fortuitous’ (s.v. *contingent*)⁴; ‘chance; fortuitousness’ (s.v. *contingency*)⁵; and ‘a chance occurrence; an event the occurrence of which could not have been, or was not, foreseen; an accident, a casualty’ (s.v. *contingency*)⁶. In this case, the connection to the meaning ‘to touch’ is not immediately apparent, although it can be determined by examining the etymology of these words. Indeed, both English *contingent* and *contingency* ultimately derive from Latin *contingo*⁷, which, besides meaning ‘to touch, to reach, take hold of, etc.’, also means ‘to happen, to befall’, and ‘to fall to one’s lot, etc.’ (see *infra*, Section 3.1). This verb is a compound form comprising the preverb *cum* ‘with, together with’ and the verb *tango*, which prototypically means ‘to touch’.

Notably, even though the polysemy that characterizes verbs of perception and its mechanisms has aroused the interest of linguists since [Viberg \(1984, 2001\)](#) and [Sweetser \(1990\)](#), studies on the polysemy of tactile verbs have generally paid little attention to the use of verbs meaning ‘to touch’ to express chance events ([Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 1999, 2006](#)), or have not examined it in depth ([Fernández Jaén, 2014](#)). The studies by Ibarretxe-Antuñano and Fernández Jaén, however, have made a fundamental theoretical and methodological contribution to the analysis of the polysemy of verbs meaning ‘to touch’ that cannot be overlooked (see *infra* and Section 4.3). Only recently, in an initial attempt to investigate the relationship between tactile verbs and chance events, [Pompeo \(2025a, 2025b\)](#) adopted a Cognitive Linguistic approach and drew on Conceptual Metaphor Theory in analyzing the Italian expression *toccare in sorte a* (roughly, ‘to befall (someone)’), while also considering contexts in which Latin verbs *contingo*, *obtingo*, *evenio*, and *obvenio* co-occur with the ablative *sorte* from *sors*, a polysemous noun that can also mean ‘destiny, chance’.

Given that the studies relevant to this paper ([Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 1999, 2006](#); [Fernández Jaén, 2014](#); [Pompeo, 2025a, 2025b](#))—and, as we shall see, this paper itself—are conducted within the framework of Cognitive Semantics, this approach deserves a brief introduction, as do certain pertinent concepts. Cognitive Semantics is generally regarded as a subfield within Cognitive Linguistics, an approach that originated in the late seventies and early eighties through the pioneering work of several researchers interested in the relationship between language and the mind: George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, Ronald Langacker, and Leonard Talmy, among others. Interestingly, both Cognitive Linguistics and Cognitive Semantics encompass a range of related, yet distinct, theoretical perspectives that are fundamentally concerned with the interplay between language, meaning, and cognition. In this field of research, in fact, a foundational assumption is that meaning lies

at the heart of language and is actively constructed through cognitive mechanisms and situated within a cultural context. Linguistic structures, in turn, are considered vehicles for expressing specific conceptualizations of a state of affairs, making the relationship between meaning and form a central concern of analysis⁸. In this broad area of research, and since part of this paper concerns Latin, it is also worth mentioning the recently established field of Cognitive Classical Linguistics, which aims to systematically apply the theories and methods of Cognitive Semantics to Classical Studies (see, among others, [Short, 2016](#); [Short & Mocchiari, 2019](#)).

Within the Cognitive Semantics framework, the mechanisms underlying semantic–lexical extensions⁹ involving perception verbs and their prototypical meanings—meanings strictly relating to the sensory sphere and, synchronically, the most frequent—have often been traced back to metaphorical or metonymic processes¹⁰. These are grounded in, and motivated by, our everyday *embodied* experience (see, among others, [Lakoff, 1987](#))¹¹ as well as cultural aspects ([Kövecses, 2005](#), among others). It is important to underline, that from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics, metaphors and metonymies are no longer considered mere ornamental devices but fundamental mechanisms of conceptualization. In this respect, it is worth highlighting the seminal work of [Lakoff and Johnson \(1980/2003\)](#), *Metaphors We Live By*, devoted to the so-called (standard) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which subsequently underwent numerous revisions, including those made by the two scholars themselves (see [Kövecses, 2021](#)). According to [Lakoff and Johnson \(1980/2003\)](#), a conceptual metaphor is understanding one domain of experience (typically abstract) in terms of another (typically concrete). More precisely, metaphorical mechanisms create a series of unidirectional, partial correspondences, known as ‘mapping’, between two domains of experience: the ‘source domain’ (the concrete domain) and the ‘target domain’ (the more abstract domain, or the one that is more challenging to conceptualize). In turn, metaphorical linguistic expressions are taken as realizations of conceptual metaphors. For example, the expressions *Is that the foundation for your theory?* and *The theory needs more support* are underpinned by the conceptual metaphor THEORIES (the target domain) ARE BUILDINGS (the source domain) ([Kövecses, 2021](#), pp. 192–193).

The meanings of polysemous words resulting from metaphorical or metonymic processes are defined as “non-prototypical”, and, to a greater or lesser extent, can be peripheral compared to the “central”, prototypical meaning. In particular, as demonstrated in various studies on tactile verbs (see, among others, [Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 1999, 2006](#); [Fernández Jaén, 2014](#), and references therein), the sense of touch and verbs whose prototypical meaning is ‘to touch’ can relate to various semantic fields and be involved in the expression of concrete meanings, such as ‘to partake of food or drink’, ‘to affect (physically)’, ‘to reach (physically)’, as well as metaphorical meanings, such as ‘to affect (emotionally)’ and ‘to reach (an aim, the time to do something, etc.)’, and ‘to deal with’. Notably, as far as the cognitive and emotional spheres are concerned, the sense of touch has been linked to emotions in studies dating back to the first half of the twentieth century, which focused on the lexis of ancient and modern Indo-European languages ([Kurath, 1921](#); [Buck, 1949](#)). Subsequent research has expanded these findings (see, among others, [Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 1999, 2006](#), and references therein). Expressions such as English *I’m deeply touched* or *touching words* ([Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 1999](#), p. 68), Spanish *Juan le tocó el corazón a María* ‘John touched Mary’s heart’ ([Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 1999](#), p. 71), and Italian *La morte di questi giovani lottatori ci tocca profondamente*, ‘The death of these young wrestlers touches us deeply’ (from *itTenTen20*; see *infra*, Section 2.2) exemplify this phenomenon.

With regard to the aforementioned studies, two methodological aspects are of particular interest when analyzing tactile verbs (see *infra*, Section 4.3). The first is Ibarretxe-Antuñano’s theory of “compositional polysemy” ([Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2006](#), pp. 249–250,

passim). According to this notion, “in every polysemous word, we can find semantic extensions that can be easily ‘predicted’ or ‘guessed’ by the semantics of the co-occurring elements [“predictable cases”], and semantic extensions that cannot be ‘predicted’ or ‘guessed’ [“unpredictable cases”]” (Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2006, p. 251, fn. 16). The second methodological aspect is taken up in Fernández Jaén’s (2014) study of Spanish *tocar*. In his analysis, he systematically theorizes and applies different image schemas (Johnson, 1987)¹²—*imagen esquemática*—to explain the polysemy of the Spanish verb *tocar*, also from a diachronic perspective. The five types of *imagen esquemática* (*esquema agentivo* ‘agentive schema’, *esquema estático* ‘static schema’, *esquema de movimiento vectorial* ‘vectorial movement schema’, *esquema de flujo invertido pasivo* ‘passive reverse flow schema’, and *esquema de flujo invertido reactivo* ‘reactive reverse flow schema’), discussed below in Section 4.3, are the basis for a series of metaphorical and metonymical conceptualizations that originate from the prototypical meaning of *tocar* ‘to hit’, in which Talmy’s force dynamics (Talmy, 1988, 2000) are at play.

Following this line of research, and expanding on Pompeo (2025a, 2025b), the present study answers the need for a more thorough investigation of the uses of Latin *contingo*, *obtingo*, and Italian *toccare* to express chance events—topics only addressed tangentially in the earlier papers. This is undertaken through an in-depth, corpus-based analysis of occurrences of these verbs by examining in detail: (a) the semantics of their arguments and how these interrelate with the meaning of the verbs, determining whether they are “predictable cases” or “unpredictable cases” of “compositional polysemy”, as described by Ibarretxe-Antuñano (2006, pp. 249–250); and (b) the syntactic constructions. The latter will be considered from a broader perspective and compared with the constructions of other verbs expressing chance events, particularly those linked to motion verbs.

More specifically, the goal of this paper is twofold. First, based on the initial definition of the prototypical category of chance events, it aims to clarify the characteristics of the events expressed by the verbs under consideration; in other words, the kinds of chance events denoted by *contingo*, *obtingo* and, above all, by *toccare*. Second, it seeks to shed light on the semantic motivation and conceptual mechanisms that underlie the use of tactile verbs to express chance events in Latin and, in particular, Italian, paying special attention to the elements common to both languages—which may indicate a shared conceptualization, likely grounded in everyday embodied experience—as well as to those elements specific to each. At this stage of the analysis, it is important to take into account the relevant features of the sense of touch. The theoretical approach adopted, as mentioned above, is Cognitive Linguistics and, in particular, Cognitive Semantics.

As regards the languages investigated, the decision to consider Latin and Italian is motivated not only by the desire to broaden the picture that emerged in previous works (Fernández Jaén, 2014; Pompeo, 2025a, 2025b), but also, fundamentally, by the need to compare data from an ancient and a modern language, independently of their genealogical relatedness, in order to identify significant similarities at the semantic and conceptual levels. The intention is to obtain a better understanding of the semantic motivation and the conceptual mechanisms that underlie the use of tactile verbs to express chance events. This should also provide groundwork for subsequent research based on a broader sample of languages. The analysis, therefore, is not intended to be diachronic but rather descriptive and, in some ways, contrastive, especially given that Italian *toccare* is not an outcome of Latin *tango*. The data on Old Italian (see *infra*, Sections 2.2 and 3.2) serve here as a general reference point, simply providing the “chronological coordinates” of the first attestations of this usage of *toccare* in the Italian language and, hopefully, paving the way for future diachronic studies.

Data were collected from lexicographical sources and corpora (Sections 2.1 and 2.2). While modern Italian data were extracted from a corpus of contemporary texts, the criteria for the selection of the Latin data were somewhat different. In light of the nature of the corpus and the relative paucity of attestations of *obtingo*, it was deemed appropriate to consider data pertaining to the key “Antiquitas” period (3rd c. BCE–2nd c. CE), eschewing a diachronic or stylistic analysis (see *infra*, Section 2.1). It is evident that the resulting description is of a “flattened” nature; nevertheless, it is useful in providing a general account of the use of *contingo* and *obtingo* to express chance events.

From the analysis, it will emerge that verbs related to the meaning ‘to touch’, when used to express chance events in Latin and Italian, involve similar intransitive constructions that are explicable from a cognitive perspective. Ultimately, it will be suggested that the “bipolarity of touch” and other related characteristics help explain why tactile verbs can express chance events.

The remainder of the present paper is organized as follows. After this introduction (Section 1), Section 2 describes the materials and methods adopted to collect and analyze the occurrences of Latin *contingo* and *obtingo*, and, in particular, Italian *toccare*; a subsection is dedicated to each language. The results of the analysis are presented in Section 3, with Sections 3.1 and 3.2 devoted to Latin and Italian, respectively. The results are discussed and explained in the subsections of Section 4, while Section 5 provides some concluding remarks.

2. Materials and Methods

The analysis is largely qualitative, with some quantitative aspects, and it takes into account both Latin and Italian data. This and the following section are thus divided into two parts: the first dedicated to Latin and the second to Italian.

2.1. Latin

Latin data were collected using digital sources. Initially, dictionaries and other reference works were consulted to identify polysemous Latin verbs related to the meaning ‘to touch’ that can also express chance events, and to verify if their use is characterized by specific constructions. In particular, the online dictionary *Logeion*¹³ and the *Thesaurus linguae Latinae* (TLL)¹⁴ online were accessed. More specifically, I used the Retro function of *Logeion*, selecting the *Concordance* tool¹⁵ and querying it by entering the English words *befall*, *fall* (for meanings such as ‘to fall to one’s lot’ or ‘to fall out’), *happen* and *occur*.

According to lexicographical sources, *contingo* and *obtingo* are the only verbs related to the meaning ‘to touch’ that can also express chance events. Other Latin verbs that denote this type of event (e.g., *accido*, *cado*, *evenio*, *incido*, *incurro*, and *obvenio*) are linked to various semantic fields. For example, *evenio* and *obvenio*, two compounds of *venio* ‘to come’, are deictic motion verbs that can also denote chance events (*evenio* ‘to fall out, to come to pass, to happen, to befall, to betide one’; *obvenio* ‘to happen, to befall’); *accido* and *incido* are both compounds of *cado* ‘to fall’; and *incurro* is a compound of the motion verb *curro* ‘to run’ (*Logeion* s.vv.). These data were confirmed by the *Thesaurus linguae Latinae* online, where I consulted the entries of the main verbs that express chance events, paying particular attention to the synonyms provided below each entry.

Secondly, in order to verify the data obtained from the reference works, occurrences of *contingo* and *obtingo* were collected by consulting the *Library of Latin Texts*¹⁶ and searching the items *contingo* and *obtingo* (including the variant *optingo*). Given the largely qualitative nature of the analysis and the significant difference in the number of occurrences of the two verbs¹⁷, I decided to take a sample-based approach. To this end, as mentioned in Section 1, I selected the period between the third century BCE and the second century CE¹⁸, along with

some of the authors—and, where possible, the same works—in which both *contingo* and *obtingo* are found. Occurrences where more than one semantic interpretation was possible were removed. The final sample contains 115 occurrences: 48 occurrences of *contingo* and 67 occurrences of *obtingo* (see *infra*, Section 3.1).

The following authors and works were selected: T. Macc(i)us Plautus¹⁹; M. Tullius Cicero (*De divinatione*, *De officiis* [Book 1], *Epistulae ad Atticum* [Books 1–8], *Epistulae ad familiares* [Books 2 and 16], *In C. Verrem orationes sex*, *In L. Calpurnium Pisonem oratio*, *In L. Sergium Catilinam orationes*, *In M. Antonium orationes Philippicae*, *In P. Vatinius testem interrogatio*); T. Livius (*Ab urbe condita* [Books 28, 31–33, 38–39, 42–44]); P. Terentius Afer²⁰; and Apuleius (*Apologia—Pro se de magia liber*, *De deo Socratis*, *De mundo*, *Florida*, *Metamorphoses*).

2.2. Italian

The first step was to select Italian verbs expressing chance events related to the meaning ‘to touch’ guided by my own native speaker competence. However, to counter any generalizations made on the basis of personal introspection, I consulted online dictionaries—*Il Nuovo De Mauro*²¹ and the *Vocabolario Treccani*²² online—searching for the verbs and their synonyms that express this type of event. This preliminary survey showed that—besides *toccare* ‘to happen’, ‘to occur by chance’ or ‘to fall to one’s lot’—several verbs are used in modern Italian to express chance events, such as *accadere* ‘to happen, to occur, to befall’, *avvenire* ‘to happen, to occur’, *capitare* ‘to happen, to occur’, and *succedere* ‘to happen, to occur’, as well as expressions with the prepositional phrase *in sorte* ‘by chance’, e.g., *toccare in sorte* ‘to fall to one’s lot’ (see *infra*), *venire in sorte* lit. ‘to arrive by chance’ and *essere dato in sorte* lit. ‘to be given by chance’. The only verb of tactile perception used for a chance event, however, is *toccare*.

To better understand the use of *toccare* to express chance events in modern Italian, I deemed it useful to identify the earliest attestations of this usage. To this end, a brief survey of Old Italian texts up until the end of the 14th century was undertaken to verify whether the verb *toccare* was used to express chance events and, if so, which construction was used at that particular stage of Italian. Data were collected by consulting the *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*²³, under the entry *toccare*, as well as two corpora: the *Corpus OVI dell’italiano antico*²⁴ and the *Biblioteca italiana*²⁵, both queried by entering the search item *tocc** in order to retrieve all inflected forms of *toccare*.

The final phase of the research entailed the collection and selection of data on the use of *toccare* in modern Italian by querying the *itTenTen20* (2020) corpus²⁶, available in *Sketch Engine*, and using the concordance tool. A preliminary remark is in order. Sentences in which *toccare* denotes a chance event and the entity to whom something ‘happens’ is not expressed, such as **La disgrazia è toccata* (lit. **Misfortune has befallen*), or **È toccato di cadere per strada* (lit. **It has fallen to fall over in the street*), are considered neither acceptable nor grammatical. The entity (typically human) to whom something *tocca* ‘happens’ is always expressed by a prepositional phrase “a ‘to’ + noun (pronoun)” or by the unstressed forms of the (dative) personal pronouns, and is the second argument of an intransitive two-place construction (see *infra*, Section 3.2). This observation, based on my competence as a native speaker and on the examples cited in dictionaries, was further confirmed by a preliminary search conducted using *ItTenTen20*. In samples of 200 occurrences, I looked at contexts in which the present tense forms *tocca* ‘[X] touches’ and *toccano* ‘[X] touch’, and the past tense forms *è toccato* ‘[X] is touched’ and *sono toccati* ‘[X] are touched’, were used. No occurrences were found where the entity to whom something ‘happens’ was omitted. Accordingly, when collecting and selecting the data, I only examined occurrences where the entity to whom something ‘happens’ is expressed, starting with contexts in which a form of *toccare* co-occurs with a prepositional phrase “a ‘to’ + noun (pronoun)”. This

resulted in 31,423 occurrences (0.0002165% of the entire corpus). In line with the qualitative nature of the analysis, and using the “Get a random sample” function in *Sketch Engine*, which modifies this number of occurrences while retaining the representativeness of the sample, the number was reduced to 200. When checking and analyzing this sample, I further narrowed down the occurrences by removing instances in which *toccare*, despite having an intransitive construction, means either ‘to be or feel compelled’ (Italian ‘essere o sentirsi costretto’), or ‘to be entitled or obliged, by right or duty, by precedence, by turn’ (Italian ‘spettare per diritto o per dovere, per precedenza, per turno’)²⁷. It is notable that when *toccare* has these meanings, the syntactic constructions are identical or very similar to the one used when this verb expresses a chance event (see Sections 3.2 and 4.2). Lastly, locutions such as *toccare in sorte* ‘to fall to one’s lot’ and *toccare in eredità* ‘to inherit’ were eliminated. Indeed, these expressions have a somewhat different construction from the two-place construction of *toccare*, with variances in the conceptualization of the event, as shown in [Pompeo \(2025a\)](#) for *toccare in sorte a*. The same method was then applied in order to analyze the contexts in which a form of *toccare* co-occurs with one of the following clitic forms of personal pronouns used to express an indirect object: *mi* ‘to me’, *ti* ‘to you’, *gli/le* ‘to him/her’, *ci* ‘to us’, *vi* ‘to you’, *gli/loro* ‘to them’²⁸. More specifically, for each pronoun, a sample of 200 occurrences was collected and then subjected to a screening process. In this instance, the procedure was more complex. Indeed, in addition to eliminating the intransitive contexts in which *toccare* does not express a chance event, as well as the aforementioned locutions—since the clitic pronouns *mi*, *ti*, *le*, *ci*, and *vi* are used to encode both direct objects (for example, *Queste parole ti hanno toccata* ‘These words touched you’) and indirect objects (*Ti è toccata una bella fortuna* ‘You happened upon some good luck’; see *infra*, example 16)—all occurrences where *toccare* is transitive were excluded. Sentences where the dative pronoun does not express an indirect object dependent on *toccare* but has another function (for example, when it encodes an external possessor) were likewise not included. Finally, cases where there was more than one possible semantic interpretation were also removed.

After this screening process, 107 occurrences remained for the qualitative analysis from an initial sample of 1600 occurrences. These are listed in Table A3 in Appendix A.

3. Results

3.1. Latin Contingo and Obtingo

As far as Latin is concerned, an analysis based on lexicographical sources revealed that chance events are denoted by two compounds of *tango* ‘to touch’: *contingo* (*co-/com-/con-* + *tango*) and *obtingo* (*ob* + *tango*). In this respect, it should be noted that besides expressing spatial values, Latin preverbs could also convey aspectual meanings. In the vast literature on this phenomenon, many elements concerning the origin and values of Latin preverbs are still being debated (see, for example, [Haverling, 2003](#); [Romagno, 2022](#)). As already observed in [Ernout and Thomas \(1953, p. 218\)](#), in Latin “les verbes d’événement (=“il arrive”), type essentiel d’aspect déterminé, sont tous des composés: *accidit, contingit, obtingit, euenit*”. In contrast to Ernout and Thomas who, with the phrase “aspect déterminé”, seem to be referring to morphological aspect, most likely of the perfective type ([Ernout & Thomas, 1953, p. 217](#)), some more recent theories relate the role of preverbs such as *com-* and *ob-* to *Aktionsart* ([Haverling, 2003](#); [Romagno, 2022](#), among others). More specifically, these theories posit that preverbs convert an atelic verb into a telic predicate ([Haverling, 2003](#); [Pinkster, 2015, p. 381](#); [Romagno, 2022](#)). Accordingly, both *contingo* and *obtingo*, when used to express chance events, can be classified as “achievement predicates” denoting a telic change of state. As we shall see, the analysis in Section 4 appears to support this interpretation.

On the basis of the number of meanings of the two verbs recorded in lexicographical works, *contingo* exhibits a higher degree of polysemy, as it can mean ‘to touch’, ‘to reach’, ‘to seize’, etc.; ‘to happen to one’, ‘to befall’, ‘to fall to one’s lot’, ‘to succeed in’, ‘to obtain a thing’; and ‘to happen’, ‘to fall to’, ‘to turn out’, ‘to come to pass’ (*Thesaurus linguae Latinae* online, s.v. *contingo*, coll. 712–720). When *contingo* means ‘to touch’, ‘to reach’, ‘to seize’, etc., it is constructed transitively, as in example (1) below²⁹:

(1) T. Livius, *Ab urbe condita*, 1, 56, 12

<i>Brutus</i> (. . .)	<i>terram</i>	<i>osculo</i>	<i>contigit</i>
Brutus.M.NOM	ground.F.ACC	kiss.N.ABL	touch.PFV.3SG

lit. ‘Brutus touched the ground with a kiss.’

In contrast, when *contingo* denotes a chance event, it is constructed intransitively, either in a two-place intransitive construction or in a one-place construction. In the first case, the chance event involves two participants and, consistently, has two arguments: (1) the subject, which denotes ‘what falls to one’s lot, happens, befalls, occurs, etc.’ to someone; this can be a nominative noun, a pronoun (a relative pronoun or an anaphoric or cataphoric demonstrative pronoun that refers to an event), an infinitive in subject function³⁰, a subjective sentence introduced by *ut*, or other types of subordinate sentence; and (2) a dative that encodes the person to whom something ‘happens, befalls, etc.’³¹; this can be a noun or a pronoun. Furthermore, the arguments of the verb can be implied if context allows. Since the first argument³² triggers verb agreement, *contingo* is conjugated in the third-person singular when the subject is a singular noun or pronoun, an infinitive or a subordinate clause; when the subject is morphologically plural, however, the verb is conjugated in the third-person plural³³.

In example (2), there is an occurrence of the two-place construction, where the sentence *Quodcumque optes* is the first argument, while *tibi* is the second.

(2) Plautus, *Cistellaria*, 497

<i>Quodcumque</i>	<i>optes</i> ,	<i>tibi</i>	<i>velim</i>
everything.N.ACC	desire.PRS.SUBJ.2SG	2SG.DAT	want.PRS.SUBJ.1SG

contingere
happen.INF.PRS
‘I wish that everything you desire would truly happen to you.’

The second construction of *contingo*, usually called “impersonal” in reference works, involves only the first argument—a sentence (example 3) or a pronoun (example 4)—and no person is present in the event. In this case, *contingo* expresses a phenomenon in a general way (something that ‘happens’ or ‘occurs’). Since the first argument is a sentence or a singular pronoun, *contingo* is always conjugated in the third-person singular.

(3) Apuleius, *De mundo*, 18

<i>his</i>	<i>passionibus</i>	<i>contingit</i>	<i>ut</i>
these.F.ABL.PL	disturbance.F.ABL.PL	happen.PRS.3SG	that

<i>quaedam</i>	<i>terrae</i>	<i>expirent</i>	<i>halitus</i>
certain.F.NOM.PL	earth.F.NOM.PL	breathe.PRS.SUBJ.3PL	vapor.M.ACC.PL

‘Because of these disturbances, it happens that certain areas of the ground release vapors.’

(4) Cicero, *De divinatione*, 1, 119

<i>quod</i>	<i>paulo</i>	<i>ante</i>	<i>interitum</i>
what.N.NOM	just	before	death.M.ACC

<i>Caesaris</i>	<i>contigit</i>
Caesar.M.GEN	happen.PFV.3SG

‘what happened just before Caesar’s death.’

There are frequent instances of *contingo* to express chance events³⁴, and they occur in all periods and genres of Latin literature (*Thesaurus linguae Latinae* online, s.v. *contingo*, coll. 717–720; *Library of Latin Texts*). The earliest occurrences are already found in Plautus' comedies and in Ennius (*Thyestes*, 360).

Regarding the semantics of the first argument, as shown in Table A1 in Appendix A³⁵, data collected by consulting the *Library of Latin Texts* reveal that the event/thing denoted can be:

(a) favorable, such as *quodcumque optes* 'everything you desire' (cf. example 2 above), *gaudia* 'joyful feelings' (example 5), a good *vitricus* 'stepfather' (Apuleius, *Apologia*, 96), *vita* 'life' (Cicero, *De officiis*, 1, 43), the beloved woman (cf. example 8 below), or a positive event (often the achievement of what somebody wants, or the occurrence of something extraordinary and positive, etc.);

(5) Terentius, *Hecyra*, 833

<i>tot</i>	<i>propter</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>gaudia</i>	<i>illi</i>	<i>contigisse</i>
so-many	because-of	1SG.ACC	joy.N.NOM.PL	him.DAT	happen.PFV. INF.

laetor

rejoice.PRS.1SG

'I rejoice that so many joys have befallen him thanks to me.'

(b) neutral, such as the occurrence of strange or surprising events or natural phenomena (above all, in Cicero's *De divinatione* and in Apuleius' *De mundo*), as in example (6);

(6) Cicero, *De divinatione*, 2, 33

<i>ostreis</i>	<i>que</i>	<i>et</i>	<i>conchyliis</i>	<i>omnibus</i>
oyster.F.DAT.PL	and	and	shellfish.N.DAT.PL	all.N.DAT.PL
<i>contingere,</i>	<i>ut</i>	<i>cum</i>	<i>luna</i>	<i>pariter</i>
happen.INF.PRS	that	with	moon.F.ABL	equally
				<i>crescant</i>
				grow.PRS.SUBJ.3PL

'That this happens to oysters and to all shellfish: that they grow in step with the moon.'

(c) adverse, such as *nihil pro spe* 'nothing compared to what was expected' (Livius, *Ab urbe condita*, 28, 24, 3), the occurrence of negative events (e.g., the impossibility of being with a friend—Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, 3, 6, 4—or the fulfilment of a dire prophecy—Cicero, *De divinatione*, 1, 47), as in example (7), where *hoc* refers to the fact that no one in the Senate greeted Catiline, a behavior that was considered contemptuous.

(7) Cicero, *In L. Sergium Catilinam orationes*, 1, 16

<i>si</i>	<i>hoc</i>	<i>post</i>	<i>hominum</i>	<i>memoriam</i>
if	this.N.NOM	after	man.M.GEN.PL	memory.F.ACC
<i>contigit</i>	<i>nemini</i>			
happen.PFV.3SG	no one.M.DAT			

'If this has happened to no one since the beginning of human memory.'

The events or concepts expressed by the first argument of *contingo* are mostly abstract in nature (cf. examples 2–7 above). A concrete entity—the beloved woman—is attested in Terence, *Andria*, 696, where both arguments of the verb are implied (example 8), as well as in Apuleius, *Apologia*, 96 (a good stepfather), and in Livius, *Ab urbe condita*, 34, 7, 8 (*nec insignia nec dona aut spolia bellica* 'no decorations, no gifts, no spoils of war'). Furthermore, the things/events that happen can be favorable (19 occurrences), neutral (15 occurrences) or adverse (14 occurrences).

(8) Terentius, *Andria*, 696

<i>hanc</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>expetivi,</i>	<i>contigit</i>
this.F.ACC	1SG.DAT	seek.PFV.1SG	happen.PFV.3SG
'This is the one I sought, and she has fallen to my lot.'			

The second argument, encoded by the dative of a noun or a pronoun, is generally a human being (31 occurrences out of 34, that is, approximately 91% of cases). Indeed, in the corpus considered, there are only three occurrences of non-human entities: 'oysters and all shellfish' in Cicero, *De divinatione*, 2, 33 (cf. example 6 above), *udis elementis aquosis que* 'humid and watery elements' in Apuleius, *De Mundo*, 10, and some natural elements denoted by the pronoun *illis* in Apuleius, *De Mundo*, 19.

Finally, it is noticeable that the forms of *contingo* in the expression of chance events are mostly in the past tense: 30 occurrences out of a total of 48, which corresponds to 62.5% of cases. As we will see in Section 4, this offers pertinent information for analyzing the conceptualization of chance events, and for this reason the number of occurrences in the past tense has been provided for each of the verbs under consideration.

Obtingo is attested in all periods of Latin literature, although far less frequently than *contingo* (*Thesaurus linguae Latinae* online, s.v. *obtingo*, coll. 290–291; *Library of Latin Texts*)³⁶; the first occurrences are found in Plautus' *Comedies*. Interestingly, in our corpus, *obtingo* is more common than *contingo* in the expression of chance events, occurring 67 times. It is attested almost exclusively in the third-person singular³⁷ and, considering the meanings provided by lexicographical works, has a much lower degree of polysemy than *contingo*.

According to lexicographical sources, *obtingo* is used with the meaning 'to touch', or more precisely, 'to reach', in a transitive construction in only one occurrence. This is found in a fragment of Plautus given in Nonius Marcellus 415, 16: *mustulentus aestus nares obtigit*, lit. 'the mosto-filled warmth touches the nostrils' (<https://logeion.uchicago.edu/obtingo>, accessed on 10 March 2026). Indeed, the main—and maybe the only—use of *obtingo* is to express chance events with the meanings 'to fall to one's lot' (especially with things), and 'to happen, to befall, to occur' (with events) (<https://logeion.uchicago.edu/obtingo>, accessed on 22 September 2025). Similar to what has been observed for *contingo*, *obtingo* can be used either in a two-place intransitive construction or in an "impersonal" one-place construction without a dative argument. However, lexicographical sources indicate that the latter usage is less frequent than the two-place construction. Data from our corpus appear to corroborate this hypothesis, as the one-place construction is attested in only one occurrence (example 9).

(9) Plautus, *Rudens*, 1211

<i>Eloquere,</i>	<i>ut</i>	<i>haec</i>	<i>res</i>	<i>optigit</i>
speak.IMP.2SG	that	this.F.NOM	thing.F.NOM	happen.PRF.3SG
<i>de</i>	<i>filia</i>			
about	daughter.F.ABL			
'Tell how this happened concerning your daughter.'				

Data collected from the *Library of Latin Texts* show that the two-place construction attested for *obtingo* is the same as that observed for *contingo*: (1) a noun/pronoun (including anaphoric or cataphoric demonstrative pronouns referring to an event), or a sentence as the syntactic subject, denoting *what* 'falls to one's lot'/'happens'/'befalls'/'occurs'; and (2) the dative (a noun or pronoun) of the entity involved, which is always a human being and—if not present—is usually retrievable from the context. This is illustrated in example (10), with the nominative subject *haec occasio* and the dative *tibi*.

(10) Plautus, *Rudens*, 927

<i>Nunc</i>	<i>haec</i>	<i>tibi</i>	<i>occasio</i>
Now	this.F.NOM	2SG.DAT	opportunity.F.NOM
<i>Gripe</i>	<i>optigit</i>		
Gripus.M.VOC	befall.PRF.3SG		

‘Now, Gripus, this opportunity has befallen you.’

As regards the semantics of the first argument, it can be³⁸:

(a) favorable, such as *fortuna* ‘luck’³⁹, *hereditas* ‘inheritance’ (example 11), *quid boni* ‘something good’ (Plautus, *Amphitruo*, 634), *benivolus iudex* ‘a favorable judge’ (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 3, 1), or, in general, a positive event (often obtaining what somebody wants, falling in love or being loved, etc.);

(11) Plautus, *Stichus*, 383

<i>Iam</i>	<i>non</i>	<i>facio</i>	<i>auctionem:</i>
already	not	do.PRS.1SG	auction.F.ACC
<i>mihi</i>	<i>optigit</i>	<i>hereditas</i>	
1SG.DAT	befall.PFV.1SG	inheritance.F.NOM	

‘I am not running auctions anymore; I have come into an inheritance.’

(b) neutral, such as *hostia* ‘a sacrificial victim’ (example 12), *occasio* ‘opportunity’ (cf. example 10 above) or *sors* ‘draw’ (Plautus, *Casina*, 299);

(12) Cicero, *De divinatione*, 2, 38

<i>at</i>	<i>enim</i>	<i>id</i>	<i>ipsum</i>	<i>habet</i>
but	indeed	that.N.NOM	itself.N.NOM	have.PRS.3SG
<i>aliquid</i>	<i>divini,</i>	<i>quae</i>	<i>cuique</i>	
something.N.ACC	divine.N.GEN	which.F.NOM	every one.M.DAT	
<i>hostia</i>		<i>obtingat</i>		
sacrificial victim.F.NOM		be.allotted.PRS.SUBJ.3SG		

‘But indeed that very matter has something divine about it: which sacrificial victim is allotted to each person.’

(c) adverse, such as *malum* ‘damage, misfortune’ (example 13), *maestitudo* ‘sadness’ (Plautus, *Aulularia*, 731), *dies pervorsus atque advorsus* ‘a wicked and adverse day’ (Plautus, *Menaechmi*, 899), *annus* ‘[unlucky] year’ (Plautus, *Mostellaria*, 532), or, more generally, an event that goes counter to the will or plans of the individual involved.

(13) Plautus, *Poenulus*, 1326

<i>Siquid</i>	<i>lenoni</i>	<i>optigit</i>	<i>magni</i>	<i>mali</i>
if-	pimp.DAT	befall.PFV.3SG	great.N.GEN	evil.N.GEN
anything.N.NOM				

‘If some great misfortune has befallen the pimp.’

In the political works of Cicero and in Livy’s *Ab Urbe Condita*, the first argument of *obtingo* with the meaning ‘to fall to one’s lot’ is often⁴⁰ an institutional office (e.g., *quaestor*, *iurisdictio*, or *uti ius diceret*), the administration of a Roman province or city (e.g., *Asia* or *Italia provincia*) or a property assigned to a deserving person—a magistrate or military officer, for example—through the drawing of lots (*sors*), a widespread practice in the Roman legal–religious system⁴¹. In this case, the chance event is often perceived as favorable, as in example (14), but it can also be considered neutral or unfavorable depending on the situation and the wishes of those involved.

(14) Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, 1, 15

Asiam Quinto, suavissimo fratri, obtigisse
Asia.F.ACC Quintus.M.DAT sweet.SUPER.M.DAT brother.M.DAT fall.INF.PFV
audisti
hear.PFV.2SG

‘You have heard that Asia has fallen to Quintus, sweetest brother.’

Interestingly, things/events that happen can be favorable, neutral or adverse, with no significant quantitative differences in frequency. Furthermore, from what has been observed, it appears that the entities denoted by the first argument of *obtingo* are: positions, duties or properties officially assigned to someone (23 occurrences, that is, approximately 34% of occurrences); abstract events of different types (39 occurrences, that is, approximately 58% of occurrences); and other concrete elements, found in Apuleius (*benivola iudex*), Cicero (*hostia*, twice), and Plautus (*hereditas*, twice), making a total of five occurrences, which corresponds to approximately 7.5% of cases. It is worth noting that, unlike *contingo*, *obtingo* is never used to express an event such as a natural phenomenon in a general way.

To conclude, it should be noted that the forms of *obtingo* used in the expression of chance events are mostly in the past tense (57 occurrences out of 67, that is, approximately 85% of occurrences).

3.2. Italian *Toccare*

Toccare is the main verb for tactile perception in modern Italian; it has all but replaced the Latin verb *tango*⁴², with which it shares various meanings⁴³. Attested since the mid-13th century (cf. *Il Nuovo De Mauro* s.v. *toccare*; <https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/toccare> (accessed on 16 September 2025)), *toccare* is believed to derive from the medieval Latin word **toccare*, of probable onomatopoeic origin, from a sequence *tok* that imitates the sound produced by knocking on a door or striking a bell. The Latin word **toccare* is the origin of all Romance cognate forms, as well as English *touch*, from Old French *touchier* (Cortelazzo & Zolli, 1988, s.v. *toccare*, p. 1345; Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 1999, pp. 96–98; Fernández Jaén, 2014, p. 97).

Regarding the earliest occurrences of *toccare* to express chance events, according to the *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (s.v. *toccare*, sub-entry 65, p. 1095), the use of *toccare* meaning ‘to be destined by fate, to be attributed by chance, etc.’⁴⁴ is already attested in Old Italian, the first occurrence quoted in the *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* being from Dante’s *Rime*, canz. 13 (1321 CE)⁴⁵. Nevertheless, the results of a search of the two text corpora seem to indicate that the first instance of *toccare* expressing a chance event is a little earlier, occurring in the *Rime dall’Archivio Notarile di Bologna*, v. 38 (ca. 1291–1300)⁴⁶. It should be noted that, based on the findings of this initial analysis of Old Italian texts, when *toccare* expresses a chance event, it occurs exclusively in the intransitive two-place construction found in modern Italian (see *infra*).

In modern Italian, *toccare* is characterized by a remarkable degree of polysemy⁴⁷ and is used in both transitive and intransitive constructions⁴⁸. Notably, the prototypical meaning of *toccare* is ‘to touch’ in a neutral sense, without expressing a specific manner of contact. In other words, *toccare* indicates generic physical contact, unlike verbs such as *accarezzare* ‘to caress’ or *sfiorare* ‘to brush against, to touch lightly’, as can be inferred from the following definition, the first sub-entry of the entry *toccare* in the *Il Nuovo De Mauro* dictionary (<https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/toccare>, accessed on 16 September 2025): 1a. transitive verb, FO, “to put one’s hand or another part of the body, or even an object held or manipulated by the hand, near someone or something, establishing contact (. ..)”⁴⁹. This use is exemplified in (15) below.

(15) From <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/toccare> (accessed on 10 March 2026)

<i>Toccò</i>	<i>l'</i>	<i>acqua</i>	<i>con</i>	<i>un</i>	<i>dito</i>
touch.PFV.3SG	the.F	water.F	with	a.M	finger.M

'He touched the water with a finger (. . .)'

Furthermore, it is worth noting that, when referring to a sensory perception, *toccare* is exclusively used for touch, unlike *sentire* 'to hear, to feel, to taste, to smell', which can denote various sensory experiences, including touch in a neutral sense (see Viberg, 1984, p. 149, among others), but cannot refer to chance events. Consider, for example, the expressions *sentire caldo/sentire freddo* 'to feel hot/to feel cold', which express physical sensations, or the sentence *Senti la morbidezza di questa lana* 'Feel the softness of this wool'⁵⁰. The other meanings of *toccare*, all occurring in transitive constructions, are the following: "essere a contatto con qcs.", 'to be in contact with something'; "usare, manomettere", 'to use, to tamper with'; "modificare, ritoccare nell'intento di migliorare", 'to modify, to adjust with the intention of improving'; "raggiungere un punto, un'altezza, una distanza e sim.", 'to reach a point, a height, a distance, and the like'; "denigrare, parlare male di qcn. o qcs. a cui l'interlocutore tiene molto", 'to disparage, to speak ill of someone or something the listener cares about deeply'; "turbare, offendere qcn. colpendolo in ciò che gli sta a cuore, ferendolo nell'animo, nei sentimenti, ecc.", 'to upset, to offend someone by touching on what is dear to them, wounding them to the quick, their feelings, etc.'; "commuovere, colpire", 'to move, to strike'; "riguardare, interessare", 'to concern, to interest'; "trattare in modo rapido un argomento, accennare", 'to deal with a topic briefly, to mention'; and "suonare", 'to play' (an obsolete meaning) (<https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/toccare>, accessed on 10 March 2026).

The use of *toccare* to express a chance event is recorded in the sub-entry no. 9 in the *Il Nuovo De Mauro* dictionary: "intransitive verb (*to be*) FO to happen, to fall to one's lot (. . .)"⁵¹, with the following examples:

(16) From <https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/toccare> (accessed on 14 October 2025)

<i>Ti</i>	<i>è</i>	<i>toccata</i>	<i>una</i>	<i>bella</i>	<i>fortuna</i>
2SG.DAT	AUX.3SG	touch.PTCP.PST.F	a.F	good.F	luck.F

'You happened upon some good luck.'

(17) From <https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/toccare> (accessed on 14 October 2025)

<i>tutte</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>disgrazie</i>	<i>toccano</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>me</i>
all.F.PL	the.F.PL	misfortunes.F.PL	touch.PRS.3PL	to	me

'All misfortunes happen to me.'

The *Vocabolario Treccani* (<https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/toccare/>, accessed on 16 September 2025), which has an even more detailed entry than *Il Nuovo De Mauro*, lists the meaning in question under sub-entry no. 3a ('to happen, to occur by chance, to fall to one's lot')⁵² and includes the following commentary⁵³: "More often, it refers to misfortunes, adversities, and unpleasant things that happen and which have to be endured by chance or by necessity, deservedly or undeservedly". To sum up, according to lexicographical sources, when Italian *toccare* expresses a chance event, "what happens" can be positive (*good luck*) or negative (*all misfortunes*), although the *Vocabolario Treccani* states that it generally refers to negative things or events.

Interestingly, as already mentioned, *toccare* always seems to refer to a chance event involving two participants and to occur exclusively in an intransitive two-place construction whose arguments are: (a) something that 'happens, occurs by chance, falls to one's lot' (the syntactic subject of *toccare*); and (b) an individual involved in the chance event—the person

to whom something ‘happens’—who is syntactically an indirect object, expressed by the unstressed forms of the (dative) personal pronouns (*mi, ti, le/gli, ci, vi* and *gli/loro*), or by the prepositional phrase “*a* ‘to’ + noun/pronoun”. In Italian, this prepositional phrase, where *a* (from Latin *ad*) has an allative meaning, has replaced the Latin dative case in the encoding of the indirect object (see, among others, Fedriani & Prandi, 2014).

Querying the *itTenTen* (2020) corpus first shows that when *toccare* occurs in a two-place intransitive construction, if the context allows, the first argument (something that ‘happens, occurs by chance, falls to one’s lot’) can be omitted (see, for example, occurrence no. 2 in Table A3 in Appendix A)⁵⁴. This differs from the second argument (the entity to whom something ‘happens’), whose expression is mandatory, as observed above (Section 2.2).

Secondly, the corpus query provides a more detailed picture of the semantic–lexical characteristics of the arguments that co-occur with *toccare* in chance events. The first argument, which encodes the thing or the event that ‘happens to one’/‘befalls’/‘fall to one’s lot’, can be expressed by a noun, a relative pronoun, an anaphoric or cataphoric demonstrative pronoun, or an infinitive⁵⁵, often preceded by the preposition *di* ‘of’⁵⁶. At the semantic level, as shown in Table A3 in Appendix A and in examples (18)–(20), the event or the thing can be:

(a) favorable, such as *bene massimo* ‘greatest good’, *fortuna* ‘luck’, *partner perfetto* ‘perfect partner’, *sorte* ‘good chance’, *successo* ‘success’, a hotel room with a beautiful view, an easy opponent to beat in a sporting competition, or, in general, an unexpected positive event (e.g., a complimentary upgrade of a hotel room, an unforeseen improvement in one’s reputation, or being moved by a positive event), etc. (example 18);

(18)

<i>i</i>	<i>due</i>	<i>bambini</i>	<i>non</i>	<i>sapevano</i>	<i>che</i>	<i>fortuna</i>
the.M.PL	two	children.M	not	know.IPFV.3PL	that	luck.F
<i>fosse</i>		<i>toccata</i>	<i>loro</i>			
AUX.SUBJ.PST. 3SG		touch.PTCP.PST.F	3PL.DAT			

‘The two children did not know what luck had befallen them.’

(b) neutral (example 19), such as *avventura* ‘adventure’, *cravatta* ‘a (useless) tie’, *gara* ‘sporting competition’, *maestra* ‘school teacher’, *mamma* ‘mother’, *papa* ‘pope’, *persona* ‘person’, *sorte* ‘chance’, *tipo di pastiglia* ‘a sort of pill’, a piece of land allocated by the drawing of lots (in historical stories), a character assigned to an actress/an actor, a sports event, etc.; this group also includes less frequent occurrences of *toccare* in the future tense, in which it is uncertain if the fate that will befall someone is good or bad (e.g., *senza sapere che sorte toccherà loro* ‘without knowing what fate will befall them’);

(19)

<i>Gli</i>	<i>toccò</i>	<i>la</i>	<i>gara</i>	<i>del</i>	<i>secondo</i>	<i>turno</i>
3SG.DAT	touch.PST.3SG	the.F	match.F	of.the.M	second.M	round.M

‘He ended up with the second-round match.’

(c) adverse, such as *beffardo destino* ‘cruel fate’, *sorte peggiore* ‘worse fate’ (example 20), *cattiverie* ‘cruelties’, *colore della propria pelle e sesso* ‘color of one’s skin and gender’ (of women), *faccenda* (spiacevole) ‘(unfortunate) matter’, *fine* ‘end (of life)’, *morte* ‘death’, *oblio* ‘oblivion’, *pena* ‘pain’, *sorte* ‘bad chance’, *strano tempo* ‘strange times’; an unpleasant and unavoidable situation (e.g., *abitare in un mondo ingiusto* ‘living in an unjust world’, *incontrare chi solitamente evitiamo* ‘to meet those we usually avoid’), or a sudden negative event, such as an emergency operation or accidentally killing someone, etc.

(20)				
<i>Sorte</i>	<i>peggiore</i>	<i>toccò</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>Costantino</i>
fate.F	worse.F	touch.PST.3SG	to	Costantino.M
'A worse fate befell Costantino.'				

Overall, negative things and adverse events (64 occurrences) are more frequent than favorable (18 occurrences) or neutral ones (25 occurrences), which is consistent with what is observed in the *Vocabolario Treccani*. Furthermore, the things/events that befall someone are often abstract nouns (e.g., *avventura*, *cattiverie*, *destino*, *faccenda*, *fine*, *fortuna*, *gara*, *oblio*, or *tempo*); nouns meaning 'fate', 'destiny', 'chance' or similar concepts (e.g., *destino*, *fortuna*, or *sorte*) are proportionally more common, and they can be good, neutral or bad depending on the context. Concrete nouns are less frequent and can denote animate (e.g., *giudice*, *maestra*, *mamma*, *papa*, an opponent or a team) or inanimate entities (e.g., *autobus*, *cravatta*, *immagine*, *tipo di pastiglia*, or a hotel room)⁵⁷.

The second argument is usually human: a person or a group (e.g., *migliaia di soldati* 'thousands of soldiers', or a soccer team). In contrast, inanimate nouns are rare, e.g., *film* 'movie', *antichi castelli* 'ancient castles', *Napoli* (the city of Naples), *la Chiesa* 'the Church', or a company⁵⁸.

As far as verb tenses are concerned, in the expression of chance events, *toccare* occurs mostly in the past tense (62 instances, that is, approximately 58% of occurrences); the present and future tenses are less frequent. As already mentioned, occurrences of *toccare* in the future tense largely refer to events perceived or presented as uncertain. Interestingly, with regard to *Aktionsart* (lexical aspect), just as Croft (2012, pp. 83–84) observes for the English verb *to touch*, *toccare* is a particularly versatile predicate in terms of aspect–semantic interpretation. Its meanings allow it "to be interpreted as belonging to different aspect–semantic types, depending on the grammatical and/or discursive context in which it is used". As regards the construction under investigation, *toccare* is an achievement predicates denoting a telic change of state.

Before turning to the discussion in the next section, there is another aspect worth highlighting. As already mentioned in Section 2, when *toccare* means (a) 'to happen, to occur by chance, to fall to one's lot', (b) 'to be entitled or obliged, by right or duty, by precedence, by turn', or (c) 'to be or feel compelled', the syntactic constructions in which it occurs are very similar or even identical. Indeed, at a formal level, the main difference is that when *toccare* is used with the meanings (b) and (c), it tends to be followed by the simple infinitive⁵⁹. In contrast, as seen earlier, the infinitive tends to be preceded by the preposition *di* 'of' when it expresses a chance event.

More specifically, when *toccare* means 'to be entitled or obliged, by right or duty, by precedence, by turn' (meaning b), and the first argument is a noun or pronoun, the syntactic construction is identical to that used for chance events (see example 21), in all verbal persons (third singular and plural). However, when the first argument is an infinitive, the risk of interpretative ambiguity is lower, since the infinitive tends to be used without a preposition. In this case too, as in the expression of chance events, the second argument of *toccare* is always expressed.

(21)						
<i>Ora</i>	<i>tocca</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>Ghirlandina</i>	<i>il</i>	<i>verde</i>	<i>muovere</i>
now	touch.PRS.3SG	to	Ghirlandina.M	the.M	green.M	move.INF
'Now it is the green Ghirlandina's turn to move.'						

With the meaning (c) 'to be or feel compelled', modern Italian *toccare* functions as a modal (deontic) auxiliary, and typically has the following construction: (I) the prepositional phrase "*a* + noun/pronoun' or a dative clitic personal pronoun; (II) a form of *toccare*;

(III) an infinitive, which—as already mentioned—has a tendency to directly follow *toccare* but can be preceded by the preposition *di* ‘of’⁶⁰. It is worth noting that when *toccare* has this meaning, it can also be used in a one-place construction, without the second argument, and expresses a generic deontic value. Since the first argument is always an infinitive, the verb is only conjugated in the third-person singular⁶¹. Consequently, the risk of interpretative ambiguity in this case is limited to third-person singular verb forms and only in specific contexts.

(22)

vi toccherà prendere un modello più semplice
 2PL.DAT touch.FUT.3SG take.INF a.M model.M more simple.M
 ‘You will have to go for a simpler model.’

While the semantic relationship between the various uses of *toccare* in intransitive constructions will be briefly examined in the next section, Table 1 (below) provides a summary of the aforementioned characteristics in order to clarify the formal overlap between the different types of expression; when a symbol appears in parentheses, it indicates that the characteristic is less frequent or non-canonical.

Table 1. Syntactic characteristics of the intransitive uses of *toccare*.

	I Argument = Noun/Pronoun	I Argument = Infinitive	I Argument = <i>di</i> + Infinitive	Possibility to Omit the II Argument
(a) ‘to happen’, etc.	+	(+)	+	—
(b) ‘to be entitled or obliged, by right or duty’, etc.	+	+	(+)	—
(c) ‘to be or feel compelled’	—	+	(+)	+

4. Discussion

In this section, the data presented in the previous parts of the paper will be analyzed and discussed in relation to the two main objectives of the study, starting with the semantics of the verb arguments.

4.1. “Compositional Polysemy” and Verb Arguments

The first aim of this paper was to clarify what constitutes a chance event when *contingo*, *obtingo* and, above all, *toccare* are used. This has been undertaken by analyzing the occurrences of these verbs, focusing on: (a) the semantics of their arguments; and (b) their constructions.

As far as the first aspect is concerned, both in Latin and in Italian the semantic content of the first argument seems to play a major role in the semantic extension from ‘to touch’ to meanings such as ‘to happen, to occur by chance, to fall to one’s lot’. The second argument, in turn, is typically a human being. In other words, it is plausible to assume that the semantic extensions of the verbs considered here—and hence their polysemy—are “predictable cases” of “compositional polysemy”, as theorized by Ibarretxe-Antuñano (2006, pp. 249–250, *passim*). As regards *obtingo*, however, caution is required, since it almost exclusively denotes chance events in Latin texts.

Focusing on Italian *toccare*, the range of mostly negative elements or events involved in chance events is rather heterogeneous. In an attempt to classify them, if we return to the initial definition of the prototypical category of chance events presented in Section 1 (good or bad events that are typically beyond the control of the individuals involved, events that are unpredictable, and often unexpected and sudden), we can observe the following:

(a) all the events expressed by *toccare* are beyond the control of the individuals concerned and are unavoidable; occasionally, albeit rarely, such events are characterized by these features alone (typically, a mother who has not been chosen), as in example (23);

(23)

<i>Ti</i>	<i>tocca</i>	<i>una</i>	<i>mamma</i>	<i>abbastanza</i>	<i>collaudata</i>	<i>su</i>
2SG.DAT	touch.PRS.3SG	a.F	mother.F	fairly	experienced.F	in
<i>alcune</i>	<i>cose</i>					
certain.F.PL	things.F.PL					

‘You are ending up with a mother who is fairly experienced in certain things.’

(b) almost all the events, or their outcomes, are unpredictable and unavoidable (e.g., the pope who will be elected or the results of a draw), exemplified in (24);

(24)

<i>è</i>	<i>stato</i>	<i>abbastanza</i>	<i>fortunato</i>	<i>nel</i>	<i>sorteggio</i>
AUX.PRS.3SG	be.PTCP.PST.M	rather	lucky.M	in.the.M	draw.M
<i>gli</i>	<i>è</i>	<i>toccato</i>	<i>Jiri Novak</i>		
3SG.DAT	AUX.PRS.3SG	touch.PTCP.PST.M	Jiri Novak		

‘He was rather lucky in the draw: he was matched with Jiri Novak.’

(c) several events, in addition to being unavoidable, unpredictable and beyond the control of the individuals, are unexpected and sudden (an emergency operation, accidentally killing someone, a sudden death, or an illness; but also positive things, such as a complimentary upgrade of a hotel room, an unforeseen improvement in one’s reputation, meeting the perfect partner, or the destiny or fate that has been or will be assigned to us). These are the most representative members of the prototypical category of “chance events” (example 25).

(25)

<i>senza</i>	<i>sapere</i>	<i>che</i>	<i>sorte</i>	<i>toccherà</i>	<i>loro</i>
without	know.INF	what	fate.F	touch.FUT.3SG	3PL.DAT

‘without knowing what fate will befall them.’

The frequent use of nouns meaning ‘destiny’, ‘fate’, ‘chance’, etc., (e.g., *destino*, *fortuna*, or *sorte*) is a clear indication of the link between the realm of chance and the meaning of ‘touch’.

That the semantics of the first argument of *toccare* plays a significant role in its use in expressing chance events is also proven by the fact that it is a fundamental element in disambiguating the different meanings of *toccare* when it occurs in an intransitive two-place construction, above all when the first argument is a noun or a pronoun. In fact, as noted above, *toccare* is used in a very similar or even identical two-place intransitive construction with three different meanings: (a) ‘to happen, to occur by chance, to fall to one’s lot’, (b) ‘to be entitled or obliged, by right or duty, by precedence, by turn’, or (c) ‘to be or feel compelled’. Interestingly, the three intransitive uses of *toccare* all refer to “unavoidable” events, though each exhibits a different nuance: (a) the inevitability of a chance event, (b) an action that is one’s turn to perform, or (c) an action that must be performed. Consequently, as already noted, when the context is not sufficiently clear, one cannot always distinguish between the various meanings. Therefore, we cannot rule out the possibility—though, at this point, it remains a hypothesis—that the most important semantic feature of the original meaning of *toccare* in this kind of use was the actual UNAVOIDABILITY of the event. Indeed, this remained the common thread linking the various meanings that developed and diverged over time, probably due to the recurring use of the verb in different contexts⁶². What is certain is that, as we shall see, UNAVOIDABILITY is not only common to the three

forementioned meanings of *toccare*, but also distinguishes the chance events expressed by *toccare* from those denoted by other verbs (see *infra*, Section 4.4). The central role of the semantic component of UNAVOIDABILITY in this use of *toccare* appears to correlate with the fact that it more frequently conveys negative events. Indeed, people only want to avoid what is negative, or what they perceive as such.

As regards *contingo* and *obtingo*, there are two points worth highlighting. First, chance events expressed by these verbs can be favorable, neutral or adverse, with no significant quantitative differences in their frequency. Second, *obtingo* is primarily used with positions or properties officially assigned to someone through the drawing of lots, as well as with various kinds of abstract events referring to a specific entity. It is never used to express an event in a general way. In contrast, *contingo* has a broader range of uses and can refer to events in a general way, being used in a one-place construction.

Before turning to the constructions of the verbs under investigation, some remarks on the prevalence of past tenses in both Latin and Italian occurrences are in order. Although this can partly be explained as a feature of the text types (historical narrative, myth, etc.), the percentage of past tenses in languages—62.5% for *contingo*, 85% for *obtingo*, and ca. 58% for *toccare*—is still high and most likely indicates that the verbs in question, being verbs of happening, mainly refer to something that has already happened and not to something that is thought to be happening. At most, one might wonder what might happen, as in the occurrences in the future tense. The present tense, in turn, is often used to express something that is generally considered to be true (gnomic present) or as an historical present (example 26).

(26)

<i>Destino</i>	<i>simile</i>	<i>tocca</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>Sandra</i>	<i>Leonardo</i>
fate.M	similar.M	touch.PRS.3SG	to	Sandra	Leonardo
'A similar fate befalls Sandra Leonardo.'					

4.2. Constructions and Chance Events

We shall now proceed to examine the second aspect of the analysis: the syntactic constructions of the verbs in question. Again, our argument is based on fundamental assumptions of Cognitive Linguistics. Indeed, following Langacker (2008, p. 14, *passim*), we consider grammar—at all its levels, including syntax—to be symbolic in nature. Furthermore, “[t]he meaning of an expression is not just the conceptual content it evokes—just as important is how that content is interpreted” (Langacker, 2008, p. 55); in other words, the choice of a specific linguistic expression reflects a particular conceptualization of a given entity or event (Croft, 2012, p. 6, *passim*). In our case as well, the intransitive syntactic constructions in which the verbs under examination occur reflect specific conceptualizations of chance events and are particularly important for understanding the use of tactile verbs in their expression.

As regards the syntactic constructions attested for Latin *contingo* and *obtingo* and Italian *toccare*, on the basis of the data illustrated in the previous sections, we can note that:

- (a) all the verbs have essentially the same construction—a two-place intransitive construction—with differences determined by the morphosyntactic characteristics of Latin and Italian, respectively, and
- (b) only *contingo* and, more rarely, *obtingo* can occur in a one-place construction, where no person is involved in the chance event and a phenomenon is expressed in a general way.

The first construction is outlined in Table 2. As this is a schematic representation, the elements that comprise it are indicated regardless of the actual word order.

Table 2. Two-place intransitive constructions of Latin *contingo* and *obtingo* and Italian *toccare*.

	I Argument	Verb	II Argument
Lat.	Nominative noun or pronoun/infinite/sentence	<i>contingo, obtingo</i>	Dative (noun or pronoun)
Ital.	Noun or pronoun/(di 'of') infinitive	<i>toccare</i>	Prepositional phrase “a ‘to’ + noun/pronoun” or dative pronoun

A significant aspect for understanding the conceptualization of the type of chance event expressed by *toccare* is that the entity (typically a human being) to whom something *tocca* ‘happens’ must always be specified. This entity is therefore an indispensable element of the type of event being described, which never occurs in a generic sense but always specifically relates to a human being. In this respect, *toccare* differs not only from *obtingo* and, above all, from *contingo*—which, as noted, also have an impersonal construction, albeit used in different proportions—but also from other verbs that express chance events in Italian, such as *accadere*, *capitare*, or *succedere*. Indeed, in contrast to *toccare*, these verbs can be used either in a one-place intransitive construction (“X *accade/capita/succede*”, broadly speaking, ‘X happens’) or in a two-place construction (“X *accade/capita/succede* a qualcuno”, broadly speaking, ‘X happens to someone’). As we will see in Section 4.4, the mandatory involvement of a human entity in the chance event expressed by *toccare* can be explained by the characteristics of the sense of touch.

Interestingly, the two-place intransitive construction described above is cross-linguistically frequent in the expression of chance events. Consider, for example, Ancient Greek συμβαίνω <symbainō>, a polysemous verb that also means ‘to happen, to occur’; Latin *accido*, *evenio* and *obvenio*; English *to happen*; and Italian *accadere*, *capitare*, *succedere*⁶³. This is due to the fact that, for various reasons, this construction is particularly suited to expressing chance events.

In this respect, the first point to be stressed is that verbs indicating chance events are frequently based on different types of motion verbs: for example, deictic motion verbs, such as συμβαίνω <symbainō> (a compound of βαίνω <baínō> ‘to go’), *evenio*, *obvenio*, and *venire* (*in sorte*), or verbs that denote an uncontrolled movement, such as *accido*, *accadere*, *succedere*, as well as English *to befall*⁶⁴. Verbs that mean ‘to touch’ can also be considered motion verbs, since contact with something generally necessitates movement in order to reach the object being touched.

To better understand what characterizes the use of verbs related to the meaning ‘to touch’ in the conceptualization of a chance event and, at the same time, differentiates such usage from other possible formulations of a similar event, it is useful to briefly take into account the relationship with motion verbs and the conceptualization of the event. The first aspect to be considered is that, according to Croft (2012, p. 198), “[t]he fundamental semantic property that determines participant role ranking for argument realization is the causal structure of events, more specifically, the transmission of force relationships between participants”. From this perspective, the prototypical two-participant event type is the one that is most easily distinguished in the causal network. This is the transitive event prototype, which is “initiated by an agent/initiator using her/his own volition to bring about a complete change of state in a patient/endpoint” (Croft, 2012, p. 356). Events that deviate semantically from the two-participant event prototype in one or more respects may also deviate grammatically from the canonical transitive argument structure construction. In this process, the presence or the absence of a directed change plays a major role in the analysis of event construals. Following Croft’s theory, therefore, the two-place intransitive construction of verbs expressing chance events is a clear preliminary indication that these

types of events do not involve directed change and deviate from the causal structure of events.

Secondly, from a Cognitive Linguistic perspective, spatial experience and motion play a central role in shaping how humans conceptualize events, states, and changes. According to Lakoff (1987) and Johnson (1987), our understanding of motion is based on an image schema whose structural elements comprise ORIGIN, PATH, DESTINATION, and DIRECTION. It thus describes motion from an initial location, along a trajectory, towards a final destination (Radden, 1996, p. 423). Based on this schema, the most typical verbs of motion—in English and probably in most other languages—are the deictic motion verbs that mean ‘to come’ and ‘to go’ (Radden, 1996, p. 425). Given the fundamental relevance of motion, it is not surprising that it serves as the source domain for metaphorical conceptualizations of more abstract domains of thought, including that of the “event”. In this respect, the “Event Structure Metaphor” proposed by Lakoff (1993) deserves mention. This is a complex set of metaphors, generally considered universal (Kövecses, 2005, p. 47), relating to the conceptualization of different aspects of event structure, such as states, changes, processes, and causes. These are conceptualizations via metaphor in terms of space, motion, and force: consider, for example, STATES ARE LOCATIONS, CHANGES ARE MOTIONS, CAUSES ARE FORCES, ACTIONS ARE SELF-PROPELLED MOTIONS, and PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS (Lakoff, 2018, p. 69)⁶⁵.

Starting with the metaphor CHANGES ARE MOTIONS, according to which MOTION is mapped onto CHANGE OF STATE, different conceptualizations of events emerge depending which part of the motion we focus on; these conceptualizations also involve different roles for the force vectors associated with motion (Radden, 1996, *passim*). As we shall see in Section 4.4, this observation also applies to the role of different types of motion verbs in various conceptualizations of chance events. What the conceptualizations of different motion verbs have in common—and what leads to the use of the intransitive construction described above—is that, in different types of chance events, “what happens” is seen as a moving object external to the person involved in the event, who, in turn, is conceptualized as the endpoint of the motion. As Radden (1996, p. 438) observes, this kind of motion can occur “independently of a human observer,” which is one of the typical characteristics of chance events.

Before drawing some preliminary conclusions, it is useful to consider certain aspects regarding the use of the dative case, or of a prepositional phrase involving a preposition with an allative meaning (in our case, *a* ‘to’) to encode the human entity affected by an event. The dative case is widely recognized as being associated cross-linguistically with a range of functions and roles, including Recipient, Beneficiary, Malefactive, and Experiencer (Næss, 2009, among others). These roles consistently represent the human target or endpoint of an activity or, in the case of the Experiencer, an emotion. Furthermore, especially with two-place verbs, the dative often expresses non-prototypical patients associated with a relatively low degree of transitivity⁶⁶, and it is used when the animate entity participating in the event is involved in a marginal way (*indirect affectedness*) and lacks control over the event (cf., among others, Wierzbicka, 1992, p. 114; Croft, 2012, pp. 318–319, *passim*; Fedriani & Prandi, 2014, p. 574, and references therein). Interestingly, as observed by Fedriani (2014, p. 97), “[i]t has therefore been argued that the use of the dative case is motivated both by inherent properties, in the sense that the dative is cross-linguistically oriented toward animacy, and by relational properties, as it usually encodes non-instigating and non-affected endpoints of various types of transactions or transfers”. As we will see in Section 4.4, all these properties are consistent with the type of involvement of the animate entity in chance events, since they are conceptualized as being beyond human control and,

therefore, unpredictable and unavoidable: it is something that *touches* a person by chance, and not a person acting in some way (Fernández Jaén, 2014, pp. 109–110)⁶⁷.

To sum up, drawing on what was discussed in Sections 4.1 and 4.2, we can conclude that the uses of *contingo* and *toccare* are “predictable cases” of “compositional polysemy”; this is more difficult to ascertain for *obtingo*, since it seems specific to the expression of chance events, without other productive meanings being attested. As regards *toccare*, it expresses events that always involve two participants, mostly negative events that are typically beyond the control of the individual involved and are unpredictable, unexpected, sudden, and consequently, unavoidable. In contrast, *obtingo*, and above all *contingo*, can occur both in a two-place and, less frequently, in a one-place construction. The two-place intransitive construction is typical of most verbs expressing chance events, in particular motion verbs, which in this construction denote events that deviate semantically from the two-participant event prototype; in these events, “what happens” and the person involved are conceptualized as a moving object and the endpoint of the motion, respectively. These aspects will be analyzed in greater detail in the rest of this section, which examines the semantic motivation and the conceptual mechanisms underlying the use of tactile verbs to express chance events in the languages investigated.

The next subsection starts by reexamining relevant theoretical contributions on the polysemy of tactile verbs in light of specific characteristics of the sense of touch.

4.3. Characteristics of Touch and Previous Studies on the Polysemy of Tactile Verbs

The first aspect to consider is what Ibarretxe-Antuñano (1999, pp. 71–72, 2006, p. 238) observes about the Spanish expression *Me tocó la lotería*, ‘I won the lottery’ (lit. ‘the lottery touched me’), which is used when people win the lottery. She considers this use as part of the broad ‘to affect’ domain, typical of verbs meaning ‘to touch’, which implies a “contact-to-effect” chain. As she writes, “the lottery is the agent that provokes the change in me; that is to say, I became rich” (Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2006, p. 238).

While Ibarretxe-Antuñano’s observations are essentially valid—in fact, there is an individual “affected” in some way by a chance event—it is nevertheless necessary to specify how tactile verbs “affect” human beings in this kind of event and which characteristics are relevant to this process. First, it should be noted that touch, in many respects, is different from the other senses; it affects the body in its entirety, providing us with the means to be aware of the various, innumerable things that surround us⁶⁸. In this respect, De Vignemont and Massin (2015, p. 300) observe that touch is characterized by a “phenomenological priority” compared to the other senses. Indeed, “only tangible objects can be presented to us as real, that is, as existing independently of us”.

As observed in Pompeo (2025a), among the properties of tactile perception, certain interrelated attributes are pertinent to the phenomenon under consideration. A fundamental characteristic that, according to “The Phenomenal Character Criterion”⁶⁹, distinguishes touch from the other senses, and is universal as it derives from the very nature of our body, is its “bipolarity” (Trojszczak, 2019, p. 211, and references cited therein). Tactile experience, in fact, involves at least two entities: our body and one or more external elements, which may or may not be animate. Since “tactile perception always involves some experience of our own body in combination with the experience of external objects” (De Vignemont & Massin, 2015, p. 296), we can be at the same time both the perceiver and the perceived. De Vignemont and Massin (2015, p. 301) explain this bipolarity when they consider “the pressure theory of touch”: “[p]ressure is a symmetrical relation: we feel something pressing on this part of our body or that this part of our body is pressing on something”.

Consistent with the bipolarity of touch—and this is another characteristic of this sense—two types of tactile experience have been theorized: active and passive⁷⁰. Of these,

the former mainly involves the active manual exploration of objects; the latter, on the other hand, “is the perception of the condition of one’s own body that does not involve goal-oriented actions” (Trojszczak, 2019, p. 211, and references therein), and, among its various characteristics, tends to be body-oriented and to involve no control (Fulkerson, 2014, p. 7). On the physical and concrete level, this implies that in a passive tactile experience we perceive someone or something only when they “touch” us, in other words, when we have already been “affected” by them.

From this perspective, regarding the polysemy of tactile verbs and the bodily characteristics of the sense of touch, Fernández Jaén’s (2014) study is an important contribution. The classification proposed by Fernández Jaén (2014) effectively reflects, at a linguistic-descriptive level, the “bipolarity of touch” mentioned above, taking into account not only the polysemy of *tocar* but also the syntactic constructions in which it occurs. As mentioned in Section 1, five types of image schemas (*imagen esquemática*)—‘agentive schema’, ‘static schema’, ‘vectorial movement schema’, ‘passive reverse flow schema’, and ‘reactive reverse flow schema’—together with Talmy’s force dynamics (Talmy, 1988, 2000), are key to understanding the polysemy of the Spanish verb *tocar*. In a nutshell, Fernández Jaén distinguishes and associates with each of the five schemas all the meanings of *tocar* and the different underlying conceptualizations. For example, the agentive schema underpins the conceptualization of *tocar* as a dynamic event in which an Agent acts upon a Patient after reaching them (the sentence is syntactically transitive), while the static schema is involved when *tocar* expresses states with two or more passive entities that are simply very close to each other in physical space. In particular, the *esquema de flujo invertido pasivo* ‘passive reverse flow schema’ merits attention. This is mainly characterized by the “passivity” of the individual (*el conceptualizador* ‘the conceptualizer’) involved in the tactile perception event, who has no control over it, is not affected by the action of the subject in the same way as a Patient, and is thus encoded as an indirect object; the referent encoded as the syntactic subject, in turn, reaches the human being involved after overcoming a distance. Interestingly, among the metaphorical extensions from the concrete passive perception, as in *Vicente paseaba por la selva y le tocó una serpiente en la pierna* (‘Vicente was walking through the jungle when a snake touched his leg’), linked to the prototypical meaning of *tocar*, Fernández Jaén (2014, pp. 110–111) considers the metaphor “CORRESPONDER ES TOCAR”, “TO BE ASSIGNED IS TO TOUCH”, which relates to the image of DISTRIBUTION, in which “touching” can represent the fact that someone is assigned a certain element or a certain state beyond their choice or even against their will. Consider, for example, the following sentence, about a bull being assigned to a bullfighter in an official draw (Fernández Jaén, 2014, p. 110): *Al novillero ese le tocó un toro con unos pitones exageradísimos; mi amigo estaba asustado*, ‘That novillero [person who fights young bulls] ended up with a bull with absolutely massive horns; my friend was terrified’. As Fernández Jaén argues, when the syntactic subject is an infinitive, it is a state imposed on the individual involved against their will (Fernández Jaén, 2014, p. 111). By means of a metonymic mechanism, the variant in which the subject is a prize originates from the general conceptualization “CORRESPONDER ES TOCAR”, as in *A Juan le ha tocado un jamón en la verbena local*, ‘Juan won a ham at the local festival’ (lit. ‘To Juan to him touched a ham at the local festival’). It should be noted that, in this case as well, “el requisito de involuntariedad se mantiene, por lo que este nuevo contenido se utiliza cuando el premio es contingente, al pertenecer a una rifa o a un sorteo” (Fernández Jaén, 2014, p. 111)⁷¹. Interestingly, the latter examples concern types of chance events.

4.4. ‘To Touch’ and Chance Events: Semantic Motivation and Conceptual Mechanisms

Having determined what constitutes a chance event in relation to the verbs under consideration—the first aim of this study—and having discussed some relevant theoretical aspects, we will now turn our attention to the second aim: understanding the semantic motivation and conceptual mechanisms underlying the use of verbs related to the meaning ‘to touch’ to express chance events.

In line with the basic definition of chance events as a prototypical category proposed in Section 1, prototypical chance events can be good or bad and are typically beyond the control of the individuals involved in them; they are events that are unpredictable and often unexpected and sudden. Even though *toccare* can express a variety of chance events, it usually denotes prototypical negative events beyond the control of the person involved (who is always expressed), events that are unpredictable and unavoidable. Similar observations apply to *contingo* and *obtingo*, even though, as previously mentioned, these verbs express favorable, neutral or adverse events with no significant quantitative differences in their use. As we will see, the semantic component of UNAVOIDABILITY is what characterizes the conceptualization underlying the use of verbs meaning ‘to touch’ when denoting a chance event. It also distinguishes such usage from other potential formulations of a similar event.

To illustrate this point, it is helpful to briefly consider the relationship between motion verbs and chance events⁷² introduced in Section 4.2. As already observed, cross-linguistically, most verbs expressing chance events are motion verbs used in a two-place intransitive construction. In this construction, at a syntactic level, “what happens” is the syntactic subject, while “the person to whom something happens” is encoded by a dative or a prepositional phrase (a preposition with an allative meaning and a noun/pronoun, e.g., Italian *a* or English *to*). At the conceptual level, in turn, “what happens” is conceived as an external object moving independently of a human observer, while the person involved in the event constitutes the endpoint of the motion.

Underpinning events involving change is the metaphor CHANGES ARE MOTIONS, where CHANGES are types of EVENTS. The image schema of MOTION comprises ORIGIN, PATH, DESTINATION/GOAL, and DIRECTION. Motion verbs differ according to the part of MOTION they profile, that is, the part that is most salient: for example, English *to come*, a deictic motion verb, profiles the terminal phase of the motion leading up to the goal (Radden, 1996, pp. 426–427). When different types of motion expressed by specific verbs are mapped onto CHANGES OF STATE, the former profile different aspects of this type of event. This also holds true for chance events.

To gain a fuller picture, we can briefly compare three types of motion verbs involved in the expression of chance events: (a) deictic motion verbs; (b) verbs denoting uncontrolled motion; and (c) verbs meaning ‘to touch’.

- (a) As observed above, deictic motion verbs, such as Latin *evenio* or *obvenio* and Italian *venire* in the locution *venire in sorte*, profile the terminal phase of the motion when the goal is reached. Consequently, the focus in this case is on the final part of a chance event when ‘what happens’ *comes* to the endpoint, that is, the person involved in the event. Interestingly, in Latin *evenio*, the preverb *e/ex* ‘out of from’ contributes to conceptualizing “what happens” as something external to the entity who is the endpoint of the motion.
- (b) Verbs related to the meaning ‘to fall’ (e.g., Latin *accido*, Italian *accadere* and *succedere*, and English *to befall*), which denote uncontrolled motion, produce a different conceptualization of the chance event. “Falling” is a downward vertical movement, usually unintentional or accidental, sudden and unexpected; it is typically brief and can be a negative and unpleasant experience (Kövecses, 2017, pp. 130–131). Just as falling interrupts the natural and linear order of an entity’s path and compromises

predictability, occasionally with negative effects, chance events interrupt the orderly succession of events, sometimes with unpleasant consequences for those involved. This type of conceptualization therefore seems to be linked to the image schema of VERTICALITY, but can also focus on the interruption of a deictic motion.

- (c) Regarding the use of verbs related to the meaning ‘to touch’ to express chance events, the bipolarity of touch and, related to it, active and passive perception are particularly suited to expressing this type of conceptualization. In the semantic frame of a prototypical chance event, verbs meaning ‘to touch’ profile the CONTACT, after the endpoint has been reached, when: (a) the thing/event “touches” a human participant and “affects” them; and, at the same time, (b) the human participant “perceives the touch”, becoming aware of what is happening at the very moment it occurs. In this way, the unpredictability and, above all, the unavoidability of the event itself are therefore highlighted. By contrast, the component PATH—and the motion related to it—remains in the frame. In other words, verbs meaning ‘to touch’ make salient the contact moment when the individual has a “passive perception” of a chance event, having already been irrevocably drawn into it. In this type of process, the importance of bipolarity and of perception—which is both active (on the part of the thing or event that is happening) and passive (on the part of the entity to whom something is happening)—is clearly evident. The fundamental significance of the semantic components UNPREDICTABILITY and, above all, UNAVOIDABILITY in the conceptualization of chance events expressed by Italian *toccare* is confirmed by the fact that the person to whom something happens—the endpoint—must always be expressed; otherwise, the sentence is ungrammatical. This is a key indication that the endpoint is a focal element of the conceptualization.

On the other hand, the analysis of the Latin verbs *contingo* and *obtingo* revealed that they are both used in two different constructions: a two-place construction and a one-place construction. In this regard, it can be assumed—though this is a hypothesis that needs to be reconsidered on the basis of a broader dataset—that the two-place construction was the original one, while the one-place construction developed as a variant of the former. There are two arguments for this. First, the two-place construction is more frequent than the one-place construction, especially with *obtingo*, a verb that seems to be used exclusively to denote chance events. Second, at the conceptual level, the two-place construction—with two participants—more closely mirrors the characteristics of tactile perception, which involves two entities in contact. The observations made above regarding *toccare* seem to support the hypothesis proposed for the Latin verbs. However, it should again be underlined that a broader cross-linguistic analysis is necessary.

Furthermore, the *Aktionsart* of *contingo*, *obtingo* and *toccare*—all achievement predicates—is consistent with a conceptualization of the chance event with the focus on the CONTACT phase. It is worth noting that the prototypical meaning of *toccare*, which expresses generic physical contact in a neutral sense, also contributes to this conceptualization. In this way, it is not a manner of contact that is profiled, but rather contact itself, which is thus made more prominent.

A final remark is in order, namely that the use of the dative/prepositional phrase to encode the individual involved in the chance event characterizes them as the Possessor of what has ‘befallen’ them. More precisely, according to Fernández Jaén (2014, pp. 110–111), this role is a metaphorical extension from the Location role (“LUGAR”) encoded by an indirect object⁷³. In Cognitive Linguistics, it is well known that the expression of spatial proximity between two entities—here expressed by both the semantics of the verb and the dative/prepositional phrase—can activate the idea of “possession”. Coming into possession of something, even if it happens ‘by chance’, causes a change in the status of the

individual involved in the event, a change that may concern concrete elements, such as goods, or their condition/state. In this respect, I would suggest that Possessor in chance events seems to constitute a sort of “macro-role” determined on a case-by-case basis by the type of chance event and the semantic features of the participants. For example, if such an event concerns a misfortune that has affected an individual, especially at the emotional level, the semantic role of the dative/prepositional phrase might best be conceived as an Experiencer, while the subject denotes the Stimulus; in other cases, the roles of the two participants can be better defined as Possessum and Possessor, respectively.

All these characteristics are conceptualized through metaphors, as we will see in the next section.

4.5. ‘To Touch’ and Chance Events: Metaphorical Conceptualizations

To conclude, in the light of the present analysis, we can attempt to identify the underlying conceptual metaphors in the use of tactile verbs to express chance events in Latin and Italian, drawing on Casadei’s (1996) study of the relationships between Italian metaphors and idioms, as well as on Pompeo (2025a, 2025b)⁷⁴.

As illustrated above, the conceptualization of chance events expressed by verbs related to the meaning ‘to touch’ profile the sudden—and hence unpredictable and unavoidable—CONTACT between an external moving object (the thing/event that happens) and an endpoint, namely the human participant to whom something happens. This type of event can be better understood by referring to various levels of metaphorical mapping, ranging from the most general to the most specific. Therefore, following Casadei’s proposal (1996, pp. 209–230), which in turn is based on Lakoff’s Event Structure Metaphor (see *supra*, Section 4.2), we can first identify the metaphor underlying all events that imply CHANGE, including chance events: CHANGES ARE MOTIONS. This, in turn, relates to the metaphor HAVING CONTROL OVER THE EVENT IS HAVING CONTROL OVER THE MOTION, which, in our case, with regard to the condition of the human participant, becomes NOT HAVING CONTROL OVER THE EVENT IS NOT HAVING CONTROL OVER THE MOTION. Second, since things/events that happen by chance are conceived of as external moving objects, the relationships between them and the individual involved can be better conceptualized through the metaphor EVENTS ARE OBJECTS. Merged with the aforementioned metaphors, this leads to UNCONTROLLED EVENTS ARE EXTERNAL MOVING OBJECTS. A more specific schema of this metaphor is found in Casadei (1996, p. 230). Taking into account Italian locutions such as *piovere/piombare/cascare addosso* (lit. ‘to rain/to plunge/to fall onto’), meaning that “something happens unexpectedly (especially something negative)”, or *cadere/cascare/piovere dal cielo* (lit. ‘to fall/to drop/to rain from the sky’), denoting that “something happens unexpectedly (especially something positive)”, Casadei suggests the metaphor UNEXPECTED EVENTS ARE OBJECTS THAT ARRIVE SUDDENLY (ESPECIALLY FROM ABOVE)⁷⁵. Finally, with regard to the use of verbs meaning ‘to touch’ to express chance events, given the focus on CONTACT and the relevance of the semantic components of UNPREDICTABILITY and, above all, UNAVOIDABILITY, a complex conceptual metaphor that can be proposed, adapting the metaphor put forward by Casadei, is CHANCE EVENTS ARE OBJECTS THAT TOUCH SUDDENLY AND CANNOT BE AVOIDED.

5. Concluding Remarks

To sum up and conclude, drawing on lexicographical sources and corpus data, the analysis has first shown that the polysemy of *contingo* and *toccare*—and, with greater caution, of *obtingo*—can be classified as “predictable cases” of “compositional polysemy” (Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2006). Indeed, the semantic content of the co-occurring verb arguments makes

the extension from the prototypical meaning ‘to touch’ toward the expression of chance events largely predictable.

Furthermore, the study has identified the types of chance events typically expressed by Latin *contingo*, *obtingo*, and, in particular, Italian *toccare*, and has explained the semantic motivation and conceptual mechanisms underlying the use of these verbs to denote chance events. Notably, most verbs expressing this type of event share a two-place intransitive construction that is cross-linguistically common and based on metaphorical mappings involving MOTION. Unlike verbs which express uncontrolled motion, in the case of deictic motion verbs and verbs meaning ‘to touch’, the event that ‘happens’ is conceptualized as an external moving object reaching a human participant, who is consistently construed as the endpoint of the event. This conceptualization is consistent with the use of telic verbs in both Latin and Italian. From a constructional perspective, what characterizes verbs meaning ‘to touch’ and distinguishes their use from that of other verbs denoting similar events in Latin and Italian is the focus on the phase of CONTACT with the human endpoint, that is, the culmination of the event. This highlights the UNPREDICTABILITY and, above all, the UNAVOIDABILITY of the chance event. More specifically, in Italian, the fundamental role of the semantic component UNAVOIDABILITY is confirmed not only by the fact that it is common to the three intransitive uses of *toccare*, but also by the prevalence of negative events and, above all, by the obligatory expression of the second argument. Indeed, unlike other verbs that express chance events, such as *accadere*, *capitare* and *succedere*, *toccare* cannot be used in a one-place construction, and the human entity involved must always be specified. As far as the Latin verbs are concerned, a notable difference is that *contingo*, and to a lesser extent *obtingo*, can also occur in a one-place impersonal construction. In this respect, and on the basis of both quantitative data and conceptual aspects, it has been suggested that the two-place construction was the original one. Not only does it occur more frequently, but it also more closely mirrors the characteristics of tactile perception, which involve two entities in contact. While it is possible that the one-place construction developed as a variant of the former, this remains, for now, a hypothesis that needs to be reassessed on the basis of a larger dataset.

In addition, it has been proposed that, in this conceptualization of chance events, two characteristics specific to the sense of touch are especially relevant: its “bipolarity” and the distinction between active and passive tactile experience. Both provide an embodied grounding for the metaphorical extension whereby events perceived as unpredictable and unavoidable are construed as involving an individual.

As for the conceptual metaphors underlying this use, drawing on Lakoff’s Event Structure Metaphor and Casadei’s (1996) work on Italian metaphors and idioms, the complex metaphor CHANCE EVENTS ARE OBJECTS THAT TOUCH SUDDENLY AND CANNOT BE AVOIDED has been suggested.

In conclusion, the study provides evidence that tactile verbs, owing to their semantic and experiential properties, offer a cognitively grounded and productive means of expressing chance events. This opens up avenues for further comparative work across languages to explore the extent and variability of this phenomenon.

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Appendix A

Table A1. *Contingo*: occurrences.

Apuleius	
1. Apol., 96	Pontianus me vitricum sibi contigisse intimis affectionibus laetabatur
2. Mund., 10	quae udis elementis aquosis que contingunt
3. Mund., 18	his passionibus contingit ut quaedam terrae expirent halitus
4. Mund., 19	si illis eadem incommoda soleant ac secunda contingere
M. Tullius Cicero	
5. Att., 3, 6, 4	Non fuerat mihi dubium quin te Tarenti aut Brundisi visurus esse (. . .) Quoniam id non contigit
6. Att., 5, 17, 5	et simul hanc gloriam iustitiae et abstinentiae fore illustriorem spero si cito decesserimus, id quod Scaevolae contigit , qui solos novem mensis Asiae praefuit
7. Att., 8, 7, 2	Italiam relinquit, si malui, contigit : victus sum
8. Att., 8, 11D, 5	quoniam autem te cum ut essem non contigit , utinam tui consili certior factus essem!
9. Cat., 1, 16	si hoc post hominum memoriam contigit nemini
10. Cat., 3, 15	quod mihi primum post hanc urbem conditam togato contigit
11. Div., 1, 34	quod et somniantibus saepe contingit et non numquam vaticinantibus per furorem
12. Div., 1, 46	quod ita contigit ; nam ad septuagesimum pervenit
13. Div., 1, 47	quod ita contigit ; nam Babylone paucis post diebus Alexander est mortuus
14. Div., 1, 47	‘O praeclarum discessum’, inquit, ‘e vita, cum, ut Herculi contigit , mortali corpore cremato, in lucem animus excesserit!’
15. Div., 1, 52	<ut> est dictum, sic scribitur contigisse
16. Div., 1, 81	Obiciuntur etiam saepe formae, quae reapse nullae sunt, speciem autem offerunt; quod contigisse Brenno dicitur eius que Gallicis copiis
17. Div., 1, 113	quod aut vatibus contingit aut dormientibus
18. Div., 1, 119	quod ne dubitare possimus, maximo est argumento, quod paulo ante interitum Caesaris contigit
19. Div., 1, 120	et, si mulier leonem peperisse visa esset, fore ut ab exteris gentibus vinceretur ea res publica, in qua id contigisset
20. Div., 1, 129	A natura autem alia quaedam ratio est, quae docet, quanta sit animi vis seiuncta a corporis sensibus, quod maxime contingit aut dormientibus aut mente permotis
21. Div., 2, 33	ostreis que et conchyliis omnibus contingere , ut cum luna pariter crescant pariter que decrescant
22. Div., 2, 94	quod non contingeret , si haec non vis et natura gignentium efficeret, sed temperatio lunae caeli que moderatio
23. Fam., 2, 2	qui cum suis laudibus tum vero te filio superasset omnium fortunam si ei contigisset ut te ante videret quam a vita discederet
24. Fam., 16, 6, 2	quoniam non contigit ut simul navigares
25. Off., 1, 1, 3	quidem nemini uideo Graecorum adhuc contigisse ut idem utroque in genere laboraret sequeretur que
26. Off., 1, 22, 74	atque id in magnis animis ingeniis que plerumque contingit eo que magis si sunt ad rem militarem apti
27. Off., 1, 32, 118	Iovis satu edito potuit fortasse contingere nobis non item qui imitatur
28. Off., 1, 43, 153	argumento confirmari potest quod si contigerit ea vita sapienti ut omnium rerum affluentibus copiis [quamvis] omnia quae cognitione digna sint summo otio se cum ipse consideret et contempletur

Table A1. Cont.

M. Tullius Cicero	
29. Phil., 2, 17	quis esset qui ad salutem communem defendendam non excitaretur, praesertim cum senatus populus que Romanus haberet ducem, qualis si qui nunc esset, tibi idem quod illis accidit contigisset ?
30. Phil., 5, 49	utinam C. Caesari, pa<t>ri dico, contigisset adulescenti ut esset senatui atque optimo cuique carissimus!
31. Phil., 13, 38	numquam exsurget: quod tibi tuis que contingat
32. Phil., 14, 24	quod idem contigerat superioribus bellis civilibus
33. Phil., 14, 24	quam ob rem aut supplicatio re publica pulcherrime gesta postulantibus nostris imperatoribus deneganda est, quod praeter A. Gabinium contigit nemini
T. Livius	
34. Liv., 28, 24, 3	Mandonius et Indibilis, quibus, quia regnum sibi Hispaniae, pulsus inde Carthaginiensibus, destinarant animis, nihil pro spe contigerat
35. Liv., 28, 41, 4	modo contingat ut te consule vincamus
36. Liv., 34, 7, 8	non magistratus nec sacerdotia nec triumphi nec insignia nec dona aut spolia bellica iis contingere possunt
37. Liv., 44, 27, 3	cum aduersus id quoque misceri ambages cerneret, <in>uiolato fallaci nuntio, quod vix sperauerat ipse posse contingere
T. Maccius Plautus	
38. Amph., 186	id contigit , ut salvi poteremur domi
39. Amph., 1061	Ita erae meae hodie contigit : nam ubi parturit, deos sibi inuocat, Strepitus, crepitus, sonitus, tonitrus: ut subito ut propere, ut ualide tonuit
40. As., 720	Opta id quod ut contingat tibi vis
41. Cist., 497	Quodcumque optes, tibi velim contingere
42. Poen., 1271	Tandem huic cupitum contigit
43. Ps., 692	Euge: par pari aliud autem quod cupiebam contigit
44. Rud., 1176	istuc ex pietate vostra uobis contigit
P. Terentius Afer	
45. Andr., 696	hanc mi expetivi, contigit
46. Haut., 322	haud stulte sapis, siquidem id saperest, uelle te id quod non potest contingere
47. Hec., 833	tot propter me gaudia illi contigisse laetor
48. Phorm., 843	Nos que amicos eius exonerastis metu! Sed ego nunc mihi cesso, qui non umerum hunc onero pallio ad que hominem propere inuenire, ut haec quae contigerint sciat

Table A2. *Obtingo*: occurrences.

Apuleius	
1. Apol., 1	quo ego uno praecipue confisus gratulor medius fidiis, quod mihi copia et facultas te iudice optigit purgandae apud imperitos philosophiae
2. Apol., 4	quae tamen ab ipsis tribui sueta multis uolentibus non obtingunt
3. Flor., 16	id—praefascine dixerim—iam quodam modo mihi obtigit
4. Met., 3, 1	mitis tam que benivolus iudex obtinget
5. Socr., 20	quod si cuivis potest evenire facultas contemplandi divinam effigiem, cur non adprime potuerit Socrati obtingere , quem cuivis amplissimo numini sapientiae

Table A2. Cont.

M. Tullius Cicero	
6. Att., 1, 15, 1	Asiam Quinto, suavissimo fratri, obtigisse audisti
7. Att., 1, 20, 3	et eam quam mihi dicis obtigisse Σπάρταν non modo numquam deseram
8. Cat., 4, 3	deinde, si quid obtigerit , aequo animo parato que moriar
9. Div., 1, 103	ut cum rege Perse gereret obtigisset
10. Div., 2, 38	quid est tam perspicuum quam, cum fortuito hostiae adducantur, talia cuique exta esse, qualis cuique obtigerit hostia?
11. Div., 2, 38	at enim id ipsum habet aliquid divini, quae cuique hostia obtingat , tamquam in sortibus, quae cui ducatur.
12. Fam., 2, 19, 1	nuntium acceperissem te mihi quaestorem obtigisse
13. Fam., 2, 19, 2	mihi quaestor optatior obtingere nemo potuit
14. Fam., 16, 12, 3	citeriorem Considio Noniano (his enim obtigerunt) traditurum
15. Off., 1, 7, 21	ex quo quia suum cuiusque fit eorum quae natura fuerant communia quod cuique optigit id quisque teneat
16. Phil., 14, 34	id genus quod esset pulcherrimum suis obtigisse eos que nec inhumatos esse nec desertos
17. Pis., 95	damnatio ista quae in te flagitatur, obtigit P. Rutilio
18. Vat., 11	in eo magistratu cum tibi magno clamore aquaria provincia sorte obtigisset , missus ne sis a me consule Puteolos, ut inde aurum exportari argentum que prohiberes
19. Verr., I, 21	et Marco Metello obtigisset ut is de pecuniis repetundis quaereret
20. Verr., II, 1, 34	obtigit tibi consularis
21. Verr., II, 1, 34	Carbo graviter ferebat sibi quaestorem obtigisse hominem singulari luxuria atque inertia
22. Verr., II, 1, 37	quaestor cum L. Scipioni consuli obtigisset
23. Verr., II, 5, 38	cum tibi sorte obtigisset uti ius diceret
T. Livius	
24. Liv., 28, 38, 13	urbana Cn. Servilio obtigit
25. Liv., 31, 6, 2	alteri consulum Aurelio Italia provincia obtigit
26. Liv., 32, 28, 2	urbana Sergio, peregrina iurisdictio Minucio obtigit
27. Liv., 33, 22, 3	Q. Minucius utrique Italiam prouinciam obtigisse diceret
28. Liv., 33, 36, 2	inter cives peregrinos que iurisdictio obtigerat
29. Liv., 38, 35, 10	Messallae Ligures Salinatori obtigit Gallia
30. Liv., 39, 32, 5	Sempronius, cui sors comitia habendi obtigerat , Romam venit
31. Liv., 42, 1, 3	cum quibus praetor cui Sardinia obtigisset in Corsicam transgressus bellum gereret
32. Liv., 43, 15, 2	urbana C. Sulpicio, peregrina C. Decimio obtigerat
33. Liv. 44, 21, 3	et ut sollemni Latinarum perfecto L. Aemilius consul Cn. Octavius praetor, cui classis obtigisset , in provinciam proficiscantur
T. Maccius Plautus	
34. Amph., 634	Quin incommodi plus mali que ilico adsit, boni si optigit quid
35. As., 726	animo sis bono face: exoptata optingent
36. Aul., 731	Immo ego sum, [miser] et misere perditus, quoi tanta mala maestitudo que optigit
37. Bacch., 426	Id quom optigerat , hoc etiam ad malum accersebatur malum

Table A2. Cont.

T. Maccius Plautus	
38. Bacch., 543	qu<o>i non inuidea<n>t rem secundam optingere
39. Bacch., 951	adsimiliter mi hodie optigit
40. Capt., 156	fugitant omnes hanc prouinciam, quoi optigerat postquam captust Philopolemus tuos
41. Capt., 591	Pergin seruom me exprobrare esse, id quod ui hostili optigit?
42. Capt., 745	Nam mihi propter te hoc optigit
43. Cas., 299	Attamen mihi obtinget sors
44. Men., 899	dies peruorsus atque aduorsus mi optigit
45. Merc., 136b	At tibi sortito id optigit
46. Merc., 319	Humanum amarest atque id vei optigit deum
47. Mil., 1011	Erit et tibi exoptatum optingit : bonum habe animum, ne formida
48. Mil., 1246	Nam nulli mortali scio obtigisse hoc nisi duobus, Tibi et Phaoni Lesbio
49. Most., 532	Scelestiorem ego annum argento faenori umquam ullum uidi, quam hic mihi annus optigit .
50. Poen., 1326	uolup est mihi, siquid lenoni optigit magni mali
51. Poen., 1326	Quom que e uirtute uobis fortuna optigit
52. Rud., 494	quem propter hoc mihi optigit misero mali
53. Rud., 872	Bono animo meliust te in nervom conrepere: tibi optigit quod plurumi exoptant sibi
54. Rud., 927	Nunc haec tibi occasio, Gripe, optigit , ut *liberes ex populo praeter te
55. Rud., 1193	(Satin siquoi homini dei esse bene factum uolu<nt>, aliquo illud pacto optingit optatum piis?)
56. Rud., 1211	Eloquere, ut haec res optigit de filia
57. Rud., 1231	Tanto illi melius optigit qui perdidit: Tuom esse nilo
58. Stich., 383	Iam non facio auctionem: mihi optigit hereditas
59. Truc., 344	Verum nunc siqua mihi obtigerit hereditas magna atque luculenta
P. Terentius Afer	
60. Andr., 607	Perii. Atque hoc confiteor mihi iure optigisse , quandoquidem ego tam iners, tam nulli consili
61. Andr., 965	O Pamphile! Nescis quid mi optigerit
62. Andr., 966	Certe; sed quid mi optigerit scio
63. Haut., 683	istuc tibi ex sententia tua optigisse laetor
64. Hec., 577	me di ament ita que optingant ex te quae exoptem mi
65. Phorm., 239	Incertumst quid agam, quia praeter spem atque incredibile hoc mi optigit : ita sum inritatus, animum ut nequeam ad cogitandum instituere
66. Phorm., 577	Quid gnato optigerit me absente, audisti, Chreme?
67. Phorm., 820	Laetus sum, ut meae res sese habent, fratri optigisse quod volt

Table A3. *Toccare*: occurrences grouped according to the different types of event.

Favorable Chance Events
"a + noun/pronoun"
1. Destino simile tocca a Sandra Lonardo, moglie di Clemente Mastella
2. Questo è un mestiere che porta al cinismo, ma ci sono occasioni in cui ci si può anche commuovere. A me è toccato qui a Strasburgo, l'altro giorno

Table A3. Cont.

Favorable Chance Events
<i>"mi"</i>
<i>"ti"</i>
3. Facciamo dipendere il destino comune di tutti dalla mera sorte e quindi a seconda che ti tocchi il primo giudice favorevole
<i>"gli"</i>
4. chi aveva gridato al miracolo perché i brandelli di lottizzazione di cui gli era toccato qua e là di godere lo avevano portato al livello di caposervizio di + inf.
5. Nel 1705 gli toccarono commissioni per la provincia marchigiana (i dipinti nel duomo di Iesi e nel S. Francesco di Fermo sono ancora in loco)
6. l'ultimo dei grandissimi protagonisti della musica del diavolo ringrazia ogni giorno il Creatore per la fortuna che gli è toccata
7. L'azzurro uscito dalle qualificazioni è stato abbastanza fortunato nel sorteggio: gli è toccato Jiri Novak
<i>"le"</i>
8. Occorre dunque ritrovare Imogen per informarla della fortuna che le è toccata
9. dall'altra le [ad Artemisia] toccò di veder crescere la sua stima presso Serse, pur avendo combinato un disastro e anzi proprio per questo
<i>"ci"</i>
10. Dalla finestra della stanza (ci è toccata una matrimoniale) si vedono la valle
11. Non penso alle prime volte fisiologiche (avvio dell'attività lavorativa, pensione, trasloco, nascite, morti. . .) che nella vita ci toccano .
<i>"vi"</i>
12. Oggi potrete incontrare difficoltà nella convivenza a meno che non vi sia toccato il partner perfetto: calmo, fedele e anche molto paziente.
13. sono convinto, anzi, che la missione che svolgo per il dio sia il bene massimo che vi è toccato in questa città.
14. Carbonara, gricia, matriciana . . . ma quanto sono buone!!! Prossimamente vi toccherà di vederle anche qui
<i>"loro"</i>
15. Quest'anno ci toccano loro e il 2013 si chiude con queste facce (. . .): le rivelazioni televisive degli ultimi 12 mesi.
16. I due bambini non sapevano che fortuna fosse toccata loro
17. Ogni cosa va fatta in un determinato momento della vita ed è giusto che, questa nuova versione del gioco, riguardi altri concorrenti e . . . che la fortuna tocchi loro.
18. avevano raggiunto tantissimi traguardi, visto i loro migliori amici avere il meglio dalla vita; ma quando era toccato loro, qualcosa li aveva fatti vacillare.
Neutral chance events
<i>"a + noun/pronoun"</i>
1. stessa sorte toccata a Crash
<i>"mi"</i>
2. Sugli autobus ci ho lavorato per qualche anno, (. . .) mi sono toccati prima un Iveco 370 e poi un D303 cruccio
<i>"ti"</i>
3. Caro Matteo, io dico semplicemente di provare a fidarti un po' di più di chi ti è toccato come papa, anche se non è il papa dei tuoi sogni.
4. A scuola si fa a fortuna, dipende che maestra di sostegno che ti tocca

Table A3. Cont.

Neutral chance events
5. Ti tocca una mamma abbastanza collaudata su alcune cose e abbastanza pronta a farsi scombussolare su quello che tu deciderai
6. Non è una cosa velocissima da spiegare comunque proverò ad essere sintetico (ndr altro che esperto! ti tocca l'esploso!)
<i>"gli"</i>
7. mi diverti per buona parte della giornata col racconto delle accoglienze e delle avventure che gli toccarono in quella città
8. Lo studente dovrà descrivere l'immagine che gli è toccata nel modo più completo possibile
9. E ancora che chi oggi si azzardasse a comperare vuoi in asta, vuoi sul secondario non ha la più pallida idea della sorte che gli toccherà
10. diresse Olanda-Uruguay 2-0 e del 1982 dove gli toccò la gara del secondo turno tra Francia e Austria 1-0
<i>"le"</i>
11. Ma la plebe di Roma non coglieva in patria gli stessi successi che le toccavano in campo militare.
<i>"ci"</i>
12. Arriviamo al tenero Jonas, che non sa cosa lo aspetta, finché si ha denti in bocca non si sa quel che ci tocca
<i>"vi"</i>
13. Un'idea originale per concludere la festa è mettere tutti i nomi dei presenti in una ciotola e pescarne uno a turno. Scrivete una cartolina alla persona che vi è toccata ed inviatela
14. ringraziate ogni giorno della fortuna che vi tocca , illustri lettori: essere sensibili all'errore è una tragedia soltanto se non vi rendete conto che si tratta pur sempre di sensibilità
<i>"loro"</i>
15. Fu tirata a sorte la parte della tribù dei figli di Beniamino, secondo le loro famiglie; la parte che toccò loro aveva i confini tra i figli di Giuda e i figli di Giuseppe
16. Ancora nessun passo avanti nella risoluzione del mistero delle gemelline scomparse, Alessia e Livia non si trovano e nessuno sa quale sorte sia toccata loro
17. ma a noi poco importa della sorte che toccherà loro, conta solo non farli approdare
18. Questi piccoli [= i bambini] crescono in ambienti diversi, a seconda della sorte che è toccata loro
19. come quelli di una generosità e di una misericordia che continuano a dispensare a piene mani—e anche oltre—dovunque tocca loro di mettere piede.
20. Era preoccupazione di questi giorni, per i pazienti dializzati che fanno riferimento all'ospedale di Tolentino, la sorte che sarebbe toccata loro in vista dell'abbattimento del nosocomio
21. ma ignoravano quale tipo di pastiglia fosse toccata loro
22. Proprio perché sconosciuti, può toccar loro di diventare arbitri del nostro domani
23. i volontari che si prestano ogni mese a preparare le ricette sui singoli temi, vengono barbaramente reclutati all'inizio della sfida, senza sapere che sorte toccherà loro
24. Sono le donne alle quali viene chiesto di prendere una decisione anche per gli altri 300 lavoratori che attendono di sapere quale sorte toccherà loro
25. Discutiamo oggi il bilancio di fine legislatura, in un momento in cui (...) c'è una mobilitazione generale, sostanziale, dei dipendenti delle Province che non sanno che sorte toccherà loro
Adverse chance events
<i>"a + noun/pronoun"</i>
1. soprattutto quando avevano avuto dal marito indiano qualche figlio mezzosangue come toccò a Anna Brewster Morgan

Table A3. Cont.

Adverse chance events
2. spetterebbe loro la stessa so[r]te toccata a migliaia di soldati siriani catturati da questi tagliagole
3. Lo stesso destino che tocca a molti popoli indigeni sparsi per il globo
4. De Venuto aveva capito ormai quale sorte fosse toccata a quasi tutte le centinaia di persone rimaste nella galleria
5. ma di sicuro non hanno l'immagine di speculatori che è toccata a molte banche
6. affinché (...) a Roma sia evitata la gogna mondiale che è toccata a Napoli
7. Stessa sorte è toccata adesso a Balotelli e Osvaldo, entrambi espulsi nelle loro rispettive squadre
8. Esistono donne messe in ombra dai genitori, dal marito, dall'epoca in cui vivono, a volte persino dalla loro stessa opera: tutte queste sorti insieme sono toccate a Mary Shelley
9. Sorte peggiore toccò a Costantino, figlio di Alessio, che fu accecato
10. La stessa sorte che è toccata a molti altri antichi castelli i quali, privati della loro funzione originaria, si sono spopolati
11. Il peggior destino che possa toccare a un individuo
12. L'ultimo papa (...) era stato nominato arcivescovo di Bologna in modo inaspettato (come sarebbe toccato a mons. Montini a Milano)
13. Peraltro tale sorte tocca a molti insegnanti precari anche della scuola provinciale
14. Un'apocalisse personale, che coincide con il giorno in cui la stessa sorte toccò a Amy Winehouse
<i>"mi"</i>
15. In Italia persi una sola partita, in maglia azzurra, e la triste storia mi toccò proprio a Torino, davanti al mio pubblico.
16. Ma la faccenda che mi era toccata , (...) m'indusse a pensare alle poche probabilità che mi si risparmiasse la più terribile delle morti
<i>"ti"</i>
17. ma la cosa peggiore che ti toccherebbe è che in Italia non ti farebbero rientrare
18. Ognuno di noi riceve nel corso dell'anno almeno un regalo...non azzeccato. Questa volta ti è toccata un'altra cravatta e tu non ne usi mai
<i>"gli"</i>
19. Altrimenti gli toccherà una sorte analoga a quella della rivoluzione francese (corsi e ricorsi storici)
20. gli rammentavano la passeggiata ch'egli aveva fatta per rincasare tutto stupito non dell'avventura che gli era toccata [This is a passage from Svevo's, <i>Una vita</i>]
21. Come cacciatore di bufali si accompagnò a W. Skelton Glenn sino a quando per un alterco gli toccò di uccidere un altro cacciatore.
22. nella sciagura che ormai gli era toccata non gli importava di morire sotto i colpi.
23. gli toccava là quella atroce puntura di veder quel suo uomo aver riconosciuto con quell'atto che Nizza era Francese! [This is a passage from Abba's, <i>Storia dei Mille</i>]
24. non che credessero che Duro fosse spaventato per la sorte che gli era toccata , morire nell'arena non piaceva a nessuno
25. dopo una battesimo del fuoco come quello che gli è toccato
26. Creatura del nulla, l'uomo può affrontare l'inconcepibile pena che gli tocca —questi pochi anni d'esistenza—esclusivamente sbronzandosi.
27. Se fosse un uomo come tutti noi (...) e gli toccasse ad esempio di avere come sede di competenza quella del Torrino, in Roma di + inf.
28. gli toccò il destino comune a tanti altri. Chiuso.

Table A3. Cont.

Adverse chance events
29. bastava guardare il profilo del personaggio e la sua recitazione per capire che, prima o poi, una scivolatina nel Lato Oscuro gli sarebbe toccata
30. La fine che gli toccò non fu degna delle sue passate imprese
31. Riccardo Tonfo sospirò. Sapeva che prima o poi gli sarebbe toccato qualcosa del genere
32. Perché ognuno torna come può e alle ore che gli toccano
<i>“le”</i>
33. Ma quante cattiverie, e che contrappasso di malignità, le [all’amicizia] sono toccati dall’età dei “Lumi” in poi.
34. L’Inter di Mourinho il Barcellona lo dovette battere in semifinale, non le toccò certo una squadretta come il Monaco
35. Una non migliore sorte le [alla cultura weimeriana] tocca a sinistra
36. La ballerina napoletana teme di fare la stessa fine che le era toccata a Temptation Island 2 quando Emanuele l’aveva illusa
37. ma Reiko era ancora inchiodata in Classe, senza sapere alcunché della sorte che le sarebbe toccata
38. Questi benefici avrebbero dovuto conciliare alla Chiesa l’amore di tutti; ma le toccò il contrario
39. Ma se l’immagine è la stazione intermedia tra parola e cosa perché le è toccato questa sorte obliosa?
<i>“ci”</i>
40. il piccolo folletto in questi frangenti fa sì che ci tocchi incontrare proprio chi solitamente evitiamo
41. Una volta era il legame degli uomini che vanno in guerra insieme—una condanna che, se Dio vuole, non ci tocca più
42. Non penso alle prime volte fisiologiche (avvio dell’attività lavorativa, pensione, trasloco, nascite, morti. . .) che nella vita ci toccano .
<i>“vi”</i>
43. Se il vostro lavoro non vi soddisfa, vi rassegnate e sopportate la situazione che vi è toccata .
44. godetevi questo sindaco che poi vi toccherà di nuovo lo scempio.
45. Se però vi tocca il piano terra prendete 1 asciugamano e tappate la fessura [per evitare che entrino insetti e animali]
46. [A proposito di una slot machine] se vi capiterà della frutta avrete dei premi e la vostra energia verrà ripristinata, se vi toccheranno delle immagini di Andross la slot machine sputerà plasma e laser verso di voi.
47. A questo punto siete entrati nell’entropia pura della scheda di compilazione dei ragazzi del call center 187 (. . .) Mi rendo conto del calvario che vi è toccato e rinnovo un moto solidale
<i>“loro”</i>
48. A dir la verità è toccato loro molte volte di essere sbaragliati e messi in fuga, privati dell’accampamento e di parte del territorio [Translation of a passage from Livy’s, <i>Ab Urbe Condita</i> , 3, 67]
49. per il resto, poté toccar loro di ricevere il classico e abusato ammonimento: “In questa fabbrica si viene per lavorare”
50. Le donne pachistane vantano un primato, possiedono uno dei più alti tassi di suicidi e li attuano dandosi fuoco, per sfuggire all’orribile sorte che tocca loro in vita
51. Invece a Cantello nemmeno uno dei gatti scomparsi è rientrato e, cosa ancora più inquietante, non siamo ancora riusciti a scoprire nulla su quale sorte sia toccata loro
52. questi film sono stati ignorati, o quasi, dalla distribuzione (. . .) Stessa sorte è toccata loro nella versione home-video
53. il mondo ingiusto in cui era toccato loro di abitare non gli piaceva
54. Pensavo si trattasse di un altro romanzo che dava voce (. . .) alle donne, condannate in egual misura dal colore della propria pelle e dal sesso che fortuitamente era toccato loro alla nascita
55. Quando all’improvviso la signora Wellington muore, le loro sorti sono appese ad un filo. Toccherà loro di tutto. Anche affrontare le loro più tremende paure.

Table A3. Cont.

Adverse chance events
56. dispiacersi per un dramma che tocca loro oppure del fatto che muoiano secondo me è normale e giustificato.
57. Quale beffardo destino toccherà loro?
58. Quando hanno osato anche di poco muoversi contro i cristiani, ciò che è toccato loro nel tempo recente lo sapete
59. voglio—scrive—che i miei parenti “dopo avermi perduto (come toccherà loro ben presto) possano ritrovarvi alcuni tratti delle mie qualità [Translation of a passage from Montaigne]
60. Probabilmente, stanno meglio lì da te, perché quello che è toccato loro d’osservare negli ultimi anni so che li amareggiava
61. Avevano il diritto di tenere i capelli lunghi e di scrivere quando volevano, purché non rivelassero nulla della sorte che era toccata loro
62. ma il buon senso mi dice che sicuramente sarebbe toccato loro la stessa identica sorte che il prof. Luraghi ha scritto subirono i soldati di colore unionisti
63. Ci sono luoghi, un tempo sede di operose attività produttive, che ora giacciono inerti nella condizione del più silenzioso abbandono. Troppo spesso tocca loro anche il vile oblio degli uomini.
64. tutti nel corso della loro Storia hanno quanto meno provato a riservare ai rispettivi vicini la sorte che poi è toccata loro per mano degli Europei?

Notes

- For a brief yet informative introduction to the lexicon of luck and its cultural associations, see Chapters 1 and 2 in Gordon (2023); see also *infra*, Section 4.
- The basic definition proposed here is drawn from entries in English, Italian, and Latin dictionaries relating to the concept of “chance”. In the case of English, various entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary* were considered, including *accident*, *casualty*, *chance*, *contingency*, *contingent*, and *happence* (<https://www.oed.com/?tl=true>, accessed on 28 October 2025).
- Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press. Available online: <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/> (accessed on 1 October 2025).
- Oxford English Dictionary*, “contingent (adj.), sense II.4,” March 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3040187519>.
- Oxford English Dictionary*, “contingency (n.), sense II.3.b,” March 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3715945417>.
- Oxford English Dictionary*, “contingency (n.), sense II.4.a,” March 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/8362882799>.
- Oxford English Dictionary*, “contingent (adj. & n.), Etymology,” March 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6822063815> and *Oxford English Dictionary*, “contingency (n.), Etymology,” March 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2963317288>.
- The literature in this field is extensive and in constant growth. For a recent introduction to Cognitive Semantics, see Li (2024). For an overview of Cognitive Linguistics, see Croft and Cruse (2004).
- As used in Cognitive Semantics studies, the term “semantic extension” refers to the process by which a linguistic form acquires new meanings over time. Similarly, “metaphorical extensions” and “metonymical extensions” denote semantic extensions realized through metaphorical or metonymical mechanisms. The study of semantic change and the role of semantic extensions is of considerable interest to researchers investigating polysemy within the Cognitive Semantics framework. As Geeraerts (1997, p. 6) observes, “The interest of theoretical semanticists working within the framework of Cognitive Semantics in the study of meaning changes derives from their interest in polysemy, if only because the synchronic links that exist between the various senses of an item coincide with diachronic mechanisms of semantic extension such as metaphor and metonymy”.
- A well-known example is the extension of ‘to see’ to ‘to know’, common in both Indo-European and non-Indo-European languages (see Viberg, 2001, pp. 1304–1305, among others).
- As regards embodied thought, Lakoff (1987, p. xiv) observes that “the structures used to put together our conceptual systems grow out of bodily experience and make sense in terms of it; moreover, the core of our conceptual systems is directly grounded in perception, body movement, and experience of a physical and social character”.
- According to Johnson (1987, p. xiv), “An image schema is a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience. The VERTICALITY schema, for instance, emerges from our tendency to employ an UP–DOWN orientation in picking out meaningful structures of our experience”.
- Logeion. University of Chicago. Available online: <https://logeion.uchicago.edu> (accessed on 22 September 2025).
- Thesaurus linguae Latinae*. Available online: <https://thesaurus.badw.de/tll-digital/tll-open-access.html> (accessed on 22 September 2025).

- ¹⁵ <https://artflsrv03.uchicago.edu/philologic4/LewisShort521/query?report=concordance&method=proxy&q=word&start=0&end=0&head=> (accessed on 22 September 2025).
- ¹⁶ *Library of Latin Texts*. Brepols. Available online: <http://www.brepols.net> (accessed on 24 September 2025).
- ¹⁷ Queries for *contingo* and *obtingo* for the period between the third century BCE and the fifth century CE yielded 4159 occurrences of *contingo* and 129 of *obtingo*.
- ¹⁸ This is the period known as *Antiquitas* in the *Library of Latin Texts*: it encompasses the archaic and classical phases, as well as part of the imperial phase. Queries for *contingo* and *obtingo* for this period yielded 1346 occurrences of *contingo* and 97 of *obtingo*.
- ¹⁹ All comedies by Plautus were checked. Occurrences of *contingo* and *obtingo* are in the following works: *Amphitruo*, *Asinaria*, *Aulularia*, *Bacchides*, *Captivi*, *Casina*, *Cistellaria*, *Menaechmi*, *Mercator*, *Miles gloriosus*, *Mostellaria*, *Poenulus*, *Pseudolus*, *Rudens*, *Stichus*, and *Truculentus*.
- ²⁰ All comedies by Terence were checked. Occurrences of *contingo* and *obtingo* are in the following works: *Andria*, *Heautontimorumenos*, *Hecyra*, and *Phormio*.
- ²¹ *Il Nuovo De Mauro*. Available online: <https://dizionario.internazionale.it/> (accessed on 16 September 2025).
- ²² *Vocabolario Treccani*. Available online: <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/> (accessed on 16 September 2025).
- ²³ *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (Vol. XX). Squi-Tog. UTET. Available online: <https://www.gdli.it/> (accessed on 6 October 2025).
- ²⁴ *Corpus OVI dell'italiano antico*. Available online: <http://www.oivi.cnr.it/> (accessed on 8 October 2025).
- ²⁵ *Biblioteca italiana*. Available online: <http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it/> (accessed on 8 October 2025).
- ²⁶ A full description of the corpus is available on the website itself: <https://www.sketchengine.eu/ittenten-italian-corpus/> (accessed on 1 October 2025).
- ²⁷ Cf. sub-entries nos. 10 and 11 in *Il Nuovo De Mauro* dictionary (<https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/toccare>, accessed on 16 September 2025).
- ²⁸ In Italian there is no case inflection. However, relics of cases remain in some pronominal forms. Regarding the unstressed forms of Italian personal pronouns, the forms *mi*, *ti*, *lo* (m.)/*la* (f.), *ci*, *vi*, *li* (m.)/*le* (f.) encode a direct object (“accusative pronouns”); the forms *mi*, *ti*, *gli* (m.)/*le* (f.), *ci*, *vi*, *gli/loro* encode an indirect object (“dative pronouns”); cf. Renzi et al. (2001, vol. 1, p. 551). Notably, the third-person plural form *loro*, which is used as an indirect object only in learned or literary language (Renzi et al., 2001, vol. 1, p. 551), is not a proper clitic but rather a weak form ([https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/clitici_\(Enciclopedia-dell%E2%80%99italiano\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/clitici_(Enciclopedia-dell%E2%80%99italiano)/), accessed on 18 November 2025). For a comprehensive illustration of the theory of the tripartition of pronominal systems into clitic, weak, and strong elements within the framework of Generative Grammar, see Cardinaletti and Starke (1999).
- ²⁹ The Latin texts are taken from *Library of Latin Texts*; the English translations are mostly mine. For the sake of readability, glosses are limited to basic morphological information (singular number is not indicated for nouns, adjectives, participles, and articles; active voice and indicative mood not indicated for verbs).
- ³⁰ As stated by Fabrizio (2018, pp. 62–63, *passim*), in Early and Classical Latin, an infinitive in subject function can only occur with specific types of predicates: stative predicates, achievements (denoting telic change of state), and activity predicates in the marked voice (i.e., passive). Among the telic predicates, *contingo* is also included (Fabrizio, 2018, p. 72).
- ³¹ As Pinkster (2015, pp. 104–107) observes, “verbs of approaching and befalling”—a group of verbs that comprises *contingo* and *obtingo*—belong to one of the four Latin verb classes that have a second argument encoded by the dative. These verb classes include a large number of compounds, especially those with the preverb *ob-*. Compound verbs with *co-/com-/con-* are also attested, but the dative is relatively less common with them than the prepositional phrase with *cum*. In this usage, the dative case—or the prepositional phrase ‘a + noun/pronoun’ in Italian—is what is generally referred to as the ‘logical subject’ of the sentence, that is, the animate participant that performs or experiences the action expressed by the predicate, independently of its grammatical position.
- ³² When dealing with the decomposition of the logical structure of the predicate (a lexical entry designating an event and taking arguments), even scholars working with different theoretical approaches represent a verbal argument according to its position with respect to the predicate (cf. Levin & Rappaport Hovav, 2005, pp. 69–70). In this paper, I use the labels ‘first’ and ‘second argument’ with no reference to any specific theoretical approach. Rather, the terms are used in a purely denotative sense and for practical reasons, given the variety of expressions that can function as the syntactic subject of the verbs under investigation, and because, as we will see in Section 4.4, the semantic roles encoded by the two arguments lend themselves to different interpretations.
- ³³ In our corpus, *contingo* occurs three times with a plural subject: in Terentius, *Phormio*, 843, Apuleius, *De mundo*, 18 (*soleant contingere*), and Apuleius, *De mundo*, 19.
- ³⁴ The total number of occurrences of *contingo* in the selected text corpus is 48 (see Table A1 in Appendix A). To be precise, the two place-construction occurs 34 times, while the impersonal construction is attested 14 times.
- ³⁵ Table A1 in Appendix A lists the Latin passages analyzed in this paper; the occurrences of *contingo* are grouped according to the author in alphabetical order, with verb forms in bold.

- ³⁶ Ernout and Meillet (2001, s.v. *tangō*, p. 676) observe that “[*Obtingō*] tombe en désuétude sous l’Empire; si on le trouve dans Quintilien, c’est à l’imitation de Cicéron”.
- ³⁷ Occurrences in the third-person plural are rare. In our corpus, *obtingo* is used four times in this way: in Apuleius, *Apologia*, 4, Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* 16, 12, 3, Plautus, *Asinaria* 3, 3, 136, and Terentius, *Hecyra*, 577.
- ³⁸ Table A2 in Appendix A lists the Latin passages analyzed in the present study; as in Table A1, the occurrences of *obtingo* are grouped according to the author in alphabetical order, with verb forms in bold.
- ³⁹ Latin *fortuna* is a *vox media* that can have a positive, negative, or neutral meaning. In the passage considered (Plautus, *Poenulus*, 1326), the term should be read as “good luck”, as it describes a favorable event and is juxtaposed with ‘something bad’ (see example 13).
- ⁴⁰ All the occurrences of *obtingo* in Livy are of this type, as are most of those in Cicero, with a total of 23 occurrences.
- ⁴¹ The noun *sors* also means ‘a lot, share, the duty assigned by lot’ (<https://logeion.uchicago.edu/sors>, accessed on 10 December 2025), as in Livius, *Ab urbe condita* 39, 32, 5 in our corpus.
- ⁴² In *Il Nuovo De Mauro* (<https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/tangere>, accessed on 16 September 2025), the verb *tangere* is tagged as LE, that is, a word restricted to literary use. Its meaning is ‘toccare’ in the figurative sense, i.e., ‘to arouse emotion, to upset’ (Italian ‘suscitare un’emozione, turbare’). In particular, this meaning appears in the celebrated words spoken by Beatrice to Virgil in the *Inferno* (II, 92) in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*: *la vostra miseria non mi tange*, which literally means ‘Your misery does not touch me’.
- ⁴³ In fact, Italian *toccare* shares more meanings with Latin *contingo*.
- ⁴⁴ Original text: “65. Essere destinato in sorte; essere attribuito in modo casuale, senza tener conto dei meriti o di altro criterio; giungere, sopravvenire in modo fortuito; accadere, capitare, determinarsi, prodursi, manifestarsi all’improvviso, in modo inaspettato (una circostanza, un evento, in partic. un’avversità, una calamità, una sciagura, ecc.); cf. *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, s.v. *toccare*, sub-entry no. 65, p. 1095.
- ⁴⁵ “Piangono gli occhi e dogliasi la bocca/degli uomini a cui tocca/che sono a’ raggi di cotal ciel giunti” (Dante, *Rime*, canz. 13).
- ⁴⁶ “e del tormento ch’è ssi duro e forte/che no nde tocchi a llei alcuna sorte” (*Rime dall’Archivio Notarile di Bologna*, v. 38).
- ⁴⁷ The entry *toccare* in *Il Nuovo De Mauro* (<https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/toccare>, accessed on 16 September 2025) includes 14 different meanings. Thirteen of the fourteen are marked with the abbreviation “FO”, indicating that these meanings of *toccare* are part of the “fundamental lexicon” (“lessico fondamentale”) of the Italian language. This is the section of the lexicon that comprises the most important and most frequently used words and their relative meanings (<https://dizionario.internazionale.it/avvertenze/8>, accessed on 16 September 2025).
- ⁴⁸ Cf. *Il Nuovo De Mauro* dictionary (<https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/toccare>, accessed on 16 September 2025) and the *Vocabolario Treccani* online (<https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/toccare>, accessed on 16 September 2025).
- ⁴⁹ Original text: “1a. v.tr., avvicinare la mano o un’altra parte del corpo, o anche un oggetto che si regge o manovra con la mano, a qcn. o qcs. stabilendo un contatto (. . .)”; cf. <https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/toccare> (accessed on 16 September 2025). In this section, the English translations are mine.
- ⁵⁰ Cf. *Il Nuovo De Mauro* dictionary (<https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/sentire>, accessed on 10 March 2026) and the *Vocabolario Treccani* online (<https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/sentire>, accessed on 10 March 2026).
- ⁵¹ Original text: “v.intr. (essere) FO capitare, venire in sorte (. . .)”; cf. <https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/toccare> (accessed on 16 September 2025).
- ⁵² Original text: “3. intr. (aus. essere) a. Capitare, accadere come per caso, venire in sorte (. . .)”; cf. <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/toccare/> (accessed on 16 September 2025).
- ⁵³ Original text: “Più spesso, riferito a mali, avversità e cose sgradevoli che còpitano e si devono subire per caso o per necessità, meritatamente o immeritatamente (. . .)”; cf. <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/toccare/> (accessed on 16 September 2025).
- ⁵⁴ Table A3 presents a selection of occurrences of *toccare* grouped according to the different type of events (favorable/neutral/adverse) and the second argument (“a + noun/pronoun”, *mi, ti, le, gli, ci, vi, loro*); the forms of *toccare* are in bold.
- ⁵⁵ On the subject status of “(di) + infinitive” with unaccusative verbs, including verbs expressing chance events such as *avvenire, capitare, succedere*, and *toccare*, see Renzi et al. (2001, vol. 2, pp. 539–540).
- ⁵⁶ Out of a total of twelve infinitives in our corpus, only one is a simple infinitive.
- ⁵⁷ Out of a total of 94 nouns/pronouns, 17 are concrete nouns; the remaining are abstract nouns.
- ⁵⁸ Out of a total of 107 occurrences, there are 10 datives/prepositional phrases that denote inanimate entities. Moreover, these are often metonymic uses that refer back to animate entities, e.g., *la Chiesa* ‘the Church’.
- ⁵⁹ Although reference works (Renzi et al., 2001, vol. 2, pp. 539–540, among others) state that *toccare* generally shows free alternation between the simple infinitive and the infinitive preceded by *di* ‘of’, when analyzing the intransitive uses of *toccare*, I noticed that the simple infinitive is more frequent with meanings (b) ‘to be entitled or obliged, by right or duty, by precedence, by turn’ and (c) ‘to be or feel compelled’. This is consistent with the examples given in dictionaries (<https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/toccare>

(accessed on 16 September 2025) and <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/toccare> (accessed on 16 September 2025)). However, this is a point that I hope to examine in greater depth elsewhere.

- 60 The corpus analysis also revealed that when *toccare* has a deontic meaning, its use with a preposition occasionally appears to be non-standard, contrary to what is observed in reference works (Renzi et al., 2001, vol. 2, pp. 539–540, among others). However, what is relevant here is that in sequences involving an infinitive preceded by *di* and without an appropriate context, it is not always possible to construe whether *toccare* is used as a modal verb or used to express a chance event. In some cases, the boundary between the two notions is blurred. For example, in our corpus (CQL *toccare* + *mi* Sample 200), the sentence *Bah, è proprio un mondo ipocrita quello in cui mi è toccato di vivere* can be interpreted both as *Bah, è proprio un mondo ipocrita quello in cui mi è capitato di vivere* ‘Well, it’s a hypocritical world where I happen to live’ and as *Bah, è proprio un mondo ipocrita quello in cui devo vivere* ‘Well, it’s a hypocritical world I have to live in’.
- 61 For a diachronic survey of the deontic meaning of the impersonal use of *toccare*, see Benincà and Poletto (1997), among others.
- 62 It would be interesting to analyze the relationship between these three uses of *toccare* from a diachronic perspective. Indeed, an analysis of occurrences across the various stages of Italian is a potential topic for future study.
- 63 Cf., among others, Wierzbicka (1992, p. 114) with regard to Russian.
- 64 English *to befall*, which also means ‘to fall out in the course of events, to happen, occur’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. *befall*), can be traced back to the Proto-Germanic root **fallan-*, from which the primary meaning ‘to fall’ is reconstructed (Kroonen, 2013, pp. 125–126, s.v. **fallan-*).
- 65 Lakoff’s original formulation of the Event Structure Metaphor is slightly different (Lakoff, 1993, pp. 219–220).
- 66 In this context, I use the term ‘transitivity’ to refer to semantic transitivity, which I consider a prototypical category characterized by a cluster of properties, as detailed in the extensive literature starting with the seminal study by Hopper and Thompson (1980).
- 67 Interestingly, the lack of control over the event by a human participant links chance events with emotions, which, as stated in Section 1, are often expressed by polysemous tactile verbs. In other words, like emotions, chance events cannot be controlled.
- 68 To illustrate this point, consider how touch, in contrast to the other senses, does not appear to depend on an individual sensory organ. Touch involves the entire body: diverse receptors in the skin, muscles, and internal organs are all stimulated during tactile experiences. For a comprehensive review of studies on touch in philosophy and cognitive science, see Fulkerson (2024).
- 69 Macpherson (2011, pp. 23–27) identifies four principal philosophical approaches to individuating the senses: the Representational Criterion, the Phenomenal Character Criterion, the Proximal Stimulus Criterion, and the Sense-Organ Criterion. The Phenomenal Character Criterion adopts an experiential perspective, positing that “what makes a sense the type of sense it is will be the nature of the phenomenal character of the experiences that the sense produces or involves” (Macpherson, 2011, p. 25). Consequently, this approach focuses on the aspects of a given sensory experience that are only present in that specific experience.
- 70 The relationship between passive tactile perception and these types of meanings has already been noted, though not explored in depth, by Fernández Jaén (2014, pp. 109–110) with regard to the polysemy of the Spanish verb *tocar*. On the role of the physical characteristics of the sense of touch in the conceptualization of the Italian expression *toccare in sorte a*, see Pompeo (2025a).
- 71 ‘The requirement of involuntariness remains, so this new content is used when the prize is contingent, as it belongs to a raffle or a draw’; translation mine.
- 72 This is an interesting aspect that merits further study. It is touched upon here in relation to the phenomenon under investigation.
- 73 According to the *esquema de flujo invertido pasivo* ‘passive reverse flow schema’, an inactive entity is reached and touched by an active entity that approaches and remains close to them. The “touched” entity, lacking control over the event and being only indirectly involved, is conceptualized as a Location (Fernández Jaén, 2014, p. 110).
- 74 This issue is addressed, in part, in Pompeo (2025a, 2025b) with regard to the locution *toccare in sorte a*.
- 75 Original text: “Gli Eventi Inattesi sono Oggetti che Arrivano all’Improvviso (soprattutto dall’Alto)” (Casadei, 1996, p. 230).

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