Introduction[1]

When the study of meaning became a linguistic discipline, the main interest of semanticists was in the technical level of language and the major focus was represented by the single word. A different view of the relationship between language and meaning was provided by Malinowski (1923) at the beginning of the 20th century. The meaning of language was interpreted in terms of context of culture and context of situation. Malinowski's theories influenced linguists such as Firth (1957) and Halliday (1985) and language became to be considered meaningful only if considered within the language events in which it is used. For this reason, language started to be analysed only in authentic contexts: the focus of interest is not the single word any more but the meaningful relations words enter into with the other words around them (Sinclair 1991; 1996).

The main theme in this book is meaning: how meaning originates and how meaningful communication can be established in texts.

The target readers of this book are those students that are approaching the study of language, particularly of the English language, from a linguistic perspective for the first time. Discovering how language works is fascinating but it may also be perceived as complex and confusing. Students may not be aware of all the constraints which limit language choices: they may be aware of that only intuitively but they cannot know how pervasive this phenomenon may be. Constraints on language are operated by the broader context of culture but also by the topic and the participants of a language event, that is to say the context of

situation. Further constraints are to be found in the linguistic environment of a word: every time we choose a w ord or a phrase we are limited by the phraseological tendency of language.

Added to this, the structure we give to our message is also a meaningful choice: what is placed in initial position of a clause or at the end of it are constrained by the final aim of our message.

Students will be guided through the five chapters constituting the book to understand the strict relationship existing between context and language and to become better users of the English language.

Outline

The book is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1 presents the concepts of context of culture and context of situation by discussing the theories by Malinowski, Firth and Halliday. Practical examples are also provided in order to make students aware of the influence operated by the context of culture and the context of situation on the language used.

Chapter 2 introduces corpora and corpus analysis tools. Students will learn the terminology of corpus analysis and what concordances, wordlists, and keywords are. The criteria that are usually applied in the compilation of corpora will also be outlined. The chapter also presents and explains how to use some of the tools available to carry out a corpus analysis.

Chapter 3 focuses on Firth's and Sinclair's theories on the notion of collocation. Students will understand how meaning arises from the combination of words and which steps have to be taken in order to identify extended units of meaning. Some practical examples of analysis are also provided.

Chapter 4 explores issues related to the identification of equivalent units of meaning across languages. The methodology proposed by Tognini Bonelli (2001) and Tognini Bonelli and Manca (2002) on functionally complete units of meaning will be described and applied to a number of English and Italian case studies.

Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes Halliday's view on Theme and Rheme in the systemic functional tradition. Students will learn the differences between marked

and unmarked Themes and the features which contribute to create cohesion in a text. Examples of thematic progression in English will also be provided following the theories by Firbas (1964) and Danes (1974).