4 Translation and functionally complete units of meaning

4.1 Meaning as function in context

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the identification of meaning involves the analysis of the co-text of a word and the analysis of the context in which this item has been used. The interdependence between the item and its environment in the definition of meaning has important implications in the process of translation. As Sinclair et. al. argue (1996: 175)

> Translation equivalence at word level is not by any means the whole methodology. In many instances (…) there is no translation equivalent for the chosen word. Translation can only be achieved by first of all combining the word with one or more others; the whole phrase will then equate with a word or phrase in the other language.

The starting point in the translation process is, therefore, represented by the extended unit of meaning rather than by the word. However, the identification of the meaning of a unit of language is not enough when dealing with different languages. The pragmatic function performed by the unit has also to be identified. We need to understand why that string of language has been used in that co-text and in that context.

That is why Tognini Bonelli (2001), following in the Firthian tradition, sees meaning as function in context and considers the information provided by the context of fundamental importance. Her approach, both in language description and in contrastive work, postulates the existence of *functionally*

complete units of meaning (2001:131). These units are extended units of meaning which perform specific functions at the pragmatic level.

Tognini Bonelli (2001:31) develops a methodology which allows the translator or the language student to identify equivalent functionally complete units of meaning across languages. This methodology starts from the assumption that in order to identify equivalent units of meaning across languages, all the components that are necessary for the unit to function (collocation, colligation, semantic preference, semantic prosody) need to be identified. This approach (Tognini Bonelli 2001; Tognini Bonelli and Manca 2002) involves three steps. The aim of this methodology is contextualizing the unit to be translated by considering its co-text and identifying a network of possible equivalences between the unit in the source text (the text that has to be translated) and the target language (the language the text has to be translated into). In order to apply this methodology a comparable corpus is needed (see chapter 2 for definition). The three steps of the methodology are adapted below (see Tognini Bonelli 2001; Tognini Bonelli and Manca 2002):

Step 1: The initial node word in the source language is analysed in order to identify its collocation, colligation, semantic preference and semantic prosody.

1) from the **node word** ⟶ to **its unit of meaning**

Step 2: For each collocate of the node word a possible translation equivalent is posited by looking up in dictionaries. The item reported or believed as equivalent is investigated in order to identify the unit of meaning in which it is embedded.

2) from the **collocates of the node word** ⟶ to **their equivalents** ⟶ to the **collocates of the equivalents**

Step 3: Within the collocates of the equivalents we shall identify an adequate translation equivalent of the initial node word.

3) from the **collocates of the equivalents** ⟶ to the **translation equivalent of the initial node word**

Adopting this methodology the analysis of the co-text will reveal the presence or the absence of functionally similar patterns of language across different languages.

4.2 Applying the methodology: some examples

In order to illustrate this methodology we will provide below a series of examples obtained by working with comparable corpora. The first of these examples is represented by the analysis of the adverb *largely* carried out by Tognini Bonelli (2001:150ff).

Tognini Bonelli establishes a procedure that takes into account both context and function in the identification of translation equivalence.

The basic procedure she proposes consists in taking a first step 'via collocates' and a second step 'via function'. Let us consider the analysis in some detail.

The adverb *largely* frequently occurs in expressions such as *largely because*, *largely thanks to*, *largely as a result*, *largely due to*, thus displaying an overall function associated with cause or reason. We should note that, as she demonstrates, this is not the only function *largely* engages in, but here we will only concentrate on this as an example.

In order to find an adequate Italian translation equivalent for the unit *largely because* (to take the most common collocation pattern) Tognini Bonelli (*ibidem*) proceeds to posit, as a next step, a translation equivalent of *because* in Italian – that is *perché*. By scanning the collocational profile of *perchè*, Tognini Bonelli (*ibidem*) finds that *perchè* can be modified only by *soprattutto* (and not by other adverbs that are usually taken as the translation

equivalent of *largely*, that is *largamente* or *in larga misura*). This means that the Italian functional equivalent of *largely because* is not *in larga misura perchè* or *largamente perchè* but *soprattutto perchè*. The Italian unit performs the same function as the English unit and, for this reason, can be taken as equivalents.

Further original examples of how this methodology can be applied with different comparable corpora are provided and described below.

Let us start with the node word *reunification* as used in a corpus of EU documents. Bilingual dictionaries (see Il Ragazzini, 2005) provide *riunificazione* as possible translation equivalent. However, a look at the Italian corpus of EU documents reveals the absence of this word. This means that *reunification* and *riunificazione* are not equivalent in the language of EU documents. The methodology described above has to be applied in order to find a functionally similar translation equivalent in Italian. As suggested by Step 1, the node word has to be analysed in its collocational profile. Some instances of its concordance are provided below:

```
refused an application for family reunification has correctly
Memb er State to authorise family reunification in its territory,
y of limiting the right to family reunification of children over the
idering an application for family reunification and the Community
o require applications for family reunification of minor children to
is of 'grounds other than' family reunification which are not
pplying the conditions for family reunification which are prescribed
 Directive as referring to family reunification in the cases where
equivalent to a refusal of family reunification. The Council also
 for applying the right to family reunification in a harmonised
  been laid for a right of family reunification, subject to a number
 f submission of applications for reunification that are founded
 ears between the application for reunification and the issue of a
```
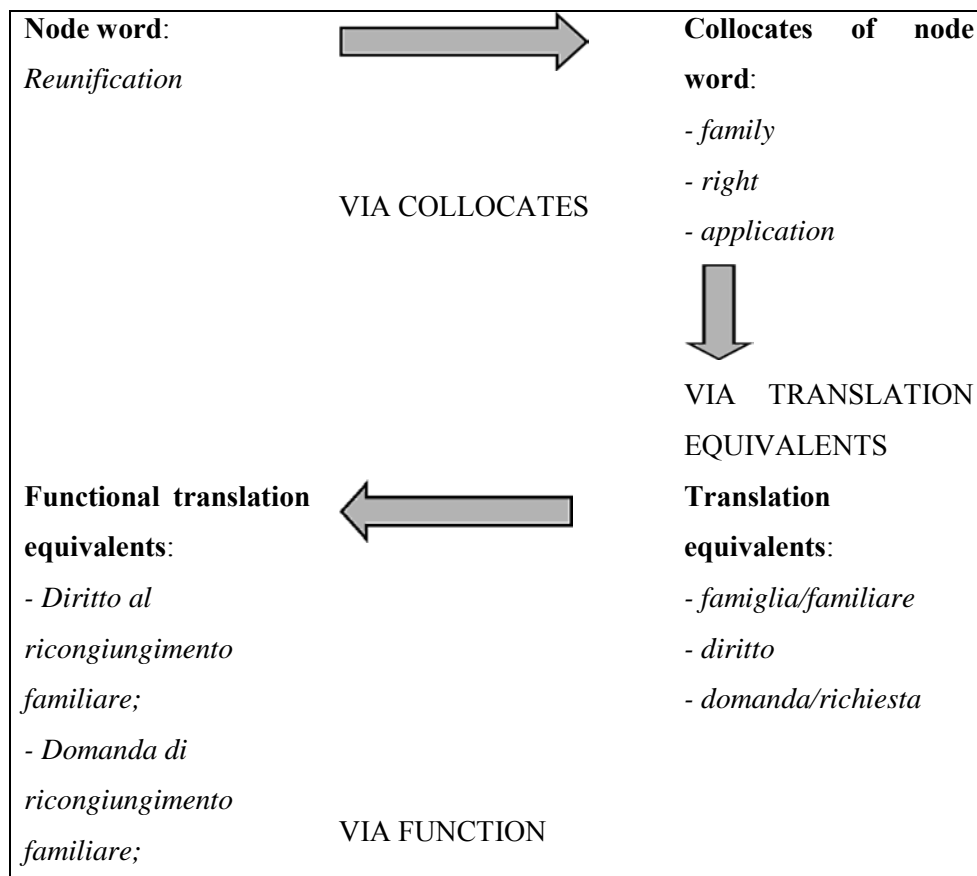
As visible in the instances above, the most frequent collocates of *reunification* are: *family, right, application*.

According to Step 2, f or each collocate of the node word a possible equivalent has to be posited and the collocational profile of these equivalents has to be identified. *Family* can be considered equivalent both to

famiglia and *familiare*, the word *right*, in this context, is equivalent to *diritto*, and *application* has *domanda* and *richiesta* as Italian counterparts. The word *famiglia* is embedded in the patterns *indipendentemente dalla propria famiglia* and *vivere in/con la famiglia*. These units do not carry the same meaning of the English units in which *reunification* is used. Conversely, something interesting can be found in the collocational profile of *familiare*. This word is frequently preceded by *ricongiungimento* and in its co-text we also find words such as *diritto* and *domanda*. The patterns of usage are *diritto al ricongiungimento familiare* and *domanda/domande di ricongiungimento familiare.*

Starting from the collocates of the equivalents (Step 3) a translation equivalent of the initial node word has been identified. The word *reunification* in the legal context and when it co-occurs with *family, right,* and *application* can be translated into Italian with *ricongiungimento*. The presence of these patterns shows that the initial translation equivalent provided by dictionaries, that is to say *riunificazione* is not adequate in this context and similarly, that *riunificazione familiare* is not used because it has a different meaning and engages in a different function with respect to the English *family reunification.* It is likely that a more specialized bilingual legal dictionary could provide the right translation equivalent. However, the authenticity of the language contained in the corpora and the frequency of occurrence of the patterns considered for analysis represent the validity of the results obtained. To sum up the procedure:

Node word: *Reunification*	VIA COLLOCATES	**Collocates of node word**: - *family* - *right* - *application*
		VIA TRANSLATION EQUIVALENTS
Functional translation equivalents: - *Diritto al ricongiungimento familiare;* - *Domanda di ricongiungimento familiare;*	VIA FUNCTION	**Translation equivalents**: - *famiglia/familiare* - *diritto* - *domanda/richiesta*

The following example is taken from the language of tourist websites. The corpora considered for analysis are two comparable corpora constituted of websites of Italian and British farmhouses. We will start from the Italian node word *passi*, that can be literally translated into English as *steps*. Let us consider some examples from the concordance of *passi*:

```
onte al bosco della Mercanzia, a due passi da Castiglione,ecco, ben
, il paesino natio del maestro a due passi da Partigliano. Ma pochi
  nel cuore dell'Umbria verde, a due passi da Spoleto città del
 verdi colline del Montalbano, a due passi da un borgo medievale,
i queste terre basta però fare pochi passi: affacciato sullo stesso
itico mare di Capo Palinuro, a pochi passi da Paestum, dalla Certosa
 Parco naturale del Partenio a pochi passi da Roccabascerana in
orre del Sasso. Una località a pochi passi dal Centro Storico di
ico vigneto e gli olivastri, a pochi passi dal fiume. Possibilità di
la collina di Farra d'Isonzo a pochi passi dalla tenuta, dove
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As suggested by the examples above, *passi* frequently co-occurs with *due*,

pochi, and *da* and shows a s emantic preference for geographical names (Step 1). The pattern in which it is used is

a pochi passi da + (geographical names)

Bilingual dictionaries provide *steps* as translation equivalents. However, its collocational profile in the English comparable corpus suggests a different usage of *steps*. While the Italian *passi* is used metaphorically to refer to distance, the English counterpart is used literally to refer to the steps of stairs, as in *Six shallow steps to open-plan sitting room* or *and are approached via stone steps to both front and rear*. This means that there is no literal equivalence between the two words.

In order to find an adequate translation equivalent, possible translation equivalents for each of the collocates of *passi* need to be posited and their collocational profiles have to be analysed (Step 2).

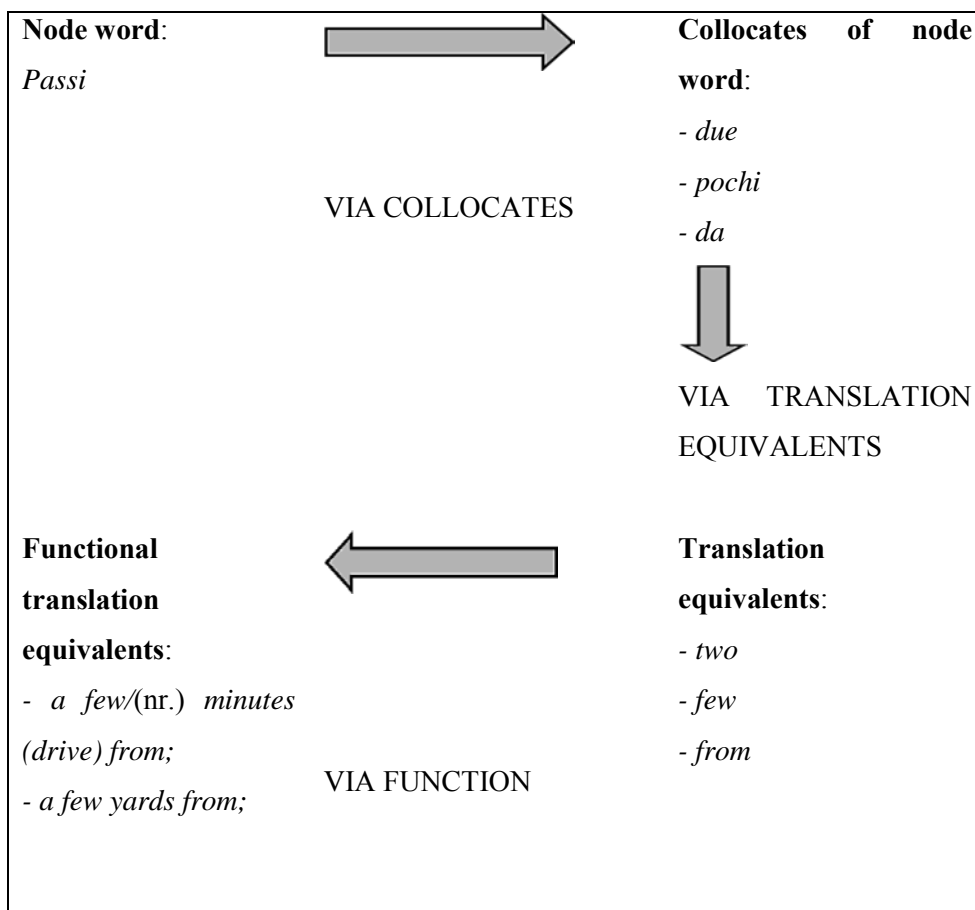The English equivalents of *due, pochi,* and *da* are *two, few,* and *from*.

As expected, *two,* in its function as quantifier, has a varied collocational profile: it co-occurs with *bedrooms, adults, bathrooms, miles, people, single beds, twin bedded rooms*. The only item referring to distance is *miles* which is not, however, the equivalent we are looking for, in that *a pochi passi da* describes a very short distance.

The item *few* collocates with *days, miles, minutes* and *yards*. Both *minutes* and *yards* are used to describe a very short distance and are embedded in a unit of meaning very similar to the one containing *passi*. Examples are the sentences: *only a few minutes drive from the medieval town of Pembroke, …the county ground is a few minutes away, … a peaceful retreat just a few yards from your holiday home*.

The preposition *from* has, obviously, a varied range of collocations. However, when it refers to distance it ma inly collocates with *miles* and *minutes*.

In the light of the results obtained, we may take *minutes* as translation equivalent of *passi* (Step 3). In fact, its function is that of describing the

short distance existing usually between a location and a place, such as a city, a town or a nature reserve. To sum up:

Node word:	VIA COLLOCATES →	Collocates of node word:
Passi		- *due*
		- *pochi*
		- *da*
		↓
		VIA TRANSLATION EQUIVALENTS
Functional translation equivalents:	← VIA FUNCTION	Translation equivalents:
- *a few/*(nr.) *minutes (drive) from;*		- *two*
- *a few yards from;*		- *few*
		- *from*

Our next example will start from an Italian node word and the methodology will be applied in order to identify its English functional translation equivalent.

The node word chosen for analysis is the Italian adjective *familiare* as used in the language of tourism (see above for details on the corpora used). The English equivalents of this word are *family, domestic,* and *household* but the bilingual dictionary *Il Ragazzini* 2005 also provides in the examples the equivalents *friendly, informal, easy, well-known*, and *familiar*. A look at the collocational profile of *familiare* will help us to identify the different units of meaning in which it is used and the English equivalents.

The most frequent collocates of the Italian *familiare* are: *conduzione, atmosfera, ambiente, accoglienza, ospitalità.* Some examples are reported

below:

```
a Vigna: azienda agrituristica a conduzione familiare immersa nel
rfettamente curate da un attenta conduzione familiare,sono parte
 immerso nel verde,l'atmosfera è semplice e familiare, le camere e
etto per la pesca amatoriale e un'atmosfera familiare fatta di cose
a Il casolare offre un'inconsueta atmosfera familiare, sia per la
correre dei momenti di relax in un ambiente familiare.
a che circonda l'Agriturismo.  L'ambiente è familiare e discreto, ma
ort ed elegantemente arredati. L'ambiente è familiare e discreto e
 tranquilla e offre una cordiale ospitalità familiare. L'azienda è
lie in un'atmosfera di autentica ospitalità familiare. La tradizione
acque ioniche.L'ospite trova un'accoglienza familiare e riservata in
ico e Perna Lanera offrono una   cordiale e familiare accoglienza,
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At this point, we should identify functional translation equivalents for the following units: *azienda agricola a conduzione familiare*, *atmosfera familiare*, *ambiente familiare*, *ospitalità familiare*, and *accoglienza familiare*. First, we need to check if there is a w ord-for-word correspondence, that is to say if the corresponding English units contain *family* or *familiar*. In case of no direct equivalence, we will proceed according to the methodology proposed.

The word *family*, in the English set of the comparable corpus used, frequently co-occurs with the following words: *run, rooms, home, bedroom, ideal for*. Only one match with the Italian units can be identified and refers to *azienda agricola a conduzione familiare* which, as suggested by the presence of *run,* can be translated as *family-run farm*. The possible equivalent *family-owned farm* suggested by bilingual dictionaries is not used in this corpus. There are no matches for the other collocations of the Italian word *familiar* both in the concordance of *family* and in the concordance of *familiar* which has no entries in the corpus used. For this reason, the analysis proceeds with Step 2 of the methodology.

The English equivalent of the collocates of *familiare* are: *atmosphere, environment/ambience, hospitality, welcome*. The collocational profiles of these equivalents need to be analysed in order to find a functionally similar units of meaning of the Italian collocations.

The word *atmosphere* collocates with *friendly* and *informal*. These collocates do not exactly refer to the family but at the functional level they refer to the in formality of the place. This is why the units *friendly atmosphere* and *informal atmosphere* can be taken as functional equivalents of *atmosfera familiare* (Step 3).
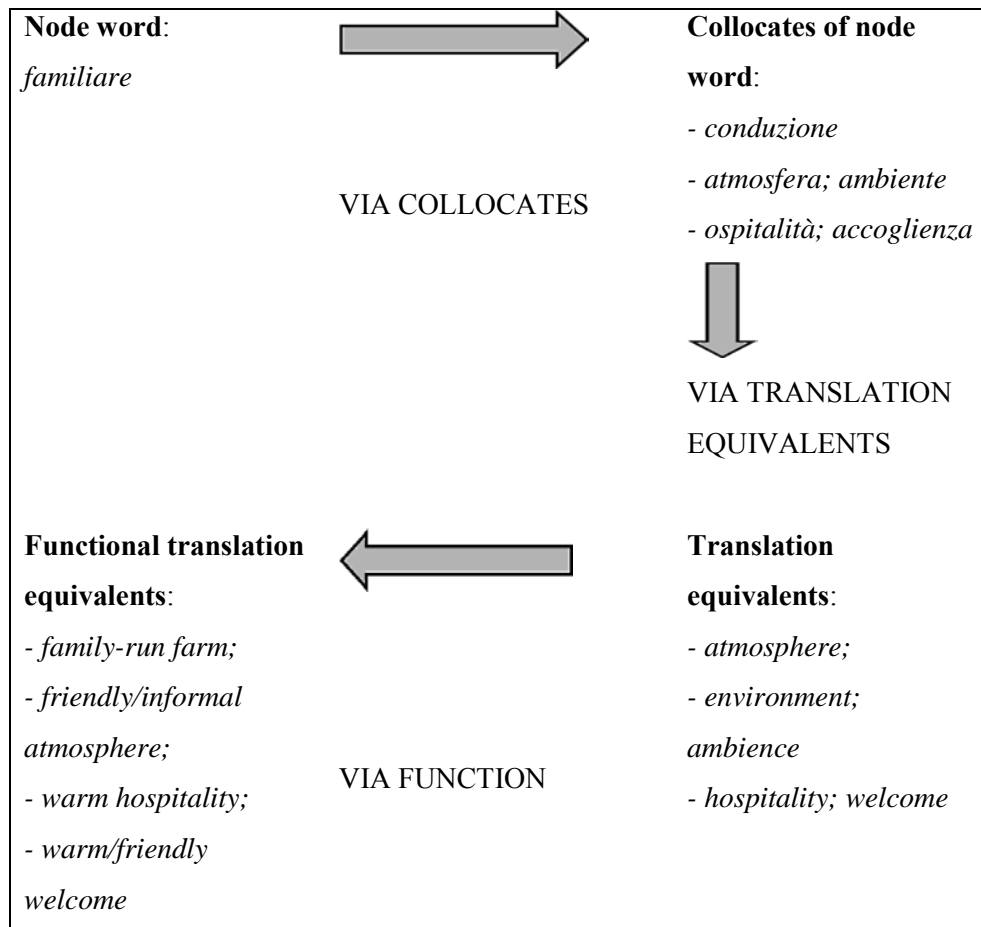
Let us proceed with *environment*. This word is used rarely in the corpus (only 4 times) and does not show any frequent co-occurrence. The same can be said for *ambience* occurring only 3 times. Both the concordances of *friendly* and *informal* do not suggest possible equivalents of *ambiente*. However, in the Italian texts and in this collocation, the function of *ambiente* is very similar to the one engaged in by *atmosfera*. It refers to the place where accommodation is offered and for this reason it may be translated with *friendly* or *informal atmosphere* with no change in meaning or function.

The other two equivalents of the Italian collocates are *hospitality* and *welcome*.

The item *hospitality* is not used frequently. However, a recurring adjective for this word is *warm* and in three instances it is also associated with the noun *warmth*. The concept of warmth is strictly linked to that of familiarity. A warm hospitality will make visitors feel at home. For this reason, the adjective *warm* can be taken as functionally equivalent to the Italian *familiare.*

As expected, the concordance of *welcome* does not show unexpected results in terms of collocations. The adjectives it f requently collocates with are *warm* and *friendly*, which, for the reasons described above, are functional equivalents of *familiare.*

The table provided below will help us to summarize the procedure followed and the results obtained.

Node word:		Collocates of node word:
familiare		- *conduzione*
		- *atmosfera; ambiente*
	VIA COLLOCATES	- *ospitalità; accoglienza*
		↓
		VIA TRANSLATION EQUIVALENTS
Functional translation equivalents:	←	**Translation equivalents**:
- *family-run farm;*		- *atmosphere;*
- *friendly/informal atmosphere;*		- *environment; ambience*
- *warm hospitality;*	VIA FUNCTION	- *hospitality; welcome*
- *warm/friendly welcome*		

4.3 Conclusion

The examples described in these sections have shown the importance of considering units of meaning as a starting point in the translation process. In the majority of cases, a word-for-word translation leads to mistakes and misunderstandings and does not consider the phraseological tendency of language. Starting from units of meaning means considering all the elements that a unit needs to function properly and to carry meaning. As shown above, the words *reunification, passi* and *familiare* may have different meanings depending on the contexts in which they are used and on the co-texts they are embedded in. As Tognini Bonelli (2001:150) says, if we need to establish functional equivalence across languages and cultures "it is not the word but the contextual patterning associated with it that identifies a function".

The process of translation is a complex process involving different levels of interpretation of meaning. The units of translation identified need also to be interpreted in terms of text type and its function, of register and according to the two cultures involved.

This methodology is a starting point for those students who are being trained to be translators and are taking their first steps in the difficult task of making a bridge between different languages and cultures.

In the domain of contrastive studies, comparable corpora prove to be valid tools both for the linguist and the translator in that they give insights into the patterns of a given language and allow the researcher to identify systematically the features of languages, that is to say typical and recurrent words, phrases, and expressions.