Introduction

The present work proposes an exploration of a representative set of English verbs of communication in their reporting function and focuses on both the lexico-semantic and pragmatic perspectives of analysis. Indeed, reporting verbs represent a functional area that includes heterogeneous verb categories. The challenging and intriguing aspect of these verbs rests on their hybrid nature between semantics and pragmatics, which makes their form-function pairs quite unstable and difficult to be accounted for in an *a priori* fashion. As a result, the correlated cross-linguistic mapping, for example, is less predictable than for other items in the lexicon.

Why another study on reporting verbs? Despite extensive research on the subject, several questions still have to be answered. Without anticipating the full discussion of the relevant literature (reviewed in chapter one), it is worth mentioning the following points immediately:
1) Which criteria can be employed whereby the functional area in question can be organised in a principled and systematic way?
2) What is the specific relationship between lexico-semantic and pragmatic information underlying the use of reporting verbs in different contexts?
3) How can this shed light on what reporters do in reporting what people do with words?[1] More specifically, besides the general direct illocutionary force of *informing*, which kind of more indirect illocution can be detected in the use of a given verb in an act of reporting? And what is the role of the axiological evaluation by the reporter as variously inscribed in the report?
4) How can this interplay of dimensions be productively applied to a contrastive analysis of reporting verbs in English and Italian?
This study investigates such issues and correlatively attempts to provide some relevant answers.

As a matter of fact, reporting agents' representations of past communicative events inevitably convey their own construal of facts as recipients of

those events. The construal is hardly objective and often includes some kind of evaluation of those events and their participants, especially in argumentative text types. This is crucial evidence for understanding the reporters' manipulative goals towards the readership, and may be reflected, among other things, by the choice of reporting verbs. The latter, and especially verbs reporting statements and assertions, represent a less obtrusive means for conveying the reporter's stance than other linguistic devices. However, the less obtrusive the means, the higher the potential effectiveness of manipulation[2]. Hence the importance of being aware of the mechanisms underlying the use of such verbs, and of the subtle shifts that they can potentially bring about in terms of stance-shaping.

From a theoretical point of view, reference is made
I) to the framework of Lexical Complexity (Bertuccelli Papi and Lenci 2007), which provides a cognitively plausible basis for the organisation of the area as a whole and of the various verb groups therein;
II) to a flexible notion of 'meaning potential', as expounded in the cognitive linguistic model of Dynamic Construal (Croft and Cruse 2004), integrated with Sbisà's (1989) pragmatic approach.
This integrated approach proves to be a constructive starting point for hypothesising the details of the conceptual frame of the typical reporting situation. In my view, the frame not only covers the stable components of semantic nature, but also (to some extent) pragmatic information defined in terms of socially determined modal roles (see Sbisà 1989) and dependent on the semantics of verbs, on which abductive inferencing rests.
From an empirical point of view, relevant data sources referred to are dictionaries, lexical databases and corpora. The majority of examples actually come from the British National Corpus (BNC).
Methodologically, the analysis involves two stages:
a) a bottom-up investigation of corpora occurrences and correlated generalisations, paired with
b) a top-down matching of the details of the prototypical frame of the reporting situation with such generalisations.
As regards stage (a), verb-adverb collocation patterns are especially focused on: they are in fact a heuristic test for pinpointing varying meaning components presupposed by verbs (cf. Verschueren 1985). On

the one hand, such patterns are useful to make generalisations about what is potentially available in the meaning of verbs, independently of any specific context of use and/ or text type or genre. On the other hand, this knowledge about what is available for construal may give us insights into such verbs' subtle biasing potential undermining the objectivity claim of most factual reports.

The study is organised in the subsequent way: chapter one proposes a review of previous research on reporting verbs, also including the main hypotheses and research questions of the work. Chapters two and three introduce the composite theoretical background adopted here, i.e. Lexical Complexity (Bertuccelli Papi and Lenci 2007) and the Dynamic Construal Approach (Croft and Cruse 2004) (cf. chapter two), and Sbisà's (1989) pragmatic approach (cf. chapter three). The chapters also clarify the contribution of each framework and approach to different, albeit interrelated aspects of the work. Chapter four presents the details of the analysis, subdivided into distinct sections: these include a principled organisation of different verb groups in the area at issue, a close-up on verbs reporting statements and assertions, the illustration of the dynamics of meaning construal in context. Finally, chapter five applies the integrated approach mentioned above to the cross-linguistic analysis of a set of English and Italian verbs reporting statements and assertions, followed by a concluding appraisal of the overall exploration and of its implications for future research.

Notes

[1]   *Reporting; Or, What Reporters Do in Saying What People Do with Words. An Investigation into the Lexical Semantics and Pragmatics of English Verbs of Report* is the title of my doctoral thesis (Masi 2004), of which the present study is a revised version.

[2]   On this point, see Hoey (2000).