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SOLVING TRANSLATION PROBLEMS WITH TERMINOLOGICAL VERB COLLOCATIONS: CASE STUDIES WITH BUILDING MATERIALS

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces a Taxonomic-Frames Contrastive Analysis (TFCA) approach for addressing translation challenges associated with terminological verb collocations (TVCs) in a particular specialized domain. The study highlights the systematicity of terminological relationships as a cornerstone for enhancing the accuracy of technical translations and professional communication. By combining taxonomic analysis and frame-based terminology, the research categorizes TVCs into conceptual groups, enabling a structured methodology for identifying suitable translation equivalents. The proposed approach is illustrated with case studies with the construction concept *steel* from the narrow domain of building materials, delving into issues such as synonymy, terminological gaps, long translation equivalents and violation of terminological systematicity. The findings emphasize the importance of the expert validation for the precise categorization in bridging linguistic disparities and enhancing the development of terminological collections for translation and professional purposes. This integrated framework offers a replicable model for tackling TVC translation problems across other specialized fields.

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1. Introduction

Collocations, in general, are defined as syntagmatic relations of words – a common point among the abundance of definitions trying to delimit the various word combinations, with terminological verb collocations being a specific category within them. Two principal approaches to collocations exist: the frequency-based approach and the phraseological approach. The former considers word combinations as collocations based on their statistical co-occurrence, whereas the latter is semantically driven, differentiating between a meaning-bearing autonomous element known as the base and a dependent element called the collocator. In terminological verb collocations, the term – typically a noun or noun phrase – functions as the base, while the verb acts as the collocator [1]. Both general and terminological collocations share certain semantic properties, particularly regarding valence relations, which categorize bases as *low-valence* or *high-valence*. For instance, in construction terminology, the term ‘pile’ predominantly collocates with the verb ‘drive’, while ‘steel’ combines with multiple verbs such as ‘melt’, ‘cast’, and ‘roll’. A parallel pattern is observed in general collocations, where low-valence bases appear in expressions like ‘take precautions’, whereas high-valence bases allow for multiple collocators, as seen in ‘give/offer/provide/reject advice’. A key distinction between general and terminological collocations lies in the semantic behaviour of the collocator. In general collocations, the collocator often undergoes semantic transformation through delexicalization (e.g. ‘make an investment’) or acquires a figurative meaning (e.g. ‘pay attention’). In contrast, in terminological collocations, the collocator – in our case the verb, always involves the concept denoted by the term into a specific semantic frame, i.e. conceptual scene [2].

The knowledge of specialized collocations has long been recognized as vital for the competent use of technical language in professional communication and especially relevant for solving translation problems. The question of finding a proper translation equivalent for one type of terminological collocations in particular – terminological verb (T+V/V+T) collocations (TVC), has long been established as one of the main problems even experienced technical translators often have to face. The fact that it is much easier to find the translation equivalent of a technical term in existing terminological dictionaries than the verbs it typically goes with has led to the increasing awareness among the modern terminologists of the need for investigating those specialized collocations and eventually including them as elements of the entries of translation-oriented terminological collections.

A powerful tool for suggesting adequate solutions can be found in the theoretical premises of a terminological contrastive analysis (TCA), provided it takes into consideration the domain specificity of TVC. On the other hand, a preliminary taxonomic analysis of the cognitive frames underlying the TVC will allow to first categorize the event structures into conceptual groups and then identify the systematic sets, thus ensuring a more compatible subsequent terminological contrastive analysis [1, 2].

The present paper discusses how the proposed model for *A Taxonomic-Frames Terminological Contrastive Analysis* of terminological verb collocations can arm terminologists with the necessary strategies for finding the most appropriate translation equivalents in the target language for both specialized communication and translation purposes to facilitate subject specialists. To achieve this goal, the author first starts with a brief overview of the taxonomic-frames approach to TVC, then focuses on the concept of systematicity, followed by the procedure for terminological contrastive analysis. The suggested combined methodology is exemplified with case studies from the narrow domain of *steel*.

2. A Taxonomic-Frames Approach

The Combined Taxonomic-Frames Approach presents an innovative theoretical development, consistent with the latest approaches to terminological lexis, but in combination with the basic theoretical statements in terminology [1, 2]. The proposal for this approach is preceded by an argumentation in support of the thesis that terminological verb collocations should be viewed as terminological units which are subject to analysis using terminological approaches and methods [3, 4]. In this regard, the latest trends in the theory of terminology are considered [3, 5, 6] and special attention is paid to the *Frame-Based Terminology* [7] to interpreting terminological relations in a given special domain, emphasizing its appropriateness for analyzing terminological verb collocations. According to the latter, the concept designated by the term (T) in the collocation is assumed to be the Patient in a dynamic scene whereas the verb (V) designates a dynamic Action/Process affecting the Patient with a consequent Result. What is lexicalized, i.e. explicated on the surface structure, are the Patient and the Action/Process, the action being performed by a human agent and the process induced by a natural agent. Within the context of our proposal, to perform the frame semantic analysis of the scenes (frames) which constitute the underlying event in a special domain, it is deemed necessary to categorize those event structures into conceptual groups according to the type of Agent (human or natural) and the type of Result (e.g. quality improvement or deterioration in the case of a building material playing the role of Patient).

The main term *steel*, as the first keyword, and the terminological verb collocations it forms, are used to illustrate the proposed author's methodology, which is certainly applicable to other basic construction materials. If we are interested in representing the verbs that go with the basic term *steel*, we can extract automatically the necessary terminological data by submitting the appropriate text to a term extractor [8] and using the results yielded from the concordances and bigrams functions.

In terms of the frames approach, the terminological collocations these verbs form with the term *steel* can be specified in categories according to the type of Agent and the type of Result since *steel* is a building material on which human agents act and which is subjected to natural forces. According to the type of Agent (human or natural) a terminologist with a linguistic background can easily classify the verbs and the collocations, respectively, into two groups, all the more that in the knowledge contexts extracted the processes caused by a Natural Agent are expressed by verbs which in the corpus commonly occur in a grammatically marked form, viz. 3rd person singular, present simple (-s). Therefore, as a first step towards categorization we can represent two generic frames for the verb collocations of *steel*, which according to the type of Agent can be termed the Process Frame (Tab. 1) and the Action Frame within the general Steel Processing Event:

Table 1. Process Frame within the general Steel Processing Event

Process Frame			
<i>Natural Agent</i>	<i>Process</i>	<i>Patient</i>	<i>Result</i>
Weather	Corrodes Cracks Embrittles Oxidizes Rusts Splits	Steel	Steel quality deterioration

However, even for the laymen it seems obvious that a second step towards categorizing all other terminological verb collocations in one Action Frame would be an act of very imprecise categorization. A need is intuitively felt for further subdivision of the actions carried out in relation to the material concept 'steel'. A more precise categorization can be performed only with the help of an expert. By applying an integrated top-down and bottom-up approach as recommended by Faber [7]), i.e. extracting terminological data from a textual corpus and from reference sources including an expert's opinion¹, the following definitional information on the verbs in question was collected [1, 2]:

Heat Treating – a group of industrial and metalworking processes used to alter the physical, and sometimes chemical, properties of a material:

- *Quench* – To cool (hot metal) by thrusting into water or other liquid.
- *Temper* – To harden or strengthen (metal or glass) by application of heat or by heating and cooling.
- *Anneal* – To heat (glass, earthenware, metals, etc.) to remove or prevent internal stress.

Steel Shaping/Forming – changing the shape of a piece of metal:

- *Cast* – To form (liquid metal, for example) into a particular shape by pouring into a mold.
- *Roll* – To pass metal stock through one or more pairs of rolls to reduce the thickness.
- *Extrude* – To produce (moulded sections of plastic, metal, etc) by ejection under pressure through a suitably shaped nozzle or die.
- *Forge* – To form (metal, for example) by heating in a furnace and beating or hammering into shape.
- *Stamp* – To form or cut out by application of a mold, form, or die.
- *Draw* – To flatten, stretch, or mold (metal) by hammering or die stamping.

Joining – Bringing two separate materials together through some type of forming. Joining is one of the main ways metals can be formed:

- *Weld* – To join pieces of metal together by heating the edges until they begin to melt and then pressing them together.
- *Braze* – To solder (two pieces of metal) together using a hard solder with a high melting point.
- *Solder* – To join together two or more metal items by melting and flowing a filler metal (solder) into the joint, the filler metal having a lower melting point than the adjoining metal.
- *Rivet* – To hammer the headless end of so as to form a head and fasten something.
- *Bolt* – To secure or lock with or as if with a bolt.

As seen from the above, within the Action Frame three subcategories can be identified: Heat Treating, Steel Shaping and Joining. These subcategories are represented respectively in Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4 below to illustrate the semantic frames to which each terminological verb collocation from the generic Action Frame belongs:

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Table 2. Action Frame 1 – Heat Treating within the general Steel Processing Event

Action Frame 1 – Heat Treating			
<i>Human Agent</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Patient</i>	<i>Result</i>
Metallurgist	Anneal Quench Temper	Steel	Steel property improvement

Table 3. Action Frame 2 – Steel Shaping within the general Steel Processing Event

Action Frame 2 – Steel Shaping			
<i>Human Agent</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Patient</i>	<i>Result</i>
Metallurgist	Cast Draw Extrude Forge Roll Stamp	Steel	Steel shape modification

Table 4. Action Frame 3 – Joining within the general Steel Processing Event

Action Frame 3 – Joining			
<i>Human Agent</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Patient</i>	<i>Result</i>
Builder	Bolt Braze Rivet Solder Weld	Steel	Steel Joining

The procedural steps presented in the categorization tables above show clearly that the present proposal can be termed *Taxonomic-Frames Approach* since it starts with an expert-based taxonomy of the basic event frames lexicalized by the respective terminological verb collocations thereby arriving at scientifically accurate categorization schemes. It is important to note here that the concept ‘taxonomy’ in this context is understood in a broad sense, viz. as the science of classification. Cruse [9] defines taxonomic hierarchies as “essentially classificatory systems” which “reflect the way speakers of a language categorize the world of experience” and are characterized by well-developed levels. Therefore, if we want to subsume all events associated with the concept *steel* described above, for example, we can designate that higher-level event Steel Processing (as denoted above the tables) thus making it possible to represent, if necessary, the categorization scheme in the form of the classical tree-diagram typical of classification representations.

The analytical procedure of the proposed combined methodology to terminological verb collocations has proved to be explicit and applicable in a subsequent terminological contrastive analysis provided that a preliminary identification of *systematic* conceptual groups and the corresponding term sets is performed.

3. Systematicity

The importance of systematicity in handling translation problems by means of a clearly formulated term translation strategy is closely studied by Hitcheva [1, 2]. A quick browse through Internet leads to the meaning of *systematicity as the state or quality of being systematic*. *Systematic* is related to *system* which etymologically comes from the Greek ‘sústēma’, “organized whole, body” from ‘synistanai’ = to bring together or combine. *Systematic* is also defined in Wikipedia as *methodical, regular and orderly*. Hence, the term *systematicity* implies the same as the term *regularity* which we encounter in the terminology papers written in English. Systematicity lies in the basis of the so-called ‘systems approach’ which became very popular with the Industrial Revolution of the 19 – 20th c. when the need for organizing complex systems arose. The systems approach considers the interrelations between elements and processes – the component parts of the whole through the perspective of the four major concepts, namely specialization, grouping, coordination, and emergent properties [10].

These principles can be easily applied to lexical systematicity where the components of the lexical system (words, lexemes) are interdependent and enter into systematic relations between themselves. The building units of language resemble the parts of a jigsaw puzzle – each irregularly cut piece of a set must find its proper place in the assembly to match the others. The so-called structural-taxonomic trend in lexicology [11] deals with identifying the semantic relationships in the various semantic fields in terms of semantic typology, and [12] further emphasizes the correlation between thematic, i.e. semantic groups of lexical items and their respective structural patterns. Searching for such correlations will certainly facilitate a terminologist in making the correct semantic-structural choice of a proper translation equivalent for terminological verb collocations.

Considering the vocabulary of both source language (SL) and target language (TL) as a series of conceptual fields with their respective ‘lexical sets’ can be useful to a translator in assessing the ‘value’ of a word in the context of a given system of words and subsequently in working out a strategy ensuring the most adequate translation of lexical items [13]. On the other hand, there are arguments [14] that discovering regularities (meaning systematicity as mentioned above) is of “limited usefulness” for term formation because of the arbitrariness in the choice of a linguistic sign for a concept. That might be true from a monolingual point of view. From a bilingual (translation) perspective, however, evidence can be provided to prove that “the choice of a translation equivalent of a term is not quite arbitrary and frequently depends on certain systematicity criteria” [15].

Although the issue continues to be quite relevant even today, very few terminologists have dealt with it in sufficient detail as it is generally believed that the problem with the translation equivalents for most special terms has already been solved by the compilers of the respective specialized bi-/multi-lingual terminological collections. However, many practitioners point out that “new terms see light almost every week” [16]. Nowadays, since English has gained the status of lingua franca in international scientific and research communities, it is usually the first language in which a new special concept is designated. Thus, the options for problem solving in term translation are curbed to either loan translation (calquing) of the source term or direct borrowing (transcribing or transliterating) of the latter [16].

Sager [14] claims that “Loan translation is preferred to direct borrowing but neither form of term creation is acceptable if it violates the natural word formation techniques of a linguistic community”. The cultural specificity of this tendency, as regards metaphorical terms, is discussed by Alexiev [17], who contends that whether the metaphorical conceptualization

will be preserved by calquing or substituted by a cultural metaphoric substitute or lost by resorting to a superordinate, a gloss or a loanword, depends primarily on the metaphorical term translator determination whether similar or different culture-experiential parameters operate in the source and target language. According to the criteria for assessing the functional appropriateness (FA) of the translation equivalents of metaphorical terms, namely informativity, economy of expression and internationality, the highest degree of FA is achieved by calques and loanwords (borrowings) with preference given to calques for their higher informativity whereas glosses (paraphrases) should possibly be avoided as they possess the lowest degree of FA [18].

In his integrated approach to the translation of special terms, Yubin [19] tries to summarize the basic terminological knowledge a translator needs to acquire and use when handling a term translation problem, in the form of two basic assumptions: first, the onomasiological approach, that terms, unlike ordinary words, require the form (nomenclature) to be found for the known referent; and secondly, that “terms demand the singularity of meaning and the unique reference of the referent”. The knowledge that monosemy and mononymy are desirable characteristics of a term although synonymy is an existing phenomenon in terminology, according to Yubin, can encourage technical translators to search for an equivalent term in the target language (TL) among the existing term formation sources within the same special domain. This preferred strategy of translating a source language (SL) term, though, should take into account “the differences between SL and TL disciplinary traditions and development”. The coinage of a new TL term which corresponds to the concept expressed by the SL term and conforms to “the reading and cognitive habits of the TL readers” is well-reasoned then.

The strong conviction of the present research that terminological systematicity can solve such translation problems and can serve as a solid ground for designing a technical term translation methodology is confirmed by Kageura who, by analyzing the regularity of term formation in a given subdomain, asserts that the systematic factors present in a given special domain determine the formation of new terms [20]. His basic assumption about the existing regularity at concept level and its correspondence with linguistic representation levels is further developed by Alexiev who proves that “the conceptual regularities in a special domain are generally reflected in their linguistic exponents in the form of regular linguistic patterns” [15]. Popova [21 – 24] goes even further in her studies distinguishing between implicational and classificational systematicity in terminology. The former is subdivided into partitive (whole-part relation) and associative (predication scene) systematicity while the latter reveals the hierarchical relations between terms and their referents.

The Russian terminologists recognize the close connection between terminological systematicity and the term translation strategy. Quite interesting are their elaborations on how the contrastive perspective of the issue can be applied in finding solutions for term translation problems. Bondareva [25], for example, concludes that a contrastive analysis of the elements and their relationships in a particular special domain is essential for solving the problem of the translation equivalence in terminology. The contrastivists are concerned also with the typology of terminological systematicity defining two major types according to the two basic levels of terminological analysis.

The formulation deemed most applicable to this study distinguishes between *conceptual systematicity* and *linguistic systematicity*, defining the former as involving the systematic conceptual relations within a special domain and within each *conceptual group* in that domain, and the latter as involving the systematic lexico-structural patterns within a *term set* representing the lexical realization of each conceptual group [15].

4. Procedure for Terminological Contrastive Analysis

Whatever procedural steps are chosen to be followed in contrasting terminological items, they should be very well grounded in the theoretical premises of terminological contrastive analysis. For a minor language like the Bulgarian the terminological contrastive studies are of particular relevance since in many cases the original linguistic designations of the transferred concepts, with their semantic and structural features, inevitably influence the term formation in the acceptor language [15].

If two items have to be compared, there exists a natural presumption that they share something in common against which their difference can be outlined. The sameness in the CA theory, used to conduct a bilingual contrast, is traditionally called *tertium comparationis* (TC). Bearing in mind the generally assumed monosemic and mononymic nature of terms, the common conceptual structure of the contrasted terminological items will be the perfect TC for the present investigation. So what actually has to be done is to carry out a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the degree of reflection of the concept structure in each term or in other words, an assessment of the informativity of the contrasted terms. Therefore, the higher degree of precision that could be achieved depends on the bigger number of concept characteristics reflected in the term.

An Expanded model of Contrastive Analysis was proposed by Danchev [26], who claims that the ‘level’ representation of the language system has proven convenient for any kind of contrastive analysis, providing that these levels are not interpreted as linguistic levels in general. The levels of description and translation equivalents found there are easily integrated into the model for domain-specific terminological contrastive analysis elaborated in [27]. Having assumed that the basis of contrasting source language (SL) terms and terminological collocations with their target language (TL) counterparts is conceptual, the differences are reasonably searched for in the particular language-specific choice of lexical items and structural patterns (Fig. 1).

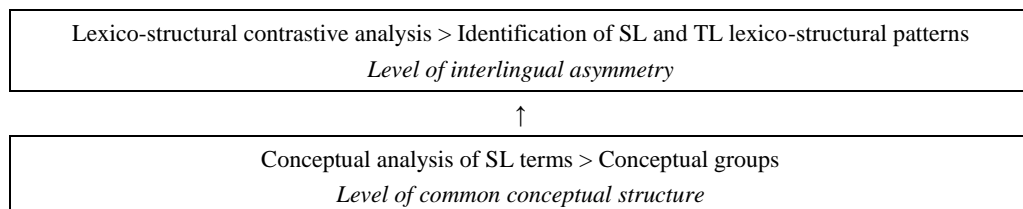


Figure 1. A two-step model [27] for TCA

The above model serves perfectly our taxonomic-frames categorization of terminological verb collocations and follows the procedural steps given below [27] *with some modifications* [1, 2]:

Step 1 Grouping the glossary items into conceptual groups by analysing their definitions and/or consulting an expert.

Step 2 Identifying the conceptual groups with their corresponding term sets containing translation-problem SL-TL term/term collocation pairs (in our particular case English-Bulgarian/E-B term/term collocation pairs) – *semantic frames*.

Step 3 Determining the lexico-structural patterns of the identified SL and TL term sets – *in the present proposal by preliminary categorization of the semantic frames*.

Step 4 Comparing the linguistic systematicity in the SL and TL term/term collocation sets.

Step 5 Proposing solutions to term/term collocation translation problems based on systematicity and pragmatic criteria.

5. Case Studies

Naturally, the taxonomic-frame categorization of terminological verb collocations, already discussed in Section 2, leads to a taxonomic-frame contrastive analysis of TVC. It is performed manually and individually for each case study, with an attempt to offer solutions justified by both terminological systematicity and pragmatic criteria, the former provided by systematically grouped conceptual and terminological items while the latter including verification based on internet data, expert validation and bilingual reference tools. The main translation problems, namely, translation equivalent synonymy, terminological gaps, long translation equivalents and violation of terminological systematicity are illustrated in the case studies with *steel* below.

Case 1

Problem: Translation equivalent synonymy

Within the Steel Processing Event, Action Frame 1, the subcategory of Heat Treating, is exemplified by a group of verbs, related to steel property improvement, for which the available bilingual reference tools propose the same Bulgarian equivalents, namely *калявам, темперирам, отвърщам, отгрявам*. The conducted taxonomic-frame categorization has made evident that these are three different processes modifying different properties of steel. And only after turning to a subject specialist, it became possible to distinguish them and provide the proper Bulgarian terms, as follows:

- **Quench** – heat red-hot, soak, plunge in cold water; properties achieved: much harder, very brittle – BGE **закалявам**;
- **Temper** – heat to moderate degree, cool more slowly; properties achieved: hard and strong – BGE **отвърщам**;
- **Anneal** – bring to very high temperature, cool gradually; properties achieved: softer, easier to work, less brittle – BGE **отгрявам**.

Case 2

Problem: Terminological gap

Another interesting *problem* can be noticed in the conceptual group above, which can be identified as a possible example of *terminological gap*. The verb *soak* collocating with the term *steel* is related to *quenching* and defined as ‘the heating of a metal at a constant temperature for a suitable duration of time’. Consultation with the English-Bulgarian Technical Dictionary [28] provides not a target language equivalent but a long description which actually almost literally translates the English definition quoted above: ‘нагрявам продължително (задържам) при висока температура (за равномерно прегряване)’. Browsing the net for Bulgarian technical texts on the topic resulted in *задържам* („...за определено време при тази температура...”), which is the Bulgarian literal translation of ‘hold, keep, retain’, for a stage

in *quenching* between the heating and the cooling. The final validation with the expert and taking into account the common conceptual structure with the literal meaning of *soak* gave grounds to consider the translation equivalent ‘**здържа́м при определена температура**’ (*lit.* retain under certain temperature) quite acceptable.

It will be interesting for the audience to make a contrast with the use of the verb “soak” when collocating with the term for another building material *concrete*, more specifically in ‘pre-soaking of aggregate for concrete’, translated *предварително омокряне* (*lit.* pre-wetting).

Case 3

Problem: Long translation equivalent

An example for a *long terminological expression* is a term set of collocations from the Joining Action Frame 3 above, which is translated into Bulgarian by adding a gloss (brief explanation) to the verb collocate:

1. Braze (EN) – Споявам с твърд припой/Solder with hard solder (literal translation of the BG translation equivalent);
2. Solder (EN) – Споявам с мек припой/Solder with soft solder (literal translation of the BG translation equivalent).

Case 4

Problem: Violation of terminological systematicity

The example is taken again from the Joining Action Frame 3 but concerns joining by mechanical fasteners not by adhesive bonding (fusing) as the previous one. In English both *rivet* and *bolt* exist as a noun and a verb. The definitions of the verbs are respectively: *to fasten with a rivet* & *to fasten with a bolt*. In the Bulgarian translation equivalent, while the former follows this pattern, i.e. ‘нит, занитвам’, in the latter the verb follows the structure verb + prep + noun, i.e. ‘болт, закрепвам (съединявам с болт)’, not ‘*заболтвам’. Obviously in this case the criterion of functional appropriateness informativity has outweighed the criterion of economy of expression.

6. Conclusion

Although just a few, the examples discussed in this paper prove that the proposed *Taxonomic-Frames Contrastive Analysis* can handle translation problems because a preliminary categorization of a special domain of knowledge undoubtedly helps in systematizing the object of a subsequent terminological contrastive analysis, in the present case of terminological verb collocations, thus assisting the terminologist or subject specialist in making justifiable translation decisions in case of terminological gaps, long terminological expressions, synonymy of translation equivalents or violation of terminological systematicity. The combined approach emphasizes scientifically accurate, expert-driven classification systems that align with real-world terminology use in specialized contexts. The explicit methodology proves to have the potential for facilitating the creation of structured terminological collections for technical translators or domain specialists.

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РЕШАВАНЕ НА ПРЕВОДНИ ПРОБЛЕМИ С ТЕРМИНОЛОГИЧНИ ГЛАГОЛНИ КОЛОКАЦИИ: КАЗУСИ СЪС СТРОИТЕЛНИ МАТЕРИАЛИ

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Ключови думи: терминологични глаголни колокации, терминологичен контрастивен анализ, рамково-базирана терминология, таксономично-рамков подход, систематичност, преводни проблеми, професионална комуникация, специална област

РЕЗЮМЕ

Настоящата статия представя подход за таксономично-рамков контрастивен анализ (Taxonomic-Frames Contrastive Analysis, TFCA), насочен към решаване на проблеми при превода на терминологични глаголни колокации (ТГК) в дадена специална област. Изследването подчертава систематичността на терминологичните взаимовръзки като основополагащ елемент за подобряване на точността на техническите преводи и професионалната комуникация. Комбинирането на таксономичен анализ и рамково-базирана терминология за категоризирането на ТГК в концептуални групи позволява разработването на структурирана методология за идентифициране на

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подходящи преводни еквиваленти. Предложеният подход е илюстриран с казуси, свързани с конструктивния термин „стомана“ от тясната специална област на строителните материали. Разглеждат се въпроси като синонимия, терминологични празноти, дълги преводни еквиваленти и нарушения на терминологичната систематичност. Резултатите подчертават значението на експертната оценка за по-прецизна категоризация за преодоляване на езиковите различия и разработването на терминологични ресурси за преводачески и професионални цели. Тази интегрирана рамка предоставя практичен подход за разрешаване на преводни предизвикателства, свързани с ТКК, и в други специализирани сфери.

