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# ON TRANSLATING COLLOCATIONAL PATTERNS INCLUDING TERMS SHARED BY SPECIALIZED AND GENERAL CONTEXTS

Some say that knowing a **language** implies knowing its **words** and the rules that have to be observed in order to produce grammatically correct messages. Nevertheless, if reference is made to the various types of **more or less fixed lexical patterns** existing in any language, the fact has to be emphasized that ***the knowledge of a language is not only knowledge of individual words, but of their predictable combinations***, and of the cultural information which these combinations encapsulate. This statement is supported by the generally shared idea that people use **set phrases**, rather than **separate words** in communication, and that such phrases represent an important part of the speakers' (mental) lexicon.

Furthermore, if **general** and **specialized contexts** are brought into discussion, mention should be made that the lexical patterns used in **general contexts** differ from those used in **specialized contexts**, and vice versa.

The main reason for the existence of differences between the lexical patterns used in **general** and in **specialized contexts** is the fact that, theoretically speaking, the **presence of terms** is restricted to the latter category of patterns. Practice however, has proved that this is not always the case.

Although **words** and **terms** are quite often used interchangeably by unaware speakers, the realities they denote and their specific features prove that these two concepts are hardly, if ever, interchangeable [1].

**Terms** are generally agreed to be highly conventional forms which are very easily coined and equally easily accepted. One of the most important features of **terms** is their relevance to the system or to the set of terms used in a particular **science**, **discipline** or **art**, i.e. to their nomenclature.

Unlike words, **terms** are directly connected with the concept they denote, which implies that terms have the role to direct the mind to the essential quality of the thing, phenomenon or action as seen by scientists in the light of their own conceptualization. As Verhaar[2] puts it,

> "a word is organically one with its meaning; likewise, a **term** is one with a concept. Conceptualization leaves, as it were, language behind, although the words remain as (scientific or philosophical) terms. Linguistically, the difference is important in that terms are much more easily substitutable by other terms than are words by other words. […]".

Since **terms** are predominantly used in special works dealing with the notions of some branch of science, they are regarded as belonging to the language of science. Nevertheless, their use is not confined to the style of scientific prose. **Terms** may be used in other functional styles of language, but in such situations, their function changes.

Another important aspect distinguishing **words** from **terms** is their semantic specificity and the possibility that their meaning should change in time and under specific circumstances.

As far as ordinary **words** are concerned, the idea is shared that they change their meaning in a variety of ways through usage. On the contrary, **terms** are generally protected from the effects of usage, as much as possible.

Even though seemingly valid, the opposition between **words** and **terms** is often contradicted in practice. For example, there are numerous names of flora and fauna, which resemble **terms** very much, just as there are many **words** which have a specialized and protected meaning in a discipline without necessarily being granted the status of **terms** (e.g. *window* and *mouse* in general use vs. specialized use in computing).



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This 'virtual' distinction between **words** and **terms** is also referred to by Bidu-Vrănceanu. In her opinion, many **terms** have been assimilated in the common language, but the number of **terms** undergoing such changes and the extent to which they are used in their non-specialized meaning are difficult to specify. Moreover, the terms accepted to have changed their status in this way originate in various, but not necessarily predictable, domains:

> "Care sunt situaţiile, proporţiile şi gradul de răspândire şi asimilare a unor **termeni** în limba comună sunt probleme greu de precizat. Exemplele date de specialişti pentru a ilustra **termeni** deveniţi **cuvinte** în limba română …provin din domenii variate şi nu neapărat previzibile: oxigen, oţel, trafic, vitamină, virus, frână, ecuaţie, algoritm, etc". [3]

Referring to the **functions** of a term, Bidu-Vrănceanu[4] suggests that they ensure the accuracy of specialized communication in a given language and the interlingual correspondences. In addition, she states that the possible definitions provided for **terms** as "fundamental units of terminology", and a clear specification of their **characteristics** may prove useful instruments for the differentiation of **terms** from **words**. Her opinion is supported, on the one hand, by some very useful definitions provided for the concept of **term** by other specialists[5], and by the features which Spillner[6] considers to be specific to **terms**, on the other. Thus, the aspects characterizing **terms** and distinguishing them from words are as follows:

- the **denotative function** resulting from the fact that terms denote objects by means of concepts;
- a good definition strengthening its term status;
- the naming biunivocity which ensures its monoreferetiality, monosemantism and non-ambiguity;
- membership to a specific terminological field;
- its invariable value in a linguistic and professional community which gives a certain stability to a term;
- stability related to its norming in the experts community or to its coding by means of norms;
- the possibility that the stability of term should be imposed diachronically;
- the neutrality or the lack of variety as regards modality and affective marks, which gives priority to **denotation**, and leads to avoidance of **connotations.**

Even though these ideal features are difficult to find simultaneously in one **term,** they represent, as Bidu-Vrănceanu[7] suggests, a useful instrument for the individual and comparative descriptions of **terms**.

As far as the (lack of) **fixity of meaning** characterizing **words** and **terms** is concerned, most **words** used in ordinary language gradually change their meanings in time, while, as regards terminology, the specialists strive to keep the meaning of **terms** constant. The rare changes that are made at the level of **terms** are motivated by factors external to the structure of language, and have to do with clarifications or advances in the disciplines.

The meanings of **words** may also change by their frequent association with other words (e.g. while *enormous* may be used with both pleasant and unpleasant things, *enormity* is restricted to crimes, scandals and heavy burdens). In other words, meanings are no longer strictly identifiable in single words, but also in lexical patterns. Moreover, new, unique, and unrepeatable meanings are created by means of syntax, which in spite of retaining a high level of rigidity, allows that texts can be understood by all the users of the language.

Furthermore, meanings inevitably change in ad hoc situations. This will often be the case with general words, but will hardly be the case with **terms** whose forms and meanings are protected by the conventions of **terminology**.

Even if any variation specific to a given occasion is avoided in the case of **terms**, this does not exclude their **transfer** from one domain to another or from **specialized** contexts to **general** ones. The possibility to make such transfers is, however, less visible if terms are taken in isolation. Rather, their inclusion in a **collocation** can clarify the semantic and contextual changes undergone by terms depending on 'the company they keep'.



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In fact, numerous **terms** normally associated with **specialized contexts**, have come to be used in **collocations** specific to the **general contexts**. In this respect, a good example could be the noun *lege* which, in spite of being normally associated with **law** and the **legal system**, is frequently used in collocations associated with other domains of activity (economics, sciences), as well as in **general collocations**. Similarly, nouns such as: *semn, bloc, cod*, which are generally related to domains of activity such as philosophy, politics, and linguistics, respectively, make up collocations which extend far beyond the respective domains of activity (see **Table 1** below).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **LEGE** | **Law** | *a încălca **legea** → to break/infringe/violate the **law*** |
| | **General** | *a lua **legea** în propriile mâini→ to take the law into one's hands, the **law** of the jungle→ **legea** junglei, **legea** este aceeaşi pentru toată lumea → the **law** is the same for everybody* |
| | **Economics** | ***legea** cererii şi a ofertei → **law** of supply and demand* |
| | **Sciences** | ***legea** lui Newton → Newton's **law*** |
| **SEMN** | **Philosophy** | ***semne** naturale → natural **signs*** |
| | **Linguistics** | ***semn** lingvistic→ linguistic **sign, semn** de punctuație→ punctuation **mark*** |
| | **Sciences** | ***semn** distinctiv → distinctive **sign*** |
| | **General** | ***semn** particular→ distinctive **sign, semn** din naştere→ birth **mark*** |
| **BLOC** | **Politics** | ***bloc** politic → political **block*** |
| | **Drawing** | ***bloc** de desen → drawing **block/tablet.*** |
| | **Constructions** | ***blocuri** prefabricate → prefab **panels, bloc** turn → tower **house*** |
| | **Sciences** | ***bloc** motor → engine **block*** |
| **COD** | **Linguistics** | ***cod** lingvistic → linguistic **code*** |
| | **Law** | ***cod** penal→ criminal **code, cod** civil → civil **code, cod** de comerț → commercial **law, cod** de procedură penală → **code** of criminal procedure* |
| | **Semiotics** | ***cod** de culori → colour **code**, **cod** poştal→ postal **code**, **cod** Morse → Morse **code** , **cod** secret→ secret **code*** |
| | **Sciences** | ***cod** binar → binary **code, cod** genetic → genetic **code*** |

**Table 1- Examples of terms shared by general and specialized contexts and their English equivalents**

More importantly, mention should be made that this **'sharing' of terms** is traceable not only in Romanian, as the source language (SL) selected for the examples provided, but also in English which, in this case, is the target language (TL).

As regards the translation of such collocations from a given language culture (LC) into another, the common distinction between **lexical** and **grammatical collocations** could be exploited to suggest a further grouping of **lexical collocations** into **collocations including words** and **collocations including terms[8]**.

Such a distinction is as important as useful for the purpose of the present paper, because each of the two types of lexical collocations requires a different approach in translation.

In spite of the fact that **lexical collocations including terms** are strictly used in their denotative meaning, such patterns are not always easily transferable from one language into another due to the **collocational** and **contextual restrictions specific to each language**.

Moreover, the translation of **lexical collocations including terms** is conditioned by the **linguistic**, **collocational** and **domain-specific** knowledge of the translators in the languages in which they operate, as well as by their **collocational** and **terminological competencies.** In fact, only a balanced blending of such knowledge and competencies may favour an accurate interpretation of the SL lexical collocations and their appropriate translation into the TL(s). (see **Figure 1** below)



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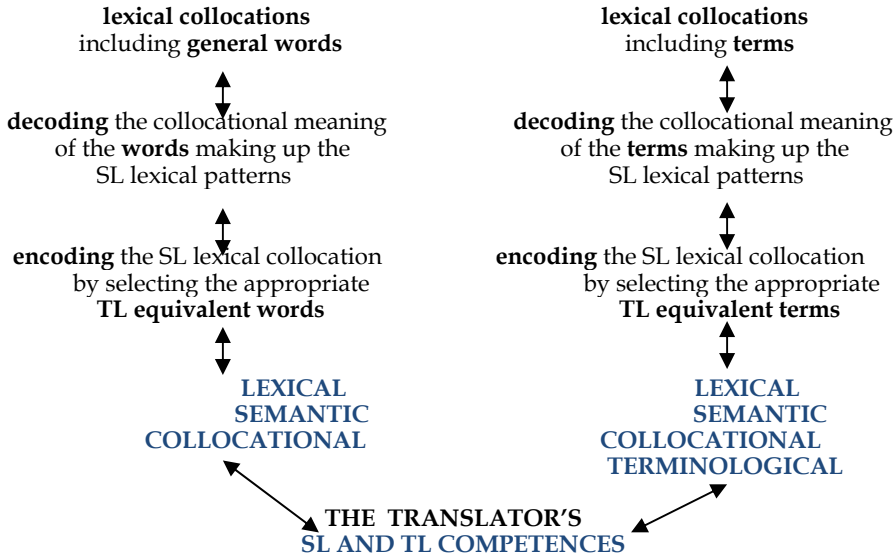


**Figure 1 –Lexical collocations including words and terms in translation** (my suggestion)

This holds valid in the case of lexical collocations including terms that have a **formal equivalent** in another language. For example, many of the Romanian collocations included in the table previously suggested may be easily translated into English, because the formal and semantic specificity of the SL collocation is preserved in the TL pattern:

**e.g.** *a lua* ***legea*** *în propriile mâini→ to take the law into one's hands, the* ***law*** *of the jungle→* ***legea*** *junglei,* ***legea*** *este aceeaşi pentru toată lumea→* ***law*** *is the same for everybody,* ***legea*** *lui Newton→ Newton's* ***law, semne*** *naturale → natural* ***signs, semn*** *lingvistic→ linguistic* ***sign, semn*** *distinctiv → distinctive* ***sign, semn*** *particular→ distinctive* ***sign, cod*** *lingvistic → linguistic* ***code, cod*** *civil → civil* ***code, cod*** *de culori → colour* ***code***, ***cod*** *poştal→ postal* ***code***, ***cod*** *Morse → Morse* ***code*** *,* ***cod*** *secret→ secret* ***code, cod*** *binary → binary* ***code,*** ***cod*** *genetic → genetic* ***code, bloc*** *politic → political* ***block,*** ***bloc*** *motor → engine* ***block****.*

Moreover, certain Romanian collocations including the same terms may be translated into English by two or more patterns in which one of the collocation members is replaceable on the basis of synonymy: *a încălca* ***legea*** *→ to break/infringe/violate the* ***law, bloc*** *de desen → drawing* ***block/tablet, cod*** *penal→ criminal/penal* ***code, cod*** *de comerț/comercial → commercial* ***law*****.**

Finally, there are collocations whose translation is mainly conditioned by collocational restrictions, i.e. the term used in the SL, in our case Romanian, is not translated by the **formally similar equivalent**, but by the appropriate **collocational equivalent:**

**e.g.** ***legea*** *cererii şi a ofertei →* ***law*** *of supply and demand* not **law of demand/ request and offer;* ***semn*** *de punctuație→ punctuation* ***mark*** not **punctuation sign*; ***semn*** *din naştere→ birth* ***mark*** not * *birth sign*; ***blocuri*** *prefabricate → prefab* ***panels*** not **prefab blocks;* ***bloc*** *turn → tower* ***house*** not **tower block,* ***cod*** *de procedură penală →* ***code*** *of criminal procedure* not **code of penal procedure.*

The translation problems encountered by the language mediators in the case of these lexical collocations including terms would surely be the same irrespective of the fact that the SL is Romanian, or English. In addition, such collocations would hardly cause any problems regarding the equivalence of the terms making them up.

Nevertheless, the fact cannot be ignored that **terminological equivalence** cannot always be easily achieved in translation. As Scarpa[9] suggests, it is often very difficult to provide equivalents which match **terms** with only one meaning, because most often such terms lack



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an appropriate equivalent in the TL. Consequently, in such cases the translator has to make **approximations**. Palumbo[10] considers that the translation procedures which can be used by the specialized translators when approaching such **terms** are the following:

**- analogical translation** is valid only in the TT, thus not applicable to all the uses of the same term;

**- descriptive translation** is more vague and general as regards its denoting the concept corresponding to the SL term (**e.g.** ***overbidding*** → *lasciarsi prendere la mano nella corsa al rilancio*);

**- explicitation** implies explanation of the SL term in the TL. For example, the adjective ***harsh*** collocating with the noun ***cement*** in [...] a *mortar made only with portland cement is "**harsh**" and does not flow well on the trowel* can only be translated in Italian by explaining the specific meaning it acquires in this collocation: [...] *se usato da solo [il cemento] può dare un impasto **eccessivamente disomogeneo** e difficilmente lavorabile con la cazzuola*. [11]

**- borrowing** implies the use of the SL terms as such, on condition they are semantically transparent in the TL. For example, the nouns ***coach*** and ***orchestrator*** are preserved in Italian, because their meaning is accessible to the target readers:

> **e.g.** *Anche la McKinsey and Company, una società di consulenza aziendale, era convinta del fatto che la strategia a livello aziendale dovesse essere gestita dal vertice aziendale. Essa riteneva che l'Alta Direzione potesse creare valore sulla base di nove ruoli diversi. Tra questi, per esempio, c'erano quelli di **coach** e **orchestrator**, dove l'abilità e l'esperienza dei vertici dirigenziali potevano essere utilizzate per addestrare, motivare e coordinare i dirigenti di divisione.*

**- neologisms** (creation of new words): **e.g.** *diseconomie di scala* originating in *economie di scala*;

**- deletion,** i.e. deliberate omission of a term which lacks an equivalent in the TL. For example, *high-employment surplus* and *standardized employment surplus*, which have no equivalent in Italian and may be easily replaceable by their synonym *full-employment budget surplus*, may be deleted in a text such as:

> *There are other names for the full-employment budget surplus. Among them are the cyclically adjusted (or deficit), the **high-employment surplus**, the **standardized employment surplus** and the structural surplus.* → *L'avanzo di piena occupazione viene definito anche in altri modi, fra cui avanzo (o disavanzo) corretto per il ciclo e avanzo strutturale.*

The difficulty in finding **equivalent terms** in different languages is obvious not only in the case of **isolated terms**, but also, significantly, in the case of lexical collocations including terms.

In such cases, the specialized bilingual dictionaries including domain-specific collocations may be of great help to the translators. This aspect is made clear by some of the examples included in the appendix, whose translation is practically impossible to the linguistically, collocationally and terminologically unaware mediators. The fact may be easily noticed that in quite numerous domain-specific collocations including the term ***law*** the mediator has to make a **descriptive translation** of the English collocation

> (**e.g.** *law of constant heat summation* → *legea lui Hess; law of electrostatic attraction* → *legea lui Faraday; law of extreme path* → *principiul lui Fermat; law of induction* → *legea lui Coulomb*), or to use **explicitation** (**e.g.** *law of superposition* → *legea superpoziției straturilor; law of moment of momentum* → *teorema momentului cinetic/ impulsului/ momentului cantității de mişcare; law of proximity theory* → *legea teoriei efectului de proximitate; legea acțiunii din aproape în aproape*) (see the **Appendix** for further examples).

Mention should be made that, with the rapid emergence of various domains of activity, certain lexical collocations can hardly be found in bilingual dictionaries. In such situations, their equivalents in other languages have to be extracted from parallel corpora.

Referring to the importance of the **context** in establishing the collocational appropriateness of a **term**, Musacchio e Palumbo[12] explain that the collocation *a new equilibrium* used in **tourism economics** should not be translated into Italian by *processo di*



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*riequilibrio dell' economia* ('a process of economic rebalancing'). This is because the term *riequilibrio* is normally used in **finances**, being related to public debt accounts (as proved by the analysis of Italian economic corpora), whereas the English collocation points to an equilibrium that has to be reached or maintained in ***economy***. Thus, the translation variant considered appropriate by Musacchio e Palumbo in this context is "una nuova posizione di equilibrio".

**To sum up**, in spite of the fact that **scientific**, **technical**, **legal** and some **bureaucratic** language are characterized by a well-organized terminology industry which continually seeks to maintain the semantic isolation of the **terms**, and to counteract the natural pressure of usage, many **terms** used in such languages are so frequently encountered in every-day situations that they seem to have significantly altered their quality of **terms**. As regards **ordinary**, **non-technical language,** similar attitudes to meaning are shown in comments on language change in the **press**, in **politics**, and in **education**.

At the level of **collocations**, this results in cases in which **words** and **terms** change their original status, depending on the collocational pattern(s) in which they occur. Consequently, this allows that **collocations** having the same lexical item used either as a word, or as a term to be assigned to various **types of discourse**, hence to various **text types** and **functional styles**.

The distinction between **words** and **terms** is however very important and useful in translation, because each of the two types of collocations in which words and terms may be identified, i.e. **general** and **specialized**, require a different approach in translation and different competencies on the part of the translator.

**APPENDIX-THE TERM *LAW* USED IN DOMAIN-SPECIFIC COLLOCATIONS**

| English | Romanian |
|---|---|
| *Law of action and reaction* (mechanics) | *legea actiunii şi reacţiunii, legea a treia a lui Newton* |
| *Law of areas* (mechanics) | *legea ariilor, legea constanţei vitezelor sectoriale, a doua lege a lui Kepler* |
| *law of conservation of momentum* (mechanics) | *legea conservării cantităţii de mişcare, legea conservării impulsului* |
| *Law of constant heat summation* | *legea constantei căldurii totale de reacţie, legea lui Hess* |
| *Law of constant/definite proportions* | *legea proporţiilor definite* |
| *Law of degradation of energy* | *legea transformării energiei* |
| *Law of electrostatic attraction* | *legea atracţiei electrostatice, legea lui Coulomb* |
| *Law of energy conservation* | *legea conservării energiei* |
| *law of the equivalent/ reciprocal proportions* | *legea proporţiilor echivalente/ multiple* |
| *Law of equivalents* | *legea echivalenţelor* |
| *Law of excluded middle* (mathematics) | *legea/principiul terţului exclus* |
| *Law of extreme path* (physics) | *legea traiectoriei luminii între două puncte, principiul lui Fermat* |
| *Law of falling bodies* (mechanics) | *legea căderii corpurilor* |
| *Law of gravity* (physics) | *legea atracţiei gravitaţionale* |
| *Law of induction* (physics) | *legea inducţiei electromagnetice, legea lui Faraday* |
| *Law of large numbers* | *legea numerelor mari* (teoria probabilităţilor) |
| *Law of least squares* | *legea celor mai mici pătrate* |
| *Law of mass action* | *legea acţiunii maselor* |
| *Law of mass conservation* | *legea conservării masei* |
| *Law of matter conservation* | *legea conservării materiei* |
| *Law of the mean* | *teorema mediei* |
| *Law of moment of momentum* | *teorema momentului cinetic/ impulsului/ momentului cantităţii de mişcare* |



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| English | Romanian |
|---|---|
| *Law of multiple proportions* | *legea proporțiilor multiple* |
| *Law of nations* | *drept international* |
| *Law of proximity theory* | *legea teoriei efectului de proximitate, legea acțiunii din aproape în aproape* |
| *Law of refraction* (physics) | *legea refracției* |
| *Law of similarity* | *lege de similitudine* |
| *Law of the situation* | *cale de urmat într-o situație* |
| *Law of small numbers* | *legea repartițiilor rare, legea lui Poisson* |
| *Law of superimposed stress* | *principiul suprapunerii tensiunilor* |
| *Law of superposition* | *legea superpoziției straturilor, legea suprapunerii efectelor* |
| *Law of supply and demand* (economics) | *legea cererii și a ofertei* |
| *law of the trivial many and the critical few* (economics) | *regula 80 la 20* (în controlul stocurilor) |
| *laws of electric networks* (physics, electricity ) | *legile rețelelor electrice, legile lui Kirchhoff* |
| *laws of motion* (mechanics) | *legile mișcării/cinematicii* |

## NOTE

[1] The same holds valid in the case of terms and professionalisms. If **terms** are used to denote new concepts that appear in the process of, and as a result of, technical progress and development of science, **professionalisms** are words used in a definite trade, profession, or occupation by people sharing common interests both at work and at home. Moreover, **professional words** name already existing concepts, tools, or instruments and have the typical properties of a **special code**, their main characteristic being **technicality**. **Terms**, on the other hand, make direct reference to a certain branch of science, being up to a point self explanatory, thus not functioning as a code. In addition, **professionalisms** are special words in the non-literary layer, whereas **terms** are a specialized group belonging to the literary layer. Since **terms** are connected with a field or branch of science or technique well-known to ordinary people, they are easily decoded and enter the neutral stratum of the vocabulary**.** On the contrary, **professionalisms** generally remain in circulation within a **definite community**, being linked to a **common occupation** and **common social interests**.

[2] Verhaar 1966, in Galperin 1977: 76.

[3] Bidu-Vrănceanu 2007: 29.

[4] Bidu-Vrănceanu 2007: 31.

[5] **Termenul** reprezintă forma lingvitică sau nelingvistică care desemnează un concept determinat, impus printr-o definiție la la nivelul unui domeniu dat. (Cabré 2000: 35, in Bidu-Vrănceanu 2007: 32). **Termenii** sunt "vectori ai cunoştinţelor non-lingvistice" (Herat 1994: 28, in Bidu-Vrănceanu 2007: 32). **Termenul** este o unitate cognitivă (a cunoaşterii) realizată în orice tip de terminologie. (Bidu-Vrănceanu 2007: 32)

[6] Spillner 1994: 56-59.

[7] Bidu-Vrănceanu 2007: 34.

[8] Such a grouping is based on the distinction between **terminological** collocations and **non-terminological** collocations. These two types of collocations cannot be clearly differentiated because, on the one hand, they both form paradigms and, on the other, the general and specialized experiences often intermingle.

[9] Scarpa 2008: 191-192.

[10] Palumbo 1999: 129-133.

[11] Palumbo 1999:132.

[12] Musacchio and Palumbo 2008: 73.

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**ABSTRACT**

Considering the **general–specialized** distinction, the fact may be easily noticed that sometimes the same term may have a different semantic interpretation depending on 'the company it keeps' and on the domain to which the collocational pattern including the respective term is attached. Such semantic differences are visible in translating **isolated terms**, but especially in translating **collocational patterns** in which they are used.



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