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INTERPRETATION CHALLENGES OF ENGLISH ANALYTICAL TERMS FOR EFL LEARNERS: A LINGUISTIC STUDY OF SEMANTIC TRANSPARENCY AND CONTEXTUAL CUES

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the interpretation challenges posed by English analytical terms among B2-level EFL learners, emphasizing the multidimensional factors that influence semantic comprehension. Analytical terms—lexical units encoding complex, domain-specific concepts—are ubiquitous in academic and professional discourse but often lack semantic transparency, creating significant cognitive and linguistic barriers for non-native speakers. Employing a mixed-methods design, the research investigates learner engagement with selected terms from the EMN (European Migration Network) Asylum and Migration Glossary across three stages: a structured questionnaire, a multiple-choice test on isolated terms, and a contextualized comprehension task. The analysis examines how linguistic phenomena such as polysemy, synonymy, and homonymy contribute to semantic ambiguity and misinterpretation, and evaluates the role of contextual metadata—definitions, examples, and usage cues—in facilitating accurate comprehension. Findings indicate that learners struggle to interpret analytical terms when presented in isolation, particularly when lexical components do not transparently reflect the underlying institutional or conceptual meaning. Terms such as talent partnership and single permit exemplify how semantic opacity and cross-contextual variation hinder intuitive understanding. However, comprehension improves markedly when terms are embedded in authentic discourse, underscoring the importance of contextual framing.

The study also identifies learner strategies for decoding and retaining specialized vocabulary, including contextual inference, morphological analysis, and reliance on prior domain exposure. By integrating linguistic, cognitive, and contextual dimensions, this research contributes to both terminology studies and EFL pedagogy. It highlights the pedagogical imperative to incorporate term-focused instruction into curriculum design and to develop targeted resources that enhance learners' accuracy, fluency, and confidence in navigating academic and professional texts.

KEYWORDS

Analytical Terms, Semantic Transparency, EFL Learners, Term Interpretation, Polysemy, Context

CITATION

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Introduction

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, the interpretation of analytical terms—lexical units that encode complex, domain-specific concepts—poses persistent and multifaceted challenges. These terms are prevalent in academic, legal, political, medical, and technical discourse, and are marked by high conceptual density and limited semantic transparency. Unlike general vocabulary, analytical terms cannot be reliably decoded through literal translation or intuitive word recognition. Their accurate comprehension requires advanced linguistic proficiency, domain-specific knowledge, familiarity with disciplinary conventions, and sensitivity to socio-cultural and institutional contexts (Cabr , 1999; ISO 704:2022; Faber & Le n-Ara z, 2016). For EFL learners, this multidimensional interpretive burden often results in cognitive overload, semantic misalignment, and diminished communicative effectiveness—particularly in contexts where precision and conceptual clarity are essential.

The complexity of analytical terms stems from the tension between linguistic form and conceptual meaning. While specialized discourse ideally adheres to the principle of univocity—where each term corresponds to a single, clearly defined concept—real-world usage frequently diverges from this ideal (ISO, 2022; Wright & Budin, 2001). Analytical terms often exhibit lexico-semantic phenomena such as polysemy, homonymy, and synonymy, which obscure their intended meaning and complicate interpretation. Polysemy, the coexistence of multiple related meanings within a single term, demands nuanced contextual discernment (Saeed, 2023; Cruse, 2020). Homonymy, where identical lexical forms represent entirely distinct concepts across domains, generates ambiguity that cannot be resolved without disciplinary cues (Cruse, 2020). Synonymy—the presence of multiple terms for the same concept—introduces terminological variability and may hinder learners’ ability to identify authoritative or contextually appropriate usage (Wright & Budin, 2001). These phenomena collectively intensify the cognitive demands placed on EFL learners, who must integrate linguistic, conceptual, and contextual knowledge—skills not always systematically developed in traditional language instruction.

Illustrative examples such as *separated child* (განცალკევებული ბავშვი) [gantsalkevebuli bavshvi] and *irregular migration* (არალეგალური მიგრაცია) [aralegaluri migratsia] highlight the interpretative challenges posed by analytical vocabulary. Both terms originate in migration law and social policy, yet their semantic and functional dimensions vary significantly across legal texts, policy frameworks, and public discourse. *Separated child* denotes a minor without parental care and outside their country of origin, typically requiring humanitarian protection under international legal standards. However, in media narratives, the term is often used more loosely, conflating legal definitions with broader social realities such as temporary family separation due to conflict or displacement. Similarly, *Irregular migration* refers to movement outside established legal frameworks—such as undocumented border crossings or visa overstays—but its interpretation fluctuates across legal, policy, and human rights contexts. The term often carries implicit moral, political, or security-related connotations. The presence of synonymous or overlapping terms—such as *unauthorized migration*, *illegal entry*, rendered in Georgian as არალეგალური იმიგრაცია [aralegaluri imigratsia], უკანონო მიგრაცია [ukanono migratsia], ფარული მიგრაცია [faruli migratsia]—further complicates comprehension, especially when semantic boundaries are fluid or contested.

These examples underscore the limited semantic transparency and cross-contextual polysemy inherent in analytical terms. Lexical components such as *separated* and *child* do not fully encapsulate the legal and humanitarian scope of the concept, while *irregular* in *irregular migration* implies not only procedural deviation but also evaluative judgments tied to legality and state authority. For EFL learners, navigating these layered semantic fields requires more than linguistic decoding—it demands conceptual awareness, contextual sensitivity, and familiarity with disciplinary registers.

Pedagogically, the instruction of analytical terms presents additional challenges. Learners often struggle with the abstract and conceptually dense nature of specialized vocabulary, which impedes both comprehension and production (Schmitt, 2008; Yousefi & Biria, 2018). These difficulties are exacerbated by the lack of explicit instruction on semantic and functional nuances, leading to misinterpretation and limiting learners’ ability to engage meaningfully with academic and professional texts. Effective pedagogy must therefore move beyond rote memorization and incorporate contextualized learning strategies that promote deeper semantic processing and long-term retention (Graves, 2006).

A critical component of such instruction is the integration of metadata—definitions, examples, usage notes, and contextual framing—which plays a pivotal role in facilitating conceptual understanding. Empirical studies have shown that rich contextual cues significantly enhance learners’ ability to decode and internalize

complex terminology (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). Embedding metadata into instructional materials supports the construction of accurate mental representations, enabling learners to navigate the semantic, pragmatic, and disciplinary dimensions of analytical terms more effectively.

This study investigates these interpretative challenges through a systematic analysis of EFL learners' engagement with selected analytical terms drawn from migration, law, and social policy discourse. By examining comprehension patterns in both isolated and contextually embedded formats, the research provides empirical insight into the cognitive and linguistic demands posed by analytical vocabulary. The findings aim to inform pedagogical strategies that enhance learners' accuracy, fluency, and confidence in interpreting domain-specific terms. Through this multidimensional lens, the study contributes to both terminology research and EFL pedagogy, illuminating the intersection of semantic opacity, conceptual precision, and learner cognition in the acquisition of specialized vocabulary.

Background

One of the most persistent challenges in teaching analytical terms to EFL learners in higher education is the phenomenon of polysemy—the capacity of a single lexical unit to convey multiple interrelated meanings. While polysemy is often celebrated in general linguistics as a marker of lexical richness and evolutionary dynamism, its role within terminology studies is far more problematic. In specialized discourse, polysemy disrupts the principle of *univocity*, which holds that each term should correspond to a single, clearly defined concept (ISO 704:2022). This principle is foundational to terminological standardization, translation accuracy, and disciplinary clarity.

Polysemous terms pose a particular threat to terminological stability in specialized domains. As Faber and León-Araúz (2016) note, terms in specialized domains gain metaphorical or functional extensions, conceptual meaning changes over time, and context affects terminological stability accordingly. Specialized terminology is dynamic, domain bound, and not always stable. Faber & León-Araúz argue that specialized knowledge domains evolve, and terms' semantic boundaries can shift. Although contextual disambiguation may mitigate ambiguity in technical texts, polysemous terms still require rigorous codification to prevent conceptual overlap and misinterpretation in professional settings. A particularly illustrative case is the term *facility*, which exemplifies lexical polysemy across institutional and functional domains. In one sense, *facility* refers to physical infrastructures—*medical facility*, *research facility*, *correctional facility*—denoting designated spaces for specific operations. Yet the term also encompasses the services and organizational mechanisms within those spaces, as seen in *residential treatment facility*, which in Georgian corresponds to a rehabilitation center offering inpatient care. Furthermore, *facility* extends into abstract domains, such as financial services (*overdraft facility*) or administrative functions (*reporting facility*), where the material substrate is secondary to the operational role. Lexicographic sources reflect this semantic diversity, listing meanings such as “establishment,” “installation,” “service,” “opportunity,” and “ease.” Etymologically derived from Latin *facilitas* (“ease,” “ability”), the term's historical semantic core has expanded to accommodate both concrete and abstract referents. This evolution underscores how polysemy is not merely a lexical phenomenon but a reflection of shifting conceptual emphases across disciplines. For EFL learners, such semantic multiplicity presents a significant interpretative burden. Without explicit instruction and contextual scaffolding, learners may struggle to reconcile surface-level lexical forms with deeper disciplinary meanings. In pedagogical terms, polysemy complicates vocabulary acquisition, translation equivalence, and the development of disciplinary literacy. It also hinders automated processing and classification in digital learning environments, making it a critical issue for both educators and curriculum designers in multilingual higher education settings.

Furthermore, the differentiation of homonymous terms represents one of the most sensitive and complex tasks in terminological standardization. Unlike polysemy—where a single lexical unit conveys multiple semantically related meanings—homonymy involves a complete semantic split between unrelated concepts that share the same lexical form. This rupture in meaning complicates interpretation, reduces the effectiveness of contextual regulation, and poses significant risks to conceptual clarity in specialized communication.

It is noteworthy that Cabré (1999) considers lexicographic polysemy to be equivalent to terminological homonymy. As she argues, polysemy is understood very differently in terminology than in lexicography. The foundation of terminology lies in the principle that each designation must correspond to one concept; however, in practice this univocal link is not always achieved. The semantic value of a term is determined solely by its relation to a specific conceptual system. Identifying a term's affiliation with a particular discipline therefore entails situating it within a defined conceptual framework, such that what is considered polysemy in

lexicography may, in terminology, be treated as homonymy. Cabré further emphasizes that terminology conceives each subject field as a system distinct from other systems, yet simultaneously integrated into a global linguistic system. Accordingly, any term that migrates from one discipline to another by analogy is classified as a homonym. As a result, the number of homonyms is generally greater in terminology than in general language, whereas polysemy is more prevalent in lexicography than in terminology.

In sum, homonymy poses a unique challenge to terminology instruction and management. Its resolution requires a combination of definitional rigor, contextual anchoring, structural modification, and strategic term creation. For EFL learners in higher education, encountering homonymous terms without adequate scaffolding can lead to misinterpretation and hinder disciplinary engagement. Addressing this issue pedagogically demands explicit instruction, metadata integration, and exposure to domain-specific usage patterns—strategies that align with best practices in terminology education and multilingual curriculum design.

Terminological synonymy is a multifaceted phenomenon that exerts both constructive and disruptive influences on domain-specific communication. On one hand, it can serve as a resource for linguistic flexibility, enriching specialized discourse and enhancing its adaptability to diverse audiences. This is particularly relevant in contexts where the popularization of technical concepts or their integration into educational settings is prioritized (Cabré, 1999). For example, the term *environmental tax* has two widely recognized synonyms: *ecotax* and *green tax*. In Georgian, these are rendered as *გარემოსდაცვითი გადასახადები* [garemosdatsviti gadasaxadebi] (“environmental taxes”), *ეკოლოგიური გადასახადები* [ekologiuri gadasaxadebi] (“ecological taxes”), and *მწვანე გადასახადები* [mtsvane gadasaxadebi] (“green taxes”). According to the IATE terminology database, *environmental tax* is the preferred variant. However, Georgian academic literature and legal texts reflect terminological variation. The Law of Georgia “On Environmental Protection” (Chapter V, Article 16) uses the expression *გადასახადები გარემოს დაცვის სფეროში* [gadasaxadebi garemos datsvit sferoshi] (“taxes in the field of environmental protection”), which encompasses payments based on the principles of “paid use of natural resources” and “the polluter pays.”

Another example is the synonymous pair *reverse engineering* and *back engineering*. While both terms are used in English, Georgian terminology standardizes the concept as *რევერსიული ინჟინერია* [revesiuli inzhinieria] (“reverse engineering”), defined as the dismantling and analysis of a mechanism or device to understand its operating principles and replicate its functionality. This lexical consolidation reflects a deliberate effort to reduce ambiguity and promote terminological consistency. Despite its potential benefits, synonymy poses significant challenges to terminological standardization. The coexistence of multiple terms for a single concept undermines the principle of *univocity*, complicates lexicographic systematization, and impedes automated translation and documentation processes. In professional settings, unregulated synonymy may be perceived as inconsistency or institutional disagreement, thereby diminishing the authority of the field and jeopardizing communicative precision.

For EFL learners, synonymy introduces a layer of semantic complexity that is often underestimated in instructional contexts. Learners may encounter multiple variants of a term across disciplines, registers, or institutional sources, without clear guidance on preferred usage or conceptual distinctions. Research shows that EFL students frequently misinterpret synonymous terms due to insufficient awareness of subtle semantic, stylistic, or pragmatic differences. This can lead to lexical confusion, reduced confidence, and errors in both comprehension and production—particularly in academic writing and professional communication. Effective management of terminological synonymy requires a systematic framework grounded in normative principles and pedagogical mechanisms. Terminology databases such as IATE and UNTERM provide preferred variants, domain tags, and usage notes to guide learners and professionals. In educational settings, instructors must explicitly address synonymy through corpus-based examples, contrastive analysis, and contextualized instruction. Strategies such as semantic mapping, scenario-based exercises, and cross-linguistic comparisons can help learners develop nuanced understanding and accurate usage of synonymous terms. In educational settings, instructors must explicitly address synonymy through corpus-based examples, contrastive analysis, and contextualized instruction. Strategies such as semantic mapping, scenario-based exercises, and cross-linguistic comparisons are widely recommended in vocabulary pedagogy, especially in works like Beck, McKeown, & Kucan (2002). Empirical studies of lexical organization (e.g. Agustín-Llach, 2023) further suggest that cross-linguistic awareness and exposure to multiple contexts help learners develop more nuanced understanding and accurate usage of synonymous terms. In sum, while synonymy enriches specialized discourse, its pedagogical and communicative risks must be carefully managed—especially in multilingual

higher education environments. For EFL learners, mastering terminological synonymy is not merely a matter of vocabulary expansion, but a critical component of disciplinary literacy and conceptual precision.

Polysemy, synonymy, and homonymy collectively represent linguistic-structural phenomena that pose significant constraints on the implementation of terminological standardization. While in general language these features are often celebrated for their lexical richness, expressive flexibility, and cultural nuance, their function in specialized discourse is markedly different. Within domain-specific communication, they act as destabilizing forces, undermining the principle of univocity—the one-to-one correspondence between term and concept—and thereby compromising semantic precision and professional accountability (Temmerman, 2000). Polysemy introduces semantic dispersion by allowing multiple related meanings to coexist within a single term, complicating conceptual clarity. Synonymy increases terminological variability, making it difficult to establish preferred usage and consistent representation across texts and registers. Homonymy, by contrast, generates interpretative ambiguity when a single lexical form denotes entirely distinct concepts across disciplines. Together, these phenomena challenge both the pedagogical and institutional goals of terminology instruction, particularly in multilingual higher education environments where conceptual accuracy and communicative clarity are essential.

Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted with a group of 15 third-year undergraduate students enrolled in the English Philology Bachelor's program at the Faculty of Humanities, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University (BSU). All participants demonstrated B2-level proficiency in English, as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Selection criteria included consistent academic performance in English-medium coursework, ensuring adequate exposure to analytical terminology across disciplines. Prior to data collection, participants were briefed on the study's objectives.

Research Design

A mixed-methods design was employed to investigate the semantic transparency and interpretative challenges associated with English analytical terms among EFL learners. The study integrated both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques across three sequential stages, each targeting a distinct dimension of learners' interaction with specialized vocabulary.

Stage 1: Multiple-Choice Test on Non-Contextualized Analytical Terms Learners were presented with ten analytical terms from The EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary¹ in isolation and asked to select the correct definition from four options. This stage provided an objective measure of term comprehension without contextual support and enabled comparison with self-assessments from Stage 1. Figure 1 shows the extract from stage 1 questionnaire.

Read each item carefully and choose the option that best reflects the meaning of the term.



1. Work permit

- A) Official document allowing a person to work legally in a foreign country
- B) Contract between an employer and employee
- C) A temporary visa for migrant workers
- D) License for opening a company

Fig. 1. Performance on Multiple-Choice Items Featuring Non-Contextualized Analytical Terms

¹ The EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary is an online resource of terms related to migration and asylum in Europe, which improves comparability by enabling a common understanding and use of terms and definitions relating to asylum and migration. It draws on a variety of sources, but primarily on the legislation of the EU asylum and migration acquis, and makes terms available in the majority of EU Member States languages. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary_en

Stage 2: Multiple-Choice Test on Contextualized Analytical Terms In this stage, participants were presented with ten analytical terms (e.g., social security, brain waste, active citizenship, etc.) embedded in short illustrative sentences designed to reflect authentic usage. For each item, students were asked to: 1. Select the most appropriate meaning from four multiple-choice options, based on the contextual cues provided in the sentence. 2. Provide a Georgian equivalent for the term, based on their own background knowledge, intuition, or educated guess. Figure 2 shows the extract from stage 2 questionnaire.

11. **Social security**
Social security plays a central role in shaping inclusive societies and promoting individual well-being.

A) Government-provided financial support for people who are elderly, unemployed, or disabled

B) A system of financial assistance for vulnerable populations

C) Insurance paid by private companies

D) The right of every member of society to exercise economic, social, and cultural rights necessary for personal dignity and individual development, supported by national and international mechanisms

11. **Social security**
Provide a Georgian equivalent for the term, based on your own background knowledge, intuition, or educated guess

Your answer _____

Fig 2. Performance on Multiple-Choice Items Featuring Contextualized Analytical Terms

Stage 3: Questionnaire on Perceptions and Strategies Participants completed a structured questionnaire designed to elicit self-reported data on perceived difficulty, interpretation strategies, retention, and confidence in using analytical terms relative to general vocabulary. The instrument included Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and one open-ended prompt for reflective feedback. This stage aimed to capture learners' subjective experiences and cognitive approaches to specialized terminology. Figure 3 shows the extract from stage 3 questionnaire.

24. What would make learning analytical terms easier for you?

More examples in context

Visual aids/illustrations

Translation into my native language

Comparative analysis with L1 equivalents

Practice exercises (speaking/writing)

Other: _____

Fig. 3. Semantic Transparency and Interpretation Challenges of English Analytical Terms

Procedure

The study was administered during a single 40-minute session in a classroom setting at BSU. The sequence was as follows: 1. Participants first completed Stage 1 (isolated terms test) without prior exposure or discussion of the target vocabulary. 2. Immediately afterward, they proceeded to Stage 2 (contextualized terms test), allowing for direct comparison of comprehension with and without contextual support. 3. Finally, participants completed Stage 3 (questionnaire), reflecting on their experiences and strategies in relation to both test formats.

All responses were anonymized and collected for analysis. Quantitative data from the multiple-choice tests and Likert-scale items were statistically tabulated. Qualitative data from open-ended responses were thematically coded to identify recurring patterns in learner perceptions, challenges, and strategic approaches.

The aim of the study

The primary objective of this study was to examine the semantic opacity and interpretative complexity of English analytical terms for B2-level EFL learners. Specifically, the research sought to: Explore learners' subjective experiences and perceptions of analytical vocabulary; Evaluate comprehension of analytical terms in isolated versus contextualized formats; Assess the pedagogical impact of metadata and contextual cues on term interpretation and last, Identify learner strategies for decoding and retaining specialized vocabulary.

This methodological framework enabled a multidimensional analysis of both cognitive and reflective dimensions of vocabulary acquisition, offering pedagogical insights for enhancing the teaching of analytical terms in EFL contexts.

Results

The responses to Question 24 "What would make learning analytical terms easier for you?" reveal a strong preference among students for learning analytical terms through contextualized examples. Specifically, two-thirds of participants (66.7%) indicated that more examples in context would facilitate their understanding. This suggests that students perceive contextual exposure as the most effective means for grasping the meaning and use of analytical terminology. A smaller, yet notable proportion of students (20%) emphasized the importance of practice exercises involving speaking and writing. This highlights learners' awareness of the value of active engagement and productive use of terms in reinforcing comprehension and retention. In contrast, only a minority of respondents selected comparative analysis with L1 equivalents (6.7%) and visual aids/illustrations (6.7%) as helpful strategies, while no student opted for direct translation into their native language. This indicates a preference for approaches that prioritize contextual and communicative learning over purely visual or translation-based strategies. (see Figure 4)

24. What would make learning analytical terms easier for you?

15 responses

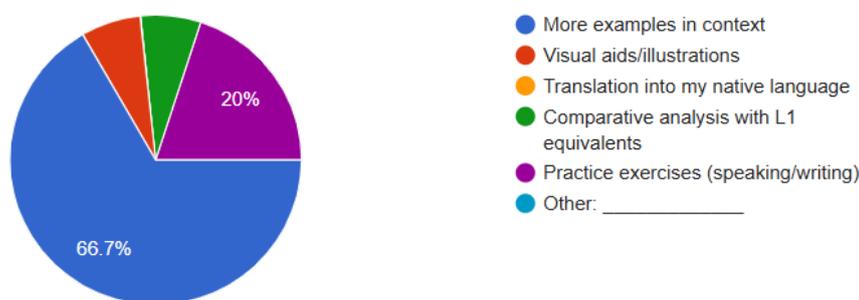


Fig. 4. Student Preferences for Strategies Supporting Analytical Term Comprehension

Taken together, the data demonstrate that students overwhelmingly favor methods that integrate terms into meaningful discourse and allow them to see how these terms function in real contexts, rather than relying on translation or isolated visual representations. This finding aligns with communicative and usage-based approaches to language learning, which argue that authentic input and meaningful practice are central to mastering specialized terminology.

Analysis of Question 25 "How confident do you feel using analytical terms in your own speaking or writing?" suggests that students' confidence in applying analytical terms is generally low. The largest proportion of respondents (40%) reported feeling "not very confident", while an additional 33.3% identified as "neutral" regarding their confidence level. Together, these categories comprise nearly three-quarters of the responses, indicating a widespread lack of strong self-assurance in using analytical terminology productively. A smaller share of students (20%) reported feeling "confident", and only one respondent (6.7%) indicated being "very confident." Notably, no participant selected the option "not confident at all," suggesting that while

confidence is limited, students do not perceive themselves as completely incapable of using such terms. See Figure 5.

25. How confident do you feel using analytical terms in your own speaking or writing?

15 responses

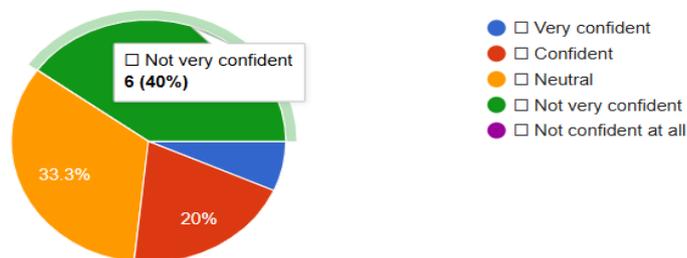


Fig. 5. Student Self-Reported Confidence in Using Analytical Terms

This overall pattern reflects a gap between passive recognition of analytical terms and active, productive use in speaking and writing. The results also underscore the pedagogical challenge of moving learners beyond theoretical understanding toward communicative competence with specialized terminology. The prevalence of neutrality further implies uncertainty among learners, possibly due to inconsistent exposure or limited opportunities for active practice. When responding to the Question 26: "When you first see an analytical term, how often can you guess its meaning correctly without external help?" the majority of respondents (60%) indicated that they can sometimes infer the meaning of analytical terms, while 26.7% reported that they can do so often. Only a small proportion stated that they can guess meanings almost always (6.7%) or rarely (6.7%), and none selected never. See Table 3 below. These results suggest that learners possess a moderate ability to deduce meaning from context or form, but their success is inconsistent, reflecting the partial familiarity and challenges inherent in interpreting specialized terminology.

26. When you first see an analytical term (e.g., **green tax, cultural mediator, operation waste, etc**), how often can you guess its meaning correctly without external help?

15 responses

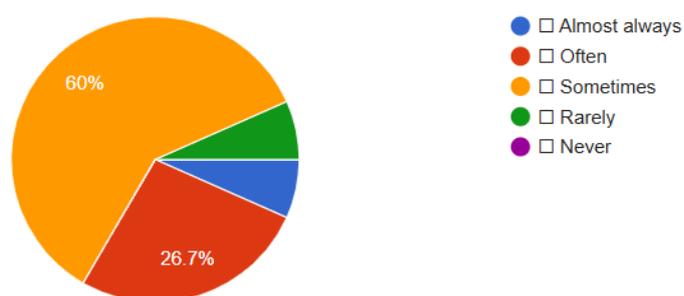


Fig. 6. Reported Frequency of Correct Guessing of Analytical Term Meaning Upon First Encounter

Student responses to two open-ended reflection questions: 1. Did the presence of context make the terms easier or more difficult to interpret? You may describe specific examples, challenges, or strategies that helped or hindered your comprehension. 2. Are there any additional challenges or observations related to learning and interpreting analytical terms that you would like to share, which were not addressed in the previous sections? (Please feel free to describe any personal experiences, difficulties, or suggestions regarding terminology learning.) revealed a strong consensus: contextualization plays a pivotal role in facilitating the comprehension of analytical terms. Across the dataset, learners consistently emphasized that encountering terms within

authentic sentences or situational examples enhanced their ability to interpret meaning, especially when terms were abstract, specialized, or unfamiliar.

As one student succinctly noted, “*Presence of context usually makes the terms easier to understand*” (St 1), while another affirmed, “*Context indeed made terms easier to perceive*” (St 2). Several responses highlighted the inferential value of context, with one learner stating, “*Context is very helpful. It guides to correct interpretation*” (St 4), and another elaborating, “*Context made the terms easier to understand, like ‘unaccompanied minor’ in migration. Without context, terms like ‘operational waste’ can be confusing. I rely on the subject area or related terms to figure out their meaning*” (St 5). These reflections suggest that context not only aids lexical decoding but also activates domain-specific schemata, allowing learners to situate terms within broader conceptual frameworks.

The feedback also revealed that context served as a compensatory mechanism for semantic opacity and polysemy. For example, terms such as *single permit*, *talent partnership*, and *brain waste* were frequently misinterpreted when presented in isolation, but contextual framing narrowed the interpretive field and guided learners toward the intended institutional meaning. As one student explained, “*Some of them made it easier to figure out word’s meaning. All in all it was okay, yes, surely*” (St 3), while another observed, “*I think most of them was easier to guess due to context*” (St 7).

In response to the second reflection prompt, students identified additional challenges in learning analytical terms, particularly those related to abstraction, specialization, and cross-disciplinary variation. One participant noted, “*Analytical terms can be difficult because they are often abstract, long, or specialized (legal, administrative, or technical). Context helps a lot: seeing the term in a sentence or real-life example makes meaning clearer*” (St 1). Another emphasized strategic approaches to comprehension: “*Strategies that help me personally: translation into L1, breaking the term into parts (prefixes/suffixes), comparing with familiar terms, and repeated exposure*” (St 2). Others pointed to the value of multimodal support, stating, “*Visual aids, examples, and practice exercises improve memorability and usage*” (St 3), and “*Analytical terms can be confusing due to their context-dependent meanings. Terms like ‘sustainable return’ can vary across fields (e.g., migration vs. environment). Also, overlapping terms across subjects can cause mix-ups. Real-world examples and case studies would make these terms easier to understand*” (St 4).

Responses to Question 27 reveal that nearly half of the students (46.7%) perceive all domains of analytical terms as equally difficult, suggesting a general challenge with specialized vocabulary irrespective of subject area. Among specific domains, legal/administrative and environmental terms emerged as slightly more problematic than social or economic/technical ones, though none stood out as overwhelmingly difficult on their own. This indicates that learners experience difficulty across disciplinary fields, reflecting a broader issue with interpreting specialized terminology rather than challenges tied to one particular domain. See Figure 7.

27. Which type of analytical terms do you find most difficult to interpret?

15 responses

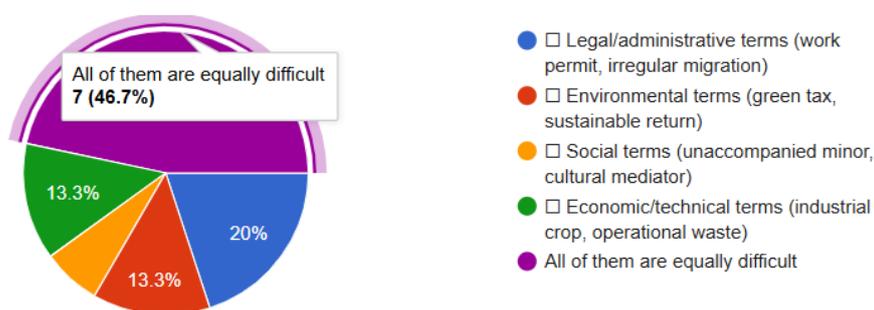


Fig. 7. Student Perceptions of Difficulty Across Analytical Term Domains

Taken together, these reflections underscore the pedagogical importance of contextualization, multimodal reinforcement, and strategic scaffolding in terminology instruction. They affirm that learners benefit from exposure to terms in use—where syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic cues converge to support meaning-making—and that instructional design should prioritize discourse-based approaches over isolated vocabulary presentation. In multilingual higher education settings, such strategies are essential for fostering terminological literacy and enabling learners to engage critically with domain-specific texts.

Discussion

A particularly illustrative case of polysemy-induced misinterpretation emerged in students' responses to the term *single permit*. In the context of EU migration policy, the term is defined as “A residence permit issued by the authorities of an EU Member State after a single application procedure allowing a third-country national to reside legally in its territory for the purpose of work” (Source(s) EMN based on Art. 2(d) of Directive 2011/98/EU (Single Permit Directive) Note(s) A single permit is a combined title encompassing both residence and work permits within a single administrative act based on a common set of rights for third-country workers legally residing in an EU Member State). https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary_en Its Georgian equivalent is ერთიანი ნებართვა, denoting a unified or integrated legal instrument. However, the modifier *single* proved semantically problematic for many participants, as evidenced by the ambiguity reflected in EFL learners' responses (see Figure 8)

Single Permit

“With a single permit, a foreign worker can both live and work legally in the host country.”

What does the term *single permit* most accurately refer to in this context?

15 responses

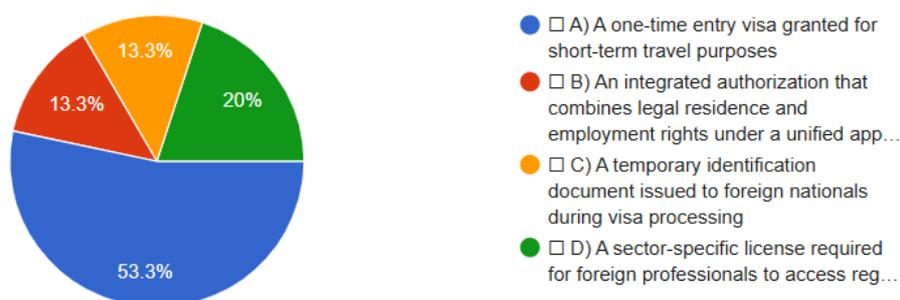


Fig. 8. Analytical Term Single Permit in Context

The confusion appears to stem from the polysemous nature of *single*, which in English may denote unified, individual, isolated, or one-time, depending on context. In Georgian, this ambiguity is mirrored in the contrast between ერთიანი [ertiani] (unified, integrated) and ერთჯერადი [ertjeradi] (one-time, non-recurring)—both plausible equivalents depending on the interpretive frame. Students frequently interpreted *single permit* as a temporary or one-off authorization (ერთჯერადი ნებართვა) [ertjeradi nebartva], rather than recognizing its institutional meaning as a consolidated legal mechanism that combines residence and employment rights.

This misreading suggests that learners relied on the more frequent or familiar sense of *single* as “one-time,” rather than engaging with its policy-specific meaning as “unified.” The error highlights a core challenge in terminology acquisition: polysemous modifiers embedded in compound terms can obscure the conceptual integrity of the whole, particularly when learners attempt to translate or interpret based on surface-level lexical cues. Without contextual framing or definitional support, such modifiers may activate misleading associations, leading to semantic drift and conceptual misalignment. This case underscores the pedagogical importance of metadata and contextual framing in terminology instruction. Without explicit guidance on domain-specific usage, learners may default to literal or general-language interpretations, leading to semantic drift and conceptual misalignment. Moreover, it reveals the limitations of intuitive translation strategies in multilingual educational settings, where terminological precision is essential for legal, administrative, and policy-related comprehension. As Faber and León-Araúz (2016) argue, polysemy in specialized terms must be addressed through contextual disambiguation and definitional clarity, particularly when modifiers carry multiple semantic loads across languages.

In sum, the misinterpretation of *single permit* exemplifies how polysemy can disrupt learners' ability to accurately decode analytical terms, even when the term appears structurally transparent. It calls for targeted instructional strategies that foreground semantic nuance, cross-linguistic contrast, and institutional framing—especially in domains where terminological accuracy has legal and procedural implications.

A particularly revealing instance of terminological misinterpretation emerged with the term *talent partnership*, for which only 3 out of 15 student responses matched the correct institutional definition. The Georgian equivalent—პარტნიორობა სწავლისა და დასაქმებისთვის [partnioroba scavlisა da dasakmebistvis] (partnership for study and employment) —captures the term's intended meaning within EU migration and labor policy. According to official EU documentation, talent partnership refers to “Comprehensive EU policy framework as well as funding support for cooperation with third countries to better match labour and skills needs in the EU aimed at enhancing legal migration and mobility with key partners. Source(s) European Commission: Communication on a New Pact on Migration and Asylum, COM(2020) 609 final Note(s) 1. Talent partnerships should be launched first in the EU's Neighbourhood, the Western Balkans, and in Africa, with a view to expanding to other regions. 2. The Talent Partnerships require engagement of EU Member States, involvement of the private sector and the social partners, and ownership from partner countries”. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary_en. This definition reflects a complex, policy-driven construct that is not semantically transparent to learners unfamiliar with its institutional context. Figure 9 below illustrates the range of student misinterpretations.

“Through the **talent Partnership**, the EU collaborates with selected third countries to align labor market needs and qualifications, promoting legal migration and mobility.”

What does the term **Talent Partnership** most accurately refer to in this context?

15 responses

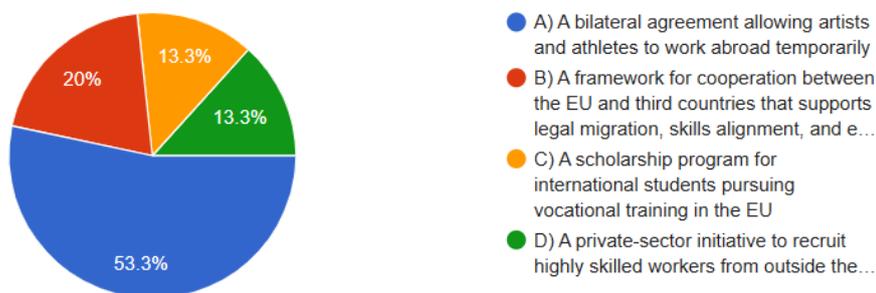


Fig. 9. Analytical Term Talent Partnership in Context

The difficulty encountered by students was both predictable and instructive. The lexical form Talent Partnership offers little semantic guidance without contextual framing. The modifier *talent* may evoke notions of individual skill or giftedness, while *partnership* suggests a general collaborative arrangement. However, in EU policy discourse, the term refers to a structured, multilateral framework involving migration governance, labor market integration, and educational alignment. Without access to this institutional context, learners are likely to interpret the term in its general-language sense, leading to conceptual misalignment. This case underscores a broader challenge in terminology instruction: the opacity of compound terms whose meanings are institutionally constructed rather than lexically inferable. Unlike terms with partial semantic transparency, Talent Partnership requires metadata, definitional support, and policy context to be accurately understood. Its misinterpretation by students reveals the limitations of intuitive decoding strategies and highlights the need for explicit instructional scaffolding when teaching policy-related analytical terms.

From a pedagogical standpoint, this example reinforces the importance of embedding analytical terms within authentic discourse and providing learners with domain-specific framing. As Temmerman (2000) and Faber (2019) argue, terminological comprehension depends not only on lexical recognition but on conceptual anchoring within disciplinary and institutional systems. For EFL learners, especially those engaging with legal,

policy, or migration-related texts, semantic opacity can obstruct both comprehension and critical engagement. Addressing this requires a shift from vocabulary-based instruction to concept-based pedagogy, where terms are introduced alongside their functional roles, institutional relevance, and cross-linguistic equivalents. In sum, the misinterpretation of *talent partnership* illustrates how terminological opacity—particularly in policy-driven compound terms—can hinder learners’ ability to access and engage with specialized discourse. It calls for instructional strategies that foreground context, institutional framing, and conceptual clarity, especially in multilingual higher education environments where analytical terms serve as gateways to disciplinary knowledge and civic understanding.

One particularly illustrative cases —*brain waste*—revealed how homonymy and semantic opacity can significantly hinder EFL learners’ accurate interpretation of analytical terms. These examples underscore the cognitive and linguistic challenges posed by compound terms whose components carry multiple meanings across general and specialized discourse. The term *brain waste* refers to “The non-recognition of the skills (and qualifications) acquired by a migrant outside of the EU, which prevents them from fully using their potential. Source(s) EMN based on footnote 28 of European Commission: Communication on Migration and Development, COM(2005) 390 final” https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary_en. In Georgian, the concept aligns most closely with უნარ-ჩვევების დაუფასებლობა [unar-chvevebis daufasebloba] or უნარების გაუფასურება [unarebis gaufasureba]. However, student responses included გონების დაქვეითება [gonebsi dakveiteba] (“cognitive decline”) and ტვინების გადინება [tvinebis gadineba] (“brain drain”), indicating a misinterpretation rooted in the homonymous nature of the word waste. The term waste in English is polysemous, encompassing meanings such as physical refuse, misuse, deterioration, and loss. In this context, waste denotes underutilization or non-recognition of human capital, yet students interpreted it through more literal or biomedical lenses—associating it with mental degradation or emigration. This confusion illustrates how homonymy within compound terms can obscure conceptual meaning, especially when learners rely on surface-level lexical cues rather than institutional context. This case highlights the interpretative risks associated with semantically opaque terms, particularly those embedded in legal or policy discourse. As Temmerman (2000) notes, such terms require explicit semantic framing to prevent interpretative drift and ensure terminological precision. Without definitional guidance and contextual anchoring, learners may default to familiar or culturally salient meanings, thereby missing the conceptual scope of the term. As Faber and León-Araúz (2016) emphasize, terminological instruction must address not only lexical recognition but also the cognitive and cultural dimensions of meaning construction.

6. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that the interpretation of English analytical terms by EFL learners is shaped by a constellation of semantic, cognitive, and contextual factors. Through a multidimensional analysis of polysemy, homonymy, and semantic opacity, the research revealed that even structurally simple or seemingly transparent terms—such as *single permit*, *talent partnership*, and *brain waste*—can pose significant challenges when stripped of institutional framing or contextual support.

The questionnaire findings strongly reinforce these observations. When asked what would make analytical terms easier to learn, the vast majority of students (66.7%) emphasized the importance of contextualized examples, while others valued practice-based exercises (20%), and only a small minority favored visual or L1-comparative approaches. This pattern highlights that learners themselves recognize contextualization as central to comprehension. At the same time, responses concerning confidence in using analytical terms revealed that most learners positioned themselves as either not very confident (40%) or neutral (33.3%), with only a few reporting confidence. Similarly, when asked about their ability to infer meaning without external help, most students indicated success only sometimes (60%) or often (26.7%), suggesting limited but developing inferential strategies. Finally, when identifying which types of analytical terms were most difficult, nearly half of respondents (46.7%) viewed all domains as equally challenging, pointing to a generalized difficulty that transcends disciplinary boundaries rather than being confined to specific fields such as law, environment, or economics.

Taken together, these findings underscore that learners often rely on surface-level lexical cues, general-language associations, or intuitive translation strategies, which can lead to conceptual misalignment with the intended meaning of policy-driven terminology. Misinterpretations were particularly pronounced when modifiers carried multiple semantic loads or when terms operated within specialized legal, administrative, or

migration frameworks. Student reflections and survey results converge on the point that authentic discourse, contextual examples, and domain-specific cues are indispensable for accurate comprehension and confident application.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the study calls for a shift from vocabulary-based instruction to concept-based terminology teaching. Educators should prioritize definitional clarity, cross-linguistic contrast, and institutional anchoring, while also integrating multimodal scaffolding, comparative analysis, and practice-based reinforcement. The learners' responses show that confidence develops not through isolated memorization but through repeated exposure to real-world contexts and opportunities for productive use in speaking and writing. Such strategies are vital not only for ensuring linguistic accuracy but also for enabling learners to engage critically with disciplinary knowledge and to participate meaningfully in academic and civic discourse.

At a broader level, the research highlights that in multilingual higher education settings, where terminological precision intersects with legal and policy literacy, fostering semantic awareness and interpretive competence is both an academic and ethical imperative. Addressing these challenges is particularly important in fields such as law, migration studies, and public policy, where misunderstanding terminology may have consequences that extend beyond the classroom.

Future research should investigate how these challenges manifest across different domains, languages, and learner profiles, with particular attention to the role of digital resources, collaborative learning environments, and corpus-based tools in terminology acquisition. A longitudinal perspective would also help track how interpretive competence develops over time, offering insights for curriculum design and assessment.

In sum, this study emphasizes that analytical terms are not merely linguistic units but cognitive and cultural constructs embedded in institutional practices. Supporting learners in navigating these complexities requires pedagogy that is context-sensitive, cognitively responsive, and ethically grounded—an approach that recognizes terminology learning as central to both linguistic development and informed global citizenship.

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