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## ■ DIDACTICS OF SPECIALISED TRANSLATION – FROM MEMORISATION TO CONTEXTUAL LEARNING

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Ovaj rad razmatra ključne izazove u didaktici stručnog prevođenja i predlaže integrisani model nastave koji povezuje teorijsko znanje, kontekstualizovano usvajanje terminologije i sistematsku primenu specijalizovanih korpusa. U tradicionalnoj univerzitetskoj praksi i dalje prevlađuje pristup zasnovan na memorisanju izolovanih termina i učenju terminologije u formi glosara, pri čemu ostaju zanemareni polisemija, kolokacione veze, pragmatičke funkcije termina i širi semantički okvir u kojem se oni koriste. Takav reduktivan pristup dovodi do toga da studenti prepoznaju termin na površinskom nivou, ali ga u prevodilačkoj praksi ne umeju adekvatno primeniti, naročito u pravno-institucionalnom diskursu Evropske unije, koji zahteva preciznost, ustaljenu terminologiju i funkcionalnu usklađenost. Metodologija obuhvata komparativnu analizu, ATA okvir za procenu grešaka i rad sa dvojezičnim korpusima. Studentski prevodi analizirani su segment po segment, u poređenju sa izvornim tekstovima i odgovarajućim prevodima iz Evroteke, što je omogućilo jasno uočavanje terminoloških, semantičkih i stilskih odstupanja. ATA okvir obezbedio je objektivno i konzistentno kategorizovanje grešaka u smislu prenosa značenja, upotrebe terminologije, idiomatske prirodnosti i funkcionalne adekvatnosti, dok je Evroteka poslužila kao empirijski izvor potvrđenih kolokacija, frazeologije i prevodilačkih obrazaca karakterističnih za pravni diskurs EU. Rezultati pokazuju naglašen raskorak između studentskog teorijskog znanja o datom terminu i njihove sposobnosti da ga pravilno inkorporiraju u autentičan kontekst. Najčešće greške uključuju doslovna tumačenja polisemičnih termina, interferenciju lažnih prijatelja, neadekvatne pravne formulacije i pogrešna razumevanja ključnih koncepata, poput „nadležnosti“, „ovlašćenja“ i „sprovođenja“. Rad zaključuje da uspešna nastava stručnog prevođenja mora biti zasnovana na dinamički integrisanom modelu koji spaja teoriju, vođenu praksu i korpusnu analizu, uz jasne i transparentne kriterijume vrednovanja u skladu sa profesionalnim standardima.

Ključne reči: stručno prevođenje, terminologija, polisemija, kolokacije, korpusna analiza, ATA okvir, procena kvaliteta prevoda, prevodilačke strategije.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalised world, demand is steadily increasing for precise and effective communication across professional fields such as law, medicine, engineering, and finance. Specialised translation plays a pivotal role in facilitating this communication by bridging linguistic and cultural gaps in complex, technical domains. This task requires more than basic bilingual competence; it demands a combination of linguistic precision, deep subject-matter expertise, and pragmatic awareness to ensure that translations are not only accurate but also coherent, fluent, and contextually appropriate.

However, traditional pedagogical approaches to teaching specialised translation often fall short of equipping students with these comprehensive competencies. Many didactic models place disproportionate emphasis on the memorisation of terminology lists and the use of glossaries, while underestimating the importance of subject-matter knowledge, contextual nuance, and phraseological competence. Even familiar terms within a chosen field are rarely analysed for their polysemous meanings, and collocational patterns, essential for producing natural and idiomatic translations, are typically overlooked. Furthermore, students' mastery of the target language, particularly when it is their mother tongue, is frequently taken for granted, with insufficient attention to genre conventions, register, and discourse cohesion. Even though didactics overemphasises terminology, students end up weak both terminologically and stylistically. These limitations risk producing graduates who, despite an overreliance on terminology-focused training, lack both accurate terminological knowledge and linguistic and textual competence needed for professional specialised translation.

Despite the centrality of specialised translation in professional practice, little empirical research has examined how current pedagogical models fail to integrate terminology, subject-matter expertise, and target-language fluency in a balanced and effective manner.

The aim of this paper is to critically evaluate current pedagogical practices in specialised translation, demonstrate their shortcomings through empirical examples drawn from student translations, and propose a more integrated framework that combines subject-matter expertise, terminological accuracy, and fluent target-language production. Through a classroom-based case study, the paper illustrates common challenges faced by students and assesses the effectiveness of an enriched teaching approach. By combining theoretical insights with practical evidence, this study seeks to contribute to the refinement of specialised translation didactics and to offer clear directions for future pedagogical research and practice.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW ON HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES IN TRANSLATION DIDACTICS

According to Dorothy Kelly (2014), for much of the history of translator training, it was assumed that translation competence would emerge naturally through practice alone. Early trainers, often practitioners themselves, rarely engaged in pedagogical planning, relying instead on spontaneous oral translations of texts and offering their own versions as unquestioned models. This method, lacking structured instruction and reflection, proved both pedagogically unsound and frustrating for learners (Kelly 2014: 11).

Kelly (2014) provides a historical overview showing how translator pedagogy moved from unstructured, teacher-led drills to more learner- and process-oriented methods. For decades trainers assumed students would learn simply “by translating,” correcting students’ output after the fact. Christiane Nord (1991) insisted that classroom tasks simulate real translation commissions and carry a meaningful purpose (asking students “Who is to transmit... what for... by what medium... to what effect?”) (Nord 1991: 144). Kelly notes Nord’s model is “very complete and explicitly didactic,” clearly moving pedagogy toward a “student-centred paradigm” with “professional realism in the classroom”. Nord also stresses gradual competence-building, with significant teacher guidance early on to keep authentic tasks feasible and motivating. Importantly, Nord insisted that training focus on the translation process, not merely on final products. (Nord 1991: 143–144). Daniel Gile’s process-oriented model epitomised this shift. He argues that teachers should “focus on the translation process, not the end product” (Gile 1995: 14), isolating components of the task (e.g. comprehension, strategies, drafting) in targeted practice. Gile shows that this approach leads to faster learning – students can “focus... on one aspect of the process at a time” and avoid being overwhelmed by all errors at once (Gile 1995: 15). In sum, Kelly’s historical account highlights how Nord’s realistic task design, and Gile’s process-model collectively shifted translator training toward well-defined goals, authentic assignments, and reflective, learner-centered instruction (Kelly 2014: 11–14).

Kelly (2014) continues her historical account by exploring how cognitive and psycholinguistic research influenced translator training from the 1980s onward. Scholars such as Kiraly advocated pedagogical frameworks rooted in cognitive science, where training emphasised the development of interlingual and intercultural associations, guided error analysis, and the cultivation of intuitive and reflective skills. The goal was to foster a translator’s self-concept and internal monitor, and to recognise that higher-level translation competence rarely develops naturally without specific intervention (Kiraly 1995).

Kiraly (2000), in his later work embraced a *socioconstructivist* approach, advocating collaborative learning and authentic translation projects as entry points into the professional community. Rather than building skills through isolated exercises, he called for holistic, practice-based learning from the outset.

These evolving pedagogical models reflect a broader shift from atomistic, skill-based training toward integrated, learner-centered approaches in translator education. The progression from task-based learning to socioconstructivist models reveals increasing recognition of translation as both a cognitive and social practice. What emerges from this overview is the importance of aligning teaching methods with the complexity of translation as a professional activity. While the early emphasis on discrete competencies provided necessary structure, later approaches highlight the value of experiential learning, collaboration, and authentic context. Importantly, these models are not mutually exclusive but rather address different dimensions of learning and stages of student development. This theoretical foundation proves particularly relevant when addressing one of the most persistent areas of confusion in both teaching and practice: the distinction between specialised and technical translation. The following section explores this conceptual and practical divide, which has significant implications for curriculum design, student expectations, and professional readiness.

## 2.1. SPECIALISED TRANSLATION VS. TECHNICAL TRANSLATION

Specialised translation is an umbrella term that refers to the translation of texts dealing with specific subject matter, often requiring domain-specific knowledge and terminology. It includes a broad range of fields such as legal, medical, economic, scientific, and technical texts. The focus is on accuracy, domain competence, and terminological consistency.

Technical translation, on the other hand, is a subtype of specialised translation that deals specifically with technical subjects – such as engineering, IT, mechanics, electronics, and applied sciences. It typically involves manuals, product specifications, data sheets, standard operating procedures, and other documents intended for professional users or end-users of technology.

Theresa Cabré (1999) notes that specialised translation is “the translation of texts that contain a high degree of terminological density and require subject-area knowledge” (Cabré 1999: 47–48). Newmark (1988) considers technical translation to be a part of specialised translation, distinct from institutional translation (Newmark 1988: 151).

According to Jody Byrne (2006):

Technical translation has long been regarded as the ugly duckling of translation, especially in academic circles. Not particularly exciting or attractive and definitely lacking in the glamour and cachet of other types of translation, technical translation is often relegated to the bottom division of translation activity and regarded as little more than an exercise in specialised terminology and subject knowledge. Indeed, these factors, particularly subject knowledge, have in some quarters led to technical translation being feared and loathed, like a modern-day barbarian of the linguistic world (Byrne 2006: 1)

Byrne emphasises that technical translation should be strictly understood as the translation of technological content, rather than being broadly applied to any field with specialised terminology. She criticises the tendency to group legal, financial, or economic texts under the technical translation umbrella, arguing that although such texts are specialised, they do not deal with technology *per se*. For instance, religious texts also have distinct terminology and conventions, yet they are never considered technical. Byrne warns that blurring this distinction is misleading, as each specialised domain has its own specific requirements and constraints that must be addressed individually.

Byrne challenges several widespread misconceptions about technical translation. One is the overemphasis on terminology. While terminology is a prominent feature of technical texts and plays a crucial role in conveying meaning, it actually represents only a small portion – around 5–10% – of a text’s content, as Newmark (1988) argues. Despite this, terminology often receives disproportionate attention in translation practice. Another mistaken belief is that style is irrelevant in technical translation. Byrne refutes this, stressing that linguistic precision and appropriate writing style are just as essential in technical contexts as in any other type of translation. Lastly, he critiques the idea that technical translators must be subject-matter experts in highly specialised fields. Citing Robinson (2003), Byrne explains that successful translators often work across various fields by developing solid foundational knowledge and researching as needed

– essentially learning to “act the part” with competence and adaptability (Byrne 2006: 2–3).

Having distinguished technical translation from other forms of specialised translation, it is important to turn our attention to legal translation – another highly specialised field that brings its own set of linguistic, functional, and cultural complexities.

## 2.2. LEGAL TRANSLATION AS A TYPE OF SPECIALISED TRANSLATION

A clear example of the growing significance of legal translation can be seen within the European Union (EU). Multilingualism and linguistic equality among the Member States have been the central principles since the EU's establishment. This linguistic and cultural diversity gives the EU its distinct character (Wilson, 2003). The European Parliament, as the law-making body, enacts laws that become binding national laws for Member States. These laws are translated and made available in the official languages of the Member States. Therefore, translation is essential for the operations of the European Parliament, as EU laws cannot function without translation (Correia 2003) (as cited in Cao 2007: 2).

A special purpose register should not be regarded as a completely distinct language, but rather as the standard language adapted to specific contexts and purposes. It is characterised by a range of identifiable features such as syntactic, lexical, semantic, functional, and cohesive elements which tend to appear with varying frequency depending on the communicative situation. These patterns of usage distinguish the register as a linguistic sub-system (Ingram/Wylie 1991: 39).

Legal language can be regarded as a specialised register with technical characteristics. While it is rooted in general language, it diverges from everyday language through distinct lexical, syntactic, textual, and pragmatic features that define its unique status as a form of technical language (Cao 2007: 18).

Many descriptions have been offered of what the legal translator should be like and what skills such a translator should possess. Often, it is said that the legal translator requires both linguistic skills and some basic understanding of law. Smith (1995) believes that there are three prerequisites for successful translation of legal texts: (1) the legal translator must acquire a basic knowledge of the legal systems, both in the SL and TL; (2) must possess familiarity with the relevant terminology; and (3) must be competent in the TL-specific legal writing style. Another slightly different description of the requirements is that the legal translator must possess the ability to retrieve information from the specialised SL, and the ability to process information (Wagner 2003). In other words, the legal translator must understand all the shades of meaning of the SL so that he or she may reproduce it as faithfully and naturally as possible in the TL, and must understand all the mechanisms of the law... (Cao 2007: 37).

In sum, legal translation is a highly specialised domain that requires more than mere linguistic proficiency; it demands familiarity with legal systems, mastery of terminology, and the ability to accurately reflect legal meaning across languages and legal cultures. These complexities underline the need for careful training and methodical instruction in specialised translation. This brings us to a closely related issue: how teaching methods align with students' learning styles. The effectiveness of translation pedagogy often hinges on whether the instructional approach resonates with the cognitive preferences

and learning strategies of students. In the following section, we explore this dynamic relationship and consider how tailoring teaching methods to diverse learning styles can enhance the acquisition of specialised translation skills.

### 3. THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN TEACHING METHODS AND LEARNING STRATEGIES IN TRANSLATION TRAINING

The way specialised translation is taught significantly shapes how students come to understand and approach it. Pedagogical methods are not neutral; they actively influence students' perceptions of what matters in specialised translation – whether it is the mastery of terminology, the imitation of model texts, or the development of subject-matter competence. This connection is particularly evident at the undergraduate level, where students' learning strategies and expectations are still forming and where the grading system plays a powerful role in reinforcing certain norms and behaviours. For example, a teacher who emphasises terminological precision over contextual analysis may inadvertently lead students to adopt a reductive view of specialised translation as a mechanical transfer of terms rather than a complex, interpretive act. Consequently, the didactic approach adopted by instructors does more than transmit knowledge – it shapes the very skills, strategies, and attitudes that future translators carry into professional practice. Understanding this dynamic is essential for developing pedagogical frameworks that align with the real demands of specialised translation.

Moreover, the assessment strategies employed in specialised translation courses further reinforce specific attitudes toward the learning process. A grading system that rewards accuracy of terms over textual cohesion or contextual reasoning may implicitly discourage critical thinking and creativity, encouraging students to focus narrowly on glossary-matching exercises. This can lead to a superficial understanding of translation, where success is measured by terminological correctness rather than the ability to convey meaning within a broader communicative and disciplinary context.

Additionally, students' learning strategies tend to adapt to the expectations set by the teacher's methodology. For instance, in classrooms that heavily rely on static bilingual glossaries and model translations, students often become passive learners, dependent on memorisation and replication rather than active engagement with the complexities of the source and target texts. In contrast, when pedagogical approaches include collaborative translation tasks, critical reflection, and exposure to authentic domain-specific texts, students are more likely to develop analytical skills and strategies necessary for dealing with the multifaceted nature of specialised translation.

Therefore, the link between teaching practices and student learning strategies should not be underestimated. It has a profound impact on students' attitudes toward specialised translation and on the competencies they develop. Instructors need to be aware that the way they design their courses, structure their assignments, and assess student performance will shape not only the learners' academic success but also their long-term professional development as translators.

Schäffner and Adab (2000) outline a comprehensive model of translation competence that underpins the structure of undergraduate translator training programmes. Their framework includes six interrelated components: linguistic competence in both the source and target languages; cultural competence encompassing general knowledge



of the historical, political, and socio-cultural contexts of the relevant countries; textual competence, defined as familiarity with the conventions of various text types, genres, and discourse structures; and domain-specific or subject knowledge relevant to the translation task. In addition to these, they emphasise the importance of (re)search competence – referring to the translator's ability to identify and resolve problems that arise in cross-cultural transfer – and transfer competence, which entails producing target texts that meet the functional requirements of the translation brief. This holistic perspective demonstrates how translation competence extends beyond linguistic accuracy, integrating broader cognitive and contextual skills essential for professional practice (Schäffner/Adab 2000: 146).

Schäffner and Adab (2000), citing Anderman (1998), raise a critical issue in translator education: attempting to develop translation competence in students who are not yet linguistically proficient or culturally informed may be akin to making them run before they can walk. Yet, Schäffner and Adab also question the widespread assumption that translation competence should only be addressed once students have acquired full mastery of both working languages. Postponing translation training until the postgraduate level presents its own difficulties, particularly because students often enter such programmes with preconceived notions of translation shaped by their earlier experiences. At school and undergraduate levels, translation is frequently used as a language-learning device aimed at vocabulary acquisition, grammatical control, and reading comprehension rather than as a professional skill. These pedagogical translation exercises do not equip students with the broader set of competences required for professional practice. Consequently, students who advance to postgraduate translation programmes must often “unlearn” what they thought translation entailed. Schäffner and Adab's observations suggest that carefully scaffolded training should begin earlier in the educational pathway, so that students not only develop translation-related skills progressively, but also cultivate a more realistic and professional understanding of what translation involves from the outset (Schäffner/Adab 2000: 144).

This unlearning process highlights the indispensable role of theoretical knowledge in shaping competent translators. A solid theoretical foundation not only helps students reframe their understanding of translation but also equips them to make informed decisions in practice. It encourages critical reflection on the nature of equivalence, fidelity, cultural transfer, and the functional purpose of texts – all essential concepts that influence practical outcomes. Far from being abstract or dispensable, translation theory provides the conceptual tools necessary to navigate the complexities of real-world translation tasks. Without this grounding, students risk treating translation as a mechanical or purely linguistic activity, rather than as a dynamic, context-sensitive process requiring both cognitive and strategic competence.

The preceding discussion has shown how students often enter specialised translation programmes with preconceived and limited notions of translation shaped by prior language instruction. Addressing this requires more than just practical training. It calls for an integrated pedagogical approach – one that combines practice with theoretical reflection. The next section explores the role of theoretical knowledge in translator education, arguing that far from being an abstract exercise, theory plays a vital role in shaping informed, reflective, and professionally competent translators.

#### 4. THE ROLE OF THEORY IN TRANSLATOR EDUCATION

While hands-on practice remains a central component of translator training, it is increasingly recognised that theoretical knowledge must underpin this practice. Teaching methods that incorporate basic theoretical principles enable students to understand translation as a purposeful, context-sensitive activity rather than a mere linguistic exercise.

It is essential that students of specialised translation are introduced to fundamental translation strategies and techniques, not with the expectation that they apply them indiscriminately, but rather to develop an informed awareness of their scope and relevance. Although such strategies are often covered in undergraduate translation or language courses, students frequently fail to establish connections between these theoretical components and their practical translation work. Instead, they tend to treat these courses as isolated hurdles to be passed, rather than as integral to their development as translators. A more reflective understanding of translation strategies would enable students to critically evaluate their choices, narrowing the range of techniques to those that are truly applicable to specialised translation contexts. Familiarity with established taxonomies, such as those proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), Newmark (1988), or Hlebec (2009), can provide a conceptual framework for navigating translation problems and making informed decisions. Moreover, this type of theoretical grounding enhances students' ability to articulate and justify their translation choices. It equips them with the metalanguage necessary to evaluate their own work and that of others, a skill that becomes particularly relevant when assessing translation quality, which will be explored in more detail in the following section.

Fawcett (2003) argues that a translator's limited ability to articulate their decision-making process, particularly in terms of translation strategies, can restrict the quality of both their internal reasoning and their output. While skilled translators may intuitively apply techniques such as hyponymic or antonymic translation, a lack of precise terminology can lead to vague self-assessments based on subjective impressions like "sounding right" or "flowing well". Drawing on insights from psycholinguistics, he suggests that enhancing a translator's metalanguage could improve performance, particularly in challenging translation moments. Although Komissarov cautions that the ability to verbalise one's processes does not equate to the ability to translate effectively, Fawcett maintains that intuition alone can be misleading. He contends that translation theory, when understood not as a constraint but as a corrective and enriching framework, can refine intuition and lead to more consistent, conscious, and ultimately better translation practice. In this view, the "art" of translation evolves from the practical application and internalisation of its theoretical foundations (Fawcett 2003: 50–52).

Theoretical knowledge of translation is not only essential for developing students' competence as translators, but also plays a crucial role in how their translation work is assessed. In order for students to meaningfully engage with feedback and develop professionally, it is important that they recognise assessment criteria as grounded in objective standards rather than as expressions of the teacher's personal preferences. A key element of the author's teaching approach is to demystify the evaluation process by showing students that the criteria applied in assessing their work are drawn from established translation theory and internationally recognised grading frameworks,



such as those used by the American Translators Association. By making the underlying rationale transparent, students are encouraged to view evaluation not as a subjective judgment, but as a structured reflection of the principles and techniques they are expected to master. This understanding fosters greater trust in the learning process and empowers students to critically reflect on their own translations using a shared professional and academic vocabulary.

## 5. TRANSLATION EVALUATION: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

A structured and transparent approach to assessment is a crucial component of translator training, especially in specialised translation. Once students are equipped with a basic understanding of translation theory and key strategies, this knowledge must be reinforced through clear and consistent evaluation practices. It is important that students perceive assessment not as a subjective judgment based on individual teacher preferences, but as an objective process rooted in established theoretical frameworks and professional standards. In this context, internationally recognised evaluation models, such as those proposed by the American Translators Association (ATA), offer a valuable benchmark. These models help both educators and students align their expectations and foster a shared understanding of what constitutes a high-quality translation. The following section outlines the ATA's assessment criteria and explores how they can be integrated into classroom practice to support fair and constructive feedback.

One of the main purposes of introducing objective assessment criteria is to give students a clear understanding of what constitutes a good translation and what they should be aiming to achieve. A key step in this process is presenting them with a working definition of a successful translation, such as that provided by the American Translators Association, so they develop a concrete reference point for quality. Once this standard is established, students must also become aware of the types of errors that typically detract from translation quality. This dual awareness, of both the target and the pitfalls, helps guide their learning and self-assessment. In terms of grading, the distinction between prescriptive and descriptive approaches often becomes blurred in real-world educational settings. While a purely descriptive approach may lack clarity and consistency, an overly rigid prescriptive model can ignore context and stifle nuanced judgment. Therefore, a balanced approach is essential, one that is firmly grounded in clearly defined criteria, yet flexible enough to account for textual and situational variables. Such clarity is especially important at the undergraduate level, where students benefit from explicit, transparent feedback and are often frustrated by perceived ambiguity or inconsistency in evaluation.

In teaching specialised translation, the author of this paper adopts the working definition provided by Koby et al. (2014: 416–417), which states that a high-quality translation is one “in which the message embodied in the source text is transferred completely into the target text, including denotation, connotation, nuance, and style, and the target text is written in the target language using correct grammar and word order, to produce a culturally appropriate text that, in most cases, reads as if originally written by a native speaker of the target language for readers in the target culture.” This comprehensive definition emphasizes the multifaceted nature of translation quality, highlighting the importance of accuracy, cultural appropriateness, and linguistic fluency.

To operationalise this definition in the classroom, the author incorporates the American Translators Association (ATA) grading charts as a practical framework for assessment. These charts provide students with clearly defined criteria and categories for evaluating translation quality, helping to demystify the grading process by anchoring it in widely recognized professional standards. This approach enables students to see assessment as an objective, systematic process rather than a subjective judgment, fostering a more critical and informed engagement with their own work.

Together, the theoretical clarity offered by Koby et al.'s definition and the practical guidance of the ATA criteria empower students to understand what constitutes a good translation and to develop the skills necessary to meet these standards consistently.

The ATA grading framework distinguishes errors that pertain to the correct use of the target language itself (grammar, spelling, punctuation – i.e., *Target Language Mechanics*) from those that affect the accurate transmission of meaning from the source text to the target text (i.e., *Meaning Transfer*). While both categories are interrelated – because poor grammar can sometimes distort meaning, and a mistranslation may also violate syntactic norms – the ATA separates them for the sake of clearer evaluation.

Even in the final year of their undergraduate studies, students may still lack a clear understanding of how closely a specialised translation should adhere to the source text. It is therefore essential for instructors to clarify the distinction between accuracy and literalness, and to emphasise that free translation is generally not acceptable in the context of specialised translation. This highlights the importance of basic theoretical and linguistic knowledge, including concepts such as synonymy, near-synonymy, semantic fields, superordinates and hyponyms, denotation and connotation, polysemy, and collocations. Collocations are particularly important because specialised texts often rely on conventional word pairings that contribute to naturalness and precision in the target language. Similarly, polysemy, the phenomenon of words having multiple related meanings, requires careful attention to context and domain-specific usage. The teacher's role, therefore, is not only to introduce these linguistic categories but also to apply them to real translation problems, helping students develop analytical strategies for making informed, justifiable choices rather than relying on intuition or superficial equivalence.

Raising students' awareness of translation standards that are grounded in objective, recognised criteria is a crucial component of specialised translation training. Without this foundation, assessment risks being perceived, and at times truly becoming, an arbitrary reflection of a single teacher's personal preferences rather than a reflection of professional norms. This lack of transparency can lead to confusion, mistrust, and a superficial understanding of what constitutes a high-quality translation. By introducing students to established frameworks, such as the American Translators Association's grading criteria, and by explicitly linking assessment to theoretical and practical standards, educators can foster a clearer, more consistent, and more professionally relevant understanding of translation quality. In doing so, they empower students to evaluate their own work more critically and to recognise translation not merely as an academic exercise, but as a discipline with shared benchmarks and expectations.

Having established the theoretical and pedagogical framework that underpins the teaching and assessment of specialised translation, the next section turns to practical application.

## 6. METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this paper integrates several complementary approaches. First, a comparative (contrastive) analysis is conducted through a systematic segment-by-segment comparison of the source text and the students' translations. This is followed by an error analysis based on the ATA error-marking framework, which provides a structured evaluative grid for identifying and categorizing translation errors. Finally, a corpus-based comparison is carried out using Evroteka<sup>2</sup> as the principal reference tool and source, enabling verification of terminology, phraseology, and established translation patterns in EU legal discourse.

The following case studies present selected examples of student translations, drawn from real classroom scenarios, with the aim of illustrating common patterns of error, successful strategies, and areas where theoretical knowledge, or the lack thereof, directly impacts translation outcomes. By analysing these samples through the lens of established translation standards and criteria, this section seeks to demonstrate how abstract concepts translate into practical challenges. More importantly, it shows how students' performance reflects their understanding of translation norms, language competence, and subject-matter familiarity. These examples serve both as evidence supporting the arguments previously discussed and as a didactic tool for identifying and addressing recurrent issues in translator training.

Since the author teaches specialised translation from English into Serbian and Serbian into English to final-year students at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade, she is well aware of the fact that they enter their fourth year with prior experience in specialised translation acquired during their third year of study. As the curriculum progresses, the fourth year represents an advanced stage that builds on the same foundational knowledge but introduces more complex tasks involving similar text types, most notably, legal and EU texts that combine legal discourse with the specific terminology of the European Union. In order to assess the extent to which students retained and internalised this previously acquired knowledge, the author conducted a diagnostic test at the very beginning of the course, focusing specifically on their command of EU-related terminology in context.

In the first specialised translation class (English into Serbian), prior to administering a diagnostic test, a written consent from the students was obtained to use their translations for the purposes of this study. A total of 51 students participated in the exercise. The aim was to gain insight into their actual familiarity with high-frequency EU terminology, which they were expected to have already encountered and studied during their third year. The test consisted of two tasks.

The first task focused on self-assessment: students were presented with a list of commonly occurring EU legal terms and were instructed to place a tick next to each word

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2 Evroteka (<https://prevodjenje.mei.gov.rs/evroteka/>) is a bilingual corpus containing segments of EU legal acts in English and their translations into Serbian. Like Evronim, it is created in the process of preparing the national version of the European Union's *acquis*, based on the translation memories that are produced and used in that process. Evroteka is intended primarily for translators engaged in translating European legislation, but it is also available and useful to other professional translators as well as to a broader circle of users.

they believed they understood. This format mirrors a familiar classroom practice used in previous generations of translation courses, in which such word lists were often provided as a tool for exam preparation. The selection of terms – *regulation, provision, provide, administration, powers, treaty, paragraph* (in legal context), *article* (in legal context), *judicial*, and *competence* – was deliberate, comprising high-frequency items commonly found in EU texts.

In the second part of the test, these same terms were embedded in short passages selected from the *Evroteka* bilingual corpus. Students were asked to translate five short passages containing the previously listed terms, thereby demonstrating their ability to render the words in authentic legal-administrative contexts. This two-phase task was designed to reveal potential discrepancies between students' perceived and actual mastery of specialised terminology.

## 7. RESULTS

Although a total of 51 students were included in the testing, due to the impossibility of analysing all the tests, only three short passages were selected, and for each passage, three different student translations are presented, along with the author's comments.

In total, three diagnostic tests were administered. Each test is presented in the following sequence: the source text from *Evroteka* in English, the corresponding *Evroteka* translation into Serbian, followed by the translations produced by Student 1, Student 2, and Student 3, each accompanied by the author's commentary. The same structure is applied to the remaining two diagnostic tests. After all the translations and commentaries have been examined, a final section provides an overall assessment summarizing the key observations from all three diagnostic tests.

### 7.1. STUDENT TRANSLATIONS: DIAGNOSTIC TEST – EXAMPLE 1

Source text:

*The implementation of the common foreign and security policy shall not affect the application of the procedures and the extent of the powers of the institutions laid down by the Treaties for the exercise of the Union competences referred to in Articles 3 to 6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.*

Translation from *Evroteka*:

*Sprovođenje zajedničke spoljne i bezbednosne politike ne utiče na primenu postupaka i obim ovlašćenja organa utvrđenih Ugovorima za vršenje nadležnosti Unije navedenih u čl. 3–6. Ugovora o funkcionisanju Evropske unije.*

Student 1:

*Uvođenje zajedničke inostrane politike i politike bezbednosti neće uticati na primenu postupaka i na opseg moći institucija osnovanih sporazumom o radu vlasti Unije navedenom u članovima 3 do 6 sporazuma o radu Evropske Unije.*

Commentary:

This translation reveals multiple lexical mismatches. The phrase *uvođenje zajedničke inostrane politike* is inappropriate both collocationally and terminologically; *zajednička*

*spoljna i bezbednosna politika* is the established term in the EU discourse. The student also renders *powers* as *moći*, a common literal error where *ovlašćenja* is required. Furthermore, *sporazum o radu vlasti Unije* is an incorrect and imprecise formulation of *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*, which should be translated as *Ugovor o funkcionisanju Evropske unije*. The misinterpretation of *laid down by the Treaties* as *osnovanih sporazumom* also reflects the student's insufficient awareness of legal translation conventions.

Student 2:

*Uvođenje međunarodne strane polise i bezbednosne polise neće uticati na primenu procedura i količinu moći institucija predstavljene u Ugovoru i sprovođenju sposobnosti Unije prikazane u članovima 3, 4, 5 i 6 Sporazuma o funkcionisanju Evropske unije.*

Commentary:

This version demonstrates serious terminological and stylistic issues, many of which result from the misuse of literal and false friends. The use of *polisa* for *policy* reflects a false friend error. The word *policy* has been rendered as *polisa*, which in Serbian typically refers to an *insurance policy*, not a political or strategic course of action. These are classic examples of false friends – words that appear similar in both languages but have different meanings. The phrase *količina moći* as a translation of *extent of the powers* demonstrates a misunderstanding of polysemy and results in an inaccurate collocation. The noun *powers* in the legal-administrative EU discourse refers to *institutional authority or competences*, not physical or abstract strength. Translating it literally as *moć* and quantifying it with *količina* (amount) reflects a misreading of its intended meaning. The correct phrase in Serbian should be *obim ovlašćenja*, which accurately captures both the register and semantic field of the source term. Similarly, *sposobnosti* is an inaccurate rendering of *competences*, which in the EU context refers to *nadležnosti*. It is a classic example of polysemy creating confusion in translation. In the context of EU and educational policy documents (such as the CEFR or EU frameworks for key competences), *competence* refers not to someone's *abilities* (*sposobnosti* in Serbian) but to a broader concept closer to *responsibility, authority, or remit* – in Serbian, this would be *nadležnosti* or, depending on the context, *ovlašćenja*. Overall, this student's translation reveals a lack of awareness of the polysemous nature of domain-specific terminology.

Student 3:

*Primena zajedničke strane politike i politike bezbednosti ne utiče na primenu postupaka i obim moći institucija određene Uredbom radi pokazivanja kompetencija Unije pomenute u Članovima 3–6 Uredbe o funkcionisanju Evropske Unije.*

Commentary:

While somewhat more coherent structurally, this translation still exhibits key terminological and grammatical inaccuracies. *Zajednička strana politika* is again a calque that disrupts the standard formulation. *Određene Uredbom* misrepresents *laid down by the Treaties*, as *Uredba* (Regulation) is a different legal instrument from *Ugovor* (Treaty). The use of *pokazivanja kompetencija* is problematic due to polysemy; *ostvarivanje*

*nadležnosti* would be a better fit. This translation shows a partial understanding of the structure and function of EU legal language but lacks refined command of the Serbian legal style. Also, in Serbian orthography, the word *član* followed by a number (e.g., *član 5*) is not capitalised, unlike in English, where *Article 5* is typically written with a capital A.

## 7.2. STUDENT TRANSLATIONS: DIAGNOSTIC TEST – EXAMPLE 2

Source text:

*Judicial cooperation in criminal matters in the Union shall be based on the principle of mutual recognition of judgments and judicial decisions and shall include the approximation of the laws and regulations of the Member States in the areas referred to in paragraph 2 and in Article 83.*

Translation from Evroteka:

*Pravosudna saradnja u krivičnim stvarima u Uniji zasniva se na principu međusobnog priznavanja presuda i pravosudnih odluka i obuhvata usklađivanje zakona i propisa država članica u oblastima iz stava 2. i člana 83.*

Student 1:

*Zakonodavna saradnja po pitanju kriminala u Uniji treba da se zasniva na principu međusobnog prepoznavanja suda i zakonodavnih odluka i treba da obuhvata ocenjivanje zakona i regulacija Država članica u oblastima navedenim u članu 2. stav 83.*

Commentary:

This version shows several conceptual misunderstandings. *Zakonodavna saradnja* (legislative cooperation) is a misinterpretation of *judicial cooperation*, while *po pitanju kriminala* lacks the formality expected in legal discourse and would be better expressed as *u krivičnim stvarima*. The rendering *međusobno prepoznavanje suda* incorrectly uses *sud* (court) in the singular instead of *presuda* (judgments), while *zakonodavne odluke* (legislative decisions) misrepresents *judicial decisions*. Finally, *ocenjivanje zakona* does not capture the intended meaning of *approximation of laws*, which refers to harmonization rather than evaluation.

Student 2:

*Sudska saradnja u kriminalnim pitanjima u Uniji se zasniva na principu međusobnog uvažavanja presuda i sudskih odluka i uključuje skup zakona i uredba država članica u oblastima pomenutim u paragrafu 2 i članu 83.*

Commentary:

This version is closer to the original in recognising *sudska saradnja* and correctly translating *presuda* and *sudske odluke*. However, *kriminalna pitanja* is ambiguous and less idiomatic than *krivične stvari*. The phrase *skup zakona i uredba* suggests a fixed collocation and fails to express the legal process of approximation. Also, *paragraf* is a false friend in this context and should be rendered as *stav* in Serbian legal usage. Agreement issues appear in *zakona i uredba*, where both elements should be plural and congruent.



## Student 3:

*Sudska saradnja u vezi kriminalnih pitanja unutar Unije će biti bazirana na principu međusobnog prepoznavanja presuda i sudskih odluka i uključuje približnost zakona i propisa zemlji članica u oblastima navedenim u pasusu 2 i članu 83.*

## Commentary:

While this translation captures more legal vocabulary than the first one, several expressions are off the mark. *U vezi kriminalnih pitanja* is both semantically and stylistically unidiomatic; *u krivičnim stvarima* is the conventional term. *Biti bazirana* is less preferred in legal register than *zasnivati se*. *Približnost zakona* is not a recognised term in Serbian legal language and should be replaced by *usklađivanje zakona*. Finally, *pasus* is used for a paragraph in a general text, not in legal documents, where *stav* is standard. Additionally, *zemlji članica* is a case error; it should be *država članica* in genitive plural.

This sentence is particularly instructive for assessing students' ability to handle abstract legal concepts and high-frequency EU legal collocations, such as *judicial cooperation*, *mutual recognition*, *judgments*, *approximation of laws*, and *paragraph* versus *article*. It also tests their sensitivity to both syntactic structure and the conventions of Serbian legal style.

## 7.3. STUDENT TRANSLATIONS: DIAGNOSTIC TEST – EXAMPLE 3

## Source text:

*In implementing the multiannual framework programme, the Union may make provision, in agreement with the Member States concerned, for participation in research and development programmes undertaken by several Member States, including participation in the structures created for the execution of those programmes.*

## Translation from Evroteka:

*Pri sprovođenju višegodišnjeg okvirnog programa, Unija može, u dogovoru sa zainteresovanim državama članicama, predvideti učešće u istraživačkim i razvojnim programima koje preduzima više država članica, uključujući učešće u strukturama uspostavljenim radi realizacije tih programa.*

## Student 1:

*Tokom izvršavanja višegodišnjeg okvirnog programa, Unija može obezbediti, u skladu sa zemljama članicama koje su u pitanju, učešće istraživačkim i razvojnim programima koje su preuzele nekoliko država članica, uključujući i učešće u strukturama izgrađene u svrhu izvršavanja tih programa.*

## Commentary:

Polysemy-related error: The verb *obezbediti* in the phrase *Unija može obezbediti* represents a misinterpretation of the English verb *provide*, which is polysemous. In this legal-administrative context, *make provision for* refers to the act of formally allowing, foreseeing, or arranging for something in an institutional framework.

Prepositional error: *učešće istraživačkim programima* is incorrect; it must be *učešće u programima*.

Ambiguity and agreement error: *koje su preuzele nekoliko država članica* misrepresents the original meaning and is grammatically awkward (several = singular in Serbian).

Structural error: The phrase *izgrađene u svrhu* is problematic due to its literal interpretation of *izgrađene* (*built*), which is inappropriate in this abstract administrative-legal context. Additionally, there is a congruence error, as *izgrađene* is feminine plural, but does not agree with the correct noun (*strukture*) in the intended meaning. A more appropriate expression would be *uspostavljene radi realizacije*.

Collocational inadequacy: The phrase *izvršavanje programa* is not a standard collocation when referring to *programmes* in administrative or legal texts. A more appropriate and commonly accepted term is *realizacija programa*, which better reflects the intended meaning of implementation or execution in a formal register.

#### Student 2:

*Tokom sprovođenja višegodišnjeg okvira programa, Evropska Unija može da donese odredbu, u ugovoru sa zaduženim državama članicama, za učešće u istraživanju i razvijenim programima koje je ostvarila nekolicina država članica, uključujući i učešće u strukturama koje su kreirale za izvođenje tih programa.*

#### Commentary:

Polysemy-related error: The verb *obezbediti* in the phrase *Unija može obezbediti* represents a misinterpretation of the English verb *provide*, which is polysemous. In this legal-administrative context, *make provision for* refers to the act of formally allowing, foreseeing, or arranging for something in an institutional framework. However, *obezbediti* in Serbian typically conveys meanings such as *to secure*, *to supply*, or *to ensure*, which implies a more material or protective function. This choice, therefore, reflects a misunderstanding of the source word's specific legal-administrative sense and leads to a semantic deviation.

Lexical inaccuracies: *u ugovoru sa zaduženim državama članicama* → *u dogovoru sa zainteresovanim državama članicama* is the correct rendering. *Ugovor* is a false friend here; *istraživanju i razvijenim programima* mixes participles and nouns in an odd manner – it should be *istraživačkim i razvojnim programima*.

Verb mismatch: *koje je ostvarila* suggests that only one subject (she/it) created them, distorting the meaning. The original implies joint action by several Member States.

The phrase *kreirale za izvođenje* is functional but lacks the legal precision and formality of *uspostavljene radi realizacije*.

#### Student 3:

*Tokom sprovođenja višegodišnjeg okvirnog programa, Unija može, u dogovoru sa zainteresovanim državama članicama, da predvidi učestvovanje u istraživačkim i razvojnim programima koje preduzima nekoliko država članica, uključujući učestvovanje u strukturama koje su uspostavljene za izvršavanje tih programa.*

#### Commentary:

- very close to the official translation in terms of both structure and terminology
- *učestvovanje* is slightly less formal than *učešće*, though still acceptable

- *koje preduzima nekoliko država članica* mirrors the original phrasing well, but *više država članica* would reflect the correct number more clearly
- *izvršavanje tih programa* is not a standard collocation, *realizacija* is more standard in legal-administrative texts

The first result shows that all the students recognized every lexical item on the list and marked it as familiar. By ticking each word, they indicated that they believed they knew its meaning. However, when they encountered the same words in context in the second part of the task, they faced difficulties and often translated them incorrectly. Mere recognition of words without understanding their actual meaning in context was the first finding.

The recurring issues observed in these examples point to a broader problem in students' handling of polysemous terms, false friends, and domain-specific collocations. Many errors stem from a tendency to default to the most familiar or literal meaning of a word, often acquired through rote memorisation rather than contextual understanding. This superficial vocabulary acquisition results in mistranslations that may appear grammatically or stylistically acceptable in Serbian but fail to preserve the semantic integrity of the source text. Such instances are particularly problematic in specialised translation, where precision and conceptual consistency are crucial.

Students often fail to recognise that certain terms belong to specific semantic fields and must be translated accordingly. For example, the term *implementation* has a defined function in legal-administrative discourse that cannot be replaced by a more general or colloquial synonym without altering the intended meaning. Similarly, misuse of terms like *competences*, often mistranslated due to unfamiliarity with its context-dependent meanings in EU and institutional language, demonstrates a lack of awareness of how terminological polysemy operates in practice.

These errors suggest not only insufficient lexical depth but also a gap in students' understanding of how meaning is constructed across linguistic and disciplinary boundaries. They also reflect a failure to integrate theoretical knowledge, such as awareness of semantic fields, register, and functional equivalence, into practical translation work. This underscores the need to strengthen pedagogical approaches that bridge theory and practice, foster critical thinking about lexical choices, and promote a more analytical engagement with translation problems. Ultimately, improving these areas will contribute to the development of more context-sensitive and semantically accurate translators.

## 8. DISCUSSION

Effective teaching of specialised translation requires a balanced integration of theoretical knowledge with practical training. Students should not only learn how to translate but also understand the underlying principles that guide translation choices. By familiarising themselves with translation strategies and techniques, learners develop critical thinking skills that enable them to evaluate and justify their decisions. This theoretical foundation also equips students to better articulate their reasoning during peer reviews and self-assessment, fostering a reflective approach to translation.

A crucial element in specialised translation is precise vocabulary acquisition within appropriate semantic fields. Students often struggle with polysemous domain-specific terms and false friends due to limited contextual understanding. To address this, educators should emphasise the use of authentic materials, particularly specialised translation corpora, alongside glossaries. Corpora provide rich examples of how terms and phrases are used in real-world contexts, allowing students to explore collocations, frequency, and variations that go beyond dictionary definitions. Training students to consult and analyse corpora encourages autonomous learning, deepens their semantic understanding, and reduces errors linked to improper term usage.

Kübler, Mestivier, and Pecman (2021) provide compelling evidence supporting the effectiveness of specialised corpora in the training of specialised translation. Their quantitative analysis of learner translation corpora, annotated according to error types, demonstrates a marked reduction in errors within the subset of translations produced with corpus assistance, compared to those completed without such support. While certain error categories showed limited improvement and some challenges were identified, such as learners' overreliance on corpora and diminished intuitive processing, the overall benefits of incorporating corpora into specialised translation practice were clear and substantial. Furthermore, the authors emphasise that combining corpus linguistics tools with terminology management and collaboration with domain experts constitutes a robust, multidisciplinary approach to translator training. This methodology not only enhances learner confidence and competence but also offers a valuable framework for evaluating translation quality and identifying recurrent errors through annotated learner productions and varied translation task conditions (Kübler et al. 2021: 822).

Students must also be made aware of the flexibility inherent in specialised translation. It is not a process of mere word substitution but requires navigating a range of translation options and selecting those best suited to the context.

Clear, theory-based assessment criteria are essential to guide students in understanding what constitutes a quality translation. Grounding grading in recognised frameworks, like those of the American Translators Association, helps ensure that evaluation is objective rather than subjective. Providing detailed, constructive feedback based on these criteria encourages learners to identify recurring mistakes and fosters continuous improvement. Furthermore, involving students in self- and peer-assessment exercises based on the same standards cultivates critical evaluation skills and autonomy.

A collaborative learning environment enhances the acquisition of specialised translation skills. Group work and peer feedback promote the exchange of diverse perspectives and collective problem-solving, mirroring professional translation settings. Authentic projects grounded in real-world contexts boost motivation and practical competence. Additionally, encouraging reflective practices, such as translator's journals or commentary, helps students deepen their awareness of translation decisions and learning progress.

Finally, maintaining high teaching standards requires continuous professional development for educators. Staying informed about advancements in translation theory, pedagogical methods, and industry practices ensures curricula remain relevant and effective. Partnerships between academic programs and translation professionals can further enrich learning by providing insights into evolving professional demands and standards.

## 9. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the teaching of specialised translation must be grounded in a comprehensive approach that integrates theoretical understanding, practical application, and the use of modern pedagogical tools. It is essential for students not only to learn translation strategies and techniques but also to develop a critical awareness of when and how to apply them, recognising that these tools serve as guidelines rather than rigid rules. This theoretical foundation enhances their ability to approach translation tasks thoughtfully and adaptively, which is crucial in specialised fields where precision and contextual appropriateness are paramount.

The incorporation of specialised corpora into translator training has proven highly effective in reducing errors and improving translation quality. When combined with terminology management and collaboration with subject-matter experts, corpus-based methodologies provide a robust and multidisciplinary framework that supports students in acquiring both linguistic accuracy and domain-specific knowledge. Such approaches encourage reflective practice and greater autonomy, equipping learners to handle complex texts with confidence.

Additionally, transparent and theory-informed assessment criteria play a vital role in helping students understand the objective standards of translation quality. By demystifying the grading process and linking it to established professional benchmarks such as those of the American Translators Association, students gain clarity on the expectations they must meet. This clarity reduces ambiguity, fosters motivation, and aligns their learning outcomes with the demands of the translation profession.

Overall, a holistic teaching model that combines cognitive, linguistic, and sociocultural dimensions of translation prepares students more effectively for the realities of specialised translation work. By fostering both technical competence and critical reflection, such education cultivates translators who are not only skilled practitioners but also thoughtful professionals, capable of navigating the nuanced challenges of their field.

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## SUMMARY

### DIDACTICS OF SPECIALISED TRANSLATION – FROM MEMORISATION TO CONTEXTUAL LEARNING

This paper examines persistent challenges in the teaching of specialised translation and argues for a pedagogical model that integrates theoretical knowledge, contextualised terminology acquisition, and corpus-informed practice. Although traditional approaches in undergraduate translator training often rely heavily on memorisation of isolated terms and glossary-based learning, these methods fail to address core linguistic and conceptual issues that arise in specialised domains, particularly polysemy, collocational behaviour, and the semantic structures characteristic of EU legal and institutional discourse. Consequently, students may recognise individual lexical items but struggle to interpret or translate them accurately in context, resulting in errors that undermine precision, appropriateness, and textual coherence.

To investigate these challenges empirically, the study employs a multi-method approach combining comparative analysis, ATA-based error analysis, and corpus consultation. Student translations were examined segment by segment against original EU legal texts and official Evroteka equivalents. The ATA error framework served as a systematic tool for categorising errors related to meaning transfer, terminological choice, and target-language mechanics, while corpus evidence provided insight into authentic usage patterns, established collocations, and domain-specific phrasing. This triangulated methodology enabled both qualitative interpretation of students' decision-making and quantitative identification of recurring problem types.

The findings reveal a significant discrepancy between students' perceived familiarity with specialised terminology and their actual ability to deploy such terminology appropriately. Frequent errors include literal translations of polysemous



items, interference from false friends, inappropriate Serbian legal-administrative formulations, and misunderstandings of key EU concepts such as 'competence,' 'powers,' and 'implementation.' These issues point to a deeper pedagogical problem: recognition-based vocabulary learning does not foster the conceptual understanding required for accurate specialised translation. Moreover, students often lack awareness of genre conventions and stylistic expectations in Serbian legal discourse.

The paper argues that more effective didactics must move beyond terminology lists toward an integrated model that connects theory, guided practice, and corpus exploration. Theoretical instruction, particularly regarding translation strategies, semantic fields, and functional equivalence, sharpens students' analytical skills and helps them make informed choices. Transparent, theory-based evaluation criteria such as those used by the American Translators Association further strengthen students' ability to understand expectations, interpret feedback, and self-assess their work.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that a pedagogy grounded in reflection, contextual sensitivity, and empirical evidence better prepares students for the complexities of specialised translation and aligns academic training more closely with the demands of professional practice.

**KEYWORDS:** specialised translation, terminology, polysemy, collocations, corpus analysis, ATA framework, translation quality assessment, translation strategies.

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