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# Research on Professional Terminology Acquisition and Application in College English Teaching

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**Abstract:** Professional terminology serves as a fundamental tool in college English education, where its acquisition quality directly impacts students' language proficiency and professional competence development. Drawing on language acquisition theories and practical teaching experiences, college English instructors exploring scientific terminology acquisition methods and application strategies can enhance instructional effectiveness, help students build a systematic English terminology framework, and promote the integrated development of linguistic knowledge and practical skills. This study conducts research from two perspectives—acquisition methodologies and application strategies—to provide professional references for efficient instruction and flexible utilization of specialized terminology in higher education settings, thereby facilitating steady improvements in English teaching quality.

**Keywords:** College English teaching; Professional terminology; Acquisition methods; Application strategies

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## 1. Introduction

With the increasing globalization of higher education, English teaching in universities has shifted from basic language instruction to specialized and practical approaches. Professional terminology serves as a critical component of the English language system for storing specialized knowledge and conveying accurate information. Students' mastery of these terms directly correlates with their comprehension of English texts, while also influencing cross-cultural communication skills and academic performance. Against the backdrop of enhancing teaching quality and efficiency in higher education, English instructors should conduct systematic research on the acquisition patterns and application strategies of professional terminology. By uncovering the inherent logic of terminology instruction, educators can provide scientific guidance for teaching practices, promote comprehensive improvement in students' English proficiency, and highlight the professional value and practical significance of English education.

## 2. Methods for Acquiring Professional Terminology in College English Teaching

### 2.1. Contextual Association Method

The meaning production of language cannot be separated from specific contexts. According to contextual theories in pragmatics, the acquisition of technical terms also requires context-building to establish bridges for understanding.

Technical terms exhibit strong subject-specific characteristics and contextual dependence, with their semantic meanings often closely tied to disciplinary contexts. When memorized in isolation without contextual grounding, students ‘comprehension of these terms becomes superficial, failing to grasp their pragmatic scope and collocation rules<sup>[1]</sup>. College English teachers can enhance learning by integrating technical terms into academic discourse, professional dialogues, or disciplinary contexts. This approach enables students to analyze term meanings, fixed collocations, and syntactic functions while understanding contextual semantic logic and pragmatic functions, thereby establishing connections between terms and contexts to deepen comprehension of semantic connotations and pragmatic value. During instruction, educators may utilize English academic corpora containing target terms from scholarly articles and dialogues. Students can identify semantic clues in key words within contextual settings, infer term definitions, and observe usage variations across contexts. Through immersive contextual learning, students naturally acquire terminology mastery, achieving synchronized development of “term acquisition, contextual understanding, and pragmatic competence”<sup>[2]</sup>. This methodology aligns with cognitive principles of language acquisition and the “comprehensible input” principle in second language acquisition theory, enhancing students’ flexible application of technical terms while avoiding the pitfalls of mechanical memorization.

## **2.2. Cognitive Assimilation Method**

According to Ausubel’s meaningful learning theory in cognitive psychology, the acquisition of new knowledge involves learners integrating new information into their existing cognitive structures. The mastery of professional terminology follows this cognitive principle. English majors typically possess foundational vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, and disciplinary cognitive abilities prior to learning specialized terms. By establishing substantive connections between new terminology and students’ existing knowledge frameworks, college English instructors can effectively reduce term acquisition difficulty, enhance memory retention, and improve cognitive efficiency. Educators should proactively guide students to explore intrinsic relationships between new terms and foundational vocabulary or existing academic terminology. Utilizing etymological knowledge through methods like root/affix analysis, synonym substitution comparisons, semantic extensions, and category classification enables seamless integration of new terms into existing knowledge systems<sup>[3]</sup>. For instance, analyzing the root “bio-” combined with the verb suffix “bi” and disciplinary suffix “ology” reveals the meaning of “biology.” Students can also connect this term with previously learned cognates to achieve knowledge transfer and assimilation. This approach leverages students’ existing cognitive resources, boosts term acquisition initiative and effectiveness, and fosters systematic knowledge integration—aligning perfectly with the fundamental principles of meaningful learning.

## **2.3. Pragmatic Contextual Approach**

The ultimate goal of language acquisition lies in flexible application. According to speech act theory, the learning of technical terminology should align with pragmatic needs, enhancing students’ awareness and pragmatic competence through immersive pragmatic contexts. The pragmatic value of technical terms stems from their practical use in specific communicative scenarios, where adherence to established pragmatic norms and repeated application in authentic contexts enable students to truly master terminology usage, connotations, and pragmatic boundaries. College English instructors can design academic communication scenarios aligned with professional orientations—such as academic paper abstract writing, scholarly Q&A sessions, and cross-cultural exchanges—to facilitate real-world application of learned academic terminology<sup>[4]</sup>. By employing teaching methods like situational simulation, group interaction, and task-driven approaches, students can experience terminology pairing rules and pragmatic norms through practical activities. This helps them recognize contextual differences in term usage (formal vs. informal, written vs. spoken) and master techniques for applying terminology across sentence structures. Such an approach bridges theoretical knowledge with practical application, allowing students to consolidate terminology retention and improve usage proficiency. It fosters coordinated development of terminological acquisition, pragmatic competence, and academic communication skills, aligning with the “output-driven hypothesis” in second language acquisition research.

### **3. Strategies for the Application of Professional Terminology in College English Teaching**

#### **3.1. Strengthening Contextual Application of Terminology to Enhance Language Proficiency**

The practicality of language dictates that the acquisition of professional terminology must serve real-world applications. Strengthening the use of terms in specific contexts can deepen students' understanding, enhance linguistic accuracy, and improve flexibility in language application. The meaning of professional terms is significantly influenced by context, as the same term may carry different connotations and usage patterns across various academic disciplines and pragmatic settings. For instance, terms like “academic writing” and “discourse analysis” exhibit varying collocations and emphasis in English academic contexts. Only through contextual application can students truly grasp the core meanings and usage scope of these terms<sup>[5]</sup>. Guided by core principles of second language acquisition, contextual application helps students develop stable pragmatic habits, transforming knowledge into practical skills—aligning with the fundamental goal of college English education: applying learning to real-world scenarios. College English instructors should create diverse teaching scenarios based on curriculum content to encourage active term usage in communication<sup>[6]</sup>. Leveraging academic corpora, reading instruction should guide students to analyze lexical units, cohesion markers, and their pragmatic functions within textual contexts, while using terminology to summarize key content. In writing instruction, teachers should instruct students on proper usage of terms like “citation” and “thesis statement” to enhance academic rigor, accuracy, and standardized spelling, collocation, and sentence structure. In oral language instruction, teachers design scenarios such as academic dialogues and thematic discussions, encouraging students to use terms like “intercultural communication” and “academic debate” to articulate their perspectives and exchange ideas. Through regular contextual practice, students develop practical skills in terminology application, thereby enhancing their language proficiency and academic expression capabilities.

#### **3.2. Improve the Terminology Teaching System and Consolidate the Application Foundation**

The effective use of professional terminology requires support from systematic teaching frameworks. Enhancing English terminology instruction in higher education institutions can provide students with clear learning pathways, establish foundational terminology application skills, and align with the core objectives of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) education. Currently, terminology teaching in some universities remains fragmented, lacking systematic structure and targeted approaches, resulting in fragmented learning experiences regarding academic vocabulary and discipline-specific terms. This fragmentation prevents students from developing comprehensive practical competencies. A structured teaching system ensures orderly terminology instruction that emphasizes both knowledge acquisition and practical application, safeguarding students' long-term development. College English instructors should develop systematic terminology teaching frameworks based on instructional goals and students' cognitive patterns<sup>[7]</sup>. Regarding content design, core and high-frequency terminology should be organized according to disciplinary requirements—such as “morphology” and “syntax” in English linguistics, or “theme” and “symbolism” in English literature—arranged in progressive difficulty levels to build a complete terminology knowledge system. In terms of teaching methods, instructors should flexibly employ diverse instructional approaches tailored to terminology characteristics, focusing on understanding, memorization, and practical application of specialized terms. In teaching evaluation, educators establish a diversified assessment framework that incorporates “terminology standardization” application skills. Evaluations are conducted through multiple dimensions including classroom participation, assignment completion, and practical task outcomes, encouraging students to prioritize terminology usage. Furthermore, university English instructors should emphasize expanding terminological knowledge by supplementing explanations with etymological backgrounds, disciplinary connections, and cross-cultural variations. This comprehensive approach enables students to develop a well-rounded understanding of terminology, laying the foundation for flexible application.

### **3.3. Conduct Terminology Practice Training to Enhance Application Capabilities**

Practice serves as the primary pathway to enhance terminology application skills. Purposeful terminology training enables students to consolidate knowledge through repeated exercises, improving proficiency and accuracy in usage—aligning with the fundamental principles of task-based teaching methodologies. Mastery of professional terminology cannot be innate; it develops gradually through prolonged practice. Neglecting practical training may result in difficulties applying concepts like “term collocation” or “semantic connotation” flexibly in real communication scenarios. Practical exercises strengthen terminology retention, help students identify application challenges, and improve knowledge transfer capabilities, meeting the practical requirements of college English education<sup>[8]</sup>. College English instructors should design diverse terminology training tasks based on teaching realities, incorporating both written and oral applications to meet students’ academic needs. Written exercises include term fill-in activities, sentence restructuring, and academic essay writing, requiring students to accurately use terminology such as “abstract” and “keywords,” while standardizing spelling, collocation patterns, and sentence structures. In oral training programs, instructors organize group discussions, thematic presentations, and situational simulations to guide students in expressing ideas and exchanging information using professional terms like “academic presentation” and “critical thinking,” thereby enhancing the professionalism and fluency of their spoken communication. College English teachers should also provide practical training guidance and feedback, utilizing corpus analysis tools to identify common errors in “term application errors” among students. By promptly correcting these mistakes and helping students summarize effective techniques, educators can continuously strengthen their terminology application skills.

### **3.4. Establish a Terminology Exchange Platform to Broaden Application Scenarios**

Diverse application scenarios create more opportunities for terminology usage. By establishing professional terminology exchange platforms, university English teachers can expand students’ practical application contexts, enhance the flexibility and practicality of terminology usage, and align with the principles of immersive language teaching. In university English education, students typically learn terminology primarily through classroom instruction, lacking authentic academic exchanges and cross-cultural communication environments. This results in students struggling to master the practical application methods of academic and interdisciplinary terminology<sup>[9]</sup>. Teachers should develop terminology exchange platforms to provide students with more opportunities for terminology use, enabling peer learning and collaborative improvement in terminology proficiency. Educators can leverage campus resources and online platforms to create various terminology exchange initiatives. For instance, organizing campus events such as terminology knowledge competitions, academic salons, and English corners centered on professional themes like “translation equivalence” and “pragmatic competence” can provide platforms for students to showcase their knowledge and engage in discussions. Establishing online communication groups and learning platforms to share terminology learning materials, academic corpora, and case studies allows for real-time terminology exchange and discussion, while online corpus tools can improve terminology accuracy<sup>[10]</sup>. Universities may also invite industry experts and foreign faculty to participate in exchange activities, offering professional guidance to deepen students’ understanding of specific terminology usage scenarios and norms in practical contexts, thereby enhancing their terminology application skills and cross-cultural communication abilities.

### **3.5. Integrate Corpus-assisted Teaching to Optimize Terminology Application Accuracy**

Corpus resources, as a data-driven teaching carrier, provide objective, authentic and quantifiable support for the standardized application of professional terminology, and effectively solve the common problems of non-standard collocation, improper register selection and vague semantic boundary in students’ terminology application. At present, many students’ mastery of professional terms mostly stays at the level of Chinese-English corresponding meaning memorization, lacking an intuitive perception of the high-frequency collocation, pragmatic norms and register differences of terms in authentic academic contexts. This often leads to Chinglish in term application, such as mismatched collocation of professional terms, mixed oral and written registers, and misuse of synonyms in professional contexts, which directly

reduces the professionalism and accuracy of students' English expression.

College English teachers should take corpus-assisted teaching as a regular part of terminology application teaching, and systematically guide students to master the application norms of terms with the help of multi-dimensional corpus resources. In classroom teaching, teachers can guide students to use authoritative general corpora such as Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and British National Corpus (BNC), as well as discipline-specific academic corpora, to retrieve target professional terms. Through data sorting and comparative analysis, students can clarify the high-frequency collocation structure, typical syntactic environment, semantic prosody and register distribution of terms, and form an intuitive perception of the correct application of terms. For example, when teaching academic writing terms, teachers can let students compare the application differences between "hypothesis" and "assumption" in academic papers through corpus retrieval, and master their respective applicable scenarios and collocation rules. In addition, teachers can build a special term corpus for the course, integrating core terms in textbooks, authentic application cases in top international journals, and typical error cases of students, to provide students with targeted retrieval and learning resources, and continuously improve the accuracy of students' term application

### **3.6. Link Disciplinary Professional Needs to Enhance the Practical Value of Terminology Application**

The fundamental goal of professional terminology application teaching in college English is to help students master language tools that meet their academic research and career development needs. Therefore, terminology application teaching must be deeply linked with students' professional training objectives, to break the separation between terminology learning and professional application, and enhance the practicality and pertinence of teaching. At present, some college English terminology teaching still follows the general vocabulary teaching mode, focusing too much on the explanation of general academic terms, while ignoring the coverage of professional terms closely related to students' majors, resulting in a disconnect between what students learn and what they need. Students cannot flexibly use corresponding professional terms when reading professional English literature, writing academic papers, participating in international academic exchanges and engaging in related work, which makes it difficult to give full play to the practical value of terminology teaching.

To solve this problem, college English teachers should carry out in-depth docking with the professional training system, and build a targeted terminology application teaching system according to students' professional characteristics and development needs. First of all, teachers should cooperate with professional course teachers to sort out the core professional term system required by the talent training program, clarify the key term categories and application scenarios of different majors, and integrate them into English teaching content in a hierarchical and step-by-step manner. For example, for business administration majors, focus on application training of professional terms in international trade, cross-border e-commerce and business negotiation; for computer science majors, strengthen teaching of standardized application of terms in English paper writing and patent document translation; for English translation majors, focus on practical training of term translation norms and term management technology. In addition, teachers should design term application tasks combined with professional scenarios, such as guiding students to write professional English reports, translate professional literature, and complete simulated academic speeches with professional terms, so that students can consolidate term application ability in the process of completing professional tasks, and lay a solid language foundation for their subsequent academic development and career growth .

## **4. Conclusion**

The acquisition and application of professional terminology constitute a vital component of college English education, where teaching quality directly impacts students' comprehensive language proficiency. Scientific learning methodologies enable students to effectively master technical jargon, building a systematic knowledge framework. Strategic application approaches facilitate the transformation of terminological knowledge into practical skills, enhancing both the professionalism and adaptability of language use. By helping students solidify their command of specialized terminology

and improve its application capabilities, college English instructors can drive pedagogical progress toward greater specialization and practical relevance. This approach lays a robust foundation for students' cross-cultural communication and professional development.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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