

# TEACHING ENGLISH TERMINOLOGY AND VOCABULARY THROUGH AN INTERCULTURAL LENS

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**Abstract.** This article examines the teaching of English terminology and vocabulary from an intercultural perspective, arguing that lexical instruction should not be limited to memorising definitions, equivalents, and word lists. In contemporary English language education, vocabulary functions as a carrier of disciplinary knowledge, social values, pragmatic conventions, and cultural assumptions. The study synthesises research on second-language vocabulary acquisition, English for Specific Purposes, academic word lists, technical terminology, and intercultural communicative competence. Using qualitative content analysis of published scholarship, the article proposes an integrated model in which terminology teaching combines corpus-based selection, repeated contextual exposure, task-induced involvement, cultural-pragmatic explanation, and reflective comparison of meanings across languages and cultures. The results suggest that intercultural vocabulary pedagogy is especially effective when teachers move from isolated lexical items to culturally situated lexical use. The article concludes that English terminology instruction should prepare learners not only to understand specialist vocabulary, but also to use it appropriately in intercultural academic and professional communication.

**Keywords:** vocabulary; terminology; intercultural competence; English for Specific Purposes; academic vocabulary; lexical pedagogy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is one of the central components of English language proficiency. However, in many educational contexts, vocabulary and terminology are still taught as lists of words with direct translations. Such an approach may help learners remember surface meanings, but it rarely prepares them to use vocabulary in authentic academic, professional, or intercultural communication. English terminology is not culturally neutral. Terms used in science, education, business, technology, law, or medicine often reflect particular disciplinary traditions, institutional practices, and communicative norms. The problem becomes especially important in English as a Foreign Language and English for Specific Purposes settings. Learners may know the dictionary meaning of words such as *competence*, *innovation*, *sustainability*, *identity*, *assessment*, or *professional ethics*, but still misunderstand how these words function in academic argument, institutional discourse, or intercultural interaction. Therefore, teaching English terminology requires attention not only to meaning and form, but also to context, register, cultural associations, pragmatic use, and disciplinary convention.

This article aims to analyse how English terminology and vocabulary can be taught through an intercultural lens. It argues that vocabulary instruction becomes more effective when lexical learning is connected with cultural interpretation, communicative purpose, and professional discourse.

## BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on vocabulary acquisition shows that lexical competence is multidimensional. Schmitt (2008) stresses that knowing a word involves much more than recognising its translation; learners need knowledge of form, meaning, collocation, grammatical behaviour, register, and use. Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) further argue that vocabulary retention depends on the learner's cognitive and motivational involvement in a task. This means that terminology is learned more deeply when learners search for meanings, compare alternatives, and evaluate appropriate usage.

Repetition is also essential. Webb (2007) demonstrates that repeated encounters with vocabulary in meaningful contexts contribute to stronger lexical knowledge. This is particularly relevant for terminology teaching because technical words cannot be mastered through one-time explanation. Learners need to meet terms in definitions, diagrams, professional texts, case studies, lectures, discussions, and written assignments.

A major contribution to academic vocabulary teaching was made by Coxhead (2000), who developed the Academic Word List on the basis of a large corpus of academic texts. Her work showed that academic vocabulary has a systematic distribution across disciplines. However, terminology teaching cannot rely only on general academic vocabulary. Chung and Nation (2004) show that technical vocabulary requires separate identification and analysis because specialist terms carry discipline-specific meanings. Mudraya (2006) similarly argues for corpus-based and lexical approaches in teaching engineering English, demonstrating the importance of frequency, professional relevance, and authentic disciplinary context.

The intercultural dimension is equally important. Alptekin (2002) questions native-speaker-based models of communicative competence and argues that English language teaching should prepare learners for international and intercultural communication. Baker (2011) develops the concept of intercultural awareness, emphasising that English as a lingua franca requires sensitivity to dynamic cultural meanings rather than fixed stereotypes. Sercu (2006) argues that language teachers need a new professional identity as teachers of intercultural competence, while Young and Sachdev (2011) show that many teachers support intercultural aims but face practical difficulties in implementing them.

Taken together, these studies suggest that vocabulary and terminology teaching should combine lexical accuracy with intercultural appropriateness.

## METHODS

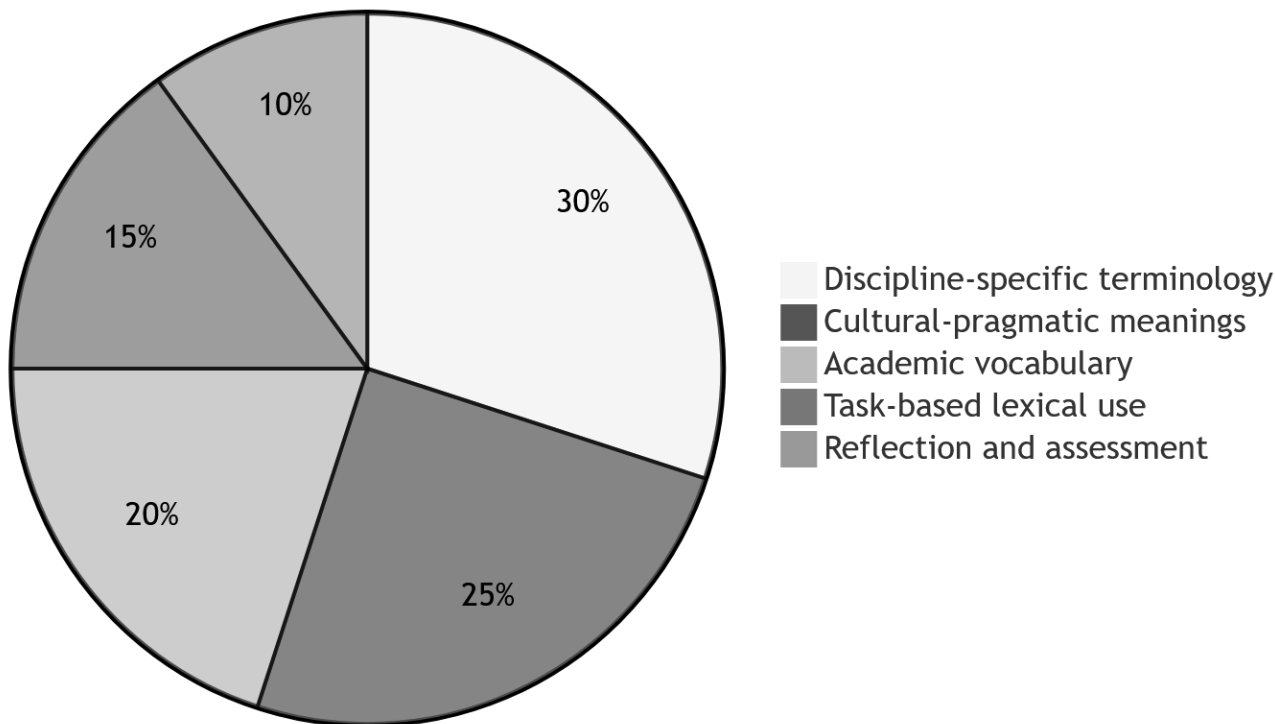
This article is based on qualitative analytical synthesis. Ten peer-reviewed articles with DOI were selected according to three criteria: relevance to English vocabulary or terminology teaching, relevance to intercultural communicative competence, and applicability to EFL or ESP contexts. The selected studies were grouped into three thematic categories: vocabulary acquisition, terminology and academic vocabulary, and intercultural language pedagogy. The analysis focused on identifying pedagogical principles that can be applied to the teaching of English terminology and vocabulary. Special attention was given to how lexical items are selected, contextualised, practised, interpreted, and assessed. The study does not present experimental classroom data; rather, it develops a theoretically grounded model for intercultural vocabulary instruction.

## RESULTS

The analysis indicates that effective intercultural vocabulary teaching should include five interrelated components: discipline-specific terminology, academic vocabulary, cultural-pragmatic meanings, task-based lexical use, and reflective assessment. These components do not function separately; they form an integrated pedagogical cycle.

First, terminology should be selected according to disciplinary relevance. Corpus-based approaches, as shown by Coxhead (2000), Chung and Nation (2004), and Mudraya (2006), help teachers identify which words are frequent, useful, and professionally significant. Second, vocabulary should be taught through repeated contextual exposure. Schmitt (2008) and Webb (2007) show that lexical knowledge develops gradually and requires multiple encounters. Third, learners should process vocabulary through meaningful tasks. Laufer and Hulstijn's (2001) involvement-load hypothesis supports activities that require learners to search, compare, classify, and use terms in purposeful communication.

Fourth, terminology should be interpreted interculturally. For example, words such as *leadership*, *privacy*, *innovation*, *critical thinking*, and *professional responsibility* may carry different cultural expectations in different academic and professional communities. Alptekin (2002) and Baker (2011) suggest that learners need to understand English as a medium of intercultural negotiation rather than as a fixed native-speaker code. Fifth, teachers should include reflection and assessment. Following Sercu (2006) and Young and Sachdev (2011), vocabulary teaching should evaluate not only lexical recall, but also learners’ ability to use vocabulary appropriately in intercultural contexts.



**Figure 1. Distribution of key components in an intercultural model of terminology and vocabulary teaching.**

The proposed distribution reflects the article’s analytical model. Discipline-specific terminology occupies the largest share because terminology is the core object of instruction. Cultural-pragmatic meaning is also highly significant because words are used differently across cultural and institutional contexts. Academic vocabulary remains essential, but it should support rather than replace technical vocabulary. Task-based use and reflective assessment ensure that learners move from recognition to communicative performance.

### DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that English terminology teaching should be redesigned as an intercultural and discourse-based process. Traditional vocabulary teaching often follows a linear model: word, translation, pronunciation, example sentence, and test. This model is insufficient for learners who need English for academic mobility, international research, professional communication, or cross-cultural cooperation.

An intercultural model requires teachers to ask several questions about each lexical item. What does the term mean in a particular discipline? In which genres does it appear? What collocations are typical? Does the term have different connotations in different cultures? Can it be translated directly into the learner’s first language, or does it require explanation? What communicative behaviour is expected when the term is used?

For example, the word *argument* in academic English usually means a reasoned position supported by evidence, whereas in everyday usage it may mean conflict. Similarly, *critical* in academic discourse often means analytical and evaluative, not simply negative. Such examples show that vocabulary teaching must include semantic, pragmatic, and intercultural clarification.

In ESP contexts, terminology also shapes professional identity. A student who learns medical, legal, pedagogical, or engineering terminology is not only learning words, but also entering a discourse community. Therefore, vocabulary tasks should include authentic texts, mini-corpora, problem-solving activities, role plays, presentations, and comparative analysis of terms in English and the learners' native language.

The teacher's role is central. As Sercu (2006) notes, foreign language teachers increasingly need to act as mediators of intercultural competence. However, Young and Sachdev (2011) show that teachers may support intercultural teaching in theory while lacking materials, time, or methodological confidence. This means that teacher training should include practical models for integrating vocabulary, terminology, and intercultural communication.

### CONCLUSION

Teaching English terminology and vocabulary through an intercultural lens is necessary in modern language education. Vocabulary is not merely a collection of lexical units; it is a system of meanings embedded in academic, professional, social, and cultural contexts. The article has shown that effective terminology teaching should combine corpus-based selection, repeated exposure, cognitively demanding tasks, cultural-pragmatic explanation, and reflective assessment.

The intercultural approach helps learners understand not only what English words mean, but also how, when, and why they are used in particular communicative situations. This is especially important for students who use English as a medium of academic study, professional development, and international cooperation. Therefore, vocabulary instruction should move beyond memorisation and become a tool for developing intercultural communicative competence.

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