



CLASSIFICATION OF POLITICAL TERMINOLOGY: PRINCIPLES, CATEGORIES, AND TYPOLOGICAL APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT

This article examines principal approaches to classifying political terminology according to structural, semantic, functional, and etymological criteria. Drawing on translation theory and discourse analysis, it proposes an integrated typological framework for systematizing political terms and discusses its implications for translation practice.

Introduction

Political language is one of the most dynamic and consequential registers of human communication. Within it, political terminology serves as the foundational lexical apparatus through which governance, ideology, diplomacy, and public debate are organized and transmitted. The systematic study of political terms their formation, meaning, and classification is therefore indispensable to linguistics, translation studies, and political science alike. Unlike scientific domains where terminology rests on relatively stable conceptual hierarchies, political terms are shaped by ideology, culture, and historical contingency, which renders their classification a genuinely complex theoretical task.

The classification of political terminology serves multiple practical purposes: it maps the conceptual field, facilitates the identification of translation equivalents, and provides a basis for lexicographic work. As Chilton observes, political language is never merely descriptive it is constitutively linked to power relations, institutional structures, and contested social meanings [3]. Cabré similarly argues that any terminological classification must account for both the cognitive dimension of terms as representations of specialized concepts, and their communicative dimension as units deployed within specific discourse situations [2]. The present article examines four principal classificatory dimensions structural, semantic, functional, and etymological and proposes an integrated framework applicable to translation practice and linguistic research.

The Nature of Political Terms

Before turning to classification proper, it is necessary to establish the conceptual boundaries of political terminology. Felber defines a term as a verbal designation of a concept within a specific subject field, emphasizing that terms are constituted not only by their formal

properties but by their relation to a structured conceptual system [5]. Political terms, accordingly, are lexical units whose conceptual content belongs to the organized domain of political theory, governance, institutions, and ideology.

The boundary between political terms and general vocabulary is frequently permeable. Words such as “power,” “freedom,” “justice,” and “rights” occupy an intermediate zone between ordinary lexis and specialized terminology. Sager notes that terms in social science domains often undergo semantic narrowing when adopted into technical discourse, while retaining links to everyday meanings that scientific terms in other fields do not [8]. Furthermore, as Fairclough demonstrates, political terms frequently become sites of discursive struggle, in which competing political actors seek to fix or destabilize meanings in accordance with particular ideological interests [4]. The term “democracy,” for instance, carries radically divergent connotations depending on the political tradition and cultural context in which it is deployed. This ideological dimension complicates classification but does not render it impossible.

CLASSIFICATIONS

One of the most productive approaches to classifying political terminology is based on structural or morphological composition. This approach groups terms according to the number and type of constituents involved in their formation, and has direct implications for translation strategy.

The first category is that of simple, one-word, terms single-word items designating political concepts without internal structural complexity, such as “parliament,” “sovereignty,” “veto,” and “amnesty.” Simple terms typically exhibit high terminological stability and are most likely to possess established equivalents across languages. The second category consists of compound terms formed by combining two or more lexical bases. These may be written as single words “statecraft,” “geopolitics”, hyphenated forms “nation-state,” “decision-making”, or open compounds “civil society”. Newmark identifies compound terminology as a major source of translation difficulty, particularly when the semantic relationship between constituents is culturally specific [7]. The term “shadow cabinet,” for instance, designates a parliamentary institution whose logic is intelligible only within the Westminster political tradition.

A third structural category encompasses multi-word terminological units (MWTUs) fixed collocations functioning as single terminological units, such as “balance of power,” “habeas corpus,” and “lame duck president.” Baker notes that their terminological status depends on the degree of lexicalization and semantic fusion achieved by the constituent elements, and that they regularly resist word-for-word translation [1]. Finally, abbreviations and acronyms constitute a fourth type. The political sphere generates an exceptionally high density of abbreviated terminology: UN, NATO, EU, ASEAN, NGO. Acronyms present particular classification challenges because they operate simultaneously as formal abbreviations and fully lexicalized terms with independent conceptual content.

Semantic classification examines the conceptual content encoded by terms and the relationships among terminological meanings. A primary distinction is between monosemic and polysemic terms. Monosemic political terms such as “suffrage,” “quorum,” “ratification,” and “extradition” maintain a stable, univocal relationship between form and meaning, and are relatively amenable to exact equivalence in translation. Polysemic terms, by contrast, carry multiple related meanings whose activation depends on context. The term “government” may denote an abstract political institution, a specific administration, or a process of governance,

depending on contextual variables a distinction that demands principled interpretive decisions from the translator.

A second key distinction is between ideologically neutral and ideologically marked terms. Neutral terms such as “amendment,” “referendum,” and “electorate” have relatively fixed, institutionally determined meanings. Ideologically marked terms, however, carry evaluative connotations that vary with political perspective. Van Dijk demonstrates that terms such as “terrorism,” “liberation,” and “regime” are systematically deployed in political discourse to construct particular representations of social actors and events, and their semantic content is therefore inherently contested [9]. The reproduction of such ideological markedness in translation requires deep familiarity with target-language political culture.

Political terminology may further be organized according to conceptual hierarchy relationships of hyperonymy and hyponymy within the terminological system. “Political system” is a hyperonym for “democracy,” “authoritarianism,” and “oligarchy.” Mapping these hierarchical relationships is essential for systematic lexicography and for identifying translation equivalents at appropriate levels of specificity [2]. A related dimension is the degree of terminologization the extent to which a lexical item has been absorbed into the political lexicon and detached from everyday meanings. Partially terminologized items such as “platform,” “bloc,” and “grassroots” retain significant links to common vocabulary and are particularly susceptible to false-friend errors in translation.

Political terminology spans a wide range of institutional and thematic subfields, each of which generates its own terminological conventions. Classification by functional domain organizes terms according to the specific sphere of political activity they serve. Lasswell was among the first scholars to systematically document the specialized vocabulary of political institutions, observing that such terms encode the normative frameworks through which political authority is legitimized and constrained [6].

The most fundamental domain is constitutional and governmental terminology, encompassing the lexis of state organization and governmental institutions: “federalism,” “parliamentary sovereignty,” “separation of powers,” “judicial review.” These terms are grounded in specific constitutional traditions, and their translation requires both legal and political knowledge. A second domain is electoral and democratic terminology, including “proportional representation,” “gerrymandering,” “electoral college,” and “plebiscite.” These terms are often highly culturally specific and present significant challenges when translated into languages that lack comparable institutional frameworks.

A third domain is international relations and diplomatic terminology: “détente,” “multilateralism,” “sanctions regime,” “treaty ratification.” Vinay and Darbelnet discuss the terminological transfer mechanisms applicable to borrowings in this domain, distinguishing between direct loans, calques, and adaptive equivalents [10]. A fourth domain encompasses ideological and doctrinal terms “liberalism,” “conservatism,” “populism,” “totalitarianism” whose translation is among the most demanding tasks in political work, as ideological vocabularies are embedded in specific historical traditions whose connotations do not transfer transparently across languages [3].

The etymological origin and word-formation mechanisms of political terms illuminate their cross-linguistic transferability and help account for systematic asymmetries between political vocabularies in different languages. A large proportion of English political terminology

derives from Latin and Greek roots. Terms such as “democracy” (Greek: *dēmos + kratos*), “republic” (Latin: *res publica*), and “senate” (Latin: *senatus*) are etymologically transparent to readers familiar with classical languages, and because these roots appear across European languages, they often permit relatively direct translation equivalences. However, semantic shift over time means that etymological transparency does not guarantee equivalent conceptual content [7].

A second category consists of French borrowings that entered English political vocabulary through the Norman Conquest and the development of diplomatic registers: “parliament,” “cabinet,” “diplomacy,” “envoy,” “coup d’état.” A third formation category consists of terminological neologisms responding to emerging political phenomena: “soft power,” “Euro-scepticism,” “post-truth politics.” Sager notes that neologisms may arise through affixation, compounding, semantic extension, or borrowing from cognate fields, and that in political discourse they are often driven by ideological innovation [8]. A fourth category encompasses metaphorical extensions of common vocabulary. Terms such as “platform,” “iron curtain,” “cold war,” and “landslide” retain visible metaphorical motivation. Fairclough treats metaphorization as a central mechanism in the ideological construction of political meaning, and argues that the choice of metaphorical frame always carries ideological implications [4].

CONCLUSION

The classification of political terminology resists reduction to any single criterion. As the foregoing analysis has shown, political terms may be organized according to structural composition (simple, compound, multi-word, abbreviated), semantic properties (monosemic or polysemic, neutral or ideologically marked, degree of terminologization), functional domain (constitutional, electoral, diplomatic, ideological), and etymological origin (classical roots, French borrowings, neologisms, metaphorical extensions). These four dimensions are not mutually exclusive but complementary, and a comprehensive description of any political term requires attention to all four axes simultaneously.

For translation studies, this integrated framework has clear practical implications. The structural type of a term conditions the formal strategies available for its translation; its semantic properties determine the precision required in equivalent selection; its functional domain specifies the register within which an equivalent must operate; and its etymological origin may facilitate or impede cross-linguistic transfer. Translators working in the political domain require not merely bilingual competence but a principled understanding of the terminological architecture of both source and target political discourse communities. Future research would benefit from corpus-based investigations of political terminology in specific language pairs including English and Uzbek where typological distance creates particular challenges for achieving equivalence across all four classificatory dimensions identified here.

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