

Research on Situational Teaching of English-Chinese Translation of Trade Terminology: A Case Study on the Teaching of “International Trade Practice” in Higher Vocational Colleges

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Abstract: The English-Chinese translation teaching of trade terminology usually adopts literal translation, which fails to effectively integrate actual business operation processes and even causes decontextualization. Taking the English-Chinese translation of trade terminology in the higher vocational course “International Trade Practice” as a case study, this paper demonstrates that situational teaching carried out through three methods — self-constructed terminology database, practical operation on the SimTrade Platform, and case-video integration — can effectively help students understand and memorize trade terminology, and improve their foreign language proficiency and professional competence.

Keywords: International Trade Practice; English-Chinese translation of trade terminology; Situational teaching; Higher vocational education

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1. Introduction

The English-Chinese translation of trade terminology in “International Trade Practice” covers a wide range of knowledge areas, and some terms involve numerous international practices and policies that are constantly evolving. It is essential for first-year vocational college students to correctly understand and master these English translations. However, they have not yet accumulated solid cross-cultural knowledge at this stage, which makes these English translations obscure and difficult for them.

At present, in the teaching of translating professional terms from English to Chinese, there are common problems such as “overemphasizing theory at the expense of practice” and “explaining terms out of context”, which cannot be solved merely by relying on traditional lecture methods. Although some scholars have conducted research on this course from the perspective of situational teaching, there is still a lack of research on the English-Chinese translation of professional terms from this perspective. Therefore, in order to alleviate

students' learning burden, enhance their professional confidence, and foster the cultivation of professional competencies, this paper explores the application of situational teaching to the English-Chinese translation of trade terminology.

2. Research on the teaching of “International Trade Practice”

According to statistics from CNKI, 2,831 academic journal articles and 198 dissertations on “International Trade Practice” have been published. Among these studies, many scholars have explored the integration of ideological and political elements into the course to cultivate foreign trade professionals with both an international vision and professional ethics.

Xu Xing & Mao Liangcan (2025) integrated ideological and political elements such as patriotism, legal awareness and social responsibility into teaching reform based on teaching objectives ^[1]. Luo Junxia, Ding Yumin & Dong Bolin (2024) incorporated values such as tolerance, integrity and self-confidence through competitions and case analyses ^[2]. Chen Shibang (2024) explored and practiced based on the OBE concept from the setting of ideological and political objectives and reconstruction of content, to improvements in teaching methods and optimization of assessment mechanisms ^[3]. In general, these scholars integrated ideological and political elements with professional knowledge and skills, improving the educational effect of ideological and political education in the course.

With the development of educational technology, blended teaching has become a focal point of reform. Wang Jun (2025) organically integrated the MOOC platform with project-based learning to optimize both online and offline teaching content ^[4]. Wang Juan (2024) applied the SPOC blended teaching model to the course, facilitating the development of students' professional competencies ^[5]. Wu Hao & Gui Kaixuan (2024) explored the role of the OMO blended model in promoting students' autonomous learning, deep learning and lifelong learning ^[6].

In terms of situational teaching, Tan Min (2023) elaborated on the application of the situational simulation teaching method in “International Trade Practice” in detail by setting situations, simulating experience and after-class reflection ^[7]. However, the paper had insufficient situational simulation topics and insufficient elaboration. Zhou Wenjun (2021) designed situational teaching with real enterprise cases based on an in-depth study, improving students' autonomous learning and problem-solving abilities, but also faced a scarcity of real cases ^[8]. Xiao Cuiyun (2014) also pointed out that simulating specific foreign trade situations could stimulate students' creative thinking, but was limited by insufficient basic support ^[9].

Notably, “teaching of professional term” has also been explored in other disciplines. Cao Ying (2026) suggested that the teaching of chemical professional terms should follow the “term-context-application” framework ^[10]. Chen Haibei (2025) developed a “stratification-word formation-context” three-dimensional systematic teaching system for food professional terms ^[11]. Chang Xiao & Zhou Ting (2023) believed that introducing situational teaching into the teaching of chemical vocabulary could improve students' learning interest, but their research only stayed at the level of book reviews without real classroom practice ^[12].

Focusing on “International Trade Practice”, He Haibo & Zeng Haiyan (2012) once proposed that teaching combined with case analysis and situational simulation could strengthen the repetitive memory of English professional terms, but their suggestions lacked practical implementation ^[13].

Based on the above analysis, a considerable number of scholars have studied “International Trade Practice” from the perspectives of “ideological and political elements” and macro teaching models. These studies indicate that it is insufficient for teachers to rely solely on traditional lectures when taking this course.

Teachers need to define teaching objectives and diversify their teaching methods to improve students' interest.

In terms of English-Chinese translation of trade terminology, systematic design and research have not yet been explored in this course under the framework of situational teaching. John Dewey (2004), a foreign scholar, pointed out that the quasi-realistic situational teaching model can effectively help students establish the connection between knowledge acquisition and application, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and reality^[14]. The situational teaching emphasizes taking cases or situations as carriers. Given that the English-Chinese translation of professional terms is obscure due to decontextualization, it creates conditions for setting situational roles when explaining terms.

By completing corresponding businesses in role-playing, students gain a deeper understanding of the meanings of these terms in English-Chinese translation and learn to apply them. In general, situational teaching can address students' lack of exposure to real foreign trade scenarios and lay a foundation for cultivating students with practical skills in the new era.

3. Problems in the teaching of English-Chinese translation of trade terminology

Relevant studies point out that the course generally emphasizes theory over practice. For example, Li Shi (2024) pointed out that the "International Trade Practice" course lacks practical components, insufficient cross-cultural communication skills training and real cases^[15]. Hu Lili (2021) also pointed out in her paper that in the context of the digital economy, training of trade professionals emphasizes theoretical knowledge over practical operation^[16]. In the English-Chinese translation teaching of professional terms, there are also the following three problems.

3.1. Literal translation techniques for professional terms

In class, the teacher explained the international trade terms using literal translations. However, many students couldn't understand their meanings. For example, FAS (Free Alongside Ship) — many students do not know what "alongside ship" means. Specifically, this refers to the seller delivering the goods to the ship's side designated by the buyer at the named port of shipment (such as placing them on the wharf or barge).

For the 2020 version of FOB (Free On Board), teachers explain its real meaning using literal translation without putting more emphasis on the differences from the 2010 version, so students will not realize that the risk of this term has been updated in the 2020 version. The specific boundary for risk division is when the goods are loaded onto the ship, rather than when they pass the ship's rail. The consequence of failing to combine specific situations in the teaching process is that students will misuse the English-Chinese translations of these professional terms.

3.2. Not aligned with actual business operations

Many documents need to be completed in international trade business processes, and it is challenging for students to memorize the Chinese translations of these documents without being immersed in the business context. For example, "original B/L" — many students easily interpret it as "原始的海运提单" without participating in role play or handling the actual document. Similarly, for the "letter of credit", students can hardly recall its translation by imagination and have no concept of standardized filling.

In this case, situational teaching makes it easier for students to understand the meanings of these documents than theoretical teaching. They do not need to rote memorize the Chinese translations of

professional terms and can apply them accurately in business.

3.3. Improper contextual use of English-Chinese translations of professional terms

International trade professional terms are obscure, and some translations can only be understood according to specific contexts. Taking “clean B/L” as an example, it refers to a bill of lading where the goods appear to be in good condition when shipped, and the carrier has not added any adverse remarks that could affect settlement. Without context, students cannot understand what a clean B/L is, and that it mainly reflects the condition of the goods.

In this course, other professional terms start with “clean”, each with different meanings in different English combinations. Another example is “clean collection” — only with contextual explanation can students know that it refers to a collection method where the exporter claims payment only by draft, and realize that the same word can have different meanings. Teaching without specific contexts confuses students about the English-Chinese meanings of professional terms.

4. Survey on students’ learning needs

The author conducted a learning needs survey among college students using Wenjuanxing (Questionnaire Star). Part of the survey content is as follows:

4.1. Teaching feedback (Multiple choice)

- (1) What do you think needs the most improvement in the current teaching?
 - Add real case analysis (e.g., letter of credit process)
 - Provide updates on trade terms (e.g., Incoterms® 2020)
 - Strengthen situational simulations (e.g., contract negotiation, document production)
 - Supplement the comparison of cultural differences (e.g., common law differences of “force majeure”)
 - Establish a terminology database/corpus resources
- (2) How do you want to obtain learning resources?
 - Electronic terminology database (accessible on mobile phones)
 - Situational animations/videos
 - Real enterprise document samples
 - Compilation of trade legal provisions

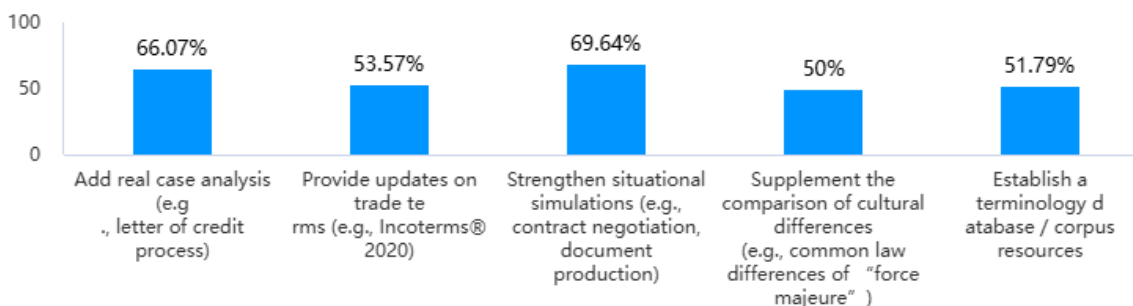


Figure 1. Results of the survey on teaching improvement needs.

According to the survey data, the corresponding bar chart of teaching improvement needs was created. The author found that more than 50% of students required the establishment of a terminology database and the dynamic update of terms. They were most eager for teachers to integrate real enterprise document cases to analyze business processes and to strengthen situational simulations.

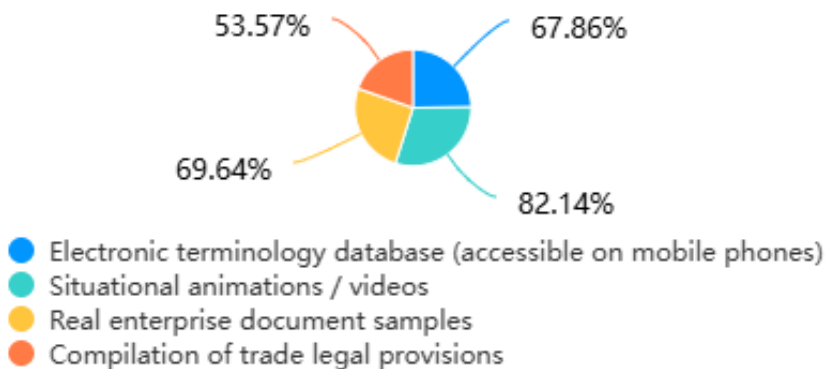


Figure 2. Results of the study on learning resource needs.

From the pie chart of learning resource needs, the author found that students most desired situational animations/videos to assist in classes. More than 50% of students also hoped to complete tasks with reference to real enterprise document samples during practical exercises and use an electronic terminology database to solve understanding problems of professional terms.

5. Significance of the situational teaching for English-Chinese translation of trade terminology

5.1. The situational teaching helps facilitate the rapid understanding of the English meanings of professional terms

The situational teaching helps students understand obscure professional terms because teachers can integrate the terms into specific scenarios in class. According to the questionnaire results, 69% of students expressed the desire to strengthen situational simulations. For example, to distinguish D/P at sight, D/P after sight and D/A, students can play relevant roles and simulate the operational processes of these transactions.

In the context of particular communication, they connect the understanding of these terms with the images and actions in the whole scenario, establish a direct link between English words and actual concepts, and form a comparison chart instead of memorizing their Chinese translations rigidly. Students said that under the theoretical teaching mode, they could not process this important information through multiple senses simultaneously, so they could not deepen their memory. As a result, they were more likely to forget the English definitions of these terms and failed to distinguish the risks related to the sellers' foreign exchange collections.

5.2. The situational teaching helps students perceive the subtle changes in policies and regulations

The situational teaching helps students deeply understand the subtle changes in relevant policies and regulations because they can truly be "insiders" in the relevant scenarios to understand and implement the

regulations and policies concerning the Chinese translations of professional terms. In addition, the survey showed that 53% of students requested a dynamic update of terms.

For example, when students are in the role of sales representative trading under the FCA (Free Carrier) term, they learn the differences between the 2010 and 2020 versions by referring to the latest materials. The 2020 version of this term introduces a new option that allows the buyer and seller to agree that the buyer can instruct its carrier to issue an on-board bill of lading to the seller once the goods have been loaded onto the ship. In this case, students will be able to resolve the sticking point of understanding the professional terms in the context of dynamic policies.

5.3. The situational teaching improves foreign trade competence and business English proficiency

The situational teaching simulates real work scenarios, thereby prompting students to actively apply their knowledge to solve specific problems. For example, the professional term “offer”, students, when proposing transaction terms in English, realize that language is a tool to complete tasks. They no longer memorize words out of context but use formal language to address issues in specific contexts. Therefore, the students can enhance professional confidence by exercising a lot.

6. The corresponding teaching suggestions notes

In view of the problems above, the preliminary exploration mainly restores the real meanings of professional terms through a self-constructed terminology database, combining with the SimTrade Foreign Trade Practice Platform system, and case-video integration, so as to solve the key problems such as oversimplification and specialization in the English-Chinese translation of professional terms.

6.1. Using a corpus to solve the contextual problems of professional terms

The main reason why students find it difficult to understand the English-Chinese translation of professional terms in this course is that these words are not presented in specific contexts. It is difficult for students to understand and memorize their Chinese translations only by literal meaning.

The solution to this problem is to summarize all professional terms in the textbook, using corpus resources (CoCa Corpus) and a corpus retrieval tool (Sketch Engine) to check the latest correct usage of these terms. According to the contextual characteristics of terms, the author can redesign classroom content, update corresponding practical cases, and provide professional English expressions combined with situational simulation processes.

6.2. Developing an English–Chinese terminology database for professional terms

To this end, the author first uses the corpus to solve the problem of understanding professional context, and then provides students with rich contextual example sentences and comparative analysis through a self-constructed terminology database. For example, entering the term “clean” and clicking “search”, students can observe contextual example sentences in the database to understand the different usages of the word in bills of lading and letters of credit.

One advantage of the database is its flexibility — it can update and add new terms at any time. Entering “FOB”, the database will prompt the change of the FOB risk point according to Incoterms® 2020. In addition, students reported low mastery of culturally differentiated terms such as “Force Majeure”. Relevant cross-

cultural cases can be added to the database to help students understand these terms.

6.3. Role immersion and enterprise real-scene embedding

The questionnaire survey shows that 69% of students requested real enterprise document samples. To solve the problem of “disconnection from actual business operation processes”, the author adopts role immersion and enterprise real-scene embedding, allowing students to fill in real documents on the SimTrade platform. For example, students simulate roles such as exporter, importer, exporting bank and importing bank, completing transactions with FOB terms.

In practice, real foreign trade documents are transformed into classroom cases, such as the production of the letter of credit, the bill of exchange, etc. Systematic practical operations not only strengthen students’ understanding of the English-Chinese translation of these professional terms, but also integrate the ideological and moral teaching element of “prudence and responsibility”.

What’s more, teachers found that displaying the collected real document templates in class greatly increased students’ classroom participation. Many students completed corresponding system operations by imitating document samples, enhancing their focus on the English-Chinese translation of professional terms in the process.

6.4. Case and video integration

More than 60% of students requested the establishment of a case bank integrating real cases such as letters of credit and contract disputes, and 82% of students desired situational animations or videos used in teaching. In this context, transforming abstract terms into visual representations through case-video integration is a good approach to solving the problem of “literal translation of professional terms”.

For example, for the international trade term FOB, teachers can first ask students to watch term videos, which present abstract business concepts with animations to help them quickly understand key concepts. They then take on the role of exporter to analyze and discuss the allocation of risks under this term.

After-class feedback shows that the students are willing to participate in such classes. And they can reach a deeper understanding of key points of risk division, thus achieving twice the results with half the effort in learning the English-Chinese translation of relevant terms. On the contrary, if the course is taught entirely in a theoretical manner, students’ attention decreases greatly. Students are inevitably tired of learning the English-Chinese translations of professional terms halfway through the semester.

7. Conclusion

Aiming at the teaching problems of decontextualized English-Chinese translation of professional terms and excessive reliance on theoretical lectures, this paper proposes three methods of situational teaching for English-Chinese translation of trade terminology based on comprehensive analysis of “the Survey on Teaching Improvement Needs” and “the Study on Learning Resource Needs”: technology-enabled terminology database, role immersion with real-world business scenarios, and case-video integration.

The practical results of teaching reform show that these three teaching methods can effectively correct literal translation misunderstandings, compensate for the lack of practical operation, and clarify polysemous terms. They also help ensure the close connection between teaching materials and industry practice, thereby enhancing both the practicality and the cutting-edge of English-Chinese translation teaching of professional

terms. Further efforts should be made to actively and deeply explore how to integrate artificial intelligence technology into this teaching model.

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