



## Article

# Lexical-Semantic Features of English and Karakalpak Legal Terminology

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**Abstract:** This article examines the lexical-semantic features of English and Karakalpak legal terminology through a qualitative and illustrative comparison. It focuses on semantic specialization, polysemy, semantic proximity, terminological variation, hierarchical relations, collocation, and translation equivalence. English examples are drawn mainly from a recent legal dictionary, while the Karakalpak material is selected from official legal texts of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. The analysis suggests that legal terms should not be compared as isolated words: their interpretation depends on jurisdiction, branch of law, document type, institutional function, and collocational environment. The selected English examples show the interaction of ordinary and specialized meanings, whereas the Karakalpak sources show productive multi-word terms and a legally defined classification of normative acts and the documents approved by them.

**Keywords:** legal terminology, English, Karakalpak, lexical semantics, polysemy, semantic relations, document type, legal translation

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## 1. Introduction

Legal terminology is a specialized part of language in which lexical meaning is closely connected with legal effect and institutional use. A term in a legal text may identify rights, duties, powers, procedures, or consequences. Precision is therefore a central requirement of legal language. At the same time, legal terms are not semantically simple: they may have context-dependent meanings, stable collocations, related but non-interchangeable terms, and different equivalents in another language. The comparison of English and Karakalpak legal terminology is important because the two languages use different lexical and word-formation resources. English belongs to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family, while its legal vocabulary has also developed through Latin, French, common-law, statutory, and international usage. Karakalpak belongs to the Turkic language family and forms legal terms through Turkic derivation, borrowing, and descriptive multi-word units.

The practical relevance of the topic is connected with bilingual legal communication. Legal information circulates through statutes, official websites, institutional documents, educational materials, and digital databases. A translator or researcher must therefore distinguish lexical resemblance from conceptual and functional equivalence. Formally similar words may perform different legal functions, while structurally different expressions may refer to comparable concepts in a particular context.

The aim of this article is to identify selected lexical-semantic features of English and Karakalpak legal terminology. The objectives are to examine semantic proximity and

near-synonymy, describe cases of polysemy, analyze document-based variation, and explain how hierarchy and collocation influence translation equivalence. The comparison is qualitative and illustrative rather than exhaustive.

## 2. Materials and Method

### 2.1 Conceptual Framework

The research is grounded in contemporary terminology theory and legal translation studies. ISO 704:2022 presents terminology work as a systematic analysis of the relationships among objects, concepts, definitions, and designations [1]. This principle is relevant to legal terminology because legal terms acquire specialized meanings within particular institutions, procedures, and normative systems.

### 2.2 Data Sources

The English examples are verified mainly through *A Dictionary of Law*, tenth edition [2]. The dictionary primarily reflects English law and is used to establish the specialized meanings of the selected terms; it is not treated as evidence for every English-speaking jurisdiction.

The Karakalpak material is drawn from the Constitution of the Republic of Karakalpakstan [3]. The official list of laws is used to confirm established titles of legislative documents and recurrent terminological forms [4]. The Law on Normative Legal Acts provides material on the classification, preparation, adoption, and legal force of normative documents [5]. The Law on the Council of Ministers supplies institutional and administrative terminology [6]. The Law on the State Language provides examples related to language status and forms of official address [7].

### 2.3 Analytical Procedure

The study uses a purposive illustrative sample. Terms were selected because they demonstrate polysemy, semantic proximity, hierarchical relations, document classification, collocation, or translation difficulty. The methods are qualitative comparative analysis, lexical-semantic analysis, contextual analysis, componential analysis, and thematic classification. No frequency counts are made, and no claim is made that the material constitutes a statistically representative corpus.

### 2.4 Lexical-Semantic Profile of Legal Terms

A legal term differs from a general word by the degree of conceptual restriction expected in specialized use. In ordinary communication, a word may remain relatively open to interpretation; in legal communication, the same form may be linked to a defined procedure, status, institution, or legal consequence. Semantic analysis should therefore distinguish general-language meaning from jurisdiction-specific legal meaning.

Selected English legal terms often contain semantic layering. The word *action* may denote conduct in general language, but in legal usage it can refer to a proceeding or lawsuit. *Consideration* may mean careful thought in ordinary language, while in contract law it refers to the bargained-for value or exchange that supports an enforceable promise [2]. These examples show how an ordinary lexical form can develop a specialized legal sense.

Karakalpak legal terminology frequently uses descriptive combinations. The Law on Normative Legal Acts includes expressions such as *normativlik huquqiy akt*, *yuridikaliq kúsh*, *nızam joybarı*, and *túsindiriw xatı* [5]. The Law on the State Language uses the expression *mámleketlik til* as a legally defined designation [7]. In these examples, the specialized meaning belongs to the complete combination rather than to one component in isolation.

In the selected material, English examples are often lexically compact, whereas many Karakalpak examples are multi-word structures. This is an observation about the present sample, not a universal typological rule. Compactness does not guarantee semantic simplicity, and a transparent multi-word form does not eliminate the need to check its legal definition and source document.

Morphological productivity is also relevant. English legal vocabulary includes related forms such as *legal*, *legality*, *illegal*, *valid*, *validity*, *liable*, and *liability* [2]. Karakalpak legal language uses suffixation and attributive structures in forms such as *nızamlılıq*, *yuridikaliq*, *normativlik*, *wákillik*, and *mámleketlik*. These patterns show that legal terminology includes

nouns, adjectives, and abstract forms expressing status, authority, validity, and institutional relation.

## 2.5 Semantic Proximity and Near-Synonymy

Exact synonymy is uncommon in legal terminology because the choice of a term may determine scope, procedure, document type, or legal effect. Terms that appear similar should therefore be classified more precisely as near-synonyms, hierarchical terms, procedurally related terms, or functionally associated terms.

In English, *law* and *statute* are not full synonyms: *law* may refer broadly to a legal system or body of rules, whereas a *statute* is a written enactment of a legislature. Likewise, *claim*, *complaint*, and *petition* are procedurally related but distinct. A *complaint* may initiate a civil action; a *claim* states a demand or asserted right; and a *petition* is a formal request whose function depends on the procedure. *Duty* and *obligation* may overlap in some contexts, but *liability* usually concerns legal responsibility or exposure to a legal consequence and should not be treated as their synonym [2].

Karakalpak official usage also requires differentiation. The Law on the State Language lists *arzalar*, *usınıslar*, and *shağımlar* as separate forms of address [7]. This is evidence against treating *arza* and *shağım* as freely interchangeable. The Law on Normative Legal Acts uses *qarar* as the formal name of a type of normative legal act [5]. In the Constitution, *sheshim* is used in reference to a court decision [3]. Their equivalence must therefore be established from the institution, procedure, and document type rather than from surface similarity alone.

Variation between borrowed and descriptive forms may occur in legal discourse, but interchangeability cannot be assumed without evidence from official texts or a representative corpus. In the present study, such forms are treated as potential variants only when their function and source context are known.

A synonymy analysis should ask whether the terms designate the same concept, occur in the same legal field and document type, and produce the same legal effect. If these conditions are not met, the relation should be described more narrowly than full synonymy.

**Table 1.** Selected relations that should not be collapsed into synonymy

| Relation                          | English examples                                        | Karakalpak examples                           | Analytical note                                                             |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hypernymy / hyponymy              | <i>law</i> — <i>statute</i>                             | <i>normativlik huquqiy akt</i> — <i>nızam</i> | The first term is broader; the second is a subtype in the relevant system.  |
| Procedural differentiation        | <i>claim</i> — <i>complaint</i> — <i>petition</i>       | <i>arza</i> — <i>shağım</i>                   | The terms are related but not procedurally interchangeable.                 |
| Contextual overlap                | <i>decision</i> — <i>resolution</i>                     | <i>sheshim</i> — <i>qarar</i>                 | Institution, procedure, and document status determine the appropriate term. |
| Duty / responsibility distinction | <i>duty</i> — <i>obligation</i> versus <i>liability</i> | <i>minnet</i> versus <i>juwapkershilik</i>    | A duty is not identical to responsibility for breach or legal consequences. |

## 2.6 Polysemy and Semantic Specialization

Polysemy is the use of one lexical form in several related meanings. In legal language, polysemy often arises when a general word acquires a technical sense or when a legal

form is used differently across branches or jurisdictions. The main translation risk is selecting the ordinary meaning when the context activates a specialized legal meaning.

In English, *action* may refer to conduct or to a legal proceeding. *Act* may denote an action or deed, while a capitalized *Act* may name a statute. *Title* may refer to a heading, a legal right in property, or a documentary basis for that right. *Consideration* has a specialized contract-law sense that cannot be replaced by its ordinary meaning of attention or reflection [2]. The relevant meaning is activated by jurisdiction, legal field, capitalization, and collocation.

Karakalpak material contains similar context-dependent specialization. The form *akt* occurs in the legally defined combination *normativlik huquqiy akt*. The noun *kúsh* means force or strength in general language, but *yuridikaliq kúsh* denotes legal force or validity. The form *tártip* may express order, procedure, or manner, and its exact legal sense depends on the governing text and collocation [5].

Contextual and componential analysis can help distinguish these meanings. In *yuridikaliq kúsh*, the adjective restricts the general meaning of *kúsh* to a legal-status meaning. In *normativlik huquqiy akt*, the modifiers delimit the broad form *akt* as a legally defined official document. For translation, the complete term and its institutional context should therefore be treated as the unit of analysis.

## 2.7 Terminological Variation, Paraphrase, and Document Type

Terminological variation occurs when the same or closely related concept is expressed by different lexical, morphological, or syntactic forms. In legal language, however, an apparent variant may indicate a different legal status rather than a stylistic choice. A terminological variant must also be distinguished from an explanatory paraphrase and from a functionally related but conceptually distinct expression.

For example, *statute* may be explained by the paraphrase *written legislative enactment*, but the paraphrase is not itself an established terminological variant. Similarly, *appeal* and *appellate review* are related, yet they do not necessarily designate the same procedural unit [2]. The first may name a party's procedural step, while the second may describe the review process. Such expressions should therefore not be treated as automatically interchangeable.

The Karakalpak Law on Normative Legal Acts provides a legally defined classification. It identifies the Constitution, laws, and decisions of authorized bodies as types of normative legal acts. The same law separately states that normative legal acts may approve documents such as *reje*, *qağıyda*, *kórsetpe*, *reglament*, *konceptciya*, and *bağdarlama* [5]. These approved documents should not be presented as if they were all independent normative acts of the same hierarchical level.

This distinction is important for translation. The English term *regulation* cannot be assigned automatically to every Karakalpak document name. Depending on function, *qağıyda* may be rendered as *rules* or *regulations*; *reglament* may require *rules of procedure* or *procedural regulation*; and *reje* may describe the status, functions, and organization of a body. The correct equivalent depends on the content of the document, the approving authority, and its legal status [5].

The official source consistently uses *joybar* for a draft, including *nızam joybarı* and *normativlik huquqiy akt joybarı* [5]. A *joybar* is a proposed text and is not yet an act in force. The same law defines *kórsetpe* as a document that specifies aspects of applying normative legal acts; its English rendering must therefore follow that function rather than surface resemblance.

## 2.8 Hierarchical, Oppositional, and Collocational Relations

Legal hierarchy is jurisdiction-specific. The Law on Normative Legal Acts states that the Constitution has the highest legal force and classifies laws and decisions of authorized bodies according to legally defined categories [5]. The relation among a constitution, a law, a decision, and a document approved by a normative act must therefore be described from the governing legislation rather than from a general dictionary hierarchy.

Oppositional relations should also be classified carefully. Pairs such as *lawful* / *unlawful* and *valid* / *invalid* are lexical oppositions. By contrast, *right* / *duty* are legally correlative concepts, and *claimant* / *defendant* are procedural roles rather than antonyms.

Karakalpak pairs such as *nızamlı / nızamsız* may express opposition, whereas *huqıq / minnet* are better described as correlative legal concepts. Expressions such as *kúshke iye bolıw* and *óz kúshin joytıw* describe contrasting legal statuses or processes.

Collocation is a strong semantic marker. English legal combinations include *enter into force*, *legal force*, *bring a claim*, *file a complaint*, and *adopt a law* [2]. Karakalpak official texts include *yuridikalıq kúshke iye bolıw*, *kúshke kiriw*, *nızam qabıl etiw*, *qarar qabıl etiw*, *nızam joybarı*, and *túsindiriw xatı* [5]. Institutional texts also contain combinations such as *Ministrler Keńesiniń qararı* and *Ministrler Keńesiniń biyligi* [6].

Collocational analysis is especially useful in bilingual comparison. Translating an isolated form such as *kúsh* may produce a general-language equivalent, whereas translating *yuridikalıq kúsh* requires the legal expression *legal force* or, in some contexts, *legal validity*. The appropriate choice must be based on the complete phrase and its function in the source text.

## 2.9 Translation Equivalence

Equivalence in English-Karakalpak legal terminology is not always direct, since legal equivalence depends on conceptual correspondence between legal systems rather than on lexical similarity alone [8]. Some terms have relatively close conceptual correspondence in general constitutional discourse, while others have only partial or functional equivalents because jurisdictions and document classifications do not match exactly.

Relatively close correspondence may be found in pairs such as constitution — *Konstituciya* and right — *huqıq* when the legal context is sufficiently general. Terms such as liability, claim, decision, regulation, and act require closer contextual analysis because their scope varies by branch of law, procedural setting, and document type. A one-word dictionary equivalent may therefore be misleading, particularly given that full, partial, and near equivalence must be carefully distinguished in legal translation [9].

A practical translation procedure should include four steps. First, the translator should identify the jurisdiction and legal field. Second, the document type and issuing authority should be determined. Third, definitions and stable collocations should be examined. Fourth, an equivalent should be selected that reproduces the legal function rather than merely the lexical form, consistent with functionalist approaches to comparative legal linguistics [10]. When no full equivalent exists, an explanatory translation or a terminological note may be more accurate than a forced one-word match.

**Table 2.** Main lexical-semantic features and translation risks

| Feature                    | Typical example                               | Translation risk                                                     |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Near-synonymy              | <i>duty / obligation; sheshim / qarar</i>     | Using one equivalent without checking the field and document status. |
| Procedural differentiation | <i>claim / complaint; arza / shaǵım</i>       | Treating related procedural terms as interchangeable.                |
| Polysemy                   | <i>action; kúsh</i>                           | Selecting the ordinary meaning instead of the legal sense.           |
| Document-type variation    | <i>regulation; qaǵıyda / reje / reglament</i> | Ignoring the approving authority and the document's legal status.    |
| Hierarchy                  | <i>constitution — law — decision</i>          | Flattening different levels or categories of legal force.            |
| Collocation                | <i>legal force; yuridikalıq kúsh</i>          | Translating isolated words rather than stable combinations.          |



### 3. Result

The analysis yields a consistent set of lexical-semantic patterns across the selected English and Karakalpak legal material, summarized in Tables 1 and 2. First, both languages show semantic layering, in which a general-language form acquires a distinct legal sense (e.g., action, consideration; kúsh, akt), confirming that legal meaning cannot be read directly from ordinary usage. Second, exact synonymy is rare: pairs that initially appear equivalent (law/statute; duty/obligation/liability; arza/shağm; sheshim/qarar) instead show hypernymy, procedural differentiation, or contextual overlap, and must be classified accordingly rather than treated as interchangeable [11]. Third, the Karakalpak legal material relies heavily on multi-word and descriptive constructions (normativlik huqıyqıy akt, yuridikalıq kúsh), whereas the selected English examples are frequently compact single words carrying a specialized sense; this asymmetry appears linked to genre and source type rather than to a general typological rule. Fourth, the Law on Normative Legal Acts establishes an explicit document hierarchy (Constitution, laws, decisions) that is distinct from the set of documents such acts may approve (reje, qağıyda, kórsetpe, reglament, koncepciya, bağdarlama), and collapsing this distinction was identified as a specific source of translation risk. Fifth, collocation functions as a reliable indicator of legal meaning: isolated forms such as kúsh or akt take on legal force only within fixed combinations (yuridikalıq kúsh, normativlik huqıyqıy akt), a pattern mirrored in English combinations such as legal force and enter into force. Finally, translation equivalence between the two languages ranges from relatively direct correspondence (constitution–Konstituciya, right–huqıq) to partial or function-dependent equivalence (liability, claim, regulation, act), with Table 2 summarizing the principal features and their associated translation risks.

### 4. Discussion

#### 4.1 Interpretation of Findings in Relation to the Research Objectives

The findings directly address the four objectives set out in the introduction. Regarding the first objective — examining semantic proximity and near-synonymy — the analysis confirms that apparent synonym pairs in both languages (law/statute, duty/obligation/liability in English; arza/shağm, sheshim/qarar in Karakalpak) are more accurately described as hypernymic, procedurally differentiated, or contextually overlapping relations (Table 1). This finding indicates that semantic proximity in legal discourse cannot be assessed through dictionary synonymy alone; it requires reference to the institutional and procedural context in which each term operates.

Regarding the second objective — describing polysemy — the analysis shows that specialized legal senses in both languages are activated by systematic contextual cues rather than occurring randomly. In English, capitalization (Act vs. act), collocation, and legal field jointly determine which sense of a polysemous form (action, title, consideration) is intended. In Karakalpak, modification by adjectives such as yuridikalıq narrows general forms such as kúsh to a legal-status meaning. This parallel patterning across two typologically unrelated languages suggests that context-triggered polysemy resolution may be a general property of legal language rather than a feature specific to either linguistic tradition.

Regarding the third objective — analyzing document-based variation — the Karakalpak material demonstrates that apparent lexical variants frequently encode legally consequential distinctions rather than stylistic choice. The Law on Normative Legal Acts' explicit two-tier classification (normative acts versus the documents they approve) shows that document-type variation is not incidental but is itself part of the legal system's conceptual architecture; the term joybar for a draft, and the functional distinction among reje, qağıyda, kórsetpe, and reglament, further illustrate why orthographic and terminological accuracy matters, since mixing these terms or treating them as unrestricted synonyms can distort legal hierarchy and translation [5]. This finding extends the general claim that legal terminology is system-bound to the more specific claim that document hierarchy itself must be treated as a semantic feature of individual terms.

Regarding the fourth objective — explaining how hierarchy and collocation influence translation equivalence — the results show a graded rather than binary pattern of equivalence, ranging from near-direct correspondence (constitution–Konstituciya) to function-dependent partial equivalence (regulation, liability). Collocation emerges as the operational mechanism that resolves this gradation in practice: because legal force in isolated forms such as *kúsh* or *akt* is activated only within fixed combinations, translators cannot rely on component-by-component substitution and must instead treat the collocation as the basic unit of equivalence.

#### 4.2 Comparison with Previous Studies

These findings are consistent with, and extend, several strands of existing scholarship on legal terminology and translation. Prieto Ramos argues that legal terminology should be analyzed in relation to conceptual differences between legal systems rather than through direct lexical mapping [12]. The present analysis provides concrete empirical support for this position: the hierarchy identified in the Law on Normative Legal Acts, and the resulting hypernymic relations in Table 1, show precisely the kind of system-internal conceptual structure that Prieto Ramos identifies as the proper basis for terminological comparison, rather than surface equivalence between English and Karakalpak forms.

Peruzzo's account of the contextual constraints shaping how national legal terminology is presented — including target audience, publication type, and legal system of reference — helps explain an asymmetry identified in the present material [13]. The English examples, drawn primarily from a general legal dictionary aimed at a broad readership, tend toward compact single-word forms, whereas the Karakalpak examples, drawn from legislative and institutional texts addressed to specialists and citizens within a specific legal system, tend toward explicit multi-word constructions. This is consistent with Peruzzo's claim that presentation format is shaped as much by audience and genre as by the underlying conceptual content, and it cautions against treating the English–Karakalpak compactness contrast as evidence of a deeper typological difference between the two languages.

Pavliuk's case study of translating regulation into Ukrainian emphasizes that translation potential depends on conceptual correspondence between source and target legal systems, semantic structure, and professionally accepted equivalents [14]. The present findings on regulation-type Karakalpak terms (*qaǵıyda*, *reglament*, *reje*) mirror this pattern closely: no single Karakalpak equivalent for regulation is adequate across contexts, and the appropriate choice depends on the same variables Pavliuk identifies — the issuing authority, the document's legal status, and its function within the normative hierarchy. This convergence across an unrelated language pair (Ukrainian–English) and the present pair (Karakalpak–English) suggests that Pavliuk's framework may generalize beyond the single case she examined.

#### 4.3 Theoretical Implications

At a theoretical level, the findings support and refine the terminology-work model set out in ISO 704:2022, which frames terminology analysis as the systematic study of relationships among objects, concepts, definitions, and designations [1]. The present analysis shows that, for legal terminology specifically, these relationships are not purely conceptual but are anchored in institutional documents that assign legal force and procedural function to particular forms. This suggests a refinement of the general ISO model for the legal domain: legal terminology work should treat the source legal text's own classificatory statements — such as the Law on Normative Legal Acts' explicit document hierarchy — as primary evidence of conceptual structure, rather than inferring that structure solely from lexical or definitional analysis.

The findings also contribute to legal-linguistic theory more broadly. The collocation-based account of how legal force is activated (*yuridikalıq kúsh*, legal force) is consistent with functionalist approaches to comparative legal linguistics, which hold that legal meaning resides in use rather than in isolated lexical items. Extending this functionalist perspective to a Turkic–Germanic language pair — rather than the more commonly studied European language pairs in the legal-translation literature — provides cross-

linguistic evidence that collocation-dependent legal meaning is not restricted to Indo-European legal traditions.

#### 4.4 Practical Implications

For bilingual glossary design, a one-word equivalent is often insufficient. An entry should include the jurisdiction or legal field, a short definition, a typical collocation, the document source, and a note on restrictions. For example, an entry for *shağım* should distinguish it from other forms of address, while an entry for regulation should warn that several Karakalpak terms may be possible depending on function and legal status. Where no single equivalent exists across all contexts, the glossary entry itself should model the four-step procedure identified in Section 8 — jurisdiction, document type, definition and collocation, and functional equivalent — so that users are guided toward the correct choice rather than presented with an undifferentiated list of options.

From a teaching perspective, legal terminology should be learned through semantic relations and authentic contexts rather than memorized as isolated pairs. Grouping terms by polysemy, hierarchy, procedural function, and collocation helps students understand why lexical similarity does not automatically produce legal equivalence. For translator training specifically, the findings suggest that exercises built around document-hierarchy classification (distinguishing normative acts from the documents they approve) and collocation-based translation (translating fixed combinations rather than isolated words) would directly target the two areas where the present analysis identified the greatest translation risk.

#### 4.5 Limitations and Future Research

The source design also limits the scope of the comparison. The English material comes mainly from a dictionary, while the Karakalpak material comes from legislative and institutional texts. Therefore, differences in compactness or explanatory structure may partly reflect the genre of the sources rather than language structure alone, a limitation also noted in corpus-based studies of translated legal genres [15]. The qualitative and illustrative sampling strategy is a further limitation: because terms were selected purposively to demonstrate specific lexical-semantic phenomena, the findings cannot be generalized to the full lexicon of either language's legal terminology, and no frequency-based claims can be made about how common any given pattern is in actual legal usage.

A future corpus-based study should compare parallel genres, such as statutes with statutes or legal dictionaries with legal dictionaries, to isolate genre effects from language-structural effects. Such a study could also quantify the relative frequency of near-synonymy, polysemy, and document-type variation identified qualitatively here, and could extend the comparison to additional Turkic languages to test whether the patterns observed for Karakalpak reflect broader family-level tendencies or are specific to Karakalpak's particular legislative drafting conventions.

### 5. Conclusion

The selected English and Karakalpak material demonstrates a complex set of lexical-semantic relations, including semantic specialization, semantic proximity, near-synonymy, polysemy, document-based variation, hierarchy, correlation, opposition, and stable collocation. These features show that legal terms should be analyzed as elements of conceptual and institutional systems. Polysemy is constrained by jurisdiction, legal field, capitalization, and collocation. Variation may reflect document type and legal status rather than style. In translation, the most reliable equivalent is not necessarily the closest dictionary word, but the expression that reproduces the source term's legal function in context. The findings are qualitative and illustrative and should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all English or Karakalpak legal terminology.

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