MAKING MEANING THROUGH TEACHER TALK: LEXICAL RELATIONS IN VOCABULARY INSTRUCTION IN AN ESP SPEAKING CLASSROOM

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Abstract
Vocabulary mastery remains one of the most persistent challenges for EFL learners, particularly when closely related words carry different meanings across registers, a problem that intensifies in register-dense professional genres. This qualitative study aims to identify the types of lexical relations used by an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) speaking teacher while clarifying vocabulary for her students, and to describe the discourse strategies accompanying those clarifications. A case study design was employed, with the ESP teacher and her speaking class of undergraduate Law students preparing curriculum vitae (CV) and job-interview materials as the research subject. Data were collected through a 100-minute non-participant classroom observation, video recording, and a semi-structured interview, then analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis. Consistent with this aim, the results show that the teacher's talk fully realized seven of the eight categories of lexical relations proposed by Yule (2020), namely synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, prototype effects, polysemy, metonymy, and collocation, while the eighth category, homophones and homonyms, was only partially represented through two instances of homonymy, with no instances of homophones identified in the data. These relations were embedded within a recurring routine of elicitation, code-switching, contrastive restatement, and exemplification. These findings imply that a single, register-dense ESP topic can be strategically leveraged to teach a wide range of lexical relations. It is concluded that explicit, context-sensitive vocabulary clarification supports learners' precision of meaning in specialized professional communication.

Keywords: *lexical relations, vocabulary instruction, teacher talk, English for Specific Purposes*

Introduction

Vocabulary is widely regarded as one of the most difficult components of language competence for EFL learners to master, largely because learners must constantly negotiate the boundary between their first language (L1) and the target language (L2) when matching form to meaning. Limited exposure to authentic English input outside the classroom compounds this difficulty, since most EFL learners in similar under-resourced contexts rarely use English for genuine daily communication and therefore have few opportunities to encounter the same word in multiple, naturally occurring contexts. Vocabulary instruction, consequently, should not merely present isolated word

lists; it should equip learners with strategies for expanding and organizing their lexical knowledge so that they can infer, retain, and appropriately deploy new items (Bao & Peng, 2024; Alshumrani, 2024).

One pedagogically powerful way of organizing vocabulary knowledge is through lexical relations: the systematic connections that hold between the meanings of words, such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, homonymy, polysemy, and metonymy (Yule, 2020). Rather than treating each word as an isolated unit, lexical relations allow teachers to cluster items meaningfully, which in turn helps learners deduce unfamiliar words, strengthens memorization through association, and provides more precise boundaries between items that might otherwise be confused. Recent research continues to confirm that grouping vocabulary through sense relations gives coherence to a lesson and measurably supports the breadth and depth of learners' lexical knowledge (Jashari, 2024; Nguyen & Le, 2023). At the same time, several studies caution that not all lexical relations are equally salient to learners: paradigmatic relations such as synonymy and homonymy in particular tend to be a persistent source of confusion because two words may share an identical form while carrying meanings that differ sharply depending on register, discipline, or context (Jashari, 2024).

This concern is especially relevant in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction, where students are expected to use general vocabulary items in highly specialized ways. Vocabulary that is unremarkable in everyday conversation may carry a distinct, field-specific sense once it appears in a professional document, such as a curriculum vitae or a job application letter. Words like sex, gender, reference, and qualification are common examples: each has an everyday meaning that students already know, yet each also carries a narrower, context-bound meaning that must be explicitly taught if learners are to use these terms accurately in academic and occupational settings (Al Zahrani & Chaudhary, 2022). Because ESP courses are typically organized around learners' future occupational or academic needs rather than general communicative competence, ESP teachers frequently find themselves explaining exactly these kinds of lexical nuances as they arise spontaneously in the course of instruction (Villabona & Cenoz, 2022).

Despite the growing body of research on vocabulary pedagogy, comparatively little attention has been paid to how lexical relations actually surface in the spontaneous, unplanned talk of teachers as they respond to students' questions and misunderstandings in real time. Most vocabulary research to date has examined lexical relations either as a component of learners' productive or receptive vocabulary knowledge (Bao & Peng, 2024; Albelihi, 2022) or as an experimental intervention designed and delivered by a researcher (Nguyen & Le, 2023). Far fewer studies have observed how an ordinary classroom teacher, without being prompted to design a lexical-relations lesson, naturally draws on such relations while clarifying meaning for students, and why the teacher makes those particular choices. Understanding this naturally occurring teacher talk is valuable because it reveals which lexical relations are pedagogically salient to practitioners themselves, and because teacher explanations of vocabulary are known to shape students' subsequent understanding and retention of specialized terms (Tong et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023).

A further complexity is that ESP classrooms in many EFL contexts across Asia are typically bilingual in practice: teachers routinely alternate between English and the students' first language to scaffold explanation, a phenomenon well documented in the code-switching literature (Munawaroh et al., 2022; Temesgen & Hailu, 2022; Ulum &

Clark, 2024). Because lexical relations are frequently explained through this kind of bilingual scaffolding, an accurate description of how teachers use lexical relations in practice must also attend to the discourse strategies, including code-switching, through which those relations are conveyed to students.

Based on this background, the present study turns to one ESP teacher's classroom talk while she guided undergraduate Law students through CV-writing and job-interview vocabulary, tracing the kinds of lexical relations that surfaced as she clarified words for her students and the pedagogical reasoning that appeared to underlie those choices. This setting is particularly well suited to examining lexical relations in specialized vocabulary instruction because Law students preparing job-application materials must simultaneously navigate two register-dense domains at once: the disciplinary register of legal-professional English that structures their academic training, and the equally specific, high-stakes register of CV and job-application English, in which ordinary words such as reference, qualification, and position carry narrow, non-negotiable meanings. The convergence of these two dense registers within a single class session raises the stakes of lexical confusion beyond the classroom, since a misunderstood term could affect how these students are subsequently evaluated in an actual scholarship or job application, which is what makes the teacher's real-time clarification strategies in this particular setting especially worth documenting. Such a classroom-grounded account contributes to a more grounded understanding of vocabulary pedagogy and offers practical insight for ESP practitioners on how to anticipate and pre-empt the lexical confusions that learners are most likely to encounter (Simel Pranjić, 2021; Xu et al., 2026). Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What types of lexical relations does the ESP teacher realize while clarifying vocabulary for undergraduate Law students preparing CV and job-interview materials? (2) What discourse strategies accompany the teacher's clarification of these lexical relations? (3) What reasoning does the teacher report for selecting these particular lexical relations and discourse strategies?

Method

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative design utilizing a case study approach, which is appropriate for exploring a bounded, real-world instance of classroom practice in depth rather than testing a predetermined hypothesis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A case study approach was selected because the object of inquiry, one teacher's naturally occurring explanation of vocabulary during an ongoing ESP course, could only be understood by examining the specific instructional context, the participants involved, and the discourse produced within that context (Walsh, 2011).

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in an ESP speaking class for undergraduate Law students. The class, referred to here as the ESP Speaking class, focused on the topic of Curriculum Vitae (CV) writing and job interview preparation. The teacher participant was a non-native English-speaking instructor who had approximately four years of experience teaching ESP courses across several academic majors at the institution. She was purposively selected because she was the instructor assigned to the observed class and

had substantial experience negotiating vocabulary explanation for non-English-major students.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, the researcher conducted a 100-minute non-participant classroom observation during one full session of the ESP Speaking class, sitting outside the immediate teaching interaction so as not to influence the naturally occurring discourse. Second, the session was video-recorded in its entirety, and field notes were taken concurrently, to allow the verbal utterances of the teacher to be transcribed and reviewed for accuracy after the observation. Third, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the teacher to elicit her reasoning for selecting and explaining the particular vocabulary items that emerged in the lesson; because of scheduling constraints, the interview questions were administered through a WhatsApp text exchange that allowed the teacher to respond at length and in her own words. This combination of observation, recording, and interview data enabled triangulation between what the teacher actually said in class and why she reported having said it (Munawaroh et al., 2022).

Data Analysis

The video recording was transcribed verbatim, preserving instances of code-switching between English and Indonesian as they occurred in the teacher's talk, consistent with recommendations for analyzing bilingual classroom discourse (Temesgen & Hailu, 2022). The transcribed utterances were then read repeatedly and coded according to Yule's (2020) classification of lexical relations (synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, prototypes, homophones and homonyms, polysemy, metonymy, and collocation) to identify which types of lexical relations the teacher drew upon while explaining vocabulary. Utterances that did not involve an explicit or implicit comparison between two or more lexical items were excluded from the analysis. The interview responses were analyzed thematically to identify the teacher's stated rationale for the vocabulary explanations she gave. Data were displayed in a summary table and interpreted narratively, following a qualitative descriptive analysis procedure (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Result and Discussion

Types of Lexical Relations Used by the Teacher

Analysis of the classroom transcript revealed that the teacher's talk realized seven of the eight categories of lexical relations proposed by Yule (2020) across nine distinct communicative episodes: synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, prototypes, homonymy, polysemy, metonymy, and collocation. Table 1 below summarizes the word pairs or expressions involved and the communicative context in which the teacher raised them.

Table 1. *Types of Lexical Relations Used by the Teacher*

No.	Type of Lexical Relation	Word Pair / Focus	Communicative Context
1	Synonymy	Sex / Gender	While reviewing the items that belong in a CV's personal details section, a student suggested "gender." The teacher clarified that a CV conventionally uses the word sex, and distinguished it from gender, which she

			associated with the broader social rather than biological sense of the term.
2	Antonymy	Strengths / Weaknesses	While preparing students for the mock-interview question "What are your strengths and weaknesses?", the teacher elicited strengths first, then immediately asked students to name the opposite term, explaining that the two words are conventionally requested together in interviews as a gradable antonym pair.
3	Hyponymy	Skills → Hard skills / Soft skills	When discussing the Skills section of the CV, the teacher explained that skills is a broad, superordinate term, and guided students to sort the skills they had listed into two more specific subcategories, hard skills (e.g., legal drafting, data analysis) and soft skills (e.g., teamwork, negotiation), illustrating that both are hyponyms of skills.
4	Prototypes	Computer skills (as a typical "skill")	Asked to spontaneously name one skill for their CV, most students answered "computer skills" before any other example. The teacher used this pattern to point out that some category members, such as computer skills, are more prototypical and come to mind first, even though less typical members such as negotiation or public speaking are equally valid.
5	Homonymy	Reference(s)	The teacher distinguished the everyday academic sense of reference (a cited source in a book, journal, or research paper) from its distinct sense within a CV, where references denotes named persons, such as a lecturer, who can vouch for the applicant when applying for a scholarship or job.
6	Homonymy	Qualification	Students initially equated qualification with its everyday Indonesian sense of "criteria" (*kualifikasi*). The teacher redirected them to the CV-specific meaning of qualification as an academic title or degree (e.g., Master of Arts, Master of Education, Master of Science).
7	Polysemy	Position	The teacher explained that position, as in "the position you are applying for," is related to the everyday sense of position as physical placement or standing, both senses stemming from the core idea of where something or someone stands, even though the CV usage refers to a job role rather than a physical location.
8	Metonymy	The company / HR	While explaining what to expect after submitting an application, the teacher noted that a sentence such as "the company will contact you" does not mean the organization itself will call, but that a specific person, usually from Human Resources (HR), will do so on the company's behalf.
9	Collocation	Strong communication skills / Attention to detail / Team player	The teacher pointed out that certain CV expressions are fixed word combinations that should be learned as whole chunks rather than translated word for word, noting that native

speakers habitually pair strong with communication skills and attention with detail, rather than substituting near-synonyms such as "powerful" or "carefulness."

Nine of these episodes emerged not as pre-planned vocabulary presentations, but as responsive clarifications triggered by students' answers or visible confusion. This is consistent with recent classroom discourse research showing that much of the vocabulary explanation delivered by EFL and ESP teachers is reactive rather than pre-scripted, arising from moment-to-moment negotiation of meaning rather than from a fixed lesson plan (Tong et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023).

Beyond simply cataloguing which categories occurred, it is important to ask why certain lexical relations surfaced more readily than others within this single session. Three factors appear to account for the distribution in Table 1. First, task structure mattered: activities that required students to sort or classify items, such as the Skills section, mechanically invited hyponymic organization and, by extension, prototype effects, because sorting a list into subcategories is inherently a hyponymy-generating task. Second, genre convention mattered: episodes such as antonymy (strengths/weaknesses) and collocation (strong communication skills) were triggered by fixed, formulaic expectations of the CV/interview genre itself rather than by spontaneous vocabulary confusion, so their emergence was largely predetermined by the topic rather than by learner error. Third, register mismatch mattered: homonymy and polysemy (reference, qualification, position) surfaced specifically where a word's everyday meaning, already well known to students, actively conflicted with its specialized CV meaning, suggesting that these relations become communicatively salient only when a genuine comprehension gap exists rather than appearing evenly across all vocabulary. This is also the only mechanism that produced a numerically repeated category in Table 1: homonymy was the sole relation realized twice, in references and qualification, precisely because both words carried an unusually strong pre-existing everyday meaning that had to be actively overridden, whereas the other categories each surfaced only once, from a single triggering episode. In other words, the relative prominence of each lexical relation in this session was shaped less by the teacher's free pedagogical choice than by structural features of the CV-writing task itself, namely which relations the topic made available and which produced an actual meaning conflict worth resolving.

Looking more closely at the synonymy episode, the sequence began with the teacher's open elicitation ("*apalagi yg bisa dicantumin*?", or "what else can be included?"), to which students volunteered “gender." Rather than simply rejecting the answer, the teacher validated its plausibility before narrowing it: "*CV itu umumnya pakek Sex, nah gender itu lebih ke social law*" ("a CV commonly uses Sex; gender relates more to social categorization"). This elicit, accept partially, narrow, and restate-in-English structure reflects a discourse pattern in which synonymy is negotiated collaboratively through the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequence that typifies much of teacher-fronted EFL talk (Tong et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023). The students' final choral response ("*Ohhh,,, jadi pakek Sex ya*") signaled uptake, suggesting that the contrast, though brief, achieved its intended clarifying function.

The antonymy episode followed a comparable elicitation structure but served a different semantic purpose. Rather than resolving ambiguity, the teacher used the strengths/weaknesses pair to model a conventional interview routine, prompting students first for strengths ("*Sebutin kelebihan kalian, dalam bahasa Inggris ya*") and then immediately for their lexical opposite ("*Naaah, kalo gitu kebalikannya apa? Itu yang disebut weaknesses*"), framing the two terms as a matched set that English-speaking interviewers typically request together rather than in isolation.

The hyponymy and prototype episodes were closely linked, both arising from the same stretch of talk about the Skills section. The teacher first established skills as a general category ("*Skills itu general ya, nah di bawahnya ada dua jenis*"), then asked students to classify their own examples under hard skills or soft skills, a superordinate-to-subordinate move characteristic of hyponymic organization (Yule, 2020). When several students independently offered "computer skills" as their example, the teacher paused to remark that this was the answer most students give first ("*Kayaknya computer skills favorit ya, padahal masih banyak yg lain kayak negotiation atau public speaking*"), an observation that aligns with the concept of prototypicality, in which some category members are cognitively more central or accessible than others despite equal category membership (Yule, 2020).

The homonymy episodes followed a similar but more elaborated pattern than the earlier ones. For references, the teacher first confirmed students' existing, and incomplete, understanding by asking whether anyone had already written a reference in their CV, then supplied the general-academic sense of the term ("like the source of books, like in journals") before pivoting explicitly with the discourse marker "*tapi kalo dalam CV*" ("but in a CV") to introduce the specialized sense: a named person who can vouch for the applicant. For qualification, the teacher again began from students' existing lexical resources, prompting them to supply the Indonesian near-equivalent "*kriteria*" (criteria), before contrasting it with the CV-specific sense of an academic title, illustrated through a concrete category list (Master of Arts, Master of Education, Master of Science) rather than an abstract definition. In both cases the teacher did not declare the everyday meaning wrong, but layered a second, register-specific meaning on top of the meaning students already held, a strategy consistent with descriptions of homonymy instruction as requiring learners to hold two senses of one form in mind simultaneously rather than replacing one sense with another (Jashari, 2024).

The polysemy episode (position) differed subtly from the homonymy episodes in that the teacher explicitly linked, rather than contrasted, the two senses of the word: "*Position itu jabatan pekerjaan, tapi masih nyambung sama posisi duduk misalnya, sama-sama soal 'ada di mana.*'" ("Position is a job role, but it is still connected to a seat position, for example; both are about 'where something is.'") This connectedness between senses is precisely what distinguishes polysemy from homonymy in Yule's (2020) framework: whereas homonyms are historically and semantically unrelated forms that happen to share a spelling, polysemous senses share a traceable conceptual core.

The metonymy episode arose when a student asked how they would know if their application was successful. The teacher's response, "*biasanya kalo lolos, the company will contact you, tapi maksudnya bukan perusahaannya yang telpon langsung, biasanya HR-nya,*" used the organization's name to stand in for the specific individual who performs the action on its behalf, a classic instance of metonymic reference in which a whole institution is invoked to refer to a part or member of it (Yule, 2020).

Finally, the collocation episode emerged when a student produced the phrase "powerful communication" in a practice sentence. The teacher corrected this to the conventional collocation "strong communication skills," and extended the point to two further fixed expressions, attention to detail and team player, explicitly telling students, "*ini kayak paket, kata-katanya udah nempel jadi satu, jangan diterjemahin kata per kata*" ("these are like a package, the words are stuck together, don't translate them word by word"), a formulation that captures the syntagmatic, co-occurrence-based nature of collocation as distinct from the paradigmatic relations (synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, homonymy, polysemy) illustrated in the preceding episodes (Yule, 2020).

Taken together, these nine episodes show that the teacher's talk was not confined to a single type of lexical relation but ranged fluidly across the paradigmatic relations that hold between words sharing a grammatical class (synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, homonymy, polysemy), the cognitive organization of category membership (prototypes), and the syntagmatic relations that hold between words that habitually co-occur (collocation, metonymy). This range supports the observation that paradigmatic relations such as homonymy and polysemy are especially prone to cause difficulty in specialized registers, because learners tend to default to the meaning they already know and transfer it uncritically into a new context (Jashari, 2024), while the synonymy, antonymy, and collocation episodes illustrate how ESP vocabulary instruction is often as much about register-appropriate word choice and habitual combination as about denotational meaning (Al Zahrani & Chaudhary, 2022).

Discourse Strategies Accompanying the Lexical Relations

Beyond identifying which lexical relations the teacher used, the transcript also reveals how she made those relations accessible to students, and this how is arguably as instructive as the what. Four recurring discourse strategies were identified across the nine episodes: elicitation before explanation, code-switching as a scaffolding device, contrastive restatement, and concrete exemplification.

First, in every episode the teacher elicited students' existing knowledge before supplying new information, asking what students already associated with a term rather than beginning from a definition. This elicit-then-clarify structure gave the teacher diagnostic information about which sense of the word students already held, allowing her to target her explanation precisely at the point of confusion rather than repeating information students already possessed. This mirrors findings that more experienced teachers tend to diagnose learners' existing lexical assumptions before intervening, whereas less experienced teachers are more likely to supply definitions unprompted (Tong et al., 2024).

Second, code-switching between Indonesian and English served a clear scaffolding function throughout the transcript rather than functioning as a lapse into the learners' first language. Indonesian was used to pose comprehension-checking questions ("Ada yg sudah menuliskan reference di CV nya?"), to elicit students' background lexical knowledge ("Kalo di bahasa indonesia biasanya kualifikasi itu apa artinya?"), and to mark the pivot toward the specialized meaning ("tapi kalo dalam CV"), while English was reserved for stating the target lexical item and its formal definition. This distribution is consistent with descriptions of code-switching as a purposeful, structured scaffolding resource in EFL and ESP classrooms rather than a random or deficit-driven behavior (Munawaroh et al., 2022; Temesgen & Hailu, 2022), and echoes evidence that flexible

movement between languages, or translanguaging, can support rather than undermine learners' conceptual grasp of context-dependent vocabulary (Ulum & Clark, 2024).

Third, the teacher repeatedly used contrastive restatement, explicitly juxtaposing the everyday sense of a word against its CV-specific sense within the same conversational turn (e.g., "Reference biasanya like the source of books... Tapi kalo dalam CV, references is the name of person"). This side-by-side contrast, rather than sequential or isolated definitions, is precisely the discourse move that lexical relations theory identifies as most effective for helping learners perceive the boundary between two senses of a single form (Yule, 2020; Jashari, 2024).

Fourth, the teacher grounded each explanation in concrete, familiar exemplars, inviting students to name examples of academic qualifications, or noting that references appear in relation to a lecturer or academic advisor, rather than resting on an abstract description of category membership. This exemplification strategy is consistent with recommendations in the ESP literature that specialized vocabulary is best anchored in scenarios that reflect learners' immediate institutional and occupational reality (Al Zahrani & Chaudhary, 2022; Villabona & Cenoz, 2022).

Taken together, these four strategies suggest that the teacher's handling of lexical relations was not limited to the choice of which words to contrast, but extended to a coherent, repeatable discourse routine, elicit, code-switch to scaffold, contrast explicitly, exemplify concretely, that she appeared to apply consistently across different vocabulary items.

The Teacher's Rationale for Selecting These Lexical Relations

In the interview, the teacher explained that her overriding goal was for students to genuinely understand the material she presented, even if not every student grasped it fully in the moment. She stated, in her own words, that she hoped at least some students would come to know the difference between sex and gender, or understand what reference means within a CV, so that when they encountered these terms again in the future, for example on an official form, they would recognize the intended meaning immediately rather than misinterpreting it ("*biar mereka nggak salah persepsi atau salah mengartikan itu apa*"). She further emphasized that these terms are important terminology that students are bound to re-encounter across academic and administrative documents, and that this recurrence, rather than the topic of the current lesson alone, is what made explicit clarification worthwhile despite the limited class time available.

Two aspects of this rationale merit closer attention. The first is the future-oriented framing of the explanation: the teacher was not primarily concerned with the students' immediate comprehension of the day's material, but with equipping them to correctly interpret the same terms when they appear again outside the classroom, for instance on a scholarship application or an official form. This orientation situates her vocabulary instruction within a broader goal of long-term lexical competence rather than short-term lesson completion, a distinction that recent research on vocabulary teaching beliefs identifies as characteristic of teachers who see vocabulary instruction as preparation for real-world language use rather than as content coverage (Alshumrani, 2024).

The second notable aspect is the teacher's explicit acknowledgment that not all students would grasp the distinction fully ("walaupun nggak semua"), yet she persisted in offering the explanation regardless. This suggests that her motivation was not

narrowly instrumental, tied to measurable immediate outcomes, but reflected a broader sense of responsibility toward students' wellbeing and future readiness. This interpretation is consistent with research linking teachers' willingness to repeat, reformulate, and elaborate explanations, even when full uptake is uncertain, to an underlying ethic of care in the teacher-student relationship (Simel Pranjić, 2021), and with evidence that teachers' emotional investment and sense of responsibility shape how much scaffolding effort they are willing to expend on potentially confusing vocabulary (Xu et al., 2026).

Discussion

Synonymy as a Register-Selection Device

The sex/gender episode illustrates that synonymy instruction in ESP contexts frequently functions less as a matter of defining meaning and more as a matter of guiding register-appropriate word choice. Sex and gender are not true synonyms in the strict semantic sense; rather, they are near-synonyms whose difference lies primarily in domain and connotation. The teacher's intervention was therefore less about correcting a factual error and more about socializing students into the lexical conventions of a specific genre, the CV, a function that aligns with descriptions of ESP vocabulary instruction as oriented toward the pragmatic and generic norms of a target discourse community rather than toward denotational meaning alone (Villabona & Cenoz, 2022; Al Zahrani & Chaudhary, 2022).

Antonymy and the Vocabulary of Self-Presentation

The strengths/weaknesses episode shows antonymy functioning as a genre-specific expectation rather than a purely lexical contrast. In everyday conversation, a speaker might discuss a strength without any obligation to mention its opposite; in the interview genre, however, the two terms form a conventionalized pair that students are expected to anticipate together. This suggests that teaching antonymy in ESP is not only about clarifying that two words are semantic opposites, but about teaching learners which oppositional pairs are pragmatically bundled within a given communicative event, a nuance that purely definitional vocabulary instruction would be unlikely to capture (Al Zahrani & Chaudhary, 2022).

Hyponymy and the Organization of Skill Categories

The hard skills/soft skills episode demonstrates how hyponymy can be used pedagogically as a sorting device, giving students a two-branch taxonomy under which to organize an otherwise unstructured list of self-generated vocabulary. This use of hyponymy is consistent with the broader claim that organizing new vocabulary under superordinate categories improves both the coherence of a lesson and learners' ability to retain and retrieve related items as a structured set rather than as isolated words (Webb & Nation, 2017; Nguyen & Le, 2023). Because the CV's Skills section inherently invites students to list multiple items, it created a natural opportunity for hyponymic organization that a more constrained topic might not have afforded.

Prototype Effects in Category-Based Vocabulary Recall

The computer skills episode illustrates a cognitive dimension of vocabulary knowledge that is distinct from, but closely related to, hyponymy: not all members of a lexical

category are equally accessible to learners. The fact that most students independently produced the same example suggests that certain category members function as cognitive reference points, or prototypes, that learners retrieve first when a category is invoked (Yule, 2020). Recognizing this pattern allowed the teacher to explicitly broaden students' response range by naming additional, less prototypical examples, a strategy that helps prevent learners' productive vocabulary from clustering narrowly around a small set of default items, an outcome consistent with concerns raised in research on the breadth of EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge (Bao & Peng, 2024).

Homonymy and the Negotiation of Context-Dependent Meaning

The references and qualification episodes demonstrate a more classic case of homonymy interference, in which learners' well-established, general meaning of a word actively competes with its specialized, register-bound meaning. What is pedagogically significant is that the teacher did not treat this competition as something to be eliminated, but as something to be managed: students were not asked to discard their prior understanding of reference or qualification, but to add a second, context-triggered sense alongside it. This additive, rather than corrective, approach to homonymy resonates with the broader argument that teaching paradigmatic lexical relations such as homonymy is fundamentally about training learners to select the contextually appropriate sense of a word rather than about eliminating ambiguity altogether, since the ambiguity itself is a permanent feature of the lexicon (Jashari, 2024).

Polysemy and the Extension of Core Meaning

The position episode illustrates a lexical relation that is conceptually adjacent to, but pedagogically distinct from, homonymy. Because the CV-specific and everyday senses of position share a traceable semantic core (both involve the notion of standing or being located), the teacher's explanation drew a connecting line between senses rather than a dividing one. This distinction matters pedagogically: while homonymy instruction benefits from a clear contrast that separates two unrelated meanings, polysemy instruction benefits from helping learners see the shared conceptual thread that links a word's senses, which can, if made explicit, actually ease rather than complicate a learner's task of remembering the new sense (Yule, 2020).

Metonymy and Institutional Reference in Professional Communication

The company/HR episode reflects a lexical relation that learners are unlikely to encounter in general English coursebooks but that is pervasive in professional and administrative communication, where an institution's name routinely substitutes for the individual acting on its behalf. Left unexplained, this metonymic usage could plausibly mislead students into a literal interpretation, for instance expecting a phone call from "the company" as an undifferentiated entity rather than from a specific staff member. The teacher's clarification therefore addressed a pragmatic, real-world comprehension gap that sits at the intersection of vocabulary knowledge and genre awareness, an intersection increasingly recognized as central to ESP instruction (Villabona & Cenoz, 2022).

Collocation and Formulaic Language in CV Writing

The collocation episode differs from all the preceding cases in that it involves a syntagmatic rather than paradigmatic relation: the concern is not which word to choose from a set of related alternatives, but which words conventionally co-occur once a word has been chosen. The teacher's correction of "powerful communication" to "strong communication skills" reflects an awareness that ESP learners often produce grammatically well-formed but idiomatically atypical phrases when they translate concepts word by word from their first language, and that explicit instruction in fixed expressions can reduce this kind of non-native-like phrasing (Webb & Nation, 2017). This finding also reinforces the value of teaching vocabulary in chunks rather than as single words, a recommendation echoed in research on lexical and cohesive competence in EFL writing (Albelihi, 2022).

The Scaffolding Role of Code-Switching Across Lexical Relations

A further point worth isolating from the broader discourse-strategy discussion above is the specific relationship between code-switching and lexical relations instruction. Across all nine episodes, code-switching was never used to introduce the target lexical item itself; target items were consistently stated in English. Indonesian was reserved for the surrounding scaffolding talk: eliciting prior knowledge, checking comprehension, and marking the pivot to the specialized meaning. This selective, function-specific use of code-switching suggests that the first language served as a bridge toward, rather than a substitute for, target-language vocabulary, a distinction that is important because indiscriminate code-switching has been associated with reduced target-language exposure, whereas function-specific code-switching of the kind observed here has been associated with improved comprehension and participation (Munawaroh et al., 2022; Temesgen & Hailu, 2022). The finding also lends support to the argument that translanguaging practices, when used with pedagogical intent rather than as an unplanned fallback, can be productively integrated into ESP vocabulary instruction without displacing the target language (Ulum & Clark, 2024).

Absences and Asymmetries: A Critical Reading of the Data

The complete absence of homophones from the data is itself analytically significant rather than a simple gap in coverage. Homophone confusion, words that sound alike but differ in spelling and meaning, is primarily a feature of oral, real-time listening comprehension, where learners rely on sound rather than orthographic form. In this session, however, the vocabulary items in question, reference, qualification, position, sex/gender, were all encountered through a written genre, the CV, in which students could see the target word on paper. This visual anchor arguably pre-empted the perceptual ambiguity that homophones create, since spelling rather than sound was the primary channel through which meaning was negotiated. This suggests that the type of lexical relation a teacher draws upon may be shaped not only by the topic but by the modality of the classroom task, written versus oral, an interaction that merits explicit investigation in future observational studies.

Similarly, the fact that only one prototype episode emerged is not necessarily evidence that prototype effects are rare in ESP talk, but more plausibly an artifact of the data-collection design. Prototypicality becomes observable to a researcher only when multiple students independently generate examples from an open category, a condition that arose only once, during the Skills section, within this 100-minute session. Had the

lesson included additional open-ended categorization tasks, other prototype effects might plausibly have surfaced. This points to a limitation of single-session case studies: relations that depend on cumulative or repeated elicitation, such as prototypicality, are structurally less likely to be captured than relations, such as homonymy, that can emerge from a single well-timed question.

Code-switching's dominance across all nine episodes, meanwhile, is best explained not by any property of the lexical relations themselves but by the sociolinguistic composition of the classroom. Both the teacher and her students shared Indonesian as a first language, and the students were non-English-major Law students who plausibly had lower confidence in extended English discourse. Under these conditions, code-switching functioned less as an optional stylistic choice and more as the default communicative resource available for scaffolding, regardless of which lexical relation was being taught. This reading is consistent with the view that the extent of code-switching in EFL/ESP classrooms is driven primarily by shared L1 background and learner proficiency rather than by the linguistic properties of the target vocabulary (Munawaroh et al., 2022; Temesgen & Hailu, 2022), which would explain why its use remained constant across otherwise very different lexical relations.

Interaction Among Lexical Relations Within a Single ESP Topic

A notable feature of the findings is that a single, narrowly defined topic, CV writing and job-interview preparation, was sufficient to elicit nearly the full range of lexical relations identified by Yule (2020). This suggests that the range of lexical relations available within a lesson is shaped less by the breadth of the topic itself than by the density of register-specific vocabulary embedded within it: a professional genre such as the CV compresses many small, high-stakes distinctions, appropriate term versus near-synonym, everyday sense versus specialized sense, related sense versus unrelated sense, institution versus individual, free combination versus fixed expression, into a short list of core vocabulary items. Vocabulary explanation in ESP classrooms is therefore best understood as need-driven and topic-bound (Villabona & Cenoz, 2022), but the present findings indicate that a well-chosen, register-dense topic can itself be pedagogically generative, surfacing a diverse set of lexical relations without requiring the teacher to plan multiple, separately themed lessons (Bao & Peng, 2024).

Conclusion

This study found that an ESP speaking teacher, while guiding undergraduate Law students through CV-writing and job-interview vocabulary, drew on a rich and varied repertoire of lexical relations, synonymy (sex/gender), antonymy (strengths/weaknesses), hyponymy (skills/hard skills/soft skills), prototype effects (computer skills), homonymy (references and qualification), polysemy (position), metonymy (the company/HR), and collocation (strong communication skills, attention to detail, team player), to resolve context-specific ambiguities and to socialize students into the lexical conventions of a specialized professional genre. These relations were not delivered as isolated definitions but were embedded within a consistent discourse routine of elicitation, code-switching, contrastive restatement, and concrete exemplification, and were driven by the teacher's future-oriented concern that students avoid misinterpreting these terms outside the classroom. The findings demonstrate that a single, register-dense ESP topic can surface nearly the full breadth of Yule's (2020)

lexical-relations framework, and that even brief, spontaneous classroom clarifications can meaningfully support learners' precision of meaning within a specialized register (Nguyen & Le, 2023; Bao & Peng, 2024). Future research would benefit from observing multiple sessions across different ESP topics and multiple teachers, in order to examine whether other register-dense topics are similarly generative and to compare how novice and experienced ESP teachers differ in their spontaneous vocabulary-explanation strategies (Tong et al., 2024; Alshumrani, 2024).

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