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Context-Dependent Meaning and Polysemy in English And Uzbek Criminalistics Terminology

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Abstract: Terminological precision depends partly on the context in which a term is used. This article examines that relationship in selected English and Uzbek criminalistics expressions. A qualitative documentary comparison draws on contextual approaches to terminology, an English technical report, an Uzbek research article and an institutional account of trace examination. Dictionary entries provide a separate check on lexical polysemy. The analysis distinguishes a change of sense from the specification of a source, observable condition or investigative role. The selected expressions show that different modifiers can describe one underlying concept without creating additional senses of the head word. A further contrast concerns the scope assigned to a term by a particular technical source. The contribution is a source-based procedure for making these distinctions explicit in English–Uzbek research. The findings are exploratory and apply to the examined cases; they do not establish language-wide frequencies or a universal classification of criminalistics terminology.

Keywords: Criminalistics terminology; contextual meaning; polysemy; English; Uzbek; contrastive analysis; semantic interpretation.

Introduction: Criminalistics terms connect language with observations and expert reasoning. Misreading a term can blur the distinction between a physical trace, a characteristic observed in it and a conclusion reached after examination. Yet the meaning of a familiar word is rarely recoverable from its form alone. The surrounding phrase, the subject under examination and the purpose of the document help the reader select the relevant interpretation.

A useful starting point is the distinction between polysemy and contextual variation. Polysemy concerns related senses associated with one lexical form. Contextual variation can instead highlight different aspects of a concept without necessarily introducing another sense. San Martín (2022) develops this distinction in his discussion of terminological definitions and shows why contextual restrictions matter for the information included in a definition. His study provides the closest methodological precedent for the present investigation, although it does not examine English and Uzbek criminalistics.

The theoretical background also includes approaches that question rigid sense boundaries. Croft and Cruse (2004, Chapter 5) explain polysemy through the construal of boundaries within a word's meaning potential. Temmerman (2000) argues for a sociocognitive description of specialised categories rather than an unconditional requirement that every term have one fixed meaning. These approaches make it necessary to justify analytical decisions instead of treating every difference in wording as a separate lexical sense.

For an English–Uzbek comparison, this problem becomes especially visible in expressions containing impression and iz. A modifier may specify visibility, the object that produced a trace or the conditions of examination. Such differences can be relevant to criminalistics while leaving the central concept intact.

The research question is therefore: which contextual differences justify a change of semantic interpretation, and which merely restrict an already available meaning?

The aim is to develop a transparent case-level distinction between lexical polysemy, contextual specification and source-dependent conceptual scope. The analysis concerns meaning in documented expressions. Its contribution is methodological: it shows what evidence supports each interpretation and where the available evidence leaves a decision unresolved. Figure 1 summarises the contextual cues considered.



Figure 1. Contextual information used to interpret a term

Note. The six elements represent contextual cues, not numerical proportions. Author's synthesis informed by Dash (2008), Faber and León-Araúz (2016) and San Martín (2022).

METHODS

The study uses purposive qualitative sampling. The theoretical literature was selected through the references of San Martín (2022) and Faber and León-Araúz (2016), followed by checks of the original publications or publisher records. This citation-based selection led to Croft and Cruse (2004), Temmerman (2000) and Dash (2008). These works supply the analytical framework; they are not counted as criminalistics language data.

The English specialist material comes from ASB Technical Report 097 (AAFS Standards Board, 2019), particularly its entries for impression and selected modified expressions. Uzbek material comprises the abstract and keywords of Zulfuqorov (2023) and sections 3 and 5 of the Qashqadaryo Regional Department of Justice's account of trace examination (2024). Cambridge Dictionary's impression entry and the Izoh.uz entry for iz are used only to check the existence of broader lexical meanings. The NIST identification entry supplies an additional example of a source-specific restriction. All online material was consulted on 28 September 2026.

The unit of analysis is an expression together with its definition or immediate explanatory setting. The comparison does not assume that English and Uzbek expressions are official translation equivalents. Instead, it asks whether they perform comparable semantic work, such as identifying visibility or narrowing the type of object described. The small selection is intended to expose contrasting interpretive problems, not to represent the distribution of terms throughout either language.

Three decisions guide the analysis. A lexical contrast is treated as polysemy when the evidence supports related but distinguishable readings. A difference is classified as contextual specification when an expression adds a condition while retaining the same basic referent type. A difference in conceptual scope is recorded when a technical source sets boundaries that cannot be inferred from the term alone. The latter category prevents a disagreement between definitions from being labelled automatically as lexical polysemy.

Dash's (2008) distinction between local, sentential, topical and global context informs the reading procedure. Faber and León-Araúz (2016) provide a

complementary account of context at linguistic and knowledge-representation levels. The present application records the head word, the restricting element, the referent and the source setting. An interpretation is retained only when its supporting location can be identified. No frequency estimates, significance tests or inter-rater agreement figures are reported because the material is a documentary case selection coded by one analyst. Figure 2 outlines the procedure.

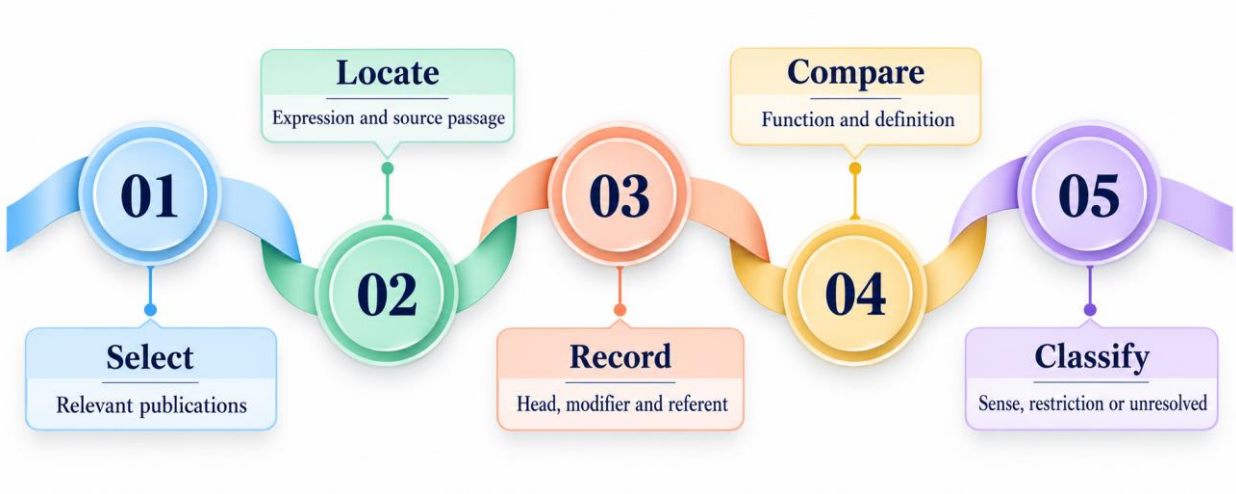


Figure 2. Procedure for the documentary comparison

Note. The five stages show the analytical procedure used in this study. Each classification retains its source location; insufficient evidence is recorded as unresolved.

RESULTS

1. Lexical polysemy and technical interpretation

The dictionary evidence supports a distinction between physical and non-physical readings. Cambridge Dictionary records impression in connection with both a mental view and a physical mark. Izoh.uz likewise records iz in physical and extended uses. These entries establish that a specialist text draws on lexical forms with wider semantic possibilities. They do not establish how often those possibilities occur in criminalistics writing (Cambridge University Press, n.d.; Izoh.uz, n.d.).

Once the text concerns a retained contact pattern, the mental reading of impression is excluded by the subject matter. The same principle applies when iz occurs in an explanation of a physical trace. Context selects an appropriate reading from the lexical range. Selection is different from creation: the presence of a specialist context does not, by itself, prove that a new sense has emerged.

This distinction changes how the material should be counted. A list containing several modified expressions may contain several named categories but only one relevant reading of the shared head word. Conversely, one unmodified word can remain ambiguous if the surrounding text provides too little information. The number of phrases and the number of senses therefore answer different research questions. Figure 3 summarises these analytical distinctions.

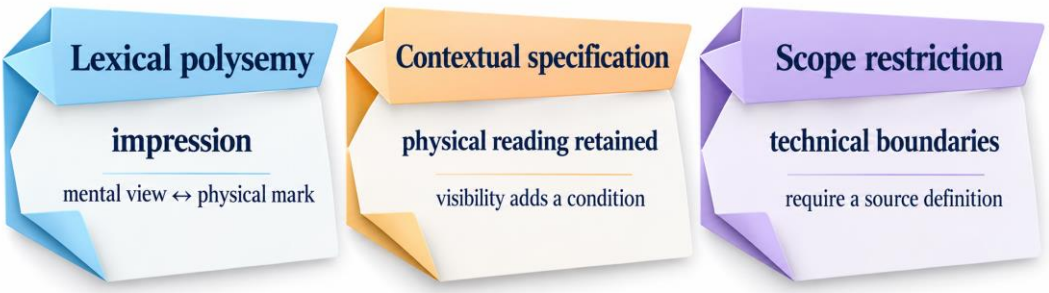


Figure 3. Distinguishing sense change from contextual restriction

Note. The panels distinguish related lexical readings, specification of an existing reading and limits imposed by a technical definition. Based on Cambridge Dictionary and San Martín (2022).

2. What modifiers contribute

ASB Technical Report 097 distinguishes impressions according to visibility, completeness and comparison-related use. Its definitions provide a technical basis for reading the selected English modifiers (AAFS Standards Board, 2019, entries 3.61, 3.77, 3.103 and 3.160). Zulfuqorov's (2023) keywords similarly include Uzbek expressions that distinguish whether a trace is visible and describe its physical form. Figure 4 records a focused comparison of the restrictions expressed.

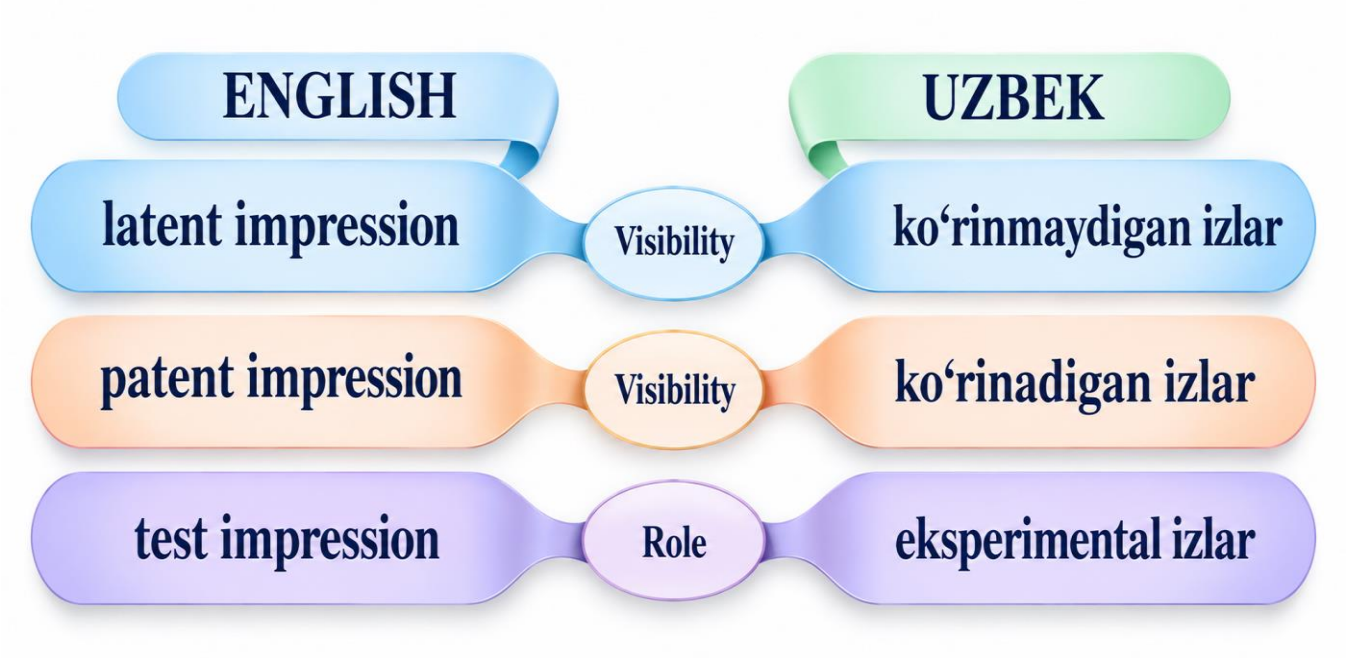


Figure 4. Comparable contextual functions in English and Uzbek expressions

Note. The connections indicate comparable contextual functions, not certified translation equivalence. Sources: AAFS Standards Board (2019), entries 3.77, 3.103 and 3.160; Zulfuqorov (2023), keywords; Qashqadaryo Regional Department of Justice (2024), section 5.

The visibility examples support a specific conclusion: a change in observability need not change the kind of entity denoted. The analyst still interprets a physical trace or impression. The modifier contributes information about access to that entity through observation. Treating the visible and less visible cases as unrelated senses would confuse a property of the referent with the meaning of the head word.

The comparison-related examples introduce a different restriction. Here the relevant information concerns the role of the object in an examination, rather than its appearance. The institutional Uzbek account includes experimentally produced footwear traces among examination objects (Qashqadaryo Regional Department of Justice, 2024, section 5). This permits a functional comparison with the English comparison-related expression, but it does not establish complete terminological equivalence. Their documentary settings and definitions remain part of the evidence.

The distinction between observable condition and investigative role is useful because both can occur around the same head. A trace may have a particular appearance and also serve a particular purpose. These are compatible descriptions, not competing senses. This reading follows from the relation between the modifier and its referent; it should not be generalised into a claim about all English or Uzbek word combinations.

3. Broad scope and restricted scope

The Uzbek institutional account explicitly discusses broad and restricted understandings of iz. Its explanation of trasologik izlar centres on the representation of one object's external structure through interaction with another object. It also discusses a broader range of changes and remains associated with an event (Qashqadaryo Regional

Department of Justice, 2024, section 3). The distinction is evidence of variation in conceptual scope within a specialised discussion.

A broad-to-restricted relation does not automatically settle the question of polysemy. One analysis may treat the restricted use as a conventional technical sense; another may treat it as contextual narrowing of a broader concept. The present evidence supports recording the restriction, but it does not determine how firmly the restricted sense is established across speakers and genres. That further claim would require repeated contextual evidence from a larger dataset.

This is where the narrower operational criteria used here differ from an unrestricted count of contextual meanings. The procedure preserves a category for scope restriction instead of forcing every example into either complete identity or separate senses. It consequently makes the analysis more open to revision: later evidence can justify reclassifying a case without erasing the original observation. Figure 5 illustrates the scope relation.

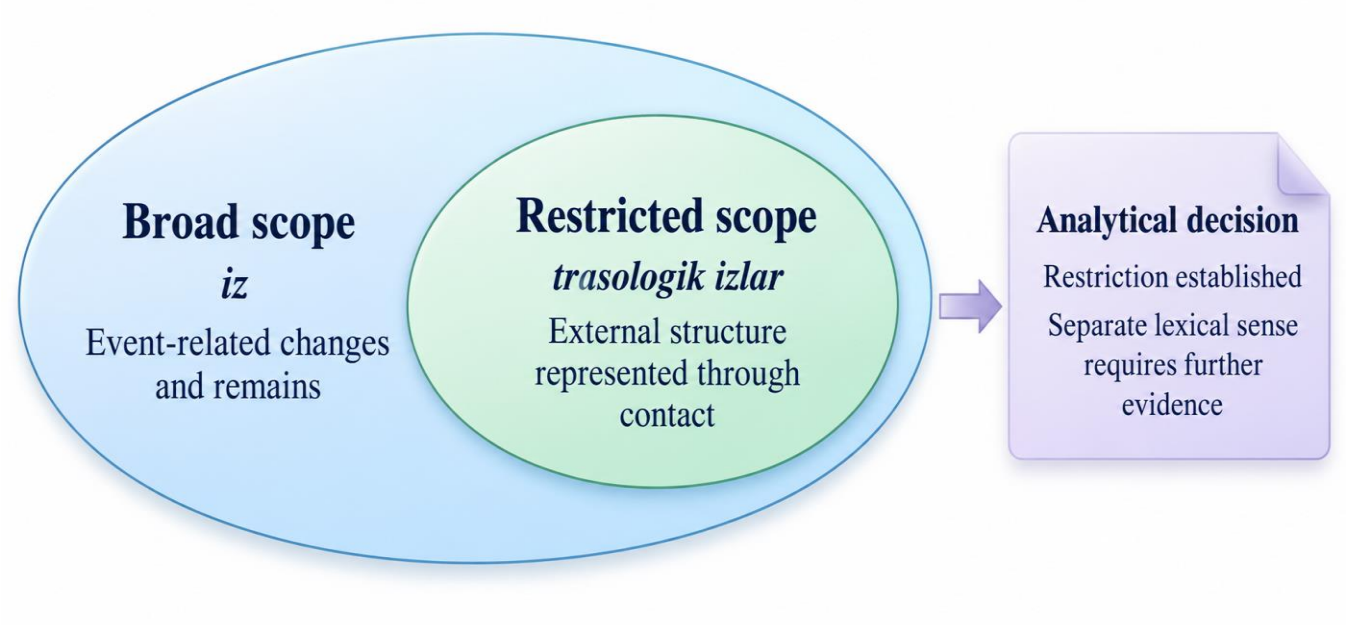


Figure 5. Recording a restriction without assuming a new sense

Note. The nested shapes illustrate conceptual restriction, not measured set sizes. Author's analysis of Qashqadaryo Regional Department of Justice (2024), section 3. Further evidence is needed to establish a separate lexical sense.

4. Why the source definition matters

A further problem appears in the interpretation of identification. ASB Technical Report 097 uses the term for a strong association between an examined impression and a source, subject to its stated information requirements (AAFS Standards Board, 2019, entry 3.68). The NIST entry examined here describes assigning an unknown item to an appropriately specific class and includes a caution about using identification when communicating source conclusions (NIST, 2025).

These are two English technical contexts. Their difference therefore cannot be explained simply as an English–Uzbek semantic contrast. Nor should it be silently resolved by assuming that one definition applies everywhere. The documentary result is that source, disciplinary remit and date are necessary parts of the interpretation. It would take a separate historical and professional analysis to explain why those formulations differ.

For contrastive research, this finding is a useful control. Before attributing a difference to language, the analyst should check whether the compared documents define the same task at the same level of specificity. A terminological comparison can otherwise turn a difference between publications into an unsupported difference between linguistic systems. Figure 6 shows this source-level control.

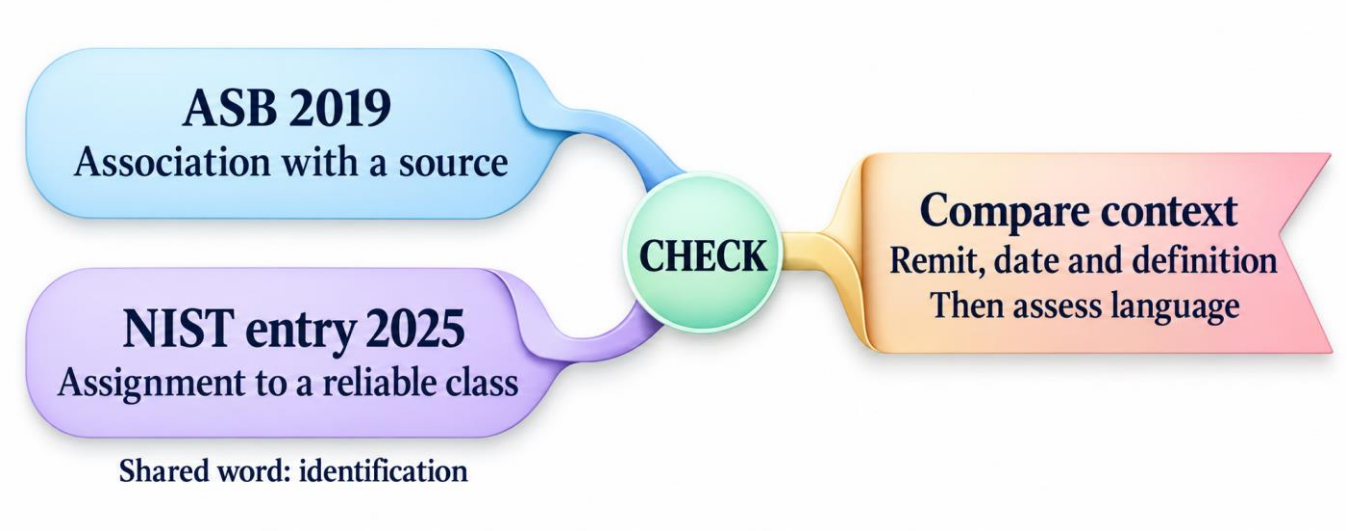


Figure 6. Controlling for differences between technical sources

Note. Both definitions are from English-language sources. Their difference calls for a check of source context before any language-level conclusion. Sources: AAFS Standards Board (2019), entry 3.68, and NIST (2025).

DISCUSSION

The cases suggest that contextual interpretation operates at more than one level. A word's lexical range supplies possible readings. The immediate expression restricts properties or functions. The technical source then determines the boundaries of an admissible interpretation. These observations are consistent with the contextual approaches of Dash (2008), Faber and León-Araúz (2016) and San Martín (2022). They are an application of existing theoretical distinctions, not evidence that context has newly been discovered as a factor in terminology.

The main analytical benefit is a clearer unit of comparison. Instead of comparing isolated words, researchers can compare an expression, its referent and its defining context. This makes it possible to explain why two formally different expressions perform similar contextual functions, or why the same word is assigned different scope in two documents. It also prevents morphological variety from being used as an indirect measure of semantic variety.

The findings support a practical sequence. First, identify whether the expression refers to an object, a property, an operation or a conclusion. Next, ask what information the neighbouring words add. Finally, compare that reading with the relevant definition and document purpose. If the evidence supports only a narrower application, record that restriction without multiplying senses. If the definition remains unclear, preserve the uncertainty for later analysis.

There are limits to this procedure. The English material is largely definitional, whereas the Uzbek material includes article keywords and explanatory prose. Genre can influence how much information is made explicit. The visibility comparison is more directly supported than claims about broader lexical conventionalisation. In addition, dictionary senses are editorial analyses rather than independent measurements of specialist usage. The study therefore offers an auditable interpretation of selected cases, not a balanced corpus description.

A larger study should collect matched passages from textbooks, examination guidelines and research articles in both languages. Each record should preserve the sentence, disciplinary field, publication date and source location. Independent coding could then test whether analysts agree on the distinction between specification and sense change. Such a design would allow the present proposal to be evaluated without assuming in advance that either language is more polysemous.

CONCLUSION

The selected English and Uzbek evidence shows why contextual variation should be separated from lexical polysemy. A modifier can restrict visibility or examination role while preserving the central physical reading of a term. A technical definition can introduce a further restriction whose source must remain visible in the analysis. Differences between definitions also occur within English and cannot automatically be

attributed to cross-linguistic differences.

The contribution is a source-based procedure for distinguishing these cases. Its value lies in making interpretive decisions explainable and revisable. Further evidence is needed to establish how widely the observed patterns extend across English and Uzbek criminalistics terminology.

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