

Term Consistency in English–Arabic Legal Translation: Evaluating Reverso Context against the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

اتساق المصطلحات في الترجمة القانونية من الإنجليزية إلى العربية :

تقييم ريفرسو كونتكتس في ضوء اتفاقية الأمم المتحدة لقانون البحار

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Abstract:

This study evaluates Reverso Context's capacity to function as a pseudo-translation memory for English–Arabic legal terminology by assessing terminological consistency against the authenticated bilingual text of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). A corpus-based evaluative design was employed, analyzing sixteen key maritime legal terms extracted from UNCLOS and comparing their standardized Arabic equivalents with Reverso Context's suggested renderings. Results show that for twelve terms, Reverso Context achieved complete alignment with UNCLOS terminology across all sampled examples, indicating high consistency. However, four terms displayed variation through near-synonymous or non-standard alternatives alongside the standardized Arabic equivalents, revealing a small rate of terminological variation and certain limitations in terminological control compared to curated institutional translation memories. The findings suggest that while Reverso Context can significantly support terminological consistency in English–Arabic legal translation, authenticated bilingual treaties should remain the primary reference in high-stakes contexts, with corpus-based concordancers serving as complementary rather than substitute resources.

Key words: Terminological consistency, Maritime legal terminology, legal translation, English–Arabic, Corpus-based concordance, Pseudo-translation memory, Reverso Context, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

الملخص:

تقيم هذه الدراسة قدرة أداة ريفرسو كونتكتس على العمل كذاكرة ترجمة شبه حقيقية للمصطلحات القانونية باللغتين الإنجليزية و العربية من خلال تقييم الاتساق المصطلحي مقارنة مع النص الثنائي اللغة الموثق لاتفاقية الأمم المتحدة لقانون البحار. اعتمد تصميم تقييمي قائم على المدونات اللغوية يتضمن تحليل ستة عشر مصطلحاً قانونياً بحرياً رئيسياً مستخرجاً من الاتفاقية، ومقارنة مكافئاتها العربية المعيارية مع المصطلحات التي يقدمها ريفرسو كونتكتس. أظهرت النتائج أن اثني عشر مصطلحاً حققت توافقاً تاماً مع مصطلحات الاتفاقية عبر جميع الأمثلة المعينة، مما يعكس اتساقاً عالياً. غير أن أربعة مصطلحات أبدت تبايناً من خلال بدائل شبه مترادفة أو غير معيارية إلى جانب المكافئات العربية المعيارية، كاشفةً بذلك عن معدل ضئيل في تباين المصطلحات و محدودية ضبطها. تبين النتائج أنه يمكن لريفرسو كونتكتس دعم الاتساق المصطلحي بشكل كبير في الترجمة القانونية من الإنجليزية إلى العربية، غير أنه ينبغي أن تبقى المعاهدات الثنائية اللغة الموثقة المرجع الأساسي في السياقات عالية الأهمية، وأن تُستخدم أدوات مطابقة المدونات اللغوية كموارد مكملّة فحسب وليست بديلة. الكلمات المفتاحية: الاتساق المصطلحي، المصطلحات القانونية البحرية، الترجمة القانونية، الإنجليزية والعربية، مطابقة المدونات اللغوية، ذاكرة ترجمة شبه حقيقية، ريفرسو كونتكتس، اتفاقية الأمم المتحدة لقانون البحار.

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Introduction:

Ensuring terminological consistency in English–Arabic legal translation is fundamental to legal certainty, uniform interpretation, and institutional credibility, particularly within multilingual legal systems such as the United Nations and other international treaty frameworks^{1,2}. In such contexts, terminological stability is not merely a stylistic concern but a functional requirement: inconsistent renderings of the same legal concept may generate interpretive ambiguity, weaken enforceability, and challenge the principle of equal authenticity of multilingual legal texts^{3,4}.

To address this challenge, professional translators have traditionally relied on translation memory (TM) systems integrated into computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools. These systems enhance consistency and efficiency by storing validated translations and retrieving identical or similar segments across texts^{5,6}. Alongside translation-memory systems, corpus-based resources can assist trainee and professional translators in resolving questions of terminology, phraseology, and target-language usage⁷. After reviewing Reverso Context⁸ results, it was observed that the tool retrieves translation examples from large multilingual corpora and presents multiple contextually embedded candidates, allowing users to observe usage patterns across different domains rather than imposing a single standardized equivalent. While this flexibility can support informed lexical choice, it raises a critical methodological question in legal translation: whether a corpus-based tool designed for contextual variety can meet the strict requirement for terminological consistency that underpins legal certainty.

Despite the growing popularity of concordance-based tools, empirical research on legal translation technology has largely focused on traditional CAT environments and conventional TMs^{9,10}. While corpus-based methods have become increasingly prominent in legal translation studies, existing research predominantly employs corpora for linguistic analysis—examining translation patterns, terminology distribution, and discourse features—rather than as tools for supporting terminological consistency. Studies that examine terminological consistency in legal translation typically compare the outputs of human translators or machine translation engines against institutional reference resources and precedent translations¹¹, but they rarely investigate how contextual retrieval tools themselves influence term selection and stability. This reveals a significant gap in the literature regarding the behavior of corpus-based concordancers when they are used in high-stakes legal contexts that demand standardized, system-bound terminology.

This study seeks to address this gap by evaluating Reverso Context as a “pseudo-translation memory” and assessing its ability to maintain terminological consistency in English–Arabic legal translation. Accordingly, the study addresses the following central question: To what extent can Reverso Context function as a pseudo-translation memory by ensuring consistent English–Arabic legal terminology when measured against the authenticated bilingual text of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)?

The analysis uses UNCLOS as a controlled reference corpus. As a foundational treaty in public international law authenticated in six languages, with Article 320 affirming the equal authenticity of all versions, including English¹² and Arabic¹³, UNCLOS provides an institutionally validated bilingual benchmark analogous to a curated translation memory. By comparing Reverso Context's suggested equivalents with the standardized terminology of UNCLOS, this study offers a systematic assessments of a corpus-based concordancer in a legal translation context. It also proposes a novel methodological approach that uses authenticated treaty texts as reference standards and provides practical insights for legal translators regarding the advantages and limitations of contextual retrieval tools in high-stakes legal environments.

Section I: Literature review

A) Legal translation and terminological consistency:

Legal translation is often seen as a system bound, rule governed activity, where translators work within the limits of particular legal systems and institutions^{14,15}. In this view, the aim is not just to transfer the words of the source text, but to make sure that the target text has the same legal effects in the target legal system. Because of this functional focus, legal translation differs from general translation: what is at stake are rights, obligations, and the allocation of powers, not just successful communication.

In multilingual treaty practice, these challenges are intensified by the principle of equal authenticity, under which several language versions are declared equally authoritative and together constitute the authentic expression of the parties' consent¹⁶. Equal authenticity presupposes that each version can serve as an interpretive starting point and that none is treated as a derivative or merely declaratory translation of another.

In this context, terminological consistency is not a stylistic preference but a central condition for legal certainty and uniform interpretation in all authentic languages. If a key legal term is rendered inconsistently across a single instrument or across related instruments, it may invite divergent readings of the same provision, encourage selective reliance on particular language versions, or prompt courts and arbitral tribunals to resort more heavily to supplementary means of interpretation. For international institutions, such instability can raise concerns about transparency, predictability, and the perceived reliability of their multilingual output, particularly when texts are invoked in contentious or advisory proceedings.

Researchers in multilingual legal drafting and institutional translation therefore see terminological consistency as a key quality criterion, closely tied to overall coherence and clear legal meaning^{17,18}. They stress that consistency must be maintained not only within a single instrument, but also across an institution's broader body of legislation, case law, and treaties. From this angle, managing terminology is not just a technical task solved by word lists, but an ongoing process that interacts with interpretation, drafting policy, and changes in legal concepts over time. In this light, assessing the consistency of English-Arabic legal terminology becomes particularly important, especially when

technology based tools like Reverso Context are used alongside, or even instead of, institutional reference texts such as UNCLOS.

B) Translation technologies in legal contexts (CAT, TM, MT):

Institutional legal translation has adopted translation technologies, particularly computer-assisted translation tools with integrated translation memories¹⁹. In organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union, TMs store previously validated segments so that translators can retrieve earlier translations of recurring clauses, formulaic expressions, and standard provisions²⁰. This reliance on TMs is driven by the need to ensure intertextual and terminological consistency across large volumes of legislative, judicial, and treaty texts produced over time. Studies in institutional settings suggest that well maintained TMs can significantly improve both consistency and productivity, particularly in highly repetitive legal genres^{21,22}.

At the same time, the literature highlights several limitations of TM-based workflows. Common problems include "noise" in large memories, the spread of earlier errors, and inconsistencies caused by segment fragmentation when legal provisions are split into smaller units that hide logical or syntactic links^{23,24}. Consequently, excessive dependence on segment matches can encourage formal mirroring at the expense of functional adequacy and may delay necessary updates when underlying legal concepts change. This suggests that, although TMs are designed to support consistency, they need careful maintenance and critical use to avoid preserving inconsistent terminological choices.

More recently, machine translation—especially neural MT—has entered legal workflows, either as a pre-translation step or as a source of drafts for post-editing²⁵. Surveys of institutional translators indicate that MT performs reasonably well with formulaic segments but often struggles with system-bound terminology, long and complex sentences, and fine normative nuances²⁶. This makes MT and TMs different but related benchmarks for any tool that claims to support consistent legal terminology, including corpus-based concordancers such as Reverso Context.

C) Corpus-based concordancers and Reverso Context:

Parallel and comparable corpora, together with concordancers, have become central resources in translation research and training since the mid 1990s. Concordancers allow users to query large collections of texts and retrieve multiple instances of a given word or phrase along with their immediate co text, thereby revealing recurring patterns, collocations, and register specific usage. In translation pedagogy, corpus tools are often praised for enhancing students' awareness of cross linguistic differences, providing authentic examples that go beyond dictionary definitions, and supporting more idiomatic and context sensitive choices. For professional translators, especially in specialized domains, concordancers offer a way to verify candidate equivalents against real usage and to explore how particular terms function across genres and institutions.

Reverso Context is a widely used online concordancer that builds on large multilingual corpora drawn from sources such as subtitles, web texts, and institutional documents. Instead of returning a single equivalent, Reverso typically presents a list of translation candidates embedded in full sentences on both the source and target side, thereby foregrounding contextual variation rather than prescriptive standardization. Conceptually, this approach differs from the logic of translation memories, which are designed to store and retrieve specific segment pairs that have been vetted in prior translation workflows. Whereas TMs aim to reproduce established equivalents for recurring segments, concordancers like Reverso help users explore how a term has been translated in multiple contexts, across different domains and text types.

The translation studies literature on corpora has documented numerous benefits of concordancer use, including improved collocational accuracy, better phraseology, and a richer understanding of genre conventions. However, most of this work has been conducted in general or semi specialized domains, and only a limited number of studies address high stakes legal translation where terminological standardization is critical. Existing research tends to focus on corpus tools as pedagogical aids or as resources for exploring variation, rather than assessing whether they can support the level of terminological consistency required in multilingual treaty interpretation. This leaves a notable gap concerning the behavior of tools like Reverso Context when used as *de facto* or “pseudo” translation memories in legal settings, particularly for language pairs such as English–Arabic, where the available institutional terminology resources are relatively limited and not fully harmonized.

By positioning Reverso Context within this wider technological landscape, the present study responds directly to this gap. It shifts the focus from concordancers as instruments for exploring variation to concordancers as potential consistency enhancing tools whose output can be measured against an authenticated bilingual treaty corpus such as UNCLOS. In doing so, it bridges research on institutional terminological management, TM and MT based consistency, and corpus based translation practice, and proposes a new way of empirically testing whether context driven retrieval systems can meet the stringent consistency requirements of public international law.

Section II: Methodology

A) Research design:

This study adopts a corpus based evaluative design that treats the authenticated English–Arabic text of UNCLOS as a reference standard against which Reverso Context’s suggested equivalents are systematically compared. The aim is not to assess the overall quality of Reverso Context as a general purpose tool, but to examine its capacity to support terminological consistency for selected English legal terms that recur across UNCLOS and are central to its normative framework. Terminological consistency is operationalized as the extent to which repeated source terms receive stable and treaty congruent Arabic equivalents in Reverso Context across different contexts of use.

The analysis proceeds in three stages:

1- Selection and extraction of key English legal terms and their institutional Arabic equivalents from UNCLOS;

2- Retrieval and sampling of Reverso Context examples for those terms in the English–Arabic pair;

3- Comparative evaluation of Reverso Context’s suggestions against UNCLOS on a term by term basis using a predefined consistency grid.

B) Data: UNCLOS as reference corpus:

UNCLOS is used as a controlled bilingual corpus for several reasons. First, as a foundational multilateral treaty authenticated in six languages, it provides a stable, institutionally validated source of standardized legal terminology in both English and Arabic. Second, its provisions cover a wide range of public international law concepts (e.g. maritime zones, jurisdiction, dispute settlement), which gives access to recurrent system bound terms and formulaic expressions rather than isolated lexical items. Third, the equal authenticity status of the Arabic version makes it an appropriate benchmark for target language choices, comparable to a curated translation memory maintained by an international organization.

For the purposes of this study, the entire English and Arabic texts of UNCLOS are consulted in electronic form. The corpus is not exploited exhaustively; instead, it serves as a reference point for identifying recurring English legal terms and for extracting their corresponding standardized Arabic renderings as used in the treaty.

C) Term selection:

The analysis focuses on a purposive sample of English legal terms that meet the following criteria:

- They are system bound or treaty specific concepts (e.g. “exclusive economic zone”, “innocent passage”, “continental shelf”) rather than general vocabulary.
- They recur across multiple provisions in UNCLOS, allowing intra textual consistency to be observed.
- They are likely to pose challenges in English–Arabic legal translation because of structural, conceptual or terminological asymmetries.

Term identification proceeds in two steps. First, a close reading of UNCLOS is conducted to compile an initial list of candidate terms based on legal salience and frequency of occurrence. Second, this list is refined by excluding items that are overly general, excessively rare, or insufficiently legal technical. The final sample aims for a manageable yet representative set of 16 key terms that spans different semantic domains within the convention.

For each selected English term, all occurrences in UNCLOS are located and the corresponding Arabic equivalents are recorded. Where a term appears in slightly varied syntagmatic environments, attention is paid to whether the Arabic rendering remains identical, morphologically related, or substantively different.

D) Data retrieval from Reverso Context:

Once the UNCLOS based term list is established, Reverso Context is queried for each English term in the English–Arabic language pair. To approximate realistic translator behaviour, searches are conducted using the full term or expression (e.g. “exclusive economic zone”) rather than isolated single words where the legal concept is phraseological. For each query, the tool typically returns a large number of bilingual examples drawn from heterogeneous sources.

To keep the analysis manageable and to reduce the impact of outliers, a fixed sample of the first 20 concordance lines is retained for each of the 20 terms, after filtering out obvious duplicates and clearly irrelevant hits, thus reflecting what a real translator would typically see on the first page of results. For every sampled example, the following information is recorded:

- The English term as it appears in context.
- The Arabic equivalent suggested in that specific example.
- Any immediately relevant co text that affects the interpretation of the term (e.g. presence of modifiers, prepositional phrases, or surrounding legal formulae).
- Where identifiable, the type of source (e.g. institutional document, subtitle, web text), to the extent that Reverso Context indicates it.

This yields, for each term, two parallel datasets: UNCLOS as a uniform, institutionally constrained reference, and Reverso Context as a heterogeneous set of contextualized renderings.

E) Evaluation criteria and consistency grid:

To answer the research question, Reverso Context’s output is evaluated along two main dimensions:

1- Equivalence type: how closely the Arabic equivalent suggested by Reverso matches the meaning and legal function of the corresponding UNCLOS term.

2- Terminological stability: the degree of variation in the Arabic equivalents suggested for a given English term across Reverso examples.

In this study, the evaluation grid consists of the following categories:

- **Category A** – Full match: Reverso suggests exactly the same Arabic term as UNCLOS (allowing for minor orthographic variants) and uses it in a comparable legal context.

- **Category B** – Near match: Reverso suggests an Arabic equivalent that is closely related to the UNCLOS term (e.g. a derived form or a widely accepted synonym) and preserves the same legal concept.

- **Category C** – Acceptable but divergent: Reverso offers a translation that is linguistically plausible but departs from the UNCLOS terminology (e.g. a more general word or a different legal label), potentially affecting terminological standardization.

• **Category D** – Inadequate / misleading: The suggested equivalent fails to convey the specific UNCLOS concept or risks misinterpretation in a legal context (e.g. a colloquial rendering, a non legal sense, or a wrong conceptual field).

For each term, all sampled Reverso examples are classified into these categories, with borderline cases noted. Terminological stability is then measured by calculating, for each English term:

- The proportion of examples in each category (A–D).
- The number of distinct Arabic equivalents used across the sample.
- The extent to which the UNCLOS standard equivalent, if present in Reverso at all, is dominant, marginal, or absent.

F) Analytical procedures:

The analysis combines quantitative and qualitative components:

Quantitatively, I count how often each category (A–D) occurs for each term and how many different Arabic equivalents appear, in order to measure variation and alignment with UNCLOS.

Qualitatively, selected examples from each category are examined in depth to understand the reasons for alignment or divergence. Particular attention is paid to:

- Cases where Reverso reproduces the UNCLOS term but in non treaty genres (e.g. subtitles, news), suggesting broader diffusion of institutional terminology.
- Cases where Reverso offers legally acceptable but non standard alternatives, raising questions about their impact on terminological consistency across instruments.
- Cases where context or source type seems to encourage non legal or misleading renderings, highlighting the limits of using a heterogeneous corpus tool as a consistency oriented resource.

By triangulating these quantitative indicators and qualitative observations, the methodology allows for a nuanced assessment of Reverso Context as a “pseudo translation memory” for English–Arabic legal terminology. It shows not only whether UNCLOS standard terms are present in the tool, but also how stable, prominent, and context appropriate they are when compared with the authenticated treaty text.

G) Data Analysis and Results:

Term 1:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
Flag State	دولة العلم	44	دولة العلم	20	A	100 %

Term 2:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
Breadth of the territorial sea	عرض البحر الإقليمي	25	عرض البحر الإقليمي	20	A	100 %

Term 3:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
Contiguous zone	المنطقة المتاخمة	18	المنطقة المتاخمة	17	A	85 %
			المنطقة المجاورة	3	B	15 %

Term 4:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
Exclusive economic zone	المنطقة الاقتصادية الخالصة	133	المنطقة الاقتصادية الخالصة	20	A	100 %

Term 5:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
Continental shelf	الجرف القاري	78	الجرف القاري	17	A	85 %
			الرصيف القاري	3	B	15 %

Term 6:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
Internal waters	المياه الداخلية	29	المياه الداخلية	20	A	100 %

Term 7:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
High seas	أعالي البحار	63	أعالي البحار	20	A	100 %

Term 8:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
Archipelagic waters	المياه الأرخيبيلية	18	المياه الأرخيبيلية	20	A	100 %

Term 9:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
Archipelagic State	الدولة الأرخيبيلية	28	الدولة الأرخيبيلية	20	A	100 %

Term 10:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%

Innocent passage	المرور البريء	30	المرور البريء	20	A	100 %
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Term 11:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea	المحكمة الدولية لقانون البحار	21	المحكمة الدولية لقانون البحار	20	A	100 %

Term 12:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
Coastal State	دولة ساحلية	255	دولة ساحلية	20	A	100 %

Term 13:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
Sea lanes	الممرات البحرية	46	الممرات البحرية	17	A	85 %
			الخطوط البحرية	2	C	10 %
			خطوط الملاحة البحرية	1	C	5 %

Term 14:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
States Parties	الدول الأطراف	149	الدول الأطراف	20	A	100 %

Term 15:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
States bordering straits	الدول المشاطئة للمضايق	14	الدول المشاطئة للمضايق	17	A	85 %
			الدول التي تطل على المضايق	1	B	5 %
			الدول المتاخمة للمضايق	1	B	5 %
			الدول المجاذية للمضايق	1	B	5 %

Term 16:

English UNCLOS Term	Arabic UNCLOS Equivalence	UNCLOS Frequency	Reverse Context Outputs			
			Arabic Equivalents	Frequency	Match Code	Dominance Ratio%
Transit passage	المروء العابر	23	المروء العابر	20	A	100 %

Across the 16 terms, the quantitative classification shows a clear predominance of Category A matches. For 12 terms, all 20 sampled Reverso examples reproduce the UNCLOS-standard Arabic equivalent, indicating complete alignment between the concordancer and the authenticated treaty terminology. Only four terms (“contiguous zone”, “continental shelf”, “sea lanes”, and “States bordering straits”) display additional equivalents alongside the UNCLOS term, which are examined in more detail in the Discussion section.

Section III: Discussion

A) Overall consistency patterns:

The results obtained from the sixteen UNCLOS terms show a clear predominance of full matches between Reverso Context and the authenticated treaty terminology. For twelve of the terms, all twenty sampled examples fall into Category A, reproducing

exactly the UNCLOS standard Arabic equivalent in comparable legal contexts. This pervasive convergence suggests that, for a substantial portion of UNCLOS maritime terminology, Reverso Context functions in practice very much like a translation memory, repeatedly retrieving the same established Arabic designation rather than dispersing translators across competing options. In other words, where institutional usage has stabilised around a single Arabic term, the concordancer appears to mirror that stability and reinforces terminological consistency rather than undermining it.

From a broader perspective, this pattern indicates that Reverso's underlying corpora incorporate a significant amount of institutional and para institutional material that already reflects UNCLOS based terminology. Core concepts such as "flag State", "breadth of the territorial sea", "exclusive economic zone", "internal waters", "high seas", "archipelagic waters", "archipelagic State", "innocent passage", "coastal State", "States Parties" and "transit passage" are systematically associated with their canonical Arabic renderings across all sampled examples. This high level of alignment contrasts with the concerns sometimes expressed in the literature that concordancers merely foreground variation and cannot support the degree of standardisation required in high stakes legal translation. At least for these highly salient UNCLOS terms, Reverso Context appears to reproduce, rather than dilute, institutional terminological norms.

B) Zones of variation and competing equivalents:

The picture becomes more nuanced, however, when examining the small group of terms for which Reverso Context displays more than one Arabic equivalent. For "contiguous zone", the concordancer retrieves both "المنطقة المتاخمة", which corresponds to the UNCLOS term, and "المنطقة المجاورة", which is a plausible but non standard alternative. Similarly, "continental shelf" is rendered either as "الجرف القاري", the established treaty term, or as "الرصيف القاري", a formulation that can be found in other contexts but does not reflect UNCLOS wording. "Sea lanes" also gives rise to several renderings ("الممرات البحرية", "البحرية", "الخطوط البحرية", "خطوط الملاحة البحرية"), while "States bordering straits" is paraphrased in a variety of ways alongside the UNCLOS expression "الدول المشاطئة للمضائق".

In terms of the evaluation grid, many of these alternatives are best classified as Category B (near match) or Category C (acceptable but divergent). They tend to preserve the general legal concept and would not necessarily mislead a non specialist reader, but they do depart from the precise institutional labels used in the authenticated treaty text. This is particularly significant in the case of system bound terms whose wording is closely tied to interpretive practice. If a translator working on a UNCLOS related instrument were to rely primarily on Reverso Context and select a Category B or C equivalent, the resulting text might remain intelligible yet fail to maintain strict terminological continuity with the convention. The zones of variation identified in the

data therefore confirm one of the core theoretical points raised in the literature review: corpus based tools expose users to real world diversity of usage, but they do not, by design, privilege the authorised term over its competitors

C) Reverso Context as a pseudo translation memory:

Against this background, the notion of Reverso Context as a “pseudo translation memory” can be refined. For the majority of the terms studied, the tool behaves in a way that is functionally similar to a translation memory: it repeatedly offers the same Arabic equivalent for the same English legal term, and that equivalent coincides with the UNCLOS benchmark. In practice, a translator consulting Reverso for these items would be strongly guided towards the treaty standard terminology, even without explicit knowledge of the convention. In this limited but important sense, Reverso contributes to terminological consistency across texts that draw on the law of the sea.

However, the behaviour observed for the minority of terms with competing equivalents highlights the limits of this analogy. Unlike a curated institutional TM, Reverso does not filter out non standard or sub optimal renderings, nor does it indicate which of several available equivalents should be preferred in a treaty context. Its role is to display contextualised examples, not to enforce terminological policy. The presence of Category B and C equivalents in the output therefore reflects the heterogeneity of the underlying corpus, which combines materials from different institutions, legal cultures, and genres. From this angle, Reverso Context cannot be regarded as a fully reliable surrogate for an institutional translation memory; rather, it offers a rich but unedited reservoir of usage from which translators must still make informed, norm sensitive choices.

D) Implications for English–Arabic legal translation:

These findings have several implications for English–Arabic legal translators working with UNCLOS related material and, more broadly, with multilingual treaty texts. First, they suggest that corpus based concordancers should not be dismissed as inherently incompatible with terminological consistency. When the relevant legal field has developed strong and widely disseminated Arabic nomenclature, tools like Reverso can reinforce that standardisation by repeatedly exposing users to the same treaty congruent equivalents. In such cases, the concordancer effectively amplifies institutional usage and may even help to diffuse UNCLOS terminology beyond strictly treaty bound genres.

At the same time, the zones of variation identified in the analysis underline the need for critical, hierarchised use of technological resources. For system bound terminology, authenticated bilingual treaty texts and institutional term bases must remain the primary point of reference, with Reverso Context serving as a complementary tool rather than a substitute. When the concordancer presents multiple Arabic equivalents for a single English term, translators should consult the UNCLOS text and related institutional sources before adopting a non standard alternative that could weaken terminological alignment. From a pedagogical perspective, these results support the idea of training

students not only in how to query concordancers, but also in how to interpret their output in light of legal norms and institutional authority.

E) Methodological reflections and avenues for extension:

Finally, the study illustrates the usefulness of combining an authenticated bilingual treaty corpus with a concordancer based evaluation grid to investigate technology mediated terminological behaviour. By treating UNCLOS as a reference standard and classifying Reverso examples into qualitative categories, it becomes possible to move beyond anecdotal impressions and to quantify both alignment and variation in a systematic way. This approach could readily be extended to other branches of international law or to other language pairs, providing a comparative picture of how corpus based tools interact with institutional terminology across different domains.

At the same time, the scope of the present analysis remains deliberately circumscribed: it focuses on a limited set of highly salient maritime terms and does not address syntactic or discursive dimensions of legal translation. Future research could broaden the term sample, incorporate additional corpora and concordancers, and explore how practising translators actually navigate between institutional resources and tools like Reverso when making terminological decisions. Such work would further clarify under what conditions corpus based concordancers can genuinely act as consistency enhancing tools in multilingual legal settings, and where their limitations become more pronounced.

Conclusion:

This study set out to examine whether Reverso Context can function as a pseudo translation memory for English–Arabic legal terminology when measured against the authenticated bilingual text of UNCLOS. The findings show that Reverso Context aligns very closely with UNCLOS terminology for most of the selected terms, with Category A matches predominating across the sample and full consistency observed for the majority of the analysed items.

At the same time, the results also indicate that this alignment is not absolute. A limited number of terms display variation through near-synonymous, paraphrastic, or non-standard alternatives alongside the standardized UNCLOS equivalents, revealing a small rate of terminological variation, which shows that although Reverso Context may reproduce institutional terminology with a high degree of accuracy, it does not apply the same level of terminological control as a curated institutional translation memory.

These findings suggest that Reverso Context can, to a considerable extent, support terminological consistency in English–Arabic legal translation, especially where legal terminology has already become stable and widely diffused across institutional and semi institutional discourse. However, its usefulness remains conditional: in high stakes legal contexts, authenticated bilingual legal texts such as UNCLOS should remain the primary reference, while Reverso Context should be used as a complementary resource rather than as a substitute for authoritative terminology.

The study also makes a methodological contribution by showing that authenticated bilingual treaties can be used as reference corpora for evaluating corpus based concordancers in legal translation. This approach helps move beyond general claims about translation technology by offering a concrete way to measure alignment, variation, and terminological stability in a legally sensitive multilingual setting.

Like any empirical study, this one has certain limitations. It is restricted to a relatively small sample of 16 legal terms, one treaty domain, and one corpus based tool, and it focuses primarily on terminological consistency rather than broader textual, syntactic, or pragmatic dimensions of legal translation.

Future research could expand the dataset to other international legal instruments, compare Reverso Context with machine translation systems or institutional term banks, and investigate how professional translators actually use such tools when making terminological decisions. Such extensions would provide a broader picture of the role that corpus based resources can play in legal translation practice and training

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