

# Lexical Inflation of “*Logistics*” in France: Implications for Professional Identity and Public Perception

Gilles Paché

CERGAM Lab, Aix-Marseille University  
IUT TC Aix & TC Marseille, 413 Avenue Gaston Berger  
13625 Aix-en-Provence Cedex, France  
E-mail: gilles.a.pache@gmail.com

## Abstract

Over recent decades, the term logistics has migrated from a specialized technical term to a fixture in media discourse, applied to contexts ranging from the organization of an international summit to the preparation of a family picnic or a wedding. The article examines this semantic expansion through the French case, assessing its media framing and its impact on both social and professional perceptions of logistics management. Drawing on insights from communication and management scholarship, it demonstrates a paradox: heightened visibility confers symbolic value on activities long considered mundane yet simultaneously diminishes recognition of the complexity and expertise inherent in supply chain management (SCM). The phenomenon reflects less a simple semantic drift than a performative process in which language actively shapes collective representations. The consequences are significant for mass communication and for safeguarding the technical legitimacy of the logistics profession. In an environment where words often circulate faster than the ideas they express—particularly through social media—three avenues of inquiry emerge: expanding cross-cultural comparisons, conducting longitudinal analyses of buzzword usage, and investigating the professional issues of lexical inflation.

**Keywords:** Buzzwords, Communication, Discourse analysis, France, Lexical inflation, Logistics, Media framing, Semantic change, Social perception

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## 1. Introduction

In early August 2025, during an intense heatwave, several French media outlets—echoing trends observed in other European countries—described the routine organization of family vacation departures as a “major logistical challenge,” asserting that 20 to 40 percent of the population would cancel summer plans (Ané *et al.*, 2025). Tasks such as packing luggage, coordinating transport schedules, and planning meals were framed with a vocabulary historically reserved for the complex management of supply chains in business and the military. This extension of technical terminology to mundane domestic activities illustrates a broader linguistic shift: logistics has evolved into a ubiquitous media buzzword. The term now encompasses organizing birthday parties, managing school timetables, or coordinating home care. This semantic drift risks eroding the distinction between professional rigor and everyday organization, potentially trivializing logistics as a technical discipline. Foundational socio-linguistic and communication studies—particularly Berger & Luckmann (1984 [1967]) and Fairclough (2018)—demonstrate how media reshape meanings, producing a divergence between expert definitions and popular perceptions. This widening gap warrants scrutiny given its implications for professional identity, public debate, and the conceptual clarity of logistics as both a field of practice and a domain of research.

Buzzwords are terms loaded with symbolic meaning, often deployed less to convey precise information than to generate legitimacy or foster consensus. As Jaworski & Coupland (2014) demonstrate, such expressions can create a sense of shared understanding, even when they obscure the complexity of the underlying phenomena. In organizational discourse, Bhatia (1993) identifies the performative function of language, where words not only describe but also shape collective realities. This process often involves strategic ambiguity—deliberate vagueness that enables communication to appeal to diverse audiences while avoiding firm commitments. Ambiguities operate on two levels: *lexical*, when a term carries multiple meanings depending on the context; and *strategic*, when those meanings are intentionally left open. Cognitive linguistics, notably Lakoff’s (1990) work, illuminates how metaphors facilitate the transfer of technical vocabulary into everyday contexts, making messages more accessible but reducing conceptual precision. Such dynamics create a delicate equilibrium between media simplification and the rigor expected in professional discourse. The uncontrolled spread of

certain buzzwords over the past two decades embodies this tension, revealing a persistent conflict between discursive effectiveness and analytical accuracy in the public sphere.

This article addresses a significant gap in mass media discourse research by tracing the semantic evolution of the term logistics, with a particular focus on France, where its usage has expanded far beyond its original technical scope. While academic literature overwhelmingly approaches logistics as a managerial discipline, relatively few studies examine its role as a cultural and *communicative marker* within French mass media. The present study offers an original perspective by analyzing how logistics operates as a buzzword embedded in everyday speech, influencing social perceptions, organizational narratives, and professional identities. By investigating the tension between conceptual rigor and popular appropriation, the analysis interrogates the consequences of semantic dilution for skill recognition, policy debate, and the integrity of specialized knowledge. The empirical approach combines critical discourse analysis with concrete illustrations drawn from media coverage of routine activities. The article is structured as follows: the second section examines the mechanisms of lexical diffusion and semantic extension; the third section presents three illustrative cases from the French context; and the fourth section discusses the communicative challenges posed by lexical inflation in logistics, highlighting its implications for both public understanding and professional discourse.

## 2. Analytical Framework

In various forms of communication, certain words quickly establish themselves as essential signifiers, crossing professional, media, and social spheres with remarkable intensity and persistence. Often invested with a technical or expert aura, these terms actively contribute to the *collective construction of meaning* by providing widely shared interpretative frameworks that facilitate exchanges among diverse and heterogeneous actors. However, rapid diffusion frequently leads to gradual dilution and simplification of their original meaning, creating an ambivalence between conceptual clarity and evocative power. This phenomenon challenges the ongoing tension between preserving the precision of specialized concepts and adopting accessible, mobilizing language in public discourse. The term logistics exemplifies this dynamic of lexical inflation, whose profound impact on the representation and understanding of complex technical and organizational issues remains significant. Examining the linguistic mechanisms underpinning the transformation of “fashionable” terms illuminates how language actively shapes contemporary debates, including those in the political arena.

### 2.1. Conceptualizing the Buzzword in Scholarly Research

Buzzwords are words or expressions that spread rapidly in discourse, often serving less to convey specific information than to impress or capture the attention of a broad audience. A buzzword is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “a term used more to impress than to inform, especially a technical or jargon term” ([https://www.oed.com/dictionary/buzzword\\_n?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#11390186100](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/buzzword_n?tab=meaning_and_use#11390186100), accessed December 29, 2025). Such a definition emphasizes their rhetorical function, which can be superficial and elusive, often masking the real complexity of situations. In the sociology of language, buzzwords frequently operate to circumvent uncertainty or to avoid intricate technical debates (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999). Czarniawska (1997) characterizes them as “discursive devices” that temporarily stabilize meaning in unstable contexts, providing a common ground for understanding even when clarity remains limited. Robert (2019) further notes that in the media, linguistic cohesion devices—such as connectives and repetitions—enhance the fluidity and continuity of texts, facilitating the appropriation and comprehension of buzzwords by broad audiences. Far from being empty words, these linguistic tools fulfill an essential social function by organizing language and promoting collective coordination in uncertain and evolving environments.

In the field of science, technology, and society research, the scope of buzzwords is analyzed through their ability to concretely impact social reality. Bensaude Vincent (2014) demonstrates that such terms are not merely superficial expressions but true “performers” that build strategic alliances between professional groups, institutions, media outlets, and even individuals, uniting them around a shared discourse, common interests, or collective causes. The conception draws heavily on the seminal work of Callon (1984) and Latour (1988), who conceptualize words as *actants*—agents actively participating in the construction and stabilization of complex social and technical networks. Knorr-Cetina (1999) advances the view by describing buzzwords as “capsules of expertise,” condensing knowledge, values, and intentions into a compelling and seductive formula playing a major role in governance and scientific policymaking. Although often imprecise, such keywords produce tangible effects in social dynamics: enabling coordination of actions, shaping public debates, and establishing shared collective norms. The dual nature—both ambiguous and performative—renders buzzwords complex yet essential objects of study for understanding contemporary social interactions and organizational behavior.

Notably, management buzzwords often migrate beyond their original fields, acquiring new meanings in diverse social spheres. To illustrate semantic diffusion, Table 1 presents six widely used management buzzwords alongside their core managerial definitions and examples of deployment in broader social contexts. This overview underscores the multifaceted nature of lexical inflation and confirms that logistics is not unique in its expansion toward generalized, metaphorical use.

**Table 1.** Management Buzzwords and Expanded Social Applications

Buzzword	Management usage	Examples of social context applications
<i>Agility</i>	Organizational ability to rapidly adapt to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exercising flexibility in caregiving roles</li> <li>• Responding to changing local policies</li> </ul>
<i>Benchmarking</i>	Comparative evaluation of performance against competitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparing community program outcomes</li> <li>• Measuring local government services</li> </ul>
<i>Empowerment</i>	Enhancing employee autonomy and initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting grassroots activism</li> <li>• Encouraging individual decision-making</li> </ul>
<i>Engagement</i>	Active and meaningful employee participation at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participating in civic organizations</li> <li>• Mobilizing neighborhood improvement efforts</li> </ul>
<i>Lean</i>	Process optimization aimed at eliminating waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopting minimalist lifestyles</li> <li>• Practicing resource-efficient household budgeting</li> </ul>
<i>Synergy</i>	Collaboration between organizations to maximize efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building community coalitions for social causes</li> <li>• Fostering cooperation in volunteer groups</li> </ul>

Source: The author.

The life cycle of buzzwords is marked by a well-documented linguistic phenomenon known as *semantic bleaching* (Blank, 1999; Kutuzov *et al.*, 2018). Originally carrying precise and technical meanings, buzzwords tend to lose their specificity when widely adopted across broad and varied social, professional, and media contexts. This process manifests as a gradual “trivialization,” where terms transform into generic labels stripped of their original conceptual richness and nuanced significance. For instance, the term *iterate*, once strictly linked to iterative design, has become a catch-all word simply meaning “to redo,” lacking the methodological rigor it once implied (Mitra *et al.*, 2014). Semantic bleaching undermines not only the communicative power of buzzwords but also their critical structuring function within professional and scientific practices. By losing precision, such words diverge from the specialized knowledge they initially represented, leading to frequent misunderstandings or an underestimation of the complexity of the phenomena described. For researchers and practitioners alike, this ongoing evolution demands renewed vigilance in buzzword usage to maintain the clarity and conceptual rigor essential for effective, transparent, and reliable communication.

## 2.2. Dynamics of Semantic Change

Words are never fixed; their meanings constantly evolve under the influence of multiple linguistic, cultural, and social factors. Historical linguistics and distributional semantics emphasize that shifts in meaning can occur through linguistic drift—a slow, gradual process whereby varied usages subtly alter the scope of a word (Traugott & Dasher, 2002; Geeraerts, 2010). Such natural phenomena arise from the contextual variability and innovations in usage experienced by every society. Simultaneously, semantic transformations may accelerate due to major cultural events, technological innovations, or intense media coverage—a process referred to as “semantic cultural change” (Blank, 1999; Hamilton *et al.*, 2016). These developments often result in an extension of original meanings toward broader, less precise, or even vague interpretations, which diminishes a term’s capacity to convey clear and specific meaning (Dirven & Pörings, 2003). For instance, concepts such as commitment have undergone significant diversification in meaning throughout their application in various fields, including psychology, management, and law (Fraser, 1999). Such dynamic underscores the crucial role of socio-cultural contexts in driving the transformation of lexical meanings.

Modern computational approaches, widely represented within the Association for Computational Linguistics, have revolutionized the study of semantic evolution by analyzing large text corpora over extended periods, enabling precise modeling of meaning changes (Hamilton *et al.*, 2016; Kutuzov *et al.*, 2018). Such methods distinguish linguistic drift—a gradual shift driven by contextual variations and frequency of use—from rapid changes triggered by cultural, technological, or media events, as previously noted. Grasping this distinction

proves essential for understanding how technical terms transform into true buzzwords, often losing original specificity while spreading into diverse and sometimes contradictory contexts. The term logistics typifies this phenomenon: once a strictly professional vocabulary associated with managing product flows to create value (Langley & Holcomb, 1992), it has become ubiquitous in the media, describing realities as varied as family management, event coordination, or health crises, thus risking complete conceptual confusion. Rapid and disorderly expansion of meaning poses both theoretical and practical challenges, especially regarding the preservation of precision and conceptual relevance amid the semantic broadening accompanying buzzword popularization.

### 2.3. Research Question

The transformation of a specialized term into a generic buzzword constitutes a linguistic and social phenomenon extensively documented within organizational discourse and applied sociolinguistics literature. Fairclough (2014) argues that words imbued with technical authority gain symbolic power, enabling them to dominate diverse discursive fields, often at the expense of their original precision. Media exposure and the proliferation of digital communications across social networks further reinforce such appropriation by amplifying the diffusion and generalization of these terms. Similarly, Phillips *et al.* (2004) highlight buzzwords as “cultural artifacts” that legitimize discourses and construct organizational identities, while gradually losing strict semantic boundaries over time. Semantic extension of technical vocabulary also invites analysis through linguistic pragmatics, where contextual usage significantly shapes term interpretation (Austin, 2018 [1962]; Searle, 1984 [1969]). Returning to Fairclough’s (2014) critical discourse analysis, lexical inflation often serves political or economic agendas by masking complex issues behind seemingly consensual language. For instance, the term competitiveness frequently appears in European political discourse as a positive and widely endorsed objective. Yet beneath this apparent neutrality lie contentious debates regarding austerity measures, deregulation, and labor precariousness (Pühringer *et al.*, 2021).

The growing polysemy of the term logistics cannot be reduced to a mere lexical shift, as it reveals deep tensions between technical expertise and popular appropriation. Originally confined to military and industrial domains, the concept of logistics has gradually expanded toward diverse applications linked to everyday life in its infra-ordinary dimensions, as described by Perce (2008 [1974]). Widely amplified by the French media, this semantic broadening forms part of a dominant logistical mindset, a structuring paradigm now embedded in the collective imagination (Quet, 2022). Le Goff (2025) highlights an ambivalence within the phenomenon: on one hand, logistics retains prestige associated with efficiency and control; on the other hand, the term risks dilution by becoming an undifferentiated discursive vessel. This dynamic raises a crucial research question warranting thorough examination: *To what extent does media overexposure of the term logistics, through metaphorical and generalized uses, reshape social and professional perceptions of logistics management?* The French case serves as a pertinent example to illuminate the discursive and cognitive mechanisms by which a technical term transforms into an omnipresent buzzword—imbued with symbolic authority yet conceptually weakened.

### 3. Insights from the French Case

Three registers—family life, back-to-school, and exam organization—illustrate a shared perspective on lexical inflation, articulated around three principal dimensions: (1) a domestic scaling-up process transforms infra-ordinary tasks into operations labeled as logistics, thereby granting a managerial framework to the management of private life; (2) a dramatic effect intensifies perceptions of tension, complexity, and high stakes, even in otherwise routine situations; and (3) a progressive dilution of the concept results in the term logistics becoming a buzzword that broadly encompasses all forms of organization, ranging from family planning to school coordination. In France, the popular appropriation of “logistics” largely reflects a genuine fascination with, as well as ambivalence toward, managerial performance (Benvegnù & Gaborieau, 2020), with both proponents and critics deploying the term for symbolic, ideological, or political purposes. This trend has persisted for over two decades and forms part of a wider phenomenon observed in French mass media, which actively contributes to the simplification, metaphorization, and popularization of managerial concepts—a dynamic anticipated and analyzed early on by Charaudeau (1997). To clarify the methodological approach underpinning this investigation, the following box outlines how data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted to capture signals of semantic diffusion and trivialization of the term logistics in French media.

### Methodological Positioning

The aim of this article is to examine the trivialization of the term logistics in the French mainstream media, with a particular focus on its usage outside the traditional domain of management. Between 2020 and 2025, three groups of students enrolled in the author's supply chain management (SCM) courses, at both the Bachelor's and Master's levels, were assigned to analyze three media outlets: *Le Monde* (national press), *France 3 Régions* (regional television and online articles), and *Le Parisien Libéré* (national press). Each group was tasked with identifying, throughout the academic year, the most unorthodox instances of the term logistics and producing a summary report that listed and discussed the five most illustrative examples per media outlet, highlighting metaphorical or extended uses in relation to everyday activities and events. Methodologically, this approach relies on manual qualitative analysis of the corpus, enabling the detection of signals of semantic diffusion that would not be discernible through simple statistical frequency counts. This strategy provides a representative overview of media usage patterns of the term logistics over time, allowing the identification of trends toward trivialization while maintaining a critical perspective on the relevance and diversity of the contexts in which the term appears.

The validity of this qualitative approach is supported by research in applied linguistics and media sociology, which emphasizes that buzzwords can be studied through contextual analysis to understand their symbolic and social significance without requiring exhaustive quantification. Different chapters of Jaworski & Coupland (2014) highlight the capacity of discourse analysis to reveal the dynamics of diffusion and transformation of linguistically and symbolically salient terms. Similarly, Bhatia (1993) and Fairclough (2018) underline that critical discourse analysis allows researchers to identify processes of semantic expansion and ideologization in the media. This perspective is further reinforced by van Dijk (1993), who demonstrates that discourse structures systematically reflect underlying social and ideological formations, and by Mautner (2016), who shows how qualitative discourse analysis can productively interact with corpus-informed approaches to examine patterns of meaning without reducing analysis to purely statistical procedures. By integrating such theoretical perspectives with a structured observation of student reports, this study identifies, through illustrative examples rather than statistical measures, the metaphorical and trivialized uses of the term logistics in French media. The resulting qualitative corpus provides a robust foundation for analyzing tensions between professional rigor and the popular appropriation of managerial vocabulary, which can subsequently be further examined or corroborated using textometric tools such as *Hyperbase* or *Frantext*.

#### 3.1. Family Logistics

In large families, and more broadly among households with children, managing daily life has evolved into a genuine logistical planning exercise. As early as the late 1980s, discussing the French context, Nicole-Drancourt (1989) explicitly described a form of logistics managed primarily by women within the “domestic regulation system.” It is therefore unsurprising that today, specialized websites offer parents tools and methods directly inspired by industrial practices. A clear example is the popularization of *family batch cooking*, which involves organizing meal preparation through a systematic process: menu planning, optimized procurement, centralized cooking, and packaging meals for the week into separate containers. This approach explicitly adopts production-line organization and just-in-time principles, adapted to the domestic setting (<https://www.7etplus.fr/famille-nombreuse-c-est-une-organisation-au-quotidien/>, accessed July 6, 2025). Similarly, daily transportation management relies on optimization matrices modeled after professional fleet management, incorporating carpooling with neighbors or friends, precise coordination of children's schedules, and a hub-and-spoke system for organizing household travel. The application of managerial methods to the family environment signals an unprecedented professionalization of domestic management, in which efficiency and optimization have become core imperatives.

Beyond practical tools, family logistics also reflects a broader transformation of relationships and roles within the household. For instance, the French web magazine *MaFamilleZen* recommends restructuring daily routines when a newborn joins older siblings by implementing rigorous task planning, clearly dividing responsibilities between parents, and maintaining a stable lifestyle for all family members (<https://www.mafamillezen.com/organiser-la-logistique-familiale-avec-un-nouveau-ne-et-des-enfants-plus-ages/>, accessed April 16, 2025). This managerial approach to daily life borrows principles such as time and human resource management from business contexts, applying them within the private sphere. Planning and optimization become indispensable tools to navigate the increasing complexity of family obligations, effectively transforming domestic organization into a near-professional activity. The adoption of management vocabulary

and methods leads to a technical framing of family life, where unexpected events and emotional dynamics are often subordinated to notions of efficiency and control. While domestic labor gains visibility, it simultaneously becomes more intricate, oscillating between constraint and empowerment, raising critical questions about the boundaries separating private life from rationalized management.

### 3.2. *Back-to-School Logistics*

Every year, the start of the school year in France, which takes place in early September, attracts extensive media coverage, often framed with alarmist rhetoric portraying it as an exceptionally complex organizational challenge. Reports, such as those broadcast by *France 3 Régions*, frequently describe it as a “logistical puzzle” for families, emphasizing difficulties sometimes deemed insurmountable, including issues with school transport in certain rural or peri-urban areas (<https://france3-regions.franceinfo.fr/grand-est/marne/epernay/un-stress-terrible-et-de-la-colere-le-casse-tete-des-parents-pour-le-transport-scolaire-de-leurs-enfants-3191631.html>, accessed September 10, 2025). This dramatization effectively reclassifies a cyclical event—long embedded in social routines—as analogous to the most delicate supply chain challenges. According to a September 2023 survey by the French Institute of Public Opinion (IFOP), 64% of women reported handling the entire purchase of school supplies (compared to 16% of men), while most parents acknowledged an increased mental load as September approached, attributed to the multiplication of logistical constraints such as supply lists, schedule adjustments, and coordination of commutes and extracurricular activities (<https://egalactu.com/fin-des-vacances-rentree-scolaire-et-charge-mentale-nouvelle-enquete-de-lifop/>, accessed May 14, 2025). Nonetheless, these responsibilities remain situated within the domestic and family realm, markedly distinct from professional logistics, which entails large-scale coordination, inter-organizational planning, and optimization of complex flows.

The start of the school year demands complex coordination that often exceeds the organizational capacities of families, particularly in dense urban and peri-urban areas. For instance, in the Paris region, over 1.2 million students rely daily on public transport to commute to school, requiring precise synchronization of school schedules, transit routes, parental caregiving, and public infrastructure. This daily orchestration demands sustained engagement not only from families but also from local authorities and educational institutions (Hugoo, 2022). However, labeling this family and local coordination as logistics obscures critical differences from professional SCM, which entails intricate planning, control, and coordination among multiple stakeholders. This semantic shift reflects a trivialization of the term logistics in French mass media discourse, stripping the concept of its original technical rigor while amplifying the social perception of the school year’s start as an exceptional logistical challenge. In this respect, the media play a pivotal role in constructing a heightened and dramatized image of family management, exemplifying a broader trend of trivialization and semantic dilution surrounding logistics terminology.

### 3.3. *High-Stakes Exam Logistics*

The *Baccalauréat*, France’s national exam marking the end of secondary education and determining access to higher education, annually mobilizes a large population of students. In 2025, approximately 740,000 candidates are registered, a figure slightly exceeding previous year. Instituted by Napoleon in 1808 with just 136 candidates in 1809 (El Atia, 2008), the organization of this exam demands rigorous coordination involving the printing and distribution of millions of exam copies, the establishment of hundreds of examination centers nationwide, and the management of tens of thousands of proctors and administrative staff—all within a matter of days (Fort, 2004). A 2018 reform, implemented in 2021, introduced enhanced continuous assessment alongside a more fragmented exam schedule, further complicating exam administration. Some French mass media outlets quickly highlighted the complex logistics involved, often emphasizing shifting instructions and a challenging timetable to harmonize ([https://www.franceinfo.fr/societe/education/reforme-du-bac/casse-tete-logistique-inequitable-discriminante-pourquoi-la-nouvelle-formule-du-bac-inquiete\\_3651407.html](https://www.franceinfo.fr/societe/education/reforme-du-bac/casse-tete-logistique-inequitable-discriminante-pourquoi-la-nouvelle-formule-du-bac-inquiete_3651407.html), accessed June 13, 2025). While the frequent invocation of logistics reflects a perceived sense of disorder, it inadequately represents the sophisticated professional methodologies employed by educational teams.

In the French media, the logistics of the *Baccalauréat* is frequently portrayed as a fragile system fraught with numerous organizational challenges. Newspapers coverage often emphasizes the geographical distribution of exam centers, coordination of proctoring teams, security of sensitive documents, and management of student flows. For instance, *Le Parisien Libéré* detailed in 2023 the heightened security measures implemented following test paper leaks, highlighting the logistical complexity involved in printing, transporting, and delivering paper copies nationwide (<https://www.leparisien.fr/etudiant/examens/bac/bac-2023-comment-les-sujets-sont-protéges-pour-eviter-les-fuites-S4FYOAXSXVAYRNN2KQPW76GZHLA.php>, accessed May 26, 2025).

However, the pervasive use of the term logistics in this context tends to obscure the critical distinction between administrative coordination and professional SCM. While corporate logistics depends on integrated systems for flow optimization and inventory control, the management of the *Baccalauréat* primarily involves bureaucratic planning, communication, and strict adherence to established procedures. This broad application reduces logistics to a buzzword that dramatizes an operation which, despite its complexity, has remained largely stable and effectively managed for decades.

#### 4. Discussion

Three registers—family life, back-to-school, and exam organization—illustrate a shared dynamic structured around three key dimensions. The first dimension concerns domestic scaling, where everyday tasks transform into fully articulated logistical operations, thereby attributing a managerial dimension to private life management. The second dimension produces a dramatic effect, emphasizing perceived tension, complexity, and high stakes even in otherwise routine or seemingly trivial situations. The third dimension highlights the progressive dilution of the concept, as logistics becomes a buzzword indiscriminately used to denote any organizational effort, ranging from family planning to detailed school timetable coordination. In France, popular appropriation of the term reflects a dual cultural tension: on one side, fascination with managerial efficiency methods extending into the most intimate domestic spheres; on the other, loss of the word’s original operational and technical meaning, which is now often employed for stylistic, symbolic, or rhetorical purposes. Such semantic shift aligns with a broader trend of metaphorizing managerial concepts in everyday social discourse (Cornelissen, 2023). The widespread expansion of the term across media and daily language raises critical questions about its implications for social, professional, and organizational perceptions of logistics, as well as for the recognition of specialized expertise and technical authority.

##### 4.1. Conceptual Dilution

The trivialization of the term logistics leads to a progressive dilution of its initial meaning. Originally, logistics designated a precise, technical, and strategic function aimed at optimizing the management of physical, informational, and financial flows in highly complex supply chains (Rushton *et al.*, 2022). This definition is based on principles of integration, planning, and interdependent coordination, which lie at the core of the performance of industrial and commercial systems (Mangan *et al.*, 2021). However, the transposition of the concept into trivial contexts, such as family management or the organization of personal events, contributes to the phenomenon of semantic bleaching mentioned above, i.e., a loss of specific content in favor of vague and generic use. Such dilution undermines the conceptual rigor necessary for the scientific and managerial development of the discipline. It blurs the distinction between intricate operational perspective and simple daily organizational tasks, thus risking reducing the perception of logistics to a superficial and easily accessible notion, ultimately distorting the understanding of its true role and inherent intricacy.

The lexical inflation of the term logistics carries significant consequences for the recognition and advancement of professional competencies within the field. By trivializing the concept, the inherent complexity of actual logistics operations is diminished, concurrently weakening the authority of specialists among decision-makers, businesses, and the broader public (Hugos, 2024). Logistics demands sophisticated technical knowledge, advanced analytical tools, and deep expertise in risk management and innovation (Christopher, 2022). To reduce logistics merely to “organization” or “day-to-day activity management” effectively negates its technical depth and strategic significance. Moreover, this semantic dilution negatively impacts the education and formation of future professionals, who risk viewing the discipline as less rigorous or even dispensable. Such a conceptual shift presents a substantial challenge to the renewal and development of essential skills needed to manage contemporary supply chains, especially amid the growing complexities posed by digitalization and ecological transition (Christopher & Holweg, 2017). Consequently, upholding the recognition of logistics as a demanding and specialized discipline remains central to ongoing debates regarding its professional and academic trajectory.

Contemporary logistics management demands advanced expertise in risk management, digital technologies, and sustainable development, all of which require specialized and rigorous training. Yet, the widespread trivialization of the term logistics tends to erode the perceived importance of these essential technical skills. The application of logistics in vague or metaphorical contexts obscures the complexity of the operational and technical know-how necessary for modern SCM. Such dilution fosters an underestimation of critical competencies, especially in flow optimization, contingency planning, and the integration of technological innovations. This phenomenon risks diminishing the profession’s appeal, discouraging potential talent from pursuing careers in a field perceived as oversimplified or superficial. Moreover, the loss of linguistic precision fuels increasing skepticism toward

technical discourse, undermining the social construction and professional legitimacy of logistics, which is sometimes dismissed as inaccessible jargon or devoid of practical value (New, 2004). The decline in credibility significantly weakens the discipline's capacity to influence public and strategic debates. Consequently, defending a rigorous and nuanced definition of logistics is imperative to preserve its scientific, economic, and social standing, thereby ensuring its relevance over the long term.

#### 4.2. *Social Ambivalence*

Paradoxically, extending the term logistics to everyday contexts simultaneously trivializes the profession and elevates activities traditionally invisible or undervalued. Media expressions like “family logistics” or “holiday logistics” attribute newfound legitimacy to tasks often associated with mental load and domestic organization, which remain insufficiently recognized socially (Hochschild & Machung, 2012 [1989]). This reframing resonates with feminist and social movements advocating for the acknowledgment of the skills, expertise, and significant efforts involved in family management. By introducing technical and managerial terminology into the domestic realm, daily life is recast as a process of planning, coordination, and optimization that transcends routine. The discursive evolution enhances societal recognition of invisible work—especially that performed by women—thereby fostering a more nuanced appreciation of household responsibilities and cognitive labor (Bittman *et al.*, 2003). Consequently, media diffusion of the logistics concept reshapes public perceptions, underscoring the organizational and cognitive complexity of such tasks and highlighting domestic roles amid mounting multitasking demands.

Nevertheless, this valorization reveals a fundamental ambivalence. The widespread—and often imprecise—use of the term logistics diminishes the discipline's technical rigor and specificity, reducing it to a broad notion of administrative management accessible to general audiences (Koh & Yuen, 2022). While the term bestows technological prestige on commonplace activities, it simultaneously masks the sophisticated operational skills essential to the profession, including flow management, inventory optimization, and command of logistics information systems (Sanders & Wagner, 2014). This paradox confronts practitioners with the dual challenge of defending their expertise's complexity amid media oversimplification, while leveraging the term logistics' growing visibility. Such tension raises pivotal questions regarding social recognition and professional legitimacy in an environment where technical language increasingly permeates everyday discourse, risking the devaluation of critical operational knowledge. Therefore, sustained scholarly inquiry is vital to assess the impact of lexical inflation on the status and perception of logistics as both a scholarly discipline and a professional field.

#### 4.3. *Communicational Challenges*

Finally, the trivialization of the term logistics within institutional, economic, and political discourse presents significant communication challenges. As a buzzword, logistics enables organizations to engage diverse audiences, reassure stakeholders, and bolster perceived legitimacy (Vaara & Tienari, 2011). However, its strategic use carries risks: vague and jargon-laden language can generate confusion, erode trust, and create disconnects between decision-makers and operational actors. In complex organizational settings, where alignment between strategic intent and frontline execution is critical, semantic ambiguity can undermine decision-making effectiveness (Phillips *et al.*, 2004). Communication must therefore balance the appeal of a powerful term with the need for precise and accessible discourse adapted to varied stakeholders. This paradox reflects a broader trend of conceptual dilution that undermines the credibility of technical language, sometimes reinforcing perceptions of empty rhetoric rather than specialized knowledge. To counter these effects, heightened vigilance in communication practices is essential to maintain clarity and preserve the intended impact across organizational levels.

The excessive and imprecise use of logistics further complicates the clear definition of responsibilities, optimal allocation of resources, and rigorous measurement of performance indicators, as highlighted by Mentzer *et al.* (2001) in their comprehensive study on SCM. The semantic vagueness transforms then logistics into a “catch-all term,” spanning from basic organizational activities to highly complex strategic functions, thereby weakening the construction of a shared professional language. The resulting divergent interpretations among stakeholders hinder effective coordination and create operational inefficiencies. These challenges are particularly acute in high-stakes sectors such as humanitarian logistics, where precision, reliability, and rigor are paramount. To address these issues, organizations must explicitly distinguish logistics as a technical and strategic function from their broader or metaphorical usages. Embedding this differentiation within professional training programs, managerial communications, and institutional documentation is critical to preserving the discipline's recognition, credibility, and operational effectiveness in an increasingly globalized environment. Table 2 presents eight key

dimensions that synthesize the complex interplay between linguistic evolution, professional identity, social perception, and organizational challenges.

**Table 2.** Key Dimensions of the Semantic Shift of “Logistics”

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Implications</b>
<i>Communication challenges</i>	The use of logistics as a buzzword leads to jargon-filled discourse that can cause confusion among stakeholders and hinder decision-making processes	Necessitates clearer communication strategies and differentiation between business logistics and metaphorical uses to maintain credibility and operational efficiency
<i>Conceptual dilution</i>	The original technical and strategic meaning of logistics becomes vague and generalized, weakening its conceptual precision	Undermines scientific rigor and professional recognition, blurring boundaries between complex SCM and simple daily organization
<i>Domestic scaling</i>	Daily household tasks are reframed as logistical operations, attributing managerial characteristics to private life organization	Elevates domestic management to a quasi-professional status, but risks overtechnical framing of personal spheres
<i>Dramatic effect</i>	Everyday situations are portrayed with heightened tension and complexity, amplifying their perceived organizational challenges	Generates media sensationalism, reinforcing public anxiety and overemphasizing routine management issues
<i>Educational impact</i>	Banalization of logistics compromises the perceived rigor and importance of academic training and professional development in the field	Endangers the development of critical competencies needed for advanced SCM and adaptation to technological transitions
<i>Professional identity</i>	The semantic shift affects the self-perception and public image of logistics professionals, potentially devaluing their expertise	Risks discouraging talent and weakening the field’s attractiveness, threatening its capacity to address future challenges
<i>Social ambivalence</i>	Simultaneously banalizes the profession while revalorizing invisible or undervalued activities, especially domestic and family tasks	Creates tension between recognition of logistics complexity and loss of operational specificity, challenging professional legitimacy.
<i>Strategic significance</i>	Despite semantic dilution, logistics remains a pivotal function with strategic importance in industry, commerce, and policy	Calls for defending a rigorous and differentiated definition to preserve the discipline’s scientific and economic relevance in a globalized context

Source: The author.

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that the media’s widespread diffusion of the term logistics, through metaphorical and generalized usages, profoundly reshapes social and professional perceptions of logistics management. Within the French public sphere, lexical inflation produces a dual effect: it endows mundane activities with a technical and organizational aura, thereby enhancing their symbolic recognition, while simultaneously undermining the conceptual rigor required to fully understand logistics as a professional discipline. Media coverage, by repeatedly emphasizing the semantic shift, tends to trivialize complex competencies by equating them with basic organizational skills. Such a phenomenon, well documented in studies on buzzwords, reveals the media’s active role in constructing a collective imagination whereby logistics is no longer viewed solely as a strategic function, but rather as a flexible discursive register applicable to any context involving coordination and planning. Consequently, the research question is decisively answered: media appropriation of the term logistics reconfigures its social representation by increasing visibility but diminishing recognition of technical expertise within professional and academic domains.

The findings of this investigation open new perspectives at the intersection of communication science and management. Theoretically, they confirm that the semantic evolution of technical terms within media contexts is a performative process, where words actively shape, rather than merely describe, social practices. Insights from critical discourse analysis find concrete application here: logistics emerges as a pertinent object of study for understanding how media redefine the scope and legitimacy of organizational concepts. From a managerial standpoint, such dynamics require logistical stakeholders—companies, institutions, and consultants—to clarify their discourse to preserve professional credibility. Communication teams must anticipate lexical ambiguities by

explicitly differentiating professional logistics from metaphorical usages, while leveraging enhanced visibility granted by media exposure. Finally, this reflection advocates for integrating media literacy strategies within logistics education, equipping future professionals to balance technical precision with discursive accessibility. The interplay between conceptual rigor and media influence thus stands as a pivotal concern for safeguarding professional identity and fostering effective public engagement.

Ultimately, three decisive avenues for future research stand out. The first research avenue involves conducting rigorous international comparisons of how the term logistics appears in French mass media, to determine whether the dynamics documented in France are replicated—or challenged—across different cultural and linguistic landscapes. The second research avenue requires longitudinal analyses of extensive media corpora to chart the evolution of both the frequency and the discursive contexts of logistics, integrating critical discourse analysis with advanced computational techniques. Such work would quantify the scale of semantic bleaching and reveal its impact on the conceptual integrity of logistics. The third research avenue addresses the influence of lexical inflation on education and recruitment in the transport and logistics sector, investigating the ways in which media narratives shape career aspirations and perceptions of the competencies essential to the profession. Pursued together, these directions call for a sustained interdisciplinary dialogue among scholars in communication, linguistics, and management, to expose the media's structuring power over the “*organizational lexicon*” and to anchor conceptual clarity in an increasingly unstable discursive arena.

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