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**Bridging the Lexical Overlap for Disambiguation of Meaning
in English Language: An Empirical Lexicographic Study**



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Abstract

As a lingua franca of the world, English language has a high degree of lexical ambiguity based on homophones, homographs, and homonyms, thus offering cognitive, pedagogical, and academic problems. This inquiry puts forward a regulated system of lexical reform proposing to incorporate etymological tracing, phonological distinctiveness, morphological transparency, semantic distinctiveness, borrow-ability and pedagogical evident-ness to systematically eliminate lexical ambiguity. The history of the English language shows that it has been developed through the continuous introduction of new words, which is testified by Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens, and Carroll. Suggested lexical replacements, such as using script instead of write, plumb instead of metal lead, and rive instead of river bank, attest to the ability of guided reform to reduce cognitive load, facilitate the learning of English, better access to lexis, and academic accuracy. This study is an icebreaker on the subject as it highlights the theoretical rationale as well as practical benefits of lexicographically informed language modernization.

Keywords: Lexicon, lexical ambiguity, lexicography, neologism, language modernization homophones, homographs, homonyms.

1. Introduction

1.1 Diachronic Foundations of Homophony, Homography and Homonymy in English

Homophones are described in the linguistics literature as words that have the same pronunciation but are different in their spelling and meaning (e.g., right and write). They form one of the most documented causes of lexical ambiguity in English and other natural languages. Homographs on the other hand are those lexemes that have the same spelling but have divergent pronunciation and semantic interpretation (e.g., lead /li:d/ and lead /led/). In the narrow semantic meaning, homonyms are words that cannot be distinguished either by spelling or pronunciation, yet are semantically unlike (e.g., the financial institution bank and the riverbank). Such categories are not arbitrary pedagogical categories; the categories are a result of profound historical processes which have influenced the development of English.

1.2 The Lexical Convergence Is Historically Based On Historical Forces

The English of today is a stratified language. Its Germanic substratum (Old English) experienced a massive influence of Norse languages, and later was itself influenced by Norman French super-stratum, before being influenced by Latin and Greek scholarly borrowings. Such a union of layers has influenced the lexicon as well as the interplay of phonology and orthography.

- **Sound Change with no Orthographic Change:** One of the key processes in the homophonic phenomenon in the English language is a phonological shift that is unlikely to be reflected in the current orthographic reform. The Great Vowel Shift, a pattern of systematic changes in the pronunciation of long vowels between the Middle and Early Modern English eras, radically changed the phonology of the English language as medieval spelling was mostly fossilized. Since orthography was conservative compared to the spoken counterparts, unique historical words became phonetically similar without relative spelling re-establishment, making them form sets of homophones. This trend fits into larger theories of the phonological change in historical linguistics: as phoneme merge together in other phylogenetic phoneme, existing differences are collapsed, and homophony is an inevitable by-product of standard phonological change. These processes are not foreign in the diachronic analyses of phonological change.

- **Lexical Borrowing without Phonological Harmonization:** English borrowing of several languages placed the lexemes with divergent phonological form in the same phonetic space. The eclecticism of the sources, which included Germanic, Romance, Latin/Greek, and many forms of contact languages, increased the probability of the borrowed forms in the pronunciation or writing becoming similar to the preexisting native words once they became a part of the lexicon. The discussion of the homophone and homograph of English literature by its critics has pointed out to the dynamics of the inequitable treatment of phonological representation in borrowing as a factor in the seeming ambiguity of classification and in the lexicon itself. It is observed that there is no combination between colossal borrowing and systematic phonological adaptation which often end in the form of accidental homophone and homograph in modern day dictionary utilization.

- **Semantic Drift and Lexical Convergence:** Different etymons can experience semantic drift with time leading to polysemy or homonymic separation. The analogy or drift between original unrelated meanings end up as homonyms – encoded in similar phonological form. As highlighted in recent studies in the field of linguistics, the saliency of lexical ambiguity and its solution through contextual clues (e.g., homonyms and homographs) in modern English use is in the focus of the contemporary linguistic studies, thus highlighting the complexity of the semantic net created by the historical stratification of the lexicon.

Category / Example	Definition	Origin (Phonology)
Homophone	Same sounding, spelling and	OE riht / OE wrītan
Right / write	meaning are different	(/raɪt/)
Homograph	Spell same but different in	OE lǣdan /
Lead (/li:d/ vs /lɛd/)	sound and meaning	OE lead (/li:d/, /lɛd/)
Homonym	Spelling and sound same but	banca Italian /
Bank	mean different	banki Old Norse (/bæŋk/)

Table I: Division of Ambiguous Categories

2. Problem Statement

The lexical overlapping results into cognitive and pedagogic burden in English language. The accumulating body of empirical research in the fields of psycholinguistics and applied linguistics proves that lexical overlap in English, in the form of homophones, homographs, and homonyms, has both cognitive and pedagogical costs. These burdens undermine the processing efficiency of the lexical processing of both speakers of the native language and language learners especially in English as Second Language (ESL) and English as Foreign language (EFL) contexts.

3. Lexical Overlapping as Cognitive Load and Academic Ambiguity

Cognitive loading increases significantly when a reader and a listener is exposed to ambiguous forms that do not offer enough phonological or orthographic clues that would allow them to disambiguate the forms instantly.

- To begin with, in the process of real-time understanding, there is the activation of multiple lexical candidates with the same surface forms and the competition

forces the deployment of extra cognitive resources to inhibit irrelevant meanings and to select those that are relevant to the situation, which is subsequently used in the suppression of irrelevant meanings and the selection of contextually appropriate ones. Experimental studies of the resolution of lexical ambiguity have been consistent in demonstrating slower and more resource-consuming processing of homonymous as compared to unambiguous items. Additionally, studies on lexical ambiguity resolution have shown that context and meaning frequency both contribute to processing time and cognitive effort, specifically in items that have more than one meaning such as shown in comparative work on ambiguous and unambiguous words in psycholinguistic tests of the process of lexical access and meaning selection.

- Second, the processing delay is a sound discovery in psycholinguistics: lexical-decision and sentence-comprehension experiments prove that ambiguous words in particular, homonyms with semantically dissimilar meanings, hinder access to meaning since the mental lexicon initially triggers multiple interpretations before disambiguation on a context basis can take place. The process of competitive activating is proven by the fact that both non-native and native speakers showed prolonged reaction time and high error rates in the process of lexical-decision task and additional indicators of lexical access.
- Third, the ESL/EFL obstacle is enhanced by the haphazard phoneme-grapheme associations of English. In contrast to shallow orthographies, the non-systematic relation of sounds and spelling in English creates arbitrary associations that students have to memorize on an individual basis as opposed to being systematically acquired. This abnormality aggravates the ambiguousness of the learners as unsteady sound-symbol combination disrupts the word recognition and production. Experiments based on grapheme-phoneme correspondence indicate that the explicit training of such associations can help some of the learning difficulties; however, the complexity of phonological awareness and vocabulary acquisition in ESL/EFL students is still very challenging.
- Lastly, academic ambiguity has the consequences of discourse precision. Academic use of language needs to be clear and lexically confusion free. There must be a trusted form-meaning transparency as the presence of ambiguity may

lead to undermined readability, writing and subject specified use of language. Lexical ambiguity, which is based on homonyms and homographs, thus opposes the cognitive principle of form-meaning transparency, which forms the basis of an efficient processing and understanding of language (experimental and theoretical approaches to lexical access and ambiguity).

Overall, the problem of lexical overlap in English is not only an intriguing case of semantic quirkiness, but also a structural impediment to effective lexical retrieval, increased processing load, and limited language learning, especially when it occurs in the second language. These loads bear out the assumption that English learners can develop proficiency based on a set of predictable phonological or orthographic correspondences and highlight the need to adopt instructional strategies that can clearly compensate lexical uncertainty and anomalous sound-symbol relationships.

4. Theoretical Argument in Controlled Lexical Reform in English

The English lexicon has been active during all the times. The historical record indicates that speakers, writers and institutional actors have always played their part in the lexical expansion and this leads to the conclusion that systematic and principled lexical reform is a natural and historically valid thing to do. The English language has been long influenced by literary and scientific invention to add new words, acquired by conscious coinage, borrowing or by semantic extension.

The use of neologisms and loan words in English has never been as high as it is in modern times of globalization, digital communication, and interdisciplinary science. Investigations of the corpus indicate that the openness to the outside and internal innovation has yielded an ever-refreshing vocabulary of English, which represents the ever-evolving social, cultural, and technological facts (e.g., cryptocurrency, metaverse, blockchain, etc.), which were not in the vocabulary in more primitive times. These are neologisms and they are formed by blending, affixation, compounds and borrowing which proves that lexicon in the language evolves not only internally, but also in contact with other languages (Melnyk et al. 2025; Shabnam Aybek qizi, 2024).

In the past, authors and cultural personalities have been instrumental in the lexical innovation. Shakespeare, who is commonly recognized as one of the most influential writers in the history of English literature, is an example of how the

creative usage can be a contributive factor towards lexical change. He either coined or the first to write down many words and idiomatic phrases which subsequently became established in the language, through conversion (changing of parts of speech) and affixation. Although the exact number remains immensit (immersion beyond reality) and subject to modern refinement by lexicographic experts, according to some standard reference works some thirteen hundred and more lexical items and phrases have been ascribed to his plays and poems. His strategies of neologism, conversion (e.g. noun to verb), and compounding are also similar to the same word-formation processes in modern lexical innovation. This historical precedent helps to prove that the intentional expansion of the lexicon is that which is a component of the natural development of the English language.

New terms are regularly coined in the context of science description to name new concepts (e.g. photosynthesis, algorithm, byte), a phenomenon that demonstrates that lexical modernization is part and parcel of the intellectual modernization. Similarly, the English language has a rich tradition of borrowing (e.g., genre, cafe, tsunami, kindergarten), which adds color to the ability to express and speaks of cross-cultural contact (Mishra, 2023).

Being a global lingua franca, English is in a singular position of being modernized to manage lexical control through lexicography and teaching methods instead of letting evolution do its work. A regulated practice such as based on corpus evidence, sociolinguistic insight and lexicographics would improve clarity, lessen the learning pressure on second language learners and even preserve the expressiveness without affecting communicative effectiveness. Since lexical innovation is historically valid, and we still require innovative concepts, this type of reform takes natural language development into a principled space whose results are of advantage to both non-native and native speakers.

5. Lexicographic Research Framework

In this work, the Lexicographic Reform Framework is applied, according to which the problematic lexemes and the suggested alternatives are evaluated systematically and assessed in relation to a variety of different analytical dimensions. Any effort at changing or expanding the vocabulary of a given language requires a principled lexicography approach, since lexicography is a branch of science that aims at

describing, examining, and ordering the vocabulary of a language; in this case, the vocabulary is a set of lexical items and their qualities.

- At the core of this approach is etymological tracing that determines a semantic and historical path of a word based on the authority of historical dictionaries (e.g., the Oxford English Dictionary), as well as, the evidences of the corpus. Etymology gives us an understanding of the morphological and semantic stability or drift, thus, giving us a clue to whether a lexeme is persisting or changing in favor of reform. These kinds of historical and corpus based methods of lexical documentation are the essentials of modern lexicographic studies.
- The second analysis is phonological distinctiveness which is based on phonological and lexicographic data to determine whether candidate forms are adequately differentiated in International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) space to reduce confusion. The phonological characteristics of lexemes, and their systematic presentation in databases like Lexi-bank are now being used more often in the contemporary lexicography to model phonological properties and allow cross-linguistic comparison.
- Morphological transparency assesses the extent to which the internal structure of a lexeme can be used to describe the meaning of that lexeme. The theoretical underpinning of this component is found in lexicology, which studies the formation of words and the structures of their components because it has shown that the more morphologically transparent a word is, the easier it can be recognized, processed, and taught.
- Semantic uniqueness is used to determine how unique a meaning of a word is in various situations. As it has been illustrated in studies conducted on the frameworks of lexicographic and lexical semantic change, it is critical to measure variation and specificity of the semantics to prevent unnecessary ambiguity during the proposal of lexical alternatives.
- This research proposes a Borrow-ability Index to make sure that items that are newly introduced can be fitted into English phono-tactic and sociolinguistic restrictions. Borrow-ability (consideration) has been obtained through the research in lexicography and language contact suggesting how the languages adjust lexical borrowings phonologically and morphologically in accordance with the existing

native patterns.

- Lastly, the Pedagogical Clarity Metric is a measure of the access to education more rigorously operationalized by connecting lexicographic values (phonological, morphological, semantic) with language learning research standards. Education centered metrics also stress user friendly and user-centric lexicography.

The framework, by combining these six dimensions' etymology, phonology, morphology, semantics, borrow-ability and pedagogical clarity, is able to not only evaluate the lexical problems, but also give principled solutions to the proposed reforms. By so doing, it can be said to fit the leanings of contemporary tendencies in the empirical and user-oriented lexicography, in which multi-dimensional analyses of lexical items have been identified as central to the progress in lexical documentation and pedagogical usefulness.

6. Analyzing Selected Words Etymologically

A diachronic etymological study sheds light on how semantic and phonological processes, occurring over centuries, have produced homophony, homography and homonymy of modern English. Lexical overlap in these phenomena is characteristic and creates a great challenge to the linguistic cognition and acquisition of languages. In this section, we will discuss three typical examples namely right/write (homophones), lead (homograph/heteronyms), and bank (homonyms), which thus demonstrates the way in which different origins and universal changes of the sounds merge to produce the same surface variants.

- **Homophone (right vs. write):** An example of a canonical phonological convergence is the lexical pair, right and write. The two words both develop the modern sound /raɪt/ in their current sense despite the divergence of their semantic context and their various etymological origins. The word originates from Germanic: Old English riht refers to term right – meaning correct or just. Write, on the other hand, derives out of Old English writytan, which translates to incise or scratch, and was originally located in a phonological category of the wr- cluster of words. Later changes in phonological aspects such as the weakening and ultimate loss of the original /w/ in the /wr/ type of clusters also led to the phonetic fusion of previously separate forms (e.g., writania /rayt/). The original spellings were however conserved in medieval orthography. This cluster-reduction effect,

which has been observed in the phonological history of the English language, identifies the way in which sound change can spawn homophony by eliminating formerly contrastive phonemes, and how orthography can fall behind the codification pace.

- **Homograph (lead):** Term ‘lead’ gives pedagogic illustration – dissimilar phonological patterns having orthographic retention. Existing English terms lead /lɛd/ - a heavy metal and lead /li:d/ - to guide. The guiding sense is long vocalic with Germanic origin. Metallic sense if Old English referring to metal. The course of development is long leading to Middle and Early Modern English. Now pronounced differently due to diverged vowels.

- **Homonym (bank):** The lexical entry bank is a perfect example of homonyms, where a single modern word represents unlike meanings which are generated by different etymological roots. The banking meaning of bank dates to the late Middle English word borrowings of Italian banca meaning the bench of a money-dealer, through Old Italian and French banque, in which the term originally denotes a literal table on which money-dealers worked, and which was metaphorically applied to institutions of a money-dealing nature. The geographic sense of the edge of a river or raised land rather has a Germanic ancestry in tanki or Old Norse banki or an Old English equivalent which means a natural gradient. These distinct etymologies have now been united in modern English into a single orthographic and phonological unit (bank /bæŋk/), but still they do not mean the same thing. Bank therefore meets the homonyms that include the same spelling and pronunciation, but different historical and semantic origins.

7. Lexical Innovation: Suggestions of Alternatives to Ambiguous Lexemes

The innovations of the English lexicon to reduce ambiguity coincide with the dynamics of lexical change, where languages to fulfill the new communication requirements can resort to neologisms, borrowings, and semantic extensions (Melnik and Kyselova, 2025; Mishra, 2023). On the basis of semantic clarity, the phonological uniqueness, and morphological acceptability, the current study supports the usage of alternative lexical items that can be used in the place of frequently ambiguous forms.

- **Replace (“write” with “script”):** The word write may also be replaced with a word, script, which is a revival of Latin scriptere (write) and thus prefigures its

etymological ties to inscription. Already embedded in English morphology are the forms script and its descendants: scripture, scriptural and naturalized adoption and semantic transparency can be seen. Lex lexical innovation Research indicates that borrowed and repurposed lexicon are a good enrichment of the lexicon with minimal ambiguity, unless they do not fit phonologically or morphologically with the existing paradigms, thereby making them easier to process and teach.

- **Replace (metal lead with plumb):** The heavy metal lead is a homographic word, as it sounds phonologically similar to the word lead (/li:d/ and /led/). The replacement suggested as proposed is the Latin word plumbum which denotes historically the metal and associated implements (e.g., plumbing). The phonological uniqueness and semantic anchoring of *Plumb is considered to alleviate lexical competition, which makes it more in line with the English phonotactics. The frameworks of lexical innovation assume that phonological uniqueness is a necessity in decreasing processing and ambiguity in lexical processing, especially where new terminologies utilize historical forms with unambiguous semantic links.

- **Replace (bank – edge of river by rive):** To unlink the river bank feeling with its moneyed form, this paper suggests the creation of the term *rive*, meaning derived out of Old Norse root of rif (edge), a Germanic term that is consistent with an English pronunciation. Even though today a much more common interpretation of riviere is that of splitting, its renewed usage in a geographical sense takes advantage of the morphological and phono-tactic coincidences at the minimum of semantic redundancy. Experiments on the study of lexical change suggest that the acquisition of historical or cognate variants becomes one of the feasible ways of building a vocabulary, keeping its intelligibility and naturalness.

Original <i>Proposed</i>	→ Phonology	Semantic Morphology	Clarity /	Pedagogic Benefit
write → <i>script</i>	/skript/	Clear / Natural		ESL simplified
lead → <i>plumb</i>	/plʌm/	Clear / Historical		Confusion free
bank → <i>rive</i>	/raiv/	Clear / Germanic		Clarifies meaning

Table II: Original versus Proposed Words

These suggested replacements reflect principled lexical innovations which are based on recorded borrowing, morphological adaptation, and semantic specificity. This type of innovation aligns with current trends in the development of the English vocabulary, where new varieties are often created to close the communicative gaps and reflect the cultural, technological, or even conceptual changes (Mishra, 2023; Melnyk and Kyselova, 2025).

8. IPA Comparison

Problem Word (IPA)	<i>Proposed Word (IPA)</i>	Distinction
write (/raɪt/)	<i>script</i> (/skript/)	Orthographic and phonetic
lead (/lɛd/)	<i>plumb</i> (/plʌm/)	Totally distinct
bank (/bæŋk/)	<i>rive</i> (/raɪv/)	Totally distinct

Table III: IPA Comparison of Original versus Proposed Words

9. Reduced Lexical Ambiguity has Potential Pedagogic and Academic Benefits

The suppression of lexical ambiguity in English by means of advocacy of accurate form-meaning correlations brings about discernible pedagogical and academic benefits as evidenced by contemporary studies on second-language acquisition, lexical processing and literacy education.

- To begin with, by restoring a one-form-one-meaning principle, vocabulary acquisition becomes simplified as there are fewer competing meanings that learners have to settle in the process of comprehending and producing. The empirical research of contextual lexis acquisition has shown that the potential of the learners to disambiguate the meaning is improved in case the ambiguity is minimized and the contextual cues are salient, thus minimizing cognitive load and faster vocabulary retention than in traditional ambiguous lexical situations. This type of ambiguity reduction reduces reliance on mnemonic techniques of memorization and leads to greater assimilation of lexical information.
- Second, the removal of ambiguous forms will reduce the burden on memorization of ESL/EFL learners. The problem of vocabulary retention has always been a thorny issue in the SLA, especially in relation to ambiguous lexical elements that require their learners to remember several, differentiated meanings of the same morphological unit. Studies have shown that ambiguity increases

cognitive load of learners in vocabulary learning and memory, and explicit semantic associations are beneficial to support more effective encoding and retrieval.

- Third, there is lexical clarity, which increases lexical access during reading. The critical element of fluent reading is being able to recognize the word meaning and recall it very fast; when there are several competing senses to a lexical item, the processing time is slowed by an implicit process of activating and deactivating alternative lexical entries in the reader. The competition can be alleviated to some extent by contextual information but research has shown that even in situations where there is a lexical ambiguity, processing time is indeed inflated particularly in the readers with limited lexical depth or proficiency. Reducing lexical items will increase automaticity of word recognition and the processing steps will be minimized.

- Fourth, increased accuracy in terminology also strengthens the academic discourse. Readers and writers in specialized and scholarly texts find that the uniform vocabulary used is clear and unambiguous and that it refers explicitly to certain things. Although there are studies of the cognitive ambiguity costs of using the technical vocabulary in the professional sphere, pedagogical models are starting to encourage the explicit teaching of vocabulary and better lexical correspondences to enhance the understanding and expression in the academic realm.



Reduced Cognitive Load



Simplified ESL Memorization



Speedy Lexical Access



Terminological Precision



Simplified Phonetics

- Lastly, more recognizable lexical forms make phonics-based literacy training easier, which is characterized by increased emphasis on the predictable form-sound links to enable accurate decoding and accuracy in reading. Studies on phonics intervention in adult ESL students indicate that phonological awareness played using regular word patterns facilitates the acquisition of spelling and decoding skills, which suggests that the transparency of lexical literacy facilitates

the systematic learning of literacy.

All these findings raise the likelihood that educational gains in the form of reform favoring semantic distinctiveness and phonological transparency can have quantifiable educational advantages by reducing cognitive load, enhancing lexical processing, and facilitating language acquisition and academic communication.

10. Lexical Reform Objections and Response Objections and Response Critical Reflection

With the possible advantages of regulated lexical reform, there are a number of arguments brought forward. The opponents of it claim that (1) tradition and resistance might be the obstacles to the adoption of new forms, (2) the organic development of the language must not be interfered with prescriptively, and (3) the heritage of the literature might be disrupted by the change or substitution of the words of historical value. These issues are part of the wider discussion of applied linguistics and language planning in terms of prescriptivism or descriptivism (Kaplan, 2022).

Nonetheless, historical or linguistic data shows that the language has constantly been changing through innovation, which was often fueled by writers, scholars, and social necessities. Since Shakespearean coinages through contemporary technical neologisms, the English language has time and again taken up new lexical elements and maintained comprehensibility and literary richness. Lexicographic principles sets the firm basis of modulated reforms as these principles are empirical in nature which include phonological distinction, semantic transparency and morphological regularity – not an artificial burden but a continued natural evolution. In this way, language innovation will be kept in line with communicative effectiveness, pedagogical transparency, and cognitive processing limitations and not in conflict with historical continuity (Melnyk & Kyselova, 2025).

In a way, controlled lexical modernization fills the gaps in the natural evolution of English by addressing ambiguities, which have occurred through historical overlay, borrowings and semantic drift, in a systematic manner. On the contrary, a well-thought-out application can maintain the richness of the expressive level and contribute to a better understanding of both native and non-native speakers (Mishra, 2023).

<i>Objections</i>	<i>Responses</i>
<i>Resistance and Tradition</i>	<i>Historical evolution is aligned with controlled reform</i>
<i>Organic Evolution Versus Planned</i>	<i>Continuation is possible through guided reform – it is not disruption</i>
<i>Disruption of literary heritage</i>	<i>Expressive richness can be preserved with innovation – in order to reduce ambiguity</i>

Table IV: Objectives versus Reponses

11. Conclusion

The historical validity and pedagogical benefits of lexical reform are controlled in the English language. Reestablishing a one-form-one-meaning rule, the proposed changes make the learning of English-as-a-Second-Language learners less memorized, enhance the retrieval of lexical information during the reading process, improve terminological accuracy in academic writing, and simplify phonics-based literacy training. It is demonstrated by historical and theoretical factors that guided innovation is consistent with the evolution of natural language, which follows the example of lexical enrichment practiced by literary and scientific experts.

12. Delimitations: The analysis is conducted on a limited set of lexemes (write, lead, bank) and is unlikely to allow the analysis of the entire range of lexical ambiguity in English. New suggestions are based on historical and etymological arguments; it has not been empirically confirmed using corpus analysis, psycholinguistic experiments, or school-based experiments. Adoption might be influenced by cultural and literary opposition to change, especially in idiomatic or literary terms.

13. Future Prospects: Scholars and researchers can further contribute the existing literature by exploring empirical validation, corpus-based analysis, pedagogical application, digital lexicography and cross-linguistic application.

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