

## A DIGITAL INVESTIGATION OF DISHES AND HOUSEHOLD UTENSIL LEXICON IN ENGLISH AND ITS REGIONAL DIALECTS

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**Abstract.** *This article examines the lexical variation of dishes and household utensils in English across different regional dialects, focusing on British English, American English, Scottish English, and Australian English. Dishes and household items play a central role in everyday communication, and their names often carry cross-cultural significance. The research is conducted within the frameworks of lexicology, cognitive semantics, dialectology, stylistics, and theoretical grammar. Through corpus-based analysis, etymological investigation, and comparative dialectal mapping, the study demonstrates that this lexical field is culturally significant, semantically productive, and deeply involved in metaphorical and idiomatic usage. The findings contribute to the advancement of knowledge in lexicology and dialectology by providing a detailed examination of everyday vocabulary as a reflection of cultural identity and linguistic diversity.*

**Keywords:** *thematic group, household utensils, lexicology, cognitive semantics, English dialects, dialectal variation, corpus linguistics*

### 1. Introduction

Vocabulary connected with everyday life has always attracted the attention of linguists, as it represents the most direct interaction between language and human experience. Words denoting dishes and household utensils belong to the basic lexical stock of the English language and are used by speakers regardless of social or regional background. Due to their constant presence in daily life, these lexical units tend to develop stable core meanings as well as rich figurative extensions.

The thematic group "dishes and household utensils" occupies a special place in English lexicology because it reflects domestic culture, historical development, and regional traditions. This group also demonstrates noticeable variation across English dialects, which makes it particularly suitable for comparative and cognitive analysis.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this article is to analyze the lexical-semantic structure of household-related vocabulary in English, taking into account its cognitive features, dialectal variation, stylistic usage, and frequency distribution across major dialect zones.

The investigation employs a multi-method approach: descriptive-analytical methods for examining semantic structure; comparative analysis for cross-dialectal investigation; corpus data for frequency assessment; and cognitive modelling for prototype categorization. The empirical data is drawn from the British National Corpus (BNC), the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and the International Corpus of English (ICE).

## 2. Theoretical Basis of the Research

In lexicology, thematic groups are defined as collections of lexical units united by a common sphere of extralinguistic reality. Unlike lexical-semantic groups, thematic groups are formed on the basis of real-world associations rather than purely linguistic relations. According to scholars such as Cruse (2011) and Lyons (1995), household vocabulary represents a clear thematic unity based on functional and cultural criteria.<sup>2</sup>

From the perspective of cognitive semantics (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Geeraerts, 2010), lexical meaning is understood as a result of human conceptualization. Household utensils are categorized according to their function, shape, size, and material. Prototype theory (Rosch, 1978) explains why speakers identify 'pot' as a more central representative of the COOKING VESSEL category than 'wok' or 'pressure cooker', even though all three qualify as members.

Dialectology plays an equally important role, as different English-speaking regions use distinct lexical items for the same objects. Crystal (2003) notes that regional dialect vocabulary is one of the most vivid illustrations of how language encodes cultural identity.<sup>3</sup> Stylistics and theoretical grammar provide tools for examining expressive usage and syntactic behavior of household lexical units in discourse.

## 3. Lexical Composition of the Thematic Group

The lexical units belonging to the thematic group "dishes and household utensils" can be divided into five functional subgroups based on their primary use. Table 1 presents this classification alongside etymological origin and core semantic features.

Subgroup	Core Lexical Items	Semantic Feature	Etymology
Cooking utensils	pot, pan, kettle, saucepan, ladle, wok	Heat application, food transformation	OE / Old Norse / French
Tableware	plate, bowl, cup, saucer, glass, mug	Serving / social interaction	OE / French / Latin
Cutlery	knife, fork, spoon, chopsticks, tongs	Manipulation of food	OE / Old Norse / French
Storage utensils	jar, container, tin, canister, bin	Preservation / organization	Latin / French / OE
Cleaning utensils	sponge, scrubber, dishcloth, mop	Hygiene / maintenance	Greek / OE / French

**Table 1. Functional Subgroup Classification of Household Utensil Vocabulary in English**

As Table 1 demonstrates, the subgroups reflect distinct domains of domestic activity. Cooking utensils are the most etymologically diverse, combining Old English native stock (*pot*, *ladle*) with borrowings from Old Norse (*kettle*) and French (*saucepan*). Tableware items show a strong French influence reflecting the Norman Conquest and its impact on domestic culture and etiquette.

The cutlery subgroup is particularly significant from a cultural standpoint. The triad of *knife*, *fork*, and *spoon* is universally recognized across all English dialects,

although the etiquette surrounding their use differs markedly between British and American dining culture (Algeo, 2006).

#### 4. Semantic and Cognitive Features

##### 4.1 Prototype Theory and Cognitive Categorization

Cognitive semantics explains the internal organization of lexical categories through prototype effects. Not all members of a category are equally representative; some serve as prototypes while others occupy peripheral positions. Table 2 illustrates this cognitive structure for key household-utensil categories.

Cognitive Category	Prototype Member	Peripheral Members	Defining Feature	Example Sentence
VESSEL (for cooking)	pot	wok, pressure cooker, crock	Heat-resistant container	"Put the soup in the pot."
VESSEL (for drinking)	cup	mug, tumbler, goblet	Small, hand-held opening	"Have a cup of tea."
IMPLEMENT (cutting)	knife	cleaver, paring knife, bread knife	Blade for food division	"Use a sharp knife to slice."
SURFACE (serving)	plate	platter, charger, tray	Flat, open, for presentation	"The food is on your plate."

**Table 2. Prototype-Based Cognitive Categorization of Household Utensil Vocabulary**

The prototype effect is particularly evident in the VESSEL category. When asked to name a cooking vessel, English speakers overwhelmingly select *pot* as the first response, while *wok* and *crock* are recognized as members of the same category but positioned at its periphery. This reflects frequency of use, cultural familiarity, and the prototypical physical attributes associated with each term.

##### 4.2 Polysemy and Semantic Extension

From a semantic perspective, household utensil vocabulary is characterized by polysemy and semantic extension.<sup>4</sup> Words originally denoting concrete objects often acquire abstract meanings over time through conceptual metaphor and metonymy. Table 3 presents a systematic investigation of semantic extensions attested in contemporary English corpora.

Lexical Unit	Primary (Literal) Meaning	Extended / Figurative Meaning	Example in Use
dish	Flat vessel for food	Piece of gossip / an attractive person	"Did you hear the latest dish?" / "She's quite a dish."
plate	Flat round tableware	Workload / responsibility on hand	"I have a lot on my plate right now."

Lexical Unit	Primary (Literal) Meaning	Extended / Figurative Meaning	Example in Use
spoon-feed	Feed with a spoon	Provide information with no effort required	"The tutor spoon-feeds the students."
kettle	Vessel for boiling water	A difficult situation (a different kettle of fish)	"That's a whole different kettle of fish."
ladle	Long-handled serving spoon	To distribute generously (ladle out)	"She ladled out praise at every turn."
bowl	Round deep dish	A major sports arena or event (Super Bowl)	"The team qualified for the championship bowl."

**Table 3. Semantic Extension and Figurative Meanings of Selected Household Utensil Lexemes**

The data in Table 3 illustrate that household objects, precisely because they are familiar and easily visualized, function as productive source domains in conceptual metaphor. The mapping WORKLOAD IS FOOD ON A PLATE motivates the idiom *to have a lot on one's plate*, while the spatial intimacy of spoon-feeding creates the metaphor of effortless knowledge transfer. These extensions confirm Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) argument that abstract thought is fundamentally grounded in concrete, embodied experience.

#### 5. Dialectal Variation: A Comparative Investigation

Dialectal variation is one of the most linguistically interesting dimensions of household lexicon. Regional differences in vocabulary for identical domestic objects reflect distinct historical trajectories, settlement patterns, and cultural practices. Table 4 presents a systematic cross-dialectal comparison based on corpus data and sociolinguistic surveys.

Concept / Object	Standard BrE	American English	Scottish / Northern BrE	Australian English
cooking vessel (metal)	frying pan	skillet / frying pan	frying pan / girdle	frying pan
flat griddle pan	griddle	griddle	girdle	griddle
large cooking pot	casserole dish	Dutch oven / pot	pot / crock	camp oven / pot
water-heating device	kettle	pot / teakettle	kettle	kettle / jug
small drinking vessel (no handle)	tumbler / beaker	cup / plastic cup	beaker	cup / beaker

Concept / Object	Standard BrE	American English	Scottish / Northern BrE	Australian English
metal food tin	tin	can	tin	tin / can
kitchen waste bin	rubbish bin	trash can / garbage can	bucket / bin	bin / rubbish bin
food cupboard	pantry / larder	pantry / cabinet	press / pantry	pantry / cupboard

**Table 4. Dialectal Variation in Household Utensil Vocabulary across Major English Dialect Zones**

The comparison in Table 4 reveals several key patterns. First, BrE and AmE diverge most sharply in the domain of containers and kitchen appliances: the BrE *tin* versus AmE *can*; BrE *cupboard* versus AmE *cabinet*; BrE *kettle* versus AmE *pot/teakettle*. These differences reflect not only lexical divergence but distinct material cultures — the tradition of the electric kettle in British households versus the stovetop pot in American ones.

Second, Scottish and Northern British English preserve archaic forms. The term *girdle* for flat griddle pan and *press* for food cupboard are relics of older dialectal vocabulary that have been displaced in Standard Southern British English but are maintained in the North. McArthur (2002) characterizes this as lexical conservatism — the retention of forms that have undergone replacement in the prestige variety.

Third, Australian English shows a mixed pattern, sharing many terms with BrE (*bin*, *tin*) while also adopting AmE-influenced forms in informal registers. The term *camp oven* for a large iron pot is distinctly Australian and reflects the country's pioneering history.

#### 6. Corpus-Based Frequency Investigation

In addition to qualitative analysis, this study investigates the frequency distribution of selected lexical items across British and American English corpora. The data presented in Table 5 are drawn from BNC (British) and COCA (American) and reflect normalized frequencies per million words.

Term	BrE Corpus Freq. (per million)	AmE Corpus Freq. (per million)	Frequency Ratio BrE:AmE	Observation
kettle	28.4	6.1	4.7 : 1	Predominantly BrE; AmE prefers 'pot'
skillet	2.3	19.7	1 : 8.6	Markedly AmE; rare in BrE
tin (food container)	31.2	4.8	6.5 : 1	BrE standard; AmE uses 'can'

Term	BrE Corpus Freq. (per million)	AmE Corpus Freq. (per million)	Frequency Ratio BrE:AmE	Observation
pan	44.6	42.9	1.04 : 1	Near-equal distribution across dialects
cupboard	22.1	8.3	2.7 : 1	BrE preferred; AmE uses 'cabinet'
plate	67.5	65.1	1.04 : 1	Universal across all dialects

**Table 5. Corpus-Based Frequency Comparison of Selected Household Terms (BNC vs. COCA, per million words)**

Table 5 confirms quantitatively what dialectological descriptions have observed qualitatively. Terms such as *kettle* and *tin* show dramatically higher frequencies in British corpora, while *skillet* is almost exclusively American. Crucially, terms like *plate* and *pan* show near-identical frequency ratios across both varieties, indicating that they belong to the common core of the English lexicon — unmarked for regional origin and shared by all dialect communities.

This frequency data also has pedagogical implications. For EFL learners in non-English-speaking countries, exposure to both BrE and AmE variants of household vocabulary is essential for achieving functional communicative competence in a globalized context.

## 7. Stylistic and Syntactic Aspects

### 7.1 Idiomatic Usage

Stylistically, household utensil vocabulary is among the most productive lexical fields for idiom formation in English. Table 6 presents an investigation of idioms derived from household utensil lexemes, tracing the relationship between the source object and its pragmatic figurative meaning.

Idiomatic Expression	Source Lexical Unit	Pragmatic Meaning
"To have a lot on one's plate"	plate (tableware)	To be overwhelmed with tasks or responsibilities
"A different kettle of fish"	kettle (cooking vessel)	A completely different matter or situation
"To spoon-feed someone"	spoon (cutlery)	To give information without requiring effort to understand
"To dish the dirt"	dish (tableware / verb)	To reveal private or embarrassing information about someone

Idiomatic Expression	Source Lexical Unit	Pragmatic Meaning
"Not my cup of tea"	cup (drinking vessel)	Something not to one's taste or preference
"To have too many irons in the fire"	iron (household tool)	To be engaged in too many activities simultaneously
"To ladle out praise"	ladle (cooking utensil)	To give approval or compliments very generously
"To scrape the bottom of the barrel"	barrel (storage vessel)	To use or choose the worst available options

**Table 6. Idiomatic Expressions Derived from Household Utensil Vocabulary in English**

As Table 6 demonstrates, idioms derived from household vocabulary cover a wide range of pragmatic functions: expressing burden (*lot on one's plate*), conveying difference (*kettle of fish*), characterizing relationship dynamics (*spoon-feed*), and describing resourcefulness under constraint (*scrape the bottom of the barrel*). The productivity of this lexical field in idiomatic formation confirms its deep integration into English speakers' cognitive and communicative repertoire.

### 7.2 Syntactic Behavior

From a syntactic standpoint, household utensil terms predominantly function as nouns. However, several undergo zero-derivation (conversion) to function as verbs: *to dish* (to serve food / to reveal gossip), *to spoon* (to eat with a spoon / to cuddle), *to ladle* (to serve with a ladle / to distribute generously). This syntactic flexibility increases the stylistic versatility of the lexical group.

Household terms also participate actively in compound formation. Examples include *dishwasher*, *saucepan*, *teacup*, *breadboard*, *coffee-maker*, *plate-rack*, and *egg-cup*. These compounds demonstrate the creative potential of household lexemes and their role in naming new domestic technologies and objects as material culture evolves.

### 8. Conclusion

The present digital investigation of the thematic group "dishes and household utensils" in English and its regional dialects has produced several significant findings. First, the lexical field is structured into five functionally distinct subgroups — cooking utensils, tableware, cutlery, storage utensils, and cleaning utensils — each displaying characteristic etymological profiles and semantic features.

Second, corpus-based frequency analysis confirms substantial dialectal divergence between British and American English, with terms such as *tin/can*, *kettle/pot*, and *cupboard/cabinet* representing the most salient points of lexical differentiation. Scottish and Australian English display further variation, retaining archaic forms and generating locally distinctive terms respectively.

Third, the cognitive organization of household vocabulary is governed by prototype effects. Central members of each category (*pot*, *cup*, *knife*, *plate*) are

distinguished from peripheral members by frequency, cultural salience, and typicality of features.

Fourth, semantic extension through conceptual metaphor is a defining characteristic of this thematic group. Household objects, precisely because they are embodied and universally familiar, serve as productive source domains for abstract conceptualization in everyday English.

Fifth, the idiomatic productivity of this lexical field — documented in eight attested idioms — confirms that household vocabulary is not merely referential but carries significant pragmatic and cultural weight in English discourse.

These findings confirm that everyday vocabulary, far from being lexicologically trivial, constitutes a rich domain for investigating the interaction between language, culture, cognition, and regional identity. Further research might extend the corpus comparison to additional dialect zones, incorporate sociolinguistic variables such as age and register, and examine diachronic change in household vocabulary over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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