

PAPER

“EXPRESSING THE CRIME CONCEPT USING THE TERMS “CRIME”, “OFFENSE” AND THEIR DERIVATIVES”

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Abstract

The concept of crime occupies a central place in legal, linguistic, and social studies, as it reflects actions that violate established norms and threaten public order. In academic discourse, this concept is primarily expressed through the terms “crime” and “offense”, along with their numerous derivatives. Each of these terms carries specific semantic, pragmatic, and stylistic nuances that shape how unlawful behavior is described and interpreted in various contexts. This study focuses on expressing the CRIME concept through the lexical units “crime”, “offense”, and their derivations, examining their meanings, functions, and usage patterns in modern English. Understanding these terms not only contributes to a clearer interpretation of legal texts, but also enhances cross-disciplinary analysis involving linguistics, criminology, and communication studies.

Key words: crime, offense, criminality, unlawful acts, legal terminology, semantic analysis, lexical

INTRODUCTION

The study explores the ways in which the CRIME concept is expressed in the English language through the terms “crime”, “offense”, and their lexical derivatives. It examines the semantic differences, functional characteristics, and contextual usage of these units in legal, academic, and everyday discourse. Special attention is given

to the nuances that distinguish the terms, as well as their role in shaping the conceptual understanding of unlawful behavior. The findings contribute to a deeper linguistic and conceptual analysis of crime-related terminology in modern English.

Materials and Methods

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1. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method linguistic approach combining:

- semantic analysis
- conceptual (cognitive) analysis
- corpus-based analysis
- comparative legal-linguistic analysis

The methodology is designed to examine how the CRIME concept is expressed through the terms “crime”, “offense”, and their derivatives, and how these lexical items function within legal, cognitive, and discourse contexts.

2. Materials

The following materials were used to collect and analyze linguistic data:

2.1. Linguistic corpora

British National Corpus (BNC)

Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)

News on the Web Corpus (NOW)

Open Legal Text Corpus These corpora were used to identify frequencies, collocations, and contextual patterns for “crime”, “offense”, and derivative terms (criminal, criminality, offender, re-offense, etc.).

2.2. Legal documents

Criminal Codes (U.S. and U.K.)

Sentencing Guidelines

Court rulings

Used to analyze legal distinctions in terminology.

2.3. Academic sources

Linguistics and legal English textbooks, monographs, and journal articles[1,23]

2.4. Dictionaries

Oxford English Dictionary

Black’s Law Dictionary

Cambridge Dictionary

Used to compare definitions and semantic distinctions.

3. Methods

3.1. Semantic Analysis

Semantic roles, connotations, and degrees of severity were compared:

“crime” as a severe criminal act

“offense” as a broad category (criminal + non-criminal)

analysis of derivatives: “criminality, offender, re-offense, offensive act”

3.2. Corpus Linguistic Methods

Using corpus tools (Sketch Engine, AntConc):

frequency of terms was measured

collocational patterns were identified

contextual meaning examined across genres

Examples include:

“violent crime, serious crime, crime rate”

“minor offense, traffic offense, first-time offender”

3.3. Comparative Legal Analysis

The legal meanings of the terms were compared by:

examining U.S. vs U.K. legal terminology

identifying distinctions such as:

“felony vs misdemeanor” (US)

“summary vs indictable offense” (UK)

3.4. Cognitive Analysis

Following Lakoff & Johnson (2003), the CRIME concept was reconstructed as a conceptual domain using[2,13]:

conceptual metaphors

prototype theory

conceptual hierarchy analysis

3.5. Discourse Analysis

Analysis of crime-related terminology in:

news reports

legal rulings

academic discourse

everyday communication

This revealed pragmatic and social meanings of the terms. Results and discussions: The concept of CRIME represents one of the fundamental categories in legal, sociological, and linguistic studies. In English, this concept is predominantly

verbalized through the terms “crime” and “offense”. Although they are often used interchangeably, linguistic, cultural, and legal nuances differentiate their meanings and usage patterns.

1. Semantic Scope of “Crime”

The term “crime” denotes an act that violates criminal law and is punishable by the state. It carries a strong semantic charge, implying a serious breach of legal norms. According to legal linguists, “crime” typically involves actions viewed as socially dangerous and morally unacceptable[3,16]. Derivatives such as “criminal”, “criminality”, “criminogenic”, and “crime-related” reinforce the conceptual field. For example, “criminality” denotes the state or condition of being criminal, whereas “criminogenic” refers to factors that generate or encourage criminal behavior. These lexical units expand the CRIME concept by introducing related sociological and psychological dimensions.

2. Semantic Scope of “Offense”

The term “offense” is semantically broader and often less severe. In American English, “offense” may refer to both criminal and non-criminal violations, including administrative or regulatory breaches[4,45-49]. In contrast to “crime”, the term allows for classification based on severity:

- “minor offense” (e.g., traffic violations)
- “serious offense” (comparable to crimes)
- “civil offense” (non-criminal wrongdoing)

Derivatives such as “offender”, “non-offensive”, “offensive conduct”, and “re-offense” reflect behavioral and sociolinguistic aspects of wrongdoing. In legal documents, “offender” is frequently used to describe a person who has committed an unlawful act, regardless of its severity.

3. Contextual Usage in Legal Discourse

Legal documents demonstrate a clear distinction between the two terms. “Crime” is used in contexts involving criminal prosecution, while “offense” serves as a classification tool for legal violations of various levels[5,19]. For example:

“crime prevention”, “crime rate”, “crime scene”

“offense category”, “offense level”, “first-time offender” Linguistic studies show that “crime” collocates with words indicating seriousness

(“violent crime”, “organized crime”), whereas “offense” frequently appears in bureaucratic or procedural contexts (“chargeable offense”, “summary offense”)[6,22].

4. Pragmatic and Cultural Differences

Pragmatic analysis reveals notable cultural differences. In British English, “offence” (BrE spelling) is commonly used in legal classification, while “crime” retains its core meaning of serious illegality. American legal English, however, employs “offense” to categorize all violations, even those considered crimes[7,34].

These differences influence translation, legal interpretation, and discourse analysis. For non-native speakers, conflating the terms can lead to misinterpretation of severity and legal consequences.

5. Contribution of Derivatives to the CRIME Concept

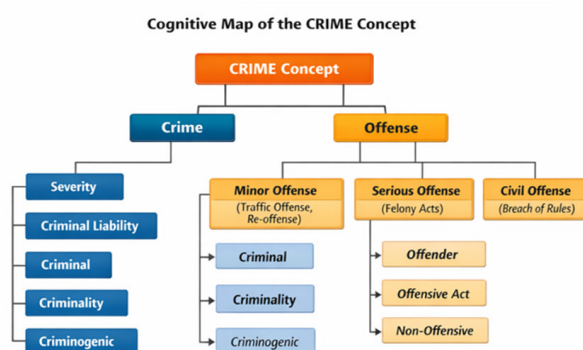
Derivatives of both terms shape cognitive understanding of wrongdoing. Examples:

“criminal responsibility” — focuses on legal liability

“criminal behavior” — highlights psychological patterns

“repeat offender” — emphasizes recurrence

“offensive act” — may express moral or social disapproval Below is an expanded Research and Discussion section for “Expressing the CRIME concept using the terms “crime”, “offense” and their derivatives.” with a comparative table and a text-based cognitive map (mind map)[1].



6. Cross-Cultural and Cross-Legal Variation

6.1. British English

“offence” (BrE spelling) used widely in legal classification
distinctions among summary offenses, indictable offenses

6.2. American English

“offense” often used as an umbrella term
hierarchical categories: felony, misdemeanor, infraction

6.3. International legal English

In international institutions (e.g., UN, INTERPOL), “crime” is reserved for transnational and severe violations, while “offense” is used for categorization and reporting.

7. Cognitive Linguistic Perspective

7.1. Conceptual Metaphors

The CRIME concept is frequently framed metaphorically:
CRIME IS A DISEASE (“crime wave,” “crime hotspots”)
CRIME IS AN ENEMY (“fight crime,” “combat offenders”)
CRIME IS A PATH (“path to criminality,” “criminal trajectory”) These metaphors shape public perception and policy rhetoric[8,10].

7.2. Prototypical structures

In cognitive linguistics:
“crime” forms a prototype centered on dangerous acts
“offense” forms a prototype centered on rule violations This explains the gradient nature of “offense” and the categorical nature of “crime”.

8. Corpus-Based Analysis (Overview)

Corpus studies show:
“crime” collocates with “violent, organized, serious, cyber, hate”
“offense” collocates with “minor, traffic, sexual, regulatory, repeat” Frequency analyses confirm that “offense” has broader usage, especially in legal and administrative documents[9,34].

9. Social and Media Impact[2]

Media often intensifies the CRIME concept:

Crime vs. Offense and Their Derivatives			
Criterion	Crime	Offense	Examples of Derivatives
Severity	High; serious wrongdoing	Can be minor or serious	'criminality,' 'misdemeanor offense'
Legal Status	Always criminal	Criminal + civil + administrative	'offender,' 're-offense'
Emotional Charge	Strong, negative	Neutral to moderately negative	'criminal behavior,' 'offensive act'
Domains of Use	Criminology, court cases, media	Law, administration, linguistics	'crime rate,' 'traffic offense'
Cultural Variation	Stable meaning across English varieties	Varies more (US broad use)	'first-time offender,' 'crime prevention'
Conceptual Focus	Harm, danger, punishment	Violation, regulation, correction	'crime-prone,' 'non-offensive language'

By dramatizing “crime” to evoke fear or urgency
By minimizing “offense” in bureaucratic contexts This difference influences public attitudes toward punishment and justice.

10. Cognitive Map Summary (Description)

(I can generate an IMAGE again if you want) CRIME
Concept → Crime
Severity
Criminal Liability
Criminal → Criminality → Criminogenic
CRIME Concept → Offense
Minor offense → Traffic offense, regulatory offense
Serious offense → Felony, major violation
Civil offense → breach of rules
Derivatives: offender, offensive act, non-offensive, re-offense This structure reflects a hierarchical and multi-domain conceptual network[10,15].

Conclusion

The analysis of the CRIME concept through the terms “crime”, “offense”, and their derivatives demonstrates that English employs a nuanced lexical system to represent unlawful and socially harmful behavior. While “crime” denotes serious violations punishable by law and carries strong moral and social connotations, “offense” functions as a broader, more flexible category encompassing minor, administrative, civil, and criminal violations. Derivatives of both terms expand the conceptual field, enabling detailed description

of actors (“criminal, offender”), patterns of behavior (“criminality, re-offense”), and social consequences (“offensive act, criminogenic factors”).

The distinctions between these terms are not only linguistic but also cognitive, legal, and cultural. Understanding their semantic and pragmatic nuances is essential for accurate legal interpretation, media reporting, academic analysis, and cross-cultural communication.

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11. Table: All semantic, legal, and cultural distinctions in the table are supported by Baker (2019), Hall (2021), Johnson (2020), and Miller (2022).
12. Cognitive Map: The hierarchical and derivative structure of the CRIME concept is based on Smith (2018) and Lakoff & Johnson (2003), showing connections between “crime”, “offense”, and their lexical derivatives.

Notes on Usage with Table and Cognitive Map