

CONVERSION AND ITS MOST COMMON TYPES

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Abstract. In this article is dedicated to the study of one of the productive ways of word formation “conversion”. Different approaches to the study of conversion such as synchronic and diachronic approaches are also discussed in the article.

Key words: *conversion, affixes, communication, semantic, functional approach, dictionaries.*

Introduction

Conversion is a very productive way of forming new words in Modern English. The term «conversion» was first used by H.Sweet in his book “New English Grammar” in 1892.

There are a lot of approaches to the study of conversion. Some linguists think that conversion is the formation of the words without affixes. Others say that conversion is the formation of new word with the help of a zero morpheme Conversion is also defined as a shift from one part of speech to another. A.G.Kennedy writes “Conversion has already been defined as a shift from one part of speech to another. But this functional change has also been observed in a shift from one kind of noun to another, or one kind of verbs to another, or one kind of adverb to another; and it seems logical to regard conversion as functional change not only between the parts of speech but also within one part of speech. It should be insisted also that conversion and derivational change are two distinct processes”[1].

Prof. A.L.Smirnitsky says that conversion is the formation of new a word by the change of paradigm. It is the paradigm that is used as a word-building means[2]. For example: book, books’, book’s ; -s, -s’, -‘s are the paradigms of the noun “book” ; to book- booked, books, booking, booked; -ed, -ed. (the ending of Participle II) –s, ing, are the paradigms of the verb “to book”. So conversion can be described as a morphological way of forming words. There are two approaches to the study of conversion: synchronic and diachronic. On the diachronic level we study the origin of conversion, how the converted the pairs appeared in the language. Conversion was born in the XIII-th century as a result of the disappearance of the English language in Middle English. Some new words formed by conversion were created on the analogy of the semantic patterns existed in the language, for example: to motor – travel by car; to phone – use the telephone; to wire – send a telegram.

On the synchronic level conversion is considered as a type of forming new words by means of paradigms. The two words differ only in their paradigms. When we deal with words produced by conversion the following types of questions naturally arise: what part of speech is the word room in the sentence: I was to room with another girl called Jessie.

Conversion consists in making a new word from some existing word by changing the category of a part of speech, the morphemic shape of the original word remaining unchanged . From this point of view the word hand in Hand me that book is not a verb, but a noun used in a verbal

syntactical function, that is, hand (me) and hands (in She has small hands) are not two different words but one.

According to this functional approach, conversion may be regarded as a specific feature of the English categories of parts of speech, which are supposed to be able to break through rigid border lines dividing one category from another thus enriching the process of communication through the sheer flexibility of the syntactic structures. Normally, a word changes its syntactic function without any shift in lexical meaning. For example: in yellow leaves and in The leaves were turning yellow the adjective denotes colour. Yet, in The leaves yellowed the converted unit no longer denotes colour, but the process of changing colour, so that there is an essential change in meaning. Conversion is not only a highly productive but also a particularly English way of word-building. Its immense productivity is considerably encouraged by certain features of the English language in its modern stage of development. The analytical structure of modern English greatly facilitates processes of making words of one category of parts of speech from words of another.

Conversion is a convenient and “easy” way of enriching the vocabulary with new words. It is certainly an advantage to have two (or more) words where there was one, all of them fixed on the same structural and semantic base. The high productivity of conversion finds its reflection in speech where numerous occasional cases of conversion can be found, which are not registered by dictionaries and which occur momentarily, through the immediate need of the situation.

The two categories of parts of speech especially affected by conversion are nouns and verbs. Verbs made from nouns are the most numerous amongst the words produced by conversion: to hand, to back, to face, to eye, to mouth, to nose, to dog, to wolf, to monkey, to can, to coal, to stage, to screen, to room, to floor, to blackmail, to blacklist, to honeymoon and very many others. Nouns frequently made from verbs : do – event, incident; This is the queerest do I’ve ever come across; go – energy; He has still plenty of go at his age. Another examples: make, run, find, catch, cut, walk, worry, show, move

Verbs can also be made from adjectives: to pale, to yellow, to cool, to grey, to rough; We decided to rough it in the tents as the weather was warm.

Other parts of speech are not entirely unsusceptible to conversion as the following examples show: to down , to out , the ups and downs , the ins and outs; as in a newspaper heading” Diplomatist outed from Budapest”; the like of me and the like of you.

A word made by conversion has a different meaning from the word from which it was made though the two meanings can be associated. There are certain regularities in the associations which can be roughly classified. For instance, in the group of verbs made from nouns some of the regular semantic associations are as indicated in the following list:

1. The noun is name of a tool or implement; the verb denotes an action performed by the tool: to hammer, to nail, to pin, to brush, to comb, to pencil.
2. The noun is the name of an animal, the verb denotes an action or aspect of behaviour considered typical of this animal: to dog , to wolf, to monkey, to ape, to fox, to rat. ”To fish” does not mean :to behave like a fish”, but “ to try to catch fish”. The same meaning of one of the meanings of “to rat”, the other is “ to turn informer, squeal”.
3. The name of the part of the human body-an action performed by it: to hand, to leg (sl), to eye, to elbow, to shoulder, to nose, to mouth. However “to face” does not imply doing something by or even with one’s face but turning it in a certain direction. “To back” means either to move backwards or in the figurative sense support somebody or something.
4. The name of a profession or occupation- an activity typical of it: to nurse, to cook, to maid, to groom.

5. The name of the place- the process of occupying the place or of putting something , somebody in it: to room, to house, to place, to table, to cage.
6. The name of a container – the act of putting smth. Within the container (to can, to bottle, to pocket);
7. The name of a meal- the process of taking it (to lunch, to supper)

The suggested groups do not include all the great variety of verbs made from nouns by conversion. They just represent the most obvious cases and illustrate, convincingly enough, the great variety of semantic interrelations within so-called converted pairs and the complex nature of the logical associations which underly them. It is not always easy to guess the meaning of the verbs formed from the name of an animal. For example to fox means “ to act cunningly or craftily”, to wolf – to eat greedily, voraciously:

Charlie went on wolfing the chocolate. (R.Dahl). In the same way, from numerous characteristics of the dog, only one was chosen for the verb to dog which is well illustrated by the following example:

And what of Charles? I pity any detective who would have to dog him through those twenty months. (The French Lieutenant's Woman by J. Fowles).

In this example to dog means to follow or track like a dog, especially with hostile intent).

The main reason for the widespread development of conversion in present-day English is no doubt the absence of morphological elements serving as classifying signals, or, in other words, of formal signs marking the part of speech to which the word belongs.

Types of conversion. Among the main types of conversion are:

- 1) verbalization (the formation of verbs), e.g. to ape (from ape n.);
- 2) substantivation (the formation of nouns), e.g. a private (from private adj.);
- 3) adjectivation (the formation of adjectives), e.g. down (adj) (from down adv.);
- 4) adverbialization (the formation of adverbs), e.g. home (adv.) (from home n.) [3]

The two categories of parts of speech especially affected by conversion are nouns and verbs.

Verbalization is the creation of a verb from a noun, adjective or other word. In modern linguistics it is also called verbification, or verbing,

Examples of verbification in the English language number in the thousands, including some of the most common words, such as mail and e-mail, strike, talk, salt, pepper, switch, bed, sleep, ship, train, stop, drink, cup, lure, mutter, dress, dizzy, divorce, fool, merge, and many more, to be found on virtually every page in the dictionary.

Proper nouns can also be verbed in the English language. «Google» is the name of a popular internet search engine. To google something now means to look it up on the internet, as in «He didn't know the answer, so he googled it.»

Verbs converted from nouns are called denominal verbs. If the noun refers to some object of reality (animate or inanimate) the converted verb may denote:

- 1) action characteristic of the object: ape n. > ape v. 'imitate in a foolish way';
- 2) instrumental use of the object: whip n. > whip v. 'strike with a whip';
- 3) acquisition or addition of the object: fish n. > fish v. 'catch or try to catch fish';
- 4) deprivation of the object: dust n. > dust v. 'remove dust from smth.';
- 5) location: pocket n. > pocket v. 'put into one's pocket'.

Verbs with adjective stems, such as blind, calm, clean, empty, idle, lame, loose, tidy, total show fairly regular semantic relationships with the corresponding adjectives. Like verbs with adjective stems that had been formerly suffixed and lost their endings (e. g. to thin<OE thynnian) they denote change of state. If they are used intransitively, they mean 'to become blind, calm, clean, empty, etc.', their formula as transitive verbs is: 'to make blind, calm, clean, etc.'.

Substantivation. Nouns converted from verbs are called deverbal substantives. If the verb refers to an action, the converted noun may denote:

- 1) instance of the action: jump v. > jump n. 'sudden spring from the ground';
- 2) agent of the action: help v. > help n. 'a person who helps';
- 3) place of the action: drive v. > drive n. 'a path or road along which one drives';
- 4) result of the action: peel v. > peel n. 'the outer skin of fruit or potatoes taken off';
- 5) object of the action: let v. > let n. 'a property available for rent'[4].

In case of polysemantic words one and the same member of a conversion pair may belong to several groups. For example, the deverbal substantive slide is referred to the group denoting 'place of the action' (point 3) in the meaning 'a stretch of smooth ice or hard snow on which people slide' and to the group 'agent of the action' when this noun means 'a sliding machine part'.

Reference

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