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CONVERSION AND ITS ORIGIN

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ANNOTATION: Conversion is the process of changing or causing something to change from one form to another. 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 remains unchanged: love — to love, paper — to paper, brief — to brief, work — to work; etc. Today, conversion is widely used by linguists and new language learners and is very common in linguistics. From this article we can learn a lot about conversion through examples such as its origin and also why use conversion?

KEY WORDS: Conversion, synchronic, diachronic, homonymy, lexico-grammatical, paradigms

The problem of conversion may prove a pitfall because of possible confusion of the synchronic and diachronic approach. Although the importance of conversion has long been recognized, and the causes that foster it seem to have been extensively studied, the synchronic research of its effect in developing a special type of patterned homonymy in the English vocabulary system has been somewhat disregarded until the last decade. This patterned homonymy, in which words belonging to different parts of speech differ in their lexico-grammatical meaning but possess an invariant component in their lexical meanings, so that the meaning of the derived component of the homonymous pair form a subset of the meaning of the prototype, will be further discussed in the chapter on homonymy. The causes that made conversion so widely spread are to be approached diachronically. 1 Nouns and verbs have become identical in form first as a result of the loss of endings. Conversion is a very productive way of forming new words in Modern English. (For example, work(n)- to work(v); pen(n)- to pen(v); walk(n)- to walk(v)). The term "conversion" was first used by Sweet in his book "New English Grammar" in 1892. There lots 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 words with the help of a zero



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morpheme. Conversion is also defined as a shift from one part of speech to another. The treatment of conversion as non-affixal word-building does not help us to distinguish the cases of conversion and soundinterchange. For example sing-song and paper(n) - paper(v).

If we accept the point of view of the linguists who treat conversion as "a shift from one part of speech to another we can differ between parts of speech , I.e. between noun and verbs, noun and adjective etc.

"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 to logical to regard conversion as functional change not only between the parts of speech but also within each part of speech. It should be insisted also that conversion and derivational change are two distinct processes; derivational change by the use of prefixes and suffixes shift words between the part of speech by producing different forms as, for example, the adjective "wide" the noun "width" and the verb "widen" (A.G. Kennedy) 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 pairs appeared in the language. Conversion was born in XII century as a result of the disappearance of inflexions in the course of the historical development of the English language in Middle English. For example, lufu-luf-love n.lufian -luf-love v . Some new words formed by conversion were created on the analogy of the semantic patterns existed in the language.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.

In English grammar, conversion is a word-formation process that assigns an existing word to a different word class, part of speech, or syntactic category. This process is also called zero derivation or a functional shift.

The historical development of conversion

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in their lexical meanings, so that the meaning of the derived component of the homonymous pair form a subset of the meaning of the prototype, will be further discussed in the chapter on homonymy. The causes that made conversion so widely spread are to be approached diachronically. Nouns and verbs have become identical in form first as a result of the loss of endings. When endings have disappeared phonetical development resulted in the merging of sound forms for both elements of these pairs.

Why Use Conversion?

But why would one part of speech need to be changed into another? Jean Aitchison, author of *Language Change: Progress or Decay?* gives examples of how this process is useful. "Consider sentences such as: Henry downed a pint of beer, Melissa went to town and did a buy. English, we note, lacks a simple means of saying 'to do something in one fell swoop.' This may be why the word down can be converted into a verb to mean 'drink down in one gulp,' and the word buy into a noun which, when combined with the verb do, means 'go on a single massive shopping spree. This type of fast-moving, thorough activity may represent a change in the pace of life, which is in turn reflected in the language since we increasingly make use of conversions--the conversion of one part of speech into another,"

"Conversion refers to the word formation process whereby words belonging to one word class are created from an existing word belonging to another word class without changes to pronunciation or spelling. It is also called zero derivation. This is because nothing is added, nothing is taken away. There are noun to verb, verb to noun, adjective to verb, adjective to adverb, etc. conversions. Let us examine some of these conversions as they occur in languages.

1. Noun to Verb Conversion

Noun to verb conversion, also referred to as verbification or verbing is the process whereby nouns are converted to verbs without a change in the shape of the word. It is the most productive conversion in English as most nouns can be converted to verbs. The following are a few examples in English. 1. Noun Verb

- a. eye eye
- b. pocket pocket
- c. name name
- d. toilet toilet
- e. telephone telephone
- f. butter butter

Some of these words are used in the following examples.



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- a. I pocketed the money.
- b. He named the child.
- c. She eyed him.
- d. He telephoned her.
- e. She buttered the bread.

The words in italics are the verbs derived from nouns, pocket, name, eye and telephone. Data , taken from Don (2005) showcase instances of noun to verb conversions in Dutch.

2. Verb to Noun Conversion

This process refers to the conversion of verbs to nouns. This is exemplified in below.

Verb Noun

- a. talk talk
- b. attack attack
- c. alert alert
- d. cover cover
- e. call call

- a. I talked the talk.
- b. I just received the alert.
- c. She made the call.
- d. They had an attack.

These are sentences showing verbs converted to nouns in English. This process is also called nominalization.

3.Adjective to Noun Conversion

Nouns are derived from adjectives through the process of conversion. For example.

Adjective Noun

- a. crazy crazy
- b. regular regular
- c. final final

- a. He featured in the finals.
- b. She is one of the regulars at the club.

The data, in are example sentences showing adjectives converted to nouns in English language.



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We have looked at few examples of conversion but there are still others involving other parts of speech which are not examined here. As indicated earlier, conversion is a very productive word formation process in languages. Here is a widely held opinion among many linguists that conversion is one of the most productive ways of word formation in the modern English language. It should be mentioned that other languages, such as for instance French, German, or Russian, usually give preference to the derivational processes, such as affixation or compounding. However, the phenomenon of conversion can be observed not only in the English language. Thus, having analyzed such pattern of conversion as the transformation of a noun into a verb, we can arrive at the conclusion that such transformation does not cause any significant alteration in the meaning of the new-build word, except its functioning in the sentence. As regards the reverse process, it should be mentioned that a pattern usually makes the new word acquire a new shade of meaning. However, it is difficult to say whether it is a regular polysemy or not because such a form of conversion is not widespread. In linguistics, conversion, also called zero derivation or null derivation, is a kind of word formation involving the creation of a word (of a new part of speech) from an existing word (of a different part of speech) without any change in form, which is to say, derivation using only zero. For example, the noun green in golf (referring to a putting-green) is derived ultimately from the adjective green. Conversions from adjectives to nouns and vice versa are both very common and unnotable in English; much more remarked upon is the creation of a verb by converting a noun or other word (for example, the adjective clean becomes the verb to clean).

CONCLUSION

Conversion is a very common process of word-formation in English. It is the derivational process whereby an item changes its word-class without the addition of any affix. It is done by converting a lexeme belonging to one class to another, without any overt change in shape. However, it is not easy to determine the original and the converted word in a pair of words that are exactly the same in spelling. There are some elements that are to be considered: the semantic dependence, the range of usage, the semantic range, and also the phonetic shape. Conversion almost always involves open-class vocabulary, especially noun, verb, and adjective. The converted words produced by this process are also in these three classes. The original words, compared to the converted ones, usually have broader range of meaning and usage.



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