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## CONVERSION AS ONE OF THE PRINCIPLE WAYS OF THE WORD FORMATION IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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**Abstract.** Word formation is one of the main ways of enriching the vocabulary. There are four main ways of word building in modern English: affixation, compounding, abbreviation and nevertheless conversion. Conversion is the creation of a new word without altering the shape of the existing word by affixation. This method of word formation is a characteristic feature of the English word building system. It is also called affixless derivation or zero suffixation. Moreover it constitutes the process of coining a new word in a different part of speech and with a different distribution characteristic but without adding any derivative element.

**Keywords:** *affixation, composition, derivational complexity, functional change, paradigm, parts of speech.*

### Introduction

Conversion is particularly common in English because the basic form of nouns and verbs is identical in many cases. The commonness of conversion can possibly be seen as breaking down the distinction between form classes in English and leading to a system where there are closed sets such as pronouns and a single open set of lexical items that can be used as required. Such a move could be seen as part of the trend away from synthetic structure and towards analytic structure which has been fairly typical for the history of English over the last millennium. This suggestion is, of course, highly speculative.

**The productivity of conversion.** 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 structure and semantic base. In addition is a vital and developing process that penetrates contemporary speech as well. Subconsciously every English speaker realizes the immense potentiality of making a word into another part of speech when the need arises. Conversion may be combined with other word building processes such as composition. 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 semantic associations and the words made by conversion may prove somewhat bewildering even for some native speakers, especially for children.

### The word formation

Conversion, one of the principal ways of forming words in modern English is highly productive in replenishing the English word - stock with new words. Conversion refers to the numerous cases of phonetic identity of two words belonging to different parts of speech. This may be illustrated by the following cases:

*work - to work.* e.g. "No; said the housekeeper; there is only about three days work to do every week ..." (Th. Dreiser, p.22). The daughter hearing the statement, turned uneasily, not to work, but because she hated people to guess at the poverty that made it necessary. (Th. Dreiser, p.20)

*love - to love.* e.g. "Haven't you been in love, since you came to Paris?" (W.S. Maugham, p92) Why shouldn't she - he loved her. He had asked over and over to marry her. (Th. Dreiser, p.75)

*look - to look.* e.g. Poor Strolve gave me a troubled look, but I was not disconcerted by so little. (W.S. Maugham p.86) I paused, and I looked at him searchingly. (W.S. Maugham p.92)

It is fairly obvious that in the case of a noun and a verb not only are the so-called initial forms (i.e. the infinitive and the common case singular) phonetically identical, but all the other noun forms having their homonyms within the verb paradigm. My work ... [wə : k]; I work ... [wə : k] [1].

It will be recalled that, although inflectional categories have been greatly reduced in English in the last eight or nine centuries. There is a certain difference on the morphological level between various parts of speech, primarily between nouns and verbs. For instance, there is a clear cut difference in meaning between the noun doctor and the verb doctor.

"The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English" by A.S. Hornby gives the next explanation of these two words:

*a doctor*

1. one who has studied diseases and how to treat them;

e.g. If you are ill, I must send for a doctor.

2. The highest degree given by a University.

e.g. He is a doctor of philosophy and a professor at Sofia University

*to doctor*

1. colloquial - give medical treatment to or for

e.g. He is eager to doctor the child.

2. Make change in order to deceive people.

e.g. The dispatch from Davis had been doctored [1].

Each of these forms exists in Modern language, as a unity of its word - forms and variants, not as one form d o c t o r. It is true that some of the forms are identical in sound, i.e. homonymous, but there is a great distinction between them, as they are both grammatically and semantically different.

If we regard such word - pairs as doctor - to doctor; water - to water; brief - to brief from the angle of their morphemic structure, we see level, however, one of them should be referred to derived words as it belongs to a different part of speech and is understood through semantic and structural relations with the other, being motivated by it. Consequently, the question arises: what serves as a word-building means in these cases? It would appear that the noun is formed from the verb or vice versa without any morphological change, but if we probe deeper into the matter, we inevitably come to the

paradigm. Thus it is the paradigm that is used as a word building means. Hence, we may define conversion as the formation of a new word through changes in the paradigm.

### **The derivational complexity**

Many linguists who treat conversion as a morphological way of forming words disagree, however, as to what serves here as a word - building means. Some of them define conversion as a non - affixal way of forming words pointing out that the characteristic feature is that a certain stem is used for the formation of a different word of a different part of speech without a derivational affix being added. Others hold the view that conversion of new words with the help of a zero - morpheme. The linguists argue that as derivational complexity of a derived word involves a more complex semantic structure as compared with that of the base, it is but logical to assume that the semantic complexity of a converted word should manifest itself in its derivational structure even though in the form of a zero derivational affix. If one accepts this concept of conversion then one will have to distinguish between two types of derivation in Modern English: one effected by employing suffixes and prefixes, the other by using a zero derivational affix. It may be argued, however, that as the creation of a word through conversion necessarily involves the formation of a new word stem, a purely morphological unit, the syntactic factor is irrelevant to the process of word - formation proper, including conversion. Besides, there is also a purely syntactic approach commonly known as a functional approach to conversion. Certain linguists and lexicographers, especially those in Great Britain and in the U.S.A are inclined to regard conversion in Modern English as a kind of functional change. They define conversion as a shift from one part of speech to another contending that in Modern English a word may function as two different parts of speech at the same time.

If we accept this point of view, we should logically arrive to the conclusion that in Modern English we no longer distinguish between parts of speech, i.e. between noun and verb, noun and adjective, etc, for one and the same word cannot simultaneously belong to different parts of speech. It is common knowledge, however, that the English word - stock is subdivided into big word classes each having its own semantic and formal features. The distinct difference between nouns and verbs, for instance, as in the case of "doctor" - "to doctor" discussed above, consists in the number and character of the categories reflected in their paradigms. Thus, the functional approach to conversion cannot be justified and should be rejected as inadequate.

### **Conclusion**

It is to be considered that conversion is an exceedingly productive way of forming words in Modern English language. Still it is treated differently in linguistic literature. Some linguists define it as a morphological way of forming words, others consider it a morphological-syntactic way of forming words and there is a third category of linguists who consider conversion from a freely syntactic angle. Nevertheless the productivity of conversion and the basic criteria place this phenomenon to a wider field of word formation.

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