



DIACHRONIC AND SYNCHRONIC APPROACHES
TO THE STUDY OF THE VOCABULARY OF THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract: *The article investigates conversion as a means of forming new words without adding any derivative element when the basic form of the original and the basic derived words are homonymous having the same morphological structure, but belonging to different parts of speech. It is said that In the course of historical development grammatical forms in English were lost and there exists no inflexion to distinguish the form of the verb from a noun and this is considered as widespread word formation in English. Synchronically both types – a noun and a verb must be treated together as cases of patterned homonymy, while studying diachronically, it is essential to differentiate the cases of conversion and treat them separately. It is emphasized that it is not easy to say definitely which of the members was derived, the results of synchronic and diachronic analysis may not coincide. That means that what is understood under conversion in Modern English does not fully and necessarily coincide with earlier periods of the development of the language.*

Keywords: *linguistics, semantic meaning, conversion, grammatical forms, syntactic functions, word formation, semantic relations, lexical.*

ДИАХРОНИЧЕСКИЙ И СИНХРОНИЧЕСКИЙ ПОДХОДЫ
К ИЗУЧЕНИЮ СЛОВАРНОГО СОСТАВА
АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

Аннотация: *Статья исследует конверсию как способ образования новых слов без добавления деривационных элементов, когда основная форма исходного и производного слова являются омонимичными, имея одинаковую морфологическую структуру, но относясь к разным частям речи. Отмечается, что в ходе исторического развития грамматические формы в английском языке были утрачены, и отсутствует флексия для различения формы глагола от существительного, что рассматривается как широко распространенный способ словообразования в английском языке. С синхронической точки зрения оба типа – существительное и глагол – должны рассматриваться вместе как случаи закономерной омонимии, в то время как при диахроническом изучении важно различать случаи конверсии и рассматривать их отдельно. Подчеркивается, что не всегда легко определить, какой из членов был производным, результаты синхронического и диахронического анализа могут не совпадать. Это означает, что то, что понимается под конверсией в современном английском языке, не полностью и не обязательно совпадает с более ранними периодами развития языка.*

Ключевые слова: *лингвистика, семантическое значение, конверсия, грамматические формы, синтаксические функции, словообразование, семантические отношения, лексический.*

INTRODUCTION

Every language accepts certain classes of audio, visual or some other material phenomena which are recognizable by speakers of the language as tokens of certain expressions. Of course, an individual's careless articulation of a certain word, or someone's clumsy scrawl, is beyond the boundary of entities which count as an expression's tokens. Realize thus that the notion of an expression's token is a language-relative one.

The same holds for an expression's type. Further realize that to fully specify (the class of) admissible tokens of types of some language expressions would be a thankless task (of course, every decent language textbook contains at least some elements of this specification). However, a lot of applications of language models are



possible even when abstracting away from the multifarious peculiarities of expressions and their tokens.

In logic, a routine technique enabling such abstraction is G \ddot{o} delization, i.e. mapping of expressions to their unique numerical correlates. When expressions are replaced by their G \ddot{o} del numbers, language in a synchronic sense is seen to be a function from (at least natural) numbers to meanings. Such functions can be called numerical codes.[2] Note that thanks to G \ddot{o} delization, we are not restricted to studying particular functions as synchronic languages defined for over a particular alphabet, say that of English or predicate logic; we may consider any given linguistic system.

The temporal aspect captured by this model needs perhaps no explanation, as it is clearly a correlate of the temporal variability involved in the reality of language. Note that any change in a language, e.g. in the meanings of its expressions, corresponds to the exchange of a value of the function (which is a model of the language in a diachronic sense).

On the other hand, the modal aspect seems to be questionable. Its suspiciousness probably stems from the fact that linguistic research is normally focused on the actual, and not the counterfactual, state of language. Nevertheless, alternative (counterfactual) forms of a language are not the exclusive speculative domain of philosophers: in diachronic linguistics the researcher who asks whether an investigated feature of a language might be different is also asking a counter-factual question.

I am going to specify the model of language in a diachronic sense in one particular detail. I will thus avoid the objection that the basis for language can vary over time. Such a change in basis yields a deeper change in language than the mere exchange of its synchronic slices L and L' , which was discussed in the preceding subsection. The model of language in an enhanced diachronic sense is capable of coping with such changes. The model presented at the beginning of Section 4 is only suitable for investigating languages with a fixed basis.



METHODS

Firstly, let us explain the consequences of changing a basis. Recall the fact that each function is defined over a specific object basis. For instance, a property explicated as an intention having classes of individuals as values is only defined over a particular collection of individuals (and a collection of possible worlds and moments of time, which will be ignored for the present moment). Let $B = \{I_1, I_2, I_3\}$. No extension of that property can involve, e.g., I_4 because I_4 is not in B . If this basis is changed, the property is changed as well. Since properties are denotata of some expressions, changes in B give rise to semantic changes in L in question. The properties and other objects denoted by the expressions of L are produced by procedures which are defined by this production, thus meanings communicated by that language change as well. If synchronic languages L and L' are defined over distinct bases B and B' , their meanings differ significantly.

They thus cannot be possible values of one and the same language in a diachronic sense. Such a language in a diachronic sense is defined over a particular basis, say B ; let us call this diachronic language DLB . In other words, synchronic languages of one particular diachronic language are all defined over one particular basis. To capture the changes a language undergoes when its basis changes, we have two possibilities. One possibility is to take into consideration DLB , DLB_0 , etc., which leads to the fragmentation of answers concerning semantic or other features of that one intuitive language. It is thus more promising to deal with one entity comprising the changed languages.

This entity is the given language in an enhanced diachronic sense: a diachronic language with the basis BU , which is the union of all bases of DLB , DLB_0 , etc., i.e. $BU = \{B, B', \dots\}$. The language $DLBU$ seems to have one undesirable property. Imagine that B' contains I_4 , an individual which cannot be discussed in any synchronic language of DLB because B does not contain it. The adoption of LB into $DLBU$ leads to the consequence that (for example) a property denoted in the original LB is now (re)constructed over B' . It means that any extension of that property also has to be defined over B' . Then, to mimic the same extension (and property) from the



original LB, the truth value assigned to I 4 in this extension,¹⁹ as well as the anti-extension, in the modified LB has to be a partial gap, i.e. a non-existent value..[2]

Such a reform of the original language LB to its modification, which is a value of DLBU, thus inevitably causes particular semantic changes. This is an undesirable result at first sight, but it must be realized that this feature of the model appropriately corresponds to the fact that, for instance, a certain value of DL, i.e. LB, is limited in the sense that it cannot ascribe anything to individuals such as I 4 because this language has a blind spot there.

Conversion is a means of forming new words without adding any derivative element so that the basic form of the original and the basic derived words are homonymous having the same morphological structure, but belonging to different parts of speech.

In the course of the historical development grammatical forms in English were lost and another way of forming new words came into being. Due to the loss of inflexion words in Modern English have in most cases no special form to indicate to what part of speech they belong. When inflexions are lost, there is nothing to distinguish the form of the verb from a noun.

The terminology used for this process has not been completely established yet. The most usual terms are “conversion”, because a word is converted (shifted) to a different part of speech; and “zero-derivation”, because the process is like deriving (transferring) a word into another morphological category with a zero-affix creating a semantic dependence of one word upon another. Out of derivational interpretations, the one claiming that during conversion the converting base takes on a zero-suffix is the most widely accepted and, perhaps not accidentally, the most widely criticized. Other less frequently used terms are “functional shift”, “functional change” or “zero-marked derivative”.

The essence of the phenomenon may be illustrated by the following example: His voice silenced everyone else. The word silence exists in the English language as a noun and a verb may be formed from the same stem without adding any suffix or prefix or without changing the stem in any other way, so that both basic forms are



homonymous. Their distribution on the other hand is quite different. In our example, silence not only takes the functional verbal suffix –ed but also occupies the position of a verbal predicate “having voice” as a subject and everyone else as its object. Its lexico-grammatical meaning is also a verb. The difference between “silence” as a noun and as a verb is morphological, syntactical, and semantic; the original and the resulting words are grammatically different; a new paradigm is acquired and the syntactic functions and ties are those of a verb.

The term “conversion” is in a way misleading, as nothing is converted; the original word continues its existence alongside the new one. As to zero “derivation”. It does not permit us to distinguish this type from side interchange food (n) – feed (v), where no derivative morpheme is added either.[8]

The term “root formation” is not always suitable as the process can involve not only root words, but also words containing affixes and compounds. The terms “functional change” or transposition “implies that the process in question concerns usage, not word – formation. This immediately brings us into an extremely controversial field. Some scholars assert that conversion will become even more active in the future because it is a very easy way to create new words in English. [6] There is no way to know the number of conversions appearing every day in the spoken language, although we know this number must be high.

RESULTS

As a type of word formation, conversion exists in many languages. The main reason for the wide-spread 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. It is wide spread word formation in English. The causes that made conversion so widely spread are to be approached diachronically. Nouns and verbs have become identical in form firstly as a result of the loss of endings.

Conversion is a type of word-building – not a pattern of structural relationship. Synchronically both types of sleep (n) – sleep (v) and pencil (n) – pencil (v) must be treated together as cases of patterned homonymy. [8] However, it is essential to



differentiate the cases of conversion and treat them separately when the study is diachronic.

Established examples of noun > verb conversion are: to badger, to bottle, to mail, to mushroom, to skin, etc. [6]

Almost any noun or adjective can at once become a verb if employed as such, and almost any verb may be used to express the idea of its action and result. E.g. eye-to-eye, water-to-water, empty – to empty, clean – to clean, etc.

Frontier between parts of speech may also be illustrated by the adjectival use of adverbs.

Very (adv.) = the very man (adj.); seldom (adv.) = a seldom pleasure (adj.)

Nouns: In, out, etc. For example: He knows all the ins and outs of the town.

Adverbs are converted into verbs: Down (adv.) = to down (verb)

Even some interjections are converted into verbs: Boo (inter.) – to boo (v).

The converted word acquires a); above (adv.) = the above remark (adj.), etc.

The adverbs are converted into all the grammatical characteristics of the part of speech into which it has been converted.

This way of forming new words is productive. It should be mentioned that especially nouns are often converted into verbs. Such verbs are called “denominative” verbs. [2]

Conversion began to develop strongly in the 15th century when the English language acquired an analytical character. Now in English, almost any part of speech can be converted into some other part of speech.

Conversion can be described as a morphological way of forming words. It has been the subject of many linguistics discussions since 1891 when H. Sweet first used the term in his “New English Grammar”. [6] Various opinions have been expressed on the nature and character of conversion in the English language and different conceptions of conversion have been put forward. The treatment of conversion as a morphological way of forming words was suggested by S.I. Smirnitsky in his works on the English language. This idea is also accepted by R.S. Ginsburg and others.



Other linguists do not agree with this conception of conversion as a morphological way of forming words. As one of the words within a conversion pair is semantically derived from the other, it is of great.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical and practical importance to determine the semantic relations between the words related through conversion. We can show the following typical semantic relations.

1. Verbs converted from nouns (denominal verbs). This is the largest group of words related through conversion, the semantic relations between the nouns and verbs vary greatly. If the noun refers to some object of (both animate and inanimate), the converted verb may denote: .[2]

a) action characterizing the object: ape (n) = to ape (v) (imitate in a foolish way); butcher (n) = to butcher (v) (to kill animals for food, cut up a killed animal);

dream (n) = to dream (v) For ex: He awoke every morning from rosy scenes of dream to an atmosphere that was vibrant with the jar and jungle of tormented life (J. London). [6]

To conclude, a language such as English can be understood as a normative system (i.e. a social phenomenon) which enables us to communicate. In every moment of time (and possible world) it is possible to isolate a list of expressions and meanings associated with them, i.e. a function from expressions to meanings. This is a model of language in a synchronic sense; languages in a synchronic sense can be viewed as entities warranted or produced by language as a normative system. (I have exposed several reasons why numerical codes provide the best model of language in a synchronic sense.) A model of language in a diachronic sense is an ‘extrapolation’ of the modelled language in a synchronic sense on a time scale and in modal space. Languages in a synchronic sense are thus functional values assigned to worlds and times. .[2] A model of language in both a synchronic and a diachronic sense is thus an abstraction and also an idealization of the phenomenon of language. As such, the model is still useful because it enables us to sufficiently model especially semantic phenomena.

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