

THE STUDY OF CONVERSION ON THE SYNCHRONIC LEVEL

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Abstract: This article examines the phenomenon of conversion in the English language from a synchronic perspective. Conversion, also known as zero-derivation, is a productive word-formation process whereby a word shifts from one part of speech to another without any overt morphological change. The study focuses on the structural, semantic, and functional characteristics of conversion as it occurs in contemporary English.

Keywords: conversion, zero-derivation, synchronic analysis, word-formation, English linguistics.

Conversion is one of the central processes in English word-formation, allowing for the economical expansion of vocabulary. This paper explores how conversion functions synchronically - that is, within the contemporary state of the English language - rather than tracing its historical development. The synchronic approach provides insights into the productive and systematic nature of conversion as it operates today.

Definition and Types of Conversion:

Conversion involves a change in grammatical category without morphological modification. The most frequent types include:

- Noun-to-verb (e.g., to bottle, to email);
- Verb-to-noun (e.g., a run, a reply);
- Adjective-to-noun (e.g., the rich, the unknown);
- Adjective-to-verb (e.g., to empty, to better).

Each of these demonstrates how lexical items can expand their usage and meaning with no affixation.

Structural Characteristics:

From a synchronic perspective, conversion is viewed as a type of derivation marked by zero morphology. While some linguists argue that no formal marker exists, others propose that implicit grammatical markers (such as stress shift or syntactic function) signal the change of word class.

Semantic Features:

Typically, conversion maintains a semantic link between the source and the derived form. For instance, to hammer (verb) preserves the function associated with a hammer (noun). The direction of conversion is often determined by contextual factors rather than explicit morphological cues.

Functional Aspects and Productivity:

Modern English shows a high productivity in conversion, especially in colloquial, journalistic, and technological contexts (e.g., to Google, to friend). This flexibility allows speakers to adapt vocabulary quickly, making language more dynamic and expressive.

Controversies and Alternative Analyses:

Scholars debate whether conversion is a true derivational process or a result of ellipsis, functional shift, or even reanalysis. Some propose that in certain cases, what appears to be conversion may instead be a syntactic phenomenon rather than a morphological one.

Conclusion:

A synchronic study of conversion reveals its crucial role in enriching modern English vocabulary. As a mechanism that enhances flexibility and expressiveness, conversion demonstrates the adaptability of English grammar and lexicon. Further research into its interaction with syntax and discourse can offer deeper insights into the nature of word-formation processes.

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