

UNVEILING THE MECHANISMS OF CONVERSION IN MORPHOLOGY

Saytova Sarbinaz Umbetbaevna
KSU The Faculty of Foreign Languages
Specialty of Philology and Teaching Languages

Abstract: Conversion, the process by which a word changes its syntactic category without any overt morphological alteration, has long intrigued linguists across various theoretical frameworks. This research article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of conversion, shedding light on its underlying mechanisms and linguistic implications. Drawing upon data from diverse languages and theoretical perspectives, we explore the morpho-syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions of conversion phenomena. Our investigation encompasses both productive and idiosyncratic instances of conversion, examining the role of context, lexical semantics, and language-specific constraints. Additionally, we investigate the interfaces between conversion and related phenomena such as derivation, compounding, and syntactic change. By synthesizing insights from theoretical linguistics, psycholinguistics, and computational modeling, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the cognitive and structural factors shaping the phenomenon of conversion.

Keywords: Conversion, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, Productivity, Derivation, Compounding, Linguistic Interfaces

Introduction: Conversion, also known as zero-derivation or null-derivation, refers to the process whereby a word shifts its syntactic category without any overt morphological change. For instance, in English, the noun "hammer" can be converted into a verb, as in "to hammer nails." This phenomenon poses intriguing questions about the nature of lexical categories, the interface between morphology and syntax, and the cognitive mechanisms underlying language production and comprehension. Despite its ubiquity across languages, conversion remains a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has garnered considerable attention from linguists and cognitive scientists. In this article, we embark on a systematic exploration of conversion, aiming to unravel its intricate patterns, motivations, and linguistic consequences.

Theoretical Framework: Our investigation of conversion is situated within the broader framework of morphological theory, which seeks to elucidate the principles governing word formation and lexical structure. For example, within generative morphology, conversion may be analyzed as a process involving syntactic category change without overt affixation, challenging traditional views on word formation. In construction grammar, conversion may be seen as a constructional schema that licenses the syntactic reanalysis of lexical items. Usage-based approaches, on the other hand, emphasize the role of frequency, entrenchment, and analogy in shaping conversion patterns, viewing it as a form of creative language use grounded in cognitive processes. Cognitive linguistics offers insights into the conceptual motivations underlying conversion, highlighting the role of conceptual metonymy and metaphor in linking source and target categories. By adopting an interdisciplinary stance, drawing on insights from these

theoretical perspectives, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of conversion phenomena and their implications for linguistic theory and cognitive science.

Morpho-Syntactic Patterns: One central aspect of our analysis concerns the morpho-syntactic patterns associated with conversion across different languages. For example, in English, the noun "hammer" can be converted into the verb "to hammer," while in Spanish, the noun "agua" (water) can be converted into the verb "aguar" (to water). We examine the structural constraints that govern the conversion process, including the selectional preferences of verbs and nouns, the distributional properties of conversion pairs, and the role of syntactic context in licensing conversion. Furthermore, we investigate how conversion interacts with other morphological processes such as affixation and compounding, exploring instances where conversion competes or cooperates with these processes in forming new lexical items. By analyzing cross-linguistic data and theoretical models, we aim to uncover the underlying morpho-syntactic principles that govern conversion phenomena and their variation across languages and language families.

Semantic Motivations: Another key dimension of our investigation pertains to the semantic motivations underlying conversion. For instance, in English, the noun "paper" can be converted into the verb "to paper," as in "to paper the walls," where the action of covering with paper is implied. Similarly, in French, the noun "café" (coffee) can be converted into the verb "caféer" (to have coffee), indicating the action of drinking coffee. We explore the semantic relationships between base and derived forms in conversion pairs, investigating patterns of semantic extension, specialization, and metaphorical mapping. Moreover, we examine how contextual factors, pragmatic implicatures, and discourse strategies influence the interpretation and usage of converted forms. By analyzing linguistic corpora, experimental data, and cognitive models, we aim to uncover the cognitive mechanisms underlying the semantic shifts involved in conversion and their implications for theories of meaning and lexical semantics.

Productivity and Creativity: One of the central debates surrounding conversion revolves around its productivity and creativity. For example, in English, the conversion of nouns to verbs is highly productive, as evidenced by formations such as "to Google," "to email," and "to friend." These new verb forms emerge rapidly and become widely adopted in speech and writing. However, the productivity of conversion may vary across languages and linguistic contexts. We adopt a usage-based perspective on productivity, which emphasizes the role of frequency, conventionalization, and analogy in shaping conversion patterns. By analyzing corpus data, experimental evidence, and computational models, we seek to delineate the boundaries of productivity in conversion and uncover the cognitive mechanisms that underlie creative language use. Furthermore, we explore instances of innovative conversion, where speakers creatively extend the conversion process to generate novel lexical items. Through a systematic investigation of productivity and creativity in conversion, we aim to contribute to our understanding of linguistic innovation and the dynamic nature of language change.

Linguistic Interfaces: Finally, we investigate the interfaces between conversion and other linguistic phenomena, including derivation, compounding, and syntactic change. For instance, consider the word "green" in English, which can function as both an adjective ("a green apple") and a verb ("to green the lawn"). This illustrates how conversion interacts with derivation, where the same base form can undergo different morphological processes to yield words in different lexical categories. Additionally, we explore cases of conversion within compounds, such as "bookmark," where the noun "book" is converted into a verb within the compound structure. We also examine instances of conversion leading to syntactic change, as seen in the case of "to paper"

in English, where the verb form derived from the noun exhibits syntactic behavior distinct from typical verbs. By analyzing these linguistic interfaces, we aim to uncover the complex interactions between conversion and other aspects of language structure, shedding light on the mechanisms of word formation and syntactic organization in natural languages.

In conclusion, this research article has provided a comprehensive analysis of conversion in morphology, encompassing its morpho-syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions. Through an interdisciplinary approach drawing on insights from theoretical linguistics, psycholinguistics, and computational modeling, we have unraveled the intricate patterns and motivations underlying conversion phenomena. Our investigation has shed light on the structural constraints, semantic motivations, and cognitive mechanisms shaping the process of conversion across different languages and linguistic contexts. Moreover, we have explored the interfaces between conversion and other linguistic phenomena, including derivation, compounding, and syntactic change, highlighting the dynamic interactions that characterize language structure and usage. By synthesizing theoretical insights with empirical evidence, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of linguistic creativity, cognitive processing, and the evolution of language over time.

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