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DIACHRONIC APPROACH TO CONVERSION IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ДИАХРОНИЧЕСКИЙ ПОДХОД К ПРЕОБРАЗОВАНИЮ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

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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 the 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 considering as widespread word formation in English. It also studies conversion being a type of word-building – not a pattern of structural relationship. 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.

АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье исследуется преобразование как средство образования новых слов без добавления какого-либо производного элемента, когда основная форма исходного и базового производных слов являются омонимичными, имеющими одинаковую морфологическую структуру, но принадлежащими разным частям речи. Говорят, что в ходе исторического развития грамматические формы в английском языке были утрачены и не существует флексии, позволяющей отличить форму глагола от существительного, и это считается широко распространенным словообразованием в английском языке. Он также изучает конверсию как тип словообразования, а не как образец структурных отношений. Синхронно оба типа - существительное и глагол - должны рассматриваться вместе как случаи шаблонной омонимии, при диахроническом изучении важно различать случаи преобразования и рассматривать их отдельно. Подчеркивается, что однозначно сказать, какой из членов был выведен, непросто, результаты синхронного и диахронического анализа могут не совпадать. Это означает, что то, что понимается под преобразованием в современном английском, не полностью и не обязательно совпадает с более ранними периодами развития языка.

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

Ключевые слова: лингвистика, семантическое значение, преобразование, грамматические формы, синтаксические функции, словообразование, семантические отношения, лексика.

Background. The process of coining of a new word in a different part of speech and with a different distribution characteristic but without adding any derivative element, so that the basic form of the original and the basic form of the derived lexeme are homonymous, is variously called **conversion**, **zero derivation**, **root formation** or **functional change**.

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”.

Methods. 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 a 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 actually 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.

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. 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.

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.

Result. Conversion is a type of word-building – not a pattern of structural relationship. Synchronically both types sleep (n) – sleep (v) and pencil (n) – pencil (v) must be treated together as cases of patterned homonymy. 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.

Almost any noun or adjective can at once become a verb if employed as such, and almost 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 ex: 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.

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”. 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.

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:

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).

In this sentence the word “dream” is in the meaning of “the state of being asleep”, but it can be used as a verb, as well as, “to dream”.

milk (n) – to milk (v) e.g. You may bring me a little broth now, and some milk with a little port in it (O. Henry).

b) instrument use of the objects: whip (n) – to whip (v) – (to strike with a whip)

c) addition of the object: fish (n) – to fish (v) – (to catch or try to catch fish);

The most common fishes in the Terek are carp, barbell and sew rugs (Murray).

d) deprivation of the object: dust (n) – to dust (v) – (to move dust from smth); skin (n) – to skin (v) – (to strip off the skin from).

2. Nouns converted from verbs (deverbal substantives):

The converted noun may denote:

a) Instance of the action: to jump (v) – jump (n) – (sudden spring from the ground); to move (v) – move (n) – (a change of position);

b) agent of the action: to help (v) – help (n) – (an aid);

c) place of an action: to drive (v) – drive (n) – (a path or road along which one drives); to walk (v) – walk (n) – (walking)

d) object or result of the action: to peel (v) – peel (n) – (the outer skin of fruit or potatoes taken off);

3. An adjective preceded by the definite article is often used in the plural to denote a whole group of persons: young (adj) – the young (n), old (adj) – the old (n), poor (adj) – the poor (n), rich (adj) – the rich (n).

As a rule, the meaning of a converted word is somehow connected with the meaning of the original one. However, at the same time it has some new elements in it (that's converted words get additional meanings). For ex: pocket (n) – as a converted word to pocket; 2) to steel smth from the pocket; dog (n) – as a converted word to dog means to follow. A word is considered to be fully converted when it gets all the features of the part of speech into which it is converted.

Conclusion. 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. When endings had disappeared phonetical development resulted in the merging of sound forms for both elements of the pairs. For example, the Old English *carian* (v) and the Old English *caru* (n) have changed into the Modern English *care* (n, v). A similar homonymy resulted in the borrowing from French of numerous pairs of words of the same root but belonging in French to different parts of speech. These words lost their affixes and became phonetically identical in the process of assimilation. For example, the Old French *eschequier* (v) and *eschec* (n) both sound *check* (n, v) in Modern English.

Synchronically such pairs of words are considered conversion, though there is an opinion that they are rather manifestations of the so-called patterned homonymy in the language.

In many cases of conversion pairs, it is not easy to say definitely which of the members was derived. That is in practice more than one criterion of derivation must be applied in each concrete example. Moreover, 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.

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