

# **Synchrony and Diachrony of Conversion in English**

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# List of Abbreviations and Symbols

## Abbreviations

adj.	Adjective
N	Noun
V	Verb

## Symbols

>	becomes, changed to
*	Unattested form
-	attach to

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## **Abstract**

Conversion is one of the very productive means of forming new words in English morphology. It is a derivational process that includes no overt marking; i.e. there is no difference in the form even though the lexical category of the word has changed from one class to another.

The main goal of this thesis is to provide a critical and informative analysis of conversion in English throughout distinct time periods and try to explain the problems that are left unanswered regarding this topic. There are two main approaches that are going to be presented in this research, such as synchronic analysis on conversion in the first part, and then a historical perspective will be examined in the second part of the research.

For the synchronic analysis, in addition to representing the types of conversion in Present-Day English in greater detail, many controversial questions raised on conversion in English will be thoroughly investigated with numerous examples explicated; there are four main problems that are raised in this linguistic field, namely the problem of directionality, the problem of definition of conversion, syntactic approach of conversion, and the issue of productivity. The purpose of this part of study is to outline a number of different linguistic theories that has been proposed on conversion.

In addition to this, a historical perspective of conversion in English will be examined as a diachronic approach of analysis. The word formation process of conversion has been present for centuries in the language (Biese 1942). Little attention has been drawn on conversion historically. Apart from the fact that there have not been many studies in this linguistic area, the purposes of this diachronic study are to deliver instructive, unified and meticulous descriptions on conversion with a great deal of comprehensive historical exemplifications and also to be able to trace, with confidence, the practicable and more reliable explanations to the essential questions that arise. I will divide this part into four sub-sections, namely conversion in Old English, conversion in Middle English, and conversion in Early Modern English, and manipulate the instances of conversion in each period and find out how the morphological process; i.e. conversion, evolved which hopefully shed insights on rather practical and explicative answers to the problems of conversion.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Conversion is a non-concatenative process; i.e. derivation without affixes, which is also one of the very productive means of forming new words in English morphology. It is a derivational process that includes no overt marking; i.e. there is no difference in form even though the lexical category of the word has changed from one class to another. According to Dalton-Puffer (1992), the fact that conversion is a productive process reflects on two prospects: speakers of English prefer invariable base forms,<sup>1</sup> and English is tending to become a more isolated language. Some examples of conversion in English are shown below:

### (1) Types of Conversion in English

#### a. Noun > Verb

*a bottle > to bottle, the water > to water, a hammer > to hammer*

#### b. Verb > Noun

*to call > a call, to guess > a guess, to spy > a spy*

#### c. Adjective > Verb

*better > to better, empty > to empty, open > to open*

#### d. Adjective > Noun

*poor > the poor, crazy > a crazy, blind > the blind*

(Plag 2003: 107-108)

#### e. Marginal cases:

##### i) Phrase-compounds

*a forget-me-not, a has-been, a must-see*

##### ii) Function words (Prepositions) : *up, down etc*

*Robin climbed **up** the hill.*

*We'll have to **up** all the prices again.*

*We all have our **ups** and downs*

(Bauer 2003: 328)

There are several types of conversion: noun to verb, verb to noun, adjective to verb, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> According to Dalton-Puffer (1992: 469), this is also proved by the declining umlaut nouns.

marginal types of conversion such as phrase-compounds and other kinds, like prepositions. As can be seen in the data above, each pair of words is derivationally linked, and they are exactly the same in their phonetic realisations.

Although conversion appears to be simple, there are a variety of problems regarding conversion. Thus, the aim of this study is to provide a theoretical and informative analysis of conversion in English throughout distinct time periods. There are two main approaches that are going to be presented in this study; namely synchronic and diachronic approaches. For the synchronic analysis, in addition to representing the types of conversion in Present-Day English in greater detail, many controversial questions raised on conversion in English will be thoroughly investigated with numerous examples explicated. According to Bauer and Valera (2005), there happen to be two groups of questions confronting conversion, namely standard problems and so-called 'unexpected' problems. Standard problems are the unsolved and uncertain ones that have been examined for a long period of time so that these questions always resurface whenever there is a discussion on conversion, such as different considerations on the definition of conversion, directionality and the varied approaches on conversion such as syntactical analysis. On the other hand, there are also some other new problems which were not expected before: for example, the questions of typology, the distinction between word-formation and figurative extension, and the question of the extent to which the meaning of conversion is predictable. For the purpose of this study, I aim to analyse only the standard questions that arise on conversion for this research and to depict them coherently.

In addition to this, a historical perspective of conversion in English will be examined as a diachronic approach of analysis. The word formation process of conversion has been present for centuries in the language (Biese 1942). Little attention has been drawn on conversion historically. Apart from the fact that there have not been many studies in this linguistic area, the purposes of this diachronic study are to deliver instructive, unified and meticulous descriptions on conversion with a great deal of comprehensive historical exemplifications and also to be able to trace, with confidence, the practicable and more reliable explanations to the essential questions that arise.

The organisation of this thesis is as follows. This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces general ideas of conversion and objectives of this research. Chapter 2 briefly deals with the types of conversion in English. Chapter 3 reviews the standard questions that arise on conversion and illuminate different views on the problems by diverse scholars. Chapter 4 surveys conversion in earlier days of English and draws attention to the supportive and critical evidence of fundamental questions on conversion. Lastly, chapter 5 gives a summary of this thesis.

## Chapter 2

### Types of Conversion in English

This chapter introduces different types of conversion in Present-Day English with regards to the clear distinction of lexical categories; i.e. ‘parts of speech’ as already shown in (1). Every lexical item has its own word-class; therefore, words can be easily grouped together by virtue of their various parts of speech; for example, nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and prepositions.

In contrast, some argue that there are rather fuzzy boundaries between each of the word classes, making it quite unreasonable to classify all the elements. However, it is inevitable to speak of word-class when discussing conversion, since conversion is strictly the change of one word category into another word category. Thus, it is sensible and important to differentiate words that are involved in the derivational process of conversion centred on lexical categories.

In this chapter, two main types of conversion in English to a different word-class are considered in detail below; so-called major and minor types.

#### 2.1. Major Types of Conversion

The major types of conversion consist of three main traditionally known word-classes; that is nouns, verbs, and adjectives. These are said to be the most common types of English conversion. Due to the purpose of this section, which is to provide a short description of the cases of conversion in English, only the prototypical characteristics of each lexical category are considered here, despite the fact that there are no clear-cut boundaries between the parts of speech. Nouns are normally defined as lexical items denoting persons, objects and animals. They mostly function as subject and object, but they can sometimes be used as modifiers, too. Usually, distribution of nouns is preceded by articles, both definite and indefinite, and number inflection and genitive inflection are applied to nouns. The definition of verbs is normally in reference to actions or activities, and the prime function of verbs is as predicates. Number, tense, modality, and person inflections are used with verbs. Adjectives function as modifiers and also can be modified by adverbs, and their typical meanings are referring to properties of people or things. There are two inflections that can be applied to adjectives, comparative and superlative attaching either suffixes or more/ the most.

### 2.1.1. Adjective > Noun

This part is concerned with the adjectives that shift to nouns, and according to Balteiro (2007: 79), this type of conversion is often found in the literature. Examples of deadjectival noun conversion are illustrated below in (2):

#### (2) Examples of Adjective > Noun Conversion

- a. *the poor, the good, the rich, the false, the true, the incredible*
- b. *the Spanish, the Danish, the British*
- c. *the accused, the taught, 700 wounded, 200 killed*
- d. *intellectual, facial, musical, capital, curve*

(Balteiro 2007)

In general, those examples shown in (2a-d) have sense in relation to people or special groups of people; i.e. sense of collectivity. The adjectives in (2a) are converted into nouns because they are in the position that nouns usually occupy, that is after definite article 'the'. (2b) also has the same structure as (2a), used with definite article 'the', and the adjectives are denoting nationality or the group of nationality. The adjectives in (2c) are also used as nouns, but the adjectives are participial-adjectives. Lastly, the adjectives in (2d) are transferred to a new word class, to nouns, without any syntactic or morphological phenomena like (2a-c).

However, this type of conversion is very controversial. Many scholars do not believe that they are derivational cases of conversion; rather, they are regarded as a result of syntactic phenomena. Some also state that such lexical elements can belong to a number of parts of speech at the same time. This issue will be discussed more comprehensively in the next chapter.

### 2.1.2. Noun > Adjective

In contrast to the section above, nouns may also be placed in the position of adjectives, and function as modifiers of other nouns. Examples of this type of conversion are demonstrated in (3):

#### (3) Examples of Noun > Adjective Conversion

- : *government official, stone wall, air passage, and zero modification*

(Balteiro 2007)

As shown in (3), *government*, *stone*, *air*, and *zero* fill in the attributive and pronominal position;

thus, it is likely to say they are denominal adjectives. Nevertheless, in the same way as 2.1.1, this analysis is also at issue; some declare that this is a derivational process, but others insist that it is odd to name *government*, *stone*, *air*, and *zero* adjectives. Likewise, this matter will be dealt with in the following chapter.

### 2.1.3. Noun > Verb

This section presents noun to verb conversion in English. Examples of this type of conversion are shown below in (4):

(4) Examples of Noun > Verb Conversion

- a. *captain, father, hammer, saw, dock, bottle*
- b. *pressure, brainstorm, eye-witness, headquarter, runway, motorcycle, freefall*
- c. *MC, KO*

(Balteiro 2007)

(4a) deals with the most productive conversion in noun to verb conversion. It is the shift of simple nouns to verbs. The meaning of the converted verbs is chiefly dependent on the meaning of the nouns. Kastovsky (1989: 199) suggests that if the nominal base represents a person, the definition of denominal verbs is “act as N”, such as *captain* or *father*; if the base element refers an instrument, then the derivative form is defined as “performing some appropriate verbal action with or as with N”, for instance *hammer* and *saw*; and if the base form designates a place, the definition of the converted element would become “go, be, put into/in N”, such as *dock* and *bottle*. (4b) stands for the conversion from either suffixed nouns or compounds to verbs. The verb *to pressure* is an outcome of conversion from the suffixed noun *pressure*; *brainstorm* becomes a verb from the abstract noun form; and *eye-witness* is a result of conversion from the common person noun. There are also special cases of noun to verb conversions, which are conversions from acronyms or truncated words. Gonzalez (1987: 145) points out that noun to verbal acronym conversion is very common. For instance, the noun *MC*, which stands for master of ceremonies, becomes *to MC* (to emcee), the noun *KO*, which stands for knock out, converts into *to KO*.

### 2.1.4. Verb > Noun

As with the previous section of noun to verb conversion, verbs also can undergo the conversion process from verbs to nouns. In accordance with Balteiro (2007: 106), this type of conversion is

comfortably derived instantly for expressive purposes, and the conversions may or may not enter the language. Semantically deverbal nouns may indicate state, event/activity, object of V, subject of V, instrument of V, manner of V-ing, and place of V. These instances are exemplified in (5a) respectively:

(5) Examples of Verb > Noun Conversion

a. *desire, hit, answer, coach, wrap, walk, retreat*

(Quirk et al. 1985: 1560)

b. *a call-down, a hold-up, a mix-up*

(Kennedy 1920: 47)

In the same manner as from noun to verb conversion, different kinds of verbal bases may convert into nouns, namely simple verbs, as shown in (5a), derived verbs, and compounds. (5b) illustrates the phrasal constructions made of verbs and adverbs forming into nouns, *a call-down* denoting a reprimand, *a hold-up* meaning a robbery, and *a mix-up* designating a muddle.

#### 2.1.5. Adjective > Verb

When adjectives become nouns, the results of this type of conversion acquire all the proper inflectional and morphological features of verbs, like tense, person, and modal inflections. Semantically, for the most part, meaning of verbs is altered to “to make (more) adj.” or “to become adj.”, which indicates causative or inchoative interpretations (Adams 1973: 50-51). Such examples are indicated in (6):

(6) Examples of Adjective > Verb Conversion

a. *to round, to square, to thin, to dry, to clean*

b. *to smooth out, to sober up, to calm down*

(Balteiro 2007)

Sometimes, when adjectives are converted to verbs, the verbs then attach to a particle and form phrasal verbs, and instances of this case are included in (6b).

Quirk et al. (1985) suggest that it is significant to point out that conversion of adjectives to verbs has a low productivity in English for a number of reasons. For the most part, it is due to competition against verbal suffix *-en*, in that there already exists the suffixed form of verbs. Therefore, corresponding adjectives cannot convert into verbs since it would violate the Principle of Economy, such as *black - to blacken, sad - to sadden, deaf - to deafen*.

## 2.2. Minor Types of Conversion

In this section, other types of conversion will be introduced in brief, including the word-classes such as adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and phrases.

### 2.2.1. Adverb > Adjective

The key characteristic of adjectives is that it precedes nominal units to function as an attribute. Hence, if a lexical element from other parts of speech is in the position of the pronominal slot, it would be sufficient to say that the word in question underwent the derivational process of conversion and resulted as an adjective. For example, adverbs may also be placed in that position, such as *nightly* in *the nightly troop* (Balteiro 2007: 90). Likewise, Allerton (1982: 81) also explains that adverbs should be regarded as adjectives, because they may be substituted by adjectives. For example:

#### (7) Examples of Adverb > Adjective Conversion

- a. The difficult part is learning the new computer codes- after that it's all *downhill*.
- b. The difficult part is learning the new computer codes- after that it's all *easy*.

(Valera 1994: 125)

In sentence (7a), *downhill* is considered a deadverbial adjective, and this is possible because the word *downhill* can be substituted by the adjective *easy*.

In contrast to this syntactical and distributional analysis of conversion, morphologically, it can be said that it is one of the many adverbs that happens to be used in precedent of nouns, since there are no variable forms such as gradable inflectional endings.

In addition to this, there is further evidence making the conversion from adverbs to adjectives remain questionable. For instance, the lexeme *friendly* can be interpreted as either an adjective or and an adverb. Under the assumption that such conversion has taken place, there must be directionality; i.e. one must be the base form and the other must be the derivative. However, historical evidence indicates that the adverbial *friendly* and adjectival *friendly* are distinguishable to two clear parts of speech, such as the adjective *freondlic*, and the adverb *freondlice* in the Old English period. Since there was a great deal of loss of inflection in the earlier period, the inflectional ending was lost, which led it to be identical in its form (Valera 1994). According to Valera (1999), adverb to noun conversion is impossible to be documented because the two lexical categories are morphologically similar and share comparable inflections and the periphrastic construction.

### 2.2.2. Adjective > Adverb

In the same way that adverbs may occupy the adjective position, adjectives may also be used syntactically in the adverbial slots and also be semantically similar.

#### (8) Examples of Adjective > Adverb Conversion

: *bitter cold, wide open*

(Balteiro 2007)

This type of conversion is also controversial in grammatical analysis. Some scholars state that *bitter* and *wide* in such construction as in (8) are adjectives because of their morphology, while there are other scholars focused on syntax who notes that *bitter* and *wide* are adverbs. Quirk *et al.* (1985: 406, 1560) suggest that those cases are part of conversion, while Kruisinga (1932: 119) argues that there are a great deal of words which are both available as adjectives and adverbs. Furthermore, Nevalainen (1993: 139) claims that the adverbial suffix *-ly* is dropped very frequently in modern English, especially in informal style; therefore, this suffix is truncated due to the Principle of Economy, which means that *bitter* and *wide* are adverbs with truncated suffix *-ly*.

It is very clear to see that minor types of conversion, which include adjectives and adverbs, are all explicable by other grammatical analyses due to their identical characteristics. It seems that even though there is such type of conversion in English, it would be very difficult to prove to be true.

### 2.2.3. Noun > Adverb

Kennedy (1935: 324) states that in spite of the fact that there is still uncertainty to whether such conversion from noun to adverb exists, he views *home* in the sentence (9a) as the converted form of an adverb, because it denotes the direction.

#### (9) Examples of Noun > Adverb Conversion

a. *I am going home*

b. *I am going towards home*

(Kennedy 1935: 324)

Furthermore, syntactic analysts purport that since there is no determiner in front of the word *home*,

and as the word *home* may be substituted by other adverbial expressions such as *there*, it is reasonable to state that *home* is an adverbial element (Dawkins 1964: 37). Along with this, Valera(1994: 117) proposes further supporting evidence that such a word like *home* in (9a) can be modified by an intensifier like *right*, and Larson (1985) also believes that any nominal unit can be seen as an adverbial phrase.

In contrast to the preceding, some scholars declare that this type of conversion results from the syntactical phenomenon of ellipsis. For example, they think that sentence (9b) is the underlying structure, but as the preposition *towards* has dropped, the sentence has turned out to be as (9a).

#### 2.2.4. Adverb > Noun

There is also conversion from adverbs to noun. For example:

##### (10) Examples of Adverb > Noun Conversion

: *ups and downs, just this once, to and fro*

(Balteiro 1997)

Kennedy (1935: 323) argues that this is a case of adverbs acting fully as nouns, since newly derived nouns take on inflectional endings; and syntactically as a deadverbial noun accompanies a modifier, in the case of *just this once* in (10), this also proves that adverbs can convert into nouns. Yet, there are at least some cases in which this type of conversion can be explained by ellipsis of element.

#### 2.2.5. Verb > Preposition

Although there is no clear distinction between these lexical categories in this circumstance, and there is still doubt about this type of conversion, and lastly some argue that this is a process of grammaticalisation, verbs and participial forms of verbs may convert into prepositions causing verb to preposition conversion. Such examples are illustrated in (11):

##### (11) Examples of Verb > Preposition Conversion

a. *past, during, barring, including, notwithstanding, concerning, regarding, according to*

b. *owing to, considering, failing*

(Balteiro 1997)

As specified by Kortmann and König (1992: 687-688), this kind of converted preposition can be

divided into two main groups; namely, frequent expressions and less frequent ones. (11a) exemplifies the frequent expressions of space, time, exception, inclusion, concession, topic/respect, and accord respectively. (11b) shows less the frequent group, including the meanings of cause, condition, means/instrument, and lack/absence. In addition, Kennedy (1935: 325) accounts deverbal prepositions as secondary prepositions.

#### 2.2.6. Verb > Adjective

Reversely, despite the fact that there are competing suffixes that derive verbs from adjectives, the deadjectival verb conversion is said to be a more productive process than verb to adjective conversion.

#### (12) Examples of Verb > Adjective Conversion

a. *He was the person frightening us all*

b. *He was very frightening*

c. *time that has elapsed*

d. *elapsed time*

e. *a leaf that has fallen*

f. *a fallen leaf*

(Szymanek 1988: 39, Pinker 1994: 396)

(12a) is a sentence that exemplifies the verb in participle form, *frightening*, and when this element underwent conversion to adjective, it developed as in the sentence (12b). Pinker (1994) states that there is a restriction in this kind of conversion; that is, such conversion can take place from only intransitive verbs to adjectives. To be more specific, the participle form of intransitive verbs, such as *frightening*, *elapsed*, and *fallen* in (12), which denotes change of state, derives adjectives. Thus, the clause (12c) *time that has elapsed* resulted in (12d) *elapsed time*, and the phrase (12e) *a leaf that has fallen* is consequent on (12f) *a fallen leaf*.

Contrary to this view, some express that while there is no overt morphological indication of such conversion, this type cannot be included in the derivational process; however, syntactical evidence and a few cases of possible gradable inflection could be a source of less questionable judgement.

#### 2.2.7. Other Rare and Special Types of Conversion

In this section, other types of conversion, which are rare and special, are represented with exemplifications.

(13) Examples of Other Types of Conversion

- a. *An up-in-the-air feeling*
- b. *Directly he noticed this he hurried down, I never see wasps without I recall Devon-dear*
- c. *His argument contains too many buts, to have a down on someone*
- d. *Patriotism, nationalism, and any other isms you'd like to name*
- e. *a forget-me-not, a has-been, a must-see*
- f. *They downed tools in protest, she will off and do her own thing, I must up*
- g. *to round, to out, to up, to down*
- h. *encore, hurrah, shoo, If you uh-uh again, I won't go on with my story*

(Balteiro 2007 79-109)

(13a) illustrates the conversion from phrases to adjective. It happens when phrases have a function of nominal modification which are also placed in the attributive position; i.e. the precedent of nouns. Some grammarians refer to this conversion as downgrading conversion (Tournier 1985). (13b) is a quite uncommon case of conversion, which is from adverbs or prepositions to conjunctions. Even though it hardly possible to produce evidence of this conversion, due to no morphological indication of shifts in word-class, Kruisinga (1927: 108) expresses it as a component of conversion. (13c) shows the case from particles, such as preposition or conjunction etc., to nouns. The conjunction *but* has become a noun with plural inflectional endings in sentence (13c) *his argument contains too many buts*, and the preposition *down* turns out to be a noun with the definition of grudge as indicated in the phrase in (13c) *to have a down on someone*. (13d) is the so-called upgrading conversion, in accordance with Tournier (1985). This is when affixes derive into nouns; however, there is a fuzzy boundary in this case between conversion and lexicalisation, which is in need of further research. (13e) displays phrase/sentence to noun conversion. To use Tournier (1985)'s terminology, this type of conversion is named as downgrading conversion. The phrase/sentence is reduced to one-word status (Adams 1973: 55). Despite the possibility that the phrase/sentence is posited in the prototypical slot of nominal units, some consider this type of conversion as simple compounding. (13f) exhibits the instances of conversion when nouns are derived from adverbs. However, there is also an opposing opinion of this type; namely, shortening or omission of a verb that is modified by the adverb. (13g) exemplifies the conversion from preposition to verb; however, it is quite hard to distinguish preposition to verb conversion from adverb to verb conversion as shown in (13f). Lastly, similar to the preceding conversions, such as prepositions, Adams (1973) mentions that expressions of interjection may go through conversion and shift to verb as shown in (13h).

### 2.3. Summary

In this chapter, a variety of types of conversion has been represented with a few examples. The different types have been divided into two groups of major and minor conversion, depending on the lexical categories that words are converted from and into. Traditionally known as the main word-class, words such as nouns, verbs and adjectives belong to this major group, and others are included in the minor types. Almost all types of conversion may also be explained with different approaches, especially those in the minor groups; i.e. it is not ascertained to prove that the conversion has taken place between the same forms of two lexemes unless there is an overt morphological indication, such as taking on the inflectional behaviour of new forms. Many cases are in demand of further research; however, the main purpose of this research is to introduce each type of conversion in brief.

## Chapter 3

### Standard Questions on Conversion

This chapter investigates standard questions on conversion; there are four main problems that are raised in this linguistic field, namely the problem of directionality, the problem of definition of conversion, syntactic approach of conversion, and the issue of productivity. The purpose of this part of study is to outline a number of different linguistic theories that has been proposed on conversion.

#### 3.1. The Problem of Directionality

At first glance of the forms of a pair of words that are evidently related by the process of conversion, speakers cannot be certain which word is derived from which base word, so they must rely on their intuition.

Kiparsky (1982) claims that synchronically, noun to verb conversion and verb to noun conversion take place on separate levels in a level-ordered morphology; i.e. the lexical stratification model. Verb to noun conversion occurs on stratum I, and noun to verb conversion occurs on stratum II, which implies that the former process is more productive than the latter, and verb to noun conversion can also lead to another noun to verb conversion, as in *to sur'vey* > a 'survey > *to 'survey*; and *to pro'test* > a 'protest > *to 'protest* (Bauer and Valera 2005: 12).

There is also another point suggested by Lieber (1981) asserting that conversion is not a directional process; in other words, the members of conversion pairs are listed in the lexicon separately. For example, we regard the verb *to bottle* to be derived from the noun *a bottle*. In contrast to this view, according to Lieber's analysis, the new form of *bottle* is re-listed in the lexicon, belonging to a new category of verb. This means that she views the two related words as having a non-derivational relationship and they are linked lexically by a 'non-directional redundancy rule'.

Bauer and Valera (2005) propose two primary approaches for judging directionality in conversion; synchronic and diachronic approaches. The diachronic approach uses historical evidence as a basis and manipulates the etymological information to determine which word is the base and which is the derivative (as in Biese 1941). The other approach, the synchronic one, analyses the semantic relation between the pair of words (as in Marchand 1963, 1964). They also conclude that the problem of determining directionality remains, but the issue with directionality suggests a problem with the definition of conversion as a morphologically derivational process, not just a parallel link between two lexemes.

Five possible ways to determine the directionality of conversion have been suggested in Plag (2003); history of the language, semantic complexity, inflectional behaviour, stress shift and frequency, all of which will be reviewed in the following.

### 3.1.1. The History of the Language

This is the very clear and simple way to decide the directionality, using The Oxford English Dictionary to see which word was attested first. For instance,

#### (14) Demonstration of Conversion with First Appearance Date in Oxford English Dictionary

- a. bicycle (1868) > to bicycle (1869)  
ski (1885) > to ski (1893)
- b. to clown (1599) > clown (1600)  
to crowd (AD 937) > crowd (1567)

(Adams 1973: 40-41, Plag 2003: 108)

Obviously, speakers assume that the verbs ‘to bicycle’ and ‘to ski’ are more likely to be evaluated as derived forms from the nouns ‘bicycle’ and ‘ski’, and this is well confirmed by the date of their first appearance in The Oxford English Dictionary as shown in (14a). In contrast, the verbs ‘to clown’ and ‘to crowd’ seem to be derived from the nouns ‘clown’ and ‘crowd’ according to our present-time intuition, which is similar to the examples in (14b), but the historical evidence goes against our intuition, and the vast majority of speakers of English are not aware of the historical knowledge and lack a memory of all words that are involved in conversion; this highlights the weakness of relying on historical attestation. Even though the history of the words does not provide a solution to the directionality question, it cannot be ruled out; it still could be one of the reliable methods of finding the route of conversion.

### 3.1.2. The Semantic Complexity

Generally, the meanings of the derived forms are semantically more complicated than their base words, since there is a parallel coherent inference between conversion and affixation; i.e. affixes usually add an additional sense when they are attached to their bases, and this principle applies comparably to the process of conversion. Therefore, if one of the two related words can be analysed as being more complex in its semantics than the other one or if one member is semantically resting on another member, then there is good evidence that the dependent word is the derivative (Plag 2003).

For example, the definition of the deverbal noun *call* is ‘the act of calling’, and the definition of the deadjectival verb *to better* is ‘to make or become better’. In these cases the meaning of the derived words are more complex than the base words, and the derivatives rely on their first members in their interpretation, i.e. the verb ‘to call’ and the adjective ‘better’ respectively, which means that in order to define the derived forms, the concept of the base forms must pre-exist. This apparently indicates to a certain extent that the semantic relationship between the pair of words is predictable, but the extent to which the meaning of the derived member in the process of conversion is predictable is in need of further clarification.

### 3.1.3. The Inflectional Behaviour

In accordance with Plag (2003), the derived verbs have regular past-tense forms. For instance:

#### (15) Demonstration of Inflectional Behaviour in Conversion

the past-tense form of the converted verb ‘to ring’ (< ‘a ring’, noun to verb conversion)  
to ‘ring’ – to ‘ringed’ -> provide with a ring  
(\*rang -> \* provide with a ring)

The verb with regular inflectional forms ‘to ring’ is the outcome of noun to verb conversion, whereas another homophonous verb form of ‘to ring’ which has the irregular past-tense inflectional behaviour, ‘to rang’, cannot be a member of the converted words. This phenomenon is due to the “nature of irregular inflection” (Plag 2003: 109). All the word-forms with irregularities must be learned in the process of language acquisition in order to store them in the speakers’ lexicon; otherwise other forms could be produced within the regular behaviours. Thus, the new words, which are not stored in the lexicon yet as entries, have regular inflection. Consequently, as a general rule, it can be stated that converted verbs should be inflected regularly, and this fact helps us reach a conclusion about the directionality: if a verb-noun pair underwent conversion, and if the verb has a regular inflection, then this is a powerful indication that the regular inflected form is derived from the other one. In addition to this, parallel reasoning can be applied again as in the previous section; i.e. for the reason that the derivational suffixes are never inflectionally irregular, the outcome of the conversion never inflects irregularly.

### 3.1.4. Stress Shift

As shown in the data in (16a) and (16b) below, the change in stress pattern can be another feature

that is relevant for the resolution of the directionality.

(16) Examples of Stress Shift in Conversion

- a. to tormént – a tórment  
to permít – a pérmit  
to constrúct – a cónstruct  
to extráct – an éxtract  
to abstráct – an ábstract
- b. to gèt awáy – a gét awày  
to lèt dówn – a lét dòwn  
to pùll dówn – a pùll dòwn  
to pùsh úp – a pùsh ùp  
to wàlk óver – a wàlk òver

(Plag 2003: 110)

The verbs in (16a) have the stress on their last syllable while their converted nouns have the initial stress. Likewise, the phrasal verbs in (16b) have the primary stress on the prepositions, whereas their derived noun forms have the primary stress on the first elements. Thus, it is reasonable to note that the phonological changes, such as stress shift, occurred where there is conversion; for instance, in the cases in (16), the verbs are modified by accentuation in the process of derivation into nouns. Marchand (1969: 377) also states that the reposition tendency of stress relies on the lexical categories of the base element in conversion; that is, the stress pattern would be different depending on whether the underived form is a noun or a verb. In addition to this, Kiparsky (1982: 12) notes that the contrast between stress arrangement in denominal verbs and deverbal nouns that underwent the process of conversion, can account for the directionality of conversion; in other words, the difference in stress pattern may assume that some nouns are derived from verbs and some verbs are derived from nouns. Furthermore, in accordance with the Lexical stratification model, as mentioned above, the distinction in stress position produces evidence of verb to noun conversion taking place in stratum I and noun to verb conversion taking place in stratum II. Hence, as stratum I has a non-neutral stress pattern, the stress shift to initial syllable occurred in deverbal nouns, such as *sur'vey* – *'survey*. In contrast, the phonological rule of stratum II in the lexical stratification model is stress neutral, which means there is no change in stress pattern. Therefore denominal verbs have initial stress, such as *'pattern* – *'pattern*. To conclude, it can be observed that stress shifts take place only on deverbal converted nouns.

Unlike the preceding views, Plag (2003) points out that the stress shift is an overt marking of the

prosodic property even though it is not visible in orthography, and on that account, this stress shift feature should be regarded as prosodic morphology, not according to the criteria that determines the directionality of conversion. Further, Lieber (1981: 124) expresses that for the most part, derivational morphology deals with word formation, whereas morphological conversion with identical phonetic realisations is concerned with word shaping.

### 3.1.5. Frequency

In most cases, there is a strong tendency for the converted words to be less frequent in their usage than the base words. For instance, it is shown that only 7 -able derivative forms out of 92 -able forms, which were extracted from the British National Corpus, had a higher frequency than their base words, and among the 102 derivative words of -ize forms, only 11 -ize forms had a higher frequency than their base words (Plag 2002). This circumstance can be explained by the semantics of conversion; if one is being semantically more complex, then it is prone to have a limited range of meaning, which leads to the situation where it cannot be used in diverse texts; that being the case, the more complicated one, i.e. the converted word, is generally the less frequently used form. For example, the verb *to water* is less frequent than the noun *water*, and this indicates that the verb is the derivative, which solves the directionality problem on conversion.

## 3.2. Different Views on a Definition of Conversion

This section deals with one of the mainstream methods of analysis on conversion which has been studied continuously. Broadly, the different views on conversion can be divided into two perspectives; those that belong to the process of word-formation and those that are not included in the course of word-formation, or even as outside morphology. Firstly, the view on 'zero-derivation', which is another preferred term over 'conversion', will be observed, and other perspectives on conversion will be described in the second part in this section.

### 3.2.1. Zero-Derivation

Some scholars see the conversion operation as a process of affixation and assume that it is analogous to other derivational processes of affixation. Jespersen (1942: 85) states that the phenomenon of conversion would be preferable to say that one lexical element, for example a verb, is formed from another word, such as a substantive, with a suffix zero.

Strang (1968) presents zero-derivation as one of the five subtypes of word formation, on the same level with compounding, prefixation, suffixation, and backformation, which presumes the zero derivation as a separate type of word formation. She sees conversions as new emergences which are syntagmas by means of the distinct features of their grammatical phenomenon, whereas other kinds, like compounding and affixations, are comprised of sequences of morphemes.

Furthermore, Marchand (1969) also uses the terminology of ‘zero-derivation’, and he expresses that he does not protest against the term ‘conversion’; however, he regards ‘conversion’ as a denotation of the syntactic transposition of a word; i.e. it is no more than a grammatical matter, and it corresponds to a systematic syntactic pattern, not word-formation and derivation. Additionally, he also proposes that the term ‘zero-morpheme’ is simply justified when it is matched by a pronounced form; i.e. the zero-suffix can only stand if there is a correlated overt marking suffix, which has the same meaning or function, in other cases, such as *cash-∅ ~ atom-ize* (Marchand 1969: 360). This assertion is known as “overt analogue criterion” (Sanders 1988).

(17) Demonstration of Overt Analogues Criterion

- a. I'll **answer** that again : This is my final **answer**
- b. I'll **announce** that again : This is my final **announcement**
- c.  $\text{answer}_v : [\text{answer}_v \emptyset]_N = \text{announce}_v : [\text{announce}_v \text{ment}]_N$

(Sanders 1988: 156)

Basically, analogy underscores in this case that in the same way that the noun *announcement* is derived from the noun *announce* by adding the phonic noun-forming suffix *-ment*, as shown in (17b), the noun *answer* is derived from the verb *to answer* by the addition of the non-overt form, i.e. zero suffix, as in (17a) and the analogical process is demonstrated in (17c). This condition is labelled as “over analogue criterion” (Sanders 1988:156), which is to posit a zero suffix only if there is a non-zero suffix around in the same function.

Nonetheless, there are a number of critical and empirical problems that arise for such condition. First of all, in the case of conversion into verbs, it is questionable whether such a verbal deriving affix exists, which has the exact same sense as zero-affix. For example:

(18) Demonstration of Types of Meaning for Conversion into Verbs.

<b>type of meaning</b>	<b>paraphrase</b>	<b>example</b>
locative	‘put (in)to X’	<i>jail</i>
causative	‘make (more)X’	<i>yellow</i>
inchoative	‘become X’	<i>cool</i>

performative	‘perform X’	<i>counterattack</i>
instrumental	‘use X’	<i>hammer</i>

(Plag 2003: 112)

The idiosyncratic meaning of the examples illustrated above in (18) display the situation where the “overt analogue criterion” (Sanders 1988: 156) is not satisfied. Not one of the overt verb forming affixes of English can convey such extensive meanings. Plag (2003) also mentions that suffixes like –ate, –ify, and –ize denote much more limited extent of meaning than conversion, and also there are additional cases with more distinctive meanings.

To examine the issue more closely, denominal verb *to eel* means ‘to fish for eel’ or ‘to move like an eel’, and another denominal verb *to crew* can denote ‘act as a member of crew’ or ‘assign to a crew’. However, there are no overt verb-deriving affixes available in English, representing such range of meanings. Correspondingly, in the case of verb to noun conversion, the meanings of overt nominal suffixes and conversion are not identical. Therefore it contradicts overt analogue criterion; for instance, although it is not clear to compare meanings between overt nominal suffixes, such as –ation, –al, –ing, –ment, and the derived nouns through conversion because of the tendency for action nouns happens to be polysemous, Centanrowska (1993: 113) has introduced two systematic differences between converted nouns and –ing suffix derived action nouns, such as *draw* and *drawing*, *beat* and *beating*. First, if the base form is a transitive verb, the derived form with suffixation can refer to all senses of the base verb, which means that the noun *drawing* denotes any activity related to drawing, while the definition of the converted noun *draw* can only refer to the drawing of cards or lots. Secondly, when the base form of verbs can be both transitive and intransitive, the different effects are exhibited. The derived nouns with suffixation will have the sense of the transitive usage of the verb, whereas the conversion will have a reference of the intransitive usage of the verb, such as *the beating of the prisoner* and *the beat of my heart*. Likewise, regarding conversion from adjective to noun, it is stated in the previous chapter (2.1.1.) that the meaning of adjective to noun conversion denotes collectivity; i.e. people of a group of people. The overt suffixes that contain the definition of collectivity are –dom, and –hood; nonetheless, they are denominal suffixes. Other deadjectival suffixes like –ness, and –ity do not result in the same meaning as conversion, rather they refer to states or properties. Hence, this shows the resistance of the analysis of overt analogue criterion. Finally, with regard to conversion from adjective to verb, there are some cases in which the range of meaning of converted nouns is greater than the basic meaning of causative and inchoative when the verbs are derived from adjectives. For example, the converted verb *to young* is defined as ‘to present the apparently younger side’ according to The Oxford English Dictionary, yet there are no such suffixes that refer to the same sense. Thus, this final case of adjective to verb conversion confirms that overt

analogue criterion is not attested in all cases of conversion.

As a consequence, although the overt analogue criterion can be usefully explained for the identification of zero derivation, it is not sufficient enough to analyse such recognition in all cases of zero affixation.

The theory of zero derivation is advantageous in that it can assemble the derivational process into one central mechanism of affixation, which is a perspicuous, consistent and elegant way for delineation. In contrast, the term zero-morpheme gives the impression of being too abstract and it violates the definition of morpheme, which is the fundamental unit of morphology containing form and meaning, in the sense that there is no overt form. Moreover, Bauer and Valera (2005) express that because of the concept of derivational zero, this analysis is presently out of favour.

### 3.2.2. Other Viewpoints

There are some alternative viewpoints on conversion other than zero-derivation, some of which are even assumed not to be within the realm of morphology; in other words, it is regarded that conversion is not a derivational process.

According to Lieber (1981, 1992), implicit transposition such as conversion is not a morphological or grammatical operation but the outcome of coinage, which is a process that lies in the domain of language use and entails pragmatic details. In other words, the same form of a word is stored in the lexicon, i.e. listed lexeme, but it has different information as to its lexical category than its primary one. This is called relisting analysis. In other words, conversion takes place when an element that is already stored in the lexicon is re-entered as a member of a different lexical category. This relisting analysis is different from zero-derivation, since there is no need to add new endings. Thus, this new interpretation of conversion is advantageous in a way because conversion may be explicable without the addition of anything new. Moreover, unlike the morphological process forming new words unintentionally, coinage is a deliberate and purposeful process, and Lieber (1992) claims that speakers are conscious when they make use of converted forms. Nevertheless, Plag (1993) notes the vagueness of intentionality in that speakers differ in their awareness when they use their language, so the claim by Lieber(1992) might be problematic to evaluate.

The analysis of 'Functional Shift' as category underspecification has been pointed out by Farrell (2001) recently. In this theory, the main assumption is that the syntactic structure plays an important part in meaning. To give an example, the word *hammer*, which is traditionally recognised as a pair of words that underwent the word formational process of conversion such as the noun *hammer* and the verb *to hammer*, has underspecified lexical semantic representation associated with the part-of-speech category; i.e. the verb and noun distinction, and this meaning of the verb and noun is assigned when it

appears either in the verb or the noun slot on the surface level. That is to say the lexical category distinction, for instance whether the word in question is a noun or verb, is not located in the words themselves; it is not an inherent feature of words. This means that Farrell (2001)'s new approach to conversion does not require a word-formation rule or any derivational process that relates nouns and verbs; this explains the identical morphological forms between nouns and verbs, thus no need to have an overt derivation.

Along with the ideas of Functional Shift and Relisting, there is another form of analysis which views conversion as a process of figurative extension (Twardzisz 1997, Neef 2005), which is an approach of cognitive linguistics. Yet there is a problem with this proposal in that the majority of cases of figurative extension remain within the same lexical category, for example conversion between mass noun and count noun, and intransitive verb and transitive verb, though it would again depend on the notion of the word-class; i.e. how narrowly a word-class is to be defined (Bauer and Valera 2005). Moreover, I have already noted that the secondary conversion is not dealt with in this study, which figurative extension mostly concerns.

### 3.3. Syntactic Approach of Conversion

It has been argued by many scholars that the process of conversion is a matter of a syntactic process rather than word-formation. According to Bauer (1983) and Farrell (2001), conversion is using a word, which is assigned within a given syntactic category, in a syntactic position; in other words, it is straightforwardly putting a word in a slot of a syntactic category.

Bauer (1983) sees the change in word-class as a minor issue because it happens frequently and without any difficulty. For example, there are such types of changes between countable and uncountable nouns (*tea, goat* > *two teas, a slice of goat*), proper nouns and common nouns (*John* > *Which John do you mean?*), intransitive verbs and transitive verbs (*to run* > *He is running a horse in the Derby*), and there is also a case where non-gradable adjectives are regularly used as gradable adjectives (*French* > *She looks very/more French*). However, most of these instances occur within a given domain, i.e. within a same word-class, which is widely known as secondary conversion. As so-called change of secondary word-class exceeds the scope of this study, greater extensive and exhaustive treatment for this would be designated for further research in the near future.

There are some circumstances in which the adjective in question undergoes the process of conversion, resulting in a noun. Adjectives usually appear both in attributive and predicative position. For example, for the word 'stone' in *stone wall*, *stone* can be grammatical both attributively (*stone wall*) and predicatively (*The wall is stone*); however, it is not straightforward to say that *stone* is an adjective, and it went through the derivational process of conversion. Furthermore, there is no clear

lexical category classification on the first element of the words because it can either be a noun, which makes *stone wall* a compound word, or it can be said that *stone* is the denominal adjective. Thus, there is a controversy involved in this syntactic judgment on conversion, and this circumstance chiefly depends on how an adjective is defined.

(19) *stone wall*

- a. Is ‘stone’ a denominal adjective? Therefore, is ‘stone wall’ a result of conversion? , or
- b. Is ‘stone wall’ a Noun + Noun compound?

In support for (19a), as indicated above, *stone* occurs in the attributive position as well as in the predicative position, which is the main feature for adjectives. Secondly, it is generally noted that compounds have fore stress, which means that its first element bears the major stress. However, *stone wall* requires major stress on the second element, which is the phrase stress, and this indicates that *stone wall* is a syntactic construction; therefore, *stone* underwent conversion from noun to adjective.

<Table 1> Comparison of Two Types of Constructions made up of Two Words

First elements	Second elements
<i>stone, silver</i>	<i>wall</i>
<i>steel, plastic</i>	<i>bridge</i>
<i>wooden, golden</i> <i>leaden, woollen</i>	etc.

<Table 1> demonstrates two kinds of more or less similar constructions made up of two words. First elements consist of lexical items both without any suffixes, and with suffixation. The second elements include nouns. It is certainly the situation that the second parts of the first elements are adjectives since –en suffix is an adjectival suffix. If both types of constructions are compared in parallel, it is understandable to purport that the words without any suffixes should belong to the lexical category of adjectives.

On the top of that, although it is difficult to distinguish between nouns and adjectives synchronically, there might be supporting evidence of adjectival element *stone* diachronically. With reference to The Oxford English Dictionary, the suffix –en attaches to nouns to form adjectives denoting “pertaining to, of the nature of”; i.e. it is mainly applied to express the material of which things are composed. This suffix existed in the Old English period, and broadly added in Middle English to derive new forms. However, since there was a tendency in loss of inflectional endings such as suffixes, especially from the sixteenth century on the –en adjectival suffix, most of –en complexed

forms became obsolete and scarcely survived until the Present-Day English. A few instances are exemplified in (20):

(20) Historical Development of *stone*, *golden*, *silver* in pronominal position

- a. stānen > stenen > stonen > stone
- b. gylden > golden
- c. silfren > silver

(20a-c) illustrates the historical development of *stone*, *golden*, and *silver*. Loss of the –en suffix led to identical forms of certain nouns and adjectives. This implies that even though *stone* in *stone wall* seems to be in the same form as a noun, it could be the case that it was and still is an adjective to a certain extent.

Finally, the compounds are said to be listed in the lexicon because the meaning of the compounds are usually non-transparent, which signifies that the meanings of compounds are hard to predict. Since it is quite puzzling to say such examples in (3)<sup>2</sup> are stored in the lexicon with idiosyncrasy in meaning, it does not necessarily assure that the first elements are nouns.

Nonetheless, in support for (19b), a number of grammarians argue that the cases like *stone wall* are the compound, because *stone* behaves as a noun. Apart from the fact that *stone* can act attributively as well as predicatively, *stone* does not satisfy the other prototypical characteristics of adjectives. Firstly, *stone* does not inflect for degree: in other words, it does not have the comparative and the superlative forms, such as *\*stoner*, *\*the stonest*. Secondly, adjectives are usually modified by adverbs like *quite* or *very*, but it is not feasible to modify *stone* using such adverbs. Thirdly, according to Ljung (1970: 186), adjectives may allow germination, that is, repeating construction of the adjective, which is very unlikely to occur with *stone wall*.

Additionally, for the case of *government official* in (3), *government* cannot be an adjective due to the Principle of Economy, since there exists another corresponding form, such as *governmental official*. Thus, Marchand (1969) does not acknowledge conversion in these circumstances, but he relegates this incident as “transposition”.

Moreover, let us refer back to the examples of adjective > noun conversion, which are exemplified in the previous chapter in (2).

(2) Examples of Adjective > Noun Conversion

- e. the poor, the good, the rich, the false, the true, the incredible

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<sup>2</sup> (3) Examples of Noun > Adjective Conversion

: *government official*, *stone wall*, *air passage*, and *zero modification*  
(Balteiro 2007)

- f. the Spanish, the Danish, the British
- g. the accused, the taught, 700 wounded, 200 killed
- h. intellectual, facial, musical, capital, curve

(Balteiro 2007)

It is easy to realise that this case is a somewhat special type of conversion, which requires the definite article *the*, and this makes some cases of conversion more syntax-like. For instance, despite its distribution circumstances, *poor* in (2a) is still said to be an adjective. The evidence of it being an adjective is: first, the lexical item *poor* cannot be inflected for number, such as *\*the poors vs. musicals* in (2d), secondly, it cannot co-occur with an indefinite article even though it has to accompany a definite article to be reckoned as an outcome of conversion, such as *\*a poor vs. a capital* in (2d). Thirdly, *poor* can be modified by adverbs, and this is the prototypical feature of an adjective, for example, *the comparatively poor*. Lastly, *the poor* can be inflected in comparative forms and superlative forms, such as *the poorer*, and *the poorest* respectively. In (2b), there are two reasons to argue that they are not converted nouns but still adjectives: in order to denote people or a special group of people, it is not possible use an adjective with an indefinite article, but only with a definite article, such as *the Dutch*, not *\*a Dutch*, or use a phrase such as *Dutch people*. More importantly, there are corresponding nouns for *the Dutch* and *the Spanish*; they are *Danes* and *Spaniards*. It would be uneconomical to have two elements referring to the exact same object (Balteiro 2007).

It is important to note that the examples in (2c) are claimed as a syntactic phenomenon of ellipsis by some authors, not a result of conversion; in other words, ellipsis is manipulated in syntactic simplification. Therefore, the cases in (2c) do not involve creation of new words. Kennedy (1935: 318) gives an explanation of this case as a temporary nominal usage of an adjective which is a response to a communicative need. Consequently, when the communicative need is no longer required, the lexical items change back to their usual function as adjectives.

However, Adams (1973: 19) acknowledges that if the truncated nouns; i.e. the head nouns, have the general meanings like people or person, such as in the examples in (2c), it is probable to term them conversion. In addition to this, Marchand (1969: 361) states that these mentioned ellipsis phenomena have obtained full independence, which means that the word in question is no longer an outcome of omission of a noun. It became a nominal element in its own right. For example, the originally adjectival word *stimulant* is now completely accepted as a noun, and some speakers do not even realise that it was ever converted from an adjective.

Nevertheless, Plag (2003) suggests that the words must have clear category specification and the syntactic rule must be aware of the categorical information of a word in order to serialise the words accurately, but it does not have access to the word-category due to the Lexical Integrity Principle;

syntax cannot change words' lexical categorical properties.

Another significant feature that could distinguish the conversion as a morphological process is the idiosyncratic meaning; that is non-compositional semantics. It is well-known that the meaning within the category of syntax is predictable due to compositionality except with idioms. However, as it is mentioned in instances (6), some converted verbs seem to have lexicalised meanings, which indicates that conversion is more lexical; i.e. morphological in nature.

To conclude, it seems that drawing a line between conversion, i.e. the morphological approach, and a syntactic approach is dependent on one's theoretical framework.

### 3.4. Productivity

The last question on conversion is about its productivity. It is widely-known that conversion is a very free process in English word-formation. However, there are partial restrictions which are raised by Marchand (1969), specifically the 'blocking effect' on derived nouns such as *arrival*; to illustrate, the derived noun *arrival* will not convert the verb *arrive* and vice versa.

It is also interesting to note that, according to Putseys (1989), noun to adjective conversion mostly affects material nouns; thus *brick* in *brick garage* is recognised as conversion while *milk* in *milk bottle* does not qualify as an adjective.

Additionally, there is a case where even though all the words in (21) belong to a category indicating 'weather', only winter and summer are feasible for conversion.

#### (21) Examples of Weather Lexemes under the Conversion

*winter* – *to winter*

*summer* – *to summer*

*spring* - \**to spring*

*autumn* - \**to autumn*

It is also important to note a further limitation on conversion; content words cannot convert into function words, such as adverbs, conjunctions and prepositions, whereas function words can easily become content words like nouns and verbs, and this is exemplified in (1e.ii). In addition, Nevalainen (1992) also mentions that the main restriction of conversion is that content words cannot become function words, whereas function words are not so constrained. Therefore adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions and even pronouns are free to convert into nouns and verbs.

All derivational processes have some restrictions applied in the formation of new words. Bauer and Valera (2005) state that as conversion is considered a morphological process, it should be no different.

Hence, there should be some restrictions too. Jovanovic (2003) proposes several constraints, in particular, which are semantic in origin to a great degree, and he also cites ambiguity problem. In addition, he mentioned in his article that in spite of the restrictions, conversion contributes extensive opportunities for the creation of new lexemes, and the most fascinating aspect is that there is remarkable possibility for lexical enrichment and development in the word formation mechanism in the English language.

### 3.5. Summary

In chapter 3, the problematic views of conversion that arise are examined. First, regarding conversion as a derivational process from one lexical unit to another, there exists directionality in the process. Directionality can be determined by five ways, as Plag (2003) suggested, such as the history of language, the semantic complexity, the inflectional behaviour, stress shift and frequency. Each means of deciding the directionality of conversion was introduced with its limitation.

Different scholars have different opinions on conversion, especially on how to define such process. Jespersen (1942), Marchand (1969) and Sanders (1988) are in favour of zero-derivation; that is, they acknowledge the existence of zero-morphemes and explain conversion as one of the derivational processes with affixation. However, this simplification of analysis is not always met, including the case of overt analogue criterion (Sanders 1988). Other viewpoints of conversion, for example, functional shifts, relisting, and figurative extension have been introduced briefly.

In addition to this, the syntactic approach of conversion, which considers conversion as a syntactical phenomenon, has been dealt with in this chapter, along with the restrictions in productivity of conversion.



(Faiss 1992: 64-65)

In contrast with Present-Day English, which has very little nominal and verbal inflection endings so that conversion usually takes place without any intervention of an overt morphological marker, conversion in Old English would be marked for category identification by the inflectional affixes; i.e. stem-formatives (Dalton-Puffer 1992). Hence, (22a) displays the representative construction of Early Germanic morphology for both nouns and verbs. As Old English still had the remnant properties of Germanic languages, the structure in Old English persisted in being the same when deriving conversion as displayed in (12b). Then, in the course of the Middle English period, most of the inflectional endings were lost, including the rich stem allomorph of Old English, which led to the circumstance where free lexemes take on the base form of such derivation. On top of that, Biese (1942) argues that the occurrence of conversion grows with the loss of inflection in English.

## 4.2. Conversion in Old English

### 4.2.1. Evidence of Zero-Morpheme in Old English

One of the great advantages of looking into aspects of historical conversion, especially in the Old English period, is that there is rather explicit evidence of zero-affix.

<Table 2> Inflectional Paradigm of Old English Strong Nouns

Example of Strong Noun Declension						
CASE	Masculine		Neuter(long stem)		Feminine	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nominative	stan <sup>3</sup>	stanas	word <sup>4</sup>	word+∅	sorg <sup>5</sup>	sorga
Accusative	stan+∅	stanas	word+∅	word+∅	sorge	sorga/sorge
Genitive	stanes	stana	wordes	worda	sorge	sorga
Dative	stane	stanum	worde	wordum	sorge	sorgum

<Table 3> Declensional Endings for Each Gender of Strong Nouns

<sup>3</sup> Old English *stan* means *stone* in Modern English

<sup>4</sup> Old English *word* means *word* in Modern English

<sup>5</sup> Old English *sorg* means *sorrow* in Modern English

Example of Strong Noun Declension						
CASE	Masculine		Neuter(long stem)		Feminine	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Nominative	-	-as	-	-	-	-a
Accusative	-	-as	-	-	-e	-a/-e
Genitive	-es	-a	-es	-a	-e	-a
Dative	-e	-um	-e	-um	-e	-um

From the tables above, it is easy to recognise that there are affixes in all cases of inflectional paradigms in Old English words except nominative cases, which are default cases. However, in the case of the strong masculine noun ‘*stan*’, and neuter noun ‘*word*’, there is no overt change in the accusative singular case from the nominative singular case; i.e. default case, even though there has been change in cases, whereas there is an overt marking suffix for the feminine noun ‘*sorg*’, when it changes from the nominative case to accusative case. Thus, it can clearly be presumed that there is a zero-form of affix, in particular zero-suffix, which derives ‘*stan*’, and ‘*word*’ from nominative case to accusative case.

Furthermore, on the basis of this prototype, it can be said that the analogical reasoning underlies the domain of word formation, which denotes that the zero element in morphological marking does exist in the derivational process. Let us look at overt analogue criterion (Sanders 1988) from chapter 3. Sanders (1988) argues that zero-derivation of conversion is manifested if there is a corresponding overt derivational suffix that has the same meaning. If we apply these fundamentals in the Old English data, displayed in tables 2 and 3, even though there appears to be no morpheme when masculine and neuter nominative nouns shift to accusative case, due to the parallel relationship to the feminine nouns, which have the overt suffix indicating the accusative case, it is said to be that there is an unpronounced morpheme, i.e. covert suffix, in the masculine and neuter noun, when changing cases. Thus, the above Old English data does not only support the evidence of existence in zero-morpheme, but also the Sanders (1988)’s overt analogue criterion.

#### 4.2.2. Conversion in Old English

The survey of Biese (1942) suggests that mostly verbs have undergone the conversion process and a larger number of them are denominative verbs, which is illustrated in (23) below.

#### (23) Examples of Different categories on Conversion in Old English

- a. Verbs derived from substantives (or nominal stems) 219 = c 54 %

b. Verbs derived from adjectives or adverbs	127 = c 31 %
c. Substantives derived from verbal stems	61 = c 15 %

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Total 407<sup>6</sup>

(Biese 1942: 20)

From the statistics in (23), it is quite clear to work out that the key feature of conversion in Old English consists of great quantities of noun to verb conversions. Biese (1942: 20) explains this result in a way that the lexical category of nouns contains the largest number of words in languages in general, and the languages come back to these numerous nouns in order to form new verbs, which led to the characteristic that denominal verbs are, in most cases, the main type of conversion until Present-Day English. Comparatively, the type of conversion from adjectives or adverbs to verbs is also fairly common in the Old English period, since it is shown from (23b) that about one-fourth of the total amount of verbs is derived from adjectival and adverbial units. Moreover, a great deal of these type of words were very common in Old English, and they have survived throughout the period until Modern English. The least frequent type of conversion in the Old English period is conversion of nominal units from verbal elements, as specified in (23c). Despite the fact that this kind of conversion results relatively infrequently, some of the words are very common and have also remained until Present-Day English, for *example drink, ear, fight, hate, help, hold, lie, play, shape, shave, smell, stand, stir, sting, tie, and win*. It is important to note that the words that belong to this type are strongly related to strong verbs, and due to the fact that strong verbs were very common lexemes in the language, it is natural that the corresponding nominal elements were in demand.

Even though only some parts of Old English Conversion are examined in this study, there is still evident confirmation that there is more practical and explicative research to be done in relation to conversion.

### 4.3. Conversion in Middle English

An enormous amount of foreign words were borrowed in the Middle English period. Therefore, new words were created by adopting the loan words, although there were still also a number of new lexemes formed from already existing vocabularies.

There is evidence of conversion in Middle English from Marchand (1969)'s work. Marchand (1969: 364-5) indicates that when French loan words were adopted, they remained to be foreign and did not

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<sup>6</sup> There are, in addition, about thirty words of unknown relations. (Biese 1942: 20)

convert as native stems, but after a while, the derivational process was applied. In addition to this, the co-existence of nominal units and verbs borrowed eased zero-derivation, such as *annoy* (1230)<sup>7</sup> - *to annoy* (1250), *account* (1260) - *to account* (1303), and *comfort* (1225) - *to comfort* (1290).

Biese (1942) also mentions that the total number of conversions in the 13<sup>th</sup> century is significantly in excess to that of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The reason for this situation is rather natural since the 12<sup>th</sup> century was the period of the Norman Conquest, which led to a downturn in literature. Thus, it is from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards that conversion gains its importance in word formation.

#### 4.4. Conversion in Early Modern English

As stated by Nevalainen (1992), conversion in Early Modern English is known as the third-most productive word-formation process in the Early Modern English period. To illustrate, conversion from nouns to verb, such as *gossip*, *invoice*, and *lump*, conversion of nouns from adjectives, such as *ancient*, and *invincible*, and nouns to verbs conversion, such as *invite*, *laugh*, and *scratch*, are recognised as the most common types of Early Modern English conversion.

Biese (1941) reveals that since 1650, derivation with suffixation had gained predominance of direct conversion in French and Latin polysyllabic loan words, which proves that disyllabic and trisyllabic borrowed words start to disapprove zero-derivation in Early Modern English.

##### 4.4.1 Conversion to Noun

Concerning conversion to nouns, the main base forms are verbs and adjectives. There is a limitation in the process of verb to noun conversion in this period: that is, it is very unlikely that the base forms of verbs with loan suffixes, such as -ify and -ise, derive into converted nouns. In contrast, it is common to convert from the native verbs, especially those with endings like -le, and -er, such as *glister*, *whisper*, *juggle* and *grumble* (Biese 1941: 266-8). In addition, conversion from prefixed verbs to nouns seems to be more typical in Early Modern English than in Modern English, for example, *betray*, *dismiss*, *enjoy* and *pretend*. Nouns converted from verbs in the Early Modern English period are usually originated from certain types of verbs, which are those that denote event, state, or activity.

In the Early Modern English period, converted nouns from adjectival elements can be morphologically divided into three groups. The first one is nouns that have regular plural endings, such as *Christian*, *fluid*, *liquid* and *mortal*. The second group consists of the elements that can be both

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<sup>7</sup> (1230) indicates the first year of appearance

singular and plural form, but marks without overt plural morphemes, for example, *Japanese*, *Swiss* and *Chinese*. Lastly, the nouns which have no singular forms but regular plural forms belong to third group and they are *ancients*, *classics*, and *eatables* (Nevalainen 1992: 427).

#### 4.4.2. Conversion to Verb

In the majority of cases, conversion to verbs is originally from nouns, adjectives and particles, but the majority of them are from nouns in this period. As specified by Biese (1941: 134-66), conversion of derivatives from prefixes is generally limited, which means that verbs converted from negative adjectives, such as *unfit* meaning ‘to make unfit’, are said to be more productive in Early Modern English than Present-Day English; nevertheless, most of them do not last long. Moreover, loan words with suffixation are regarded as monomorphemic elements and converted into verbs.

Early Modern English attestations of noun to verb conversion reflect locative and instrumental adverbial functions; locative denotes ‘to put in/on N’ such as *bottle*, *tub* and *coffin*, and instrumental means ‘to V with N’ such as *hand*, *net*, and *gun*. The cases of the verb-object relation involving ornative or privative object are typical in this period, for instance, *brick* (ornative ‘to put bricks on’, ‘to close up with brickwork’) and *bark* (privative ‘to strip off the bark from a tree’). There is also verb-object complement relation takes place, which refers to convert something into N, but this instance is rarer than other relations mentioned; for example, *bundle* as in “to make up into a bundle”. Finally, it is standard of personal nouns to function as the stative subject complement function, which means to be or act as N, such as *butcher*, *rival*, and *umpire*. According to Nevalainen (1992), deadjectival verbs in conversion are less frequent in Early Modern English than noun to verb conversion. Besides, there are a number of instances of conversion from locative particles to verbs in this period, which includes *about* meaning to change the course of a ship, *down* meaning to bring down, *through* meaning to carry through, *under* meaning to cast down, *forward*, *near*, and *off*.

#### 4.4.3. Conversion to Adverb

In Early Modern English, there are two groups of adverbs that are derived as a result of conversion, namely intensifiers and adverbs that are based on adjectives. It is important to note that the number of intensifiers were hugely increased in this period compared to only a few derived from adjectives. However, the adverbial suffix *-ly* gained more and more adverbial derivation towards the end of the Early Modern English period. As well as intensifiers, adverbs denoting dimension, physical property, speed and value also continue to form from adjectives, and exemplifications of this kind are *bad*, *blunt*, *cheap*, *dark* and *weak* (Nevalainen 1992).

#### 4.5. Summary

In summary, the historical perspective of the derivational process of conversion has been described in this chapter. As conversion has been a productive means of word formation since Old English, a number of features of Present-Day English on conversion may have been traced back.

At the beginning of this chapter, the typological change in conversion over the period was introduced; thus, as well as owing to Germanic characteristic of stem formation, referring to inflectional affixes, and also due to the loss of inflectional endings in the course of the Middle English period, conversion has undergone change from stem formation to word formation.

The declensional paradigm for nouns, which is used for submitting the evidence on the existence of zero-morpheme as well as stating the overt analogue criterion by Sanders (1988), does make sense in the diachronic perspective. Then, three main types of conversion in Old English have been demonstrated on the basis of a survey from Biese (1942), namely denominal verbs, deadjectival or deadverbial verbs and deverbal nouns.

Likewise to the preceding sections, the characteristics of Middle English were outlined in brief, and then the illustrative information on the types of conversion by virtue of part of speech was presented in the last part of this chapter.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

In this thesis, I provided an informative study on conversion in English. There are two main approaches that are presented in this research, namely the synchronic and diachronic approaches. Many controversial questions raised on conversion in English are thoroughly investigated with numerous examples given for the purpose of synchronic analysis. Then a historical perspective, such as reviewing different types of conversion in distinctive periods, is presented.

Conversion is one of the very productive means of forming new words in English morphology. It is a derivational process that includes no overt marking; i.e. there is no difference in the form even though the lexical category of the word has changed from one class to another.

There are a number of different kinds of conversion in Present-Day English which can be divided into the major types of conversion and the minor types of conversion. This distinction is based on the parts of speech, as conversion is very closely related with change in lexical categories; i.e. if there is no shift in the word-class in the derivation, there is no need to speak of conversion.

The major types of conversion include conversion between nouns, verbs, and adjectives, which are traditionally recognised as main word categories. The rest of the lexical categories that are involved in conversion belong to the minor type of categories, in which some of them are fairly rare and special. However, when investigating each type with numerous exemplifications, the phenomena of conversion can be explained by means of different application, which is dealt with in the following chapter in more detail.

As stated by Bauer and Valera (2005), there seem to be two groups of problems confronting conversion, namely standard problems and so-called 'unexpected' problems. Standard problems have been examined in this thesis, which include prospects on the definition of conversion, directionality and the different approaches on conversion such as syntactical analysis.

First of all, directionality can be determined by five ways, as Plag (2003) presents, including the history of language, semantic complexity, inflectional behaviour, stress shift and frequency. However, there are constraints in each means of determining the direction of conversion. Secondly, scholars assert different opinions on how to define conversion. For instance, Jespersen (1942), Marchand (1969) and Sanders (1988) favour zero-derivation; that is, they acknowledge the existence of the unpronounced suffix and explain conversion as one of the affixational derivations. However, this point of view is not sufficient enough to explain all instances of conversion, including the case of overt analogue criterion (Sanders 1988). Other viewpoints of conversion, for example, functional

shifts, relisting, and figurative extension have been introduced briefly.

In addition to this, the syntactic approach of conversion, which considers conversion as a syntactical phenomenon, has been dealt with in this thesis, along with the restrictions in the productivity of conversion.

As for the historical perspective, owing to the fact that conversion has existed for centuries in the language (Biese 1942), numerous characteristics of conversion were able to be traced back into Old English. There has been a typological change in conversion from stem formation to word formation in conversion since Old English because of the remnants of Germanic features of stem formation and loss of inflection in Middle English.

Using the Old English noun data, the existence of zero-morpheme may be supported, including the practicality of overt analogue criterion by Sanders (1988). Then, in accordance with Biese (1942)'s statistical survey, three major kinds of conversion in Old English have been shown; to put in order of frequency, they are denominal verbs, deadjectival or deadverbial verbs and deverbal nouns.

Additionally, the characteristics of Middle English were outlined in brief, and then the informative analysis on the types of conversion was viewed in the last part of this chapter.

The purpose of this descriptive level of study is to be the starting point, i.e. the basis, for a more profound level of research in the near future. As I have mentioned in this thesis, there is much research to be done on conversion in English, such as the secondary changing of word class conversion, and examining additional questions conducted on conversion, which are less standard than the ones that I have addressed in this thesis, in addition to other new and unexpected questions in this linguistic field. Furthermore, and most importantly, a more detailed and meticulous investigation with a great deal of comprehensive historical exemplifications is required on the history of conversion, since I have only touched upon the subject. Thus, one would be able to trace, with confidence, practicable and more reliable explanations to the essential questions that arise on conversion.

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