Final Year Dissertation in English Studies

Linguistics

A Study on Conversion: Morphology-Syntax Boundary and Category Underspecification

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Abstract

Framed in the boundary between morphology and syntax, this paper is an attempt to prove how a 'believed-to-be' morphological process known as *conversion* is actually of syntactic essence. *Conversion* is widely understood as a morphological process that involves no visible affixation. The study of this phenomenon has been a central topic for the last decades, but there are indications that it is an unresolved theoretical point about the core coinage of words in English. The central position this project takes goes along with an underspecified categorical status approach in major word categories, which I intend to prove to be more likely to depend on the syntactic level than on the morphological one. For this reason the purpose of this paper is to study the following research questions: is there a possibility that English allows the underspecification of roots in the lexicon, possibly until the time of utterance? Are English word-formation processes not only morphological but also syntactic? If that is possible, can *conversion* be a syntactic word-formation process?

Abbreviations

A, (a)	→	Adjective
V, (v)	→	Verb
Adv, (adv)	→	Adverb
N, (n)	→	Noun
r	→	Root
L	→	Lexeme

1. What is *conversion*?

The definition for conversion resides between the boundaries of morphology and syntax. A quick look into the literature will provide us with radical different observations. Neither of these seem to be the only solution or seem to offer a comprehensive explanation of how this process works. Nevertheless, all theories have something to suggest. With regard to the suggestions, this paper will intend to move towards a single one, which we will try to study and analyse. We may even come up with possible modifications.

What seems to be the key fact about this morphological and/or syntactic process is that it triggers a lexical category shift in the words involved. Therefore, the words which are subject to this phenomenon will occupy a different syntactic slot that the original word in an utterance, as shown in (1) below. Determining the reasons and exact mechanisms that trigger the lexical category shift are two of the purposes behind the writing of this paper. By studying them, we will try to come up with the most preferable answer that helps us understand the process.

(1) a. The windows are *clean (a).*

b. May you *clean (v)* the windows?

1.1. The directionality of *conversion*

If we look again at example (1) above, we may suspect that there is some directionality between the two lexemes of a pair. There is a huge amount of research that has been done concerning the different possible directionalities that *conversional*

pairs may take, but examining it is not the purpose of the project. For that reason, we will only provide some insight about the directionality basics. By directionality we mean that in a *conversional* pair, one of the lexemes needs to have occurred in the lexicon earlier than its homonymous pair. It is worth mentioning that, although all of the pairs have homonym spellings, some may not have homonym pronunciations, as we illustrate below. Stress plays a very important role in determining the directionality of a particular set of *conversional* pairs.

Now, how to resolve the directionality? Mainly, there are four strategies that can be used to prove which of the two lexemes occurred earlier in the lexicon, as the following (i)-(iv) statements show:

i) An etymological study can give us the clue of when the lexeme was first used and with which intentions (lexical identity).

ii) In a *conversional* pair, one of the two lexemes has a more obscure and complex semantic interpretation, triggering a possible smaller frequency of occurrence.

What is important about this fact is that one of the elements in the pair, generally the new lexeme to be incorporated in the lexicon, has a smaller set of semantic interpretations than its homonymous pair which was used earliest in the language. Moreover, in many cases, the latest lexeme to be coined needs to include the definition of the former in its own definition. This can be proved with the example in (2):

(2) a. *bottle (n) – bottle (v).*

b. Bottle (n): A container for liquids usually made of glass or plastic, with a narrow neck.

c. Bottle (v): Place drinks or other liquids in bottles.

iii) New *conversional* pairs do not have irregular inflection.

This can be easily exemplified with the verb *to ring*. *Ring (v)* has an irregular inflectional paradigm: *ring – rang – rung*. However, the verb *to ring* meaning to put a ring attached to a bird's leg has regular inflection, as shown in (3). This suggests that *ring (n)* is the input for regular verb *ring (v)*. We can also include the semantic complexity argument to show how the definition of regular *ring (v)*, makes use of its *conversional* pair *ring (n)*. The following sentences are examples of regular *to ring*.

(3) *a. I ring the bird's leg.*

b. He ringed the bird's leg.

c. They have ringed the bird so they do not lose sight of it.

iv) In noun-to-verb pairs of Latinate lexemes, there is stress shift to fit the stress rules of the English language.

(4) a.

permít (v)	pérmit (n)	(Latinate origin)
prodúce (v)	próduce (n)	(Latinate origin)
combát (v)	cómbat (n)	(Latinate origin)

b.	-al (adj)	áutumn (n)	autúmnal (adj)	(Latinate)
	-ic (adj)	átom (n)	atómic (adj)	(Latinate)
	-ness (n)	háppy (adj)	háppiness (n)	(non-Latinate)
	-less (adj)	cóntact (n)	cóntactless (adj)	(non-Latinate)

This is a phenomenon that does not happen with Germanic vocabulary. Examples (4a) clarify the idea over stress shift. This stress shift happens mainly due to phonological motivated rules of English and stress patterns. Moreover, if we look at the morphology of English we can see why the stress shift pattern in conversion only applies to Latinate vocabulary, as shown in (4b). The main reason lies in affixational morphology. While Germanic affixes are stress neutral, affixes of Latinate origin trigger stress shifts on roots. This may be a reason to suspect why *conversional* pairs involving non-Latinate lexemes do not undergo stress shifts.

2. Literature Review

In this section we are going to introduce a series of approaches connected with a particular view of *conversion*. The literature that we are using does not take a mainstream morphological point of view. Instead, the approaches that we will study in this part of the project are framed into a view closer to syntactic criteria than to morphological ones. *Conversion* is studied cross-linguistically, mainly in the boundary between syntax and morphology. Semantic views have also arisen, trying to explain how this phenomenon is integrated in proposition meaning. However, we will

concentrate on the boundary between syntax and morphology and we will try to incline ourselves into either one discipline or the other.

2.1. Multifunctional perspectives to *conversion*

In this section we are going to introduce Nida's (1957) and Hockett's (1958) syntactic understandings of *conversion*. They reject morphological motivated analyses to the point of completely avoiding their presence in the phenomenon.

The first study that we are going to analyse is the one carried out by Nida (1957). As well as him, it is also worth acknowledging Spencer (1991) and Hockett (1994) for their contributions in the multifunctional perspective. This analysis is generally called *multifunctionality.* Multifunctionality is a theory operating outside the morphology which tries to explain *conversion*. Hence, no morphological processes take part in the analysis of this process or its consequences. As Balteiro (2007) illustrates when talking about a *conversional* pair, "there is only one element or lexical unit which is said to be multifunctional, i.e., it performs different functions and belongs to different categories of word classes" (Balteiro, 2007:56).

To reject the morphological analysis of *conversion* Nida (1957) refuses two analyses that have been used for decades. First, linguists have tried to explain *conversion* as a morphological process triggered by zero-affixation. The use of zero elements has been used to explain the process of *conversion*, most prominently since Sanders (1988). Nida, as many other linguists, rejects the use of zero-affixes to explain *conversion*, as the use of zero-morphemes to explain a linguistic phenomenon is found not to be linguistically accurate. Moreover, a reason to disregard zero-morphemes as a means to build words is

the fact that English is very rich in what concerns affixational morphology. If we allow the use of zero-morphemes, all the rich derivational devices that the language has are entirely avoided.

We can also favour the syntactic interpretation of the phenomenon by means of underspecification due to the fact that derivational morphology is in essence category determining. Even if we regard roots such as *perform*, for instance, as underspecified in the lexicon, the suffix *–ance* gives us the class-membership of the derived lexeme *performance (n).* So, affixes are class determining and lexically specified. We do not really need to know the category of the root to know the category of the derived lexeme because the affix contains the lexical category membership. For the purpose of this paper, roots are not primarily lexically specified in the lexicon, as we will try to illustrate in section 4.

Secondly, morphological theories define the morpheme as a linguistic form that does not have any phonetic-semantic resemblance with any other forms in the system. Following such premise, conversional pairs such as *try (n)* and *try (v)* cannot be regarded as different morphemes. They need to be listed as the same morpheme, and if they are the same morpheme they should have the same function and inflectional paradigms, which they have not. What Nida (1957) suggests under a multifunctionality view is to regard a pair such as *try (n)* and *try (v)* as a single morpheme which has double or, at least, different class-memberships. Each class membership allows a different set of inflections respectively and a set of syntactic functions. Moreover, this view parallels phonology in that each class membership is in complementary distribution to the other. That is to say, none of the class memberships that a morpheme can have will co-occur in the same sentence slot or have the same dependency

relationship within the elements in the sentence to the homonym pair. In a nutshell, this proposal seems to suggest that a single morpheme has 'word-allomorphs' that occur in complementary distribution at the syntactic level.

However, the approach taken by Nida (1957) and Hockett (1958), for instance, allows the inclusion of new class-memberships to explain the relationships between *conversional* pairs. By this we mean the inclusion of categories such as NV or VN. At this point of the paper we shall consider this idea as a starting point for the theory of underspecification to develop. The reason for this is that there is the possibility to include categories such as AVN that include the three major word categories. If *conversional* examples allow us to make a category such as AVN, in which all the major word categories can be involved in the category shift, do we really need to specify the categories? A position that we can take might move into an analysis in which the category of the word is not primarily specified in the lexicon and it may not be until the moment of utterance that the class membership is acquired. However, this view needs to be reanalysed and constrained so that lexemes such as *woman (n)* or *die (v)* are lexically specified in the lexicon and not at the moment of utterance, whereas *clean* is lexically underspecified in the lexicon, hence leaving us with the ambiguity of meaning and function until the moment of utterance where it acquires class membership and is in relation to other elements in the sentence.

For now, we will leave this idea for section 4 of the paper to concentrate on Farrell's (2001) view of category underspecification. In section 3, we will try to analyse in depth some morphological relations in major word categories, to exclude adverbs from that set, in order to start our analysis of *conversion* following the theorising of Nida and Farrell.

2.2. *Conversion* as category underspecification

Farrell (2001) is an attempt to explain the syntactic behaviour of *conversion* by making reference to category underspecification. In his analysis, he tries to account for *conversional* pairs involving nouns and verbs. His motivations do not include adjectival forms unlike Nida's (1957) account, however. Farrell provides a detailed analysis on the two main *conversion* types which he calls "process-centered" and "thing-centered". As the type names themselves show, the former involves verb-to-noun *conversion* and the latter noun-to-verb *conversion*. For our purposes, the distinction of directionality is accounted for in the first section of the paper with no further developments. However, relevant to this section, what Farrell accounts for is the non-necessity to specify the class membership of a lexeme such as *kiss*:

> "Importantly, there is no need to consider the word *kiss* to be inherently associated either with the verb or the noun meaning and, thus, no need to assume that there is a word formation rule or process relating distinct noun and verb meanings" (Farrell, 2001: 6).

Moreover, he explains the non-necessity to specify class membership by showing that nouns generally denote 'things' whereas verbs generally denote 'processes'. What he means by this is that *kiss* will acquire a semantic denotation 'thing' when it appears in a noun slot and a semantic denotation 'process' when it appears in a verb slot. In his words, "the appearance of the word in a slot in a morphological or syntactic construction demanding one of these categories is sufficient to trigger the appropriate profiling" (Farrell, 2001: 7). So, as well as Nida (1957) does, Farrell's view rejects morphological criteria as a way to explain *conversion*, but acknowledges semantic-syntactic operations to deal with it. So, the view that this paper is moving towards is

essentially syntactic with some semantic colouring. Consequently, all morphological rules or word-formation processes are ineffective to the understanding and building of our theory.

One reason that Farrell uses to reject the morphological behaviour of *conversion* is grounded on morphological evidence. As other linguists have suggested (Aronoff, 1976: 72), the phenomenon of conversion does not allow further affixational morphology on a *converted* element. That is to say, a word that has shifted its category through *conversion* cannot be the input for more morphological processes concerning affixation. To exemplify this, we need to make reference to the properties of affixational morphology. Some affixes are likely to appear together in derivational processes. If the lexical category of a word is changed from N to V through conversion, the use of affixes would be useless. Hence, a word such as *google (n),* is not input for *–ize* derivation as in **googleize*¸ but input for *conversion* in order to achieve the semantic characteristics of verbs, as in *google (v).*

Moreover, a lexeme created through affixational morphology cannot be the input for *conversion*. By this, we mean that a suffix such as *adjective forming –al* is likely to attach next to *verb forming –ize* (nationalize, generalize). However, this affix connection is not bound to be broken so that *conversion* is used half way through. That is to say, after the use of *adjective forming –al,* there is no space for A-V *conversion* but verb *forming –ize.* As well as this derivational pairing, we find other affix pairs that are productive in the language, as –ful/-ness pairs (carefulness, shamefulness). Moreover, a lexeme obtained through derivation gains lexical specification through the affix attached to the root. Once a lexeme is lexically specified, it cannot undergo *conversion.*

What the examples above suggest is that, just as the morphology of English allows class-membership shifts through overt derivational affixational morphology (and this morphology seems to follow patterns), English seems to have a covert way of shifting class-memberships not by means of attaching morphemes, but by allowing semantic underspecification with a syntactic open class-membership depending on the function that a lexeme takes at sentence level. Hence, since *conversion* cannot be the input for affixational morphology and affixational morphology cannot be input for *conversion*, there does not seem to be a reason to consider *conversion* as part of the morphology of English. Therefore, if *conversion* appears to occur at sentence level, there are indications that it has to be grounded on syntax rather than morphology.

Farrell also relies on "routine" and "language use" as reasons to account for terms that are not used in functional shift while similar ones are. What he suggests is that the use that a speaker makes of language will determine the coinage of new *conversional* pairs while excluding similar possible pairs. Generally, the most used vocabulary of the language is the one which is bound to become subject for *conversion*. The notions of 'routine' and 'occurrence', to my understanding, are not of syntactic essence, but for our purposes, they are of high importance. Undoubtedly, the use of *hand (n)* as a verb is not only a syntactic phenomenon but also a routine-like one. Why is that? Generally, we tend to include as conversional pairs those elements, words, which are part of our daily vocabulary. Technical and medical vocabulary, for instance, do not represent the usual kind of examples that we are bound to find in *conversion*. Words used in everyday conversation represent a less challenging effort to a speaker who tries to understand them if used in a different syntactic context. Moreover, world-knowledge gives us the clues to understand odd *conversional* examples. How the coinage of a *conversional* pair

is made is as follows. The process involves an addresser using a word in a specific context different from its usual slot in a given sentence and the possibility of the addressee to understand and accept the shift. (5) is an example of an odd *conversional* pair which can be understood by means of world-knowledge.

(5) *Last winter three transatlantics* ***titaniked*** *in the North Sea*.

We can conclude that a proper class-shift occurs when meaning is effectively put through in communicative speech. Gradual acceptance and use will be the reasons for a functional shift to be allowed or not in the language. However, the matter of acceptance is not in the content of this paper and would require a special study to be carried out.

3. Major word categories and root underspecification

In this section, major word categories are going to be reviewed so as to exclude adverbs from the set. Second, root underspecification and lexical stratification theories will be looked at and studied in depth. This will be made so as to clarify which lexical categories can be involved in *conversion* and why. Moreover, by studying the underspecification of roots in the lexicon, we will need to specify how the English lexicon works. With these points as our next steps, we will come to the discussion section of our paper.

3.1. Major word categories

The traditional linguistic view about words is to classify them in lexical categories. All words need to be lexically classified in order to be listed in dictionaries. However, the long list of possible lexical categories has been divided following different criteria. The general distinctions are between major and minor word categories and open and closed word categories. The difference mainly lies on the criteria used in the distinction. In the major-minor distinction, major word categories traditionally include noun, adjective, adverb and verb lexical categories, possibly also prepositions. The main reason for this division is that major classes give the most information at sentence level and the meaning of a proposition can be inferred by knowing the meaning of the words belonging to these lexical categories only.

The open-closed distinction is made to differentiate the classes that allow coinages from those that do not. In this respect, N, V, A and Adv are the four lexical categories that occupy the open slot. The rest (Pronouns, Conjunctions, Complementizers, etc.) form the closed set of categories for they do not allow coinages into their lists. However, as we will study below, adverbs do not really include new members into the category, and if they do so they depend on adjectives.

However, the view that we want to take in this paper is that only (with some exceptional examples) major word categories are able to undergo *conversion* shifts. But, in our analysis we want to exclude adverbs from this respect. As mentioned above, prepositions are included in this list by some linguists, but for our purposes, we will exclude them as they do not undergo any kind of derivational morphology processes.

The case of adverbs is far more complex to deal with. The following figure shows how our analysis is going to develop:

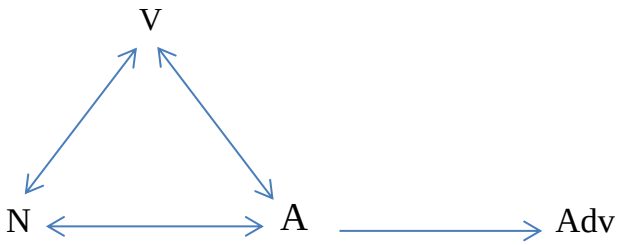

Figure 1: Affixational morphology

Following Giegerich's (2012) approach to the distinctions between adjectives and adverbs, we are going to try to exclude adverbs from the major word category set to include it in the minor one. As Figure 1 suggests, N, A and V can derive freely from one category to the other, with the restrictions that affixes may inherently have. This is also exemplified in (6), which is a sample of all the possible derivational processes in the language.

(6) A→ V: -*ise*: national-ise / bipolar-ise / external-ise

V→ N: -*al*: withdraw-al / dismiss-al / approv(e)-al

N→ V: -*ate*: fibr(e)-ate / affection-ate / mut(e)-ate

However, adverbs cannot derive from verbs or nouns. Instead, they can also derive from adjectives by means of *adverbial –ly*, as shown in (7) below. Moreover,

concerning *conversion*, there is no *conversional* pair involving adjective-adverb homonyms. The main reason for this is that adverbs denoting adjective-like properties are uniquely formed by means of *–ly*. The only exceptional pairs that share spelling and pronunciation are the ones like *fast (a)* and *fast (adv)*. In these cases the syntactic relation within the other elements in the sentence will give us the lexical category. So, if we can only form adverbs from adjectives and no *conversional* pair can be found to exist (with almost no exceptions), why should we include adverbs as a major word category? Instead, I believe that adverbs are placed more properly in the set of open class in the open-closed class distinction.

(7) -*ly*: happ(y)[i]-ly / interesting-ly / conscious-ly / subordinate-ly / conversional-ly

These distinctions, although very similar in essence, differ as mentioned above, in that the open-closed distinction has to do with the possibility of the classes to include new lexical members, whereas the major-minor distinction is more keen on meaning creation. A property that major word classes have is inflectional morphology. The three main categories (N, V, A) have an inflectional paradigm that fulfils the whole category (even the irregularities are part of their system) even after derivation. However, adverbs have no inflectional morphology of their own. They cannot inflect for number as nouns do, they have no tense, voice or aspect as verbs have and they cannot gradate as adjectives can. Only adverbs not formed by *–ly* can gradate, as shown in (8). Essentially, it is an invariable category, just as prepositions and conjunctions cannot vary, and it would require the coinage of an adjective to be able to form a new member. Quoting Giegerich:

> "only members of lexical categories are part of the morphological system; and adverbs are clearly not integrated in the system[…]when adverbs in any way appear to undergo morphological processes then these processes are always of the kind primarily associated with adjectives." (Giegerich, 2012: 347)

(8)	soon-er/est	earl(y)[i]-er/est	fast-er/est	close-er/est
	rapidly*-er/*-est	happily *-er/*-est	lately *-er/*-est	madly *-er/*-est

3.2. Root underspecification and lexical stratification

In this section of the paper we are going to explore the distribution of English morphology into a stratified system that divides the lexicon between two strata. Each stratum has a different set of properties and morphological (and phonological) processes involved. For our purposes, we are going to deal with the facts that account for the underspecification of 'roots' in stratum 1 and their process to become lexically specified roots in stratum 2. Then, we are going to elaborate on the reasons to set *conversion* either in stratum 1 or 2 or in none.

3.2.1. Lexical stratification and roots

Following Giegerich's (1999) account of lexical stratification, both the English lexicon and English morphological processes are divided into two different strata. In his view, the two strata essentially contain morphological and phonological processes, but none of syntactic essence. The reason for the phonological processes happening in the lexicon is that some affixational rules may trigger phonological motivated effects, while

syntax seems to work completely aside of the stratification system. Where syntax resides in his perspective is right after the different processes occurring in the second stratum are no longer productive for the morphology. So the outputs of stratum 2 are the input for syntax: words.

Giegerich (1999) explores a series of facts that make either 'words' or 'roots' govern the system. For our purposes, we are not going to deal with the facts that decide in favour of a non-affixational stratified model in favour of a base-driven one. What concerns our project is how underspecification works in the first stratum while specified roots are required in the second one. In the model we need to make a distinction between roots and words. Following Giegerich, "the crucial difference between Roots and Words is[…]that the former bear no lexical category specifications" (Giegerich: 1999, 74). On the contrary, words do bear category specifications. Roots are the input and output of stratum 1. Words are the input and output of stratum 2. However, we need to find a way to link the process of a root becoming a word in the stratification model. Giegerich formulates a rule by which roots leaving stratum 1 towards stratum 2 need to go through a process of grammaticality. As he mentions, "in the absence of such a process, no lexical item could transit from stratum 1 to stratum 2." (Giegerich: 1999, 76). The lexical items Giegerich refers to are major word categories and adverbs due to the possibility of *adverbial –ly* derivation, which occurs in stratum 2.

(9) Root to Word Conversion Rule

$[\ ]_r \rightarrow [[\ ]_r]_L \quad (L= , N, V, A)$

This rule shows how a root converts to a word in the process of changing from stratum 1 to stratum 2. The output of the lexicalisation is either a N, a V or an A,

possibly an Adv too. Hence, this rule accounts not only for the lexical underspecification of the affixational processes occurring in stratum 1, but also for the underspecification of all the words of the lexicon that can be the input for morphological or phonological processes. The process of a root gaining category specification is as follows. Stratum 1 is comprised of irregular morphology and phonology. Moreover, Latinate affixation is more prone to be productive in this stratum than in stratum 2. Stratum 2 includes both regular phonology and morphology, generally including Germanic affixation. However, the inclusion of affixes in either of the strata is non-conclusive since we can see affixes operating at both strata indistinctively. Also, stratum 2 includes those word-formation processes which are generally not the input for further derivation, such as truncations, compounding and abbreviations. Therefore, a root coming from the lexicon enters stratum 1, fully lexically unspecified. It can be the input for the processes occurring in stratum 1. The outputs of all the processes occurring in stratum 1 are roots. When a root cannot be the input for more processes in stratum 1 it will go through the rule that converts roots to words, hence gaining lexical specification. The output of this rule can be the input for stratum 2 processes, ultimately being the input for the production of syntax.

Here arise the questions of what happens with roots that do not undergo either morphological or phonological processes in stratum 1. In addition, we need to know what happens with roots that can be attached to a series of affixes. In this respect, the process works likewise. A root like *happy* cannot be the input for any of the processes that can occur in stratum 1. Therefore, it will move from stratum 1 to stratum 2 through lexicalisation by means of the rule in (4). Moreover, a root that has been derived in stratum 1, which can be again derived by more morphological processes in the first

stratum, may undergo lexicalisation, regardless of all the set of derivational affixes that can attach to it in that stratum. These questions are exemplified in (5). Moreover, we have to assume that the affixes operating in the first stratum are lexically underspecified too. It is only through the application of (4) that the last suffix gives the category membership to the root in order to become a word.

(10) *Stratum* 1: happy (root) [lexicalisation rule] *Stratum* 2: happy (adj)

Stratum 1: nation (root) – nation*al* (root) [lexicalisation rule] *Stratum* 2: national (adj)

Stratum 1: nation (root) – nation*al* (root) – national*ize* (root) – nationaliz*ation* (root) [lexicalisation rule] *Stratum* 2: nationalisation (noun)

3.2.2. *Conversion* in a stratified model

Throughout this paper, we have regarded *conversion* as a phenomenon outside English word-formation processes and outside the morphology of the language. Following our syntactic interpretation of *conversion* we need to account for its behaviour in relation to the stratified model of the lexicon to show whether there is any connection with it. The section above (3.2.1.) helped us understand why a lexical item involved in conversion needs not have a specific lexical category. However, two main problems arise if we try to connect the stratified model with our understanding of *conversion*. Firstly, if we account for *conversion* as a phenomenon outside the morphology occurring at sentence level, it cannot be a process in the stratified model. Secondly, if the stratified model specifies the lexical category of roots in a previous

stage to stratum 2 operations, *conversional* roots would be specified before the moment of utterance.

To overcome these problems, we need to properly identify where *conversion* resides among the different operations that language allows. If *conversion* is purely a non-morphological phenomenon, it seems that it has to be located outside the stratified model of language. If it occurs outside that model, the linguistic operations occurring in that model cannot be the input for *conversion*. That is to say, as we have explored in section 2.2. if affixation cannot be the input for *conversion* and *conversion* cannot be the input for affixation, the lexicalisation rule at the edge of stratum 1 is not at the same linguistic level as *conversion* and cannot be understood to be in any kind of grammatical relation. Moreover, if c*onversion* is not understood as a word-formation process but as a process involving functional shifts with semantic reinterpretations of a single lexeme, it cannot be compared to the processes occurring in the strata, since the essence of those processes is to build new words, may it be through affixation or truncation, for instance.

A different perspective that we can take is that *conversion* happens inside the stratified model. That would make us think that it is a word-formation process, but rather, we have to understand the stratified model as a way of classifying the linguistic mechanisms that lexemes are bound to go through in language use, regardless of which operations we make reference to. In that case, we do not necessarily have to assume that the stratified model has to be equated to the morphology of the language. As explained above, the strata include both morphological and phonological operations (vowel shortening or stress shifts for instance). Therefore, why can we not suggest that there are also syntactic operations occurring half way through the stratified model? If we look at

this idea for a moment, we could suggest that *conversion* happens in the first stratum, before the specification rule applies. Therefore, all roots involved in *conversion* are lexically underspecified, just as the rest of roots that may not undergo *conversion* but morphological and/or phonological operations.

We can provide a series of reasons to account for *conversion* as being part of the first stratum. Firstly, *conversion* does not follow general syntactic operational patterns. It cannot be compared to the syntactic operations occurring at the end of the stratified system (mainstream syntax) and therefore it appears to be an irregular syntactic mechanism. As we suggested above, the first stratum contains irregular patterns in the language. Latinate affixation and phonological issues involving vowel and syllable change happen only in the first stratum.

Secondly, *conversion* interacts with the phonology. This is shown by N-V *conversional* pairs involving Latinate vocabulary in which stress shifts occur. Interestingly, these pairs block the possibility of morphological operations once being phonologically derived. This blocking is equal to the one that morphological-phonological operations trigger towards *conversion*. This exemplifies the mutual exclusiveness that we have described in section 2.2. regarding the input and output of *conversion* and affixation. Syntax and morphology seem to be mutually exclusive in the lexicon; they do not interfere with one another: no process involving syntactic operations can be modified by the morphology and no process involving morphological operations can be modified by the syntax. However, the phonology of the language is able to interact with the two disciplines. Therefore, if morphology is considered to occur at the level of the lexicon, we can also include syntax, or at least the only syntactic operation of *conversion* as part of the stratified model of the lexicon.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this final section is to sum up the main points of the paper in order to establish a theory that explains the phenomenon of *conversion* from our point of view.

From the beginning we have differentiated between two main perspectives that try to explain *conversion*. On the one hand, we find theories involving syntactic criteria, and on the other hand, theories involving morphological criteria. In section 2 we have accounted for the difficulty of *conversion* to be regarded as a morphological process for a number of reasons. One of these reasons is that *conversion* plays against the mainstream morphological processes that trigger the coinage and formation of words. English is a language whose morphological processes are rich. Derivational morphology posits a difficult challenge to language building due to the extensive list of affixes and processes that are generated in the language. *Conversion* does not seem to fit in these processes. Firstly, it breaks with all derivational schemas and secondly, it seems to be a phenomenon that only takes into account the sentence spot that a *conversional* pair occupies.

For those reasons, this process has been understood and studied as if it was a purely syntactic phenomenon in this paper. In so doing, this study suggests that *conversion* is sensitive to word categories. Word categories are considered to be the basics for sentence building. Each word category is meant to occupy a specific set of slots in relation to other elements in a given sentence, therefore being essentially syntactic. Word categories can also be understood as part of the morphology since, as we have seen, a stratified model of the lexicon establishes that the specification of the category of a word generally occurs in the lexicon, that is to say, while the morphology interacts

with the vocabulary. The usual example is affixation. Affixes are morphological units charged with syntactic information since they determine the category of the word they attach to while performing a morphological operation. However, we do not want to get confused about *conversion*. This phenomenon, although undergoing syntactic shifts, does not show any connection to derivational morphology, for instance. Arguments supporting this fact are that the inputs and outputs of this process are always category-changing but never category maintaining, unlike derivational morphology affixation. Moreover, contrary to derivational morphology, a word that undergoes *conversion* shows no changes in its spelling or morphological form.

At this point, if we are to face this phenomenon as a purely syntactic operation, we need to know whether it shows any resemblance with other syntactic patterns in the language. *Conversion* presents itself as a procedure standing alone in comparison to other syntactic operations. Learning about syntax is trying to understand how sentences in a language can be built, which limits are there and which sentences cannot be built. It is about exploring all the possible utterances that a speaker of a language may pronounce. The approach generally used to describe syntax is sentence-based. In this paper, we need to face syntax in the framework of word-grammar. We do not need to study the impact of this phenomenon at the sentence level. Rather, we just need to carefully look at each word as a separate unit that the syntax selects to build the lexicon.

The idea of the lexicon is generally connected to the morphology in that only through morphological operations can we obtain new lexical members of a specific syntactic category. However, in our study we want to suggest that the syntax can also operate in the lexicon, as a discipline not only dividing the whole set of words of a language into lexical categories but also creating new lexical members. We could

determine that overt, or visible, processes are carried out by the morphology and that covert, or invisible, processes are carried out in the syntax in order to generate the lexicon of the language.

The traditional view concerning morphology and syntax is to consider them as in a hierarchical relation. It is widely believed that in most aspects of language we require the presence of the morphology before the syntax is put into practice. In other words, we need to build a set of words to be able to construct a grammatical sentence with it. However, as we are trying to suggest, these two disciplines should not be considered entirely as in a chain in which one comes before the other. In many aspects we can assume that, but *conversion* is a powerful exception. *Conversion* needs to be understood as a process occurring at the same time as some morphological ones. For that reason we have explored how the lexicon works and what the stratified model of the lexicon is. By doing so, we have been able to study how category specification works. The first impression is that *conversion* being a syntactic operation will overlap with the morphological operations occurring in the stratified model if we assume that both disciplines work at the same level. However, as we have shown in section 3.2.2., the lexical specification rule that works as a filter between stratum 1 and stratum 2 does not select as input the words used in *conversion*. In some way, *conversion* helps to build the lexicon not interfering with the morphology, just as much as the morphology builds the lexicon without interfering with *conversion*.

Moreover, in section 3.2.2 *conversion* has been shown to occur in the first stratum of a stratified model of the lexicon. This leads us with the question whether there are two different syntax in the language. Mainstream syntax is the one that operates at the sentence level. The new syntax would be the one based on word-grammar which we

could call word-syntax. This sort of syntax would only be in charge of helping build the lexicon in a similar fashion to the morphology, the main difference being whether this fashion was by means of overt or covert processes. *Conversion* is hence a word-syntax process that uses words from the lexicon to form new words of a different syntactic category, covertly. These new words show a semantic resemblance to the words they have been syntactically derived (converted) from.

To finish, if we go back to the research questions proposed at the beginning of the paper we see that, firstly, not only the syntax but also the morphology allow the underspecification of roots. As we have seen in section 3, not all words are roots, solely those words that are included in the major word category system with the exception of some prepositions and adverbs. However, both disciplines interact differently with the underspecification. Basically, the syntax allows underspecified roots until the time of utterance while the morphology lexicalises all roots into lexemes in a filter between the first and the second strata. Secondly, it has been shown that even if the heaviest set of word-formation processes is morphological, we can also find at least one word-formation process occurring in the syntax. Therefore, connected to the third research question, *conversion* is out syntactic word-formation process. Nevertheless, we do not really want to see *conversion* as a process bringing new words to the lexicon. The reason for that is that we want to understand *conversion* as an operation that allows new meanings in a lexeme but retains the semantics of the unconverted element. That is to say, the new element gains meaning for being used in a different syntactic slot but at the same time it is generally required to retain the meaning of the original sentence slot. Generally, we need the semantics of the unconverted form to understand the meaning of the *converted* lexeme.

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