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THE CONCEPT OF CONVERSION IN CROSS-LINGUISTIC AND CONTRASTIVE STUDIES

Abstract. In this paper the question is addressed whether conversion (referring to word-class change without addition of derivational affixes) is suitable as a comparative concept in cross-linguistic and contrastive research on word-formation. Controversies concerning the scope of conversion in English and in languages with rich inflection are highlighted. Subtypes of conversion, such as partial conversion and syntactic conversion, are identified. Other terms which are used with reference to affixless word-formation operations are mentioned, such as zero-derivation, paradigmatic derivation or transflexion. A brief overview is given of selected recent contrastive (comparative) studies of conversion/derivation in English and in selected Slavonic or Romance languages, focusing on meaning-based and corpus-based research.

Keywords: conversion; zero-derivation; paradigmatic derivation; contrastive word-formation; cross-linguistic studies

POJĘCIE KONWERSJI W PORÓWNAWCZYCH BADANIACH MIĘDZYJĘZYKOWYCH I W BADANIACH KONTRASTYWNYCH

Abstrakt. Artykuł dotyczy stosowności użycia pojęcia „konwersji” (odnoszącego się do zmiany kategoryjnej leksemów bez obecności afiksów derywacyjnych) w badaniach porównujących słowotwórstwo dwóch lub szeregu języków. Podkreślono rozbieżności dotyczące zakresu operacji konwersji w języku angielskim oraz w językach posiadających rozbudowany system fleksyjny. Zidentyfikowano oraz omówiono typy konwersji, m.in. konwersję częściową oraz konwersję syntaktyczną, oraz terminy używane w odniesieniu do bezafiksalnych procesów słowotwórczych, takie jak derywacja zerowa, derywacja paradygmatyczna lub transfleksja. Przedstawiono przegląd wybranych teoretycznych badań kontrastywnych (porównawczych) nad konwersją/derywacją zerową

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w angielszczyźnie i w wybranym języku słowiańskim lub romańskim. W przeglądzie nacisk położono na badania oparte na analizie semantycznej oraz na analizie korpusowej.

Słowa kluczowe: konwersja; derywacja zerowa; derywacja paradygmatyczna; słowotwórstwo kontrastywne; porównawcze badania międzyjęzykowe

INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses the question of suitability of conversion as a comparative concept in discussing word-class change without dedicated derivational material¹ in typologically different languages (such as languages with poor and with rich inflection). Haspelmath (2018) mentions the difference between language-particular categories and category-like comparative concepts. He suggests that category-like comparative concepts, such as syllable, adnominal demonstrative, or future tense, “were originally used for the description of some particular language and were extended to their comparative use only later” (Haspelmath, 2018, p. 86). This seems to be the case with the notion of conversion, which was primarily used in the description of English.

I will also offer a brief overview of some recent cross-linguistic and contrastive studies on conversion/zero-derivation.

As observed by Lefer and Cartoni (2011), early contrastive studies were focused on the comparison of the phonological and syntactic systems of two (or more) languages. Lefer (2011) states that contrastive word-formation has started to emerge as an independent field of study, yet certain word-formation processes, such as conversion, blending, clipping and reduplication, are under-researched, as is illustrated by the list of publications on contrastive word-formation in the appendix to her paper. It will be shown below that considerable progress has been made in comparative and contrastive studies of conversion/zero-derivation within the past twenty years since the publication of the volume edited by Bauer and Valera (2005).

The outline of this paper is as follows. Section 1 presents briefly the understanding of the term “conversion” in morphological studies of the English language and mentions the use of alternative terms (e.g. functional shift and zero-derivation). Section 2 is devoted to controversies regarding the scope of conversion in cross-linguistic studies. It illustrates difficulties in applying the

¹ This is the definition of conversion proposed by Ševčíková and Pakerys (forthcoming). Štekauer et al. (2012, p. 213) remark that in the case of conversion “a new meaning is added which is not supported by any derivational morpheme.” Cetnarowska (1996, 2017) refers to conversion in Polish as suffixless (or affixless) word-class change.

concept of conversion to languages belonging to different morphological types than English, the focus being directed towards Slavonic languages. Section 3 gives a survey of some recent analyses of conversion/zero-derivation comparing English with Slavonic or Romance languages which exhibit rich inflection. Conclusions are formulated in the final section.

1. CONVERSION IN MORPHOLOGICAL STUDIES OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The term “conversion” was used by Sweet (1900, p. 38ff.) to refer to the use of a word as a different part of speech in the English language. Bauer and Valera (2005, p. 8) define conversion as “a derivational process linking lexemes of the same form but belonging to different word classes”. As observed by Quirk et al. (1983, p. 1560), Plag (2003, p. 108) and Bauer et al. (2013, p. 547), major types of conversion in English include noun-to-verb conversion (examples (1a) and (1b)), verb-to-noun conversion, as in (2a) and (2b), and adjective-to-verb conversion (see (3a) and (3b)).

- (1) a. *bundle*_N > *bundle*_V
b. *staff*_N > *staff*_V
- (2) a. *walk*_V > *walk*_N
b. *jump*_V > *jump*_N
- (3) a. *dry*_A > *dry*_V
b. *clean*_A > *clean*_V

Marchand (1969) and Kastovsky (2005) emphasize the analogy between the creation of novel words by adding overt suffixes to the base (e.g. *develop*_V > *development*_N, *drive*_V > *driver*_N, *humid*_A > *humidify*_V) and by attaching a phonologically null affix, as in the pairs *walk*_V > *walk*_{ØN}, *guide*_V > *guide*_{ØN}, *dry*_A > *dry*_{ØV}. Consequently, they prefer to employ the term “zero-derivation” for affixless word-class change (used also by Dahl & Fabregas, 2018 or by Iordăchioaia & Melloni, 2023).

Marchand (1969) draws the distinction between zero-derivation and conversion. He regards conversion as “a syntactic transposition of a word”, e.g. when the noun *treasury* is used in the syntactic function of an adjective in the phrase *treasury bonds*. He also employs the term “conversion” for cases where the converted items show only some properties of the new word class. For instance, the adjective *poor* functions as the head of the noun phrase *the poor*,

but it does not exhibit the inflectional behaviour typical of nouns. It cannot take the plural inflection (**the poors*) but can occur with the comparative or superlative degree markers (*the poorer, the poorest*). Other scholars (Quirk et al., 1985; Martsa, 2020) treat such a nominal use of adjectives as partial conversion.

Bauer et al. (2013) mention the following English nouns as resulting from adjective-to-noun conversion:

- (4) *Australian, bilingual, daily, empty, executive, variable*

These are examples of “full” (i.e. total) conversion in Bauer et al. (2013) since the output items show the inflectional properties of nouns, e.g. they can occur in the plural form as *Australians, dailies, empties* and *variables*. However, other analyses of such nouns have been proposed in the literature. Kiefer (2005, p. 56) suggests that ethnic names, such as *Australian* and *Spanish*, exhibit multifunctionality and can be used both as nouns and adjectives. Martsa (2020), on the other hand, regards the nominal use of the adjectives such as those in (4) as a case of semantic specialization. The deletion of the head of a noun phrase causes the adjective to inherit the meaning of the whole phrase, e.g. *daily* in *a daily paper*, and *variable* in *a variable element*.

Quirk et al. (1985) recognize “approximate conversion” as a subtype of conversion which involves slight changes in the form of the base unit, e.g. the consonant and vowel modification in the pair *bath_N—bathe_V* and the stress shift in the pair *retake_V—retake_N*. Such changes are excluded from the domain of conversion in English by, among others, Bauer et al. (2013). However, Štekauer (1996) regards stress shift as resulting from conversion, hence he treats *re'take_V > 'retake_N* and *tor'ment_V > 'torment_N* as conversion pairs.

Quirk et al. (1985) mention changes of a secondary word class (i.e. of a syntactic subcategory), such as the use of mass nouns as count nouns in English, as a subtype of conversion, e.g. in the phrase *three coffees* and *Californian wines*. Such a position is not adopted by the majority of morphologists who study conversion/zero-derivation in English, including Marchand (1969), Štekauer (1996), and Bauer et al. (2013).

It might be useful to add that the interpretation of the occurrence of English lexemes with different parts of speech, as illustrated in (1–3), may differ according to the theoretical approach adopted by particular scholars (see Valera & Ruz, 2020 for more discussion).

In his onomasiological theory, Štekauer (1996) regards conversion in English as a conceptual recategorization, which is accompanied by syntactic recategorization. For instance, the conversion of the adjective *clear* into the verb

to clear results in the reinterpretation of the quality-denoting base adjective as a name of an action resulting in this quality. The focus on semantic interpretation makes Štekauer's onomasiological theory close to the cognitive view of conversion as metonymy. Dirven (1999) proposes that event schemata, such as the action schema, underlie conversion processes in English. For instance, the instrument stands metonymically for the whole action schema when nouns such as *harpoon* and *hammer* are converted into verbs.

Farrell (2001) (in the cognitive-functional framework) emphasizes the influence of constructional meaning on the interpretation of phrases, such as *to hammer the metal flat* vs. *to drop the hammer*, or *to look* vs. *to have a look*. He argues that English roots, such as *hammer*, *look*, *bag* and *kiss*, are underspecified with respect to their syntactic category. Their category underspecification results in the availability of the functional shift, i.e. the alternation between the nominal and the verbal usage.

The underspecification of roots is also assumed in syntax-based neo-constructionist approaches to morphology, such as the theory of Distributed Morphology (Iordăchioaia, 2023) and the exoskeletal model (Borer, 2013). According to the assumptions of Distributed Morphology, roots receive their syntactic category when they combine with lexical categorizers (such as nominalizers and verbalizers). In the exoskeletal model, acategorial roots are inserted into syntactic structures and they are indirectly categorized by category-specific functional heads, such as D for nouns and T for verbs.

Bloch-Trojnar (2022) investigates deverbal nouns in Polish in a neo-constructionist framework with a Nano-syntactic bias. Following the analysis of Spanish null deverbal nominals by Fábregas (2014), she assumes that a single exponent can realize more than one syntactic head. The lexical entries of some morphemes contain both a nominaliser and a verbaliser feature so it can spell out either as a noun or a verb. There is no need to postulate zero affixes as lexical nominalizers.

Yet another approach to conversion/zero-derivation can be found in Lieber (2004), where it is proposed that conversion should not be treated as a word-formation process but as a kind of creative coinage, namely a sort of "relisting" in the lexicon. This approach is criticized by Don (2005), who emphasizes the existence of morphological, semantic and phonological restrictions on conversion in English, Dutch and German.

2. CONTROVERSIES REGARDING THE SCOPE OF CONVERSION IN CROSS-LINGUISTIC STUDIES

Canonical conversion involves change of word class and identity of form between the base and the derivative (see Štekauer et al., 2012, p. 213; Valera, 2014, p. 154; Valera, 2015; Bauer & Valera, 2005). This is typical of word-class affixless change in languages with poor inflection, such as English.

It is more difficult to find instances of the formal identity of the base and the derivative in the affixless word class transfer in languages with rich inflection, such as Slavonic languages. The form of the base and the converted item differs due to the obligatory occurrence of inflectional endings and other grammatical morphemes, such as stem-forming thematic markers (also called thematic vowels). Manova (2011, p. 30) postulates the following template for a word in Slavonic languages:

(5) (PREF)—BASE—(DSUFF)—(TM)—(ISUFF)

The base (or the root) of the word can be followed by a derivational suffix (DSUFF), a thematic marker (TM)² and an inflectional suffix (ISUFF). It can also contain a derivational prefix. There is a clear difference between the citation forms of the members of the Polish conversion pair in (6).

- (6) a. *na-radz-i-ć się*
 PREF-advice-TM-INF REFL
 ‘to confer, to deliberate’ (PFV)
- b. *na-rad-a*
 PREF-advice-NOM.SG
 ‘meeting, conference’

The Polish verb in (6a), which is regarded as the base of the noun in (6b), contains the thematic vowel *-i-*, the infinitive ending *-ć* as well as the reflexive clitic *się*. The noun in (6b) contains the case ending *-a*. The presence of inflectional affixes may lead to morphophonemic alternations in the base, such as variation between the root-final consonant /d͡z/ in (6a) and /d/ in (6b).

Consequently, as observed by Valera (2014, p. 160), some morphologists (e.g. Pennanen, 1984, p. 80) assume that the concept of conversion cannot be used with reference to synthetic languages.

² Grammatical morphemes, such as thematic vowels in verbs or vocalic inflections in nouns, are treated here as inflectional morphemes, though some Slavists grant them a dual function (an inflectional and a derivational one).

However, Štekauer et al. (2012) and Valera (2014, 2015) conclude that the use of conversion as a concept in cross-linguistic research is possible if conditions for canonical conversion (set for English) are relaxed and interpreted differently for languages belonging to other morphological types and/or other genealogical language families. Valera (2015) presents a wide range of constructions which can be identified as instances of conversion. He mentions the possibility of finding various subtypes (or various degrees) of conversion within a given language or cross-linguistically.

Manova and Dressler (2005) and Manova (2011) distinguish between root-based, stem-based and word-based conversion. They postulate that languages exhibiting distinct morphological structures differ in the occurrence of those three types of conversion. In isolating languages (such as Chinese and Vietnamese) we find categorial indeterminacy (i.e. lexical multifunctionality) instead of conversion. In languages which are close to the isolating type, such as English, we can find word-based conversion. The citation forms of both members of the conversion pair in such a case are identical, as is shown in (1–3), e.g. *walk_V–walk_N*.

Synthetic languages (with rich inflection) show a preference for root-based conversion, exemplified in (7) and stem-based conversion, as in (8).

- (7) a. *emulsion-e_N* ‘emulsion’ > *emulsion-a-re_V* ‘to emulsify’ (Italian)
 b. *žen-á_N* ‘wife’ > *žen-i-t’(sja)_V* ‘to marry’ (Russian)

In the Italian example of noun-to-verb root-based conversion in (7a), taken from Manova and Dressler (2005, p. 69), the verb differs from the noun in having the theme vowel *-a-* and the inflectional *-re* attached to the root *emulsion-*. In the Russian example in (7b), from Manova and Dressler (2005, p. 90), the derived verb contains the thematic marker *-i-*, the infinitive ending *-t’* and the reflexive postfix *-sja*.

In the case of the stem-based conversion in (8a), the Italian verb “inherits” the thematic vowel *-i-* from the base noun *finis*. A similar analysis is given in Manova and Dressler (2005) for the verb-to-noun conversion in (8b): the Serbo-Croatian noun *igra* occurs with the inflectional ending *-a* which is formally identical to the thematic marker in its base verb *igrati*.

- (8) a. *fîn-i-s* ‘end’ > *fîn-i-re* ‘to end’ (Italian; Manova & Dressler, 2005, p. 87)
 b. *igr-a-ti* ‘to dance, play, act, perform’ > *igr-a* ‘game, play(ing), dance(ing)’ (Serbo-Croatian; Manova & Dressler, 2005, p. 90)

According to Manova and Dressler (2005) and Manova (2011), one can find some instances of word-based conversion in synthetic languages, as shown in (9).³

- (9) a. *učitel'stv-o* 'teachers (collective)' > *učitel'stv-ov-a-t'* (IPFV) 'to be a teacher' (Russian; Manova, 2011, p. 85)
 b. *špión* 'spy' > *špión-i-t'* (colloq.) 'to spy' (Russian; Manova, 2011, p. 82)

Manova and Dressler (2005) as well as Manova (2011) distinguish morphological conversion, exemplified above in (6–9), from syntactic conversion.⁴ The latter type of conversion involves a change in the function of the lexeme without any change of its inflectional paradigm. It can be exemplified by substantivization of German adjectives in (10), or the adjectivization of nouns functioning as modifiers in English compound nouns (as in Marchand, 1969).

- (10) *gut_A* 'good' > *der gute Mann* 'the good man' > *der Gute_N* 'the good one (NOM.SG)' (*des Guten* GEN.SG) (German)

It needs to be added that the concept of conversion is often replaced by, or juxtaposed with, other morphological terms in Slavonic word-formation, such as zero-derivation, paradigmatic derivation, and transflexion, as pointed out by Manova (2011), Štekauer et al. (2012), Cetnarowska (2017) and Ševčíková (2021), among others.

Manova (2011, p. 6) notes that the term "zero-derivation" taken from Marchand (1969) is well-established among Slavists, especially in the Russian and Serbo-Croatian linguistic tradition. A brief look at chapters devoted to selected Slavonic languages in Müller et al. (2016) confirms Manova's statement. Uluhanov (2016) analyses Russian suffixless deverbal nouns as zero-derivatives, e.g. *vybory* 'elections' from the verb *vybirat'* 'to choose, elect'. Grčević (2016) treats Croatian deverbal nouns such as *napad* 'attack' as zero-derived⁵ from the verb *napasti* 'to attack'.

Polish morphologists prefer nowadays the term "paradigmatic derivation" to conversion with reference to word-class change which involves no addition

³ Cetnarowska (2017) provides semantic arguments against treating case/number endings in conversion nouns as parts of thematic markers in (9a) or (8b).

⁴ Iordăchioaia (2023) postulates a three-way split of conversion into morphological type, syntactic type and root-based conversion. In the case of the latter type roots are treated as acategorical and they are assigned word category by their syntactic context (i.e. by appropriate functional projections).

⁵ However, Grčević (2016) interprets the vocalic case/number ending *-a* in the Croatian noun *dobava* 'supply' as a derivational formative, hence he regards the derivation of this noun from the verb *dobaviti* 'to supply' as overt suffixation.

of a derivational suffix (cf. Waszakowa, 1993; Szymanek, 2010; Nagórko, 2016). The concept of paradigmatic derivation emphasizes the importance of inflectional endings (and the whole inflectional paradigm) in signalling the semantic change and the transfer of the derivative to a new word-class.

Štekauer et al. (2012) as well as Ševčíková (2021) observe that Slovak and Czech morphologists often employ the term “transflexion”, proposed by Dokulil (1982). Transflexion denotes “class-changing processes that are overtly marked by a difference between the citation forms of the input and output words” (Ševčíková, 2021, p. 100). Ivanová and Ološtiak (2016) mention the formation of deverbal nouns in Slovak as an example of transflexion, e.g. *zmen-i-t’* ‘to change’ > *zmen-a* ‘the change’. They recognize conversion in Slovak only when the citation forms of the base and the derivative are the same,⁶ as in the derivation of the noun *ženatý* ‘married (of a man)’ from the phrase *ženatý chlap* ‘married man’ (involving the ellipsis of the nominal head).

Ivanová and Ološtiak (2016, p. 2907) assume that there are no denominal or deadjectival conversion verbs in Slovak, in contrast to English. They treat the verb *prac-ov-a-t’* ‘to work’ as a result of suffixation since they interpret *-ov-* as a derivational morpheme. In a similar fashion, Uluhanov (2016) regards thematic suffixes as derivational morphemes and analyses Russian deadjectival and denominal verbs, such as *noč-eva-t’* ‘to stay overnight’ from the noun *noč* ‘night’, as suffixal derivatives. In contrast, Manova (2011) treats formation of denominal and deadjectival suffixless verbs in Bulgarian, Croatian and Russian as affixless derivation, i.e. as conversion.

Doubts concerning the inflectional or derivational status of thematic affixes in Polish, e.g. *-owa-*, *-a-*, *-e-*, are mentioned by Waszakowa (1993, p. 11). Szymanek (2010, pp. 186–190) identifies them as inflectional elements, hence he mentions Polish denominal verbs, e.g. *król-owa-ć* ‘to reign’ from *król* ‘king’, among paradigmatic derivatives. However, Nagórko (2016, p. 2844) includes those verbs in her chapter on (overt) suffixation.

Manova and Dressler (2005) and Manova (2011) distinguish conversion from modification and the two processes are regarded as distinct morphological techniques. Consequently, the presence of prosodic modifications in (11), or segmental changes in (12) (i.e. vocalic and/or consonantal alternations) exclude those instances of suffixless category change from the scope of conversion in their Natural Morphology approach.

⁶ Similarly, Grčević (2016) assumes that conversion can transfer Croatian adjectives into the class of nouns (e.g. *mlada* ‘young’ > *mlada* ‘bride’).

- (11) a. *re'write*_V > *'rewrite*_N
 b. *osnov-á*_V 'I found' > *osnóv-a*_N 'base' (Bulgarian; Manova & Dressler, 2005, p. 77)
- (12) a. *drug*_N 'friend' > *druž-i-t'*_V 'to be a friend' (Russian)
 b. *blood*_N > *bleed*_V

Ivanová and Ološtiak (2016) point out that transflexion may be accompanied by vocalic and/or consonantal alternations in the stem, as in the Slovak verb-noun pair *nakaz-iť* 'to infect' *nákaz-a* 'infection'. Moreover, since transflexion implies a shift to a different inflectional paradigm it does not have to involve a change of the primary word-class, as in the derivation *vták* 'bird' > *vtáč-a* 'young bird'. This agrees with the view of Dokulil (1968), who distinguished between transcategorical conversion (e.g. verb-to-noun conversion) and intracategorical conversion (e.g. the shift of nouns from the masculine to the feminine grammatical gender).

Similar assumptions are made by Polish linguists with reference to paradigmatic derivation. Paradigmatic derivation in Polish may involve a change of the inflectional paradigm and the syntactic subcategory without the change of the part of speech. This can be exemplified by the derivation of female nouns, such as *markiza* 'marchioness' from the masculine noun *markiz* 'marquis'. There may be segmental and suprasegmental modifications resulting from the operation of paradigmatic derivation, such as /d/ : /ɖ/ alternation in (6) or /k/ : /č/ alternation in (13):

- (13) *dziwak*_N 'an eccentric' > *dziwacz-e-ć*_V 'to become eccentric' (Polish)

Manova (2011), in contrast to Uluhanov (2016) and Grčević (2016), treats formation of denominal and deadjectival suffixless verbs in Bulgarian, Croatian and Russian as conversion. She assumes that deverbal suffixless nouns in those languages also result from conversion (during which the inflectional thematic suffixes are deleted). In agreement with Dokulil (1968), she allows conversion to be either word-class changing or word-class preserving.

3. CONVERSION/ZERO-DERIVATION IN CONTRASTIVE AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES

As proposed by König (2012) and Gast (2012), contrastive linguistics can be viewed as a branch of synchronic comparative studies. Gaeta (2020, p. 27)

adds that contrastive linguistics can be treated as “an extreme case of typological comparison carried out on the basis of a small language sample”. It usually involves an in-depth investigation of similarities and differences between language-particular categories or comparative concepts in a pair of languages. Due to its status as a global language (Crystal, 2003), English is very often selected as one of the languages to be analysed in contrastive studies.

In spite of the disagreements concerning the scope of conversion and the terminology used to denote affixless derivation, it is possible to carry out some useful comparisons of conversion/zero-derivation in English and in inflectionally rich languages. For the comparison to be relevant, it is desirable to focus on some subtypes of conversion/zero-derivation in one language and its equivalents in another language, for instance verb-to-noun conversion, or adjective-to-verb conversion. The basis of comparison may be not only the word-category change involved but also the semantic relations between the base and the derived member of the conversion pair, as analysed by Marchand (1969). The researcher can also make use of conceptual categories from Štekauer’s (1996) onomasiological approach to word-formation, semantic categories proposed in the cognitive approach by Radden and Dirven (2007), the set of senses employed for morphologically complex English words by Bauer et al. (2013) or, for instance, the set of comparative semantic concepts postulated for cross-linguistic analyses of affixation by Bagasheva (2017).

Bloch-Trojnar (2013) discusses deverbal action nouns in English, Polish and Irish, including both suffixed nouns and suffixless nouns. Following the terminologies established among researchers who study either English or Polish, she refers to nouns which lack overt derivational suffixes as zero-derivatives in the case of English lexemes and as paradigmatic derivatives in the case of Polish. In spite of using different terms for Polish and English suffixless action nominals, Bloch-Trojnar (2013) highlights similarities in their syntactic behaviour and semantic interpretation. She points out that they exhibit process-result (i.e. event/non-event) polysemy, as in the case of *construction* and Polish *ochrona* ‘protection; security staff’. They also show a similar range of non-eventive readings, such as the senses of result, patient, agent, and instrument. When occurring in the event reading, such action nouns are able to take internal arguments and adverbial modifiers (including aspectual adverbials), as illustrated in (14).

- (14) a. *zmiana przez Eureko głównego negocjatora* ‘the change of the chief negotiator by Eureko’ (Polish; NKJP)
 b. *His sudden change of direction confused her still further.* (BNC)

Gast (2012) emphasizes the importance of corpora in contrastive studies, having in mind mainly the learner corpora and parallel corpora (which contain texts translated from one language into another). McEnery and Xiao (2007, p. 20) employ the term “comparable corpora” with reference to “corpora containing components that are collected using the same sampling procedures”. They point out that various monolingual corpora, such as the Korean National Corpus and the Chinese National Corpus, adopt the sampling procedures which are similar to those used by the British National Corpus (BNC). Consequently, such corpora can form subparts of a balanced comparable corpus.

The recent years have shown the importance of large monolingual corpora for in-depth comparisons of affixless derivation in some selected European languages.

Hledíková and Ševčíková (2024) carry out a corpus-based comparative study of the meanings of verb-noun conversion pairs in English and Czech, regardless of the directionality of the conversion process. They examine conversion pairs extracted randomly from the British National Corpus for English and from the SYN2015 corpus (Křen et al., 2015) for Czech. They conclude that, in spite of distinct morphological structure of nouns and verbs in both languages, suffixless nouns in English and Czech show similar semantic properties. The senses “Instance of action/process” and “Result” are identified as the most common ones for English as well as for Czech conversion nouns. This is also a common pattern of polysemy for such nouns in both languages, as observed in the English noun *purchase* and the Czech noun *dotisk* ‘reprint’.

In the case of conversion verbs, Hledíková and Ševčíková (2024) identify some differences between their range of senses in the languages under comparison. For instance, there are more Czech denominal conversion verbs in the agentive sense than English agentive conversion verbs, as is shown by the occurrence of the Czech conversion pair *novin-ář* ‘journalist’–*novin-ař-i-t* ‘to work as a journalist’ and the lack of the corresponding denominal conversion verb **to journalist* in English.

There are some recent corpus-based investigations of conversion/zero-derivation in which English is compared with inflectionally rich Romance languages.

Iordăchioaia and Melloni (2023) examine datasets of English and Italian zero-derived nominals. They employ their empirical data to argue against some theoretical claims put forward by Grimshaw (1990) and Borer (2013). They demonstrate that zero-derived nouns in English and Italian do not differ considerably in their morphosyntactic and semantic properties from suffixed

nouns (in contrast to what is postulated by Grimshaw, 1990, and Borer, 2013). Zero-derived nominals can realize argument structure, i.e. they can occur with internal arguments and adverbial modifiers, as is shown in 14 above for Polish and English affixless action nouns (see also Bloch-Trojnar, 2022 for a more extensive discussion of zero-derived nominals with argument structure). Morphologically complex verbs in English, including phrasal verbs (*soften up*), prefixed verbs (*retake*) and denominal conversion verbs (*shampoo*, *taxi*), can undergo conversion into nouns. Italian zero-derived nouns can contain verbalizing suffixes, such as the suffix *-eggi* in the deverbal noun in (15).

(15) *passo* ‘step’ > *pass-eggi-are* ‘to walk’ > *pass-eggi-o* ‘walk_N’

Moreover, Iordăchioaia and Melloni (2023) demonstrate that zero-derived nouns in Italian and English exhibit the same polysemy patterns as suffixed deverbal nouns.

Valera (2023) examines semantic categories which occur in noun-to-verb zero-derivation/conversion in English and Spanish, comparing them to senses of affixed verbs in both languages. His data come from the British National Corpus and Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual (CREA). Having performed a statistical analysis of his research results, he concludes that English zero-derived denominal verbs belong mainly to ORNATIVE and EFFECTIVE semantic classes, where ornative verbs can be paraphrased as ‘to provide with X’ (e.g. *to glass*, *to staff*) and effective verbs denote that some entity comes into being (e.g. *to kitten* ‘to give birth to kittens’). The semantic categories associated most frequently with Spanish denominal zero-derived verbs are slightly different, as is shown by the prevalence of the ornative type of verbs (e.g. *premiar* ‘to give an award to somebody’), followed by the classes of performative verbs ‘to do X, to perform X’ (*contactar* ‘to establish contact or communication with somebody’), instrumental verbs ‘to use X’ (*cinzelar* ‘to chisel stones or metals’), and resultative verbs ‘to make into X’ (*parcelar* ‘to measure, to mark plots for the land registry’).

Villalva (2022) compares the formation of deadjectival and denominal verbs in English and Portuguese. She emphasizes the coexistence of three types of word-formation processes used to form morphologically complex verbs, namely suffixation, conversion and parasynthesis. Parasynthetic lexemes result from the co-occurrence of two operations: prefixation and suffixation or conversion. Parasynthetic verbs in Portuguese are illustrated in (16) with the examples from Villalva (2022, pp. 272–274). They contain parasynthetic

prefixes, such as *des-*, *es-*, *en-* or *a-*, whose presence triggers the word-class change (i.e. the co-occurrence of conversion).⁷

- (16) a. *carril* ‘rail’ > *descarrilar* ‘to derail’
 b. *vazio* ‘empty’ > *esvaziar* ‘to empty’
 c. *crespo* ‘curly’ > *encrespar* ‘to curl’

Using the Portuguese data as a point of departure, Villava (2022) puts forward the proposal that the formation of prefixed deadjectival and denominal verbs in English, such as *encamp*, *enrich* and *debone*, should be reanalysed as an instance of parasynthesis (i.e. prefixation + conversion). This confirms the observation made by König (2012, p. 22) that Contrastive Analysis “describes one language from the perspective of another and will therefore reveal properties of languages that are not easily visible otherwise”.

CONCLUSIONS

Cross-linguistic or typological studies on conversion are made difficult by differences in the morphological structure of languages under comparison, by controversies concerning the scope of conversion as well as by the partial overlap between terms established in various linguistic traditions to name affixless derivational processes (e.g. conversion, zero-derivation, transflexion and paradigmatic derivation).

However, it is useful to carry out a fine-grained corpus-based investigation of selected subtypes of conversion in pairs of languages (including English and an inflectionally rich language), for instance a contrastive study of noun/adjective-to-verb conversion or verb-to-noun conversion.

Such detailed comparisons may reveal significant similarities or subtle contrasts between selected word-formation operations in the languages under analysis, for instance differences concerning the restrictions on those operations or the range of senses of converted items. They may provide arguments against particular theoretical claims, such as the view of deverbal conversion

⁷ When discussing denominal and deadjectival verb derivation in Polish and Russian which involves both the addition of a prefix and a change of the word class, Malicka-Kleparska (2015) refers to the morphological operation in question as circumfixation, i.e. the attachment of an affix which consists of two parts: one preceding and the other following the stem. This can be exemplified by the derivation of the Polish causative verb *przy-zwyczaj-i-ć* ‘to accustom’ (from *zwyczaj* ‘custom’) and the Russian verb *od-nov-i-t’* ‘to renovate’ (from *novyj* ‘new’).

nouns as being radically different from suffixed deverbal nouns in their syntactic and semantic properties. Contrastive studies on conversion may lead to new insights, as is illustrated by the proposal to reanalyse the data in one language when looking at it from the perspective of another language (for instance, in the case of English and Portuguese data compared by Villalva, 2022).

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