

WORD FORMATION: CONVERSION

- the process of forming new words of a different part of speech without adding any derivative element
- zero derivation
- original word – new word: exist alongside
- further derivation, e.g. *view* (n) > *view* (v) → *view-er/view-able*

CONVERSION

- widespread development in present-day English
- absence of formal signs marking the part of speech
- caused by the loss of inflection (historical cause)
- e.g. OE *drinkan* (v) and *drinca* (n) → ME *drink* (v, n)
- primary vs. secondary

CONVERSION - classification

Primary word-class conversion

- **Verb → Noun**
e.g. *desire, swim, answer, cover, lie, ...*
- **Adjective → Noun**
e.g. *bitter, daily, regulars, marrieds, ...*
- **Noun → Verb**
e.g. *bottle, coat, glue, pilot, ship, ...*
- **Adjective → Verb**
e.g. *calm, dirty, dry, empty, yellow, ...*
- **Noun → Adjective** (attributive and predicative)
e.g. *a brick garage* ← *The garage is brick.*
Worcester porcelain ← *The porcelain is Worcester.*

Secondary word-class conversion

- Nouns
- Verbs
- Adjectives

Secondary word-class conversion: NOUNS

- **Mass nouns → count noun**

two coffees/cheeses, some paints, a fresh bread, a difficulty, a miserable failure, ...

- **Count noun → mass noun**

an inch of pencil, a few square feet of floor, ...

- **Proper noun → common noun**

a Rolls-Royce, He wore Wellingtons, triple axel, ...

- **Stative predication → dynamic predication**

He is a fool. He is being a fool.

He is a hero. He is being a hero.

Secondary word-class conversion: VERBS

- **Intransitive verb → transitive verb**

run the business, march the prisoners, dive one's head into the water, fly, stop, turn, twist, She wrote a book. ...

- **Transitive verb → intransitive verb**

The clock winds up at the back. Your book reads well. Have you washed yet? We have eaten already. ...

Secondary word-class conversion: ADJECTIVES

- Non-gradable adj. → gradable adjectives
He's more English than the English.

- Pronunciation
Lenis and fortis consonants (lengthening of preceding vowel in verbs and shortening in nouns)

- Change in vowel (gradation)

- Shift of stress (nouns, adjectives on the 1st syllable / verbs on the 2nd syllable)
abstract, compound, compress, conduct, digest, discount, escort, export, extract, ferment, import, impress, insult, perfume, present, record, segment, survey, transfer, upset, ...

NOUN	VERB	NOUN	VERB
house	house	relief	relieve
advice	advice	belief	believe
use	use	mouth	mouth
shelf	shelve	teeth	teethe

vowel change	noun	verb
e → i:	breath	breathe
ɪ → aɪ	emphasis	emphasise
ʌ → i:	blood	bleed
u → i:	food	feed

Occasional formations (nonce-words)

- emotionally coloured
- unique occasion
- e.g. *Don't **darling** me! Don't **yes-mum** me!*

Partial conversion

- a kind of double process
- 1. a noun is formed by conversion from a verbal stem
2. this noun is combined with verbs (e.g. give, make, have, take, ...) to form a verbal phrase
- e.g. *to have a chat, to give a laugh*

Marginal Cases of Conversion

- shift of stress (neither regular, nor productive)
- e.g. verb → noun (abstract, import, refill, transfer, ...)
verb → adjective (frequent, moderate, perfect, ...)