

REVIEWS

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Laurie Bauer and Salvador Valera (eds.), *Approaches to conversion/zero-derivation*. Münster, New York, Munich, and Berlin: Waxmann, 2005. 175 pp., £19.90 (pb.), ISBN 3-8309-1456-3.

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The phenomenon of *conversion* - or *zero-derivation*, *functional change*, *multiple word-class membership* - is one of the issues in linguistics which periodically attract a fair amount of attention, while never actually managing to take centre-stage in most linguists' perception. From an outsider's perspective, the discussion must have seemed to revolve around similar problems over the past decades, such as the definition of, and designation for, the phenomenon, the direction of the derivation process and a few others. This perception is not entirely correct, however. For example, recent contributions published during the last renaissance prior to the book under review such as Stekauer (1996), Twardzisz (1997), Dirven (1999), and Farrell (2001) have approached conversion from fresh angles, many of them taking a cognitive-linguistic and/or onomasiological stance.

In addition to the concise introduction by Laurie Bauer and Salvador Valera, the volume contains six papers. Four were written by established protagonists in the morphology-and-word-formation scene: Laurie Bauer, Dieter Kastovsky, Ferenc Kiefer, and Wolfgang U. Dressler (together with Stela Manova). Martin Neef and Doris Schonefeld contributed the remaining two papers. A number of contributions were presented by invited speakers at a symposium on Conversion/Zero-Derivation held in Szentendre, Hungary, in 2002. The book is rounded off by subject and person indices.

In their introduction, Bauer and Valera outline the major issues traditionally involved in the study of conversion, among them the notorious questions of definition, terminology and directionality. Also discussed are the reliance of notions of conversion on notions of word-classes, relations between meaning and form, typological issues and semantic restrictions on possible bases of conversion. Rather than providing summaries of the individual papers, the editors refer to them where appropriate and rely on the abstracts preceding each of the papers to serve as introductions. In view of the relatively small number of papers it is not surprising that the editors have not arranged the book in sections.

One of the main criteria for the definition of conversion is the change of word-class produced by that process. The main concern of Laurie Bauer's paper 'Conversion and the notion of lexical category' is to draw attention to the fact that word-classes, or *lexical categories* in his terminology, are by no means clear-cut Aristotelian categories, but characterized by features in the different dimensions of form, function, and meaning. He looks at infinitival constructions in a number of languages in order to show that infinitives display a range of properties, from more verbal to more nominal. Conversion

may not always result in an unambiguous transposition to another word-class, but may be 'partial', for example, in the sense that an item is no longer a prototypical instance of, say, the word-class of verbs. With regard to infinitives, Bauer pleads for a more differentiated view of what verbs converted to nouns gain (e.g. the ability to co-occur with a determiner), and what they give up (the ability to take arguments).

In the first part of his contribution on 'Conversion and/or zero: word-formation theory, historical linguistics, and typology' Dieter Kastovsky repeats some of the familiar arguments for the zero-derivation account of the phenomenon, most notably the analogous function of overtly marked suffixes and the semantic changes involved in the process. Delving deep into the history of Indo-European morphology, he comes up with more support for the zero-explanation. The diachronic development from Indo-European to modern Germanic languages, Kastovsky argues, must be seen as a move from root-based to stem-based morphology. This resulted in a split of morphological processes into inflection vs. derivation. In such a system, where former derivatives are either lost or reinterpreted as inflectional endings, zero becomes the default case in the absence of overt morphological marking. Kastovsky stresses that this applies to inflectional languages (like German) to the same extent as it does to those with greatly reduced inflectional morphology (like English). The widespread assumption that the loss of inflectional suffixes in English promoted conversion is thus claimed to be misguided.

Ferenc Kiefer gives an outline of 'Types of conversion in Hungarian'. In addition to fairly familiar types of conversions from adjectives to nouns, present and past participles to adjectives and changes from active to passive comparable to English *translate - translatable* familiar from many languages, Hungarian has a productive class of conversion from noun to adjective which is uncommon in Indo-European languages. These conversions, e.g. *vitéz* 'champion' > *vitéz* 'courageous', are explained by the extraction of a salient property of the noun concept which is expressed as an adjective. Anticipating issues addressed in Doris Schöneberg's paper (see below), it can be said that this process lends itself readily to a cognitive explanation in terms of metonymy. The four morphological types are crosscategorized with three different usage conditions: *contextually driven* conversions, *syntactically determined* conversions (determined by the argument structure of the input element), and *semantically determined* conversions depending on the meaning of the input or output of the conversion.

Stela Manova and Wolfgang U. Dressler's paper on 'The morphological technique of conversion in the inflecting-fusional type' assesses conversion within the framework of Natural Morphology. As the authors demonstrate, conversion is less natural, i.e. more marked, than the competing processes of affixation, substitution, and modification. The fact that conversion is nevertheless highly productive in many languages (including English) is explained as a case of language-specific system-adequacy rather than universal preferences for naturalness. A comparison of data from a large number of languages of different types reveals that conversion is typically word-based in isolating languages, but can be word-, stem- or root-based in inflecting ones. As in English, conversion to verbs is the most productive type in Slavic languages. This is probably due to the poverty of derivational suffixes in verbal morphology in both (types of) languages.

Martin Neef contributes a paper 'On some alleged constraints on conversion'. Comparing conversion to apparently similar processes and phenomena like polysemy and transposition, he claims that while conversion is a lexeme-forming process, it does not constitute a morphological category, as it is impossible to ascribe a constant meaning to it. Neef goes on to argue that if conversion were indeed a morphological category, then one would have to be able to find constraints on conversion. Focusing on data from German and English, Neef produces counterevidence for the major restrictions on conversion proposed in previous research. Conversions from proper nouns (*7 was Robert McNamara'd...*, Paul Simon), from foreign bases (G. *interviewen*, *maniküren*), and from complex bases (G. *wirtschaften*, *frühstücken*) are just as possible as forms which are potentially blocked by homonymous competitors (G. *filzen* 'to felt' < *Filz* vs. *filzen* 'to frisk').

Doris Schönefeld's paper on 'Zero-derivation - functional change - metonymy' reviews and considerably refines recent proposals in cognitive linguistics (e.g. Dirven 1999; Radden & Kövecses 1999) to extend the notion of metonymy in such a way as to include conversion. Metonymy is thus seen as a cognitive principle underlying and motivating the linguistic process of conversion, in which parts of an event-schema come to stand for the whole event or for other parts of the schema. Among the typical examples are the INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION metonymy motivating the verbs *to ski* and *to shampoo (one's hair)* and the AGENT FOR ACTION metonymy underlying *to butcher (the cow)*. Such a view convincingly explains conversion as a semantic-conceptual process and regards changes in the morphological, syntactic, and paradigmatic properties of converted items as results of the conceptual re-categorization.

The content of the book seen as a whole is perhaps less original than one would have wished it to be. While many of the data provided - e.g. on Hungarian, on Slavic languages, on allegedly impossible formations in English and German - are original and very interesting, only a small amount of work of a distinctly empirical nature is presented, let alone systematic corpus studies or linguistic experiments. Fresh theoretical approaches are represented in the book, but they do not feature as prominently as the traditional morpho-grammatical perspectives.

Nevertheless the volume can undoubtedly be recommended as a collective state-of-the-art account of conversion, which was badly needed simply because a comparable collection on the topic did not exist. The book raises all the major issues involved, gives in-depth discussions of terminological and notional questions, contains data from various typologically and genetically different languages, looks at the phenomenon from both the synchronic and diachronic perspectives and approaches it from a range of theoretical frameworks.

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