

ON PRODUCTIVITY, CREATIVITY AND RESTRICTIONS ON WORD CONVERSION IN ENGLISH

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Abstract. *This paper is dedicated to some of the aspects of the word-formation process of conversion in English, namely the questions of productivity which is very relevant in this process, creativity which makes a vital source of conversion, as well as all those elements that restrain the conversion of words from one class to another. The central morphological preconditions and other sources of conversion in language are considered in the article. Further on, it makes a statement of all the factors which affect the high productivity of conversion and all the domains in which this productivity is at its peak, accompanied with a series of illustrative examples that best express the essence of the productivity mechanism. The fact that the pattern of more productive types of conversion is copied in certain other subtypes of conversion is also emphasized in the paper. Finally, the factors that influence the restriction of word converting can be detected in the so-called blocking, semantic factors and some other phenomena in language.*

Key words: *English language, word-formation, conversion, productivity, creativity in language.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The basis of this paper is to be found in a larger-scale research concerning conversion, an ever so present process of word formation and lexicon enrichment in English. The term **conversion** in this article implies the process of forming words by way of changing the word class, function, and therefrom the meaning of a particular lexical item, during which occurs no corresponding change in the form of the word in terms of adding derivational affixes. This definition of conversion would, in all probability, be regarded incomplete unless we clearly stated that the original form on which we have based the conversion does not cease to exist with this shift.

On the other hand, every kind of change in word function cannot be considered as conversion proper. It is often the case that the speaker, for the purposes of immediate

communication of certain facts or ideas, uses certain words in a way they have never been used before. Such words have no tendency of becoming permanent lexical items registered by lexicographers in the most important dictionaries of the language, and can be said to serve one-time purpose only. This kind of formation is referred to as *nonce* formation of words, which can be characterized as a kind of "temporary conversion" so that the speaker could, judging by the nature of the occurrence, maintain the train of thought and expression on the right track, or avoid repeating clauses or parts of clauses, as in the following example of a sentence fragment *...his current fascination and feature of the "Two Georges", the novel he has just...err...co-authored with that science fiction writer...*

Although the formal identity of a pair of words makes the basis of conversion, it is important to understand that the conversion relation that exists between the items of the pair is semantically conditioned. Phonemic and orthographic concurrence of forms is not the crucial precondition for accepting those words as a conversion pair. Despite no morphophonological differences between the bases of the adjective *long* and the verb *to long*, this cannot be a case of conversion, because these words are of different semantic contents between which no derivational link can be established. The adjective *long* meaning "not short" and the verb *to long* which means "to yearn or covet for", represent only an example of a pair of homophones or homographs. On the other hand, the words adj. *cool* (between warm and cold) and vb. *to cool* (make or become cool) can be quite obviously semantically related.

This paper takes into account one of the most important features of this formation process, namely the productivity of creating words upon this model, as well as introducing new words based on the pattern of the existing forms. It also aims at analyzing the preconditions necessary for enabling the existence of this kind of word formation process in English. The mechanisms and chief domains of conversion, the restricting factors of word converting and other aspects of creativity in language on the basis of this word formation process are given in the fourth part of the paper. Although the process of conversion, which is also known as *zero-derivation* or *functional shift*, does exist in other languages, the discussion will be focused predominantly on the process of conversion in English.

2. PRECONDITIONS AND SOURCES OF CONVERSION IN ENGLISH

In this section we discuss some of the prerequisites that were necessary for the possibility of not only using the same word forms with different functions, but also of their becoming full-fledged members of another word class. After that, we shall try to point out some of the aspects of language communication which initiate or bring about word conversion in English.

The basic precondition for the process of converting words from one class into another must have been some of the phonemic changes in English which were precursors of significant loss in inflectional suffixes. Of particular importance for the enabling of conversion were those changes which were instrumental in the gradual weakening and eventual dropping of unstressed syllables on word final positions. This particular alteration in the language system occurred in two stages within the period known as the Middle English, when the closing infinitive suffix of verbs *-en* disappeared.

In the first phase, the ultimate phoneme of this ending /n/ disappeared in a very complex process which had originated in the Old English period in the north of the country, under the strong influence of the Scandinavian languages.¹ According to H. C. Wyld,² verbs with the infinitival inflection -n could hardly be found in the written documents of the third quarter of the fifteenth century, and even as early as the very beginning of that period, these forms were rare. For the sake of illustration, such words were the noun *account* and the verb *accounte(n)*.

The disappearance of the other /e/ phoneme of the infinitival suffix also started very early in the northern section of the island, as opposed to the rest of the language community, where this process did not have its onset until later in the 14th century. As it can be easily deduced, this process was the main cause that the infinitive form of verbs lost their previous morphophonological characteristics that had erstwhile been a clear demarcation line between verbs and nouns in the nominative case. As opposed to Serbian, where there can be no difficulty in distinguishing substantive nominatives from verbal infinitives in isolation, for instance, n. *račun* vs. vb. *računati*, with a thematic suffix (base ending) /a/ as a clear differential, in English, these forms are indistinguishable, save for the presence of the infinitive particle, n. *account* and vb. *to account*. Based on this, Y. M. Biese (1941:247), one of the leading authorities on the topic, makes the following statement: "...the outcome of this phonetic process was an enormous number of monosyllabic word-pairs, i.e. words that were no longer characterized as nouns or verbs by their phonetic structure."

Another very significant fact concerning the sources of conversion as a way of obtaining new words is that in the English language, as in every other language, there existed, as Biese (1941:390) put it "the old-established habit, handed down from OE to ME..." to form new words for certain objects, concepts and actions from the extralinguistic reality on the basis of already existing words, so that their functional counterparts in other word classes are obtained.

On the other hand, it is quite certain that the development of such a vast number of conversion-words was under the strong impact of analogous formation of words, since parallelism and analogy have a rather important part in the constitution and transformation of lingual ways of expression. For example, it is through analogy with the athematic, fifth kind that the Serbian first person present tense inflectional suffix developed for all types of verbs. Confirming this, Biese (1941:272) expresses his views: "There can be no doubt that conversions already existing, especially if they were words of common use, were the pattern on which numerous new conversions of a similar meaning could be formed." The author primarily has in mind the verbs *to master*, *to lord*, *to king*, *to husband*, *to father*, which have had a strong influence on creating new verbs upon the same model. However, if we accept this opinion, we have to, perhaps, expand it by saying that analogy did not only affect language through the forming of new conversion examples which are "of a similar meaning" but, on a much wider scale, as a principle or manner in word formation in general.

¹ O. Jespersen (1965) *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, Vol. 6-Morphology, George Allen & Unwin / Ejnar Munksgard, London / Copenhagen, p. 31

² A reference to the work by H. C. Wyld (1936) *A History of Modern Colloquial English*, Oxford, is made by Y. M. Biese (1941) *Origins and Development of Conversions in English*, *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, B 45, 2, Helsinki, p. 388.

In his extensive study, Biese (1941:273) also expressed his interesting observation about the analogical influence that synonyms had had on the formation of new conversion-words, illustrating it with the example of a verse by T. Lily-a taken from "Mother Bombie": *My head is full of hammers, and they haue so **malletted** my wit, that I am almost a malcontent*. According to the author, the conversion of the noun *hammer* served as a model on the basis of which the verb *malletted* was formed, all that to the end of avoiding repetition of words, which is a frequently used stylistic characteristic.

Other potential linguistic causes of the occurrence of this phenomenon in language are not analyzed here in detail, but there is sufficient ground to assume that, just as anywhere else in language, the principle of language economy or tendency to shorter and simpler expression in everyday language has an inexorable effect in word formation as well. It is definite, however, that this usage of words or forming new lexical items with no additional material has originated from the need of the speakers of language to formulate their thoughts, ideas, or emotions in a way which requires precision and conciseness. Apparently, it is easier and shorter to say, for instance, *to bottle water* than *to put /pour water in bottles*, without omitting a single element of the meaning at that. Otherwise, the process such as conversion of words would have no practical significance at all.

In this direction, when it comes to the most important sources and reasons for accepting conversion as an important process in the language in general, creative literary writing has always been, by all parameters, a real "well" for newly-converted words, where conversion offered authors, and poets in particular, a powerful means for shaping their notions and observations. As it has been mentioned on several places in the literature concerning conversion, the creative work of William Shakespeare presented one of the turning points in stimulating more flexible use of words in classes which are not very characteristic to them. Endeavouring to account for the ways in which the poet's mind operates in terms of conversion during the moments of creative strain, Biese (1941:401) makes use of Shakespeare's lines from "Lucrece" : "*Time's glory is to calm contending kings, to unmask falsehood and bring truth to light, to stamp the seal of time in aged things, to wake the morn and **sentinel** the night, to wrong the wronger till he render right.*" In this part, the poet goes on enumerating the qualities of time putting them in a line of almost identical units of language. When a poetic image contained in the word *sentinel* forces itself upon the poet, he does not resist the ready-made syntactic structure and ordering of functional elements according to which it is for a verb to appear.

Then the easiest solution of the situation is to form a verb from the word which the linguistic counterpart of the idea *sentinel*, that is the substantive *sentinel*. The syntactical scheme prevailing in the passage has left a blank place so to speak that must be filled with a word functioning as a verb. Now the fact that no phonetic changes, except the addition of verbal endings, are needed when the substantive *sentinel* is to be transformed into a word functioning as a verb, greatly facilitates the transmutation.

(Biese, 1941:401)

This line of thinking can be considered applicable in many respects when it comes to other forms of expression by means of language, particularly in speech. In colloquial language, the speaker does not have enough time for a thorough structuring of the utterance in the language sequence, but is forced to "think on his feet" in order to maintain the logical stream of thought, and preserve the current syntactic and semantic frame of the started

sentence, and thus the cohesion of the whole speech act. This makes the contextual preconditions for using forms which perhaps subconsciously impose themselves on the speaker, so that he creates sentences containing words infrequently used in this sense : "He took another glance at the bar of Irish Spring, then **thumbed** down his pants and undershorts."³ or "He **forked** steak into his mouth."⁴

3. PRODUCTIVITY OF CONVERSION AND CREATIVITY IN LANGUAGE

The process of word conversion is nowadays considered a highly prominent way of forming new words in the English language. Several authors, as well as the increasing number of words that have become a constituent part of the standard English lexicon, speak in favour of this statement. It is certainly not easy to determine the exact volume of such words in the language. Nevertheless, the approximate number of some ten thousand words, as Biese mentions in the first half of the twentieth century, has been probably tripled by now.⁵

What is it that directly or indirectly affects the production of conversion-words? It cannot be contested that language, along with performing its primary function of a means of communication, presents a tool of play for many people. More precisely put, word play comes to be understood as an important and constituent element of communication by means of language, a token of creativity in language. But, Peter Farb perceives the wider scope of people's habit to play with language in the following way:

Playing with words does not refer solely to entertainments like anagrams or crossword puzzles. Nor is "word play" – which usually refers to riddles, puns, jokes, wise sayings, verbal duelling, and so forth – a trivial pastime. In fact, "play" and "game" are two life's very serious and complex activities [...] the language game is similar to other games in that it is structured by rules, which speakers unconsciously learn simply by belonging to a particular speech community.

(Farb, 1977:13-16)

It is this potential that we have to take into account if we want to start seriously considering the motives and forces behind the propulsion of word forms such as the one showing the verbal ingenuity of the speaker: *He **bummed** fifty cents off a bum.*⁶ We have to be aware that there are no restraints to who and where can participate in this kind of activity. Each member of the language community seems to be able to take part in this process of adding to the expressive capacities of English, but it is for the speech community to authenticate a word. This fact can, perhaps, best be viewed in the sentence to follow:

³ S. King (1996) *Desperation*, Hodder and Stoughton, London/New York, p. 238.

⁴ S. King (1981) *Cuio*, New American Library, New York, p. 81.

⁵ "...the total number of words formed by conversion along the lines indicated by the examples given above amounts to about 10,000". Y. M. Biese (1941) *Origins and Development of Conversions in English*, Y. M. Biese (1941) *Origins and Development of Conversions in English*, *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, B 45, 2, Helsinki, str. *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, B 45, 2, Helsinki, p.10)

⁶ Ian M_c Ewan (1987) *Psychopolis*, in: *The Penguin Book of Modern British Short Stories*, Malcolm Bradbury, ed., Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.

*Everything had been labeled but the basement. The man and woman had used the word "basement" as a verb and had argued about it.*⁷

When the productivity of various types of conversion is concerned, it can be justifiably expected that certain types of conversion will continue to be more productive than others. Since the great majority of English conversion-words have been formed by converting nouns into verbs, it can be assumed that conversion will go on contributing to the vocabulary of the language mostly with new-fashioned verbs and nouns.

More specifically, all the possibilities for creating verbs out of nouns indicating the means or instruments of action have not been completely drained out. Valerie Adams (1976:198) expresses her opinion about this in the following: "It seems hard to think of instrument nouns from which we cannot coin corresponding zero-suffixed verbs, so long as some other corresponding verb does not already exist". Thus, probably it will not be long until we have words to accompany the verbs like *to wallpaper*, *to umbrella*, *to metal*. A similar thing could be concluded about converting verbs into nouns which denote the result of an action or one instance of the action represented by the verb. On the other hand, analyzing the nouns whose semantic base is the interpretation "typically used for...", Boris Hlebec underlines that it is in the very definition of the meaning of such nouns that we can detect the key to its use as a verb.⁸ In case a noun denotes an item with several possible uses, and not one of them can be singled out as the dominant one, that noun will not be converted into a verb. The example used by the author is the noun *door* in **Why don't you door the room?* In a sentence like this, it would not be clear whether the door should be open or closed. Then, Hlebec, lists nouns such as *thermometer*, *telescope* and *radiator* which have no adequate verbal counterpart, finding the cause for that in the fact that these are more modern utility objects, that they are relatively long and that they have a "bookish" ring. A noun is supposed to have "lived" in the language for a period of time before it can be used in conversion.

Conversion can be said to have been in full swing in certain registers and domains of language use in the course of the last fifty years or so. Journalists, radio and TV reporters, authors, pop musicians and advertising agents, all of them are engaged in the process of coining new words, expressions, slogans, phrases on a daily basis, thus presenting one of the most important domains of manifestation of conversion potentials in the language. The examples are many and varied: *...a few months after the tremendous kerfuffle there was a very small kerfuffle - I think I may have been the only one kerfuffling - when Gambaccini was moved out;... or The £ 200,000 hatchery will buy pregnant or 'berried' lobsters that will provide about 20,000 eggs every quarter*. Some of the similar words are literally ephemeral, created and forgotten on the same day, failing to "make an impact". The others live on and get more or less tacitly adopted in the whole English speaking world.⁹ The examples such as the ones given above can be used to prove the idea that when the most productive type of conversion is in question, conversion of nouns into verbs, non-finite verb forms present a sort of transition stage, making it simple for the noun to be transformed into a verb with a complete verbal inflectional paradigm.

Particularly fruitful use for converted words can be found in well-devised advertising campaigns. Marketing different products and services is well effected exactly owing to

⁷ A. McLeans (1989) *Night Watch*, Pan Books, p.156.

⁸ B. Hlebec (1995) "Riznica reči: engleske prevrtljive imenice", *Glossa*, no. 1, p. 10, Beograd.

⁹ S. Potter (1977) *Our Language*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, p. 164.

the elements of language and uncanny use of the principles running in English. To say or implicate a lot with only a few words is the reason why the domain of advertising produces very many new conversion-words. In the commercial for Coca Cola, the authors send the message to all potential buyers of the drink: "*Thirst it!*" Another advertisement makes use of the possibility of double interpretation which leads to a new effective means of promoting a decrease in prices of the express letter delivery service of "Royal Mail": "*For £25, you can **express** yourself seven times more.*"¹⁰

It has been already mentioned that these examples are mainly words used unconventionally on the part of the speaker and that words like these can be *nonce* words, or instances of "instant conversion" which have to go through a kind of acceptability check. However, a question remains: wasn't the majority of now legitimate and widely-used conversion-words an expression of creativity and inventiveness of individuals in language in the very beginning?

Each act of creation can be defined as searching for new possibilities in a particular domain. In the sphere of language, this general and commonplace definition can be given a more precise technical sense: creativity in language does mean discovering and using new possibilities of combining the given units. The same phonological and morphological units are combined in a new way producing new words, and those words in new combinations give rise to new phrases, sentences and longer texts.

(Bugarski 1996:135)

Among other processes, the process of conversion was a manifestation of creativity in language which helped many words to take root in the language to that extent that there is almost no way of telling which of a pair of formally identical words stems from which, unless we consult an etymological dictionary.

Literature, particularly poetry, as a specific kind of language creativity, has always been a field in which it is easiest to promote new uses of words, not only in English. The freedom of artistic expression reaches extraordinary proportions in every language, and the process of converting words serves as a device for dissolving typical language structures. William Shakespeare, one of the first and most productive innovators in the English language, is famous for his unorthodox use of language forms. In numerous examples, he disregarded the boundaries of traditional classes of words, so that there are cases of conversion which he used for the first time in his works e.g. adv. *askance* in a verbal function, *to askance*, or the noun *window* as a verb, *to window*,¹¹ and which are regular words of the language today. Neither linguists, nor lay persons would treat this usage as inadequate any longer, but they would accept them as a normal way of language development which cannot be stopped. Therefore, it is disputable whether the next attitude can in its totality refer to the English language: "...completely new words, as well as words used outside their grammatical class via conversion, as when a preposition is used as a noun, or an adverb in the function of a corresponding but nonexistent adjective. These grammatical turns are characterized by serious deviation".¹²

¹⁰ The Evening Standard, Tuesday, May 2, 1995, p. 57.

¹¹ S. Potter (1977) *Our Language*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, p. 57.

¹² R. Bugarski (1996) *Lingvistika o čoveku*, Čigoja Štampa / XX vek, Beograd, p. 131

In the contemporary world, world of global communications and advance technology, computer terminology and the language of software industry make up an increasingly significant segment of lexical novelties in a language, particularly English. Along with totally new words, the language of computers and internet teems with new uses of existing words and words of new coinage: *The most efficient way to **transition** your data from legacy to Oracle systems.*¹³ Thus, a trouble-free converting of words, has become one of the chief qualities of the computer register.

Conversion is very common (*to log in - a login, to log onto AOL - logons, to hook up - a hook-up or hookup*), as well as the process we could conditionally term as lexicalization. For example WAIS is an acronym (Wide Area Information Search) but this does not prevent the jargon use of it as an ordinary lexical item pronounced /weiz/ and corresponding forms, e.g. present participle - *waising* /weizin/.

(Paunović, 1997:199)

Different forms and kinds of words in English exhibit various tendencies to converting, primarily into verbs and then nouns. It appears that the proliferation of words in the dominant types of conversion has positively affected the process of converting less prominent word class elements in English. On the model of efficient conversion of verbs and nouns, the contemporary language allows the use of verbs produced from onomatopoeic words, as in the example *...before the censor could **bleep** it from the airwaves*, or *They both nodded and **chinked** champagne flutes*, which is not unusual, concerning the fact that these words make a solid group within the section of uninflected words. As opposed to that, assigning functions of open set words to different conjunctions and pronouns can be encountered only sporadically, predominantly in clichés, stock phrases and expressions: *...as she whispers sweet **nothings** into the same ear...*¹⁴ No more productive is the use of affixes and other bound morphemes in atypical positions, since new-fangled examples, aside from the ones frequently quoted in literature, are not easy to come across: *...a boy in his **teens**...*

That this productive converting of words and different lexical elements with all its implications is a tendency in the English language with impressive proportions can be seen in the following examples of proper nouns and names conversion: *"The rows of olive-skinned faces, bent black heads, the smell of chalk-dust, an old ink stain that **ror-schached** my desk - they were like things in a mist, real yet unreal; obstacles in limbo".*¹⁵ or *"If he wasn't so **Christing** big, he'd probably be dead already."*² No less intriguing is the following section of creative writing which contains evidence that the influence of conversion spreads wide and fast through language: *"James looked at me thoughtfully. Then he said, not at once, 'Are you certain? Are you sure a) that you were pushed and b) that it was Ben?' I was not going to be a)d and b)d by James. Nothing seemed to touch him, not even attempted murder."*¹⁶ Although we could qualify this individual instant as nothing more than an interesting example of lexico-syntactic and stylistic diversion with language elements, it is definite that the author aimed at achieving a certain effect with

¹³ Oracle, vol. XI, no. 3, May/June 1997, p. 14

¹⁴ J. Le Carre (1989) *A Perfect Spy*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, p. 29

¹⁵ J. Fowles (1977) *The Magus*, Pan Books, London, p. 242

² S. King (1996) *Desperation*, Hodder and Stoughton, London/New York, p. 211.

¹⁶ I. Murdoch (1980) *The Sea, the Sea*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, p. 386

the readers but first and foremost, the authoress counted on the readers' immanent ability to comprehend the content of the message in spite of the "deviation". This can also be seen in the words of a literary critic who, in a quality daily gives an appreciation of a novelist in the form of: "*In these explicit days, Mr Amis is the laureate of the unsayable, the literary it man*".¹⁷

Although it is difficult to give value judgments about the stylistic qualities of the language abundant with conversion-words at this point and from this perspective, certain basic features in connection to this can be sketched. As it appears, conversion of words has not been to taste for most of the language conventionalists and purists in the native language environment. Ever since the beginning of this process in English, except for the indispensable cases of compensating for the vacancies in vocabulary, conversion has been a sign of more liberal attitudes to language use, and a reflection of the need for a vivid and fresh expression by means of language. This can be affirmed by the fact that most of the new-made words were under quotation marks when used for the first time. The removal of the quotation marks was supposed to mean that the word is no longer deemed "suspicious" and that the speakers of the language accepted the word. Originality, or more precisely put tendency to originality in language communication appears to be the key impulse in bringing about new forms and processes. It is no wonder that conversion found its most fertile ground in creative writing.

4. RESTRICTIONS TO CONVERSION

We have established that conversion is a very productive process. However, there are certain factors that hinder the productive capacity of this formation pattern. Lauri Bauer (1984:226) recognizes the high productivity of conversion in the fact that so far no precise morphological constraints have been perceived, constraints which are supposed to condition converting words from one class into another. In this sense, not only simple word forms can serve as starting points of conversion, but derived words as well, (*signal* > *to signal*), compound words (*bad-mouth* > *to bad-mouth*), and words that originated through reduplication (*shilly-shally* > *to shilly-shally*), blending, or words clipped from other forms (*nuclear* > *nuke* > *to nuke*). In contemporary English, it can frequently be noticed that even products of other word formation processes, such as acronymy, can be employed in atypical sentence functions, as in *MC* > *to MC*.¹⁸ There are no restrictions to the process when particular word classes are concerned, since every class seems to be subject to converting items (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, particles, interjections), although we can perhaps speak of different degrees of productivity with each of the classes and types of conversion. The only word class that still consistently avoids conversion of its various kinds of pronominal words is perhaps the class of pronouns. Moreover, conversion of pronouns into verbs, for instance, is not something we are prone to come across in English (*she* > **to she*, *one* > **to one*).

One of the restrictions to conversion, which is only partly applicable, is the one determined by H. Marchand (1969:372), who pointed out that derivatives are seldom liable to conversion into verbs, a phenomenon he labelled as "blocking". Derived nouns such as

¹⁷ K. Amis (1986) *The Old Devils*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, p. 385.

¹⁸ "...the impossibly glamorous ex-model who is organising and *MC-ing* the show..." The Sunday Times Magazine, June 19, 1996, p. 5

arrival or *organization* will not be converted into verbs if the newly-obtained verbs would be identical in meaning with the verbs *to arrive*, and *to organize*, respectively. In cases when there is no blocking, that is, when the blocking is not relevant, the derived nouns are converted with no difficulty, which can be exemplified by: a *sign* > *to sign* > a *signal* > *to signal*; *to commit* > *commission* > *to commission*. Beside that, Marchand claims that no conversion into verbs can occur of prefixed adjectives and nouns, except for the isolated case of the verb *to unfit*.

On the basis of the existence of a verb such as *to venom*, obtained by conversion from the noun, we could conclude that the formative force of conversion is a very commanding one, since the verb *to envenom*, derived by *en*-prefixation from the same stem and with the same meaning existed in the language before *to venom*. However, other verbs with similar formation patterns, that is, verbs derived by means of this or similar prefixes, such as the prefix *be-* is, convince us that this may not be completely true. The verbs *to encash* and *to becloud* were derived after the verbs *to cash* and *to cloud* with which they share no difference in meaning.

Very useful and interesting are the limitations of conversion as noted by Biese in his work. Studying the lexical treasure from *Oxford English Dictionary* in terms of conversion, this linguist inferred that strong one-syllable verbs with a "...very light sound-volume...", such as *to be*, *to come*, *to let*, *to put*, *to rid*, *to set*, *to sit* do not have inclinations towards being converted into nouns. On the other hand, in combinations with adverbial particles the situation is considerably different. In phrasal verb conversion into nouns, these verbs make the dominant group.¹⁹ This observation by Biese can be perhaps complemented by the suggestion that it is the primary sense of the verbs that rejects conversion, whereas conversion of this kind of verbs can occur with some of the secondary senses, as *go* in *to have a go* might illustrate. The semantic factor is rather significant in conversion restriction, and not only in this respect. If there is a well-established synonym in the language for the intended conversion-verb, as is the verb *to ring*, conversion of *bell* into *to bell* would not take place, since the meaning is already contained in the existing verb *to ring*.

Furthermore, we can postulate ambiguity as a considerable obstacle to conversion. If lexical ambiguity would arise as a consequence of obtaining a conversion-word which was phonologically identical to another word, no conversion should occur. The example that Biese had in mind to illustrate this idea is the adjective *left* which would become the same as the participle of the verb *to leave* after conversion.²⁰ Even though this may sound as a solidly founded restriction to conversion, the adequate argumentation is still missing, concerning the fact that it is not very likely that the potential verb *to left* could be syntactically and semantically mistaken for the past participle form of the verb *to leave*. In case of the infinitive form of this verb, the situation is, seemingly, even more unambiguous.

¹⁹ More on this issue can be found in Y. M. Biese (1941) *Origins and Development of Conversions in English*, *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, B 45, 2, Helsinki, str. 246 and U. Lindelöf, (1938) *English Verb-Adverb Groups Converted into Nouns*, *Societas Scientiarum Fennica, Commentationes Humanarum Literarum*, 9, No. 5, Helsinki.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 410

5. CONCLUSION

When we take into consideration everything previously said, we could make an inference that what is most fascinating about conversion is not describing the created word forms or the established types, but recognizing and accepting the fact that there is an exceptional potential in the English language for lexical enrichment and language development on the grounds of this word formation mechanism. Despite several restrictive factors, predominantly of semantic origin, conversion offers wide opportunities for creating new words on the basis of "rule-governed" behaviour of the native speakers of language which broadens the expressive characteristics of English in terms of vocabulary. Also, it is worth generalizing that there are not many words, either *nonce* formations, or words formed through conversion in dictionaries that may seem unnatural to the speakers of English, not questioning the criterion of "understandability" at any moment. Obviously, *nonce* words, being an instrument of language creativity and word-play of speakers, present a wide runway for launching new lexical items of the language. The issue of acceptability of the great majority of those "proto-conversions" is a problem of time and acceptance by the entire language community.

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PRODUKTIVNOST, KREATIVNOST I OGRANIČENJA U VEZI SA KONVERZIJOM U ENGLESKOM JEZIKU

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Rad je posvećen pojedinim aspektima tvorbenog procesa konverzije u engleskom jeziku, naime pitanjima produktivnosti koja prati ovaj proces, kreativnosti koja je u osnovi konverzije, kao i svi oni elementi koji sprečavaju da se reči konvertuju iz jedne klase u drugu. Razmatraju se morfološki preduslovi i drugi jezički izvori koji su doveli do omogućavanja pretvaranja reči. Osim toga, konstatuju se svi faktori koji utiču na visoku produktivnost i domeni u kojima je ona najizrazitija, uz niz ilustrativnih primera koji na najbolji način odražavaju suštinu mehanizma produktivanja. U radu je takođe istaknuta činjenica da se obrazac produktivnih tipova konverzije preslikava i u nekim drugim podvrstama konverzije, gde se i neke druge forme mogu atipično upotrebljavati u savremenom engleskom jeziku. Ograničavajući faktori za sam proces konverzije mogu se naći u blokiranju, semantičkim faktorima i nekim drugim jezičkim pojavama.