Word-Formation Processes in E4PS
** 5. Conversion **

CONVERSION or ZERO-DERIVATION may be defined as a word-formation process by which a word, belonging to one word-class, is transferred to another word-class without any concomitant change of form.

E.g.: to talk (v.) → a talk (n.)

professional (adj.) → a professional (n.)

a head (n.) → to head (v.)

It is a highly prolific source for the production of new words, since there is no restriction on the form that can undergo conversion in English.

The major kinds of conversion are:

- **noun → verb**
- **verb → noun**
- **adjective → noun**
- **adjective → verb**
- **adjective → adverb**
- **preposition → noun**
- **preposition → verb**
- **conjunction → noun**

EXAMPLES

NOUN TO VERB = book / to book
experience / to experience
eye / to eye
network / to network
face / to face
campaign / to campaign
trade / to trade

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"Who **Experiences** Homelessness?
Anyone can **experience** homelessness. And while every person **faces** unique challenges, all people **experiencing** homelessness are **impacted** by systemic issues like the lack of affordable housing and inadequate incomes".

VERB TO NOUN = to run / a run
to increase / an increase
to delegate / a delegate
to import / an import[1]
to start up / a startup
don't know / a don't-know
to check in / a check-in
to slow down / a slowdown
to lock down / a lockdown

"They were hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations that were in the business of making long **runs** of standardised products." (source: The Economist, December 2001)

"A survey finds support for both globalisation and **import** tariffs – Free trade and globalisation are more popular in developing countries." (source: The Economist, September 2017)

"Poll shows support for Welsh independence running at 41%, excluding **don't knows**".

ADJECTIVE TO NOUN = high / a high / highs and lows
elderly / the elderly
unemployed / the unemployed
official / an official
executive / an executive
renewable / renewables

"U.S. stocks **are nearing** record **highs** again after a furious rally — 'this market could surprise everyone'".

"Apple **executives** think its internal AI chatbot is 'on par' with ChatGPT".

"The logic for replacing old coal plants with **renewables** that run on costless inputs—wind and sun—looks obvious."

[1] Remember that there are a set of words – such as import, export, conflict, rebel, object, subject, present, impact – undergoing **stress shifting** when they turn from one word-class, i.e., a noun, into another, i.e., a verb.

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ADJECTIVE TO VERB = empty / to empty
clean / to clean
open / to open
better / to better

"'The high point of TV as a medium': David Lynch's Twin Peaks may never be **bettered**".

VERB TO ADJECTIVE = would be / would-be
must have / must-have
must see / must-see
must read / must-read

"Fox News' gaffe: Overlay caption calls Biden a **'would-be** dictator'". (source: Nova News, June 2023)

"The two political veterans **face** off the evening of Sept. 29 in a **must-see**-TV event.". (source: Transport Topics, September 2020)

PREPOSITION TO NOUN = up – down / ups and downs
in – out / ins and outs

"A month of **ups and downs** in almost every corner of the market".

"The **ins and outs**[2] of vaccine trials" (source: Chemistry World, November 2020)

PREPOSITION TO VERB = down / to down

"Two years ago, the protest was against plans for a single European airspace. Last year, it was budget **cuts** that led the controllers to **down tools**[3]". (source: The Economist, April 2015)

CONJUNCTION TO NOUN = but / buts
if / ifs

"There are absolutely no **ifs**, no **buts** and no **maybes** about this — no arm-twisting and nothing that can be done to me in the intervening period." (source: Politico, November 2017)

[2] **Ins and outs** = all the details, especially the complicated or difficult ones.

[3] If you say that workers **down tools**, you mean that they stop working suddenly in order to strike or to make a protest of some kind.

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FUNCTIONAL SHIFT

A particular sub-type of conversion is FUNCTIONAL SHIFT. It refers to the same process, but in such cases, words are converted from one grammatical function to another without any change in word-class.

It occurs when a noun changes its function from [U] noun to [C] noun (e.g.: business, glass, paper, hair, time, etc.)

> **"Economists say the answer, to some degree, can be found in a start-up slump — a decline in the creation of new businesses — and a growing understanding of what's behind it". (source: The New York Times, September 2017)**

or when a full verb changes its function from intransitive to transitive verb (e.g.: to grow, to run, to suffer, to fly, etc.)

> **"They have grown a reputation for quality and efficient delivery of their service over 15 years in sectors including pharmaceuticals, engineering, technology and construction." (source: The Telegraph, November 2019)**

or when an adjective changes its function from qualifier to indefinite adjective (e.g.: further)

> **"Another month, further deadlock – this isn't what the Brexiters[4] promised". (source: The Guardian, October 2017)**

Functional shift may involve also prepositions (by, for, over, etc.) and conjunctions (since, as).

For example, the preposition 'by' can introduce different kinds of complements, as in the following examples:

- **President Donald Trump said Thursday the investigations into his campaign were "set up by the Democrats".**

[4] A **Brexiter** is a supporter of Brexit.

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- Smaller independent retailers often pay the highest merchant charges to credit card companies and therefore are more open to haggling from a customer that does not want to pay by credit card.

- Banks need Brexit transition deal by end of year, warns FCA chief.

Also, the preposition 'over' can introduce different kinds of complements, as in the following examples

- Over the past two years, we have used distance learning.

- Please, put your mobiles over the desk.

- This book is over the French Revolution.

- It's over to you.

The conjunction 'since' can introduce different kinds of subordinate clauses, as in the following examples:

- How do you feel 20 years since Wales voted for devolution?

- Co-operation with the national authorities is at the heart of the CPT's[5] work, since the aim is to protect persons deprived of their liberty rather than to condemn States for abuses.

[5] European Committee for the Prevention of Torture.

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