

AN INVESTIGATION INTO MORPHOLOGICAL AND SEMANTIC FEATURES OF CONVERSION WORDS DENOTING HUMAN BODY PARTS IN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE BUSINESS NEWS

Le Kim Tien^{1*}, Nguyen Huu Quy¹

¹The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies

*Corresponding author: kimtien0810@gmail.com

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Abstract - In this research, the author has applied descriptive along with contrastive analysis methods to investigate morphological and semantic features and pointed out the morphological and semantic differences of conversion words denoting human body parts in English and Vietnamese business news. Specifically, the online newspapers are Vietnam news, CNN, VnEconomy and Vnexpress; the author also used qualitative approach to collect the data. This study aims to examine two linguistic features as well as explore the differences of features of conversion words denoting human body parts in English and Vietnamese business news based on the contrastive analysis of 50 English and 50 Vietnamese conversion words. The article proposes the particular identification and meanings of conversion words denoting human body parts in English and Vietnamese business news so that it helps Vietnamese learners and translators efficiently use conversion words in learning as well as translating.

Key words - Conversion; morphological and semantic features; business news; functional change process; human body parts

1. Introduction

Conversion is one of the most effective ways to create new words in Vietnamese as well as English, demonstrating an important characteristic of language is saving characteristics. In the last century countless linguists have looked into different matters related to this phenomenon, such as Balteiro, Bloomfield and Sweet [1], [2], [3], among many others. However, the study of conversion in new varieties of English—known as World Englishes—still remains a broadly unexplored area.

Besides, the number of words in the English language is constantly changing. The fast-growing stock of English words is the result of its variety of word formations. As a consequence, if the learners of English have a good knowledge of conversion, especially that of words denoting human body parts, they can profoundly understand meanings of new words formed in that way.

In a pedagogical view, this method will serve English and Vietnamese learners in learning both languages effectively. However, there still exist many issues relating to conversion which have not been solved yet, namely the process of converting words that causes some people to misunderstand conversion with other phenomena such as homonymy and polysemy. Specifically, editors of “Từ điển Tiếng Việt” such as Thanh Nghị, Nguyễn Như Ý and Hoàng Phê consider conversion as polysemy when it puts together homonymy unit that has relatively clear semantic relationship [4], [5], [6]. Although many definitions have been provided for this phenomenon, linguists have not yet reached an agreement

regarding “the limits of such a controversial phenomenon” [1]. While it has often been mistaken for other word-formation processes with identical results, Isabel Balteiro has tried to delimit the phenomenon by organizing and classifying the numerous views on which linguists have theorized [1].

Furthermore, Vietnamese learners have a multitude of difficulties in interpreting and analyzing converted words. For example, sometimes, they cannot know exactly the meaning of nouns denoting human body parts, which is used in business news. What is more, it is hard for Vietnamese learners to fully understand and distinguish between different types of conversion and there are quite a few researches predominantly focusing on the nouns denoting human body parts in English and Vietnamese business news.

From all the above-mentioned, I have decided to investigate morphological and semantic features of conversion words denoting human body parts in English and Vietnamese business news with an expectation that the research findings will provide both theoretical and practical knowledge for Vietnamese learners and translators of English.

2. Definition of conversion in English

Given numerous ways of defining what was conversion by different authors, it can be said that there is a universal agreement that this word creation process is a morphological phenomenon where the presence or absence of the affixed morpheme and the change of the category are taken into consideration. Among the definitions, I have found these remarkable ones:

Semchinsky used the term ‘inner derivation’ and mentioned: “Conversion is one of the inner derivation types. Lexemes change their word-class without the addition of an affix. The items chiefly produced in this way are nouns, adjectives, and verbs – especially the verbs which come from nouns (de-nominal verbs, e.g. to bottle) and the nouns which come from verbs (de-verbal nouns, e.g. a doubt)” (p.53) [7].

According to Bauer “Conversion is an extremely productive way of producing new words in English. There do not appear to be morphological restrictions on the forms that can undergo conversion, so that compounds, derivatives, acronyms, blends, clipped forms are all acceptable inputs to the conversion process.” (p. 226) [8].

Quirk et al [9] conclude that “Conversion is the derivational process whereby an item is adapted or converted to a new word class without the addition of an

affix" (p.1558). One of the example pairs given by Quirk et al (1986) is the lexeme or lexical item *release*, which the authors categorize as a verb-to-noun conversion, as in "They released him" and "They ordered his release". In their treatment, pairs like *a shelf* and *to shelve*, whose base and converted forms are spelled and pronounced differently, are also classified as conversion [9].

From a linguistic point of view, Cannon mentioned that: "Conversion is the functional shift that does not add a new form to the lexicon; but the inflectability or noninflectability of the new function shift requires it to be classed as a new form etymologically." (p.67) [10]

Also, Chalker and Edmund Weiner acknowledge conversion as: "The process by which a word belonging to one word class gets used as part of another word class without the addition of an affix (also called reclassification or functional shift)" (p.195) [11].

Stuart describes that "The conversion of a word is the process of using it in a different word class." (p.188) [12]. For instance, the noun "beard" came to be used as a verb in "The more I beard, the more my beard donates to Canadian athletes".

In researches of conversion in Vietnamese, Đỗ Hữu Châu and Bùi Minh Toàn (1987) also consider it as a method to form new words from the existing ones. They interpreted conversion as "Những từ Tiếng Việt có thể được chuyển loại từ từ loại này sang từ loại khác mà không có sự thay đổi những đặc điểm trong ý nghĩa ngữ pháp và hoạt động ngữ pháp của chúng. Bằng cách đó Tiếng Việt cũng tạo được thêm nhiều phương tiện biểu hiện mà không cần đến những nguyên liệu khác" (p.29) [13].

Meanwhile, Diệp Quang Ban và Hoàng Văn Thung (2000) pointed out the definition as follows: "Chuyển đi từ loại- chuyển loại-là hiện tượng một từ khi thì được dùng với ý nghĩa và đặc điểm ngữ pháp của từ loại này, khi thì được dùng với ý nghĩa và đặc điểm ngữ pháp của từ loại khác" (p.153) [14].

Conversion in Vietnamese is defined by Hồ Lê (2002) as follows: "Sự chuyển loại là một phương thức cấu tạo từ, có khả năng tạo từ mới trên cơ sở từ đã có, bằng cách giữ nguyên vỏ ngữ âm của từ cũ, tạo ra một nghĩa mới có mối quan hệ logic nội tại nhất định với nghĩa của từ cũ và đưa ra những đặc trưng ngữ pháp khác với đặc trưng ngữ pháp của từ cũ." (p.190) [15].

To sum up, in this article, conversion is understood as the process of forming words by way of changing the word class, function with a zero-affix creating semantic dependence of one word upon another.

3. Condition of Conversion

According to Hồ Lê (2002), the condition that enables one word to convert to another word is that there is only one relation between the meaning of the original words and the converted words. This is the logical internal relation between their meanings [15].

E.g. The unique relation between the meaning of "heart" (verb) and "heart" (noun) is that "heart" (verb) carries out the basic characteristic functions of "heart" (noun). Namely, in the follow sentence: "I heart New York."

Similarly, in Vietnamese, the relation between the meaning of "đầu" as a verb will carry out the basic characteristic functions of "đầu" as a noun. Specifically, in the sentence: "He headed straight for the fridge".

4. Data collection and samples

The samples include 100 nouns denoting human body parts in English and Vietnamese (50 nouns for each language), which are converted in English and Vietnamese business news, namely Vietnam news, VN Express international, VnEconomy, and CNN. These newspapers are the most reputable and the most read, thus, it guarantees the validity of the thesis. Particularly, they are performed in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Nouns denoting human body part in English and Vietnamese

Nouns denoting human body parts in English		Nouns denoting human body parts in Vietnamese	
beard	finger	râu	ngón tay
brain	hand	não	bàn tay
cheek	knuckle	má	đốt ngón tay
chin	palm	cằm	lòng bàn tay
eye	thumb	mắt	ngón trỏ
face	ankle	mặt	mắt cá
head	backside	đầu	mông
iris	foot	móng mắt	bàn chân
jaw	heel	hàm	gót chân
lips	knee	môi	khủy chân
mouth	kneecap	miệng	xương bánh chè
neck	leg	cổ	chân
nose	toe	mũi	ngón chân
scalp	shin	da đầu	ống chân
skull	sole	hộp sọ	lòng bàn chân
throat	blood	họng	máu
tongue	bone	lưỡi	xương
back	muscle	lưng	cơ
belly	skeleton	bụng	khung xương
breasts	skin	vú	da
chest	waist	lòng ngực	eo
flank	hip	sườn	hông
groin	wrist	háng	cổ tay
gut	mustache	ruột	ria mép
heart	forehead	tim	trán
intestine	ear	ruột thừa	tai
rib	eyebrow	xương sườn	lông mày
shoulder	lung	vai	phổi
stomach	liver	dạ dày	Gan
elbow	spinal cord	khủy tay	tủy sống

5. Morphological features of conversion words denoting human body parts in English business news

In English, when a word is converted to a distinctive part of speech, there are some differences in morphological features. Look at the following examples:

Condotel market **faces** gloomy prospects.

(Retrieved from: <https://vietnamnews.vn/economy/770434/condotel-market-faces-gloomy-prospects.html>)

Vietnam Electricity (EVN) is **eyeing** the operation of a competitive retail electricity market in 2021 following its official run of a competitive wholesale market since 2019.

(Retrieved from:

<https://vietnamnews.vn/economy/832989/vn-plans-to-launch-competitive-retail-electricity-market-next-year.html>)

[3] It attracts thousands of pilgrims **headed** for the temple to pray for peace, good fortune and prosperity.

(Retrieved from:

<https://vietnamnews.vn/sunday/features/771025/tay-ninh-historical-and-cultural-riches-waiting-to-be-explored.html>)

All nouns “**face**”, “**eye**”, “**head**” in [1], [2] and [3] shifts to verbs “**faces**”, “**eyeing**”, “**headed**” with the addition of affixes. The morphological features of converted words is that they can combine with affixes such as “**s/es**”, “**ing**”, “**ed**” to form a new paradigm (the system of form). As the cases above, the converted verb in [1] combines with the suffix “**s**” to perform plural of verb; the converted verb in [2] combines with the suffix “**ing**” for present participle of verb; and the converted verb in [3] combines with the suffix “**ed**” to mark the past tense. Therefore, we have the morphological performance of converted verbs is illustrated as follow:

V/V(related X’s function or movement) + X =VP

Another case of morphological feature words denoting human body parts is used in idiomatic phrases as in the following examples:

[4] “The Fed has basically told us they don’t **have a stomach for** this,” said MinerD.

(Retrieved from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/16/investing/scott-minerd-stock-market-federal-reserve/index.html>)

Our city council doesn’t **have the guts** to do anything,” said Fairfield, referencing what she considers a long-running lack of boardwalk rules.

(Retrieved from

<https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/02/tech/speed-cars-scooters-bikes/index.html>)

[6] Factory owners here **have a nose** for what’s hot and what’s not.

(Retrieved from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/13/business/china-fake-headphones-dr-dre-beats/index.html>)

[7] Enterprises need to **take a hand** in vocational training.

(Retrieved from:

<https://e.vnexpress.net/news/business/enterprises-need-to-take-a-hand-in-vocational-training-vcci-3859644.html>)

[8] Investors will also have to **keep an eye** on headlines from Washington, where the **Trump administration made a stimulus counter-offer to Democrats last week.**

(Retrieved from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/12/investing/dow-stock-market-today/index.html>)

These converted nouns above almost do not undergo morphological changes, except from “**have the guts**”. They are in singular form as in the example. However, words denoting human body parts are still converted to a noun and that nouns combine with the verb “**have**”, “**take**”

and “**keep**” to form a verbal phrase (VP). From this analysis, the morphological performances of nouns partially converted to VP can be illustrated as follow:

have/make/take/keep +a/an/the
+N (human body parts) = VP.

6. Morphological features of conversions words denoting human body parts in Vietnamese business news

Vietnamese is a sort of isolated languages which does not restrain its morphological form. Thus, when a word is converted to a diverse part of speech, the converted words do not link with affixes as in English. Nevertheless, the converted words can go with words of different categories marking the change of their form.

In Vietnamese, noun can be converted to noun phrase, adjective. These converted nouns are actually different from converted nouns in English in morphological form. In English, derived nouns can associate with suffixes “s” or “es” in terms of number and “ed” regarding tense. By contrast, Vietnamese derived nouns cannot combine with suffixes. Nonetheless, they can link with other kinds of words complementing for the converted nouns. Here are some types of word which the converted nouns can go with.

[9] Được hai tỷ phú “**chống lưng**”, start up y tế chuẩn bị huy động 1 tỷ USD.

(It can be translated as follows: “**Backed**” by two billionaires, the medical start-up is about to raise \$1 billion.)

(Retrieved from: <https://vneconomy.vn/duoc-hai-ty-phu-chong-lung-startup-y-te-chuan-bi-huy-dong-1-ty-usd-201419151112307.htm>)

[10] Giải thể VinPro, CEO Vingroup: “Chúng tôi đang **thắt lưng buộc bụng.**”

(It can be translated as follows: Dissolution of VinPro, CEO’s Vingroup: “We are **tightening our back and stomach**”)

(Retrieved from: <https://vneconomy.vn/giai-the-vinpro-ceo-vingroup-chung-toi-dang-that-lung-buoc-bung-20191218235248566.htm>)

[11] Chính phủ muốn “**đổi vai**” trong xây dựng luật.

(It can be translated as follows: The government wants to “**change shoulders**” in law-making.)

(Retrieved from: <https://vneconomy.vn/chinh-phu-muon-doi-vai-trong-xay-dung-luat-20190913155500175.htm>)

[12] Chiến lược để **dẫn đầu** thị trường của “Triệu phú sữa tươi” Việt Nam.

(It can be translated as follows: The strategy is to **lead** the market of “fresh milk Millionaire” in Vietnam.)

(Retrieved from: <https://vneconomy.vn/chien-luoc-de-dan-dau-thi-truong-cua-trieu-phu-sua-tuoi-viet-nam-2019061345138926.htm>)

[13] Giá Bitcoin **đổi mặt** nguy cơ trượt về 4.000 USD.

(It can be translated as follows: Bitcoin price **faces** the risk of slipping to \$ 4,000.)

(Retrieved from: <https://vneconomy.vn/gia-bitcoin-doi-mat-nguy-co-truot-ve-4000-usd-20191217084535255.htm>)

Through above examples, conversion words denoting human body parts are usually the combination of verbs plus names of human body parts (X) or verbs related to the function and movement of the parts or the action done by the parts, as a result, it shows below:

V/V(related X's function or movement) + X =VP

From the descriptions and analyses of the instances above, we can realize that conversion words denoting human body parts in English and Vietnamese business news have some changes clearly. Morphological feature in English is that English converted words denoting human body parts can combine with affixes in terms of number, tense, case such as “s/es”, “ed”, “ing” whereas Vietnamese converted words cannot. It means that Vietnamese converted words do not undergo the morphological change. The reason is that English is an inflectional language and Vietnamese is uninflected. That being said, conversion words denoting human body parts can combine with verbs (relating human body parts' s functions) then plus word denoting human body parts to form a verb phrase.

7. Semantic features of conversion words denoting human body parts in English and Vietnamese business news

7.1. Semantic features of conversion words denoting human body parts in English business news

When a word is converted to different parts of speech, the common element of lexical meaning is kept in the base and the converted words. However, the grammatical meaning of the base and the converted word changes. The base and the converted words have the common element of lexical meaning. This common element is the ground of the word class's meaning and the constituent in the generic meaning of word. When a word is converted to a different part of speech, the common element of the lexical meaning is maintained in both words. It is because the object of reflection (entity, process, specific, relation) in words does not change. As a result, on the aspect of meaning, the root and the converted word have the identical ground in the common element of the lexical meaning.

Now, we take a look into the meaning of the root and the converted words in cases. Here are some examples:

[14] It attracts thousands of pilgrims **headed** for the temple to pray for peace, good fortune and prosperity.

(Retrieved from:

<https://vietnamnews.vn/sunday/features/771025/tay-ninh-historical-and-cultural-riches-waiting-to-be-explored.html>)

[15] India, VN **eye** closer collaboration in engineering sector trade, investment.

(Retrieved from:

<https://vietnamnews.vn/economy/772667/india-vn-eye-closer-collaboration-in-engineering-secto-trade-investment.html>)

The word “**head**” in [14] denoting the **part** of the **body** above the **neck** where the **eyes**, **nose**, **mouth**, **ears**, and **brain**

is a noun by nature. In the sentence above, the noun is converted to a verb naming the action of first going place. The common element of the lexical meaning kept in two words is that both denote the characteristic of the first part or first going to somewhere. It is because the object of reflection in both words is the first thing or the top part.

In [15], the noun “**eye**”, which is defined as one of the two **organs** in **your face** that are used for **seeing**, is converted to a V, which is defined as the action of seeing something. Because the objection of reflection in both words is a trait of eye that does not change, their common element of the lexical meaning is maintained.

To deeply understand the meaning directions of converted words, I had found cases, which is illustrated in Table 2 below. X is words denoting human body parts.

Table 2. The total cases of meaning directions of converted words in English business news

Number	The meaning directions of converted words	Cases
1.	Make (more) X	beard, elbow, rib, foot, heel, sole.
2.	Remove X	skin, bone, gut, scalp
3.	Make into X	brain, back, neck, kneecap, face, shoulder.
4.	Use X (have an impact on things)	knee, finger, shoulder, hand, muscle.
5.	Use X (have an impact on things to create a way)	shoulder, elbow, muscle.
6.	Act like X (relating to X's basis function)	shoulder, stomach, cheek, jaw, mouth, finger, thumb, leg, shin, head, nose, eye.
7.	Become X	heart, back, face.
8.	X' property	gut, skeleton, lip, head.

7.2. Semantic features of conversion words denoting human body parts in Vietnamese business news

In a like manner, semantic feature of conversion words denoting human body parts in Vietnamese business news, is that the common lexical meaning is still kept in the base and the converted words. Nonetheless, the grammatical meaning of the base and the converted word shift.

The root and the converted words have the familiar element of lexical meaning. This familiar element is the ground of the word class's meaning and the component in the universal meaning of words. When a word is converted to a particular part of speech, the familiar element of the lexical meaning is retained in both words. That is because the object of reflection (entity, specific, process, relation) in words does not change, hence, on the aspect of meaning the base and the converted word have the interchangeable ground in the familiar of the lexical meaning.

To profoundly understand the meaning of the root and the converted words, Table 3 show these meaning directions of cases below.

From Table 2 and 3, there are more meaning directions of converted words in English than in Vietnamese. In English, there are registered 8 types of meaning of conversion words. Conversion words denoting human body

parts in Vietnamese business news have registered 5 cases.

Table 3: The total cases of meaning directions of converted words in Vietnamese business news

	<u>The meaning directions of conversion words denoting human body parts</u>	<u>The meaning directions of conversion words in English business news</u>	<u>The meaning directions of conversion words in Vietnamese business news</u>
1.	<u>Make (more) X</u>	+	+
2.	<u>Remove X</u>	+	+
3.	<u>Make into X</u>	+	+
4.	<u>Use X (have an impact on things)</u>	+	—
5.	<u>Use X (have an impact on things to create a way)</u>	+	—
6.	<u>Act like X (relating to X's basis function)</u>	+	+
7.	<u>Become X</u>	+	—
8.	<u>X's property</u>	+	+

To particularly show the differences the direction of converted word between English and Vietnamese business news, I design Table 4 below to apparently know how it happens in both languages under semantic view. The symbol (+) means it happens in both languages and (—) it does not happen.

Table 4. The differences of meaning directions of conversion words denoting human body parts between English and Vietnamese business news

Number	<u>The meaning directions of converted words</u>	Cases
1.	Make (more) X	ra mắt, chống lưng.
2.	Remove X	rút ruột, moi ruột.
3.	Make into X	đứng đầu, đối mặt, chạm trán, chạm mặt, hờ sườn, cầm tay, thất lung, buộc bụng, cầm cầm, chạm tay, đau tim.
4.	Act like X (relating to X's basis function)	dẫn đầu, ra mắt, cầm tay, chống lưng, bạo tay, đặt chân, nổi gót.
5.	X's property	dẫn đầu, đối mặt, cầm tay, (cú) bắt tay, đối vai.

8. Conclusion

From the descriptions and analyses the instances above, we can realize that conversion words denoting human body parts in English and Vietnamese business news have some changes obviously. Morphological features in English are that English converted words denoting human body parts

can combine with affixes in terms of number, tense, namely “s/es”, “ed”, “ing” whereas Vietnamese converted words cannot combine with affixes. It means that Vietnamese converted words do not undergo the morphological change. The reason is that English is an inflectional language and Vietnamese is uninflected. That being said, conversion words denoting human body parts can combine with verbs (relating human body parts' s functions) then plus word denoting human body parts to form a verb phrase.

Relating to semantic feature, conversion words denoting human body parts in English and Vietnamese business news have the same logical semantic relations between the base and the conversion word. The common element of the lexical meaning is kept in the base and the conversion word but their grammatical meaning changes. Furthermore, on the basis of what has been discussed above, it is clearly seen that the main pattern of conversion of English words denoting human body parts is noun to verb conversion.

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