Conversion paper BB

by Lita Diasti

INVESTIGATING STUDENTS' FAMILIARITY WITH CONVERSION, AN ENGLISH WORD FORMATION PROCESS

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Abstract: One of the paramount aspects of acquiring a language is mastering the vocabulary. One way to enrich our vocabulary is by familiarizing ourselves with word formation process. This study aimed to investigate students' familiarity with a word formation process called conversion. This was a descriptive quantitative study. Using Google Forms, the researchers distributed a questionnaire containing statements on conversion to collect data. The participants were 10 first year students of the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) of Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta. The researchers calculated the students' correct and incorrect answers. Results showed that most of the students were unfamiliar with conversion, one of the word formation processes, especially the conversion involving verbs to nouns (50%) and adjectives to nouns (50%). Most students were knowledgeable about the conversion from nouns to verbs (80%). One of the implications is that ELESP students study conversion, one of the word formation processes in English, to enrich their vocabulary items.

Keywords: conversion, verb to noun, vocabulary, word formation

BACKGROUND

Vocabulary, which can be enriched through conversion, an English word formation process, is a pivotal aspect in a language. It is simply because vocabulary is a tool to communicate with other people. Vocabulary is used to express our feelings or ideas. Vocabulary is the main aspect of language proficiency (Cahyono & Widiati, 2008). In learning a language, mastering vocabulary is a foundation of a successful language acquisition (Alqahtani, 2015). In a contrary, lacking of vocabulary mastery can be a hindrance in language acquisition (Alqahtani, 2015; Subekti & Lawson, 2007). In other words, we need to have sufficient vocabulary to communicate successfully with others.

Vocabulary is all words that we know and use in our conversation. "Vocabulary can be defined as the collection of words" (Linse & Nunan, 2005). However, it is not merely a single unit of word. It can be a phrase as well. Vocabulary is important in acquiring a language as it is utilized in every skill (Prasetyo, 2015). In listening, vocabulary mastery is needed to understand people's utterances. In speaking, vocabulary is used to reveal our feelings or idea. In reading, we use our vocabulary knowledge to understand the author's message. While in writing, we use words to convey our ideas in a written form.

1

Additionally, vocabulary mastery comprises both receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) skills (Cahyono & Widiati, 2008).

However, vocabulary teaching does not get enough attention in Indonesian school curriculum (Prasetyo, 2015). As a result, it causes low levels of students' vocabulary mastery (Achmad, 2013; Lily, 2019). Indeed, English is a compulsory subject for junior and high school students. In university level, students will also have English subject. The materials mostly are in the form of texts (Lily, 2019). The students will have more reading and writing activities than listening and speaking. However, it is found that students are not able to understand the texts as they have lack of vocabulary (Lily, 2019). Therefore, students should be provided with enough time allocation of vocabulary teaching. Through vocabulary teaching, students will know the concept of unfamiliar words, obtain more vocabularies, and use the vocabularies in the conversation effectively (Cahyono & Widiati, 2008). Moreover, increasing vocabulary mastery can promote the development of students' communicating ability (Cahyono & Widiati, 2008).

To master and enrich our vocabulary items, we need to understand how a word is formed (Prasetyo, 2015). New terms in English are always created in our daily life (Luthfiyati, Kholiq, & Zahroh, 2017; Yule, 2017). Therefore, we need to know how the words are coined so we can recognize the words that were not familiar (Luthfiyati et al., 2017). The process of forming a word can be defined as word formation. Word formation is a phenomenon that is close to our life (Ratih & Gusdian, 2018).

Word formation is a process of constructing or forming a new word (Plang, 2002; Yule, 2005). There are nine processes of English word formation, namely, coinage, borrowing, compounding, blending, clipping, backformation, acronyms, derivation, and conversion (Yule, 2006). The process of forming a new word can create different meaning. For instance, *hope* is a noun and when we add the suffix *–less,* it becomes *hopeless*, which functions as an adjective (Haspelmath & Sims, 2010). Every word formation produces a new meaning. Understanding the word formation process will then assist students to enrich their vocabulary items. In this study, the researchers investigated whether or not the first year students of the English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University familiar with conversion, a word formation process in English.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have examined students' vocabulary mastery in word formation. However, few of them discuss conversion. One of the reasons is that conversion is rarely used in conversation. Conversion is considered as unfamiliar word formation process compare to other formations (Dominguez, 2007). This study focuses on one of English word formations namely conversion. The aim of this research is to investigate students' vocabulary familiarity on English conversion. This research is conducted to fill the gap in the literature.

The theoretical bases used in this study are conversion stated by (Yule, 1996). The discussion of the literature review is divided into three parts. The first part is the definition of conversion. The second part is the characteristics of conversion. The last part is the process of conversion.

In English, one of the techniques in forming a new word is by adding suffix. It is known as derivation (Yule, 2005). Derivation is the most common word formation in

English language (Yule, 2005). There are a lot of English words that are formed through derivational process. Derivation encompasses the addition of affix (Yule, 2005). Affixes can be added in the beginning of a word, namely, prefixes, whereas some other affixes are put in the end of a word or suffixes (Yule, 2005).

Additionally, we can make a new word without the addition of suffix. According to Qurik, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985), conversion is "assigning the base to a different word class with no change of form". Similarly, Yule (1996) defines that conversion is a process of inverting a word into a new category without the addition of suffix. Katamba (2005) shares the same idea that the process of conversion includes no shift to the shape of original word. In other words, conversion is a process of converting a word without any change in the word itself. Therefore, the same word will have different categories and meanings (see Bram, 2011 & Bram, 2012). As stated by Kang (2007) "Conversion encompasses lexical forms which have two distinct syntactic and semantic functions."

Conversion is known as zero derivation, functional shift or functional change (Yule, 1996). It is simply because the categorization of the word changes but the word itself does not. For instance, we can use fax as a verb of a noun (Velasco, 2008). Bauer (2004) emphasizes that conversion is morphologically simple. Therefore, conversion can be widely used in everyday conversation.

Word formation process in conversion involves zero-affix (Yule, 1996). In conversion, we can shift every category of a word such as verb, noun or adjective. Following is the process and examples of conversion stated by Yule (1996). In addition, some of the sentences are taken from the *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* and *Cambridge Dictionary* online.

1. Conversion from verb to noun
   a. **scare**: You **scared** me. The news caused a war **scare**.
   b. **cry**: Please don't **cry**.   I heard a loud **cry**.
   c. **help**: We must try and **help** each other. Having a word processor would be a **help**.

2. Conversion from noun to verb
   a. **name**: Please write your full **name** here. They **named** the child John.
   b. **hammer**: I should by a new **hammer**.   He **hammers** down the lid of a box to fasten it.
   c. **phone**: His **phone** must be switched off. I will **phone** you tomorrow.

3. Conversion from adjective to verb
   a. **mature**: Jane is very **mature** from her age.   He has **matured** a great deal over the past year.
   b. **calm**: She is very **calm**. I **calmed** him down.
   c. **slow**: He is a **slow** driver. You should **slow** up a bit.

4. Conversion from adjective to noun
   a. **dry**: I am afraid this cake has turned out very **dry**.   You are soaked, come into the **dry**.

b. **natural**: Flood and earthquake are **natural** disaster. She will not have any troubles learning to ride a horse, you can see she is a **natural**.

Above are the examples of conversion. The shifted words are not different from the original words. Therefore, sometimes it can be confusing. A way to indentify the conversion process can be seen from the stress patterns of the words (Kang, 2007). However, most of the examples are the conversion from verbs to nouns. Adam (2014) and Kiparsky (1982), as cited in Kang (2007), mention some examples of conversion process which can be recognized from the stress pattern (verbs to nouns), as in the following: as verbs, the stress on the first syllable and as nouns, the stress on the second syllable: *export, progress, invite* and *survey*.

METHOD

The researchers employed quantitative research in conducting this study. Quantitative research is a study that relies primarily on the collection of numeric data (Johnson & Christensen). The results were presented in descriptive statistic information. Additionally, the researchers calculated the percentage on students' correct answers and presented the results in figures.

The study was conducted at the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) of Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta. The participants were the first semester students at batch 2019. The data were gathered by distributing a questionnaire through Google Forms. There were 10 participants who were able to fill out the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 16 statements. The statements were divided into two categories. The first category was list of conversion statements and the second category was statements of the original words. The participants should decide whether the statements were correct or incorrect. The statements were taken from Yule (1996), *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* and *Cambridge Dictionary* online.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The researchers presented and discussed the results in the following. The researchers provided the results of the conversion category.
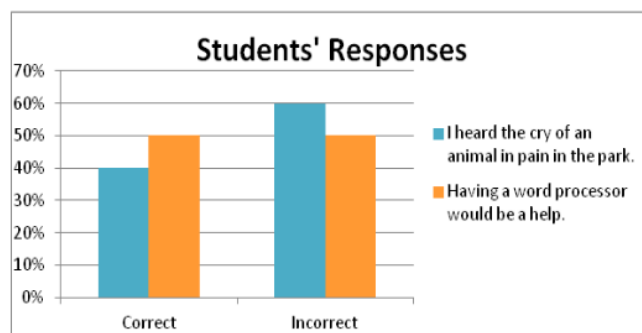

Figure 1. Students' responses to verb to noun conversion

As shown in Figure 1, in the first statement, there were only four students who were able to recognize the conversion from verbs into nouns. According to *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* online, *cry* can be both verb and noun. *Cry* functioning as a verb means to produce tears because of unhappiness or pain. Whereas, *cry* can be a noun and defined as a loud noise which expresses a strong feeling.

In the second statement, five out of ten participants answered the statement correctly. *Help* is another example of conversion from verb into noun. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* Online, *help* as a verb means to make something easier for someone by providing something that he needs. *Help* as a noun can be described as the act of helping someone. It can be defined as the fact of being useful. The results in Figure 1 reveal that most of the participants did not recognize the conversion from verb into noun.
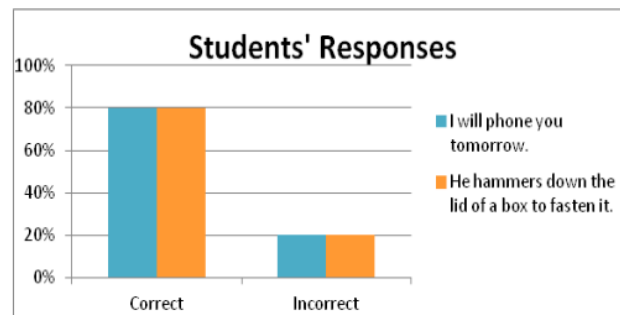
Figure 2. Students' responses to noun to verb conversion

There are two statements for this type of conversion. The first statement is *I will phone you tomorrow*. In the *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* online, the original meaning of *phone* is that a system which is used to talk to somebody else in a long distance. *Phone* can be shifted into verb category. The converted meaning of *phone* is to make a call to somebody. The second statement of conversion from noun into verb is *He hammers down the lid of a box to fasten it*. Based on the *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* online, *hammer* is a noun. The meaning of it is a tool to break something or to hit nails. *Hammer* can be a verb. The meaning is to hit something with a hammer.

The findings of the questionnaire on conversion from noun to verb indicate that the participants have already been familiar with this type of conversion. It can be seen that most of the participants answered the statements correctly. There were eight participants who decided that both of the statements were correct. While, two participants said that the statements were incorrect. It can be concluded that this type of conversion is known by most of the participants. These findings were supported by Kisselew, Rimell, Palmer, and Pado (2016), who state that conversion from noun into verb is highly productive in English.
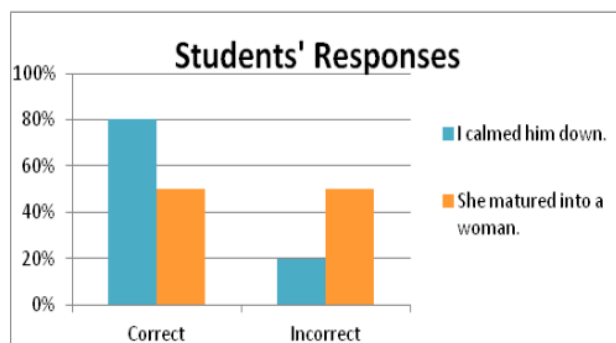
Figure 3. Students' responses to adjective to verb conversion

Figure 3 shows that most participants were familiar with the conversion from adjective to verb. There were eight participants who decided that the first statement was correct and two participants chose the opposite. In the second statement, five out of ten participants answered correctly.

In the first statement, the original word is *calm* functioning as an adjective. However, it can be a verb. According to *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* online, *calm* is not nervous or excited. When *calm* is shifted into a verb, the meaning becomes to make someone becomes more relaxed. In line with the first statement, in the second statement *mature* is also an adjective. In the *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries* online, *mature* means behaving like an adult. Based on Figure 3, it can be concluded that some participants have already known the conversion from adjective to verb.
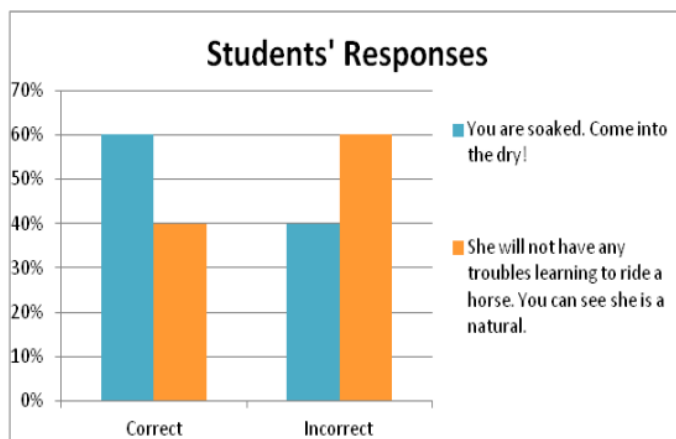

Figure 4. Students' responses to adjective to noun conversion

Based on Figure 4, there are two statements for conversion from adjective to noun. The first statement is *you are soaked. Come into the dry!* In the *Cambridge Dictionary* online, *dry* can be adjective or noun. *Dry* as an adjective means not wet. It is used to describe something which has no water on it. In the other hand, *dry* can be a noun. The

6

meaning is a place where the condition is not wet. The second statement for this type of conversion is *she will not have any troubles learning to ride a horse. You can see she is a natural.* The original word of *natural* is included in the adjective category. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary* online, *natural* as an adjective means not artificial. However, *natural* as a noun means someone who was born with special ability or characteristic and is very good at something for doing a particular thing.

As presented in Figure 4, most of the participants were familiar with the first example of conversion from adjective to noun. There were six participants who said that the first statement was correct. On the contrary, most of the participants did not recognize that the second statement was correct. There were six participants who answered that the second statement was incorrect. These findings were supported by Luthfiyati (2017), who claimed that this conversion process was rarely used than the other processes. In brief, it can be concluded that most of the participants were still unfamiliar with the conversion from adjectives to nouns.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, it can be concluded that most of the first-year students were not knowledgeable with conversion. The students were unfamiliar with the conversion from verbs to nouns, adjectives to verbs, and adjectives to nouns. However, the majority of them understood the process of conversion from nouns to verbs since the conversion from nouns to verbs was widely used in daily communication. Students of the English Language Education Study Program are expected to be teachers in the future, and for this reason, they need to know how to assist their students to enrich vocabulary items, particularly through conversion. To obtain more solid results, future studies on conversion should involve more participants. In the teaching and learning processes, word formation processes, including conversion, deserve more attention to enable the students to increase their English vocabulary.

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