# Zero-morph as a Creative Affix

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## Abstract

To be able to use the target language sentence structure efficiently, a speaker needs to learn and have a very large number of words (Nation, 2013). Research shows that understanding the meaning of a word is not sufficient, rather, it involves more than just its meaning; such as spelling, and grammatical behavior (Pigada & Schmitt, 2006). Vocabulary acquisition requires effective methods. One of the methods of learning vocabulary is learning the process of word formation in the target language. This research aims at investigating and exploring one of the productive word-formation processes in the English language which is conversion or zero-derivation in which the grammatical category of a word is changed without adding any affixes. For instance, every day, I *walk(V)* to the park near my house, or, every day, *I take a walk(N) with my dog*. The results will have several pedagogical implications for researchers, teachers, and learners. Based on the presented data in the current study, it can be concluded that zero-morph can be considered one of the productive word-formation processes, and pedagogical implications are discussed in the discussion section.

**Keywords:** Word-formation, conversion, Kurdish EFL learners, vocabulary acquisition

## 1. Introduction

This paper aims to examine and investigate one of the productive word-formation processes which have been labeled as zero-morph. In this research, the researchers provide adequate and valuable information on a key type of word-formation process that is used in ordinary everyday English but is less known and rarely discussed among most ESL/EFL speakers and learners (Valera and Ruz, 2020). First, the above-mentioned word-formation process has been defined, and clarifications are given on other concepts and terms which are used by linguists. Then, the major types of zero-morph are explained with word examples and sentences.

## 2. Zero-morph: Definitions

Linguists and researchers in the field of linguistics have been using a variety of concepts to refer to zero-morph such as conversion, zero-morph, zero-affixation, zero-derivation, functional change, and multiple word-class memberships, and non-affixational word-formation processes (Don, 1993; Mela-Athanasopoulou, 2018; Schmid, 2007). Plag (2003) defines conversion as "the derivation of a new word without any overt marking, for instance, *to bottle* (V) as a verb, whereas, *the bottle (N)"* as a noun (p. 145). In addition to that, Marchand (1969) defines zero-affixation as the change in the category of a lexicon, that is, no affixation is added to a lexeme. Furthermore, Štekauer (2009) defines conversion as "the process by which lexical items change category without any concomitant change in form" (p.418). For instance, (Google(N) ~ to google(V)). In this research, the researchers have used the terms conversion and zero-affixation and other used terms interchangeably.

## 3. Zero-morph: Explained

The phenomenon of changing word categories has been a topic of debate among linguists. Zero-morph or zero-affix is first proposed by Allen (1978). Don (1993), in his book "morphological conversion" has assumed a model for English words, and states "if English morpho-phonology has two levels for affixation, for example, *-al* and *-ive* attach at level-I, for instance, act $^{(V)}$ ~ active $^{(ADJ)}$)", whereas, for zero-affixation, this process takes place in level-II, after the affixation of level I affixes such as in [$_V$ [$_N$ hammer] $\emptyset$].

Here, two views are discussed. First, Lieber (2005) believes that conversion is a simple change in word category, but Valera (2005) states that conversion is more than just a process of word formation, and it is different from other types of derivation.

## 4. Different Views on Zero-morph

Reviewing the existing literature on this topic, a variety of views have been presented on conversion which is briefly explained in the followings:

1. Two forms are available (e.g., *write*, *right*), and both of them are independent. Their identical form is accidental (Jespersen 1942; Don, 2004); this is called the homophony approach.
2. When the word (water(N) ~ to water(V)) can be used as in the sentences "*she needs a glass of water*" and "*They water the garden every day*", no visible affix can be seen that added to the underlined verbs in both sentences. Hence, this is called the zero-derivation approach (Jespersen, 1942; Marchand 1969; Kiparsky 1982; Don 2004, 2005).
3. Lieber (2005) has proposed another approach which is called "empty category movement" which is when a word takes different functions such as (*to walk* (V) and a *walk* (N)).

### 5. Major Types of Conversion (Zero-affixation)

There are different types of conversion in the English language. These types have been explained with examples like the following (Don, 2005; Mela-Athanasopoulou, 2018; Marchand, 1969; Plag, 2003; Quirk et al., 1975; Sanders, 1988; Valera, 2005).

### 5.1. Noun →Verb

This type of conversion is one of the most productive ones. In this type, the noun could be animate or abstract. Consider the following examples (Plag, 2003):

*Table 1* **Changing Nouns to Verbs**

| The hammer | to hammer |
|---|---|
| The file | to file |
| The skin | to skin |
| The Nurse | to nurse |
| The referee | to referee |
| The brake | to break |
| The comb | to comb |
| The blanket | to blanket |
| The Bottle | to bottle |

(1) a) Plastic **_bottles_** are lighter than glass ones. (Noun)

b) The wine is **_bottled_** at the vineyard. (Verb)

Based on the given data in Table 1, the words can be used either as a noun of a sentence or as the main verb of the sentence (see example 1 above).

## 5.2. Adjective →Verb

This type of conversion can also be called the deadjectival verb. The process of adjective conversion to a verb is less productive because these verbs are produced through suffixation such as (short (ADJ) ~ shorten (V)). Examples of *adjectives to verbs* are shown in the table below: (Mela-Athanasopoulou, 2018):

*Table 2* **Changing Adjectives to Verbs**

| | |
|---|---|
| Cool | to cool |
| Empty | to empty |
| Clear | to clear |
| Slow | to slow |
| Narrow | to narrow |
| Thin | to thin |
| Open | to open |

(2) a) Shall I take the **_empty_** bottles for recycling? (Adjective)

b) The place **_emptied_** pretty quickly when the fight started. (Verb)

## 5.3. Verbs →Nouns

In the English language, verbs are either transitive, intransitive, or both. Converting a verb into a noun can also be considered one of the productive processes of zero-affixation. Examples of this type are provided in Table 3 below (Mela-Athanasopoulou, 2018):

*Table 3* **Changing Verbs to Nouns**

| | |
|---|---|
| To cheat | The cheat |
| To spy | The spy |
| To command | The command |
| To drink | The drink |
| To aid | The aid |
| To attack | The attack |
| To Hunt | The hunt |
| To delight | The delight |

The five first examples in Table 3 are transitive verbs, and the last five examples are intransitive verbs.

(3) a) Students are not allowed **_to cheat_** in any exams. (Verb)

b) Hey! You little **_cheat._** (Noun)

(4)  a) This news will ***delight*** his fans all over the world. (Verb)

b) My ***delight*** in them is as varied as my moods. (Noun)

## 6. Conversion by Stress Position

Another common type of conversion is the case where the stress changes the word category of a lexeme. In this type, verbs can become nouns or nouns can become verbs by changing the position of the stress on each word. The stress position is indicated by a (`) diacritic. Furthermore, it is worth noticing that there are words whose lexical categories are changed but the stress is still in the same position (see Tables 4 and 5) (Mela-Athanasopoulou, 2018):

*Table 4* **Changing Verbs to Nouns**

| Re`fill | `Refill |
|---|---|
| Ex`tract | `Extract |
| Per`mit | `Permit |
| Con`vict | `Convict |
| Mis`print | `Misprint |
| Inter`change | `Interchange |
| Over`flow | `Overflow |
| in`crease | `Increase |
| im`port | `Import |

*Table 5* **Changing Nouns to Verbs**

| The `Pattern | to `pattern |
|---|---|
| The `Patent | to `patent |
| The `Picture | to `picture |
| The `Question | to `question |
| The `Register | to `register |
| The `Document | to `document |
| The 'advocate | to 'advocate |

Analyzing the data sets in Table 4 and Table 5, it can be observed that zero-affixation or conversion can take place with shifting stress position on the words such as in Table 4; whereas, Table 5 tells us that shifting stress position does not always guarantee changes in the word categories. For instance, words can have more than one lexical category with the same stress position.

(5)  a) The `*increase* in salary will be appreciable. (*increase* is used as a noun)

b) Having her there would certainly in`*crease* his enjoyment. (*Increase* is used as a verb)

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## 7. Conclusions and Implications

Words are the building blocks of any language in the world. Linguists have proposed a variety of word-formation processes such as compounding (e.g., *mail carrier*), affixation which is adding an affix to the word such as (teach +-er ~ teacher), clipping such as (*advertisement~ ad),* borrowing as in (e.g., point of view from French phrase point de vue); coinage which is inventing word such as "nylon"; blending as in "breakfast + lunch → brunch", and conversion are among some of the word-formation processes For this research conversion (i.e., zero-morph) was the main focus of the investigation. Conversion has been argued since Allen (1978) introduced Zero-morph or zero-affix in linguistics. Different terms and concepts have been attached to this word-formation process, but almost all the used terms give a general understanding of the process which is shifting the category of a word without adding any affixes.

This study has some pedagogical implications for linguists, teachers, and ESL/EFL learners. For linguists, it can be an encouragement to investigate this process from different perspectives such as conducting more comparative studies. More studies are needed to be carried out across the language regarding this process. For instance, Kurdish researchers and linguists are invited to research to compare and investigate this process with the Kurdish and English languages. Furthermore, the provided information and conclusions can be used as a teaching reference by ESL/EFL teachers, especially those teachers who teach morphology.

Finally, learning this word-formation process by ESL/EFL learners can benefit them immensely because when learners read two sentences such as (6a and 6b) can be very confusing without knowing a word-formation process which is called zero-morph or conversion. Hence, it can be concluded that zero-morph is a productive affix, and it also can be assumed that this word-formation process might be one of the most productive processes in the future because learners are looking for simple and productive ways of learning and remembering words of the target language.

**پوخته**

بۆ ئەوەی بتوانیت پێکهاتەی رستەی زمانی ئامانج بە شێوەیەکی کارا بەکاربهێنیت، قسەکەر پێویستی بە فێربوونی ژمارەیەکی زۆر وشەی دەبێت (Nation, 2013). توێژینەوەکان دەریدەخەن کە تێگەیشتن لە ماناى وشەیەک بەس نییە، بەڵکو زیاتر لە تەنیا ماناکەی دەگرێتەوە؛ وەک ڕێنووسی، ڕەفتاری ڕێزمانی (Pigada & Schmitt, 2006). وەرگرتن و فێربوونی وشەو وشەسازی پێویستی بە شێوازی کاریگەر هەیە. یەکێک لە شێوازەکانی فێربوونی وشەسازی بریتییە لە فێربوونی پرۆسەی دروستبوونی وشە بە زمانی ئامانج. ئەم توێژینەوەیە ئامانجی لێکۆڵینەوە و لێکۆڵینەوەیە لە پرۆسەکانی دروستکردنی وشەو بەر هەمدار لە زمانی ئینگلیزیدا کە بریتییە لە گۆڕین یان بەکارهێنانی وشەیەک لە ڕێزبەندی و دانانی لە رستە لە شوێنی جیاواز کە تێیدا پۆلی ڕێزمانی وشەیەک بەبێ زیادکردنی هیچ پاشگرێک دەگۆردرێت. بۆ نموونە، هەموو رۆژێک، من بە پێ دەچمە (کار) پارکەکەی نزیک لە ماڵەکەم، یان، هەموو رۆژێک، لەگەڵ سەگەکەمدا پیاسەیەک (ناو) دەکەم. ئەنجامەکان چەندین کاریگەری فێرکردن و پێداگۆژیان لەسەر توێژەران و مامۆستایان و فێرخوازان دەبێت. بە پشتبەستن بەو زانیاریانەی کە لە لێکۆڵینەوەی ئێستادا پێشکەش کراون، دەتوانرێت بڵێین کە دەتوانرێت مۆرفی بەتاڵ وەک یەکێک لە پرۆسەکانی بەرهەمهێنانی وشە لەبەرچاو بگیرێت، و کاریگەرییە پێداگۆژییەکان لە بەشی باسەکەدا باس دەکرێن.

**کلیلی وشەکان**: وشەسازی، گۆرین، فێرخوازانی کوردی زمانی ئینگلیزی، بەدەستهێنانی وشەسازی

**خلاصة**

لتكون قادرًا على استخدام بنية جملة اللغة المستهدفة بكفاءة ، يحتاج المتحدث إلى التعلم ولديه عدد كبير جدًا من الكلمات ( Nation، 2013). تظهر الأبحاث أن فهم معنى الكلمة ليس كافياً ، بل إنه ينطوي على أكثر من مجرد معناها ؛ مثل التهجئة والسلوك النحوي (Pigada & Schmitt، 2006). يتطلب اكتساب المفردات أساليب فعالة. إحدى طرق تعلم المفردات هي تعلم عملية تكوين الكلمات في اللغة الهدف. يهدف هذا البحث إلى استقصاء واستكشاف إحدى عمليات تكوين الكلمات المنتجة في اللغة الإنجليزية وهي التحويل أو الاشتقاق الصفري حيث يتم تغيير الفئة النحوية للكلمة دون إضافة أي علامات. على سبيل المثال ، أسير (فعل) كل يوم إلى المنتزه بالقرب من منزلي ، أو ، كل يوم ، أمشي مع كلبي. سيكون للنتائج العديد من الآثار التربوية للباحثين والمعلمين والمتعلمين. استنادًا إلى البيانات المقدمة في الدراسة الحالية ، يمكن استنتاج أنه يمكن اعتبار الصفر المرن كواحدة من عمليات تكوين الكلمات المثمرة ، وتناقش الآثار التربوية في قسم المناقشة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية**: تكوين الكلمات ، التحويل ، متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية باللغة الكردية ، اكتساب المفردات

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