

# Conversion and figurative extension of meaning<sup>1</sup>

Salvador Valera, University of Granada, Spain

*The semantics of conversion has received growing attention in the past years. A set of semantic patterns used in conversion has been known for decades, but little room has been allowed for other variables which shape meaning and which have been described in the literature as a resource of word-formation processes. Of these, figurative extension, especially metaphor, is used in conversion, sometimes along with other well-known semantic patterns, sometimes alone. This paper reviews the major semantic patterns which are implicit in the term CONVERSION and some of their theoretical implications.*

**Keywords:** *conversion, meaning, metaphor, metonymy, word-class*

## 1. Introduction

This paper examines conversion or zero-derivation between English nouns and verbs in respect of the meaning change which it brings into a derived term compared with its base. Today's view of the semantic change brought about in conversion follows the descriptions provided in a relatively small number of classic papers. The impact of other forces on meaning is mentioned occasionally, but an overview of the range of semantic developments is missing. This paper reviews the major semantic patterns based on the lexicographic evidence provided by the electronic (on-line) version of the second edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter, OED) on noun-verb pairs related by conversion. The OED definitions are not taken here to be an exhaustive list of all the possible interpretations of each term, especially as figurative meaning has to be taken into consideration and it is often not recorded in dictionaries, but they provide a picture of how the senses of base and derived terms may coexist in conversion, and of their relation, which is one of the purposes of the paper. Only active lemmas and senses not marked as having a limited use (e.g. marked as obsolete or rare) were taken into consideration so that the results and the ensuing conclusions are as close as possible to actual use.

It has been stated that the correct interpretation of a converted term relies on non-linguistic knowledge (Clark & Clark 1979). When the interpretation of conversion depends on a figurative extension of meaning,<sup>2</sup> the possibilities are multiplied according to their context in that the focus of figurative extension of meaning is inseparable from its frame (Ricoeur 1977: 85, 99). Even so, meanings are here assumed to follow the general rule that the meaning of the derived term is somehow connected with the meaning of its base (Aronoff 1980: 747).

In sections 2.2 and 3 below, the nature of this connection relies on the OED definitions of the base and the derived terms, and on the influence of the former on the latter. Specifically, the glosses of formally identical noun-verb pairs are studied for a figurative extension of meaning from the base to the derived term. For example, the semantic

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<sup>2</sup> See Ricoeur (1977: 96).

dependence of senses of the verb on senses of the noun seems evident when the gloss of the derivative includes the base, both in literal senses as in *pigeonhole*<sup>N</sup> vs. *pigeonhole*<sup>V</sup> (“to deposit in a pigeonhole [...]”), or in figurative ones, as in *pinball*<sup>N</sup> vs. *pinball*<sup>V</sup> “to move from one thing or place to another, esp. quickly or in a seemingly haphazard way, like a ball in a pinball machine”. In this paper, this dependence has been considered to exist not only if one is defined in terms of the other, but also when the sense of the derivative relies on a set expression in which the base occurs, as in *wolf*<sup>N</sup> vs. *wolf*<sup>V</sup>, where the sense of the verb “to delude with false alarms” draws from the use of the noun in the expression *to cry wolf* “to raise a false alarm [...]”. Instances of homonymy like *box*<sup>N</sup> “a case or receptacle usually having a lid” vs. *box*<sup>V</sup> “to beat, thrash [...] to fight with fists” have not been considered.

## 2. Conversion and meaning

### 2.1. Change of categorial meaning

A part of the focus on conversion has shifted in recent years from features like the position of converted words in the sentence or their morphosyntactic profile to their semantics. Plag (1999: 219–20) summarizes the semantic patterns of conversion reported in the literature as follows (with additional cross/cutting categories like movement in time and space, typical action of the base, typical function of the base):

Locative	put (in)to X
Ornative	provide with X
Causative	make (more) X
Resultative	make into X
Inchoative	become X
Performative	perform X
Similative	act like X
Instrumental	use X
Privative	remove X
Stative	be X

These patterns are well-known and are contained in the various formulae or semantic patterns used by a number of authors to express the alteration implied in the change of word-class from noun to verb. They are specifications of the inherent semantic difference between a noun and the verb which nominal bases may develop in conversion. All are supposed to be variants of the expressions which in conversion are typically worded in broad terms (semantic prototypes/archisemes/...) as ACTION, ACTIVITY, STATE, EVENT, PROCESS... for verbs.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this paper, these patterns can be exemplified by *holster*<sup>N</sup> “a leather case for a pistol fixed to the pommel of a horseman’s saddle or worn on the belt”<sup>4</sup> and

<sup>3</sup> See Marchand (1969: 365ff.), Kastovsky (1974: 384ff.), Clark & Clark (1979), Quirk et al. (1985: 1560ff.), Tournier (2010: 185ff.), Cetnarowska (1993: 86ff.), Kastovsky (1994: 97–8). See also a review of these in Don, Trommelen & Zonneveld (2000: 948–50) and in Martsa (2007). Aronoff (1984: 45–6, cited in Pounder 2000: 101–2) brings these patterns back to a broad-spectrum contrast between categorial meanings.

<sup>4</sup> All the definitions quote the edition of the OED used.

*holster*<sup>V</sup> “to put (a gun) into its holster”, which make use of the Locative model in Table 1 above.

This type of semantic transfer and, in general, the patterns contained in Table 1 can be represented graphically as pattern A in Figure 1, where it is shown that a literal meaning is transferred from one word–class to another:

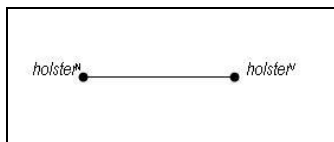


Figure 1: Pattern A of semantic change in conversion

The import of the meaning transfer implicit in this semantic model has been the object of controversy, specifically in respect of whether it entails lexical derivation or not. One position presents conversion as *conceptual recategorization* (Štekauer 1996: 46), that is to say, as a lexico–semantic process operating on the semantic dimension of words such that a nuance (feature/component/...) of meaning<sup>5</sup> is introduced (or deleted) with the effect of creating a new word and causing syntactic change but without any marker of the changed status. This position is not unanimously accepted as a feature of conversion, and doubts on this interpretation are available in the literature too (for example, in Revard 1968, cited in Ringbom & Rissanen 1984: 87).

The difficulty in deciding whether or not there is such semantic change and, if so, what its nature is, is well illustrated in the following remark by Sweet (1891–8, I: 39): “[...] although conversion does not involve any alteration in the meaning of a word, yet the use of a word as a different part of speech naturally leads to divergence in meaning.”

The apparent contradiction of denying “[...] any alteration in the meaning of a word” while at the same time admitting “[...] divergence in meaning” is difficult to resolve, but it probably refers to the contrast between categorial meaning and lexical meaning. *Categorial meaning* is here understood as explained by Pounder (2000: 98) “[...] i.e., the meaning a word has by virtue of being noun or verb, etc.” The concept of categorial meaning is accepted in general,<sup>6</sup> and the archisemes usually attributed to denominal verbalization account for most converted verbs as in the paraphrases of Table 1.

This paper will come back to the lack of unanimity on the significance of semantic change in conversion in the discussion (Section 3). The disagreement on this theoretical point may stem from diverging views of meaning, of conversion, of word–formation or of all of these, but a part of the picture may also be the fact that not all instances of conversion present the same kind of semantic change. For this reason, other possible patterns of semantic change in conversion are discussed first.

## 2.2 *Categorial and lexical meaning*

The semantic change involved in conversion cannot always be reduced to different conceptualisations of the same lexical meaning, or alternation between two or more ways of viewing the same core of meaning, for example PROCESS or THING to put it in broad terms. Some cases involve not just alternation, but actual semantic change that leads the converted

<sup>5</sup> For example, Ackema (1999: 218) associates conversion with addition of “[...] certain features to a base”.

<sup>6</sup> See, however, Helbig (1977: 96, cited in Knobloch & Schaefer 2000: 678).

word to diverge so much in meaning from its base that, while a connection can be traced, what they have in common may be, from several points of view, less substantial than what they differ in.

Possible sources of this divergence are other causes of polysemy than figurative extension, for example in the sense of *pen*<sup>N</sup> “a writing tool, and related senses” vs. *pen*<sup>N</sup> “a feather, a quill, and connected senses”, and the verb *pen*<sup>V</sup> derived from the former “to write or execute with a pen”. Here we assume that historically these were identical in meaning, and there is therefore no figure involved. This paper does not explore polysemy in detail but, if the arguments given here for the influence of figurative extension of meaning are considered to be valid, then the importance of polysemy in general should perhaps also be reassessed (see Ricoeur 1977: 110, 122–3). The term *figurative extension* is used initially in a broad sense for a variety of processes. Figures of speech like irony or hyperbole may be used with converted pairs, but they do not entail word–class change and therefore are not the subject of this paper. Two of the major processes that may entail word–class change are the ones which are often cited as the major types of figurative extension of meaning: metaphor and metonymy.<sup>7</sup> Figurative extension of meaning of various types, specifically by metaphor, has also been described as occurring in noun to verb conversion displaying typical features of metaphor like semantic mapping across domains, similarities between entities which in principle are different, and a relation across a semantic gulf.<sup>8</sup> Several combinations can be found as regards the coexistence and transfer of literal and/or figurative meaning in conversion. In one combination, the nominal base has both literal and figurative meanings, but only the literal ones are transferred to the verb, as in *brick*<sup>N</sup> “a substance formed of clay [...] used instead of stone as a building material” but also “a good fellow, one whom one approves for his genuine good qualities” vs. *brick*<sup>V</sup> “to line, face, or pave with brick; to imitate brickwork on a plaster surface by lining and colouring [...] to work with [...] bricks”.

In another case, the nominal base may have literal and figurative meanings, but only the figurative ones are transferred to the converted verb, as in *lobby*<sup>N</sup> “in the House of Commons [...] a large entrance–hall [...] chiefly serving for interviews between members and persons not belonging to the House [...]” and “[...] the persons who frequent the lobby of the house of legislature for the purpose of influencing its members in their official action; [...]” vs. *lobby*<sup>V</sup> “to influence (members of a house of legislature) in the exercise of their legislative functions by frequenting the lobby [...]”.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, both the noun and the verb may have literal and figurative meanings, as in *oyster*<sup>N</sup> vs. *oyster*<sup>V</sup>, where the literal meaning of the verb “to fish for or gather oysters” draws on the noun’s “any of various bivalve molluscs of the family Ostreidae [...]”, and the figurative meaning of the verb “to become silent; to shut up” is also based on the noun’s “a reserved or uncommunicative person”. It can be argued whether the figurative sense of the derived term is a figurative extension of the literal sense within the category verb, or whether

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<sup>7</sup> See Lakoff (cited in Ravin & Leacock 2000: 16–17) for meaning extension as motivated by metaphor and metonymy. See also Tournier (2010: 49–51, 217). These processes can also be found not involving word–class change, that is, “[...] the borderline of a lexeme is not overstepped”, as Štekauer (1996: 19) says of some of Stein’s (1977) cases of *semantic conversion* by metonymic change. On the relevance of metonymy in word–formation in general, see, among others, the debate between Janda (2011, 2014) and Brdar (2017) and Brdar & Brdar-Szabó (2014).

<sup>8</sup> See Deignan (1997: 50–68, 104–37). See also Tournier (2010: 245) and Lipka (1990: 122ff.) on the essentials of metaphor as in Jakobson (1956). See Ricoeur (1977: 23–4, 56ff., 80–4, 104ff.) for the view of metaphor held in this paper.

<sup>9</sup> Emphasis as in the original.

both the literal and figurative senses of the derived terms have been transferred from the base. The latter would seem logical, especially as the figurative senses in the converted verb are parallel to those in the nominal base, but it is not certain in view of cases in which the base and the derived term have different extended meanings.<sup>10</sup> This debate is inconsequential for the purposes of this paper.

These possibilities can be represented in Figure 2 as varied models illustrating coexistence and transfer of literal and figurative meaning between base and derived term in conversion:

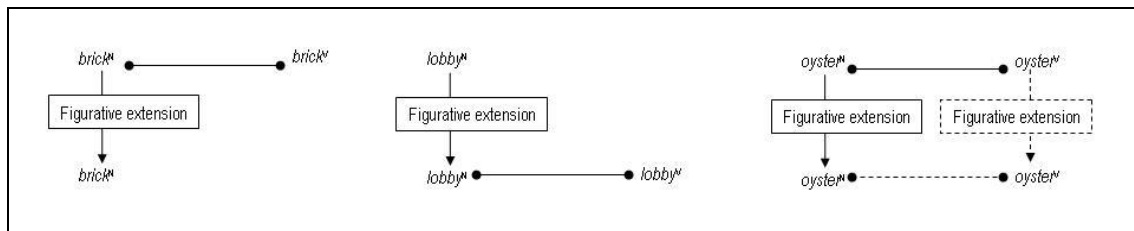


Figure 2: Variants of semantic change where figurative extension occurs in the base term (broken lines mean only one applies)

In the above, and except for one of the interpretations of the last variant, figurative extension takes place within the base, and the derivative parallels in the main the developments of the base. This is not always the case. For example, the verb may develop figurative senses which were not present in the nominal base, as in *hamstring*<sup>N</sup> vs. *hamstring*<sup>V</sup>, where the literal sense of the verbalization draws on the literal meaning of the noun “in human anatomy, one of the tendons [...] which form the sides of the ham or space at the back of the knee”, but its figurative sense results from figurative extension within the word-class verb “to cut the hamstrings of, so as to lame or disable; also to cut the muscle or tendons of the small of the whale” but also “[t]o disable as if by hamstringing; to cripple, destroy the activity or efficiency of”. This is represented in Figure 3 below:

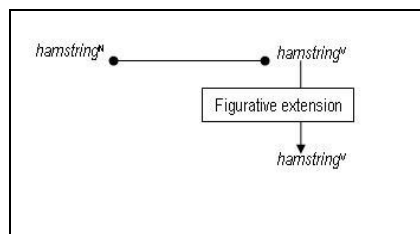


Figure 3: Variant of semantic change where figurative extension occurs in the derived term

To some extent, the patterns displayed in Figures 2 and 3 are irrelevant for a discussion on semantic change in conversion for two reasons. First, because they entail figurative extension of meaning but at the same time they can be brought back to Plag’s checklist of semantic patterns (largely thanks to the Simulative pattern), that is to say, the literal senses and their figurative extensions are transferred from base to derived term by what we called pattern A

<sup>10</sup> For example, *massage*<sup>N</sup> “sexual services, esp. as advertised by prostitutes; a sexual act, esp. one performed by a prostitute for a client” vs. *massage*<sup>V</sup> “to manipulate so as to achieve a desired effect (lit. and fig.); to flatter, gratify, indulge. [...] to manipulate (data, figures, etc., or their presentation), esp. in order to give a more acceptable result. [...] to assault (a person) with repeated blows; to kill”.

above. Second, because figurative extension takes place within one and the same word–class, regardless of whether it is later arranged into a new word–class category or not. This means that in this case figurative extension by itself does not have any effect as far as conversion is concerned.

However, these patterns are useful as a basis of comparison for a further pattern, here called pattern B. This pattern differs from the patterns illustrated above in that the conversion to the new word–class takes place exclusively as a result of figurative extension from the base and not following any of the models described in Table 1, including the Similitive one. In this case, a semantic link exists between the base and the derived term. This link expresses itself in a figurative extension of meaning which does not have a figurative counterpart in the base term and does not stem from a literal meaning within the derived term, as witnessed by lexicographic evidence (that is to say, no figurative extension has been recorded for the base, no literal meaning has been recorded for the derivative, and the sense of the converted verb does not rely for its lexicographic gloss on the base or on synonymous terms even if a figurative link exists). A number of examples can be given for this pattern, like *coffee-house*<sup>N</sup> vs. *coffee-house*<sup>V</sup>, where the sense of the verb “to indulge in gossip (orig. while waiting for the hounds to draw a covert, etc., during a fox–hunt)” draws on the sense of the noun “a house of entertainment where coffee and other refreshments are supplied. (Much frequented in 17th and 18th c. for the purpose of political and literary conversation [...])”, but no other literal or figurative senses exist in either. This pattern is represented in Figure 4:

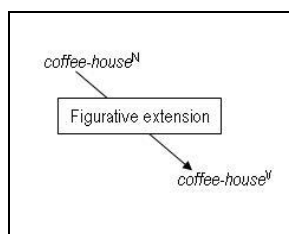


Figure 4: Pattern B of semantic change in conversion

Unlike conversions where only categorial meaning changes (Figure 1), or where categorial meaning changes by figurative extension within the same category and then to a different category or vice versa (Figures 2 and 3), figurative extension is the major process here, is the one that gives rise to conversion, and is also one in which semantic change seems to take place<sup>11</sup> (Figure 4).

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1 *Semantic change disclaimed*

The question whether word–formation processes involve change of meaning or sometimes just of word–class has been debated elsewhere (Bauer 1983: 185–9; 1997: 252). For authors like Kuryłowicz (1936) or Marchand (1967 and 1969),<sup>12</sup> the contrast between syntactic and lexical or semantic derivation distinguishes several degrees to which derivation can take

<sup>11</sup> See Ricoeur (1977: 104, 106–17, 120–5) and the review contained therein on semantic change in metaphor.

<sup>12</sup> See also Beard (1998: 58–60) and Naumann & Vogel (2000: 931).

place. Their view is that mere word–class change (*dérivation syntaxique* in Kuryłowicz, *transposition*<sup>13</sup> in Marchand) may not qualify as lexical or semantic derivation,<sup>14</sup> and does not necessarily entail other semantic changes, even if such semantic changes are frequent (see Leech 1974: 241ff.; Fleischer 2000: 887). This position holds that noun–to–verb semantic derivation introduces an argument structure, whereas word–class change “[...] simply shifts a stem from one category to another [...]” (Beard 1998: 60).<sup>15</sup> In fact, mere word–class change, usually termed *transposition*, is sometimes described explicitly as occurrence of the same meaning: literally, “[...] *gleichen lexikalische Bedeutung*“,<sup>16</sup> or “[...] basic invariance of core meaning“.<sup>17</sup> This is probably how Don, Trommelen & Zonneveld (2000: 944) interpret Sweet’s (1891–8, I: 38–9) words cited in 2.1 above.

The above applies in general to class–changing derivation and, by extension, can be applied to conversion, but direct references to conversion in line with the above can also be found. Unlike syntactic specification, semantic specification or semantic change in conversion is presented as either not a requisite (Leech 1974: 241ff.; cf. also Nagano to appear), or as uncertain (Pounder 2000: 69).<sup>18</sup> Other descriptions take a more radical position and explicitly deny the occurrence of a semantic change, for example Beard (1998: 62), who explains conversion as “[T]ransposing a lexeme from one category to another without affixation [...]“. More detailed approaches, like Mel’čuk’s (2000: 530), establish contrasts according to the “[...] feature of syntactics that is replaced: part of speech (*categorical conversion*, inflection/derivation type (*paradigmatic conversion*, and government/agreement (*rectional conversion* “,<sup>19</sup> but no explicit reference is made to meaning change, and the closest to such a change is listed as a “feature of syntactics” in any case.

Overall, these positions agree that semantic change plays a minor role in conversion if at all, and can be summarized in the following quotation:

Derivational meaning is [...] divided into type–changing derivation, which significantly alters the profiled concept in the frame presupposed by the lexical meaning specified by the root, and function–indicating derivation, which changes its syntactic category, but with much smaller semantic effects [...].  
(Croft 2000: 261).

### 3.2 *Semantic change claimed*

Croft’s claim that shift in syntactic categories involves, at most, subtle semantic changes that are “[...] almost purely a shift in conceptualization” (2000: 262) is ambiguous. The

<sup>13</sup> Note that this term is used in this paper in the sense of Marchand (1969), not of Ricoeur (1977: 17ff.).

<sup>14</sup> See Kastovsky (1992: 396); see also Pennanen’s (1984: 85) discussion on noun–verb conversion, in particular, his account of the noun *walk* where the converted denominal verb does not take any “[...] different semantic developments” or does not differ from the verb semantically; see similarly Dokulil (1968: 224) and Naumann & Vogel (2000: 938).

<sup>15</sup> See also van Marle (1985: 144–6) and Vogel (1996: 46).

<sup>16</sup> Wilske (1976: 161, cited in Fleischer 2000: 888).

<sup>17</sup> Sanders (1988: 157; see also Fleischer 2000: 894). A review of the problems of this approach is made in Fleischer & Barz (1992: 49ff.). The cases in which semantic change occurs are described as *mutation* (Fleischer 2000: 888).

<sup>18</sup> “[...] conversion is an operation in which no form rule, but only a syntactic *and perhaps also semantic* one are present” (Pounder 2000: 69, my emphasis).

<sup>19</sup> Emphasis as in the original.

ambiguity arises because the different interpretations of the cases listed in Table 1 can be considered to be either different meanings or the same meaning.

However, it can be argued that if, as Kastovsky (1996: 231) says, “[...] the function of word-forming processes in a language is to create new complex [...] items as labels for nameworthy segments of extralinguistic reality”, the nature of our perception of extralinguistic reality may mean that we prefer to see particular entities or events as nouns or as verbs, and that those different perspectives involve a semantic difference. This argument follows Bolinger’s (1969: 37, cited in Lipka 1971: 211–12) proposal to treat word-class as an attribute of lexical items;<sup>20</sup> in fact Lipka’s account of Bolinger explicitly cites zero-derivation in relation with this issue, because these different perspectives from which reality can be approached may be used to pinpoint the “[...] meaningful grammatical colouring” that members of zero-derived pairs can take.

It may also be interesting to note that Marchand (1969: 360) separates conversion from syntactic transposition as in *the poor*.<sup>21</sup> This implicitly brings conversion closer to the semantic change that occurs in lexical derivation. At other points of her discussion, Pounder (2000: 70–1) talks of “[...] change in lexico-syntactic class” and “[...] modification of (lexico-)syntactic properties [...]”, illustrates conversion with examples of a “new word” in which “[...] there is a good chance that a modification of meaning is involved as well”, and finally argues for consideration of word-formation as consisting in “[...] modification of lexemic meaning”, which in the case of conversion leads to a semantic change “[...] of the same status as the formal and syntactic changes”.<sup>22</sup>

Other authors have more distinct standpoints: Szymanek (1989: 82–3) argues for content variation in conversion and includes conversion under the notion of *semantic derivation*, even if this process “[...] sometimes results in fairly subtle and systematic modifications of meaning”. Zwanenburg (2000: 841) admits a semantic difference in conversion (although what value is attached to the difference is not entirely clear). Cetnarowska (1996: 15) cites semantic change on a par with syntactic change in conversion. Neef (1999: 218–19) detaches conversion from mere transposition from one word-class to another, and Kerleroux (1999: 90ff.) separates the categorial and the semantic contrast between conversion-related words, and makes explicit her view that there is a difference in lexical sense or a semantic difference between such words.

### 3.3 Theoretical implications

The theoretical implications of the positions summarized above revolve first around the value given to categorial meaning and, second, around what semantic changes qualify as conversion.

The first conclusion that can be drawn from this discussion is that change of categorial meaning is firmly rooted in the literature as a feature of conversion, but also that it is unclear whether it involves derivation in its broadest sense (here meant as change of word-class *and*

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<sup>20</sup> In the case of the contrast between noun and verb, the distinction can be described in terms of the occurrence of features like [VERBATION] or [STATIVATION].

<sup>21</sup> For other authors, like Bhat & Pustet (2000: 764), this kind of lexeme belongs to only one class, adjective, which can denote both the property and the person that has the property.

<sup>22</sup> Although these quotations may seem to justify counting her position as in favour of the existence of a semantic change in conversion, it is not entirely clear whether these changes go beyond categorial meaning in her framework or not.



of lexical class, that is to say, in Marchand's terms as change of word-class with "[...] an added element of meaning" or "[...] extra meaning [...]", Marchand 1969: 359–60).<sup>23</sup> The second is that denying change of categorial meaning the status of semantic change, as in 3.1, has as a consequence the existence of two types of conversion: one which changes only the word-class of the base, and another which changes the word-class and the lexical meaning of the base, perhaps by figurative extension. These two types could be associated with patterns A and B respectively. The variants of pattern A according to where and how the figurative senses are developed are inconsequential here. By contrast, allowing change of categorial meaning to be considered as a subtype of semantic change, as in 3.2, leads to just one type of conversion except that it may make use of at least two different strategies for lexical derivation. The third implication is that, whether categorial meaning is or is not viewed as semantic change, pattern B exposes a semantic heterogeneity in conversion which has been implied in the literature (especially in respect of the role of figurative extension of meaning, specifically by metonymy and metaphor), but whose significance may not have been fully assessed yet (for the role of metonymy in conversion, see, among others, Kastovsky 2005: 113–114, Cetnarowska 2011, Kalnača & Lokmane 2016: 170, Tóth-Czifra 2016, Bauer to appear).

As to the second issue, whatever semantic changes are included in conversion, most of this argumentation and the problem of relating conversion to other semantic processes are the result of the lack of clear limits on what is and what is not conversion (see Twardzisz 1997: 84). This *conceptual ambiguity*, to use Naumann & Vogel's term (2000: 932), is well-known.<sup>24</sup> However, this ambiguity is largely inevitable because the concept is about notions that lend themselves to various interpretations by definition, and therefore depends on what perspective is taken with respect to them.

In at least strictly formal terms, semantic variation within conversion ranges from the one involved in transposition to the one in secondary conversion<sup>25</sup> (i.e. semantic change without word-class variation) with several cases in between, semantic change and word-class change as a result of figurative extension among them. Which of these developments involve true semantic change is probably a matter of opinion again. More important, it is not any clearer which of these developments should be considered as falling within word-formation and which not. A review of the literature on this matter would echo the positions presented in 3.1 and 3.2 on the value of categorial meaning in that arguments have been raised for and against granting more space in word-formation to figures of speech like metaphor and metonymy. Thus, it has been claimed that metaphor and metonymy have not always been given the importance that they have outside stylistics and as processes that are not only figures of speech (Tournier 2010: 217). This has been recognized in the specific case of conversion (e.g. Lipka 1990: 124–5) and there are references which support this, for example, Dirven & Verspoor's (1998: 66–7) standpoint that "[C]onceptually, each conversion process implies a metonymical extension from one element in an event to the whole event [...]."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See also Don, Trommelen & Zonneveld (2000: 946).

<sup>24</sup> See for example Kruisinga (1931–2, II: 96–161), Dokulil (1968: 221), Stein (1977: 228–30) or Vogel (1996: 1–5).

<sup>25</sup> On this issue, see Leech (1974: 216) or Givón (1993 vol. I: 70–1). See also Bolinger (1975: 116, cited in Twardzisz 1997: 80–1), Stein (1977, cited in Twardzisz 1997: 80–1), Scalise (1988: 564–5, cited in Pounder 2000: 48), Kastovsky (1994: 95), Pena Seijas (1994: 50), Twardzisz (1997: 81–2, 175ff., 195), Bergenholtz & Mugdan (2000: 444) and Don, Trommelen & Zonneveld (2000: 944–5).

<sup>26</sup> See similarly Stein (1977), Dirven (1999: 277), Schönefeld (2005), Martsa (2007).

But accepting the influence of figures of speech on word-formation and allotting them a place is a different matter, or so it seems in view of the argument that “[...] zero-derivation [...] is [...] not to be identified with semantic transfer resulting in metaphors” (Lipka 1990: 186),<sup>27</sup> and of his explicit separation of word-formation processes from metaphorical and metonymical derivation: “[W]e could [...] regard word metaphors and metonyms as the result of a special type of derivation, which might be labelled ‘semantic’ or ‘inner derivation’” (Lipka 1990: 140).

If anything, what the examples used in this paper show is that different semantic processes may operate within conversion, and that the instances of conversion which we would naturally associate with one and the same concept may respond to several patterns, one of which is not within the ones described in the literature: A) only categorial meaning changes, with variants according to whether figurative extension occurs in the base or in the derived term; and B) figurative extension applies, where the extension of meaning takes place across word-classes (categorial and lexical meaning coexist) (see Figure 5).

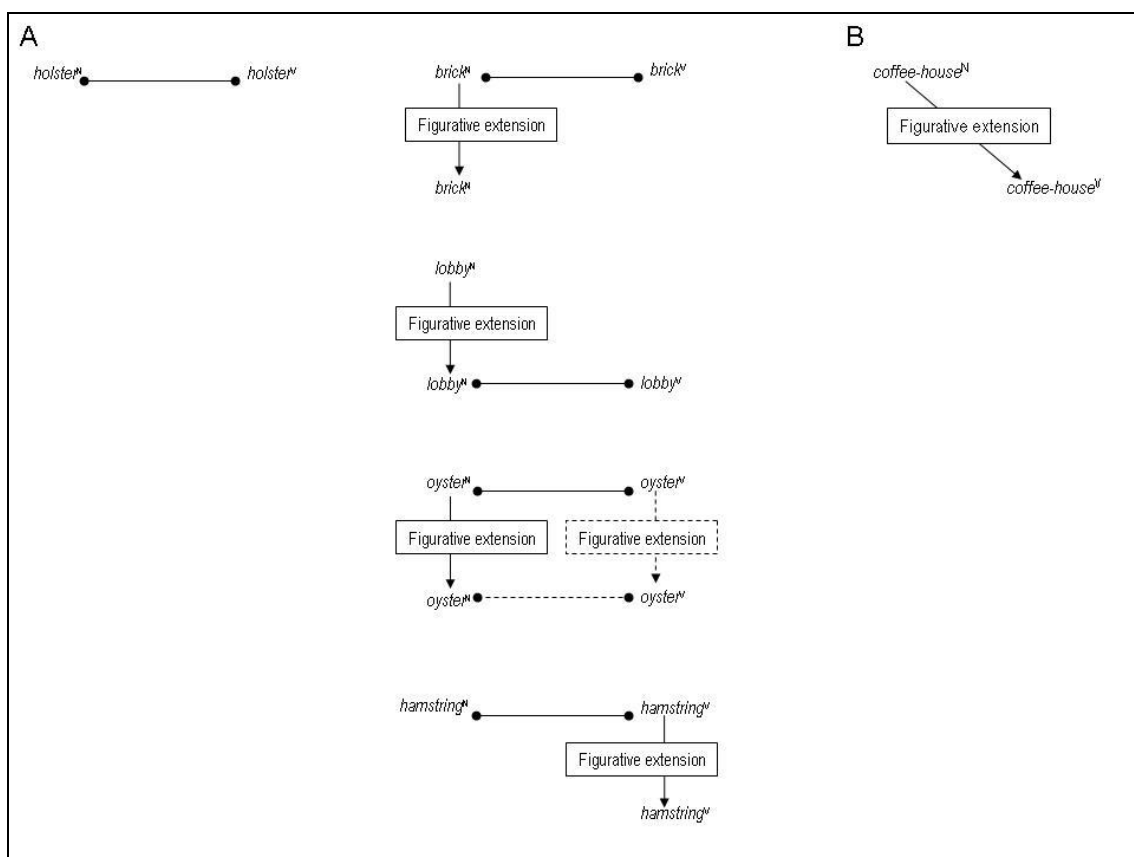


Figure 5: Two different patterns of semantic change described as conversion (with variants of the former in between for comparison; broken lines mean only one applies)

What implications a picture like this may have is unclear. First, it may establish a basis of comparison for a revision of the import of the semantic change of conversion. This might lead to group under conversion, on exclusively semantic bases (and perhaps also on their

<sup>27</sup> Pena Seijas (1994: 50) also limits conversion to cases in which meaning differs only in respect of word-class or sub-word-class.

frequency), the words that have undergone the same kind of process and separate those that have undergone others, that is to say, to identify conversion with pattern A (e.g. *holster*) and separate figurative extension of meaning (e.g. *coffee-house*, pattern B). Alternatively, both patterns could be accounted for as conversion but more semantic diversity than initially assumed should then be taken into consideration. Second, if patterns which rely exclusively on the operation of figurative extension of meaning, like pattern B, are excluded from conversion (because they are excluded from word-formation), then a new explanation should be found for them. And third, if this restricted view of word-formation combines with the restricted view of conversion in which change of categorial meaning does not imply a semantic change, then conversion comes down basically to syntactic recategorization.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Semantic change may follow patterns which may be interpreted differently and whose importance raises theoretical questions. A paper like this cannot solve all these questions, because they ultimately concern the framework of word-formation in general, not just conversion. These considerations on how meaning changes in conversion, if/when it does, are meant to show one case in which the role of certain figures of speech in conversion seems conceptually relevant.

The identification of patterns in which figurative extension of meaning interacts with word-formation processes is empirical justification of the view that some figures of speech play a role in word-formation which has not been fully defined. By outlining the definition of one such pattern, specifically of one involving noun-to-verb conversion and figurative extension of meaning, this paper raises questions on the heterogeneity of conversion at a semantic level. Being based on lexicographic evidence, it is difficult to say which of the cases found in the dictionary are widely used by speakers. This applies in the opposite direction too, we cannot state which instances of actual use are not recorded in the dictionary, but these could reasonably be expected to outnumber the former. A typology of these instances is therefore missing at this stage too.

Overall, these questions seem to lead to two positions which invariably end up granting conversion more semantic diversity than may have been assumed. This is relevant in itself but also because further research on conversion between other word-classes may disclose areas where figurative extension of meaning turns out to be more important than it has been considered so far and may lead to reassess the value of polysemy when it is related to word-class change in conversion.

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*Salvador Valera*  
*Department of English and German Philologies*  
*University of Granada*  
*Spain*  
*svalera@ugr.es*