University of Latvia, December 2, 2025

Defining conversion in Latvian

Jurgis Pakerys
Vilnius University

Outline

1. Canonical approach
2. Canonical conversion
3. Non-canonical conversion
4. Interpretation in Latvian linguistics
5. Conclusion
6. References

1. Canonical approach

“In a canonical approach, we take definitions to their logical end point and build theoretical spaces of possibilities. Only then do we ask how this space is populated”

(Corbett 2005)

1. Canonical approach

bottle$_N$ → *bottle*$_V$
run$_V$ → *run*$_N$

(A) Identity of form
(B) Word-class change
(C) The absence of (dedicated) derivational affixes

(Bauer 1983: 32; Bauer & Valera 2005: 8;
Štekauer, Valera & Körtvélyessy 2012: 213–223;
Valera 2014: 154; 2015: 322; Martsa 2020)

1. Canonical approach

	Canonical conversion	Non-canonical conversion		
		a	b	c
Identity of form	+	–	+	–
Word-class change	+	+	–	–
No derivational affix	+	+	+	+

2. Canonical conversion

	Canonical conversion	Non-canonical conversion		
		a	b	c
Identity of form	+	–	+	–
Word-class change	+	+	–	–
No derivational affix	+	+	+	+

2. Canonical conversion

Non-inflecting word classes, no paradigms

(1) *blakus*$_{\text{Adv}}$ ‘close by’ → *blakus*$_{\text{Prep}}$ ‘next to’
(2) *līdz*$_{\text{Prep}}$ ‘until, up to’ → *līdz*$_{\text{Conj}}$ ‘until’
(3) *tik*$_{\text{Ptcl}}$ ‘only, just’ → *tik*$_{\text{Conj}}$ ‘but, however’

- POS change +
- Identity of form +
- No derivational affix +

2. Canonical conversion

(1) *blakus*$_{\text{Adv}}$ ‘close by’ → *blakus*$_{\text{Prep}}$ ‘next to’

Mēs ar Žanīti guļam ***blakus***$_{Adv}$ LLVV

Blakus$_{Prep}$ *sausiem kartupeļiem*$_{DAT}$
[uz galda] bļodiņā kūpēja sīpolu mērce LLVV

2. Canonical conversion

(2) *līdz*$_{\text{Prep}}$ ‘until, up to’ → *līdz*$_{\text{Conj}}$ ‘until’

Braukt ***līdz***$_{\text{Prep}}$ *pilsētai*$_{\text{DAT}}$ LLVV

Mums jākāpj stāvā kalnā, ***līdz***$_{\text{Conj}}$
nonākam pie Krimuldas pils drupām LLVV

2. Canonical conversion

(3) *tik*$_{\text{Ptcl}}$ ‘only, just’ → *tik*$_{\text{Conj}}$ ‘but, however’

[…] paturēdami sev ***tik***$_{\text{Ptcl}}$ *vienu zirgu un vienus ratus* LLVV

Par sievu gribu ņemt, ***tik***$_{\text{Conj}}$ *viņa nenāk* LLVV

3. Non-canonical conversion (a)

	Canonical conversion	Non-canonical conversion		
		a	b	c
Identity of form	+	–	+	–
Word-class change	+	+	–	–
No derivational affix	+	+	+	+

3. Non-canonical conversion (a)

Paradigm-replacing conversion

(4) *aûg-t*$_{V}$ ‘to grow (intr.)’ → *aûg-s*$_{N}$ ‘plant’

(5) *lìksm-s*$_{Adj}$ ‘joyful’ → *lìksm-e*$_{N}$ ‘joy’

3. Non-canonical conversion (a)

Paradigm-replacing conversion

aug-u	→	*aug-s*
audz		*aug-a*
aug		*aug-am*
aug-am		*aug-u*
aug-at		*aug-ā*
aug-u		*aug-i*
aug-i		*aug-u*
aug-ā-m		*aug-iem*
…		…

3. Non-canonical conversion (a)

Paradigm-replacing conversion

līksm-s	→	*līksm-e*
līksm-a		*līksm-es*
līksm-am		*līksm-ei*
līksm-u		*līksm-i*
…		*līksm-ē*
līksm-a		*līksm-es*
līksm-as		*līksmj-u*
līksm-ai		*līksm-ēm*
līksm-u		*līksm-es*
…		…

3. Non-canonical conversion (a)

Paradigm-replacing conversion

(4) *aûg-t*$_{V}$ ‘to grow (intr.)’ → *aûg-s*$_{N}$ ‘plant’

(5) *lìksm-s*$_{Adj}$ ‘joyful’ → *lìksm-e*$_{N}$ ‘joy’

- Identity of form – inflection
- POS change +
- No derivational affix +

3. Non-canonical conversion (a)

Paradigm-restricting conversion

(6) *vecâki*$_{\text{Adj}}$ ‘older’ → *vecâki*$_{\text{N}}$ ‘parents’

(7) *reĩz-ẽ*$_{\text{N}}$ ‘at time’ → *reĩzẽ*$_{\text{Adv}}$ ‘at the same time’

(8) *bèidz-õt*$_{\text{V}}$ ‘finishing’ → *bèidzõt*$_{\text{Adv}}$ ‘finally’

3. Non-canonical conversion (a)

Paradigm-restricting conversion

vec-s		
vec-a		
…		
vec-āk-s		
vec-āk-a		
…		
vec-āk-i	→	*vecāk-i*
vec-āk-u		*vecāk-u*
vec-āk-iem		*vecāk-iem*
…		…

3. Non-canonical conversion (a)

Paradigm-restricting conversion

reiz-e		
reiz-es		
reiz-ei		
reiz-i	→	*reizi* (dial.)
reiz-ē	→	*reizē*
reiz-es		
reiž-u		
reiz-ēm	→	*reizēm*
…		

3. Non-canonical conversion (a)

Paradigm-restricting conversion

beig-t

beidz-u

beidz

beidz-am

beidz-at

…

beigd-am-s, -a

beidz-ot → *beidzot*

beidz-am

…

3. Non-canonical conversion (a)

Paradigm-restricting conversion

(6) *vecâki*$_{Adj}$ ‘older’ → *vecâki*$_{N}$ ‘parents’
(7) *reĩz-ẽ*$_{N}$ ‘at time’ → *reĩzẽ*$_{Adv}$ ‘at the same time’
(8) *bèidz-õt*$_{V}$ ‘finishing’ → *bèidzõt*$_{Adv}$ ‘finally’

- Identity of form – inflection
- POS change +
- No derivational affix +

3. Non-canonical conversion (a)

Paradigm-replacing conversion

(9) *ìesp**iê**s-t*$_{V}$ ‘to press into’ → *ìesp**aî**d-s*$_{N}$ ‘impression’

(10) *m**e**l̃n-s*$_{Adj}$ [**æ**] ‘black’ → *m**e**l̃n-is*$_{N}$ [**e**] ‘blackie’

(11) *t**èi**k-t*$_{V}$ ‘to tell’ → *t**eĩ**k-a*$_{N}$ ‘tale’

(12) *apgãd-**â**-t*$_{V}$ ‘to provide’ → *apgãd-e*$_{N}$ ‘provision’

- Identity of form – inflection, alternation, truncation
- POS change +
- No derivational affix +

3. Non-canonical conversion (b)

	Canonical conversion	Non-canonical conversion		
		a	b	c
Identity of form	+	–	+	–
Word-class change	+	+	–	–
No derivational affix	+	+	+	+

3. Non-canonical conversion (b)

Mass noun		Countable noun
*some **coffee***	vs.	*one **coffee***

Intransitive verb		Transitive verb
*the door **opened***	vs.	*she **opened** the door*

- Identity of form +
- POS change –
- No derivational affix +

Syntactic conversion (Bauer 1983: 227–228)

3. Non-canonical conversion (b)

Mass noun		Countable noun
*gribu **kafiju***	vs.	*(lūdzu) vienu **kafiju***
Intransitive verb		Transitive verb
tu** laikam **dusmo	vs.	*Jo **mani** tas viss*
par tiem neatbil-		*kaut kā ļoti **dusmo**.*
deetajiem zvaniem		
(tīmeklis-1.0*)*		(LVK2013)
		(Nau & Pakerys 2015: 112)

3. Non-canonical conversion (c)

	Canonical conversion	Non-canonical conversion		
		a	b	c
Identity of form	+	–	+	–
Word-class change	+	+	–	–
No derivational affix	+	+	+	+

3. Non-canonical conversion (c)

Paradigm-replacing conversion

(13) *kañdidãt-s*$_{N}$ ‘candidate (m.)’ → *kañdidãt-e*$_{N}$ ‘candidate (f.)’

- Identity of form – inflection
- POS change –
- No derivational affix +

3. Non-canonical conversion (c)

Paradigm-replacing conversion

(14) *cìlvẽ**k***-s_N [**æ**ː] ‘human’ → *cìlvẽ**c***-e_N [**e**ː] ‘humanity’

- Identity of form – inflection, alternation
- POS change –
- No derivational affix +

4. Interpretation in Latvian linguistics

Paradigm-replacing conversion

- Derivation by suffixal endings, (in)flectional derivation, **derivation by means of endings**, etc. (Ahero et al. 1959: 81, 159–170; Skujiņa 2007: 114 Nītiņa & Grigorjevs 2015: 201, 245; Kalnača & Lokmane 2021: 63, 66, 137–140, etc.)

- Conversion in a wider sense (with word-class change only) (Soida 2009: 72, but with caution on p. 54)

4. Interpretation in Latvian linguistics

Paradigm-restricting conversion

- **Conversion** (Ahero et al. 1959: 85; Skujiņa 2007: 194; Soida 2009: 70–72; Nītiņa & Grigorjevs 2015: 202, 207–209; Kalnača & Lokmane 2021: 73, etc.)

5. Conclusion

- Conversion in Latvian (and similar languages):

(1) the absence of dedicated derivational affixes

(2) inflections and base stems may change

(3) word classes may change

- Inflection patterns are altered through:

(1) paradigm **replacement**

(2) paradigm **restriction**

5. Conclusion

- **Conversion** can be classified together with other **non-concatenative (non-additive)** word-formation processes: reduplication, ablaut/apophony, templatic morphology, etc., cf. Štekauer, Valera & Körtvélyessy (2012)

- **Conversion** differs, however, by allowing the **identity of form**: other non-concatenative processes obligatorily affect the form of the base

Paldies!

6. References

Ahero, A., Bergmane, A., Blinkena, A., Grabis, R., Lepika, M., Mebikse, R., Miķelsone, A., Porīte, T. & Saule-Sleine, M. 1959. *Mūsdienu latviešu literārās valodas gramatika*, Vol 1. Rīga: Latvijas PSR Zinātņu akadēmijas izdevniecība.

Bauer, L. 1983. *English Word-Formation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bauer, L., & Valera, S. (2005). Conversion or zero-derivation: an introduction. In L. Bauer & S. Valera, eds., *Approaches to Conversion/Zero-Derivation*, 7–17. Münster: Waxmann.

Corbett, G. G. 2005. The canonical approach in typology. In Z. Frajzyngier, A. Hodges, & D. S. Rood, eds., *Linguistic Diversity and Language Theories*, 25–49. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Kalnača, A., & Lokmane, I. 2021. *Latvian Grammar*. Riga: University of Latvia Press.

Martsa, S. 2020. Conversion in Morphology. In M. Aronoff, ed., *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.567.

Nau, N. & Pakerys, J. 2016. Transitivity pairs in Baltic: between Finnic and Slavic. *Lingua Posnaniensis* 58(2). 83–126. (doi:10.1515/linpo-2016-0011).

6. References

Nītiņa, D. & Grigorjevs, J., eds., 2015. *Latviešu valodas gramatika*. Rīga: LU Latviešu Valodas Institūts.

Skujiņa, V., ed., 2007. *Valodniecības pamatterminu skaidrojošā vārdnīca*. Rīga: LU Latviešu Valodas Institūts.

Soida, E. 2009. *Vārddarināšana*. Rīga: LU Akadēmiskais apgāds.

Štekauer, P., Valera, S., & Körtvélyessy, L. 2012. *Word-Formation in the World's Languages: A Typological Survey*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Valera, S. 2014. Conversion. In R. Lieber & P. Štekauer, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Derivational Morphology*, 154–168. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Valera, S. 2015. Conversion. In P. O. Müller, I. Ohnheiser, S. Olsen, & F. Rainer, eds., *Word-Formation: An International Handbook of the Languages of Europe*, Vol. 1, 322–339. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.