

Aktuelles Forschungsprojekt
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CONVERSION IN ENGLISH

Conversion in English: The interaction of generic knowledge, contextual information, and syntactic constructions

General information

Research project supported by the Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung (Cologne)
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Description

While derivational word-formation is guided by constraints as to the compatibility of affixes and their bases (e.g. word-formation rules, subcategorization frames, stacking restrictions, semantic selection), no such constraints are available for the process traditionally referred to as conversion (e.g. *to soft-pedal*, *to Marconi*, *to oh-la-la*, *to clean*, *the ups and downs*). Thus, other processing strategies are required to account for the non-overt shift from one (conceptual) category to another. The aim of this project is to develop a usage-based model for English conversion which efficiently describes this highly dynamic yet non-arbitrary process. The main database comprises 507 innovative converted verbs from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

During the first two years, the focus of research was on

- the semantic relations underlying innovative converted verbs and the ranking of these relations in accordance with the relative salience of the motivating concepts and the thematic roles these concepts are associated with
- the cognate-object problem and metaphorical meaning extension
- the creation of argument structures for converted verbs
- the semantic distribution of noun-verb conversion and *-ize* derivation

The unified approach aimed at in the project is designed to model not only polysemy (including context-free and contextually determined readings), but also the rich metaphorical potential of conversion which has been largely neglected in previous works. A basic hypothesis is that the factors which determine conversion operate at different levels of genericity in the sense of Cognitive Linguistics. The multi-level approach allows us to analyse products of conversion on the basis of low-level (i.e. generic) information as to entities,

individuals, situations, etc. and to identify abstractions over low-level models at a higher level of representation (e.g. thematic or spatial relations). An additional primary level contributes cognitively grounded information which is particularly relevant for the metaphorical transfer of low-level scenarios to different domains of experience (e.g. *gas prices rocketing to record-high levels*). Another important aspect of the project is to show that context-free interpretations of innovative denominal verbs raise expectations as to the argument structures of these verbs and that these expectations are either met or modified by the discourse context, which also provides the syntactic context and hence the ‘surface’ argument structure constructions.

The third year is devoted to contrastive analyses English – German with respect to noun-verb conversion and to the question whether the three-level model developed for conversion can provide a solution to the problem of allegedly left-headed prefix verbs. Since prefixation – as compared to the dominance of conversion and *-ize/-ify* suffixation – plays a subordinate role in Modern English verb formation, the analyses are performed for German denominal verbs displaying the inseparable prefixes *be-*, *ent-*, *er-*, *ver-*, and *zer-*.

In addition, we investigate the function of an interesting syntactic pattern which has not received much attention in the literature and which is typically (though not necessarily) instantiated by converted verbs – namely the ‘verb + *it*’ construction (e.g. *to au-pair it*, *to bus it*, *to motel it*). A peculiarity of this construction is that the morpheme *it* does not have a referential function and lacks an antecedent.

List of publications resulting from this project

Baeskow, Heike (2021). Noun-verb conversion as a metonymic metamorphosis. *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics* 18(1): 2-34.

Baeskow, Heike (2022a). Experiencing the conceptual wealth of non-derived denominal verbs: A multi-level, simulation-based approach. *Studia Linguistica* 76(2): 591-625.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/stul.12189>.

[According to a certificate granted by Wiley Publishing, this article was one of the most downloaded during its first twelve months of publication in *Studia Linguistica*].

Baeskow, Heike (2022b). Noun-verb conversion between the poles of predictability and idiosyncrasy: How do denominal verbs build their argument structures? *Zeitschrift für Wortbildung / Journal of Word Formation* 6(2): 6-46.
<https://doi.org/10.3726/zwjw.2022.02.01>

Baeskow, Heike (2023a). The competition between noun-verb conversion and *-ize* derivation: Contrastive analyses of two productive English verb-formation processes. *Review of Cognitive Linguistics* (Online-first article).

Baeskow, Heike (2023b). A cognitive approach to the allegedly left-headed prefix verbs in German: Arguments for the interaction of prefixation and event-schema metonymy. *Linguistik Online* 120(2): 3-40.

Baeskow, Heike (to appear). Denominal conversion verbs and the ‘verb + *it*’ construction in English. *Word Structure*.

Further publications by Dr. Heike Baeskow

- Baeskow, Heike (2002): *Abgeleitete Personenbezeichnungen im Deutschen und Englischen. Kontrastive Wortbildungsanalysen im Rahmen des Minimalistischen Programms und unter Berücksichtigung sprachhistorischer Aspekte*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.
[This dissertation was awarded a first prize by the ‘Gesellschaft der Freunde der Bergischen Universität’, Wuppertal]
- Baeskow, Heike (2004): *Lexical Properties of Selected Non-native Morphemes of English*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.
- Baeskow, Heike (2006a): A revival of Romance roots. *Morphology* 16: 3-36.
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- Baeskow, Heike (2006b): Reflections on noun-to-verb conversion in English. *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* 25: 205-237. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ZFS.2006.008>
- Baeskow, Heike (2010a): Derivation in Generative Grammar and Neo-Construction Grammar: A critical evaluation and a new proposal. In: Susan Olsen (Ed.), *New Impulses in Word-Formation*. Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 21-59. (Linguistische Berichte Sonderheft 17).
- Baeskow, Heike (2010b): His Lordship’s *-ship* and the King of Golfdom. Against a purely functional analysis of suffixhood. *Word Structure* 3(1): 1-30.
<https://doi.org/10.3366/e1750124510000474>
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<https://doi.org/10.1177/0075424211405156>
- Baeskow, Heike (2014): Cognitive Grammar. In: Peter O. Müller & Susan Olsen (Eds.), *Wortbildung. Ein Lern- und Konsultationswörterbuch mit einer systematischen Einleitung und englischen Übersetzungen*. (Wörterbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft WSK). Berlin [etc.]: de Gruyter.
- Baeskow, Heike (2015a): Rules, patterns and schemata in word-formation. In: Peter O. Müller, Ingeborg Ohnheiser, Susan Olsen & Franz Rainer (Eds.), *Word-Formation. An international handbook of the languages of Europe. Volume 2*. (Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft HSK). Berlin: De Gruyter, 803-821.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110246278-001>
- Baeskow, Heike (2015b): Semantic restrictions in word-formation: the English suffix *-ee*. In: Peter O. Müller, Ingeborg Ohnheiser, Susan Olsen & Franz Rainer (Eds.), *Word-Formation. An international handbook of the languages of Europe. Volume 2*. (Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft HSK). Berlin: De Gruyter, 932-944. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110246278-008>
- Baeskow, Heike (2015c): Stacking as a reflex and indicator of (proto-)typical selectional restrictions. In: Laurie Bauer, Livia Körtvélyessy & Pavol Štekauer (Eds.), *Semantics of Complex Words*. Heidelberg [etc.]: Springer, 241-276.
DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-14102-2_12.
- Baeskow, Heike (2015d): Old words and new naming needs – an onomasiological account of lexical creativity in the English literature of the 16th – 19th century. *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics* 12(3): 23-53. Special Number: A Festschrift for Pavol Štekauer.
- Baeskow, Heike (2017): #Virtual Lexicality. The semantics of innovative prefixed verbal anglicisms in German. *Word Structure* 10(2): 173-203.
<https://doi.org/10.3366/word.2017.0107>

- Baeskow, Heike (2018a): *-Drink or -trunk, that is the question: The distribution of selected anglicisms and German near-synonyms in compounding*. *Studia Linguistica* 72(3): 725-768. <https://doi.org/10.1111/stul.12086>
- Baeskow, Heike & Jürgen Rolshoven (2018b): Anglicisms and German near-synonyms. What lexical co-occurrence reveals about their meanings. *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics* 15(1): 23-58.
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- Baeskow, Heike (2019): Denominal verbs in morphology. In: Rochelle Lieber & Mark Aronoff (Eds.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.502>
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