

**“BABES-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY**  
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**DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF LINGUISTIC AND LITERARY STUDIES**

**Conversion in the Contemporary Romanian Language.**  
**Old and New Directions**

**PhD Thesis**

**Summary**

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This doctoral thesis examines the complex process of conversion, which deserves, from our point of view, a detailed presentation.

Although research in the field of conversion has intensified lately, we are yet to identify a broad scientific study that is focused exclusively on the study of conversion and that approaches this process as comprehensively as it is dealt with in this doctoral thesis, enabling interested readers to have access to such a broad range of information.

Obviously, we are aware that the subject does not have to be exhausted in the present study, but we hope that it will arouse interest and serve as the starting point for other research in the field; it should also be noted that we have not managed to settle all the controversies in the field of conversion (this would ultimately be unachievable).

The need for such a study is justified by the fact that it represents a step forward. In this regard, we can invoke a few arguments:

- The non-existence of a complete and homogeneous typology of conversion and, respectively, of a typology of converters;
- Terminological inconsistencies regarding the name of the process, the name of converted items and the name of converters;
- The suppression of possible conversion cases vs. the “promotion” of false conversions;
- Signalling various ways of recording converted items in dictionaries... on a case-by-case basis;

The proposed title, *Conversion in the Contemporary Romanian Language. Old and New Directions* illustrates the essence of this research, whose primary goal was to achieve an in-depth study of this phenomenon (obviously, to the extent that this was possible), so as to make conversion more easily comprehensible to those interested. At the same time, we have taken into account both old/ traditional and new/ modern approaches to conversion in general, considering the way in which some conversion cases have already been dealt with, etc. In parallel, we have presented and defended our own vision on some controversial or still undebated aspects.

The corpus of texts is vast and diversified, comprising: the three emblematic grammars published under the aegis of the Romanian Academy: *GLR* (1963), *GALR* (2005), and *GBLR* (2010), the scientific volumes of specialists who have conducted research on conversion, too: *Teorie și analiză gramaticală* [*Grammar Theory and Analysis*] (Pană Dindelegan 1994), *Vocabularul*

*românesc contemporan* [*The Contemporary Romanian Lexis*] (Serban, Evseev 1978), various studies and articles: *Aspecte ale substantivizării în româna actuală. Forme de manifestare a substantivizării adjectivului* [*Aspects of Nominalization in Contemporary Romanian. The Nominalization of Adjectives and Its Forms of Manifestation*] (Pană Dindelegan 2003b), *Mijloace de marcare în expresie a înțelesului categorial în română* [*Means of Marking Out the Meaning of Categories in Romanian Utterances*] (Neamțu 2014), electronic documents: *Grammatical Conversion in English: Some new trends in lexical evolution* (Ana I. Hernández Bartolomé, Gustavo Mendiluce Cabrera), dictionaries: *Dicționar de științe ale limbii* [*Dictionary of the Sciences of Language*] (DȘL 2001), *Dicționarul ortografic, ortoepic și morfologic al limbii române* [*The Orthographic, Orthoepic and Morphological Dictionary of the Romanian Language*] (DOOM 2005), etc.

The illustrative corpus (examples) cumulates material that is attested in more or less well-known written texts, belonging to several generations of writers (George Bacovia, Alexandru Macedonski, Gheorghe Tomozei, Mihai Eminescu, Mircea Cărtărescu, etc.), and personal examples. In the work of compiling the illustrative corpus we have relied, in general, on a single criterion: the lexical-grammatical class of the word that appears as a converted item.

In this study we have embraced particularly the neotraditional relational conceptions of the Cluj School of Grammar/ Syntax, but also some generativist and structuralist approaches endorsed by renowned grammarians; obviously, we have frequently resorted to *GALR*, as this research represents an important benchmark for any grammarian.

The thesis is, in its entirety, a monograph of conversion in the Romanian language. It is structured into clearly delineated chapters (six) and subchapters.

In the first chapter, *An Overview of Word Formation in Romanian*, we have highlighted the fact that word formation has been placed in various compartments (morphology, the study of vocabulary, etc.) or has been considered an independent chapter of language research. We have also presented, without going into details, the other two main processes of forming new words in Romanian (derivation, composition), but also some secondary processes (clipping, contamination, etc.).

Chapter II, *A History of Conversion*, takes into account aspects such as:

- The way in which conversion has been regarded over time, some researchers considering it an internal process of vocabulary enrichment (and even including it in the derivation system), others opposing this idea;

- How far this process goes back in time, its productivity and the underlying causes of its production;
- The recording of various names attested in the consulted works, their analysis and the selection of an appropriate name;
- Briefly presenting conversion in the English and French languages.

In the third chapter, *The Typology of Conversion*, we propose a broad classification of conversion, depending on several criteria, in order to facilitate its study, and then we focus on the presentation of classic conversion cases, accepted by most specialists (*nominalization, adjectivization, adverbialization, etc.*), often complementing the information that has circulated in the scientific literature with personal views, new names and classifications. In the remaining sections of the chapter, we bring up some types of conversion less discussed until now (*verbalization, the intraclass conversion of common nouns into proper nouns and of proper nouns into common nouns*), as well as some possible cases of conversion, presented quite succinctly (*morphemization, neutralization*).

In chapter IV, *The Typology of Converters*, we distinguish between several types of converters: noun converters, adjectival converters, verbal converters, graphic converters, etc., complete the inventory of converters and reveal their importance for the recognition of converted words.

Whereas conversion has multiple consequences, the fifth chapter focuses on the presentation, not always very detailed, of some of them: phonetic consequences, morphological consequences, syntactic consequences, stylistic consequences, etc., with emphasis on lexical and lexicographical consequences, where we aim to establish the type of relation between the base word and the converted one, examine the recording of converted items in dictionaries, as well as establish the etymon for the converted words.

Chapter VI is devoted to recording the way in which converted items are named, analysed and treated (including in some textbooks for the secondary school level), and to the proposal of criteria for the recognition of converted items, a model of their analysis, as well as some appropriate names.

The study of the conversion phenomenon in Romanian, as it is conducted in this thesis, has led to the following conclusions and major personal contributions:

**1.** First of all, we believe that the most inspired choice as regards the name of the process is represented by the term *conversion*, for several reasons: it most appropriately highlights the essence



of conversion, namely *transformation*, allowing us to include in the field of conversion other transformations as well, in addition to the traditional transitions to other lexical-grammatical classes, which occur in other languages too, etc.

2. In our opinion, conversion is one of the internal processes of enriching the vocabulary in Romanian, resulting in the formation of new words.

Furthermore, in the contemporary Romanian language, conversion has come to compete strongly with derivation. At the level of the system, some types of conversion (nominalization in metalanguage, nominalizations with a stylistic function in poetic language and the nominalization of cardinal numbers) can result in an infinite number of units.

3. Although conversion was often included in the domain of derivation, we have opted for the drawing of a clear line of demarcation between the two processes, bringing a few supporting arguments: unlike conversion, which can be both marked and unmarked, derivation is always marked; the derived words are much more easily identified and analysed in comparison with the converted ones, etc.

4. We have proposed a broad typology of conversion, introducing new criteria for classifying converted items, in addition to the existing ones. For example, depending on the stages/ phases of the conversion process, we have distinguished between *intermediate conversion* (*verbs in the gerund* → *gerundial adjectives*) and *final conversion* (*gerundial adjectives* → *adjectival nouns*).

4.1. Addressing the nominalization of adjectives, we have highlighted the fact that this always occurs through the ellipsis of the determined noun, including in the case of the so-called syntactic monsters, which are considered to be converted nouns, in this study: *O știi de (fată) mică.* → *O știi de mică.* [*I've known her since she was little (a little girl.)* → *I've known her since little.*].

In regards to the conversion of numerals, although some works still talk about its values (see *GALR*), what is not specified is the value with which the numeral is nominalized. In our opinion, the one that is nominalized, again, through the ellipsis of the determined noun, is the numeral with a nominal value from structures like this: *nota doi* → *doiul* primit... [*grade two* → *the two I received...*].

Referring to the adjectival value of the numeral, our working hypothesis is that it derives from the pronominal value, just like pronominal adjectives are derived from the pronoun: *Câștigul înzecit l-a bucurat.* [*The tenfold gain gave him joy.*], while the adverbial value of numerals comes from the adjectival value: *Câștigă înzecit.* [*He wins tenfold.*]. Thus, if we accept the status of numerals as a

lexical-grammatical/ semantic-functional class with values of other classes, it would be more appropriate to speak, in the two situations, about a *conversion at the level of values*.

As regards nominalization in the metalanguage, we have stressed the idea according to which nouns themselves, including those obtained by nominalization in the primary language and regardless of their inflectional form, can be subjected to the process of *nominalization/ renominalization in the metalanguage*, resulting in *metalinguistic nouns*: „**Copii**lor” este un substantiv comun. [„Children” is a common noun.], „**Binele**” pus în text nu era necesar. [**The „good”** used in the text was not necessary.].

**4.2.** Concerning pronominal adjectives, we have proposed the retention of the name with three terms only in the case of *possessive pronominal adjectives* and *emphatic pronominal adjectives*, the qualifier *pronominal* reflecting the hybrid nature of those units: adjectives in terms of the form and pronouns in terms of the content. Accepting the twofold status of these, we have suggested that possessive pronominal adjectives and emphatic pronominal adjectives are also lexematic words and categorematic words (at the same time); stated differently, they are *lexematic-categorical words*.

The forms *cel (cea, cei, cele)*, considered *semi-independent demonstrative pronouns*, may be involved in the conversion process, because when they determine nouns and are in agreement with them (*Pe cel deal...; On that hill...*), they are converted into semi-independent demonstrative adjectives. As a consequence of those state above, we have identified two subdivisions in the sphere of demonstrative adjectives: *independent demonstrative adjectives* vs. *semi-independent demonstrative adjectives*.

As regards the status of the participle, we are inclined to believe that this is a verb only in terms of its origin, being used today exclusively as an adjective or as a subunit. Obviously, under these circumstances, the participle should be excluded from the non-personal moods and, hence, the question of the conversion of verbs in the participle into adjectives should no longer be raised in contemporary Romanian. However, for now, in order to highlight the verbal traits of these adjectives, but also to avoid straying too far from tradition, we have opted for keeping the designation of *participial adjectives*.

In the conclusion of the chapter devoted to adjectivization, we have brought up the rare cases of adjectivized prefixes and prefixoids (*petrecere super [super party]*, *produse bio [bio products]*), a phenomenon which represents the living proof of the fact that the process of conversion exceeds the boundaries of lexical-grammatical classes, extending to other “compartments” of language as well.

**4.3.** We have disproved the adverbialization of the nouns *bocnă, buștean, butuc, buluc, baltă, brici, cuc, chitic*, etc. (*E singur cuc*. [He's all alone.]), considering, in fact, that we are dealing with nouns in the accusative, with elliptical preposition, used with a figurative meaning. This meaning is actualized solely in the quoted expressions, which seem to be “frozen” in this form. This is why we cannot say: *E singur cuci.*, *E singur pasăre*. etc.

Also, we have discussed the „adverbialization” of some prefixoids: *să gândească macro* [let them think **macro**], *puteau înregistra video și audio* [they could make **video** and **audio** recordings], suggesting, however, a different interpretation from the one found in the literature: the ones that are adverbialized are, in fact, the adjectives *macro, video* and *audio*, obtained, clearly, from prefixoids with the same form.

**4.4.** In the same chapter, we have introduced a new type of conversion, *conjunctionalization*, which we have defined thus: *Conjunctionalization represents that type of interclass/ intraclass conversion which consists in the total (total conjunctionalization)/ partial (partial conjunctionalization) transition of words belonging to various lexical-grammatical classes into the lexical-grammatical class of the conjunction/ in the semantic-functional class of relatives (which we consider to be possible), through morpho-syntactic processes*. Some words are involved in both types of conjunctionalization: first, in the process of partial conjunctionalization and then in that of total conjunctionalization (interrogative *cum* [how] → relative *cum* → causal *cum*).

**4.5.** In the subchapter on interjectionalization, our hypothesis is that nouns do not interjectionalize. They are, rather, used with a figurative meaning or simply with a different meaning: *Ce foc (necaz/ problemă/ urgență) te aduce pe la noi?* [What **fire** (trouble/ problem/ emergency) brings you by?]; moreover, in these contexts, without forcing things too much, one can even use plural forms: *Ce focuri te aduc pe la mine?* [What **fires** bring you by?] and *foc* [fire] can have an adjectival determinant: *Ce foc urgent/ important te aduce pe la mine?* [What **urgent/ important fire** brings you by?].

**4.6.** As far as *verbalization* is concerned, we have distinguished between *total verbalization* (*se cireășă* [the cherry trees are in bloom], *se țandără* [it has turned into splinters]) and *partial verbalization* (*haidem, haideți* [come on]). Since the units involved in partial verbalization acquire only some of the defining features of the adoption class, they can complete the gallery of grammatical hybrids.

4.7. Next, we discuss two possible types of conversion: *morphemization* and *neutralization*. From our point of view, morphemization represents a possible type of conversion which consists in the total (*total morphemization*) or partial (*partial morphemization*) transition of words belonging to various lexical-grammatical classes into the semantic-functional class of morphemes. Regarding neutralization, this represents, for us, a process that is close to conversion, consisting in acquiring, by certain units (pronouns) and in certain contexts, a neutral character. Since the term *neutralization* has not been used so far in this sense, we have proposed supplementing the dictionary entry related to it.

4.8. We have made a fairly detailed presentation of intraclass conversion (between subclasses of the same lexical-grammatical class): proper nouns→ common nouns, common nouns→ proper nouns.

5. We have introduced a chapter entitled *The Typology of Converters*, comprising several elements of novelty. In this regard, we have completed the inventory of converters with: prepositions (*nominal converters*), adjectival desinences, adverbs (*adjectival converters*), the pronouns *se* and *te* (*verbal converters*), quotation marks, upper case, lower case, etc. (*graphic converters*). We have noticed that, in some situations, conversion may be marked by two, three or even four converters of various types, nominal converters (for example) appearing sometimes correlated with the graphic ones: *Nu mi-am dat seama că am omis un „pe”*. [*I didn't realize that I had omitted an „on”*.] and we have proposed the establishment of the semantic-functional class of converters, a deeply heterogeneous class as it encompasses the most diverse units (desinences, articles, prepositions, etc.).

6. Because conversion has multiple repercussions in semantics, morpho-syntax, stylistics, etc., we have devoted a special chapter to the consequences of conversion. Thus, from among the semantic consequences, we have focused on the fact that many of the converted items, just like the base words from which they originate, are characterized by polysemantism. From among the syntactic consequences, we have insisted on: the increase in the number of the words that have the quality of adjuncts/ group centres for the adoption class, the formation of *conditioned/ unconditioned attributes* (*Plecarea ei de tânără în străinătate... [Her departure abroad as a young woman...]/ Acordarea de ajutoare sinistraților... [The granting of aid to the flood victims...]*) through the nominalization of the head verb, etc.

As for the lexical and lexicographical consequences, we have stressed the idea that the relation between the converted word and the base word is, in most situations, one of homonymy, more precisely, of *lexical-categorical homonymy*. Thus, we have refuted the point of view according

to which conversion does not engender new words, in the sense that it only generates „new meanings” of one and the same polysemantic word.

Also, we have noticed that, until now, there has been no unity of opinions about the manner of recording converted items in dictionaries. This has been influenced by many factors: indecision in regards to the type of rapport that is established between the base word and the converted word; some conversions are more recent and it takes time for the new words to be accepted and recorded in dictionaries, etc.

In our opinion, the units obtained by conversion (in the primary language) should be recorded in dictionary entries that are distinct from those allocated to the base words: *frumos<sub>1</sub>* [beautiful] – adjective, *frumos<sub>2</sub>* – adverb, *frumos<sub>3</sub>* – noun, and not: *frumos* – adjective, adverb, noun. Also, it would be most timely to compile a dictionary of converted words as it would greatly facilitate the study of conversion, as well as to enter the correct etymon into dictionaries, an etymon represented by the base word from which the converted item derives.

**7.** Converted words can be recognized, named and analysed more easily by introducing appropriate criteria for their recognition, by providing an analysis model, as well as by unifying and simplifying the terminological apparatus.

**7.1.** As regards the names of the converted items, we have noticed that they sometimes differ even within one and the same work (the names allocated to adjectives derived from verbs in the participle, for example). Our proposal is to keep the names with two terms, one reflecting the lexical-grammatical class of the converted item, and the other reflecting the lexical-grammatical class of the base word, solely to designate the converted words, and not the derived words (as we can see, for example, in *GALR*) and only when we are referring to those converted items in the content of studies that are focused on this theme or in the case of exercises where the class of origin must be indicated as well, but not in their grammatical analysis, for which we have another suggestion.

**7.2.** In our opinion, an adequate analysis of converted items should include: the lexical-grammatical class of the converted item and, possibly, the grammatical categories specific to the converted item and the syntactic function fulfilled by it. We do not consider it necessary to specify the lexical-grammatical class of the base word because this renders our analysis as etymological as well: *Valurile spumegânde loveau malul.* [*The foaming waves were hitting the shore.*]; *spumegânde* = adjective (converted), variable, with four inflectional forms, gender – feminine, number – plural, the nominative case, the syntactic function of adjectival attribute.

**8.** As a consequence of everything stated above, the following definition of conversion has been outlined:

*Conversion is an internal process of vocabulary enrichment, which consists, generally speaking, in the total or partial transition of a word from one lexical-grammatical class into another lexical-grammatical class or into a subclass of the same lexical-grammatical class, through morpho-syntactic or syntactic processes, whether through the modification or the non-modification of the form, through a partial or a total change of meaning, with multiple consequences in different linguistic areas.*