

THE MORPHOSYNTACTIC NATURE OF FUNCTIONAL SHIFT

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Abstract

There had been many approaches to the study of functional shift in English: the semantic approach, pragmatic approach, cognitive approach, syntactic approach, morphological approach, among others. Consequently, there exists the problem of assigning an accurate domain to functional shift in English since scholars who adopted any of these approaches claim that functional shift belongs to that particular domain. In this study, having observed the prevalent trends, the study tries to bridge the gap by proving that no single domain can lay an absolute claim on functional shift because it has a wide range of coverage. However, there are domains that are primary to functional shift. These are morphology and/or syntax. Since no single domain can monopolize functional shift as a process, the study chooses the combination of morphology and syntax; hence the morphosyntactic approach. Functional shift is therefore, a communicative linguistic element belonging to both morphology and syntax. This paper seeks to critically examine the morphosyntactic nature of functional shift and possibly establish the relationship between functional shift and morphosyntax.

Introduction

Morphosyntax is the combination of morphology and syntax of English language. According to Tang, “morphosyntax is another word for grammar” (1). According to Crystal, “morphosyntax is a term in linguistics used to refer to grammatical categories or properties for whose definition criteria of morphology and syntax both apply, as in describing the characteristics of words” (234). Here, the issue of rules is implicitly applied. Functional shift is one of the processes in English where both morphological and syntactic rules apply. Lamidi in trying to summarize what grammar is asserts: “Grammar is the study of rules governing the grammaticality of language” (22). Actually, there are rules governing the grammaticality of the English language and functional shift in particular. One of the rules states:

The converted word has to in all intents and purposes become another part of speech, taking the adjuncts and the endings proper to that part of speech and has ceased to belong to its original part of speech. (Zandvoort, 365)

Here, a converted word is expected to take on the inflectional patterns of the word class it is converted into. For example, if a noun **hand** is converted to a verb **hand**, it must take on the verb inflections (hand, hands, handing, handed etc depending on the uses it is subjected to). The said inflection controls the morphosyntactic categories. Consequently, functional shift borrows the grammatical rules of concord, the present

and past tense markers, comparison, among others which in essence are the focus of morphosyntax.

Again, the converted word has to adopt at least one of the ranges of meanings of the base/root it is converted from. This implies that in functional shift, a semantic relationship exists between the root word and the derivative. It is also important to note that in English, the forms of words, the functions of words, the class of words and the meaning of words are all incorporated in this single process called “Functional Shift”. Invariably, functional shift tends to reflect the interconnectivity between morphology and syntax in the English language; hence, its link to morphosyntax.

Functional Shift in Relation to Morphology

Morphology is the study of the structure of words – the study of the rules governing the formation of words in a language (Tomori, 21). Syal and Jindal in defining morphology assert that, “Morphology studies the patterns of formation of words by combination of sounds into minimal distinctive units of meaning called morphemes” (20). Yule sees the term morphology as the study of forms (75). Whenever morphology is mentioned, the idea that readily comes to mind is word formation. Baiteiro asserts that:

If morphology is explained as the branch of linguistics that studies the formal relationships that exist among the words of a language, it seems that there is a place for [Functional shift] within this discipline... (14).

The relationship between functional shift and morphology is based on the issue of **form**. In morphology, the form a word assumes is very important at any point in time. Words are formed either through inflectional or derivational processes. In these processes, there are the addition and/or subtraction of morphemes to effect the formation of words. Taking derivational process for example, we have a rule governed procedure and it is represented by this rule schema: **Base-form plus suffix equals to a new word class** (base + suffix = new word class). This is called derivation by overt affixation. In derivation, when a word is overtly derived, it means that a morphological marker is attached to it. According to Tomori; “an overt formal difference means linguistic difference that can be easily perceived between two or more speech unit” (27). Based on Tomori’s assertion, it is vital to explore derivation by overt affixation and this is exemplified as:

Practical example 1:

sing (verb)	+	suffix -er = singer (noun)
legal (adjective)	+	suffix -ize = legalize (verb)
fact (noun)	+	suffix -ual = factual (adjective)
joy (noun)	+	suffix -ful = joyful (adjective)
warm (adjective)	+	suffix -ly = warmly (adverb)

In these examples, we observe the presence of morphological markers indicating that derivation has taken place. However, in some cases, there are neither the additions nor the subtractions of morphemes, the forms are the same; yet, changes occur in their

functions and classifications. This development is termed a zero-derivation and can be explained by covert analogy. The examples are given below:

Practical example 2:

race (noun)	+	0 = race (verb)
kiss(verb)	+	0 = kiss (noun)
clean (adjective)	+	0 = clean (verb)
back (adverb)	+	0 = back (adjective)
shoulder (noun)	+	0 = shoulder (adverb)

Zero-derivation can also be represented thus: (based on zero-derivation without a suffixal zero-morpheme):

Practical example 3:

bank (N)	+	ϕ	= bank (V)
slap (V)	+	ϕ	= slap (N)
pulp (N)	+	ϕ	= pulp (Adj.)
jump (V)	+	ϕ	= jump (N)
usual (Adj.)	+	ϕ	= usual (N)

The absence of morphological markers in these examples results in the changeless form of the words so derived. Functional shift is an example of a process in English that enjoys the provision of covert formal criterion. In functional shift, these changeless forms of derivatives and the uses, to which these derived words are put, form the fundamental considerations of the process in the English language; the former pointing to its meeting point with morphology and the latter, pointing to its relationship with syntax.

Functional Shift in Relation to Syntax

Syntax is defined as a traditional term for the study of rules governing the way words are combined to form sentences in a language (Crystal, 471). Borrowing from the words of Yule, he asserts: “If we concentrate on the structure and ordering of components within a sentence, we are studying what is technically known as the syntax of a language” (100). Similarly, Finegan sees syntax as, “The part of grammar that governs the organisation of words in phrases and sentences” (152). To him, the study of syntax addresses the structure of sentences and their structural and functional relationships to one another.

Finegan, in explaining what syntax is all about posits that syntax addresses the structure of sentences and their structural and functional relationships to one another. A word is zero-derived when there is no morphological marker indicating a change in the form of the word. When we consider the zero-derived words in relation to their formal and functional relationship among the words in a given sentence, we refer to the syntactic approach to functional shift. In other words, the form of a zero-derived word and the uses to which it is put in a sentence are of great importance to functional shift.

Now, having seen the definitions given to the term – syntax, what exactly is then the link between functional shift, morphology and syntax? We must note that forms of

words are vital considerations in morphology. In the same way, forms of words are also important in syntax of the English language. In functional shift for instance, the ability of a word to change parts of speech or word classes and still retains its form, is the puzzle thereof. Therefore, the changeless form of a word being shifted or converted stands as the hallmark of functional shift in English; and also, a meeting point among functional shift, morphology and syntax.

Having seen the importance of forms to functional shift, it is therefore, necessary to consider the place of functional criterion to functional shift in English. We have syntactic features inherent in sentence formation which functional shift also seeks to address. The syntactic features like **the function a word performs** and **the position a word occupies** in a sentence are of great concern to functional shift. Generally speaking, syntax has to do with how words are combined to form sentences. Drawing from Cadenhead,

In linguistics, functional shift occurs when an existing word takes on a new syntactic function. For example, the word **like**, formerly only used as a preposition in comparisons (as in “eats **like** a pig”), is now also used in the same way as the subordinate conjunction as in many dialects of English (as in “sounds **like** he means it”) (1).

From the above assertion, we deduce that functional shift involves words taking up a new syntactical function other than the ones they usually perform. Similarly, Houghton sees functional shift as ‘a shift in the syntactic function of word, as when a noun serves as a verb’. Here, the issue of function a word performs is showcased. Drawing from Balteiro, the following assertion is made:

If the so-called conversion is understood as functional shift, that is, it occurs when an (already) existing word takes on a new syntactic function, it is considered as a syntactic phenomenon and, therefore, it is believed to belong to the field of syntax ... (15).

Suffice it to say that every word in English has both morphological and syntactic inclination. Supporting this, Yadugiri asserts: “every word in English has both morphological and syntactic tendencies” (196). With this, virtually all the word classes in English can undergo a functional shift. Quirk and Greenbaum in support of this assertion gives instances of functional shift cases of both open class words and close class words (441-442). In addition, Yadugiri listed possible functional shift in English as:

- Verbs as Nouns
- Adjectives as Nouns
- Affixes as Nouns
- Phrases as Nouns
- And Grammatical words as Verbs (163)

Reflecting on the above assertion by Yadugiri, it is important to note that some grammatical words can also be converted to nouns and not only to verbs as we can see later. The following instances portray cases of functional shift in English:

Noun as Verb:

salt	→	to salt
eye	→	to eye
head	→	to head
bottle	→	to bottle
name	→	to name

Verb as Noun:

desire	→	desire
love	→	love
cook	→	cook
guess	→	guess
slap	→	slap

Adjectives as Noun:

rich	→	the rich
blind	→	the blind
weak	→	the weak
poor	→	the poor
lame	→	the lame

Noun as adjectives:

back	→	back
folk	→	folk
baby	→	baby
chief	→	chief
prime	→	prime

Adjective as verb:

yellow	→	to yellow
green	→	to green
wet	→	to wet

Affixes as Nouns

-logy	→	logy/logies
-ism	→	ism/isms

Verbal Phrase as Nouns

put-down	→	a put-down (As in: it was such a put-down)
run-through	→	a run-through (As in: there was time for a run-through that night)
push-over	→	a push-over (As in: that was a push-over)
lay-off	→	several lay-offs (As in: there were several lay-offs in our department)
pull-up	→	a pull-up (As in: that was a pull-up for our company)

Grammatical words as Verbs

down	→	downed (As in: they downed their drinks)
out	→	outed (As in: they were outed)
but	→	but (As in: but me no but)

Having considered functional shift in relation to morphology and syntax, the morphosyntactic nature of functional shift is to be considered. First of all, we must try as much as possible to identify different words and their morphological implications and syntactic functions. Using lexical or content words, the following are their morphological and syntactic tendencies:

Word class	Morphological features		Syntactic features
	Derivational suffixes	inflectional suffixes	
Nouns	-ness, -ity, -ment -ion/tion, -cy, -ian, -ence/ance, -hood, -ship, -dom	(i) plural suffix -s/es (ii) genitive suffix	(i) occur after determiners. (ii) function as Heads in noun phrases. (iii) occur after a preposition. (iv) function as subject, object or complement in a clause.
Verbs	-ify, -ize, -en, -ate	- present tense suffix-s/es - past tense suffix, -ed - progressive suffix, -ing - perfective or passive suffix, -ed/en	(i) have verbal function in a clause (ii) lexical verbs occur after primary auxiliaries and modal verbs. (iii) have the feature of finiteness If finite, have tense.
Adjectives	-ful, -ic, -(i)al, -ish, -less, -ous, -y, -ly, -able, -ive.	(i) comparative suffix, -er (ii) superlative suffix, -est	(i) form adverbs by addition of -ly (ii) are marked for degree (iii) occur in attributive positions between a determiner and a noun (iv) occur in predicative positions, after a verb as complement (v) occur with intensifiers.
Adverbs	-with derivational suffixes, -ly, -wise, -ward/s, -ways without derivational suffixes		(i) In a phrase, they modify an adjective or a noun. (ii) In a clause, they (a) modify the verb (b) indicate the speaker's comment on the information conveyed.

Source: (Yadugiri, 2008: 212)

With these morphological and syntactic tendencies of words, the corroboration of morphology and syntax can be better understood. Moreover, it should be noted that the lexicon of the English language is not only the concern of morphology, but also, of the concern of syntax. In a study carried out by Moreno, it attempts to prove that the 'believe- to- be' morphological process known as functional shift (conversion) is actually of syntactic essence. He observes that the idea of the lexicon is generally connected to morphology. However, in the study conducted, syntax is proved as relating to lexicon also. Hence, he asserts:

The idea of the lexicon is generally connected to the morphology in that only through morphological operations can we obtain new lexical members of a specific syntactic category. However, in our study we want to suggest that the syntax can also operate in the lexicon, as a

discipline not only dividing the whole set of words of a language into lexical category but also creating new lexical members. We could determine that overt or visible processes are carried out by the morphology and the covert, or invisible processes are carried out in the syntax in order to generate the lexicon of the language. (26 - 27).

Moreno notes that the main-stream syntax operates at the sentence level. However, contemporary syntax is the one based on word-grammar which we could call word-syntax (27-28). Moreno’s study therefore reveals that the English lexicon is not only a matter of that which is morphological inclined but also of that which is of syntactic essence which functional shift as a process incorporates.

The morphosyntactic categories in English

The following are the morphosyntactic categories we have in English:
 Conjugation, Declension, Comparison

Firstly, conjugation is one of the morphosyntactic categories that has to do with the inflectional patterns assume by verbs in English to indicate person, number, tense, mood or voice. However, based on this study, conjugation of verbs in terms of person, number and tense will be most useful. In conjugation, the corroboration between morphology and syntax is evident. This explains why certain forms of verbs are used the way they are used. Synchronically, let us consider the inflections in (N>V) conversion in the table below:

Noun	Verb	Verb Inflections	Sentences formed with the derived words
Light	Light	light + ‘s’ (singular) light + (plural) → light + past/past participle →	She lights the lantern. They light the lantern. She/they lighted/lit the candle.
back	Back	back + ‘s’ (singular) back + (plural) → back+ past/past participle → back + present participle →	He backs the audience. They back the audience. He/They backed him in times of need. Backing the class is not the solution.
Sound	Sound	sound +‘s’(singular) → sound + (plural) → sound + past → sound + present participle →	It sounds funny. They sound funny. He sounded strange on the phone. Sounding great is nothing without proper actions.
race	Race	race + ‘s’(singular) → race + (plural) → race + present continuous → race + past/past participle →	She races down the hill. They race down the hill. The car is racing at top speed. The dog raced down the road.

From these examples, it is obvious that the morphological forms determine the arrangement of the syntactic structure. This is true because, when you want to pass an information or state what is happening, what will happen or what has happened, you have to consider the ‘person’ involved, number, tense (whether in the past or present), aspect (whether the action is still going on, completed or yet to occur). The person(s) being the subject(s) and number will now tell you the verb pattern to use; the tense will tell you whether it happened in the present or past, while the aspect will tell you the progression. This knowledge depicted in various forms will now help you structure your sentence(s). This explains the reason why some zero-derived words take up the inflection patterns or properties of the class in which they are converted into; and in some other cases, they do not take them. Assuming various forms by converted words is now based on the use to which they are subjected to with special reference to subject, number, tense etc. For example, when we have sentences like:

1. He **doctors** sick horses (**Singular subject requiring singular verb**)
He is a singular subject requiring a singular verb **doctors**. Therefore, it is wrong to say: We/They doctors sick horses. He/She/It doctor sick horses. You/I doctors sick horses.

Although in the last example, ‘**You**’ can indicate a singular subject but the rule of grammar posits that it takes a plural verb. Same applies to the pronoun ‘**I**’. It takes a plural verb. Plural verb has no morpheme -‘s’ attached to it while singular verbs take the morpheme -‘s’. For instance, a singular subject requires a singular verb; on the other hand, a plural subject requires a plural verb. Hence, they require morphological and syntactic definitions. For instance: We/They **doctor** sick horses.

2. I **dreamt** about marrying Uche. (Verb)
 For **dream** (noun) above to be converted to **dream** (verb), it has to take up the past tense marker of the verb class being converted into since the syntactic structure the word finds itself indicates a past action. Although the common past tense marker is [-ed] or [-d] pronounced as /id/ or /d/ or /t/. These are used in different situations as in:

- i. If the consonant before the past tense marker is either [t] or [d] then the sound /-id/ is used.
- ii. The sound /d/ is used if the sound before the past tense marker is a vowel or a voiced consonant (As in: **move-d /mu:vd/** or **climb-ed /klaimd/**)
- iii. One can pronounce the past tense marker as /t/ if the sound preceding the past tense marker is a voiceless consonant (As in: **kissed /kist/**).

However, owing to the ‘exception to rules’ characteristics of the English language, the past tense marker /ed/ realised as /t/ was used for the word ‘**dream**’, while /m/ is a **voiced bilabial nasal**. The word ‘**dream**’ is a noun to verb conversion and can be explained as a morphosyntactic phenomenon of functional shift. The word ‘**dreamt**’ for example, is formed from the morpheme ‘**dream**’ and the morpheme ‘ed’. This occurs in the science of morphology. However, in English, **dreamt** occurs in the syntactic structure called sentence whose tense indicates past action (past tense). So, there is collaboration between morphology and syntax. Therefore, they are related in some ways. The words of Pushpinder and Jindal sound most true in the case of morphosyntax because, following the order of hierarchy ‘the higher level [syntax]

includes the lower [morphology]' (19). There are other examples like, third person singular taking up the singular verb, as in: (**He dreams about me on daily basis**), the third person plural taking the plural verb, as in: (**They dream about me on daily basis**) etcetera. The word '**dream**' can also be converted to verb without being inflected. This has to do with the uses to which it is put, as in the following examples:

- i) The **dream** came to fulfilment. (Noun)
- ii) They **dream** of getting married next year. (Verb)

These examples are also, a matter of morphosyntax. Usually, this particular instance enjoys the greatest flexibility and leaves an interesting picture of functional shift because same form devoid of inflections is maintained.

The second category is 'declension'. Declension is when the form of a noun, pronoun etc changes to indicate number, grammatical case and gender. Here, the indication of number is the most important to this study and for this, Crystal gave an instance with the distinctions under the heading of number in noun. To him, this constitutes a morphosyntactic category: on the one hand, number contrasts affect syntax.

In verb to noun conversions for instance, the issue of number is also considered with [-s] for plural noun realized as /s/, /z/and /-iz/ or the absence of [-s] for singular as in: 'My **back** is itching me' (Singular Noun) as opposed to 'Our **backs** are itching us' (Plural Noun). In (V >N) conversions with the exception of the singular form which shows the absence of plural marker '-s' and the inclusion of the singular and plural possessive case, we have the following illustrations:

Verb	Noun	Noun Inflections	Sentences formed by the derived words
light	light	light + 's' light + 's light + plural + 's	The lights displayed the colour of rainbow. The light's protective covering is lost. The lights' protective coverings are lost.
back	back	back + 's' back + 's back + plural + 's	Could you please scratch their backs ? My back's texture is rough. Their backs' skeleton appeared perfect.
sound	sound	sound + 's' sound + 's sound + plural + 's	The sounds are harmonious. The sound's echo is heard afar off. The sounds' echoes are heard afar off.
round	round	round + 's' round + 's round + plural + 's	He ate three rounds of fruit salad. A round's service will not be enough. Several rounds' services will do.
race	race	race + 's' race + 's race + plural + 's	The races have something in common. The race's style of dressing is commendable The races' cultures differ in some way.

The above examples are the few cases of inflectional patterns in verb to noun conversions as synchronically listed. Again, we have to note that the verb to noun and

noun to verb functional shift appear to be the commonest in the English language (Pinker 392).

The third morphosyntactic category to be considered is comparison. This has to do with the forms which adjectives or adverbs take to indicate comparison. This Morphosyntactic consideration can be reflected in Tallerman's assertion:

It is common, though certainly not universal, for languages to have the morphosyntactic category known as COMPARISON. In English, we represent the comparison of adjectives in two different ways. The first is morphological, via changes in the form of the adjective itself: for instance, in *straight, straighter, straightest*, the base form of the adjective *straight* takes a COMPARATIVE suffix -er or a SUPERLATIVE suffix -est. The second method is via the addition of more or most, which are functional elements: more honest, most *\honest* (60).

Morphosyntactic category of comparison is evident in adjectival conversions as noted by Tallerman and could be realized through either morphologically (when the forms are affected, as in: 'The **bigger** pot is mine') or syntactically (where functions and/or position of the adjectival elements are considered, as in: 'The **folk** music is pleasant'). Again, he notes that linguists use shared morphosyntax as one of the criteria for placing words within the same word class. For instance, in predicative position, the words 'big' and 'small' share the same morphosyntactic features and are regarded as adjectives. For instance: **She has a big/small pot**. Therefore, any word that undergoes a functional shift and can conveniently function as adjective both in function and/or position it occupies, should be regarded as adjective.

Conclusion

Functional shift is morphosyntactic in nature. Its ability to take care of both morphological and syntactic rules governing word formation, positioning and function reveals its flexibility and dynamism in the English language. Just like Moreno, I make my own submission: On a strong hold on functional shift as a morphological process, the overt or visible processes and zero-derivation with suffixal zero- morpheme will be evoked; and, on a strong hold on functional shift as a syntactic process, the covert or invisible processes and zero - derivation without suffixal zero-morpheme will be applied for in order to generate the lexicon of the language.

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