

## Conversion of English Loanwords in Bangla

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**Abstract:** Though there are debates among researchers about the actual domain of ‘Conversion’, it has traditionally been included and discussed in Morphology. Morphologists define ‘Conversion’ as a linguistic process of word-formation triggered by zero affixation. It means that conversion takes place when a word changes its category or parts of speech without the addition of prefixes or suffixes. This process is pervasive in the English language. In this article, by employing the Qualitative Method, we try to trace the presence of conversion and its types in some English words borrowed into Bangla. Light will also be shed on the contribution of conversional loans from the English tongue. The data collected chiefly from lexicographical sources reveal that the morphological phenomenon of conversion of English loanwords in Bangla mainly concerns three major categories - nouns, verbs and adjectives. Apart from these word classes, we also notice the conversion of some closed classes like (English) prepositions, interjections and conjunctions in Bangla. The productivity of the process is visible in the recipient language in the conversion of even non-morphematic elements like acronyms and initialisms. The most noticeable contribution of these loanwords and the process of conversion is that they have triggered the creation of some new lexemes in Bangla that are convertible, for example, ‘Bkash’, ‘Rocket’ and ‘Nagad’. These analogically created words can experience word-class shift like their English counterparts. Their travel from the nominal class to the verbal class is accomplished with much ease, almost like the English words using zero-morpheme.

### Introduction

The word ‘conversion’ came into currency in 1891. Henry Sweet is credited with the introduction of the term in its current sense. This word-formation process also goes by labels like ‘category change’ and ‘functional shift’ (Yule 67).

Linguists have defined conversion as a morphological process triggered by zero affixation. This means that in this process there is no visible use of prefixes or suffixes. The words change their class without the addition of any prefix or suffix. For example, let us consider the following sentence pair:

- a. You should drink at least 8 -10 glasses of water daily.
- b. He waters the plants in the garden regularly.

In sentence (a), the word ‘water’ has been used as a noun. But in sentence (b), ‘water’ has been used as a verb. So, here (b) we see that a traditional nominal class lexeme has been converted into a verb without any direct involvement of prefixation or suffixation. Even though morphologists think that in the conversion process ‘zero affixation’ is involved, the question of directionality is

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also of instrumental importance in trying to understand the mechanisms involved in the conversion of words. In the process of conversion, the word in question, at least in the English language, side by side shift of word class can also undergo stress-shift.

### **Theoretical Background: Domain, Features & Taxonomy**

Though there are many ongoing debates among linguists about the actual domain of 'Conversion', it has traditionally been included and discussed in Morphology. Despite the placement of conversion at the Morphology-Syntax frontier, it has been rescued by researchers and vigorously placed into the morphological realm.

#### ***Features of conversion***

Conversion is pervasive in the English language. Since many nouns and verbs have identical forms, their category switch without any visible and concomitant morphological changes does not seem to be striking to the speakers of English. The terminology used to refer to conversion includes 'functional shift', 'category change', 'zero-marked derivative' and 'zero-derivation'. Among these, however, the most frequently used terms are 'conversion' and 'zero derivation'. This is popularly dubbed as 'conversion' because in the process a word is converted or shifted to a different part of speech. The rationale behind calling it 'zero derivation', is "the process is like deriving a word into another morphological category with a zero affix creating a semantic dependence of one word upon another" (Quirk 358). The implication here is that there is the existence of an affix in the conversional process although it is not seen.

#### ***Taxonomy of conversion***

Conversion is traditionally taxonomized into three classes – Complete conversion, Partial conversion and Secondary conversion.

**Complete conversion:** When a word is fully adapted to a new class and acquires all the features (including inflection) of the new category, it is called complete conversion. For example, 'My recent research article has got 50 **reads**'.

**Partial conversion:** Partial conversion, as the name suggests, takes place partially. It implies that even after conversion the word retains membership of both word categories simultaneously. For example,

Adjective > Noun  
Wealthy > the wealthy  
Ignorant > the ignorant

**Secondary conversion:** This refers to the transformation of uncountable nouns into countable nouns and vice versa. Secondary conversion also includes transitive verbs into intransitive verbs. For example,

Coca-Cola > Two cans of Coca-cola > Two coca-colas for us, please!

Read (Transitive) > Read (Intransitive) > Your travelogue reads well.

From the perspective of word class, the following are the major types:

**Noun to Verb:** This is the most productive type of conversion in the English language. Affixed forms as well as compound nouns can function as base for conversion.

Mirror > To mirror

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Weekend > To weekend

Father > To father

Sum-total > To sum-total

Machinegun > To machinegun

**Verb to Noun:** This is a productive type of conversion second only to the previous category.

To bore > bore

To cheat > cheat

To cover > cover

To pass > pass

To love > love

**Adjective to Verb:** This class of conversion is not a productive type. Some examples are –

Better > To better

Brave > To brave

Free > To free

**Adverb to Verb:** Like the previous category this is also a less used type. Examples include –

Further > To further

East > To east

### Materials

As there is a visible paucity of research materials on the topic under this study, the researcher has used a number of resources for data collection. Dictionaries have been consulted, specialized dictionaries with usage samples have also been exhaustively searched to accumulate reliable samples of the linguistic phenomenon of conversion. Besides dictionaries and specialized dictionaries with usage examples, the researcher has used his native speaking status of the Bangla language in the light of the suggestion of Uriel Weinreich found in his seminal work titled *Languages in Contact* published in 1963. Researcher generated data and sentences are also incorporated into the body of the corpus to broaden the database. These samples, in conjunction with the data collected from the above-mentioned sources helped in verifying the claims of the previous researchers.

### Data

#### *Chalti Bangla Shabder Abhidhan*

As we have already mentioned, there is a visible scarcity of materials on this topic in Bangla. Our major data source on conversion of English loanwords in Bangla is *Chalti Bangla Shabder Abhidhan* compiled by Mamunur Rashid in 2017. We have picked up the following lexical items from the dictionary –

- Bkash, Email, Can, Alert, Attack, Call, Xerox, Hoover, Google (Rashid 29-64).

#### *Researcher's collection*

The following examples have been collected by the researcher from different sources –

- Text, Phone, Message, In, Out, Gravity, Rocket, Nagad, Mcash, Office, School

#### *Sample sentences*

(i) আমার মেইল পেয়েছো (Amar mail peyechho)?

(ii) তোমাকে মেইল করেছি (Tomaake mail korechhi)।

- (iii) গোয়েন্দারা এ বিষয়ে সরকারকে এলার্ট করেছে (Goyendara ebishoye sorkarke alert korechhe)।
- (iv) আমাদের এখন সারাক্ষণ এলার্টের উপর থাকতে হয় (Amader ekhon sarakkhon alert er upor thaktey hoi)।
- (v) শত্রুরা যেকোন সময় এটাক করতে পারে (Shotrura jekono somoy attack kortey parey)।
- (vi) তাদের এটাক নিয়ে আমি চিন্তিত নই (Tader attack niye ami chintito noi)।
- (vii) রাতে কল করো, আলাপ হবে (Ratey call koro, alap hobey)।
- (viii) তোমার কলের অপেক্ষায় আছি (Tomar call er opekkhai achhi)।
- (ix) এই ডকুমেন্টগুলো জেরক্স করো (Ei documentgulo xerox koro)।
- (x) জেরক্স ম্যাশিনটা কাজ করছেনা (Xerox machineta kaj korchheyina)।
- (xi) উইকএন্ডে কার্পেটগুলো হুভার করি (Weekendey carpetgulo hoover kori)।
- (xii) একটা হুভার কিনতে হবে (Ekta hoover kinte hobey)।
- (xiii) সার্চ ইঞ্জিন হিসেবে গুগল এখানে খুব জনপ্রিয় (Search engine hisebe Google ekhaney khub jonopriyo)।
- (xiv) শব্দটা গুগল করে দেখো (Shobdota google korey dekho)।
- (xv) এতো গ্র্যাভিটি ভালো না (Eto gravity bhalona)।
- (xvi) কথায় কথায় গ্র্যাভিটি দেখাও কেন (Kothai kothai gravity dekhao keno?)?
- (xvii) সে একটা মেন্টাল (Sey ekta **mental**)।
- (xviii) মেন্টাল হেলথ আজকাল বেশ গুরুত্ব পাচ্ছে (**Mental** health ajkal besh gurutto pachchhey)।
- (xiv) তোমার টেক্সটের অপেক্ষায় আছি (Tomar text er opekkhai achhi)।
- (xv) তোমার নাম্বারটা টেকস্ট করে দাও (Tar numbarta text korey dao)।
- (iii) ইদানিং কোন ম্যাসেজ দাওনা (Idaning kono message daona)!
- (iv) উনার এড্রেসটা ম্যাসেজ করে দাও (Unar address ta message korey dio)।
- (v) আজকাল ফোন কোন দূর্লভ বস্তু না (Ajkal phone kono durlob bostuna)।
- (vi) ফোন করো, আলাপ হবে (Phone koro, alap hobey)।
- (vii) এমক্যাশ বেশ জনপ্রিয়তা পাচ্ছে (Mcash besh jonopriota peyechhey)।
- (viii) টাকাটা এমক্যাশ করে দাও (Takata mcash korey dao)।
- (ix) তোমার অফিস কোথায় (Tomar office kothai)?
- (x) সারাদিন অফিস করে এসব শুনতে ভালো লাগেনা (Saradin office korey esob suntey bhalo lageyna.)।
- (xi) লোকটা আমাদের দলে কীভাবে ইন করে গেল বুঝলামনা (Lokta amader doley kibhabey in korey gelo bujlamna)।
- (xii) ব্যাটাররা এতো দ্রুত আউট হয়ে যাচ্ছে কেন (Batterra eto druto out hoye jachhey keno)?
- (xiii) সহজ হও, এতো পার্ট নিচ্ছে কেন (Sohoj hou, eto part nichho keno)?
- (xiv) মেয়ে দেখলেই লাইন মারতে চাও কেন (Meye dekhlei line martey chao keno)?
- (xv) মোবাইল করো, কথা আছে (Mobile koro, kotha achhey)।
- (xvi) মালদ্বীপে গিয়ে স্কুবা ডাইভিং করতে চাই (Maldip-e gyeie scuba diving kortey chai)।
- (xvii) এক্সের সাথে সে কথাবার্তা বলেনা (Ex er sathey sey kothabarta boleyina)।
- (xviii) এমআরআই আর ইসিজি করে রিপোর্ট নিয়ে আসুন (MRI ar ECG korey report niye asun)।
- (xix) আমি কোন ইফ আর বাট শুনতে চাইনা (Ami kono **if** ar **but** shuntey chaina)।

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(xx) তোমার ইন্টেলেকচুয়াল লেভেলটা আপ করার চেষ্টা করো (Tomar intellectual levelta **up** korar cheshta koro.)।

(xxi) তার জীবন হাহা পূর্ণ (Tar jibon hahaha purno.)।

### Discussion

The Bangla word ‘Bikash’ (বিকাশ) has taken a different orthographic shape in the brand name of the popular non-banking financial organization Bkash. This noun is frequently used as a verb in Bangla in our daily life. For example, let us think of this most frequently heard Bangla sentence – ‘Tomake panch hajar taka bkaash korechi’ (তোমাকে ৫০০০ টাকা বিকাশ করেছি – I have sent you tk.5000 through Bkash). Again, consider this sentence – ‘Bikash khub jonopriyo arthhik prathhisthan’ (বিকাশ খুব জনপ্রিয় আর্থিক প্রতিষ্ঠান – Bkash is a very popular financial organization). Here, ‘Bkash’ has been used as a noun. Though this conversion is not directly based on an English loanword, Mamunur Rashid thinks that the practice of using a noun as a verb is done under the influence of the English language.

In *Chalti Bangla Shabder Abhidhan*, we also see a few other examples of English-based conversions used in Bangla. But the compiler has not shown the words in actual use in the recipient language. The researcher has generated some sample sentences incorporated into the ‘Data’ section using some of the examples from the afore-mentioned dictionary. For instance, let us think of the two examples on the use of ‘email’ in Bangla. In sentences (i) & (ii) ‘email’, further shortened to ‘mail’, has been used as a noun and verb respectively.

In sentences (v) and (vi), the word ‘attack’ has been used as a verb in the first one while in the latter sentence, it has been used as a noun.

In sentences (vii) and (viii), ‘call’ has been used as a verb and noun respectively. We notice some different cases of conversions in sentences (ix) to (xiv). Brand names like ‘Xerox’, ‘Google’ and ‘Hoover’, like in the source language, have been used as nouns and verbs in Bangla.

The last three sample sentences in our data stand apart from the rest. In (xix), we see that conjunctions have been converted into nouns. In the next example (xx), a preposition has been used as a verb. The last sentence (xxi) shows the transformation of an interjection into a noun. So, from our examples it is clear that most of the cases of conversions in Bangla concern three word classes – nouns, verbs and adjectives. Conversions of English loanwords in Bangla involving closed-class categories (Examples xix – xxi) are at the marginal level. This phenomenon confirms the validity of the research of Blake – “Almost all the examples of [zero conversions] are shifts between noun, verb and adjective. (28)”

### Findings

The following are our findings from the data collected and their analysis –

- Most of the cases of conversions of English loanwords in Bangla concern nouns, verbs and adjectives. Other shifts are also seen i.e. preposition to noun/verb, interjection to noun/verb but they enjoy marginal level frequency.
- When Bangla borrows a noun from English and verbalizes that noun, it is normally done with the help of a dummy or light verb.

- All the nouns included in our data, have been converted to verbs, albeit by the help of a light verb in Bangla. Only one noun ‘Can’ is unable to undergo conversion to the verbal form in Bangla because it also functions as an auxiliary verb in English. But it can be converted to the adjectival form as we notice in the word ‘Canjato’ (formed in imitation of the word ‘Bottoljato’). This adjectival conversion, is however, unlike ‘bottoljato’, not in popular use.
- The brand names can also experience conversion in Bangla. When using the brand names as verbs in Bangla, like other nouns, they also ride on a Bangla dummy verb for the process of verbalization.
- The use of the morphological process of conversion is on the rise in Bangla. Recently, we have seen the use of brand names like ‘Nagad’ (takata nagad korey dao), ‘Rocket’, ‘Mcash’ etc. both as nouns and verbs in Bangla. These are analogical constructions in Bangla being popularized by the influence of English.
- In Bangla, we notice the use of some minor conversions. For example, an affix can be promoted to the status of a substantive. For example, ‘Sey tar ex er sathey kothatbarta boleya (সে তার এক্স এর সাথে কথাবার্তা বলেনা) ’.
- Initialisms and acronyms can also undergo conversion in Bangla. For example, ‘Tomar ECG kora uchit (তোমার একটা ইসিজি করা উচিত) ’ and ‘Maldip-e giye scuba diving kortey chai (মালদ্বীপে গিয়ে স্কুবা ডাইভিং করতে চাই) ’.
- In the process of conversion, some loanwords get semantically nativized and attain language-specific meanings.

The findings have been summarized in the following table –

Loanword	As used in Bangla	Conversion type
Access (এক্সেস)	Tar sachibalaye access achhey (তার সচিবালয়ে এক্সেস আছে) Documentta online –e access kortey parchina (ডকুমেন্টা অনলাইনে এক্সেস করতে পারছি না)	Noun > Verb
Pass (পাশ)	Sey porikkhai pass korechhey (সে পরীক্ষায় পাশ করেছে) Amar sachibalaye jawar pass achhey (আমার সচিবালয়ে যাওয়ার পাশ আছে)	Verb > Noun
Free (ফ্রি)	Aj ami free (আজ আমি ফ্রি) Ai jhamela thekey amakey free korey dao (এই বামেলা থেকে আমাকে ফ্রি করতে দাও)	Adjective > Verb
Boycott (বয়কট)	Mr. Boycott somparkey amra kombeshi sokolei jani (মি. বয়কট সম্পর্কে আমরা কমবেশি সকলেই জানি) Ghushkhorder samajikbhabey boycott kora uchit (ঘুষ খোরদের সামাজিকভাবে বয়কট করা উচিত)	Proper Noun > Verb
SMS (এসএমএস)	Tomar SMS kokhon pabo (তোমার এসএমএস কখন পাবো ?) Numberta SMS korey dao (নাম্বারটা এসএমএস করে দাও)	Alphabetism > Verb
Ex (এক্স)	Uni amader ex-DD (উনি আমাদের এক্স ডিডি) Sey tar ex er sathey kothabarta boleya (সে তার এক্স এর সাথে কথাবার্তা বলেনা)	Affix > Noun

Table: Conversion types of ELs

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### Why do we use conversion in Bangla?

Conversion, along with affixation and compounding is one of the most popularly employed word formation techniques used in the English language. This non-affixational process has been treated as “typically English” or “Specifically English”. Even though it seems to be a recent innovation in English word formation, conversion has a long and rich history. According to the lexicological estimate of Y. M. Biese, there were 30000 conversion-words in English in the 1940s. The number must be doubled by now (Katamba 20). A creative maestro of the stature of William Shakespeare is widely admired for his striking use of this word formation device. David Crystal quotes the following examples of conversions from the corpus of Shakespeare - “Shakespeare was a conversion expert. ‘I eared her language.’ ‘He words me.’ Some of his conversions seem really daring. Even the name of a person can become a verb. ‘Petruchio is Kated.’ But all he was doing was tapping into a natural everyday usage that is still with us” (80). Let us switch our attention from the Bard of Avon to the contemporary linguistic landscape for some more examples of conversions –

Let’s not Rumsfeld Afghanistan. (Graham 50)

Any noun can be verbed. (Courtney 90)

I am one of the regulars at the club.

Text me your address, please.

His new research paper has got 500 views, 50 reads and 180 downloads.

From the above discussion and examples, we see that conversion is omnipresent in the English language. Now a question like this might naturally crop up in our mind – Why do the Anglophones use conversions frequently in their language? Jean Aitchison has illustrated her answer to this question in an entertaining way - “Consider sentences such as: *Henry **downed** a pint of beer. Melissa went to town and did a **buy**.* English, we note, lacks a simple means of saying ‘to do something in one fell swoop.’ This may be why the word *down* can be converted into a verb to mean ‘drink down in one gulp,’ and the word *buy* into a noun which, when combined with the verb *do*, means ‘go on a single massive shopping spree.’ (35).” Richard Nordquist has added a couple of other reasons behind the phenomenal popularity of conversions. The speakers of English, according to him, use conversions to increase the lexical resources of their tongue and to cope with the fast changing tempo of life.

Now let us turn our attention from the English language to Bangla. Why do we convert English loanwords in Bangla? As English loanwords are primarily borrowed and popularized by bilingual native speakers of Bangla, it can be inferred that conversion is used in Bangla under the influence of the English language. The educated users of the loanwords borrow some items in their entire paradigm of conversional range. For example, let us think of the word ‘use’. This loanword, like its original counterpart in English, is used both as a noun and as a verb in Bangla – a) Mobile phoner onek use achhey (মোবাইল ফোনের অনেক ইউজ আছে). B) Tumi notun app ta use koro (তুমি নতুন অ্যাপটা ইউজ করো)? Apart from the influence of the English language and paradigmatic borrowing, another factor is functional in ‘conversional borrowing’. Let us bring home our point with two examples – ‘Text’ and ‘Google’.

Text – তোমার টেক্সটের অপেক্ষায় আছি (Tomar text er opekkhai achhi )।

তোমার নাম্বারটা টেক্সট করে দাও (Tomar numberta text korey dao )।

Google – আজকাল আমাদের দেশের অনেকে গুগল এ চাকুরি পাচ্ছে (Ajkal amader desher onekey Google e chakri pachchhey)।

নিজের নামটা গুগল করে দেখো (Nijer namta google korey dekho)।

We all are familiar with the nominal function of ‘Text’ and ‘Google’. But the functional shift of the two words from noun to verb in Bangla is a recent phenomenon. This conversion is done to keep pace with changing needs of our times.

Some conversions, especially the verbal ones, attain language-specific meanings in Bangla and thus they contribute to the richness of the language. The word ‘line’ can be used as an instance in this case.

সে লাইনের মানুষ- কোন অনাচারে থাকেনা (Sey liner manush – kono onacharey thakeyna)।

বখাটে ছেলেটা অনেকদিন ধরে রুম্পার সাথে লাইন মেরে যাচ্ছে (Bokhatey chheleta onek din dhorey Rumpar sathey line mere jachchhey.)।

In the first sentence ‘line’ means ‘right path’ while in the latter one it connotes ‘maintaining romantic relationship.’ Here we see that conversion contributes to the semantic coloring of the recipient language.

From the above discussion, we can deduce that the following are the main reasons behind the use of conversional loanwords in Bangla –

- Influence of the English language
- Paradigmatic borrowing
- Keeping pace with the rapidly changing times
- Adding a new flavor to the language
- Ensuring precision and economy of language

## Conclusion

Despite the fact that conversion is a non-concatenative morphological process and hence it is subject to certain restrictions connected with this, conversion of English loanwords in Bangla is a noticeable linguistic phenomenon. Sometimes Bangla uses a loanword in both its nominal and verbal forms, though it has to take the help of a Bangla light verb for verbalization. The kind of freedom the loanwords show in their source language when it comes to conversion, they become somewhat restricted in Bangla. Our data have attested that conversion of English loanwords in Bangla is confined mainly to three word classes – noun, verb and adjective. Some minor cases of conversions are also seen in Bangla i.e. conversion of preposition to verb (দলে ইন করা, doley in kora) and interjection to verb (ওয়াও করা, Wow kora). But their use is at the peripheral level. The most noticeable contribution of these loanwords and the process of conversion is that they have triggered the creation of some new lexemes in Bangla that are convertible. These analogically created words can experience word-class shift like their English counterparts. Their travel from the nominal class to the verbal class is accomplished with much ease, almost like the English words using zero-morpheme (নগদে দাও/আমি নগদ গ্রাহক, Nagadey dao/ Ami Nagad grahok). Here the word-class shift has been consummated à la mode the English language, without any visible morphological change.

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