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## DENOMINAL NOMINALIZATION (VERBIFICATION) IN MODERN ENGLISH: CULTURAL AND PRAGMATIC DIMENSIONS

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*This article explores denominal nominalization, also known as verbification, based on modern English-language journalistic discourse material. Denominal nominalization appears to be a type of conversion that presupposes the usage of affixless means of word formation, which results in the formation of a new part of speech – verb based on the same root of the source word-noun. Traditionally, it is deverbal substantiation, which is considered the most widespread type of conversion in English, though recently, the processes of the reverse character show their activity and are supposed to attract attention from the side of linguists.*

*The study demonstrates the processes of transforming nouns into verbs and analyzes the general linguistic consequences of such transformations: linguistic economy and contextual efficiency. The role of digital communication and the latest technological advances for creating and applying verbified linguistic units is particularly emphasized. (e.g., to Google, to Zoom, to DM, to email). Examples from modern journalistic discourse illustrate how verbification enhances dynamism and expressiveness in media language.*

*It seems that denominational nominalization is closely related to the British-American communicative values of clarity, directness, and logical communication, as well as to Anglo-American values such as action-work orientation. Through the prism of verbification as a grammatical phenomenon, Grice's cooperative principle and relevance theory are manifested since verbification increases the efficiency of the meaning transmission. In addition, denominalization can contribute to the development of social identity and professional group linguistic norms, especially in the field of business and digital communication.*

*The article emphasizes the role of verbification in adapting English to modern needs, marking cultural identity, and facilitating linguistic innovation. Future research*

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Denominal Nominalization (Verbification) in Modern English: Cultural and Pragmatic Dimensions  
(in English)

*directions include cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparisons of this grammatical phenomenon, particularly between English and Ukrainian as focal languages, to study both changes in syntactic functions and sentence structures, as well as the pragmatic and cultural consequences of the spread of this phenomenon.*

**Keywords:** *conversion, denominal nominalization (verbification), cooperative principle, relevance theory, cultural values, language evolutionю*

## ДЕНОМІНАЛІЗАЦІЯ (ВЕРБІФІКАЦІЯ) У СУЧАСНІЙ АНГЛІЙСЬКІЙ МОВІ: КУЛЬТУРНИЙ ТА ПРАГМАТИЧНИЙ ВИМІРИ

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*У презентованій статті на матеріалі сучасного англійськомовного журналістського дискурсу досліджується деномінальна номінація, також відома як вербіфікація. Це вид конверсії, що передбачає використання безафіксних засобів словотворення, в результаті чого утворюється нова частина мови – дієслово на основі того самого кореня вихідного слова-іменника. Традиційно девербальна субстантиввація вважалася найпоширенішим видом конверсії в англійській мові, проте останнім часом процеси зворотного характеру (вербіфікація) значно активізувалися, що потребує уваги з боку лінгвістів.*

*У дослідженні демонструються процеси перетворення іменників на дієслова і аналізуються загальномовні наслідки таких перетворень: лінгвістична економія та контекстуальна ефективність. Особливо підкреслюється роль цифрової комунікації і найновіших технологічних досягнень для створення та застосування вербіфікованих лінгвальних одиниць (наприклад, to Google, to Zoom, to DM, to email). Приклади з сучасного журналістського дискурсу ілюструють, як вербіфікація посилює динамізм і експресивність мови ЗМІ.*

*Як видається, деномінальна номіналізація тісно пов'язана з британсько-американськими комунікативними цінностями ясності, прямої та логічності спілкування та має стосунок до такої англо-американської цінності, як орієнтованість на дію. Крізь призму вербізації як граматичного явища проявляються кооперативний принцип Грайса та теорія релевантності, адже*

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вербізація підвищує ефективність передачі значення. Окрім того, деномінальна номінація може сприяти розвитку соціальної ідентичності та професійних групових лінгвістичних норм, особливо у сфері бізнесу та цифрового спілкування.

У статті підкреслюється роль вербіфікації в адаптації англійської мови до сучасних потреб, маркуванні культурної ідентичності та сприянні мовним інноваціям. Майбутні напрямки досліджень включають міжмовне та кроскультурне зіставлення цього граматичного явища, зокрема між англійською та українською мовами як фокусними з метою дослідження як змін в синтаксичних функціях і структурах речень, так і прагматичних і культурних наслідків поширення у мовах цього явища.

**Ключові слова:** конверсія, деномінальна номіналізація (вербіфікація), принцип кооперативності, теорія релевантності, культурні цінності, еволюція мови.

## Introduction

In this article, we will address the problems of word formation in Modern English. The processes of word formation are carried out on the border of vocabulary and grammar, which is why the word-formation system, according to S. V. Semchinsky, belongs to the morphological system of the language, which, together with the lexical system, comprises the semantic endosystem [Семчинський 1996, с. 100; с. 122].

According to the authoritative academic edition of “Multilanguage Dictionary of the Linguistic Terms” [Багатомовний тлумачний словник-довідник мовознавчої термінології, 2020] “**конверсія:** *англ.* **conversion, zero derivation; фр.** **conversion lexicale, dérivation impropre, dérivation implicite, dérivation zéro, suffixation nulle; нім.** **Konversion; іт.** **conversione, derivazione zero; ісп.** **derivación cero, conversión** is an affixless method of word formation, in which the derived word changes its part of speech or syntactic status compared to the original word” (БТСДМТ, с. 248). In «The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language» [CEL, 1988] conversion is looked upon in a little article, «New Words out of Old» [Opus cit., p. 90] among four other «normal processes of word formation»

(prefixation, suffixation, compounding), within which it is characterized as: “*conversion* is a word changes its class without any change of form, e.g. (*the*) *carpet* (noun) becomes *to carpet* (verb)” (CEL, p. 90). Evidently, David Chrystal gives an example of verbing/verbification, when a noun gives birth to a verb without any changes in the source word form.

In George Yule’s “The Study of Language” (2017) conversion is defined as “a change in the function of a word, as for example, when a noun comes to be used as a verb (without any reduction). Other labels for this very common process are “category change” and “functional shift”... The conversion process is very productive in Modern English, with new uses occurring frequently” [Yule 2017, p. 60].

Alongside verbification (we may also call denominal nominalization), e.g.: *a bill : to bill; a garage : to garage; a bottle : to bottle; a chair : to chair, a glue : to glue; a referee : to referee*, etc., such types of conversion as substantiation: *to swim – swimming; to appear – appearance; to assign – assignment; to describe – description*; adjectivation: *hero – heroic; wind – windy, child – childish, beauty – beautiful*, and adverbialization: *basic – basically, cheap – cheaply, happy – happily, gentle – gently* are usually pointed out. Traditionally, deverbal substantiation is considered to be the most widespread type of conversion in English, and that's why it attracted the most attention from linguists [Farrell 2001; Harley 2005; Kiparsky 1997; Labelle 2000, etc.].

Though the first instance of the word verbification dates up to 1871, in today’s research on verbing, little attention is given to this phenomenon, which commonly results in new words with nuanced cultural and pragmatic functions<sup>1</sup>. In Modern English, this transformation is highly productive, creating verbs such as: *to color, to*

<sup>1</sup> So far we succeeded in finding only one scientific work dealing with using nominalization in scientific texts [Dezfuli 2021].

*host, to cup, to divorce, to dress, to fool, to medal, to mutter, to pepper, to salt, to ship, to style, to train, to voice, etc.*

Hereto, **the paper's objective** is to explore the processes of verbification in Modern English based on electronic media stuff (journalist discourse) and shed light on how these transformations reflect cultural trends and meet communicative needs.

Summingly, denominal nominalization is a type of conversion that presupposes the usage of affixless means of word formation, which results in the formation of a new part of speech – verb based on the same root of the source word-noun. It causes the emergence of a new linguistic unit belonging to a different part of speech (verbs) that is homonymic and semantically related to the initial word (noun). E.g.: noun: *email* → verb: *to email*; noun: *a market* → verb: *to market*; noun: *a text* → verb: *to text*; noun: *a mirror* → verb: *to mirror*; noun: *an access* → verb: *to access*.

For English language users, it might not be easy to imagine these words solely as nouns, but there was a time when that was true. For example, the earliest known usage of the verb *to medal* appeared in a newspaper in 1966, but the noun *a medal* was first recorded in 1586 [BCED, p. 466]. Therefore, it took about four hundred years to verbify a noun. Today, the adjustment time is becoming much shorter: to Google was named “the most useful word of 2002” and reportedly entered the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2005, although Google has been around since 1997.

### **Research**

Many denominal verbs come from everyday objects or concepts that easily lend themselves to actions. Zero-derivation allows the language to adapt flexibly and contextually, which is why English has so many denominal verbs – especially in response to technological advances or cultural changes.

Denominal nominalization allows speakers to convey more information with fewer words, streamlining communication. For

example, saying “*to text*” instead of “*to send a text message*” saves time and mental energy. This linguistic economy is especially relevant in fast-paced, technology-driven societies where speed and efficiency are valued.

English speakers can instantly transform nouns into verbs, even inventing new verbs as needed. This flexibility is convenient in digital communication (texting, emailing), where new technologies create new actions that need linguistic representation.

It was just digital communication, which has popularized nouns as verbs to describe new actions related to advanced technology use: *to Google* – to search information online, especially via Google; *to message* – to send a digital message via email, SMS, or apps; *to Zoom* – to engage in a video call, often on Zoom; *to friend* or *to unfriend* – to add or remove someone from a social network; *to DM* – to send a direct message, particularly on social media; *to screenshot* – to capture an image of a screen; *to email* – to send a message via email; *to text* – to send an SMS or similar message on a mobile device; *to ping* – to quickly message or remind someone.

Here, we see how the above nouns have evolved into verbs to describe specific actions essential to digital communication and social media. They have become integral to our everyday digital language, where brevity and efficiency are highly valued:

**Google** – “I forgot the right answer, so I’ll just Google it quickly.”

**Message** – “Could you message me the details when you’ll be available?”

**Zoom** – “Let’s Zoom later to go over the project updates.”

**Friend / Unfriend** – “After the argument, she unfriended him on Facebook.”

**DM** – “If you have any questions, please DM me on Instagram.”

**Screenshot** – “I’ll screenshot the directions and send them to you.”

**Email** – “Please email me the document by the end of the day.”

**Text** – “Text me when you’re on your way home so I know when to start getting ready.”

**Ping** – “I’ll ping you again if I don’t be back by tomorrow.”

**Uber** – “He didn’t have a car, so he Ubered to the concert.”

**Photoshop** – “This picture looks too good to be real; I bet it’s been Photoshopped.”

As we see, denominal verbalization, on the one hand, illustrates the cultural significance of online social behaviors, showing how digital practices drive new linguistic expressions (*to DM, to friend / to unfriend, to ping*); on the other, it often reflects cultural shifts, trends, and technological advancements, as language adapts to encompass new experiences and tools. Verbs like *Google, Uber, Zoom, and Photoshop* reflect the influence of technology and specific brands on daily life, indicating that certain actions are now synonymous with particular services or platforms. Verbified words like those given above reveal our cultural dependence on technology and emphasize how brands are becoming embedded in everyday activities.

Now let us look into some examples of verbing in modern journalist discourse:

1. “*These people will question establishment practices*” (The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/11/08/trump-second-term-unknowns-questions/>). Here, the journalist uses the noun *question* as a verb to denote scrutinizing or doubting.
2. “*...heard Trump say he’d let the Russians do ‘whatever the hell they want’ to allies that don’t shoulder their share of NATO’s military burden*” (The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/11/08/trump-second-term-unknowns-questions/>). The noun *shoulder*, usually meaning the part of the body, is used here in a verbal function denoting taking on or bearing responsibility.
3. “*...after the bond market freaked out...*” (the Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/11/08/trump-second-term->

- [unknowns-questions/](#)). A noun *freak* originally referring to something odd or unique, is used here as a phrasal verb meaning to react with shock or anxiety.
4. “...*the Trump administration will not jettison the extensive alliance infrastructure*” (The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/11/08/trump-second-term-unknowns-questions/>). A noun *jettison* naming the act of throwing goods overboard to lighten the ship (known from 1570) [BCDE, p. 404] here, being in a verbal function means not to discard or abandon.
  5. “*This question gets dusted off every few presidential election cycles.*” (The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/11/09/big-lie-trump-biden-election/>). Here, *dusted off* is a phrasal verb derived from the noun *dust*, which typically describes cleaning or refreshing an object, but it is used in this context as a verb to imply revisiting a topic.
  6. “*Eventually, Mr. Biden bowed to reality and stepped aside.*” (The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/11/08/democrats-lost-credibility-harris-biden/>). A noun *bow* referring to a physical gesture of respect is used here in a verbal function – *bowed to reality* in the sense he (Mr. Biden) acknowledged the circumstances and acted accordingly.
  7. “...when Mr. Trump prematurely declared victory, twisted arms of federal and state legislators to reverse his loss, and then incited a mob **to riot** at the Capitol as Congress counted the electoral votes.” (The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/11/06/kamala-harris-howard-concession-speech/>). Here the noun *riot* is used in a verbal function, meaning ‘to rebel, to vandalize, to roister’.

The examples above demonstrate how journalists creatively use verbified nouns to succinctly convey complex actions and criticisms. They show how nouns evolve into verbs to convey dynamic actions concisely and how they can take action-oriented meanings, often for emphasis, impact, or accuracy of expression, which are inherent to mass-media language. We see that verbified nouns give journalistic

writing lots of dynamism, making the descriptions more immediate, vivid, and persuasive.

Both British and American lingual cultures favor clear, direct speech. “To be articulated” means expressing yourself with a good sound and logic, and it forms a highly culturally engaged British-American notion. In the present context, it is appropriate to mention Paul Grice’s cooperative principle [Logic and Conversation 1975, Studies in the Way of Words 1995], which is associated with four maxims concerning quantity, quality, relation, and manner in speaking. As a whole, they established the grounds for the theory of the relevance of an utterance [Sperber, Wilson 1995], originally inspired by the works of Paul Grice and developed out of his ideas.

The essence of “relevance of an utterance” notion lies in its relevance “...to an individual to the extent that its positive cognitive effects on the individual are large and the mental processing effort to achieve these effects is small” [Sperber, Wilson 1995, p. 153]. Using verbs instead of noun phrases can make the language more relevant, active, straightforward, and creative. Therefore, verbificated forms emphasize action, agency, and pragmatism, which are considered fundamental British-American cultural values [Kohls 1984] and are reflected in numerous English proverbs and sayings (*Actions speak louder than words, Deeds, not words; Even if you are on the right track, you won't get over if you sit there; We are remembered by our good actions, not by our good intentions; When you stop rowing, you start downstream*) [Дубенко 2012, с. 18-19].

English has spread worldwide, becoming a global lingua franca that interacts with many other languages [Rao 2019; Jenkins 2007]. In contexts where English is a second language, denominal verbs can make English simpler to learn and use, especially since many languages don't require a significant change in form between nouns and verbs (Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, Finnish, etc.).

As a global language (Globish), English absorbs influences from different cultures and becomes much more adaptable. We may suppose that denominal verbs contribute to this adaptability, allowing English speakers of various backgrounds to “invent” new verbs to suit their realities without adhering to rigid grammatical rules.

From a pragmatic perspective, denominal verbalization streamlines communication and facilitates nuanced expression. Verbalizing nouns allows speakers to convey complex ideas more succinctly, which is often advantageous in fast-paced or informal communicative exchanges. The pragmatics of denominal verbalization also lies in: 1) **contextual economy** – packing complex meaning into single words (e.g., *to mastermind* implies both planning and leadership). This economy is highly effective in those contexts where time or space is limited, like headlines, advertising, and casual speech; 2) **immediacy and relatability** – speakers create a more immediate and relatable experience for the listener by using denominal verbs. For instance, saying *to brainstorm* gives a clear, action-oriented image of generating ideas, compared to a phrase like *to engage in brainstorming*; 3) **social identity and group norms** – **applying** specific denominal verbs can align speakers with particular social or professional groups. E.g., using terms like *to pivot* or *to roadmap* in business circles might enhance in-group identity: “*When the original business model wasn’t working, the startup decided to pivot and focus on a new product that better met customer demand.*”<sup>2</sup>; “*Before launching the new software, the team took the time to roadmap their development phases, ensuring each milestone was clearly defined and achievable.*”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In this context, *pivot* means to shift direction or strategy, a common term in business to describe changing approaches based on new information or challenges.

<sup>3</sup> In this case, *roadmap* means to plan or lay out a strategy for future actions, typically with a focus on key goals and timelines. It’s frequently used in business and technology contexts to describe detailed planning or outlining a path forward.

### Conclusion and perspectives

Thus, denominal nominalization reflects contemporary English-speaking societies' practical needs and cultural preferences. It helps keep the language efficient, expressive, and relevant to its speakers, adapting to technological changes and reflecting social attitudes. This dynamic process gives Modern English cultural depth and universal appeal, making it a more versatile and accessible language worldwide.

This article was devoted to denominal nominalization. As it seems, this type of nominalization is opposed to nouns-born-from-verbs nominalization case. The latter was once characterized by Henry Hitchings as “an instrument of manipulation, in politics and in business” because it “can sap the vitality of one’s speech or prose; it can also eliminate context and mask any sense of agency”, and also “they conceal power relationships and reduce our sense of what’s truly involved in a transaction” [Henry Hitchings 2013]. This statement might sound true for substantiation cases.

Nevertheless, it makes no sense in the context of denominal nominalization (verbification). As it has already been shown, this type of nominalization reflects a dynamic interplay of culture and pragmatics in English. The process not only adapts the language to fit modern needs and technological advances but also enables speakers to communicate efficiently, sound fresher and less traditional, be relevant and innovative, mark social identity, and adapt to evolving cultural norms.

Even though reportedly Benjamin Franklin (the Founding Father of the United States) said in a letter to Noah Webster (the Father of American English), that denominalization is “awkward and abominable” we can state that the verbs-born-from-nouns are becoming increasingly commonplace in modern colloquial, journalist, and technical English. This tendency is likely to expand to reflect new cultural artifacts and values.

Thus, this study contributes to the understanding of language evolution, demonstrating how verbification reflects cultural trends, technological progress, and pragmatic efficiency in communication.

The prospectives of this research lie in examining this tendency on the material of different styles and also other languages (analytical and syntactical as far as their structure is concerned), studying the shifts in their syntactic functions and structures, scrutinizing the problem of the verbified lexical units' translation from English into Ukrainian taking into consideration the connotative side of the newly-born lexical units.

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