

## Tracking lexical change in present-day English

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For several centuries English has been well-known for frequent cases of conversion (word-class change without any formal alteration). In recent decades a further development can be observed which for the want of a better word could be termed *univerbation*. By this is meant that structures consisting of several words are reduced to one, as when a verbal phrase is compacted to a single word, e.g. *we spent the night in Vienna* -> *we overnighed in Vienna*. My contention is that such cases illustrate a process which is part of a long-term typological shift in English. The latter is what has been observed in the shift from a morphologically complex to an inflectionally simplified language and is conventionally referred to as a move from synthetic to analytic. The current process can be viewed as a later stage in an analytic language where lexical compaction is in evidence and can thus be interpreted as part of a typological cycle. A side-effect of this compaction is that the subcategorisation rules for existing verbs can be altered (usually expanded to include a new type) as in *This door is fitted with an alarm* -> *This door is alarmed*, i.e. the valency of *alarm* has been altered to allow for both animate and inanimate objects. The paper will look at several cases illustrating the matters just alluded to and comment on the theoretical ramifications for the structure of English.