

**Tunnelling, Towering, and Bridging:  
The Figurative and Non-Figurative Use of Converted Verbs**

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This paper is a corpus linguistic investigation of the converted verbs *tunnel*, *tower* and *bridge*. It is based on 500 random instances of each verb from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)*. We analyze the usage patterns of these verbs and the ways in which they are constrained by people’s embodied experiences of real-world tunnels, towers and bridges. Our aim is to better understand the ways in which people’s embodied experiences of artefacts influence the usage patterns of converted verbs.

Noun-verb conversion has previously been explained in terms of metonymy (e.g. Dirven 1999), or in terms of combinations between metonymy and metaphor (e.g. Kuczok 2011). Dirven (1999: 280) suggests five classes of converted verbs – object, instrument, manner, locative, and essive verbs – based on three types of event schemata, where the converted verb metonymically represents a salient participant in the schema.

Our analysis shows that *tunnel*, *tower* and *bridge* are indeed all metonymic, but do not clearly fit into any of Dirven’s classes. They share some similarities with the converted verbs in his ‘manner’ category, but the artefacts that are represented by the nouns *tunnel*, *tower*, and *bridge* are not always clear participants in an event schema, and there are significant differences between them. Moreover, the verbs differ in regard to their tendencies to be used metaphorically.

As is coherent with the connecting function of real-world bridges, *bridge* is primarily used metaphorically to bridge gaps, differences, domains, divides, boundaries, and chasms. *Tunnel* is used both metaphorically and non-metaphorically, with a focus on the manner and path involved in the action schema of digging a tunnel. As opposed to bridges, the salient feature of tunnels thus seems to be related to how tunnels are constructed, rather than to what function they currently serve. *Tower* is used metaphorically in reference to trees, mountains, or people that tower over something. Uses such as these appear related to the fact that the salient feature of a tower is that it is tall, and thus has the function of placing people in a high-up position.

Taken together, the usage patterns of these verbs suggest that their meanings are based on our embodied experience of the artefact, the artefact's affordances, and general image schemas. To fully understand the metonymic bases and the figurative uses of these verbs, we therefore need to also consider salient features of those particular artefacts, especially their functions (Gibson 1979).

**Keywords:** conversion, metonymy, metaphor, artefacts, embodiment, function

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