



Video 6 – Real Grammar: is *impact* a noun or a verb?

Can a noun become a verb and the other way around? Let's find out.

It's common to see a sentence such as

"The bad weather will *have an impact on* our profits"

- where *impact* is a noun and is followed by the preposition *on*.

But you will also sometimes see *impact* used as a verb, like this:

"The bad weather will *impact on* our profits".

Some traditionalists think this verbal use is incorrect, and they insist that *impact* can only be a noun. But are they right?

The use of *impact* as a verb appears to be a more recent development. But this process of turning nouns into verbs and verbs into nouns - which is sometimes called "conversion" - is as old as the English language itself.

Think of a word like *text*: for centuries it was used only as a noun, to refer to any piece of writing. But now we routinely use it as a verb, saying things like. "Text me your contact details". This is a very useful and common mechanism in English, it's an economical way of extending the meaning of a familiar word. And after all, it's easier to say "Text me your contact details" than "Send me a text with your contact details".

What's happening with *impact* is just the same. It would be irrational to accept *text* as a verb but then insist that using *impact* in this way is incorrect.

What the corpus evidence show is that the noun use of *impact* is still far more common, but we can find thousands of examples of *impact* being used as a verb as well. So the two sentences above are equally correct.

And the funny thing is, that if you study the history of this word, you find that *impact* began life as a verb in 1601, only becoming a noun in 1781!

If you'd like to know more about this topic or other real grammar questions, have a look at the Macmillan Dictionary Blog.