



## ORIGINAL PAPER

# Romanian Tenses versus English Tenses

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### Abstract

Romanian English teachers should know the Romanian language perfectly. This helps them create the correct connections between the Romanian language grammar and the English language grammar. Although Romanian and English are distinctive languages that do not share the same origins: the first one is of Latin origin and the second one is of Germanic origin, we can find similarities and differences between their grammars.

In this article I will illustrate how the verbs from Romanian language take different forms based on Romanian grammar rules versus English verbs and their tenses. The English language verb tenses as well as the Romanian verb tenses are intuitive and one of the most important differences is that English tenses have aspects. The two main aspects in English are: *perfect* and *progressive*. In Romanian language, the verb is the main part of speech, it is flexible and it can act as an independent part of speech and therefore it can create the predicate of the sentence. The English verb does not have this characteristic – even in small sentences it is accompanied by other words (in general pronouns): e.g. (Romanian): *Plouă / Ninge. / Citeam o carte.* – in English: *It rains/ It snows / I was reading a book.*

Such examples and comparisons will continue throughout my article.

**Keywords:** *Romanian tenses; English tenses; similarities; difference; aspects; characteristics.*

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Learning a foreign language can be challenging due to the fact that in the first stage, the learner will automatically try to connect the syntax of the new language to the set of grammar rules that exist in his mother-tongue. This process will undoubtedly lead to syntax and grammar mistakes.

To try to translate word by word – a Romanian sentence into English is impossible and vice versa. Moreover, according to Vivian Cook in her book *It's all in a Word*, one cannot learn a foreign language without creating a link between the words from your native language to new words from the targeted language. “The language you already know is the key to the new language you are learning. Many words are known to you once you have been given some tips how to recognize their similarity with your own language.”(Cook, 2010:226)

To establish connections between the mother-tongue and the targeted language is an essential part of the teaching and learning process. In nowadays, English teachers have a lot of resources that can help them obtain an interactive and attractive English grammar course. According to the linguist researcher *Denisa Bărbuceanu* – in her article *Visual Teaching – Using Material to Engage ESP Students*: “Nobody can deny that today, our students, also called the X generation live in a media world, in which most of the data is delivered by visual input, through diverse high-tech devices.”(Bărbuceanu, 2020: 39a)

English teachers can use visual resources in order to obtain a better display of English language. Audio-Visual support and digitalized materials can be used when teaching English grammar. These computer-related materials comprise elements like: animation, video-sound and digital images. Such visual-audio materials can also be used when teaching grammar. They can help teachers illustrate the differences and the similarities between Romanian and English language in terms of grammar. Verb tenses in both languages: Romanian and English are distinct and require a lot of explanation and practice. All type of materials: grammar books, practice books, audio and visual ones will help the foreign languages teachers create an interactive English/ Romanian class – even if the targeted subject is grammar.

In this article I will compare Romanian verb tenses to English verb tenses, with the intention of identifying similarities and highlighting the differences between Romanian language and English language in terms of verb. The most important difference between English and Romanian, in terms of parts of speech, is that:” the noun and the denominal verb generally have the same form in English (dance-to dance, corral-to corral, butter-to butter a.o.), while this is not the case in Romanian (dans-a dansa) where the verb presents an additional suffix which has a different form depending upon the conjugation at stake” (Bleotu, 2009:249)

### **Generalities**

Romanian language belongs to the Romance language group and it has retained many old Latin structures. Romanian morphology is very complex and the Romanian verb system consists of four different conjugations. The Romanian verb “has four major inflection classes continuing those of Latin, principally identifiable by a characteristic ‘theme’ vowel immediately following the lexical root in parts of the paradigm (notably the infinitive)” (Ledgeway, Maiden, 2016:108)

As a general rule: *the first conjugation* belongs to verbs ending in -a : *a testa, a lucra, a tasta*; *the second conjugation* belongs to the verbs ending in – ea: *a vedea, a placea, a tacea* ; *the third conjugation* belongs to the verbs ending in –e: *a face,*

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*a desface, a pune*, and the last one – *the fourth* belongs to verbs ending in –i: *a cobori, a veni, a mormăi*. Additionally, the Romanian verb “has five sets of finite synthetic verb forms, indicating tense, mood, and person and number of the subject. The subjunctive (virtually always marked by the preceding particle să<se<Lat si “if”) has third person forms derived from the Latin present subjunctive.” (Ledgeway, Maiden, 2016:108)

The classification of Romanian verbs is made by dividing them in: **predicative verbs** (that have their own meaning and they can form the verbal predicate: e.g. Ea **este** la birou. – in this case the verb **este** tells us- *self-alone*- something about the subject and therefore it is the verbal predicate). The second category is represented by the non-predicative verbs (that do not have their own meaning, so they cannot express something – *self-alone*- about the subject: e.g. Afară ***e caniculă.***/ Cu timpul el ***a devenit foarte vorbăreț.***)

Unlike Romanian, English does not have these verb conjugations, most of the English verbs are lexical verbs as they represent the main verb of a sentence (e.g. read, write, like, play, sleep etc.). However, in English “because many verb occurrences do not involve action (e.g. is, have, know, believe, think, hope), it is probably better to recognize verbs on the basis of their form. There are three main classes of verbs: **lexical verbs** (e.g. think, find, replace), **primary verbs** (be, have, do) and **modal verbs** (e.g. will, can, might). They have different functions and grammatical characteristics” (Kennedy, 2013:177)

Another classification of the English verbs is represented by **stative** and **dynamic** verbs. “These classes very much affect our choices of which verb tense to use. As the name imply, **stative verbs** refer to ongoing, existing states or conditions that are not time bound. **Dynamic verbs**, on the other hand, refer to actions or activities that take place in a moment or limited period of time and then are completed. Dynamic verbs are time bound” (Lester, 2012:1)

e.g. **Stative verbs** (*believe, remember, agree, know, prefer, forget, appreciate* etc.)

- He *knows* I’m right. / I *believe* this pandemic will end. / Mary *prefers* chocolate instead of vanilla.

**Dynamic verbs** (*jump, talk, write, hit, swim, play, watch* etc.)

- Right now, he *is watching* a football match. / She *is writing* an email to her manager. / That boy was bored so right now *he is reading* all the magazines from the kitchen table.

Nevertheless: “Some verbs can be used either as **dynamic verbs** or **stative verbs**. When this happens, the two different uses of the same verb will necessarily have different meanings”. (Lester, 2012:2)

e.g. **I think** we should postpone that meeting. (Stative)

**I’m thinking** about buying a new laptop. (Dynamic)

**I don’t mind** if you take the kids out for a walk. (Stative)

I’m not that enthusiastic about going to that party. So, **I’m minding** my own business! (Dynamic)

English language also has *auxiliary verbs* that determine another verb from a verb phrase. Auxiliary verbs determine the tense of the verb that they accompany. (e.g: *be, have, do, will, can, may*) :

e.g. *a tacea* (in Romanian) - to be quiet

Ele *se uită* la un film – They **are watching** a movie.

Tu îl *poți ajuta* pe copil la teme – You *can help* the child do his homework.

Eu mă *gândeam* – I *was thinking* (was the past tense of the verb to be which is an auxiliary verb)

Moreover, English verbs are divided in regular and irregular. The second category – irregular verbs – derives from the Old English period and, although in English there are less irregular verbs than regular ones, irregular verbs are among the most commonly used. For the English regular verbs, the –ed form can be used for the past as well as for the past participle. Even if English regular verbs form their past by adding –ed; for irregular English verbs there is no rule – their past tense and past participle forms have to be learnt by heart.

In order to learn either Romanian or English as a foreign language, several didactic approaches have been forwarded. One of these approaches encourages the teacher: “to use and combine in a natural, harmonious way cultural elements in the teaching process of all types of lessons, whether it is about an hour of grammar, translation or vocabulary.”(Lăpădat, Lăpădat, 2020:143a)

### **English tenses versus Romanian tenses**

In English, as in any other language, the verb represents the core of a sentence. The verb creates the link between the speaker and the receiver, meaning that the verb helps the speaker/ writer transmit what or about what he speaks/ writes about. Due to the fact that the verb occupies the central position in a sentence, the English learner has to seriously tackle this part of speech. The English verb has 12 different tenses as well as many exceptions and distinct expressions like the phrasal verbs.

For the present, English has four tense forms: the Present Simple( formed by using the infinitive verb without ‘to’), Present Continuous (formed with the auxiliary of the verb ‘to be’ in the present simple+ the main verb which adds the suffix ‘-ing’), Present Perfect (formed by using the auxiliary verb ‘to have’ in the present simple + the past participle of the verb) and Present Perfect Continuous (formed by using the present perfect+the main which adds the ending ‘ing’).

For the past, English has another four tense forms: Past Tense Simple( the verb adds either the ending ‘ed’ for regular verbs while the irregular verbs take different forms), Past Tense Continuous (formed by using the past tense form of the verb ‘to be’+ the present participle of the main verb), Past Perfect (the past tense of the verb ‘to have’ = the past participle of the main verb) and Past Perfect Continuous ( this tense represents the past of Present Continuous).

For the future, English language adds another four tense forms: Future Simple (with will/ shall and with the auxiliary to be in the present simple+going+the infinitive of the main verb), Future Continuous (the simple future of to be + the present participle) and Future Perfect (the future simple of the verb to have + the past participle of the main verb).

In contrast to the English language, the Romanian language has for its verbs 8 verbal modes which are grouped in 2 categories: Personal modes and Impersonal modes. The personal modes: The indicative with the following tenses: the Present, the Imperfect, the Compound, the Simple Compound, the Pluperfect, the Future and the Previous Future. All these tenses have different forms for each person.

The second personal mode is the Conjunctive which indicates an achievable, possible action. The Conjunctive has Present (e.g. El să scrie) and Perfect (El să fi scris).

Then, Romanian language has the Optional- Conditional mode which expresses a desired action, a condition. It has Present and Perfect tense. For the Present (

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e.g. El ar scrie) and for the Perfect (e.g. El ar fi scris). These tenses have a correlation with the English language they can be used in the translation of *If Conditional* sentences from English.

e.g. I would go to the mountain if the weather were fine. - Aș merge la munte dacă vremea *ar fi* bună.

If he came at the party his friends would be very happy. Dacă el *ar veni* la petrecere, prietenii lui *ar fi* foarte fericiți.

Finally, the personal modes end with the Imperative which expresses an order, something that must be done. It has the positive and negative tense. For the positive form (*Scrie! Scrieti!*), for the negative (*Nu scrie!, Nu scrieti!*). In English, the Imperative functions as in Romanian – it expresses an order, a demand or something that needs to be done (e.g. Write! Read!) The only difference is that in Romanian, the verb that goes at Imperative changes its form according to the person who has to perform that action while the English Imperative does not change the form of its verb depending on the person.

Even though both languages have a different historical origin, they share a complex tense and mood system. In Romanian the verb changes its form according to the person while in English the verb takes a certain tense without any form-modification according to the person except for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular.

e.g. Romanian present tense	English present tense
Eu ascult	I listen
Tu asculti	You listen
El/ Ea asculta	He/ She listens
Noi ascultam	We listen
Voi ascultati	You listen
Ei asculta	They listen

Another category of English verbs is represented by phrasal verbs. This category is quite challenging for the English learners because in Romanian grammar we can't find direct equivalents." Phrasal verbs have long been regarded as being among the most characteristic features of the English language... In the 20<sup>th</sup> century phrasal verbs came to be one of the favourite topics not only of grammarians and lexicographers, but also of authors of popular style guides; only few properties of English are commonly seen as more typical of the language than phrasal verbs" (Thim, 2012:1). Romanian learners of English have difficulties in mastering phrasal verbs due to the fact that there is more than one meaning attached to an individual verb:

e.g. He *asked* me *out* to celebrate his birthday. – El *m-a invitat* sa sarbatorim ziua lui de nastere. ( English phrasal verbs are formed by adding different prepositions to verbs that if translated as stand-alone verbs have a different meaning. In this case: the verb *ask* – *a întreba* but *ask somebody out* – *a invita pe cineva* )

Jane was confused and *asked around* but nobody could indicate his address. – Jane era confuză și *a întrebat în jurul ei* dar nimeni nu a putut să-i indice adresa lui.

Their car *broke down* right after they left the restaurant. – Masina lor *s-a stricat* imediat dupa ce au parasit restaurantul.

I *broke* this article *down* in separate sections in order to approach Romanian and English verb particularities. – *Am împărțit* acest articol în secțiuni separate pentru a putea aborda particularitățile verbului în limba engleză și în limba română.

Romanian present tense

Learning the morphology of the Romanian verbs is one of the main aspects in the process of transfer/ translation from Romanian to English and the other way around. In Romanian language, the verb attracts other parts of speech, has restrictions of form and can ensure the connection between the Subject- Verb- Complement (Object). The errors that can occur at those who learn Romanian as a foreign language are related to the Romanian phonetic system (what is specific to Romanian are the sounds: ă, ș, ț, î). Difficulties can be seen when trying to use the Romanian accent which, unlike other languages, varies. The Romanian accent can stay at the beginning, the middle and at the end of a word; the difficult part is that there are no set of rules for it. Comparing English to Romanian, in English we also find some difficulties of pronunciation especially for the letters L, R and the group TH. As in Romanian language, the English accent is as important. The place where we put the accent on a certain syllable can lead to changes of the entire sentence / phrase. Finally, those who learn Romanian as a foreign language can have difficulties in understanding the verbal and nominal inflections. The verb in Romanian changes its form very often according to the tense that is required in a certain context. Moreover, using Romanian verb tenses means knowing phonetic alternates.

In Romanian, the present tense of each verb has a different form according to the person that it determines, while in English – the present tense simple changes its form only for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular. English language has one more tense for the present – present continuous. In Romanian this tense has no equivalent and the English learner has to be carefully when choosing between present tense simple and continuous:

e.g.(in Romanian) El citește doua cărți pe semestru. – He reads two books every semester. (Present tense simple)

El citește la cartea cea noua acum. – He is reading the new book now (present tense continuous)

For the past, English verbs have several tenses. First, there is Past Tense Simple; second, there is Past Tense Continuous; third, Past Perfect and Past Perfect Continuous. Each of these tenses have their own set of rules and forms. According to Mark Foley&Diane Hall in their *Advanced Learners' Grammar*, in English the past simple tense is used for single completed actions and past states while the past continuous is used 'for temporary or interrupted actions'. Past perfect simple is used to describe an action which is completed before a time in the past; the Past Perfect Continuous is used to describe "an ongoing situation or action which continued up to, or stopped just before, a time in the past"(Foley, Hall,2003: 64).

Romanian language expresses the past with: Imperfect, Compound Past, the Perfect Simple (Perfectul Simplu) si Pluperfect (Mai mult ca perfect).

According to Romanian grammar, the Imperfect tense expresses an unfinished action which happened in the past from the moment of speaking:

e.g.: În timp ce citeam, copilul se juca. – While I was reading, the child was playing.

Tu scriai la articol în fiecare seară. – You were writing for the article every night.

Ei se certau mereu. – They were always quarreling.

From the examples above, the Romanian Imperfect tense is mainly translated in English with the help of Past Tense Continuous.

The Romanian tense Compound Tense shows an action which was completed and finished in the past:

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e.g. Eu am așteptat rezultatul acela două ore. – I waited for that result for two hours.

El a primit cadoul de ziua lui. – He received the present for his birthday.

Noi am luat doua bilete pentru meciul de fotbal. – We bought/ took two tickets for the football match.

According to these examples, the Romanian tense – Compound Tense is translated in English with Past tense Simple. Nevertheless, we have to consider that if we include these sentences in a context (a paragraph), the English tense may change.

The next Romanian tense – The Perfect Simple (Perfectul Simplu) – in general this tense is similar to Pluperfect (Mai mult ca perfectul) tense. This tense expresses an action without connecting it to the moment of speech or connecting it to a near past

e.g. (the Romanian verb – a putea – Perfectul Simplu)

*Eu putui*

*Tu putusi*

*El/ Ea putu*

*Noi Puturăm*

*Voi Puturăți*

*Ei/ ele putură.*

Tu căutași adresa ei până o găsiși. – You searched for her address until you found it.

El *putu* să te convingă să accepți aceea ofertă. – He could convince you to take that offer.

Voi așteptarăți în fața teatrului. You waited in front of the theatre.

The last tense for the past is *Mai mult ca perfectul*. This tense is used to express a past action that finished before another past action:

e.g. (the Romanian verb – a citi – Mai mult ca perfectul)

*Eu citisem*

*Tu citisesi*

*El/ Ea citise*

*Noi citisem*

*Voi citiserati*

*Ei/ Ele citisera*

Ele veniseră acasă înainte ca tu să ajungi. - They had come home before you arrived.

Eu mersesem la mare atunci. – I was at the seaside back then.

As illustrated in other examples, Romanian verb tenses are translated in English according to the context. In fact, the English *Past Perfect* can be translated in Romanian with Pluperfect (*Mai mult ca perfect*) tense:

e.g. We had already realized the importance of his statement when he returned in his office. – Noi realizasem deja importanța afirmației sale când el s-a întors în birou.

Moving on, for the future tense, English uses a variety of forms. “The choice of form often depends on whether we are making a prediction, expressing an intention or talking about an arrangement” (Foley, Hall, 2003: 74). In order to express future in English we can add one of the modal auxiliaries before the base form of the verb. These modals: “are limited in number: shall, should, will, would, can, could, may, might, must, have to, had to, ought to. From this group, “shall” or “will” can express the future tense.

Although years ago students were instructed to use “shall” ..., in nowadays “shall” is reserved almost exclusively for emphasis as in ‘This child shall come to no good if he doesn’t learn better manners’. Since, future action is almost always expressed by “will”. (Vitto, 2006:203)

In English we distinguish the following future tenses:

**Future Progressive** formed by ( will+be+present participle of the main verb).

This tense expresses an action that will be in progress in the future:

e.g. Andreea will be working for the article in the afternoon.

He will be recovering from his injury for the next couple of days.

**Future Perfect** formed by ( will+have+past participle of the main verb). This

tense will have its action completed in the future:

e.g. He will have finished his book by the time he contacts the publishing house.

They will have left the party by the time the restaurant closes.

**Future Perfect Progressive** formed by ( will+have+been+present participle of the main verb). This tense describes an action that will be in progress at the same time as another future action:

e.g. He will have been running for half an hour when we go to visit him tomorrow.

The teacher will have been tutoring many students by the time she retires.

As forms for the future, English uses: will, be going to+infinitive, and a distinct characteristic is that English has what is called Future in the Past:

e.g. We will see each other next month – Ne vom vedea luna viitoare.

According to the weather forecast it’s going to rain in the afternoon. – Potrivit prognozei meteo va ploua dupa-amiaza.

I was going to send (Future in the Past) you a copy this morning but the internet connection failed. – Eu urma sa-ti trimit o copie in dimineata aceasta dar a picat conexiunea la internet.

In Romanian the future tense is formed by adding ( voi, vei, va, vom, veti, vor):

e.g. the verb a citi ( future form) – Eu voi citi/ Tu vei citi/ El/Ea va citi/ Noi vom citi/ Voi veti citi/ Ei/ Ele vor citi.

Romanian language also has Previous Future Tense ( Viitor Anterior) which expresses an action that will happen before another future action:

e.g. Eu voi fi terminat articolul acesta pana maine. – I will have finished this article by tomorrow.

Another tense is the Gerund. In Romanian, this tense expresses an unfolding action without precise time reference:

e.g. El a vazut-o pe ea plecand de la serviciu. – He saw her leaving work.

According to Christina N. Hoffman in her book Romanian Reference Grammar: “Unlike in English, the Gerund has low-frequency use in Romanian. Structures such as ‘Running is a popular sport’ would be translated ‘Alergatul este un sport popular’ in which ‘alergatul’ is not a Gerund, but a noun drawn from a past participle”(Hoffman, 1989:46)

In English, the Gerund is formed by adding –ing at the end of certain verbs. The English Gerund is, in fact, “one of the most intriguing and, unsurprisingly, also one of the most studied phenomena of English grammar.” (Maekelberghe, 2020: Introduction 2) In fact, while conducting my research for this article, I found numerous



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studies related: The Gerund-Infinitive use in English language. The gerund for the verb to work is: working. The English Gerund can be used as a subject, complement or as the object of a sentence:

e.g.: Working makes you organize your life better. (Subject of the sentence)

His interest is learning. (Complement of the sentence)

He enjoys working. (Object of the sentence)

For many English learners it is quite confusing to know when to use the gerund or the infinitive because some verbs are followed by the gerund while others accept the infinitive. In order to improve their skills in handling English tenses, learners need a lot of practice and guidance. English learners can find different resources either digital or paper-written in which they find distinctive lists of English verbs that are followed by the Gerund or by the Infinitive :

e.g. to miss ( to desire something that you no longer have) – I *miss going* to work. ( in this sentence the verb miss is followed by the gerund of another verb – to go)

to suggest: I suggest selling that house before it becomes a ruin. (The same as above – the Gerund of the verb to sell)

to ask: I asked to see his project. (*the infinitive*)

to choose: She chose to let him decide. ( the infinitive)

Coming back to the connections that exist between English verb tenses and Romanian verb tenses, English: "... verbal gerunds have a structure similar to that of Romanian supines, while nominal gerunds resemble Romanian infinitives." (Arregi, Fagyal, Montrul, 2010:118)

In fact, Romanian language does not have such a strict usage of tenses like English has. Some Romanian verbs may or may not have a direct object, while English language needs to specify who or what is doing a certain action:

Măncam un mar. (This sentence does not have a direct object in Romanian while in English we use the pronoun *I*) – I was eating an apple.

Lucrau la proiect. (no direct object) – They were working at the project. (The pronoun *they*)

Romanian verbs have finite moods while English language has modal auxiliaries like: can, could, may, might, would, should. Romanian language does not have modals and they are translated from English with verbs in the present/ past or future:

e.g. I can – Eu pot / I could – Eu puteam I would buy – Eu aş cumpara (Present conditional in Romanian)

The expressions 'Have to' and 'Must' can be unipersonal in Romanian language:

e.g. Trebuie să pleci. - You must go.

Unde trebuie să trimiți articolul? – Where do you need to send the article?

The finite moods for Romanian verbs are: indicative, subjunctive, presumptive, conditional and imperative and the non-finite moods are: infinitive, gerund, past participle and supine.

The finite moods or personal moods change the form of the verb according to the person:

e.g. Bunica mi-a spus să citesc (conjunctive/ subjunctive mood)

Grandma told me to read (in this context English uses the infinitive)

Copilul ar veni dacă îl inviți. (Conditional)

The child would come if you invited him. ( English second conditional)

The non-finite moods do not change the form of the verb according to the person and can't function as a predicate:

e.g. Citind vei cunoaste mai multe lucruri. (Gerund)

If you read you will know more / Reading helps you know more. (The Romanian sentence can be translated in English either by using first conditional or a noun)

### Conclusions

Identifying the similarities and differences between Romanian tenses and the English ones is a helpful tool for learners as well as for interpreters. Analyzing identical parts of speech from these two languages offer linguistic researchers ways of detecting and identifying subtleties of language.

Discovering English and Romanian is a challenging process for every foreign language learner. If we speak about English, we should mention: "...its enormous vocabulary, its peculiar and abundant idioms, its numerous periphrastic forms to express every possible shade of meaning, is worthy of serious study, apart from the mere memorizing of inflections and formulation of rules" (p.4, 2012)

As for Romanian language I can say, probably because it is my mother tongue, that it is flexible and melodious language despite its complex grammatical system. Romanian language was and is the source of inspiration for many national and international writers, while English language remains the beautiful and intriguing language of Shakespeare. Both languages and civilizations have impressive histories filled with battles for power and domination. These two languages – Romanian and English- have survived the test of time. The most difficult part in learning Romanian as a foreign language is represented by its grammar although some studies have shown that for English natives learning Romanian can be easier than learning German.

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