

Temporal Domains in English and Romanian

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Abstract: This paper will focus on temporality in language (verb tenses in English and Romanian). Temporality is an abstraction which joins together the elements contributing to the conveying of details about the chronology, the distance and the duration of events in a certain context. This paper is mainly divided into a first half discussing the temporal divisions on the time axis and a second which deals with situations which happen in the present, in the past or in the future as they are placed on the temporal axis and illustrate the temporal domain to which they belong.

Key words: temporal domains, time axes, present, past, future, timeless, real time situations

1. Temporal Divisions and the Time Axes

This paper briefly presents some views on *time* and *tense* put forward by philosophers, linguists, grammarians and logicians, whose ideas point to a nearly similar conclusion according to which “people probably feel that they share the same idea of time.” (Lewis 1994: 48)

Since people normally perceive time to be divided into Past, Present and Future, we shall assume that these three segments cover some divisions on Isaac Newton’s time axis and will be labelled the three *temporal domains*. Therefore, the approach will consist of three major sections, each of them assigned to a particular temporal domain. The chapter will consider tenses and aspectual forms as representations of time points or intervals placed on each of the time segments to describe various types of situations (which happened in the past and have no consequence at the SM, or which have no consequences whatsoever).

For practical purposes, we shall adopt the view according to which linguists divide the English tense system into three domains: the present, the past and the future. These domains are peculiar to many natural languages (such as both English and Romanian), but not to all of them. There are languages, such as Hebrew, where the infinitive accompanied by an adverb or an adverbial conveys the idea of time.

The temporal system of the English language also included aspectual forms and both the tense and aspect patterns of the **present** domain are:

- present tense simple / present tense continuous
- present perfect simple / present perfect continuous

The tempo-aspectual forms of the **past** domain are:

- past tense simple / past tense continuous
- past perfect simple / past perfect continuous

The constructions which express future situations and cover the **future** domain are:

- ‘traditional’ simple / continuous future
- ‘traditional’ simple / continuous future perfect
- ‘traditional’ simple / continuous future-in-the-past
- ‘traditional’ simple / continuous future perfect-in-the-past

A systemic distinction of the tenses of the Romanian language will look as follows:

- prezent
- trecut (generic denomination, which consists of imperfect, perfect simplu, perfect compus, mai mult ca perfect)
- viitor (with its representations, viitor simplu or viitor I, and viitor anterior or viitor II)

As mentioned previously, “*time* is not the same thing as *tense*” (Lewis 1994: 47). *Time* is an element of human experience of reality, whereas *tense* is a purely grammatical idea and a technical term pointing to a morphological change in the basic form of verbs. The images which follow synthetically present a few of the tenses of the English grammar. The figures that follow represent the possibility of graphically expressing the aspectual distinction *simple-continuous*, seen at the level of the present tense and present perfect tense.

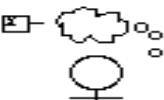
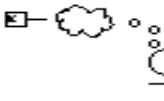
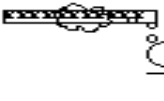
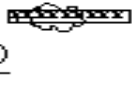
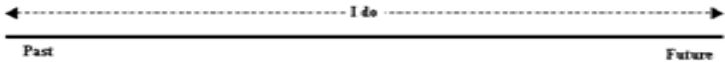
	simple	perfect	progressive
P R E S E N T	 HE EATS	 HE HAS EATEN	 HE IS EATING
P A S T	 HE ATE	 HE HAD EATEN	 HE WAS EATING
F U T U R E	 HE WILL EAT	 HE WILL HAVE EATEN	 HE WILL BE EATING

Fig.5. The tenses (www.learnenglish.de/pictureit/tensespage.html)

Present Tense Simple / Continuous

- *Used to say what someone usually does*



- *Used to say what someone is doing now*



Fig.6. PTS vs. PTC (www.learnenglish.de/pictureit/tensespage.html)

Figure 5 is a synoptic representation of nine of the most frequently used tenses in both written and spoken English. Although temporality is a feature of both the subjunctive and the conditional, grammars distinguish between factual and non-factual meanings assigned to tenses.

Since these two last moods do not express factual situations, our focus will rest only on real or factual situations, expressed exclusively by means of the tenses of the indicative.

Present Simple		Present Continuous	
Things that are always true.	Water boils at 100 degrees. English is a popular language in business. It never snows in Germany in the summer.	Something that is happening now.	The kettle isn't boiling . I am in my lesson, so I'm speaking English. It isn't snowing , the sun is shining .
Regular and repeated actions (always, often, sometimes, never).	I always boil the kettle before I make the tea. I always speak English in my lessons. It often snows in the winter.	Temporary situations.	I am studying English for a year at University.
		Emotional emphasis	The child is always crying at 6 in the morning.
General facts about our lives.	I like English. I enjoy snow.	To describe change, development, progress.	Is the kettle boiling yet? I'm improving my English.
Facts known about the future.	The plane leaves at 5.00 in the morning.	Present plans for the future.	I'm taking my husband to New York for his birthday.

Fig. 7. Uses of PTS and PTC (www.learnenglish.de/pictureit/tensespage.html)

Present Perfect Simple/Continuous

- Used to show unfinished time.



- Used to say how long someone has been doing something.

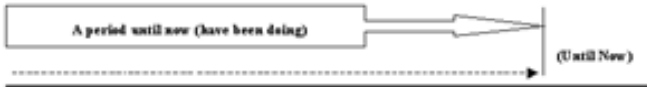


Fig.8. PPS vs. PPC (www.learnenglish.de/pictureit/tensespage.html)

Present Perfect Simple		Present Perfect Continuous	
Action/event connected with the present	He has lost his key. He has gone to Paris. I've already mailed the letter.	Continuous action up to or still going on at present.	How long have you been waiting? It has been raining all night. It's wet outside. I have been eating your lunch.
Period of time including the present	Have you seen her? I've never been to China. She hasn't written so far. Where have you been all day? I haven't seen you for ages. She has always believed him. This is the first time I've driven a car. This is the most boring film I have seen.	Repeated actions over a period of time including the present	They have been meeting like that for years.
Action previous to a present one	Every day when I have finished work I go for a walk.	Emotional emphasis	You have been going to the pictures again!

Fig.9. Uses of PPC and PPS (www.learnenglish.de/pictureit/tensespage.html)

The two temporal domains of the English language are the **present** and the **non-present** or the past. Although the segments on the time axis (fig. 6) clearly delineate zones which may represent the present or the past, zones to which well-established tenses will correspond, there are instances which indicate other situations. These deviations from the norm occur both in the domain of the present and in that of the non-present. The following subdivision focuses on the flexibility of a few tenses in English, in terms of their relationships with the temporal domains.

Timeless vs real time situations

All the examples in the illustration of the foregoing indicate situations (actions, events, processes) which are placed in a certain order, depending on the moment they happened, or happen or are happening, etc. In addition to all these cases when different tense forms refer to certain moments on the time axis, there are many other instances when the moment of speech cannot be placed on any segment or in any temporal domain. The aim of this subdivision is to compare such sentences whose verb forms do not refer to a specific moment with those which do so. Therefore, when speakers build up their sentences, they may refer to real time moments/intervals or they may make statements which do not refer to a particular time interval or time point. Grammars call such sentences ‘timeless situations’. The feature *timeless* should not be mistaken for *tenseless* or vice versa, for each word refers to a particular situation; the former focuses on the generic meaning of the sentence tense, while the second characterizes those sentences which do not have a tense in their structure.

Timeless situations

They represent a particular case in the semantics of temporality. This is because sentences may be constructed around any of the three absolute tenses in both Romanian and English, but they do not refer or relate to a specific moment-interval. Therefore, situations where the event moment is not related to a certain reference moment (RM) but which has a generic meaning and which holds true for ever. Comrie (1985: 8) calls these situations ‘timeless’ for they have universal validity, as seen in this example:

The Sun and the Moon *are* in the same galaxy with the Earth.

Based on the tense of the sentence predicate, the present tense with a timeless value includes rather “examples such as”:

a) sayings and proverbs:

1a. *'It's only once in the best of the blue moon, he said'* (p. 338)

1b. „*Se întâmplă o dată în Paști, se indignă Paul.*“ (p. 371)

(Fii și îndrăgostiți, cap. XII, trad. Antoaneta Ralian)

2a. *Actions **speak** louder than words.*

2b. *Faptele **vorbesc** mai apăsător decât vorbele.*

3a. *'Been in a bit of mess **lately**'* (p.387)

3b. „*În **ultima vreme** a dat de necazuri.*“ (p.422)

(Sons and Lovers, chapter XIV, trad. Antoaneta Ralian)

b) sentences expressing universal truths:

4a. *Oxygen is capable of combining* with all elements except the inert gases.

4b. *Oxigenul se poate combina* cu toate elementele, cu excepția gazelor inerte.

c) sentences expressing general truths:

5a. *'But she **often** can't touch that lady with a long prop,* retorted Mrs. Radford to Paul.' (Sons and Lovers, p. 342)

5b. „– Dar **adeseori** nu poate ajunge până la această doamnă nici c-o prăjină, vorbi doamna Radford adresându-se lui Paul.“ (p.376)

6a. *'That's him to a “T”, she cried...'* (Sons and Lovers, p. 353)

6b. „– *Asta-i seamănă leit, strigă ea...*“ (p. 387)

(Sons and Lovers, chapter XIII, trad. Antoaneta Ralian)

7a. *Turks drink* a lot of coffee.

7b. *Turcii beau* multă cafea.

The Romanian versions provided for each of the examples show a case of tense identity: the present tense simple is rendered in Romanian by its correspondent, Prezent (spelt with capital letter to be distinguished from the common noun - the present is here and still a bit ahead of us).

The concept of **timelessness** also occurs with the past tense simple. Two of the below will show this temporal value of the past tense:

a) sayings or proverbs:

8a. Men *were deceiving* ever.

8b. Bărbații *mint* dintotdeauna.

9a. Diamond *cut* diamond.

9b. Cu diamantul *se taie* diamantul.

10. A *tunat* și i-a *adunat*.

11. Domnul *a dat*, Domnul *a luat*.

Unlike the set of sentences under the present tense simple, where there is tense correspondence in both languages, in the case of the past tense (7a) and 8(a), their Romanian equivalents are still expressed with the verb in the present tense. Nevertheless, to bring to light the use of at least one form tense expressing past situations, examples (9) and (10) were included. In either example the verbs are Perfect compus forms which primarily involve the fact that a situation happened in the past and it has no consequence in the present. Still, in the two cases, the use of Perfect compus involves a lifetime experience and resignation in front of important losses people may have to cope with.

Timeless situations find their wording with the help of the future tense. There is no other indication to show the temporal moment or interval when such an instance might occur, and such a lack of other information suggests the feature of timelessness:

12a. A drowning man *will clutch* at a straw.

12b. Cine se înecă se agață și de un pai.

13a. Boys *will be* boys.

13b. Copiii tot copii *rămân*.

14a. He that *will steal* an egg *will steal* an ox.

14b. Cine *fură* azi un ou, mâine *va fura* un bou.

The grammatical patterns of temporality differ in the case of timelessness expressed with future structures. Out of the three English proverbs with simple future only one Romanian version uses partially the future, i.e. in 13b; the other two correspondents use the same form of Present.

Real time situations

Unlike timeless situations, where the tense form means “at all times” or “no particular time” (Downing and Locke 1900: 354), the greatest majority of sentences do refer to either a certain time point or time interval which is expressed within a smaller or larger context (sentence or paragraph). The syntagm ‘real time’ in the section title was chosen for the sake of contrast with the preceding section, timeless situations.

Therefore, the rest of the chapter will further on those situations which are related to a specific time interval or time point and whose relationship may be supported either by an adverb or an adverbial of time.

2. The English Tense System

To characterize the tense system of the English language reference will be first made to the physical time and to tense as the two are closely interrelated, tense being the linguistic expression of the physical time which enables speakers to chronologically order events in relation to their own (either individual or social) system of reference. Both physical time and tense are subdivided into past, present and future, but tense, unlike the physical time, may or may not possess forms for each of these subdivisions.

According to this theory, tenses are considered to be predicative expressions underlying the relationship of the temporal ordering to be established between the speech moment and the event moment. This approach accepts tenses as binary predications: one argument of the temporal predication expresses the speech moment and the other one denotes the event/state moment lexicalized by the verbal group. Seen through this perspective, the distinction between the Past Tense and the Present Tense entails a differentiation between two predications of the temporal ordering: the Past Tense orders the speech moment after the event/state moment expressed by the verbal group, while the Present Tense is a predication of simultaneity, of coincidence or of

temporal inclusion, placing the speech moment within the grammatical situation expressed by the verbal group.

2.1 Past situations and their temporal domain

Past situations are described in terms of temporal coordinates as follows: the situation expressed by the verb took place in the past, that is, before or more precisely preceding the SM and the RM. Figure 2 in annex 1 represents this type of relationship established between the SM on the one hand and the EM and RM on the other. The temporal domain of the past is a bit richer in Romanian, as compared to the domain of the present, meaning that Romanian learners should make choices for four past tenses out of its English counterpart.

Thus, the domain of the past includes Imperfect, Perfect Simplu, Perfect Compus and Mai Mult ca Perfect, while English relies on Simple Past Tense, Continuous Past Tense, Simple Past Perfect and Continuous Past Perfect, Simple Future in the Past, Continuous Future in the Past.

2.2 Present situations and their temporal domain

Bull's hypothetical system refers to the tenses of the indicative and since this is our starting point we shall consider mainly its tenses in the two languages. The present time axis of orientation hosts one Romanian Tense Present, and four English forms, Present Tense Simple and Present Tense Continuous, Present Perfect Simple and Present Perfect Continuous.

2.3 Future situations and their temporal domain

Temporally and graphically, the time axis has a segment intended for the representation of futurity. This segment is richer in the case of the English language as compared to that of the Romanian language. English has a form suggesting nearness in relation to the speech moment or a future of intention (15), a future of imminence (16) and a future of (official or institutional) planning (17). To these situations those patterns involving duration or full progress of a situation should be added and this would be indicative of the abundance of English future expressing patterns.

- 15a. They *are going to* visit the museum one of these days.
15b. Au *de gând să* viziteze muzeul într-una din aceste zile.
16a. He *is be about to* spend two years in prison.
16b. *Urmează să* petreacă doi ani în închisoare.
17a. The members of the two delegations *are to* arrive by a night plane.
17b. Membrii celor două delegații *vor sosi* cu un tren de noapte.

Situations related to a past reference represent a particularity of the English verb, if compared to Romanian. The Romanian language does not possess grammatical instruments to express future situations related to a past reference.

Future situations related to present reference

Futurity or situations imagined, supposed or expected to happen in a moment or time interval which follows the SM, may be expressed in English by means of simple or continuous verb forms, by auxiliary as well as modal verbs and even by lexical patterns with a future meaning.

The Grammar of the Romanian Academy records only the Viitor and the Viitor Anterior (GA, 1963: 240-241), even if Romanian benefits from a multitude of possibilities to convey future meanings; these instruments belong to either the literary or colloquial registers, and they do not include continuous verb forms for the simple reason that our language lacks such patterns. Nevertheless, descriptions of the choices at the hand of Romanian native learners of English distinguish between ‘pure futurity’ and ‘coloured futurity’ (Bîră :131) and quotes R. A. Close who distinguishes (a) pure futurity, (b) present indications of what the future may bring and (c) personal attitudes.

Despite the discrepancies between the two languages, this division of our parallel approach will reveal those instances of correspondence, to continue by pointing to the particularities of either language.

Romanian Future Forms and English Future Forms

When Romanian natives have to choose from the English means of expressing futurity (i.e., Simple Future, Continuous Future, Near Future, Future Perfect Simple and Future Perfect

Continuous) an equivalent for Viitor and Viitor anterior, they may find themselves in a difficult position. This is due to the fact that the perspective on time in the two cultures is different: while the English speak about futurity with particular shades of meaning (involving that a situation will happen for sure when threat or menace is the hidden message, when the imminence of a situation is considered, etc.), the Romanians usually involve temporal meanings associated with future tenses (fewer than they may be in English, though).

Conclusions

This paper aimed at creating a theoretical background of the concept of temporal domain, with reference to both the English and the Romanian language.

After a concise view of the temporal divisions on the time axis, particular situations were considered, such as timeless versus real time situations – as a mutual feature of temporality in the two languages. The second half of the paper focused on present, past and future situations taking into account features shared by English and Romanian temporality.

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Biodata

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