
The Role of Auxiliary Verbs in Expressing Aspect in English Compared to Russian

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Annotation

This study looks at how English and Russian handle aspects of time in their languages, and honestly, the differences are quite fascinating. It dives into the different ways each language expresses the timing of actions – whether something is ongoing, completed, or just beginning. Both languages deal with similar ideas, but they do it in very different ways, which can be tricky for learners. English tends to be more analytic, using auxiliary verbs like “be” and “have” to carefully build meaning around aspects. You can almost see the language constructing the picture piece by piece. On the other hand, Russian is more synthetic, weaving aspectual differences directly into the verbs through prefixes and suffixes - it feels more immediate, more compact. By comparing these two approaches, the research sheds light on how their unique structures lead to natural variations across languages. The results help clarify how these different grammatical systems manage the complexities of actions and their timing, and hopefully make life a bit easier for anyone trying to master either tongue.

Keywords

Aspectology, comparative linguistics, analytic system, synthetic system, auxiliary verbs, morphological markers, typological divide, perfective and imperfective.

Ingliz va rus tillarida yordamchi fe'llarning ko'rinishni ifodalashdagi roli

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Annotatsiya

Ushbu tadqiqot ingliz va rus tillaridagi aspektual tizimlarni taqqoslaydi - ikki tizimni, ular umumiy maqsadga qaramay, mutlaqo turli grammatik tillarda gapiradi. Tadqiqot harakatlarning ichki vaqtinchalik tarkibini kodlashda ishlatiladigan turli strategiyalarga e'tibor qaratadi: harakat yakunlanganmi yoki davom etmoqdam, bir martalik voqea yoki takrorlanuvchimi. Har ikkala til ham o'xshash semantik voqeliklarni ifodalasa-da, ularning tarkibiy tatbiqi katta tipologik farqni ko'rsatadi, bu hatto tajribali tarjimonlarni ham qiyinchilikka soladi. Ingliz tili tizimi asosan

analitik bo'lib, aspektual ma'noni qismlab yig'adi, "be" va "have" kabi yordamchi fe'llardan foydalanadi. Rus tili esa sintetikroq – bu yerda aspektual farqlar prefiksatsiya va suffiksatsiya orqali bevosita fe'lning o'ziga joylashtiriladi, yanada yaxlit va ixcham gap hosil qiladi. Ushbu tadqiqot ingliz tilining analitik modulliligini rus tilining sintetik integratsiyasi bilan qiyoslaydi va turli tarkibiy modellar tillararo farqlanishga qanday ta'sir qilishini ko'rsatadi, har bir tilning grammatik xususiyatlarini chuqurroq tushunish yo'lini ochadi.

Kalit so'zlar *Aspektologiya, qiyosiy tilshunoslik, analitik tizim, sintetik tizim, yordamchi fe'llar, morfologik ko'rsatkichlar, tipologik farq, tugallangan va tugallanmagan aspekt*

**Роль вспомогательных глаголов
в выражении вида в английском
языке в сравнении с русским
языком**

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Аннотация *Данное исследование представляет собой сравнительный анализ аспектуальных систем английского и русского языков – двух систем, которые, несмотря на общую цель, говорят на совершенно разных грамматических языках. Здесь акцент сделан на различных стратегиях, которые применяются для передачи внутренней временной структуры действия: завершено оно или продолжается, разовое ли это событие или повторяющееся. Хотя оба языка касаются похожих семантических реалий, их структурные реализации демонстрируют значительный типологический разрыв, который часто ставит в тупик даже опытных переводчиков. Английская система в основном аналитическая: она собирает аспектуальное значение по частям, используя вспомогательные глаголы вроде "be" и "have". Русская же система более синтетическая – здесь аспектуальные различия вплетены непосредственно в сам глагол через префиксы и суффиксы, создавая более цельное и компактное высказывание. Исследование оценивает, как аналитическая модульность английского сопоставляется с синтетической интеграцией русского, и показывает, как разные структурные модели влияют на вариативность между языками, открывая путь к более глубокому пониманию грамматической специфики каждого из них.*

Ключевые слова *Аспектология, сравнительная лингвистика, аналитическая система, синтетическая система, вспомогательные глаголы, морфологические маркеры, типологический разрыв, совершенный и несовершенный вид*

Introduction

The classifications of tense and aspect are crucial in structuring the representation of events within language. Despite being closely related, they serve distinct roles: tense usually denotes the time frame of an event, whereas aspect reveals the internal progression of that event—regardless of whether it is seen as finished, ongoing, or habitual.

Languages vary significantly in the expression of these meanings, with the difference between English and Russian being particularly revealing. English often conveys grammatical meanings using distinct words and structures (an analytic method), whereas Russian integrates many of these meanings directly into the verb (a synthetic method). A key characteristic of the English verbal system is its dependence on auxiliary verbs to create aspectual forms. These auxiliaries lack lexical meaning but function as grammatical supports, enabling speakers to convey nuanced differences in time and process. In Russian, however, aspect is not formed using auxiliary verbs, but is inherent in the lexical form of the verb itself. This article examines these mechanisms to explain how two languages can express similar meanings through fundamentally different grammatical structures.

Literature review

The distinction between tense and aspect has been essential for linguistic research, largely influenced by Comrie (1976), who defined aspect as the internal temporal structure of a situation—a deceptively simple idea that opens up remarkably complex questions about how languages view time. In English grammar, scholars like Huddleston and Pullum (2002) argue that the language utilizes a 'periphrastic' structure, wherein auxiliary verbs combine with main verbs to express various grammatical meanings. It is almost as if English speakers assemble their temporal meanings piece by piece, adding layers as

needed. Quirk et al. (1985) also emphasize that the progressive and perfect tenses are the primary ways to express aspect in English, creating a system that feels modular and flexible. Conversely, the Russian viewpoint, illustrated by Bondarko (1991), views aspect not as an "addition" but as a fundamental property of the verb—something woven into its very DNA. Timberlake (2004) notes that Russian verbs are inherently marked for aspect, typically forming "aspectual pairs" that distinguish between completed (perfective) and ongoing (imperfective) actions. Dahl's (1985) cross-linguistic framework supports this, categorizing these differences as arising from the significant typological distinction between analytic and synthetic languages—a divide that shapes how entire cultures conceptualize the flow of events.

Methodology

This study uses a comparative, qualitative method, emphasizing the structural and functional aspects of English and Russian.

The examination relies on three main foundations, each offering a unique window into how these two languages think about time and action. First, the analysis of fundamental verb structures in both languages—the very building blocks that speakers use without a second thought. Second, the determination of the particular grammatical processes utilized to convey aspect: The English way of stacking auxiliary verbs like building blocks, versus the Russian approach of folding meaning directly into the verb itself through morphology. Third, the analysis of comparable semantic interpretations between the two systems, asking whether they truly see the world differently or simply take different paths to the same destination.

Through vivid illustrative examples drawn from everyday speech and literature, the research emphasizes how these mechanisms operate in practical application, not just in theory. It seeks to uncover the fundamental

structural logic of every language – the hidden architecture that shapes how speakers perceive, experience, and ultimately express the flow of time around them.

Analysis

Auxiliary Verbs as Markers of Aspect in English

The two main auxiliaries, “be” and “have”, each offer a distinct understanding of an occurrence, and together they form the backbone of English aspectual expression. The progressive aspect is created using the auxiliary “be” along with the present participle – that familiar “-ing” form we use every day without even thinking. This construction depicts an action occurring at a particular moment, something unfolding right before our eyes. In the phrase “She is reading,” the auxiliary verb “is” shows that the action is happening right now, capturing a living, breathing moment in time.

The perfect aspect, on the other hand, employs the auxiliary “have” along with the past participle. This framework usually links a previous occurrence to a subsequent moment in time, creating a bridge between then and now. In “She has completed her tasks,” the emphasis gracefully transitions from the procedure itself to the outcome – the finished result that still matters in the present.

Importantly, English permits these meanings to merge quite naturally, as seen in “She has been reading,” where an elegant accumulation of auxiliaries allows the language to convey intricate temporal connections with remarkable accuracy. In each of these instances, the auxiliaries quietly relinquish their standalone lexical significance to function solely as grammatical indicators, almost fading into the background so the aspectual meaning can shine through.

Aspect without Auxiliaries in Russian

In contrast, Russian conveys aspect without using auxiliary verbs, embedding the meaning directly within the verb through morphological differences – a beautifully compact solution that feels almost

architectural. Russian verbs typically come in pairs; the imperfective refers to actions that are ongoing or habitual, painting a picture of something unfolding in time, whereas the perfective depicts the action as a finished entity, a completed whole. For example, “писать” (to write) signifies the activity itself – the very process of putting pen to paper – while “написать” (to have written) denotes its conclusion, the satisfying moment when the last word is set down.

These differences are accomplished by means of prefixes, suffixes, or subtle alterations to the root. Thus, aspect becomes an inherent characteristic of the verb form, woven into its very fabric. In Russian, the auxiliary “быть” (to be) is utilized to create the future imperfective tense, but here it mainly serves a temporal function rather than an aspectual one. The aspectual meaning remains strongly embedded in the lexical verb itself, emphasizing the language’s deeply synthetic characteristics – a stark and elegant contrast to English’s more scattered, piece-by-piece approach.

Discussion

An examination of the two systems shows a distinct typological separation, and once you start looking closer, the differences only become more striking. English establishes a framework in which grammatical significance is spread among various components, facilitating a modular and extremely adaptable syntax. It is almost as if the language hands you building blocks and lets you assemble the meaning yourself. In contrast, Russian conveys this meaning through one more concise word, leading to a system that is structurally “denser” – everything is packed tightly inside the verb, waiting to be unpacked by the reader. These variations indicate wider trends: English depends on syntax to convey meaning, whereas Russian emphasizes morphology. This presents major obstacles for learners and translators alike. A Russian speaker needs to patiently understand the “helper” verb system in English, while an

English speaker must slowly gain an intuition for the internal transformations of Russian verbs. In translation, achieving direct equivalence is frequently unfeasible, necessitating a “functional” approach that conveys the intended aspectual nuance instead of merely copying the literal terms. Ultimately, both systems are elegant in their own way – they simply speak different grammatical languages.

Practical implications

These structural differences carry significant weight beyond theoretical linguistics, directly affecting how we teach, learn, and translate between English and Russian. For language instructors, understanding why students make certain errors is often more valuable than simply correcting them. A Russian learner of English frequently drops auxiliary verbs, producing sentences like “She reading” instead of “She is reading” – not out of carelessness, but because their linguistic intuition tells them that aspect should live inside the verb itself. Recognizing this interference allows teachers to address the root cause rather than the symptom, designing exercises that explicitly highlight the modular, additive nature of English aspect.

Conversely, English speakers learning Russian often struggle to grasp that a single prefix can entirely reshape a verb’s temporal identity. They may treat “писать” and “написать” as minor variations rather than fundamentally different words, leading to subtle but persistent errors in expressing completion. Here, visual tools – such as pairing verbs with timelines or completion markers – prove especially effective.

For translators, the absence of direct equivalence demands creative solutions. The English perfect tense rarely maps neatly onto Russian morphology. “I have lived here for five years” does not call for the perfective “прожил” at all; instead, the imperfective “живу” with the adverbial “пять лет” captures the ongoing relevance that English encodes through have.

Similarly, the progressive “She is reading” might require not a verb form but a contextual particle like “как раз” to convey immediacy in Russian. A translator who clings to word-for-word equivalence will inevitably flatten these nuances.

Ultimately, awareness of these typological habits – English’s reliance on syntactic assembly versus Russian’s morphological integration – equips both educators and translators with the analytical flexibility these languages demand.

Conclusion

The analysis provided here demonstrates the crucial role that auxiliary verbs play in the structure of the English language. By relying significantly on auxiliaries such as “be” and “have”, English establishes a notably adaptable structure, enabling speakers to alter their viewpoint on an event through nuanced, incremental modifications. This dependence on external indicators is a defining characteristic of the English aspectual system, adding a dimension of subtlety that is both practical and unique.

Russian, on the other hand, adheres to a completely distinct linguistic reasoning. Instead of assembling meaning through separate words, it integrates aspect directly into the verb’s morphological structure. In Russian, aspect is not an “extra” feature – it is an essential, integral part of a word’s identity.

The addition of a practical perspective reveals that these differences are not merely theoretical curiosities. They create real challenges for learners, teachers, and translators who must navigate between two fundamentally different ways of conceptualizing time and action. As this study has shown, awareness of the analytic-synthetic divide equips language professionals with the flexibility to move beyond literal equivalence toward functional accuracy.

By positioning these two systems side by side, we observe a clear demonstration of the profound gap between analytic and synthetic frameworks. This research acts as a

foundation for further inquiries into how
bilingual individuals manage these two realms

during the natural flow of everyday
communication.

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