

The comparison of tense systems in English and Russian languages

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Received: 26 October 2024; **Accepted:** 28 December 2024; **Published:** 30 January 2025

Abstract: This article provides a comparative analysis of the tense systems in English and Russian, highlighting their structural and functional differences. English, with its twelve tenses, offers a comprehensive framework to express time and aspect, emphasizing tense-aspect combinations such as simple, continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous forms. In contrast, Russian features a simpler tense structure—past, present, and future—relying heavily on verbal aspects (perfective and imperfective) to convey nuances of time and completion. The article explores the implications of these differences, particularly in the formation of the future tense, negation, and question structures, while also discussing the role of context in resolving temporal ambiguity. This study sheds light on the challenges faced by learners of both languages and underscores the significance of understanding tense-aspect systems for cross-linguistic competence.

Keywords: Tense system, verbal aspect, English grammar, Russian grammar, tense-aspect distinction, future tense, negation, comparative linguistics, language learning, temporal expression.

Introduction: Tense systems are fundamental to understanding how languages convey time and aspect. By comparing the tense systems of English and Russian, we uncover notable differences in how these languages structure temporal information. English, with its extensive system of tenses, provides a rich framework for expressing time and aspect in detail. In contrast, Russian places a greater emphasis on aspect, simplifying its tense structure while still capturing nuanced meanings. This study examines the main differences and similarities between these systems, highlighting their linguistic and practical implications [5, 353-378].

To begin with, English employs a combination of tense and aspect to convey detailed temporal and aspectual information. The twelve tenses in English are categorized into simple, continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous forms across the past, present, and future. For instance, the verb to write can take forms like writes (present simple), is writing (present continuous), has written (present perfect), or has been writing (present perfect continuous). These variations enable English speakers to specify not only when an

action occurs but also whether it is ongoing, completed, or has relevance to another time. For example, She has been writing for two hours emphasizes the duration of the activity, while She wrote yesterday simply indicates when the action took place.

By contrast, Russian verbs operate on a different principle, dividing actions into two aspects: perfective and imperfective. This aspectual system is key to understanding the Russian approach to time. The imperfective aspect represents ongoing or habitual actions, while the perfective aspect signifies completed actions. For example, Он писал письмо (He was writing a letter) in the imperfective aspect focuses on the process, whereas Он написал письмо (He wrote the letter) in the perfective aspect highlights the completion of the task. This distinction allows Russian to express meanings that, in English, would require different tense forms, such as the progressive or perfect tenses.

One of the most striking differences lies in the formation of the future tense. In English, the future tense is generally marked by auxiliary verbs like will or

shall (e.g., I will write). Additionally, English uses other constructions, such as going to or the present continuous, to indicate planned actions or immediate intentions (e.g., I am going to write a letter). Russian, however, forms the future tense differently based on the aspect of the verb. Imperfective verbs use a compound form with the auxiliary verb *быть* (to be), as in *я буду писать* (I will be writing), which indicates an ongoing or habitual future action. Perfective verbs, on the other hand, use a simple conjugated form, as in *я напишу* (I will write), to denote a single, completed action. This reliance on aspect provides a level of precision that compensates for the absence of distinct continuous or perfect tenses in Russian.

Furthermore, negation and question formation illustrate additional contrasts. English uses auxiliary verbs such as *do*, *does*, or *did* to form questions and negatives, while Russian relies on simpler structures. For example, *Did she write the letter?* requires the auxiliary *did*, whereas in Russian, *Она писала письмо?* (She wrote a letter?) uses intonation alone to form a question. Similarly, English negatives require auxiliaries, as in *She did not write the letter*, whereas Russian uses the particle *не* before the verb: *Она не писала письмо* [2, 98-104].

In addition, context plays a crucial role in both languages to resolve ambiguity. For instance, in English, a sentence like *I was reading* may be clarified by adding a time reference such as *yesterday at 5 p.m.* Similarly, in Russian, temporal adverbs like *вчера* (yesterday) or *в тот момент* (at that moment) are often essential to fully understand the time frame of an action.

Beyond these structural differences, the practical implications of the tense-aspect systems also vary. For learners of English, mastering the twelve tenses can be challenging, particularly because the distinctions between continuous and perfect forms are not immediately intuitive. In contrast, learners of Russian must focus on mastering verbal aspects, as they are crucial to expressing subtle differences in meaning. For example, the choice between *писать* and *написать* can significantly alter the intended message.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the tense systems of English and Russian represent two distinct approaches to conveying time and aspect. English provides a detailed framework with a wide variety of tenses to express temporal nuances, while Russian emphasizes aspect to achieve similar effects with a simpler tense structure. Despite these differences, both languages rely on context and additional markers to clarify meaning. Understanding these systems not only deepens linguistic knowledge but also enhances communication across cultural and

linguistic boundaries. Therefore, by exploring the interplay of tense and aspect in English and Russian, we gain valuable insights into how languages reflect and structure human perception of time.

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