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Aspectual Errors in Romanian and Serbian ESP Learners Majoring in Tourism and Hospitality Management

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Abstract. This paper examines the interference of the mother tongue, Serbian and Romanian, in the case of students of English for Tourism and Hospitality Purposes (ESP) at the university level in the field of verbal aspect. The first part of the paper focuses on the ways in which the category of aspect is defined and expressed in Serbian and Romanian in comparison to English. It was hypothesised that the native speakers of these three languages may conceptualize verbal aspect rather differently, especially given their inherent relevant linguistic differences, particularly with Serbian having a more complex system of grammaticalized aspectuality than English and Romanian. This paper analyses the difficulties that Serbian and Romanian ESP learners might encounter in attempting to comprehend the features specific to aspect in English and in capturing the different aspectual uses of English verbs. For this analysis, a study was carried out featuring a questionnaire on the specific context of aspectual uses, which was completed by the participating Serbian and Romanian ESP students.

Keywords: ESP, aspect, interference, Romanian, Serbian

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the influence or interference of the mother tongue, Romanian and Serbian, among ESP students of English for Tourism and Hospitality at the university level in regard to verbal aspect.[1]

1 In addition to Business English, the students at the College of Hotel Management learn an

This study focuses on verbal aspect and the influence of the native Romanian and Serbian languages on the use of English aspect. The research analyses the interference among Romanian and Serbian native speakers in this context, respectively, and then compares the interference in these two languages.

1.1. Research methodology

This questionnaire-based study analyses the influence and interference of the native Romanian or Serbian language on the students of English for Tourism and Hospitality (ESP) at the university level in the field of verbal aspect. These students/examinees were not provided with additional instructions regarding the uses of English aspect prior to filling in the questionnaire, as the aim was to determine how the knowledge acquired about English aspect in the course of regular teaching within their curriculum could help them answer the relevant questions in the questionnaire. The research included the following stages: a) reviewing the regular teaching materials about English aspect for the examinees, without additional teaching about aspect; b) preparing the questionnaire; c) filling in of the questionnaire (30 minutes); d) analysis of the results.

The examinees (B1 level of English according to the Common European Framework of Reference) included two groups according to their native language: Romanian (40 second-year students of Tourism Management attending The Faculty of Management in Tourism and Commerce in Timişoara, a branch of the Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University in Bucharest) and Serbian (40 second-year students of Hospitality and Restaurant Management from The Academy of Applied Studies Belgrade, The College of Hotel Management Department).

The multiple-choice questionnaire consisted of 20 sentences, encompassing English aspectual oppositions (perfective/imperfective and perfect/non-perfect) with secondary aspectual meanings such as habitual, perfect of result, experiential perfect, perfect of recent past, and temporariness. The questionnaire was intended to provide insight into the aspectual interference of the native language in ESP learning and into common aspectual mistakes ESP students might make, as the sentences were constructed to reflect English usage and contexts typical of the ESP B1-level students.

elective foreign language, i.e. French, German, or Russian (elementary level), while students at the Faculty of Management in Tourism and Commerce learn business French, German, Spanish, or Italian. However, the authors consider that these elective languages do not significantly influence the learning of English aspectual oppositions, whereas research has shown that students' native language has an impact on the acquisition of the English aspect.

1.2. Initial hypotheses and expected results

For the Romanian native speakers, the following initial hypotheses were formulated:

R1 – The Romanian language lacks a direct equivalent of the present perfect, so the English resultative and experiential present perfect are frequently replaced with the simple past.

R2 – Because Romanian present simple is commonly used to denote the imperfective aspect, the English perfective aspect may be erroneously used instead of the imperfective.

R3 – The reverse type of present perfect – simple past error is expected because the Romanian compound perfect (*perfectul compus*) resembles the English present perfect.

As for the Serbian native speakers, the following initial hypotheses were formulated:

S1 – Serbian does not have a direct equivalent for the present perfect, so the English resultative present perfect and the perfect of recent past may be replaced with a simple past tense.

S2 – The English present perfect for a persistent situation may be interpreted as Serbian present tense.

S3 – Serbian perfective and imperfective aspect do not completely correspond to the English non-progressive and progressive aspect, which may lead to errors among Serbian native speakers.

S4 – English stative verbs are typically not used in the progressive aspect, and Serbian native speakers may not recognize this distinction.

2. Theoretical background

This section briefly discusses the concept of interference and aspect in Romanian, Serbian, and English.

2.1. Language interference and error analysis

The notion of language interference,[2] introduced by U. Weinreich (1953), concerns the influence of the native language (L1) on foreign language (L2) learning, implying a broader transfer of various patterns of L1 to L2 or a narrower negative

2 As Ellis (1996: 301) points out, the terms *language interference* or *transfer* are often associated with behaviourist theories of L2 learning, so there is also a theory-neutral term *crosslinguistic influence*.

transfer, which impedes learning of L2. This is also indicated as occurring in ESP learning due to the application of the native language rules on the target language. Language interference is reflected in mistakes typically made by ESP students, and these errors can range from grammatical, morphological, lexical, and semantic, to syntactic. Namely, ESP learners undergo several stages (interlanguages) as they acquire L2; errors may appear when learners make incorrect deductions about a structure in L2, relying on the patterns of L1, providing evidence about the learning process (Crystal 1991: 372). Moreover, a distinction should be made between mistakes (non-systematic errors) and errors (systematic errors reflecting the learner's transitional competence); only the latter are of significance for L2 learning (Corder 1974: 25). Errors in comprehension and production may stem from the "faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language" (Richards 1974: 178), overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, etc. (Ellis 1996: 174–176), resulting from the negative transfer from L1. Therefore, errors may indicate the possible influence of native language on L2 performance, which is a key assumption of this research.

Error analysis, as a component of contrastive studies, enables the tracking of the interlanguage during second language acquisition and of the possible interference of the native language, as well as the potential intrusion of other foreign languages. This research concentrates on the interference of the native language, drawing upon relevant preceding studies and research about contrastive studies and error analysis such as those of Richards (1975), James (1998), and Ondrakova (2016). Also relevant to this study are particular papers examining errors in acquiring and teaching English (Collins 2007, Khansir and Pakdei 2018) and certain papers comparing English verb categories (tense-aspect) with other languages (like Arabic, Gad 2018). Finally, papers on contrastive linguistics (English–Serbian and vice versa), with translation equivalents (Mandić 2016, Balek 2017), were consulted in the designing of the questionnaire.

2.2. Aspect in English, Romanian, and Serbian

The typological linguistic literature defines aspect as a category which enables the viewing of a situation as a single whole (*perfective aspect*) or as a structure (*imperfective aspect*) (Comrie 1976: 3). Furthermore, Comrie specifies that the imperfective aspect (in addition to the general reference to the internal temporal structure of a situation) also includes the concepts of habituality and continuousness (Comrie 1976: 24–26), thus partially overlapping with the perfective (like in the habitual domain), which is relevant for this research.

Although Serbian, Romanian, and English belong to different branches of Indo-European languages, some similarities can be established when aspect is concerned. This study presents insights into the nature of aspect in all three

languages and into their systematic similarities and differences, thereby making a specific contribution to aspectology in general.

According to Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985: 90), English has two sets of aspectual contrasts: a) progressive (typically denoting imperfectivity) and non-progressive (typically denoting perfectivity) and b) perfect and non-perfect.[3] Discussing the concrete uses of the English progressive aspect, that is, the imperfective aspect, Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985: 92–94) make the following distinctions: a) temporariness vs indefinite time; b) limited duration vs habitual activity; c) emotionally coloured tone vs objective tone; d) incompletion vs completion. This complexity of English progressive is a reason why English aspect represents a key area where errors may occur among B1-level learners. Bearing this in mind, this study focuses on those uses of English progressive aspect typically taught to ESP students at the B1 level such as temporariness, limited duration, and incompletion. Finally, this study also examines the use of English stative verbs like *see*, *hear*, and *feel*, which are non-progressive in their involuntary, stative meaning (for example: *He felt cold.*), but which can be used in the progressive aspect, by which they acquire a dynamic, voluntary quality (for example: *The doctor was feeling the boy's arm.*).

Declerck, Reed, and Capelle (2007: 28–38) also distinguish (2007: 28) the perfective aspect as presenting the respective situation in its entirety and the imperfective aspect as presenting a situation as ongoing (or progressive). These authors discuss two English aspects systematically expressed by special verb markers – the progressive and non-progressive aspect; the former implying that the situation is complete, presented in its entirety, the latter suggesting that the situation is ongoing, with internal temporal structure, durative, and continuous. Finally, these authors do not recognize *perfect* as a specific aspect in English.

As regards the perfect/non-perfect opposition, other linguistic sources (Comrie 1976: 56–61; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik 1985: 91; Novakov 2005) regard perfect in the category of aspect, stating that the English perfect aspect connects the verb situation with another situation or state. Thus, the present perfect connects the past and the present, indicating that the situation happened in the past but has links to the present. According to its usage, English perfect aspect is usually divided into four types – perfect of recent past (e.g. *They have just arrived.*), perfect of result (e.g. *He has washed his hands.*), experiential perfect (e.g. *She has been to China twice.*), and perfect of persistent situation (e.g. *I have been waiting for hours*) (Comrie 1976: 56–61).

Traditional Romanian linguistic literature (Găgeanu 1985, Evseev 1974, Dumitru 1976, Dimitriu 1979, Lucian 2007: 26, Pungă and Părlog 2015: 167)

3 These authors use the terms *perfective* and *non-perfective*, but they have chosen to apply the terms *perfect* and *non-perfect* to avoid possible confusion with the traditional term *perfective* from Slavic grammar.

did not consider aspect a separate and independent verb category. The verb form was regarded exclusively as a morphological category, which must be morphologically expressed (Savin-Zgardan 2001: 38). Poghiric (Poghiric 1953: 21) also asserted that aspect in the Romanian language is exclusively a temporal opposition. On the other hand, some linguists (Cemârtan 2001: 155) have argued that the verbal aspect in the Romanian language should be considered a semantic category, as aspect and tense represent a continuum that should be understood as a whole. Furthermore, Mişan (1969: 140) claimed that aspect is a binary category that is realized through the perfective/imperfective opposition, which can be correlated with similar theses presented by English linguists (Comrie 1976, Brinton 1988, Dahl 1987). Moreover, Luchian (2007: 28) propounded that verb tenses in the Romanian language define situations as perfective or imperfective. Namely, the present, imperfect, and future denote a situation that lasts, so they signify the imperfective aspect, while the compound perfect, simple perfect, and pluperfect express the perfective aspect. Similarly, verbs denoting duration imply imperfectivity if they are used in the present, imperfect, or future, while in other verb tenses they have a perfective meaning.

Contemporary Romanian linguists have recognized aspect as a meaningful characteristic of Romanian verbs. In the *Encyclopaedia of the Romanian Language* (Avram–Sala 2001: 65–68), the authors point out that the relevant oppositions, which have been treated as temporal in the past, are in fact of aspectual nature. Thus, in the Romanian language, the perfective/imperfective aspectual opposition is expressed by verbal tenses named *perfectul compus/imperfectul*, where *perfectul compus* denotes a completed situation, and *imperfectul* represents an ongoing situation: *am venit* / *veneam* 'I came / I was coming'. An imperfective verb can denote an action that lasts (*durative*), but also an action that repeats (*iterative*). In addition, in the Romanian language, the perfective/imperfective opposition is morphologically expressed only in the past tense, and, accordingly, a distinction is recognized between the imperfect (*imperfectul*), which most often represents the situation as a single whole without differentiating the phases that make up this situation, and the simple and complex perfect (*perfectul simplu* / *perfectul compus*) and pluperfect (*mai-mult-ca-perfectul*), which presents the situation as a structure divisible into segments.

Moreover, contemporary Romanian literature offers contrastive studies of English and Romanian aspectual systems (Bodean-Voizan 2015; Hanganu 2014; Hanganu 2015), as well as features error analysis and examines language interference between the Romanian and English languages (Presada and Badea 2014, Pungă and Pârlog 2015).

Based on the relevant Romanian linguistic literature, it can be argued that verbal aspect is an independent category that is only partially grammaticalized in Romanian in the sense that aspectual oppositions on the morphological level

exist only in the past tense, while each verb tense in the Romanian language also expresses certain aspectual meanings.

There is a correlation between the English past perfect and the Romanian pluperfect in the sense that these forms both denote situations that occurred before some other situation in the past.

As a Slavic language, Serbian has a morphologically-marked verbal aspect, with verb lexemes having two aspectual forms in the infinitive: imperfective or perfective (with a small number of bi-aspectual verbs which determine their aspect in the context). As traditional Serbian linguists pointed out (for instance, Belić 1924 and Stevanović 1979), imperfective verbs imply unlimited duration, while perfective ones denote the limited duration of a situation. Some other linguists, such as Grubor (1953), stated that the imperfective aspect indicates situations as structured, while the perfective aspect presents situations as wholes, in their entirety. Similarly, Riđanović (1976) asserted that aspect deals with the divisibility and indivisibility of situations in time. Thus, it can be argued that, in Serbian, aspect is dominantly a morphological category, usually without contextual influences. These aspectual properties may influence the aspectual choices of Serbian native speakers when learning English as an L2.

The three mentioned languages were chosen for this analysis because they involve one concept of aspectuality yet three different ways of expressing it. Namely, in the Serbian language, aspect is a specific verbal category expressed at the morphological level in the infinitive, which is not the case for either Romanian or English verbs. In the English language, aspect can be expressed in all tenses by means of the progressive/non-progressive opposition. In Romanian, however, aspect can be morphologically distinguished only in the past tense using *perfectul compus* and *imperfectul*, which are perceived as tenses in the Romanian language. This is why, in traditional Romanian linguistic literature, aspect was not regarded as an independent verbal category but rather either connected it to the verb tenses or made no reference to the category of aspect at all (Graur, Avram, and Vasiliu 1966). However, Romanian offers a somewhat restricted possibility to express aspectual values through prefixes (*dormi* / *adormi*). Consequently, Romanian lacks morphemes that can express the category of aspect, though some modes and tenses can express the notion of duration and incompletion, as opposed to perfective situations.

3. The Study

3.1. Results for the Romanian native speakers

The Romanian sample comprised 40 respondents, i.e. B1-level students of Management in Tourism and Commerce in Timişoara, who completed the tailored questionnaire. All the respondents were Romanian native speakers. The primary aim of the study was to determine the influence or interference of respondents' mother tongue on the uses of English aspectual oppositions.

Figures 1–3 present general information about the participants:

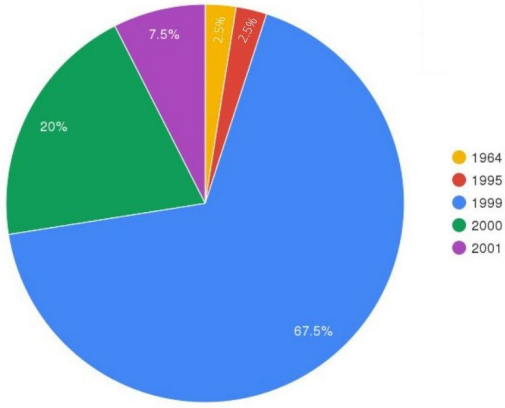


Figure 1. *Year of birth of the respondents*

Figure 1 displays the age of the respondents: the vast majority of the 40 respondents (27, or 67.5%) were born in 1999, while 8 (20%) were born in 2000, 3 (7.5%) in 2001, and 1 (2.5%) in 1995 and 1964 respectively.

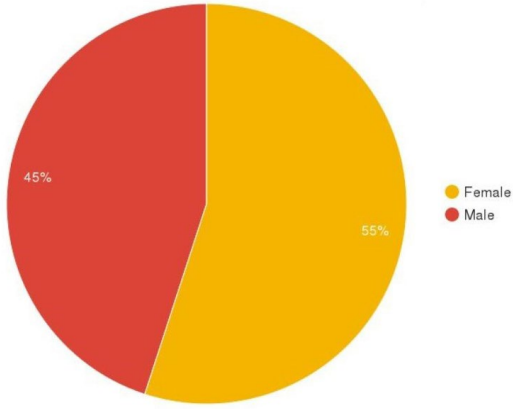


Figure 2. *Gender of the participants*

Figure 2 indicates that there were 22 (55%) female respondents and 18 (45%) male respondents, meaning the gender structure was quite balanced.

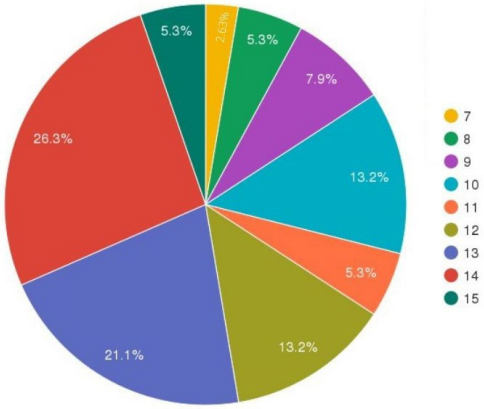


Figure 3. *Years of active English learning of the participants*

Finally, *Figure 3* shows the respondents' active years of learning English as a foreign language: the Romanian respondents were documented as having learned English for: 15 years (2 respondents, or 5.3%); 14 years (11 respondents, or 26.3%); 13 years (8 respondents, or 21.1%); 12 years (5 respondents, or 13.2%); 11 years (2 respondents, or 5.3%); 10 years (5 respondents, or 13.2%); 9 years (3 respondents, or 7.9%); 8 years (2 respondents, or 5.3%); 7 years (1 respondent, or 2.5%). (NB: 2 participants did not fill this field.)

The analysis of the Romanian ESP learners first addresses sentences connected to the English progressive aspect and then the English perfect aspect. Furthermore, the sentences featured in the questionnaire were divided into subgroups according to their aspectual meanings and uses. The respondents' answers to particular tasks are presented in the samples below, displayed in brackets according to the participants' answers in the following manner: in each bracket, the first number corresponds to the number of respondents who circled a particular answer, and the second represents the respective percentage of this response from among the total amount of responses.

Regarding the Romanian ESP learners, the study conducted for this paper has indicated a significant problem among these participants in comprehending or expressing the English present progressive aspect due to the interference of their native Romanian language. As opposed to the English language, where the progressive aspect is freely combinable with all tense forms, the Romanian imperfect is restricted to past situations. Therefore, there is actually no possibility to express the Romanian present progressive aspect using tense forms, inflection, and/or derivational affixes. It is either expressed by lexemes or implied contextually. These would seem to be the reasons for Romanian native

speakers having difficulties in grasping the features specific to this category in English. Specifically, aspectual errors were shown to occur in situations in which the English imperfective aspect should be used in the present tense. This is a typical mother-tongue-triggered error of misusing the English simple present instead of the characteristic present progressive. This can be illustrated by example sentences 1, 2, 3, and 4, where in each instance 60% or more of erroneous answers were recorded in regard to the incorrect use of the perfective instead of the imperfective verbal aspect.

1) He _____ on a cruiser this month.
   a) lived (2/5%) b) lives (24/60%) c) **is living (14/35%)**
2) The receptionist _____ the guests into the hotel right now.
   a) **is checking (10/25%)** b) checks (25/62.5%) c) was checking (5/12.5%)
3) (In an e-mail to a hotel) I _____ to book a room at your hotel.
   a) write (30/75%) b) **am writing (7/17.5%)** c) wrote (3/7.5%)
4) I _____ to call home, but I can't get an outside line.
   a) try (28/70%) b) **am trying (8/20%)** c) was trying (4 /10%)

Since in the Romanian language the imperfective aspect cannot be morphologically expressed in the present, the present indicative is used to indicate both perfective and imperfective aspect in the present, apparently causing confusion among ESP learners. Consequently, other syntactic elements, such as adverbials (examples 1 and 2), or context play a very important role in determining the aspectual scope of the situation. In the first sentence, the adverbial *this month* implies limited duration, which requires the use of the present progressive (*is living*), though this was successfully recognized by only a very low percentage (35%) of the respondents, with a relatively high percentage (60%) of respondents using the present simple, and a small percentage (5%) even employing the past simple.

Furthermore, the contexts in sentences 2, 3, and 4 demand the real present use of the English progressive. The Romanian ESP students did not appear to successfully recognize the necessity to use progressive aspect in such instances, as only 25% of the respondents' answers to sentence 2, 17.5% to sentence 3, and 20% to sentence 4 employed the progressive aspect, while a rather high percentage of respondents erroneously chose the present simple: 62.5% in task 2, 75% in task 3, and 70% in task 4.

In brief, in such situations in the native Romanian language, the Romanian present indicative would be used to express the imperfective aspect, which the respondents seemingly mistakenly applied to the English examples. This would appear to be the reason why the majority of Romanian students opted for the wrong aspect.

On the other hand, Romanian ESP learners correctly used the English past progressive to indicate the imperfective aspect, as can be seen in the sentences just below. Very likely, this can be explained by the existence of a grammatical correspondent called the imperfective (*imperfectul*) in their mother tongue.

5) The maid _____ the room when the gust entered.
a) **was cleaning (36/90%)** b) is cleaning (2/5%) c) cleaned (2/5%)
6) The waiter _____ Mr Smith morning coffee in the breakfast room when the new guest arrived.
a) served (0) b) **was serving (37/92.5%)** c) has served (3/7.5%)

The above two sentences tested the use of the progressive as a temporal frame for a situation which interrupts the activity in progress. In both instances, the vast majority of the respondents (90% in example 5 and 92.5% in example 6) seemed to recognize these contexts and successfully used the past non-progressive, with only a very low percentage opting for the wrong answers.

In the Romanian language, the imperfect (*imperfectul*) is typically used to denote imperfective aspect, which likely explains why the students scored very high in the examples above.

As an unexpected result, the study conducted for this paper appeared to reveal an interesting curiosity, which was not accounted for in the original hypotheses. Namely, traditional grammar states that the verbal aspect does not exist as an independent category in Romanian, which seems to explain what appears to be a lacking understanding of the imperfective concept among Romanian ESP learners since the participants made unexpected errors in distinguishing the perfective/imperfective aspectual values. Moreover, this occurred only in the present tense, but not in the past, which is assumably explained by the Romanian language morphologically expressing imperfectivity only in the past tense by the *imperfectul*. This is further illustrated by examples 7 and 8, where 90% and 50% of the examinees, respectively, mistakenly employed the present progressive instead of correctly applying the present simple.

7) Hotel employees _____ two or more foreign languages.
a) are speaking (36/90%) b) **speak (4/10%)** c) have spoken (0)
8) Every year we _____ two trips to the seaside.
a) are making (20/50%) b) were making (12/30%) c) **make (8/20%)**

These results strongly suggest that there is confusion amongst native Romanian speakers in the use of the imperfective aspect in the present tense induced by mother tongue interference.[4]

4 As has already been mentioned, even though the students at both universities study other

In the next three sentences from the questionnaire, the authors intended to test the use of English stative verbs which require the non-progressive aspect:

9) Whether I get the job of a receptionist _____ on my skills and education.
a) **depends (34/85%)** b) is depending (6/15%) c) was depending (0)
10) The chicken _____ delicious.
a) is tasting (2/5%) b) was tasting (0) c) **tastes (38/95%)**
11) Hotel facilities _____ a large indoor pool, Jacuzzi and a sauna.
a) **include (32/80%)** b) are including (0) c) were including (8/20%)

The analysis reveals that Romanian ESP students were seemingly familiar with this rule, as they chose the correct answer 85% (task 9), 95% (task 10), and 80% of the time (task 11) respectively.

Apart from examining the English perfective/imperfective opposition, this paper also analyses the use of the perfect aspect in English, focussing on the present perfect, both in the non-progressive and progressive aspects.

The English present perfect has been recognized as causing confusion among Romanian native speakers, mainly because the concept of connecting the past with the present in one situation that does not exist in Romanian. Consequently, it was assumed that the Romanian ESP learners participating in the survey would make mother-tongue-triggered errors in this context and mistakenly employ the present perfect for the typical English simple past.

This indicated misperception is likely further deepened by the dual nature of the Romanian compound perfect (*perfectul compus*). Namely, the Romanian compound perfect can be used to express completed situations in the past, and thus it can be directly correlated with the notion of the perfective aspect. On the other hand, the Romanian compound perfect may also imply a situation characteristic of the English perfect aspect.

The dual nature of the Romanian compound perfect was a key notion for the investigation of this paper and its initiation as there was no clear indication as to where the respective findings would lead.

Nevertheless, this analysis has revealed that the Romanian ESP learners seemingly tend to overlook the resultative use of the English present perfect and replace it with the simple past, thereby making an aspectual mistake:[5]

foreign languages, the authors consider that the elective languages do not play a major role in the learning of English aspectual oppositions. The study indicates that it is the students' native language which has a significant impact on the acquisition of the English aspectual system.

5 Please note that this (in the examples 12 and 13) reflects the use of present perfect in British English, because in colloquial American English the simple past could also be a correct answer. The British use is expected to be familiar to the examinees as this is the primary system in which they are instructed.

12) The guest_____. He is waiting in the lobby.
a) **has arrived (14/35%)** b) arrived (24/60%) c) arrives (2/5%)
13) I just ____ the window.
a) closed (32/80%) b) had closed (1/2.5%) c) **have closed (7/17.5%)**

The above sentences illustrate a typical use of the English present perfect: recent activity in the past with an obvious result in the present, a concept with which the respondents should be familiar at their established B1 level of learning. However, a high percentage of the Romanian ESP students appeared to not recognize this rule, employing the past simple most frequently in both instances (80% in task 13 and 60% in task 12), whereas only 17.5% and 35% of the respondents chose the correct answer in examples 13 and 12 respectively.

Furthermore, the results of the study confirm the initial hypothesis that the Romanian ESP learners may misuse the experiential present perfect for the standard English simple past, which can be considered a learning-induced error that learners of English for specific purposes tend to make. Evidence of such an error can be seen in examples 14 and 15 below, where 80% and 60% of students mistakenly applied the past simple rather than the correct perfect aspect:

14) I _____ London three times so far.
a) visited (32/80%) b) **have visited (8/20%)** c) was visiting (0)
15) I _____ in this hotel twice so far.
a) am staying (0) b) **have stayed (16/40%)** c) stayed (24/60%)

On the other hand, the results of the study also confirmed the reverse type of present perfect – simple past error. Namely, likely due to the Romanian compound perfect (*perfectul compus*) resembling the form of the English present perfect (the present indicative of the auxiliary verb *a avea* 'to have' + past participle), 50% of the Romanian ESP learners wrongly chose the English present perfect instead of the past simple, as demonstrated in example 16 just below, which can be logically assumed to be a mother-tongue-triggered error rather than a learning-induced one:

16) Martha _____ in India when she was young.
a) has lived (20/50%) b) had lived (2/5%) c) **lived (18/45%)**

Similarly, for example 17, only 30% selected the correct answer (past non-progressive) against a very high 60% of students choosing the present perfect.

17) When he was young, he _____ The College of Hotel Management and graduated in 2019.
a) was attending (4/10%) b) **attended (12/30%)** c) has attended (24/60%)

Given that the Romanian language does not conceptualize the semantic merge of the present and the past in a single situation, the mother-tongue-triggered error of misusing the present perfect for the typical English simple past is understandable and expected. Nonetheless, an interesting curiosity revealed by this research is the occurrence of the apparent incorrect use of the English present simple instead of the present perfect, as evidenced in the misapplication of the perfect aspect in examples 18 (62.5%) and 19 (42.5%):

18) I _____ English for tourism and hospitality purposes since 2016.
a) **have been studying (15/37.5%)** b) study (25/62.5%) c) am studying (0)
19) I ____ a receptionist for over 15 years now.
a) a) am (17/42.5%) b) was (4/10%) c) **have been (19/47.5%)**
20) He _____ in this hotel for 10 years now.
a) **has been working (16/40%)** b) is working (16/40%) c) worked (8/20%)

Sentences (18), (19), and (20) were intended to test the use of the English present perfect to denote a period of time up to the present. It seems that approximately half of the respondents disregarded this rule and opted for the present simple option. Most of the remaining respondents recognized that the context implied the period up to the present and used the perfect aspect appropriately.

3.2. Results for the Serbian native speakers

The sample of Serbian native speakers comprised 40 respondents in order to establish the possible influence of their mother tongue on the uses of English aspectual oppositions. The respondents were B1-level students of Tourism and Hospitality in Belgrade, all of whom completed the administered questionnaire.

Figures 4, *5*, and *6* present general information about the informants. *Figure 4* shows the age breakdown of the respondents: the vast majority out of the 38 respondents[6] (24, or 63%) were born in 2000, while 4 of them (11%) were born in 1999, 8 (21%) in 2001, and only 2 (5%) in 1996.

6 Two respondents did not fill in this field.

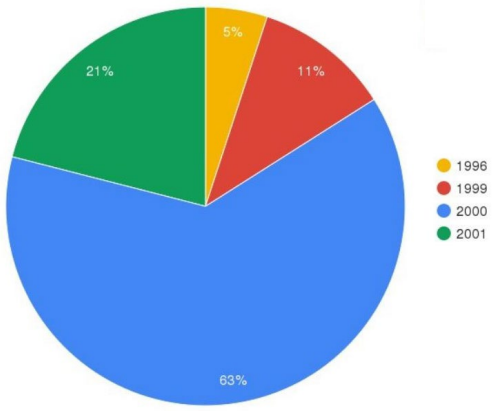


Figure 4. *Year of birth of the respondents*

Figure 5 shows the gender makeup of the sample. As there were 22 (55%) female respondents and 18 (45%) male respondents, the gender structure is quite balanced.

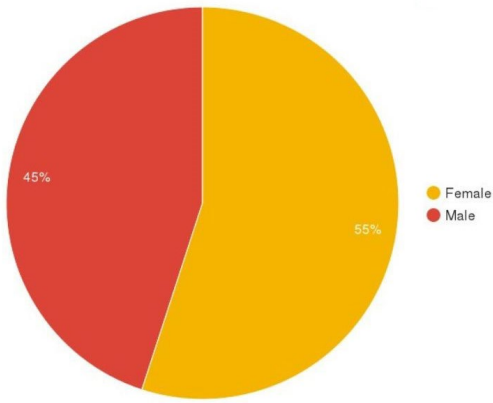


Figure 5. *Gender of the respondents*

Figure 6 presents the respondents' respective active years of learning English as a foreign language: the Serbian respondents had been learning English for the following time periods: 15 years (2 respondents, or 6%), 14 years (8 respondents, or 23%), 13 years (7 respondents, or 20%), 12 years (4 respondents, or 11%), 11 years (1 respondent, or 3%), 10 years (4 respondents, or 11%), 9 years (2 respondents, or 6%), 8 years (1 respondent, or 3%), 7 years (1 respondent, or 3%), 6 years (2 respondents, or 6%), and 5 years (3 respondents, or 8%).

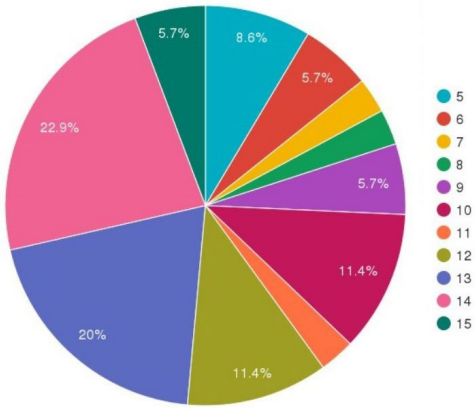


Figure 6. *Years of active English learning of the respondents*

NB: 5 informants did not fill this field.

For the purposes of the analysis, the sentences related to the use of the English progressive and perfect aspect were divided into several groups according to the meanings and uses tested in these sentences. The respondents' answers are indicated in brackets following the offered solutions: first, the number of respondents who circled a particular option and then the percentage. The respondents' answers to particular tasks are presented in the samples below, displayed in brackets according to the participants' answers in the following manner: in each bracket, the first number corresponds to the number of respondents who circled a particular answer, and the second represents the respective percentage of this response from among the total amount of responses. The first group includes the following sentences:[7]

1) Hotel employees _____ two or more foreign languages.
   a) are speaking (14/35%). b) **speak (24/60%)** c) have spoken (2/5%)
2) Every year we _____ two trips to the seaside.
   a) are making (13/32.5%) b) were making (3/7.5%) c) **make (24/ 60%)**
3) He _____ on a cruiser this month.
   a) lived (7/ 17.5%) b) lives (12/30%) c) **is living (21/ 52.5%)**

Sentences (1) and (2) were designed to test the use of the progressive aspect in the context signifying a repeated situation or a general skill. A clear majority of the respondents (60%) apparently recognized these contexts, as they employed the non-progressive present correctly; still, the percent of those who incorrectly opted for the present progressive in sentence 1 (*are speaking*) is rather high (35%),

7 One informant did not answer question 12 of the questionnaire, represented by example 17, while two did not answer question 6 (shown in example 7).

while a slightly smaller but still high percentage (32.5%) of the students circled the present progressive in sentence 2. In the last sentence (3), the adverbial *this month* implies limited duration, which requires the present progressive (*is living*). This was seemingly recognized by 52.5% of the respondents, as they correctly selected the present progressive aspect, though a rather high percentage (30%) incorrectly applied the present simple, with a small group even selecting the past simple (17.5%).

The contexts in the following group of sentences demand the real present use of the English progressive, also called temporariness:

4) The receptionist _____ the guests into the hotel right now.
   a) **is checking (38/95%)** b) checks (1/2.5%) c) was checking (1/2.5%)
5) (In an e-mail to the hotel) I _____ to book a room at your hotel.
   a) write (5/12.5%) b) **am writing (21/52.5%)** c) wrote (14/35%)
6) I _____ to call home, but I can't get an outside line.
   a) try (3/7.5%) b) **am trying (24/60%)** c) was trying (13/32.5%)

In the instances just above, the respondents did not seem to fully recognize the necessity to use the progressive aspect: only in example 4 did they overwhelmingly and correctly apply the progressive (95%), while only 52.5% of students applied this aspect correctly in sentence 5 and 60% in sentence 6. Apparently, in example 5, some of the students failed to recognize the typical standard tense used in the opening line of an e-mail, while in sentence 6 certain respondents seemingly disregarded the present tense of the modal (*can't*), since they incorrectly selected the past progressive of the missing verb.

The following three sentences were intended to test the use of English stative verbs, which require the non-progressive aspect:

7) Whether I get the job of a receptionist _____ on my skills and education.
   a) **depends (31/81.5%)** b) is depending (6 /15.8%) c) was depending (1/2.7%)
8) The chicken _____ delicious.
   a) is tasting (4/10%) b) was tasting (1/2.5%) c) **tastes (35/ 87.5%)**
9) Hotel facilities _____ a large indoor pool, Jacuzzi, and a sauna.
   a) **include (31/77.5%)** b) are including (9/22.5%) c) were including (0)

The respondents appeared to recognize this rule, as they chose the correct answer in 81.5% (sentence 7), 87.5% (sentence 8), and 77.5% (sentence 9) of the time. Only in example 9 did a rather large percent of respondents (22.5%) choose the present progressive incorrectly.

Finally, the last two sentences, presented just below, were meant to test the use of the progressive as a temporal frame for a temporal clause which interrupts the activity in progress:

10) The maid _____ the room when the guest entered.
a) **was cleaning (34/85%)** b) is cleaning (4/10%) c) cleaned (2/5%)
11) The waiter _____ Mr Smith morning coffee in the breakfast room when the new guest arrived.
a) served (0) b) **was serving (37/92.5%)** c) has served (3/7.5%)

The respondents answered both tasks with a high degree of success, with 85% of them choosing correctly in example 10 and 92.5% in example 11.

The questionnaire was also intended to test the use of the perfect aspect in English, focussing on the present perfect (non-progressive and progressive), as demonstrated in the example task sentences below:

12) Martha _____ in India when she was young.
a) has lived (16/40%) b) had lived (6/15%) c) **lived (18/45%)**
13) I _____ English for tourism and hospitality purposes since 2016.
a) **have been studying (36/90%)** b) study (4/10%) c) am studying (0)
14) He _____ in this hotel for 10 years now.
a) **has been working (30/75%)** b) is working (9/22.5%) c) worked (1/2.5%)
15) When he was young, he _____ The College of Hotel Management and graduated in 2019.
a) was attending (4/10%) b) **attended (22/55%)** c) has attended (11/27.5%)

Sentences 12, 13, 14, and 15 were all aimed at testing the students' ability regarding the temporal component of the English present perfect – a period of time up to now – but without specifying the exact period in the past. It seems that the respondents widely disregarded this rule, as in (12), 40% of them, a rather high level, opted for the present perfect despite there being a clear indication of the past period without any link to the present, while another 15% mistakenly selected the past perfect. Contrastingly, in example 13, the respondents seemed to recognize that the context implied the period up to now, as 90% correctly employed the present perfect (90%). Their response success was similar in example 14, with 75% selecting the correct answer though a rather high percentage (22.5%) did incorrectly choose to apply the present progressive, while for example 15 only 55% of the respondents selected the correct answer (past non-progressive), with 27.5% opting for the present perfect.

The last group of sentences, just below, presents contexts that demand typical uses of the English present perfect, cases which should have been familiar to the respondents given their established B1 level:

16) I ____ a receptionist for over 15 years now.
a) am (17/42.5%) b) was (2/5%) c) **have been (21/52.5%)**

17) I _____ in this hotel twice so far.
a) am staying (0) b) **have stayed (27/69%)** c) stayed (12/31%)
18) I just _____ the window.
a) closed (32/80%) b) had closed (27/69%) c) **have closed (7/17.5%)**
19) The guest_____. He is waiting in the lobby.
a) **has arrived (27/67.5%)** b) arrived (11/27.5%) c) arrives (2/5%)
20) I _____ London three times so far.
a) visited (15/37.5%) b) **have visited (24/60%)** c) was visiting (1/2.5%)

Yet despite their B1 language level, only 52.5% of the respondents opted for the correct present perfect in sentence 16, while 42.5% incorrectly opted for the present non-progressive form. In example 17, 69% selected the right answer, yet 31% used the past simple incorrectly. Surprisingly, in example 18, only 17.5% employed the correct present perfect against 80%, who mistakenly opted for the past simple. Yet in a seemingly similar context, recent activity in the past with the result in the present, as demonstrated in example 19, the percentage of students selecting correct answers was much more numerous: 67.5% against 27.5% who incorrectly chose the past simple. Regarding sentence 20, despite its similarity to example 17, only 60% of the respondents answered correctly, while 37.5% opted for the incorrect past simple.

In summary, when it comes to the English aspectual opposition progressive – non-progressive, the analysis indicates that the Serbian informants managed to basically grasp the differences formulated through the grammatical rules they were supposed to acquire. However, in some examples (for instance, 1 and 2), a quite high percentage of Serbian speakers wrongly chose the progressive form to denote general abilities, probably because the Serbian imperfective aspect is used in this context, which the students then relate to the English progressive. As for English stative verbs, non-progressive is the norm even with the meaning of temporariness; examples 7, 8, and 9 indicate that the Serbian imperfective aspect likely did not cause a negative transfer. Finally, progressive as a temporal frame (examples 10 and 11) was solved for the most part successfully by the respondents.

The English perfect aspect presented a different problem for the sampled Serbian native speakers: the students had to recognize its link to the present moment (continuation, results), as well as that it is not used with the exact past time indication. The results for sentence tasks 12 and 15 show that the Serbian speakers likely did not fully recognize the exclusion of specific past time adverbials. However, they did seem to recognize that continuation up to the present requires the present perfect, based on their responses in examples 13 and 14, though in contrast, in example 16, more than 40% employed the present simple incorrectly.

4. Conclusions

The study has confirmed the initial (R1) hypothesis that since the Romanian language lacks a direct equivalent of the present perfect, the simple past (with 60% of the respondents employing it in the relevant tasks) would be used in place of the English resultative and experiential present perfect. The reverse type of present perfect – simple past error was also documented, likely due to the morphological resemblance between the Romanian compound perfect (*perfectul compus*) and the English present perfect. Furthermore, the results of the study focused on the Romanian language have corroborated the second hypothesis (R2), with over 60% of incorrect answers to tasks in this context involving the mistaken use of the perfective instead of the imperfective verbal aspect. This can assumedly be attributed to the Romanian present simple being commonly used to denote the imperfective aspect: such aspectual errors seem to occur when the English imperfective aspect is used in the present tense. This would appear to be a typical mother-tongue-triggered error of misusing the English simple present instead of the present progressive. The third hypothesis (R3) was partly substantiated by the results of the study: Romanian ESP learners produced two types of errors related to the English present perfect: they used either the past simple (60%) or the present simple (70%), which indicates that while the notion of connecting the past and the present conceptually exists in the minds of Romanian ESP learners, their documented tendency to not express this connection on the morphological level is a seeming indicator of limitations in their ability to recognize and determine situations when the present perfect should be used (the mother tongue interference).

One of the main strengths of this paper is that it identifies key areas where aspectual errors may occur and where additional attention could be focused so as to improve the teaching of English aspectual oppositions. Regarding Romanian native speakers, the results of the study imply that emphasis should be placed on the resultative and experiential notions of the English present perfect. Furthermore, it would seem to be prudent in this context for English language professors to direct students' attention to the morphological similarity between the Romanian compound perfect and the English present perfect in order to avoid the present perfect – simple past error. Based on the results related to the imperfective aspect, it is recommended that relevant professors should emphasize the difference between perfective/imperfective aspectual oppositions in the present tense, especially as this study has shown that aspectual errors occur when the English imperfective aspect should be used in the present tense. Finally, it is suggested that English language professors of native speakers of Romanian underline the connection between the past and the present, since the Romanian language does not express this connection on the morphological level.

In regard to the phase of the study involving native speakers of the Serbian language, several pertinent findings were brought to light. Serbian does not have the direct equivalent for the English present perfect, and the study evidenced that Serbian native speakers tend to use the past tense instead, particularly if the situation is clearly in the past (clearly ended) or produces consequences (perfect of recent past or perfect of result). This was particularly apparent in sentence 18, where 80% of the respondents used the simple past instead of the present perfect, though to a lower degree in sentence 19; therefore, hypothesis S1 was partly confirmed. Hypothesis S2 was also partly confirmed, as the Serbian native speakers used the English present tense instead of the present perfect a relatively high percentage of the time, with more than 40% of the respondents doing so in sentence 16, with similar results for sentence 20. Hypothesis S3 was also partly corroborated; namely, the negative transfer of the uses of the Serbian imperfective verbs probably caused errors in sentence tasks 1 and 2: a high percentage of the respondents (over 30 of them) applied the English present progressive aspect instead of the present simple. As for hypothesis S4 about English stative verbs (tested by using items 7, 8, and 9), it was not confirmed since the respondents used the present non-progressive correctly in more than 80% of the time, with only a slightly lower yet still very high percentage (about 77%) making the correct selection in sentence 9 involving the verb *include*. Additionally, the results of the study have also revealed areas where errors may occur and which would thus seem to require particular attention in order to improve the teaching of English aspectual oppositions of native speakers of Serbian at the B1 level. Moreover, based on the results of the Serbian respondents, it is suggested that particular attention be paid in instruction in English involving native speakers of Serbian to the concepts of result, continuation to now, and recent past, which trigger the use of present perfect. For the imperfective aspect (English progressive), the study's results indicate that teachers should underline the concepts of temporariness and limited duration in this context.

In closing, a concise comparison of the answers provided by the Romanian and Serbian native speakers is highly relevant and offers a further contribution to this field of research. In this regard, the mistakes made by both groups of respondents were similar in the examples involving the English perfect aspect: likely due to both languages lacking direct equivalents, the English past or present tense were used quite frequently instead. Here, the decisive factor seems to be the completion of the English situation in the past (past tense) or its continuation up to now (present tense). Finally, Romanian respondents made more errors in the use of the English present progressive than Serbian participants did, seemingly on account of the specificities of the distinct aspectual systems of the Romanian and Serbian languages.

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