COMPARATIVE ASPECTS OF THE VOICES IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN

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Abstract:*The paper presents a comparative approach of verbal voices, both in English and in Romanian considering the new opinions after the latest issue of the Grammar of the Romanian Language, edited by the Romanian Academy. The study has a double goal: At a methodological level it illustrates particularities in English verbal voice teaching for Romanian native speakers taking into account that the passive voice is better represented in English while reflexive structures are seldom present. At a practice level, the study suggests the most suitable solutions for translating the specific constructions into the two languages: Romanian and English.*

Keywords*: voice, active, passive, reflexive.*

Experience in teaching English for various ages (especially for persons over the age of 18) has shown us that for a better comprehension and memorization of acquired knowledge, the comparative teaching (that is using symmetry and stressing the similarities and the differences between the native tongue and the foreign language) has proven more efficient on a certain stage than using the linguistic immersion method (in which the student is thrown in the linguistic pool of the target language and must get along alone)[1].

Due to possible anthropological reasons, this allows us to originate our work in a foundation structured on the fact that for problematizing persons (especially persons over the age of 18), explanatory notes regarding the linguistic mechanism in certain situations make it easy a logical and, implicitly, a more rapid memorization of the linguistic fact – which represents one of the stage goals that points to the final goal[2].

If we are to stick to the principle according to which we should use a *certain* method on a *certain* stage, then the taught matter should be adapted in such a manner, that it should meet the requirements of the moment when the teaching-learning process takes place.

Teaching the verb to Romanian native speakers is assuming difficulties originated in the differences between English and Romanian.

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[1] As we have already mentioned (see *A Long-Term Strategy in Teaching English as a Foreign Language*, The International Conference – Language and Literature, European Landmarks of Identity; Faculty of Letters, Pitești, Romania, June 8-10, 2012), there are various teaching methods which, used on a proper stage strategy lead to optimal results.

[2] The stage goal is to have an explanation for the linguistic event and to memorize it; the final goal is to accurately use the construction on a practical level. Since no one would ask in London: "How many voices are there in English ?", the final goal of a lesson is ***not*** to make the student replicate a grammar rule, but use it consciously in various exercises in order to use it further, unconsciously

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As it is already known, in English, the verb represents a very important part of speech. If we had a balance and in one pan we put the verb and the preposition, then in the other pan we may put the noun, the pronoun, the adjective, the numeral, the article, the adverb and the conjunction. That is – the rest.

Difficulties occur not only due to the significant place the verb has in English; also it is not only that the two languages belong to two different families (the former is a Germanic language, while the latter is a Romanic one) and also it is not only that the former is an analytic language and the latter is a synthetic one, but beyond these obvious dissimilarities, it is the differences both at the content and the form levels which are most confusing in verbs.

And indeed, if we find it easy to admit that there is an English present tense which is rendered into Romanian with *timpul prezent*, or an English past tense which is rendered into Romanian with *timpul trecut*, or and English future tense which is rendered into Romanian with *timpul viitor*, then it is not as easy to admit an English tense such as *present perfect* which may be rendered into Romanian either with *trecut*, or with *prezent*, or with *viitor*.

In such cases, the academic staff is certain to use the notorious and already traditional traductology way of working: *the context determines the text*; nevertheless this principle is of no much help (at least on a primary stage) for a student...

For a comprehensive and wide view, we should "X-ray" the verb in both languages and differences would become recognizable from the very level of voices. In this paper we limit the resesarch area to the Voices section because the verb is a very large chapter in both languages.

Differences between the English verb and the Romanian one are obvious at the voice level. According to the latest norms[1], in Romanian there are three voices: active, passive and impersonal. In English – there are only two voices: active and passive[2].

The active voice displays comforting and calming similarities both in English and in Romanian (since there is an active voice in English as well as in Romanian) The active voice is the most extended in both languages; all moodes and tenses have an active form.

The passive voice arises more difficulties than the active one. Although at a formal level, the fact that in both languages the passive voice is formed with the verb *to be* + past participle makes this structure easily comprehensible to students, difficulties occur as the auxiliary *to be* may be replaced by *other* verbs in passive constructions and English is more generous than in Romanian: *to get, to become, to grow, to feel.* (see infra)

In Romanian, the verb *a veni* is used in colloquial speech and in popular structures: *Grinda aceea vine aşezată aici.* (GA 2005, p. 134). *That beam is to be placed here.* In this case, the verb *a veni* has "the modal value of necessity, with a future

[1] Gramatica limbii române, Academia Română. Institutul de Lingvistică „Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti", Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 2005, vol I, vol. II, hereinafter referred to as GA 2005.

[2] Before this latest edition issued in 2005, it was considered that in Romanian there were also three voices but these were: active, passive and reflexive; the previous Romanian Academic Grammar pointed out that the reflexive voice is "less defined and organized than the other two voices" – see Gramatica limbii romîne, Academia Republicii Populare Romîne, Institutul de lingvistică, Bucureşti 1963 (hereinafter referred to as GA 1963), p. 209, vol I.

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projection for the action". For this reason, we consider that we can render this structure into English with *be to + past participle: That beam is to be placed here*[1].

In English, the auxiliary *to be* may be replaced by *to get*, the latter bringing more dynamism to the context. (Gramatica limbii engleze, Alice L. Bădescu, 1984, p. 353): *He got killed during the war in an air raid. (was killed).* According to Quirk and Greenbaum (A University Grammar of English, Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum, 1989, p. 168) when the "passive draws more attention to the result than to the action or agency, the resulting copula *get* replaces *be*, though chiefly in rather informal usage": *The window was broken by my younger son. I know how the window got broken.*

The verb *become* used to form a passive construction shows the gradual change from one condition to another: *With the passage of time, the furniture became covered in dust*. (Quirk and Greenbaum, *op. cit.* p. 168)

Grow and *feel* may also occur in passive constructions replacing the auxiliary *to be*: *They grew accustomed with the new environment. (Ei s-au obişnuit cu noul mediu)*
He felt wearied by life.(Gramatica limbii engleze, C. Paidos, vol. I, 1992, p. 191)

We should point out that in the last two examples, the passive constructions in English can be rendered into Romanian only with a reflexive form and with a passive one.[2]

Another significant difference is the fact that, as it is already known, unlike Romanian, in English the passive voice is more effective. The reason is that in Romanian, in order to obtain a passive structure, the ultimate condition is that there must exist a transitive verb – that is there must be a verb which allows the presence of a direct object. Should this condition be not accomplished, there would be no direct object in an active voice to become a grammatical subject:

Mama vede copilul. → *Copilul este văzut de mamă.*
El urmăreşte filmul. → *Filmul este urmărit de el.*
Ea citeşte cartea. → *Cartea este citită de ea.*

Whereas in the following examples:

Eu dorm în pat → **Patul este dormit de către mine.*
Băieţii şi fetele fug pe stradă. → **Strada este fugită de către băieţi şi fete.*

the structures built as a passive pattern hardly could be accepted in Romanian. This interdiction is not to be applicable in English though.

In English, there may exist such structures, which represent no breach of grammar rules, although they have a verb which does not require the presence of a direct object.

I slept in this bed last night → *The bed was slept in last night by me.*
Boys and girls ran on the street → *The street was run by boys and girls.*

[1] Note that the English translation has no colloquial tone; moreover, this construction may be used in English in instructions and notices: *The medicine is to be stored in a cool place* (on medicine bottles) and in some other common expressions: *There is nothing to be done.*
[2] Methodologically we consider that all passive structures where the verb *to be* can be replaced by other verbs should be taught at an advanced level, when students can feel better the subtle differences and have a broader visual angle of the language.

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Another noteworthy case is the following: not seldom in English are there passive structures (no agent expressed) with prepositional verbs (intransitive verbs that consist of a verb followed by a prepositional phrase) such as: *care for, look after, laugh at, send for, listen to, arrive at* etc., because if the Agent were to be expressed, the active voice would be preferred instead of a passive verb form: *The children were laughed at (by them) They laughed at the children.* Translation into Romanian of such passive strucures is possible only using the impersonal reflexive[1]. Moreover, unlike Romanian, active intransitive verbs with passive meaning are met in English: *read, act, eat, iron, sell, feel, peel, perform, taste, wear.*(Alice Bădescu, *op. cit.* p. 353). See examples: *This novel reads easily.* (Gramatica limbii engleze, Leon Levițchi, 1961, p. 86) *(= it can be easily read); The shirt doesn't iron. (= must not or cannot be ironed); It tastes bitter (= it is bitter when tasted)*(Alice Bădescu, *op. cit.,* p. 353)[2]

If we have confidence in the very helpful and practical linguistic theory according to which everything surrounding us has a shape and a substance (a form and a content), we can accept that these structures have the appearance of the active voice and the substance of the passive voice.

A similar case can be noticed in passive structures with : *to deserve, to need, to require, to want (= need),* followed by an *–ing* form – which grants a passive meaning to the entire construction (Swan, *op.cit.* p. 280)

This lock needs oiling (to be oiled) - Broasca trebuie (să fie) unsă.
My hair wanted cutting (being cut) - A trebuit să mă tund.
The piano needs tuning (to be tuned) - Pianul trebuie (să fie) acordat.

Such structures are correlated to the Romanian constructions with *a trebui* + a passive conjunctive.

Another English passive structure is the complex construction of the Nominative + the Infinitive. Taking into account the active – passive opposition, this structure represents actually the transit of the active structure of the Accusative + the Infinitive to the passive structure of the Nominative + the Infinitive.

They know <u>him</u> <u>to be</u> serious. → <u>He</u> is known <u>to be</u> serious.
Acc. Inf. Nom. Inf.

Such structure, inexistent in the Romanian language, has the following translation variants:

E cunoscut ca fiind un om serios. (passive)
Se ştie că e un om serios. (impersonal reflexives)

Similarly, there is also the complex construction of the Nominative + Present Participle – which also represents the transit of the active structure of the Accusative + Present Participle to the passive structure of the Nominative + Present Participle:

I saw <u>the man</u> <u>leaving</u> the house. → <u>The man</u> was seen <u>leaving</u> the house.

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[1] According to Swan (Practical English Usage, Michael Swan, 1995), "agents are mentioned in only about 20 per cent of passive clauses" (page 410). Passives without "agents" are frequently used in scientific and academic writing. (ibid): *The positive hydrogen atoms are attracted to the negative oxygen atoms*.

[2] Quirk and Greenbaum *op. cit.* (p. 352) consider such verbs as intransitive ones with a „passive" sense (converted from transitive verbs) and they virtually require an adjunct (i.e. adverb): *The book sells badly*, while Swan considers such verbs as reflexive structures (sic!) (See ergative verbs, *op. cit.,* p.607). In Romanian, some of the mentioned verbs lead to the so-called *impersonal reflexive*: *Romanul acesta se citeşte uşor.Cămaşa nu se calcă.*

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Acc. Pres.Part. Nom. Pres. Part.

A special construction with a passive meaning is the *Have something done* and *Get something done* structure – mainly because there is no such pattern in the Romanian language. This English structure is used to refer to actions which are done *for* the subject rather than *by* the subject. Verbs with causative use occur instead of passive verbs to show that the subject causes the action to be done[1]. Translating into Romanian such a structure, the main idea must be preserved: it is *not* the subject that does the action, yet it *is* the subject that decides, decided or will decide upon the action to be done suffered by the direct object. Quite often, *have (*or *get) something done* represents an English solution for Romanian statements which include the following pattern: Dative + Reflexive Passive + Subject, such as:

Studenţilor li se testau capacităţile. → *The students were having their skills tested.*

Vărului meu i s-a furat maşina. → *My cousin has his car stolen.*

In such situations, the pattern has the meaning of *to suffer* or *to experience.*

Frequently, on a colloquial level, this structure is rendered with the Romanian verb *a pune* (to put) + the Conjunctive Mode – such as:

Are you having me followed ? →*Ai pus să fiu urmărită ?*

I had my bedroom painted → *Am pus să-mi zugrăvească dormitorul.*

and also with the structure pattern: *(mi-) am dat+ substantiv + supin*:

I had my car serviced. → *Am dat maşina la reparat.*

She had her shoes mended → *Şi-a dat pantofii la reparat.*

For a complete view of this structure and of its features in the passive voice context perhaps we should add that the configuration may be used also with the verb *to get*: *Where do you get your shoes mended ?*

The verb *to have* is preferred in formal speech and in writing, while *to get,* generally used in every day conversation, suggests a more determined action and consequently it is quite often used in imperative or infinite forms: *Get this room cleaned at once! Pune să fie curăţată camera imediat!*[2]

The most fascinating segment is probably represented by the reflexive voice. Subject to reservation and distrust in the latest Romanian studies (see *supra*), the reflexive voice persists and subsist due to a tradition rather than an official recognition. And indeed, in the ultimate Romanian authorized grammar as issued by the Romanian Academy published in 2005, the reflexive voice is excluded from the chapter "Voices"[3].

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[1] For this reason, considering the meaning, this construction may be regarded as a passive structure. The resemblance with the passive voice is also related to the form since – similar to the passive structures – there is a Past Participle form of the notional verb.

[2] Traditionally, English teachers call this structure „Causative HAVE"; Some grammarians (Quirk & Greenbaum) speak about „Causative verbs". We believe that the term *Causative use of to have, to get or to be*, is more accurate since the verbs in question do not play only a causal role; moreover, some other grammarians make the difference between the non-causative use of *have* and *get* in such strucures where actions are also done *for* the subject and not *by* the subject. (non-causative uses of *have* and *get*).

[3] The Romanian Academy (Romanian: *Academia Română*) is the supreme Romanian cultural and scientific forum. It covers the scientific, artistic and literary domains. According to its bylaws, the academy's main goals are the cultivation of the Romanian language and literature, the study of the Romanian national history and research into major scientific domains.

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From both a practical and a methodological point of view or from a translating point of view this has no much influence as long as there are Romanian structures containing the reflexive pronoun which are to be renedered into English.

A classification of the Romanian verbal structures having the reflexive pronoun and an analysis of such classes according to the content is not of much help either because in an example such as: *Ea se priveşte în oglindă (pe sine).* (active reflexive) will be rendered into English: *She is looking at herself in the mirror.*

Yet an example as: *Ea se îmbracă (pe sine)* – will be rendered into English : *She is dressing*. (without a reflexive pronoun).

Our solution represents actually a mere review of several cases, labelled according to previous Romanian norms, before GA 2005, at least for the sake of an easy identification. On the other hand, we must also take into account that there is no such reflexive voice in English; and yet we can speak about reflexive verbs and reflexive pronouns. In case of the so-called *active reflexive* we must use the English reflexive pronouns: myself, yourself etc.: *S-a rănit ieri. → He hurt himself Yesterday.*

Such a situation is difficult to be theorized; on a practical level there are not many solutions but reviewing various cases with their suitable solutions and commiting such cases to memory since there may not exist a unitary taxonomy. In other words, we should practically stay out of any attempt to classify the cases – especially in such situations when students attend non-philological colleges.

Difficulties arise also from the fact that between the two languages (English and Romanian) reciprocity is not always available: if there are such cases where the Romanian reflexive structure including the reflexive pronoun *se* is rendered into English with the reflexive pronoun *myself.... Se priveşte în oglindă. → She is looking at herself in the mirror.*

... there are also cases when there is no reflexive pronoun in Romanian, but in English its presence is mandatory: *Bătrânul vorbea de unul singur. → The old man was talking to himself.*

In case of the so-called *active reflexive* we must use the English reflexive pronouns: myself, yourself etc.: *S-a rănit ieri. → He hurt himself Yesterday.*

An interesting case is the rendering the Romanian impersonal reflexive into English: *Se spune că e cel mai mare om de ştiinţă → He is said to be the greatest scientist*

For the Romanian impersonal reflexive we find the solution in the English passive voice, but the subject is personal: *Se spune că e cel mai mare om de ştiinţă → He is said to be the greatest scientist.* – where the impersonal subject in Romanian becomes very personal in English in a passive structure.

The following example: *Se construieşte o şcoală nouă*. represents the so-called Romanian passive reflexive – as it is obvious that a school cannot build itself. The case can be easily verified and confirmed because it may be replaced with a genuine passive form of the same verb and it is often joined by an Agent: *Este construită o şcoală nouă (de către locuitorii oraşului).*

For this passive reflexive the solution is again the English passive voice: *Se construieşte o nouă scoală. → A new school is being built.*

The Romanian reciprocal reflexive – a form that supposes a mutual participation – can be easily identified because the reciprocal pronouns can be added to the statement: *Unul pe altul* sau *Unul cu altul* (*one / another* or *each / other*): *Ei se ceartă şi se împacă în fiecare zi. Deşi nu se iubesc, nici nu se urăsc.* The solution is as

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simple, since there is a reciprocal pronoun both in English and in Romanian. *Se iubesc. Nu se urăsc.→They love one another. They don't hate each other.*

The eventive reflexive espresses in Romanian a change of state: *El s-a îngălbenit de spaimă. Ea s-a înroşit de teamă.*The English solution is an active voice verb (sometimes + adjectives in cumulative degree) *S-a albit. → He grew pale.*

The Romanian dynamic reflexive can be easily identified because doubling is not allowed and neither is the replacement with a personal pronoun: *Copilul se joacă în curte*. One cannot say: **Copilul se joacă pe sine. El se teme*. (One cannot say: **El se teme pe sine*) The Englsih correspondent of the Romanian dynamic reflexive is the active voice: *Copilul se joacă în curte → The child is playing in the yard.*

If we still believe that, as in a chemical equation where it is asserted that the left-hand side and the right-hand side of the equals sign are the same, there should be a balance between the two languages, we will find English solutions for Romanian cases – although not entirely at the Verb but also at the Pronoun[1].

In this paper we point out the problems that occur when rendering voice forms from Romanian into English or vice-versa taking into account both the differences between the two languages and the new trends revealed in the the latest issue of the Grammar of the Romanian Language, edited by the Romanian Academy[2].

As the passive voice in English is more effective, the start point was the English language, so that we could perceive the way passive structures are formed and also the way they are rendered into Romanian.

For the Romanian traditionally considered reflexive structures the study is focused on numerous Romanian constructions with a reflexive pronoun and the way these patterns are rendered into English – a language where such voice does not exist.

Our study represents the grounds for the teaching-learning strategy of voices, according to the complexity of the voice forms, to the students' level and also to the ways of rendering such structures from one language into the other.

The comparative approach of voices in English and Romanian has a double goal: at a methodological level – to line up the ways of teaching voices in English for Romanian native speakers; at a traductology level – to provide solutions for rendering voice structures from a language into the other.

If, on a theoretical level, things seem to be subject to an endless linguistic dispute, on a practical level (that is in teaching or translating activities) such disagreement remains somewhere on the background.

In this respect, we consider that the approach should be focused on the practical side of the problem, especially in cases when teaching is accomplished before non-philological students – mainly because it is very difficult to make a classification.

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[1] Swan, for reflexive verbs, points to the reflexive pronouns! see *reflexive verbs*, *op.cit.*, p. 411.

[2] The Romanian linguist Mioara Avram says: „Theoretical controversies regarding a third Romanian voice (the reflexive voice) or other voices have no importance for the language practice. The really important thing for teaching a language is the use of a verb with or without the reflexive pronoun (*and its translation – we add*) and not a judgement upon the belonging to a certain voice", Gramatica pentru toţi, Mioara Avram, p. 159.

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