A BRIEF COMPARATIVE STUDY ON MAIN WORD-FORMATION MEANS IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN

Simona Redeş,

Assist. Prof., PhD, "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad

Abstract: In a period when English is more and more present in our daily life whatever country we live in, this brief comparative study presents the various means of word-formation in the two languages chosen, English and Romanian, focussing on similarities and differences. The numerous examples used to illustrate the various theoretical aspects presented in the paper are meant to offer a wider perspective on the issue.

Ke words: word-formation, affixation, compounding, conversion, meaning

Before developing on the techniques of word formation in the two languages of our study, the introduction of the main concepts involved in this presentation might prove useful.

The basic concept used in morphology is the term of **morpheme** which is defined as "the smallest unit that has meaning or serves a grammatical function in a language. Morphemes are the atoms with which words are built" (Katamba 2005: 29). Morphemes may appear independently in a context, having in this case a meaning of their own and being called **free morphemes** or they can be linked to free forms, being called **bound morphemes** and having neither an independent use nor a full notional meaning.

The second important concept when we deal with word-formation is **the root**. A root is "the necessary and sufficient constituent for a word to exist" and it is the common part of all the words in a word family, as Tătaru says „the whole series of words and word-substitutes obtained from one root by all possible word-formation mechanism (Tătaru 2002:38).

The third concept is the **affix** which is a bound morpheme that we append to the root in order to obtain a new word. Affixes are divided into **prefixes** and **suffixes**,

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4024 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:53:39 UTC)

depending on their position to the root (prefixes are added in front of the root whilw suffixes are added at the end of the root).

The last but not least concept is the **stem** that we obtain when we remove the affixes of a word. Sometimes the stem and the root are similar (we call it a **simple stem**) but there are situations when the stem contains other elements as well, compared to the root. We call this type of stem a **derived stem**.

Now that we have introduced and explained the key terms of word-formation, we may develop the main means of enriching the vocabulary in Romanian and in English, pointing out similarities and differences.

The most productive means are derivation, compounding and conversion**.**

Derivation is the process of obtaining new words in a language by means of adding prefixes (prefixation) or suffixes (suffixation) to the root or stem. Prefixes do not change the morphological class of the roots or stems while suffixes do.

Prefixes from both languges can be classified into the following main categories according to the meaning they convey:

a) negative prefixes**,** express various shades of negative meaning**:**

-de-/dis- („not", „the contrary of"): disagree, discourage (English)

-dez-/des/(„not", „the contrary of"): dezlegare, desprins (Romanian)

-in-/il-/ir- („not", „the contrary of"): inadequate, impartial, irrespective, illogical (English)

-in-/im-/i- („not", „the contrary of"): inadaptat, imposibil, ilegal (Romanian)

-mis- („badly): mislead, misunderstand (English)

-ne- („badly"): neînțelegere (Romanian)

-un- („the opposite of"): unwise, unkwown (English)

-mal- („wrongly"): malfunction, malpractice (English)

-mal- („wringly"): malpraxis, malabsorbție (Romanian)

b) reversative and privative prefixes

-un- („to reverse the action"): unlock, untie (English)

-des-/ dez-(„to reverse the action"): desface, dezbraca (Romanian)

-de-/ dis- („to get rid of"): deforestation, discoloured (English)

-des-/ dez-(„to get rid of"): despăduri, dezaburi (Romanian)

c) prefixes of degree and size

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4024 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:53:39 UTC)

-arch- („supreme”): archbishop, archenemy (English)

-arhi- („chief”): arhidiacon, arhiepiscop (Romanian)

-hyper- („extra”): hypersensitivity, hypermarket (English)

-hiper- („extra”): hipertensiune, hiperactiv (Romanian)

-mini- („little”): minivacation, minibus (English)

-mini-, micro- („small”): minijup, miniaspirator, microfermă (Romanian)

-over- („too much”): overpopulated, overcooked (English)

-supra- („too much): supraaglomerat, supraacut (Romanian)

-out- („more”, „longer”): outnumber, outlive (English)

There is no equivalent in Romanian for the English prefix *out*-. The derived English words are translated into Romanian using a whole construction (to outlive= a trăi mai mult).

-super- („above”): superhero, supernatural (English)

-supra- („above”): supralicitație, suprataxă (Romanian)

-sub- („less than”): substandard, subclass (English)

-sub- („less than”): subordonat, subestima (Romanian)

-ultra- („beyond”): ultraviolet ultrasonic (English)

-ultra- („extremely”): ultramodern, ultraaglomerat (Romanian)

d) prefixes of attitude

-co- („with”): coordination, co-author (English)

-co- („together”): coechipier, co-președinte (Romanian)

-pro- („on the side of”): pro-democratic, pro-European (English)

-pro- („on the side of”): progerman, prodecan (Romanian)

-anti- („against”): anti freeze, antiwar (English)

-anti- („against”): antifumat, aticoagulare (Romanian)]

e) prefixes of space, direction and location

-in- („going in”): income, influx (English)

-in-/intra- („being in”): input, influx, intramuscular (Romanian)

-out- („going out”): outflow, outdoors (English)

-out- („being out”): outsider, output (Romanian)

-up- („in an ascending direction”): uphill, upstairs (English)

-down- („in a descending direction”): downstairs, downhill (English)

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4024 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:53:39 UTC)

In Romanian, there are no equivalent prefixes for *up-* and *down-*, the same idea is expresed using a prepositional phrase such as „în josul/ susul dealului/scărilor" (GLR 2005: 627).

-super- („over"): superellevation, superstructure (English)

-super- („above"): superpune, superfosfat (Romanian)

-sub- („under"): suborbital, subway (English)

-sub- („under"): subteran, subacvatic (Romanian)

-inter- („between"): intergallactic, interface (English)

-inter- (between"): international, interactiv (Romanian)

-trans- („across"): transmigration, transcontinentalc(English)

-trans- („into another place"): transatlantic transfrontalier (Romanian)

f) prefixes of time and order

-ante- („before"): antenatal anteroom (English)

-ante- („before"): antepenultim, antecameră (Romanian)

-fore- („before"): forehead, foretell (English)

-pre- („before"): prefabricat, prezicere (Romanian)

-ex- („former"): ex-wife ex-friend (English)

-ex- („former"): excampion, expremier (Romanian)

-post- („after"): post-war, post-position (English)

-post- („after"): post-natal, post-mortem (Romanian)

g) iterative prefixes

-re- („one more time"): reconstruct, reread (English)

-re- („again"): reitera, renegocia (Romanian)

As we can see, in most of the cases presented above there are equivalent prefixes in more than 90 % of the situations in both languages, being only 3 prefixes from English that do not have a Romanian corresponding prefixe.

As far as different classes of suffixes are concerned, the situation in English and Romanian is as follows:

a) suffixes denoting the doer of the action:

- -er/ -ist: builder, teacher, artist (English)
- -er/ -ist: recepționer, violonist (Romanian)
- -en/ -ant: student, attendant (English)
- -ent/ -ant: respondent, reprezentant (Romanian)

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4024 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:53:39 UTC)

- -ar/ -aș/ -giu: acar, arcaș, macaragiu (Romanian)

b) feminine suffixes that are gender morphological markers for nouns:

- -ette/ -ess/ -euse: usherette, actress, chauffeuse (English)
- -easă/ -esă/ -ă/ -iță/ -oaică/ -oară/ -că/ -e: bucătăreasă, ducesă, casieră, pictoriță leoaică, profesoară, tulceancă, ambasadoare (Romanian)

c) suffixes denoting nationality or origin:

- -ese/ -an/ -ard: Portuguese, Mexican, Spaniard (English)
- -ez(ă)/ -an(ă)/ -ean(că): chinez(ă), marocan(ă), muntean(că) (Romanian)

d) diminutive suffixes:

- -ette/ -let/ -y/ -ie: kitchenette, booklet, mummy, auntie (English)
- -aș/ -uc/ -el/ -ică/ -iță: băiețaș, sătuc, tinerel, cărticică, iconiță (Romanian)

e) abstract noun-forming suffixes:

- -ing/ -age/ -ance/ -ence/ -ism/ -dom/ -ment/ -ty/ -ship: reading, coverage, appearance, existence, comunism, freedom nourishment, honesty, leadership (English)
- -are/ -ere/ -ătate/ -ță/ -eală/ -ie: centralizare, creștere, bunătate, putință, amăgeală, prietenie

f) adjectival suffixes:

- -ish/ -y/ -ly/ -le ss/ -ful/ -ed/ -able/ -ive/ -some: boyish, muddy, brotherly, pointless, colourful, painted, readable, illustrative, handsome (English)
- -esc/ -al/ -ar/ -at(ă)/ -bil/ -eț(eață): copilăresc, săptămânal, fugar, plușat, lizibil, certăreț (Romanian)

g) verbal suffixes:

- -ise/ -ize/ -ify/ -en: organize, realise, intensify, broaden (English)
- -a/ -ăi/ -ăli/ -âi/ -iza/ -fica/ -i/ -î/ -ni/ -ona/ -ui: ancora, chițăi, mâzgăli, mârâi, actualiza, electrifica, acri, izvorî, bocăni, atenționa, cârmui (Romanian)

h) adverbial suffixes:

- -ly/ -wise/ -ward: sadly, clockwise, backward (English)

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4024 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:53:39 UTC)

- -(ic)ește/ -iș/ -âș/ -mente: iepurește, cruciș, târâș, totalmente (Romanian)

i) numeral suffixes:

- -teen/ -ty/ -th: seventeen, eighty, eleventh (English)
- -ime: optime, cincime (Romanian)

The conclusion that we can draw at the end of the presentation of derivation, as the most important word-formation means, is that it has, irrespective of the language, a systemic character. This means that, starting from some common patterns and using a relatively small number of affixes, we can build hundreds even thousands of words, that we can easily understand, mainly because they are built on preexisting patterns and according to rules that we learn in our early childhood. From this point of view, derivation, in general, resembles morphology that has a more systemic character, implying a very small number of rules as compared to the great number of words existing in any language.

Some researchers have found connectins, in some way, between prefixation and compounding and their argument is the fact that prefixes keep a stronger connection with various autonomous grammatical tools and mainly with prepositions. (Hristea 1984: 68)

Compounding also known as composition is the word-formation process relying on the grammatical and semantical combination of two or more roots or stems. Compounds in English can be spelt in three different ways, as solid, hyphenated and completely separated words while the Romanian compound words are spelt either solid or hyphenated.

Certain linguists introduced a finer subclassification of compounds according to the morphological class to which they belong. Basically, all morphological classes may have compound members. We are going to present and to illustrate the most common compounding patterns that we have in both languages.

a) compound nouns:

- noun+ noun: bull dog, backpack, câine-lup, redactor-șef;
- verbal noun+noun: working place, riding horse, operațiuni de căutare, pierdere de date;
- noun+ verbal noun: air-conditioning, sleepwalking, sistem de navigație;

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4024 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:53:39 UTC)

- adjective+ noun: blackbird, bluebells, rău-făcător, bună-stare;
- pronoun+ noun: she-wolf, he-doctor;

The last compounding pattern applies only to English as there is no similar pattern in Romanian.

- verb+ noun: pickpocket, dare-devil, zgârie-nori, zgârie-brânză;
- noun+ verb: sunset, rainfall, meșter-strică;
- verb+ verb: pick-and-mix, hit-and-run;

There is no such compounding pattern in Romanian.

- adverb+ noun: after-thought, back-talk, binecuvântare, proastă-intenție;
- preposition + noun: afternoon, underworld, dupa-amiază;

b) compound adjectives

- adjective+ adjective: bitter-sweet, dulce-acrișor;
- noun+ adjective: duty-free, sea-sick, făt-frumos, argint-viu;
- adjective+ noun: hot-blooded, verde-smarald;
- noun+ verb: love-struck, ocean-going, aragaz de gătit;
- adverb+ participle: ill-behaved, everlasting, bine-intenționat, rău-famat;
- adverb+ adjectiv: evergreen, veșnic tânăr.

c) compound verbs

- noun+ verb: baby-sit, house-keep, soare-răsare;
- adjective+ verb: white-wash, dry-clean, scurtcircuita;
- adverb+ verb: overhear, underestimate, binevoi, binecuvânta.

d) compound numerals

In English, all the cardinal numerals between round figures, starting from twenty-one, are compound numerals. Distributive numerals are obtained by reduplicative composition along with the insertion of the preposition „by": two-by-two, nine-by-nine. Fractions are compounds too: 2/3=two-thirds.

In Romanian, all the cardinal numbers starting from unsprezece up to nouăzeci și nouă are compound numerals, round figures including. The distributive and colective numerals are compound words too: amândoi, tustrei, dintâi, unsprezecelea.

e) compound pronouns

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4024 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:53:39 UTC)

We have to present the situation of compound pronouns separately as there are no connections between the two languages.

Thus, in English we may have the following compounding patterns:

- possessive adjective+ the noun *self*: yourself, themselves;
- personal pronoun in accusative + the noun *self*: himself, herself;
- *some-*, *any-*, *no-*, *every-*+ the noun *body*: somebody, anybody, everybody;
- the relative-interrogative words *which*, *what*, *whowhere*, *when*+ the adverb *ever*: whoever, whenever;

On the other side, in Romanian we have the following classes of compound pronouns without being always able to identify the composing elements:

- reflexive pronouns: însumi, însăși;
- demonstrative pronouns: ălalalt, celălalt, cestălalt;
- indefinite pronouns: altceva, fieșicare, fitecine, orișicare;
- negative pronouns: niciunul, niciuna;

f) compound adverbs

- adverb+ adverb: throughout, hereabouts, tam-nesam;
- adjective+ noun: uphill, indoor, altădată, altfel;
- adverb+ preposition: thereby, hereby, numaidecât, nicicum.

Like in the case of derivation, compounding involves almost identical patterns in English and in Romanian. There are slight differences that have been outlined during the presentation of the different compound patterns specific for each morphological class.

Conversion is the transfer process of a word from its original morphological class to another. This process can be very productive in any language. Some linguists use the term „functional shift" to refer to this process and highlight the fact that the form of the word remains unaltered even if it is converted from a grammatical function to another.

The most frequent cases of conversion involve nouns, verbs adjectives and adverbs. The nouns obtained by conversion may result from converting an adjective (the good, the beautiful, tânărul, absurdul), a verb (an ache, a drive, cântat, scris, compunere), an adverb (left, front, back, spatele, dreapta, susul), a preposition (the altogether, un pe) or an interjection (a bang, a screech, un ham, un buf).

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4024 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:53:39 UTC)

The verbs obtained by conversion may result from converting a noun (to snow, to frost, a păta, a ploua, a acoperi), an adjective (to dirty, to round a uda, a calma), an adverb or an interjection (to forword, to meow, a chiți, a înainta).

The situations when adverbs are converted to a new grammatical case are very rare. Sometimes, in non-literary language forms homonymous to adjectives occur in adverbial distribution, but, as Tătaru (Tătaru 2002: 88) points out, „it is rather doubtful whether there are cases of conversion or simply manifestations of the tendancy to drop the ending in the adverb". *Awful rare* used instead of *awfully rare* is such a case.

Since conversion does not imply any changes or it implies slight changes in the form of the word, it is sometimes difficult to tell which item should be treated as the base and which as the converted form.

References:

***_Gramatica limbii române_. Cuvântul, Editura Academiei Române, 2005

Cannon, G., *Historical Change and English Word-Formation: Recent Vocabulary*, Peter Lang Publishing Group, 1987

Hristea, T., *Sinteze de limbă română*, București, 2002

Katamba, F., *English Words. Structure, History, Usage*, Routledge, 2005

Lipka, L., *English Lexicology*, Gunter Narr Verlag, 2002

Tătaru, C., *An outline of English Lexicology. Word-Formation*, Limes, 2002

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4024 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 12:53:39 UTC)