

On the Sequence of Tenses and Moods in English and Romance

Domain of the course The course offers a description of the sequence of tenses and moods in English from a comparative perspective, highlighting the specificity of English with respect to Romance languages, Romanian in particular. The term sequence of tenses (=SOT) refers to the conditions imposed on subordinate tenses by the main verb; importantly these conditions refer both to the *choice of tenses* and *to the interpretation* (meaning) of the subordinate tense. Hence the SOT is an interface problem involving syntactic, semantic, and phonological aspects. The sequence of tenses is a complex phenomenon, in as much as it is sensitive to the type of subordination, since complement clauses, relative clauses and adjunct clauses differ regarding how (un)constrained they are in the use of tenses.

Objectives a) A first objective of the course is a *practical one*, namely, revising and refining the description of tenses in complement clauses, and examining the SOT in other types of clauses as well: in particular, relative clauses and time clauses. This presupposes a coherent framework for the description of tense and mood in English, leading to a proper understanding of the use of *tenses in indirect speech, as well as in free indirect speech*; entailed translational problems will also be discussed.

b) The second objective of the course is *comparative*. From a comparative perspective, the study of tenses has revealed the existence of two sources of crosslinguistic variation regarding the form and the meaning of subordinate tenses, respectively known as the *Sequence of Tenses parameter* and *Double Access Reading parameter*.

1. The SOT refers to the fact that languages vary in the constraints on tense selection in subordinates. English is an SOT language in as much as it imposes a past-under-past language, while Romanian is a non-SOT language which freely uses a present-under-past sequence:

- (1) *John told me that Mary still lived/*lives in Paris, but I am sure that she is in Bucharest now.*
Ion mi-a spus ca Maria locuieste/??locuia la Paris, dar eu sunt sigur ca este in Bucuresti acum

In both sentences *lived /locuieste* are interpreted as dependent on the main clause, expressing simultaneity with respect to the main clause. What is striking and should be explained is that in acquiring a present-like interpretation, the English past acquires a reading never available in main clauses. The selection of tenses is part of the more general phenomenon of tense and mood selection, given that verbal forms exhibit both a mood feature and a tense feature. In sum, the SOT parameter expresses a difference between sentences *which have the same content, but different tense and/or mood forms*.

2. More recently, a second complementary cross-linguistic difference, *the Double Access Reading parameter*, has come to light: a difference between sentences which have *the same form* as far as subordinate tense choice is concerned, but not the same content.

- (2) *a. You just told me that Mary is pregnant. /b. *Two years ago you told me that Mary is pregnant.*
(3) *a. Mi-ai spus că Maria este însărcinată./ b. Acum doi ani, mi-ai spus că Maria este însărcinată.*

The English (2a) is a case of DAR: the present goes up to now, while also being true at the time of the main clause eventuality (the time of telling). If the subordinate clause cannot be true now, the present cannot be used (2b). In contrast, in Romanian, the use of the present does not guarantee that the subordinate clause is true now, as clearly shown by the grammaticality of sentence (3b). The target of the analysis is to understand where this type of differences springs from.

Some of the main topics dealt with include: the use of the Present and the Past Tense in subordinate clauses, current approaches; Tense and Aspect, an aspectual account of the Sequence of Tenses; Tense and Mood: mood selection, tense problems in sentences with modal verbs.

Final Mark: 50% attendance online and participation; 50% final home-take exam, based on the theoretical and practical problems discussed in class.