

# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PARENTHESES IN ENGLISH, ROMANIAN AND RUSSIAN

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## Abstract

This article makes an attempt to analyze the structure, meaning and the functions of the parenthetical elements in three different languages, paying attention to the similarities and the differences these structures have in English, Romanian and Russian.

**Keywords:** study, comparative, parentheses, structure, language.

Parentheses have for a long time been the focus of discussions of the linguists of different languages, who analyzed and classified these language units from different points of view: structural, grammatical, and functional. The status of parentheses in English and Russian has been studied by many Russian linguists, such as O. Alexandrova, L. Barhudarov, V. Babaitseva, while the Romanian parenthetical constructions were not given such a thorough analysis. In this article we would like to dwell on the differences and similarities of these language elements within three languages, different by the type of language they represent and the branch of languages they belong to.

Professor O. Alexandrova, the representative of the Russian school of linguists, defined parenthesis, as "... a qualifying, explanatory or appositive word, phrase, clause, sentence, or other sequence which interrupts a syntactic construction without otherwise affecting it, having often a characteristic intonation and marked in written form by commas, brackets or dashes"<sup>1</sup>. O. Alexandrova classifies the parenthetical constructions from two perspectives, from the point of view of structure and meaning. From the structural point of view parentheses are divided into:

(1) one-word parentheses: *indeed, probably, perhaps, so, still, therefore, thereby, first, second, then, moreover, doubtless, anyway, next, nevertheless, though, further, well, thus, thenceforward; pesemne, poate, parcă, cică, firește, bineînțeles, desigur, evident, negreșit; может, право, подлинно, кажется, думаю, передают, слышно, напротив, далее, наконец, впрочем, главное, кстати, вообще, вернее, пойми, поймите, поверьте, послушайте, согласитесь, вообразите, etc.?*

(2) parenthetical word-combinations: *at any rate, no doubt, in general, for example, after all, in my judgment, in my opinion, in addition, in fact, in a way, no wonder, on the contrary, on the one hand, on the other hand, for example, of course, etc.* (the most common prepositions which are used in English parentheses are: *for, of, with, without, at, to, on, etc.*); *spre nedumerirea mea, din păcate, din (ne)fericire, fără îndoială, cu siguranță, de altfel, de altminteri, din contra, printre altele, în general, în special, de fapt, în fond etc.; другими словами, иначе говоря, коротко говоря, попросту сказать, мягко выражаясь, если можно так сказать, в общем, в частности, прежде всего, кроме того, сверх того, стало быть, нечего греха таить, странное дело etc.*

So we can notice that this category of parentheses is pretty rich and varied from the point of view of composition in these languages.

V. Babaitseva adds to the list of the English parentheses another category of parentheses and, namely, parentheses which contain one component ending in *-ly* such as: *generally speaking, pretty uncontroversially, clearly enough, effectively realized, quite hypothetically, vaguely enough, intelligibly enough, more or less persuasively* etc.<sup>3</sup> No doubt that this is specific only for the English language in which adverbs have such a form.

(3) parenthetical sentences. e.g: *I believe, I suppose, I fancy, I think, it seems to me, one may think, one would say, one would suggest, one may suppose, some would say, we believe, we may agree, etc.; p remise, cred eu, mi se pare* etc.

If in English these constructions have undoubtedly the traditional structure of a sentence (subject+predicate), in Russian and Romanian they do not have necessarily such a structure, unless these are insertions, e.g:

«Она выглядела счастливой (как всегда при виде его), улыбаясь вышла на порог».

From the point of view of parts of speech which make up parenthetical elements they are pretty much similar in the languages under discussion, with the exception of some of them. Parentheses can be expressed by:

- modal verbs:

“That’s what I was about to observe too, *certainly*” (Ch. Dickens). „Pentru întâia oară, *poate*, în zilele mele, mergeam pe un drum de munte în strălucita dimineață de vară...” (Hogaș). «Я не знаю, где зарыты Опанаса кости: *может*, под кустом ракиты, *может*, на погосте» (Багрицкий).

- adverbs:

“*Apparently* her brain had been working while her mind was disconnected” (Frank E. Peretti, *Piercing the Darkness*). „*Adevărat*, nu e nici o asemănare între voi amândoi”. «*Серьёзно*, можешь что-нибудь откопать про него?» (А. Юрчук).

- prepositional clauses:

“The worthy dame, *to his surprise*, turned very pale and very red” (Ch. Dickens). „Eu intrasem, *în adevăr*, masa lângă pat, pusesem lumânarea pe masă și scosesem câteva foi de hârtie pentru a scrie” (Hogaș). «*К сожалению*, он всего лишь аббат и проповедник, но...зачем вам потребовалось это?» (Л.М. Леонов).

- infinitive constructions:

“She had broken a precious china and, *to make the things still worse*, she never told anyone about it”. «*Сказать правду*, спасённый не понравился Морозке с первого взгляда» (А. Фадеев).

As for Romanian parentheses, they are never expressed by infinitive constructions. The English parentheses, “to make the things still worse”, can be translated into Romanian by the parentheses “mai mult decât atât”, which is not expressed by an infinitive. Or if we trans-

late into English the Russian parenthesis, «сказать правду», it will sound, “truly speaking”, which again is not expressed by an infinitive.

- participial construction:

“*Speaking of fundamentalist problems, I understand Amber Brandon was in your class?*” (Frank E. Peretti). „*La drept vorbind, nimeni nici nu-și imagina o astfel de situație*”. «*Собственно говоря, не касаясь других предметов, я должен выразиться о себе, между прочим, что судьба относится ко мне без сожаления, как буря к небольшому кораблю*» (А.П. Чехов).

- additional sentences:

“*You are not complaining, I hope*” (A. Cronin). „*Este o criză, mă-nțelegi, care, poți să zici, că nu se poate mai oribilă*” (I.-L. Caragiale). «*Я всякому, ты знаешь, рад*» (М. Горький).

Analyzing the parenthetical elements from the point of view of their meaning, O. Alexandrova divided them into three large groups:

- parentheses reflecting the category of *references* (these are words and syntactical constructions, sometimes containing more than several words used by the speaker in order to refer to some fact, source, event etc.<sup>4</sup>: *hence, then, too, hence-forward, to my mind, as you say, etc.*):

“*So anyway, I’m faced with two options: I can be retained by Christians and find out later they can’t afford my services, or I can take their case for free or on a reduced basis - usually a drastically reduced basis*” (Frank E. Peretti, *Piercing the Darkness*). “*Considering his predicament, therefore, a lack of feeling was all right*” (James Aldridge, *Endurance for Honour*).

- parentheses reflecting the category of *exemplification*, which includes words and word combinations that serve for introducing examples, such as: *for instance, suppose we take, etc.* e.g:

“*Suppose that, for instance, being struck by the vastly different character of the carvings of some primitive tribe and of contemporary sculptors, I were to conclude that “of course, aesthetic concepts change...”*” (G. J. Warnock, *The Object of Morality*). “*To look at, he was quite clean in appearance*” (M. Spark, *You Should Have Seen the Mess*). “*In the case right here, there would be about a zero chance of any contingency recovery*” (Frank E. Peretti, *Piercing the Darkness*).

- parentheses reflecting the category of *deliberation*, expressing someone’s appreciation, doubt, assertion, etc. Here we may refer to such constructions, as: *probably, perhaps, anyway, in my opinion, of course, I suppose, I believe, etc.*:

“*Anyway, after Bingo he and his wife asked me if I wouldn’t like to join them for a drink. So I did*” (J.D. Salinger, *A Perfect Day for Bananafish*). “*He would probably be dead by the time he got halfway there but it would be better to be dead halfway home than to be living here*” (F. O’Connor, *An Exile in the East*).

The Romanian grammarian E. Ionașcu<sup>5</sup> and the Russian grammarian, V. Babaitseva<sup>6</sup> give another classification of parentheses from the point of view of meaning, such as:

- parentheses expressing the attitude of the speaker towards the message: *din păcate, din (ne)fericire, cu părere de rău, spre marele meu regret, spre nedumerirea mea* etc.; *к счастью, к несчастью, по счастью, по несчастью, к радости, к огорчению, к прискорбию, к досаде, к сожалению, к удивлению, к изумлению, к ужасу, к стыду*:

„*Din fericire, rănille primite în urma accidentului de automobil nu erau prea grave*” (V. Eftimiu). «Совсем скоро, безусловно, птицы улетят на юг».

In English such parentheses can be identified, as well. They sound as follows: *fortunately, unfortunately, to his surprise*, etc.

- parentheses expressing the certainty or uncertainty of the speaker towards the related things: *probably, no doubt, naturally, possibly*, etc.; *firește, bineînțeles, desigur, evident, negreșit, într-adevăr, fără îndoială, cu siguranță, fără doar și poate, natural, de bună seamă, probabil, pesemne, poate, se prea poate, parcă, cică*, etc.; *без всякого сомнения, очевидно, безусловно, разумеется, само собой разумеется, бесспорно, действительно, наверное, возможно, верно, вероятно, по всей вероятности, может, может быть, быть может, должно быть, кажется*, etc.:

„*Era, poate, prea târziu*” (V. Eftimiu). «На горизонте мы увидели большой корабль, несомненно, это были пираты».

- parentheses expressing the source of the information: *according to..., to my regret, to my surprise*, etc.; *după mine, după părerea mea* etc.; *говорят, сообщают, передают, по словам..., по сообщению..., по сведениям..., по мнению...,* etc.:

„*După parerea mea, în limba greacă și germană capacitatea lor de compunere...*” (C. Noica). «*Говорят*, у этого человека наблюдалось постоянное и непреодолимое стремление окружить себя оболочкой, создать себе футляр» (А.П. Чехов).

- parentheses expressing the connection between things expressed: *firstly, secondly, finally*, etc.; *în primul rând, în al doilea rând, mai întâi de toate, în sfârșit, la urma urmelor, de altfel, de altminteri, dimpotrivă, din contra, printre altele, aproape, pe de o parte, pe de altă parte* etc.; *так, следовательно, значит, наоборот, напротив, далее, наконец, впрочем, между прочим, в общем, в частности, прежде всего, кроме того, сверх того, стало быть, например, к примеру, главное, таким образом, кстати*:

„*Cu o dragoste și cu o admirație neclintită, acest frate bandit îi punea totul la îndemână, la urma urmei, îl întreținea*” (C. Petrescu). «*Вся жизнь Никиты не была постоянным праздником, а, напротив, была не перестояющей службой*».

- parentheses expressing ways of expressing one's thoughts: *truly speaking, in a word, in short, to cut a long story short, actually, as a matter of fact, etc.*; *într-un cuvânt, cu alte cuvinte, altfel spus, mai exact, mai bine zis, în general, în linii mari, în special, la drept vorbind, de fapt, în fond etc.*; одним словом, иными словами, другими словами, иначе говоря, коротко говоря, попросту сказать, мягко выражаясь, если можно так сказать, если можно так выразиться, с позволения сказать:

„Mi-aş face, *cu alte cuvinte, datorită*” (L. Rebreanu). «Честно говоря, устал после лекции».

All of the linguists agree upon the fact that the parenthetical constructions are uttered with an intonation that differs from that of the rest of the sentence, being isolated from it by pauses, which are rendered graphically by commas, dashes, brackets in Romanian and Russian. In English sometimes parentheses are not marked by any punctuation marks, depending on the choice of the author. Still, one can hardly find any examples of unmarked parenthetical constructions either in Russian or Romanian texts. The omission of the punctuation marks may bring to certain confusion which will cause misunderstanding of the whole meaning of the utterance:

„Peste două zile, trebuia să plece, *negreşit, la post*” (Basarabescu).

In case we try to omit the comma before the word, *negreşit*, the meaning of the whole message will change. It will mean that the doer of the action “will leave, by all means”. If the comma will be used only before the word *negreşit* it will emphasize the word *post*, meaning that the doer “will go to “post” not to another place”. In English the logical stress or certain intonation patterns, characteristic for parentheses, help to emphasize where the parenthetical element belongs. This is another difference between English parentheses one the one hand and Romanian and Russian parentheses on the other hand.

According to L. Barhudarov, parentheses, as a rule, are not linked to the sentence semantically, their place in the sentence is free<sup>7</sup>. Still there are cases when we can't vary the position of a certain parenthesis without breaking the structure of the sentence. One of such cases is when the parenthesis plays a constructive role in the sentence and it should be preserved in its proper place without having any possibility for shifting it. For example:

“Mr. Crawley, as a diplomatist, was exceedingly proud of his own skill in speaking the French language (*for he was of the world still*), and not a little pleased with the compliments which the governess continually paid him upon his proficiency” (W. M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*).

We notice that if we place the parenthetical element, “for he was of the world still”, in any other place the meaning of the sentence will be completely deteriorated.

In Romanian we can notice the same thing:

„Vorbea prea mult, tăcea prea mult, *de netăgăduit, fazele nebuniei*” (Delavrancea).

The part of the sentence following the parenthetical expression, *de netăgăduit*, is a conclusion, drawn from its first part, which precedes the parenthesis. The parenthesis, *de netăgăduit*, plays here a concluding function and can't be reduced or replaced. The same is characteristic for Russian:

«Давно уже, лет десять, *а может*, и пятнадцать, как он жил в Деканьке» (Н.В. Гоголь).

We can not replace the parenthesis, *а может*, as it refers namely to the word *пятнадцать*, being logically connected to it having the purpose of emphasizing this word, or the doubt of the speaker concerning the period, whether it was ten years or fifteen. Being shifted to any other place within this utterance it will lose its actuality and use.

Having analyzed both the theoretical foundation of the status of parentheses in English, Russian and Romanian and the given examples, it is worth mentioning that the Romanian grammarians distinguish some categories of parentheses which are not included into this group of language elements in Russian and English. For example, the Romanian grammarian V. Șerban, distinguishes the following categories of parentheses which is different from the English and Russian researcher's classifications<sup>8</sup>:

- names of address (in Rom: *vocativele*):

„Scrie-ne, *tată*, când ai să vii?” (Beniuc).

In Russian and English such words, as *tata*, are considered a form of address, not a parentheses. This word *tata*, which means *father*, is very much different semantically from such parenthesis, as: *to my mind, I would say, perhaps, firstly, definitely*, etc. The latter have a meaning, expressing some relations, attitudes of the speaker towards the main part of the sentence, being semantically different from the words of address. The Russian linguists did not include words of address into this category of parentheses.

- explanatory apposition (in Rom: *apozitia explicativă*):

„Luca Talabă, *un bărbat cât un munte*, fost primar odinioară, îi adunase pe oameni la sfat” (L. Rebreanu).

The part of the sentence “*un bărbat cât un munte*”, is an apposition, which is not included by any of the Russian linguists in the category of parentheses.

- some adverbs or adverbial phrases, as well as some verbals, that have become phrases, which in Romanian are called, *locuțiuni adverbiale, expresii verbale devenite locuțiuni*. This group of parentheses is subdivided into 6 other subgroups (parentheses expressing appreciation, doubt, speaker's point of view, etc.), which represent classical examples of parentheses:

„Am aflat, *cu satisfacție*, de succesele voastre”.

„Problema ortoepiei, după mine, are mare importanță pentru unitatea limbii literare”.

The Romanian grammarians attribute the so-called “filling words” (in Rom: *cuvinte de umplutură*) to the class of parentheses, too. They are: *bre, măi, fă, mă rog* etc.):

„Stai, bă, să-ți spun”. “No! Numai doamna să spună, *mă rog*, apoi eu sunt gata la comanda, *mă rog*. No!”

It is interesting to note that in each language these words include absolutely different expressions. For example in English they are: *well, so, damn it, I mean, I'd say*.

This comparative study of parentheses in the three languages, English, Romanian and Russian prove that these language elements still require a further study for determining the real functions and criteria of identification and delimitation of parenthesis in each of these languages.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Alexandrova, 1994, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup>In Romanian such structures are not so numerous as in English and Russian.

<sup>3</sup>Babaitseva *et alii*, 1987, p. 255.

<sup>4</sup>Barhudarov, 1984, p. 425.

<sup>5</sup>Ionașcu, 1986, p. 279.

<sup>6</sup>Babaitseva *et alii*, 1987, pp. 379-382.

<sup>7</sup>Barhudarov, 1984, p. 478.

<sup>8</sup>Șerban, 1994, p. 453.

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