

**The English Progressive at Home and Away.  
Contrastive Analysis:**

**German, Spanish, Romanian**

BY GINA MĂCIUCĂ. Suceava: “Ștefan cel Mare”  
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This is pioneering research on contrastive linguistics investigating four languages: two of Germanic lineage (English and German) and the other two descended from Latin (Spanish and Romanian). The female author, **Gina Măciucă**, is associate professor at the Department of Germanic languages of the Romanian “Ștefan cel Mare” University in Suceava, with a PhD in Comparative Philology, she is the author of seven books and has contributed to more than fifty national and international journals and conference proceedings, and is currently teaching Contrastive Grammar and Phraseology to BA level – and Translation Strategies to MA students respectively.

In her introductory remarks Doctor Măciucă asks the question that many readers might echo: “with the number of books on the Progressive running into the dozens [...] why the compelling urge to add yet another one to this huge host?” The main reason behind this “compelling urge” seems to be the novelty of the approach. The book is divided into two parts: Part One: *The English Progressive at Home* and Part Two: *The English Progressive Away. Comparative View: German, Spanish, Romanian*. Whereas Part One submits to the reader a semantico-pragmatic delineation of the features displayed by this genuine “bone of contention” of the English grammar, Part Two is, in a first phase, tracking down the morphological conveyors of its semantics in a closely related Germanic language (German), and, in a second phase, is comparing the English Progressive with morphologically and/or semantically similar constructions in two Romance languages (Spanish and Romanian).

The first chapter, “Throwing the Reader ‘out of’ Confusion – Contrastive View: ‘Aspect’ versus ‘Aktionsart’” zooms in on the above-mentioned

dichotomy by ventilating theories advanced by H. Weinrich, J. Raith, E. Leisi and A. F. Freed, with concomitant focus on the “misleading duo” Perfect-Perfective.

Chapter 2 is taking the reader on “A Trip down Memory Lane”, meant to highlight diachronically the watersheds in the evolution of the English verb combination under discussion.

Switching back to the synchronic view, the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter, “The Progressive through the Looking-Glass”, presents “progressive stances” – i.e. individual views on the progressive combination – as diverse as those put forward by E. Krusinga, H. Poutsma, O. Jespersen, A. Brusendorff, G. O. Curme, E. Calver, D. Bolinger, M. Deutschbein, R.W. Zandvoort, M. Joos, R. L. Allen, A. Schopf, G. Leech, F. R. Palmer, J. Scheffer.

Chapter 4, “The Elusive Stuff That Progressives Are Made of: Semantics”, chops logic even further by going about in quest of a “core meaning” of the Progressive. After in-depth discussion of the “time-frame” theory and three major readings (“duration”, “incompletion” and “emotional”), the author concludes that “the quest for one single core meaning which could be safely ascribed to the Progressive is in fact tantamount to squaring the circle”, for “in some cases it is of absolutely no consequence which point [of view: simple or progressive] is chosen”. The difference between the two is not a factual one, Doctor Măciucă claims, but rather one of aspect and “more often than not, one of dramatic shifts in the semantics of the verb employed”.

Intent on illustrating the “tenuous distinction between use and abuse”, “The Progressive at Fieldwork” – the last chapter of Part One – goes into exhaustive detail on several of the most “ticklish” pragmatic aspects of the Progressive, such as “Stative verbs – the natural enemy of the Progressive?”, “Contextualization: the great extricator or intricator”, “The ‘always’ dilemma”, with a concluding section on “Ambiguities at their wildest” investigating ‘stance’ verbs, modals and statal vs. dynamic passives.

Part Two is further subdivided into two main chapters: one on German as *the* prototype of Germanic languages, and the other on Spanish and Romanian as main representatives of Romance ones.

Paradoxically enough – given their common Germanic descent –, Doctor Măciucă argues, no pattern morphologically similar to the English Progressive seems to be anywhere in evidence in German. After considering several tenable hypotheses most likely to account for “the surprising slip-away”, the author proceeds to analyze the most frequent ‘Ersatz’-devices resorted to, suggest the most appropriate ways of translating the Progressive, and finally promote the ‘Funktionsverbgefüge’ to the position of ideal substitute for the English verb combination under scrutiny, while venturing to assume that “the two languages at issue seem to have each clung to what the other one chose to dispose of. Thus, while English dismissed the preposition and kept the *-ing* form, German decided

that it would be better off without the participle and made up for the loss by bolstering up the preposition”.

Subchapter II.1 of Part Two – with a number of pages amounting to an impressive sixty – is in a way “redeeming the reputation” of the English Progressive, in that Doctor Măciucă’s research comes up with what “at first blush” seems to be “the perfect morphological match” for the construction scrutinized: Spanish ‘*estar* + gerundio’. However, further investigation on the topic reveals certain dissimilarities between the two in terms of meaning (s. sections II.1.2 “‘*Estar* + gerundio’ & ‘*be* + -ing’: a semantic match made in heaven?” and II.1.3 “Faithful *ser* versus fickle *estar*: the split personality of Spanish statives’ archetype”). Since recourse to *ser* or *estar* seems to have the “final say” in the semantics of Spanish periphrases, the author thinks fit to devote three subsections to digressing on various semantic features which these two verbs contribute to the adjectives they combine with, as opposed to those of English *be* in ‘*be* + adjective’ collocations. Concluding the chapter is a “Contrastive analysis Spanish/English” which goes “with a fine-tooth comb” through a vast array of translation possibilities and difficulties encountered.

The final subchapter reveals an equally surprising fact, namely that the verbal system of Romanian – also of Romance descent – exhibited “at a certain point in its evolution – the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century [...] a manifest preference for the use of gerundial periphrases similar morphologically, and, to a certain degree, semantically as well, to the English Progressive”. Most of the examples cited are loan-translations from Greek. However, the author maintains, some of them “have been coined by the translator on the analogy of the pattern loaned from this language, which speaks volumes for the ‘operativeness’ of the model”. As regards contemporary standard Romanian, “though now an extinct grammatical pattern, gerundial periphrastic combinations live on morphologically [...] under the guise of the ‘prezumtiv’, a fact which obviously attests to their recognition as a formerly widely circulated pattern”.

The chief novelty of the present book resides in the fact that comparative research is being conducted on no less than four languages of different lineage. Enhancing the complexity of the approach is also the double focus of the contrastive analysis: on the languages as members of a particular family, and furthermore, on the Germanic and Romance families as descended from the larger European stem. Major targets of research throughout this difficult investigation are establishing common morphological and structural trends, highlighting semantically and/or morphologically similar or identical features within Germanic and Romance language patterns, zooming in on relevant cases of semantic switch-over as well as on more or less conspicuous “between-the-borders” cases, both from a synchronic and a diachronic vantage-point, and last but not least, defining clear-cut paradigms on which further research can safely be grounded.

Conducted with rigorously documented and coherently constructed arguments – in turn corroborated by meticulously amassed evidence and better illuminated by ample comparative glosses and final *Notes*-sections – the research under review is without doubt a valuable addition to the, unfortunately, rather slender international series on contrastive linguistics.

Let me give a final word of warning to the reader. As already made abundantly clear in the excerpts quoted above, Doctor Măciucă is possessed of a metaphorical style - a feature which some may view as a blemish rather than a forte. This is apt to pose a serious problem to readers with a less than complete mastery of English, and an even bigger one to those who are easily diverted... from the main topic. To such readers a second reading of the book is a *sine-qua-non*, and must be regarded not as a punishment, much rather as a reward, as alluded to by the author herself in the introductory *Motto*: “Language is an angel, which one fights with until forced to give one his blessing” (R. Humphrey).