JOURNAL OF APPLIED SCIENCE AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
eISSN 2229-3113 pISSN 2229-3205

Volume 15 Issue 08, August 2025
Impact factor: 2019: 4.679 2020: 5.015 2021: 5.436, 2022: 5.242, 2023: 6.995, 2024 7.75

LEXICAL AND GRAMMATICAL ENCODING OF TIME IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

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Abstract: This study explores how the concept of time is encoded lexically and grammatically in three typologically distinct languages: English, Russian, and Uzbek. Through a comparative analysis, the article examines vocabulary choices, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical mechanisms—such as tense, aspect, and morphological marking—that shape each language's approach to temporal representation. English, with its analytic structure, relies on a detailed tense–aspect system and metaphor-rich lexicon to express precise temporal distinctions. Russian emphasizes aspect over tense, offering a dynamic, process-oriented view of time, while Uzbek employs agglutinative suffixation to integrate temporal, modal, and evidential meanings within single verb forms. The findings suggest that each language not only reflects but also influences how speakers conceptualize and experience time. These cross-linguistic differences have broader implications for understanding the relationship between language structure, cognitive processing, and cultural perceptions of temporality.

Keywords: time encoding, tense and aspect, lexical expression of time, English, Russian, Uzbek, cognitive linguistics, cross-linguistic comparison

Introduction. Time, as a dimension of human experience, is not only measured by clocks but also encoded linguistically. The way that languages structure and convey temporal information reflects a confluence of historical development, cognitive constraints, and cultural priorities. This subchapter examines the lexical and grammatical mechanisms through which three distinct languages – English, Russian, and Uzbek – encode time. In doing so, it demonstrates that these systems vary in terms of vocabulary, grammatical categories, and syntactic patterns. By comparing these languages, we gain insight into how typological differences influence the representation of time and how speakers' cognitive processes may be subtly shaped by the linguistic tools available to them.

Lexical encoding of time

Lexical encoding involves the vocabulary items and expressions that speakers use to refer to temporal concepts. In English, the lexicon provides a wide array of terms to denote temporal intervals, moments, and periods. For example, words such as "instant," "epoch," "era," "moment," and "interval" allow speakers to specify different scales of time. English also employs a range of idiomatic expressions like *"in the blink of an eye"* or *"at the eleventh hour"* to convey nuances of brevity or urgency. These expressions are not merely decorative; they serve to frame time as a dynamic resource that can be fleeting or critical depending on context. Moreover, the semantic field of time in English often overlaps with economic and competitive metaphors – terms like "deadline," "time is money," or "running against the clock" suggest that time is viewed as a valuable commodity to be managed efficiently (Bybee, 2010).

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In contrast, Russian offers a rich vocabulary that not only marks temporal intervals but also encodes aspects of quality and intensity. Russian adjectives such as *«быстрый»* (fast) and *«мгновенный»* (instantaneous) are frequently combined with time-denoting nouns to express not just duration but the manner in which time unfolds. Russian also utilizes a set of idiomatic expressions that provide a different perspective on time. For instance, the expression *«в два счета»* (literally "in two counts") conveys swiftness, whereas *«тянуть время»* (to drag out time) emphasizes procrastination. Such lexical choices reveal an underlying cultural attitude that, in some cases, contrasts efficiency with deliberate pacing. Importantly, the Russian lexical inventory includes not only absolute measures of time but also relative expressions that depend on context and speaker perspective (Comrie, 2013).

Uzbek, a member of the Turkic language family, demonstrates yet another approach. Uzbek lexical items for time often reflect the language's agglutinative nature, where complex temporal meanings are built through the concatenation of morphemes. For example, basic time terms such as *«vaqt»* (time) combine with derivational affixes to produce a variety of meanings, such as *«tezlik»* (speed, quickness) or *«uzoq vaqt»* (a long time). Uzbek also features proverbs and colloquial expressions that express temporal attitudes, such as *"vaqtni bekor qilmaslik"* (not to waste time), which stress the ethical and practical dimensions of time management. Unlike English or Russian, where metaphorical expressions tend to lean toward either economic or emotional perspectives, Uzbek idioms often blend pragmatic wisdom with communal values. This results in a lexicon that not only describes time but also provides guidance for its proper use within social life (Aikhenvald, 2000).

Across these three languages, the lexical encoding of time reveals both universal concerns – such as the management, passage, and significance of time – and language-specific nuances. While English frequently utilizes metaphor and idiom to signal urgency or opportunity, Russian provides detailed qualitative distinctions, and Uzbek reflects its agglutinative structure and cultural ethos in its temporal vocabulary. These lexical differences are not arbitrary; they are deeply embedded in the cognitive and cultural milieus of their respective speech communities.

Grammatical encoding of time

Beyond vocabulary, grammatical encoding plays a crucial role in how languages represent time. This includes the use of tense, aspect, mood, and other grammatical categories that situate events within a temporal framework.

In English, the grammatical system is characterized by a relatively intricate tense–aspect structure. English employs multiple tenses – including simple past, present, and future – alongside a variety of perfect and progressive forms to indicate not only when an event occurs but also its temporal flow or completeness. For example, the difference between "I eat" (simple present), "I am eating" (present continuous), and "I have eaten" (present perfect) provides speakers with a nuanced means of communicating the state and progression of events. These distinctions are crucial in contexts such as narrative discourse and planning. The clear grammatical demarcation between completed and ongoing actions allows speakers to construct narratives that are chronologically and aspectually coherent (Comrie, 2013).

Russian, on the other hand, exhibits a different approach to grammatical time. The Russian verbal system is famously built around aspect rather than tense. Although Russian does have past, present, and future forms, the distinction between perfective and imperfective aspects plays a central role in conveying temporal information. The perfective aspect indicates the completion or

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boundedness of an event, while the imperfective emphasizes its ongoing, habitual, or repetitive nature. For instance, the verbs *«читать»* (to read, imperfective) and *«прочитать»* (to read completely, perfective) enable speakers to express subtle differences in how an action is conceptualized in time. This aspectual division can affect not only narrative structure but also the speaker's evaluation of an event's progression. Russian's reliance on aspect rather than a strict tense system suggests that temporal encoding is more about the inherent structure of events than about their position on an absolute timeline (Tarasov, 2012).

Uzbek grammatical encoding of time reflects its agglutinative character and typological heritage. In Uzbek, time is primarily marked through a system of suffixation. Although Uzbek does have markers for past, present, and future, these are often attached directly to the verb stem as a series of suffixes that may also encode modality and evidentiality. For example, the suffix *-di* is commonly used to denote the past, while *-yapti* may indicate a completed action in the present or recent past. These markers combine with additional morphemes to indicate nuances such as habitual action or expectation. Unlike English and Russian, where multiple auxiliary verbs or changes in verb form may signal different temporal states, Uzbek relies on a more uniform system of affixation that builds temporal meaning incrementally (Karimov, 2015). This morphological approach results in a highly regular yet flexible system that mirrors the language's overall typological features.

One noteworthy phenomenon is the interaction between lexical and grammatical encoding. In English, for example, lexical adverbials such as "yesterday," "tomorrow," or "soon" work in tandem with grammatical tenses to locate an event in time. In Russian, temporal adverbs complement the aspectual system by providing additional information about when an event occurred or will occur, while in Uzbek, temporal markers are often fused with the verb and rarely appear as separate lexical items. Such differences highlight that languages employ different strategies – ranging from analytic (as in English) to synthetic (as in Uzbek) – to achieve the same communicative goal of situating events temporally (Aikhenvald, 2000).

When comparing these languages, several patterns emerge. First, English tends to prioritize a clear division of events along an absolute timeline through its combination of tense and aspect. This system supports a narrative structure that is highly chronological and segmented, making it particularly suited for contexts that demand precision in temporal ordering. For example, in formal reports or scientific discourse, the ability to differentiate between "I have been working" and "I worked" can be critical for clarity and accuracy. Moreover, the extensive use of auxiliary verbs in English supports a rich interplay between different temporal nuances.

Russian, with its emphasis on aspect, offers a contrasting system. Here, the primary focus is on how an event unfolds rather than on its position in time per se. This allows for a more fluid and context-dependent understanding of events. In narrative discourse, a Russian speaker might use aspect to indicate not only that an event occurred but also whether it was habitual or punctuated by interruptions. The reliance on aspect can sometimes lead to ambiguity in precise temporal localization; however, it offers a more dynamic picture of events as processes rather than static points in time. This fluidity is particularly evident in conversational Russian, where context and shared knowledge often fill in the gaps left by grammatical markers.

Uzbek, with its agglutinative structure, employs a system in which time is encoded via a series of suffixes that attach directly to the verb. This method allows for a high degree of regularity and predictability in temporal marking. In Uzbek narratives, the consistent application of suffixes

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enables speakers to construct sequences of events that are internally coherent even if they are less segmented than those in English. For example, an Uzbek speaker may indicate habitual action, completed events, and future plans through a single complex verb form that encapsulates multiple layers of temporal information. This integration of grammatical and morphological encoding reflects the language's broader typological tendencies, where flexibility and regularity coexist in a finely balanced system (Karimov, 2015).

One significant difference among the three languages lies in the way they handle evidentiality and modality in temporal expressions. In English, evidentiality is rarely marked morphologically, and speakers rely on context or lexical choices to indicate the source or certainty of temporal information. In Russian, certain verbal forms or particles can imply whether the speaker is certain about an event's timing, though this is less systematized than in some other languages. Uzbek, however, often incorporates evidential markers as part of its verb morphology, which can signal whether the speaker witnessed an event or is reporting second-hand information. This feature not only enriches the temporal encoding but also ties it to broader epistemological concerns within the language.

The cross-linguistic differences in lexical and grammatical encoding of time underscore the idea that temporal cognition is mediated by language-specific strategies. In cognitive linguistics, the notion that language influences thought is further supported by the observation that speakers of different languages approach time in distinct ways. For example, the analytic structure of English, which compartmentalizes events into discrete tenses and aspects, encourages a perception of time as a linear and measurable continuum. In contrast, Russian's focus on aspect encourages speakers to view events as ongoing processes that can be experienced in varied degrees of completion. Uzbek's agglutinative system, meanwhile, fosters a view of time that is cumulative and integrative, with a high reliance on morphological regularity.

These differences have important theoretical implications. They suggest that language can not only shape the way time is described but may also influence the underlying cognitive processes associated with time perception. Empirical studies have shown that speakers of languages with different temporal encoding systems perform differently on tasks that require temporal judgment or sequencing (Croft, 2001). Such findings lend support to the idea that linguistic structures are intertwined with cognitive representations of time, an idea that challenges more universalist approaches to temporal cognition.

Another aspect worth considering is the role of language contact and borrowing in shaping temporal expressions. In multilingual contexts, speakers often draw on multiple linguistic systems to express time. For instance, bilingual speakers of Russian and Uzbek may exhibit hybrid forms that incorporate both aspectual distinctions from Russian and suffixation patterns from Uzbek. Such hybridization can lead to innovative expressions that challenge traditional classifications and open new avenues for research into the flexibility and adaptability of temporal encoding. These phenomena illustrate that the boundaries between languages are porous and that temporal cognition may evolve as a result of linguistic convergence and divergence (Croft, 2001).

Moreover, the study of lexical and grammatical encoding in these three languages offers insights into the broader typological classifications of languages. English, with its relatively analytic structure, contrasts with Russian's fusional tendencies and Uzbek's agglutinative features. These typological differences are not limited to the domain of time; they reflect general principles of language structure that influence various cognitive domains. By examining time in detail,

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researchers can better understand how the general architecture of a language shapes its approach to abstract concepts. This, in turn, provides a window into the intricate interplay between language structure and cognitive function (Aikhenvald, 2000).

To illustrate these differences without repeating previous examples, consider the following fresh instances. In English, expressions such as *"in due course"* or *"a matter of seconds"* not only locate events temporally but also convey a sense of inevitability or precision. Such phrases are common in legal or technical discourse where exact timing is critical. In contrast, Russian speakers might use constructions like *«скоро начнется»* (soon to begin) or *«давным-давно»* (a long time ago), which emphasize the relative nature of time and invite the listener to interpret temporal intervals flexibly. Meanwhile, Uzbek speakers may express similar ideas through phrases like *"tez orada"* (shortly) or *"uzoq vaqt oldin"* (long ago) that combine both lexical terms and morphological markers to produce a composite meaning. These examples reveal that while all three languages are capable of conveying similar temporal information, they do so by employing distinct grammatical and lexical strategies.

Another area of divergence lies in the use of temporal adverbials. In English, adverbials such as "often," "rarely," or "occasionally" are used to modulate the frequency of events and are usually placed in a relatively fixed position within the sentence. Russian, however, may allow greater flexibility in adverbial placement, which can affect emphasis and nuance. For example, the Russian adverb *«иногда»* (sometimes) can appear at various points in the sentence to indicate a recurring yet non-specific temporal pattern. Uzbek also demonstrates flexibility in adverbial use, but its agglutinative nature means that many adverbial meanings are integrated directly into the verb complex rather than standing alone. These differences highlight that the encoding of time is not only about marking tense or aspect but also involves the integration of frequency and modality into the overall temporal framework.

Grammatical encoding also diverges in the treatment of future time. English typically uses modal auxiliaries (e.g., "will" or "shall") to signal future events. In contrast, Russian employs a periphrastic construction using the verb *«быть»* (to be) along with an infinitive to denote future actions. Uzbek, on the other hand, marks the future with a specific suffix that attaches to the verb stem, which may also combine with evidential markers to indicate the speaker's certainty. These variations underscore how the grammatical mechanisms of time encoding are tailored to each language's structural tendencies and cultural priorities. Such differences not only reflect typological diversity but also have implications for how speakers of these languages conceptualize the future, make predictions, and plan actions.

Empirical research comparing these systems has revealed intriguing patterns. For instance, studies have found that speakers of languages with a rich morphological marking of the future tend to exhibit more cautious behavior in financial decision-making (Chen, 2011). Although such studies are still emerging, they hint at the possibility that grammatical encoding of time may extend its influence beyond communication into domains of behavior and social organization. Similarly, experiments using sentence completion tasks have shown that Russian speakers are particularly sensitive to aspectual distinctions, often favoring perfective forms when narrating completed events and imperfective forms when discussing habitual actions (Tarasov, 2012). Uzbek speakers, when tested in a controlled setting, tend to produce verb forms that integrate multiple layers of temporal information, reflecting the language's capacity for fine-grained temporal modulation. These empirical findings provide support for the idea that lexical

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and grammatical encoding are not neutral mechanisms; they actively shape the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of time.

In synthesizing the comparative analysis of English, Russian, and Uzbek, it becomes clear that lexical and grammatical encoding of time is a multifaceted phenomenon. Each language employs its own unique set of tools to structure temporal experience – tools that are informed by its historical development, typological characteristics, and cultural context. English, with its analytic tense–aspect system and metaphor-rich lexicon, offers a model of time that is precise and segmented. Russian's focus on aspect, coupled with its flexible lexical expressions, produces a more process-oriented representation of events. Uzbek's agglutinative system, with its systematic suffixation and integrated morphological markers, supports a cumulative and context-sensitive approach to time.

These differences are not merely descriptive; they have theoretical and practical implications. The diversity of encoding strategies provides evidence for the hypothesis that language influences cognitive processing of time. Moreover, the way temporal information is encoded can affect how speakers plan, remember, and engage with the world around them. By understanding these cross-linguistic variations, scholars can better appreciate the interplay between language structure and cognitive function, shedding light on how abstract concepts such as time are rendered intelligible within different linguistic frameworks.

Furthermore, the comparative approach underscores the importance of considering language-specific features when developing models of temporal cognition. Rather than assuming a universal, one-size-fits-all model of time, researchers must account for the ways in which different linguistic systems channel attention to distinct aspects of temporal experience. Whether it is the precise future marking in English, the aspectual nuances in Russian, or the integrative suffixation in Uzbek, each system reflects a unique cognitive strategy that has evolved in response to specific communicative needs.

Results

The comparative analysis reveals the following key findings:

1. Lexical Encoding:

- *English* employs metaphor and idiom extensively to express urgency, value, and flow of time.
- *Russian* emphasizes qualitative and aspectual distinctions with context-sensitive idiomatic expressions.
- *Uzbek* integrates temporal expressions with ethical and communal values through proverbs and derivational morphology.

2. Grammatical Encoding:

- *English* uses a well-defined tense–aspect system with auxiliary verbs and analytic constructions.
- *Russian* focuses primarily on aspect (perfective/imperfective), using it to frame events' completeness and flow.
- *Uzbek* relies on regular suffixation to express tense, aspect, modality, and evidentiality in compact verbal forms.

3. Typological Influence:

- English demonstrates an analytic approach to time encoding.
- Russian exhibits fusional characteristics with aspectual complexity.

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- Uzbek's agglutinative nature supports modular and highly regular time marking.

4. Cognitive and Cultural Patterns:

- Each system reflects and potentially shapes temporal cognition in ways consistent with Sapir–Whorf hypotheses.
- Empirical research supports the link between grammatical encoding and behavioral outcomes (e.g., financial decision-making, narrative recall).

In conclusion, the lexical and grammatical encoding of time in English, Russian, and Uzbek offers a compelling illustration of how language mediates one of the most fundamental dimensions of human experience. By comparing these languages, we not only highlight the diversity of temporal expression but also reinforce the idea that language and thought are inextricably linked. This subchapter has demonstrated that the mechanisms used to mark time – whether through vocabulary or grammar – are deeply embedded in the cognitive and cultural fabric of a speech community, and they play a decisive role in shaping how time is experienced, interpreted, and utilized.

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