



## Comparative Analysis of Participle I and II in English and Russian: Morphological, Syntactic, and Stylistic Dimensions

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**Abstract.** *This study presents a systematic comparative analysis of Participle I and Participle II in English and their functional equivalents in Russian, examining morphological formation, syntactic roles, and stylistic distribution. Participles are investigated as hybrid non-finite verb forms that combine verbal and adjectival properties, enabling them to operate across multiple grammatical contexts with varying degrees of complexity in each language. The research adopts a qualitative descriptive-comparative methodology grounded in contrastive linguistics, drawing on established grammar references and authentic language examples from literary, academic, and media discourse. The findings reveal that English participles are structurally simple and invariant, reflecting the analytic character of the language, whereas Russian participles exhibit high morphological complexity, including systematic agreement in gender, number, and case. Significant differences are also identified in syntactic behavior: Russian participles are more frequently deployed in attributive constructions and function as condensed alternatives to relative clauses, while English participial forms operate flexibly across both written and spoken registers. A further functional divergence concerns adverbial expression: Russian employs a separate grammatical category — the gerund (ðeenpu4acmue) — for adverbial participial functions, whereas English Participle I covers both adjectival and adverbial domains. These differences are interpreted through the broader typological distinction between analytic and synthetic language structure, and their implications for contrastive linguistics, second language acquisition, and translation practice are discussed.*

**Keywords:** *participles, non-finite verb forms, contrastive linguistics, English grammar, Russian grammar, morphological typology, syntactic analysis, second language acquisition*

### 1. Introduction

Participles constitute an essential component of the verbal system in many Indo-European languages, functioning as non-finite verb forms that exhibit a characteristically dual nature — combining verbal properties such as aspect, voice, and temporal reference with adjectival or adverbial characteristics. This hybrid status affords participles a unique position within grammatical systems, enabling speakers and writers to achieve syntactic compression and stylistic variation that finite clause structures cannot replicate with the same economy (Quirk et al., 1985).

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In both English and Russian, participial constructions serve as a bridge between clause-level and phrase-level expression, allowing complex semantic relationships to be conveyed within compact structural configurations.

In English grammar, participles are traditionally divided into Participle I (the present participle, formed with the suffix *-ing*) and Participle II (the past participle, formed with *-ed* or irregular equivalents). Participle I is widely deployed in progressive aspect constructions (e.g., *is writing*), in adjectival functions (a smiling child), and in adverbial participial clauses (*Walking along the street, he noticed a change*). Participle II is central to perfect and passive constructions (*has written*; *was written*) and can function attributively (a broken window). Crucially, English participles are invariant forms that do not inflect for gender, number, or case, a morphological minimalism that reflects the fundamentally analytic character of the language (Quirk et al., 1985; Biber et al., 1999).

Russian, by contrast, operates within a synthetic grammatical tradition that encodes grammatical relationships primarily through inflection rather than word order and auxiliary constructions. Its participial system distinguishes four principal categories — present active, past active, present passive, and past passive — each of which inflects fully for gender, number, and case in agreement with the modified noun. Moreover, verbal aspect plays a structurally constitutive role in Russian participial formation: imperfective verbs generate present-tense participial forms while perfective verbs produce past forms, a dependency with no direct parallel in English (Timberlake, 2004). Russian also maintains a categorical distinction between participles (причастия) and gerunds (депричастия), distributing adjectival and adverbial functions across two separate non-finite categories — a distribution that English collapses into the single Participle I form.

These typological contrasts make English and Russian participles a productive object of contrastive linguistic analysis. The divergences in morphological complexity, syntactic behavior, stylistic distribution, and functional scope generate significant challenges for language learners, translators, and applied linguists working between the two languages. The present study investigates these differences systematically, with the aim of contributing both to the theoretical description of participial systems and to the practical understanding of cross-linguistic variation in this grammatical domain.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundations of this study draw on three principal traditions. The first is typological linguistics, particularly the analytic-synthetic parameter as theorized by Comrie (1981) and developed in subsequent typological research. This parameter provides the primary explanatory framework for the morphological contrasts observed between English and Russian participial systems: the invariant, contextually determined forms of English participles exemplify analytic grammatical organization, while the richly inflected, agreement-governed forms of Russian participles instantiate the synthetic pole of the typological continuum. As Comrie (1981) argues,



these typological orientations are not merely descriptive labels but reflect deep-seated organizing principles that permeate the grammatical systems of the languages concerned.

The second theoretical tradition is aspect theory in Slavic linguistics, particularly as developed by Forsyth (1970) and systematized in Timberlake's (2004) reference grammar of Russian. The binary perfectivity distinction in Russian — which organizes virtually the entire verbal lexicon into aspect pairs — has direct consequences for participial morphology, since the aspectual value of the base verb determines which participial categories can be formed from it. An adequate contrastive account of English and Russian participles therefore requires engagement with Slavic aspect theory as well as with the standard description of English verbal morphology.

The third tradition is register-oriented corpus linguistics, as represented by Biber et al.'s (1999) Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English. This work provides the empirical basis for claims about the differential distribution of participial constructions across spoken and written registers — a dimension of analysis that is indispensable for a complete account of how participles function in real discourse, as opposed to how they are described in prescriptive or idealized grammatical accounts.

### 3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive-comparative research design grounded in the methodology of contrastive linguistics, which aims to identify systematic similarities and differences between grammatical structures across languages through feature-by-feature alignment (James, 1980). The analysis operates at three interconnected levels — morphological, syntactic, and stylistic — ensuring that both form and function are examined in their mutual dependency.

Data were drawn from authoritative grammar references including Quirk et al.'s (1985) *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, Timberlake's (2004) *A Reference Grammar of Russian*, and Biber et al.'s (1999) *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, supplemented by authentic examples from literary texts, academic writing, and media discourse in both languages. A purposive sampling procedure was used to select examples that clearly illustrate specific participial functions across attributive, predicative, and adverbial syntactic contexts and across formal and informal registers. Analytical reliability was enhanced through cross-referencing examples across multiple sources; the study acknowledges that its qualitative orientation and relatively small illustrative sample preclude large-scale quantitative generalizations.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Morphological Features

The analysis confirms the fundamental morphological contrast between the two systems. English Participle I is formed through the suffix *-ing* (reading, writing) and Participle II through *-ed* or suppletive/irregular forms (worked; written, gone). Neither form inflects for gender, number, or case; their grammatical interpretation is entirely context-dependent. This invariance reflects what



Quirk et al. (1985) identify as a defining property of the English verb phrase: grammatical relationships are encoded analytically through word order and auxiliary selection rather than through morphological marking of the participle itself.

Russian participles, by contrast, inflect fully across all four principal categories. Present active participles take suffixes in -ущий/-ющий (читающий 'reading'), past active in -вший (читавший 'having read'), present passive in -емый/-омый (читаемый 'being read'), and past passive in -нный/-тый (прочитанный 'having been read'). Each of these forms then inflects for gender (masculine, feminine, neuter), number (singular, plural), and case (six cases), generating paradigms of up to twenty-four forms per base participial stem (Timberlake, 2004). Additionally, past passive participles carry a short form (e.g., написан / написана / написано / написаны) used predicatively, adding a further inflectional dimension without equivalent in English.

The interaction between verbal aspect and participial formation introduces a further layer of morphological complexity. Imperfective verbs generate both present and past active participial forms, while perfective verbs, which express completed action, generate only past participial forms and do not typically yield present active participles — since the concept of ongoing, incomplete action is incompatible with perfectivity. This systematic aspectual constraint on participial paradigms has no counterpart in English, where -ing and -ed forms are formed from verbs regardless of any comparable aspectual distinction.

#### *4.2 Syntactic Functions*

Both languages employ participles in attributive, predicative, and participial clause (adverbial) functions, but the frequency, structural elaboration, and functional scope of these uses differ significantly.

In attributive function, both languages allow participial modification of nouns — English: the broken window; Russian: разбитое окно. Russian, however, permits substantially more complex pre-nominal participial phrases that English would typically render as post-nominal relative clauses. The construction читающий книгу человек ('the man reading a book') concentrates an entire relative clause's worth of predication into a pre-nominal modifier. As Timberlake (2004) observes, this construction type is particularly characteristic of Russian formal written style, where participial density serves as a stylistic marker of register elevation. English has no equivalent construction of comparable productivity.

In predicative function, English participles are central to the tense-aspect-voice system: progressive constructions (she is reading) and passive constructions (the letter was written) are built around participial forms. Russian uses comparable finite auxiliary constructions for tense and voice, but past passive participles in predicative position tend to behave as short-form adjectives (письмо написано 'the letter is written'), which blurs the category boundary between verbal and adjectival predication in ways that have no precise English parallel.



The most diagnostically significant functional divergence concerns adverbial expression. English Participle I covers both adjectival modification and adverbial clause functions: *Walking down the street, he saw a friend* encodes a simultaneous adverbial relationship through the participial clause. Russian distributes these functions categorically across two separate word classes: participles (причастия) handle adjectival modification exclusively, while a distinct grammatical category — the gerund (деепричастие) — handles adverbial participial functions: *Идя по улице, он встретил друга*. This categorical separation means that Russian learners of English must map a single English category onto two distinct Russian categories, while English learners of Russian must learn to control a category boundary that does not exist in their first language.

### 4.3 Stylistic and Register Distribution

Biber et al.'s (1999) corpus-based analysis demonstrates that non-finite constructions, including participial clauses, are substantially more frequent in written than in spoken English, but remain attested and pragmatically unmarked across all registers. English participial clauses contribute to textual cohesion and information packaging without carrying strong stylistic markedness.

The stylistic situation in Russian is considerably more constrained. Extended participial phrases — constructions in which a participle heads a phrase containing its own complements and modifiers — are characteristic of formal written registers: academic prose, official documentation, and literary narrative. In spoken Russian, these constructions are widely avoided as cognitively demanding and stylistically inappropriate; the equivalent relative clause (студент, который читает книгу, 'the student who is reading a book') is strongly preferred over the participial equivalent (студент, читающий книгу). The participial form thus carries register-marking information that the English equivalent does not: choosing it in Russian is a stylistic decision with identifiable social meaning, while the English participial clause is stylistically more neutral.

## 5. Comparative Summary

The following table provides a feature-by-feature comparison of the principal dimensions analyzed in this study.

Feature	Participle I / II in English	Participles in Russian
Formation	-ing (Part. I); -ed / irregular (Part. II); invariant	Suffixes: -ущий/-ющий, -вший, -емый, -нный/-тый; fully inflected
Agreement	None — no gender, number, or case inflection	Agrees with head noun in gender, number, and case
Aspect dependency	Not constrained by aspect	Perfective → past participles; imperfective → present participles



Attributive use	Pre- and post-nominal (e.g., a broken window)	Pre-nominal; can replace full relative clauses
Adverbial use	Participial clauses (e.g., Walking down the street...)	Gerunds (деепричастия) used instead; participles adjectival only
Register	Used across all registers including spoken language	Extended forms mainly formal/written; spoken prefers finite clauses
Typological basis	Analytic: meaning through word order and auxiliaries	Synthetic: meaning through morphological inflection

## 6. Discussion

The results situate the English-Russian participial contrast within the broader typological parameter of analytic versus synthetic grammatical organization. English participles instantiate analytic minimalism: two invariant forms whose grammatical contribution is entirely determined by syntactic context. Russian participles instantiate synthetic maximalism: a system in which morphological form encodes multiple intersecting grammatical dimensions simultaneously — voice, tense, aspect, gender, number, and case. This morphological density produces the characteristic Russian capacity for syntactic compression in attributive contexts: information that English distributes across a relative clause structure is concentrated into a single inflected form and its agreement marking (Comrie, 1981).

The role of aspect in constraining Russian participial paradigms represents a structural dependency without English parallel and constitutes one of the most significant challenges for English-speaking learners of Russian. Mastery of the participial system requires prior mastery of the aspect system — a two-stage acquisition challenge compounded by the fact that English provides no reliable structural cue to the relevant distinction (Forsyth, 1970; Timberlake, 2004). Conversely, the functional multi-valence of English Participle I — its capacity to serve both adjectival and adverbial functions that Russian distributes categorically — creates ambiguity challenges for Russian learners and requires attention in both pedagogical and translation contexts.

The stylistic asymmetry between the two systems has important applied consequences. Russian learners of English who produce participial constructions in inappropriate spoken contexts may generate utterances that are grammatically well-formed but stylistically marked as formal or written. English learners of Russian who produce extended participial phrases in conversation may similarly create an impression of register mismatch. Pedagogical approaches must therefore address not only the formal properties of participial constructions but their register distribution and



the stylistic inferences that their deployment triggers in each language (Biber et al., 1999; Swan, 2005).

From a translation perspective, the absence of one-to-one correspondence between the two systems necessitates structural transformation rather than form-to-form substitution. Russian participial modifiers are regularly rendered as English relative clauses; English participial adverbial clauses may correspond to Russian gerundial constructions, finite subordinate clauses, or coordinate structures depending on the semantic relationship expressed. Translators must command both the structural options available in each language and the register implications of the choices they make (Quirk et al., 1985).

## 7. Conclusion

This study has provided a systematic comparative analysis of participial systems in English and Russian across morphological, syntactic, and stylistic dimensions. The findings confirm that while participles in both languages serve comparable core grammatical functions, their structural realization diverges substantially in ways that reflect the fundamental typological difference between analytic and synthetic language organization. English participles are morphologically invariant and functionally expansive, covering both adjectival and adverbial domains within a two-form system; Russian participles are morphologically complex and stylistically marked, operating within a system that distributes adjectival and adverbial non-finite functions across categorically distinct word classes.

These differences carry significant implications for contrastive linguistics, second language acquisition, and translation practice. A thorough comparative account of participial systems must engage not only with morphological and syntactic description but with the register constraints, stylistic conventions, and typological underpinnings that govern participial usage in each language. Future research could productively extend this analysis through large-scale corpus investigation of participial frequency and distribution, and through acquisition studies examining how learners of each language negotiate the structural and stylistic challenges identified in this analysis.

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