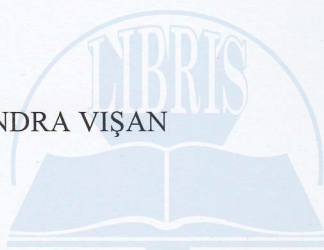


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PRESENT SIMPLE	PRESENT CONTINUOUS
I/you/we/they work	I am working
He/she/it works	He/she/it is working
We/you/they work	We/you/they are working
It works	It is working



CHAPTER 1

THE PRESENT TENSE: SIMPLE OR CONTINUOUS?

I. PRELIMINARIES

A. Read the following text, paying attention to the tenses used here:

I'm writing this down because I don't ever want to forget the way it was. It doesn't seem as if I could, now, but they all tell you things change. And I guess they're right. Older people must have forgotten or they couldn't be the way they are. They try to understand but they don't seem able to know how. It sounds as if I were trying to run away from what I have to write down, but I'm not. I want to remember that summer, too, because it's the last one I'll ever have. Oh, when I'm an old man – thirty or forty – things may be all right again. But that's a long time to wait and it won't be the same.

(Stephen Vincent Benet -*Too Early Spring*)

B. The text is written taking the present tense as a point of reference.

- i. Identify each tense used in the excerpt.
- ii. The tenses that are used in the excerpt are mainly present. Identify the *Simple Present Tense* versus the *Present Continuous Tense* in the fragment. Can you list differences in meaning, looking at the way in which these tenses have been used?
- iii. Try to change the tense of the predicates from *Present Simple* into *Present Continuous*. Indicate when this is possible /impossible.

II. EXPLANATIONS

1. Simple or Continuous?

In English all tenses have **simple** forms (also called **nonprogressive**) or **continuous** forms (also called **progressive**). A speaker can communicate **situations taking place in the present** by using either **the Present Simple** or **the Present Continuous**:

Table 1

PRESENT SIMPLE	PRESENT CONTINUOUS
<u>verb(=infinitive)+ -/-s</u> I/you/we/they paint. He/she paints.	<u>be + verb(=infinitive)+ -ing</u> I am painting. You/We/They are painting. He/She is painting.

John <u>paints</u> his house every year. John își zugrăvește casa în fiecare an.	John <u>is painting</u> his house now. John își zugrăvește casa acum.
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Besides the forms that are given above for the two tenses, we also remind readers the **spelling rules** that are associated with each of them:

Table 2

PRESENT SIMPLE (-S FORMS)	PRESENT CONTINUOUS (-ING FORMS)
<p>1. Add <i>-s</i> for most verbs leap –leaps, manage-manages</p> <p>2. Add <i>-es</i> for words that end in <i>-ch, -s, -sh, -x, or -z</i> pinch-pinches, pass-passes, wash-washes, vex-vexes, buzz-buzzes</p> <p>3. When a verb ends in a consonant <i>+y</i>, change the <i>-y</i> into <i>-ie</i> study-studies, cry-cries</p> <p><u>However</u>, do not change <i>-y</i> to <i>-ie</i> when the verb ends in a vowel <i>+y</i> play-plays, say-says</p> <p>4. There are some verbs that have slightly different forms in the Simple Present. They have to be learned as such. do-does, go-goes, have-has</p> <p>5. Remember that there is a class of verbs that doesn't take an <i>-s</i> in the third person singular. These are called <i>the modal verbs</i> and they do so because they have special properties that distinguish them from other verbs. can (could), may (might), must, will (would), shall (should)</p>	<p>1. Add <i>-ing</i> to the verbal form: paint –painting, scream –screaming</p> <p>2. If the verb ends in <i>-e</i>, drop the final <i>-e</i> take – taking, choose – choosing</p> <p>3. Double the consonant in one-syllable words ending in a consonant (vowel-consonant) run – running, hop-hopping</p> <p><u>However</u>, do not double the consonant if the verb ends in <i>-x, -w, -y</i> vex-vexing, sow-sowing, say-saying</p> <p>4. If the verb ends in <i>-y</i>, keep the <i>-y</i> and add an <i>-ing</i> obey-obeying, try-trying</p> <p>5. If the verb ends in <i>-ie</i>, change the <i>-ie</i> to an <i>-y</i> before adding <i>----ing</i> die – dying, cry-crying</p> <p>6. If the verb of two or more syllables ends in a <u>consonant-vowel-consonant</u> (CVC) combination and the stress falls on the last syllable, double the consonant submit - submitting, regret – regretting</p>

NOTA BENE!

DO NOT EVER FORGET TO PLACE THE –S FOR THE THIRD PERSON SINGULAR IN THE SIMPLE PRESENT. THIS IS WHAT GRAMMATICALLY (=morphologically) MARKS THE THIRD PERSON AS DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHER PERSONS.

Food for thought

Consider the following text.

- i. Identify and correct those Present Simple verb forms that should be in the third person singular.
- ii. Some Present Continuous verb forms are misspelled. Identify them and correct them.

Shortly after her visit to H.G., Rebecca invites Anthony to meet her for tea at her London club, the Lansdowne. They have not met for some time and she is struck unfavourably by his appearance. At thirty he is still handsome in a bulky, fleshy sort of way, but today his cheeks seem unnaturally fat, almost swollen, and his hair need washing and cutting, as it is falling lankly forward over his forehead. His clothes look crumpled and grubby, no doubt because he is living away from home and Kitty's housewifely care so much of the time. When they get on to the subject of H.G., and whether it was right to tell him he has an incurable cancer, his speech seem to her theatrical, inauthentic. He makes offensive remarks in a manner designed to make them seem compassionate, taking her hand and saying, 'I don't want to hurt you, Rac, I would rather do anything than that, but you shouldn't involve yourself in H.G.'s welfare. The truth is, it's a long time since you were the centre of his life.' 'I know that perfectly well,' she say indignantly.

(David Lodge – *A Man of Parts*)

2. Frequently or right now?

The difference in form that we have underlined above between the Present Simple and the Present Continuous correlates with a difference in meaning. Let us examine the sentences above one more time:

- (1) John paints his house *every year*. (FREQUENTLY)
- (2) John is painting his house *now*. (RIGHT NOW)

It is very clear that the two tenses (**which are both present**) combine with **different ways of seeing the present**, as suggested by the time adverbials (the phrases that show the time taken as a point of reference for a situation – *every year*, *now*) present in the sentences. In sentence (1) the adverbial "every year" refers to a **present interval, which includes several moments** relevant for the present. The event occurs with a certain **frequency** in the present. During this interval, John can perform the event described, namely painting his house, several times. In sentence (2), the present that the speaker refers to points to a **single moment in time** and **the event described by the sentence is taking place at the very moment when we speak**.

The type of situation taking place in sentence (1) is called **habitual**, because it happens according to a **habit**: *John has the habit of painting his house every year*.

The continuous verbal form used in sentence (2) can be seen as an instance of the **“continuous” (or “progressive”) aspect**. Aspect (which is here **marked grammatically** by the combination of the auxiliary verb *be* with the *-ing* form of the lexical verb *to paint*) refers to the way in which the speaker views the internal make-up of a situation. The **continuous/progressive aspect** in sentence (2) refers to the fact that **the situation is viewed as ongoing** (compare this to (1) which is **nonprogressive** – the situation is not ongoing, but **habitual**, see **Chapter 2, Section II, Subsection 4** for further details on habitual situations).

Food for thought

Discuss the difference between the sentences where the event expressed is taking place as we speak and the habitual sentences, where the event is presented as repeated. Try to translate these sentences into Romanian. Does translation reflect the differences of meaning you previously identified?

- a. Look! Kenny is killing that chicken.
- b. Kenny kills a chicken a week.
- a. Pinocchio is dancing on stage.
- b. Pinocchio dances for Stromboli every night.
- a. “Are you talking to me?” the taxi driver asked him.
- b. The taxi driver talks to every customer he takes for a ride.

3. In general or right now?

Let us look at two more sentences evincing a contrast between the two tenses:

- (3) Fish swim but don't get wet. (GENERALLY)
Peștii înoată dar nu se udă.
- (4) Those fish are swimming towards me. (RIGHT NOW)
Peștii aceia înoată spre mine.

As in the case of the first two sentences, the sentence that contains the **Present Continuous** (4) refers to a situation that is taking place at the moment when we speak. It is a situation **happening in front of our very eyes**, which thus refers to something **temporary**.

The **Present Simple** in sentence (3) includes, just like sentence (1), more moments and not just a single moment (**Generally** – *and not necessarily right now* – *fish swim and do not get wet*). It is what we would call a **general situation** or a **generic situation**.

NOTA BENE!

Generic sentences can either:

- a. refer to a state which is **true at all times (universally true) in the existence of the entity the sentence refers to:**

One and one is two.
Unu și cu unu fac doi.

The sun sets in the west.
Soarele apune în vest.

b. have predicates that refer to **typical characteristics of a kind/species**. The sentences below refer to "lions" as a species:

Lions are ferocious animals.
Leii sunt animale feroce.

The lion is a ferocious animal.
Leul este un animal feroce.

The main difference between the Present Simple and the Present Continuous thus refers to the fact that the **Present Simple Tense** represents a more inclusive notion of the present that **can encompass more than a single moment and often does so, representing frequent processes** called **habitual situations** (sentence 1) or **general situations** called generic situations (sentence 3). The **Present Continuous** always refers to a process **taking place (or unfolding) at the moment when we speak** and at that moment **only**. The Present Continuous **does not usually express** generic and habitual sentences.

Let's generalize!

While the Simple Present Tense can express generic or habitual situations, the Present Continuous tense can express situations unfolding at the moment NOW.

Food for thought

Discuss the difference between the sentences where the event expressed is taking place as we speak and the habitual sentences, where the event is presented as repeated. Try to translate these sentences into Romanian. Does translation reflect the differences of meaning you previously identified?

- a. The hunters are shooting ducks.
- b. Hunters shoot ducks in autumn.
- a. Stop skating on that lake! The ice is melting.
- b. Ice melts when the sun shines.
- a. They are gathering herbs for tea.
- b. A rolling stone gathers no moss.

4. Instantaneous or Continuous?

Let's examine one more group of sentences:

- (5) I place my hat on the table. (RIGHT NOW) :
(I want to make a demonstration and I do this thing in an instant in order to be able to show you something else.)
- (6) I'm placing my hat on the table. (RIGHT NOW)
(I'm in the middle of doing this. While I'm doing this, somebody else comes in.)