

## The challenges that Kosovan students face while translating adjectives from English to Albanian and vice versa

Osman Osmani  
University of Prishtina, Kosovo

Fikret Pajaziti  
Kosovo Pedagogical Institute,  
Kosovo

### Abstract

*Language is one of the most important and vital means of communication. Many people try to learn a foreign language, but suffer some shortcomings when it comes to transferring their ideas from one language to the other. Accuracy in using the two languages needs a thorough knowledge of both languages, especially the similarities and differences between them. The study provides a brief summary of similarities and differences that exist between adjectives in English and Albanian. Besides, it contains an empirical research which was designed to examine the issue of adjectives in the context of the vocational upper secondary school in Viti, Kosovo, during a three month period in 2017. Fifty upper secondary school students chosen from four different classes participated in the study. One assignment was administered to the participants. They were given two short paragraphs, one in English and the other in Albanian. These paragraphs contained a series of adjectives, mainly attributive and predicative, and articulated and unarticulated adjectives (in Albanian). Students were required to identify adjectives of both languages and translate the same paragraphs from one language to the other. Even though the two languages under study belong to the same family, i.e. Indo-European, yet again there are many differences and similarities between them. From our findings, it can be seen that although Kosovan students have English classes twice a week, they haven't mastered adjectives yet. As a result of the lack of this knowledge, students encountered difficulties both in identification and translation of adjectives. Besides, this paper is very helpful to language learners and especially those who want to teach or learn grammar besides the ones who try to do translation from one language into the other.*

*Key words: adjectives, translation, English language, Albanian language.*

### The purpose of the study

The purpose of the current study is to carry out an empirical research, and find out the challenges that students of the vocational upper secondary school "Jonuz Zejnullahu" in Viti face while translating adjectives from one language to the other and vice versa.

### The significance of research

The findings of this study will be of most use to English language learners, since they will be provided with insights regarding adjective form, position, and usage in both languages, and as a consequence, they will be able to know the similarities and differences that exist in English and Albanian regarding adjectives. Being equipped with this knowledge, they will be able to recognize adjectives and will have a clue which will lead them in the reduction of errors in using and translating adjectives from one language to the other, i.e., from English to Albanian and vice versa, an outcome which is of prime importance to those students that will sit the state Matura once their high school education is over, as it is already known from my own experience that the state Matura has thirty questions regarding English, and besides other questions, few of them have to do with adjectives.

### Research hypothesis

The current study hypothesizes that Kosovan students of vocational upper secondary school "Jonuz Zejnullahu" in Viti, Republic of Kosovo, do face difficulties, both in identification and translation of English and Albanian adjectives.

### Research question

The current study is based on the following research question:

- What difficulties do Kosovan students face while translating adjectives from English into Albanian and vice versa?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The importance of a language

Language is a fundamental means for interaction in everyday life. Through it, we communicate with people surrounding us about our feelings, desires, and concerns. This communication is carried out through words, gestures, and voice tone. Undoubtedly, language is very important and beneficial for everyone. Even though it is very beneficial, if being misused or translated improperly, misunderstanding does occur.

### The importance of translation

Translation means changing a language, either written or spoken, into another one. Said in another way, translation means converting words in another language without losing its meaning. To understand what one is saying is very crucial at every time. A tiny mistake may at some cases produce consequences for the party involved. Translation emerges by the reason that it is one of the important disciplines being very much useful in various spheres of human activities. Translation has its roots in the earliest times of mankind – it is certainly older than writing itself. This is the reason why it is considered as one of the oldest crafts of mankind (Gërmizaj, Sh. 2005:15).

### The importance of contrastive analysis

Contrastive analysis among linguists is known as a systematic study of two languages with the aim of identifying the similarities and differences between them. According to Fries (1945), the most efficient materials are those based on scientific descriptions of the language that is intended to be taught, carefully compared with a parallel description of mother tongue. (Lado cited in Contrastive Functional Analysis) shares the view that comparative analysis is extremely important in curriculum development, selection of teaching materials, and the identification of problems encountered during learning.

### Similarities and differences between adjectives in English and Albanian

English and Albanian belong to the Indo-European language family. Despite this fact, these two languages share many similarities and differences in terms of usage, position, degree, and many

other aspects. Below, we will mention briefly the similarities and differences that exist between adjectives of two languages under study:

- Adjectives in English and Albanian are a separate class of words. They modify a noun or a pronoun by describing, identifying, or quantifying it.
- While adjectives in English have the same form for singular and plural, masculine and feminine, their counterparts in Albanian reflect the characteristics of the noun. Thus, if the noun is feminine, the adjective will have a feminine ending. If the noun is plural, the adjective will have a plural form.
- Adjectives of English and Albanian occur at two opposite side of the noun. (E.g.: This is a *heavy* bag – attributively; this bag is *heavy* – predicatively. / Nënë e *shkretë* nuk dinte ç'të bënte. – Predicatively; E *shkreta* nënë, nuk dinte ç'të bënte. – Attributively.)
- Suffixation is one of the most productive methods of formation of adjectives in both languages from other parts of speech.
- Both English and Albanian adjectives form their negative meaning by adding prefixes.
- Adjectives in English and Albanian can be formed by conversion.
- English adjectives do not take articles, i.e. they are never articulated. On the other hand, their counterparts (Albanian adjectives) are mostly articulated. However, they can also be unarticulated.
- Adjectives of both languages can be formed by compounding, from the union of two sometimes three stems.
- Regarding number, English and Albanian adjectives differ completely. While in Albanian, the adjective must agree with the head noun in number, the opposite happens in English. (E.g.: Vajzë e *mençur* – (njëjës); Vajza të *mençura* – (shumës). A *clever* girl - (singular); *Clever* girls - (plural))
- Another similarity of adjectives of both languages is that of degree. Both languages have positive, comparative and superlative degree. (E.g.: Positive: Ai është *i bukur*. 'He is *handsome*.' Comparative: Ai është *më i bukur* se Agroni. 'He is *more handsome* than Agron.' Superlative: Ai është *më i bukuri* nga të gjithë. 'He is *the most handsome* of all' (Agalliu, A. et al. (2002); Dhrimo, A. et al. (1984); Kabashi, J. (2000), and Gërmizaj, Sh. (2004)).

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

The current research was carried out at a vocational upper secondary school in Viti, Republic of Kosovo, during a three-month period in 2016/17. Fifty high school senior students chosen from four classes were involved in the study. The research population sample included male as well as female students aged of 17 and 18 from the same ethnic background, Kosovans. They were taking General English Courses twice a week and each lesson lasted 45 minutes. Students' level of proficiency in English was CEFR A2. The ones that were planning to sit the state Matura examination were chosen as the subject of this study. Only those students whose achievements in English language during the course of their education were marked with the highest possible grade – 5 were chosen as the subject of the study. The aim of this selection was to ensure that students were at the same level of proficiency in English, thus ensuring that this would not be counted as a variable that would affect the validity of the study results. They all had the same teaching syllabuses. They used the same textbooks, New Headway CEFR A2, the third edition, thus they were taught exactly the same content in English classes. They were taught by three different teachers. Students' motivation to participate in this study was significantly raised when they were told that there would be an improvement in their performance regarding adjective use if they went through this process of translating their written assignments, which is of great importance to them because at the end of the school year each of them will have to sit the state Matura exam where they have to deal with this issue, i.e., adjectives.

### Procedures

The study started in 2017. One instrument was utilized to conduct this study, a translation assignment. Students were assigned to translate two paragraphs, one from English to Albanian and the other from Albanian to English. During the first month, students were given an assignment. This was done in the first week of the first month. The assignment was a short paragraph to be translated from English to Albanian. The next month, students were given once again a translation assignment, but this time they had to translate a paragraph from Albanian to English. The paragraph in English was based on the students' book New Headway the third edition. While the paragraph in Albanian, was taken from a book in Albanian. Students were allotted 45 minutes to translate the texts. Before starting with their assignments, they were only

given instruction regarding the information that needed to be included in the assignments. While translating their assignments, students were not given any help.

### Correcting students' assignments

Once students' translated assignments had been marked, they were distributed back to them so that they could re-examine their translated paragraphs and see where their adjective errors were more emphasized. Then, the researchers invited the students to participate in a small group discussion. Being aware that the students are Pre-Intermediate level of English proficiency, and taking into account that they are not proficient enough in spoken English, they were allowed to use their first language as a medium of communication and instruction during those small group discussions. Moreover, this contributed to a more relaxing atmosphere, where students were not afraid to ask for an explanation about their misconception regarding adjectives. The teacher also provided the students with an oral explanation, that is, a mini-lesson was held where the rules and examples of adjectives were presented, practiced, and discussed. Students were divided in two groups of twenty-five with the aim of establishing a working atmosphere and avoiding boredom. They were strongly recommended to carefully examine the copy of their translated paragraphs being explicitly corrected and compare those corrections with the ones they had previously made on their paragraphs.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Identification and translation of English adjectives

The number and percentage of participants that have identified English language adjectives and translated them properly is given below in Table 1.

Eng. Adjs.	Iden.	%	Translated Properly	%	Eng. Adjs.	Iden.	%	Translated Properly	%
sunny	11	22%	33	66%	big	50	100%	50	100%
warm	41	82%	50	100%	tall	48	96%	50	100%
blue	50	100%	50	100%	lucky	14	28%	50	100%
pail	37	74%	29	58%	tired	7	14%	33	66%
white	50	100%	50	100%	bored	7	14%	31	62%

new	50	100%	50	100%	active	33	66%	50	100%
shiny	07	14%	32	64%	favorite	42	84%	37	74%
closest	13	26%	22	44%	fast	35	70%	50	100%
old	50	100%	50	100%	furious	27	54%	33	66%
as old as	19	38%	18	36%	black	50	100%	50	100%
dark	37	74%	35	70%	stunning	9	18%	27	54%
large	48	96%	41	82%	brown	50	100%	50	100%
<b>Mean</b>		<b>61.47</b>			<b>Mean</b>				<b>84.10</b>

**Table 1**

In terms of identification, it is obvious that as far as attributive adjectives are concerned, students showed better performance compared to the predicative ones, even though their performance was not satisfactory to the researchers. The reason for this is likely to be the fact that some students have been equipped with the knowledge that adjectives in English always precede the noun. The greatest performance in regard to recognition was exhibited with adjectives which refer to color, age, and quality. A great performance was also showed with adjectives referring to length, *tall*; size, *large*, where forty-eight out of fifty or 96% of participants identified them accurately. English adjectives in general have been identified by 61.47% of participants. On the other hand, 38.53% of students have failed to do so. These results are an indicator that students are not aware of the importance of this part of speech. Therefore, due to the lack of the knowledge concerning adjectives, errors were expected to occur.

In translation, however, students proved to be more effective than in the identification process. This probably happened due to the fact that students were allowed to use their dictionaries, and this was evident as most of them used English-Albanian electronic dictionaries in their mobile devices. Their performance in translating these adjectives into Albanian was better than their identification for 22.63%, which means that 84.10% of students translated them properly.

This unsatisfactory result led the researchers to hold a conference. After the conference was held with the same participants, we came to understand the reason why they did not show the same accuracy with predicative ones. And the main reason for this performance was the lack of knowledge by some students who thought that English adjectives can only come before the noun and not the reverse. During the conference, students reported that being aware that the researchers would provide them with a copy of their paragraph sheet with the errors being explicitly corrected, made them feel challenged and confident about looking carefully at the

assignment, and activating the knowledge they had already acquired in order to provide the correct linguistic form.

As far as participial adjectives are concerned, most of the students did not perform well. Less than 20% of them were able to identify these adjectives. A slightly better performance was showed with the present participle adjective '*stunning*' compared to the two past participle adjectives '*tired and bored*'. Less than ten students were aware of such a type of adjectives that end in participles. It is worth mentioning here that the sentence: "*I started to feel tired and bored*" has been neglected by thirteen students, which means that they had not translated it at all, instead they just skipped it. The reason for the avoidance of this sentence according to them was the lack of knowledge that English adjectives can be formed by participles. They thought that only verbs can take participles. Therefore while trying to translate it (the sentence), the participants encountered problems because of the incongruity which was displayed in Albanian. Then, during the conference, the researcher, certainly explained and illustrated some examples to students which included participial adjectives, where they got a clearer picture about this type of adjectives.

Almost the same unsatisfactory performance was displayed with recognition of adjectives which end in -y. Adjectives that end in -y involved in the English composition, or more precisely adjectives, *sunny*, *lonely*, *lucky*, and *shiny* were identified by a small number of students. *Sunny* was recognized by 22% of students and was translated by 66% of them. The adjective *lonely* was identified by 24% of the participants, but it was translated properly by almost all of participants or 98% of them. The adjective *lucky* was identified by fourteen students and was translated in the correct form by all participants. What we had assumed came to be correct. In the conference, after we distributed students the marked tests, they were surprised when they realized that there are some adjectives that end in -y. According to the majority of them, this was the first time that they were hearing about such adjectives in English, because till then, they thought that only adverbs end in -y. Then, in the conference, the researcher explained and illustrated these adjectives by examples, and did some extra exercises related to this kind of adjectives.

It is worth emphasizing that the idea of having students attends a conference after each writing lesson is not new. Ferris (2001) has also conducted research combining error correction and post writing conferences. She shows great support of this idea. She claims that pointing out and correcting students' errors is not enough for students to store the newly acquired information in



long term memory. Furthermore, she emphasizes the need of such post writing conferences during which the teacher can teach students grammar rules, thus helping students synthesize what they have learned by going through the teachers' feedback on their written assignments and apply it in subsequent compositions.

Regarding the adjective of superlative degree in the sentence *the closest object...*, only few students managed to translate it properly, while the rest of them failed to do so. They translated it as *objekt i mbyllur*. When students were asked about the reason for translating this adjective not properly, they responded that they did not know that the adjective *close* has another meaning besides *i mbyllur*. On the other hand, twenty-three among them failed to translate it as an adjective of superlative degree. They justified this failure with the fact that they did not pay attention to it and this happened because of their lapse, and not because of the lack of knowledge since they are aware of the way how the superlative degree of English adjectives is used.

Students seemed to have encountered a lot of difficulties in identifying the appropriate adjective of equality. The only adjective of equality involved in the composition *as old as* was identified by nineteen students and translated properly by eighteen out of fifty. The others identified it as an adjective of positive degree and did not underline together with particles *as...as*. Therefore, the small number of correct answers is a signal that Albanian learners of English do encounter difficulties regarding degree of adjectives.

### Identification and translation of Albanian adjectives

The number and percentage of participants that have identified Albanian language adjectives and translated them properly is given below in Table 2.

Alb. Adjs.	Iden.	%	Translated Properly	%	Eng. Adjs.	Iden.	%	Translated Properly	%
i ri	23	46%	50	100%	të bukur	18	36%	50	100%
shumëngjyr ëshe	03	06%	25	50%	piktoresk	01	02%	17	34%
e vogël	32	64%	50	100%	madhështore	15	30%	44	88%
e larta	13	26%	37	74%	e rehatshme	11	22%	40	80%
i heshtur	07	14%	19	38%	respektues	11	22%	17	34%
i zhytur	10	20%	15	30%	magjike	09	18%	48	96%
e vetmuar	17	34%	45	90%	e errët	13	26%	35	70%

e vjetër	21	42%	50	100%	e zymtë	05	10%	22	44%
magjik	09	18%	47	94%	të plotë	21	42%	19	38%
të ngrohtë	12	24%	44	88%	i humbur	18	36%	37	74%
e ftohtë	16	32%	41	82%	të lashtë	05	10%	31	62%
i frikësuar	13	26%	25	50%	e lumtur	20	40%	48	96%
e dobët	14	28%	36	72%	mizore	07	14%	07	14%
të etur	13	26%	29	58%	të freskëta	11	22%	44	88%
<b>Mean</b>		<b>26.96</b>			<b>Mean</b>				<b>70.41</b>

**Table 2**

According to the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the subjects participating in this study experienced great difficulties when it came to identifying Albanian adjectives. It is evident from Table 2 that from the very beginning as well as throughout the whole identification process, students encountered much more difficulties in comparison to translating the same adjectives into English. Only 26.96% were successful in terms of identification.

In regard to articulated and unarticulated adjectives, as it can be seen from the findings, the participants committed multiple errors in recognizing them. In general only 26.96% of them were able to distinguish adjectives from other parts of speech. However, a slightly better performance was demonstrated with articulated adjectives compared to the unarticulated ones. This was probably because of the fact that the relationship between these Albanian adjectives and their English counterparts is a divergent relationship. This is the reason why an Albanian learner of English at this level is expected to experience considerable difficulties while translating Albanian adjectives properly into English.

However, for this poor performance of theirs, students blamed the school syllabuses with the pretext that high school syllabuses do not provide grammar of Albanian language. According to them, the syllabus focuses mainly in literature, thus the non-identification of adjectives was to be expected. Consequently, the majority of students faced difficulties regarding Albanian grammar in general and not only adjectives in particular.

Having in mind that English is the second language in Kosovo it is acceptable that students may be faced with unfamiliar or unknown words. Therefore, they were allowed to use dictionaries.

In terms of translating the paragraph from Albanian to English, the performance of students was not as satisfactory as expected. This could be due to the lack of genuine Albanian-English

dictionaries. Anyway, in the translation part they were more effective than in the identification one. Adjectives which are used quite often in everyday life were easily translated. Such adjectives are: *të reja*, *e lumtur*, *magjik*, *e vjetër*, *e vetmuar*, *magjike*, *e vogël*, *të bukur*, *i ri*. In total, 70.41% of participants managed to translate Albanian adjectives involved in the paragraph, whereas 29.59% failed in translating these adjectives.

The process of finding and choosing the correct right equivalents of English adjectives in Albanian language when students translate seems to be difficult and misleading in most cases. This happens because of the probable differences between some Albanian adjectives and their possible equivalents in English. Therefore, students should pay attention to the context of the sentence.

Taking into consideration that Albanian vocabulary compared to that of English is poor students faced difficulties while translating these adjectives adequately, since it is known that a word of Albanian language may have up to ten English equivalents, which vary depending on the context. The adjective '*i ri*' has not been translated adequately by 40% of participants, because they did not focus in the context of the sentence. Thus, thirty participants out of fifty had translated it as '*new*' and the rest or 60% of them had translated it exactly in the proper form, i.e., they had translated it as '*young*'. This occurred because they did not know how to make the distinction between these two different adjectives in English, which have only one equivalent in Albanian, '*i ri*'. The latter refers to age and quality, while the English adjective '*new*' refers to the quality, and '*young*' to age. It also resulted in translating out of context, which as a result lost the meaning of the sentence. The same happened with the adjective '*të etur*' which was translated out of context by thirty-eight participants. They translated it as '*thirsty*' instead of '*eager*'. These two adjectives and others that have more than one meaning in English, when being misused, may cause serious misunderstanding on the native listeners and readers of the second language. Consequently, the process of finding and choosing the correct equivalents of English adjectives into Albanian when they translate adjectives which have more than one meaning is difficult and misleading in most cases. This happens because the students try to translate Albanian adjectives into English depending on their experience and influence of the mother tongue itself. In other words, students find the equivalents of those English adjectives in Albanian and try to translate them as they frequently appear in the communication of the Albanian native speaker.

The findings of the study showed also that the translation of adjectives ordering poses some serious problems for translators and learners of English. Besides, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the modification systems in English and Albanian, and there is no one-to-one correspondence between adjective ordering in English and Albanian. In English, this ordering is governed by some syntactic and semantic rules, whereas in Albanian, it is governed by speaker's intuition, emphasis shift, and language usage. This results in inadequate and inaccurate renderings. The study showed that there are numerous differences regarding adjective sequencing. As a result, errors were expected to be caused because of the difficulty in constructing English adjectives and the negative interference between Albanian and English.

## CONCLUSION

### Introduction

The study hypothesizes that the students of vocational upper secondary school "Jonuz Zejnullahu" in Viti do not have the mastery of the rules which govern the use of adjective in English and Albanian, and that is why they encounter difficulties in their performance.

Moreover, it is clear that adjectives in particular, are not totally similar in two languages. Because of the discrepancy that exists between English and Albanian adjectives regarding their position and their usage, there is a likelihood of committing errors while using and translating them from English into Albanian and vice versa. In the same line, in order to find the probable similarities and differences made by Albanian learners of English, the present research was provided a contrastive study of the main points of similarities and differences between Albanian and English adjectives. In many cases, the points of difference between two languages constituted obstacles to the majority of students.

According to the results of the present study, it is obvious that students experience much more difficulties when it comes to identifying Albanian adjectives. The students argue that they face more shortcomings in respect of Albanian grammar than in the English language. This even proved to be correct through their assignments. Therefore, due to the lack of knowledge regarding adjectives and due to the interference of their mother tongue into the second language, students used and translated them erroneously in English.

### Limitations of the study

The research paper included only a small number of participants. Namely, fifty students participated in it. The study was carried out only in the context of the vocational upper secondary school “Jonuz Zejnullahu” in Viti. Consequently, the sample was small and not representative of all tertiary schools in Republic of Kosovo. If the study is to yield more generalizable and reliable findings, it needs to involve a greater number of students from different tertiary schools.

### Suggestions for further research

First of all, the research should be carried out over a longer period of time. Secondly, more students should be included in the study, and more tests should be given to them regarding adjectives. In an attempt to obtain more reliable results, it would be advisable for future researchers to assign students to write compositions in the same genre and on the same topic.

### Bibliography

- Agalliu. A et al. (2002), Gramatika e Gjuhës Shqipe, botimi i Akademisë së Shkencave, volume 1, Tiranë.
- Andrew Chesterman, (1998), Contrastive Functional Analysis, John Benjamins Publishing Company, University of Helsinki, Amsterdam.
- Dhrimo et al, (1984), Gramatika e Gjuhës së Sotme Shqipe (Morfologjia), botimi i dytë, Prishtinë.
- Ferris, D. and Roberts, B. (2001). Error feedback in L2 writing classes: How explicit does it need to be?, Journal of Second Language Writing, 10, 161-184.
- Gërmizaj, Sh. (2004), A Comprehensive Handbook of English Grammar, Prishtina.
- Gërmizaj, Sh. (2005), Translation Theory in the Classroom, Prishtinë.
- Kabashi, J. (2000), English Grammar - Morphology, University of Prishtina, Prishtinë.
- Lado Robert, (1957), Linguistics across Cultures, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.