Difficulties in Learning and Identifying Prepositions Expressing Time Relations in Albanian and English Language

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ABSTRACT

In a traditional way of expressing the meaning of prepositions is that they serve as connecting words placed before a noun or a pronoun. This definition stands quite well in Albanian as well. As such, prepositions are frequently used in English as well as in Albanian. Indeed prepositions, from their beginning, were affected by factors that caused corresponding changes in the frequency of use.

This research aims to show the basis of differences and similarities for prepositions, particularly those of time. By comparing prepositions and prepositional phrases in Albanian and English, we will try to shed light on similarities and differences. With the intent to illuminate linguistic features in both languages, we will try to analyze and reveal their structure. In spite of the important changes that result from the progression, their grammar systems still maintain much regular skin texture as well as differences. In our case, Albanian, in comparison to English, has cases that English does not have (besides genitive, of course). Even though enriched with cases, the subsistence of new elements such as prepositions became an essential need, thus empowering the case system and also giving additional potential in expressing diverse functions.

Later on, prepositions also appeared in an "adnominal" function (Xhuvani, 1961), and with time it progressed in growth. This was because the noun suffixes were not enough to show different rational relationships, such as a person’s location, his place of origin, time, etc.

Keywords: prepositions, time, adverbial, nominal, para, Brenda.

Introduction

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Languages are alive. They develop, change, and evolve. New words can be created, thus enriching languages and enabling them to express different notions. A language is a tool whereby people exchange opinions and come to agreements. In a traditional way of expressing the meaning of prepositions is that they serve as connecting words placed before a noun or a pronoun. This definition stands quite well in Albanian as well. As such, prepositions are frequently used in English as well as in Albanian. Indeed prepositions, from their beginning, were affected by factors that caused corresponding changes in the frequency of use. The study of language as a form of communication includes the structure and rules under which words interrelate. Scholars are facing the need for research on difficult issues and comparisons at the global and local level.

The acquisition of the English language prepositions is not an easy task for foreigners who study English as a second or foreign language. This paper specifies that mastering English language prepositions is one of the prerequisites to become skilled at English language fluency and accuracy. Firstly, this research paper discusses ways prepositions are used in English.
It also analyses the underlying system that governs prepositions and how this system might be represented to English language learners by analyzing the current teaching pedagogy and suggests a possible adequate alternative. Studying prepositions is not an easy task for ESL or foreign students due to their numerous alternatives and their polysemic nature of their meanings. This is because prepositions pose a big challenge to English language learners. It is highly important that teachers develop effective instructional methods. In such cases, English language instructors should take effective and serious steps to apply sophisticated methodologies to easily overcome them and provide real understanding among heterogeneous language learning groups.

The theme of our study is prepositions of time. We aim to deepen the knowledge of distinct prepositions and their use. Several comparative studies of this nature exist regarding the English and Albanian languages; we have tried to update the studies to facilitate students’ acquisition of English as a foreign language and the work of translators between English and Albanian.

This research aims to show the basis of differences and similarities for prepositions, particularly those of time. By comparing prepositions and prepositional phrases in Albanian and English, we will try to shed light on similarities and differences. With the intent to illuminate linguistic features in both languages, we will try to analyze and reveal their structure.

In the ongoing efforts to study this issue, it has been made clear that languages not only correlate but often also dissociate in their perspective and under different conditions. This research provides a modest contribution to the observation of similarities and differences between the English and Albanian language in their use of prepositions. Given the complexity of the topic, we admit it is not easy to say all there is to say about English prepositions and compare them to Albanian; as Harry Blamires said, "It would not be an exaggeration to say that there is an epidemic of prepositional anarchy around" (Thatcher, 2008, p.1). During our research on the use of prepositional phrases with particular emphasis on prepositions of time, we realized that these two languages differ as well as they comply in their grammatical structure. This research specifies the use and translation of certain prepositions in English and Albanian and their percentage in use, and how they are translated.

In order to clarify the research, we studied the use of prepositions, particularly prepositional phrases with emphasis on prepositions of time, and compared them with prepositions in the Albanian language from selected novels in English and Albanian. The study will be based on a corpus of four novels, two by English authors and two by an Albanian writer. The first two novels translated from English into Albanian include:
- "White Fang" by Jack London, translated by Mikaela Minga as "Dhëmbi i -Bardhë" (hereinafter as W. F. and Dh. B.); and
- "Dubliners" by James Joyce, translated into Albanian by Idhir Azizi as "Dublinasit" (hereinafter used as D. and Dubl.).

The two Albanian novels are by the well-known Albanian writer Ismail Kadare:
- "Darka e gabuar" translated by John Hodgson as "The fall of the stone city" (hereinafter used as D.G. and FSC); and
- "Kronikë në gur" translated into English by Arshi Pipa as "Chronicle in Stone" (hereinafter used as K.G. and C.S.).

The decision to base the research on the above-mentioned novels derived from the fact that both Jack London and James Joyce stand in high regard in both languages, and as such, have been translated into the targeted language.

The same stands for the Albanian corpus, as Ismail Kadare is one of the most translated Albanian writers, especially into French and English. Moreover, the two novels were translated directly from Albanian into English. There were other novels translated into English, but they were first translated from Albanian into French and then from French into English. In the above-stated novels, prepositions of time will be treated according to their grammatical function, namely to semantic nuances brought from one language to another, from English into Albanian and vice versa. As semantics is the study of meaning communicated through language, we will be looking into the meaning of prepositions in sentences. According to Saeed (2008), "in most current linguistic theories, semantic analysis is as an important part of the linguist’s job as phonological analysis. Theories differ on details of the relationship between semantics and other levels of analysis like syntax and morphology, but all seem to agree that linguistic analysis is incomplete without semantics" (p.7).

The Albanian language as an Indo-European language has a relationship with all languages of the Indo-European group; in terms of grammatical systems, the Albanian language during its ongoing evolution has followed a similar path to those of other Indo-European languages (Demiraj, 1988). In spite of the important changes that result from the progression, their grammar systems still maintain much regular skin texture as well as differences. In our case, Albanian, in comparison to English, has cases that English doesn’t have (besides genitive, of course). Even though enriched with cases, the subsistence of new elements such as prepositions became an essential need, thus empowering the case system and also giving additional potential in expressing diverse functions. According to Littlefield (2005), "statistically, in a corpus of one million English words, one in ten words is a
preposition. Yet, despite their frequent occurrence, there is no generally accepted account of this category and its characteristics. At best, prepositions represent a problematic, contradictory category for theories of syntax.” (pp.1-10)

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Although enriched with cases, the presence of new elements such as prepositions became a necessity, empowering the case system and giving additional possibilities to express different functions in the sentence clearly.

If we look at the origin of Albanian prepositions, in most cases, they were that of adverbial meaning and use as well (afër, Brenda, gjatë). Later on, prepositions also appeared in an “adnominal” function (Xhuvani, 1961), and with time it progressed in growth. This was because the noun suffixes were not enough to show different rational relationships, such as a person’s location, his place of origin, time, etc.

So far, the issue of prepositions has been often discussed. It is important to note that Sami Frashëri was the first author who translated the term praeposition or prosthesis into the Albanian term parje or përparje, which later at the Education Congress in Lushnjë in 1920, was replaced by the current oneparafjalë (Samara, 1999).

Later on, other authors have addressed prepositions in their various aspects. Here are some of their definitions:

In Gramatika Historike e Gjuhës Shqipe (Demiraj, 1988), the author discussed the formation of prepositions through the history of the language and defined them: the term prepositions used to mark those useful words that are regularly placed before a noun or a pronoun in a particular case, to express their syntactic relation with another part expressed by a noun (p. 624). The class of prepositions, during the historical evolution of Indo-European languages, has been constantly enriched by adverbs and some conjunctions, by set forms of some nouns and verbs, and by complex prepositions (lokucione). With time, all these formations have gradually lost their initial grammatical features and acquired those of prepositions.

Another grammarian who discussed prepositions and gave a strong basis for further discussions was Xhuvani (1964), who treated prepositions as an invariable part of speech that shows different relations between two entities in a sentence (p. 9).

As such, prepositions have interested other Albanian grammarians. The question of whether they should be called words or not depends on their meaning. According to Samara (1999), prepositions are words too, because they contain all the features of a word. every preposition is considered whole, which is reflected in both a categorical-lexical meaning (prepositions form a large class of words distinguished from other classes of speech) and individual lexical meaning (p. 17).

Based on the definitions for prepositions in both languages, English and Albanian, they are not considered a closed class. It appears that prepositions are words that have been expanded and enriched, thus creating even complex prepositions. We need to mention the influence of foreign languages that have played a role in the enrichment of the Albanian language with new elements.

Xhuvani (1964), after distinguishing the meanings between simple prepositions (në, mbi, për) and prepositions of adverb origin (pranë, afër, sipër), said that the lexical value of prepositions is assigned by the inner meaning of words in a given context where they are located; simple prepositions (në, mbi, për) don’t have lexical meaning, and other prepositions (formed from other classes such as from adverbs -pranë, afër, sipër) do have lexical meaning.

Not only does the preposition express syntactic relations, but also the whole prepositional phrase expresses all nuances of meaning in English and Albanian. In Albanian, besides prepositions, there is also the presence of case forms that can express certain syntactic relations even without a preposition. English lacks case forms besides the genitive. As stated in previous paragraphs, prepositions express a relationship between two entities, between a verb or verb phrase and a noun or noun phrase, or other phrases. Although a preposition is a small word, its function is very important.

As with the English language, in Albanian there is a strong connection between adverbs and prepositions because some adverbs are used as prepositions, such as: afër, anembanë, anës, brenda, drejt, gjatë, jashët, këtej, krahas, larg, matanë, ndanë, nga, para, pas, përballë, përibri, përkrash, përms, përpara, përposh, përeth, përsipër, poshtë, pranë, prapa, reth, rotull, sipër, tatëpjetë, tutje, vec (Gramatika e Gjuhës Shqipe, 2002, p.384).

Adverbial prepositions are connected semantically with adverbs, and in semantic structure, they carry many semantic components corresponding with adverbs. Once they became prepositions, they lost their initial meaning or some semantic components, but in some cases, their meanings are consistent with prepositions (Samara, 1999).
In the following, let's look at some of the prepositions of adverbial origin (para, gjatë, Brenda) that express only time relations.

During the research, we found a number of the above-mentioned prepositions used with the place and time relations. Still, most of the uses were for a time, especially the prepositions para and përpara that were used 15 times in FSC. (para pushtrim, para kohe, para ca vitesh, para masditës, pas mesditës). They appeared translated with the preposition before and an adverb too soon (para kohe). In regard to the preposition përpara, it was used as an adverb (…shënësit që kishët përpara… që mbante përpara, translated as in front of), and we found it used as a conjunction (përpara se të flistë).

The same phenomenon is found in C.S. by the same Albanian writer, where the preposition para showed mainly time relations (para dy javësh, para ca kohë, para shumë kohe, para katërëqind vjetësh etc.). In contrast, the preposition përpara was used as a preposition of place (përpara reklamave, përpara saj), time (përpara kohës, përpara mbretërises) and several times as conjunction (përpara se). Other prepositions used as adverbs and prepositions are Brenda and gjatë, and they are very much alike. The preposition Brenda has the same explanation in both Albanian dictionaries (1981, p. 174, 604; 2006, p. 107, 348); when someone or something is performed in due time or during the time that marks the noun; between borders of this time. Brenda dites (javës, vitit). Brenda prillit (shhtorrit…). Brenda orarit. Brenda orëve të mësimit (të punës). Brenda një kohë të shkurttër. Brenda tre muajsh (pesë minutaq).

A preposition's time relation is emphasized more than its place relation. Prepositions showing a place relation are similar to prepositions of noun origin such as buzë, anës: gjatë rrugës, gjatë lumit, gjatë bregut, gjatë kufrinit, etc. that can be replaced with prepositions buzë and anës. Although very similar in meaning, we found during our analysis of both above-mentioned novels that gjatë is used more often than Brenda. For example, in C.S., gjatë was found twenty-two times showing time relation and four times used as an adverb of time (…vazhdoi gjatë (2x) and …foli gjatë (2x)). Two times it appeared translated with the preposition for (for a long time), once with dragged on and once with endlessly.

In regard to time relations gjatë was used 22 times, 8 times translated with the preposition during (gjatë filmit, gjatë kohës, gjatë udhëtimit, etc.); two times with before (gjatë shumë vjetëve, gjatë natës); three times with in (gjatë verës, gjatë dimrit, gjatë katër ditëve; five times it was not translated at all (gjatë gjithë javës, gjatë evakuimeve, gjatë natës, gjatë rènies, gjatë kohës); until (gjatë gjithë ecjës; from morning to evening (gjatë gjithë asaj kohën); as he spoke (gjatë fjalimit; at (gjatë natës).

In the second novel, FSC, the preposition gjatë was found only 7 times; three times translated with during (gjatë ndërhyrjeve, gjatë darkës, gjatë hetimit); two times it lacked translation (gjatë, ndërhyriqës, gjatë gjithë natës; one with in (gjatë darkës) and one with while (gjatë kohës). As an adverb, it was used only two times: one lacked translation, and the other translated with the preposition for.

The preposition brenda was used two times, showing time relation (brenda natës-during the night) and (brenda katër ditëve - in just four days) and two times as adverbs of place (atje brenda, u futën brendad). In FSC, brenda showed time relations two times (brenda një dite…p.77-on the same day…brenda javës…p.106-…for the second time that week).

From the analysis it appears that, although they have similar meanings in Albanian, the prepositions appear translated mainly with the same prepositions into English (during and in). According to the analysis, the preposition gjatë is used more often in Albanian and has a more flexible meaning than the preposition brenda, which has a more controlled meaning.

In all cases, the preposition brenda can be replaced with the preposition gjatë – it can share the meaning but not the use of it (brenda natës, brenda katër ditëve, whereas not in all cases can the preposition gjatë be replaced with the preposition brenda (gjatë udhëtimit, gjatë filmit, gjatë evakuimit). The preposition brenda can have the same meaning as gjatë but not the practicability in use. Although similar in terms of time, the preposition brenda is used less than the preposition gjatë, and is becoming accepted only as a preposition of place rather than of time.

This feature is not the same as their correspondents in English, namely the prepositions during and in, because we know that the preposition in is one of the most frequently used prepositions in English. In the two analyzed English novels: In W. F., we found that out of 1214 times, only 68 instances of in showed time relations, and the preposition during was used only 11 times. In D, out of 1056 times, the preposition in showed time relations only 29 times, and the preposition during was used only 8 times for time relations.

Another synonymous pair of prepositions with the adverbial origin is that of afër and pranë. These two prepositions have similar meanings that show more place relations than time relations. On the other hand, we may encounter the meaning of time more often with the preposition afër, as Samara (1999, p. 66) said that the meaning of time is "outdated" with pranë. We support his opinion as the same situation was found in the analyzed novels. We found the preposition afër showing time relations in two sentences such as: …afër drekës... C.S. p. 117; (around lunch) and …afër drekës... C.S. p.146; (by noon), and none expressed with the preposition pranë.
As regards nominative prepositions in Albanian, they are called nominative prepositions because they are formed from nouns, and, as happened with other formations, the same occurred with nouns. Once they became prepositions, they lost their lexical meaning to a certain extent and got a functional one. When they become prepositions, they carried a function as simple prepositions do. However, again, apart from them, their lexical meaning is not totally lost because they still retain a certain degree of their lexical load. This shows that they are new elements in the category of prepositions and that they are in the process of grammaticalization, during which, with time, they may lose their lexical meaning and become totally functional words.

These prepositions express place relation except the prepositions midis and reth, which can show time relations as well. In both Albanian dictionaries (1981, p. 1135; 2006, p. 627), from the five meanings of preposition midis, one shows time relations between two borders, two dates, amid a period (Midis së hënën dhe se premtës. Midis orës dy dhe tre e gjysmë. Midis verës dhe vjestës. Midis shekujsh). The preposition midis is similar to në mes when they show slightly longer periods (midis dimrit; në mes të dimrit). Although they express meanings in time, these prepositions were not shown to be frequent in the analysis. There were only two times that midis were used in FSC. (…midis darkës p. 22, -during dinner; midis mëngjesit…p. 59, without a translation). If we refer to the above statement that midis are similar to në mes, then it could have been translated in the morning… as it was translated…në mes të ditës…p. 8. - in broad daylight..p.7). They have similar meanings even when they showplace relations:

... rrinte midis sheshit…(K.G. p. 133) (...in the main square (C. S.p.168)). Ishim në mes të sheshit. (K.G. p. 137) (... were in the middle of the square. (C. S. p. 172)).

From the 79 times preposition midis is used in C.S., preposition among carries the burden of translation into English twenty-two times (midis tyre p. 22 - among them; midis drurëve, p. 166 - among the trees; midis kujpë, p. 189 - among the wailing); through – 12 times (midis sakive, p. 48- through the flowerpots; midis njerëza, p. 12 - through the crowds; midis thirjeve, p. 178 - through the roars); in - 10 times (midis gërmadhove, p. 82 - in the rubble; midis fushës, p. 109 - in the middle of the field; midis turmë, p. 152 - in the crowd); between - 6 times (midis malit, p. 13 - between mountain; midis trokellimave, p. 74 - between blows; midis patrulhave të ballistëve, p. 196 - between Ballist patrols). Other prepositions used once are on, across, alongside, amid, up, within, and we found a lack of translation 19 times. Although in the written language, it is not used so often, in daily communication practices, we notice the frequent use of this proposition in terms of time.

The table below shows the use in percentages of the preposition midis and its equivalent in English.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Kronikë në gur (Chronicle in stone)</th>
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<tr>
<td>The usage of preposition midis</td>
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<td>---------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>midis - among</td>
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<td>midis - through</td>
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<td>midis - in</td>
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<tr>
<td>midis - between</td>
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<tr>
<td>midis - translation missing</td>
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<tr>
<td>midis - on</td>
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<tr>
<td>midis - across, alongside, amid, up, within</td>
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We also found that the same prepositional phrase in Albanian is translated with a different preposition, and we are talking about the prepositional phrase midis turmës used in K. G., for example:

midis turmës

1.…. xha Avdua u gjend midis turmës…(K. G. p. 125) (Avdo found himself in the midst of the crowd… (C. S. p.156)).
2.……tha Luka që u gjend midis turmës ... (K. G. p. 125) (…asked Luka from the middle of the crowd… (C. S. p.156)).
3.….edhe po ti shikonin rastësisht midis turmës… (K. G. p. 152) (…we ever encountered them in the crowd… (C. S. p.19)).
4. Karabinierët vërtiteshin *midis turmës*... (K. G. p. 177) (Italian gendarmes came and went through the crowd... (C. S. p. 227)).

From the above examples, we see that the verbs in Albanian *ujgend* and *shikonin* have conditioned the translation of the prepositional phrase *midis turmës* in the first three examples, these two verbs show a static action, while the fourth verb *vërtiteshin* shows moving up and down and is rightly translated with the preposition *through*.

Another nominative preposition *buzë*, besides its place meaning, also carries the meaning of time and shows the beginning of a time, of action, and the start of something (*Në buzë të dimrit, vjeshtës. Në buzë të mbërmijës, agimi*, all these meanings are in use today, but we have not found any example in our novels with this preposition showing relations of time, only once when it was used as a compound noun (*…një buzëmbërëjmë*...D.G. p. 57).

**Conclusion**

The Albanian language as an Indo-European language has to do with all the languages of the Indo-European group; in terms of the grammatical system, the Albanian language has followed a similar path to that of other Indo-European languages. Despite the significant changes that result from evolution, they retain many common features as well as differences in their grammar system. As such pose problems not only to lower levels of learners but also to more advanced ones. In relation to this, beginners who start learning English face the same problem.

Knowing that prepositions take their meanings from phrases in which they are used, their memorization is conditional on the situations in which they are used with drawings and other demonstrations and activities, such as filling the gaps in exercise books.

Based on the analysis of similarities and differences between these two languages, one good way of learning prepositions of time is to focus on the PP as well, since sometimes there is a shade of meaning between them, and some of them cannot be visually shown (*towards dawn*).

**References**


