ENGLISH AND ALBANIAN PREPOSITIONS OF TIME AND PLACE: A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Fatime ABDULLAHI[1]

[1*] *English Language Teacher, Primary School "Rexhep Voka", Shipkovicë, Tetovo, Republic of North Macedonia*
[*]*Corresponding author e-mail: fatime.abdullahi8@gmail.com*

Abstract

This study examines selected English prepositions of time and place and their equivalents in Albanian language through a qualitative and contrastive analysis. It is focused on the three commonly used English forms *in*,*on* and *at,* whose meanings are distributed across several Albanian constructions, including their prepositional phrases and expressions without an overt preposition. A purposively constructed set of twenty-four illustrative expression pairs was classified according to their temporal and spatial function and compared for semantic interpretation, syntactic realization, and degree of formal correspondence. The analysis identifies systematic differences between the two languages: English distinguishes temporal units through conventional choices such as *in November*, *on Monday*, and *at noon,* whereas Albanian commonly uses *në* for some of these meanings and a bare temporal expression for others. Spatial examples likewise demonstrates that English *at* can encode a location as a reference point while Albanian frequently uses *në* and that English *on* may correspond to *mbi* when physical support is salient. These patterns do not provide evidence of how frequently learners make such mistakes. Rather, they reveal differences between the two languages that may require greater attention in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Based on these findings, the paper proposes a short sequence of classroom activities involving noticing, guided comparison, and contextualized language use. The study offers a small-scale analytical framework that connects linguistic comparison with practical classroom instruction.

Keywords: contrastive analysis, English prepositions, Albanian, cross-linguistic influence, EFL pedagogy

1. Introduction

A learner may know the meanings of *in, on* and *at* and still hesitate over a sentence as ordinary as "The meeting is on Monday." The difficulty is not simply remembering three words. English makes distinctions between kinds of time reference and ways of viewing a location that do not always correspond neatly to Albanian expressions. Translating a phrase word by word can therefore produce a form that seems reasonable but is not idiomatic in English.

A comparison of the two languages is useful here, provided its claims are kept within limits. Lado (1957) placed systematic comparison at the centre of language teaching, while later work on cross-linguistic influence has shown that transfer is neither automatic nor uniform (Odlin, 1989). A difference between English and Albanian may be worth teaching explicitly; it is not, by itself, evidence that students make a particular mistake.

This paper considers a small, deliberately selected set of time and place expressions built around English *in*, *on* and *at.* It asks two questions: how are comparable meanings expressed in Albanian, and which contrasts are worth drawing to learners' attention? The aim is descriptive and pedagogical rather than experimental. No claim is made about how frequently particular errors occur among Albanian-speaking learners.

2. Theoretical framework

The use of prepositions is an important aspect of English grammar, particularly when the language is learned by speakers whose first language follows different grammatical patterns. Although English and Albanian both use prepositions to express relationships of time and place, these relationships are not always expressed in the same way. Understanding such differences requires attention not only to individual prepositions but also to the grammatical constructions in which they occur.

2.1. Contrastive analysis and cross linguistic influence

Contrastive analysis examines similarities and differences between languages at different levels of linguistic structure. In the context of foreign language learning, it can help identify grammatical distinctions that may deserve attention during instruction.

Lado (1957) argued that differences between a learner's first language and the target language may contribute to difficulties in language learning. Later research, however, demonstrated that linguistic differences alone cannot reliably predict learner errors. Odlin (1989) describes language transfer as a complex phenomenon involving similarities and differences between the target language and languages previously acquired.

For this reason, the present study does not assume that Albanian-speaking learners necessarily make errors when using English prepositions. Instead, contrastive analysis is used to identify differences in how temporal and spatial relationships are expressed in the two languages. These differences may provide useful starting points for classroom explanation and further empirical investigation.

2.1 Prepositions as semantic and constructional choices

Prepositions are best considered within phrases rather than as isolated dictionary entries. English in commonly occurs with months and enclosed locations, on with days and certain surfaces, and at with clock times and points of reference. These are useful tendencies, not rules without exceptions (Quirk et al., 1985; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Albanian may express the same relation with a different preposition or with a construction that has no overt preposition at all.

Consider on Monday and të hënën. Both identify a day, but the English phrase has an overt preposition while the Albanian expression does not. By contrast, in November and në nëntor are structurally closer. Such comparisons are more revealing than presenting on as the translation of a single Albanian word.

3. Methodology

The study used a qualitative, descriptive contrastive approach. The material consists of 24 illustrative expression pairs: 12 referring to time and 12 to place. They were selected to show a range of familiar uses of *in*, *on* and *at*, rather than drawn as a representative sample from a learner corpus. The unit of comparison is the expression and its intended meaning, not the preposition in isolation.

The expression pairs were grouped into two categories, time and place, and analyzed according to the meanings they convey, their Albanian equivalents, and whether an overt preposition is used. In cases where the Albanian translation varies depending on context, this variation was taken into account. The analysis drew on the grammatical descriptions of English provided by Quirk et al. (1985) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002), together with the Albanian grammar reference included in the bibliography.

The study did not involve the collection of learner writing or any classroom intervention. Consequently, the findings are limited to the selected examples and do not provide evidence of the frequency of learner errors, learners' proficiency levels, or the effectiveness of the suggested teaching activities.

4. Results and discussion

The selected examples reveal that equivalent temporal and spatial meanings are not always expressed through the same grammatical forms in English and Albanian. While some

expressions show close structural correspondence, others differ in their choice of preposition or in the construction used. These variations are examined below to highlight the relationship between grammatical form, meaning, and context, as well as their potential relevance to English language teaching.

4.1. Temporal expressions

Table 1 sets out 12 temporal expressions, covering months, years, seasons, parts of the day, weekdays, dates and clock times. The point of comparison is not only which English preposition appears, but also how the corresponding time reference is normally phrased in Albanian.

Table 1. Illustrative English–Albanian temporal correspondences

English	Albanian equivalent	Observation
in November	në nëntor	Overt preposition in both
in 2026	në vitin 2026	Overt preposition in both
in winter	në dimër	Overt preposition in both
in the morning	në mëngjes	Overt preposition in both
on Monday	të hënën	No overt Albanian preposition
on Friday	të premten	No overt Albanian preposition
on 18 November	më 18 nëntor	Different overt marker
on my birthday	në ditëlindjen time	Different overt preposition
at noon	në mesditë	Different overt preposition
at midnight	në mesnatë	Different overt preposition
at eight o'clock	në orën tetë	Different overt preposition
at night	natën	No overt Albanian preposition

Several English expressions use different prepositions where Albanian uses *në* or a construction without an overt preposition. The contrast between *in November* / *në nëntor* and *on Monday* / *të hënën* is particularly useful in teaching, a learner who relies on direct translation receives little guidance about the English choice in the second pair.

It would be misleading to conclude that Albanian-speaking learners necessarily confuse these forms. What the examples show is a gap between the distribution of English prepositions and the available Albanian equivalents. A teacher can make this gap explicit by asking learners to sort expressions by month, day, date and clock time before completing sentences of their own.

4.2. Spatial expressions

Table 2 turns to place. Its 12 pairs cover containment, support or contact with a surface, and location understood as a point of reference. These distinctions are useful, but the meaning of a place expression can shift with the situation being described.

Table 2. Illustrative English–Albanian spatial correspondences

English	Albanian equivalent	Observation
in the room	në dhomë	Location within a bounded space
in the box	në kuti	Containment
in the garden	në kopsht	Area construed as space

in the city	në qytet	Location within a geographical area
on the table	mbi tavolinë	Surface support, different form
on the wall	në mur	Attachment, different form
on the floor	në dysheme	Surface location, different form
on the roof	mbi çati	Surface location, different form
at the station	në stacion	Location as reference point
at the door	te dera	Proximity/reference point
at the entrance	te hyrja	Location as reference point
at school	në shkollë	Institutional location

Some correspondences are close: *in the room* / *në dhomë* refers to being inside a bounded space. Others require more care. On the table is naturally rendered *mbi tavolinë,* whereas on the wall may be *në mur* when an object is attached to it. It would be misleading to assign English on a single Albanian equivalent across all spatial contexts.
At is similarly dependent on how the speaker presents the location. *At the door* identifies a point or vicinity, whereas *in the room* places someone within an interior. *Te dera* may work for the first expression, but context remains essential. The classroom question should therefore be "What relation is being expressed here?" rather than "Which Albanian word means at?"

4.3. Cross-domain synthesis

Taken together, the pairs show that formal similarity varies across expressions. English temporal choices are partly conventional, while spatial choices depend strongly on how the location is conceptualised. The small set is not exhaustive, but it gives a manageable basis for discussing why bilingual word lists alone are insufficient.
For teaching purposes, the most useful unit is the complete phrase in a meaningful sentence. Comparison can help students notice a difference and contextual practice is needed before they can make the choice independently.

5. Pedagogical implications for EFL teaching

The contrastive observations can be translated into a brief classroom activity. Students first underline time and place expressions in six short sentences. They then match the expressions to Albanian equivalents and discuss which ones contain an overt preposition in each language. The teacher draws attention to the pattern without treating it as a rule that covers every case.
One possible 20-minute sequence allocates five minutes to noticing, five to bilingual sorting, seven to sentence completion with reasons for each choice, and three to an exit ticket. The exit ticket could ask students to explain the difference between *on Monday* and *in November*, or between *in the room* and *at the door*.
Students can write four sentences about their weekly routines and four describing familiar places. In pairs, they identify the prepositions and explain why each is appropriate. This invites students to move from recognising a pattern to using it in context.
Teachers should avoid teaching simplified mnemonics as absolute rules. In particular, English preposition choice can depend on idiomatic usage, dialect, and the construal of a location. A brief note about exceptions and alternative expressions is more accurate than an inflexible mapping such as "in = në, on = mbi, at = te."

4. Conclusions

This paper compared 24 selected English–Albanian expressions involving *in, on* and *at.* The examples show that comparable temporal and spatial meanings do not always have matching prepositional structures. In particular, some English time expressions correspond to Albanian To make one last effort to convince the reader forms without an overt preposition, and the Albanian equivalent of a spatial expression may vary with the relation intended. The contribution is deliberately limited: a set of explicit comparisons and a practical way to bring them into an EFL lesson. The examples were selected for illustration, not sampled from learner production, and some translations require fuller contexts. A next step would be to examine actual student writing and test whether focused contrastive instruction helps learners make more accurate choices.

References

[1]. Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë. (2002). Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe II: Sintaksa. Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë.
[2]. Beci, B. (1997). Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe: Për mësuesit e gjuhës shqipe. Tiranë.
[3]. Demiraj, Sh. (2004). Gjuhësi ballkanike. Tiranë: Fokus.
[4]. Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). The Cambridge grammar of the English language. Cambridge University Press.
[5]. Lado, R. (1957). Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers. University of Michigan Press
[6]. Odlin, T. (1989). Language transfer: Cross-linguistic influence in language learning. Cambridge University Press.
[7]. Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). A comprehensive grammar of the English language. Longman.
[8]. Schmidt, R. W. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. Applied Linguistics, 11(2), 129–158. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/11.2.129