

# **Syntactic Similarities and Differences between Albanian and English**

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to address some similarities and differences in English and Albanian syntax, as the two languages typologically belong to the same parent language, the Indo-European one, but of course each of them has its own special features.

One of the most conspicuous features we will analyse is the word order in the sentence. It should be noted that the word order in Albanian sentences is more flexible than in English, since Albanian is a language with a highly developed flexion. For example, in indicative sentences in Albanian, apart from the Subject + Verb order, under certain conditions the Verb + Subject order can also be found, which does not occur in English.

Furthermore, we will concentrate on the distribution of adjectives in noun phrases. A significant difference can be noticed in the order of the noun and adjectives in both these languages.

In the paper will also be analysed some of the similarities and differences in the morphosyntax

of various types of subordinate clauses in English and Albanian, as well as problems related to them. Similarities, but more specifically the differences, should be taken into consideration especially during the process of translation from one language to another.

## **Introduction**

In general terms, this paper is concerned with different aspects of morphosyntax seen from the point of view of two languages; English and Albanian. Grammar is traditionally divided into two different but inter-related areas of study: morphology and syntax. However, now, these two areas are often combined into one unity called morphosyntax. According to Crystal (1980: 234) *morphosyntax* is a term in linguistics used to refer to grammatical categories or properties for whose definition criteria of morphology and syntax both apply, as in describing the characteristics of words.

Albanian language, just like English, is part of Indo-European language family; but it has a special place in it. The Indo-European character of the language was first recognized in 1854 by the German linguist Franz Bopp in his *Über das Albanesische in seinen verwandtschaftlichen Beziehungen*.

According to the Albanian linguist E. Çabej (1982, p. 35), Albanian language is a sister, not a descendant of the Indo-European family. Although both languages belong to the Indo-European family, in addition to common features in the phonetic, semantic and grammatical system, they naturally have differences from one another.

In this paper we will try to point out some of main similarities and differences of these two languages in the syntactic level, which should be considered not only during the translation from one of these languages to the other, but also in a better acquisition of either Albanian or English.

### **The word order**

By analyzing the syntactic structure of the sentence and the word order in these two languages we noticed that: The sentence in Albanian usually consists of a noun group and a verb group. The noun group may contain only the subject or the subject and its modifiers. The same could be said about the verb group which may consist of the predicate only, or the predicate and noun or prepositional groups that serve as its complements. As a rule, the noun group (the subject) comes directly in front of the verb group (predicate) when it expresses something known to the speaker or listener (see more in Gramatika e Gjuhës Shqipe II, Malaka, Tiranë, p. 413-420), for example:

- 1 *Qyteti kishte rënë në qetësi. Në qetësi kishte rënë qyteti. Kishte rënë qyteti në qetësi. Kishte rënë në qetësi qyteti.*
- 2 *The city had fallen in silence. \*In silence had fallen the city. \* Had fallen the city in silence. \* Had fallen in silence the city.*

Owing to the fact that English language does not have a developed flexion system, the function of a word in a sentence is

not signalled by inflectional ending (as it occurs in many languages including Albanian), on the contrary, it is determined by its place in the sentence. Consequently, we can say that the word order in English is fixed, to a large extent, and if a given word order is disrupted, the sentence would change its meaning, would become less acceptable or ungrammatical. We use the expression “to a large extent” because other elements like sentence intonation and word stress can also affect the meaning of a sentence. Gimson (1980: 264) describes the importance of intonation as “the most efficient means of rendering prominent for a listener, those parts of an utterance on which the speaker wishes to concentrate attention”. Even though the literal meaning of the sentence would not change, the intent can vary considerably based on the word you stress. Concerning the word order in English, we can say that the typical one is:

Subject – Verb – Complement – Modifier

In Albanian the word order in the sentence is relatively free due to the fact that it is an inflectional language, however, the most common order is:

Subject – Verb – Complement – Adverbial

The word order *adjective –noun* could hardly be found in Albanian, except for in the poetic language. In this case what happens is the nounification of the adjective whereas the noun itself simply turns into the indefinite form, as you can see from the example:

*vajza e bukur / e bukura vajzë*

*\* the girl beautiful / (the) beautiful (a) girl*

English language also has a fixed order concerning the position of *adjective–noun* that is the contrary of the order you notice in Albanian. This order can rarely change, if it does, this may happen in two cases:

in fixed phrases, for example:

*Attorney General, Court Martial etc.*

for stylistical reasons in poetry when the poet deliberately breaks the rules to make an impact on the reader, for example:

W. Shakespeare in "Love's Labors Lost":

*I am the very model of a modern Major-General,  
I've information vegetable, animal, and mineral,  
I know the kings of England, and I quote the figths historical  
From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical:  
I'm very well acquainted, too, with matters mathematical,  
I understand equations, both the simple and quadratical,  
About binomial theorem I'm teeming with a lot o'news,  
With many cheerful facts about the square of the  
hypotenuse.*

or T.S. Eliot in "Journey of the Magi":

*Just the worst time of the year  
For a journey, and such a long journey:*

*The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
The very dead of winter.*

As we see examples of this kind are more typical in poetry and famous poets use them to convey and emphasize unusual and vivid images as well as to add variation, emphasis, exaggeration, exclamation, irony and luxuriance to literary works and to English language in a more general sense.

### **The syntax of subordinate sentences**

Turning to the syntax of sentences we should emphasize that one of the ways to make a clear categorization of the sentences is to distinguish the clauses they contain. Concerning the parts of indicative sentences, Randolph Quirk et al. (1997, p. 342), distinguished two types of clauses: the main clause and the dependent clause, for example:

- 1 *I quickly shut the door (main clause) / before the animal could escape (dependent clause).*
- 2 *Unë menjëherë mbylla derën (sifjali e mëvetësishme) / përpara se të ikte kafsha (sifjali e varur).*

Based on the surface level of the sentence, we can analyse in more detail the word order in English language sentence. The following schemes give a clear view of the fix word order in English (R. Quirk, G. Leech, J. Svartvik, op. cit., p. 533):

## Subject + Verb + Complement

- 1 *She's happy.*
- 2 *Ajo është e lumtur.*

## Subject + Verb + Adverbial

- 1 *He was at school.*
- 2 *Ai ishte në shkollë.*

## Subject +Verb

- 1 *The curtains disappeared.*
- 2 *Perdet u zhdukën.*
- 1 *He was working.*
- 2 *Ai ishte duke punuar.*

## Subject + Verb + Object + Complement

- 1 *He declared me a criminal.*
- 2 *Ai më shpalli kriminel.*

Note: As we will see in other examples provided below, in translating indicative sentences from English into Albanian it is noticed that the direct or indirect object is usually expressed only with a clitic form of the pronoun in the accusative case (*më, të, e, na, ju, i*). This is also supported by Benjamin W. Fortson (2009, p. 397) who states that characteristic of Albanian syntax are the stressed and unstressed (clitic) forms of the personal pronouns, but especially the use of the latter to double an object pronoun (e.g. Zefi e mori librin. lit. \*Joseph it took the book.). However, it is important to emphasize

that none of the enclitic pronouns in other Indio-European languages can be placed in this way.

Subject + Verb + Object + Adverbial

- 1 *He placed it on the shelf.*
- 2 *Ai e vuri në raft.*

Interestingly, these enclitic pronouns, though typically not clause-initial, can sometimes appear at the beginning of a clause, such as:

Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object

- 1 *I bought her a gift.*
- 2 *I bleva asaj një dhuratë.*

Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object + Complement

- 1 *I bought him those fresh.*
- 2 *I bleva atij ato të freskëtat.*

Note: As you can see from the schemes and the examples provided, in English it is always obligatory to place a subject in the sentence, whereas in Albanian, just like in Italian, Spanish etc, the subject expressed with a personal pronoun may not be present and the sentence is grammatically right. This phenomenon is known as the null subject parameter. As we can see, in both English and Albanian, finite verbs can have an overt subject. The difference consists in the fact that the finite verbs can also have a null (a missing, but understood) subject in Albanian, but not in English. In other words, finite verbs in a null subject language like Albanian can



have either an overt or a null (missing) subject, whereas in a non-null subject language like English finite verbs can have only overt subjects, not null subjects. Jaeggli and Safir (1989; 29) explain it in this way: “Null subjects are permitted in all and only languages with morphologically uniform inflectional paradigms.”

### **Analysis of time, purpose and attributive clauses**

Concerning compound sentences, we will analyse dependant time, purpose and attributive clauses. Subordinate time clauses in English cannot have the verb in the future tense, for this reason when we translate a time clause that in Albanian is constructed by using a verb in the subjunctive into English; we use the present simple tense to talk about the future, for example:

- 1 *Unë do të shkoj kur të jem gati.*
- 2 *I will go when I am ready.*

In the same way, the present perfect subjunctive in Albanian would be given by using the present perfect tense of the indicative in English, for example:

- 1 *Do të bisedojmë për të pasi ai të ketë ikur*
- 2 *We will talk about that after he has gone.*

Concerning the word order in the time clauses in English, it corresponds to some degree to that of Albanian, for example:

- 1 *I remember the day when I saw you first.*
- 2 *Më kujtohet dita kur të pashë për herë të parë.*

In order to express the purpose in English purpose clauses, it is used the infinitive form of the verbs. That could be reinforced by so as to, that corresponds to the Albanian conjunctions në mënyrë që, or me qëllim që:

- 1 *He stands on a low wall so as to see better.*
- 2 *Ai po qëndron mbi një mur të ulët, me qëllim që të shohë më mirë.*

An attributive clause in English is a clause that adds more information about a noun; in other words, the clause serves as a modifier of that noun. It has the function of a qualitative adjective that modifies the meaning of the noun or object in the main clause and can either be restrictive or nonrestrictive. In English, the relative pronouns that are used when referring to a place, thing or idea are: which and that. Even though there is a tendency to use these pronouns with no difference in meaning, still there is a certain difference. For restrictive attributive clauses, it is used the relative pronoun that, never which. In case the antecedent noun is a person, the relative pronoun who is used. For nonrestrictive attributive clauses it is used the relative pronoun which, (never that) preceded by a comma. In case the antecedent noun is a person, the relative pronoun who is used.

The relative pronoun që in Albanian has both functions, but differently from that (that in nonrestrictive attributive clauses is obligatory if it functions as a subject, but can be omitted if it is in the role of the object) the relative pronoun që is obligatory.

So, we have:

- 1 *Shtëpia që ndodhet në fillim të rrugës...*
- 2 *The house that is standing at the corner of the street...*
- or
- 3 *The book (that) you lent me last week... (object).*
- 4 *Libri që më huajtët javën e kaluar...*
- or
- 5 *I have a watch that tells the day of the month. (subject).*
- 6 *Kam një orë që tregon ditën e muajit.*

In Albanian, when we change an active voice sentence into a passive voice sentence, the direct object becomes the subject of the sentence:

- 1 *Babai im shkroi një letër. (subject)*
- 2 *Një letër u shkrua nga babai im. (object)*

We notice the same phenomenon in English:

- 1 *My father wrote a letter.*
- 2 *A letter was written by my father.*

In the case of the indirect object in Albanian, the latter remains unchanged even when we change the sentence from the active to the passive voice. For example:

- 1 *Babai im i dërgoi një letër mjekut të tij.*
- 2 *Një letër iu dërgua mjekut nga babai im.*

In English we notice a different structure. When we have an indirect object in the sentence it is acceptable another form of the passive voice, in which the indirect object becomes the subject of the sentence. In Albanian we have:

- 1 *Më dërguan një letër.*

rarely:

- 2 *M'u dërgua një letër.*

In English we have:

- 3 *I was sent a letter.*

In English some verbs are followed by the infinitive, whereas in Albanian by the subjunctive.

- 1 *We tried to get in. U përpoqëm të hynim brenda.*
- 2 *He asked to come in. Ai kërkoi (që) të hynte brenda.*

Purpose clauses in English are expressed with a to-infinitive clause, for example:

- 1 *He went to open the door.*
- 2 *Ai shkoi të hapte derën.*

If the subordinate clause expresses the purpose openly, that happens when the subject of the main clause is different from that of the subordinate purpose clause, that, in order that, or so that are generally used.

- 1 *He opened the door that she might come in.*
- 2 *Ai hapi derën me qëllim që ajo të mund të hynte brenda.*

In English, apart from a purpose adverbial, the sentence can include a causal adverbial as well, which is not typical in Albanian.

- 1 *I am glad to see you.*
- 2 *(Unë) Jam (i, e) gëzuar që ju shoh.*

In conclusion, we can say that the composition and the word order in English sentences is more or less the same with the composition and the word order in Albanian sentences. In both languages it is typical to find the construction *subject + predicate* not only in the simple sentences but also in the subordinate clauses as part of the compound sentence. Differences are noticed in other parts of speech. Above all it is important to mention the shift in order between the noun and adjective. In English the word order is *adjective + noun*, in Albanian it is the contrary. The change of the order in both languages is applied only in special cases for stylistical reasons. Concerning the object, in Albanian it may also be expressed with a clitic form of the accusative case if it is a direct object and a clitic form of the dative case if it is an indirect object. In a language like English, short forms of personal pronouns do not exist, so in this language are always used the full forms.

Another difference between the two languages, as it became clear from this paper, was found in the subordinate clauses in the respective languages, which is important to take

into consideration when translating from one language to another and vice-versa.

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