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Lexical and Grammatical Interference in Translation from Albanian into English

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate lexical and grammatical interference in translation from Albanian into English. The study raised the questions: To what extent students rely on their mother tongue when learning a foreign language grammar? In which cases does mother tongue interfere in translation from first into a foreign language? To reach the objective of the study and answer these questions, the research examined students' errors in translated sentences from Albanian into English. Results demonstrated that the problems that occur from interference are lexical and grammatical. The results also proved that these kinds of interference occur as a result of students' lack of knowledge of the source and target languages. For the purposes of this study it was designed a translation test and it was used with students whose native language is Albanian. The aim is to show that native language interferes to a high extent in learning L2 grammar, especially when the two grammars differ in structure.

Keywords: native language, second language, translation, errors, interference

Introduction

According to Aljumah (2020), numerous studies have been carried out around the world, chiefly after the establishment of second language acquisition (SLA) in the 1970s. Since this time, many researchers and linguistic experts have carried on examining the influence of native language interference in the learning of a foreign language (FL) or a target language (TL). A research by Stivens (2017), which highlighted the grammatical fragments of English affected by the grammatical fragments of Lumarachi among the Lumarachi students of English where he investigated the examples of interference by virtue of errors of morphology demonstrated that differences regarding the phonological and morphological structures between Lumarachi and English cause L1 interference. In addition, another study conducted by Adebayo (2018), investigated the extent to which the grammatical and structural differences between English and Yoruba influence the L2 acquisition. Budiharto (2019), investigated the role of mother tongue among Indonesian students and the errors made by those students which come as a result of language dissimilarities.

Linguists use different terms that are associated with the phenomenon of interference, such as: language transfer, cross-linguistic influence, interlanguage etc. Smith & Kellerman, (2018) use the term cross linguistic influence; Corder, (2019), in order to overcome the behaviorist connotations of the term transfer, he uses the term 'the role of mother tongue'. Language interference was studied by many linguists, such as: Nation (2001), Ellis (1997), Gass and Selinker (1994), Dulay & Burt (2012), Patten, Keating, Wulff, (2020), Kellerman, (2018), Larsen-Freeman (2019), Adebayo (2018), Budiharto (2019), Aljumah (2020), etc.

However, no study involved the Albanian language interference in learning a second language grammar. Therefore,

the major aim of this research is to show the Albanian language interference in students' translations from their mother tongue into English language.

Language transfer or interference is defined in different ways in different theories of L2 acquisition research. "Those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i.e. as a result of language contact, will be referred to as *interference* phenomena" (Lynch, 2017, p. 1). While, Nation (2001, p. 27), defines transfer as "the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired", thus, this theory is widely accepted and it is considered to be the most accurate one, since, it has been confirmed that previous knowledge has an influence on what is being learnt. "Lado defined transfer, either positive or negative, as the extension of a source-language habit into the target-language, with or without the awareness of the learner (as cited in Krzeszowski, 2019, p. 11). According to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) there are two types of transfer or interference: positive transfer, whose role is facilitative and negative transfer, whose role is inhibitive. In cases where there are similarities between the grammars of the two languages, then positive transfer or interference takes place, however, negative interference also takes place, and this occurs in cases where the two grammars differ in their structure. Positive interference is neglected in second language acquisition (SLA) research since it facilitates learning, and its results are already not noticed, thus, are less often discussed, while negative interference is discussed more often, as it causes difficulties in learning. The more differences there are between the two grammars, the more negative interference is likely to take place.

According to Corder (2019), "Errors fall into four categories: *omission* of some required element; *addition* of some unnecessary or incorrect element; *selection* of an incorrect element; and *misordering* of the elements" (p. 264). Dulay, Burt and Krashen (2012) described omission as "the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance" (p. 154). Errors can vary, they can be small or big errors, and they can include a phoneme, a morpheme, a word, a sentence and also a paragraph. Ellis (1997) holds that "classifying errors in these ways can help us to diagnose learners' learning problems at any stage of their development and to plot how changes in error patterns occur over time" (p. 264). Indeed, it is important that the teacher classifies learners' errors in order to better diagnose and prevent learners' problems and difficulties that they may further encounter when making errors.

The sources of errors can be categorized within two fields: 1) Interlingual transfer, and 2) Intralingual transfer. As defined in the Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1992), interlingual error is a result of language transfer, which is caused by the learner's first language. Erdogan (2019) points out that "these kinds of errors may occur at different levels, such as transfer of phonological, morphological, grammatical elements etc. of the native language into the target language" (p. 265). On the other hand, Ellis (1997) claims that "some errors seem to be universal, reflecting learners' attempts to make the task of learning and using the target language simplier" (p. 266). He adds that "the use of past tense suffix '-ed' for all verbs is an example of simplification and overgeneralization" (p. 267). Intralingual errors may be caused by the influence of one target language item upon another. "These errors occur as a result of learners' attempt to build up concepts and hypotheses about the target language from their limited experience with it" (Erdogan, 2019,

p. 266). Such an example can be seen in the translation of the sentence: *How much did you paid for the notbooks?*, which contains two past forms, which is a result of the insufficient learner experience with the target language or the incomplete mastering of the target language.

Linguists distinguished various types of errors: global and local errors. According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), "global errors affect overall sentence organization significantly, whereas local errors affect single elements (constituents) in a sentence" (p. 191). If the error is global then it provides a deviant sentence which does not make sense and interferes with communication, whereas local errors affect only a small part of the sentence which does not cause difficulties in comprehension and communication.

In teachers' experiences with teaching English as a foreign language to students of different levels, the issue of the role of mother tongue in English classes has been a continuous concern. This research deeply analyzes the intereference of Albanian language in production of English forms, and the results from this research are important especially when taken into consideration that such a study was not carried out with the Albanian learners of English in North Macedonia. This study is descriptive and has characteristics of qualitative research.

This research investigates the interference of native language (L1) in learning the grammar of a second language (L2). It explores, analyzes and clarifies the cases where native language interferes in a large degree, and explores the errors that come as a result of the impact that native language has on learning other languages.

This study aims to give answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent students rely on their mother tongue when learning a foreign language grammar?
2. In which cases does mother tongue interfere in translation from first into a foreign language?

Literature Review

The role of learning and teaching grammar and interference has always been an important issue in second language acquisition research. Larsen-Freeman gives a great importance to the teaching of grammar in order to produce accurate forms of a language and also to develop communicative skills. "Grammar is about form and one way to teach form is to give students rules; however, grammar is about much more than form, and its teaching is ill served if students are simply given rules" (Larsen-Freeman, 2019, p. 251). However, Krashen (1981) does not give enough importance to the acquisition and use of grammar rules. He points out that "Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill" (p. 6-7). Instead, he suggests that language acquisition requires more communication. Krashen (1981) also claims that "Acquisition requires meaningful interactions in the target language-natural communication-in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding" (p.7). However, this theory received many criticisms from other researchers who did not agree with these views, for example, Long (1990) concluded that form-focused instruction (attention on form) does affect acquisition. "Krashen (1981) has argued that people learning foreign languages follow

basically the same route as they acquire their mother tongue, hence the use of the mother tongue in the learning process should be minimized" (as cited in Tang, 2020, p. 17). In many cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies, transfer among other sources is considered responsible for error occurrences. Language transfer or interference is defined in different ways and in different theories of L2 acquisition research. Nation (2001) defines transfer as "the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the TL and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired" (p. 8), thus, this theory is widely accepted since it confirms that the previous knowledge has an influence on what is being learnt. Chireac, Francis & McClure (2020) define interference as "the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language" (p. 12). Interference can happen consciously or unconsciously. Lotto (2016) and Bhela (2019) consider that interference is one of the major sources of errors in the learner's use of the foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue.

The issue of native language usage and interference in the classroom has been a very controversial topic as there were researchers who were completely against native language transfer. Researchers who opposed the transfer view considered the majority of errors as developmental errors rather than errors resulting from L1 transfer. It was argued that L2 errors were similar to the errors made by the L1 learners when learning their own native language.

Methodology

The methodology of the present study is based on qualitative approach where there was used a translation test containing 12 sentences translated from Albanian into English. Students' performance in this test helped in investigating native language interference in learning English language grammar. It also helped in identifying L1 morphological and syntactic interference in the process of translation. Through this translation test there were identified types of errors and the reasons for the occurrence of such errors.

Participants

The present study was conducted at high school '7 Marsi' in Tetovo, North Macedonia, involving 54 students of intermediate level, 31 females and 23 males. The study was conducted with students from two different classes, one with 26, the other with 28 students of the same study year. They all have learned English for seven years, starting from the 3rd grade of the elementary school. Their mother tongue is Albanian language; they all speak Macedonian language, too; 23 of them speak German apart from English and Macedonian. They all come from Tetovo, both, the city and surrounding. According to the state curricula, English courses are offered three times a week and are taught by non-native speakers of English, which means that the students and techers share the same native language.

Instrument

The data collection tool as the translation test (see Appendix 1) was designed to identify the probable morphological and syntactic interference of the mother tongue in foreign language learning. It was a test containing 12 sentences in Albanian that had to be translated into English. This instrument aimed to

identify the problems with the proper use of different parts of speech such as nouns, verbs, prepositions, articles, adverbs, adjectives, as well as the sentence structure. The instrument was a pen-and-pencil test done in the classroom settings.

Procedure

The test was implemented in the last week of February 2020. For the purposes of the study, prior to visiting the classes, it was discussed with the school principle, as well as with the English teacher who teaches in the first study year. With their permission, the study was carried out in two classrooms. The 12 sentence test was distributed to the students who were explained with the purposes of this task. The students were asked to read each sentence in Albanian and carefully translate it into English. They were encouraged to work individually and were assured that the test results will not have any impact on their course grades. The time given to the students for this activity was 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

The results that were derived from the present study and discussion of the findings are presented in the following:

Figure 1 presents interference of mother tongue in learning L2 grammar

Figure 2 shows the interference of mother tongue in translating from Albanian into English
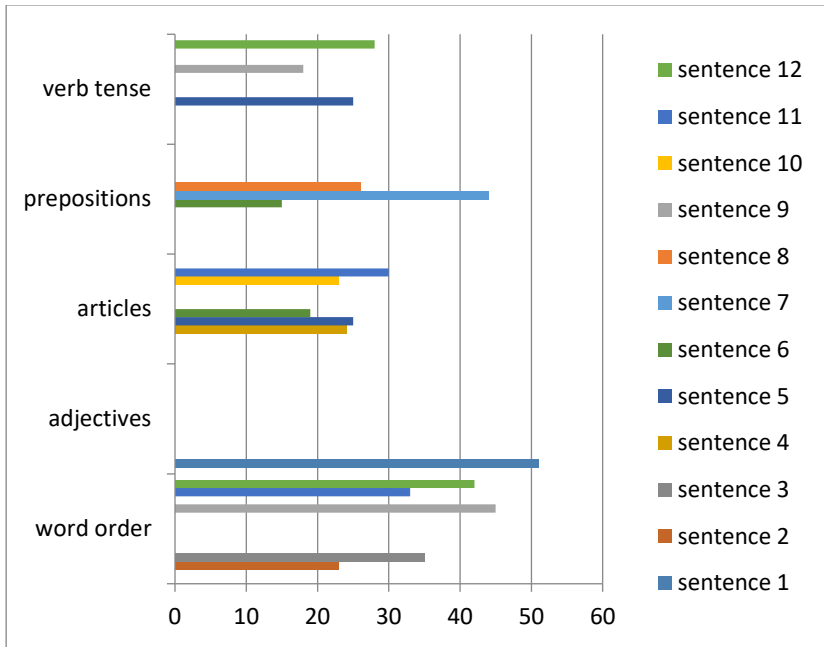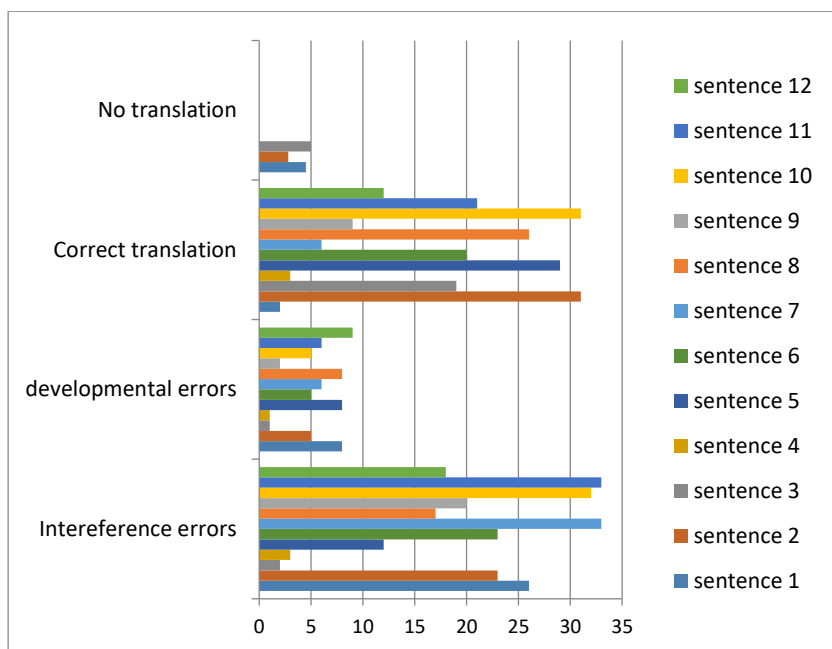
Figure 1: Interference of mother tongue grammar in L2 grammar

According to the findings, English infinitive and gerund were the parts in which no difficulty was observed. When it comes to adjectives and prepositions, learners have difficulty at the rate of 60%. Additionally, with the use of articles, both definite and indefinite ones, the learners have notable difficulties. As the definite form of the noun in the Albanian language is made with the suffixes –i for male, and –a for female gender, the errors made in translation from Albanian into English come as a result of mother tongue influence. The findings of the present study revealed that 60% of students face difficulties with the proper use of English tenses, particularly with the irregular verbs in past simple and past participle. 50% of students are challanged by the proper use of past simple and present perfect, which also interpreted as an influence of native language. In Albanian language these two tenses express

actions that have happened in the past whereas in English present perfect is used for finished actions as well as for the actions that are occuring at the present. One of the most notable and characteristic features of the impact that native language has on foreign language learners is the sentence structure, more particularly, the word order in the sentence. 55% of the total number of students rely on the native language sentence structure. Word-for-word translation was found in 90% of translated sentences.

Figure 2: interference of mother tongue in translating from Albanian into English

The students' errors in compositions are divided into two categories:, 69 % of errors come from students' native language interference, whereas 31% of errors are accounted for developmental, intralingual or overgeneralization errors. The

majority of students' errors in this study are interference errors, which come as a result of the impact that mother tongue has on learners of other languages. This occurs because students first think in their native language then write in English, therefore, the number of L1 interference errors in this study is very high.

The linguistic knowledge of Albanian language may interfere with the learning of English and it is the teachers' obligation to maximize their students' exposure to English grammar, vocabulary, and English as the only language spoken in the classroom.

Collaborative interaction is essential to learning a foreign language. Swain and Lapkin (1999, p. 321) pointed out that 'what occurs in collaborative dialogues is learning'. So the studies of L2 learning have focused on looking at how foreign learning is mediated by language use in collaborative interactions between students and teacher (see, for example, Anton and DiCamilla (1999); Donato (2004); Brooks et al. (1997); Villamil and De Guerrero (2006); Swain and Lapkin (1999) who have discussed the role of the L1, and the functions it serves in collaborative interaction in the foreign language classroom.

Results

The findings of the present study reveal that 60% of students face difficulties with the proper use of English tenses, particularly with the irregular verbs in past simple and past participle. In Albanian language these two tenses express actions that have happened in the past whereas in English present perfect is used for finished actions as well as for the actions that are occuring at the present. According to the findings, English infinitive and gerund were the language structures where no difficulties were observed. When it comes

to adjectives and prepositions, learners have difficulties at the rate of 60%. Additionally, as the definite form of the noun in the Albanian language is made with the suffixes –i for male and –a for female gender, the learners have notable difficulties with the use of articles, both definite and indefinite ones. One of the most notable and characteristic features of the impact that native language has on foreign language learners is the sentence structure, more particularly, the word order in the sentence. 55% of the total number of students rely on the native language sentence structure. Word-for-word translation was found in 90% of translated sentences.

The results show that the majority of errors belong to the field of morphology and syntax, which come as a result of different sentence patterns that Albanian language, as source language (SL), and English language, as target language (TL) have.

Sentence 1: *Ajo është shumë më e lartë sesa unë.* (*She is much taller than me.*)
Correct translation: 2 students
Incorrect translation: 49 students
No translation: 3 students
   a) 26 students: *She is taller than me.*
   b) 12 students: *She is more taller than me.*
   c) 7 students: *She is very tall than me.*
   d) 4 students: *She is lot taller than me.*
   e) 2 students: *She is much taller than me.*

As the superlative of the adjective is rarely used in the Albanian language, the interference of mother tongue can be seen in the translations of 26 students who omitted the adjective *much*, and provided a translation in comparative degree.

Sentence 2: *E pashë vëllain tënd para dy ditësh.   (I saw your brother two days ago.)*
Correct translation: 31 students
23 incorrect translations: *I saw your brother before two days.*

The Albanian sentence pattern is directly transmitted in the translation of this sentence into English language.

Sentence 3: *Unë mund të këndoj shumë mirë.   (I can sing very well.)*
Correct translation: 19 students
35 incorrect translations: *I can sing very good.*

Having in mind that the word *mirë* in Albanian is an adjective, and is used after the adverb of measure, the students find it difficult to use two adverbs that would describe a verb. However, in this case this error can also occur due to insufficient L2 knowledge on irregular adverbs.

Sentence 4: *Sa pagove për fletoret?   (How much did you pay for the notebooks?)*
Correct translations: 3 students
Incorrect translations: 48 students
No translation: 3 students
   a) 24 students: *How much did you pay for notebooks?*
   b) 9 students: *How much you paid for notebooks?*
   c) 11 students*: How much you pay for notebooks?*
   d) 4 students: *How much did you paid for notebooks?*

The English language, different from the Albanian, uses the article to define nouns, and as a result of that difference, in 24 cases the students omitted the article *the*. In the Albanian language, the main verb is the one that denotes the past simple, different from the English where we use the auxiliary verb *to do*, and as a result of these differences, there were 9 students who

omitted the verb *did*. Another characteristic translation that comes as a result of mother tongue interference was given by 4 students who use verbs, the auxiliary and the main verb, in past tense. Generally, it can be said that these group of students have major problems with the use of definite article *the*, as well as with the word-for-word method of translation.

Sentence 5: *Unë i gjeta librat.   (I found the books.)*
Correct translations: 29 students
Incorrect translations: 25 students
    a) 15 students: *I found books.*
    b) 5 students: *I find books.*
    c) 5 students: *I find the books.*

As same as with the previous sentence, there were students who show that the Albanian learners of English find it difficult to use different sentence patterns other than the ones that are used in their mother tongue. Again, as the most characteristic errors made by the students are the use of definite article and verb tense.

Sentence 6: *Më pëlqejnë lulet në oborrin tënd.   (I like the flowers in your garden.)*
Correct translations: 20 students
Incorrect translations: 34 students
  a) 14 students: *I like flowers in your garden.*
  b) 15 students: *I like the flowers on your garden.*
  c) 5 students: *I like your flowers in your garden.*

Incorrect translation provided under a) and b) occurs due to the interference of students' mother tongue. The purpose of this sentence was to find out the proper use of prepositions by the Albanian learners, and as it was expected, 15 students use preposition *on* instead of *in.* Prepositions of place, such as in, on

and at, are one of the biggest problems for the Albanian learners, as in their mother tongue these prepositions are not subdivided into prepositions of place and prepositions of surface. The other constant problem for these students remains the use of definite article *the.*

Sentence 7: *Ju lutem përgjigjuni pyetjes sime!   (Please answer my question!)*
Correct translations: 6 students
Incorrect translations: 44 students
No translation: 4 students
   a) 32 students: "*Please answer in my question!*
   b) 8 students: *Please answer to my question!*
   c) 4 students: *Please answer at my question!*

As it was expected, the problem would occur with the use of proper preposition. Furthermore, it was the same case as with the previous sentences and it generally it comes as a result of the fact that prepositions in English don't always match up neatly to case endings as they do in Albanian.
Even though Albanian language has prepositions, the translation problems appear in cases when English doesn't use one, or the ones they use in specific situations are different from the ones used in the target language.

Sentence 8: *Xhaxhai im do të arrijë të hënën.   (My uncle will arrive on Monday.)*
Correct translations: 26 students
Incorrect translations: 28 students
   a) 13 students: *My uncle will arrive in Monday.*
   b) 10 students: *My uncle will arrive at Monday.*
   c) 5 students: *My uncle will be arrived in Monday.*

There is only one preposition of time and this is the reason that a large number of students use incorrect preposition when required to translate from Albanian into English. Since the developmental errors reflect on the lack of experience, it is expected that intermediate students will make such errors which prove that the rule and structures of their mother tongue can hardly be replaced by the new rules and patterns of the non-native language.

Sentence 9: *Ç'bën Paola në Shqipëri?   (What is Paula Doing in Albania?)*
Correct translations: 9 students
Incorrect translations: 45 students
   a) 26 students: *What does Paola in Albania*?
   b) 13 students: *What is Doing Paola in Albania*?
   c) 6 students: *What Paola Doing in Albania*?

The first group of students made these errors due to their native language interference. The question in Albanian language was formulated with the apostrophe, which might have confused the student; they might have referred to it as a determiner rather than a pronoun. The influence of the native language can better be seen with the group of students who used word-for-word translation, with the Albanian pattern: Pronoun+Predicate+ Subject+Adverbial Phrase. The errors made by the third group of students come as a result of insufficient level of knowledge in both the languages.

Sentence 10: *Djali i Agimit është 8 vjeç.   (Agim's son is 8 years old.)*
Correct translations: 31 students
Incorrect translations: 23 students

    a) 17 students: *Son of Agim is 8 years old.*
    b) 6 students*: The son of Agim is 8 years old.*

Both these groups of students make interference errors; the fist group applies word-for-word method of translation, whereas the second groups would belong to literal translation method.
We have divided them into different groups because 6 students, by adding the article *the* try to incorporate the definite form of the noun *son*, which in Albanian appears as a definite noun, with the suffix *-i* for the masculine gender.

Sentence 11: *Tirana është një qytet i madh dhe i bukur.   (Tirana is a big and beautiful city.)*
Correct translations: 21
Incorrect translations: 33

    a) 10 students: *Tirana is big and beautiful city.*
    b) 8 students: Tirana *is big city and beautiful.*
    c) 9 students: *Tirana is a big city and beautiful.*
    d) 6 students: *Tirana is one big city and beautiful.*

The problem with the use of articles is constantly repeated in this research. The first group of students has omitted the article *–a*, which translated into Albanian is *–një*. The second group of students, apart from omitting the article, they have translated the sentence word-for-word, following the Albanian sentence structure: *qytet i madh dhe i bukur-big city and beautiful.* The fourth group, similarly with the third group, uses the word-for-word method of translation following the patterns, rules and structures of the Albanian language.

Sentence 12: *Këtë fustan e bleva në Paris.   (I bought this dress in Paris.)*

Correct translation: 12

Incorrect translation: 42

    a) 31 students: *This dress I bought in Paris*
    b) 11 students: *This dress I buy in Paris*

The word order and the sentence pattern used by 31 students prove that mother tongue plays a big role in the learning a second language and translating from mother tongue into a non-native language. *Këtë fustan -This dress + e bleva- I bought + në Paris-in Paris,* as it can be seen, the translated sentence follows the source language word order. The second group of students, apart from following the Albanian sentence structure, they make other errors due to incomplete knowledge of the target language grammar.

Interpretations and Conclusions

The results from the translation test showed that native language interferes in target language grammar mostly in cases where the two grammars differ in structure. We also found out that the Albanian linguistic knowledge reflects on the learning of English language and translating from Albanian into English. The research was conducted with students who are hardly ever exposed to English that is spoken by native speakers of the language. The language and its grammatical rules are taught by teachers who share the same native language with their students. Due to time consuming, very often these rules are explained in the students' mother tongue, which minimizes the students' exposure to the English language. The learning material is designed in English speaking countries; no space is

given to the mother tongue and to translation to mother tongue or vs. These materials do not encounter students' linguistics specifics; they do not raise the students' awareness of differences between their mother tongue and English. Accordingly, we can say that the conducted research with these students was the first task where they were required to use and practice two languages at the same time. The research also prove that the biggest problems that the Albanian students face with while translating into English are: word order, the use of prepositions and articles, and the use of tenses.

According to Lems, Miller and Soro (2018), "word order differs among languages, and trying to construct the same sentence in a new language can create errors" (p. 9). These types of errors were very frequent in students' production of L2. Krashen (1981) also generalizes that "first language influence appears to be strongest in complex word order and in word-for-word translations of phrases", thus, the same was concluded from the results of this study.

According to some previous studies, interference errors are regarded as unimportant since they seem to be lower in number. Budiharto (2019) claims that the majority of errors were developmental errors rather than L1 interference errors. He adds that only 3% of the analyzed errors were due to L1 interference. On the other hand, Ellis (1997) states that the percentage of interference errors was 33%. Nevertheless, the results of this study show that the majority of errors are interference errors (69%) rather than developmental ones. These results might vary due to the different group of students, different levels of English, different students' native languages, and different cultural and linguistic background.

This study provides insights into native language interference in the process of translating from students' mother

tongue into English. Thus, as far as these participants are concerned, this study yielded the following conclusions:

- Native language interferes to a high extent in transaltion from Albanian into English.
- Native language interferes in translation, mainly in cases where the two grammars differ in structure and rules, resulting in errors of word order, omission and addition.
- Word-for-word translation is the main cause of word order errors in translation from L1-L2.
- The most common cases of negative interference in translation occur when the students are required to apply grammtical forms that are different from their L1 grammar rules.
- The most frequent errors due to L1 interference belong to articles, prepositions, and word order.
- The majority of students' grammatical errors in writing are native language interference errors rather than developmental.

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Appendix 1: The Translation Test Results

Sentences for translation from L1-L2	Interference error	Developmental error	Correct translation	No translation
1. Ajo është shumë më e lartë sesa unë.	23	26	2	3
2. E pashë vëllain tënd para dy ditëve.	23	-	31	-
3. Unë mund të këndoj shumë mirë.	35	35	19	-

4. Sa pagove për fletoret?	**48**	**24**	**3**	**3**
5. Unë i gjeta librat.	**20**	**10**	**29**	**-**
6. Më pëlqejnë lulet në oborrin tënd.	**34**	**20**	**20**	**-**
7. Ju lutem përgjigjuni pyetjes sime.	**44**	**32**	**6**	**4**
8. Xhaxhai im do të arrijë të hënën.	**28**	**28**	**26**	**-**
9. Ç'bën Paola në Shqipëri?	**45**	**6**	**9**	**-**
10. Djali i Agimit është 8 vjeç.	**23**	**-**	**31**	**-**
11. Tirana është një qytet i madh dhe i bukur.	**33**	**-**	**21**	**-**
12. Këtë fustan e bleva në Paris.	**42**	**11**	**12**	**-**
	398	**192**	**209**	**10**