

## COMMON DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATION FROM ENGLISH TO ALBANIAN

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**Abstract:** Translation is a complex and multifaceted process that involves more than simply converting words from one language to another. This seminar paper investigates common challenges faced by translators working from English into Albanian, a language pair marked by significant linguistic and cultural differences. Key obstacles explored include syntactic divergence, semantic nuances, idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and structural disparities. The study aims to identify the primary sources of difficulty and examines effective strategies and techniques to overcome these challenges. These approaches seek to improve the accuracy, clarity, and cultural appropriateness of translated texts. Ultimately, this research deepens the understanding of the translation process and offers practical guidance for students and professionals engaged in English–Albanian translation.

**Keywords:** translation process, English–Albanian translation, linguistic challenges, cultural references, idiomatic expressions, translation strategies, syntactic differences, semantic nuances.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Translation is a complex and demanding activity that involves transferring meaning from a source language to a target language while respecting both linguistic structures and cultural contexts. Translating from English to Albanian presents unique challenges stemming from significant differences in grammar, vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references (Spahiu, 2022; Nida, 1964; Baker, 1992). As members of different language families—English belonging to the Germanic group and Albanian to the Indo-European but distinct branch—these languages exhibit notable structural divergences, including variations in word order, tense systems, and idiomatic usage.

For example, many English idioms or phrasal verbs lack direct equivalents in Albanian, compelling the translator to seek alternative expressions that preserve the original meaning and emotional resonance (Baker, 1992). Additionally, grammatical contrasts—such as the obligatory use of articles in English versus their often absent counterparts in Albanian—pose further difficulties. Translators must carefully decide how to render such elements in Albanian to ensure that the final text sounds natural without sacrificing the original meaning (Spahiu, 2022; Hatim & Mason, 1997).

Successful translation thus requires more than linguistic proficiency; it demands a high degree of cultural competence to bridge the gaps between the source and target languages. As Venuti (1995) asserts, understanding the cultural backgrounds of both languages enables translators to avoid misunderstandings and produce translations that are both accurate and fluent.

This paper explores the most common difficulties encountered in translating from English to Albanian and examines the techniques and strategies employed by translators to overcome these obstacles. It also underscores the importance of linguistic and cultural awareness in producing translations that not only convey the intended message accurately but also reflect the tone and stylistic nuances of the original text. By analyzing specific examples and common translation challenges, this study aims to offer valuable insights for both novice and experienced translators engaged in English–Albanian translation.

### 2. DEFINITION OF TRANSLATION AND ITS TYPES

Translation is a complex communicative activity that involves the transfer of meaning from one language, referred to as the source language (SL), into another, the target language (TL), with the goal of preserving the original's intent, style, and cultural nuances. As Spahiu (2022) emphasizes, translation extends far beyond mere word-for-word substitution; it is a dynamic, interpretive process in which the translator must skillfully navigate both the linguistic structures and the embedded cultural context to produce a rendition that is both faithful to the source and natural for the target audience. This perspective aligns closely with Nida's (1964) theory of dynamic equivalence, which advocates for conveying meaning in a way that elicits an equivalent response and understanding in the target readership or listenership.

The field of translation studies further categorizes translation into various types based on the nature of the source text and the mode of communication—whether written or oral. These distinctions reflect the wide-ranging contexts in which translation occurs and highlight the unique challenges and competencies required for each setting.

Understanding these categories is essential for appreciating the diversity of translation tasks and for developing strategies suited to the particular demands of different communicative environments.

#### **Written Translation**

Written translation involves converting texts that exist in a fixed, permanent form—such as literary works, legal contracts, scientific articles, and official documents—from one language into another. This mode provides translators with the advantage of time, allowing them to thoroughly analyze, revise, and refine their output to ensure both semantic accuracy and stylistic fidelity to the source text (Spahiu, 2022; Newmark, 1988). The enduring and public nature of written texts necessitates a particularly high level of precision, as even minor errors or ambiguities may lead to significant and lasting consequences. Furthermore, written translation frequently entails navigating intertextual references, idiomatic language, and specialized terminology, which calls for not only advanced linguistic competence but also subject-matter expertise within the relevant domain (Baker, 1992).

#### **Oral Translation (Interpreting)**

In contrast, oral translation—or interpreting—involves the immediate, real-time transfer of spoken messages from the source language into the target language. This occurs in settings such as conferences, diplomatic negotiations, courtrooms, or live broadcasts. Due to the immediacy of the task and the lack of opportunity for revision, interpreting demands exceptional memory, linguistic proficiency, and cognitive flexibility (Spahiu, 2022). Interpreting is generally categorized into two main types:

Simultaneous interpreting, where the interpreter translates the speaker's utterances almost concurrently, often with only a brief delay, requiring high concentration and multitasking skills.

Consecutive interpreting, where the interpreter waits for the speaker to pause or finish a segment before delivering the translation, often taking notes to aid accuracy.

Each mode presents unique cognitive and technical challenges, necessitating specialized training and skill development tailored to the demands of real-time language mediation.

#### **Literary Translation**

Literary translation involves the rendering of imaginative and artistic texts—such as novels, short stories, poetry, and drama—from one language into another. Unlike technical or informational translation, literary translation extends beyond linguistic accuracy; it requires a profound sensitivity to the stylistic, rhetorical, and aesthetic qualities of the source text. The translator must grasp not only the literal meaning of words but also their tone, rhythm, figurative language, and cultural symbolism. As Bassnett (2014) emphasizes, the literary translator faces the dual responsibility of maintaining fidelity to the author's intent while creating a work that resonates meaningfully and artistically within the target culture.

Achieving this balance often entails creative problem-solving. Translators must skillfully adapt metaphors, idioms, sound patterns, and intertextual references to preserve the emotional and poetic impact of the original. For instance, a metaphor that draws on a culturally specific image may need to be reimagined using imagery familiar to the target audience, without compromising the original's thematic or emotional weight. Similarly, the rhythmic and musical qualities of poetry—such as meter, rhyme, or alliteration—pose additional challenges, often requiring inventive reformulation.

Understanding the primary types of translation, including literary, technical, legal, and audiovisual, enables practitioners to anticipate the distinct demands and constraints of each genre. This typological awareness provides a theoretical foundation for selecting appropriate translation strategies, whether they involve domestication, foreignization, adaptation, or compensation. It also facilitates the translator's ability to handle broader concerns such as achieving semantic and stylistic equivalence, preserving cultural nuance, and ensuring that the translated text fulfills its communicative and artistic function in the target language.

### **3. THE ROLE OF THE TRANSLATOR**

The translator occupies a central and dynamic position as a mediator not only between languages but also between entire cultural systems. Translation is far more than the mechanical substitution of words; it is an act of interpretation and re-creation that requires conveying meaning, tone, stylistic nuance, and cultural resonance. As Hatim and Mason (1990) emphasize, the translator's task involves constant negotiation—making informed choices about register, idiomatic usage, and the level of fidelity to the source text's stylistic and rhetorical features.

This interpretive responsibility demands more than bilingual competence. It requires an in-depth understanding of both the source and target cultures, as well as sensitivity to genre, audience expectations, and communicative function. When linguistic or cultural elements lack direct equivalents—whether due to grammatical structure, culturally specific references, or rhetorical conventions—the translator must devise functionally equivalent or adaptive solutions that preserve the intended effect of the original.

These decisions are never neutral. Each choice shapes the reader's experience and influences how the text is received, interpreted, and valued by the target audience. In this sense, the translator becomes both a linguistic technician and a cultural negotiator, whose work involves creative problem-solving, ethical judgment, and intercultural mediation. Ultimately, the translator plays a crucial role in shaping cross-cultural communication, literary reception, and the global circulation of knowledge and meaning.

#### 4. THE MEANING AND PROCESS OF TRANSLATION

Translation is far more than a mechanical or formulaic act—it is a dynamic, interpretive, and highly intellectual process. It demands not only linguistic proficiency but also analytical thinking and cultural sensitivity. At its core, translation involves a careful examination of the source text, encompassing its semantic layers, pragmatic intent, syntactic structures, and embedded cultural meanings. According to Nida (1964), translation is best defined as the reproduction of meaning from one language into another in a manner that preserves both content and functional equivalence. This foundational perspective shifts the focus from mere word-for-word substitution to conveying the original message in a way that resonates authentically within the cultural and linguistic framework of the target audience.

The translation process typically unfolds in several interrelated stages. It begins with deep comprehension of the source text—its vocabulary, grammar, tone, register, and cultural references. The subsequent transfer phase entails re-encoding this meaning into the target language using a range of translation techniques. Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) categorize these strategies into methods such as borrowing, calque, literal translation, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation. These techniques are particularly valuable in bridging lexical and cultural gaps where literal translation would fail to preserve nuance, tone, or intent.

Cultural competence is indispensable throughout this process. Translators are often required to reinterpret concepts that are culturally bound or lack direct equivalents, including religious references, idioms, proverbs, holidays, or institutional terminology. In such cases, preserving communicative effect becomes more important than lexical fidelity.

Finally, the post-translation phase—comprising editing, revision, and stylistic polishing—is critical for ensuring that the translated text reads fluently and naturally in the target language. It must align with the conventions and expectations of the intended readership while faithfully reflecting the purpose of the original. In this way, the translator acts not only as a linguistic conduit but also as a co-creator, shaping how knowledge, literature, and culture traverse linguistic boundaries.

#### 5. COMMON DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATING FROM ENGLISH TO ALBANIAN

##### **Linguistic Challenges**

One of the most persistent challenges in translation stems from the fundamental grammatical divergence between English and Albanian. English is largely characterized by a fixed Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) word order, where syntactic position plays a key role in conveying meaning. In contrast, Albanian exhibits a more flexible syntax, enabled by its inflectional morphology, which allows word order variation without necessarily altering semantic roles. This structural difference means that a literal, form-bound translation from English into Albanian can result in stiff, unnatural, or even misleading phrasing.

Moreover, the English language makes extensive use of modal and auxiliary verbs—such as will, might, should have been, or would have to—to express tense, aspect, mood, and modality. These elements often do not have direct or one-to-one grammatical equivalents in Albanian. As a result, translators must rely on paraphrasing, periphrastic constructions, or idiomatic expressions to render the intended meaning. For example, conveying epistemic modality (e.g., He might have gone) in Albanian requires nuanced restructuring to preserve both the uncertainty and the temporal reference.

This linguistic asymmetry is not merely a technical matter; it often affects tone, emphasis, and stylistic features of the original. Therefore, the translator must carefully consider both form and function, aiming for pragmatic equivalence rather than formal symmetry. Mastery of both languages' grammatical systems—and an acute awareness of their communicative conventions—is essential for producing translations that are both accurate and idiomatic.

##### **Lexical Challenges**

Lexical mismatches represent another recurrent difficulty in the translation process. Many English words are polysemous, carrying multiple meanings depending on context, and often bear cultural connotations that do not transfer directly into Albanian. Idiomatic expressions such as “kick the bucket” cannot be rendered word-for-word (shkel kovën) without sounding absurd or losing their intended meaning. Instead, translators must select a

functionally equivalent expression—such as *vdes* or another culturally resonant phrase—that accurately conveys the original's intent and tone.

Furthermore, English continues to generate a growing number of terms in fields like technology and popular culture, many of which have no standardized Albanian equivalents. In these cases, translators must decide between strategies such as phonetic borrowing (*kejsi* for *case*), calquing (*shtëpi e bardhë* for *White House*), or descriptive paraphrasing (*aparati që rrit zërin* for *hearing aid*), depending on factors like the target audience's familiarity with the source culture, the communicative context, and the text's functional goals.

### **Cultural Differences**

Culture-bound elements pose some of the most nuanced and intricate challenges in translation. These include social customs, holidays, gestures, idiomatic expressions, and humor—each deeply rooted in the source culture's worldview and collective experience. Such elements often lack direct equivalents in the target language and must therefore be carefully adapted. For example, translating *Thanksgiving* as *dita tradicionale e falënderimeve në SHBA* provides necessary cultural context for Albanian readers, rather than a literal rendering that might obscure its significance.

Similarly, idioms and proverbs shaped by Anglo-American history or daily life may seem alien or even nonsensical if translated word-for-word. In these cases, translators are encouraged to seek culturally relevant counterparts in the target language that serve a similar communicative purpose and emotional resonance (Newmark, 1988). This strategy helps maintain both clarity and cultural appropriateness, ensuring the message is not only understood but also felt by the audience.

### **Pragmatic and Stylistic Issues**

Translating tone, register, irony, and rhetorical style poses yet another layer of complexity. English literary texts often employ devices such as sarcasm or puns that are deeply embedded in cultural and linguistic contexts. A pun like “Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana” cannot be translated literally without significant loss. The translator must creatively reframe such expressions to maintain the effect in Albanian. Poetic features such as rhyme and rhythm also resist direct translation due to phonological differences. Where possible, translators may opt for alternative stylistic devices that achieve similar aesthetic impact. Moreover, speech acts such as polite requests or commands may need to be softened or intensified to match the norms of Albanian discourse.

## **6. GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON TRANSLATION DIFFICULTIES**

Translating from English to Albanian involves a complex interplay of linguistic and cultural challenges that span syntax, lexis, pragmatics, and socio-cultural context. These dimensions are deeply interconnected and cannot be adequately addressed through literal or word-for-word equivalence. Rather, effective translation requires a case-by-case analysis, where the translator must make informed, context-sensitive decisions to preserve both meaning and stylistic intent. As Nord (2005) argues, successful translation hinges on achieving functional equivalence, which often demands flexibility and creativity rather than rigid fidelity to the source text.

To navigate these challenges, translators must draw on a repertoire of strategies—such as compensation (making up for lost meaning elsewhere), modulation (changing perspective or semantics), and adaptation (culturally tailoring the message)—while remaining mindful of the genre, target audience, and communicative goals of the text. For instance, a legal document may require terminological precision and formal register, whereas a literary translation may call for greater stylistic sensitivity and interpretive nuance.

Given the subtleties involved, ongoing training in contrastive linguistics, cultural competence, and translation theory is indispensable. Proficiency in both languages must be complemented by an ability to recognize and reconcile structural, idiomatic, and cultural asymmetries. Ultimately, the translator's task is not merely to reproduce a text in another language, but to recreate it in a way that is accurate, idiomatic, and contextually appropriate—ensuring the message resonates with the target audience while maintaining the integrity of the original.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Translation between English and Albanian is a complex and demanding process that requires more than just knowledge of both languages. It calls for a deep understanding of the structural differences and cultural nuances that influence meaning and expression. Translators must be skilled not only in grammar and vocabulary but also in navigating cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and stylistic features to produce a text that is both accurate and natural for the target audience. The translator's role is crucial in mediating between languages and cultures, making informed decisions that balance fidelity to the original text with the need for clarity, tone, and cultural appropriateness. While challenges such as differing syntax, lexical gaps, and culturally bound concepts are inevitable, they can be successfully addressed through a combination of linguistic knowledge, cultural awareness, and practical translation strategies. Ultimately, translation is both a technical skill and a creative act—an interpretive

process that bridges languages and cultures. By understanding the complexities involved and developing effective strategies, translators can produce work that goes beyond mere word-for-word conversion to truly convey the original message's intent, style, and impact.

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