

Instances of Romanian-English Code-Switching in English-Medium Instruction Settings: A Case Study

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Abstract:

This article investigates code-switching instances in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) settings, offering a micro-level preliminary analysis of how instructors and students alternate between English and Romanian in Computer Science classroom activities. Drawing on audio recordings of lectures and seminars, the research identifies types of code-switching (intrasentential, intersentential, and tag-switching), contextual triggers, and functional motivations. The findings reveal that code-switching serves as a strategic pedagogical tool, facilitating comprehension, engagement, and the communication of technical content. Overall, the study argues that rather than undermining EMI objectives, code-switching reflects the pragmatic realities of multilingual classrooms and supports learner-centred pedagogy. It also contributes to the underexplored area of EMI classroom discourse in Romanian higher education and highlights the importance of bilingual strategies in content delivery.

Keywords: code-switching, English-Medium Instruction (EMI), bilingual pedagogy, classroom discourse analysis, Romanian higher education

1. Introduction

The global spread of English as the dominant language of academia has brought about a marked increase in the use of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) across higher education institutions worldwide. As universities strive to enhance their international visibility and attract a more diverse student population, EMI has become a central feature of internationalisation strategies. This shift is especially evident in non-Anglophone countries, where EMI is increasingly adopted for the delivery

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of non-language academic subjects such as engineering, economics, and information technology.

In Romania, the trend toward implementing EMI at the tertiary level has gained notable momentum over the past decade. Higher education institutions (HEIs) have expanded their EMI offerings as part of broader internationalisation agendas, aiming to align with European and global educational standards. One visible manifestation of this shift is the steady growth in the number of programmes delivered entirely in English – particularly in technical and scientific disciplines. At the University of Craiova, this trend is reflected in the increasing number of EMI programmes, especially at the Master's level. Currently, there are nine English-taught programmes proposed across the undergraduate and graduate levels for the 2025-2026 academic year. On the one hand, at the Bachelor's level, there are two programmes, with considerable experience: the Computer Science programme within the Faculty of Automation, Computers and Electronics (since 1993) and the International Economics and Business programme within the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration. On the other hand, at the Master's level, the English-taught programmes include Artificial Intelligence and Applied Computing and Applied Artificial Intelligence in Mechatronics and Robotics (Faculty of Automation, Computers and Electronics), International Economics and Business Administration (Faculty of Economics and Business Administration), Sustainable Energy and Mobility Systems (Faculty of Electrical Engineering), Hybrid, Electric and Autonomous Vehicles (Faculty of Mechanics), Methods and Models in Computational and Medical Physics (Faculty of Sciences, Department of Physics), and Smart Regional Development (Faculty of Sciences, Department of Geography).

Despite the strategic emphasis placed on EMI by Romanian universities, there remains a significant gap in empirical research exploring the actual classroom practices and linguistic dynamics of these programmes. As Galloway et al. (2020) point out, “despite theoretical discussions or descriptions of EMI programmes existing, there remains a scarcity of research examining what is happening at the practical level and also the impact of EMI on both students' disciplinary and language learning.” Indeed, much of the existing Romanian literature has focused on macro-level issues such as institutional partnerships, international mobility, and policy frameworks (Deca, Egron-Polak, Fiț 2015; Fiț et al. 2022) or has explored stakeholder perceptions and English language proficiency from a

broader institutional lens (Reşceanu, Preda, Dumitraşcu 2021, 2023; Reşceanu 2024).

Moreover, no studies on code-switching in EMI (English-Medium Instruction) settings in Romania have been conducted to date, which leaves a significant gap in understanding how Romanian students and teachers manage multiple linguistic repertoires in academic contexts. While code-switching has been a widely researched phenomenon in bilingual and multilingual settings globally, research involving Romanian speakers remains limited. Only a few studies have addressed code-switching in Romanian-speaking bilingual communities (Dumitrescu 1993; Beligan 1999; Ene 2001; Bancu 2013; Greavu 2022), focusing primarily on diasporic or regional minority contexts where Romanian coexists with languages such as Hungarian, German, or English. These works tend to explore structural and sociolinguistic aspects of language mixing, often from a macro-sociolinguistic or identity-centred perspective. Even fewer studies have examined code-switching in the spontaneous speech of Romanian youth, where informal registers and digital communication environments play an increasingly influential role (Oancea 2019). The lack of data on code-switching in formal educational settings – especially in the growing number of EMI programmes in Romanian universities – suggests a pressing need for empirical research that captures the linguistic realities of learners and instructors operating in hybrid academic environments.

Considering the above, our article aims to address this research gap by offering a micro-level, classroom-based case study of EMI practices at a Romanian university. Drawing on data collected through classroom recordings and observations, it explores the code-switching behaviour of both instructors and students in EMI environments and thus contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the linguistic strategies employed in bilingual academic settings and the implications these have for language policy, pedagogy, and learner experience in Romanian higher education.

This study begins from the premise that EMI does not require absolute exclusivity of English in the classroom, but rather a balanced and purposeful use of linguistic resources to support learning. The notion that EMI must be delivered entirely in English has been increasingly challenged by researchers and practitioners who advocate for more flexible, pedagogically informed approaches. A widely accepted operational definition is provided by the Oxford EMI Training and Consulting Organisation, which maintains that EMI courses should deliver content,

conduct assessments, and use learning materials in English, while allowing for principled and limited use of other languages in specific contexts (Dearden and Spain 2021). For instance, student-to-student and teacher-to-student interaction during pair or group work may involve languages other than English to facilitate comprehension, encourage participation, and stimulate idea generation. However, students are expected to report outcomes and engage in whole-class interaction in English. Importantly, the guideline recommends that at least 70% of class communication remain in English⁴, striking a balance between maintaining the integrity of EMI and recognizing the realities of multilingual classrooms. This more inclusive and pragmatic view of EMI provides a critical foundation for understanding code-switching not as a failure to adhere to EMI norms, but as a strategic and context-sensitive pedagogical tool that reflects the linguistic complexity of real classroom practice.

2. Research context

As stated in the introduction, the focus of this study is on identifying when and how students and academic staff alternate between English and Romanian during educational interactions, both in formal and informal settings. Specifically, the research mainly focuses on:

- *Temporal and situational patterns of code-switching* by investigating the moments in which English and Romanian are mixed during classroom discourse, lectures, or seminars;
- *Types of code-switching employed*, distinguishing between intersentential, intrasentential, and tag-switching;

To contextualize these objectives, it is essential to first understand the broader linguistic phenomenon of code-switching. Code-switching has been widely studied as a linguistic phenomenon characteristic of bilingual

⁴ Oxford EMI Training and Consulting Organisation set out the following definition: "For EMI courses, the delivery of content, whole-class interaction, the learning materials, and the demonstration and assessment of learning outcomes (such as oral presentation, assignments or tests) should be in English. Other languages may be used in a principled and limited way in specific circumstances, for example, Student-to-student and teacher-to-student interaction during pair work and group work may sometimes take place in languages other than English to aid mutual comprehension and idea generation. However, students should be asked to present their discussion outcomes in English and lecturers should ensure that at least 70% of class communication takes place in English". (Dearden and Spain, 2021).

and multilingual communication. It refers to the alternation between two or more languages within a single conversation, utterance, or discourse. As Haugen (1973: 521) classically defined it, code-switching encompasses “the alternate use of two languages including everything from the introduction of a single, unassimilated word up to a complete sentence or more into the context of another language.” Subsequent research has emphasized the complexity of this phenomenon, highlighting that language alternation can occur at virtually any structural level – from bound morphemes and lexical items to phrases, clauses, and entire discourse turns (Boumans 1998; Muysken 2000; Myers-Scotton 2006).

An important distinction in the literature is that between code-switching and borrowing. While both involve the interaction of linguistic systems, they operate under different constraints and motivations. Borrowing typically refers to the integration of a lexical item from one language into the lexicon of another, often resulting in phonological and morphological assimilation over time. In contrast, code-switching maintains the structural integrity of the switched segment and is contextually motivated by pragmatic, sociolinguistic, or cognitive factors. Heath (1989) offers a comprehensive analysis of the continuum between these phenomena, particularly in contact settings characterized by diglossia and multilingual repertoires. Similarly, Grosjean (1989) point to the importance of distinguishing between these two processes, noting that while borrowing reflects long-term lexical transfer, code-switching is an immediate, dynamic communicative strategy.

Another emerging area of debate concerns the relationship between code-switching and translanguaging. While earlier scholarship treated the two as conceptually distinct – code-switching being seen as a structured alternation between clearly bounded languages, and translanguaging as a more fluid and integrated language practice – recent studies challenge the clarity of this dichotomy, with many arguing that the boundaries between translanguaging and code-switching are often blurred in practice (Sahan and Rose 2021). For instance, Chan (2022), in her analysis of English and Hong Kong Cantonese mixing, questions the rigid compartmentalization of linguistic systems and highlights the need for more nuanced, usage-based approaches that reflect how bilingual speakers navigate their linguistic resources in real-world settings. This shift has prompted a reconceptualization of bilingual speech as inherently flexible and socially situated.

Similarly, scholars such as Li Wei (2018) and García and Lin (2017) argue that the distinction between code-switching and translanguaging may reflect ideological biases rather than empirical realities. Code-switching often assumes a deficit view—suggesting speakers are temporarily compensating for gaps in one language—while translanguaging refers to the creative and strategic use of language. However, in practice, the two phenomena often co-occur in multilingual classrooms. In our context, for instance, when a student switches between English and Romanian to explain a technical concept more clearly, this act may be described structurally as code-switching, but functionally it reflects a translanguaging stance—leveraging all available resources to construct knowledge.

Contrary to earlier views, code-switching is no longer seen as a sign of linguistic inadequacy, but rather as a strategic, and often beneficial, communicative and pedagogical tool. A growing body of research supports the positive role of code-switching in foreign language (FL) and bilingual education contexts. Macaro (2001) explores how code-switching functions as a resource for classroom management, metalinguistic explanation, and affective engagement in secondary FL classrooms. Pollard (2002) and Altun (2021) similarly point to its benefits in clarifying difficult concepts, scaffolding content, and building rapport between teachers and learners. Rather than inhibiting target language acquisition, judicious use of code-switching can enhance comprehension and support learners' cognitive processing in multilingual classrooms.

Within the specific context of EMI in higher education, code-switching has begun to receive attention for its communicative and instructional functions. Dimova, Hultgren, and Jensen (2015) examine how lecturers in EMI programmes navigate linguistic challenges by strategically switching to the local language to ensure clarity and maintain student engagement. Macaro et al. (2019) investigate how teacher training can address code-switching practices to better prepare educators for multilingual classrooms. Dimova and Kling (2020) explore how content and language integration in EMI contexts requires flexible linguistic strategies, of which code-switching is a central component. In a related study, Romanowski (2020) investigates the perceptions of translanguaging among students and teachers in EMI classrooms in Poland. His findings suggest a growing acceptance of translanguaging as a natural and beneficial classroom practice, particularly in facilitating understanding and learner engagement. More recently, Cicillini (2023) has analysed the communicative and

pedagogical functions of code-switching in EMI, noting its value in mediating meaning, managing interaction, and accommodating learner diversity.

Overall, the convergence of code-switching and translanguaging in recent research encourages researchers and educators to move beyond rigid linguistic boundaries and adopt a more learner-centred view of language use in multilingual educational settings.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, empirical approach to explore code-switching practices in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) settings at a Romanian university. The focus is on capturing naturally occurring instances of language alternation among students and academic staff during educational activities.

3.1 Data collection

The preliminary data corpus consists of classroom audio recordings and observations, capturing both teacher–student and student–student interactions in EMI settings. Specifically, the recordings include two lectures and three seminars, amounting to a total of 8.3 hours of audio, which were partially transcribed and manually analysed. These sessions were recorded with participants' informed consent, as outlined in the participant information and agreement form signed by all involved. The recordings aimed to capture spontaneous language use in real-time academic discourse, providing authentic examples of code-switching across both formal and informal educational settings.

3.2 Participants

Participants were from the Computer Science study programme at the Faculty of Automation, Computers and Electronics (University of Craiova) (first- and second-year students). In line with ethical research practices, all participants were anonymized. Their personal data were not recorded, and the audio files were securely stored and deleted upon completion of analysis. The consent form signed by the participants before all recorded interactions emphasized voluntary participation, the right to withdraw at any stage, and the exclusive academic use of the data. Thus, the research adheres strictly to principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and data

protection. Moreover, the recordings were made unobtrusively to minimize observer effects and preserve the natural flow of classroom discourse.

3.3 Data analysis

The collected audio data were manually transcribed, with careful attention to instances of language alternation, code-switching types (intrasentential, intersentential, and tag-switching), and the presence of technical jargon. This transcription process also focused on identifying key patterns related to the timing and motivations behind switching between English and Romanian, as well as capturing the contrast between formal (lecture-based) and informal (seminar-based or peer) interactions. For the purpose of this study, we selected from this preliminary corpus several representative excerpts from the classroom recordings and observation transcripts in order to illustrate key findings and support interpretive claims.

4. Results

The analysis of the recorded classroom interactions and interview transcripts revealed a range of code-switching practices used by both instructors and students across EMI settings. These instances varied in structure, function, and frequency, depending on the type of classroom interaction and the participants' roles.

4.1 Types of code-switching

Three primary types of code-switching were identified in the corpus, reflecting established taxonomies in bilingual discourse analysis:

- *Intrasentential code-switching*. This was the most frequent form observed, involving the insertion of words, phrases, or clauses from one language into the syntactic structure of another within a single sentence. For example, Romanian served as the matrix language, while English terms – especially disciplinary jargon – were embedded fluidly at the constituent or clause level. This often occurred in technical explanations, where such terms are used without translation.
- *Intersentential code-switching*. Found at sentence boundaries, this type involved complete alternation between English and Romanian sentences. It was typically used for emphasis or summarization. Instructors, in particular, employed intersentential switching when

alternating between delivering core content in English and reinforcing key points or checking comprehension in Romanian.

- *Emblematic code-switching*: Also referred to as *tag-switching* (Poplack, 1980), this occurred when speakers inserted discourse markers or filler expressions from English into primarily Romanian utterances (or vice versa). Common examples included *you know*, *I mean*, *OK*, *right?*, and *anyway*. These elements mainly served pragmatic or interactional functions, signalling transitions, seeking confirmation, or softening directives.

4.2 Contexts of code-switching

The analysis of the excerpts revealed distinct patterns depending on the level of formality, participant roles, and interactional dynamics of the classroom setting.

- *Lectures*:
In formal lecture-based instruction, code-switching occurred infrequently. Instructors generally adhered to English as the primary medium of communication, in alignment with EMI objectives. However, occasional shifts into Romanian were observed, primarily as a means of clarifying abstract or complex theoretical content, explaining specific references, or checking student comprehension. These instances were often preceded by meta-linguistic cues such as *Hai să explic altfel* (“Let me explain it differently”), indicating a conscious pedagogical decision to switch codes in response to perceived comprehension gaps.
- *Seminars and group discussions (labs)*:
Code-switching was most prevalent in seminars and small-group activities, where interaction was more dialogue-based and student-centred. In these less formal settings, both students and instructors engaged in more fluid language alternation. Students frequently switched between English and Romanian when working collaboratively, formulating responses, or seeking clarification. Romanian functioned as a valuable resource for explaining processes, expressing uncertainty, or in interpersonal communication. Instructors also adopted a more flexible linguistic approach, often switching codes to guide discussions, simplify complex terminology, or respond to students’ needs. For example, during a seminar, the instructor presented multiple solutions entirely

in English, but when a student asked for clarifications and code-switched in his question, the instructor responded exclusively in Romanian. This deliberate shift facilitated clearer understanding and illustrated the instructor's adaptive use of code-switching to support student comprehension. This case illustrates functional code-switching, as the instructor, having used English throughout the initial explanation, transitioned entirely to Romanian when responding to a student's request for clarification – thus ensuring comprehension and reinforcing key points in the student's dominant language.

- *Student presentations:*

A more variable code-switching pattern emerged during student presentations of assignments and problem-solving tasks. Although students generally attempted to present in English, many reverted to Romanian when facing lexical retrieval issues or when elaborating on visual materials such as slides. No code-switching or difficulties in articulating technical content was observed. There were a few instances of code-switching in response to unanticipated instructor questions, reflecting a tension between students' language proficiency and their ability to convey subject-specific knowledge. In such moments, Romanian appeared to function as a strategic scaffold, enabling students to maintain the flow of communication and preserve the coherence of their arguments.

In the following section, we present representative examples that illustrate these patterns and highlight the linguistic features of code-switching observed in our corpus.

4.3 Examples of code-switching patterns

To illustrate the patterns identified through the classroom recordings and transcriptions, this section presents several examples of code-switching observed in the EMI setting under study. The examples are categorized according to established typologies – code-changing, code-mixing, and insertional switching – reflecting varying structural and functional characteristics. These instances not only demonstrate the linguistic strategies employed by students and instructors but also highlight the dynamic interplay between English and Romanian in real-time academic discourse.

All examples are quoted directly from the classroom recordings and have been transliterated into English for clarity, with the original Romanian elements preserved in square brackets.

a). *Code-changing* (the complete shift to another language system at major constituent boundaries)

E.g. “(previous communication in Romanian).... and then you have it”

“(...) și that’s it”

[...and that’s it]

b). *Code-mixing* (the use of opposite language elements which cannot be considered to be borrowed by the community, oftentimes used by a speaker to compensate for competence gaps). Many computing terms (e.g., “debugging,” “framework,” “compiler”, “machine learning”) have no direct Romanian equivalent or are more commonly used in English.

E.g. “Counter modulo n , care numără impulsurile de clock”

[Counter modulo n , which counts clock pulses]

“Toate clusterelor formate prin ...”

[All the clusters formed by...]

“Instaleaza driverele pentru router”

[Install the drivers for the router]

“Numerele negative sunt reprezentate în calculator in 2’s complement code”

[Negative numbers are represented in a computer using 2’s complement code]

“La acționarea latchului, ECU-l își ia un DET”

[Upon activating the latch, the ECU takes a DET]

Moreover, English acronyms and abbreviations – such as *API* and *LLM* – are frequently used in classroom discourse, often integrated morphologically into Romanian. These borrowed terms typically receive Romanian plural and definite article suffixes (e.g., *LLM-uri*, *LLM-urile*), reflecting their adaptation to the grammatical system of the matrix language. For instance, in the last example above “la acționarea latchului, ECU-l își

ia un DET” [Upon activating the latch, the ECU takes a DET], the acronyms and the technical terms are embedded within Romanian syntactic structures, illustrating the high degree of linguistic blending.

c). Insertion or embedding of constituents of L2 into an L1 pattern where categorical equivalence/congruence exists.

E.g. “Access la analitice pentru advanced usersi”
[access to analytics for advanced users]

“Explică ce face switchul ăsta”
[Explain what this switches does]

“Ne gandim la niște requirementuri...”
[We think about some requirements]

“Folosești un fel de programming language care nu e adecvat...”
[You use a certain type of programming language which is not adequate]

“Trebuie sa recunoști patternul”
[You have to recognise the pattern]

There are also cases of alternating languages between sentences:

“Let me explain again, ca să înțeleagă toată lumea (...)”
[Let me explain again so that everybody should understand]

“Nu, stai puțin! You can’t just use a simple if-else structure aici, trebuie să implementezi un state machine ca să gestionezi toate scenariile.”
[No, wait a minute! You can’t just use a simple if-else structure here, you have to implement a state machine to manage all the scripts.]

“Ascultă-mă... It’s not just about writing the algorithm, trebuie să te gândești și la complexitatea spațială și temporală, altfel codul nu va scala.”
[Listen to me... It’s not just about writing the algorithm, you also need to consider spatial and temporal complexity, or the code won’t scale.]

“A, nu, nu merge așa! You have to configure the kernel module corect, altfel sistemul nu va boota.”

[Oh, no, it doesn't work like that! You have to configure the kernel module correctly, or the system won't boot.]

“Nu e vorba numai să adaugi mai mult RAM. Ca să vezi unde sunt bottleneckurile reale you need to profile the application.”

[It's not just about adding more RAM. To see where the real bottlenecks are you need to profile the application.]

“Trebuie să gândești outside the box.”

[You must think outside the box]

Another notable pattern in the data involves the use of discourse markers to organise talk, signal speaker attitude, or manage interaction. These elements often occur as *emblematic or tag-switching*, where speakers insert English or Romanian markers into otherwise monolingual utterances. For example, an excerpt from a conversation below between the instructor and the student illustrates this:

E.g. “Nu am mai avut timp să termin prezentarea...” “Anyway, să o trimiți până mâine”.

[‘I didn't have time to finish the presentation’. ‘Anyway, you should send it by tomorrow’]

Here, the English discourse marker *anyway* introduces a shift in topic or emphasis, functioning pragmatically to refocus the conversation.

Similarly, in an example such as: “This principle is very important, nu-i așa?” [This principle is very important, isn't it?], *nu-i așa?* [isn't it?] serves as a Romanian tag question that solicits agreement or confirmation from the listener, a common device in didactic speech. These markers do not alter the propositional content but play an important interactional role, maintaining flow, managing transitions, or softening directives.

4.4 Some linguistic remarks

In this section, we briefly examine some of the structural characteristics of the code-switching instances identified in the corpus, focusing on their adherence to established linguistic constraints and models.

Drawing on Poplack's (1980) universal constraints—the Free Morpheme and Equivalence constraints—as well as Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model, the analysis highlights how English lexical items are systematically integrated into Romanian syntactic frames. Particular attention is given to the morphosyntactic behaviour of nouns, adjectives, and verbs, which constitute the most frequently switched elements in the data.

All instances of code-switching selected from our corpus for the purpose of this article adhere to Poplack's (1980) proposed universal restrictions on code-switching:

1. The free-morpheme constraint: "Codes may be switched after any constituent in discourse provided that constituent is not a bound morpheme." (p. 585)
2. The equivalence constraint: "Codes may be switched at points in discourse where juxtapositions of L1 and L2 elements do not violate a syntactic rule of either language." (p. 586)

In all the cases analysed here Romanian is the dominant language, the Matrix Language (ML) (cf. Myers-Scotton's Language Frame model), which sets the grammatical frame of the bilingual clause, and an Embedded Language (EL), which supplies some of the content words, such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives. English switches in our data consistently conform to Romanian syntactic rules and are typically integrated morphologically into the matrix language. This includes the use of Romanian plural markers on English nouns and the application of appropriate tense or aspect endings on English-derived verbs, demonstrating a high degree of grammatical accommodation within the Romanian linguistic framework.

NOUNS

- Noun phrases are by far the largest class of switched elements. These findings are in line with the results of other studies reporting the prevalence of nouns in code-switching corpora, for example Poplack (1980) on Spanish/ English, Treffers-Daller (1994) on French/Dutch, Bancu (2013, 2014) on Romanian/English.
- Number in nouns is marked morphologically by means of specific inflections, and syntactically in the agreement between the noun and its determiners.
- The Romanian plural inflection is also present (*clustere*, *drivere*, *requirementuri*, *bottleneckuri*), although less frequently used with multi-

word noun phrases. In the latter cases, users show a preference for the English plural (e.g. embedded systems).

- One case of using both Romanian and English plural suffixes with the same noun stems (as signalled in Greavu 2022 in the case of bilinguals): *userși* (user+ s_{EN} pl (s) + i_{RO} pl).

ADJECTIVES

- Adjectives are the second largest category of English elements in our data;
- In Romanian, adjectives agree in number, gender and case with the nouns they modify; however, no English adjective in our data is morphologically adapted to Romanian;
- All switched adjectives are placed on the right-hand side of the nouns they modify according to Romanian syntactic rules, a situation which supports the Morpheme Order Principle of the MLF model (Myers-Scotton 2006: 244).

E.g. E ceva user-fiendly și foarte affordable. Are modul de shift right/left.
[It is user-friendly and very affordable. It has a right/left shift module.]

VERBS AND VERB PHRASES

- Our corpus contains examples of English verbs and verb phrases, mainly occurring in the subjunctive mood, but also in the indicative, conditional and imperative, with or without pronominal clitics.
- In all examples, the verbs are morphologically integrated in the matrix language (Romanian), some even spelled phonetically to reflect their English pronunciation (e.g. “Poți să-l forwardezi” [you can forward it], “forwardează-l” [forward it], “Ai reușit să debăguiești codul ăla?” [Did you manage to debug that code?], “Da, l-am debăguit, dar încă trebuie să testez funcția aia”. [Yes, I debugged it, but I still need to test that function], “Am pus un commit pe branchul principal, să vezi modificările”. [I made a commit on the main branch, check out the changes], “Perfect, fac un pull și văd imediat.” [Perfect, I'll pull it and check right away.], “Sistemul nu va boota” [the system will not boot]).
- Double verb constructions: Romanian verb + English verb (e.g. a da click/play/run/like/enter/send/access [‘give’ lick/play/run/like/enter/send/access], a face download/power pe reset/focus [‘make/do’ download/power on reset/focus]).

“Avem un carry la rangul următor”

[*have a carry...*]

[We carry over to the next rank]

“Luam borrow de la rangul următor”

[*take borrow....*]

[We borrow from the next rank]

Overall, the analysis of nouns, adjectives, and verbs confirms that English lexical items are integrated into Romanian discourse in structurally consistent ways, with noun phrases emerging as the most frequent switched elements, adjectives maintaining Romanian syntactic placement, and verbs undergoing clear morphological adaptation—all of which reflect a stable application of matrix language constraints and support the structural predictability of code-switching in EMI classrooms.

Conclusions

By focusing on naturally occurring classroom discourse in a Romanian EMI context, this study responds to the research gap identified in the literature and achieves its aim of analysing the forms, functions, and structural patterns of code-switching between English and Romanian. It identified and classified multiple forms of code-switching—namely intrasentential, intersentential, and tag-switching—highlighting their frequency, structural characteristics, and communicative functions in both formal and informal instructional contexts.

The findings reveal that code-switching in EMI classrooms is not a sign of linguistic deficiency, but rather a pragmatic and context-sensitive strategy used by both instructors and students. Whether to facilitate comprehension, scaffold complex content, manage interaction, or build rapport, language alternation was shown to enhance rather than hinder the learning process. Instructors primarily employed Romanian to reinforce understanding, clarify abstract concepts, or respond to visible cues of student confusion, while students used it to negotiate meaning, express uncertainty, or elaborate on discipline-specific terminology.

At the structural level, the data conform to Poplack's (1980) universal constraints on code-switching and align with Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame model, with Romanian serving as the matrix language and English as the embedded language. The majority of English

insertions, particularly nouns, adjectives, and verbs, were grammatically integrated into Romanian utterances, illustrating a stable and systematic pattern of bilingual clause formation.

Thus, the study contributes to the growing body of EMI research by offering empirical evidence from an underrepresented national context. It also points to the need to move beyond prescriptive, monolingual ideologies in EMI settings and instead recognize the pedagogical value of bilingual practices. In light of these findings, code-switching should be viewed as a legitimate instructional tool that reflects the linguistic realities of multilingual classrooms and supports a more inclusive, learner-centred approach to higher education.

Future research should expand on this preliminary investigation by incorporating a larger and more diverse sample across disciplines and institutions, and by integrating student and teacher perceptions to further contextualize classroom language use. Such inquiries would help inform EMI policy and training, ultimately contributing to more effective and equitable multilingual education.

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