Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **13**, 2 (2021) 1–20

DOI: 10.2478/ausp-2021-0010

Language Use during Romanian Classes in Bilingual Settings. A Qualitative Approach

Erika-Mária TÓDOR
Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (Cluj-Napoca, Romania)
Department of Human Sciences, Miercurea Ciuc
todorerika@uni.sapientia.ro

Abstract. Education is one of the defining areas of language policy, as on this level we can track the features of the practical implementation of language ideologies. In my study, I deal with the question of teaching the official language, i.e. Romanian, in schools where the working language is Hungarian. I outline a summing-up situation based on the macro indicators (following demographic, environmental aspects), then focus on the micro level related to the question under discussion, namely to what is happening in the classroom, paying special attention to the organization of the linguistic resources in classroom interaction. In order to have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, I analyse 25 structured reflective diaries and try to identify what kind of local interpretations are there for code-switching in the classroom and what individual solutions are used by different teachers for organizing the learning process.

Keywords: classroom interaction, bilingualism, acquiring Romanian L2, structured reflective diary, code-switching

Introductory remarks

In planning, regulating, and implementing language instruction, we can distinguish between three important levels (Shohami 2006): (i) the macro level is represented by language ideologies (language policies, language pedagogy, principles of language approaches), and they are enacted through laws and norms of language use; (ii) the intermediary level, where the regulation of content takes place in relation to the mentioned values, and this is echoed in the curriculum and school books; (iii) the level of "de facto" language policies, the level of language

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

use, which in case of formal learning is the scene of classroom interaction and of the true heuristic encounters. From the perspective of a developing personality, this level is the most defining context, yet the least accessible one.

From the point of view of language use, the school is the space where classroom register, the formal and informal language use, the language of instruction and that of the environment are present at the same time. What is more, the school is the spot where different languages are acquired. For example, in schools where the working language is different from the language of the majority, it is the context in which the native tongue, the official language of the state, and also foreign languages are taught and learnt.

The relations between various languages are approached by the different language teaching models in specific manners. Although each model is the carrier of local peculiarities, in the didactic approach to various languages we can distinguish between the following views: "dive-in" language learning (Gorter–Cenoz 2017); approaches based on dual language use (Gorter–Cenoz 2017, Pisnjak 2013); translanguaging language pedagogy (Garcia–Wei 2014, Wei 2018, Heltai 2017).

Looking at it from this perspective, mother tongue plays a supportive role in the acquisition of the second or third language as well. Acquiring the mother tongue (or family languages) takes place at the same time as getting acquainted with the world through the given culture and language (Tolcsvai 2015), and this process happens by following a model, in *genuine* language situations. "The acquisition of the second language happens when already familiar with the mother tongue, in the context of already being acquainted with the world, from the specific perspective of a given culture and language"[1] (Tolcsvai 2015: 121).

In the following parts of the present paper, we will address the question of learning the official language of the country in the context of minority bilingualism, having in mind this rapport.

Romanian schools with Hungarian as the working language and the acquisition of Romanian

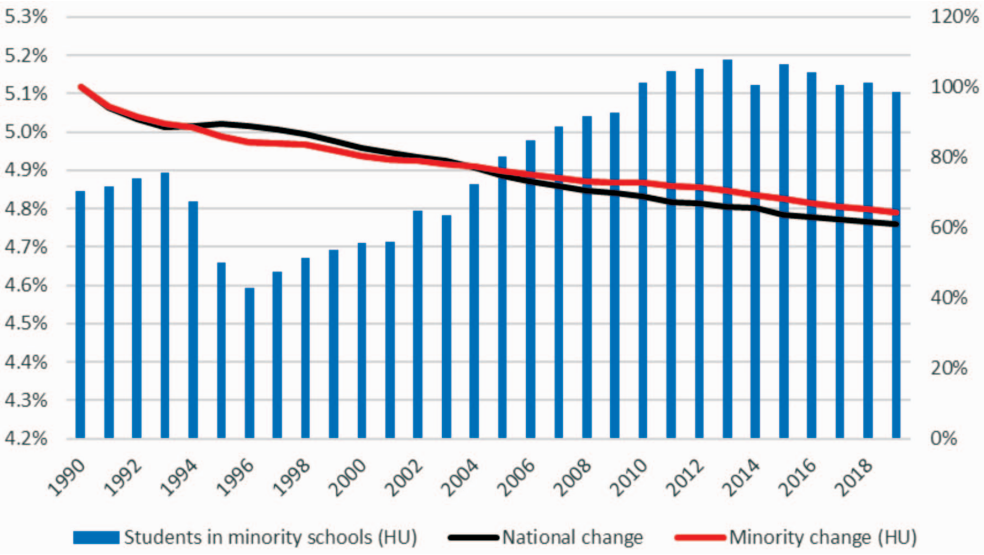
Among Hungarian communities living in Romania, which makes up around 6.1% of the total population of the country (based on the 2011 census),[2] the acquisition of the Romanian language takes the following path (Tódor 2018): (a) besides the formal education, the proximate language environment (family, community) provides opportunities for spontaneous language learning and language use or

1 Translation from Hungarian to English belongs to the author.

2 Data available online in Romanian: http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/ [02.02.2020].

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

(b) the acquisition of Romanian happens in institutional settings, the proportion of situations for using the language outside school being rather low. This latter case is characteristic for regions and settlements where the Hungarian minority is majoritarian. In this context, the communities under discussion have to choose between two dominant possibilities regarding schooling: (i) one possibility refers to situations where parents choose to send their children to a school where the working language is Romanian,[3] first of all in order for the children to "have better chances" (Sorbán 2000); (ii) the other possibility represents an educational model which favours conservation of the mother tongue, a situation in which students learn Romanian language and literature as a distinct school subject (also working language). Naturally, different linguistic choices lead to different linguistic attitudes, different habits with respect to language use, different linguistic identities and forms of behaviour. The figure and map provided below illustrate the quantitative indicators of the two mentioned socializing paths, based on data collected in 2019–2020.



Source: INS Tempo

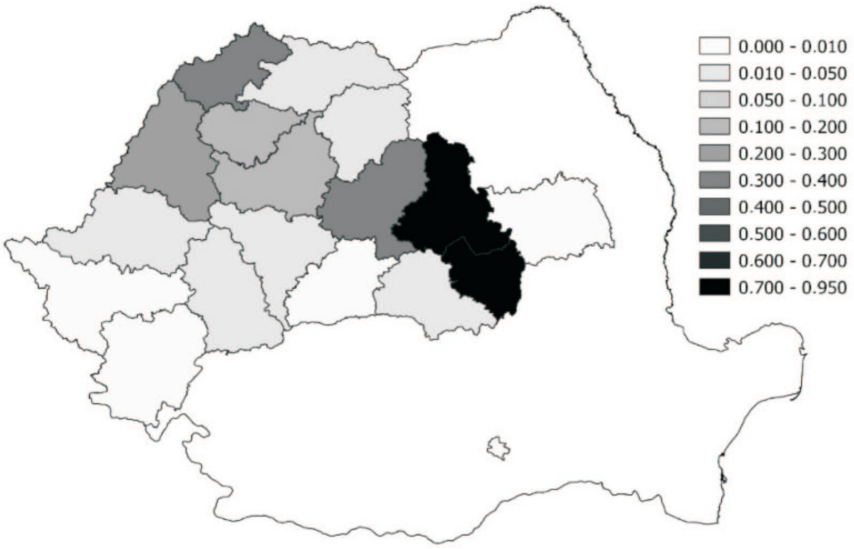
Figure 1. *Hungarian minority schools in Romania, 1990–2019*

In the case of the already mentioned school population, the question of effective school instruction of the official language is not only a question of education policy or organizing education, but it also has a mobility-related and economic

3 Concerning the percentage of students who chose to learn in Romanian, the following data is known, based on Barna et al. (2016): in 2011, the proportion of Hungarian children not learning in their mother tongue was estimated at around 12–14%.

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

role since knowledge of the official language shows strong relations with social status, building a successful career, furthermore being efficient in the economic sphere and labour market as well as with the ethnic distribution of different jobs[4] (Sorbán 2014, Csata 2016).



Source: INS Tempo, map edited by László Csák

Map 1. *The distribution of Hungarian students (based on data from 2019, 1 = 100%)*

The acquisition of Romanian and the reform of curriculum

Based on the 2011 law and a 2017 ministerial order, in the Romanian education system there occurred a curricular parallel in regulating the content of the subject known as Romanian language and literature, since *one* subject (Romanian language and literature) was associated with *two* items of the curriculum (one for the native speakers of Romanian and another one for non-native speakers). Of course, school books have been developed based on these two curriculum items. Yet, the curricular parallel can be traced in the case of different generations too,

4 "5–8% of the differences concerning the income of individuals belonging to the Hungarian community in Transylvania can be explicitly explained by knowledge of Romanian" (Zsombor Csata 2019, retrieved from: https://penzcsinalok.transindex.ro/lokalis/20190418-mennyivel-keres-kevesebbet-az-aki-nem-tud-romanul – translation from Hungarian to English belongs to the author).

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

as in the above mentioned institutions we can distinguish between two types of generations: students who learned Romanian based on the old curriculum and those who followed the new one (at the end of the school year 2020–2021, the first assessment of the 8th grade students will take place based on the new curriculum). However, at this point, it can be stated that the success of the practical implementation of curriculum development can be reached by the cooperation of exterior (framework for organizing the learning process, principles for assessment and evaluation, etc.) and interior factors (preparedness of educators, motivational background, etc.). The main characteristic of the period between 2017 and 2020 was delegating the responsibility of organizing the learning process to the level of schools (and classrooms) and raising awareness of it.

The function of code-switching in classroom interactions

Classroom interaction is a specific form of creating meaning, as it is planned and guided (Hinkel 2006, Jessnera–Allgäuer-Hackl 2020). First of all, it is characterized by a sequence of purposeful speech situations and the co-existence of classroom language and the vernacular; furthermore, it is structured by short- and long-term objectives (e.g. arousing attention or developing skills). In order to put ideas of language pedagogy into practice on the macro level, teachers opt for different individual methodological and language use strategies. According to these choices, classroom interaction reflects individual interpretations of governing principles and of the hidden curriculum. Consequently, success or failure in the classroom is influenced by the participants themselves and the experience of meanings developed together (Bannink–Van Dam 2006; Teppo 2018). The characteristics of classroom interactions are shaped by the working language as well as by the dynamics of practices related to both teachers' and students' language use. The above mentioned decisions concerning language use result in dual speech situations, which are strongly structured by code-switching.

The phenomenon of code-switching has been dealt with by several research paradigms based on different approaches (Auer 1984): some used ethnographic or (structural) linguistic viewpoints, others investigated language attitudes concerning code-switching. Language configurations brought about by different speech situations carry the features of the relationship between different languages, and those of language acquisition as well (Bartha 1999, Navracsics 2000, Vančo 2019).

In fact, the above mentioned linguistic settings can be outlined along the functionality of the two languages activated in different contexts, where the organizing principle is the local meaning. Their functionality can be interpreted

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

from two different approaches, namely from the participants' perspective on code-switching and from the discourse-centred point of view. In the discourse of bilingual speakers, Peter Auer (1984) distinguishes between alternative (intermittent) language use (or double language use) and situations of code-switching. In interpreting these switches, he adopts grammar-centred (pursuing the morphosyntactic features of code-switching), interaction-based (investigating the correlations between meanings and functions), and socio-linguistic (tracking the interpretation of the community's code-switching) approaches.

As compared to speech situations outside school, classroom code-switching (Nikolov 2000, Lin 2008, Levine 2011) fulfils specific functions.[5] During foreign language classes, it plays an important role in conveying the meaning, in ensuring comprehension, and in organizing learning. Research carried out by Cummins and Swain (1986) and Cummins (1981) prove the motivating force and the comprehension-facilitating function of code-switching occurring in classroom interaction as well as the balancing function of the target-language culture influence. Based on other research observing Romanian classes in schools where the working language is Hungarian (Tódor 2005), we found that in classroom interaction code-switching primarily appears on two important levels. On the one hand, planned code-switching can consciously facilitate achieving educational objectives (such as explanation, comparative view, or translation); on the other hand, unplanned code-switching can also be observed, and it can be related mostly to spontaneous speech situations and conveying messages of a more personal nature. In what follows, we will present the results of previously carried out research related to the topic (Tódor 2005, Tódor–Dégi 2018).

Based on previously analysed data, we can state that, as planning is concerned, the target language represents the medium for classroom language, and teachers tend to maintain this (Tódor–Dégi 2018). Usually, the proportion of the planned situations in which code-switching occurs is low; most often, students are the ones to initiate such speech situations, when personal implication is very important for the speakers, or there is an express need for quicker and more efficient communication. At the same time, we can also affirm that the use of code-switching for didactic purposes is a phenomenon that largely depends on the teacher, the class community, and the topic of the lesson.

5 Throughout the research, the question of using the proper notions arose quite often, namely if we should refer to the speech situations that emerged in the classroom as *translanguaging* or as *code-switching*. In her study, Rácz (2021) uses the term translanguaging to name the same situation. Although the term translanguaging is closely connected to classroom interaction, too (Cen William 1996, qtd. in Wei 2005), in my interpretation, in situations of asymmetric bilingualism in the classroom, we can speak about code-switching first of all since we are speaking about base-preserving bilingualism (Lanstyák 2006), in which code-switching concerns certain registers, and it also reflects linguistic relations. The features of linguistic production are shaped by speech intentions, and in our case they are also structured by specific learning objectives.

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

During the observed Romanian classes, the idea of keeping communication in L2 is strongly present in the discourse of the teacher. What is more, there is a kind of "specialization" concerning language use, which can be observed in different phases of the lesson. In speech situations, which are more controlled or routine-like, the target language is preferred, while code-switching occurs most often in practising free speech. The teaching language (especially in explanations) is the target language, yet understanding is often made easier by activating the mother tongue. In certain phases of the learning process, the exposure to the use of both languages is stronger. Such moments are, for example, maintaining discipline or proper understanding of certain tasks in organizing learning, cases in which the code-switching phenomenon or repeating sentences in the mother tongue occur more frequently in order to achieve a more accurate understanding.

To sum up, we can say that during Romanian classes we observed that we were able to distinguish between situations involving code-switching and parallel language use (where the teacher repeated the message both in L1 and L2) in classroom interaction.

The topic of the research

In the present paper, we focus on mapping the linguistic features of classroom interaction in order to get acquainted with the strategies concerning language use during Romanian classes in schools where the working language is Hungarian. In fact, we wanted to find out what individual solutions, what tools of communication are activated by teachers for achieving a more effective organization of classroom activity and in order for students to realize that the learning activity, the discovery process belongs to them. The research pursues individual and local interpretations of the phenomenon of code-switching, and it highlights the verbal dimensions in the mechanism of classroom interaction.

The characteristics of the communicative verbal situations differ from those of the written discourse (Manu 2008), and, implicitly, unilingual settings of communication differ from bilingual ones. In our approach, we were interested in the correlations of meaning constructed in the process of a dialogue,[6] and we started from the hypothesis that the way people use linguistic resources performs certain functions in classroom interaction.

Tracking classroom interaction is also indicated by pedagogical culture since (at least on the level of declarations) we are investigating situations in the context of a communicative-functional approach in language learning, where communication skills are not only objectives but also tools. All those speech

6 *Dialogical Meaning*, Auer 1984.

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

situations were considered units of analysis where, for one reason or another, the mother tongue also occurred beyond the use of the official language (L2).

The type of bilingualism we are investigating concerns students who have socialized in a dominant Hungarian environment (as illustrated in *Map 1* and *Figure 1*), where respondents can be considered special additive bilinguals (multilinguals) yet the acquisition of the second language happens mainly in institutional, formal learning context. In the motivational background of the learning process, we can find further studies and the possibility for mobility on the one hand and a more effective social integration on the other. In the last few years, this type of language learning – which is based on instrumental motivation – has been reconfigured in a special way by the prestige and "learnability" of foreign languages, first of all by the prestige and "learnability" of English.

Research methodology

The phenomenon of code-switching in classroom interaction, which is the topic of the present investigation, has been addressed in previous phases of our research from different perspectives. In a study published in 2005, I summarized the experiences of a complex research in which the phenomenon was looked at from teachers' and students' perspectives, through qualitative data analysis (based on a questionnaire), but structured observation and focus group investigations were also adopted. Another paper, published in 2018, was based on the comparative analysis of data using the method of participant observation.

The present study focuses on a single language-learning context, namely the attitude towards language use during Romanian classes. This time, we were interested in the attitudes and judgment formulated by the teachers related to the topic; consequently, the data to be presented reflects their inner perspectives, and it attempts to provide a glimpse on what teachers think about the possibilities of code-switching, its advantages and disadvantages.

In the research, we have selected bilingual subjects, more exactly teachers of Romanian whose L1 is Hungarian, starting from the idea that in their case there is a higher probability for alternately activating the two different languages. The 25 respondents of our sample were selected from three different counties in Romania, and they were teaching Romanian language and literature in urban and rural areas where the Hungarian minority constitutes the majority population. One teacher works in a rural area and teaches simultaneous classes.

Considering their age, teachers are 26–48 years old, and there are three male and 22 female teachers. The respondent teachers have socialized in different university centres. We have selected the respondents using the snowball sampling

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

method: individuals involved in the research proposed other teachers to join the process of providing their opinions.

For collecting data, we have used the structured reflective diary, since in order to understand the phenomenon of language use properly, we thought it necessary to interpret the experienced attitudes, also to analyse their inner mechanisms. Choosing the structured reflective diary was justified, as this particular method provides opportunities for teachers to organize their reflective opinions (values, beliefs, attitudes, judgments) in a written form, based on their individual experiences (in our case, concerning language use). We are speaking about evocation based on introspection (for more on the introspective method, see Mackey–Gass 2005), which has advantages on the individual as well as on the community level. The method provides opportunities for using different tools; one of its most frequent variants is based on evocation supported by recorded material (e.g. video recordings). Beyond opportunities for implementation, the studies dealing with the theoretical background and research possibilities of the introspective method draw attention to its limitations (Kimmel 2006, qtd. in Sántha 2007) such as the following: lack of certain personality traits (self-confidence, open-mindedness, flexibility, self-esteem, down-to-earth self-assessment, well-developed communication skills, etc.) can act as a distorting factor in interpreting data; at the same time, it is important that the environment, the given context provide a supportive atmosphere for expressing individual opinions. We paid special attention to this latter aspect throughout the research, as we are investigating a matter concerning language use, which triggers at the same time banning and supporting attitudes in the educational culture.

A few words about the research process

Getting ready to start the structured reflective diary presented in the previous subsection was preceded by a discussion in which we clarified the most important notions (e.g. code-switching, reflective journal), and we asked the teachers to observe their students' language use for two weeks and make reflective notes based on their observations, having in mind the following questions: (a) Has code-switching occurred? (b) If it has, how often? (c) What moment of the lesson can code-switching be related to? (d) What do teachers think about this phenomenon? (e) What advantages and disadvantages can they speak about? (f) In what conditions do the mentioned speech situations help the acquisition of the L2, and when do they hinder it?

It has to be mentioned at this point that we encountered one single diary entry referring to the attitude towards the method used in the research and which also signals the possible distorting function of self-observation: "In the period between

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

18 and 29 November 2019, I was a lot more conscious linguistically. Probably self-observation itself inevitably influenced the results of self-observation, though it worked as a kind of diagnosing process…"[7][8] (4_19.11). The mentioned phenomenon is to be taken into account in the next phases of the research process as well.

Preparation for collecting data began in November 2019. We planned to set up representative teacher samples according to the types of settlements. However, as a result of the actions taken due to the pandemic, we were forced to reorganize data collection. Thus, by 12 May 2020, a number of 12 diaries were completed, and then in the period between September and October 2020 another 13 diaries, resulting in a total of 25 diaries available for analysis, since from the middle of March a chaotic subsequent period set in. Until the end of the school year, by 15 June, not every school managed to switch to real online learning. Consequently, we can find references to experiences with online learning only in the diaries that were completed during the later phase.

In the interpretation of the data, we have considered the ethno-methodological approach to be the most effective, as this approach builds from bottom to top. Consequently, we set off from the "knowledge" (set of norms) created and respected by the members of the community (Harklau 2005). Getting acquainted with this set of norms, mapping is only possible while observing interactions (talk-in-interaction, Auer 1998, Lazaraton 2005). We have analysed the diary entries based on main codes or main units (i.e. the key notions which occurred most often) and the subcodes related to them (thoughts, attitudes, emotions related to them).

Reflecting interpretation of code-switching in the classroom

The occurrence of code-switching and its frequency appeared among the questions to start diary entries with. Analysing the entries, we can observe that when dealing with numbers, we have to interpret them very flexibly since these proportions might turn over even in the case of the same class community in the different phases of the learning process. The mentioned proportion is influenced to a great extent by internal factors such as (a1) *the content of the lesson* (the proportion of code-switching or the parallel use of two languages also increases with the frequency of grammatical notions) or (a2) *the level of difficulty of the texts* (explaining unknown words); also, certain external factors are mentioned, for example (b) *students' age* or the level of studies (the younger the students

7 Translations of diary entries from Hungarian to English are my own throughout the text.

8 The number in brackets represents the code of the diary and the date of handing in the diary.

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

are, the more often the parallel use of two languages appears) or (c) *the level of language proficiency* (beginners, advanced learners), etc. According to the answers provided by the respondents, we can state that the lower the level of the target language is, the more frequent code-switching becomes; and the more abstract the selected knowledge is, the more frequent the situations are when both languages are activated.

As opposed to previous research results, it seems more prominent in the reflective diaries that in the respondents' opinion the vast proportion of code-switching serves an unplanned didactic objective. These events are primarily called forth by certain situations of communication, and thus they are mainly attitudes towards a concrete situation. In the diary entries, the frequent codes, or indicators, that refer to this issue are the following: "it is shaped by a situation in the classroom" (25_21.03); it is defined by "the dynamics of the lesson or discussion" (9_20.02); "… it is brought forth by the situation itself; they understand the same explanation in one classroom but not in the other..." (7_20.02).

According to the respondents' view, the planned nature of code-switching can primarily refer to moments of the lesson aiming at explanation, at the comprehension of the presented knowledge: "In advance, I always mark in my notes the more difficult expressions and my explanations (…) the rest is brought in by the given situation…" (5_20.01).

Based on the presented data, it can be concluded that in the situations under investigation the language of instruction is the target language, while the language of learning and understanding carries individual and community-related features, according to the students' level of language proficiency. Thus, a specific language use configuration is activated, which is primarily justified by creating the local experience of meaning. In different phases of the learning process, the way linguistic resources are activated and organized plays a specific didactic or interpersonal role.

Decisions concerning language choice in different classroom situations

Decisions concerning language choice are defined by the main objectives of the given moment in the language classroom. The figure below presents the ratio of the most important phases in organizing the learning process and code-switching, based on the diary entries of the respondents.

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

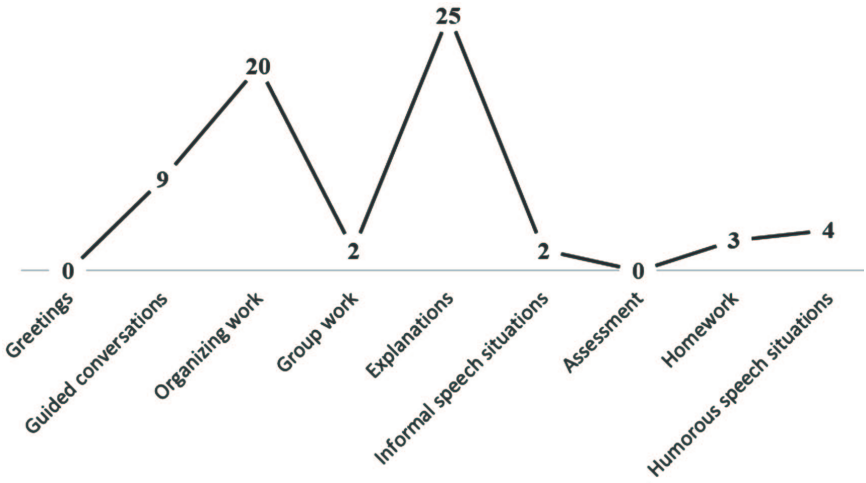


Figure 2. *Moments of classroom interaction and the percentage of code-switching (quantitative indicators), N = 25*

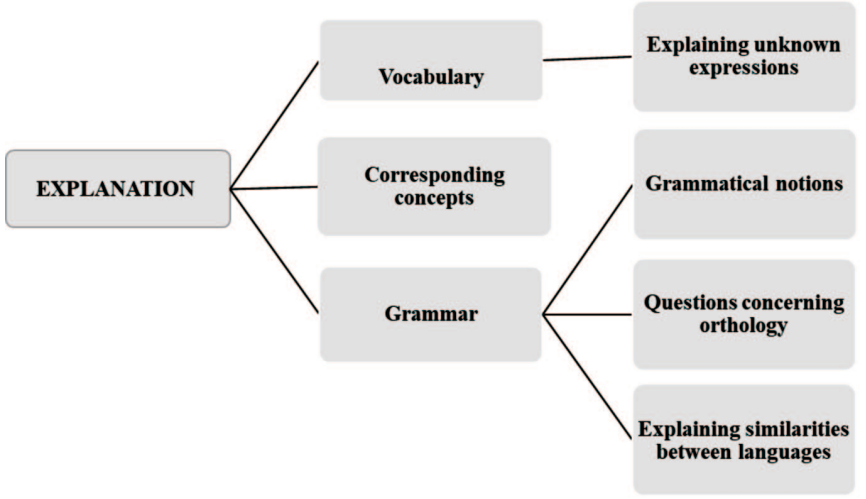


Figure 3. *Net of concepts illustrating the didactic role of linguistic resources displayed in explanations*

As displayed in the summing-up figure above, according to teachers' judgment, there are prominent moments and speech situations during language classes that can project the activation of L1 resources more frequently. Such a moment is the stage of explanations, where old and new meet. Capitalizing on the knowledge acquired in the mother tongue, this becomes the tool of efficiency in the comprehension process, and it results in code-switching. "Especially when

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

it comes to explaining words or concepts, because there are certain words, for example, in fairy tales or in classic texts of Romanian literature, where students understand better if they hear the expression which occurs in the Hungarian version" (7_20.02). "The use of L1 is required when explaining new concepts, especially if they have not learnt about it in their mother tongue, mainly in the 5th and 6th grades, but not exclusively" (15_20.02).

Based on the individual teaching experiences described in the diaries, the role of the code-switching traceable in the explanation can be illustrated in the net of concepts below.

Below we present a few illustrative diary entries:

a) related to explaining words or concepts:

"In the case of unknown words, I also use code-switching when it is a lot easier to reveal the Hungarian term than explaining it round and round and, eventually, ending up forced to say it in Hungarian" (1_19.11). "We do not translate the words but try to come up with at least two synonyms. If there is no synonym, we use the new words in sentences, I describe them to the students, and they have to deduce their meaning. We often associate the words with something, for example, with a similar sounding" (4_19.12).

b) related to grammatical notions:

"I always explain grammar rules in Hungarian. We usually discuss practical parts in both languages…" (4_19.12). "In the new curriculum, we don't have the kind of grammar that I still teach in the 8th grade; thus, explanations in Hungarian still occur mainly in this class and most often related to grammar issues…" (3_19.12).

c) translation, corresponding concepts:

"In case I can't explain something using body language and all, I translate a word or two, but as a rule of the thumb I do not translate anything" (15_20.02). "I sometimes translate Hungarian sentences into Romanian so that they understand, for example, the correct use of tenses…" (9_20.02).

Beyond explanations, organizing the learning process, discussing different tasks result quite often in parallel language use or situations of code-switching. Instructions are uttered in both languages, especially in lower grades, so that there is "less misunderstanding" (as one of the teachers puts it). In assigning homework, code-switching is used only in situations when comprehension is really hindered: "I always assign homework in Romanian. However, if I feel that it is necessary, I also explain in Hungarian what students are expected to do…" (15_20.02). In situations of communication that focus on evaluation, code-switching or using both of the languages in parallel aim at a higher level of consciousness. "If there is a frequent mistake, I always draw attention to it in Hungarian, as they understand better in Hungarian why something is not right [...] so that they don't commit the same mistake twice…" (10_20.02).

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

In informal speech situations, a wide range of examples of code-switching can be outlined. Such cases are, for example, situations based on playfulness, humour, or even irony, situations in which students' language level plays a key role in understanding them. "In order for the students to get the pun, they have to speak a given language well" (12_20.02). In spontaneous speech situations, the lack of linguistic knowledge might lead to activating resources in the mother tongue. Here is an example of such nature:[9] "A: B, **aşteaptă** eu! [B, wait I!] / (B looks at her, doesn't understand and has no reaction.) / T: A, what did you want to say? / A: I wanted to ask him to help me. / T: But A, **aşteaptă** means to wait; help is **ajută**. / A: So, that is why he has never helped me! (laughter)".

Looking at the relationship between L1 and L2 in the presented classroom interactions, we can conclude that there are four types of dominant behaviour when it comes to language use during Romanian classes: (a) a purposeful parallel use of both languages when a certain content is presented in the target language and then in the mother tongue in order for the "weaker students to catch up" and to support the experience of accurate meaning; (b) a communication-organizing strategy that redirects students to the target language in contexts where the student is speaking in Hungarian and the teacher answers them in the target language; (c) the most frequent speech situations are the so-called "in-between languages" code-switching situations, when activating the L1 resource aims at a more effective meaning production, or it is motivated by the use of some special terminology in the target language (e.g. "Which is the *predicat* [predicate] here?); (d) translating as a (comparative) method of language learning. At the same time, there also occur spontaneous, unintentional, context-dependent code-switching situations, which mainly indicate interpersonal experiences of meaning.

Based on the descriptions, we can also state that there is a conscious pedagogical attitude that builds on revealing the correspondences between the two languages, as well as a less conscious, context-shaped code-switching speech process in which the controlled feature of the situation is influenced by language routines or habits related to language use, too.

To what extent is code-switching effective in classroom communication?

In the last two decades of the Hungarian education system in Romania, the question of acquiring the official language of the country more effectively has

9 Speech situation evoked by the third informant. The initials (A, B) replace people's names, while T marks the teacher. We are dealing with a classroom interaction in a rural area, where a new student has just arrived in the 7th grade. The new student's L1 is Romanian, having little knowledge of Hungarian.

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

been redefined multiple times. Although a new curriculum has been introduced, its effects will be visible and analysable in the following years. In the present conditions in education, the question emerging rather frequently is to what extent the time invested in the learning process leads to the acquisition of a functional knowledge. In order to have an insight in how educators perceive the indicators of efficiency in the educational process, it was important to outline what advantages and disadvantages of code-switching in classroom interaction had been highlighted. The key terms associated with the advantages are displayed in the net of concepts below and are summarized in *Figure 4.*

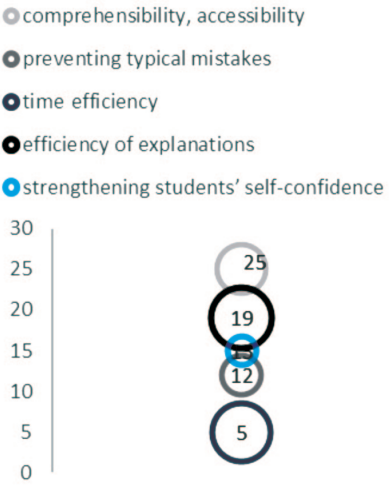


Figure 4. *Net of concepts illustrating the advantages of code-switching*

In what follows, a few illustrative remarks from the diary entries are presented.

"Its advantage is that the teacher knows what competences the students have in their mother tongue, what can be built on, what differences should be pointed out, and what typical mistakes might occur with Hungarian students. Teachers can bring together the two cultures, as they are acquainted with the traditions and cultural treasures of both nations" (17_20.09). "Its advantage is that it makes explanations more comprehensible, yet its disadvantage is that instead of communicating in the target language, it would turn classwork into a sort of translation exercise…" (5_20.01). "Translating one or two key terms might lead the students towards the solution" (10_20.02).

In the teachers' views, it appears to be a disadvantage if code-switching preserves students' thinking in their mother tongue or if it results in the "comfort" of unilingualism, though the fear from being held responsible or the idea of wasting time also occurs. On the whole, according to the diary entries, code-switching is not considered to be an effective solution, as it leaves less time for

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

practising the target language. Planned speech situations in the classroom are one of the best possibilities for practising their L2 in the case of these students. "I think that in order for teaching Romanian to be more effective, we need to reduce the use of the mother tongue to a minimum during Romanian classes" (13_20.02). In the figure below, we illustrate the considerations associated with the disadvantages of code-switching.

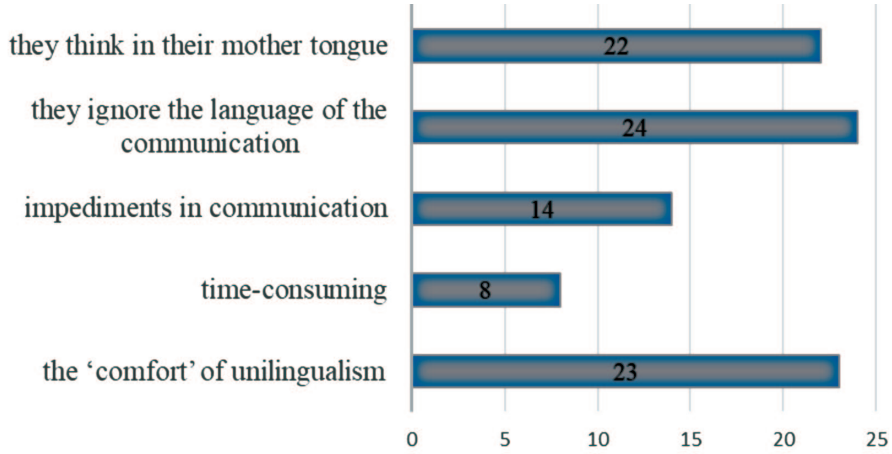


Figure 5. *Disadvantages of code-switching, N = 25*

In what follows, a few illustrative remarks are presented.

"The disadvantage is that students are not taken out of their comfort zones, so they do not try to understand instructions but rather ask questions in their mother tongue" (3_19.11). "In my opinion, the only disadvantage of code-switching is that in such cases we use Hungarian, and students don't develop their reflex to answer questions or solve tasks in Romanian. In turn, this is balanced by its huge advantage that we can easily and time-efficiently avoid any kind of misunderstanding or not understanding anything" (1_19.11).

To what extent can code-switching be used effectively before transforming the language class into a mere "translation task"?

The responses presented in the previous subchapter of the paper discussed the wide range of code-switching situations in classroom interactions. Yet, it is important to determine to what extent their effective use in language classrooms can be considered. Based on the opinions recorded in the diaries, we can

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

affirm that when considering the effectiveness of code-switching in classroom interactions, certain indicators are to be highlighted. Code-switching is effective:

(1) "…when used for understanding new information, so not constantly (e.g. for translating every word, simple questions or instructions, etc.)" (16_20.11);

(2) "… if I have to help a student who has real linguistic impediments…" (4_19.11);

(3) "… until they do not ask for an explanation because it is more comfortable…" (11_20.02).

On the whole, it can be concluded that the phenomenon is effective until it leads to the comfort of unilingualism, while it supports comprehension processes in the target language, and it also stimulates the activation of target-language-based mental skills. Based on what has been stated so far, it can also be affirmed that in the judgement of the code-switching phenomenon a dual attitude has been outlined among our teacher respondents. In general, the educators do not consider it right when L1 resources appear too frequently in the context of practising L2. The use of code-switching is motivated by effective word comprehension or concept definition, by a quicker grasp of meaning, and by creating a safe emotional atmosphere for language learning.

In minority schools, code-switching also reflects the relationship between the given languages. Language use in schools might strengthen or soften the idea that code-switching serves the coordination of linguistic knowledge or language skills and the knowledge acquired in the mother tongue.

Conclusions

The reflective nature of the summed up results points out that during Romanian classes in minority schools knowledge in the mother tongue, as a supportive background, plays an important role in experiencing different meanings. However, the organization of linguistic resources is structured by local productions of meaning. The mapped speech processes reflect the complementary and supportive nature of the way linguistic resources function.

The classroom implementation of the present curriculum requirements results in the following bilingual arrangements: (a) interactions with the purposeful parallel use of both languages; (b) "in-between languages" code-switching situations; (c) translation as method for language learning; (d) unintentional code-switching, influenced by spontaneous speech situations.

According to the respondents, the use of code-switching in language classrooms is beneficial until it supports comprehension processes in the second language and stimulates the activation of target-language-based mental skills. In this correlation, there is need for developing and operating a viable bi- or multilingualism, where

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

the mother tongue supports the acquisition of a second or third language, while the second or third language relates to the L1 culture with acceptance, so the mother tongue is considered a resource and not as an impediment. Thus, classroom interaction strengthens the acquisition of a functional institutional linguistic knowledge and the foundation of a supportive emotional background.

References

Auer, Peter. 1984. *Bilingual Conversation*. Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

—— (ed.). 1998. *Code-Switching in Conversation: Language, Interaction and Identity*. London: Routledge.

Bannink, Anne–Dam van Jet. 2006. A dynamic discourse approach to classroom research. *Linguistics and Education* 17(3): 283–301.

Barna, Gergő–Kapitány, Balázs–Kiss, Tamás–Márton, János–Toró, Tibor. 2016. *Iskolák veszélyben. Tanulmányok a Székelyföldön kívüli magyar oktatás helyzetéről* [Schools in Danger. Studies on the Situation of the Hungarian Education outside Szeklerland]. Cluj-Napoca: Nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet.

Bartha, Csilla. 1999. *A kétnyelvűség alapkérdései* [Basic Issues of Bilingualism]. Budapest: Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó.

Cummins, James. 1981. *Bilingualism and Minority Language Children*. Ontario: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Cummins, James–Merrill Swain. 1986. *Bilingualism in Education*. London: Longman.

Csata, Zsombor. 2016. Linguistic justice and English as a lingua franca from a minority perspective: The case of Hungarians in Transylvania. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, European and Regional Studies* 9: 83–93.

Garcia, Ofelia–Li Wei. 2014. *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gorter, Durk–Jasone Cenoz. 2017. Language education policy and multilingual assessment. *Language and Education* 31(3): 231–248.

Harklau, Linda. 2005. Ethnography and ethnographic research on second language teaching and learning. In Eli Hinkel (ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*, 209–225. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Heltai, János Imre. 2017. *Transzlingváló kiskáté pedagógusoknak* [Translanguaging Catechism for Teachers]. Manuscript. Available at: *http://translangedu.hu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Transzlingv%C3%A1l%C3%B3-kisk%C3%A1t%C3%A9pedag%C3%B3gusoknak.pdf* [Last accessed: 02.02.2020].

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

Hinkel, Eli. 2006. Classroom talk. In Keith Brown (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 471–473 (2nd edition). Elsevier Science.

Jessnera, Ulrike–Elisabeth Allgäuer-Hackl. 2020. Multilingual awareness and metacognition in multilingually diverse classrooms. *Journal of Multilingual Theories and Practices* 1: 66–88.

Lanstyák, István. 2006. *Nyelvről nyelvre. Tanulmányok a szókölcsönzésről, kódváltásról és fordításról* [From One Language to Another. Studies on Loan Words, Code-Switching, and Translation]. Pozsony: Kalligram.

Lazaraton, Anne. 2005. Quantitative research methods. In Eli Hinkel (ed.), *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*, 209–225. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Levine, Glenn S. 2011. *Code Choice in the Language Classroom*. Multilingual Matters.

Lin, Angel M. Y. 2008. Code-switching in the classroom: Research paradigms and approaches. In Stephen May–Nancy H. Hornberger (eds), *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, 3464–3477. New York: Springer.

Mackey, Alison–Susan M. Gass. 2005. *Second Language Research. Methodology and Design*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Manu, Margareta Magda. 2008. Limba română vorbită [The spoken Romanian language]. In Valeria Guțu Romalo (ed.), *Gramatica limbii române II. Enunțul* [Romanian Grammar II. The Sentence], 869–904. Bucharest: Academia Română.

Navracsics, Judit. 2000. *A kétnyelvű gyermek* [The Bilingual Child]. Budapest: Corvina.

Nikolov, Marianne. 2000. Kódváltás pár- és csoportmunkában általános iskolai angolórákon [Code-switching in pair- and teamwork during English classes in middle school]. *Magyar Pedagógia* 100: 401–422.

Pisnjak, Mária (ed.). 2013. *Priročnik za učitelje dvojezičnih šol v Prekmurju / Kézikönyv a muravidéki kétnyelvű iskolák pedagógusai számára* [A Handbook for Teachers of Bilingual Schools in the Mura Region]. Lendva. Magyar Nemzetiségi Művelődési Intézet.

Rácz, Krisztina. 2021. "Creating the illusion of speaking Romanian well": Hungarian speakers' teaching and learning the majority language in Romania. *Multilingua. https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2020-0129* [Last accessed: 02 February 2020].

Sántha, Kálmán. 2007. Kvalitatív módszerek alkalmazása a reflektív gondolkodás feltárásában [Applying qualitative methods in revealing reflective thinking]. In Sántha, Kálmán–Iván Falus (eds.), *A tanárrá válás folyamata* [The Process of Becoming a Teacher], 177–243. Budapest: Gondolat.

Shohamy, Elana. 2006. *Language Policy. Hidden Agendas and New Approaches*. London: Routledge.

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)

Sorbán, Angella. 2000. „Tanuljon románul a gyermek, hogy jobban érvényesülhessen". Az asszimiláció természetrajzához ["The child should learn Romanian to be more successful". Towards the nature of assimilation]. *Magyar Kisebbség* VI, 21(3): 25–32.

—— 2014. *Kisebbség és kétnyelvűség. A kétnyelvűség szociológiai aspektusai az oktatásban és a munkaerőpiacon* [Minority and Bilingualism. Sociological Aspects of Bilingualism in Education and on the Labour Market]. Sfântu Gheorghe: Anyanyelvápolók Erdélyi Szövetsége.

Teppo, Jakonen. 2018. The environment of a bilingual classroom as an interactional resource. *Linguistics and Education* 44: 20–30.

Tódor, Erika-Mária. 2005. A kódváltás és az aszimmetrikus kétnyelvűség nyelvpedagógiai összefüggései [Connections between code-switching and asymmetric bilingualism in language pedagogy context]. *Magyar Pedagógia* 1(105): 41–59.

—— 2018. Románnyelv-oktatás magyar tannyelvű iskolákban: tantervfejlesztéstől a gyakorlati kivitelezésig [Romanian language teaching in Hungarian minority schools: From curriculum development to classroom practices]. *Modern Nyelvoktatás / Modern Language Education* 24(4): 3–17.

Tódor, Erika-Mária–Zsuzsanna Dégi. 2018. Code-switching in second and third language classrooms. *JoLIE – The Journal of Linguistic and Intercultural Education* 11(2): 141–156.

Tolcsvai, Nagy Gábor. 2015. Államnyelv mint L2 oktatása kisebbségi tanulók számára – funkcionális megközelítés [Teaching the official language as L2 for minority students – A functional approach]. In Ildikó Vančo–István Kozmács (eds), *Nyelvtanulás–Nyelvtanítás. Fókuszban az államnyelv oktatása kisebbségek számára* [Language Learning – Language Teaching. Focusing on the Instruction of the Official Language for Minorities], 117–128. Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra.

Vančo, Ildikó. 2019. A szlovák nyelvi készségek kialakítása a szlovákiai magyar tanítási nyelvű iskolák alsó tagozatán [Development of Slovak language skills in the Slovak primary schools with a Hungarian working language]. *Magyar Nyelvőr* 143(2): 138–150.

Wei, Li. 2018. Translanguaging as a practical theory of language. *Applied Linguistics* 39(1): 9–30.

BDD-A33011 © 2021 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:51:26 UTC)