Queer Spaces, Global Faces: English as Style and Signal in Romanian LGBTQ+ Media

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Abstract

With the advent of digital media and communications, the circulation of cultural practices across borders and languages has increased significantly. This is particularly evident within LGBTQ+ communities, where online spaces often serve as crucial sites of identity expression, activism, and community-building. As queer individuals form connections that transcend national boundaries, questions arise about how this transnational and translingual nature is reflected linguistically, especially in non-English speaking contexts. This paper explores how multilingualism manifests in Romanian online spaces geared toward LGBTQ+ individuals, taking into special consideration the role and presence of English as a global lingua franca.

Through a mixed methods analysis of language use on public social media platforms Instagram and Facebook, this study investigates how English and Romanian (and potentially other languages) are used in posts, captions, hashtags, and comment threads. We examine not only the frequency of English usage but also its functions, whether it is used for signaling group belonging, conveying specific identities, or indexing particular forms of cultural capital within the community. The research also considers how this code-switching or language blending may contribute to the shaping of queer identities in a Romanian context.

By focusing on a relatively underexplored linguistic and cultural landscape, this study contributes to ongoing conversations in queer linguistics, sociolinguistics, and media studies. It aims to shed light on how global and local linguistic practices intersect in the digital performances of identity, particularly in marginalized communities navigating both national and global pressures.

Keywords: queer linguistics, social media, digital identity, Romanian LGBTQ+ community, multilingualism

INTRODUCTION

In our increasingly globalized and digitized world, social media has become a vital space where language, identity, community and belonging are performed and negotiated. For marginalized groups such as queer individuals whose voices are often excluded from mainstream discourse, social media offers a relatively accessible and dynamic space for self-expression,

social interaction and identity construction. These online platforms allow users to utilize multiple semiotic and linguistic resources, ranging from images to text, to sound, to video, and beyond in their processes of building and displaying their identities in the online space. Among these, English plays a particularly prominent role. As a global language imbued with cultural capital, affective resonance and a prestige position in society, English often emerges as a central code in the self-representation of queer individuals worldwide, especially in contexts where the local language and culture are more conservative and lack ways of supporting queer identity expression.

Romania, a post-socialist Eastern European country, represents one such context. While significant legal changes, such as the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2001, have marked formal progress, LGBTQ+ individuals in Romania continue to face widespread societal stigma. According to the 2025 ILGA-Europe Rainbow Map[1] which tracks the situation of queer rights in Europe, Romania ranks the lowest for EU countries in terms of queer rights and protections, which shows that there are still persistent cultural and structural boundaries to queer visibility. As is the case in many other conservative countries, as a consequence of such sociopolitical environment, many queer Romanians turn to the digital realm as a site for navigating identity and building community. It is within this digital space that the use of English becomes particularly salient, not only as a lingua franca (as arguably there was less evidence of that in the data) but also as a means of accessing global (queer) youth vernaculars and creating a connection to 'Western' culture.

Despite the growing visibility of queer communities online and the increasing prevalence of English in these spaces, there is a notable lack of scholarship that examines how queer individuals in Romania use English as a part of their online identity practices. Existing studies in the fields of sociolinguistics and digital communication have explored topics ranging from translanguaging (Lee, 2017; Li, 2018), online youth discourse (Leppänen et al., 2009; Leppänen et al., 2015), foreign language influences as a cultural marker (Rampton, 1995) to queer digital cultures (Dovchin, 2020), but rarely have these frameworks been applied to queer language users in Eastern European contexts. Furthermore, while there has been important work on queer Englishes (Leap, 1996; Boellstorff, 2004; Jackson, 2004) and English as a lingua franca (Canagarajah, 2007; Canagarajah, 2018; Higgins, 2009), these studies do not cover the ways in which English operates as both a symbolic and functional resource in queer communities navigating post-socialist realities.

This paper seeks to address this gap by investigating the use of English by queer oriented social media profiles. It explores how English is utilized not only as a means of communication but also as a semiotic resource for affective belonging and cultural positioning. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of translanguaging, queer linguistics, and world Englishes, the study positions the use of English within a broader context of sociolinguistic hybridity and post-socialist cultural flows. It considers how English, alongside Romanian, functions as a flexible medium through which queer users and pages navigate visibility, connection and comprehension. By focusing on queer Romanians, this study contributes to multiple intersecting conversations in sociolinguistics, digital media studies, and queer theory. It brings attention to a marginalized group in a region that is often underrepresented in global academic discourse while highlighting how language practices intersect with questions of power, identity and resistance.

This paper begins with a glance at the background of this topic, outlining key concepts in translanguaging, English as global and queer-coded language, the relation of this global English to the digital spaces and the sociolinguistic

[1] Accessible via https://rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org/.

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dimensions and dynamics of queer life in Eastern Europe more broadly and Romania more specifically. This is then followed by an analysis of the English use within social media data collected from various queer oriented Romanian pages, illustrating the complex interplay between language, identity and digital performance.

SETTING THE SCENE

The ever-increasing mobility of people across borders and beyond their communities of origin, combined with the rise of digital communication, has led to the development of new perspectives for looking at the ways in which individuals communicate in no longer monolingual environments. In online environments especially, language use often transcends the separation between named languages, resulting in flexible, hybrid communicative practices. This new dynamic interaction has brought with it the concept of translanguaging – an approach to language where the focus is no longer on the difference between the languages/cultures involved in the interaction but rather on identifying the intersections and blended and blurred borders that shape the interaction (Dovchin, 2020). While there have been various different approaches to analyzing these multi- and translingual spaces and interactions, such as crossing (Rampton, 1995), intercultural communication (Bennett, 1993), and code-switching (Auer, 1999), translanguaging as a concept encompasses all of these and looks at language (and in the case of this paper, specifically English) as no longer purely a language that has a set definition but rather an ever shifting space of communication, that shapes itself and evolves purely based on the interlocutors present in the interaction (Li, 2018). The discussions in this field have ranged from focusing on hybrid linguistic practices of youths online (Leppänen et al., 2009; Dovchin et al., 2018), multiethnic youths (Rampton, 1995; Matras, 2020), hybridity of language in music (Dovchin et al., 2018) to linguistic identity in education (Tannenbaum & Tseng, 2015; Li, 2020).

Translanguaging is a part of the field of world Englishes, which is where this study also broadly situates itself. These broader frameworks such as World Englishes and English as a lingua franca offer critical perspectives on how English is used in global and non-native contexts (Blommaert, 2010), however they do not necessarily apply equally well to all contexts. English in Eastern Europe for example cannot be understood purely through English as a lingua franca or English as a Second Language frameworks, due to the circumstances in which English attained its current position in the region. As such, many different ways of thinking about the use of English in 'foreign' countries have become imminent. With the ongoing internationalization and globalization of the world, English has spread far beyond its original national reach and has become much more of a flexible base on top of which communication can be constructed (Blommaert, 2010; Li, 2018). Yet despite this spread and move towards a more relaxed approach to the language, it has also managed to retain its position as somewhat of a prestige language, especially in poorer regions (Dimova, 2007), where it is seen as a necessity for financial success, which has led to its prevalence among commercial entities (Hasanova, 2010).

As it has carved itself this type of niche, English has become what can be called a nativized foreign language (Prćić, 2014). As Prćić describes it, as a nativized foreign language, English has developed the ability to function supplementally to the native language, helping form a somewhat integrated communicative resource where the native language is enriched with elements from English (Prćić, 2014: 14), and as such has turned into an adaptive tool that individuals use flexibly, depending on social context, audience and purpose. This flexibility is especially evident online, where English often holds a dual status: it

is both an accessible global resource and a prestige symbol tied to economic and cultural capital. In post-socialist countries like Romania, where Western alignment and upward mobility are often associated with English proficiency, the language can take on aspirational significance (Salakhyan, 2012). Yet for queer individuals, English can also offer discursive possibilities that may not be available in their native languages, such as identity labels that are non-pathologized or do not derive from hateful terms (Dovchin, 2020). This makes English not only a tool of social mobility but also of identity formation and affective expression, specifically within the queer community in more conservative corners of the world.

Building on the intersection of language and queer identity, queer linguistics as a field has examined how language both reflects and shapes non-normative sexual and gender identities, as queer individuals must bend language to support their identities that resist mainstream categorizations, with scholars such as Jones (2013) and Milani (2013, 2017) highlighting the diversity that exists within queer speech communities and emphasizing that the key there is linguistic flexibility rather than a specific speaking style. This connects to translanguaging and world Englishes, as in both cases the emphasis is on the fluid nature of language and its ties to identity. In recent years, the focus on queer/gay Englishes has been more and more prevalent in world Englishes scholarship (Milani, 2017; Dovchin, 2020; Epstein, 2023). However, the research has not been as prevalent in covering areas such as Eastern Europe, especially in the context of social media. While queer English already in and of itself builds its own sociolingual community (Leap, 1996; Jones, 2016) that interacts translingually with 'standard' English, the added dimension of English as a lingua franca in online contexts changes the ways in which these interactions are constructed. The concept of English as a lingua franca itself is one that is called into question in these interactions, as it presupposes a certain form of English has been exported to these non-English speaking spaces (Canagarajah, 2007), which is not quite the case for communities that use English as their primary language of identification.

The translingual nature of queer communities has been attested numerous times whether it be for safety or for an added sense of community (Boellstorff, 2004; Mourad, 2013). Language itself plays a large role in identity construction as the ways in which people choose to express themselves can carry a variety of meanings and connotations (Picq & Cottet, 2019) for any communities, but especially the queer communities globally. The use of language not only is constructive of identity, but also, as Picq & Cottet (2019) put it, 'on national and transnational levels, the language around sexuality has had legal, political and economic consequences' and as such is of paramount importance to properly study it, especially in regions where queer rights are still in the process of development. It is this process of rights being in development that influences the amount of English that appears within the queer communities in these regions, or arguably even in the overall population, as English enjoys a position as a prestige language within many countries (Dimova, 2007; Hasanova, 2010). This position of prestige, along with the taboo nature of queer lives in many countries, which leads to the lack of (non-derogatory) native vocabulary for queer terms (Mourad, 2013; Picq & Cottet, 2019), allows for English to take a place as the primary language of communication.

In Eastern Europe, queer communities navigate a complex landscape shaped by post-socialist transitions, nationalist discourses and varying degrees of institutionalized homophobia. The development of queer cultures in Eastern Europe has had a varied and tumultuous history, and currently queer individuals in many Eastern European countries are still experiencing troubles in authentically presenting themselves in everyday life, and Romania is no exception to this. As stated

in the ILGA Rainbow Map from 2025, Romania ranks among the worst places in the EU for queer individuals. While being queer is decriminalized in Romania, the situation there is still rather difficult compared to most of the rest of the European countries. Despite this, there is a vibrant queer community that has been developing there, specifically a queer community that has developed in the context of the post-socialist status of Romania (Ugron, 2025). This is key to note, as the difference of background can be a significant influence on the way these communities use (foreign) language.

However, this difficult situation encourages the existence of vibrant queer communities online (Dovchin, 2020). The internet plays a crucial role in the everyday lives of queer people in conservative countries (Dovchin et al., 2018) and Romania is no exception to this. As physical spaces for queer expression and solidarity can be limited or put individuals at risk of harm,[2] social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram help provide both visibility and community in ways that are not readily available offline. These online spaces allow for interaction with and production of content on queer related topics, however this is typically within a transnational framework where English often dominates (Dovchin & Pennycook, 2017). English becomes especially salient in the construction of online queer personas, where users often tap into broader queer digital vernaculars in order to connect with a broader international community. These forms of expression are not simply imitative but rather they are interwoven with local slang, cultural references and various code-switching and mixing that reflect the user's specific sociolinguistic positioning. Moreover, the online environment facilitates a new form of identity creation, one that is flexible, visual and multimodal (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). As social media posts can blend any number of elements, this adds another layer to the translanguaging that can occur as the users choose which elements to express in what language, adding an entirely new aspect to the study of queer linguistics, especially in Eastern Europe.

Considering all of these, there is a gap left when it comes to research of queer Englishes on social media specifically in Romania (and more broadly the Eastern European region as well). Leaning on the concept of the nativized foreign language (Prćić, 2014) and the framework of digital ethnography (Varis, 2015), this study looks at the current use of English in the queer Romanian social media landscape. The aim of this study is to see how and why English is used in queer aligned social media posts in Romania, whether any patterns can be seen, and if any conclusions can be drawn from those. The study also aims to compare the roles English and Romanian play in the queer Romanian social media landscape.

METHODOLOGY

The following section discusses the methodology of the study and presents how the data were collected and processed to address the research questions. The present study adopts a digital ethnographic approach to data by acknowledging the circumstances that are unique to online spaces. Digital ethnography is based on studying how culture and communities evolve within online spaces such as social media, forums, chats, etc. There are a variety of ways to approach those digital spaces. In general, the ethnographic approach consists of flexibility and reflectivity, and should not be seen as a limited traditionally utilized collection of techniques. Nevertheless, the aim of traditional, 'pre-digital' ethnography – capturing the situational changes or patterns within a certain spatial or temporal context – still stays relevant in the digital spaces, and,

[2] One of the posts included in the corpus referred to one of the locations that had had to deal with a violent hate crime at its premises, thus showing that physical spaces do have a much higher risk of harm for queer individuals.

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consequently, is important for the current study too (Varis, 2015: 56). The present study takes a flexible approach by analyzing two social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram) and their comment sections within the context of English usage. The study aims to analyze the results from both linguistic and ethnographic point of view by connecting the quantitative results with larger trends that have been observed within the online spaces.

The data collection was significantly influenced by the study's focus on marginalized online communities. Thus, information published by non-commercial associations specializing in the Romanian queer community was crucial in finding the relevant online spaces. Particularly, *Campus Pride*, an online student-oriented project supervised by *MozaiQ LGBT Association,* provided both general information about the Romanian queer community, and social media pages of inclusive organizations and businesses. According to *MozaiQ LGBT Association's National Report*, *Campus Pride* is

> a project initiated with the aim of creating a welcoming and safe environment and a climate of acceptance for all students in the Romanian academic environment, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, as well as their ethnicity, gender, religion, (dis)ability, or any other identity elements that differentiate them and make them vulnerable. (MozaiQ Association, 2023: 3)

The locations and their social media pages are displayed in the *Campus Pride*'s interactive map that is accessible through the project's main website.[3] An alternative justification for collecting the data from the pages provided by *Campus Pride* is that both the project and *MozaiQ LGBT Association* are targeted towards the somewhat younger generation who have a tendency to be more international minded and more active at using social media. Such conditions create a favorable field for the present study that is interested in the usage of English within Romanian queer social media. *Campus Pride*'s interactive map categorizes its locations as 'association', 'pub' and 'testing center'. Out of those three categories, only the first two were taken into consideration due to them being able to reflect more diverse engagement, since 'testing center' locations tend to give solely medical information. Furthermore, the data collected from 'association' and 'pub' locations' social media pages is more appropriately aligned with the methodological orientation of digital ethnography, as the posts would presumably gather more interaction. It is worth mentioning that the present study analyzed exclusively the locations found in Bucharest, although the map has locations outside the capital city. It appears that currently the vast majority of these locations, however, are testing centers. Further research could potentially compare the posts from Bucharest locations with the posts from other cities' locations, if a similar resource listing the potential commercial and organizational locations is found.

The data were collected from Instagram and Facebook, as the locations listed in the *Campus Pride*'s interactive map had links to their accounts on these platforms. In total, 100 posts – and their comments – from 11 locations were collected and analyzed. The total number of locations on the map was 16. Out of those 11 locations analyzed, 9 were overlapping, meaning the same locations' social media pages both on Instagram and Facebook were analyzed. Due to significant variation in how frequently the social media pages were updated, the data collection was standardized by selecting the five latest posts from each location and the data collection was carried out in early spring of 2025. As Varis (2015: 63) notes, the digital data presents both opportunities and limitations. In this study, these limitations

[3] *Campus Pride'*s interactive map is available at: https://campus-pride.ro/harta-interactiva.

included broken links (three on Instagram, and two on Facebook) and outdated locations. These limitations were solved by removing them from the data pool, leading to the difference in locations analyzed for both social media platforms and to the total locations listed on the map.

As previously mentioned, the interactive map favors bilingual locations (due to the focus on a younger audience), which stresses the use of English within the Romanian queer online community even more. Also, some of the posts were excluded if they had absolutely no text in them (e.g., an image or a video with only visuals) or were re-posted more than once in a row, in which case only one of the copies was counted. Platform-specific features and differences were taken into account during the data collection. For example, on Instagram, posts shared via the 'shared posts' feature were excluded from the dataset unless they were created by the main account. On Facebook, the comments that were set to private were not included.

The data collection is also limited to categories that were made to meet the focus of the research. In line with digital ethnography's principle of methodological adaptability (Varis, 2015: 62), the categories were emergent and were created to reflect the patterns and overlapping that was encountered in the dataset. As such, during the process of collecting the data, it was subcategorized by language present (English, Romanian, or both), purpose of the post (event, informative, fundraising, celebratory, instructional and miscellaneous) and type of post (image post, text only, video, and various combinations of these). User engagement with the posts and potential English use in the comment section was also taken note of, and in some cases it influences some of the language categorization. The posts were classified by their types to note where English is most commonly used – in images or captions, for instance. Whether English appeared in the posts in a form of individual words or phrases versus as full meaningful sections (e.g., whole post being in English or the full Romanian text also being translated into English) was also observed.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The following section will examine the data first from a quantitative and then a qualitative angle. We will start by looking at the amounts of English used in the posts that were collected and continue with a deeper look at examples of English that were found in the data, and we will finish with an analysis that synthesizes the findings from both of these approaches. The aim of this is to first understand why English is used in the posts (and compare it to Romanian) and then delve more deeply into examples that show how exactly English is used in the posts and what intricacies may be present.

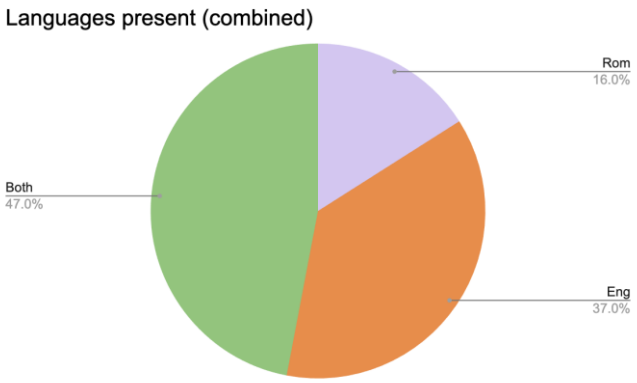
Quantitative

The results of the conducted ethnographic analysis of 100 posts from 11 different locations across their Instagram and Facebook accounts showed remarkable variability in language use, depending on multiple variables. The origin of the dataset – Facebook or Instagram posts – is stated in the headings of the figures. If there are no significant differences between the datasets or their separate analysis is not relevant, the datasets are combined in the figures. Of the 11 locations analyzed, four are non-commercial (LGBTQ+ rights organizations), while the remaining seven are commercial ones, such as bars, restaurants, coffee shops or clubs. All of the four non-commercial locations were present in both the Instagram and Facebook datasets, leading to 20 posts of the set being from non-commercial locations. The posts were categorized by the language(s) used and the perceived purpose of the post, as the present study is not only interested in identifying English in the posts but also aims to

contribute to the understanding of the context in which potential translanguaging occurs. To facilitate the comparison between the Instagram and Facebook datasets, the same amount of posts were analyzed – 50 from Instagram and 50 from Facebook. The results are presented in figures and standardized categories and subcategories. The number of posts is indicated in parentheses.

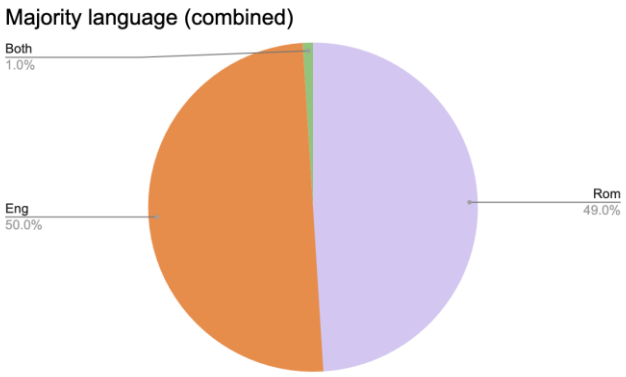
As can be seen in *Figure 1* below, the majority of posts on both platforms contained both English and Romanian. Still, the data suggests a strong presence of English, since 84% of all posts had English in them, compared to 73% of the posts having Romanian in them. In addition to this, a clear difference can be seen if we compare the percentages of purely Romanian posts (16%) to the purely English posts (37%), indicating that there is a considerable preference for making posts in English. This preference could be explained by the purpose of the majority of the posts. According to the data collected, the majority of the posts in both datasets are done by commercial locations and their posts are advertising events. These subcategories overlapping could explain the strong presence of English in general due to commercial locations wanting to reach a larger target audience. The data in the figure below shows the combined language tendencies of the posts from both platforms. When looking at the platforms individually, a small difference can be seen in the numbers, as the number of posts with both languages was lower on Facebook (n=20) than on Instagram (n=27). Interestingly, Instagram had lower amounts of both posts in English (n=17 compared to Facebook's n=20) and Romanian (n=6 compared to n=10), indicating the potential preference for using English mixed with Romanian for the accounts on Instagram.

Figure 1



In order to gain a more precise picture about the languages used in Romanian LGBTQ+ online spaces, the language use was categorized into two subsections – 'languages present' and 'majority language'. The key difference between these categories was the amount of language used, as for the 'languages present' category, even one word was enough, whereas for 'majority language' which language was more dominant in the post counted. Typically, it was easy to see which language was dominant in a post, however some edge cases occurred. Ultimately the dominant language was whichever transmitted more information. For example, an Instagram post with the description in both English and Romanian (the text being simply a direct translation from one language to the other) and an image stating in English the details of the event the post is about would be classified as having English as the dominant language. As illustrated in *Figure 2* below, while the 'languages present' category implies a strong preference for English, "the same pattern is not as clearly seen when looking at the majority languages.", as there the split is fairly even, with half of the posts in English (n=50) and almost half in Romanian (n=49) with only one outlier that had equal amounts of both languages.

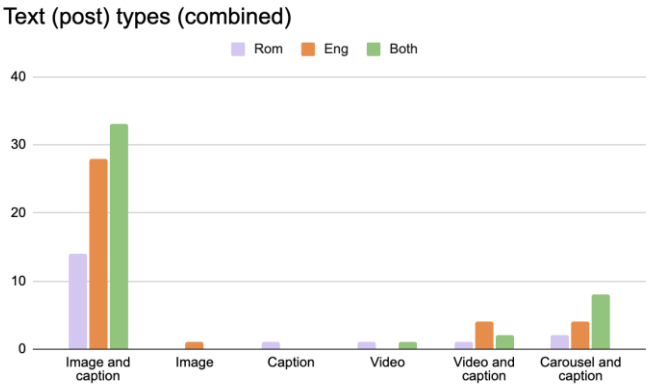
Figure 2



Both of the figures presented above depict the fact that English is indeed widely used in Romanian queer online spaces. Interestingly, there are relatively small differences between Instagram and Facebook when it comes to the prevalence of either English or Romanian as a majority language. Romanian is just slightly more frequently the majority language on Facebook (n=28) compared to Instagram (n=25), whilst English is a little bit more common on Instagram (n=25) than on Facebook (n=21). This serves as a contrast to the picture painted by just the 'languages present' category, which would show that Instagram has a preference for English (as only 6 posts were fully in Romanian). The data does however show that overall, there is a strong presence of English regardless of platform, which implies that English serves an important role for the Romanian queer online spaces.

As this study looked at language use, all the posts selected for the dataset included some form of text, however the posts tended to also include visual elements (photo or video) as is characteristic of social media platforms. The types of posts encountered and the distribution of multilingualism are presented below, in *Figure 3*. The two most used types ('image and caption' and 'carousel and caption') share similar distribution in languages, the mix of Romanian and English being the most popular one. With the post type 'video and caption' the distribution of languages present is a bit different – posts with both video and caption tend to be created mostly in English. It can be seen that visual posts were by far the most common feature in the dataset, echoing the statements made by Kress & Van Leeuwen (2001) about the multimodality of online text creation. In these posts as well, the visuals and textual elements were interwoven, in some cases leading to the texts in the post referencing the image (or the other way around). Alternatively, there were also some posts where the image was the text, which will be looked at further in the qualitative section.

Figure 3



The other big category, besides language and post type, was the purpose of the post, which had six subcategories: event, informative, fundraising, celebratory, instructional and miscellaneous. 'Event' posts were encouraging readers to participate in a certain activity such as musical performances, workshops, movie nights, etc. Majority of commercial posts fell under this category as they typically advertised events that they were holding. 'Informative' posts, as the name suggests, informed readers about certain changes in schedules, on-going situations, and elections, to name a few examples. 'Fundraising' posts, which were posts aiming to collect money for a cause not related to commercial interests, were present in both datasets, whilst 'celebratory' and 'miscellaneous' posts were identified only on

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Instagram posts (see *Figure 4*). The one post categorized as 'miscellaneous' is a picture of a 'send nudes' neon sign posted by one of the commercial locations, a night club.

The figures below demonstrate what languages were present in each of those six subcategories. *Table 1* indicates that the most popular subcategory for the posts is 'event'. 'Event' is also the subcategory that best showcases the drastic difference between the datasets. Exclusively Romanian appears in a lesser number of 'event' posts, as noted in *Table 1*. However, a great disparity can be observed between the datasets. Facebook's 'event' posts are split between half (n=18) being only in English and the other half being either bilingual or monolingual Romanian. Meanwhile, monolingual Romanian is completely absent from Instagram's 'event' posts. On the other hand, the posts with both Romanian and English present occurred frequently both on Instagram and Facebook. The column that shows the number of posts with just individual English words/phrases, shows, however, that there was a stronger tendency to have posts with individual English sprinkled in among Romanian text in Instagram posts, aligning with Instagram having a larger amount of posts that were categorized as bilingual, as mentioned earlier.

When it comes to categories beyond the 'event' category, the 'informative' posts with only English present are slightly more common on Facebook (n=5) than on Instagram (n=1). The 'informative' posts contained information related to the locations such as working hours (more typical for Facebook), or they informed of relevant political occurrences (more typical for Instagram). Fundraising posts also show a difference in language preferences as Instagram had no posts in this category that were fully in Romanian, while Facebook had two. The reason for this is unclear, however this could simply be a matter of when the data was collected and which campaigns were going on at the time. Interestingly, despite this lack of monolingual Romanian for Instagram, both social media platforms' posts in this category were mostly in Romanian, potentially showing that the language choice is influenced by the seriousness of the topic (this can also be seen in the 'instructional' category which is almost fully in Romanian, as it was mostly instructions on voting or medical matters).

Purpose of text	**Languages present (rom / eng / both)**	**Majority language**	**Number of posts with just individual English words**	**Total number of posts**
celebratory	IG: 0/0/1 | FB: 0/0/0	IG: English | FB: -	IG: 1 | FB: -	IG: 1 | FB: -
event	IG: 0/14/19 | FB: 3/18/15	IG: Romanian | FB: English	IG: 15 | FB: 14	IG: 33 | FB: 37
fundraising	IG: 0/1/3 | FB: 2/1/2	IG: Romanian | FB: Romanian	IG: 3 | FB: 2	IG: 4 | FB: 5
informative	IG: 3/1/3 | FB: 1/5/1	IG: English | FB: English	IG: 2 | FB: 1	IG: 7 | FB: 7
instructional	IG: 2/0/1 | FB: 2/0/0	IG: Romanian | FB: Romanian	IG: 1 | FB: -	IG: 3 | FB: 2
miscellaneous	IG: 1/0/1 | FB: 0/0/0	IG: English | FB: -	IG: 1 | FB: -	IG: 2 | FB: -

Table 1

This effect of (assumed) purpose on the language choice can be looked at further when analyzing the types of locations and their language choices, outlined in *Figure 4*. As stated before, out of 11 locations only 4 can be classified as non-profit organizations, while the remaining 7 are LGBTQ+ inclusive businesses (this classification followed the one on the map used as the basis for

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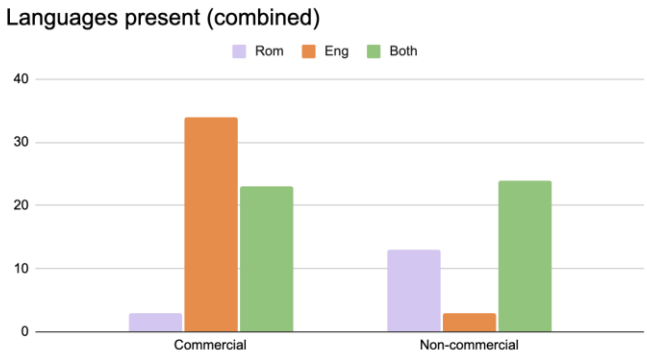
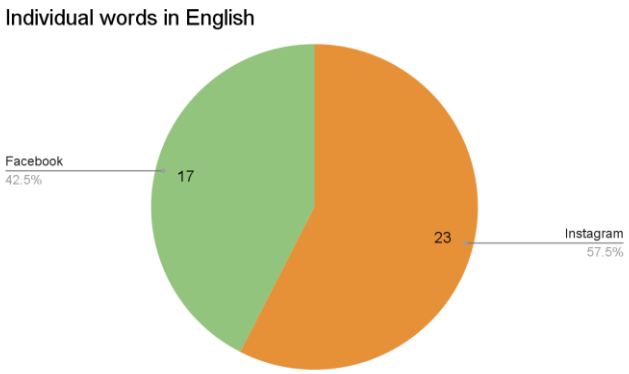
finding the locations). One of the key findings of the present study is that the commercial locations tend to prefer English more than the non-commercial ones, as the *Figure 4* reveals. Still, both non-commercial and commercial locations are multilingual; both types include either individual English words or phrases into their posts. However, commercial locations are more prone to include solely English, with no Romanian in their posts. Such linguistic preferences could be explained by the international image of English. Namely, English is associated with prestige and elitism, especially in the post-Soviet space after the fall of the iron curtain (Hasanova, 2010: 3-4). Also, English, expectedly, attracts more clients and as a global lingua franca represents modernity and trends (Hasanova, 2010: 7).

Figure 4



This idea of trendiness is also one of the observations made in the present study, since the individual English words appearing in the posts written were also noted in both datasets. As can be seen in *Figure 5,* the majority of English individual words appear more frequently in the posts from Instagram (n=23), whilst Facebook had less English words (n=17). Still, a larger proportion of posts from the datasets were completely written in either Romanian or English and had no code-switching (see *Figure 1*). However, one example of English grammatically embedded into a Romanian sentence was identified from the Facebook dataset. This kind of code-switching is indeed rare and occurred only once in a 100-posts-large dataset. However, this kind of code-switching was identified in the comment section of both Instagram and Facebook posts. The comments were analyzed separately from the posts.

Figure 5



Besides the English present in the posts, this study looked into the English used in the comment section. The most notable disparities between the datasets can be observed in comment sections. First of all, the Facebook dataset contained fewer comments (n=25), whereas the Instagram dataset featured more than six times as many (n=166), though this accounts for only comments with text, as emoji-based comments would raise those numbers even higher for Instagram in particular. This shows a clear difference in the interaction patterns on the platforms. The languages present in Facebook and Instagram's comment sections are illustrated in the figures below (*Figure 6* and *7*).

Notably, the comments were disproportionately divided across the 100 posts analyzed. The average number of comments left under a Facebook post is as low as 0.5. Instagram's average is higher at 3.32. The most common value for both datasets, however, is 0. The visible difference in the number of comments could be explained by Facebook's feature of 'private comments' that are visible only to the chosen

recipients. The Facebook dataset had 10 private comments that were excluded from the analysis. Those private comments were present in the posts that included English, the majority language in five posts being solely English. The majority of the private comments were left under the posts that were advertising events.

Figure 6

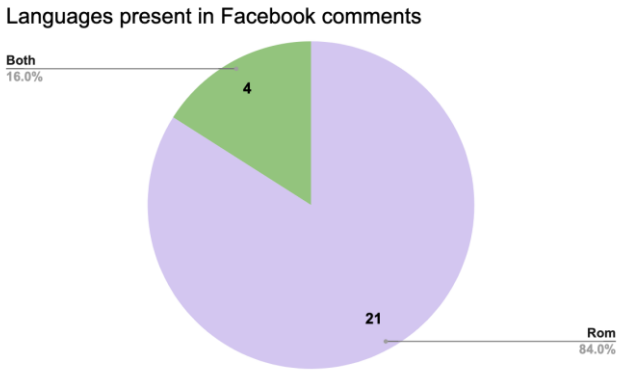
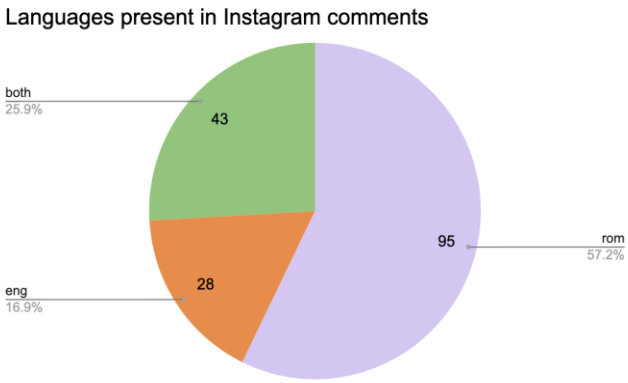


Figure 7



Comments on Facebook were comparatively less likely to feature English words or phrases than those on Instagram (see *Figure 6* and *7*). From the ethnographical standpoint, one of the factors explaining the disproportionality in the number of comments could be the concept of anonymity. According to Varis (2015: 64), Facebook is a challenging platform for research, since the platform encourages its users to avoid anonymity and to create accounts by using their real names. It has been studied that discouraging or prohibiting anonymity lowers the engagement with the online content. On the other hand, it has been noted that anonymity fosters negative behavior, such as swearing (Omernik & Sood, 2013: 4-5). However, in theory anonymity is still completely possible while engaging with the posts published on Facebook. For example, the user can 'privately' comment on the posts and Facebook does not require its users to create an account based on personal information, which, while uncommon, shows that anonymity is possible on Facebook as well. Additionally, Instagram is not much more anonymous compared to Facebook as most people tend to use their accounts in ways that do directly connect to their real life identity. Thus, anonymity provides only a partial explanation for the difference in interaction patterns. The lower engagement on Facebook could potentially be explained by the changing social media behaviors among the youth. The topic has been studied within the Romanian context, too. Particularly, a survey research focusing on the usage of social media among the Romanian youth conducted by Mocanu (2018) determined that the younger generation is experiencing 'migration' from Facebook to Instagram (Mocanu, 2018: 459, 462).

Qualitative

The data revealed two different uses of English in the posts. The first use case was English as a proper language, meaning that these posts were ones where English was either used for the entire post or used in the same capacity as Romanian (e.g. the Romanian text was translated to English). The second use case was the more interesting one, as it covered the cases where English was used as either single words or phrases. This could be further broken down to English used for service names (e.g. *Rainbow care*) and English used as a stylistic choice. The majority of individual words were somehow related to the LGBTQ+ community, namely such

words as *rainbow*, *pride*, *slay* and *glam*. These words can be interpreted as social signifiers indexing identity and community belonging, in a way that resembles the semiotic signaling discussed by Rampton (1995) in the context of language crossing. The signaling is aligned with the public image of LGBTQ+ inclusivity that the locations have successfully maintained, particularly following their inclusion on the *Campus Pride*'s interactive map.

One such example is an Instagram post featuring the image text *rainbow eggs, serving legs*, with an image of legs and rainbow eggs as the background. As this is rather nonsensical, it shows that English is being used here more in the sense of a nativized foreign language for this small group (queer people) as the English serves a function of signaling alignment with queer identity rather than carrying meaning. This post was made by a queer rights organization, which aligns with this analysis of English here being used as a tool to signal alignment with the broader global queer culture. This same post (an image carousel with a caption on Instagram) also featured other terms such as *slay*, with the comments including terms such as *coming out* aligning further with this view.

Other identified cases of curious language use were for example *link in bio* which can be classified as either English or Romanian without diacritics. As most posts did use the diacritics, we opted to categorize posts with the words without the diacritics as English, however this could arguably be incorrect depending on the culture around proper writing in Romanian online communities, as many communities opt to simply use the standard English keyboard and thus forego the extra effort of diacritics. However, this ambiguity did not make a large difference in the language classifications of the posts, as the majority of the posts where this phrase was encountered were already bilingual. While this example is not significant for drawing any conclusions about English use, it was important to note as other such cases of ambiguity could also be present, though it was attempted to catch any of these and confirm using a dictionary (one such example would be the word *call center* which was eventually categorized as Romanian).

Cases where a sentence would use full English phrases in the middle of otherwise Romanian text were rare, with only one such example being identified. The sentence 'Bine, noi credem că al nostru *cast* este format din *your favorite performer's favorite performers*, pentru că *you are in for a treat*.' appeared on an 'event' post of a commercial location's page. In this example, the blending of the languages highlights what Prćić (2014) noted about the nativized foreign language, where English is used as an element that is both semantic but also in a sense decorative, adding more flair to the sentence. As this post was from a commercial entity, it also highlights that English is used by many commercial entities due to its trendy nature and connection to the global consumer.

Beyond the contents of the posts themselves, the hereby study also looked at the comments on the posts. As seen in the quantitative section, the English use in the comments was very different for Facebook and Instagram, with Instagram having visibly more English comments (though also just more comments overall). Interestingly, a pattern of negativity appeared more prominently in the exclusively Romanian comments compared to those that were multilingual or written in English. This could be indicative of the negative institutional attitudes towards queer communities in Romania, but further research is needed to confirm whether this constitutes a stable pattern within the LGBTQ+ online spaces. Beyond the opinions in the comments, there were also notable cases of code-mixing, as English words and phrases were used within otherwise Romanian comments. One such example would be '"sustin parteneriatul civil cu toata fiinta mea" right back at u' where one commenter replies to a previous comment (which was in English) with a quote from the politician the first comment was

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presumably defending. This is an example of English serving both a simple communicative role (as in showing that the text in Romanian is meant to combat the original commenter's statement) but also a more complex role as a trendier youth language, contrasting with the political statement being in Romanian.

These results from the posts show various language related trends among queer oriented Romanian social media accounts. As illustrated earlier, English was a very prominent language in the dataset, eclipsing the amount of purely Romanian content when looking at the overall totals. However, differences occurred between the two social media platforms, as English played a much more prevalent role in the Instagram dataset, both in the posts and in the comments section. It is unclear what exactly could have caused this discrepancy, but one could assume that the user demographics of Instagram skew a bit younger and thus a bit more English-oriented than those of Facebook. The use of English tended to be in line with commercial interest (as many commercial posts utilized English in some capacity) and with being an identity marker (as could be seen in individual English words being those that are associated with international queer English lexicon such as *slay* or *rainbow*), showing that English holds a dual role within the queer community in Romania. Further research is needed to see if these patterns also replicate themselves within active communication between queer individuals, as while the use of English in the comments suggests that that could be a possibility, it is in no way conclusive.

The roles of English displayed in this dataset align somewhat with the theoretical concept of English as a nativized foreign language (Prćić, 2014), as English is not necessarily used separately from the native language (Romanian) but rather as a sociocultural modifier, with the aim to take part in the global Anglophone culture. While mixing of full phrases was rare in the posts, with only one recorded example, language mixing in general (with individual words/short phrases) was not that rare, being present in nearly half of the posts, which shows that English tended to play more of a cultural signaling role than a communicative one when mixed in. When English was not mixed in however, and rather made up the full body of the post, it tended to be used with the intention of marketing events as internationally oriented, showing the prestige position of English.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the current study imply that the role of English in Romanian queer social media circles is multifaceted and very prominent. As on both Instagram and Facebook the majority of the posts contained English, the presence of the language is very visible; however, the data about the majority languages showed that Romanian is also still present (n=49). As such, it does not seem that English plays a role where it is used in place of Romanian, but rather it is used beside Romanian, which aligns with the theoretical concept of the nativized foreign language laid out by Prćić (2014), wherein English serves as a modifying element. This nature of English as a modifier is further seen in the individual posts used as examples, where English plays a role of connection to the global queer community, or as visual shorthand for more global (West-aligned) content. This connection to globalness is also evident from the fact that commercial locations tended to use significantly more English and also had more posts fully in English. This is presumably due to the prestige position that English holds as an international language and as a language of business (Hasanova, 2010). From this we can see that the how and why of English use in the context of Romanian queer social media are rather dependent on the purpose of the posts and the aim of the accounts.

Beyond just the accounts themselves, the comment sections also showed remarkable English use, especially in the case of Instagram,

which adds plausibility to the idea that the trends seen in this analysis of posts from official pages (whether commercial or non-commercial) could also be reflective of communication between queer Romanians themselves on social media. The comments tended to also show more creative language mixing (using full phrases instead of single words or simply separating the Romanian and English altogether) compared to the actual posts, which again hints at English being used more casually by actual queer people than by official accounts. This, however, needs further study to be confirmed.

These findings raise important questions about how language can function not only as a communicative tool but also as a site of identity building/displaying for marginalized communities. The Romanian queer online spaces that were observed here are reflective of a broader global pattern of English use as both a symbolic and practical resource, one that gives the individual access to global queer identity and community, while simultaneously reinforcing existing linguistic hierarchies. The strategic use of English, whether for visibility, connection, or commercial engagement, illustrates how queer users and accounts actively curate their online presence in ways that navigate local stigma while participating in transnational queer culture. Future research could explore more direct perspectives of queer Romanians through more direct methods such as interviews or discourse analysis of conversational data, or if looking more into the institutional aspect, as this study did, have a longer-term overview of the languages used in posts. These further approaches could provide additional insight into what ideologies may underlie individuals' language practices. In particular, more work is needed to understand how queer Romanians and queer associated accounts/locations balance their language use and what kinds of thought processes guide it, especially in interactions beyond the public-facing digital stage.

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