

The Impact of English and German on the Albanian Language Usage among University Students

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of English and German on the everyday use of Albanian among students at the University of Tetovo. The research focuses on the frequency and contexts in which students use English and German lexical items while communicating in Albanian, as well as their attitudes toward this linguistic influence. The participants were 35 students enrolled in the English Language and Literature and German Language and Literature programs. Data were collected through a 13-item questionnaire containing single-choice, multiple-response, and open-ended questions. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the closed-ended responses, while the open-ended responses were reviewed descriptively.

The findings show that English has a substantially stronger influence than German. English was selected as the most frequently used foreign language by 65.7% of the respondents, and 82.9% reported using English words in Albanian at least occasionally. In contrast, 60.0% reported using German words rarely or never. Foreign lexical items were used primarily in communication with friends and on social networks. Students' attitudes were mixed: some regarded foreign influence as a natural part of linguistic development, while others perceived it as a potential risk to standard Albanian. The findings highlight the growing role of English in informal and digital communication while demonstrating the continuing importance of linguistic awareness and standard Albanian in academic contexts.

Keywords: Albanian language, English influence, German influence, language contact, loanwords, university students

Introduction

The influence of dominant international languages on smaller national languages is particularly visible among younger speakers. University students are regularly exposed to foreign languages through education, digital media, technology, popular culture, and transnational mobility. In Albanian-speaking settings, English has become highly visible in academic and digital communication, while German is also relevant because of migration, employment, and long-standing connections with German-speaking countries.

English functions as a global lingua franca in science, technology, business, education, and online communication (Crystal, 2003). Students encounter English vocabulary through academic sources, software, social media platforms, entertainment, and international cultural content. German is less globally dominant, but it has a distinct social presence in Albanian-speaking communities because many families have personal, educational, or professional links with Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.

Language contact can result in lexical borrowing, code-switching, and different forms of linguistic adaptation (Matras, 2009; Weinreich, 1953; Winford, 2003). In this paper, the term loanword refers to an individual lexical item taken from English or German and used in Albanian communication. Code-switching refers more broadly to alternation between languages within an interaction. Because the questionnaire focused primarily on the reported use of individual words, the empirical analysis concerns loanword use rather than the grammatical structure of code-switching.

The study investigates how students from the English and German Language and Literature programs at the University of Tetovo report using English and German words in Albanian. It also examines the contexts in which this use occurs and the way students evaluate foreign-language influence. The study is exploratory and is intended to provide a current picture of language practices within a small multilingual university sample.

Theoretical background

Language contact has long been treated as a central source of linguistic change. Weinreich (1953) described contact-induced influence as the transfer of elements between linguistic systems in bilingual use. Later research emphasized that contact outcomes depend on social intensity, speaker networks, prestige, mobility, and the communicative functions assigned to each language (Matras, 2009; Thomason & Kaufman, 1988; Trudgill, 1986; Winford, 2003). Labov (1994) likewise demonstrated that

language change must be interpreted in relation to both linguistic structure and the social conditions of use.

Lexical borrowing is among the most visible outcomes of contact. Haugen (1950) defined borrowing as the adoption and reproduction of linguistic elements from another language. Borrowed items may initially remain recognizably foreign, but repeated use can lead to phonological, morphological, and semantic integration. Their status is therefore not fixed: an item may function as an occasional foreign insertion for one speaker and as an established loanword for another.

English currently has exceptional reach because of its role in international communication and digital culture (Crystal, 2003). Its influence is especially strong in domains in which new terminology circulates rapidly, including computing, social media, entertainment, and higher education. Research on contemporary Albanian has similarly noted that international vocabulary can both enrich expression and create concern about unnecessary replacement of available Albanian forms (Vasili, 2016).

German influence follows a different pattern. It is connected less to global digital dominance than to regional mobility, migration, family networks, study, and employment. Such domain specialization is consistent with sociolinguistic accounts showing that multilingual speakers select linguistic resources according to context, identity, audience, and communicative purpose (Myers-Scotton, 2006; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015).

Research questions

1. To what extent do English and German influence the everyday Albanian communication of the participating university students?
2. In which contexts are foreign lexical items most often used?
3. How do students evaluate the influence of English, German, and social media on Albanian?

Methods

The study aims to analyze the extent to which English and German influence the everyday communication of Albanian university students and to identify the contexts and situations in which they are more likely to use English or German terms instead of their Albanian equivalents. Using convenience sampling, the study included 24 students from the English Department and 11 students from the German Department aged between 18 and 25 who were enrolled in the Undergraduate program at the University of Tetovo in the year 2025. The aim was to provide an exploratory description of language use among university students who are regularly exposed to foreign languages in academic and social contexts.

This study is based on a mixed-method approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative perspectives (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). A structured questionnaire was used as the primary instrument for data collection (Dörnyei, 2007). The 13-item questionnaire combined single-choice, multiple-response, and open-ended questions. The first section collected basic participant information and identified the foreign language used most frequently. The second section measured how often students used English and German words while communicating in Albanian. The third section examined the contexts of use, including communication with friends, social networks, study, work, and other situations. The final section explored students' perceptions of English and German loanwords, the influence of social media, and the need to protect standard Albanian in academic settings.

Two open-ended items invited students to provide examples of English and German lexical items that they used while communicating in Albanian. The English-language item received 32 responses, while the German-language item received 28 responses. The responses were reviewed manually, and capitalization and obvious spelling variants were normalized for descriptive counting. For example, *OK*, *Okay*, and *Okey* were treated as variants of the same item, as were *Shpajz* and *Shpajs*. Because some participants provided complete expressions rather than individual loanwords, the examples are presented as participant-reported lexical items and expressions rather than as etymologically verified Albanian loanwords.

Responses were exported from Google Forms and analyzed at the aggregate level. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for single-choice items. For the multiple-response context item, both the number of selections and the percentage of the full sample were reported; because respondents could choose more than one context, percentages do not sum to 100%. Item-level response totals are stated whenever they differ from the full sample of 35.

Open-ended responses were reviewed manually using a basic thematic procedure informed by qualitative content analysis (Silverman, 2005). Responses concerning standard Albanian were grouped around recurring positions such as protection of academic language, acceptance of natural language development, and concern about excessive foreign influence. No inferential statistical tests were applied because the study was exploratory and the sample was small. Results were analyzed in aggregate, and no identifying information is reported.

Results

Sample composition and most frequently used foreign language

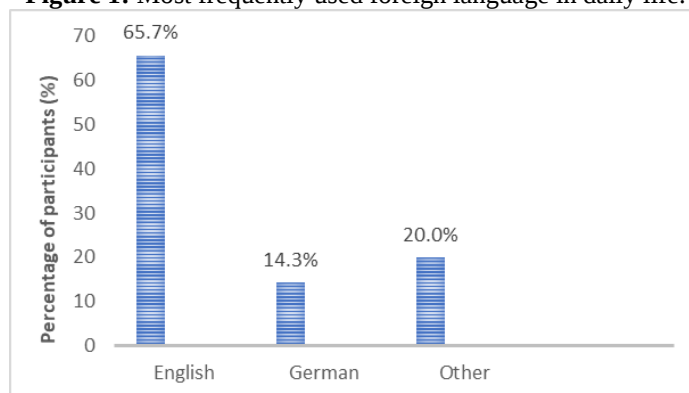
All 35 participants answered the question concerning their field of study. Twenty-four participants were enrolled in the English program and 11 in the German program.

Table 1: Participant composition by study program

Study program	n	%
English Language and Literature	24	68.6
German Language and Literature	11	31.4
Total	35	100.0

Regarding everyday foreign-language use, English was clearly dominant. Twenty-three students (65.7%) selected English, five (14.3%) selected German, and seven (20.0%) selected another language or a combination of languages, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Most frequently used foreign language in daily life.



Note. $N = 35$. The “other” category included Turkish, Macedonian, and combinations of more than one foreign language.

Frequency of English loanword use

English lexical items were common in Albanian communication. Eighteen students (51.5%) reported using English words frequently or very frequently, and another 11 students (31.4%) reported occasional use. Overall, 29 of the 35 respondents (82.9%) used English words at least occasionally. Only six students (17.1%) selected rarely or never.

Table 2: Frequency of English words used while communicating in Albanian

Frequency	n	%
Very frequently	8	22.9
Frequently	10	28.6
Occasionally	11	31.4
Rarely	4	11.4
Never	2	5.7
Total	35	100.0

Frequency of German loanword use

German lexical items were substantially less frequent. Thirteen respondents (37.1%) reported never using German words and eight (22.9%) reported rare use. Thus, 21 students (60.0%) used German words rarely or never. Eleven respondents (31.4%) selected occasional or frequent use, while two (5.7%) selected very frequent use. One participant entered a non-standard response rather than selecting a frequency category.

Table 3: Frequency of German words used while communicating in Albanian

Frequency	n	%
Very frequently	2	5.7
Frequently	5	14.3
Occasionally	6	17.1
Rarely	8	22.9
Never	13	37.1
Other/non-standard response	1	2.9
Total	35	100.0

Participant-reported lexical items and expressions

The two open-ended items provided concrete examples of the English- and German-related linguistic forms used by the participants. After capitalization and obvious spelling variants had been normalized, *okay* was the most frequently reported English item, with ten mentions. *Like*, *email*, *yes*, and *password* were each mentioned four times. Other recurring items included *hello*, *laptop*, *chat*, *bye*, and *computer/kompjuter*, each of which was mentioned three times. The German responses were less varied and less frequent. *Bitte*, *nein*, and *danke* were each mentioned four times, while *Shpajz/Shpajs* was mentioned three times. *Frizer*, *egal*, *ja*, and *Autobahn* were each mentioned twice. Some participants also provided longer expressions, including *no way*, *see you*, and *I love you* in English, and *oh mein Gott*, *keine Ahnung*, and *wie geht es Ihnen* in German.

This indicates that some respondents interpreted the question broadly and included examples of code-switching alongside individual lexical borrowings.

Table 4: Most frequently reported English- and German-related items

Language	Reported item	Mentions (n)
English	<i>okay</i>	10
English	<i>like</i>	4
English	<i>email</i>	4
English	<i>yes</i>	4
English	<i>password</i>	4
English	<i>hello</i>	3
English	<i>laptop</i>	3
English	<i>chat</i>	3
English	<i>bye</i>	3
English	<i>computer/kompjuter</i>	3
German	<i>bitte</i>	4
German	<i>nein</i>	4
German	<i>danke</i>	4
German	<i>Shpajz/Shpajs</i>	3
German	<i>Frizer</i>	2
German	<i>egal</i>	2
German	<i>ja</i>	2
German	<i>Autobahn</i>	2

Note. Counts represent mentions in the open-ended responses. Capitalization and obvious spelling variants were combined. The classification reflects the participants' own responses and does not imply that every item is an established or direct loanword in Albanian.

Contexts of foreign lexical use

The context item allowed more than one answer. Foreign words were used mainly in informal and digitally mediated communication. Thirty respondents selected communication with friends and 29 selected social networks. Academic and professional contexts were less prominent: nine selected study and eight selected work. Seven respondents selected other contexts.

Table 5: Contexts in which foreign words were used

Context	Selections (n)	% of participants
Communication with friends	30	85.7
Social networks	29	82.9
Study	9	25.7
Work	8	22.9
Other contexts	7	20.0

Note. Multiple responses were permitted; therefore, percentages exceed 100% when combined.

Attitudes toward English and German influence

Thirty-three students answered each attitude item. English loanwords were most often perceived as a risk to Albanian (42.4%) or as a natural part of linguistic development (36.4%). Five respondents (15.2%) described them

mainly as a trend, and two (6.1%) viewed them as enrichment. Attitudes toward German were slightly more evenly distributed: 36.4% regarded German influence as a natural part of linguistic development, 33.3% as a risk, 18.2% as a trend, and 9.1% as enrichment. One respondent stated that German words were not used at all.

Table 6: Perceptions of English and German loanwords

Perception	English n (%)	German n (%)
Enrichment of the language	2 (6.1)	3 (9.1)
Risk to Albanian	14 (42.4)	11 (33.3)
Natural part of linguistic development	12 (36.4)	12 (36.4)
Trend	5 (15.2)	6 (18.2)
Not used at all	0 (0.0)	1 (3.0)
Valid responses	33 (100.0)	33 (100.0)

Perceived influence of social media and views on standard Albanian

Thirty-four participants answered the item on social media. Twenty-nine (85.3%) believed that social media had influenced changes in the Albanian spoken or written by students “very much,” while five (14.7%) selected “somewhat.” No respondent selected “little” or “not at all.” This result supports a strong association between foreign lexical influence and digital communication. Given the overall dominance of English in the responses, English likely accounts for a substantial part of this influence, although the context item did not distinguish between languages.

The final open-ended item received 32 responses. The visible response summary indicates broad support for stronger protection of standard Albanian in academic settings, although several answers adopted a qualified position. Recurring arguments emphasized the formal character of academic communication, the responsibility of lecturers and students to model standard usage, and concern that excessive foreign vocabulary may weaken clarity. Other responses accepted borrowing when no precise Albanian equivalent is readily available. Because the available export displayed abbreviated response labels rather than the complete text, exact thematic frequencies were not calculated.

Discussion

The findings show a clear asymmetry between English and German. English was selected as the most frequently used foreign language by nearly two thirds of the sample, and more than four fifths of respondents reported using English words in Albanian at least occasionally. By contrast, 60.0% used German words rarely or never. These results answer the first research question by showing that English has a broader and more regular influence on the participating students’ everyday Albanian.

The lexical examples further illustrate the difference between the influence of English and German. English responses included many items connected with everyday interaction and digital communication, such as *okay*, *like*, *email*, *laptop*, *chat*, *password*, *online*, and *download*. German responses were concentrated around common interactional forms such as *bitte*, *danke*, *nein*, and *ja*, together with participant-reported adapted forms such as *Shpajz/Shpajs* and *Frizer*. The presence of multiword expressions in both sets of responses also shows that participants did not always distinguish between lexical borrowing and code-switching.

The context data help explain this difference. Communication with friends and social networks were by far the most frequently selected domains. English has a strong presence in precisely these environments because social media interfaces, entertainment, software, and transnational youth culture circulate large amounts of English vocabulary (Crystal, 2003). The result that 85.3% of respondents perceived a very strong social-media influence further supports this interpretation.

German influence appears more limited and specialized. Its lower overall frequency does not mean that it is sociolinguistically irrelevant. German influence may be associated with narrower educational, professional, migration-related, and family networks connected to German-speaking countries. However, these factors were not measured directly in the questionnaire. This pattern corresponds to theories of domain-specific multilingual practice, according to which speakers draw on different languages according to audience, setting, identity, and communicative purpose (Myers-Scotton, 2006; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015).

Students' attitudes reveal an important tension. For both English and German, substantial groups described foreign influence as a natural part of linguistic development, but many also considered it a risk to Albanian. These positions are not mutually exclusive. Borrowing can provide efficient labels for new technologies and international concepts, while excessive replacement of clear Albanian equivalents may create concern about linguistic identity and standard usage. Similar debates accompany language contact in many smaller linguistic communities (Matras, 2009; Vasili, 2016).

The findings should not be interpreted as evidence that students are abandoning Albanian. The reported use of foreign words is better understood as a functional response to multilingual environments. Nevertheless, the strong role of informal digital communication suggests that higher education has an important role in developing students' awareness of register. Students can be encouraged to distinguish between acceptable international terminology, informal code-mixing, and the requirements of clear standard Albanian in academic writing.

Conclusions

This study examined the self-reported influence of English and German on Albanian language use among 35 students at the University of Tetovo. English had the stronger and more widespread influence. It was the most frequently used foreign language for 65.7% of respondents, and 82.9% reported using English words in Albanian at least occasionally. German use was more limited, with 60.0% reporting rare or no use.

Foreign lexical items were used most often in communication with friends and on social networks. The findings therefore connect English influence primarily with informal and digital communication. German showed a more limited overall presence and may be associated with narrower educational, professional, and migration-related networks.

Students did not evaluate foreign influence uniformly. Some viewed borrowing as a natural feature of language development, while others considered it a risk to Albanian. The findings suggest that language contact should be addressed through critical language awareness rather than through simple rejection or unrestricted acceptance. University teaching can support this aim by promoting standard Albanian in formal contexts while also helping students evaluate when international terminology is necessary, established, or avoidable.

Limitations and future research

The study has several limitations. The sample was small, was selected through convenience sampling, and included only two language programs at one university. The data were self-reported and therefore describe perceived rather than directly observed language behavior. The open-ended questions elicited both individual words and longer expressions, and some items identified by participants as borrowings may instead represent code-switching or indirect borrowing through other contact languages. The examples were based on participants' own classifications and were not subjected to a separate etymological analysis. Future research should retain the full anonymized response file, use a larger and more diverse sample, compare departments outside language studies, and combine questionnaires with recorded interaction or systematically conducted interviews.

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