

English as the Digital World's Lingua Franca: Insights from Switzerland

Kim Surenthiran

Master Studies, Bern University of Applied Sciences, Bern, Switzerland

E-mail: kim.surenthiran@me.com

Andrea Wehrli

Bern University of Applied Sciences, Bern, Switzerland

Brückenstrasse 73, Postfach 305, 3005 Bern, Switzerland

E-mail: andrea.wehrli@bfh.ch

Ramón Andrés Ortiz-Rojo

Federal University of Espirito Santo (UFES)

Avenida Fernando Ferrari, 514, Goiabeiras, Vitória, ES, Brazil

E-mail: ramonandres.31@gmail.com

Kyria Rebeca Finardi (Corresponding Author)

Federal University of Espirito Santo (UFES)

Avenida Fernando Ferrari, 514, Goiabeiras, Vitória, ES, Brazil

E-mail: kyria.finardi@gmail.com

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Abstract

With the acceleration of digital globalization, English has consolidated its role as the primary lingua franca of online communication. While this enables cross-cultural interaction, it also raises questions about linguistic identity, cultural representation, and communicative equity,

particularly for non-native speakers of English. This study examines the relationship between participants' perceptions during online interactions and the frequency with which they engage in English use in digital environments. Grounded in Linguistic Globalization Theory, Language Ecology, Postcolonial and Decolonial Language Theories and Identity Construction in Digital Spaces, this research draws on data from a larger study (Surenthiran, 2025), which investigated the perception of participants in different countries. The present study reanalyzes these data with a focus on participants in Switzerland, using a quantitative methodological approach. Robust Linear Regression (RLR) was applied to address residual non-normality and outliers, while Principal Component Analysis (PCA) identified latent affective constructs and improved model interpretability. Age was included as a categorical moderator across four groups. Results suggest that younger participants (18–24) reported higher authenticity, and frequent English use appeared to foster confidence in low-exposure contexts. These findings highlight the multifaceted identity outcomes of digital English use and call for more inclusive global linguistic environments.

Keywords: Digital lingua franca, Linguistic identity, Perceived authenticity, Multilingualism in digital spaces, Online English use, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF).

1. Introduction

Switzerland stands out as a paradigmatic case of multilingualism. With four national languages—German, French, Italian, and Romansh—and a high proportion of residents speaking additional foreign languages (Finardi, 2017), the country embodies both linguistic diversity and the tensions produced by it (Wehrli, 2025 a, b). Census data reported in Finardi (2017) reveal that German is spoken as a first language (L1) by the majority of the population (around 63.7%), followed by French (20.4%), Italian (6.5%), and Romansh (0.5%), with Swiss German dialects further complicating the picture of internal communication and English disputing the role of the first additional language (L2) spoken by most of the population. When interpreting these figures, it should be considered that they refer to the speakers' (L1) and that these individuals predominantly reside in the corresponding linguistic regions, where they constitute the demographic majority.

Migration has added further linguistic layers to Swiss context: English, Portuguese, Albanian, Spanish, Slavic languages from the former Yugoslavia and Turkish are now widely spoken in different cantons. Geneva, one of the most international Swiss cities (Finardi & Csillagh, 2016), reports English among the languages most frequently used in daily life, despite the policy to teach German as the first foreign language (L2) in schools in the French-speaking parts of the country (Finardi, 2017). This complex linguistic landscape has historically been managed through policies aimed at balancing national cohesion with linguistic inclusion. However, as Finardi (2017) points out, English has increasingly emerged as a *multilingua franca* (Jenkins, 2015) in Switzerland, referring to multilingual settings in which speakers share the knowledge of English as a contact language, such that it remains part of the linguistic repertoire regardless of whether and to what extent it is used (Jenkins, 2017). This is particularly true in academic and professional domains, raising questions about the role of English in relation to the Swiss national languages and to the global pressures of internationalization.

The growing prominence of English in Switzerland reflects both global and local dynamics. On the one hand, English facilitates communication across regions and among diverse linguistic groups, often serving as a 'neutral' language when national languages are politically or socially marked. On the other hand, its rise has generated debates about whether English strengthens or threatens Swiss multilingualism. Some scholars warn that the spread of English in schools and universities may undermine traditional language policies aimed at protecting national cohesion, while others view its use as a pragmatic tool that complements, rather than competes with Switzerland's multilingual profile (Finardi, 2017). This tension mirrors broader debates in Europe and beyond about the role of English as a *lingua franca*, the risks of linguistic homogenization and hegemony, and the potential benefits of fostering plurilingualism.

It is against this backdrop that the present study was conceived. The paper builds directly on a Master's thesis defended at the Bern University of Applied Sciences, in Switzerland, by the first author under the supervision of the second and with co-supervision by the third and fourth authors in Brazil (Surenthiran, 2025). The thesis investigated the use of English as a digital *lingua franca* across different global contexts, drawing on a large-scale quantitative survey. However, given that most of the respondents (96%) in Surenthiran's (2025) pool were based in

Switzerland, the current paper reanalyzes the data with a specific focus on the Swiss context. By examining how English is perceived and experienced in a society where multilingualism is the norm, the study seeks to contribute to ongoing debates about linguistic authenticity, identity construction, and the implications of English use in digital communication within a highly multilingual environment.

The concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has evolved significantly since it was first introduced in the 1990s, reflecting changing perspectives on the role of English in global communication. Jenkins (2018) outlines three main phases of ELF research: an initial stage (ELF 1) centered on linguistic forms and pronunciation variation; a second stage (ELF 2) that shifted the focus to pragmatic use and communicative functions; and a third stage (ELF 3) that positions ELF within the wider context of multilingualism, highlighting translanguaging practices. This trajectory has been supported by major milestones such as the development of ELF corpora (e.g., VOICE, ELFA, ACE, WrELFA), which enabled empirical investigations and expanded the scope of the field. While ELF research has faced resistance from advocates of standard English and has been subject to misconceptions that it promotes a new global norm, Jenkins (2015, 2018) argues that ELF is best understood as *multilingualism-with-English*.

In an earlier publication, Jenkins (2015) positions English as a Multilingual Franca (EMF) and challenges monolingual assumptions that have traditionally dominated ELF research and pedagogy, arguing that ELF cannot be understood as a self-contained, monolingual variety of English, but rather as an inherently multilingual practice. Drawing on empirical evidence, Jenkins shows how ELF users frequently draw from their full linguistic repertoires, engaging in flexible, hybrid, and translanguaging practices that move beyond the boundaries of English alone. This repositioning aligns ELF more closely with multilingualism, highlighting how speakers negotiate meaning, identity, and power in global encounters. Jenkins also critiques deficit views that treat non-native English use as a deviation from standard norms, instead framing ELF as a resourceful, context-sensitive, and equitable means of communication. By situating ELF within broader multilingual realities, Jenkins lays important theoretical groundwork for understanding English not as a single code, but as part of dynamic, multilingual repertoires that reflect the complex sociolinguistic landscapes of today.

With the rise of digital globalization, English has become the dominant lingua franca in online communication or what Bosso (2021) would call virtual English as a lingua franca (VELF), defined as the adaptation of English to online communicative needs of multicultural formations. While this facilitates cross-cultural interaction, it also raises questions about linguistic identity, social justice, communicative equity (Wehrli, 2025 a, b) and cultural representation, especially for non-native speakers. This study investigates how the use of English as a digital lingua franca shapes the linguistic and cultural identity of non-native speakers (of English) in Switzerland, with particular attention to perceptions of linguistic authenticity.

According to the McKinsey Global Institute (2016), the rise of digital technologies has profoundly transformed how individuals communicate across borders. As part of this

transformation, English has emerged as the dominant digital lingua franca (VELF), mediating interactions between speakers of diverse linguistic backgrounds in social media, academic platforms, and professional digital environments (Seidlhofer, 2011). As Oluwaseun (2023) notes, language is more than a tool for communication; it is a cultural force that shapes identities and reflects deep-seated values. The use of English as a ‘digital lingua franca’ thus raises critical questions about linguistic diversity, cultural representation, and identity formation among non-native speakers in multilingual online settings.

While the global adoption of English in digital interaction offers increased access and global connectivity, it also introduces tensions between communicative efficiency and cultural authenticity and representation. Non-native speakers may experience challenges such as limited expressive precision, linguistic insecurity, and the marginalization of local languages and epistemologies. These effects are amplified by digital infrastructures and platforms that often prioritize English-language content and standard linguistic norms, thereby perpetuating postcolonial patterns of linguistic dominance (Pennycook, 2017).

Colonial ideologies and sociolinguistic hierarchies still persist in the use and perception of English around the world. Studies such as Hildeblando Júnior (2024), França and Finardi (2025), Finardi (2022) and the Accent Bias Britain project (2020) demonstrate how non-standard and/or ethnically marked English varieties are often perceived as less competent than prestige accents/norms, despite conveying identical content. These findings suggest that the use of English online is embedded in power-laden ideologies that affect how speakers are evaluated and included—or excluded—from global discourse.

Furthermore, the assumption that English serves as a neutral medium for inclusive interaction has been criticized in recent scholarship. García et al. (2015) found that English monolinguals on digital platforms tend to form isolated clusters, whereas multilingual users engage in more heterogeneous and integrative exchanges. This points to the need for more inclusive digital practices and attention both to multilingual repertoires as well as to the monolingual English bubble in global communication.

Despite growing theoretical attention to English as a digital lingua franca or VELF (e.g. Bosso, 2021), relatively few empirical studies have examined how its everyday use shapes non-native speakers’ perceptions of linguistic authenticity and identity, particularly in informal digital spaces. Although Switzerland is well known for its institutional multilingualism and digital language infrastructures (Sommet, 2022), there is limited empirical research on how individuals negotiate linguistic identity and authenticity in digital spaces, particularly when using English as a lingua franca. To address this gap, this study focuses on the Swiss context, characterized by institutionally recognized multilingualism (Wehrli, 2025 a, b; Finardi, 2017), where English increasingly functions as a pragmatic bridge across language communities in online environments.

The central research question guiding this study is: How does the use of English as a digital lingua franca influence the perception of Swiss residents who are non-native speakers of English in terms of linguistic authenticity in digital interactions? To investigate this question, the study draws on four complementary theoretical perspectives: Linguistic Globalization

Theory, Language Ecology, Postcolonial and Decolonial Language Theories, and Identity Construction in Digital Spaces. These frameworks enable a critical examination of how language practices in digital contexts intersect with issues of power, belonging, and authenticity.

Methodologically, this study adopts a quantitative approach to analyze the relationship between perceived linguistic authenticity and the frequency of English use in digital environments. Focusing on non-native English-speaking residents in Switzerland, the research uses Robust Linear Regression (RLR) and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) techniques.

By combining theoretical insights with advanced statistical modeling, the study contributes to current debates on digital multilingualism, identity, and equity. It underscores the need to move beyond simplistic narratives of English as a unifying force and instead consider how digital language practices are shaped by—and shape—social hierarchies and individual experiences.

The structure of this paper is as follows: Section 2 presents a literature review on digital communication, global English, and linguistic identity. Section 3 outlines the methodological design and analytical procedures. Section 4 presents empirical findings. Section 5 offers a critical discussion of the results in light of the theoretical frameworks, and section 6 concludes with implications for inclusive language practices in digital education and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

To understand the sociolinguistic implications of using English as a digital lingua franca in Switzerland, this study builds on four theoretical pillars: Linguistic Globalization Theory, Language Ecology, Postcolonial and Decolonial Language Theories, and Identity Construction in Digital Spaces. These frameworks collectively enable a critical analysis of how English use in digital interaction influences identity perceptions, particularly authenticity, within a multilingual Swiss context.

2.1 Linguistic Globalization Theory

Globalization, as conceptualized by Appadurai (1996), involves multidirectional flows of people, ideas, and technologies. English, within this paradigm, functions as both medium and product of these flows—spreading through digital platforms while undergoing transformation through local adaptation (Pennycook, 2007). This duality is especially visible in digital contexts, where English varieties such as Singlish or K-pop English challenge the hegemony of standardized norms.

In Switzerland, where multiple national languages and migration languages coexist, the increasing use of English as a lingua franca—particularly in digital and academic domains—adds a layer of complexity. English operates not as a replacement, but as an overlay, often valued for its neutrality and accessibility across language groups. However, as pointed out by Finardi (2017), this may be seen as a breach of the national policy that prioritizes the teaching of national languages as first foreign languages; moreover, as argued by Crystal (2003) and Blommaert (2010), this prominence also entrenches access disparities by privileging those

with early exposure and digital literacy in English.

Digital infrastructures and algorithmic systems continue to encode (monolingual) English dominance (from Anglo-Saxon countries), shaping not only who communicates globally but also how and under what conditions. In Switzerland, students' engagement with English in digital spaces is filtered through their multilingual repertoire, educational background, and broader sociopolitical discourses that frame English as an additional layer of opportunity and threat in the discourse on multilingualism (Wehrli, 2025 a, b).

2.2 Language Ecology and Digital Transformation

Drawing from Haugen's (1972) notion of language ecology, this study examines English not as an isolated linguistic system but as one embedded within Switzerland's sociolinguistic ecosystem. In multilingual contexts, language choice in digital interaction reflects both individual preference and structural dynamics, including educational access, technological affordances, and prevailing language ideologies.

Switzerland offers a unique case. Despite official multilingualism, this is not necessarily reflected at the individual level when it comes to national languages, and English plays an increasingly central role as a lingua franca and in academic, corporate, and online settings. The EF English Proficiency Index (EF, 2024) shows high national proficiency in English, but with regional and age disparities. These uneven patterns raise questions about how different levels of English exposure influence users' self-perception and perceived authenticity in digital communication.

Santos' (2014) concept of epistemicide—the marginalization of non-dominant knowledges—resonates in this context. Digital platforms often elevate English-medium content, contributing to the invisibility of local languages and perspectives. Within Switzerland, this can lead to identity negotiation or dissonance, especially among speakers of globally less dominant languages and educationally disadvantaged individuals.

2.3 Postcolonial and Decolonial Language Theories

Postcolonial and decolonial perspectives illuminate how English, even in non-colonial multilingual contexts such as Switzerland, functions as a marker of inclusion or exclusion. While Kachru's (1992) "Three Circles" model legitimized expanding varieties of English, it has since been critiqued for not fully addressing global inequalities (Bruthiaux, 2003; Phillipson, 1992).

In the Swiss setting, Wehrli (2025 a, b) documents how students with migrant backgrounds often experience subtle exclusion, even when they are multilingual. Their home languages may lack institutional prestige, which results in misrecognition and identity tension. Native-speaker norms, reinforced by global media and digital platforms, continue to shape perceptions of linguistic legitimacy—favoring standardized varieties and reinforcing symbolic hierarchies (Tupas, 2015; Noble, 2018).

This study draws on these perspectives to examine how residents in Switzerland experience the intersection between English usage, digital interaction, and perceived linguistic authenticity. It

asks not only whether English boosts access and participation, but how its use affects self-perception in a sociolinguistically stratified context.

2.4 Identity Construction in Digital Spaces

Digital communication has transformed how identity is constructed and negotiated in digital spaces. In the absence of physical cues, users rely on linguistic and other semiotic strategies—hashtags, emojis, platform conventions—to signal stance and belonging (Zappavigna, 2018; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). This performative aspect is especially pronounced among multilingual users navigating multiple audiences and registers.

In Switzerland, where people often switch between languages and dialects (the latter in the case of German speakers), digital identity is not fixed but rather fluid. The use of English on platforms such as LinkedIn or academic forums may convey professionalism, while local or hybrid varieties are more common on social or informal media. This strategic variation reflects broader questions of authenticity, visibility, and adaptation (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015).

Algorithmic systems further complicate this process. As Broussard (2018) and Noble (2018) argue, content that aligns with dominant linguistic norms—especially English—is more likely to be surfaced and validated. Large language models (LLMs) are also trained on English data bringing serious implications for the use of artificial intelligence for other languages (Finardi, 2025). This reinforces epistemic hierarchies and can shape how individuals understand their own communicative legitimacy. By analyzing the perception of participants in Switzerland in terms of self-reported experiences of using English in digital environments, this study interrogates how identity is constructed within algorithmically mediated, multilingual, and stratified digital spaces.

3. Method

To investigate the relationship between participants' perceptions during online interactions and the frequency with which they engage in English use in digital environments, this study adopted a quantitative analytical framework. Robust Linear Regression (RLR) was employed as the primary modeling technique, selected for its capacity to cope with non-normal residual distributions and to mitigate the influence of potential outliers (Filzmoser & Nordhausen, 2021; Yu & Yao, 2017)—considerations especially pertinent given the ordinal nature of the dependent variable. In preparation for the regression analysis, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was conducted to identify latent constructs underlying participants' affective responses, thereby enabling dimensionality reduction and enhancing the interpretability of subsequent models (Hotelling, 1933). In addition, age was included in the model as a categorical moderator variable and defined across four age groups to examine its moderating effect on the relationship between participants' perceptions and English-use frequency. All analyses were performed using the R statistical computing environment (R Core Team, 2023).

3.1 Data Collection and Sample

A survey employing a five-point Likert scale was administered in April 2025 to residents in

Switzerland. The sample was composed of 967 completed questionnaires. The minimum sample size—considering 1 dependent variable, 7 manifest variables (i.e., items), 1 moderator variable (grouped into four age categories), a significance level of 0.05, a statistical power of 0.8 and effect size of 0.15, considered medium, by Cohen grading (1988)—was estimated at 122 observations, using the online application *Free Statistics Calculators* (Soper, 2023). Thus, the final sample of 967 substantially exceeded the minimum requirement of 122 observations.

Table 1. Sample of the study

Description		Frequency	Relative frequency
Age	18–24	382	40%
	25–34	453	47%
	35–44	79	8%
	45+	53	5%
Gender	Male	357	37%
	Female	587	61%
	Diverse	23	02%

Source: authors'.

3.2 Data Analysis

Two principal components—Factor 1: Linguistic Identity and Factor 2: Online Communication—were extracted via PCA and used as independent variables. Together, these two components explained 48.88% of the total variance, supporting their retention for subsequent analysis and enhancing the interpretability of the model. The dependent variable was treated as continuous for modelling purposes. The variable Age, coded from 1 to 4 to represent ascending age groups (18–24, 25–34, 35–44, and 45+), was included as a moderator in interaction terms. The model specification included all main effects and interaction contrasts (linear, quadratic, cubic) using orthogonal polynomials (.L, .Q, .C).

Normality and homoscedasticity were inherently addressed by the robust regression technique, which down-weights influential outliers and adjusts the estimation method accordingly. As for independence of residuals, the Durbin-Watson test was applied to a parallel linear model (lm), yielding $DW = 1.95$ ($p = 0.2157$), indicating no significant autocorrelation. Regarding multicollinearity, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values remained below 5 for all predictors, which is generally accepted as a threshold for low multicollinearity. Table 2 shows the research model.

Table 2. Research model

Variable	Variable type	Index number
Factor 1 -Linguistic Identity	Predictor	4
Factor 2 -Online Communication	Predictor	3
Age	Moderator	4
Use of English in digital environments	Dependent	5

Source: authors'.

4. Results

Firstly, Harman's single-factor test indicated that the total variance extracted by one factor was 0.28%, which is less than 0.50%, suggesting that common method bias was discarded. A robust linear regression analysis was conducted using two principal components extracted via PCA—labelled Linguistic Identity and Online Communication—as independent variables. The ordinal variable age (coded from 1 to 4) was included as a moderator, and the dependent variable, use of English in digital environments, was treated as continuous for modeling purposes.

An alternative model applying heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors (HC1) was also tested; however, given the presence of influential observations and the nature of the residuals, the `rlm()` estimator offered more reliable results. To estimate the explanatory power of the robust model, a pseudo R^2 was calculated based on residual variance. The resulting value was 0.158, which indicates a modest fit and supports the suitability of this approach for data influenced by perceptual constructs and potential outliers.

The analysis revealed that Linguistic Identity has a significant negative direct effect on the use of English in digital environments ($\beta = -0.0782$; $p < 0.01$), indicating that increases in this component are associated with reductions in the dependent scores. In contrast, Online Communication showed a significant and positive direct effect ($\beta = +0.1597$; $p < 0.001$), suggesting that greater engagement with this dimension is linked to higher levels of use of English in digital environments. The moderator age displayed meaningful direct effects. The linear contrast was statistically significant ($\beta = -0.2953$; $p < 0.001$), suggesting that the use of English in digital environments decreases progressively across age levels. A significant quadratic contrast ($\beta = -0.1925$; $p < 0.01$) further indicated a curved pattern in the age-related association.

Among the tested interactions, the linear interaction between Online Communication and Age emerged as statistically significant ($\beta = -0.2064$; $p < 0.01$), confirming that the effect of Online Communication on the use of English in digital environments varies by age group. Meanwhile, interactions involving Linguistic Identity and age (linear, quadratic, and cubic) were not statistically significant, suggesting that the impact of Linguistic Identity remains consistent across age groups (see Table 3).

Table 3. Predicted Values Across Age Groups

Age Group (1–4)	Factor_2 = –1 SD*	Factor_2 = Mean	Factor_2 = +1 SD*
18–24	3.77	3.96	4.15
25–34	3.70	3.89	4.08
35–44	3.68	3.87	4.06
45+	3.65	3.83	4.01

Note. These predictions reinforce the presence of moderation effect, with younger individuals (Age = 1) exhibiting stronger responsiveness to increases in Factor 2; *Standard deviation.

Source: authors’.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study shed light on the complex dynamics of English use as a digital lingua franca in Switzerland, highlighting how linguistic practices intersect with perceptions of authenticity, identity, and generational differences. Results indicate that two factors extracted through PCA influenced participants’ reported use of English in digital contexts: the first factor—Linguistic Identity—exerting a negative effect, and the second factor—Online Communication—a positive one.

The interpretation suggests that the Linguistic Identity factor is negatively associated with participants’ self-perception of English use in online spaces. Specifically, as scores on the linguistic identity factor increase, the reported use of English tends to decrease. Furthermore, this effect remains consistent across different age groups.

Regarding the Online Communication factor, higher levels of online communication are associated with increased use of English in digital environments. Additionally, the moderation analysis by age showed that the effect of Online Communication on English use varies across age group. More specifically, the use of English in digital environments decreases progressively across with age, indicating that older participants report lower levels of English use online.

As demonstrated, age emerged as a significant moderator, with younger participants (18–24) reporting higher levels of linguistic adaptation and perceived authenticity in the use of English in digital environments. This finding aligns with broader literature on generational differences in digital literacy and linguistic adaptability (McKinsey Global Institute, 2016; Van Dijk, 2020). Younger individuals, having grown up in digitally saturated environments, may not perceive English use as a challenge to their linguistic identity but rather as an extension of their existing multilingual repertoires.

Conversely, older participants may experience greater tension between authenticity and the adoption of English, reflecting the persistence of normative language ideologies that privilege standard varieties and native-speaker norms (Accent Bias Britain, 2020; Jenkins, 2015, 2018). The ‘age’ variable may also be influenced by the earlier commencement of English instruction starting from Year 5 (previously Year 7), implemented by the German-speaking

cantons of Switzerland (CDPE, 2025). The results also highlight the sociolinguistic inequities embedded in digital environments. Platforms that prioritize English content reinforce epistemic hierarchies and contribute to the invisibility of minority or migrant languages—an effect theorized by Santos (2014) as *epistemicide* and observed in Swiss contexts by Wehrli (2025 a, b) regarding migrant languages. This dynamic could be extended in this context even to the official languages of a multilingual country such as Switzerland. The negative relationship between Linguistic Identity and digital English use may capture this sense of alienation, while the positive effect of Online Communication suggests that, for many Swiss residents, English nonetheless serves as a valuable resource for participation in transnational networks.

These findings align with Jenkins' (2015, 2018) argument that English as a lingua franca should not be understood as a monolithic, neutral medium, but as *multilingualism-with-English*, embedded in local repertoires and shaped by power relations. The findings also resonate with decolonial critiques of language use (e.g. Hildeblando Júnior, 2024; França & Finardi, 2025, Finardi, 2022, Finardi, França & Guimarães, 2022), which emphasize that linguistic practices cannot be divorced from social hierarchies, historical inequalities, and the politics of recognition. By demonstrating how age, attitudes, and contextual factors interact in shaping perceptions of authenticity, this study contributes to rethinking the role of English in digital multilingual environments.

5.1 Limitations

As is usually the case with quantitative studies, some limitations must be acknowledged. First, the dataset was originally collected for a broader project (Surenthiran's thesis) and subsequently reanalyzed for the Swiss context, which may limit the specificity and representativeness of the findings. Second, the study's quantitative design did not allow for deeper exploration of the nuanced ways in which authenticity and identity are negotiated in real-time interactions. Finally, the distribution of age groups across the sample may constrain the generalizability of results across the diverse linguistic landscape of Switzerland, where regional, educational, and migratory backgrounds could produce different outcomes. These limitations suggest caution in interpreting the findings while also pointing to avenues for future mixed-methods and comparative research.

6. Conclusions

This study investigated the relationship between Swiss resident participants' self-perceptions during online interactions and the frequency of their English-language use in digital environments. By combining robust statistical modeling (RLR) with dimensionality reduction (PCA), it identified latent attitudinal factors that significantly shaped reported English use and showed that age plays a crucial role in moderating these effects. The findings offer nuanced insights into the multifaceted outcomes of digital English use in multilingual societies.

Three key conclusions can be drawn. First, perceptions of authenticity are not uniform across demographics: younger participants demonstrate greater comfort and confidence in English-mediated interactions, whereas older groups display more ambivalence. Second, the

dual role of English as both an enabling and constraining resource underscores the need to address the structural inequities that privilege English while marginalizing other languages, including official languages of high prestige. Third, digital multilingual practices must be understood within broader ecological and postcolonial frameworks, recognizing that linguistic hierarchies and identity negotiations are inseparable from sociopolitical and technological contexts.

For policymakers and educators, these findings highlight the importance of fostering inclusive digital environments that validate diverse linguistic repertoires rather than reinforcing and reproducing English dominance. This includes developing pedagogical strategies that encourage critical digital literacy, promote translanguaging practices, and recognize authenticity as a socially negotiated construct rather than a fixed property of native-like speech (Finardi et al., 2024).

Future research could build on this study by incorporating qualitative data to capture the lived experiences of multilingual users in digital spaces, exploring cross-country comparisons to situate the Swiss case within broader global trends, and analyzing the role of algorithmic mediation and artificial intelligence (e.g. Finardi, 2025) in shaping linguistic visibility. Ultimately, by foregrounding authenticity, identity, and equity, this study contributes to ongoing debates on how English and other languages can coexist in more just and inclusive digital environments.

Finally, the study confirms the relevance of the four theoretical frameworks that guided its design. From a linguistic globalization perspective, it shows how English continues to expand as a digital lingua franca, while language ecology helps to situate this use within Switzerland's broader multilingual landscape. Postcolonial and decolonial theories underscore how power asymmetries and linguistic hierarchies shape experiences of authenticity, and identity construction in digital spaces illustrates how participants negotiate belonging and self-representation online. Together, these perspectives reveal that English use in Switzerland is not a merely neutral communicative choice but a socially and politically embedded practice that both reflects and reshapes contemporary multilingual realities.

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