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Additional Information

1 **Managing identity in football communities on Facebook: Language preference and**  
2 **language mixing strategies**

3 **Abstract**

4 In this article, we examine language choice and code-switching in two different social  
5 media multilingual communities: comments posted on the official Facebook pages of  
6 the most important football clubs in Cameroon and Spain. In these two cases, non-  
7 standardised languages like indigenous Cameroonian languages or “minority”  
8 languages like Catalan have to compete with other languages. By means of a  
9 quantitative and Computer-mediated Communication Discourse Analysis (CMCDA),  
10 our results show that translingual written exchanges are frequently adopted and serve to  
11 establish local and global identities in these highly multilingual environments.  
12 Specifically, the results of this case study demonstrate that language mixing strategies  
13 are vital to create distinct in-group language style and alignment. However, the article  
14 concludes that multilingual interactions are constructed differently by the two  
15 communities. The language mixing strategies in the Cameroonian comments are more  
16 varied and provide richer examples of language mixing phenomena than the texts from  
17 the Spanish clubs. We argue that this is likely because language mixing and lexical  
18 creativity are deeply embedded in Cameroon’s daily communicative practices.

19

20 **Keywords:** Computer-mediated Communication (CMC); social media; identity;  
21 language mixing; code-switching; sports discourse; football.

22

23 **1. Introduction**

24 We are now witnessing mass multilingualism<sup>1</sup> thanks to the Internet. This  
25 technical medium has allowed online writers to vent their feelings and voice their ideas  
26 in a variety of ways, mixing languages as part of mixing “things” such as genres, styles,  
27 texts, etc. (Leppänen & Peuronen, 2012). Unfortunately, although these mixing  
28 phenomena have been studied since the beginning of Computer-mediated  
29 Communication (CMC) research (see, for instance, Georgakopoulou, 1997), the spread  
30 of code-switching (CS) and language mixing practices on an unprecedented scale has  
31 not attracted the attention of academia in equal measure, as noted by Androutsopoulos  
32 (2013). Yet, over the last few years, the number of studies has increased significantly.  
33 While some recent articles and book chapters have dedicated effort and expertise to  
34 acknowledging and explaining this phenomenon, such as the research carried out by  
35 Tsiplakou (2009), Androutsopoulos (2013), Lee (2016), and Kulavuz-Onal and Vásquez  
36 (2018), Leppänen and Peuronen (2012) indicated that more publications are still needed  
37 to document current global translingual communicative practices, that is, “...the ways in  
38 which groups and communities of people experience and do things that involve more  
39 than one language”, which are not necessarily directly related to the geographical  
40 location of the speakers (Lee, 2016: 126). Different sites, types of online  
41 multilingualism and comparisons between modes, languages and settings need to be  
42 addressed in Androutsopoulos’ view to understand the “...specific properties of CS  
43 online” (2013:688).

44 From a sociolinguistic point of view, creative linguistic resources in online  
45 communication can be used “...for strategic styling, for representing certain identity  
46 aspects in specific situations, and for emphasizing what kinds of cultures or lifestyles  
47 one is willing to align oneself with” (Peuronen, 2011: 154). Likewise, de Fina et al.

48 (2006) indicated that the relationship between language, discourse and identity has been  
49 a crucial area in the field of sociolinguistics as we build images of ourselves through  
50 language. Globalisation has enhanced the contact between people of different  
51 backgrounds and traditions (Li, 2011). The global social medium Facebook, one of the  
52 three major online social media that have gained global popularity over the past few  
53 years (Chovanec & Dynel, 2015), could be a good example of a multilingual virtual  
54 space, a translanguaging virtual space where multilingual written practices are likely to  
55 be closely related to the identity position of its users. As Li (2011) indicated, individuals  
56 now "...consciously construct and constantly modify their socio cultural identities and  
57 values through social practices such as translanguaging" (2011:1224). In  
58 translanguaging spaces, "...identities, values and practices" do not simply coexist but  
59 combine to create "new identities, values and practices" (Li, 2011:1223).

60 In this line of thought, the study we present here attempts to explain language  
61 choice and language mixing phenomena in several online communities and how  
62 linguistic choices and strategies are deployed as mechanisms to create different  
63 intersecting identities. More specifically, this case study examines the online interaction  
64 of multilingual communities formed by football supporters from one of the most  
65 multilingual countries in the world, Cameroon, and virtual multilingual communities  
66 formed by interactants from many different countries. We analyse interactions on the  
67 Facebook pages of the most popular football teams in Cameroon and written Facebook  
68 exchanges by multinational football supporters of the two most popular Spanish football  
69 teams, F. C. Barcelona and Real Madrid C. F, the two football teams holding the  
70 leading position in the world's ranking of the most popular clubs on social media (*The*  
71 *Guardian*, Dec. 2014).

72           There is no doubt that football offers a viable site for social investigation (Clark,  
73 2006). Particularly interesting nowadays is that football is a highly-globalised socio-  
74 cultural phenomenon with an outstanding transnational, multicultural and therefore  
75 often multilingual character which “...makes football discourse a legitimate, yet so far  
76 almost completely neglected, target for sociolinguistic studies on multilingualism”  
77 (Kytölä, 2014:81). Unfortunately, most of the research into the sociology of sport has  
78 acknowledged the relationships between online and offline cultural lives “...instead of  
79 exclusively examining online identities, experiences, and social constructions” (Wilson,  
80 2008:135). In connection with this, we will focus on multilingual online texts entirely in  
81 sport communities to see how group identity and alignment is constructed in these  
82 environments.

83           Another novel aspect of this article is its non-Anglocentric research perspective.  
84 Academic research on online multilingualism carried out to date has almost exclusively  
85 had an Anglocentric and Northern European orientation (see for example, Tsiplakou,  
86 2009; Kytölä, 2014; Lee, 2016). Few studies have dealt with multilingual texts within  
87 the global South (López, 2007) perspective of online discourse analysis.

88           Overall, we will demonstrate the importance of local, in-group identity effects  
89 generated by the linguistic choices made in posts by football supporters on club  
90 websites, assuming that certain discursive practices in multilingual contexts enact  
91 “identity effects”. These effects are produced in most instances of communication, but  
92 our claim is that in the multilingual context of our study the choice of language has an  
93 identity-related impact on both the “sender user” and their audiences. Firstly, we are  
94 dealing with languages such as indigenous Cameroonian languages and Catalan, which  
95 compete against the pressure of parallel official languages. Hence, the explicit choice of  
96 these languages immediately acts as an in-group identity marker. Secondly, virtual

97 platforms can be accessed from all over the world and therefore local languages  
98 compete against the international pressure from English as a lingua franca on the  
99 Internet. In both cases, we will demonstrate that explicit language choices yield  
100 interesting insights regarding the identification and understanding of online multilingual  
101 interactions.

102         Finally, we would like to say that these two specific groups, rather than others  
103 from multilingual countries such as Asian multilingual societies, were chosen  
104 principally because of the language background of the researchers. The analysis of  
105 multilingual communities is usually a hard task because it involves the work of several  
106 researchers who are fluent in several languages, but such analysis is especially complex  
107 when minority languages in digitally underdeveloped countries like Cameroon are  
108 included. At the time of writing this article, there are no dictionaries or translation  
109 facilities available for most indigenous Cameroonian languages, either online or on  
110 paper, such as those offered by Facebook for more than 150 languages. In our case, we  
111 were able to overcome this barrier because one of the authors of this paper was born in  
112 the Francophone part of Cameroon but has lived most of her life in an Anglophone  
113 province; in addition to these languages she is also fluent in Pidgin English and several  
114 Cameroonian languages. Her multilingual upbringing has been a key factor in enabling  
115 an exhaustive examination of these multilingual texts. The second author is a native  
116 speaker of Catalan and Spanish and fluent in English and French. Thus, both researchers  
117 are able to fully understand the nuances found in many of these interactions. In this  
118 article, it is clear that we do not intend to provide universal principles or general  
119 maxims regarding linguistic behaviour. However, by examining these mass multilingual  
120 interactions, we can offer some explanation as to how individuals, within the global  
121 South and non-Anglophone fora, establish in-group identity today through language

122 choice and language mixing strategies, and how their written communication is  
123 generally influenced by the sociological and ideological phenomena that normally  
124 characterise sports discourse.

125 The layout of this paper is as follows: the next section reviews some of the  
126 theoretical concepts and the general language context on which this research is based;  
127 the objectives, corpus, methodology and parameters are then described followed by the  
128 next section which discusses the basic analysis of language choice and code-switching  
129 in the two groups studied with interpretation using relevant literature from the field; and  
130 finally, some conclusions and a brief outline for further study are put forward.

## 131 **2. Theoretical background**

### 132 ***2.1. Multilingualism on the Internet and the construction of online identity***

133 Academia has normally taken a macro-sociological view of online multilingualism and  
134 language choice. It has predominantly focused on measuring language use on the  
135 Internet (Warschauer & De Florio-Hansen, 2003; Paolillo, 2007). Conversely, studies  
136 such as that by Georgakopoulou (1997) and recent research into the study of  
137 multilingual online practices have taken a different approach, see Leppänen and  
138 Peuronen (2012), Androutsopoulos (2015) or Lee (2016). Based on pragmatics,  
139 sociolinguistics or discourse studies, rather than centring on measuring language choice  
140 these publications tend to focus on understanding and identifying online  
141 multilingualism, for example, and also on questioning assumptions that have dominated  
142 the field in previous years.

143 A key issue in the literature is the definition of online multilingualism. In this  
144 regard, Androutsopoulos (2015:185) clearly details the scope of what he calls  
145 “networked” multilingualism. In his view, this is a cover term for multilingual practices  
146 “...that are shaped by two interrelated processes: being networked, i.e. digitally

147 connected to other individuals and groups, and being in the network, i.e. embedded in  
148 the global digital mediascape of the web”. As this scholar contends, Computer-mediated  
149 Communication (CMC) is a rich site for the study of written multilingualism and code-  
150 switching, but some of the traditional approaches towards the study of multilingual  
151 practices must be reconsidered.

152         We need to explain, in line with Lee (2017: 23), that language choice in online  
153 environments is basically concerned “...with the codes or linguistic resources available  
154 to online participants and how they negotiate their code preferences when  
155 communicating with others”. It is also worth noting that participants may or may not  
156 share common codes or languages. On some platforms such as Facebook, this is not  
157 usually a problem, as the platform provides translation facilities for comments or news  
158 feeds in many languages. Nevertheless, it may be a drawback for users of minority or  
159 non-standardised languages for which translation still is not available on Facebook; as is  
160 the case of many African languages at the time of writing this article.

161         In multilingual CMC, language choice and CS are often studied together (Lee,  
162 2017). Therefore, let us now focus on CS. In CMC, a basic concept such as the  
163 definition of CS established by Gumperz (1977:1, 1982:59), “...the juxtaposition of  
164 passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems,  
165 within the same exchange,” can pose problems. In online discourse, the coexistence of  
166 different languages or different linguistic varieties in one platform does not necessarily  
167 constitute CS, such as when several languages coexist on a webpage (Lee, 2016). In this  
168 regard, Androutsopoulos (2013:673) emphasises that, for multilingual Computer-  
169 mediated Communication Discourse (CMCD) to qualify as CS, “...evidence is required  
170 that [different language choices] are in some way dialogically interrelated by  
171 responding to previous, and contextualizing subsequent, contributions”. Thus, the



172 simple mixing of languages on the same platform is generally excluded from CS  
173 linguistic research. Besides, new terms have been adopted and proposed to refer to  
174 switches online that go beyond "...single words, phrases or sentences of one language  
175 that are well integrated into another" (Jaworska, 2014:59). For example, in Jaworska's  
176 analysis of the online interactions of German expatriates living in Great Britain, she  
177 refers to language alternations based on "...conscious manipulations and playful  
178 distortions of linguistic material" as digital code plays (2014:59). In a similar vein,  
179 Hinrichs (2016) has recently proposed the term "digital language contrasting" to refer to  
180 both language choice and code-switching in online discourse practices. However, these  
181 alternative referents are far from being adopted unanimously by academia to substitute  
182 the traditional code-switching and language choice firmly rooted in the literature.

183         Another important issue that has frequently arisen in multilingual online  
184 interaction is the analysis of language choice, CS and language mixing phenomena as  
185 resources that have pragmatic, discourse and social functions (Androutsopoulos, 2013;  
186 Lee, 2016). The functions identified so far in CS include switching for formulaic  
187 discourse practices, and switching to perform culturally-specific genres or to convey  
188 reported speech. Androutsopoulos (2013:681) specifies that interactants can "...switch  
189 to or from the interlocutor's code to index consent or dissent, agreement and conflict,  
190 alignment and distancing". A pragmatically informed micro-analysis of CS in CMC can  
191 show how the use of different languages by the members of a group may serve these  
192 pragmatic functions and identity values.

193         Factors that determine the language used by online participants are, among  
194 others, the expressiveness of the language, technical constraints of inputting methods,  
195 and user identification with the language (Lee, 2016). Language has a crucial role in  
196 constructing online identities or "virtual identities" (Tsiplakou, 2009), defined as the

197 ways we want to be in our social interactions (Lee, 2017). Identities in social media do  
198 not only refer to who we are but "...also who we want to be to others, and how others  
199 see us or expect us to be" (Lee, 2017:55). Online identity is, under constructivist  
200 approaches followed here, constructed or created (Yus, 2018), often through creative  
201 orthography, code choice, and code-switching (Lee, 2016). Indeed, online identity is, in  
202 Lee's view, a dynamic concept "...always open for reappropriation, recontextualization,  
203 and transformation" (2017:55). Likewise, in-group or intra-group identity involves a  
204 sense of belonging to a social group and is generally constructed by means of special  
205 discursive features working as inherent sources of in-group or intra-group identity; these  
206 features also establish inter-group differentiation (Yus, 2018).

207        Basically, research on CMC has emphasised the fact that negotiation of language  
208 choice and alternation between languages are important for self-presentation and  
209 identity performance (Lee, 2017). Language is important in identity construction mainly  
210 because other identity markers such as gender, race or social class are not "visible" on  
211 the Internet (Warschauer & De Florio-Hansen, 2003). Visibility on social networking  
212 sites such as Twitter or Facebook has specifically emerged as a core property of the  
213 system, reinforcing posters' concern with identity construction through language choice  
214 (Sifianou, 2018).

215        The distinction between local and global self-presentation through language  
216 choice is important in the construction of online identities (Warschauer & De Florio-  
217 Hansen, 2003). For example, in globalised platforms like Flickr, non-native speakers of  
218 English may prefer English to project themselves as global participants whereas the use  
219 of their native language emphasises their local identity (Lee, 2016). This distinction has  
220 been widely noted by studies of bilingual conversation where, as Auer (2005) states, the  
221 minority language is usually a symbolic carrier of ethnic self-identification.

222           Apart from local and global identities, Lee indicates (2016) that new kinds of  
223 self-presentation strategies can be employed by online participants, who perform glocal  
224 identities in translocal online spaces; glocal being defined as a “...dynamic negotiation  
225 between the global and the local” by Koutsogiannis and Mitsikopoulou (2007: 143). In  
226 general, social media glocal identities are constructed by mixing English and local  
227 languages (Lee, 2016). Particularly in greetings, closings, slogans and the like, instances  
228 of local or minority languages are often used to signal ethnic identity associated with  
229 “we” codes, as stated by Androutsopoulos (2013). Local codes are often one of the  
230 preferred resources to create in-group solidarity (Tsiplakou, 2009) or to maintain in-  
231 group identity (Lee, 2016).

232           According to Lambert Graham (2016), the impact of multi-ethnic and  
233 multilingual communication in establishing and negotiating relationships in CMC has  
234 been widely explored. These studies include explanations of how Cantonese-English  
235 code-switching in a chat room is used to develop a collective ethnic identity (Lam,  
236 2004); how in Jamaican emails and discussion fora, Patois is employed as a resource to  
237 create humoristic identity (Hinrichs, 2006); in Tsiplakou’s email study (2009), language  
238 alternation between Greek and English is the mechanism deployed par excellence to  
239 construct that group’s online communicative identity; in a fan fiction story published  
240 online, Finnish is used to identify the real world and English represents a fictional  
241 realm; and in a blog entry, multiple language choices are functional and meaningful to  
242 construct the cosmopolitan identity of the writer (Leppänen & Peuronen, 2012). In  
243 English-Spanish online mixing practices, Montes-Alcalá (2016) concludes that in her  
244 corpus of bilingual speakers, CS plays an important role in signalling social and/or  
245 ethnic identity, mirroring the functions traditionally perceived in bilingual speech.

246           In addition to these studies, research published in two book chapters presents a  
247 complete revision of language choice and CS in CMC. First, Androutsopoulos (2013)  
248 highlights that the pragmatic functions and identity values of different codes in a  
249 group's usage cannot be assumed a priori. Another significant point made is that the use  
250 of linguistic heterogeneity to index social identities on the Internet goes beyond a  
251 simple "...reflection of spoken conversational patterns". Lee (2016) updates  
252 Androutsopoulos' (2013) list of selected research on CS in digital communication and  
253 concludes that, essentially, mixed-language texts enable participants to "...manage  
254 relationships, perform multicultural identities and build communities."

255           Nevertheless, despite this wide range of studies and the two detailed revisions  
256 outlined above, we have not found any analysis of multilingualism in online written  
257 conversations in Cameroonian contexts. As for Spanish, although it is not entirely about  
258 language mixing for identity matters and it centres exclusively on bilingual groups of  
259 communicators, the article by Montes-Alcalá is the only well-documented analysis  
260 published in the field of which we are aware. Hence the need for our article to fill the  
261 gap in research in the area of CMC language mixing in the languages of Cameroon and  
262 Spain.

263           Lee (2017) explains that the study of language choice must start by identifying  
264 the languages or resources available to users. Consequently, before explaining the study  
265 undertaken, the language context in Cameroon and Spain must be briefly considered.

## 266 *2.2. Multilingualism in Cameroon*

267           The linguistic landscape of Africa is characterised by the rivalry between post-colonial  
268 languages, mainly English, French and Portuguese, and indigenous languages (Wolff,  
269 2018). As this author manifests, the imposition of post-colonial languages as national

270 languages is often officially motivated by reasons associated with globalisation, to  
271 facilitate international and national communication in multilingual countries.

272 Cameroon is one of most multilingual countries in the world. More than 240  
273 languages coexist with the two official languages, English and French, the ex-colonial  
274 languages, and the main Lingua Franca, Pidgin English (Echu, 2004). These languages,  
275 as Ngefac (2010) claims, have distinct statuses and functions in society; most of them  
276 are not fully standardised, not taught at school and rarely written, as is the case in many  
277 other African countries. In general, traditional educational practice in multilingual  
278 Africa forbade the use of the students' linguistic repertoires in the classroom and "...  
279 ruled out codeswitching as dirty manifestations of imperfect language" (Wolff, 2018).  
280 This teaching, based on language ideologies obsessed with purity and normative  
281 standardisation, penalised the use of language mixing phenomena, impeding effective  
282 teaching and learning in multilingual contexts in sub-Saharan Africa, according to  
283 scholars on African sociolinguistics such as Wolff (2018).

284 Regarding the identification of languages with national identities, in most  
285 African countries, Simpson (2008) sustains that languages did not play a part in  
286 constructing national identities as they did in other nationalist movements, for example,  
287 in Europe. This is due to the varied ethno-linguistic character of the majority of former  
288 African colonies, which did not permit one language to be a representative symbol of  
289 the new nations. In Cameroon, indigenous languages have never played any role in  
290 national identity issues. English and French are the languages involved in the projection  
291 of the two main national groups, the Anglophone community and the Francophone, as  
292 stated by Biloa and Echu (2008). These authors point out that despite this official  
293 bilingualism, the public sphere is occupied mostly by French, which has caused many  
294 political problems in the English-speaking part of the country.

295           Recently, however, this ethnic identification with the former colonial languages  
 296 has become slightly blurred (as in other parts of Africa) by the emergence of a second  
 297 set of “mixed language” forms, mainly in urban environments (Simpson, 2008). In  
 298 Cameroon, this new mixed language is called Camfranglais (a mixture of English,  
 299 French, and Cameroonian languages), an urban slang which has become a new symbol  
 300 “...of ethnically neutral local identity”, and which may emerge in time as “...significant  
 301 linguistic elements in the expression of a broader national identity alongside longer  
 302 established pidgins and creoles” (Simpson, 2008:11). Regarding the concept of national  
 303 identity, McLaughlin (2008) observes that the term national identity may have two  
 304 different meanings. One of them refers to “...a population’s relationship and sense of  
 305 belonging to a nation-state, and the second is the identity of an individual nation-state  
 306 within the international world order” (2008:79). In this article, we will use the term  
 307 “national identity”<sup>3</sup> to mean the identification citizens may make with other members of  
 308 the population of a state, leaving issues related to the external imagery of a given state  
 309 for subsequent research.

### 310 *2.3. Language context in Spain and Spanish in the world*

311 Sociolinguistic and sociological studies of the history of Spanish have highlighted the  
 312 fact that Spain has been a multilingual and multicultural society for many centuries  
 313 (Moreno-Fernández, 2007). Yet, during several periods of its history, Spanish as the  
 314 national language and Spanish culture as the only identity of Spain have been politically  
 315 enhanced and strengthened through a monolingual and monocultural view of society,  
 316 influenced by the French models of the eighteenth century of state and linguistic politics  
 317 (Moreno-Fernández, 2007). As a result, the other languages of the country were totally  
 318 excluded from education and public life (see, for example, Montaruli et al., 2011).

319 Today, the linguistic landscape of the country is considerably different. Spain  
320 has been divided into autonomous communities or regions since the Constitution of  
321 1978, which declared Spanish to be the national language of the country while giving  
322 other languages official status in certain autonomous communities (Moreno-Fernández,  
323 2007). The main symbolic effect of this new Magna Carta has been "...the recognition  
324 and legitimization of regional cultures and languages, which fostered the development  
325 of bilingual and bicultural regional identities" (Montaruli et al., 2011:95).  
326 Consequently, since 1978 the central territories, including Madrid, have been officially  
327 monolingual while most peripheral territories, such as Galicia, the Basque Country,  
328 Catalonia, the Valencian Region, the Balearic Islands and parts of Navarra and Aragon,  
329 are bilingual communities with two official languages for teaching and use in the public  
330 domain (Moreno-Fernández, 2007).

331 In Catalonia, Catalan is undergoing a process of normalisation (Author et al.,  
332 2009), recovering from its former exclusion from the public sphere (Blas Arroyo, 2005).  
333 Since 1978, both Catalan and Spanish are the official languages of Catalonia. However,  
334 despite its prestige in society and education (Blas-Arroyo, 2007), and the efforts of  
335 linguistic and educational policies to redress the dominance of Spanish over Catalan,  
336 these policies have not been completely effective (Climent et al., 2003). For example, as  
337 Climent et al. pointed out, the policies have not succeeded in improving the level of  
338 spontaneous usage of the language nor, of particular importance for this article, in  
339 improving its presence on the Internet.

340 The inclusion of languages in ethnic struggles is a worldwide phenomenon  
341 which has also occurred in Spain, as noted by Warschauer and De Florio-Hansen  
342 (2003). These authors explained that many Catalan and Basque-speakers are working to

343 build a language-based nation within a nation or state, while some Catalan and Basque  
344 citizens are also struggling for independence.

345 To conclude this subsection, a brief note must be included regarding the use of  
346 Spanish as an international language. Spanish is one of the most widely-spoken  
347 languages in the world. It is used by approximately 500 million people, mainly in  
348 America and Spain. In 2018, it was the third most widely-used language on the Internet  
349 according to <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>.

#### 350 *2.4. Football, online communities and the construction of identities*

351 Communities are constantly being reinvented and re-imagined in the wake of new  
352 developments (Hobsbawm, 1990). The definition of online communities<sup>2</sup> is very broad  
353 and covers a wide range of topics, methodologies, theories and practices (Preece &  
354 Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). In general, “online community” is a term used to refer to  
355 “...almost any group of people who use Internet technologies to communicate with each  
356 other” (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). In football, according to Clark (2006),  
357 community or collectivity is defined upon the assumptions of it being relational,  
358 negotiable and, more significantly, the definition includes notions of similarity and  
359 difference. This definition can also be applied to the new communities of football  
360 supporters on Facebook, i.e., completely new communities created thanks to the  
361 affordances of new media (Peuronen, 2011). Online affinity groups on Facebook  
362 resemble online neighbourhoods, as Papacharissi (2002) stated regarding web  
363 communities, or (and more relevant to our case) groups of friends that meet up to talk  
364 about or watch their favourite hobby in a pub.

365 Generally, participants in online communities identify themselves as members of  
366 specific and distinct groups by showing their competence in “...making appropriate  
367 linguistic, semiotic, and discursive choices across different communicative situations”



368 (Peuronen, 2011:155). Specifically in online communities of football supporters,  
369 participants usually resort to these choices, which also entail mixing languages, to  
370 perform their fandom, show their support and demonstrate special interest in a player  
371 (Kytölä, 2014) or a team. However, not all language mixing phenomena are valid ways  
372 to manifest membership in these fora. A shared identity is based on shared linguistic  
373 and cultural contexts such as slogans and chants, as well as background knowledge of  
374 the players and history of the team (Chovanec, 2009).

375 Furthermore, due to the context analysed, this study needs to refer to national  
376 identity construction and football in relation to the Spanish clubs studied. Many scholars  
377 have examined football as a tool to express national identity (see, for example,  
378 Hobsbawm, 1990; Hernández-Alonso, 2003; Simpson, 2008). In the contemporary era  
379 in Spain, the two Spanish clubs analysed in this study have been identified with  
380 nationalistic ideas: Barça with Catalan nationalism and, more recently, separatism; and  
381 Madrid with Spanish nationalism (Rodríguez Ortega, 2016). When it comes to  
382 Facebook comments however, globalisation may have blurred these contentious  
383 positions: most of the 100 million people from all over the world who like the official  
384 Facebook pages of Barça and Real Madrid and receive a daily update from the clubs are  
385 unlikely to be aware of past and current nationalist confrontations in Spain.

### 386 **3. Research objectives**

387 This article will distinguish between local and global self-presentation through language  
388 choice, as in the study of multilingualism written by Lee (2016), although from a  
389 different perspective. Here, we will not focus on bilinguals' interactions but on  
390 speakers, who may be monolingual, bilingual or multilingual, communicating  
391 multilingually on Facebook. By examining comments posted to the official Facebook  
392 pages of the most popular Cameroonian and Spanish football clubs by two groups of

393 sport supporters communicating online, this article will consider the interplay between  
394 language choice, CS and identity in these two groups of interactants.

395 Specifically, the main research question posed is:

396 1. Are there any significant differences between the language mixing strategies  
397 these online communities use for in-group alignment?

398 In Spain, football clubs have been strongly identified with their local community  
399 and the language of that community (Crolley, 2008). However, globalisation seems to  
400 have provoked a change of paradigm, at least for some of the Spanish clubs analysed by  
401 González Ramallal (2014): local languages are set aside with the mass introduction of  
402 English on clubs' websites and social media platforms. In this article, we will see  
403 whether this identification with local cultures and languages still occurs in globalised  
404 environments. On the other hand, we will also examine whether indigenous languages,  
405 rarely written before in Cameroon, are now employed for local and national identity  
406 purposes in what Maynor (1994) called "written conversations".

407 Consequently, a related research question is:

408 2. In these wholly globalised environments, do minority languages or non-  
409 standardised ones, such as Catalan and indigenous Cameroonian languages,  
410 work as establishers of local identity and favour in-group self-presentation?

411 Overall, we hope the examination of the written practices of football supporters  
412 from a long-established multilingual society, like Cameroon, which has only recently  
413 begun to communicate online, and those of multinational and multilingual groups  
414 gathered on the virtual platforms of the Spanish clubs may yield interesting results  
415 regarding the identification and understanding of online multilingual interactions in  
416 different social settings. These are multilingual texts publicly displayed in new

417 authentic contexts; authentic online communication contexts in non-Anglocentric  
418 environments.

#### 419 **4. Corpus and Methodology**

##### 420 4.1. *Corpus*

421 For this research, we formed two main corpora:

422 A. 200 comments posted by football supporters on the official Facebook pages of two of  
423 the most popular clubs in Cameroon<sup>4</sup>: Union Sportive Douala (around 6,000 followers)  
424 and Coton Sport Garoua (8,000 followers). This corpus comprises most of the  
425 comments posted on these pages during the whole 2017.

426 B. A total of 200 comments posted to the official Facebook pages of the most popular  
427 Spanish football clubs, F. C. Barcelona and Real Madrid C. F., compiled in January  
428 2018 (these sites each have more than 100 million followers). Throughout this article,  
429 we will refer to the clubs by both their official names and some of their nicknames:  
430 Barcelona or Barça (F. C. Barcelona) and Madrid or the White Club (Real Madrid C.  
431 F.).

432 In both groups, only comments that included at least one sentence were  
433 downloaded for the corpus. Those formed exclusively by emoticons or the slogans and  
434 chants of the team were not considered, as this would not provide enriching results in  
435 the analysis and would only attest the predictable myriad of the ubiquitous Catalan  
436 *Visca Barça* or Spanish *Hala Madrid*. Comments including videos were also discarded  
437 from this study.

438 Firstly, all the messages were downloaded, copied and pasted into a Word  
439 document so the languages employed in these comments could be coded and counted  
440 much more easily. Secondly, in an attempt to preserve the original format of the  
441 comments that included language mixing phenomena and better illustrate how

442 linguistically-mixed discourse is produced in these cases, comments were snipped and  
443 fully anonymised by eliminating names and blurring faces.

#### 444 4.2. *Methodology*

445 The starting point of this research is a brief quantitative study to shed light on the most  
446 important aspects of the participants' linguistic practices and confirm what the preferred  
447 language is in each community, as this can be closely connected to the club's identity  
448 (Crolley, 2008). This quantitative analysis provides language use percentages for the  
449 language/languages in the comments downloaded by counting the number of words in  
450 each group of comments and classifying these words using the different languages  
451 employed in each online community. In the results section, the figures shown in the  
452 tables represent the percentages of words in each language.

453         In the second phase of the study, we selected the comments which featured more  
454 than one language to carry out a detailed discourse analysis; around 72% of the  
455 comments analysed here included some instance of language mixing<sup>5</sup>. In addition to  
456 quantitative studies, Leppänen and Peuronen (2012) indicate that we need more research  
457 into online multilingualism from a variety of perspectives and methodologies to  
458 document the specificities and differences between the languages chosen and their  
459 functions and meanings on the Internet. Code switches and code choice are  
460 contextualisation cues that give writers context information (Hinrichs, 2006). We  
461 attempt to explain how these cues are used in multilingual virtual communities, broadly  
462 following the Computer-mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) approach described by  
463 Herring (2007). In her view, the choice of a particular language in multilingual CMC  
464 groups serves different discourse functions (see also, Tsiplakou, 2009;  
465 Androutsopoulos, 2013; and Montes-Alcalá, 2016, for functions and identity values of  
466 linguistic heterogeneity). From the varied list of discourse functions outlined by these

467 authors, in this article we will focus exclusively on those found to favour a sustained  
468 use of minority languages. As explained above, switching to local codes is one of the  
469 preferred resources to create in-group markers of solidarity (Tsiplakou, 2009) or  
470 maintain in-group identity (Lee, 2016). Consequently, all the comments containing  
471 words in more than one language were firstly identified and then closely examined by  
472 the two authors to classify switching and mixing for identity construction. Comments  
473 were primarily coded according to these functions: switching to index group identity or  
474 alignment, and to manage local and global self-representations. Although studies on  
475 language mixing are now moving away from quantitative analysis (Li, 2011), figures  
476 will be provided to support some of the claims made about these functions in the results  
477 sections and final conclusions. A summary of the coding of these functions is presented  
478 in a table as an end note.

479         Before displaying the results, we need to once again clarify that online  
480 multilingualism in this study does not refer to the simple coexistence of multiple  
481 languages on the same online page: this does not qualify as a language mixing  
482 phenomenon such as code-switching (Lee, 2016). Rather, we investigate the coexistence  
483 of more than one language in the same communicative act, the same comment posted to  
484 the page. Moreover, while the two clubs from Cameroon have a clear local character  
485 and hence official publications on their Facebook pages are only written in French,  
486 those of the Spanish teams are multilingual (see example below). Almost all Barça news  
487 posts are in three languages: Catalan, English and Spanish. Madrid's news posts are  
488 usually in English and Spanish. At present, translation facilities on Facebook pages  
489 make this information available to everyone, regardless of language and ethnicity (Lee,  
490 2016), thereby increasing the audience and community.

## Posts



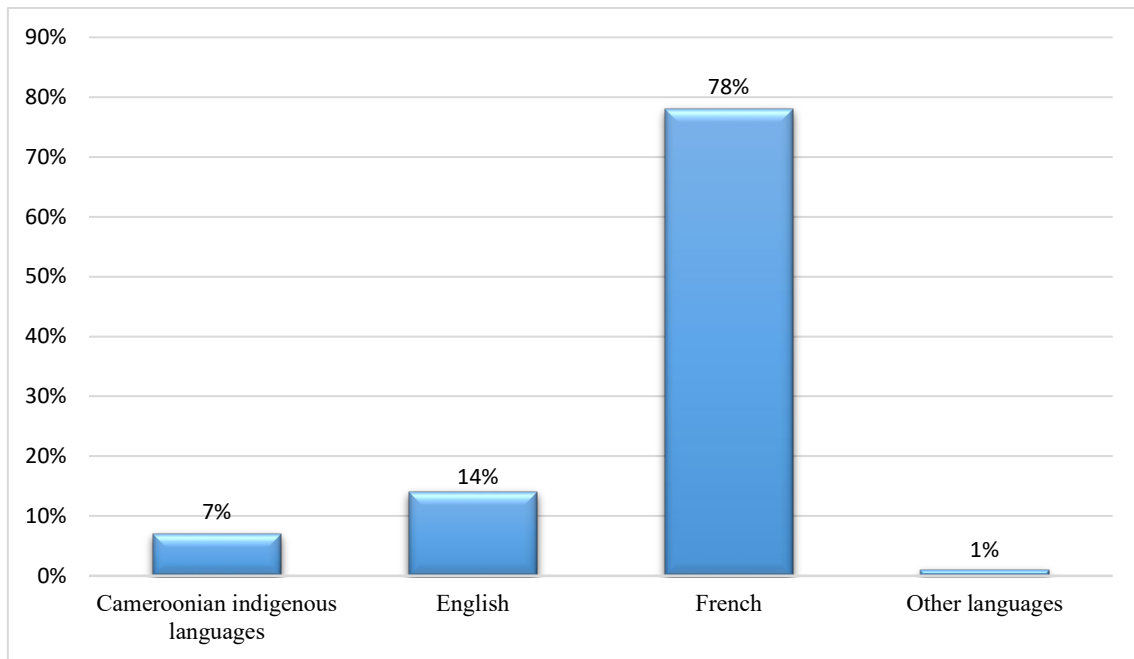
491

492 Image 1. Information in three languages on Barça's Facebook page.

493 Finally, it is important to say that the percentages and examples provided in the  
494 results section show the general tendency of the community at the time of corpus  
495 gathering: January 2018. In very active online communities, such as those formed by  
496 the Spanish football teams, there are so many written conversations taking place daily  
497 we would need a large number of researchers, fluent in many more languages, to carry  
498 out a statistical analysis that would document these interactions in detail and the  
499 language mixing strategies involved throughout a year, for example. Unfortunately, at  
500 the moment, this task is beyond our reach.

### 501 **5. Results and discussion**

502 For the Cameroonian pages corpus, the quantitative analysis shows that French is, by a  
503 large margin, the preferred language of interaction: this multilingual community seems,  
504 at first sight, practically monolingual on Facebook.

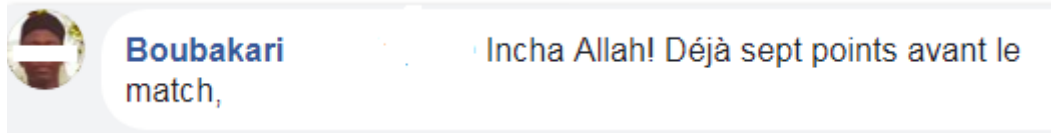


505  
506

507 Table 1. Percentage of words in different languages found in the Cameroonian clubs.

508 In general, the Cameroonian fandom community studied, formed largely by  
509 young,<sup>6</sup> educated interactants, identifies itself by means of the majority language of the  
510 country, probably because indigenous languages are not taught at school and are still  
511 not fully standardised, which is one of the main reasons why these languages are mainly  
512 oral in nature and rarely written (Bilola & Echu, 2008). Facebook users regularly feel the  
513 need to communicate in the language they know how to write best since they are likely  
514 to fear being considered non-educated by the other members of the community if they  
515 write in non-standardised codes. Moreover, at the time of writing, there are no  
516 translations available into or from indigenous Cameroonian languages on Facebook.  
517 Nevertheless, instances of language mixing phenomena are present, as demonstrated by  
518 the selection of the most representative examples below.

519 In the following two comments, we see how global and local identities are  
520 performed by means of a different language in texts predominantly in French.



521

522 Comment 1. Coton Sport Garoua<sup>7</sup>: If Allah wills it! We are already seven points (ahead)  
 523 before the match.

524 The writer starts to negotiate group identity by positioning himself as a member  
 525 of the club and the territory: this expression of goodwill in Romanised Arabic, a case of  
 526 script switching, identifies the writer with Garoua, the province in the north of  
 527 Cameroon where the population is predominantly Muslim. Local self-presentation is  
 528 performed by means of this phrase while the national or global character of the writer is  
 529 established through the use of French. Normally, on globalised platforms such as  
 530 Facebook, participants do not challenge the globally-recognized status of English as the  
 531 lingua franca on the Internet, as Lee (2016) explained in her study of Flickr, another  
 532 global platform. In some multilingual African countries, as Wolff (2018) explains, post-  
 533 colonial languages, principally English, French or Portuguese, have been chosen as the  
 534 official national languages so as to enhance globalisation. This seems to be the case in  
 535 these Cameroonian teams, whose fandom usually choose French as the global language  
 536 in this context.



537

538 Comment 2. Union Sportive Douala: Courage father buh (the name of a player). One  
 539 day. God is in control.

540 On the other hand, in this comment, French is the matrix code, as in most  
 541 comments studied, 91%, but here Pidgin English is included, probably to give a  
 542 Cameroonian touch to the text. *One day One day*, Pidgin English that means *one day*.  
 543 Repetition of words in Pidgin is a common strategy of this language (Nkwain, 2011).



544 Pidgin English is normally used in Cameroon in informal contexts where it seems to  
 545 have acquired prestige. At present, it has a wider scope than English as it is spoken in  
 546 the country and other neighbouring territories (Bilola & Echu, 2008). Again,  
 547 globalisation is performed through French, as in comment 1, and Pidgin English is used  
 548 for group identity and for local/national self-presentation as a member of the club and  
 549 the territory.

550 Repetition is a common strategy in Pidgin English, but sometimes this is  
 551 performed by Pidgin English and another language, such as English, as seen in  
 552 comment 3 below:



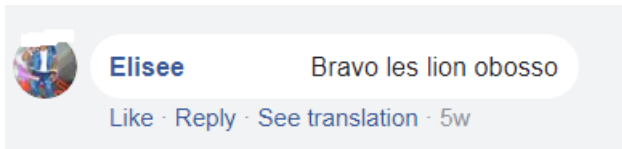
553

554 Comment 3. Union Sportive Douala: Thank you for your courage football is football.

555 This fan-base makes recurrent reference to the set expression *football is football*,  
 556 which normally refers to the fact that it is simply a game, nothing more (Davis, 2015).  
 557 Here, what may interest us the most is the switch to Pidgin English, “football na  
 558 damba”, where *na* is *is* and *damba* is *football*. This switch and language play seems to  
 559 work as a means of establishing the group’s well-being by mitigating potentially face-  
 560 threatening acts, as in Tsiplakou (2009). In our case, the team has lost the match but the  
 561 writer tries to reduce conflict by means of this language play involving language mixing  
 562 with a non-official language. The response of an emoticon from another interactant  
 563 appears to confirm that the strategy has been successful. It seems that managing in-  
 564 group alignment is deeply related to eliminating possible face-threatening situations;  
 565 there is no doubt that employing local languages can be useful for this purpose, as seen  
 566 in the literature in the field (see, for example, Tsiplakou, 2009).

567 Concerning the use of indigenous languages in the corpus, unlike the cases  
 568 studied by Taiwo (2010) who found that switches to indigenous languages were  
 569 principally inter-sentential, in the corpus gathered for this study, both inter-sentential  
 570 and intra-sentential switches are common: 45% of the language mixing examples  
 571 include instances in Cameroonian languages. Overall, local languages are  
 572 predominantly employed to index these categories: in-group identity by inserting them  
 573 in clubs' slogans and chants, the management of local self-representations and  
 574 expressions of affection.

575 The following comments illustrate their functions<sup>8</sup> and purposes.



576

577 Comment 4. Coton Sport Garoua: Bravo the lions come on.

578 Inserted in a text in French, we read *obosso* (usually in standard orthography  
 579 written *oboso*), an adverb that means *come on* or *go* in English. It is in Basaa, the  
 580 language of Duala, although it is a cheering motto for a team in another province,  
 581 Garoua. The fact that indigenous languages are used in other provinces is explained by  
 582 Biloa and Echu (2008), who point out that some of the major languages, such as Basaa,  
 583 are employed beyond their territory. The switch to Basaa lexis gives a local touch to the  
 584 text in French, as a marker of social bonding: bravo, the lions, as the players of the  
 585 Cameroonian national team are called. In this case, both group solidarity and  
 586 local/national self-presentations are implied by the use of minority languages.

587 A similar situation is found in comment 4 but this time a word in the region's  
 588 dialect is inserted with the English, French and Pidgin English or informal English  
 589 (urbandictionary.com); this language mix could form what linguists call Camfranglais  
 590 (Simpson, 2008), a symbol of ethnically neutral local identity.



Peggy Yes ! Mon ndolé chamba courage bro

Me gusta · Responder ·

591

592 Comment 5. Union Sportive Douala: Yes! My ndolé (popular dish) chamba (the  
593 name of a player) courage, brother.

594 Comment 5 is a clear example of language mixing at play: in 6 words we have  
595 four different languages or language varieties. Starting in English, the author uses  
596 French for the possessive pronoun, lexis in Duala language, *ndolé*, one of the most  
597 popular dishes in the country, French again and Pidgin English or informal English. The  
598 writer wants to express her affection for the player by means of a lexical item in a local  
599 language; she seems to appreciate the player greatly as she uses the name of a local dish  
600 in Duala lexis to qualify the player as something as good as the dish. In this comment,  
601 as in the previous one, the club's bonding is performed by means of global languages, in  
602 this case, both national languages and lexis in the local dialect of the province.

603 Finally, mixing the two official languages of the country in the same text is a  
604 strategy often employed, possibly to reinforce the national identity of the Cameroonian  
605 people: a country with two official languages. Despite the conflicts provoked by this  
606 official bilingualism and unhealthy identity competitions with one of the official  
607 languages (Ngefacs, 2010), 32% of these comments employ English and French;  
608 normally one or two words in English in a comment predominantly in French. The high  
609 percentage of messages formed exclusively by these two languages may be due to the  
610 fact that only these two languages are taught at school; writers are therefore more  
611 confident in using them when their messages are likely to be seen by a large audience.



Babba Trop happy les gars... merci o commentaire de ns  
faire vivre les match de Coton in live

612

613           Comment 6. Coton Sport Garoua: Too happy guys.... thanks to the commentator  
614 for making us live the Coton's matches live.

615           The writer of comment 6, in addition to using long-established borrowings from  
616 English such as match, inserts some other words in English in the French base language.  
617 As mentioned above, language mixing is an everyday practice in Cameroonian  
618 quotidian exchanges; the exclusive involvement of the two official languages and no  
619 other creoles or indigenous languages serves to manage the writer's official national  
620 self-presentation, a national of an officially bilingual country. Thus, by means of this  
621 language choice, s/he negotiates the kind of identity they wish to project to their  
622 imagined audience, as in Lee and Barton (2011). Another important issue arising in this  
623 comment is that the sole use of the colonial languages together with non-standard  
624 orthography shows the high literacy level of the author, who is not only able to write  
625 correctly in both languages but also skilled in using some of the so-called textual  
626 deformation strategies traditionally associated with CMC (Author, 2019).

627           This selection of comments exemplifies the overall tendency in the findings  
628 from Cameroon: language mixing and code-switching are often oriented towards  
629 expressing in-group alignment and identity performance. In spite of the local character  
630 of these teams, this identity performance usually refers to the national identification of  
631 the writers (63% of the cases). References to the "lions", as in comment 4, the name  
632 given to the Cameroonian national football team, unmistakably illustrate the tendency.  
633 Other frequent functions of code-switching are expressing affection and mitigating face-  
634 threatening acts (24%).

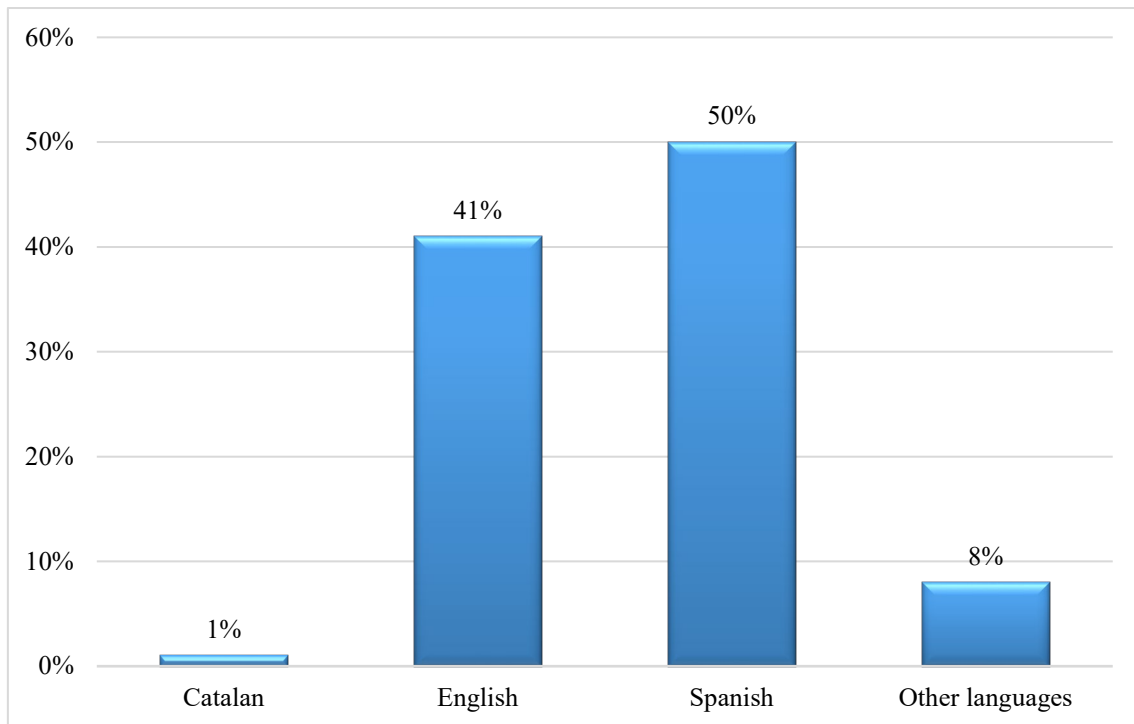
635           To conclude the analysis of the Cameroonian corpus, we would like to highlight  
636 the most interesting points from our findings. Although the percentage of indigenous  
637 Cameroonian languages in the corpus is still very low (7% of the total words), the

638 coding has shown that group identity is performed in 39% of cases by the inclusion of  
639 lexical items from the non-official languages of the country. In nearly half of the  
640 language mixing cases there is at least one word in these languages. This may constitute  
641 a novelty in the study of language preference in Cameroon by showing that the status of  
642 local languages and the attitude towards their use may be starting to change, at least in  
643 online communication carried out by young, educated people on Facebook. These new  
644 communicative practices are important for the linguistic studies of the region because  
645 they are in stark contrast to what Biloa and Echu (2008:202) posited only a few years  
646 ago in this respect:

647         ....in Cameroon the indigenous languages of the country have never really  
648         played any major role in issues of national identity, and the critical languages  
649         involved in the projection of major group identities in Cameroon are in fact the  
650         ex-colonial languages, English and French.

651         The incipient change of paradigm observed is in line with what scholars are  
652         identifying in other African countries such as Nigeria, where the conscious and  
653         deliberate inclusion of what Taiwo (2010) calls *Nigerianisms* in SMS and online fora  
654         (in his case) undoubtedly reveals the participants' need for identity construction in their  
655         discourse. Indeed, language mixing works primarily as a mechanism to give an  
656         authentic *national flavour* to this type of communication.

657         As for the Spanish clubs, the language preferences displayed in the comments on  
658         the Barcelona page at the time of corpus collection are as follows:



659

660 Table 2. Percentage of words in the languages used in selected F. C. Barcelona

661 Facebook comments.

662 Before explaining language preference and mixing phenomena on the Barcelona  
 663 Facebook page and exemplifying with some comments, we would like to point out  
 664 again that the fact this social media page is truly dynamic could yield other percentages  
 665 in a corpus downloaded in another month for other studies. That said, over the last year,  
 666 English and Spanish have been observed to be the most consistently used languages of  
 667 interaction on the webpage.

668 F. C. Barcelona has clear global aspirations (Crolley, 2008). It is obviously  
 669 willing to align with the global multilingual character of its fans but, at the same time,  
 670 the official publications seek to strengthen the club's links with its local territory by  
 671 using Catalan and Spanish in nearly all the news published on its Facebook wall.  
 672 Nevertheless, this situation is not clear-cut and creates some controversy in the  
 673 community of supporters who, as a novelty, sometimes fight exclusively about language

674 preference in a forum eminently devoted to football issues. This confrontation is  
675 illustrated by the following example.

676 The club welcomes the transfer of Coutinho, a Brazilian player, in an imaginary  
677 group chat in which other stars such as Piqué and Luis Suárez welcome the new  
678 colleague. This imaginary chat is only in English, unlike most of the news posted to  
679 Facebook by the club and, therefore, generates many comments about the fact that a  
680 global language has been chosen instead of the two official local languages:



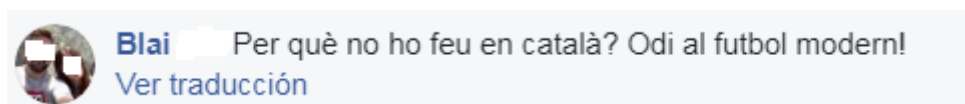
681

682 Image 1. Excerpt from Barcelona's Facebook wall to welcome a new player.



683

684 Comment 7. And what about Spanish?



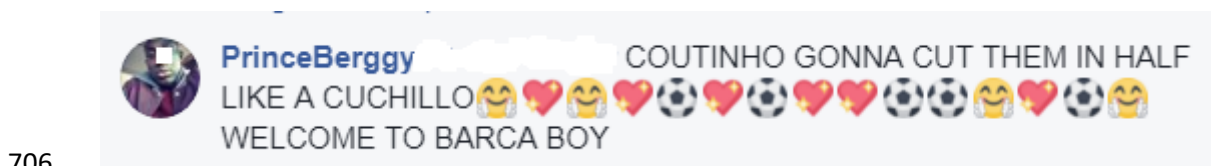
685

686 Comment 8. Why not in Catalan? I hate modern football!

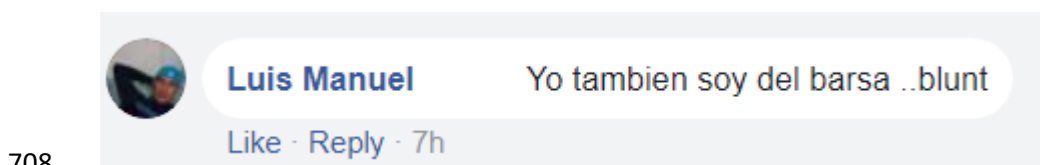
687 These two comments and many others that cannot be included in this article do  
688 not talk about the good news for the squad, they are only concerned about the fact that

689 the welcome message was written in a foreign language. The writer of the message in  
 690 Catalan (comment 8) is definitely complaining that by choosing English as the language  
 691 of interaction, his club is no longer related to or identified with its geographical area:  
 692 Blai, the author, states he hates modern football, as it favours globalisation over  
 693 localisation through language choice.

694 In light of the above, another noteworthy feature of Barça's Facebook page is  
 695 that the use of Catalan is mostly limited to slogans and chants, despite its  
 696 standardisation and prestige in education and society (Blas Arroyo, 2005). Barcelona's  
 697 Catalan slogan *més que un club* (more than a club) together with the Catalan chants  
 698 *Visca Barça* or *Força Barça* (go Barça) are present throughout the corpus as identity  
 699 markers: they are the formulaic expressions of alignment to assert the club's fandom, to  
 700 establish solidarity among the members of the community. Slogans and the nicknames  
 701 of the club are continuously and dialogically interwoven in the comments to reinforce  
 702 these community links, however, their spelling is highly inconsistent. Most of the time ç  
 703 is substituted by s or c, since, in some keyboards, typing this character may involve the  
 704 combination of several keystrokes. In this case, orthography is directly dependent on  
 705 technology.



707 Comment 9. Already in English except *cuchillo*, knife.



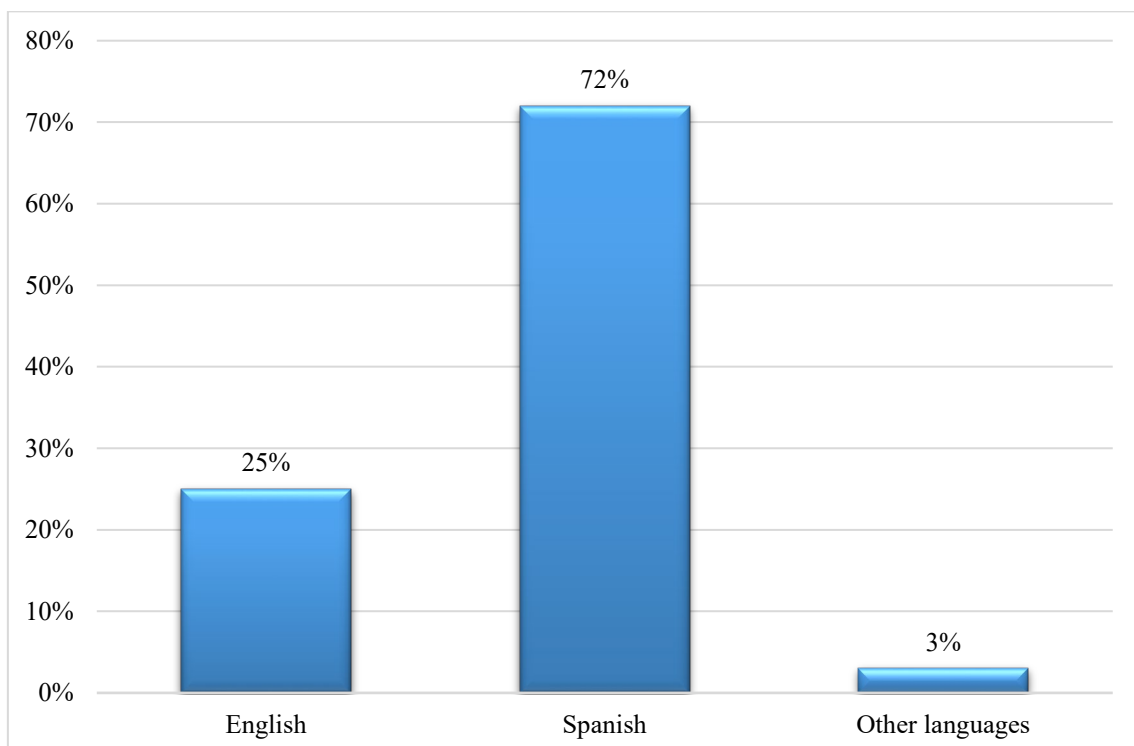
709 Comment 10. I am also from *barsa*, blunt.



710 In comments 9 and 10, the name of the club has been spelt non-normatively and  
 711 language mixing is intentionally at play. In the first, the text is written mostly in English  
 712 with a lexical item in Spanish, *cuchillo* (knife); and the second is in Spanish but  
 713 includes a word in English, blunt. These switches are devoted to articulating two  
 714 different self-presentations: on the one hand localisation by inserting a lexical item in  
 715 one of the local languages; on the other hand, the switch to English in comment 10 is  
 716 indeed intended to give a global character to the text.

717 The examples shown illustrate a tendency on Barcelona’s Facebook page: in-  
 718 group identity is defined by the shared practice of mixing English and Spanish, together  
 719 with slogans in Catalan; 68% of the cases include this particular language mixing  
 720 pattern. The mixed-code is used to perform glocal identity (Lee, 2017), as well as the  
 721 club’s and its members’ distinct identities.

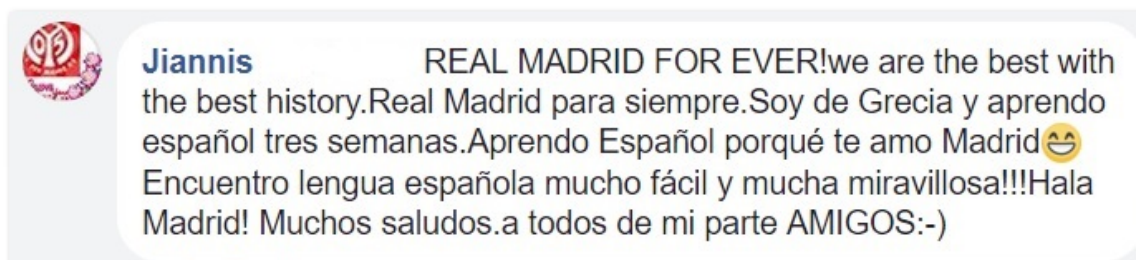
722 Turning now to Real Madrid, we find a slightly different situation. As we can  
 723 see in the graph below, it seems that supporters have essentially adopted Spanish as the  
 724 language of the club, although English is found on the page fairly often:



725

726 Table 3. Language choice in Real Madrid C. F. corpus

727           There has been a long-standing rivalry between Madrid and Barcelona football  
 728 clubs, which can be seen to reflect a nationalist-separatist rivalry. Historically, Real  
 729 Madrid has been identified with Spanish nationalism, especially after the Spanish Civil  
 730 War (Hernández Alonso, 2003). In contemporary Spain, Rodríguez Ortega (2016)  
 731 contends that due to the separatist turn in Catalonia, the White Club seems once again to  
 732 epitomise the Spanish cause over the Catalan. The “Spanishness” of Real Madrid could  
 733 be the reason why the fan-base consciously decides to interact mostly in Spanish,  
 734 despite the fact that many participants are unlikely to be native speakers of the  
 735 language, as we can see in comment 11 below:



736  
 737 Comment 11. Real Madrid for ever! we are the best with the best history. Real Madrid  
 738 for ever. I am from Greece and I am learning Spanish three weeks. I learn Spanish  
 739 because I love you Madrid. I find Spanish *much* easy and *much* wonderful!!! Hala  
 740 Madrid (go Madrid)! Many greetings to you from me FRIENDS.

741           This person feels the need to learn Spanish to fully belong to the community, to  
 742 converge to the group’s style, which is closely related to language choice. However,  
 743 although Spanish is the preferred language of interaction, language mixing is sometimes  
 744 part of the club’s fandom self-presentation, for instance, for emphatic and group identity  
 745 purposes. As comment 12 illustrates, English and Spanish are often in the same text  
 746 (74% of the cases of language mixing). By means of this translation, the author  
 747 positions himself as a local and as a global citizen in this truly globalised community.



Lontchi

I admit, I miss Benzema. He may not score always but he creates a lot of opportunities, especially for Ronaldo. He definitely misses him too.

Lo admito, echo de menos a benzema. Puede que no lo haga siempre pero crea muchas oportunidades, especialmente para ronaldo. Definitivamente lo echa de menos.

748

749 Comment 12. The comment is already translated by the author.

750 In general, and similar to what we found on Barcelona's page, the imaginary  
751 audience of Madrid's page is decisive in language preference in public discourse (Bell,  
752 1984). We see in the examples that language mixing strategies are strategically  
753 employed for self-positioning and identity performance, as in Lee (2016). However,  
754 although the conventions of practice of the club's members are intimately related to this  
755 interplay between global and local self-presentations, English is used slightly less on the  
756 Madrid page than on the page of its old-age rival, probably because Real Madrid has  
757 traditionally represented Spanish nationalism, which is closely connected to the defence  
758 of the Spanish language (Mar-Molinero, 2000).

759 Finally, this study has yielded some unforeseen issues. In the corpus from the  
760 Cameroonian teams, we realised that words in Catalan and Spanish, and slogans and  
761 expressions pertaining to the Spanish teams are often included in the comments. These  
762 languages are possibly popular in Cameroon because Samuel Eto'o, the most popular  
763 footballer in the history of the country, played for Barcelona and briefly for Real  
764 Madrid. Possibly, people in Cameroon who like football and, therefore, have followed  
765 Eto'o's international career, would have picked up Barça and Madrid's slogans. In this  
766 way, the languages, slogans and chants, all elements used to establish the group identity  
767 of a football club, go beyond the context and the community where they were created  
768 and become markers of the whole football fandom worldwide with a clear alignment  
769 purpose. Globalisation has made it possible for both Catalan and Spanish, and the

770 slogans of Barcelona and Real Madrid to be perceived as markers of sporting success,  
771 something Cameroonian football fans want to align with.

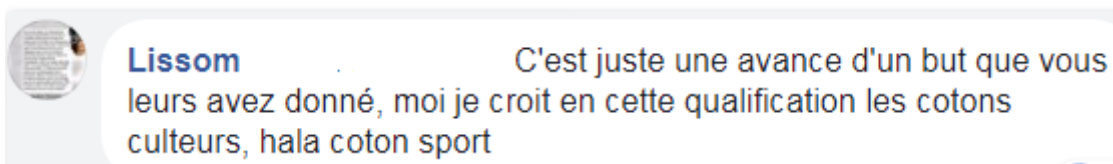
772 Comment 13 exemplifies how Spanish and Barcelona's slogans, this time  
773 translated mostly into Spanish with one lexical item in Catalan (*equip*, team), are found  
774 in a text from the Coton Sport Garoua Facebook page to align the Cameroonian club  
775 with the victories of the Catalan club:



776

777 Comment 13. Coton Sport Garoua: Champion Coton, more than a club.

778 In the same vein, our next example features Real Madrid's club chant, aligning  
779 the same Cameroonian club with the success of the other Spanish club:



780

781 Comment 14. Coton Sport Garoua: it is just an advance of a goal that you have given to  
782 them, I believe that the players of Coton will be qualified, *hala* coton sport.

783 The two comments show that language choice is intentionally taking place as a  
784 resource for self-positioning since it seems likely that these football fans want to align  
785 their local team with a successful global team by using lexical items closely related to  
786 these internationally-renowned clubs' languages. In this way, the language itself, in  
787 addition to their slogans and chants, is also considered as a symbol or marker of the  
788 Spanish clubs' national and international success. Consequently, displaying Spanish and  
789 a mixture of Catalan and Spanish is an important way of signalling the appropriation of  
790 the language or languages of success. This is similar to Swain's (2002:163) conclusions  
791 in his study of the Letters to Atticus: in Roman times the display of Greek was "...the  
792 appropriation and subordination of the existing language of high culture".

793 **6. Conclusions and further studies**

794 On balance, from the comments studied, our research has largely confirmed that these  
795 highly multicultural sport communities often mix languages as an important resource  
796 for self-positioning.

797 With regard to our first research question, whether these online communities use  
798 significantly different language mixing strategies for in-group alignment, the study  
799 reveals that, in general, regardless of the official indications given by each club in this  
800 respect, members of each community determine the main language for in-group  
801 communication and create its shared norms as processes of conventionalisation that are  
802 permanently operating in human language (Ferguson, 1983). As the examples have  
803 shown, in each online community the choice of language and the language mixing  
804 strategies employed seem to be vital in creating distinct in-group language style and  
805 alignment. In Cameroon, there is no doubt that the online communities studied have  
806 chosen French as the base language of the fandom. Glocal identity is performed here  
807 through French and, in many cases, instances of indigenous Cameroonian languages  
808 (45% of the cases). It is also noteworthy that 32% of the messages are written  
809 exclusively in the two official languages of the country, which are the only ones taught  
810 at school, probably to reinforce the national identity of the country against the current  
811 political crisis originating in the Anglophone provinces. On the other hand, on the  
812 Spanish Facebook pages, in-group alignment is normally managed by mixing both  
813 English and Spanish. However, whereas in Real Madrid this in-group alignment is  
814 principally established by the use of Spanish, possibly because of the White Club's  
815 identification with Spanish nationalism as stated above, in Barça's texts, in-group  
816 identity is defined by a more balanced use of English and Spanish with some words in  
817 Catalan for slogans and chants completing the language repertoire of the comments.

818 Consequently, despite the indications given by each institution when they publish  
819 messages in a certain language on their Facebook walls, we have seen that each fan-  
820 base decides and creates its own identity markers through language choice. Moreover,  
821 the representative examples provided show that creative forms of language mixing take  
822 place in these comments albeit for different purposes. While on the Spanish clubs’  
823 pages, instances of CS occur essentially for alignment purposes (87% of the cases),  
824 language choice in comments on the Cameroonian pages can imply other pragmatic  
825 effects such as affection or the mitigation of potentially face-threatening acts.

826         As for the second research question, whether indigenous Cameroonian  
827 languages and Catalan serve to establish local and in-group identity in these  
828 communities, the study has yielded important results with regard to language preference  
829 in Cameroon: indigenous Cameroonian languages are being written in public  
830 environments for the first time, although their use is still limited to the inclusion of a  
831 few lexical items in the text; whole sentences written in these languages have not been  
832 found. This scarcity is probably due to the formal character of education in Africa,  
833 which has excluded the linguistic repertoires of the students from the classroom (Wolff,  
834 2018). Here, code-switching to local dialects, usually considered a “dirty mixing” of  
835 languages, serves to establish local and national identity, although the identification  
836 with the territory of the club by means of the local dialect is not done systematically, as  
837 seen in comment 4. Yet, despite this incipient public appearance of written  
838 Cameroonian dialects, national identity is still more often established by switching to  
839 English: writers add some lexis in English to a comment in French to create a  
840 local/national identification with this officially bilingual country.

841         Regarding Catalan, this code is mostly restricted to slogans and chants which, as  
842 with any football club, obviously reinforce group cohesion. In this case, the insertion of

843 formulaic expressions in Catalan link the global community, made up of more than 100  
844 million fans, to the territory, as the club wishes to portray Barcelona's identity: Catalan  
845 and global (Crolley, 2008). Notwithstanding this, excluding slogans and chants, Catalan  
846 is rarely found in the corpus.

847         We would like to emphasise that the examples show that glocal identity is  
848 negotiated with the use of a global language to perform cosmopolitan identity  
849 (Leppänen & Peuronen, 2012), while lexical items and slogans in local languages are  
850 inserted in the same comment to establish a local identity, which, in our case, is the  
851 distinct identity of the local football club. However, in addition to this, by choosing a  
852 foreign language of interaction, Cameroonian translingual texts can emphasize the  
853 cultures and lifestyles with which the nation's fandom want to align themselves. On the  
854 whole, the examination of long-established Cameroonian multilingual communities and  
855 that of multinational and multilingual groups gathered recently on social media  
856 indicates that Cameroonian's multilingual written texts are more varied and provide  
857 richer examples of language mixing phenomena, probably because language mixing and  
858 lexical creativity is deeply embedded in the daily communicative practices of Cameroon  
859 (Farenkia, 2008). This time, however, as a novelty, they are also present in the country's  
860 daily written exchanges which are publicly displayed.

861         We would also like to refer to Bell (1984) who explained how a particular  
862 language style is created by communicators as an expressive instrument to declare in-  
863 group identity in mass communication. In these online communities on Facebook,  
864 however, communicators and audiences are no longer different; they are intertwined.  
865 Indeed, we have seen that the audience is no longer a passive entity; football fans  
866 participate actively in the creation of in-group identity through language choice,  
867 although specific language choices may also be used as a distancing technique to react

868 against the establishment, when interactants disagree with aspects of official  
869 communications, as in comments 6 and 7.

870         Finally, it should be said that within the field of CMC linguistics, there is no  
871 doubt that online communication favours the blurring of styles, registers and genres  
872 (Author et al., 2010). Multilingualism is only one facet of the overall heteroglossic  
873 character of the medium, and together with other semiotic resources, language mixing is  
874 just one discursive resource writers can use to create meaning (Leppänen & Peuronen,  
875 2012) and, in our case, for identity making.

876         This analysis can be seen as a contribution to a more nuanced understanding of  
877 how language mixing in current online written exchanges serves to index local and  
878 global identities. More studies are needed to gain deeper quantitative and qualitative  
879 critical insights into digital practices and written global translingual communicative  
880 strategies for self-presentation. Further analysis could involve more researchers in order  
881 to undertake a large statistical study, which could involve multimedia sources,  
882 following the multimodal analysis by Lee and Barton (2011).

883



884 **7. Notes**

885 <sup>1.</sup> There is a debate in the field of post-structuralist sociolinguistics about the adoption  
886 of terms such as translanguaging and superdiversity to replace the so-called obsolete  
887 “language” and “multilingualism” (Wolff, 2018). However interesting this debate may  
888 be, it is beyond the scope of this article. Here, we use translingual texts/ multilingual  
889 texts indistinctly.

890 <sup>2.</sup> With regard to social networking, boyd and Ellison (2007) summarised the key points  
891 involved in the way individuals construct an online representation of self. In their view,  
892 identity refers to the way in which users develop their online profiles and lists of friends  
893 to carry out these four community processes: impression management, friendship  
894 performance, networks and network structure, and bridging of online and offline  
895 connections. Nevertheless, in this article we focus exclusively on the role of language as  
896 a decisive factor for online identities, in line with Lee (2016).

897 <sup>3.</sup> In this line of thought, local identity will imply the sense of belonging to a local  
898 community.

899 <sup>4.</sup> According to Internet World Stats (<https://www.internetworldstats.com>), in 2017 only  
900 24.8% of the population had access to the Internet.

901 <sup>5.</sup> As will be explained below, it must be noted that these figures are only illustrative of  
902 the situation when the corpus was gathered. In truly dynamic communities formed by  
903 more than 100 million people, percentages can change overnight.

904 <sup>6.</sup> We do not know the writers’ real age, name or nationality for certain, but for this  
905 study we do not question these data: we accept the information and pictures shown in  
906 the person’s profile as “real”. Moreover, we refer to them as “educated” following  
907 Penard et al. (2015:71) who explained that “...young and educated individuals are more  
908 likely to use the Internet in Cameroon”.

909 7. The examples displayed in this article have had all sensitive data and information that  
 910 could lead to the identification of authors removed. Translations into English are  
 911 provided in each case, maintaining the style of the original as far as possible.

912 8.

Functions of code switching on Cameroonian pages	Percentage of these functions in the corpus
Switching to index group identity or alignment	63%
Switching to express affection and mitigate face threatening acts	24%
Functions of code switching on Spanish pages	
Switching to index group identity or alignment	87%

913

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