

The use of the English language in digital media and daily communication among non-native speakers of English in Croatia

Semenčić, Katarina

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DIGITALNI AKADEMSKI ARHIVI I REPOZITORIJI

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za lingvistiku

Jezik i komunikacija u višejezičnom društvu (dvopredmetni)

Katarina Semenčić

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communication among non-native speakers of English in
Croatia**

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Završni rad

Studentica:

Katarina Semenčić

Mentor:

Dr. sc. Antonio Oštarić

Zadar, 2023.



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ABSTRACT

The use of the English language in digital media and daily communication among non-native speakers of English in Croatia

In the past five decades, development of technology has enabled a faster and more effective communication than ever before, and English has become a global language that allows people around the world to maintain such quality communication. The English language is present among younger Croats who are showing a growing excitement for the language and have been using it a lot in their digital and face-to-face communication. This paper focuses on the digital communication of non-native speakers of English in Croatia, and it explores the topic through language choice, language ideologies, and code-switching. Furthermore, it tries to answer the following research questions: why do some native Croatian speakers prefer using English over Croatian; when and where do they use English the most; does their communication style remain the same after switching to English; and do they practice code-switching, or they prefer speaking and writing only in English? I have conducted five semi-structured interviews with young respondents of approximately 20 years of age. After analysing the data, I realized that some interviewees preferred English over Croatian, and some of them only preferred it in certain situations whereas others preferred it at all times. One participant stated that even though they love English, their love for Croatian is stronger because they think it is a beautiful and a rare language. All participants stated that they prefer using English with young people and do not use it with their parents. They are active on various websites and social media such as TikTok, Reddit, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc., where they insert many English phrases or completely switch to English. Most of them have stated that their confidence increases when they write and/or speak in English. Some have stated that they feel like a different person, almost disconnected from the reality in which they speak Croatian. Whether they prefer digital communication or face-to-face communication depends on various reasons, for example, a participant mentioned that they feel more comfortable using English online because they can express themselves more eloquently, whereas another participant stated that they prefer face-to-face communication in English because it feels more natural to them. To conclude, English is a frequent language in daily communication, and this is especially visible among younger Croats. The extent of the use of English depends on the individuals and their views and feelings towards the language, and their language is influenced by

the media they consume. This study is based on the results of only five participants, so it is not representative of the entire population, but it shows the tendencies in the use of English among young people in Croatia.

Keywords: code-switching, language choice, language ideologies, digital media, digital communication, the English language, Croatian speakers

SAŽETAK

Upotreba engleskog jezika u digitalnim medijima i svakodnevnoj komunikaciji među hrvatskim govornicima kojima engleski nije materinski jezik

U proteklih pedeset godina razvoj tehnologije omogućio je bržu i učinkovitiju komunikaciju nego ikad prije, a engleski je postao globalni jezik koji ljudima diljem svijeta omogućuje kvalitetnu komunikaciju. Engleski jezik prisutan je među mlađim Hrvatima koji pokazuju sve veće oduševljenje jezikom te ga sve više koriste u digitalnoj komunikaciji i komunikaciji uživo. Ovaj se rad usredotočuje na digitalnu komunikaciju neizvornih govornika engleskog jezika u Hrvatskoj i istražuje tu temu kroz izbor jezika, jezične ideologije i prebacivanje kodova. Nadalje, pokušava odgovoriti na sljedeća istraživačka pitanja: zašto neki izvorni govornici hrvatskog radije koriste engleski nego hrvatski; kada i gdje najviše koriste engleski; ostaje li njihov komunikacijski stil isti nakon prelaska na engleski; prakticiraju li promjenu koda ili preferiraju govoriti i pisati samo na engleskom? Provela sam pet polustrukturiranih intervjua s mladim ispitanicima od približno 20 godina. Nakon analize podataka, shvatila sam da neki ispitanici preferiraju engleski jezik u odnosu na hrvatski, neki od njih samo u određenim situacijama, dok ga drugi preferiraju uvijek. Jedan je sudionik izjavio da iako voli engleski, njihova ljubav prema hrvatskom je jača jer smatraju da je to lijep i rijedak jezik. Svi sudionici izjavili su da preferiraju engleski jezik s mladima, ali ne i s roditeljima. Aktivni su na raznim web stranicama i društvenim medijima kao što su TikTok, Reddit, Facebook, WhatsApp itd., gdje ubacuju mnoge engleske fraze ili u potpunosti prelaze na engleski. Većina njih izjavila je da im se samopouzdanje povećava kada pišu i/ili govore na engleskom. Neki su izjavili da se osjećaju kao druga osoba, gotovo isključena iz stvarnosti u kojoj govore hrvatski. Hoće li više voljeti digitalnu komunikaciju ili komunikaciju uživo ovisi o brojnim razlozima, na primjer, sudionik je naveo da im je ugodnije koristiti engleski na internetu jer se mogu elokventnije izražavati, dok je drugi sudionik izjavio da preferiraju komunikaciju uživo na engleskom jer im se to čini prirodnijim. Naposljetku, engleski je jezik koji se koristi često u svakodnevnoj komunikaciji, a to je osobito vidljivo među mlađim Hrvatima. Opseg korištenja engleskog jezika ovisi o pojedincima i njihovim pogledima i osjećajima prema jeziku, a na njihov jezik utječu mediji koje konzumiraju. Ovo istraživanje temelji se na rezultatima samo petero sudionika te stoga nije reprezentativno za cjelokupnu populaciju, ali pokazuje tendencije u korištenju engleskog jezika među mladima u Hrvatskoj.

Ključne riječi: prebacivanje kodova, izbor jezika, jezične ideologije, digitalin mediji, digitalna komunikacija, engleski jezik, hrvatski govornici

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1. Introduction

Due to the advancement of technology, digital communication has become more widespread and available to many people on the internet who speak different languages. This study will investigate digital communication of non-native speakers of English in Croatia from three perspectives. Firstly, the study will focus on language choice, i.e., the codes or linguistic material used by participants in online communication and how they choose the language when communicating online. Secondly, the study will also focus on language ideologies in digital communication, that is beliefs about different aspects of language use in digital communication (Tarnarutckaia & Ennslin, 2020). Finally, the study will also focus on code-switching in digital communication, that is shifting from one language or varieties of language in a conversational setting (Morrison, 2010) and this study will focus on code-switching from Croatian to English in digital and spoken communication. The aim of this study is to find answers to the following questions: 1) why some native Croatian speakers prefer using English over Croatian, 2) when and where they use English the most, 3) does their communication style remain the same after switching the English, and 4) do they practice code-switching, or they prefer speaking and writing exclusively in English? I will conduct five semi-structured interviews in person or using a videocall. I expect to find that non-native speakers of English in Croatia prefer English when quoting light-hearted and comedic content such as memes or movies, when talking about private topics and they do not want somebody to understand them, because they believe they can express themselves more vulnerably and productively in English, that some of them use it only with closer people and that they believe they sound more objective when using English.

2. History of the contemporary English language

2.1.Factors contributing to the globalization of English

English has become a common language and has made the world more accessible and united, despite the many differences in culture, habits, views, and so on (Rao, 2019). Many argue that English is a global language and often provide reasons for the claim. For example, they argue that many politicians mention it in the news and that English signs and advertisements can be seen almost everywhere (Crystal, 2003). When one enters a hotel or restaurant in a foreign city, the staff will speak English and provide an English menu and there are many more examples. However, it would not be correct to assume that English is spoken by everyone on the planet. Is that to suggest that English is recognized as an official language in every country on the planet? This, too, is incorrect. Nowadays, English is spoken by at least 1.35 billion people, but only 360 million are actually native speakers (Assi, 2022). Furthermore, what does it imply when a language is described as a global language? Some other most frequently asked questions are: Why is English the most used language in this context? What led to this situation? Could that change? Is it true that once a language becomes a global language, it stays that way indefinitely?

Those people whose first language is English may have mixed opinions about how the language is spreading across the globe. Some may be content about the popularity of their language; on the contrary, others may worry that people from different countries use the language differently than them and change it in a way that is more suitable for their communication. When a language becomes so widely used that it is considered a global language, no one can own it and people can use it freely whenever and however they want to. Therefore, a lot of individuals feel resentful and uneasy about this matter. Those individuals whose mother tongue is not English also have different opinions. Upon realizing that being able to speak the language allows them to form connections with more people, they may be excited to learn even more. They may have mixed emotions after realizing how time-consuming and difficult language learning may be and become resentful towards the language. After making progress, many would be proud of their accomplishment and enjoy the communicative capacity they now possess, but they may still believe that native English speakers have an unfair advantage over them. Furthermore. If one lives in a nation where the dominance of English threatens the survival of one's language, it is possible to feel envious, resentful, or angry (Crystal, 2003). Many wonder why English was chosen as a dominant *lingua*

franca over any other language in the world. House (2014) believes that English is now a global language because of how the United States replaced the old British Empire and enforced its politics after World War II. The same source also stated that English was selected because of the rapid advancement of technology which benefits a lot from a universal language that enables successful communication when using the same language.

Various explanations refer to the English language's apparent simplicity. Another, more mundane reason for the continued expansion of English could be that when a language becomes spoken on a global level and becomes accessible to everyone, its use continues to rise (House, 2014).

It is important to define a global language in order to understand the term. According to Crystal (2003), when a language develops a certain position that is accepted in all countries, it then becomes significant on a global level. The countries where the language is spoken as a first language showcase how such a position would be showcased. When talking about English, such countries would be Canada, the United States, Ireland, and others. No language, however, has ever been spoken by the majority in more than a few nations, which proves the claim that mother-tongue use is not enough to provide a language with a global status. Even if there are few (or no) native speakers, people must decide to give it a specific position in their communities.

A question arises whether a global language is needed. Crystal (2003) further states that when a community has linguistic diversity, it does not depend on people to form communication among each other. Bilingualism, or multilingualism, is a viable option in places where only two or three languages are spoken, because children can easily learn multiple languages without difficulties and subconsciously. However, this option may be challenging in countries where people speak more languages. Traditionally, the problem has been overcome by establishing a *lingua franca*, also known as a common language. Academic and business organizations around the world recognize the importance of a global language and recognize that it allows them to communicate with each other online via a common language. Crystal (2003) further mentions that we live in a time when the environment is changing constantly, and we are yet to see how language develops. Technology enabled more successful communication which is why a lot of countries want to share information with others. Moreover, so many people want to explore the world and the need for resources that could provide translation is growing rapidly. The demand for more universal

bilingualism to reduce the pressure imposed on the professional few has never been higher. And the demand for a global language has never been greater.

So, why has English been chosen as a global language, and not another language? It's a language that comes in a variety of flavors, each with its own set of sounds, grammar, and vocabulary. Crystal (2003) expands on how history follows the journey of English and its expansion throughout the world. The expansion intensified in the middle of the twentieth century when English was adopted as an official language by several newly independent governments. Every continent and the three major oceans now have English speakers: St Helena (Atlantic), Seychelles (Indian Ocean), and Pacific. The use of the title "global language" is made possible by this expansion of representation. According to Crystal (2003), English has become a global language in the society since many people need it to function in their daily lives and have economic security. English is now present in many public spheres and media on a global scale. Since it allows people to communicate with others in a common language and maintain meaningful communication, many value the benefits English provides.

The current view of English as a global language was influenced by the dominance of British colonies and the powerful economy of the United States in the 20th century, which is why it continues to have such a global status. Nearly 70% of speakers whose native language is English live in the United States (Crystal, 2003). Because of its influences, America possesses an interest in the future development of the language. English was chosen due to political developments, international relations, its access to knowledge and especially the media. When focusing on the media, various outlets such as the press, advertising, broadcasting, popular music etc., have contributed to the expansion of the language across the globe. International travel is also an important aspect and people travel for many different purposes, whether for work, sport, entertainment, spirituality, etc. Travelers are expected to know English and many countries strive to provide service in English when needed; restaurant menus and signs on windows are often written in English and these are just some of the many examples. Lastly, a lot of today's information that provides knowledge to the world is in English and education provides an opportunity to learn as much as possible. Therefore, many countries decided that their schools have to focus on incorporating English in their programs (Crystal, 2003). Writer Harry Mashabela (1983) argues that learning and using English would help uniting the world and become a vessel

for thrilling ideas in the future. He also mentions that it would allow people to share their experiences and inspire others.

2.2. The use of the English language in Croatia

According to Sočanac and Nikolić-Hoyt (2006), English had a different status in Croatia than other languages that were taught at the time because of different politics and culture. For centuries, German and Hungarian, as well as Latin, dominated the cultural, political, and educational settings in countries that were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After a long battle for official language status, Croatian was finally granted it, and it began to dominate political and cultural life. Due to political conditions – the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the formation of Yugoslavia in 1918 – German became the most dominant foreign language, particularly in northern Croatia, whereas Hungarian was limited to the language of the Hungarian national minority. Moreover, Sočanac and Nikolić-Hoyt (2006) state that the educated people in the 19th century used French as the main form of communication in Europe and they used it to talk about their ideas, politics, culture, and science. Numerous creative works by Croatian writers from the second part of the nineteenth century forward, who borrowed French terminology into their stories and novels, witness to the same. Prior to WWII, French and German were taught alongside Latin in every good high school in Croatia.

Prior to 1945, English was only used on an irregular basis. In 1882, the Naval Academy in Bakar was the first to adopt English as a foreign language. At the close of the nineteenth century, it was taught at Zagreb's private schools on a continuing basis (Sočanac & Nikolić-Hoyt, 2006). According to Vilke (2007), when English Language and Literature was launched as a major at Zagreb University in 1898, A. Lochmer was the first English language instructor. With the advent of Professor Torbarina, an Oxford scholar, English was reintroduced after a 20-year hiatus following his death. Few students graduated in English before World War II, and the years after the German Reich's complete dominance did not provide much opportunity for English studies to advance. However, a handful of well-known English intellectuals were able to finish their studies. After World War II, only a small percentage of the educated classes could claim to have a decent knowledge of the English language. German and French remained dominant among modern foreign languages and cultures.

The number of English students continuously increased in the 1950s and 1960s. After the war, the number of German students was low, but it began to rise in the following decades as the number of our foreign workers in Western Germany grew. According to Vilke (2007), politics and social occurrences can affect the popularity of certain foreign languages and their acquisition. Rudolf Filipović was entrusted with organizing the first organized English course, ensuring that teaching followed the most up to date Bloomfieldian teaching methods. The combined efforts resulted in the recruitment of world acclaimed experts to teach in English teacher seminars, the awarding of several scholarships to deserving teachers, and the distribution of books and journals, all of which contributed to the quality of English teaching, which could showcase high quality despite political constraints. The Ministry of Education initially supported the project, but unfortunately, the Ministry's top personnel changed in the initial stages of the project, and the attitude suddenly became unfavorable to the project. Nonetheless, the project continued to achieve great achievements because of the commitment of the project's teachers and researchers (Vilke, 2007). Furthermore, Sočanac and Nikolić-Hoyt (2006) state that purist efforts developed strongly in the first postwar period after Croatian became the state's official language in the 1990s. Purists especially targeted Serbian linguistic components, particularly lexical and syntactic forms, resulting in a severe divergence among Croatian and Serbian after a lengthy period of cooperation. The other focus of purist attacks was Anglicisms because they were seen as a threat to Croatian, which was a part of their identity as Croats. The early purist campaigns faded with time, while similar efforts continue to be made (Sočanac & Nikolić-Hoyt, 2006). Cooperation between educational authorities and colleges and schools appears to be considerably better, and problems appear to be solved via the combined efforts of all parties involved. In 2006, a doctoral program in FL education was established, the first of its kind in the country, and its 23 students formed an enthusiastic group willing to tackle various research challenges they encounter. TEFL teams from Zagreb, Osijek, Zadar, Split, Rijeka, and Pula universities collaborate in and lead various national and international projects and conduct lectures and workshops all over the world as guest professors and researchers. Teaching used to be a safe option in English language and literature departments, rather than a genuine desire for a future career, but now a lot of students display interest in becoming teachers. In the past, the low social position of teachers in our society contributed to a lack of desire for the teaching profession. This was reinforced by a very traditional educational system that failed to consider the needs of future instructors. The Bologna Reform

made it possible to improve initial teacher education (Vilke, 2007). According to Sočanac and Nikolić-Hoyt (2006), English is the first foreign language in the contemporary English-Croatian communication scenario. Also, while many languages are used mostly for international purposes, English in Croatia is also used for intranational conversational communication, meaning that it is not only used to converse with individuals from all over the world, but also within the borders of the country. The growth of English also implies that English terminology is being adopted by other languages. The increasing usage of English terms in different Croatian functional styles, and a growing excitement for the language, demonstrate the language's presence in Croatian today (Sočanac & Nikolić-Hoyt, 2006).

3. Digital communication in the present-day world

3.1. The influence of digital media on language use

One of the most popular themes when discussing digital technology is the influence of digital media on language (Sergeant & Tagg, 2014). "Digital language" is occasionally promoted as a creative and artistic mode of communication. Language characterizations and descriptions associated with digital forms, such as Twitter or text-messaging, are primarily concerned with positive representations, in which the technological restrictions of limited characters are introduced as a possibility for users to be innovative with the given resources (Sergeant & Tagg, 2014).

Nowadays, the Internet has developed into a wide range of social websites where users communicate and exchange a vast amount of information. The Web has evolved into a participatory, dynamic "read-write" worldwide medium where people create and consume content as a result of the quick growth of information and communication technologies. Faizi, El Afia, and Chiheb (2014) mention that the creation of a group of online tools known as social media has supported this new idea of the Web as a platform for collaboration. Online tools that fall under the category of "social media" include social networks, blogs, microblogs, wikis, as well as websites for sharing and bookmarking media. Social media programs have a remarkable impact on practically every aspect of our professional and personal life and are utilized by people from all backgrounds due to their ability to connect, share, and collaborate with people (Faizi et. al., 2014)

Social media, and especially social network sites, are of importance for socially oriented linguistics for a variety of reasons, according to Seargeant and Tagg (2014). On a fundamental level, there is a connection that is obvious: social media platforms that allow for networking, are significant and relatively new forms of communication, so researchers interested in social language use would want to investigate their characteristics and application. Issues relating to ideas of community such as the presentation of oneself and maintaining relationships online, are very important regarding the use of the social networking site (SNS) and they are significant for sociolinguistics (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). This is particularly true for social networks such as Facebook, that have three major components: the ability to create and show a member profile, form connections with other users, browse and search connections of other users in your network (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). When these three features are combined, users can create, manage, and access enormous social networks in a visible manner. The act of talking and connecting then incorporates this visibility, or the presentation of a person's identity as revealed by their social ties.

Thurlow (2006) claims that in news media outlets, attitudes concerning negative views of digital language as well as its general influence on language norms are widespread. In the publications in English language Thurlow (2006) explored, such pessimistic examples often present digital language as “responsible for a number of wider social and educational ills,” for example “dumbing down the English language” or “declining standards of literacy”, which are then link to immoral behaviors often seen in the news and other media. There are a couple of more concerns regarding digital media and its effects on language use. Such concerns can be traced back to the introduction of email and SMS text messaging around the turn of the twenty-first century. Technology had progressed a decade later, from email to social networking sites, and from SMS to messaging systems like WhatsApp and Line, but there have not been any changes in language. For example, concerns over the impact of the English language on Arabic arose in the Arab world in 2013, prompting the creation of “Arabizi” (Arabic written using a mix of Roman letters and Arabic numerals (Tag, 2015).

Internet language, most commonly known as internet slang, is very popular and comes in many forms. The slang used on the internet is not a standard language (Barseghyan, 2013).

Instead, it changes depending on the person and the specific situation and context of the Internet. This is a method of substituting whole words or parts of words with their phonetic equivalents represented in single letters or symbols, straight out of the SMS language.

Examples:

2: to, or too; 2moro: tomorrow; 2nite: tonight; u: you;

4: for; 4u: for you

10q: thank you; 10x: thanks

Gr8: great; da: the; y: why

Other widely used Internet symbols and abbreviations, as Barseghyan mentions (2013), contain "3" (which looks like a heart and stands for "love"), "@" (which replaces the word "at"), and "2" (which replaces the words "to" or "too") ("I 3 you.," "I'm @ the store.," "I'm going 2 school.").

The following types of slang may be seen in telephone and Internet-mediated communication, according to what researchers have been able to discover in their research materials from SMS, chat on FB, and Twitter social networks, despite the difficulty of providing a precise definition of Internet slang (Barseghyan, 2013, p. 24).

Moreover, emoji are frequently used in internet communication as non-verbal signs and they are used in at least half of all text messages on Instagram (Dimson, 2015), and 5 billion of them are sent on Facebook to people who communicate with each other. Bai, Dan, Mu, and Yang (2019) noticed that the Oxford English Dictionary announced in 2015 that the word "emoji" was the official word of the year, which they choose every year as a tradition. Currently, research is mostly concerned with describing people's preferences for emoji but does not go extensively into the underlying causes. It was discovered that certain emoji were more popular than others, such as "heart" and "tears of pleasure," although it has not been determined whether this is because of certain cultural characteristics. There are different reasons as to how and why people use various emojis that depend on a lot of variables, such as their previous experience with emojis or personal connections with said emojis and it provides as interesting research to experts who are curious about it (Bai et al., 2019).

It is worth noting that social media platform logos and titles, such as I Can Has *Cheezburger?*, YAHOO!, Flickr, Tumblr, and others, mimic non-standard discourses. Discourse about digital language shows a distinct difference between language use of adolescents online who are seen as “digital native other” and the adults who are often associated with the more standardized language (Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2016). Furthermore, these researchers state that young people are associated with the non-standardized language by the public.

One of the more positive aspects regarding media and language use would be learning through social media. Social media can be a great place to practice language learning. Because they are entertaining, engaging, and interesting, these social applications really facilitate language learning. Language learning could be accelerated and made more interesting by using the same web tools that facilitate communication. All language lovers can connect with native speakers of various languages via social media. Even though non-native speakers can teach students the basics of vocabulary and grammar, and despite any language practices or activities that may be carried out in class, some students may still struggle with speaking and listening. The fact is that discussions and class activities do not often reflect real-life events. Faizi, El Afia, and Chiheb (2014) state that social media platforms, in contrast, allow students to learn a language efficiently in real time and these platforms offer native speakers who can instruct others who want to learn their language. In fact, this is where the internet complements real life and provides additional language learning options. Given this, a language student can use social media to connect and communicate with native language speakers from all over the world, turning a tedious chore such as studying into something pleasurable (Faizi et al., 2014). There are many more advantages of digital media on language use that can be found in various studies.

3.2.English as an international language and its role in digital communication

Berns, De Bot and Hasebrink (2007) among many others, believe that the English language and the media are strongly intertwined. The global spread of American popular culture via film, television, and music demonstrates the strong relationship between the English language and the media. The formation and transfer of social values, as well as the transmission, development, and even formation of cultural identities, are all aided by audio-visual media (Berns et al., 2007).

What is English as an International Language (EIL)? English as an International Language refers to a program for thinking, studying, and practice. It is critical to note that EIL does not apply to a specific type of English. Sharifian (2009) states that some academics mix up the terms “International English” with “English as a second language.” They mention that when an adjective is used with the word "English," it usually refers to a specific type, such as American English or Chinese English. As a result, the term "International English" can suggest a specific type of English, and that is not what EIL is attempting to portray. In fact, it is said that EIL opposes the use of any specific variation as a *lingua franca* for international communication. EIL underlines that English, in all its forms, is a language of international communication, and therefore of intercultural communication as well. As a worldwide *lingua franca*, English is today learned and spoken as a second language by millions of non-native speakers (“NNSs”), far outnumbering native speakers (“NSs”) (Sharifian, 2009). According to research on second language acquisition, only a small percentage of NNSs can attain native-like English proficiency (Cook, 1999).

Georgakopoulou and Spilioti (2016) mention that early computer-mediated communication (“CMC”) research, mainly those released in the 1990s, placed a strong emphasis on English on the Internet. There are a number of reasons behind this. Firstly, the Internet originated in the United States, where English is considered the primary language (Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2016). Secondly, in the 1990s, the dominance of English was encouraged by the discourses of "hyperglobalisers" (Held & McGrew, 2001), who claimed that globalization would result in world homogenization. Linguists have realized that since English has attained global prestige, it will continue to be the most widely used language online (Crystal, 1997; Fishman, 1998). Concerns were raised, based on these views, over whether the rise of the Internet in the United States might lead to linguistic imperialism. While nowadays, English may remain the *lingua franca* in various aspects of international communication, it is important to mention that the level of popularity of English and other languages has changed drastically over the years (Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2016). Moreover, Fishman (2016) shared that the online content in English from 1998 to 2012 fell from 80% to 55%, as stated by W3techs (2012). Although a lot of people online speak English, it had been discovered in 2014 at least 71% claim English is not their first language (Internet World Stats, 2014). Even though no specific method has yet been created to reliably evaluate linguistic variety on the Internet, surveys suggest that the use of languages apart from English is increasing (Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2016).

However, the power of English is evident in some respects, especially when sharing information on the Internet. English websites continue to dominate information sharing on the Internet, but the Chinese ones remain close behind. According to Internet World Stats, English websites account for 27.3 percent of all websites, while Chinese websites account for 22.6 percent. Spanish, Portuguese, German, French, Arabic, Russian, Japanese, and Korean all have had fewer than 8% of websites, and their percentages were declining (Internet World Stats, 2010). Nevertheless, as Crystal (2003) mentions, such numbers may conceal the fact that English is the most used language on the internet. Numerous websites in other languages, for example, give an English translation, as Crystal (2003) points out, and it is argued that knowing English is required to fully utilize the information available on the Internet.

4. Digital and immediate communication

4.1. Language choice

Technology has made it relatively simple and affordable for many nations outside of the US and Europe to use the Internet. According to Fitzgerald (2003) most foreign language scripts are legible on the most popular web browsers, and it is now possible to process even non-Roman scripts on computers. However, web users have developed inventive ways of "spelling" things in languages that aren't traditionally written in the Roman alphabet for a variety of technological and social reasons. Today, the most of literature on multilingual Internet users tends to focus on describing and documenting their language preferences and code-switching habits (Fitzgerald, 2003).

Fitzgerald (2003) also believes that language choice online refers to the codes or linguistic resources that web users have access to as well as how they manage their decision while interacting online with others who speak a shared language or who do not. Existing research examines a variety of platforms and details consumers' language preferences, particularly when comparing English and other languages. English is seen by many multilingual web users as the universal language of internet communication. It is not unexpected that groups of people who interact online and do not speak the same first language experience a language shift to English. Among many others, Fitzgerald (2003) states that many speak the same language online and yet choose to speak

in English instead. A lot of research explores this topic such as the book “How different are we?: spoken discourse in intercultural communication: the significance of the situational context” by Fitzgerald (2003) or “Teaching English as an additional language in secondary schools: Theory and practice” by Bracken, Driver, and Kadi-Hanifi (2016) and so on. Over 2000 bilingual young people in eight distinct nations with English-education participated in Kelly-Holmes' (2004) assessment of their linguistic repertoires. The study demonstrates that speakers of languages with fewer speakers, including Indonesian and Swahili, are far more likely to switch to English over the Internet, even if there was no discernible shift to English in the group. Therefore, the study confirms Paolillo's (2007) claims that the Internet shows more preference for larger languages such as Mandarin and English, rather than smaller languages.

However, in certain occasions on the Internet, it had been proved that English is not always the more favourable language. Androutsopoulos (2007) claims that many migrant participants use German when communicating with others on online forums, and in 2013, Androutsopoulos studied their communication on YouTube videos. Despite being perceived as a worldwide platform, YouTube also promotes local activity, such as the discussion of regional dialects among German speakers. Androutsopoulos makes the initial observation that many YouTube videos are tagged with German dialect-related key phrases like *Bairisch* (“Bavarian”), *Alemannisch* (“Alemannic”), or *Berlinerisch* (“Berlin city dialect”). These dialects, besides being prevalent in these videos, become a main part of such videos and viewers often leave comments.

Warschauer, Said, and Zohry (2002) claims that the web provides a platform for people to write in their own languages or in varieties that lack a standard writing system in offline situations, as is demonstrated in several research. Digital writing has increased the visibility of written languages that are not employed in offline contexts anymore. For instance, Warschauer et al. (2002) reported a Romanized version of informal Egyptian Arabic used in informal email and online chat in Egypt, even though formal emails were typically sent in English. Online, colloquial Arabic is widely used alongside English, compared to offline environments when it was used very little (Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2016).

Finally, a crucial factor according to Lee (2014) is how closely individuals' online language preferences correlate with their offline linguistic repertoire. For instance, Lee (2014) offers an example of Yan, a second-year history major, who speaks Hakka and formerly resided in mainland

China before relocating to Hong Kong as a young child. She converses with her family in Hakka, a dialect spoken in southern China, even though she speaks a lot of Cantonese in her daily interactions. When communicating with her family and former acquaintances in China via SMS, she still uses some stylized Hakka. Additionally, Lee (2014) states that many participants associated a certain language with a function they played in other aspects of their lives, such as taking a course as a student, being a friend, a family member, etc. The same language could enable individuals on various internet platforms to share with their followers the many roles they perform in daily life. For example, Mark from Lee's study illustrates how English can mean different things on Facebook and in open forums in the passage that follows:

“I would leave Facebook comments in English because most of my Facebook friends are also English majors like me...because we are used to communicating in English. But at the same time, it is also because I am an English major that I want to avoid using English in public forums... People may judge me if I make mistakes...” (Lee, 2014, p. 101)

Mark's various Facebook and online forum code choices reveal his conflicted thoughts about his role as a student of English. When speaking with other English majors, he is content to emphasize that he studies English by continuing to use the language, where a few mistakes are accepted. However, in other situations, he acknowledges that his potential lack of English proficiency may interfere with his ability to function as a capable university English major. Mark's choices show how the participants control how their identities change by switching between languages when communicating with various people in their lives (Lee, 2014, p. 101).

4.2. Language ideologies

The study of belief systems linked to languages, how they are used, norms, practices, rules, and deviations is known as language ideologies (Tarnarutckaia & Ensslin, 2020). Language ideologies are being expressed, established, changed, and enforced during debates in which language is the primary subject, motif, or target (Blommaert, 1999). Language ideologies go beyond open discussion that appears in spoken or written conversation. Through interpretation, attitudes, and ideologies concerning how people use language in speech and writing, they can become firmly embedded in the implicit metalanguage (Preston, 2004). According to Niedzielski and Preston

(2003), language ideologies can also be seen in the metalinguistic remarks and conclusions made by non-linguists. Metalinguistic attitudes generally are usually influenced by the irrational and unsupported "feelings" toward types of language usage in folk linguistic discussions and are frequently structured around a rigid sense of the only possible "norm" (Tarnarutckaia & Ensslin, 2020).

Philologists and anthropologists have consistently observed that these kinds of attitudes about language are shared by all human communities. However, these very same social scientists used to disregard such widespread notions as unimportant to a fundamental comprehension of language and social interaction because they are frequently quite blatantly irrational (Piller, 2015).

For example, Ennaji (1999) stated that reports on the news on Moroccan radio and television represent the government discourse or philosophy of the period. The predominant ideology in Morocco represents the viewpoints of affluent, male, and educated individuals. The official narrative aims to portray Morocco as a liberal democratic Islamic Arab-Berber nation that aspires to the status of developed nations and encourages cross-border interaction. Moroccan Arabic, also known as "Educated Spoken Arabic", is only used in interviews and weather reports to hide the obvious influence of the prevailing ideology on the language of news. Ennaji (1999) reported that the goal of using Modern Standard Arabic is to, on the one hand, attain cultural harmony, and, on the other hand, to perpetuate the ruling ideology and sway public opinion. Moroccan radio and television news represent the official ideology or discourse; they carry out the government's socioeconomic and linguistic policies and demonstrate the country's social cohesiveness and stability. Ennaji (1999) then explains that the media reassures people that everything is in order and that both individual and societal demands are addressed. Moroccan Arabic or "Educated Spoken Arabic" (a higher form of Moroccan Arabic employing several idioms from Standard Arabic), is used only in interviews and weather reports to hide the fact how such ideologies can influence the way news are being broadcasted to people through their expressive language (Ennaji, 1999).

*"KanlaHdu f 1-xaariTa 1-juwwiyya takawwun Dabab fawqa 1-murtafa'at
xuSuSan f nnaHiya dyal Shamal"*

Meaning: "We notice on the map clouds on the mountains in the northern region" (Ennaji, 1999, p. 158).

In this example, the weatherman follows Standard Arabic grammatical rules by using the Moroccan Arabic function terms */(on)* and *dyal* (of). The objective is to get to know the people better and win their support. As a result, there is typically an ideological undertone in news language, which can be either apparent or disguised (Ennaji, 1999, p.158).

Lastly, music is one area where linguistic ideologies have only recently been investigated, especially in the context of the Caribbean. The initial research in this field (Trudgill, 1983) discovered that American English elements were preferred in pop singing, even among British bands. American-sounding accents are the norm for pop music and employing a different accent would be markedly different (Gibson & Bell, 2012). However, singers may decide not to use the required characteristics for ideological reasons.

For instance, Beal (2009) reported on the British band Arctic Monkeys' usage of the Sheffield English accent and showed how it was employed as a sort of protest against American dominance of the popular music market. Similar to this, in Gibson and Bell's (2012) research of New Zealand singers, participants acknowledged employing more New Zealand traits in songs where the topic was tied to sentiments of home and westernized features in songs with greater all-encompassing attraction. These more recent studies particularly emphasize the tendency for ideas to be questioned and altered as well as the careful character the language some vocalists use (Wilson, 2017).

4.3.Code-switching

Thomason (2001) claims that when a single speaker uses words or phrases from two (or more) languages in the same discourse, this is known as code-switching. By definition, "the same conversation" denotes that every other person is fluent in both (or all) languages, or at the very least is versed in both. Code-switching is sometimes separated into two categories: intrasentential switching, also known as code-mixing, in which the switch occurs within a single sentence, and intersentential switching, which occurs at a sentence boundary. Numerous sociolinguistic investigations of switching make use of these two categories (Thomason, 2001). Barnali (2017) explains that the term code-mixing refers to the mixing of two or more languages or language varieties in speech. They further mention that code may be a language or a variety or style of a language; the term code-mixing emphasizes mixing the languages, and the term code-switching

emphasizes movement from one language to another. However, in formal grammar studies, linguists use the term code-mixing and switching interchangeably (Barnali, 2017).

Thomason (2001, p. 132) offers two common examples of intrasentential code-switching from bilingual Yiddish - English speakers are “When I come in I smell the *kugel*” (*kugel* means *pudding*) and “*Di kinder geen tsu* high school” (“the children go to high school”). In all these instances, a single word from one language's lexicon is introduced into a phrase that is otherwise completely in the other language; the added words refer to ideas like “*kugel*” and “high school” that are foreign to the other culture and hence lack a native counterpart. Thomason (2001) then explains that from the same Yiddish-English bilingual community as the aforementioned examples, two additional functions may be demonstrated. In the first, a Yiddish word is used as a euphemism to minimise the harsh meaning that would be more visible in English: “One is already ‘*geshtorbn*’ (‘*dead*’). In the second example, when a person recognized as Yiddish is stated in the middle of a phrase in English, a Yiddish clause is added: “*Dos hot meyn shvester gemakht* a long, long time ago” which translates to “that has my sister made,” meaning “my sister made it” (Thomason, 2001, p. 132).

Research on code switching has also been conducted in multilingual contexts, with the main focus being on the use of English in association with a different national language (Haggan, 2007). They also discovered that, for example, texters in Kuwait combine Arabic and English in their messages, while teenagers in Finland combine Finnish with different foreign expressions, drawing appropriate phrases from any language the writer is familiar with (Kasesniemi, 2003), and texters in South Africa combine English and isiXhosa by writing English nouns with isiXhosa prefixes (Deumert & Masinyana, 2008). Nigerian texters, on the other hand, try not to display any "Nigerianness" in their messages, preferring standard British English and refraining from using Nigerian English even in personal texts (Chiluwa, 2008).

Spilioti (2009) gives a description of graphemic representations in Greek texters' alphabet selections and code-switches in her study. Spilioti's research indicates that a lot of research still focuses on English and other dominant European languages, as well as languages like Japanese and Arabic, causing negative effects to other languages of the world, despite the fact that these and other studies undoubtedly prove significant cultural variability. This disparity reflects tendencies of economic inequality around the world as well as the academic community's symbolic market. (Herring, Stein & Virtanen, 2013).

Barnali (2017) notices that code-mixing and code-switching are no longer considered abnormal in India, a multilingual nation. English and South Asian languages are combined to create Hinglish, a combination of "Hindi" and "English." These languages are a code-switching variation, meaning that they can be freely switched among or inside sentences. Barnali explains that even though the term is based on Hindi, it is used in India and incorporates English expressions along with Punjabi and Hindi. Most upper-class Indians, especially younger people, now speak Hinglish as their primary language. Although this is more frequently observed in urban and semi-urban centers of the Hindi-speaking states of India, it is currently gradually gaining vernacular status by distributing through different media, the internet, and word of mouth in rural and remote areas of all the states. Lastly, Barnali mentions that radio hosts and TV hosts frequently introduce English words into a stream of Hindi sentences to appear hipper and cooler. In no other Indian language are there equivalent words for words like railway, TV, computer, mobile, and so forth. Even if they do, they are not employed in language used in daily life (Barnali, 2017).

5. Methodology

After contacting five people who assess themselves as being fluent in English, they agreed to take part in a semi-structured interview, which was conducted in person and via video, depending on their preferences. Some interviewees are my close friends, while others are acquaintances. Strangers were not included in this research because I wanted the interviewees to be as relaxed as possible, in order to get more detailed and informative responses. They were interviewed one by one so that their answers would not be influenced by others. I wrote down as many questions related to the research as possible and added a couple of other questions during the interviews that were inspired by their answers. They were given time to process the questions and think about their answers, and the average duration of the interviews was 20 minutes. All the interviews were conducted in English and the participants allowed me to record the meetings so that the research could be carried out objectively and correctly. Furthermore, the key theoretical concepts helped me with forming questions for the interview that strived to research these aspects and incorporate them in the analysis. The participants were asked whether they prefer English over Croatian, which language they use more often when speaking with their friends and family (English or Croatian), which language they use on digital media and why, their communication style when switching to

English, how they felt when they spoke both languages in different settings. A couple of more questions were regarding the differences in their spoken and written communication in both languages, their thoughts about whether digital media made an impact on their communication preferences and so on.

6. Results

6.1. Interviewee 1

The first interviewee stated that they prefer using English over Croatian because they code-switch from Croatian to English when speaking privately with their friends and because in their free time, they prefer writing in English. Writing in a different language gives them a sense of a new identity and view of the world. Being an only child in a family that does not know any English, they only use Croatian with them. However, they tend to speak solely in English with their friends who also know and love the language. Because they themselves are very active on digital media, they share a lot of inside jokes with their friends who also use such media. An interesting comment was added, when they said that they speak more freely in English when the bond is stronger between the friends. They also mentioned that they have pen pals online with whom they communicate only in English, but they do not feel as comfortable speaking English with strangers online because of the pressure that their grammar needs to be correct, which is why they prefer talking with their Croatian friends, with whom they decided the language they would use. However, they are grateful for the opportunity that knowing a language has provided them, particularly being able to communicate with people from all over the world. This interviewee does not use English in media to leave comments and communicate with strangers on posts, mostly because they consume Croatian news where people leave comments in Croatian, so using English would not benefit anyone. When being asked about where and when they use English the most, the interviewee specified that writing is the most important outlet where they only use English. Moreover, they said that writing in English came naturally to them and that they had more ideas and creativity in this language. By writing in English rather than Croatian, the participant mentioned that using a language that is not their native language, gives them a chance to discover different parts of themselves; that they are more honest in writing in English because they are hiding a part of themselves by using a different language. They also wanted their writing to be private, which is

why they used a language their parents do not understand. Although they show preference for writing in English, when communicating with others online, they prefer speaking and often send voice notes and call their peers on video. When asked about the cause of their preference for English, they answered that they did not want to feel left behind by their peers, so they wanted to fit in and started to do so by listening to foreign music with English lyrics. Since they had been learning English in school, I asked them whether they learned the language more through academia or different media, to which they replied that the media were the most influential. Movies also helped in their English learning process. The interviewee is mostly active on social media where they communicate with friends and engaging in other content online in English is not appealing to them at the moment. Because they started learning English through digital media in hopes of discovering something new and different, the interest grew, and Croatian media never left a strong impact on them. They spoke up about the negative aspects of social media, such as not being able to communicate with others in person as openly as they wanted to because it became more natural to talk to people behind a screen. The participant explained that they would like to choose English over Croatian in all aspects of communication, despite not being proud of that fact. Lastly, they speak differently in English because their tone of voice is slightly higher and more feminine, and they can express themselves in an eloquent manner.

6.2. Interviewee 2

The second interviewee did not state that they exclusively prefer English over Croatian, but they explained that their preferences depend on the situation. For example, when they cannot think of the Croatian word or expression, they use the one in English or simply when they want to express their opinions to someone. This participant's experience is distinct because when the interview was conducted, they attended a university in Italy where they listened to lectures in English, so they use English quite a lot. They are fluent in English, whereas their Italian is not as good, so they often used English on a daily basis.

When talking about digital media and their online habits, they noted that whenever they want to search for something online, they do it in English rather than Croatian. Before moving to Italy for a couple of months, they researched apps where people help each other in learning languages and taught someone English (e.g. HelloTalk), while the foreigner helped them in learning Italian. In

their case, they are more comfortable speaking English with strangers because they do not know them on a personal level, so they tend to be more relaxed. They are not very active on social media, but they sometimes leave comments on Reddit where they see a lot of posts in English. There is a lot of content on Reddit and sometimes the interviewee gives advice to people or asks for more tips about things that interest them. They use Reddit when they want to explore certain topics, but when they need quick answers then they search it online in English because they believe it is easier to find information in said language. Sometimes they look it up in Croatian as well, in case there might be more information.

The participant expressed that they preferred talking in English online than in person because they felt self-conscious about their English pronunciation in real life. However, since using English on a regular basis in Italy their confidence grew, but their most comfortable way of using English is via writing. They send messages mostly in Croatian with their friends and share a chat group on WhatsApp with Croats and a foreigner. They do not send emojis often because they find them childish, but they use emojis when they do not want to sound too harsh over text messages. Even when the foreign friend is not present in the chat, all of them text each other in English as a gesture of kindness, which extends to their meetings in person. It does not feel unnatural to any of them, and they do not have problems with it. TikTok and Instagram are the apps the participant and their friends use the most for communicating and they often use English, since most of the videos targeted to them are in that language.

I asked them if they believe that digital media influenced their language preferences, and they answered that it did because most of the content we see is in English, so people naturally gravitate toward the language. The interviewee said that they learned English mostly through movies and tv shows, but new generations also learn it via social media which may be why there is a growing number of English-speaking people.

They do not speak English with their family because most of them have only basic knowledge of the language. However, they often insert English phrases and inside jokes in conversations with friends because they are all active on social media where they send each other popular posts and comment on them. The interviewee stated that they feel different when they speak in English with their friends because it is often easier to talk about certain topics in English rather than in Croatian. When they were in Italy, they realized that it was much easier to talk more in class when they were forced to speak English so that everyone could understand them. The situation in Croatia is not the

same because they are often quiet and reserved, almost afraid to speak up in class. With English, they are more carefree and comfortable with expressing themselves. The participant has been speaking English for most of their life due to school and friends, but they feel as if a slightly different version of themselves in that language, which might explain their suddenly extroverted personality. In private settings where they have to share their feelings with others, they believe it is much easier to do so in English. Words such as 'I love you' are easier to say in English than in Croatian, according to them.

I asked them whether they preferred English over Croatian and they hesitated before answering because they love their language. Croatian sounds more beautiful to them because not many people know the language and they had never focused on the way English sounds; it does not feel as significant to them.

6.3. Interviewee 3

The third interviewee prefers using English over Croatian because they express themselves much better in English than in Croatian and even think and dream in English. Their family members also do not understand English; therefore, the participant speaks to them in Croatian. When talking to their friends, they use English and Croatian, but they prefer switching to English whenever they can because they believe they can express their thoughts and emotions better in said language. The interviewee does switch to English a lot, even with people who are not that close to them, because they feel more comfortable when speaking English. They have online friends from America, so they have to speak English with them, especially when they play video games together. They have expressed that they write comments online in Croatian if the original post is written in Croatian, but they sometimes input phrases in English when they want to communicate an idea that is better understood in English. They also write comments on foreign posts in English, most often on Facebook and Reddit. This participant claims that they prefer speaking English online to in person because they are socially anxious, which does not allow them to convey their thoughts easily and speak when they want to. They have noticed that they mostly text in English with their friends, and often use English phrases and quote memes their friends are familiar with. TikTok is a social media platform they like the most because of the various content that can be found there, and they follow many American trends that are all in English. Digital media had a great impact on their love for the language because they learned the most by playing foreign video games when they were

little and listening to a lot of western music. Having asked them about their writing style online, they admitted that they write fan fiction in English based on their favorite characters from American shows. They post some of their stories online and receive a lot of comments about them on Wattpad, a platform that allows their users from all over the world to write stories that can be accessed for free. When texting, they use many emojis that fit the tone of the messages and write internet slang such as “omg”, “tbh”, etc., because everyone uses them, and they are easier to write. When asked about the cause of their preference for English, they emphasized that it is probably because they have been speaking the language for so long that it seems as if it was their native language at this point. At times, they forget certain Croatian words, and then they use the English translation if they are speaking to someone who knows English, or they translate it on Google translate.

Their communication style changes when they begin speaking in English because they feel much more confident; it separates them from the reality in which they speak Croatian, and they assume that is why many people feel more extroverted and comfortable when speaking or writing in English. In their opinion, English is a beautiful language, and it is used in most digital media nowadays which may also be the cause of its globalization.

6.4. Interviewee 4

The fourth interviewee prefers using English most of the time and they mentioned that most of their thoughts are in English. Their classes are also in English at the university, so they have become quite accustomed to the language. The participant’s parents know English, so whenever they cannot think of a word in Croatian, they mentioned the one they know in English so that their parents could understand. Since they were little, they consumed a lot of media in English, such as TV series, reading books, and even Japanese media that did not have Croatian subtitles, so they had to watch it in English. When they spend time with friends, they mostly speak Croatian, even though they all know English. However, they do reference a lot of memes and jokes that are in English and could not be translated to Croatian without losing the humor. Although they have mentioned they like English more than Croatian, they do not try to switch completely to English with Croats because it would not be natural to them. Some of their friends are Asian, and when speaking to them, they talk in English and their language. They have mentioned that even though

they love English, speaking Korean is more appealing to them, partially because they are proud of the fact that they know a language that is not well-known in Croatia.

They are active on social media, and they use a language exchange app where they learn Korean, Japanese, and Mandarin, whilst teaching others English in exchange. They are active on YouTube where they watch Asian and western videos, and they leave comments in the language which fits the one on the video. The participant does not consume any Croatian media and therefore, does not leave comments in Croatian. Sometimes they like to read news in Croatian because the English media do not cover much of Croatian events.

Just as the other interviewees, they also think that their preference for English stems from the fact that Croats are exposed to media in English from a young age, especially when watching movies and browsing different websites that offer more information in English. Many European countries have English content that is dubbed in another language; they do not use subtitles as much, so as a result, many people in such countries have poor knowledge of English. Furthermore, the interviewee pointed out that Croatia relies heavily on the import-export industry and receives many foreign products, often written in English.

The participant noted that they are more direct and confident when they speak English than when they communicate in Croatian and believe this might be due to different cultures and their mentality. Their tone of voice becomes deeper than when they speak in Croatian.

Regarding their online communication, they admitted that they say a lot of the things they probably would not mention in person because they would feel more vulnerable and exposed, or even unusual. They read a lot of web novels in different languages and wait for them to be translated into English, for example, manga and comics. There are websites online that they use for writing short stories in English where they are given a writing prompt and then they have to think of a story that fits the theme. When they were younger, they believed that they expressed themselves better in Croatian, but now with the number of English media they consume and the university subjects that are in English, they think that English is their stronger language.

6.5. Interviewee 5

The last interviewee prefers English instead of Croatian in certain situations. For example, when they joke with their friends, they do it in English and they believe the digital media are the cause

of their situation. Although most of their friends know English, the participant prefers to code-switch when they are with people closer to them.

Most of the content that they consume online is on English, and that is where they find inspiration for their witty remarks. Since they are not connected with Croatian digital media, they do not have references to use in Croatian. They are most active on TikTok where they watch videos mostly in English and they send them to their friends and family members. Although their parents speak English, they are not familiar with the content the younger generation loves, so they do not have many inside jokes or topics to talk about in English. Their sister is very good at English and is closer to their age, so they share some English phrases together, but they never speak exclusively in English.

Some of their friends send Croatian memes to the participant, but they do not connect with such content, so they do not encourage it or find it amusing as much as the English content. The interviewee has expressed that it would be unusual for them to completely switch to English with anyone who is from Croatia.

They do not have pen pals at the moment, but they had one in the past and it was a foreigner who spoke English with them. It was described as a pleasant experience because they felt like a different person, as someone who does not live in Croatia and leads a more exciting life. They have a few friends who do not live in their area, so they rely on social media to stay in touch with them; memes and TikTok videos are the best content for their communication because even when they are too busy to talk, these outlets help in maintaining contact. However, they do not feel more at ease when they communicate online because they do not think that it is the same as talking to someone in person; nothing can replace communication with someone near you. Also, sometimes social media convey meanings that are visible from texts or videos, which would be much harder to explain in real life. In person, they could not find ways to communicate as many thoughts because they would feel too exposed and vulnerable.

This person shows more interest in English than Croatian, but they prefer reading and watching content in English instead of speaking in English because they have hearing difficulties. However, they are very good at writing and grammar. Their favorite social media platform, besides TikTok, is Instagram. Instagram has many interesting features, and they have an option where it is possible to share content strictly with closest people, which allows the interviewee to use these options to their advantage and become closer with others by sharing their ideas, opinions, and jokes online.

Had they only been studying English in school, they probably would not know as much English or have such love for the language as they do now. Because of different digital media such as movies, news, tv shows, music etc., they have a growing interest for English. The interviewee expressed that they would prefer speaking and writing exclusively in English if they had a better knowledge and confidence in their English skills. The tone of their voice does not depend on the language, but merely on their mood.

7. Discussion

After analyzing my data, I realized 3 out of 5 participants prefer English over Croatian, whereas the ones who do not, either prefer it only in certain situations or generally like Croatian more than English. It appears that digital media have shown a strong influence on their language preferences and that without it, the participants probably would not have such strong feelings for English as they do now. Movies, tv shows, social media apps (e.g., TikTok, WhatsApp, Reddit, Instagram), language exchange apps, music, and reading foreign books were some of the outlets that helped them learn more English and explore all the possibilities these media offer.

Regarding their linguistic choices, all the participants use only Croatian with their parents, mostly because their parents are not skilled in the language or they do not consume the same social media, so they are not familiar with the same trends and jokes as their children. However, all of them use English with their friends to a certain degree; most of them do not switch completely to English and prefer to input certain English phrases and memes whenever they can. One of the participants switches to English with people who know also know the language, simply because they believe that English is a superior language and that they feel most comfortable when expressing themselves in it. Another participant speaks exclusively in English but only with people they feel most comfortable with. Others do not use solely English with their friends because it would feel unnatural to them, or they only have a need to use it in specific situations.

They have mentioned that English allows them to bond with others in ways Croatian could never offer them because the media they use together give them many topics to talk about and witty remarks to share. The interviewees claim that they feel as if they become different people, or at least show more aspects of their personalities when they speak or write in English. Some even say that they have noticed that they become more talkative, opinionated, and sociable. Expressing their emotions is often easier in a second language because they feel less exposed and more eloquent,

which allows them to be vulnerable and form meaningful friendships. Saying words such as “I love you” and “You mean a lot to me” seem more natural in English than in Croatian to these participants. During my research, I have noticed a lot of similar examples online where people around the world, whose first language is not English, state that such expressions sound beautiful in English, but awkward and too strong in their native languages. Such language ideologies may not apply to everyone, but they are strongly present among younger communities active on social media.

Their online communication is mostly composed of texting, video calls, and sending memes/funny videos. The interviewees believe that they can express themselves even better online than in person because they are hiding behind a screen which gives them more courage to say what they want. Others state that they speak in English online the same as in person because they do not perceive them to be very different things. Although social media help in maintaining many friendships and relationships, many believe that meetings and conversations in person are incomparable to those online. Therefore, this also means that some do not share everything with ease in English in person, even though they are less nervous and closed off than when they speak in Croatian. Their conversations online and in person (in English) have some basic differences, such as the use of emojis and numerous abbreviations and internet slang, which are rarely used in real life, and most of them are in English. Based on the research, it is possible to see that each experience regarding one’s experience with using English online and in person is different, but there are many similarities.

8. Conclusion

English is considered by many a *lingua franca* and it would be difficult to assume for how long it will preserve such status. Its prevalence is visible among Croats who consume vast amounts of English media and are well-educated in the language. Therefore, it is unsurprising that many of them use English in daily and online communication. The conducted research shows that Croats like to speak English with people their age and that younger people do not usually speak English with their parents even when they all know the language. The extent of the use of English depends on various factors that were explored in this research, but the use of digital media has proven to be the main cause of their preferences for English, and in some cases, they favor it over their native

language. The language they use on the internet is heavily influenced by the media they consume and the language of the people their age. Such language is often accompanied by emojis, internet slang, etc., and Croats who are skilled in English use many of these examples in English because there are no Croatian alternatives or because they think it is better said/written in English. It would be interesting to find more research about the possible causes of the changes in people's style of communication and level of confidence when speaking and writing in English online and in person; this paper explores this phenomenon briefly. Finally, the assumptions regarding the main ideas of this paper have proven to be correctly assumed. Naturally, since this study has included only five participants, we cannot take its findings to be representative for the entire population, but they certainly manifest interesting trends in the use of English among young people in Croatia.

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Appendix

Interview protocol

Do you prefer using English over Croatian?

Why do you prefer English over Croatian?

How often do you switch from Croatian to English?

Which language do you use when talking to your family members and why?

How do you feel when using that language with your family?

Which language(s) do you use when talking to your friends and why do you use it?

How do you feel when you use that language with them?

If you have pen pals online, which language do you use to communicate with them and how do you feel when you use it?

If you leave comments online, how do you feel when leaving them and which language do you prefer?

When and where do you use English the most?

If you prefer English, what do you think is the cause of your preference for the language?

Does your communication online when using English differ from your daily communication?

Do you prefer English or Croatian when texting someone on WhatsApp or a similar platform? Explain why.

Are there any online platforms where you are most comfortable speaking in English? Why is that so?

Do you think that digital media made an impact on your communication preferences in general?

Do you prefer speaking and writing exclusively in English or do you tend to switch between the languages?

Does your communication style change or stay the same after switching to English? For example, do you speak more when using English, do you feel more confident when talking in English etc.

Do you believe that you express yourself better in English or Croatian?