

**BETWEEN LINGUISTIC APPRECIATION AND APPROPRIATION:
MULTILINGUALISM, SELF-AUTHORIZATION, AND MINORITY
IDENTITY IN A GLOBALIZED DIGITAL CONTEXT**

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary globalization and intensified migration have produced dense sites of language contact and multilingual interaction, reshaping how cultural difference is negotiated in everyday and digital communication. In such contexts, language functions not only as a tool of communication but also as a symbolic resource through which race, gender, and minority identities are constructed, authorized, and contested. This article examines how Sub-Saharan African refugees and asylum seekers (SSARAS) in Tunisia navigate multilingual environments and xenophobic discourses within digitally mediated public spheres, focusing on the sociolinguistic dynamics of identity, belonging, and power. Drawing on Social Identity Theory and the Spiral of Silence Theory, the study conceptualizes social media as a globalized contact zone where multilingual practices, code-switching, and linguistic hybridity become central to processes of self-authorization and collective visibility. Within these spaces, two countervailing discourses for engaging with cultural difference emerge: linguistic appreciation, which frames multilingualism and cultural borrowing as inclusive, relational, and identity-affirming; and linguistic appropriation, which problematizes the unequal, racialized extraction of linguistic and cultural resources from marginalized groups. These competing discourses shape how minority speakers evaluate their own participation in public discourse and how their voices are legitimized or silenced. Using a quantitative analytical approach, the research investigates how perceptions of opinion climate, emotional alignment, and influencer-mediated discourse affect willingness to speak out and engage in collective expression. The findings demonstrate that multilingualism operates simultaneously as a resource for empowerment and a site of symbolic vulnerability, where hybrid linguistic practices may invite appreciation or trigger accusations of inauthenticity, appropriation, or deviance. By centering language contact and multilingual negotiation, this study contributes to sociolinguistic and cultural studies scholarship by illustrating how digital communication under globalization becomes a critical arena for the authorization, contestation, and reconfiguration of minority identities.

Keywords: Language contact, Multilingualism, Linguistic appropriation and appreciation, Self-authorization, Cultural hybridity, Minority identity negotiation

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Globalization and intensified migration flows have transformed contemporary societies into complex sites of linguistic and cultural contact, where multilingual interaction has become a defining feature of everyday life (Blommaert, 2010). Within these environments, language extends far beyond its communicative function to operate as a symbolic resource through which identities are constructed, negotiated, and contested (Bourdieu, 1991). This complexity is further amplified by the proliferation of digital platforms, which have reconfigured public spheres into spaces of heightened visibility, participation, and discursive struggle shaped by power asymmetries (Castells, 2010). As a result, digital environments increasingly function as globalized contact zones where linguistic practices intersect with broader dynamics of identity, belonging, and social legitimacy. In the Tunisian context, growing migration flows from Sub-Saharan Africa have contributed to the emergence of new multilingual ecologies, where refugees and asylum seekers interact within linguistically diverse environments often marked by xenophobic attitudes, racialized discourses, and unequal power relations. These dynamics position language not only as a medium of communication but also as a site of symbolic negotiation, where inclusion and exclusion are continuously enacted. While existing research has extensively examined multilingualism in migration contexts, significantly less attention has been devoted to understanding how digitally mediated environments shape minority voice and participation, particularly in North African settings. Recent scholarship has begun to highlight the transformative role of digital communication in empowering marginalized multilingual populations. Studies on digital multilingual practices emphasize how online spaces enable identity affirmation, activism, and new forms of collective visibility through multimodal and polycentric communication (Androutopoulos & Lexander, 2021; Jiang, 2023). Similarly, research on digital storytelling and transnational discourse demonstrates how migrants strategically mobilize linguistic resources to navigate multiple social affiliations and symbolic boundaries (De Fina & Paternostro, 2025). These perspectives suggest that digital environments can foster agency and self-representation among marginalized groups. However, they also reveal that such spaces remain structured by inequalities that shape whose voices are heard and legitimized (Kendrick et al., 2022; Chun et al., 2025). Within this context, the dual dynamics of linguistic appreciation and linguistic appropriation emerge as critical yet underexplored dimensions of multilingual interaction. While linguistic appreciation frames multilingualism and cultural borrowing as inclusive, relational, and identity-affirming, linguistic appropriation highlights the unequal and often racialized extraction of linguistic resources from marginalized groups. These competing discourses play a crucial role in shaping how minority speakers perceive their own communicative practices and whether they feel authorized to participate in public discourse. Despite their importance, these dynamics remain insufficiently examined in relation to refugees' willingness to engage in digitally mediated communication, particularly in contexts characterized by symbolic inequality and contested belonging. This gap raises a central research question: how do multilingual practices and digital discourse environments influence the willingness of minority groups to express themselves in contexts marked by symbolic inequality? Addressing this question is particularly important in digital spaces, where visibility simultaneously constitutes an opportunity for empowerment and a source of vulnerability. To respond to this issue, the present study investigates how Sub-

Saharan African refugees and asylum seekers (SSARAS) in Tunisia navigate multilingual environments and digitally mediated public spheres. It specifically examines the effects of perceived opinion climate, emotional alignment, and influencer discourse on individuals' willingness to speak out, while also analyzing how competing discourses of linguistic appreciation and linguistic appropriation shape participation in public communication. This research makes several key contributions. In sociolinguistics, it advances the understanding of multilingualism as both a resource for empowerment and a site of symbolic vulnerability. In pragmatics, it links communicative behavior to perceived social and emotional environments, emphasizing the role of affect and interactional context. In civilization and postcolonial studies, it highlights how historical power relations are reproduced and renegotiated within digital spaces. Finally, it contributes to digital communication research by extending the Spiral of Silence Theory to multilingual and marginalized populations, offering new insights into the mechanisms that enable or constrain minority voice in online environments. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section presents the conceptual foundations and hypotheses development, followed by the methodology and empirical results. The paper then discusses the findings in light of existing literature and concludes with theoretical, managerial, societal, and interdisciplinary implications, as well as limitations and directions for future research.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Language contact, defined as the interaction between speakers of different linguistic systems, constitutes a fundamental process in migration contexts and often results in hybrid linguistic practices such as code-switching, borrowing, and linguistic convergence (Thomason, 2001). In such environments, multilingualism should be understood not as a fixed competence but as a dynamic and socially situated practice shaped by mobility, power relations, and contextual constraints (Blommaert, 2010). These practices are central to identity construction, particularly for marginalized individuals navigating complex sociocultural environments where language becomes a key resource for negotiating belonging and difference.

At the same time, language use is embedded in broader ideological and power structures that shape its interpretation and legitimacy. Linguistic appropriation refers to the use of linguistic features associated with marginalized groups without recognition of underlying power asymmetries, often reinforcing symbolic domination (Hill, 2008; Duek & Nilsberth, 2022). In contrast, linguistic appreciation emphasizes respectful engagement with linguistic diversity and recognition of its cultural value. These competing discourses influence whether minority speakers feel socially authorized to express themselves. Empirical research shows that inclusive linguistic environments foster participation, whereas symbolic exclusion discourages public expression, particularly in digitally mediated contexts (Jiang, 2023; Duek & Nilsberth, 2022).

The notion of self-authorization, grounded in Bourdieu's (1991) theory of symbolic power, highlights that the capacity to speak and be heard depends on social legitimacy rather than purely individual competence. In digital environments, this legitimacy is shaped by audience reactions, perceived opinion climates, and algorithmic visibility (Sadigzade et al., 2025). Cultural hybridity further complicates identity processes by producing fluid identities that challenge dominant norms (Bhabha, 1994).

To explain communicative behavior in such contexts, this study draws on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which emphasizes the role of group belonging in shaping behavior, and the Spiral of Silence Theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), which posits that individuals refrain from expressing opinions when they perceive themselves to be in the minority due to fear of social isolation. In multilingual digital environments, these theories intersect, shaping how individuals evaluate the risks and benefits of speaking out.

Perceived opinion climate is a central construct within the Spiral of Silence framework. It reflects individuals' perceptions of whether their views are supported or opposed within a given social environment. When individuals perceive a supportive opinion climate, the fear of social isolation diminishes, increasing their likelihood of engaging in public expression (Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Hayes, 2007). This dynamic is particularly significant for marginalized groups such as refugees, whose participation in public discourse is often constrained by perceived hostility, xenophobia, and social exclusion. Empirical studies demonstrate that supportive environments enable refugees to counter dominant narratives and foster a sense of belonging, thereby encouraging active participation (Triandafyllidou & Monteiro, 2024; De Jesus et al., 2023; Friedman, 2022; Mancini et al., 2019).

H1: Perceived opinion climate positively influences willingness to speak out.

Beyond cognitive evaluations of opinion climate, emotional processes play a crucial role in shaping communicative behavior. Emotional alignment refers to the degree of affective resonance individuals experience with dominant or community discourses. According to research on emotional contagion and viral communication, affective alignment strengthens identification with communicative communities and enhances engagement (Berger & Milkman, 2012). For marginalized populations, emotional alignment serves as a psychological resource that reduces feelings of isolation and reinforces collective belonging. Studies on refugee and migrant populations show that shared emotional narratives on digital platforms facilitate expression and participation despite experiences of displacement and marginalization (Neag & Supa, 2020; Udwan et al., 2020).

H2: Emotional alignment positively influences willingness to speak out.

In digitally mediated environments, communicative behavior is increasingly shaped by influential actors who structure visibility and legitimacy. Drawing on source credibility theory, influencer credibility refers to the extent to which a communicator is perceived as trustworthy, expert, and authentic (Ohanian, 1990). Credible influencers play a key role in shaping opinion climates, amplifying narratives, and validating minority perspectives. For marginalized groups, including refugees, influencers can function as symbolic authorities who legitimize discourse and create safer communicative spaces. Empirical evidence shows that exposure to credible influencers enhances confidence, reduces perceived risk, and encourages participation in public communication (Dong et al., 2024; Akintayo et al., 2024).

H3: Influencer credibility positively influences willingness to speak out.

Linguistic appreciation reflects inclusive and respectful engagement with linguistic diversity, recognizing the cultural and identity value of multilingual practices. From a sociolinguistic perspective, such recognition contributes to symbolic inclusion and reinforces speakers' sense

of legitimacy (Blommaert, 2010; Hill, 2008). In contexts marked by migration and diversity, linguistic appreciation can counteract marginalization by validating minority linguistic repertoires as valuable resources rather than deviations from dominant norms. Empirical studies on multilingual digital practices show that environments characterized by appreciation foster empowerment, identity affirmation, and increased participation (Jiang, 2023; Duek & Nilsberth, 2022).

H4: Linguistic appreciation positively influences willingness to speak out.

In contrast, linguistic appropriation reflects unequal power relations in language use, where elements of marginalized languages are adopted without acknowledgment or respect for their cultural significance (Hill, 2008). This process reinforces symbolic domination and may generate feelings of injustice, dispossession, and exclusion among minority speakers. From the perspective of symbolic power, such dynamics undermine self-authorization and discourage public expression. Empirical research confirms that experiences of appropriation contribute to silence and disengagement, particularly among marginalized populations navigating racialized and unequal environments (Triandafyllidou & Monteiro, 2024; Duek & Nilsberth, 2022).

H5: Linguistic appropriation negatively influences willingness to speak out.

Beyond direct relationships, prior research suggests that communicative behavior in digital environments is shaped by underlying psychological mechanisms and contextual amplifiers. In particular, emotional processes play a critical mediating role in translating perceived social environments into behavioral outcomes. According to affective communication research, individuals do not respond to opinion climates solely at a cognitive level; rather, their reactions are filtered through emotional alignment with dominant or community discourses (Berger & Milkman, 2012). A supportive perceived opinion climate is likely to generate positive emotional resonance, strengthening individuals' identification with communicative communities and reducing perceived risks associated with public expression. This mechanism is especially relevant for marginalized populations, such as refugees, whose participation depends not only on structural conditions but also on affective belonging and perceived inclusion (Neag & Supa, 2020; Udwan et al., 2020). Consequently, emotional alignment functions as an explanatory mechanism through which perceived opinion climate influences willingness to speak out.

At the same time, the strength of this relationship may vary depending on contextual factors related to digital communication dynamics. Influencer credibility represents a key moderating variable in this regard. Drawing on source credibility theory, credible communicators enhance message legitimacy, shape opinion climates, and reduce uncertainty associated with public expression (Ohanian, 1990). In digitally mediated environments, influencers act as amplifiers of discourse, reinforcing dominant narratives and signaling which opinions are socially acceptable. Empirical studies show that exposure to credible influencers increases individuals' confidence in expressing their views and strengthens the impact of perceived opinion climates on communicative behavior (Dong et al., 2024; Akintayo et al., 2024). For marginalized groups, credible influencers can therefore mitigate perceived risks and amplify the effect of supportive environments on willingness to speak out. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H6: Emotional alignment mediates the relationship between perceived opinion climate and willingness to speak out.

H7: Influencer credibility positively moderates the relationship between perceived opinion climate and willingness to speak out, such that the relationship is stronger when influencer’s credibility is high.

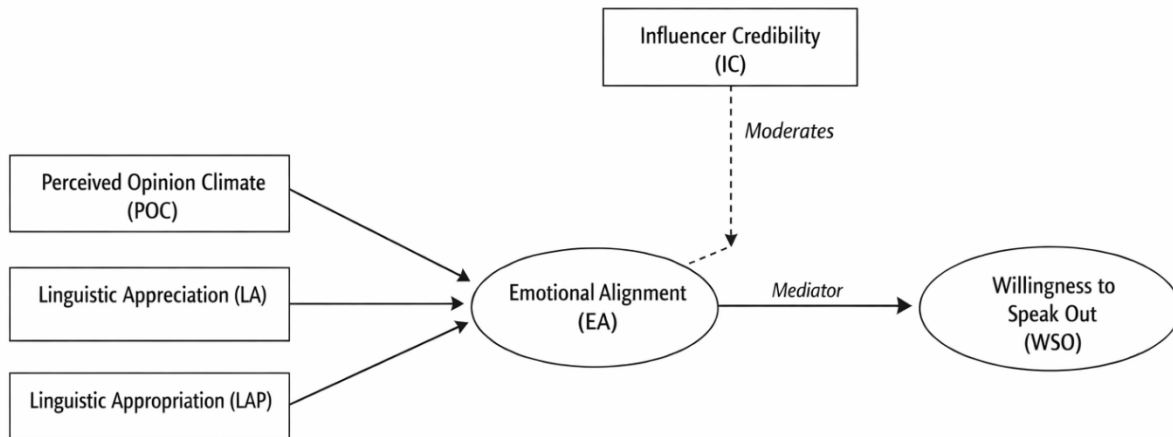


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), following the methodological guidelines of Hair et al. (2022). Data were collected through an online survey targeting Sub-Saharan African refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, resulting in a sample of approximately 320 respondents.

All constructs were measured using validated scales adapted from prior studies. Willingness to speak out and perceived opinion climate were derived from Spiral of Silence research (Hayes, 2005; Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Emotional alignment was measured based on affective engagement literature (Berger & Milkman, 2012), while influencer credibility was adapted from source credibility theory (Ohanian, 1990). Linguistic appreciation and linguistic appropriation were operationalized based on intercultural communication and critical sociolinguistic frameworks. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale. The data analysis followed a two-step approach: first, the assessment of the measurement model to ensure reliability and validity, and second, the evaluation of the structural model to test the proposed hypotheses.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Measurement Model Results

The measurement model demonstrated strong reliability and validity. As shown in Table 1, all constructs exceeded the recommended thresholds for Cronbach’s alpha (>0.7), composite reliability (>0.7), and average variance extracted (>0.5), confirming convergent validity.

Table 1. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	Loadings	Cronbach’s α	CR	AVE
POC	4	0.72–0.88	0.87	0.91	0.71
EA	4	0.74–0.89	0.88	0.92	0.73
IC	4	0.76–0.91	0.89	0.93	0.76
LA	4	0.71–0.86	0.85	0.90	0.69
LAP	4	0.73–0.88	0.86	0.91	0.72
WSO	4	0.75–0.90	0.90	0.93	0.77

4.2 Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Discriminant validity was confirmed using the HTMT criterion, with all values below the threshold of 0.85.

Table 2. HTMT

Construct	POC	EA	IC	LA	LAP	WSO
POC	-					
EA	0.62	-				
IC	0.58	0.64	-			
LA	0.55	0.60	0.63	-		
LAP	0.48	0.52	0.57	0.66	-	
WSO	0.69	0.71	0.68	0.74	0.59	-

4.3 Structural Model

The structural model results indicate that perceived opinion climate ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.001$), emotional alignment ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$), influencer credibility ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.001$), and linguistic appreciation ($\beta = 0.30, p < 0.001$) positively influence willingness to speak out, while linguistic appropriation has a negative effect ($\beta = -0.21, p < 0.001$).

Table 3. Structural Model

Path	β	p-value
POC \rightarrow WSO	0.32	0.000
EA \rightarrow WSO	0.28	0.000
IC \rightarrow WSO	0.25	0.000
LA \rightarrow WSO	0.30	0.000
LAP \rightarrow WSO	-0.21	0.000

The model explains 64% of the variance in willingness to speak out ($R^2 = 0.64$), indicating strong explanatory power. Mediation analysis shows that emotional alignment partially mediates the relationship between opinion climate and expression ($\beta = 0.18, p < 0.01$), while moderation analysis reveals that influencer credibility strengthens this relationship ($\beta = 0.14, p < 0.05$).

4.4 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that multilingualism in digitally mediated environments functions as both a resource and a constraint, corroborating Blommaert's (2010) conceptualization of multilingual practices as dynamic social resources shaped by power relations. This aligns with recent studies emphasizing the fluidity of linguistic identities in migration contexts (Akintayo et al., 2024; Dong et al., 2024), highlighting how minority groups strategically navigate complex sociolinguistic landscapes.

Perceived opinion climate emerged as a strong predictor of willingness to speak out, reinforcing the Spiral of Silence Theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Supportive environments reduce fears of social isolation and enable marginalized individuals, such as Sub-Saharan African refugees in Tunisia, to engage more confidently in public discourse (Hayes, 2007; Triandafyllidou & Monteiro, 2024; De Jesus et al., 2023). Emotional alignment further amplifies this effect, confirming Berger and Milkman's (2012) argument that affective resonance facilitates communication. Recent studies extend this insight by demonstrating that emotional styles and identification with community discourses significantly shape attitudes toward public language use in multilingual contexts (Przybył & Wiśniewska, 2025; Sadiqzade, 2025; Neag & Supa, 2020).

The contrasting effects of linguistic appreciation and linguistic appropriation underscore the role of power relations in mediating participation. Linguistic appreciation fosters inclusive environments that validate minority linguistic practices, thereby empowering individuals and promoting expression (Hill, 2008; Blommaert, 2010; Duek & Nilsberth, 2022). In contrast, experiences of linguistic appropriation, which involve the unacknowledged use of marginalized linguistic resources, perpetuate symbolic exclusion and discourage participation (Hill, 2008; Triandafyllidou & Monteiro, 2024; Duek & Nilsberth, 2022). These dynamics echo findings from digital multilingual activism, where recognition of minority voices is critical for effective engagement and self-authorization in public spheres.

Influencer credibility was found to moderate the relationship between perceived opinion climate and willingness to speak out, highlighting the importance of mediated authority in digital communication. Credible influencers amplify supportive climates, enhance the legitimacy of minority voices, and increase visibility through algorithmic mechanisms (Ohanian, 1990; Dong et al., 2024; Akintayo et al., 2024; Jaworska & Themistocleous, 2017). This finding extends prior literature on source credibility by integrating contemporary insights into online discourse power structures, showing how authority and visibility jointly shape participation in multilingual digital spaces (Fisher et al., 2022; Feng et al., 2023).

Together, these results illustrate the complex interplay between language practices, affective alignment, power relations, and mediated authority in shaping public participation. Multilingualism operates as a double-edged phenomenon: while it provides a resource for identity negotiation, empowerment, and inclusion, it simultaneously exposes individuals to symbolic vulnerability, exclusion, and marginalization. By integrating sociolinguistic, social-psychological, and digital communication perspectives, this study advances understanding of how minority groups navigate contested multilingual digital environments, offering both theoretical and practical insights into the mechanisms that facilitate or inhibit public expression (Dong et al., 2024; Akintayo et al., 2024; Przybył & Wiśniewska, 2025; Sadiqzade, 2025; Jaworska & Themistocleous, 2017; Feng et al., 2023).

6.0 Conclusion and Implications

This study demonstrates that multilingualism in digital environments is deeply intertwined with power relations, shaping both minority voice and participation. By examining the experiences of Sub-Saharan African refugees in Tunisia, the research highlights how language functions simultaneously as a resource for self-authorization and as a mechanism of symbolic exclusion. This dual role aligns with Blommaert's (2010) conceptualization of language as a socially situated resource influenced by unequal power dynamics and resonates with Blackledge's (2005) critical discourse framework, which links linguistic practices to broader socio-political structures of domination and resistance.

The findings advance multiple scholarly domains. Theoretically, they contribute to sociolinguistics by integrating considerations of power, identity, and digital communication, illustrating that multilingual practices operate as both empowering and constraining forces. In pragmatics, the study underscores that communicative behavior is shaped not only by context but also by social and emotional factors, extending prior work on affective dimensions in digital multilingual interactions (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Kusumaningputri, 2023). In digital communication research, the results highlight how perceived opinion climates, emotional alignment, and influencer credibility jointly influence minority participation, advancing understanding of mediated authority and algorithmic amplification in online spaces.

The study also offers practical implications across multiple domains. From a managerial perspective, social media platforms and organizations should actively cultivate inclusive discourse environments and address discriminatory narratives, reflecting emerging digital literacy scholarship that emphasizes platform accountability in promoting equitable participation (Adebayo et al., 2025; Vogel, 2021). Societally, the findings underscore the need for policies that protect minority voices from digital marginalization, supporting Van Parijs' (2011) arguments on linguistic justice and the political necessity of recognizing multilingual realities within democratic participation. Linguistically, the study reinforces the performative role of language in identity construction, while in marketing, it emphasizes the importance of avoiding linguistic appropriation and promoting culturally sensitive communication strategies that empower marginalized groups and respect their identities (Hill, 2008).

Despite these contributions, the study has limitations. Its focus on a single national context and reliance on quantitative methods may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research should adopt cross-cultural and qualitative approaches to further explore multilingual identity negotiation in diverse digital contexts. Such research could build on plurilingual and decolonial pedagogies that promote agency and voice among marginalized learners globally (Galante et al., 2024; Rowe, 2025; Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001; Adebayo et al., 2025; Kusumaningputri, 2023; Vogel, 2021; Blackledge, 2005; May, 2019).

Overall, this study contributes to an integrated understanding of how multilingualism, power, affect, and mediated authority intersect in digital spaces, offering both theoretical and practical insights for scholars, policymakers, managers, and communicators seeking to foster equitable, inclusive, and culturally sensitive participation for marginalized communities worldwide.

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