

# «No encuentro bien ser cien por cien suiza» – Language of Origin and Identity Claims among Third-Generation Teens in Switzerland

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US literature on language among descendants of immigrants acknowledges little room for bilingual or mixed language use. Assuming a contextual approach of integration dynamics, this paper, based on qualitative research, argues that functional multilingualism is a significant reality among grandchildren of Italian and Spanish immigrants in Switzerland. In a multilingual country and continent, knowledge of language “of origin” plays a crucial role in legitimizing their multiple identity claims, besides institutional affiliations, ancestry and place of residence. The stake of such a claim is not an ethnic identity, but rather a recognized belonging to the norm of their plural urban environment.

*Keywords: Third generation, functional multilingualism, identity claims, urban superdiversity*

## **Introduction**

Do the grandchildren of Italian and Spanish labor migrants, who moved to Switzerland in the 1950s and 1960s, (still) speak the language of their grandparents? Did parents and grandparents of these youth intend to

pass their language of origin<sup>1</sup> on to their children/grandchildren that belong to the third generation? What is the practical and identity-relevant significance of this (family) language for these third-generation youth currently? These questions are explored in a study that looks at immigrant families in Switzerland across three generations.<sup>2</sup>

In American scientific literature, language use and multilingualism among immigrants tends to be addressed in relation to the transition that takes place over the course of three generations from home language monolingualism to local (English) language monolingualism by immigrants in the United States (Fishman 2001). This view bears testimony to a binary logic that allows little room for bilingual or mixed language realities. Yet, precisely these mixed language contexts are a reality in the Europe of today; some have existed for centuries, others have gained relevance due to waves of migration.

Without contesting the validity of Fishman's model in the US context – it is reasonable to question the extent to which it actually reflects the reality here and now, in 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe, and particularly in the multilingual Swiss context. Over time, the local language (LL) clearly comes to dominate in the language use of immigrants and their descendants, yet what needs to be understood is whether and under which influences the use of the local language goes hand in hand with the maintenance of the language of origin (within or outside of the family environment).

Linguistic (non-)assimilation always occurs in a specific linguistic, historical and geographical context. To date, most of the literature appears to have neglected the relevance of this contextual dimension. Considering that the North American situation differs widely from European conditions, where multilingualism generally receives greater recognition and mixed language situations are accommodated more easily, our study is based on the hypothesis that this context ultimately exerts a positive influence upon intergenerational language maintenance within the context of migration.

We argue that both the language teaching intentions of the parents and grandparents, and the resonance of these intentions with children

<sup>1</sup> We use the term *language of origin (LO)* to refer to the standard and regional varieties of the national languages in the grandparents' countries of birth, i.e., Italy and Spain. By way of contrast, the language of the surroundings that are currently home to the surveyed families (German or French) is referred to as *local language (LL)*.

<sup>2</sup> Project Intergenerational language maintenance in the migration context and language use by young people of the third generation in Switzerland (Rosita Fibbi and Marinette Matthey), supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation within the scope of the National Research Program NFP 56 Linguistic diversity and language skills in Switzerland.

and grand-children of immigrants in Switzerland, appear to be influenced significantly by the fact that functional multilingualism<sup>3</sup> is both regarded as desirable and taken for granted in the Europe of today. There are practical and affective reasons for the maintenance of multilingualism within the family. Moreover, issues related to the extra-familial context may also play a part. In addition, monolingualism is steadily losing its appeal in a world that is increasingly interconnected by communication and mobility.

Our research studies the importance attributed to passing on the language of origin within individual families. It focuses on the intentions, strategies and modalities of language instruction and identity (re-)production, developed and implemented by first generation immigrants (hereafter: G1) and their children, i.e. the so-called second generation (G2), in relation to their descendants, namely the members of the third generation (G3), as well as the reasoning which is used to explain them (Fibbi and Matthey, 2010). In this paper however, we concentrate on the language use of these third-generation youth, and to the question of whether and how the use of the language of origin plays a role in the process of identity formation.

One of the first studies on children of labor migrants in Switzerland takes a close look at the identity of those young people born to immigrant parents but schooled and socialized in this country. The title of the book epitomizes the way identity issues were conceived more than 30 years ago: «Who are they? Swiss and/or Spanish? The second generation of Spanish immigrants in Switzerland» (Gonvers et al., 1980). The study concentrates on the national feeling of belonging experienced by those youth, at a time when national belonging was conceived solely in antagonistic and exclusive terms: Swiss versus foreigners. One generation later, by the grandchildren of those same immigrants, and in a radically transformed geo-political and urban context, issues of belonging and identity are no longer framed along the same semantic. Linguistic practices pool various competences, just as the origins of those youth are combined; they offer the opportunity to explore the way collective identities among grandchildren of immigrants are constructed today.

<sup>3</sup> In the current context of globalisation and migration, the concept of functional bi-/multilingualism is more likely to be applied than the traditional term of “bilingualism”. Language is conceptualized in the context of action theory (pragmatic conception), rather than as a language system that can be mastered to a greater or lesser degree – as is the case in the structuralist perspective. The key characteristic of functional multilingualism is that it is based on partial competencies, with “partial” indicating a limited, imperfect command of a language.

What relevance does the language of origin have for the grandchildren of Italian and Spanish immigrants? Which practical and identity-related purposes does this language (or, respectively, their bi-/multilingualism) serve for the young persons of the third generation in Switzerland in the here and now?

While one can immediately appreciate the possible practical advantages of being well-acquainted with this (family) language, the potential identity-related function – in general terms and in the specific context of migration – is not quite so evident. Consequently, we first introduce our theoretical frame on identity (individual, social, collective identity) and on the relationship between identity and language: How are the potential functions of language theoretically formulated in processes of identity-formation and how are they presented in the scientific literature?

## **Theoretical background: identity and language**

### *Identity, identification and group affiliations*

The identity of a person (and also that of a collective) is not something static, but is rather the ever-changing product of a continuous process of identity construction, or identity maintenance (Wodak, 2009). For the individual or the group, the purpose and objective of this process is to provide satisfactory answers to the question: «Who am I / are we? What makes me/us, unique and distinctive?» Thus, identity is undoubtedly linked to self-definition. As the factors that define the uniqueness of the respective “me” or “us” are clearly numerous and extremely diverse, and are furthermore subject to continuous change, the identity process revolves around endowing these different factors with a certain level of coherence, to establish and maintain a certain continuity and consistency of the notion of “I/we” over time. This occurs through constant self-questioning, in the interpretation and perpetuation of one’s own life story (Sciolla, 2010). In doing so, the subject has to integrate “real” experiences – the things it encounters “in the wide world” – into its life story; i.e. has to “sort them into” its own narrative. As such, identity is the – always provisional – result of the routine reflexive activities of a given subject. To describe these everyday processes of both the conscious and unconscious kind, which subjects employ in order to gain certainty of them and to define themselves, A. Giddens coined the term “identity negotiation”: The provisional product of this endeavor is «the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography» (Giddens, 1991).

Every self-definition is carried out in relation to “the others”, that it integrates self-ascriptions alongside ascriptions by others, and that the latter always include attributions to social categories and groups that are significant for the respective subject. In other words, identity construction is an interactive process, involving both the individual that creates an image of itself, and the society, that provides a range of identity offers, which the individual can contest or accept and use for the purpose of self-identification (Wicker, 2008).

Pointing at the significance of group affiliations for the constitution of identity, *social identity* is that part of the individual’s self-concept that derives from his/her certainty of belonging to social groups and from the value and the emotional significance, which is assigned to this membership. In their *social identity theory*, Tajfel and Turner (1986) assume that an individual will pursue a satisfying self-concept or self-image. Because having a positive social identity contributes considerably to a satisfying self-image, individuals endeavor to fortify or improve their social identity as much as possible.

### *Ethnic and national identity*

Collective identities are somewhat more abstract than the individual kind – they are discursively construed “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1991). These affiliations are subsequently integrated into the self-definition by the individual and form components of her/his social identity. Frederik Barth’s *boundary theory* (1969) focused on the processes of construction and maintenance of borders, moving away from the characterization of defined “content” (sphere, social group). Here, the phenomena of self-ascription and ascription by others emerge as crucial elements for the construction of belonging. Based on discernable or perceived differences, individuals are divided into categories or groups by others (ascription/identification by others), or they express their (non-)affiliation with certain groups or categories by actively marking the respective differences in social interactions (self-identification). Identification and differentiation go hand in hand.<sup>4</sup>

In the US context of the “melting pot” traditionally focused primarily on ethnicity (Portes, 2000), a construct mostly regarded as a temporally stable category based on ancestry in social sciences, right up to the 1970s. After Barth, however, investigations focused on the

<sup>4</sup> Barth was particularly concerned by the construction of ethnicity or the maintenance of ethnic group boundaries; however, in principle, his approach can be applied to all kinds of construction of affiliations (state, nationality, gender, etc.).

particular social contexts, structures and situations, in which individuals “mobilize” ethnic identities (*situational ethnicity*). In Europe, on the contrary, the phenomenon of discursively constructed group membership, consisting as it does of many states, was mainly perceived, researched and presented from the national perspective.

National differentiation and nation-state affiliation also follow the pattern defined by Barth’s *boundary theory*. Nationality and citizenship gained importance in the 18th and 19th centuries as effective instruments for providing citizens with a sense of their identities. According to Wodak et al. (2009), the nation is understood as a symbolic community, based on discursive foundations, a “national narrative”, which is generated and reproduced by actors in (institutionalized) contexts. The nation state is based on this national differentiation discourse; as an institution, it not only contributes to steadily maintaining and continuing the “narrative”, but it also constructs and reproduces the collective national identity, by attributing a national affiliation to every individual, who integrates it into its self-definition. Therefore, national identity emerges as a significant part of the (multiple) social identity(ies) of an individual in today’s world, which is organized along the lines of nation states.

In line with Barth’s interactionist approach, within the scope of this study we understand ethnicity and ethnic identity (respectively, national identity in relation to the European context) as a ceaseless process of differentiation between insiders and outsiders, which needs to be expressed and validated by social interaction (Poutignat and Streiff-Fenart, 1995). Thus, an ethnic or national identity is not only based on the fact that individuals express it and claim it for themselves in the course of social interaction (self-identification). In order to gain validity and persistence, it must also be validated by the “others” (the particular audience that is addressed) simultaneously (identification by others). Institutionalized attributions by others play a very important role in this context.

In a country of immigration like the US, the dominant assimilationist perspective concluded that groups of immigrants (*ethnic communities*) would not survive the structural assimilation, they would not continue to stand out in US society as a distinct ethnic group across the generations. However, endorsing Barth’s concept of situational ethnicity, Herbert Gans (1979) refined it into a “chosen” symbolic identity, which only impacts upon the life of white Americans belonging to the post-immigrant generations, if they themselves wish it to do so. This kind of symbolic ethnic identity fulfills several important socio-psychological

and identity-related functions. In a creative act, people can choose one (or more) ethnic identities from a pool of several, allowing them to feel that they are something special, original, and at the same time satisfying their need to belong to a collective – and yet, and this is crucial – this “community” does not compromise their own individuality. Gans’ study imagines a symbolic ethnic identity able to meet the contradictory needs of white Americans for individuality and community equally, and one that does so without incurring social costs (Waters, 1990).

### *Language and identification*

We can now approach the conceptualization of the interdependencies between identity and language. In many definitions of ethnicity and nationality, language figures as a key component. However, language also functions as an identity marker. These affiliation or differentiation symbols, or “markers”, are credited with having an identity-establishing effect (Centlivres, 1986). On the basis of a person’s linguistic activities, others can assign her/him to a group/category, while the person can reveal group memberships, and thus aspects of their own social identity, through his/her use of language.<sup>5</sup>

Lüdi and Py (1995) speak of *traces of identity*, manifestations of a person’s being and acting which are made visible in social interactions and can be perceived by others. Linguistic expressions – and here we mean not only their content, but in particular their form (idiom, variety, emphasis) – can be comprehended as such traces of identity.<sup>6</sup> Hence, the use of linguistic markers provides the individual with the functional opportunity to present the own self to others as stable and orderly. Centlivres distinguishes between those situations, where the traces of identity of a linguistic actor inevitably manifest in a process outside of his/her control, and those situations, where the actor has and uses an opportunity to to emphasize a certain aspect of her/his identity through the linguistic action. In the former case, the linguistic action of the subject reveals a *communicated identity (identité manifestée)*: The linguistic action exposes a part of the identity, disclosing

<sup>5</sup> However, as such it is merely one of many, and can easily be replaced by other boundary markers. And yet, its specificity might be illustrated by the fact that a “lost” ethnic/national language is not as easily regained as other markers of ethnic/national identity.

<sup>6</sup> Along with many others, such as, e.g., outward appearance (gender, age, skin colour, style of clothing, demeanour/behavior, and the like), official documents (ID, passport, diplomas, and so on), or the adoption of certain roles, or the exercising of specific functions in society (household, family, job, politics, leisure activities etc...).

it without the deliberate cooperation of the speaker. In the latter case, the linguistic action represents a public declaration about an aspect of her/his identity thus laid bare, willingly provided by the actor in this specific situation – the revelation of a *claimed identity* (*identité revendiquée*), where she/he herself asserts to belong to a collective.

### *Language and identification in a superdiverse context*

Language transition models are part of the assimilation paradigm dominant in the American literature. This paradigm is largely de-contextualised (Vijver et al., 2015), with the notable exception of the segmented assimilation theory of Portes and Zhou (1993): for them, context – both in its historical and geographical declinations – is a variable characterizing the reception environment of immigrant groups and waves. Yet even in this theory, context – and its variations – is situated within the two poles of origin and reception countries, a dichotomous distinction that seems inadequate to capture today's reality.

In our globalized world, immigration countries have experienced a dramatic change, labelled superdiversity, that points at the increased ethnic diversity of immigration flows as well as at other axes of difference like gender, education, age cohorts and – especially pertinent for our purpose – generations (Vertovec, 2007). This change is most visible in large cities and their ethnic make-up: they become majority-minority cities in which the old majority group becomes a minority (Crul, 2016).

Contextual factors need to be linked to individual and group functioning if we are to move away from an essentialized understanding of identity. In this frame, language lends itself to a special scrutiny as it represents a highly flexible and pervasive symbolic resource available for the cultural production of identity. Beliefs or feelings about languages as used in their social worlds are multiple and diverse across cultures and individuals. Such “language ideologies” (Kroskrity, 2004) are productively used in the creation and representation of various social and cultural identities (e.g. nationality, ethnicity). Historically shared language has long served as key to naturalizing the boundaries of social groups and subordinating groups not in command of the linguistic standard. Yet language ideology research with an accent on group and individual agency provides a frame to approach the radically changed nature of their objects of study, the transformation of local linguistic communities (ibid.: 511).

## Empirical results

Our study draws upon approaches and methodologies from the field of qualitative social research. The data collection relied mainly on semi-structured problem-centered interviews. They were designed to generate information about linguistic biography and current language use of those surveyed, passing on of the language of origin within the family, attitudes towards languages and multilingualism. Feelings of belonging were also addressed with the youth (grandchildren). The interviews were conducted by bi-lingual interviewers (LL-LO).

Altogether, 96 interviews were carried out with 32 families of Italian and Spanish origin (with one member each from the first, second and third generation). The sample of young persons comprises of a total of 19 female and 13 male youth between the ages of 8 and 21, a majority of whom were between 11 and 16 years of age at the time of the interviews). Twenty of the youth have grandparents of Italian origin, and twelve have grandparents of Spanish origin<sup>7</sup>. They live with their families in the German-speaking agglomeration of Basel (15) and the French-speaking area of Geneva (17).

Mastering the local language, all the surveyed G3 have an instrument at their disposal with which they (can) unequivocally manifest themselves as belonging to the local community. Those who are also able to express themselves in the ancestral language of their grandparents have the opportunity and thus also have the option to “out themselves” as belonging to the LO linguistic community.

The performative dimension of the LO usage has the effect that the scope available to a G3 actor for the choice of national/ancestral identity might be restricted in certain circumstances, because the counterpart’s reaction to the proficiency with which the identity marker language is being wielded in the linguistic interaction may either confirm or weaken the self-identification (*claimed identity*). The partner in the interaction assesses the legitimacy of the self-attribution based on the linguistic “performance” of the G3, and this “verdict”, the reaction of the *in-group* – members to the self-identification of the young person will, in turn, influence his/her self-identification.

The external demands placed upon the LO performance of a G3 vary, depending on the “audience” or milieu, in which or with which the

<sup>7</sup> Italian and Spanish origin migrants and their grandchildren were chosen for this analysis since they represent the first immigration flow to Switzerland in the second half of the last century. Therefore they are the only groups having a large group of descendants (G3), nowadays in their teens.

youngster interactively negotiates his/her identity. They are high when Italian- or Spanish-speaking persons are supposed to recognize the affiliation of a G3 to the *in-group*; in contrast, they can be exceedingly low when members of the *out-group*, such as Swiss peers without migration background, are supposed to acknowledge the Italian or Spanish identity of a G3 individual. Given these considerations, the use of the LO mainly is used to demonstrate and negotiate shared group membership vis-à-vis the *in-group* members in the G3 living context.

### *Language use*

The language of origin of the grandparents who immigrated to Switzerland in the 1950s and 1960s occupies a place in the everyday language use of youngsters of the third generation. Even though LO use tends to decrease with each subsequent generation, grandchildren of Italian and Spanish immigrants in Switzerland are not LL monolingual. In many cases, it is possible to observe solid functional bilingualism, in some instances even among young people whose one parent has no command or only a rudimentary command of the LO. This observation corroborates the hypothesis that the European and especially the Swiss dynamic in the intergenerational language shift, differs from that occurring in the North American context (Wyssmüller and Fibbi, 2014).

The G3's attitude towards the LO and to multilingualism in general appears rather instrumental: languages are just a means of communication and trouble-free understanding. However, quite a number of statements reveal that for these youngsters, the LO has both a (potential) practical and an affective significance. The group of persons for whom the LO is emotionally charged undoubtedly includes Giuseppe, whose claimed identity is reinforced by his LO mastery. He systematically answers the phone in Italian:

Italian is a language I like, more than German / I do not know why it is so [...] [Q: Which language /do you speak on the phone?] Giuseppe: I always start with Italian; then, if I get the impression that the person doesn't understand me, I switch to German (IB02\_G3, 87).

Some youngsters however systematically displayed a slightly stronger affective link to the language of their grandparents than their (in these cases relatively rare) LO use would lead us to expect; they have a somewhat "exaggerated" positive attitude towards their LO. This empirical evidence corroborates Stösslein's comment: The further the linguistic shift has progressed, the more often one comes across instances where the individuals display an exaggerated affective attitude to their lan-

guage and culture of origin (Stösslein, 2005). This phenomenon is also in line with the observation by Billiez (1985) in France, who found that the LO can and specifically does fulfill a symbolic identity-confirming function even for those descendants of immigrants who label themselves as monolingual in the LL.

### *Identifications and their foundations*

#### a) Self-identification and institutional affiliations

Hyphenated identity claims are clearly dominant; exclusively Italian/Spanish or exclusively Swiss claims are marginal. For many of the young G3 persons, the national origin of their immigrant grandparents clearly represents quite a significant component of their own identity, while just as many visibly define themselves more strongly as Swiss.

Belonging is formulated in terms of degrees rather than of alternatives. In the explanations of their perceived national affiliation, the respondents refer most frequently to the family ancestry (nationality of the parents, grandparents). This is hardly surprising in the Swiss context where *jus sanguinis* is the only principle regulating automatic access to nationality: this mighty institutional discourse undoubtedly affects the individual concepts of the young people. As justification for their affiliation with local society, the interviewed G3 believe that they perceive themselves as Swiss, because they were born and grew up here, because they live here and attended school here. This argument points to the *jus soli* principle, which also finds wide application in Europe, the place of birth/place of residence being decisive for accessing naturalization. Emphasizing this criterion allows them all equally to define themselves as Swiss.

Overall, the impact of place of residence or center of one's life is regarded as highly significant if not crucial by those interviewed: The sense of belonging is "nourished" by the reality that is lived on a day to day basis. Incidentally, the G3 themselves to a lesser extent, but certainly their parents are also very conscious of the fact that this influential impact factor is missing. So Rita's mother says:

I believe so [...]. It must be said/ they never lived over there/ whether you like it or not. In order for them to feel Spanish/ I should go to Spain with them now (EG07\_G2, 51).

Many of the G3 respondents are at least familiar with the country of their grandparents, having spent time there on vacation. Several of them avail themselves of this explanation for the justification of the feeling of belonging to this country. Accordingly, however, the youths'

statements reflect a “holiday image” of the country of birth of their grandparents. As far as the youngsters are concerned, their self-perception as Italian or Spanish rests, amongst other things, upon their association of Italy or Spain with the pleasant experiences and the unusual degree of freedom they can enjoy there, resulting in a tendency toward an “exaggerated” national identification with the country. 17-year-old Giuseppe, for example, describes his image of Italy as follows:

I like to go to Italy because it is warm down there, there is the sea / in Italy I can ride a vespa / I can do things I am not allowed to do here / my parents grant me more freedom / since I go out with people/ with the children of people they grew up with/ with our cousins / they know whom I am with / therefore there is no problem (IB02\_G3, 65).

These identity-claims match, in various degrees, with the respondents’ official nationalities. Among the respondents holding Swiss citizenship (often as dual or even as triple citizens), those who inherited their Swiss nationality from an “indigenous” Swiss parent tend to identify more strongly as Swiss. The majority of those who have Swiss citizenship because at least one parent acquired it through a process of naturalization feel Italian/Spanish and Swiss in equal measure: Here, both criteria (ancestry and place of living) appear to be on a par, and lead to a feeling of dual belonging.

For most of the respondents’ multiple institutional affiliations stands for multiple national identifications. Bianca, for example, holds both Italian and Spanish citizenship, but not Swiss; expressing herself about the degree to which she sees herself as Spanish, Italian and Swiss, she states:

If I am being honest / I am Swiss / I grew up here and I have lived here since I was a child / and / I would be precisely Swiss-German, I grew up here/ I do not have much more to add (IB06\_G3, 166).

Her answer shows the need to legitimize the claim that she can and may identify as Swiss, even though she is not officially Swiss. The profound impact of institutional affiliation upon self-definition is also revealed in Soledad’s statement; she only holds Spanish citizenship and therefore hesitates to refer to herself as Swiss:

So I am of course a Spaniard, but [...] /Perhaps I am a bit more Swiss / but more or less the same (EB05\_G3, 119).

The hypothesis that the official citizenship(s) has a significant influence on the national self-identification of many of the G3 is further bolstered by the observation that those G3 in our sample, who perceive themselves exclusively as Italian/Spanish, also exclusively hold the corresponding citizenship.

## b) Self-identification and language use

The G3 respondents who identify overwhelmingly as Italian/Spanish, tend to use the LO relatively often in their daily lives, and attribute an affective significance to this language. Furthermore, with just one exception, they all stem from sets of parents who speak the same language. The statements made by these youth reveal that they regard familial and national roots to be closely intertwined and difficult to separate. The perhaps most telling example was provided by Giuseppe:

I feel Italian 24 hours a day / I do not feel truly Swiss [...] I have never been in a situation where I felt more Swiss than Italian. [Q: How do you reckon that you are Italian?] it is my way of being [...] I am a bit of a noisemaker / I am not a person who loses his temper easily / yet it doesn't take much / it is a matter of temperament / also the language / I believe it is the way Italians are / I am just like that / my father and my uncles / all those I know are like that / the way we dress [...] the Italians I know are dressed just like this / a person is also the way he dresses (IB02\_G3, 99).

The pronounced identification of this G3 type with the national origin of their grandparents or parents can be traced back “indirectly” to their language use. LO emerges as a crucial element in the sense of a *cultural carrier* as the proficiency in this language allows the G3 to explore their ancestral “culture of origin” (Dorian, 2001). Yet, it links also strongly to the construction of national/ancestral origin that prevails in the family. The familial construction of such affiliations usually rests upon cultural practices (such as language, culinary traditions, religious or traditional holidays) on the one hand, and upon socio-psychological traits or behaviors on the other hand. Giuseppe refers to both factors when, in his usage of LO, he speaks to his characteristics or his temperament and style of attire to legitimize his national self-identification. According to his mother, maintaining an Italian identity within the family is of great importance, which obviously exerts a strong influence upon the identification of the G3.

They feel Italian / when we happen to talk about taking the Swiss nationality / they say no / we are Italian/ we care about staying Italian / we want to be Italian / as they wish to feel Italian / there / as they grew up we taught them in such a way that they are attached to their origins even if they have never lived in Italy / they only go there for holidays / but my children speak Italian/ therefore they feel they are also Italian /indeed if somebody doesn't speak a word of Italian /how does he manage to understand, how does he manage to feel certain things? (IB02\_G2, 107).

The argument for the legitimacy of their feelings of national affiliation also revolved around language skills and language use for many of the

interviewed youngsters.<sup>8</sup> One feels Swiss because one speaks the LL most frequently or most competently (as in Bianca's case). Conversely, one feels (additionally) Italian or Spanish because one has a certain knowledge of Italian/Spanish and/or because one regularly speaks in the LO. In the same vein, in spite of Italian/Spanish ancestry, lacking any knowledge of the LO prevents the youth polled in our study from feeling Italian/Spanish. This is nicely illustrated by Claire's case:

Deep inside I feel Italian /but the language it is somewhat of a problem since I cannot speak the language (IG02\_G3, 188, 192).

Muriel offers a similar explanation for why she sees herself as Swiss more than as Italian:

Because /I always speak French and the I am also half way so/ not really / after all I am more Swiss/ since I cannot speak the language very well / that I am learning in school and not from my parents (IG06\_G3, 56).

These arguments indicate that, for several of the G3 respondents, language does function as an identity marker. Some – and, fascinatingly, it tends to be precisely those who identify most strongly with the origins of their grandparents – explain that the reason they sometimes see themselves as Swiss is because they speak the LO with an accent. For example, Christina claims that she really feels Spanish; first and foremost, she loves Spain and is proud of her Spanish roots. She justifies this by saying, amongst other things, that it is not very interesting to be 100% Swiss:

At least I have an origin / others are 100 percent Swiss / I do not feel it is good to be 100 percent Swiss (EG03\_G3, 22-32).

This statement signifies a *symbolic identity*, also observed among some white US-Americans of the post-immigrant generations, for whom «Being ethnic makes them feel unique and special and not just vanilla» (Waters, 1990: 151). However, what makes Christina feel Swiss – more or less against her own will – is her French accent, which is present when she speaks Spanish:

Well, the accent / when I speak Spanish I have a French accent, which is different from those who can speak Spanish/ and have a Spanish accent / they know I am a foreigner as soon as they hear my accent while speaking Spanish (EG03\_G3, 15).

<sup>8</sup> It is important to acknowledge that the fact that the interviews investigated language transfer and language use is relatively certain to have had an effect: Having just been asked about this very subject, the respondents will have tended to explain their feelings of national affiliation with arguments relating to language skills and language use. Nevertheless, even when the potential bias is considered, these arguments retain their relevance, as will be shown below.

Such G3 are conscious that they speak differently than “normal” Italians and Spaniards; maybe this is even specifically pointed out to them by their audience. So language clearly functions as identity marker: Whether they want to or not, G3 with an accent in the LO are perceived and identified as “not quite belonging” by others.

Linguistic aspects are non-controllable identity markers just as features like the darker complexion that is commonly associated with “southern Europeans” or a family name: they communicate – and sometimes mis-communicate – identity without the deliberate cooperation of the speaker. Some of the interviewed G3 are confronted with and react to the stereotype of the dark-skinned southern European in their daily lives and, consequently, in their identity-establishing process. In her interview, Teresa stresses that she sees herself as Spaniard, *even though* her skin is not very dark and therefore everyone believes that she is Swiss:

I feel Spanish but in school [...] everybody thinks I am Swiss since I am not so dark skinned. Yet, there is nothing Swiss about me (EB04\_G3, 77, 81, 81).

Teresa’s awareness of her outward appearance provides further confirmation of Waters’ observations that individuals are aware of their own physical appearances and of how closely they resemble stereotypes of their ethnic group. This consciousness can limit the range of ethnic choices available to an individual reacting to the relevant ascriptions by others.

The family name can also function as identity marker. Although our G3 respondents do not specifically report of any experiences in this regard, it is rather striking that those who identify most strongly with the origins of their grandparents, tend to have Italian/Spanish first and last names, while youth bearing names with “Swiss connotations” tend to hesitate to label themselves as Italian or Spanish.

When several identity markers match in terms of the national/ancestral stereotype (such as appearance, command of the LO, family name), G3 youngsters are more likely to identify with the national origins of their grandparents and parents. However, when their desired or perceived membership in the ancestral group of their grandparents does not match with the identity markers (be it language that is colored by an accent, an “incongruous” family name or a “non-typical” appearance), then the G3 have to deal with a “problem”. They struggle to justify a desired identity that appears “inconsistent”, and therefore may not be confirmed or even denied by one of the groups they deem relevant; this is an everyday experience of quite a few G3. Those who

cannot avail themselves of the LO as a particularly clear symbol of membership are particularly “disadvantaged” here. They endeavor to maintain the “inherited” and/or perceived desired identity, by verbally communicating their group membership, and/or by using other, ideally visible, signals at appropriate moments to show or to “prove” affiliation. Some, however, may adapt and consequently tend to claim membership with that national group, to which they are also ascribed externally.

The fact that *ancestry* and *place of birth/residence* are frequent arguments brought forward by the G3 in order to legitimize their national identity(ies) may indicate that the G3 understand national identity as a relatively stable fact over the course of time. Yet, several of the G3 respondents shared anecdotes showing how their feelings of national/ancestral affiliation have varied over time. Depending on their stage in life, the interaction situation and the interaction counterpart, one will choose a different identity; in this process the desire for a positive social identity as well as (anticipated) ascriptions by others play a significant part.

#### c) Self-identifications: a typology

Three combinations of ancestral identification and language communication competences among of the grandchildren of immigrants can be identified based on the principal conveyors to this identification:

##### 1) Identity as family reproduction:

as they grew up we taught them in such a way that they are attached to their origins even if they have never lived in Italy (Giuseppe’s mother IB02\_G2, 107).

Some of the respondent G3 were heavily influenced in their ancestral identification by the way in which national identity is constructed within the family, or particularly by the national identities that are “lived as an example” by the parents. Giuseppe provides a good example of this: he justifies his exclusively Italian identity by citing certain cultural practices (language, style of clothing) and socio-psychological traits and behaviors (chaotic, spirited) that characterize him, and which he also observes in other family members and other Italians. He has simply copied these behaviors, which he has learned to interpret as “typically Italian” from family “role models” he deems important, and he mimics them. Within the framework of familial identity reproduction, the language spoken in the family represents a characteristic cultural practice of the “role models”.

## 2) “Autonomous” self-identification:

After my trip / I wanted to have the Italian citizenship / I do not know why / I enjoyed this trip so much / therefore I told them [the parents] I want the passport (Giovanna, IG03\_G3, 112).

The self-identifications of these G3 appear to be “more autonomous”, more self-determined, to be found among young people that are in their earlier teens. Giovanna delivers a vivid example for this: Neither her parents nor her grandparents ever spoke to her in Italian during her childhood, nor did the family maintain a particularly strong connection to Italy. When Giovanna was 15 years old, a journey to Italy with friends triggered her “Italian phase”: She applied for the Italian passport that she was entitled to due to her ancestry and began to study Italian at school in earnest. For a period of approximately three years, this young woman identified very strongly with Italy and took autonomous steps aimed at deepening her own perception of herself as Italian.

With reference to this type of G3 in our sample, this transitory self-identification with the country of origin of the grandparents is particularly noticeable among the children of binational Swiss-Italian/Spanish parents. This type of national identification matches with symbolic identity. This desire felt by the members of the post-immigrant generations to learn the “lost” language of their forebears acts to point out very clearly the fragmented and symbolic nature of their ancestral identity, especially enhancing LO mastery.

## 3) “Heteronomous” self-identification:

I am seen as Spanish by others (Antonio, EB01\_G3, 43).

In some cases, ancestral self-identification appears to be heavily influenced by extra-familial ascriptions by others. These G3 tend to identify themselves as that which extra-familial “others” see in them. During adolescence, the national attributions occurring in their (peer group) environment are of particular relevance. What is more, the “judgment” of the “audience” in the grandparents’ country of origin can also have an effect on the G3’s self-identification. Examples for this are provided by Rita and Antonio. In their experience, they are perceived as Spanish/Italian here in Switzerland (due to their appearance, their name, their LO proficiency), while in the grandparents’ country of origin (mainly because of their accent) they are swiftly identified as Swiss, and consequently they feel there more Swiss than they would like to admit. The situational dimension of identification emerges most clearly in this case. Furthermore, language skills and the manner of speaking are particu-

larly endowed with special significance as identity markers in these context-dependent situations of perpetual negotiation and renegotiation.

## Discussion

This study suggests that the concept of “chosen” symbolic identity elaborated with regard to the members of the third generation of European immigrants in the United States can also provide an accurate frame for national identification among Italian and Spanish G3 in Switzerland. Clearly, in certain respects, the contextual conditions applicable in the two cases are comparable: As for “white ethnics” in the United States, in their daily lives, the Swiss grandchildren of Italian and Spanish immigrants have little reason to fear discrimination based on their national belonging or their declared national identity. Indeed, today, Swiss society has an overwhelmingly positive image of the respective groups of origin.

However, within multilingual and transnational Europe, LO skills play a strong role as identity markers for G3. They have to negotiate their self-identification in at least two linguistic “milieus”. It is not sufficient for the G3 to pledge themselves to their “claimed identity”, but rather, they also require validation by the respective “others”, by the “audience”, in order to be able to maintain it. Consequently, the “claimed identities” of the local G3 cannot have a character that is entirely symbolic, they come at a cost: the attainment of certain skills in the language of their grandparents.

The G3 respondents frame their skills in the language of their grandparents in light of the fact that multilingualism is highly regarded in today’s labor market as well as in society overall. They have observed and integrated the importance of the functional use and the increasingly prestigious significance of multilingualism, and they regard it as positive and desirable to grow up speaking two or more languages, or to acquire additional languages over the course of their life. From this point of view, LO skills can serve to assert an individual characteristic or an aspect of the social identity that has positive connotations, as part of the group of multilingual persons. “No encuentro bien ser cien por cien suiza” says Chirstina: to her, multiple identities and multilingualism are assets in today’s urban Switzerland. Such a statement points at a semiotic creation of identity, cutting across social and ethnic groups (Parkin 2016).

## Conclusions

The study intended to assess qualitatively language and identity (re) production among families of well-established immigrant groups over three generations in the context of two superdiverse Swiss cities. It documents widespread LO competence among adult children of immigrants and a significant LO knowledge among grandchildren of immigrants necessary to support their identity claims.

Grandchildren of immigrants, as part of well-established ethnic groups, such as those of Italian and Spanish origin, exhibit a specific language ideology: they are aware of local language stratification and, at the same time, they challenge the depreciation ideology for minority groups in this stratification. They question the sharp design of social groups' boundaries drawn by languages: multilingualism provides an inclusive boundary-blurring frame where they can deploy discursive strategies accommodating for present superdiverse Swiss cities.

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