

Dying language

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DISUSED CONTROL TOWER AS BOARD ROOM

The obsolete control tower on top of Terminal A at Zurich Airport has been transformed into a meeting or board room.

Anyone can hire the premises for a few hours or a whole day for board meetings, cocktail parties or receptions. The main attraction is the 360 degree view over the whole airport. Whether this unique view will create a distraction during board meetings has not been commented upon, but as a man who has worked for 7 years in such a control tower, your Editor can vouch for the fact that the activities on a busy airport, with the continuous arrivals and departures of aircraft, are one of the most absorbing views you can imagine.

Nevertheless, many international companies find these premises extremely handy. Directors from all parts of the world can get together without losing time to get into town and can be off again within minutes of the meeting ending.

DYING LANGUAGE

A move is under way to save Romansch, the language of the Engadin. The last population census has indicated that fewer and fewer people put Romansch down as their main language, even in the villages where Romansch used to be the dominant language. Amongst the main actions to be taken to save the language are listed: the creation of a Romansch newspaper, more tuition in Romansch in the schools, more study books to be printed in that language and language courses for new settlers in the Engadin. The authorities of Graubünden expect the Federal Government to assist them financially with this programme. Whether it will be successful is doubtful as minority languages find it harder and harder to survive in this modern world of global technology.

FRENCH SWISS ARE CONCERNED

The latest move in France to introduce a law making it illegal to use foreign words, mainly English and American words, wherever a French word or translation can be used instead. This law bans foreign words from all advertisements, sales promotion material, job descriptions, contracts, study books, circulars and of course from all newspapers and magazines.

Scientists and people in the electronics industry are particularly worried as most expressions used in these fields have no (or not yet any) equivalent words in French. The Académie Française which controls the French language since 1635, has to find French expressions first for words such as input, enter, down-load, byte, hardware, interface and software that dot the computer and electronic languages. This

new law could well mean the end of any international scientific congresses in France as the foreign participants would never understand what the French are talking about.

What compounds the problem is that many simple English or American words have no counterparts in French and their meaning can only be translated into French in form of a string of words or a whole sentence.

Now where does this new French law leave the French Swiss and, for that matter, all the other French speaking countries in the world such as Canada, Belgium and many African countries? Will French Swiss publications be banned in France if they contain foreign words? In Geneva, where thousands of people commute daily between France and Switzerland, will these people be fined under this new French law if they carry into France a Swiss newspaper or magazine?

It will be interesting, if not very funny, to learn what expressions the French will use for the everyday words such as weekend, clown, cowboy, snack, drug store, cocktail, copyright, cashflow, booking, fitness, match, sandwich, hamburger, and for the many names of sports like football, rugby, basket-hand-base- and volleyball, hockey, cricket, golf, curling, badminton, squash and strictly speaking even tennis.

No doubt the publishers of dictionaries will have a very busy time coming up, as all the old editions will become obsolete and actually illegal.

The poor French Swiss are not going to have it easy. They have been complaining for years that they were always dictated by their German counterparts, now they are getting it also from the French....

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