The future of English in Switzerland : a majority/minority problem?

The future of English in Switzerland: a majority/minority problem?

Silvia DINGWALL & Heather MURRAY

Abstract

Seit einiger Zeit sammeln wir Informationen über die Ausbreitung des Englischen als Wissenschaftssprache in der Schweiz. Anhand von Nationalfonds- und Dissertationsstatistiken sowie Umfragen dokumentieren wir die starke Zunahme dieser Sprache über die letzten 20 Jahre. Zuerst aber gehen wir der Frage nach, ob Englisch in der Schweiz eine Mehrheits- oder Minderheitssprache ist. Im dritten Teil beschreiben wir die Reaktionen unserer InformantInnen auf den zunehmenden Druck, in Englisch zu veröffentlichen. Danach analysieren wir, wie die englische Sprache in der Schweiz ganz allgemein, d.h. ausserhalb der Wissenschaft, verwendet wird. Zum Schluss wagen wir es, einige vorsichtige Prognosen darüber zu machen, wie sich der Gebrauch des Englischen in der Schweiz möglicherweise entwickeln wird. Um die schweizerische Politik der Mehrsprachigkeit zu unterstützen, wäre es angebracht und nötig, dass angewandte LinguistInnen sich vermehrt in der Debatte über die Rolle der englischen Sprache in der Schweiz engagieren.

0. Introduction

What is the future of English in Switzerland? No one, of course, knows, but an analysis of the role English is playing in Switzerland at present and of how the Swiss are reacting to the spread of English will put us in a better position to predict what will happen to the language in relation to the Swiss national languages in the 21st century. This paper is a contribution to such an analysis. The focus will be largely on the speech community in Switzerland that we have studied most, namely researchers at Swiss research institutes and universities.

Before reporting on this research, we examine, in the first section of the paper, the question of whether English acts as a majority language in Switzerland. In the following section, we explore how English has become increasingly dominant as the language of scientific communication at Swiss universities and research institutions. Given that, in many fields of research, it is hardly possible to pursue a scientific career without English, we were keen to find out how Swiss researchers feel about the pressure to use English. Section three reports on the results of our survey of Swiss scientists' attitudes towards the role of English in their work. In the fourth section we look at other uses of English in Switzerland.

Exploring attitudes to English in Switzerland raises questions about which trends are desirable in a multilingual country like Switzerland, and whether applied linguists can and should try to influence these trends. In the final section

of the paper, we make some tentative predictions about the future of English and single out for comment some common misconceptions about language in popular discourse in Switzerland.

1. Is English a minority or majority language in Switzerland?

What a question, you may say, but as CORAY (this volume) shows, defining a 'minority language' is far from simple. In exploring how English relates to this concept, we need to take acount of some of the complex majority/minority linguistic relationships in Switzerland. In particular, it is important to mention that the four Swiss ethnolinguistic groups, although unequal in numerical and economic terms, are on a national level constantly involved in finding a consensual balance of power which confers equal rights on all groups. A key element in this balance of power is respect for and knowledge of the other's language.

Switzerland is often said to be a model multilingual country with four official languages: German (Swiss German), French, Italian, and Romansh. LÜDI (1992: 46) claims that it is a myth to say that the Swiss are functionally bilingual, let alone multilingual, although official language policy anchored in the Swiss Constitution means that the preferred practice at meetings involving federal officials is to allow the use of both French and German, on the assumption that all participants will understand at least these two languages. Even though the majority of Swiss do not or cannot use the other Swiss languages much, the official image of Switzerland as highly multilingual is bolstered by the way in which the most influential individuals (politicians, diplomats, leading scientists, etc.) and federal employees in Switzerland tend to be highly competent in at least two national languages. Increasingly, they are being expected to master English as well, and many do.

Indeed, fears are sometimes expressed by high-level politicians that English is becoming a semi-official language in Switzerland, thus endangering the national languages. The current Swiss president, Ruth Dreifuss, described English as the "Hauptgefahr für die schweizerische Sprachenkultur" (DREIFUSS 1993). ANDRES and WATTS (1993) maintain that it is a further myth to believe that English is becoming a lingua franca among Swiss, i.e. an *intra*national language. CHESHIRE & MOSER, on the other hand, argue that, although English has no official status within Switzerland, it now serves as a second language in certain domains, and, is also used in advertising "as a way of transcending a problematic national identity, [allowing Swiss] to construct a self image that is

consistent with the favourable image that they present to tourists" (1994:467). We return to these issues in sections 4 and 5.

Is there, then, any way in which English can be seen as a minority language in Switzerland? In a purely quantitative sense it is since, according to the 1990 census, less than 1% of the Swiss population speak English as their main (L_1) language (LÜDI et al. 1997: 492). Spanish, Portuguese and varieties of Yugoslav were more often reported as L_1s (Ibid: 462), contributing to the plurilingual reality of modern Switzerland. Indeed, the percentage of native-speakers of English (L_1) is currently shrinking (Ibid: 470).

Besides quantitative factors, CORAY (this volume) singles out three other aspects of the notion 'minority': linguistic and cultural; legal and political; and territorial and national. English L_1 speakers do not form a minority in any of these senses. They are not, for instance, a distinct social group in Switzerland, nor do they tend to cultivate an awareness of being a minority. Further, there are no regions in Switzerland that are inhabited exclusively by English L_1 speakers. So, except in a very limited numerical sense, English in Switzerland cannot be thought of as a minority language.

If English is not a minority language, can it be seen as a majority language in Switzerland? Yes, in the sense that it has become a very important foreign language (FL) and there are moves afoot at both national and cantonal levels to have even more Swiss school children learn English. For adult foreign language courses, English is the most popular FL, making up 53% of these courses (Bundesamt für Statistik, 1996). Moreover, an increasing number of special purpose English courses are being given in industry and the public sector. Indeed, for every English L_1 speaker in Switzerland there are at least ten Swiss who speak English as a FL at Cambridge 1st Certificate level or above. This is not the case for other immigrant languages like Spanish and may not, today, even apply to Italian as a FL. Given that a large proportion of the Swiss population are L_1 speakers of German or French, English can numerically be seen as vying with French to become *the* majority FL language in Switzerland.

English is not, of course, an official Swiss national language, but it is sometimes used for *intra*national communication (i.e. communication between Swiss) in some Swiss speech communities, particularly those where international ties are important, such as scientific research, banking, the pharmaceutical and precision industries, music entertainment, tourism and Geneva-based international organisations. Does this necessarily mean that English has to be "in einem gewissen Konkurrenzverhältnis zu den

Landessprachen" (LÜDI et al. 1997: 495)? This will partly depend on how English spreads in Switzerland, as spread it will, and on how the Swiss people react to more widespread use of English (see sections 4 and 5).

In summary, English as a L_1 is, in a purely numerical sense, a minority language in this country, but shows none of the features of a minority language that are characteristic of, say, Romansh. As a FL, however, English is likely to become, if it is not already, the majority language in Switzerland. Thus English is in the paradoxical position in Switzerland, as in many other countries, of being both a minority and a majority language. Internationally, English has had a history of expanding its influence in Asian and African countries often to the detriment, in the sense of minorisation, of local languages (see, e.g. KACHRU 1986 or PENNYCOOK 1994 for critical analyses of this phenomenon). World English is, therefore, often seen as a dominant language worldwide. In the next section, we explore one aspect of this phenomenon.

II. Use of English in the Swiss scientific community

The language use of researchers could be investigated in terms of which language scientists choose for: 1. terminology; 2. interpersonal communication in doing research; 3. presenting scientific findings. In this section we focus on just the third aspect of Swiss scientists' use of English, namely how Swiss researchers report on their research.

Part of our research (reported in more detail in MURRAY & DINGWALL 1997) on Swiss scientists has involved finding out which language they use in presenting their research findings in: talks and papers, research reports, Master's theses and doctoral dissertations. The results for talks and papers are based on self-reports from a questionnaire we have been distributing to Swiss scientists since 1996. We asked 110 junior and senior researchers in both French- and German-speaking areas of Switzerland how many of their articles and talks over the past five years had been in English. The average number in the humanities and social sciences was under a third (32%), whereas it was over half in the natural sciences (57%) and nearly 80% in the life sciences (79%). The findings of students who participated in a seminar on "English at the University of Zürich" tend to bear out our results. For example, biologists and biochemists at Zürich University reported that all their recent published articles were in English (WANNER 1998)

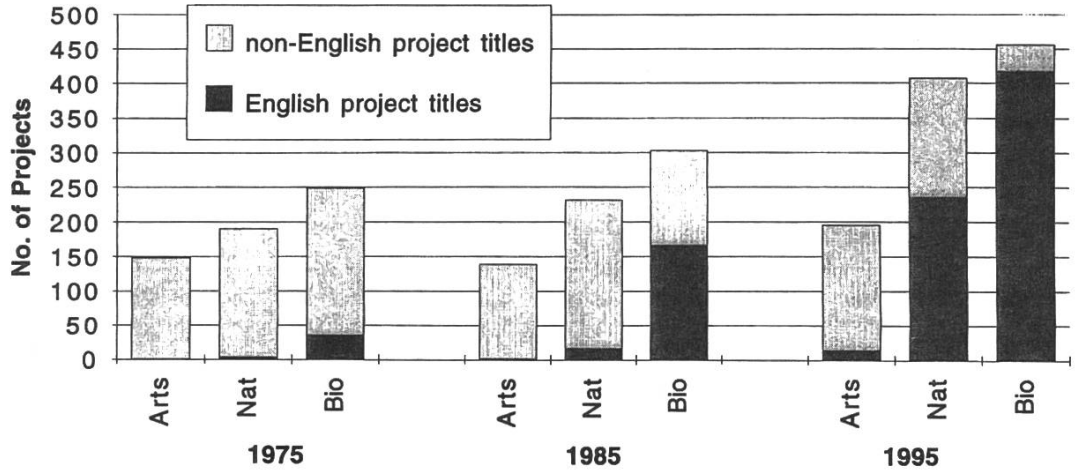
Table 1: Percentage of talks and papers in English over the past five years

Humanities and Social Sciences	32%
Natural Sciences	57%
Biomedical researchers	79%

Number of respondents = 110

We have also traced changes over the past 20 years in the language used in project proposals selected for financial support by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) in 1975, 1985 and 1995[1]. The graph (Fig. 1) shows that in 1975 the number of English titles was very low in all disciplines and had only increased slightly (7%) in the humanities (*Arts*) by 1995. For the natural sciences (*Nat*), the proportion rose to over half in English (58%) in 1995. The increase has been most dramatic in biomedicine (*Bio*), with a six-fold increase from 1975 (14%) to 1995 (91%).

Language of Swiss National Science Project Titles



For doctoral dissertations, records of the titles of those written at Swiss universities indicate that the number written in English more than tripled between 1975 and 1991 (MURRAY & DINGWALL 1997). It seems as if many junior researchers in Switzerland have realized that producing their doctoral dissertations in English could help their careers. At Zürich, student researchers found that not only were an increasing percentage of students planning to do their dissertations in English, but that there had been a trickle down effect on Master's theses (*mémoires* or *Lizentiate*) in some subjects too. Thus, WANNER

[1] Changes in SNSF language policy have, of course, played a role here, so that, for example, project proposals in the life sciences are now required to be in English.

(1998) found that 9 out of 11 postgraduate biology students had written their Master's theses in English.

The fact that the use of English among Swiss researchers has increased may not seem so very surprising, but the speed, extent and pattern of this increase are nothing short of remarkable:

- First, English has spread incredibly fast over the past twenty years;
- Secondly, English has greatly expanded its influence into different areas of Swiss academia and is increasingly making its presence felt in different disciplines, with the life sciences leading the way. The Swiss national languages still prevail in reporting on research intended for practitioners in Switzerland (e.g. medical doctors, foresters, etc.), but even in these areas English is becoming more important.
- Thirdly, the pressure to use English has been moving down the academic hierarchy, so that it is now the norm to write up research in English in some fields, such as biology, not just at the level of the scientific paper, but also at that of the dissertation, with some students even opting or having to write their Master's theses and term papers in English.

Clearly, English has become the majority language in Swiss scientific circles.

3. Attitudes to the dominance of English in science

As the findings reported in section 2 imply, English can play a major role in a researcher's career. A large measure of professional success depends on the favourable reception of his/her work by peers, and one way of quantifying this reception is to count the number of times a publication is referred to by other authors. Indeed, many scientists are evaluated in terms of how many times their name appears in the internationally recognised citation index relevant to their field of work. Since citation indices are usually compiled by American organisations, the proportion of English language journals considered in counting citations is unrepresentatively high. Therefore (although there are also other reasons), ambitious researchers of all nationalities increasingly feel pressure to publish in English. The possible negative consequences of this trend have been discussed at some length (e.g. in AMMON 1990 or MONTADA et al. 1995). For non-native English speaker researchers, the main personal disadvantage is thought to be restricted access to the discourse community of international science, because, as TRAXEL (1979: 68) puts it, "Ein Wissenschaftler wird - von Ausnahmen abgesehen - nur in der eigenen Sprache

einigermassen gut schreiben können". But is this true? And is the pressure to use English felt to be a personal disadvantage by all non-English-speaking scientists?

Our more extensive survey of Swiss university researchers included several items aimed at capturing their reactions to the dominance of English in science. First, we asked respondents how they felt the predominant role of English in research affected their careers. Our sample covered universities in the German- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland and included researchers in the humanities, natural sciences, and medicine. Specifically, we asked:

> In scientific communication, English is used more than any other language. How do you feel this affects your career? *(Please choose one:)*
> - It is a major handicap.
> - It is a slight disadvantage.
> - There is no effect.
> - It is an advantage.

Responses to this question are shown in Table 2. They indicate, first of all, that very few researchers in Switzerland appear to regard having to use English as a major handicap, although a considerable percentage feel it is a slight disadvantage. A slightly higher percentage of respondents felt that the pressure to use English had no effect on their careers or was actually an advantage.

Table 2. Swiss researchers' perceptions of how having to use English affects their careers

major handicap	slight disadvantage	no effect	advantage
4% (N=7)	43% (N=67)	29% (N=45)	24% (N=37)

Breaking down our data according to major disciplines, however, reveals some differences between them. The main difference is that a much higher percentage of researchers in the humanities perceive the pressure to communicate in English to be a major or minor disadvantage (71%), and relatively few see it as an advantage (11%). The explanation offered by several respondents (and one which ties in with our experience) was that papers in the humanities rely far more than those in the "hard" sciences on choice of words, rhetorical devices and careful argumentation to make their points, and are thus much more dependent on the actual language used for their impact.

Table 3. Swiss researchers' perceptions of English classified by major discipline

	major handicap	slight dis-advantage	no effect	advantage
humanities	11% (N=3)	60% (N=16)	18% (N=5)	11% (N=3)
natural sciences	2% (N=2)	40% (N=32)	33% (N=27)	25% (N=20)
biomedical sciences	4% (N=2)	40% (N=19)	27% (N=13)	29% (N=14)

Discovering that non-English-speaking researchers are so fundamentally divided in their perceptions of the role English plays in their careers made us curious about possible reasons. We therefore asked our respondents to comment on their responses, and also, to say whether and why they felt more comfortable writing a paper in English or in their L_1. The wide variety of comments makes it virtually impossible to quantify them in any meaningful way, so we present just a selection as further explication of the basic attitudes presented in Tables 2 and 3.

First let us look at comments made to support the view that *the dominance of English is an advantage.* English is regarded by many respondents as being a clear and simple language that is intrinsically easy to learn. Others claim that they have become adept at writing in English through long exposure:

> I feel quite comfortable writing in English, since I know all technical words in English, and not in any other languages (not even in my mother tongue!) (Biochemist, L_1=Italian)

Some, in fact, have become so accustomed to using English terms that writing a text in their L_1 means struggling to find a translation for these terms:

> Meist ist es einfacher, in Englisch zu schreiben, da die meisten fachspezifischen Wörter sich nur schwer übersetzen lassen. (Astrophysicist, L_1=German)

We collected many comments of this type, some of which were linked with the notion that using only one language, English, simplifies and streamlines scientific communication between researchers since it involves using just one set of agreed terms. But English is not always chosen for reasons of communicative efficiency: it can have symbolic value as well. In the humanities, where there is more language choice in scientific communication, publishing in English can bring prestige, or, as this post-doctoral researcher puts it:

> Writing in English is somewhat trendy, i.e. you can prove yourself as a 'tough guy', measuring yourself in the international scientific arena - and it's good for your CV. (Historian, L_1=Italian)

Finally, having to use English can be an advantage for certain researchers because it levels the linguistic playing field. This respondent, a biologist from Lugano who lives and works in Bern/Zurich, regards using English as an intranational communication strategy, which serves to make things fairer for her by reducing the home advantage of German-speaking colleagues since everyone is a non-native speaker of English:

> Well, here in the German part of Switzerland it is for me easier to "fight" for my research in English than in German, since my colleagues are German mother tongue and I would have no chance to compete against them! It is somewhat better to speak and write in a foreign language, in that way I can have the same chances as the Swiss Germans. (Biologist, L_1=Italian)

We now turn to the comments supporting the view that the widespread use of *English for scientific communication is a personal disadvantage*. There were fewer comments on disadvantages than advantages, and we have grouped them into four main areas. First of all, a great many of our respondents felt that communication in English represented a personal disadvantage because, as a medical researcher from Lausanne wrote, "il est toujours plus facile d'écrire dans sa langue maternelle". Interestingly, this argument was always expressed as a general rule, not as an individual opinion.

Secondly, a few respondents expressed worry about the linguistic effects of increasing monolingualism in science, i.e., that languages such as Italian, French and German might in due course be unable to deal with the more technical or academic aspects of scientific discourse:

> Auch wenn es notwendig ist, dass man sich auf eine gemeinsame Sprache für Artikel einigt, finde ich es schade, dass sich die deutsche Sprache kaum mehr weiterentwickelt, sondern einfach englische Ausdrücke übernimmt und somit etwas verarmt. (Microbiologist, L_1=German)

The loss of cognitive territory in a language - its restriction to certain areas of life and exclusion from others - is clearly a matter for concern and possibly a symptom of incipient minorisation of major languages worldwide. English has made immense territorial gains around the world as specialist discourse communities as well as university curricula have become international. Although this trend appears to be universal, we think the possible consequences of such terminological limitation should be subject to further debate.

Continuing with the theme of loss, we also had several comments about the negative effects of English on the special Swiss heritage of multilingual communication:

> Living in a country with several cultures I feel a bit sad about losing the ability to communicate with other citizens in their language (above all in French). [But] because I have to improve my English I will not be able to invest as much in my French language skills as I would like. (Economist, L_1=German)

Here it is worth noting that the equation is formulated so that a gain in English automatically means a loss in French, a common but misconceived way of viewing the acquisition of foreign languages as a zero-sum game.

Finally, several (German- and French-speaking) Swiss researchers expressed the opinion that English native speakers have an unfair advantage in the competition to be published. Unlike the Italian-speaking biologist quoted above, who felt that English levelled the playing field for her in contact with German-speaking colleagues, these respondents felt that having to use English in competition with native speakers of English influenced their chances negatively. One remarked that:

> I would prefer a more "neutral" scientific language (e.g., like Esperanto) as a lingua franca ... for reasons of more equal opportunities. (Psychologist, L_1=German).

Although our survey turned up a number of statements voicing concern about the dominance of English in science, these were outweighed by positive comments on the growing use of English. Although it is conceivable that respondents were being careful not to offend us as L_1 speakers of English[2], it looks as though, attitudinally as well as numerically, English is set to continue its domination of scientific communication for some time yet. In the next section we extend our enquiry into the future of English by looking at the roles and functions of English in Switzerland as a whole.

4. The uses of English in Switzerland

As in many other countries today, English is a fact of life in Switzerland. It is used by Swiss nationals as a language of wider communication in international settings. Through the music and entertainment industries it has also become enormously popular with young people. Borrowings from the English lexicon, both old and new, are a daily feature of Swiss media, advertising and informal conversation. It is even used to some extent as an *intra*national language. The varied settings in which English can be found in Switzerland point to the fact that it has taken on a number of different linguistic functions within the country. Here we look at just three of these functions.

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2 We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to us.

First let us consider *the use of English as a language of wider communication.* This occurs in a number of varied domains: in organisations dedicated to international development and cooperation, in multinational and Swiss firms engaged in international business, and, as we have shown, in science and technology. In addition, Switzerland's geographical features have prompted its railways, and probably its large tourist industry, to adopt English as a fifth language (cf. HOHL 1997). All these uses of English can be attributed to a desire for greater political, commercial or academic success in dealing with the world outside Switzerland - or, in some cases, the part of the world that comes to Switzerland. The growing pressure to include more hours of English in the Swiss school curriculum as well as the popularity of English courses in adult education testify to the strength of this motivation. It is important to remember that the use of English we are describing here is that of a global language of wider communication. Although it may put competitive pressure on other languages of wider communication, the dominant position of English as a global language cannot be regarded as a threat to local Swiss L1s.

As a number of our survey respondents noted, *English can also serve as a neutral alternative to other languages.* Of course there is nothing inherently neutral about English, but in situations where it is a matter of social or political significance to use one local or national language, and thereby significantly not use another, a third 'neutral' linguistic alternative is sought, and English, for various reasons, is frequently chosen. This has happened at national policy level in India, Singapore and other countries in Asia and Africa. Through informants we know that it also sometimes happens among Swiss in Switzerland, in situations where speakers of two different Swiss languages seek a diplomatic or face-saving alternative to speaking one or the other's first language, for example at Swiss company board meetings, at intranational symposia, and at popular music or sports gatherings. A further reason reported for using English in some of these Swiss multilingual encounters is that English provides pronoun neutrality in personal conversations, allowing speakers to use *you* instead of forcing them to choose between *tu/vous*, *du/Sie*, *tu/Lei.* [3]

It is the potential use of English as a Swiss *intra*national language that so upsets Swiss politicians and policy makers, not because any of the three main languages are threatened with a loss of native speakers or territory, but because it undermines certain assumptions about Swiss cultural identity. The use of English as a language of wider communication within Switzerland is regarded

3 It should be emphasised that this use of English as a Swiss intranational language has not been quantified, nor has it to our knowledge been studied ethnographically (but see DÜRMÜLLER 1992).

as a direct threat to the assumption that the L_2 of choice for each Swiss citizen should be one of the other two official languages, and also to the ideal of Switzerland as a multilingual society (but only in terms of the Swiss native languages). Thus, over the last decade at least, educationalists and politicians have repeatedly warned the Swiss public that using English as a second language within the country will lead to a loss of cultural identity:

> Für eine mehrsprachige Nation wie die Schweiz wäre aber die Aussicht auf Englisch als jene Sprache, die die Schweizer in Zukunft im Gespräch mit anderen Landsleuten verwenden, alles andere als eine erfreuliche Entwicklung. Sprachliche Uniformisierung unter Verlust der sprachlichen Traditionen des eigenen Landes sollte nicht der Preis sein, den man für den Anschluss an die Fortschrittsgesellschaft zu entrichten hat. (EDI 1989:6)

However, what is at stake is not so much a multilingual tradition as the delicate political balance of power between the Swiss-German majority and the French- and Italian-speaking minorities, a balance which to a large extent rests on respect for the other national cultures and languages as well as on a tacit willingness to learn and use each other's languages for intranational communication.

Concern about the effects of English on Swiss cultural plurality does not extend to the business sector: English is frequently used in Swiss product names and in advertising. One reason for this is that labelling and signs in a multilingual country can present awkward linguistic choices for suppliers. Using only one of the local languages may trigger resentment, while using all three or four languages may cost more and appear optically unattractive. In such a situation English can, once again, provide a seemingly neutral solution. But linguistic neutrality is not the only reason why pet food, beverages, furniture and sporting goods are given English names, advertised in English phrases, and decorated with English words. The English language has for some time now been used *as a cultural symbol*, although what it symbolizes varies with setting and culture. For example, in Switzerland as elsewhere English is associated with the trendier aspects of popular culture, and youth culture in particular. It can also be used to connote competitiveness or high performance because of its association with business and technology. In addition, because FL speakers of English tend to regard themselves as an elite minority, English advertising slogans may be designed to flatteringly remind them of their exclusive status. Finally, CHESHIRE & MOSER (1994) found that in some Swiss magazine advertisements English was being used rather subtly to remind readers of the international (i.e. favourable) image of Switzerland and Swiss products .

English, then, can be seen to have a number of functions and roles in present-day Switzerland. Some of these roles are related to the dominant or majority role of English in global communication (although it is far from being spoken by a majority of the world's people!); other roles relate more directly to the balance of majority/minority linguistic power within Switzerland. With this in mind, let us finally look at the roles English may play in the next 20-50 years.

5. The future of English in Switzerland

The future of English in Switzerland will be determined not so much by the community of researchers, but by the general public, who influence official language policies and set or follow unofficial linguistic trends. Here we make some tentative predictions for the three functions of English we described above, and then put forward some recommendations for action on the part of applied linguists.

5.1. English as an international language

We are by no means alone in thinking that English will become even more important as a world language, not least through the spread of the Internet (see e.g. CRYSTAL 1997 or GRADDOL 1997). Since it is not now foreseeable that English will lose its role as the major language of wider communication, it will continue to be widely, if not more extensively, used to express Switzerland's international identity as a leading nation in business, technology, diplomacy and science. Those Swiss who want to be able to influence Switzerland's performance on the world stage will have to learn English, a situation with which many non-Swiss are also familiar. Kachru describes the Indian experience thus:

> English initiates one into the caste that has power, and, more important, that controls vital knowledge about the miracles of science and technology. Thus (...) there is at present a "hunger" and an "indecent passion" for acquiring English. (...)" (KACHRU 1986: 1)

Kachru highlights the power of English in providing access to knowledge, a point that many of our respondents also made. In the interests of enabling equal access to this knowledge, it is important that as many people as possible learn to use English and in Switzerland there does seem to be a real passion for learning English. More than lipservice is paid to this passion by, e.g. the recent (EDK 1998) proposal to make English obligatory for all Swiss schoolchildren along with another Swiss national language. Regardless of whether this policy is

actually implemented or not, we can confidently predict that more English will be taught to children at ever younger ages either at school or privately. Good English is seen as another asset in finding jobs in a highly competitive workplace, and parents are increasingly opting to enable their children to acquire this asset young.

One effect of this trend to learn English earlier will be that the current high demand for general English language courses for adults at the beginner and intermediate levels will drop off over the next ten to fifteen years, whereas there is likely to be a boom in courses in English for special purposes (for business, technology, law, etc.). Courses teaching various skills (e.g. how to use the Internet) through the medium of English will probably become more widespread and immersion programmes at schools and in the workplace more common. Further, we also predict that more companies with an international outlook will adopt English as their company language, as many multinational companies have already done.

English as a/the language of instruction at Swiss universities will probably not become a general policy for a long time due to the lack of coordination among Swiss universities and their tendency to regard the competence of students in foreign languages to be the responsibility of the individual (see MURRAY & DINGWALL, 1997). In Swiss science English will continue to spread through the corridors of universities and research institutes, spilling out into lecture-halls and down the academic hierarchy (cf. AMMON's 1998 proposal to use more English for lectures at universities in Germany). Our surveys have uncovered little resentment of the encroachment of English in these areas; it is like water: few appear to have strong feelings about it.

On the other hand, PHILLIPSON & SKUTTKNAB-KANGAS (1996) express a concern that has been voiced in some circles in Switzerland and that we also found in some responses to our survey of Swiss scientists: namely, that the spread of English is contributing to an impoverishment of other languages of science. The fear is that these languages will be giving up spheres of activity and registers to English, so that it will no longer be possible to talk about, say, genetic research in French, Italian or German. While this is certainly happening to some extent, it is scaremongering to say that a diglossic situation with English as the "High" language is imminent.

A watchful eye on the publishing practices of public institutions in Switzerland is called for, however, if the Swiss national languages are not to be subjected to minorisation in the sense of becoming the junior partners in a

diglossic situation. This does not necessarily mean having new regulations and quotas, but it does suggest that linguists in particular should be recording and writing about current linguistic practices in the country so that the ongoing public debate about the roles of the different languages in Switzerland can take place in an informed manner.

5.2. English as a cultural symbol

The future use of English as a cultural symbol will be largely subject to the whims of fashion, and English will certainly lose its exclusivity as it spreads. It may acquire more negative connotations, e.g. through association with particular cultures, political situations or events, so it makes little sense to make predictions here. If English were a liquid, in its function as a language of wider international communication it would be like water: neutral in taste and provoking few strong reactions; however, as a cultural symbol it would be like a wine, or perhaps Coca Cola, with people tending either to love it or hate it, their tastes imbued with cultural meanings.

5.3. English as a neutral intranational FL

The move from English being a minority FL to becoming a majority one raises issues that are important for Switzerland's internal identity as a multilingual country. As CRYSTAL (1997: 116) says:

> The need for intelligibility and the need for identity often pull people and countries in opposing directions. The former motivates the learning of an international language, with English the first choice in most cases; the latter motivates the promotion of ethnic language and culture.

The more Swiss there are who have English as a FL, the more potential there is for intranational communication in English. ANDRES & WATTS (1993) argue that English as an intranational language in Switzerland is not a probability in the near future, although we may well see an increase in English borrowings into Swiss national languages. But even if more and more Swiss opt for internal communication in English it is wrong to blame the worldwide dominance of English. The choice will be a Swiss one based on what the Swiss decide are the key aspects of their linguistic identity and on their attitudes to their fellow Swiss.

Many Swiss seem to be calling for more outward-looking policies that rise above a tendency to be inward-looking, and that move beyond treating Switzerland as a unique player in the global arena. They seem to be going

through an identity crisis: re-examining their past, ending the country's isolation, relinquishing Switzerland's special status as a politically neutral country and opening it up to Europe. Language has played a key role in Swiss identity for some time, but the growing importance of English (and, possibly, the presence of hundreds of thousands speakers of other non-Swiss languages) is forcing Switzerland to reassess its linguistic priorities and its image of itself as a multilingual, rather than a plurilingual society. At present, Swiss politicians tend to reiterate past language policies, but language practices on the Swiss streets are following their own course. If it is a myth to say that most ordinary Swiss are functional multilinguals so that there is little communication between the different language regions, might it not then be time to face up to this reality? Rather than seeing the spread of English as a threat to Swiss multilingualism and thus to Swiss national identity, widespread use of English could be seen as a chance to encourage real dialogue between the different language regions in Switzerland by allowing it to take place on a more equal footing.

We realise that these are tricky and sensitive issues. It may well be that the spread of English calls for some active promotion of the Swiss national languages. Clearly, a great deal of important work is going on in the area of language teaching and in supporting Romansh. But besides these valuable efforts, how can applied linguists help ensure that language policies in Switzerland are based on well-founded principles rather than folk beliefs?

5.4. Recommendations for applied linguists

Applied linguists can, we believe, influence the folklinguistics that is so popular in Switzerland by subjecting some of its assumptions about language and linguistic practices to critical scrutiny and by feeding their conclusions into public debate. For example, some common misconceptions that need more public exposure if a well-informed debate about language policy is to take place are:

- the Swiss are functionally multilingual;
- learning foreign languages is a zero-sum game, so that the more you learn of one, the less "room" there is to learn another. This misconception was well put by a French teacher who maintained that: "Il n'y a personne qui ne sache parler plus de deux langues";
- it is only possible to write well in one language;
- borrowing terms from another language means assuming that language's culture;

- learning English means adopting American culture (as if this were a unified entity!);
- mixing languages is unnatural.

In addition, applied linguists need to be active in documenting the spread of English in Switzerland in order to distinguish prejudice from reality. They are also in a position to raise awareness about linguistic practices and, if necessary, question them. As more varieties of English are recognised, a dictionary of Swiss English may be called for.

Although languages tend to have an ecology of their own, we do not have to sit back and wring our hands since we may be able to at least raise awareness about linguistic issues, if not influence policy. As far as facing up to some of the implications of English as a global language is concerned, Switzerland is not alone in being exposed to the tension arising from "the need for information and the need for identity" that Crystal mentions. Other countries are facing similar dilemmas. No one knows how English will develop as a world language, but it looks set to be in a dominant position for at least the next generation. As Switzerland and the world move towards the 21st century, it is up to us all to make sure that the spread of English does not lead to the linguistic impoverishment of minority languages, but that we can extract a 'win-win' result out of what is not, after all, a zero-sum game.

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