The Sociolinguistics of Diglossia in Switzerland

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1 Multilingualism in Switzerland

Switzerland has a unique language landscape of four national languages. The experience of the state with its diverse languages teaches that this harmony is an enduring value that needs constant protection. Switzerland has managed to develop a political and administrative system that effectively secures diversity, national cohesion and local autonomy. The federal policy with regard to languages is realised according to "the ideology of multilingual Switzerland" defined as "a set of beliefs in the desirability of retaining the multilingual nature of Switzerland and enhancing the ability of the Swiss to communicate with each other across ethnolinguistic boundaries" (Watts, 2001: 303). The Swiss created a complete communication culture where particularly the political sphere necessitates a common language (cf. Stępkowska, 2019). Indeed, the question of language use at the communal, cantonal and federative levels is distinguished by legally sanctioned rules.

Multilingual experience and the traditional Swiss quadrilingualism inform the social system, which is guarded by two complementary rules, namely language freedom and the territoriality principle. Language freedom gives everyone the right to use their mother tongue, which means that federal authorities will respect the official language chosen by individual citizens. In turn, according to the territoriality principle, cantons decide about official languages in formal contexts used within their jurisdiction and territory, by which individuals are obliged to adapt to the language of the canton. The territoriality principle restricts language freedom by specifying that the communication between organs of administration and citizens is carried out in one of the four Swiss national languages, i.e. in the language of the majority group in a given area. It is not the country, but the canton (or commune)

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that determines and executes the territoriality principle. Switzerland is made up of 26 cantons; 17 of them are German-speaking cantons, 4 French-speaking cantons, 3 bilingual cantons (French and German), 1 trilingual (German, Italian and Romansh) and 1 Italian-speaking canton.

Yet the complexity of the Swiss linguistic situation includes much more: the presence of dialects, the revised spelling rules of Standard German, the regional dialects in German-speaking Switzerland, the peculiarity of literary works written in Swiss German dialects and the tensions brought about by the excessive use of dialects, which makes the life of all language groups difficult and insecure. As a country, Switzerland established a culture of maintaining and reconciling diversity (Weilenmann, 1925: 227). The value of linguistic diversity manifests itself in a specific Swiss mentality, which acknowledges the will of the majority as the sovereign authority, but at the same time recognizes the inalienable rights of minorities (Steinberg, 1996: 254). The rare historical pattern that contributed to Swiss multilingualism is a voluntary federation seen as the union of different ethnic groups or states, called cantons, under the political control of one state (Fasold, 1984: 11).

Switzerland has German, French and Italian as official languages, and Romansh as the fourth language of a national status only. But, the multilingualism of Switzerland, as it is quite commonly considered, is not an exception. Switzerland is special as an example of a country that very early in its history ensured constitutional equality for its three, and later on, four languages; however, societal multilingualism is not tantamount to the individual bi- or multilingualism (Sebba, 2011). The type of societal multilingualism in Switzerland describes a country that consists of several monolingual groups (Sridhar, 1996: 47). Those Swiss who speak regularly German or Swiss German amount to over 60%. French is the first language of about 20% of the Swiss. Italian does not go beyond 7% of the population and Romansh does not exceed half a percentage point. Multilingual individuals may function within more than one of these language groups and their language choice is determined by a string of factors, such as the interlocutors, the role relationship, domain, topic, venue, channel of communication, type of interaction and phatic function (Clyne, 1997).

This chapter focuses on diglossia with a special reference to literacy in the Swiss context. The sections that follow are planned to contribute to an overall sociolinguistic picture of German-speaking Switzerland. They accentuate the most original characteristics of this part of the country, such as diglossia with bilingualism, and the ideology of the Swiss German dialect. The use of English in Switzerland is mentioned inasmuch as it resembles the extended diglossia. Next, the situation of literacy is discussed by clarifying issues related to the contexts of dialect acquisition and the schooling of the standard language. Literacy, as regular events, has a role in raising children both at home and in school. It is purposeful to focus on these repeated literacy events to understand better about how children are taught to read and write. Thus, literacy is understood as a type of "communicative practice" (Grillo, 1989: 8) realized by schooled literacy and second language literacy. Finally, the concluding section takes an overview of the effects of diglossia against the wider background of the official multilingualism in Switzerland.

2   German-Speaking Switzerland

German-speaking Switzerland divides into three geographical regions that corre-spond to the three major dialect groups: Low Alemannic (Basel), High Alemannic (Bern, Zurich and a part of Grisons), and Highest Alemannic (some parts of Valais and Grisons). Each city has its own dialect that, in turn, has its local varieties which further comprise sub-dialects. Despite varied lexicon and phonetics, these varieties remain similar to each other, which enables inter-dialectal communication (Widmer, 2004). The German Swiss are the biggest language group (c. 65%). The main prob-lem in the relations with the other language groups in Switzerland is diglossia which is particularly prominent in the German-speaking area. *Standard German* is often called High German (*Hochdeutsch*) or Written German (*Schriftdeutsch*) since is used mostly in writing, but reluctantly (Strässler, 2001: 956). Next to it, there is *Swiss Standard German* which is a supraregional variety of Standard German and used in education. This standardized variety has a written form and differs from Standard German (in Germany) with regard to its lexicon, orthography and gram-mar. These two national varieties, Standard German and Swiss Standard German, are mutually intelligible. Swiss Standard German is based on the lexicon of Standard German. In the Swiss German variety of Standard German, there is a discrete group of words, the so-called Helvetisms (*Helvetismen*). These words are used only in Switzerland and not known in Germany or Austria, or are words that in Switzerland take on new meanings (Schläpfer, 1985: 97). The current records of Helvetisms amount to at least thirty thousand, but there are probably many more (cf. Kalberer & Meier, 2019, Troxler & Gsteiger, 2018).

The Swiss speak neither Standard German nor Swiss Standard German. They speak a variety of Swiss German dialects, henceforth *Swiss German*. Swiss German, also referred to as *Mundart* or *Schwyzertütsch*, is a somewhat artificial blanket name for more than thirty dialectal variants from the Alemannic group spoken in Switzerland (Strässler, 2001: 955). Swiss German is widely used in public life and especially in the media (radio and television). The Swiss regard it as their mother tongue, though officially is has no status of a separate language. The most striking curiosities of *Schwyzertütsch* occur in pronunciation and stress that changes the sound of words (cf. Hove, 2013). Helvetisms combined with an ethnic style of speaking that includes prosodic and phonetic variations have become an authentic strategy of the Swiss to differentiate themselves from the Standard German spoken by their neighbours. Swiss German dialects are mutually intelligible. All of them have a two-tense system (present and present perfect) and some tend to follow the word order of French rather than German (Strässler, 2001: 956). In fact, the linguis-tic distance between any of the Swiss dialects and Standard German makes mutual comprehension difficult or even impossible. The lexical and phonological differ-ences add to the morphological and syntactic ones. These and many other aspects of the differences between Standard German and Swiss German dialects have been tackled in detail by several authors (e.g. Bossong, 1994, Dürscheid & Hefti, 2006, Haas, 2000, Scharloth, 2006, Siebenhaar & Wyler, 1997).

Swiss German dialects enjoy the preferred status within the family domain, where they are used by over 90% of German Swiss (Lüdi & Werlen, 2005: 36). Similarly, dialects remain most popular with nearly 98% of German Swiss communicating in Swiss German at their workplaces. These numbers prove that dialects have permeated virtually all generations and social strata in any type of contact and setting, without exception. The speakers of Swiss German consider using Standard German as inappropriate and unacceptable. Swiss Standard German is used only for writing and for any public address. Therefore, it is quite unusual to refer to a concept of a 'standard language' which is not the standard. As the result, in German-speaking Switzerland the status of the standard language does not correlate with its identification as the language of 'the heart'. Rather, in the context of the generalized use of the dialect, the standard language is perceived as a foreign language. In this perspective, Swiss German is more a social than a linguistic category, because it is defined by the attitude of its speakers towards the dialect and towards Swiss Standard German. Furthermore, Swiss Standard German and Swiss German dialects are in a complicated relationship inscribed in the traditional framework of *diglossia*.

2.1   Bilingualism and Diglossia

In multilingual societies, different languages are usually assigned different tasks. This interrelation of linguistic form and social function has already been examined as a phenomenon labelled *diglossia*. Ferguson first wrote about diglossia in his 1959 article which then became the benchmark for the term. He was intrigued by a special kind of bilingualism in which speakers conditioned the use of a specific language variety by a specific type of circumstances. Another interesting fact was that two language varieties, standard language and regional dialect, coexisted fulfilling clearly disjoint functions throughout a community. The diglossic view of bilingualism makes use of domains which are important in the macro-analysis of functional distribution in multilingual communities (Fishman, 1972: 44). Such communities use two or more languages in intra-societal communication. Diglossia tends to reinforce social distinctions by ascribing languages to discrete domains as "the compartmentalization of varieties" (Romaine, 1994: 47), which leads to a limited access to some domains due to the mismatch of variety with context (cf. Fasold, 1984, Martinet, 1986: 245).

Ferguson described *diglossia* as a type of bilingualism denoting the coexistence of two distinct varieties of the same language. These varieties differ in status according to nine categories, such as function, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, stability, grammar, lexicon, and phonology. Diglossia is not the case of the alternate use of the standard and its variety to be chosen at will by an individual; but it is the case where "two distinct (…) languages are used (…) throughout a speech community each with a clearly defined role" (Ferguson, 1959/1972: 233). The standard variety fulfils 'high' functions appropriate for formal contexts, while 'low' functions are linked to dialectal forms used in the private life. Thus, the two

varieties, high (H) and low (L), have separate functions. Another important feature of diglossia is prestige, which relates to the speaker's attitude. The H variety is superior to the L variety in a number of respects, for example with regard to literary heritage. As to acquisition, the L variety is acquired at home whereas the H variety is learnt at school. Standardisation refers to the H variety with norms for orthography, grammar and pronunciation, while stability describes diglossia as a long-lasting phenomenon. As regards grammar, vocabulary and phonology, there are differences that can be noticed between H and L varieties. Though H and L are varieties of the same language, they cannot be linguistically too similar and having differences just in style or register. Diglossia results from a specific social context and not from the social identity of the speaker (Hudson, 2002: 6).

Later on, Fishman (1967) proposed the definition of extended diglossia which differed from Ferguson's original concept in two key aspects, namely the number of languages and the degree of linguistic difference between them. The two linguists agreed on the functional distribution between H and L varieties. Fishman (1967, 1988) broadened his concept of diglossia to include any degree of relatedness between languages and any number of them, but made it clear that it should not be confused with bilingualism. Notably, Fishman's concept of the extended diglossia is applicable on a global scale to refer to English when used for international communication in business and science, thereby confining local vernaculars to private spheres (cf. Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995: 487). There are fears that the prevalent dominance of English may lead to "a process of secondarization of all languages other than English" (Deneire, 1998: 394). In the pattern of a global diglossia, English tends to fulfil the function of the H variety in science, while other languages correspond to L varieties (cf. Mühleisen, 2003). Some recent research on English as a lingua franca in the Swiss context have indicated the signs of its increased presence which cannot as yet be classified as a diglossic relationship of English and the Swiss vernaculars (cf. Stępkowska, 2013).

Ferguson (1959/1972) chose Alemannic Switzerland as one of the "defining cases" of diglossia. German-speaking Switzerland is characterized by an enduring diglossia due to a relative equilibrium between the Swiss Standard German and the Swiss German dialects (Martinet, 1986: 248), also described as the standard-with-dialects 'internal' diglossia (Myhill, 2009, Tollefson, 1983). According to Fishman (1967: 31), the Swiss-German cantons illustrate both diglossia and bilingualism, because Swiss German dialects fulfil all functions and have become parallel to Swiss Standard German. It may be argued that Swiss German dialects ceased to function as the complementary language variety in the diglossic model (Ris, 1990: 42). The progress of this situation was described by Pap (1990: 131) as the one "somewhere half-way between diglossia and bilingualism" (also Watts, 1991: 92, Watts & Smolicz, 1997: 277). Swiss Standard German has been relegated to the position of a second language, thereby moving the whole context towards the bilingual model or "oral bilingualism" (Kolde 1988: 526). Thus, the German Swiss may be regarded as bilinguals who speak a given Swiss German dialect while they read and write Swiss Standard German and, if need be, speak it in formal contexts (Weinreich, 1953/1968: 89, Fasold, 1984: 41). The result is that high German is

subordinated to dialect and serves as the written language and the lingua franca for communication with other Swiss who do not know the Alemannic dialects and with foreigners who can speak German (Dabène, 1994: 55). No Swiss German speaker would ever use Standard German in personal contact with another Swiss from a German-speaking canton (Hudson, 2002: 3, Keller, 1982: 91). In the opinion of some authors (Hogg et al., 1984, Weil & Schneider, 1997, Rash, 1998, Schläpfer, 1994), the expanded use of Swiss German renders the original concept of diglossia less applicable to the German-speaking part of Switzerland. The main problem presents the reception of spoken texts, which is conditioned by the medium and the content formulated either in the standard or dialect form (Kolde, 1986). It is clear, then, that in German-speaking Switzerland the functional diglossia intertwines with a medial diglossia which puts an emphasis on the difference between written and spoken language.

2.2   The Ideology of the Dialect

German-speaking Switzerland presents an impressive concentration of dialects from the High Alemannic family which since 1750 are referred to as *Schwyzertütsch* (McRae, 1983: 68). Swiss German dialects symbolize "Swissness" (Watts, 1999: 75) or "non-Germanness" (Watts, 1999: 83). The use of dialects is perceived as an "in-group signal" (Lüdi, 1992: 56) or "a marker of group identity" (Schmid, 2001: 149), which is to exclude foreigners from getting "inside Switzerland" (Steinberg, 1996: 138). Dialect is the language of the childhood and family of nearly 70% of the Swiss population (Steinberg, 1996: 133). The Swiss German dialects are politically significant as a distinguishing feature between Switzerland and Germany. Swiss German dialects are also meant to stand for "local patriotism, political decentraliza-tion, a safeguard against possible outside interference in the affairs of Switzerland and the guardian of tradition" (Watts, 2001: 302). Such attitudes to dialects are not intended against the other language groups in Switzerland, but "against other forms of German" (Watts, 1988: 330). The Alemannic dialects have a meaningful function because "for the Swiss, it is important to make clear to themselves and to others that they are not Germans, but a people apart" (Winter, 1993: 304, cf. Schwander, 1983).

Richard Watts (1999) describes the ideology of the dialect as a set of beliefs about Alemannic dialects. He writes about the higher "symbolic value" of dialects which are "in competition" with the standard, and that in German-speaking Switzerland dialects are "deliberately promoted as having a higher value" (Watts, 1999: 69). One of the peculiar consequences of the "ideology of the dialect" is that native German Swiss treat Swiss Standard German like "the first foreign language" (Watts, 1999: 74) since it is used in the written communication as the language of bureaucracy and formality. Swiss Standard German is used at schools, in the media, literature and most official situations. In turn, Swiss German dialects are spoken by all in the society, regardless of social or geographical background, age, education and profession. In the nationwide context this "ideology of the dialect" is so deeply

embedded that "the German-speaking Swiss would far rather communicate in English to a foreigner than in standard German" (Watts, 1999: 75).

In sum, the functional distinction between the H and L varieties in Switzerland is less clear-cut than originally suggested by Ferguson. His assumption about speakers switching between dialect and standard is based on the belief that, besides their dialect, they are fluent enough in the H variety. Watts observes an increased encroachment of the dialect upon the domains reserved for the standard, such as the media, school or religion. For this reason, Einar Haugen (1972: 332) calls Ferguson's selected L varieties a "mixed bag" and points to Swiss German as "a prideful symbol of Swiss nationality" in which status and intimacy do not necessarily stand in direct contrast.

3   The Overall Concept of Language Education

Although the language situation in the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland has been described as a medial diglossia, this distinction does not do justice to the reality, which is much more complex. Despite the suggested difference between written (Swiss Standard German) and spoken (Swiss German) language, dialects are quite common not only in the spoken format, but also in the written ones, e.g. text messages, e-mails, personal letters and other unofficial texts (Flubacher, 2013: 176). In its spoken form, Swiss German is used regardless of the situation, be it private or public (Lüdi et al., 1995: 32). Dialect is predominantly spoken in governmental institutions, churches, businesses, schools and universities, except for primary schools (Anders, 1990: 24). Swiss Standard German is not the language of choice in social interactions, thereby making room for the dialect in all areas and levels (Schläpfer, 1985). Already in 2000 the federal census indicated that over 90% of Swiss German families speak Swiss German dialects, while about 6% speak both dialect and Standard German. A similar trend of dialect expansion is observed within the professional sphere and reflected in the broadcasting industry. As to its written format, Swiss German dialects have no standard for orthography and grammar. Though the dialects are less literary, they are not considered more vulgar than the standard language. The choice of language for writing is determined by the type of sociocultural interaction, the communication context and the relationship between interlocutors. At present, the disputes concern the function of High German as the written language, because the dialect advances firmly in its written format, and makes headway even if it stays within the private sphere. Swiss German is widely used on electronic media where it may be encountered as text messages, emails, blogs and social networks. Moreover, the popularity of English puts it on a par with the standing of the official language in German-speaking Switzerland. The advantage of this situation allows the German Swiss to conveniently dodge the discomfort of verbalizing the written language (High German) in contact with non-native speakers of Swiss German (Widmer, 2004: 13).

In Switzerland, education and culture fall into the competencies of 26 cantons. It is the Swiss peculiarity that each canton has its own school system and decides which language to offer and at what stage. The federal system of education allows secondary schools to start at different ages in different cantons. This fact was the source of difficulties for school children whose families migrate between cantons, especially with regard to foreign languages. Soon the teachers' union initiated a fundamental reform in the Swiss educational system, which led the Board of Educational Ministers (BEM) to appoint a study group for the co-ordination of foreign language teaching in compulsory education across the country (Strässler, 2001: 962). This reform was only aimed at foreign language teaching; however, it resulted in a better co-ordination of the different school systems from all 26 cantons. The cantonal governments are obliged to provide for the minimal coordination between the schooling systems. From 1897 on, this is the task of BEM which is an assembly of all the governing councils, made up of cantonal ministers. BEM is a partner organization for the federal government in all matters of shared competencies, including optional education, vocational schools and universities. In 1975 BEM proposed that children in obligatory schools should learn a national language as the second language, namely German in the French-speaking cantons, and French in the German-speaking cantons and in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino.

The recommendations of the BEM to the cantons called for a structural reform, including the reform of methodology and subject matter. As regards structural changes, the second national language courses should start no later than in the fifth grade. Besides, the effort should be made to coordinate the entire teaching process understood as goals, subject matters, course books and study plans up to the end of compulsory education. The subjects should be balanced, i.e. the additional lessons may be added but at the cost of others which should be reduced. Teachers in primary schools should offer second language tuition, which requires extra teacher training and the need to prepare new course material. Many of these structural changes have been implemented and teachers have been offered the methodological guidelines worked out by the study group and recommended by the BEM. The order of introducing languages at school was left to regional or cantonal coordination, which resulted in rather disorderly sequences, yet Zurich was among the most reluctant cantons. Naturally, this turn of events adds not only to the complexity of organizational matters (timetables, exchange programmes, materials, teachers, etc.), but the main tensions resulting from multilingual education are brought about by attitudes towards individual languages, including the dialect.

One such example concerns attitudes towards French classes in Swiss German Switzerland (Ribeaud, 2013: 83). In September 1988 voters in the canton of Zurich rejected the citizens' initiative that aimed to thwart the introduction of French classes in primary schools. The reason for the rejection of French was that it would lead to too much fatigue for pupils and the diminishing significance of French. The latest offensive against French classes in the junior high schools of Zurich occurred in 2012 when a few members of the cantonal council put forward a demand that French for pupils from the 8th and 9th grades should be changed from an obligatory subject to a subject of choice. This time the argument was that pupils would be able

to better concentrate on German classes and that French was not very useful for them. Pupils from French-speaking regions of Switzerland are better off than their peers in the German Swiss regions because they have no problem with dialects. In fact, linguistically, they are almost in the same position as any of their foreign classmates from abroad.

This fact is crucial for the cantonal government, which gives shape to language policy. The solution was the introduction of Swiss Standard German as the universal obligation in kindergartens. In 2003 BEM issued a recommendation to use it in order to improve the language competence of children, starting from kindergartens. In 2008 the official suggestion focused on roughly dividing the language teaching in kindergartens into three parts: one for Swiss Standard German, one for the dialect, and the third part be left to the decision of an individual kindergarten teacher. This solution was not innovative, but rather tangled, as it left much room for interpretation. Yet it was enough to stir up polemics and opposed reactions. Out of 600 kindergarten teachers, who were affected by the council's decision, 480 were against Standard German (Ribeaud, 2013). The protesting kindergarten teachers received support from a bipartisan committee with a right-wing nationalist lead. This, in turn, set in motion an initiative for the dialect called "Yes for *Mundart* in kindergarten" (*Ja zur Mundart im Kindergarten*). It aimed at maintaining the dialect as the basic language, which boiled down to restoring the status *quo ante*, also in cantons other than Zurich.

4   Second Language Literacy

The Swiss model of communication assumes that every Swiss speaks his or her native tongue and is understood by their compatriots from other linguistic backgrounds. Besides the native tongue, a second national language is taught to attain the receptive and productive skills that enable to participate in active communication, whereas a third national language is taught primarily to be understood (Widmer et al., 1987: 101). In theory, the intranational communication of the Swiss is supposed to take the shape of the so-called Partner Language Model (*Partnersprachmodell*) (Dürmüller, 1992). In fact, the bilingual solution promoted by the Swiss educational policy works well only in the case of the two biggest language groups. In a contact situation, one interlocutor will have to demonstrate a full (passive and active) command of the second language. For the conversation to take place, one of the two available languages is chosen for communication. In the contact between the German Swiss and the French Swiss, either of them may use their native tongue (L1). It may be assumed that passive competence in a second language (L2) will allow the interlocutors to carry out a dialogue. And yet this is too optimistic an assumption because most German Swiss do not speak the German that the French Swiss learnt at schools.

The internal communication in multilingual Switzerland according to the above mentioned Partner Language Model stands a chance of functioning when each

interlocutor has in their individual repertoire the three national languages at their disposal. Dürmüller (1989: 5) presents in detail the optimal language combinations in repertoires of the Swiss from each of the three language groups, as well as the potential threat for these combinations in the form of English taking up the L2 position in each language group. In line with the Partner Language Model, the Swiss educational system aims to equip every citizen with at least elementary knowledge of a second national language. The results are different and many people, who complete their education at a secondary or a tertiary level, have at best a passive knowledge of the second national language. Such people may be classified as passive bilinguals who, nevertheless, may find it hard to communicate effectively or freely on every topic. Dürmüller (1994) argues that the Swiss most often grow up as monolinguals and learn the second language only when at school.

The recommendations of the Board of Educational Ministers refer to the choice, the sequence and the number of languages, the aims of foreign language tuition, the age of pupils eligible for the respective tuition, as well as methods and evaluation, including the consequences for teacher training and the improvement of teaching materials. All these issues fall within the competences of the Swiss cantons. The cantons are expected to provide transparent and coherent tuition of foreign language learning across the country by agreeing on binding objectives to be achieved by the end of compulsory education. In the German-speaking cantons, French is usually the second national language, and in the French-speaking part it is German, while the cantons of Ticino and the Grisons take into account the specific circumstances. In line with inter-cantonal agreements to reach the objectives, the cantons offer and decide on the order of the foreign languages.

Proficiency in different languages is not the prime objective of language teaching in compulsory school education. Rather, it is the motivation to further improve one's own individual language competence (Strässler, 2001: 969). All pupils acquire a basic knowledge of languages which they can use immediately and, if necessary, develop further on their own. Thus, school education equips pupils with a competence in language learning. Every graduate can work on a competence in a specific language or learn a new one if needed. It looks like the didactic objectives are essentially focused on skills rather than on knowledge. The teaching of the formal system of a foreign language does not come before the development of skills that enable the effective communication with speakers of other languages. These skills include listening and reading with understanding, plus speaking and writing. Only personal contacts, such as establishing pen friend relationships or email contacts, with speakers of other languages can guarantee positive attitudes. And these can be instilled by class exchanges or school camps in other linguistic regions. School leavers should realize that the limited knowledge they have at their disposal is enough to communicate and that taking part in the linguistic exchange is their own responsibility.

Swiss German dialects are not the subject of formal education; however, they are used for teaching other non-linguistic subjects (Dabène, 1994: 47). The rough characteristics of differences between Swiss German dialects and Swiss Standard German render the former as personal and familiar, while the latter as formal and complicated. Native Swiss German speakers often consider Swiss Standard German

as their first foreign language, which they use only when forced by circumstances, i.e. in contact with Italian or French speaking compatriots or with foreigners who speak Swiss Standard German but do not understand the Swiss dialects, or less frequently in official debates (Hägi & Scharloth, 2005). Such an attitude to Swiss Standard German or dialect seems to be reproduced in the first years of school (Sieber & Sitta, 1986). Swiss Standard German is practically used for the sole purposes of writing and reading, thus maintaining the two language varieties that have clearly diverse social functions.

The structural reform of the Swiss educational system affected the foreign language teaching with regard to the compulsory nine years of education which is a lower secondary level, as well as the upper secondary level and tertiary education. A successful education relies on the presence of both languages in the social environment of children, when both varieties have specific functions and positive social representations (Dabène, 1994: 137). Swiss Standard German is the spoken and written teaching language at the primary level, thereby remaining confined to the school environment. When outside the class, the students are exposed to it in interactions with non-native speakers or in a passive manner, for example through the partial immersion by the broadcasting media. The radio and television cannot be said to be the exclusive domains of Swiss Standard German, because the language extensively used in the media is that of the dialect. Children are exposed to a mix of different German dialects and sociolects as they watch children's programmes or shows. As a rule they do not watch political debates or the news, where Swiss Standard German might be used.

The situation in German-speaking Switzerland has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the pupils gain a very early experience of foreign language learning. Through the lessons of Swiss Standard German they develop strategies of second language learning and later they use them when they begin to learn their first foreign language. These acquired techniques and strategies are the key to learning a foreign language more efficiently. Otherwise, they would have to acquire these techniques together with the new language at a much later stage (Strässler, 2001: 968). On the other hand, the expansion of Swiss German into primary and secondary schools has its less desirable consequences. At present, most young Swiss people know Swiss Standard German poorly, and the more often the German Swiss use their local dialects, the harder it is for their French- and Italian-speaking compatriots to communicate with them.

Dialects play a considerable role in the educational system particularly in the German-speaking and Romansh regions. Most of the German-speaking cantons have introduced binding directives with regard to the use of Swiss Standard German and dialects in all school subjects (Hutterli, 2012: 93). Children from German-speaking regions at the age of six or seven in primary schools speak only dialect as their L1. German is regarded as a foreign language by many speakers of Swiss German, but its status differs from the status of French, Italian or English. Both children and adults regard Swiss Standard German rather as a kind of quasi-foreign language used readily when needed (cf. Fatmi & Ilhem, 2017: 73, Myhill, 2009). For children in the German-speaking cantons, dialects are the basic tool of

communication, used in the family domain. Children have no chance to acquire Swiss Standard German as their native variety, because their parents never use it with each other, let alone with their children (Keller, 1982: 91). They feel uncomfortable with the H variety, because its native speakers belong to a different speech community. In addition, the use of dialects implies solidarity and thus the dialects are not offered to speakers who are socially distant or superior (Schiffman, 1997: 213).

Children are introduced to Swiss Standard German early on and therefore this variety does not pose learning problems at school. It is so because they are faced with similar forms of German in their natural environment and through television or radio. As a consequence, they acquire some command of such forms, particularly as regards pronunciation. In the primary school, the instruction of Swiss Standard German starts in the first grade and so the pupils need to cope with two different and demanding tasks. The first task is to learn to read and write a new variety of their mother tongue which is a form of Swiss Standard German, also called *Schriftdeutsch* ('written German' or 'German for writing'). The second task is to learn another national language and another foreign language which is predominantly English. The instruction of the second foreign language starts in the fifth grade, and the third language in the seventh grade.

According to many educators, public TV and radio programmes foster the acquisition of Swiss Standard German, and are broadcast daily for children from the ages between 3 and 6 years old. There is also a desire among parents for their children to master better German than their parents. In all likelihood, in German Swiss kindergartens the teacher speaks the dialect form of German to children. For children at school age it is natural to speak Swiss German dialects in a whole range of informal situations other than lessons, such as in the playground, at breaks, at home and amongst each other. Therefore, younger pupils often have negative associations with standard German as a language connected with learning and school. In fact, when the German Swiss talk about their bilinguality they often think about Swiss Standard German and the local dialect, and not the other national languages of Switzerland. In other words, the German Swiss are bilingual within one language (Loetscher, 1986: 28). Some recent studies (e.g. Jekat & Dutoit, 2015) on L2 acquisition of Standard German in Switzerland reveal the influences of Swiss German on the performance of speakers or learners of German as a second language. The participants showing transfer from dialects to Swiss Standard German used more the dialect than standard or more often come into contact with people speaking Swiss German dialects.

According to the language law in Switzerland, cantons are obliged to provide the teaching of one second national language (e.g. French or Italian) and one foreign language (e.g. English) during the period of obligatory schooling. In this way, the classes of a second national language are secured and cannot be crossed out from the school timetable. This language strategy overlaps with the so-called "Model 3/5" which consists in introducing a first foreign language in the third grade and a second foreign language in the fifth grade of primary education. However, the effectiveness of this partner language model has been stretched by the growing

popularity of English gradually ousting second national languages from their positions in the school curriculum (Pap, 1990, Watts, 1991). The Swiss way of life has been pervaded by English (Cheshire & Moser, 1994: 467) and it continues to enjoy favourable attitudes and increased acquisition and use as an additional language, especially in scientific and technological contexts (cf. Stępkowska, 2015). In the opinion of Fishman (1977: 309), the spread of English is likely to contribute to stable patterns of diglossia or even triglossia rather than to stir up linguistic antagonisms such as those from the previous centuries.

Although English is viewed as a foreign language in Switzerland, its status has changed more toward the status of the second language (cf. Stępkowska, 2013). This relates to three functions fulfilled by English in Switzerland today. Although English has no official status, the first function it serves is that of a "neutral" second language in some official or semi-official contexts of everyday life for all language groups (cf. Ronan, 2016). For example, English is present on Swiss passports and on the official timetable of the Swiss Federal Railway. The second function of English is connected with its status as a global international language. Recent regulations governing the two Swiss technical universities – Federal Polytechnic in Zurich and the Lausanne Federal Polytechnic – openly provide for the possibility of teaching in English or, as in the latter case, through the medium of English. In the Federal Polytechnic in Zurich, English is used as a *lingua franca* in business. Some Swiss companies choose English not only for third international business relations but also for communication inside their companies. The third function of English within Switzerland can be observed among younger people. More and more young Swiss choose to speak English with Swiss interlocutors from different language areas. English is currently fashionable and that is why it is so popular among these young people, who not only listen to English language pop music and see English language films, but tend to use it for several expressive purposes, like short exclamations, swearing, or for short direct exchanges of information (Dürmüller, 1986, 1992).

5   Summary: Challenges and Perspectives

The expansion of dialects in Switzerland continues to develop and their popularity in educational institutions of all levels is the source of concern for linguists and complicates the task of language planners and language policy makers (Annen-Ruf, 1990: 132). Many voices are explicitly sceptical about the consequences of dialects becoming self-dependent, notably in multilingual communities. Haugen (1972: 245) argues that "if dialects are about to turn into languages, they may acquire disruptive potential due to their strong appeal to local loyalty". Indeed, the expansion of diglossia generates difficulties in the communication among the Swiss from different linguistic backgrounds and maximizes the isolation of German-speaking Swiss from the German culture. The linguistic features of Swiss German varieties, displaying clear grammatical and lexical dissimilarities in comparison to Swiss

Standard German, lead to a total incomprehension of the dialects even by a large majority of native speakers of Standard German. Watts (2001: 313) writes about "the counter-ideology to the ideology of dialect" represented mainly by the French-speaking Swiss. According to this counter-ideology, the German-speaking Swiss betrayed the idea of a multilingual country and thus cannot be regarded as Swiss patriots as opposed to the speakers of French. In a more measurable scenario, as suggested by Schmid (2001: 149), the continuing spread of Swiss German may indeed cut off the German part of Switzerland from the rest of the German-speaking world.

At the same time, the intra-national communication has become a serious challenge growing to the point of a linguistic blockade. Swiss German dialects already prevail and Swiss Standard German turns into a foreign language. Swiss German is on a winning streak and everyone gives in to this pressure. This trend hardens the barriers between the two biggest language communities – the German Swiss and the French Swiss. In the long run, this situation may lead to a complete deadlock in communication between them and thereby ruin their relations for a long time. The exclusive focus on Swiss German dialects in contact with French Swiss and Italian Swiss tends to be interpreted not as impoliteness, but as an actual refusal to communicate. Insisting on dialects and demanding English as a *lingua franca* for communication between the language regions of Switzerland is unacceptable for many, because such a solution would exclude large parts of the population from the dialogue.

Swiss German dialects belong to the German-speaking cultural area and, in a way, contribute to the development of Swiss Standard German, following the concept of German as a pluricentric language (Dürscheid & Businger, 2006). As a multilingual country, the Swiss Federation fulfils its official duties towards all national languages and the languages of migration. Such language policies reinforce the protection of Swiss Standard German in the German-speaking parts of Switzerland. In turn, the exceptional condition of a fully developed diglossia (*ausgebauten Diglossie*) (Haas, 2004: 101) encourages the respect for the dialects which maintain the status of vernaculars in the Swiss German cantons.

The consistent use of the H variety at school, namely the H variety as a rule and the L variety as an evident exception to this rule, has turned into a challenge (Sieber & Sitta, 1986; Neugebauer & Bachmann, 2006). The fact that it is important to speak and understand Swiss Standard German is unquestionable and German in Switzerland does not need to be denied. In fact, it becomes a meaningful testimony of bilingualism within one language. This bilingualism points to higher demands regarding the language skills of the Swiss society. The linguistic situation in the German-speaking Switzerland clearly indicates the necessity of strengthening language skills in the fluent use of Swiss Standard German, which is the prerequisite of educational and professional success. The 2000 census revealed a new language barrier between those who spoke only dialect and those who used dialects and the standard. Contrasting the L variety with the H variety is not enriching but impoverishing, particularly when the largest speech community of about five million people in Swiss German Switzerland can hardly speak any other language except for the

dialect. If so, then the multilingualism which used to be a reality, now may become a mere demand. A support of dialects in kindergartens and schools is urgent for their early contribution to an independent and reliable culture of Swiss Standard German in Switzerland. Such a culture is directed not against dialects, but serves equally for language protection and cultural exchange in Switzerland and beyond.

What strikes most is the affinity for the dialect to the point of becoming a hindrance. The insecurity of Swiss German speakers has both its cause and effect in their unwillingness to use the high variety. This insecurity comes from the lack of practice in Standard German, thereby turning Swiss Standard German into a rusty version of the language. Language repertoires evolve and when insecurity increases it contributes to maintaining negative representations towards the language. The German-speaking Swiss are compelled to use their skills, which leads to a high level of language insecurity. This situation results in a complete lack of identification with the national language, i.e. Swiss Standard German which is inscribed in the Swiss Federal Constitution. Instead, Swiss German dialects are considered as representative of the German-speaking Switzerland.

A commonplace opinion about Switzerland as a multilingual country where different national language groups, including immigrants, live together in harmony, has been recently more and more critically analyzed. Described by the motto "unity in diversity" and derived from a long tradition of contact between different language groups, the model of Swiss society was eventually formed in the first half of the twentieth century. Apparently now, this model has been put to the test. The regional (territorial) quadrilingualism of Switzerland ceases to correspond with the reality due to several irreversible changes on the macro scale. The social processes related to language issues – to name a few – include the growing mobility of the Swiss society within the country, innovative communication techniques affecting language socialization, the progressing decline of Romansh, the ever weaker knowledge of Swiss national languages apart from one's own, and the loss of prestige of national languages for the sake of English.

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