German in Switzerland: A Socio-linguistic Approach

Nirosha Paranavitana
Department of Languages, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, PO Box 02, Belihuloya, Sri Lanka.

Abstract

German like English is a pluricentric language (Rash, 1993:23) i.e., a language with several national varieties, each having its own established form. A living language is in constant flux of change, especially when it is spread in a large geographical area surrounded by other different language communities. In this study I will look at Swiss German in a national perspective so as to have a glimpse of the role of the German language in Switzerland. The role of German in Switzerland raises the question of its relationship with the other three national languages in Switzerland namely, French, Italian and Romansch. The main emphasis in this paper is therefore, to present a picture of the German language in Switzerland with its historical background, which has contributed much to the present position of *Schwyzerdütsch* (Swiss German) and the contemporary situation of the German language within the multilingual society and its institutional framework.

Introduction: A Country with Language Diversity

Switzerland is one of the countries in Europe, which has a large German-speaking population. It is a country lying among the territories of France, Germany, Italy and Austria. Geographically, it is situated in an area bounded by the Rhine, the Alps and the Jura Mountains. This republic is a confederation of twenty-six cantons, of which three are subdivided into half cantons, retaining a large measure of autonomy within the limits of a federal constitution. Switzerland has a population of nearly seven million of which about five million are Swiss nationals. It has four main languages i.e., German (Swiss German), French, Italian and Rhaetian (Romansch). Within Switzerland, the German language takes center stage in the language planning of four national languages, as it is the language, which is spoken by the majority of Swiss nationals. Technically speaking, the language of the German speaking Swiss is *Schwyzerdütsch,* which has a large number of dialects in this small geographical area. German is the language of the eastern, central and northwestern parts of Switzerland and parts of the cantons of Fribourg and Valais, while French is spoken in western Switzerland. The border between the German and the French speaking regions runs from north to south approximately 30 kilometers to the west of the Swiss capital Bern. Italian is the language of the canton of Ticino and of the southern valleys of the canton of Graubünden where besides German dialect, Romansch is spoken.

Residents of Switzerland by Mother-tongue (in 100%)

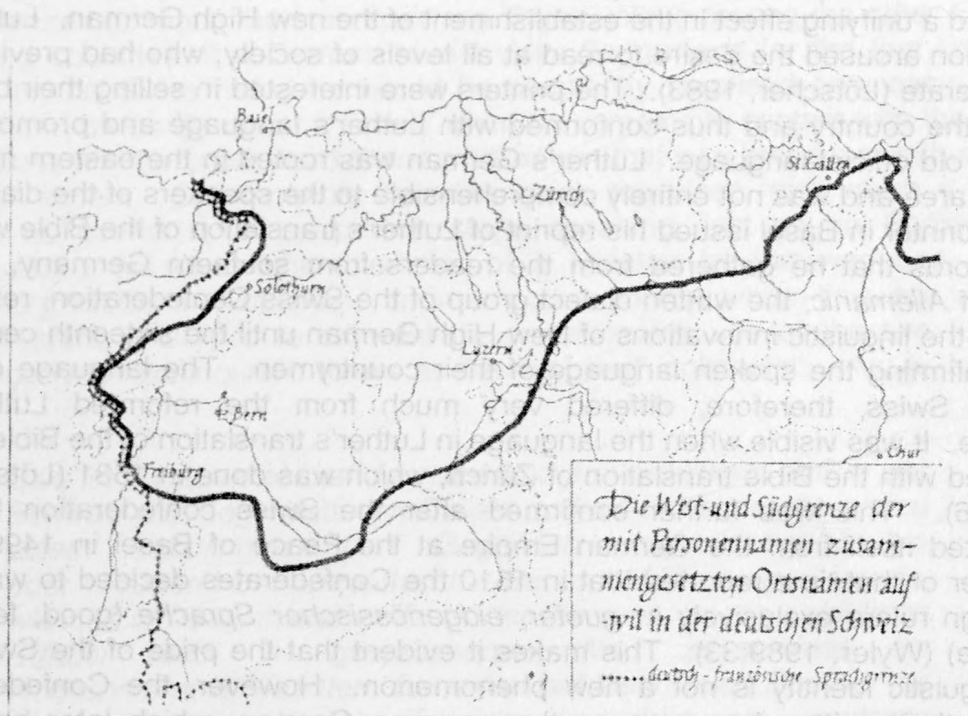| Year	German	French	Italian	Romansch	Other
1950	72.1	20.3	5.9	1.0	0.7
1960	69.3	18.9	9.5	0.9	1.4
1970	64.9	18.1	11/9	0.8	4.3
1980	65.0	18.4	9.8	0.8	6.0
1990	63.6	19.2	7.6	0.6	8.9

Source: *Statistisches Jahrbuch der Schweiz 1995 (Bern 1995) Table 16.2 p.352* (Steinberg, 1996:131)

The relationship between different language groups is thus not always devoid of tension and is therefore, a matter of great political and historical significance. The Swiss federal structure, which grants the cantons and the communities living therein a large measure of autonomy, has however, so far prevented any serious disagreements between the different language groups. The relationship between language groups is further complicated by the *Schwyzerdütsch*, which is only spoken in the areas of German speaking Switzerland and which consists of a large number of dialects differing considerably from Standard German. French and Italian speakers show a reluctance to speak Swiss German, which is understood only by the German Swiss, as it is used only in their oral communication. The colloquial language of the French speaking cantons also has its regional peculiarities but it is much closer to standard French compared to Swiss German with Standard German. The dialects in Ticino are limited in a sociological sense as they are only spoken within familiar and intimate circles. The language of the smallest linguistic group, Romansch, is a split of five dialects. Räto-Romansch speaking people are normally bilingual or trilingual since the area in which they speak their mother tongue is small and they cannot function without any knowledge of German or French.

Historical Development of Plurilingualism

Swiss German identity, its political and linguistic diversity or authority cannot be perceived without an understanding of its historical development. The origin of a people called the 'Swiss Germans' is difficult to pinpoint, as there is no existing group of people by that name that we can trace through the Romans in the ancient times. It is well known that the northern Alps used to be a part of the great Roman Empire. People who lived in the northern Alps at that time did not speak a Germanic language but a *Gallo-Romanic* language, which was a Celtic-Latin mixed language (Lötscher, 1983:31). Until or even long after the Roman era, the inhabited area in Switzerland was fairly small. The valleys of the river 'Aare' and the highlands of present day Bern (Berner Oberland) and the high valleys of the river Rhine (Oberrheintal) were partly inhabited by small tribal communities. The areas around the Jura Mountains and the inner valleys of the alpine rivers and small areas northeast of Switzerland were said to be practically empty. In the beginning of the third century the Germanic tribes - *Allemannic* people - moved towards the highlands of the Rhine through the Roman areas. Who were these *Allemannic* people that brought trouble for the Roman troops? Lötscher states that they have come from areas of the Middle Elbe in Germany, that is the areas of present Magdeburg, Wittenburg and Leipzig. These "Elbgermanen" moved towards the south west, of Germany. The prevailing Roman areas, which had already lasted for hundreds of years, were taken over by the *Allemans* who came from northern Germany at the beginning of the fifth century. The Roman troops moved away from the north of Switzerland. Thereafter, *Allemans* moved towards the areas of present day Basel, Schaffhausen towards the area around the Black Forest (*Schwarzwald*). Due to the pressure that was created by the Franks in AD 496 the *Allemans* remained settled further to the south of Switzerland. The remaining Romans settled in the area between Lake Geneva and the Northern Jura Mountains. Wallis/Valais in the central east of Switzerland was by this time inhabited by both *Allemans* and Romans. At the turn of the seventh century there came a new group of settlers, the *Burgundians*. The *Burgundians* were of Germanic origin. After a severe battle with the Huns in AD 437 they moved southwards near Lake Geneva and towards the direction of present day Neuchâtel (Neuenburg) and Bern (Lötscher, 1983). They were not a large crowd but,

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consisted of about 20,000 people. Thenceforth, their language gradually became a mixture of both Romance and German, and by the time of the sixth century it was completely a Romance language. In the seventh century, the pressure of the *Allemans* in the west started the language separation i.e., Romance language and Germanic language, while in the east of the Alps it later had further success. Roughly at the juncture of history the change of the local place names into the so-called *Allemanic* began to take place. Even today these areas do not have original Roman or Germanic names but Celtic names which have become Germanized: Zürich (from Turicum), Solothurn (from Salodorum), Winterthur (from Vitodurum), Kempten (from Cambiodunum), or Roman names Augst (from Augusta ramica), Pfyn (in present Thurgau and in Wallis), Koblenz (from Confluntia), etc, (Lötscher, 1983:35). Thus the gradual germanization of the areas was to be seen through some of the changes as such that had occurred in the local languages (Celtic and Roman) at that time. The map 1 given below outlines the geographical language border for the *Allemanic* speaking area in the ninth century AD.

Die West- und Südgrenze der mit Personennamen zusam- mengesetzten Ortsnamen auf -wil in der deutschen Schweiz
...... datsch - französische Sprachgrenze

Map 1.(Lötscher, 1983:41)

German in Perspective

When and how each and every place came to be German cannot be explained, as it is an internal change as well as an external one. In the tenth century or a little earlier Freiburg/Fribourg was a German speaking area though it had its local changes from time to time due to political pressure. Murten in the middle of the eighteenth century was a fully German speaking area. This may have caused Bern to be a wholly German speaking area at present. In the fifteenth century there were German-speaking areas even south of Freiburg/Fribourg but now they are more French. In the time of the duke of Zähringer, Freiburg/Fribourg was originally a German area and soon it became French as the French became dominant (Lötscher, 1983).

While these changes in German were taking place, the people in Wallis/Valais from the southwest wandered about with some Romans (NS) from the northern side. In the ninth century AD the whole high valley of the Rhine and quite a large area of Voralberg were Romance speaking. The whole area including Graubünden had a political and cultural identity because it belonged to Chur, which in the year 1464 became a German canton. Therefore, many German craftsmen were brought to Chur to build a new city and consequently the Romance power in that area weakened. By the late fourteen hundred the official language of Chur became German (Lötscher, 1983).

The development of a single standard language, i.e., New High German, for the German-speaking world was a process, which took hundreds of years. There were many regional languages, which assumed the place of official languages but the strongest influence that led to the establishment of the new High German language was exercised from the Saxon Electorate (Sachsen Anhalt) by using the language, which Luther wrote. Luther's translation of the Bible into High German was one of the important developments in the history of the German language, which had a unifying effect in the establishment of the new High German. Luther's reformation aroused the desire to read at all levels of society, who had previously been illiterate (Lötscher, 1983). The printers were interested in selling their books all over the country and thus conformed with Luther's language and promoted it over the old official language. Luther's German was rooted in the eastern middle German area and was not entirely comprehensible to the speakers of the dialects. Thus, a printer in Basel issued his reprint of Luther's translation of the Bible with a list of words that he gathered from the readers from southern Germany. The writers of *Allemanic*, the written dialect group of the Swiss Confederation, refused to adopt the linguistic innovations of New High German until the sixteenth century, thus confirming the spoken language of their countrymen. The language of the German Swiss, therefore, differed very much from the reformed Lutheran language. It was visible when the language in Luther's translation of the Bible was compared with the Bible translation of Zürich, which was done in 1531 (Lötscher, 1983: 56). This was further confirmed after the Swiss confederation finally dissociated itself from the German Empire at the Peace of Basel in 1499. A chronicler of that time reported that in 1510 the Confederates decided to write to all foreign rulers exclusively in *guoter, eidgenössischer Sprache* (good, federal language) (Wyler, 1989:33). This makes it evident that the pride of the Swiss in their linguistic identity is not a new phenomenon. However, the Confederates adopted their written language as the common German, which later became homogeneous to the German in the Bible translation of Luther. By 1700 almost all the educated people in the German speaking area were writing in a relatively uniform language. Until up to the second half of the nineteenth century the co-existence of the dialects and the written High German caused no problems to German speaking Switzerland. The reason for the dialect not to disappear is because German-speaking Switzerland adopted standard German only as a written language. It took some time before the view became established among language experts and people that the dialects were by no means inferior forms of communication but valid linguistic forms, which held quite an important a position in certain situations as High German did in others. During the first two decades of this century, the vernacular received support from the representatives who brought up the idea of 'Heimatschutz' (protection and preservation of the national heritage) (Wyler, 1989:35). It proclaimed that the dialects were to be preserved in the same way as popular customs and traditions and protected from the effects of industrialization. Dialects subsequently gained prestige as a symbol of the cultural identity of German speaking Switzerland as distinct from that of Germany.

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Linguistic Situation of German in Switzerland

Now there are two forms of the German language used in German speaking Switzerland. Standard German (*Hochdeutsch*), also called written or literary German (*Schriftsdeutsch*) in Switzerland, is primarily used in written communication. Its oral use is mainly restricted to education and mass media and public speaking to a certain extent. *Schwyzerdütsch* (Swiss German) is not a single language but a collection of regionally varying vernaculars, which is rarely used in written form. Its significance as a literary language is limited compared to Standard German. Almost all Swiss authors write in Standard German. Thus, the linguistic situation in German speaking Switzerland is Diglossic; that is, two forms of the same language used in a single language community but with separate domains of use.

> "Es herrscht praktisch eine mediale Diglossie: Gesprochen wird Schweizerdeutsch, Geschrieben wird Hochdeutsch..." (König, 1996:137)

This feature has made German speaking Swiss unique among the other German speaking countries. If a German tourist visits Switzerland for the first time and listens to the Swiss radio, he would be pleasantly surprised how easy it is to understand Swiss German. It is only when he comes into contact with the dialect he realizes that he understood Standard German that was broadcast with a Swiss German accent. Swiss people can distinguish the place from which a person comes no sooner a Swiss person starts speaking, just as an English man distinguishes the class characteristics of a speaker by the way one speaks (Steinberg:1996). In Switzerland, as in any other country where linguistic varieties are prevalent, it is hard to differentiate or define the use of the two forms of language in socio-linguistic terms as 'literary' and 'colloquial'. As A. Lötscher says,

> *Dies ist zunächst einmal den Umstand zu verdanken, daß in der Schweiz der Gegensatz von Dialekt und die Hochsprache nie zu einem soziolinguistischen Gegensatz<<ungebildet-gebildet>> oder <<Oberchicht Unterchicht / Bauernbevölkerung>> wurde, wie das in Deutschland vielfach der Fall war, wo die gebildeten Städter auch im gesprochenen Wort zunehmend die Hochsprache verwendten. Sicherlich hat hierin auch Bodmer mit seiner Aufwertung des Schweizerdeutschen ein gewisses Verdienst. (Lötscher, 1983:66)*

Written German is the language of the educated population and also the spoken language of elevated discourse. A university Professor will lecture in Standard German and conduct his oral examinations and seminars in that language too. But he probably will speak the dialect when he speaks with the students individually.

As mentioned above, Swiss German and Standard German have a number of domains or functions of usage in which they predominate. Traditional functions are as follows,

Function	Swiss German	Standard German
Secondary and post-secondary education		
Church services		

Speeches in Parliament •
News broadcasts on Radio and Television •
Newspapers and editorials •
Personal correspondence •
Literature •
Deaf people learning to lip read •
Non German speakers addressed in •
Public meetings • •
Military commands • •
All normal conversation •
Great deal of broadcasting other than news •
Folk and Children's literature •

* This is based on my personal experience gathered during the period I was in Switzerland reading for my postgraduate studies.   .

It has always been ? cause for astonishment for many foreigners to know how Swiss people understand one another's dialects so well. Communication among people who speak different dialects is not a problem for them, but there are some exceptions to specific expressions and words, which are distinctive to certain areas. Some words and expressions of upper Wallis/Valais are barely understood by the German speakers of the lowlands. Therefore, those German speakers will have to switch over to another expression in the same vernacular or express it in Standard German to avoid the communication barrier. The extraordinary diversity of dialects in such a small area could result mainly from the arduous transport conditions of the Alps, which has impeded the development of large language communities. Usually, a dialect of a region is named after the canton from where it originates. For example, the dialect from Bern is *Berndütsch*, from Basel *Baseldütsch*. The line running along the alpine areas separates the northern dialects of the central plateau from the southern ones of the alpine valley, which were isolated for a long period of time. Therefore, in the south an older form of dialect has been preserved. Some forms of Old High German have been retained in the dialect of the upper Valais/Wallis. Linguistic innovations have rarely integrated in this area. Thus the contribution of the eastern and western dialects is important. The vocabulary of the western dialects is common with all other vernaculars but eastern dialects have retained old *Allemanic* names.

The notion that a language reflects certain inborn characteristics has been one of the main reasons for preserving the identity of a language and similarly in the Swiss context the dialects mirror a peculiar Swiss way of expressing the world. The dialects, especially Swiss ones, are regarded as older, purer and more genuine than standard language and thus Swiss German is often seen as a kind of language museum, where many archaic features, particularly phonological features and lexical terms, have been retained (Rash, 1998:110). Since the turn of the nineteenth century various extra-linguistic forces have made an effort to preserve the existence of the Swiss German dialects. *Schweizerisches Idiotikon* (Swiss dialect dictionary) began publication in 1862. Another work *der Sprachatlas der deutschen Schweiz* (language atlas of German speaking Switzerland) was first published in 1961. These major endeavours came out because the authors of both works were prompted by the prevailing belief that the vernacular was threatened with extinction.

As already mentioned here, Standard German is the medium of education. Since Swiss German is spoken in all day-to-day communication situations, Standard

German has become almost a foreign language at school, which the students are obliged to learn with extra effort. Even though there is a considerable difference between Standard German and Swiss German, Swiss German does not seem to be regarded as an independent language as Dutch in the Netherlands.

The difference between Swiss German and Standard German is significant, especially with regard to the pronunciation, which even makes a native speaker of German reluctant to make an effort to understand the meaning. The differences in the phonetic system are seen in both vowels and consonants.

Phonetics

The most striking feature of Swiss German is the frequent use of the velar fricative [x], which occurs when pronouncing *k* of the Standard German words. In Swiss German this *k* is replaced by *ch*. For example

Standard German	Swiss German
kalt [kalt]	*chalt* [xalt]
Kind [kint]	*Chind* [xint]
Kuchenkätchen [kuxan-]	*Chuchichäschtli* [xuxixä-]

The initial sounds [b], [d] and [g] are substituted by their voiceless counterparts [p], [f] and [gg] in Swiss German. For example,

Standard German	Swiss German
bitte	*pitte*
danke	*tankche*
Gans	*ggans*
Direktor	*tiräkter*
Bier	*pier*
Bauer	*puur*

In general one can see, that in most of the words in Swiss dialects, the vowel of the first syllable is lost, (Lötscher, 1983:86)

Standard German	Swiss German
Bericht	*pricht*
gelingen	*glingen*
müde	*müed*
alles	*alls*
liebes	*liebs*

The endings at, eit,-heit, -keit, -ling, -end have lost the originality,

Standard German	Swiss German
Heimat	*Häimet*
Arbeit	*Arbet*
Krankheit	*Chrankhet*
Faulheit	*Fuulhet*
Frühling	*Früelig*
Abend	*Ooobig*
Tausend	*tuusig*

Morphology

Swiss German has only two cases namely nominative and dative cases. The distinction between nominative and accusative, which is so important in High German is thus absent in Swiss German.

		Singular			Plural		
		Nominative	Accusative	Dative	Nominative	Accusative	Dative
Masculine	SG	de(r) Hund	en Hund	em Hund	d(i) Hunde	d(i) Hunde	de Hunde
Neuter	SG	s Chalb	as, e Chalb	em Chalb	Chälber	Chälber	Chälber(e)
Feminine	SG	d(i) Chatz	e Chatz	e Chatz	Chatze	Chatze	Chatze

There is no genitive case in Swiss German as in Standard German. The genitive case is expressed through other means.

Standard German	Swiss German
das Dach d. Hauses	s Tach vom Huus
das Resultat dieser Rechnung	s resultat vo dere Rächnig

Pronouns also differ from Standard German. (Lötscher, 1983:94)

		Masculine	Neute	Feminine
	SG(Nom.)	mein Mann	mein Kind	meine Frau
	SG(Acc.)	meinen Mann	mein Kind	mein Frau
Nom/Acc	SWG	myyn Maa	myys Chind	myyni Frau
Singular}	SG	meinem Mann	meinem Kind	meiner Frau
Dative	SWG	myynm Maa	myym Chind	myynere Frau
	SG	meine Männer	Meine Kinder	meine Frauen
Nom/Acc	SWG	myyni Manne	myyni Chinder	myyni Fraue
Plural}	SG	meinen Männem	meinen Kindern	meinen rauen
Dative	SWG	myyne Maa	myyne Chinder	myyne Frau

The words ending in -lein or -chen in many dialects are liberally used with the affex -li at the end of the noun. The sound ch [k] of Standard German, is pronounced as kch [x], for example,

Standard German	Swiss German
König	Kchönig
elektrisch	elekchtrisch
Kaffee	Kchafi
Kamel	Kchamel
klar	kchlar

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Syntax

Swiss German also differs from standard German in not having a Preterit (Präteritum) and a Pluperfect (Plusquamperfekt); instead the Past Participle (Partizip Perfekt) is used,

Standard German	Swiss German
Wir aßen und gingen ggange.dann ins Kino.	*Mer händ ggässe und sind dänn is kino*
Als wir schon gegessen hatten, schliesslich noch Peter.	*Wo mir ggässe gha händ, isch zletscht no de kam Peeter choo*

Swiss German tends not to use a relative pronoun such as *der, die* or *das*. Instead *wo* is used. (Lötscher, 1983:111)

Standard German	Swiss German
Der Mann, der uns gestern besucht hatte.	*de Maa, won öis gëschter psuecht hët.*
Die Frau, die ich gestern gesehen habe.	*D Frau, won i gëschter gsee ha.*

Ethnolinguistic Identity of Swiss German among the Swiss Community

There are numerous salient characteristics that make Swiss German differ from Standard German though one can only discuss a few in a study of this nature. *Schwyzerdütsch* or Swiss German, as it is called now, is the normal language of the German Swiss in daily life and at all levels of society. The dialect for the German Swiss is an identity, a source of pleasure and self-satisfaction, a delight in ones own *Eigenart* (special nature). *Schwyzerdütsch* binds Swiss Germans together. The Swiss love their dialect as someone loves his home. Spiritually speaking, it is their home in a narrow sense and a national home in a wider sense.

An interesting difference between German and Italian Switzerland is that, while the Germans have two levels of speech, Swiss Italians have three: the local dialect, the general 'Lombard' dialect or *koine* and the Standard Italian. The 'Lombard' dialects belong to the family known as *gallo-italicci* and they are very close to French in both pronunciation and vocabulary (Steinberg, 1996:143). For the Italian Swiss, the dialect is less universal than it is to Swiss German speakers as it is only spoken among intimate circles. Two Swiss Italians may meet in a street in Zürich and speak in their dialect with each other but if they meet in Lugano or Lucarno they would speak with each other in Standard Italian. Therefore, the usage of Standard Italian and the dialects is somewhat different from that of Swiss German dialects and Standard German. On the one hand, all Swiss Italians are trilingual. They learn both French and German to communicate with their fellow citizens from the other regions but they never expect them to return the compliment. On the other hand, they are aware that their contribution to Swiss identity is indispensable in spite of the small proportion of population who speaks Italian. Raeto Romansch speakers make up 1% of the population. However, Romansch speaking Swiss are also usually trilingual. The commune has the right to adopt whichever language they wish and most of the time they learn German or French or both, especially for educational purposes and to communicate with the larger population in Switzerland. The next important

linguistic community after the German speaking one is the French speaking Swiss or the *Suisses romands*. They comprise about 20% of the total population and are the dominant linguistic group in six cantons. Unlike other Swiss linguistic communities, the French do not speak a dialect. Their French does not show a major difference from the French spoken in metropolitan France(Steinberg, 1996). Unlike the German Swiss, the "Swissness" of the *Suisses romands* is not primarily based on the language. The relations between the French speaking Swiss and the German Swiss are always complicated as French Swiss are somewhat at a disadvantage when they are faced with the Swiss German dialects. The largest of the language groups is still the Swiss German. The caricature taken from Patrick Stevenson's book where three Swiss nationals are depicted as though it may be a portray of their own stereotypical images. This could be considered as a widely held perception of an outsider who would look at a plurilingual society as Switzerland with regard to the linguistic proportions of the Swiss society. That is to say the social categorization in Switzerland is in terms of what is called ethnolinguistic identity (Stevenson, 1997:22).


Switzerland: stereotypes on the stereotype
Jean-François Burgener, *Nebelspalter* 25, 1980.

It is obvious that strongly felt ethno-linguistic identities are likely to generate at least a potential for conflict. Twenty-two of the twenty-six cantons and half cantons in Switzerland are officially monolingual. According to the territorial principle, each canton has the right to declare which language will have official status within the territory. The very fact of the co-existence of languages raises the question about a consequences of the outcome. On the face of it, there are only two possible outcomes as far as the speech community is concerned. Either the multilingual constellation continues in a more or less stable fashion or one language becomes increasingly dominant to the extent that it ultimately displaces the other(s) (Stevenson, 1997:34). The process is referred to as language maintenance and 'language-shift' respectively.

It is often discussed in Switzerland whether one should use dialect or Standard German. Before the World War I there was a strong preference for Standard German. The official communication in other German speaking areas was done in written language. The philologists were concerned about the decaying of the dialects. Both world wars, which themselves led to a "geistige Landesverteidigung" (resistance against fascist ideals in 1930s) and a "Schwyzer Sproch Bewigig"

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(Swiss language movement), supported the dialects so that German more or less appears a foreign language. Today, dialect is accepted by the Swiss to be used freely in their daily life all over the German speaking areas of Switzerland. The geographical distribution of the languages, which has been relatively stable for several centuries, coincides fairly accurately with the linguistic territories as can be seen in the map. Map 2 (Rash, 1998:28).
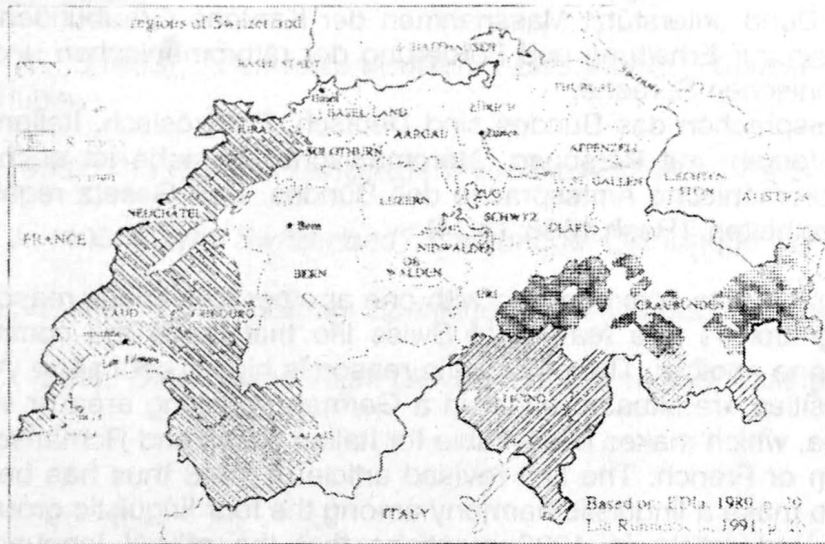
15/26	German (monolingual)
4/26	French (monolingual)
1/26	Italian (monolingual)
3/26	French/German (bilingual)
1/26	Raeto Romansch/French/German (trilingual)

The quantitative imbalance of the four national languages is so marked that the German speakers outnumber the speakers of all three Romance languages. The Swiss political system, characterized by decentralized federalism and consensual system of democracy, allows national linguistic diversity to be maintained. Many issues concerning language and culture are the responsibility of the canton. Trilingual or monolingual cantons frequently deal with their issues at the communal level. The four language communities are thus able to co-exist relatively peacefully in a country as small as Switzerland. This is partly due to the state policy, which protects the interest of all four communities. French German and Italian have been granted equality under the constitution since 1848 (in Article 09 revised as Article 116 in 1874) (Rash, 1998);

" Die drei Hauptsprachen der Schweiz, die deutsche, französische und italienische, sind Nationalsprachen des Bundes."

Article 116 was revised in 1938 to include Romansch as a national language but not as an official language;

1. Das Deutsche, Französische, Italienische und Rätoromanische sind Nationalsprachen der Schweiz.
2. Als Amtssprachen des Bundes werden Deutsche, Französische und Italienische erklärt.

Further strengthening of the harmony between the linguistic plurality could be seen in the revised Article 116 in the year 1996, which was accepted by plebiscite on the 10th March 1996:

1. Deutsch, Französisch, Italienisch und Rätoromanisch sind die Landessprachen der Schweiz.
2. Bund und Kantone fördern die Verständigung und den Austausch unter den Sprachgemeinschaften.
3. Der Bund unterstützt Massnahmen der Kantone Graubünden und Tessin zur Erhaltung und Förderung der rätoromanischen und der italienischen Sprache.
4. Amtssprachen des Bundes sind Deutsch, Französisch, Italienisch. Im Verkehr mit Personen rätoromanischer Sprache ist auch das Rätoromanische Amtssprache des Bundes. Das Gesetz regelt die Einzelheiten. (Rash,1998:33-34)

Swiss citizens have to communicate with one another for various reasons. Cross-cantonal migration is one feature of Swiss life that leads the communities to interact with one another. The other main reason is higher education. All the main Swiss universities are situated either in a German speaking area or in a French speaking area, which makes it inevitable for Italian Swiss and Romansch Swiss to learn German or French. The first revised article of 1848 thus has been revised twice so as to make a linguistic harmony among the four linguistic groups. The no 4 of the revised article in 1996 mentions that the official languages of the confederate are German, French and Italian and in communicating with the Rhaetian (Romansch) speaking communities, Rhaetian (Romansch) is the official language. It is not clear as to why Rhaetian (Romansch) is not mentioned with the other three official languages of the Confederate in the first line.

Conclusion

A diglossic community such as the one that speaks German in Switzerland, has to cope with many problems. The main problem arises with regard to the medium of education. School children have to learn two forms of the same language. Firstly, Swiss German, is the language spoken outside the classroom and secondly, Standard German the language of the classroom. This could lead to negative attitudes towards StandardGerman at an early stage. French speakers and Italian speakers face the same kind of problem with the dialect being a communication barrier, as they, having learnt Standard German at school, barely understand the Swiss dialect. It has been largely during the twentieth century that concern has arisen over the quality and purity of the standard German in Switzerland because the Swiss German language belongs to it and it was also a means of communicating with Germanophone Swiss nationals. Switzerland is often presented as a model of linguistic harmony with four national languages co-existing in one nation and having a relatively free diglossia in German speaking regions. But the linguistic peace, which is supposed to exist in Switzerland, is in reality quite fragile. The only true stability it enjoys is in the official policies, which protect it. French speakers think that the German dialects are the main linguistic barrier in Switzerland. German speakers think that their problem is Standard German and have a tendency to preserve and promote dialects, which is a source of national identity to them. The federal constitution allows for a minimum of legal enforcement in matters relating to national languages. The position of German geographically and demographically thus plays a dominant role in Switzerland.

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This has consequently caused the role of the German speakers in Switzerland to be perceived as the most economically and politically powerful within the four language groups.

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