

# **ENGLISH IN THE WORKPLACE IN SWITZERLAND BETWEEN IDEOLOGIES AND PRACTICES**

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- Interviewer: Okay. Could you tell to us something about the meaning of the languages in the company? As well as you see this now? From your point of view.
- MM: Well, this is relatively easy, with us it is English only. (...) so who doesn't speak English, has no future here. Nowhere. (...) and, I'm now speaking about the Headquarter (...) so here it's English (...) there is a dominance of English almost up to arrogance (MM <Agro A>, translated from German)

## **Abstract**

A widely shared opinion states that English in its international form is particularly suited for the economy. Consequently, a shift from national languages to English as corporate language has been observed in many countries. However, this choice is not based on the results of scientific research, but rather on ideologies. In many cases, the real practices can differ quite significantly from what people think and/or tell they do. This calls for empirical research. In this paper, we will analyse the demolinguistic situation of Switzerland with a special focus on English at work, have a look at the public debate about English and national languages at school and acknowledge the actual linguistic practices in several types of economic environments, in order to answer the question whether English and/or any other language dominates communication at work in Switzerland.

*Key-words Workplace, English, mixed teams, plurilingualism, language management, communication strategies, language ideologies, plurilingual speech, vocational training*

## **1. THE 'DOXA' ABOUT ENGLISH AS GLOBAL LANGUAGE OF BUSINESS**

This quotation from an interview with a HR manager at a global agro-business company based in Switzerland seems to confirm the widely shared opinion that English in its international form is particularly suited for the economy. Consequently, a shift from national languages to English as corporate language has been observed in many countries as for example in the case of Airbus, Daimler-Chrysler, Fast Retailing, Nokia, Renault, Samsung, SAP, Technicolor, and Aventis “in an attempt to facilitate communication and performance across geographically diverse functions and business endeavors” (Neeley 2012).

This choice results from the international weight of the English language. In a widely quoted paper, Weber (1997) developed a formula that used six criteria to judge the worldwide significance of each language, i. e. number of primary speakers, number of secondary speakers, number and population of countries using the language, number of major areas of human activity in which the language is important, economic power of countries using the language, and socio-literary prestige of the language. In his ranking, English was by far the most influential before French, Spanish and Russian.<sup>1</sup>

Concerning the move toward “English only” as corporate language of the economy, three primary reasons are often invoked:

Competitive pressure.

(...) Companies that fail to devise a language strategy are essentially limiting their growth opportunities to the markets where their language is spoken, clearly putting themselves at a disadvantage to competitors that have adopted English-only policies.

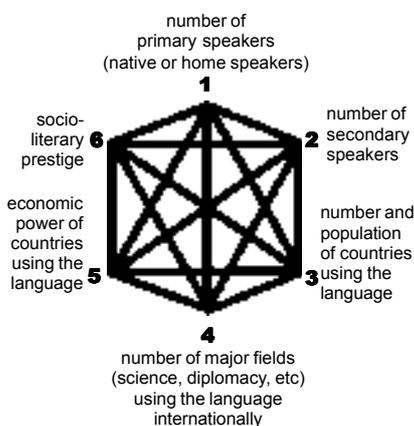
Globalization of tasks and resources.

Language differences can cause a bottleneck (...) Better language comprehension gives employees more firsthand information, which is vital to good decision making. Swiss food giant Nestlé saw great efficiency improvements in purchasing and hiring thanks to its enforcement of English as a company standard.

M[erger]&A[cquisition] integration across national boundaries.

Negotiations regarding a merger or acquisition are complicated enough when everybody speaks the same language. (...) that's why when Germany's Hoechst and France's Rhône-Poulenc merged in 1998 to create Aventis, the fifth largest worldwide pharmaceutical company, the new firm chose English as its operating language over French or German to avoid playing favorites.

(Global Business Speaks English, Tsedal, Harvard Business Review, May 2012)



The initial quotation manifests the doxa prevailing with <Agro A> and grounded on exactly this type of arguments.

There is, however, a back of the coin that is much less bright. The same manager emphasised, in an other section of the interview, the importance of linguistic diversity as a source of richness, and denounces the information loss, a certain malaise not being able to speak one's own language, and a lower level of participation caused by an English only policy.

MM: Mehrsprachigkeit heisst ja nicht nur, es gibt unterschiedliche Sprachen, aber heisst ja, Mehrsprachigkeit bringt ja andere Bilder, bringt andere Vergleiche, bringt auch andere Kultur, bringt ja ALLES. Aber bei uns, das Problem ist, es es ist nachher alles, es muss alles ins Englische übersetzt werden. Und damit verschwindet natürlich ein Grossteil dieses dieses Reichtums.

(...)

ich war jetzt in Brasilien bei einem Training und dort gab es Referenten, die konnten kein Englisch. Und dann wurde das übersetzt. Und da habe ich gemerkt, dass bei der Beteiligung ein, +nein nein+, wir haben eine ganz andere Beteiligung erreicht, (.) denn die Brasilianer und Latinos, die konnten überall Fragen stellen und konnten mitreden und konnten in ihrer Sprache (...) Ich habe die Erfahrung selber auch gemacht, ich habe einen Führungskurs besucht, in Freiburg, der auf Deutsch lief. Das ist anders. Ich rede in meiner Sprache anders, freier, offener, selbstbewusster, sicherer. (<Agro A>)

This feeling is confirmed by the results of scientific research. Fine (1996) states that communication in a *lingua franca* learnt as a foreign language may be accompanied by a lack of emotional involvement, and argues:

Assimilation into the dominant organizational culture is a strategy that has had serious negative consequences for individuals in organizations and the organizations themselves. (...) Those who assimilate are denied the ability to express their genuine selves in the workplace; they are forced to repress significant parts of their lives within a social context that frames a large part of their daily encounters with other people. (Fine 1996: 494)

On the other hand, the heterogeneity of members of scientific teams can be conceived as a chance. Indeed in mixed teams or research groups, the clash of different perspectives, modes of interpretation or prediction (Page 2007), and different forms of language use in “conceptual spaces” (Boden 1996), more precisely in “in-between spaces” (Bhabha 1994) between cultures result in cognitive creativity (cf. Mitchell/Nicholas 2006, 72). The innovation concerns among others the way in which actors organise their meetings, structure their collaborative practices, set up rules, negotiate or even impose general attitudes concerning the use of languages — and finally the knowledge that is constructed itself (Berthoud et al. 2012, eds. 2013).

However, actors and decision makers do not, normally, chose their actual behaviour on the ground of the results of scientific research, but rather based on ideologies, i. e. shared

public beliefs. In many cases, the real practices can differ quite significantly from what people think and/or tell they do.

This calls for empirical research along different lines. In the following sections, we will first analyse the demolinguiistic situation of Switzerland with a special focus on English at work. We will then have a look at the public debate about English and national languages at school. Finally, we will acknowledge the actual linguistic practices in several types of economic environments, from SME to multinational companies, in order to find answers to the question whether English and/or other languages — or maybe no single language at all — dominates communication at work in Switzerland.

## **2. THE DEMOLINGUISTIC SITUATION OF SWITZERLAND**

Human societies have always been multilingual. However, growing mobility of important parts of the world's population has led to a massive increase in multilingualism in post-modern societies and a lasting change from homoglossic to polyglossic communities with important "deterritorialised" linguistic minorities, mostly multilingual to a variable degree. Throughout many centuries – and fostered by the processes of nation-building and language standardisation – the prevalent image of linguistic diversity was that of a patchwork of rather homogeneous language communities which are in contact at their peripheries, through trade relations and exogamous marriages, but remain fundamentally monolingual. In modern times, particularly in urban contexts, such communities interpenetrate each other in new, original ways.

Switzerland represents a particularly interesting case in this respect. Since the constitutional process in the first half of the 19th century, the country is institutionally multilingual with German, French and Italian as national languages. Shortly before World War II, Romansh was added to this list. Since the 50ies, the steady increase in the number of migrants, expats, refugees, etc. has added different layers of non-national languages to this basis. From 1950 to 2013, their percentage as main languages rose steadily:

### Ständige Wohnbevölkerung ab 15 Jahren nach Hauptsprache(n), 1970-2013

in %

	1970	1980	1990	2000	2013 <sup>1</sup>
Total	4'575'416	4'950'821	5'495'018	5'868'572	6'744'794
Deutsch / Schweizerdeutsch	65.3	65.7	64.6	64.2	64.5
Französisch	18.7	18.6	19.3	20	22.6
Italienisch	11.1	9.3	8	6.8	8.3
Rätoromanisch	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.5
Andere Sprache	4.0	5.5	7.6	8.5	21.5

1) Das Vertrauensintervall ist in jedem Fall weniger als +/- 0,2%.

Quelle: 1970-2000: VZ; 2013: SE

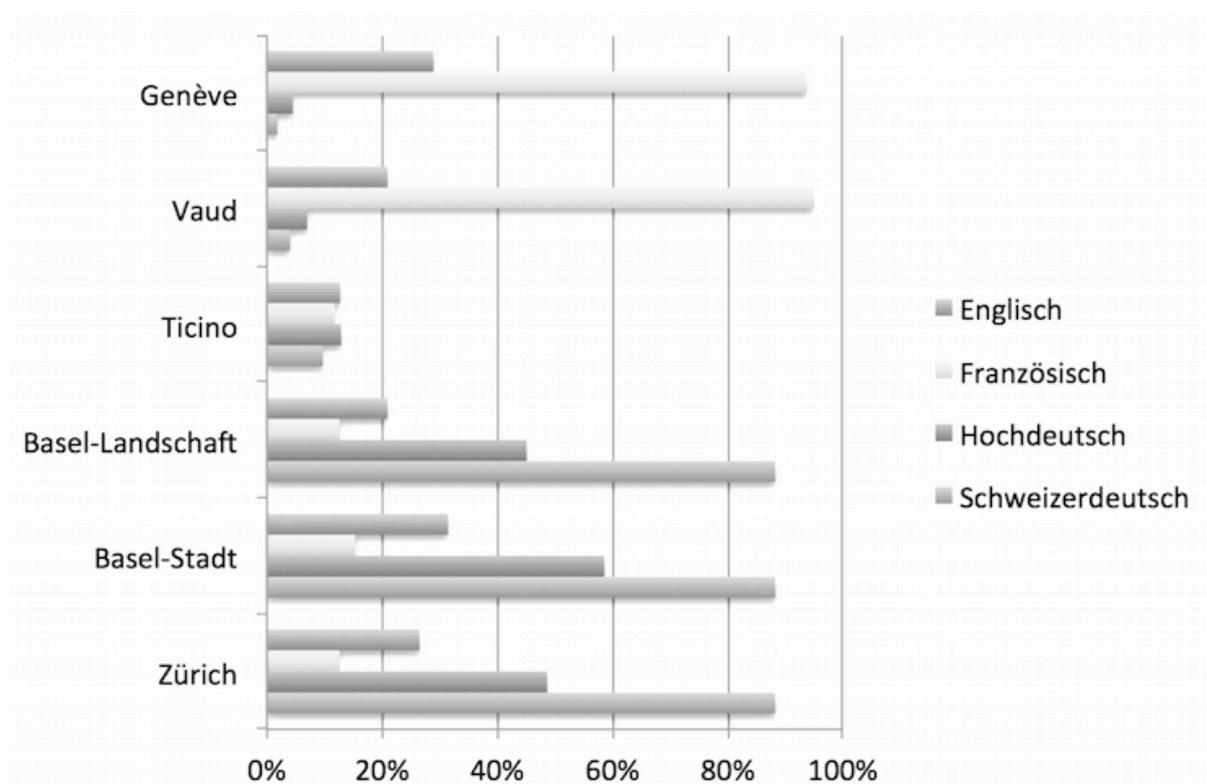
Die Daten von 1970-2000 wurden mit der Strukturerhebung ab 2010 harmonisiert. Die Verteilung der Landessprachen ist in den letzten vier Jahrzehnten relativ stabil geblieben. Im Gegensatz dazu hat der Anteil Personen, die eine Fremdsprache als Hauptsprache angeben, stark zugenommen. Die Daten von 1970-2000 und 2013 sind nur beschränkt vergleichbar, weil seit 2013 mehrere Hauptsprachen angegeben werden können, während bis 2000 nur eine Hauptsprache möglich war.

Table 1: main languages of the Swiss population 1970-2013

(<http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/01/05/blank/key/sprachen.html>)

For constitutional reasons, the distribution of the languages varies from one language region to the other, the respective official language reaching between 68% (Rhaeto-Romansh) and 88%.

English is not very frequent as main language (less than 5%). Nonetheless, for some people it is heading towards the status of “5<sup>th</sup> national language” (see Watts *et al.* 2001 and section 3) due to its presence in the linguistic landscape and as a language spoken at work. According to the figures published online by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office in 2012, one of five jobholders in the canton Basel-Landschaft, one of four in the Canton of Zürich and almost every third in the canton Basel-Stadt ticked the box “English at work”. English is mostly spoken in addition to other languages (Swiss German is spoken by four of five, Standard German by one of two jobholders). The figures are similar in the French (Geneva comparable to Zürich, Vaud comparable to Basel-Landschaft) and clearly lower in the Italian part of the country (less than one and a half of ten in Ticino).



Graph 2: Language use in different Cantons of Switzerland

There are however tremendous differences between different job categories. In Basel-Stadt, for example, the proportion goes from less than one of ten (Craft and related trades workers, Plant and machine operators and assemblers, Elementary occupations) to over four of ten (Professionals) and even one of two (Managers). These differences are reflected in provisions concerning the language requirements (based on the levels of the CEFR) for vocational training as exemplified by a table produced by the Pedagogical University of Central Switzerland that distinguishes between first and second foreign language:

Métier	langue étrangère exigée (LE) 1	langue étrangère exigée (LE) 2	niveau attendu LE 1	niveau attendu LE 2	Particularités LE pendant l'apprentissage
Employé de bureau					LE encore comme branche optionnelle, bientôt exigée
Employé des postes	Fr		A1		
Télématicien	An		A1		Anglais technique; lecture et conversation importantes
Commerce de détail	Fr ou It		A1+		
Contrôleur de train	2 d'entre Fr / An/ It		A1+	A1+	
Libraire	Fr ou It	An	A1+	A2	
Vendeur	Fr ou It		A1+ pour Fr		pas d'exigences pour l'It
Assistant d'hôtellerie / de gastronomie	1 entre Fr/It/An		A2		priorité à la conversation
Employé de commerce	Fr ou It	An ou It	A2	A2	Suisse centrale 1; hautes exigences pour le Fr; certificats intern. prévus
Médiamaticien	Fr ou It	An	A2	A2	niveau supérieur pour lecture An
Préparateur chimiste, droguiste, assistant dental	Fr ou It		A2+		exigences élevées compréhension orale et lecture d'instructions et de manuels
Electronicien	An		A2+		1ère année: cours indiv. d'An, dès 2e année: An technique, lecture et conversation techniques prioritaires; enseignement en partie en An
Informaticien	An		A2+		exigences élevées lecture, enseignement en partie en An
Agent en information documentaire CFC	Fr		A2+		
Laborantin,	An		A2+		
Assistante médicale	It (év. Fr)		A2+		
Electronicien multimédia	An		A2+		1ère année: cours indiv. d'An, dès 2e année: An technique, lecture et conversation techniques prioritaires; enseignement en partie en An
Maturité professionnelle commerciale	Fr	An	A2+	A2+ - B1	stages linguistiques obl., certificats intern., exigences élevées
Maturité professionnelle	Fr	An	A2-B1	A2-B1	exigences élevées

Table 2: Language requirements in vocational training (Hodel/Leu 2010)

As can be seen in this list, for many professions the knowledge of more than one foreign language is requested, French (or even Italian) preceding even sometimes English. This corresponds to the need of the labour market as documented in several quantitative studies

(Lüdi *et al.* 2005, Andres *et al.* 2005). They showed that the labour market is remarkably multilingual, and that the higher the percentage of English is (by canton and by socioprofessional categories) the more other languages are used.

### 3. THE IDEOLOGICAL DEBATE

Consequently, in March 2004, the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) adopted a convention recommending that two foreign languages be taught in primary school – English and one national tongue. Similarly, a Swiss Federal Act on the National Languages, voted in 2001, went into effect in 2010; it aims at preserving the multilingual culture of Switzerland and stipulates that school children are to be taught at least one other Swiss national language (German in the French and Italian parts of the country, mostly French in the German one) as well as one other world language (see <http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/ff/2006/8977.pdf>.) In the Romandie, a huge effort to modernise the teaching of German is observable (NZZ, 16.2.1015, page 38). In contrast, there are important moves in German speaking cantons to delay the teaching of French at school. On Sunday 8 March 2015, voters in Nidwalden rejected — by a majority of more than 61% — an initiative sponsored by the right-wing UDC party that would have resulted in French being dropped from the canton's primary school curriculum. The debate is far from being closed because similar initiatives have been launched by groups of teachers and politicians in a number of other German speaking cantons. Their main overt argument is that children are overburdened, are losing interest in language learning, and that other important subjects are neglected. But in reality, the initiative to stop the teaching of two “foreign” languages at primary schools has a hidden agenda; it is clearly directed against French because nobody questions the priority of English and the necessity to teach it as early as possible.

As some bloggers put it in their comments to an interview in the news portal *20 Minuten* on March 29th, 2014:

#### *Französisch unnötig*

Meine Erfahrungen in 25 Jahren Berufsleben haben gezeigt: französisch habe ich NOCH NIE gebraucht, ohne englisch wäre es SEHR VIEL schwieriger, wenn nicht gar unmöglich, gewesen. Zum Glück habe ich mich nach der Lehre für einen Sprachaufenthalt in den USA entschieden! Und auf allen Reisen konnte ich mich bisher problemlos auf englisch verständigen.

#### *Englisch ist nun mal wichtiger*

(...) Eine Sprache zu lernen ist aufwendig, wenn man sich auf Englisch beschränkt, so kann ich diese Sprache besser lernen. Es ist eine Tatsache, dass man sich mit English auch mit Romands oder Franzosen unterhalten kann! Natürlich ist es super, wenn ich viele Sprachen kann, wenn jemand einfach Sprachen lernt, so sollte er es tun, aber nicht zwangsweise in der Schule alles überladen und den meisten das Sprachenlernen auch noch im Kindesalter vermiesen.

*Englisch hat heute Priorität.*

Das "Problem" liegt doch ganz woanders: Englisch wird immer wichtiger, Englisch ist auch in der Schweiz immer verbreiteter und entsprechend sehen immer mehr Leute keinen Grund darin, Französisch zu lernen. Was man nicht lernen WILL, KANN man nicht lernen; viele Leute WOLLEN Französisch nicht mehr lernen, also muss sich das Schulsystem anpassen und Französisch durch Englisch ersetzen. (...)

Adds promoting English courses for children exploit the common belief that knowing English assures the children a bright future:



Graph 3: Language courses for children

Many commentators simplify the language question along two axes:

(a) bilingualism (one second language as “language of communication” in combination with the respective local language as “language of identification” [House 2003]) is enough; it is better to speak one additional language well (be it reality or only a myth) than several languages approximately. Today this 2nd language is English, but it could also be Chinese as thematised in the following cartoon by Jaermann and Schaad published in the *Tages-Anzeiger* some time ago:



Graph 4: Cartoon early language learning

(b) languages are transparent; if everybody spoke English, intercomprehension would be perfect and misunderstandings due to linguistic and cultural diversity could be avoided (see also Wright 2011).

In a way, this debate reproduces a struggle originating in a period of emerging nationalism and “national languages”: The best way to solve communication problems in a period of Babylonian confusion is to come back to one unique language of communication, without any negative side effects.<sup>2</sup> The main arguments in favour of the one-language-only solution are the worry of effectiveness, but also the equality of the chances to participate in a global speech community whatever the language and the culture of the concerned persons may be (cf. Kekulé, 2010). In contrast to the creation of the nation states, the English-only phenomenon is global and affects all the countries and language regions in the same way.

If only languages were transparent... Detailed analysis of interactions in English as *lingua franca* in the framework of European research project *Language Dynamics and Management of Diversity* (DYLAN)<sup>3</sup> revealed that the resources used are sometimes treated as only partially shared, as opaque to a certain degree, and as needing some repair, and that many other communication strategies can be observed in business contexts. In other terms, actual communication practices often challenge the ideological prejudices.

It is uncommon indeed that all members of a mixed group share the same plurilingual repertoire and understand all others' preferred languages. Nonetheless, the choice of a *lingua franca* — mostly English — might be a suboptimal procedure in business communication and can entail severe drawbacks:

- Speaking the same language levels differences and might create the illusion of shared values and representations. Different languages carry a different epistemic potential (Fetscher 2013) the perception of which could be part of the resources for mixed team members' boundary spanning ability in multinational corporations, cultural and language

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<sup>2</sup> The increased formation of national languages in the 19th and 20th centuries (*political unity in linguistic unity*) as fully functional and symbol-laden languages was also an attempt to overcome collective as well as individual multilingualism. The advantages of monolingualism (e.g. maximum intelligibility, participation in a political debate on the national level, promise of mobility, efficiency of one written norm, range of communication) seemed obvious, and it still took quite some time until it was desirable or possible to question them seriously. (Moliner *et al.* 2013, 412).

<sup>3</sup> This was an integrated project from the European Union's Sixth Framework Program, Priority 7, “Citizens and governance in a knowledge-based society”. 19 partners from 12 countries addressed the core issue of whether, and, if so how, a European, knowledge-based society designed to ensure economic competitiveness and social cohesion can be created despite the fact that, following enlargement, the European Union is linguistically more diverse than ever before. (cf. <http://www.dylan-project.org> for an overview and Berthoud/Lüdi/Grin 2013 for detailed results).

skills influencing the extent to which boundary spanners perform most demanding functions (Barner-Rasmussen *et al.* 2014).

- The perception of one's lack of competence in the *lingua franca* is reflected in more insecurity.
- Communication in a *lingua franca* learnt as a foreign language may be accompanied by a lack of emotional involvement (Fine 1996, 494).
- Speaking a FL may lead to less precise formulation and thus to a loss of information.

Ich rede in meiner Sprache anders, freier, offener, selbstbewusster, sicherer. (...) Da gehen also wirklich viele Ideen eigentlich verloren, wenn man sich einfach für das Englische entscheidet in einer solchen Situation, weil dann nicht alle gleich, sich gleich wohl fühlen. (Maurice M., Agro A)

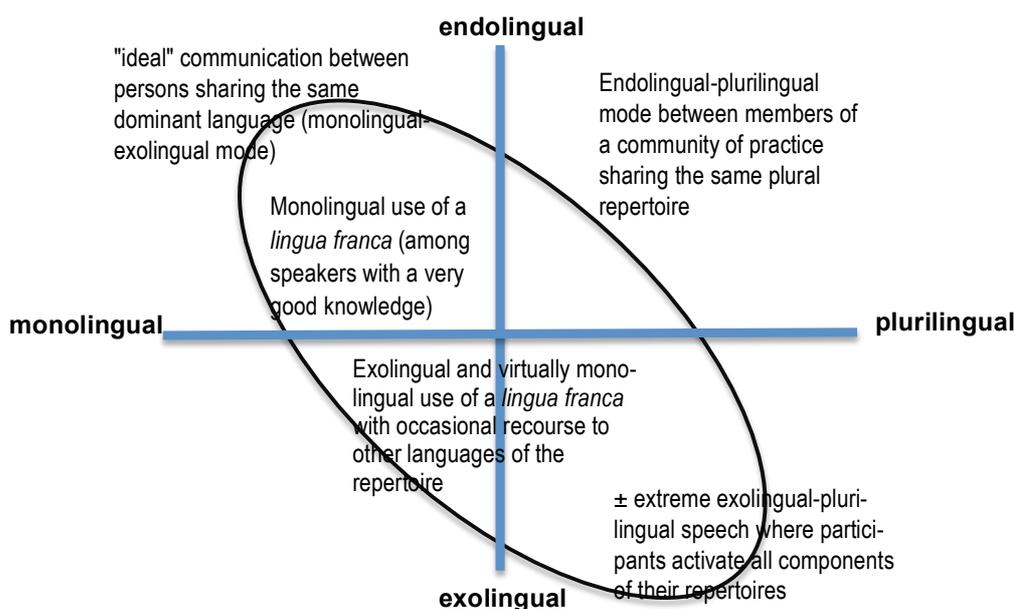
The harms and losses caused by “monolingual solutions” have already been mentioned in section 1.

#### 4. PRACTICES

An important part of the Dylan-project consisted in a fine-grained examination of numerous interactions in business contexts in order to understand how the very diverse linguistic repertoires of speakers operating in increasingly multilingual environments develop and how actors make the best use of their repertoires and adapt them skilfully to different objectives and conditions. Careful observation of actors' multilingual practices revealed finely tuned communicational strategies drawing on a wide range of different languages, including national languages, minority languages and *lingue franche*. The aim was to understand which communicative strategies are used in settings where several languages are used that are not all spoken equally well by all the individuals concerned. Understanding these practices, both their meaning and their implications, helps to show in what way and under what conditions they are not merely just a response to a problem, but an asset in business, political, educational, scientific and economic contexts.

One of the results of this research was the disproof of the common assumption that everyone speaks English. Participants adopt a wide range of strategies, and they do so in an extremely variable and dynamic way, constantly reassessing the solutions chosen. These strategies can be positioned on two axes. One axis contrasts “monolingual” strategies (“one language only” [olon] and “one language at a time” [olat]) with “multilingual” ones (“all the languages at the same time” [alast], sometimes called “all language at all time” [alat]), and the other one links the “exolingual” pole (greatly asymmetrical repertoires) with the

“endolingual” one (participants share the same repertoire). The following graph illustrates the diversity of solutions chosen, the solution inside the oval pointing to different forms of use of *lingue franche*:



Graph 5: Overview of language practices

Not only is the choice of a *lingua franca* such as English or French just one of many solutions; in addition, its form depends heavily on the speakers' levels of competence, ranging from a monolingual-endolingual mode (among speakers with a mastery of the *lingua franca* at a very high level) to a monolingual-exolingual one (where a barely mastered language is chosen for communication) or a multilingual-exolingual mode (where the speakers occasionally draw on other linguistic resources) and extreme forms where the *lingua franca* is a kind of hybrid, “rough-and-ready” version of the language. Other solutions comprise the *lingua receptiva* mode (sometimes known as “Swiss” or “Scandinavian” model [Lüdi/Höchle/Yanaprasart 2010]) in which everybody is expected to speak his/her own language and to understand the ones of the other speakers, and, of course, different forms of interpretation.

An extreme plurilingual mode can by the way also be observed in written discourse as exemplified by an ad of Swiss Airlines (NZZ am Sonntag, 1.3.2015). The slogan “our sign is a promise”) and the syntax of the headline (“volare to vingt-deux new destinations in ganz Europe”) are English (= matrix language); the inserted lexical units belong to English and three of four national languages.

The choice of language(s) at work in a mono-/multilingual mode largely depends on the participants' profiles and competence, as well as on the — negotiated — framework of participation (see Lüdi *et al.* 2012). In settings where participants are aware that their competence is asymmetrical, solutions that enable the multilingual situation to be managed are developed in the course of the activity. Such solutions are not pre-existing models that are simply adopted as they stand, but invented *in situ* by the multilingual participants, and negotiated throughout their interaction, thus exploiting their cognitive and strategic flexibility mentioned above. These rough-and-ready solutions allow maximum flexibility and adaptability to the context. Our observations confirm the findings by Mondada (Mondada/Nussbaum 2012, Mondada 2012) that actors use all these strategies in a very systematically patterned way, based on underlying socially constructed knowledge. Note that these patterns are quite different from classic bilingual interactions in traditionally bilingual communities such as Puerto Ricans in New York, or Alsatians, even if the translinguistic markers<sup>4</sup> might belong to similar categories.

Two cases of plurilingual interactions in very different business contexts can exemplify the diversity of strategies used.

The first interaction (examples 1 - 3) was recorded in 1999 by Isabel Kamber in a publishing-house in Montreux (French speaking part of Switzerland), and transcribed and published by Wetzel-Kranz (2001). DC, a German speaking programmer presents a new computer programme specially designed for the management of scientific articles to be published in a review. Florence's and Yolande's (the two collaborators') preferred language is French; the L1 of Rainer, the head of the unit, is German; his French is not very good and he prefers English.

Several observations are to be made:

(a) the dominating mode is plurilingual; all the participants have at least a passive knowledge in all the others' languages.

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<sup>4</sup> *Translinguistic markers* are phonetic, morpho-syntactic and lexical elements in utterances in a given variety (La) perceived as belonging to another variety (Lb), regardless of their origin and nature.

(b) the language choice is frequently renegotiated, sequences of exploratory language choice alternating with sequences where French, German and English are the *lingue franche* and at the same time the matrix language in which elements of all the other languages are embedded (Myers Scotton 1997).

In a first sequence (example 1), the matrix language is French. In line 8, Florence makes a participant related code-switching to German to make DC feel more comfortable; he sticks to French, but, corresponding to the level of his competence, in a clearly exolingual mode, with many insecurities and mistakes (e.g. *\*comprener* [l. 12 & 14], *on besoin un peu* [l. 13], *qu'est-ce que maintenant actuel* [l. 18], *tous les personnes* [l. 16], etc.) and the Swiss German discourse marker *aso* (lines 17 and 20). In this sequence, English appears only when they refer to the computer screen as in the case of the book title *book of Europe* (line 19) is the title of a book that appears on:

**Example 1**

1 DC: c'est okay'  
 2 Florence: mhm  
 3 DC: ouais'  
 4 Yolande: jusqu'à nouvel ordre  
 5 Florence: ((laughs))  
 6 DC: quoi'  
 7 Yolande: après application ça ira mieux . en gros je comprends  
 8 Florence: ((laughs)) nach Arbeit wird es besser  
 9 DC: mhmh . .  
 10 Florence: ((laughs))  
 11 DC: ouais . c'est . c'est . comme je dis' . c'est . difficile pour ex/  
 12 exni/ . pour expliquer comme ça parce que äh pour comprendre la  
 13 structure comment ça marche c'est . c'est . on besoin un peu . on doit  
 14 réfléchir ça pour comprendre comme ça marche avec tous les structures  
 15 ici . comment je dois définir ça . c'est un peu complexe . mais après.  
 16 quand on a une personne qui définit toujours ça avec Rainer tous les  
 17 personnes peuvent travailler travailler avec ça . **aso** par exemple je  
 18 pense on va maintenant travailler sur ça qu'est ce que maintenant  
 19 actuel pour vous . **book of Europe** je pense c'est Rainer avec Elena ils  
 20 ont fait ça . on a ici . X des articles . **aso** je pense c'est des  
 21 articles qu'ils ont jusqu'ici  
 22 Florence: mhmh . ouais  
 23 DC: ouais'  
 24 Florence: ouais

At the beginning of the second sequence (example 2), the constellation of the participants changes with DC's German request to Rainer to join the group. The language choice is at first exploratory with rapid switches from French to German (l. 2) to English (l. 4) until, after a pause of three seconds, Rainer chooses German, a choice to which all agree (from l. 15 onwards) even if DC shortly falls back into French (l. 22). This time, it is Florence and

Yolande who get into troubles (*le troisième* [l. 18], *von die Leuten* [l. 19], *die Adressen ist immer uns* [l. 26], German as *lingua franca* showing a kind of mirror effect of what we observed in example 1.

**Example 2**

1 DC: attends attends . peut-être je . je . Rainer' könntest du mal  
 2 kommen' .weil jetzt gehts um die Ressourcen  
 3 Rainer: ja  
 4 DC: maintenant il est en train de faire ça ((Rainer arrives)) you have  
 5 made the ressources here'  
 6 Rainer: yeah  
 7 DC: yes . now we have here the images from editor  
 8 Rainer: mhmh  
 9 DC: now it will be received from Taylor . the first . **aso**  
 10 Yolande: sent to Taylor  
 11 DC: sent to Taylor or received'  
 12 Rainer: received  
 13 Florence: no . sent .. the images  
 14 ((3 sec.))  
 15 Rainer: kommen von Taylor . gehen an die Grammatek  
 16 Yolande: ah ah ah  
 17 Florence: ja . aber zuerst  
 18 Yolande: (**le troisième**)  
 19 Florence: zuerst wir bekommen die Fotos von eh die Leuten  
 20 Rainer: nein . das wo der Taylor verantwortlich is kriegt er sie . das ist mir  
 21 so gesagt worden .  
 22 DC: **et ça maintenant**  
 23 Florence: ja weil . **aso**  
 24 Rainer: und es macht ja auch Sinn . weil der Taylor muß sie ja erst mal sehen  
 25 ob es gut is  
 26 Florence: klar . aber . zum Beispiel die Adressen ist immer uns . und dann . wir  
 27 schicken . weil zum zum Beispiel . ich hab das Problem gehabt . weil .  
 28 wir haben ein Fotos bekommen äh äh und jetzt müssen wir das zu Taylor  
 29 schicken . wir haben das by per mail geschickt und dann . wir schicken  
 30 weiter zum .  
 31 Rainer: gut . wenn es . wenn die Sachen für Taylor sind .. läßt de[=du] das  
 32 Foto . das wird nicht registriert . dann gehts automatisch  
 33 weitergeschickt an den Taylor und wird dann erst erfaßt wenns dann  
 34 wirklich is . weil wir wissen nich ob der Taylor das Foto überhaupt  
 35 akzeptt  
 36 Florence: ach so  
 37 Rainer: weil sonst hast du ja das Problem . du ak/ du nimmst das Foto in deine  
 38 Liste auf . versuchst es zu verfolgen . und er macht (quk quk quk)  
 39 Florence: mh  
 40 Rainer: mh'

A couple of minutes later, the common language (matrix language, *lingua franca*) has changed again, this time from German to English. But the characteristics remain the same as in the two preceding examples: the quality of the *lingua franca* is variable (e.g. lines 9-10 *when it arrive in French then you have to send it to get it translate in English*) and there are

embedded elements of other languages (e.g. l. 27 *ça c'est quoi ça?*, l. 33-33 *les P M E, ah eh, ça c'est partie A, ça c'est le S M I*, l. 37 *c'est ça maintenant*).

**Example 3**

1 DC: what'  
 2 Yolande: sometimes we receive everything in French . so we give the title we  
 3 receive in French and then we . you know  
 4 Rainer: we are making an English book with English titles English articles  
 5 Yolande: yes . but  
 6 Rainer: I don't care . I have an English book I have English articles . I  
 7 don't want any translation inside this ressource planning . because (I  
 8 can take my mind)  
 9 Yolande: but it's a process which we have to go through . when it arrive in  
 10 French then you have to send it to get it translate in English to get  
 11 it translate in English and then it has to go back to the writer to  
 12 check and then come back (we still have this on) because the people  
 13 are supposed to write in the language they want  
 14 Rainer: ähm .. that's correct . for the part A it's a different way- for part  
 15 B and part C it's correct . ( and there are some ressources I created  
 16 äh when its a different language other then english to the translation  
 17 office then it comes back . this is äh .. BUT . for here . to have an  
 18 overview . what's . of what's going  
 19 Yolande: of what is going on . yes  
 20 Rainer: you have to decide one language and this is an English book . so we  
 21 have an English language . that's it ... and I do . I don't want to  
 22 change my my point of view  
 23 Yolande: oh it's okay for me  
 24 DC: ok- but- now these texts here- are this the final aso finished  
 25 articles text' or'  
 26 Florence: ehm  
 27 Yolande: **ça c'est quoi ça'**  
 28 Florence: yeah, because eh  
 29 DC: E Q P  
 30 Rainer: it's an English text  
 31 Florence: it has a French title  
 32 Yolande: what is it' . **les P M E .ah eh . ça c'est partie A**  
 33 DC: **ça c'est le S M I .**  
 34 Yolande: **partie A**  
 35 DC: **oui** . is this the final text' or'  
 36 Florence: ehm .. it's supposed to .. because eh  
 37 DC: **c'est ça maintenant** . you know you have different ressources from text  
 38 A and now we have here check in text A . checking layout . corrected .  
 39 final prooved . the final text . now . here we don't see what we have-  
 40 which text we have-  
 41 Florence: mhmh  
 42 DC: that's- that's the point-

The preceding considerations draw upon a functional conception of multilingualism (CECR 2001). A set of skills in different languages, from near native to very partial, is seen as an integrated whole which is more than the sum total of its parts. Such a “multicompetence” (Cook 2008) or plurilingual “repertoire” (Gumperz 1982; Gal 1986; Lüdi 2006; Moore & Castellotti eds. 2008; Lüdi & Py 2009, etc.) was defined as a set of

“resources” – both verbal (registers, dialects and languages) and non-verbal (e.g. mime and gestural expression) – that are shared and jointly mobilised by the actors in order to find local solutions to practical problems (Mondada 2001; Pekarek Doehler 2005).

Where one language only seems appropriate or possible, participants try to remain with this choice as much as possible. This is the case for French in example 1, German in example 2 and English in example 3. Nonetheless, — referring to English —, the Vienna specialists in *lingua franca* speak of a "multilingual mode":

When language users are in an ELF mode, the range of resources and possibilities available to them is not limited to English however. Even though English is apparent on the surface, all of the speakers' linguistic resources are concurrently available for use. They are not automatically switched

As a matter of fact, the ways of using a *lingua franca* depend heavily on the speakers' levels of competence, ranging from a monolingual-endolingual mode (among speakers with a mastery of the *lingua franca* at a very high level) to a monolingual-exolingual one (where a barely mastered language is chosen for communication) or a multilingual-exolingual mode. The results of all Dylan teams having worked on this topic point into the same direction. A *lingua franca* — be it French, German or English — is not a variety, but “actually constituted by very heterogeneous and multilingual varieties” (Markaki et al. 2013, 26), a kind of open variational space. This is of course also true for English: “Like any *lingua franca*, ELF emerges in multilingual settings. It is not only realised within, but also through linguistic diversity.” (Hülmbauer/Seidlhofer 2013, 388). The more exolingual the setting is and the broader the interlocutors' repertoire, the more the speakers will draw occasionally on other linguistic resources. Talk in *lingua franca* is “interwoven with speakers' overall linguistic repertoires” (Hülmbauer/Seidlhofer 2013, 387). Thus, English as *lingua franca* appears “to be a multilingual mode” and the linguistic means used correspond to the “kind of hybrid, “rough-and-ready” version of the language” mentioned above (Lüdi et al. 2013). In other words, the use of a *lingua franca* does not differ categorically from plurilinguaging, but constitutes a borderline case of the latter.

Our second case study comes from a very different context. Recorded by Lucas A. Barth (2008) at a counter of the railway station of Basel, it presents a transactional interaction between an officer and a client. As the client answers in English to the Swiss German greeting *guete Tag* (LINE 2), the officer switches to English too and the whole transaction will be carried out in a monolingual-exolingual mode:

**Example 4**

1 Employé guete Tag  
2 Client good morning I want (going) to the Milano.  
3 Employé to Milano ?  
4 Client yes.=  
5 Employé =on which day ? (..) what day are you travelling?=  
6 Client =today.  
7 Employé today. and what time roughly? (1) at what time? (2) what time are  
8 you leaving?  
9 Client eh nine.  
10 Employé nine o'clock (.) now? (..) so you need a ticket for the nine o  
11 four.  
12 Client nine o four.  
13 Employé how many travellers? (2) one person [two three&  
14 Client [eh a person]  
15 Employé &four five? ((dénombrer en utilisant ses doigts))  
16 Client one one. one. one person.  
17 Employé in second or in first class? (2) in second class or in first  
18 class?  
19 Client eh (2) first class.  
20 Employé first class. (13) so that's for now (.) in eh: fifteen minutes  
21 >the train leaves nine o four Basel to Milano Centrale< and you  
22 arrive fourteen thirty five in first class. coach is three one  
23 one one. You're booked on seat seventy one. the price is one  
24 hundert and sixty four francs please.  
25 Client okey and: I eh: eh I want going to Kopenhagen and police eh  
26 german eh turn to Italy  
27 Employé I beg your pardon. What XXX?  
28 Client police german turn to Italy eeh ticket from Milano eh eh if  
29 return to Milano  
30 Employé (3) this has been used. (Rail service) in Italy. I can't refund  
31 the ticket here. you must speak to Italian eh: Italian ticketing-  
32 (back). I would like to have hund- one hundert and sixty four  
33 francs please. that's the price for this ticket.  
34 Client one hundert?  
35 Employé one hundert sixty four [francs eh swiss francs]  
36 Client [euro? euro?]  
37 Employé do you have swiss francs? (1) so do you need to change money?  
38 Client how (many) euro?  
39 Employé hundert and five euro

The sequence consists of two parts. Firstly, the aim of the client is to buy a first class ticket to Milan (lines 1-25). Despite of some linguistic problems, solved by frequent reformulations by the officer (lines 7-8) and non verbal means (lines 13-16), this goal is achieved. In a side sequence, he then tries to get his original ticket Milan-Copenhagen reimbursed, a journey he could not complete because of administrative problems with the Germans (*police german turn to Italy*, lines 26-27 and 29-30). This part of the interaction is hardly comprehensible, but the officer is able to make a guess because the client provides the original ticket. However, he relegates him to the Italian railway company and returns to the first aim, the payment of the ticket. In this monolingual-exolingual interaction, no other means than English, gestures and material objects are used. Nevertheless, this transaction

illustrates well the rough-and-ready character of the *lingua franca* that is used. In the client's turns, there is no elaborated syntax (*I want going to Kopenhagen and police eh german eh turn to Italy*), no verbal morphology (past time), no articles, minimal use of prepositions, etc. He sticks to a pre-grammatical mode of communication (Givón 1984, <sup>2</sup>2001; 1998) that is heavily knowledge based and where word order is mainly characterised by the information status of discourse elements. Speaking about the use of English as *lingua franca*, we must acknowledge that it includes such minimal forms of English that are very far away from “Queen's English”.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

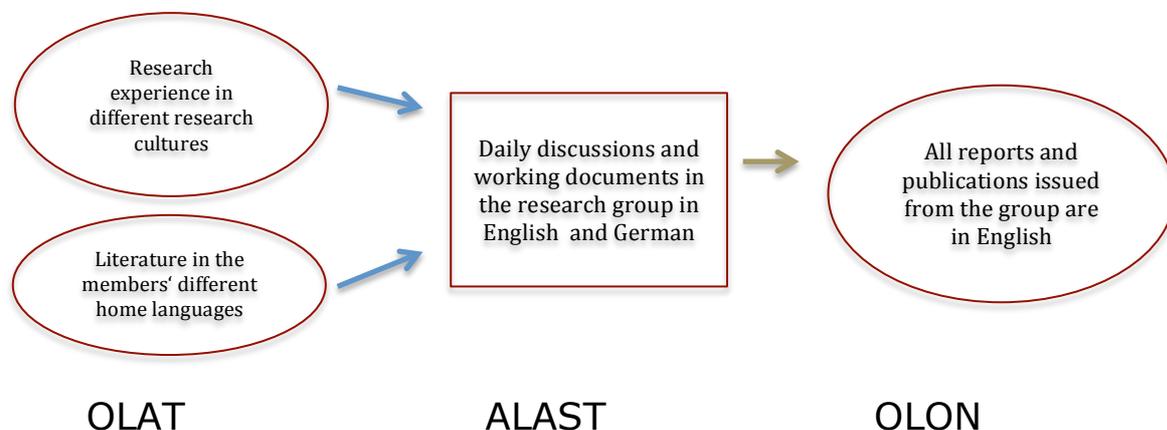
English is very important, indeed, as business language in Switzerland, in particular — but not only — for external communication. But this does not mean that it replaces the national languages. In fact, multilingual solutions prevail where participants draw on their entire repertoire. This is even true for the written mode. In their 2013 contribution about English as *lingua franca* to the Dylan book, Hülmbauer and Seidlhofer restrict the range of their findings to spoken language because it is “less constrained by the standardising forces associated with writing” (Hülmbauer/Seidlhofer 2013, 392). However, the written language might be affected as well. Concerning reporting about the experimental work in his unit, the head of a research laboratory with <Pharma A>, confesses

Tous les rapports doivent être en anglais. Tout document officiel, le study plan, doit être en anglais. Le travail expérimental, ça peut être en allemand ou anglais. Il y a ce que nous appelons raw data, les données brutes, c'est en allemand. Les working documents, les documents avec lesquels elles [sc les laborantines] travaillent, sont en allemand, et ça, c'est un peu toléré parce qu'on est en Suisse. C'est un mélange. Parfois c'est intéressant, mais je ne me rends pas compte quand je parle et parfois il y a un mélange linguistique.

This can be seen as an asset instead of as a problem. The members of the lab bring with them a wide experience in different research cultures (Swiss, French, English); in their daily work, they use a language mix<sup>1</sup> that allows for precision and creativity in their respective comfort zones. However, the official reporting is in English (see Lüdi ed. 2010 and Lüdi *et al.* 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> In order to know how real life communication at the workplace matches these declarations, we not only audio-recorded different team meetings, we also convinced some persons to record all their verbal inter-actions during two working days with a clip-on microphone. Jamal H., head of the Lab B, was one of the participants in this study. The recordings firstly confirm the hypothesis that English is the most frequently used language by him and indeed with him (68%). All the meetings with members of his lab with one exception, including many encounters with other people, most phone calls, the greetings in the corridors and the small talk in the cafeteria, were all in English. However French obviously competed with English in his daily practice from small talk to negotiations with IT



Graph 6: Flowchart representing the process of writing an English report

In other words, the team is linguistically mixed, team members are plurilingual to a different degree, bring along readings and research experiences in different scientific cultures in their "educational suitcase" — and are facing the task to produce texts in English as corporate language only. We start from the premise that the asset that should be exploited for major innovation is reflected by the content of the members' respective suitcases.

In our flow chart we suggest that English might be in fact the language of reporting, but that all of the speakers' linguistic resources might have been concurrently used during the process of elaboration of knowledge. In other words, even scientific discourse produced in academic English (i. e. eventually corrected by native readers) "may only be superficially monolingual, in the sense that beneath the outward expression of this discourse, the many mental stages of its elaboration have taken place in another, or possibly many other languages"; thus, discourse in one given language "draws on a stratification embodying other linguistic inputs." The internal discussions correspond to the ALAST mode.

One of the conclusions of DYLAN claims that this is an asset:

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specialists up to a long scientific discussion about an experience protocol (23% of the overall speaking time). The underlying rule is: if an interlocutor is francophone, speak French and if his or her preferred language is another than French then use English. Jamal H. makes one exception to his second rule – when addressing a lab assistant of Hungarian origin, he systematically chooses German (9%). In addition, Jamal H.'s microphone records a great number of Swiss German conversations in his immediate entourage indicating that he is frequently exposed to this language.

This superposition of layers probably has particular relevance for scientific and academic discourse, because the elaboration of analytical thought embodied in written or oral productions can proceed differently depending on the linguistic resources exploited in the process. (Berthoud et al. 2013, 451).

The (re)discovery of the layers beneath the surface may then be compared to an exercise in “thick description” – a notion proposed by Usunier (2010) in the continuity of Geertz's (1973) approach to the interpretation of cultures. “Thick standardisation” – focuses on the complex dynamics between diversity and standardisation, the presence of the “different” within the homogeneous, and the diversity which exists within uniqueness. From the outset, the use of a standardised form, reflecting the desire to reach a certain threshold of mutual comprehensibility in the broadest sense, must be understood in full awareness of the potentially deceptive character of standardisation that may sometimes lead to a failure to understand even when you think you do. In other words, the use of a single language (whether English or any other) can create a false impression of shared meaning, when in fact actual meanings may differ and reflect deeper linguistic layers. Here again, one implication is that communication will be more reliable if allowance is made for these complex, intrinsically multilingual processes.

It is time to conclude. It results from our investigations that

- English is increasingly important in the Swiss business world, but rather in addition than instead of other languages;
- as a general rule, English is one of the components of an integrated plurilingual repertoire;
- in most cases, the practice of English as *lingua franca* corresponds to an exolingual mode that bears more or less traces of the users' other languages;
- more generally, plurilingual solutions to the firms' and their employees' communicative challenges are not only frequent and normal, but represent a real asset rather than an emergency solution.

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