

TEENAGERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS FRANGLAIS IN FRANCE AND FRANCOPHONE SWITZERLAND

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Abstract

The insertion of English items into the French language has gradually become more and more common since the 1950s: from *e-mail* through to *lunch bag*, French is now pervaded by English words. Elaborating on this observation, this article examines and compares the attitudes to these words – belonging to the *franglais* paradigm – as reported by teenagers of France and francophone Switzerland. Based on empirical questionnaire-derived data, it shows, after a quick review of the sociolinguistic background of each area of investigation that the use and perception of *franglais* among teenagers is similar in the two countries, where *franglais* appears to be frequently used and favourably considered

Key-words: Franglais, Anglicisms, globalisation, Académie française, youth language, Swiss French, French French.

1. INTRODUCTION¹

In 1964, French writer Étiemble published *Parlez-vous franglais?*, denouncing what he called “le sabir atlantique” or, in other words, the linguistic imperialism of the English language, whose vocabulary was gradually penetrating the French language. At a time when America was taking over the economy, Étiemble’s book quickly became a bestseller in France. The journalists praised “l’espèce de génie créateur de ce diable d’homme” (Le Monde, 1964) and the book was to be published in a new augmented edition in 1973 and in 1980. To launch his book, Étiemble toured France to hold conferences and even stopped in Lausanne, where his talk also met with success. Talking to a full house, Étiemble charmed the audience and the Swiss journalists praised him in their articles: “M. Étiemble lutte pour une bonne cause” wrote the reporter of the *Journal de Genève* in 1965.

That was fifty years ago. At that time, for Switzerland, “le bon usage” was dictated by Paris and [...] ‘tout ce qui ne figure pas dans le dictionnaire n’est pas français.’” (Charnley 2002: 191). However, the French language spoken in Switzerland has evolved since then and the second half of the 20th century has been a time of development of the Swiss variety of French in Romandie, gradually differentiating itself from Standard French (Prikhodkine

¹ The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers, as well as the editor, Patricia Ronan, for their helpful advice. All remaining shortcomings are, of course, the author’s responsibility.

2011). One is hence entitled to wonder if Étienne would be as welcome today as he was in the 1960s and if France and Switzerland would still share the same attitudes as far as *franglais* is concerned. Elaborating on this question, this article explores the stance of French and Swiss teenagers concerning the insertions of English words into the French language. Based on the results of a questionnaire survey, it particularly seeks to determine (1) if French and Swiss teenagers use *franglais*, (2) the way French and Swiss teenagers value *franglais* and (3) if French and Swiss teenagers differ from each other as far as *franglais* is concerned. After defining what *franglais* consists of, the linguistic background of each country is reviewed, with special attention paid to the institutional and societal treatment of *franglais*. The method used to elicit and treat the data is discussed in the following section, prior to presenting the findings of the study. Conclusions are drawn in the last section.

2. ENGLISH ITEMS IN THE FRENCH LANGUAGE? A DEFINITION OF FRANGLAIS WORDS

Examples of language contact throughout the world have shown that languages can influence each other in a wide range of ways: new features of pronunciation, lexical evolution, syntactic changes or new graphemic styles are just few of the various and numerous outcomes of language contact, which may potentially impact all the levels of a given language. This multi-stratal influence has also been demonstrated in the case of English and Romance languages, whose contact results in different types of anglicisms, including (among others) phonological, graphemic, syntactic, morphological, lexical and semantic anglicisms (Gómez Capuz 1997). While all these types of anglicisms also exist in the case of French, the present study focuses solely on *franglais* words, as defined by Thody:

The implicit definition of a 'franglais' word is that of a term which is of visibly English or American origin [and] which has not been fully assimilated into the language (1995:16).

'Franglais' thus refers to the most salient lexical anglicisms, that is to say those words that still sound English (be they genuine loans or pseudo-loans, i.e. words which sound English but do not actually exist in English) when encountered by a native speaker of French. Words such as *e-mail*, *babyfoot* and *shopping* are typical examples of items that were investigated within this study.

3. DIFFERENT CONTEXTS OF INVESTIGATION? SOCIOLINGUISTIC BACKGROUND OF FRANCE AND ROMANDIE

Although France and Romandie share the same language, French, the sociolinguistic context of each country strongly differs from the one to the other. France, on the one hand, has a very strong tradition of interventionist linguistic policy: from the Edict of Villers-Cotteret of 1539

imposing the use of French in the whole country through to our times, French has been used as a tool to strengthen the power of the state and unify its citizens (Adamson 2007). The present situation of French in France reflects this long interventionist tradition, as it is to date protected by numerous laws and institutional measures. The first of them consists in the *Loi Toubon*, a legal provision seeking to maintain the status of French in France. Passed in 1994, the law ensures that French be used whenever a message is publicly addressed, be it in adverts, contracts or corporate names, for example. Although its efficiency has been criticized (Chaudenson 2006, Adamson 2007, Grigg 1997), it is still in force today and definitely influences the linguistic landscape in France. The *Dispositif d'enrichissement de la langue française* is another of these measures and results from the *Loi Toubon*. Because words of foreign origin are legally prohibited in public spaces, the *Dispositif* is in charge of creating the new words needed to cope with the societal and technical evolutions. The *Dispositif* involves almost all the institutions in charge of dealing with language in France, such as the *Académie des Sciences*, the *Association française de normalisation*, the *Institut national de la langue française*, the *Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France* and the *Académie française*. Although its efficiency has also been criticized (Chaudenson 2006, Thody 1995, Bogaards 2008), the *Dispositif* remains an important characteristic of the French linguistic policy, as some of its words are now widely used instead of English words. The words *ordinateur* and *affichage tête haute*, for example, imposed themselves to refer to a *computer* and *head up display*, respectively. Among the various institutions involved in the *Dispositif*, lastly, the *Académie française* deserves a special mention. Created in 1635 with the aim of ensuring the purity of the French language, the *Académie* is strongly engaged in the fight against anglicisms and regularly publishes recommendations as to how to speak correctly and avoid anglicisms. Through the *Loi Toubon*, the *Dispositif d'enrichissement de la langue française* and the *Académie française*, France is provided with a whole apparatus in charge of dealing with and regulating the French language, particularly as far as *français* is concerned.

The linguistic situation is, however, completely different in Switzerland and Romandie. Whereas France tries to enforce the use of one sole language on its territory, the linguistic policy of Switzerland distinguishes itself by its liberalism and enforces the use of multiple languages, possibly English. As language freedom is guaranteed by the federal constitution, Switzerland neither does nor wishes nor is able to legislate on anglicisms, which are, legally speaking, free to be used in the country. Furthermore, the only linguistic agency in charge of dealing with French, the *Délégation à la langue française*, has shown no interest in anglicisms so far and has not made any communication on the subject. Accordingly, the legal and institutional linguistic situation of Switzerland concerning anglicisms completely differs

from the one in France, with the former country being extremely permissive and the latter extremely strict.

Whereas the institutional and legal situations of France and Switzerland concerning anglicisms are clearly defined and different from each other, the status of anglicisms within their society is harder to assess. In the case of France, the growth of the English influence onto French has been met, on the one hand, with the creation of numerous NGOs and publications decrying this evolution. Associations such as (among others) the *Association Francophonie Avenir*, the *Association pour la sauvegarde et l'expansion de la langue française* or the *Collectif Unitaire Républicain pour la Résistance, l'Initiative et l'Emancipation Linguistique* seem to testify to the attachment of the population to its language and confirm Grigg's comment on the *Loi Toubon* that

the very fact that the subject has been brought to the public's attention for debate can only bolster support for the plight of the language [...]. The French population has been forced to think about the effects of Anglo-American words on its language, and in a way the whole process has functioned like an immense nationwide trial." (Grigg 1997:384)

On the other hand, various sociolinguistic studies have shown that the French population is not as unamenable to anglicisms as the French state is. Four studies (Spence 1999, Guilford 1997, Walker 2002 and Walsh 2013) have been particularly concerned with anglicisms and come to conclusions such as:

many French citizens are not as purist nor as hostile to Anglo-American culture as the politicians who oppose *franglais* (Spence 1999: 136, translation by the present author)

loans are welcome and accepted (Guilford 1997: 133, translation by the present author)

The relationship of the French citizens to *franglais* is thus ambivalent, with part of the population opposing it and another part embracing it.

The situation is even more difficult to assess in the case of Switzerland and Romandie. Whereas the growth of the English influence onto French has also been met with the creation of a NGO, the *Association Défense du français*, the present author could not find any sociolinguistic study particularly pertaining to anglicisms in the western part of Switzerland. Though Rash (1996) already dealt with the topic, her study only takes eastern Switzerland and the Swiss-German language into consideration. The perception of *franglais* expressions in Romandie remained to be investigated.

4. DATA AND METHOD

In order to compare France and Switzerland, this study focuses on one specific group of informants in each country, final year high school students. To gather their opinion, a

questionnaire was designed and distributed to six classes in two high schools, the one in the city of Amiens, in France, and the other in the city of Lausanne, in Switzerland. The two groups were chosen for their similarity: Lausanne and Amiens are comparable in size and the two high schools are comparable in terms of social class and location within the city. The questionnaires were completed in class by the two sets of informants in October 2013. The French set of informants was made up of 51 students aged between 16 and 19, 32 girls and 19 boys, who all speak French at home. The Swiss set of informants was made up of 55 students aged between 17 and 21, 29 girls and 26 boys. The majority of them (85%) speak French at home, the remaining part speak other languages.

As the questionnaire contained many closed questions for which the respondents had to tick or cross, statistical analysis and testing were also carried out. The results of these tests appear in the commentary accompanying the results in the next section. The tests used were the chi-square test, the Fisher exact test and the *t*-test – depending on the type of question. As the number of participants remains low, the Fisher exact test was preferred to the chi-square test whenever the format of the question allowed it. The standard of $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$ was also considered as the significance threshold for this study.

5. RESULTS

The first part of the research aimed at assessing the general point of view of the informants towards English and French. In order to do so, the informants were first asked to report on the associations they had with the two languages. As the question was open and no items suggested, this provided us with a range of replies by each informant. The six most frequently appearing terms in the informants' answers are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

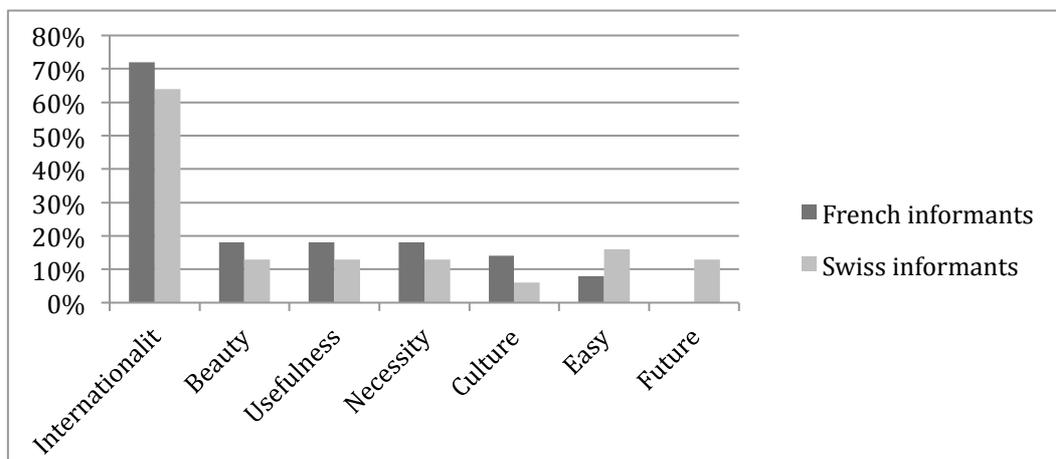


Figure 1: informants' most frequent associations with English

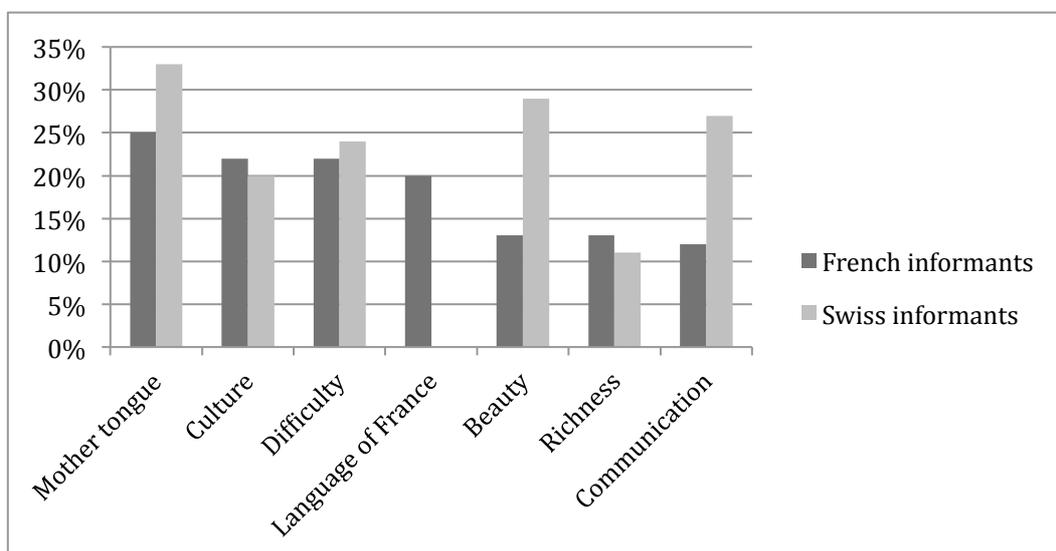


Figure 2: informants' most frequent associations with French

The examination of the two figures above reveals that, for each language, five associations are common to both groups. English thus typically prompts positive associations, such as *internationality*, *beauty*, *usefulness*, *necessity* and *ease* whereas the associations prompted by the French language are more nuanced with *mother tongue*, *culture*, *beauty*, *richness*, but also *difficulty* (even for native speakers – 22% of the French and 24% of the Swiss set of informants report French to be difficult, while no non-native speaker of French is to be found in the French group and only 15% in the Swiss group). Hence, and for each language, there is only one difference between the two groups: the French informants do not associate English with future and the Swiss informants do not consider French as the language of France. This first part of the questionnaire was supplemented by a closed question asking the respondents to report on their attachment to French, in which they had to select between the statements “I feel attached to French” and “French is a means of communication for me”. Here again, the results are similar, as illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1: attachment of the informants to the French language

	French informants	Swiss informants
I feel attached to French	58%	59%
French is a means of communication	42%	41%

The results obtained for this first part of the questionnaire thus demonstrate that the French and the Swiss respondents share similar representations of the two languages at stake with franglais. Both groups have a positive attitude towards English and a more ambiguous relationship to their own language, which they both praise but find complex. Both groups nevertheless claim to be attached to it.

In order to investigate perception of franglais items, and the reasons triggering their use, the informants were first given a text containing a high number of franglais words. To ensure that the informants were not yet alerted to the focus of the study, this element was placed at the very beginning of the questionnaire. In this open question, the informants were simply asked to report whatever they noticed in the text provided. Figure 3 indicates the proportion of informants who reported the heavy use of franglais.

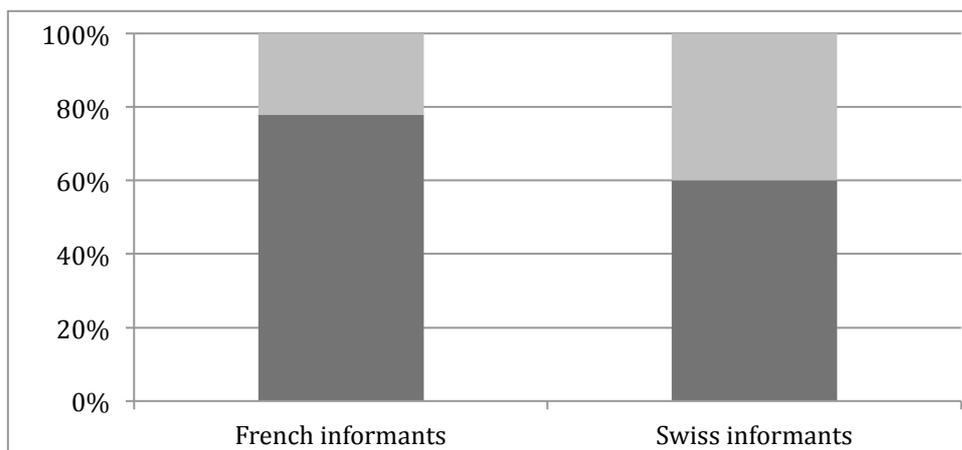


Figure 3: Proportion of informants who reported franglais (in dark colour) and did not report franglais (in light colour)

As Figure 3 shows, the majority of both groups still reported franglais terms when they encounter them in a text. Although a larger number of French than Swiss informants report them than the Swiss ones, the difference is not statistically significant (Fisher exact test p -value = 0.06). Thus, franglais still seems to be part of the extraordinary for most informants.

The next question asked the informants to report on their own frequency of use of franglais. The results are given in Figure 4.

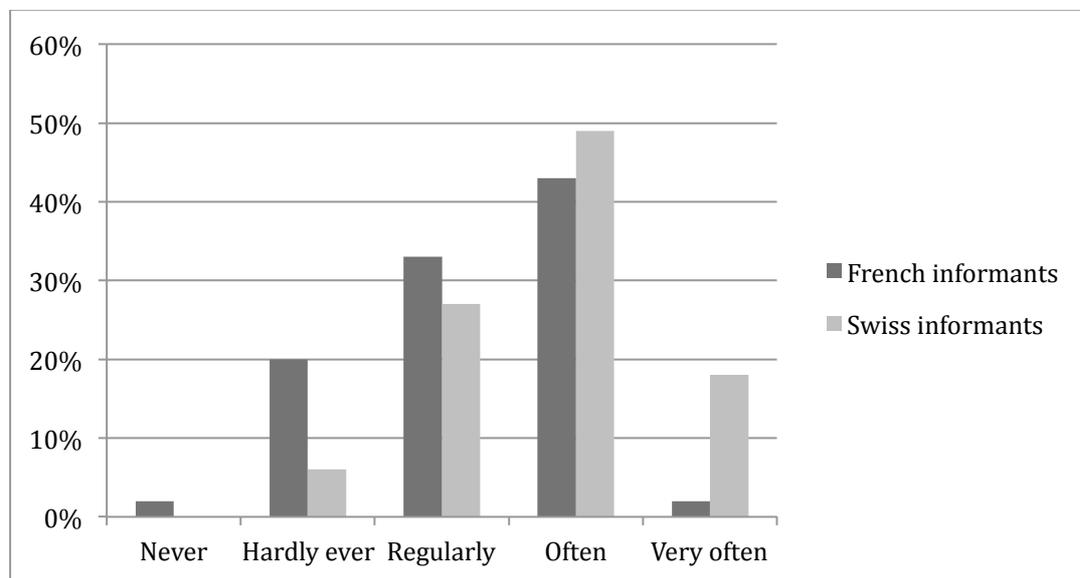


Figure 4: Reported frequency of use of franglais by the two groups

As Figure 4 shows, the majority of the informants report using franglais either regularly or often. The difference between the two groups is significant (unpaired t-test p -value=0.0007). This high frequency of use nevertheless appears to be limited to an oral context as 82% of the French informants and 98% of the Swiss ones claim to try to avoid franglais more in a formal or written context than in an oral context. Franglais is thus frequently used by the informants of both groups, though they are still aware of its use as seen in the frequency of its reporting in texts and its explicit avoidance in formal contexts.

The reasons triggering the use of franglais were also investigated within this part of the research. In order to evaluate them, the informants were asked to select the most important out of four reasons, obtained by previous pilot studies carried out by the present author. The results obtained have been summarized in Figure 5.

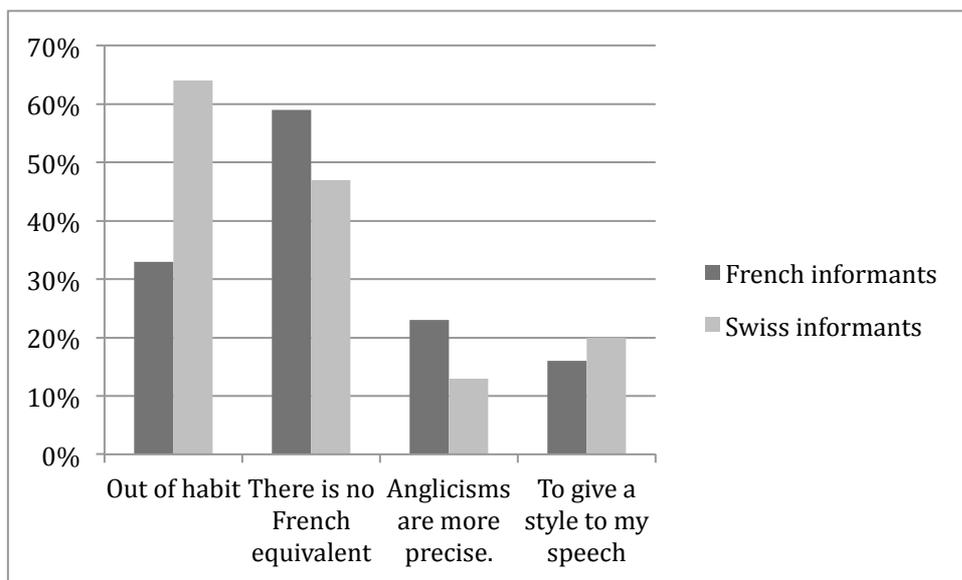


Figure 5: Reasons for using franglais words

Although some differences seem to emerge for this question, they are not important enough to be considered statistically significant (chi-square test p -value= 0.06). Both the Swiss and the French informants primarily use franglais because they are common or because there is no French equivalent and, to a lesser extent, because they are more precise or because they have a phatic function.

This second section has shown that the use of franglais does not differ from one country to the other. Although the majority of the two groups notice franglais when it appears and try to avoid its use in a formal context, they nevertheless use it often, and for similar reasons.

The third and last step of the research aimed at determining the attitude of the informants towards franglais. In order to measure their attitude, the informants were asked to rate fourteen statements related to six different aspects of franglais, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A no opinion option was offered as well. Each statement was also balanced by a corresponding negative statement in order to check the reliability of the answers. To treat the data statistically, the answers were coded using a scale ranging from 1 to 5. The analysed aspects included (1) general position towards franglais (items 1-4), (2) aesthetics (items 5-6), (3) purism (items 7-8), (4) language maintenance (items 9-10), (5) culture (items 11-12) and (6) comprehension (items 13-14). The results obtained in both groups are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Attitude of the French and Swiss informants towards franglais

	French informants		Swiss informants		T-test two-tailed <i>p</i> -value (means)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
◆1. I'm completely opposed to franglais.	4.56	0.79	4.5	0.74	0.74
2. I'm completely open to franglais.	4	1.08	3.68	1.05	0.13
◆3. I'm irritated when someone uses franglais.	4.44	0.77	4.41	0.78	0.84
4. I like it when someone uses franglais.	3.4	0.81	3.23	0.78	0.37
◆5. Franglais harms the beauty of French	3.7	1.26	3.27	1.11	0.06
6. Franglais brings tinges to French and make it stylish.	3.29	1.25	2.96	1.13	0.17
◆7. The French language is polluted by franglais.	3.8	0.96	3.51	0.99	0.13
8. The French language is enriched by franglais.	3.35	1.23	2.96	1.39	0.13
◆9. Franglais is a threat to the survival of French.	3.55	1.1	3.61	0.98	0.77
10. Franglais is necessary for French to be still used in the future.	2.76	1.14	2.4	1.38	0.16
◆11. Franglais is a threat to our cultural wealth.	3.62	1.09	3.37	1.12	0.29
12. Franglais enhances our culture.	3.6	1.02	2.81	1.3	0.0007
◆13. The meaning of a franglais word is not always clear in French.	2.66	1.08	2.65	1.11	0.96
14. Franglais fosters a better understanding between French speakers.	2.96	1.06	2.21	1.12	0.0009
AVERAGE	3.55	1.05	3.26	1.07	0.18

◆ = Question negatively correlated to franglais. The mean written in the table has already been inverted. SD = Standard Deviation

The answers appearing in Table 2 show that the informants have a positive attitude towards franglais in general, as the positive averages of the two groups demonstrate. Furthermore, the average *p*-value according to the t-test confirms that the two groups are homogeneous. The reliability check nevertheless shows that this positive general stance is not blind faith: although the informants strongly disagree with any statement against franglais

(odd-numbered statements), they do not agree as strongly with the corresponding statement in favour of franglais (even-numbered statements). This pattern can be noted throughout the table: while most informants disagree that franglais harms the beauty of the language, they do not agree as strongly with the assumption that it makes French more pleasant either, an observation that can be repeated for the pollution of the language and its enrichment. This distribution is even more noticeable with the fourth factor (items 9 and 10): franglais is not considered a threat to the survival of the language, but its use does not guarantee its survival either. As far as culture is concerned, the same distribution as for the previous factors can be observed for the Swiss informants. The French informants, by contrast, seem to be much more positive about it and consider franglais as a way to broaden their culture. The last factor, understanding and communication, provides the only reason for which both groups seem to be opposed to franglais, which seem to cause misunderstandings to both the Swiss and the French informants. The attitudes towards franglais are thus similar for the two groups of informants, who all appear to be open to franglais in general.

6. CONCLUSION

The results presented in the above section provide a clear answer to the three research questions of this study. The question whether French and Swiss teenagers use franglais has received the answer that the informants do use franglais to a large extent, though it remains part of colloquial speech. In answer to the second question, this research has also shown that both groups associate positive values with franglais, as the two reasons evoked by most participants for this use – commonness and lack of French equivalents – testify to the importance of English in the everyday life of francophone speakers. Nonetheless, the informants' answers show that they do not vow unconditional love to English and that they remain, in majority, attached to the French language. The third and last research question of whether French and Swiss informants differ in their opinions regarding franglais is thus to be answered negatively: the French and the Swiss informants, despite the political and institutional differences between the two countries, do not appear to differ from each other as far as franglais is concerned.

We can thus see that the attitude of the Swiss informants towards franglais is not different from the one of the French informants. The global influence of English seems to be as strong and English as appreciated in Switzerland as in France, despite the purist tradition maintained by the *Académie française* and the laws in force in this latter country. The numerous associations defending French in France do not mirror the opinion and habits of the majority of the French informants, as the *Association Défense du français* does not reflect the opinion and habits of the majority of the Swiss informants either.

Both France and Switzerland – or, at least, the teenagers participating in this study – have evolved since the time of Étiemble's *Parlez-vous franglais ?*, though probably not in the way he would have liked. If his opinion were to be heard again nowadays, chances are France and Switzerland would probably still resemble each other but his discourse would certainly not be met with as much enthusiasm as back then, to say the least. This prevision, however, can only be made in case of an audience reflecting the present set of informants, that is to say, in case of a young, well-educated audience. The French and the Swiss living in different regions with different traditions and backgrounds, it might even be possible that their perceptions differ within similar populations. Further research is thus still needed in order to give a comprehensive overview of the overall situation of franglais in France and Switzerland, especially as sociolinguistic studies concerned with other languages have shown that age plays a crucial role in its perception, with older people appearing to be more critical about the use of franglais. A new study with a larger sample population could also allow taking the gender dimension into account, which had to be left out of this study due to the small number of informants of each gender. Accordingly, age and gender are two dimensions that still need to be investigated with regard to franglais. Then, and only then, could it be determined if francophone speakers really *parlent franglais* or not.

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