Receptive Multilingualism

Linguistic analyses, language policies and didactic concepts

Edited by

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CHAPTER 6

The Swiss model of plurilingual communication

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The Swiss have decided to teach three languages, the local language, a second national language and English, from Primary school on. This should enable communicative encounters between persons from different linguistic backgrounds. An asymmetry between productive and receptive competences should foster the receptive bilingualism in a form sometimes called “Swiss model”: everyone speaks his or her own language and understands the other. But real communicative practices do not match this stereotype fully. This paper analyses the complex dynamics of face to face interaction in some key examples of authentic cross-linguistic communication at work in Switzerland. It shows how native and non-native speakers take mutual profit from all the languages they know. Neither monolingual models nor receptive bilingualism strictu sensu dominate; “mixed” forms of exploiting the respective repertoires emerge. In order to understand this language use, the paper questions the traditional representations of language competence.

Keywords: receptive competence, Swiss model, cross-linguistic communication, Switzerland

1. Introduction

We all know that Switzerland is quadrilingual and basks in peaceful linguistic harmony. But this image is misleading and needs to be corrected in many respects. First, the Federal Constitution mentions four national languages (German, French, Italian and Romansch), but, in addition, there are increasing unrecognized linguistic minorities of migrants who live in Switzerland (see table 1).¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>63.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhaeto-Romance</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other languages</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Most important languages of immigration in 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>in %</th>
<th>in absolute figures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serbian/Croatian</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>103,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>94,937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>89,527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>77,506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>73,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>44,523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>21,816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>14,345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>11,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>9,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>8,279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>7,569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>7,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonian</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>6,415</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 gives an overview of the most important languages of immigration in 2000 (in absolute figures and in percentage of the whole resident population).

Second, the territoriality principle allows or rather constrains the use of only one of the official languages in each of the language regions of the country with the exception of a few overlap areas such as Bienne, Fribourg or the federal capital Berne. Juridically, Switzerland is thus a mosaic made up of largely monolingual regions in which the other national languages enjoy more or less the same status as, say, Spanish or English.

The school system, with obligatory language teaching in a second national language from the 3rd/5th grade of primary school onwards, does make an attempt to correct this picture. But even if every adolescent in Switzerland has acquired a basic knowledge of one of her/his neighbouring languages, we can hardly speak of bilingualism, let alone multilingualism. We will come back to this point.

Third, German speaking Switzerland provides the stage for a diglossic situation between standard German (often called High German or written German) and Swiss German, the functional distribution of which can be roughly described as ‘medial’ (Kolde 1981). In almost all social situations throughout German-speaking Switzerland dialects are spoken in all social classes without exception (in 2000, 86.1% of all inhabitants of the German speaking region, including the speakers of other languages, spoke Swiss German [exclusively or together with another variety] at home, but only 9.0%, mostly foreigners, spoke Standard German [exclusively or together with another variety]). The diglossic situation and the fact that the dialect can be shown to have adopted an increasing number of functions in the electronic media and in written communication (chat rooms, short messages)² in the last decades³ have led to considerable unrest among the Romance-speaking minorities.

Fourth, as everywhere else in Europe, English plays an increasing role as a foreign language taught at school, as a language at work and as a language present in the ‘lin-
The Swiss model of plurilingual communication

linguistic landscape”. In 2000 (Federal census of the population with questions on language use at work), 23.4% of the active population in the German speaking part of the country indicated that they used English at work on a regular basis. In 1990 they were 17.4%. The corresponding figures are 17.7% in 2000 and 13.0% in 1990 for the French and 11.0% in 2000 and 7.7% in 1990 for the Italian speaking parts of the country.

For obvious reasons (shared institutions, existence of a national economy, frequent mobility of parts of the population, etc.), communicative encounters between persons from different linguistic backgrounds, may they live in the same linguistic region or communicate across the language borders, are frequent and necessary. Another frequently reproduced myth says that communication is based on the principle “everyone speaks his or her own language” because all Swiss citizens are competent in several national languages, at least in the three major ones. This paper pursues the question whether real communicative practices match this stereotype or not.

2. The educational context

As already mentioned, most Swiss citizens are monolingual during their childhood (if we exclude the migrant population with bi-/plurilingual repertoires including the local language and one or various non-national languages). Therefore, the basis for the communication between the language groups must be laid by the educational system. A first major reform of foreign language teaching started in 1975 when the Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (short EDK or CDIP) decided that (a) all Swiss children (and not only those “gifted” for language learning and attending secondary education with enlarged requirements) should have the opportunity to learn a second national language, (b) this learning should start in Primary School (4th or 5th grade) and (c) it should be based on a communicative approach and not on the grammar-translation-method, which dominated the Swiss educational system at that time (CDIP 1975). Eleven years later, having realized that the next school level did not account for the skills acquired at Primary School in an appropriate way, the same Conference introduced so called “Meeting points” (CDIP 1986) in order to coordinate the teaching of the languages at different levels. Even more explicitely than in 1975, the accent was laid on communicative skills not only for the Primary School, but for the whole period of compulsory education. Receptive skills should be significantly higher than productive ones at the end of the 9th grade, and orality more important than reading and especially writing skills. Even if it is easier to control knowledge than aptitudes, the accent should be laid on the latter. The vision explicitly aimed at by this asymmetry between productive and receptive competences was that—because the whole population would have acquired a second national language—cross-linguistic encounters would be possible for everybody at least between the German and the Swiss speaking French (the others would have to acquire active knowledge in at least one of those two) along the lines of the “Swiss model” (Kolde 1981, CDIP
1986). With this “plan”, we are manifestly at the heart of the debate about receptive multilingualism.

Even if by the mid nineties most of the cantons had adopted the 1975 and 1986 recommendations, a general dissatisfaction with the quality of the L2 competences acquired by the young generation was felt (only the elites were really able to apply the “Swiss model”, e.g. at national expert meetings in the Swiss Academy of Human and Social Sciences or in the Council of Research of the Swiss National Foundation). This is due to different reasons, which we cannot discuss in detail here, e.g. the Romands’ dissatisfaction with the fact that the language spoken by their German compatriots does not really resemble the German they learn at school, too few hours dedicated to L2-teaching, inappropriate methods and ways of testing, inappropriate teacher training etc. But a new major challenge had appeared: learning a second national language and communication along the lines of the “Swiss model” were becoming more and more overruled by the presence of English as an international lingua franca. Why should children in Zurich learn French — and those in Geneva German — if they could easily communicate in English? And what about the thousands of migrant children whose L1 is not the local official school language? With all these problems in mind, the CDIP commissioned a Holistic language-policy plan (“Gesamtsprachenkonzept”) that should make proposals for a deeply rooted reform of language education in Switzerland comprising the local national language, a second national language, English, languages of immigration and other ancient and modern languages. The plan was presented in Summer 1998; another six years of political discussions were necessary until the corresponding political decisions were taken in March 2004.

The plan is based on a sociolinguistic, pedagogical and political analysis of the situation, and on the following specific premises:

- The ability to express trains of thoughts precisely, to argue in a differentiated way, and to communicate ideas by using the medium of language is essential for the cultural and political life as well as for the generation and dissemination of knowledge.
- Linguistic and cultural diversity is deeply rooted in the history of Switzerland and Europe. It is part of the continent’s identity and of the idea that Swiss people have of their country. Its cultivation and maintenance is an explicit goal of the Swiss (cf. article 70 in the Constitution) and European policies.
- Due to numerous movements of migration, but also to the expansion of private tourism, Switzerland, historically quadrilingual, became multilingual.
- The knowledge of neighbouring languages or partner languages not only permits cross-border communication, but also and especially contributes to the development of mutual comprehension and of an attitude of tolerance for other cultures and thus to peace.
- As an additional professional qualification, proficiency in various languages becomes more and more important in a world characterised by mobility and globalisation.
• In terms of educational policy, the study of foreign languages has a central meaning as an element in the education for citizenship.

• During the obligatory school period, the foundations have to be laid so that each individual and the society as a whole can take on those challenges and meet them with success.

• Building on their original monolingual or plurilingual competences, the repertoires of the pupils should be broadened in the direction of functional plurilingualism, within the realms of an integrated language pedagogy and without augmenting of the total strain.

In summary, great importance is attributed to the development of the local language (in its standard variety in diglossic contexts), the learning of additional national languages, the languages of the neighbours (among them also the languages of immigration) and languages of larger diffusion because this contributes to building up a stable society, functioning plurilingually and open to a multicultural world. The recommendations contain clear references regarding the number of foreign languages (at least one second national language and English) and the general objectives that should be achieved (the standards being formulated on the basis of the Common European Framework scale). This meets the requirements of a management oriented to efficiency. The goals formulated are demanding and exceed in many ways the results previously obtained by the educational system. Therefore — and knowing that the educational system was not fully successful in reaching the more limited goals — ways and means are described for enhancing the efficiency of language teaching in order to achieve these objectives, e.g. starting with second language learning at grade 3, two languages at primary school, meeting points guaranteeing vertical (between the levels) and horizontal (between schools and cantons) coherence, integrated language pedagogy, teaching subjects through the media of foreign languages (CLIL), exchange pedagogy, general diversification of teaching/learning methods in order to meet the needs of different student profiles and of different combinations of languages (teaching Italian as L2 being for instance different from teaching Italian as L3), “intercomprehension” methods teaching several related languages simultaneously, etc.

These recommendations are starting to be implemented, some of them meet political resistances: Learning two foreign languages at primary school is questioned by some teacher organisations, offering of languages of immigration is rejected by local nationalist politicians). Further, there is a heavy debate going on about the order (English > Second national language or Second national language > English). There are voices advocating in favour of intercommunity communication in English in Switzerland (cf. Watts and Murray 2001). Nevertheless, we might say that — as in most political declarations throughout Europe — there is consensus among Swiss that the solutions for the communication problems in an increasing multilingual country may not be monolingual (one dominant national language or English), but must be plurilingual (several national languages and English and other languages).
3. French–German intercommunity communication: from myth to reality

We said already that the “Swiss model” might be an idealisation. Let us become more precise now. When talking about communication in situations where the partners rely on asymmetric competences, applied linguists frequently speak about “exolingual communication”, characterized not only by the difference in itself, but also by the fact that all partners are conscious of this situation and use different strategies to compensate for these differences and to avoid misunderstanding or non-understanding (see already Noyau and Porquier 1984, Py and Alber 1985, Lüdi 1989). In most cases, the underlying representation of how communication works is monolingual: One linguistic variety is chosen that is at least partly shared by all the partners and both, i.e. the partners with a weaker and those with a better competence of the language respectively, make an exclusive use of this variety. A Moroccan and a French partner in Paris will exclusively speak French, an Albanian and a German in Munich German, etc. In cases where no one has even little knowledge of the other’s language, a third code may be used as lingua franca, e.g. English between a Chinese and a German.

However, many researchers have argued since several decades that this conception of cross-linguistic or intercultural communication is biased by what we may call “homo- glossic” views of the society and “monolingual” representations of the individuum (Lüdi 2005c). For many years, a bulk of research has shown that the interacting partners often have the choice between several more or less shared language competences because more than half of mankind is plurilingual by birth and/or has formally or informally learned additional languages in multilingual settings. In fact, plur- and multilingualism is the normal case in most parts of the world, unilingualism can be defined as an exception. The partners might still want to insist on monolingual ways of communicating e.g. for social reasons, because one and only one variety is perceived as the “legitimate” one in a given situation (Bourdieu 1982). But while it is their choice to define the situation as “monolingual” despite having alternatives, they can also decide to mutually define the situation as “bilingual” or “plurilingual” even if their competences are not equal. This does not only involve reframing of the social situation, but also another way of activating the languages in the brain in the so-called “bilingual mode” (Grosjean 1985, 2001). This is to say that the factual symmetry or asymmetry between the speakers’ competences does not automatically entail specific ways of behaviour, but that the interacting partners have considerable freedom in resolving the communicative task and in defining the situation. This applies particularly if we swap a perspective that is centred on modelling the behaviour of speakers or hearers for an interactive perspective. Interactivity means a reciprocal definition of the communicative situation by all interacting partners (Schutz 1967). Based upon Schegloff’s definition of “discourse as an interactional achievement” (Schegloff 1982), we claim that the choice of the language mode is locally negotiated and defined by the partners — in the compass of systems of social values, but sometimes with the explicit intention of questioning and reshaping these systems.
Many people still associate “mixed” forms of speech with insufficient competences for choosing a monolingual mode. This, definitely, is not always the case, as a huge amount of research has shown in more than 30 years (see for example Milroy and Muysken 1995). Today, code-switching as a recognised form of use of bi-/plurilingual repertoires is largely documented by research (cf. Lüdi 2005a for an overview) and has led to highly valued forms of multilingual literature (cf. Lüdi 2005b). On the other hand, it is evident that “interlinguistic compensation strategies” (Faerch and Kasper 1983a and b) are frequently used by beginning learners (even in socially monolingual situations) not because they actively choose a bilingual mode, but because they just cannot do better. There are good reasons for the hypothesis that code-switching (bilingual technique) and translinguistic wording (exolingual technique) can be distinguished (Lüdi 2003). But is this distinction relevant when it comes to explaining how people really interact in daily life?

A research project on Language Dynamics and Management of Diversity, financed by the European Union and starting on October 1st 2006, is intended to generate a broad and in-depth evaluation of competing monolingual and plurilingual scenarios of language use in different professional and institutional settings. It will compare the advantages and drawbacks of these scenarios with due attention to the associated effects in terms of efficiency and fairness. Expected research results will constitute essential groundwork towards a deeper and more integrative understanding of the complex processes linking key dimensions of language learning and language use as basis for formulating language policy proposals.

The project is founded on new conceptions of ‘multilingual competences’. They are viewed less in terms of formal (syntactic) knowledge and more as a set of linguistic resources available to members of a community for socially significant interactions. The totality of these resources constitute the linguistic repertoire of a person or a community (Gal 1986), not in an “additive” sense (the multilingual person as a kind of combination of various monolingual components), but in a holistic view (Grosjean 1985; Lüdi and Py 2003) which values the integration of partial competences (Council of Europe 2001). A positive assessment of partial competences also sheds new light on the “exolingual” techniques for assuring intercomprehension in the case of asymmetric competences mentioned before. But the notion of competence itself has undergone deep changes in the course of the twentieth century. The “Hymesian revolution” made it possible to go beyond the reductionist conception of linguistic competence introduced by Chomsky. It recognised the plural nature of communicative capacities and allowed for accounts of the discursive and pragmatic dimensions of language use. For Hymes and his successors (for example Canale and Swain 1980), the focus remains however on the observable competence of the learner and on the know-how deposited in his or her brain. There are several intents to move beyond these approaches that tend to misjudge the situational sensitivity of competences (regardless of whether this competence is linguistic or pragmatic) and the complexity of the processes in which these are implemented, as part of the practical activities of learners, users and their interlocutors.
An interactionist interpretation of competence, by contrast, is based upon a contextualised and collective conception of activities and of human cognition, and focuses on the central role that practical communication (and, therefore, social action) play in their formatting. This perspective deconstructs, in a radical manner, any individualising, decontextualised and isolating definition of linguistic and communicative competences.

Research on language acquisition confirms the high degree of unpredictability and the complex dynamics of face to face interaction in authentic interaction (Pekarek 1999). At the same time, it sheds new light on the ways native and non-native speakers of a language take mutual profit from their entire repertoires using their respective first languages and other support languages (e.g. English when speaking French as L2, French, English, Spanish and Latin when speaking Italian etc.). We thus need a language theory that gives special prominence to the ways the interlocutors exploit all the resources that are at their disposal. We fully agree with Franceschini (1999) who summarises her considerations as follows:

I conceive the linguistic system from the perspective of its use in interaction. In human evolution, the System Language emerges from its use, in a phylogenetic as well as in an ontogenetic perspective. Language developed on a biological base, but always in the context of social interaction. (1999, 272 my translation; see also Tomasello 1999, 2003 and Bates 2003).

According to this concept, the elaboration and the mobilisation of competences are configured in the course of practical activities that are linked to specific sociocultural contexts and to particular forms of action, interaction and intersubjectivity (Berthoud, Grin and Lüdi 2005, Pekarek Doehler 2005, Lüdi 2004, 2006).

4. Examples of intercommunity communication at work

It is relative to this background and with a view to elaborating such considerations that we recorded many hours of oral interaction between actors from very different linguistic and social backgrounds, in and outside Switzerland, in order to get a better understanding of the alternatives present in potentially plurilingual situations (Lüdi, Py et al. 1995, 2003, Franceschini 1999, Mondada 2003, 2004 a and b, Miecznikowski and Mondada 2001). In the following, we will concentrate on examples of internal communication at work in Switzerland. The research question is whether monolingual models on one hand (the use of only one national language or, progressively, the exclusive use of English) and on the other the “Swiss model” of receptive bilingualism — every one speaks his or her language and understands the other, i.e. mobilises exclusively passive competences in the other’s language5 — are realised in real life or, in other words, how these ideal types are reflected in daily interactions. We formulate the hypothesis that in a situation of shared, even asymmetric, bilingualism, other forms of communication will emerge. We conceive the analysis of key examples as part of a search for empirical evidence without any claim for statistical relevance.
The first example was recorded in Montreux by Bettina Wetzel-Kranz (Wetzel-Kranz 2000). ‘Walter’ (all names changed) is a young German Swiss informatician mandated to install a new computer program in the office of a small publishing house where ‘Marinette’ and ‘Jeanne’, two young French Swiss women, work as professionals. He is training them in front of a computer where the program is running. The default language choice seems to be in contradiction to the Swiss model: the German speaker chooses French, French speaking Marinette often German and sometimes French. Only Jeanne mainly sticks to her dominant language French. The three of them make sporadic use of English words or expressions, always in relation to what they observe on the screen. In the second part of the example (unrecorded speech of several minutes between lines 34 and 36), Horst, the German boss of Marinette and Jeanne, joins the scene (line 44). The personal constellation changes, and so does the linguistic behaviour. In the unrecorded part and from line 36 onwards, all participants were in an exolingual-monolingual French mode. When Walter addresses himself to Horst, he uses (Standard) German. After a short period of exploratory language choice, i.e. alternation between French, German and English, the base language changes to German in line 55 (even if Jeanne continues intervening in French):

Example (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marinette:</th>
<th>exploring?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walter:</td>
<td>oui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinette:</td>
<td>[on va] sur exploring eh et couper data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter:</td>
<td>c'est où? . là?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinette:</td>
<td>äh non . oben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanne:</td>
<td>au-dessus ( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinette:</td>
<td>G . als äh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter:</td>
<td>ah là . ici . ouais</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinette:</td>
<td>ja genau . und äh . products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter:</td>
<td>livreur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinette:</td>
<td>livreur . texte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter:</td>
<td>[was?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinette:</td>
<td>nein . Text . unten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter:</td>
<td>ouais partie A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinette:</td>
<td>hier hast du A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter:</td>
<td>ah okay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinette:</td>
<td>und alle Sektionen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter:</td>
<td>comment fonctionne l’Europe ((3 sec.))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanne:</td>
<td>comment ça- comment fonc-tionne l’Europe’ ça c’est . comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter:</td>
<td>fonctionne l’Europe- c’est le seul qui ne soit pas de la partie B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinette:</td>
<td>mais ça c’est la partie A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter:</td>
<td>il est de partie A ça?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanne:</td>
<td>ah vous êtes en partie A là . ah non je croyais qu’on était/ qu’on faisait la partie A . B excuse-moi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter:</td>
<td>comment fonctionne Europe . c’est dedans maintenant? . comment fonctionne . c’est tout en anglais ici</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinette:</td>
<td>äh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Walter: Europe place. European Union ((6 sec.))
Marinette: how Europe works ((3 sec.)) ah.

30 Walter: mais pas ici
Marinette: non mais. comment fonctionne l’Europe. c’est. es ist diese Titel
Walter: ah okay
Marinette: äh. schau mal wieder bei exploring
Walter: oui

((the conversation goes on for several minutes))
Marinette: les images en fait peuvent nous parvenir en principe de chaque personne
concernée par l’article. si l’article c’est par exemple l’article c’est le comité
européen.
Walter: oui

40 Marinette: ben l’article c’est
Walter: attends attends. peut-être je. je. Horst’ könntest du mal kommen’. weil jetzt
gehts um die Ressourcen
Horst: ja
Walter: maintenant il est en train de faire ça ((Horst joins the group)) you have made

45 the ressources here’
Horst: yeah
Walter: yes. now we have here the images from editor
Horst: mhmh
Walter: now it will be received from Taylor. the first. aso

50 Jeanne: sent to Taylor
Walter: sent to Taylor or received’
Horst: received
Marinette: no. sent .. the IMAGES

((3 sec.))

55 Horst: kommen von Taylor. gehen an die Grammatek
Jeanne: ah ah ah
Marinette: ja. aber zuerst
Jeanne: (le troisième)
Marinette: zuerst wir bekommen die Fotos von eh die Leuten

60 Horst: nein. das wo der Taylor verantwortlich is kriegt er sie. das ist mir so gesagt
worden.
Walter: et ça maintenant
Marinette: ja weil. aso
Horst: und es macht ja auch Sinn. weil der Taylor muß sie ja erst mal sehen

65 ob es gut is
Marinette: klar. aber. zum Beispiel die Adressen ist immer uns. und dann. wir
schicken. weil zum zum Beispiel. ich hab das Problem gehabt. weil. wir
haben ein Fotos bekommen äh äh und jetzt müssen wir das zu Taylor
schicken

(recording and transcription: Bettina Wetzel-Krantz)

Generally speaking, the overall language choice is inconsistent as one can expect for
multilingual speech (Lüdi and Py 2003). The four persons make a very pragmatic use
of all the communicative resources they share. Walter and Marinette display a fairly
good active interactive competence in the second national language; Jeanne’s German
is only receptive as is Horst’s knowledge of French. “English only” could also be an alternative as shown in the intermediary part of the interaction. But normative representations of either monolingual language use or of what the “Swiss model” could be seem totally absent. At the same time, we get a first glimpse of existing power relations between Horst and his collaborators. Communication does not, of course, occur in a “neutral space”; multilingual speakers exploit their repertoire in order to press the maximum gain out of their language choice. Even if Horst’s preferential language choice is normally English (he often imposes English to the others), here he switches to German in line 55, entailing a general change of the base language of the communication. Nevertheless, it is evident that multilingual forms of speech can be very rewarding, as illustrated for example in the linguistic behaviour of Walter. Furthermore, this interaction, which illustrates various ways of mobilising multilingual repertoires, is obviously successful. In the list of activities presented in the Common European Framework (Council of Europe 2001), it would enter into the category “practical goal-oriented co-operation”. Thus, in order to measure the success of this communicative event, we do not have to assess the quality of the language(s) spoken, but we have to answer the question whether the goal of the interaction has been achieved. An analysis of the mutual reactions of the interacting partners to the ongoing conversation shows that this is the case in the perception of the members themselves. We get further confirmation in the activity report written by Walter at the end of his stay in Montreux.

Let us now turn to a second example. The setting is in a regional bilingual bank that we have analysed in detail (Heiniger 2005, Lüdi and Heiniger 2005). This institution resulted from a merger between a former monolingual French-speaking bank in the canton of Jura and a monolingual German-speaking bank operating in the Laufental. From the beginning, the new company was supposed to work in a geographical area covering the French-German language border, with local agencies working in the languages of the respective local clients while the head offices merged and thus came to work in both languages. For those responsible it was always clear that the new bank would be bilingual, the explicit language strategy formulated by the head of the bank being that every employee should continue speaking his or her language, even in joint meetings.

The reality as observed in an ethnolinguistic study turned out to be slightly different. Let us first say that the new bank is very successful commercially. Quite evidently, communication in the merged back-offices between persons from different language backgrounds works quite well. But it is not the “Swiss model” in its ideal sense. “Ich habe einfach festgestellt, dass das [sc. Jeder spricht seine Sprache] nicht ausreicht, weil, vor allem die welsche Seite noch ein bisschen..., noch nicht so weit ist, oder nicht, dass sie uns verstehen. Darum muss man halt einfach jeweils meistens auch auf Französisch probieren [I have realised that it (i.e. each one speaks her or his language) is not sufficient, because, mainly the French speaking side still has to ..., is not ready, I mean, to understand us]”, says one informant. For different reasons (lack of status and knowledge on both sides of the border in dominantly rural areas, lack of competences with
some actors in the bank, etc.) English plays no role at all in the internal communicative networks. The three varieties (French, German and Swiss German) do not appear to be chosen randomly, but neither is there an evident preferential choice for each person. Werner, the highest ranking participant in the discussion, switches between the varieties, frequently chooses the “other” language, translates or asks for translation. Jean always speaks French; Heiri uses the emotionally loaded Swiss dialect knowing about the risk that Jean will not understand; Werner uses different bridging techniques. Here one short example:

Example (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Werner</th>
<th>Aso, dann, dann werden wir das, das Kombi-Flex Produkt werden wir auch in diesem Prospekt abbilden, he? On veut, Michel, on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Oui.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Werner</td>
<td>On laisse ce produit combi-flex Hypothek dans le prospectus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Ah, il va venir justement ce que l'on fait ici on aura, ce prospectus et puis on va offrir ce produit, eh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Werner</td>
<td>OK …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heiri</td>
<td>ja ja, wenn eine Frogt, scho.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Werner</td>
<td>parce qu'on dit ici falls gewünscht, si on souhaite.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Recording and transcription: Monica S. Heiniger)

In short: even if ‘every one speaks her/his language’ is the generally accepted communicative maxim, it is however sometimes combined with or replaced by other techniques:

- Some actors (mainly speakers of German) accommodate to the French-speaking interlocutor and choose French from the beginning or switch to French when a communicative problem appears.
- German speaking persons normally do not use the default oral variety but make an effort to speak standard German; however, Swiss German is chosen in emotionally important moments even if the Romands do not understand.
- (More) bilingual colleagues are asked to translate or at least to make a summary in the other language (see De Stefani, Miecznikowski and Mondada 2000).
- Very often, the utterances in either language are not pure, but mixed: concepts, lexical items or short phrases of an embedded language are splashed as “translinguistic markers” (Lüdi 2003) into utterances in the base language. This happens with particular frequency in cases where German-dominant persons speak French.

We could add many similar examples of talk at work to this list. They do not really contradict the model of receptive plurilingualism. However, they show how an abstract concept is put into practice, how, from the level of a model, it is translated into real life. Several reasons may cause deviations from the ideal model: (a) someone’s receptive competence in the other language is not sufficient to ensure communication; (b) some
participants willingly use a variety some of their interlocutors do not understand. It is a particularity of polyadic conversations, that one can make a language choice that excludes some of the participants; (c) accommodation patterns lead someone to the use of the interlocutor’s language as preferential choice, etc. The main lesson to draw from these examples is, however, that there is a lot of freedom in the individual linguistic behaviour, but also that responsibility for ensuring communication is shared by all participants in the interaction.

The awareness of specific constraints in plurilingual interactions is also visible in our third example, documented in a slightly different context. Participants from several European countries and language backgrounds meet at a colloquium on history of the antiquity organised by the Upper Rhine Universities. The whole colloquium was tape recorded in the framework of a research project on plurilingualism in scientific encounters (Mondada 2003).

**Example (3)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>ostman</th>
<th>steiner</th>
<th>steiner</th>
<th>liberman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>i may therefore conclude . with a questionmark\ .. might . the byanz/ . xxx section/ about which . xxxx extensively adds where . and which . was so much at odds with nnnn/s principal interest . itself . be another example of how much . the present volume bears the imprint . of (yussouf . acula)\ .. a thank your\</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>nous vous remercions/ beaucoup/ nous avons . cinq minutes/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>ostman</td>
<td>thank you\ ((rires))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>steiner</td>
<td>il y a certainement des ques[tions/ [INDENT] [wow/ x (you) x \ oxx\</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>liberman</td>
<td>ch x in english . ch what interest me (what) . intrigued me\ .. is the problem of the (1) outside stimulation of turkish historiography . which came from russia from the immigrants from russia/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(e9/OT15058/am1B/CD5:12.37- 13.36)

A frequently reproduced stereotype says that international scientific encounters make a preferential or even exclusive use of English. English is very present in this meeting indeed, but the choice of the *lingua franca* is in no way dominant. Instead, many “plurilingual techniques” are employed. And it is manifest that the participants are aware of their mobilisation of plurilingual repertoires as can be observed from their frequent mentioning of their language choice. In our example, Ostman concludes his presentation in English by making a metadiscursive announcement of a question, the question and the usual thanks to the auditors (lines 1–5). The chairman Steiner thanks
in French and opens the floor for discussion (6–9). Because nobody takes the floor, Ostman repeats his thanks ironically and earns laughter (lines 10f.). Steiner asks again for questions (12). The first question is by Liberman, in the language of the paper, but he announces explicitly that he will use this language (15).

We retain from these examples that the receptive competence of all participants is mutually judged to be sufficient for using either French or English as a preferential choice. The next example from the same colloquium shows that this is also true for German. This time, three languages (at least) constitute the shared repertoire:

Example (4)

| Müller | aber ansonsten . ist da leider gottes wenig rauszuholen was eh . <mich ((en riant))>=x |
| Müller | =dann enttäuscht hat aber na ja besser man merkt sowas nach dreiwanench"acht|wie wenn man ein . halbes jahr eh: schon drangesessen ist\ . vielen dank\ |
| Steiner | alorh: écoutez ces problèmes/ paraît stimule:x/ des exposés tout à fait animés \xxx/ [INDENT] \{(quelques rires\) |
| Steiner | ça a des effets/ positifs\ . bon euh: on a encore deux minutes oui/ euh: . euh “eh” i . i think (i) don’t think you should really drop . (drop) that\ because there are there are so many things to do/ with these eh . magazines |

(recording and transcription Mondada and team)

After a paper presented in German, Steiner thanks again in French and opens the floor, Durand asks the first question in English. But he does not do this without a preparation sequence ("oui/ euh: . euh “eh” i . i think"). This type of behaviour shows that the participants are aware of the plurilingual character of their meeting and of the difficulties raised by that fact, but also and mainly that they are willing to use specific techniques for the management of the linguistic diversity and, simultaneously, for guaranteeing the success of the interaction. In this case Durand, a French-speaking scholar, prefers English to French, probably due to politeness, because he assumes that Müller’s receptive French is weaker than his receptive English. Mondada and her team found many instances of language crossing, i.e. using another than the preferential language for many different functions. Again, the success of the plurilingual speech cannot be assessed in terms of linguistic norms, but only with regard to the scientific outcome of the conference, which was very good in accordance with what participants reported.

5. Perspectives

As I said before, my purpose is not to blame the communicative maxime underlying the model of receptive multilingualism, but rather to show which forms this maxime
adopt in real life. Even if we find similar tokens of multilingual behaviour in many other parts of the world, it still seems legitimate to speak of a “Swiss model”. In fact, one cannot deny that external conditions exert an influence on the speakers’ behaviour. We think that long-term Swiss experiences in language use in French–German intercommunity communication contributed to the construction of a communication culture which might entail a higher acceptance of “mixed” speech than in other countries. Thus, an existing system of linguistic values determines which “linguistic capital” the knowledge and use of one or the other variety convey (Gumperz 1982, Bourdieu 1982).

However, the fact that language choice is highly unstable, very dynamic and permanently renegotiated among the participants, suggests that we should question the traditional representations of what a — monolingual or multilingual — language competence is. One might want to continue the reflection in two directions:

a. If we conceive the multilingual competence as an integrated whole, formed by partial competences in all the varieties (languages and dialects) that the repertoire of the multilingual person consists of, then we have to include a “strategic competence” (Council of Europe 2001), i.e. the mastery of exolingual and multilingual communication techniques as we have observed above. In other words, we continue here our plea for a new linguistic focus on the multilingual speaker/hearer (cf. Lüdi 2004). We would even dare to interpret the “perfect” knowledge of one language as a “partial competence”.

b. If we reject the “essentialist” conception of language that underlies most modern linguistic theories at least since Herder, then we will have to focus, on the contrary, on the situated, locally negotiated use of variable linguistic resources that draw upon the multiple repertoires of all participants in the interaction (Lüdi 2006). Communicative competences are extremely sensitive to context. In the light of new models that stress the collective dimension of social action and cognition, the claim seems justified that linguistic resources are constructed, formatted and implemented in the framework of concrete, practical, common linguistic activities of the users. Following Franceschini (1998, 1999), Pekarek Doehler (2005) and others, we are sceptical about individualising, context free and autonomous (i.e. from other dimensions of social competence) conceptions of language competence. This is particularly important for constructing models of plurilingual communication. A broad consensus starts establishing itself that “the human language faculty has an endowment for multilingualism” (Meisel 2004). In the light of new research results, this cannot mean the predominant use of one single language at a time. The mobilisation of the participants plurilingual resources happens in situ, not consecutively but in one common movement, is frequently not determined in advance, but self-organised, negotiated among the participants. The latter put together all their possibilities, which are at the same time constantly reconfigured.
In this sense, the described model of plurilingual communication — which might not be very “Swiss”, indeed, — can serve as a kind of anticipation of models of plurilingual interaction to cope with the growing diversity of the European Union, in order to find a “plurilingual answer” (Umberto Eco) for the communicative problems in a world characterised by growing globalisation. The colloquium organised by EUCOR, the association of the Upper Rhine universities Strasbourg and Mulhouse (French), Karlsruhe and Freiburg im Breisgau (German) and Basle (Swiss), clearly points in this direction.

These considerations, of course, open the path to many new and intriguing questions. Let us just mention one: An increasing number of universities throughout Europe require students to show competences in foreign languages, usually in the form of language certificates. How does a new conception of plurilingual competences and plurilingual interaction become compatible with this requirement? Let us, first of all, reconsider a couple of statements of the Common European Framework for languages:

a. The competence in a foreign language is never “perfect”, but can be situated on a differentiated scale going from beginners to independent users.
b. The framework encourages profiling of objectives and competences, which constitute the answer to very many different communicative needs. A researcher may for example only need comprehension knowledge. He will have to answer questions like: What sort of things will he be listening to or reading? Under what conditions will he have to act? What knowledge of the world or of another culture will he need to call on? (Council of Europe 2001, 44). The response could for example be that this person needs listening and reading competence at the B2 level in his or her scientific discipline, but that the other skills might be situated at a much lower level.

However, even if language courses more and more aim at objectives of the kind we just suggested, exams and certificates more scarcely do so. This is particularly true for oral interaction. Indeed, “the focus on the ability of the candidate in conventional approaches within second language assessment views the candidate in a strangely isolated light; it is he or she who held to bear the bunt of the responsibility for the performance; in this sense the inevitable gap between a test and real life appears unusually stark.” (McNamara 1997: 452) Research on the relation between interviewer style and candidate performance in oral exams (Brown and Hill 2003) sheds light on the particular context sensitivity of oral skills. If one adds to all that the plurilingual character of the workplace interactions we have observed (more than two languages), the frequent deviations from the “receptive multilingualism” model (oral production in foreign languages) and the particular awareness for the instability of the situation, it seems obvious that there is no secure procedure to test the capacity for successful plurilingual communication as it was described above, and that the best way for acquiring it is learning by doing.
Notes

1. For further details on the linguistic landscape of Switzerland in 2000 see Lüdi, Werlen et al. (2005).
2. See for example the work of Samuel Sypcher (2004) on SMS communication and of Beat Siebenhaar (n.d.) on Swiss chat rooms. For early overviews already Ris (1990) and Siebenhaar (1996).
3. The results of the Swiss National Census show that the use of Swiss German continued increasing between 1990 and 2000, namely in the educational systems, but that the medial diglossia (one speaks Swiss Dialect and writes Standard German) is being weakened (Werlen 2004).
5. One might call this model another manifestation of a monolingual ideology in the sense that accepting to understand another language could be the condition for refusing to speak it actively.
6. In 2000, i.e. two years before the merger, only 15.0% of the working population of Laufen ever used English at work and even only 6.7% of those working in Delémont. For the banking sector the respective figures were 19.4% and 11.5% respectively in the two townships compared with an overall rate of use of English of 51.8% and 42.2% in the banking sector of the respective language region.

References


