Language Policy in Switzerland’s Educational System: A Case of Anglo Encroachment?

Debating the Anglosphere: History, Hegemony, Identity
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A bike ride in the countryside
Key issue

Advances of English:
- Linguistic imperialism / conspiracy of the Anglosphere?
- Self-inflicted colonisation / an encroachment into a vacuum?

Linguistic imperialism

“... language dominance dovetails with economic, political and other types of dominance. It entails unequal resource allocation and communicative rights between people defined in terms of their competence in specific languages, with unequal benefits as a result, in a system that legitimates and naturalizes such exploitation” (Phillipson, 2009:2).

“Linguistic dominance has invariably been buttressed by ideologies that glorify the dominant language: as the language of God (...), the language of reason (...), the language of modernity, technological progress, and rational unity (...))” (Phillipson, 2009:3).

encroach, v.
a. intr. To trench or intrude usurpingly (esp. by insidious or gradual advances) on the territory, rights, or accustomed sphere of action of others. Also transf. and fig. of things: To make gradual inroads on, extend (its) boundaries at the expense of, something else. Const. on, upon (the territory, rights, etc. invaded, or the person whose rights are infringed); also simply. Oxford English Dictionary

The worldliness of English

- English = globally general and locally specific
- Colonial legacy > adopted by colonised and colonialists for resistance and social change
- Acts of language imply a position within a social order / a cultural politics

“a term intended to refer to the material existence of English in the world, its spread around the world, its worldly character as a result of being so widely used in the world, and its position not only as reflective but also as constitutive of worldly affairs.” Pennycook (1994:33)
Overview

1. Introduction
2. Constitutional upheaval: The Swiss confederation’s struggle with multilingualism*
3. Early English at school: The normalisation of a revolution
4. The diversity of target language cultures: A look at materials design
5. Conclusion: Demystifying hegemonic tendencies


The imagined multilingual nation state

- Periphery of 3 large linguistic communities (F, G, I)
- Co-existence of 4 distinct communities («Willensnation»)
- Principle of territoriality with few enmeshed bi-/multilingual communities
- «Balance», «harmony» as constructs to be maintained
- Federalism, esp. in the educational domain

«Les Suisses s'entendent bien parce qu'ils ne se comprennent pas»
Changes in the Swiss constitution

Articles pertaining to languages

- Principle of territoriality (70:2): Cantons to designate official languages
- Teleological formulation: «In order to preserve harmony…»
- «Indigenous linguistic minorities»: exclusion of immigrant minorities
- Redoubling the efforts taken by the small minority Cantons (>> $$$)

Discourse formations

1. Confederate discourse: Building and maintaining the nation state around cultural diversity and mutual understanding.
2. Federalist discourse: Preserving niches and opportunities for regional and local development, anti-centralist tendencies, subsidiarity.
3. Globalising discourse: Participating in transnational exchanges and fulfilling the needs of citizens in new educational and occupational configurations
English as a language of intranational communication?

Confederate discourse avoids:
• questions of class and economic power
• lack of motivation for learning a second national language
• a discussion of the role of English in Switzerland

Resorting to English, a foreign language to all speakers, is undoubtedly an acknowledgement of failure. Even if it allows elites to engage in a dialogue among equals, it nevertheless reduces the specific features of the other cultures. (Knüsel, 1997)

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* Also called Öhrli English by Pedro Lenz
The big bang in Swiss educational language politics

- Unilateral moves by Zurich and Appenzell IR to introduce English in primary (starting in 1998)
- Cantons AI and ZH reacted to parents’ demands under the guise of equality (Chancengleichheit)
- Motivation and popular demand trump federalist respect
- Anti-centralist discourse: English = language of communication society

Translations of key statements

- E. Buschor: «We began with English because motivation for French among the young is worse than for English»
- J. Pilet: “If a young adolescent has already learnt English quite well, he will not at all be motivated to learn a difficult language such as French”
- M. Braunschwig: «The politicians’ role is not to take things at face value but to develop visions. And my vision is not to have English as a lingua franca in Switzerland»
The aftermath of «Schulprojekt 21»

- Attacks against primary school French (cantonal initiatives)
- The Zurich decision hastened the publication of a «Comprehensive Languages Concept» (Luedi et al., 1998)
- Long-term consequences: Sequence of foreign languages left open, no attainment levels specified (>>> EDK Strategy 2004, Languages Law 2006, Lehrplan 21, Passepartout)

Revisiting the hypothesis

1. Immersion-type schooling violates territoriality
2. Symbolic politics yields to powers of globalisation
3. Federalism produces a patch-work map with differing set-ups
4. Tenuous compromise of comparable school-leaving competences
5. The 2006 Languages Act does nothing to shore up the national languages at school
6. Fear and loathing in the science-political discourse
Patching up the dissonances

EDK Factsheet 2014

EDK Factsheet 2017

www.edudoc.ch/static/web/arbeiten/sprach_unterr/fktbl_sprachen_d.pdf
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New law on languages (2006)

Focusing on school language learning:

- Linguistic/cultural exchanges supported by national agency
- Backing for standard German
- Promoting pupils’ multilingualism
- Cantonal autonomy not questioned
- No statement about the level of competence to be achieved in national L2
- English not even mentioned
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Proposal for a project within the NSF Programme 56

Quotes from the evaluation by the Leitungsgruppe (my translation):

…the topic is ideologically explosive and the study should not serve the purpose of paving the way argumentatively for English as the first foreign language in Swiss schools.

… The project is not constructed in a way that is ‘open to results’. With a view specifically to the ideological background of the theme, the hypotheses and questions would have to be formulated with utmost caution.

Walter Haas (Hrsg.)
*Do you speak Swiss?*
Sprachenvielfalt und Sprachkompetenz in der Schweiz – Nationales Forschungsprogramm NFP 56 240 Seiten, deutsch, französisch, italienisch, englisch und z. T. romanisch
Summing up

• From revolution to normalisation
• Partial vacuum in the federalist and confederate discourse clusters
• Supercharged question of the sequence and presence of languages in the school curriculum

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Intercultural communicative competence

- Open up differentiated panoramas
- Pathway to intercultural communicative competence
- Educationally relevant content
- Critical perspectives
- «Authentic» input materials

Gone missing
In this task, you're going to read and hear about young people who went missing in the South African city of Cape Town. You will try to find out what happened to them. You are going to record an interview with a missing person.

CD 1.38 Look at the mural of street scenes in Cape Town. Listen to the local news in the week when Rod disappeared.
- Number the headings 1 to 6.
- Which news item is shown in which part of the mural? Connect them with lines.

Kidnapping suspected
Dance extravaganza
Graffiti ban
Copper thief

What then? What now?

Restaurant Clipper: Est. 1963, first purveyor of Asian food in Zurich
Bibliography