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TRADITION AND MODERNITY AS REFLECTED IN THE LANGUAGE
DIMENSION OF MULTICULTURALISM. THE CASE OF
SWITZERLAND

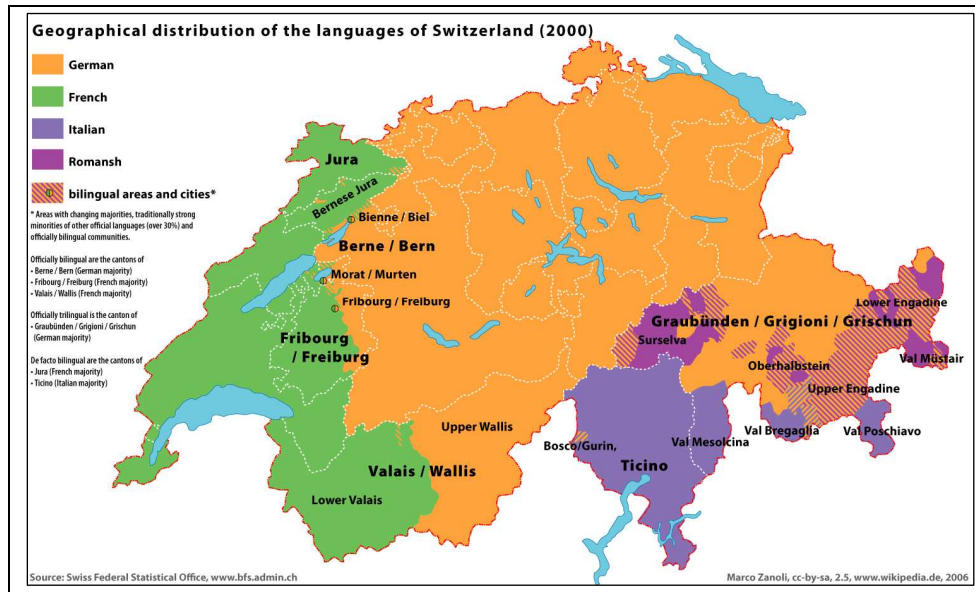
1. Introduction

The beginnings of the Swiss Confederation date back to the end of the thirteenth century. However, the processes which led to the emergence and development of this political and – with the passage of time – national organism arose through, and for many years progressed under, the dominion of the German-speaking House of Habsburg. It was only after Bern had acceded to the Confederation (1353) and expansion to the south at the beginning of the fifteenth century, that the Swiss became more open towards different Romance cultures. This process which spanned many centuries, led to the institutionalisation of Swiss linguistic pluralism in a form which might be referred to as traditional and which ultimately led to the Constitutional recognition in 1938 of the following four languages as Switzerland's national languages: German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romance¹. The final act of maturity of this traditional linguistic pluralism was the recognition of Rhaeto-Romance as one of the official languages of the entire Confederation. The *Sprachartikel* [*Language Clause*] under the latest Swiss Constitution passed in 1999 makes reference to this (Article 70).

However, much the same as in the case of religious pluralism, the crystallization of traditional multilingualism was accompanied by significant social processes, both within the Confederation and beyond it, which gradually led to an important change in the context of traditional multiculturalism. The Fig. 1 and tables 1 and 2 depict the spatial and statistic aspects of the distribution of national languages in Switzerland.

¹ In specialist literature the Rhaeto-Romance language is also referred to as *Romansch*. This paper refers to the traditional and more commonly known form i.e. the *Rhaeto-Romance* language.

Fig. 1. Geographical distribution of the languages of Switzerland



Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9f/Map_Languages_CH.png

Table 1. Percentage share of languages amongst the Swiss population, 1950–2000

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
German	72.1	69.4	64.9	65.0	63.6	63.7
French	20.3	18.9	18.1	18.4	19.2	20.4
Italian	5.9	9.5	11.9	9.8	7.6	6.5
Rhaeto–Romance	1.0	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.5
Non–national languages	0.7	1.4	4.3	6.0	8.9	9.0

Source: G. Lüdi & I. Werlen, *Sprachenlandschaft in der Schweiz. Eidgenössische Volkszählung 2000*, Bundesamt für Statistik, Neuchâtel 2005, p. 8.

Table 2. The population of Switzerland divided into national areas and language groups, taking into account the speakers of different languages in 2000

	Percentage of all German language speakers in the given area	Percentage of all French language speakers in the given area	Percentage of all Italian language speakers in the given area	Percentage of all Rhaeto–Romance language speakers in the given area	Percentage of all speakers of other languages in the given area
German language area	86.6	1.4	3.0	0.3	8.7

French language area	5.1	81.6	2.9	0.0	10.4
Italian language area	8.3	1.6	83.3	0.1	6.6
Rhaeto–Romance language area	25.0	0.3	1.8	68.9	3.9

Source: G. Lüdi & I. Werlen, *Sprachenlandschaft in der Schweiz*, p. 17.

2. The institutionalisation of quadrilingualism in Switzerland since 1848

2.1. The *Sprachartikel* in the Constitution of 1848

In the modern, era the authors of the new Constitution were faced with the dilemma of Switzerland's internal cultural diversity. After half a century of the Swiss State, which remained under the influence of French models (the Constitution of 1798, The *Act of Mediation* (1803) and the Constitution of 1815), the members of the elite involved in forming the State had to decide whether the reviving Switzerland should follow in the footsteps of French centralism as a *Federal State*, or whether it should return to the *federation of cantons–states* formula¹. Following discussions, the approval of the so-called *Sprachartikel* (Article 109) under the 1848 Constitution states that the *main languages of Switzerland, German, French and Italian, are the national languages of the Confederation*². This does not mean that the Rhaeto–Romance language and regional dialects were forgotten, but rather that for practical purposes, financial reasons included³, these were not included in the basic law. The percentage share of users of languages other than the three mentioned *main* languages was, however, small. The multilingualism of Switzerland was expressed as trilingualism, with all three recognised languages being given equal rights.

During discussions on the 1848 Constitution, an important topic was the planned opening of a federal university. The university was to act as a catalyst for national unity and to facilitate the education of the nation's multilingual intellectual elite. However, this plan was not implemented. To the present day Switzerland still only has cantonal universities. The recognition of Switzerland's multilingualism has also played a certain role in choosing the Confederation's capital. Bern was given this status, among other things, because of its role as a bridge between the German and French speaking parts of the country,

¹ E. Godel, D. Acklin Muji, *Nationales Selbstverständnis und Sprache in der Bundesverfassung von 1848* in: J. Widmer, R. Coray, D. Acklin Muji & E. Godel, *Die Schweizer Sprachenvielfalt im öffentlichen Diskurs. Eine sozialhistorische Analyse der Transformation der Sprachenordnung von 1848 bis 2000*, Peter Lang SA, Berne 2004, p. 48.

² E. Godel, D. Acklin Muji, *Nationales Selbstverständnis ...*, p. 60.

³ *Amtliches Bulletin der Bundesversammlung*, Nationalrat, 6. December 1937, 714 cites: G. Lechmann, *Rätoromanische Sprachbewegung. Die Geschichte der Lia Rumantscha von 1919 bis 1996*, Verlag Huber, Frauenfeld – Stuttgart – Wien 2005, p. 501.

spanning hundreds of years, a fact which was openly spoken about during the national debate¹. Nonetheless, during work on the 1848 Constitution, Switzerland's multilingualism was perceived more as an administrative problem than as a symbolic aspect of the existence of the Confederation: *In 1848 language was not yet a fundamental identity criterion for social groups inhabiting Switzerland*². Linguistic consciousness gradually became stronger with the passage of time.

The revision of the federal Constitution of 1874 amended the numbering of the *Sprachartikel* in the basic law from 109 to 116, but the wording of the Article remained unchanged. The only addition was an entry stating that during the election of judges to the Federal Court the principle of representing all three national languages in it should be respected. This was one of a number of possible and at the same time very gentle ways of solving the problem of court language. But which of these languages would constitute the basis for translating regulations and procedures? The trilingual nature of the Federation imposed on it the obligation to translate all State documents. During discussions a proposal was put forward, though never implemented, to establish three separate language sections within the Federal Court.

It must be noted, however, that during preparation work on revising the 1874 Constitution, deep divisions in Swiss society manifested themselves for the first time along the language borders, whilst awareness of regional identity became far more pronounced than in 1848. The French language community, fearing Germanisation, was against centrist tendencies which could be noted in the early version of the new Constitution and strongly disputed the issue with German language communities. All of this took place against the ominous backdrop of rising nationalism in neighbouring France and Germany, the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) and the threat of incorporating the German language Cantons into Germany. Expressions such as *Kluft* (cleft, chasm), *Riss* (fissure), *Spaltung* (split, division) and *fossé* (ditch) started appearing in the press of the times in reference to the mutual animosity between the country's two largest language groups³. The final revised version of the Constitution was gentler, thanks to which it was also approved without any problems in the French language Cantons, whilst the media wrote at length about national reconciliation.

2.2. The first review of the *Sprachartikel*

Attempts at including Rhaeto-Romance as one of the national languages of the Confederation really started with the formation of the Rhaeto-Romance cantonal organisation *Lia Rumantscha* [the Rhaeto-Romance League] in 1919. The initiator of the League and its first President, Giachen Conrad, openly expressed his wish to raise the status of the Rhaeto-Romance language

¹ E. Godel, D. Acklin Muji, *Nationales Selbstverständnis ...*, p. 103.

² E. Godel, D. Acklin Muji, *Nationales Selbstverständnis ...*, p. 119.

³ *Röstigraben*, which refers to language division, became a buzzword in contemporary language. Further reference will be made to this concept in this article.

when sketching the plans of his organisation's activities. In the early 1930s the League submitted a demand to expand Article 116 of the Constitution. An additional impetus, possibly the most important of all, and which elevated the matter to Parliamentary significance, was the situation outside the country, namely the designs of Italy under Fascist rule towards land occupied by the Rhaetians. The official view of Italy was the recognition of Rhaeto–Romance dialects as part of the Lombardic dialect. In the light of this dubious approach all expressions of autonomy amongst the Friulans and the Ladinian inhabitants of the Dolomites were eliminated, whilst further plans included the annexation of Graubünden by *Great Italy*, the legitimacy of which was the defence of Italian countrymen against Germanisation¹. The Rhaeto–Romance elite reacted strongly by declaring publicly that *Rhaetians are organically part of the Swiss fatherland*, whilst the Austrian dialectologist, Teodor Gartner, defended the argument that Rhaeto–Romance was an independent language². An analysis of the press of the time provides proof that the rejection of irredentism was common amongst the community of Graubünden.

The Rhaeto–Romance League was aware that the demand to elevate Rhaeto–Romance to the status of official language in the Confederation would be too far-reaching and very difficult to implement. For this reason the League set out to place it on the same footing as the three remaining national languages and to recognise it as an independent neo–Latin language. This measure still did not solve any of the above problems of the group, particularly the one of decreasing size, but at least it provided an opportunity to solve them in the future, as the entire matter was now seen in the light of the law.

The League's efforts were rewarded with success. In 1937 the proposal to expand the *Sprachartikel* under the Constitution was unanimously approved by both chambers of the Parliament and finally confirmed by the nation and the Cantons in the referendum of 20 February 1938. The turnout (54.4% of those eligible to vote) was relatively high with more than 90% of voters in favour of expanding Article 116 of the Constitution. The majority of Cantons were also in favour. Rhaeto–Romance was finally recognised as Switzerland's fourth national language, whilst German, French and Italian continued to be the official languages.

2.3. The second review of the *Sprachartikel*

The concept of reviewing the *Sprachartikel* once again under the Constitution was officially voiced in the Federal Parliament by the Graubünden Member of Parliament, Martin Bundi (the so-called *Motion Bundi*) on 21 June 1985. However, this motion was preceded much earlier by the long-term endeavours of various circles interested in improving the status of the weaker language groups. After World War II these endeavours became more intense. Attempts were made at obtaining financial support for French language

¹ G. Lechmann, *Rätoromanische Sprachbewegung ...*, p. 503.

² G. Lechmann, *Rätoromanische Sprachbewegung ...*, p. 503.

schools in the Canton of Bern. A well-known case was the separation of the Canton of Jura from the Canton of Bern. This conflict, brought about by the discriminatory approach of the authorities in Bern towards the French-speaking politician, Moeckli, in 1947, also had a strongly religious dimension towards it. In the 1970s the aspirations of the francophones were joined by Italian speaking circles which demanded better conditions for the Italian language as an official language of the Federation, greater effort to ensure language equality in terms of union administration, higher education and the media¹. The Rhaetians, in consideration of the decreasing number of users of their language, sought the assistance of the Confederation, in order to help them survive. A spectacular example of these kinds of measures on the part of the Rhaetians was the publication in 1981 by *Casa Editura Revista Retoromontscha* of the work of the Swiss linguist, Jean-Jacques Furer (author of works such as the Rhaeto-Romance-French dictionary), characteristically entitled: *Death of the Rhaeto-Romance language or the beginning of the end of Switzerland [Der Tod des romanischen oder der Anfang vom Ende für die Schweiz]*². The evocative cover of this book shows the Swiss emblem – the four-armed cross which, losing one of its arms, namely the Rhaeto-Romance, i.e. the country's fourth national language, transforms into the funeral cross of the entire Confederation. In his conclusions Furer stressed that the Rhaetians required multiple support, not only financial, but also legal, organisational and scientific. In order to save the Rhaeto-Romance language it would have to be elevated to the level of official language in the entire Confederation, the Rhaeto-Romance communities should receive education exclusively in Rhaeto-Romance and school-leaving examinations should be in Rhaeto-Romance, there should be a Rhaeto-Romance university, as well as Rhaeto-Romance radio and television. In 1981 these demands might well have seemed to be unreasonable and unreal, but with time most of them were introduced.

Attempts at amending the *Sprachartikel* in the Constitution contained a number of themes connected with one another: more effective equal rights for national and official languages, the protection of languages against extinction and greater understanding and exchange between language groups.

Other important measures concerning the reviewing of the *Sprachartikel* in the Constitution included reports of groups of experts, appointed by the federal authorities. The first of these, entitled *2½-Sprachige Schweiz? [2½-language Switzerland?]*³, was published in 1982. The main threats to multilingualism were perceived in the tendency of language groups to close in on themselves (the so-called Belgianisation of Switzerland), the lack of contacts, the internationalisation of life in the country, e.g. by the English language forcing its way in, media concentration and the dominance of the German-language group. A few years later a second Government expert group report

¹ R. Coray, *Minderheitenschutz und Beziehungspflege: die zweite revision des Sprachenartikels (1985–1996)* in: J. Widmer, R. Coray, D. Acklin Muji & E. Godel, *Die Schweizer Sprachenvielfalt ...*, p. 251.

² J.-J. Furer, *La morte del romanco – l'inizio della fin per la Svizzra. Der Tod des Romanischen – der Anfang vom Ende für die Schweiz*, Casa Editura Revista Retoromontscha, Cuera 1981.

³ H. R. Dörig & Ch. Reichenau, *2½-Sprachige Schweiz?*, Desertina Verlag, Disentis 1982.

was published on the language situation in Switzerland¹, which also expressed anxiety about the future. This document, popularly known as the *Saladin Report* (named after the Chairperson of the team, Professor Peter Saladin), concentrated on the legal and historical aspects of multilingualism, but it also contained a proposal of future linguistic direction for the Confederation. The overtones of the report were clearly negative. The authors of the report indicated that language topics had been underestimated, that there was too much *laissez-faireism*, that Switzerland was heading towards a two-and-a-half language model², that the English language was taking over with its colloquialisms (*Umgangssprache*) and that linguistic regionalism (or dialecticism) was taking place in Switzerland. The report, which expressed alarm and care, recommended the simultaneous taking of decisive and specific counter measures. The press of the time interpreted the report as a cry of desperation, as the unmasking of the delusion of multilingualism. The Government approached the matter with greater calm. It accepted the thesis that the existence of the weaker language groups was under threat and that it was necessary to implement a new language policy for the Confederation. In March 1991 the Government prepared a message to the Parliament concerning the reviewing of the *Sprachartikel* in the Constitution³.

It is worth noting that neither the debate in the press nor the mentioned message of the Government to the Parliament touched on two important aspects of the Saladin Report. First of all, the Report contained a suggestion to expand the viewpoint in perceiving the language topic in Switzerland. Though up until now reference was made in this context to quadrilingualism (*Viersprächigkeit*) in Switzerland, the Report also uses the concept of multilingualism (*Vielsprächigkeit*), which better reflects the actual state of affairs. The final decades of the twentieth century demonstrated a growing percentage of inhabitants of Switzerland who, when asked about their native (or first) language during censuses, did not indicate any national language. In 1950 this percentage stood at 0.7%. Future censuses gave the following results: 1.4% (1960), 4.3% (1970), 6.0% (1980), 8.9% (1990), whilst the census of 2000 reached 9.0%⁴. Secondly, the Report called into question the principle of homogeneity of language areas and the constancy of their borders. The next herald, indicating the *crossroads of the traditional quadrilingualism of Switzerland* also remained unnoticed⁵.

The language topic once again became an important element in the social debate on the national identity of the Swiss, particularly during celebrations

¹ *Zustand und Zukunft der viersprachigen Schweiz*, Abklärungen, Vorschläge und Empfehlungen einer Arbeitsgruppe des Eidgenössischen Departements des Innern, Bern, August 1989.

² Reference was made to the following versions: German + French + ½ Italian or a native language (one of the national languages) + English + ½ of a second national language; it is clear that reference is made here to the title of the 1982 report.

³ Botschaft des Bundesrates an die Bundesversammlung über die Revision des Sprachartikels der Bundesverfassung (Article 116 BV) vom 4. März 1991.

⁴ G. Lüdi & I. Werlen, *Sprachenlandschaft in der Schweiz*, p. 8.

⁵ R. Coray, *Minderheitenschutz und Beziehungspflege ...*, p. 323.

commemorating the 700th Anniversary of the Confederation (1991). Quadri-lingualism or multilingualism in Switzerland was often written about in the press of the times¹. However, differences in attitude amongst language groups emerged with force during the referendum on the accession of Switzerland to the European Economic Area, which took place in December 1992 and which was rejected. The French-speaking Swiss were primarily in favour of Swiss integration into EU structures, whilst the German speakers were against it.

At the same time a discourse was taking place on the position of the English language. Liberal circles were in favour of introducing it as the first foreign language at primary school level, which broke the principle stating that the first language should be one of the national languages of the Confederation. Currently, there is considerable discussion on the function of the English language in Switzerland. This the topic will be considered in other parts of the paper.

The debate on revising the *Sprachartikel* was also influenced by developments outside the country, namely the announcement of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1992, ratified by Switzerland in 1997) and the signing by Switzerland of the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (1995)².

Summing up, the long-term debate on the amendment of the *Sprachartikel* was conducted from two points of view. The first of these, particularly characteristic of the Romance group of languages, accentuated the need to protect the linguistic heritage and traditional language areas of Switzerland as well as the inviolability of the territorial principle under language legislation. The second, connected primarily with the German-speaking community, placed emphasis on contact, exchange and understanding among the language groups. The concern to maintain national unity within the country linked both of these approaches³. More broadly speaking, one can refer to the constant attrition in Switzerland of the two language options. The first of these is sometimes referred to as defensive, patrimonial, but also paternalistic and focuses on seeking to protect the four traditional language areas and autochthonous minority groups, especially the Rhaetians. It refers to state regulation and solidarity with the minorities. The second option is geared towards the future-oriented, psychologising, liberal model of *agreement*. As a first issue, it perceives the relationship between the German-speaking community and the French-speaking community, whilst its solution is attributed to individual behaviours and actions, designed to optimize a dynamic system of communication⁴. These two models co-exist, but not without tension arising. The referendum on reviewing the current *Sprachartikel* under the Constitution (Article 116) was conducted on 10 March 1996. Only 29.9% of those entitled

¹ R. Coray, *Minderheitenschutz und Beziehungspflege ...*, p. 253.

² G. Janusz & P. Bajda, *Prawa mniejszości narodowych. Standardy europejskie [National Minority Rights]*, Stowarzyszenie „Wspólnota Polska”, Warszawa 2000, p. 41.

³ R. Coray, *Minderheitenschutz und Beziehungspflege ...*, p. 411.

⁴ R. Coray, *Minderheitenschutz und Beziehungspflege ...*, p. 410.

to vote participated in it. The vast majority of voters (76.1%) opted for amendment of the *Sprachartikel*, which constituted a compromise between the positions outlined above, and which read as follows:

1. German, French, Italian and Rhaeto–Romance are the national languages (*Landessprachen*) of Switzerland.
2. The Confederation and the Cantons promote understanding and exchange between linguistic communities.
3. The Confederation supports measures taken by Graubünden and Ticino aimed at retaining and promoting Rhaeto–Romance and Italian.
4. The official languages of the Confederation are German, French and Italian. Concerning contacts with persons who use Rhaeto–Romance, this language also serves as an official language of the Confederation. Specific matters are regulated by law¹.

It is interesting to note that in the referendum the *Sprachartikel* received most support in Geneva (85.8%) and Ticino (84.2%), whilst Graubünden belonged to the group of three Cantons with the lowest support (Uri 65%, Schwyz 66.3%, Graubünden 68.3%). This strange result may be explained by the lack of support for the actions of the Rhaetians on the part of the German-speaking Walser communities inhabiting Graubünden, concerned about the future of their minority dialect, as well as the views cropping up here and there and suggesting that the amended *Sprachartikel* was a hidden form of promoting the new, supra-dialectic *Rumantsch Grischun* language which, apart from having its supporters amongst the Rhaetians, was also vehemently opposed. However, the official representatives of the authorities of Graubünden and *Lia Rumantscha* activists categorically opposed this interpretation.

2.4. The language topic under the new Federal Constitution (1996)

In the thoroughly revised Swiss Constitution, adopted by the Parliament on 20 November 1996 and approved by the nation and the Cantons in the referendum of 18 April 1999, the actual contents of the *Sprachartikel* (which currently constitutes Article 70 of the Basic Law) were amended only slightly².

The official languages of the Confederation are German, French and Italian. Concerning contacts with persons who use Rhaeto–Romance, this language also serves as an official language of the Confederation. The Cantons define their official languages. In order to guarantee the coexistence of language communities emphasis is placed on the traditional language structure of the region and consideration is given to the autochthonous language minorities. The Confederation and the Cantons support understanding and exchange between the language communities. The Confederation supports multilingual Cantons to fulfil their specific tasks. The Confederation supports

¹ A. Baur, *Viva la Grischia*, Verlag Huber, Frauenfeld 1997, p. 47.

² I quote the *Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation of 18 April 1999* after: M. Ratajczak, *Jak porozumiewają się Szwajcarzy? Media w wielokulturowej Szwajcarii*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2004, p. 164.

measures taken by Graubünden and Ticino aimed at retaining and promoting Rhaeto–Romance and Italian.

It must be stressed, however, that the overall tone of the revised Constitution relating to language and culture is fundamentally new. Commentators point out that the amount of space dedicated by this document to language matters¹ and the use of the expression *language communities* point towards the conviction of the community–generating power of language and that Switzerland is a country consisting of various language communities. Furthermore, the revised Constitution contains a phrase relating to language users (Article 70: *persons using Rhaeto–Romance*), which, according to the mentioned commentators, is proof of consolidation of the ethnolinguistic concept of the Swiss nation² as opposed to the hitherto dominating political concept. This is also confirmed by the contents of the recital which refers to the will to live in unity, mutual good–will and respect for diversity, and the contents of Article 2 which, as some of the objectives explaining the existence of the Confederation, mentions internal cohesion and cultural diversity, and finally Article 69, which states that the Confederation takes into account the cultural and linguistic diversity of the country. It must also be remembered that the statement on the four national languages of Switzerland appears at the very beginning of the Constitution (Article 4), out of a total of six Articles, under Title One, which determine the foundations of nation and state. Concerning the dynamics of multiculturalism, Article 70(2) is particularly significant when it states that the Cantons *respect the traditional territorial distribution of languages, and consider the indigenous linguistic minorities*. This is clear confirmation of the principle of territoriality, without which the principle of freedom of language under Article 18 could pave the way towards free market sociolinguistic processes.

Article 70(2) also refers to the need for *harmony* [*Einvernehmen*] between linguistic communities, which points towards a departure from the once modern concept of *freedom of language* [*Sprachenfriedens*], assuming the possibility of a *language war* in the background and replacing it with a concept taken from the psychology of interpersonal relations³.

It must be added that in the newly–approved *Sprachartikel* under the Federal Constitution there are no implementing rules (popularly referred to as the *legislation on language* [*Sprachengesetz*]). Work on drawing up this Law (its full name is: Federal Law on National Languages and on Agreement Between Language Groups) is currently being conducted by a special Parliamentary Working Group (*Paritätische Arbeitsgruppe Sprachengesetz Bund und Kantone*), chaired by the Member of Parliament, Iten, of the Canton of Zug. However, it will take some time before the Group completes its work. Without

¹ The *Swiss Federal Constitution of 18 April 1999* speaks about language matters five times: in Article 4. (on national languages), Article 8. p. 2. (ban on discrimination, including language discrimination), Article 18. (on language freedom), Article 69. p. 3. (on supporting language diversity) and Article 70 (on official languages).

² R. Coray, *Minderheitenschutz und Beziehungspflege ...* , p. 385.

³ R. Coray, *Minderheitenschutz und Beziehungspflege ...* , p. 407.

the appropriate control instruments and sanctions, under the new Constitution the *Sprachartikel* is more of a symbolic gesture than an authentic term in the language context of the country¹. The implementing rules would be expected to contain e.g. decisions referring to supporting language authority within the national languages, supporting student and teacher exchange at all levels of education, supporting Rhaeto–Romance and Italian in Graubünden and Ticino and supporting the multilingual Cantons.

Furthermore, an Institute for Multilingualism (*Institut für Mehrsprachenforschung*) is expected to be set up. The Canton of Graubünden and *Lia Rumantscha* would like this Institute to be placed in their location. Unfortunately, there are concerns that the Federal authorities will decide to shelve the implementing rules altogether, not only to save money, but also in consideration of the ongoing test of strength between the Confederation and the Cantons on the formulation and conduct of language policy. In April 2004 the Federal Government postponed work on the Law². This measure led to many objections in Parliament, amongst researchers and other interested parties. For example, Georges Lüdi, Professor at the University of Basel, Member of the *Language and Culture* Foundation Council indicates that, in consideration of the costs, the European Union has taken the decision to protect its cultural heritage, whilst Switzerland renounces this in the name of savings and that deregulation on the language market is damaging to all of the country's national languages, as it facilitates the spread of English.

3. Language in Education

The Federal Constitution gives citizens the right to free primary education (Article 19), but the *school system is a cantonal matter* (Article 62). The Cantons must give access to free primary education to all of its citizens, which of course does not exclude the existence of paid private schools. The Federation places the obligation on Cantons to maintain primary schools (Article 62(2)), to promote sport (Article 68) and reserves itself the right to direct and supervise these schools. The State does not intervene in remaining matters.

The language of education and foreign language tuition have not been regulated at Constitutional level. These are matters which require long-term discussion throughout the country. Up until recently it was common practice for the first foreign language at primary schools to be one of the Federation's national languages (*Landessprachen*). It is worth noting that during discussions on revising the Federal Constitution a proposal was put forward to supplement the *Sprachartikel* with an entry placing a Constitutional obligation on all Cantons to introduce one of the national languages as the first foreign language at school. However, this proposal was not approved³.

¹ R. Coray, *Minderheitenschutz und Beziehungspflege ...*, p. 408.

² G. Ghisla, *Ein Requiem für das neue Sprachengesetz und für eine schweizerische Sprachenpolitik?* in: *Babylonia* 1/2004, pp. 70–71.

³ Proposal put forward by Social Democrat Member of Parliament, Berberat, Canton of Neuchâtel, who argued in favour of supporting national cohesion. See. R. Coray, *Minderheitenschutz und Beziehungspflege ...*, pp. 407–408.

The coordination of cantonal systems of education was and still is managed by the *Swiss Conference of the Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK)* [*Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren (EDK)*]. The decisions of the Conference are not binding on the cantonal educational authorities, but are rather seen as recommendations. Concerning language instruction the Conference has voiced its opinion on many occasions over the past decades¹. One of its most significant expressions of interest was the recommendation to introduce in the German-language Cantons, and as early as in the first forms of primary school, the teaching of French (*Frühfranzösisch*) as the first foreign language. However, in some Cantons (Zurich, Thurgau, St. Gallen) decisions taken by the educational authorities were opposed by the inhabitants, up to the point of even having to hold cantonal referendums. Though the applications to block the early tuition of French were rejected in the referendums, the very fact that the referendums took place provoked outrage in the French-speaking cantons, which loyally committed themselves to introducing the teaching of German at primarily education level.

In 1997 the Canton of Zurich experimentally introduced the teaching of English, apart from computer science, as early as from form one at primary school. A number of other German-language Cantons followed suit. The controversial trustee from Zurich, Ernest Buschor, introduced English from 2003 in all schools as the first foreign language in place of French. This caused an outrage amongst educational circles. The Cantons are virtually divided down the middle on this issue. Part of them is in favour of the traditional choice of one of the national languages, whilst the rest prefer freedom of choice². Meanwhile, the Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education *has decided not to take a decision on this issue*, i.e. according to R. Coray, the common approach has been adopted not to attempt to solve issues which cannot be solved³. In the end, however, the Conference opted for a compromise. In March 2004 it decided that from 2012 at the latest, primary schools throughout the country would offer two foreign languages; the first from form three and the second from form five. One of these languages would have to be a national language. In practical terms this does not undermine the priority of the teaching of English at primary schools⁴. The innovative step taken by the school authorities in Zurich in 1997 triggered a lively discussion in Parliament and in the mass media on national languages and English, which has continued to this very day.

¹ See R. Coray, *Die Transformation der Sprachordnung und des nationalen Imaginären* in: J. Widmer, R. Coray, D. Acklin Muji & E. Godel, *Die Schweizer Sprachenvielfalt ...*, p. 458. All of the documents relating to the Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education are available on <http://edkwww.unibe.ch>.

² The Cantons of Western Switzerland and Ticino are in favour of the traditional model, the Cantons of Central and Eastern Switzerland are in favour of English from form three primary school and French from form five, whilst the Cantons of Northern Switzerland do not have a firm view. See. R. Coray, *Die Transformation der Sprachordnung ...*, p. 460.

³ See. R. Coray, *Die Transformation der Sprachordnung ...*, pp. 436–439 & p. 460.

⁴ G. Ghisla, *Ein Requiem für das neue Sprachengesetz und für eine schweizerische Sprachenpolitik?*, pp. 70–71.

3.1. The issue of English

The issue of English has been discussed in Switzerland for a long time¹. The teaching of English in Switzerland is not just a matter of mechanically *replacing* one language with another, which is more useful in business or research. The discussion includes a number of significant topics, e.g. socio-linguistics as well as national, economic and global issues.

Linguists point out the following topics relating to the expansion of the English language²:

1. Three of Switzerland's national languages are international languages which link contemporary Switzerland with Europe's huge cultural background.

2. At school the teaching of English is lifeless, devoid of any connection with living culture. Any language, including English, changes depending on the environment in which it operates. It is also important that in Switzerland English is not used for communicating with native speakers but with people for whom English is a foreign language. Under such circumstances language loses its vitality, as it is detached from its base, from its native culture, and is merely used but not cultivated. Nowadays English is used by the masses, but mainly as a spoken language and not in writing. As a result, English is the most threatened language in the world. American culture makes exclusively pragmatic use of the above. Paradoxically, parents, pupils and politicians place great hope in this lifeless language. The language offers the illusory promise of being a universal means of communication. Of course, ESP (*English for Special Purposes*) may be distinguished. It is used for communication between specialists, but this is not a language which may be taught to children. And if children start learning foreign languages from such a sterile, uprooted, globalized, alien composition, which is supposed to replace every other foreign language, how are they expected to want to learn another national language?

The above argumentation focuses on the bond between language and culture. All four national languages in Switzerland, though to varying degrees, have experienced this naturally over the centuries by functioning in a specific social and natural environment and by neighbouring with the larger national communities (Germany, France and Italy) as well as – to a certain degree – with related Rhaeto–Romance groups – the Ladins and the Friulans. This is an indication of Switzerland's unique character amongst other European countries. Concerning Switzerland, the English language cannot claim to have this attribute.

¹ In 1997 in *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Politische Wissenschaften* a debate was published on the prospects of language and politics in Switzerland. In the same year the specialist in Romance studies, Marco Baschera, asked the provocative question *How much English will Switzerland put up with?* (in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 11 October 1997). An overall consideration of the public discourse on the position of the English language is contained in: R. Coray, *Englisch in der Schweiz: Trojanisches Pferd odce Sprungbrett in die Zukunft?* in: R. J. Watts & H. Murray (eds), *Die fünfte Landessprache? Englisch in der Schweiz*, Hochschulverlag, Zürich 2001.

² M. Baschera, *Die Schweizer Landessprachen zwischen local und global* in: *Die multikulturelle Schweiz*, M. Escher (ed.), Verlag Rügger, Zürich – Chur 2003, pp. 51–57.

The issue of English in Switzerland, perceived from a national identity perspective, was the subject of the inaugural address at the opening of the 2005/2006 academic year at the University of Fribourg. The address was made by the Chancellor, Professor Urs Altermatt¹. In his speech he stressed that in a multilingual country language was not only a means of communication but also a symbol of cultural diversity. For this reason, e.g. Romandie feels that its identity is under threat and treats the teaching of French at primary education level as a test of will on the part of Swiss Germans in maintaining national compactness.

Census data for 2000, however, indicates that compared to the three great national languages, English is currently without greater meaning. Only about 1% of the country's population uses it as the first language, whilst Serbo-Croatian is used by 1.4%, Portuguese by 1.3%, Spanish by 1.1% and Turkish by 0.6%. However, compared to the 73,425 speakers of English as the first language, Rhaeto-Romance, i.e. Switzerland's fourth national and official language is used by a mere 35,095 speakers. Considering Switzerland as a quadrilingual whole the topic is far from trivial. Furthermore, Altermatt stresses that towards the end of the twentieth century waves of migration radically altered the country's linguistic landscape; previously immigration was primarily from the neighbouring countries, in other words the same language areas, representing the same national languages of Switzerland, whereas currently immigration is of a different nature.

Research carried out as early as 1985 on preferred foreign languages amongst potential students showed that two-thirds of German and French-speaking Swiss chose English as opposed to another national language. In 2000 73% of Swiss Germans and 45% of Swiss French supported the already mentioned controversial decision of the school authorities in Zurich. When asked which language should be used during government press conferences if time did not permit for interpretation services, 38% said German, 34% English and only 10% French. English is growing in importance at primary school level, but even more so in higher institutes of education – vocational colleges and universities – as well as in the army. This state of affairs weakens the position of the national languages. The almost one-hundred year old middle-class family custom of *Welschlandaufenthalt*, i.e. a one-year stay of a child in a French-language region with the purpose of perfecting its command of the language and knowledge of culture, is ever less frequently practised.

English is growing in importance in Switzerland much the same as in other European countries and throughout the world. Internationally, at the end of the twentieth century the number of speakers of English as a foreign language (400 million) significantly exceeded the number of people for whom it is a native language (300 million). In many government and managerial circles English has become the language of everyday use. In 2005 a Eurobarometer survey showed that English is the most frequently taught foreign language in the European Union. This concerns one in three EU citizens, with

¹ U. Altermatt, *Wieviel Englisch brauchen die Schweiz und ihre Universitäten? Rektoratsrede Dies academicus 2005*, Universität Freiburg, Freiburg 2005.

German scoring 12%. After World War I German and French lost their hitherto strong position at European universities. In the 1930s English emerged as the number one language. From 1999, in connection with the Bologna process, student mobility increased massively. This was another reason why English consolidated its position even more.

The large countries of Western Europe – Germany, France – with their own strong scientific traditions, attempt to resist Anglicism, whilst the smaller countries and Central and Eastern Europe adopt a more open policy towards English. In teaching, English is not as expansive as it is in research and publications. For this reason it is more apt to refer to English as the language of scientific research rather than the language of learning. National languages have primarily managed to retain their position in the locally rooted disciplines such as law.

Swiss universities are following in the footsteps of foreign universities. In 2005/2006 approx. 22% of all students in Switzerland were from abroad. Once again, English dominates in research rather than in teaching. In 1991 in Switzerland 31% of doctorates in natural science, 12% in medicine and pharmacy and 11% in the humanities were written in English.

Summing up, Altermatt believes that multilingualism is not only a question of constitutional recognition but also of everyday practice. Quadri-lingualism in Switzerland is the heritage of the country and nation and contributes to its identity. The socio-political debate and the rule of law will continue having a *raison d'être*, providing that the elite and society are not divided by an abyss. If the English language were to force its way into university education and start playing a dominating role this could indeed give rise to a rift¹. Small countries, such as Switzerland, must ensure that university education is provided in the national languages and not in English. If not, this could lead to the impoverishment of culture, the fall of *raison d'être* and even threaten the political existence of Switzerland. National languages are indispensable for socialising people as *citizens* in civil society. The important thing is to create multilingual culture, which will promote openness to other languages. For universities it is important that secondary level education provide pupils with a solid grounding in the first language (the native language) as well as in other languages (the foreign languages). Altermatt, making reference to F. Dürrenmatt², proposes the following language formula for the Swiss: native language + second national language + English. Cultural diversity – including multilingualism – encapsulates the specific nature of Switzerland.

However, it must also be indicated that apart from the above presented linguistic and *national* arguments the debate on the role of English is also being considered by liberal circles, particularly the world of business, which is more inclined to stress the principle of linguistic freedom rather than the principle of territoriality. The concept of *communication and exchange*

¹ U. Altermatt, *Wieviel Englisch brauchen die Schweiz und ihre Universitäten?* ... , p. 29.

² F. Dürrenmatt, *Die Entdeckung des Erzählens. Gespräche 1971–1980*, Heinz Ludwig Arnold, Zürich 1996, pp. 278–285 (cited after: *Wieviel Englisch brauchen die Schweiz und ihre Universitäten?* ... , pp. 30–31).

between linguistic communities, introduced into the language debate in 1987 by the liberal party Member of Parliament Müller (*Freisinnig–Demokratische Partei*) from Zurich, has become extremely popular in recent years; it was taken into account in the *Sprachartikel* of the new Federal Constitution (Article 70 p. 3) and is now used to define one of the main objectives of language policy¹. The most important means of implementing this communication and exchange is seen primarily in the use of national languages. However, more and more often this role is being played by English. First of all, English as a neutral language for all language groups in the country could not be criticised as permitting one of the languages to dominate the rest. Secondly, thanks to English the Swiss could have greater access to the values and products of modern society and mass global culture. Economic factors also play an important role, which is particularly significant for liberal circles. If Switzerland wants to continue being competitive in the European and global economy it cannot limit itself to tradition.

According to R. Coray², the social debate on the English language in the early twenty-first century demonstrates that the liberal option has an advantage over the supporters of traditional State-guaranteed quadrilingualism. This can be seen from the tone of the press and from the results of opinion polls. The federal authorities have adopted the strategy of *taking a decision not to take any decision* and of shifting the problem to the Cantons and regions. In this situation it is likely that English will spontaneously become the first binding foreign language at school and the next national language, and with time its position will be sanctioned by a referendum.

3.2. Mutual isolation of the national language groups

Specialist literature on Swiss national identity often cites the words of the eminent intellectual, F. Dürrenmatt: *I think that the Swiss are faced with the danger of losing this specific experiment [creating something common out of four cultures] [...], the French and German speakers, as well as the Italian speakers, do not live together at all, but side by side*³. What Dürrenmatt says can be perceived primarily in the centre of specific language areas. On the borderlands of these language areas the situation is somewhat better, though negative examples can also be found. There is much talk of the need of communication without barriers, but the results are still poor. School exchanges, teaching in the language of another group and the use of media in another language are concepts which are currently part of the social discourse, but which hardly translate into educational practice. There are some extremely successful but unfortunately sporadic projects involving immersion teaching (*Immersionsunterricht*)⁴. This involves teaching the foreign language in a

¹ R. Coray, *Die Transformation der Sprachordnung ...*, p. 457.

² R. Coray, *Die Transformation der Sprachordnung ...*, p. 467.

³ U. Dürmüller, *Mehrsprachigkeit im Wandel. Von der viersprachigen zur vielsprachigen Schweiz*, Pro Helvetia, Zürich 1996, p. 30.

⁴ B. Claudine, *Der zweisprachige Unterricht. Entwicklung, Ergebnisse und Perspektiven* in: *Die multikulturelle Schweiz*, M. Escher (ed.), pp. 83–92.

natural, authentic environment, in other words teaching something in the given language and not just the language itself.

However, it must be stressed that these projects also led to strong objections in the French-speaking parts of the Canton of Fribourg. These projects were perceived as a deliberate plan to Germanise the Romance population and there were also concerns of *semilingualism* and of pupils being overworked. We see here two concepts colliding with one another, but with the same objective in mind and yet with approaches paradoxically and mutually excluding each other. On the one hand, we have the concept of retaining linguistic homogeneity in given areas in the name of protecting minority languages and, on the other, the concept of supporting the multilingualism of given persons. This may help improve the educational opportunities of the young, and as a result consolidate their native linguistic consciousness and lead to protecting the minority languages against domination¹. The *principle of territoriality*, which in the past might have proved successful in quadrilingual Switzerland by helping to retain linguistic peace, today, in the context of multilingualism and uncontrolled migration, appears to be increasingly anachronistic.

An interesting example of this new multilingual phenomenon is the Canton of Basel–City, with 28% foreigners and 58 non-national languages. 41% of pupils are bi- or multilingual. The cantonal, i.e. official educational concept (*Gesamtsprachenkonzept*) depends essentially on maintaining the bi- or multilingualism of children acquired at home. Apart from German, which is taught and used as the first language of this monolingual Canton, a second language is also taught from an early age if possible. Furthermore, the languages of all national groups inhabiting the Canton are introduced to schools. This has a positive impact on children, since it helps to reduce stereotyping of the less prestigious languages and allows children to build a positive image of themselves. Courses in Native Language and Culture [*Kurse in Heimatlicher Sprache und Kultur (HSK)*] are also offered; these consolidate the child's first foreign language. In this context, G. Lüdi used the characteristic expression: *curing monolingualism*. This involves becoming aware of and experiencing multilingualism and multiculturalism, supporting bilingual identity and the multilingualism of children.

Gianni Ghisla, the President of the *Sprachen und Kulturen* foundation², which came into being in 1993, also made reference to the mutual isolation of given language groups in Switzerland. He pointed out that German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland were not engaging in any cultural exchange with the speakers of Italian and Rhaeto-Romance, and that the inhabitants of

¹ S. Germann, *Die Mehrsprachige Schweiz – mehrsprachige Schweizer?* in: E. Jeleń, M. Rauen, M. Świątek & J. Winiarska (eds), *Zmiany i rozwój języka oraz tożsamości narodowej – trendy w procesie integracji europejskiej*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 2002, p. 180.

² The *Sprachen und Kulturen [Languages and Culture]* foundation was launched in 1993 in Monte Merita n. Ascona. Its objective is to improve the multilingual communication skills of the Swiss. The foundation has its own publishing authority, *Babylonia*, which regularly addresses the most important problems of multilingualism in Switzerland.

the first two majority regions only perceive the remaining regions incidentally and in a degrading manner as a peculiar kind of Helvetic exoticism¹.

4. Integration measures at Federal level

From the very beginning of its existence the federation of cantons was faced with the challenge of neutralising isolation and decentralist tendencies, as well as initiating integration measures. In this context, more recently a number of such initiatives has played a particularly important role.

4.1. *Forum Helveticum*

This is a politically and religiously independent association founded in 1968. Its objective is to provide an institutionalised platform for social discourse on the social, political, economic and cultural standing, the problems of the existence of the nation, communication between language groups and the place of Switzerland in the community of nations. Forum Helveticum intends to become the meeting point and the place of dialogue for various forces and circles throughout the country. The members of the *Forum* are the umbrella organisations of Swiss associations, private and public organisations, totalling approximately 60².

4.2. New Swiss Association (*Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft, NHG*)

The aim of this organisation, which was founded in 1914, was and is the retention of unity and cohesion of the country by supporting dialogue between different groups in Swiss society and supporting the solving of internal and external problems: *Currently, in the face of the identity and trust crisis of Switzerland of the last few years and in the light of the worrying relations between French-speaking Switzerland and German-speaking Switzerland, the involvement of the NHG in statutory objectives is more urgent than ever*³.

The NHG has approximately 1300 members which are grouped in cantonal, local and regional circles. The objectives are met by open lectures, debates and group work. At State level the NHG organises an annual symposium in Schloss Lenzburg (Stapferhaus) which focuses on current topics and it also organises debates. An NHG annual is also published, which usually concentrates on the Schloss Lenzburg symposium. Either independently or in cooperation with others, the NHG has called into being a range of institutions, such as *Auslandschweizer-Organisation (Organisation for the Swiss Abroad)*, *Stiftung Pro Helvetia (Pro Helvetia Foundation)*, *Sektion Heer und Haus des Generalstabes der Armee (Command Section and House of the Army General Staff)*, which played an important role in maintaining the

¹ G. Ghisla, *Die Minderheiten brauchen ein Mindestmass an Reziprozität. Gedanken zu einer mehrsprachigen und multikulturellen Schweiz* in: *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Politische Wissenschaft*, 3/1997, pp. 149–156, R. Coray, “*Sprachliche Minderheit*” ein Grundbegriff der schweizerischen Sprachenpolitik in: *Minderheitensprachen im Kontext*, Band 1: *Minderheitensprachen zwischen Vielfalt und Standardisierung* in: *Bulletin suisse de linguistique appliquée*, Juin 1999, p. 185.

² See. <http://www.forum-helveticum.ch>.

³ *Die multikulturelle Schweiz*, M. Escher (ed.), p. 211.

cohesion of Switzerland during World War II), *Jugendaustausch* (Youth Exchange). The NHG is funded by member contributions and donations made by private institutions and companies.

In 2002 the NHG decided not to hold its traditional annual symposium in Schloss Lenzburg (Stapferhaus) and instead organised, as part of Expo.02, a conference on multiculturalism in Switzerland. At the close of the conference, on 22 June 2002, the so-called *Biel Resolution* was approved, in which the Association Board proposed a range of measures in order to improve relations between the country's language communities, including in particular¹:

– the calling into being of the *Confederation Unity Council*, something similar to a Council of Elders, comprising a small number of independent celebrities, whose objective was to intervene with the Federation and Canton authorities in situations placing unity under threat; the Council would intervene on its own initiative or on application of the interested circles;

– the teaching of languages in order to master one's mother tongue (including standard German (*Hochdeutsch*) for the German-speaking Swiss) as well as a sufficient knowledge of a second national language and English; the learning of a second language from form one at primary school; during German language lessons in Romance-speaking Switzerland an understanding of Swiss German dialects should be encouraged (*deutschschweizerische Dialekte*); encouraging bi-lingual teaching, particularly with the use of the immersion method; elaboration of the appropriate resources for this innovative policy; concerning multilingualism and multiculturalism Switzerland should play a leading role;

– multiple mass media information on things taking place in other language regions; more frequent publication of articles in a language other than the language normally used by readers; a return to the use of standard language when presenting the news on radio and television in German-speaking Switzerland; the application of technical resources which permit the reception of electronic media broadcasts (public radio and television) in all of the country's regions, with popular programmes being dubbed or containing subtitles.

5. Multilingualism from the perspective of given language groups

In order to give a full picture of the situation it is necessary to add a few more words on the perception of multilingualism in Switzerland in various language groups.

The German-speaking inhabitants of Switzerland have always constituted and still constitute the majority of the population. However, their participation in society as a whole has undergone change. Statistics covering the last 120 years provide an indication of the scale and dynamics of this process. Currently German speakers constitute 63.7% of Switzerland's population. Over the last century this level has tended to remain rather stable,

¹ *Die multikulturelle Schweiz*, M. Escher (ed.), pp. 17–18.

though a slight tendency towards decline has been noted, caused primarily by the marked increase in the percentage of people speaking other languages.

The German-speaking population occupies 17 monolingual cantons (the percentage of German speakers in these cantons is very high and varies between 79.3% to 93.5%), parts of 3 bilingual French–German cantons and part of the trilingual Canton of Graubünden. During the census of 2000 the number of people who indicated that German was their main language was 4,201,237.

The standard form, i.e. *Hochdeutsch*, in principle is used only, and reluctantly, in writing. So-called written Swiss German functions alongside *Hochdeutsch*. In spoken language, however, *Schwyzertütsch* reigns supreme. This is a wide range of local dialects, such as the dialects of the regions of Zurich, Bern, Lucerne, Basel, St. Gallen or Schaffhausen¹. For many young Swiss from the German-speaking cantons their first contact with the standard language (*Hochdeutsch*) is as late as at school and this language is treated by them as a foreign language. Furthermore, it is noticeable that dialects are becoming more common at school and are beginning to supplant the standard language. Textbooks for teaching them are now appearing. The findings of the census in 2000 are alarming. Almost half of the children of foreigners attending school in German-speaking Switzerland do not know the standard language but only the dialect². More and more often people refer to the *Hollandising* of German-speaking Switzerland, which is understood as the emergence of language barriers between the German-speaking Swiss and Germans or Austrians. *Schwyzerdeutsch* is regarded by the German-speaking Swiss as their native language, though officially it does not hold the status of a separate language.

Common diglossia amongst German speakers also leads to problems in relations with the remaining Swiss, who, wishing to communicate with German-speaking countries, would also have to master a second German language, apart from *Hochdeutsch* taught at school.

The rebirth of *Schwyzerdeutsch* is relatively new. First of all, the wave of interest in dialects, in other words the so-called *Mundartwelle*, arose in the 1930s as a reaction to the threat posed by Nazi Germany. In 1938 an association came into being called *Bund Schwyzertütsch*, established, among others, by Adolf Guggenbühl and Professor Eugen Dieth. Work was started on an alphabet and spelling for the dialects³. Next, interest in dialects grew in the 1960s. Since 1961 the *Language Atlas of German Switzerland* has been published as well as a range of other, monumental linguistic works dedicated to dialectological grammar and research. *Schwyzerdeutsch* is commonly used in public life, primarily on radio and television.

¹ See T. M. Marzantowicz, *Sytuacja językowa w niemieckojęzycznej Szwajcarii*, published by the author, Zurich 1995.

² G. Lüdi & I. Werlen, *Sprachenlandschaft in der Schweiz*, p. 104.

³ Earlier, in 1746, Johann Jakob Bodmer, the eminent figure of the Swiss Enlightenment, talked about the need to standardise the German dialects. See. W. Haas, *Die deutschsprachige Schweiz* in: *Die viersprachige Schweiz*, (eds) H. Bickel & R. Schläpfer, Verlag Sauerländer, Aarau – Frankfurt am Mein – Salzburg 2000, p. 134.

French-speaking Switzerland, known colloquially as Romandie, covers four French-speaking cantons: Vaud, Neuchâtel, Geneva and Jura (the last of these contains one German-speaking community) and part of the three bilingual French-German speaking cantons: Bern – with a clear advantage of the German-speaking population, Fribourg and Valais – with a clear advantage of the French-speaking population. The total surface area of these seven cantons is 17,989 km², with a population of 2,740,500. However, the number of Swiss inhabitants who indicated French as their first language during the census of 2000 was 1,485,056, which constitutes 20.4% of the total population of the country¹. Compared to the other three language areas of Switzerland, the use of spoken local dialects in French-speaking areas is extremely limited.

In the mid-nineteenth century a conscious effort was made to protect the endangered dialects in the Canton of Neuchâtel². With this purpose in mind A. Huguenin founded *Cercle du Sapin* in 1857. However, this organisation was not able to achieve its noble objectives, as there was a lack of strong communities in which dialects could actually be used. Today, this work is being continued by, among others the Association of Friends of Dialects, founded in the Canton of Wallis in 1953 (*Fédération cantonale valaisanne des Amis du Patois*). In 1990 the Association managed to publish a book and cassettes for learning two local dialects. There are also other organisations of this type concentrated around *Fédération des patoisants romands* which continue being active. In recent times interest in dialects has been unexpectedly strong amongst the young who use them for example for lyrics in contemporary songs³. The dialects are also broadcast by local private stations in the Cantons of Valais, Fribourg and Jura (*Radio Rhône*, *Radio Fribourg* and *Fréquence Jura*).

The remnants of the Franco-Provençal language are still existent in very small numbers amongst the Catholic communities of parts of the Cantons of Valais, Fribourg and Jura, whilst Protestants do not use dialects at all. Estimates show that at most 1–2% of French-speaking Swiss inhabitants still use dialects, i.e. the so-called *patois*. The census of 2000 indicates even lower percentages. The weakness of these small groups is accentuated by the fact that they are isolated from one another and that the dialectal forms used by them differ from one another considerably. Finally, it must be said that in the language debate in French-speaking Switzerland, apart from issues concerning dialects, there is also, albeit to a very limited degree, a regional French-language version (French Helvetian). Hitherto, the non-existence of a separate Helvetian language awareness amongst the French-speaking Swiss and the non-existence of a different form of the language was regarded as an obvious state of affairs.

¹ G. Lüdi & I. Werlen, *Sprachenlandschaft in der Schweiz*, p. 8.

² See P. Knecht, *Die französische Schweiz ...*, p. 162.

³ A similar phenomenon may also be observed in other small language groups, e.g. amongst the inhabitants of Cornwall in the British Isles, despite the fact that Cornish is used by just a few dozen, or at most a few hundred speakers.

However, in the final decade of the twentieth century certain events gave rise to reflection, namely, the reaction of the Swiss to the standardisation of spelling recommended in 1990 by official French institutions. This reaction was very stormy and displayed reluctance. The educational authorities of certain cantons flatly refused to implement these amendments at their schools. Another area of conflict was the introduction of feminine forms for the names of professions. In this case also the forms which appeared in Switzerland were different to the ones used in Paris. The question remains as to whether these instances are sufficient evidence to suggest the beginnings of separatism amongst the French-speaking Swiss in relation to the Francophone community, as in the case of, say, Quebec. According to Pierre Knecht there can be no talk of such a development¹.

The Swiss Italian language area comprises two geo-political elements, i.e. the Canton of Ticino with a surface area of 2,812 km², inhabited by a population of approximately 312,000, and four Alpine Valleys, constituting part of the Canton of Graubünden – Val Mesolcina, Val Calanca, Val Bregaglia and Val Poschiavo. Jointly, the valleys occupy a surface area of 985 km² and are inhabited by a population of approximately 12,500.

Culturally, the Canton of Ticino is oriented to the south, towards its neighbour Italy, whilst the four Italian-speaking valleys in the Canton of Graubünden are geographically isolated from one another and oriented more to the north. Geographically it is the Alpine landscape which dominates and leaves its mark on the economy and culture².

Over the last 200 years Ticino has been integrating with Switzerland more and more and at the same time distancing itself from Italy. The centre of Switzerland is relatively far and divided naturally by the Alps. For this reason Ticino has grown accustomed to being an *island* left to itself. For two centuries this area has been balancing its existence between two opposing identities – the Italian cultural and linguistic identity and the Swiss national and political identity. In recent times the catchphrase *Open Ticino (Ticino aperto)* has become popular, which draws the line on its hitherto specific kind of insularity. In this context the University of Lugano, opened in 1996, is of symbolic importance.

The language repertoire of the modern inhabitants of Ticino is comprehensive. It comprises four language codes³:

1. The Ticino regional variation of Italian, so-called Ticino Italian. This belongs to the Lombardic language group, whose centres are in Milan and Como. Apart from the similarities to other languages belonging to this group (vocabulary, syntax and pronunciation), these characteristic traits, e.g. in its intonation, are also contained in Ticinese. Ticino Italian has clearly been

¹ P. Knecht, *Die französische Schweiz* in: *Die viersprachige Schweiz*, (eds) H. Bickel & R. Schläpfer, p. 176.

² *Zustand und Zukunft der viersprachigen Schweiz*, pp. 272–279.

³ O. Lurati, *Die sprachliche Situation in der Südostschweiz* in: *Die viersprachige Schweiz*, H. Bickel & R. Schläpfer, Verlag Sauerländer, Aarau – Frankfurt am Main – Salzburg 2000, p. 193.

shaped by the many years of functioning inside Switzerland. It contains a range of borrowings and calques taken from French and German.

2. The cross-regional dialect which emerged in the early twentieth century as the *koiné* for locally spoken dialects and which is gradually undergoing Italianisation.

3. Standard Italian which is one of the four national and official languages of the Swiss Confederation.

4. Spoken local dialects.

Recently, one more variation of so-called popular Italian (*italiano popolare*), i.e. the language of mass culture, is being used more and more, primarily by young people. Although its social status is not consolidated, it is expanding dynamically.

Up to the 1990s the native language for 80% of Ticinese people was one of the local dialects. Currently, for the young generation, this role is being taken over by Ticino Italian. Standard Italian, however, for centuries bore the traits of an official or ceremonial language. It is only in recent years that it is becoming more widespread in spoken language.

Local dialects spoken in Italian-speaking Switzerland have been spoken for a long time, as opposed to the dialects of French-speaking Switzerland. On the other hand, they have not attained high social status, as in the case of German-speaking Switzerland, but have primarily become prevalent in the lower social strata. As a result, they did not act as a *national* identification factor – on the contrary their use was stigmatised. As recently as World War II many schools in Ticino used tokens (*gettone*). These had to be worn on the hand by each pupil caught using the dialect. Sometimes additional punishments were given. Today, this situation is changing completely. In the light of Pan-European ethical revival interest in dialects is growing. They are now perceived as personal and group wealth.

Although Italian has always been one of the recognised national and official languages of the Swiss Confederation, its status in this respect does not seem to be particularly high. The Italian-speaking Swiss complain that there is no real equality between their language and German or French. This can be seen for instance in the delays in, or absence of, translating official texts into Italian. Furthermore, the teaching of Italian at schools in the German-speaking cantons is clearly neglected. A large number of secondary schools ignore the language completely in their curricula. In education, English is gaining a higher profile than Italian, despite the fact that the latter is a national language.

Rhaeto-Romance belongs to the group of western Romance languages, together with French, Catalan and Portuguese. Geographical conditions – settlements dispersed in over 150 Alpine valleys – have meant that from the beginning the Rhaetians have employed many local dialects which differed from one another. Only some of these dialects developed a written form during the Reformation. Attempts at turning the Rhaeto-Romance dialects into a standard supra-dialectic language were made on a number of occasions but unsuccessfully. It was only in 1982, on commission of the *Lia Rumantscha*, that the so-called *Rumantsch Grischun* (Graubünden Rhaeto-

Romance)¹ came into being, elaborated by the Zurich-based specialist in Romance languages, Professor Heinrich Schmid. From the very beginning the objective was not to drive out the local dialects but to create a bridge between them and at the same time to offer an alternative to German. In this manner the Rhaetians were to fulfil the process of maturing the language which, in their case, had stopped at the times of the Reformation. When elaborating the new language, application was made of the principle of proportionality of vocabulary and grammatical rules of all five existing dialects, thanks to which *Rumantsch Grischun* may be easily understood by the vast majority of Rhaetians and much effort is not required to master it actively. However, it must be said that unlike the previous, somewhat amateur attempts at creating a supra-dialectic language, *Rumantsch Grischun* is the result of work carried out by an entire team of specialists, based on reliable research. In 1985, the first German-Rhaeto-Romance and Rhaeto-Romance-German dictionary appeared in *Rumantsch Grischun* as well as an outline grammar, edited by Georges Darms. In 1993 a great dictionary was published – the so-called *Pledari Grond*.

Education in Graubünden is based on cantonal law. The latest law on this matter dates back to 2001. The given municipalities decide the language of education. Primary schools may teach in German, Rhaeto-Romance and Italian². Rhaeto-Romance may either be the language of instruction or a subject which is taught. Since 2003, the Higher School of Pedagogy in the capital of Graubünden, Chur, has been offering special studies for Rhaeto-Romance nursery school and primary school teachers. Furthermore, studies in Rhaeto-Romance are offered by the School of Applied Linguistics in Zurich and its branch in Chur. Professional Romance studies with Rhaeto-Romance as a specialist subject are offered by the universities of Zurich, Bern, Geneva and Fribourg as well as by Zurich Polytechnic. Only the University of Fribourg offers Rhaeto-Romance as a main degree course. However, the existence of the Department is under threat, as its current Head, Professor Georges Darms, will retire in 2011 at the latest, leaving no successor. Furthermore, interest in this topic is dwindling. Only 6 students enrolled on the 2006/2007 winter semester³.

Statistical data analyses carried out by the cantonal authorities of Graubünden on the second-to-last census (1990) gave rise to the following pessimistic conclusions: *Rhaeto-Romance is retreating relentlessly. The disintegration of territorial integrity can be seen with the naked eye.*⁴ and: *This situation can only be described as alarming. The decline of Rhaeto-Romance substance continues to progress, the Rhaeto-Romance area is decisively disintegrating into individual isolated islands. A state of extreme debility has*

¹ G. Lechmann, *Rätoromanische Sprachbewegung ...*, pp. 433–447.

² See *Romanisch. Facts & Figures*, Lia Rumantscha, Chur 2004, p. 48.

³ *Romanisch-Lehrstuhl dürfte ins Wackeln geraten* in: *Die Südschweiz am Sonntag*, 20 January 2008, p. 3.

⁴ St. AGR Chur, Bündner Regierungsprotokoll vom 27. September 1993, No. 2465, 2 (cited after: G. Lechmann, *Rätoromanische Sprachbewegung ...*, p. 37).

been reached. Any further losses on the scale of the last decades, and further disintegration of the Rhaeto–Romance language area, will be a mortal blow for this language.¹ Unfortunately, the census of 2000 confirms this trend.

6. Summary

The multilingualism of Switzerland is not just a state, but rather a long-term process, which throughout history underwent numerous, quantitative and qualitative changes. The most important stages of these changes may be expressed in the following points:

1. The institutionalisation of Swiss multilingualism entered a decisive phase at the time of preparing the Constitution of 1848 when German, French and Italian were recognised as the national languages of the Confederation. First of all, this phase was supplemented by revising the *Sprachartikel* in 1937 and recognising Rhaeto–Romance as the fourth national language, and finally in the new Constitution of 1996, where Rhaeto–Romance was given the status of fourth official language in the State, though with certain reservations.
2. In the early 1980s the idea of *multilingualism* entered the Swiss language discourse. This was the result of the increasing waves of migration from the culturally distant communities of Europe and beyond. The census of 2000 demonstrated that almost 10% of Switzerland's inhabitants did not regard their first language as one of the country's four national languages.
3. In the face of the growing number of language problems, two ideological options have developed in Swiss society: (a) the defensive option which refers to the old principle of territoriality and whose objective is to maintain the hitherto language structure, and (b) the liberal option, which is guided by pragmatism and consequently permits a *free market* language process. Both of these options exist in Switzerland's current language discourse.
4. One of the clearest manifestations of the linguistic *crossroads* in the Switzerland of today is the problem of the English language in education. English is slowly becoming the number one language in schools, despite the commonly accepted principle that this position should be held by one of the national languages.
5. Contemporary analyses also indicate the danger of mutual isolation of the four traditional language groups of the country. This phenomenon is being counteracted both at Federation level and at Canton level.

¹ BAK Bern, Bündner Regierungsprotokoll vom 18. Januar 1994, No. 102, 3 (cited after: G. Lechmann, *Rätoromanische Sprachbewegung ...*, p. 37).