Diglossia and bilingualism:
High German in German-speaking Switzerland from a folk linguistic perspective

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Abstract

The notion of 'diglossia', i.e. the functional distribution of two varieties, introduced by Ferguson (1959) has been controversially debated for the case of German-speaking Switzerland. While the language situation constituted by the coexistence of Swiss German and High German seems, *prima facie*, to fit in the definition, a closer examination unveils several gaps in the argument. The aim of this paper is to discuss the notion of 'diglossia' for German-speaking Switzerland from a folk linguistic perspective, based on recent data collected through a questionnaire with 750 participants. The paper examines the current popular opinions and beliefs with a focus on the most relevant components of 'diglossia', i.e. the language status, the High/Low distinction including the notion of 'prestige', and the functional distribution of the two language forms.

Résumé

Introduite par Ferguson (1959), la notion de 'diglossie' désignant la distribution fonctionnelle de deux variétés linguistiques a fait l'objet de vifs débats dans le cas de la Suisse germanophone. Alors que la situation linguistique particulière que constitue la coexistence entre suisse-allemand et haut-allemand semble à première vue bien correspondre à la définition, une étude plus approfondie révèle certaines lacunes dans l'argumentation. Le but de cet article est de discuter de la notion de 'diglossie' appliquée à la Suisse alémanique en partant du point de vue de la linguistique profane (dite aussi 'populaire'), et en se basant sur des données récentes recueillies par le biais d'un questionnaire rempli par 750 participants. Il s'agit ici d'analyser les opinions et croyances populaires actuelles en mettant l'accent sur les éléments les plus pertinents associés au concept de 'diglossie': statut de la langue, distinction entre langue haute (H, *high*) et basse (L, *low*) y compris en tenant compte de la notion de 'prestige', et répartition fonctionnelle des deux formes linguistiques.

Zusammenfassung

Der von Ferguson (1959) eingeführte Begriff ‚Diglossie', i.e. das funktionale Nebeneinander zweier Varietäten, ist für die Deutschschweiz kontrovers diskutiert worden. Obwohl sich die Sprachsituation, die sich durch die Koexistenz von Schweizerdeutsch und Hochdeutsch auszeichnet, auf den ersten Blick in die Definition einfügt, zeigt eine genauere Betrachtung einige Lücken in der Argumentation. Basierend auf aktuellen Daten einer Fragebogenbefragung mit 750 Teilnehmenden ist es das Ziel dieses Beitrages, das Konzept der Diglossie für die deutschsprachige Schweiz aus laienlinguistischer Perspektive zu diskutieren. Der Beitrag untersucht die aktuellen Laienmeinungen mit einem Hauptaugenmerk auf den wichtigsten Komponenten der Diglossie, i.e. den Sprachstatus, die *High-Low*-Unterscheidung inklusive des Begriffs ‚Prestige' und die funktionale Verteilung der beiden Sprachformen.

In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, the language of everyday life is *Swiss German* (*'Schweizerdeutsch'*).[1] The standardized language is *(Swiss) High German* (*'Hochdeutsch'*), which is learned mainly in school and traditionally used in official situations. The fact that Swiss German and High German are used side by side and in this clear-cut functional distribution has led to the conclusion that the German-speaking part of Switzerland is an instance of *diglossia* (Ferguson 1959). Even though Ferguson utilizes Switzerland as a prime example, the categorization is subject to certain qualifications. Ferguson himself admits that not all parameters defining diglossia are equally accurate for describing the language situation in Switzerland. Unsurprisingly, other researchers have controversially discussed whether the coexistence of Swiss German and High German should be categorized as diglossia (Ris 1990; Berthele 2004, among others).

Whether Switzerland is an instance of diglossia – understood as an *institutionally* conditioned and performed distribution of two varieties or, in a broader sense of diglossia, of two languages (Fishman 1967) – is closely related to the question of how the language situation in German-speaking Switzerland should be described at the *individual* level. Are Swiss German and High German merely two varieties of the same language, and are the individuals using them in everyday life thus *monolingual* in the traditional sense? Alternatively, are Swiss German and High German two different languages, which means that their speakers are *bilingual*? Those who support the 'monolingual approach' assume High German to be an 'extended mother tongue' (e.g. Häcki Buhofer/Burger 1998). Those who argue for the 'bilingual approach' sometimes use the term 'atypical or asymmetric bilingualism' (e.g. Berthele 2004; Werlen 1998) to describe the situation. The impact of both views is linguistically, politically and socially not marginal. Consequently, newer approaches advocate the use of the term '*internal* multilingualism'. This term captures the special case of multilingualism involving two varieties rather than two languages (see, e.g., Wandruszka 1979).

Not only does the scientific community not agree on this matter, but also popular opinions about the coexistence of Swiss German and High German in German-speaking Switzerland vary widely. Debate about these concerns is a highly developed practice among the ordinary population and their views must be taken into consideration in conducting a thorough linguistic investigation of the entangled language situation, with all its historical, political, cultural and social conditions and impacts. Since the status of High German in German-speaking Switzerland is the subject of a long-continuing debate, not only in science but also in folk metalanguage, the focus of this paper is what folk linguistic research can add to this discussion.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first section, the language situation of German-speaking Switzerland is outlined with regards to the concept traditionally used to describe its central core, i.e. *diglossia*. The second section will briefly discuss the methods applied for this study. The third section presents the answers to the main questions posed in the paper, namely 'Is the notion of 'diglossia' for the German-speaking part of Switzerland obsolete?' and 'Are Swiss German and High German, from a folk linguistic perspective, two varieties of one and the same language – or is Swiss German perceived as a language of its own and High German as a foreign language?' The fourth section discusses the most significant results.

[1] The term 'Swiss German' does not represent a standardized or uniform language or dialect but is used to encompass all Alemannic dialects spoken in the German-speaking part of Switzerland.

Diglossia and bilingualism

In relation to research on language attitudes, the German-speaking part of Switzerland is interesting for at least two reasons. First, the language situation is described traditionally as *diglossia* – i.e. the functional distribution of two varieties (Ferguson 1959). In practice, it is a part of the everyday routine in German-speaking Switzerland to deal with both Swiss German and High German. High German – rather than Swiss German – is one of the official languages in Switzerland, which makes it the language of school and formal situations. Moreover, High German is also the literary language and, importantly, the language predominantly used in the media (television, broadcast and press).[2] Hence, even people who state that they barely come into contact with High German are surrounded by it to an extent they are probably not aware of.

Second, German is a *pluricentric* language with standard varieties for Germany, Austria and Switzerland (Clyne 1995; Ammon 1991). While these varieties are equal in theory, people estimate the variety developed in Germany as the gold standard (Scharloth 2005); Swiss High German, the standard variety spoken in Switzerland, on the other hand, is frequently seen as poor and awkward and hence its speakers' language abilities as inferior to those of the Germans.

This paper concentrates on the first concept, *diglossia*, and outlines how High German is seen from a folk linguistic perspective.

The language status of Swiss German and High German

The first question arises with the categorization of Swiss German and High German as 'varieties'. In the original definition, diglossia is applicable only if the language situation is such that "in addition to the primary dialects of the language […], there is a very divergent, highly codified […] superposed variety […]" (Ferguson 1959, 336). From an expert's view, it may be justified to speak of two *varieties*, thanks to the comparatively close linguistic relationship between Swiss German and High German (e.g. Ammon 1995; Siebenhaar/Wyler 1997; Häcki Buhofer/Burger 1998, among others): "Überdies läßt die enge Verwandtschaft zwischen den beiden Sprachformen kaum zu, das Schweizerdeutsche als selbständige Sprache zu bezeichnen [...]" (Moreover, the close relationship between the two language forms scarcely allows Swiss German to be designated an independent language […]) (Siebenhaar/Wyler 1997, 35). Attempts to determine the grade of 'closeness' necessary for two language forms to be treated as varieties of the same language, however, have hitherto not been fruitful (cf. Berthele 2004). This is one of the reasons why many experts argue in favour of categorizing the language situation in German-speaking Switzerland not as diglossia but as a bilingual setting in which Swiss German and High German are two autonomous languages (e.g. Baur 1983; Ris 1990, among others). Another reason to see Swiss German as an independent language and not as a mere complex of dialects is the fact that Swiss German has the status or, at least, the predisposition to be an *Ausbausprache* [*lit.* 'elaboration language'] (cf. Werlen 1998).[3]

Either way, this problem diminishes if we take Fishman's (1967) interpretation of 'diglossia' into consideration. According to Fishman, it should not be a precondition for the

[2] Undoubtedly, Swiss German has been gaining ground over the last couple of decades, especially in local television and broadcasting (cf. Werlen 2004, 23), particularly in entertainment shows; newscasts are still predominantly in High German.

[3] The notion of *Abstand* [*lit.* 'distance'], i.e. the extent of linguistic differences, and the notion of *Ausbau* [*lit.* 'elaboration'], i.e. the extent of development and standardization, were introduced by Kloss (1988) to decide on a variety's 'language status'.

definition of diglossia that it involve standard and nonstandard varieties of the same language. Independent (and even genetically unrelated) languages are accredited as well. He argues that the question of diglossia has to be detached from the question of the language status of the involved language forms – and from monolingualism vs bilingualism. Therefore, it is no longer relevant whether Swiss German is defined as a variety of a superposed language or as a language of its own. Fishman himself classifies German-speaking Switzerland as a case of 'diglossia and bilingualism', since "the entire population of school age and older alternates between High German (H) and Swiss German (L), each with its own firmly established and highly valued functions" (Fishman 1967, 31).

However, this does not solve the problem. A closer look at the concept of 'diglossia' reveals several other arguments against the classification of German-speaking Switzerland as a diglossic society.

The notion of 'diglossia'

There are many reasons to reconsider Ferguson's classification (and Fishman's as well) – I will not adduce all aspects, but name only the most relevant two (for a detailed discussion, see Berthele 2004). The most salient and, in terms of the original definition, the most profound are, first, the *High–Low* distinction involving the notion of *prestige*, and second, the functional distribution of Swiss German and High German.

In Ferguson's definition, 'H' and 'L' are initially used just to distinguish the two varieties: "For convenience of reference the superposed variety in diglossia will be called the H ('high') variety or simply H, and the regional dialects will be called L ('low') varieties or, collectively, simply L." (Ferguson 1959, 327). Together with this classification, however, comes the mapping of prestige to H but not to L: "In all the defining languages the speakers regard H as superior to L in a number of respects. Sometimes the feeling is so strong that H alone is regarded as real and L is reported 'not to exist'." (Ferguson 1959, 329-330). This specification does not hold for the situation in German-speaking Switzerland. High German indeed has a certain prestige, thanks to a pronounced norm consciousness, in accordance with Ferguson's description. Nevertheless, nobody would assert that Swiss German has no prestige at all. On the contrary, Swiss German has not just *covert prestige* (Trudgill 1972) but is seen as the *(unifying) language* for German-speaking Switzerland across all social classes and therefore as highly identity-establishing and -maintaining (as stated already by Ris 1973, and confirmed by many others in the last decades). To capture this, Berthele (2010) transfers Geeraerts' (2003) cultural models of standardization into a *cluster model* composed of a *rational model* for H and a *romantic model* for L.

Furthermore, it is not only the prestige of Swiss German that calls the term 'diglossia' into question, but also the claimed functional distribution of the two language forms. Ferguson (1959, 328) states that "[o]ne of the most important features of diglossia is the specialization of function for H and L. In one set of situations only H is appropriate and in another only L, with the two sets overlapping only very slightly." Ferguson's list of situations for H and L (1959, 329) might be applied, *prima facie*, to the circumstances in German-speaking Switzerland. High German is the language for formal and written contexts, e.g. university, newspapers, news broadcasting; whereas Swiss German is the language for everyday contexts, e.g. family and friends (for an interpretation of diglossia in terms of 'proximity' for L vs 'distance' for H, see Koch/Österreicher 2011, 138). However, it is clear that the stated correlations and distributions are no longer completely valid for Swiss German and High German. Contexts such as church

sermons, political speeches and personal letters are all examples of the broadening of the L-variety into the domain of the H-variety. Conversely, recent studies illustrate that the H-variety occurs in L-contexts. In colloquial conversations, High German is more prevalent and also more naturally used than has hitherto been assumed (see, e.g., Christen et al. 2010; Studler *in prep.*).

While both cases subvert the functional distribution postulated for the notion of diglossia, the motivations to use one variety in the domain of the other are different. In the former, where Swiss German is brought into play in areas where High German traditionally prevails, the motivation can be found in an appreciation for Swiss German. Since Swiss German is seen as the language of proximity, people naturally tend to use Swiss German in H-domains where intimacy is required. Swiss German is thus becoming popular in written private contexts such as personal letters (or, rather, their modern equivalents such as emails or text messages),[4] as well as in public settings such as the church or politics. In contexts where High German acts as the colloquial language, the shift to it from Swiss German is motivated by the reality regarding communications (e.g. tourism, migration, globalization): today's conversations often involve collocutors without knowledge of Swiss German. Thus, resorting to High German not only makes the conversation possible but also is an act of politeness and hospitality. Besides, it may be used as an act of self-assertion to demonstrate that the participant is able and willing to speak High German (Studler 2014).

These examples alone suggest that German-speaking Switzerland is far from being an exemplary instance of diglossia. Berthele (2004, 126) calls it a 'peripheral example', an 'outlier' (*'Sonderfall'*), thereby enabling the conclusion that the situation is better described as a special case of bilingualism (Berthele 2004, 131). Nevertheless, many experts cherish the concept of diglossia for Switzerland, and, to save it from sinking into obscurity, have modified it several times (e.g. Kolde 1981; for an extended discussion, see Haas 2004).

In folk linguistic research, the efforts to find a scientific definition that meets the criteria of the complex language situation are complemented with the folk perception of the situation (see, e.g., Niedzielski/Preston 2009; Hundt 2009). Although laypeople obviously do not normally use the scientific term 'diglossia', they certainly have opinions and beliefs concerning these questions. In discussing some of the preliminary findings of the present study with a focus on the topics identified, laypeople shall finally have the floor. Before doing so, I will pass some remarks about the theoretical and methodological framework and the general set-up of the study.

Methods

Aim of the study

The study *'The emergence of language attitudes towards High German'*[5] investigates folk perceptions of the language situation, opinions concerning the status of Swiss German and High German and attitudes towards the different varieties of German and their speakers. The essential aims of the study are threefold. First, it captures the contemporary attitudes and the atmospheric picture of the language situation in German-speaking Switzerland. Second, it scrutinizes the parameters in language socialization and in language use responsible for these

[4] To capture the media distribution (High German for written contexts, Swiss German for spoken contexts), Kolde (1981) introduces the term 'media diglossia', which is partially blurred in the new media (cf. Werlen 2004).

[5] The project is partly supported by the SNSF (PA00P1_139602). For preliminary results, see Studler 2013.

attitudes. Third, in considering the folk perspective, it aims to uncover the social and individual consequences of this particular language situation. In doing so, it hopes to answer questions of identity, loyalty and cultural coexistence. In this paper, the focus cannot lie in these overall purposes but in finding answers to the initially addressed questions.

Folk linguistics

Research on language attitudes has a long tradition of using indirect methods, the best known and established of which are the *matched-guise technique* (Lambert et al. 1960) and the *subject evaluation test* (Chambers 2000). In both cases, the participants in the experiments are not informed about the subject of the investigation and are not aware what it is they are providing information on. Advocates of indirect methods are convinced that this is the only way to uncover naturally unconscious attitudes. In the recent past, a new paradigm arose, based on Anglo-American research in the field of *folk linguistics* and its subfield, *perceptual dialectology* (Preston 1999, 2004; Niedzielski/Preston 2000, 2009). Language attitudes are no longer seen as necessarily implicit and therefore unconscious or hidden. Rather, they are conceptualized as explicit and accordingly emerging in "conscious, deliberate acts", i.e. "conscious reactions to and comments on language" (Niedzielski/Preston 2009, 357). In such a study, the participants are fully informed about the subject of the investigation, and they know that they are speaking about language(s). Although Niedzielski and Preston (2009, 357) speak of a "continuum of consciousness" rather than of a distinct dichotomy, the view that language attitudes are either implicit or explicit is widespread (for a detailed discussion, see Studler 2014).

In my study, I advocate a blended approach, taking for granted that attitudes are a conglomerate of *implicit* and *explicit* components. The emergence of attitudes is founded in *socialization*, on the one hand, and in *interaction*, on the other hand. Attitudes formed in socialization cannot be just eliminated in interaction; they are part of the '*brought-along identity'*. Attitudes emerging in interaction are not distorted; they are part of the '*brought-about identity'* (Baynham 2015). To investigate both facets of attitudes at a stroke, it is good practice to combine quantitative and qualitative data in a mixed methods design (Tashakkori/Teddlie 2003; Dörney 2007; Mertens 2005).

Questionnaires and in-depth interviews

The research employed a mixed methods design combining quantitative and qualitative data collected through questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Both were designed to explore the following five domains: 1. (language) socialization and background, 2. language competence, 3. perception and aesthetic judgments, 4. attitudes and opinions, and 5. language policy. The questionnaire contained 67 questions in total, 60 of which were closed questions providing quantitative results (semantic differentials, Likert scales, etc.), and seven of which were open questions providing qualitative results (specifications, comments, and reasons). Although the study did not designate a representative sample as the main target, it did aim for a wide variety of participants in terms of *age*, *gender*, *education* and *occupation* (see next paragraph). The interviews were conducted with a small subsample of selected interviewees along the sociolinguistic parameters *age*, *gender* and *education*, and conceptualized as semi-structured interviews with guided questions to elicit detailed answers, narratives ideally. This paper concentrates on the results of the questionnaires.

Who answered?

In total, the questionnaire elicited responses from 750 people. It was implemented as an online survey, so as to reach a wide variety of participants, who were mainly recruited via personal and professional networks. To avoid an overrepresentation of people with a higher education, I also systematically reached out to individuals in vocational education. Although it was not possible to achieve a fully balanced sample, the stratification with regard to the three most common sociolinguistic parameters of *age*, *gender* and *education* was more satisfactory than expected. First, the youngest participant was 13 years old, the oldest 82. However, younger people were easier to reach than older ones. Second, whereas the habitual overrepresentation of women in linguistic studies is well known, at least one third of the participants in the present study were men. Third, almost half of the participants had had or were in primary or secondary education, and the other had or were expecting to have a tertiary education, i.e. university or polytechnic (applied sciences, business, teaching).

Another interesting point was the participants' degree of familiarity and preoccupation with language concerns. A criticism often levelled at folk linguistic studies is that the participants are not really laypeople but experts, for example students of linguistics or language teachers. In the present study, the process of recruiting people from all kinds of backgrounds led to the desired diversity and the method of asking them directly about their (linguistic) background and their preoccupation with language revealed the relevant information.[6] While 70 % stated that they were not at all preoccupied with language in their educational or professional life, 30 % indicated that 'language' was, to some extent, part of their education or profession.

Diglossia and bilingualism – from a folk linguistic perspective

Theoretical preliminaries

Ammon (1995, 298) proposes that people's *beliefs* concerning the language situation in German-speaking Switzerland should not be put on a level with the linguistic reality. To do so would have far-reaching consequences. As Ammon points out, we would have to adapt the linguistic reality whenever popular beliefs change. It cannot be a matter of popular beliefs whether Swiss German is linguistically a language of its own or not. However, the people's opinions and concerns should be observed, especially when it comes to the political climate in Switzerland in regard to the status and prestige of High German: "Gerade wer sich für die Verbesserung des Status des Hochdeutschen einsetzen will, tut gut daran, die Augen vor dieser zweisprachigen 'Realität' in den Deutschschweizer Köpfen nicht zu verschliessen." ['Especially those who want to take a stand for a better status of High German would be wise not to close their eyes to the bilingual 'reality' that exists in Swiss German heads'] (Berthele 2004, 132). Conversely, Sieber and Sitta (1986) believe that the scientific recognition of German-speaking Switzerland as bilingual and of High German as a foreign language could be risky. According to them, this approach confirms the already existing gulf and is likely to stir up negative attitudes

[6] It was not an aim of the study, of course, to question laypeople only but to have a broad range of people who could be described as something between expert and layperson. While the notions of 'expert' and 'layperson' are by no means clear, it is well known that 'experts' are, wittingly or otherwise, not immune to having laypersons' *beliefs.*

towards High German. In a new folk linguistic study, however, Cuonz (2014) detects that the attitudes tend to be more positive if High German is perceived as a foreign language.

I agree that we should be extremely cautious about adjusting the objective linguistic reality to the people's reality. Nevertheless, popular opinions form a picture of the attitudinal climate, which we should not ignore. So, the question is: How *do* Swiss German speakers talk about Swiss German and High German? What is their stance when it comes to the specification of the language situation in German-speaking Switzerland? What are they saying about High German being a part of their mother tongue vs being a foreign language? The following paragraphs present some of the findings relating to these topics, i.e. (1) the language status of Swiss German and High German, and (2) the challenges for the notion of 'diglossia' relating to the *prestige* and the *functional distribution* of the two language forms.

The language status of Swiss German and High German

To evaluate the respective language status of Swiss German and High German, we first needed to consider the background of acquisition and use of the two language forms. Further, the participants in the study were asked in a closed question to say whether they viewed High German as part of the mother tongue or as a foreign language. Additionally, they spontaneously offered their perceptions of and opinions about the issue in the open questions.

Background: acquisition and use

The first (undirected) contact with High German can serve as a clue to whether early exposure to a language can affect attitudes towards the language. It does not, however, help much in determining whether Swiss German and High German are perceived as two varieties or two languages. Undirected language acquisition does not lead necessarily to the perception of a language as being part of the mother tongue. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that, although a majority of participants stated that their first contact with High German was before kindergarten, more than one third indicated that their first contact was in (pre)school or later.[7] This finding leaves room for at least two interpretations. Either a third of participants did indeed come into contact with High German quite late or they do not remember that they were in contact with High German before (pre)school. In either case, it would be difficult to argue that High German is seen as part of the mother tongue.

More interesting, though, is the age at which children learn High German institutionally. Since this counts as 'directed language acquisition', the circumstances are comparable with foreign language learning in school, whether delivered as teacher-centred teaching or in line with the more modern immersion concept.[8] Since High German education recently became part of the kindergarten curriculum in some German-speaking cantons of Switzerland, about 12 % of (young) participants had already learned High German in kindergarten. The large majority of children in Switzerland, however, learn High German in primary school (from the age of six

[7] 10 % grew up with High German as a first or second language and about 20 % name relatives, friends and neighbours as their first contact, whereas about 30 % indicated the media, in the form of books, newspapers, television, broadcasting, etc. About 10 % named kindergarten as their first contact, 25 % primary school or even later. The rest did not remember the time of the first contact.

[8] Even if immersion is conceptualized as language learning *en passant*, it is applied as a pedagogical concept for foreign language learning in school (for an early approach, see Swain/Lapkin 1982; for a broader overview of the concept, see Colin 1993).

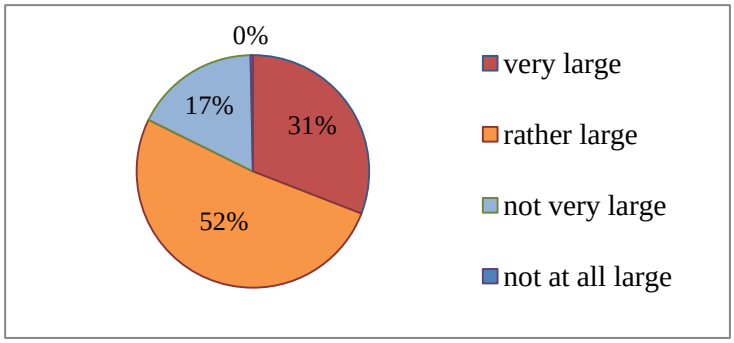
onwards) and, indeed, almost 85 % of the participants in the present study confirmed that their institutional contact with High German was in primary school. It therefore seems natural that a majority of participants took the view that High German is not part of the Swiss mother tongue but rather a foreign language learned in school. The fact that most people use High German mainly in school and professional contexts (70 %) but not in their private everyday life underpins this view: no more than 12 % stated that High German belongs mainly to their private everyday life. The remaining 18 % do not use High German in their daily lives but for very special occasions only. Although High German is, under these circumstances, not regarded as (part of the) mother tongue, it should be borne in mind that it is used in school and in many professional contexts on a daily basis. Thus, almost half of the participants reported that they use High German frequently.

Is High German a foreign language for German-speaking Swiss?

There are several ways to determine whether High German is seen as a foreign language and Swiss German as language of its own. First, the perceived differences between Swiss German and High German contrast the popular picture with the scientific notion of 'Abstand' ('distance') (Kloss 1976; Ammon 1995), one of the criteria to define a language form as an independent language.[9] Second, the participants were asked a direct yes/no question about whether High German is a foreign language for German-speaking Swiss. Third, they reported how they feel while speaking High German. Moreover, some of the participants volunteered an opinion on this issue in their answers to the open questions.

In the first place, the participants were requested to estimate the extent of the differences between Swiss German and High German ('Wie gross schätzen Sie die Unterschiede zwischen Dialekt und Hochdeutsch im Allgemeinen in etwa ein?').[10] In contrast to the scientific view, the participants rated the differences predominantly as large (83 % in total, whereby 31 % chose 'very large' and 52 % 'rather large'). The remaining 17 % chose the 'not very large' option, and none estimated the differences as 'not at all large':

Fig. 1 - Rated extent of differences between Swiss German and High German



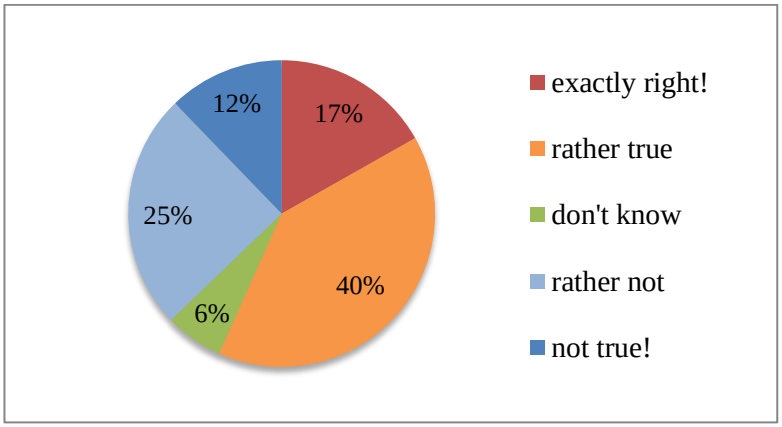
[9] Ammon (1995, 298) argues that the linguistic 'distance' is, from a scientific point of view, not sufficiently large for Swiss German to be regarded as an independent language (cf. also p. 31).

[10] In Switzerland, the term *Dialekt* ('dialect') is used in folk metalanguage as equivalent to *Schweizerdeutsch* ('Swiss German'). Both terms are therefore used interchangeably throughout the survey. The scientific term *Standarddeutsch* ('Standard German') is not part of the folk metalanguage and is rather frowned upon – in the survey the common term *Hochdeutsch* ('High German') is used instead.

This result does not prove that Swiss German and High German are necessarily perceived as two independent languages. It indicates, however, that the 'distance' between the two language forms is, from a folk perspective, large enough to consider them both to have a language status of their own. Moreover, the large distance perceived by the participants may support the view that High German could be seen as a foreign language (and vice versa).

To shed light on whether the participants really believed High German is a foreign language for German-speaking Swiss, they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: 'Hochdeutsch ist für Deutschschweizerinnen und Deutschweizer eine Fremdsprache' ('High German is a foreign language for Swiss German speakers').[11] A majority of 57 % agreed (17 % highly, 40 % rather); 6 % did not know, 25 % tended not to agree and just 12 % disagreed:

Fig. 2 - Degree of agreement/disagreement with the statement
"High German is a foreign language for Swiss German speakers"



Interestingly, there was no correlation between these answers and the participants' initial contact with High German (see above). There was, however, a significant correlation with the participants' directed acquisition of High German: the later High German was learned institutionally, the more probable it was that High German was perceived as a foreign language (40 % if High German was learned in kindergarten, 58 % if learned in primary school).

These results suggest that the majority takes the view that High German is a foreign language – implying that Swiss German is an independent language and, therefore, the speakers of Swiss German have to be seen as bilingual. These statements are qualified, however, by the results of the multiple-choice question 'Wie fühlen Sie sich, wenn Sie mit Deutschen Hochdeutsch sprechen?' ('How do you feel speaking High German to Germans?'). While this question was asked to focus on conversational situations involving Germans, the answers could also provide hints as to whether High German was seen as a foreign language. The two answers that might indicate that High German was experienced as a foreign language, however, were chosen by fewer than one in four respondents (22 % said they were 'annoyed not to be more articulate' and 21 % were 'annoyed not to be able to talk naturally'). We should keep in mind, on

[11] One section of the questionnaire was designed as a set of so-called 'popular opinions', with which the participants had to report their degree of agreement or disagreement. This was intended to permit the posing of sensitive questions without suggesting the answers.

the other hand, that there could have been (and actually were) participants considering High German to be a foreign language without being *annoyed* about it. That almost half of the participants reported that they find the differences between the two language forms interesting and that they enjoy speaking High German, for example, does not speak necessarily against the view of High German being a foreign language. Additionally, there were quite a few free answers (given via the option 'anderes, nämlich:' ['other, namely:']) that indicated the foreign status of High German, as in the following examples.

(1) *Ich ärgere mich manchmal, dass immer ich als Schweizerin auf eine* ***andere Sprache*** *ausweichen muss (betrifft übrigens nicht nur das Hochdeutsche).*

(I am annoyed sometimes that it is always I, as a Swiss person, who have to switch to another language (this doesn't just apply to High German, by the way).)

(2) *Ich ärgere mich, dass ich im deutschen Sprachraum auf* ***'eine Fremdsprache'*** *umschalten muss, weil das Gegenüber sich nicht bemüht unseren Dialekt zu verstehen.*

(I am annoyed that I have to switch to 'a foreign language' in the German-speaking area because the person I am talking to won't make the effort to understand our dialect.)

(3) *Ich schäme mich, mein Hochdeutsch zu sprechen und rede lieber English.*

(I am embarrassed to speak High German, so I prefer to speak English.)

The view that High German is a foreign language for German-speaking Swiss was frequently expressed in the open questions as well, as the following examples illustrate.

(4) *[...] dass alle eine Anstrengung unternehmen müssten, um Hochdeutsch zu lernen, es* ***also eine Fremdsprache*** *sei.*

([…] that everybody needs to make an effort to learn High German, that it is, therefore, a foreign language.)

(5) *Und die zwei Sprachen sind eigentlich* ***verschiedene Sprachen****. [...] Aber für uns Schweizer das Deutsch immer noch eine* ***Fremdsprache*** *ist […]*

(And the two languages are actually different languages. [...] German is still a foreign language for us Swiss [...])

(6) *[...] da Hochdeutsch, auch wenn es mich mein Leben lang begleitet hat, eine* ***Fremdsprache*** *ist, welche wir als neue Sprache dazulernen.*

([...] since High German, even though it has accompanied me my whole life, is a foreign language, which we have to learn as a new language.)

(7) *Hochdeutsch* ***ist nicht unsere Muttersprache*** *und sollte* ***als Fremdsprache*** *adäquat vermittelt werden.*

(High German is not our mother tongue and should be taught properly as a foreign language.)

The view that High German is not a foreign language for German-speaking Swiss, on the other hand, was expressed in answers to the open questions only a few times.

(8) *'Hochdeutsch' wird **irrtümlich** immer **als Fremdsprache** für Schweizerdeutschsprechende angesehen.*

('High German' is mistakenly always seen as a foreign language for Swiss German speakers.)

(9) *Die Deutschschweizer Kinder sollen lernen, dass Hochdeutsch **keine Fremdsprache** ist.*

(German-speaking Swiss children should learn that High German is not a foreign language.)

In some cases, the answers acknowledged the special status of High German, classifying it as 'kind of a foreign language' by using a hedge or putting the term in quotation marks, as in the following examples.

(10) *Zweitens lassen sich **'Fremdsprachen'** allgemein leichter aneignen, je früher man ihnen ausgesetzt ist (womit Hochdeutsch für Deutschschweizer nicht mit **eigentlichen Fremdsprachen** gleichgesetzt werden soll).*

(Second, the sooner you are exposed to 'foreign languages', the more easily you learn them, in general (that said, High German should not be equated with an actual foreign language for Swiss Germans).)

(11) *[…] Deutschunterricht, in dem ich Hochdeutsch **fast wie eine Fremdsprache** lernen musste […] und dieses Lernen ist der Sinn der **'Zweitsprache Hochdeutsch'**.*

([…] German classes, where I had to learn High German almost as a foreign language […] and this learning is what 'second language High German' means.)

To sum up, almost everybody in German-speaking Switzerland learns High German at school. Aside from that, High German is frequently used also in daily working life. Interestingly, this does not seem to prevent people from perceiving High German as a foreign language. A majority does not classify High German as part of the mother tongue but rather as a (kind of) foreign language. German-speaking Switzerland may therefore be seen from a folk linguistic perspective as an instance of 'diglossia with bilingualism', to use Fishman's (1967) term. The following paragraphs examine this further.

The notion of 'diglossia' – challenges for German-speaking Switzerland

L and H: The prestige of Swiss German and High German

As mentioned above, the notion of 'diglossia' entails the notion of 'prestige', meaning the esteem a language form has in a language community. According to the early advocates of the distinction between an H-variety and an L-variety, prestige is assigned to the H-variety alone. As we have seen, this does not hold true in the case of German-speaking Switzerland. Swiss German is held in high esteem virtually throughout the entire population, as the present study confirms: negative prestige was never attached to Swiss German. Not only are all the statements about Swiss German positive, but also the *conveyed* image of Swiss German is mainly positive (in 65 % of responses) or at least neutral (in 28 % of responses). Thus, if the absence of prestige for the L-variety is constitutive for the definition of 'diglossia', Switzerland cannot be treated as a case of diglossia, either from a scientific or a popular viewpoint.

The prestigious status of High German, however, is more elaborated. A negative image of High German is widespread, mainly induced by the fact that High German is seen as the language of achievement in school. Moreover, it is perceived as the language of a people, the Germans, with whom the Swiss share a complicated history (for outcomes along these lines, see Häcki Buhofer/Studer 1993; Schläpfer/Gutzwiller/Schmid 1985; Sieber/Sitta 1986, among others). In general, the present data confirm these findings, resulting thereby also in a plain rejection of Switzerland being classified as an instance of diglossia. There is evidence, however, to suggest that a positive image exists as well. High German is seen as a *beautiful language* by a majority of 63 %, and the *conveyed* image is not as bad as expected (40 % positive, 45 % neutral). The reasons for holding High German in high esteem are diverse.

First, the *norm consciousness* towards High German (mainly as spoken in Germany) is pronounced throughout the Swiss population, as can be revealed through the questions targeting the 'cold prestige' of High German, i.e. its value as rational, logical, artificial language (cf. Berthele 2010). Apart from a few aesthetic and communicative aspects, most answers to the question "Was ist für Sie 'gutes Hochdeutsch'?" ('What is 'proper High German' for you?') involve norm-driven aspects. Additionally, 83 % of the participants make an effort to speak proper High German ("Geben Sie sich Mühe, gutes Hochdeutsch zu sprechen?"), and, even more striking, 97 % stated that they notice if someone else speaks bad High German ("Fällt es Ihnen auf, wenn andere schlecht Hochdeutsch sprechen?"). Furthermore, respondents observed, in their answers to open questions, that High German is a rational and logical language that is more suitable for conveying complex content.

(12) *Hochdeutsch ist eine systematisierte Gebrauchssprache. Gewisse Dinge lassen sich deutlicher damit ausdrücken als im Dialekt.*

(High German is a systematized everyday language. Certain things can be expressed more clearly in High German than in dialect.)

(13) *Meines Erachtens ist die hochdeutsche Sprache besser dazu geeignet komplexe Inhalte und Themen zu transportieren und zu diskutieren.*

(In my opinion, High German is better qualified to convey and discuss complex content and topics.)

All this indicates that the *cold prestige* of High German fits in very well with the original definition of the prestige assigned to the H-variety.

Second, a *good command* of High German is highly valued: 93 % believe that competency in High German is important. Apart from being the written and literary language (see below), High German is essential for communicating with speakers of other languages (including Germans): Almost 30 % of the participants named High German as an integral factor in communicating with people without a command of Swiss German (14, 15). Additionally, 24 % mention communicating with Germans (and Austrians) in particular (16, 17).

(14) *Für Ausländer ist es schwierig Schweizerdeutsch zu verstehen, wegen all den Dialekten. Ein einheitliches Hochdeutsch kann sehr helfen und stört ja nicht.*

(For foreigners, it is hard to understand Swiss German, because of all the dialects. A unified High German can help a lot and it's no trouble, after all.)

(15) *Die Schweiz ist klein… Und nur mit Schweizern zu reden, wäre ja ein wenig langweilig.*

(Switzerland is small… And it would be a bit boring to talk only to Swiss people.)

(16) *Hochdeutsch ist das Englisch der Deutschsprachigen Welt. Für das Verständnis der Deutschen und Österreicher ist es unerlässlich.*

(High German is the English of the German-speaking world. It is essential for understanding the Germans and the Austrians.)

(17) *Es ist die offizielle Sprache, die im gesamten Deutschen Sprachraum verwendet wird. Wichtige Informationen und sich genau zu äussern geht nun mal nur mit dem Hochdeutsch.*

(It is the official language used in the whole German language area. Important information and expressing yourself precisely are only possible with High German.)

Thanks to economically profitable international collaboration, High German is perceived as an entry point and *conditio sine qua non* for the globalized job market.

(18) *Ich arbeite viel mit deutschen Kolleginnen und Kollegen zusammen, ohne Hochdeutsch könnte ich meinen Beruf nicht ausüben.*

(I often work with German colleagues; without High German, I could not practise my profession.)

(19) *Ausserdem gibt es viele Firmen, welche in DE den Hauptsitz haben und die Schweizer Niederlassungen rapportieren an DE. Wenn man sich in einer solchen Firma auf Hochdeutsch nicht gut artikulieren kann, haben die Deutschen das Gefühl, wir seien nicht gebildet. Das ist schädlich für die Karriere.*

(Additionally, there are many companies with their headquarters in Germany, and the Swiss subsidiaries report to Germany. If you cannot express yourself well in High German in a company like this, the Germans get the feeling that we are not educated. This is damaging to your career.)

In addition to the norm-driven and the communicative-pragmatic approaches, there is a third reason to hold High German in high esteem. People who eschew a negative view of High German assert that High German is not only the official written language (20) but also the *literary language* (21). The heritage of a rich body of German literature is seen as the cultural nexus of the all-German identity (22).

(20) *Die Standardsprache ist auch die Schriftsprache, insbesondere die in der Gesetze, Erlasse, amtliche Mitteilungen, Verträge etc. formuliert werden.*

(The standard language is the written language as well, especially being the language in which laws, edicts, official communications, contracts, etc., are formulated.)

(21) *es ist meine Schriftsprache! meine Lesesprache!*

(it is my written language! my reading language!)

(22) *Primär meine kulturelle Identität. Sie ist keine schweizerische, sondern eine der deutschen Sprache. D.h. Literatur gilt mir mehr als Politik und Geographie.*

(Primarily my cultural identity, which is not a Swiss identity but a German language identity. That is, literature means more to me than politics and geography.)

The 'cold prestige', as well as the importance of High German as a written language, is well investigated, but the outcomes concerning the communicative and cultural aspects are still remarkable. Although Ferguson (1959, 330) found that the literary heritage was held in high esteem, the strong link to a cultural shared identity that many participants perceive, for example through their literary language, was not to be expected. Also, the present study reveals the unexpected finding that at least part of the population seems to deal more naturally with High German than had hitherto been assumed (for a similar outcome, see Christen et al. 2010). The question whether this has an impact on the functional distribution of the two language forms is addressed in the next paragraph.

The functional distribution of Swiss German and High German

The notion of 'diglossia' as such is not part of the folk metalanguage but is a term solely applied in scientific language. It appeared in the answers to the questionnaire only a few times and only from participants with a linguistic or pedagogical background. That said, people are, of course, fully aware of the distinction between and the distribution of Swiss German and High German in German-speaking Switzerland. Though not directly asked for, statements about this distribution were commonly made in answers to the open questions. Often, they transmitted the 'traditional' diglossic view (23). Moreover, they testified to a partial shift in the domains, as demonstrated above, namely as a widening of the L-variety (24) or of the H-variety (25) into the other domain.

(23) *Dialekt ist Alltags- und Umgangssprache aller Schichten, Hochdeutsch ist Schul- und Verwaltungssprache*

> (Dialect is the everyday and colloquial language for all social classes, High German is the language of education and administration.)

(24) *Der Dialekt wird in der Schweiz auch im beruflichen Alltag und in den Medien verwendet [...]*

> (Dialect is used in Switzerland in business life and the media as well [...])

(25) *Ich würde ihm erklären, dass man in der Schweiz im Privaten mehrheitlich Dialekt spricht, dass man aber wenn man den Dialekt nicht beherrscht auch Hochdeutsch sprechen kann. Denn nach meiner Erfahrung haben (va junge Leute) kein Problem damit auf Hochdeutsch zu kommunizieren.*

> (I would explain to him that in Switzerland we mainly speak dialect in private contexts, but that you can speak High German if you don't know the dialect. In my experience, (especially young) people have no problem communicating in High German.)

While statements like (24) and especially (25) query the traditional distribution, the result of the tested popular opinion that feelings can be expressed only in Swiss German and not in High German ("Gefühle kann man nur im Dialekt ausdrücken – Hochdeutsch ist dafür nicht geeignet") goes further. Although the dialect is normally seen as the only language form for expressing intimacy, a small majority (53 %) disagreed with this opinion. This indicates that the clear-cut distribution along the line of the *cluster model* by Berthele (2010) seems to have blurred, at least partly: High German may, to some extent, be part of the romantic model as well.

The participants' preferences on the use of language in kindergarten and school were similarly unexpected. It is assumed that German-speaking Swiss are sympathetic to the traditional distribution of languages, i.e. Swiss German for kindergarten and High German for school. Interestingly, however, at least half of the participants reported that they favour a partial use of High German in kindergarten. Moreover, about half of the participants favour an equivalent or even prevalent use of Swiss German in school. Another 44 % opted for High German to prevail, implying that Swiss German may play at least a marginal role. These results show that respondents saw no problem in the use of a mixture of Swiss German and High German and indeed favoured it.

In summary, the clear-cut functional distribution suggested by Ferguson appears to have given way to a more blurred distinction between the two language forms. Both may, to some extent, be used in the domain of the other. While Swiss German has been gaining ground in various H-domains for quite some time, the expansion of High German into L-domains as well seems to be a more recent trend. The natural use of High German, even in core domains of Swiss German, and, above all, the (desired) mixture of the two language forms signal the end of the clear-cut distribution that accompanies the notion of 'diglossia'.

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The notion of 'diglossia' introduced by Ferguson (1959) and advanced by Fishman (1967) has been controversially discussed for the case of German-speaking Switzerland. Although the language situation constituted by the coexistence of Swiss German and High German seems, *at first glance,* to fit the definition very well, closer examination reveals several gaps in the argument.

The aim of this paper was to investigate from a folk linguistic perspective whether the German-speaking part of Switzerland is an instance of diglossia, that is, to explore the language status of Swiss German and High German, the *High/Low* distinction including the notion of *prestige* and the functional distribution of the two language forms. For that purpose, I drew upon new data collected as part of a folk linguistic study investigating language attitudes towards High German.

The data suggest that Swiss German and High German are perceived more likely as two, more or less independent, languages, primarily because of the experienced 'distance' between Swiss German and High German. Furthermore, a majority of respondents reported experiencing High German as foreign language. With regard to the core definition of 'diglossia', it was shown that both Swiss German and High German have high prestige. This is not new. But the fact that High German has not only 'cold prestige' but may also be accorded some of the romantic prestige hitherto reserved for Swiss German is a new and noteworthy trend. Additionally, the functional distribution claimed by Ferguson seems to have partly disintegrated. These findings lead, at least from a folk linguistic view, to a rejection of the idea that German-speaking Switzerland is a diglossic society in the strict sense.

However, this conclusion needs to be qualified. First, the paper does not address all aspects of diglossia but only the three main features of Ferguson's definition. If one wants to hold onto the concept of diglossia as applicable to Switzerland, one would have to revalue it and give it a new definition. Second, in this paper I did not take into consideration sociolinguistic parameters, such as *education* and *profession*. It might turn out that for a specific social class the language situation in Switzerland *is* diglossic. Third, the paper does not give a detailed answer to

the question *why* people think that they have to master two different languages. Folk linguistic research takes the folk perspective seriously not primarily to compare it with the perspective of the experts, but to uncover the mental concepts, beliefs, and stereotypes, which underlie popular opinions (cf. Preston 2004). I conjecture that these opinions find a more adequate explanation, once we abandon the concept of diglossia in favour of that of bilingualism.

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