

The opinion of a Swiss abroad : against provincialism

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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad**

Band (Jahr): **15 (1988)**

Heft 3

PDF erstellt am: **29.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907589>

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ing a group of people – earlier an automatic gesture of politeness – have resulted in arbitrarily raised barriers, according to many French- and Italian-speaking Swiss.

Even if the rift between German-speaking and western Switzerland – which the French-speaking Swiss complain about bitterly – can only be attributed partly to this language difficulty or this refusal to make contact, nevertheless the extra consideration which the majority owes the minority calls for overcoming this language and contact barrier which is highly disadvantageous for mutual understanding. Our language problem is in fact of great political as well as cultural significance in view of the undisturbed living together of the language regions and language groups in our multilingual country. The cry of alarm which can be discerned more and more clearly in Romance Switzerland is an emergency signal which German-speaking Switzerland must not ignore. The possibility of communication using that form of the German language which is understood on both sides is the elementary prerequisite for living together.

«Unified dialect»?

A further side effect, less often mentioned, of the radio and television media in the area of dialect should be borne in mind. Swiss Germans who live in smaller dialect regions and who value and love their way of speaking risk losing the natural, spontaneous assurance of finding the sounds, vo-

cabulary and intonation of their inherited tongue if they very often hear the dialect of the large regions. The danger arises that the local character, the identity of these dialects

becomes blurred through long-term effect. This is a disadvantage considering the enriching variety of Swiss German dialects, discussed at the beginning. *Walter Gut*

The opinion of a Swiss Abroad

Against provincialism

As a Swiss citizen I have been teaching at a German university, the University of Tübingen, for nearly 30 years. Not only have I kept up contacts with my homeland in all those years, but I have the possibility here in Tübingen of receiving the radio and TV programmes of the German-speaking Swiss station. And particularly as a Swiss abroad I am increasingly concerned about a situation which has arisen in the past few years in so many areas of Swiss public life, not least of all in the area of radio and television. It is the increased use of dialect in the Swiss media with simultaneous repression of spoken high German.

In short: I speak a pure Lucerne German, and have not the slightest prejudice against our Swiss dialect. As a Swiss abroad, Swiss German is especially dear to me, and I use it wherever I can in private contacts with my relatives and friends in Switzerland. For me

dialect is also a symbol of cultural identity and personal ties to my homeland.

But it is something else when dialect takes over in the public media to such a disproportionate extent. This leads to a dangerous isolation of the German-speaking Swiss both internationally as well as within Switzerland.

A representative survey by the Tourist Marketing Research System (TOMAS) only confirms what one knows only too well as a Swiss abroad: Switzerland is popular as a holiday resort, the Swiss themselves less; not least of all because of their language they are considered (except of course where there is something to be gained) as encapsulated, not very friendly toward foreigners and egocentric. When even classical music is announced in Swiss German (just imagine the same thing in Bavarian), one cannot be amazed at such judgments. I would therefore like to encourage the German-speaking Swiss station to resist this trend towards provincialism and cutting oneself off, and to return to a justifiable level of use of dialect in radio and television.

Prof. Hans Küng (Tübingen)



... to the Lake of Constance (refectory of the former Cistercian Monastery in Steckborn, Thurgau): Multilinguality creates problems. (photos: Keystone)

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