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Forum on language conflicts (3/99)

Yes, English has come to dominate the world's politics and economics, but if it came to dominate Switzerland, then Switzerland would also lose much of its heritage, its essence. And it is these various heritages which help keep Switzerland so pristine and wholesome. It is so fascinating and wonderful to be able to travel one country and experience so many cultures. Yes, we have a variety of cultures here, but they are so hidden and obscured by the big English main culture.

While it is inevitable that English will continue its invasion into Switzerland, I sincerely hope that all proud Swiss people of every heritage stand against the remotest chance of English becoming a national language.

Dicie Bürge, USA

If you speak any language at home, this language will carry on forever; and the introduction of English at school can only bond the Swiss people together. English can be the connection needed to put Switzerland at the level of international business competition and economy, and in today's world English is the business language.

Philipp Maitre, Australia

It is important to emphasise that every Swiss-German classroom is a perfect

example of immersion teaching. From a linguistic point of view it must be noted that the wide range of dialects classified under "Swiss-German" form a unique language group that is quite distinct from standard German in terms of vocabulary, grammar and phonology. The difference between Swiss-German and standard German is far greater than that between Italian and Spanish. The fact that we have still not managed to find an acceptable written standard for Swiss-German proves that our cultural diversity is stronger than any attempts to contain and preserve it.

Beat Kunz, Canada

Even though English is ubiquitous in today's world, we should not, or better must not, simply give in to a general trend at the expense of our cultural diversity. I firmly believe that both objectives could be met (Erba's and Dürmüller's) if we were willing to make the necessary changes to the status quo.

There are a couple of potential solutions. First of all, languages should be taught geared toward everyday living, i.e. the language used in daily newspapers as well as magazines should be taught. The detailed study of grammar and classical literature should be voluntary (either at high school or university level). Secondly, there should be an option for students to spend 6–12 months attending a high school in the French

and/or Italian speaking parts of Switzerland.

Daniel C. Schütz, USA

I can totally identify with the problems that occur in Switzerland with reference to foreign language usage. Every time I visit Switzerland, I notice the immense increase of English in daily life.

I absolutely support the teaching of English. Especially after my enrolment in an academic institution in the United States, my advanced English knowledge gave me such an advantage that I never had major problems in either my classes, nor later in the job market. I could compete easily with Americans. I actually had the advantage of being fluent in German and also having a considerably stronger knowledge of French than the average American.

Especially here in the United States, knowing several languages can be of major advantage. I think Swiss people sometimes forget that in the global job market the usage and fluency of diverse languages can give a person the advantage over another applicant. The more languages an individual is truly fluent in, the better.

Judith Schwizer, USA

What you failed to point out is that English is much easier to learn than the older European languages with multiple genders and a multitude of prefixes and suffixes.

You also erred when you stated that the Italian and French taught in schools was understood by everybody, whereas the German dialect was not taught. Italian is easy enough to learn but it is not the language spoken by the people on the street. The people of the Ticino speak a dialect which is utterly incomprehensible to someone trained in classical Italian!

A. Rico, Canada

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