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The "red bench" was an eye-catching feature of Switzerland's presence in Leipzig. Benches for relaxation and reading were placed throughout the city

A tale of minorities

Now an editor working in French-speaking Switzerland, I spent my early years as a Swiss abroad, only arriving in Geneva in 1975. I was born in Lesotho six decades ago to Protestant missionary parents from Romandie. While the mandatory study of Afrikaans at school in Bloemfontein meant I became familiar with the grammatical structure of Germanic languages, I do not speak any German. So why visit the Leipzig Book Fair?

For ten years, I've worked for a publishing house which publishes the work of Swiss German authors in French and which has links with German, Austrian and Swiss publishers. In view of its cultural importance, attending Leipzig is essential to some degree, not just because of professional contacts but also for the relationships that can be forged with authors during public readings and debates or at informal meetings. Few fairs of this size provide as many events where priority is given to authors and their literary work.

Thursday, 13 March. Leo Tuor, a Sursilvan writer from Grisons and Claudio Spescha, his German translator of Sursilvan origin, are surrounded by a group of young school pupils whose mother tongue is Sorbian. They have travelled 200 km from the Lusatia region in Upper Saxony to visit the Leipzig Book Fair. I am astonished that they are on familiar terms. Leo Tuor and Claudio Spescha explain to me (in Italian and French!) that they visited a class at a Sorbian high school in Bautzen a few days earlier to talk about Tuor's latest work published in German, *Cavrein* (Limmat Verlag). The exchange initiative with the school pupils gave rise to a meeting between two minorities who study and write in their own respective languages: Sorbian – a language of Slavic origin spoken by a community of 60,000 which has lived in Saxony since the sixth century – and Sursilvan – one of the five Romansh dialects from the canton of Grisons, spoken by 15,000 people. Such an occurrence gives an indication of the extent of linguistic diversity and bibliodiversity. Minorities are real crucibles of literary creation.

The Leipzig Book Fair places great emphasis on the work of translators and provides them with an opportunity to meet. Camille Luscher, a young translator of Arno Camenisch (*Sez Ner* and *Derrière la gare*, éditions d'en bas), introduces me to some colleagues and we discuss the practices and difficulties of translation, above all when it comes to translating a "spoken" literary work written in a largely un-codified language like Bärndütsch into French. Pedro Lenz's novel, *Der Goalie bin ig*, which has just been published in French by our publishing house under the title of "Faut quitter Schummertal!" is a prime example. When Daniel Rothenbühler and Nathalie Kehrli translate Pedro Lenz's work, they have to create a literary construction which conveys the notion of a "spoken" form of French. In Leipzig, authors belonging to the Bernese group "Bern ist überall" presented their work on stage. Such a theatrical treatment of language is rare in the francophone world. It would benefit greatly from visiting the Leipzig Book Fair.

JEAN RICHARD