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Teaching and Learning English in Geneva: Questions of Economy, Identity, Globality and Usefulness

Eva Waltermann and Virág Csillagh

In multilingual and multicultural contexts such as Switzerland, language diversity is a core element of local culture, economy and language policies. However, the spread of English as a global language poses new challenges and raises questions of identity, equality and economic benefits, particularly when looking at policies of foreign language (FL) teaching. Consequently, national languages are frequently compared to English in terms of value, usefulness and necessity. But what does this evaluation of English truly represent? Is it based on economic reality, social values or urban legend? This essay addresses these questions from two perspectives. Learners, on the one hand, are faced with increasingly complicated choices and expectations, making the learning of English a complex matter of identity and self-expression, financial growth and social cohesion. On the other hand, these issues also resonate among FL teachers, who are those who face the learners in the end and transmit a certain representation of the English language. This study draws on the findings of two surveys carried out in Geneva to demonstrate the motivational power of Swiss national identity in relation to career prospects for learners, as well as the strength of socially constructed stereotypes on English among teachers.

Introduction

That the status of English is so often linked to questions of economy is no surprise, as the long-standing debate concerning the role of the language in current economic trends of empowerment and exclusion (see

Economies of English. SPELL: Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature 33. Ed. Martin Leer and Genoveva Puskás. Tübingen: Narr, 2016. 75-96.

Crystal; Graddol; Pennycook; Phillipson) also demonstrates. The importance of English in the realm of business and international trade – one of the many ways to look at *economy* – has become part of the everyday reality of a globalized world. Moreover, the spread of the language in the 20th century has been investigated in terms of economic growth or transnational relationships (e.g. Crystal) and, from a linguistic point of view, of establishing English as a *lingua franca* (e.g. Hülmbauer, Böhringer and Seidlhofer). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that introducing English in this new function in historically multilingual environments raises fundamental issues related to the existing balance of languages, linguistic identity and language learning policies. Switzerland is a particularly good example of this change, as the growth of English on the international level and its increasing momentum as a foreign language taught at Swiss schools have further complicated a linguistic landscape of long established complexity.

Foreign languages in Switzerland

Swiss plurilingualism dates back to the time of Napoleon (Elmiger and Forster), and encompasses a range of cultural values that point beyond the simple coexistence of languages. In fact, it makes Switzerland one of the few countries in the world where a range of official languages are accorded equal status. The four official languages, German, French, Italian and Romansh, form the basis of the country's multilingualism at the institutional level, as citizens can choose to communicate with authorities in any of the four languages. Moreover, as research indicates, individual plurilingual competence surpasses even these bounds.

According to the results of the 2013 census, where respondents were asked to name one language as their mother tongue, 63.5% of the population speak German, 22.5% French, 8.1% Italian and 0.5% Romansh, while the remaining 5.4% indicate another language as an L1 (Federal Statistical Office). Since these figures presuppose an essentially monolingual profile, the different languages are not represented equally. In addition, since the results do not take into account any form of individual plurilingualism, they conceal participants' skills as regards the other Swiss official languages. Nevertheless, as the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK-CDIP) warns, "the knowledge of a second national language is, for all citizens, of a great political and cultural importance" (*Recommandations du 30 octobre 27*, our translation); the

particular linguistic situation of Switzerland is therefore all the more interesting to study (see also Lüdi and Werlen; Werlen).

In this context, the teaching of the other main official language (French or German) in the different linguistic regions started as early as the first half of the 19th century. However, the tradition was confronted when English emerged as an alternative to national languages and started challenging – in the 1970s – the undisputed primacy of the official languages. By 1975, the EDK-CDIP, which coordinates the teaching policies of the different cantons, therefore mentioned English in an official recommendation on the teaching of FLs in the Swiss obligatory curriculum that explicitly states as a pre-condition that:

1. [. . .] The teaching of a first foreign language is mandatory for all pupils. [. . .]
2. The first foreign language for the French-speaking part of Switzerland is German. The first foreign language for the German-speaking part of Switzerland is French. [. . .] The first foreign language for the Italian-speaking canton is French. [. . .]
3. The teaching of the first foreign language shall leave *no choice between a national language and English*.
(EDK-CDIP, *Recommandations du 30 octobre 27*, our translation, our emphasis)

The pressure of English on political, economic and academic spheres and institutions however soon made its presence in the official curriculum unavoidable, which was also recorded in the *General concept on language teaching*, decided by the EDK-CDIP in 1998:

1. The recommendations of 1975 (obligatory teaching of a second national language from the 4th or 5th school year) remain applicable.
2. *English shall become obligatory from the 7th school year. Weak students may be exempted from its teaching.* [. . .] (1, our translation, our emphasis)

Despite recurring debates, general interest in the teaching of English has grown even more since then, and by 2004, the official position was even adapted to the following recommendation: “Two foreign languages at least are taught in Switzerland during the first school years, no later than from the 5th school year on, among which at least one is a national language” (EDK-CDIP, *Enseignement des langues 4*), leaving the freedom to each canton to decide which should come first and considering that English can be taught to *any* student – with no exception for weak students.

In fact, nowadays, English is present in every school curriculum and in some regions of the country it has even gained priority over national languages. While in the French-speaking part and in the cantons close to the linguistic border, the “other” main national language (French or German) is taught first (3rd school year) and English second (5th school year), the northeastern cantons give priority to English, placing further strain on the intricate system of federal and cantonal foreign language (FL) policies.

Each new political decision affecting this fragile balance however raises important questions regarding not only the role of financial considerations but also that of plurilingualism and national identity in FL teaching.

Conflicting representations

In fact, whenever one of the Swiss regions decides to change its local policy of FL teaching, promoting either the second national language or English, local and national media as well as stakeholders in teaching politics or economic sectors come to the front and issue sometimes conflicting statements about what solution should – or should not – be established, which are then sometimes heavily commented on by press readers. In this discourse, questions of economy, of importance, of usefulness or on the other hand of identity, of social cohesion and national strength (to name only a few) are often very vivid and push towards one choice or the other. Every time, strong beliefs about the value of a language or another are brought forward and bring up the predominance of the different representations that exist about the languages in conflict. These representations, as defined by social psychologists, are “forms of shared knowledge” (Jodelet 36) consisting both of descriptive and evaluative conceptions of languages that are underlying in social interactions and discourse.

These representations are particularly interesting because, as Castellotti and Moore point out, “it is precisely because representations and images of languages play a central role in language learning processes, and because they are malleable, that they are relevant to linguistic and educational policy” (7). In other words, these socially constructed images of given languages are not only bound to lay discourse but can heavily influence language learning and teaching – both in the classroom and in the offices of the policy makers.

The discussions around the choice the latter have to make hence regularly opposes national languages, which are most of the times associated with the cultural multilingual heritage of Switzerland and draw on ideas that go centuries back – favoring “mutual understanding” and “national cohesion” – to English, much more recently established but heavily linked to the “opening” of Switzerland to the rest of Europe and the world, to economic benefits and to the “international number 1 status” of the language.¹ In other words, based on this argument, one would have to choose between an official language on the one hand, an emblem of national history and identity, and a global language on the other, which carries some emotional value but is mostly characterized by its profitableness. However, as research shows, the distinction is far from clear-cut.

Languages and economic value

Indeed, when comparing the economic benefits of the main foreign languages taught in Switzerland, Grin (*Compétences*) found interesting patterns. His comparison was based on a classification of the different types of values a language carries. First, this model (Grin, “Language planning”) distinguishes between market and non-market benefits and therefore separates emotional attachment, cultural enrichment or the enjoyment of speaking a particular language from financial advantages such as a higher salary or better job opportunities. Secondly, a distinction is made based on the level of impact, or in other words whether gains are reaped by society as a whole or by the individual proficient in the language. Table 1 displays the schematic structure of the model.

Individual market value	Individual non-market value
Social market value	Social non-market value

Table 1: Schematic representation of the four types of values
(adapted from Grin, “Language planning”)

¹ All the above mentioned quotes are translated from articles or readers’ reactions to them issued in online newspapers on the decision of the Swiss canton of Thurgau, in 2014, to not only teach English before French at primary school but remove the latter from the primary curriculum

This classification renders computing the profitability of foreign language skills possible, with a few reservations. Grin (*Compétences*; “Language planning”) discusses these difficulties in detail, but it is important to point out that what lies at the heart of the matter is that languages behave strikingly differently from other types of commodities. Therefore, estimating the actual value of a given language requires rigorous procedures and a wealth of information not often available to the researcher. Nevertheless, a large-scale study of Swiss residents of working age (Grin, *Compétences*) offers clear indications as to the individual market value of their language skills. Table 2 summarizes the results of the survey, showing that Swiss official languages were highly remunerated in all language regions.

% of salary increase	French	German	English
Men in French-speaking Switzerland	-	13.82	10.23
Men in German-speaking Switzerland	14.07	-	18.08
Men in Italian-speaking Switzerland	17.17	16.87	[11.78]
Women in French-speaking Switzerland	-	ns	[9.87]
Women in German-speaking Switzerland	ns	-	25.04
Women in Italian-speaking Switzerland	ns	11.46	ns

ns: results not significant

Brackets indicate that not all parameters were controlled for.

Table 2: Salary differentials per foreign language spoken
(adapted from Grin, *Compétences*)

While the figures for women are not conclusive due to a number of factors, it is clear that men tend to benefit considerably from their skills in foreign languages. Building on these and other findings, Csillagh considers Swiss plurilingualism as “the life blood of the country’s economy” (“Global trends”). Research shows that official languages are used on a daily basis in corporate communication all around Switzerland (Grin et

al.). In addition, if all Swiss residents who speak another, non-local, official language were to lose these skills from one day to the next, the financial loss would be equal to 10% of Swiss GDP (ibid.)

Love or money? A question of motivation

At the same time, little importance is attached to the motivational impact of these findings, although they can be surmised to play an important role in Swiss residents' attitudes to the languages in question. Csillagh ("Global trends") discusses this dimension in the light of current theories of motivation and concludes that economic aspects are inherent to many of the concepts used in mainstream L2 motivation research. Moreover, recent years have seen a shift in L2 motivation theory from a conceptualization of motivation as a personality trait to viewing it as part of the *complex dynamic systems* that surround individuals (Dörnyei, MacIntyre and Henry). These new approaches have great potential in investigating the role of contextual influences, of which economic factors form an integral component.

Building on decades of theoretical development on the one hand, and previous research conducted in a number of modern language learning contexts on the other, Dörnyei describes L2 motivation as an ongoing, dynamic process of identity creation and reinforcement. The three key elements of his model (ibid.) are the *ideal L2 self*, which refers to language-related facets of one's visions of one's ideal future self, the *ought-to L2 self*, which corresponds to perceived obligations and expectations as regards the language in question, and the *language learning experience*. Csillagh ("Global trends") argues that these components incorporate aspects of the economic milieu to different degrees and in different ways.

The ideal L2 self, generally measured as a variable of its own, includes questions of career prospects and the overall importance of the language as a means to one's coveted goals, many of which can be theorized to have economic implications. Quantitative studies (cf. Dörnyei and Ushioda) showed the ideal L2 self as key to predicting learners' motivation and performance. Often found to be an indirect or marginal motivational factor, the ought-to L2 self on the other hand reflects the values that society places in the language, economic concerns included, which thus become part of learners' socially influenced self. The same studies showed the L2 learning experience, assessed through language learning attitudes, to be influenced by both self-guides. Nevertheless, it

is important to point out that since these concepts incorporate economic implications covertly, further research is needed to explore the direct impact of such factors.

A study of Swiss university students' L2 motivation and attitudes

Drawing on these quantitative traditions, in a survey study of university students in the multicultural, multilingual context of Geneva, Csillagh ("Global trends; *Attitudes*) found that factors related to the local economic and social milieu were strongly linked to participants' attitudes and motivation toward English. Investigating university students' attitudes and self-concept, the study furthermore revealed significant differences between Swiss and foreign respondents' profiles. Although a thorough analysis is beyond the scope of this essay, we briefly outline these results below, with special emphasis on the motivational role of the economic environment.

A total of 375 students completed the online questionnaire in fall 2013, and they pursued studies at four faculties of the University of Geneva, those of Law, Medicine, Science and Economic and Social Sciences (SES). Table 3 sums up their numbers as regards their gender and faculty. In addition, it displays where participants had completed their secondary education, which served as an indication of their origins, nationality being a delicate and unclear issue in Switzerland. Seven students attended several faculties and were thus excluded from the comparative analysis.

	Faculty				Place of upper secondary education		
	Law	Medicine	Science	SES	Geneva	Switzerland	Other countries
Male	27	20	52	23	62	83	41
Female	67	44	98	37	125	173	78
Total	94	64	150	60	187	256	119

Table 3: Participants in the motivation study per gender, faculty and place of secondary education.

In-depth analysis of the language data revealed high levels of plurilingualism among participants, as only 6.4% of them were completely

monolingual. As many as 18.7% of students had skills in two languages, while 38.4% spoke three and 29.3% four languages and 7.2% reported competencies in five. Interestingly, a great majority (80%) marked only one of their languages as their mother tongue, indicating that they considered most of the languages they spoke as foreign languages. Indeed, many respondents spoke one (26.7%), two (37.1%) or three (24.3%) foreign languages, with an impressive 4% declaring proficiency in four. The analysis also showed that Swiss official languages played a central role in this diversity, both as L1s and as L2s.

Furthermore, overall mean values of the attitudinal variables included in the study (for details, see Csillagh [“Global trends”; “Love or money”]) demonstrated a remarkable trend. Whereas studies conducted in other contexts (cf. Dörnyei and Ushioda) revealed participants’ future self-vision to be a key element, the aspect of the self-concept related to social obligations played only a marginal role, if any, in respondents’ attitudes and motivation. The Geneva study, however, produced different results. The mean values of the attitudinal scales are compared in Figure 1.

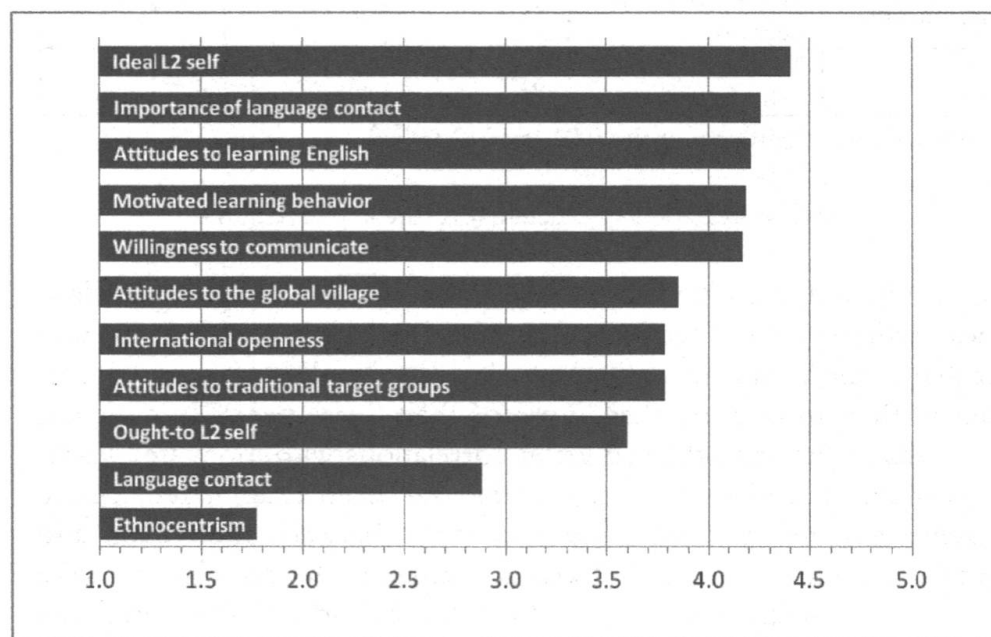


Figure 1: Mean values of the main variables included in the motivation study.

Note: Options ranged from 1 (complete disagreement) to 5 (complete agreement).

Interestingly, while the scale linking English to students’ future self-vision was the strongest in the set, the socially influenced facet of their language-related self-concept also proved relevant. It is also important

to point out that, as part of the former, the item on the role of English in participants' future career scored the highest of all. In addition, scales related to the global status of English also yielded high results.

Examining the links among these variables, Csillagh ("Global trends") concludes that the strongest relationships were found, on the one hand, between motivation to learn English and positive attitudes toward the learning process. This is perhaps not surprising, nevertheless, the strong correlation points to the importance of the learning context and educational practices. More interestingly, among the rest of the factors, the social aspects of the self showed the closest link to motivated learning behavior. Table 4 summarizes the correlation coefficients for three of the key variables, displaying the results for "Swiss" students and "foreigners" altogether as well as separately.

		Attitudes to learning English	Ought-to L2 self	Ideal L2 self
All students	Motivated learning behavior	.58**	.40**	.38**
Swiss students	Motivated learning behavior	.56**	.43**	.43**
Foreign students	Motivated learning behavior	.61**	.37**	.34**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Pearson's coefficients for the key variables

When compared, these figures are suggestive of some intriguing dissimilarities. Although the direction of the relationships is not known, it is clear that foreign students' attitudes to learning English are more closely linked to their motivation than those of their Swiss peers. In addition, both facets of the self achieved lower correlations with motivated learning behavior among foreigners. Last but far from least, a remarkable difference emerged regarding the connection between motivation and target cultures. In the case of Swiss participants, the correlations were moderate for English people ($r = .35, p < .01$) and low for Americans ($r = .29, p < .01$). By contrast, while foreign students' attitudes to the former showed a similar link to their motivation ($r = .32, p < .01$), their views of Americans correlated more with motivated learning behavior ($r = .47, p < .01$) than either element of their self-concept.

As international aspects of English, in the form of international openness and attitudes to the global village, were also only moderately related to motivation in both subsamples, it can be concluded that the

results of the correlation analysis are indicative of the role of the local context in these relationships. Moreover, similar patterns can be observed in the connections between participants' attitudes to learning English and the variables mentioned above, as shown in Table 5.

		Ought-to L2 self	Ideal L2 self	Attitudes to English people	Attitudes to Americans	Attitudes to the global village	International openness
Swiss students	Attitudes to learning English	.37**	.32**	.55**	.44**	.34**	.24**
Foreign students	Attitudes to learning English	.37**	.40**	.51**	.43**	.48**	.21*

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5: Pearson's coefficients for learning attitudes and international aspects of English

When it comes to Swiss students' attitudes and motivation, these figures show the importance of the local context, on the one hand in influencing respondents' self-concept, but also in transmitting values related to target cultures and the international community. Moreover, students' views on target cultures might be suggestive of the role that teachers play in the development of these attitudes. In a study of Swiss teachers of English, Murray found their opinion of international varieties of the language very low, as survey participants preferred and valued standard dialects above all.

In sum, the results presented in this section are indicative of the impact of contextual factors on Genevan university students' attitudes and motivation to learn English. In contrast with research findings in other contexts, the Geneva study showed that socially influenced aspects of the self played an important role. Their connection to motivated learning behavior and learning attitudes equaled or even surpassed the relevance of ideal future self-images. The latter was especially true in the case of Swiss students, who showed a number of differences when compared with their foreign peers.

Despite the exceptional plurilingualism demonstrated by the whole sample, Swiss students consistently outperformed foreigners in the four

foreign languages tested: French, German, Italian and English. Swiss official languages were at the heart of this phenomenon, their levels highest at the faculties of Law and Medicine, professions that offer coveted job opportunities locally (Csillagh, "Love or money"). Overall, these findings suggest that Swiss participants' language attitudes are linked to a socially defined self-concept, highly sensitive to the economic milieu. It is interesting to note that their perceived importance of English is more closely linked to locally defined values than to general international openness.

Nevertheless, Swiss students' positive attitudes to speakers from England, strongly related to their attitudes to learning English, raise questions concerning the impact of Swiss language teachers' views on traditional target language groups. Students' attraction to traditional target language groups seems to echo Murray's findings on teachers' opinion of international varieties of English. This, in turn, might be indicative of teachers' power in promoting plurilingual values on the one hand and motivating attitudes on the other. While in order to achieve the former it is essential to reconcile conflicting representations of English and Swiss official languages, the latter requires a reconceptualization of *target culture* to encompass global speaker communities, which might present many learners with a more immediate reality.

The role of teachers in the debate

Indeed, as we previously stated, teachers cannot be left out of this discussion, as they contribute to the spread of some of the representations and ideologies that lead to such distinctions. Although we will not address the question of University language teaching here, focusing on secondary school instruction, teachers play a fundamental role in the construction of the distinctions between national languages and English.

The position they hold is however quite an unstable one. On the one hand, they are not systematically taken into account – or at least not more than any other citizens – when it comes to redesigning the curriculum or to changing cantonal policies, and are thus at the mercy of governmental decisions that may regard as much the curriculum itself as the contents that are to be taught or even the methodology that should be used to do so. In other words, their own representations are not considered particularly relevant when FL teaching is reformed, or at most at a consultative level. However, on the other hand *they* are those who really enact the teaching curriculum within the schools and in front of the pu-

pils, and who therefore impersonate some form of representation about the subject they teach. It has also long been established that “knowledge” is an essential part of any teaching situation – and we’re referring to the *content knowledge* here and not the other forms of professional knowledge that are used, notably by Shulman – but it is essential at this point to remember that this knowledge is not homogeneous: teachers are not only educators and transmitters of a predefined form of content (i.e. grammar rules, speaking strategies, vocabulary and so on) but they also (and much more implicitly) convey a socio-cultural representational load about the language they teach. Whenever they consider a regularity / a rule as being “less important,” whenever they focus on a certain domain of literature rather than another, whenever they comment on a language saying “you’re going to need this for . . . ,” they make explicit things *about* a language which are sometimes even stated as facts but pertain to the realm of representations, or, as Houdebine-Gravaud defines it, as “linguistic imaginaries”:

This relationship of the subject to the language [. . .], relationship which can be elicited in terms of images, part of social and subjective representations, in other words on one hand ideologies (social side) and on the other imaginaries (subjective side). (9)

Hence, the position of teachers is a crucial one when it comes to examining the importance of socially and individually constructed representations in the learning/teaching process.

Teachers’ attitudes towards English: a study

It is therefore interesting to investigate the images that are vivid among language teachers: how far do they match the common message of the social importance of English? Do they correspond to the learners’ motivational characteristics?

The following results are drawn from a larger-scale PhD study that was carried out among foreign language teachers in Geneva to analyze their attitudes and representations (i.e. both the descriptive and evaluative dimensions) of 7 of the most commonly used languages in the area (German, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Swiss-German), but we will restrain our presentation to the data concerning English for this paper, and keep to the elements that could enrich our discussion.

107 foreign language teachers in the Geneva area were submitted an internet questionnaire they voluntarily completed. All of them were foreign language teachers (70.7% of English, 33% of German, 11.3% of Italian, 11.3% of Spanish – 29.1% indicated teaching more than one of these languages) and taught at the level of secondary school (Secondary I or Secondary II schools, corresponding to learners aged respectively 11 to 15 or 15 to 19).

For each of the languages in the sample, they were asked to complete two tasks:

a. To write down the three first concepts that came to their mind when thinking about this language, through what is called a *Word Association Task*. This methodology, based on psychiatric processes, is one of the methods used in social psychology to uncover representations (see notably Doise et al.) These elicited concepts could be of any grammatical category, and could even be groups of words such as “difficult to read” or “too often left aside.” Although the survey was carried out in French, answers in other languages were accepted. The concepts that were collected were examined both in a quantitative and a qualitative way, among which frequencies which we will present here.

b. To assess this language on 7 differential scales (based on the traditional Osgood *Semantic Differential*, cf. Osgood): easy-difficult, logical-illogical, melodious-rough, rich-poor, beautiful-ugly, useful-useless, and close-distant; these pairs were based on the most frequently cited adjectives when concerning a language, which were provided by another sample of 160 language teachers from a previous study. In this survey, the participants could indicate whether they assessed the language at the end of a scale, fairly on one side of it or whether they were neutral, for example:

	<<very		neutral		very>>	
Logical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Illogical

Answers were therefore interpreted from a scale of -2 to +2 and compared both to other languages and to the other pairs.

The data collected from each of these two tasks were then compiled and analyzed, first globally and then according to individual variables such as experience or language level, on which we will not elaborate here.

The results of the Word Association Task proved very interesting. As we can see, simply by looking at the 11 most cited concepts (trans-

lated into English for this article) and without going into too much detail in the analysis, some of the common ideas re-emerge:

1. international (15 occurrences)
2. Shakespeare (12 occurrences)
3. beautiful (11 occurrences)
4. useful (9 occurrences)
5. culture (6 occurrences)
6. travel (6 occurrences)
7. “easy”² (5 occurrences)
8. easy (4 occurrences)
9. hello (4 occurrences)
10. literature (4 occurrences)
11. universal (4 occurrences)

We can for example see that the most frequently cited concept is “international,” a word which directly places English on a very large scale, beyond the individual. Clearly, it seems to indicate that rather than personal subjective imaginaries (which are not absent from the list), it is a global picture that comes first when thinking about English, even if the representation of the language that can be understood here is much richer than this, notably through the words “Shakespeare,” “useful,” “travel” or “culture.” The concept of *internationality* seems nevertheless to be the core element that characterizes English for the teachers interrogated here, which resonates with the social value placed on this language for learners that was stated previously.

We could however add, not far behind, a strong need to qualify the language and to take a personal stance (also pointing to these subjective representations), notably through the notions of beauty, usefulness and ease (adding “easy” and the French version “facile”), which characterize English both from a contextualized and an aesthetic point of view, but also from a learning perspective. Although the two last areas (represented by “beautiful” and “easy”) are present in the most frequently cited terms for all of the languages in our sample (albeit not always positively, but sometimes rather through words such as “ugly,” “complicated” or “difficult” . . .), the notion of usefulness is stronger for English than for the two other languages for which it’s mentioned: Spanish (5 occurrences) and German (4 occurrences). It is thus clear that even if other languages share this representational feature with English, it is the one for which it is most apparent in the sample.

² Provided in English – the other one was translated from the French “facile.”

This can also be verified when looking at the semantic differential scales:

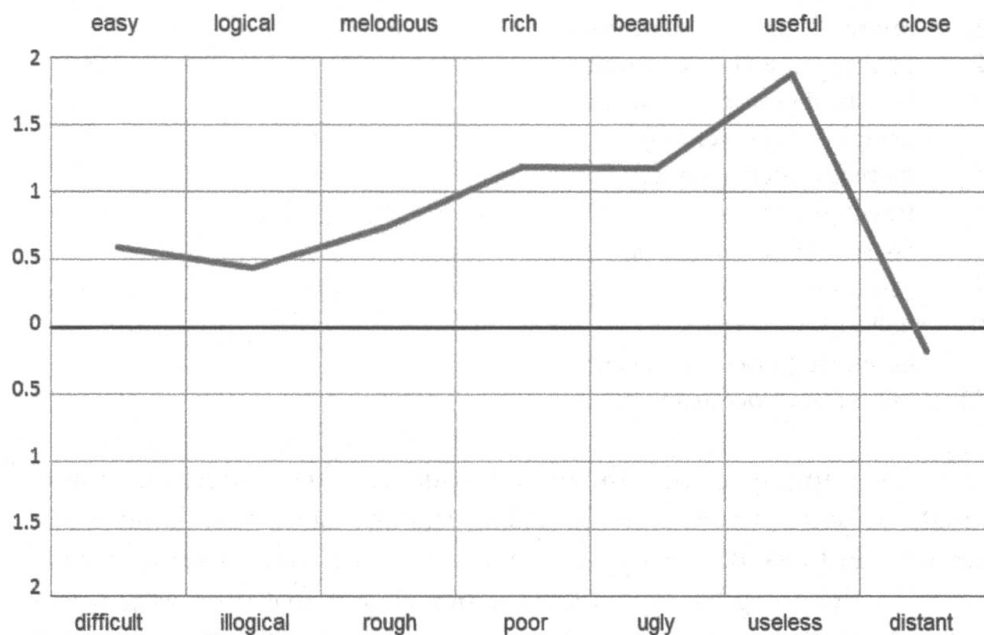


Figure 2: Semantic differential for English, all teachers (N=107)

Obviously, the idea that English is useful is predominant also in this form of evaluation the participants were asked to perform. Although almost all the adjectives (i.e. all except “close/distant”) tend – here again – towards adjectives with positive connotations, the “peak” we can see for the adjective “useful” leaves no doubt that there is consensus on this idea, which is all the more interesting if the language is considered in the educational context, where disciplines are meant to be “useful,” and still linked to the “international” level mentioned before. This was also the statement that was the most unanimous among all answers (i.e. all pairs of adjectives for each of the 7 languages), with an average of 1.92 and a standard deviation of 0.49.

This assessment is also interesting on the linguistic level because it shows that this characteristic of English is given more value, is more applicable than other more intrinsic characteristics conveyed by adjectives such as “logical,” “beautiful” or even “easy.” It is thus really the *use* of this language and not its personal value for the participants that seems to have priority in the shared representation of it. In other words, if we come back to the notion of *Linguistic Imaginary* developed by Houdebine-Gravaud, it appears that the factors that are maybe more “personal” or indicating a higher degree of personal involvement are

less absolute than the form of social value brought by the term “useful.” These results completely match the findings released by Araujo e Sá and Schmidt, who state when presenting their research carried out in Portuguese schools that

[Their] results confirm the collective and homogeneous idea of English being a language of prestige. In concrete, the data obtained by means of the semantic differentials, reflects the image of an extremely useful language, politically and economically important. Moreover, this language seems to be considered rather beautiful and easy. (109)

This may confirm that the image conveyed by English goes further than the local area, some of the traits of representation being even internationally shared. It becomes however even more interesting when we realize that the opinions on German, which could maybe precisely differ between a Swiss audience and a Portuguese one due to the different status of the idiom in these two countries, also comes to the same conclusions. Indeed, we can read in the aforementioned article that

As far as the German language is concerned, the scenario seems to be quite [different]: although it is considered to be relatively useful, this idiom is thought to be ugly and most definitely difficult. (10)

The same appears in our survey (see Figure 3 on next page). Indeed, we can see that – even if German is still considered fairly “useful” (albeit less than English), it is quite less “beautiful” and above all definitely “difficult.” Even if for the majority of all these rankings, the average scores are rather positive, it is essential to point out that both for the pair “beautiful/ugly” as well as for the pair “easy/difficult,” German is *last* of all the languages, and is followed only by the Swiss-German dialect which brings about even more negative attitudes.

It is thus interesting to see, in the light of all that has been written so far in this article, which representations and evaluations are underlying in the community of foreign language teachers in Geneva. More precisely, it is fascinating to realize that the social value of English seems to lead to much more positive connotations than the status of German which, albeit often publicly declared as indispensable for Swiss learners, reveals suffering from a much more severe reputation among teachers – who are apparently giving more credit to alleged market (economic or at least professional) advantages than to questions of non-market values.

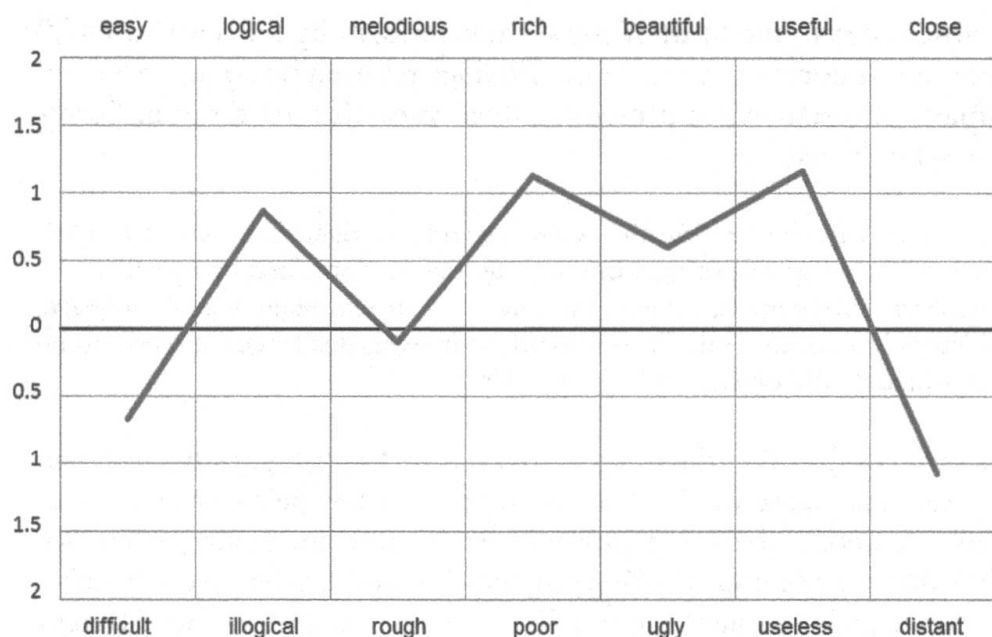


Figure 3: Semantic differential for German, all teachers (N=107)

Conclusion

In summary, the studies discussed in this paper demonstrate the complexity of the values that English represents in the multilingual setting of Geneva. Both individual market value and socially influenced non-market benefits played an important role in defining the status of the language in this particular local context. This marked lack of more personal orientations was manifest both in learners' attitudes and motivation and in teacher's ideologies. It can be concluded that these two studies revealed English as a language that is considered first and foremost as useful and even necessary in the local setting, much more so than as an individual aspiration or an attractive choice of genuine enthusiasm or international openness. Teachers value the usefulness of English above any other of its characteristics, and learners consider it as a skill they *need* to possess for their career and place in Swiss society rather than as a means of cultural enrichment and identity creation.

This view of English appears to be so strong among Swiss learners that it surpasses the influence of other representations that are also prevalent in the local context and loud in public discourse. By contrast, German, despite its high market value that exceeds even that of English on the Swiss market, seems to have the sole advantage of being an official language. Although this feature is important enough that it will con-

tinue to ensure the place of German in the curriculum, the question remains whether it will be enough to help counterbalance the socially constructed image of a difficult and fairly ugly language.

These conclusions testify to the strain that the emergence of English places not only on German and other local Swiss languages but also on the linguistic diversity of multilingual Europe. This pressure that a language of an undisputed reputation of usefulness in the economic and international field represents will only ease once the market value of local languages is recognized and added to their representations of cultural values and national identity. Breidbach argues that the benefits of the emergence of English as an “interlingual mediator” (22) in multilingual Europe can only be reaped if language policies continue to rest on fundamental European values of *both* mutual understanding among citizens as well as cultural and linguistic diversity. Only when the value of linguistic and cultural diversity is fully recognized can more positive representations and attitudes supersede the ideas of difficulty and limited importance that German has carried along the way ever since the economic contribution of English began playing a role in the Swiss language teaching context.

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