

Abstract

Multilingualism has played a major role in Swiss society, enshrined historically in its four national languages policy (French, German, Italian, and Romansh). Laws protect each language region's historical 'homogenous' composition and seek to guarantee mutual understanding and social cohesion at a national level. However, the extant legal/policy framework does not account for the plethora of local varieties (notably in German), the influx of heritage languages such as Portuguese, and the international and intra-national *lingua franca* English which increasingly shapes Switzerland's linguistic landscape. The study analyzes the interplay among the neoliberal forces that led to a growing popularity and (perceived) necessity of English, the romantic, traditionalist view on national languages, and the social justice perspective of including heritage languages. This work is embedded in on-going sociopolitical debates in Swiss education language policies and is framed in critical theories of language, education, power, and multiculturalism. This work also draws on concepts of plurilingual identities, heteroglossia, and translanguaging to examine individuals' linguistic repertoires, lived experiences of language, perspectives on Switzerland's multilingualism and multilingual education, and language (sub-)hierarchies. It strives to ameliorate linguistic and educational practices and to increase equity and social justice for minoritized speakers by elucidating underlying (obfuscated) power, hegemonic, and ideological mechanisms. This study contributes to innovative, non-hierarchical approaches to language learning and to bottom-up policy decision-making processes by showcasing students' and teachers' perspectives on languages, language learning, and the aforementioned policies. The study draws on 94 student questionnaires and 34 interviews with students and teachers from the cantons of (French-speaking) Fribourg, (Romansh-speaking) Grisons, and (German-speaking) Zurich by adopting a phenomenological research design that zooms in on individuals' perspectives and practices within their multilingual lifeworlds. The data analysis reveals that Switzerland's multilingualism is restricted to official and prestigious languages, but that this is detrimental to plurilingual identity expression and does not mirror the society's linguistic diversity accurately. This situation is exacerbated within an education system that continues to impose a 'monolingual habitus' or, at best, a 'bilingual habitus' despite the increasing heterogeneity

of its students. The data also showed that language hierarchies are legitimized and reproduced within education systems and structures, thereby attributing prestige and power not only to certain languages, but also to their speakers. Ideological influences also legitimize and reproduce sub-hierarchies based on speakers' 'deviance' from the native-speaker yardstick or from local varieties' resemblance to standard-speech norms. The study found that linguistic prejudices and discrimination result in a symbolic violence that negatively affects speakers' linguistic repertoires, well-being, self-confidence, and language teaching in schools. Finally, the study advocates for the (institutional/official) recognition of each individual's linguistic repertoire, the 'normalization' of linguistic and cultural diversity, and for a critical awareness of the interdependency of language, education, and power among all actors in the education sphere.