Introduction

There is a saying by Ludwig Wittgenstein that could be used to summarize the underlying message of this study: *Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt*, which is commonly translated into English as *the limits of my language mean the limits of my world*. Languages and language hierarchies develop out of ideologies that connect individuals, languages, and culture within a social space. People are judged according to their linguistic skills and the 'market value' that a certain language variety, or the one they speak, has within this space or 'field' (Bourdieu, 1991). Some varieties are considered to be more prestigious than others so that speakers of a variety situated at the lower end of a particular language hierarchy can be limited in terms of their personal and professional development. Speakers of prestigious varieties, conversely, typically benefit from the high status of their first language(s) (L1(s)), the seemingly unrestricted access to opportunities, and their ability to accumulate 'linguistic capital' effortlessly (Bourdieu, 1991). A central question facing scholars in the field of language and education, therefore, is: "what [language] resources are assigned what value, by whom, how, why and with what consequences?" (Heller, 2008a, p. 517). Almost ten years later, Heller and McElhinny (2017, p. xv) still see the need to investigate the "question of what language has to do with social difference and social inequality" further. They call for a better "understand[ing of] the relationship between language and social order through linking the value and meaning of language to the value and meaning of the rest of the resources that count in society, and so to the basic working of the economic and political order" (Heller & McElhinny, 2017, p. xv). The present study's intention is to make a meaningful contribution to this field of research by elucidating not only the relationship between

languages and social (in)equality,[1] but also between languages and social (in)equity more generally.[2]

English is typically considered a highly prestigious language, one learned and used by individuals from all over the world for inter- and intra-national communication, (social) media, internet, technology, business, education, science, and for other uses. English functions as a *mediator* among individuals with different L1s and cultural backgrounds in most of these contexts and vies to achieve a common communicative goal and to engage in mutual meaning-making. This can involve simple interactions such as a student participating in an exchange in a foreign country or a mandatory working language in big international companies with multinational employees. In both situations, English is defined as a *lingua franca* (ELF) (Seidlhofer, 2011). English functions as a key to opening doors to new opportunities socially, culturally, and economically by vastly enlarging the amount of people with whom one can communicate and connect, and by rendering more spaces accessible. It appears to be a 'good' that people should, and do, wish to obtain in order to enhance their private and professional life in an ever-changing globalized world (Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Graddol, 2006; Blommaert, 2010).

Contrarily, people's chances of personal and/or economic improvement are drastically diminished without this 'linguistic capital', and they risk an enormous lack of competitiveness compared to those who are proficient users of this highly valued language (Grin 2001; 2006; Grin & Korth, 2005; Gal & Woolard, 2001; Heller & Duchêne, 2012; Tupas & Rudby, 2015). In contrast to knowing English, which seemingly easily opens doors to new opportunities, insufficient linguistic skills symbolize a key that locks doors from the inside and restricts access for those who do not fulfill the necessary (or expected) requirements. Thus, English has become a medium that simultaneously creates barriers and inequality as well as promotes and facilitates the cooperation and inclusion of culturally diverse people in an interconnected, dynamic, and diverse world in which there is ever more transnational interaction and integration among people. Language, then, is not *only* a medium of communication for individuals intra- and inter-culturally; language also expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural and political prestige, belonging, identity, and power (Kramsch, 1998). As Brown, Koreinik, and Siiner (2017) put it succinctly: "The voluntary and

1 In the case of Switzerland, the Swiss Federal Constitution "ensure[s] that [the Confederation] treats the four national Swiss languages equally" (LangA, Art. 3, a, 2017). According to the Cambridge Dictionary, 'equality' means "the right of different groups of people to have a similar social position and receive the same treatment," for the purpose of this study, based on their linguistic repertoire.

2 Despite the *equal* legal basis of Switzerland's four national languages, this study promotes an *equity* perspective since a (restrictive) *de jure* linguistic equality does not automatically lead to a situation of linguistic equity in which individual speakers and their linguistic repertoires are treated fairly, never mind equally (Stewart, 2013).

forced transnational mobility of people, ideas, and money generate new, sometimes hybrid ideas of belonging, identity, and possibility, while shaping language choice, need, affiliation, and understanding" (p. 6).

The seeming paradox of English's omnipresence and usefulness, and its related problem of unequal access, are critical challenges for the education system because it serves as the main provider of modern societies' language teaching. Language education policies dictate who will learn what, when, how, and to what degree. This challenge is heavily intensified when decisions about language instruction in schools are made within officially multilingual countries. Countries with more than one official language typically provide language teaching in a second or third national language in order to establish, and potentially to ameliorate the social cohesion, cooperation, and understanding of different language groups within the same country (Coray, 2001). This is the case in Switzerland where language laws guarantee and strengthen the equal status of the national languages – French, German,[3] Italian and – to a more restricted extent – Romansh – for the sake of internal cohesion, linguistic equality, as well as for the sake of individual and institutional linguistic development. Furthermore, language instruction in public schools has traditionally focused on fostering linguistic and cultural competences in the two dominant national languages – French and German – and on navigating the corresponding, different characteristics between the Roman and Germanic cultures respectively. English takes on a more complex role in Switzerland, given that it is an internationally popular and important foreign language. Whereas the teaching of national languages can be said to follow the romantic idea of expressing one's identity in one's own language and valuing diverse cultures (Geeraerts, 2003; see also the concept of 'pride' in Heller & Duchêne, 2012), the teaching of English has rationalist underpinnings. It symbolizes emancipation and participation on the one hand, as well as academic and economic opportunities on the other (Geeraerts, 2003; see also the concept of 'profit' in Heller & Duchêne, 2012). By speaking English with a certain competency, individuals are granted access to transnational spaces that provide opportunities to participate and to engage in emancipatory and liberatory activities. Such instrumental value is

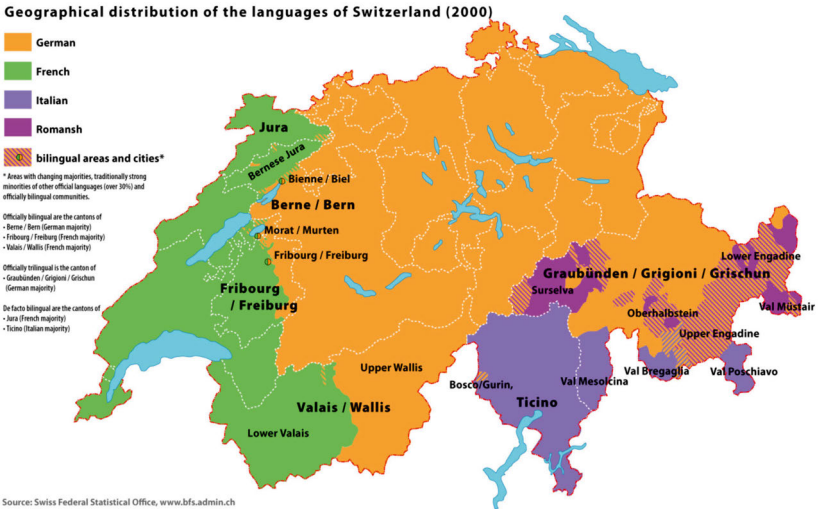
3 This study considers the following distinctions to be important regarding German: Different German varieties exist in Switzerland and terminology is not always used coherently. In this study, the following definitions are adopted: Swiss Standard German (SSG) is used in official contexts, such as educational institutions, written communication, and the law. It is the official language in German-speaking Switzerland by law. SSG differs from Standard German (SG) which is typically associated with Germany in terms of vocabulary, orthography, and other grammatical characteristics, which are called 'helvetisms' (Dürscheid & Sutter, 2014). Swiss German, conversely, according to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (2021a, n.p.) "…is a collection of distinct Alemannic dialects" which exist in many different local or regional varieties and is the *de facto* language spoken in German-speaking Switzerland on a daily basis (for more details see 1.4.2).

highlighted when students who seek to acquire a highly prestigious language, such as English, do so merely for their academic and socioeconomic benefits. At the same time, this acquisition endangers multilingual societies' linguistic diversity in terms of languages that may not have the same status and prestige as English (inter)nationally (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Phillipson, 1992; 2003).

1.1 The Study's Setting

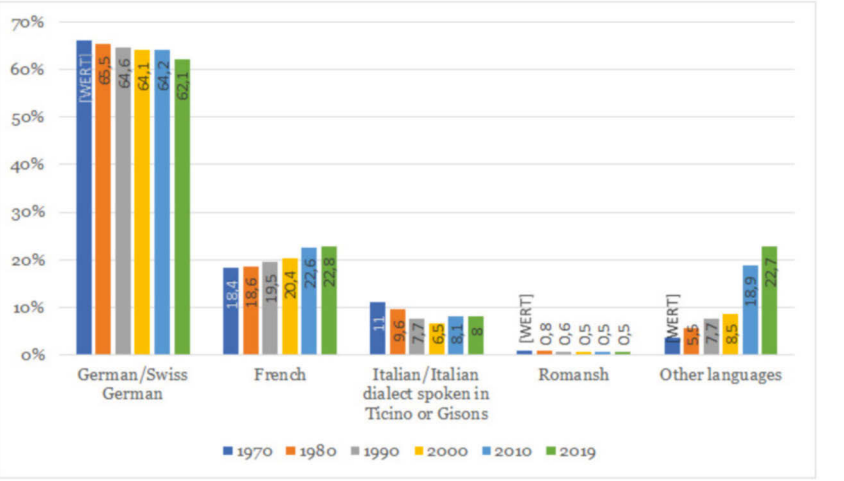
Switzerland can be considered an outlier among its neighboring countries and within the European context *tout court*. Heavily influenced by nation-building efforts in the 18th century, Switzerland's neighbors emphasized their unity by determining and by codifying one national language, such as German, Italian, or French. Interestingly, Switzerland has defied the *one nation – one language* ideology (Bauman & Briggs, 2000) and has integrated all three neighboring languages, plus Romansh, as its national languages. The preservation of these languages is protected by laws, such as the Languages Act and (educational) policies that introduce a second national language mandatorily in primary and/or secondary schooling. Further regulated by the territoriality principle, Switzerland's national languages are distributed geographically and serve to divide its linguistic landscape into 17 monolingual German-speaking cantons, four monolingual French-speaking ones, three bilingual (French/German) ones, one trilingual (Romansh/German/Italian), and one monolingual Italian-speaking one (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Geographical distribution of Switzerland's languages



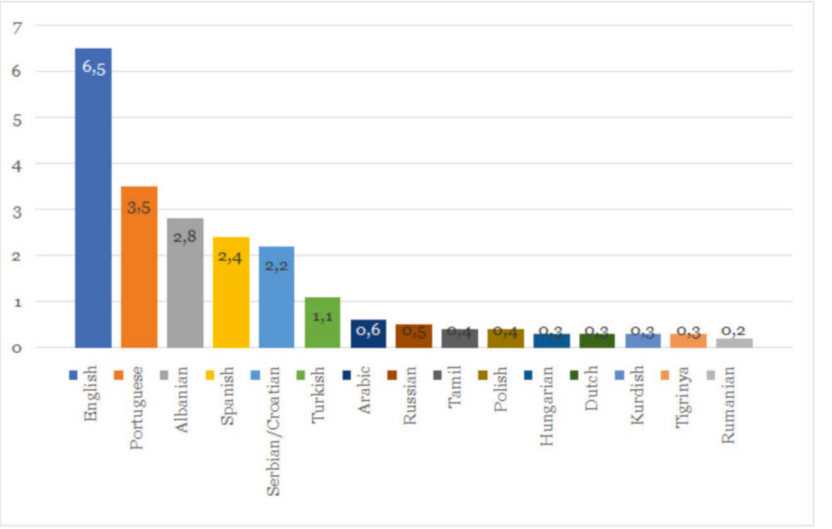
In addition to its already *de jure* multilingual landscape, Switzerland is home to a plethora of heritage languages (HLs), which have increased significantly over the past decades without any concomitant changes being made to the language policy framework. According to Polinsky (2018, p. 9), HL speakers are "simultaneous or sequential (successive) bilingual[s] whose weaker language is the dominant language of that society." While speakers of other languages than the four national ones made up 3.7% of the population in 1970, they accounted for 22.7% in 2019 (FSO, 2021a). The development is captured in the graph below.

Figure 2: The permanent resident population's main languages, 1970–2019 (FSO, 2021a)



The 15 most common ones among these heritage languages for Switzerland's permanent resident population have been visualized in the graph below.

Figure 3: The 15 most common non-national languages among Swiss permanent resident population (in %, in 2019) (FSO, 2021b)



Thus, despite its multilingual landscape and the importance allocated in the education system, the average Swiss person is often not bi- or even plurilingual; that said, and interestingly, most Swiss people speak English to a very high level, thereby supporting its *lingua franca* function in the country (Durham, 2014).

1.2 The Study's Purpose

This study is situated in the intersections of applied linguistics and upper secondary education research in multilingual Switzerland; this is a setting particularly underresearched, but that remains relevant due to ongoing policy reforms that were expected to be implemented in 2023. Swiss upper secondary schools need to be defined, given national education systems' specificities; they represent the post-compulsory part of secondary education and can be further divided into three different programs in Switzerland: general education, vocational education, and training programs. The latter two offer trainings for adolescents to learn a profession and in which the majority of Swiss students enroll after lower secondary education. In the

former, adolescents are prepared for tertiary level education programs in Baccalaureate schools and this accounts for 20–30% of the students enrolled in post-compulsory education. This study uses *upper secondary schools* to refer to the Baccalaureate schools, which students complete at the age of 18/19 (Swiss Education, 2020; Swissinfo, n.d.). According to the FSO (2020), 91% of upper secondary students are Swiss nationals.

This study's interest emerges out of societal debates concerning the power and politics of language teaching and draws on several examples in Switzerland in which English represents exactly both sides – a *mediator* and a *troublemaker*. It focuses on the lived experiences of local agents of Swiss language policies and on their implementation, namely students and teachers. These areas are becoming increasingly important in a globally interconnected 21st century education system shaped by neocapitalism and migration: Students (are forced to) move, to complete their education in very different places with different local languages, and to adapt to the rapidly changing requirements for their entry into the job market. Teachers are increasingly challenged to cope with heterogeneous classrooms and with the discrepancy among their real-life teaching concerns, curricula, and the textbooks they have to hand. The study will, therefore, analyze the interplay among the neoliberal forces that led to an increase in English's popularity and necessity in Switzerland, the romantic, traditionalist view of its four national languages, and the social justice perspective on including students' heritage languages by asking:

1. How are students' and teachers' linguistic repertoires constituted and how are they employed so as to position individuals and groups within (restrictive) linguascapes?
2. What are students' and teachers' lived experiences of language?
3. What are students' and teachers' perspectives on Switzerland's multilingualism and its multilingual education?
4. How do students and teachers (de)construct and legitimize (existing) language hierarchies?
5. How do they (de)construct and legitimize (existing) sub-hierarchies within certain languages?

These questions address real, sociopolitical issues in Swiss education's language policies that have caused emotionally charged public debates and have raised difficult questions that have not been entirely answered to date. In answering the aforementioned research questions, this study sheds light on the underlying power and hegemonic mechanisms that can obscure and hinder the equitable integration of individuals' voices into a pluralistic learning space. It contributes to more innovative, non-hierarchical approaches to language learning and to bottom-up policy decision-making processes. The study makes apparent that the educational

and linguistic choices made by these actors are often based on social and political factors and that this implies the need for an interdisciplinary sociolinguistic and educational investigation and input. *Language*, *ideologies*, and *hierarchies* as well as *lived experiences of language* are briefly outlined in the sections that follow in order to clarify the terminology used in the research questions.

1.3 Language, Ideologies, and Hierarchies within Linguascapes

This study adopts Heller's (2007) distinction between language as a static system and as a dynamic one, as "linguistic resources which are organized in ways that make sense under specific social conditions (or, to use a Foucauldian approach, within specific discursive regimes)" (Heller, 2007, p. 1). Although this study advocates the latter, the common understanding of language as a system was established historically through modernist nation-state ideologies (Heller, 2006; Hobsbawm, 2012) intending to construct national identity by following the *one language – one culture – one nation* paradigm (Pujolar, 2007). Consequently, these ideologies continue to impact upon individuals' (and even researchers') opinions, beliefs, and understandings of language, similarly to other crucial markers of social structurization such as gender, race, and class (Orelus, 2012). In this study, *language* is defined "as a set of resources which circulate in unequal ways in social networks and discursive spaces, and whose meaning and value are socially constructed within the constraints of social organizational processes, under specific historical conditions" (Heller, 2007, p. 2). Furthermore, viewing language "as a fundamentally *social* phenomenon…it also reflexively constructs our analyses as a form of social action, and situates our disciplines…within the modes of regulation and discursive regimes of our times" (Heller, 2007, p. 2 [emphasis in original]). This study examines language ideologies by adopting "a critical social perspective…combining practice, ideology and political economy," (Heller, 2007, p. 2) and investigates how they, materialized in hierarchies, have felt and material consequences for certain groups of speakers in specific and for Switzerland's multilingual society more generally.

Language hierarchies are to be understood – in this study – as an artificially constructed social phenomenon based on language ideologies, in which languages are ranked according to their perceived prestige and value within the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991; Kroskrity, 2000). Importantly, they "are not inherently linguistic, but rather social and political; language is but one terrain for the construction of relations of social difference and social inequality" (Heller, 2007, p. 2). Thus, language issues are *mobilized* in order to gloss over sociopolitical or economic interests or discourses (Pujolar, 2007). Hierarchies are never fixed, since languages are constantly revalued depending on financial, economic, military, and other geopolit-

ical factors. *Language ideologies*[4] or *linguistic differentiation*, as defined by Irvine and Gal (2000), are "the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them" (p. 35). They go on to explain that researchers focusing on these linguistic ideologies are as biased as the speakers that they are analyzing; they also argue that it is often the linguists and other language experts who define, set standards, and separate varieties from others. In so doing, they attribute a certain value to a specific variety, thereby providing the necessary requirement for it to become an official language.[5] This is an important point to keep in mind throughout this study. Irvine and Gal (2000) further state that:

> …linguistic features are seen as reflecting and expressing broader cultural images of people and activities. Participants' ideologies about language locate linguistic phenomena as part of, and evidence for, what they believe to be systematic behavioral, aesthetic, affective, and moral contrasts among the social groups indexed. That is, people have, and act in relation to, ideologically constructed representations of linguistic differences. (p. 37)

These linguistic/cultural images and ideologies typically incorporate power dynamics and transmit sociopolitical meaning (Blommaert, 1999). As Bucholtz and Hall (2004, p. 379) summarize: "ideology organizes and enables all cultural beliefs and practices as well as the power relations that result from these." They are localized within a given space, such as a nation-state, in which *de facto* or *de jure* language policies dictate how inhabitants of this space must speak. I use the term *linguascape* by drawing on Appadurai (1996), who coined the concept of *scapes*, which describe "deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors" (p. 33). The analogy here refers to those speakers (actors) who position themselves based on their linguistic skills within an increasingly more complex and diversified space that is shaped by historical, political, and social factors (Blommaert, 2008). The term *linguascape* is employed – in this study – to describe a (virtual) space in which subjects position themselves through language, construct their own identities, and experience recognition or devaluation based on their linguistic repertoires' market value. Although Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2013) do not characterize the linguascape as a physical space *per se*, they do

4 The term is also sometimes used in the singular. In line with Kroskrity (2004), I prefer the plural term since it is not a final product, but is rather a fluid organization of different layers and dimensions such as identity, morality, aesthetics, society, norms, and beliefs. For a broader overview on language ideologies see Woolard & Schieffelin (1994).

5 A saying that is commonly used in linguistics to emphasize the language's embeddedness in a sociopolitical reality, and the arbitrariness of the definition of what a language really is, goes as follows: "A language is simply a dialect that has an army and a navy" (author unknown, quoted in Irvine & Gal (2000, p. 35), most often attributed to Max Weinreich).

argue that the term emphasizes "the way the languages of a space form part of that space's environment and are as ever-present a part of that space as its physical landscape" (p. 35)

Focusing more on sociopolitical embeddedness, Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015) add that "like a named national cuisine, a named language is defined by the social, political or ethnic affiliation of its speakers…a named language cannot be defined linguistically, it is not, strictly speaking, a linguistic object" (p. 286). The authors contend that so-called languages are social or sociopolitical phenomena, which are constructed and regulated by the state, by deconstructing languages as actually existing entities. The state, thus, has the authority to make the *arbitrary* difference between languages, dialects, and other ways of speaking legally binding and, more importantly, can appropriate official status to the variety preferred by a small group of elites. They go on to argue that a focus on the individual's linguistic repertoire and the deconstruction of languages, as named entities, is necessary wherever appropriate in order to do away with language ideologies. Makoni and Pennycook (2007) and Pennycook (2010) have pushed for a 'decategorization' or 'disinvention' of named languages in order to reduce discrimination and social inequity based on linguistic differences; the implementation has proven rather difficult, however.[6] In line with Otheguy, García, and Reid (2015), this study adopts the perspective of recognizing a certain utility and necessity within these categories. In order to research the topic of multilingual education, one is faced with the reality that languages are (still) taught separately in schools, even though attempts have been made to foster integrative language teaching. Basing language teaching strategies on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), students are expected to achieve a mastery in the medium of instruction as well as in at least two foreign languages. Entering the professional world, applicants are often asked to provide language certificates in a certain, required language that sometimes does not have a direct relevance to the job. Furthermore, a distinction of named languages is needed in order to examine language hierarchies. Languages and their attributed values need to be investigated in order to possibly entangle or even to do away with these different positions. This can only be achieved if (for now) named entities continue to be (critically) used as a categorical framework. Speakers of minority languages will continue to make use of the language concept in order to visualize the perceived and felt discrepancies between their language(s) and other (more) prestigious ones. Thus, it is not (yet) conceivable to simply abandon these categories when talking about educational/professional or advocacy settings. The difference between being a native English or Albanian speaker have physical,

6 Romaine (1994), for instance, hypothesizes that the differentiation and categorization of languages as separate entities is a 'European invention' resulting from literacy and standardization processes.

psychological, social, and material consequences for many people. Researchers should consider opting for alternatives to such a restrictive, categorical system in critical research on education and multilingualism. The concept of language often does not do justice, or even accurately capture, the multiple discursive practices encountered among speakers (Love, 2017). More flexible and inclusive solutions, such as *translanguaging*, are discussed below. The social reality, however, still relies upon these named entities and categories.

Importantly, despite being mental constructs, language ideologies form the basis of social practices and can result in physical or social discrimination. Following the 'native-speaker ideology' (Chomsky, 1957; 1965) and judging speakers for their 'deviant' accent, for instance, can create barriers between artificially constructed in-groups. This judgement of certain expressions, accents, or even of entire varieties leads to their speakers being (de)valued accordingly, not only on a linguistic level but as social individuals in a wider network; this can foster or impede social justice (Lippi-Green, 1997; Ortega, 2019; Piller, 2016). It follows that belonging to a certain linguistic group can determine how these individuals will be judged and assessed as people and even as a nation (Bylin & Tingsell, 2021). Hymes (1973) explains the connection between language (and ideologies) and social inequality as a natural phenomenon. Being part of a regularly occurring process, certain people will decide to use certain expressions or varieties more than they will others. These forms of speech will rise in popularity and will become a prestigious language almost effortlessly. The expressions or varieties used less commonly will automatically lose their applicability and all of their speakers by the end of the process. The obvious paradox, then, is that people seemingly choose to appropriate certain expressions or varieties, through which an underlying force is created, thereby reaching more and more people. Although voluntary at first, people are forced to follow it by adopting their speech and ways of communication once this movement is underway. This can be seen in changing language hierarchies: Whereas Latin or French found themselves at the top of the language hierarchy for a long time, recent globalization processes have catapulted English to the top. While individuals have their own perceptions of how much prestige and value they attribute to a specific language variety, it is typically a normalized social construct that is perceived similarly by individuals within the same society.

1.4 Lived Experiences of Language

Another important concept used in the study's research questions concerns the *lived experiences of language*; this refers primarily to the subjective dimension of both perception and understanding. According to Boylorn (2008), a lived experience "is a representation and understanding of a researcher or research subject's human ex-

periences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one's perception of knowledge" (p. 490). The aim of researching lived experiences is not so much to produce facts about social reality, but rather to gain a more profound understanding of individuals' experiences and actions (Merleau-Ponty, 2014). Lived experiences of language are understood as experiences gained either through linguistic interaction or the deprivation thereof. Access can be either granted or denied to a certain speech community, depending on one's linguistic repertoire (Busch, 2017c). Therefore, linguistic experiences can be very emotional and are also linked to other personal experiences. Individuals can be forbidden from speaking their L1 and might be forced to use another language instead. They (are forced to) acquire – whether consciously or unconsciously – a certain variety, to adopt a specific accent, and to abandon their linguistic and cultural heritage. Plurilingual individuals particularly are exposed to such emotional experiences revolving around language. These can also certainly be positive, of course, such as when language opens the way to intercultural exchange, private and professional enhancement, and emancipation. Drawing on a phenomenological perspective, the focus here is on the subject itself, how individuals feel, perceive, and position themselves through experiences, actions, and interactions *vis-à-vis* other individuals, the society, and the discourses produced within. Thus, lived experiences of language have a direct impact upon the person, their bodily and emotional dimensions that create feelings of joy, pain, (in)security, embarrassment, and belonging among others. As stated by Kramsch (2009), these personal emotional experiences are decisive in language learning. Positive experiences linked to the feelings of joy, appreciation, and belonging contribute hugely to the success of the learning process, whereas negative experiences attributed to linguistic insecurity, such as embarrassment and shame, hinder development further. The present study investigates students' and teachers' linguistic repertoires and how these shape their lived experiences of language and follows Kramsch's call for more of an emphasis to be placed on, and more research into, language learning experiences and their impact on each individual.