Anja Giudici, Rocco W. Ronza e Verio Pini (a cura di), (2020) Il plurilinguismo svizzero e la sfida dell'inglese. Riflessioni dal laboratorio elvetico a confronto con l'Europa.

Locarno: Armando Dadò editore. 270 pp.

Reviewed by Osservatorio linguistico della Svizzera italiana

The volume reflects and acts upon the context of Swiss language policy and planning and may be considered a typically Swiss editorial enterprise. This is manifested by the fact that it is published in Italian-speaking Switzerland and written entirely in Italian, a language rarely used in scientific debate, even on issues of language policy. The book was initiated by "Coscienza svizzera", a think tank founded in 1948 with the aim of spreading civic awareness in Italian-speaking Switzerland. Rather than a presentation of original research, the volume is a diverse collection of research experiences concerning the present situation of multilingualism in Switzerland and its relationship with English from the perspective of the minority official language Italian and its speakers (however, including also non-Italian-speaking voices). This point of view is often ignored, especially in the debate around the competition between the global language English and the national languages, where the issue almost invariably revolves around the national majorities. Paradoxically, the fact that the book is written in Italian, might reduce its impact among German and French speakers, where the awareness of the national minorities is not always to be taken for granted.

The book reflects on Swiss multilingualism at an institutional, social and individual level from various disciplinary perspectives including ethnography, sociolinguistics, economics and discourse analysis. The focus is not only on the internal dynamics (institutional management of national quadrilingualism), but especially considers external and international forces that place the English language in a substantially different position compared to the national languages; the intention being to transfer some conclusions about the Swiss case to other countries and the European Union as a whole. The volume comprises 10 chapters, an introduction and two afterwords.

The editors' introduction contrasts the narrative of Switzerland as a peaceful and tolerant "model of multilingualism" with less flattering aspects, such as: the selectivity with which national/official language status has been granted to minority languages, the fact that multilingualism and equal status apply to the federal level only, the discrepancy between egalitarian rhetoric and actual power relations between the languages. Although the status of minority language does not officially exist, there is a clear predominance of the majorities. As opposed to the European Union, English has no official status whatsoever in Switzerland, although it is generally perceived as useful. Similarly to the European Union, Switzerland's federal political and administrative structure is multilingual, while the media, political debate and daily life are essentially monolingual. Any decision (or non-decision) on the languages to be used in administration, schools, legislation and in courts is a political decision that may benefit certain language groups to the detriment of others. By re-examining the myth of the stable model of multilingualism, Switzerland could serve as a laboratory to analyse the complex, and sometimes contradictory, dynamics inherent in the coexistence of several language groups and languages (including English).

Chapter 1, by **Dunya Acklin**, focuses on multilingualism and language education policy by illustrating how a matter of educational policy, traditionally the responsibility of the cantons, has turned into a debate of national importance. The value at stake was nothing less than national coherence. The author presents an analysis of parliamentary and media debate, often called the "war of languages", regarding the issue of teaching the national languages and English in compulsory schools. The two opposing positions are represented on the one hand by the German-speaking cantons of Eastern Switzerland and, on the other, the Western German-speaking cantons close to the language border and the French-speaking cantons. The first give priority to learning and teaching English at primary school level while the latter prioritize the majority national languages. During the 1990s, the English language entered the public debate as a threat to the

understanding between the language regions. The antagonistic framing made the discussion move progressively from a pedagogical-didactic towards a political dimension.

The "war of languages", however, was resolved in 2001 with a common strategy for language teaching in compulsory schools, above all by placing the issue not in terms of mutual exclusion of English and national languages, but recognising the importance of both. However, the decisions of the cantons continue to reflect the geography of the controversy, with the Western cantons introducing the second national language first and the Eastern cantons teaching English first. The compromise remains fragile and the concept of competition between English and the national languages remains deeply rooted among a large part of the population as well as among teachers. The author finally draws a parallel with between Switzerland and the European Union: for both, linguistic plurality is constitutive of their identity. The role of English as a lingua franca in the EU has certainly influenced the debate in Switzerland, where English nevertheless does not have such a function at an official level. In both Switzerland and the EU, plurality is a guarantor of democratic stability and protection against nationalisms.

In **chapter 2**, **Till Burckhardt** identifies the challenges of English in the context of Switzerland's participation in the project of European citizenship in the form of the free movement of persons. Burckhardt points out the inconsistency between the federal language regime based on an official symmetrical trilingualism in German, French and Italian and the individual trilingualism of the school curricula aiming at good skills in German, French and English. Two options for communication between the language communities are the use of English as a lingua franca or receptive bilingualism between German and French. Burckhardt reflects on the two scenarios by analysing the challenge of free movement in Switzerland's European policy. The Agreement on the free movement of persons between Switzerland and the European Union permitted a progressive liberalisation of the movement of workers, favouring the influx into Switzerland of generally skilled workers from neighbouring EU countries, who share the official language with the adjacent Swiss language region. This has consequences for communication practices and the integration of immigrant workers into the Swiss language regime characterized by diglossia and intercomprehension. The low or absent competence of German, Austrian, French and Italian immigrants in the national languages not coinciding with their own, makes their integration more difficult when communication beyond the language borders is necessary: in these cases, the Swiss model of intercomprehension is not feasible. The analysis of statistical data on the use of languages at work shows that the territorial languages are dominant, but English is the most widely used foreign language, especially by non-Swiss citizens.

Language regimes based on intercomprehension between two national languages constitutes an opportunity of multilingual communication without hierarchies and without mediation. However, it is not necessarily an alternative to English as a lingiua franca. The shortcomings of the intercomprehension model lies in the fact that it does not contemplate the role of the immigrant population, frequently excluded from this mode of communication. Furthermore, it does not consider the marginalized role of Italian. The drawback of the model of English as a lingua franca, on the other hand, is that it trivialises the functions of language skills: English enables trade, but not communication at any deeper level. All things considered, the author does not exclude a tendency of the Swiss language regime (based on intercomprehension) to move towards a European model of English as a lingua franca, however with a growing emphasis on territoriality as an instrument of protectionism in a liberalised European market.

In **chapter 3**, **Nenad Stojanović** and **Matteo Bonotti** address the challenges for political parties operating in a multilingual context. The focus is on the role of the so-called Europarties, i.e. the transnational political parties of the European Union, in the process of European integration, especially the citizens' involvement in political life, defined by the concept of 'partisanship'. Given the bottom-up dimension and the deliberative nature of partisanship, only a multilingual approach (rather than the adoption of a lingua franca) can fulfil this role effectively. The authors also reject the idea that a shared language is necessary for the formation of a democratic opinion, arguing, instead, that multilingual parties, operating and deliberating in all the

languages of their members, are more efficient. The contribution examines in particular the political and electoral systems in Belgium, Canada and Switzerland, the three western liberal democracies that can be considered 'deeply multilingual', i.e. they have more than one official language, the majority of the population is monolingual and there is no lingua franca. Belgium has a largely monolingual party system; in Switzerland, all major national parties are multilingual, while the situation of Canada is somewhere in between: some pan-Canadian bilingual parties coexist with monolingual parties. On the basis of the experiences of these three countries, the authors suggest some incentives for the formation of multilingual transnational parties at a European level that could improve multilingual partisanship and thus electoral participation and direct involvement of citizens within the Union: (1) Incentives of electoral systems (such as national electoral districts); (2) presidential rather than parliamentary regimes; (3) direct democracy. Opting for English as a lingua franca would not be the best choice for Europarties, since it would create difficulties in fulfilling fundamental functions such as connecting with the national parties and its members. Furthermore, the authors identify problems in the legitimisation of transnational parties which do not communicate in the languages of their members.

In **chapter 4, Jean-Luc Egger** presents an overview of the situation regarding the presence of English in the Federal Administration. He points out that official directives of the Administration on the matter are quite distant from what is actually produced in texts. The discrepancy between explicit intentions and established practices is illustrated and analysed from different points of view. At a normative level, considering the non-official status of English, there is no great concern regarding an exaggerated use of this language. At a practical level, however, its pervasive use exerts various types of pressures which undermine the equality between the national languages and their official roles. This occurs in a less evident, but not less incisive way than would be the case if the presence of English were officialised. The pervasive penetration of individual terms and expressions in English contribute to alienating the language of Swiss institutions from the languages of the citizens. Moreover, the massive use of English has the effect of increasingly excluding official languages from certain sectors (e.g. the financial sector), making them less functional. The author warns against adopting language use and practices as the sole criterion for managing a multilingual situation, especially when based on purely quantitative indicators, without considering normative aspects. Although usage is primordial for the shaping of the norm, in multilingual contexts without an adequate regulatory framework, spontaneous use and practice have a tendency towards simplification and official multilingualism has little chance of survival. If the official languages are to be safeguarded, a joint effort by all the bodies involved (citizens, institutions, researchers, legislators, etc.) is necessary in order to truly observe the constitutional principles of Swiss language plurality, with all the political and civil benefits deriving from it.

The author of **chapter 5**, **Rocco W. Ronza**, proposes a cross-border comparison between Italy and the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland with respect to language regimes. In both Italy and Switzerland, Italian has the status of official language at a national level. Despite the fundamental differences between the two institutional realities and their language policies, there are some points in common, in particular the debate regarding the relationship between English and the national languages. The problems of growing linguistic and cultural heterogeneity and the crisis of national sovereignty are transversal and independent of state organization.
The author traces a common development of the status of Italian in Italy and Italian-speaking Switzerland through three historical phases: the nationalisms of the second half of the 19th century, international integration and symmetrical multilingualism after World War II and, finally, the assertion of English as a lingua franca since the last decades of the 20th century. In the most recent stage, since the 1990s, the two realities share the progressive dominance of English and the global language has penetrated into the education system. In Switzerland the ensuing public debate revolves especially around primary education (see Acklin, this volume), while in Italy the debate focuses mainly on English as a vehicle for tertiary education. On both sides of the border, the main argument in favour of the strong presence of English is its "usefulness". Italian being a minority language at a national level in Switzerland, Italian-speaking Switzerland tends to be more sensitive than Italy to the advancement of English. The author concludes that the common experiences of

Italian-speaking Switzerland and Italy could be a valuable resource in the search for new solutions in facing the shared challenge of making the increasing diffusion of the global language coexist with the aim of protecting national languages.

In **chapter 6**, **Remigio Ratti** and **Rocco W. Ronza** take an economic, historical and political viewpoint to reflect on the future of Italian in Switzerland and the dynamics of Swiss multilingualism and English in the context of cross-border cooperation. In this region, the process of internationalisation does not only consist in the development of global relations, largely conveyed by English, but also in the growth of closer and more intense relations on a regional scale, facilitated also by a common territorial language. The tension between 'local' and 'global' at a European level could benefit from solutions found in such spaces as Italian-speaking Switzerland and multilingual Switzerland as a whole.

Italian-speaking Switzerland stands between two opposing poles: the Swiss national pole on the one hand, (with its German-speaking and French-speaking components) and the Italian/international pole (Milan) on the other. The orientation towards the Swiss pole and the Swiss model of intercomprehension and individual trilingualism remain justified at an economic level. Likewise, the new dynamics of the global economy and the development of regional and metropolitan economic areas suggest the search for new forms of proximity beyond national borders. This may represent an opportunity for Ticino and for the future of Italian in Switzerland. The authors see linguistic commonality as a complementary structure to the affirmation of English as a lingua franca: English constitutes a functional infrastructure at a global level; it is however more superficial in cultural terms. The regional language ensures a deeper and longer-lasting understanding. The sharing of the same language and culture also constitutes a starting capital for the development of a regional economic dynamic between Italian-speaking Switzerland and Italy.

In **chapter 7,** the writer **Sergio Roic** reflects on the multiple "creative identity" of immigrant writers who have given up their own writing language in order to adopt the language of the host society and culture, especially authors who have embraced Italian as their new language. Their language choices and biographical paths are the starting point of a series of considerations advocating verbal language as a vehicle of understanding within the human community. Over the centuries, four key concepts have characterised human communities throughout the world: *identity*, *national state, mother tongue* and *culture of origin*. Today, identity is expressed in a hybrid, cumulative form. National state, according to the author, is an outdated concept due to globalised economies and communications. Mother tongue is especially relevant to immigrant writers who are obliged exchange it with another language. The culture of origin is a national or local culture, from which the immigrant writer moves towards a hybrid and global culture.

In **chapter 8**, **Stefano A. Losa** questions the value of English on the Swiss language market in terms of actual practice in various areas of social life (institutional, professional, etc.). Two examples of multilingual action, the first in the context of military training and the second in the context of the Federal administration, highlight the discursive roles of different languages.

Army training interactions are characterised by the asymmetry between instructor and recruits in terms of competence and knowledge as well as in hierarchical terms. The use of languages is instrumental to managing social roles. French-German bilingualism in the instructor's discourse not only ensures understanding by recruits but also affirms the instructor's role as a superior.

The analysis of meetings in an office of the Federal Administration allows the author to confirm that the so-called Swiss model (everyone speaks their own language) is useful for overcoming limitations in language competence in many cases. However, when interlocutors apply this communication strategy rigidly, the use of the preferred language can sometimes carry hierarchical or identity values and thus tends to build barriers rather than reduce them. In the management of multilingualism, local situational factors thus convey opposing language ideologies: supporting inclusion and communication on the one hand and aiming at exclusion and distancing on the other. Therefore, any communicative situation is potentially ambivalent and

may therefore convey realistic as well ideological contents. Especially when a radical language policy is imposed from above, as is often the case with English in some business contexts, an approach to multilingual communication which is aware of such situational peculiarities, may suggest creative solutions, as is shown in typically Swiss "bricolage" practices.

Based on ethnographic research into the administration of tertiary education institutions and the language practices and attitudes of student populations, **chapter 9** by **Martina Zimmermann** identifies the multiple socio-economic factors that influence the dynamics between national languages and English. Hierarchies between languages, and consequently of their teaching, derive from the neo-liberal utilitarian perspective of the convertibility of language skills into higher salaries and better professional opportunities. Recent change in the federal funding policy, aiming primarily at performance, has increased competition between higher education institutions. An analysis of promotional activities of universities shows that the national languages are of paramount importance in establishing a relationship with future students. The ethnographic survey of the Italian-speaking student population from the canton of Ticino reveals that the language ideology expressed by students reflects Swiss language education policy. There seems to be a shared awareness of the dominance of German over French and the indispensability of English language skills. On the other hand, students' actual behaviour is only partially in line with the declared hierarchy: in local contexts, the majority national languages, as well as the students' own language, Italian, predominate, the latter thanks to the strong presence of Italian-speaking social networks. English remains in the background and the majority-minority and the local-global hierarchies dictated by the neoliberal logic of capitalizing on language skills is overturned, leading the author to criticize the application of global criteria to local contexts.

Chapter 10, by **Verio Pini** and **Sandro Cattacin**, proposes a review of Swiss language legislation at a cantonal, federal and international level, whose shared aim is to support understanding between the language communities. The authors reflect on the constitutional principle of freedom of language and its restrictions by means of the designation of official languages of communication between the State and its citizens at the federal and cantonal levels. This territorial normativization of language is frequently in conflict with the principle of freedom of language. The authors therefore question whether the current application of the principle of territoriality is still appropriate for the management of multilingualism and for the support and promotion of minority languages, especially national languages. The authors evaluate territorial regulations positively in as much as they favour individual and collective enrichment as well as the ability of civil participation. However, they also highlight the problematic aspects of a territorial regulation when it becomes assimilationist, i.e. when it is not conducive to dialogue due to its strong focus on the learning of the local language which may result in potential discrimination, misunderstandings as well as difficulties in schooling, in professional and social development etc. The principle of territoriality dates back to times when societies were homogenous and static, while modern societies are characterized by strong demographic development and mobility. The authors therefore support the rethinking of the principle of territoriality by strengthening the freedom of language at the local level, in balance with the demands of territoriality and the autonomy of the cantons. The approach should be more dynamic, with the aim of enhancing multiple individual language skills, without detracting from the status of the official language of the territory. The Confederation's intervention in support of the cantons would not be an interference in their autonomy, but a comprehensive support of the territorial and non-territorial national languages.

The volume closes with two afterwords, the first, by **François Grin**, who warns of the dangers of attributing languages to certain domains, such as the "language of science", the "international language", the "language of business", which excludes other languages from being used in these domains. The hegemony of English is both cause and effect at the same time: English is used because it is the dominant language in a given domain and, vice-versa, it is dominant because it is the most-used. This is not a problem of English as a language. A language is not per se attributable to any specific domain of human activity. This process of auto-propagation

of English is a challenge, which can only be met jointly by the micro-level of the individual, the meso-level of institutions and corporations and the macro-level of states. According to Grin, the Swiss population is well aware of the multiple layers of belonging and identity and is therefore particularly well equipped for such multi-level decisions regarding the linguistic environment it wishes to inhabit.

In the second afterword, the many decades of activities of the Swiss think tank "Coscienza Svizzera" are summarized by **Alessio Petralli**, a long-standing member of the association. Language matters are among the many commitments of the association, which promotes the minority language Italian as a key component of Swiss multilingualism and a special focus is on how Italian meets the challenges of English in the Swiss context. In 2015, a new group, *Incipit*, emerged from the think tank. Sharing the main interest of the present volume, the group is attentive to incipient neologisms and especially monitors the influence of English on the Italian language.

Sabine Christopher, Osservatorio linguistico della Svizzera italiana (OLSI)
Sabine Christopher graduated at the University of Zurich and obtained her PhD at the Università della Svizzera italiana USI in Lugano. Since November 2013 she has been a researcher at OLSI, where she collaborates on projects in sociolinguistics, multilingualism and L2 teaching. She has published in the following areas: institutional multilingualism, L2 teaching, language policy and argumentative discourse analysis.