DIGLOSSIA: LANGUAGE BETWEEN CULTURES - THE SWISS-GERMAN POSITION

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Abstract : The paper discusses various types of diglossia. The Swiss-German dialect speaker's situation will serve to illustrate a diglossic situation which, inter alia, can also be found in the South of Germany, in Austria and other countries where dialects are alive or minority languages are spoken. It will be shown that in some speech communities diglossia is more complex than in others since the dialects or the less known language is confronted with two or more varieties of a standard language. The confrontation with communicative cultures and cultures in general leads to a modified and more complex definition of diglossia.

Keywords: dialects- standard language-attitude-culture-complexity-definition

1. INTRODUCTION : DIGLOSSIA IN GENERAL

Discussion of "Diglossia" really started with Charles Fergusson's classic article in Word 17,1959, in which he referred to speech communities where two or more varieties of the same language are consistently used for different functions in different domains (L(V1,V2,..)). His so-called defining languages were Arabic, Sanskrit, Greek and Swiss-German. Also he stated in his article that each of these languages had a form or style which he called H or High, the variety with high prestige, and another he called L or Low, the variety with low prestige, the classical example being Sanskrit, the 'learned or refined language', which was used for reading the texts of the Veda and ritual service, and Prakrit, the 'natural' or 'crude speech' which served for everyday communication (see F.C.Southworth,1971:258).

Moreover diglossia does not only refer to different functions or different domains, but along with this, it may also involve different social status. Here again the classical example would be the Greek distinction between the language of literature and science 'katharévusa' (pure

speech) and the language used by the so-called ordinary people, 'dhimotiki', now abolished since 1981. Or we may recall Albert Valdman's (1971:60) description of the Creole language in Haiti used by a speaker when, for instance, he talks to others in the market square or in a pub and the French language he uses when he is summoned before a court. However, Valdman continues, this kind of command of the two varieties applies only for an educated élite, whereas the majority of the people is monolingual and speaks nothing but the French Creole.

Gumperz, J.J. (1964), Fishman, J.A. (1967, 1980)) and others enlarged the concept of diglossia insofar as not only speech communities with two or more varieties of one language but also a consistent system of two different languages with either specific or unspecified functions used in a speech community can be considered as instances of diglossia According to Fishman countries like Belgium, Canada and Switzerland would fall into this category, yet in the modern world of global contacts especially minor languages, in particular, Danish, Finnish, Irish, Maltese and many more, develop diglossic situations if, for instance, they want to take part in international communication, orally or in the written form, with interlocutors who have no command of their vernaculars. In such cases any social implication is no longer relevant, the decisive factor is the necessity of communication. This sort of language behaviour is often understood as code-switching or a kind of bilingualism. On second thoughts, however, one realises that the foreign' or, as it often is, the more widely used language is only used for specific functions in specific domains, as for example in international business, the exchange of scientific data, certain types of publications, and so forth. It would never be used for conversation with fellow citizens of their own speech community

2. DIGLOSSIA IN GERMAN-SPEAKING SWITZERLAND

If we consider Fergusson's article we see that the discussion of diglossia in his time focused mainly on orthography, phonology and grammar of the varieties of the languages, which established a diglossic situation or created a diglossic system. These aspects have lost much of their predominance in more recent research in sociolinguistics. One aspect of the early discussions has proved to be more stable, that is the distinction between H and L, in other words the questions of prestige and/or the social or even class aspect of a diglossic situation. Apart from this, new aspects have entered the analysis of diglossia of the respective speech communities. We shall discuss some of these by analysing the diglossic situation of German-speaking Switzerland.

Among the four defining language groups Fergusson also mentioned "Schwyzertüütsch" or "Swiss-German". He listed Swiss-German as a diglossic system with two varieties of German:

the H or superimposed variety which evolved in the process of standardisation in Germany, called Standard German or, in Swiss phonology, "Hochtütsch"

and

the L variety which was the "naturally" developed vernacular or the Swiss dialect, or more accurately the regional Swiss dialects, called "Schwyzertütsch".

This characterisation of the diglossic situation of German-speaking Switzerland needs to be corrected in order to understand the more complex diglossic situation actually valid for this speech community. To begin with, it would be more accurate not to refer to 'Schwyzertütsch', which is, in fact, nothing but a comprehensive term for the totality of Swiss-German dialects and is, as such, spoken by nobody at all. The term can be used to refer to dialectal Swiss

speech in opposition to Standard German. The language spoken by German-speaking Swiss is their respective local or regional German-based dialects (D), which may differ in various ways and to a greater or lesser degree from each other. However, in certain specific domains Standard German takes over from dialect as we shall outline below.

As to the functions of dialects in the speech community, speakers use the vernacular in practically all speech situations where their interlocutors are also Swiss-German dialect-speakers. Contrary to Ferguson's, Fishman's, but also more recently Romaine's (1989:33) view, there is no H/L distinction in the use of dialect. In this respect there is a significant difference between diglossia in German-speaking Switzerland as compared with Arabic, Sanskrit and Hindi, Hebrew and Yiddish, Spanish and Guaranti in Paraguay (see Fishman 1980:4). However, there have always been certain speech situations where the dialect is, or must be, replaced by Standard German. Thus we may say:

Standard German is used in the schools and most of the educational institutions, where in fact the dialect-speaking children have to learn Standard German. It is used in the courts, for oratory, on formal occasions, in the church, to some extent radio and television, in particular the news and sports commentaries. Standard German is, or is at least recommended to be used when dialect-speakers speak with non-Swiss-German dialect interlocutors, as for instance their French-speaking compatriots or foreigners at large. The principal function of Standard German, however, is its function as the medium for writing (also note the sometimes used term "digraphia") since there is no accepted spelling code for dialects.

3. THE DIALECT-SPEAKER'S ATTITUDE TO STANDARD GERMAN

A first question to be raised in a present-day approach to diglossia is: What is a dialect-speaker's, in particular a Swiss-German dialect-speaker's psychological or emotional attitude to a standardised language, in the case of German-speaking Switzerland to Standard German? Do the two varieties exist side by side, with unreserved acceptance of each of the two by the speakers, or are they partners in a more or less stable diglossic system with a certain preference for the one or the other? Similar questions can also be asked for a large number of speakers, say in Bavaria, in Baden-Würtemberg, in various regions of Italy, in Austria and so forth (see Hundt, M. 1992) but also in countries where minor or minority languages are in some sort of functional partnership with a widely-used language. The question raised does not apply only to the Swiss type of diglossia

Let us give a first answer to this question of attitude. When a Swiss-German dialect-speaker has to fill in a form and state his or her mother-tongue, he may waver whether it is his or her dialect or Standard German. A non-specified entry 'German' is a sort of macro-term like 'red' for any shade or variety of 'red'. Yet the entry 'German' also immediately awakens an emotional attitude in the dialect-speaker: 'German' in the sense of 'Standard German' or 'Hochdeutsch' in the sense Standard German as used in Germany, also referred to as "Bundesdeutsch" (FRSG) is hardly a Swiss-German speaker's mother-tongue. Werlen/Ernst (1993:202) write: "The variety of German, called 'Hochdeutsch', has, in Switzerland, a position which is hard to describe. It is mother-tongue as well as a foreign language, depending on the medium (oral versus written), the domain, the situation and the function, and it is neither mother-tongue nor a foreign language, for instance compared to French; above all 'Hochdeutsch' is not considered to be a 'Nationalsprache' although 'Deutsch' is one of the four 'Nationalsprachen' and one of the three (now four) official Swiss languages (Amtssprachen)." As to the attitude of speakers in the German-speaking part of the country towards

'Hochdeutsch" (FRSG) we may quote Häcki Buhofer (1993:180): "The attitude of grown-up Swiss-German citizens towards the spoken 'Hochdeutsch' is negative" (also cf. Schläpfer et al. 1991). It may be added that this negative attitude is, to a great extent, emotional, possibly also historical, rather than an objection to an 'imposed norm'. Also such considerations as the so-called 'inherent value', that is that "the standard language sounds better, is more beautiful, is more differentiated, and so on" (Hundt, M 1992:11) is of no importance at all. Apart from this psychological and emotional reaction to one section of the diglossic system, we can state that the distinction between H and L is not valid. Neither is there any social or class implication regarding the use of the dialect, nor any prestige factor connected with the standardised variety of German (FRSG). Even school children consider Standard German as tied to the subjects taught at school, in fact a classroom language, their natural language being their dialect, the language they use in the breaks and outside the school building, in no case does Standard German exercise an attraction like English or, to a lesse r extent, French. (see Häcki Buhofer 1993)

4. USE OF THE STANDARD LANGUAGE

How then does the Swiss-German diglossic system work? According to the definition of 'diglossia', the two varieties of a language or the two different languages are used for different functions by the speakers of the same speech community. Also there may be a social parameter, that is to say that only certain groups make use of, or are able to master, the two idioms. Speaking of Swiss-German dialects, and this is certainly true of many other dialect areas in other countries, the social factor can be waived altogether. The dialect is spoken by everybody in daily communication, at home, in business, at the workplace, even more so, in fact it has, in recent times, become used more and more. It has ousted the Standard where formerly this one was strictly required. It is now used extensively on television and radio. Also it is nowadays quite often used on formal occasions, thus the clergyman may use it at a wedding or even at a funeral It must also be noted that to speak Standard German (CHSG) requires on the part of the grown-up speaker practically always a special effort. .

Standard German has to be taught in the first years of primary school where, by and by, the pupils have to learn to read, to write and to speak the Standard German language (CHSG). We may add that nowadays pupils also pick up Standard German from television.. Häcki Buhofer, A. and Th. Studer (1993:190) found that first-grade pupils like Standard German for its novelty as a subject, but from the second grade onwards Standard German (CHSG) has lost its attraction. And Werlen, I. and K.Ernst (1993:210) write that the pupils consider Standard German (CHSG) to be restricted to certain subjects of the curriculum and certain speech situations. In other words, this is a classic case of diglossia. For most grown-up speakers Standard German (CHSG) is the language used generally by teachers and lecturers in class, judges and lawyers in court, people who give reports, radio reporters especially in sports, newsreaders, etc. However, it must be added that, even if people do not use Standard German orally, they have generally no difficulty to understand it. However, some may have some difficulty with the Standard German (FRSG) used in Germany. However, the principal function of the standard variety is, as referred to above, to serve as the idiom of the written language; books are written in this form, our writing is done in this form mainly because there is no existing code or norm to write the dialects. Standard German is therefore also called 'Schriftsprache', the language to write in (CHSG).

From this actual speech situation there derive several consequences or difficulties. The first is that the so-called 'Schriftsprache', which is in some way a written form of the type of Standard

German (CHSG) spoken in German-speaking Switzerland, differs in many ways from 'Hochdeutsch' or Standard German (FRSG). This means that the Swiss-German language user is in fact confronted with two varieties of a standardised language, namely CHSG and FRSG. It is well-known that differences exist in the vocabularies of the two varieties, such as 'Schaffner', 'Gehsteig', or 'Telephonzelle' in FRSG against 'Konduktör', 'Trottoir' or 'Telephonkabine' in CHSG. but of greater relevance for the existing differences of the two varieties, seems to me, is what Werlen, I. (1992) called the "culture of communication". "Culture of communication" can be defined as the way of expressing oneself, which, admittedly, could also be defined as 'style'. But 'style' would predominantly refer to a personal use of language whereas 'culture of communication' refers to the language use of a speech community. It is the form of expression that draws on the largely common vocabulary and morpho-syntactic system of a language, German in the present case, and chooses those elements that, according to the conventions valid in the speech community, serve best to express the speakers' intentions. What is in the speaker's mind and forms part of a communicative process is bound to the speaker's socio-cultural as well as to his emotional background or, we may say, to his way of life. Culture of communication is a cultural phenomenon, in fact, it is part of the overall culture of a group or society. It is the linguistic-communicative system of meaning of this group or society, the meta-system of implicit plans and rules which determine a group or a society's linguistic identity and way of communication. (also see Werlen, E.1997:123,138; Geertz, Cl.1983, 1991).

Different communicative cultures can be discerned in speech situations such as the following:

If a chairperson wishes to thank a lecturer for his paper, a speaker of Hochdeutsch (FRSG) would say "Ich bedanke mich für den interessanten Vortrag" whereas the speaker of Swiss 'Schriftsprache' (CHSG), if he did not intend to be very proficient in 'Hochdeutsch' (FRSG), would thank with the words "Ich möchte den interessanten Vortrag verdanken". If a Swiss speaker has chosen the wrong telephone number, he will never use the standard phrase used in Germany "Entschuldigung, ich habe mich verwählt". The Swiss standard phrase would be "Entschuldigung, ich bin falsch verbunden."

Or: For FRSG "Hier ist bereits erreicht, was in andern Bereichen leider angemahnt werden muss", wheras a Swiss Schriftsprache speaker sagen würde :"Hier ist bereits erreicht, worauf man in andern Bereichen leider noch hinweisen muss."

Or consider a few sentences from a commentary by a Swiss reporter (Heinz Günthard) of a tennis match at Key Biscayne between Martina Hingis and Joe Fernandez, March 1997, in the Swiss TV programme:

(i) Nun hat sie einen Doppelfehler produziert

(ii) Da draus musste ein erster Breakball werden, tut es auch

(iii) Wir notieren den ersten Servicedurchbruch

Although the spoken text is Standard German, if we analyse it more closely, it proves to be very close to dialectal expression, only phonology, morphology and grammar are those of Standard German, the ductus of the text, that is the communicative culture, is that of the dialect-speaker. A reporter in Germany would use a different style, or better, his reporting would reveal a different communicative culture. Take these typical phrases from FRSG reporting (Flushing Meadows, 1996, German Sports TV):

(iv)"..da geht er gleich mit dem Doppelfehler ran",

(v)"ich sah den Ball 'gut' (d.h. auf der Linie)",

(vi)"in der Zwischenzeit hat sich nichts getan".

Or: We may read that "Im ersten Weltkrieg diente XYZ bei der Armee." No Swiss citizen, however, would say "im Zweiten Weltkrieg diente ich in der Armee", he would say "Im Zweiten Weltkrieg war ich im Aktivdienst" or "leistete ich Militärdienst" or just "ich war im Dienst".

Underlying communicative culture also reveals itself clearly in the written texts:

Consider an example from the Neue Zürcher Zeitung (N.Z.Z.) on the one hand and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) on the other:

(vii) Im Verfahren gegen die beiden ehemaligen südkoreanischen Staatspräsidenten und Generäle Chun-Doo-hwan und Roh Tae-woo sind am Montag die Urteile *ergangen.* (FAZ , 26.08.96)

(viii) Nach einwöchiger Aufschiebung sind am Montag in Seoul sind die Urteile gegen die nach der Ermordung Park Chung Hees im Jahre 1970 durch einen Putsch an die Macht gekommenen Militärführer *verkündet worden.* (N.Z.Z., 6.08.96)

It becomes obvious, even in such a quality paper as the N.Z.Z. that the written form used in Switzerland is much closer to the spoken idiom than an outspoken "Schriftlichkeit" as this may be the case in FRSG. This becomes even more outspoken if we take an example from the popular press. We choose a passage from the Boulevard Press: "BLICK" (26.08.96):

(ix) "Bruno und seine Mama sitzen hinter Gittern! Spanische Polizisten verhafteten die Drahtzieher in der Korruptionsaffäre im Bundesamt für Statistik. Noch letzte Woche fühlte sich Bruno Bättig (34) sicher:" and then in direct speech, a style characteristic for this type of paper: "Die Bundesanwaltschaft hat doch nichts gegen mich in der Hand. Es wird Jahre dauern bis die spanische Polizei auch nur einen Finger rührt."

The whole passage can easily be read in dialect, the only change to be made is to exchange the past tense for the perfect tense, since Swiss dialects have only a present and a perfect tense.

But also in the language of the law such differences can be shown. The German "Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch" writes in §2 on attaining majority:

(x) "Die Volljährigkeit tritt mit der Vollendung des achtzehnten Lebensjahres ein."

The Swiss "Schweizerisches Zivilgesetzbuch" on the other hand describes the same content with. §14

(xi) "Mündig ist, wer das (20.) 18. (since 1.1.1996) Lebensjahr vollendet hat".

It is important to realise the communicative-cultural implications in these ways of expression as well as the citizen's attitude towards the law: it should be "bürgernah", in other words intelligible for the reader, close to his way of expression in his vernacular. Regarding the Civil Code, the Swiss text stresses the citizen's so-to-speak 'active', even personal position, whereas

the text of the German Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch prefers abstract terms like 'Volljährigkeit' (majority) and 'Vollendung' (completion).

5. DIGLOSSIC RELATIONSHIPS

Let us try to show the relationship between these different languages or language varieties in a more abstract way:

S shall mean Standard German (or the principal language)

D shall mean a dialect of this language which does not only differ in phonology and suprasegmental elements but also in syntax, morphology and semantics

and n_x, n_y shall indicate an undefined number of different functions.

Then the relationship might be shown as:

$$\text{Diglossia} = Sn_x + Dn_y$$
$$\text{where} \quad n_x =/= n_y$$

if we apply this to the Swiss situation of today we must put the dialect in first place and attribute a fairly limited scope to the 'Schriftsprache' variety. The index 'ch' shall indicate 'Swiss'.

$$\text{Diglossia}_{ch} = Dn_y + Sn_x$$
$$\text{where} \quad n_y > n_x$$

Now, what is missing in this form of notation is the way of expression, which Werlen (1992) calls the 'culture of communication'

In order to bring this into the notation we add an index 'cc' meaning 'culture of communication'::

$$\text{Diglossia}_{ch} = D\,n_{y/cc} + Sn_{x/cc}$$

Yet we do not know whether S in this case is the Standard Language as used in the country, in the case of Switzerland that is the variety of German called 'Schriftsprache' (CHSG), or the Standard Language as used in Germany (FRSG). We showed above that the difference is not only one within the area generally called 'grammar' but also one of a different culture of communication. Thus the dialect-speaker is actually faced with two standard languages, Schriftsprache (CHSG) and Hochdeutsch (FRSG), each with its own idiosyncracies. If we put again Snx1 for the functions in 'Hochdeutsch', and Snx2 for the functions in 'Schriftsprache' with the respective appertaining 'culture of communication', ch1 for Germany and ch2 for German-speaking Switzerland, the notation would then be

$$\text{Diglossia}_{ch} = Dn_{y/cc2} + \begin{array}{l} Snx1/cc1 \\ Snx2/cc2 \end{array}$$

Now the dialect-speaker's linguistic situation is even more complex than this, since not only the culture of communication is a significant parameter but also what is generally called 'culture' or the culture of a particular country or speech community. A Swiss research programme (NFP 21, quoted in Werlen, I., 1992:4) defined 'culture' as follows: "Culture is the individual and collective mastering of existence (Daseinsbewältigung). It forms the basic way of life and the concept of society and individual, creates the socio-cultural community and defines its identity....." and, very importantly, it adds: "Complex societies.....are characterized by a cultural pluralism, by a plurality of partial cultures." Thus one must consider that for all components that build up the diglossic pattern the parameter of a community's or an individual's 'way of life', or to put it briefly and simply, 'culture', must be included in our argument. What is significant of an individual's culture is difficult to define; it is easier do so for a society or community, since it comprises such institutions as schools, government, political structure and political culture, church, traditions, festivities, all kinds of organisations, and, in the narrower sense of culture, of course also the arts, music, theatre, literature and so forth. Language as such is always a metaphor for, or a symbol of, realities, a metaphor or symbol of things. Therefore, we must add a cultural factor to our notation. The index denoting 'culture' shall be k. And, since the underlying culture of, say, Germany differs from the culture underlying German-speaking Switzerland, we write k1 for the culture in the country of the principal language, in this case the German Republic, and k2 for the culture of its diglossic partner, in this case Switzerland. We can then enlarge our notation as follows:

$$Diglossia_{ch} = D_{ny/cc2/k2} + \begin{array}{l} Snx1/cc1/k1 \\ \\ Snx2/cc2/k2 \end{array}$$

where cc is part of k

If we express this once again in words, this would mean that the dialect-speaker in a diglossic situation when resorting to a standard language must constantly monitor his speech against the culture of communication of his vernacular and its underlying culture and, if he or she chooses to do so, against the culture of communication and the underlying culture of the principal language, in this case against the Standard German of the Federal Republic, commonly referred to as 'Hochdeutsch'. Moreover it must be added that the distance from, or the difference between, his or her native dialect and one of the Standard German varieties may differ from dialect to dialect, since some Swiss dialects have grown closer to the 'Schriftsprache', whereas others have preserved a more original, broader state of dialect. For instance the dialects of Appenzell Innerrhoden or of the German-speaking part of the Valais also differ in all respects, linguistically, as to culture of communication and underlying culture, from other Swiss dialects. Furthermore, the dialects spoken in the towns, say the dialect spoken in the town of Zurich, are sometimes closer to the Swiss Standard German . Also it is maintained that the dialects spoken by younger people may have become corrupted to some extent and this has resulted in regionally equalised dialects.(see Werlen, I. 1988:95, Ris, R. 1979).

6. CONCLUSION

Summing up, we may say that diglossia for dialect-speakers or speakers of minor or minority languages means being placed in linguistic systems which presuppose a speaker's awareness of a multitude of parameters or factors. Depending on the speaker's linguistic needs these parameters may or will become important to safeguard speech behaviours which retain a speaker's individuality and his or her intentions and mode of expression. In the case of Swiss

dialect-speakers, diglossia is strongly influenced by the speaker's culture of communication, the underlying general culture, possibly also his or her regional or local variety of this culture, and the individual's personal attitude towards the dialect and the varieties of Standard German. This may also be true of languages in other speech communities. Complex diglossia may also exist between their native mother-tongue or dialect and one or several varieties of a standard or widely understood language. On account of the complexities we have outlined in this paper, we maintain for German-speaking Switzerland that diglossia in fact becomes triglossia, consisting of a dialect plus two varieties of the Standard Language. This type of triglossia, however, differs from triglossia as described for instance for Tunisia where Classical and Tunisian Arabic and French are in diglossic distribution(see Romaine 1989:34). Also it must be noted that for Swiss-German diglossia socio-linguistic, psychological, emotional and subjective valuation resulting in attitudes have become essential constituents of whereas earlier parameters such as phonology and above all H(igh) and L(ow) grading, the parameters of paramount importance in the diglossic systems met with in Asia and the Carribean, have lost their determining or even characterising value.

In view of these facts it may be argued that also in a more general sense diglossia in the present time has changed its nature as compared with the original definitions given by Fergusson, Gumperz, Fishman and others. The parameters are, as we outlined for diglossia in German-speaking Switzerland, no longer, or to a much lesser degree, phonological or grammatical ones or those of more or less prestige of the language used. In their place speaker's attitude to the idiom used, speaker's and listener's psychological and emotional reactions and direct language needs as in the case of minor languages or business and science have become the constituents of present-day diglossic situations and diglossic systems.

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ABBREVIATIONS:

FRSG   = Federal Republic Standard German ("Hochdeutsch")

CHSG   = Swiss Standard German ("Schriftsprache")

D   = Dialect

Indices:

n_x = number of functions

ch   = Swiss

cc   = culture of communication

k   = culture (general)