

French-German Bilingual Education in Alsace

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After a discussion of the past history of the instruction of German in Alsatian schools, this paper focuses on a recent and new development — the introduction of bilingual instruction (half of the time in French, the other half in German) in a series of pre-elementary and elementary schools, public as well as private. Since other forms of German instruction continue to exist (a three-hour and a six-hour system) the motivation and incentive for this new (and politically highly unexpected) decision is discussed, the methodology and aims are contrasted with those of the other systems and the first evaluations are published and analysed. Also, since the continuation of this bilingual instruction system on the secondary school level is projected, we try to evaluate how this evolution may possibly affect the overall linguistic situation of Alsace and how it meets the aspirations of the advocates of an official bilingual statute for the region.

Introduction

For scholars of languages and dialects in contact (and its educational aspects) Alsace is interesting in many respects. Not only has it always been a border region where two languages and cultures met but most of all, due to a specific historical evolution, it occupies a special position among linguistic minorities in Europe (Harnisch, 1996). In less than a century, Alsace has changed its nationality no less than four times and at every occurrence both the French and the Germans were eager to directly influence and manipulate the linguistic habits of the Alsatians and devised language policy measures, including a large number of laws and regulations concerning the educational system and its language of instruction (Bister-Broosen, 1998).

In traditional dialect geography, the Upper Rhine territory is usually described as a continuum of Alemannic dialects in which the Rhine was never considered to be a real language border (Maurer, 1942). This linguistic unity of the Upper Rhine region does not exist anymore. France's language policy in Alsace after World War II, the strong linguistic ties with that country, and the fact that the dialects are influenced by standard French, were the main causes for the disruption of the former unity between Alsace and neighbouring Germany (Baden) (Klausmann, 1990: 210).

Three linguistic and communication systems presently coexist in the Alsace area: standard French, standard German and Alsatian dialects (Hartweg, 1984). Native speakers are only to be found of the first and the last systems, the number of people having been socialised in standard German being statistically small.

Whatever competence in standard German Alsatians have, it has been acquired by learning German as a foreign language. Most people socialised in an Alsatian dialect have acquired mastery of standard French in very much the same way, i.e. as a foreign language (all Alsatians have at least some knowledge of French). People socialised in French, on the other hand, often have no more than a passive knowledge of Alsatian, if any (Bister-Broosen, 1996, 138–9). French is the official prestige language, standard German is used almost exclusively for written purposes and the Alsatian dialects are mainly used orally (Bister-Broosen, 1997: 306).

An enquiry carried out by the polling institute *Iserco* of a representative sample of the Alsatian population of all generations revealed that in Alsace overall 70.7% of the population 'are able to speak Alsatian' (*Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*, 15 March 1990). More thorough investigations, including questions as to the domains in which, and the interlocutors with whom Alsatian is used, usually yield much more alarming returns, showing a rapid decline of the use of the language. In Bister-Broosen (1996), based on an investigation among youngsters (15–19 years of age), it is reported that, although 54% the informants claim mastery of the Alsatian dialect, the use they make of Alsatian is minimal. The family, it appears, 'is the only domain in which dialect use is still considerable; within that domain it is conversation with the grandparents ... The informants almost never use their dialect proficiency in public settings or formal domains ... it is hardly ever used with siblings and with peers' (Bister-Broosen, 1996: 154).

The future of a minority language depends to a large extent on how it is treated in the education system. According to Philipps (1980: 90) the insufficient amount of German and or Alsatian instruction is one of the paramount reasons for the present decline of the language of the Alsatians in this part of France. Yet during recent years, major changes have been introduced in the Alsatian education system, providing elementary schools with three different types of German language instruction. In this paper we describe, analyse and evaluate those changes and programmes in depth. We will start, therefore, with a short overview of the past history of German language instruction in the Alsatian school system.

Past History

The major part of Alsace has belonged to France since the Westphalian Peace Treaty (1648), after which the French king, Louis XIV, annexed most of the region. The resistance of the Free '*Reichsstadt*' of Straßburg against the French lasted until 1681, whereas Mülhausen, which had an alliance with Switzerland, was only incorporated into France in 1797, as the result of a referendum. German-speaking Lorraine was annexed in 1766 (Akten, 1989: 59). Although the French '*Conseil d'Etat*' decreed in 1685 that all official documents in Alsace had to be drawn in French '*par affection pour le Roy*' (for love of the King) (Denis & Veltman, 1989: 13), there was no real language policy during the time of the monarchy, let alone a deliberate policy of Frenchification. The habitual policy of the French in annexed territories used to be to maintain the traditions and the language of the new subjects as much as possible and to refrain from interfering with the school system.

The first real change occurred after the French Revolution (1789), the new

revolutionary leaders being the first to try to thoroughly gallicise the Alsatian population. The propagation of French being one of the major revolutionary tasks, they intended to provide the subjects of all parts of France with a uniform language (Willemyns, 1997: 57). The revolutionary period meant the real start of a Frenchification policy which was to continue ever after.

The practical effects in Alsace of the school system reform of December 1793 (every commune in France had to provide a French language primary school education at no cost), were small mainly because of the lacking of the basic prerequisites — sufficient teachers and students mastering the French language. On the other hand, French substituted German as the language of instruction in high schools and universities in 1808. Thus, although the role of French in primary schools remained marginal for a long time, in high schools and universities it acquired a strong position during the first third of the 19th century.

During the Second Empire (1850–1870) there was an intensive and systematic propaganda campaign on behalf of the use of the French language. One of its vital components was the policy of school authorities to intensify French language instruction to the point of almost completely ousting German. The churches, on the other hand, continued to consider German as the most important tool of instruction in their primary schools, with French as a necessary and important complement. The success of boarding schools for girls accounted for a rapid progress of French amongst the middle class (Hartweg, 1989).

As a consequence of the Franco-German war the peace treaty of Frankfurt (1871) returned Alsace and Lorraine to Germany, as a '*Reichsland*', instigating a thorough change in the linguistic situation. Not only was the advance of French halted but, also, the language measures of the German government considerably enhanced both the use and the prestige of High German. We witness a rapid and thorough penetration of German in all domains of public life in spite of (or thanks to) a great many transitional measures in favour of French (Woytt, 1994). In primary schools, German replaced French as the medium of instruction, and at all other school levels, German became the habitual language of instruction, except in the French speaking villages of Alsace and Lorraine, where instruction continued to be in French (Akten, 1989: 60).

The new German university at Strasbourg was meant to reflect 'the greatness and the superiority of German culture and scholarship' (Vassberg, 1993: 17). It was also intended 'to assimilate Alsace', an assimilation which indeed appeared to progress steadily. The returns of the censuses of 1900, 1905 and 1910 show that 94% of the Alsatian population indicated German to be their 'mother tongue'. As Stephens (1978: 345) says: 'Alsace, economically flourishing and with a modern, progressive administration, was beginning to grow accustomed to its new situation', and Vassberg (1993: 17–18) adds: 'Even many Francophiles saw positive aspects — economic and cultural — in German rule'.

When the Versailles Treaty (1918) returned Alsace and Lorraine to France once more, the French authorities were determined to start a policy of systematic assimilation, intended to Frenchify not only some sections or social classes, but also the Alsatian population at large. Since the main 'weapon' in this Gallicisation policy was to be the school, the Alsatian opposition against the new language

policy was mainly concentrated on French education measures which were based on the following principles (Hartweg, 1984):

- French was to be the sole language of instruction;
- most of the 'local' teachers were forced to complete training periods in the '*intérieur*' (the habitual term used in Alsace to designate the rest of France), in order to obtain, or to keep, their teaching licence;
- the so-called '*méthode directe*' was officially introduced; it meant that without consideration for their actual situation, Alsatian students were considered to be in no different linguistic position than their colleagues in the rest of France and to have French as their mother tongue (this is why, very soon, they were called 'the sacrificed generation').

Fierce opposition, supported by most of the local political parties and the churches, succeeded in forcing the government to certain concessions as far as linguistic school regulations were concerned. Initially, three hours of German language instruction a week from the fourth grade onward were intended and the religious instruction (four times a week) was to be conducted in High German. Between 1927 and 1940 (as a consequence of the opposition mentioned above), instruction in German started in the second semester of the second year. Yet, it was generally felt that neither language really profited from this kind of situation. An Alsatian member of the French Senate described the situation in the following way: 'The children are taught a language they don't understand, and the language they do understand is not taught' (quoted in Hartweg, 1984: 1964; we have translated all non-English quotations into English). Consequently, the compulsory measures of the French were responsible for a situation which has been labelled as '*le malaise alsacien*' (the Alsatian malaise), referring to a condition of linguistic insecurity. On the one hand, competence in High German ceased to be that of a native speaker while the usage of the dialect was frowned upon. On the other hand, reaching a workable competence in French appeared to be an impossible goal for most Alsatians since no language didactic measures were introduced to help them.

In 1940, Alsace was once more taken over by Germany. The language policy of the Nazis mirrored their general policy: it was ruthless and brutal. On 16 August 1940 it was decreed that German was to be the only language authorised to be used in official domains, including the school system. By then, High German was felt to be the language of the Nazis, of occupation, of collaboration even, and these linguistic measures were qualified by contemporary and later observers as 'language terror' (Hartweg, 1989).

According to Stephens (1978: 351) Nazism probably 'did more for the French cause in Alsace than all the French patriots in Paris up to 1939'. Hartweg (1984: 1965) adds that, whereas in 1918 High German was regarded only as the 'language of the adversary' ('*Sprache des Feindes*'), in 1945 it was considered and treated as an 'adverse language' ('*feindliche Sprache*') and an insufficient command of French on the part of the Alsatians led to 'diffuse feelings of collective guilt'. The fact that, after the war, there was no real protest against treating High German as 'a foreign language' in the education system has to be considered a direct consequence of these feelings.

After World War II, and for the first time in Alsatian history, the German

language was banned from Alsatian schools in order to, as it was phrased 'allow the French language to recuperate the ground it had lost during the war' (Akten, 1989: 74). At the same time, the language policy of the French became both more subtle, and more harsh than before. A campaign, using the slogan '*C'est chic de parler français*' (to speak French is chic) (Beyer, 1989: 295), was meant to appeal to the desire for social integration and assimilation of those striving to become part of the powerful and the rich, of the important and '*chic*' people. Upward social mobility, it was indicated unmistakably, would only be possible through shifting to French. All of this was corroborated by harsh linguistic legislation: High German was completely banned from the school system. In the preschool system that was introduced simultaneously, use of the dialect was made impossible and even punished. Parents of dialect-speaking children were officially warned that, if they wanted to prevent their children from being expelled from school, they had to make sure that they became French speaking overnight. This 'direct method', as it was called, although pedagogically absurd, appeared to be politically very successful, even if the consequence was that the 'Alsatian malaise' (insufficient competence in both languages) was intensified. Another characteristic slogan during this campaign was the continuously repeated: '*Oubliez chaque jour un mot de dialecte et apprenez un nouveau mot de français*' (forget a dialect word every day and acquire a French word instead)! For most parents this was reason enough to switch to French since they feared that socialising their children in the dialect 'would lead to discrimination in the classroom and would jeopardize academic success' (Hartweg, 1984: 1967).

It was only in 1952 that German was reintroduced as an optional subject in the two final classes of the primary school in those villages 'where the Alsatian dialect was still used as the main means of communication' (Hartweg, 1981: 100). Because of a lack of volunteering teachers and financial resources, and due to the fact that it was not an examination subject, this optional instruction, for which two-and-a-half hours a week were insufficient anyway, often did not take place at all. It was only after the extension of compulsory instruction to 16 years during the 1960s, that a majority of youngsters had regular access to German language instruction again.

A New Education Policy

In 1972, the '*Ministère de l'Éducation*' introduced, on a trial basis, the so-called 'audiovisual Holderith-Method', which aimed at making the acquisition of High German easier through the medium of the Alsatian dialect. This method was gradually expanded and initially the results were quite satisfactory, (i.e. as long as the Alsatian dialect was the mother tongue of almost all students, and as long as the majority of the teachers still displayed a perfect command of the German standard language). Yet, as the Alsatian, René Schickele-Gesellschaft, observed, 'the goal to guarantee German language instruction to all children and families who so desire is not met. In Strasbourg and Mulhouse, only 45–50% of the children are reached' (*Land un Sproch* 4, 1985: 13).

In 1975 the 'Haby'-law made it possible to organise courses in 'regional language and culture' in France. Yet, the '*Recteur*' of the Academy of Strasbourg (in France all state schools are under the authority of the '*recteurs de l'académie*')

waited until June 1982 to issue a circular 'to promote the use of dialect from kindergarten onward' (Denis & Veltman, 1989: 17).

As a consequence of the 'Treaty of Friendship' between France and the Federal Republic of Germany in 1984, an agreement was made between Alsace and the neighbouring German 'Länder' to promote close contacts between schools in the border region. This project started in 1986 under the motto '*Lesne die Sprache des Nachbarn — Apprends la langue du voisin*' (learn the language of your neighbour). Although it was very much appreciated and quite successful, many Alsatians pointed out that in their case German was not only the language of their neighbours but their own language as well (Beyer, 1989: 298).

It is only during recent years that a much more important and fundamental change has occurred. The numbers of dialect-speaking children and of teachers with a sufficient command of High German having dramatically diminished, it became clear that at the end of the 1980s the kind of German language instruction as offered by the Holderith method could not be very successful, the more so since in many classes it had ceased to exist altogether for lack of the voluntary cooperation of parents and teachers on which it was based. In 1980, therefore, advocates of Alsatian urged the French Minister of Education to create a new and double system which, apart from German language instruction of three hours a week in all schools starting in kindergarten, would also provide bilingual instruction to start in the first class of kindergarten, in which German would be the language of instruction during half of the week and French during the other half. Both demands were denied by the Ministry of Education.

In 1990, parents originating from approximately 20 different places in Alsace once more strongly demanded this type of bilingual education. Since, once again, the demand was rejected by the '*Académie de Strasbourg*', Mr P. Kleinclaus, the director of the department of '*Langue et culture régionale*' of the '*Conseil Général du Département du Haut-Rhin*' (the regional government), privately drafted a project that would make possible the organisation of so-called 'associative bilingual classes'. An organisation called '*ABCM-Zweisprachigkeit*' ('Association pour le bilinguisme dès la classe maternelle' (Association for the advancement of bilingual education starting from kindergarten onward)) was founded for this purpose. In September 1992, the French Ministry of Education agreed to start a bilingual education system and, simultaneously, to significantly increase the number of schools in which German language instruction of three weekly hours would be provided. On 7 January 1993 an agreement was made between the French Ministry of Education on the one side and the Chairman of the '*Conseil Général du Haut-Rhin*' on the other, allowing for bilingual instruction on a larger scale. The Ministry agreed to assume the financial cost of providing learning materials for the '*enseignement bilingue paritaire*' as it is called now, i.e. for classes in which German and French are each the medium of instruction for half of the week (13 hours). The German part was to be taught by teachers with sufficient command of German and who volunteered for the job. In case their numbers would be insufficient, it was agreed that teachers could be solicited from other schools or from Germany. Their wages would be paid by the Alsatian school administration (*Land un Sproch* 109, 1993-94: 9-11). Thirty-eight such classes were set up during the school year 1992-93. The René Schickele-Gesellschaft warmly

applauded this new turn of events, yet, pointed out that this only affected 0.5% of the total of classes and calculated 'how long it would take at this pace until at least 50% of students would be able to enlist in bilingual classes' (*Land un Sproch* 108, 1993–4: 9). The tone became more optimistic because the new system, which started at kindergarten level, 'was to be continued in primary education and probably also in secondary schools' (*Land un Sproch* 109, 1993–94: 11). The 'Département du Bas-Rhin' followed suit in October 1993 and in 1995 bilingual instruction commenced in 26 kindergarten classes, while a system providing for six weekly hours of German language instruction was started in 26 other ones.

At the beginning of the school year of 1995, the state school system in Alsace totalled 73 bilingual classes (as compared to 46 classes in the preceding year, and to an overall total of approximately 7000 classes), attended by some 1500 students; 157 classes with 2951 students were providing six weekly hours of German language instruction (CRA, 1995). As the students advanced from one class to the next, the bilingual education system increased in size.

The association 'ABC-M-Zweisprachigkeit' is currently in charge of 16 classes in both the Haut-Rhin and the Bas-Rhin (*Land un Sproch* 116, 1995: 12). The latest (unofficial) report shows that, at the beginning of the school year in September 1996, the number of bilingual classes had risen to 116 (in 40 different schools), and the number of students to approximately 2800. Level CM1 (fourth grade; see below) has now been reached (*Land un Sproch* 121, 1996: 13). This type of school bilingualism does not involve the (mainly spoken) indigenous language (Alsatian) but its related standard (High German) instead.

The next phase in the progress of bilingual instruction was the passing of a 'Contrat de Plan Etat-Région', an accord between four partners, the French Republic, the *Conseil Régional d'Alsace*, the *Conseil Général du Bas-Rhin* and the *Conseil Général du Haut-Rhin*, on 7 April 1994. This was meant to increase and advance the so-called '*enseignement bilingue précoce*' (early bilingual instruction); the official text of the agreement has been published in CRA (1995).

Before discussing this in more detail, contextual information is provided as to the way the French school system is organised (Auduc & Bayard-Pierlot, 1995). In France the kindergarten and primary school levels are combined into one level, the first cycle of which is called the '*cycle des apprentissages premiers*' and comprises the first and the second year of the 'pre-elementary school' ('*maternelle*'). Its first class is called 'PS' (*Petite section*, for 2- or 3-year-olds), its second one the 'MS' (*Moyenne section*, for 4-year-olds). The second cycle combines the third year of the pre-elementary school (called 'GS' i.e. '*Grande section*', for 5-year-olds), with the first and second year of the elementary school. Its first class, called 'CP' i.e. '*Cours préparatoire*', constitutes the first year of compulsory education (for 6-year-olds); its second class is the CE1 ('*cours élémentaire*', for 7-year-olds). The third cycle comprises the third (CE2) year ('*cours élémentaire*' for 8-year-olds), the fourth (CM1) year ('*cours moyen*' for 9-year-olds) and the fifth (CM2) year (second '*cours moyen*' for 10-year-olds) of the elementary school. This cycle is called the '*cycle des approfondissements*'. The 'Collège' then, constitutes the first cycle of secondary education. Its first class (for 11-year-olds) is called '*sixième*', then follow the '*cinquième*', '*quatrième*' and '*troisième*'. In principle the '*sixième*' is the class in which the instruction of a first foreign language is started (LV1), the second one starting

in the '*quatrième*' (LV2). The '*Lycée*', finally, groups the '*seconde*', the '*première*' and the '*terminale*' (final class) at the end of which the exam for the '*baccalauréat*' (graduation from High School) can be taken.

Article 1.3.1. of the '*contrat*' stresses the importance of drawing on the already existing 'natural bilingualism', along with extending the 'secondary bilingualism' (Baetens Beardsmore, 1986) by means of an appropriate instruction. It states the following priorities:

- the further development of bilingual instruction in both kindergarten and elementary schools;
- the generalisation of early German language instruction;
- the establishment of 'trilingual and European' sections (i.e. featuring a supplementary foreign language);
- the enhancement of proficiency in German as a 'general and job-related language';
- the 'renovation' of the optional subject 'regional language and culture' (i.e. Alsatian) in High School.

For the total duration of a four year project, 100 million FF (= 20 million \$) is provided by the parties involved.

In order to improve the teacher training, which is seen as essential and decisive for the success of this enterprise, a training centre for bilingual instruction has been set up in Guebwiller ('*Centre de formation aux enseignements bilingues*'). It is the first one in France, and as a pilot project, it benefits from the investment of 18 million FF (3.6 million \$), financed by the Alsatian '*Région*' and both '*Départements*'. The overhead expenses are paid for by the French state and the centre functions in close collaboration with the teacher training department of the University of Strasbourg. The '*Centre*' was officially inaugurated in May 1996.

The text of the Treaty contains detailed instructions as to the way in which the 'development of bilingualism and of German language instruction' is to be brought about:

(1) In elementary school:

The pedagogical continuity of bilingual instruction at the point of transition between kindergarten and the elementary school has to be guaranteed. The 'maximal' goal is to have one school with a complete bilingual programme in the area of every high school; the 'minimal' one to secure that during the time of the project at least twenty more such schools are being set up in Alsace at large.

In all other schools the existing German language instruction has to be at least continued and possibly enlarged. The 'three hour' system of teaching of German is now present in most schools of the 'cycle 3'. Its introduction in all cycles and classes has been decided.

(2) At secondary level the main aim is to deepen the teaching objectives defined for the elementary school through:

The conservation and further development of German language instruction that immediately follows the instruction programme of the elementary school. An LV¹ instruction must be provided for beginners.

The extension of 'European French-German Sections', which are to include regional language and culture.

Research on which kind of courses are to be developed for those students who will soon leave the bilingual classes of elementary school. The deadline was set for 1997.

The pedagogical and methodological renovation of the courses in 'regional language and culture'.

In order to meet these goals, the Ministry of Education has pledged to speed up the teacher training of German language teachers both at the beginning and at the advanced levels and to make extensive use of all teacher exchange possibilities offered by the French-German Treaty. Every year at least ten new jobs for 'bilingualism teachers' and 20 new bilingual classes or sections will be created.

Structure and Methodology

Currently the following systems of German language teaching are in existence in Alsatian pre-elementary and elementary schools.

The three hour programme

This is now offered from level CE2 onward in all schools under the authority of the Strasbourg '*Académie*' as well as in some classes of the second cycle. The plans are to make them available to all classes in this cycle as soon as possible. The objective is that the German language instruction be given by the regular class teacher. If s/he is not able or willing to do so, another teacher from the same school, a neighbouring school or from outside (e.g. from Germany) will be given the assignment.

The continuation of German language instruction in all high schools is guaranteed: starting from the first high school year and onwards, German can be chosen as the first 'foreign' language. The most advanced students are also given the opportunity to start with a supplementary foreign language.

The six hour programme

Both in the pre-elementary and in elementary schools some class activities are conducted in German and/or some subjects are taught in that language. Alphabetisation starts in French but very soon German is incorporated in the reading lessons (starting from CP or during CE1).

In those regions where Alsatian is still widely used, Standard German will be replaced by Alsatian 'in order to facilitate the natural and gradual transition to Standard German in the elementary school' (quoted from a brochure issued by the departmental administration in Colmar). The final goal is an 'intensified learning' of the German language.

The bilingual instruction

Both in the pre-elementary and in elementary schools, half of the class activities will be conducted and half of the subjects will be taught in German.

Alphabetisation starts in French but very soon German is incorporated in the reading lessons (starting from CP or during CE1).

In those regions where Alsatian is still widely used, Standard German will be replaced by Alsatian in pre-elementary schools 'in order to facilitate the natural and gradual transition to Standard German in the elementary school'.

The final goal is to reach equal competence in both French and German by the end of the elementary school, based on the principles and methods of 'natural language acquisition'.

Furthermore it is intended to bring children in contact with native speakers of Standard German as soon and as often as possible, (e.g. through school, class and teacher exchanges). Since the cooperation of parents is essential, parents who are able to do so are advised to use Alsatian with their offspring as often as possible, to provide them with German-language books and papers and to have them watch German language television programmes regularly. Also, parents are encouraged to grant their children the opportunity of participating in immersion stays in German-language environments.

The major conditions for successful bilingual instruction are seen to be the following:

- it has to start as early as possible;
- a maximum of contact hours: both languages must necessarily be used every day and to the same amount for the 'immersion effect' to have its greatest possible impact;
- the 'one language – one teacher' principle: both languages have to be used and taught by different teachers;
- strong support in the family.

Evaluation and Results

No doubt, what we are witnessing here constitutes a very important development which, almost inevitably, has given way (and is still giving way) to opposition, not only from associations such as the '*Association pour la promotion de l'enseignement en Français*' (Association for the promotion of instruction in French), but also from the '*Syndicat des enseignants*' (the teachers' union). Consequently, a thorough evaluation of the results was needed quickly.

As far as the '*ABC-M-Zweisprachigkeit*' schools are concerned, an interim report of the results of a partial evaluation confirms that students in these bilingual classes are achieving better, not only in general but also for French, than those enlisted in monolingual classes to which they were compared: 'At the end of the third class of kindergarten the "*compréhension de l'allemand*" (comprehension of German) almost equals that of native speakers and the mastery of French is very often even higher than in students of French-speaking schools. The same applies to other subjects, such as e.g. mathematics (Klein, 1995).

In 1997, there are no more major pedagogical differences left between the *ABC-M*-classes and those under the authority of the '*Académie de Strasbourg*'. Yet, in the pre-elementary *ABC-M*-classes the activities in German are scheduled in the morning, (i.e. at the time of the day which appears most favourable for second language instruction). In the bilingual classes of state schools this is not the case: French and German language activities are scheduled alternately in the morning

and in the afternoon. Furthermore in ABCM-schools instruction in German is given by native speakers (Kleinclaus, 1995). In state schools this is simply not possible because teachers have to be appointed on the basis of the results of the national teachers exam for France at large.

In the state schools under the authority of the Strasbourg 'Académie' a yearly and thorough evaluation is carried out by the academy's 'Commission académique d'évaluation de l'enseignement des langues'. For the three systems involved, the competence in German as well as the competence in French and mathematics is evaluated.

In 'L'enseignement bilingue précoce 1991-1994. Bilan d'étape' (Colmar, Conseil Général du Haut-Rhin, 1995), the results of the latest evaluation carried out between 7 March and 16 April 1994 were published. The teaching sequences, the 'comprehension' of the children and the use of language have been evaluated, as well as the interaction between students and teachers and among students, and the 'linguistic production' of the students. We will now briefly discuss their findings and recommendations (CRA, 1995).

The bilingual instruction

'Classes du Cycle 1' (an evaluation of ten classes).

Both the passive competence and the comprehension ability of the students is satisfactory. Both proficiency and interest of the students grow with their age.

'Cycle 2' (evaluation of four classes)

The passive competence and comprehension of the students is rated between 'good' and 'excellent'. According to the commission, the number of Alsatian-speaking students in a class is hardly relevant as far as the overall achievements of the class is concerned.

The six hour system

'Classes de moyenne et de grande section' (evaluation of eleven classes)

The results are very variable and are influenced, the commission says, by the number of Alsatian speakers in the class, the students' motivation, the coordination between the teachers, and the extent of the 'human and material resources'.

'Classes de cours préparatoires' (evaluation of nine classes)

The passive competence and comprehension are lower and, at the same time, the differences among the students more extensive than in the bilingual classes.

The three hour system

Passive competence and comprehension are less developed than in both the six hour and the bilingual system. The three hour system is perceived as 'significantly less efficient'.

Remarks and Recommendations

Although the experiment with the six hour system is called 'interesting' (provided the instruction is carried out in adequate pedagogical and material circumstances) it should be regarded as a transition stage, and meant to relocate

students to either the three hour or the bilingual system. The commission feels that students should not be kept in this system for too long, since otherwise they are in danger of acquiring an insufficient competence and their general progress will slow down.

As to the bilingual system, the commission feels that the efficiency of the system, evidenced by the sound competence displayed by the students, grows with the number of immersion hours provided. Yet, the possibilities for 'interactive communication' in the classroom have to be considerably extended and better lesson materials must be provided. Also, there is an urgent need for a more accurate definition of the teaching goals as well as a more precise picture of the progress which is intended and may be expected.

The following recommendations, the commission suggests, might further increase the efficient functioning of bilingual instruction still:

- the teaching goals are to be defined more accurately;
- instruction has to be carried out more interactively and more communicatively;
- more attention has to be paid to the structure of the language in order to create better conditions for its functional and communicative usage. As is already the case with instruction in French, an 'implicit grammar' for German should be made the preliminary stage to an 'explicit grammar'.

As far as the results of the evaluation of French and mathematics are concerned, the main conclusions of the respective commissions (CRA, 1995) are that, although the French competence of monolingual and bilingual students is not significantly different, a small advantage for the bilinguals has been noticed (Index 108 vs. Index 100). The same holds true for the mathematics achievements of both groups, who are very much on the same level as well, yet here too with a small advantage for the bilingual group. An earlier evaluation in the (French) Basque Country where a similar system of bilingual instruction has been in existence for a longer time came to identical conclusions and yielded identical results. Exact figures, issued by the '*Académie de Bordeaux*' are to be found in Petit and Rosenblatt (1995, no page numbering, footnote 47)

Summarising the various commissions' findings we see that bilingual instruction not only leads to an increased competence in German but also to improved achievements in French and mathematics. Consequently, the system deserves to be expanded as soon as possible. The evaluation of 1996, of which only partial information was available at the time this article was written, signals progress for the mastery of German as well as French, as compared to the preceding year. A comparison between students of the bilingual and the monolingual system goes to the detriment of the latter (*Land un Sproch* 121, 1996: 12).

Final Conclusions

The current experiments with early bilingual instruction are not only in line with the wishes and the intentions of the Alsatian population but also with those of the present regional political leadership. The evaluation of results has demonstrated that the system seems to guarantee better school performance, not

only in German language competence, but also in general cognitive competence and the mastery of the French language.

The experiments are all very recent and the amount of data is still too small to allow for a reliable scientific analysis. Also, research during recent years has demonstrated that the efficiency of bilingual educational systems and/or methodologies aimed at introducing bi- or multilingual skills is partly determined by the specification of the concrete goals one wants to achieve. Whenever it is the target to enlarge competence in a less prestigious language, some kind of immersion method is probably the most suitable one, as has been demonstrated recently in an investigation and analysis of the Catalan situation (Vila, 1996). In Alsace, though, to demand a school system in which the early instruction would be solely in German may not yet be politically realistic. This is the reason, (given in an interview with Mr Kleinclaus) that an immersion system has yet to be introduced. He is convinced, though, that very soon immersion is exactly what the parents will demand. However, many advocates of bilingualism in Alsace seem to be rather pleased with what has been achieved during recent years.

A generalisation of bilingual instruction would be in line with what the majority of the Alsatian population has been claiming for a long time, according to an opinion poll carried out by *Iserco* in 1989 (a complete overview of the results is given in *Land un Sproch* 96, 1990: 10–11). Sixty-six percent of the interviewees (and 76.5% of those speaking Alsatian) requested an 'official language statute', as well as 'a legally established recognition of the regional language and its rights alongside the French language of the nation'. For 74%, a generalised French-German (meaning both High German and Alsatian) bilingual statute ought to be introduced as soon as possible. As to the school system, 81% of the respondents were in favour of bilingual education in the elementary school, 77% in high schools and 62% in kindergarten. Furthermore, 60% were convinced that 'a more appropriate training for teachers of the regional language and culture' was absolutely necessary, all of which corroborates the commissions' opinions mentioned above.

As far as the possible influence on the general linguistic situation in Alsace is concerned, the relevant question is whether it is reasonable to expect that the educational changes discussed in this paper could support the continuation or the reintroduction of general bilingual skills in Alsace at large. The loss of the Alsatian mother tongue is already so widely advanced and the possibilities of use for Alsatian or Standard German in official domains are so restricted (Bister-Broosen, 1996: 145–53), that even a generalisation of bilingual instruction is rather unlikely to bring about any major consequential changes, the more so since a revival of the Alsatian dialects has never been the purpose of the policy makers who introduced the bilingual education system.

The revival of High German in and through the educational system will certainly increase bilingual competence in general. It is not to be expected, though, that this will fundamentally change the linguistic habits of the Alsatians. Neither will increasing High German competence bring Alsatians to use this language among themselves in Alsace. Nor is it realistic to expect that it will lead to an increasing use of the Alsatian dialects. Both their number of speakers and the domains in which they are used are likely to continue to decrease steadily

and the current pace of dialect loss is unlikely to slow down either. Increasing bilingual skills, therefore, may not stop the current shift towards monolingual functioning in French. Also, since young Alsatians do not clearly realise what the relationship between Alsatian dialects and Standard German is (Bister-Broosen, 1997), increasing High German competence will not stop or slow down the ongoing monolingualisation of communication, not even if bilingual instruction were to be extended to all schools or if an Alsace-wide immersion system were to be installed.

A thorough and real change of the Alsatian linguistic situation (if possible at all) would require a complete rearrangement of the language political landscape. As long as the Alsatian dialects are strongly influenced by non-genetically related French instead of by Standard German, no change is likely to occur. A restoration of High German as the root language variety of the local dialects would presuppose the reintroduction of standard German as one of the official languages of administration, education, culture, politics and other aspects of public life. This, then, would imply the end of the monopoly position of French and it is not conceivable that a political decision to this avail will be taken by the French authorities.

Yet, the fact that the new educational policy will not be able to bring about this kind of fundamental change, does not mean that it is not to be acclaimed for what it is — a fundamentally new and very laudable orientation of the official policy, which will considerably enhance the chances of young Alsatians to acquire bilingual competence. The existence of ever more generations displaying an ever growing bilingual competence in French and Standard German is a thrilling perspective indeed (also viewed within the framework of European unification) and one can only hope that Alsatian and French politicians and school authorities will not only continue their present bilingual policy, but will enlarge it and quicken its pace.

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