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Localising international schools in multilingual Switzerland: From parental strategies to institutional dual-language programmes

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Abstract

This article aims to complexify the linguistic dimension of international schooling in light of the increasing diversification of the field but also as a result of the "banalisation" of English and the growing "added" value of multilingual competence in the knowledge economy. Drawing on data from focus groups with mobile families and institutional documents from an international school in Switzerland, we claim that the value of English-medium education to facilitate worldwide mobility is simultaneously conceived by parents as an obstacle for their children's acquisition of certain linguistic capitals in the locality. This engenders constant family (re-)evaluations of school choice and the development of strategies for children to acquire locally-available linguistic competences. The Swiss context activates the multilingual imagination of global middle-class families who demand that the school help their children maximise their chances of local linguistic capitalisation. In our case study, the current educational shift responds to parental desires for elite multilingualism with French and materialises in an optional dual-language programme to attract an increasing number of Swiss and established transnational families in a competitive eduscape.

Keywords: international schooling, English-medium education, Swiss eduscape, multilingual education, parental school choice

1. Introduction

The Lake Geneva region (Switzerland), with a foreign population of over 40% comprising a third of short-term residents, has a high concentration of private international schools. This private education market is divided into English-medium schools following the International Baccalaureate curricula and Swiss bilingual schools (French plus English and/or German) offering both national and international diplomas. They compete among themselves and

against the prestigious local public education system in French. Due to a significant drop in private school enrolment rates after 2010, private schools had to diversify their linguistic and curricular offer to cater for not only so-called “expats”, the traditional clientele, but also an increasing number of “local” and “established” transnational families.

This article examines a recent trend towards the incorporation of local languages (i.e., French) as a way of fostering the children’s multilingual profile in a traditionally English-medium international school, which we investigated as part of a broader study of two private schools in the Lake Geneva region. We focus on how different families navigate and negotiate the continuity and rupture in their children’s school trajectories, what their rationales for school choice are, and how they are instantiated by specific linguistic, pedagogical and curricular options. We aim to contribute to the emerging body of sociolinguistic knowledge on international schooling. Despite the central role of language in it, there is paucity of available sociolinguistic inquiry on international schools (for an exception see Sunyol, 2019; 2021). This is probably due to the fact that not only is international education almost always associated with English-medium instruction, but the former actually functions as a proxy for the latter (Sunyol, 2019). However, there is more (linguistically) than meets the eye. Languages other than English, for example, Chinese, are emerging as desirable capitals and gradually finding their way into international schooling (Codó and Sunyol, 2019). This article aims to complexify the linguistic dimension of international schooling in light of the increasing diversification of the field (Wu and Koh, 2023), but also as a result of the decreasing "banalisation” of English (Grin, 2015, p. 129) and the growing “added” value of multilingual competence in the knowledge economy (Barakos and Selleck, 2019).

This article is organised as follows. First, we situate our study objectives in relation to current developments in international schooling research. Then, we introduce the context of the Lake Geneva region foregrounding recent socioeconomic and political transformations and their impact on international education. The following section situates our study methodologically and outlines our data collection and ethical procedures. That section is followed by the analysis of our data. Finally, we offer some conclusions that foreground the novelty of our research perspective and underscore the need for more research on processes of localisation of international schools.

2. International schools: Institutions in transformation in competitive eduscapes

International schools are becoming major educational players around the world owing to their exponential growth (Bunnell, 2019). The scholarly literature on international schooling is vast and impossible to review here. For that reason, this section will selectively focus on those strands that are of particular relevance to this article.

We situate our study within current explorations of the interplay between the global and the local in international schooling. Recent studies, such as Wu and Koh (2023), have shown that, rather than a globally circulating cultural formation becoming seamlessly inserted into local contexts, the institution of the "international school" is subject to multifaceted processes of localisation, as a result, among others, of enforced state legislation, uneven socioeconomic and cultural processes and evolving *eduscapes*. In this article, we draw on the concept of eduscape, following Breidenstein et al. (2018, p. 163), to denote "a system, an apparatus characterised by an interconnected ensemble of institutions, architectural forms, regulatory negotiations, legislation, policies, as well as philosophical and moral discourse and positionings". The notion of eduscape allows us to situate transformations of institutional schooling as embedded in (and driven by) highly competitive educational marketplaces that are quickly responsive to shifting socioeconomic, political and cultural conditions.

Given the increasingly heterogenous profiles of families, rationales for parental choice are crucial to understanding the direction of changes in the international school industry. This study aims to add to the growing body of literature examining parental school choice (Mackenzie, Hayden and Thompson, 2003). Recent scholarship has begun to examine international education in relation to the educational choices of the "global middle classes" (GMCs). Ball and Nikita (2014, p. 85) define them as "managers and professionals and their families who move around the globe in the employ of multinational corporations as freelance experts". International schools have been reported to be key institutions in the formation of the GMCs, who are both highly mobile and post-nationally oriented. By and large, existing research has tried to identify the ways in which the choices of the GMCs have an impact on local education systems (see e.g., Sunyol, 2019). In this article, by contrast, we aim to do the opposite; we seek to understand how the local context of Switzerland, and more specifically, that of the French-speaking Lake Geneva area, shapes parental hopes and expectations in relation to the children's chances of linguistic capitalisation.

Research has shown that one major parental reason for international school choice is ensuring a smooth transition into a new country and school system (Breidenstein et al., 2018).

English and globally taught curricula such as the International Baccalaureate[1] work as mobility facilitators and reassurance factors for parents, as stated by the families in our study. However, as we will see, English only is not enough. Breidenstein et al. (2018) argue that "mobile families have to operate within the complex ideoscapes and social structures created around them" (p. 165). This is certainly the case among the families with whom we conducted our research, who partake in the worldwide and national imagination of Switzerland as an emblem of multilingualism in the Global North and want their children to benefit from it.

One major difference between past and present models of international schooling is related to its changing clientele. Indeed, as Bunnell (2014) points out, international schools no longer host –either exclusively or predominantly– the children of expatriate families, but are largely populated by "local" students, who bring their languages and cultures into the classroom. There are different reasons for this, as we shall see in the next section, but one of them, which is particularly relevant in the Swiss context, is the worsening of economic conditions for employees in multinational corporations (Bunnell, 2014) which have traditionally covered the school fees. While this new trend has in some cases been problematised by stakeholders and the media for challenging the international character of schools, we will see in our data how local French-speaking students are constructed as coveted agents of local socialisation by transnational non-French speaking families. This is certainly a new dimension of global-local dynamics in the context of international schooling. In a somewhat similar line, Breidenstein et al. (2018) show how the presence of the "local" culture in the international school's ethos, activities and clientele has a significant impact on parents' selection. They identify two parental rationales for "choosing international". The first type prioritises ensuring continuity in children's schooling and minimising disruption. This model favours socialisation with co-nationals in a fairly homogeneous school environment. The second type, by contrast, seeks for children to engage with the multicultural and cosmopolitan realities of global cities (Sassen, 2001). This is the line this article aims to develop but with a particular focus on language, which Breidenstein et al. (2018) gloss over. In contrast with these authors, we will show how, to remain competitive in the Lake Geneva context, the school under investigation is transitioning towards a linguistically blended model that tries to cater for the needs and aspirations of both types of parents.

[1] For more information, visit www.ibo.org

In spite of the distinctiveness of the language policy of international schools, not much research has focused on examining the existence of different language-based models. Because the appeal of English-medium instruction is the driver of this booming industry (Bunnell, 2019), especially in Asia, little attention has been devoted to identifying incipient multilingual trends. Among the very few published studies of language in international schooling is De Mejía's (2002), which investigates the development of elite multilingualism (Barakos and Selleck, 2019) in different types of programmes. De Mejía argues that the development of bilingual or multilingual competence has not been considered important in international schools. She points out a fundamental contradiction between these schools' ideological valuing of intercultural exchange as part of the cosmopolitan training of students (many of whom are actually multilingual, as are many of their teachers) and the fact that "the emphasis in curricula and school language provision is monolingual and often monocultural" (p. xi). This leads her to ask the question "how far do International Schools see bilingualism or multilingualism as a priority?" (p. xi). This article tries to provide some answers to the question.

Finally, this piece also contributes to research on international education in Switzerland, which is an under-explored context despite the very high number of international schools and the fact that the very concept of "international schooling" is closely linked to the International School of Geneva. For some exceptions, see Mackenzie et al. (2003), who examine the factors shaping parental school choice in three international schools located in the German part of Switzerland, and Bertron (2016) on the international transformations in Swiss private schools.

3. Context: Multilingual diversification of the Lake Geneva private school eduscape

Located on the border with France, the Lake Geneva (*le Léman* in French) region in Switzerland comprises the cantons of Geneva and Vaud and is characterised by intense trans-border relations with France and to a lesser extent, Italy. Both cantons have a high percentage of resident foreigners, 40% in Geneva (Canton de Genève, 2019) and 42% in Vaud (Ville de Lausanne, 2019). The Swiss People's Party (*Schweizerische Volkspartei* in German) has tried to limit free movement of workers in Europe and curb the number of foreigners settling for work through a number of referenda (see Swiss Confederation, 2020 for a history). In 2014, it narrowly won a referendum calling for annual quotas for employed foreigners and preference for Swiss residents in job hires. Although it was watered down following arduous

negotiations with the EU, the local preference was upheld and foreigners have to show proof of integration to obtain a residence permit. This had an impact on the local economy, especially on multi-nationals and universities that need to hire talent abroad to remain competitive (but not international organisations, whose workers do not need a Swiss residence permit).

In accordance with the 1999 Constitution,[2] the Swiss Confederation has three official languages (German, French and Italian) and a fourth national language, Romansh. As a paradigmatic example of federal governance, the Cantons shall decide on their official languages (Article 70.2) with respect to the traditional territorial distribution of languages. Therefore, Vaud and Geneva have French as their official language despite their multilingual realities. Switzerland is imagined as "the multilingual country par excellence" (Lundberg, 2020, p.53) and "an exception" to monolingual European states created out of the will of different linguistic groups to live together (see Del Percio, 2016). Nonetheless, the federalist educational system is organised into multiple monolingually-oriented systems in cantons (see Zimmermann and Häfliger, 2019). The HarmoS agreement (2007) between 15 cantons, including Vaud and Genève, standardises compulsory education in Switzerland and the first foreign language (a second national language, usually German in the Léman area) is taught no later than 5th grade and the second foreign language (English) no later than the seventh grade.

The lakeside region has a high concentration of international schools (a total of 18, see Figure 1), compared to other Swiss regions like Zürich (7) or Bern (1).[3] This is partly due to the historical presence of dozens of international organisations like the United Nations, the International Olympic Committee or the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the resulting influx of hundreds of NGOs, as well as the establishment of multi-national companies such as Nestlé or Cargill in the area. In addition, the area has had a long tradition of "Swiss international boarding schools" for the European and North American aristocracies and bourgeoisies since the 19th century (Bertron, 2016). Historical and more recent international schools are embedded in a local economy of luxury services in the Léman area catering to not only foreign aristocracies but also, increasingly, expatriate managers of multi-nationals and international organisations (Bertron, 2016).

[2] The English translation of the Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation can be accessed here: https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/1999/404/en

[3] Data extracted from the website: https://www.teacherhorizons.com/schools?view=map&countries=Switzerland.

Besides a growing number of "international schools" at the turn of the century, the 2014 Swiss referendum for stricter measures against migration and downsized company packages for "expats", who increasingly turned to public schools, resulted in a crisis in the international school sector in the 2010s (*24 Heures*, 2015). Like the private Catalan school reported on by Sunyol (2021), many historical Swiss elite (boarding) schools have undergone an internationalisation process through the introduction of English as a medium of instruction (e.g. Bertron, 2016, p.179), often in conjunction with French, and the adoption of the IB curriculum, which was originally devised in Geneva and is registered as a Swiss not-for-profit organization.[4] For example, one of the schools we conducted research in for the broader study framing this article, which we call "Swiss Bilingual School"[5], was founded in the early 20th century to serve the local elites but it was bought by a multinational educational group in the late 2000s owing to decreasing student numbers. It currently offers the Swiss, French and IB curricula and French is presented as "the primary teaching language" followed by English. In secondary school, there are various curricular options, Swiss *Maturité*, French Baccalaureate and International Baccalaureate, which have different vehicular and foreign languages. The broadening of linguistic and curricular options is a response to the crisis, and it seeks to attract new types of families looking for distinctive capitals (Bourdieu, 1984) to maintain their social status nationally, and increasingly, internationally.

The focus of this article is on a different trend, the recent localisation (see section 2 above) of international schools that traditionally teach in English and offer non-national curricula, notably IB. We argue that this new development mainly caters for transnational families' desire for not only English but also French/German as linguistic capital available in the localities where schools are situated. It is important to note that the private school system competes against the prestigious cantonal school system which requires a highly selective test (in French) for vocational and academic tracks at the end of primary education. The school that we will examine in this article is "International Lakeside School" (ILS henceforth),[6] which is a more recent school that initially catered to the English-speaking community from the 1960s to the 1980s. It became an "international" (rather than American or British) school in the 1990s decade and it was not until the 2010s that the IB curricula were introduced. In

[4] See https://ibo.org/jobs-and-careers/working-for-a-better-world/international-presence/geneva/
[5] All the names used in this article are pseudonyms.
[6] In addition to using pseudonyms, we have decided not to share specific details about the focus school and we have masked its specific location.

recent years, it has established mother tongue tuition after school and it has offered an optional dual-language programme for primary school since 2021 (see section 5.3 below).

4. Methodology and data: Talking to a variety of families

This article draws on different types of data including focus groups with families, interviews with school representatives and promotional school material. After an initial interview with the school principals, the authors ran focus groups collected in November and December 2019 with families whose children were enrolled in secondary education at International Lakeside School and Swiss Bilingual School. At ILS, the focus of this article, the principal sent out an invitation through a family newsletter to recruit as many families as possible. The school coordinators grouped the families into three focus groups for us and we ran them in the school premises during the day. The three focus groups, lasting a total of 224 minutes, were conducted in English and were recorded with the participants' written informed consent (provided in English and French). We followed the American Anthropological Association statement for ethics[7] to protect our participants[8]. Based on our transcriptions (see conventions in Appendix 1), the qualitative analysis focuses on the parents' viewpoints and experiences in relation to the linguistic policies at school and in the family. We drew on thematic analysis of declarative and textual data to identify, define and name recurrent and relevant themes found in our data set (Nowell et al., 2017) albeit in a non-linear process, and we triangulated our individual interpretations of the data.

At ILS, we talked to 20 self-selected mothers (and no fathers) during the focus groups. The families were formed by heterosexual couples and, as expected, they had all been mobile internationally. Nevertheless, English-speaking families were the minority and we had families hailing from non-English speaking countries such as Portugal, Brazil, Italy, Turkey and interestingly, Switzerland. These families were often bilingual or multilingual because of mixed marriages and/or migrant descent. In addition, there were several families relocating from the US and the UK whose children had previously attended non-international schools, with three having followed dual-language programmes in French (1 family) and Chinese (2 families) in the USA.

[7] Check https://americananthro.org/about/policies/statement-on-ethics/

[8] The University of Lausanne did not legally require research consent for this study, which falls outside the application of the *Federal Act on Research Involving Human Beings* (2011).

5. Data analysis

5.1. Transnational parents' school choice: Between academic and linguistic continuity, and multilingual localisation

After a general round of introductions, our first focus group question was meant to elicit families' reasonings in relation to school choice. We were interested in bringing to the fore not just their motivations or justifications, but also to get some insight into the decision-making process which included, for example, the other schooling options considered and negotiations with spouses or the children themselves. Invariably, the parents produced accounts that reflected lengthy and multi-dimensional information searches and intense family deliberations. This is in line with the highly reflective processes of middle-class school choice described in the literature (Ball and Nikita, 2014).

Most participant families narrated they were content with their decision. However, two elements struck us as unexpected. First, about a quarter of the parents acknowledged that private schooling was not their preferred option; they had rather enrolled their children in state schools. Second, almost half foregrounded the "losses" for their children in choosing ILS, which we considered unusual as a way of discussing school choice.

By and large, families foregrounded the pedagogical continuity that the IB represented. This does not mean that all the children had previously been schooled in international schools; roughly a third had actually attended public education in their home countries, as mentioned earlier. The parents valued the active, student-centred, individualised and special needs-sensitive approach of the school. They opposed it to their perceived characteristics of Swiss public education: competitive, exam-driven and favouring rote learning. Yet, this was not always appraised negatively: some parents acknowledged that a more demanding educational style would have been more beneficial for their children in the long run (e.g., to access university), but saw insertion into the highly reputed Swiss system as unworkable or even undesirable given their children's educational trajectory or individual needs.

All families except one constructed ILS as a *refuge school* (Bourdieu, 1989), that is, as a less regulated and less selective educational space that enabled their children to circumvent the high educational and linguistic requirements of the state system and still obtain an academic diploma to enter university. According to Bourdieu (1989), "teenagers from the business bourgeoisie who find themselves excluded from the most academically advanced institutions [...] must, in order to get around the academic obstacle, turn to the […]

least academically controlled sectors of the school system, i.e. the refuge schools that have mushroomed" (page 308, our translation). In the parents' narratives, English-medium instruction at ILS is presented as some sort of "shelter" that ensures academic continuity/stability and facilitates the children's social insertion into these refuge establishments.

One crucial aspect of the discursive representation of ILS as a refuge school is that families construct narratives of "given-up desires". That is, they explain what their ideal choice would have been and present ILS as second best. This does not mean that they are unhappy with their school selection. On the contrary, some claim that, once inside, they have "got hooked" to ILS. Such is the case of Maia, an Italian researcher in her mid-forties and a mother of two daughters aged 5 and 8 at the time of data collection.

Excerpt 1:

01 MAI: [...] we saw about (.) six seven schools .hh uh we:::: (.) *I* seriously considered the:: (.)
02 local schools\ my husband was not of the idea\ .hh u:::m but I seriously considered it (.)
03 because (.) our plan is to come here to stay. / so:: we don't expect to move (.) so from the
04 start I said .hh why don't we put them in the local schools / like there is (.) Swiss schools
05 have good reputation / and it will be (.) maybe a chore (.) it's a matter of finding the right
06 school / so we need to find a house (.) that is (.) not far from the right school (%act: laugh)
07 and so I said like why don't we explore that (.) and so we can integrate / with the local
08 community (.) more easily / u:::m::: / the::n like (.) our daughters really suff (.) suffered the
09 idea of moving / and they were terrified about changing language (.) changing culture /
10 a::nd so we thought we'd go a step at the time / maybe we do:: a couple years at ISL and
11 then we see / but um (.) when we came here we got hooked / we:: sort of liked (.) the
12 school and um (.) my youngest one has um some (.) issue / in um previous school (.) she had
13 selective mutism .hh and (.) some people thought (.) oh because she's bilingual / but other
14 (.) I / I never thought so (%act: laugh)

Maia's story reveals the tension between local "integration" through Swiss schools (line 7) and the segregation potential of international schooling, and how different members of the family position themselves differently with respect to this tension. In her case, her favouring of Swiss schooling was influenced not only by the fact that her family did not envisage a prompt relocation (often discussed in the international school literature as the main motive), but importantly, by the high academic prestige of local schools in this eduscape (lines 4-5). This is what makes the study of international schooling in the Swiss context such an appealing case. Maia's narrative shows how her children's affective and learning needs took priority in opting for ILS, a choice that she viewed as temporary (line 10) but then became permanent (line 11).

In discussing school choice, Violet (see excerpt 2 below) also foregrounds what her two eldest children lost in choosing ILS (line 1). They had both been schooled in a French-immersion programme in the US and were hoping to maintain this academic language upon moving to French-speaking Switzerland. Her narrative emphasises the many linguistic and academic obstacles they encountered upon arrival (most notably having to sit a highly selective exam which tracks students into academic or vocational education) and how these obstacles shattered the family plans for children's "localisation" (line 7).

Excerpt 2:

01 VIO: […] if we come to ILS we were giving up / the language / to- to come here (.) u:m (.) but
02 because the public school system wouldn't let us in / […] and that combined with the fact
03 that my daughter was gonna be arriving as she had to sit for that bit exam to deci::de / we
04 were arriving (.) she would've within (.) eight weeks had to sit for the exam to decide (ad
05 nauseam) .hh and I / was like (.) w- / with the way they're treating me / the fact that I don't
06 speak French // this (.) no we can't (.) we can't do that / um which was surprising because we
07 wanted to localise the kids.

What we see through these two excerpts is that, contrary to what the literature has traditionally argued, international schooling is not always constructed as the most logical or desirable option by transnational and multilingual parents. Over half of the parents produce highly reflective narratives in which they weigh the different schooling options, bring multiple voices, needs and aspirations to bear, and finally, make a decision that is often a compromise between "ideal" expectations and "real" possibilities. Most importantly for our argument in this paper, Swiss "multilingualism" is viewed both as desirable capital (hence the will to "localise" children, see line 7 in Excerpt 2) and as part of a constraining language regime that places major demands on transnational children (hence the choice of international schooling).

5.2. Capitalising on Swiss linguistic diversity from the perspective of international families

The state-sponsored imagination of Swiss cultural and linguistic diversity constructs an international image of the Alpine nation-state as an "exceptional" nation vis-à-vis other homogeneising European states anchored in ethnic and civic ideologies (Del Percio, 2016). The international promotion of Switzerland as pluralistic, neutral and humanitarian capitalises on the purported peaceful coexistence of different cultures and languages. Since the interwar years, this interdiscursive chain of "multilingual Switzerland" has circulated to

new spaces at the intersection of Switzerland as a business location and tourism destination (Del Percio, 2016, p.85) and these include international and boarding schools. For some non-Swiss families at ILS, the global distinctiveness of Switzerland on transnational educational and labour markets hinges on multilingualism as an object of self-capitalisation. As we shall illustrate below, this is highly dependent on the different and variable demands and expectations of ILS families. Following Irvine and Gal (2000), we will illustrate the *iconisation* of multilingualism as a natural essence of the Swiss Confederation (Del Percio, 2016), and its potential for self capitalisation for these families, and the *fractal recursivity* that projects this iconic relationship between Switzerland and multilingualism to the international school and the linguistic diversity among its student body.

Multilingual Switzerland is discursively presented as an opportunity for capitalisation and in the eyes of some families, the almost exclusive focus on English at ILS closes doors and is almost a disservice to multilingual kids. Let us meet Sonja, who introduces herself as "specialist in kids' bilingual education" and describes her family as "completely Russian". She set out to expose her 7 children to foreign languages from an early age through governesses and tutors at home. At the time of our focus group, 5 out of the 7 kids attended ILS (one was too young and another one attended a British boarding school) and they had previously attended an English-medium school in Russia. At ILS, the French courses were "too weak for them" and she had successfully lobbied for a strong French group in reception that is "adapted for bilingual kids". Excerpt 3 below illustrates the naturalised assumption that kids are exposed to "different languages" in Switzerland and its potential for self-investment.

Excerpt 3:

01 SON: for example for kids who / wants to have English as a / first language of study / they are
02 fluent in French for example and they want German / in future they study in Zurich for
03 example of St-Gallen (.) there is not enough / strong classes / to prepare them for this .hh
04 u::h for example they can pass their *Matura* in German here (.) they are going to the
05 Polytechnic school or something else (xxx) it's a shame because (.) here being in Switzerland /
06 kids are exposed to different languages and there is um big opportunities for them.

Building on her criticism of foreign language programmes at ILS, Sonja thinks it is a "shame" (line 5) that the international schools limited the seemingly natural possibilities in this multilingual country. She focused on higher education in prestigious universities such as the Federal Polytechnic School of Zürich that require academic competence in the official language (German in this case) and a Swiss Maturity diploma, none of which are attainable at

ILS (see previous section). Her school choice thus sacrificed access to "Swiss" multilingualism (mainly defined as German and French) in favour of an English-medium IB curriculum to ensure academic continuity.

In line with the criticism of the language policy of the school, Amanda was unhappy with the erasure of the student population's diverse languages resulting from the English-medium curriculum. This Canadian-born participant had two children born in the UK who were bilingual in English and French. In order to bypass the secondary school tracking exam (as Violet above) and invest in academic English, the family moved the oldest daughter from a private Swiss school to ILS. She was reported to be dominant in English and to "avoid speaking French at all cost". By contrast, the younger son who attended a private Swiss bilingual school (see section 3 above) was more French-dominant. In Excerpt 4, Amanda claims that she would have liked to maintain her children's French and German skills alongside English as a potential investment in higher education in Switzerland. In a fractal recursive projection of Swiss diversity onto the international school, the school's English-medium curriculum limits the already existing "natural" bilingualism among the students and further stifles their multilingualism through the late introduction of foreign languages like German.

Excerpt 4:

RES2: not just English but also (English) are there any other languages or / talk (.) so what do you think of the language policy of the school

AMA: you kno:w like at the school activity maybe put one in French or (.) move the second language forward 'cause / all the kids in the school (.) I think the French has this class / not one of the kids speak only English / they all speak / they're at least bilingual or trilingual (.) so (.) it's almost a disservice (.) to just be in English .hh u::m the second language I know they start next year I think (.) so in the eighth grade she'll be able to then continue with German / but u::m / if they've already started it's kind of a shame that they don't look / uh but the school is / its focus is English (.) so /

Given that "everything else outweighs the languages" in school choice as another participant put it, many families decided to complement (foreign/heritage) language learning with private tutors (like Sonja) or extra-curricular activities. In fact, Irish participant Ulla summarises the school's approach to language as "just 'cause we live here .hh doesn't mean you get extra French". Her English-French bilingual family decided to enroll her youngest child at ILS because of the IB curriculum, even though her kid had attended state Catholic schools in the UK. Ulla complains about the piecemeal and insufficient teaching of foreign languages, similar to the public Irish system. In turn, Rachel's two children had attended a

dual-language immersion programme in Chinese offered at an American state school but they chose ILS over the public Swiss system because of their lack of French competences. In Excerpt 5, Rachel questions the "monolingual approach" in the globalised world and crucially for our argument, in the context of multilingual Switzerland.

Excerpt 5:

RAC:I kno::w (.) I understand but if you got to like (.) Le Bois (.) you take social studies / in German / you take Maths / right (.) that is (.) that is / it is more than I'd (.) like // I- / I'm struggling to // understand / in this day and age (%act: claps in rhythm while speaking) the value of the monolingual program .hh like (.) I understand if you're in the UK (.) or if you're somewhere where (.) truly / that is- I even understan- I would understand if you did IB / in French here .hh but there's something about (.) like (.) you were living in another place / a::nd you were taking away this hu::::ge advantage / and that's (.) I mean (.) so:::

Like the other mothers in this section, Rachel complains about the missed opportunities when taking away the taken-for-granted "huge advantage" (line 7) of Swiss multilingualism. Once again, Swiss multilingualism is reduced to French and German without any mention of Italian and Romansh as less economically valuable languages. Rachel compares the language policy at ISL with that of other Swiss private schools that offer Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) subjects in German as the majority language in Switzerland. She advocates for bilingual IB programmes in French, which echoes Sonja's lobbying for stronger French courses in reception. In keeping with territorial multilingualism in Switzerland, it was the limited French exposure and low levels that was most recurrently topicalised in our focus groups. For Aline, a Swiss Francophone married to a Swiss Germanophone, the common strategy for "local families" at ILS is having "extra French at home" because she claims that the school only teaches *présent* in year five. Violet, whose two oldest children attended a French dual-immersion programme in an American state school and whose youngest was enrolled in a private Swiss bilingual school, foregrounds leisure activities in French such as "local activities" or "summer camps" in France as a strategy to develop their colloquial French.

5.3. Ideologies of immersion and new dual-language programme at ILS

As we saw in the previous sections, a number of families were vested in "localising" their kids by capitalising on the multilingual opportunities in Switzerland, notably French as the official and dominant language of the *Arc Lémanique*. Our focus groups revealed a growing dissatisfaction with the low exposure and level of French, and to a lesser extent German, at ILS. Some parents re-evaluated their school choice by sending younger children to private

bilingual schools and many resorted to tutors, after-school activities and summer camps to fill the gap. Leisure activities emerged as particularly desirable because parents were vested in the ideology of immersion as a more efficient, fun and low-pressure alternative to foreign language learning (Schedel, 2022). However, as Hanna puts it, "it's hard because you're never gonna get that immersion because in the playground they're always going to speak the dominant language which is English" at ILS. In the absence of teaching in a language other than English at the time of research, parents highlighted the fact that the school had started after-school activities like cooking or knitting in French and in Ulla's words, "where they learn it in a fun way, while they're not in no structured, academic sort of way". Like Sonja above, Rachel also criticised the approach to French as a foreign language as "[her] kids were in French immersion, they weren't learning French, they were learning in French" in a dual-language programme in the USA. Generally, parents want their kids to learn and interact *in* French, i.e. "immersion", as it is related to natural, spontaneous language learning (Codó and Sunyol, in press).

Since 2021, ILS markets a "new bilingual–dual language programme", an optional track that was gradually introduced in primary education as an "immersive programme" that is identified with CLIL or "learning through language use rather than learning about a language". This echoes Rachel's comment above. According to the school's webpage, over 80% of current primary school families are interested in this approach and roughly 30% of primary school pupils were enrolled in this programme in the 2022-2023 academic year. ILS foregrounds that this new programme is "a result of being responsive to our community" in a multicultural world, as the focus groups analysed show. In the promotional material, the optional programme addresses not only current families who want "a stronger focus on both French and English", like the ones we spoke to, but also "locally or newly-arrived families" who seek both IB curriculum and a bilingual curriculum (like Rachel's) and crucially, "French speaking Swiss families who are looking for a greater exposure to English for their children, while continuing French as an academic language" (like Aline's). As mobile families tend to stay for longer in Switzerland, they show an increasing interest in "settling in Switzerland", which is discursively connected to the French language and culture locally in the school promotional material (which we have chosen not to reproduce). ILS materials link the dual-language programme to the children's "integration into the Swiss way of life".

We can see that this new bilingual pathway not only addresses the traditional mobile GMC population that it serves, but also broadens its clientele to "local" families. English-medium schools going bilingual is a new development in the field of international education,

but at ILS, there are different degrees of localisation through French with different linguistic options within the same IB curricula. In line with neoliberal trends of personalised education, ILS opts to offer a new dual-language programme to remain locally competitive and give a response to the families' demand for intensive, academic and "stronger" French skills while ensuring an English-only pathway for those families seeking a refuge school from the selective French-language school system in Geneva and Vaud.

6. Concluding remarks

In this article, we have focused on the examination of a recent and major development in international schooling: the increasing need to move away from exclusive or predominantly English-medium instruction. In that sense, the case of ILS is not exceptional and it relies on the unprecedented provision of optional "dual language programmes" in the official language of the canton, which has been attested in the German-speaking region of Switzerland too[9]. The current educational shift relies on a new offer of extra-curricular and optional programmes in different languages. It is motivated by the heightened value, both practical and symbolic, of elite multilingual repertoires (see Barakos and Selleck, 2019). The Swiss context, we have argued, activates the multilingual imagination of GMC families who demand that ILS help their children maximise their chances of local linguistic capitalisation.

Our ethnographic case study is relevant in that it illuminates ongoing transformations in the conceptualisation of international schooling as an educational product. The fact that ILS is located in the Lake Geneva eduscape is highly productive because it allows us to examine how the articulation of shifting local and global sociopolitical and economic conditions forces schools to reimagine themselves and their educational offer to remain competitive. Indeed, "traditional" international schools like ILS are not only competing against other internationalising private schools, but increasingly, against the academically-reputed public education system in Switzerland. Our study also brings to the fore a number of dimensions of the tension between "national" and "international" forms of schooling that usually remain hidden. In fact, it shows that this dichotomy is becoming increasingly blurred, not only, as is often argued, because national systems are becoming internationalised (see Maxwell, 2018) but also, as we have shown, because international schools are subject to processes of (at least partial linguistic) localisation. However, this is not a straightforward move, as schools like ILS must strike a difficult balance between their function as refuge schools (thus, English-dominant) and the demands of some GMC families for wider

[9] We have documented similar programmes in Basel and Zürich.

curricular presence of other elite languages, such as French. We have claimed that requesting a more substantial presence of French is linked to the prestige of Swiss state schooling and to the perception of "missed opportunities" that comes with the family decision to choose ILS.

The focus on parental choices, rationales and perspectives, that is, the "demand side" of international schooling, as Ball and Nikita (2014) call it, fills an important gap in existing scholarship (Bunnell, 2019). In addition, this study contributes a school language policy dimension that is systematically overlooked. We have argued that this focus is necessary, not only to understand the increasing diversification of the international schooling market (Wu and Koh, 2023) but also to comprehend the direction this diversification is taking. Finally, we have claimed that we need to understand family school choices as complex decisions that are usually the result of difficult compromises between parental aspirations, student needs and shifting institutional trajectories.

Given the novelty of the bilingual programmes in international schools, we call for more research into localisation through languages other than English in a wide variety of contexts, including those in which the local languages are not traditionally constructed as valuable to access and maintain a perceived global elite way of life.

Disclosure statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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Appendix 1: Transcription conventions

(.)	very short pause
/	short pause
.hh	air intake
:	sound lengthening
%act	non-verbal action
( )	transcriber's interpretation of a word
(x)	unintelligible speech