

Languages in the Canton of Grisons

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Abstract

The Canton of Grisons is the fourth of the Cantons that make up the Swiss Confederation. In this canton, five main Romansh languages — standardized by H. Schmid in 1982 — are spoken. Standardization was accepted in its written form by the different speech communities of the Canton. The present article reports the results of a research study on the image the speakers have of the different languages under investigation: Romansh Idioms, German, Italian and Rumantsch Grischun. Given the young age of the participants in the sample, the data may provide an estimate of trends among Romansh speakers in the near future. Our study highlights that German scores the highest with regard to all of the aspects addressed in the research, with the exception of informal and affective communication, for which the Romansh idioms are favored.

1. Premise

Languages spoken by small communities and national languages that have little importance in international communication are undergoing great changes which generally lead to a marked restriction of their private and official use and drive speakers towards more prestigious languages. The linguistic situation of the Canton of Grisons, analyzed from this perspective, is a diversified and complex reality.

To understand the Grison-Rhätian regionalism, the following terms have to be distinguished:

- *Bündner* (leaguer), which indicates the identity shared by all the Swiss that live in the Canton (Synonym Grischun/Graubünden);
- *Grischun* (Grison), which indicates territorial domination and historical-political identity;

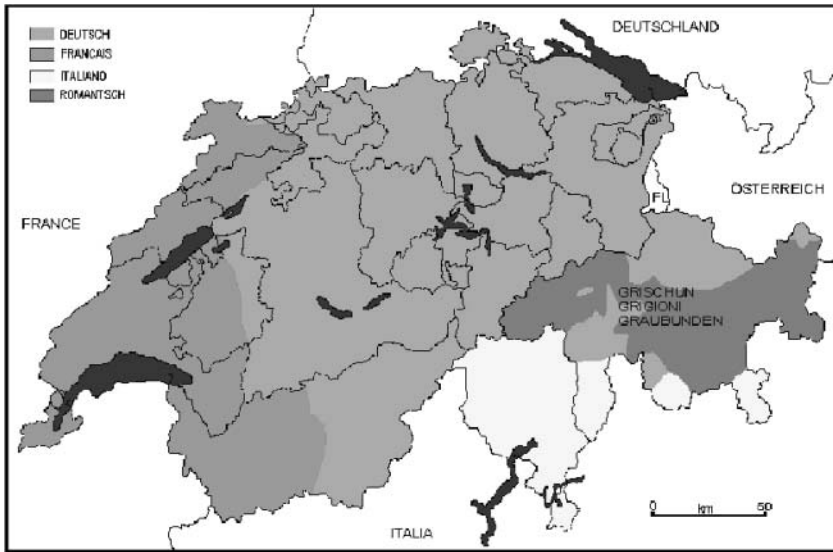


Figure 1. *Swiss linguistic areas*

- *Retic* (Rhætian), which indicates the geographical location since Roman times as well as historical-political identity, but only a part of actual Grisons is situated in Rhætia.

Today, the Grisons represent themselves with a tourist slogan, “the Swiss holiday canton”, which reinforces their image of uniqueness. In Switzerland, the stereotypes on the Grisons involve rurality, the odd pride in being people from times past and their indifference of what others think of them.

The different sub-regions developed their own identity during the Protestant reform and some specific tendency exists to this day, although religious passion has somewhat abated. However, inter-regional and inter-idiomatic contacts are scarce and many who speak Ladin or Silvan maintain they cannot understand one another, although, curiously enough, they underline the similarities between Romansh, Friulan, and Portuguese. Differences in the languages coupled with infrequent contacts between the Romansh populations of the different valleys have so far prevented the growth of a real feeling of Romansh identity (Figure 1) (Decurtins 1993; Coray 2008).

Unlike what happens in nearby Countries, the founding element of Swiss identity is neither a common national language nor a unitary cultural or ethnic tradition. The Swiss concept of state is rooted in the convictions shared by all Swiss, regardless of their diverse linguistic and cultural heritage.

Of the 26 cantons in Switzerland (three of which are semi-cantons), the Grisons' is the largest (7,105 square km, one sixth of the whole of Switzerland), but also the least densely populated (26 inhabitants per square km), and it is the only one in which three different cultures and languages coexist.

The canton of Grisons is called *little Switzerland* because it has the cultural diversity and the alpine ecology that the world associates with Switzerland. The relative inaccessibility of its territory has maintained its cultural diversity intact over the centuries. The languages spoken in the canton of Grisons are German, Italian, Romansh (with the five idioms and since 1982 Rumantsch Grischun as the written standard) and the Sursylvan idiom (Billigmeir 1979; Goebel et al. 1990).

2. The German language

In Switzerland, the German standard (*Hochdeutsch*) exists alongside local variants generally called *Schwyzerdütsch* (Swiss German). This set up is more widespread in the northern, eastern and central regions of the Country and affects 65% of the Helvetian population. It is a wrong belief that the Swiss Germans can understand *Hochdeutsch* and that they can easily interchange the two languages. Two out of three admit they cannot speak it even if they understand it when they watch TV or German tourists speak to them. In the Canton of Grisons German is the majority language in that it is spoken by two thirds of the population. Four main variants of the German language can be recognized in the canton territory:

- *Walserdeutsch*, spoken in Rheinwald, Vals, Safien, in Schanfigg including Arosa, in Prettigovia including Kloster and Davos, and in the enclave of Obersaxen;
- *Bündnerdeutsch*, with its typical open vowels, is spoken in Coira, in Churer Rheintal and in all the regions where once Romansh used to be spoken;
- The *Bavarian-Tyrolese* dialect, spoken only in Samnaun;
- To these, the German studied as the first foreign language by the Italian group and the standard German can also be added.

3. The Italian language

In the canton of Grisons, Italian is spoken in the southern valleys of Mesolcina, Calanca, Bregaglia and Poschiavo by about 10% of the

overall Swiss population. In addition to the official Italian language, which is used in schools, media and official events, three groups of local dialects exist:

- *Bregagliot* of the Bregaglia Valley, a spoken form between Lombard and Romansh dialects;
- *Pus'ciavin* of the Poschiavo Valley, similar to the dialect spoken in Valtellina;
- *Moesano* of the Mesolcina and Calanca Valleys, akin to the dialect of Ticino Canton.

In recent years, thanks to popular consensus, the Italian language has been introduced in the German schools of the Canton as first foreign language (two hours at week: Romansh and Italian schools use German with a higher dotation). This underlines the common will for linguistic integration that goes beyond the mere recognition of Italian as a language of a Canton (Ticino Canton) (Tessarolo and Cumbo 2006).

4. The Romansh language

Romansh is closely related to French and Italian and similar to the nearby Lombard and Venetian dialects. Together with the Ladin of the Dolomites (spoken in the Gardena, Fassa, Badia and Marebbe Valleys) and the Friulan language (Gorizia and Udine districts), it is currently classified as Rhæto-Romance (Harris and Vincent 1988; Holtus and Kramer 1987) (a synonym for Romansh is Bündnerromanisch, that is, the language spoken in the Canton of Grisons or Graubünden). Because of special historical circumstances, internal rifts and the early establishment of German language in Coira (fifteenth century) as the main town of the Canton of Grisons, Romansh was unable to develop a general standard. Today it is divided into five regional systems called *idioms*, each with its own coded written language (data from the 2000 census). Rumantsch Grischun was added in 1982, but not as a natural standard:

1. *Sursilvan*, spoken in Surselva (the front Rhine Valley from Flims/Laax to the Canton borders) by 78.5% of the local population (17,897 people);
2. *Sutsilvan*, spoken in Sutselva (in parts of the rear Rhine Valley) by 1,111 people;
3. *Surmeiran*, spoken in Sostes (Alvra Valley) and in Surses (Gelgia Valley) by 3,038 people;

4. *Puter*, spoken in the High Engadin Valley (between Maloggia and Zernez) and in Bravuogn by 30.8% of the local population (5,497 people);
5. *Vallader*, spoken in the Low Engadin Valley (between Zernez and Martina) by 77.4% of the population and in the Monastero (*Müstair*) Valley by 86.4% of the local population (6,448 people altogether). In this valley the written language is almost exclusively Vallader, whereas the spoken form is Jauer.

As already said above, each idiom has a written and a spoken variant.

Some “linguistic islands” do exist outside the traditional area of the language, like, for example, Trin, Rhàzüns, and Domat/Ems west of Coira. The grouping of the five idioms represents the typical difference in the Romansh way of speaking (Schmid 1981).

Even if Romansh is a heritage of the Roman occupation of the Central Alps, it must be said that none of the five written variants was historically called Romansh/Romantsch/Romontsch/Rumantsch. The German term *Rätoromanisch* is among the major causes of the linguistic evolution that took place not before the 1800s, in which German showed its dominance by deciding the label under which the speakers recognize their idioms as a whole and ultimately their ethnicity. The term Romansh is used by the population and the administration to designate the fourth national language, while Rhaeto-Romance is applied to the area that goes from the Canton of Grisons to Friuli (Papa 1993; Kattenbusch 1996; Grünert et al. 2008; Liver 1999).

5. Romansh in figures

Paradoxically, a multilingual society like Switzerland has no official statistics on the actual diffusion of the Country's languages (Furer 2001). The *bilingual* and *multilingual from birth* are not yet recognized as such in the federal censuses and this has consequences for the estimate of the Romansh-speaking population. The total number of individuals that know and speak Romansh in any domain of their life is higher than the numbers reported in the censuses. From several surveys carried out in the 1990s in the Canton of Grisons (with the exception of the Italian-speaking valleys) the Romansh speakers can be hypothesized at around 100,000 altogether in the whole of Switzerland (Furer 1996).

Since 1850 Switzerland has had a census scheduled every 10 years. Between 1880 and 1980 great changes took place and question formulation was changed several times. This does not always allow to compare results. The question “Which is your mother tongue?”, with all the

psychological and affective valence that the construct entails, was asked to find out which was the language used. The Romansh speakers constantly increased from 1880 (38,705) to 1980 (51,128) (Bundesamt für Statistik 1996). Since 1990 the same question has taken on a new valence; it now asks: “Which is your best language?” In 1990, 39,632 Swiss inhabitants out of 6,873,687 (0.6%) said it was Romansh. The enormous difference over only ten years does not simply translate into a dramatically decreased number of speakers, but shows to what extent the Romansh speakers can be bilingual when urged to learn German by discrimination against their own language. They have to learn it even better than Romansh and use it in so many situations that they give only one answer (German) to the question on their best language.

In 2000 it emerged that only 35,095 Swiss out of 7,288,010 (0.46%) indicated Romansh as their main language versus 39,632 in 1990 (0.6%). These data mark the regression of Romansh over the 1990s. Romansh speakers in any domain, that is to say those that indicated it as the best known language and/or the most spoken in the family, at school, in the workplace, went from 66,082 in 1990 (0.97%) to 60,561 in 2000 (0.8%); albeit regressing, Romansh shows a certain endurance as a regularly used language.

In 2000, in the Swiss list of “languages indicated as the best language”, Romansh took 10th place behind German, French, Italian, Serb-Croatian, Albanian, Portuguese, Spanish, English and Turkish (it lost two places since 1990).

Table 1 shows the Canton censuses of the population in 1880, 1980, 1990, and 2000 which clearly support what has been said so far.

Table 1. *Results of Canton censuses*

	1880	1980		1990		2000
	MT	MT	BKL	BKL + LSH	BKL	BKL + LSH
German	43,664 (46%)	98,645 (59.9%)	113,661 (65.3%)	144,439 (83.1%)	127,755 (68.3%)	157,827 (84.4%)
Romansh	37,794 (39.8%)	36,017 (21.9%)	29,679 (17%)	41,067 (23.6%)	27,038 (14.5%)	40,168 (21.5%)
Italian	12,976 (13.7%)	22,199 (13.5%)	19,190 (11%)	39,089 (22.5%)	19,106 (10.2%)	42,901 (22.9%)
Other languages	557 (0.6%)	7,780 (4.7%)	11,410 (6.6%)		13,159 (7.0%)	
Total	94,991 (100%)	164,641 (100%)	173,890 (100%)		187,058 (100%)	

* MT (mother tongue); BKL (best known language); LSH (language spoken at home, school and/or work).

As a mother tongue, Romansh (Grison) decreased 40% in 100 years (1880–1980). In 1990 only 17% of the Romansh population indicated it as the main language and in 2000 the percentage went down to 14.5%.

Romansh speakers also speak German, whereas the other Swiss do not speak Romansh. Swiss linguistic abilities are usually overestimated: it looks as though only 25% of the whole population actually speaks two or more national languages (Bundesamt für Statistik 1995). On the contrary, 75% of Romansh speakers (all the adult population) do speak another national language, mostly Swiss German. Romansh communities are undergoing significant linguistic changes because the traditional linguistic area is relentlessly becoming smaller and fragmented. Besides competition with other European languages (German, Italian and French), another thing is that agricultural areas are becoming urbanized: the agricultural villages in Surselva and Low Engadin are at present still Romansh (63 out of 116 communes of the Canton of Grisons have a Romansh majority, but the situation is unstable).

Of those that speak Romansh as the best language, 75% (about 40,000) live in the Canton, where the language is official, but only 49% live in traditionally Romansh territory (Furer 1996). From the 2000 census it is clear that in the entire traditionally Romansh area only one third of the population indicates Romansh as the best language.

To the changes mentioned above the principle of territoriality (Segesser 1998) must also be added, which highlights the fact that cultural provisions are resolved at local level and, when the non-Romansh citizens are more numerous than the Romansh citizens, the decisions taken, albeit democratic, may not be the most suitable for the Romansh language. In any case, considerable local autonomy allows specific provisions to be implemented and opposition to be made against controversies with an external cultural group that wishes to impose their will. Romansh communities have the right to make decisions for their own preservation (Williams 1994).

6. The *Rumantsch Grischun* language

Rumantsch Grischun (RG) is an artificial, super-regional and dynamic written language form which is largely a compromise between the traditional idioms: it is rooted mainly in Sursilvan, Vallader and Surmeiran (privileging the most used pronunciations), but it features terms from the other two idioms and even local variants. It was created in 1982 by the Romanist Heinrich Schmid (University of Zurich), who had been given

such a task by the *Lia Rumantscha* (Romansh League). Since 1996 RG has been the official language of the Cantonal administration (central administration); since 2001 it has been the language used for official documents and in some sectors of the Romansh state broadcasting company (RTR); since 2004 it has been used in school teaching. This language is on an equal basis with Italian and German and the semi-official language of the Confederation which is obliged to use it in its contacts with *Retoromània/Rumantschsä* (a neologism that covers all individuals and places associated with Romansh culture). RG is promoted and safeguarded by the Romansh League, founded in Coira in 1919, which publishes the greatest part of dictionaries and a part of literary documents, written both in the idioms and in RG. The League also promotes and implements the programs for the “Romanshization” of technical and professional training.

As always happens in these cases, there has been no lack of controversy on the adoption of Rumantsch Grischun. In 1991 the federal government suggested the appointment of a committee with the task of rigorously stating the sociolinguistic issue of information in view of a possible planning. The investigation was entrusted to the *Institut Cultur Prospectiv* in Zurich, which concluded its works and published the results (Gloor et al. 1996). The investigation was carried out on 1,115 individuals drawn from 106 communes. The results relevant to the present work are: 25% of the interviewees stated they were in favor of RG because of their personal conviction; another 19% stated that the RG option, albeit possibly not the best solution, was however reasonable and realizable (Gloor et al. 1996: 129). When asked if they wished for a single written form, 66% answered that they did and 34% that they did not. Out of the 66%, 44% were in favor of RG and 22% in favor of other Grison idioms. Out of the 44%, 25% stated they agreed with Schmid's project and 19% stated they were persuaded because of its advantages. Out of the 22% in favor of other idioms, 11% favored Surmeiran, considered an idiom in between Sutsilvan and Sursilvan in the west and Engandinian (Puter and Vallader) in the east. The other 11% included those that had been in favor of another Grison idiom in addition to Surmeiran.

The 34% who were against a single written form were articulated as follows: 19% against any solution, 16% against both RG and Surmeiran. However, the ‘Noes’ did not really seem totally against a linguistic union, as long as it applied only to the administrative field.

The debate is still underway and focuses on issues like imposition of RG on reluctant regions and the parallel linguistic situation of the Swiss German population. It is true that the latter uses the German standard to write, but the written use of Swiss German variants is rare outside poetic

circles. On the contrary, the written use of the Romansh idioms is widespread among Romansh speakers and is often seen as the only way for the survival of the idioms themselves. In this sense the new standardized language would be seen as a threat for the idioms the Romansh speakers identify with. Many Romansh speakers are said to prefer using Swiss German rather than another Romansh idiom.

Spelling, phonetic, syntactic and, occasionally, vocabulary differences notwithstanding, the five Romansh idioms are inter-understandable (with a little effort, but without great difficulties); it follows that the common language is destined to be used only in cases where, due to the division of the Romansh language, German would be used in addressing Romansh speakers. The latter only need to recognize it when they come across it, as their mother tongue is and remains the traditional form of their region/the dialect of their village. All their literature is written in the traditional idioms and, with very few exceptions, the authors are continuing to use it (Furer 2001).

RG is an advantage as regards costs and strategies: the federal and canton governments would like to have a single standard Romansh for their publications. All in all, given the small number of Romansh speakers, it would be a good thing if RG were eventually accepted, but this is unlikely to happen without imposing it on the population; the long-term prospects for a common written language depend on cross-idiomatic interaction. Hence the existence of a diglossia between spoken Romansh and written (and spoken) German. RG has no part in this situation because Romansh people write either the idiom or German. Rumantsch Grischun is only used in writing by administrated organizations (LR, radio/TV and the cantonal administration) (Solèr 2008).

7. The Romansh media

The transformation of the telecommunication system in Europe has led to the homologation of scheduled planning and advertising in the area that includes Germany, Austria, and Switzerland; it is but an example of what Barber defines the “techno-cultural Babel” (Barber 1995). Romansh participates in the revolution of telecommunications, which presents fresh challenges and opportunities. The *Lia Rumantscha* is the Holding for regional companies. The *Radio* and the *Televisiun Rumantscha* are part of the semi-state institution “SRG SSR idée suisse”. The *Radio Rumantscha* is the most productive medium, with more than 18 hours of scheduled programs every day, including also the broadcasting of international music hits; it is also possible to hear it via satellite. The television

programming schedules 10 minutes a day of news broadcasting in Romansh; on Sunday evenings 45 minutes are devoted to a Romansh information program. Altogether, each week features one and a half hours of Romansh programs.

The main Romansh publications are: *Gasetta Romontscha*, *Fögl Ladin*, *Casa paterna/La pùnt*, *Pagina da Surmei*. The monthly *Punts* is a good youth magazine, but it is not very well known. In addition, pages in Romansh are published in the German *Engadiner Post* (three times a week). Since 1997 the commercial editor *Südosstschweiz* has published a daily paper, *La quotidiana*, in which contributions and the last page are written in *Rumantsch Grischun* (Grison Romansh). In addition, the regional linguistic organization *Union da Surneir* publishes *La Pagina da Surmair* (a weekly), with the rest of the paper being in the various idioms (mostly Sursilvan). It is a case that well represents the Romansh dilemma. *La quotidiana* gets criticism on an individual level, as non-familiar idioms are predominant, but it has a small number of subscribers, which shows that many actually support the only Romansh daily paper. Despite very modern ways of communication, the linguistic regional groups continue to be rather alien to one another.

8. Romansh education

Schools are the only institutions where Romansh speakers can ask non-speakers to conform. In the Canton of Grisons the choice of the administrative and teaching language at municipal level falls on the communes, which provide basic schooling (9 years). If Romansh is the chosen teaching language, it is taught in the nursery school (*scolinas/scolettas* existing in 80 communes) and in the first three years of elementary school (in 78 communes); four communes actually have bilingual elementary schools. The early and intensive concentration on the non-dominant language guarantees consolidation of linguistic structures to all pupils and creates the foundations for balanced bilingualism. Since 2002 in the final middle school years 3 weekly hours of Romansh have been compulsory in communes with Romansh elementary schools. In communes where German or Italian is taught, Romansh can be offered either as an optional or compulsory subject. Until a few years ago, German was the first, and in some cases, the only teaching language in secondary schools. However, since 1999 the possibility of bilingual Romansh-German A levels certificate has been offered. Gymnasium/Grammar schools: Chur and Samedan (bilingual certificate), other grammar schools offer some Romansh instruction (Mustér/Disentis, Zuoz, Ftan) (Rumantsch. Facts & Figures 2004).

In the Romansh areas there are no universities, but courses in “Romansh language and literature” are held at the Universities of Fribourg, Zurich and Geneva. Outside the institutional courses, schools very rarely offer the opportunity to teach Romansh to adults. In 2003 the Great Council of the Canton of Grisons approved the governmental proposal of publishing Romansh schoolbooks only in *Rumantsch Grischun* from 2005 and introducing the sole use of RG in schools from 2010. The provision triggered off angry protests. Recently in the Canton of Grisons people also reacted to the controversy on the teaching of English and, by means of a referendum, adopted the teaching of Italian as the second language of education in German schools. Thus, the tradition of teaching a second national language was maintained. The addition of further languages to the school curriculum would prove quite difficult and the change in priorities would be controversial.

9. Other considerations on Romansh in the Canton of Grisons

The current linguistic situation of the Romansh speakers in relation to the Swiss German speakers is that of a coordinated, subtractive, unstable, individual and unilateral bilingualism. Actual diglossia in the relation between traditional Romansh idioms (*low level*) and *Rumantsch Grischun* (*high level*) cannot be said to exist, perhaps because of the very recent introduction of RG (Ferguson 1959; Solèr 2004, 2008).

The idioms are learnt in the elementary schools of the traditional Romansh area and are written and used in the literature as well as in interpersonal communication. *Rumantsch Grischun* has only the written form, is used in formal situations and is currently taught in very few communes of the central Canton of Grisons as the language of literacy, but not in official use. The variants under scrutiny become complementary only as regards communications from the Canton and the Confederation to the Romansh population. Unless a message is directed to a particular idiomatic area, the institutions avail themselves of the new standardized written language.

Considering the notion of diglossia in prototypical terms, it can be assumed that most common situation for the young Romansh speakers is of double diglossia (own idiom-*Rumantsch Grischun*/Swiss German-standard German), made more complex by the presence of English.

In accordance with Fishman’s (1972) classification, the picture of bilingualism and diglossia in the Canton of Grisons can be described as follows:

1. (*D + B*) In the Swiss German Cantons all individuals from school age onwards alternatively use standard German and Swiss German

(*Schwyzerdütsch*), each language with its own functions solidly established and taken in great consideration (Ferguson 1959; Weinreich 1963).

2. (*D – B*) This situation was true in the past for some areas of the Canton of Grisons, where the population spoke mainly Romansh and the “elite” used first French and then German.
3. (*B – D*) This is the actual situation experienced by immigrants in general and also in the traditionally Romansh area, where Romansh is thought to be “losing ground” to Swiss German and English in informal communication (especially with the young).
4. (*–B – D*) The fourth case reflects very well the past situation of the Romansh idioms within their respective linguistic areas and, to some extent, also what is happening today in the Valdeese-German Vaz Valley, which is located in the “very Romansh” Surselva, but prefers the teaching of Italian as a second language in school, thus perpetuating a sort of linguistic isolation.

A citizen of the Canton of Grisons can usually access the use of one or more Romansh idioms: German and its variant, Italian and related dialects, English, possibly French and other extra-national languages. The complexity of the situation is evident.

Each variety of language has its place within the linguistic repertory of the community, which regulates its use in the various communication situations and defines its social status. Three classes of linguistic variety are recognized and they imply a territorial geographical criterion, a social criterion and a criterion of recognition of differences in communication situations.

Leach (1968) believes that status and role played contribute to determine the different types of identities that the individual has. Tessarolo (1990) maintains that the concept of identity is the product of the social structure, but that the social identifications produced “retroact” on the social structures, either by preserving them or making changes in them. The formation of the concept of identity occurs gradually and the time comes when the process is practically over and, at least in its general outline, no longer reversible. This does not mean that it is static; on the contrary it varies along with society since, as Bateson (1980) maintains, it is circumstances and not humans that change from community to community.

Determining and defining one’s own ethnicity imply common characteristics that are shared with a certain number of individuals. Ethnic identity starts from the will of differentiating oneself, of establishing some boundaries. Barth (1969) says that it is not boundaries in themselves that

are important, but rather the mechanisms that allow their creation and maintenance. Delimitation signals are important to establish the identity of the group (Fishman 1972).

Fishman (1977) lists the three main components that define ethnic identity:

1. *Paternity*: the group's biogenetic inheritance;
2. *Patrimony*: the culturally learnt behavior;
3. *Phenomenology*: the awareness of belonging to the group based on the other two factors.

Language is one of the first elements on which a group tries to base a community; however, it is only one element and, as such, it might not be essential to the creation of an ethnic identity. Ethnic identity remains a complex phenomenon that must be analyzed and described as a "cluster" of linguistically and non-linguistically oriented traits (Heilmann 1988). Le Page (1968) maintains that each individual creates his/her own system of verbal behavior in such a way as to make it similar to that of the group or groups he/she wants to be identified with. And so, in addition to being a means of communication, language is endowed with a certain prestige. Weinreich (1963) stated that prestige is connected to the value of a language in relation to "social progress". Generally speaking, the language with the greatest prestige tends to replace the one that has less; however, a language can be preserved even if it has no prestige.

Sharing cultural, geographical and historical origins generates national identity. National sentiment, consciousness and identity are, respectively, affective, psychological and anthropological phenomena. According to Cassirer (1955) what makes up a people is the awareness of being a people and such a community finds in a common language its direct expression.

10. The research

The primary objective of the present research was to find the attitudes implicit in the image of the Romansh, German, Italian and Rumantsch Grischun languages in a group of students from Ilanz, capital town of the Surselva region, which, together with low Engadin, is the heart of the Romansh language. The work follows the direction defined by Tesserolo in *Minoranze linguistiche ed immagine della lingua* [Linguistic minorities and image of the language] (1990). German was used as the lingua franca both to administer the questionnaire and the semantic differential. Albeit largely adjusted to the special situation of Romansh Switzerland, the questionnaire was originally inspired by the works of Francescato and

Solari Francescato (1994) and Tessarolo and Cumbo (2006) in the field of bilingual contexts.

A non-probabilistic sample was chosen, made up of 60 students, 29 male and 31 female (mean age 18.8 years), attending the commercial school (Handelsschule) in Ilanz (Glion in Romansch), the capital of Surselva, in the western side of the Canton. Some of its inhabitants report regularly using Sursilvan (81.5%) and having a very good knowledge of it (75%). Moreover, Sursilvan Romansh literature is extremely important both as regards quality and quantity (Furer 1996: 94).

What was said above allows us to hypothesize that:

- there are different attitudes towards the languages considered, especially as regards affect, use and prestige;
- use of Swiss German is more widespread than the Romansh idioms in their speakers;
- the Romansh idioms, Sursilvan in this case, in their traditional diffusion area, are used to a certain extent also in formal situations, notwithstanding the pervasiveness of German and the introduction of Rumantsch Grischun, which is proposed as an element of artificial diglossia;
- Rumantsch Grischun does not particularly attract the favor of Romansh speakers living in the area investigated;
- the image of the language is not directly correlated with its public use, but affect plays an important role.

11. Results of the questionnaire

The questionnaire aims at establishing the relation of the participants with the languages considered: some questions ask to define one's own ethnic identity compared to the rest of Switzerland and of the Canton.

The questionnaire features questions with nominal scale answers and interval scale answers: data analysis utilized the chi square test in the former and the *t* of Student in the latter.

Thanks to the questions asked on the interval scale a comparison was obtained between the languages as regards prestige, familiarity and usefulness constructs (Table 2). Answers could be modulated on a 7-interval scale.

The question on the usefulness of German obtains very high values, the mean being 6.76. The indication that emerges is the strong use of the German language. Even more indicative is the result with the questions on prestige ($M = 5.86$) and familiarity ($M = 6.35$), which show high val-

Table 2. *Language qualities*

Language	Prestige		Familiarity		Usefulness	
	M.	sd	M.	sd	M.	sd
German	5.86	1.73	6.35	0.91	6.76	0.58
Romansh idiom (Sursilvan)	5.53	1.86	5.88	1.93	5.15	1.74
Italian	3.56	1.55	3.30	1.48	2.91	1.56
Rumantsch grischun	2.48	1.49	2.85	1.38	1.63	0.84

Table 3. *Comparison between Grison and German*

	Romansh means		sd	German means		sd
Usefulness	5.15		1.74	6.76		0.58
Prestige	5.53		1.86	5.86		1.73
Familiarity	5.88		1.93	6.35		0.91

ues. This proves that the use of German is accepted in all sectors of communication. Table 3 shows the mean values for Romansh and German.

In the question on familiarity German gets a higher mean than Romansh as concerns prestige and usefulness, German gets higher values than Romansh, which, in any case, shows greater variability among participants.

In line with what we hypothesized, Italian was thought to obtain low consensus given its marginal role in the Romansh linguistic picture. On the contrary, the means were fairly good as concerns prestige (M = 3.56) and familiarity (M = 3.30); Romansh and Italian have in common their neo-Latin origins and having to yield to German. Italian was taught as a second language in the school investigated. As was to be expected, consideration for the cisalpine language is lower as regards usefulness (M = 2.91), given its scarce use in the daily life of the sample considered.

None of the languages mentioned so far was judged negatively in the three questions on usefulness, prestige, and familiarity. The same cannot be said for Rumantsch Grischun (RG), which yields very low means (usefulness = 1.63; prestige = 2.48; familiarity = 2.85).

The poor acceptance of the new common language is underlined also by the low score obtained on the question “How similar are your Romansh idiom and RG?” (M = 3.28; SD = 1.59), even if the idiom used by the sample (Sursilvan) is well represented in RG (Schmid 1982). Two questions asked to express closeness of Grison culture to Swiss and German cultures. In the first case the mean was 5.38, in the second 4.25 (Table 4).

Table 4. *Closeness of cultures*

	means	sd
Closeness between Grison and Swiss cultures	5.38	1.89
Closeness between Grison and German cultures	4.25	1.37

Table 5. *Importance of Grison and Swiss identities*

	means	sd
Importance of Grison identity	5.23	1.68
Importance of Swiss identity	5.45	1.54

Closeness to German culture is supported by the question “How close do you feel to the German people?” which gets a mean of 5.46 ($SD = 1.54$).

The young Grisons that took part in the research not only use German widely, but also consider German culture significantly similar to their own. Yet again, German shows its homologating influence on local particularisms. Some questions intended to establish a relation between Grison and Swiss identities; results show a slight preference of the sample for the latter (Table 5).

Both identities obtain high scores and so coexist without necessarily interfering with each other. It is plausible to think that both contribute to define our participants’ global identity. The slight predominance of the Swiss identity is reinforced by the widespread conviction that the rest of Switzerland has a good opinion of the Canton of Grisons.

To the question “How pleased are you that your first language is Romansh?” corresponds a mean of 5.85: it is a high value even if it is characterized by variability among participants ($SD = 2.14$).

The answers to the question “How close do you feel to the Swiss part that does not speak Romansh?” show that the Ilanz group feels little discriminated by the uniqueness of their language: the mean was 5.65 ($SD = 1.42$): The *t* of Student test highlighted two significant differences between genders as regards usefulness of German and Italian, greater for females ($M = 6.93$ and $M = 3.48$, respectively) than for males ($M = 6.58$ and $M = 2.41$ respectively; for both males and females $p = 0.001$).

It is significant that to the question, “Do you think it would be a good thing if the first language were the same all over Switzerland?” 95% of participants answered No and 5% Yes. Plurilingualism, an essential pre-requisite for the survival of Romansh and since time immemorial the

foundation of civil living together in the Canton, is still highly approved by the new generations.

To the question “Do you speak Romansh?” 81.7% said “yes”, 8.3% said “sometimes” and 10% said “no”. When the interviewees were asked, “If you often speak Grison, why do you do it?”, the most frequent explanations were “because I’m used to it” and “because I live in an area where Romansh is spoken a lot” (in both cases the percentage was 48.3%). Among our participants, 88% answered, “It is useful to speak and/or understand Romansh”. Main motivations were: “because a lot of people speak Romansh” (88.3%) and “because it is more real” (81.7%).

The percentage of those that say that it is useful or fairly useful to speak or understand Romansh (98.3%) is higher than those who say that they speak it at least occasionally (90%); the slight difference could be produced by those that have the linguistic competence, but do not make active use of it.

The answers to the questionnaire point to large use of German in both formal and informal situations. Participants were asked which language they used with friends and family members: 78.8% answered German and 88% Romansh. As concerns formal situations, participants were asked which language they spoke at the doctor’s or in the bank: 76.7% answered German and 53.9% Romansh.

To the question “Who do you think those who speak Romansh and German use Romansh with?”, 98.8% answered “friends that speak Romansh” and 18.3% answered “everybody”. And so it emerged that those who speak Romansh do it only with others who speak the same language. The language used in interpersonal relationships is shared by the interlocutors.

Changing the question in favor of German, “Who do you think those who speak Romansh and German use German with?”, 18.7% answered “everybody” and 68.8% answered “friends that speak Romansh”. This underlines that use of German is not generalized for communications with all interlocutors and that Romansh is easily interchanged with German by most interviewees when they address friends and family members that speak Romansh.

The question “Which language and linguistic variety do you prefer?” presented the following options: “German”, “Italian”, “Rumantsch Grischun” and “local Romansh idiom”; results are shown in Table 6.

One’s own Romansh idiom is preferred by the Ilanz group (66.7%); German gets 58% of preferences, while Rumantsch Grischun gets no preferences at all. This endorses the low acceptance of the new standardized language. By calculating the chi square, no differences were found as regards gender.

Table 6. Favorite languages

Favorite languages	Frequency	Percent
German	30	58
Italian	5	8.3
Rumantsch grischun	0	0
Local Romansh idiom	48	66.7

12. Results of the semantic differential

The semantic differentials were applied to Italian, Rumantsch Grischun, own Romansh idiom and German, in that order.

The mean scores obtained underwent the *t* of Student test to find possible statistical differences between male and female participants. A factor analysis was then carried out in order to examine the sample more in depth and to make some comparisons.

Table 7 shows the overall mean profiles obtained by the four languages in the semantic differentials.

The graph in Figure 2 shows that the trend is fairly similar in the two languages, German and Romansh, with the exception of three scales, difficult/easy, original/common and unmelodious/melodious, where German is placed on the side of difficult, common and unmelodious.

In the graph in Figure 3, the lines of Romansh and Rumantsch Grischun (RG) are opposed, almost as if one language were considered the opposite of the other, with the exception of very few scales: difficult/easy, obligatory/voluntary, prestigious/unprestigious, spontaneous/imposed, public/private.

The one-way analysis of variance highlights that the concept Rumantsch Grischun differentiates remarkably from all the other languages considered in all the bipolar scales. The means attributed to *Italian* show that the females always differ from the males in allotting the scores (always more extreme), with the exception of the *spontaneous-imposed* and *ours-theirs* scales, where the males have the “stronger” means. Females seem to appreciate Italian more than males. As regards the other concepts under scrutiny, few differences were found between genders. It must be underlined that the *Romansh idiom* is the one that does not record any significant difference between genders.

The data underwent factor analysis via the main component procedure. Three factors were extracted and subjected to Varimax rotation. Thus, the matrices supplying the structure of attitude to the language were obtained. The three factors extracted from the sample of Romansh

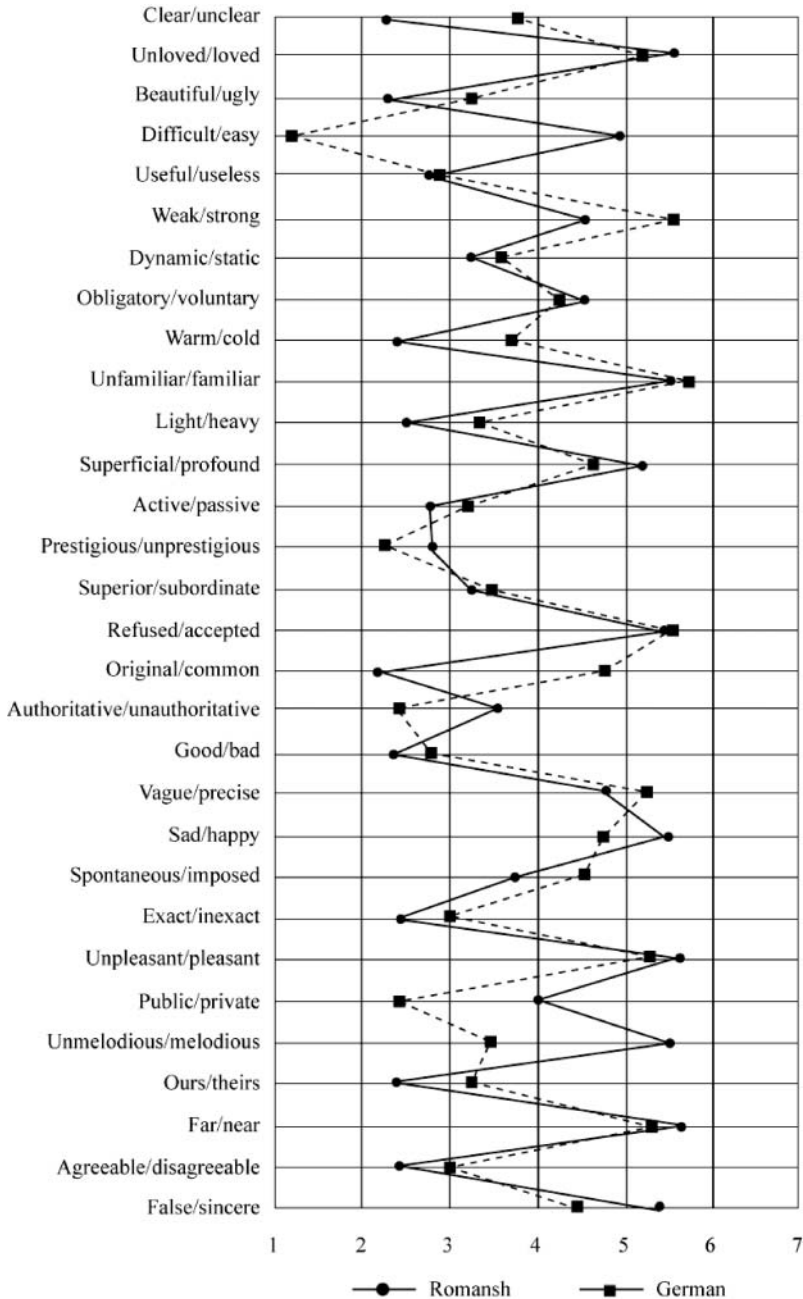
Table 7. Mean profiles of languages

	Italian	RG	Romansh	German	
Clear	2.62	5.13	2.27	3.85	Unclear
Unloved	5.85	2.36	5.62	5.15	Loved
Beautiful	2.61	4.96	2.28	3.18	Ugly
Difficult	3.96	2.98	4.91	1.18	Easy
Useful	3.88	4.41	2.81	2.86	Useless
Weak	4.35	3.86	4.56	5.63	Strong
Dynamic	3.81	4.15	3.12	3.68	Static
Obligatory	3.96	3.88	4.62	4.30	Voluntary
Warm	2.88	5.11	2.41	3.78	Cold
Unfamiliar	4.45	2.65	5.56	5.71	Familiar
Light	3.84	5.05	2.58	3.21	Heavy
Superficial	4.66	3.16	5.12	4.73	Profound
Active	3.27	4.48	2.82	3.18	Passive
Prestigious	3.13	4.85	2.93	2.28	Unprestigious
Superior	3.47	4.95	3.18	3.46	Subordinate
Refused	5.42	2.58	5.48	5.51	Accepted
Original	2.86	4.66	2.18	4.85	Common
Authoritative	3.30	4.75	3.68	2.40	Unauthoritative
Good	2.69	4.58	2.27	2.85	Bad
Vague	4.38	3.48	4.89	5.16	Precise
Sad	5.76	3.21	5.51	4.70	Happy
Spontaneous	4.27	4.61	3.78	4.55	Imposed
Exact	3.32	4.65	2.41	3.00	Inexact
Unpleasant	5.71	3.00	5.77	5.18	Pleasant
Public	3.49	3.16	4.00	2.41	Private
Unmelodious	5.93	3.23	5.48	3.48	Melodious
Ours	5.81	4.51	2.29	3.18	Their
Far	4.28	2.83	5.72	5.35	Near
Agreeable	2.89	5.13	2.36	3.00	Disagreeable
False	4.66	3.28	5.32	4.76	Sincere

speakers from Ilanz explain 62.5% of total variance: the first factor (F1), called “Identification and prestige”, is very important as it covers by itself 51.8% of variance; it loads on several scales, *non familiar-familiar*, *prestigious-unprestigious* and *ours-theirs* among them. The second factor (F2), called “Pleasantness and dynamism”, explains 6.3% of variance and concerns the *melodious-unmelodious*, *dynamic-static* and *unpleasant-pleasant* scales. Lastly, the third factor (F3), called “Spontaneity”, covers 4.4% of variance and concerns the *spontaneous-imposed* and *public-private* scales.

The factor analysis allowed to reveal attitude towards the language in general and, via the calculation of composite factor scores (CFS), the

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Figure 2. Means for German and Romansh

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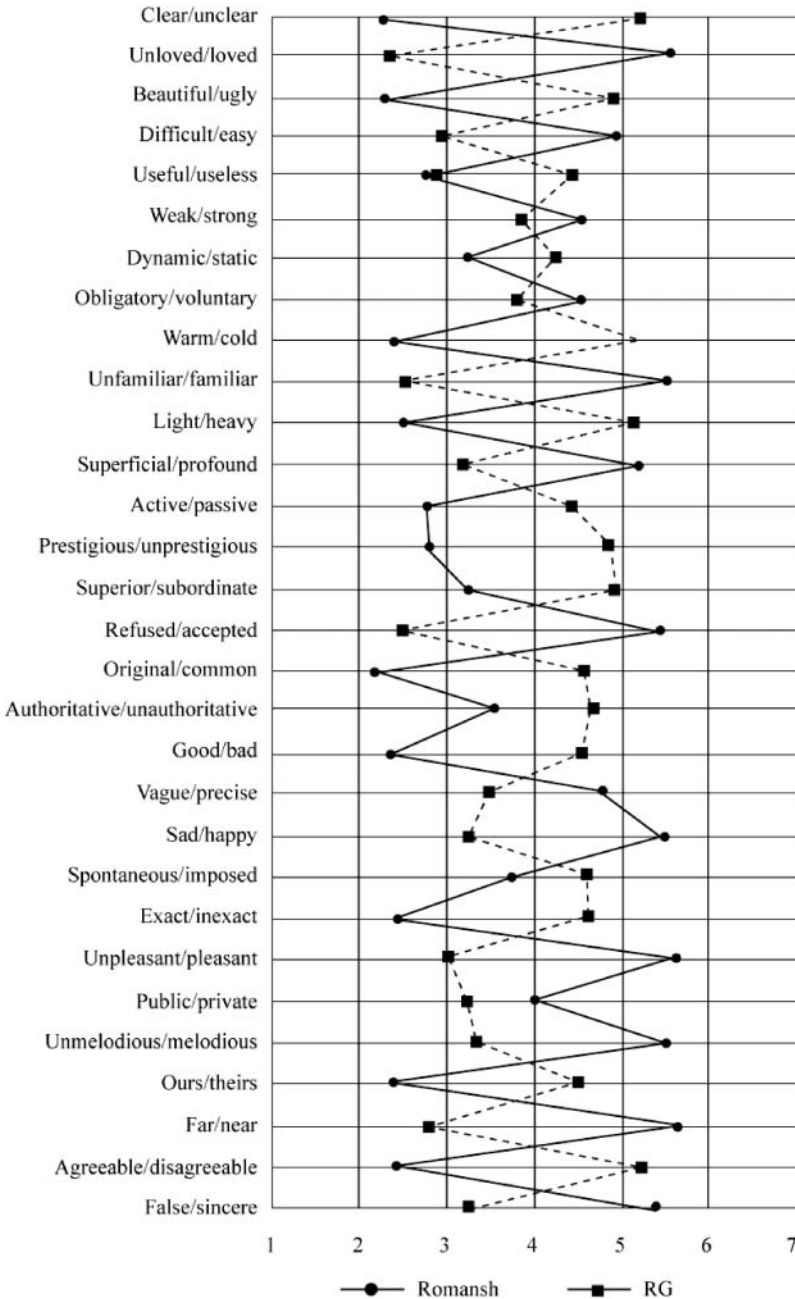


Figure 3. Means for Romansh and RG

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Table 8. *Composite factor scores*

	Identification and prestige	Pleasantness and dynamism
Italian	0.21	1.24
Rumantsch Grischun	−0.86	−0.76
Romansh idiom (Sursilvan)	1.38	1.43
German	1.37	0.30

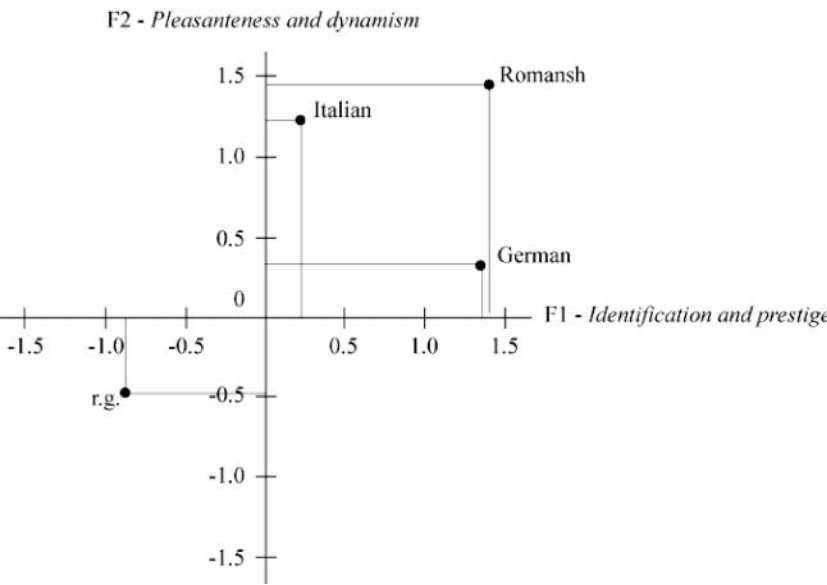


Figure 4. *Position of the languages in the semantic space*

attitude towards each language and its coordinate in the semantic space can be found. It was possible to calculate the CFS only on the first two factor dimensions. The loaded scales used are for F1 weak-strong, non familiar-familiar, prestige-no prestige, ours-theirs, far-near and agreeable-disagreeable; for F2 dynamic-static, warm-cold, unpleasant-pleasant and unmelodious-melodious.

Table 8 shows the composite factor scores for the four languages present in the Canton of Grisons.

The graph in Figure 4 clearly shows that Romansh is the language with the highest identification and prestige and also with the highest Pleasant-

ness and Dynamism scores. Prestige is very strong for German and Pleasantness for Italian. Interesting is the position of Rumantsch Grischun (RG), a language that was created *ad hoc* and taught by force.

Our data show that German, albeit present and prestigious, does not attract favor and is not felt as dynamic. On the whole, one's own Romansh idiom is considered more positively than the other languages investigated. Rumantsch Grischun is given negative values on both dimensions: the imposition of the "artificial koine" is at present not appreciated by the Romansh youth interviewed. Lastly, Italian, albeit not having high scores on the first dimension, attracts favor and is felt as dynamic.

13. Closing notes

The Swiss confederation pays great attention to the safeguard of linguistic minorities, as it clearly showed in 1997 by ratifying the "European chart for regional and minority languages". The Canton of Grisons is the only one in Switzerland where three languages, German, Italian and Romansh, coexist and are recognized by the institutions. Romansh, which was the majority language until the mid-1800s, has now been replaced by German, which in time has become the *lingua franca*.

The events of the last 100 years — among them the end of isolation, the population mobility, the shift from primary to tertiary economy, the impact of new technologies and the introduction of a new standardized written language — have had a negative effect especially on Romansh language and culture (it must be recalled that the institutionalization of the language in 1938 did not originate from a stance taken by the Romansh speakers, but from external contingencies linked to the Italian irredentism).

The traditionally Romansh linguistic area (to which belongs the Surselvan region investigated in our research), that is to say the only linguistically vital milieu, has been progressively decreasing, as can be seen in the censuses by the constant declining of its speakers (Haiman and Benincà 1992).

In the Canton of Grisons we are confronting, at best, bilingualism without coordinated, subtractive, unstable and unilateral diglossia (in the sense that the Romansh population speaks Swiss German, whereas the other Swiss do not speak Romansh). The presence of the Swiss German variant and of Rumantsch Grischun indicates the advent of a double diglossia, complicated by the presence of Italian and English (the latter particularly popular with the young). However, it can be noted that

diglossia between the oral and the written form exists in all idioms, sometimes more important than between a local oral form and the standard Rumantsch Grischun.

Given the young age of the sample, the data should supply an estimate of Romansh speakers' trend for the near future. Our research highlights that German is at the top on all the aspects addressed in the questionnaire, with the exception of informal and affective communication; German asserts itself as the most advantaged language. The semantic differential shows that German is considered the most *difficult*, but also the most *prestigious*, *authoritative*, *accepted* and *familiar* language. Composite factor scores reveal low *favor* and *dynamism* towards German, but events connected to modernity produce progressive, and seemingly unstoppable, move towards the German language area.

Overall, our results suggest the speakers' own Romansh idiom (Sursylvan) is thought useful — less than German, however — as it still has some applications especially in the private sphere and to a lesser extent in the public sphere. Romansh remains the favorite linguistic variety and shows “resistance” on all fronts. The traditional Romansh idiom is positively evaluated with regard to *beauty*, *acceptance* and *originality*. Also as regards composite factor scores it gets the highest scores in the factor dimensions.

Interesting are the results on the relation between speakers' own Romansh idiom and Rumantsch Grischun. The latter gets the lowest means and percentages of all in the questionnaire. This shows low acceptance just by those who will be most affected by its introduction. The most significant outcome of the semantic differential is that for Rumantsch Grischun as many as 25 out of 30 scales are positioned on opposite polarities from the other languages (Figure 3) and its position in the semantic space has negative coordinates (Table 8).

Attitudes towards the languages investigated have changed over time in response to of the ethnic identity and socio-economic developments of the Canton. The identity of the young Romansh speakers interviewed was made up in a fairly balanced way of Grisons and Swiss.

The following hypotheses have been confirmed:

- Participants have different attitudes towards the languages investigated as regards familiarity, use and prestige;
- The use of Swiss German turns out to be more widespread than Romansh among Romansh speakers.
- Romansh is still used to a certain extent, even in formal situations, although German prevails. Romansh remains the language of informality *par excellence*.

- The new common standard (Rumantsch Grischun) has not been accepted by the sample of our research study.
- The semantic differential has confirmed the results of the questionnaire: German dominates undisputed in the results of both instruments, followed closely by the Romansh idiom.

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