Separated multilingualism?
The experience of students' multilingualism in minority language education in Brittany (France)

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ABSTRACT:

This article presents the results of a three-month empirical study in a private minority immersion school of the non-profit association DIWAN in Brittany (France). The private minority schools of DIWAN, founded in 1977 as a reaction against monolingual language policy in France, were modeled on Canadian immersion schools, which first appeared in 1965 in Ontario, as well as on Ikastolas (Basque country) and Welsh language schools (Wales). The network of DIWAN immersion schools has created a linguistic regime, ideologically founded in language revitalization. The regime guarantees an artificially secure Breton-only space in schools, along with the teaching of two foreign languages (English and German or Spanish) and classes in the students' mother tongue French. Nowadays this artificially created Breton-only space is definitely in opposition to a globalized and flexible world. In this context, the research study questions the following: "How do the students experience their multilingualism?" — hypothesizing that the students do encounter separated multilingualism. The study is based on the theoretical concept of multilingualism and on the models of multilingualism-encouragement in schools. In addition, there are references to the theory of the production of social space, the concept of language regime and also the study of material semiotics. The empirical part of the study combines language biographical and ethnographical approaches in the form of language portrayals and narrative interviews, as well as linguistic landscaping.

KEY WORDS:

integrated and separated multilingualism, language portrayals, language regime, linguistic landscaping, minority language education, production of space

0. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTION

This contribution discusses the experience of students' multilingualism in minority language education in Western Brittany, France. In the following I will be referring to a three-month ethnographic study in a DIWAN immersion school, which I conducted within the scope of my diploma thesis at the University of Vienna.

As the research question deals with the experience of students' multilingualism in a Breton-focused profile of minority schooling of DIWAN, which has created a linguistic regime, ideologically founded in language revitalization (Vetter, 2013), I would like to suggest the following hypothesis: The pupils who participate in the study encounter separated multilingualism. In doing so, I follow the concept of Blackledge and Creese (2010) and their separated-integrated continuum of multilingualism.

The article is divided into four main parts. Firstly, I will contextualize the research question and outline the concept of DIWAN schools. Secondly, I will consider the theoretical concepts my study is based on. Here I refer to concepts such as multilingual subject positioning, creation of social space and multilingualism. Furthermore, I will explain the methodology behind my study, which is ethnographically oriented, and, lastly, I present one of the major findings of the outcome of my study.

1. CONTEXTUALIZATION

DIWAN's private minority immersion schools were founded in 1977 as a reaction against monolingual language policy in France and represent one of the best practice examples of minority schooling in Europe today (Vetter, 2013). Canadian immersion schools, which first appeared in 1965 in Ontario, Ikastolas (Basque country) and Welsh language schools (Wales) served as a model for this school-type (Kuter, 1999, p. 178). The French monolingual language policy implemented towards the end of the 19th century and the high symbolic value of the French language as "une et indivisible" (Hagège, 1996) resulted in the banishment of minority languages from school for decades. The prohibition was accompanied by drastic measures. When children used the Breton language at school, they were immediately punished. One way of punishment was the so-called practice of "symbole": the punished child had to wear an object negatively associated with the Breton culture, such as a clog or a board, until he or she named another child who had just used Breton. The child, who was in possession of the symbols at the end of the day, had then to suffer a further punishment (Puren, 2003, p. 56; An Du, 1992, p. 76).

The negative connotation of Breton and its devaluation as the idiom of farmers and artisans (Walter, 1988, pp. 162–164) contributed to the fact that the transfer of the Breton language from parents to the children declined (Broudic, 1999, p. 115). Only the law "Loi Deixonne" introduced in 1951 ensured a place for minority languages at schools in regions where they have been in use. Today the Breton language, which is the only Celtic language spoken on mainland Europe, is regarded as one of the worldwide minority languages with official status (Stephens, 1992, p. 349; Breton, 2008, pp. 6–7).

This heavy burden as well as the existing concern about the survival of the Breton language led to an assembly of a young generation of activist parents aiming to counteract the given situation of languages and thus to secure the survival of the Breton language. They founded the non-profit association DIWAN and implemented the Breton language as the language of instruction at DIWAN schools as part of a total immersion (Christian, 1996; Decke-Cornill — Küster, 2010).

The school's language regime therefore guarantees a secure Breton-only space, along with the teaching of two foreign languages. At the age of 11, pupils enter secondary school and start their English lessons. At the age of 13, they are able to choose between German and Spanish language classes.

As it is described on their website (Diwan Breizh, 2001) the official goal of DIWAN schools is to implement three different *languages of instruction* by the end of secondary school, namely Breton, French and English. Additionally, pupils should gain written

and spoken language competence in a fourth language, which would be either German or Spanish. Learners may choose Latin as soon as they have reached the third grade.

Thus, the students should have skills in up to four different languages that do not represent their first language. This is in contrast to other public secondary schools in France, where the students are trained alongside their French L1 in up to two languages.

However, the main language used at school and outside of language classes (French, English, German, Spanish or Latin) remains Breton in order to achieve the goal of total immersion in the Breton language. This implies that the school life is completely embedded in Breton. It constitutes the instructional and social means of communicating, in the boarding school's both educational and residential sphere.

2. THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGY

In the following it will be assumed that learners entering the school area and their acting in the space (with and without language) become a part of it (Blommaert — Collins — Slembrouck, 2005).

Therefore, the interaction between learners, language and education area will be considered as being essential and will further be discussed in the following. The theoretical concept and the terminology described below are closely connected to each other and can be graphically illustrated as a cycle (cf. Figure 1). Based on the broad definition and the concept of the integrated-separated continuum of *multilingualism* presented below, the production of social space is explained. In school space one can localize multilingual individuals in process who are, in turn, theoretically linked to the integrated-separated continuum of multilingualism.
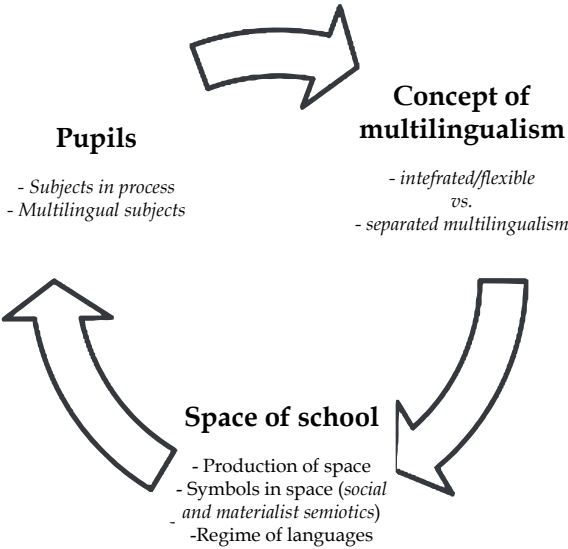

Pupils

- *Subjects in process*
- *Multilingual subjects*

Concept of multilingualism

- *intefrated/flexible*
  vs.
- *separated multilingualism*

Space of school

- Production of space
- Symbols in space (*social and materialist semiotics*)
- Regime of languages

FIGURE 1: Theoretical concepts and terminology.

2.1 DEFINITION AND CONCEPTS OF MULTILINGUALISM

For my empirical study I refer to a rather broad definition of the term multilingualism. The term itself addresses the terminological duality of multilingualism and plurilingualism, as established in the *Common European Framework of References for Languages* (CECRL, 2000). In deconstructing this antagonism inherent in this differentiation, I understand multilingualism as a dynamic "continuum" which leaves a distinguishing and dominant impression on an individual's language repertoire. As Weber and Horner (2012, p. 3) put it:

> [...] multilingualism is a matter of degree, a continuum and since we all use different linguistic varieties, registers, styles, genres and accents, we are all to a greater or lesser degree multilingual. [...] we will say that the varieties, etc. that we use constitute our linguistic repertoire. Moreover, these repertoires are not static but dynamic, since the resources in them change over time.

Apart from this general definition of multilingualism, my study especially relies on the relevant notion of integrated/flexible and separated (bi-/)multilingualism respectively (Blackledge — Creese, 2010) to emphasis my understanding of the individual as an actor in a certain space.

According to Blackledge and Creese integrated/flexible (bi-/)multilingualism is the usage and the mixture of more languages in any setting. In this respect, the authors refer to Bailey's (2012) heteroglossia, who himself relies on Michail Bachtin ("the simultaneous use of different kinds of forms and signs", p. 499), as well as to García's (2009) definition of the practice of translanguaging, which she describes as the act of using different linguistic features due to one's comprehension. Blackledge and Creese explain that with integrated/flexible (bi-/)multilingualism different languages are used as hybrids, yet neither as homogenously nor as rigidly separated from each other. In contrast to the integrated type of multilingualism, separated (bi-/)multilingualism is considered to be the usage of one language after the other in any setting. More precisely, this means that languages are not mixed in any discourse. Hence, depending on the context, several languages can indeed be used at once, yet separately and thus without any mixing within a setting. Blackledge and Creese (2011, p. 1206) make it clear that separated (bi-/)multilingualism seems to be typical for institutions whose aim is to promote minority languages:

> Separate bilingualism can be understood as constituting a response to anxiety about the potential loss of the community language, and the cultural knowledge it is considered to index.

2.2 THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE

In conceptualising the space in which the school is embedded, I rely on the French philosopher and Marxist sociologist Henri Lefèbvre who offered in 1974 a new theoretical perspective on the production of space. The English translation, published in

1991, caused uproar amongst scholars in the sociology of space (Lefèbvre, 1991/1974; 2004/1974). Lefèbvre defines space as a social product, which is constituted of social practices. The social product, then, can be further differentiated within a triad of factors, namely spatial practice (day to day practice), representations of space (academic discourses about space) and spaces of representations (living space through pictures, symbols, memorials, etc.). The elements of this triad stand in a complex, interconnected relationship to each other and cannot be separated from each other.

According to Lefèbvre's understanding of the social construction of space, the consequence of individuals shaping their space is the development and change of the space they originally stepped into. Kress (2010) analyses symbols in this space with regard to the practices of social semiotics, since symbols are acting as social agents and they characterize social life in space. Additionally, social semiotics reflects space structure through their ascribed function. Blommaert and Huang (2010, p. 3) clarify this when assuming a set of semiotics that they describe as materialist:

> Sociological, cultural, sociolinguistic and political features of that space will determine how signs look and work in that space, and signs will contribute to the organization and regulation of that space by defining addresses and selecting audiences and by imposing particular restrictions, offering invitations, articulating norms of conduct and so on to these selected audiences.

Furthermore, we can find a manifestation of one or more language regimes in a social space, which consists of rules and regulations that are positioning language usage in an institutional space (Busch, 2013). In sociolinguistics, however, we do not just look at regulations, but also at speakers' habits with regard to the language regime (Kroskrity, 2000; Coulmas, 2005).

The distinction between administrative and non-administrative language (Lüdtke, 1999) is crucial in this respect. Administrative languages are languages declared by the institution, whereas non-administrative languages do not have the institution's approval but they are nevertheless used in informal situations. This is the reason why the influence of the language regime in the majority of cases affects language at the level of administrative language, and less so at the level of non-administrative language (Lüdtke, 1999).

2.3 THE MULTILINGUAL SUBJECT

In the third part of the theoretical examination I will take a closer look at the learners acting in space, who I will henceforth classify as multilingual subjects.

Claire Kramsch offers this definition of the multilingual subject in her monograph with the same title, published in 2006. Her usage of the term subject refers to Julia Kristeva's (1977) subject in process. In an interview in 2012 Kramsch further clarifies:

> This is something you *become*. You are not born a subject. Language shapes who you are and you become a subject throughout your life in contact with various symbolic systems, including languages. That is why Kristeva talks about the "sub-

ject in process". By putting the subject in there I was focusing on the subjectivity and the identity of the learner (Kramsch, 2012, p. 75).

Hélot explains the notion of Kramsch's term "multilingual subject" as follows:

> The multilingual subject is not necessarily the person who speaks many languages with equal mastery or with native or near native proficiency, but rather someone who resonates to each language relative to the other, and who has a more acute awareness than usual of the social, cultural and emotional contexts in which his/her various languages have grown and the life experiences they evoke (Kramsch, 2006, cit. by Hélot, 2008, p. 75).

This subject-centered approach emphasizes and sets the permanently developing and dynamic linguistic repertoire of learners at the center, with which they act in the space of the school and in whose design they are involved. Furthermore, this approach points out that, being multilingual subjects, learners have an awareness, which enables them to reflect on the social, cultural and emotional context in which their entire dynamic linguistic repertoire is embedded.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA CORPUS

Asking for the pupil's experience of multilingualism at school space does not only call for a subject-oriented, but also an inductive approach. Hence, I rely on an intensive period of field research. Especially ethnography has experienced its turning point in educational research since the end of the 1980s (e.g. Woods, 1990; Dubet, 1994). At this point it shall be referring to Moore and Sabatier (2012) who claim that school is characterized as one of the natural spaces *par excellence* for an ethnographic research.

Hence, the three-month triangulated study combines ethnographical approaches: in situ-observation (Lüders, 2010; Moore — Sabatier, 2010), linguistic landscaping (Landry — Bourhis, 1997; Weber — Horner, 2012), and language biographical approaches: language portrayals (Gogolin — Neumann, 1999; Krumm — Jenkins, 2001; Busch, 2013) and narrative interviews (Hopf, 2010; Talmy, 2010).

In total, 76 learners from different classrooms (aged 10 to 14 years) participated in the production of language portrayals. As an initial point to a biographic approach, they were asked to mark their spoken languages into a human silhouette during class. They could use different colors for each language. Furthermore, the learners briefly explained their chosen location of each language on the silhouette in written word.

In this methodology, the instructions for learners are kept short. Thus terms such as language are not to be discussed beforehand. This creative method allows learners to reflect on their practices and attitudes towards their languages, which usually proceed subconsciously. The biographical approach furthermore promotes the deconstruction of normative categories, which quite often depict languages as solid

units and where dialects or fantasy languages and the like are not even to be counted (Busch, 2013, p. 39).

The language portrayals and the written texts were analyzed according to the Qualitative Content Analysis (Mayring, 2010). Based on the language portrayals, 14 narrative interviews were conducted with students at the age of 12 to 14 years.

The narrative interviews consisted of five phases: In the introductory phase learners were informed about the open questions about/concerning the languages at school and their language portraits. The second phase (spontaneous narration stage) represented the definitive beginning of the interviews where the learners were supposed to describe how an ordinary school day looked like. They were then asked to tell how a day looked like when they did not have to go to school. This phase was followed by another phase in which short questions to topics already narrated were asked (inquiry stage). Subsequently, aspects, which were not clear enough during the narration, were taken up in the fourth phase (repetition stage). In the final phase, the learners had the opportunity to tell something that they had not yet expressed (Fischer-Rosenthal — Rosenthal, 1997, pp. 414–418).

The narrative interviews were also analyzed and interpreted by means of the qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2010).

4. RESULTS

4.1 IN SITU-OBSERVATION AND LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPING

With reference to the methodologies of in situ-observation and linguistic landscaping, and by looking at school space from three different perspectives (outside school, inside school and communication from inside the school to the outside), it becomes obvious that social space in school is characterized by a monolingual habitus (Gogolin, 1994). On the administrative level, the monolingual habitus is accompanied by Breton monolingualism. Entering the school building, one faces an artificially created monolingual space. The outside world, however, is characterized by multilingualism. This can be illustrated by the pictures below (cf. Figures 2 and 3a,b):

There are multilingual directions outside school (cf. Figure 2), which are replaced by monolingual directions on the school grounds and in the school building (cf. Figure 3). Furthermore, upon entering the schoolyard there is a Breton imperative, which tells the students to use Breton on the school grounds and inside the school building (cf. Figure 4).

Concerning the communication between school and parents, it has been observed that the majority of documents directed to the parents is written in both French and Breton. This can be explained by the fact that a lot of the students' parents do not have sufficient command of Breton. However, some documents, for instance school certificates or special terms in official letters, are written in Breton only.

The question why DIWAN promotes Breton monolingualism to such an extent that other languages occupy only little space is discussable. One might argue that this kind of policy aims for total immersion. Taking closer look at this issue and taking into account Lefèbvre's (1991/1974; 2004/1974) work, one notes that historical and societal cir-
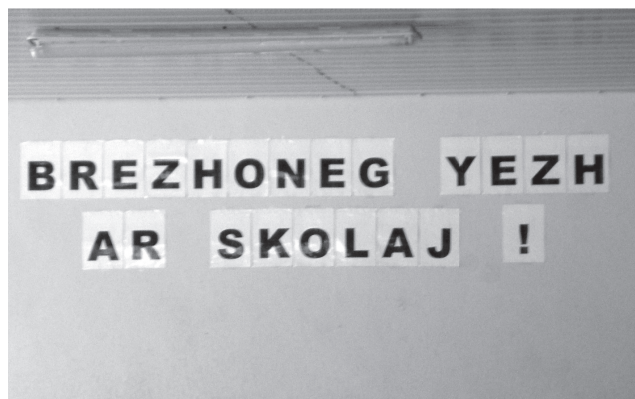
FIGURE 2: Bilingual street signs
(Osterkorn, 2013).

FIGURE 3A, B: Entering the school
(Osterkorn, 2013).

**FIGURE 4:** In the schoolyard
(Osterkorn, 2013).

cumstances are affecting tangible spaces. Likewise one might refer to Bachtin (2008), who, within the framework of literary analysis, speaks about chronotopos and states that every speech act refers to different spaces in time. Keeping this in mind, with regard to Breton's dark history — the ban of Breton and the subsequent efforts taken by the association of DIWAN to save this dying Celtic language — one can perhaps better understand the manifestation of the dominating monolingual language regime. However, is this monolingual language regime not in direct opposition to a multilingual and multicultural world, which is increasingly shaped by globalization?

4.2 LANGUAGE PORTRAYALS OF MULTILINGUAL SUBJECTS

Although the space is considered to be a monolingual space, it is composed of multilingual individuals or, multilingual subjects in process, to use the term of Kristeva (1977) and Kramsch (2006). The analysis of the language portrayals shows that the learners experience and "live" their individual multilingualism quite consciously. They give an account of at least three languages to be in their language repertoire and they express the social, cultural and emotional context that these languages are embedded in.

The locations of the learners' languages on the silhouette suggest dynamics, which emerge from the learners' inter-subjective relationships, their origin and personal experiences with the languages. This can be exemplified by the following language portrayal (cf. Figure 5a, b).
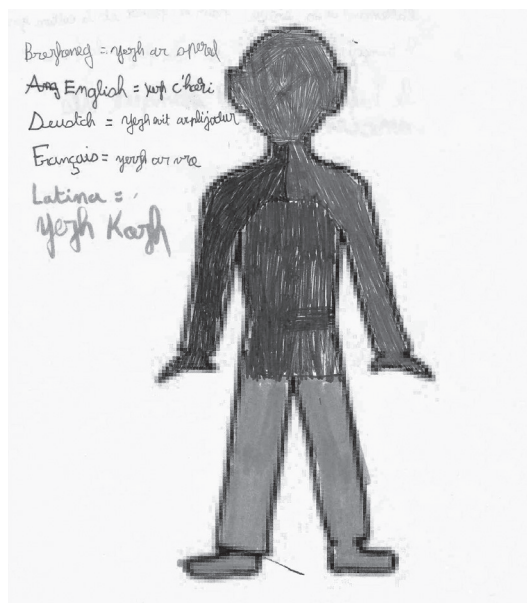
FIGURE 5A, B: Language portrayal (recto-verso) (Osterkorn, 2013).
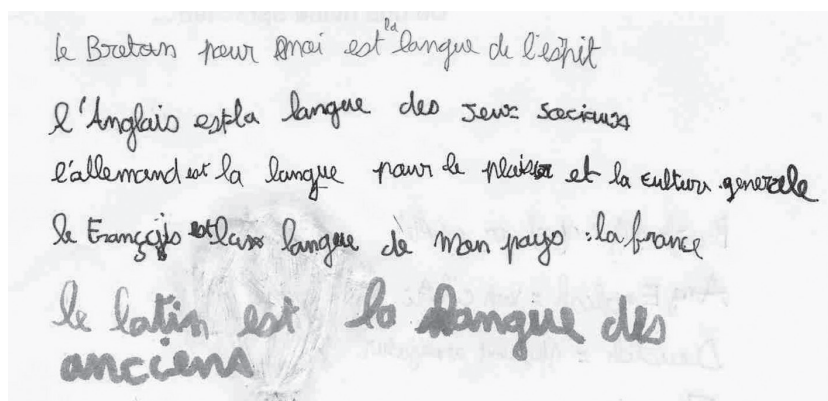
Let us call the student who created this language portrayal Youenn. Next to the portrayal there is a short text in French that contains an explanation of the drawing. Youenn is 13 years old and currently attends third grade of secondary school and boarding school. The speaker identification process within the framework of the narrative interview reveals that his first language (L1) is Breton. Both his parents and grandparents use French and Breton at home. Youenn lives in a small village in the countryside.

As for Youenn, his head is Breton. He explains that it is the "language of the mind". French and English are located in his arms, left and right: "English is the language of computer games and French is the language of my country."

The German language constitutes a substantial part of Youenn's portrait. On the silhouette German is spread across his chest and stomach in brown color. Youenn associates the German language with "fun" and "general knowledge".

Youenn attends Latin classes as an optional subject. Latin is located at his legs and feet on his language portrayal, since it is the "language of the ancestors".

Per definition, Youenn is a multilingual subject. The analysis of his language portrait, combined with the narrative interview, confirms this assumption in even clearer terms. He accounts for five languages to be in his language repertoire, and actively reflects the social, cultural and emotional context that these languages are embedded in.

4.3 NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS AND THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SEPARATED-INTEGRATED CONTINUUM OF MULTILINGUALISM

The analysis of the language portrayals and the narrative interviews suggests that language practices in a specific space are subjected to rules and habits that are determined by an existing language regime. Learners perceive the dominant monolingual language regime when they enter the school premises and are therefore encouraged to immediately switch to Breton since the language regime requires it.

In order to once again refer to the spatial triad described by Lefèbvre (1991/1974) and the reciprocal connection with the materialist semiotics ("social agents"; Kress, 2010) and those who are (inter)acting there (Blommaert — Collins — Slembrouck, 2005; Blommaert — Huang, 2010), the language regime constructed in space explicitly requires especially at the level of administrative language (Lüdtke, 1999) the sole use of Breton. On the part of the learners a school language hence develops which stands opposite their private language.

When they feel observed by the institution school (teaching staff), they use Breton (school language) in formal situations. In informal situations however (in their boarding rooms, in the classroom, in the schoolyard, etc.) they handle the language regime by drawing on the language which is the easiest to use and which is emotionally the closest: their first language (L1) that is most frequently French (private language). The compulsion to use Breton only implicates a form of multilingualism among the pupils, where we shall refer to Blackledge and Creese (2010) and their notion of separated multilingualism (separate use of languages within any setting).

Furthermore, learners clearly express in the interviews that they feel pleasure in informal moments when mixing languages, i.e. they start a sentence in Breton, end

it in English and occasionally add some French and German words. The fun factor of this form of multilingualism, which we shall name with Blackledge and Creese (2010) integrated/flexible multilingualism (the use of several "languages" in any setting) becomes therefore quite obvious.

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The school environment is characterized as a place where a monolingual habitus (Gogolin, 1994) in Breton language is present. It is accompanied by a monolingual Breton regime of languages, which affects the scope of administrative language. However, the school space is a space where students can be localized and considered as multilingual subjects in process (Kristeva, 1977; Kramsch, 2006).

They repeatedly experience separated multilingualism, because they are aware of the situations and places of specific language usages. Especially at the level of administrative language, mixing languages is not an accepted or tolerated practice. The experience of separated multilingualism affects the students' emotional world — they frequently feel constrained using Breton the whole day due to the language regime, even if they want to express themselves in another language, such as in French, in certain moments. Apart from separated multilingualism, the students encounter — rarely and only at the level of not-administrative language — integrated multilingualism, in situations of mixing languages. The students experience integrated multilingualism quite positively, which reflects the benefits of multilingualism. This form of multilingualism also occurs in the case of spontaneous reactions or in situations when students feel far off the institution of their school. An example of that would be whispering during class when the teacher has no way of taking notice.

The goal of the non-profit organization DIWAN is to make Breton the language of its student body. In the course of total immersion, Breton should not only be used during class; Breton should also be the language of social interaction among the school's community. Eventually and ultimately it is supposed to turn into a language that is used with joy by the learners. Reaching that goal remains a difficult undertaking, as students stop speaking Breton as soon as they leave school grounds with its dominant monolingual regime of languages. The majority of learners do not use Breton at home, which they are well aware of and often they are simply tired of using the language as soon as they have left school for the day.

This research work partially agrees with the hypothesis and shows that the pupils who participate in the study encounter separated multilingualism. What is more, it points out that the experience of multilingualism remains a complex issue due to various circumstances, only some of which can be considered in the research work and presented in this article.

Thus, the following matter remains a matter under discussion: When is it time to create a space in our globalized and multicultural world, where all languages of the learners will be encouraged; a space in which students are considered multilingual subjects who grow up and develop themselves by drawing on to their entire language repertoire. With this in mind, this article shall conclude with the conception of a mul-

tilingual school (Hélot — Young, 2006, p. 69): "In other words, a multilingual school is not just a place where pupils can learn two or more languages. It is also a place where the plurilingual repertoire of bilingual/multilingual pupils is perceived and viewed as a resource to be shared and built upon, rather than regarded as a dilemma."

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