



Learning from Swiss Watching

ETAS Lucerne

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Diccon Bewes

www.dicconbewes.com

Instant ice-breaker: Quiz time

Level: Pre-intermediate and above (B1 upwards)
Time: 30 minutes
Aim: Cross-cultural perceptions, discussion about Switzerland

Warm up

- Get the students to imagine they don't live in Switzerland.
- Tell them they are taking part in the TV quiz show '5 Gegen 5', aka Family Fortunes or Family Feud.
- Ask them to write down the first thing they (as a pretend foreigner) think of when they hear the word 'Switzerland'

Main activity

Round One

- As students read out their answers, write them up on the board to see which are the most popular.
- Get the students to guess any missing answers from the Top Ten (as discovered during my research, see below).
- Discuss what makes up the image of Switzerland abroad and how true it is.

Round Two

- The same concept, but this time students have to name a Swiss celebrity who is famous abroad.
- Most will name Roger Federer, so get them to think of one another. It's hard!
- Write the Top Five answers (see below) on the board.
- Discuss why it is that Swiss celebrities are so rare.

Alternative method

- Divide the class into two groups and make it a competition, just like in the real television quiz show.
- Write 1 to 10 on the board, with a space beside each number for an answer.
- Team A has a chance to guess an answer in Round One. Write their answer on the board in the relevant place and give it points.
- Team B now has the chance to guess an answer and score points.
- Alternate turns until all 10 answers are found.
- The team with the most points wins Round One.
- Repeat for Round Two, letting the losers go first at guessing.
- The team with the most points overall at the end wins.

Extra activity

- Rework the game using Britain or America instead of Switzerland.
- Most answers will include celebrities (The Queen, Obama, The Beatles, Beckham) so open up the discussion as to why.

Answers

Research from *Swiss Watching* (referenced on page 1, Introduction).

Round One

I asked 100 non-Swiss people abroad something they associate with the word Switzerland.

Top Ten answers:

1. Chocolate	20
2. Cheese	13
3. Mountains	12
4. Banking	9
5. Cuckoo clocks	7
6. Skiing	7
7. Watches	7
8. Red Cross	4
9. Snow	3
10. Toblerone	3

Note that no-one mentioned a person; every answer is a product or natural feature. All 100 people gave an answer; no one said “don’t know”

Round Two

I asked the same 100 people to name a famous Swiss person.

Top Five answers:

1. Roger Federer	27
2. Don't know	26
3. William Tell	12
4. Heidi	7
5. Albert Einstein	5

The second most popular answer was “don’t know”, “no idea” or left blank; excluding that then answer six was Albert Schweitzer with 4 responses.

Note that of the five answers, Federer is the only one who is really Swiss. William Tell and Heidi are both fictional, Einstein and Schweitzer both German by birth.

In both rounds the points do not add up to 100 as there were more answers given than these Top Ten or Five.

Extra material

Interview with me from July 2010 on BBC Radio 4 Excess Baggage, talking about Switzerland and Swiss culture. Interview starts at 01:06.

Excess Baggage online <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00t3263>

Lesson Plan 1: Swiss inventions

Level: Pre-intermediate and above (B1 upwards)
Time: 45 minutes to 1 hour
Aim: Word order consolidation, information exchange and text comprehension.

Warm up

- Students have to unscramble the four questions (supplied with the attached extract) relating to the text, without having read the piece first.
- Compare their re-written questions in pairs.

Ask for feedback and see if anyone can answer the questions at this stage.

Main activity

Comprehension exercise

Using the first text extract (p165):

- Students now read the text relating to the questions.
- All four answers can be found in the text.
- Check that everyone has found the right answers.
- Revise any vocabulary as necessary.

Using the second text extract (p163):

- Students read the text and then write three questions of their own.
- Circulate and check the questions are correctly phrased and relate to something within the text.
- In pairs, students answer each other's questions.
- Revise any vocabulary as necessary.

Extra activity

- Play the Birdie Song video. You can see it on my website: www.dicconbewes.com/2010/08/12/swiss-watching-trivia-no-12-birdie-song
- Ask the students what they know about the origin of the dance and music (or even get everyone to join in together!).
- Use the text (p166-7) to answer their questions.

Homework

- Use the internet to find out about a favourite invention (Swiss or not).
- Write three questions and answers relating to that invention.

Additional homework for advanced students:

- Write a short text about the chosen invention before writing the three questions and answers.

Questions for first text

1. inventor did Switzerland the in live where?
 2. original what made the was from cube?
 3. did cube when its invent Knorr?
 4. Maggi which brand the owns company now?
-

First extract from *Swiss Watching* (p165): Swiss inventions

Stock cubes

Real chefs may hate them, though even they must use them, but most of us couldn't cook without a stock cube. And for that we have to thank one Julius Maggi, a half-Swiss, half-Italian man from Frauenfeld, who created the first *Bouillon-würfel*. These days you can get any variety you fancy, be that fish or porcini mushroom, but the original bouillon cube was made from beef. The Swiss Maggi cube (1908) pre-dates the ones from both Oxo (Britain, 1910) and Knorr (Germany, 1912). Maggi, now part of Nestlé, is one of Europe's biggest brands and probably best-known for its dried soups, also something it invented.

Second extract from *Swiss Watching* (p163): Swiss inventions

Velcro

More properly called 'hook-and-loop fastener', Velcro (which should probably be VELCRO® as it is a registered trademark) is possibly the most useful Swiss invention ever. It was the brainchild of Georges de Mestral, a native of Canton Vaud, who went out for a walk with his dog and ended up changing the world of children's trainers and strippers' trousers. Far from getting irritated from all the burrs sticking to his clothes, he inspected them under a microscope and decided to invent a man-made version. That's the sign of true genius – producing an extraordinary idea from an ordinary moment. And as befits all great inventors, although he wasn't taken seriously at first he never gave up. In 1955 he patented his invention as 'Velcro', a contraction of *velours* and *crochet* (French for velvet and hook respectively). It's so useful for so many things, but such a shame he didn't also invent an easy way getting all the dust and hairs out of the hooks.

Third extract from *Swiss Watching* (p166-7): Swiss inventions

The Birdie Song

Originally called *Der Ententanz* (or duck dance), this ridiculous dance-along song was composed in 1963 by a Swiss waiter called Werner Thomas. It began life as a sort of polka played on an accordion in an après-ski club of Davos and just kept on going. Its high-point came in the early 1980s when the absurdly popular 'La Danse des Canards' in France and 'The Birdie Song' in Britain stormed the charts. In total, there have been 370 versions in 42 countries selling over 40 million copies. Some duck, some dance, as Churchill might have said, though I'm sure he would never have flapped his arms on the dance-floor. In 2000 it was voted the most annoying song of all time, beating other classics such as 'Teletubbies' and 'Barbie Girl'.

Lesson Plan 2: Use of Swinglish

Level: Intermediate to advanced (B2 upwards)

Time: 45 minutes to 1 hour

Aim: To raise awareness of Swiss English words with different meaning from standard English. Reading practice and dictionary usage.

Pre-class assignment

- Ask students to make list of English words they see, read or hear in everyday life (not including English studies!), eg in newspapers, adverts, shops, films or on television.
- Suggest that they bring in newspaper articles, adverts from magazines, iPhone pics of posters, food containers etc to show English in use.

Warm up

- In pairs or small groups, students compare their lists of words.
- Students can start deciding which of their words are Swinglish and which English, using a dictionary if necessary.

Key question: which words are Swinglish?

Prepare some Swinglish words of your own to make sure there is enough variety. Write them out on cards to be handed out later, one for each student.

Main activity

Basic Swinglish (vocabulary exercise)

- Students take it in turns to read out their words or show the cuttings and pics they have brought in.
- Write the students' words up on the board.
- Get them to look up unfamiliar words in an English dictionary so they can try and see which are Swinglish and which not.
- Divide the words into three groups, asking the students to decide in which group to put each word.
 1. Ones with the same meaning, eg sandwich, shopping, online, party
 2. Ones with a different meaning in English and Swinglish, eg Handy, Old-timer, Drink, Agenda
 3. Swinglish words which don't exist in English, eg Wellness, No-Name.
- Students can then read the Mastering Swinglish text (page 282-3, also attached) to understand the difference in meanings for words like Drink.

Extra activity

- Hand each student one of your cards with a Swinglish word on it.
- Ask them to decide which group to put it in and what it means in both Swinglish and English.

Homework

- For selected Swinglish words, write a sentence using the real English meaning, eg using handy as an adjective not a noun.

Additional homework for advanced students:

- Ask the students to find German words used in English.
- Get them to see if anything has changed between languages, eg meaning, spelling, degree of usage.
- Easier examples: kindergarten, wanderlust, dachshund, rucksack, frankfurter, kitsch, poltergeist, muesli, schnitzel, hinterland.
- Harder examples (less common, or with slight changes): zeitgeist, ersatz, doppelganger, Schadenfreude, blitz, angst, schnapps, delicatessen, waltz.

Extra notes

Three blog posts have some more material:

It's chips with everything

Includes a list of English words seen around Bern and a video advert for Zweifel chips (note the crucial British/American English difference between chips and crisps)

www.dicconbewes.com/2011/01/08/its-chips-with-everything

An introduction to Swinglish

Uses the text extract given here but also with 6 pictures of everyday English in Bern.

www.dicconbewes.com/2010/07/16/an-introduction-to-swinglish

When is a car not a car

More examples of common pitfalls with false friends.

www.dicconbewes.com/2012/05/18/when-is-a-car-not-a-car

Extract from *Swiss Watching* (p282-3): Mastering Swinglish

Contrary to official statements, there are in fact five national languages in Switzerland. Alongside German, French, Italian and Romansh, there is also Swinglish, the product of Swiss meets English. It may be less developed than its linguistic cousins Franglais and Spanglish but, within its home country, it's widely spoken and widely (mis)understood. Before we get to grips with Swinglish, it should be noted that it is entirely different from the liberal sprinkling of English words that appear in normal Swiss speech, such as ticket, sandwich, quickie, management, online, sofa, hobby, snack and so on.

Swinglish has two levels, Basic and Advanced, though paradoxically the former is actually harder for outsiders to understand. The reason for this is twofold: the English words are hugely outnumbered by the Swiss ones, and, more disconcertingly, they sometimes have completely different meanings from their original English root. For example, a mobile phone is known as a Handy in Swinglish – an appropriate enough word but with a totally different meaning in English, where it's not even a noun. At this level, most Swinglish words are there for one of two reasons. Firstly, it is cool. Using an English word is so much trendier than a dull old Swiss one, especially when trying to sell something. Secondly, it overcomes the language barrier. It's much easier to use one English word, such as Sale, which can be understood by everyone, than translating it into four separate words; it saves space for one thing. Swinglish is thus at once both hip and helpful.

A good everyday example is the word Drink, which in Swinglish roughly means semi-skimmed milk; in any Swiss supermarket there is *Milch* (or *lait* or *latte*), the real deal with all its fat intact, and then Drink. To a native English speaker, using the word Drink in relation to milk or juice (as in the dreaded 'fruit juice drink') usually means that it's been watered down and/or sweetened up. For Swinglish speakers, it merely means milk that is not whole, but using an English word makes it appear trendy, and so more marketable, and avoids translating 'semi-skimmed milk' in triplicate.

The trouble for foreigners is that when the Swiss speak English, some forget that many of the words they're using are actually Basic Swinglish. This is fine when misspelt, such as (k)now-how often losing its k, or when the meaning is self-explanatory, eg anti-baby-pill. But, just as American and British English have different meaning for pants, purse and rubber, so too can Swinglish and English produce moments of mutual misunderstanding. A few examples, with the Swinglish meanings given:

- Hit – a special offer; it comes after, and is joined to, the word it is qualifying, producing some unfortunate results: Price Hit becomes Preishit, and Dish of the Day is Tageshit. Not too appetising for English speakers.
- Mobbing – bullying, usually within the workplace
- Old-timer – a vintage car, but also buses and trams, though not men
- Pudding – a specific dessert rather like a blancmange
- Smoking – a dinner jacket
- Tip-top – very good
- Trainer – a track suit
- Wellness – a spa, though normally used as an adjective, eg wellness weekend or wellness hotel

Conversation class topics

Here are some ideas for conversation class topics that you can tailor to different groups. Depending on the level, you could get students to read the relevant passage of Swiss Watching beforehand.

Switzerland and its neighbours

Pages: VII-IX, General map at the beginning.

Possible themes:

- How the Swiss see their four neighbours (eg loud, stylish)
- Stereotypes about Switzerland (eg Heidi, chocolate)

Introducing yourself

Pages: 26-29, Meeting and Greeting

Possible themes:

- Other unspoken rules of behaviour
- Students' experiences of etiquette abroad

Swiss cheese

Pages: 205-6, Conclusion of the cheese chapter

Possible themes:

- Favourite Swiss cheese (with samples!)
- Importance of farming in Switzerland

Great Swiss people

Pages: 262-4, Ten of the Best

Possible themes:

- Discussion of the ten people chosen
- Other suggestions for the list

Table manners

Pages: 229-231, Table Manners

Possible themes:

- Expected etiquette in public and private
- Other culture clashes students have noticed

The political system

Pages: 87-90, Beginner's Guide to the Referendum

Possible themes:

- Discussing if the referendum system really works
- Direct democracy compared to presidential politics

Money matters

Pages: 121-4, A Singular Currency

Possible themes:

- Swiss attitudes to cash and credit
- Status of the Swiss franc at home and abroad

About me

Travel writer, chocolate lover and Englishman in Bern.

I grew up in deepest Hampshire. A degree in International Relations from LSE and an 18-month world trip set me up for a career in travel writing, though I took the scenic route via bookselling. After ten years at Lonely Planet and *Holiday Which?* magazine, I decamped to Switzerland, where until last year I was manager of the Stauffacher English Bookshop in Bern. Now I am full-time writer, occasional public speaker and permanent expat.

As well as grappling with German grammar, re-learning to cross the road properly, and overcoming my innate desire to form an orderly queue, I have spent the last few years exploring bits of Switzerland I'd never heard of. And eating lots of chocolate.

If you want to know more, then please:

- Contact me via my website: www.dicconbewes.com
- Like my Facebook page: www.facebook.com/SwissWatching
- Follow me on Twitter @dicconb
- Join me on LinkedIn

I regularly go and talk to groups and classes – just ask!

About the books

Swiss Watching: A Financial Times Book of the Year

One country with four languages, 26 cantons and 7.8 million people (but only 78% of them Swiss): there's nowhere else like it in Europe. Switzerland may be almost 400km from the nearest drop of seawater, but it is an island at the centre of Europe. This is a country famous for punctual trains, strict neutrality, and Roger Federer – but what lies behind the stereotypes? What does Switzerland look like from the inside?

Swiss Watching can be bought everywhere in Switzerland, ordered online or as an e-book. It is also available in German, as *Der Schweizversteh'er*, and will be published next year in French.

Swisscellany: facts & figures about Switzerland

This Swiss miscellany is a collection of curious and quirky, statistical and historical, intriguing and interesting facts & figures. You can discover how much yoghurt an average Swiss person eats each year, or who was elected president the most times, and the most successful pop songs. Plus learn the words of the Swiss national anthem, the 13 herbs in a Ricola drop and who scored *nul points* for Switzerland at Eurovision. Not forgetting Switzerland's largest hotel, tallest church spire, longest railway bridge, smallest community, deepest lake, and oldest funicular.

Swisscellany was published in July 2012 and is available all across Switzerland or online. It's perfect for a class quiz!