

Language within the institutions: observed practices

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The linguistic practices of Geneva institutions vary according to their origin, their clientele and their culture. The traditional Geneva private banks retain French as the language of the house, of institutional communication and of relations with the authorities, while using English for their international activities and their research publications. The subsidiaries of foreign banks often adopt the language of their parent company — French for French banks, English for British and American banks, Arabic and English for the Gulf banks. The trading companies work in English, the language of the markets and of their international teams, with French for local relations and for dealings with francophone partners.

The independent asset managers and the *family offices*, being smaller, adopt the language of their founders and of their clientele, with great diversity. Lawyers, notaries and fiduciaries work in French for Swiss law and local relations, in English for international business, and in German for dealings with the federal authorities and German-speaking colleagues.

This diversity makes for a financial centre in which several languages coexist without any one of them prevailing entirely. It reflects the nature of Geneva as a French-speaking and international city. It demands of staff a linguistic flexibility that the financial centre values, and it obliges the institutions to define their language policy according to their positioning.

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