

Amira-Louise Ouardalitou

## Lëtzebuergesch, Français and Deutsch in everyday life in Luxembourg

### Abstract (Luxembourgish)

D’Groussherzogtum Lëtzebuerg ass e Land mat ville Sproochen an Nationalitéiten. 602.000 Awunner liewen zu Lëtzebuerg, dovunner sinn 313.800 Lëtzebuurger, an 288.200 Leit, mat enger anerer Nationalitéit. Dat heescht, datt zu Lëtzebuerg net nëmmen eng Sprooch am Alldag ze héieren ass. D’Méisproochegkeet ass schonn ëmmer an de Wuerzele vum Grand-Duché dran. Esouguer an dem Gesetz spigelt sech d’Méisproochegkeet erëm. Lëtzebuergesch, Franséisch an Däitsch sinn déi offiziell Sprooche vum Land, mee wéi gi se am Alldag benotzt? Oder ginn et méi Sproochen am Alldag ze gesinn an ze héieren? Ginn all déi Sproochen op deem selwechten Niveau benotzt, oder gëtt et eng Hierarchie an de Sproochen? A wéi enge Situatiounen gi wéi eng Sprooche benotzt? Ginn et zu Lëtzebuerg just déi dräi offiziell Sprooche vum Land am Alldag, oder ginn et weider inoffiziell Sproochen, déi als offiziell Sprooche fungéieren? De Sproochegebrauch vun de verschiddene Sproochen ass an all Aspekt vun eisem Liewen zu Lëtzebuerg ze gesinn. Dësen Artikel fokusséiert sech op déi aktuell Sproochesituatioun am Alldag zu Lëtzebuerg, deen en Abléck an d’Méisproochegkeet soll ginn.

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is a country with many languages and nationalities. A total of 602,000 people live in Luxembourg, including 313,800 Luxembourgers and 288,200 people with another nationality (as of February 2019). This means that in Luxembourg, not only one language is heard in everyday life. Indeed multilingualism has always been at the heart of the Grand Duchy and this is even reflected in its laws, specifically in relation to trilingualism. Luxembourgish, French and German are the official languages of the country but how are they used in everyday life? Or are more languages to be seen and heard in everyday life? Are all of the languages used at the same level, or is there a hierarchy? And in what situations do you use which language? Are only the three official languages of the country used in everyday life in Luxembourg, or are there any further languages that function as official languages? Use of the various languages can be seen in every aspect of our lives in Luxembourg. This article focuses on the current language situation in everyday life in Luxembourg, which should provide insights into the multilingualism of the Grand Duchy.

## **1. Introduction: the population of Luxembourg**

The population of the only Grand Duchy in the world is 602,000,<sup>1</sup> of which 313,800 are Luxembourgers and 288,200 foreigners, in an area of 2,586 km<sup>2</sup>. The population is divided into 52.13% Luxembourgers, 16.04% Portuguese, 7.61% French, 3.65% Italians, 3.36% Belgians, 2.18% Germans, 0.98% UK/Irish, 0.71% Dutch, 6.06% other EU countries and 7.28% nationalities from outside the EU. This means the majority are Luxembourgish and Portuguese with a total of 409,500 (68.17%) citizens. Other EU countries add up to 36,500 and non-EU countries to 43,800 while nationalities with a Romance language background make up 184,500 (14.62%) of the population and nationalities with a Germanic language background 23,300 (7.75%) citizens.

## **2. Daily commuters: French and German workers cross the border daily**

Luxembourg is an international working environment for many nationalities, especially because it is the seat of the Court of Justice as well as the Court of First Instance, the Court of Auditors, the European Investment Bank, the General Secretariat of the European Parliament, the European Court of Auditors, the European Commission plus administrative entities from eight Directorates-General, the European Investment Fund, the European Financial Stability Facility, the European Stability Mechanism, Eurostat, the Publications Office of the European Union, the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union, the Executive Agency for Health and Consumers, and the Euratom Supply Agency.<sup>2</sup> Those nationalities and their mother tongues are found in the everyday life of Luxembourg. The common language seems to be English for most of those institutions, apart from the Court of Justice, where French is the most common language. Not only French is spoken among the residents, but also German as well; both are used by daily commuters from France, Belgium and Germany (see Fig. 1).

In 2017 Luxembourg had a total of 186,465<sup>3</sup> daily commuters, divided into 96,513 French, 45,134 Belgians and 44,818 Germans, compared to 20,000 in 1980, which had only increased by 13,000 to 33,000 daily commuters by 1990. In 2018 the number of daily commuters rose from 188,357 at the beginning of the year to 192,766<sup>4</sup> in the third quarter. Bastien Larue from Statec estimates that the number of daily commuters will increase to above 200,000 by mid-2019, if the economy remains stable.

<sup>1</sup> STATEC. Recensement de la population. As of February 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Grand-Duchy of Luemboug (2015).

<sup>3</sup> STATEC. Marché de l'emploi.

<sup>4</sup> 192,766 = 100,552 French, 46,184 Belgians, 46,030 Germans.

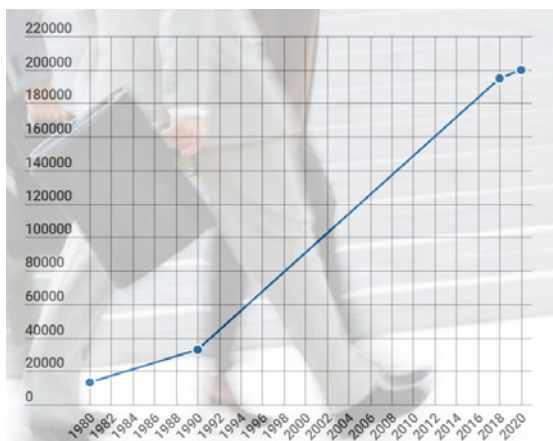


Fig. 1: Development of commuters in Luxembourg<sup>5</sup>

### 3. The Language Law<sup>6</sup>

Multilingualism was already established in the language law of Luxembourg dating from 24th February 1984. The law specifies how to use Luxembourgish, French and German in the administrative and judiciary systems.

In that law the first article states that the national language of Luxembourgish citizens is Luxembourgish. However the second article, about the language of legislation, states that legislative acts and their implementing regulations are drafted in French. Only the French text is authentic, with legislative and regulatory acts being accompanied by a translation. In the event that regulations not referred to in the preceding paragraph are issued by an official body of the State, municipalities or public institutions in a language other than French, only a text written in the language used by this body is authentic. This article does not deviate from the provisions applicable to international conventions. In the third article, relating to the language of administrative matters, contentious or not, and judicial matters, inquiries may be made in French, German or Luxembourgish, without prejudice to the special provisions concerning certain matters. Finally in the 4th article, the law specifies that the administration must use the same language, *Luxembourgish*, *French* or *German*, in which applicants have chosen to make their request.

<sup>5</sup> L'essentiel (2018).

<sup>6</sup> Memorial – Journal Officiel du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg (1984).

## 4. Multilingualism in everyday life

As already mentioned, Luxembourg has three official languages, Français (French), Deutsch (German) and Lëtzebuergesch (Luxembourgish). These languages are spoken and written throughout the country and in relation to every aspect of life, whether private, professional, social, cultural or political. Luxembourg is a polyglot nation, further enriched by the mother tongues of other nations living in the Grand Duchy. The biggest community in Luxembourg is the Portuguese, followed by French-speaking people (see Figure 2 below). The children of the second generation of the Portuguese community speak Portuguese in addition to the three official languages before they enter secondary school.

### 4.1 The distribution of main languages

Every 10 years, Statec carries out a study about language use in Luxembourg, the last one being in 2011 on the five languages *Lëtzebuergesch*, *Français*, *Deutsch*, *English* and *Português*.<sup>7</sup>

	Luxembourgish	French	German	English	Portuguese
Luxembourgers	88.8%	4.2%	1.1%	0.4%	2.3%
French	4.1%	91.5%	0.8%	0.7%	0.6%
Belgians	6.2%	77.5%	3.4%	0.7%	0.2%
Germans	12%	2.5%	80.9%	1.5%	0.5%
British	2%	2.7%	0.7%	92%	0.2%
Portuguese	8%	5.1%	0.4%	0.1%	85.4%

Fig. 2: Nationalities and their main language

The relationship between nationality and the national language as the main language is close: 88.8% of Luxembourgers gave Luxembourgish as the language they spoke best, but only 8.0% of foreigners did so. Whether Luxembourgers under the age of 20 call Luxembourgish their main language depends on whether their parents were born in Luxembourg or abroad. If both parents were born in Luxembourg, 98.3% refer to Luxembourgish as their main language, but if both parents were born abroad, only 50.4% of their children consider Luxembourgish as their main language.

<sup>7</sup> Recensement de la population (2013).

## 4.2 A global view over the main language spoken in Luxembourg

The linguistic maps of Luxembourg (Fig. 3-6) illustrate how the percentage of the main spoken language, namely Luxembourgish, French, German or English, varies in different areas.

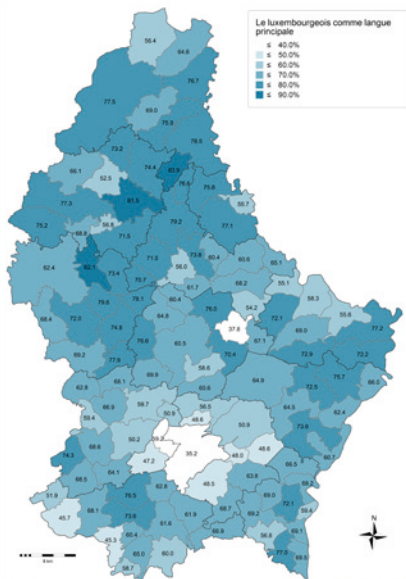


Fig. 3: Luxembourgish as a main language<sup>8</sup>

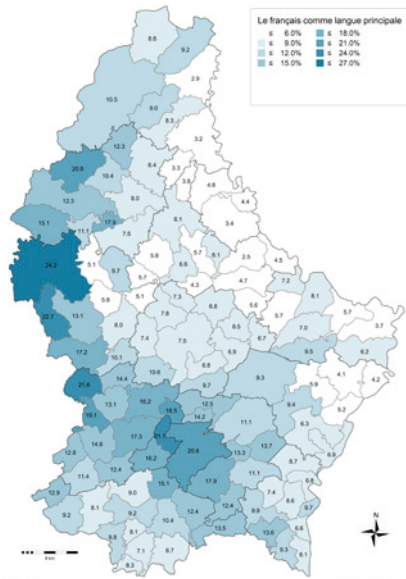


Fig. 4: French as a main language

In the rural areas in the north and east of Luxembourg, Luxembourgish is the main spoken language while French is used more in the centre and west of Luxembourg. Figure 3 shows Luxembourgish as the main language. In the north 80% use Luxembourgish as their main language while in the city centre fewer than 40% use it as the main language. French as the main language is used by less than 6% in the north and in the east, but is used by more than 20% as a main language in the west and centre of Luxembourg. This result can be explained by the French and Belgian border in the west and south and by the German border in the east.

<sup>8</sup> Recensement de la population (2013).

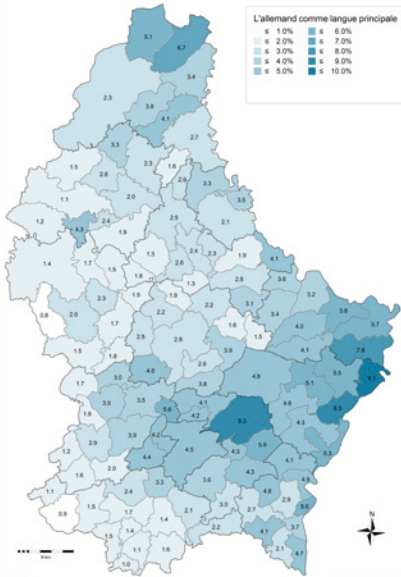


Fig. 5: German as a main language

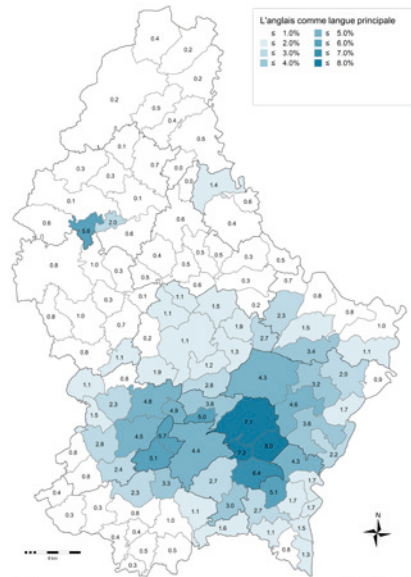


Fig. 6: English as a main language

German is spoken more in the east along the German border. In the commune de Wasserbillig, more than 9% speak German as a main language. English is used more often as a main language in the city, namely 7% in comparison to the rest of the country.

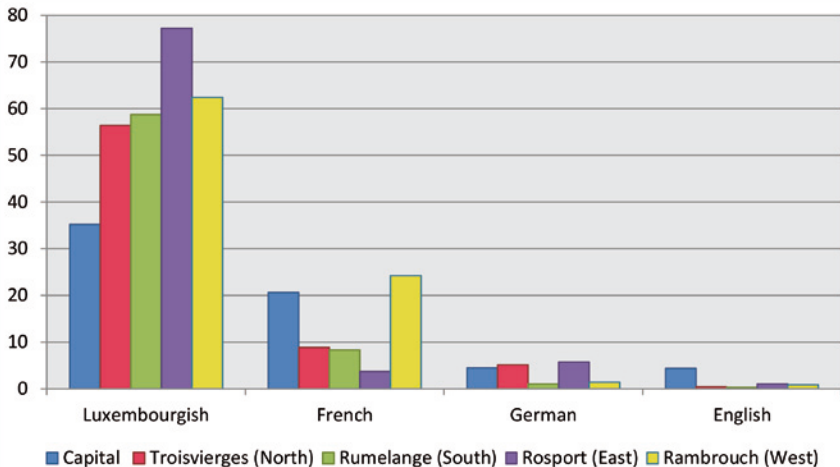


Fig. 7: A global view of the main language spoken in different areas (2011)

Looking at only Luxembourg city, Luxembourgish is spoken as a main language at 35.2%, followed by French at 20.6%, English at 4.4%, and German at 4.5%. In the far north, in Troisvierges, Luxembourgish is spoken by 56.4%, French by 8.8%, English by 0.4% and German by 5.1%. In the South, in Rumelange, Luxembourgish is spoken by 58.7%, French by 8.3%, English by 0.3% and German by 1%. In the east of Luxembourg, in Rosport, Luxembourgish is spoken by 77.2%, French by 3.7%, English by 1% and German by 5.7%. In the west of Luxembourg, in Rambrouch, 62.4% speak Luxembourgish, 24.2% French, 0.8% English and 1.4% German.

### 4.3 Study about the languages used in everyday life in Luxembourg<sup>9</sup>

TNS ILRES is one of the institutes of market research, opinion research, social research and marketing consultancy in Luxembourg. They were commissioned by the Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth to evaluate the role of Luxembourgish in the society of the Grand Duchy. The research period was from 23rd January 2018 to 6th February 2018. Their data collection method was an online form (64%) and by phone (37%), with 1,053 people aged 16 and above responding. TNS Ilres ensured that the sample was representative by using the quota method based on sex, age, nationality, occupation and area of residence. The respondents are divided into 60% Luxembourgish and 40% non-Luxembourgish<sup>10</sup> speaking Luxembourgish, French, German, English, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, Creole and other languages. The evaluation was made public on 7th June 2018 at a press conference.

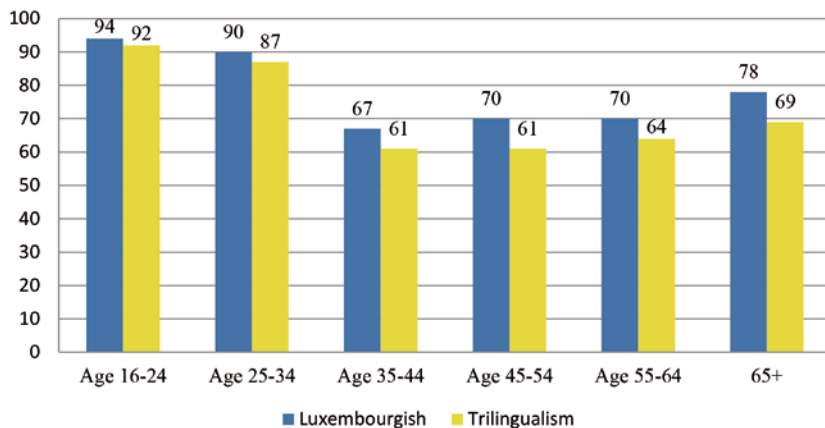


Fig. 8: Language skills by age of respondents

<sup>9</sup> TNL ILRES (2018).

<sup>10</sup> Le Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg (2018).

In Figure 8, the respondents<sup>11</sup> had to give their language skills and which language(s) they speak. This chart (Fig. 8) shows that people speaking Luxembourgish are able to speak the three official languages. The younger generation are stronger in their language skills than the older generations. This could be explained by the fact that they are still in secondary school.

#### 4.3.1 Trilingualism in everyday life

TNL Ilres found out that 27% of the respondents have difficulty changing between French, German and Luxembourgish, depending on the situations in their everyday lives. The majority do not have a problem changing between the official trilingualism.

#### 4.3.2 Private life versus work life

The youngest respondents and those aged 25-34 years are stronger than the other age groups when it comes to writing and speaking Luxembourgish in their private lives. Out of the group of 16-24 year olds, 90% write in Luxembourgish and 92% of them speak Luxembourgish, compared to those aged 35 or more where only around 56% write in Luxembourgish and only between 62% and 73% speak Luxembourgish.

The most common language spoken and written at work is French with 84% followed by oral Luxembourgish with 68% and written 51%. German 48% and English 45% are on the third and fourth place.

### 4.4 Languages in school

#### 4.4.1 Primary and secondary school, and higher education

The fact that languages are part of the school system is important for the multilingual society in Luxembourg. In Figure 8 above, the youngest generation of respondents had the strongest results for speaking Luxembourgish and 92% master trilingualism in their everyday lives. Credit must go to the Luxembourgish school system where Luxembourgish is promoted as the language of integration and the common language and which tries to strengthen multilingualism. Most pupils who graduate from school speak at least four languages: Luxembourgish,<sup>12</sup> French, German and English.

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<sup>11</sup> 146 people = 16-24 years, 154 people = 25-34 years, 189 people = 35-44 years, 244 = 45-54 years, 181 = 55-64, 139 = 65+.

<sup>12</sup> It must be pointed out that most Luxembourgers do not know how to write their own language due to the fact that they do not learn it at school.



In Luxembourg the school system is based on German<sup>13</sup> in primary school<sup>14</sup> and the first three years of secondary school. French is introduced in the second year of primary education and is the lingua franca in the last four years of secondary school. This makes it difficult for children from a German, French or English-speaking background. Those pupils can choose to join one of the other European or international schools, which are mostly attended by the children of foreign residents. The government has started to open international schools for free which follow the international English curriculum, like the secondary school Lycée Michel Lucius in the city centre. Although French and English are the most common languages in private schools, Luxembourgish is an optional subject in some. In secondary school, pupils may have the choice to add Latin, Spanish or Italian to their schedule. Higher education in Luxembourg consists of the University of Luxembourg, where the courses are taught in French, English and German. Most pupils choose to study abroad and because of their ability to speak French, German and English, they have a wide choice of universities to study at.

#### 4.4.2 National Institute of Languages

The National Institute of Languages plays a major role in the importance of languages in Luxembourg. The number of people who attend their classes and the popularity of the different languages taught reflect the language situation in Luxembourg.

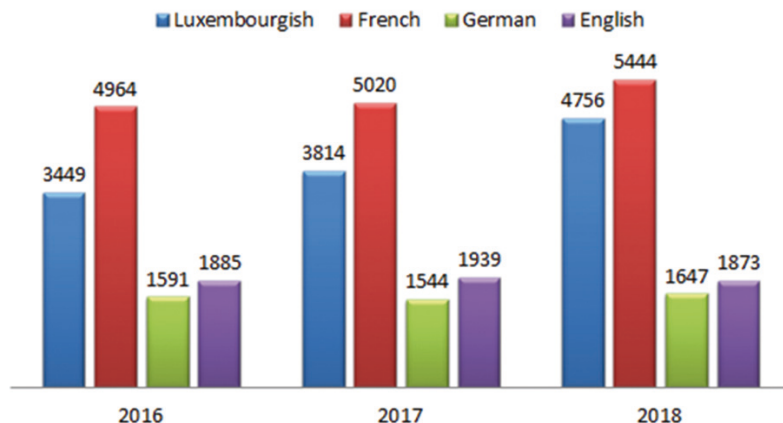


Fig. 9: Trends in registrations for language classes at the National Institute of Languages

<sup>13</sup> The lingua franca at primary school is German.

<sup>14</sup> Children start primary school at the age of 6 but can attend kindergarten at an early age, where teachers use Luxembourgish as much as possible. Children of foreign origin might hear Luxembourgish for the first time at pre-school.

The chart indicates that the most important languages in Luxembourg are Luxembourgish and French, both languages being important for work and integration into Luxembourg's society. In 2018 the number of people wanting to learn Luxembourgish increased to 4,756 while French grew to 5,444. Not only language classes are held at the National Institute of Languages but also the nationality test, the "Sproochentest". The law of 23rd October 2008 on Luxembourg nationality requires applicants to take a Luxembourgish language test. To pass the test they need to speak Luxembourgish at level A2 and pass the listening test at level B1.<sup>15</sup> Some adjustments have been made so that the language is not an insurmountable obstacle: candidates pass the test if they obtain at least half the possible marks in the oral exam and an insufficient score can be compensated by the mark in the listening comprehension test.

## 4.5 Media

The media play an important role in learning a new language and Luxembourg has a pluralistic media landscape. In addition to national newspapers, there are numerous audio-visual and new media. The multilingual situation and the use of the country's three common languages – Luxembourgish, German and French – is one of the features of the Luxembourg press. It is very common to find articles in a newspaper in German and French, side by side on one page. Mainly Luxembourgish, German and French are used in the print media, although there is also a Portuguese newspaper. Luxembourgish and English are the main languages used for social media and radio programmes can be heard in Luxembourgish, Portuguese and English. Luxembourg has five national daily newspapers, which are published in the morning and sold primarily via subscription, and a free daily newspaper. Luxembourg is home to one of the oldest newspapers in Europe, the "Luxemburger Wort", which was founded in 1848.<sup>16</sup> The first French newspaper, "Le Jeudi", was established in 1997, but has been suspended since June 2019, and the first Portuguese newspaper, "Contacto", was set up in 1970. The first English daily newspaper, "Luxembourg News Digest", was launched in 1981 and replaced by a magazine called "352", called after the country code of Luxembourg, in 2003; this was then replaced in June 2011 by the magazine "Delano", which is published once a month. Another unique feature of Luxembourg is the fact that the main publications are all known to be close to a political movement.

Luxembourgish citizens are able to watch French, German, Luxembourgish, Belgian, English, Portuguese and Italian channels via cable television (since the 1970s) and satellite. The German channels remain the most popular among the Luxembourgish community. Movies in Luxembourgish are becoming increasingly

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<sup>15</sup> The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

<sup>16</sup> Le Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg (2013).

popular, witness the latest film in Luxembourgish: “Superjhemp Retörns”. An interesting fact is that when the Utopolis cinema was taken over by Kinopolis, the subtitles changed from French and Dutch to French and German.

Luxembourg has radio programmes for each language community in Luxembourg. The Luxembourgish ones are RTL, Eldorado and 100,7; for the English-speaking community there is Radio Ara and for the Portuguese-speaking population Radio Latina. Since late 2001, the parliamentary debates of Luxembourg’s Chamber of Deputies are broadcast live on a channel created for this purpose.

Literature in Luxembourg is not written in only one language but in the three official languages of the country, Luxembourgish, French and German. In 1985 Guy Rewenig published the first novel written in Luxembourgish (Rewenig 1985).

Advertising is mostly in French, but Luxembourgish is experiencing a boom; the same is true for the names of businesses and newspaper announcements, etc.



Fig. 10: Advertisement for Spuerkees

Figure 10 shows an advertisement for the bank Spuerkees (a savings bank). Their slogan *Äert Liewen. Är Bank* is in Luxembourgish, but the advert is otherwise in French. The use of Luxembourgish is increasing in those contexts where German was used in the past. Luxembourgish was used as a low variety and is increasingly turning into a high variety.

#### 4.6 An illustration of the linguistic situation in Luxembourg and examples from everyday life



Fig. 11: The language situation in Luxembourg in 2018<sup>17</sup>

Figure 11 shows a global view about the linguistic language situation in 2018 and illustrates the multilingualism in the everyday life of Luxembourg as already written above

<sup>17</sup> Let's make it happen (2018).

One example of multilingualism in Luxembourg is the ATM. Users can choose between 4 or even 5 languages, namely French, English, German, Luxembourgish and Portuguese,<sup>18</sup> at every cash machine in Luxembourg.



Fig. 12: ATM



Fig. 13: Pack-Up Station

At the Pack-Up Station, where you can get your parcels dropped off by the postman, five languages are used as well.

<sup>18</sup> This language is optional and it depends on the bank whether they choose Portuguese for their clients.

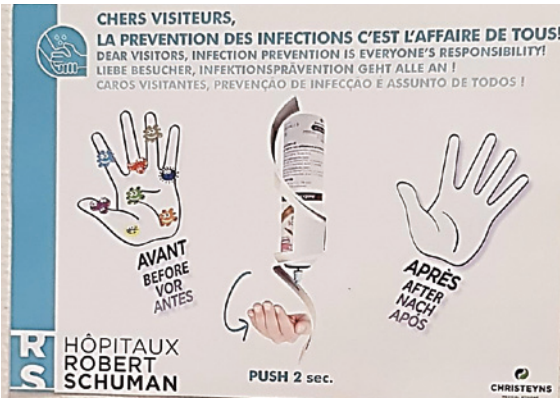


Fig. 14: Hospital sign

This hospital sign calls on staff, patients and visitors to wash their hands in order to avoid infections. This sign is written in French, English, German and Portuguese.



Fig. 15: Top-down (official) sign for the tram

A tram has been running in Luxembourg City since 10th December 2017 and it is still a new form of transportation, although there was a tram in the old days. For this reason the government put up signs warning people to be careful. Those instructions were published in Luxembourgish, French, English, German and Portuguese.

## 5. Conclusion

Luxembourg has officially been a trilingual country since a law was passed to this effect on 24th February 1984. In everyday life the Grand Duchy is a multilingual society as well. The Grand Duchy has 602,000 inhabitants: 313,800 Luxembourgers and 288,200 foreigners (as of February 2019). There are many nationalities but the Portuguese and French-speaking communities are dominant. French and German are not only two of the official languages which are spoken and written in Luxembourg but are also the languages of some 200,000 daily commuters from France, Belgium and Germany. Français (French), Deutsch (German) and



Lëtzebuergesch (Luxembourgish) are also spoken and written throughout the country in every aspect of life, whether private, professional, social, cultural or political. A fourth language is spoken and/or written in addition to the three official languages, before entering secondary school, if one or both parents have a different mother tongue, like Portuguese. In 2011 Statec published a study about the use of languages in Luxembourg revealing that the relationship between nationality and national language as the main language is very close. A second study by Statec published in 2013 covered regional differences in language use. The results only focussed on the capital, Troisvièrges in the north, Rosport in the east, Rumelange in the south and Rambrouch in the west and showed that Luxembourgish is spoken most in the east, French is spoken most in the west, German is spoken most in the east, and English is spoken most in the capital of Luxembourg. In 2018 TNS ILRES launched a survey about language use in everyday life by interviewing a representative sample of 1,053 people. Clearly the younger generations from 16 to 24 and from 25 to 34 have the strongest skills in Luxembourgish and in official trilingualism. Only 27% of the respondents have difficulty speaking the language demanded by specific situations in their everyday lives, which means that the majority do not have a problem changing between French, German and Luxembourgish. For the respondents aged 16 to 24 the most common language written and spoken at work is French and in their private lives the most common language is Luxembourgish. This result is not surprising because they are still in education or only recently completed it. In the Luxembourgish school system, alphabetisation is in German; from the second year of primary school, the pupils learn French; from the second year of secondary school English, and they may be able to learn other languages like Latin, Spanish and Italian as well. Most pupils graduating from school speak at least four languages: Luxembourgish, French, German and English.

The National Institute for Languages is also a place which reflects part of the current language situation. People wanting to learn Luxembourgish increased to 3,592 in 2018; with French it increased to 3,320. There are several reasons, but mostly work, integration, wanting to understand their children and the nationality language test are the main ones. The media landscape of Luxembourg is also flourishing in its multilingualism. The newspapers can be read in several languages, Lëtzebuergesch, Français, Deutsch, English and Português. The same languages can be heard on television, and in Italian as well.

Although Luxembourg is officially a trilingual country with French, German and Luxembourgish as its official languages, two new languages seem to be important in everyday life: *English* and *Portuguese*. Those, for example, can be found at cash machines, a bottom-up sign, or on top-down (official) signs like the tram warning signs. Portuguese has a more minimal place in the society but it cannot be neglected because of its use in bottom-up signs. The language situation in

Luxembourg is experiencing a significant change because of migrants and their work environment. In the capital city, alongside Luxembourgish, French and German, also English and Portuguese can be found more often written next to each other. This means that Luxembourg is growing out of its official trilingualism as laid down by law into what is still an unofficial case of multilingualism.

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