

Gouvernement

Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

about . . .

languages

Grand Duchy
of Luxembourg

System of
Government:
Constitutional
Monarchy

Neighbouring
countries:
Belgium
France
Germany

Surface:
2 586 km²

Population:
429 700
out of which
152 900 foreigners
Luxembourg City:
79 850

Density:
163,8 inhbt/km²

Rate of
unemployment:
3,6%

GDP per inhbt.:
| 338 900 luf

Grand-Duché de Luxembourg
MINISTÈRE D'ÉTAT



The linguistic specificity of Luxembourg can only be understood by looking at its past.

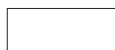
A few key-dates:



The name *Lützenburg* (then called Luxembourg in the 19th century) came from a small fortress in ruins on the Bock, a rocky promontory overlooking the river Alzette, called *Lucilinburhuc* in Old German. At that time, Luxembourg was part of the Germanic Empire and the language used was High German.



Postage stamp illustrating Luxembourg's international evolution.



The territory had expanded to the north and to the west and was divided in two - a Walloon area and a Germanic region¹. The Walloon area was French-speaking and the luxembourgish dialect was spoken in the Germanic region. The written and administrative language were respectively French and German, in their ancient forms. Luxembourg-City, however, escaped the

¹ According to the geographical charts of the era.

implacable logic of the juxtaposed division of the languages as French was the administrative language.

Under the 1st French occupation by Louis XIV, the use of the German tongue was almost totally banned. One hundred years later, as a result of the French Revolution, French gained ground in a long-lasting way, penetrating the local administration of the German-speaking area. In 1804, the Code Napoleon was installed. Luxembourgish remained the language shared by all.

At the London Conference, the Great Powers of the era declared Luxembourg to be independent and split the country. Luxembourg was reduced to its present size (2586 km²) and its whole territory happened to be situated in the German-speaking area. The German language was threatening to overrule the pre-eminence of French. But the lack of support from William II to the German civil servants enabled the influential Luxembourgish notables to impose French as the administrative, judicial and political language.

The industrial revolution brought about deep changes in the population: lots of Germans and Italians arrived in Luxembourg while many Luxembourgers emigrated to France and to the United States.

The linguistic

Manuscript of a popular tale entitled *Dem Grow Siegfried sei Gold*, written in 1872 by Michel Rodange, a Luxembourg author.



positioning became a political matter. In fact, in order to distinguish itself from the rest of the German provinces and to protect the country from the attempt of germanization by the nationalists, a decisive law was voted: French was, from then on, introduced in the primary school system as a taught language, along with German. The final linguistic programme was defined by the School Reform of 1912.

The Luxembourgers took the opportunity of a referendum set up by the German oppressors to reassert their language as the symbol of their national identity and to reaffirm Luxembourgish as their only mother tongue. After the war, reinforced by its status of language of the resistance, the Luxembourgish tongue was stronger than ever. Its vocabulary integrated progressively more French words, as a result of the identity and linguistic trauma brought about by the German military occupation. Moreover, the Constitution of 1948, more incisive than that of 1848, stated: "The Law shall regulate the use of languages in administrative and judicial matters".

From the 60s - after the opening of the borders by the Treaty of Rome in 1957 - new influxes of immigrants to Luxembourg changed the linguistic landscape dramatically. Most of these immigrants came from Latin countries: these people used French to communicate with Luxembourgers. The use of French, symbol of the old "bourgeoisie" and perpetuated as such, became more democratic as Luxembourgish freed itself through the integration of the younger generations in the national education system.

The law regulating the use of languages granted the statute of national language to the *Lëtzebuergesch*. The public was, for the first time, allowed to use *Lëtzebuergesch* in all kinds of correspondence with the public administration. Then, its recognition at the European level by the programme LINGUA in 1989 represented a further promotion, a confirmation of the social-cultural reappearance of Luxembourgish in relation to French and German as observed from the 70's. Soon, foreign nationals and borderers from the neighbouring countries represented more than 50% of the

active population. Several schools for adults responded to a growing demand for evening classes teaching *Lëtzebuergesch*. To conclude, the historian Gilbert Trausch's relevant statement illustrates well the new

linguistic landscape of the end of this century: "French, as often as possible, German as far as necessary".

The State, the School and the Church are institutions where the preferences in the use of the different languages become evident. Free and equal in their rights, as none of them stands as official language in the Grand Duchy, they are omnipresent and share among themselves the roles of language at the workplace, as well as wording and communication language, be it formal or informal.



The Chamber of deputies.

The laws are drawn up in French. On the other hand, spoken French has progressively vanished from Parliament, in spite of the fact that the MP's generally prefer French when making important declarations. But in this official place where no spoken language is clearly defined a certain complexity prevails: the politicians behave according to their personal preferences.

The fact is that the general debates in Parliament are, most of the time, held in Luxembourgish. When this happens, the language borrows many words from French (*de Congé pénal, en Débat an der Chamber*)² and from German (*d'Gleichberechtigung*)³. So, the report of the public sessions of the Parliament sent to

the population illustrates the mixture of the languages: the debates are transcribed in Luxembourgish (which represents the highest amount of regular written production) and the questions to the Government as well as the laws are always in French.

In order to understand the situation, you have to know that for all administrative and judiciary matters the law of February 1984 provides that, "you may use French, German or Luxembourgish". The citizens enjoy the right to choose when they make any administrative request. Yet the Administration is not strictly bound to respect their preference.

Generally speaking, the weak presence of German at the national level is counterbalanced by its strong presence at the local level, both spoken and written. The publications from the town council are often bilingual German/French, depending on the percentage of foreigners living in the town. To conclude, it is interesting to notice that the way the Administration of the Grand Duchy works reflects a clear balance. It prefers using French in the written texts and Luxembourgish for the oral part (at the workplace and to communicate).

During the two years of compulsory pre-school education, the teachers use Luxembourgish to speak

Take a glance at a language classroom!



² In English: *debate in Parliament*

³ In English: *equality of representation*

with their young pupils. The main goal is to develop the language abilities of all the children. There are the young Luxembourgers who have already learnt a few words at home, and the young foreigners for whom those two years provide a first contact with the Luxembourgish tongue.

Primary school introduces the other languages. The children learn how to read and write in German, considered to be the written version of *Lëtzebuergesch*. The year after, they start learning French. Depending on the number of children from immigrants, the teachers speak German, sometimes *Lëtzebuergesch* or French. In 1991, the local schools started a programme providing some classes in Portuguese and Italian.

During the first years of secondary education, most of the classes are held in German. A couple of years

Languages alternate according to the subject studied.



later,

French is used to teach History, Maths etc. in the classic section, while German prevails in the technical section.

The *Centre Universitaire* in Luxembourg offers the students the possibility to follow a first academic cycle in six different branches. Most of the classes are held in French. Then at the end of this cycle, the students continue their degree courses in the neighbouring countries.

Last but not least, the foreign schools account for

17% of the students. In those private schools the mother tongues are sovereign. These schools provide foreign languages courses (French is on the first place) and mother tongue evening courses for the children who have entered the Luxembourg school system.

As a trivial detail, the first international conference discussing the question of bilingualism at school took place in Luxembourg in 1928. Today, the volume of hours dedicated to the learning of languages - in both classic and technical education - lies around 50% of the total teaching schedule. Among the restraints imposed on the teaching system by the linguistic landscape there is, first, the fact that languages can, depending on the choice made, be an

obstacle to succeeding in school. Secondly, there is the obligation - Luxembourg is the only country in Europe where this happens - for students who want to become language teachers - to study in the countries of which they intend to teach the language and culture. But the goal at stake is a cultural one: the success of the *Fête des Langues et du Livre*⁴, for instance, is a good illustration of the multilingual atmosphere and the taste for communication in foreign languages that is developed by the Luxembourgish schools.

Among all the churches in Luxembourg, the Catholic Church is the one which gathers most of the faithful.

The texts are written in German, while the preaching and the mass are held in *Lëtzebuergesch* as well as the weddings and the funerals. The Scriptures are told in German. At a local level, the priests use French or German, depending on the percentage of immigrants.

² In English: *Language and Literature Festival*



It is almost impossible for a Luxembourger to spend a whole day speaking only one language. It is the same for the foreigners, all generations taken into account. How many of them can restrict themselves to their mother tongue? In the kingdom of mixed marriages and other identity curiosities some of these figures provide some answers:

- 17% of the residents speak more than one language with their children.
- 53% speak more than one language with their friends.
- 70% speak more than one language at their workplace.

There is no doubt about the fact that everybody chooses different linguistic paths in daily life. Today, the coloured markers blend and superimpose each other: people speak more and more languages in more and more different places.

Thus, the languages tolerate one another, come close without any jealousy, borrow from each other and lend to each other with no false modesty. This phenomenon appears, for example, in the alternation of languages, an art where the Luxembourgers excel. In a conversation, one language slides to another and borrows one single word, an expression or even a whole idea. A communication technique in itself!



Tell me which languages you speak and I will tell you who you are! In that little cosmopolitan country one's personality appears in one's knowledge of the languages and in one's preferences in using the one or the other.

In Luxembourgish for example, it is almost impossible to "talk for the sake of talking"! You can prefer, in one home or the other, to watch d'Tële rather than de Fernseh⁵, use d'Fernbedienung rather than d'télécommande⁶. The social class you belong to or your geographical origin can be revealed through the choice of language. The same goes for the immigrants who have been living in Luxembourg for a long time. The

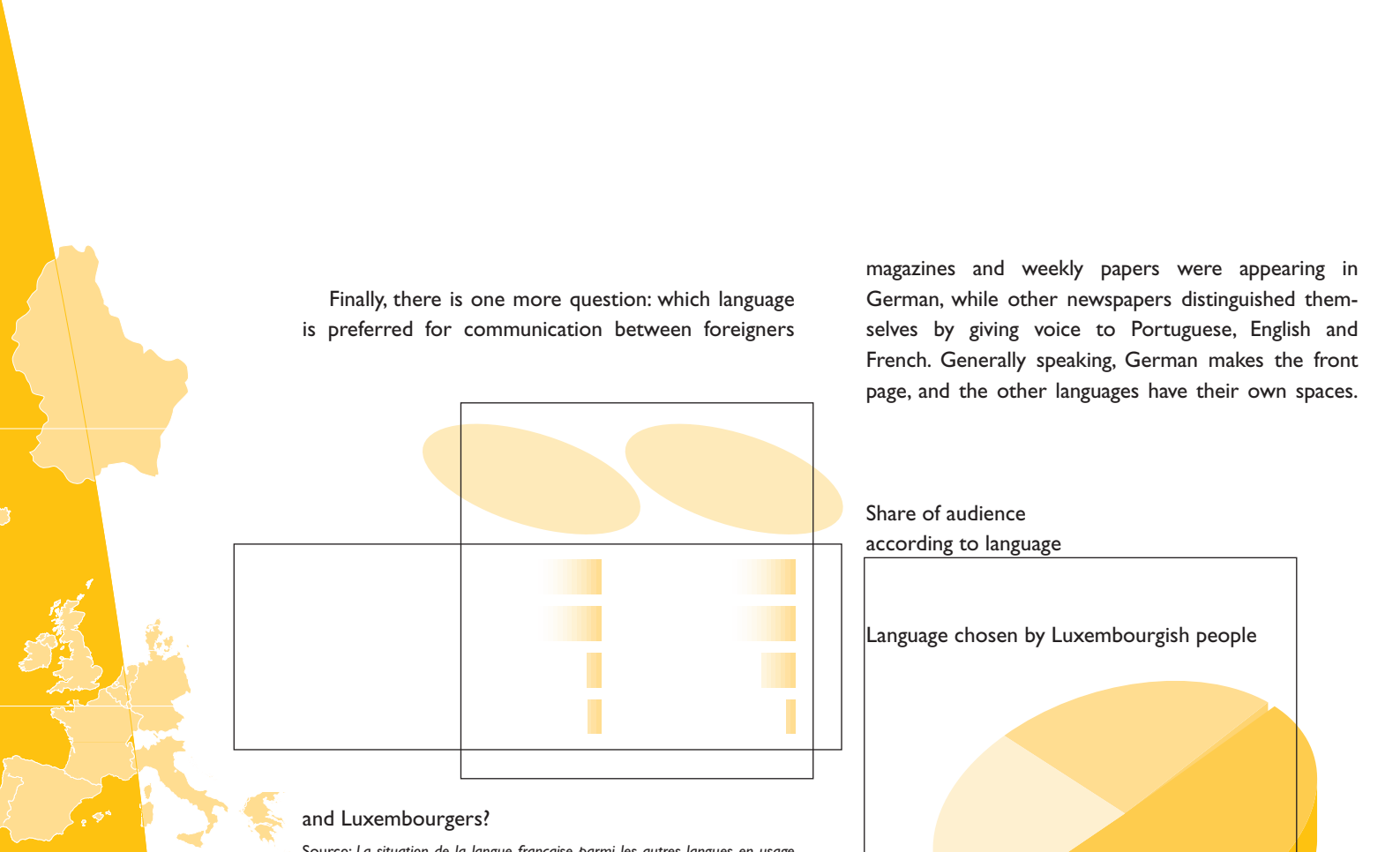
different generations do not have the same tendencies. Depending on their age, they would mix Luxembourgish with Portuguese, French with Italian...



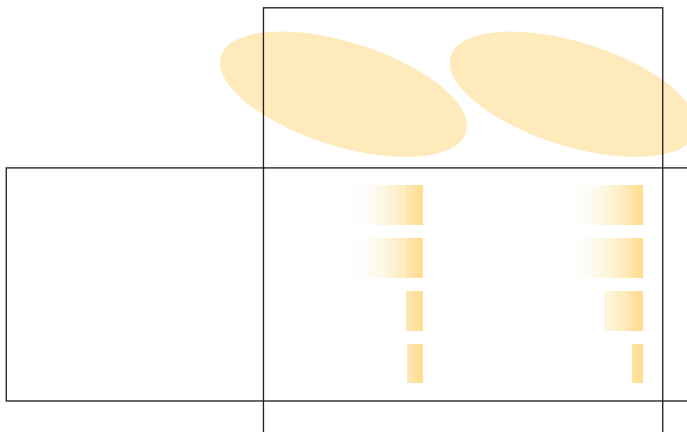
"Moien schwätzt du lëtzebuergesch"

⁵ In English: television, Tële comes from the French (télévision) an Fernseh from German (Fernseher).

⁶ In English: remote control. Fernbedienung is the German word and télécommande the French one.

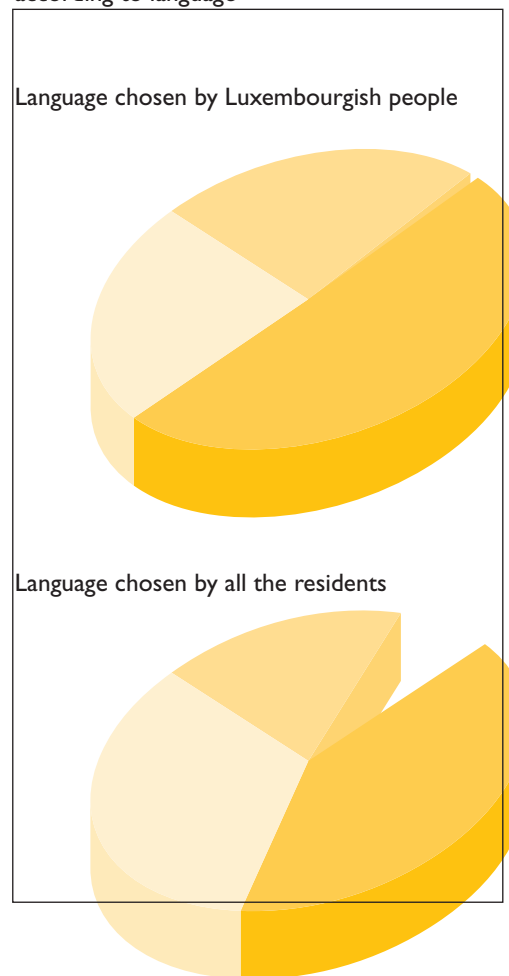


Finally, there is one more question: which language is preferred for communication between foreigners



magazines and weekly papers were appearing in German, while other newspapers distinguished themselves by giving voice to Portuguese, English and French. Generally speaking, German makes the front page, and the other languages have their own spaces.

Share of audience according to language



and Luxembourgers?

Source: *La situation de la langue française parmi les autres langues en usage au Grand-Duché de Luxembourg*. P. Magère, B. Esmein, M. Poty, Centre Culturel Français, 1998.

A sample of the national press.



German has always been the language of the press.

In the main daily papers of the country, the *Luxemburger Wort*, created in 1848 and the *Tageblatt*, created in 1913, French has taken more and more importance and accounts today for 20% and 30% of their texts and advertisements. From the 60s on, new

Source: Le sondage Baleine, coll. RED, éd. Sesopi Centre Intercommunautaire, 1998

Since 1991, Luxembourgish has conquered a significant place on television with the launch of a daily news-programme. Five years later, it is also broadcasted in French. French-speakers can appreciate this new option as well as the effort made to enable them

to watch the national news.

The radio is the media where Luxembourgish is present the most. Of course, the national and local Luxembourgish radio stations enjoy the highest ratings. These results combined with the success of the television news bring about the emotional importance with which Luxembourgers consider their mother tongue.

Moreover, the immigrants are no leftovers. Apart from the fact that the main radio stations from the neighbouring countries are available, English and Romance languages, and not only, have been daily present on the Luxembourg radio waves for several years.

Out of all the sites taken into account, about one quarter of them is multilingual. Of course, French, the most widely used in the Grand Duchy, and English, the most widely used on the Internet, have almost the same importance (55% of the sites against 51%). However, German and Luxembourgish are most of the times part of multilingual sites.

When it comes to interpret cultural matters and express the opening up of a country, the more languages you can use, the more winning cards you hold. Thus, Luxembourg benefits from a privileged setting in the European cultural space.

At the cinema, the audience can enjoy movies presented systematically in their original version with subtitles in French, German or Dutch. The national production in Luxembourgish is developing but remains minimal and is marginally transmitted. As it happens on the television screen, it is during the commercials that Luxembourgish enjoys the most important place: the trademarks use the national language advisedly now since it is the best way to reach out for the consumer.

Tonight at the theatre...



At the theatre, the plays can be presented in several languages, which is an important and appreciated characteristic. Aside from the Luxembourgish theatre companies, the most prestigious companies coming from Germany, France and Belgium offer the international public in Luxembourg a “repertoire” which is worthy of the great European capitals - relatively speaking, for the urban area of the capital has 150 000 inhabitants.

The book shops and libraries have a particularity. They offer publications in French, German and many other languages. Fourteen publishing houses are established in the Grand Duchy. The Luxembourgish literature demands its linguistic plurality, a real asset which permits its marketing to diversify: co-edition with foreign countries, translation (even from Luxembourgish into Russian for the poet Anise Koltz, for instance!), participation to international literary contests and adaptations are many ways for the Luxembourgish creations and authors to break down barriers and cross borders.



A selection of some Luxembourg authors books.



Would you think that Luxembourg is overloaded with languages? On the contrary, it has permitted to many others (i.e. English, Italian, Portuguese) to establish themselves.

On the banking place, in trade and industry, English rallies the different nationalities working together, in spite of the fact that 60% of the banks of the capital are from Germanic origin. Nevertheless, French is inevitably present in all administrative matters, in the relations with the clients and in the mail.

Finding English in an evening dress is no surprise when you consider the huge international community of the capital which goes out at night. Whether they are from Iceland, the United States, Scandinavia, Asia or from Slavic countries, English is their favourite idiom at the workplace as well as outside.

The high degree of the immigrant integration shows in the large number of meeting places which exist in Luxembourg (associations and clubs, bars, restaurants, etc.). This is also relevant in the fact that they use their mother tongue at the workplace. It is particularly true for the Italians and Portuguese of the first generation.

As far as French is concerned, it puts on an unusual face. It is not exactly like the French language from France because the influences from Belgian Walloon are rather strong. These influences have impregnated many generations of students and are now brought in directly by the employees crossing the borders every

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Every year, the multicultural atmosphere is at its height!

day. When Luxembourgers speak French, they are very aware of grammatical rules, a remain of the rigorous learning in school. They speak a careful and formal kind of French, sometimes too correct, which runs wild only in poetry and writings or when spoken by the younger generations.

Lëtzebuergesch

West Moselle Frankish dialect

Last name:
Lëtzebuergesch

First name:
Lëtzebuergesch

Authorised visa:

- to Germany (the platt in Saarland)
- to France (the platt from Thionville)
- to Belgium

(dialects on the border with Luxembourg)

Characteristic: a borrower language

- from German: Familjebuch, etc.
- from English: week-end, back-office, etc.
- from French: plus ou moins, à peu près, etc.