

The situation of modern language learning and teaching in Europe:

GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBOURG

Dominique Portante

Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training

Overview of the linguistic situation

Luxembourg is a country located at the intersection of two cultures: the Latin culture, as it is embodied in the French-speaking world and the French language, and the German-speaking culture embodied in the German language. These two languages, French and German, are the languages of our French, Belgian (French and German-speaking) and German neighbours. All Luxembourgers learn them at school, starting in primary school, and use them alongside their mother tongue and national language, Luxembourgish (Lëtzebuergesch), which is a French-Moselle dialect. It is fair to say that the Luxembourgers base their linguistic identity on these three languages.

Unlike European countries such as Switzerland and Belgium, Luxembourg thus has only one linguistic community, and this is multilingual. Trilingualism is enshrined in legislation and has the following overall characteristics as regards the use of the different languages:

- *Luxembourgish*: national language and mother tongue of the Luxembourgers, used in everyday communication in practically all contexts by all social classes, largely orally (even in the Chamber of Deputies);

since the end of the 19th century, Luxembourg has experienced immigration mainly from Mediterranean countries (especially Italy and Portugal), and immigrants become integrated by learning Luxembourgish, usually in the 2nd generation;

there has been a literature in Luxembourgish since the first quarter of the 19th century;

since the end of the Second World War, Luxembourgish has been spreading in all social classes in everyday life, and an official orthography was laid down in 1975.

- *French*: historically and traditionally the language of government, jurisprudence and, more generally, of a large proportion of the intellectual elite (this applies particularly to written French);

the increase in migration from the Mediterranean countries, especially in the 1950s, and the many Belgian and French cross-border workers, have encouraged the spread of spoken French, especially in the south and centre of the country.

- *German*: traditionally the language used in written communication in everyday life (except in central government and jurisprudence), is increasingly being replaced by Luxembourgish, except in the print media, which are the main area in which German predominates.

A survey of language use commissioned in 1983 by the Ministry of National Education and conducted among a representative sample of the population gives an impression of the complexity of the situation. The study in question reflects

the situation in 1983, which has changed over the last 10 years, especially as regards the use of Luxembourgish, which has made progress in the media. The situation which is revealed is that of a *de facto* multilingualism.

It is certain that the use of languages in Luxembourg is a product of history. It is equally certain that the geographical situation and the outlook of political leaders have, together with economic factors, been decisive for the development of a society that wishes to be increasingly multilingual.

As for the extent to which Luxembourgers are in fact multilingual, it is difficult to give an overall answer using exact figures. As in all other countries, ease of understanding and expression depends, among other things, on the social context, on a person's level of education, his or her relationship to the various languages, motivation, intellectual faculties and, above all, experience.

Given the smallness of the country and the relatively large number of foreigners in Luxembourg, everyone is obliged to use German and French (in addition to Luxembourgish) in situations that may be either competitive or complementary. In general, it can be said that all Luxembourgers speak fluently, and increasingly read, Luxembourgish, and achieve sufficient competence to communicate orally, and pertinently, about everyday matters in German and French. The same applies to understanding the written word. The majority also achieve a level of conceptualisation and competence in writing in both languages that enables them to begin secondary education. Almost 30% successfully complete these secondary studies and thus in principle achieve a competence which permits them to take a higher education course in a French or German-speaking country. Most upper secondary graduates are also capable of following a higher education course in English. Pupils who have pursued secondary technical education are capable of using the three languages at basic level and, in many cases, also sufficient English to satisfy the requirements of their working lives. It should be added that young people from immigrant backgrounds who have gone through the Luxembourg education system are also fluent, to varying degrees, in their language of origin or in that of their parents.

Brief description of the situation in education

Even in primary education, language teaching provides for the compulsory learning of two languages, German and French, by all pupils, alongside the national language, Luxembourgish (learnt from compulsory pre-school onward). It should be added that the learning of a fourth compulsory language, English, is included in the curricula of lower secondary education and secondary technical education.

Pupils who are enrolled in the languages track of upper secondary education learn a fifth modern language, which is generally Italian or Spanish. This provision will be complemented by Portuguese in the near future.

The principle underlying the language learning system is that of a multilingualism which reflects geographical links with France, Belgium and Germany (and their languages of proximity), and links arising out of immigration which, historically, has largely been from Italy, Spain and Portugal. The principle of linguistic proximity is complemented by the learning of

English, which is regarded as an international language, especially in the world of business.

Detailed overview of pre-school and primary education

General characteristics

- Compulsory pre-school education (4 to 6 years of age)
- Primary education (6 to 12 years of age)
- Pre-school education and primary education are organised by the local authorities (communes). The Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training is responsible for the curriculum (study plans at national level).
- The three official languages of the country are taught and used in primary teaching.
- Almost 40% of pupils in pre-school education and primary education are the children of immigrants (largely speaking Latin languages).

Languages taught

- Children learn *Luxembourgish* in kindergarten (pre-school education).
- They learn to read and write in *German* in the first year of primary school.
- The learning of *French* begins half-way through the second year of primary school.
- *Luxembourgish* continues to be developed throughout primary schooling.
- In pre-school education, the *medium of instruction* is Luxembourgish.
- In primary education, the *media of instruction* are Luxembourgish and German.
- French is only used during French classes (3 lessons per week in the 2nd year of schooling, and 7 lessons per week from the 3rd to the 6th year).
- On the recommendation of the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training, a number of communes have included the language of origin of the children of immigrants (Portuguese and/or Italian) in the official curriculum.

Theoretical principles and methodology

- Use of languages as means of communicating, expressing and exploring experience.
- Exploration of languages as sounds and graphic phenomena.
- Regard for children's input (linguistic input and experience), and for the importance of social interaction and peer exchanges.

Learning activities

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• listening and oral comprehension• oral interaction (role plays, interactive games, talking about things and experiences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• exercises aiming at exploring aspects of<ul style="list-style-type: none">• sound• morphology and syntax
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "story-telling" with the option of using an oral editor • short stories, songs and poems • written production (co-operative writing with and without computer; exchanges of text) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lexis • development of metalanguage in oral and written use • checking and reformulating
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Teacher training requirements

- communicative competence in the three official languages, knowledge of the linguistic systems of these languages; cultural knowledge;
- knowledge of child development, the learning process and good pedagogical practice;
- practical skills and ability to analyse and reflect on one's own practice.

Teaching materials

Since 1990, the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training has been co-ordinating the development of teaching materials (textbooks, methodological dossiers, oral and written aids and multimedia aids) appropriate to the teaching described.

Detailed overview of secondary and secondary technical education

In both secondary general and secondary technical education, English is added to German and French from the second year. Latin is taught in the classics track of secondary education (7th and 8th years of schooling). In the languages track of secondary education, pupils also have the opportunity to choose a fifth modern language: Spanish, Italian or Portuguese.

Language teaching remains traditional in secondary education: in lower secondary, great emphasis is laid on perfecting systematised linguistic skills acquired in primary education, especially in writing, and in upper secondary, teaching is based essentially on literature. In secondary technical education, the position and objectives of languages vary from track to track.

Since the early 1990s, an oral test has been included in the secondary leaving certificate examination, and the importance of oral language has spread throughout secondary and secondary technical education.

German, which is the medium of instruction in primary schools (together with Luxembourgish) is gradually replaced by French as the medium of instruction in secondary education, in general secondary technical education, and in the commercial and administrative tracks. German predominates as the medium of instruction in most other tracks in secondary technical education. At the beginning of secondary technical education, pupils who are experiencing difficulties in one of the official languages of Luxembourg because of their recent arrival in the country have the opportunity of enrolling in classes with a special language regime that takes account of their profile and give them the chance to improve the language they know least well. Pupils entering secondary

education can make use of support teaching in the language in which they are having difficulties.

Added value and problems

Added value for individuals and society

Language learning allows Luxembourgers not only to communicate with neighbouring countries, but also enables pupils leaving secondary education to continue their higher education in a significant number of European countries, and even outside the borders of Europe. This communication with different economic, cultural and social systems is felt to be an enriching factor. Moreover, it meets an economic need since the Luxembourg economy rests largely on exports.

Overall, the fact that the Luxembourg education system provides for the compulsory learning of several languages is regarded as a positive general advantage (both for individuals and society) and as raising the quality of education. The principle of multilingual education for all pupils starting in primary school is not contested.

Current problems

It has to be said that it has not been possible to maintain and develop the language situation described above without efforts and sacrifices, which are increasingly giving rise to criticisms, some of which are justified:

- Firstly, multilingual education demands a special effort, even though this is willingly made by the majority of pupils and teachers. Visitors from other countries are struck by the atmosphere of work and the "ideology of effort" that predominates in Luxembourg schools. The situation is generally felt to be extremely demanding, especially by the children of migrants who, in addition to the three official languages, wish at least partially to improve their knowledge of their mother tongues.
- It has to be admitted that, despite the efforts that are willingly made, the importance given to language learning, and especially the demands made that are sometimes far removed from social and economic reality, largely contribute to school failure at all levels of schooling and thus prevent a relatively large number of young people from gaining an officially certificated vocational qualification. The problem has been partially recognised and, in addition to experiments in primary schools aiming at helping teachers to diversify their approach so as better to match the diversity of their pupils, consideration is currently being given, especially in initial vocational education, to the learning objectives for various languages and different populations.
- Furthermore, the time-consuming demands of language teaching necessarily diminish the position and importance accorded to other subjects in the timetable, such as science and technology.