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## Multilingual education and the politics of language in Luxembourg

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### 1. Introduction

With a population of 524,900 and a geographical size of 2,586 square kilometres, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is situated between Belgium, France and Germany and is one of the six founding member-states of the European Union (EU). Luxembourg is home to the highest proportion of resident foreigners in the EU (43.8 per cent), the majority of whom are passport holders of other EU member-states. With 16.2 per cent of the total population, Portuguese passport holders currently make up the largest number of resident foreigners, followed by French (6.3 per cent), Italian (3.4 per cent), Belgian (3.3 per cent), other EU (8.6 per cent) and non-EU (5.9 per cent) residents. The number of resident foreigners climbed steadily after World War II and increased dramatically from the 1970s until 2012 (Statec 2012).

Luxembourg's niche for international banking and special tax schemes has propelled economic prosperity since the late 1960s and this niche subsequently served as a buffer during the steel crisis in the 1970s. Together with the resident foreigners, 157,000 *frontaliers* (border-crossing commuters) now make up a large proportion of the workforce in the Grand Duchy. Their significant presence is linked to the small geographical size of Luxembourg as well as EU regulations facilitating free movement of the EU workforce. About 80 per cent of the *frontaliers* come from France and Belgium and nearly 20 per cent come from Germany. Whilst many *frontaliers* possess multilingual repertoires, these repertoires do not necessarily match up directly with those of the long-term resident population in Luxembourg (Franziskus and Gilles 2012).

### INSERT FIGURE 1: The location of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

In much of the academic literature published in the late twentieth century, the language situation in Luxembourg has been labelled as 'triglossic' with specific reference to the three languages used in the education system and recognized by the 1984 language law: Luxembourgish, French and German (e.g. Berg 1993, Hoffmann 1996). The distinction between spoken and written language has been pivotal to understanding long-standing norms and patterns of language use in Luxembourg, with most spoken communication among the native-born taking place in Luxembourgish and written functions carried out primarily in standard French or German. Luxembourgish language varieties are Germanic and are similar to Moselle Franconian varieties (likewise Germanic) spoken in adjacent parts of Germany,

Belgium and France. For this reason, basic literacy skills are taught via standard German in state schools. French is introduced as a subject in the second year of primary school, becomes a full subject in the third year and gradually replaces German as the main medium of instruction, particularly in the prestigious *lycée classique* or college preparatory secondary school. Based on the Education Act of 1843, the curricula of state schools have perpetuated elite bilingualism, or the valorization of standard German and French (Davis 1994). French, brought to the fore because of its widespread use by *frontaliers* and resident foreigners, is now used as a (supplemental) home language – as opposed to a (mere) school language – by a larger segment of the population than ever before. In this context, there have been shifts in perceptions of French as a marker of prestige. It remains the case that the mastery of standard, written French is valuable in educational and professional contexts. However, the increased use of vernacular French is frequently stigmatized in the public sphere, where it is also widely used in contemporary Luxembourg (Horner 2007a, Weber 2009).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, pressure and support for the development of Luxembourgish grew. In 1984 a language law was passed, which for the first time officially recognized Luxembourgish as the national language and, in theory, as an administrative language. However, it can also be said that this legislation simultaneously reinforced aspects of the sociolinguistic status quo by designating French and German as legal, judicial or administrative languages, precisely the state of affairs prior to the ratification of the law even if it was previously *de facto* rather than *de jure* policy. The ratification of the 1984 law signals a shift towards explicit language policy, thus imparting on Luxembourgish a higher position in the hierarchy of languages (Horner and Weber 2008: 106f.). Luxembourgish is declared the ‘national language’ in Article 1, while the expression ‘official language’ is studiously avoided in the text of the law. This wording provides a springboard for language ideological debates (Blommaert 1999) which frequently revolve around the status and use of Luxembourgish. On the other hand, language ideological debates thematizing education issues tend to focus on the ‘trilingual ideal’ (Horner and Weber 2008: 87), i.e. the mastery of the standard, written varieties of German and French together with the presupposed (consistent) use of spoken Luxembourgish.

According to Irvine (1989: 255), language ideologies constitute ‘the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests’. Language ideologies inform discourses that are widely circulating in particular societies at particular times. In contemporary Europe and, more specifically, in Luxembourg, widespread discourses include those of ethnolinguistic essentialism, language endangerment and linguistic integration. With roots in the long nineteenth century and the rise of the nation-state, discourses of ethnolinguistic essentialism are underpinned by the one nation-one language ideology and they serve to construct an inextricable link between ethnicity and language (cf. Gal and Woolard 2001). Discourses of ethnolinguistic essentialism remain prominent in the European context but have been recast in the late modern era in such a way that they often intersect with discourses on language endangerment and linguistic

integration. The chapters in Duchêne and Heller (2007) show how the discourses of language endangerment have gained prominence since the mid-1990s and are prominent on a global scale. Discourses of language endangerment are based on the identification and categorization of a particular ‘language’, so that it can then be split off from other ‘languages’ on what is usually a linguistic continuum and, as a separate and discrete entity, can then be constructed as being in need of revitalization. Discourses of linguistic integration, which are arguably most salient in the context of the European Union, are constructed around a restrictive definition of societal belonging that is mapped out onto degrees of proficiency in the ‘national’ or official language (cf. Horner 2009). All three discourse clusters rely upon a conception of language as discrete, bounded entities and an assumption of monolingualism as the norm, thus illustrating what Clyne (2008) refers to as the ‘monolingual mindset’.

In this chapter, we discuss language-in-education policies and debates – and the language ideologies underpinning them – in Luxembourg from the nineteenth century to the present (see also Weber and Horner 2012). We emphasize the remarkable persistency of these policies, despite the demographic changes and the fact that the school population in many of today’s primary classrooms, especially in Luxembourg city, consists of a majority of children whose home languages include Romance (rather than Germanic) language varieties. This persistency may be due at least partly to the smallness of the country, in which issues of cultural and economic survival have been at the centre of narratives of national identity. We analyse a wide range of language-in-education policy documents as well as a recent language ideological debate and show to what extent they are informed by the discourses of ethnolinguistic essentialism, linguistic integration and – though in much less detail – language endangerment (for discussion of the discourse of language endangerment, see Horner and Weber 2010a). We also show how the European Union policy of multilingualism has corroborated Luxembourg’s language-in-education policies. We conclude that, in order to ensure the educational success of a wider range of students, the trilingual Luxembourgish school system needs to move in the direction of a more flexible multilingual education. But first we provide a historical overview in order to contextualize present-day developments in language-in-education policies.

## **2. Historical overview of language-in-education policies**

### **2.1. The nineteenth century: constructing a national school system**

As a result of the redrawing of boundaries in northwestern Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century, the more francophone Province de Luxembourg (the so-called ‘quartier wallon’) of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg was incorporated into the newly established state of Belgium following the Belgian revolution of the 1830s. The remaining eastern territory remained the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Subsequently, Luxembourg became a *de facto* independent state in 1839, and an autonomous government was established in Luxembourg in the 1840s under the tutelage and sovereignty of the Dutch monarch. From this time, most of the inhabitants of the Grand Duchy tended to be more germanophone; furthermore, in

1842, Luxembourg joined the Prussian-controlled *Zollverein* (customs union). Yet, in the Education Act of 1843, the government opted for a German/ French bilingual system of state education. Spizzo (1995: 172) traces the emergence of such a bilingual school system to what he calls the ‘protonationalism’ of the new state, buffeted as it was by powerful French-speaking neighbours on one side and German-speaking ones on the other. The government felt the need to assert the specificity of Luxembourg and its difference from both France and Germany. In this way, the attempt at constructing a national school system was one of the first important acts of nation building (see Rohstock and Lenz 2011).

Another powerful player was the Catholic Church, which William II (who had come to power at the end of 1840) did not want to antagonize, considering that this had been one of the main causes of the 1830 Belgian revolution. Hence, the 1843 Education Act grants the Church a lot of power and influence in the educational domain, with for instance teachers having to be approved by the clergy. The Church was more German-oriented, and its principal organ, the *Luxemburger Wort* newspaper, actually proclaimed Germany as the *Vaterland* (homeland) of the Luxembourgers (in 1848; quoted in Spizzo 1995: 179). French, on the other hand, was the language of the bourgeoisie, of state administration and high culture. This allegiance to both German and French is reflected in the parliamentary debates of the 1843 Education Act, for instance when Deputy Jurion defended the bilingual school system by referring to both German and French as the ‘national languages’ of Luxembourg (quoted in Georges 1986: 22).

A further quote from the 1843 parliamentary debates – more precisely, the debate in the new *Assemblée des Etats* created by William II in 1841 – illustrates the at times difficult negotiations and somewhat precarious balance between German and French:

- Les Etats ne pourront-ils pas en quelque sorte être soupçonnés d’une tendance à vouloir galliciser le Luxembourgeois allemand?
- Chez nous le fonctionnaire et généralement tous ceux qui ont reçu quelque instruction, préfèrent le français à l’allemand. (quoted in Diederich 1973: 11)
  
- Could Parliament not be somehow suspected of intending to ‘gallicize’ Luxembourgish German?
- Here in Luxembourg civil servants and generally all those who have received some education prefer French to German.

It should thus be clear that the social class distinction in nineteenth century Luxembourgish society was bound up with linguistic differences. As Calmes (1993: 20, 32) puts it, the upper class preferred to use French and ‘dédaignait parler le langage des pères, la langue de Schiller et de Goethe ... alors que la classe inférieure de la population luxembourgeoise ne reniait pas ... son “origine et son esprit allemand”’ (contemptuously refused to speak the language of the fathers, the language of Schiller and Goethe ... whereas the lower classes of the Luxembourgish population did not deny their ‘German origin and spirit’).

According to Huls (2002: 42-3), the 1843 Education Act allowed for the possibility of biliteracy, or simultaneous literacy, in German and French. She traced a *Lehrplan* (syllabus) for the primary school dating back to 1844 or earlier, which in its Article 1 lists the following as compulsory parts of the curriculum: reading German and French, writing, as well as the ‘elements’ of the two languages, without specifying a precise starting-point for each subject. It seems that the system was based on a certain amount of flexibility and teacher autonomy in that starting French in the first year of primary school was not compulsory but up to each teacher (Georges 1986: 58-9).

At the same time, Article 1 of the Education Act added the proviso that ‘the Council of Government can allow schools to opt out of the teaching of French, if requested by the communal authorities for serious reasons’. This possibility of opting out of the teaching of French was rendered inevitable by the lack of availability of qualified bilingual teachers. In reality, therefore, there was very little teaching of French in most primary schools during the years following 1843. In this way, the primacy of German over French within the framework of the education system was clearly established in practice if not in theory. By the 1870s, the school system had changed to a more fixed sequential literacy approach, with German as the language of basic literacy being taught from the first year of primary school onwards and French normally taught from the third year onwards (as indicated in a syllabus for 1873, quoted in Georges 1986: 114). Interestingly, even the programme description for French is written in German, though titles are left in French (Huls 2002: 49); also, at that time French was usually taught through German, at least in the initial stages. This may reflect the increasing access to the schools of lower-class children who only used Germanic varieties (Luxembourgish) outside school and for whom French was a mere school language.

## 2.2. The twentieth century: constructing Luxembourgish as a language

The end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries was a time of change, of industrialization and immigration, especially in the south of the country. Thus, according to Calmes (1977: 118), the number of ‘foreign’ children in the primary schools of the canton of Esch-sur-Alzette went up to 2,713 out of a total of 9,482 children, which amounts to well over a quarter of the school population. While some of these immigrants hailed from Prussia/ Germany, the majority of people immigrating to Luxembourg to work in the steel industries came from Italy. These shifting demographic patterns contributed to the rise of a Luxembourgish ‘cultural and linguistic nationalism’ at that time (Spizzo 1995: 275-92). In 1910, Lucien Koenig founded the *Lëtzeburger National-Unio’n*, a racist and xenophobic movement inspired by the nationalism of Maurice Barrès. Their nationalist ideology stressed the importance of the Luxembourgish language, as well as soil, religion and democratic values (Spizzo 1995: 289).

It was in this rather nationalistic atmosphere that the coalition government of liberals and social-democrats – the so-called *bloc de la gauche* (left-wing block) – passed the

new Education Act of 1912 against the fierce opposition of the *cléricaux* (clerical right-wing movement). Its primary aim was to restrict the power and influence of the Catholic Church on the education system and to allow for the Protestant and Jewish faiths of many of the Prussian/ German immigrants by introducing more of a separation between the religious and the ‘profane’ elements in the school curriculum. However, there was no such opening in matters of language for the Italian migrant children. On the contrary, we will see that what happened was just the opposite: namely, a new emphasis on Luxembourgish.

The clergy and the Catholic press had organized a virtual ‘witch-hunt’ against the new law, which they considered to be utterly hostile to (the Catholic) religion (Spizzo 1995: 258). While the religious aspects of the new law were fought over with great vehemence, another change went through almost unnoticed. And yet this is the aspect for which the 1912 Education Act is mostly remembered nowadays: namely, the addition of Luxembourgish as a subject to the curriculum, thus initiating a slight shift in the framework of the educational system from a bilingual towards (what is nowadays seen as) a trilingual one. Social-democratic Deputy Spoo proposed an amendment to this effect, arguing for it on the basis of three main reasons:

- to emphasize the beauty of the Luxembourgish language and literature
- to move beyond the reigning confusion in the area of spelling
- to teach students to love and care for the special characteristics of Luxembourgish people

The right-wing opposition expressed the fear that the addition of another linguistic subject to the curriculum might prove too much for many students, but they were reassured that it would just be a matter of reading some prose and poetry by the best Luxembourgish authors, and so the amendment was passed (Diederich 1973: 75).

The long-term influence of this decision has been wide reaching: it has contributed to the now common perception that Luxembourgish and German are two separate languages and it has served as a key reference point in endeavours to promote Luxembourgish. Nowadays, Luxembourgish is more and more perceived as the one and only mother tongue of the Luxembourgers, while German and French are more and more looked upon as foreign languages. Yet this change of awareness did not take place immediately after the passing of the 1912 Education Act. To show this, we briefly look at a Ministerial Circular about the teaching of French published in 1922 (significantly, in the aftermath of World War I). It is this circular that organizes the teaching of French the way it is still structured nowadays: pupils start to learn French in a more ludic way during the second half of the second year of primary school, and it becomes a major part of the curriculum from the third year onwards. The justification for this ‘light’ introduction to French in year 2 of primary school is given as follows in the above-mentioned circular:

Il s’ensuit encore que ces premiers exercices de langage devront tirer le plus de profit possible du vocabulaire français préscolaire des enfants – plus riche

que l'on ne l'admet généralement et surtout d'un usage très courant ... Bref, il importe d'user de tous les moyens pour gagner, dès les premières semaines, l'intérêt de l'élève pour le français, que nous disons notre seconde langue maternelle. Il faut lui montrer, dès le début, que celle-ci n'est ni si difficile que les grammairiens l'ont faite, ni si étrangère qu'elle en a l'air, et que l'on ne saurait parler luxembourgeois sans parler un peu français. (Wagener 1930: 412-13)

It also follows that these first language exercises will have to draw as much as possible on the children's pre-school French vocabulary – richer than usually acknowledged and above all widely used ... In short, it is essential, right from the beginning, to use every possible means to raise the children's motivation to learn French, which we call our second mother tongue. Right from the beginning, they have to be shown that French is neither as difficult as the grammarians have made it out to be, nor as foreign as it seems to be, and that one cannot speak Luxembourgish without at the same time speaking a little French.

Here French is not seen as a foreign language; on the contrary, it is stated that 'we' – the Luxembourgers – refer to it as 'our second mother tongue'. It needs to be made clear that this implies that German is still considered as the Luxembourgers' first mother tongue and that Luxembourgish is still perceived as a regional variety of German. In this way, we see that the addition of Luxembourgish as a school subject ten years earlier has not yet led to a widespread awareness of Luxembourgish as a language separate from German.

The same conclusion can be drawn from the textbook in use for Luxembourgish in primary schools, Nikolaus Welter's *Das Luxemburgische und sein Schrifttum*. In its ninth edition for 1929, for instance, Luxembourgish is referred to as *Luxemburger Deutsch* (Luxembourgish German; Welter 1929: 8, 10), and compared and contrasted with *Schriftdeutsch* (written German) and *Hochdeutsch* (standard German; Welter 1929: 12). Similarly, Wagner and Davies (2009: 127) mention that the 1948 edition of the textbook *Luxemburger Lesebuch* (Luxembourgish Reader) distinguishes between writings in *Mundart* (dialect) and *Hochdeutsch* (standard German). Hence, the awareness of Luxembourgish as a language separate from German did not emerge during or immediately after World War II either, despite many claims to this effect by Luxembourgish historians and language experts. Wagner and Davies conclude their discussion of what they call the 'myth' of the importance of World War II in the development of Luxembourgish as a national language as follows:

The fact that the indigenous language variety of Luxembourg is here referred to as *Mundart* (dialect) may indicate that the overall perception and acceptance of this variety as a language had not yet been established in 1948, three years after the end of World War II. The fact that these textbooks used for reading and comprehension exercises in primary schools did not contain more Luxembourgish texts, that the number of Luxembourgish texts they did



contain did not rise after World War II, and that no clear curriculum for the teaching of Luxembourgish was established, are more indicators that claims for the role of World War II in the change of the status of Luxembourgish have been exaggerated. (Wagner and Davies 2009: 127)

In fact, we have to wait for the economic and demographic changes of the 1970s onwards for such an awareness to fully emerge. As Horner and Weber (2008) have argued, this is largely a reaction to increased levels of immigration in the wake of globalization and Europeanization. And so, for example, the 1990 textbook *Lëtzebuergesch Texter* (Luxembourgish Texts) draws a clear line between Luxembourgish, the language of the ‘Luxembourgers’, and the languages used by people in neighbouring countries and/or spoken by resident ‘foreigners’ in Luxembourg (in a text actually written in Luxembourgish):

Déi meescht Lëtzebuurger kënnen haut, nieft hirem Lëtzebuergesch, och nach Däitsch a Franséisch, muncher och Englesch. An dat soll och esou sin! Mir sin op eis Noperen ugewisen, fir mat Friemen an d’Gespréich ze kommen, musse mir hir Sprooche kennen. Mir hun bal 30% Ausländer bei eis am Land wunnen, mat dene mer eis wëlle verstoen. (Rasquin et al. 1990/1994: 22)

In addition to their Luxembourgish, most Luxembourgers today know German and French, and many also English. And that is the way it should be! We are dependent on our neighbours; in order to have conversations with foreigners, we must be able to speak their languages. We have almost 30% foreigners living in our country, with whom we want to make ourselves understood.

It is not just the role of German but also French which is affected by these changing language attitudes and ideologies: French, the language of state administration and high culture, is now widely used by resident foreigners and cross-border commuters and, as a result, mixed and contact varieties of French have spread rapidly. The consequence of this has been a loss of prestige of (at least certain varieties of) French and, more particularly in the area of education, the demotion of French to the level of a foreign language, the promotion of Luxembourgish primarily within pre-school education and a ‘fixing’ of the trilingual system with German as the language of basic literacy (and medium of instruction throughout primary school; see Horner and Weber 2010b).

### **3. Present-day developments in language-in-education policy**

#### **3.1. From identification with bi/trilingualism to monolingual identification with Luxembourgish?**

We have seen how the boundary between German and Luxembourgish has shifted: whereas in the nineteenth century, Luxembourgers tended to refer to their varieties as ‘our German’ or ‘Luxembourgish German’, they now tend to perceive Luxembourgish more and more as a wholly separate language from German – in line with the 1984

Language Law which officially recognizes Luxembourgish as the ‘national language’ of Luxembourg. The gradual transformation of the status of Luxembourgish from a ‘dialect’ to a ‘language’, separate from German, also implied that the traditional bilingual German-French education system metamorphosed into a trilingual Luxembourgish-German-French system. At the same time, through having its status upgraded, Luxembourgish also came to be perceived as an endangered language. Many people began to feel that the ‘small’ language was in need of standardization and promotion, and suggestions to ensure its survival include inserting a language clause in the constitution, promoting Luxembourgish to the level of a European Union working language (at the moment, French is the EU working language for Luxembourg) and introducing it into the education system as a full subject or as the medium of basic literacy.

Many of these demands have been formulated by *Actioun Lëtzebuergesch*, an association founded in 1971 to ‘promote the cause of everything that is Luxembourgish, especially the language’ (*fir alles anzetrieden, wat lëtzebuergesch as, apart fir d’Sprooch*; *Actioun Lëtzebuergesch* 1978: 63). In a recent publication, *Actioun Lëtzebuergesch* builds upon the new status of Luxembourgish as a language (wholly separate from German) in order to argue that monolingualism is natural and that every human being can only have one ‘mother tongue’:

Jidfer ‘gestackte’ Mëttel-Lëtzebuenger huet eng eenzeg Sprooch, an deer hie fillt, bannewänneg ‘fir sech’ schwätzt, dreemt ... Et ass déi Sprooch, déi an engem ‘normale’ Lëtzebuenger Elterrenhaus geléiert a geschwat gëtt; den Ausdrock ‘Mammesprooch’ ass an deem Sënn ze verstoen. Haut wësse mir, datt de Puppelchen ewell banne bei der Mamm Geräicher an op d’mannst den Tounfall vun deer Sprooch matkritt, déi rondrëm geschwat gëtt ... an dat ass e ganz anere Klank wéi deen däitschen a franséschen. (Roth 2011)

Every ‘rooted’ Luxembourger has one and only one language, in which he [sic] feels, talks to himself, dreams ... It is the language which is learned and spoken in a ‘normal’ Luxembourgish home; the expression ‘mother tongue’ is to be understood in this way. Nowadays we know that the baby even before being born hears noises and at least the tone of the language which is spoken around him ... and that is a very different tone from that of the German or French language.

This is a perfect illustration of what Clyne (2008) describes as the monolingual mindset, which regards monolingualism as the norm and multilingualism as ‘exceptional, deviant, unnecessary, dangerous or undesirable’ (Clyne 2008: 348) or even – as in the extreme version of it in this newspaper article – as theoretically impossible:

Ee kann e puer Sproche GEBRAUCHEN, ower jiddereen huet nëmmen eng ‘Mammesprooch’, an zwar déi éischt (primär), an deer hie begraff, verstan a geschwat huet! ... Dat kimm dann am déiwe Sënn drop eraus, datt et keng

absolutt ‘Méisproochegkeet/ Polyglossie’ gëtt. Och net fir d’Lëtzebuerger! Mir léieren a GEBRAUCHEN – ee Gléck! – vill Däitsch, Franséisch, vläicht och nach Englesch, mä mir sinn net ‘dräisproocheg’. (Roth 2011; capital letters in original)

One can USE a few languages, but everybody has only one ‘mother tongue’, namely the first (primary) language in which he understood and spoke! ... This would mean in a deeper sense that there is no absolute ‘multilingualism/ polyglossia’. Not even for Luxembourgers! We learn and USE – fortunately! – a lot of German, French, maybe also English, but we are not ‘trilingual’.

The implication here is that if ‘even’ Luxembourgers – who are assumed to be (near-) perfect language learners – are not multilingual, then nobody is. In this way, monolingualization is taken to its extreme, to the point where even the possibility of growing up bilingual becomes inconceivable.

### 3.2. The eradication of French from pre-school

While *Actioun Lëtzebuergesch* may represent a somewhat extreme position, yet the new emphasis on Luxembourgish is also reflected in language-in-education policies from the 1990s onwards – though within the framework of the traditional trilingualism of Luxembourgish education. Thus, for instance, in the Luxembourgish Ministry document *Pour une école d’intégration*, it is acknowledged that French is frequently used as a lingua franca in schools:

Dans les écoles à pourcentage élevé d’enfants étrangers, la langue de communication entre élèves en dehors des heures de classe est souvent le français. En classe, il arrive que l’enseignant soit obligé d’avoir recours au français pour se faire comprendre ... Les grandes concentrations d’enfants étrangers dans certaines écoles sont un des principaux facteurs empêchant l’intégration. Le phénomène de ‘l’immersion linguistique’ ne fonctionne pas, ou alors il fonctionne en sens inverse: les enfants luxembourgeois communiquent en français avec leurs camarades non-luxembourgeois. (MENFP 1998: 8, 12)

In the schools with a high percentage of foreign children, the language of communication between the children outside the classroom is often French. In the classroom, it can happen that the teacher is forced to use French so that the children can understand him/her ... The large numbers of foreign children in some schools are one of the main factors impeding integration. The phenomenon of ‘linguistic immersion’ does not work, or works in the opposite direction: Luxembourgish children communicate in French with their non-Luxembourgish friends.

The widespread presence of French in the classrooms of the 1990s is seen as a problem, an impediment to ‘integration’: instead of migrant students learning

Luxembourgish through contact with Luxembourgish-speaking peers, it is the latter who learn French through contact with the former. One might have thought that, from a perspective of educational ‘integration’, this would be seen as a welcome development: after all, success within the trilingual Luxembourgish school system, at least at the higher levels, depends much more on a mastery of French than of Luxembourgish. Yet what prevails in the Ministry discourse is a nationalist ideology, similar to that found in the discourse of *Actioun Lëtzebuergesch*, that looks upon the Luxembourgish language as the sole icon of Luxembourgishness. In this ideology, French is seen as a threat and hence needs to be eradicated, at least from pre-school education. In order to achieve this, the authors of the Ministry document, as we will see, present an argument in favour of mother tongue education. The document is informed by the discourse of ethnolinguistic essentialism, seeing Luxembourgish as the one and only mother tongue of Luxembourgish children and Portuguese as the one and only mother tongue of luso-descendant children – even though in reality many of the children in both groups are bi- or multilingual. In this way, the official language-in-education policy does not build upon the whole of the children’s home linguistic resources; instead, it simplifies the children’s complex multilingual use of language and reduces it to monolingualism (in the ‘mother tongue’).

In the case of luso-descendant children, pre-school education thus aims at developing only their competence in Luxembourgish (while at the same time respecting their assumed ‘mother tongue’, i.e. Portuguese), as a result of which many of them fail to develop their knowledge of French, which they then learn in its standard version as a foreign language from year two of primary school onwards. This policy based on the mother-tongue ideology also involves bringing in Portuguese ‘mother-tongue’ assistants, which might seem to be a progressive measure but which is explicitly justified here as allowing the pre-school teachers to cut out French and focus on Luxembourgish:

un intervenant portugais collabore avec l’enseignante luxembourgeoise dans la classe pendant trois heures par semaine.

Cette mesure a des effets très positifs à plusieurs points de vue: ...

- l’enseignante luxembourgeoise n’est plus obligée de recourir au français pour se faire comprendre par les enfants, ce qui a pour effet que les enfants étrangers peuvent se concentrer sur l’apprentissage du luxembourgeois, unique langue parlée par la titulaire de classe, tout en gardant les repères avec leur langue d’origine. (MENFP 1998: 9)

a Portuguese assistant works together with the Luxembourgish teacher in the classroom for three hours per week.

This measure has a number of very positive effects: ...

- the Luxembourgish teacher is no longer forced to use French so that the children can understand her; as a consequence, the foreign children can concentrate on the learning of Luxembourgish, the only language spoken by the teacher, while at the same time keeping in touch with their heritage language.

Behind the essentialist discourse of respect of the ‘mother tongue’, the aim here is ultimately assimilationist: the children are taught to speak Luxembourgish and later they learn standard German and French mostly for writing purposes – which, as has already been suggested above, corresponds to the traditional ‘trilingual ideal’ of Luxembourgish society and education. In other words, societal assimilation is here considered to be more important than successful ‘integration’ into the school-system (in the sense of providing students with the best possible chances of educational success). Indeed, if the primary concern were success within the school-system, then the children’s home resources in vernacular French would be valued and built upon in pre-school education as a preparation for primary and secondary education.

### 3.3. The construction of Luxembourgish as the “language of integration”

In this way, Luxembourgish, which is frequently perceived as a key marker of national identity, has also been promoted as the language of integration and its role within the education system has been reinforced. The increased use of Luxembourgish has been hailed as a solution to the perceived problem of societal heterogeneity and as a way of achieving the vaguely formulated goals of ‘integration’ and ‘social cohesion’ (see Horner 2009). As Luxembourgish is still a spoken much more than a written language, it is dominant in the context of pre-school education, where it has replaced vernacular French, which had been widely used by the increasing number of romanophone children. This has created a fracture between educational policy and actual language practices, in that Luxembourgish is constructed as the sole language of integration in schools, while many migrant children live in areas where French is a widely used lingua franca.

Pre-school education consists of one optional year of *précoce* (for children aged three) and two obligatory years of *préscolaire* (from age four upwards). In the Ministry of Education document *L’Education précoce: Plan-cadre*, it is assumed that children who do not already speak Luxembourgish will acquire it through “natural” interaction with other pupils and teachers. It is hoped that the teaching and use of Luxembourgish during three years of pre-school will help these children to “integrate” and prepare them for the German-language literacy programme of the primary school:

Les groupes d’Education précoce comprendront des enfants luxembourgeois et des enfants qui ont appris une autre première langue. Il est clair que l’objectif de l’Education précoce et préscolaire est de faire acquérir une bonne maîtrise de la langue luxembourgeoise, car cet apprentissage est considéré, dans notre système scolaire, comme un tremplin efficace vers l’apprentissage ultérieur de l’allemand, langue de l’alphabétisation à l’école primaire. (Ministère de l’Education Nationale 2000: 20)

Education précoce groups will include both Luxembourgish children and children who have learnt another L1. It is clear that the aim of Education précoce and préscolaire is to get children to acquire a good mastery of the

Luxembourgish language, for this is considered, within our school system, as a powerful stepping-stone towards the later acquisition of German, the language of literacy in primary school.

This text emphasizes learning and promotion of Luxembourgish, which is simply assumed to be the (one and only) mother tongue of all the “Luxembourgish children”. At the same time, the close linguistic relatedness of Luxembourgish and German is used to justify the maintenance of the German-language literacy program. In this way the text attempts to maintain a somewhat precarious balance between monolingual identification with the mother tongue and trilingual identification with the three languages used in the educational system: Luxembourgish, German and French (though French is not explicitly mentioned here, the official text is actually written in French). The cultural model of Luxembourgish national identity allows for an oscillation between these two poles: identification with Luxembourgish versus identification with the trilingual ideal (Horner 2007a, 2007b). Horner’s detailed analyses illustrate how official, international, as well as educational discourses often tend towards the latter option, whereas internal or popular discourses are frequently informed by the former. However, the recent emphasis on Luxembourgish as the “language of integration”, which – as we have just seen – is even beginning to colonize the educational domain, has shifted the balance in favour of the “monolingual identification with Luxembourgish” model. In these discourses, “linguistic integration” only refers to knowledge of Luxembourgish, and (for instance) Portuguese-origin residents who have learnt French are not seen as having taken a first step towards integration.

#### **4. The Walferdange bilingual school project**

The Luxembourgish trilingual education system is based on the premise that the children have Luxembourgish as a home language: they acquire literacy in standard German, which is linguistically closely related to Luxembourgish, and then learn French as a second or foreign language from the second year of primary school onwards. However, since the 1970s, there has been an ongoing and dramatic change in the school population, to the point where nowadays only about one third of primary children have Luxembourgish as (one of) their home language(s) (*L’Essentiel* 10-06-2011). Many of these children have Romance languages as their home languages, including French, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish and Cape Verdean Creole. Often, because they fail to achieve the required level of mastery in standard German, they cannot access the elite *lycées classiques* and are oriented towards the more vocational *lycées techniques*, or they complete secondary education in schools in nearby Belgium and France.

In the vocational *lycées* the focus is more on ‘technical’ subjects, and a rather low amount of hours is devoted to language teaching and learning; as a result these students’ acquisition of English, which is only taught at secondary level, is often limited to a rudimentary level. They are thus deprived of an important job qualification on both the national and the European employment market. Indeed,

Klein (2007) has shown that English is the most important language (along with French) facilitating access to the Luxembourgish labour market. In fact, it has become so important that he concludes his paper with the suggestion that, in Luxembourg among others, the EU language policy of mother tongue plus two other languages (MT + 2) should be 'guided by a "MT + English + 1" slogan', though he adds that, on the one hand, this means 'prioritiz[ing] economic rather than cultural considerations and, on the other hand, the advantages of commanding English will tend to diminish when these competences become more and more abundant' (Klein 2007: 278). In this way, there is an increasing disjuncture between the employment market (where French and English are the most important languages) and language-in-education policy (where German is the language of basic literacy and medium of instruction).

As a way of increasing the chances of educational success of romanophone students who have difficulty with German – and by the way also those of Luxembourgish-speaking students who have difficulty with French – a group of primary school teachers put together a school project involving parallel French and German literacy. They taught in the francophone primary school of Walferdange, a residential suburb of Luxembourg city, which was unique in that it was the only state primary school offering a French-language literacy programme. It had been opened in 1968 for the children of expats working for a number of international companies in the area, especially NAMSA (NATO Maintenance Supply Agency, renamed NATO Support Agency in 2012). It was targeted for closure by the Ministry of Education from 2007 onwards and was eventually closed down on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013. In order to fight against the threat of closure and to keep their school alive either in its existing site or another one, the teachers put together an innovative proposal for a bilingual school project (Pettinger 2009), which has come to be known in the media as the Walferdange bilingual school project. In the proposed school, the curriculum was to be organised differently from all other state schools with their compulsory German-language literacy programme, in that students would work in parallel sections, one with German as the language of literacy and French taught as a foreign language, and the other with French as the language of literacy and German taught as a foreign language, with intensive links between the two sections. The objective would be the development, through immersion education techniques, of high levels of fluency in both German and French, with the sections being fully merged after a number of years.

One important issue for the teachers was how to avoid ghettoization of one or the other section. They pointed out that, just as the group of migrant students is not homogeneous, the group of Luxembourgish-speaking students is not homogeneous either. While many Luxembourgish-speaking parents might choose to put their children in the germanophone section, there are also many mixed marriages with one francophone parent, who might prefer to enrol their children in the francophone section. Similarly, while the majority of migrant students may be romanophone, there are also many immigrants from Central and Eastern European countries who might find it easier for their children to attend the germanophone section. In this way, both

sections would comprise a mix of mainstream children and children with a migration background.

The local authorities of the city of Luxembourg showed great interest in the project, looked upon it as necessary in the light of the changing school population and expressed readiness to implement it in one of their primary schools. However, the project was rejected somewhat summarily by the Ministry of National Education in April 2010. As a consequence, some opposition Members of Parliament tabled a parliamentary question enquiring about the reasons for the Ministry's rejection of this project. In their response, the Ministry of Education argued as follows:

En ce qui concerne l'accroissement continu du nombre d'élèves non-luxembourgeois sur le territoire national, la majorité des élèves de langue étrangère sont lusophones et non pas francophones, provenant du Portugal, du Cap-Vert ou du Brésil. (MENFP 2010)

As far as the continuously growing number of non-Luxembourgish children on the national territory is concerned, the majority of these foreign language speakers are lusophone and not francophone, originating from Portugal, Cape Verde or Brazil.

This is a typical instantiation of the discourse of ethnolinguistic essentialism, which is informed by the one nation–one language ideology and, moreover, sees languages as discrete and bounded entities with nothing in common between them. As such, it fails to adequately describe the full complexity of these children's sociolinguistic reality. Thus, Weber's (2009) ethnographic study of a number of Portuguese-origin families in Luxembourg city has shown that all the families surveyed are highly multilingual, using mostly Portuguese and French, often also Luxembourgish (as well as some other languages), with frequent occurrences of code-switching, code-mixing and lexical borrowing. This complex reality is ignored in the Minister's statement, which has the effect of imprisoning these children in fixed, essentialized identities. Based upon the one nation–one language ideology, the assumptions are that they are ethnically Portuguese (or Cape Verdean or Brazilian), that therefore their home language is Portuguese and only Portuguese, and an education in another language (French) as the language of literacy cannot help them. Indeed, what the Ministry has done is some token promotion of their assumed 'mother tongue' (Portuguese) through the introduction for these children of a two-hour per week course taught in standard Portuguese throughout primary school. But otherwise, there has been no change in the language learning and teaching regime of primary school, with German still used as the language of literacy for everybody.

In the parliamentary debate about the proposed 'bilingual school' project, the Ministry was also quoted in the newspapers as stating the following:

Toutes les écoles au Luxembourg sont au moins bilingues, sinon multilingues.  
(*L'Essentiel* 13-07-2011)



All the schools in Luxembourg are at least bilingual, if not multilingual.

The argument here is that there is no need to create a bilingual school as advocated in the proposed project, since all Luxembourgish schools are already bilingual (German–French) or even multilingual (Luxembourgish–German–French, plus a special course taught in Portuguese for lusophone students, plus some other languages – especially English – taught as subjects at secondary level). Indeed, Luxembourg’s educational system is often presented as a ‘model’ of multilingual education, even by academics (e.g. Baetens-Beardsmore 1993: 105; Garcia 2009: 268). It lives up to the dual European ideal of protecting small autochthonous languages (such as Luxembourgish) and teaching a number of additional standard languages (MT + 2), thus both helping to preserve the European cultural heritage and turning its students into multilingual citizens. In a sense, the Ministry of Education is drawing upon this widespread ‘multilingualism is automatically progressive’ ideology as a way of justifying their argument that there is no need to create the newly proposed bilingual school or to change the language regime of the school system.

## 5. Conclusion

We have seen how *Actioun Lëtzebuergesch* and the Ministry of Education, while seemingly defending very different goals, with the former promoting monolingualism and the latter multilingualism, actually rely upon the same assumptions and discourses, in particular the discourse of ethnolinguistic essentialism. Moreover, we have seen that the existing multilingual school system is a highly fixed system, with all children forced to go through the same language regime with German as the language of literacy. This is the case even for romanophone students whose home languages include mostly French and Portuguese and who hardly ever use or even come across German, except in the classroom (Weber 2009: 92). But this linguistic reality is ignored or erased by the Ministry of Education, who for decades has failed to change the language teaching and learning regime and to set up a more flexible system building upon all the children’s actual (vs. assumed) linguistic resources. The proposed ‘bilingual school’ project would have introduced at least some degree of flexibility into this rigid system. Thus, a fixed multilingual school system such as the Luxembourgish one ignores the needs of large numbers of students, in a way very similar to a monolingual system. We can conclude that the important distinction is not between monolingual and multilingual school systems but between fixed and flexible multilingual systems: only a flexible multilingual system potentially builds upon all (or most) of the children’s linguistic needs and resources, and ensures better opportunities of educational success.

In Luxembourg, on the other hand, the multilingual school system is informed by a monolingual mindset, and by the discourses of linguistic integration and ethnolinguistic essentialism. Underlying these discourses and assumptions, there is also a concern with language endangerment or, more specifically, a fear that, if the position of German is weakened, this might affect the role and status of Luxembourgish, because of the close linguistic relatedness. This in turn links to a

broader fear that Luxembourg might eventually turn into a French-speaking country, due to the continuing high level of in-migration from romanophone countries. In short, there is a fear of Luxembourgish dying out and of Luxembourgers becoming a minority in 'their own country'. Hence, there is an urgent need to re-focus the societal debate, away from this issue of power and privileges, and upon the key question of how to construct an education system that puts children first and their needs and interests, rather than a particular language.

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