Linguistic Diversity of Luxembourg

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is a country situated in the west of Europe, surrounded by France, Germany and Belgium. With the area of only 2,586 square kilometers, it is one of the smallest countries in Europe (Wikipedia, 2021). In 2019 the population of Luxembourg amounted to 626,108 people, making it also one of the countries with the smallest number of citizens. Interestingly, half of that number is made up by foreigners. Data from 2017 regarding the different nationalities present in Luxembourg shows that exactly 50.9% are Luxembourgers - the remaining 49.1% of the population are Portuguese (18.2%), French (13.5%), German (10.3%) and others (7.1%).

The historical background may account for such a diversity of population. The construction of Luxembourg Castle in 963 marked the beginning of the history of Luxembourg. Due to its favorable geographical location between the powerful countries of France and Germany, the country had to face their omnipresent influence. Throughout its history Luxembourg was ruled by many dynasties, including Bourbons (the French), Habsburgs (the Austrians) and Hohenzollerns (the Prussians). Nowadays, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is a wealthy, high-ranked country with a stable international reputation and great influence. It is a prominent member of numerous international organizations, including NATO, UN, EU, and Benelux. All of these factors contribute to an immense linguistic diversity. According to the data from 2017 gathered by SIL International, Luxembourg's linguistic diversity index is 0.622 - the country ranks 72nd in the world.

There are as many as three official languages spoken in Luxembourg - Luxembourgish (Luxembourgois in WALS), German and French. As described in the "Ethnologue" (n.d.), both German and Luxembourgish belong to the Germanic family of languages (the former being an East Middle German and the latter a West Middle German language), whereas French belongs to the Romance language family. The "Ethnologue" (n.d.) profile of language vitality for Luxembourg classifies all three languages as institutional - meaning that they are used not only within the communities, but its usage is sustained by various institutions. According to the official website of Luxembourg (n.d.), other prominent languages that are present within its linguistic landscape are English, which as a *lingua franca* is very often accepted within government services, and Portuguese. Indeed, the official website of Luxembourg is available in German, French and English. Additionally, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Swedish, Finnish and Romanian are enumerated as the languages of existing minority communities. The website repeatedly highlights the multilingual character of the country, e.g. with its telling statement "speaking more than one language has come to be a part of what makes us Luxembourgers" (Government of the Grand

Duchy of Luxembourg, n.d). Apart from the obvious chance to promote diversity, openness, and tolerance, it is underlined that Luxembourg benefits immensely from its multilingual environment, especially in the terms of economy. Additionally, as for the aforementioned prestige on the international stage, the country acknowledges its great advantage as the third EU capital, which makes it able to host the EU translation center and publications office.

The government website confirms the linguistic diversity index with a statement that "the majority of Luxembourgers speak four languages and the rate of foreign residents almost reaches 50% of the total population" (Government of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, n.d). A 2018 study of the Ministry of National Education concludes that 98% of the Luxembourg population speaks French, 80% speaks English, and 78% speaks German. Luxembourgish is used by 77% of the population. All three aforementioned official languages, namely Luxembourgish, German, and French, are the languages of the government. Furthermore, German plays a vital role as the language of the print media, the legislature is entirely in French, while Luxembourgish is used most in political discourse. English is omnipresent in the public sector. In conclusion, the languages interplay within the country's landscape. For example, the northern part of Luxembourg is less densely populated and mostly used for farming - here Luxembourgish is more dominant. In the southern part, countryside and cities can be less clearly distinguished, as goes for the dominance of one or another language. Further, the closer to the border one is located in Luxembourg, the more influential the language of the bordering country becomes.

The high level of multilingualism in Luxembourg is particularly promoted by its multilingual education system. Starting out with Luxembourgish as the primary language of communication, students are introduced to German in first, French in second, and English in eighth grade (N. Ruppert, personal interview, March 27, 2021[1]). In the primary school, most subjects are taught in German, while in the secondary school French is used instead. In practice, however, Luxembourgish is also often used for oral communication, effectively training the code switching abilities of the students. Many Luxembourgers appreciate that the educational system uses all three official languages for instruction and fosters balanced multilingualism, but some claim that the schools should also offer different approaches to multilingualism. Natural affinities or difficulties to one or another language can cause a lot of pressure when the language of instruction changes and consequently result in students losing their fascination for learning languages.

As it has become visible in the previous paragraphs, Luxembourg prides itself with maintaining a quite balanced linguistic diversity. This seems to have a great positive influence on

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[1] Caren Sausmikat conducted a personal interview with Nina Ruppert, a Luxembourg citizen currently studying in Freiburg.

its socio-political standing in Europe and the multilingualism profiles of its citizens. Certain sectors of public life are dominated by one of the official languages more than others. Naturally, the dominance of one language over the others is also influenced by the geographic region one is located in, although generally, just like the sectors of public life, each of the three languages is welcomed and widely spoken. For the average Luxembourger, this results in an impressive multilingualism profile. They usually have native speaking skills in Luxembourgish, German and/or French, and fluency in English. Many also have additional basic to fluent speaking skills in e.g. Portuguese or Spanish.

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