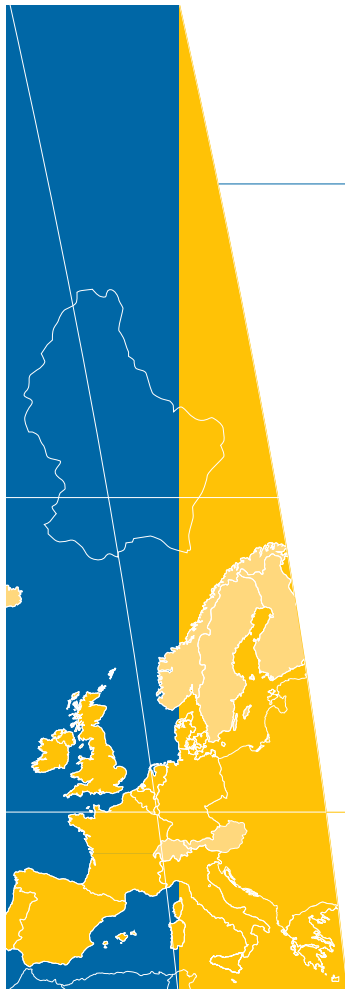


LE GOUVERNEMENT
DU GRAND-DUCHÉ DE LUXEMBOURG
Service Information et Presse



about...

languages

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is one of those rare countries in the world where several languages are spoken and written throughout its territory and in different spheres of life - private, professional, social, cultural and political. *Lëtzebuergesch* is the national language and French, German and *Lëtzebuergesch* are the legislative and administrative languages. You may, therefore, say that 290,000 Luxembourg people share a native multilingualism. Over recent decades, outstanding economic growth and a policy of social promotion have resulted in this polyglot nation being enhanced by the mother tongues of some 145.000 foreign nationals now living in Luxembourg.

Grand Duchy
of Luxembourg

Regime:
Constitutional
Monarchy

Neighbouring
countries:
Germany,
Belgium,
France

Area:
2,586 km²

Population:
439,539
of which
144,844
are foreigners

Population density:
170 inhabitants/
km² (2000)

Unemployment
rate:
3.4% (2002)

Languages intimately associated with the country's history

*The linguistic features of Luxembourg today
can only be appreciated by viewing the past.*

A few key-dates:

963

From a small ruined fortress on the *Bock*, a rocky promontory overlooking the River Alzette, called *Lucilinburhuc* in Old German, came the name *Lützenburg* (to become Luxembourg in the 19th century). At that time, Luxembourg was part of the Germanic Empire and the language used was High German.

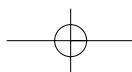
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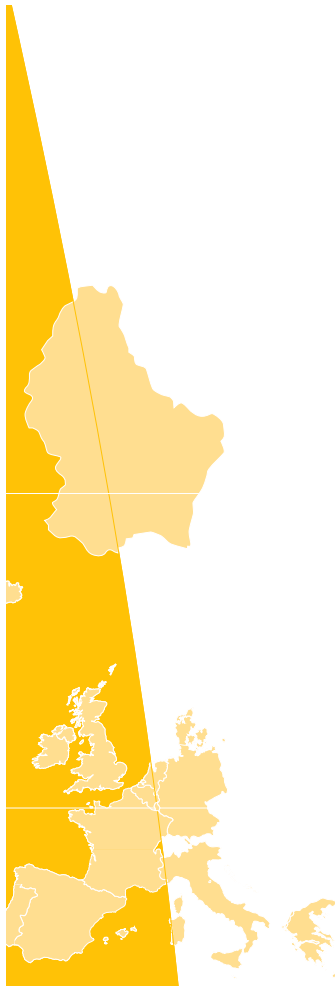
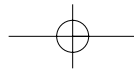
Conquests to the north and west extended the country, which was divided in two - the Walloon area which was French-speaking and the German-speaking region where the Luxembourg dialect was spoken. The written and administrative languages were respectively French and German, in their ancient forms. The City of Luxembourg, however, escaped the relentless logic



Postage stamp illustrating Luxembourg' international evolution

¹ According to the geographical charts of the era.





of the juxtaposed division of language as French was chosen to be the administrative language.

1684

Under the 1st French occupation by Louis XIV, the use of German was almost totally banned. One hundred years later, as a consequence of the French Revolution, French gained ground in a lasting manner, penetrating the local administration of the German-speaking area. In 1804, the Code Napoleon was introduced. *Lëtzebuergesch* remained the language shared by all.

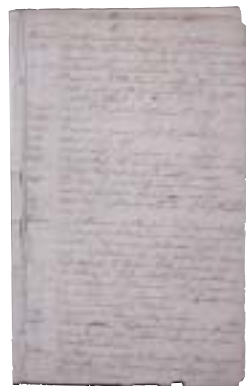
1839

At the Conference of London, the Great Powers of the era declared Luxembourg to be independent and split the country. Luxembourg was reduced to its present size (2,586 km²), its entire territory then being situated in the German-speaking area. The German language was threatening to override the pre-eminence of French. But the lack of support from William II, King of the Netherlands and Grand Duke of Luxembourg, to German officials enabled the influential Luxembourg notables to impose French as the administrative, legal and political language.

1843

The industrial revolution brought about deep changes in the population: a great many Germans and Italians arrived in Luxembourg while many Luxembourg citizens emigrated to France or the United States. Linguistic positioning became a political matter. In fact, in order to distinguish itself from the rest of the German federation of provinces and to protect the country from any attempt by nationalists to "germanise" it, a decisive law was passed: French was henceforth to be the language of education, together with German. French lessons were introduced at primary level, and the linguistic programme was definitively set out by the School Reform of 1912.

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



1941

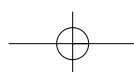
The Luxembourg people courageously took the opportunity of a census held by the German oppressors to reassert, notably, their language as the symbol of their national identity and to reaffirm *Lëtzebuergesch* as their only mother tongue. After the war, reinforced by its status as the language of resistance, the *Lëtzebuergesch* tongue was stronger than ever. Steadily its vocabulary integrated more French words, as a reaction to the trauma of identity and language caused 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 legal matters".

1960

From the Sixties, after the opening of the borders by the Treaty of Rome in 1957, new influxes of immigrants to Luxembourg started changing the linguistic landscape. Three quarter of those immigrants came from Latin countries: they used French to communicate with Luxembourg people. The use of French, a symbol of the old "bourgeoisie" and perpetuated as such, became more available whilst *Lëtzebuergesch* was liberated through the integration of the younger generations in the national education system.

1984

The law regulating the use of languages granted the status of national language to *Lëtzebuergesch*. This law provided, for the first time, that "when an application is directed to a public authority in *Lëtzebuergesch*, French or German, then that authority should seek, insofar as possible, to respond in the language chosen by the applicant". Then, its recognition at European level by the "Lingua" programme in 1989 represented a further promotion, a confirmation of the socio-cultural re-emergence of *Lëtzebuergesch* in relation to French and German as observed from the Seventies. Soon, foreign nationals and borderers from the neighbouring countries represented more than 50% of the active population: several language schools for adults responded to a growing demand for evening classes teaching *Lëtzebuergesch*. To conclude, the historian Gilbert Trausch's pertinent statement in "La situation de la langue française parmi les autres langues en usage au Grand-Duché" (1998) is a good illustration of the new linguistic landscape at the end of the century: "French, as often as possible, German so far as necessary".



Official uses, with no official language

The State, the School and the Church are institutions where the fields of 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 in the workplace, for publication and for communication, be it formal or informal.

What languages for the State?



Parliament
(Chambre des députés)

The laws are drawn up in French. On the other hand, spoken French has progressively vanished from Parliament (*Chambre des députés*), in spite of the fact that sometimes Deputies prefer French when making important declarations. In this official place no spoken language is clearly defined, and politicians behave, at a certain degree, according to their personal preferences.

The fact is that these days regular debates in Parliament are held in *Lëtzebuergesch*. The language borrows many words from French (*de Congé pénal, en Débat an der Chamber*)¹ and from German (*d'Gleichberechtigung*)². So, accounts of the public sessions of Parliament published in the daily newspapers illustrate the mix of language: the debates are transcribed in *Lëtzebuergesch* (which represents the highest amount of regular written production) and questions to the Government as well as the texts of laws are usually in French.

¹ In English: debate in Parliament

² In English: equality of representation

An understanding of the situation is made easier by the fact that for all administrative and legal matters the law of February 1984 provides that, "use may be made of French, German or *Lëtzebuergesch*". Citizens enjoy the right to choose when they make any administrative application, yet the Administration is not strictly bound to respect their preference.

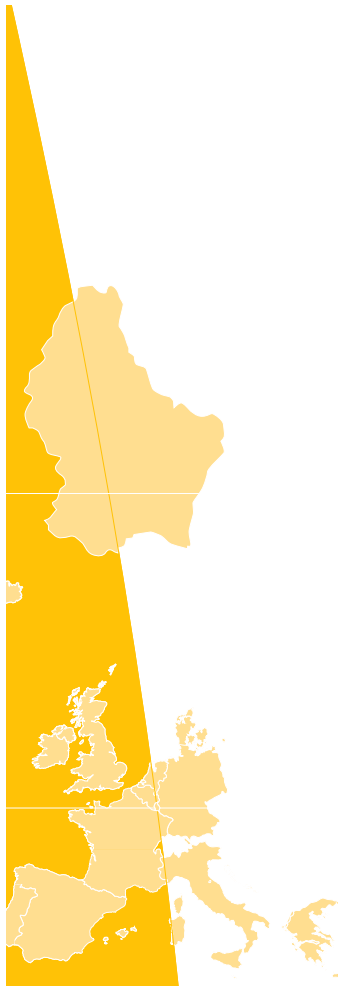
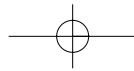
Generally speaking, the weak presence of German at a national level is counterbalanced by its presence at the local level, both spoken and written (publications from local councils). The manner in which the Luxembourg State is administered reflects a clear balance, preferring French in written texts and *Lëtzebuergesch* as the spoken language (in the workplace and for communication purposes).

What languages for the School?

During the two years of compulsory pre-school education, teachers use as far as possible *Lëtzebuergesch* to speak with their young pupils. The principal concern is to develop the language abilities of all the children, and in particular those of foreign origin, for whom those two years provide most of the time a first contact with the Luxembourg language.

Primary school introduces the other languages. Children learn to read and to write in German, considered to be the written version of *Lëtzebuergesch*. The following year they start learning French. Depending on the composition of the class (the number of children from immigrant families), teachers speak German, sometimes *Lëtzebuergesch* or French.





In 1991, local schools began a programme providing some classes in Portuguese and Italian. Since then, these courses, run in parallel to the official curriculum, have been replaced by integrated mother-tongue courses at the primary stage. They give children the opportunity to develop their original language by maintaining contact with their own culture. Subjects appearing in the official curriculum are taught in Italian or Portuguese during two lessons a week.

During the first years of secondary education, most classes are held in German. Then French is used to teach history, geography etc. among the classic subjects, while German prevails among the technical subjects.

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

Last but not least, the foreign schools in Luxembourg account for 7% of pupils. In these private schools, the mother tongue rules supreme. Evening courses are



Centre universitaire of Luxembourg

also run for children who have entered the Luxembourg school system.

Incidentally, the first international conference discussing the question of bilingualism in school took place in the Grand Duchy in 1928. Today, the number of hours dedicated to the learning of languages, in both classic and technical subjects, is on average around 50% of the total teaching timetable. Among the restraints imposed on the teaching system by the lin-

³ In English: Language and Literature Festival

guistic landscape there is, first, the fact that languages can, depending on the choice made, be an obstacle to succeeding in school. Secondly,

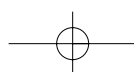
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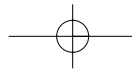
there is the obligation (Luxembourg is unique in Europe in this regard) for students who want to become language teachers to study in the countries of which they intend to teach the language and culture. But the stakes are cultural: witness the success of the *Fête des Langues et du Livre*,³ which started in 1995. This event symbolises the multilingual atmosphere and the taste for communication in foreign languages that is developed by Luxembourg schools.

What languages for the Church?

Among all the churches in Luxembourg, the Catholic Church has the largest congregation. Texts are published in German, while the sermon and the mass are generally in *Lëtzebuergesch*, and the same applies to weddings and funerals. The Holy Scriptures are read in German. At a local level, priests speak to their parishioners in French or German, depending on the percentage of immigrants, or their own linguistic preferences.

"Moien, schwätz du lëtzebuergesch?"





In daily life, language is multi-coloured

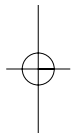
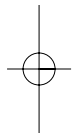
A Luxembourg person spending the entire day speaking just one language would be a first! Similarly, among foreigners, all generations considered, how many of them could survive on their mother tongue alone? In the kingdom of mixed marriages, these figures provide some of the answers:

- 17% of residents speak more than one language with their children,
- 53% speak more than one language with their friends,
- 56% speak more than one language in their workplace.

There is no doubting the fact that everybody chooses a different linguistic path in their daily life. Today, the colours blend and superimpose: people speak more and more languages in more and more varied places.

Regional differences also come into play. From a statistical point of view, *Lëtzebuergesch* is used 45% of the time in the Capital, 54% in the remainder of the central part of the country and 68% in the north. Farmers use *Lëtzebuergesch* without exception as their working language, the figure becoming 75% among teachers. For workers without any professional training, French dominates, with 46%.

So languages tolerate one another, come close without jealousy, borrow from each other and lend to each other with no false modesty. This phenomenon appears, in particular, in the rotation of languages, an art in which the people of Luxembourg excel. In conversation, one language slides into another and borrows a single word, an expression or an idea. A complete communication technique in itself!



Everyday words

“Tell me the languages you speak and I will tell you who you are!” In this tiny cosmopolitan country, personality is reflected in a knowledge of languages and in the preferential use of one or the other.

In *Lëtzebuergesch*, for instance, it is almost impossible to “talk for the sake of talking”! The preference, in one home or another, may be to watch the *Tële*⁴ rather than the *Fernseh*⁴, or to use the *Fernbedienung*⁵ rather than the *télécommande*⁵. The social class or geographical origin of a person can be revealed through their choice of language. The same applies to immigrants who have been living in Luxembourg for a long time. The different generations do not have the same instinctive behaviour. Depending on their age, they mix *Lëtzebuergesch* with Portuguese, French with Italian, and so on.

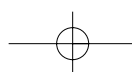
⁴ *Tële* comes from French (*télévision*) and *Fernseh* from German (*Fernseher*)

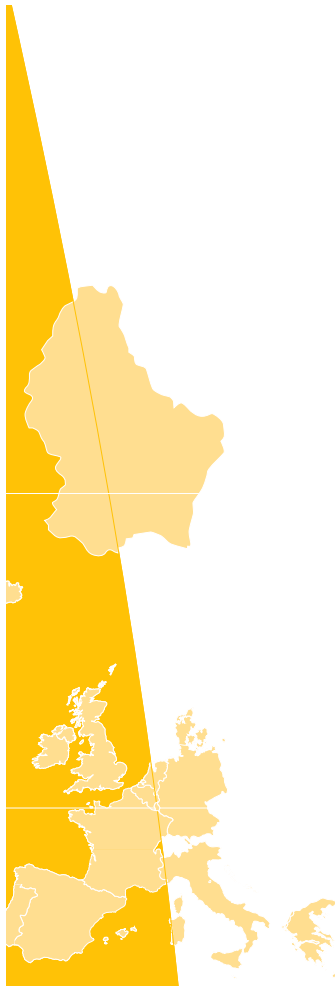
⁵ “Remote control” in English. *Fernbedienung* is the French word and *télécommande* the French one

Finally, there is a more general question: which languages are preferred in communication between foreigners and Luxembourg people?

	Language spoken between Luxembourg people and foreigners	Language spoken between foreigners and Luxembourg people
<i>Lëtzebuergesch</i>	15%	33%
French	79%	58%
German	2%	8%
English	2%	1%

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.





The media

The press

Whilst German was always the language *par excellence* of the press, slowly but surely in the major dailies in the country, such as the *Luxemburger Wort*, created in 1848, and the *Tageblatt*, created in 1913, French came to take up 20% to 30% of editorial space. From the Sixties, while new magazines and weekly journals were appearing in German, other newspapers were created giving the word to Portuguese (for example the weeklies *Contacto* since 1970 and *Correio* since 1999), English and French. Indeed, in 2001 two newspapers in the French language arrived on the Luxembourg media scene: the *Voix du Luxembourg* and the *Quotidien*. The weekly *Le Jeudi*, for its part, first appeared in 1997. All in all, if German makes the front page, the other languages also have their headlines.

It might therefore be said that the Luxembourg press has always been polyglot. Although in general German is dominant (just as French is the dominant language of administration), no journalist finds any problem slipping into an article written in German an extract from a law drafted in French, and the reader is in no way upset by that. If, as a foreigner, the reader wants to read all the daily newspapers then he or she must have a mastery of both languages. It might be that an article on anti-terrorist measures in the USA or the

A sample of the national press



summit of European Heads of State appears in one language today and another tomorrow: there is no fixed rule.

That also applies to the language in which journalists choose to express themselves. Most of them use only one language. The choice sometimes depends on the country in which the writer was educated, and sometimes on the subject being tackled: those who write about domestic politics and local news generally prefer to use German, and those dealing with the economy or culture more often opt for French. The target readership also plays a role in the choice of idiom: given that weeklies such as *Revue* and *Télécran* are aimed at the family, German is appropriate. Nevertheless, the use of language is undergoing changes, both in daily life and in the media.

On television

The principal languages listened to on television by:

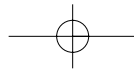
Luxembourg people

Lëtzebuergesch	24%
French	24%
German	50%
other	1%

all residents

Lëtzebuergesch	18%
French	34%
German	40%
other	8%

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



Since 1991, *Lëtzebuergesch* has gained a significant place on television after the launch of a daily news-programme. Twelve years after that date, its simultaneous translation into French offers a choice to viewers and demonstrates a considerable openness to French-speakers.

On the radio

This is the media where *Lëtzebuergesch* is most used. Of course, the national and local Luxembourg radio stations enjoy the highest ratings. These results combined with the success of the television news programme underline the emotional importance which Luxembourg people attach to their mother tongue.

Moreover, immigrant communities are not ignored. Apart from the fact that the main radio stations from the neighbouring countries are available, English and the Romance languages, *inter alia*, have enjoyed a daily presence on the Luxembourg radio waves for several years.

Words of culture

When it comes to interpreting and expressing the openness of the country, with its predilection for languages, Luxembourg holds an historically natural trump card to distinguish itself at a European cultural level.

At the cinema, the audience can enjoy films shown in their original version with subtitles in French and Dutch. As for *Lëtzebuergesch*, it is in advertising sequences that it comes into its own: some brands now use the national language very wisely. It is certainly the most effective way in which to achieve proximity to the consumer.

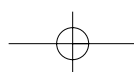
At the theatre, plays can be presented in several languages, which is an important and much appreciated feature. Apart from Luxembourg theatre companies, the most prestigious companies from Germany, France and Belgium offer the international public in Luxembourg a "repertoire" which is worthy of any great European capital, relatively speaking.

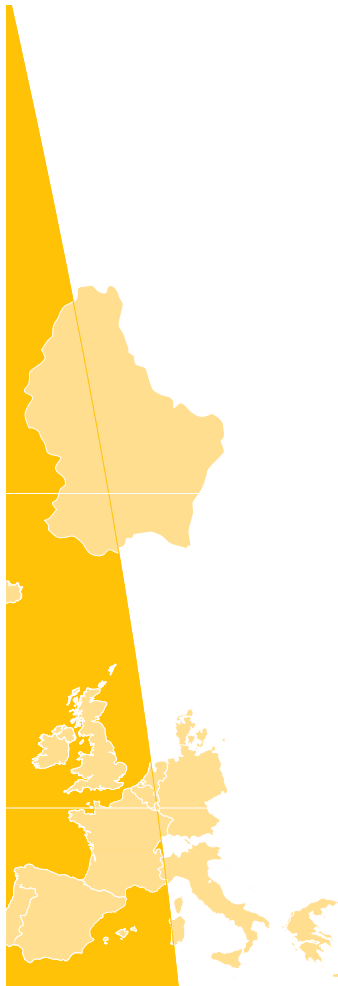
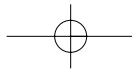
Some bookshops and libraries offer publications largely in French and German, and often in many other languages. The shelves of others only stock volumes in

French, German, Spanish or Portuguese. The Grand Duchy has about twenty publishing houses. Luxembourg literature is steadily laying claim to its linguistic plurality as a veritable asset enabling it to diversify its forms of distribution: co-editing with foreign companies, translation (even from *Lëtzebuergesch* into Russian for the poet Anise Koltz, or from *Lëtzebuergesch* into German for the novels of Roger Manderscheid for instance), and adaptation are some of the ways in which the works of Luxembourg authors can break down linguistic borders.



Luxembourg authors at the "Salon du Livre et des Cultures"





Words from abroad

Is the country saturated by languages? On the contrary, it has even allowed many others, such as English, Italian and Portuguese, to become established.

In the financial market place, in trade and in industry, English may unite the different nationalities working together, even though a third of the banks in the capital are German and, for several years now, French-speaking crossborder workers have been leaving their mark on the Luxembourg labour market.

Moreover, meeting English in an evening dress is no surprise when you consider the huge international community in the capital which enjoys its nightlife. Whether they are from Iceland, the United States, Scandinavia, Asia or from Slavic countries, English is the preferred language in all their relationships.

The high degree of immigrant integration is reflected by the large number of meeting places which exist in Luxembourg (associations and clubs, bars, restaurants, etc.), and also by the use of their mother tongue in their place of work. This 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 the French language from France

Luxembourg passport

Surname:

Frankish-Moselle dialect from the East

Forename:

Lëtzebuergesch

Visas:

- Germany (the "platt" of the Saarland)
- France (the "platt" of Thionville)
- Belgium (dialects of the border zone)

Particular features:

a language which borrows from others

- German: *Familjebuch*, etc.
- English: *weekend*, *back-office*, etc.
- French: *plus ou moins*, *à peu près*, etc.

because the influences of Belgian Walloon are rather strong. But examples of that influence may be extremely subtle. When Luxembourg people have to speak in French, they are very conscious of grammatical rules, a remnant of strict teaching in school. They speak a careful and formal kind of French, sometimes too correct, which runs wild only when penned by poets and authors, or when spoken by younger generations.

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