

# Experiencing trilingual Master study programs at uni.lu

## Perceptions of multilingualism: a Grounded Theory

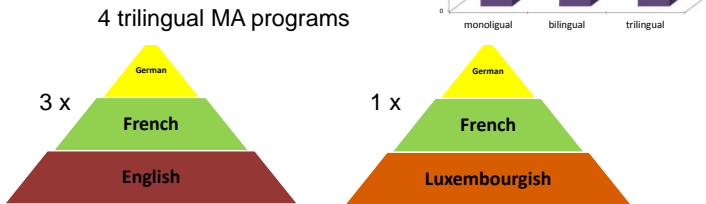
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### Subject

University of Luxembourg: founded in 2003, officially trilingual (French, German, English), bi- or trilingual BA-Programs

26 MA-Programs in winter term 2012/13



### Purpose

- Exploratory study
  - Focus on students perceptions of studying in several languages
- Aims:
- develop an **interpretive theory** of how individual & institutional multilingualism is perceived
  - show value of trilingual study programs for Higher Education, the labor market and students



### Research questions

- Where and how do multilingual practices emerge in the Master?
- Which perceptions of multilingualism and of a multilingual study program are expressed by students?
- How do students perceive and categorize individual language repertoires?
- Which strategies do students declare to use to cope with linguistic and academic challenges?

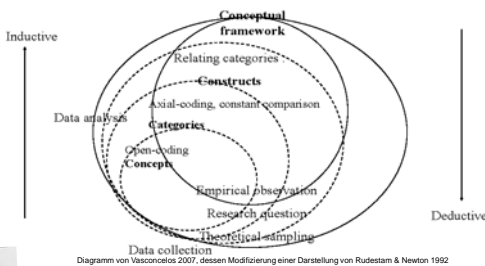
### Methods

- Interactional and linguistic ethnography (Dellwing & Prus 2012; Rampton et al 2004)
- Constructionist Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2006; Birk & Mills 2012)

#### Data generation

Pilot phase: June 11- March 2012  
Field phase I: Sept. - Dez 2012  
Field phase II: Febr. - April 2013

Field phases I + II	Duration
47 Course observations with 3 audio recordings	90 h
19 questionnaires	
13 interviews	14 h



Participant observation

open coding & memo-writing

Open questionnaires

focused -> theoretical coding

Interviews



developing categories

-> a Grounded Theory

### Preliminary findings

#### a) Perceptions of a trilingual Master

- multilingualism = courses in different languages vs. multilingual practices within courses
- emergence of language hierarchies seen as necessary vs. problematic when combined with marginalization of languages
- ideal of trilingual students and professors vs. perception of heterogeneous linguistic repertoires (seen as enriching or disturbing)

#### b) Multilingual teaching strategies

- in heterogeneous groups resuming parts of lecture in another language
- alternating between languages
  - comparing originals with translations
  - discussing concepts in different languages -> enhancing awareness of meaning nuances

#### c) Student's strategies for coping with multilingualism

- writing papers in one language mainly (time economic)
- giving presentations in a weaker language to improve
- while taking notes translating a lecture into L1 or taking notes in the language of the talk
- learning from misunderstandings and from corrections
- creating new words in Luxembourgish (building up the academic register of Luxembourgish in the Lux-Master)

#### d) Perceptions of learning the third language (as a beginner/ already advanced learner)

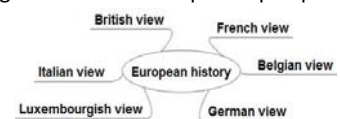
- acquiring writing skills in Luxembourgish (only Lux-Master)
- realizing that immersion in one language is hard to achieve
- learning from each other & multilingual contexts
- avoiding the weak language
- following lectures by clinging to key words already acquired

### Conclusion

#### Trilingual Master's program: an opportunity to

- construct new linguistic and disciplinary knowledge
- improve metalinguistic and multilingual capabilities (compare knowledge in different languages)
- consider subject content from different perspectives

Example of student's perception of a trilingual Master: each language and each member of teaching staff contributes specific perspectives linked to language & culture



= European perspective (G3, X)

### Selection of References

Birks, Melanie & Mills, Jane (2011). Grounded Theory. A practical guide. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.  
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