**Competing language ideological perspectives on societal multilingualism among cross-border workers in Luxembourg**

**Abstract**

Due to the weakening of state borders within the European Union and the favorable economic situation of Luxembourg, there has been a steep rise in migration across Luxembourg’s borders. Of special prominence are cross-border workers, who live in the surrounding border regions of France, Belgium and Germany and now make up 44 percent of the workforce. This increasing presence of ‘foreigners’ is prompting substantial change to Luxembourg’s traditionally triglossic language situation, where Luxembourgish, French and German have coexisted in public use. In this situation, competing language ideologies are likely to emerge, reflecting the interests of different groups. Horner and Weber (2008) discuss the presence of two opposing language ideologies among the autochthonous population: the trilingual language ideology (trilingualism as the ‘language’ of Luxembourg); and the nationalist language ideology (Luxembourgish as the only true language of Luxembourg), which latter they claim has increased in reaction to the rise in cross-border workers. Little research has been done on the language ideologies of cross-border workers themselves, however. Encountering Luxembourg’s multilingualism, cross-border workers may adopt one of the ideologies above, or one of two further competing ideologies: that of societal multilingualism as a problem or as an opportunity. Through analysis of metalinguistic discourse in interviews with thirty cross-border workers in Luxembourg, this article examines how participants approach societal multilingualism in Luxembourg and how cross-border workers might contribute to competing perspectives on the place of languages in Luxembourg.

**Keywords:** language ideologies, cross-border workers, multilingualism, minority languages, Luxembourg

1. **Introduction**

Luxembourg is a small country of 2,586 square kilometres and a population of around 493,500 (STATEC 2009a). Bordered by France, Belgium and Germany, it is also located on the border of the Romance and Germanic language families, and historically its larger neighbours have had an important influence on its unique language situation. With its own national language (Luxembourgish) and three languages of administration (French, German and Luxembourgish), all of which are used to varying degrees on a daily basis, Luxembourg is one of the most multilingual countries in the world[[1]](#endnote-1). This is ever more so with the increasing proportion of ‘foreigners’[[2]](#endnote-2) , who at 215, 000 make up 44% of the resident population, and bring further languages into the mix. The most prominent groups are Portuguese (80,000), French (28,500) and Italians (19,400) (STATEC 2009a). Another particularity is Luxembourg’s increasingly high proportion of cross-border workers, living in France, Belgium and Germany but working in Luxembourg. In 2009 there were 148,300 cross-border workers, comprising 44% of the workforce, compared to 29 % Luxembourgish nationals and 27 % foreign residents (STATEC 2009a, 2009c). This newer form of migration is increasing across Europe, but is particularly significant in a country as small as Luxembourg.

This economic and demographic change is likely to be accompanied by linguistic change, as cross-border workers bring their existing – and often more monolingual - language practices to an already complex multilingual situation. Given that language ideological debates are most salient in times of social change (Blommaert 1999), one would expect public discourse about cross-border workers to relate at least partly to language. This is indeed so, with cross-border workers often construed as a threat to the traditional shape of multilingualism or the place of the Luxembourgish language, and discourses linking Luxembourgish national identity with monolingualism (in Luxembourgish) rather than multilingualism becoming increasingly salient (Horner and Weber 2008). Although determining which languages occupy ‘minority’ or ‘dominant’ positions in Luxembourg is problematic (Horner and Weber 2008), speakers of the different languages have strong interests to maintain, not least because languages are a primary factor structuring the Luxembourg labour market (Fehlen et al 1998, Fehlen 2009). Despite the high salience of language issues in relation to cross-border workers, however, little research has been done on the language ideologies of cross-border workers themselves, as they have rarely been included in sociolinguistic research in Luxembourg[[3]](#endnote-3).

In order to gain a better understanding of intergroup power issues related to language use in Luxembourg, a current project at the University of Luxembourg investigates the language ideologies of cross-border workers[[4]](#endnote-4). Based on the results of thirty interviews conducted within this project, this article examines how participants approach societal multilingualism in Luxembourg, and how cross-border workers might contribute to competing perspectives on the place of languages in Luxembourg and the surrounding border regions.

1. **The cross-border context in Luxembourg**

Before discussing the results in relation to languages in particular, this section provides some background on the cross-border situation in Luxembourg, to provide context for the language ideologies discussed.

Luxembourg is at the centre of what has come to be referred to as the Greater Region, made up of Luxembourg and its neighbouring regions Lorraine (France), Wallonia (Belgium), and Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate (Germany). National borders in the Greater Region have changed repeatedly, including during the two World Wars. In the post-war period, the member regions have developed a strong political commitment to cross-border cooperation, to the point that Luxembourg is often presented as a symbol of European regional integration. This is exemplified by the creation of a series of formal transborder institutions, such as the *Sommet de la Grande Région*, the *Comité économique et social de la Grande Region* and the *EuRegio SaarLorLuxRhin*, among others[[5]](#endnote-5). Despite this idealised view of regional integration, however, the Greater Region is characterised by marked socioeconomic differences, which are reflected in patterns of cross-border employment.

Since the decline of the steel industry as a major source of employment in the Greater Region and the subsequent rise of the financial sector in Luxembourg, Luxembourg has become not only the geographic centre of the Greater Region, but also its main economic driving force. Luxembourg’s GDP amounted to 88,300 euros per earner in 2003, compared to the Greater Region average of 59,090 euros, and unemployment rates are lower in Luxembourg, at 5.1% compared to 8.4% in Lorraine and 10% in Wallonia in 2008 (www.grande-region.lu/eportal/, accessed 3 August 2011). Although cross-border workers are represented across all sectors of the labour market in Luxembourg (Ministere du Travail et de l’Emploi 2008: 11), the service sector in particular attracts a large number of foreign workers who benefit from higher incomes, greater availability of jobs, and the favourable Luxembourgish tax regime[[6]](#endnote-6). In fact, the Greater Region accounts for ‘the biggest daily cross-border flows of any European region’ (OECD 2007, 31) with a total of 200,000 workers, the majority of whom commute to Luxembourg (148,300 in 2009) (STATEC 2009c)[[7]](#endnote-7). 49.4% of these workers are resident in France, 25.2% in Germany and 25.5% in Belgium (STATEC 2009c)[[8]](#endnote-8).

Wille (2010) discusses a diversity of perceptions of cross-border workers in Luxembourg, based on research with Luxembourg residents. On the one hand, some participants see cross-border workers as a necessity for the Luxembourgish economy and not as a threat to their own position in the labour market. Others, however, vacillate between this perception of cross-border workers as an economic necessity and a fear that their numbers are becoming too high, leading to a ‘cross-borderisation’ of the labour market (Wille 2010: 322). A third group perceives cross-border workers as representing direct competition in the labour market and as a threat to their own employment. Wille argues that the Luxembourgish resident population can be separated into two main groups: the ‘Sekurierten’, who are in a privileged situation (generally highly educated, in secure employment, working in the public sector or retired), and the ‘Prekarierte’ (the young, less educated, job seekers, and those experiencing difficulties re-entering the job market). The latter group generally takes a defensive position vis-à-vis cross-border workers (Wille 2010:325-326). Within the foreign resident population of Luxembourg, French, Belgians and Germans mostly have a positive perception of cross-border workers (in some cases due to having formerly been cross-border workers themselves), whereas Portuguese participants tend to see cross-border workers as a threat (Wille 2010).

All of these particularities mean that, while cross-border workers are viewed in some ways as a subset of the group of ‘foreigners’ in Luxembourg, they are also seen as a distinct category, presenting different characteristics and calling up different – and perhaps generally more negative - associations among the autochthonous population. Some such associations are non-language-specific, e.g. a perception of cross-border workers ‘taking advantage’ of the Luxembourg economy by earning in the country but spending their money in their country of residence, while others relate particularly to language, e.g. a lesser perceived motivation among cross-border workers than foreign residents to learn the Luxembourgish language.

Against this backdrop, we now move on to the analysis of language ideologies among cross-border workers in Luxembourg.

1. **Language ideologies**

The theoretical approach of this research is that of language ideologies, deriving from linguistic anthropology (Kroskrity 2000, Woolard 1998, Gal 2006). Many definitions of language ideologies exist but a useful conception is that they ‘represent the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group’ (2004: 501). A key feature of this definition is the notion of interest. As Kroskrity (2000: 8) observes:

A [society] member’s notion of what is ‘true’, ‘morally good’, or ‘aesthetically pleasing’ about language and discourse are grounded in social experience and often demonstrably tied to his or her political-economic interests. These notions often underlie attempts to use language as the site at which to promote, protect, and legitimate those interests.

Rather than a static system of normative beliefs, language ideologies are seen here as a resource that individuals can employ to position and reinforce their own interests. By selectively adopting and promoting particular conceptions of language, they can advance conceptions that benefit themselves and groups to which they belong, potentially at the expense of others. Language ideologies are thus used as tools in the negotiation of power relationships and in the pursuit or exercise of power (Woolard 1998). This explains why, as frequently noted, language ideologies may be expressed in terms of language but do not relate solely to language (Woolard 1998).

Although fundamentally representing the interests of individuals, language ideologies often develop into widely shared systems of understanding the relationship between language and society, and one can thus talk of dominant ideologies. A set of dominant ideological positions have been identified across modern Western European nation-states, including ‘one nation, one language’ (Woolard 1998), the ‘essentialist link between language and identity’ (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998), and the ‘social hierarchy of languages’ (Weber 2009). Dominant language ideologies usually reflect the interests of powerful élites, such as governing groups within the nation-state, but may become so pervasive that they are widely seen as ‘common sense’. They thus subtly perform a function of ‘naturalizing relations between language and social order’’ (Philips 1998: 217), thereby ‘masking the social construction processes at work’ (Boudreau and Dubois 2007: 104).

Although some language ideologies are shared across nation-states, there are also distinctive state language ideological positions. Woolard (1998: 21), for example, contrasts the more formalised public control of language development in France (e.g. through the *Académie française*) with the more ‘privatized and laissez-faire’ tradition in England. Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) note contrasts between French and German emphases on language in defining nation and between official Dutch and Belgian positions (described in Woolard 1998). These ‘national’ language ideologies cannot be seen as singular, coherent entities, straightforwardly shared by all members of those communities, but aspects of them are likely to influence individuals’ own language ideologies and their response to further language situations they encounter.

The potential of language ideologies for promoting individual and group interests is present in all societies at all times, but is most evident in circumstances of social and linguistic change, when boundaries between groups are shifting and individuals have stakes in conceiving these boundaries in different ways. In such situations, one can expect to find a high degree of contestation on language ideological grounds, and a range of competing ideologies. Schieffelin and Doucet (1998: 286) observe that:

In countries where ‘nation-ness’ (Anderson 1983: 4) is being negotiated, every aspect of language – from its phonological features to lexical items to stylistic alternatives to multilingualism – can be contested, and often is. Similarly in such situations, there is rarely a single ideology of language. Rather, one finds multiple, competing, and contradictory ideologies of language that are offered as the ‘logic’ for which features may be contested. Such logics are often claimed to be strictly scientific, when, in fact, they are culturally constructed and represent particular political and social interests.

Language ideologies thus present a fertile area for analysis of intergroup relations in contexts of increasing contact between different national and linguistic groups, as is the case in Luxembourg. Changes in the current sociolinguistic situation, due in part to cross-border migration, have arguably given rise to several competing ideologies among both the autochthonous and cross-border worker populations in Luxembourg.

1. **Language ideologies among the autochthonous population of Luxembourg**

Horner and Weber (2008) discuss the coexistence of two competing language ideologies prevalent among the autochthonous population of Luxembourg[[9]](#endnote-9).

* 1. **Trilingual language ideology**

The first of these is the *trilingual language ideology,* which represents the three officially recognised languages of Luxembourg (Luxembourgish, German and French) as coexisting harmoniously. According to Horner and Weber (2008: 85-86), the rhetoric of ‘trilingual Luxembourg’ is used in official government policy to convey a spirit of multiculturalism and ‘support claims that Luxembourg is a model of harmony and tolerance’. This ideology appears to promote an inclusive vision of the place of multiple languages in Luxembourg. However, it contains several ambiguities, most notably its focus on only three languages rather than broader societal multilingualism. This is reflected in the dubious status given to languages outside the established trilingual mix, in particular Portuguese, the language of the largest immigrant group, which receives minimal state and public support. The increasing presence of English in many international companies and within the education system has also created growing pressure to add English to the mix (Horner and Weber 2008: 93). This leads to an inherent tension between a ‘trilingual’ and a ‘multilingual’ vision of the country.

* 1. **Nationalist language ideology**

The second and competing language ideology is the *nationalist language ideology[[10]](#endnote-10)*, which posits Luxembourgish as the only true national language of Luxembourg. Horner and Weber (2008: 85-86) claim that, in contrast to official discourses, media representations and opinions expressed in everyday conversation tend to be unfavourable towards societal multilingualism. These discourses are based on the notion that Luxembourgish is under threat from other languages, and ‘in this situation popular discourses linking Luxembourgish national identity with monolingualism rather than trilingualism have become increasingly salient’ (2008: 111). This ideology can also be related to the ‘one nation, one language ideology’ that is prominent across Europe, involving the equation of one language with one national people and positioning linguistic boundaries as coinciding with the boundaries of nation-states (Woolard 1998, Gal 2006). Horner and Weber argue that the increasing prevalence of the nationalist language ideology in Luxembourg is a reaction to the rising numbers of foreigners and cross-border workers, and an associated increase of French in particular in the public sphere. This is echoed by Fehlen (2009), citing research that Luxembourgish has not in fact been threatened by the presence of foreigners but has actually gained ground in terms of speaker numbers and new domains. He attributes political motivations, specifically resistance to high levels of migration, to popular claims that Luxembourgish is under threat. The nationalist language ideology also appears in official discourses, for example Weber (2009: 82) notes that government sources often use the term ‘linguistic integration’ in contexts where it means learning solely Luxembourgish.

The trilingual and nationalist language ideologies both in different ways reflect the interests of the autochthonous population. The trilingual ideology enables the presentation of an open and inclusive multiculturalism, while privileging the three languages the autochthonous population is most likely to master. The nationalist language ideology promotes the one linguistic resource that cross-border workers and foreigners are least likely to possess, while devaluing languages in which they may have considerable skills. The changing socio-demographic context puts both these ideologies under pressure and it will be interesting to observe how the language ideologies of the autochthonous population evolve in response. Equally interesting is how the significant proportion of cross-border workers respond to the multilingual context of the country in which they work. This is the subject of the following sections.

1. **Methodological approach**

The research presented in this article targets the workplace; 128 cross-border workers living in France, Belgium and Germany who work at selected workplaces in Luxembourg were recruited to take part. Adopting the view that language ideologies involve both ideas and behaviour[[11]](#endnote-11), the data collection design focused on a combination of explicit metalinguistic discourse and language practices, with methods including questionnaires, interviews and recordings of language use at work. Participants were recruited through direct contact with workplaces and a general invitation through the media. The relatively small sample size is due to a decision to focus on a range of methods with a smaller group of participants. Hence the results are not claimed to be representative of the cross-border worker population as a whole, but detailed small-scale research such as reported in this article arguably allows us to gain insights into possible broader trends.

This article uses interview data to examine the language ideologies adopted by participants in relation to societal multilingualism in Luxembourg. Interviews were undertaken with thirty participants selected to be representative of the broader group taking part in the project. The interviewees included six participants each from four main workplaces (one educational institution, one social service provider, one research organisation, and one distribution company) and six participants from a wider range of workplaces (real estate, the public service, retail, food production, insurance and construction). They were of French, Belgian, German and other nationalities, and all lived in France, Belgium or Germany. They covered a range of ages, genders, and education levels. They comprised people who had worked in Luxembourg for only a year as well as those who had done so for over twenty years. Some had lived in the regions bordering Luxembourg all their lives, while others had moved there from elsewhere. Although full comparability was not sought (or possible), therefore, the participants reflect some of the diversity of experience and background of cross-border workers in Luxembourg. The interviews were semi-structured, lasting around 45 minutes. Participants were asked questions about how they came to be working in Luxembourg, their perspectives on multilingualism in Luxembourg in general and at work in particular, language policies and language practices in their workplace, their perceived language competence, and their experiences of working as a cross-border worker more generally. Although their answers to all of these questions were of interest, the questions were also conceptualised as a means of drawing out underlying language ideologies through prompted discussion about matters relating to language in Luxembourg. The focus of this article is on the ideologies participants revealed in the process of answering the questions.

Where examples appear, a notation system is used to summarise participant characteristics. Nationality is indicated by F (French), B (Belgian), G (German) or O (other); gender is indicated by M or F; workplace category by E (educational institution), S (social service provider), R (research organisation), D (distribution company) or I (individual); age by tranche; all are linked by hyphens. For example G-F-D-25/30 indicates a German female participant aged 25 to 30 who works at a distribution company. For participants of ‘other’ nationalities, who are less frequent in the data, the nationality has been changed in the text to maximise anonymity. The interviews were undertaken in German, French or English, and where appropriate quotations have been translated into English. Although interview extracts are limited due to space, they are reflective of broader trends in the data.

1. **Language ideologies among cross-border workers in Luxembourg**

Compared to the autochthonous population of Luxembourg, cross-border workers tend to come from backgrounds where there is one official state language (French in France, German in Germany) or where two languages fulfil this role but in clearly separated regions (French and Flemish in Belgium). On encountering the multilingual situation of Luxembourg, they may adopt one of the existing ideologies among the autochthonous population or, alternatively, adopt further language ideologies deriving from a combination of their prior experience and their particular interests in their new context. The interview data reveals a range of competing language ideologies among the participants. These are discussed below, with particular attention to how these ideologies reflect and promote the interests of the cross-border workers who adopt them.

* 1. **Nationalist ideology**

Some participants orient to the nationalist ideology to some degree, by claiming respect for Luxembourgish as ‘the language of Luxembourg’. References abound to the link between Luxembourg as a country and the Luxembourgish language, which is portrayed as logical in nature:

We go and work in a country that gives us work, it’s normal that we use its language (F-M-S-50/54)

Alongside this, some participants adopt the view that the autochthonous population having to use French in their own country is not ‘normal’.

[My colleague] is in her own country…and she’s obliged to cope with speaking French, she’s obliged to ask me how to say things, it’s really not normal (F-F-D-55/59)

Some participants refer to the negative reactions they encounter from colleagues, clients and the general public when they do not speak Luxembourgish:

I have been told you are in Luxembourg, you must speak Luxembourgish (F-M-D-30/34)

Another participant claims that Luxembourgish is under threat due to the presence of cross-border workers:

I think that Luxembourgish in everyday life, in shops for example, is less and less present if there are lots of cross-border workers who work in this shop, and I think that certainly has an influence on…I hope not, but on the disappearance of the Luxembourgish language. (B-M-I-25/29)

For these reasons, several participants claim cross-border workers should learn at least some Luxembourgish, and are critical of those who do not:

If someone tries to make the effort, at least, to be able to…just to say hello and goodbye, everyone can do that, but there are those who don’t, not even that […] A Luxembourger who addresses someone with ‘Moien’ and to his face, in his country, they reply ‘bonjour’, that’s really someone who doesn’t want to, because everyone can learn two words. (F-M-I-35/39)

A range of benefits are presented for making the effort to learn Luxembourgish, including better understanding of the people and the country and receiving positive reactions from the autochthonous population:

Through the language […] one doesn’t just learn words, one learns a whole spirit, the whole soul of a country […] One understands the people much better, their way of living, their way of being. (F-F-E-35/39)

I had no idea just how happy Luxembourgish people could be to see someone trying to learn their language (F-F-E-35/39)

One participant explicitly orients to the sensitivity of the issue of cross-border workers and the Luxembourgish language and admits that learning Luxembourgish is a way to defuse potential tensions:

It’s a topic that’s rather…I can’t find the words, tricky or sensitive. So I want to learn Luxembourgish to show respect, but also for my own best interests. (B-M-I-25/29)

While orientations to the nationalist ideology may partly be explained by participants’ adaptation to ideologies in the local context, it is also likely that they come to Luxembourg with pre-conceptions relating to the one nation, one language ideology from their countries of origin, e.g. the historically strong emphasis on French as *the* language of France, which they then transfer to the Luxembourgish context. If they are not proficient in Luxembourgish, however (as few are), it may be more in their interests to conceive of Luxembourg as multilingual. Indeed, although echoes of the nationalist language ideology are present in the form of claimed respect for the place of Luxembourgish, no participants present it as the sole true language of Luxembourg.

* 1. **Societal multilingualism as a problem**

It is more common for participants to adopt one of two further ideologies, which are also present outside Luxembourg. The first is the *ideology of societal multilingualism as a problem* (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). Related to the one nation, one language ideology, this ideology holds that whereas individual multilingualism may be advantageous (e.g. the ability to speak prestigious languages such as French, Spanish and English), multilingualism on a broader societal level is an impediment to social cohesion (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998). This ideology can be applied to multilingual states as a whole (e.g. Belgium) or to immigrant groups in particular (e.g. Spanish speakers in the USA). Official discourses in Luxembourg seldom express problems relating to societal multilingualism in connection with the three traditionally recognised languages (French, German and Luxembourgish), but do so in relation to others (such as Portuguese, for example in relation to difficulties of Portuguese students in the multilingual education system). Some of the autochthonous population may also draw on this ideology to promote the nationalist ideology in relation to Luxembourgish. The data shows that some cross-border worker participants, used to more monolingual work contexts in their country of origin, orient to the ideology of societal multilingualism as a problem in describing perceived problems of communicating at work, including contexts involving the three traditionally recognised languages.

Holders of this ideology commonly note that there is no problem as long as others can speak their preferred language(s):

Given that everyone speaks French I can say that for us it’s an easy solution (F-M-D-40/44)

Participants instead say problems arise when others do not possess the same language skills as them, thereby attributing the problem to others rather than to themselves:

At the beginning it posed a few problems for me because […] I was surprised how […] they didn’t speak French […] I was expecting that they would speak better French because I had always been told that in Luxembourg they spoke all the languages. (F-F-D-55/59)

Holders of this ideology ascribe several problems to working in a multilingual context, including:

* *limited access to information*:

Very important things that affected me, i.e. employment contracts, interviews etc. were in French and almost ‘French only’ […] and I view that a bit critically (G-M-R-35/39);

* *reduced quality of communication*:

Unfortunately there is sometimes loss of information, less content, less detailed transmission of information, also misunderstandings that sometimes happen and then come to light in the way projects are implemented (G-M-R-40/44);

* *feelings of exclusion*:

We used to be in [another department] and there I had the feeling that sometimes people changed into French on purpose in order to exclude us a bit. And well of course I can’t prove it, but I just had the feeling that this was the case (G-F-E-30/34);

* *limited career options*:

There is effectively a sort of selection on the basis of languages, yes, I can say if we did a survey of the offices here we wouldn’t find many French people […] when they hire someone for the office it’s always a Luxembourger […] in terms of future prospects here…there is a wall (F-M-D-40/44).

These participants also present further problems outside their work context as being related to societal multilingualism, e.g. the burden of learning multiple languages in the education system:

I can also imagine for studying here […] you have to know so many languages you know at the end maybe you don’t know any of these language correctly, or for example […] children have to learn so many languages at school, do they still have time to learn something other than languages? (O-F-E-25/29)

In addition to these ideas about the pitfalls of societal multilingualism, holders of this ideology report practices reflecting a more monolingual orientation. Some describe disliking accommodating to others:

[An] aspect which upsets me personally somewhat is that I am often pulled down in French even when the other person speaks English or German. I notice that my French-speaking colleagues […] one has to, as it were, force them to speak a language other than French and that I as the one speaking a foreign language just have a disadvantage […] and this I don’t find particularly fair. (G-M-R-35/39)

Others experience discomfort when they don’t understand the languages used around them, sometimes accompanied by suspicion:

There are also Portuguese people who speak in Portuguese with each other […] when we go past they speak in French but when they want to say something to each other they speak in Portuguese so that we can’t understand, I think it’s mostly to talk behind our backs (F-M-D-30/34)

Importantly, the ideology of societal multilingualism as a problem is much more prevalent among those participants who are monolingual, or who do not have the ‘right’ language resources for their particular workplace (Blommaert et al 2005). Given the highly multilingual nature of workplaces in Luxembourg, the languages required can vary significantly; the source of the perceived ‘problem’ can thus vary between Luxembourgish, French, Portuguese, German or English, in different combinations and to different degrees. If the participants do not master one or more of the languages perceived as important in their workplace, there is little incentive for them to adopt a multilingually-focused ideology, as this does not align with their current interests.

* 1. **Societal multilingualism as an opportunity**

In contrast to those who adopt the ideology of societal multilingualism as a problem, many participants instead promote a competing ideology of *societal multilingualism as an opportunity*. It is again important to distinguish here between individual and societal multilingualism. In the former case, participants are impressed that people in Luxembourg can speak several languages:

It’s good to speak lots of languages […] I think it’s really good that in Luxembourg […Luxembourgers] can speak at least four languages (F-M-D-30/34)

As noted above, this position can coexist with the ideology of societal multilingualism as a problem. In the case of societal multilingualism as an opportunity, however, we are talking about participants who not only focus on the benefits of language skills for individuals but see the use of multiple languages as a positive aspect of working in Luxembourg more generally.

Among those who adopt this ideology, multilingualism in Luxembourg is not characterised as problematic:

Having several languages [in Luxembourg] doesn’t pose any problem for me (B-M-E-35/39)

Some participants explicitly reject the use of the term ‘problem’ in this context, and instead describe occasional communication difficulties as fun or entertaining:

There were never any language-related problems, and if sometimes one has little difficulties, I don’t see them as problems. It rather amuses me. (F-M-I-35/39)

These participants focus on the benefits as opposed to the problems associated with multilingualism, both within and outside of a work context, including:

* *contact with people of other cultures*:

I like traveling and meeting different people of different cultures and I believe that multilingualism makes up part of this journey of discovery of other cultures and other worlds etc, so for me in the end I find it very positive (B-F-R-30/34);

* *the excitement of an international environment:*

My feeling was that it was more exciting to go to a country where there are several languages, where it is more international, than to stay in Germany and in fact in Bavaria, where I even speak the dialect (G-F-E-30/34);

* *using and developing language skills:*

I knew that there were several languages present in Luxembourg. And I said to myself ‘well, perhaps this will also be an opportunity for me to use the linguistic baggage I have, and to try to explore new horizons on a linguistic level’ (F-F-E-35/39);

* *cognitive benefits:*

I think it’s neat because people don’t think in the same way […] I think that language also shapes one’s way of thinking (F-M-E-45/49);

* *clarity of communication:*

The fact that people are in difficulty when they speak obliges them to explain themselves a lot […] being forced to speak another language […] you have to speak slowly and reflect carefully, be sure that what you say is very very clear (F-M-E-45/49);

* *broader relationships:*

For me it’s absolutely positive, you know, because there are so many languages that it links many more people than if there was only one language (F-F-R-30/34);

* *flexibility:*

I immediately adhered to the Luxembourgish model which is to not ask yourself too many questions about language and to simply try to speak together, no matter what language is used…in the country I come from [Belgium], as we keep seeing on the news, that is not always the case (B-M-E-35/39).

Those who see societal multilingualism as an opportunity also report different practices from those who see it as a problem. They describe enjoying accommodating to others, and being comfortable with the use of languages they cannot understand:

It’s voluntary. I made the free choice to come here knowing how things worked linguistically. That’s the first thing. The second thing is that it’s an enrichment for me to be able to learn [French]. I would never see myself as compelled or forced to submit, it’s completely the opposite, it’s a huge enrichment. (G-M-R-40/44)

Some French people say […] when a Luxembourger speaks with another Luxembourger it’s to badmouth French people, or things like that. They don’t understand what’s being said, but [Luxembourgers] have better things to do than that. (F-M-I-35/39)

Others remain uncomfortable in such situations, but not because they wish others would accommodate to them. Their discomfort instead derives from their own lack of ability to accommodate:

It embarrasses me to not be able to reply in Luxembourgish, because if I see that it starts in Luxembourgish if I open my mouth […] I think I am going to oblige them to stop talking in Luxembourgish. (F-M-E-45/49)

Those participants who see societal multilingualism as an opportunity are more likely to be multilingual, or at least proficient in the most important language(s) of their specific workplace. Once again, therefore, the ideologies of the participants reflect their own linguistic interests.

* 1. **Trilingual ideology**

Also of interest is how the ideologies above relate to the trilingual ideology identified among the autochthonous population. On the one hand, some who see societal multilingualism as an opportunity seem to orient to a strictly trilingual conception of multilingualism in Luxembourg, by referring to the three officially recognised languages:

I start from the principle that if one comes into a country, it’s like that. I mean, it’s part of the history of the country if one speaks French, Luxembourgish and German in Luxembourg. That’s how it is. (B-F-I-30/34)

Those who adopt this stance implicitly distance themselves from the nationalist ideology, in that they do not elevate Luxembourgish to the position of the most important language in the country:

It seems obvious to me anyway that if one decides to live in a country it’s normal to speak the language that is the most used, the most understood and the most appreciated. Let’s just say that it’s delicate here for Luxembourg […] it’s not obvious; the three languages are recognised. (B-F-I-30/34)

Others express comfort with the use of Luxembourgish, French and German, but reservations when it comes to Portuguese:

Portuguese er…well I can’t say that it has no importance but let’s say that...there has to be limits (F-M-E-45/49)

On the other hand, some who see societal multilingualism as a problem express irritation at the rigidity of the languages required by the trilingual ideology, and the lack of value attributed to other languages:

Something that would be advantageous for you in another country, I mean that I speak English and German, if I were in Hungary it would be great, you know in Germany anyway that I speak Hungarian and that I speak English but […] here actually it’s not enough […], for somebody that is from here probably it’s easier you know than for somebody coming and then you discover you actually don’t speak so many languages (O-F-E-25/29)

Furthermore, it is clear that the multilingualism envisioned by some participants stretches beyond the three officially recognised languages. This is particularly evident in the positive orientation to the use of Portuguese in Luxembourg by some who see societal multilingualism as an opportunity. Several participants express admiration at the broad language skills of people of Portuguese descent in Luxembourg, and one has used Portuguese himself in his office environment:

A few years ago I had a bonsai on my desk and to make sure the cleaning lady understood me so that she didn’t just throw out the pot that I used to water the bonsai I wrote the message in Portuguese, getting it translated by one of my colleagues, and then I had no problem […] I use a bit of everyday resourcefulness and it works. (B-M-E-35/39)

Here we see an important difference between the orientations of some cross-border workers towards societal multilingualism on the one hand and the trilingual ideology identified among the autochthonous population on the other. Not having grown up in a context of official trilingualism, many cross-border workers appear to treat Luxembourg as a more generally ‘multilingual’ rather than strictly ‘trilingual’ environment. This means they are potentially more open than holders of the trilingual ideology to the inclusion of languages not contemplated by the trilingual mix[[12]](#endnote-12).

* 1. **Mixed language ideologies**

From the way the language ideologies are presented above, it could appear that each individual participant fits squarely into one ideological category. In practice, virtually all participants draw on different ideologies at different times, sometimes referring to perceived problems relating to multilingualism, at other times to perceived benefits. This variability within individuals is a noted feature of language ideologies. Kroskrity (2000: 12) attributes it to the multiplicity of ‘meaningful social divisions (class, gender, clan, elites, generations, and so on) within sociocultural groups that have the potential to produce divergent perspectives expressed as indices of group membership’. In all cases, however, the participants seem to creatively select whatever they ‘need’ from available language ideologies to best represent their own interests in the Luxembourg setting.

1. **Conclusion**

This article has discussed the results of a research project on the language ideologies of cross-border workers in Luxembourg, based on metalinguistic discourse elicited through interviews with thirty participants. The results show that, as would be expected within language ideologies theory, the participants tend to adopt language ideologies based on their own linguistic interests. Although the language ideologies of the participants are mostly mixed, prominent trends are for those who are more monolingual to adopt the ideology of ‘societal multilingualism as a problem’ and those who are multilingual to adopt the competing ideology of ‘societal multilingualism as an opportunity’. There is potential for ideological conflict here, not only as these two ideologies come up against each other, but also as they stand in uneasy relationship to two further competing language ideologies, the nationalist and trilingual ideologies, identified as present among the autochthonous population. There is also potential, however, for the language ideologies of the cross-border workers to meet these local language ideologies halfway. Firstly, the results generally reveal a respect among cross-border workers for the place of Luxembourgish in Luxembourg, potentially calming the fears of those who perceive cross-border workers as a threat to the Luxembourgish language. Secondly, among those cross-border workers who value the multilingualism of Luxembourg we often see a wider conception of multilingualism than that envisaged by the trilingual language ideology. The people of Luxembourg, residents and cross-border workers alike, will continue to adopt language ideologies that best reflect their own interests. Nevertheless, ideological change does occur, and the results reveal at least the potential for development of support for a broader kind of multilingualism within Luxembourg, taking into account not only the officially supported languages of the country, but also the wider range of languages spoken by its increasingly diverse population. This is one way in which Luxembourg’s fluid cross-border context could result in a more inclusive language environment for all those who live and work within its borders. The extent to which this is the case, however, will depend on the interaction between the language ideologies of cross-border workers and those of the autochthonous population and resident foreigners, both of which represent important directions for future research.[[13]](#endnote-13).

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1. For reasons of space, features of the Luxembourg language situation are not detailed here. See Horner and Weber (2008) for an excellent overview. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The terms ‘foreigner’ and ‘foreign resident’ are widely used in Luxembourg to refer to residents not born in Luxembourg or with a family history of migration to the country. In contrast, the term ‘Luxembourger’ involves connotations of ‘nativeness’. Despite their widespread use, definitions of these terms are slippery. People of Portuguese origin in Luxembourg, for example, often continue to be called foreigners even if their family has been in the country for several generations. This article uses the term ‘foreigner’, reflecting local practice, but uses ‘autochthonous population’ to refer to that category of people generally termed ‘Luxembourgers’. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The majority of sociolinguistic research in Luxembourg has concentrated on residents of Luxembourg (e.g. Fehlen et al 1998), with some exceptions. Derveaux and Esmein (1998) interviewed French cross-border workers on their language experiences in Luxembourg, Wille (2011) conducted questionnaires and interviews with cross-border workers on their sense of identity, Fehlen (2009) analysed cross-border workers’ perceptions of the Luxembourg language situation based on internet forums, and Berger (2005) reports on interviews with 2,470 cross-border workers on several subjects, including languages. These studies all have a very small corpus (Derveaux and Esmein 1998, Fehlen 2009) or feature language as only a minor aspect (Wille 2011, Berger 2005). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This project (‘Dealing with language diversity: the language ideologies of cross-border workers in Luxembourg’) runs from 2009 to 2012 at the University of Luxembourg. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The *Sommet de la Grande Région*, first held in 1995, operates at a political level, bringing together the highest political actors of each region (<http://www.granderegion.net/fr/cooperation-politique-interregionale/sommet-grande-region/index.html>), the *Comité économique et social de la Grande Region,* created in 1997, works on an economic and social level (<http://www.granderegion.net/fr/cooperation-politique-interregionale/cesgr/index.html>) and the EuRegio SaarLorLuxRhin operates at the communal level ( <http://www.granderegion.net/fr/autres-cooperations-interregionales/EUREGIO_SAARLORLUX_/index.html>) (sites accessed 3 August 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Luxembourg’s service sector generates 84% of the country’s gross value added, of which banking and insurance services alone provide 29%, followed by business services, telecommunication and transportation (STATEC 2009b). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. While cross-border employment is heavily weighted in favour of Luxembourg, there is some degree of economic interdependency in the Greater Region. For example there is a high degree of cross-border consumption in both directions, due to differences in price, product range, availability and quality. Residents of Luxembourg shop in France, Belgium and Germany for a wider range of products at cheaper prices, and residents over the borders shop in Luxembourg for items that benefit from lower taxes, for example petrol, alcohol and cigarettes (see Affolderbach fc for a discussion of cross-border retail patterns in the Greater Region). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Portail statistique du Luxembourg, <http://www.statistiques.public.lu/stat/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=494&IF_Language=fra&MainTheme=2&FldrName=3&RFPath=92>, accessed 3 August 2011. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. This analysis is based on media and government sources, rather than face-to-face research with the autochthonous population. No previous research has been undertaken on the language ideologies of the autochthonous population using elicited metalinguistic discourse. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Horner and Weber refer to this ideology as ‘monolingual identification with Luxembourgish’. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. There is a distinction within language ideologies theory between those who view language ideologies as primarily an ideational phenomenon (ideas about language), those who see them as located in linguistic practice (language behaviours), and those who regard them as multi-sited, encompassing both ideas and behaviour (Woolard 1998). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. It is possible (likely, even) that some of the autochthonous population share this broader conception of societal multilingualism. The presence of such an ideology among this group has not been discussed in previous research on the Luxembourg language situation, however. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. As noted above, research on language ideologies among the autochthonous population has been based on media and government sources rather than face-to-face data collection. While resident foreigners have been included in sociolinguistic research in Luxembourg (e.g. Fehlen et al 1998, Fehlen 2009), this research has not focused on language ideologies in particular, so that it is not currently possible to consider how the language ideologies of ‘foreigners’ who live in Luxembourg might differ from those who merely work there. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)