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Intercultural work environments in Luxembourg

Multilingualism and cultural diversity among cross-border workers at the workplace

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Abstract

The trilingual country of Luxembourg accounts for the highest percentage of cross-border workers in the European Union. These workers commute daily from France, Belgium and Germany to Luxembourg. Their presence in the national labour market results in increasing linguistic and cultural diversity at Luxembourgish workplaces. Drawing upon interview and interactional data, the present contribution is the first to investigate how cross-border workers in Luxembourg perceive and deal with multilingualism and interculturality, and presents a range of related linguistic and intercultural practices.

Keywords: Cross-border workers, Luxembourg, transborder region, transnationality, language ideologies, intercultural communication

Introduction

Luxembourg has 155,000 cross-border workers, the highest such number in the entire EU (2011).² They come primarily from neighbouring France (50%), followed by Belgium and Germany (25% each). This recruitment of labour power from nearby regions began in the 1980s when Luxembourg's services sector experienced massive growth. Cross-border workers already comprised 20% of employees in the Grand Duchy in 1990; just over ten years later (2001) this number had increased to the point that Luxembourgish employees were in the minority. Until the financial and economic crisis hit in 2008, growth in cross-border employment continued, with cross-border workers constituting almost half (43%) of the local workforce that year, followed by Luxembourgers (29%) and resident foreigners (27%) (Wille 2012).

Cultural studies research has scarcely addressed the phenomenon of cross-border workers as a circular form of mobility. Cultural studies do, however, provide an exemplary framework for investigating numerous current phenomena involving languages and cultures as 'properly practised' complexes of symbols and norms (Hörning and Reuter 2004). Cross-border workers therefore provide an example through which we can uncover how linguistic or cultural 'orders' are practised, represented, and re-created in cross-border contexts. The findings used as a basis for this study come from three empirical research projects conducted at the University of Luxembourg (in the Research Unit IPSE – Identités, Politiques, Sociétés, Espaces), which investigate cross-border commuting from sociolinguistic and sociocultural perspectives, complementing each other in methodological terms. This group of cross-border workers is comprised of those employees and freelancers who practise their profession in one EU member state and live in another to which they regularly return, at least once a week (EEC Regulation No. 1408/71).

1 First published as : Wille, Christian / de Bres, Julia / Franziskus, Anne: Interkulturelle Arbeitswelten in Luxemburg. Mehrsprachigkeit und kulturelle Vielfalt am Arbeitsplatz von Grenzgängern. In: Interculture Journal. Zeitschrift für Interkulturelle Studien. Jg. 11 (2012), Heft 17, S. 73-91.

2 Only Switzerland claims more cross-border workers (246,252) than Luxembourg (2011).

Working from the basis of selected results of the studies presented in Table 1, we pursue the question of what strategies cross-border workers develop for dealing with different languages and cultures. Differences are understood not as inherent, fixed features, but rather as subjective constructions that coalesce in the actions and behaviour of cross-border workers and then in turn become operative. In the following sections we explain the language situation and the internationalisation of the working world in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, how cross-border workers experience this, and the strategies for action that our research participants employ in the workplace.

Table 1: Data sources

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Context and work	Post-doc project 2009-2011, Julia de Bres	Dissertation project 2009-2013, Anne Franziskus	Dissertation project 2008-2011, Christian Wille
Topic	Dealing with language diversity: the language ideologies of cross-border workers in Luxembourg	Dealing with linguistic diversity at the workplace: the linguistic practices of cross-border workers in Luxembourg	Socio-cultural dimensions and constructions of space in cross-border employee mobility in the greater SaarLorLux region ³
Methods	Qualitative interviews, standardised written survey	Qualitative interaction analyses ⁴	Qualitative interviews, standardised written survey
Sample	N(qualitative) = 30 N(quantitative) = 128	Qualitative case studies at three workplaces	N(qualitative) = 32 N(quantitative) = 458

Language and communication at the workplace

One characteristic feature of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is its multilingualism. The Language Law of 1984 (*loi du 24 février 1984 sur le régime des langues*) establishes Luxembourgish, French and German as the country's official languages. A distinction is drawn between the national language (Luxembourgish), administrative languages (Luxembourgish, French, German), and the language of legislation (French). Unlike other multilingual countries, such as Belgium or Switzerland, language use is based on domains, rather than divided up on a territorial basis. Hoffmann (1979) described the situation in Luxembourg as triglossic, in that German and French were used primarily in written domains (media, education, administration, etc.) and Luxembourgish in oral domains. Actual linguistic practice, however, is much more diverse. In education, for example, German serves as the official language of instruction in primary schools. German and French are languages of instruction in secondary schools (*enseignement secondaire*), with French predominating in the 'classical' secondary

3 Published as: Wille 2012.

4 Interactional sociolinguistics belongs to conversation analysis research (Deppermann 2001) and goes back to Gumperz (1986). It is a form of discourse analysis that deals with authentic recordings of conversations. The aim of conversation analysis is to "investigate conversation practices that the members of a culture understand as typical types of action, structured by binding forms, or conversation events" (Deppermann 2001: 22).

schools (*Lycée classique*) and German in the technical secondary schools (*Lycée technique*). English is a compulsory subject in secondary schools. The Luxembourgish language, in contrast, has a minimal official presence in post-primary curricula, even though in practice both teachers and pupils use it in several areas of everyday schooling. Pupils in Luxembourg therefore theoretically speak four languages on completing their schooling: Luxembourgish, German, French, and English. In practice, however, there is a great deal of variation in language skills, for instance relating to pupils' migration or class backgrounds (Weber 2009, Davis 1994).

The language situation in Luxembourg is currently undergoing significant change, driven primarily by the growing number of resident foreigners (43% of the total population) and cross-border workers (Horner and Weber 2008, Fehlen 2009). The increasing use of French is among the most important developments; because most cross-border workers come from France, French is used with ever-greater frequency as a *lingua franca* between different language groups that work and live in Luxembourg (Horner and Weber 2008: 87). At the same time, English is becoming an increasingly important common language due to the presence of several multinational companies and European institutions headquartered in Luxembourg, a development accompanied by a claimed decrease of German usage in the workplace (Klein 2003). In a parallel development, there is a growing importance of Luxembourgish as an identity marker within the Luxembourgish population, revealed for instance in increased written use of Luxembourgish (Horner und Weber 2008: 86).

The Luxembourgish labour market is also characterised by language segmentation. According to Fehlen (2009), Luxembourgers are increasingly entering the public service, which requires mastery of the three national languages. This means that cross-border workers are largely left to the private sector, in which language use at the workplace is not as strongly regulated. With regard to cross-border workers who come from monolingual countries or countries that have territorial languages – such as Belgium – we must assume that many have more restricted language skills than Luxembourgers who have grown up in a multilingual context.

This leads us to the question of how cross-border commuters confront linguistic diversity at the workplace. Despite the growing importance of cross-border workers and their strong presence in the working world, there are hardly any studies on the language practices of cross-border workers at the workplace in the context of Luxembourg.⁵ Two current research projects (Studies 1 and 2) therefore pursue the question of how cross-border workers experience, and assert themselves within, a multilingual working environment.

Language practices and perceptions of multilingualism

First of all, it is important to emphasise that it is not possible to make general statements about cross-border workers' language practices at work. It became clear in Study 1 that language use varies significantly: in some workplaces we found nearly monolingual practices, whereas in others two or more languages were regularly spoken. Furthermore, the national origin of companies, their orientation of activity, and internal language policies shape mono- and multilingualism at the workplace. Additionally, there is much diversity in language competence among cross-border workers. Many of the respondents reported that they were fluent in more languages than the usual stereotypes would lead one to suspect, yet there was not always an opportunity to apply these language skills at work. We did find that nearly all re-

⁵ In the majority of previous work on this topic, cross-border workers are left out for the benefit of the resident population (i.e., Fehlen et al. 1998). Only a few works address them from a linguistic perspective, yet often only as an ancillary theme or on a narrow empirical basis (Derveaux und Esmein 1998, Berger 2005, Fehlen 2009, Wille 2012).

spondents were confronted with multilingualism at the workplace. Even if the immediate work environment in some workplaces tended to be rather monolingual, the overarching multilingual context of Luxembourg always had some effect on language practices at work.

In Study 1, research subjects were asked to articulate their position with regard to various statements about language use at the workplace. These statements were all designed to elicit positions favouring either the use of one language (monolingual perspective) or the use of multiple languages (multilingual perspective). First, we can note a trend towards a monolingual perspective among the participants: 42.2% of the cross-border workers reported that the use of multiple languages at the workplace can be problematic; 82.8% believe that a shared language makes it easier for them to complete tasks at work. Moreover, half (49.2%) of the participants felt uncomfortable when colleagues spoke a language they could not understand; 51.6% felt excluded when this happened. However, the participants also aligned with some statements reflecting a more multilingual perspective. Almost two-thirds (63.3%) underscored that mastering multiple languages could improve relationships with their colleagues, and that different languages could make work more interesting (49.2%). In addition, a majority agreed that multilingualism encouraged colleagues to support one another (55.5%). Over half of the participants (53.1%) were against the use of one language at the workplace, and 47.7% disagreed that the presence of different languages at the workplace represented a burden or imposition. The research results show that the respondents perceived multilingualism as challenging with regard to task-related aspects of work, but also as a gain in terms of interpersonal relationships at the workplace.

We explored the participants' experience of multilingualism in Luxembourg and at the workplace in more detail in the context of interviews (Study 1). Our aim was to uncover the various language ideologies of the participants, by which we mean "the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group" (Kroskrity 2004: 501). We thus investigated the degree to which the participants' experience of multilingualism in Luxembourg was associated with their linguistic (and other) interests. Against this background, the participants fell into two groups: the proponents of an ideology that understands *societal multilingualism as a problem*⁶ and the advocates of the competing ideology of *societal multilingualism as an opportunity* (de Bres 2014). Holders of the first ideology ascribed the following problem areas to a multilingual work environment:

Table 2: *Societal multilingualism as a problem: perceived problem areas*⁷

Problem areas	Interview excerpts
Restricted access to information	<i>This means that the many employment laws that affect me, that pertain to work contracts, etc., are in French, and I view this somewhat critically. (RLP-Lux, m., 35/39)</i>
Poor quality of communication	<i>Unfortunately [there is] sometimes a loss of information, less content, less delicate communication of news; also misunderstandings that sometimes happen, that come up in the implemen-</i>

6 The difference between individual and societal multilingualism is significant here, because people can be impressed by individual multilingualism (for example, if a person can speak prestige languages such as French, English or Spanish) yet still believe that multilingualism at the social level is an obstacle for social coherence (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998).

7 The interview participants who provided the quotations included in the following discussion are identified as follows: Direction of commute (RLP = Rhineland-Palatinate, Saar = Saarland, Lor = Lothringen, Lux = Luxembourg, Wal = Wallonia), gender (w. = female, m. = male), age (35/39 = age group 35-39 years).

Problem areas	Interview excerpts
	<i>tation of projects or misunderstandings, that can have consequences. (RLP-Lux, m., 40/44)</i>
A sense of exclusion	<i>We were previously [in another department] and [...] there I had the feeling that sometimes people intentionally switched into French to kind of exclude us. And that, at least I think so, I can't prove it, but it was simply a feeling that French was privileged. (RLP-Lux, w., 30/34)</i>
Limited possibilities for advancement	<i>Yes, I would say that there is a sort of selection by language. If you take a survey in the offices here, you won't find very many French people [...] when they hire someone for the office, it's always a Luxembourger [...] when it comes to prospects for the future here... you hit a brick wall. (Lor-Lux, m., 40/44)</i>

Source: Study 1 – de Bres, J.: Dealing with language diversity: the language ideologies of cross-border workers in Luxembourg.

Along with these ‘dangers’ of societal multilingualism, the proponents of this ideology tended to report that they personally used only one language at the workplace. A few expressed their displeasure at having to adapt to others in terms of language:

[One] aspect that bothers me a bit personally is that I am often pulled down into French, even if my interlocutor can speak English or German. I notice then, among my French-speaking col-leagues, [...] that you kind of have to force them to speak a language other than French, and that I, as a foreign language speaker, [...] am disadvantaged, which I don't necessarily view as fair. (RLP-Lux, m., 35/39)

Other cross-border workers felt uncomfortable when colleagues used a language they did not understand. This impression was often accompanied by a degree of suspicion:

There are also Portuguese people who will speak Portuguese to one another [...] when we pass by, they will speak French but when they want to speak among themselves they'll speak Portuguese so that we can't understand. I think it's to talk behind our backs actually. (Lor-Lux, m., 30/34)

A central result of the study is that the ideology of *societal multilingualism as a problem* seems to be prevalent among those cross-border workers who are either monolingual or do not have adequate language skills for their specific workplace (Blommaert et al. 2005). We should add however that the language requirements at a workplace can vary significantly. A problem-oriented perception can therefore result from the variable interplay of Luxembourgish, French, Portuguese, German, and English. If a respondent is not fluent in one or several of the languages required in the workplace, then he or she tends to develop a hostile attitude towards societal multilingualism.

In contrast, other respondents supported the competing ideology of *societal multilingualism as an opportunity*. These cross-border workers primarily emphasised the advantages associated with multilingualism:

Table 3: Societal multilingualism as an opportunity: perceived opportunities and advantages

Opportunities and advantages	Interview excerpts
Contact with people from other cultures	<i>I like to travel, I like to meet people from different cultures and I think that multilingualism contributes a bit to this discovery of other cultures and other worlds. So, personally I find it very positive. (Wal-Lux, w., 30/34)</i>
Enjoyment of an international work environment	<i>I feel that it's more exciting to go to a country where there are several languages; where it's more international, than staying in Germany in Wuppertal, where I even speak the dialect. (RLP, w., 30/34)</i>
Use and development of language skills	<i>I knew that in Luxemburg there were several languages that were spoken and I thought "fine, it will be a good opportunity for me to use a little of the linguistic baggage I have, or even tackle new linguistic horizons". (Lor-Lux, w., 35/39)</i>
Cognitive development	<i>I think it's great because people don't even think the same way [...]. I think that language also shapes the way we think. (Lor-Lux, m., 45/49)</i>
Clarity of communication	<i>The fact that people find it more difficult to speak forces them to provide explanations [...]. Being forced to speak another language...forces us to make an effort to explain [...]. You have to speak slowly and make sure that what you are saying is very, very clear. (Lor-Lux, m., 45/49)</i>
Expanded relationships	<i>Personally, I think it's absolutely positive precisely because there are so many languages, it brings people closer together than if there was just one language. (Lor-Lux, w., 30/34)</i>
Linguistic flexibility	<i>I immediately adopted the Luxembourg model which is to not ask questions about language but to simply try to speak together, whatever the language spoken...uh the current situation in my country shows us that this is not always the case! (Wal-Lux, m., 35/39)</i>

Source: Study 1 – de Bres, J.: *Dealing with language diversity: the language ideologies of cross-border workers in Luxembourg.*

The advocates of this ideology reported that they enjoyed accommodating to their colleagues in terms of language and that they felt comfortable in an environment where languages were spoken that they did not understand:

I freely chose to come here, and I knew about the language situation here. That's the first thing. The second thing is that it's enriching for me to be able to learn the [French] language. I would never see myself as coerced or forced to defer to someone; it's completely the opposite, an enormous enrichment. (RLP-Lux, m., 40/44)

Certain French people say [...] when a Luxembourger speaks to another it's to speak badly of the French, or something like that. They don't understand what is being said, but [Luxembourgers] have better things to do than that. (Lor-Lux, m., 35/39)

Other cross-border workers in this category did report feeling uncomfortable in this kind of situation, but not due to feeling pressure to accommodate, but rather due to feeling aware of their own lack of fluency.

It bothers me that I'm not really capable of answering in Luxembourgish. Because if I see that the conversation begins in Luxembourgish, if I open my mouth [...] I think I'll force them to stop speaking Luxembourgish. (Lor-Lux, m., 45/49)

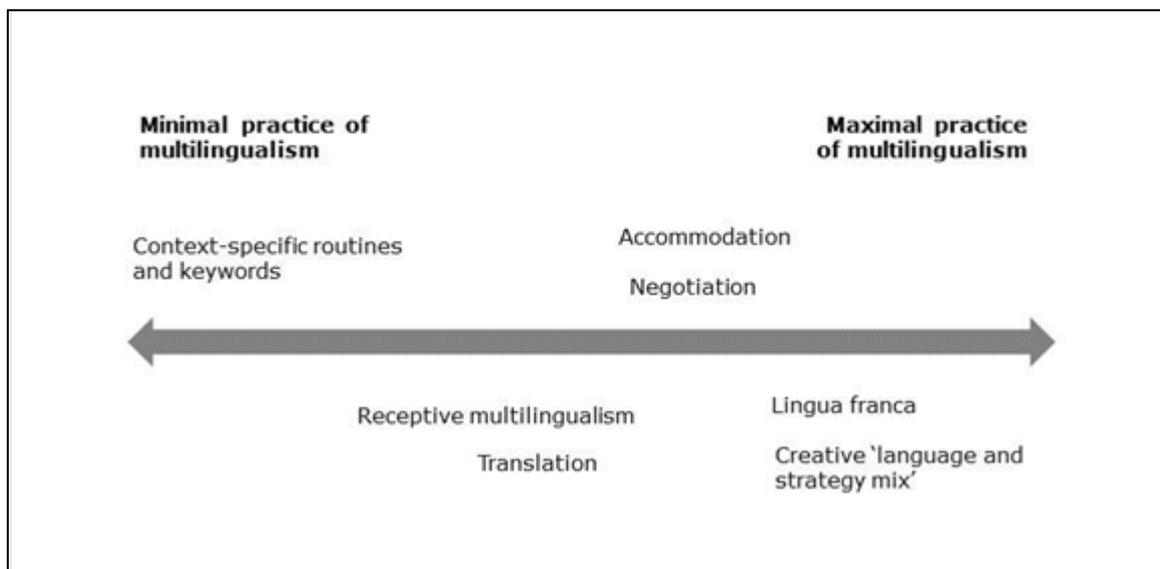
The advocates of the ideology of *societal multilingualism as an opportunity* tended to be fluent in a greater number of languages or have greater skills in the languages that were considered most important for their workplace. Accordingly, their experience of multilingualism corresponded to their linguistic interests.

In practice, not all of the participants could be put into one of these ideological categories alone. In fact, the participants often made reference to various ideologies of multilingualism during the interview, depending upon the perceived problem area or advantage. This recalls Kroskrity's (2000: 12) concept of the inherent multiplicity of language ideologies, which he attributes to the variety 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 general, the cross-border workers tended to creatively combine elements of different language ideologies in their arguments in order to articulate their stance and construct their identity with respect to language.

Multilingual practices

The following will explore what practices cross-border workers adopt to deal with multilingualism in their everyday professional lives. Our explanations are based both on the practices that cross-border workers reported in interviews (Study 1) and on the analysis of recordings of conversations conducted at three workplaces (Study 2). First we must emphasise that multilingual practices are influenced to a significant degree by factors such as the participants' language skills and those of their colleagues, as well as company-specific language policies. For example, a cross-border commuter who shares a first language with his or her colleague has less of a need to resort to multilingual practices than a cross-border commuter whose colleagues primarily speak other languages. An extreme case arises when colleagues cannot find a shared language of communication. Study 2 shows that cross-border workers can then become linguistically very creative in order to facilitate interaction. The multilingual practices we identified are presented below in a continuum that ranges from "minimal practice" to "maximal practice" of multilingualism (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Continuum of multilingual practices



Note: This is a simplified graph that summarises multilingual practices. A more detailed discussion is given in Franziskus (2013).

Context-specific routines and key words: A widespread practice in multilingual workplaces is the use of language routines and keywords (Franziskus and de Bres (2012), Franziskus (2013)). Routines are understood, following Lüger (1992: 18), as “consolidated, repeatable procedures that are available to people as ready-made solutions to problems”⁸. Greeting and leave-taking routines are exemplary in this regard. They are used very frequently by some workers. For example, the Luxembourgish greeting *Moien* (‘hello’) is frequently used to greet colleagues, even when no Luxembourgers are present. The use of such routines is qualified as a minimal practice of multilingualism because it does not imply any more extended language exchange. The same applies to the use of so-called keywords, i.e. terms or jargon words that have become integrated in language use in the workplace and have obtained a context-specific meaning. The use of such keywords can significantly simplify communication at the workplace. For example, workers in a supermarket used the word *frigo*; this word is found in both French and Luxembourgish, and originally described a refrigerator. In this supermarket, however, this word refers to the entire refrigerated section of the store, and is used equally by Luxembourgish, German, and French colleagues. This is just one example of how words are borrowed from conventional vocabulary and loaded up with new meanings, thereby becoming part of an ‘expert vocabulary’.

Translation: The cross-border workers we surveyed also often rely on the practice of translation in a multilingual context. A language mediator enables communication to take place even if those present do not share a common language. We can differentiate between different forms of translation at the workplaces under consideration: (a) a cross-border commuter explicitly asks a multilingual colleague to translate a written document; (b) two colleagues who do not share a common language ask a third employee for translation; (c) a multilingual colleague spontaneously translates, without being asked to do so, in order to include those present in the conversation.

Receptive multilingualism: This is a linguistic practice during which each participant uses his/her first language when communicating with his/her interlocutor. It therefore requires at least passive language competence. This multilingual practice is—ostensibly because of struc-

⁸ Original in German.

tural linguistic similarities – widespread primarily among Luxembourgers and German-speaking cross-border workers. The latter often view this strategy as an opportunity to linguistically accommodate to the Luxembourgers even if they have only little knowledge of the local language. Yet there are also instances of receptive communication between French colleagues on the one hand and German cross-border workers or Luxembourgers on the other. Koole and ten Thije (2007: 76) describe receptive multilingualism as “the most equal mode of communication, as none of the interlocutors has to adapt to the other, nor are they forced to use a lingua franca”.

Accommodation and negotiation: Accommodation refers to the linguistic adaptation of a speaker to the first language of his or her interlocutor (Giles et al. 1973). This is a more maximal practice of multilingualism as it requires active competence and use of another language. Cross-border workers If a Luxembourger is speaking with cross-border workers, he or she is often the one who switches into the language of his or her interlocutor, due to the generally higher level of individual multilingualism among Luxembourgers. Among cross-border workers, the question of who will adapt to whom is less predictable and depends primarily on the language skills of those involved. In situations in which speakers are encountering one another for the first time, language accommodation is typically preceded by a process of negotiating which language to use.

Lingua franca: The use of a *lingua franca* – a ‘third’ and shared language of communication – also qualifies as a maximum practice of multilingualism. This is because it requires all participants to switch to a different language. Today, English is considered to be the most widespread lingua franca around the world. The use of English as a lingua franca is used to varying degrees by the participants of the two studies. Those participants working at a more international workplace report to switch to English frequently. In more local workplaces, such as the supermarket for example, the use of English as a lingua franca is not widespread, either because the staff members have no knowledge of this language or because they are able to communicate in one of their first languages (mostly French).

Creative ‘language and strategy mix’: A mixed form of the language practices discussed so far also belongs to the maximum practice of multilingualism. We observed that interlocutors who cannot resort to a shared language or a translator creatively employ all of the communicative means at their disposal. For example, we recorded a conversation where a German employee and a Belgian employee use linguistic elements from German, French, and Luxembourgish to engage in communication. Both of these staff members rely on the receptive comprehension of Luxembourgish and German, which gives rise to an individual, productive and creative language style. A similar dynamic is on display in the following example, which is taken from a conversation between three cross-border workers at a supermarket. Florence (F) is bilingual in German and French; Lisa (D) has basic knowledge of French; and Melanie (B) does not know German, but has basic knowledge of Luxembourgish. The three colleagues are speaking about their days off:

Table 4: Example of the “creative ‘language and strategy mix’” practice of multilingualism

Line	Discussant (nationality)	Dialog
01	Lisa (D):	[et toi] qu'est-ce que tu fais demain?
		<i>and you, what are you doing tomorrow?</i>
02	Melanie (B):	(--) oh je vais à long-longwy

Line	Discussant (nationality)	Dialog
		<i>oh I'm going to long-longwy</i>
03	Lisa (D):	schlafen he ((lacht))
		to sleep (laughs)
04	Melanie (B):	oui non
		<i>yes no</i>
05	Lisa (D):	[no:n]
		<i>no</i>
06	Melanie (B):	[moi je] schlafen net gutt
		<i>I'm not sleeping well</i>
07	Lisa (D):	[(nee)]
		No
08	Melanie (B):	[schlaf]en eh (-) vier auer pro
		<i>I'm sleeping four hours each night</i>
09	Lisa (D):	[véier stu] [véier stunden]
		<i>four hour four hours</i>
10	Melanie (B):	[(fa) oui]
		<i>yes</i>
11	Florence (F):	[oh immer wenn ich] net acht stunde [habe ich stirb]
		oh whenever I don't get eight hours I die
12	Melanie (B):	[moi je (dormais) pas]
		<i>I haven't slept</i>
13		[moi je dors très mal]
		<i>I sleep very poorly</i>
14	Lisa (D):	[immer]
		always

Line	Discussant (nationality)	Dialog
15	Melanie (B):	[très mal] oui
		<i>very poorly yes</i>
16	Lisa (D):	ja - yes

Source: Study 2 – Franziskus, A.: *Dealing with Linguistic Diversity at the Workplace: the linguistic practices of cross-border workers in Luxembourg.*

Key: French shown in normal font, German in bold, Luxembourgish underlined, translation shown in italics, overlapping of speech features shown in brackets [].

Explanation of Table 4

At the beginning of this excerpt, Lisa asks Melanie what she is planning to do on the following day (Line 1): *and, what are you doing tomorrow*, after Florence has explained her plans (in German). She asks her question in French, thereby signalling explicitly that she is addressing the question to Melanie; Lisa was speaking German previously with Florence. Melanie answers in French (Line 2): *oh, I'm going to Longwy*. Lisa ignores this statement though and supplies a possible answer in German: *to sleep*. Melanie rejects this proposal with a French answer *oui non* (yes no, Line 3). Lisa reacts with a surprised French *non* (no, Line 5). Melanie now explains that she is not sleeping well, at most four hours a night. As becomes clear in Lines 6 and 8, she is using elements of German and Luxembourgish to make her statement. The French colleague, Florence, interjects later (Line 11) in German, saying that she would die if she did not sleep for eight hours.

This excerpt from a typical lunch break conversation between three colleagues shows that speakers can use a combination of strategies to deal with multilingualism *in situ*, and are very flexible in doing so. Note the language accommodation, the various elements of receptive multilingualism, and the use of Luxembourgish elements as an approach towards a *lingua franca* practice. In the interviews, cross-border workers were led to reflect on cultural diversity in the workplace more generally in the context of discussing the aforementioned linguistic aspects of working together. To explore this broader theme in more detail, the following discussion considers intercultural relationships between employees of different nationalities working in Luxembourg.

Cultural diversity at the workplace

A recent study (Aoun Ben 2011) shows that people from the countries neighbouring Luxembourg constitute more than half of the nationalities employed in the private and semi-public sectors. Companies in the following industries demonstrate a particularly pronounced diversity of employees: health and social services, financial services, industry, corporate services, education, retail, and repair. These economic branches employ an above-average proportion of cross-border workers, especially in industry and corporate services, where they comprise about 60% of employees.

Table 5: Nationalities of employees in Luxembourg (excluding public administration)

Nationalities	Proportion in %
French	27.3
Luxembourgish	25.4
Portuguese	12.9
Belgian	12.6
German	11.9
Other European	4.2
Non-European	3.2
Italian	2.6
TOTAL	100.0

Source: Aoun Ben (2011: 2)

The diversity of staff in Luxembourg companies does not necessarily mean that people of different nationalities encounter one another in everyday working life. Study 3, for example, shows that many cross-border workers work with people from their country of residence and/or share informal moments with them at the workplace. A cross-border worker from Rhineland-Palatinate reports: “In our department, we are exclusively Germans; we have less to do with the others” (RLP-Lux, m., 35/49). Along with the structural formation of specific groups at the workplace, shared everyday knowledge and a shared language are important. One cross-border worker from Saarland said:

The groupings, the little groups that form, are typically homogeneous in terms of language and culture. That doesn't mean that all of the French people are together, and it doesn't prevent exchanges with the Germans or German-speaking employees. But it is very often the case that the little groups that are formed are typically homogeneous with regard to language. (Saar-Lux, m., 35/39)

Despite the formation of a community at the workplace described above, the Luxembourg labour market is characterised by a pronounced interaction among people of different nationalities. One cross-border worker from Lothringen confirmed this, saying, “One works together with Japanese, English, French, Luxembourgish, Belgians and Germans, and there are a few people who come from the United Kingdom – a bit of everything” (Lor-Lux, m., 25/29). From the perspective of companies, this national diversity can sometimes be problematic (Wille 2012: 240ff.), but it is also viewed as advantageous, for example in the advertising industry.

Cross-border workers and foreigners from other countries, commuting daily between their home country and Luxembourg, creates a mix of employees that is understood as an “opportunity” to be able to have so many influences “under one roof”. This enables [...] products in corporate communications and advertisement

to be tested for cultural comprehensibility and acceptance, say the experts. (Reddeker 2011: 170f.)

Although national diversity does not necessarily lead to cultural diversity, we nevertheless observe that nationality plays an important role in cultural attributions. This is because the characteristics perceived by cross-border workers with regard to how their colleagues work are typically categorised along national lines, whereby the subjects' constructions of reality are oriented towards political-administrative classifications. Such stereotypical categorisation processes and perceptions of interpersonal differences, as well as how to deal with them, are illuminated in the following description of selected results from Study 3.

(Re-)constructions of cultural differences

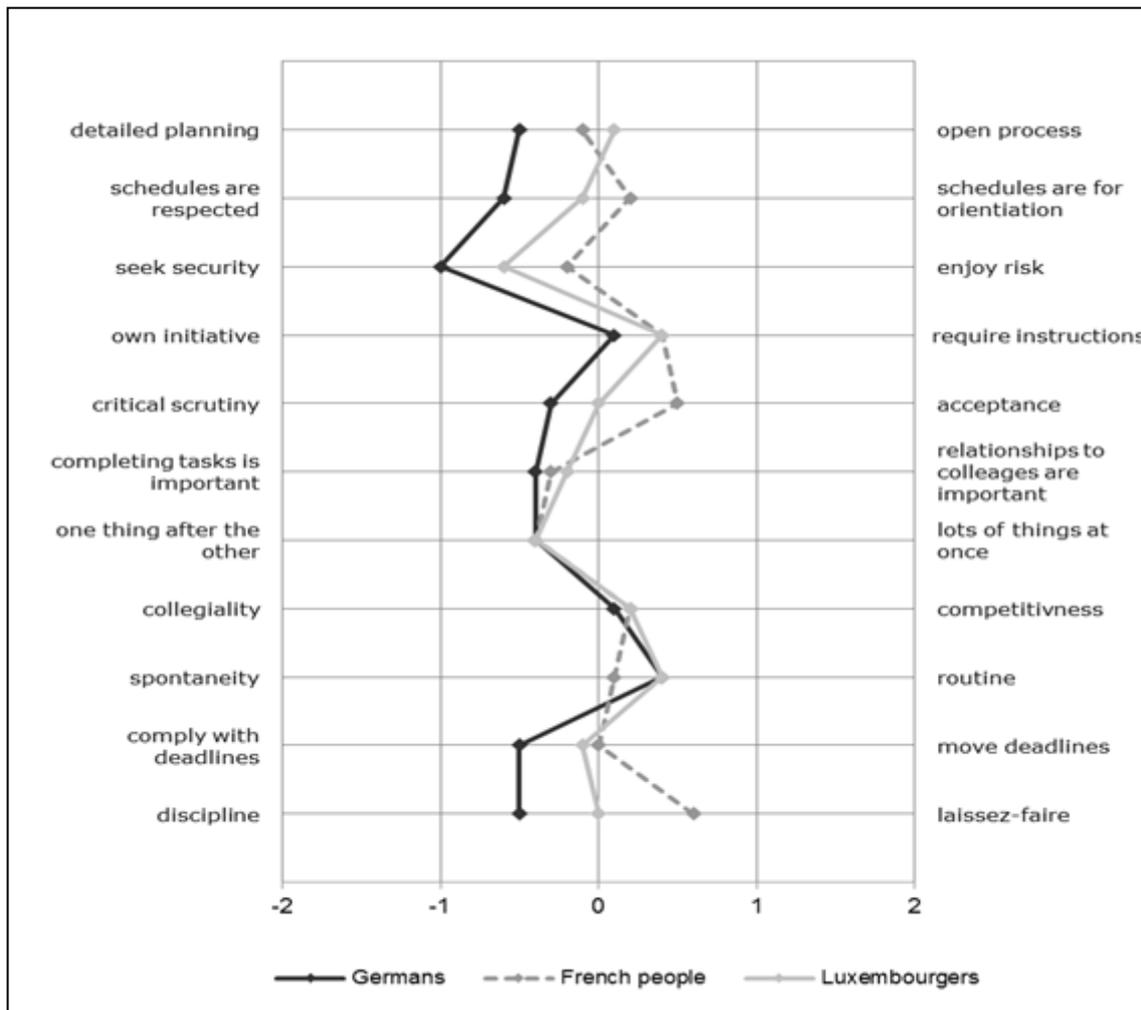
Cross-border workers in Luxembourg experience interculturality at the workplace in different ways. Many of them view working with colleagues as “problem-free”, although for some it depends on whether the Luxembourgers are “more oriented towards German or French” (RLP-Lux, m., 30/35), or, as one puts it, “you have to reach an understanding with [the Luxembourgers], and then there’s a nice atmosphere at the workplace” (RLP-Lux, m., 35/40). Some cross-border workers – especially young people – perceive diversity within companies as “enriching and interesting”, while others view their experience of interculturality as “difficult and problematic”.

In order to further explore the problem-oriented point of view, 55 cross-border workers whose everyday work life was spent predominantly with colleagues of nationalities other than their own were surveyed about possible reasons for “intercultural misunderstandings”. The response behaviour reflects a pronounced awareness of this problem with regard to the languages spoken and working styles at the workplace. Cross-border workers viewed the latter in largely stereotypical ways, whereby the Luxembourgish style of working was situated between the perceived German and French styles.⁹ This shows the semantic differential (see Fig. 2) in the overarching question of the extent to which a style was identified as disciplined or laissez-faire: respondents classified the German style of work as disciplined and the French as laissez-faire. The Luxembourgish style of work was located somewhere in between these two national styles, as shown in the following impression articulated by a cross-border worker:

It’s something different in any case. I had already noticed it when I studied abroad. There are of course differences in mentalities – for example in punctuality, precision, or in stressful situations. You could say that the Luxembourgers approach things in a more stress-free way – if it doesn’t work out sometimes, that’s OK. That’s where you also notice the French influence. And they also aren’t as detail-oriented as the Germans. (Saar-Lux, m., 25/29)

⁹ Due to the low number of cases, we were unable to make any additional statements about a supposedly ‘Belgian style of working’.

Fig. 2: Evaluations of the working styles of Germans, French people, and Luxembourgers by cross-border workers who work primarily with the respective nationality (mean values)



$n=82$ (Germans); $n=27$ (French people); $n=67$ (Luxembourgers)

Key: 82 cross-border workers who work together primarily with Germans and have a nationality other than German tend to perceive their German colleagues as disciplined.

Source: Study 3 – Wille, C.: Socio-cultural dimensions and constructions of space in cross-border employee mobility in the greater SaarLorLux region

With regard to an orientation towards certainty the respondents characterised the German style of work – in contrast to the Luxembourgish style of work – as defined by detailed planning and routine processes, and therefore the most oriented towards certainty. A cross-border worker from Rhineland-Palatinate employed in Luxembourg supports this finding:

I have the impression that we [Germans] plan our work in such a Prussian style: we define and distribute the work. My experience in the company is that indeed everything is predictable, but the colleagues let things come up and in the end it will be done by two people, and they almost collapse, and they don't even complain. (RLP-Lux, m., 30/34)

In terms of dealing with time, cross-border workers considered the Germans in particular, followed by the Luxembourgers, to pay attention to complying with deadlines and respecting schedules. For the French, however, schedules were seen as being much more flexible. Overall, the respondents tend to classify nationalities as monochromatic in terms of dealing with

time, which corresponds to a sequential form of organising work. A person from the Saarland perceived his French colleagues as rather polychromatic.

The French are also like the Luxembourgers; it's just that whatever has to do with savoir-vivre, they [French people] take in a much more relaxed way. This also applies to punctuality, whether in interviews or especially in meetings. The French arrive a quarter of an hour late, and that's OK. [...] The Germans are perceived as very meticulous, precise, and sometimes annoying. The French take a much more casual view. At the end of the day, all of us always have to send a report about our transactions to the parent company in Germany, and if it doesn't arrive punctually at 4:00, then they immediately give us a call – and the French find it very irritating. (Saar-Lux, m., 25/29)

With regard to orientation towards power structures, the French style of work is assessed as strongly oriented towards hierarchy, which is expressed in the emphasis on little personal initiative and a distinctive acceptance of instructions. The Luxembourgish style of work is also classified as hierarchy-oriented, albeit in a weaker form, and is categorised as located somewhere between acceptance and critical scrutiny of work instructions. Finally, the German style of work is rated as less oriented towards hierarchy, which a cross-border worker from Germany described in comparative terms:

The French tend rather to listen to the boss. So if the boss says that something has to be done in such and such a way, that's how it's done – there's no questioning it. Among the Germans, sometimes someone will say, 'No, I don't think that's OK.' or 'Don't we want to do that in a better way?' – which means that the Germans then give counter-proposals. (RLP-Lux, m., 30/34)

In terms of orientation towards relationships or subjects, the respondents assess work styles generally as subject-oriented, although the working style of Germans is characterised more by prioritising the completion of tasks over relationships to colleagues. This trend is also clear in the interviews:

I find that the Germans are very rigorous. I don't know how to explain it but the Germans and the Dutch....it's almost like rigidity. It's straight, square, it's pragmatic. While the others [the French and the Belgians], it's more empathetic, there's this pronounced Mediterranean side I find. (Lor-Lux, w., 30/34)

The survey results for constructions of difference and the features of different styles of work are problematic from a methodological perspective. First of all, the categories of the semantic differential, which were developed on the basis of previous explorative interviews (Study 3) and on the review of relevant studies (Hofstede 1997, Trompenaars 1993, Hall 1984), can be critically questioned. In addition, we must point out the comparatively small sample size, which currently represents the only source of information about the (re-)construction of cultural differences at the workplaces of cross-border workers, as well as the implied bundling of 'cultural perspectives'. The perception reflected in the semantic differential, for example in the Luxembourgish style of work, is based upon assessments by German and French cross-border workers. The isolated evaluation of their respective perceptions, which is not presented separately because of the low number of cases, nevertheless confirms the intermediary position of the Luxembourgish style of work. This is because the Germans, perceived broadly as certainty-oriented, believe that the Luxembourgers for example are comparatively less certainty-oriented, French cross-border workers who are described as less certainty-oriented emphasise the Luxembourgers' striving for certainty. This pattern of perception repeats itself in

relation to dealing with time or the orientation towards relationships or tasks among Luxembourgish colleagues.

Notwithstanding the methodological limitations, we find that, with regard to the working styles of colleagues of other nationalities, differences are perceived and categorised in stereotypical ways. Such constructions of difference, which are significant for personal and collective identity formation, vary according to one's cultural perspective, as well as the manner in which they are handled in the workplace.

Intercultural strategies

Assuming that the styles of work that are perceived as different are important for interactions at the workplace, the current section discusses the strategies for dealing with cultural differences observed among cross-border workers in Luxembourg. We rely here on a heuristic that differentiates between ethnocentric and ethnorelative strategies (Thomas 2003: 98f.).

Dominance strategy: We can describe a dominance strategy as occurring when cross-border workers react to cultural contact by assuming the superiority of the values, norms and practices with which they are familiar. This appears for example in attempts to promote 'familiar' (and therefore 'the right') routines of action as opposed to 'foreign' ones, thereby trying to dominate the interaction. A cross-border worker from the Saarland describes this tendency towards 'conquering' in privileging his own style of work:

And then with the French people it's always a great big kindergarten, where everyone does what they want to do. And my Luxembourgish boss said at some point, French people can't plan and that's plain for all to see. [...] Certainly there are different kinds of people in every country, but the most that I have met ... the French, they think that they are the kings and they know everything, and if it's about quality or other topics, that doesn't work. (Saar-Lux, m., 45/49)

Assimilation strategy: The trend towards adaptation, or the voluntary assumption of 'other' values, norms and practices, can be described as an assimilation strategy. Cross-border workers often prefer this strategy for pragmatic reasons, which requires a certain "disposition", as one cross-border worker stated:

At the beginning it was worse. But over time you get used to people. It's a matter of habit. And maybe a matter of character. I know a friend who works in a German bank in Luxembourg and always asks me how I can stand it to work with French people. That's a pure question of character, of what kind of disposition you have. (RLP-Lux, m., 25/29)

The fact that the French communicate differently was new to me. Before this position, I had management responsibilities for about 25 people, but they were Germans and Luxembourgers – meaning German-speaking people. I applied a completely different leadership style there than I do with my current company. Or vice versa: I had to adjust my leadership style to current conditions and understand that what I had done before was not necessarily what was wanted anymore. Specifically, that mean I had to provide more direction, more instructions, perform less coordination, ask less about opinions, but rather set the tone. I had to articulate a clear line because that's what is expected. I had to adjust my approach because my leadership style has a more democratic bent and I also like to grant latitude whenever it works. I also prefer direct and open communication, but that's not what people want in this environment. That's different. (RLP-Lux, w., 40/44)

Divergence strategy: Many cross-border workers classify cultural differences as something that can make working together more difficult, yet must be respected. They see a fundamental incompatibility of different values, norms and practices as problematic. A strategy based on divergence shows up when the ‘other’ is recognised and/or commonalities are highlighted. In most cases, however, the respectful and ostensibly indissoluble incongruity of cultural orientations remains in the foreground.

We [German interview partner and German colleague] have often seen this same phenomenon, particularly in the work morale [of Luxembourgers], or the flow of work, structure, coordination – then it is really helpful that another German is there; otherwise, I would feel pretty lost. (RLP-Lux, m., 25/29 Jahre)

Synthesis strategy: Some cross-border workers practice a creative strategy of action. They assume an equal ranking of values, norms and practices that are perceived as different and attempt to bring them together in a productive way. Thereby, it is intended that a better result, or more effective teamwork, can be achieved – which would not be possible without cultural diversity – through the combination of qualities perceived as ‘strong’ and ‘weak’.

Many things that are not attributed directly to daily work are governed somewhat vaguely. For example, you ask three people a question and you’ll get four answers. That’s sometimes sort of chaotic in terms of organisation. Things like this are arranged better in a German company, which however makes it less flexible. In a French-speaking environment, I think it’s that people don’t control some things, and some things are intentionally not controlled – that sometimes leads to short-term decisions and sometimes to slightly chaotic circumstances. But as a German with a typical German mentality, if such a thing exists, you can still learn something from all of this. (RLP-Lux, w., 40/44)

The intercultural strategies identified by cross-border workers must be viewed as ideal-typical and context-dependent strategies for dealing with perceived cultural differences. In addition, further strategies are conceivable, as are mixed forms of the types introduced above, which are modified in interactions and can be stabilised again in the form of new routines.

Another aspect that affects dealing with perceived cultural differences is communication between cross-border workers about different working styles. Keeping in mind the aforementioned formation of community at the workplace, we were able, in analyses of the interviews, to discern two trends in the discursive negotiation of cultural differences. In the context of *in-group situations*, in which cross-border workers from a shared country of origin communicate with each other cultural differences are not an urgent matter, but they are discussed and considered important. In *out-group situations*, in which cross-border workers from different countries of origin are present, cultural differences are far less often the subject of conversation, or are played down. Discursive negotiation often remains at the level of humour or uncontroversial topics to prevent a possible loss of face (Spencer-Oatey 2007).

Conclusion

This paper has illuminated the situation of cross-border workers at Luxembourg workplaces from the perspectives of language and intercultural relationships. The unique multilingual context of Luxembourg is particularly interesting because it includes an unusually high number of cross-border workers from neighbouring countries – as compared to resident employees –, and the resident population also has a high proportion of foreigners. This results in diverse linguistic and cultural constellations in the (in-)direct work environment of cross-border

workers. A description of the intercultural working worlds of cross-border workers is correspondingly multilayered and complex. First, we found that cross-border workers can experience a multilingual and multicultural work environment as both positive and negative. Their perceptions range from perceptions of social exclusion and loss of information to enrichment and opportunities for development. The results also show that the subjective experience of these aspects is apparently influenced by previous professional experience and personal skills. These are particularly important whenever cross-border workers must cope directly with multilingual and/or intercultural situations. In terms of language contact situations, six strategies were identified as forming a continuum from minimal to maximal practice of multilingualism. Four central intercultural strategies were discerned, ranging from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. Both language and cultural contact situations occupy a spectrum from adaptation (assimilation / accommodation) to productive, creative strategies of negotiating difference (synthesis / language and strategy mix).

The empirical insights discussed here provide indications of skills that are desirable or necessary for cross-border workers to develop in order to work effectively in cross-border labour markets. In order to develop an elaborate skill profile and methods to teach these skills, we first need further systematisation and additional studies in the context of Luxembourg. At this point, the recommendations given by cross-border workers provide some guidance, in terms of the skills and knowledge that they consider essential for future cross-border employees. They emphasise in particular, for example, that language preparation is indispensable for employment in Luxembourg. German-speaking cross-border workers underscore the importance of French language skills, while Francophone cross-border workers view Luxembourgish language skills as advantageous. Furthermore, cross-border workers recommend that employees, before beginning work, take the time to learn about the country in cultural and geographical terms, “be open to lots of new things”, and be prepared to meet “the other” and their differences with humour, and to be open to them (Study 3). These statements came from study participants, just as the perceptions and strategies discussed in this paper were developed from their perspective. An additional step would be to explore the institutional-entrepreneurial side and its policies with regard to the specific challenges of Luxembourg as a place to do business. We know that since 2009 every employee in the Grand Duchy has had a legal right to attend a language course during working hours (*Congé linguistique*), and that many companies support their employees when they want to learn languages. We also know that some companies only hire cross-border workers from specific countries because of negative experiences with multilingualism, interculturality, or country-specific professional trainings. A systematic survey and analysis of the action strategies practised in Luxembourg’s companies in the area of multilingualism and interculturality, however, remains to be done.

Our own experience

This contribution on languages and cultures at workplaces in Luxembourg is itself the result of multilingual and intercultural teamwork. The authors – a New Zealander, a Luxembourger, and a German – discussed their ideas in German, English and French, and wrote the sections in the language of their choice. Each of the authors contributed elements of his or her disciplinary, academic and personal culture in a productive way, a process during which we used some of the practices and strategies explained in our study.

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