

Value transmission in a multicultural and multilingual context: A case study example of American and Japanese women in Luxembourg

Saki C. Nakai & Elke Murdock, PhD; University of Luxembourg


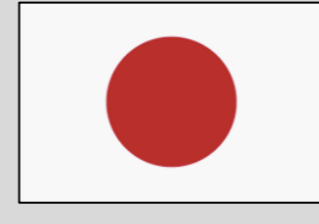
Luxembourg: Multilingual & Multicultural

- **Multilingual:** 3 officially recognized national languages (French, German, Luxembourgish) but more languages spoken and heard, English also used for communication



- **Multicultural:** Largest foreign percentage per capita in Europe (Statec, 2022), approx. half composed of foreigners (49.1%).

Americans & Japanese in Luxembourg

- Although most foreigners in Luxembourg have European roots, increasingly there are residing foreigners with non-European roots
- Both US and Japan are monolingual with English and Japanese mainly spoken, respectively
- **Americans:** 2,170 people (as of January 2022; Statec, 2022) 
- **Japanese:** 537 people (as of January 2022; Statec, 2022) 
- Luxembourg total population: approx. 660,000

Intergenerational value transmission:

Cultural value transmission is the “passing on of information from individual to individual or from groups to other groups” (Schönpflug, 2001, p. 131). In fact, the transmission of cultural information, while sharing explicit knowledge or information, inevitably shapes other people’s behavior. Transmission is a two-stage process, first with the awareness of the knowledge that is desired to be transmitted, and the second being acceptance (or not) of the knowledge by the receiver. There are many “directions” of transmission; specifically, vertical transmission (i.e., parent-offspring) can include activities, language, and linguistic usage, which is the focus of this study.

Research question:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the acculturation experiences of American and Japanese women in Luxembourg. We explore, if and to what extent coming from multicultural US or monocultural Japan adds to the complexity of adapting to a multicultural and multilingual context (Murdock, 2016). We focus on the intergenerational value transmission (i.e., **language, traditions**) within this context.

Participants & Methods

Participants:

- Eight women (5 American, 3 Japanese, age range between 35 and 61 years, $M = 48.3$)
- All in international marriages with a European partner with children (on average 2)
- Most have lived in Luxembourg for at least 10 years

Method:

- Qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews supported by culturally meaningful visual primes.
- Images can serve as an initial prime to the mind, serving as an indirect way for acculturation/negotiation processes to become visible and accessible (Campill, 2020). Visual primes and hybrid images evoking a particular emotion, thought, or experience (Cheon et al., 2016) function as stimulus for reflection and further elaboration.
- The stimulus material was anchored in everyday life experiences, allowing the exploration of facets of daily life in Luxembourg, including language and traditions.
- The first author, with a bicultural American and Japanese background, conducted the interviews, engaging in a self-reflective process that not only allowed for further cultural engagement but also prompted reflection on her position as a bicultural researcher.

Material: Presentation of visual stimulus material

Image category 1: Language


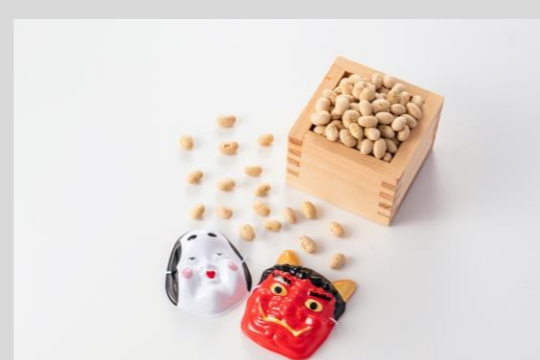

Original Text	English translation
<p>Le Franglëtzelish!</p> <p>You can't lesen diesen artikel si t'es net quadrilingue</p> <p>Being viersprachig est parmi de beschte Freudens dans le world enter. Think about it for a Abbeck. You can utiliser vliet verschiedene languages en même temps in such a Manier that it makes dein Gehirn want to explodiere from the Geschwindigkeit par laquelle it switches from one Sprooch to die andere but still tu peux das tun and te sentir spécial(e) zur gleichen time. The Tatsache that tue peux lire this article oui opehalen to think est un talent très few Menschen hurn. La majorité of people struggle to lire juste in enger einzigen language, aber what you are doing elo est un Zeichen of absolute genius. Reading fluently a très schwierigen Text in four verschidde Sprooche makes you un(e) merd et someone qui huet Spass mat languages. Reading cet article must have given deinem Gehirn a flotte petit workout.</p> <p>That's warum you devoirs le deelen avec tes amis. De renen im Voraus an have une ganz bonne Dag.</p>	<p>The French-Luxembourgish-German-English!</p> <p>You can't read this article if you're not quadrilingual!</p> <p>Being quadrilingual is among the greatest joys in the entire world. Think about it for a moment. You can use four different languages at the same time in such a manner that it makes the brain want to explode from the speed of which it switches from one language to another but you can still do it and feel special at the same time. The fact that you can read this article without stopping is a talent that very few people have. The majority of people struggle to read just in a single language but what you are doing now is a sign of absolute genius. Reading fluently a difficult text in four different languages makes you a need and someone who has fun with languages. Reading this article must have given your head a nice little workout.</p> <p>That's why you should share this with your friends. You're welcome in advance, and have a good day.</p>

Quadri-lingual text (DE, FR, Lux and EN)

Questions:

- Please take some time to read the text (left). Please give me your first general impressions.
- What is your experience with multilingualism in Luxembourg?

Image category 2: Traditions

		
Luxembourg Bring light "in"	Japan Bad spirits "out", good spirits "in"	USA Scare the ghosts "away (out)"

Questions:

- Can you name this Luxembourgish tradition to the left?
- What Luxembourgish and or [US or Japanese] tradition do you celebrate in Luxembourg?

Results: Language

Both cultural groups had a desire to transmit the language of origin (i.e., English, Japanese). However, language choice and usage at home and school differed. Parents faced a difficult choice regarding schooling systems, as there are different options, but all involving language choices with long-term impact regarding social participation and future academic paths.

The transmission of the English language was well maintained given English is a global language; however, the transmission of the Japanese language was harder. Specifically, time and effort is required by the mother to pass on Japanese, but the time constraints and less opportunity to use Japanese in a European context made transmission more difficult.

American:

- *I find it challenging for my daughters who are being raised in the Luxembourgish school system. ... [My husband is German.] But as a family, we made the decision to speak English at home because he was uncomfortable speaking German. ... So when they are struggling with German and struggling with Luxembourgish and struggling with French, it's frustrating.* (Female, 52 years)

Japanese:

- *I was like "oh well" because I didn't have that kind of time to put up with everything. I also definitely cannot teach them Japanese myself, so I've had to stop.* (Female, 44 years)
- *My child can speak a little Japanese, but he's really bad at it. : I don't think I can make that much effort. Homework and all. That's a little hard for me.* (Female, 47 years)

Results: Traditions

There were variations in terms of celebrating traditions of home and host country – from inventing a new tradition, mixing home and host traditions, either home or host traditions, or no tradition. In general, less Japanese traditions were passed on than American traditions.

American:

- *We made a decision to celebrate the Luxembourgish traditions and holidays because our kids were going to local school. So Mother's Day is their Mother's Day. ... But my girls don't celebrate American Mother's Day. ...* (Female, 52 years)
- *Well, because my husband is Swedish, it's very mixed. In Sweden, their real Christmas is on the 24th. And then I said that the American Santa had to work on Christmas Eve and travel all night. And so when they wake up on the 25th, they would run down the stairs, just like in America, and open their American gifts.* (Female, 57 years)

Japanese:

- *We've done Setsubun (the first day of spring) before, throwing beans. Before, we used to make Chirashi-zushi for the Hinamatsuri, and decorate them [with dolls].* (Female, 44 years)
- *No, not at all... I don't really relate to such events in my life.* (Female, 61 years)

Discussion:

Transmission of language and traditions continues to be a maternal duty. Since all women were in international marriages, compromises were made in terms of language choice and traditions. Given Luxembourg's multilingual setting, languages define many social spaces in Luxembourg, which then determines level of social connectedness. With return to country of origin unlikely, parents made compromises with regards to language choice for their children. Both cultural groups recognized challenges regarding language, such as which language of Luxembourg to learn. While Luxembourg's multilingual nature makes it more open, the study showed how this openness comes with constraints. Given Luxembourg's multicultural nature, participants noted more freedom and acceptance to celebrate home and host cultural traditions, and even invent "new" traditions. The celebration of traditions served as specific occasions to strengthen the bond of the family, although the transmission was weaker among the Japanese. We note significant differences between level of effort for transmission between activities; while language learning is effortful daily practice to achieve proficiency, traditions are special occasions occurring a few times throughout the year. This research highlights the challenges of cultural value transmission in a multicultural and multilingual setting.

Literature:

- Campill, M. A. (2020). Japanese women in Luxembourg: A meandering self (unpublished Bachelor Thesis, Psychology). Luxembourg: University of Luxembourg.
- Cheon, B. K., Christopoulos, G. I., & Hong, Y. (2016). Disgust Associated With Culture Mixing: Why and Who? *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 47(10), 1268–1285. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022116667845>
- Murdock, E. (2016). Multiculturalism, Identity and Difference. Palgrave Macmillan UK. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59679-6>
- Schönpflug, U. (2001). Introduction: Cultural transmission—a multidisciplinary research field. *Journal of cross-cultural Psychology*, 32(2), 131-134.
- Statec (2022). Luxembourg in figures. Luxembourg: Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (statec).

Contact:

Saki Nakai (University of Luxembourg)
sakicnakai@gmail.com
Campus Belval, Maison des Sciences Humaines
11, Porte des Sciences, L- 4366 Esch-sur-Alzette