

# The differences between Luxembourgish in Luxembourg and in Germany

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As I already have postulated very often, there is a quite big community of Luxembourgish speakers in Germany in Trier District, mainly in the counties Trier-Saarburg, Vulkaneifel, Berncastel-Wittlich, Bitburg-Prüm, and the city of Trier; as well as in parts of Cochem-Zell County in Coblenz District. In these areas, people mainly speak no dialects of German language, but dialects of Luxembourgish language – a fact which is unknown to many people, but it's evident anyways, because on both sides of the border in Luxembourg and Germany people can talk to each other in their dialect variety without the need of switching (at least if they are able to speak “real” dialect). It is sad that Luxembourgish has no official recognition in Germany, but it's no wonder since there is a lack of self-identification (see Schmitz, 2015), leading to the problem that the language is not taught in German schools.

In this article, I want to show some elementary differences between speakers of Luxembourgish in Luxembourg (LU) and in Germany (DL – the abbreviation stands for “Däitschlëtzebuergesch” meaning ‘German Luxembourgish’). However, a big problem of ‘German Luxembourgish’ is the lack of a standard in Germany which could represent the German-Luxembourgish community appropriately. Therefore, one here might say “Fuschatt” (from French ‘fourchette’) or “Gowel” (from German ‘Gabel’), both meaning ‘fork’. Thus, if one meets Luxembourgish speakers in Germany, it probably won't be unlikely that they sometimes prefer other words than those that I use here to represent Luxembourgish in Germany. The words that I present here are mostly either from around the area of Bitburg or from Trier City.

To show that there can be larger differences, I want to start with the days of the week. For instance, we say ‘Mundeg’, ‘Moundeg’ or ‘Mëndeg’ while in LU it's ‘Méindeg’ (Monday). We say ‘Dinsdeg’ (DL) instead of ‘Dënschdeg’ (LU), meaning Tuesday; ‘Mëttwuch’ (DL) instead of ‘Mëttwoch’ (LU) for Wednesday <sup>1</sup>; ‘Donnerschdeg’ or ‘Dunnesdeg’ (DL) for ‘Donneschdeg’ (Thursday); however, Friday is ‘Freideg’ in both; ‘Samschdeg’ or ‘Samsdeg’ (DL) is said instead of ‘Samschdes’ (LU) for Saturday; and finally, when we say ‘Sunndeg’ or ‘Sundes’ we mean ‘Sonndeg’ <sup>2</sup> (LU).

Next, I want to face some differences with the numbers in both varieties:

LU – een, eent, eng; DL – eent, en, äins *for ‘one’ (in German: eins)*  
 LU – zwee, zwou; DL – zwee, zwäi, zwou, zwu *for ‘two’ (in German: zwei)*  
 LU – dräi; DL – dräi *for ‘three’ (in German: drei)*  
 LU – véier; DL – véier *for ‘four’ (in German: vier)*  
 LU – fënnef; DL – fënnef *for ‘five’ (in German: fünf)*  
 LU – sechs; DL – sechs, siechs *for ‘six’ (in German: sechs)*  
 LU – siwen; DL – siwwen<sup>3</sup> *for ‘seven’ (in German: sieben)*  
 LU – aacht; DL – uecht, ocht *for ‘eight’ (in German: acht)*  
 LU – néng; DL – näin, ning, nein *for ‘nine’ (in German: neun)*  
 LU – zeng; DL – zéin, zenn *for ‘ten’ (in German: zehn)*  
 LU – eleef; DL – eleef, ölf<sup>4</sup> *for ‘eleven’ (in German: elf)*  
 LU – zwielef; DL – zwelef *for ‘twelve’ (in German: zwölf)*  
 LU – dräizeng; DL – dräizenn *for ‘thirteen’ (in German: dreizehn)*  
 ...  
 LU – uechtzeng; DL – uechzenn<sup>5</sup> *for ‘eighteen’ (in German: achtzehn)*  
 ...  
 LU – honnert; DL – hunnert<sup>6</sup> *for ‘hundred’ (in German: hundert)*

One can clearly see that the dialects of the Luxembourgish language in Germany are really closer to Luxembourgish than to German. Another interesting thing is that there is a distinction between the words morning and tomorrow in both, LU and DL, while in German there is only one word which is ‘morgen’. While ‘moien’ is used for ‘morning’, ‘muer’ is used for ‘tomorrow’<sup>7</sup>. Instead of muer, one can sometimes hear “muren”. In many words, where Standard Luxembourgish has an ‘i’, there can be found an ‘ü’ in DL. In Wittlich (LU: Wittlëch, DL: Wittlüschen), the sentence ‘dat lor gütt et doch net’ is used instead of Standard Luxembourgish ‘dat do gött et dach net’, meaning ‘that can’t be true’. In Trier (LU/ DL: Tréier), one can often hear ‘un su’ instead of ‘an esou’ (LU) for ‘and so’ and ‘maren’ instead of ‘man’ for ‘to do’. Thus, we say ‘mir maaren’ (DL) instead of ‘mir maan’ (LU), meaning ‘we do ...’. In Trier, we also have another expression to show gratitude as we say ‘ville Merci’ instead of ‘Merci villmols’ which is used in Standard language for ‘thank you very much’. However, one can see once again how close the dialects on the German border side are to those in Luxembourg<sup>8</sup>. In Wittlich and surrounding, one can hear “gäff” (DL)<sup>9</sup> instead of “gëff” (LU) for ‘give’, ‘biis’ (DL) instead of ‘béis’ (LU) for ‘angry’ and ‘nit mi’<sup>10</sup> (DL) instead of ‘nimmi’ (LU) for ‘not anymore’. Words that contain a ‘b’ in German, change to ‘w’

in almost all Luxembourgish dialects, for instance ‘Iwung’ for ‘Übung’ (exercise), ‘awer’ (just DL) for ‘aber’ (but), ‘Owend’ for ‘Abend’ (evening), and ‘iwwer’ or ‘iwer’ for ‘über’ (over), etc. The rule does not work if the ‘b’ is in the beginning or the end of a word.

Something very typical of Luxembourgish is that it sometimes has a lot of words closely related to Dutch, for instance ‘kéier’ (LU), which is pronounced ‘kehr’ in DL and has the same pronunciation in Dutch, meaning ‘times’<sup>11</sup>.

Another typical phenomena is the switch from “ë” (LU) to “u” (DL), such as in rënnerhuelen (LU) – runnerhoulen (DL) for “take down”,

ënnerwéis (LU) – unnerwéigs (DL) for “on the way”,

ënnerhaalen (LU) – unnerhaalen (DL) for “talk to someone”

drënnerloen (LU) – drunnerloen (DL) for “lying under something”.

That Luxembourgish has a lot of diversity can be seen in the word “our” or “us” (German: uns), where people in Southern Luxembourg say “eis”, those in Northern Luxembourg say “ons”<sup>12</sup>, and in Germany we say “ees” in Bitburg (DL: Béburg) and “uus” in Wittlich. I’ve even heard that there is the word ‘oos’, but I am not sure about it.

In the end I want to talk about conjugations. In Luxembourg, one says “léieren”, while in Germany one says “léiren”, meaning “to learn” (compare German: lernen). So “-éieren” becomes “-éiren”. Instead of “froen” and “soen” (LU), we say “fron” and “son” (DL), for “to ask” and “to say” (compare German: fragen, sagen)<sup>13</sup>, and instead of “liesen” (LU), we say “léisen” in Germany for “to read” (compare German: lesen).

As this article can show clearly, Luxembourgish in Luxembourg and Germany has many things in common, and we should have more discussion about it and make people aware that they do not simply speak a rude rural dialect of German, but a dialect of Luxembourgish which is worth to be preserved. Of course, one can also see its close ties to German language, as the dialects of Luxembourgish in Germany (“Eastern Luxembourgish”) are the link between the German language and Luxembourg’s Luxembourgish (“Western Luxembourgish”)<sup>14</sup>, such as the Limburgish language is the link between German and Dutch, and Dutch is the link between German and English. However, unfortunately today there are more and more German words entering into the Luxembourgish language in Germany starting to push the ‘real’ language aside<sup>15</sup>, leading to complications among Luxembourgish speakers in both countries, which did not appear in the past. Therefore, I suggest to take measures against the silent death of our language, as long as it is still not too late.

### Annotation for this English version:

The influence of Luxembourgish can be seen when one hears someone from Bitburg speaking German. In German, the respectful form for 'you' is 'Sie'. However, in Bitburg many people say 'Euch' instead, which is derived from Luxembourgish 'Iech' which means the respectful 'you', but equals the German word 'euch' in its meaning, and thus the word is transferred. When one goes through Bitburg, you might be asked "Kann ich Euch helfen?" (which would indicate an informal plural form in German) even if you are alone, because one is not referring to the plural informal, but regards it as singular formal. In proper German, one would say "Kann ich Ihnen helfen?" (May I help you?). In Luxembourgish one would say "Kënnen ech Iech hëllef?".

### Notes:

1. The difference here are the words for 'week', where in DL one can find a 'u' instead of 'o', and thus DL-speakers say 'wuch' instead of 'woch'
2. The word for sun in DL is 'de Sunn', while in LU it is 'déi Sonn', thus one again can find a 'u' instead of 'o'.
3. The difference here is the tonation. While LU probably has a longer i, the 'i' in siwwen is spoken very short, and thus it makes sense to double the 'w'.
4. The letter 'e' is seemingly often pronounced as 'ö' in the area around Daun.
5. Interestingly, one can see here that DL is more consequent as they say 'uecht' and 'uech(t)zenn', while LU has another word for a single eight than when it is paired with another number.
6. Here again, the difference lies in the 'u' (DL) which is 'o' in LU.
7. I heard, however, that in some DL dialects 'moien' represents both, morning and tomorrow, and thus there is only one word as it is in German, which is probably an influence from German language to use one word for both. That, however, does not mean that the second word is inexistent or extinct. It just shows that there is no real distinction or that the word is used in two contexts uncarefully.

8. And here we speak of the Luxembourgish language and not of German language, of course. German language dialectal influences in the area are something different once again.
9. Of course, “güff” is also used in DL, mainly in Bitburg and Daun. In the town of Wittlich “giff” is used, while the word used in the text is mainly used in the surroundings (mostly in Vulcaneifel).
10. In some villages, one can hear “net mi”.
11. Another word for ‘times’ (German: Mal) is ‘ees’, although it’s used in another context. For instance ‘Ech kucken ees’ would be ‘Ich schaue mal’ (I am going to take a look) in German. Even funnier, there is the construction ‘ees emol’ for instance ‘Ech mëssen do ees emol hëllef’ which would be ‘Ich muss dort mal helfen’ in German, meaning ‘I have to help there’. The funny thing in the sentence is that both words, ‘ees’ and ‘emol’ mean times which means that the word times is two times in this sentence building a double construction. The word ‘ees’ does not work in every construction. If one wants to say ‘See you next time’ one has to use the word ‘kéier’ instead, which would be ‘Bass eng annescht kéier’ (or: Bass en aanescht kehr (DL)) in Luxembourgish and ‘Bis ein anderes Mal’ in German.
12. compare with Dutch “ons”.
13. so ‘-en’ changes to ‘-n’ when preceded by an ‘o’.
14. So our dialects in Germany are the phase between German and ‘proper’ Luxembourgish.
15. Although Luxembourgish is the youngest Germanic language that just split off German language about one hundred years ago.

### Literature:

Schmitz, Timo: The Luxembourgish Language and Its missing preservation in Germany, self-published online article, 10 May 2015,

<https://schmitztimo.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/the-luxembourgish-language-in-germany.pdf>

This article is completely based on my article “Ënnerschider zwëschen Lëtzebuergesch an Lëtzebuerg un an Däitschland”, published on 23 March 2016

Download: <https://schmitztimolu.files.wordpress.com/2016/03/c3abnnerschider-zwc3abschen-lc3abtzebuergesch.pdf> (in Luxembourgish)

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