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Multilingualism: Driver of Competitiveness?

Forward

This document addresses the issue of multilingualism in Luxembourg, specifically in the business world, and examines its role in making Luxembourg a competitive player in international economics.

It focuses on two separate, yet intricately linked, components of a long-term project to determine the effect of multilingualism on business competition in Luxembourg, initiated by Mr Artur Sosna of Berlitz Luxembourg and undertaken in collaboration with Quest Market Research and Luxembourg for Business.

Firstly, this document presents the results of an online survey carried out in May 2011 on multilingualism within business; secondly, it reports on a symposium held in September 2011 entitled "Multilingualism: Driver of competitiveness?"

The document was compiled by two students at the University of Luxembourg who are studying in this specific domain.

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1. Introduction

The main topic of this brochure **“Multilingualism: driver of competitiveness?”** concerns a project that has been carried out by Berlitz Luxembourg, Quest Market Research and Luxembourg for Business. The project is based on an online survey made in May 2011 throughout the business community of Luxembourg, where 265 business leaders gave their opinion about multilingualism within business and also more generally about the multilingual environment in Luxembourg.

The results of the study were then presented at a symposium held at the Chamber of Commerce of Luxembourg on 27 September 2011; this event involved a number of guest speakers and panelists coming from different business backgrounds who gave their opinion about the topic.

This brochure aims to merge the results of the survey with the discussion and analysis which took place during the symposium.

Firstly, a short introduction is presented about the widely-discussed term of multilingualism followed by detailed results of Quest’s market research online survey. These are followed by a description of what transpired during the symposium, with the conclusion of the brochure including reflections about the term multilingualism with its effects on other real-life situations in Luxembourg, such as in the educational field.

2. Multilingualism in Luxembourg: Setting

Luxembourg is a multilingual and multicultural country with three official languages – Luxembourgish, German and French. Luxembourg has a high percentage of foreigners and commuters – 43% of the resident population is not of Luxembourg nationality, and around 160,000 cross-border workers commute into the country every day; this accounts for half of the working population in Luxembourg. With such a diverse international workforce, there are many more than just the three languages spoken in the country on a daily basis.

There are other countries too, such as Switzerland and Belgium, which are theoretically just as multilingual as Luxembourg; however, in practice, the language use stays divided in separate areas with linguistic communities remaining isolated. Therefore, there is not much contact between them.

In Luxembourg, by contrast, the different languages are very much inter-related and mixed. The people living in Luxembourg get quickly used to the fact that in the same place at the same time, different languages are spoken. This multilingual environment makes Luxembourg a very interesting and varied country – both on the level of everyday life as well as on the level of business and business communication.

In such a multilingual country as Luxembourg, where different languages and cultures come together, there is the need for having people with not just good language skills, but above all with a good intercultural awareness. As addressed in the symposium, it is not simply enough to train people in foreign languages, but there is the need for training people in intercultural competencies as well.

What is the point of having people who speak the same languages, if cultural understanding is missing? Therefore, multilingualism is a big challenge for a country, but if it works the way it works in Luxembourg, it can be a massive and rich advantage.

However, there are many skeptics concerning the benefits of multilingualism. Multilingualism and what is behind this term seems to scare many people. It is a term which is currently used and discussed a lot, also within the Luxembourg school context, where it is often seen as “a problem”.

“Die ungeordnete Sprachsituation an luxemburgischen Schulen ist seit langem Quelle vieler Probleme.”
 (“The orderless language situation in Luxembourgish schools has been a source of multiple problems for a long time.”)

(www.voxx.lu)

The word “problem” is also often mentioned in work environments. As Guy Harles, Chairman of the Chamber of Lawyers claims:

“Diese bunte Mischung ist eine Bereicherung, kann jedoch auch zu Problemen führen [...] im multikulturellen Gemisch der Anwälte führen unterschiedliche Traditionen und Ausbildungen zu Problemen (“This mix is an enrichment which, however, can also lead to problems [...] within the multicultural mix of lawyers, different traditions and education backgrounds lead to problems”)

(www.wort.lu)

As mentioned before, it is indeed a challenge to live and function in this multilingual and multicultural environment for both the children who go to Luxembourg schools and also for the people working in Luxembourg. However, should multilingualism be considered a problem, or rather a challenge? By the time they leave school, Luxembourg children speak on average four languages, above the average across the EU.

In order to make this multicultural environment function, much effort, energy and also a good intercultural understanding is required.

Expanding the context and looking, as well, outside Luxembourg, it is extremely interesting to see how the individual multilingualism (the languages an individual speaks) is promoted at the EU level. At the same time, people fear societal multilingualism (the languages which are spoken in a country) within the individual EU member states, often calling it a “problem”:

On the one hand, the European countries spend so much time and money to develop multilingualism, and on the other hand, [they] neglect the plurilingual resources of the migrants in their midst.

(Krumm, 2007: 669)

Die Vielsprachigkeit bringt eine Menge von sozialen und pädagogischen Problemen [...] die der Diskussion und Planung bedürfen.

(Multilingualism involves a lot of social and pedagogical problems [...] which are in need of discussion and planning.)

(Luxemburger Wort, 2007, 14)

Finally, this brochure illustrates how multilingualism is indeed a huge advantage for Luxembourg, as the 265 participants of the survey claim and explain.

3. Business in Luxembourg: “Multilingualism: driver of competitiveness?”

3.1 Socio-professional make-up of survey respondents

The opinion of 265 business leaders in Luxembourg concerning the use of multilingualism within their businesses is illustrated through the results of an online survey carried out during May 2011. As the following graphic shows, leaders from different areas have been chosen for this survey.

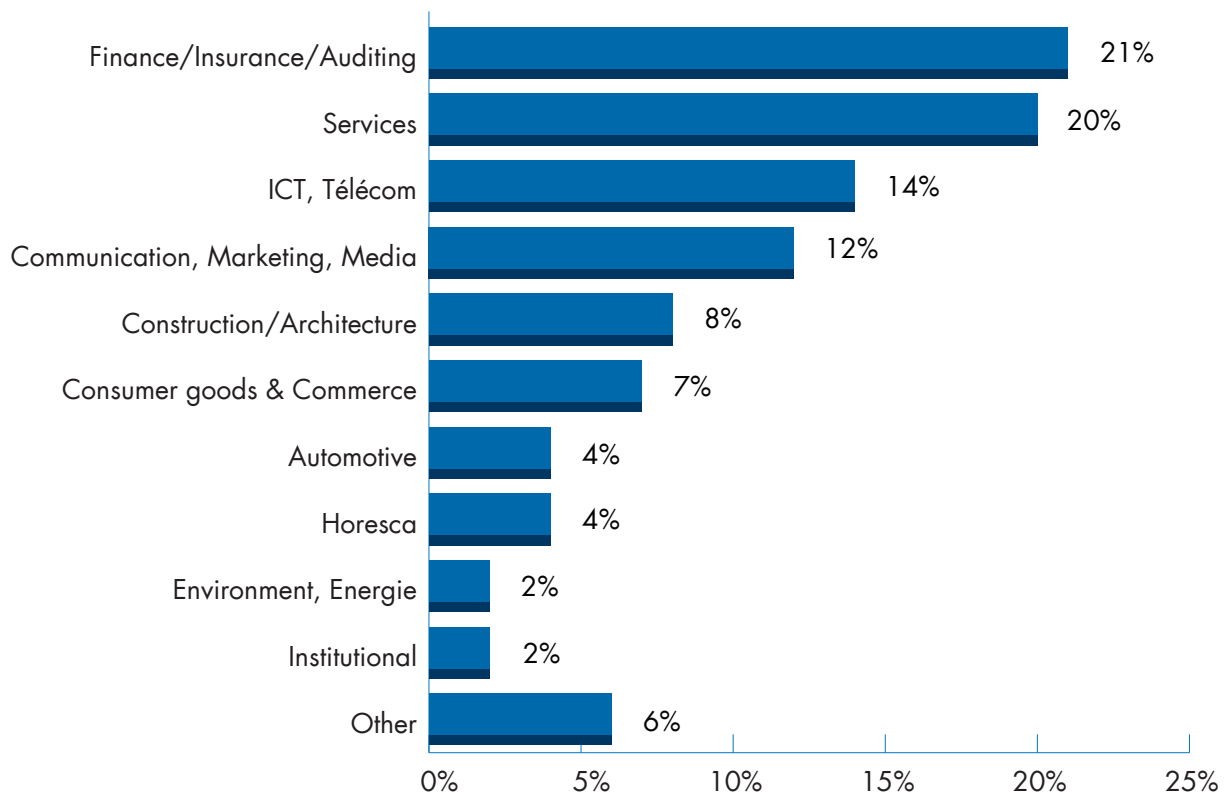


Table 1: Respondents' occupational fields

A high percentage of the companies are operating on a stand-alone basis, many of them are a subsidiary of a headquarters based outside Luxembourg and others are either global or regional headquarters. Most of the participants' positions within the company is either as a CEO, CFO, COO, Head of Communication/Marketing, Responsible for Media or HR Director.

Through the illustration of the results of the survey we can see how much multilingualism is actually perceived as a driver and source of competitiveness within a business, as well as its perceived

possible challenges and difficulties within a multilingual work environment. This section will use graphics and analysis to demonstrate these results more fully.

The survey begins with some general questions about the main language(s) used in companies operating in Luxembourg and their internal linguistic development during the years 2006-2011. Furthermore, the advantages and disadvantages of having a multilingual and multicultural working environment are addressed, as are the impact these companies have on other markets and the future development of multilingualism in general.

3.2 Main language used within the company

As the graphic shows, the main language used in most of the involved companies in Luxembourg is French (55%), followed by Luxembourgish (20%). Even though German is one of the three official languages of Luxembourg, it is now used less than English.

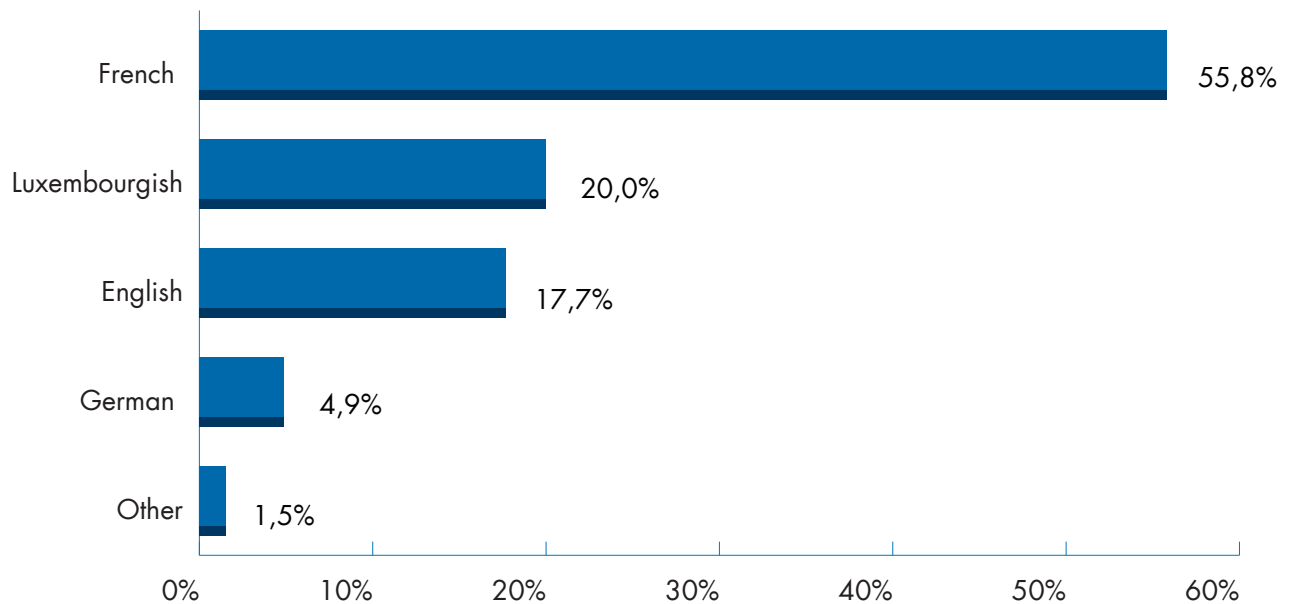


Table 2: The main language used in company

The main reasons for the choice of language in the workplace are first and foremost linked to the highest common denominator among the employees or to the official language of the company. Other reasons for the choice are those that are linked to the market in which the company operates, or simply that one language has become the most used over a period of time with or without any specific reason behind it. For instance, according to some respondents, French might be chosen as the main language used within a company because three times as many cross-border workers come from French-speaking Belgium and France as compared to those who come from German-speaking regions.

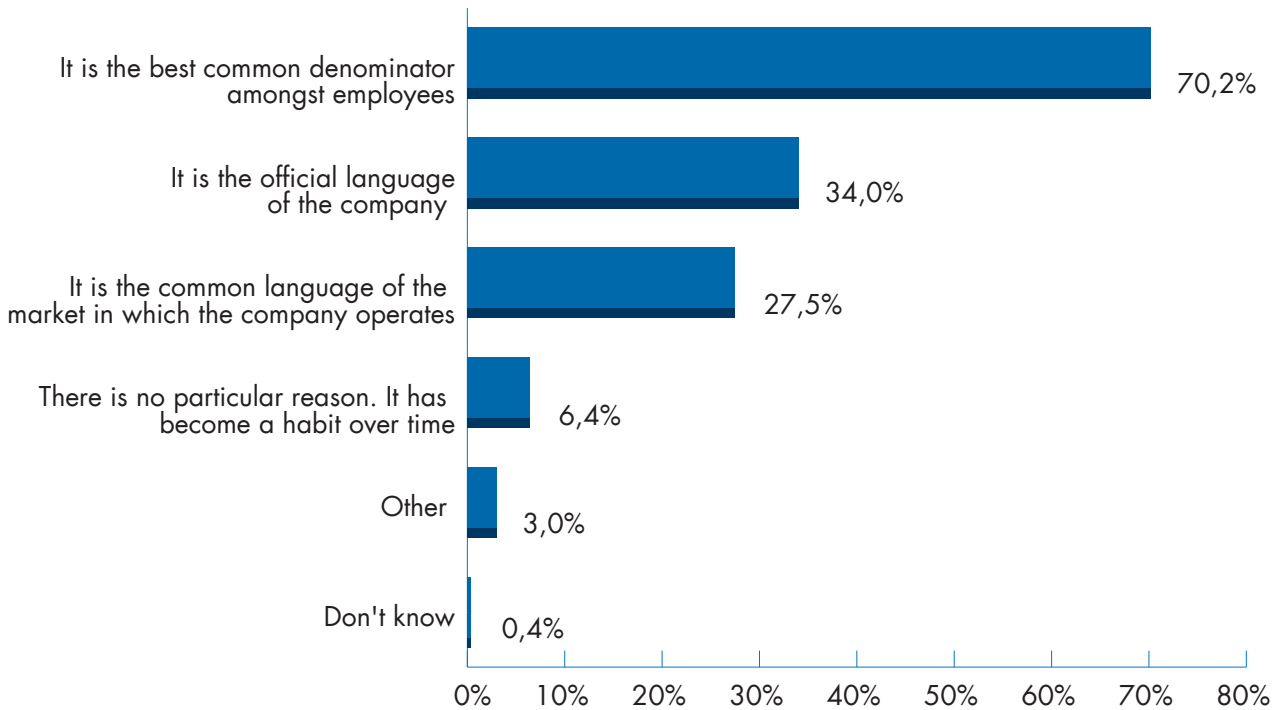


Table 3: Main criteria for language choice within company

Even though French seems to be the dominant language within companies in Luxembourg, the weight of other languages used within the same companies, particularly English, is considerable. When the business leaders were asked about the other languages used in their company, German, English and Luxembourgish all had a relatively high percentage.

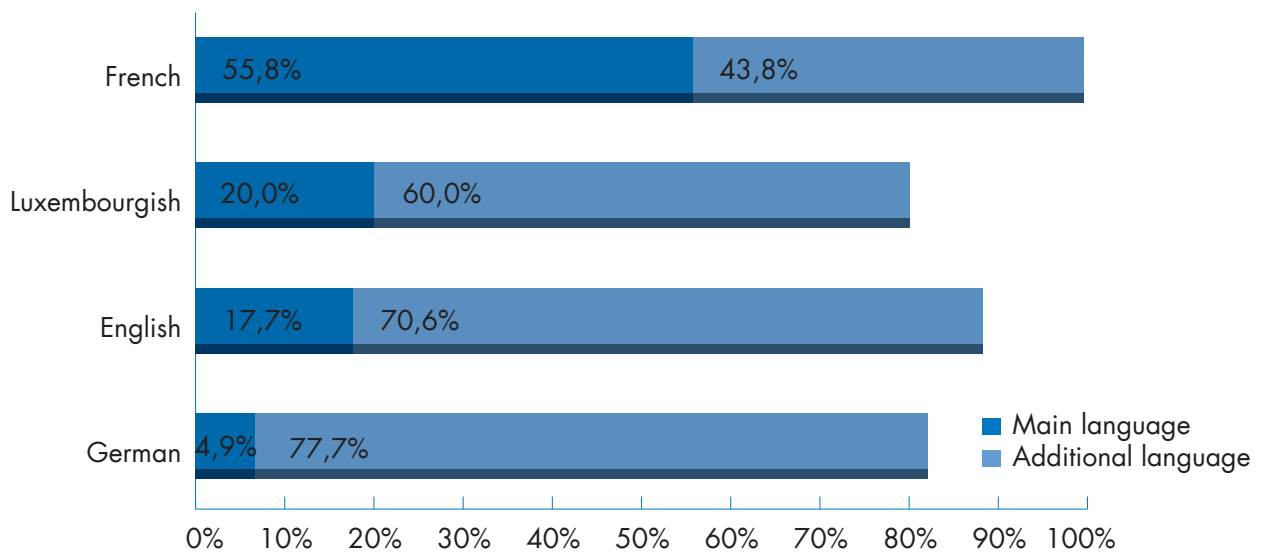


Table 4: Comparison of use between the main language and others within the company

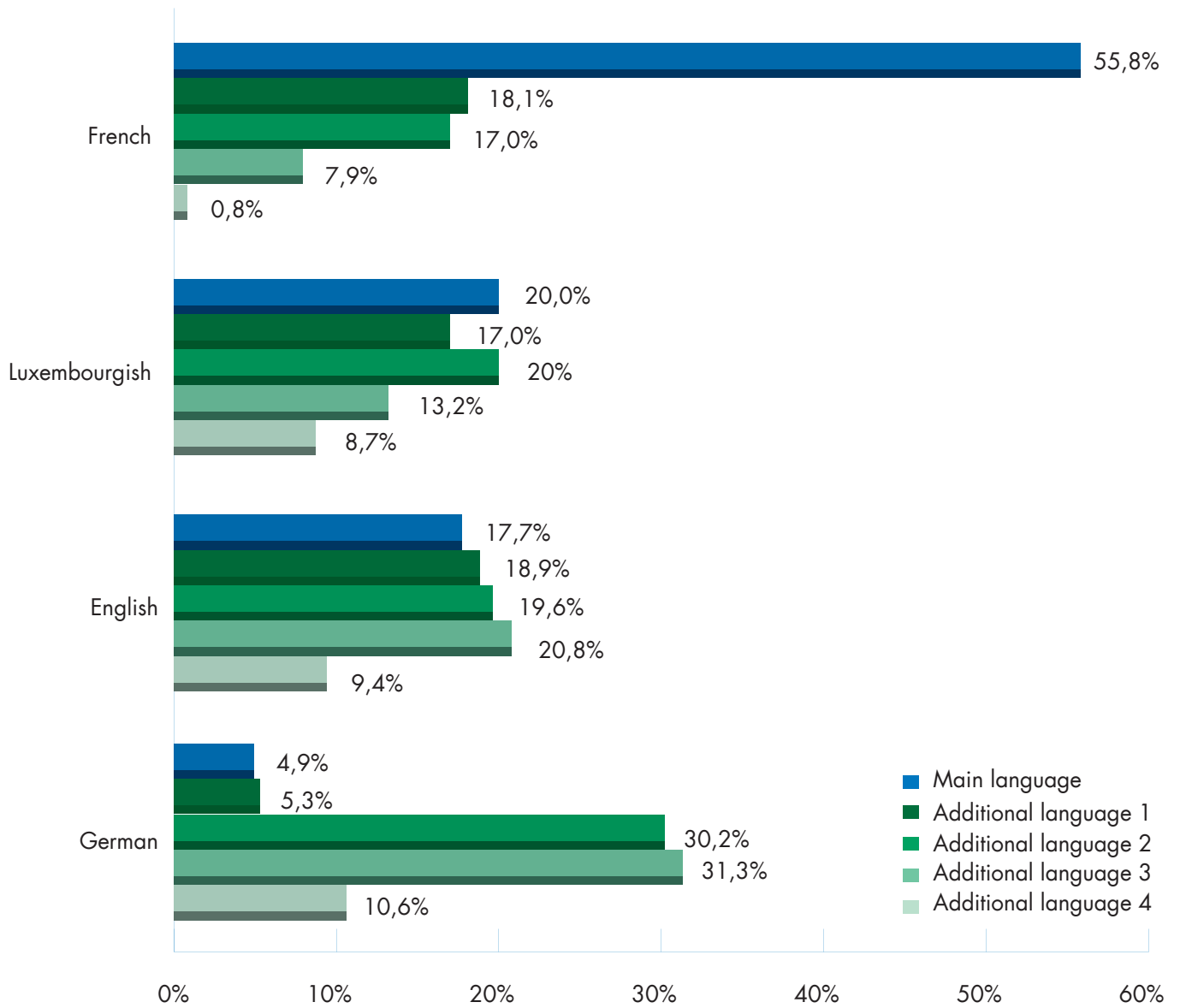


Table 5: Languages used in the company

3.3 Linguistic development in the years 2006-2011

A further issue of the survey was linguistic development during the past 5 years. The results show that 52% of the respondents claim that there was no linguistic change within their company during the past 5 years.

However, 45% of respondents indicated that there was a growth in language use, and only 2% believe that nowadays fewer languages are used in daily working activities.

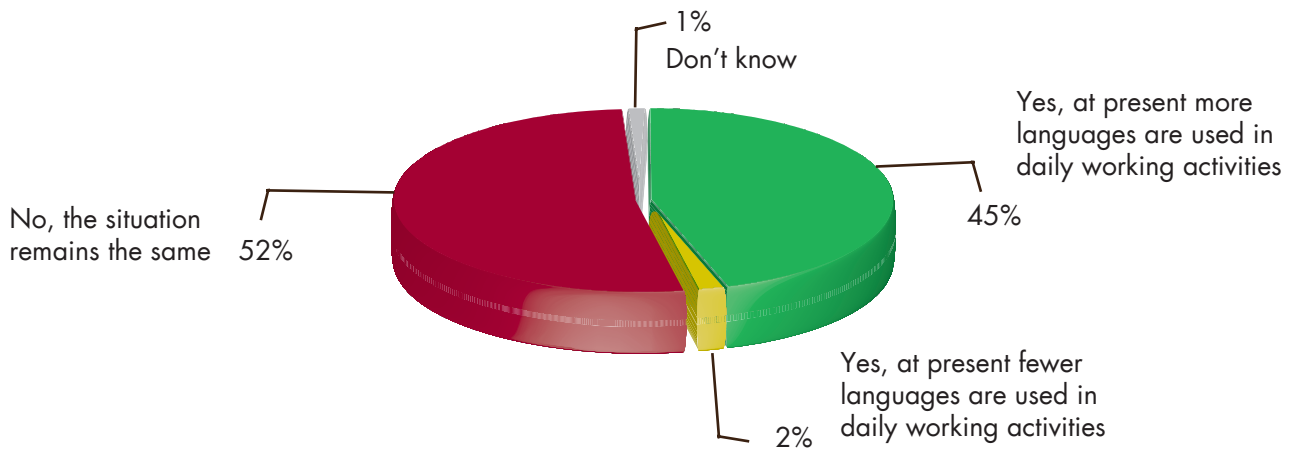


Table 6: Change in company's linguistic situation over previous 5 years

According to the majority of respondents, this change is mainly due to a natural evolution. However, a relatively high percentage of them also maintain that this change is linked to the implementation of a new recruitment policy where specific languages were targeted. 15% of them also attribute the change to the increased proportion of staff members following attending language courses.

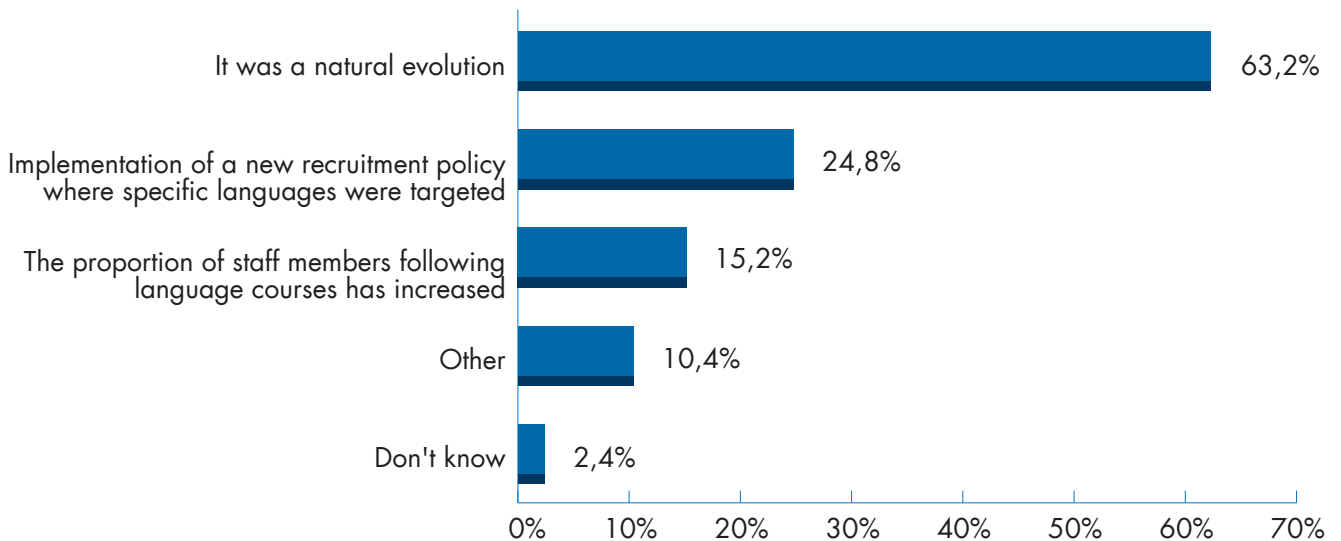


Table 7: The main reason for linguistic change within company

3.4 Advantages of a multilingual environment within a company

Believing that multilingualism is one of the main drivers and sources of competitiveness of a business, the survey was mainly based on questions related to the advantages of the multilingual environment at work.

As the graphic below shows, language skills are among the primary skills business leaders require or see as essential when hiring a new candidate.

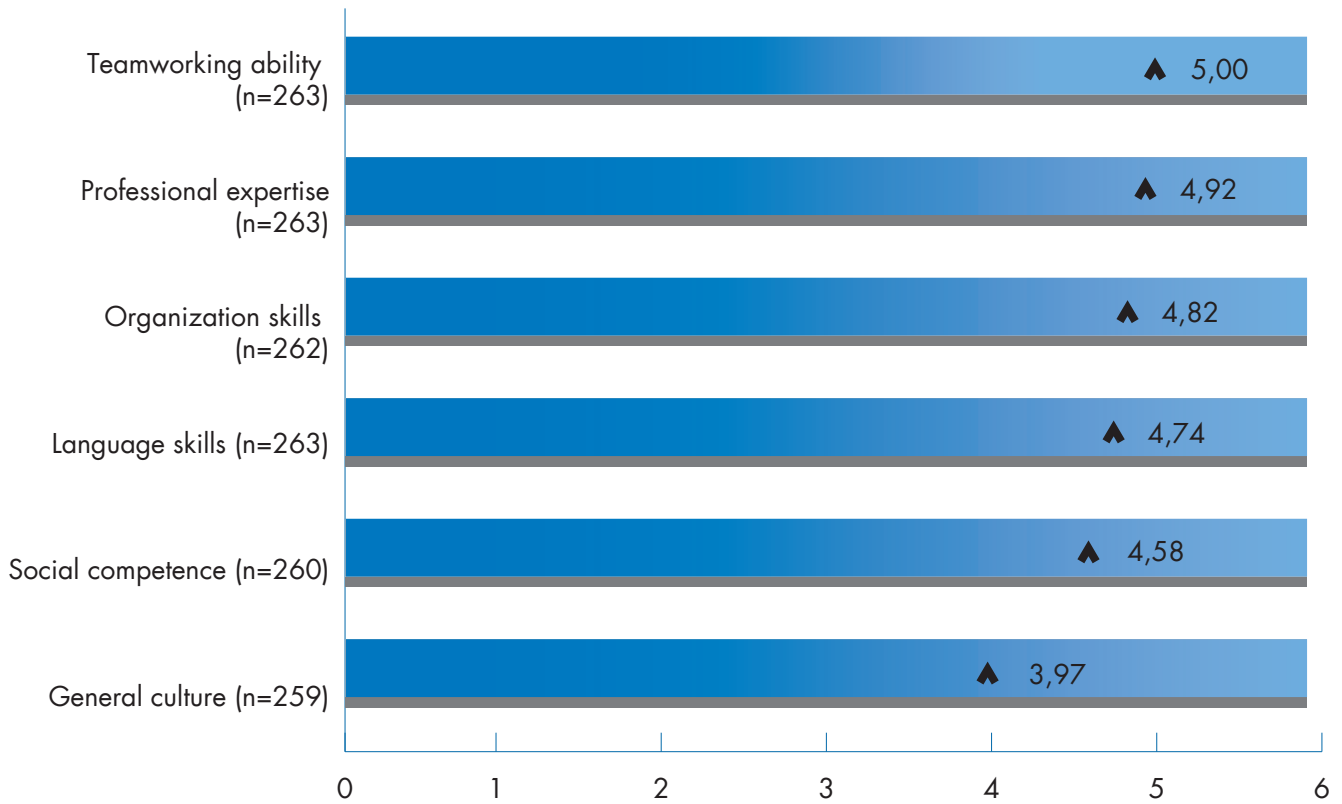


Table 8: Importance attributed to general skills when hiring an employee (rated on a scale from 1 to 6, with 6 being the most important)

Also, the business leaders are mostly satisfied with the language proficiency of their employees. According to 41% of the respondents, the overall language proficiency of the workforce in Luxembourg has improved during the past 5 years. For 37% of them it has stayed the same and only 13% among them believe that language proficiency has worsened.

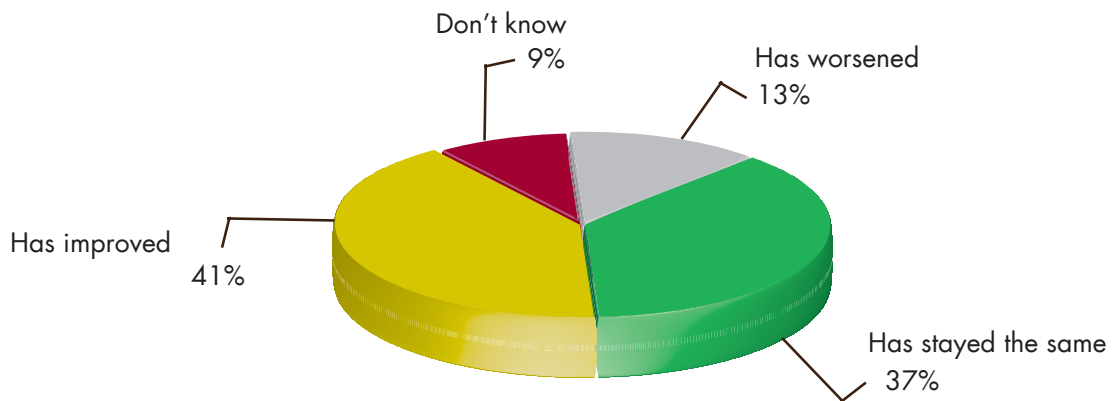


Table 9: Change in language proficiency of workforce over previous 5 years

Luxembourg is a multilingual and multicultural country, not only because of its three official languages, but above all because of the high percentage of non-nationals resident in the country and also because of cross-border workers. Therefore, it is important to also analyse whether there is a difference between these three above-mentioned categories when talking about language proficiency. By asking business leaders to evaluate the language skills of their employees, Luxembourgish nationals seem to have the best language skills, followed by the bob-nationals resident in Luxembourg. Cross-border workers are shown to have a lower language proficiency compared with the other two categories.

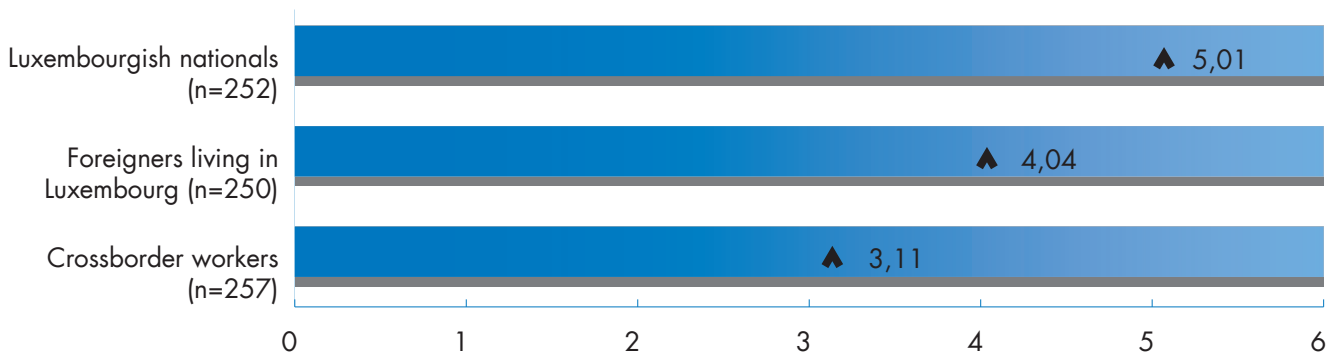


Table 10: Language skills of different nationals (rated on a scale from 1 to 6, with 6 being the most proficient)

What does “language proficiency” actually mean? There are several items which constitute “language proficiency”, such as “listening proficiency”, “speaking proficiency”, “reading proficiency” and also “writing proficiency”. According to the respondents, the most important are “listening proficiency” and “speaking proficiency” followed by “reading proficiency”. “Writing proficiency”, instead, is seen as less important compared to the other three. This result underlines the importance of oral communication within a multilingual business, where both speaking and listening skills are required more.

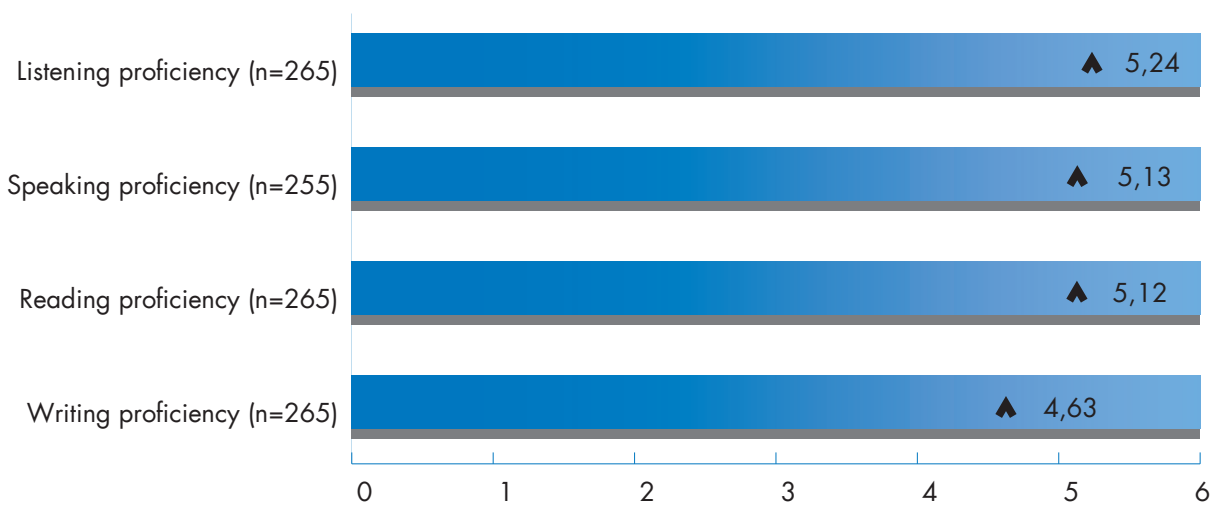


Table 11: Importance of foreign language proficiency in field of work (rated on a scale from 1 to 6, with 6 being the most important)

So far, the graphics have looked at and analysed the main languages, such as French, Luxembourgish, English and German, used in Luxembourgish companies. However, there are more languages involved within this multilingual environment.

A further question within the survey addresses the possible challenges to find candidates with further languages skills, such as Chinese, Russian, etc. However, the result shows that 58% percent of the interviewees do not have any problems recruiting people with these language skills and only 19% of them claim that it is indeed difficult to recruit such candidates. Another 23% of them do not know. These results show once more that there is a high language proficiency rate at the national level in Luxembourg.

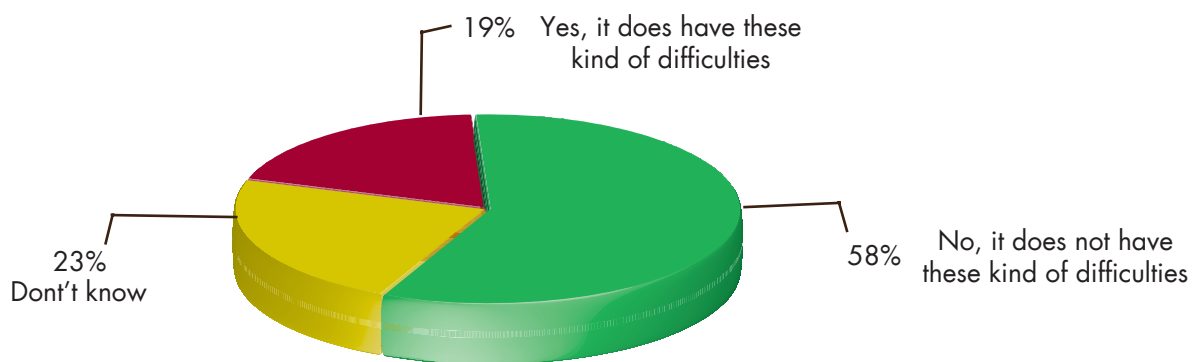


Table 12: Occurrence of problems recruiting candidates with special language skills

The graphic below gives further details about what specific languages are seen as problematic in which to recruit people.

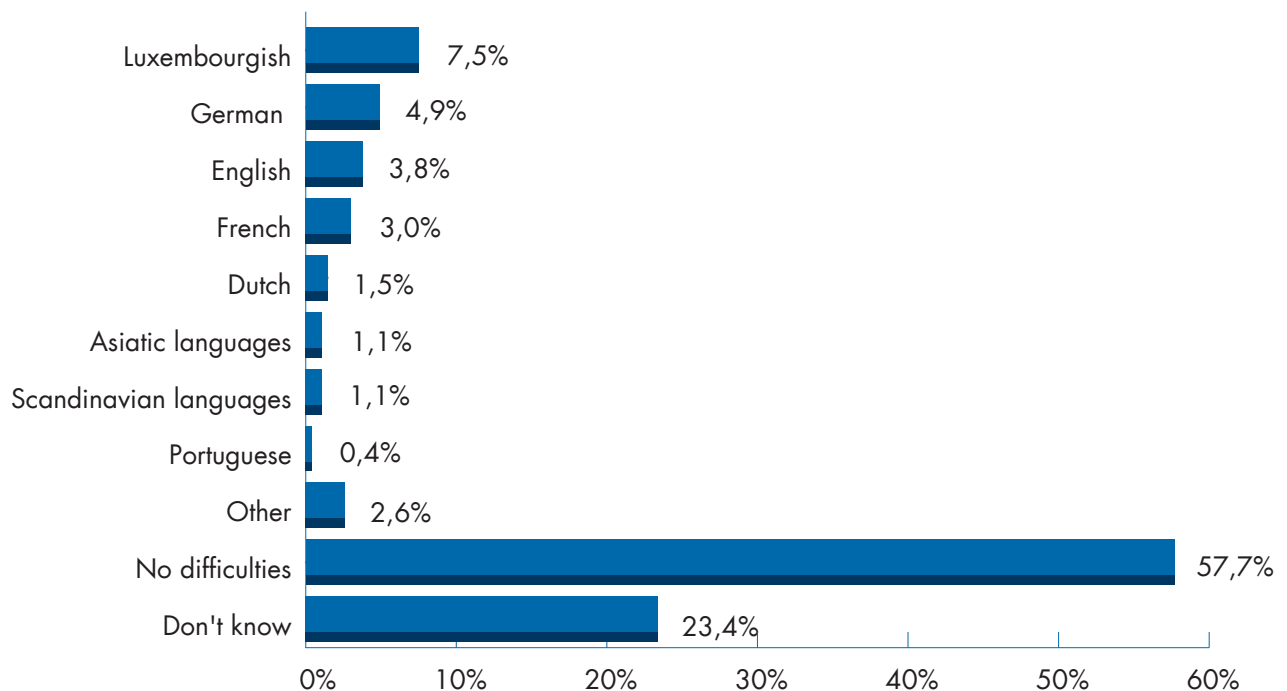


Table 13: Details of occurrence of problems recruiting candidates with special language skills

Until now, advantages on the level of language proficiency have been presented. However, offering such a multilingual and multicultural environment brings also many advantages on a broader, international level. In response to the question on whether the fact that Luxembourg offers a multilingual and multicultural environment makes it easier for a company to attract highly-skilled international workers, 62% were positive, whereas only 25% were negative and 13% of respondents were not sure.

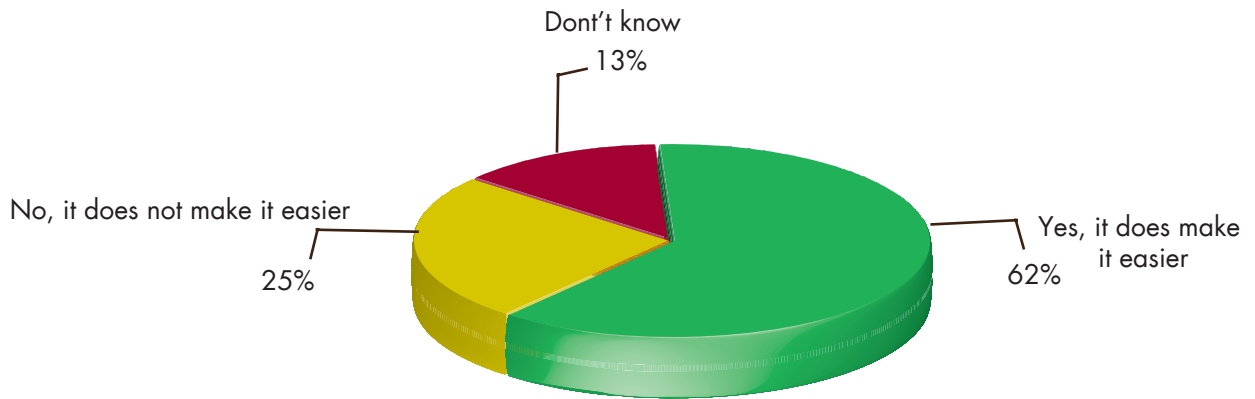


Table 14: Ease of attracting highly skilled international workers due to Luxembourg’s multilingual and multicultural environment

Moreover, a big percentage of the respondents agreed that having employees who come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds is an Important competitive advantage and makes client relationship management easier. Also, it can generate new business opportunities outside and inside Luxembourg and is an Indicator of innovation within a company.

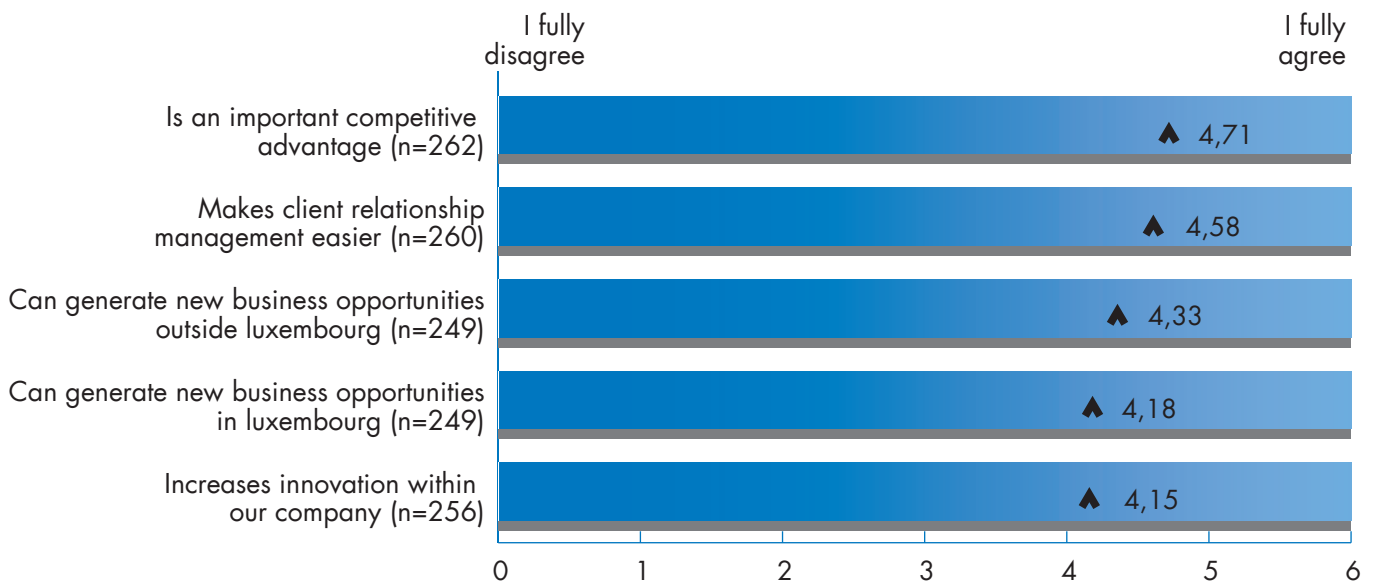


Table 15: Agreeability of having employees who come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (rated on a scale from 1 to 6, with 6 being in full agreement)

3.5 Disadvantages of multilingualism within a company

The results of the survey have clearly shown that multilingualism is a source and driver for competitiveness. It opens new doors and facilitates communication. Even when the participants were asked to point out the main disadvantages of having multilingual staff within a company, 30% of them replied that there were “none”. That means that for these participants, multilingualism only has advantages for their company. However, there are certain aspects of multilingualism which are considered as disadvantages for a company. Recognizing and pointing out these disadvantages is, nonetheless, a good way of improving and possibly changing certain aspects in the future.

Therefore, the main disadvantages the survey shows about the issue of multilingualism will be illustrated below. The following graphic displays a list of the main disadvantages which we further analyze in this chapter.

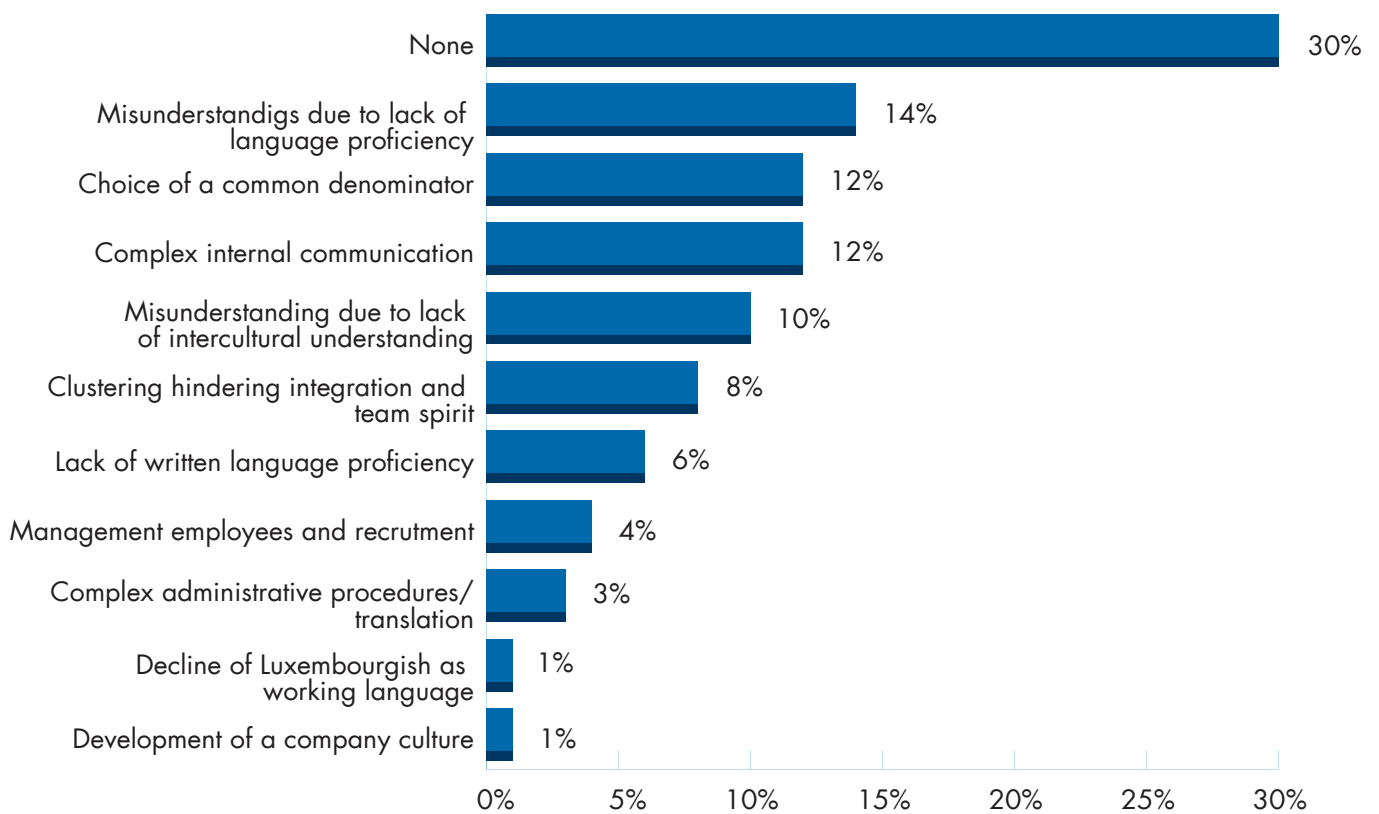


Table 16: The main disadvantage of having multilingual staff in the company

A common language to deal with complex internal communication

One of the biggest disadvantages is the risk of misunderstanding due to a lack of language proficiency. However, misunderstandings do not seem to be linked to a bare lack of language proficiency but also to a lack of intercultural understanding. One of the participants of the online-based survey

stated that: “I don’t think it is multilingualism that causes a problem, it is rather the multiculturalism and the intercultural understanding.”

This lack of intercultural understanding leads to tensions and interpersonal problems. Some other respondents wrote:

“The management of different cultures regarding working methods and dealing with professional relationships can cause tension among the employees or with the upper management.”

“Potential communication failures and cultural background differences lead to relational difficulties, misunderstandings and/or longer explanations.”

“... the cultural diversity - more than language diversity - is a challenge”

Misunderstandings are often linked to misinterpretations and lack of understanding. Sometimes, even when people speak the same language and come from the same culture, misunderstandings occur. It is even more probable for them to happen when the people are from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. As one of the participants mentioned: “Even when people speak the same language, it can lead to interpretation problems.”

A further disadvantage which is mentioned is the difficulty to choose a common language. One of the participants points out:

“We have Portuguese employees that speak Portuguese and a bit of French, French employees speaking only French and a little German, Germans speaking German and English, a Brazilian lady speaking only Portuguese and Luxembourgers to translate.”

Companies are often forced to choose English as a means of communication because it is the only common denominator among the employees. However, some participants dislike the use of English, since it is not an official language of Luxembourg.

Some others mention that the common denominator is sometimes determined by the cross-border workers which seem to be less willing and less interested in learning a new language. The use of a common (linguistic) denominator is not only a question of language proficiency but also a question of disparities in terms of competencies. Finally, some participants of the survey also mentioned the issue of extra energy required to ensure a good transmission of information.

Clustering as one of the effects of multilingualism

Another disadvantage raised is the issue of “clustering”. Having a multilingual environment sometimes leads to involuntary clustering of people and therefore makes team spirit and integration challenging. As a consequence, some people can feel excluded and the internal atmosphere can be affected. As two participants mention:

“People may identify themselves more with people using the same language. This creates micro-group atmosphere. Can be negative.”

“Using languages that others don’t understand may lead to a feeling of being held out of discussions.”

Multilingualism and the quality issue quality of oral and written linguistic expression

As the survey shows, having a multilingual staff within a company seems to have an impact on the quality of oral and written linguistic expression. One of the participants even claims that:

“Mastering several languages orally means often a loss of proficiency of the work written in the mother tongue.”

The issue of knowing several languages but none of them at a high level is also mentioned by another participant who says that:

“Since little details can be of great importance (for example in contracts), some work can only be correctly done by those for whom it is their native language. Luxembourg nationals often cannot formulate things with 100% precision although they do have a better general knowledge of languages.”

Multilingualism: trampoline or obstacle?

As some of the participants of the online survey pointed out, it is sometimes impossible to find a candidate who has both high linguistic proficiency in several languages and the competencies in the field in which he/she is working. Therefore, it sometimes happens that certain candidates with an interesting profile are rejected because of a low linguistic proficiency. The level of foreign language proficiency also affects career prospects, as some respondents mentioned:

“Language can be used as a weapon. If the linguistic skills of employees differentiate too much, the mother tongue employee can overrule the employee who is using his/her third or fourth or more language to communicate with this mono-lingual employee.”

However, having a high linguistic proficiency is for sure a good pre-condition for being recruited. On the other hand, some candidates with a strong grasp of linguistic and cultural differences often do not have the in-depth technical skills necessary for the specific role; in this case, multilingualism can be viewed as an obstacle, albeit indirectly.

Other disadvantages of multilingualism

Other issues mentioned by respondents concern administrative processes or translation, the risk of losing Luxembourgish as one of the languages used within companies and the difficulty to develop a common company culture due to the multilingual environment.

3.6 The multilingual environment of Luxembourg: a key asset in attracting new businesses

Going deeper into the question of competitiveness and attractiveness of multilingualism in Luxembourg, 87% of the participants concur that “the multilingualism of the workforce and population is a key asset in attracting new businesses to Luxembourg”. Therefore, we can underline once more that multilingualism is seen as positive and one of the main drivers of competitiveness. Apart from multilingualism, there are further aspects, such as the favorable tax environment and ICT infrastructure, connectivity to markets, logistic facilities, proximity to national political decision-makers and also proximity to financial and European institutions, all of which make Luxembourg extremely attractive for companies.

Moreover, there is a common agreement on the fact that the offer of qualified and multilingual staff does not only make Luxembourg attractive for the establishment of companies, but also enables the offices to cover foreign markets in Europe as well as outside Europe, strengthens the position of the Luxembourgish market and increases the economic development of the company.

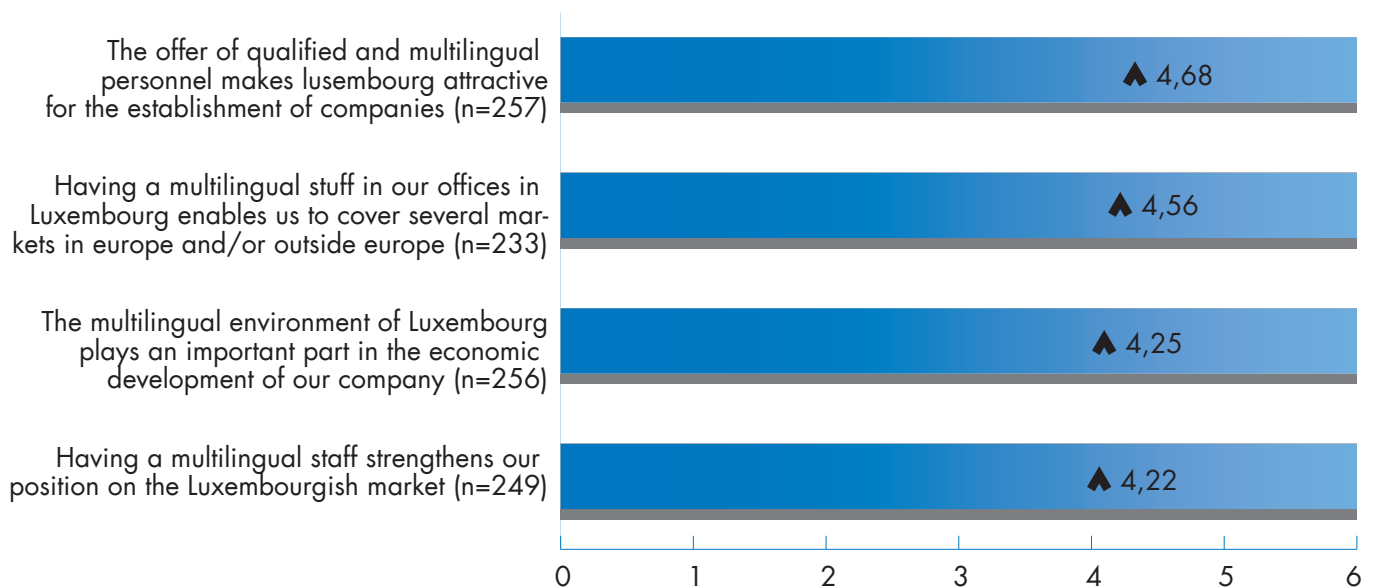


Table 17: Agreeability of statements
(rated on a scale from 1 to 6, with 6 being the most agreeable)

3.7 Future developments of multilingualism

So far the survey only addressed the current situation of multilingualism in Luxembourg and its development during the past few years. However, the participants were also asked for their opinion about the future development of multilingualism in Luxembourg. There is a common belief that multilingualism will play an important role when talking about the economic attractiveness in development and competitiveness of companies in Luxembourg.

4. The Symposium: “Multilingualism: Driver of competitiveness?”

4.1 Symposium Setting

The symposium was held at the Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce on 27 September 2011. It was organised by Berlitz Luxembourg, together with its project partners - Quest Market Research, Luxembourg for Business, the Chamber of Commerce Luxembourg - and its supporter, the American Chamber of Commerce in Luxembourg. The event attracted a total of 240 participants and comprised an open forum discussion with invited guest speakers who were selected due to their lives and work being a perfect example of living multilingualism.

Keynote addresses were given by Mr Sosna, Mr Kissen and Mr Gramegna and the other guests formed a panel for discussion. All invited guests are presented below along with introductions to their personal and corporate backgrounds to enable the reader gain a thorough understanding of each.

4.2 Opening of the Symposium: Mr Artur Sosna, Berlitz

Mr. Artur Sosna, Director of Berlitz Language and Business Training in Luxembourg, was the initiator of the long-term project to determine the effect of multilingualism on business competition in Luxembourg. Berlitz worked together with the market research company, Quest Market Research, to conduct an extensive poll with Luxembourg companies’ top managers. The poll covered multiple aspects of multilingualism in the workplace and concerning competition, the results of which were then presented at the symposium: Multilingualism: Driver of competitiveness?

Contribution

Mr. Sosna opened the symposium with introductions and a humorous video clip taken from a British sketch television show. The clip showed the demand for proficient knowledge and use of multilingual skills in today’s global business world. In turn, it also portrayed how multilingualism is integral to the competitiveness of a business and can either be beneficial or detrimental to the success of a company depending on its use.

Mr. Sosna continued by explaining how Luxembourg is unique in its extensive multilingual and multicultural environment. He stated that it would take, on average, 50 - 100 years for other, more monolingual countries to arrive at the point at which Luxembourg is today.



The Chamber of Commerce Luxembourg

Personal Background



Artur Sosna was born and grew up in Poland (1974-1992). At the age of 18 he migrated alone to Germany where he learned German, finished his secondary school and went to the University of Passau where he successfully finished the Master degree in Economic and Cultural Studies with a focus on Latin America and Spain.

His economic and cultural studies as well as his passion for languages led him to visiting over 60 countries around the world and to learning five different languages.

Since moving to Luxembourg in 2007, he considers himself as a true multinational. He holds both Polish and German passports (and is waiting impatiently for having the opportunity of getting his Luxembourgish nationality). He also fluently speaks: English, German, Polish, French, and Spanish and speaks Luxembourgish quite well. He also has a good basic knowledge of Russian and Italian.

Corporate Background

Artur has been working for Berlitz, a worldwide operating and oldest language school, for almost 10 years and has been surrounded by over 20 nationalities and around 15 languages in his place

of work in the city center of Luxembourg. He leads Berlitz Luxembourg with a clear vision of living the diversity of nationalities and cultures. He loves the extremely mixed team of Berlitz Luxembourg.

4.3 Mr. Carlo Kissen – CEO, Quest Market Research

Personal & Corporate Background



Born in 1967 a Luxembourg citizen, Carlo Kissen studied corporate communication in Brussels. After a career in the marketing and European chemical industry, he founded «Quest market research» with partners in 2002.

He regularly publishes pro bono surveys and articles in the Luxembourg professional press and moderates workshops for different work groups of national interests and management groups of corporations.

He speaks fluently four languages and teaches basic principles of marketing at the «Luxembourg School For Commerce» at the chamber of Commerce.

Contribution

Mr. Carlo Kissen, CEO at Quest, continued the direction of the symposium by announcing the results of the market research poll concerning multilingualism as a driver of competitiveness in Luxembourg businesses. Of the 265 businesses that responded, he said that the poll found only 2 companies which only used one language in their workplace.

The poll also found that language competence was welcomed and one of the most important criteria when hiring a new employee – even above social competence. This gives an edge to Luxembourg nationals during the hiring process, followed by non-national residents and then cross-border residents. Mr. Kissen then went on to explain the poll's perceived advantages and disadvantages of multilingual use in Luxembourg business. Not only do companies find multilingual skills to be a critical asset for their company and employees to have, but they believe that it also helps to expand outside of Luxembourg and in turn to attract foreign companies to conduct business in Luxembourg. As for disadvantages, he said that some respondents saw some disadvantages manifesting themselves mostly owing to misunderstandings that can occur through being multilingual.

4.4 Mr. Pierre Gramegna – Director, Chamber of Commerce Luxembourg

Personal Background



Pierre Gramegna has been Managing Director of the Chamber of Commerce Luxembourg since 2003. Born on April 22, 1958, he was raised bilingually in Luxembourgish and French. In primary school he also learned German and in secondary school, Spanish, English and Latin. He studied law and economics in Paris.

During his professional career, he first worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then he moved to Paris and on to San Francisco in 1993 where he was appointed Honorary Consul for almost four years. In 1996 he moved from the USA to Japan. As Luxembourg Ambassador in Tokyo, he represented the interests of Luxembourg for several years. He got to know Japanese traditions and language and treasured them.

As Mr. Gramegna quotes: “only he who is open to the world is able to represent and deliver such a small country to the whole world.” Pierre Gramegna has always been open to the world and has tried to implement this as Managing Director of the Chamber of Commerce Luxembourg, where he welcomes delegations from, for example Russia, personally in their own language.

Corporate Background

The Chamber of Commerce Luxembourg’s most important task is to boost entrepreneurial spirit and provide assistance for the establishment, development and sustainment of companies. It also aims at establishing a favorable legal environment for economic development and increasing the economic and trade relations at regional, European and international levels. The main language in the Chamber of Commerce is French, with English, German and Luxembourgish being the other languages that are spoken there. Important documents are written in French, English and German. The Chamber’s employees are mostly Luxembourgish, but there are also Belgian, French, Portuguese, German, British, Dutch, Chinese, and Indian nationals who work there.

Contribution

Mr. Gramegna furthered the discussion on multilingualism by stating that, in such a small country as Luxembourg, it is a necessity to be multilingual – there is no other choice. Luxembourg has to be multilingual in order to be open to such things as trade, capitalism and people. It is necessary to be able to speak the language of the customers and those who invest in Luxembourg. He added that a knowledge of their languages, in turn, adds to a better understanding of their cultures as well. This understanding then leads to people and companies who integrate well with each other.

All in all, does Mr. Gramegna think that multilingualism is a driver of competitiveness? Yes, he believes one hundred percent that multilingualism is integral to competition.



Panel in mid-discussion

4.5 Panel Discussion

Mr. Jakub Adamowicz, journalist of the Luxemburger Wort and specialised in international politics and the EU, led a panel discussion in which he asked each of the panelists different questions. Beforehand, though, Mr. Adamowicz presented briefly the general topic for the panel – competitiveness – and discussed Luxembourg’s placement for competitiveness in the world forum. While other multilingual countries such as Switzerland and Singapore are considered the global leaders in competition (placed first and second, respectively, according to, Luxembourg was placed only 23rd. This shows that multilingualism is not the only factor in deciding the standing for a country’s competitiveness.

The various panelists, their backgrounds and qualifications, as well as the responses they gave during the panel discussion, are detailed in the following sections.

4.5.1 Ms. Petra Buderus: Director of HR, KPMG Luxembourg

Personal Background



Petra Buderus was born and raised in Germany where she finished her secondary education before leaving for France at 19 years of age where she studied psychology under linguistic challenges, i.e. not in her mother-tongue. After obtaining her Master in Occupational Psychology, she started her career in social work, specifically the integration or reintegration of low-skilled workers in the labour market. Then she worked as a consultant in the outplacement industry at the management level.

With her move to Luxembourg in 1998 when she joined BDO Compagnie Fiduciaire, she took not only the next step in her career, but also took the opportunity to work with her three languages - German, French and English - and to build up an understanding of Luxembourgish by attending meetings held in Luxembourgish and interacting with Luxembourgish colleagues and clients. Since 2006 she has been working with KPMG Luxembourg as Director of Human Resources and has meanwhile added to her language skills with private courses in basic Norwegian.

Corporate Background

Within KPMG Luxembourg, an average of 35 nationalities among 1000 employees work together, with English being the official business language, i.e. all documents, communications and trainings are in English. Nevertheless (and depending on the departments and colleagues), French, German and Luxembourgish are predominantly spoken on a day-to-day basis. Within some departments (such as Human Resources) even all four languages are represented and used depending on the colleague with which one is communicating.

Since KPMG's business activity serves multicultural clients with audit, consulting and tax services, the people structure of KPMG needs to reflect the diversity of its clients in order to ensure the best quality service delivery.

Contribution

When asked about the link between multilingualism and finding employees who have multilingual experience, Ms. Buderus explained that it is one of the most important skills looked at during the hiring process. However, there are some disadvantages to having so many multilingual employees in the same workplace. Phenomena such as clustering could occur, but that as long as employees still work together when they have to, it should not be considered a "problem."

What does tend to cause problems is when employees who work in the same language have different concepts and/or translations of terms that are used or when there is a lack of intercultural understanding. These problems could hinder work progress from employee evaluation misunderstandings to, for example, a male staff member who is not culturally used to being subordinate to a female manager. Ms. Buderus feels that children in Luxembourg have gained an advantage by living the diverse languages and cultures that abound and surround them in their country, and that this should help them to be more culturally-aware.

4.5.2 Mr. Daniel Tesch: Director, Automobile Club of Luxembourg

Personal Background



Daniel Tesch was born in Luxembourg in 1961 to a Luxembourgish father and a British mother. Both languages were spoken at home. Besides that, he grew up in a multilingual context, interacting with mainly French-speaking relatives and friends. The neighborhood in Dommeldange where he lived was multilingual as well. French and Italian were on the daily agenda due to the languages spoken by neighbours.

Mr Tesch studied law in Montpellier, France (1982-1987), then worked as a lawyer in Luxembourg (1987 – 1993) until he joined the steel conglomerate ARBED in Brazil where his main occupation was heading the steel exports (1993-2000). He attended to customers worldwide, but especially to those in the Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America.

He returned to Luxembourg in 2000 and joined the ACL, a traditional Luxembourgish institution but which clearly addresses the international community in the country.

Today, he considers himself to be fluent in Luxembourgish, English, French, German, Portuguese and Spanish. He has good knowledge of Italian and Dutch.

Corporate Background

The Automobile Club Luxembourg represents 170,000 members and advocates mobility in all respects. It provides assistance to its members, offers travel advice and promotes motor sports.

French is the main language within the organisation, but due to the different nationalities of its members, ACL employees also speak Luxembourgish, English, German, Portuguese and Dutch.

Contribution

Mr. Tesch thinks that it is very useful for businesses to be multilingual. One of the reasons for this is that it helps them to provide services to their customers in, preferably, the language of the customer. While it is possible to be friendly in all languages, it is still more of a competitive advantage to be able to converse with and help a customer in their own language – giving them a better feeling of empathy. Mr. Tesch also finds that living in a different country, such as Brazil, gives a better understanding of different cultures and therefore helps with a cultural understanding that is needed in a multilingual environment.

4.5.3 Ms. Carole Tompers: Secretary General, Luxembourg for Business

Personal Background



Having started her career as a Marketing and Communication manager in the automotive industry, Mrs. Tompers currently serves as Secretary General at Luxembourg for Business.

Ms Tompers was educated in Great Britain at Manchester University Business School and Manchester Metropolitan University, gaining a Masters in International Business and Management, and a Bachelor in Marketing and Management.

Mrs. Tompers has superior skills in five languages, both written and oral: French, English, German, Italian and Luxembourgish. She speaks four of these languages when dealing with about 15 different nationalities daily.

Corporate Background

Ms Tompers works in close cooperation with Luxembourg for Business's founding members - the Ministry of the Economy and Foreign Trade, the Ministry of Small and Medium-sized Businesses and Tourism, the Chamber of Commerce, the Office du Ducroire, the National Credit and Investment Corporation (SNCI), the Chamber of Crafts and the Luxembourg Business Federation -FEDIL) to jointly create added value in promotional efforts and to foster competences, leading to the development of avant-garde solutions. These projects aim to increase the professionalism of each partner in their support to companies and benefit the internationalisation process of Luxembourg's companies as a whole. Mrs. Tompers' mission and projects focus on strategic marketing which she strives to implement jointly with the Luxembourg network abroad, i.e. Luxembourg's Trade and Investment Offices (LTIOs), Luxembourg's embassies as well as Luxembourg's consulates general and bilateral chambers of commerce.

Contribution

Mrs. Tompers stated that multilingualism is a key factor in the promotion of Luxembourg's economy. According to her, the challenge however remains in promoting multilingualism in a broader context and not as a "stand-alone" argument. As she explained, the true added value in marketing the Luxembourg economy comes from connecting multilingualism to Luxembourg's other strengths and advantages, such as its quality of life, its multiculturalism and the more "hard factors", such as Luxembourg's achievements in ICT, logistics and life sciences. According to her, the advantage of multilingualism has also to be considered in a "customer-specific" context, meaning that not every investor, due to the nature of its business, or its target audience, may necessarily be able to or will want to benefit from the richness of Luxembourg's language skills. English, she states, prevails therefore in many cases as the quickest and easiest language choice.

Mrs. Tompers stressed that multilingualism is one of Luxembourg's key advantages when promoting Luxembourg abroad. It shows that Luxembourg thoroughly speaks "the language of the customer".

4.5.4 Dr. Rolf Tarrach: President, University of Luxembourg

Personal Background



Rolf Tarrach (born in Valencia, Spain, 1948) studied physics at the University of Valencia, Spain, and achieved his PhD from the University of Barcelona. He speaks Spanish and Catalan, German, English and French as well as some Luxembourgish.

He was a postdoctoral researcher at CERN, Geneva, and is professor of theoretical physics, serving in that capacity at the Universities of Valencia and Barcelona. He has published more than 100 papers in theoretical high energy physics, quantum field theory, quantum mechanics and in quantum information theory and has written two books.

Dr. Tarrach has given more than 100 talks and seminars on physics and more than 100 conferences on general science, research, scientific policy, energy policy, higher education policy, science and philosophy and innovation. He has been awarded a *honoris causa* degree from the University of Saint Petersburg, Russia, and is the recipient of 8 prizes and decorations. He has been Dean of the School of Physics and Vice-rector of the University of Barcelona. Dr. Tarrach has been the president of the multilingual University of Luxembourg since January 2005.

Corporate Background

The University of Luxembourg, founded in 2003, is a multilingual, internationally oriented research university. It offers a very special framework to students and researchers alike, thanks to the proximity of the institutions of the European Union, the Luxembourg financial centre and the attractive national job market, but also thanks to the outstanding multilingual situation of the Grand Duchy.

The multicultural flair of the country is an experience lived each day on campus. Students come from 95 different countries, with academic and administrative staff from 25. Furthermore, there are exchange agreements with over 50 universities around the world. Whether it be English-French or German-French, many degree programmes are bilingual. Several Masters degrees are taught exclusively in English.

The 5,500 students may choose between degrees to be obtained from

- the Faculty of Science, Technology and Communication,
- the Faculty of Law, Economics and Finance,
- the Faculty of Language and Literature, Humanities, Arts and Education.

Contribution

Dr. Tarrach was asked to compare his experiences living in different multilingual areas of the world, such as Catalonia, to determine whether he thought multilingualism helps with competitiveness. His general impression to this idea was that it helps if you at least understand the languages that are being used. Instead of trying to learn the basics of many languages, it is probably more useful to gain a good grasp of even at least one. Languages cannot be equal, and often times English is the most important language to know and understand and is becoming more and more a “must”. He also added that for those students who cannot succeed in a multilingual system (unlike the Luxembourgish students who grow up in its multilingual school system), it does not mean that they are not smart – they can succeed in different areas.

4.5.5 Ms. Hjoerdis Stahl: Executive Vice President, LuxairCARGO

Personal Background

Hjoerdis Stahl, born in 1966 in Puerto Rico (US overseas territories), started her career in Passenger Sales with Lufthansa in 1989. Her responsibilities progressed quickly: in 1995, Lufthansa gave her an opportunity for overseas experience in Germany as Product Staff Manager for the Americas and Southern Europe. In 1998, she was nominated as head of the Service Support Center, then spent another two years in Express Airfreight Handling Management in Frankfurt. Nominated as the General Manager Inflight Catering International at LSG Sky Chefs in 2001, she returned to Lufthansa



Cargo in 2003 as Vice-President at Cargo Stations. In this position, Ms. Stahl managed the Lufthansa Cargo Center in Frankfurt, the central hub of Lufthansa's global airfreight operations.

After many years with Lufthansa, Ms. Stahl was attracted to Luxair. She perceived her challenges in planning strategies to redesign LuxairCARGO's freight handling, making it resistant to crisis and bringing it to a state-of-the-art platform in the business. The unusually wide variety of nationalities and the pride and loyalty of many employees were further reasons for her to join LuxairGroup. The three years since her arrival have seen her manage the decreasing freight tonnage as a result of the economic downturn, changing the structure of the LuxairCARGO business unit and intensifying and changing the relationship with the home carrier, Cargolux, and all other clients as well.

Ms. Stahl has dual German and American nationalities. She speaks English, German, Spanish and French.

Corporate Background

LuxairCARGO is the leading air freight handling agent at Luxembourg airport, making it the fifth largest air freight platform in Europe. LuxairCARGO caters for all categories of cargo and aircraft and has a capacity of 1,000,000 tons per year, with further possibilities for expansion. Integrated processes from aircraft to truck and vice versa are a unique and valued benefit offered by LuxairCARGO.

LuxairCARGO's main working language is French, but employees also speak English, French and Portuguese. Important documents are written in all four languages. The company's staff includes Luxembourgish, Portuguese, French, German, Belgian nationals as well as some others.

Contribution

Ms. Stahl brought her sense of humour into the panel discussion when she responded to the questions and ideas that were posed to her. She said that it is hard not to accept multiculturalism in Luxembourg; however, knowledge of French is integral to living in the country – especially within the service sector and when shopping in Luxembourg.

French, as well as English, language skills are also a necessity in her daily job, and these skills are harder to learn as one grows older. She feels that to become fluent in a language, one needs to start learning the language at an early age. Ms. Stahl also stated that, with the way languages are taught at an early age in Luxembourg, it gives those growing up in the school system here a competitive edge for the future.

4.5.6 Questions from the Audience

After Mr. Adamowicz led the panelists through their discussion on multilingualism and its aid or detriment to competitiveness, he called on four members of the audience to pose questions and/or statements that would, in turn, elicit responses from the panelists.

- 1 The first comment came from a man who wondered at Luxembourg's multilingualism having been a more recent characteristic for the country; while the Luxembourg school children of today are receiving a multilingual education, those from the older generations did not necessarily have the same exposure. Therefore, with Luxembourg's current modern, multilingual state, how does the 'older Luxembourg' cope with all of the languages?
- 2 The second comment came from Mrs. Toulia Vassilacou, Director of the European school with over 4,000 pupils, who believes everyone has the right to have a strong 'mother tongue'. Do the panelists believe it is better to have knowledge of many languages at a low proficiency level, or a few at a high proficiency level?

Prof. Dr. Tarrach answered the question by saying that the school systems need to make sure that at least one language is understood correctly – that you need just one good language. He then gave the example of how those who work in the science and mathematics fields do not necessarily have to have the best language proficiency skills to be understood in their work.



Question to the panel from Toulia Vassilacou – Director of the European School

3 A third comment came from the Ambassador of Germany to Luxembourg, Dr. Hubertus von Morr, who pointed out that it was incredible how the whole of the symposium was conducted in English, though it is not even one of Luxembourg's three official languages. He then followed up his comment with a question concerning language misunderstandings – are the panelists content with the English of their employees for whom it is not their mother tongue?

Ms. Stahl explained that while an employee's English may not be perfect, it is important to keep listening and trying to understand them. In cooperation with this, is it also important to know which employees can conduct certain tasks and who can manage them properly.

Ms. Buderus continued the discussion by saying that employees do not need to be proficient in high academic English, per se, but in the proper English for their work culture and that which the other employees will understand.

In reference to the comment about the conduction of the symposium in English, Mr. Sosna, the initiator and organizer of the project, had announced that the symposium was held in English because it is one of the universal languages for businesses in Luxembourg.

4 The fourth question came from a woman who asked the panel about which tools they use to build on, or compensate for, the different cultural backgrounds from which their employees come.

Mr. Tesch responded first by saying that it is helpful and important to give employees the same purpose for which to work.

Ms. Tompers responded to the question by saying that multilingualism needs to be fostered through example and that obstacles should not hinder this progress. Extra effort needs to be put in to be successful in this.

Ms. Buderus agreed with Ms. Tompers by saying that one needs to lead by example, especially in management, to show how multilingual and multicultural workplace communities can thrive. They have to try to integrate with each other, to live and work with other cultures and backgrounds.

4.6 Closing of the Symposium

After all of the panelists had been given their turn to respond to the audience's questions, Mr. Adamowicz returned the floor to Mr. Sosna. In closing the symposium, Mr. Sosna said:

"Once you reach a high level of harmony, you constantly have to work on it..."

He then followed this up with the brief announcement that a Diversity Committee had just been established as part of the American Chamber of Commerce in Luxembourg, in which multilingualism will play a major role.

Mr. Sosna also added that Luxembourg is a great place to do business and to invest in new opportunities. For instance, he has the great idea that Luxembourg would be the perfect site for a multicultural theme park for children, teenagers and adults since the country itself is so multicultural and multilingual.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Multilingualism: outside the business world

The workplace is not the only sector in which multilingualism abounds in Luxembourg. Multilingualism is pervasive everywhere, most especially in the capital city and border regions. Just like in the business sphere, the prevalence of multilingualism in Luxembourg is also discussed and its benefits debated in such realms as the educational spheres as well. As the article, *A Success Story of Multilingualism? Luxembourg's Language Policy Under the Microscope* (www.thebeginner.eu), states, Luxembourg "is mainly characterized by its functional language use." Its situation is different in that its three official languages are spoken according to the situation, rather than by region like in Switzerland. The article goes on to say that this puts Luxembourg in a "complicated situation."

Also just like in the business world, one can see multilingualism referred to often as a "problem" when it comes to education. However, though only the aspects of multilingualism in Luxembourg business were researched for the symposium, there are many similar arguments between multilingualism in business as for multilingualism in education. Many of these arguments were even brought up by the panelists during the discussion.

Children learn the three official languages (as well as English) as they grow up through exposure to Luxembourg's unique pedagogical language policies. It is seen as an advantage that Luxembourgers become proficient in at least three languages at such an early age. This, as some of the panelists recognised, is an advantage not just for the future careers in Luxembourg's multilingual-driven business world, but also in terms of intercultural diversity learning. However, it is also often times seen as a disadvantage for those who are not able to cope with the different languages or who do not succeed in school get "linguistically separated" and do not therefore learn French, widely recognised as an important language in the country.

Dr. Rolf Tarrach, one of the panelists and president of the University of Luxembourg, told the Luxembourgish publication paper *Jam* that the university hopes to use multilingual options as an advantage for students who want to participate in exchanges and collaborations with other foreign universities. Through these exchanges, the students can use multilingual skills to get to know the cultures of the exchange countries.

He also points out in a *Luxemburger Wort* article from 2 April 2011 that, in conjunction with what is happening around the world, the trilingual (French, German and English) University of Luxembourg (also with some Luxembourgish) has an ever-increasing amount of English in use, while in the communication sector, French is becoming more widespread. This correlates with Dr. Tarrach's insistence during the symposium that, while understanding languages is good, English is an especially advantageous language in which to become proficient.

5.2 Multilingualism does drive Competitiveness

If we ask ourselves again now whether multilingualism is a driver of competitiveness, we can answer with a clear “yes”. This multilingual and multicultural environment makes Luxembourg an extremely attractive and interesting country for new business opportunities and gives the country excellent access to foreign markets. Living in a world of globalisation, multilingualism plays an important role and facilitates the communication on both a national and international level.

Even though there have been some aspects which are considered as disadvantages, when talking about multilingualism, the overall opinion about multilingualism within the working environment and within many other environments in Luxembourg remains extremely positive.

About the Authors

Nicole Gotling-Dudding and Sarah Moser are students at the University of Luxembourg on a Masters degree course in Learning and Development in Multilingual and Multicultural Contexts. They specialise in researching and analysing contexts in which people of different cultural and language backgrounds interact. Some of these contexts include the fields of: education, business, society, communication, etc.

Writing this brochure gave them the opportunity to extend their knowledge in terms of the national and international business community and how it is perceived in Luxembourg.

Nicole Gotling-Dudding is from Chicago, USA, and her native language is English. She has also studied many others and regularly works in French.

Sarah Moser was born in Zurich, Switzerland, and also lived for many years in Italy. She is fluent in German, Italian and English, and is also learning other languages.

They would like to thank Berlitz Luxembourg and, in particular, their supervisor Mr. Artur Sosna for the wonderful opportunity to collaborate in the interesting symposium and research.

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