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Luxembourgish

Peter Gilles

University of Luxembourg

peter.gilles@uni.lu

Jürgen Trouvain

University of Luxembourg and Saarland University, Saarbrücken, Germany

trouvain@coli.uni-saarland.de

1 Introduction

Luxembourgish (local language name: Lëtzebuergesch) is a small West-Germanic language mainly spoken in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg where it has the official status of the national language with French and German being used as other official languages. There are approx. 260,000 native speakers of Luxembourgish, and it is used as a foreign language by many of the 130,000 immigrants in Luxembourg and a few of the approx. 140,000 cross-border workers from France, Belgium and Germany. Although its origins can be historically considered a Central Franconian dialect, Luxembourgish is, by the Luxembourgers themselves, evaluated today as a language of its own, has its own orthography, and German is considered a different language. Luxembourgish is spoken on all social levels and is used in everyday communication, with a predominantly oral domain; it is the common language in local radio or TV programmes and used in the parliament or to a considerable degree on the workplace. The vocabulary of Luxembourgish shows a fairly good amount of French and Standard German loan words whereas the morpho-syntax follows Germanic patterns.

Luxembourgish shows various regional varieties. The phonetic system of the speakers presented here is representative for the central region around the capital Luxembourg City. The vernacular spoken here can be seen as the emerging standard variety of Luxembourgish with a medium degree of standardisation (Gilles 1999). Although there do exist some descriptions of single local dialects as well as sound-to-spelling rules for the Luxembourgish orthography, there is no phonetic and/or phonological account of standard Luxembourgish so far.

2 Consonants

| | bilabial | labio-dental | alveolar | post-alveolar | alveolo-palatal | palatal | velar | uvular | glottal |
|------------|----------|--------------|----------|---------------|-----------------|---------|-------|--------|---------|
| plosives | p b | | t d | | | | k g | | |
| fricatives | | f v | s z | ʃ ʒ | ç ʒ̥ | | x ɣ | | h |
| affricates | | | ts dz | tʃ ɟʒ | | | | | |
| nasals | m | | n | | | | ŋ | | |
| glides | w | | l | | | j | w | | |
| trill | | | | | | | | R | |

Table 1. Consonants of Luxembourgish. Note: [w] is a labio-velar approximant.

Among the fricatives, [x] and [ç] are allophones of one single phoneme. The same holds for their voiced counterparts [ɣ] and [ʒ̥] with the former allophone appearing only in few words, however. An increasing number of speakers does not distinguish between the alveolo-palatal and the post-alveolar fricatives, i.e. between [ʒ̥] and [ʒ] on the one hand and between [ʃ] and [ç] on the other. The progression of the sound change will eventually lead to a phoneme merger by reducing the number of the fricatives.

The affricate [ɟʒ] only appears in English loans like *Jeans* [ɟʒi:ns] and [pf] only in a few German loans like *Kampf* [kɑmpf] 'fight' whereas [dz] occurs only in few words such as *spadséieren* [ʃpa'dzeiəɾən] 'to go for a walk'. The glide [w] has to be regarded as an allophone to the voiced labio-dental fricative [v] with the former only occurring after [ʃ] (*schwammen* [ʃwɑmən] 'to swim'), [ts] (*zwee* [tswe:] 'two') and [k] (*Quatsch* [kwatʃ] 'jabberwocky') and the latter occurring elsewhere.

| | | | | | |
|----|------------|----------------------------|----|------------|---------------------------------|
| p | ['pa:kən] | <i>paken</i> 'to pack' | b | ['ba:kən] | <i>baken</i> 'to bake' |
| | [pap] | <i>Papp</i> 'father' | | ['labə] | <i>labber</i> 'lax' |
| t | [teɪ] | <i>Téi</i> 'tea' | d | [deɪ] | <i>déi</i> 'the' |
| | [blut] | <i>Blutt</i> 'blood' | | ['brudə] | <i>Brudder</i> 'brother' |
| k | [ke:s] | <i>Keess</i> 'cash office' | g | [ge:s] | <i>Geess</i> 'goats' |
| | ['kukən] | <i>kucken</i> 'to look' | | ['go:ən] | <i>goen</i> 'to go' |
| f | [fë] | <i>Fësch</i> 'fish' | v | ['vëʃən] | <i>wëschen</i> 'to wipe' |
| | ['pæfə] | <i>Peffer</i> 'pepper' | | [va'kants] | <i>Vakanz</i> 'holiday' |
| s | [ta:s] | <i>Taass</i> 'cup' | z | ['ta:zən] | <i>Tasen</i> 'cups' |
| | [glas] | <i>Glace</i> 'ice cream' | | ['zumə] | <i>Summer</i> 'summer' |
| ʃ | [bi:ʃt] | <i>Biischt</i> 'brush' | ʒ | ['ʒakæt] | <i>Jackett</i> 'Jacket' |
| | [ʃte:n] | <i>Steen</i> 'stone' | | ['ʒærtsən] | <i>jäizen</i> 'to shout at so.' |
| ç | [li:çt] | <i>liicht</i> 'light' | ʒ | ['heɪʒən] | <i>heijen</i> 'high' |
| | [biəç] | <i>Bierg</i> 'mountain' | | ['ʃpiʒəl] | <i>Spigel</i> 'mirror' |
| x | [kux] | <i>Kuch</i> 'cake' | ɣ | ['kuɣəl] | <i>Kugel</i> 'ball' |
| | [a:xt] | <i>aacht</i> 'eight' | | ['ju:ɣənt] | <i>Jugend</i> 'youth' |
| h | [haɪ] | <i>hei</i> 'here' | | | |
| | [haut] | <i>haut</i> 'today' | | | |
| ts | [tsux] | <i>Zuch</i> 'train' | tʃ | ['rɛtʃən] | <i>rëtschen</i> 'to slide' |
| | ['ʃwætsən] | <i>schwätzen</i> 'to talk' | | [dærtʃ] | <i>däitsch</i> 'German' |
| | | | w | ['ʃwa:rts] | <i>schwaarz</i> 'black' |
| | | | | ['kwæɪ] | <i>Quell</i> 'source' |
| m | [mam] | <i>Mamm</i> 'mother' | l | [loft] | <i>Loft</i> 'air' |
| | [ham] | <i>Ham</i> 'ham' | | [kil] | <i>kill</i> 'cool' |
| n | [man] | <i>Mann</i> 'man' | j | [jo:] | <i>jo</i> 'yes' |
| | [nuəs] | <i>Nues</i> 'nose' | | [jo:ɐ] | <i>Joer</i> 'year' |
| ŋ | [kæŋ] | <i>keng</i> 'nobody' | R | [ROU] | <i>Rou</i> 'silence' |
| | [joŋk] | <i>jonk</i> 'young' | | [ɑri've:] | <i>Arrivée</i> 'arrival' |

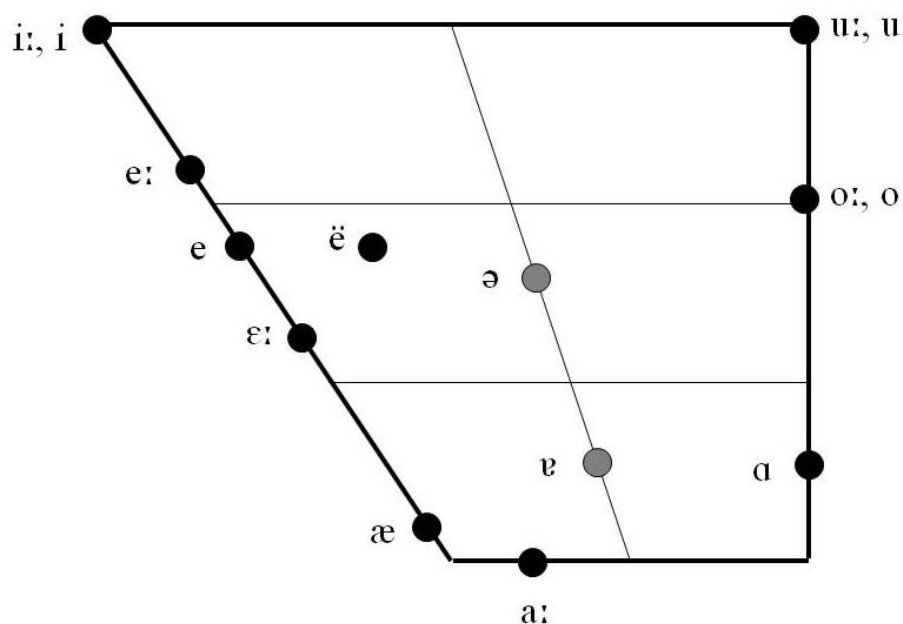
Similar to Standard German, all voiced obstruents cannot occur syllable-finally and will be devoiced ('Auslautverhärtung'). [g] is found only word-initially and banned in all other positions, where the successors of historical [g] are realised as fricatives [ç, ʒ, x, ɣ] or have disappeared. Frequently, [j] is substituted with [ʒ], and vice versa. Similar to German all

voiceless plosives are aspirated in most positions. The glottal stop [ʔ] is missing altogether. The main variant of /r/ in pre-vocalic position is the trill [ʀ], the lesser used variant is the fricative [ʁ]. Elder speakers pronounce [ʀ]/[ʁ] in all post-vocalic positions, e.g. *Bir* [bi:ʀ] 'pear' whereas younger speakers often show an /r/-vocalisation and produce [ʁ] instead, i.e. [bi:ʁ] for *Bir*.

3 Vowels

The vowel inventory shows some parallels to that one of Standard German. However, it is organised quadrangular rather than triangular. Another important difference is the fact that the set of diphthongs in Luxembourgish is larger than that of Standard German.

3.1 Monophthongs



| | | | | | | |
|------|-----------|-----------------------------|-----|--------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| [i:] | [li:çt] | <i>liicht</i> 'light' | [i] | [mit] | <i>midd</i> 'tired' | |
| | [ʀi:zəç] | <i>riseg</i> 'huge' | | [ʰivə] | <i>Hiwwel</i> 'mound' | |
| [e:] | [ke:s] | <i>Keess</i> 'cashier desk' | [e] | [mek] | <i>Méck</i> 'fly' | |
| | [me:te] | <i>Meter</i> 'metre' | | [neŋ] | <i>néng</i> 'nine' | |
| | | | | [ë] | [dën] | <i>dënn</i> 'thin' |
| | | | | [nët] | <i>net</i> 'not' | |
| [ɛ:] | [ʃte:rən] | <i>Stären</i> 'stars' | [æ] | [hæl] | <i>hell</i> 'bright' | |

| | | | | | |
|------|------------|-----------------------------|-----|---------|--------------------------|
| | [kɛ: rən] | <i>Kären</i> 'cores' | | ['mænə] | <i>Männer</i> 'men' |
| [a:] | [ka:p] | <i>Kap</i> 'cap' | [ɑ] | [kɑp] | <i>Kapp</i> 'head' |
| | [a:xt] | <i>aacht</i> 'eight' | | [blɑn] | <i>blann</i> 'blind' |
| [o:] | [ʃpɾo:x] | <i>Sprooch</i> 'language' | [o] | [ʃpɾox] | <i>Sproch</i> 'saying' |
| | [ʃo:f] | <i>Schof</i> 'sheep' | | [loft] | <i>Loft</i> 'air' |
| [u:] | [du:ʃt] | <i>Duuscht</i> 'thirst' | [u] | [gut] | <i>gutt</i> 'good' |
| | [tu:t] | <i>Tut</i> 'plastic bag' | | [kux] | <i>Kuch</i> 'cake' |
| [ə] | ['fudələn] | <i>fuddelen</i> 'to cheat' | [ɐ] | ['kɑnə] | <i>Kanner</i> 'children' |
| | [ʃɑmpəs] | <i>Schampes</i> 'champagne' | | [ɑʊə] | <i>Auer</i> 'hour' |

Like most other Germanic languages Luxembourgish distinguishes short and long vowels. Unlike the Standard German monophthongal system the contrasts of the "i-, u-, and o-vowels" lies solely on vowel quantity but not on vowel quality. However, the short rounded vowel [o] shows a greater variability than its longer counterpart [o:] ranging from [ɔ] to [ɔ̞]. Short [i] and [u] as in *vill* 'many' and *gutt* 'good' appears as closed variants with length distinction only to their long counterparts [i:] and [u:] as in *Zil* 'goal' and *Tut* 'plastic bag'.

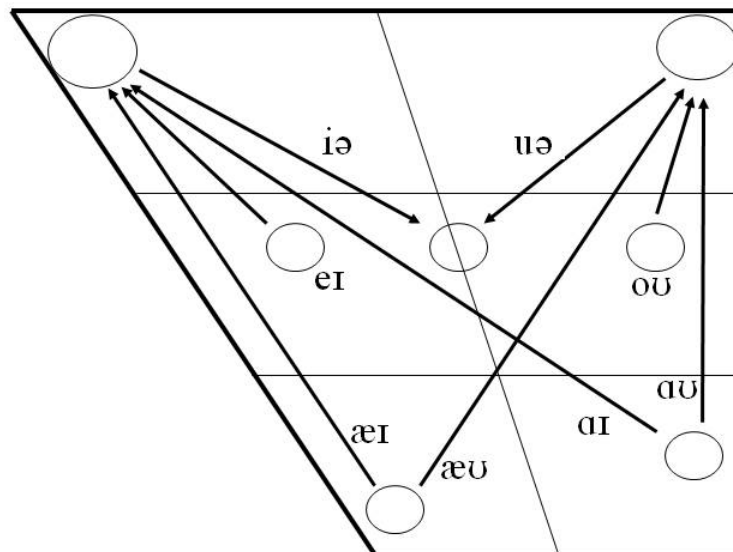
The long front vowel [e:] as in *Keess* 'cash office' becomes a more open [ɛ:] as in *Kär* 'core' when it precedes an /r/ in simplex words (see sub-section on 'r-diphthongs'). In addition, long front vowel [e:] *Schleek* 'snail' contrasts phonetically with the short front vowel [e] *Stéck* 'piece' by duration and vowel quality with the short vowel being more open.

The short vowels [e] and [ɛ̃] are complementary distributed allophones of the same phoneme /e/. [e] appears only before velar consonants like in *Méck* [mek] 'fly', *zeng* [tseŋ] 'ten' or phonologically velar consonants like *sécher* ['zɛçɐ] 'secure' (phonemically /'zɛxɛr/), whereas [ɛ̃] appears in all other positions. [ɛ̃] is realised frequently with a slight lip rounding and compared to [e] this vowel is clearly centralised.

Compared to the Standard German cognates, the vowel in words such as *hell* [hæɪ] 'bright' or *Decken* ['dækən] 'blanket' is far more open and sometimes even merges qualitatively with the long open vowel /a:/. In contrast to Standard German the opposition between both *a*-vowels is manifested in quantity *and* quality where the long and front /a:/ shows a tendency to raise to the quality of [æ]. As a consequence, this shift will constitute a contrastive association between long [a:] and short [æ] such as in *Sak* [za:k] or [zæ:k] 'bag' (sg.) and *Säck* [zæk] 'bag' (pl.).

The schwa sounds [ə] and [ɐ] are high-frequency vowels but occur only in unstressed position. In contrast to German, where it is usual to omit [ə] in closed syllables, schwa is retained in Luxembourgish (e.g., *setzen* 'to put' ['zætsən] in Luxembourgish vs. ['zɛtsɪ] in German).

3.2 Diphthongs



Luxembourgish shows six raising and two closing diphthongs:

| | | | | | |
|------|--------|----------------------|------|-------------|------------------------------------|
| [eɪ] | [frɛɪ] | <i>fréi</i> 'early' | [oʊ] | [ʃoʊl] | <i>Schoul</i> 'school' |
| | [ʃɛɪ] | <i>schéin</i> 'nice' | | [okə'zjoʊn] | <i>Okkasioun</i> 'second-hand car' |

| | | | | | |
|------|----------|-------------------------|------|-----------|----------------------------|
| [æɪ] | [tsæɪt] | <i>Zäit</i> 'time' | [æʊ] | [ʀæʊm] | <i>Raum</i> 'room'/'space' |
| | [væɪs] | <i>wäiss</i> 'white' | | [læʊs] | <i>Laus</i> 'louse' |
| [aɪ] | [laɪt] | <i>Leit</i> 'people' | [aʊ] | [ʀaʊmən] | <i>raumen</i> 'to clean' |
| | [vaɪs] | <i>Weis</i> 'manner' | | [ˈaʊto:] | <i>Auto</i> 'car' |
| [iə] | [hiən] | <i>hien</i> 'he' | [uə] | [ˈbuədəm] | <i>Buedem</i> 'soil' |
| | [ˈviədə] | <i>Wieder</i> 'weather' | | [vuət] | <i>Wuert</i> 'word' |

All diphthongs have a vowel length similar to the long monophthongs. However, the diphthongs [æɪ] and [æʊ] sometimes show additional lengthening of the onset (i.e., [æ:ɪ] and [æ:ʊ]), which was reported throughout for Luxembourgish in all older descriptions (e.g., Bruch 1954).

As mentioned above there is a tendency in Luxembourgish to vocalise tautosyllabic /r/ after long monophthongs which is similar to Standard German (cp. Kohler 1999). This results for many speakers in centering r-diphthongs like *Dier* [di:r] 'door', *Joer* [jo:r] 'year' and *Kär* [kɛ:r] 'core' in contrast to the consonantal appearance due to resyllabification in the corresponding plural forms *Dieren* [ˈdi:rən] 'doors', *Joeren* [ˈjo:rən] 'years' and *Kären* [ˈkɛ:rən] 'cores'. The r-vocalisation tendency generally does not hold for [a:] as in *schwaarz* [ʃwa:rts] 'black'. For many speakers word-final /r/ in French loans like *classeur* [ˈklasɛ:r] 'folder' is also realised consonantal. In contrast to Standard German, /r/ is always realised as a consonant after short monophthongs.

3.3 Foreign and Rare Vowels

Due to many loan words from French and modern Standard German on the one hand, and the Luxembourger's linguistic competence in speaking these both languages on the other, we find several sounds which historically do not belong to the Luxembourgish sound system.

| | | | | | |
|------|-----------|----------------------|-----|----------|----------------------|
| [y:] | [ˈzy:dən] | <i>Süden</i> 'south' | [y] | [ˈbyro:] | <i>Büro</i> 'office' |
| [ø:] | [blø:t] | <i>blöd</i> 'stupid' | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|------|--------------|------------------|----------------------|------|-------------|-------------------|---------------|
| [œ:] | [ˈɛ:təriœ:r] | <i>Interieur</i> | 'interior equipment' | [œ] | [ˈœfəntleç] | <i>öffentlech</i> | 'public' |
| [ɔɪ] | [ˈɔiRO:] | <i>Euro</i> | 'Euro' | | | | |
| [ɛ:] | [dɛ:t] | <i>Dinde</i> | 'turkey' | [ã:] | [ʃã:s] | <i>Chance</i> | 'opportunity' |
| [õ:] | [ˈkõ:twɑ:r] | <i>Comptoir</i> | 'bar' | | | | |

4 Stress and intonation

The lexical tone contrast from the Central Franconian tone accent (cp. Gussenhoven & Peters 2004) has completely disappeared from Luxembourgish (Gilles 2002). This development gives rise to the already mentioned two sets of diphthongs with [æ(:)ɪ] and [æ(:)ʊ] associated with the former (lengthened) Accent 2, and [aɪ] and [aʊ] associated with the former Accent 1, respectively.

The word accent in Luxembourgish shows a stronger tendency to the trochee than German which also frequently applies to French loans [ˈpɑrfɛ:] 'fragrant', [de:'kolte:] 'décolleté' (Gilles 2009).

Little is known yet about intonation. A typical intonational feature of Luxembourgish is the rising-mid-falling nuclear tune which serves to signal continuation.

5 Cross-word variations

There are various obvious phonological alternations of sounds operating at a supra-segmental level. Syllable-final *-n* is subject to phonologically conditioned *n*-deletion (Gilles 2006): All final *-n* are deleted unless the following syllable starts with a vowel or the consonants /h, d, t, ts, n/ respectively at the end of an utterance. Thus, the final nasal in the article *den* is retained in *den Dësch* [dɛn'dɛʃ] 'the table' whereas it is deleted in *de Schaf* [dɛ'ʃa:f] 'the cupboard'. Since Luxembourgish has a lot of words ending in an alveolar nasal, *n*-deletion occurs quite often.

Unusual consonant clusters arise postlexically due to cliticisation of the definite article *d'* (for feminine and neuter) as in *d'Sprooch* [dʃpro:x] 'the language' or *d'Kräiz* [dkræ:ts] 'the cross'.

Lenition of voiceless obstruents occurs across word boundaries when the following phonological word starts with a vowel, such as *eng interessant Iddi* [eŋ intərə'sand_ 'idi] 'an interesting idea' but also in compounds like *mateneen* [mad_ ə'ne:n] 'together'. In all these cases, final devoicing is therefore blocked.

6 Transcriptions of the recorded passage

The translation of "The North Wind and the Sun" in Luxembourgish orthography has been read by a female semi-professional speaker from the central region of Luxembourg.

The broad phonetic transcription is based on this read-aloud version. Stress marks do apply on phrasal rather than on word level here.

Den Nordwand an d'Sonn

An der Zäit hunn sech den Nordwand an d'Sonn gestridden, wie vun hinnen zwee wuel méi staark wier, wéi e Wanderer, deen an ee waarme Mantel agepak war, iwwert de Wee koum. Si goufen sech eens, dass deejéinege fir dee Stärkste gëlle sollt, deen de Wanderer forcéiere géif, säi Mantel auszedoen. Den Nordwand huet mat aller Force geblosen, awer wat e méi geblosen huet, wat de Wanderer sech méi a säi Mantel agewéckelt huet. Um Enn huet de Nordwand säi Kampf opginn. Dunn huet d'Sonn d'Loft mat hire frëndleche Strahle gewiermt, a schonn no kuerzer Zäit huet de Wanderer säi Mantel ausgedoen. Do huet de Nordwand missen zouginn, dass d'Sonn vun hinnen zwee dee Stärkste wier.

dən 'nortvant an 'dzon

an dɛ 'tsæit hun zɛç dən 'nɔrtvant an 'dzon gə'ʃtridən
 viə fun hinən 'tswe: vuəl 'mei ʃta:rk vie
 vei e: 'vandərə
 de:n an ə 'va:rmə 'mantəl 'agəpa:k va:ɐ
 ivət də 've: koum
 zi: goufən zɛç 'e:ns
 das 'de:zemezə fiə de: 'ʃtɛ:ɛkstə gələ zolt
 de:n də 'vandərə for'seɪərə geɪf
 zæi 'mantəl 'æustədo:ən

dən 'nɔrtvant huət mat 'alɐ 'fɔrs gə'blo:zən
 'a:və vad_e: mei gə'blo:zən huət
 vat də 'vandərə zɛç 'mei a zæi 'mantəl 'agəvekəlt huət
 um 'æn huət də 'nɔrtvant zæi 'kampf 'ɔpgin
 dun huət 'dzon 'dloft mat hiərə 'frɛntleçə 'ʃtra:lə gə'viəmt
 a ʃon no: 'ku:ɛtsɐ 'tsæ:it
 huət də 'vandərə zæi 'mantəl 'æusgədo:ən
 'do: huət də 'nɔrtvant misən 'tsougin
 das 'dzon fun hinən 'tswe: de: 'ʃtɛ:ɛkstə vie

Acknowledgements

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