Keywords: communicative repertoire, repertoire-building approach, emerging identity, multilingual Luxembourg, asylum seeker

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is often portrayed as a country of immigration. Official government policies continually draw upon the rhetoric of trilingualism to support claims about the country’s openness and multicultural spirit. This, along with the recognition of three languages – Luxembourgish, German and French – is expected to facilitate the integration of foreign nationals. It is claimed no Luxembourger is monolingual: moving fluidly back and forth between a multitude of languages is a communication method in its own right and members of the local society are believed to excel in it. Despite widespread acceptance and favourable attitudes towards multilingualism, language resources outside the recognised trilingual model have ambiguous statuses. As a result, broader societal multilingualism is perceived as problematic in numerous instances (Horner & Weber, 2008; Horner, 2015). In present-day language ideological debates, the strong presence of foreigners tends to be perceived as a threat to the established language regime and particularly to the position of the Luxembourgish language. The role of Luxembourgish as “language of integration” has been increasingly emphasised, although it is the one resource new arrivals are least likely to have in their communicative repertoires (de Bres, 2014). The often conflicting nationalist and multilingual language ideologies give rise to ambivalent messages as to what languages and what identities should be offered to newcomers, among them to the refugees who have sought international protection in Luxembourg.

This contribution offers detailed insights into the linguistic integration trajectory of an Iraqi asylum seeker who arrived to Luxembourg in the summer of 2015. Our aim is to explore how his language resources are being compiled, enhanced and discarded in the course of the integration process, i.e. the reorganisation of his communicative repertoire. As integration seldom starts from scratch, first we report on language resources the research participant accumulated prior to his arrival to Luxembourg. These are being discussed in the context of his educational and professional experiences and future life-projects. Secondly, we examine his language learning trajectory bearing in mind the competing linguistic ideologies and practices refugees are required to adjust in their daily efforts to integrate in Luxembourg. Thirdly, we offer examples of the language practices he engaged in. These demonstrate how he responded to multilingual social settings in both language use and attitudes towards the languages and identities offered. Furthermore, they provide clues about what language resources have become part of his complex repertoire. Blommaert and Backus (2013) described language learning as a “process of growth” drawing attention to the fact that repertoires do not develop in linear fashion, but “explosively in some phases of life and gradually in some others”. Our data suggest that the process of repertoire-building is highly dynamic during this transition period. The research participant’s deliberate use of newly-acquired language resources, without regard to how well he knows the languages involved, indicates new forms of linguistic identification. These include fluid multilingual practices, which are considered to be expressions of his new emerging identity.

This contribution presents data from an ongoing linguistic ethnographic research (obtained through interviews, classroom observations and shadowing) and will include a discussion about the challenges brought by working with vulnerable research participants and the need to research multilingually.
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