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Language ideologies in conflict at the workplace

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23.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the issue of linguistic conflict in linguistically diverse workplace settings. The empirical data derives from Luxembourg, a small and highly multilingual country where nearly half the workforce lives in the surrounding countries: France, Belgium and Germany. The analysis uses interviews with a group of these cross-border workers to investigate how they mobilise language ideologies to further their own interests when constructing experiences of linguistic conflict at work.

Luxembourg has three official languages, with distinct but overlapping functions. According to the 1984 language law, Luxembourgish, a West Germanic language variety of the Moselle Franconian area, is the national language of the country. French is the language of the law, and German, Luxembourgish and French have equal status as administrative languages. Institutionally, Luxembourg is one of the most multilingual countries in Europe, offering a quadrilingual education system (the three languages above, plus English) that enables its inhabitants to acquire impressive multilingual skills. In a survey by the European Commission in 2006, 92 percent of participants reported speaking at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue, and 69 percent speaking three languages in addition to their mother tongue (European Commission, 2006). Alongside the languages mentioned, which have a long tradition in the country, many more languages are present as a result of striking levels of migration. In 2017, non-nationals made up 47.7 percent of the resident population of 576,200, with the largest groups being Portuguese, French and Italians (STATEC, 2017). A further form of migration impacts the workplace context in particular. In 2016, 45 percent of the workforce was made up of cross-border workers who live in the surrounding border countries of France, Belgium and Germany, but come to Luxembourg to work (STATEC, 2016). This makes the workplace a key locale for intercultural – and interlinguistic – contact in Luxembourg.

Two competing language ideologies have been identified among the resident population of Luxembourg (Horner and Weber, 2008). On the one hand, a trilingual ideology promotes the idea of Luxembourg as an inherently multilingual environment and, on the other, a monolingual ideology presents Luxembourgish as the one true language of Luxembourg.
The former ideology is highly present in official government discourse, which seeks to promote Luxembourg as an open and inclusive environment, while the latter is more prevalent in private discourse, where it is often linked to the high numbers of cross-border workers, and an associated increase in the use of French in everyday life (Horner and Weber, 2008). Less is known about the language ideologies of the cross-border workers themselves, and how they respond to the multilingual environment at their workplace.

To fill in this gap, this chapter uses data from interviews with 30 cross-border workers in Luxembourg to examine how participants construct linguistic conflict in the workplace. The chapter starts by describing the theoretical framework of language ideologies and their relationship to linguistic conflict, before providing more detail on the data used for the study. The analysis examines how participants employ language ideologies when discussing the theme of linguistic conflict at work. The focus will be on how participants use these language ideologies to promote their own interests and to construct discursive spaces of inclusion and exclusion in Luxembourg.

23.2 Language ideologies and conflict

The term “language ideologies” has been conceptualised by theorists in very different ways. Some researchers conceive of language ideologies in relatively neutral terms; Spolsky (2004, p.186), for instance, sees them as synonymous with “beliefs” about language. Others view them as merely shared cultural background (for a discussion, see Woolard, 1998). We adopt a more critical view and argue that language ideologies are positions on language adopted by individuals to advance their linguistic and non-linguistic interests (see de Bres, 2014, 2015). Five key features of this approach are outlined below (for a full discussion, see de Bres, 2013):

1. Language ideologies are based on individual and group interests. Kroskrity (2004, p.501) claims that language ideologies “represent the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group”. This group may be large-scale, as in the case of an imagined national ethnolinguistic group such as French people, or small-scale, as in members of a certain profession, or individuals of a particular gender, etc.

2. Language ideologies are normative. Although often masquerading as common-sense descriptions of matters relating to language, they promote a prescriptive view of language; they involve “beliefs about the way the world is, the way it should be, and the way it has to be with respect to language” (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes, 2006).

3. Language ideologies function as a strategic resource that individuals can employ to maintain and reinforce their interests. By selectively adopting and promoting particular views of language (through formal policies or everyday interactions), individuals can advance ideologies that benefit them, potentially at the expense of others. Ideologies are thus used as tools in the negotiation of power relationships and in the pursuit or exercise of power (Woolard, 1998).

4. Language ideologies are subject to contestation and challenge. Briggs (1998, p.249) claims that contestation is not simply a feature of some ideologies […] or a process that emerges in special circumstances that lead people to begin questioning taken-for-granted ideologies; to the contrary, contestation is a crucial facet of how particular ideologies and practices come to be dominant.
Once language ideologies are established as dominant, contestation continues to play a role, given that even dominant widely held ideologies, as social constructions rather than “truths” about language, must continually be reproduced lest they lose their sway in the face of conflicting ideological positions; this means that “even “dominant” ideologies are dynamically responsive to ever-changing forms of opposition” (Kroskrity, 2000, p.13).

5. Language ideologies can be used for identity construction. Given that they involve the promotion of one set of interests over another, language ideologies can represent an important means for constructing individual and group identity. This is particularly due to the potential of language ideologies for establishing and reinforcing group boundaries on linguistic grounds, and thereby constructing the inclusion and/or exclusion of individuals within particular groups (see Kroskrity, 2004 and Weber, 2009).

Several aspects of the description above point to the relationship between language ideologies and conflict. If language ideologies reflect the interests of specific groups, these interests will not always align, and when this is the case, conflict is always implicitly or explicitly present. This is reinforced by the normative and strategic character of language ideologies, which do not function merely as an expression of certain interests, but involve an attempt to impose those interests on others. As described above, it is this very process of conflict among divergent language ideologies that results in some becoming more widely accepted than others, and leads to continuing competing practices of reproduction and contestation. If, following the broad definition used in this volume, conflict is any situation or behaviour involving parties (individuals or groups) who are, or consider themselves to be, instrumentally, intellectually and/or emotionally opposed or simply feel antagonistic to each other, language ideologies thus provide an important window into mechanisms of (supposedly) language-based conflict.

The concept of language ideologies as outlined above provides a theoretical perspective for investigating issues of linguistic conflict, but the question remains of what methods can be used to analyse language ideologies. The differences in ways that language ideologies are conceptualised by different researchers is reflected in the different kinds of data, methods and analytical approaches used to study them (Woolard, 1998). For example, Hill (1998) analyses explicit metalinguistic discourse through interview data, Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) analyse implicit metalinguistic discourse in newspaper texts and Spitulnik (1998) analyses a combination of metalinguistic discourse and language practices in broadcasting. While methodological variety is increasing within language ideologies research, there is still a primary reliance on discourse analytic methods, in which researchers analyse language ideologies as they appear in everyday language use. Such methods arguably provide the greatest insights into language ideologies, given their socially constructed nature. In common with much research on language ideologies, this chapter focuses on explicit metalinguistic discourse elicited through individual interviews.

23.3 Methodology
The data used in this chapter is taken from 30 interviews with cross-border workers at six different workplaces in Luxembourg which were collected as part of a broader research project on language at work in Luxembourg, involving questionnaires and recordings of language use (Franziskus, 2013). The participants were recruited through direct contact with workplaces, as well as a general invitation to individuals to participate that was publicised
through the Luxembourg media. The interviewees included six participants each from four main workplaces targeted in the study (one educational institution, one social service provider, one research organisation and one distributor of office products) and six participants from a wider range of workplaces (in real estate, the public service, retail, food production, insurance and construction). They included participants of French, Belgian, German and other European nationalities (Polish and English), and all lived in France, Belgium or Germany. They covered a range of ages, genders, and education levels. They comprised participants who had begun working in Luxembourg for only a year prior to the research commencing, and those who had been working in Luxembourg for over 20 years. Some had lived in the border regions surrounding Luxembourg all their lives, and others had moved to these regions from further away. Representativeness was not sought (or possible, given the small scale of the research), but the participants do reflect some of the broad diversity of experience and background of cross-border workers in Luxembourg.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted around 45 minutes. The participants were asked a range of questions relating to how they came to be working in Luxembourg, their perspectives on multilingualism in Luxembourg and at work, language policies and language practices in their workplace, their perceived language skills, and their experiences of working as a cross-border worker in Luxembourg more generally. Although the participants’ answers to these specific questions were of interest, the questions were also conceptualised as a means of drawing out underlying language ideologies across the course of the interviews, through prompted discussion about matters relating to language in Luxembourg. Indeed, the focus in this chapter is not on the answers participants gave to particular questions, but rather on the ideologies they revealed in the process of answering them.

The analytical process involved examining the 30 interviews to look for moments where the participants oriented to the theme of interpersonal conflict in relation to language at work. While scrutinising the data, the following questions were considered: What is the perceived source of this linguistic conflict? How do the participants respond discursively to this perceived conflict? What role do language ideologies play in their responses? How do they endeavour to resolve the conflict? Working through participants’ answers to these questions, we found that the participants used a range of discursive strategies to respond to perceived linguistic conflict and promote their own interests, which we present in the following sections.

23.4 Sources of linguistic conflict

Most of the participants were aware of negative representations of cross-border workers in Luxembourg. For some, these representations were a minor phenomenon that reportedly did not affect them, whereas for others they were very salient. In many cases, these negative representations were linked to language use.

The most frequently raised issue was reactions to the use of French by cross-border workers. Georges, a French cross-border worker who worked at the social service provider, reported that even if most of his Luxembourgish patients spoke French, German and Luxembourgish, as a cross-border worker nurse “one will be much better perceived speaking Luxembourgish than speaking French” (on sera beaucoup mieux perçu en parlant le luxembourgeois que le français). Georges’ patients complained to him about the French cross-border workers who worked in the shops to which he accompanied them or who came to assist them at home, about whom they made dismissive comments such as “it’s French people at the checkout at Auchan [supermarket] again or French people coming to help me
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again” (c’est encore des Français à la caisse à Auchan ou c’est encore des Français qui vont venir m’aider). In the same context of home health care, Geneviève, a Belgian cross-border worker, commented that patients “sometimes say to us that we are in their country so it’s normal that we should be able to speak their language” (ils nous disent parfois qu’ils sont dans leur pays donc c’est normal qu’on puisse parler leur langue). These comments were especially common among participants working in service-oriented professions. In the context of her work in administration at the office products distribution company, Eloïse similarly observed in relation to the company’s Luxembourgish clients that “there are sometimes people who are profoundly against the fact that we employ people who start out purely Francophone” (il y a des fois des personnes qui sont profondément contre le fait que nous engagions du personnel qui au départ est purement francophone).

If French and Belgian cross-border workers often felt under pressure to speak Luxembourgish when at work, pressure to speak French was more salient to other cross-border workers. A number of German participants felt that French was used against them in the workplace, in professional and social contexts. Norbert, a German cross-border worker at the research organization, felt that he was unfairly obliged to accommodate to French speakers rather than them accommodating to him:

[An] aspect which upsets me personally somewhat is that I am often dragged down in French even when the other person speaks English or German. I notice that my French-speaking colleagues […] one has to, as it were, force them to speak a language other than French and that I as the one speaking a foreign language […] just have a disadvantage, and this I don’t find particularly fair.

[Ein] Aspekt der mich persönlich ein bisschen stört ist dass ich oftmals auf Französisch runtergezogen werde auch wenn der gegenüber Englisch oder Deutsch kann. Ich merk dabei meinen Französisch sprachigen Kollegen […] dass man die quasi schlagen muss dass die eine andere Sprache als Französisch sprechen und dass ich als Fremdsprachler […] einen Nachteil hab, was ich nicht unbedingt als eh gerecht empfinde.

Another German participant at the educational institution, Birte, expressed feelings of exclusion in the workplace related to the use of French by others:

We used to be in [another department] and there I had the feeling that sometimes people switched to French on purpose in order to exclude us a bit, and well of course I can’t prove it, but I just had the feeling that this was the case.

Wir waren ja vorher bei [einer anderen Abteilung] und da hatte ich schon das Gefühl, dass auch eher doch bewusst auf’s Französische gewechselt wurde, um uns ein bisschen auszusperren. Und ich mein’ das kann ich nicht nachweisen, aber es war einfach vom Gefühl her so.

Some participants had also observed negative reactions towards the use of languages other than French. Lena, a German cross-border worker, felt that the resistance to German she perceived might be linked to memories of the linguistic oppression of Luxembourg by Germany during the Second World War:

In the beginning […] I thought OK maybe people don’t like you to speak German because I think OK it’s all those Germans invading us here or … um … all kinds of
stereotypes they might attach to me which I didn’t really know what kind of stereotypes they had (laughs) um it could have been for, say, historical reasons.

In other cases, participants reacted negatively to the use of Portuguese at work in their presence. François, a French participant at the distribution company, commented:

There are also Portuguese people who will speak in Portuguese with each other [...] When we go past they will speak in French but when they want to say something to each other they speak in Portuguese so that we can’t understand, no I also think it’s rather to talk behind our backs.

Il y a aussi des portugais qui vont parler en portugais entre eux [...] Quand nous on passe ils vont parler en français mais dès qu’ils veulent se dire quelque chose ils vont parler en portugais pour que nous on ne comprenne, non moi je pense aussi c’est plutôt pour nous taper dans le dos quoi.

We can see from the above that perceived linguistic conflict could be related to one of many languages in the workplace – Luxembourgish, French and Portuguese, among others – and that this conflict could be experienced in a variety of ways, including a sense of pressure to provide service in a certain language, a feeling of being professionally or socially excluded at work and suspicion as to the motivations of colleagues for speaking in another language. Some participants saw the source of this conflict as being purely linguistic in nature. Georges, at the social service provider, stated that “it’s the fact of not being able to speak Luxembourgish, not being French, it’s rather just the language” (c’est le fait de ne pas parler luxembourgeois, pas en tant que Français, c’est plutôt juste la langue). But other participants linked the perceived conflict to nationality rather than language. Quentin, a French cross-border worker at the same workplace, told us:

I don’t know if it is language-related … it’s about Luxembourgers, French people, Germans, etc [...] there is perhaps a little barrier that exists, but I don’t think it is linked to language per se.

Je ne sais pas si ce soit que le fait de la langue ... c’est par rapport aux Luxembourgeois, par rapport aux Français, aux Allemands, etc [...] Il y a peut-être une petite barrière qui existe, mais je ne pense pas que ce soit liée à la langue en soi.

Even when they minimised the role of language in negative representations of cross-border workers, the participants sometimes saw language as contributing to their propagation. Eloïse, for example, at the social service provider, spoke of the rising status of Luxembourgish having “exacerbated” negative reactions to cross-border workers:

Eloïse: I have the impression that it has been exacerbated a little recently.
Interviewer: And why do you think that is?
Eloïse: I don’t know, perhaps … the fact that Luxembourgish became an official language at some point a few dozen years ago, and that encouraged this sentiment.

Eloïse: J’ai l’impression que ça s’est un petit peu exacerbé les derniers temps quoi.
Interviewer: Et pourquoi, à votre avis?
Eloïse: Je ne sais pas, peut-être que ... le fait que le luxembourgeois a été à un moment donné, il y a une dizaine d’années, reconnu comme une langue officielle, ça favorisait ce sentiment.
The next section looks at how the participants responded discursively to such perceived instances of linguistic conflict in order to protect and promote their own interests.

23.5 Responses to linguistic conflict

Not only were linguistic questions often raised as a central aspect of negative representations of cross-border workers in Luxembourg, but language was also recurrently used as a means of constructing reactions to these representations. Faced with instances of what they perceived to be linguistic conflict, the participants took several different discursive approaches to advance their own interests.

23.5.1 I’m not like those other ones

One strategy used was to bolster their own position by emphasising that, while other cross-border workers might be at fault for lacking language skills, this was not their case. An American cross-border worker at the research organisation, Kevin, felt his limited proficiency in French and German prevented him from making deeper social connections with his workmates. In response, he drew on the ideology of English as a global language (Seargeant, 2009) to justify his use of English at his workplace, but was also at pains to distinguish himself from monolingual English speakers by his greater efforts to be multilingual. He described how he wrote emails in English and then translated them below in German, or indicated receptive competence by responding to a conversation colleagues were having in Luxembourgish. In doing so, he enjoyed contradicting his colleagues’ potential perception of him as a “dumb American guy who doesn’t understand what we’re on about”, commenting:

I guess coming from America, there’s always been this feeling that […] with English as an international language that there’s this sort of [puts on voice] the bloody Americans they’re so lazy, they can’t be bothered to learn any other languages, and I don’t like that, and I like to say well yeah OK my languages are pretty poor but I’m willing to make an effort, and I’m willing to accept that there are other languages than just English, and so I’m quite happy to make an effort towards you know meeting [people half way].

Kevin’s combination of these two different stances allowed him to promote his interests as a native English speaker, while at the same time shielding himself from potential criticism on the basis of his language skills.

Those participants who adopted a multilingual ideology sometimes engaged in concurrent criticism of the lack of multilingual skills of their peers. Sometimes this criticism was directed at people of particular nationalities. Claude, a French cross-border worker who met the requirement of speaking Luxembourgish fluently in his job in the public service, declared in relation to his French co-nationals:

J’ai du mal à comprendre qu’il y ait des Français qui n’apprennent vraiment pas à dire bonjour et au revoir, ou qui le savent mais qui ne le diront pas, parce que … donc, on peut dire par là que je fais un petit effort en plus pour ça.
Other participants criticised colleagues in their immediate working environment. Martine, who felt valued for her multilingual skills at the real estate company where she worked, in comparison to her monolingual colleagues, claimed:

Let’s say that I think what the company is doing is good, because they organise Luxembourgish courses … then I think there is also a responsibility on the part of the employees, also on their side to show goodwill towards learning languages.

This strategy enables these participants to distance themselves from other cross-border workers, to avoid themselves being the target of criticism on the basis of language skills at work.

23.5.2 Bowing to the pressure

Other participants appeared to accept the criticism levelled at cross-border workers in relation to their allegedly poor language skills, particularly in regard to Luxembourgish, and took up an ideological stance in favour of learning Luxembourgish themselves. Luc, a Belgian participant at a retail company, explicitly oriented to the sensitivity of the issue of cross-border workers and the Luxembourgish language and admitted that learning Luxembourgish was in part a way to defuse potential tensions:

It’s a subject that is rather, I can’t find my words, tricky or sensitive. So that’s why I want to learn Luxembourgish, to show respect, [but] also for my own best interests.

C’est un sujet assez, je ne trouve pas mes mots, tricky ou sensitive. Alors, c’est pour ça que je veux, par respect, apprendre le luxembourgeois, aussi par intérêt.

Such efforts to accommodate to an ideology of the importance of Luxembourgish sometimes came at a high personal cost. Bertrand, a Belgian cross-border worker working in food production, expressed a highly positive ideology towards Luxembourgish, which he had learnt for seven years but claimed to still hardly be able to speak due to having “a lot of difficulty with languages” (j’ai vraiment des difficultés avec les langues). His pro-Luxembourgish ideology appeared to align with his expected or hoped-for competence, but not being able to gain the desired competence had nevertheless left his ideology intact. The implications for exclusion in such cases are high, Bertrand telling a story of how he decided not to be involved in a professional association because he knew Luxembourgish would be used and he did not want to force people to speak French just because he was there. Rather than attempting to promote the use of a language he could speak, e.g. adopting a language ideology holding that French should be used as a lingua franca in this context, he preferred to “exclude himself” (on s’exclut soi-même). This can be seen as a hegemonic language ideology (Gal, 1998), in the sense that the participant adopts it even though it does not promote his own interests, but rather those of another group (here, speakers of Luxembourgish).

In other cases, the adoption of an ideology of the pre-eminence of Luxembourgish appeared to involve an apparent concession (van Dijk, 1993), before participants went on to promote other language ideologies. This was common among more monolingual
participants with an orientation to an ideology of societal multilingualism as a problem (Blommaert and Verschueren, 1998). For example, Quentin, the French cross-border worker at the social service provider mentioned earlier, started by expressing highly positive views towards societal multilingualism and Luxembourgish in particular. When asked what advice he would give to someone who was planning to come to Luxembourg to work, he said that they should learn Luxembourgish:

Me, I advise in any case that one should start speaking Luxembourgish because first of all because we are going to work in a foreign country so it’s normal that if we want to integrate properly, even without being a resident, if we want to integrate into the professional fabric there is an effort to make at that level […] We go and work in a country that gives us employment, it’s normal that we use its language.

Moi je conseille fortement en tout cas qu’il faut se mettre à parler luxembourgeois parce que d’abord parce qu’on va travailler dans un pays étranger donc il est normal que si on veut s’intégrer correctement, même sans être résident, si on veut s’intégrer dans le tissu professionnel il y a un effort à faire à ce niveau-là […] On va travailler dans un pays qui nous donne du travail, il est normal qu’on utilise sa langue.

Quentin expressed alignment here with the “one nation, one language” ideology (Woolard, 1998), presenting Luxembourgish as the one true language of Luxembourg (“its language”), which people working in a “foreign country” should learn in order to “integrate”. Later in the interview, however, he expressed strong resentment at the discrimination he perceived as being directed towards him due to not being able to speak Luxembourgish:

As cross-border workers we come, we contribute something to the Luxembourgish economy, but I’m not sure if the Luxembourgers are happy that there are so many foreigners coming to their country […] Now that Luxembourg is insisting so much that its language be recognised, it’s legitimate, but it’s also a way of asserting themselves […] One perhaps also has the tendency to think that this language is a barrier that they are putting up against the invasion.

Nous en tant que frontaliers, on vient, on apporte quelque chose à l’économie luxembourgeoise, mais je ne suis pas certain qu’au niveau des Luxembourgeois qu’ils soient satisfaits qu’il y ait tellement d’étrangers qui viennent chez eux […] Maintenant que le Luxembourg insiste tellement pour que sa langue soit reconnue, c’est légitime, mais c’est aussi un moyen de s’affirmer […] On a peut-être tendance aussi à penser que cette langue est une barrière que l’on met contre l’invasion.

Furthermore, at the end of the interview, his commitment to societal multilingualism in general was also put in doubt by his comment that:

Sometimes I say to myself, we are almost all French, we could speak in French, it would be simpler [laughs].

Parfois je me dis, on est presque tous Français, on pourrait parler en français, ce serait plus simple [rire].

This approach could reflect a self-preservation strategy i.e. Quentin wanting to be seen as adopting a pro-Luxembourgish ideology even if he privately does not, in order to protect how he comes across to others.
23.5.3 Expressing resistance

Some participants responded to instances of perceived conflict by adopting a defensive approach and going on the attack. These participants expressed very strong feelings of injustice and discrimination, constructing scenarios of xenophobia and lack of opportunity linked either to their language skills or their nationality. This was the case for Norbert, the German cross-border worker referred to earlier who felt forced to accommodate to French at the research organisation where he worked. Norbert established a link between cross-border workers and other groups of migrant workers, arguing that cross-border workers in Luxembourg were perceived as Gastarbeiter (guest workers):

In German we have a useful word which in my opinion describes the situation very well, it’s the word Gastarbeiter […] No matter how international, no matter how multilingual Luxembourg is, or how it presents itself, no matter how many cross-border workers come or are necessary, at the end of the day there is always a Luxembourger who shuts the door with their key.

At the same workplace, Henri, a French cross-border worker, was worried about his future career prospects in Luxembourg. In describing his perception of discrimination on the basis of his limited language skills and his status as a “foreigner”, he constructed a metaphor of bus drivers who treated cross-border workers as livestock:

I don’t encounter [negative attitudes] directly, in fact, there is not really any aggressiveness but I find that sometimes […] it’s difficult to define, but I feel it, I feel it for example in the morning when we have to get the bus and the buses are overloaded so it’s just Belgian and French and German cross-border workers and […] I find that the bus drivers don’t make an effort to drive slowly, so it’s very violent in fact, we are shaken about, they brake brutally, they accelerate brutally and … if we arrive when the door has just closed … I don’t know if they also do it for Luxembourgers, but I take it as a certain violence and aggressiveness towards people who are not from the country […] so sometimes in these cases I have the impression that we are taken for livestock in fact and that … well … that there is really no respect.
These participants expressed strong sentiments of division between cross-border workers and Luxembourgers, and aligned themselves with an ideology of exclusion on the basis of cultural and linguistic difference. In this way, their discourse contributes to reinforcing traditional ethnolinguistic barriers between the different language groups in Luxembourg. One can ask how this ideological stance reflects the interests of these participants. It may be that their experiences to date have given them the sense that they have nothing to gain by attempting to adapt to local language linguistic or cultural practices, that the cards are stacked against them. From this perspective, they may see their interests as better served by reinforcing their own in-group identity (as “foreigners”) in order to fortify themselves for the battle they see themselves engaged in against the opposing group.

**23.5.4 A strategy of inclusion**

Rather than focusing on a perceived requirement to accommodate linguistically, other participants constructed a picture of pre-existing linguistic inclusion based on common language background. Several French participants alluded to linguistic links between Luxembourgish and the *platt lorrain*, a language variety originating from the Lorraine region in France that is very close to Luxembourgish. Delphine, a French cross-border worker at the educational institution, mentioned that becoming aware of these linguistic links to Luxembourg had reinforced her sense of regional identity:

> There are lots of things that I have discovered and learnt [...] precisely through Luxembourgish, through the language and through the people of the country, about my own origins [...] the meals my mother made, the words we used, there are so many things, there are lots of things that I have really understood.

_delphine_ went on to say that, when she was working in Luxembourg, “I don’t feel like I am in a foreign country and I don’t feel like a foreigner” (_je ne me sens pas en pays étranger et je ne me sens pas étrangère_). Marie, working at the social service provider, claimed her skills in the _platt lorrain_, which she had learnt as a first language, led Luxembourgers to take her for a Luxembourger when she started to work in the health sector in Luxembourg:

> Luxembourgish is a bit like the platt lorrain where we live [...] and so this Lorraine dialect resembles Luxembourgish a little bit. I spoke Luxembourgish straight away when I arrived here, people thought I was a Luxembourger.

_Le luxembourgeois c’est un peu comme chez nous le platt lorrain [...] et donc ce patois lorrain il ressemble un petit peu au luxembourgeois. Le luxembourgeois ici quand je suis arrivée je parlais tout de suite, on m’a pris pour une luxembourgeoise quoi._

It is interesting to see how Marie moves swiftly from referring to Luxembourgish tentatively as being “a bit like the *platt lorrain*” to conflating the two entirely in saying that she “spoke Luxembourgish straight away”. By drawing on this ideology of linguistic commonality,
these participants promote the legitimacy of their presence in Luxembourg by emphasising a cultural and linguistic connection with the country that negative representations of cross-border workers in Luxembourg would seek to deny. While these claims were made by the participants in very positive terms, it is important to note that they provide a direct challenge to dominant language ideologies in Luxembourg that would construct Luxembourgish as belonging to Luxembourg and Luxembourgers alone. For instance, when Delphine commented that “roots never stop at a border, they pass underneath” (les racines ne s’arrêtent jamais à une frontière, elles passent par en-dessous), she resisted the state borders inherent in the ‘one nation, one language’ ideology (Woolard, 1998).

For some participants, the resemblance between Luxembourgish and the platt lorrain was not sufficient to engender a sense of transnational identity, however. Quentin, who described his feeling of discrimination at the social service provider further above, had also noticed the similarity between the two regional varieties, but his strong perception of prejudice in Luxembourg prevented him from adopting an ideology of regional identity. He commented:

If I didn’t work in the social sector then yes I would have this feeling of being in a greater region. Working in the social sector I have it a bit less, because of the very forceful relationships one can have with the Luxembourgish public sector, so one has a stronger feeling of being a cross-border worker […] In relation to the Luxembourg public administration one really has the impression of being a migrant worker, it’s annoying […] It’s clear that, in inverted commas, one has the impression of being the little Arab who comes to work here […] through the attitude that [people] can have, they look down on you, or they even insist on speaking Luxembourgish […] There is no effort by people to welcome [cross-border workers].

Si je ne travaillais pas dans le social oui j’aurais cette impression d’être dans une grande région. Travailler dans le social, je l’ai un peu moins, du fait des relations qu’on peut avoir très fortes avec la fonction publique luxembourgeoise, donc on a un ressenti plus important en tant que frontalier […] Au niveau de la fonction publique luxembourgeoise on a vraiment l’impression d’être travailleur immigré, c’est pénible […] C’est clair que, avec plein de guillemets, on a l’impression d’être le petit Arabe qui vient travailler quoi […] par l’attitude que peuvent avoir [les gens], on vous prend de haut, ou bien voire on insiste à parler luxembourgeois […] Il n’y a pas d’effort des gens pour accueillir des [frontaliers].

Thus, the same linguistic “facts” can be used to support contrasting language ideologies, depending on the participant’s assessment of what best serves their interests.

23.6 Explicit and implicit attempts to resolve conflict

Participants sometimes reported having directly engaged in discussions with Luxembourgers in relation to negative representations of cross-border workers. Geneviève, the Belgian cross-border worker at the social service provider who felt pressure to use Luxembourgish with clients, reported that she generally tried not to take notice of negative comments about cross-border workers. When they came up recurrently, however, she claimed to talk directly with the person concerned. One of the arguments she used was that Luxembourg needed cross-border workers due to a lack of qualified workers. Geneviève recounted that she said “take all the foreigners well all the cross-border workers out of the country, uh … well,
I think you are going to have a problem (laughs)” (retirer tous les étrangers enfin tous les frontaliers du pays, euh ... bon, je pense que vous allez avoir un souci (rire)). Georges, at the same workplace, claimed to have had discussions with his Luxembourgish patients when they insisted on speaking Luxembourgish to cross-border worker cashiers at the supermarket who could only speak French. In these instances, Georges reported saying to his patients “come on stop it, you can speak [French too]” (ben arrêtez, vous parlez [français aussi]). When the patients distinguished between the cashiers and him personally by saying “but you’re nice, there’s no problem” (mais toi t’es gentil, il n’y a pas de problème), he pressed the point, saying “they might be nice too” (ils sont peut-être aussi gentils). Mostly, however, participants did not report engaging directly with others in situations of perceived linguistic conflict. Marie, a French cross-border worker at the social service provider, was one of the participants who expressed discomfort at colleagues speaking Portuguese to each other in her presence:

You’re next to them and you wonder if it’s so that you can’t understand ... or if it’s because they want to speak Portuguese.

On est à côté et on se demande si c’est pour qu’on ne comprenne pas ... ou si c’est parce qu’elles ont envie de parler portugais quoi.

She discounted the option of asking her colleagues about their intentions because she felt she wouldn’t get a straight answer:

[It’s] impossible to know. Even if you ask them they’ll say ‘oh no, no, it wasn’t so you wouldn’t understand no, no, no’, so it won’t be the truth anyway.

Impossible de savoir. Même si on leur demande, elles vont dire euh ‘ah non, non, ce n’était pas pour que tu ne comprennes pas, non, non, non’, donc ça ne sera pas la vérité de toute façon.

As the data analysed here involves talking to the participants, rather than watching them in interaction with others, it is not possible to know to what degree they actually engaged with the people they perceived themselves being in conflict with at work. Going by their comments in interview, however, responses to linguistic conflict seemed to largely take place in participants’ minds. This may in part be due to the strong norm in support of multilingualism in Luxembourg, which can make it ‘face-threatening’ for individuals to admit difficulty related to languages in work and other contexts. It may also result from the sense among some cross-border workers that, as non-residents and non-nationals, they are not in a position of social and economic power to challenge the aspects of their working experience that they perceive as linguistically or culturally challenging. Alternatively, it may relate to the relative implicitness of the conflict itself. As we saw above, participants were sometimes unsure as to what was really going on, as when one of the participants commented “well of course I can’t prove it, but I just had the feeling that this was the case” (ich mein’ das kann ich nicht nachweisen, aber es war einfach vom Gefühl her so) or another “it’s difficult to define, but I feel it” (c’est difficile à définir, mais je le sens). Whatever the reasons, the various strategies of response described above appear to reside less in direct confrontation and more in choosing an ideological stance to adopt that participants feel will best further their interests. Rather than offering an opportunity for interpersonal conflict resolution, therefore, discourses of linguistic conflict in the data here under scrutiny often seem to represent a vehicle for cross-border workers to construct a
positive self-image and work through their own identity negotiations of inclusion or exclusion. Depending on how they perceive their situation, it is sometimes in their interest to construct themselves as belonging in Luxembourg, and sometimes not. In this, we can see the identity-related function of language ideologies, as participants use them to establish their own positioning with regard to being a member or a non-member of social groups variously defined.

### 23.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined cross-border workers’ representations of linguistic conflict in multilingual workplaces in Luxembourg. Not only did the participants often refer to the theme of language as a source of perceived conflict in Luxembourg, but they also drew on language as a way of constructing their reactions to this perceived conflict. As well as underlining the importance that languages play in the working life of cross-border workers in Luxembourg, the results illustrate some important mechanisms of how language ideologies function in linguistically conflictual environments.

The approach to language ideologies taken here proposes that individuals adopt stances on language that reflect their personal interests. We can see in the data that the ideologies adopted by participants depend both on their linguistic skills (e.g. multilingual ideologies for multilingual participants, monolingual ideologies for monolingual participants) and on their perceptions of their social status in Luxembourg (e.g. as welcomed or resented, local or foreign). For those who feel included and valued in the country, language can be used as a tool to reinforce that sense of inclusion (e.g. through finding links between the language varieties of home and the language varieties of the country of work). For those who feel excluded and discriminated against, language can be used as a means of expressing injustice and resistance (e.g. through opposing the use of Luxembourgish). In all cases, participants appear to creatively select from available language ideologies to respond to the specific circumstances of their situation, as they see them.

A final point to emphasise is that it was not always clear if the instances of interpersonal conflict discussed in the interviews were based on language per se. This was a point some participants raised themselves, when they expressed uncertainty about whether a perceived reaction on the part of another person related to language or something else, such as nationality. In some cases, the interviewers felt too as if language acted as a proxy for other points of contention in participants’ discourse, be this nationality, place of residence, cultural identity or social difference in general. If these instances of linguistic conflict were not so linguistic after all, this would not be surprising, as language ideologies, by their very nature, are never about language alone.

**Note**

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**Notes**

1. All names used are pseudonyms.
2. Original interview extracts are provided in brackets after the English translation. If no original text is provided, this means the interview was undertaken in English.
References
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