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Bellamy, John ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1617-1309>
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Contemporary Perspectives on Language Standardization

The Role of Digital and Online Technologies

John Bellamy

26.1 Introduction

As the usage and spread of digital and online forms of communication have grown, so has their impact on the formation, implementation and dissemination of language standards and norms. The bulk of existing linguistic research on such technological developments has focused on ‘bottom-up’ practices, especially on how online literacies provide new spaces for a greater variety of writing practices and how digital domains enable policies ‘from below’ in the regulation of language usage. Other lines of enquiry have addressed the implications for agency with regard to both the increasing role of crowdsourcing for lexicographic purposes and the ease of becoming a popular authority on ‘proper’ language use through social media. Section 26.2 discusses the surge of scholarly interest in these areas, followed by a more specific look at how this is illustrated by the expansion of written Luxembourgish in digital and online spaces. The Luxembourgish language is a particularly interesting case in this respect because its orthography is undergoing another official revision, but it is debatable how aware Luxembourgish speakers are of the spelling norms. Both sides of this policy–practice spectrum are played out in online and digital spaces. Therefore, this chapter will complement the more established view ‘from below’ with fresh perspectives on the role of these technologies in the standardization process ‘from above’ by looking at actions from both the state institutions and private organizations in the top-down diffusion of

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language standards. The latter research angle has received comparatively little analysis, despite the fact that online and digital means are becoming increasingly significant channels for shaping and promoting official language norms. The main discussion will comprise three key areas: (1) the Schreiwien.lu online resources and spelling campaign; (2) the most popular online and digital dictionaries, spellcheckers and apps; and (3) an analysis of rtl.lu, a web platform in Luxembourgish which has considerable influence in spreading awareness of the written norms for Luxembourgish.

26.2 The Influence on Written Standards from the Growing Presence of Digital and Online Media

The importance of the written form as a symbolic cornerstone of a standard language is widely recognized in scholarship on standardization; for example, Milroy and Milroy (2012: 51) acknowledge that '[o]ne function of written language and the writing system (its conventions of spelling, grammar and word-choice) is to enforce or maintain standardisation'. Frequently positioned as emblematic of a nation (Anderson 2006: 74), written standard language is often ideologically associated with power (Gal 2006: 173), prestige (Trudgill & Hannah 2013: 45) and propriety (Crowley 2012: 985). Efforts to make changes to an existing orthography, even subtle ones, can face considerable opposition and be mired in prolonged disputes (cf. Johnson 2005 on the most recent orthographical reform for German).

From traditional perspectives, the written form of a language is imposed 'from above' (cf. Chapter 2, this volume) through institutional means such as education, official documentation and state policies, as well as via literature, usage by a social elite and the media. There is a focus on correctness (Milroy 2001: 535) and a prescriptive tradition (Langer & Davies 2005: 24) to control how the standard is written and to preserve the supposedly timeless, 'purest' form of the language. However, writing practices take place in many domains, not just the public sphere and formal registers, which are usually the most heavily regulated. Writing can be informal, immediate and flexible in terms of its production, purpose and structure. Research has increasingly brought into focus the largely invisible writing practices which do not necessarily conform to the norms set by an official standard. Weth and Juffermans (2018: 1) revisit Saussure's phrase *la tyrannie de la lettre* ('the tyranny of writing') to explore 'ideologies of language and literacy in culture and society as well as the tension and contradictions between the written and spoken word'. Elspaß (see Chapter 3, this volume) draws attention to written sources 'from below', which principally consist of ego-documents and writing in the private domain. Such bottom-up approaches to analysing writing afford greater recognition to writing practices which embrace both standard and 'non-standard' language, both formal and informal registers and both distance and immediacy, as well

as both conceptually written forms and conceptually spoken forms (Koch & Oesterreicher 1985: 450). The infiltration of oral elements into a written text has been described by Martineau (2013: 134) as a type of linguistic hybridity, although digital forms of writing might also be considered a blending of styles rather than simply the intermingling of the vernacular with formal writing skills.

In the present day, particularly salient examples of a graphic representation of informal, spoken communication emerge in many written practices found in text messaging, social media and other types of constantly evolving digital means of communication. Androutsopoulos (2011: 153) labels this innovation and change in digital written usage *the elaboration of vernacular writing*: 'Simply put: more people write, people write more, and unregimented writing goes public'. At least in the European context, this moment is unique in the standardization of national languages because of the growing abundance of publicly available written language that has not been subjected to editorial scrutiny. Just as the private and public spheres become ever more entwined in Late Modernity, so do public vernacular writing and professionally crafted, institutionally framed language (Androutsopoulos 2011: 154). This is, however, not to imply that all informal digital written content has never been subjected to any normative processes. Like all forms of communication, such writing practices also adhere to some extent to their own stylistic norms and categories. In her analysis of online instant messages (IMs), Baron (2010: 17) stops short of categorizing synchronous written messages as 'speech', but agrees that 'there are enough speech-like elements (especially in male IM conversations) to explain why it seems so natural to talk about IM "conversations" and not IM "letters"', although they consist entirely of text. Shortis (2016: 506), who has examined several corpora of text messages, goes further and suggests that we have reached 'post-standardization' in the variation observed in such forms of written communication because '[t]his treatment of the centripetal resources of conventionalised written system as material for endless flexible innovation calls into question the association between the normative conventions used in print and the theoretical construct of an "English writing system"'. The shift away from traditional print media and their loosening grip on written production possibly heralds a nascent 'democratization' of written norms which are continually evolving as they are creatively reproduced, modified or discarded at a rapid pace.

The increased mass participation in the creation and reworking of language norms and practices, which has been facilitated by digital resources and Internet access, has been recognized in research on lexicography and online grammar resources (Schaffer 2010; Nelson 2019). Free and publicly accessible online lexicographical resources which rely on volunteers to create the content, such as Wiktionary (www.wiktionary.org) and Urban Dictionary (www.urbandictionary.com), continue to rise in usage since the inception of so-called Web 2.0. Although fully crowdsourced, the Urban

Dictionary has been formally consulted and cited in court proceedings, where the definition and interpretation of slang terms were pertinent to the case (State of Wisconsin 2013).

The popularity and impact of the English language version of Wiktionary has steadily climbed over the past four years, for which the average number of monthly page views has grown from just under 47 million (January 2016) to just under 90 million (January 2020) (numbers from Topviews Analysis in Wiktionary:Statistics). Not only do these figures demonstrate the increasing prominence of such online crowdsourced resources, but their unmatched capacity to include emerging neologisms has also been noted (Sajous et al. 2018) because the process to include nascent lexemes in established professional dictionaries usually takes much longer. Another example of such increased individual agency in the formation and evolution of language standards is the increasing number of online self-appointed language experts and ‘grammar gurus’ who regularly update their blogs with their own guidance on ‘proper’ language usage and reminding visitors of ‘correct’ grammar rules (cf. the Grammar Girl blog, for example). The generally prescriptive language advice blogs and postings (Schaffer 2010) have no barrier for entry and hence the unregulated recommendations on language use can generally be published at will with a potentially wide readership.

The dictionary publisher HarperCollins (Chapter 10, this volume) has embraced crowdsourcing as a contributory factor in the production of their dictionaries, which they are encouraging so that they can dismantle the divide between creator and consumer. Similarly, the official Spanish dictionary from Spain’s national Language Academy (*Diccionario de la lengua española de la Real Academia Española*) has conceded to public pressure applied by users on the microblogging platform Twitter with regard to one its definitions of the word *fácil* (Chapter 8, this volume) which was perceived by many as sexist. The use of technology to enable stronger public involvement in the decision-making process behind the compilation of dictionaries is another indication of how digital media and online communication is influencing the processes of language standardization, particularly with regard to formal, written standards.

Such mediatization of language (Hepp 2014) has had a particularly large impact on autochthonous heritage languages (Reershemius 2017), on creoles (Rajah-Carrim 2009) and on languages which have a comparatively large number of new speakers (Ní Bhroin 2014). Electronically mediated forms of communication give rise to new literacy practices and have far-reaching ramifications for ongoing debates about standard language, rules and written norms in these contexts. For example, virtual ethnography has revealed (Lenihan 2013) language policies enacted on social media both in terms of ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ processes in the use of Irish. By creating a space which encourages the writing of a language amongst speakers who previously were reluctant to do so (Reershemius 2017: 45 for

Low German) or unsure of how to write the language (Belling 2015: 266 for Luxembourgish), digital and online media have become instrumental in enabling writing practices, and are also becoming forums for debates about how the written forms should be normalized and regulated.

With reference to the case of Luxembourgish, this chapter demonstrates how the growth in these more recent technologically driven forms of communication have not only influenced the practices of writing Luxembourgish ‘from below’, but also are increasingly significant factors in the ‘top-down’ formalization and promotion of a written standard for the Luxembourgish language.

26.3 Overview of the Luxembourgish Language Situation

Luxembourg’s current national borders have been in existence since the 1839 Treaty of London and are shared with Belgium, France and Germany. The Grand Duchy’s geographical position has a considerable influence on its language situation. A 1984 language law formally recognized French and German as legal, judicial and administrative languages in Luxembourg while officially designating Luxembourgish as the national language (*Mémorial* 1984). From a linguistic perspective, Luxembourgish is situated in the Central Franconian Germanic dialect area and has many lexical borrowings from French (Gilles & Moulin 2003: 307–8). The 1984 legislation more or less acknowledged the de facto language situation that was already in existence (Weber & Horner 2012: 4). Covering 2,586 square kilometres, Luxembourg has a population of 613,900, of which 47.5 per cent (291,500 people) are designated as ‘foreigners’ according to official figures (Statec 2019). As one of the original members of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, Luxembourg has been part of the European Union and its earlier iterations from the beginning, a factor which plays a significant role in constructing the Grand Duchy’s national identity.

Since French and German have been traditionally regarded as the languages fulfilling the written functions and Luxembourgish mainly used for speaking, the situation in Luxembourg has been described as ‘triglossia with trilingualism’ (Knowles 1980). In Luxembourgish primary schools, literacy is initially taught through German, and French is introduced later at the end of the second year of primary school. Luxembourgish is not officially approved as a medium of instruction in school and features as a subject for one hour per week over the course of six years at primary school and one year at secondary school. Therefore, Luxembourgish formally has a minor role in the syllabus, although informally the language is used frequently as a spoken form of communication in the classroom. Weber (2009: 136) describes this scenario as one which entrenches at an early age ‘a particular ideological model of the ideal Luxembourger (speaking Luxembourgish

and learning standard German and French as additional languages, mostly for the purposes of writing’.

The standardization of Luxembourgish is a relatively recent development compared to ‘some of the long lasting standardization histories of many of the other Germanic languages’ (Gilles & Moulin 2003: 310; also Belling & de Bres 2014: 76). Consequently, speakers of Luxembourgish have been found to express insecurity about being able to write the language ‘properly’ according to officially sanctioned norms (Bellamy & Horner 2018: 335). These feelings of uncertainty potentially signal an initial phase of norm orientation. Speakers of Luxembourgish are aware that there are norms but are often unsure about the specifics. After monitoring workplace interactions in an ethnographic study in Luxembourg, Franziskus (2016: 218) observes how ‘four team members of an IT company collaboratively construct a view of Luxembourgish as a grammarless language that has no rules for writing’, a stance which Franziskus points out has weighty implications for constructing a perceived hierarchy in the status of languages in Luxembourg. However, such uncertainty and anxiety about writing Luxembourgish is generally less pronounced in informal domains such as text messaging and social media communication amongst friends. A summary of these sentiments is echoed in the following two example extracts from the focus groups carried out as part of the MULTILUX project (‘Multilingualism and the Voices of Young People in Luxembourg’, 2014–16, conducted by Horner and Bellamy).

Extract from Focus Group No. 11, Ettelbruck

Mike: So I can only write two proper words in Luxembourgish. It’s a really difficult language to write too. I don’t have a clue.

Extract from Focus Group No. 15, Belval Campus Group

Yvette: *Ich schreibe eigentlich alle meine SMS oder so auf Luxemburgisch aber halt nicht in dann der richtigen Grammatik. Also man versteht, was ich sagen will. Man kann es lesen aber dann fehlt vielleicht auf einem ‘E’ einen Strich oder zwei Punkte aber ...*

(‘I actually write all my text messages and such in Luxembourgish but not using the proper grammar. So everyone understands what I want to say. They can read it but then perhaps there is a line or two dots missing above an ‘e’ but ...’) [translation JB & KH] (Bellamy & Horner 2018: 335–6)

In fact, Yvette from the above example goes on to add that she particularly likes the flexibility that Luxembourgish offers precisely because of what she perceives as a lack of strict orthographical rules, allowing her to write Luxembourgish however she wants. This practice corresponds with findings by Belling (2015: 288), who observed a ‘bottom-up’ process of writing Luxembourgish in his analysis of Facebook Wall postings amongst Luxembourgish speakers. Belling describes these forms of writing

Luxembourgish in relation to Sebba's (2007: 43–4) concept of 'unregulated orthographic space', which Sebba suggests is expanding in online communication and other digital technologies like SMS messaging (Sebba 2012: 5). The continuing spread of Luxembourgish in the form of informal digital writing has been recognized as an ongoing process for some time (Gilles 2011). Belling and de Bres (2014: 85) have examined posts from a Facebook group associated with Luxembourg, including posts written in Luxembourgish, to analyse digital literacy practices. They observe the 'rising importance of Luxembourgish as written language in social media [which] is arguably all the more surprising, given that it is still mainly used as spoken language' (Belling & de Bres 2014: 85).

This is not to say that Luxembourgish has not existed as a written language before recent times. Adopting a different angle of analysis, Wagner and Davies (2009) examined letters written in Luxembourgish, French and German during World War II. According to this corpora, Luxembourgish has been recognized as 'the language of closeness' (Wagner & Davies 2009: 123) in contrast to letters written in German, which are much more distant and formal. At the same time, they noticed how some of the letter writers actually felt secure in their writing of Luxembourgish precisely because they believed that there was no official orthography for writing the language and so they did not think that they could make any mistakes due to the lack of a prescribed way of spelling correctly (Wagner & Davies 2009: 125). This latter observation indicates the general low level of awareness amongst Luxembourgish speakers of official laws, regulations and rules on the language which are already in existence. Published pieces written in Luxembourgish were already being printed in the 1820s (Newton 2000: 136–7), and an increasing number of works in Luxembourgish (poetry, dictionaries and spelling guides) began to emerge shortly after (Bellamy forthcoming). The Welter–Engelmann (Welter 1914) spelling system was developed at the beginning of the twentieth century and so there was indeed an official orthography at the time in which the aforementioned letters were written. There have been several official orthographies formulated and enshrined in law since then: Margues–Feltes 1946 (*Mémorial* 1946), revised form of the Welter–Engelmann for the *Luxemburger Wörterbuch* (*Mémorial* 1975), followed by minor amendments in 1999 (*Mémorial* 1999). Most recently, the two rulings on spelling from 1975 and 1999 have been revised again to produce a more coherent set of spelling rules, which were published in November 2019 and are also meant to clarify some uncertainties (<https://portal.education.lu/zls/ORTHO-FAQ>). There is a transition period until September 2020 while the latest orthography is being implemented. However, it is debatable to what extent Luxembourgish speakers are aware of these official standards. The rest of this chapter seeks to address part of this potential discrepancy between establishing official rules for Luxembourgish as part of its ongoing standardization and the general lack of knowledge of them by examining the increasing usage of online

and digital media in top-down efforts by state institutions and private organizations to implement language norms. This approach has to date receive comparatively little attention in research on the standardization of Luxembourgish. Since the most recent official norms have prioritized the standardization of the spelling system for Luxembourgish, this will be the focus of the chapter's analysis. As discussed earlier in this chapter, most existing studies on Luxembourgish in online and digital domains have centred on bottom-up practices.

26.4 The Schreiwen.lu Online Resource and Campaign

As a starting point for the discussion, recent developments in the standardization of Luxembourgish can be traced back to a series of events occurring in 2015 and 2016. A national referendum was held in Luxembourg in June 2015 that included a question on whether foreign residents should also be granted a right to vote in elections. A total of 78 per cent of Luxembourgers voted 'no' to the proposal, and discourses emerged to justify this outcome of the referendum by explaining that it did not reflect animosity towards 'foreigners' in Luxembourg but was meant to 'protect' the Luxembourgish language from a perceived threat of French. These discourses also manifested in online petitions to the government. Luxembourgers can participate in petitions which are submitted online to the parliamentary chamber. If the petition reaches a threshold of 4,500 signatures, it will trigger a debate in parliament. Such e-petitioning platforms are rising in popularity in many democracies and are regarded by some lawmakers and scholars as improving the participation of citizens in political decision-making (Puschmann et al. 2017: 204). In 2016, Petition 698 was submitted with the proposal that *Lëtzebuenger Sprooch als 1. Amtssprooch an Nationalsprooch gesetzlech fir all Awunner zu Lëtzebuerg festzeleeën* ('Luxembourgish language legally recognized as 1st official and national language for all residents of Luxembourg'). Petition 698 broke all records by reaching the threshold for setting in motion a parliamentary debate in only five days, achieving 14,702 signatures in total.

Besides demanding that Luxembourgish be legally established as the official and national language of the country, Petition 698 asked for the language to feature increasingly in the school curriculum and for Luxembourgish to be the first language of communication in official channels. In response to this, Petition 725 was submitted two months later with the title « *NEEN* » *zu eiser Mammesprooch als äischt offiziell Sprooch* ('No' to our mother tongue as the first official language') in Luxembourgish, French and German. Petition 725 also reached the necessary threshold for a debate, gaining 5,040 signatures, and declared its goal to be the promotion of the benefits gained from the traditional multilingualism of the Grand Duchy. The central issues of the opposing petitions were debated in early 2017 and the outcome was the

latest government initiative *Strategie fir d'Promotioun vun der Lëtzebuurger Sprooch* ('Strategy for the promotion of the Luxembourgish language'). It is worth mentioning that a general election was on the horizon (in October 2018) and so there might have also been politically motivated intentions for announcing this policy at this time. This forty-point strategy (available in Luxembourgish and in French) outlined a twenty-year plan for a linguistic and cultural policy for Luxembourgish and concentrates on four key areas:

- (1) To strengthen the position of the Luxembourgish language;
- (2) To further the normalization, use and study of Luxembourgish;
- (3) To encourage the teaching of Luxembourgish language and culture;
- (4) To promote Luxembourgish-speaking culture.

Much of this document was then enshrined in law with the *Gesetz iwwer d'Promotioun vun der Lëtzebuurger Sprooch* ('Law of the Promotion of the Luxembourgish Language') on 20 July 2018, a key feature of which is the foundation of the *Zenter fir d'Lëtzebuurger Sprooch (ZLS)* ('Centre for the Luxembourgish Language'). Since the petitions are all submitted electronically on the government's webpage, we already can see how the interface between language, policy, standards and agency is being shaped by the modern online and digital resources increasingly at our disposal. Language ideologies can be voiced, language debates can take place and language policies can be shaped within the formalized apparatus of the state's electronic petition system.

In the midst of this initiative, an online resource providing guidance on how to write Luxembourgish according to official rules was set up (early 2017): *Schreiwen.lu* (*schreiwen* is the verb 'to write' in Luxembourgish). *Schreiwen.lu* was also accompanied by a publicity campaign with posters displayed on billboards and videos published on social media. The *Schreiwen.lu* campaign, being a top-down approach to language standardization from the Luxembourgish government and using an online platform, merits some further discussion here.

Upon landing on the *Schreiwen.lu* website, the user is presented with a foreword from the Minister of Education, Children and Youth, Claude Meisch. This foreword is useful for providing context about the campaign and the postulated reasons for promoting awareness of spelling rules. However, it is also important to bear in mind that, being written by a government minister, there is a political dimension to the piece, especially considering the contemporary discourses mentioned earlier about 'protecting' Luxembourgish. At several points in the foreword, the concept of *change* is highlighted, especially in the last fifty years. This is initially described in terms of technological developments and the rise in written Luxembourgish:

Besonnenesch eis Schrëftsprooch ass an de leschte fofzéng Joer duerch d'Opkomme vun neien Technologien an den digitale Medien nach méi wichteg an eisem Alldag ginn.

(‘In particular, our writing in the last fifty years has become even more important in our daily life through the emergence of new technologies and digital media’.)

The domain shift of Luxembourgish from a primarily spoken medium to an increasingly written medium is also mentioned with regard to a surge in using Luxembourgish in the professional sphere:

D’Kommunikatioun op Lëtzebuergesch ass net méi just reduzéiert op de private Beräich, mee och am beruflechen, formellen Alldag gëtt eis Nationalsprooch ëmmer méi wichteg – sief et fir eng E-Mail un de Chef oder en offizielle Brëif un eng staatlech Institutioun.

(‘Communication in Luxembourgish is no longer only reduced to the private domain, but our national language becomes more and more important also in professional, formal daily life – be it for an email to the manager or an official letter to a government institution’.)

However, the minister also mentions how this transition poses challenges because of widely shared feelings of not being able to write the language ‘correctly’ in informal situations, a linguistic insecurity which he says that he also shares. Such awareness at this institutional level of a widespread unease about writing Luxembourgish and the changes mentioned in the *Schreiwen.lu* foreword, caused largely by technological innovations, reflect the discussion on these topics earlier in the chapter (cf. also Gilles 2015: 128–9). The growth in the written domain, especially in digital media, has led gradually to a greater realization of standards for written Luxembourgish and feelings that users of the language do not know enough about these norms. The foreword to *Schreiwen.lu* explains that this shift is accompanied by a transformation of attitudes towards Luxembourgish, which is an idea that constitutes the next main topic. When writing text messages, the minister states that he shares the uncertainty about having to think how this or that word should be written, an admission which is significant considering his remit as Minister of Education. He then contends that he is not the only one who is becoming more careful about writing Luxembourgish: ‘*Allgemeng mierken ech, datt de Wonsch an de Wëllen an der Gesellschaft, fir korrekt Lëtzebuergesch schreiwen ze kënnen an ze léieren, an der Lescht staark gewuess ass an ëffentlech ëmmer méi heefeg gefuerdert gëtt*’ (‘In general, I realize that the desire and the willingness of society to be able to write Luxembourgish correctly and to learn the language has recently grown and become more frequent’). In response to this increased demand, the Ministry has created this resource: ‘*Aus dësem Grond hu mir am Educatiounsministère dës Outillen ausgeschafft, fir jiddwer Interesséierten ze motivéieren, sech mat eiser Rechtschreiwung ze beschäftegen*’ (‘For this reason, we at the Ministry of Education have prepared these tools to motivate everyone who is interested to get to grips with our spelling’).

The resource and tools referred to consist of fifteen interactive areas of the website that the user can visit in order to gain access to examples illustrating a particular writing rule, as well as *D'Prinzipien* ('key principles') about how to use it. An example of such a rule is the so-called *n*-rule (also known as the *Eifel* rule), which is often considered challenging to use correctly (Schanen & Zimmer 2006: 87–8), and the resource provides the details of the latest ruling on the situations where either *n*, *nn* or neither is placed at the end of a word. Each of the fifteen rules contains exercises, accompanied by its own video and poster which were used as part of the publicity campaign in Luxembourg in 2017. Some of the functions of the *Schreiwen.lu* website have since been taken over by the new ZLS (<https://portal.education.lu/zls>), whose website contains a page on the latest Luxembourgish orthography, an online training tool for spelling (*Online Ortho-Trainer*) and a spelling FAQ section. The ZLS also promotes a guide for 'writing our language correctly' (*Eis Sprooch richteg schreiwen*) by the Luxembourgish author Josy Braun, which contains a comment that the guide has been updated with the most recent Luxembourgish spelling as of November 2019.

26.5 Online and Digital Dictionaries, Spellcheckers, Training Tools and Apps

The ZLS's *Online Ortho-Trainer* (<https://ortho.lod.lu>) is illustrative of the growing influence of online and digital means for promoting the language standards of Luxembourgish, most recently for the written standard. This area has expanded considerably for Luxembourgish in recent years with the development and introduction of other digital tools such as *Spellchecker* (<https://spellchecker.lu>) and the *Lëtzebuurger Online Dictionnaire (LOD)*; (<https://www.lod.lu>).

The *Online Ortho-Trainer* is introduced on its homepage with the assertion that '*Fir eng Sprooch kënnen ze liesen, ze schreiwen an ze vermëttelen, brauch een d'Reegele vun enger offiziell unerkannter Orthografie (Rechtschreiwung)*' ('To be able to read, write and teach a language, you need the rules of an officially recognized orthography (spelling)'). The online training resource consists of around forty interactive tests which the user can complete to evaluate their ability to spell Luxembourgish according to the latest spelling rules and to remedy any mistakes. It is one of the key features of the newly established ZLS.

The *Online Ortho-Trainer* is twinned with the *LOD*, an official online-only dictionary created, financed and promoted by the Luxembourgish government. Although the *LOD* is one of many dictionaries of Luxembourgish since Gangler's *Lexikon* in 1847 (Bellamy forthcoming), it is the first time that '*die aktuellen orthografischen Normen für den gesamten Wortschatz [werden]*

angewandt ('up-to-date orthographical norms are used for the entire vocabulary') (Gilles 2019: 1052). Granted approval as part of the 1999 Language Law, the *LOD* went online in 2004 with entries beginning with 'A' and has now reached the milestone of having entries for all letters of the alphabet. This online platform is meant to serve as an official authoritative source for checking and confirming written usage of Luxembourgish according to official norms. This role is emphasized on the *LOD*'s landing page, which displays prominently that '*Dëse Service gëtt Iech offréiert vum Zenter fir d'Lëtzebuenger Sprooch a baséiert op der offizieller Orthografie*' ('This service is offered to you by the Centre for the Luxembourgish Language and is based on the official orthography'). This resource will remain in an online-only format (i.e. no printed version is envisaged) for the foreseeable future as there are currently no plans for a printed version (personal communication with the Conseil Permanent de Langue Luxembourgeoise, May 2018). One of the principal reasons for keeping the dictionary a digital online-only resource is to maintain its flexibility and to ensure that it is up to date. These characteristics would be much more difficult to maintain in a printed format.

Gilles (2019: 1052) emphasizes the prescriptive and formative influence the official online dictionary has had on shaping the current Luxembourgish standard because of the decisions continually made by the *LOD* lexicographers on which lexemes belong to the language and which do not. Similarly, the intensive language contact with French and German has led to numerous discussion amongst the *LOD* team about which borrowings or loanwords from French or from German should have preference (Gilles 2019). Another feature which is simple to implement with an online resource such as the *LOD* is the opportunity to provide feedback channels from the public. The official online dictionary offers this possibility, which is illustrative of the 'democratizing turn' in language standardization heralded by the greater use of digital and online platforms for the process (Sajous et al. 2018; Nelson 2019).

Another example of the increasingly powerful impact on the elaboration of a standard language from the combination of digital lexicography and online means of mass participation stems from a more recent *Pétition publique* (no. 767) filed in May 2017 demanding '*Lëtzebuergesch als Flichtsprooch an de Kliniken*' ('Luxembourgish language as mandatory in clinics'). The petitioners stated that their aim was to make it compulsory for all staff (examples given were doctors and nurses) who deal with patients to communicate in Luxembourgish. The petition gained 4,259 signatures in five months, just below the required threshold of 4,500 signatures to initiate a parliamentary debate. However, the government did issue an official response via the Health Minister, Lydia Mutsch, and in November 2017 a separate specialized medical dictionary was launched as a companion to the existing *LOD*. This is the only specialist version of the official

online dictionary, and the description on the English-language edition of its homepage states:

The medical section of the LOD exemplifies how we talk about little ouches, illnesses, treatment and care in Luxembourgish.

This section is of concern to each and everyone of us. It is aimed at patients as well as professionals in the healthcare sector, enabling both sides to use the *LOD* in order to make themselves better understood. (<https://med.lod.lu>)

The indication that medical vocabulary in Luxembourgish is still very much in a phase of development and expansion is made clear from the following comment on the same page: 'We are well aware that the current list is still incomplete and strive to keep it continually updated. Do not hesitate to contact us via med@lod.lu by sending us all medical expressions you find are still missing in the list. Feel free to include an example sentence, your usage of the term and/or a translation into one or more of the *LOD* languages'. Being an online resource, it can be easily updated, and the medical dictionary is making the most of this versatility by encouraging users to contribute their suggestions.

The official online dictionary of Luxembourgish was not the first online tool to assist with spelling Luxembourgish according to official norms. The *LOD* was preceded by a private initiative started by a computer science student at the University of Luxembourg who created *Spellchecker* (<https://spellchecker.lu>). His aim was to produce a tool for everyone to be able to write Luxembourgish correctly, and it is still popular today (Bellamy & Horner 2018: 337), with over 2,900 people using the tool daily on average according to the *Spellchecker* website (also confirmed in personal communication with the tool's founder). Usage of the tool continues to rise, and it has a considerable influence on transmitting official spelling norms to users of Luxembourgish, although it is neither a state-approved nor state-financed platform. The resource also used to have a form which users could complete to add their own suggestions, but the *Spellchecker* team realized that in fact the overwhelming majority of submissions received did not conform to official spelling norms, and it actually took considerable time to correct them to ensure they were accurate for usage in their corpus (personal communication with the *Spellchecker* team). The tool is regularly kept updated as indicated by the website, which announces the last time it was updated. *Spellchecker* is not only an online resource, but is also offered as an add-on for popular computer office suites and as a downloadable app for smartphones.

There are other normative influences on Luxembourgish from online and digital resources. In addition to the growth in the breadth and usage of the Luxembourgish version of Wiktionary mentioned in the previous section, the Luxembourgish version of Wikipedia (<https://lb.wikipedia.org>)

also has a dedicated page on *Eis Schreifweis* ('our writing style'), which has comprehensive guidance on how to write Luxembourgish according to official rules. The Luxembourgish language Wikipedia has considerable reach, with over 55,000 articles and a monthly average of around 500,000 page views from July 2015 to January 2020.

26.6 Writing Standards and Digital Media: View from a Language Norm Authority

To complement the above analysis of how online and digital resources shape the standardization of Luxembourgish, a series of interviews were carried out with 'language norm authorities' (Ammon 2003) in order to refine and contextualize these observations with the experiences and practices of teachers, publishers and journalists. This final section of the analysis consists of an interview conducted in May 2018 with one of the senior journalists who maintains the Luxembourgish-language news section of rtl.lu, a particularly influential online platform for publicizing and disseminating written norms for Luxembourgish.

Gilles (2015: 134) discusses the substantial impact of rtl.lu as 'an ever-increasing source of written Luxembourgish', which already had 60,000 users on average per day in 2015, by all accounts a large number considering the approximate number of 400,000 people who speak Luxembourgish. The interview with the senior journalist at rtl.lu confirmed the wide influence of the online news portal, which he described as likely the largest producer of written Luxembourgish that adheres to the official spelling rules. Yet the fast-paced nature of publishing news online means that there is no guarantee that every single item is spelled completely correctly.

Extract from Interview No. 7

Wir sind Journalisten. Wir sind Webjournalisten und wenn 90, 95 oder 97 Prozent unserer Wörter richtig sind, dann reicht mir das. Wir können nicht stundenlang, Stunden investieren um 100 Prozent richtig zu sein.

('We are journalists. We are web journalists and if 90, 95 or 97 per cent of our words are correct then that's good enough for me. We can't for hours, invest hours of time to be 100 per cent correct'.)

Indeed, the journalist does not consider it the responsibility of the media to promote language norms, which he deems should be a task delegated to other organs of the state. In fact, he points out the challenge of finding journalists who can write Luxembourgish to a high standard, echoing the research discussed earlier which establishes the general uncertainty amongst Luxembourgish speakers with regard to writing the language 'correctly' according to official norms, even amongst 'language professionals'.

Extract from Interview No. 7

Heute findet man kaum Journalisten, die von sich aus behaupten können, dass sie schon perfekt Luxemburgisch schreiben können. Sie können das besser Deutsch, Französisch und English, weil das unterrichtet wird, auch wie man das schreibt, und das Luxemburgische kommt dann ein bisschen zu kurz.

(‘We hardly come across journalists these days who would be able to claim that they write Luxembourgish perfectly. They are better with German, French and English because that is what they are taught, also how to write them, and there isn’t much left over for Luxembourgish’.)

Faced with this situation, the journalist organizes and teaches courses to help other journalists in the team with Luxembourgish spelling. Sometimes this consists of bringing them up to speed in a couple of hours and then they continue learning on the job as they write. The difficulties that many feel with writing Luxembourgish in formal contexts is acknowledged because of the ongoing developments with the language and the current codification phase of the standardization process. The arrival of social media has been a milestone in the latest surge in writing Luxembourgish.

Extract from Interview No. 7

Dann kamen die sozialen Medien und dann war es für viele auf einmal einfach schneller in der Sprache zu schreiben, die man, die man spricht, und die Sprache hat dennoch den großen Vorteil, es hatte sich in den Köpfen der luxemburgischen Bevölkerung festgesetzt, man könne Luxemburgisch ein bisschen schreiben wie man will. Es gab zwar eine offizielle Rechtschreibung aber die war irgendwie nicht sehr präsent. Das heißt, die Leute gingen davon aus, sie könnten schreiben wie sie wollen.

(‘Then came social media and for many it was suddenly quicker to write in the language that they, that they speak, and the language also had the advantage that people thought, you can write Luxembourgish any way you want. There was actually an official spelling system but people did not really know about it. So everyone assumed they could write the way they wished’.)

As discussed earlier, the uncertainty about being able to spell the national language in line with official rules is countered to some extent by the convenience and enjoyment stemming from the belief that there is a flexible approach to writing Luxembourgish (cf. Bellamy & Horner 2018: 336). Significantly, the state’s continual efforts to standardize the language do not always filter through effectively into public consciousness. State-endorsed orthographical reforms have occurred several times since 1914, and yet creating awareness amongst Luxembourgish speakers of these formal rules has been slow, even if gradual progress is being made (Gilles 2015: 145). This is not entirely surprising considering that Luxembourgish

traditionally fulfils spoken functions, with French and German being used for writing. The state's mission of making the official standards of Luxembourgish more widely known also partly explains the motivations behind the government's Schreiwien.lu writing Luxembourgish campaign and the establishment of the new ZLS.

The challenges of raising awareness amongst the public of institutional language standards emphasizes even more powerfully the importance and comparatively strong influence of popular commercial and private resources such as rtl.lu and *Spellchecker*, respectively (the latter is free of charge and uses open-source software). Therefore, the decisions taken by such private and commercial initiatives can have considerable weight, particularly when they have to find a suitable word or grammatical feature because of ambiguities surrounding a neologism that they have come across.

Extract from Interview No. 7

Vor allem im Plural, also die Mehrzahl. Sagt man Smartphones oder sagt man Smartphonen? Auf Luxemburgisch, würde man Smartphonen sagen, kann aber vielleicht komisch wirken.

(‘Above all in the plural, well the plurals. Do we say *Smartphones* or *Smartphonen*? In Luxembourgish you would say *Smartphonen* but that can sound a bit odd’.)

Further examples provided by the journalist are Luxembourgish words for *fan* (as in *football fan*) and *info(rmation)*, which could be *Fannen/Fans* or *Infoen/Infos*. The journalist gives a personal preference for each of these, which could have wider implications if that form is the one to become published and circulated amongst the rtl.lu readership. Standard Luxembourgish allows for more than one plural form for some words because the morphology is not yet completely standardized. Entering these three lexical examples into *LOD* and *Spellchecker* produces the results shown in Table 26.1.

Even from only this small selection of words, it is clear that there are challenges in keeping pace with providing officially standardized forms for the constant influx and development of new words. It demonstrates the different information provided by the various digital resources. It also underlines the potential value of efforts undertaken by non-state schemes

Table 26.1 Suggested plural forms in online reference works for selected Luxembourgish words (as of January 2020).

Singular form of lexeme	Suggested plural form	
	<i>LOD</i>	<i>Spellchecker</i>
<i>Fan</i>	<i>Fannen/Fans</i> (both versions)	<i>Fannen/Fans</i> (both versions)
<i>Info</i>	Not recognized	<i>Infoen</i>
<i>Smartphone</i>	Not recognized	<i>Smartphonen</i>

and enterprises to assist and keep up with ongoing standardization processes. On the topic of other actors becoming involved in language standardization, rtl.lu receives comments from the public about the written Luxembourgish used in published articles, and the web journalists have taken this feedback into account where valid and appropriate.

Extract from Interview No. 7

Es gibt auch manchmal: 'das schreibt man nicht so', 'Sie haben da einen Fehler gemacht', so weiter und so fort. Also Luxemburgish ist wie gesagt ein Thema. Und dann ist das natürlich gut, wenn man, ohne jetzt nicht missverstanden zu werden, wenn man mit einer gewissen Autorität antworten kann. Natürlich kann man sagen: 'gut, wir haben einen Fehler gemacht' aber man kann auch sagen: 'ja tut mir Leid, Sie schreiben das so aber laut neuer Regel kann man das so schreiben'.

(‘Sometimes you also have: “you don’t write it like that”, “you’ve made a mistake there”, and so on. Well, Luxembourgish is an issue, as we said. So then it’s good if we, I hope this isn’t misunderstood, if we can answer with a certain authority. Of course we can say, “fine, we made a mistake” but we can also say “ok, sorry but you write it this way and according to the new rules you can write it that way”’.)

Conscious of the authority that the journalist has both in terms of the wide readership of the rtl.lu news portal and its consequent impact on the dissemination of written norms for Luxembourgish, as well as his influence on how his colleagues write the language due to the spelling courses he organizes, he has studied the *Zertifikat Lëtzebuergescher Sprooch a Kultur (ZLSK; ‘Certificate in Luxembourgish Language and Culture’)* at the University of Luxembourg. Introduced by a law passed in 2009, the ZLSK is a masters-level qualification consisting of 120 hours/credits, which comprise Literature and Culture (30 hours), Didactics (60 hours) and Linguistics (30 hours). The qualification is particularly orientated towards preparing teachers of Luxembourgish in the adult education sector and is another sign of the emerging Standard Luxembourgish.

26.7 Conclusion

This discussion has aimed to shed light on the increasing role of online and digital means for shaping, implementing and disseminating language standards by using the example of recent technological developments and their role in the standardization process ‘from above’. This also provides fresh perspectives on the mediatization of language by focusing on ‘top-down’ processes rather than only on the ‘bottom-up’ practices which have comprised the bulk of the research on modern forms of communication to date. This is not to overlook the emergence and importance of

the 'bottom-up' regulation of language, which is also encouraged by new technologies (as discussed in Ní Bhroin 2014 for Irish and Northern Sámi). Indeed, the processes from above and from below do not exist in isolation, but mutually influence each other to some extent, as illustrated in particular by the interview at rtl.lu, where top-down norms are implemented by journalists partly in conjunction with their own decisions on which variant or grammatical form to use. As we have seen, online and digital media enable multiple approaches for creating and reworking language standards. The case of norms for written Luxembourgish illustrates the growth in the use of online and digital media for language standardization, not only as a product of writing practices in the informal and private domains, but also as a part of official language policy effected either by state institutions (Schreiwen.lu, ZLS and LOD) or private (i.e. non-governmental) organizations (*Spellchecker* and rtl.lu). This chapter has drawn attention to the role of these technologies in the implementation and promotion of official norms, a development which is gaining pace as these forms of communication continue to mature and become more popular.

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