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Luxembourgish within Western Germanic

Luxembourgish is a Mosel Franconian dialect within the Middle German dialect group. This statement is true in many ways, but there is a lack of qualitative research within the historical development of the Luxembourgish language, where the works of R. BRUCH (1953: *Grundlegung einer Geschichte des Luxemburgischen*. Luxembourg: Publications littéraires et scientifiques du ministère de l'éducation nationale, 1954 : *Das Luxemburgische im westfränkischen Kreis*. Luxembourg: Publications littéraires et scientifiques du ministère de l'éducation nationale.) are still deemed most important, even though highly outdated.

In the following presentation, Luxembourgish linguistic history will be analysed mostly relying on the inherited lexicon and morphological features to place it as a Middle German language inbetween Dutch and High German, and, within western Germanic context in general. Due to a lack of historic writing in Luxembourgish (with the appearance of writing in Luxembourgish only in the 19th century), reference is made to microtoponomastic data in order to enhance the possible historical analysis of the development of Luxembourgish and its linguistic placement.

Among the most prominent examples is the sound change of $-p/b-t- > -\chi-t-$ (later $> -f-t-$ before high front vowels, or loss of the fricative before mid to back vowels with compensatory lengthening of the vowel). A common example would be the word *Lucht* 'air, (day)light, lamp' (German *Luft*, Dutch *lucht*). A semantic shift can be attested (from 'air' to '(day)light') and later on, the High German word *Luft* was borrowed in the form *Loft* with the meaning 'air, wind'.

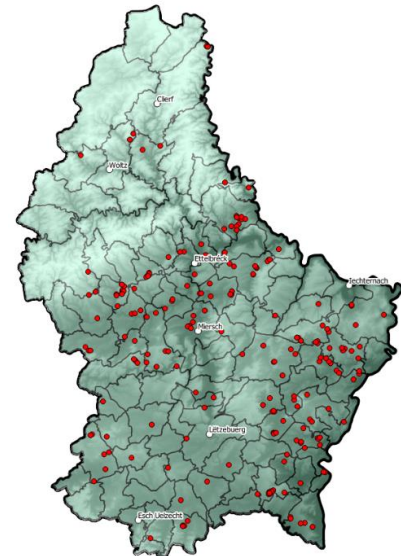


Fig. 1 - Distribution of names with *Griecht* 'trench'

This soundchange can be traced in the earliest periods of significant sound changes for Luxembourgish and can almost exclusively be found in toponomastic data. Fig. 1 shows the distribution of the place name *griecht* 'trench' in Luxembourg, alternative spellings for this named place can be found in *gracht*, *graeht*, *gruecht*, simply representing different time periods of sound change. The name shows the exact morphological built as Dutch *Gracht*, but with the semantic difference, that in Luxembourgish it mostly denotes natural, and only sometimes man-made trenches. The man-made trenches are mostly referred to by the name *Gruef*(/we). Compounding context and location of the place names suggest a later adoption, as the names very often hint to coal and iron industry. The location of the sparsely attested place name *Grouf*(/we) and the linguistic context suggest an earlier adoption of use than *Gruef*(/we). Where as *Gruef*(/we) could be explained as a rebuilt from the verb *gruewen* 'to dig, scrape' or as a High German loan ($<$ Graben 'trench'), the name *Grouf*(/we) has to be analysed as an older genuine Luxembourgish form.