The Letzebuergesch Verb *ginn* (give):

Grammaticalisation from Full Verb to Copula, Existential Construction, Passive Auxiliary, and Conditional Mood Auxiliary

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The Letzebuergesch Verb *ginn* “give”

fir de Papi
pour papi

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Mamm, Papp, un lech geet de gréisste Remerciement. Mat Ärer Hëllef a Léiwt hunn ech et souwäit bruecht. Villmols Merci!
The Letzebuergesch Verb \textit{ginn} “give”

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Section 1: Introduction

This first section will start in the introductory section 1.1 discussing the subject of this paper. Section 1.2 gives an overview of the history of the Letzebuergesch language, followed by section 1.3 the present day language situation subdivided into 1.3.1 Speakers, 1.3.2 the trilingual situation, 1.3.3 the uses for Letzebuergesch. The last section 1.4 deals with some general linguistic aspects of the Letzebuergesch language.

1.1 Introduction

According to Moulin (SLE 2001) Letzebuergesch¹, the national language of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg (Loi 1984), is one of the least linguistically investigated languages in Europe. In addition, the last codified grammar of this West-Germanic language dates back to Bruch in 1955 (Gilles and Moulin 2003) and in the age of spell-checkers and grammar checkers, any linguistic research in Letzebuergesch would be welcome, hence, for instance, the CORTINA project (Mousel 2003) or the development of a new Letzebuergesch dictionary.

This paper will concentrate on the verb ginn “to give” which not only acts as a full-verb, hereafter also referred to as the lexical use, but also acts as a copula, an existential predicate, a passive auxiliary, and as a conditional modal.

Parallels will be drawn from other Germanic languages such as German (hereafter referred to as NHG) or English, and features of grammaticalisation and auxiliation will be described.

At this point, the author of this paper would like to specify that he writes Letzebuergesch according to the reformed Letzebuergesch spelling rules according to Règlement (1999). Any spelling mistakes are inadvertent. Note that it is has been chosen to spell “Letzebuergesch” without diacritics (i.e. not “Lëtzebuergesch”) because of spelling convenience.

1.2 Overview of the History of the Letzebuergesch Language

Letzebuergesch is classified as a West-Germanic language, and specifically in German dialectology as a West-Franconian language, which has only partly undergone the German Second Sound Shift (Keller 1961) i.e. not fully fricativised non-medial voiceless plosives.

¹ other terms found in literature: Lëtzebuergesch, Letzebuergish, Luxembourgish, Luxembourgeois, Luxembourgian, Luxembourgeois
The name for the country dates back to 963 when Siegfried (or Sigefroi), count of Ardennes, acquired an old Roman lookout tower by the Benedictine abbey of Trier (Trèves). The name of that ruined fortress was Lucilinburhuc (little borough). Whereas Letzebuergesch has kept the original /ts/ affricate, other languages developed the /ks/ affricate: Luxembourg (English and French) or Luxemburg (NHG).

As for the native language spoken in Luxembourg, it has been referred to as “bad German and a corrupt French” in 1806 (Hollenfeltz 1938 and Rinnen 1981; cited in Newton 1996b), “Luxembourg German” (De Feller 1820; ibid.), “Luxembourg German dialect” and “our dialect”, both in 1855, “our German”, or a “patois” in 1906. Bach’s classification (1950) defined Letzebuergesch a “town dialect” which “found use as a “regional common language” (landschaftliche Gemeinsprache)” (ibid.; cited in Newton (1996b). Kloss (1952) defined Letzebuergesch as a Halbsprache “half language”. Newton (1996b), however, argues that already by 1952 it was an Ausbausprache.

### 1.3 Present Day Language Situation

#### 1.3.1 Population and Speakers

The population of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg was in 2003, according to STATEC (2003), the Luxembourgish statistics institute, of 448,300 inhabitants of which 61.9% were Luxembourgers who have a native command of Letzebuergesch and have thus at least Letzebuergesch as their L1. Of the 38.1% of foreigners in Luxembourg one part also speaks Letzebuergesch as their second or third language. SIL International (2004) writes that in 1998...
Letzebuergesch was the L2 of 50,000 speakers. The total population speaking Letzebuergesch is thus just over 300,000 speakers which is slightly more than Icelandic (260,000 speakers according to Henriksen and van der Auwera 2002) or Irish Gaelic.

As regards geographical areas outside Luxembourg in which Letzebuergesch is spoken, SIL (ibid.) writes that it is also spoken in the neighbouring countries of Luxembourg i.e. Belgium, France, Germany, but also in the USA. A linguistic description of pre-war immigrants’ US Letzebuergesch can be found in J.-P. Hoffman (1996: 174-6).

1.3.2 The Trilingual Situation in Luxembourg

The Luxembourg languages act (Loi 1984) gives authority to three languages: Letzebuergesch, French, and German. The first article of the act states that “the national language of the Luxembourgers is Letzebuergesch” (“La langue nationale des Luxembourgeois est le luxembourgeois.”). The second article states that the language of legislation is French, and that whenever a text of law is supplemented with a translation, only the French version is valid. The third and the fourth article state that the State’s administrative and judicial languages are without any discrimination French, German, or Letzebuergesch. Furthermore, when a request is written in one of the languages, the administration is to reply back in that language, as far as possible.

In public school education, children are alphabetised in German and thus immersed in German-medium education from a very young age (± 6 years old). One year later, they start learning French as a foreign language, until it becomes the medium of higher secondary education. English is taught from the second year of secondary education (± 14 years old). Letzebuergesch is sporadically taught as a written language and most L1 speakers cannot write Letzebuergesch according to the official spelling rules. Letzebuergesch lessons in primary and the first year of secondary education are, if at all, dedicated to reading and learning Letzebuergesch fiction and poetry by heart.

As far as the written media go, articles in newspapers and magazines printed in Luxembourg tend to be mostly written in French and German (see Hoffmann, F. 1996). Letzebuergesch and other languages such as English, Italian or Portuguese are less used. The spoken media, however, use Letzebuergesch as their common language whereas other languages such as French or English tend to be broadcast as well.

\(^2\) note that Pfäif has only kept the initial plosive whereas the last plosive has been fricativised: /p/ > /f/
Announcements, road signs and any other written informative data tend to be written in French, thus turning French into Luxembourg’s lingua franca between Luxembourgers and their foreign population.

German, on the other hand, has lost its prestige since the Nazi invasion in the Second World War.

1.3.3 The Uses for Letzebuergesch
As far as the spoken use of Letzebuergesch is concerned, it is the sine qua non language between Luxembourgers. A Luxembourgish in-group conversation would not switch from Letzebuergesch to NHG, for instance, the more formal the topic gets. Speaking in town halls, churches, and parliament, for instance, is thus done most of the time in Letzebuergesch.

If, however, a Luxembourger is speaking to somebody who is not a Luxembourger then the choice is firstly done on the basis whether or not the foreigner knows Letzebuergesch or not. If they do, Letzebuergesch will be spoken or at least code-switching will be done involving Letzebuergesch and another language. The author of this paper, for instance, speaks with his Portuguese friends a mixture of Letzebuergesch and French.

Written Letzebuergesch, on the other hand, exists on rarer occasions; administrative letters such as water, electricity or telephone bills, or birth or degree certificates are written in French. However, personal letters tend to be either written in NHG or Letzebuergesch. Newer written mediums such as e-mail, mobile phone SMS (texts) or online chatting are written in Letzebuergesch, but because of their more informal aspects, other languages occur as well. The 12-year old cousin of the author of this paper, for instance, writes SMS to her friends in Letzebuergesch, French and German.

There is, thus, no domain in which Letzebuergesch is not spoken; however, written Letzebuergesch is still not a public feature, thus turning the Grand-Duchy – so tourists think – into a French-speaking (i.e. French-writing) country. The reason for not writing in Letzebuergesch is because French and, in a more moderate proportion, NHG have more prestige. F. Hoffmann (1996: 130) writes that “most Luxembourgers do not like having to read their own language” which is linked to the issue of prestige but also to the fact that pupils learn to read and write

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3 “Luxembourghish” here refers to the adjective, whereas “Letzebuergesch” refers to the language.
through German and not their L1. Newton (1996a: 27) argues that “[l]iteracy in Lëtzebuergesch was not, and still is not, considered a matter of any urgency.”

1.4 General Linguistic Aspects of Letzebuergesch

One interesting phonological feature of Letzebuergesch which will be relevant in what follows is the so-called “mobile <n(n)>” or Rule of Eifel (NHG *Eifler Regel*) which generally omits final <n(n)> of any word when any next word does not begin with a vowel or with /n/, /t/, /d/ /ts/ and /h/:

Wann däi∅ klenge∅ Brudder e∅ grousse∅ Lausbouf ass, da∅∅ sinn ech Grousse ∅ ∅
If your little brother a big scoundrel is, then am ∅ big-one a klengen Eefalt.

little nincompoop.

“If your little brother is a big scoundrel, then me big one am a little nincompoop.”
(inspired from Braun 2002)

It is possible that the partial loss the final <n(n)> is related to the loss of case marking. The only cases remaining are Common Case (Accusative and Nominative), Dative and to a certain extent Genitive. Case is morphologically marked on determiners, pronouns and attributive adjectives, not, however, on nouns. The distinction between nominative (subject) and accusative (direct object) is made by word order.

De Schoulmeeschter schléit de Schüler.
The teacher hits the pupil.

“The teacher hits the pupil.”

De Schüler schléit de Schoulmeeschter.
The pupil hits the teacher.

“The pupil hits the teacher.”

There are three genders in Letzebuergesch: masculine, feminine, and neutral. Some words have the same gender as in NHG, but others are closer to French.
The Letzebuergeresch Verb *ginn* “give”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letzebuergeresch</th>
<th>NHG</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>same as in NHG</td>
<td>d’Sonn (<em>fem.</em></td>
<td>die Sonne (<em>fem.</em>)</td>
<td>le soleil (<em>masc.</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>de Mound (<em>masc.</em>)</td>
<td>der Mond (<em>masc.</em>)</td>
<td>la lune (<em>fem.</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>same as in French</td>
<td>d’Zill (<em>fem.</em>)</td>
<td>der Ziegel (<em>masc.</em>)</td>
<td>la tuile (<em>fem.</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>de Botter (<em>masc.</em>)</td>
<td>die Butter (<em>fem.</em>)</td>
<td>le beurre (<em>masc.</em>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Gender assignment in Letzebuergeresch

As for number, Letzebuergeresch makes the distinction between singular and plural; as in English and NHG there is no indefinite plural article.

Letzebuergeresch verbs are conjugated according to person and number, but apart from some modals, most verbs in the present tense in the indicative mood only show 3 or 4 forms: the 2nd person singular, the 3rd person singular, the 2nd person plural, and the remainder:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person &amp; Number</th>
<th><em>sinn</em> (be)</th>
<th><em>hunn</em> (have)</th>
<th><em>maachen</em> (make)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st person singular</td>
<td><em>sinn</em></td>
<td>Hunn</td>
<td>maachen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person singular</td>
<td>bass</td>
<td>hues</td>
<td>méchs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person singular</td>
<td>ass</td>
<td>huet</td>
<td>mécht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st person plural</td>
<td><em>sinn</em></td>
<td><em>hunn</em></td>
<td>maachen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person plural</td>
<td><em>sinn</em></td>
<td>hutt</td>
<td>maacht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person plural</td>
<td><em>sinn</em></td>
<td><em>hunn</em></td>
<td>maachen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. The Letzebuergeresch Verb Forms (Present Tense)

For the past tense, Standard Letzebuergeresch has lost most preterit past forms, thus relying on the perfect aspect to express past events. Like in NHG and French, Letzebuergeresch can use either the *sinn* (be) auxiliary or the *hunn* (have) auxiliary along with the past participle to express the perfect aspect. *sinn* is mainly used with motion verbs and change-of-state verbs (incl. *sinn*) whereas *hunn* is used for other verbs.

D’lescht Joer  
si mer  
an d’Vakanz  
gaangen.

The last year are we in the holiday gone.

“Last year, we have gone / went on holiday.”

Ech hu  
meng Prof  
gesinn.
The Letzebuergesch Verb *ginn* “give”

I have my teacher seen.

“I have seen my teacher.”

As far as word order goes, Letzebuergesch is similar to NHG as in that it is a “verb second” language: in non-subordinate clauses the finite verb always comes second, whether it follows the subject noun phrase or an adjunct. In subordinate clauses, however, the finite verb is in final position. The exceptions to that rule are, however, modals, as mentioned below.
Section 2: Data Description

In this section the verb *ginn* will be analysed according to its semantic and syntactic construction. Section 2.1 takes a look at the di-transitive verb and additionally gives all morphological verbal inflections. Section 2.2 describes the copular verb meaning "become" whereas section 2.3 describes the existential particle meaning "there is/are". Section 2.4 concentrates on the passive auxiliary using *ginn* and in the last section 2.5 the conditional modal will be described.

2.1 Three-Place Full Verb

2.1.1 Conjugation

The first sense of *ginn* is, as already mentioned above, ‘to give’. Its forms are mentioned above in Table 1. As in most Letzebuergesch verbs in the Present Tense the first person singular, the first person plural and the third person plural coincide with one another. However, they are not the same in their past tense or in the conditional mood. As in French “tu/vous”, the 2nd person plural coincides with the v-form of the 2nd person singular: "du/dir".

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person &amp; Number</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Present Tense</th>
<th>Past Tense</th>
<th>Conditional Mode</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Singular</td>
<td>Ech</td>
<td>gi(nn)</td>
<td>gouv</td>
<td>gef</td>
<td>gi(nn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Singular</td>
<td>du</td>
<td>gëss</td>
<td>goufs</td>
<td>gef</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Singular</td>
<td>- masc.</td>
<td>hie(n)</td>
<td>gëtt</td>
<td>gef</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fem. (t-form)</td>
<td>hatt</td>
<td></td>
<td>gouv</td>
<td>gef</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fem. (v-form)</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>gi(nn)</td>
<td>gouve(n)</td>
<td>géife(n)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- neutral</td>
<td>et</td>
<td></td>
<td>gouv</td>
<td>gef</td>
<td>gi(nn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Plural</td>
<td>mir</td>
<td>gi(nn)</td>
<td>gouve(n)</td>
<td>géife(n)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Plural</td>
<td>dir</td>
<td>gitt</td>
<td>gouf</td>
<td>géitt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Plural</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>gi(nn)</td>
<td>gouf</td>
<td>géitt</td>
<td>gi(nn)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. The forms of *ginn*

2.1.2 Transitivity

In English and German *ginn* takes both an indirect and a direct object. The unmarked case sequence after the verb would always be indirect object (dative case) followed by the direct object (common case) regardless whether the indirect object is a noun phrase (1) or a pronoun (2).

(1) Ech ginn dem Bouf e Kichelchen.
    I give the boy a biscuit.
    “I give a biscuit to the boy.”

(2) Ech ginn him e Kichelchen.
    I give him a biscuit.
    “I give him a biscuit.”
2.1.3 Using *ginn* in the Past

Although Table 1 above gives the declension of *ginn* in its past tense, *gouf* is not used when using the past form of *ginn* when speaking of the *full verb*. However, *gouf* is used with the other uses of *ginn*: copula, existential predicate, and passive auxiliary; this will be discussed below. A sentence like (3) would thus be ungrammatical.

(3) *Ech gouf dem Bouf e Kichelchen.*
I gave the boy a biscuit.
“*I gave him a biscuit to the boy.*”

Instead of using the preterit i.e. using a synthetic form, the past is formed analytically with the perfect auxiliary (PerfAux) *hunn* “have” and the past participle *ginn* (given). In order to be grammatical, sentence (3) would therefore be transformed into:

(4) *Ech hunn dem Bouf e Kichelche ginn.*
I have the boy a biscuit given.
“I have given a biscuit to the boy.”

Sentence (4) uses the present perfect; the past perfect is used in the same way:

(5) *Ech hat dem Bouf e Kichelche ginn.*
I had the boy a biscuit given.
“I had given a biscuit to the boy.”

2.1.4 Using *ginn* in the Future

The future in Letzebuergesch is usually expressed, writes Russ (1996: 85), “with the present tense and an adverb of time, although recently under the influence of NHG the future can also be expressed by using [wäerden] (6), NHG for to become”. Additionally, Letzebuergesch also uses the auxiliary verb *goen* “go” to express the future; *ginn*, however, does not permit this auxiliary (7).

(6) *Ech wäert dem Bouf e Kichelche ginn.*
I become the boy a biscuit give.
“I will give a biscuit to the boy.”

(7) *Ech ginn dem Bouf e Kichelche ginn.*
Ech go the boy a biscuit give.
“I will give a biscuit to the boy.”

2.2 Two-place Copular Verb “become”
2.2.1 Meaning

As a full verb, *ginn* does not only mean “to give” when used as a di-transitive verb, but, used mono-transitively, it acts as a copular verb and thus means “to become”:

(8) Wann ech grouss si, ginn ech Pilot.
When I big am, give I pilot.
“When I’m big, I’m going to be a pilote.”

2.2.2 Parallels to German

German, does not use *geben* to express “to become” since it uses the verb *werden* which only exists in Letzebuergesch to express, as mentioned in 1.4, the future.

(9) Wenn ich groß bin, werde ich Pilot.
When I big am, become I pilot.
“When I’m big, I’m going to be a pilot.”

Moreover, whereas German would mostly use *werden* to express the idea of ‘to become’, Newman (1997: 316-17) also found in Fischart’s translation of Rabelais’ Gargantua *geben* used as a two-place verb meaning ‘to become’ (emphasis his):

a. *gebst ein guten Goldscheid* (123, 25)
   ‘you will become a good goldsmith’

b. Geltet ihr Fronecken, welche nit gern spinnen, *die geben gute Wirtin*?
   (135, 29-30)
   ‘Isn’t it so that your girls who don’t like to spin will make good inkeepers/inkeepers’ wives?’
   (Newman ibid.)

This is, however, an obsolete use of *geben* in NHG. The closest verb to express a similar meaning is probably *abgeben*.

2.2.3 Using *ginn* in the Past

As already mentioned above the mono-transitive use of *ginn* can be used in the past tense:

(10) D’Pamela gouf Mamm.
The Pamela become mum.
“Pamela became a mum.”

Whereas the full uses the PerfAux *hunn* to express the present perfect, the copular verb uses the PerfAux *sinn* “be”:

(11) Gëschter ass d’Pamela Mamm ginn.
Yesterday is the Pamela mum given.

“Pamela has become a mum yesterday.”

As for when using the appropriate past i.e. past tense or PerfAux, there does not seem to be any major difference. However, temporal proximity could make the distinction: *ass ginn* is used when speaking for a near past event whereas *gouf* would indicate a distant past event. This explains why (11) uses the adverb *gëschter* ‘yesterday’.

2.3 Existential Construction

2.3.1 Introduction

Another meaning of *ginn* is “to exist”, which is similar to the NHG version of *es gibt* “it gives”:

(13) Et gëtt eng Universitéit zu Bangor.

It gives a university to Bangor.

“There is a university in Bangor.”

(14) Muer gëtt et Reen.

Tomorrow gives it rain.

There’ll be rain tomorrow.

Not only is (14) similar to the NHG *Morgen gibt is Regen*, but it is also close to the Pennsylvanian Dutch *It will give rain tomorrow*.

Furthermore, (13) could also be expressed with the copula *sinn*:

(15) Et ass eng Universitéit zu Bangor.

It is a university to Bangor.

“There is a university in Bangor.”

If the adjunct comes first in the sentence, *ginn* keeps *et “it”* (16) while *sinn “be” does not* (17).

(16) Zu Bangor gëtt et eng Universitéit.

To Bangor gives it a university.

In Bangor, there is a university.

(17) Zu Bangor ass eng Universitéit.

To Bangor is a university.

In Bangor is a university.

Note that initial locative in Letzebuergesch, as in German, is more common than in English.

2.3.2 Using *ginn* in the Past
As already mentioned above, the past of *ginn* can either be expressed synthetically (18) or analytically (19) with the PerfAux *sinn*.

(18) Zu Bangor gouf et eng Universitéit.
    To Bangor gave it a university.
    There was a university in Bangor.

(19) Zu Bangor ass et eng Universitéit ginn.
    To Bangor is it a university given.
    There has been a university in Bangor.

The choice when to use which past is unclear again; formal versus informal speech or spoken versus written Letzebuergesch might indicate the different.

2.3.3 Singular and Plural
Letzebuergesch uses two verbal forms of *ginn* with *et* “it” depending on whether the following noun is singular (20) or plural (21). This is different from NHG where both singular and plural nouns have the *es gibt* construction. The Letzebuergesch existential *ginn* construction thus agrees with the following object and not with its subject *et* “it”.

(20) Zu Bangor get et eng Universitéit.
    To Bangor gives it a university.
    There is a university in Bangor.

(21) A Wales ginn et vill Universitéiten.
    In Wales give it many universities.
    There are many universities in Wales.

2.4 Passive Auxiliary
2.4.1 The Passive in NHG
In Old High German, writes Valentin (1986), two constructions were used to express the passive voice. There was either *siin/uuesan* “sein” (be) or *uuwerdhan* “werden” (become) followed by the past participle. Their use was complementary: whereas *siin/uuesan* was mostly used in the present tense, *uuwerdah* was more frequently used with its preterit form.

Valentin concludes his paper by observing that periphrastic “sein” was used in a “predicatively grasped state description” (Valentin 1986: 14) whereas periphrastic “werden” was more and more used to describe proceedings and events.”\(^4\) (ibid.)
2.4.2 The Passive in Letzebuergesch

Whereas German uses the verb *werden* “to become”, Letzebuergesch uses the verb *ginn* for passivisation. Consequently the active sentence (22) will be passivised – without agent in (23), with agent in (24). Note that the agent is expressed in Letzebuergesch as prepositional phrase consisting of *vun* and either a pronoun in the dative case or a noun phrase in which the determiner is in the dative case.

(22) Ech iessen de Kichelchen.
   I eat the biscuit.
   “I eat the biscuit.”

(23) De Kichelchen gëtt giess.
    The biscuit gives eaten.
    “The biscuit is being eaten.”

(24) De Kichelchen gëtt vu mir giess.
    The biscuit gives by me eaten.
    “The biscuit is being eaten by me.”

2.4.3 Actional Passive versus Statal Passive

Whereas (23) and (24) have an actional passive, Russ (1996: 85) suggests that there is also another passive construction in Letzebuergesch: the statal passive as in (25):

(25) De Kichelchen ass giess.
    The biscuit is eaten.
    “The biscuit is eaten.”

Because “The biscuit is eaten” is ambiguous in English one could also translate it using Russ’ (ibid.) words: “The biscuit is in the state of being eaten.”
As one can see the statal, or also called the adjectival passive does not use the *ginn* passive auxiliary (PvAux), but uses the verb *sinn*.

2.4.4 Using the PvAux in the Past

As with the two-place verb *ginn*, the PvAux can be either expressed analytically in the past using *gouf* (26) or it can be expressed synthetically using the *sinn* PerfAux with the PfAux (27).

(26) De Kichelchen gouf giess.

---

4 “So entwich die sein-Umschreibung allmählich in die Rolle einer prädikativ aufgefaßten Zustandsbeschreibung,”
The biscuit gave eaten.
“The biscuit was eaten.”

(27) The Kichelchen ass giess ginn.
The biscuit is eaten give.
“The biscuit has been eaten.”

2.5 Impersonal Passive

2.5.1 Introduction
Just like in German, Letzebuergesch can use the impersonal passive, using the passive voice in which the subject of the unmarked sentence is Et or its contacted form, ’t “it”. Moreover, the impersonal passive accepts transitive verbs (28), mono-transitive verbs (29) and di-transitive ones (30).

(28) ’t gouf gedanzt.
It gave danced.
“People danced.”

(29) ’t gëtt Kuch giess.
It gives cake eaten.
“People eat cake.”

(30) ’t gi Bréiwer dem Premier geschéckt.
It gives letters the PM sent.
People send letters to the PM.

2.5.2 Using the Impersonal Passive in the Past
Letzebuergesch accepts both preterit form (31) and the analytic form (32) to express the past for the impersonal passive. No distinction is made between the one form and the other.

(31) ’t goufe Bréiwer dem Premier geschéckt.
It gave letters the PM sent.
People sent letters to the PM.

(32) ’t si Bréiwer dem Premier geschéckt ginn.
It is letters the PM sent given.
People have sent letters to the PM.

* während die werden-Periphrase immer stärker dazu benutzt wurde, einen Vorgang wiederzugeben.*
2.6 Conditional Mood Auxiliary

2.6.1 Introduction
The last function *ginn* has in Letzebuergesch is the auxiliary expressing the conditional mode. It corresponds to the German *würden* "would".

(33) Ech géif dir et soen, mee ech wëll net.
     I would you it tell, but I want not.
     “I would tell it to you, but I don’t want to.”

2.6.2 Analytical Conditional Mode versus Synthetic Conditional Mode
The auxiliaries *sinn* “to be” and *hunn* “to have” have their own conditional mood verb forms, which express past events (34). If *sinn* and *hunn* are analytically used with CondAux *ginn*, a hypothetical situation (35) is expressed.

(34) Hie sot, hie wier aleng.
     He said, he was alone.
     “He said he was alone.”

(35) Hie sot, hie géif aleng sinn.
     He said, he would alone be.
     “He said he would be alone.”

Modal verbs, however, when used in the conditional mode cannot be expressed with the CondAux; they have to be declined analytically, like in English.

(36) Hatt sot, ech dierft net an d’Schoul goen.
     She said, I could(Cond) not to the school go.
     She said I could not go to school.

(37) *Hatt sot, ech géif net an d’Schoul duerfe goen.
     She said, I would not to the school can go.
     * “She said I would not can go to school.”

2.6.3 Other Conditional Mood Auxiliaries
Apart from *ginn*, Letzebuergesch has also three other verbs which can express the conditional mode; they are *goen* “to go” (38), *doen* “to do” (39), and *maachen* “to make” (40).

(38) Ech géing der et soen.
     I go(Cond) you it say.
     “I would tell you.”
(39) Ech déit der et soen.
    I do(Cond) you it say.
    “I would tell you.”

(40) Ech méicht der et soen.
    I make(Cond) you it say.
    “I would tell you.”

In Letzebuergesch, however, only the CondAux *goen* is used in parallel with *ginn* whereas *déit* and *méicht* are only used in some parts of the northern Ösling area of the Grand-Duchy. Although Keller (1961: 277) writes that *géing* and *déit* “are used especially when a wish is expressed, e.g. NHG würde gerne, möchte ["would like to”], this is no longer the case in present-day Letzebuergesch. There is no semantic or pragmatic difference between *géif* and *géing* so that both are freely interchangeable.

### 2.6.4 Word Order

Word corpus\(^5\) analysis has shown that the most common sequence in subordinate clauses is, as mentioned in Russel (1996), like in Dutch\(^6\), the modal verb following the non-finite verb (41). Another sequence (42) is the modal verb preceding the non-finite verb. Nico Weber (p.c.) suggests that this sequence may be an NHG influence. Additionally, the author of this paper would like to extend this idea and suggest that this above-mentioned sequence is a hyper-correction: when asking his father what the sequence was, he replied that the sequence was to be followed along the NHG word order.

\[(41)\] Hie freet, ob s du an d'Schoul goe géifs.
    He asks, whether you to the school go would.
    “He asks whether you would go to school.”

\[(42)\] Hie freet, ob s du an d'Schoul géifs goen.
    He asks, whether you to the school would go.
    “He asks whether you would go to school.”

Another sequence also possible according to some native speakers of Letzebuergesch is the separation of modal and non-finite:

\[(43)\] ? Hie freet, ob s du géifs an d’Schoul goen.
    He asks, whether you would to the school go.
    “He asks whether you would go to school”.

---

\(^5\) I am grateful for Dr. Nico Weber for having shown me evidence with the help of his word corpus collection.
Note that in the above-mentioned example *an d'Schoul* is a locative, rather than being a direct or an indirect object. If on the other hand a direct or indirect object separate modal and non-finite verb, the construction is not strictly ungrammatical, but at least doubtful.

6 I would like to thank Saskia van den Berg and Monique Flecken for having enlightened me on that matter.
Section 3: Theoretical Background

This section will take a closer look at the theoretical background needed to understand what has happened above with the Letzebuergesch verb *ginn*. Section 3.1 takes a general look at grammaticalisation. 3.2 discusses auxiliation cross-linguistically. 3.3 gives a brief overview of the *es gibt* “there gives/is” construction in German. Section 3.4 describes the passive construction in NHG and the passive *get* in English. Section 3.5 deals with the use of Perfekt and Präteritum in NHG.

3.1 Grammaticalisation

3.1.1 Introduction

Heine and Kuteva (2002: 2) define grammaticalisation as the “development from lexical to grammatical forms and from grammatical forms to even more grammatical forms”. These forms, the authors write, are also referred to as “functional categories” (ibid.) whereas Hopper and Traugott also speak of “content words” (2003: 4) when talking of lexical items.

Cross-linguistic research on grammaticalisation, observe Hopper and Closs Traugott (2003: 2), show “correlations across time among semantic-pragmatic, morphosyntactic and (sometimes) phonological changes”.

A good example to illustrate grammaticalisation is the development of negation in French (after Hock 1991 [1986]: 194; Schwegler 1988; both cited in Hopper and Closs Traugott 2003):

**Step 1**: negation is accomplished by placing the negative particle *ne* before the verb

> ‘I don’t see. I don’t eat. I don’t walk.’

**Step 2**: optionally, “pseudo-object nouns” are placed after the verb to reinforce the negation

> Je ne vois point. Je ne mange mie. Je ne marche pas.
> ‘I don’t see mark. I don’t eat crumb. I don’t walk step.’

**Step 3**: *pas*, the noun used when negating verbs of movement, is used for other verbs as well

> Je ne vois pas. Je ne mange pas.
> ‘I don’t see (step). I don’t eat (step).’

In step 3, *pas* has been fully grammaticised into the second negation particle. Step 4 illustrates Heine and Kuteva’s claim that grammatical forms become more grammatical:
Step 4: *ne* becomes optional in vernacular French; negation is accomplished by placing the now obligatory *pas* after the verb

*Je vois pas.*

‘I don’t see.’

### 3.1.2 Processes of Grammaticalisation

Hein and Kuteva recognise four main interrelated mechanisms of grammaticalisation. The first one is “desemanticization” (or “semantic bleaching) in which there is a “loss in meaning content” (Hein and Kuteva 2003: 2). In the above example of negation in French, this means that *pas* loses its meaning of *step*. The second mechanism is “extension” where the use of the lexical form appears in new contexts. *pas* is thus not only used with verbs of motion, but also with other verbs. The third one is “decategorialization”: the morphosyntactic properties that are characteristic of the lexical forms get lost. As for the negation example, *pas* is now no longer considered as a noun, but is interpreted as a particle. The last mechanism is “erosion” where there is a loss of “phonetic substance”. Although *pas* is still pronounced as /pa/, some accents seem to pronounce *pas* as /pɔ/, hence the sometimes written form <pô>. Whether the open-o vowel is a weaker form of pronunciation or is related to other French accents, such as Picardian, remains, however, unclear.

### 3.2 Auxiliation

*The moment a verb is given an infinitive complement,*

*that verb starts down the road of auxiliariness.*

Bolinger (1980: 297); cited in Heine (1993)

#### 3.2.1 Introduction

In order to explain why a verb like *ginn* (give) has become an auxiliary over the years, Heine (1993: 28) assumes that

“[A]uxiliaries express grammatical concepts typically relating to the temporal state (tense), the temporal contours (aspect), and the type of reality (modality) of propositional contents (c.f. Steele 1978: 3), almost invariably, linguistic expressions for these concepts are derived from concrete entities describing [...] general notions.”

Furthermore, a broad list of those notions is given: location (e.g. be at, live at), motion (e.g. go, come), activity (e.g. do, take, begin, finish), desire (e.g. want), posture (e.g. sit, stand), relation (e.g. be (like), be with), possession (e.g. get, have). Heine (ibid.) also writes that the verbs prone
to grammaticalise are verbs of frequent use and context-free. This is the case for *go* in English, which has a more general meaning than other verbs of movement like *walk*, *stroll* or *slide*.

### 3.2.2 Give as an auxiliary

In a paper on auxiliation in Europe⁷, Kuteva (1998) briefly mentions among 20 lexical verb sources the verb *give* which leads to an ingressive meaning if followed by a preposition (optional) and an infinitive.

Note that in Hindi, *dena* “give” has become a “vector verb” (Hopper and Closs Traugott 2003: 112) having the semantic force of perfectivity:

\[
\text{mā∅ ne use paise de dije.}
\]

I (Agent) him:dative money give (Vector) gave.


Heine and Kuteva (2003: 149-55) also mention *give* having turned into various prepositions such as benefactive in Thai, causative in Vietnamese, or dative in Modern Mandarin Chinese.

The most interesting and most relevant auxiliation of *give* is however in NHG, where all its constructions also occur with the Letzebuergesch verb *ginn* “give”. This will be discussed below.

### 3.3 The History of the *Es gibt* construction

Newman (1997) points out that NHG has two different constructions with the verb *geben* “give”. The first construction would function as a “three-place predicate” (Newman 1997: 307) whereas the other construction functions as a “two-place predicate with an impersonal subject, corresponding approximately to the English ‘there is/are’ construction.” (ibid.)

In order to explain the origin of the existential construction, the author finds early examples of the *es gibt* construction in Fischart’s (1546/7-1590) translation of Rabelais’ *Gargantua*, the German title being *Geschichtklitterung*.

Newman identifies *geben* in three historical stages. In Middle High German (C12th – C13th) there is the three-place verb on the one hand (X transfers Y to Z), and on the other hand the two-place verb with three different meanings: X becomes Y, X produces/yields Y, X leads to Y. In the next

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The Letzebuergesch Verb *ginn* “give”

historical stage Newman locates Fischart’s writing (second half C16th) with the same constructions as the stage before, adding, however, two more emerging constructions: There will occur Y, There exists Y. The last stage is NHG, with the same constructions as the previous stage with the only exception that the construction “X becomes Y” is not in use anymore.

The evolution from the three-place verb to the two-place verb, argues Newman, happened via the “X produces/yields” construction. Newman (1997: 323) identifies four stages with the following examples:

**Stage 1:** X produces/yields Y.

*Der Ofen gibt Wärme.* “The oven provides/gives warmth.”

**Stage 2:** X leads to Y.

*Wenn du das tust, gibt’s ein Unglück.* “If you do that there will be a calamity.”

**Stage 3:** There will occur Y.

*Es gibt bald Regen.* “There will be rain soon.”

**Stage 4:** There exists Y.

*In diesem Fluss gibt es viele Fische.* “There are many fish in this river.”

NHG *geben* only has the meaning of transferring and the meaning of existing whereas the meaning of becoming got lost between the C16th and the NHG period. The only cognate nowadays corresponds to *abgeben* as in *Er würde einen guten Lehrer abgeben.* “He would make a good teacher.”

3.4 The Use of Perfekt and Präteritum in NHG

As we have seen above, Letzebuergesch has in its non-lexical use of *ginn* (and some other lexical verbs) two simple forms of expressing the past. The first one is synthetic i.e. *gouf* “gave” and the second one is analytic i.e. *hu ginn* “have given”. In Letzebuergesch, Braun (2000: 26) calls these two respective tenses by their French names: “Imparfait” and “Passé Composé”. In NHG, they are referred to as “Präteritum” (*gab* “gave”) and “Perfekt” (*habe gegeben* “have given”).
Comrie (1995: 148) writes that “in some [...] varieties [of NHG] the Präteritum has been completely lost. In others it may survive in a handful of verbs, for instance in the modal verbs and “be”. Furthermore, he observes that

“[t]he difference between the Perfekt and the Präteritum in German is clearly different from that between the Perfect and Simple Past in English, despite the etymological identity or near-identity of two pairs. One characteristic of the English distinction is that the Perfect requires continuing relevance of the past situation of the present moment, while the Simple Past does not have any such requirement. In German, the Perfekt can be used in examples that have no continuing relevance.” (ibid.: 151)

He concludes his paper that the Perfekt is used when referring to an action with no necessary present relevance and that the Präteritum is used when referring to some action with a past point.
Section 4: Discussion

This part of the paper applies the theoretical knowledge from the previous section to the data presented in section 2. Section 4.1 explains the relationship between the full (lexical) verb and the grammaticised forms while establishing a sequential order of those different forms. Section 4.2 deals with the analytic and synthetic forms of the past use of the non-lexical forms of ginn. Section 4.3 wants to predict the future development of ginn.

4.1 From Lexical to Grammatical

4.1.1 The Grammaticised Form of ginn

As seen in section 3.2.2, action verbs like do or get have grammaticised i.e. developed into auxiliaries in Indo-European (Kuteva 1998). Give is a further to this as it also has grammaticised in languages like Hindi (Hopper and Closs Traugott 2003; Hook 1974), Thai, Vietnamese, and Chinese (Heine and Kuteva 2003). It is thus not surprising to find that specific verb having changed over time in Letzebuergesch.

Because there is no written Letzebuergesch data before the late C19th, one might speculate that Letzebuergesch grammaticised ginn just the same way as NHG did. This possibility will be explained in the following sections.

4.1.2 Ginn “Become”

Similar to Newman’s claims (1997) described in section 3.3, the first grammaticised form of ginn probably meant “become”. The changes that occurred in German probably occurred in Letzebuergesch as well. Unlike NHG, however, Letzebuergesch has retained this meaning of “become” until today.

Because of the homophony and homography (see Table 4) of ginn “give” and goen “go” in the present tense, Russ (1996: 85) suggests that “a confusion [could have] arisen between ech ginn “I give” and ech ginn “I go””. This suggests that the initial grammaticalised verb was not “give” but “go”. Both Russ and Newton (see Appendix) support this idea with the English copula “go” as in “I go blind”. Letzebuergesch speakers thus saying Ech gi blann could either mean “I give blind” or, as Russ and Newton propose, “I go blind”. Although there is no verb-formal distinction between the 1st person singular and the three persons in the plural of both verbs, the distinction is made in the 2nd person and the 3rd person singular. *Du gees blann with goen “go” is thus ungrammatical in Letzebuergesch and only ginn “give” is grammatically correct: Du géss blann.
The Letzebuergesch Verb *ginn* “give”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person &amp; Number</th>
<th><em>ginn</em> “give”: Present Tense</th>
<th><em>goen</em> “go”: Present Tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st person singular</td>
<td>ginn /gɪn/</td>
<td>ginn /gɪn/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person singular</td>
<td>gëss /gəs/</td>
<td>gees /geːs/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person singular</td>
<td>gëtt /ɡət/</td>
<td>geet /ɡeːt/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st person plural</td>
<td>ginn /gɪn/</td>
<td>ginn /gɪn/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd person plural</td>
<td>gitt /ɡɪt/</td>
<td>gitt /ɡɪt/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd person plural</td>
<td>ginn /gɪn/</td>
<td>ginn /gɪn/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. The Homophony and Homography of *ginn* “give” and *goen* “go”

4.1.3 The Passive *ginn*

According to Newton (Appendix), Germanic *uuerdhan* “werden” (become) “are also found in [the Letzebuergesch/Luxembourgish] medieval verse poem *Yolanda von Vianden* (ca. 1290). [...] There are no examples of *geben* (NHG “give”) [meaning] *werden* (NHG “become) in the text, and only *werden* in this latter sense occurs. So at what point “gin” [sic] stepped in to take over from *werden* is a mystery.” Nico Weber (p.c.), however, suggests that the author of the poem might not be a speaker of the local West-Franconian language. One could suggest that *uuerdhan* could have been “imported” from elsewhere.

We have thus two theories here: either *werden* has never been part of the local Luxembourgish tongue and *uuerdhan* was thus a Germanism, or *uuerdhan* and *ginn* co-occurred at one point in time, followed by the single use of *ginn*.

The development from *ginn* “become” into the passive auxiliary can be explained, by analogy, through Strang’s (1970: 150-1; cited in Denison 1993: 420) explanation how the English *get* full-verb turned into the passive auxiliary. She describes the non-finite verb following the passive auxiliary as a “predicate which could be taken as a participle”. (ibid.) Thus, “He becomes acquainted with her.” develops into “He gets acquainted with her”.

Gaeta (forthcoming) explains in a paper why “give” “has become first an inchoative verb [i.e. expressing a beginning] and consequently the auxiliary for the passive” (Gaeta p.c.). He writes that the development of the Letzebuergesch *ginn* passive has emerged from the original causative semantic extension of “give”, which has been mentioned in 3.3, and got on the same “track” as NHG *werden* and shared thus the same destiny (Gaeta op cit.).
Moreover, the Letzebuergesch passive *ginn* grammaticalisation has extended Haspelmath’s (1990) general image of the sources for passive development (Gaeta forthcoming). As seen in Figure 1, causative and inactive verbs have different paths. These are however, not quite distinct for Letzebuergesch as Haspelmath assumed. (ibid.)

![Figure 1. The Various Sources for Passive Development](Gaeta forthcoming; see Haspelmath 1990)

### 4.1.4 Sequential Order

Figure 2. below shows a possible explanation of the development i.e. grammaticalisation of the verb *ginn “give”* in Letzebuergesch. It is assumed that in the first stage a distinction was made between the 3-place verb meaning “X transfers X to Z” and the 2-place verb meaning “X becomes Y”. In a later stage, the second-place verb kept its meaning of becoming, but also included the existential construction and the passive construction. In a later stage the passive construction led to the “standard” (actional) passive and the impersonal passive.

As for the CondAux, the conditional mood auxiliary, one can only observe that Letzebuergesch lost most of its conditional mood forms and only a couple of them remain nowadays. In order to compensate for that loss, some verbs still conserving their conditional mood form were used as an auxiliary. These verbs were *géif “would give”, géing “would go, déit “would do” and méicht “would make”*. As already mentioned in Section 2, present-day Letzebuergesch only uses *géif* and *géing*. 

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The Letzebuergesch Verb *ginn “give”*
The Letzebuergesch Verb *ginn* “give”

### 4.2 The Past Tense in Letzebuergesch

#### 4.2.1 The Lexical Verb’s Loss of the Preterit Form

Despite Hopper and Closs Traugott (2003) writing that grammaticised forms tend to be morphologically simpler than their lexical counter-parts, Letzebuergesch *ginn* proves to be the opposite: the lexical verb does not permit the preterit and is thus less morphologically rich than its grammaticised forms.

Interestingly enough, it is the lexical verb alone that allows the *hunn* “have” perfective auxiliary whereas the constructions resulting from “become” (see Table 5.) have *sinn* “be” as their perfective auxiliary. One can at least theorise that the distinction between the lexical verb and “become” is quite important.

#### 4.2.2 The Remainder in Letzebuergesch

As opposed to NHG, only a couple of verbs (see Table 4; adapted from Braun 2000: 37) have kept their preterit forms. Those verbs include modals (e.g. *ginn*, *kënnen*, *sollen*), locative verbs (e.g. *bleiwen*, *goen*, *kommen*, *leien*, *sëtzen*), the two perfective auxiliaries *sinn* and *hunn* and some other verbs.

As for Comrie’s observations on the use of Perfekt and Präteritum in German(1995; see 3.4), they could apply to Letzebuergesch as well; however, Nico Weber (p.c.) proposed that the preterit form suggest a more “literary” or highly marked style.
The Letzebuergesch Verb *ginn* “give”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitival Form</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Preterit Form: 1st Person Singular</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bleiwen</td>
<td>Remain</td>
<td>Blouf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brêngen</td>
<td>Bring</td>
<td>Bruecht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doen</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>doung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gesinn</td>
<td>See</td>
<td>gesouch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ginn</td>
<td>Give</td>
<td>Gouf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goen</td>
<td>Go</td>
<td>goung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heeschchen</td>
<td>be called</td>
<td>houscht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hunn</td>
<td>Have</td>
<td>Hat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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Table 6. Some Remaining Preterit Forms in Letzebuergesch

We could suggest that the lexical verb *ginn* has followed the tendency of other lexical verbs to loose their preterits whereas the grammaticised forms have followed the tendency of auxiliaries and modals to keep theirs.

4.3 The Future Development of *ginn*

There are two main future developments that can be predicted from the present analysis of *ginn*. The first one is that the synthetic form of *ginn* (*gouf*) could well disappear in the future. Being already now a highly marked form and probably only used in literature, speakers of Letzebuergesch might only use the analytic form. As it happened with other verbs, it could well happen to *ginn* as well. Note that this process of “analyticisation” is also happening in other (oral) European languages such French and German.

The second development is the choice of two conditional mood auxiliaries, *géif* and *géing*. Although it has been suggested that *géing* expressed volition, this is no longer the case now. Letzebuergesch will keep both auxiliaries, regardless of their use.
A last development to follow is the word order of modals and non-finite verbs in subordinate clauses. Although only briefly discussed in section 2.6.4, linguists should be intrigued to watch the modals stabilising in one particular position, or else, offering several possibilities.
Section 5: Conclusion

Although the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg is close to Germany, several processes in Letzebuergesch are different to those in NHG. This paper shows that the Letzebuergesch verb *ginn* “give” is not only a full verb, it also has the meaning of “becoming”, it can be used to express existence (like NHG), it is used to indicate the passive voice (including the impersonal passive), and it is a conditional mood marker.

Data in Section 2 shows that only the full verb does not permit the preterit form and has the *hunn* “have” perfective auxiliary whereas the other uses of *ginn* accept both the synthetic and analytic forms to express the past and express the perfect through the *sinn* “be” auxiliary. Additionally, Letzebuergesch modals (here: *géif* and *géing*) come before non-finite verbs in subordinate clauses, although other positions are also possible to a certain extent.

Section 3 explains grammaticalisation, auxiliation and why a verb like “give” can extend its original meaning. It draws on an example of NHG where *geben* “give” is used in an existential construction. Furthermore section 3 explains the semantic difference between the synthetic and analytic forms to express the past.

Section 4 tries to account for *ginn* in Letzebuergesch in respect to its different forms. It also discusses the past forms of *ginn* and predicts that the synthetic form could disappear as it is already now highly marked.

Overall, it is the semantic extension of the Letzebuergesch *ginn* verb that has opened the way to grammaticalisation.

From this paper several further research topics have arisen. The first one is general grammaticalisation in Letzebuergesch i.e. which lexical words have turned into grammatical words. A second topic is the loss of preterit forms in Letzebuergesch. A third topic is the rise of Letzebuergesch modals with syntactic comparisons with the *hunn* and *sinn* auxiliaries and with special concentration on, however little has been dealt with in this paper, the word order of modal and non-finite verb in subordinate clauses.
The author of this paper hopes that Letzebuergesch will not remain the least linguistically investigated language in Europe and that more research will be done on the language of the “little borough”.
The Letzebuergesch Verb *ginn* “give”

References

The title of non-English references is translated in English in square brackets.


Bibliography

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Appendix: Email

Date: Thu, 22 May 2003 11:33:23 +0100
From: "G.Newton" <G.Newton@sheffield.ac.uk>
To: Cedric Krummes <eluc87@bangor.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: Letzebuergesch

Dear Cedric,

[…]

(c) Concerning the "gin"/ "goen" thing: I didn't mean that people used contamination forms of both of these verbs, but simply that "ech gin" (old spelling, which I prefer) can, according to the "Luxemburger Wörterbuch", mean both "ich gehe" and "ich gebe"; similarly "mir gin" = "wir gehen"/ "wir geben", "si gin" = "sie gehen"/ "sie geben"; and possibly also "dir git" = "ihr geht"/ "ihr gebt" (although "dir gët" is also found for "ihr gebt"). This is fine nowadays, but in previous centuries, when no one could read or write, how could they know whether "ech gi blann" is actually "ich gehe blind" or "ich gebe blind"? Or whether "si gi futti" is "sie gehen futti" or "sie geben futti"?

[…]

(e) As for the conditional/ modus modestiae, or whatever you like to call it, you seem to have three possibilities in Luxembourgish: "ech géif dat nët man", "ech géing dat nët man", and "ech déit dat nët man". Perhaps you can tell me what the difference is.

(f) The "werden" forms are found in Old High German as well as Old English. They are also found in your medieval verse poem "Yolanda von Vianden" (ca. 1290), as the following lines from that show:

0132 dat kint was minnebêre,
0133 gút, zuhtich, reine, milde,
0134 schöhn als ein engels bilde,
0135 lûtsâlich baz dan einich kint,
0136 dat wart an him bezûtet sint.
0148 ein lûter òigenspygelglas
0149 wart sy den gûden al zehant;
0150 sy was geheizen Iolant.

There are no examples of "geben" = "werden" in the text, and only "werden" in this latter sense occurs. So at what point "gin" stepped in to take over from "werden" is a mystery.

[…]

Best wishes for now,

Gerald Newton

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