

# Speak Luxembourgish With Me

TOON VOS · LUXEMBOURG



Illustration by [Eddie Stok](#)

THE BURN-BURN? It sounds like gibberish when translated literally, but to the Luxembourgish ear, *Buergebrennen* makes perfect sense. From the Latin *burere*, or “to burn,” and the German *brennen*, also “to burn,” the word signifies the old tradition of lighting a massive bonfire to mark the onset of spring.

“This tradition is still ongoing in Luxembourg today and comes loaded with predictions of weather forecasts and crop harvests, stories of courtships, and rich symbolisms of cleansing, renewal, fertility and community,” Liz Wenger explains. The founder of [www.learnluxembourgish.com](http://www.learnluxembourgish.com), she is well aware of the connection between language,

cultural tradition, and a sense of connection to a specific place.

***“Words in another language are not just translations, but contain stories passed on from generation to generation.”***

“It’s a beautiful thing when you realize that the words in another language are not just translations, but contain stories passed on from generation to generation,” she says. Moreover, Liz argues that learning a new language is entertaining, and might spark an interest in things you wouldn’t have done otherwise. “If you get bored with your usual English-recipe-based

cooking routine, why not look for recipes in German. You'd be surprised how different they are, despite decades of globalization."

Luxembourgish schoolchildren first learn German, then French, and finally, English in their early teens. Yet, crammed as it is between Germany, Belgium and France, the Luxembourgish language is an important part of the social fabric of the tiny Grand Duchy.

"Luxembourgers realize that foreigners do not necessarily have to learn their language, so it makes it all the more special when they do," Liz remarks. "By learning their language, you're contributing to the continued existence of their cultural heritage

and that makes them want to do something in turn to help you.”

Liz admits that the linguistic ambiguity one faces within the country’s mere 2,586 square kilometers can be inconvenient at times. “The biggest downside of living in a country where everyone speaks a different language is the hesitancy you develop in approaching someone.” She notes that the anglophone nature of Toronto, where she currently lives, makes it easier to approach strangers.

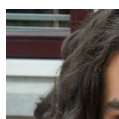
Liz knows a thing or two about adapting to a new cultural and linguistic context—in 2016, she was named one of *Politico*’s 28 European movers and shakers, earning her the

nickname “Integration  
Champion.”

“When you first move to a new country where you don’t speak the language, it is very easy to feel left out and struggle to integrate yourself. Integration happens when you become part of the social and cultural fabric around you, when you’re no longer viewing yourself as separate or different from ‘them,’ but as one and the same.”

Language, she says, is a distinct part of that process. In that, there’s a balance to strike between openness, and letting language become a tool of nativists seeking to exclude. Liz welcomes the idea of Luxembourgish becoming the only official language in

preference of the  
German-French-  
Luxembourgish trifecta:  
“It is the only language  
that defines our nation,  
the language that  
includes our historic,  
cultural and social  
footprint.”



## **Toon Vos**

Author · Brussels

Toon Vos is an editor for Are We Europe and a cultural anthropologist, primarily preoccupied with religious affairs, the far-right and wherever it is the two meet or clash.

This article  
appears in Are  
We Europe #4:  
**This Is Not An  
Elections Issue**



## This Is Not An Elections Issue

ORDER NOW



Discuss Europe outside your bubble

Meet your discussion partner



Comments (0)

Newest First    Subscribe via e-mail



Preview

POST COMMENT...

## Malta's Leftist Relief

# Who's Laughing Now? A Talk Show Host Goes Political

Search

## Subscribe to our Newsletter

Email Address

SIGN UP

We respect your privacy.

SUBSCRIBE STOCKISTS CONTACT

ABOUT

INSTAGRAM