

Ingrid Bello-Rodzeń

University of Silesia, Poland

Multilingual Upbringing as Portrayed in the Blogosphere: On Parent-Bloggers' Profile

Abstract

This article presents the results of an online survey completed by an international group of parents who write about their multilingual upbringing experience on personal blogs. As the first stage in a multi-case study that aims at characterizing multilingual parenting styles and strategies, the web questionnaire was designed to build the profile of the participants based on their demographic and linguistic background, their blogging practices, and their family's linguistic situation. The literature review discusses the prevalence of multilingual child rearing and endorses parent-blogging both as a genre and as a potential research data source. The methodology, on the other hand, introduces the participants, as well as the survey design procedure. Results derive from the identification of salient themes, summarized in two preliminary categories: parents' views on being bi-/multilingual and parental insights on multilingual upbringing strategies. The descriptive-interpretive analysis of the responses indicates that parents' understanding of multilingualism influences their self-concept as language users and their being bloggers. Moreover, parents' capacity to adopt and adapt communication strategies is deemed an important factor for successful early multilingualism. In general, the findings are treated as the starting point to examine the role of parent-blogging in promoting multilingualism and delve into multilingual parenting styles.

Keywords: multilingual upbringing, parent-blogging, online surveys, multilingualism research

Introduction

Multilingual families thrive as global mobility and the Internet enhance cross-linguistic encounters and bring people from all corners of the world together. Every day, parents of different nationalities with distinct educational

backgrounds and levels of expertise in multilingual upbringing discuss their family language practices over the web. Although the reasons to participate in online exchanges may vary from one parent to another, the will to promote multilingualism in their household prompts them to join a growing virtual community that encourages its members to exchange experiences, share concerns, and meet like-minded people.

While many parents search the web to find information and explanations, others decide to contribute their own stories in the form of narratives and reflections posted on personal weblogs. Their entries are not only a form of personal expression but a type of text meant to trigger discussion and opinion exchange among potential readers, including other bloggers and parents in a similar linguistic situation. This initiative has turned the blogosphere into a space where it is possible to learn about the multilingual upbringing experience of families around the world just by reading their e-journals, which can be easily found by any internet user with the help of some query keywords.

Blogs of this kind have been chosen for an ongoing study on multilingual upbringing. They offer first-person accounts on the communication practices of several families, an overview of their language plan (Rosenback, 2014), and a non-intrusive look into their multicultural lives. From a research perspective, such blogs represent access to personal narratives written without any conditioning or externally-imposed purpose in mind. Before looking at the texts, however, the study has focused on their writers. Consequently, the main purpose of the present article is to introduce the parent-bloggers (PBs) whose online journal entries will be examined to shed light on parenting styles in the multilingual family context.

The profile presented here has been built on the data gathered through an online survey completed by an international group of parent-bloggers who, firstly, fulfilled the participant selection criteria and, secondly, granted consent for their posts to be analyzed for research purposes. While the findings discussed henceforward are limited in scope and need to be expanded with the subsequent analysis of the blogs, they acknowledge the existence of a pro-multilingualism virtual community and set the ground to explore a new research avenue in the study of child-rearing practices in multilingual households.

Multilingual Upbringing: An Exception to the Norm?

In most societies, multilingualism has been the norm throughout the ages (Lamza, 2007), thus “the majority of peoples in the world are multilingual, not mono- or even bilingual” (Bagga-Gupta, 2013, p. 36). On a global scale, pure

monolingual societies and individuals who exclusively speak one language are hard to find. The coexistence of several languages within a community is not atypical, and neither is the case of couples with different native languages who adopt a lingua franca to be able to communicate. As distances shrink and cultural encounters happen, interracial, multicultural, and multilingual families flourish worldwide.

Being the first “educational environment where the culture forming process takes place” (Majorczyk, 2010, p. 23), the family plays a key role in promoting values such as mutual respect, empathy, and cultural sensitivity. It is within the household that the next generation of world citizens, with high interpersonal skills and the ability to understand themselves in relation to the other, are being formed. From this perspective, the potential individual and social benefits for children being raised in such environment become evident: advanced communication skills, intercultural awareness and, in general, understanding and respect for the other.

Despite the advantages it may have, multilingual/multicultural families seem to make a bigger effort to achieve what is often taken for granted in the “traditional” ones. Passing on their languages, values, and traditions to their offspring requires conscious decision-making and collaborative work from the parents. Not only are they obliged to create a favorable environment that guarantees exposure to several languages, but also to actively get involved in the process. As a result, the efficiency of language acquisition in multilingual upbringing by parents of different nationalities is viewed as a current and complex research issue (Paradowski, Bator, & Michałowska, 2016).

In order to succeed in their endeavor, parents may even require some external support from relationships, professionals, and other families in the same situation, especially when they have no prior experience to rely on. According to Rosenback (2014), the seven central principles of multilingual parenting or what she refers to as “the seven Cs” are: communication, confidence, commitment, consistency, creativity, culture, and celebration. Each one of them refers to both a challenge and a goal for parents to pursue in order to foster the knowledge of languages, which is the key that opens the door to other cultures.

As demanding as it may be, multilingual upbringing is not a rare practice occurring in isolation or just recently. The ubiquity of multilingualism becomes apparent on weblogs featuring families composed of parents and children with different nationalities, who communicate in several languages and, in some cases, reside in a place none of them is originally from. What conditions favor or hinder their success and what factors influence their decisions might give us some hints on the principles of multilingual parenting, as well as on issues that need careful consideration when examining and/or promoting early multilingualism.

Even though “[t]here are more people in the world who use more than one language in their everyday lives than people who spend their whole lives using only one language” (Cruz-Ferreira, 2010, p. 5), much is yet to be learned about the conditions in which multilinguals develop. In order to determine whether there is a correlation or a gap between the existing theory about multilingual upbringing and the practices conducted at home, a bridge between them both needs to be built. Given their nature and scope of interest, the logs kept by the parents may well be scrutinized from a research perspective to establish that connection.

Parent-Blogging as a Genre

Weblogs, or blogs in short, are frequently updated websites consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order, which are typically published by individuals in a personal and informal style (Walker, 2005). Unlike personal webpages with fairly static formats, blogs present original and constantly changing content. They have been considered “an important social tool” (Ferreira et al., 2013, p. 1177) that encourages “self-motivated” users (Chen, 2014) to share ideas, individual experiences, and opinions in order to meet a/the need for self-expression and community development (Morrison, 2010).

Three main styles of blogging have been identified: personal or diary-style blogging, filterblogging, and topic-driven blogging (Walker Rettberg, 2008). Personal blogs are used as a diary deliberately open to the public. Although not limited to a predefined topic, they present pieces of information about the author’s life and interests. The second type of blogs, as their name indicates, is used to filter the Web from the bloggers’ own point of view. Instead of documenting their offline life, bloggers record their experiences and finds on the Web. Finally, on topic-driven blogs authors share newly discovered ideas and information with their readers about a specific subject. Unlike the previous ones, these blogs are often run collaboratively by a group of contributors.

In order to research multilingual upbringing from the parents’ perspective, the scope of the research study is limited to personal weblogs. As explained by Walker Rettberg (2008), these blogs let their writers’ individual voices be heard and disclose information purposefully shared with potential readers and, consequently, they are marked by wit and introspection. While filter blogs offer information about a subject matter without engaging in “partisan advocacy” (Webb & Wang, 2013, p. 206) and topic-driven blogs act more like websites, personal weblogs have “an intimate, sometimes confessional, style where the

author provides the readers with subjective representations and reflections on the topic discussed” (Lomborg, 2009, n.p.).

Most of the personal weblogs that discuss childrearing can be categorized as ‘mommy blogs,’ a genre that features personal online logs whose primary topic is motherhood. Morrison (2010) considers mommy blogging “a form of autobiography in real time” (n.p.). Her definition stresses the introspective, personal and time-bound character of this genre. She characterizes these writing practices as purposive, creative, and interpersonal to distinguish them from private diaries or public websites. The mommy blogger network is strongly interconnected and highly diverse, so it allows parents to build a community in which they talk to others and get feedback on their ideas (Stansberry, 2011; Webb & Lee, 2011).

Compared to other weblogs, mommy blogs share the same technical affordances, but they can be significantly different in terms of audience reach and degree of reciprocity (Morrison, 2010). Some of these blogs are externally-oriented (Scheidt, 2008), written for a broad audience, in a more professional but less intimate tone. Other are confessional personal accounts, or “confessional online diaries” (Walker, 2005), written to meet a personal need rather than attract audience. As opposed to the first group, a third type of blogs is treated as newsletters for far-away relatives and friends, where authors are more concerned about strengthening bonds and sharing materials than about having a fine or creative writing style.

Despite the efforts to endorse mommy blogging as a genre, it is argued that the term itself “reinforces women’s hegemonic normative roles as nurturers, thrusting women who blog about their children into a form of digital domesticity in the blogosphere” (Masullo Chen, 2013, p. 510). Likewise, “this label may disrespect other aspects of bloggers’ identities including worker, wife, friend, and daughter” (Webb & Lee, 2011, p. 245). Opinions are divided among bloggers, as well. Some people support the idea of mommy blogging as “a radical act” (cjo9, 2012), while others prefer to distinguish between Mom blogging—mothers who blog but do not necessarily or exclusively write about their family lives—and mommy blogging—a genre that features blogs about mom-centric topics (Piersall, 2011).

Noticeably, a change in usage of the term can be observed by conducting the Google search mentioned by Friedman & Calixte (2009). The authors report that the search for the term “mommy blogging” offered 80,000 hits, ten times more than that for “mom blogger.” Unlike the significant difference they account for, a more recent Google verbatim search—conducted in June 2016—offers only 54,000 matches for “mommy blogging” and more than 44,800 for “mom blogging.” This variation in the results can be interpreted either as an increase in the amount of mothers who blog, following Piersall’s (2011) distinction, or as

a decline in popularity and, allegedly, in the number of bloggers who embrace the first term.

Given both the controversy over the name of the genre and the fact that the participants of this study include mothers and fathers who blog, the terms “parent-blogging” and “parent-bloggers” are deemed to be more accurate and inclusive. Parent-blogging (on multilingual upbringing) is viewed here as a dynamic, interactive and introspective form of online writing in which parents offer chronological records of their family’s efforts to pass on and maintain three or more languages in their household. The uniqueness of this genre makes it a valuable data source for studies on multilingual language acquisition (MLA) from a parental perspective.

Parents’ Blogs as Data in Multilingualism Research

The analysis of parent-blogging is founded on the notion of multilingualism as “the new linguistic dispensation” (Aronin & Singleton, 2008, 2012), that is, a systemic phenomenon with an evolving status that “embraces the current reality of language ideologies and policies, and language education in all its aspects” (Aronin, 2015, p. 5). From that perspective, “languages are seen as complex and dynamic systems which are in constant interaction” (Safont Jordà & Portolés Falomir, 2015, p. viii) and the relationship user-environment-language is deemed essential to understand current linguistic realities (Aronin & Singleton, 2008).

As suggested by Cruz-Ferreira, the approach taken in this paper—and in the whole study—distances itself from the “clinical” view of multilingualism that examines what knowing several languages “does” to people and, rather, focuses on what people are able to do with several languages in order to support learning and acquisition processes. The analysis of the selected cases is an attempt to inquire into the multilingual reality of families located on different parts of the world who use and/or are exposed to three or more languages on a daily basis.

Bloggng confers authorship and endorses personalized content production and presentation, hence weblog entries reflect the writer’s topics of interest and opinions (Scheidt, 2008). Posts about parenting, for example, may reveal attitudes and beliefs held, as well factors on which some of the decisions regarding child rearing are grounded. Although the emphasis added on language acquisition and the frequency with which this topic is discussed varies from one blogger to another, the existing parent-blogging archives contain significant episodes in the multilingual journey of the authors and their families.

Morrison (2010) asserts that parent-blogging responds to an expressed need to create and/or deliberately join a community that understands and recognizes parenthood as a subjective experience. “Bloggers assign meaning to the stages and cycles of life that may otherwise be missed in their busy existence, if not chronicled” (Webb & Lee, 2011, p. 246). Regarding multilingual upbringing, parents’ chronicles may unveil what they consider significant moments, gains, fears, and challenges in this endeavor. Moreover, the posts can be examined to analyze parental attitudes, beliefs and, in general, an array of field data that could otherwise be lost, unavailable or much harder to gather.

The reason to inquire about multilingual upbringing from the parental perspective by means of blog entries is twofold. On the one hand, parent-blogging on multilingualism is an introspective, dynamic, and socially-oriented phenomenon which is, as such, under-researched. On the other hand, this practice evidences parents’ widespread need and efforts to promote several languages in their household. If multilingual upbringing is a complex and demanding process that requires persistence and dedication from the parents in order to be successful (Paradowski et al., 2016), then it is worth researching how parents strive for it by looking at the narrative introspections they so readily share online.

To some extent, parent-bloggers can be viewed as ethnographers willing to share their participant observations and field notes with anyone interested in their findings. Drawing on the literature, it is assumed that: a) the online exchanges that occur in the blogosphere are beneficial because they encourage parents to discuss ideas, share concerns, and meet like-minded people; b) as a result of their interactions, a growing virtual community of practice that endorses multilingualism exists; c) the information shared by parent-bloggers offers valuable insights into the dynamics of language acquisition and use in diverse sociocultural settings, which could not be easily reached, or would simply remain unknown otherwise.

The Online Survey

Participants: The Parents behind the Blogs

The study employs a multiple-case study design, in which each parent-blogger ($n = 13$) is conceptualized as a “case” and a cross-case analysis (Yin, 2003) is conducted to find similarities amongst all participants. In total, 12 female and 1 male participants, whose ages range between 20–29 (1), 30–39 (9), and 40–49 (3) years old, completed the survey. A code (PB#) was assigned to identify each parent—the number was given according to the order in which

the answers were automatically saved on the online spreadsheet. Additionally, participants chose to be addressed as “First name, author of (name of blog)” when excerpts from their blogs were to be cited throughout the study.

Table 1

Parent-bloggers’ demographic and linguistic background

PB# – Place of origin	Current place of residence	Family languages	No. of children: year, (country) of birth
Latvia	Germany	ENG – LTV – GER	2: 2014, 2016 (Germany)
Spain	Bulgaria	SPA – BUL	2: 2008, 2013 (Spain)
Sweden	Germany	SPA – SWE – GER	2: 2005, 2008 (Germany)
Poland	USA	POL – SPA – ENG – ASL	1: 2013 (USA)
Poland	Canada	FRE – POL – ENG	2: 2011, 2014 (Canada)
Scotland	Germany	ENG – HUN – GER	2: 2012, 2014 (Germany)
Poland	Germany	SPA – POL	1: 2013 (Germany)
Venezuela	Hungary	SPA – ENG – HUN	1: 2012 (Hungary)
Germany	Italy	ITA – ENG – GER	2: 2008, 2010 (Italy)
Russia	Italy	ENG – RUS – ITA	2: 2009, 2011 (Italy)
Singapore	Malaysia	ENG – CHI – GER	1: 2011 (Singapore)
Ecuador	Norway	ENG – NOR – SPA	1: 2013 (Norway)
USA	France	FRE – ENG – SPA	4: 2001, 2003 (USA); 2006, 2012 (France)

Table 1 shows that the participants come from Europe (9), South America (2), North America (1) and Asia (1) and that none of them lives in their birth-place at present. Noticeably, seven PBs reside in their partner/spouse’s country of origin, whereas the rest are based in a “third” country, namely Germany (4), the USA (1), and Malaysia (1). Most people (11) have been living in their current place of residence for more than five years and expect to stay there permanently. Regarding the number of children, seven couples have two, five have one, and one couple has four kids. In total, there are 23 children (13 girls, 10 boys), out of whom 13 are toddlers/preschoolers (2–5 y/o). Only in two cases (PB3 & PB9) the children’s age range is a bit higher.

By number of families in which they are spoken/used, the languages (FamLang) listed by the participants include: English (10), Spanish (7), German (5), Polish (3), French (2), Hungarian (2), Italian (1), Bulgarian (1), Chinese (1), Latvian (1), Norwegian (1), Swedish (1), and American Sign Language (1). While English was found to be the most common language between couples (10 cases), it is used between one or both parents and their children only in four families. Spanish was the second most popular “couple language” (5/13 cases), with one of the parents being a native speaker. It was listed as a FamLang in 5 cases.

Even though most parent-bloggers (PBs) are not native speakers of English and two families did not include it as a FamLang, nine people in the group

use English to write most of the content of their blogs. Two other respondents write in Spanish, one in Polish, and another one mostly in Swedish with occasional posts in English or Spanish. English can therefore be seen as the means for self-expression and the lingua franca among the majority of these parents.

Method: Web Survey Design & Implementation

Surveys administered online are used to address a wide variety of language-related issues. They have gained popularity and are extensively employed in social research, for they have been found to be economical, fast to create and deploy, and convenient to reach out to a representative group of potential participants (Sue & Ritter, 2012; Wilson & Dewaele, 2010). According to Dörnyei and Csizér (2012), survey studies in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) can inform us about people's intended language behavior, their background information and biodata, their knowledge of certain issues in SLA and, in general, their opinions and attitudes towards the L2.

In large-scale studies, but also in small-scale studies in which face-to-face contact with the participants is complicated or even impossible, questionnaires are administered using different survey software or applications available on the web. That is the case of this study. An online questionnaire was created with the purpose of gathering information to build the profile of an international group of parents. Prior to preparing the online survey, purposive criterion sampling (Palys, 2008) was applied to filter the search results and to define the scope of the study. Moreover, the following five criteria were used to scrutinize and choose the blogs and potential research participants:

- It had to be a personal weblog, not a filter or a topic-driven blog.
- Explicit reference to the use of more than two languages in the family was a must.
- It had to be written in English, Spanish, and/or Polish—the languages of the researcher.
- It had to include posts about multilingual upbringing, early multilingualism and/or any other related topics.
- It had to be a public blog and still active at the moment it was found.

In total, 48 blogs were located between July 2015 and January 2016. An invitation to participate in the study was sent to 32 people whose blogs complied with all the conditions above. Although 11 bloggers never replied, 21 agreed to fill in the online survey and granted consent for their posts to be analyzed for research purposes. The instrument was designed to elicit information about four related topics, namely: general demographic and linguistic background, self-perceived proficiency level in their languages, blogging practices, and multilingual parenting experience.

Preparing the offline version of the questionnaire and a general benefit-cost estimation of different survey software were the initial steps. Once approved and available online, the questionnaire was piloted with two parent-bloggers who, despite meeting the initial selection criteria, differed from the rest of the group because their children are adults already and their entries are not focused on their current family situation. The feedback received served to adjust the wording of a few questions and validate clarity and accuracy of the instrument. The URL was e-mailed to 19 parent-bloggers and the data-analysis began four months later.

Following Gläser and Laudel (2010), the theory and the data analysis were taken into consideration to identify salient themes related to multilingual parenting. Both verbatim quotes taken from the answers of different respondents and a brief description of the theme were used to name the preliminary categories. Excerpts from the survey responses are quoted or paraphrased when a whole statement was given by a specific PB. Verbatim words appear in quotation marks to account for the participants' voice. In other cases, the interpretation of the answers to close-ended questions is provided. Rather than final conclusions, the data gathered offered an array of essential issues to delve into during the blog content analysis phase.

Results & Discussion

The results presented hereafter correspond to the descriptive-interpretative analysis of the survey questions that specifically addressed issues in multilingualism. As mentioned, this instrument was the means to establish a first contact with the participants in order to learn about their background and ask for certain information that could not have been found just by reading their blogs. Although multilingual upbringing practices were not inquired in detail, most open-ended questions encouraged and/or required the respondents to elaborate on their answers. The findings derive from the analysis of their comments.

“Multilingualism is a Lifestyle Choice”: Parents' Views on Being Bi-/Multilingual

The term *multilingual* is used here to refer to individuals and their families, rather than to societies. Who is considered to be multilingual and what does it take to become one? The answer to those queries is not always clear-cut. “Multilinguals have been called all sort of names, which cast more shadows

than light on what they are” (Cruz-Ferreira, 2010, p. 1). In this study, it is assumed that “a multilingual is neither the sum of three or more monolinguals nor a bilingual with an additional language” (De Angelis & Selinker, 2001, p. 44). In the survey, the participants were asked to identify themselves and their partners as “monolingual, bilingual, multilingual or other” and to elaborate on their choices.

Almost everyone, 12 out of 13 PBs, indicated that they perceive themselves as multilinguals. PB2, who self-identifies as a bilingual and not as a multilingual is, however, a simultaneous bilingual in Spanish and Catalan, who additionally declares being a proficient user of Bulgarian and an independent user of English. The justification for her choice was as follows: “I consider myself bilingual because I can speak 2 languages at a native level. As for the other 2 languages I know, I don’t speak them perfectly well” (Q11, PB2). As Paradowski et al. (2016) state, her answer could indicate that she confines the labels bi/multilingualism to early language acquisition.

Additional data would be needed to know the linguistic biography of the parents in order to better understand their perceptions as language users. Moreover, it could be useful to contrast the results obtained with the blogs to determine what views of multilingualism, if any in particular, parents convey. Yet, the survey showed that they are aware of their linguistic background. Among the reasons for considering themselves multilingual, PBs mentioned their ability to speak three or more languages fluently (PB1), the fact that they use them on a daily basis, for different purposes with specific people (PB5, PB6) and their living abroad experiences (PB9).

For the sake of this study, it is worth mentioning that all the PBs have completed higher levels of education: they hold either bachelor’s (1), master’s (10), or doctoral (2) degrees. In the survey-based study conducted by Paradowski et al. (2016), the authors highlight that the fact that 43.2% (16 out of 37) of their participants had higher linguistic education could have influenced the thoroughness of their observations and answers. Further research will help to determine whether there is a correlation between the parents’ linguistic knowledge and their family language practices. Yet, answers like those quoted below indicate that the participants’ language trajectories are solid and give them the perspective of a native speaker, a FL learner and a language model/teacher—in their role as parents.

I speak and understand Polish and English at a native level, having immigrated to the US at age 8. I studied Spanish for 5 years and am married to a native Spanish speaker. My expressive Spanish is better than my receptive Spanish. I am literate in all three languages. (Q11. PB4)

I use three languages every day (English, German, and Hungarian) and because we spend a lot of time in Romania at my parents-in-law I use basic Romanian while I'm there (3–4 months a year). (Q11. PB6)

English is my native form of communication in work and with my husband, family and friends and in the community where I live. I use Mandarin with my father and some relatives, my friends from China and Taiwan (they are native speakers) and primarily with my son. I switch to German with my in laws. I used French sometimes when I worked in Brussels.” (Q11. PB11)

In addition to assessing themselves, the participants were asked to describe their partner's/spouse's proficiency level. The goal was to build up a broad picture of the couples and, consequently, comprehend the dynamics of their language practices at home. The respondents said their partner/spouse to be multilingual or bilingual in 7 and 5 cases, respectively. In one case, the answer given was “not bilingual [but] able to understand and live bi and multilingual culture and education” (Q.22.5. PB7). “Speaks well/fluent,” “is proficient,” “understands well” or “has near native proficiency” were some of the phrases used to support their choices. No-one chose monolingual as a response and one person did not supply any answer.

Although there are no monolinguals in the group, not everyone is a native user of all the languages they listed as their L1. PB13 self-evaluated as a proficient speaker of Spanish and a native speaker of English. Surprisingly enough, she mentioned that Spanish is the language she uses to communicate with her children almost 100% of the time, while English is her and her French husband's common language. Her case shows efforts to maintain her heritage language, Spanish, despite it not being her stronger language or the majority language in her current place of residence.

Based on their comments, it could be argued that this group of parents concur with Otwinowska (2015), who maintains that being multilingual does not imply knowing several languages perfectly, but being able and trying to use this knowledge and competence in various communicative situations. Beyond the number of languages an individual may know, or the sequence in which those languages were acquired or learned, it is the ability and willingness to use them, not perfectly but effectively, what makes someone multilingual. As PB13 states, “*multilingualism is a lifestyle* [emphasis added]” and not only a label assigned to describe a fixed attribute or some sort of innate talent of people who speak several languages.

The way parents perceive multilingualism has also a direct impact on their being bloggers. Although blogging is not their main occupation, they devote time and effort in keeping their sites updated. 12/13 PBs listed language-related topics when asked about the main topics of their blogs; the person who did

not put it explicitly, mentioned motherhood instead. According to the survey, parents run their blogs “to share [their] experiences raising a multilingual child and sharing [sic] more about [their] expat life (PB1),” as well as “to document [their] kids’ language development” (PB6). PB13’s comment concisely expresses what most participants mentioned as reasons to blog:

Many people close to me were asking me what I thought was the reason why bilingualism worked in some families and not in others. After struggling to answer the question, I decided I would start a blog in a quest to define what factors lead to successful bilingual families. (Q13. PB13)

Even though she only refers to bilingualism in this statement, she explains in another comment that her family moved to a different country and since then she has been passing on two minority languages to her children. As a result, she even renamed her blog “Trilingual Mama.” Parents’ blogs are also the result of a felt need to disseminate multilingualism, for ‘there was very little information around and [they] wanted to share [their own] experience’ (PB9). Parents may not be experts in all multilingual upbringing matters, but they are both willing to share their first-hand experience and eager to spread the word in the blogosphere.

If multilingualism influences the way in which these families live, it is pertinent to observe what influences their language practices and to what extent they pass on their own attitudes to their children. The second salient theme in the analysis of the survey sheds some light on this regard, as it focuses on the decisions made by the PBs and their partners in terms of following a multilingual upbringing “plan.” Their evaluation of the process and the results observed thus far place the parents’ capacity to adjust existing strategies to their specific needs as an important factor for successful early multilingualism.

“OPOL Version 2.0”: Parents’ Insights on (In)efficient Multilingual Upbringing Strategies

Parents may employ different strategies to stimulate the acquisition and use of each language, but “[t]here is no ‘golden rule,’ no single ‘foolproof’ strategy to raise multilingual children successfully: each family decides what suits their needs best, because every family is unique and so is every child” (Cruz-Ferreira, 2010, pp. 60–61). Multilingual families do not simply adopt language-learning strategies; they adapt them to their particular needs and their unique linguistic situation.

For the sake of consistency, terms such as model, method, approach, strategy and/or technique are not used interchangeably here, despite this happening

in the literature. In this article, parenting strategies refer to specific parental behaviors used in the child-rearing process (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). In the same vein, multilingual parenting strategies are understood as practices to pass on and maintain several languages. Terminological consensus could help in describing linguistic environments and interaction patterns more accurately, hence the restricted use of the term here.

As Cruz-Ferreira (2010) suggests, “families who decide to raise their children multilingually are bound to start at once seeking information and advice about what exactly should be done to achieve this purpose successfully” (p. 59). What seems to be natural or taken for granted in other families (e.g., using one’s L1 to talk to a baby) requires deliberate action in multilingual ones because parents fear that their actions may hinder their children’s MLA process. This being so, it is pertinent to analyze what factors influence parental decisions so as to support effective multilingual upbringing practices.

In the web survey, parent-bloggers were asked to mention the strategy or strategies of communication they followed in their family. In order to check whether parents were aware of the characteristics and potential advantages and disadvantages of different strategies, no additional information or major explanation was provided. However, it was assumed that they were quite familiar with the concept, as most of them have written about this topic on their weblogs. In the order they appeared, the options given and the corresponding number of respondents were: “One parent/person, one language—OPOL” (11), “minority language at home—ML@H” (0), “mixed strategy” (1), “time and place” (0), “initial one-language strategy” (0), “other” (1), and “none” (0).

The findings from Paradowski & Michałowska (2016) were helpful to interpret the survey results. In their case, 91% of the respondents said to have followed a specific strategy to raise their children bilingually, but three families had adopted none. In mine, not only did all PBs mention the strategy they employ, but they also provided the links to the posts they have written about this topic for further analysis. This may imply higher awareness of the MLA process from the parents who deal with three or more languages in their households at the same time.

The results proved the popularity of the OPOL strategy in which each parent uses his or her native language to communicate with the child. OPOL has been appointed as a household strategy for natural bilingualism (Pearson, 2010), especially for families in which parents have different nationalities (Paradowski et al., 2016). Parent-bloggers commented that they chose OPOL because “... it is what [they] believed to be most effective for imparting 3 languages” (PB11) and because “it was helpful to pass on [their] L1 as a minority language” (PB5).

In spite of its popularity, the effectiveness of OPOL as a multilingual parenting strategy has been questioned. De Houwer (2007) states that it is “neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition” and Cruz-Ferreira (2010) argues that it

is “a *monolingual*-caregiver norm” because it encourages parents to use only one language to talk with their children, denying the fact that they are also multilinguals. The survey results indicate that most families use what PB13 described as “an adaptation of OPOL” (Q.27), that is, a more suitable and personalized version of this strategy. PB3’s comment below supports this statement:

I call it OPOL version 2.0. In today’s society it is impossible to speak only one language in front of the children, they know that I speak other languages as well. But they also know, that they should speak Swedish with me. (Q.27.1, PB3)

Clearly, PB3 is aware of the ubiquity of multilingualism and argues that limiting oneself to just one language when the children know their parents are multilingual is contradictory. She also makes a point when she mentions that the children know what language they should use with whom. If parents are expected to teach through example, and if they want their children to be able to function in different languages, then they should act accordingly.

Not only did parents explain why following a strategy like OPOL strictly would restrict their everyday interactions, but they also gave an overview of the complex communication patterns that characterize their multilingual lifestyle. In the excerpt below, PB7 and PB8 describe how they switch between languages depending on the context and on their current situation. Their statements demonstrate that their strategies are flexible and prone to be modified.

Before our daughter was born we used to speak only German. Since 2 years we switched to use only Spanish at home between us, because my husband does not spend so much time at home, but I can and love to speak Spanish. Last months I start to use more Polish phrases to him also and he answers when he understands in Spanish. Our child learns [German] through hearing it in kindergarten and in the environment where we live (Q.27.1, PB7).

One parent, one language [Spanish, Hungarian]. English was introduced by chance, when we started going to a playgroup in English. At that time (Elena was 8 months old) I decided to keep English as an alternative language for games, songs and story books (Q.27.1, PB8).

The adoption of multilingual upbringing strategies is key in understanding the dynamics of early MLA. So far the findings suggest that the popularity of certain strategies does not necessarily guarantee their effectiveness. Paradowski et al. (2016) argue that a single strategy of communication seems to be insufficient for most families, so parents use additional aids and methods to make the language acquisition process more efficient. In view of the linguistic

background of the parents, the next step in the ongoing research study will be studying the factors that determine how they plan, follow and change their multilingual communication practices at home.

Although multilingualism might be natural and accessible, especially to people whose parents are of different nationalities (Paradowski et al., 2016), there is still a lot to learn from parents who commit to this endeavor. If willingness and the ability to use several languages for specific purposes in various situations are needed to be considered multilingual, then examining the correlation between parental attitudes and their children's multilingual competence development can shed light into the actions we as researchers may take to endorse multilingual practices in contexts where different cultures and languages coexist.

Conclusion

Multilingual upbringing is an increasing phenomenon inextricably linked to today's world's unique sociolinguistic situation, hence research in this area is essential to support these practices amongst international families. This article presents an attempt to gain insight into the stories of thirteen multilingual families who share a common goal: bringing up their children to be multilingual. The profile of the participants was built on the interpretation of the data gathered by means of an online questionnaire. The blog mining phase, the survey preparation process, and the preliminary analysis of the information obtained have been summarized.

Multilingualism studies are multilayered and acquisitive in nature, and so there is a promising future for interdisciplinary research in the field (Comanaru & Dewaele, 2015; Aronin & Hufeisen, 2009). Psychological methods have been integrated to broaden the scope of mainstream multilingualism research (see for example Pavlenko, 2004; Dewaele & McCloskey, 2015). In general, there is a call for apposite and emerging methods that consider and explore the inherent properties of contemporary multilingualism, namely complexity, liminality, suffusiveness and, more recently, super diversity (Aronin, 2015; Aronin & Singleton, 2002).

The study in which this paper is framed responds to that call by taking parents' blogs as an alternative road to understanding and visualizing multilingual parenting strategies and styles. Parent-blogging is personal yet public, dynamic but consistent, and introspective though socially-oriented in nature. As a genre, it offers access to archival records containing anecdotal reports and introspective reflections that could be hard to retrieve otherwise. The analysis of blogs

written by parents who chronicle and discuss their family's multilingual journey needs to be conducted taking into consideration the evolving user-environment-language relationship in order to understand their linguistic realities.

Thus far the interpretation of the web survey results has focused on introducing the parents and their family's multilingual environment. As the first stage in the process of exploring parents' blogs from a multilingualism research perspective, it was possible to learn about their personal and linguistic background, their family languages and the strategies they use to enhance multilingualism at home. Existing theory and research on bi/multilingual language acquisition are the lenses used to look at the data with the purpose of understanding how the families strive to maintain their languages.

The survey was also helpful to notice issues that need to be examined at subsequent research phases, such as parental discourses and attitudes towards MLA. In addition to the content of the entries, the scope of the blogging practices needs to be investigated to determine whether and how they promote multilingual child-rearing. The goal is to examine the participants' experiences and strategies from various analytical perspectives to unveil their parenting styles. By the same token, the study seeks to recognize parents' first-hand experience and their enterprise in documenting their children's linguistic developmental process.

If language is the faculty that distinguishes humans from other animals and permits us to organize all forms of social life, then preserving languages should be regarded as a priority for the future of our society. The international family is the setting where languages and cultures meet and flourish. The present article shows that international families, despite being geographically scattered, strive to join efforts and form a community in which multilingual upbringing provides fertile ground for intercultural dialogue, social cohesion, and mutual respect.

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Ingrid Bello-Rodzeń

Das Spiegelbild mehrsprachiger Erziehung in der Blogosphäre: zum Profil eines Elternbloggers

Zusammenfassung

In dem Beitrag werden Ergebnisse der im Internet durchgeführten Umfrage dargestellt. Der Fragebogen wurde von internationaler Gruppe der ihre Blogs zum Thema mehrsprachige Erziehung führenden und ihre eigenen Erfahrungen dabei ausnutzenden Eltern ausgefüllt. Als erste Stufe der analytischen Forschung (eng.: multi-case study), die bezweckt, verschiedene Erziehungsstile und Erziehungsstrategien zu schildern, wurde ein Internetfragebogen ausgearbeitet, dessen Zweck war es, den Profil von den Forschungsmitgliedern in Bezug auf ihre demografischen und sprachlichen Umstände, ihre Tätigkeit in der Blogosphäre und sprachliche Situation ihrer Familien zu bilden. In dem Literaturüberblick werden betont: die Natürlichkeit der mehrsprachigen Erziehung und große Bedeutung der von den Eltern geführten Blogs (eng.: parent-blogging), sowohl als einer literarischen Gattung, als auch als potentieller Forschungsdatenquelle. Der Beitrag stellt die an der Forschung teilnehmenden Eltern vor und schildert den Prozess der Umfrageanfertigung. Ihre Ergebnisse werden in zwei folgenden Kategorien resümiert: Ansichten der Eltern über Zweisprachigkeit und Mehrsprachigkeit, und ihre Bemerkungen über Strategien der mehrsprachigen Erziehung. Die deskriptiv-interpretatorische Datenanalyse zeigte auf, dass die Betrachtungsweise der Mehrsprachigkeit von den Eltern deren Identität als Sprachbenutzer und Bloggers beeinflussen. Darüber hinaus gilt die Fähigkeit der Eltern, eine Kommunikationsstrategie anzunehmen und anzupassen als unerlässlicher Faktor beim Mehrsprachigkeitserwerb von den Kindern. Im Großen und Ganzen betrachtet man die Ergebnisse der besagten Forschung als ein Ausgangspunkt für Erforschung der Rolle von der Bloggattung bei Verbreitung der Mehrsprachigkeit und als eine Grundlage für Erforschung der Erziehungsstile in mehrsprachigen Familien.