

**“We must be doing something right”:
An Exploratory Study of Parental Blogs about Multilingual Upbringing**

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Summary

This study responds to international demands for research on how multilingualism shapes family dynamics in different sociocultural contexts (King, 2016). The overarching aim was to examine the linguistic beliefs, practices and management strategies that influence the formation and maintenance of multilingual family language policies by means of parental blogs. Furthermore, the study aimed to discuss the main characteristics and potential use of the blogosphere as a tool in multilingual upbringing.

The dissertation consists of six chapters and is divided into two major parts, a theoretical and an empirical one. The first three chapters form the theoretical framework and offer a review of the literature. Chapter 1 introduces key concepts and theories in relation to family multilingualism, family language policy (FLP), and multilingual child-rearing strategies. The discussion addresses a number of topics, including the development of FLP as a research field, the adaptation of Spolsky's (2004, 2007, 2009) model for the study of the main dimensions of language policy, and the influence of individual and contextual factors in successful multilingual parenting.

Chapter 2 presents personal blogs as a tool that enables parents to participate in new dynamics of interaction and discussion over the Internet. To begin with, various blog definitions and typologies permit to contextualize the discussion. Afterwards, parent blogging is characterized as a genre and a classification of parents' motivations to blog is offered, based on the work of Pettigrew et al. (2016). Moreover, issues regarding the effects of monetization (Archer, 2017) and the risk of (over)sharenting (Wagner & Gasche, 2018) are discussed. Towards the end, the focus is on the parental blogosphere as a virtual community of practice (VCoP) and its potential influence on child-rearing.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of research-based knowledge in relation to the core constructs of the study, namely FLP and parent blogging. The contributions of various researchers are summarized, taking into consideration major similarities and differences in the foci of their studies, as well as their most significant findings. In addition to reviewing related research studies within each field, an integrative perspective is adopted in order to discuss points of convergence between the two of them. In general, the discussion draws attention to the interdisciplinary turn both in FLP and Internet-based studies, which recommends

integrating concepts, theories and methods in order to provide more solid and thorough explanations of different phenomena.

The second part of the dissertation includes the study description, detailed methodological considerations as well as the results of the study. In general, it is argued that parent-generated blog content is a source of self-reported data (Hookway & Snee, 2017) and, in the case of blogs about multilingual upbringing, a source of information that is yet to be explored in FLP studies (Lanza, 2018). Within that perspective, three main research questions are posed. The first one aims to discuss how the language policies portrayed on parental blogs relate to or differ from one another; the second one explores the relationship between the content of the selected blogs and the literature on multilingual upbringing; and the third question enquires about the potential use of the blogosphere as a tool for multilingual families.

Chapter 4 presents the description of the study. The possibilities and challenges of the blogosphere as a research site are discussed first. After that, the focus and scope of the study are explained on the basis of the research questions and sub-questions that have been formulated. The chapter continues with the description of the data-collection and the data-analysis methods, which offer an overview of the research process and an outline of the corpus, consisting of 255 blog entries written in English, Spanish or Polish. Additionally, the linguistic and demographic profile of fourteen parent-bloggers (PBs), the research participants, is summarized. At the end of the chapter, some ethical considerations of the study are acknowledged.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the analysis and discussion of the data. At first, a thick description (Denzin, 1989; Holloway, 1997; Ponterotto, 2006) of each blog is offered based on the analysis of the “About” section. Later on, and building upon Hartelius’ (2005) work, a content-based taxonomy is proposed, taking into account the parents’ blogging motivations and intended readership. Such typology allows to pinpoint and discuss major differences in the blog sample and their impact on blog content and visibility. On the whole, it is argued that the suggested classification criteria could prove useful in future studies interested in using blog-based data to examine FLP.

The remaining sections of Chapter 5 present the theme-based analysis of the corpus using Spolsky’s tripartite model as a framework. To discuss PBs’ linguistic beliefs, emphasis is placed on their views on multilingualism and multilingual upbringing, as well as on their ideas about the challenges of raising multilingual children. Language practices and language management, the other two dimensions of FLP, are examined based on PBs’ posts about communication strategies in multilingual families and their reflections on their experience teaching languages to their children.

Answers to the research questions are offered at the beginning of Chapter 6. With regard to the first question, the analysis demonstrated that the language policies of the families featured on the selected blogs can be characterized as multilingual, explicit, purposive and dynamic. Contrary to the findings reported in related studies, it is suggested that the pervasiveness of the one-parent, one-language (OPOL) strategy is challenged in multilingual households, in which additional strategies and “adaptations of OPOL” are common. Likewise, it is argued that the apparent mismatch between parents’ language beliefs and practices can actually be the result of a deliberate effort to enhance multilingualism, while facing changes or unexpected situations in their linguistic milieu.

In relation to the second question, the findings revealed that PBs promote a rather positive and informed idea of what multilingual parenting entails. Their strong *impact belief* (De Houwer, 1999) acts as a catalyst for a critical stance on popular misconceptions about multilingualism. Most PBs hold some professional knowledge about the issues they discuss and are able to make references to the sources they consult. In general, the allusion to academic references on the blogs depends mainly on their emphasis in multilingual parenting, the profile of the authors and their intended audience. However, none of the blogs is written for academic or research purposes.

Finally, the answer to the third question indicates that the parental blogosphere has the potential to contribute to the promotion of multilingual upbringing. Blogging was found to serve a two-fold purpose: For PBs, it is a systematic way to document and reflect upon their own experience and the lessons they have learned throughout their multilingual parenting journey. For their audience, the blogs can be a source of inspiration and information, as well as a unique opportunity to connect with other parents raising multilingual children. Further research on the interactions occurring in the blogosphere is still needed, but the results of this study they may impact multilingual FLPs positively.

To finish, chapter 6 summarizes key aspects regarding the content and scope of personal blogs which tackle issues in multilingual upbringing. The last part of the chapter considers the main limitations of the study and includes some suggestions of possible areas for further research. Taking everything into consideration, it is argued that the main purpose of the study has been achieved. The findings yield valuable insights into issues germane to the field of FLP, as perceived and reported by an international and multilingual group of parents on personal blogs. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the potential influence of blogging in the (trans)formation of knowledge and beliefs about multilingual parenting.