

NCLRC Senior Research Associate



Name: **Christine Foster Meloni**
Profession: **Senior Research Associate at the NCLRC**
Number of years in this line of work: **3**
Native Language: **English**
Other Language(s): **Italian, French, some Spanish**

1) What is your profession?

At the present time my "day job" is as a senior research associate at the National Center for Language Resource. I am also a language teacher. I taught English as a Foreign Language full-time part-time.

2) Describe a "typical" day as a research associate.

I spend most of my time working on the Culture Club. I look high and low to find keywords. I need to find authors for the Salon articles, reviewers of films, books, and CDs, and wander the Web looking for interesting art work for the Art Gallery and for authentic materials. I also find teen-agers around the world who are willing to be interviewed for the Hangout. The Teacher's Lounge should always be full of interesting culture lessons.

3) What do you enjoy about it? What do you not enjoy about it?

I enjoy learning about other cultures and in my role as Culture Club President I am interacting with language teachers at annual conferences to help them. I don't enjoy the pressure of deadlines. We seem to be doing a lot here at the NCLRC but I would like to have more "free" time to read professional journals and to visit teachers.

4) Do you speak any other language(s) besides the one(s) you work with?

I use English most of the time in my work but I also have the opportunity to use other languages. I listen to CDs in Italian and French and then I am able to write reviews of them. I can use French, and Spanish that might be useful to them in the classroom.

5) What language do you think in?

If I am speaking in English, I think in English. If I am speaking in Italian, I think in Italian, Italian, and French all at once. My French is not as good as my English.

6) What do you think helped you the most in mastering the foreign/second language?

First of all, I was highly motivated to learn Italian when I was a college student. I was more than anything else to go to Italy and communicate with Italians. I think motivation. Secondly, I spent two summers at the Italian School of Middlebury College in Middlebury. During that six-week period, we all had to sign a pledge that we would speak nothing but Italian. I learned my Italian by leaps and bounds. Thirdly, I studied at the University of Florence for a year on a Fulbright fellowship. I assiduously avoided Americans whenever possible and immersed myself in Italian immensely. And, last but not least, I returned to Rome a few years later to teach. I married a Roman. Having an Italian husband helped me perfect my command of Italian. I continue to communicate only in Italian, I have been able to keep up with my Italian.

7) What opportunities have knowing another language provided in your career or otherwise?

One of the requirements for my current job was knowledge of a foreign language. I was able to do it without my knowledge of Italian and French.

Knowing Italian in particular has opened many doors for me professionally. Let me give you an example. I was invited to give a series of lectures on using technology in teaching foreign languages. I have been invited without my proficiency in Italian. It was a great experience. Another example was my work on a child bilingualism project in Rome. I worked with two other researchers, one Italian-French, and I was the one who studied Italian-English child bilingualism. I am writing a book about 21 Italians who were raised in an orphanage in Naples because I was interested in their language acquisition.

And, of course, knowing other languages has enriched my life personally. I am able to communicate with people from other cultures.

French and do not have to depend on translations. I can watch the news in other languages (Subtitles don't always convey the message accurately.) But more importantly, I am able to meet many Italians and French who do not speak English but I can communicate with them. While I cannot speak Spanish very well, I can understand it fairly well so I can communicate. I am able to learn much more about people in this way.

Knowing other languages has very definitely expanded my horizons and made my life richer.

8) Do you think it is essential to learn not just a language, but also the culture spoken?

Language and culture cannot be separated. Although I love languages per se, I am even as a child, I have always been fascinated with differences between cultures and at the same time people of different cultures are so much like me in their basic humanity.

9) If you had the time to learn another language now, what language would you choose?

I would like to learn Norwegian. I have finally discovered where my Norwegian ancestors came from, not everyone speaks English. And when I am in a non-English-speaking country, I do not stick out as an Ugly American.

10) How do you think your life would have turned out if you had never learned a second language?

I would probably not have had as many marvelous opportunities to travel. And I would not have had my Roman husband. Thanks to my knowledge of Italian, I have a wonderful husband and two grandchildren. The two oldest (ages 9 and 8) are bilingual in English and French. They speak English and Italian.

11) In your opinion, are there more career opportunities for people who speak a second language?

There are many careers that should require foreign language proficiency. Any career in a foreign country should require a foreign language. Any American who needs to travel abroad should know the language of the country. Knowing a language creates a lot of good will abroad. It shows that we respect other cultures and we seem less arrogant.

12) What do you think you would be doing if you weren't a research associate?

I'd be a travel writer! Wouldn't it be marvelous to travel all around the globe and get paid to do it? Why didn't I think of becoming a travel writer half a century ago? Of course, I would like to follow in the footsteps of Peter Mayle (A Year in Provence among others) and Frances Mayes (Under the Tuscan Sun). I don't do it to get rich materially but to make my life richer. How boring to be monolingual!