

# **ANTI-SCREEN BUT PRO-LANGUAGE: EXPLORING PARENTAL ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES TOWARDS DIGITAL HERITAGE LANGUAGE PRACTICES**

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# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To what extent and how do families from heritage language backgrounds use technology to support heritage language literacy development for their primary school level children?
- What applications, platforms, or websites are available/used, and for what purposes?
- What (if any) are the issues experienced by children and parents surrounding access to these applications, and their quality?
- What is the balance between formal literacy development (e.g. for religious purposes or formal language “lessons”) and literacy for pleasure (e.g. games or reading for pleasure)?
- What are heritage language families’ attitudes to using games-based digital technology for heritage language and literacy development?
- How do these attitudes link to children’s perceptions of themselves as language learners or speakers?





# BUT, FOR THE PURPOSES OF TODAY...

- How do parents express and negotiate juxtaposing views regarding the affordances of technology for supporting heritage language development, and potential concerns regarding its use?



# UK LITERACY ASSOCIATION SMALL RESEARCH GRANT

- Online questionnaire (212 responses)
- **10 intergenerational family interviews**
- App evaluation
- Local community engagement event



# PROBLEMATISING “SCREEN TIME”



- Screen time  $\neq$  sedentary time (Leblanc et al, 2015)
- Discourse around “good” and “bad” screen time (Robinson & Mackey, 2003)
- “Addiction” misunderstood and misrepresented
- Little understanding of different cultural attitudes towards screen time

i iNews

Konnie Huq on tech moral panic and how she manages her children's 'good' screen time

“Screen time can be educational, informative and interactive, if it is the right sort of screen time,” she argues. The freshest exclusives and...

2 weeks ago



# PROBLEMATISING “MOTIVATIONAL TECH”



- What excites and motivates us to engage in gameplay are ‘meaningful challenges’- edutainment games are frequently too thinly veiled for these to occur (Whitton 2014)
- Parents see the advantages of “tech for motivation” (Little, 2020)
- Just because you are motivated to play Fortnite doesn’t mean you are motivated to use a gamified Chinese vocab test.



# RESOURCES USED AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK

|                                                         |            |
|---------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Books</b>                                            | <b>87%</b> |
| <b>Internet-based games</b>                             | 21%        |
| <b>Mobile apps and games aimed at language learners</b> | 20%        |
| <b>Mobile apps and games aimed at native speakers</b>   | 20%        |

My child is interested in learning the heritage language”  
(Agree/agree completely) = 78%

“My child is interested in mobile games and apps” (Agree/agree completely) = 82%



# **INTERVIEWS: SAMPLE AND METHOD**

- Hindi, French, Italian, Chinese (Putonghua), Malay, German (×3), Russian, Japanese, Dutch, and Greek (two families spoke multiple languages)
- All with at least one child in primary education (5-11 years old)
- Interviews via Skype/phone



A silhouette of a family consisting of a woman, a child, and a man walking away from the viewer on a beach. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange glow. The family is holding hands.

## **MATCHING PARENTAL VIEWS WITH AREAS OF “PROBLEMATISATION”**

- Screen time / addiction
- Controlling “play”
- Also: nostalgic narrative



SCREEN TIME / ADDICTION

CONTROLLING "PLAY"

NOSTALGIC NARRATIVE

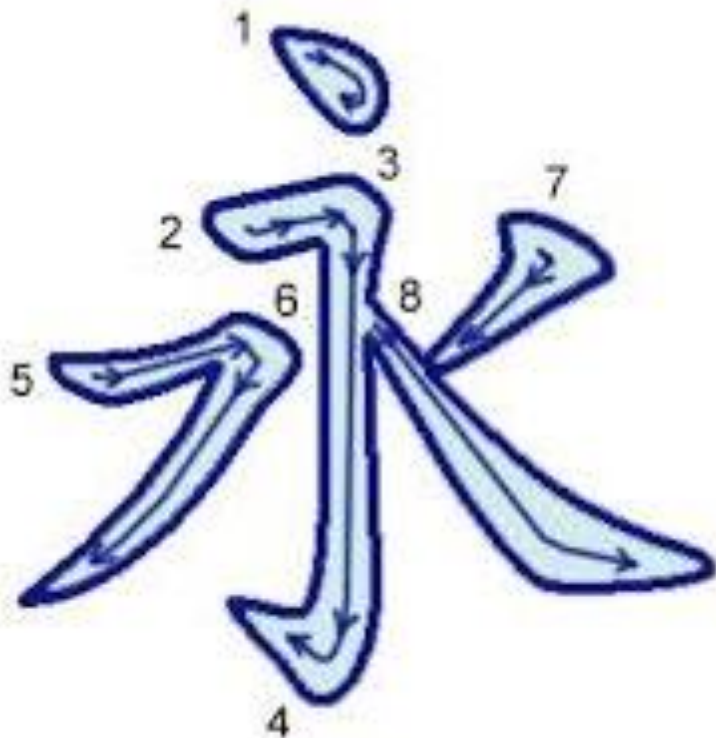
- I want her to be more interactive .... My parents didn't want any of us to sit in front of television or screen to either watch cartoon or even to watch educational programmes, so I am also really strong opinion about it. I don't want her to be addicted to learn things on the screen. (Interview, Mother of 5-year-old girl, Japanese)



SCREEN TIME / ADDICTION

CONTROLLING "PLAY"

NOSTALGIC NARRATIVE



The gaming apps he likes, but there's another new one I'm getting him to do which is a Chinese writing, [which] sometimes I think it's like homework in a way so ... sometimes I find he's not doing it correctly.

(Interview, Mother of 5-year-old boy, Malay/Chinese)



Screen time / addiction

Controlling “play”

Nostalgic narrative

... Who is “we”?

We have only tried one online game [Reading Eggs]. But it became boring very quickly, and so we didn't do any more. We haven't looked for any other online resources, and we don't want to. We would like to “minimise screen time”. This is the approach that is most familiar to myself, I was taught how to read by my great grandmother, and of course, she didn't have a computer. What I am reading about screen time in the parenting magazines sounds negative. I would prefer my children to have time with a book. Screen time is addictive – when you say you are going to have 5 minutes with a screen, it turns into half an hour. (Interview, Mother of 5-year-old boy, Russian)



## BONUS: EXPECTATIONS OF TECH

“we started using YouTube with him in order for him to watch some Peppa [Pig] and Fireman Sam in German but we gave up because [as soon as we left the room] he would click the options on the right hand side and end up going through Peppa episodes in this order every time! German - Polish - Czech - and he would invariably end up with the English episodes, [...] so we have stopped using YouTube altogether for now.”



# CHILDREN'S SEARCH OF AUTHENTICITY – AS PLAYERS, AND AS MULTILINGUALS

- I absolutely love to game and stuff, I love Minecraft, Sims, all of that. ... I guess if [language learning] is in game format it kind of helps but it would need to sync in a bit more in that.  
(Interview, Daughter, 10yo, Italian)
- If the game is for people who speak English, then playing it is a bit like being in a classroom, but if the game is for proper German children, then playing it is like being free. It's just playing. (Interview, Son, 8yo, German)
- 'something that made everything everybody says speak Finnish, so like the whole ... .so like everyone I meet is like Finnish' (10-year-old daughter, interview, Finnish)



# MAIN FINDINGS

- Parents' beliefs and ideologies impact on their function as gatekeepers: how technology is viewed, how much time is dedicated to/allowed for it, how this time is used.
- Parents homogenise screen time to include multiple practices, and justify it mainly for “educational purposes”, whereas children foreground authenticity, both in game play and in language.
- Initial willingness to try games and app wanes quickly when faced with anything other than immediate success, BUT parents also have higher expectations of technology than of books:
  - To motivate child to learn the language
  - To facilitate language development
  - To do so with minimal parental input



# FUTURE QUESTIONS

What would happen if game play and language were foregrounded (rather than “edutainment” and “education”)?

What would happen if parents treated games and apps the same way they treat books – for sharing, mutual exploration, family time, etc.?

How has Covid shaped family attitudes and practices?





**THANK YOU!**

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