

Screening language acquisition skills in a mediated childhood

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In a wide-ranging research project which focuses on the digital media consumption of very young children (aged 0–5), and the family-based construction and support of these skills, one child has particularly caught attention. This child finds herself raised in a multi-lingual dual location household spanning three generations, with two foster siblings who are mother tongue English, raised by the grandparents. The parents use English as their working language but Mandarin at home, while the grandparents are mainly Mandarin speaking. This paper draws upon an observational ethnographic case study plus interviews with mother, and engagement with the two year old child, Lavinia. Lavinia is an ardent fan of Peppa Pig and loves everything that brings Peppa Pig into her life. However, what astonished the researchers was when she was playing Peppa Pig in Mandarin on an iPad in parallel with the same episode in English in streaming video mode on the television. Whilst talking to her mother, the researchers watched Lavinia set this whole system of media retrieval and play into action. In a matter-of-fact way and without needing to ask for help, Lavinia created a self-paced tutorial to practice her Mandarin–English bilingual comprehension using Peppa Pig. Neither mother nor daughter construed this behaviours as either out-of-the-ordinary and it seems as though this innovation, which has been practiced on a number of occasions, was entirely Lavinia’s idea. Lavinia’s clear desire to learn bilingually has also prompted her parents to enrich her play experiences with supplementary media resources and experiences.