

Childhood bilingualism in homeland and heritage contexts

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This paper discusses some issues in childhood bilingualism in homeland and heritage contexts in light of the availability of the longitudinal corpora involving Cantonese and Mandarin in monolingual and bilingual contexts. Currently available in the CHILDES archive and contributed by the Childhood Bilingualism Research Centre (CBRC), these corpora are compiled by recording individual bilingual children's speech production regularly and linking their speech data to audio or video files over an extended period of time from age one to five. I will highlight a recent corpus that documents the development of bilingualism in three Chinese heritage children born and raised in the USA: Luna (2;0 - 4;11), Avia (2;0 - 3;11) and Winston (1;07 - 3;07) who have successfully developed Mandarin and English (and Cantonese in Winston's case) in the early years and maintained the heritage language to varying extents (Mai, Matthews and Yip 2018; see website: <https://childes.talkbank.org/access/Biling/CHCC.html>). With the availability of such heritage corpora, issues of incomplete acquisition, language attrition and maintenance can be addressed more systematically.

In our ongoing projects, methodological innovations include data collection via video conferencing and 360° cameras. While most of the existing bilingual corpora in CHILDES are built upon speech data of adults interacting with children in the same venue, recent technological advances provide researchers with exciting alternatives. Our Hong Kong-based research assistants interact with American-born Chinese children residing in the US via Skype video calls, in addition to being regularly recorded by their parents and RAs at home. The combination of traditional home-recording and online video calls captures both parent-child interaction in Mandarin, the heritage language and adult-child interaction in English, the societal dominant language.

Together, the heritage and baseline data allow us to address fundamental questions including the role of reduced input and its relationship to bilingual development, vulnerability of specific constructions that are subject to attrition, and crosslinguistic influence. Heritage children's development is shown to be on a par with monolingual children initially but the children shift in dominance to English as they approach school age.