



Who do children believe and why?

Web explorers

The internet provides a wealth of information but it is not always accurate. This game was designed to find out whether children can distinguish between correct and incorrect information they read online.

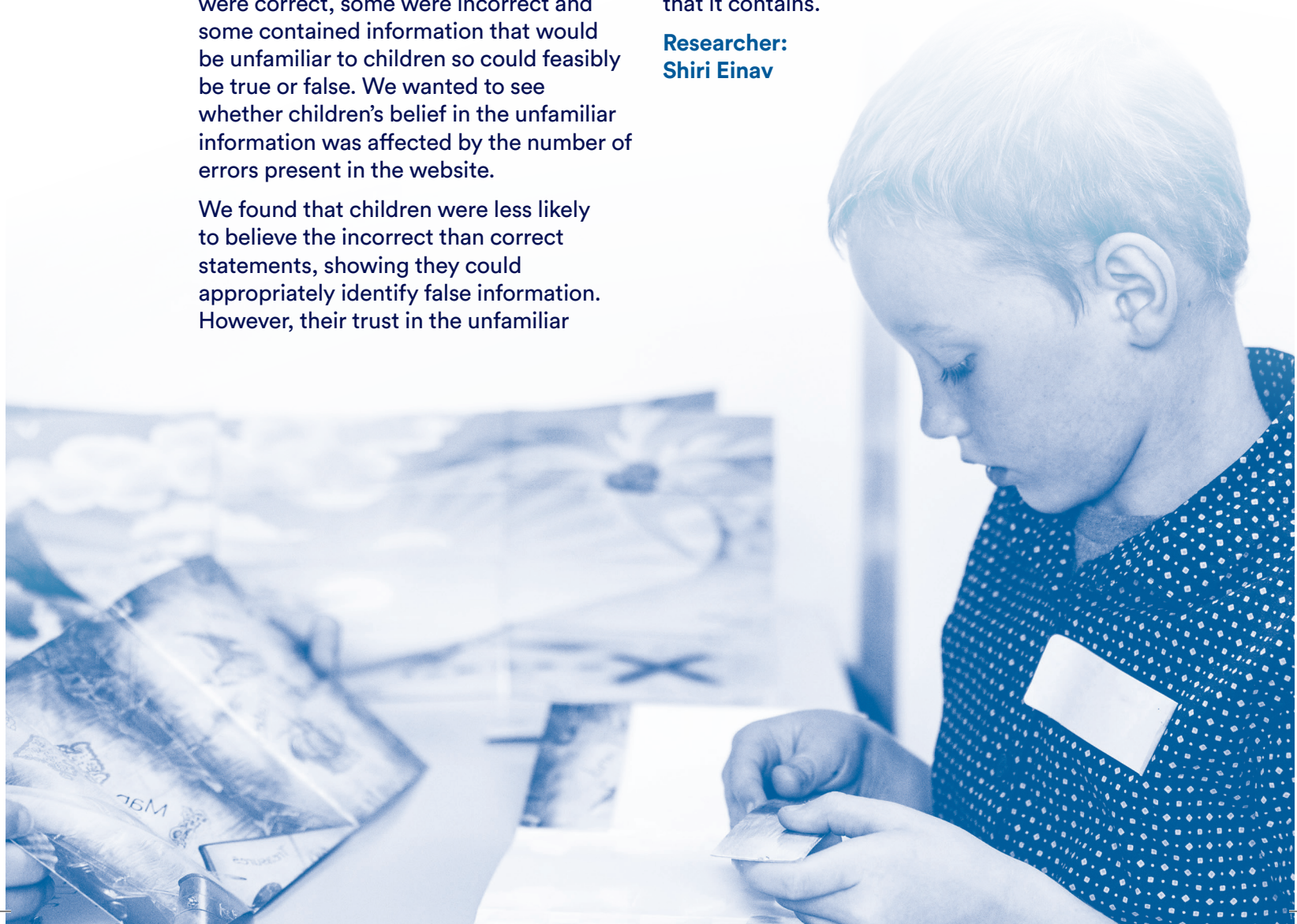
We asked 8-11 year-olds to read four news website articles that varied in the number of errors they contained, ranging from 0-4 errors. They were then asked to rate how much they believed certain statements to be true or false. Some of the statements were correct, some were incorrect and some contained information that would be unfamiliar to children so could feasibly be true or false. We wanted to see whether children's belief in the unfamiliar information was affected by the number of errors present in the website.

We found that children were less likely to believe the incorrect than correct statements, showing they could appropriately identify false information. However, their trust in the unfamiliar

information was the same, regardless of whether it appeared in an article that contained many errors or no errors.

These findings suggest that 8-11 year-olds do not trust all online information to the same extent. However, at this age their critical evaluation may be limited to information they can assess for themselves. They may not yet realise that it's important to take into account an article's overall reliability when deciding whether to believe unfamiliar information that it contains.

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Who do children believe and why? Guess who?

In our well-connected world we often meet speakers from different places who don't "talk like us." Adults can very quickly understand new speakers, even if their accent is unfamiliar. We also make judgments about people's characteristics based on how they talk. In this study we investigated whether children are able to understand accented speakers as well as adults can, and whether they use accent information to make judgments about people. Children played a computer game that asked them to compare British- and Canadian-accented speakers, and to repeat sentences spoken by these same speakers.

Results suggest that children were able to hear the difference between Canadian and British accents; when asked which of the two speakers sounded more like them and they successfully picked the British speaker. The presence of an accent also affected how well they could understand the speaker, and they repeated sentences from British speakers more accurately than sentences spoken by Canadians. Despite

noticing the accent and it affecting their ability to understand what was being said, children did not seem to attach the same social value to accent information as adults do. When asked which of two speakers they would like to be their teacher, they did not have a preference for the British speaker over the Canadian. Similarly, when asked to rate how good they thought the person would be as a teacher they gave similar ratings for both Canadian and British speakers.

This study is currently being run in Toronto, Canada as well. Toronto is one of the most linguistically diverse cities in the world where over half of the population speak more than one language. Comparing the results of British and Canadian children in the same task will allow us to directly investigate how cultural and environmental factors influence children's social and linguistic development.

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