



DRAGON+

DEVELOPING RESISTANCE AGAINST GROOMING ONLINE:
STORIES STRENGTHENED SAFEGUARDS

REPORT

**RESEARCH-EVIDENCED RESOURCE
DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT CHILD
SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE**

2024

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1.3. PROJECT DRAGON+ RATIONALE

DRAGON+ has been developed in partnership with UK-based lived experience experts and with child safeguarding practitioners from 25 organisations in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. We have also achieved global representation on our DRAGON+ Advisory Network and Steering Board (See Figure 1 and Appendix).

OG is, at its heart, practice of communicative manipulation. Offenders engage children in online talk. The dynamics of these interactions hold vital insights that can be used to help keep children safer online and support them if they experience abuse. Language-based research on OG that has emerged over the last 10 years or so has tended to focus on offenders and the tactics they use to manipulate and control children[i]. This research is crucial but only tells part of the story. It is also vital to study children's language. This is because OG entails two-way engagement. Groomers adapt their communication to the interactional choices of children and vice versa: children's responses

can tell us a lot about how groomers' manipulative tactics work. The research that underpins DRAGON+ is, to our knowledge, the first large-scale study to examine both children's language use and children's and groomers' language alongside each other, filling a crucial gap in current knowledge.

2. APPROACH

DRAGON+ takes an innovative, multidisciplinary approach, synergising sophisticated language analysis and participatory research methods (with practitioners, children and lived experience experts) to generate new insights about OG communication and to develop resources for their effective application to child-safeguarding practice. All our research has received ethical approval from Swansea University.

2.1. LINGUISTICS RESEARCH

Data:

We conducted four complementary studies, as listed and briefly described in Table 1.

Study Focus	Study Aims
Study 1: Children's talk in OG interactions	1.To provide an account of children's talk when interacting with groomers, specifically, what they talk about, i.e., the 'aboutness' of their talk. 2.To compare the 'aboutness' of children's and groomers' language.
Study 2: Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM)-sending in OG interactions	1.To ascertain the functions that children's sexual photo/video sending talk performs. 2.To identify possible language patterns linked to sexual photo/video sending.
Study 3: Children's resistance and groomers' responses to children's resistance	1.To examine how children resist groomers communicatively. 2.To examine how groomers challenge children's resistance. 3.To explore the dynamics between children's resistance and groomers' responses to children's resistance.
Study 4: Age-stating in OG interactions	1.To investigate the communicative practice of age-stating. 2.To identify language patterns linked to age-stating.

Table 1: DRAGON+ linguistic studies: Focus and aim

Data for these four linguistic studies consisted of OG chatlogs in English and Spanish (totalling approx. 250,000 words), provided by law enforcement and project partners, from 2014 – 2023.

Method:

The studies deployed a variety of well-established, quantitative and qualitative linguistic frameworks, from corpus linguistics through to conversation analysis, as required by the specific aims/research questions of each study.

2.2.PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

Data:

The participatory research generated and

analysed data from:

- Child safeguarding practitioners in hotlines and child helplines (n=150) from our project participation network (see Figure 1).
- Children, aged 12-17, in the UK and Colombia (n=150).
- UK-based lived experience group (5 members).

Method:

The research entailed two waves of consultation, in English and in Spanish, the aims of which are outlined in Table 2.

Each consultation wave entailed:

- [With practitioners]: administering a pre-workshop survey and conducting a 120-minute workshop.
- [With children]: conducting focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

Consultation		Aims
Wave 1	Practitioners	1.To gather practitioners' views on key findings from the linguistics studies (see Table 1). 2.To gather practitioners' views on how linguistics research findings might be applied to practice. 3.To gather practitioners' views on the studies/insights that, when translated into anti-OG prevention and support oriented resources, would be most relevant and important to their day-to-day practice.
	Children	1.To learn about children's knowledge of OG. 2.To gather children's views on key findings from the linguistics studies (see Table 1). 3.To gather children's views on approaches needed to enhance OG preventative messaging targeted at children.
Wave 2	Practitioners	1.To receive feedback on a first iteration of three training resources developed from the outputs of consultation wave 1 (both practitioners and children). 2.To receive practitioners' views on and experiences of processes involved in cross-cultural adaptation of anti-OCSEA / OG resources and on how to move from research insights to effective resource design and implementation.
	Children	1.To receive feedback on a first iteration of child-facing training resources developed using findings from consultation wave 1 (both practitioners and children).

Table 2: DRAGON+ participatory research

The workshops were recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. The surveys were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively.

The project's lived experience group was involved in all aspects of the project, including research protocol design, workshops sessions with stakeholders and feedback provision on the blueprint and resources. Members of the group were involved in the project's Advisory Board, and one member sat on the Steering Board, to ensure that lived experience informed the project at all levels.

2.3.RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

Figure 2 shows the process we followed in Project DRAGON+ to develop the linguistic and participatory research findings into resources for use in practice.

The process started with linguistic analyses of OG chatlogs in four complementary key studies (see Table 1) and checking in Consultation Wave 1 (see Table 2) the relevance of this research – and its potential value to practice – with those who will benefit from it, i.e. practitioners and children. Consultation Wave 1 also entailed soliciting participants' views on how to translate the research findings into usable resources for OG prevention and support, and the format of such resources. Three resources were identified, each one based on a study (Studies 1-3). These are:

- A booklet about children's talk in OG comprising a fact and activity sheet (based on Study 1).
- A storyboard for a digital animation about CSAM sending during OG (based on Study 2).
- A booklet about children's resistance in the course of OG, including three child resistance scenarios, one of them being presented as a video displaying the text of a

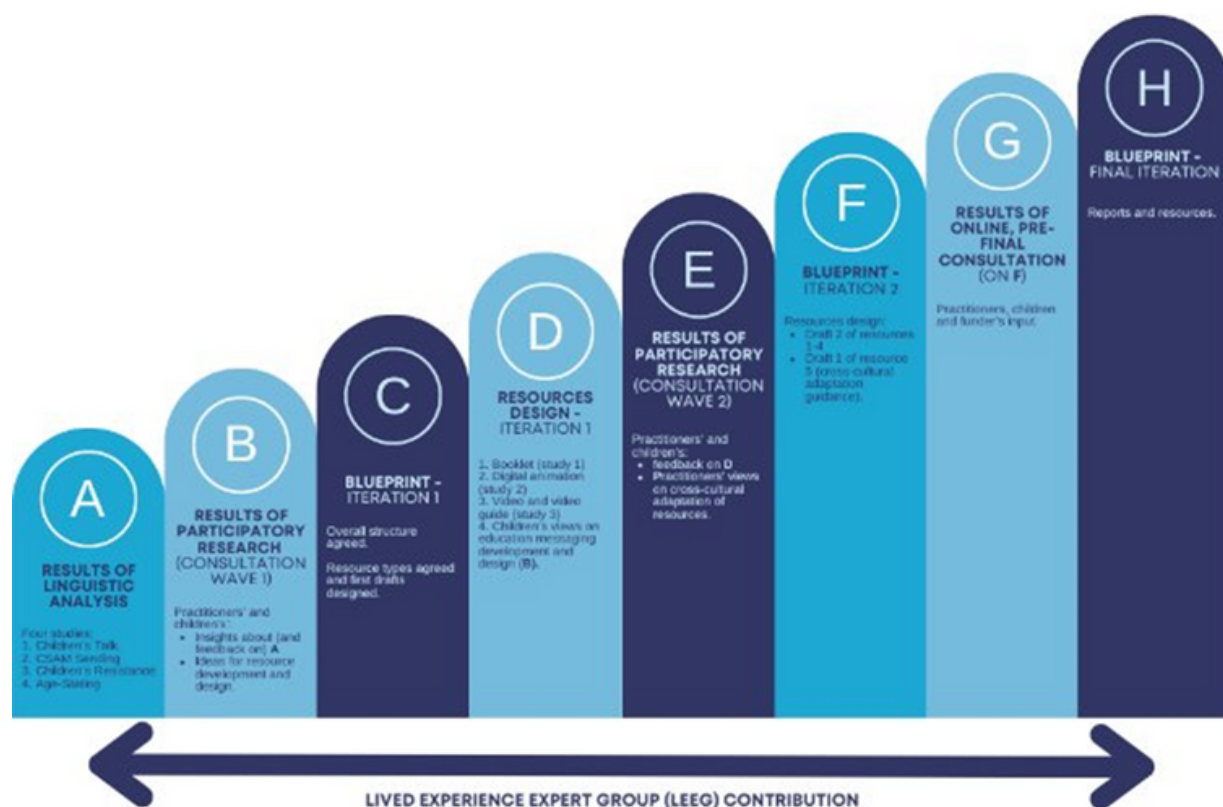


Figure 2: Synergistic linguistic / participatory research approach

course of OG, including three child resistance scenarios, one of them being presented as a video displaying the text of a groomer-child chat exchange with a commentary about child resistance (based on Study 3).

A first iteration of each resource was produced. The process then continued with presenting and soliciting feedback about the resources from practitioners and children in Consultation Wave 2. Consultation Wave 2 also included gathering information and views about the cross-cultural adaptation and practical implementation of resources.

Following analysis of the findings from the second consultation wave, a second iteration of the three training resources was produced. In addition, a first iteration of guidance resources on education messaging for children and cross-cultural adaptation / practical implementation was produced. The resource development process continued with these being shared with all our co-creators, including children, and a final version of each resource being created and included in the project blueprint that is made available to all project participants. Also included in the blueprint are detailed reports covering all aspects of the project's research and recommendations for using the resources and how these might be scaled up internationally.

3.HIGHLIGHT FINDINGS

3.1.LINGUISTICS RESEARCH

3.1.1 STUDY 1: CHILDREN'S TALK IN OG INTERACTIONS

This study investigated the talk of children in OG interactions to explore the child's perspective more closely. Four main categories were found to represent what children's talk is about when they interact with groomers (see Figure 3).

Categories were not always mutually exclusive.

Most obviously, topic-based talk co-occurred frequently with interpersonal dynamics-based talk.

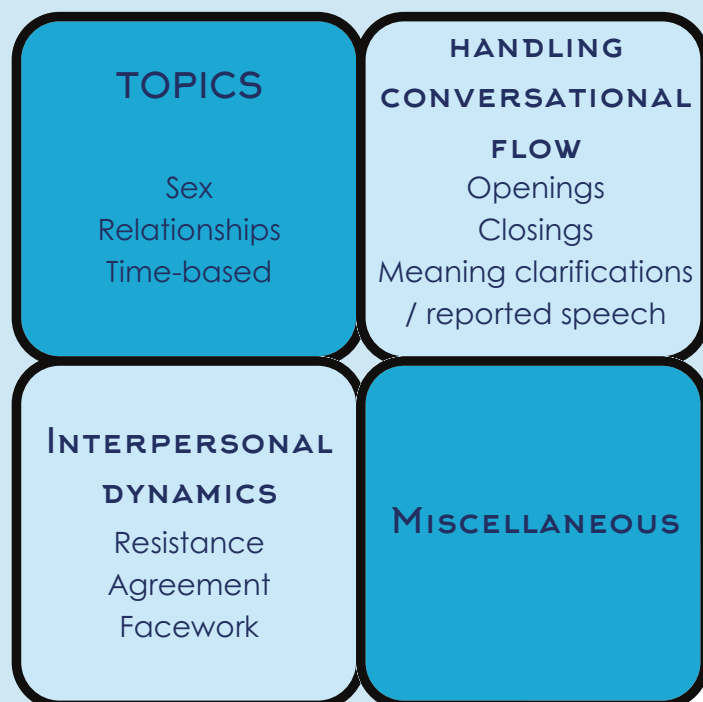


Figure 3: Categories representing the 'aboutness' of children's talk in the context of OG interactions

The largest proportion of children's talk was topic-based, with 'Sex' (see Examples 1-3) and 'Relationships' being the topics that children talked about the most when interacting with groomers. In the English-language dataset, 'Sex' was the dominant topic, whereas in the Spanish context, 'Relationships' was more common.

Comparison of groomers' and children's topic-based talk showed that groomers talked about 'Sex' more than children. This suggests that children's talk about 'Sex' likely reflected the interests of the groomer rather than being the primary interest of the child.



Example 1:

make out with me like now



Example 2:

want a show on Tuesday?



Example 3:

oh, that's it. slave good boy?



When it came to 'Relationships' (see Examples 4-6), children talked about this more than groomers, who had the strongest influence in determining the topic of conversation. This suggests that talk about the topic of 'Relationships' was particularly representative of the child's perspective in OG interactions.

**Example 4:**
I really do love you

**Example 5:**
we don't really know anything about each other

**Example 6:**
I would like someone to actually show interest in me



Handling the conversational flow and talking about 'Interpersonal Dynamics' are standard features of interaction. Their presence as salient topics in children's language was therefore not unexpected. The exception was the sub-topic of 'Resistance', which was distinctive of children's talk in the data (see Study 3).

Comparisons between children's talk with groomers' talk showed groomers' greater use of agreement and relationship management strategies (facework). This shows their use of tactical communication in deceptively building trust with children.

3.1.2 STUDY 2: CSAM SENDING

This study investigated the talk surrounding the sending of CSAM when children are groomed online. The findings revealed distinct cultural / linguistic differences that require further investigation. For instance, groomers in the English-language dataset were notably more effective at engaging children in video / photo-sending, and sexual activity linked to this, than groomers in the Spanish-language dataset.

The study identified various functions and sub-functions of video / photo sending in OG interactions, as shown at Table 3.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of children's talk across the video / photo sending function categories in each dataset.

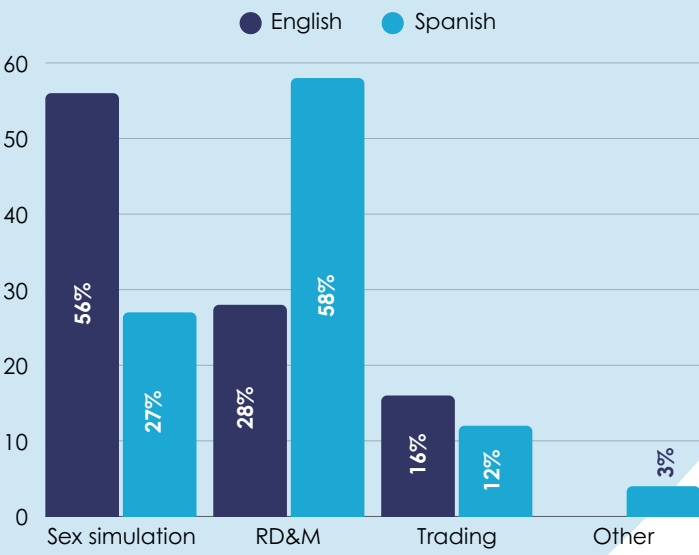


Figure 4: Function tendency around video/photo-sending

As seen in Figure 4, in the English-language dataset 'Sex Simulation' was the most common of the main functions, representing 56% of all video/photo-sending, while the second most common function, 'Relationship Development and Maintenance' (RD&M), represented half of this amount. The pattern in the Spanish-language dataset was almost the complete reverse, 27% representing 'Sex Simulation' and 58% representing 'RD&M'.

A key finding of the study was that the functions of video/ photo-sending or soliciting used language to diminish the sense that sending photos or videos is permanent, that is, that the videos and photos represent actual objects (files) that the groomer will possess and be able to use as they wish later. This is likely to have the effect of reducing children's perception of the consequences and risks of sending nude and semi-nude images and videos to someone online.

Main Function	Description	Sub-Functions	Description
Sex Simulationⁱⁱ	When a child sending videos or photos supports some form of sexual routine between child and groomer.	Stimulant	To provide stimulation for the groomer when the groomer is giving a sexual performance on camera.
		Directing Action	To visually represent compliance with the groomer's directions when taking part in a simulated sexual exchange.
		Show (Titillation)	To put on a 'show' for the groomer, typically sending suggestive or explicit videos or photos.
Relationship Development and Maintenance (RD&M)	When videos or photos are sent by the child for relational purposes, such as to support bonding or to help avoid conflict or a breakdown in relations.	Getting to Know Each Other	To help with getting to know each other and bonding when nonsexual photos are exchanged, especially near the start of a conversation.
		Closeness	To express relational or emotional closeness, such as when photos are sent in the manner that friends might send them to each other.
		Good Relations	To keep the groomer happy / maintain good relations with them (e.g., when a groomer is seeking to interact on camera with a child and the child offers a photo as a compromise).
Trading	When videos or photos represent products, and the child sends photos as part of engaging in a trading transaction	N/A	N/A

Table 3: The functions and sub-functions of video/photo-sending in OG interactions

3.1.3 STUDY 3: CHILDREN’S RESISTANCE AND GROOMERS’ RESPONSES TO CHILDREN’S RESISTANCE

This study investigated how language is used when children perform communicative resistance in OG. A 'facework' approach was used, analysing all children's language aligned to resistance in terms of it being politeness or impoliteness based.ⁱⁱⁱ As shown in Figure 5, children's resistance in the English-language dataset was fairly balanced between impoliteness and politeness-based, though politeness-based resistance was present in almost two-third of the instances of child resistance in the Spanish language dataset.

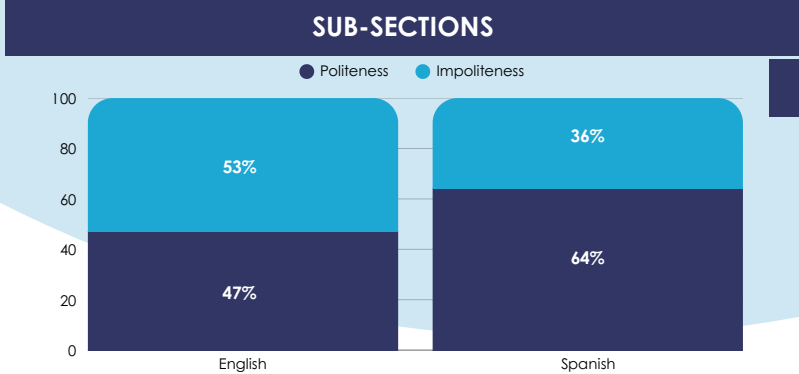


Figure 5: Politeness vs. impoliteness-based children's resistance

Within the general distinction between impoliteness and politeness-based children's communicative resistance, we observed particular types of resistance. These are shown in Figure 6.

Children's tendencies with respect to producing these different types of resistance are represented in Figure 7.

When producing politeness-based resistance, children tended to favour positive politeness, over three-fifths of the time in the English-language dataset, and most of the time (91%) in the Spanish-language dataset.

When producing impoliteness-based resistance, children tended to favour positive impoliteness. This occurred about two-thirds of the time in

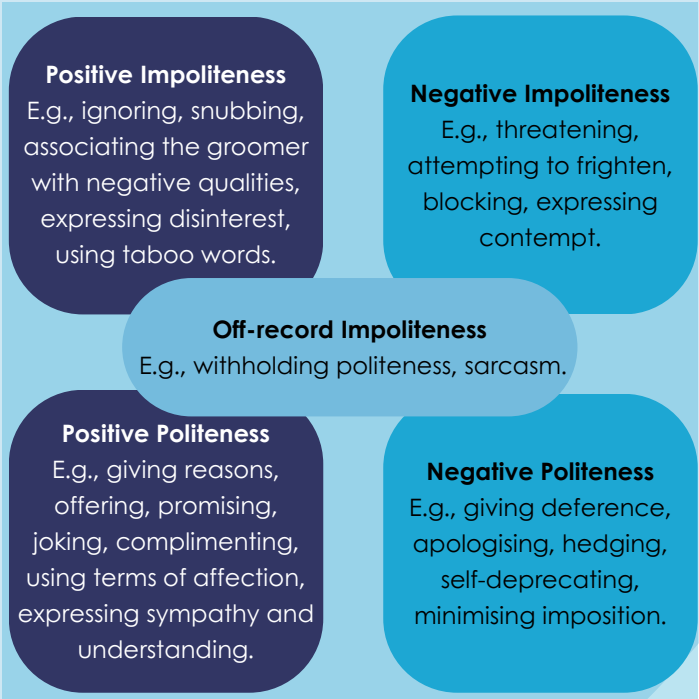


Figure 6: Types of children's communicative resistance based on politeness and impoliteness

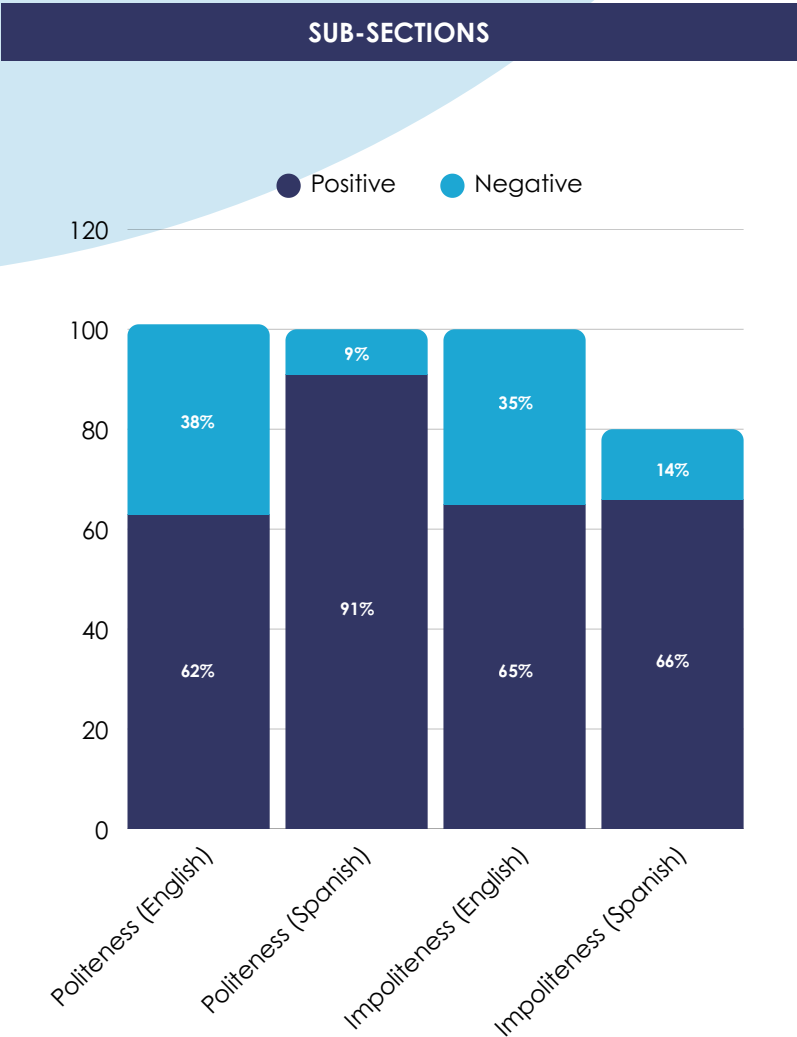


Figure 7: Tendency of different types of child communicative resistance

both the English and Spanish datasets. As shown in Figure 7, negative impoliteness constituted 35% of impoliteness-based resistance in the English-language dataset, and half the proportion (14%) in the Spanish-language dataset, while off-record impoliteness was uncommon in the English-language dataset (occurring 5% of the time) but represented a fifth of all impoliteness-based child resistance in the Spanish-language dataset.

The variation of children's communicative resistance across different types reflects the complexity of a situation in which resistance is not a simple matter of just saying 'no'. Child resistance is constrained by a number of influences, including children's feelings towards groomers. This can lead children to produce positive politeness when resisting, as shown in Example 7, where the child gives reasons as part of their offering:

Groomer:

Let me take you out on a date and then to my bedroom 😊

As you can tell I'm sexual haha

Child:

I'll say yes to the date, but you'll have to wait for the bedroom bit. Not one that's been THERE before so it's more of a nervous thing 😊

Example 7

Another constraint on child resistance is the power imbalance between children and groomers, which is why they may try to avoid conflict with a groomer through use of negative politeness, such as apologies.

In this study, we also investigated how groomers respond to children's resistance. Different types of groomer response to resistance are shown in Figure 8.

Groomers' tendencies with respect to producing these different types of responses to resistance are represented in Figure 9.

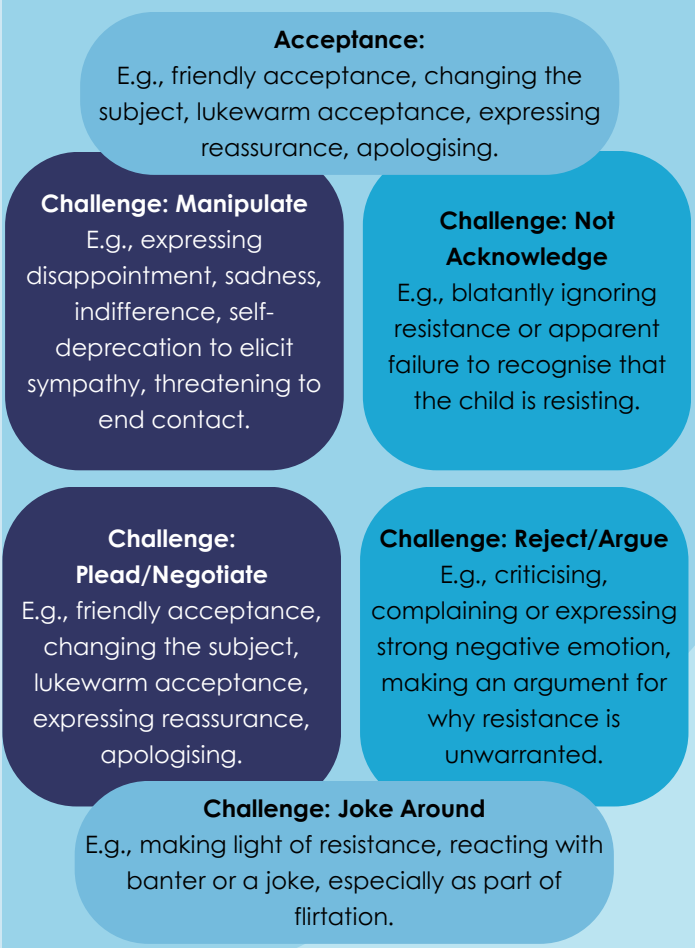


Figure 8: Types of groomers' responses to children's resistance

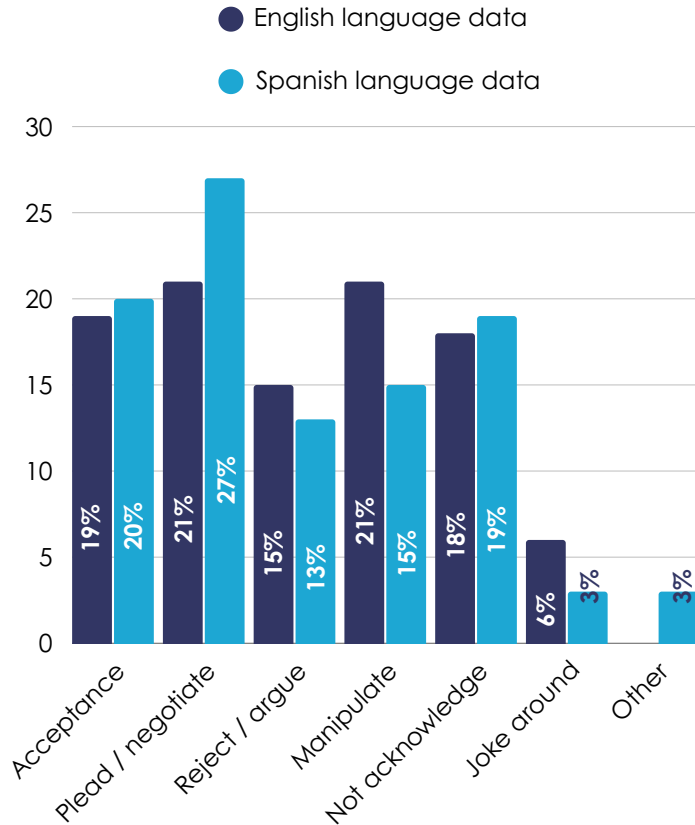


Figure 9: Tendency of different types of groomers' responses to children's resistance

Overall, as Figure 9 shows, although groomers can express acceptance of children's resistance (a fifth of the time or thereabouts), the majority of groomer responses represented a challenge to children's resistance. The fairly even balance across diverse types of challenge to resistance reflects the tactical nature of groomer communication, i.e., their use of different strategies to try to block or overturn children's resistance. The close similarity in distribution of groomer response types between the Spanish and English language datasets suggests that the way groomers respond to children's resistance in OG interactions is consistent across different linguistic and cultural contexts.

Types of groomer challenge of child resistance suggest a tactical trait of their communication, namely, pivoting between 'nice' and 'nasty' talk. For example, groomers may intend a 'nice' effect when 'Joking Around' or making light of a child's resistance, as illustrated in Example 8:

Groomer:
That's what they all say

Child:
Well I wouldn't know because I'm not doing it

Example 8

At other times, when producing the challenge type 'Reject / Argue', groomers' responses to children's resistance can be accusatory and aggressive, i.e., 'nasty', as Example 9 illustrates:

Groomer:
Don't change subject just say... you waste so much time

Example 9

In this study, the variety of types of child resistance and groomer responses were found to occur together in unpredictable ways as part of complex interactions. This highlights the scale of the challenge

facing children when resisting groomers online. The dynamic nature of children resisting and groomers challenging that resistance across turns in an OG interaction is addressed by one of the resources developed by the DRAGON+ team (see Section 4).

3.1.4. STUDY 4: AGE STATING IN OG INTERACTIONS

In this study, which was carried out on the English-language dataset, children and groomers were found to provide age on request notably more often than volunteer it, with children doing so three-quarters of the time and groomers over two-thirds of the time (see Figure 10). Whether provided on request or volunteered, groomers initiated age stating more than children, approximately three-fifths of the time, as shown in Figure 11. Overall, age stating in OG interactions was found to be one-sided almost as often as to be reciprocated, as Figure 12 shows.

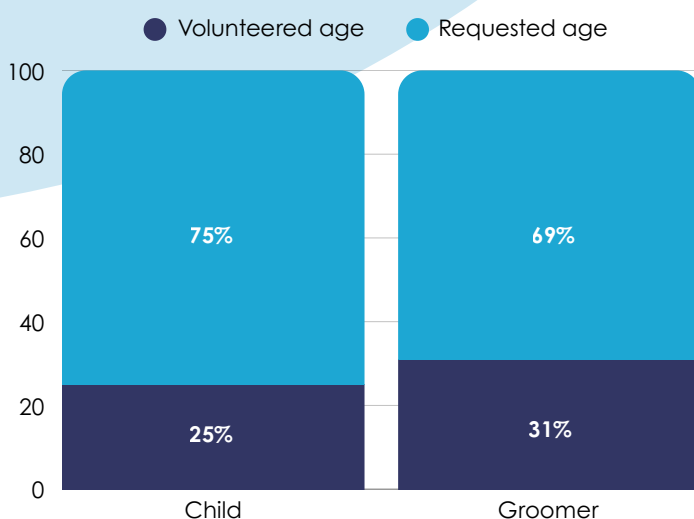


Figure 10: Age requested vs volunteered

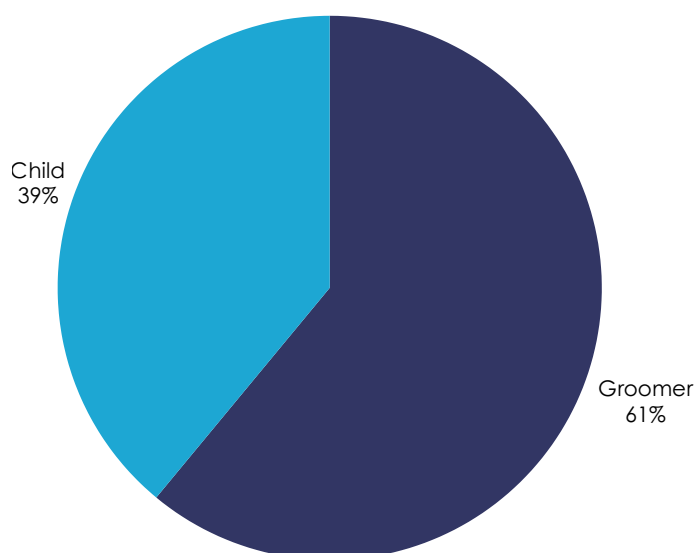


Figure 11: Who initiates age stating?

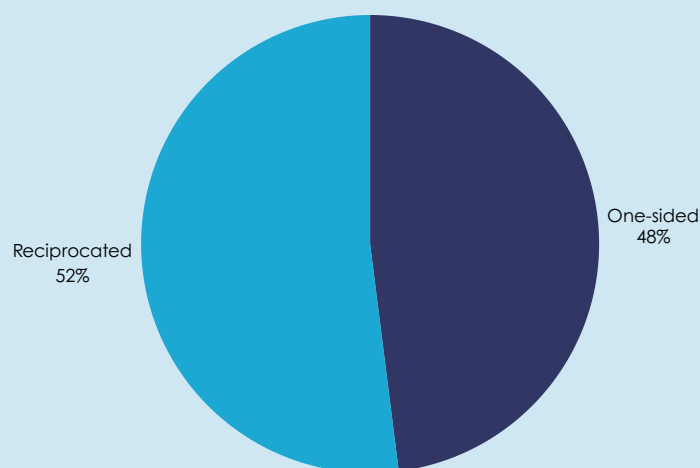


Figure 12: Amount of one-sided vs reciprocated age stating

There were a lot of similarities in the language used by children and groomers around age stating. The most common way of using language for requesting age was similar and entailed stating it on request and volunteering it. For requesting age, this involved using a simple and direct style (e.g., 'how old are you?'), which children did 88% of the time and groomers 56% of the time. When stating age on request, the most common way of using language involved simply providing the information, i.e., a number, which children did 67% and groomers 29% of the time. When volunteering age, this was most commonly done using a matter-of-fact style (e.g. 'im 17 by the way'), which children did 50% and groomers 38% of the time.

Notable differences between children and groomers included children providing their age to express resistance (e.g., 'I'm only 12 remember'), which they did 50% of the time, and groomers not at all when volunteering age. Other notable differences included

- groomers prompting children to confirm acceptance when providing age on request (e.g., 'not too old?'), which they did 29% of the time, whereas children were found not to do this;
- groomers hedging (e.g., 'so you know, Im 17') when volunteering age, which they were found to do 25% of the time and children not at all; and
- groomers drawing attention to how their age might be problematic when volunteering it (e.g., 'i must be fucked up cus im 34'), which they did 38% of the time while, again, children were not found to do this at all.

As might be expected, age stating tended to occur early in OG interactions, though over three-fifths of the time (62%) it was preceded by other kinds of

communication, especially trust-building chat and sex talk. Groomers initiated implicit sex talk a third of the time and explicit sex talk about a fifth of the time prior to an age stating exchange. This demonstrates the lack of concern about the appropriateness of such talk and indicates the highly sexual nature of OG interactions.

In this study, we found that, although exchanging information about age can represent a bonding, getting-to-know-each-other exercise, it primarily represented an age verification check.

3.2.PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

3.2.1. LIVED EXPERIENCE GROUP

As noted in Section 2, the project worked closely with a lived experience group, whose members were integrally involved in DRAGON+. Table 4 includes some examples of the feedback provided by the group at different stages of the project and of how this feedback was taken on board.

3.2.2. PRACTITIONER CONSULTATION

Given its aims (see Section 1), the participatory research primarily produced findings about how to develop the linguistics research insights into training resources and guides.

3.2.2.1. CONSULTATION WAVE 1

The first wave of consultation entailed getting the perspective of practitioners on the DRAGON+ linguistics research and the themes represented by the studies. The general response from practitioners was that many of the findings resonated with their own experiences and were relevant to their work. For example, responding to Study 2 (CSAM-sending in OG interactions), especially the finding that how language is used can create a sense of video- or photo-sending being an inconsequential in-the-moment activity, one practitioner observed:



We get a lot of cases where the victim is convinced to get on a video chat on the pretext that it will leave no traces... image/video are [screenshot] and recorded by the perps without consent and knowledge.



Resource	Feedback Provided	Change Made
Training Resource: CSAM Sending – Digital Animation	Provided insight into the use of language that may inadvertently imply blame, guilt or shame. The initial draft script for the animation contained a sentence which said: "And then when it felt weird, they didn't tell anyone because they were ashamed." The group pointed out that, often, a child does not or cannot recognise when a grooming relationship 'feels weird'.	The next iteration of the story board acknowledged this feedback and removed the sentence completely to ensure no blame was attributed to victims who were unable to recognise the 'weird' feeling.
Training Resource: Children's Talk Booklet	Reference to "managing the conversation flow" which the group felt wrongly implied children have control over the conversation with the perpetrator.	This was changed to "handling the conversation flow", which more accurately describes how children are navigating the power imbalance between them and the perpetrator, and avoids placing any responsibility onto the child. The linguistics studies report references use of the term "conversational management" as a technical term in linguistics, making the distinction above clear.
Blueprint	The group also helped to keep language across all its sections accessible to different audiences.	The final blueprint reflected this feedback, using a more accessible register throughout, including across all the practitioner and child-facing resources.

Table 4: Feedback from the Lived Experience Group

Practitioners identified a number of areas where they felt that receiving more information about the research would be useful, such as further details about the demographics of the children and groomers in the OG interactions, and of the digital platforms on which they take place.

In Consultation Wave 1, we also sought practitioners' views on what format training based on these findings should take. Here, we found some notable difference between the language cohorts, with participants in the English language cohort strongly favouring a handbook / workbook format (38%) and participants in the Spanish language cohort preferring audio-visual formats, with animation, bot simulation and podcast being the formats identified the most, all by 20% of participants. Format preferences are represented in Figure 13.



Figure 13: Resource format preferences as identified by English and Spanish language cohorts

3.2.2.2. CONSULTATION WAVE 2

As mentioned in Section 2, the second wave of consultation followed the development of initial versions of training resources. Feedback on the resources was collected via a survey and the results of this are presented in Figures 14-17.

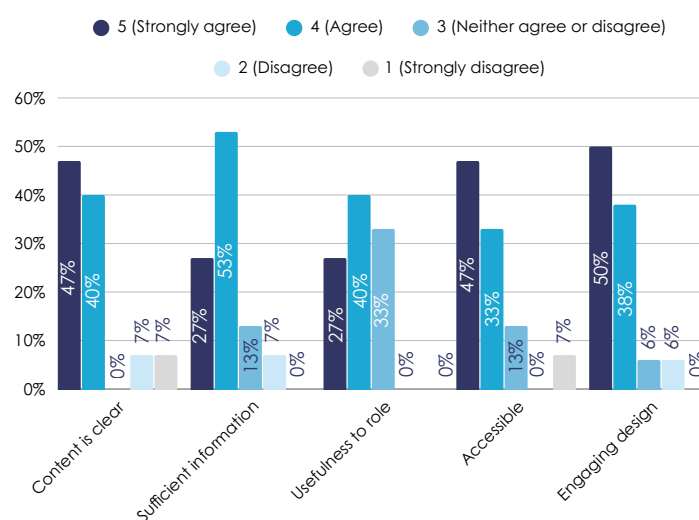


Figure 14: Responses to fact sheet (Study 1 resource)

The 'fact sheet' was highly rated by participants, 80% or more of whom indicated agreement or strong agreement that it represented clear content, provided sufficient information, was accessible and had an engaging design. The view that this resource

had an engaging design. The view that this resource would be useful to participants' work roles was less resoundingly expressed, 67% agreeing or strongly agreeing that it would be, though none of the participants indicated disagreement with this view.

The 'fact sheet' was highly rated by participants, 80% or more of whom indicated agreement or strong agreement that it represented clear content, provided sufficient information, was accessible and had an engaging design. The view that this resource would be useful to participants' work roles was less resoundingly expressed, 67% agreeing or strongly agreeing that it would be, though none of the participants indicated disagreement with this view.

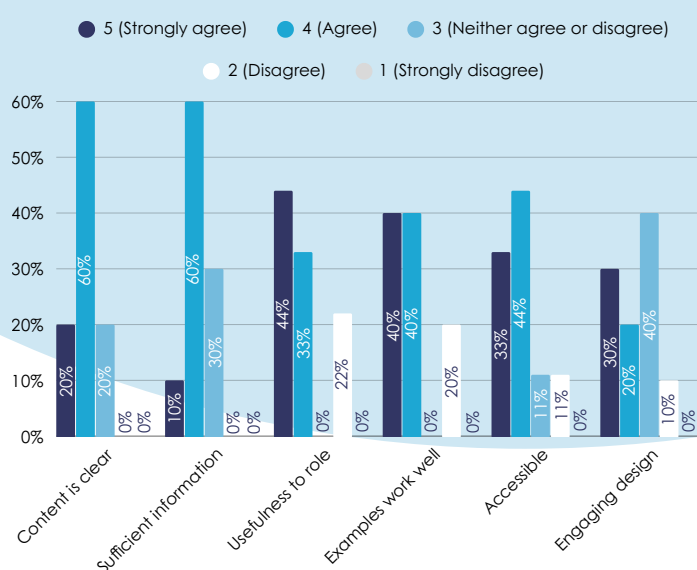


Figure 15: Responses to activity sheet (Study 1 resource)

Though not as highly rated as the 'fact sheet', the 'activity sheet' was still very well received, with 80% of participants indicating agreement or strong agreement that it contained appropriate content with examples that work well. 70% or more agreed or strongly agreed that the duration of the activities was appropriate, the content was clear and the resource accessible. Only 50% agreed or strongly agreed that the design of the 'activity sheet' was engaging, highlighting an area for improvement.

The 'animation storyboard' was very positively received, 86% of participants indicating agreement or strong agreement that it contained clear content and was accessible, 79% that it contained sufficient information and was useful to participants' work roles, and 74% that it had an engaging design.

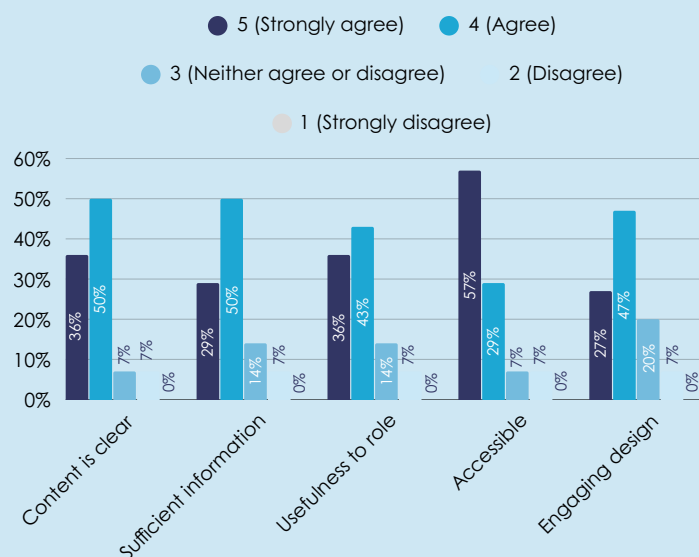


Figure 16: Responses to animation storyboard (Study 2 resource)

Of all the first iterations of the DRAGON+ resources seen by participants in Consultation Wave 2, the 'conversation explainer' received the lowest rating overall. However, the majority of participants still indicated agreement or strong agreement that the content was clear (69%), that it provided sufficient information (64%), that it would be useful to their role (75%), and that the video format was engaging (54%). The comparatively low score of the latter aspect highlighted this as an area for improvement.

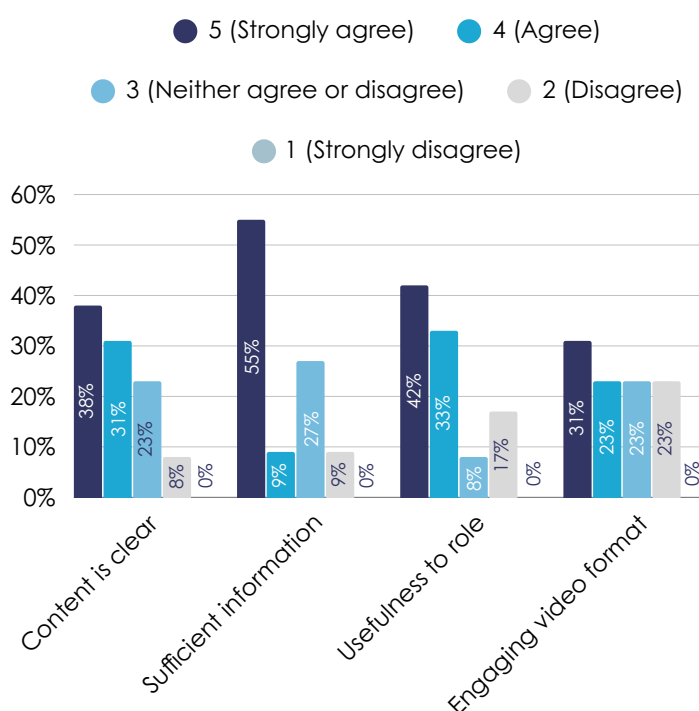


Figure 17: Responses to conversation explainer (Study 3 resource)

Practitioner experience and views of the cross-cultural adaptation of resources were solicited in

relation to potential communication issues that may arise when translating resources for use in other linguistic and cultural contexts. Participants highlighted a number of possible reasons why concepts may not work when resources are translated. For example, one participant observed that in Vietnamese the concept of grooming is not represented by a single word, as it is in English, but requires paraphrasing. Participants also noted that a linguistic style or register that was appropriate in the source language may not be appropriate when translated into another language.

Another issue that might arise when translating resources is with the social meaning of words as experienced in certain contexts, where certain language choices can perpetuate harmful norms and expectations. Participants noted how such meaning might not be picked up by a translator who does not appreciate the experiential, context-specific meaning implications of the language being used:



“[People with] lived experience... can pick up language that may be seen as victim blaming, shaming or silencing, whereas a standard translator might not pick up those nuances”



In the consultation, practitioners were also provided with a suggested 'checklist' of practical considerations when adapting resources for use in different linguistic and cultural contexts, and then asked to share their views on it, including priorities when putting the list items into practice. The priorities identified by participants included the need for practitioners, people with lived experience of OG, and children to be involved in the adaptation process; for translators to have knowledge of online CSEA, where possible; and for resources to not only be adapted but also adaptable, i.e. to account for regional variations in customs, cultural norms, etc.

Consultation wave 2 also entailed soliciting practitioners' views on the practical implementation of the resources, with a focus on what works well and what does not work well (and proposed solutions for the latter). The responses from participants are summarised in Tables 5-7.

What works well
UX testing before rolling out resources for use in practice.
Resources that are adaptable to different circumstances and include topics that are relatable for children.
Up-to-date training to keep pace with changing technologies.
Practitioner skills to detect signs / red flags in 'what is not being said' by children.
Practical resources that are logical, inclusive and use clear and accessible language.

Table 5: What works well when implementing resources

What does not work well
Not fully understanding lived experience or involving the target audience in the development of resources.
Getting practitioners to engage with resources when already managing a heavy workload.
Managers not effectively communicating how to apply resources to frontline staff or providing appropriate training.
Training that is not up to date, keeping up with the fast pace of changing technology.
Resources that do not use in an appropriate communication and design style for the target audience.

Table 6: What does not work well when implementing resources

Proposed solutions
Sense checking the language of resources with children to check that intended meaning matches interpreted meaning.
Incentivising practitioners with certification of training on resources.
Taking a holistic approach by developing resources with an understanding of how they will be used differently by different audiences.
Providing clear instructions to managers on how to roll out resources to frontline staff.
Producing resources that are in an appropriate communication and design style for different target audiences.
Providing staff with time for training on the use of resources, as well as access to an expert in the resource topic.

Table 7: Proposed solutions to issues encountered when implementing resources

3.2.3. CHILDREN'S CONSULTATION

3.2.3.1. CONSULTATION WAVE 1

As noted in Section 1, the main aim of the children's consultation was to gain insights about children's understanding of OG and their views on existing online safety education, as well as their views on current reporting and support approaches. This was for the purpose of putting children's perspectives for the purpose of putting children's perspectives and

preferences at the centre of the development of educational resources, with a view to this supporting the creation of effective resources that resonate with their intended audience, i.e., children. As with the practitioner consultation, the child consultation consisted of two waves.

In the first wave, information about their understanding of, and views relating to, OG was collected with respect to five themes. The themes and summaries of children's responses in relation to the themes are presented in Table 8.

Theme	Summary of children's response in relation to theme
Children's current understanding of OG	The children expressed a strong understanding of the dangers of meeting strangers online, but a lack of awareness of the different tactics used by groomers.
	Most of the children were found to view OG being about older adults exploiting children, mainly older males targeting girls.
Children's views on existing online safety education (messaging and delivery)	Children expressed mixed feelings about parents delivering messages: some looked to their parents for advice while others felt it was too awkward.
	Children expressed greater trust in teachers over influencers or celebrities when it comes to the source of educational messages.

Theme	Summary of children's response in relation to theme
Children's preventative education preferences	Children's preferences included attention-grabbing messages containing real-life stories and the voices of people who have experienced OG first-hand.
	Children put emphasis on accessibility, i.e., for the need for education messaging to be offline as well as online, and to be in different forms to overcome communication barriers, e.g., braille, sign language, other languages.
	Children identified a number of preferred ways of accessing messaging, including: • Online: Mobile phones warning pop-ups; apps; social media; online games / simulations; podcasts; movies / TV series; the news; YouTube ads; children's books; school conference. • Offline: Information boards; school conference / assembly meetings; children's books; screens in school; face-to-face services; radio; youth clubs; the news; posters; billboards; via messaging with parents.
Children's views on existing reporting and support	The children expressed their fears of seeking help, such as worrying about being blamed, patronised or judged, and also of getting in trouble.
	The children also shared their views on what constitutes current, good support. This included receiving practical advice from knowledgeable advisors who are caring and empathetic, and the support being accessible, inclusive, and available when needed.
Children's reporting and support preferences	Children's preferences included guaranteed privacy when reporting, and clear messaging that demystifies for children what happens when they disclose.
	The children also expressed a preference for reporting / support phonelines, as well as for continuous support from the same person and support that is non-judgemental.

Table 8: Children's understanding of, and views relating to, OG

3.2.3.2. CONSULTATION WAVE 2

In the second wave of the children's consultation, children were asked to provide feedback on Study 1 resource (a children's talk booklet incorporating the factsheet and activity sheet) and an infographic poster representing children's views on education messaging on OG (based on information provided in Consultation Wave 1). A summary of this feedback for each resource is presented in Table 9.

The children's feedback was taken fully on board by the DRAGON+ team and used in the continued development of the resources.

Resource	Children's feedback
'Children's talk' booklet	• Eye-catching but too much content on page. • Language too difficult in places and design style too childish. • Viewed as useful but questions raised about how realistic the content (based on real examples so feedback may reflect expectations rather than reality of OG). • Neurodivergence issues with interpreting nuance and different learning styles identified as possible accessibility barriers.
Infographic poster about education messaging on OG	• Attention-grabbing appearance, though too many colours may make it difficult to distinguish information. • Content relevant, though language difficult to understand in places. • Viewed as useful, though concerns expressed about accessibility issues for people with language barriers or disabilities.

Table 9: Children's feedback on resources

4. PROJECT OUTPUTS

Project DRAGON+ has produced multiple outputs. These include:

Publishing a project blueprint (May 2024), making it available to all project partners (see Figure 18). The blueprint includes an interactive project overview and houses detailed reports of our research findings. It also includes training resources, guidance resources, and a reflective piece from our lived experience group. If you are interested in having access to some of its contents, please contact us via project.dragons@swansea.ac.uk.



Delivering a podcast with project partner Red PaPaz .

Delivering ten presentations at conferences and specialist sessions in Thailand (November 2023), UK (February and May 2024), Colombia (February 2024), Dubai (March 2024) and Spain (April 2024).

Co-producing two types of resources with practitioners, children and our lived experience group: Training resources and guidance resources (see Table 10).



DRAGON+

DEVELOPING RESISTANCE AGAINST GROOMING ONLINE: STORIES STRENGTHENED SAFEGUARDS

DISCLAIMER

The information contained within this blueprint (and associated resources), which is provided by DRAGON+, is for Project DRAGON+ partners only. It is not intended to be used as a standalone resource. It is not intended to be used as a standalone resource. It is not intended to be used as a standalone resource.

DRAGON+ is part of DRAGON (Developing Resistance Against Grooming Online), a multi-disciplinary research portfolio working on enhancing practices to keep children safe from online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA), with a focus on online grooming (OG). Between 2021 and 2023 we created state-of-the-art, ethically responsible tools to help detect (DRAGON-spotter) and prevent (DRAGON-shield) OG.

In 2023-24, and supported by End Violence Against Children and Tech Coalition, our new project, DRAGON+ focuses on children's communication and the interpersonal dynamics between offenders and children during OG interactions. Our approach is innovative and rigorous, and our findings provide novel, richly contextualised research-derived insights to inform the design and implementation of actionable preventative/detective technologies, at scale.

In this Blueprint, we articulate our research insights and provide prototype resources for OG prevention and support that benefit directly from synergising linguistic analysis results and extensive consultation with practitioners, children and lived experience experts.

Email: project.dragons@swansea.ac.uk
Web: www.swansea.ac.uk/project-dragon-s

Twitter: @ProjectDragon-s
LinkedIn: @project-dragon-s



Swansea University
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Figure 18: DRAGON+ blueprint

1 Aims

Our project strives to respond to the 2 following key research questions:

How does offender <-> child interaction manifest in OG conversations?

How can the research findings be used to develop and enhance existing educational and protective measures to help children and young people to resist and report OG prevention/ intervention solutions?

OG is, at its heart, a process of entrapment that relies on communication. Groomers and children talk, send and receive images and videos. The dynamics of these interactions hold the key to understanding how and why children become vulnerable to OG. Our research aims to explore the OG interaction in detail, with a focus on the OG tactics they use to manipulate and control children.

This research is critical but only forms part of the story. It is vital to also study children's responses to OG, and how they can be supported to resist and report OG. Our research aims to explore the OG interaction in detail, with a focus on the OG tactics they use to manipulate and control children.

Our work is the first to study children and groomer's language alongside each other, filling a critical gap in current knowledge. Addressing our core research questions, DRAGON+ will be able to:

- 1. Generate detailed knowledge and nuanced insights about:
 - 1.1. Groomer <-> child interaction dynamics
 - 1.2. Groomer <-> child interaction dynamics

And to deliver:

- A blueprint that outlines the research research findings, and prototype tools and resources and a handbook for implementation to best practice development, and a handbook for implementation to best practice development, and a handbook for implementation to best practice development.

2 Team

Organisation Chart



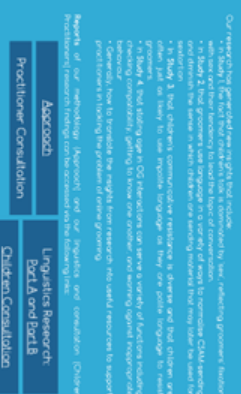
Global Map of OG



3 Approach & findings

In our research, we take an iterative and iterative, multi-disciplinary approach, synergising educational language research and participatory research methods to generate new insights into the OG interaction. We have used a variety of research methods to generate new insights into the OG interaction. We have used a variety of research methods to generate new insights into the OG interaction.

Our research has generated new insights into the OG interaction. We have used a variety of research methods to generate new insights into the OG interaction. We have used a variety of research methods to generate new insights into the OG interaction.



5 Next steps

This Blueprint captures the collaborative input from practitioners, children and lived experience experts, which guided the development of research evidence based training resources on communication in OG interactions. It provides the prototype resources and underpinning report which outline the approach in an accessible format to support further development and scale up by Tech Coalition partners.

[Click to view feedback from our Lived Experience Group](#)

Our first consultation wave has gathered vital insights from end users (practitioner/online practitioners, children and lived experience experts) about further refinements they would like to see.

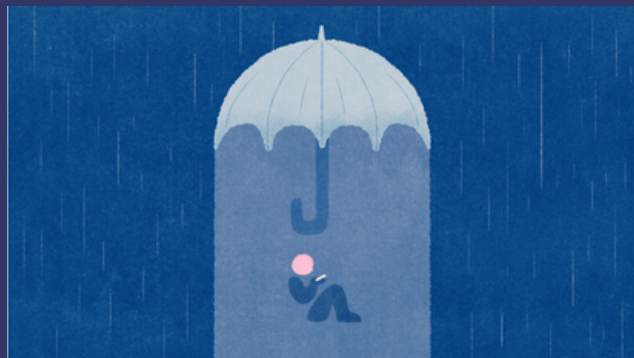
This Blueprint provides an off-the-shelf set of prototype resources (training and guidance) that apply the novel research evidence about child <-> groomer interactions in OG.

Page 18



Children's talk – Booklet: Fact Sheet and Activity Sheet

The booklet includes a factsheet which outlines the key patterns in children's talk identified in the research. It also contains activities, with carefully curated examples of OG chatlogs, to support practitioners' work with children.



CSAM Sending Digital Animation Storyboard

This resource includes a script and storyboard of a digital animation that helps to explain the communicative context in which CSAM is sent in the context of OG interactions. It includes four CSAM sending scenarios that illustrate key findings from our research.



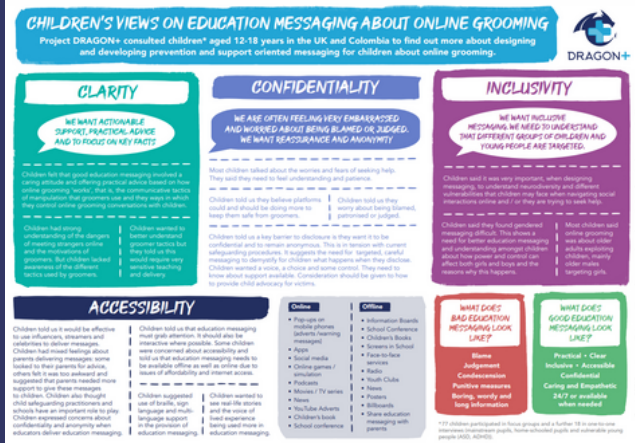
Child Resistance and Groomer Challenge- Video and Explainer video

This resource provides a comprehensive knowledge guide about the dynamics of communication between children and groomers, specifically children's attempts to resist groomers' advances and groomers' challenges to such attempts.

The booklet includes chat fragments and commentary regarding two resistance-challenge scenarios.

An additional child resistance – groomer challenge scenario in video format is also provided.

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5. NEXT RECOMMENDATIONS

This briefing and the DRAGON+ Blueprint that underpins it capture the collaborative input from practitioners, children and lived experience experts that guided the development of evidence-based training and guidance resources to support practitioners in their efforts to prevent OG and to support children who may have experienced it.

Project DRAGON+ outputs provide an off-the shelf set of resources that showcase how to apply the novel research evidence we have derived about offender <-> child interactions in OG. We hope that they form the foundations for innovative future approaches to educate and upskill practitioners and to develop effective education and reporting approaches

anchored in lived experience and research evidence.

By combining linguistics research with participatory research, we have collated rich insights and feedback and we have gathered critical recommendations for funders, policy and decision-makers. We hope these recommendations, and the insights and evidence that underpin them, will contribute to converting the time, commitment and energy of all those who have inputted into real-world, applied and impactful enhancements to practice. We also hope that these enhancements, in turn, will provide new ways to boost collective efforts to prevent and disrupt OG and better support those who experience it.

Recommendation 1

Scale up - these are resources that practitioners and children, as well as lived experience experts, say are novel, much needed, and eminently usable.

Recommendation 2

Embed within comprehensive training to counter OG - **DRAGON-Shield**. Make this training widely available, across languages, spending the required resource on adaptation (we have a guide for how to do so!).

Recommendation 3

Fund and replicate the underpinning research across other languages and platform contexts to derive a more nuanced understanding on how OG manifests across languages and geographies, as well as emerging digital contexts (e.g. augmented reality).

Recommendation 4

Use the findings of the linguistic studies to inform safety by design technology development.

Recommendation 5

Develop training resources for parents/carers based on the co-production and participatory research approach already showcased by Project DRAGON+.

Recommendation 6

Use the DRAGON+ education and support messaging infographic to implement the changes children want to see, such as:

- **Education:** innovative, inclusive approaches that provide practical advice, avoid blaming language, and are delivered through diverse and engaging experiential based educational methods that draw from lived experience.

- **Support:** a child-centred reporting system built on clear, age-appropriate communication - one that acknowledges and addresses privacy concerns.

Recommendation 7

Embed consultation with those with lived experience into the development of strategies, action plans, and policies to prevent CSEA, ensuring they are treated as equal consultants, supported and compensated. Their insights are crucial for understanding real-life impacts, identifying necessary changes, and learning vital lessons.

Recommendation 8

Create sustainable feedback loops with children, practitioners and lived experience group about the changes made and the rationale underpinning them to evidence the impact of their input.

APPENDIX 1

PROJECT PARTICIPATION

		APAV [Portuguese Association for Victim Support]
		BeSmartOnline! A safer Internet Centre for Malta
	Betternet	Betternet (Belgium)
		ChildFund Vietnam
		Child Online Africa
		DeafKidz International
		E-enfance/3018 organisation, France
		European Schoolnet
	Expertisecentrum Online Misbruik	Offlimits, Netherlands
	hotline.ie	Hotline.ie [Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland]
		InHope
		Insafe
		Lifeline/Childline Zambia

		Lifeline Malawi/ANPPCAN Malawi Chapter
		Marie Collins Foundation, UK
		National Contact Centre for Child Safety on the Internet, Serbia
		Nummer gegen Kummer e.V., Germany
		RATI, India
		Red PaPaz, Colombia
		SafeSpot (Jamaica)
		Saferinternet4kids, Foundation for Research and Technology-Hellas, Greece
		Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth
		Southwest Grid for Learning, UK
		StopOnSexGroom, Spain
		Te Protejo, Mexico

END NOTES

[i] See, for example, Chiang, E., & Grant, T. (2017). Online grooming: moves and strategies. *Language and Law=Linguagem e Direito*, 4(1), 103–141. <http://ojs.letras.up.pt/index.php/LLLD/article/view/2411>; Chiang, E., & Grant, T. (2019). Deceptive identity performance: Offender moves and multiple identities in online child abuse conversations. *Applied Linguistics*, 40(4), 675–698. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amy007>; Lorenzo-Dus, N. (2023). DIGITAL GROOMING: Discourses of Manipulation and Cyber-Crime. In *Digital Grooming: Discourses of Manipulation and Cyber-Crime*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190845193.001.0001>; Lorenzo-Dus, N., Evans, C., & Mullineux-Morgan, R. (2023). *Online Child Sexual Grooming Discourse (Cambridge Elements)*. Cambridge University Press; Lorenzo-Dus, N., Kinzel, A., & Di Cristofaro, M. (2020). The communicative modus operandi of online child sexual groomers: Recurring patterns in their language use. *J. Pragmat.*, 155, 15–27.

[ii] The term ‘simulation’ describes the function of an action, i.e., video or photo-sending, performed through language. It does not represent the child’s attitude or relationship with the groomer, and in no way changes the fact that all OG is abuse.

[iii] The terms politeness and impoliteness are used in a linguistic sense. Both are based around the concept of ‘face’ – a person’s self-image – and the idea that people have certain face needs when they engage in interaction. People’s face needs have been grouped into two main categories: positive and negative (Brown, P. and Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use*. Cambridge: CUP). Positive face needs refer to the desire to be liked and appreciated. Negative face needs refer to the desire to not be imposed upon. Politeness occurs when people use language in a way that supports the face needs of others, and impoliteness when they use language in a way that acts against those needs.

[iv] <https://open.spotify.com/episode/7A7QSuXrN5rodQ3RRkWLDj?si=ghmuHN23R7qN5H45zwjPEg>



DRAGON+

DEVELOPING RESISTANCE AGAINST GROOMING ONLINE:
STORIES STRENGTHENED SAFEGUARDS

REPORT
RESEARCH-EVIDENCED RESOURCE
DEVELOPMENT TO SUPPORT CHILD
SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE
2024

Email: project.dragons@swansea.ac.uk

Web: <https://www.swansea.ac.uk/project-dragon-s/dragon/>