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Beliefs and Practices Concerning Talk to Children:

A Comparison of Hong Kong Cantonese Mothers and Filipino Domestic Helpers

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Abstract

Many families in Hong Kong employ domestic helpers. One of their primary responsibilities is to take care of children. Their beliefs concerning talk to children can be quite different from their employers owing to their cultural backgrounds. The current study used a survey instrument to compare the childrearing beliefs and discourse practices between 89 Chinese mothers and 38 Filipino helpers. Reliable group differences for 11 (55%) belief items and eight (67%) practice items were shown in the nonparametric chi-square procedures and the stepwise multiple regression procedures. These findings call into attention the need for mothers and domestic helpers to appreciate their differences in beliefs and practices concerning talk to young children, and to discuss mutually comfortable interaction patterns that are built upon their similarities.

Introduction

Background

In Hong Kong, there is an increasing number of working mothers and live-in foreign domestic helpers. According to the Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics (Census and Statistics Department, 2004), 218,500 domestic helpers worked in Hong Kong at the end of 2004. These domestic helpers are responsible for household chores and taking care of the elderly as well as young children in the families. In families where both parents work, these domestic helpers have contributed a certain degree of influence on the learning and development of the young children whom they take care of, including language, through the way they talk and interact with the children.

More than 95% of domestic helpers in Hong Kong come from Southeast Asian countries, with the Philippines in particular (55%). With a work visa, Filipino domestic helpers are allowed to stay in Hong Kong for two years. During their stay, they are employed to take up domestic duties such as baby-sitting, child rearing, taking care of household chores and cooking for a designated employer (Tam, 1999). Among the households with Filipino domestic helpers, 78.87% have children whose age is below 15 (Chiu & the Asian Migrant Centre, 2005). According to a survey on married, female Chinese employees in a public service agency in Hong Kong, 49.3% of the 226 participants reported that they rely on Filipino domestic helpers as the major care provider for their children who are below the age

of four (Tam, 1999).

Human behaviours are driven by our values and beliefs. Due to cultural differences, practices as well as beliefs concerning talk to children can be quite different between parents and their domestic helpers. Such differences might lead to conflicts in the way they interact with the children in the family, especially when parents expect their helpers to play an active role in facilitating the language development of their children. This study aimed to investigate the beliefs and practices of Hong Kong Cantonese mothers and Filipino domestic helpers concerning talk to children, and to suggest possible implications based on the similarities and differences found.

Importance of Language Input in Children's Language Development

Previous research suggests that both the quality and the quantity of language input are important for language development (Snow, 1999; Hart & Risley, 1995). Snow (1999) argues that the more words a child hears, the more words s/he will learn. In syntax acquisition, when parents adjust the level of complexity of language input and respond to their children's topics, their children will acquire grammar and vocabulary at a faster rate. Results from Hart and Risley (1995) add that the nature of children's language experiences is the most important contributing factor to language acquisition even though economic resources in the family also play a role. Parents' language diversity, feedback, guidance style, language emphasis and responsiveness make up their children's language experiences and are found to be good

predictors of children's future achievement in language development.

The fact that many children in Hong Kong are taken care of by domestic helpers raises the question about the impact of these helpers on a child's language acquisition. Cheuk and Wong's study (2005) indicates an association between childcare by domestic helpers and an increasing risk and severity of specific language impairment (SLI). The authors reviewed medical records of 496 Chinese children who were aged below five and were assessed in a child assessment centre in Hong Kong. The authors defined SLI cases as children with normal general developmental quotient (GQ) but with language quotient (LQ) more than one SD below the mean and below the GQ. Childcare by a domestic helper was defined as "childcare by an employed full-time domestic helper who is the main caretaker of the child during daytime (\pm nighttime) for at least one year before the initial evaluation of the child". Some further information is needed to explain the association, for example, the language that these helpers spoke to the children, their level of fluency of this language, the frequency of verbal interaction with the children, and the quality of discourse practices with the children. However, detailed information of the domestic helpers is not available. Moreover, the mean ages of the cases and controls were as young as 2.51 and 2.89 respectively. It was possible that some cases were actually late talkers, and did not turn out to have SLI.

Cultural Differences behind Talk to Children

Culturally-related values, beliefs and practices underlie parent-child interactions.

Traditional programs that train parents to facilitate children's language learning are developed on the basis of studies that have focused only on white, middle-class families in Western countries (van Kleeck, 1994). Other cultural groups may hold different values and beliefs that are reflected in language use. Therefore, the language facilitation techniques taught in these parent-training programs may not be applicable to the other cultural groups.

Johnston and Wong (2002) examined the childrearing beliefs and practices of Chinese and Western mothers regarding Child Direct Talk (CDT). A written survey instrument was distributed to mothers of preschoolers in two Canadian cities with a large population of Chinese immigrants. For the first 20 survey items, the mothers rated their extent of agreement with the nature of their children's learning, the independence of learning and early language milestones. The mothers indicated their frequency of using certain verbal practices described in the Western CDT literature for the remaining 12 items. A total of 86 surveys were collected from 44 Western mothers and 42 Chinese mothers. "Western" mothers were those who did not have a Chinese surname, spoke English at home and were born in Canada or in Europe. "Chinese" mothers were born in the geographical regions of China and their average duration of stay in Canada was eight years. The authors reported reliable group differences between Chinese and Western mothers for 14 (44%) of the survey items. Together with the variable of income, six belief items accounted for 67% of the variance (Multiple $R = .82$) and could identify group membership with 95% accuracy. Along with the variable of income, five

practice items accounted for 66% of the variance (Multiple $R = .81$) and could identify group membership with 94% accuracy. Among the belief items that were significantly different, one example is that Chinese mothers agreed more strongly that “children learn best with instruction” while Western mothers agreed more strongly that “young children learn important things while playing”. An example in terms of practices is that Chinese mothers reported a more frequent use of flash cards and picture books to teach new words than Western mothers. These differences may stem from their cultural differences. For example, the belief of importance of instruction and the use of flash cards are concordant with the Chinese emphasis on “nurture” rather than “nature”.

Several studies examined childrearing practices in Chinese and Filipino parents. It was observed that in both ethnic groups, parents show much indulgence for and protectiveness towards their children (Santo & Chan, 2004; Chan & Lee, 2004). For example, parents from both cultural groups allow their children to live with them until the children are grown up as adults. During this period, the parents provide meals, laundry and educational expenses for their children. These findings suggest that these two groups might share similar beliefs and practices in childrearing. Research evidence on similarities and differences in cultural values suggests otherwise. Examining responses to questionnaires collected from several Asian American ethnic groups in three previous studies, Kim, Yang, Atkinson, Wolfe and Hong (2001) report that the Chinese group received higher scores for the “Conformity to Norms”

and “Emotional Self-control” dimensions than the Filipino American group. One explanation to these findings is that the influences of Buddhism and Confucian philosophy have remained constant to a large extent in Chinese. But the influences have lessened in Filipinos as a consequence of foreign occupation in the Philippines from Spain (1565-1898) and the United States (1898-1946). Buddhism and Confucian philosophy emphasizes the importance of respect for elderly, a responsible attitude towards family matters, consideration for group interests and harmonious relationships. Differences between these two ethnic groups may lead to different patterns of child-directed talk. For example, since Chinese expect more on one’s conformity to the expectations from the society than Filipinos do, it is possible that Chinese parents correct their children’s speech more frequently than Filipino ones.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to examine the similarities and differences between Hong Kong Cantonese mothers and Filipino domestic helpers in Hong Kong concerning talk to children. Possible factors that explain the similarities and the differences would be discussed.

Method

Materials

The written survey instrument reported in Johnston and Wong’s study (2002) was adapted for use in this study. According to Johnston and Wong’ study (2002), the survey was originally written in English. The second author translated the survey into Chinese. Then a

professional translator in Hong Kong translated this Chinese version back into English to ensure comparability of the two versions. After two rounds of back-translation/revision, the Chinese version was finalized. The first 20 items asked about childrearing beliefs (e.g. “Parents should let children experiment, even if they might make mistakes”). The participants were asked to grade their degree of agreement on a five-point ordinal scale (from 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree). The remaining 12 items were related to the use of some caregiver-child discourse practices (e.g. “Change my words or sentence when my child does not understand me”). The participants indicated their frequency of use on a four-point ordinal scale (from 1 – hardly ever to 4 – almost always). In the present study, all of the 32 items were used and no changes were made to the original statements.

Demographic information was asked in the last part of the survey instrument for identification of target participants and interpretation of results. Some basic information asked in Johnston and Wong’s study (2002) was included in the present study. The information was place of birth, length of stay in Hong Kong, number and ages of children, number of caregivers in the family, and language(s) frequently spoken to the children and adults in the household. Adaptations were made in the survey for the Filipino domestic helpers (subsequently referred as “helpers”). They were asked to indicate whether they had taken care of young children in the past five years. For the information about the family, they were requested to give information regarding their employer’s family in Hong Kong.

The Chinese version of the survey instrument was distributed to the Hong Kong Cantonese mothers (subsequently referred to as “mothers”). Since English is an official language in the Philippines, the English version was distributed to the helpers.

Distribution of Survey Questionnaires

The surveys were distributed to potential participants through different channels. A total of 323 surveys were distributed to mothers through the author’s friends, one kindergarten in Lok Fu and one in Mid-levels, whilst 142 completed surveys (44%) were collected. Fifty-three surveys (37% of the completed ones) were excluded because the respondents did not meet the participant requirements. To be included in the mother group, mothers had to have children aged between two and four, speak Cantonese as their first language, and be born in Hong Kong or have resided in Hong Kong for at least seven years. A total of 89 participants were in the mother group.

Filipino helpers were recruited through 11 Christian churches. When asked to provide information of the family they were working with, some of them misunderstood the instructions and put down the information of their own families in the Philippines. Some of them also chose not to answer several items. To encourage the respondents to answer all questions, two additional sheets were attached to each survey after the first round of distribution in one of the churches. These sheets were “Notes for participants” and “Sample answers” for the part that asked about demographic information. A total of 239 surveys were

distributed to helpers and 117 (49%) completed surveys were received. Seventy-nine (41%) surveys were excluded because the respondents did not fulfill the participant criteria. To be included in the helper group, the helpers had to currently take care of a child aged between two and four or have done so in the past five years, have a native language other than Cantonese, be born in the Philippines, and have resided in Hong Kong for less than seven years. A total of 38 participants were in the helper group.

As the two groups were recruited from various sources, the chance of having a helper and a mother from the same family was minimal. Any similarities identified between groups could not be attributed to discussion of responses.

Participants

Eighty-four (94%) of the 89 Chinese mothers were born in Hong Kong. The other five were born in Mainland China, but all had resided in Hong Kong for over 25 years. All 89 mothers reported that their first language was Cantonese. Sixty-seven mothers (75%) spoke Cantonese while the remaining 22 (25%) spoke both English and Cantonese to their children. All mothers were younger than 45 years old, with 3 (3%) younger than 25, 42 (47%) between 26 and 35 years old, and 42 (47%) in the range of 36 and 45. Fifty mothers (56%) completed a degree in college or above whereas the level of education of 37 mothers (42%) was secondary school or below. The average number of children in their families was 1.6. On average, they spent 7.2 hours on weekdays and 16.9 hours during weekends with their

children. Ten mothers (11%) were the only caregiver of their children while in 27 families (30%), relatives such as grandparents also helped them care for their children. Foreign domestic helpers were employed to take care of children in 50 families (56%). For these mothers, 28 (56%) of them indicated that there were differences between them and their helpers in terms of viewpoints and practices on language facilitation with children.

For the 38 helpers in the study, the average length of stay in Hong Kong was two years and nine months. Thirty-three helpers (87%) spoke a Filipino dialect as their first language and five helpers (6%) both English and Filipino dialect(s). Concerning the language they spoke to the children in the family where they were working with (subsequently referred to as “their children” or “their families”), 31 helpers (82%) reported that they spoke English, three (8%) Cantonese and English while three (8%) spoke a Filipino dialect. Nine (24%) of them were younger than 25 years old, while 18 (47%) were between 26 and 35, ten (26%) between 36 and 45, and two (5%) were older than 46 years old. Twenty-six helpers (68%) received a degree in college or above and the level of education for four helpers were secondary or below, while four (11%) received vocational training, such as midwifery and secretarial training. The average number of children was 1.9 in the helpers’ families. On average, the helpers spent 13.7 hours on weekdays and 6.6 hours during weekends with their children. However, it is not clear how many hours the mothers of the children these Filipino helpers care for spend with their own children because a large proportion of helpers did not provide

such information. Twenty-two helpers (58%) reported that they were the only caregiver in the family. In 12 families (32%), mothers and relatives such as grandparents were the additional caregivers. Thirty-four helpers (90%) indicated that there were differences between them and their employers regarding beliefs and practices on promoting children's language learning.

Results

Calculations of percentages for each group were based on the number of participants who responded to a specific item. One to four mothers gave no response to six statement items and seven items for demographic information. Six mothers did not report their occupation. One to four helpers gave no response to 14 statement items and seven items for demographic information. Seven helpers did not report their language to the children. All of these non-respondents were not taken into account in the calculations. Before we report the differences between Chinese mothers and Filipino helpers, the results from the mother group in this study and those from the Chinese group in Johnston and Wong's (2002) study will be first presented.

Hong Kong Mothers in this Study and Chinese Mothers in Johnston and Wong's Study (2002)

Table 1 shows the percentage of 89 Chinese mothers in this study and 42 Chinese mothers in Johnston and Wong's study (2002) who agreed or strongly agreed (or, in three items, disagreed or strongly disagreed) with each of the 20 belief items. Similar percentages

(with a difference no more than 4%) were found in six items (2, 5, 6, 9, 15 and 18), and a large difference in percentages (more than 20%) in four items (7, 8, 11 and 17).

Table 1

Percentage of Chinese Mothers in this Study and those in Johnston and Wong's Study (2002)

Agreeing (4) or Strongly Agreeing (5) with 20 Statements of Belief about Childrearing and

Children's Learning

Item	Chinese mothers in		Item	Chinese mothers in	
	Mothers in this study	Johnston and Wong's Study (2002)		Mothers in this study	Johnston and Wong's Study (2002)
1	53	67	11	74 [#]	60
2	92	93	12	80	91
3	60	76	13	88	93
4	81	91	14	81	86
5	90	93	15	89	88
6	93	90	16	82	71
7	12	55	17	61	31
8	61	38	18 [#]	64	62
9 [#]	55	57	19	66	50
10	44	26	20	64	71

Note. [#] Predominant responses were negative; percentages are given for “disagree” or “strongly disagree.”

Table 2 indicates the percentage of 89 Chinese mothers in this study and 42 Chinese mothers in Johnston and Wong's study (2002) who reported that they “almost always” or

“very often” (or, in two cases, “hardly ever” or “sometimes”) used a certain caregiver-child discourse practice. Similar percentages (with a difference no more than 4%) were found in four items (21, 26, 27 and 30). A large difference in percentages (more than 20%) was found in four items (23, 24, 31 and 32).

Table 2

Percentage of Chinese Mothers in this Study and those in Johnston and Wong’s Study (2002)

Reporting that they Use a Practice “Very Often” or “Almost Always”

Item	Chinese mothers in		Item	Chinese mothers in	
	Mothers in this study	Johnston and Wong’s Study (2002)		Mothers in this study	Johnston and Wong’s Study (2002)
21	39	40	27 [#]	56	57
22	48	29	28	85	79
23	94 [#]	31	29	56	52
24	74	7	30	62	64
25	48	43	31	55	2
26	73	69	32	53	21

Note. [#] Predominant responses were negative; percentages are given for “hardly ever” or “sometimes.”

Group Differences in Individual Survey Items

The level of agreement of beliefs and the frequency of practices for each of the 32 survey items were compared between two groups. Since ordinal scales were used in the rating of items, nonparametric chi-square procedures were employed to identify statistically reliable

group differences. Alpha of .01 was set to reduce Type I error. Table 3 shows the percentage of mothers and helpers who agreed or strongly agreed (or, in three items, disagreed or strongly disagreed) with each of the 20 belief statements. Statistically reliable group differences were found for ten items (3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 18, 19 and 20).

Table 3

Percentage of Mothers and Helpers Agreeing (4) or Strongly Agreeing (5) with 20 Statements of Belief about Childrearing and Children's Learning

Item	Mothers	Helpers	Item	Mothers	Helpers
1	53	62	11* [#]	74	34
2	92	87	12*	80	92
3*	60	100	13	88	95
4*	81	95	14	81	87
5	90	95	15	89	86
6	93	84	16	82	76
7*	12	65	17	61	82
8	61	50	18* [#]	64	49
9* [#]	55	68	19*	66	30
10*	44	74	20*	64	74

Note. * $\chi^2(4)$ or $\chi^2(3)$ (for item 12) significant at $p < .01$, tested on entire distribution.

[#] Predominant responses were negative; percentages are given for “disagree” or “strongly disagree.”

Table 4 indicates the percentage of mothers and helpers who reported that they “almost

always” or “very often” (or, in two cases, “hardly ever” or “sometimes”) used a certain caregiver-child discourse practice. Statistically reliable group differences were found for seven items (21, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30 and 31).

Table 4

Percentage of Mothers and Helpers Reporting that they Use a Practice “Very Often” or “Almost Always”

Item	Mothers	Helpers	Item	Mothers	Helpers
21*	39	78	27* [#]	56	37
22	48	46	28*	85	76
23 [#]	94	89	29	56	71
24	74	80	30*	62	87
25*	48	56	31*	55	74
26*	73	78	32	53	45

Note. * $\chi^2(3)$ significant at $p < .01$, tested on entire distribution.

[#] Predominant responses were negative; percentages are given for “hardly ever” or “sometimes.”

Group Differences in the Two Sets of Survey Items

Stepwise multiple regression procedures were utilized to determine the reliability of group differences in the pattern of responses to the survey items. Responses to the belief items were first analyzed. Seven items (7, 3, 6, 12, 10, 11 and 9) reliably accounted for 53% of the variance (Multiple $R = .73$). Further summary statistics are shown in Table 5. A

follow-up discriminant analysis utilizing the regression data indicated that a function based on responses to these seven items identified group membership with 89% accuracy.

Table 5

Summary Statistics for the Multiple Regression Analysis of Responses to Belief Items

Step	Item	Multiple		Change in	F
		R	R ²	R ²	
1	#7 proper titles	.55	.30	.30	48.47
2	#3 ask child to repeat new words	.64	.41	.12	40.28
3	#6 let child experiment	.67	.44	.03	29.96
4	#12 learn best with instruction	.68	.47	.03	24.62
5	#10 “baby talk” impedes language development	.70	.49	.02	21.39
6	#11 too young for household chores	.71	.51	.02	19.15
7	#9 clear speech	.73	.53	.02	17.55

The second stepwise multiple regression analysis was carried out to compare the groups' responses to the discourse practice items. Three items (21, 31 and 22) were found to reliably account for 34% of the variance (Multiple $R = .58$). Further summary statistics are shown in Table 6. A follow-up discriminant analysis utilizing the regression data indicated that a function based on responses to these three items could identify group membership with 75% accuracy.

Table 6

Summary Statistics for the Multiple Regression Analysis of Responses to Items Concerning Caregiver-child Discourse Practices

Step	Item	Multiple		Change in	F
		R	R ²	R ²	
1	#21 tell child if s/he uses wrong word	.51	.26	.26	41.07
2	#31 ask child to repeat adult's speech	.55	.31	.05	25.53
3	#22 read to child	.58	.34	.03	19.31

Group Differences in Demographic Variables

Several demographic variables were compared between the two groups using nonparametric chi-square procedures. Ninety-four (94%) mothers were between the age of 26 and 45 as compared to 28 (78%) in the helper group. Age differences were statistically significant between the groups ($\chi^2(3) = 13.5, p < 0.01$). Group differences in level of education were also statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = 14.5, p < 0.01$). Fifty (58%) mothers and only 26 (77%) helpers received education at a level of college or above. The number of children in the family was similar in both groups ($\chi^2(3) = 8.8, p > 0.01$). Eighty-three (93%) mothers had no more than two children and this was the same in 31 (82%) helpers' families. When asked the importance for the child to be bilingual, 68 (78%) mothers and 36 (100%) helpers indicated that it was "very important" or "important". The group differences were statistically significant ($\chi^2(3) = 19.6, p < 0.01$).

Summary of Differences between Chinese Mothers and Filipino Helpers

Reliable group differences for 11 (55%) belief items and 8 (67%) practice items were shown in the nonparametric chi-square procedures and the stepwise multiple regression procedures. For the 11 (55%) belief items, helpers agreed more strongly that the proper titles for people are more important to learn than the names of objects, that parents should ask young children to repeat new words in order to help them learn to talk, that children learn best with instructions, that parental use of “baby talk” impedes language development, that speech is especially important because it helps children to make friends, and that grandparents or older family members give good advice about child development. They also tended to disagree that clear speech is more important than polite speech. While mothers showed the opposite pattern to these belief items, they agreed more strongly than helpers that parents should let children experiment even if they might make mistakes, and that children should be allowed to take turns in conversations that include adults who are not family members. They tended to disagree that three-year-olds are too young to help with household chores, and that children generally like the same things as their parents.

The helpers reported higher frequencies of use than the mothers for seven (58%) practice items. They often tell their children if they use the wrong word, ask their children to repeat a sentence after them, read a book to their children at bedtime or naptime, and use language facilitation techniques such as expansion, parallel talk and self-talk. The helpers

also use picture books or flash cards to teach new words, remind children of missing words in a sentence, and ask children to repeat a sentence after them. While the mothers showed lower frequencies of use of these practices, they reported that they often rephrase their sentences when their children do not understand.

Discussion

The survey results indicate that Filipino helpers and Chinese mothers shared a similar level of agreement for nine (45%) of 20 belief items, while there was a significant difference for the remaining 11 (55%) items. Both groups also reported similar frequencies of use for four (33%) of 12 practice items, while there was significant difference for the remaining eight (67%) items.

We will first compare and discuss briefly findings on the mother group as reported in this study and those in the Johnston and Wong's study (2002). We will then investigate various factors in an attempt to explain the differences and similarities between the mother and helper groups. Caveats and implications of this study will also be presented.

Hong Kong Mothers in this Study and Chinese Mothers in Johnston and Wong's Study (2002)

Similarities were found for some belief and practice items between the Hong Kong Chinese mothers in this study and the Chinese mothers in Johnston and Wong's study (2002). The fact the Chinese mothers who lived in a Western city still shared similarities in items suggest that some cultural values are robust and do not change with influences from the

culture of one's city of residence. For example, about 90% of mothers in both studies believed that children understand some words before they can speak, and babbling is communicative. These beliefs of children's language learning may be universal among Chinese. About 40% of both groups reported that they would tell their children if they use the wrong word and about 60% would use pictures to teach words. The frequencies of using these practices are similar in both groups although their locations of residence were different.

A large difference, however, was also found for several belief and practice items. For example, 61% of the mothers in this study believed that children will learn to talk on their own, but only 31% of the Chinese mothers in Johnston and Wong's study (2002) believed so. A larger proportion of mothers in this study (74%) reported that they frequently followed along with the child's topic of conversation, while only 7% of Chinese mothers in Johnston and Wong's study (2002) did so very often or almost always. The discrepancies may be due to sample differences. In Johnston and Wong's study (2002), the Chinese mothers were born in Hong Kong, Taiwan or Canton. Subtle differences in beliefs and practices might be found among mothers from three regions. Moreover, the number of mothers ($N = 89$) in this study is more than double of that in Johnston and Wong's study (2002) ($N = 42$). If the sample sizes of both groups have been more comparable, the discrepancies might have been less obvious.

Possible Factors to Explain the Differences between Chinese Mothers and Filipino Helpers

One factor that might explain the differences is the different cultural interpretations of

some childrearing beliefs, such as protectiveness. The childrearing practices in Filipino societies are often overprotective (Church & Katigbak, 1992). For example, Filipino children are often watched closely by caretakers, and they are never left alone until as old as seven years old (Roseberry-McKibbin, 1997). Filipino helpers perceive the environment as hostile and would fear that the children may get hurt when they do household chores and experiments. As a result, they would be less likely to allow the children to do such activities. Similar to Filipinos, Chinese mothers are also reported to be protective, when compared to Canadian mothers in a study that examined the childrearing practices between these two cultural groups (Chen et al., 1998). Chinese mothers also desire to maintain authority over and to provide a safe environment for their children. Therefore, they will be more likely to believe that children should help in household chores and are allowed to explore the outside world. The differences in belief and practice between Filipinos and Chinese suggest that the expression of protectiveness may be different between Chinese mothers and Filipino helpers.

Another factor that may explain the differences is that Chinese and Filipinos have different expectations on young children. In Filipino societies, children are taught at a very young age to respect their elders and persons in authority (Gendrano, 1996). They are not supposed to talk back to or argue with them. It is also important for them to use titles, e.g. Dr. Lam, rather than simply first names (Chan & Lee, 2004). In Chinese societies, titles are also emphasized, as indicated by a variety of terms for different relatives in the extended family.

However, for Chinese mothers, the use of proper titles may be less important than the knowledge of object names. Shek and Chan (1999) interviewed 420 parents and investigated their perceptions and attributes of an ideal child using the content analyses of the parents' narratives. They reported that good academic outcome and positive attitude to study were the second and third attributes highly ranked by the parents, while the first one was good parent-child relation. A large vocabulary repertoire is often viewed as an indication of good memory and a stepping stone to a positive academic outcome. Therefore, Chinese mothers may expect their children to be more able to name objects than to use proper titles. When Chinese parents desire to maintain a good parent-child relation, they may tend to keep the conversation going with the child by avoiding correcting their children's speech. But they will be more likely to rephrase their sentences when their children do not understand.

Although clear speech is important in a conversation, both mothers and helpers predominantly disagree that to speak clearly is more important than to speak politely. This importance of politeness over clarity reflects the respect stressed by the Filipino culture (Gendrano, 1996) and the desire to maintain authority in Chinese parents (Chen et al., 1998).

The third factor is related to the design of this study. The percentage of variance accounted by the belief items is moderate (53%) while that by the practice items is low (34%). The low percentages of variance indicate that variables other than ethnicity account for the differences. Age and level of education are significantly different between the two ethnic

groups in this study. However, these variables could not be controlled in this study. According to the Hong Kong Statistics Department (2004), the age of giving birth to the first baby is 30 in Hong Kong. Therefore, it is not unusual to have most of the mothers in this study to be between 26 and 45 years old. When a domestic helper is employed in Hong Kong, the employers usually prefer the young ones because of their physical fitness or the experienced ones because of their previous experiences. Thus, the variability of age in the helper group is expected. Besides, domestic helpers of a higher level of education are preferred. Therefore, the level of education in the helper group was less heterogeneous than the mother group.

The fourth factor is related to the role. The two groups not only differ in ethnicity (Chinese vs. Filipino), but also in role (mother vs. domestic helper). The difference between variances in belief items and in practice items suggests that one's beliefs may not be fully actualized into one's practices. As a domestic helper, she is expected to follow the employer's instructions. Although she may have her own childrearing belief, she may not be able to put into practice due to various reasons. For example, 100% of Filipino helpers in this study agreed or strongly agreed that children should be asked to repeat new words. But only 74% of them almost always or very often ask the children to repeat after them. The inability to carry out this practice frequently may be because the helpers are occupied with household chores, or the employer explicitly instructs them not to do this. It is also possible that the helpers do not feel obliged to do this because the children they are caring for are not their own children,

and they are only paid to take care of others' children.

Caveats of this Study

It should be cautioned that behind a belief and a practice are complex interactions of many factors. A cluster of factors may seem to explain the presence of significance in a belief or practice found in one participant group. But this cannot explain the absence of significance of another belief or practice, which is similar to the one that is significantly different. For example, there are two belief items which are related to the active exploration of children. While the mothers tend to believe that caregivers should let children experiment and the helpers believe otherwise, both groups agree that children learn important things while playing. Moreover, a certain characteristic of a group may seem to explain the dominant response to one belief or practice item, but cannot explain the dominant response to an item that suggests a totally different value. For example, 92% of the helpers agree or strongly agree that children learn best when instructions are given. But at the same time, 86.5% of them agree or strongly agree that children learn important things through playing. These two belief items suggest two different modes of learning, one passive and another active. In light of the complex relationships between the factors and the beliefs or practices, among the factors and among the beliefs or practices, the discussion above provided some plausible interpretation of findings that can be followed up by ethnographic studies.

Implications of the Study

Although both groups share similarities in some beliefs and practices, differences exist due to various factors. On one hand, Chinese mothers and Filipino helpers can discuss mutually comfortable interaction patterns that are built upon their similarities. On the other hand, both groups should be aware of their differences. The increased awareness will not only enhance their mutual respect of each other's differences, but will also help them become patient with each other. In an individual family, the mother and the helper can fill in the survey of this study separately. They can then discuss the ratings with each other. Compromises can be made and optimal solutions suggested so that they can work together in order to achieve the common goal of the child's language learning.

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