

Attribution Resulting in Miscommunication between Malaysian Employers and Filipino Domestic Helpers

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the attributes of Malaysian employers as perceived by Filipino domestic helpers and shows how such attributions result in miscommunication. Attribution theory focuses on how people make sense of their world; what cause and effect inferences they make about the behaviours of others and of themselves. Attribution theory is used to explain how domestic helpers assign attributes to their employers and how such perceived attributes influence communication. Twenty Filipino domestic helpers were interviewed at the Filipino Workers' Resource Center (FWRC) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The individual narratives of domestic helpers were recorded, transcribed and analysed. The analysis focuses specifically on the attributes assigned by domestic helpers to their Malaysian employers. The themes/attributes emerging from the narratives and their effects on communication are discussed. The findings of the study reveal that Filipino domestic helpers label their Malaysian employers with negative attributes such as abusive, controlling, irritable, inconsiderate and disrespectful. Such negative attributes bring negative stereotypes resulting in miscommunication between Malaysian employers and Filipino domestic helpers.

Keywords: Attribution theory, domestic helpers, Filipino, Malaysia, miscommunication

1. INTRODUCTION

Miscommunication is not widely studied and literature shows that studies have been conducted focusing on effective communication rather than communication breakdown (Coupland, Wieman & Giles, 1991). Studying miscommunication provides explanations why such problems arise. Communication breakdown is inevitable particularly in intercultural communication since speakers from two different cultures do not have the same communicative competence (Saville-Troike, 2003). According to Hymes (1972) communicative competence involves more than grammatical competence where speakers need to know how to use the language in a particular speech community to achieve their communicative

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intent. Consequently, interactions among people who do not have the same communicative competence may result in miscommunication.

People from other Southeast Asian countries, particularly the Philippines, have come to Malaysia to work. Many Filipino women work in Malaysia as domestic helpers (Dumanig, 2010). With little knowledge about the language and cultural differences, problems arise between the foreign domestic helpers and employers. Problems between Filipino domestic helpers and Malaysian employers have at times resulted in abuse and even death.

Despite the implementation of new policies by the Philippine government to minimise such problems, miscommunication between Malaysian employers and foreign domestic workers continue to exist. This study focuses on the linguistic and cultural issues which occur in communication between Filipino domestic helpers and Malaysian employers. More specifically, this study explores the incidences of miscommunication which Filipino domestic helpers face when communicating with their Malaysian employers.



Figure 1. Map of the Philippines (Dumanig, 2010)

1.1 The Philippines

The Philippines (see Figure 1) is a multilingual and multicultural country consisting of 170 languages (Dumanig, 2007) and has a population of 88.57 million (National Statistics, 2008). People in the Philippines speak different languages and dialects but Filipino, the national language, is widely spoken. Apart from Filipino, English is also used as an official language which serves other functions specifically in the government and education sectors (Dumanig, 2010). Most Filipinos can speak English because it is used as the medium of instruction in the kindergarten, elementary, high school and college (Dumanig and David, 2011). Although multilingual education is encouraged, many people give importance to English because of the economic benefits that it brings, particularly for employment purposes. Due to the high demand for English, some Filipinos tend to compare intelligence with their ability to communicate in English (Darunday, 2006). A person who can express himself or herself freely in English can be regarded as smart but those who have a poor command of English are regarded as less intelligent (Darunday, 2006). Working overseas is one of the aims of many young Filipinos (Dumanig, 2010). Due to economic and political instability in the country, people are motivated to work overseas (Dumanig, 2010). Moreover, the Philippine government has motivated Filipinos to master English because of its aim of sending workers overseas so as to increase the country’s revenue. In some cases, Filipinos marry people of the host country and eventually live and reside permanently in these countries (Japp, 2001).

Since overseas Filipino workers leave their families behind in the Philippines, remitting their monthly income is a common practice. In fact, the remittances of overseas Filipino workers have helped to improve the economy of the Philippines (Manalansan, 2008). In 2008, the monthly remittance average rose to USD1,368,905 as shown in Table 1.

The remittances of overseas Filipino workers(OFW) have increased continuously due to the increase in Filipino workers overseas. The increasing number of OFW in various parts of the world influences the perception of Filipinos in relation to the importance of the English language. As a result, learning English is no longer a choice but a necessity. Learning the language is not just for the sake of communicating internationally but for economic access to the global world. However, the English language learned in the

Table 1. OFW remittances by origin (2008-2007)(USD,thousands)

Overseas Filipino Workers(World)	2008 (USD)	2007 (USD)
Asia	1,883,996	1,543,173
Middle East	2,502,639	2,172,417
Europe	2,658,726	2,351,704
Americas	9,213,372	8,244,344
Africa	17,746	16,027
Others	952	846
Land based total	13,392,301	12,213,565
Sea based total	3,034,553	2,236,363
Grand total	16,426,854	14,449,928
Monthly remittance average	1,368,905	1,204,161

Source: <http://www.poea.gov.ph>

Philippines is a distinct Philippine English variety (Dumanig and David, 2011). It is a New English variety that is influenced by the local Philippine languages (Dumanig and David, 2011). This is evident in the lexical, syntactic, and prosodic features of Philippine English (Dumanig and Manuelli, 2009).

Statistics show that the number of OFW from April to September 2007 was 1.75 million (National Statistics, 2008). Based on the special report released by the Philippine National Statistics Office in July 2008 the percentage of Filipinos working in other countries had increased by 15.3% compared to the numbers in 2006-2007.

Table 2 shows the percentage of Filipinos working overseas and their place of origin in the Philippines. It is clear that Filipinos who work overseas come from different regions in the Philippines. However, most Filipino overseas workers come from the Tagalog region like the CALABARZON and the national capital region.

Table 3 shows the percentage of OFW in various parts of the world. In South-east Asia, there is a huge number of overseas Filipino workers and 6% of the OFW work in Singapore while only 2.5% work in Malaysia. In Malaysia, Filipinos work in various professions. However, those who work as domestic helpers outnumber other professions. Based on an interview conducted in the Philippine Embassy at the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) there are 10,972 registered legal Filipino domestic helpers in Malaysia (Dumanig, 2010).

Table 2. Percentage distribution of Overseas Filipino Workers by region of origin (2006- 2007)

	2007	2006
Region	100.0	100.0
National Capital Region	16.0	16.4
Cordillera Administrative Region	2.1	2.2
I - Ilocos	7.7	7.6
II - Cagayan Valley	5.9	5.3
III - Central Luzon	14.3	14.5
IVA - CALABARZON	17.7	16.8
IVB - MIMAROPA	1.7	1.3
V - Bicol	3.0	2.5
VI - Western Visayas	8.5	9.5
VII - Central Visayas	5.1	5.5
VIII - Eastern Visayas	2.1	2.2
IX - Zamboanga Peninsula	2.0	2.2
X - Northern Mindanao	3.1	2.8
XI - Davao	2.6	3.1
XII - SOCCSKSARGEN	4.2	4.0
XIII - Caraga	1.0	1.1
Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao	3.1	3.1

Source: Survey on Overseas Filipinos Income and Employment, (National Statistics Philippines, 2008) (<http://www.census.gov.ph>).

Table 3. Percentage distribution of Overseas Filipino Workers by place of work abroad (2006-2007)

Place of work	2007	2006
	%	%
Africa	1.2	1.7
Asia	78.1	78.3
Hongkong	6.7	7.0
Japan	5.6	6.0
Taiwan	5.5	6.1
Other countries in East Asia (ex. China, South Korea)	3.1	3.5
Southeast and South Central Asia	10.3	9.9
Malaysia	2.5	2.8
Singapore	6.0	5.0
Other countries in Southeast and South Central Asia (ex. Brunei)	1.7	2.1
Western Asia	46.8	45.8
Kuwait	4.4	4.8
Saudi Arabia	19.8	21.8
United Arab Emirates	12.1	9.2
Qatar	4.5	3.7
Other countries in Western Asia (ex. Bahrain, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan)	6.0	6.3
Australia	1.9	1.2
Europe	9.2	9.5
North and South America	9.3	9.2
Other countries	0.3	-
Country not reported	0.1	0.2

Source: Survey on Overseas Filipinos Income and Employment, National Statistics Philippines, 2008) (<http://www.census.gov.ph>).

The Philippine government ensures that overseas Filipino workers (OFW) are supported by the policies of the government. Guidelines and policies are made by the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) to ensure the security of Filipinos working overseas. The policy emphasises that Filipinos can work abroad through direct hiring by foreign employers by using POEA licensed recruitment agencies. The agency charges the applicants a service fee to cover recruitment services rendered. The charges paid by the applicants include the costs for the passport, NBI/Police/Barangay clearance, authentication, birth certificate, medicare, and medical examination. All Filipinos who intend to work overseas regardless of the type of work undergo a similar process. However, due to a bigger number of Filipino domestic helpers working overseas and the number of cases of abuse, the Philippine government recently instituted new policies to ensure their security (Manalansan, 2008).

Recently, POEA approved a number of policy reforms to improve the security of Filipino domestic helpers. The policies are wide ranging and include the upgrading of skills of workers, orientation course on country specific culture and language, protective mechanisms at job sites, obliging employers to shoulder the cost of deploying the domestic helper, and increasing the minimum salary to a level commensurate with their acquired competencies.

To upgrade the skills of workers, all domestic helpers undergo skills assessment through the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). However, those with years of experience as household workers overseas can directly go through the TESDA skills assessment system.

To minimise the problems encountered by domestic helpers with their employers, the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) has initiated a pre-qualification system to determine the employer's fitness to hire domestic workers. The POLO and the POEA will blacklist employers who have abused and maltreated Filipino workers or have not made regular payment or underpaid them.

1.2 Malaysia



Figure 2. Map of Malaysia (Dumanig, 2010)

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multilingual society with a population of 28.31 million (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2009). Malaysia has three major ethnic groups; Malays, Chinese, and Indians and there are also other minority groups like the Orang Asli and other ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak.

Most Malaysians are Muslims (60%), followed by Buddhists (19.2%), Hindus (6.3%), and Christians (9.1%) (Manalansan, 2008). Bahasa Malaysia is the national language and English is the country's second language. Many people speak English but have different levels of proficiency. The major languages spoken are Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese (Mandarin), and Indian (Tamil).

In the past, English was widely spoken in Malaysia and used as the medium of instruction in schools. However, in 1960 Bahasa Malaysia was introduced and eventually replaced English as the medium of instruction (Venugopal, 2000). Ethnic loyalty has resulted in the establishment of vernacular schools which use their own ethnic languages as the medium of instruction in the formative years in these schools. According to Abdul Rahman Arshad

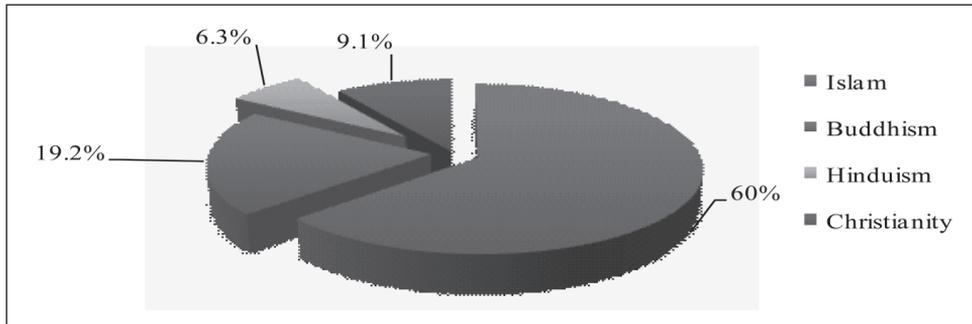


Figure 3. Religious affiliations in Malaysia (Dumanig, 2011)

(2007) there are 1,800 vernacular schools consisting of 1,286 Chinese primary schools and 514 Tamil primary schools. In 1976, all English-medium primary schools were converted into schools where Malay was used as the medium of instruction. In 1982, all English-medium secondary schools were converted to National Schools in Peninsular Malaysia; however it was only in 1985 that the use of Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction was fully implemented in Sabah and Sarawak (Solomon, 1988 as cited in David, 2007). Consequently, Bahasa Malaysia was given a high status while the status of English was changed from the medium of instruction to that of a subject (David, 2007, p. 7).

The use of Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction led to a decline in the standard of English (David and Dumanig, 2008; Ting, 2003). With the rapid development in information technology, the emergence and popularity of globalisation and the increasing importance of English resulted in a change in the language policy. The Private Educational Institutions Bill (1996) allows the use of English as the medium of instruction with the approval from the Ministry of Higher Education. Slowly, English was introduced in the national and national-type schools as the second most important language. Consequently, in 2003 English was introduced as the medium of instruction to teach Mathematics and Science. However, this policy was reversed in 2009 when Bahasa Malaysia was again implemented as the medium of instruction in teaching Mathematics and Science.

Currently, English has become an important language to many Malaysians. Some families particularly the Chinese and Indians have started using English as the medium of communication even at home (David, 2006).

1.3 Miscommunication in an Intercultural Setting

The occurrence of miscommunication in an intercultural setting is not new. There have been a number of studies that reveal the occurrence of miscommunication resulting from language issues.. Harnisch, David and Dumanig (2009) argue that crosstalk or communication breakdown occurs due to mispronunciation, conceptual misinterpretations and semiotic interference. Similar findings were revealed in a study on interaction between Malaysians and Filipinos in which miscommunication occurred due to phonological, syntactic and pragmatic differences between the two groups (Dumanig, 2011).

The occurrence of miscommunication does not only exist in the professional setting but even in the classroom. Wang Zhen Xian (2010) studied verbal miscommunication between English native speakers and Chinese learners to reach an understanding on the nature and sources of verbal miscommunication - the problematic face-to-face talk – between Chinese learners of English (CLEs) and native speakers of English (NSEs). She proposed two models: a model of L2 learners' communicative competence which can be used to account for the sources of CLE-NSE verbal miscommunication; and a model for the categorisation of CLE-NSE verbal miscommunication. Then instances of the CLE-NSE verbal miscommunication were analysed according to these two models. This model suggests that the miscommunication between the CLEs and the NSEs results from a combination of the following factors such as wrong attitude toward each other's culture, lack of awareness, ignorance of the linguistic, pragmatic or cultural knowledge, and inability to perform correct or appropriate linguistic and pragmatic actions.

Cahillane *et al.* (2009) studied the perception of miscommunication in a coalition environment and the impact of such miscommunication between UK and US military personnel. The perceived frequency and impact of miscommunications arising from different communication media were examined. A secured web-based questionnaire was used to address security issues. The study showed that miscommunication events in a US-UK coalition do occur and these have a significant impact on work performance.

Poteet *et al.* (2008) believe that miscommunication manifests in a number of ways and at different levels of language use. Some instances of miscommunication are simply due to lexical differences, which are not closely related to culture. Differences in styles of communication are more closely associated with cultures. The study looked at a small sample of anecdotes of miscommunication between UK and US military groups. They have identified various types of linguistic variations and cultural differences manifested by the US and UK groups. American English and British English differ in complex ways not only in terms of lexical differences but also, perhaps more importantly, in terms of language use due to cultural differences. The results indicate that much needs to be studied about the current coalition communication patterns, styles and other characteristics of language use. This would then help in identifying appropriate strategies and tools that need to be developed to improve process and cognitive interpretability among multinational forces. Importantly, the current analysis suggests that many relevant issues are largely pragmatic in nature, and move beyond lexical and grammatical differences to 'semantic' similarity of the communication content.

Problems in miscommunication are also caused by negative attributions made by workers of their employers. Such attribution leads to negative stereotyping which influences the communication process. Attribution Theory is used to anchor the current study.

2. ATTRIBUTION THEORY

This paper uses the Attribution Theory to explain the occurrence of miscommunication between Filipino domestic helpers and Malaysian employers. The theory originates from the concept of attribution which is the set of thought processes used to explain a person's

own behaviour and that of others (Wiener, 2000). The theory was founded and developed by Heider, who emphasised the differences between internal and external causes of behaviour (Heider, 1958). Internal attributions are explanations based on individual characteristics, such as attitudes, personality traits, or abilities while external attributions are explanations based on the situation, including events that presumably would influence almost anyone (Wiener, 2000). Internal attributions or dispositional explains that an individual's disposition leads to a specific behaviour. On the other hand, external attributions or situational explains that a specific situation leads to a particular behaviour. Internal attributions occur when information is surprising. Internal and external attributions may lead to misunderstandings between members of different cultures.

Kelley (1967) proposed three types of information when creating an internal or an external attribution for someone's behaviour such as consensus information, consistency information, and distinctiveness. Consensus information focuses on how a person's behaviour compares with the behaviour of others. If someone behaves the same way you believe other people would in the same situation, you make an external attribution, recognising that the situation led to the behaviour. When a behaviour seems unusual, you look for an internal attribution pertaining to the person. Consistency information focuses on the person's behaviour which varies from one time to the next.

Both internal and external attributions are confirmed by certain stereotypes. Such stereotypes strengthen the individual's view of their own and the behaviour of others. Communication is influenced by stereotyping which produces either positive or negative attributions. Stereotyping and attributions can explain the miscommunication that occurs between Filipino domestic helpers and Malaysian employers.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative approach which specifically employed a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is a method of inquiry which is based on the premise that reality consists of objects and events as they are perceived or understood in human consciousness and not of anything independent of human consciousness (Husserl, 1991).

The participants were selected by the Philippine embassy and were Filipino domestic helpers who had left their employers without any formal termination of their contracts. Prior to the interview, an approval from the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) was obtained. Another approval was needed by the officers in the Filipino Workers' Resource Center (FWRC) before the interview was allowed. Detailed information about the research including the interview questions were submitted for checking and verification.

A total of twenty (20) Filipino domestic workers were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain personal experiences. The interviews were conducted in the Filipino Workers' Resource Center (FWRC) where Filipino domestic helpers facing problems with their employers were housed. The data collected were analysed qualitatively by examining specifically the linguistic and socio-psychological issues in the narratives obtained.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Profile of Filipino Domestic Helpers

The findings of the study show that Filipino domestic workers' age varied from 24-41 years. The majority of the respondents, making up 45% of the sample, are in their early adulthood ranging from 26-30 years old.

Table 4. Age of Filipino domestic workers

Age group	No	%
20-25	5	25
26-30	9	45
31-35	2	10
36-40	2	10
41-45	2	10

It is evident that domestic helpers who encountered problems were those who worked in Petaling Jaya, Penang, Perak, and Damansara (a suburb in Kuala Lumpur). There are more single than married domestic workers.. This means that most women who prefer to work overseas are single.

Table 5. Marital status of Filipino domestic workers

Marital status	No	%
Single	12	60
Married	8	40

The data further shows that 50% of Filipino domestic helpers who had problems with their Malaysian employers did not complete their college education. However, 25% of them completed their college or university degrees while the other 25% were high school graduates.

Table 6. Education level of Filipino domestic workers

Education	No	%
University/College Degree	5	25
Some college education	10	50
High school	5	25
Elementary	0	0

In general, Filipino domestic helpers went to college and as a result they can communicate quite well in English with their Malaysian employers. The languages spoken by the respondents vary. Moreover, 25% of them can converse in Bahasa Malaysia particularly those who had Malay employers.

Table 7. Languages spoken by the Filipino domestic workers

Languages	No	%
English	20	100
Filipino	20	100
Bahasa Indonesia	0	0
Bahasa Malaysia	5	25
Chinese	2	10

The Filipino domestic helpers who experienced problems with their employers are all Christians. They are either Catholics or born again Christians.

Table 8. Religion of the Filipino domestic workers

Religion	No	%
Christian	20	100
Muslim	0	0
Buddhist	0	0
Hindu	0	0

4.2 Employment Status

The data shows that 70% of the participants who came to Malaysia as domestic helpers underwent a legal process required by the employment agency in the Philippines and Malaysia. However, 20% of them came to Malaysia as tourists and later began work as domestic helpers; they had their work permits processed after finding employers. Ten percent (10%) of the domestic helpers were hired directly by the employers. This means that 80% of Filipino domestic helpers have legal documents.

Table 9. Employment status of Filipino domestic workers

Mode of hiring	No	%
Direct hiring	2	10
Employment agency	14	70
Tourist	4	20

4.2 Employment Fees and Procedures

For Filipino domestic helpers, working overseas as domestic helpers requires them to first pay a considerable sum of money to an agency to process their papers and other relevant documents. During the application process they are required to pay from PhP 2,500-PhP 3000 for the processing fee, PhP 1,200-PhP 2,700 for travel documents PhP 4,000 for air ticket from the province to Manila, and PhP 3,950-PhP 6,000 for medical tests. This would mean that prior to their deployment to Malaysia, they would have spend more or less PhP 30,000 (MYR 2, 310).

In addition they would also have to spend a certain amount for their training. Domestic helpers undergo training in TESDA and OWWA. They are taught how to operate some household appliances and given information about the language and culture of the countries they will be working in. This means that Filipino domestic helpers are equipped with necessary skills before they commence work.

Filipino domestic helpers read and sign their contracts before leaving the Philippines. Consequently, they are fully aware of their rights and responsibilities. These include their monthly salary, day off and type of work.

4.3 Employment Issues

From the interviews conducted, out of twenty (20) domestic helpers, 16 of them were working for Chinese employers, 3 for Indian employers and 1 for a Malay employer. This means the narratives analysed will be provided mainly by those working for Chinese employers. Some employers did not pay them the salary based on the contract. They received monthly salaries ranging from RM 750 to RM 1200. Their services included *inter alia* cooking, marketing, cleaning, taking care of the children, taking care of the sick/disabled/elderly, laundering, ironing, doing massage, gardening, stitching, car washing, and tutoring.

The domestic helpers narrated the problems they encountered with their respective employers. They stated that their employers were frequently angry with them, and that they had communication problems. The maids were physically abused, had no freedom and received their salaries late. From the interviews conducted, they say:

My boss is very fussy and always angry all the time.
Ako po ay lumayas sa bahay kasi sinampal niya ako. (I left the house because my employer slapped my face).
 They don't pay me. Delayed payment of salary.
 We have problems in communication.
 She doesn't want me to have friends and I do not have freedom to spend my own money.
 I sometimes cannot understand them when talking.
 They are too lazy in everything and they want me to do all the work at home.

Because of such issues, all participants were not happy and satisfied with their jobs. When asked if they were satisfied with their job, the domestic helpers gave negative responses. They could not understand their Malaysian employers. It is also evident that Filipino domestic helpers are not understood by their employers. They say:

No, because all the time they are always angry. Always complaining about my work.
No, hindi po ako nakatagal kasi masyado po problema ang employer ko pag tapos na po akong magtrabaho parang gusto niya naman akong sabunutan kasi nagpapahinga lang ako saglit. (No, I can't stand this

because my employer is really problematic; after doing something, when I just rest for a while, then she wants me to do something else. She doesn't want me to rest even for a while).

No, kasi mahigpit sila sa mga bagay bagay at hindi nila ako pinapahawak nang sahod ko. (No, they are very strict in all things and they do not want me to keep my salary).

Wala din daw akong karapatan na makipag kaibigan sa mga kapwa Pilipino. (They told me I don't have the right to build friendship with other Filipinos)

No, Minsan di magkaintindihan sa pagsasalita. Lagi sila ang tama. (No, we don't understand each other. They are always right)

No, kasi ginawa mo na nga ang lahat di pa sila content sa trabaho mo, palaging nagcocomplain, ayaw nilang nakikita kang nakatunganga ka na walang ginagawa. (No, because even though you have done everything for them, they are still not contented; they always complain, they do not want to see you not doing anything)

No, because it's my first experience working as a housemaid but I am not happy with my employer because they want me to do everything.

4.4 Language and Communication Problems

Problems in language is seen to be a major factor why Filipino domestic helpers and Malaysian employers encountered problems. Misunderstandings occur due to lack of proficiency in the English language. Sometimes the message is not understood clearly or it is understood differently.

4.4.1 English language problem

English is the only language that Filipino domestic helpers and Malaysian employers can use to understand each other. Despite having one common language, miscommunication still occurs due to lack of proficiency. Malaysian employers and Filipino domestic helpers vary in their language proficiency in English. Such different levels of English language proficiency result in problems when communicating. The Filipino domestic helpers commented, "*they want me to understand easily or fully, yet sometimes, they pronounce the words incorrectly, oftentimes, I have a bit of trouble because of their accent and they understand me but I could not understand them because their 'L' becomes 'R'*". Based on the interviews conducted, the domestic helpers say:

Ang employer ko minsan hindi kami mag-kahintindihan. (My employer and I sometimes do not understand each other).

English. Yong matanda di marunong mag English sign language lang kami parati (we speak English but the old people do not know English, then we just use sign language all the time.)

Sometimes if the parents of my employer do not speak English, we use sign language.

Mahirap sila intindihin kasi minsan mali mali ang grammar nila at lagi masusungit sigaw ng sigaw. (It's difficult to understand them because they speak with wrong grammar, they are always angry and they keep on shouting)

Naiintindihan nila ako, pero diko sila maintindihan kasi yong L nila ay magiging R. Example Table sa kanila Tabor. (They understand me but I could not understand them because their 'L' becomes 'R'. Example 'Table' becomes 'Tabor'.)

Oftentimes, I have a bit of trouble because of their accent.

Sometimes their English is difficult.

They want me to understand easily or fully, yet sometimes, they pronounce the words incorrectly.

4.4.2 Attributions and miscommunication

From the narratives of Filipino domestic helpers, it is evident that one of the factors that lead to miscommunication is the quality/qualities that domestic helpers attribute to their Malaysian employers. External attributes are seen to be the common causes of identifying the behaviour and attitude of employers. This means that they tend to focus on situations where they judge their employers' behaviour. Such judgements lead to stereotyping and eventually influence their ways and manners of communication and may lead to miscommunication. In the interviews conducted, the participants perceive their Malaysian employers as abusive (verbal and physical abuse), controlling (financial control), irritable, inconsiderate and disrespectful.

1.5 Attributes of Employers

4.5.1 Abusive employers

Being abusive is perceived by Filipino domestic helpers as a common attitude of Malaysian employers. The abuse can be classified as verbal which includes shouting and cursing and physical abuse which includes slapping and hitting some parts of the body. Such attribution made by domestic helpers is based on the external causes. This means that the attribution is based on what the domestic helpers actually see. Such abusive character traits of employers are evident in the narratives.

Ako po ay lumayas sa bahay kasi sinampal niya ako. (I left the house because my employer slapped my face).

Naka experience ako dito ng sinampal nila ako paulit-ulit. (I have been slapped on my face many times.)

Minsan sasampalin ka at sipain nila. (Sometimes they slap your face and kick you).

Minsan hindi kami nagkaintindihan ng amo ko kasi pag meron siyang sinasabi sa akin sinisigawan niya ako. (Sometimes we don't understand each other because when he says something he shouts at me)
Yes, minsan pag may instruction sila na hindi naming makuha yung gusto nila. They simply say I am stupid. (Yes, sometimes if they have instructions and if I don't understand what they want, they simply say I'm stupid).
 Sometimes my employer calls me like an animal. He says "Hey, do this".
 Sometimes they insult me, but I cannot do anything, just cry always.

From the narratives, Filipino domestic helpers claim that they are physically abused by their Malaysian employers. They state that slapping their face seems to be a common physical abuse that they get from their employers. Such abusive behaviour is based on external causes like hurting the helpers physically.

At the same time Filipino domestic helpers claim that they are verbally abused by their employers. They are always shouted at when they do not meet the expectations of their employers. Sometimes domestic helpers are labelled as 'stupid' when they do not perform well in their jobs. Shouting and calling them 'stupid' results in the employers being evaluated as abusive.

The abusive behaviour which is a negative attribute may result in breakdown in communication. Due to verbal and physical abuse, Filipino domestic helpers tend not to talk to their employers and keep their hurt feelings to themselves. Although, they want to say something, they refrain from saying it to avoid verbal and physical abuse. In short, communication is minimised. From the narrative, this reticence and withdrawal on the part of the helpers is clear:

Tahimik nalang ako, wala ring magagawa kung magsalita. (I'll just keep quiet, nothing will happen if I do not say something)
Mas maganda kung di ka nalang magsalita (It's better if you do not say something)
Mas lalaki ang problema kung magsalita pa. (The problem becomes worse when you speak)
Minsan ayaw ko nalang sumagot sa mga tanong nila baka masigawan pa ako. (Sometimes I don't answer their questions because they might shout at me)
Oo nalang ako n goo kahit ayaw ko. (I'll just say yes although I don't like it).
Wala akong magawa katulong lang ako. (I can't do anything, I'm just a housemaid)

4.5.2 Controlling attitude of employers

Controlling the financial issues of the helpers such as keeping their salaries and controlling their expenditure is viewed by Filipino domestic helpers as negative behaviour on the part

of their Malaysian employers. The control is seen as a form of not giving them the freedom to keep and spend their own money. The Filipino domestic helpers say “*she doesn’t want me to have friends and doesn’t want me to have the freedom to spend my own money, they are very strict in all things and they do not want me to keep my salary*” Such controlling behaviour of employers is evident in the narratives.

She doesn’t want me to have friends and doesn’t want me to have freedom to spend my own money.

No, kasi mahigpit sila sa mga bagay bagay at hindi nila ako pinapahawak nang sahod ko. (No, they are very strict in all things and they do not want me to keep my salary). Wala din daw akong karapatan na makipag kaibigan sa mga kapwa Pilipino. (They told me I don’t have the right to build friendships with other Filipinos)

Control nila ang pera lalo na pag gusto kong magpadala at kung saan saan din nila ako pinapatrabaho mga kapatid, friends. (They control my money particularly if I send money and they bring me to work for their brothers, sisters and friends).

Sila yung namamahala sa pera ko ayaw nila makita na may binibili ako, kahit sariling pera ko yun. (They keep my money and they don’t want to see me buying something though it’s my own money)

Kasi sila ang humahawak ng sweldo, kung may ipabibili ako sabihin huwag daw don’t waste money. (They keep my salary and if I request to buy something, they will say don’t waste money.)

Such control may lead to problems in communication between the employers and domestic helpers. Consequently, the helpers tend to avoid telling their employers of their personal needs and personal problems. Thus it minimises their interactions. In their narratives, they say

Marami akong kailangan pero di ko nalang sinasabi kasi di rin naman maibigay. (I need many things but I don’t bother to say it because they won’t give it)

Minsan gusto kung bumili ng kahit ano pero di ko na sinasabi baka magalit lang. (Sometimes I want to buy something but I don’t say it because they might get mad)

Feeling ko nakakulong ako pero ayaw ko nang magsabi sa kanila. (I feel I am in jail but I don’t want to tell them)

Gusto ko magpadala pero wala akong hawak na pera pero di nalang ako nagsasalita. (I want to send money but I don’t have money with me, so I just keep quiet)

4.5.3 Irritable employers

Filipino domestic helpers attributed their Malaysian employers as people who are always angry. Such irritable behaviour is negatively perceived by Filipino domestic helpers and

has also contributed to the negative responses of the helpers when communicating with their employers. They say, “*My boss is very fussy and always angry all the time, I keep on asking because sometimes I cannot understand what they are talking about and they get angry.*” Such behaviour of being always angry is reflected in their narratives.

My boss is very fussy and always angry all the time.
 No, because all the time they are always angry. Always complaining about my work.
 Yes, all the time because she is always complaining and angry all the time.
 I keep on asking because sometimes I cannot understand what they are talking about and they get angry.

The anger that the employers have shown to their employees has resulted in minimal communication. They say:

Natatakot na akong magsalita baka sila magalit at sigawan lang ako. (I am afraid to say something because they might be angry and they will shout at me)
Kapag nagtanong sila kinakabahan ako baka kung may masasabi ako at magalit ulit. (If they ask something I am scared because I might say something that would make them angry)
Mas mabuti nang tumahimik para di sila magalit. (It’s better to keep quiet so they will not get angry)
Siguro iiyak nalang ako sa kwarto kung di ko masabi ang gusto ko para wala ng gulo. (Maybe I’ll just cry in my room if I can’t say what I want so there will be no problem)

4.5.4 Inconsiderate employers

Malaysian employers are also perceived by the helpers as inconsiderate. Malaysian employers do not seem to understand the needs of their helpers. The domestic helpers say, “*they don’t pay me, or delay the payment of my salary; sometimes we can’t understand each other because they cannot accept me because they want me to be a perfect maid.*” In the interviews conducted, Filipino domestic helpers narrated:

They don’t pay me. Payment of my salary is delayed.
 They are too lazy to do anything and they want me to do all the work at home.
No, hindi po ako nakatagal kasi masyado po problema ang employer ko pag tapos na po akong magtrabaho parang gusto niya naman akong sabunutan kasi nagpapahinga lang ako saglit. (No, I can’t stand because my employer is really problematic; after doing something, I just rest for a while; then she wants me to do something else. She doesn’t want me to rest even for a while).

Minsan di magkaintindihan sa pagsasalita. Lagi sila ang tama.
(Sometimes we don't understand each other. They are always right)
Kahit ginawa mo na nga ang lahat di pa sila content sa trabaho mo, palaging nagcocomplain, ayaw nilang nakikita kang nakatunganga ka na walang ginagawa. (Even though you have done everything for them, they are still not contented, they always complain, they do not want to see you not doing anything)
It's my first experience working as a housemaid but I am not happy with my employer because they want me to do everything.
Sometimes we can't understand each other because they cannot accept me because they want me to be a perfect maid.

4.5.5 Disrespectful employers

Filipino domestic helpers feel that Malaysian employers are disrespectful and look down on the maids. They feel that Malaysian employers do not appreciate them and instead belittle them. Such negative attitudes of employers has resulted in reducing the self-esteem of the domestic helpers. As a result, domestic helpers pity themselves. The helpers say, "*sometimes they insult me, but I can do nothing, just cry always, they don't respect a housemaid, they underestimate us.*" In the interviews conducted, they say:

Mainit ang ulo lagi at minamaliit nila ang kakayahan nang mga Filipino. (They are always irritated and they look down on the Filipinos).
Oo lagi ako minumura pinapahiya sa marami tao. (Yes, they always curse and belittle me in front of many people.)
They don't respect a housemaid, they under estimate me.
Sometimes they insult me, but I cannot do nothing, just cry always.
I encounter emotional abuse. My female employer always insults me.

5. CONCLUSION

It is clear that the Philippine government has implemented a strict policy of hiring Filipino domestic helpers in order to safeguard them while working overseas. However, the problem appears to be personal relationships and communication between the employers and house help. This is the reason that problems of abuse of domestic helpers still exist despite the new policies implemented by the Philippine government. Problems in communication are seen not only in the language used by the Malaysian employer and Filipino domestic helpers but is more evident in the behaviour attributed by the domestic helpers towards their Malaysian employers. Communication breakdowns or miscommunication occurs because of the negative attributions caused by external factors. Negative attributions like abusive, controlling, irritable, inconsiderate and disrespectful lead to stereotyping of Malaysian employers. This in turn results in minimal communication or no communication. Filipino domestic helpers minimise their interactions with their Malaysian employers due to negative attributes and negative stereotypes. When personal problems and other issues

between the employers and Filipino domestic helpers are not resolved due to negative attributes and stereotyping, problems will escalate over time.

It is hoped that such information as provided by this study can be used by the relevant authorities to ensure a more positive attribution of Malaysian employers by their Filipino house helpers.

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