

How Love is Perceived by Malaysian Malay Children

Kuang Ching Hei^{1*} & Maya Khemlani David²

¹Consultant, Learning & Development, Universal Business Academy, Malaysia

² Professor of sociolinguistics, Associate Member, Asia-Europe Institute, University Malaya, Malaysia

Corresponding Author: Kuang Ching Hei, E-mail: djeb13@yahoo.co.uk

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how love is perceived by Malaysian Malay children from two perspectives: parental love and their own expression of love. They were volunteers who agreed to participate in the study. Their ages ranged from 10 to 12 years old and they were school going Malay children. Four questions were posed to gather their written responses. Due to some incomplete answers, a total of 93 sets of data were found to be suitable for analysis. Using the love language categories proposed, data were then categorised accordingly. Findings suggest that majority of the children perceive their parent's love language as 'Acts of service' and 'Receiving gifts' and to a small extent, 'Physical touch'. Similarly, the love language expressed by majority of the Malay children encompass 'Acts of service' and 'Receiving gifts'. This could indicate that the expression of love in a Malaysian Malay context could be influenced by the parenting styles. However, about a quarter of the total responses did not fit into the categories proposed. This implies that the love language of the Malaysian Malay children cannot be completely analysed through a western model and that some cultural differences exist. Due to the small sample, the outcome of this study cannot be generalised but it is an eye opener for parents, psychologists and foreigners alike who may use this information to better understand how the Malaysian Malay family functions. This information could increase a more harmonious interaction among different cultures in the future.

INTRODUCTION

Love is an important value in life; it sustains relationships and marriages (Hoesni, Subhi, Alavi, & Wan, 2013) and it glues the family together. It is "the most important essence of the family well-being" (Jamiah, Fazilah, Syaidatun, & Zuraidah, 2015, p.11) and it allows the mother to raise her children to become great individuals (Jamiah et al., 2015). Love is an important core of the family because it not only enhances family relationships but also provides children with stability. This in turn, makes the children confident individuals who are better at dealing with life problems (Jamiah et al., 2015; Razali & Razali, 2013). This fact has been further endorsed by the Bucharest Intervention Project (The Guardian, February 17, 2006) which states that love strengthens the quality of a child hence it is an insurance for a better adult life. Better adults mean a better society and a better society means a better country that is not only healthy, happy and forward going but also one that is desired and respected by others.

Love is an emotion that is inherent in human beings yet many are overwhelmed by it because of its ambiguous nature. Some people die because of love

and others kill because of love. Wars are staged because of love as exemplified in the story of the Trojan horse and friendships have ended because of love as illustrated by Mark Anthony and Julius Caesar in the story of 'Cleopatra'. Although most people relate to the concept of love, many tend to link love to the heart because love is felt. The truth is that the feeling of love is initially triggered in the brain by various chemical processes running in the body. Thus love, especially romantic love, makes people 'intoxicated' (see Chapman, 2011).

According to Dictionary.com, love is "a profoundly tender and passionate affection for another person, a feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection as for a parent, child, or friend" (love, n.d. in <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/love>). Harlow (1958) notes that love is a wondrous state; it is deep, tender and rewarding because of its intimate and personal nature but there are some who regard "love

as an improper topic for experimental research” (Harlow, 1958, p. 678). Western culture defines the emotion of love in one word ‘love’ whether as passion or affection. The word can be used to denote the declaration of one’s deep and respectful feeling for one’s parents, the immense desire one has for a lover, the revered feeling one has for God or the patriotic feeling one has for one’s country. The same word, ‘love’, can also be used to express the intermittent feelings one has for materials such as ‘I love ice creams’ or ‘I love music’. In contrast, the unassuming and non-conflicting culture of the Malays (Asmah, 1995; Jamaliah, 2000) contain different words which distinguish the variations of love. For example, Love for God is *Cinta pada Tuhan*; Love for one’s country is *Cinta pada negara*; Love for one’s parents is *Sayang pada ibu/bapa*; Love for one’s spouse/lover is *Kasih pada suami/isteri* while Love for one’s indulgence such as a singing idol, is *Minat XYZ* and to Love sleeping is simply *Suka tidur*. In the Malay language, there are different lexical items to denote these variations of ‘love’ hence, the difference in cultural values.

Although love is a universal concept, the expression or the feeling of love may not be universal (Karandashev, 2015). Thus, it may not be adequate to define the concept of love through one particular culture alone. Research focusing on the concept of love from different cultures need to be further explored (see Harlow, 1958). In particular, there is a need to explore how children perceive parental love and how they would express love to others such as their parents. This is because when children sense that they are loved (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012), they are more likely to love in return. Consequently, they acquire a personal sense of identity which strengthens their self-esteem and confidence (see Jamiah et al., 2015; Razali & Razali, 2013) as well as values which build up their character. These are extremely important in today’s world that is filled with immense stress, peer pressure and poor mental health. Adults who possess a strong sense of love feel supported in whatever they do therefore, they are better able to deal with the daily issues encountered in their lives. Their contributions to society can help to alleviate the propensity for mental health issues such as depression, stress or hopelessness which can affect many people, if they feel unloved or unsupported by their loved ones. The World Bank (The STAR Online, April 2, 2017) predicted that 340 million people in the world would be affected by depression by the year 2020 (<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2017/04/02/malaysians-will-suffer-from-mental-health-issues-in-their-lifetime/#h3Daujv7PC0z0d14.99>). The statistics also mention that this encompass 40 percent

of Malaysians (The Star Online, April 2, 2017). This is a serious matter to the country because mental health issues incur a lot of expenses for the government and it impedes the country’s economic growth and development (see Impact of Economic Crises on Mental Health Issues, World Health Organisation, 2011).

With Malaysia striving to reach a developed world status in less than two years (Vision 2020), it is imperative for the country to monitor its human resources development. In order to prevent the mental health issues from escalating, it is thus vital that more studies be conducted to assess how young people in Malaysia experience and cope with life. One aspect that is related to this is in the emotion of love or how they are loved. This important aspect concerns their future and the future of the country because a well developed child will evolve into a well developed adult which in turn produces a healthy society. Love can do wonders for society (see Jamiah et al., 2015; Razali & Razali, 2013; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012) thus it is necessary to conduct studies that look into this discipline. Another benefit of drawing empirical evidence from studies is that the evidence can be used to support claims. In this regard, the actual data that can be drawn from examining and analysing how children perceive love can be used as an input into understanding their parents’ parenting styles and practices. This is because children’s perception of love are modelled by their parents’ practices. An insight into this can help to clarify some grey areas of Malaysian Malay parenting practices which may have been inadvertently misunderstood by other cultures such as the west. An example is traced to the incident reported in the STAR Online (March 28, 2014) which said that two Malaysian Malay parents were imprisoned in Sweden for assaulting their children with *rotan* and hangers although the parents had claimed that their actions were a part of their discipline.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of love

As an integral part of the human life, love has often been perceived as something that one feels inside. The Collins English Dictionary (2006, p. 470) defines love as an intense emotion of affection towards a person or thing; a deep feeling of sexual attraction; wholehearted liking for or pleasure in something while Dictionary.com defines love as a feeling of great wonder which is deep, tender and rewarding (totescute.com, n.d.). Love is a state of the mind which gives the respective individual a sense of good feeling. This implies that love is something intimately shared between two or more individuals

who care and value each other so much that the emotion they experience becomes one that is deep, tender and rewarding. In one website (totescute.com, n.d.), the concept of love was noted as something special but complicated to understand. It states, "Artists, poets and painters all consider the heart as a symbol of love" (totescute.com, n.d.) but scientifically, it is the brain that generates the chemical signals that make people understand love (see Chapman, 2011). The heart may symbolise love between two individuals but one can have 'love' for various material things in life. Therefore, it is important to differentiate the various types of love and the different ways of expressing love. The website, totescute.com suggests that there are four types of Greek love (the first four) but Burton (June 25, 2016) adds an additional three (the subsequent three) to make it to seven.

- a. **Agape.** This refers to the kind of unconditional love that one has for another regardless of the good and bad the individual brings; sacrifices are made without expectations. The translation of agape love is love in the verb form, demonstrated through one's behaviour towards another person. It is a committed and chosen love.
- b. **Phileo.** This refers to the affectionate, warm and tender feeling shared between platonic friends. Phileo love is the kind that livens up Agape love. The translation of phileo love is love in the noun form; it is about how you feel about someone; it is a committed and chosen love.
- c. **Storge.** This refers to the love that parents naturally feel for their children, the kind that a member of the family feels for each other or between friends. This type of love may transform into a romantic relationship when the couple becomes best of friends. Storge is unconditional; it accepts flaws, faults and ultimately drives one to forgive. It is committed, sacrificial and makes one feel secure, comfortable and safe.
- d. **Eros.** This refers to the love that is passionate and intense because it arouses romantic feelings and triggers high feelings in a new relationship. It makes one say "I love him/her". It is emotional and sexual. Although this romantic love is important in the beginning of a relationship, it may lessen unless it moves to a higher level. Eros focuses more on self than the other person. If the person "in love" does not feel good about the relationship anymore, the person stops loving the partner.
- e. **Ludus.** This refers to the playful or uncommitted love which involves teasing and dancing or overt flirting, seducing, and conjugating. The focus is on fun and sometimes conquest, with no strings attached.
- f. **Pragma.** This refers to a kind of practical love founded on reason or duty and one's longer-term interest. Sexual attraction takes a back seat in favour of personal qualities and compatibilities and shared goals.
- g. **Philautia.** This refers to self-love which can be healthy or unhealthy. Unhealthy self-love is akin to hubris which in ancient Greece, is when the person places himself above the gods, like modern politicians.

From these seven types of love identified, the focus that is most relevant to this study is Storge, the love that parents feel for their children and vice versa, as family members.

Studies of 'love'

The concept of love has been studied from the biological, psychological, philosophical and cultural perspective (see Braxton-Davis, 2010; Chapman, 2011; Karandashev, 2015). Braxton-Davis (2010) focused on how people fall in love within the context of "Social Psychology of Love and Attraction". Her results indicated several outcomes one of which states that parents or caregivers have a strong impact on how individuals love and who they are attracted to. She found that individuals whose parents were still married were most likely to fall in love and enter into relationships, suggesting an emulation process that was unconsciously acquired during the process of growing up within their own families (Braxton-Davis, 2010).

Chapman (2011) studied the romantic love experienced by couples. She noted that love was felt "both as an analgesic and sedative" (Chapman, 2011, p. 7). Looking at the biological perspective, she explained that when love is felt, various chemicals such as endorphins are released into the body. When this happens, the sensation of euphoria is felt and pain is relieved (Chapman, 2011, p. 7).

Karandashev's (2015) paper looked at the concept of romantic love from the historical, anthropological and biological perspectives. From the wide comparisons made, it was concluded that throughout history, throughout the world and in various cultures, most people have experienced love. However, this concept of love does not manifest itself in the same way for all people in all cultures because different cultures perceive the giving and taking of love

differently. Thus, culture has an influence on how people view love; culture affects how the individuals feel and think about love.

Määttä and Uusiautti (2012) examined a number of Finnish studies (Määttä, 2010; 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012; Määttä, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2012) on love and its various forms of love. Focusing on “Parental Love: Irreplaceable for Children’s Well-Being”, they found that all the children in those studies had emphasised that the most important thing they wanted in their lives was to be cared for and loved by their parents. However, despite this desire, parents do not always express their love outwardly for their adolescent children.

From the Turkish perspective, Kılıçgüna (2016) aimed to understand how four to six year old children perceived their parent’s love. A face-to-face interview was conducted with 240 children and she asked them one question, “How do you know that your mother/father loves you?” Content analysis was used to analyse the data. Based on the themes, she was able to classify them according to six categories which include: physical contact with parents, parental approval words, spending quality time with parents, being given presents by parents, ensuring basic needs of child by parent and meeting parental expectations. These were itemised in the order of frequency noted from her data. She concluded that a healthy parent-child relationship is important for the child’s future relationship and development.

In the Malaysian context, the concept of love has been examined but not specifically from the children’s perspective. Among these is the statistical study on “Love and marital satisfaction among urban Malays” (Hoesni, Norba’yah, Wan Shahrazad & Sarah, 2016), “Exploring marital satisfaction among Malay married males” (Hoesni, Alavi, Subhi, & Wan Azreena, 2013), and “Exploring expressions of marital love prototype among married urban Malays (Hoesni, Hashim, & Sarah, 2013). Although love was the focus, these studies emphasized more on marriages.

Another study conducted on Malaysians was by Gomez and Suhaimi (2015). They concentrated on “Parent–parental acceptance–rejection questionnaire: invariance across ratings of Malay, Chinese and Indian Children”. From their results, they concluded that Malaysians are in general, collectivist in nature. However, there was evidence to suggest that the Malaysian society was evolving. The researchers claimed that as the society modernises, its traditional values were also fused with some modern western values. This transformation is more evident as the

country attempts to acquire an industrialised nation status. Based on the outcome of their study, the authors concluded that both modern western values and culture-specific values co-exist within the Malaysian context. This common set of traditional cum modern western values may have influenced the attitude of the Malay, Chinese, and Indian parents hence, their parenting practices. In this regard, the different cultural and ethnic groups may not be as distinct as has been described by others (Zawawi, 2008; Chi et al., 2012; Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009; Quah, 2004). In other words, it is likely that these parents may have adapted their values from other cultures such as the west.

Keshavarz and Baharudin (2009) noted that in the Malay culture, parents have an important impact on their children’s attitudes and behaviour. Parents are the main influence in the family; they provide guidance to their children towards their children’s spiritual growth. Majority of the Malay parents continue to emphasise on the values of unity, sharing and caring for others in their families, suggesting that family values are more consistently imparted in Malay families.

Parenting styles

In their work, Russell, Crockett and Chao (2010) noted that there was a difference in parenting styles between the white Americans and Asian Americans. They noted that the former practised the authoritative parenting style while the latter practised the authoritarian parenting style which has been described as being less supportive and more rigid. The ResearchLink (Volume 2, Number 1 in <http://McClellandInstitute.arizona.edu>) however, mentions that there could be differences, for example, Asian parents may support their children instrumentally; they ‘make sacrifices’ such as leaving their secure jobs in their home country to migrate to another country which offers better opportunities in life for their children. Asian parents who provide resources for their children’s daily needs are also showing love although saying ‘I love you’ is not in their repertoire (see Lan, 2015; Phan 2016; ResearchLink p.3 in <http://McClellandInstitute.arizona.edu>).

Hugging and praising is part of the western parents’ authoritative style and children derived from this kind of parenting style coped better with problems, they do better in schools and they suffer less from delinquency and depressions (Russell et al. 2010). Nonetheless, the report in ResearchLink (Volume 2, Number 1) also asserted that parenting styles that promote optimal development may differ culturally in important ways. Thus, it was recommended that

professionals working with Asian youths develop a sensitivity to cultural differences which can be manifested through parents' behaviors and expectations. For instance, it was observed that Asian parents' support for their children tend to be different from the western (white) parents because such concepts mean different things to them.

In an anecdotal article (August 24, 2015), Lan wrote that some Asian parents express love through "Worrying" – they ask if you are hungry; some through "Actions" – they are prepared to cook for you, keep you company when you do tuition or play the piano; some "Give Gifts" – they send you money when you are studying away from home, some "Care for you" – give you messages, look after you when you are sick and some make "Sacrifices" – they can spend on you but they would rather you not spend on them. Similarly, Phan (February 18, 2016 in <https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/life/family/article/2016/02/18/different-ways-asian-parents-show-their-love>) also noted that Asian families do not hug or kiss their children. They show love differently.

Focussing on Malaysians, Ang (2006) noted that the different parenting styles of the respective parents from the different ethnic groups have an impact on the personal and social behaviours of the adolescents in particular, the Malay and Chinese adolescents. Ang (2006) remarked that the Malaysian (Malays, Chinese, and Indians) parents' different cultural values had influenced their attitudes and behaviours which subsequently, affected their parenting styles and interactions with their children.

Comparing Malaysia and mainland China's parents and their parenting styles, Bao and Xu (2006) revealed that Malay adolescents were more attached to their parents and peers as compared to the Malaysian Chinese and mainland Chinese adolescents.

Examining the differences in parenting styles and expectations among Singaporean Malays, Chinese, and Indians, Quah (2004) found that physical punishment was more likely to be considered by Chinese parents as an effective means of disciplining their children when compared to Indian and Malay parents. This finding was also supported by Chi, Baharudin, and Hossain (2012). Quah (2004) further reported that Chinese parents were less likely to demonstrate affections by hugging, kissing or holding their children when compared to the others. She stated that the parents' practice of Confucianism had caused them to have certain expectations on how their children should behave. Consequently, Chinese children were expected to be obedient, self-

disciplined, hard-working, and achievement-oriented. Observations of the Malay and Indian parents revealed that the latter were less indulgent, stricter and had higher expectations of their children's behaviour and standards as compared to Malay parents.

Parental Communication

Widen and Russell (2002) conducted a study on adults and children to see how they perceive love. A stimulus containing nine stories involving a boy and his parents was used to collect data. The results of their study showed that children differ from adults in the way they perceive love. While adults perceived love as a persisting emotion, young children (3 to 4 years of age) perceived love as a volatile emotion. For children, love is dependent on the situation and not the target of love.

Agonos, Bade, Cabuling, and Mercene (2015) examined how family relationships may be affected by parental presence. Their study revealed that parental absence, due to one or both parents being away working, especially in another country, can affect the well-being and upbringing of the Filipino children in question.

Parents have an impact on the way their children develop. Baldwin and Hoffman (2002) noted that when parents emphasised on the development of their children's self-concept and accentuated this with a level of integrity in their communication, their children's self-concept improved. Baumeister (1999) stated that self-concept is the individual's belief about him/herself including the person's attributes and who and what the self is. This means that the higher the self-concept, the better the children's communication and the better their development as an individual.

The same observation was noted by Razali and Razali (2013) who confirmed that the communication styles of parents can impact their adolescents' self-concept. Such an occurrence, they noted, was more typical among Malay children. They suggested that children's self-concept is enhanced when parents show an interest in their children's development. The authors attributed this to the Malay's communal and collectivistic culture which has been further supported by Asrul (2013), Asmah (1995), Jamaliah (2000) and Kamisah and Norazlan (2003). All these scholars had noted that the Malay community's way of life promotes politeness and indirectness in communication style thereby, mitigating conflicts. Razali and Razali (2013) also stressed that when an opinion is required, the Malay parents have their own way of submitting an opinion. Even if the parents do not agree with the opinion of the children, the

parent's views are not challenged. This implies that most Malay homes practise the 'harmonious' concept of communication.

The Five Love Languages

The concept of 'love language' was developed by the psychologist, Dr. Gary Chapman (1995) who outlined five ways of expressing and experiencing love. These were listed as "gifts", "quality time", "words of affirmation", "acts of service" (devotion) and "physical touch" (intimacy). Chapman (1995) affirms that the chosen 'language' is the way one prefers to receive love. Chapman (1995) also adds that people are emotionally hungry creatures and love is one of the basic needs (see Maslow, 1943) for many. Hence, it is imperative that love be received. This idea has led to the creation of the metaphor 'love tank' (see Chapman, 1995). When giving love, people should not focus on the love language that they themselves prefer the most (Chapman, 1995). Instead, love should be given in the love language that is most preferred by their loved ones. People's love language do not change over time but instead, it develops and this needs to be nurtured in different ways. There were criticisms made about the validity of Chapman's theory where critics highlighted the abstractness of love. However, Egbert and Polk (2006) suggested that despite its abstractness, Chapman's theory might have some psychometric validity.

In 1997, Chapman developed the Five Love Languages of Children with Dr. Ross Campbell. They revealed that American children also subscribed to these five typical demonstrations of love language. While children should experience each of these love languages, there is usually one dominant one that meets their deepest emotional needs. This is the one that should be most used with them. Although both parties may 'speak' a different language of love, it is important that parents do whatever is within their power to express their love for their children in the way most preferred by their children. This can pave the way for an unconditional loving bond to nurture (Chapman & Campbell, 1997). The outcome can enrich children's lives, making them feel cherished and understood. When this occurs within a family, a more harmonious and better family relationship is created. In order for parents to understand what is most preferred by their children, they should ask their children how they would express their own love. In the Malaysian context, this has not been explored. The current study hopes to fill the gap by focussing on Malaysian children of Malay descent as a starting point.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is qualitative in nature. Data were drawn from the participants' written responses and linguistic analysis (see Kılıçgüna, 2016) was employed to identify the themes which emerged in the written responses. The written responses were coded according to the key words (see below) before they were categorised into the five love languages (Chapman & Campbell, 1997).

Participants

The participants were 93 Malay children, aged from 10 to 12 years old. This is a good age based on Piaget's cognitive developmental stages where the children are able to articulate their needs and understanding. The children were studying in Standard Five and Six in two national primary schools located in the suburbs of the Klang Valley, Malaysia. They were in the average class among their standards. All were able to read and write in English as well as express themselves clearly, in other words, normal children. There were 36 males and 57 females in total.

Instructions

The participants were informed that it was a study. All agreed to participate and consent for using their data was given verbally. Four questions were written on the board by their respective English subject teachers during one of their classes. The children were asked to write these questions into their papers before they write their responses. They were told that only their written responses were required; they were not to write their names. However, they may want to indicate their Standard, Age, Gender and Ethnicity. They were also told that there was no right or wrong answer and responses can be written in English or Malay. Their grammar or spelling was not important. Fifteen to twenty minutes were allocated. If there were queries, the teachers would clarify the questions.

The four questions

Following the aim of this study, the four questions posed were: 1) Do your parents love you? 2) Who loves you more? 3) How do you know that your father/mother loves you? Give examples. 4) What do you do to show love to your parents?

Question 1 sets the ground for the children to be conscious of the scenario on love. If the answer to Question 1 was "No", "Not sure", "Maybe" or "I don't know", the rest of the written responses would be invalid for analysis and the respective data would be excluded. Question 2 encourages the children to focus on either father or mother or both so that it is just the parents who were involved. Question 3

prompts the children to recall an instance and to provide a specific example. Question 4 places the children as the one to show love hence, what they would do for their parents. These four questions were not based on any specific design other than to extract the responses required. However, it was noted that Kılıçgüna (2015) applied a similar question as that of Question 3 on her four to six year old participants.

Model for analysis

The five categories of love language proposed by Chapman and Campbell (1997) are as follows.

- a. Acts of service – acts/actions that parents do in devotion of their children such as providing a home.
- b. Receiving gifts – the receiving of objects such as toys or clothes which are given out of pleasure to please, encourage, motivate or inspire.
- c. Physical touch – showing affections by hugging, kissing, holding, embracing or touching.
- d. Quality time – doing things together such as a washing car.
- e. Words of affirmation – expressing loving or support through words such as ‘I love you’.

Analysis of data

All the written responses were collected and screened for eligibility. From a total of 105 responses collected, only 93 (N=93) were eligible. Twelve written responses were excluded – five were written by Indian children (homogeneity was of concern here), five were incomplete responses and two were illegible responses. The eligible responses were then scanned and transferred into a Microsoft word document. Question 3 was analysed for the perceived love language of the parents while Question 4 was analysed for the perceived love language spoken by the children. All the data were linguistically scrutinised for key words. For example, take care of me, give me a home, would be categorised under Acts of service; my mother kiss me would be categorised under Physical touch; buy toys for me, give me X-Box would be categorised under Receiving gifts; my mother cook with me would be categorised under Quality time and my mother say “I love you” would be categorised under Words of affirmation. Responses with words that were not relevant to any of the key words or five categories of love were placed under a new column, ‘Others’. Data were then counted for frequency. This process was performed three times to ensure consistency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 demonstrates the outcome of the first aim of this paper - the perceived love language of the parents.

Figure 1. The perceived love language of Malay parents (N=93)

Majority of the children perceived their parents’ love language as ‘Acts of services, followed by ‘Physical touch’, ‘Quality time’, ‘Receiving gifts’ and last in their list was ‘Words of affirmation’. The ‘Others’ category was also noted.

Acts of Service

More than half (50.5%) of the participants noted their parents’ love as ‘Acts of service’. Examples include ‘Gives me home’, ‘Provides me home’, ‘Gives me money’, ‘Gives me food’, ‘Gives me clothes’, ‘Cooks for me’, ‘Takes care of me’, ‘Helps me in my homework’, ‘Takes me on a trip’, ‘Teaches me’, ‘Washes the clothes for me’, ‘Do anything for me’, ‘Look after me’ and ‘Cleans the room’.

Examples:

3. How do you know whether your father/mother loves you? Give example. Take care your me.

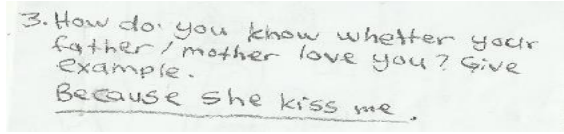
3. How do you know whether your father/mother loves you? my mother give me home.

3. How do you know whether your father/mother loves you? Give examples be love me because he take care me for sick.

Physical touch

Less than a quarter (13.9%) of the participants had perceived the love language of their parents to be Physical touch. Examples include 'Kisses me' and 'Hug me'.

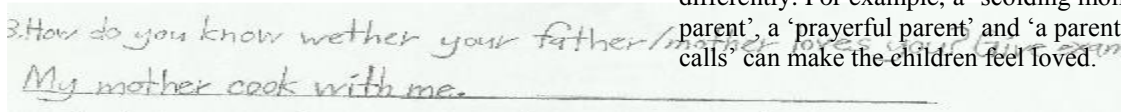
Example:



Quality time

Only 6.5 percent of the participants noted their parents' love language to be Quality time. Examples include 'Cooking together', 'Washing car together', 'Baking cookies together' and 'Clean home together'.

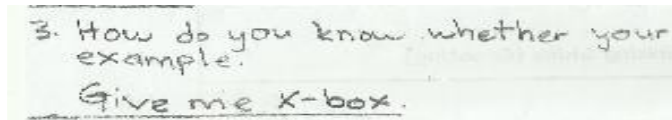
Example:



Receiving gifts

Only 5.4 percent of the participants indicated that their parents spoke this love language. Examples include 'Buy me toys', 'Gives me a treat' and 'Buy me gifts'.

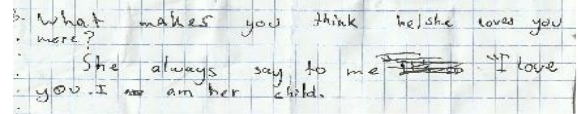
Example:



Words of affirmation

Only 2.2 percent of the participants had stated that their parents spoke this love language. The limited examples include 'My mother says I love you' and 'She complements me'.

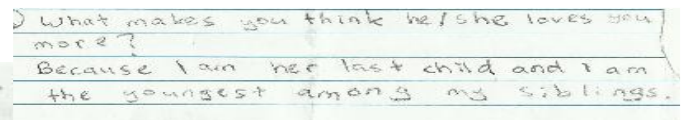
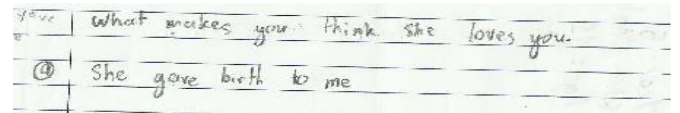
Example:



Others category

This column contained data which could not fit into any of the five categories of love language distinctively. Examples include responses like 'my mother loves me more than my father', 'she gave birth of me' (7.5%); 'I'm their child' (4.3%); 'my mom always scold me to be better person' (2.2%); 'they are the only one in my life' (1.1%); 'I make sure to do everything for them' (1.1%); 'I don't know' (1.1%); 'they are patient with me' (1.1%); 'pray for me' (1.1%); 'always call me' (1.1%); and 'my dad is not angry with me when I do something wrong' (1.1%). Unlike the regular expressions of love language that could be quantified through actions, affirmative words or behaviour, the responses here indicate that the participants view love differently. For example, a 'scolding mom', a 'patient parent', a 'prayerful parent' and 'a parent who always calls' can make the children feel loved.

Examples:



Mother vs. father

The analysis suggests that 64.5 percent of the children noted that mothers loved them more. Many wrote 'she', 'mom' or 'my mother' while answers using 'my father' and 'he' were confined to only 12.9 percent. The remainder used 'they' to refer to parents and some did not use any pronouns.

Examples:

Receiving gifts

2) Who loves you more?
My mom.

Only 20.43 percent of the participants had considered this category as their second choice and examples were 'Make them cards', 'Buy a gift', 'Give (buy) her t-shirt' and 'Buy him a car'.

2. Who loves you more, father or mother?
Mother

Example:

4. What do you do to how love to you?
give mother shirt, give father car.

Malay Children and their Perception of Love

Table 1 illustrates the findings that would indicate the answer to the second aim of this paper which is the perceived love language of the Malay children.

Table 1" Love language perceived by the Malaysian Malay children

As the statistics illustrate, less than half of the children identified 'Acts of service' as their main love language and less than a quarter had indicated 'Receiving gifts'. The categories of 'Physical Touch' and 'Words of Affirmation' were very minimal while 'Quality time' was not even selected. Nonetheless, the 'Others' category stood out prominently, at 21.5 percent.

Acts of service

Although only 46.24 percent of the participants opted for this category of love language, it was their main love language. Examples include 'Help them (to cook, in kitchen, to clean the house, cleaning, to wash the car)', 'Take care of my brothers' and 'Take care of them'.

Examples:

4) What do you do to show love
I help my father car wash

What do you do to show love to you parent?
I help my mother in the kitchen,

Physical touch

Only 5.38 percent of the Malay children had considered 'Physical touch' as their love language with a limited example shown through 'Kiss her'.

Example:

4. What do you do to show love to your parents?
I kiss my mom

Words of affirmation

As the lowest on their list, only 2.15 percent had opted for this language of love which was confined to the example of 'Say thank you'.

Example:

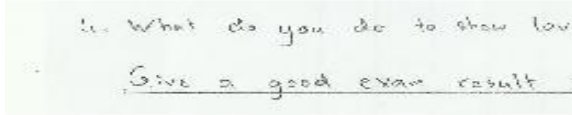
4. What do you do to show love to your parents?
Say "Thank you." help her do the chores and thank her for giving birth.

Others category

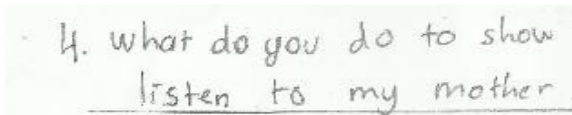
In the context of this study, 21.5 percent of the responses were placed under the 'Others' column. It contained responses such as 'I will study hard'; 'I will get good exam results'; 'I will find success in my life'; 'I will follow what they say'; 'I will listen to them'; 'I will make them happy'; 'I will be honest';

and 'I will give love to them'. These variations in showing love by the Malay children suggest that love can be demonstrated through doing well in exams and obeying their parents as shown through the following examples.

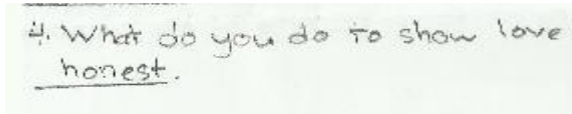
Examples:



3. What do you do to show love?
Give a good exam result



4. What do you do to show love?
listen to my mother



4. What do you do to show love?
honest.

Discussion

From this study, it seems clear that Malaysian Malay children viewed love differently as is evidenced through the different responses. This outcome can be attributed to the difference in age groups (compare this to Kılıçgüna, 2016), cultural differences (Karandashev, 2015, Bao & Xu, 2009; Quah 2004) and possibly, even parenting style differences (see Russell et al, 2010, Quah, 2004; Bao & Xu, 2009; Razali & Razali, 2013).

In the Turkish context, Kılıçgüna (2016) noted that the Turkish children who were aged four to six had perceived their parents love through six typologies: 'physical contact with parents', 'parental approval words', 'spending quality time with parents', 'being given presents by parents', 'ensuring basic needs of child by parent' and 'meeting parental expectations'. These were also derived based on the frequency of her data. While the Turkish children perceived 'Physical touch', 'Words of affirmation' and "Quality time" to be important, the Malay children opted for 'Acts of Service' and "Receiving gifts". This difference in findings can be attributed to the ages of the children in this study who were older as they were 10 to 12 years old. It is possible that as age increases with growth and maturity, love may be demonstrated differently by the parents. Thus, what the parents did as an expression of love for their children were retained in the children's mind. This transference of parenting style and expression of love

onto the children demonstrates that the Malay families of these children practised harmony and were traditional in their communications (see Razali & Razali, 2013; Karadashev, 2015; Gome & Suhaimi, 2016).

The outcome noted in this study also implies that the Malay parents' demonstration of love to their children was more inclined towards the Asian or authoritarian parenting style (Russell et al., 2010). Here, the Malay parents, like the Chinese participants in Russell et al. (2010) had indicated, 'sacrificed' for their children through acts or actions. In addition, it is also possible that the western concept of warmth and support denoted by hugs and kisses as well as loving words (see Russell et al., 2010) is rarely practised by the parents of the Malay children involved in this study although Quah (2004) had noted that there were more hugs and kissing within Malay families than other Malaysian families.

Since 'Receiving gifts' as a love language was equally small in percentage for both the perceived language of the Malay parents and the children, it can be assumed that this practice may have been induced by the circumstances of the family. Another reason could be attributed to the age of the children, who, being older may not identify with gifts as a demonstration of love although this outcome needs to be verified further. It was obvious that the Malay children's perceived love language of their parents had included 'Quality time' but this category was not listed in their own expression of love. This finding suggests that the Malay children were aware of the practice when imposed by their parents and they were aware that their parents' company meant something valuable to them. However, their lack of indication for this category of love language when expressing their own love for their parents is an issue that requires more exploration. It is possible that many modern parents are earning dual incomes for the families thus, their busy work schedules may have restrained their ability to spend more time with their children. Indirectly, this may have affected the children's perception too. The outcome noted from this study not only shows little relevance to the western concept of love as proposed by Chapman and Campbell (1997); it also demonstrates a likelihood that Malaysian Malay children do not subscribe to the western concept of love, warmth or support as denoted by parents' quality time with their children (see Russell et al., 2017).

Previous studies (Gomez & Suhaimi, 2015; Razali & Razali, 2013; Bao & Xu, 2009; Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009, Ang, 2006; Quah, 2004) had indicated that Malay cultural values were quite

different from the Chinese and Indians but the variables distinguishing these differences have not been clearly identified. Quah (2004) and Gomez and Suhaimi (2015) also noted that Malay parents' cultural values can have a strong influence in the way they interact with their children and this thread of argument may have some relevance in this study as seen in the similar love language expressed by the children and as perceived of their parents. Nevertheless, more studies need to be conducted to validate this possibility even though many local studies (Keshavarz & Baharudin, 2009; Razali & Razali, 2013) claim that Malay parents have a strong influence on their children's upbringing. Some factors contributing to this can be traced to their strong sense of collectivist nature (Zawai, 2008; Asrul, 2003; Asmah, 1992) and their family oriented values (Gomez & Suhaimi, 2015; Razali & Razali, 2013; Baldwin & Hoffmann 2002). In the context of this study, it is possible that the Malay children had unconsciously absorbed the values of their parents (Braxton-Davis, 2010). As Bao and Xu (2009) had revealed, Malay adolescents were more attached to their parents hence, it is possible that the Malay children of this study had been influenced due to their strong attachment to their parents.

CONCLUSION

This study is one of the few conducted in the Malaysian context which focused on how Malaysian Malay children perceive love. As an exploratory study, the aim was to uncover the 'love language' spoken by Malaysian Malay children. It seems clear that the concept of 'love language' encompasses more acts and actions as well as more linguistic expressions which the current study was unable to include. Thus, the concept of 'love language' as conceived and examined in the current study may not be as close in definition as it should be according to Chapman and Campbell's (1997) definition. Therefore, it can be deduced that the western concept of love language as proposed by western psychologists may be applicable to the Malaysian Malay context only to a certain extent, with the two categories of 'Acts of service' and 'Receiving gifts' being more prominent. Nonetheless, this study has demonstrated that Malaysian Malay children perceive their parents love to be similar to 'sacrifices' such as doing things for them and in return, they too want to express love in similar ways.

The findings gathered from this study suggest that Malaysian Malay parents and children seldom practise the western concept of love that is expressed through physical touch and words of affirmation. Therefore, these categories should not be employed

when dealing with the Malaysian context and in particular, Malay children.

It was obvious from the 'Others' category that love can be expressed for their parents through other means such as doing well in examinations and listening to their parents. This implies that the Malaysian Malay children's concept of love includes passing examinations and obeying their parents. In addition, a parent who scolds the child is also perceived to be showing love thus, this observation should not be dismissed as a verbally abusive parent. Clearly, there are cultural differences and expectations. Parents who make the effort to 'have their children because they want to', 'pray for their children' or who make the effort to call their children (presumed to be through telephones) are also appreciated by the Malay children because these virtues of their parents were perceived as a demonstration of love. These details of love should be taken seriously by parents, caregivers, psychologists and foreigners so that family relationships can be enhanced and misunderstandings avoided. Chapman and Campbell (1997) had noted that children may have different perceptions of how love should be 'spoken' and as children grow, their sense of love may also change. In this regard, more attention needs to be given to growing children so that they are not only loved but can also grow up to have love for others thereby, becoming adults who can contribute to society.

This study is also limited in other ways. For instance, it is confined to a small group of school going Malay children aged between 10 to 12 year old. For the outcome of this study to be generalisable, more participants need to be included. As the context of this study was only on one ethnic group, more studies need to be conducted to include other ethnic groups and also to be more diverse in geographical region by including rural as well as urban children.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS(S)

Kuang Ching Hei is a retired associate professor from the Faculty of Languages & Linguistics, University of Malaya, Malaysia (2018). She is Visiting Professor at the Jaipuria Institute of Management, Lucknow, India and an Associate Member of the Centre of Civilisational Dialogue, University of Malaya. She is currently a Consultant for Learning & Development at the Universal Business Academy, Malaysia. Her research interests comprise language teaching and language use in society. She is a life member of the Malaysian English Language Teachers Association, Modern Languages Association, Malaysia and the

Association of Gerontology, Malaysia. She has published several books and a number of papers in language use.

Maya Khemlani David is a retired professor of sociolinguistics. She is *honourary fellow of the Chartered Institute of Linguists, member of the International Advisory Board of Linguapax, former member of the Faculty of Languages & Linguistics, University of Malaya, Malaysia, She is also Visiting Professor at the Jaipuria Institute of Management, Lucknow, India and an associate member of several organisations. She specializes in Cross-Cultural Communication, Discourse Analysis and English for Specific Purposes*

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Appendix:

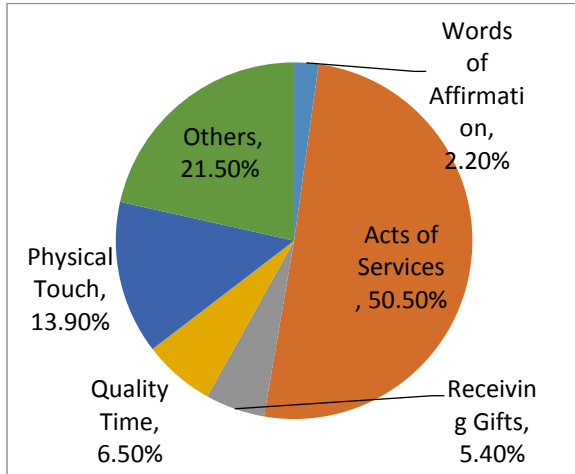


Figure 1. The perceived love language of Malay parents

Table 1. Love language perceived by Malaysian Malay children (N=93)

Love language perceived by children	Perception according to gender		Total	
	Males	Females		
Acts of services	19/93	24/93	43/93	46.24%
Receiving gifts	6/93	13/93	19/93	20.43%
Physical touch	2/93	3/93	5/93	5.38%
Words of affirmation	1/93	1/93	2/93	2.15%
Quality time	0	0	0/93	N/A
Others	8/93	12/93	20/93	21.5%
No answers given	0	4/93	4/93	4.3%