The Effect of Young Mothers' Social Classes on First Language Acquisition

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the significant relationship between different young mothers' social classes and children's language learning. According to this research goal, this study is eager to answer the two major research questions: (a) Is there any significant difference between middle-class and working-class mothers' speech? (b) Is there any significant relationship between different social class mothers' input and their children's language acquisition? All of the subjects were selected from a kindergarten. The researcher chose 2-6 year-old children as subjects. They were eight boys and two girls. At each age, she chose two children. One was from a middle class family and the other was from a working class one. The criteria for classifying were the degree of education, career and income. About middle-class family, the parents were graduated from college. Also their careers were professionals, managers or owners. On the contrary, about working class family, their educational background was under college and their careers were like clerk, skilled manual workers or labors. The researcher used T-test to examine the difference among different social class mothers. In addition, Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the significant relationship between young mothers and children.

Keywords: Young mother's social class, First language acuisition, Children.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, psychologists have become increasingly aware that children's early social interactions play an important role in development of language skills (Nelson, 1981). In addition, Bloom (1956) ever stated that from pregnancy to four years old, children' IQ develops 50%, and then from four years old to eight years old, children's IQ adds another 30%. During this period, children's language acquisition would develop soon and well. Therefore, mothers' verbal input would influence children's language acquisition. From this statement the researcher understands that at this period the children's language acquisition becomes a vital issue.

In children's development, parents are children's first teachers and family becomes the first teaching place (Huang, 2004) .As Olson (1986) claimed that mothers will give children the most input. From mothers' verbal input, children can acquire the language gradually. Also Snow (1977) showed the importance of mothers' speech to their children's language. In children's language development, mothers play the important role. From their points the researcher can realize the importance of mothers' verbal input. However, even the researcher emphasizes on the importance of mothers, there are still lots of variables to consider. Different social class mothers will affect children's language development. (Lewis & Wilson, 1972; Hoff-Ginsberg, 1991). Low-income mothers always talk less to their children (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1991) Through those evidences, we eager to know if those variables will affect children's language learning. As a result, this study investigated the relationship between different social class of mothers' verbal input and children's language acquisition. In addition, in order to observe the relationship between young mothers' verbal input and children's language acquisition, this study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research to examine the significant difference among different social class mothers. Moreover, the researcher used correlational research to investigate the relationships between mother-child interactions. Furthermore, by this study, the author hopes our government can get some ideas for children's educational policy.

The goal of this study is to investigate the effect of different social class of young mothers' input on their children's language acquisition. In addition,

from the findings of this study, the researcher is eager to provide a suggestion to the educational policy in foreign spouse education.

There are two research questions involved in this study.

1. Is there any significant difference between middle-class and working-class mothers' speech?

2. Is there any significant relationship between different social class mothers' input and their children's language acquisition?

Based on the two research questions, the researcher would adopt T-test and correlational research to find the relationship between those variables.

The hypotheses of this study are in the following:

1. According to the previous studies, the researcher supposed that middle-class mothers will provide more positive input to their children.

2. The researcher supposed that there is a significant relationship between young mothers' verbal input and their children's language acquisition (Snow, 1977; Olson, 1984; Lieven, 1994).

2. Review of the Literature
2.1. Children's Language Acquisition

There are various theories about language acquisition. As we know, different scholars have their different thoughts about language acquisition. One of the best-known theories is Skinner's behaviorism. Skinner was commonly known in the contribution of observing animals' behavior. However, Skinner also devoted in education through mechanical teaching and focused on stimuli-response connection (Brown, 2000).Skinner (1957) stated that idea or meaning is explanatory fiction, and that speaker is merely the locus of verbal behavior, not the cause. However, in 1960s, Chomsky (1959) had a highly critic about Skinner's behaviorism. (Brown, 2000) Chomsky (1965) claimed the existence of innate properties of language to explain the child's mastery of a native language. Chomsky believed that people have inner knowledge about language learning. More recently, constructivism brings a new school of thought in language learning. Vygotsky (1978) proposed a new theory called ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) which means that it is a distance between a child's actual cognitive capacity and the level of potential development. Children can

achieve their potential ability through others' teaching. Moreover, Vygotsky also stated that language is a kind of communication. Everyone can learn language through the social interaction. In the following there would be more detailed explanation about social interaction and language acquisition.

2.2. Interaction and Children's Language Acquisition
2.2.1. Social Interaction
Social interaction is an important factor in language acquisition. Vygotsky claimed that the social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Only when children interact with others in the social environment, their inner development will start. Therefore, social interaction will become one certain part of children's development. Also Gleason (2005) thought that conversations may be learned in early interactions, such as taking turns and the way they express. As a result, this life long process of development was dependent on social interaction and that social learning actually leads to cognitive development. Moreover, generally speaking, the children's social interaction is firstly occurred in the family. Thus at the beginning, children's language acquisition will take place with their parents. Parents will become children's first teachers. (Huang, 2004)

Moreover, from birth, mothers and children have the most familiar relationship. Children learn language from their mothers. Just as Brown (2000)'s statement, language will be acquired through imitation. Snow (1977) declared language acquisition is a process of interaction between mother and child from birth. The purpose of mothers' speech is to show children all the languages. Also Olson (1986) stated the importance of learning in the environment. Mothers will give children's numerous input so that children can learn the languages quickly. Therefore the input of young mothers' speech will affect children's output. However, in children's development, there may not be just variable of young mothers' input. There is still different variables that affect language acquisition such as social status and cultural difference.

2.2.2. The social Class and Children's Acquisition
Social class can be divided into two subcategories, which mean the social status and cultural difference. Both class and culture are variables in which

meaningful psychology phenomena may be found (Lewis & Wilson, 1972). We cannot just discuss one single part. In the following, the researcher discussed and reviewed the two variables of social class.

Sometimes social status plays a vital role in children's language acquisition. We discern that learning languages should depend on numerous of input. For example, in Lewis and Wilson's study (1972), mothers' input was categorized into several categories, such as reading, looking, smiling, and vocalizing to others. In this study, they proposed that different social status would have different influences on their children. In addition, education, career and economy would influence the forming of social status. According to Hoff-Ginsberg (1991) poor and working-class children may have less opportunity to experience interaction of the sort suggested to support language development. Moreover, concluded from Kagan and Tulkin's study (1972), middle-class mothers would like to give their children stimulus things and have more interaction with their children. Based on the support of those researchers, social status and children's language development have close relationship. However, a social class, it is necessary to remember that it is not the only variable in children's development. The cultural differences should be included too. (Lewis & Wilson)

Moerk (2000) observed some different culture background mothers and their children. He claimed that in some cultures, some parents lack the concept of talking with their children. For example, Harkness and Super (1977) stated that the Kipsgis mothers take a much less active role in teaching their children talk. About French mothers and African mothers, African mothers don't usually talk to their children during child care or diapering (Rabain-Jamin, 1994). From those support, we understand that cultural differences will also influence the mothers' input.

3. Method

The purpose of this study is to investigate the significant relationship between different social class mothers' input and children's language learning.

According to those research goals, this study is eager to answer the two major research questions: (a) Is there significant difference between middle-

class and working-class mothers' speech? (b) Is there any significant relationship between different social class of mothers' input and their children's language acquisition?

Therefore, in order to correspond with the research goals and research questions, this section included four major parts: subjects, instruments, procedures and data analysis.

3.1. Subjects

All of the subjects came from a kindergarten. The researcher chose 2-6 year-old children as the subjects. There were eight boys and two girls. At each age, she chose two children. One was from a middle class family and the other was from a working class family. The criteria for selecting the social groups were the degree of education, career and income. About middle-class family, the parents were graduated from college. Also their careers were professionals, managers or owners. On the contrary, about working class of family, their educational background was under college and their careers were like clerk, skilled manual workers or labors.

3.2. Instruments

Recording and interviewing were used in this study. The researcher asked some background questions, such as family situation, mothers' personality, and children's personality. After that, the researcher used the tape-recording at home to record the conversation between mothers and children. Each recording lasted 30 minutes. While recording those conversations, the researcher controlled the conversation as naturally as possible. She was careful about avoiding some unnatural talk to happen during conversations.

3.3. Procedures

At the beginning, the researcher used interview to investigate the background of every subject to control the variables, such as personality, family background and others. Then the researcher started to recode the conversations between mothers and the children. However, in order to avoid the anxiety, the researcher tended to involve in the situation. For example, before the recording,

the researcher would establish a close relationship with them. She tried to reduce the nervous atmosphere and recorded 30 minutes for every subject, and then transcribed the recordings. Finally, after the data collection, the researcher analyzed the data and described the findings. Then from the analyzing consequences the researcher could infer the conclusion and even the suggestions.

3.4. Data analysis

This study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigate the relationship between young mothers' input and children's language acquisition. About quantitative approach, the researcher used both descriptive and inferential statistics to examine the data.

T-test was used to examine the significant difference between different social class mothers' input. Also the researcher listed six basic domains to calculate how many times the verbal input would happen during the recording time and then got the Mean score. The six domains were control, negative response, response to the speech, guiding, positive response and negative emotion. For example, "Hurry up. Eat your meal quickly." was belonged to "control domain." "No, don't do that." was belonged to "negative response domain." If mothers or children response to others' talk, those were belonged to "response to the speech domain." Also, "You are so great." was belonged to "positive response domain." "At the beginning, you have to put it on the top, and then….." was belonged to "guiding domain." Finally, "You are not good. You are stupid." was related to "bad emotion domain." After categorizing the verbal input, the researcher used T-test to examine the difference.

Then correlation analysis was used to determine if there was a significant difference between young mothers' verbal input and children' output. From the six domains, the researcher investigated if mothers verbal input would influence children' language acquisition.

4. Results

In this chapter, observed data were analyzed in the context of the research questions. As the two hypotheses predicted the relationship between mothers'

verbal input and children's language acquisition, findings are reported in relation to the T-test and Correlation coefficients. In this section, the first part presents the significant difference between social class mothers. In this part, the researcher used T-tests to report the final results. The second part presents the significant difference between mothers' verbal input and children's language acquisition. The researcher used Correlation coefficients to report the findings.

About the significant difference between different class mothers, based on Table 1, the researcher divided all the verbal input to six basic categories (A-control, B-negative response, C-response to speech, D-positive response, E-guiding and F-bad emotion). In addition, the results present that only category E (guiding) has significant difference between different social class mothers. Other categories do not have significant differences. As the researcher discussed in the previous section, low-income mothers would talk less to their children. Also, some low-social class mother would lack the concept of talking to their children. As a result, when they talked to their children, they would just direct or control their children to do some tasks. However, middle-class mothers would try to guide their children to complete the tasks because of their higher educational degree. Those findings were presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. Mean, standard derivations and t-test

Categories Nation		n	frequency	Mean	SD	Significance
A Control	Middle Class	5	31.00	6.20	2.16	.111
	Working Class	5	48.00	9.60	3.64	.119
B Negative response	Middle Class	5	18.00	3.60	3.36	.639
	Working Class	5	14.00	2.80	1.48	.645
C Response to speech	Middle Class	5	70.00	14.00	9.82	.052
	Working Class	5	19.00	3.80	1.92	.080
D Positive response	Middle Class	5	21.00	4.20	1.64	.390

	Working Class	5	15.00	3.00	2.44	.393
E Guiding	Middle Class	5	64.00	12.80	3.70	.004**
	Working Class	5	27.00	5.40	1.94	.007**
F Bad emotion	Middle Class	5	10.00	2.00	1.22	.296
	Working Class	5		3.00	1.58	.298

p< .05 has significant difference

From this table, the findings present that working class of mothers used more control input to their children. In addition, comparing with the mean in C (Response to speech), middle class mothers would talk more to their children. On the contrary, working class mothers tended to talk less to their children.

In addition, the researcher found that only in E (guiding), there is significant difference between middle class and working class mothers verbal input. Moreover, about the research question two, the researcher used Correlation coefficient to investigate the relationship between mothers' input and children's language acquisition.   From the findings, the researcher concluded that only in A (Control), B(Negative response), D(Guiding) and F(Bad emotion) there are significant relationship between mothers and children in middle class families. It means that when mothers used verbal input such as control, negative response, positive response and bad emotion, children would be influenced by their mothers, and then children use more similar output. Those findings are presented in the following tables.

Table 2. The mean and derivation of the six categories between young mothers and children (middle class)

Descriptive statistics

Categories		n	Mean	SD
A Control	Mother	5	6.20	2.16
	Child	5	5.40	1.14

B Negative response	Mother	5	3.60	3.36
	Child	5	4.60	3.91
C Response to speech	Mother	5	14.00	9.82
	Child	5	12.20	5.58
D Positive response	Mother	5	4.20	1.64
	Child	5	4.00	2.82
E Guiding	Mother	5	12.80	3.70
	Child	5	1.80	2.49
F Bad emotion	Mother	5	2.00	1.22
	Child	5	3.80	4.14

Table 3. The significant relationship between mothers' verbal input and children's language acquisition (middle class)

Correlation coefficient

Categories	Correlation between child and mother	
A Control	Pearson correlation coefficient Significance .006	.971**
B Negative response	Pearson correlation coefficient Significance .005	.973**
C Response to speech	Pearson correlation coefficient Significance .110	.793
D Positive response	Pearson correlation coefficient Significance .007	.968**

E Guiding	Pearson correlation coefficient Significance	.398	-.494
F Bad emotion	Pearson correlation coefficient Significance	.045	.886**

p< .05 (Significance)
** Correlation Coefficient: r> .80

Table 3 presents that the significant relationship between middle class mothers and their children. In this table, it showed that in Category A, B, D, and F, there are significant relationships. The researcher found that in the four categories, there are significances. (P<.05)   In addition, there are high correlations in the four categories. From the table, the Correlation Coefficient is high (r> .80). From the finding, the researcher found that in this table, most categories of mothers' verbal input and children's language acquisition have high correlation. However, about Category C and E, the researcher found that there is no significant relationship in middle class mothers' verbal input and their children's language acquisition.

Table 4. The mean and derivation of the six categories between mothers and children (working class)

Descriptive statistics

Categories		n	Mean	SD
A Control	Mother	5	9.60	3.64
	Child	5	7.00	2.64
B Negative response	Mother	5	2.80	1.48
	Child	5	3.80	1.78
C Response to speech	Mother	5	3.80	1.92
	Child	5	3.80	1.48

D Positive response	Mother	5	3.00	2.44
	Child	5	3.00	1.58
E Guiding	Mother	5	5.40	1.94
	Child	5	3.20	2.16
F Bad emotion	Mother	5	2.00	1.22
	Child	5	3.80	4.14

Table 5. The significant relationship between young mothers' verbal input and children's language acquisition (Working class)

Correlation coefficient

Categories	Correlation between child and mother	
A Control	Pearson correlation coefficient Significance .010	.959**
B Negative response	Pearson correlation coefficient Significance .554	.358
C Response to speech	Pearson correlation coefficient Significance .015	.946**
D Positive response	Pearson correlation coefficient Significance .007	.968**

E Guiding	Pearson correlation coefficient	.568
	Significance	.318
F Bad emotion	Pearson correlation coefficient	.435
	Significance	.464

p< .05 (Significance)

** Correlation Coefficient: r> .80

Table 5 presents that the significant relationship between working class mothers and their children. This table shows that in Category A, C and D, there are significant relationships. The researcher found that in the three categories, there are significances. (P<.05) In addition, there are high correlations in the three categories. From the table, the Correlation Coefficient is high (r> .80). However, about the other categories B (Negative response), E(Guiding), and F(Bad emotion), there is no significant relationship between working class mothers' verbal input and their children's language acquisition. From the finding, the researcher found that in this table, three categories of mothers' verbal input and children's language acquisition have high correlation.

Generally speaking, about the research question one, those findings present that only in the category E (guiding), there is a significant difference between different social mothers. Other categories do not have high significant difference. From the findings, the researcher concludes that the different social background mothers would have some influence on their children.

In addition, about the significant relationship between mothers and children, the researcher finds that only in category A (control) and D (positive response), middle class and working class families have the same conclusion. There is a high relationship between mothers' verbal input and children's language acquisition. However, in category E (guiding), there is no significant relationship. Other categories present that there are different conclusions in different social mothers.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the significant difference between different social class mothers and also significant relationship between mothers' verbal input and children's language acquisition. The researcher used T-test to examine the difference among different social class mothers. In addition, Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the significant relationship between mothers and children. About the research question one, the researcher examined the difference between different social class mothers. However, only in category E (guiding) there is a significant difference. As the previous studies discussed, the low-income mothers would talk less to their children. (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1991) In addition, they would just control their children directly. As a result, this may be the main reason that the working-class mothers would use less guiding to their children. However, for the other categories, although in this study there is no significant difference between different social class mothers, it does not mean that it is really no difference. There may be some variables impacting the result. For example, the researcher explained some facts in the following

(a) The samples are not enough. The researcher just chose ten families in this study. In addition, the recording just lasted 30 minutes. Because of the limitation of the time, the researchers just recorded once in a family. As a result, the data collection might not be enough.

(b) The categories are just six basic domains. The researcher just categorized all the data into six domains. However, there are still much data to be analyzed. As a result, the researcher suggested that in the future, other researchers can discuss more domains. Perhaps there will be many different findings.

(c) The recording topics are different in every family. Therefore, the results may not be so correct if the topics would be different. For example, if the topic is more related to guiding works, actually, the guiding will happen more often between mothers and children. Therefore for the future studies, the researcher can investigate mother-child interaction in different communicative settings.

In the second research question, the researcher investigated the significant relationship between young mother's input and children's language acquisition.

The findings indicated that in categories A (control) and D (positive response), there is a significant relationship, no matter in middle class family or working class family. However, from the findings of some categories such as negative response, response to the speech, and bad emotion, the researcher got different results in different social class families. Therefore, the researcher listed some limitations for future studies to further discussed.

(a) The researcher may not collect enough data. Even the researcher recorded every family for 30 minutes; it does not mean that all the data is useful. As a result, the data may not be enough. In addition, this variable is possible to influence the results.

(b) The gender of children: At the beginning, the researcher did not consider the impact of gender. However, in this study, because of the small sample, the researcher cannot judge that there is no influence according to gender. This section needs further discussion.

(c) Perhaps the influence comes from there other relatives. Children's language acquisition can involve many aspects. However, mother is just one main aspect. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of mothers on their children. Therefore, the researcher has to control other variables, such as fathers and grandparents. In addition, the category E (guiding) has different relationship between young mothers' verbal input and children's language acquisition. The results present that there is no significant relationship between mothers and children. This is because that children's cognitive development is not mature enough to learn the guiding skills. As a result, at this preschool age, children just can follow mothers' guiding, but they haven't use good use of guiding skills in the conversation. Hence, in this category, the results cannot support the hypothesis. To sum up, the purpose of this study is to elicit the importance of education of children in foreign spouse family. The researcher discussed the importance of young mothers' verbal input. In addition, the researcher mentioned that parents are children's first teachers and family becomes the first teaching place. As a result, from this paper, the government should start to emphasize the children education of foreign spouses. Even if possible, the government can also plan the education policy for foreign mothers so that children education can be improved.

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