Taiwanese young adults' intergenerational communication schemas

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Abstract. This study examined intergenerational communication schemas by investigating young adults' cognitive representations of communication with older adults in Taiwan. Forty-one Taiwanese college students described conversations with an older adult in response to a variety of interviewer prompts. Transcripts were read and content analyzed by the first two authors. To capture the characteristics of the conversation descriptions, eleven coding dimensions were generated based on schema theory, and all conversation descriptions were coded along these dimensions. Coding results were submitted to hierarchical cluster analysis, yielding five schemas: *Mutually satisfying*, *helping*, *mixed feelings*, *small talk*, and *mutually unpleasant* conversations. Results are discussed in terms of similarities and differences from Harwood, McKee and Lin's (2000) study, schema theory, intergenerational communication, and Chinese cultural norms.

Keywords: Aging, Cultural Values, Intergenerational communication, Schemas, Taiwan

Introduction

A considerable amount of work examining factors that influence the processes and consequences of intergenerational communication has been produced as the aging population has increased. This line of research has demonstrated that communication is crucial to improving intergenerational relationships and successful aging (e.g., Coupland, Coupland & Giles, 1989; Giles, Fox & Smith, 1993; Williams & Nussbaum, 2001). Since most of theory in this area is developed from a North American or Western European perspective, cultural issues gain particular salience when the research focus shifts to a non-Western society. Core cultural values have a profound influence on perceptions and behavior, and a society's value systems are largely enacted through its members' communicative practices in social relationships (Lindsley, 1999; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Triandis, 1994). The current study builds on other recent work that has explored cross-cultural variation in intergenerational communication (e.g., Cai, Giles & Noels, 1998; Harwood, Giles, Clément, Pierson & Fox, 1994) and examines young people's perceptions of intergenerational communication in Taiwan from a communication schemas perspective (Harwood, McKee & Lin, 2000).

Schemas are our cognitive structures about people or events which guide the ways in which we approach interactions (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Encompassing multiple components, (e.g., visual, verbal, emotional, evaluative, etc.), *communication* schemas are cognitive representations of our context-based interaction with a target person or group and are derived from our accumulated knowledge and our communication experiences in a given society. This paper will begin by reviewing existing literatures in two areas. First, attention will be given to research on intergenerational communication focusing on stereotypes and schemas. Second, research on intergenerational communication in East Asian cultures will be discussed. These discussions lead to our research interest in identifying common cognitive patterns that might be shared by Taiwanese young people, and how the Chinese cultural norm of filial piety influences Taiwanese young people's intergenerational communication.

Intergenerational communication research in the West:
Stereotypes and schemas

Our social experiences with people and events are categorized into cognitive structures. One such structure is a stereotype, which is a schema concerning people that is activated by contextual factors (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981; Hamilton, 1981; Hamilton & Trolier, 1986; Hummert, Garstka, Shaner & Strahm, 1994). Fiske and Taylor (1991) stated that a schema is "a cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including attributes and the relations among those attributes" (p. 98). Schemas provide information for us to manage situations and constantly affect our judgments and memories of our experiences.

The relationships between our schemas and intergenerational communication are evident. Harwood and Williams (1998) used stereotype traits (e.g., perfect grandparents, despondent) identified in a study by Hummert et al. (1994) to examine how schemas may operate in intergenerational interactions from young people's perspectives. The results showed that different sets of stereotypical traits were associated with different evaluations of intergenerational communication (e.g., levels of speech accommodation, complaining, emotions, communication satisfaction). Other studies using stereotype traits to prompt responses also demonstrated considerable impact on communication expectations and/or impression formation (Hummert, 1994; Ryan, 1992). As useful and powerful as they can be, stereotypes are trait-based person perception schemas which provide limited information about context-based communication. The current study adopts a communication schema perspective (Harwood et al., 2000) which invokes a broader cognitive representation of a communication event.

The communication schema approach emerged from two perspectives. First, Cantor, Mischel, and Schwartz (1982a, b) suggest that people's social knowledge involves associations between types of *people* and *situations*. Second, Carlston (1994) proposed Associated Systems Theory as a useful tool to describe how social knowledge is structured as cognitive representations that are composed of a variety of categorical information, such as traits, behavioral and affective responses. Carlston (1994) suggests that these cognitive representations are structured via the interrelatedness of these various elements. In short, communication schemas are not simply a person's trait-based perceptions of an interlocutor, but also his/her holistic perceptions of interacting with that person in certain situations.

Harwood (1998) investigated young people's communication expectations and evaluations of intergenerational communication with an older adult, Jennifer. After reading a narrative description of Jennifer which characterized her in terms of either a perfect grandparent or despondent stereotype (Hummert, 1994), participants then were asked to describe a conversation with her. Those open-ended descriptions generated six intergenerational communication schemas (*helping*, *learning*, *gerontophobic*, *gerontophilic*, *pity* and *polite*) representing different sets of expectations about conversations with Jennifer. When analyzing the relationships between the typologies that emerged and the two stereotype traits, the *helping* and *pity* ICSs were exclusively associated with Jennifer described with despondent traits. Harwood's findings offered initial empirical evidence that communication schemas existed, and these schemas demonstrated coherent patterns across stereotypes.

Building upon Harwood's (1998) findings, Harwood et al. (2000) sought to explore young and old people's intergenerational communication schemas (ICSs) including an understanding of their hierarchical structures. Participants were asked to described interaction processes according to the types of situations provided to them. Accounts of each type of interaction consist of an intergenerational conversation description (ICD). These ICDs were then summarized into shorter version of descriptions which were used for content coding. In terms of young people's ICSs, they identified eight ICSs grouped at three hierarchical levels based on these coding results: level 1 (2 clusters)—*positive*, *negative*, level 2 (5 clusters)—*positive and close*, *positive and respectful*, *negative and sympathy*, *negative and no connection*, *negative and hostile*, and level 3 (8 clusters)—*overwhelmingly positive*, *positive and help*, *positive and respectful*, *neutral*, *negative and sympathy*, *negative and no connection*, *no connection but help*, and *negative and hostile*. These ICSs illustrated the complexity of cognitive representations of intergenerational communication in the U.S. ranging widely in both valence and content. The current study extends Harwood et al.'s (2000) research by examining

young adults' cognitive representations of communication with older adults in Taiwan.

Intergenerational communication research in the East:
Cultural influences

It has been suggested that one should begin with the teachings of Confucianism in order to understand the discourse of aging in East Asian cultures (Chang, 1997). Confucianism clearly dictates an individual's roles and proper behaviors in relation to others with filial piety (*Xiao*) as one of its core values. The basic tenets of filial piety (e.g., being respectful and obedient of older adults) guide people's attitudes towards parents and older adults in general (Gao, 1996; Noels, Giles, Gallois & Ng, 2001). The influence of this cultural value on attitudes towards older adults and perceptions of aging has been well documented in China (Zhang & Hummert, 2001), Japan (Tobin, 1987), and Taiwan (Lee, Parish & Willis, 1994). Ho (1994) claimed that intergenerational relationships in Chinese culture are actually defined by filial piety: "the attributes of intergenerational relationships governed by filial piety are structural, enduring and invariant across situations within Chinese culture" (p. 350). In addition to obeying and honoring family elders, one needs to provide material and emotional support, continue the family line, and perform ceremonies of ancestral worship (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Ng, Loong, Liu & Weatherall, 2000). Thus, filial piety can be understood as a cultural value rooted in collectivism, designated by hierarchy, and enacted through defined role relationships with the goal of preserving desired social harmony.

Recent studies of stereotypes of old age and intergenerational communication in the East Asian countries, as discussed below, suggest that the norm of filial piety still holds its ground and is enacted in people's stereotypes of and attitudes towards older adults. However, at the same time, it is undergoing challenges and young people expressed certain level of dissatisfaction and struggled with traditional behavioral norms.

Gallois et al.'s (1996) study on the impact of filial piety indicated that young Asian participants scored higher on items suggesting practical support (e.g., taking care of aging parents and providing financial support) and lower on those suggesting communicative support (e.g., listen patiently, retain contact) than their Western counterparts. To the extent that filial piety obligation from younger to older is manifested in interaction, we might expect a greater emphasis on status marking (e.g., older people emphasizing power differentials between generations, expecting status-related terms of address) and less emphasis on intimacy and bonding (Yeh, Williams & Maruyama, 1998; Yu & Gu, 1990).

Studies that have examined age-related perceptions in East Asia reflect the influence of cultural values and beliefs. The endorsement of filial piety was supported by Zhang and Hummert's (2001) interview accounts. Young interviewees "expressed their willingness to respect older persons regardless of context and personal satisfaction, identifying *Xiao* as the ethical norm to follow" (p. 222). At the same time, young people were especially bored of older adults' unpleasant, intrusive, and critical "*Laodao*, meaning endless repeating" (p. 215) and desired more equality when interacting with older adults, while older interviewees expressed a necessity to maintain the generational hierarchy. The essential elements of obligation/politeness and hierarchy prescribed by filial piety, therefore, may create tensions for intergenerational communication and, at times, may erupt into open intergenerational conflicts (see Zhand, this special Issue). As Zhang and Hummert (2001) put it "tensions and harmonies coexist in a *Yin* and *Yang*" fashion, reflecting a mixed picture in Chinese intergenerational communication (p. 221).

Zhang, Hummert and Garstka (2002) examined stereotype traits of older adults generated by Chinese young, middle-aged and older participants (in the PRC) and compared these with earlier research reported by U.S. and Chinese New Zealand participants (Hummert et al., 1994; Ng, Lui, Loong & Weatherall, 1999). The majority of the traits overlap with those generated in the West, however, traits unique to Chinese age stereotypes were also uncovered, both positive and negative (e.g., experienced, face-conscious, *Laodao* (endless repeating), male-favoritism, meddlesome). Their findings provided evidence in recognizing the nature of perceptions of aging as both culturally grounded and cross-culturally shared. In a similar vein, we argue that some of the intergenerational communication schemas held by Taiwanese young people might be influenced and reflective of the Chinese cultural norms and some might be similar to those found in the West.

Taiwan is rooted in Confucianism and yet advancing itself to be economically competitive. With its economic growth, Taiwanese society has also experienced "culture shocks," with some traditional cultural values (e.g., filial piety) remaining intact and some becoming westernized (e.g., autonomy) (Yang, 1996). Studies have found that Taiwanese young people were more negative about older people, felt more deferential and obligated in interactions than their Euro-American counterparts, and tended to avoid interactions with older adults (e.g., Giles, Liang, Noels & McCann, 2001; Yeh et al., 1998). Taiwanese young people, therefore, may endorse the ethic of filial piety or respect for old age, but do not actively engage with older people.

The primary goal of the current study was to examine Taiwanese young people's cognitive schemas of intergenerational communication. To borrow from Cantor et al. (1982b), we wanted to examine how "perceptions and

behavior are created 'in the head' and biased toward preexisting expectancies" (p. 62). Once these schemas are uncovered, they permit comparisons between the Taiwanese ICSs and those from Harwood et al.'s (2000) study in the US. Such comparison allows us to see connections between cultural norms and social knowledge concerning intergenerational communication.

Method

Participants and procedures

Forty-one college students from the north and south of Taiwan were interviewed (28 females, 13 males, M age $= 20.36$, $SD = 2.98$) and received monetary compensation in exchange for their participation. The interview protocol was based on Harwood et al.'s (2000) study which was originally adapted from Cantor et al.'s (1982b) coding scheme for analyzing person-in-situation prototypes, and from Carlston's (1994) Associated Systems Theory. The interview protocol was translated into Chinese and back translated by a bilingual Taiwanese graduate student. Two pilot interviews were performed to correct problems related to the interview questions and procedures.

One-on-one interviews were conducted by the first author who is a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese. Participants were first instructed to imagine and describe a "typical" conversation with an older person (65 or above). After the description was provided, additional probes solicited more detailed descriptions of the conversation (e.g., "What might you feel like at the end of the conversation?" "In this conversation, what does the older person look like?"). Participants could elaborate on whichever elements of the conversation they felt were salient. Following the description of a "typical" conversation, participants were asked to imagine and describe one to three additional conversations with an older person. These additional descriptions were solicited using prompts from the following categories: Family/non-family, senile/healthy, socially inept and bitter/wise and kind, positive/negative experience, ideal/worst conversation, and strangers on the bus or in the subway. The interviewer selected which type of older adult and/or situation to prompt for after listening to participants' previous description(s) with the goal of achieving a contrast with previous descriptions. For instance, if the target older person in the "typical" conversation seemed to be a family member, the participant was asked to imagine a conversation with a non-family member. The number of intergenerational conversation descriptions (*ICD*s) obtained per interview ranged

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from 1–4 depending on the length of the descriptions provided (*Mean* = 2.57, total *N* of ICDs = 106). These ICDs were transcribed in Chinese.

The retrieval of our schemas depends upon their accessibility to individuals and their cultural pervasiveness. It is likely that our procedure elicited both generic situational knowledge structures (Carlston & Smith, 1996) and descriptions of specific, albeit representative situations. We treat these as functionally equivalent for our purposes and do not attempt to differentiate "real" from "imagined" in participants' responses (Wyer & Carlston, 1994).

The first two authors (who are native Chinese speakers) read each ICD and generated coding dimensions independently based on the salient emotional and communicative characteristics that occurred across multiple respondents' ICDs. The coding dimensions were developed in Chinese. These two individuals discussed their coding dimensions to reach consensus on the key dimensions. Eleven dimensions emerged (see Table 1). Each ICD was coded along these dimensions using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = absent, 2 = low, 3 = moderate, 4 = strong). The first two authors and another bilingual coder practiced two rounds of coding on ten ICDs to check understanding of definitions and exhaustiveness of the coding categories. The first two authors then coded all ICDs, including an overlap of 30 ICDs (31.25%) which were randomly selected to check reliability (reported in Table 1). Reliability was acceptable in all cases, albeit not optimal in a few. The categories with low reliability coefficients nevertheless achieved high levels of percentage agreement. Low intercoder reliability estimates in these cases appear to result from a few isolated and unusual cases.

Results

The ICDs' ratings along the eleven categories were submitted to hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method. Examination of the agglomeration schedule and dendrogram revealed that a five-cluster and a 3-cluster solution (positive conversations, mixed feelings, and negative conversations) were appropriate. Each cluster is interpreted as an intergenerational communication schema (ICS). Mean scores for each of the 5-cluster ICSs on the eleven coding dimensions were examined and analyzed using ANOVA to assist in interpretation (see Table 2: ANOVA results are omitted because tests of significance are not relevant and would consume large amounts of space). Each schema is described below within the three broader categories. The number of ICDs in each is provided in parentheses. All excerpts are translated into English by the first and second authors.

Table 1. Brief definitions of coding categories and intercoder reliability

Coding Category	Definition	Krippendorff's α/ % agreement
Making old happy	The young person believes that his/her conversation makes the older person feel better	1.00/100
Superior	The young person perceives the older person acting like a superior (demanding, bossy)	.83/93
Laodao	The "repetitious advice and questions of older people" (Zhang & Hummert, 2001, p. 224). While it may be well-intentioned expression of love and caring, it takes forms such as criticism, imposed advice or endless nagging.	.84/97
Old's satisfaction	The young person perceives the old person enjoying the intergenerational conversation	.92/90
Young's openness	The young person perceives he/she can be open in sharing personal information, family life, and/or job-related stories with the older person	.67/77
Young's satisfaction	The young person feels satisfied with the conversation	.93/87
Young disengaged	The young person feels disengaged from the conversation	.85/90
Young intimidated	Young person feels restrained or intimidated in the conversation (filial piety)	.96/97
Young being polite	Young person is polite or respectful in the conversation (filial piety)	.61/80
Generation gap	Young person perceives generational differences between the young and old person	.66/87
Old being bitter	Young person perceives the older person to be bitter in the conversation	.67/80

Table 2. Means of each intergenerational communication schema for the eleven coding dimensions

	Schemas (3 and 5-cluster solutions)				
	Positive Conversations		Mixed	Negative Conversations	
Coding Categories	Mutually satisfying	Helping	Mixed feelings	Small talk	Mutually unpleasant
Making old happy	**3.36**	**3.54**	**3.80**	*1.71*	2.00
Superior	2.07	2.25	2.27	*1.53*	**3.73**
Laodao	2.21	2.86	*1.20*	*1.59*	2.87
Old's satisfaction	**3.93**	**3.75**	**3.80**	**3.29**	*2.50*
Young's openness	2.57	2.36	2.47	2.59	1.59
Young's satisfaction	**3.14**	**3.50**	**3.47**	2.65	*2.05*
Young disengaged	2.14	2.29	2.47	**3.18**	**3.64**
Young intimidated	2.29	2.39	**3.20**	2.53	**3.09**
Young being polite	*1.29*	**3.50**	**3.93**	2.94	2.78
Generation gap	*1.71*	**3.79**	2.40	*1.53*	**3.27**
Old being bitter	2.71	*1.82*	**3.53**	*1.24*	**3.55**

Note. For each schema, the means above 3 (1–4 point scale) are in bold, and the means below 2 are in italics. Higher scores indicate greater presence of the emotion/behavior (e.g., more emphasis on making the older person happy).

Positive conversations (N = 40)

This cluster reflected conversations in which both young and older people were generally satisfied with the conversation experiences. Young people were willing to participate in the conversation and felt that their conversations were helpful for older adults (e.g., spending time with older adults, being good company). The perceived level of intimidation by the older adults was low. Within this broad description, two clusters emerged.

Mutually satisfying conversations (n = 13)
As can be seen in Excerpts 1 and 2, this ICS was characterized by young people showing interest in conversing with older adults and believing that these conversations made older adults feel better or happier (e.g., "I enjoyed the conversation very much" "He would be happy that I wanted to know about his past experiences"). The older people were perceived to appreciate the young people's company or effort. Interview accounts revealed that

young people respected older adults' experiences and would apply those experiences to their current or future situations (e.g., "the experiences would be helpful for me in the future"). Young people did not indicate the need to adapt their conversation style to show respect (e.g., "I could share a lot of my personal feelings and thoughts with her"). Older adults were perceived as outgoing or active. The notion of generation gap was mentioned less frequently than in other schemas. Young people wanted to engage in the conversation (e.g., "visit her once a week"). To some extent, these two excerpts suggested a generally rewarding schema in which age difference was treated positively.

Excerpt 1

"I enjoyed the conversation very much. I could learn how to talk to older people and also learn a lot about his experiences. These experiences would be helpful for me in the future. He would be happy if I wanted to know about his past experiences because not many people would ask about things like that" (ICD 51).

Excerpt 2

"After we talked, I felt that this older lady understood me, and I could share a lot of my personal feelings and thoughts with her. She was a very optimistic kind of person and had positive attitudes toward life. I wanted to make her feel happier too. If she did not mind, I would go visit her once a week, and I wanted my mom to know her too" (ICD 102).

Helping conversations (n = 27)
Similar to the first ICS, this one contained references to young people's intention to make older adults happy (see Excerpts 3 and 4: e.g., "you knew what to say to make her happy"). Unlike the first ICS, this cluster had remarks more clearly indicating that young people felt sympathetic towards older people which often became important sources for young people's communication satisfaction (e.g., "I was happy too because I could spend some time with her"). The conversation tended to be one-way, in terms of the young person asking questions about the older person's life, and then letting the older person talk. Young people expressed an interest in learning about older people's lives and/or past. Being very polite and respectful with older adults and adapting topic choices to the interlocutor were expressed in these interview accounts (e.g., "we talked about the same topic every time which was fine with me"). The perceived generation gap was large (e.g., the idea that "older people live in the past," was mentioned in some cases). Older adults were perceived as being mildly *laodao* (endless repeating, see Table 1 for its definition) or

demanding. Although the need to be respectful was noted, young people did not feel particularly intimidated by older people.

Excerpt 3

"You talked to this older person, and within a few minutes, you knew what type of person she was. Then, you knew what to say to make her happy. The conversation would be more enjoyable and have more things to discuss in this way" (ICD 76).

Excerpt 4

"She liked to have her family visit her, like her daughter who she didn't see very often, her daughter-in-law . . . I could tell that she was very happy to see us. I was happy too because I could spend some time with her even though we always talked about the same topics every time which was fine with me" (ICD 98).

Mixed feelings conversations (N = 18)

This group contained only one cluster and it revealed an ambivalent feeling about older adults and the interactions. Young people strongly felt that they were doing something nice by conversing with older adults and that older adults loved their company. Learning from older adults' past experiences was another positive aspect about the conversations (e.g., "there was so much we can learn from older adults, their life experiences"). At the same time, the positive feelings were coupled with the need for young people to be polite or respectful. The intimidation level was greater here than in the two clusters above. Older people were perceived more as being demanding, or meddling (e.g., "he might point his finger at me"), however, the level of older people being *laodao* was very low. Older people were described as having a tendency to complain or disclose unpleasant life experiences in the conversation. Overall, the accounts suggested a satisfying conversation for the older person, but a less positive experience for the young (e.g., "I wouldn't want to prolong the conversation"). Two illustrative excerpts are included here.

Excerpt 5

"I think that there is so much we can learn from older adults such as their life experiences. There are many things you could discuss with them. I think this older person would be happier when I talk to him. But, he wouldn't agree with me on certain things, like the ways I think about things, young people today, or their life styles. I would be more patient with older adults because of their age, but I wouldn't want to prolong the conversation" (ICD 79).

Excerpt 6

"I let him complain about his life so that he could release some stress he had at home. I did not like that either because he might point his finger at me or blame me for something I did not do. But I guess he did not mean to do that. It was the time he grew up, the society and his life experiences that made him become this way. After all, I was happy to be able to share some of his feelings" (ICD 16).

Negative conversations (N = 38)

Two clusters were included in this category. The common characteristics shared by these two clusters were that young people did not feel their conversations had a positive influence on their interlocutor such as making them happy or less lonely. Young people were not very interested in engaging in, nor were they satisfied with the conversations.

Small talk conversation (n = 18)

A prominent characteristic of this cluster was that young people treated the conversation as a daily occurrence and made minimum effort in terms of their time or attention to the conversation. There was no intention to prolong the conversation, and an indifferent attitude towards or distance from the conversation was expressed (e.g., "most of the time, I wouldn't really hear what he said to me"). The small talk orientation was also illustrated in cases where young people noted that they would not have much lasting memory of the conversation (e.g., "I would forget what this conversation was about right after we finished"). Polite and accommodative comments were commonly found across these ICDs (e.g., "I was coping with the situation in order to be respectful"). The level of communication satisfaction was moderate to low. Older adults, on the other hand, were perceived as enjoying the conversation. Very few descriptions indicate an interest in getting to know more about the older adult or the conversation. Two illustrative excerpts are included below:

Excerpt 7

"Most of the time, I wouldn't really hear what he said to me. To me, talking with this kind of older adult did not mean much to me. I mean, his experiences might be very important and useful, but I felt like I did not listen to them with my heart. I would forget what this conversation was about right after we finished it. I did not reflect on it or think about it. He asked me questions, and I answered. But, most of the time, I was just a

listener instead of trying to find things to talk with him. I think he was happy to see me and I felt happy to see him too but I did not like to be in a situation where I did not know what to say, so the conversation became awkward" (ICD 95).

Excerpt 8

"When I talked to him, even though I would be in a bit of a bad mood, I still think that he wanted to be cared for. He needed me to talk to him; he would like me to talk to him. It is just that his responses would put me in a bad mood. Basically, I was coping with the situation in order to be respectful; therefore, I kept a smiling face all the time. I didn't want to tell him what I thought. I would say what he wanted me to say so he would be happy. I would think to myself, 'please let this conversation be over. I don't want to pretend anymore' (ICD2).

Mutually unpleasant conversation (n = 20)

A common experience reported in this schema was a feeling of frustration with the older interlocutor (e.g., "he was unhappy with whatever I did. Nothing was right"). Young people avoided or showed little interest in maintaining such conversations, nor did they foresee that conversations had any positive outcome for older adults. Conversations were restrained as a result of young people's fear of upsetting older adults, or because the older adults were already angry for something young people did. The level of intimidation was greater than the level of being respectful or polite in this cluster (e.g., "I was intimidated by his seriousness, so the conversation stopped without really finishing it"). Older adults were described as stubborn, meddling, and also *laodao*; they had a tendency to correct young people's behavior and extended negative comments to young people in general (e.g., "he picked on everything I did, *laodao*, *laodao*, and *laodao*"). Therefore, young people believed that old people were unhappy too about the conversation. Two illustrative excerpts are included here.

Excerpt 9

"He was unhappy with whatever I did. Nothing was right. He used his standards on me. He was very *laodao* when talking to me. He picked on every aspect of me; from my clothing style, hair style, to me as a person, and the way I talk, *laodao*, and *laodao*. I really wanted to say bad things back at him, but there was an age difference here. I had to keep smiling and pretended to be respectful. If he was one of my peers, I would have yelled back at him right away" (ICD 71).

Excerpt 10

"This kind of older adult is usually very lonely, very old. I didn't understand what he said, and he didn't understand what I said either. Because he spoke so softly that I couldn't hear him very well. I dared not to ask him to repeat again because there was a distance between us. I was intimidated by his seriousness, so the conversation stopped without really finishing it. I turned around to do other things which he did not even notice at all and just kept saying something in his mouth. It was really a very bad feeling" (ICD 21).

Discussion

The *helping* schema was the most common among the five ICSs. Young people tended to help older people by spending time with them, showing proper respect, or showing interest in older persons' lives in the conversations. This ICS views old age as linked to loneliness, and intergenerational communication as a chance to elevate older persons' spirits and to reconnect older adults to society. This powerless image of older adults was also echoed by Chiu (2000) who conducted in-depth interviews with 498 Taiwanese residents in four age groups (12–19, 20–40, 41–64, and 65 and above). The interview results revealed that the most frequently mentioned image of old age by the 20–40 age group was—pitiful (including abandoned by others, bored, sad, no goals for life, neglected, and lonely). The helping tendency, on one hand, brought satisfaction to younger people but, on the other hand, implied a power imbalance between young and old, with young people having more power than older adults.

Second, older adults' experience was both a unifying force of and a limiting factor for intergenerational communication. Older people's wisdom is universally recognized across cultures, and this holds true in these Taiwanese ICSs whether in a negative or positive schema. Numerous interview accounts revealed that young adults, to a great extent, were motivated by an attitude of "learning from older people's experience" when engaging in intergenerational conversation (e.g., Zhang & Hummert, 2001). This intergroup element was not perceived as a barrier but a connection to establish common ground for young and old people. Young respondents indicated that they would not accept criticism from their peers, but would accept the same criticism from their elders, because older people "have eaten more salt than young people have eaten rice after all" (i.e., have had more experience in life).

On the other hand, older adults' experience also limited or stopped young people from trying to engage in conversations for the experience may not be applicable to their current situations. In addition to cohort experiences between generations that naturally create some distance between young and old, dramatic changes in Taiwanese society may enlarge that gap. Traditional values such as thrift, education and job stability are not well-received by today's Taiwanese young people. As a result, they may dismiss older adults' opinions and suggestions even while appearing respectful and attentive (McGee & Barker, 1982; Sharps, Price-Sharps & Hanson, 1998). Chiu's (2000) interviewees in the 12–19 and 20–40 age groups also expressed these two-sided impressions of old age.

Young people's rejection of older people's advice may be due to the way in which advice is offered—through *laodao*, a common communicative feature associated with Chinese older people. "*Laodao* is the repetitious advice and questions from older adults" (Zhang & Hummert, 2001, p. 224). Zhang and Hummert (2001) suggested that *laodao* may overlap with "nagging" or "overparenting" in the Western literatures (Giles & Williams, 1994, Williams & Giles, 1996), but is not identical. When advice is communicated to young people in a "*laodao*" way, they tend to feel being criticized and imposed upon with unwanted advice, and associate traits such as "outdated," "stubborn," "conservative" and "living in the past" with older adults.

Laodao may also resemble *patronizing speech*, a slower and simplified form of communication prevalent in European and American intergenerational settings (Ryan, Hummert & Boich, 1995; Williams & Giles, 1998). Patronizing speech is grounded in negative stereotypes of aging. While patronizing to older adults is less common in a Chinese society as a result of the respect and privilege afforded older adults, patronizing the young, which is the case in the current study, is typical and expected. Giles and Williams (1994) uncovered three distinctive clusters representing patronizing the young from older adults in the US: non-listening, disapproving/disrespect youth, and over-protective parental. In terms of its forms, *laodao* is similar to disapproving of youth and over-protective parental. However, the essence of *laodao* is the "repetitious" aspect. In other words, a disapproving remark can be characterized as a "criticism" and the same remark will be qualified as "*laodao*" is when it is given repetitiously and sometimes without a specific incident to demand such remark.

In the current study, *laodao* was more associated with the *mutually unpleasant* and *helping*, but not with the *small talk* and *mixed feelings* schemas. The reason *laodao* was seen more in the *helping* schema might emerge from an association that lonely older people tend to repeatedly offer advice to prove their self worth, to reassure their age status or to prevent young people from

making the same mistakes they made and for which they are suffering the consequences (A Chinese saying states, "not listening to older adults, immediate failures").

Taiwanese and U.S. ICSs (from Harwood et al., 2000) can be compared in two ways. First, the number and range of schemas differed. Our research demonstrated a smaller repertoire of ICSs and fewer levels of abstraction in Taiwan (two levels and five ICSs in Taiwan; three levels and eight ICSs in the U.S.). Our findings also showed that the range between the most positive and most negative schemas was smaller in Taiwan than the U.S. While the number or complexity of schemas might be due to respondents' knowledge, purposes, or cognitive complexity (Wiggins, 1979), we offer two possible reasons that may account for the fewer number and narrower range of schemas found in the current study. The first is methodological. Harwood et al.'s (2000) study used *summaries* of intergenerational communication descriptions (ICDs) in the cording process, whereas the current study used the complete transcripts. While the summaries of ICDs in Harwood et al.'s study (2000) captured the central features and dynamics of intergenerational interaction, they might have at the same time filtered out some subtle, but important features and created an exaggerated sense of a consistently positive or negative description. Using complete ICDs allowed us to see the ways in which interviewees described intergenerational communication in a natural flow from a more holistic perspective. The more complex information in such descriptions might result in less extreme evaluations (Linville, 1982).

Our favored interpretation of the smaller number and narrower range of ICSs in Taiwan is one of a cultural restriction on range of permissible behavior. As discussed earlier, the norm of filial piety grants older people authority and much higher power over younger people. Direct confrontation or challenges are considered disrespectful. Likewise, relaxed, highly personalized interactions are more difficult to achieve under prescriptive norms of power imbalance. Hence, interaction styles are fairly firmly and unambiguously established, and variation tends to be smaller given the limits set on highly positive and highly negative interaction styles. While stereotype traits (e.g., Zhang et al., 2002) and stereotype structures (e.g., Zhang, Hummert & Garstka, 2003) identified in a Chinese context (PRC) are as diverse and complicated as in the U.S., communication schemas require more than recognition of characteristics associated with older adults. Intergenerational communication schemas, which are not trait or stereotype based cognitive structures, reflect the context-based reality of Taiwanese young people's intergenerational communication experiences designated or conditioned by the norm of filial piety.

In addition to number and range, the Taiwanese and U.S. schemas can be compared in terms of their specific content. Both cultures demonstrate a helping orientation in intergenerational interactions. However, while the Taiwan study found one helping schema, there were three different types of helping ICSs (*positive and helping*, *sympathy and helping*, and *no connection and helping* schemas) in Harwood et al.'s (2000) study. The *helping* schema in the Taiwan study had a similar outlook as the *sympathy and helping* schema in the U.S. study. Comments such as "older people are lonely" (ICD 75), "their children do not take good care of them; their daughter-in-laws are not filial enough" (ICD 82) were commonly expressed in these accounts. In particular, sympathetic feelings were mostly from a concern that older people's children did not fulfill filial responsibilities. Interviewees expressed that they would avoid topics involving older people's children especially the stereotypical negative relationships between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law in Taiwan. Another similarity in the two cultures was the *small talk* schema in Taiwan and the *no connection* schema in the U.S. Both schemas showed that young people did not engage in or care for the conversations, or feel any emotional connection with older persons. Older adults were described as cold or talkative and they were not considerate in terms of whether young interlocutors enjoyed the conversations.

Interestingly, there are no schemas with *respect* as the central characteristic in Taiwan, while one such schema did emerge in the U.S. data. We suspect that the *respect* norm is so ubiquitous in Taiwan that it pervades all intergenerational communication. Showing deference is such an integral and fundamental part of intergenerational communication that it exists in every schema. Put differently, it may be one element that is shared across all the schemas because of its essentiality. Not engaging in deference does more than merely question the rather specific dictates of filial piety. It also undermines the structural organization of the society (Gallois et al., 1996).

These schemas have direct consequences for intergenerational communication and successful aging. For example, the ICSs identified in the current study contributed to our understanding of possible forms and valence of intergenerational interactions in Taiwan. As specified in more detail in the Harwood et al. (2000) article, we believe that schemas are instrumental in driving real communication. They provide a somewhat more specific guide to action than trait-based stereotypes, and hence when a schema is activated it may lay out a plan for interaction that can be followed in whole or part. The content of these ICSs as provided in the excerpts illustrates how cultural values are manifested in cognitive representations of communication. Quality social interactions is one important predictor of successful aging (Nussbaum, 1985). These ICSs, such as the *mutually satisfying*

schema, suggest types of interaction that may be beneficial to both younger and olderer adults (from the latter's perspectives). By the same token, knowing the possible consequence for engaging in conversations based on a *helping* schema, for instance, may require both sides to re-examine common modes of intergenerational interaction. Lastly, these ICSs also reflect possible sources of intergenerational conflicts which can be detrimental to intergenerational relationships.

A limitation of this study is obviously its respondent population. The study advertisement was posted and announced in liberal arts and science schools where fewer male students enrollment—only one third of the interviewees were males. It is possible that the interview accounts obtained reflect female more than male perspectives on interacting with older people.

This project revealed the ICSs held by Taiwanese young people. Rather than a resentful feeling because of the politeness and obligations imposed on young people (Williams et al., 1997), results of this project find Zhang and Hummert's (2001) discussion on tension and harmonies in intergenerational communication a better delineation of the current situation in Taiwan. Today's Taiwanese young people do not accept an absolute form of filial piety and have varying ideas of how older people should live their lives. But, they endorse the basic principle of filial piety and apply it out of a sympathetic feeling that older people are not well cared for by their families (e.g., no direct confrontation, tolerate *laodao*, be patient with older people). The comparisons with the U.S. ICSs showed that Taiwanese young people held fewer types of ICSs, and were also less extreme (both positive and negative) in range. We suggest that filial piety accounts for such variation. These findings informed us about the content of Taiwanese ICSs and offered insights into the cultural dimensions of communication schemas. Future studies should continue to examine the extent to which these ICSs predict actual intergenerational communication behavior. Communication schemas should predict behavior better than trait-based stereotypes, because they are both more comprehensive and more specific to the communication context (Hummert, Shaner, Garstka & Henry, 1998).

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