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Résumé de l'article

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Using a Western-Based Survey to Assess Cultural Perspectives of Dene Mothers in Northern Manitoba

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Abstract

With increasing numbers of immigrants entering Canada over the past several decades, educators have become more sensitive to the various genres of communication competence and discourse patterns within a given culture. This is especially true for the Aboriginal students struggling to acclimate into Western curricula. The purpose of this study was to explore Aboriginal mothers' perspectives on language acquisition for their children. Thirty Dene speaking mothers from a northern first nation community were administered a survey in a face to face format. The survey was replicated in part from previous studies on language acquisition of cultural groups in Canada. This paper will describe the challenges in trying to adapt such a survey, including issues of administration, translation, and survey validity and reliability. Challenges in adhering to Western research standards while displaying cultural sensitivity to its participants by way of acknowledging the community's indigenous knowledge and English as an alternative language (EAL) issues are discussed.

Introduction

As a practising speech-language pathologist in Lac Brochet, Manitoba for the last five years, I became curious as to why children in this community, as well as many other First Nation communities I visited, tended to score low in language competency tests. I decided to explore this question by attempting to gather Aboriginal mothers' perspectives on how children learn and use language. A survey was chosen as a method of collecting the perspectives, as previous research indicated such surveys as being a reliable tool (Guitierrez-Clellen & Kreiter, 2003; Johnston & Wong, 2002; Simmons & Johnston, 2007; Siren, 1995; Squires, Bricker, & Potter, 1997). The answers from the Aboriginal mothers were then compared with non-Aboriginal mothers. Results indicated the Dene mothers in Lac Brochet have similar perspectives in terms of how they teach their children language, with some significantly different beliefs and practices noted as well.

The work completed on language development in various cultures has largely been ethnographic, where the researcher would spend an extensive amount of time observing caregiver-child interactions and gathering data within the homes and community. For this cross-cultural study there were restrictions that prevented research from being conducted in a qualitative manner. These restrictions involved limited resources such as time and funding. A survey resulted in a more time- and cost-saving measure to collect data.

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As Johnson (1992) explained "The purpose of a survey is to learn about characteristics of an entire group of interest (a population) by examining a subset of that group (a sample)" (p.104). In a bilingual language acquisition study, Guitierrez-Clellen & Kreiter (2003) made reference to questionnaires being successful when obtaining specific language histories from families. Squires, Bricker, & Potter (1997) noted how questionnaires are valid tools for screening and identification of language impairment. Siren (1995) favourably discussed the use of questionnaires for collecting information on language histories from culturally diverse families.

Two language based studies which used surveys are Johnston and Wong (2002) and Simmons and Johnston (2007), who looked at Canadian Chinese mothers and Canadian Indian mothers, respectively, in comparison to Western mothers, in terms of mother-child interaction

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patterns. I based my own survey items on the survey used in these studies, altering the questions where necessary to reflect, as best possible, Aboriginal language and culture. I developed the survey based on the literature and what members of the community reported regarding communicative competence in Aboriginal children.

Purpose of Study

Three research questions were developed to guide my inquiry into Aboriginal language development, specifically within the Dene families of the northern community of Lac Brochet, Manitoba:

1. Are there any demographic attributes of caregivers that influence their attitudes and beliefs regarding how language is learned in pre-school years?
2. What do caregivers perceive or believe to be child-rearing practices that are influential in promoting language development in their children?
3. What do caregivers report regarding how frequently they use discourse practices believed to be influential in terms of language development?

The significance of gathering these perspectives was to educate language specialists and educators on the extent that culture and community dialect affect how language is learned by children of this community. This information may be further extended by specialists to develop and provide proper assessment protocols and treatment measures when working with Aboriginal children. An information meeting was held in the community prior to addressing the research questions.

Thirty mothers from Lac Brochet were recruited for the study, as well as 30 non-Aboriginal mothers for the comparison group. The two sample groups were matched as best as possible on demographic characteristic, such as socio-economic status, age of children, and level of education. Such environmental factors are noted in the literature to be influential language development of children (Fewell & Deutscher, 2004; Hart & Risley, 1995; Rush, 1999; Schacter, 1979; Snow, Dubber, & De Blauw, 1982; Tough, 1977; Vernon-Feagans, Hurley, Yont, Wamboldt, & Kolak; 2007). These studies revealed how participation in dialogue is crucial to attainment of sophisticated language forms or higher functions of language.

All mothers in Lac Brochet had Dene as their first language while the comparison Western mothers were speakers of Canadian English. To present a cross-cultural perspective on how Aboriginal children acquire language, I looked at studies by Crago (1990a; 1990b) with Inuit children, Scollon & Scollon (1981; 1984) with Athabaskan natives in Alberta, Philips (1983) with Native Americans in the state of Oregon, Schieffelin (1983) with Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea, Heath (1983) with Black and Anglo mothers in the upper Eastern United States, John-Steiner and Panofsky (1992) with Black, Hispanic, and Native American cultural groups, Johnston and Wong (2002) with Canadian Chinese and Anglo mothers, and Simmons and Johnston (2007) with Indian and Euro-Canadian mothers, all of which noted the differing values and beliefs when caring for young children and how social occurrences reflect on language development.

Survey Development

Members of the community, including a research assistant and cultural informants, were involved in deriving the research questions, administration of the survey, interpretating the results, and discussion of the findings. The survey (Appendix A) used in this study was adapted, with permission, from a survey (Appendix B) used in Johnston and Wong's (2002) study of Western Canadian and Chinese Canadian mothers and their beliefs and practices regarding children's language interactions. In order to include Aboriginal perspectives, questions (items) from the original survey were removed and replaced with items that related more to Aboriginal practices and beliefs.

A research assistant was recruited to complete face to face interviews (survey questions). She was a young female member of the community. As part of the training, a pilot videotaped interview guide with an Aboriginal volunteer was completed before beginning the data collection. The purpose of this step was to reassure me, and the research assistant herself, that she was confident and independently capable of conducting face-to-face interviews. This tape was reviewed with the research assistant to establish if (a) the interview guide was of appropriate length, and (b) the process of collecting the data was appropriate (e.g. the research assistant was comfortable in administering the survey questions and the

participant was at ease in answering the survey items)

The development of effective questionnaires or surveys to gather responses in the context of a cross-cultural study is an area of research that is actively growing due to concerns of *response bias* (Cronbach, 1950; Hui & Triandis, 1989; Marin, Gamba, & Marin, 1992; Paulhus, 1991). R*esponse bias* is "a systematic tendency to respond to a range of questionnaire items on some basis other than the specific item content (i.e., what the items were designed to measure)" (Paulhus, 1991, p.17). Cross-cultural studies are susceptible to providing conclusions drawn from empirical data that are not sensitive to different response patterns seen in various cultural groups studied. Paulhus (1991) further explains "To the extent that an individual displays the bias consistently across time and situations, the bias is said to be a *response style*" (p.17).

Dolnicar and Grun (2007) list six different response styles in their study, with *Extreme Response Style* (ERS) being the one that has been the focus of most related studies. ERS is a style that is best described as tending to pick the extreme ends of the scale; the extreme negative or extreme positive response. Hui and Triandis (1989) and Marin et al. (1992) are two studies that looked at ERS as a response style in studying Hispanic and Western groups. Both studies concluded there was no difference between the Hispanic and non-Hispanic response styles, as both were classified as ERS. Adding further to the complexity of using surveys to study cultural groups, these studies employed different multi-category scales, ranging from a 4-point scale used in Marin's study to a 10-point scale used in Hui and Triandis's study. Dolnicar and Grun (2007) remarked on the lack of consensus in regards to the most appropriate range of scale for use in a cross-cultural study and that further investigation is necessary.

Thus, different response styles will lead to different probabilities for the categories to be chosen (e.g. the choice of Never (1) versus Always (5) on a 5-point Likert scale). A participant classified as having an extreme response style is more likely to pick end points of the scale, while respondents with a mild response style have a lower probability of doing so. Response style bias is a concern for cross-cultural studies, as participants' responses may not reflect the content of the survey, but instead, the cultural values of those which are surveyed (Dolnicar & Grun, 2007). Of the studies reviewed, there were none completed that looked at Aboriginal response styles.

The measurement scales used in Johnston and Wong's (2002) study remained unchanged in my study (summative scales or Likert 5-point scale) with the first set of questions pertaining to cultural *beliefs*, and the remaining questions related to the *frequency* in which the practices (survey items) are maintained. Ten of the 20 *belief* questions were removed from the original survey and 14 new questions were added, making a total of 24 *belief* questions. These new questions are listed 1-14 in the adapted version (Appendix A).

I prepared the 14 survey questions having (a) completed an extensive literature review on cross-cultural language acquisition (b) an educational background in language acquisition, (c) close consultation with a bilingual research assistant, and (d) personal clinical experience as an speech-language pathologist working with young Aboriginal children..

In formulating questions 4, 8, 13 of the survey, I looked at the research by Crago (1990a) and Scollon and Scollon (1981; 1984) concerning their observations of Aboriginal classrooms, in the hope of drawing out similar cultural views from the participants. For example, Crago's (1990a) study showed how classroom teachers are sometimes more concerned if an Inuit child is overly talkative, rather than quiet. Scollon and Scollon (1984) mentioned how an Athabaskan grandparent felt that it is not desirable to have young children talk a lot. Crago and Eriks-Brophy (1993) noted how Inuit mothers may not feel comfortable stimulating expressive language the same way that Western mothers are taught to do (questions 6, 9, 13). Young children most often learn language as a product of sibling interactions in play, not from direct elicitation methods or one-on-one play with the caregiver. The use of narratives, however, is a more preferred and natural method of teaching (Scollon & Scollon, 1984; John-Steiner & Panofsky, 1992). Two Aboriginal SLPs working in Canada made reference to response lag times, eye contact, and the strong connection these Aboriginal communities have to nature and oral traditions (Ball et al., 2006) (questions 1, 2, 7, 8, 10, 14, 21). Response lag-time differences compared to Western groups were also noted in Philips' (1983) work with Native Americans and Crago's studies with the Inuit of Quebec (1990a). Philips showed how young children tend to be more physical and learn best through visual and tactile modes. Ball and Lewis' (2005) project indicated that Aboriginal children tended to be silent in the presence of Elders (question 11). Other survey items were derived from personal experience working with Aboriginal parents and their knowledge of language acquisition (3, 5). The remaining 10 questions (15 to 24) from the original survey (Appendix B) were maintained, as they were considered strong predictors of cultural variance among the Western and Aboriginal groups. Table 1 in Appendix C displayed how the variables in the study (beliefs, practices) related to the research questions and survey items.

Survey Administration

Most of the literature on the differing types of survey administration has occurred in the field of health care and pertained mainly to response rate, not the validity of the response nor the cross-cultural issues potentially influencing responses.

Studies such as Amodei, Katerndahl Larme, and Palmer's (2003) study on different methods of gathering data showed that self-report or paper format, and interview formats (used with primary care patients), delivered minimal differences. Siemiatycki (1979) completed a comparison study of data collection measures for three different survey formats: mail, telephone, and home interview strategies for household health surveys. The telephone format showed the greatest response rate. Validity of responses were also checked through individual responses and compared to the national database, noting mail-in surveys to be most valid. The validity of the responses may depend on survey content, specifically where the level of sensitivity of survey items is an issue. In this case, mailed surveys may produce the most valid responses as the respondent would not be overtly disclosing sensitive information.

None of the studies mentioned above noted cross-cultural sample groups. The attitudes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mothers were evaluated using culturally sensitive methodology. In order to ensure that the study design was culturally appropriate for both groups of participants, an asymmetrical research design with different interview techniques for the two groups was used. This required adopting the attitude that "different from" is not the same as "worse than" or "better than", and that the same measure will not necessarily assess all mothers fairly. Specifically, the survey was administered to the Aboriginal mothers in a face-to-face interview conducted by the research assistant, who was fluent in Dene and also a member of the community. This supported elements of oral culture, translation into first language, and clarification of items as needed. Having a personable approach to gathering the Aboriginal mothers' perspective seemed more congruent with the literature on Aboriginal sharing circles and social discourse practices.

The surveys were administered to the non-Aboriginal mothers in written format only. This allowed them to complete the surveys on their own schedule and respond without feeling the judgement of the researcher regarding their interactions with their children. Completing the survey privately may have lessened response bias, as their initials would be the only identifying information linked to their answers.

During the stages of participant recruitment, the research assistant asked the Dene mothers' preference in terms of a location the questionnaire would take place, offering the option of either a private room in the school, or in their own home. All participants requested the interview to be done in their homes, except for two or the 30 mothers who asked for it to be completed at their place of work. Interestingly, I had completed pilot interviews with five Aboriginal members of the community, and all five requested that the interviews be completed at the school. This differing in request for location assured me of the importance of hiring a research assistant who is a member of the community.

The research assistant also completed a pilot videotaped interview guide with an Aboriginal volunteer before beginning the data collection. The purpose of this step was to reassure me, and the research assistant herself, that she was confident and independently capable of conducting face-to-face interviews. This tape was reviewed with the research assistant to establish if (a) the interview guide was of appropriate length, and (b) the process of collecting the data was appropriate (e.g. the research assistant was comfortable in administering the survey questions and the participant was at ease in answering the survey items).

To ensure the appropriateness of the survey in its current form, it was self-administered by two teachers (Resource and Nursery) from Lac Brochet, to comment on relevancy, ease of comprehension, sensitivity, and length, with the option of making suggestions for change. English was the first language for both teachers. Their responses resulted in making some minor changes to the survey. Once the final version of the survey was completed in both languages (oral Dene version, written English version), a pilot study was conducted. Johnson (1992) noted the importance of pilot testing in the development of a survey, regarding it as "the most crucial step" (p. 114). The pilot study consisted of administering four surveys, two with Aboriginal mothers and two with non-Aboriginal mothers. I completed one of the pilot trials for the Aboriginal group and the research assistant completed the other. The survey trials for the non-Aboriginal mothers were mailed out to willing participants. The completed surveys from both groups did not suggest any misinterpretations or confusion. All respondents fit the inclusion criteria. No comments were made at the end of the four trialed surveys. The data from the pilot surveys were destroyed and not included as part of this study.

A survey form of data collection is limited in that it may only indicate whether differences exist between the two groups, but will not provide an in-depth description of the meaning behind these differences. Thus, this survey was the first step toward understanding a small component of a complex paradigm of practices and beliefs within one FN community.

Survey Validity and Reliability

Western-based research methods (pilot study) as well as accommodating indigenous ways of knowing (face-to-face interview guide to be administered by a known community member) strengthened the validity of the findings. Indigenous knowledge, confidentiality, sharing, respect, and reciprocity towards members of the community were issues considered throughout the project, but especially during times of participant and research assistant recruitment, survey administration, and finally in the dissemination of results to the community. Having a group of cultural informants assisted me greatly in the interpretation of the surveyed responses. In addition to input from the cultural informants, a small comment section inserted at the end of the survey provided some insight at the time of analysis. This step also served to increase the effectiveness of the survey, as it added a qualitative component to the survey. Hines (1993) acknowledged that certain qualitative aspects of inquiry would assist and ideally be incorporated into the survey tool if used in a cross-cultural study. Using a survey in this manner also helped to ensure that the responses on the Likert scale were consistent with responses found in the comment section.

The use of a previously validated survey increased the effectiveness of my own survey and is an alternative cross-cultural method for investigating views and perspectives of different cultural groups. Given the successful results of two particular cross-cultural studies involving a survey design (Johnston & Wong, 2002; Simmons & Johnston, 2007), I used a similar, quantitative approach for this particular study.

The replication of the study with two different cultural groups also adds to the reliability of the measure, particularly since the findings distinguished significant differences between the target and Western mothers. The survey items were also based on well-established literature related to language acquisition and caregiver-child interaction patterns which further supports the validity of the survey contents.

Survey Translation

The survey was created first in English and then translated to Dene by an Aboriginal woman who is a well-known translator in the community. The Dene version was then back-translated, that is, a second Dene speaker listened to the taped Dene version and translated it back into English. Comparisons were made of the two English versions (original English and English rendition of the Dene translation) to see where discrepancies occurred.

Three questions no longer conveyed the original message. For Q.10 *My child's connection to spirituality is important to me* was represented in the back translation as "*I don't mind my child learning through other spirituality what is right or wrong and I strongly agree and I encourage my child to learn the belief between right and wrong."* The question now became one regarding teaching the child the difference between right and wrong rather than a more general perspective of the role of spirituality. This was not the meaning I wanted to convey to the caregivers, so the translated version was redone in a way that captured the intended meaning more clearly. The final oral Dene version (in translation) became "*How my child understands his knowledge and belief and faith. I really want this for my child."* The next question requiring some attention was Q. 16 *Children understand some words even before they can speak.* This question was translated into Dene as *"Some kids or most of them learn new words by listening even before they speak."* The corrected English rendition of the Dene version was "*Before a child can even speak, they learn new words by listening to others."* The last question that needed correction was Q.18 *If parents use "baby talk" (like wawa for water, or jammies for pajamas) their child won't learn to speak well.* The first translation of this question became *"When a parent speaks to a child like a little baby, then it will be hard, difficult, for a child to learn how to speak properly or correctly."* The corrected oral Dene version when back-translated into the English version became "*When a child is small they speak in baby language and if parents speak to a child in the same way (baby language) it will be difficult for the child to learn or speak correctly.*" These corrected versions were incorporated in the Dene audio-taped version of the survey. Review of the back-translated versions of the survey allowed me to witness the diversity between the two languages in terms of word meanings, grammar, and syntax.

The Dene version was not presented in script to the participants, as very few Lac Brochet community members can read Dene syllabic language forms. Therefore, the participants had three choices of survey administration: (a) listening to the translated version by the initial translator (audio-taped version played during the face-to-face interview), (b) listening to the research assistant read out the question in Dene, or (c) reading the survey question in English as presented in the survey. Nearly all participants declined the use of the audio-taped translation. If needing translation, they would ask the research assistant to provide it. This may have been due to the translated version being less personal. The research assistant had familiarized herself with the taped recording during the training process to the extent of essentially memorizing the Dene version. The research assistant stated that the majority of the participants were read the question in English, but then needed some additional clarification that occurred in Dene. Strict guidelines were

not provided to the research assistant in terms of the chosen language of survey administration. The free use of either English or Dene was permitted to incorporate aspects of indigenous methodology, such as reciprocal respect between participants and researcher, and facilitating comfortable and relaxed participation.

In this study, the fact that the Dene mothers of Lac Brochet used English as a second language was an important point that had direct impact on survey responses. Discourse patterns and lifestyle differences in terms of community demographics and context also impacted how a parent may answer the survey questions. These differences can be displayed by a child through body language, eye contact, whole-to-part learning style, visual–kinaesthetic learning style, verbal response time lags, speaking volume, and frequency.

Summary and Conclusions

In this article, I attempted to describe the various steps necessary to develop and administer a survey that would accurately gather responses from two culturally different sample groups. Adding even more complexity to the development of a survey is having English as a second language for one of the groups sampled. For such cross-cultural studies, the researcher must adhere to methodological procedures in order to strengthen survey validity and reliability. Other issues relating to this particular survey development and administration included a) employing sensitivity towards cultural dependent survey response styles and response bias, b) limited literature to draw from when creating survey items (content), c) interview format and administration, d) language translation issues, and e) Western research practices colliding with culturally sensitive practices.

It is not known whether Dene culture is associated with a certain response style (Dolnicar & Grun, 2007) and if so, this may bias the way participants responded to the survey items. There were no studies revealed in the literature search which looked at survey response styles relating to Aboriginal culture. The Aboriginal mothers' responses reflected an extreme response style. This response style was especially evident in the final 14 questions which looked at *frequency* of language facilitating practices. These 14 questions were not adapted from the previously used questionnaire. The responses from the Western urban mothers were more evenly distributed across the 4-point Likert scale. The same type of varied responses was not seen from the Dene mothers. Nearly all 30 mothers answered these questions with a (3) Very Often, or (4) Almost Always. A graphic representation of the sample groups' responses for each survey item is presented in Appendix C.

Creating the survey items to reflect both cultures presented significant challenges. Most of the studies completed on Aboriginal groups relating to language acquisition and discourse patterns occurred in the 1980s and were researched largely by qualitative measures. Even with a comment section inserted at the end of this particular survey, additional open-ended questions or other means of gathering qualitative information may have helped.

In the initial preparation of the survey, I consulted with the research assistant regarding each survey item to ensure they were culturally appropriate. In doing so, some questions were deleted, while others were changed slightly to provide clarity and ensure appropriateness. However, the research assistant was not a mother, and perhaps did not detect the nuances that a mother in the community might have. In addition, the very nature of Aboriginal discourse, where speakers are less overt and opinionated compared to Westerners (Scollon & Scollon, 1995), may have influenced how the Dene mothers responded. There were also survey items that included vague vocabulary, such as "play" or "instructions", and these terms were open to a broad range of interpretations. For example, the first two questions asked about children's preferences for indoor and outdoor play activities. Judging by the varied responses within both groups of mothers, factors other than culture, such as the age of the child or the time of year, may have influenced the mothers' responses.

In terms of the internal validity of the survey, using survey items that were replicated from previous (non-Aboriginal) studies may not have been appropriate. Given the range of variability within First Nation communities and the current findings, these items were not as effective as expected in identifying differences between the Dene and non-Aboriginal mothers' responses.

The reliability of the survey was weakened by using two different forms of survey administration – interviews with the Dene mothers, and mailed, self-administration with the non-Aboriginal mothers. The decision to have the research assistant interview the Dene mothers was based on following a more culturally appropriate protocol, where a trusted member of the community would facilitate open and forthright responses. Allowing the research assistant to have free use of language (Dene and English) also weakened both survey validity and reliability, as it was difficult to determine how confident the Aboriginal women were in answering the questions in either English or their native language.

My absence from the community throughout the majority of the interviews in Lac Brochet may have made a difference in terms of ensuring that the interviews were being conducted in a manner that was

consistent throughout data collection. I had no way of recording how much clarification was necessary during the administration process. This information would have allowed me to have a better sense of whether or not there may have been issues of EAL. Since the interviews were typically occurring in an informal setting (mother's homes), the research assistant may have unknowingly elicited a specific pattern of responses, which I was unable to monitor.

Finally, my reasons for not conducting a similar type of interview with the Western urban mothers stemmed from feelings of apprehension in conducting such personal interviews, as these mothers may have sensed judgement by a professional. However, in retrospect, I could have avoided this presumed bias had I recruited a research assistant to conduct these interviews, who was part of this small, urban, low socioeconomic group of mothers.

Although the demographic information was gathered similarly to what was done in the Johnston and Wong (2002) study, the *extent* to which the caregivers used two languages was not recorded in great detail in the current study. Instead I relied on anecdotal information from the research assistant and the cultural informants. All Dene caregivers listed Dene as their first language and English as a second language. All Western mothers listed English only as their first language. It may have been worthwhile to gather more specific data on language use for the Aboriginal mothers to aid in the interpretations of the results, such as: the language used most often with children, language used with other adults in the home, and views regarding transitioning of the language from home to school. Some of this information was relayed through the comment section; however, not all Dene mothers chose to present their views in such detail.

All of the above factors resulted in differences between the two groups that may have influenced the differences or similarities found in the survey results. In order to truly understand the cultural differences regarding future comparison studies of Aboriginal language acquisition, it would be necessary to match participant groups on age, gender, economic, education, urban/rural, bilingual/ monolingual (with a need to maintain a heritage language) and possibly religious orientation.

Strengths of the Study

Methodologically, the study recognized the ethical principles set out by the various governing agencies (ACUNS, CIHR, NIHR, RCAP) when completing research with Aboriginal people in terms of cultural sensitivity, recruitment, reciprocity, participatory research, respect for indigenous ways of knowing, and dissemination of the findings. Examples of adhering to issues of cultural sensitivity were shown in hiring a research assistant, as well as cultural informants, to assist in the interpretation of the results. These individuals were key to the success of the study. Accommodating indigenous ways of knowing, such as allowing a face-to-face interview guide to be administered by a known community member, strengthened the validity of the findings. Having worked in this community for several years leading up to this study, I was able to establish a sense of trust with key stakeholders in the community.

Using a survey tool that was replicated from published surveys strengthened the validity of the findings, and added to the reported differences and similarities in language perspectives across varying cultural groups in Canada. The method of analysis chosen was thorough and allowed me to compare both individual participant responses as well as the groups' responses as a whole. Additional analyses, beyond what was completed in the replicated studies, were carried out to further substantiate the results. Furthermore, the survey allowed for qualitative comments to be added by the caregivers, where expansion was necessary to justify their survey responses.

In preparation for this study, I expected the survey to reveal cultural differences in the beliefs and reported practices of language interaction patterns between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mothers to a greater extent than what the survey responses revealed. This expectation was based on previous ethnographic studies researching Aboriginal cultural traditions, the strong connection between culture and language, along with the results of similar surveys used with other minority groups in Canada.

As a new researcher and creator of a survey tool, I needed to reflect on the lack of differences seen in the mothers' perspectives between the two groups and try to determine whether it was the survey tool itself or the study's design and methodology that brought about the apparent lack of differences, or was it simply a true reflection of this particular group of Aboriginal mothers. Only future research can determine this, perhaps taking place in the same community, with different methodological procedures. The lack of research in the area of Aboriginal language acquisition justifies further studies to be completed.

Regarding the survey tool itself, researchers attempting to conduct similar studies may want to include more Aboriginal knowledge in the construction of the survey itself by involving members of the community in the initial process. I relied heavily on past literature and the research assistant in creating survey items. I could have instead asked members of the community to help me create appropriate questions specifically related

to language acquisition, and not to rely solely on the research assistant.

The Dene mothers were bilingual, while the urban mothers were not. Although both of Johnston's studies revealed that the main language at home for the non-Western comparison groups was their native language (Cantonese, Hindi, or Punjabi), these non-Western samples were both situated in a large urban centres of Canada. It would be of interest to complete a study comparing urban Aboriginal mothers with urban Western mothers, or alternatively rural Aboriginal mothers with rural Western mothers, so that the demographic attributes of the samples could be more comparable than what occurred with this study. Also, an observed difference between groups is more likely to occur in a larger sample size.

Finally, survey administration methodology that was similar for all targeted groups may have proven more helpful than asymmetrical survey methods in distinguishing groups. However, the researcher's decision to chose a Western-based design over a one that shows more cultural sensitivity towards group participants is one that needs to be well thought through and individualistic in its approach.

In the identification of culturally relevant differences between the two groups of mothers, it would be worthwhile to explore these differences further. Thus, additional research is necessary to understand the meaning behind identified behaviours in this study. Such qualitative-based studies could be in the form of language sampling, both in the home and in the school, which would again add to the emerging database of cultural practices believed to be related to language emergence. These studies could then be compared to the present study which instead incorporated a quantitative-based survey tool.

This study served to provide valuable information on gathering Aboriginal perspectives using an adapted survey, which incorporated aspects of indigenous methodology and included a section for open-ended comments. In addition, assistance from a member of the community in creating the survey, cultural informants to help analyze the data, and incorporating an asymmetrical study design provided additional indigenous methodology.

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Appendix A

Survey

Thank you for your consent to complete this survey with you. You have the option for this survey to be read to you in English or Dene. We are doing this survey to educate ourselves on how your children learn language. There are many different ways that adults and children talk and play together. We want to find out about how the caregivers in your community talk and play with their children It is important for us to understand this so that we can assess your children's language in a fair way, and offer appropriate suggestions to you if your child is having trouble learning language or how to speak.

There are no right or wrong answers. The format of the survey is such that you will be asked to choose a number from 1-5 that shows how much you agree with the statement.

For example:

It is important that your child eats breakfast every day

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

If you strongly disagree with this statement you would answer 1

If you agree with this statement, but not overly agree, you would tell me 4.

If you really have no preference one way or the other, you would answer with 3

When answering these questions, try to think about your children who are in the range of 3-5 years of age or in pre-school.

1. My child spends much of the day playing outside.

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

2. My child spends much of the day inside with books and toys (blocks, trucks, play-dough, coloring books, etc.).

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

3. I would like to be taught how to help my child to understand and say more words.

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

4. I would be concerned if my 4-year old child was not speaking in Nursery/Headstart.

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

5. A lot of ear infections may change how a child speaks.

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

6. I feel comfortable copying my child's play on the floor (E.g. They are playing with blocks and you go down and play with the blocks too).

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

7. It is Ok for my child to not respond to me right after I ask a question.

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

8. My child can easily sit and listen to a story without picture books.

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

9. My child's brothers and sisters teach him/her new language as much as I do.

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

10. My child's connection to spirituality is important to me.

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

11. My child will easily talk to an older person (who they know) if given a chance.

Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

12. My 4-5 year old should attend Nursery/Kindergarten 3-5 days a week.
Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree
13. When I tell my child a story, it is usually for a purpose (example: teaching).
Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree
14. Children learn best by doing (provided they are out of danger), for example, how to make toast.
Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree
15. Parents should ask young children to repeat new words in order to help them learn to talk.
Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree
16. Children understand some words even before they can speak.
Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree
17. Speech is especially important because it helps young children to make friends.
Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree
18. If parents use 'baby talk' (like wawa for water, or 'jamies' for pajamas) their child won't learn to speak well.
Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree
19. Three year olds are too young to help with household chores.
Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree
20. Young children learn best when they are given instructions.
Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree
21. Young children should always be encouraged to communicate with words rather than gestures.
Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree
22. Young children learn important things while playing.
Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree
23. Young children should be allowed to take a turn in conversations that include adults who are not family members.
Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree
24. Grandparents or older family members give good advice about the way that young children grow up.
Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Agree

The following 12 questions will be answered in terms of how often these practices occur. For example, whether or not it always happens or never happens. You will choose the number according to how often it occurs:

Hardly ever	*Sometimes*	*Very often*	*Almost always*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*

25. Tell my child if s/he uses the wrong word.

Hardly ever	*Sometimes*	*Very often*	*Almost always*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*

26. Read a book to my child at bedtime or naptime.

Hardly ever	*Sometimes*	*Very often*	*Almost always*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*

27. Ignore the fact that I do not understand something my child says.

Hardly ever	*Sometimes*	*Very often*	*Almost always*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*

28. Follow along with my child's topic of conversation.

Hardly ever	*Sometimes*	*Very often*	*Almost always*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*

29. Repeat what my child says, adding new words.

Hardly ever	*Sometimes*	*Very often*	*Almost always*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*

30. Talk about what is going on when my child and I are playing or doing things together. Example: When playing tea party, "Now, I'm pouring my tea. You're eating a tea cake. Is it good?"

Hardly ever	*Sometimes*	*Very often*	*Almost always*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*

31. Tell my child if s/he leaves some words out of a sentence.

Hardly ever	*Sometimes*	*Very often*	*Almost always*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*

32. Change my words or sentence when my child does not understand me.

Hardly ever	*Sometimes*	*Very often*	*Almost always*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*

33. Talk with my child about what happened that day when I wasn't there. Example: at preschool, or at home while I was at work.

Hardly ever	*Sometimes*	*Very often*	*Almost always*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*

34. Use picture books or flash cards to teach my child new words.

Hardly ever	*Sometimes*	*Very often*	*Almost always*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*

35. Ask my child to repeat a sentence after me.

Hardly ever	*Sometimes*	*Very often*	*Almost always*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*

36. Ask my child to tell another family member about something that we did together.

Hardly ever	*Sometimes*	*Very often*	*Almost always*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*

COMMENT SECTION

_____

Sometimes surveys do not allow you to explain yourself well enough. Please use this page to expand on certain issues that are important to you and your child's language/culture.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank-you!

Appendix B

Original Survey

Appendix. Survey Items and Instructions.

We would like to know your ideas about young children. Circle a number to indicate how much you agree with each of the statements below. Here is what the numbers mean:

1 = *strongly disagree* with the statement.
2 = somewhat *disagree* with the statement.
3 = unsure about the statement.
4 = somewhat *agree* with the statement.
5 = *strongly agree* with the statement.

Think especially about your 2-4 year old child(ren) when you answer.

Here's an example:

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
A.	Young children should have a rest period every day.	1	2	3	4	5

If you strongly agree with this statement you would circle the number 5. If you disagree with the statement, but not very strongly, you would circle number 2.

Please give us your opinion about the following statements:

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1.	Children who spend time quietly observing tend to be smart.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	It is important to find out what young children are thinking.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Parents should ask young children to repeat new words in order to help them learn to talk.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Speech is especially important because it helps young children to make friends.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Children understand some words even before they can speak.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Parents should let children experiment, even if they might make mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	The proper titles for people ("Aunt" Sally) are important to learn than the names of objects.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Parents should wait until young children ask before giving help.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	It is more important for young children to speak clearly then to speak politely.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	If parents use "baby talk" (like "wawa" for water, or "jamies" for pajamas) their children won't learn to speak well.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Three-year-olds are too young to help with household chores.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Young children learn best when they are given instructions.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Young children should always be encouraged to community with words rather than gestures.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C

Table 1: Relationships between the survey items, research questions, and variables

Study Variables: Child rearing, beliefs, discourse practices, demographic information	Research Question	Survey item
Responsiveness of maternal speech (Tough, 1977); Value of pre-school (Feagans & Farran, 1982); Reported differences seen in body language, eye-contact, whole-to-part learning style, visual-kinesthetic learning style, verbal response lags, speaking volume & frequency, and spirituality (Ball et al., 2005); Aboriginal children talk is often reserved for important social interactions, not typically oral around Elders (Ball & Lewis, 2005); Aboriginal children generally speak less than Western children (Crago, 1990a; Philips, 1983)	What do caregivers perceive or believe to be child-rearing practices that are influential in promoting language development in their children?	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24
Race, culture, bilingualism, socioeconomic status, socio-educational status, caregiver-child interactive occurrences (Connor & Craig, 2006; Curenton & Justice, 2004; Dart, 1992; Diehl, Bennetto & Young, 2006; Fazio, Naremore & Connell, 1996; Gutierrez-Clennen, Pena & Quinn, 1995; Feagans & Farran, 1982; Liles, Duffy, Merritt & Purcell, 1995; Paul & Smith, 1993; Shiro, 2003); Example: a single mother in poverty, caring for small children may not have the time to read stories to their children or have direct one-on-one play together (Snow et al., 1982)	Are there any demographic attributes of caregivers that influence their attitudes and beliefs regarding how language is learned in pre-school years?	Basic Data Sheet 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 12, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 29, 34
Responsiveness of maternal speech (Tough, 1977); Inuit mothers not practicing Western-based language facilitation techniques (turn-taking, expansion, correcting their child's speech, parallel talk, following their child's lead) Crago and Eriks-Brophy (1998).	What do caregivers report regarding how frequently they use discourse practices believed to be influential in terms of language development?	25-36