Title: Korean-American Parents’ Perceptions on Autism Deficits and their Home Language Policy after their Child’s Autism Diagnosis

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Introduction: Despite the most prominent manifestations of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) through social communication impairments and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, parents tend to overestimate the language delay of their children, usually because they start to suspect ASD through language delays in their children (“Learn the Signs of Autism,” 2017). Bilingual development in children with ASD is reported to positively correlate with improvement in their communication and social skills (Valicenti-McDermott et al., 2013). Ethnolinguistic minority parents of children with ASD, however, have adopted the home language policy where they speak English only to their children based on the assumption that the bilingual exposure might delay the language development (Jegattheesan, 2011; Yu, 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore how Korean-American parents perceive autism deficits was related to their decision making for the home language policy.

Method: The study population consisted of messages posted to an online community by Korean-American parents of children with ASD. A total of 136 messages were sampled for this study. Content text analysis of the messages aimed to categorize the types of home language policy after the child’s ASD diagnosis and parents’ perceptions on autism deficits.

Results: Twenty messages (13.6%) were seeking for information regarding the home language policy and the rest messages shared their experiences or beliefs on which language should be spoken at home. The home language policy was categorized into four groups: (a) Korean (44.2%), (b) English only to the child with ASD but Korean is spoken among adults (14.3%) (c) both Korean and English to the child with ASD (i.e., simultaneous bilingualism, 3.4%), and (d) English only (29.3%). Out of 42 bilingual children, 78% were from Korean speaking home. All the nine English speaking children were from English only speaking home. Seventy-five messages reported how they perceived the core deficits of autism: 58.7% of the posters perceived impaired communication/social interaction as the core deficits and the rest perceived language delay/impairment as the core deficits of autism. There was a significant association between the autism core deficit perceptions and the home language policy adopted by Korean-American parents ($X^2(3) = 29.096, p < .001$): Out of 31 who perceived language delay as the core deficits, 28 spoke English only to their child, whereas out of 44 who perceived impaired communication/social interaction as the core deficits, 32 spoke Korean to their child at home.

Discussion: This preliminary study shows that Korean-American parents’ perceptions on the core deficits of autism is meaningfully related to their home language policy, which may impact on bilingual development of children with ASD. Future study should focus on why ethnolinguistic minority parents including Korean-American parents have different perceptions on the core deficits of autism.

References/Citations: