

‘Reasoning out’ as Intercultural Competence: An Exploration of Rhetorical Practices of Filipino Domestic Workers (FDWs) in Singapore

Nimrod L Delante*

James Cook University, Singapore Campus, Singapore

*Corresponding author: Nimrod L Delante, James Cook University, Singapore Campus, Singapore, Tel: +65 6709 3888; E-mail: nimrod030582@gmail.com

Received date: January 07, 2019; Accepted date: January 21, 2019; Published date: January 28, 2019

Copyright: © 2018 Delante NL. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Abstract

In a cross-cultural domestic space, such as those Singapore homes where domestic help exists, intercultural competence is at play when the employer and the domestic worker, despite their differing status in the social hierarchy, show respect and positive regard for one another. However, in such domestic space in Singapore and across the world, the rights of many domestic workers to express their opinions and to reason out are almost always silenced due to their abusive employers, unscrupulous agents, the fear of losing their jobs, and other forms of exploitation.

Using communication as a lens, this paper analyses the rhetorical practices of Filipino domestic workers (FDWs) in Singapore who operate in a cross-cultural and/or multicultural domestic space. It has been influenced by the rhetorical tradition of communication theory which views communication as the practical art of discourse. The rhetorical tradition of communication theory recognises the intent, logic and strategy of a communicator (e.g., a domestic worker in a cross-cultural domestic space), the presence of social exigency requiring some deliberate thought, the power of words, the authenticity of emotion, the art of persuasion, and the value of informed judgment within communicative situations, with the aim to be heard and to be recognised as an individual and as a part of a cultural group. This study is anchored on Kenneth Burke’s dramatistic pentad, which states that the kind of language that people use and the way they express themselves are strategies to convince others of their viewpoints. If we, as communicators, have the ability to identify with the audience, we can then elicit empathy, which goes a long way in persuading people.

This study draws insights from casual conversations and key informant interviews with six (6) Filipino domestic workers (FDWs) in Singapore who expressed willingness to share their stories. Through these casual conversations and interviews, I was able to pin down their rhetorical practices when they communicate with their employers in the domestic space. I met them when I was volunteering as a communication and leadership mentor in AIDHA, a non-for-profit organisation that champions the rights and voices of underprivileged women in Singapore through leadership and education.

Results revealed that these domestic workers employ some rhetorical practices as an outward manifestation of their reasoning as a form of intercultural competence. These include explanation, justification, humility and kindness, silence, seeking for empirical evidence, common sense and scientific assumption, which accomplish common understanding. From these rhetorical practices, I argued that intercultural competence is a rhetorical act that promotes logic or reason, invites reflection, and fosters an empowering perspective on the part of the FDWs. Intercultural competence, as a rhetorical tool, also affords them agency to act on their circumstances in the domestic space. An insight from the interviews revealed a common rhetorical act that the respondents share: to not be afraid to speak when they think that they are right and when they have done nothing wrong. Results also showed that these FDWs resort to prayer and crying as a response to the seemingly insulting or condescending attitude of their employers. To them, praying is a source of strength, and crying in silence or to be silent is a form of resilience. However, silence as a form of rhetorical practice may act back and refuse to be mobilized in accomplishing a communication goal in the domestic space.

Keywords: Intercultural competence; Reasoning out; Cross-cultural domestic space; Filipino domestic worker (FDW); Rhetorical practices; Intercultural rhetoric; Rhetorical tradition of communication theory

Understanding Domestic Work

According to the International Labour Organisation [1], domestic workers comprise a significant part of the global workforce in informal employment and are among the most vulnerable groups of workers. Generally, they work for private households, often without clear terms

of employment, unregistered in any book, and excluded from the scope of labour legislation. Currently, there are at least 67 million domestic workers worldwide, not including child domestic workers and this number is increasing steadily in developed and developing countries. Even though a substantial number of men work in the sector – often as gardeners, drivers or butlers – it remains a highly feminized sector: 85% of all domestic workers are women. Their work may include tasks such as cleaning the house, cooking, washing and ironing clothes, taking care of children, elderly or sick members of a family, gardening, guarding the house, driving, attending to business operations of their

employers, and even taking care of household pets. A domestic worker may work on full-time or part-time basis; may be employed by a single household or by multiple employers; may be residing in the household of the employer (live-in worker) or may be living in his/her own residence (live-out). A domestic worker may be working in a country of which she/he is not a national, thus he/she is referred to as a migrant domestic worker. At present, the global statistics show that domestic workers often face very low wages, excessively long hours, have no guaranteed weekly day of rest, and at times are vulnerable to physical, mental and sexual abuse or restrictions on freedom of movement. Exploitation of domestic workers can partly be attributed to gaps in national labour and employment legislation, and often reflects discrimination along the lines of sex, race, and caste [1].

In Singapore, as of December 2017, the total number of foreign domestic workers amounted to 246,800 [2] and about 70,000 of these are Filipinos [3]. Domestic workers in Singapore are entitled to a one-day rest day based on an employment policy by the Singapore government, and if their work permit was issued or renewed after 1 January 2013. The employer and his/her domestic worker must mutually agree on which day of the week she should take the rest day. To avoid disputes, both should have this agreement in writing. If the domestic worker agrees to work on her rest day, the employer must compensate her with one of the following: (1) at least one day's salary, or (2) a replacement rest day taken within the same month. However, several employers in Singapore do not follow this rule and exploitation of these domestic workers is on the rise [4].

Although living a difficult life in Singapore, Filipino domestic workers (FDWs) are one of the top remittance senders to their families back home. The Philippine government considers them as 'modern day heroes' because of their contribution in helping the Philippine economy afloat [5]. However, a rising percentage of exploitation and violence towards these migrant workers is being observed in the past two decades [4]. This causes an alarm to leaders in politics, employment sectors, agencies and the government. One of the common abuses that many domestic workers experience in Singapore is being starved by their employers. Other abuses include some forms of racism, physical violence and verbal abuse [4]. A recent survey by an independent consultancy Research across Borders revealed that 6 out of 10 domestic workers in Singapore are exploited with the workers themselves citing bad living conditions, excessive working hours, and unreasonable deduction of salary, verbal abuse and violence. They continue to be in a vulnerable position due to a lack of adequate work regulations and legal protection, and the systemic nature of their employment conditions [6].

Despite the risks and vulnerability that FDWs experience at work, their number is increasing in Singapore. The FDWs comprise at least 55% of the total number of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in Singapore (Consul Oliver Delfin of the Philippine Embassy in Singapore, personal communication, 2013) and they are considered one of the top choices by Singapore employers, whether local or expatriates. This can be due to range of characteristics that galvanise their position in the global domestic market. These include the following: (1) they speak better English than those domestic helpers from other countries in Southeast Asia, (2) they are generally friendly, warm and outspoken, (3) they are smarter than their counterparts because a big percentage of them are degree holders in the Philippines, and (4) they are generally dependable, versatile and quick to learn in handling domestic tasks [7].

Compared to other domestic workers such as those from Indonesia, Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand, the Filipino domestic workers are more skilled and are preferred by employers because they are able to speak English fluently which brings a positive impact on their salary level and creates a leverage in terms of performing domestic work. Their language competence also seems to help them adjust to the foreign culture more easily. This helps them communicate well with their employers and enhance their intercultural competence, which refers to their ability to adapt and perform effectively in a cross-cultural context such as the domestic space in a foreign country [6]. In the domestic space where FDWs operate, that is, the homes of their employers, their intercultural competence is shown through active listening, careful observation of the employers' likes and dislikes, adapting to their employers' attitudes and behaviour, establishing rapport and engaging in an open communication with them, and even perspective taking, that is, trying to see things through their employers' eyes [1]. This means that the FDWs utilise a range of cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills that lead to effective and appropriate communication with people of other cultures such as their employers. This intercultural competence is couched in FDWs utilisation of rhetorical practices such as informed reasoning, explaining, and justifying, to name a few, with an intent to express themselves and to be understood. Their rhetorical practices play a vital role in their daily life as migrant women. These rhetorical practices are inherently connected to their intercultural competence, which makes intercultural competence a rhetorical act because it affords the practical art of discourse in the domestic space.

Context of the Study

In 2016, I volunteered as a leadership and communication mentor for AIDHA, a non-for-profit organisation that offers certificate programs for domestic workers in Singapore with the aim to help improve their lives through education and training. I volunteered for nine months (1 Sunday in a month; 1.5 hours per Sunday) with the intent to help this marginalised group of women through education and training. The students in AIDHA are all domestic helpers (all women; there are no male domestic helpers in Singapore), although AIDHA is recently looking into the possibility of offering specialised certificate courses for construction workers, yet another marginalised group in Singapore. Of the domestic workers, 36% are Filipinos while the remaining 64% are nationalities from Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar [8].

My sense of volunteerism and empathy emanated from the circumstances that I see around me in Singapore. On Sundays, I would see many FDWs in public parks and other spaces such as shopping malls (e.g., Lucky Plaza). As a teacher and as an OFW, I asked myself if I could reach out to them through teaching. My intent is simple: to contribute something to their development through education out of empathy and the eagerness to do good to others. By asking fellow OFWs in my network, I learned that a non-for-profit organisation in Singapore offers short certificate courses to domestic helpers and the way they do this is to invite volunteer teachers from all walks of life to teach these courses. This is AIDHA as I have mentioned above. Without hesitation, I inquired and attended AIDHA's training for teacher volunteers. This became my legitimate pass to become an official volunteer mentor teaching the subject 'leadership and communication'. In those AIDHA classes, I met a group of FDWs.

Rationale for exploring Filipino domestic workers' reasoning skills

One of my Sunday lessons in AIDHA prompted me to embark on this study on rhetorical practices of domestic workers in the cross-cultural domestic space. One of the questions in the module one Sunday afternoon was: Do you reason out to your employers about an issue or problem that concerns you and your role? How do you reason out? When I asked this, the opinion of the class was divided; one group (comprised of domestic helpers from Myanmar and Vietnam) said that it is difficult for them to answer back; the other bigger group (a group of Filipino domestic workers) assertively expressed that they do reason out in a form of explanation or justification when they think that have not done anything wrong. The discussion became a bit emotional when one FDW started to share an experience of verbal abuse from her male employer. Crying became an outlet for her. The rest of the FDWs joined the conversation, which reinforced the topic and escalated the emotion in class. As a teacher volunteer, I had to step forward to control the situation before everyone else would go berserk. However, that incident became an eye opener for me to understand the struggles of domestic workers as victims of maltreatment or abuse. As a matter of fact, the HOME executive director in Singapore asserted: "Agencies see them (domestic helpers) as stock or commodities that need to be transported and monitored, and employers see them as machines without a voice, feelings, or a presence" [4]. In the Straits Times's Life section in November 2017 where poetry and other literary outputs of domestic helpers had been honoured through The Arts House, Rea Maac, a domestic worker from the Philippines retorted: "Some of my friends and fellow domestic neighbours are always being called idiots and belittled by their employers. This (the reading of her poem to the audience) is my chance to speak for them."

That specific incident in class triggered a deeper conversation between me and these FDWs about their experiences with their employers. During class breaks, I would join them to give in to their frequent lunch invitations. This enabled me to listen carefully to their stories and understand their struggles better since they became more self-disclosing of their experiences. During those nine months, I was able to save my lunch budget because these group of women would usually invite me for a lunch potluck. Each of them would bring food and share this with the rest of the group. They are normally seen eating together on a table or on the grass using plastic food covers, plates and cups. In many occasions as well, I would bring fruits, bread and drinks to reciprocate their kindness.

Listening to their stories opened my consciousness and made me become more empathetic towards domestic workers in general. For nine months, I have listened to their stories in an environment where there was no coercion. It is during this period that I was able to capture some critical incidents in their narratives. In my view, it became natural for them to share their struggles perhaps because they wanted to unload such struggles with someone who knows how to listen and to empathise. I almost always had my ears ready to listen to their stories of struggle. I had established rapport with them, and in the end, we became good friends.

It is a fact that these migrant women are suffering from abuse, some physical, some psychological. A British journalist in the name of Fiona Mitchel who lived in Singapore from mid-2009 to early 2012 argued that modern-day servitude is both a Singapore issue and a global issue that needs attention. While in Singapore, she was struck by the attitudes that many expatriates and locals had towards their domestic helpers, treating them as inferior and slaves. She recalled how one day

at a restaurant, she saw a family that made their helper sit at a separate table. The helper took her food out from a bag in a plastic box and the family didn't speak to her at all. She sat there in the table eating her food with her head bowed down. As an OFW, I felt the responsibility to help these Filipino migrant women share their stories and echo their voices for the world to hear. I thought that doing this study will help me amplify the voices and narratives of these marginalised women in society. Hearing their stories, I became interested to explore how effective (or ineffective) their sense of reasoning is when confronted with issues or problems in the domestic space where they operate, the homes of their employers. I also became interested to know when and how they use reason and for what purposes. More importantly, I became interested to know the impact or usefulness of their reasoning practices to themselves as individuals and as migrant women. This is how this exploration of their rhetorical practices began. This is how this study started.

'Reasoning out' as intercultural competence

Intercultural communication focuses on the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms among people from different backgrounds to develop engaging and deep relationships [9]. It describes cultural groups or communities in which there is deep understanding and respect for all cultures. It describes the wide range of communication processes and problems that naturally appear within a group, organisation or social context comprised of individuals from different religious, social, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. It seeks to understand how people from different countries and cultures act, communicate and perceive the world around them [10,11]. Intercultural communication is perceived to be a potent force that enables people to view cultural groups and nations not as static entities, but as ongoing accomplishments achieved through the symbolic conceptualisation and enforcement of difference [12]. In the context of domestic workers as migrant women, intercultural communication emphasises unequal power relationships, diversity, difference, and the significance of ethnic, class and gender identities [13] that are inherent in multicultural communication spaces.

Intercultural communication manifests in concrete forms in specific contexts such as in the domestic space as a cross-cultural setting, a setting in which two or more people from different cultural backgrounds interact and share ideas. It is a dynamic force that permeates increasingly globalised, multicultural homes in Singapore where domestic workers are considered members of such homes. In the context of cross-cultural domestic space, intercultural communication is observed, manifested and experienced through interpersonal human interactions involving active listening, attention to details, pace of speech delivery, pitch and intonation, tone, pauses, repetitions, nonverbal cues in conversations, silence, resistance and negotiation of meaning, to name a few, with the intent to express an idea, to be heard, to assert one's position over an issue, and to persuade in order to fulfil a personal, social, cultural or economic goal. In these intercultural communication situations, intercultural competence is considered an inherent factor that influences the success or failure of communication. Part of this intercultural competence is how these FDWs reason out.

Intercultural competence is the ability to reason out using targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions [14]. People who are intercultural-competent possess knowledge that includes self-awareness, culture-specific understanding

and linguistic competence. Their self-awareness and linguistic competence are instruments to understand others in the interaction and to reason out if and when necessary. Reasoning out as intercultural competence comprises focused listening, careful observation and fair evaluation of an incident or situation. Their ability to interpret and relate to situations also contribute to the quality, effectiveness and impact of their reasoning as a component of their intercultural competence. The attitudes of interculturally-competent individuals include respect to cultural diversity, openness, tolerance to ambiguity, and viewing differences as a learning opportunity [14,15].

Intercultural rhetoric in the cross-cultural domestic space

To Aristotle, "rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" [16]. Rhetoric has galvanised its position in fostering communication and cultural understanding among people, from an interpersonal level to organisational and even intergovernmental levels [16,17]. Farrell asserts that rhetoric addresses and guides decisions and judgment that cannot be decided by force [17]. As mentioned by Lindlof [12], rhetoric incorporates the knowledge of cultural members from different cultural groups in their development and use of criteria for evaluating both text and spoken discourse. In communication transactions, for instance, in the intercultural or cross-cultural communication that exists in the domestic space, rhetoric remains a potent force that enables the exchange of ideas, invites deep and deliberate thinking, tests persuasive abilities and summons informed judgment.

The cross-cultural domestic space, where employers and domestic helpers live and interact, provides a wide landscape for rhetorical practices to be utilised and examined. The cross-cultural domestic space is a space where domestic helpers can utilise the power of rhetoric to interact with their employers and other members more skilfully, effectively and persuasively. This power of rhetoric can be couched in forms of reasoning or rationalising. Since rhetoric is immersed in all human activities including the day-to-day casual conversations and non-verbal communication that pervade in the employer's home, domestic workers are placed in a crucial position to utilise rhetoric to transform reasoning and become more persuasive communicators and more discerning audiences capable to accomplish a fundamental communication goal: understanding. The very ordinariness of rhetoric is one very important tool that is not only learned in schools or business organisations, but also in real-life situations such as in the domestic home where domestic workers are made to understand its dynamics and practise them for their own benefit.

Specifically, this rhetoric that is inherent in the cross-cultural domestic space is called intercultural rhetoric. Intercultural rhetoric may come into play in the cross-cultural domestic space given the ever-increasing global migrations and seemingly instantaneous global communication [18]. This migration includes those women who migrate to other countries to work as domestic helpers. Intercultural rhetoric is defined by Connor [18] as the study of discourse between and among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Intercultural rhetoric studies interactions in which individuals from a variety of linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds negotiate meaning through speaking (and writing). Connor [18] proposes three premises of intercultural rhetoric: (1) texts must be seen in their full contexts, (2) small and large cultures interact in complex ways, and (3) accommodation and negotiation are necessary to achieve

understanding in intercultural communication. Therefore, intercultural rhetoric investigates how language is used to make and assert a stand, to organise and maintain social groups, to construct meanings and identities, to coordinate behaviour, to mediate power, to produce change and to create knowledge. Rhetoricians believe that intercultural communication is constitutive (we shape and are shaped by language), dialogic (it exists in the shared territory between self and other), closely connected to thought (mental activity as inner speech) and integrated with social, cultural and economic practices such as those practices in the domestic space [19].

In the practice of intercultural rhetoric in varied contexts – from public discussion, to organisational forums, and to interpersonal relationships such as those that exist in the cross-cultural domestic space – problems or issues of communication are viewed as social exigencies that can be resolved through the artful use of discourse to persuade someone and to accomplish a communication goal. In the domestic home, domestic workers do not need to memorise the key principles of rhetoric such as invention, arrangement, style and delivery. Rather, they need to speak their minds, to interrogate their own context, to reflect, to have confidence and to use informed judgment as part of their intercultural capital that encourages the employment of rhetorical tools such as active listening, explanation, justification, and the use of non-verbal cues, to name a few, in order to be understood. This employment of such intercultural rhetorical tools can be initiated, developed, maintained and practised to improve their communicative processes and to foster cultural understanding that will help build better relationships between domestic helpers and their employers.

The rhetorical tradition of communication theory

The intention to explore and analyse the rhetorical practices of six Filipino domestic workers (FDWs) in Singapore suggests that this study be anchored in Craig's [17] rhetorical tradition of communication theory which views communication as the practical art of discourse. To Craig [17], the rhetorical tradition of communication theory recognises the intent, logic and strategy of a communicator (e.g., a domestic helper in a Singapore domestic home), the presence of social exigency requiring some deliberate thought, the power of words, the art of persuasion, and the value of informed judgment within situated speech or interpersonal communication contexts. The rhetorical tradition of communication theory can be traced back to "the ancient Greek sophists and runs through a long and varied history down to the present". It challenges other commonplace beliefs that "mere words are less important than actions, that true knowledge is more than just a matter of opinion, that telling the plain truth is something other than strategic adaptation of a message to an audience... that appearance is not reality, style is not substance, and opinion is not truth."

The rhetorical tradition of communication theory posits that people can become effective and persuasive communicators by learning and practising strategies or methods of communication that can be invented, discovered, enhanced and maintained through research and practice. With rhetorical issues including emotion, personal belief, bias, cultural practices, and logic and strategy in communication, the FDWs involved in this study can self-examine, self-reflect and self-interrogate in connection to the real problems that they face in the cross-cultural domestic space or in their 'intercultural world' with their employers. The domestic home in Singapore is not only communicative such that it invites interlocutors (the domestic worker and her employers) to

convey ideas through speech, but also intercultural as it fosters interaction and learning about cultures, comparing cultures and exploring intercultural dynamics. This exploration invites domestic workers to discover how reasoning out can be a rhetorical act in particular, and how intercultural communication can be a rhetorical practice that accomplishes understanding as a communication goal.

Kenneth Burke's dramatisic pentad as theoretical framework

Language expert Kenneth Burke identified a method of analysing the rhetorical dimensions of language through a five-part dramatisic pentad that describes people's narratives. Burke said that we choose words because of their dramatic potential, and that we each have a preference for particular parts of the pentad. Burke introduced the pentad in his 1945 book entitled 'A Grammar of Motives'. Burke based his pentad on the scholastic hexameter which defines questions to be answered in the treatment of a topic such as who, what, where, by what means, why, how, and when. Burke created the pentad by combining several of the categories in the scholastic hexameter. The result was a pentad that has five categories including the following: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. The 'who' is obviously covered by agent. Scene covers the 'where' and the 'when'. The 'why' is the purpose, motive or intent. 'How' and 'by what means' fall under agency. All that is left to take care of is considered the act or the 'what' in the scholastic formula.

The act is associated with actions (captured in the use of verbs in speech) and answers the question 'what'. Burke defines the act as what takes place in thought or deed. Burke states that any verb, no matter how specific or general, that has connotations of consciousness or purpose can be considered an act. Scene, on the other hand, is associated with the setting of an act and answers the questions 'when' and 'where'. Burke defines the scene as the background of an act, the situation in which it occurred. Moreover, the agent answers the question 'by whom'. This refers to what person or kind of person performed the act. Agency (or means), is associated with the person or the organization that committed the deed and answers the question 'how'. Implying a pragmatic point of view, Burke defines agency as what instrument or instruments the agent used. Lastly, purpose is associated with meaning and answers the question 'why'. It indicates that the agent seeks meaning in action. Purpose is inextricably linked to the analysis of motive or intent, which is the main subject of a rhetorical analysis [20].

In Singapore, the FDWs interact with their employers on a daily basis within their employer's homes. They use a certain language (e.g., English) to communicate. They have stories to tell. In connection to Kenneth Burke's dramatisic pentad, the FDWs operate within a scene (a cross-cultural home or setting) and have specific thoughts, deeds and performances that comprise their rhetorical acts, which they employ for a certain purpose, i.e., to reason out in order to understand and to be understood. Through the pentad, I was able to describe and analyse the motivations or acts of the FDWs involved in this study. In short, the pentad influenced my analysis of the data utilised in this study.

Research questions

Therefore, the main research questions that this study tried to answer are the following:

What are the rhetorical practices of Filipino domestic workers (FDWs) in the cross-cultural domestic space?

How do these rhetorical practices accomplish reasoning as intercultural competence and common understanding as a communication goal?

Methodology

This study aimed to explore the rhetorical practices that six Filipino domestic workers (FDWs) utilise in the domestic space where they operate, and to analyse how these rhetorical practices accomplish their ability to reason out to achieve common understanding. In this section, I (1) describe the participants of the study, and (2) discuss grounded theory as research methodology, together with the materials, procedures and ethics.

Participants of the study

This study involved six Filipino domestic workers (FDWs). Five of them are from the Visayas region of the Philippines, while one is from Mindanao. All of them speak Cebuano and Filipino or Tagalog. Three of them have been working for 10 years, two for 8 years and one for 5 years as of 2016. Four of the FDWs are married and have children. Their husbands and children are in the Philippines. The other two FDWs are separated from their husbands due to their husbands' reported infidelity. Their children are with their own parents in the Philippines. Three of the FDWs are employed by local Singaporean-Chinese, one by a French couple, another by local Indians, and another by an American expatriate. As I mentioned above, I met this group of FDWs in 2016 when I volunteered as a leadership and communication mentor with AIDHA. To keep their identity confidential, I created an alias for each of them. Their names in this study are not their real names.

Grounded theory as research method

Grounded theory articulates a compelling logic of discovery, along with a set of formalised rules and vocabulary that bring a sense of order to the messy process of qualitative research [12]. Grounded theory celebrates openness by removing biases in the mind and allowing categories and themes to emerge on their own. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss introduced grounded theory in 1967 as a general research program for developing substantial (specific) or formal (general) theory by starting without too many assumptions and working immediately with the 'data'. This is what the term 'grounded' refers to. Grounded theory as a method provides guidelines on how to identify categories, how to create codes and themes, how to make links between categories, codes and themes, and how to establish relationships between them. To identify categories, and ultimately to theorise from the analysis of raw data, I employed a number of key strategies described below.

Categorising

This designates the grouping together of instances (e.g., processes, occurrences, incidents) that share central features or characteristics with one another. Categories can be at a low level of abstraction, in which case they function as descriptive labels or concepts [21]. For example, references to 'anxiety', 'anger' and 'pity' can be grouped together under the category of 'emotions'. As grounded theory analysis progresses, the researcher is able to identify categories at a higher level

of abstraction. These categories become analytic rather than descriptive. They interpret, rather than simply label, instances of phenomena. For example, references to diverse activities such as getting drunk, jogging and writing poetry could be categorised as 'escape' if they appear to share the objective of distracting the individual from thinking about a problem. Categories in grounded theory emerge from the data; they are not mutually exclusive and they evolve throughout the research process.

Coding

This is the process by which categories are identified. There are two kinds of coding: open coding and in vivo coding. Open coding is the initial, unrestricted coding of data. The researcher goes through the texts line by line and categorises a chunk of data based on its own coherent meanings, not by an arbitrary designation of grammar. Through open coding, categories are built, named and have attributes ascribed to them. *In vivo* coding, on the other hand, is coding that uses the terms or vivid language of the social actors or participants to

Characterise their own scene. Ideally, category labels should be in vivo, that is, they should utilize words or phrases used by the participants in the study rather than being replaced by existing terminologies. This helps the researcher to avoid importing existing theory into the analysis. In the early stages of analysis, coding is largely descriptive where descriptive labels are attached to discrete instances of phenomena. New, low-level categories emerge frequently as a result. As coding progresses, the researcher is able to identify higher-level categories that systematically integrate low-level categories into meaningful units. In other words, analytical categories are introduced. In grounded theory, category labels should not be derived from existing theoretical formulations but Should be grounded in the data instead [22,23].

Theoretical sensitivity

This is what moves the researcher from a descriptive to an analytic level. In grounded theory, the researcher interacts with the data. That is, he/she asks questions of the data, which are in turn modified by the emerging answers. Each emerging category, idea, concept or linkage informs a new look at the data to elaborate or modify the original construct. The researcher engages with the data by asking questions, making comparisons and looking for opposites [21,23].

Theoretical sampling

This involves collecting further data in the light of categories that have emerged from earlier stages of data analysis. Theoretical sampling means checking emerging theory against reality by sampling incidents that may challenge or elaborate its developing claims. While the earlier stages of grounded theory require maximum openness and flexibility to identify a wide range of predominantly descriptive categories, theoretical sampling is concerned with the refinement and, ultimately, saturation of existing, and increasingly analytic categories. Ideally, the process of data collection and data analysis in grounded theory continues until theoretical saturation has been achieved. In other words, the researcher continues to sample and code data until no new categories can be identified, and until new instances of variation for existing categories have ceased to emerge [22]. Some newly collected data add little or no value to the concepts and categories and "later modifications are mainly on the order of clarifying the logic, taking out non-relevant properties, integrating details of properties into the major

outline of interrelated categories, and most importantly, reduction" [24].

Materials, procedures and ethics

I utilised an audio recorder to record my casual conversations and interviews with the FDWs. I was allowed to do this through a verbal and written consent from the FDWs. I also used a pen and a notepad to log key ideas, incidents or insights during the course of my interviews. It is through these that I was able to capture those critical incidents in their narratives. I informed them that I might utilise some of my notes and the audio data for research purposes. They had given me both their verbal and written consent provided that their identities are kept confidential. Copies of their written consent are kept in my hard files. They were also provided with hard copies of the consent sheet for them to keep. I kept a promise to keep all information confidential and this enabled me to earn their trust. I have established friendship with them even until to date.

Findings

In this section, I presented my findings according to 'case stories' that are unique to each of the six FDWs that capture their rhetorical practices. These case stories are captured in a form of dialogues and are centered on the critical incidents that happened in the domestic homes where they operate as domestic helpers. Please take note that all conversations in this chapter are transcribed to English from conversations in Cebuano and Filipino (or Tagalog). As a speaker of Cebuano and Filipino, I transcribed the audio data myself. All six FDWs speak both languages, which I speak, too, therefore transcribing did not become a problem. Slight modifications in some episodes in the dialogues had been made for clarity and fluency.

Case Story 1: "I can't do all the errands you want me to do because the budget you leave me is not enough, Ma'am." – 'Gwen'

I met Gwen in one of those Sunday afternoons. She was one of those FDWs who were in my leadership and communication class. I started our conversation by asking how she felt that day. She replied, "I'm tired doing all the housework." I could see her exhaustion through her eyes and her slouching back. Her sighs were deep and relentless, too. We were sitting in one of those benches in United World College of Southeast Asia (UWCSEA) Dover campus. This is where AIDHA classes are held on Sundays. We talked about a few things until our conversation led to one of those days when she fell ill.

Me: So, what happened?

Gwen: I caught a flu last week.

Me: Did your employer send you to a clinic to get some medicines?

Gwen: No. I was alone. She's always traveling for business. We're the only two persons in the house plus a dog.

Me: I see. In that case, you really have to take care of yourself...

Gwen: Yes. And I am thankful we have a pet dog in the condo.

Me: I see...

Gwen: Well, he (referring to the dog) could understand how I feel. I mean, I talk to him. He looks at me and I could feel that he can understand what I'm feeling, that I'm sick. He scratches my legs

perhaps to let me know that he is there. He does things to get my attention.

Me: That's a clever and concerned dog.

Gwen: That day, I couldn't go out to walk him to the park. It was his schedule to go out, but he did not seem to want to go out. I could see that he understood my situation.

Me: Yes, dogs are smart. They would know if we are sad, happy or not feeling well.

Gwen: Yes, you're right, Sir. He is even more human than my female employer.

Me: What made you say that?

Gwen: She messaged me on WhatsApp that day and asked if I was able to water all the plants in the house. I did it even if I had a flu for three days. I mean I do my job even if I am sick. What choice do I have?

Me: In other words, she doesn't seem to care?

Gwen: She doesn't. She did not even ask if I'm feeling better. She always travels and the budget she leaves me is not enough and she expects me to do all the errands she wants me to do?

Me: Like what?

Gwen: A lot of things. Dog food. Dog check-up. Groceries and others.

Me: I see. Maybe you're right to say that the dog in the house understands you better than she does... Did you every say that to her?

Gwen: No, I didn't. I think she would get angry if I'd say that. I just explained that the money was not enough for the dog's check up. She was yelling at me over the phone without asking me why.

Me: What did you say or do?

Gwen: I told her that the budget she leaves me every time she goes overseas is not enough. She wants me to do a lot with insufficient amount? I sent the receipts of expenses to her as proof. I told her to leave me enough money to do the errands she wants me to do. After all, she's always travelling. When she's back I can give all the receipts to her. But I don't think she trusts me. Maybe she's afraid that I will leave the house with the money. No way.

Me: That's reasonable to me if I were the employer.

Gwen: To you, Sir. To her, no. At the end of the day, I realise that our pet dog is even more understanding than her.

Gwen is using explanation as a rhetorical tool. Gwen reasons out to her employer by explaining that the budget she leaves her with is not enough to do the errands she wants her to do while she is away. She uses explanation not to disrespect her employer but to drive a point and be realistic. However, even if her employer does not seem to adjust or change, she learns to accept who her employer is. "I just have to accept her for being like that and go with the flow.", Gwen quipped. She tries to explain when she knows she's right even if her employer does not seem to listen. This behaviour manifests Gwen's intercultural competence couched within her ability to explain and her acceptance of her employer's personality and attitude. If not for this, she would have left to risk finding another employer or go back home. To her, "As long as I can manage, I'm okay. If I really feel bad, I keep quiet and I just pray to God to guide me and give me more patience and strength.

I need to sacrifice for my family back home. And yes, I cry to release the pain."

Case Story 2: 'Using my mobile phone does not mean I'm not doing my job.' – 'Merly'

Merly is another FDW I spoke with. She was also one of my students in the leadership and communication class where I worked as a volunteer mentor. My conversation with her was more engaging and empathic because Merly is an assertive person, perhaps even more assertive than Gwen. I could feel it in the tone of her voice and her gestures. Our conversation was focused on one incident at home when her employer caught her speaking with someone over her mobile phone one evening:

Me: What actually happened?

Merly: Ma'am (referring to her female employer) just scolded me right away when they arrived one evening.

Me: Why?

Merly: Because I was talking to a friend over the phone.

Me: Your mobile or the house landline?

Merly: No, I was using my own mobile phone. I'm using WhatsApp. I don't use their landline.

Me: Then your employer saw you and scolded you?

Merly: Yes, right away. Maybe that evening, she was not in good mood. I felt insulted by her behaviour that evening.

Me: That's bad.

Merly: She was shouting at me and Sir advised her to calm down.

Me: That's good that he intervened.

Merly: Maybe because Sir noticed that the house was clean and the table was ready for dinner. While waiting for them, I used my phone to talk to a friend in the Philippines. I mean, did I do something wrong? I am doing my job in the house. Can I not talk to my friends over the phone?

Me: Well, if the house was clean and dinner was ready, why would I be angry to see you on your phone if I were her? Phones are now a part of us.

Merly: Exactly. She did not stop. She was still yelling at me. So, I answered back.

Me: What did you say?

Merly: I told her: "Ma'am, I am done with all the house chores, and the dinner is ready. Did I do something wrong? Why are you shouting at me like that? Could you please calm down?"

Me: Well, to me, you're in the right position to say that.

Merly: She was stunned because I reasoned out to her. I mean, I do that when I feel that I am reasonable. I told her that all day I was doing all the house chores. Everything! From vacuuming and mopping the floor to doing the laundry and ironing the clothes just to make her happy to see the house clean and in order. So I told her it's unfair to be shouting at me unless I did something terrible.

Me: Did she stop then?

Merly: She toned down her voice but she was still murmuring in the kitchen. Of course, she told me that she was my employer and I have no right to talk back. That all I need to do is keep silent and listen to her. That I am just a domestic helper. I felt like an idiot.

Me: But you did not keep silent. You reasoned out.

Merly: I mean, I'm afraid most of the time because I don't want to lose my job here, but when I feel that I'm right and I am doing nothing wrong, I feel it is right for me to answer back. I was asking her what I did wrong but she could not answer me. She just told me to keep silent.

Me: Perhaps they are having a serious problem in the family and you became her outlet to express her anger?

Merly: Perhaps. But still, it's not right. I'm not giving them a headache you know. I do my job well.

Me: That's great to know that you're really doing your job well. So, after that, you all ate dinner?

Merly: They did. I went to my room and cried in silence. I only came out to wash the dishes. I did not talk to her anymore that evening.

Me: I see

Merly: I always pray to God that I can stand all this. Prayer is my source of strength. I believe God listens to my prayers.

Me: Yes, I believe in prayers, too. There's nothing wrong when we believe in Him, right?

Merly: Yes, Sir. You're right.

Merly's story is just one of those hundreds of stories of FDWs who are experiencing unfair treatment in the domestic space. One of which is verbal abuse. In my conversation with Merly above, I could say that she was using justification as her rhetorical instrument to express her voice. Merly was trying to be reasonable. She was justifying her act of using her mobile phone by saying that she is done with all the household chores and that dinner is ready. She was justifying that she only uses her mobile phone when she's done with the household chores. She knew that she has no leverage in the house, but this does not mean that she will keep silent when her employer treats her unfairly. Crying and praying are two of her common outlets when things like this happen in the house. She is afraid of answering back to her employers, but that evening, given the circumstances, Merly showed courage to reason out considering that she did nothing wrong. She felt it was right to justify her act.

Case Story 3: 'I'm sorry Ma'am, but I wash the baby's milk bottles very well.' – 'Vicky'

If Gwen and Merly are outspoken, Vicky is a bit reserved. Her manner of dressing is also different from others. She is one of those conservative types of women. She carefully chooses her words when she speaks. Apart from this, Vicky's sense of humility can be seen through her actions and words. She speaks softly and moves rather slowly. Evident in her words are 'po' and 'opo', the polite way of addressing people in the Tagalog regions of the Philippines. We talked about a few things. One of which is how AIDHA has helped her to save money for herself and her future. As we moved on, Vicky disclosed a critical incident that affected her.

Vicky: I've been feeling anxious lately, Sir.

Me: I'm sorry to hear that. Do you mind sharing it with me? I will listen.

Vicky: Ma'am (referring to her female employer) seems to be finding faults in me, in what I do on a daily basis.

Me: Oh, that's bad. Why do you think is she doing that?

Vicky: I don't know, po. I can't understand her. I'm really afraid. The latest incident is that she complained about their baby's milk bottles. She accused me of not washing them properly. She told Sir (the husband of her female employer) that she saw blotches of milk on the bottles' lids many times.

Me: In other words, she is accusing you of not doing your job well?

Vicky: Yes, po Sir.

Me: Were there blotches of milk indeed?

Vicky: No, Sir. I swear. My eyes are clear. I maybe slow in doing things sometimes, but I see to it that when I do things, I do them properly.

Me: So what did you say to your employer?

Vicky: I asked for an apology even if I'm sure that I wash the milk bottles very well.

Me: What did your male employer say?

Vicky: He always believes in what my female employer tells him. She's his wife; I'm just a helper.

Me: Hey, don't look down on yourself. You're doing a great job to ensure that their family and the baby is okay.

Vicky: But they don't seem to appreciate that. I don't feel it.

Me: I'm sorry to hear that.

Vicky: It's okay, Sir.

Me: So, what did your female employer say after that accusation?

Vicky: She told me to prepare my stuff because she is going to give my release paper. She told me I can leave anytime.

Me: That easy? What did you say or do?

Vicky: I cried. I could not stop crying in front of them. I told them that I am willing to accept the release paper. And I asked for an apology for not washing the baby's milk bottles well. I said sorry to them even if I know that I am not neglectful. Who am I to fight back, Sir?

Me: I'm sorry to hear that, but Vicky, you have a voice. You can answer them back in a proper way.

Vicky: They will not listen, po, especially Ma'am. She's very strict and she doesn't seem to care about my feelings. She doesn't listen to me.

Me: So, did they send you back to your agency?

Vicky: No, Sir. That morning when my luggage was all packed, I heard the baby crying. She did not stop crying. Then I took the baby from my male employer because I could not resist the mother's instinct in me to get and pamper the baby. Both of them could not pamper her. I took the baby's milk and after a while, she calmed down. She slept in my arms.

Me: That's amazing. Did they wonder?

Vicky: I don't know, Sir. Maybe. I think the baby has gotten used to my arms and to my body odour. I take care of her even at night. I treat her as my own daughter. So, why should I not wash her milk bottles, properly? I will never do that. (crying)

Me: I'm sorry, Vicky. I commend your humility and patience, you know. Not all of us can live with humility.

My conversation with Vicky attests that humility and kindness are her rhetorical instruments whether she is conscious of these or not. Even if she knew by herself that her female employer's accusation is a false accusation, she did not respond with anger or aggression; rather, she asked sorry for doing something she did not do. Knowing her, I suspect that she would often ask for an apology for every accusation that her employer would make. However, her kindness has taken her somewhere: the moment when the baby calmed down in her arms signifies her significance in her employers' lives. Her employers did not pursue to release her, but the possibility of finding more serious faults for her in future can be tremendous. In my view, humility breeds silence and silence breeds exploitation. Out of concern, I advised Vicky to assert her rights and to reason out because she has a voice. Her response is: "For as long as I can manage how they treat me, and I am doing nothing wrong, I will remain humble and kind, Sir. This is what my grandmother taught me. Be kind to others. God knows what is in my heart. I always pray for His guidance and protection. If I feel so down, I will cry in prayers. Prayers make me strong."

Case Story 4: "I don't have money Sir, but I am not a thief" – 'Marissa'

Marissa's sharing of her story was focused on a recent accusation of theft in the house. Her male employer had accused her of stealing an expensive watch. She is the only worker in the house, therefore, her employer suspected her no less. However, Marissa retorted to her employer by virtue of empirical evidence and the circumstances when the wrist watch was suspected to be stolen. Here's how we talked about it:

Me: What happened?

Marissa: Sir (referring to her male employer) had accused me of stealing his wrist watch.

Me: Well, if you did not do it, there's no reason to be afraid, right?

Marissa: Yes, but he threatened to report me to the police.

Me: What did you say to him?

Marissa: I asked him to check the CCTV videos. I swore to him I did not steal his watch. I've been working for him for 8 years and he did not lose anything in his house.

Me: Is he your only employer?

Marissa: Yes, Sir. But he has friends and family visiting the house every now and then.

Me: So, did you both dig the videos?

Marissa: No, he did not allow me. He said it's a complicated process. He would need to get someone to get the videos ready. Something like that.

Me: Did you say something else apart from checking the videos?

Marissa: Yes, I asked him to remember when and where he left his watch.

Me: It must be an expensive watch...

Marissa: Yes, Sir. He said it's Tag Heuer.

Me: Well, that's indeed expensive. So, what was his reply?

Marissa: He gave me a date, around 11 June, something like that.

Me: And?

Marissa: I remember I had to contact a caterer a week before that date because he was expecting visitors – some young people from Thailand. A school trip or something. One of the students is his friend's son.

Me: And how is that connected to the lost watch?

Marissa: Well, that day was a busy day. It was 11 June. We had visitors. A few staff from a catering company were there. So, I asked him about the last time he removed his watch from his wrist. Whether he took it out from his wrist that busy evening and left it somewhere. He helps me in the kitchen sometimes, you know. He's like that. He's not bad, you know.

Me: What did he say?

Marissa: He was trying hard to remember. Then, he told me that he removed it in the toilet. He is quite old – in his mid-50s. And he is like that. He seems to leave his things almost anywhere in the house.

Me: Did you tell him that?

Marissa: About what?

Me: That he tends to leave his things anywhere in the house?

Marissa: I wanted to, but I did not pursue. I was afraid he would feel bad.

Me: Okay...

Marissa: So, I asked him if he was sure about leaving his watch in the toilet.

Me: Okay. And what happened next?

Marissa: He called a guy to check the CCTV videos in the house and they suspected someone else.

Me: He suspected another one? Not you? In other words, the videos did not show any instance of stealing?

Marissa: Yes, Sir. Then I asked him if he would report me to the police. I swore to him I did not steal the watch. I was somehow panicking that time. (Crying)

Me: What did he say?

Marissa: He said nothing and rushed to work. He told me we will discuss the matter later. But when he came back that evening, he was wearing the watch already.

Me: In other words, he left his watch in his office?

Marissa: Yes, Sir. I cried when he talked to me. He asked for an apology that evening.

Me: Good thing that he knows how to ask for an apology.

Marissa: Yes, but I actually told him that even if I don't have money, I don't steal. I'm not a thief. I did not come here in Singapore to become a thief. I told him how afraid I was when he told me he's filing a police report.

Me: He must have felt the shame when you said that.

Marissa: I don't know. Maybe. But he's still the boss in the house. Who am I to complain?

Asking for empirical evidence and remembering those specific circumstances about an incident are Marissa's way of reasoning out to her employer. Her fear of being reported to the police prompted her to ask her employer about the particular date, time and occasion so she could help him unravel the incident of stealing. She was unyielding to ask her employer to dig the CCTV videos in the house for him to see some proof, which indicates that she did not steal the watch. She knew that her employer would not believe him if she kept telling him that her conscience is clear. She embarked on digging evidence as her weapon to free herself from the accusation. What is frustrating, though, on Marissa's part is when her employer came home wearing the watch. Whether her employer felt guilty or not, it was painful yet empowering on Marissa's part to show her integrity intact by saying, "I am poor Sir. I don't have money, but I am not a thief."

Case Study 5: "To drive away the ants in your room is to not eat in your room, Ma'am." – 'Beth'

Beth's story is a story about common sense that many tend to take for granted, including professionals. In my conversation with her, I learned that she is one of those who finished a 4-year business management degree in a college in the Philippines. This could have contributed to her high sense of logic when she shared her experiences with me. One critical incident that she disclosed with me is about a colony of ants who attacked her employers' bedroom. Below is our dialogue:

Me: So, there's this colony of tiny ants in your employers' bedroom? That's what you're saying?

Beth: Yes, Sir. I mean, I clean their room every day. I mop it morning and evening. I vacuum the whole house twice a week. But these tiny little creatures are there in their bedroom.

Me: Something must have triggered them to stay in their bedroom.

Beth: I have been observing them, Sir. They usually bring food in their bedroom. They eat on their bed while watching TV. I suspect the food is the culprit.

Me: Well, it's possible. Ants have a tremendous sense of smell. And they like sweets.

Beth: I mean, my common sense tells me it's the food. The sweets they eat. Their bedroom is full of snacks, too.

Me: So, what did they say?

Beth: Ma'am (referring to her female employer) scolded me one day because the ants are there in their bedroom. She is afraid of ants. She said I am not cleaning their bedroom well. That I'm not doing my job well.

Me: And what did you say?

Beth: I told them that I clean their bedroom every day. How come the ants are there?

Me: And what did she say?

Beth: She was screaming at me. She told me I'm a defiant woman. She told me that I have no right to answer her back because she's my employer. She told me to clean their room right away. No complaining.

Me: Really. Even if you have a reason to say something?

Beth: That's what she is. Even her husband is like that.

Me: And what happened after that?

Beth: I cleaned the whole bedroom. I changed all the linens and bed sheets. I mopped the floor. I killed the ants. She asked me to buy something in the store to drive them away. Some kind of a spray.

Me: Then?

Beth: Then, the next day, the ants were back (Laughs).

Me: That's funny. The ants are persistent, huh.

Beth: So, I advised her if they could stop bringing food into their bedroom. I just thought about it because I suspect the food is the trigger. It just came out naturally from my mouth. I mean, that's based on observation.

Me: Then, what was her response?

Beth: She was angry. She told me I have no right to advise her. Who am I to advise her?

Me: Oh, that's really bad.

Beth: She told me that she's going to replace me because I can't keep my mouth shut. She just wants me to keep silent. She wants me to just do my job. No answering back.

Me: That's unfair.

Beth: Yes, Sir. But I was not afraid. I asked her to give me my release paper, so I could easily move out from their house. All I need is the release paper. Although I was afraid, I answered her back.

Me: Did she give it to you?

Beth: No, Sir. She did not. She changed the topic and she told me that I am defiant, that I don't respect her. I felt bad when she said that. So, I did not keep quiet. I made it clear to them that I was just suggesting. It was not my intention to insult them or tell them what to do.

Me: And?

Beth: Well, I think they took my advice for a few days because I saw them bringing their snack food to the kitchen. I also noticed that they were not bringing food into their bedroom anymore. They shifted to eating at the balcony.

Me: Did the ants disappear after that?

Beth: Yes, Sir. The ants were gone. (Laughs) So, I think I'm right. I mean, that's common sense to me.

Me: You make sense, yes. Did they say anything after that?

Beth: No, Sir. No apologies. I felt bad you know. But what can I do? I went back to my room and cried. I cried to let go of the insult and the pain.

Me: I'm sorry to hear that, Beth. You're a strong woman.

This dialogue shows that in this particular incident in the domestic space, Beth is using common sense as her rhetorical instrument to reason out to her employers. Her common sense was telling her that the food is the trigger for the ants to attack the bedroom, so she advised her employers to stop bringing food into their bedroom. Although this brought them to a heated argument, Beth made it clear

to them that her intention was not to insult her employers or disrespect them, but to try out a possible solution that is easy to do: to not bring food or to not eat inside their bedroom. What is dejecting is when her employer thought that her advice was disrespecting her as an employer. However, her employers must have realised Beth's point, so, they took Beth's advice and saw a significant change: the ants disappearing in their bedroom. Although painful on Beth's part, she was able to suggest an alternative that somehow helped change an act (i.e., from bringing food in the bedroom to no longer bringing food in the bedroom) and the way her employers view her. That alternative was based on common sense.

Case Story 6: "We are surrounded by trees, Sir. The trees are home to these birds. Thus, it is normal to have bird poo in the balcony." – 'Elai'

My interview with Elai was a bit relaxed due to her cheerful personality. Like Beth, Elai is a degree holder. She finished an undergraduate degree in Education in a provincial university in the Philippines with a major in Biology. Apart from a certificate course in AIDHA, she also completed another 2-month certificate course in the British Council in Singapore. Elai believes in the power of education, therefore, given time and resources, she would enrol courses to augment her knowledge and skills. She said that she does not want to be a domestic worker all her life. A critical incident that Elai shared with me was focused on birds and bird poo. In our conversation, it can be inferred that Elai both has common sense and basic knowledge about the characteristics of birds.

Elai: What I'm saying is that my male employer was complaining about the bird poo in the balcony. Of course, we are surrounded by trees so there are birds there. A lot of birds. So, there must be bird poo.

Me: And perhaps the branches are on top of your balcony already? It takes time for the National Parks Board of Singapore to do the pruning of trees. Singapore is surrounded by thousands and thousands of trees.

Elai: That's true, Sir. I mean, I cannot cut the branches myself. It's not within my job scope, you know.

Me: And it's dangerous! Of course, you don't do that.

Elai: That's true. I mean these trees growing and the birds taking refuge in these trees are beyond my control. The trees are their habitat, their home.

Me: That's right. But, wait, every time there's bird poo, you clean the balcony?

Elai: Yes, Sir. That's every morning. Sometimes, they would ask me to drive the birds away in the evenings. It's funny, you know. They are professionals. They should know better the nature of birds. I mean, you don't need to read to know. Maybe they're too busy with work that they no longer understand what's happening in the natural environment.

Me: Well, yes. You're right. Maybe.

Elai: But who am I to complain? I sprinkle water on the poo and scrub the balcony to remove the poo. The poo is not even smelly. I was planning to dry them under the sun, so I can use them as fertiliser for our potted plants in the balcony and in the front yard.

Me: Did they allow you?

Elai: No, Sir. They told me it's disgusting.

Me: It's organic. If there's no smell, then, why not?

Elai: It's difficult, Sir. Whatever they say, I follow. I'm just the helper in the house.

Me: Don't look down yourself, Elai. But yes, I know, it's quite difficult on your part to insist.

Elai: Yes, Sir. Of course, I get tired of cleaning the poo and of my male employer's whining. He has an OC tendency, you know. He wants all things to be clean. He doesn't want any dirt or mess in the house.

Me: And what did you tell him?

Elai: Well, one day I told him that our condo is surrounded by big trees. And the trees have grown. Their branches are spreading wide extending to condo units, and that include the roofs and balconies. And these trees are home to birds, so it is normal to see bird poo in the balcony and it's beyond my control.

Me: What did he say?

Elai: I mean, he told me to stop explaining because he's not stupid. With that, I told him to stop complaining, too. After all I'm cleaning the balcony every day.

Me: You're brave. That's a good point.

Elai: But, Sir, he got angry. He told me I don't have any right to speak.

Me: So, what happened?

Elai: I told him I was just explaining. But then, they are like that. So, I just kept silent in the end.

Me: I'm sorry to hear that. Any other alternative?

Elai: I told him to call the people in charge of pruning the trees. Perhaps that's the best solution. I was just suggesting.

Me: Did he call?

Elai: No, he asked me to call them. I mean the one that you said a while ago...

Me: The National Parks Board?

Elai: Yes, Sir. That Board. But they told me it would take 2-3 weeks. For an immediate response, they told me to call a private company to do the pruning.

Me: And?

Elai: No, my employer did not want me to. He's quite stingy, you know...

In this incident, Elai is using both common sense and empirical assumption to reason out to her male employer. Her rhetorical statement that says "these trees are growing and the birds taking refuge in trees are beyond my control" manifest a basic knowledge and understanding about her surroundings. It's based on observing the natural environment she is in. Her hypothesis is simple: trees grow, their branches spread out reaching roofs and balconies, and birds take refuge in those branches. Therefore, with birds on those branches, bird poo is possible to fall on to roofs and balconies. As a Biology major and someone who has a sense of understanding with the environment she is in, Elai was able to express her reasons in a scientific way, rather than using an unsubstantiated explanation. However, just like the other FDWs, Elai became (or is) a victim of verbal insult (i.e., "Don't talk. You're only a domestic worker. You work for me.") – a struggle and a painful reality that many of them endure on a daily basis. Nonetheless,

in this incident, Elai has expressed her thoughts that are grounded on empirical observation, something that must have made her employers realised that she uses her sense of reason based on empirical observation.

Summary of Findings

In a rhetorical study of communication, the main focus of the communication researcher is to determine the purpose, motive or intent of something, which can be a custom, routine or practice. Determining the intent would lead one to surface the rhetorical acts of a rhetor (e.g., a speaker or an authority), which would explain the framework in which the study is anchored, in this case, within the rhetorical tradition of communication theory.

As I am writing this paragraph on this particular page, I carry with me the intent to contribute knowledge to the communication field

through the rhetorical lens of communication and within the context of the cross-cultural domestic space. This intent encapsulates an example of my rhetorical act as a communication researcher.

A rhetorical act involves a matter of recognition, i.e., clarity and accuracy of perception, and a matter of intentional, artistic, human action. It exists in a rhetorical situation where the rhetor (the speaker) intends to influence or bring out an effect.

Apart from intent, a rhetorical act also involves evidence (the different kinds of support material for the argument) and strategies (the adaptation of appeals, language and argument) to overcome challenges and to accomplish the intent of communication.

Table 1 is a summary of these case stories that capture the rhetorical practices of the FDWs and their perceived rhetorical intent.

Statement/Quote	Rhetorical Practice	Rhetorical Intent
"I can't do all the errands you want me to do because the budget you leave me is not enough, Ma'am." – 'Gwen'	Explanation	To leave her with enough budget to accomplish errands
"I use my mobile phone when I'm done with all the house work. When I use it, it doesn't mean I'm not doing my job." – 'Merly'	Justification	To justify that her act of using her mobile phone is not an indication of irresponsibility or neglect of household chores
"I'm sorry, Ma'am, if you think that I don't clean your baby's milk bottles very well. But I do, Ma'am." – 'Vicky'	Humility and kindness (silence)	To avoid altercation in the house despite a false accusation; to keep her job
"Please remember the last time you removed your watch from your wrist, Sir. Please take note, too, that on 11 June, there was a party in this house. A lot of people came. We can check the CCTV videos." – 'Marissa'	Seeking for empirical evidence	To free herself from a false accusation; to defend herself
"To drive away the ants in your bedroom is not eat in your bedroom, Ma'am. Do not stock food there as well." – 'Beth'	Common sense	To change her employers' act based on a common observation
"We live in a house that is surrounded by big trees, Sir. Trees are home to birds. Therefore, the bird poo in the balcony is beyond my control." – 'Elai'	Assumption based on empirical observation	To assert an idea based on a fundamental assumption; to state a fact based on environmental circumstances; to influence how her employers view her

Table 1: Filipino Domestic Workers' Rhetorical Practices in the Domestic Space.

To answer research question 1, I have created codes that capture the intent of the rhetorical practices of the FDWs within the context of domestic space. For example, Gwen's statement "I can't do all the errands you want me to do because the budget you leave me is not enough, Ma'am.", is a rhetorical practice coded as leaving sufficient budget to do all errands in the house. The intent of this rhetorical statement in relation to reasoning and common understanding is for the employer to understand that enough budget is important in accomplishing errands. As this unfolds, common understanding and harmony are accomplished in the domestic space. No heated argument will ensue, and both parties will be happy.

To answer research question 2, I have identified themes that pertain to the realisation or accomplishment of reasoning and common understanding. For instance, with the statement above: "I can't do all the errands you want me to do because the budget you leave me is not enough, Ma'am.", I have determined that it accomplishes reasoning and common understanding because it explains a condition, a reasoning pattern that emerges from the data, a reasoning pattern in the form of explanation. This makes explanation as a common rhetorical practice that Gwen uses when discussing issues with her employers. Gwen's

declaration to her employer about the need to leave enough budget invites her employer to think and examine her point: that a good budget leads to accomplishing errands in the house. When this happens, reasoning and common understanding in the domestic space are accomplished: no arguments and both parties are content.

It can be inferred that reasoning out tends to be a predominant skill that these FDWs utilise in the domestic space. The case stories reveal that these FDWs speak their minds and are interculturally-competent as migrant women. They reason out based on explanation and justification, on observation of their environment, and on their interpretation of circumstances guided by their sense of right or wrong. This implies that to reason out as intercultural competence is inherent in them as domestic workers. This is shown in how they defend their stand using explanation, justification, empirical evidence, common sense and scientific assumptions. They are able to accomplish not only their domestic work but more importantly intercultural communication as a rhetorical act in the domestic space couched in the forms of reasoning out or rebuttal. In summary, explanation, justification, silence, seeking for empirical evidence, common sense, and assumption based on empirical observation are rhetorical acts in

the cross-cultural domestic space because they accomplish reasoning and common understanding. These rhetorical acts comprise their intercultural competence. Such intercultural competence is a considered a rhetorical act as it accomplishes common understanding in the cross-cultural domestic space.

An obvious advantage that enables the FDWs to reason out is their linguistic competence, i.e., they can express themselves in English, which is a common language spoken in Singapore homes. Linguistic competence seems to be a key part of intercultural competence. The perceived rhetorical intent indicated in the last column of Table 1 signify that these women are self-spoken, independent-minded and empowered despite their marginalised position in the domestic space and their fear to lose their jobs. More importantly, the perceived rhetorical intent suggests that the FDWs aim to accomplish open communication, understanding and acceptance in the domestic space.

When things are hard on them such as feeling the pain induced by verbal abuse or insult, they resort to prayer and crying as their shared solitary acts. Prayer is their source of strength, while crying becomes their outlet to release the pain, insult, and other negative emotions. They know that they can only reason out to a certain extent. They know that their being right about an issue or problem does not change their status in the domestic space, a status that many of the employers will look down. They believe that prayers make them stronger and crying makes them resilient. This is part of their sacrifice in the foreign soil – just so they can give a better life to their families back home.

I explained a caveat with one of the respondents though, in the name of Vicky. I told her that too much kindness can be abused and can make a false accusation to appear true since kindness can breed silence and silence can lead to more exploitative acts. Out of concern, I advised her to reason out in a genuine or proper way, rather than remain silent at most times. Silence, as a form of rhetorical practice, may be viewed as a form of speech (Raul Pertierra, personal communication, 2018), or is itself a form of reasoning or resistance (Lance Collins, personal communication, 2018), but if one consistently uses silence, it may act back and refuse to be mobilized in accomplishing a communication goal in the domestic space. That goal is common understanding and respect.

Discussion

In this section, I present some key arguments based on my analysis of the case stories. I argue that

- reasoning out as intercultural competence is a rhetorical act that promotes logic or rationality,
- reasoning out as intercultural competence is a rhetorical act that is reflective and reflexive,
- reasoning out as intercultural competence is a rhetorical act that can be empowering, and
- silence may act back and refuse to be mobilised in the domestic space. I discuss each of these below.

Reasoning out as intercultural competence is a rhetorical act that promotes logic

In my view, explanation, justification, seeking for empirical evidence, common sense and empirical assumption based on observation of the environment are rhetorical practices that denote that these FDWs have a sense of reason or logic. In those rhetorical remarks in Table 1, the FDWs show rational thinking in expressing

their ideas to their employers. They speak their minds not based on ungrounded facts, but based on the realities of experience, the circumstances in their environment, and empirical data available. Despite their marginalised status in the domestic space, they are taking an active role in using reasoning or judgment that are not questionable, but rather well-thought and sensible based on their observations and their logical interpretation of these observations (e.g., why ants swarm the employers' bedroom or why there is bird poo in the balcony). They have a sense of right or wrong. They also utilise rebuttal to argue that what is said of them or how their employers view them is not true. In conclusion, the FDWs' sense of logic fosters a more rational view of communication, and this somehow positions themselves as interculturally-competent individuals in the domestic space – with a sense of reason and a voice that influences action. As they continue doing this, they may experience some more heated conversations, but this will enable them to maintain an open communication and accomplish a common understanding as a communication goal in the cross-cultural domestic space.

Reasoning out as intercultural competence is a rhetorical act that is reflective and reflexive

Those rhetorical practices such as explanation, justification and assumption based on empirical observation seem to invite FDWs to reflect on those incidents that happened in the domestic space where they operate so that a more open and trusting interaction can exist, interaction itself being constitutive of communication, i.e., as people interact, they “produce and reproduce shared meanings”. Interaction between people is contingent on the constitutive nature of communication and the reflexive awareness of their actions, interests and beliefs. Constitutive view of communication sees communication as a collective process that produces outcomes, and one of those outcomes is ‘meaning’. In the context of the FDWs, this ‘shared meaning’ can be translated into ‘how they do things’ or ‘how they do things more effectively’ in order to make their employers happy or to let them know that they are doing their job well and that they deserve fair treatment and respect as fundamental human rights. This self-reflection can further invite FDWs to interrogate their words, actions and situations. In communication theory, this is called reflexivity. In other words, FDWs reflecting on these critical incidents can also influence, either to reinforce or to change, everyday thinking and practice of those involved in the interaction, who are themselves (FDWs) and their employers living together and interacting with each other in the domestic space. Reflecting on their words, actions and situations may help them improve the way they communicate with their employers, adjust to the dynamics of communication, or more importantly, to negotiate meanings in the communication process, in order to understand each other and to develop tolerance to each other's differences.

Reasoning out as intercultural competence is a rhetorical act that can be empowering as it affords agency

The FDWs' rhetorical intent to explain, to justify, to defend one's self from false accusations, and to change an act (e.g., for an employer to stop bringing food into the bedroom) attests a showcase of agency. Agency is a form of awareness of initiating, executing and controlling one's own thoughts and actions. Being an agent means being able to act or speak “on behalf (or in the name) of principal”. In the narrative economy, a principal refers to a collective entity like a group, organisation or society. Agency is the capacity to communicate an

effect or change of behaviour. Put simply, in the context of FDWs operating in the domestic space, agency is the capacity to accomplish common understanding as a communication goal and to be empowered. The rhetorical statements in Table 1 above suggest that reasoning out as a rhetorical act is agentic. Explaining, justifying, seeking for evidence and common-sense reasoning are patterns of reasoning that enable these FDWs to confront their challenges in the domestic space, to improve the way they conduct themselves, to engage in open communication, to assert their rights and to direct themselves towards becoming informed and empowered individuals. Therefore, the perceived outcome of agency is that FDWs become empowered individuals because they will have a better sense of themselves, which includes a clearer understanding of their skills, knowledge, and abilities. More importantly, their sense of agency would help in accomplishing a common understanding between them and their employers.

Overall, from a practical standpoint, reasoning out as intercultural competence enables the FDWs to accomplish their domestic work as a form of service that is expected of them as migrant domestic workers. From a theoretical standpoint, reasoning out as intercultural competence enables them to accomplish intercultural communication and common understanding – two of the goals that indicate that they are accomplishing life in general, a life that is couched in the domestic space.

Silence may act back and refuse to be mobilised in the domestic space

This argument emerged from Vicky's case. As I mentioned above, Vicky is someone who uses kindness and humility when confronted with some issues of concern in the domestic home. For this, I gave Vicky a caveat to consider. Vicky tends to be apologetic (e.g., I'm sorry) to her employer even though she knows that she did not do anything wrong or appalling. The perceived reasons for this could be twofold: (1) it is her innate personality to be humble and kind, and (2) that she fears losing her domestic job, thus, she remains silent or appears passive and subservient when talking with her employers. Humility and kindness are ideal values that may attract empathy from others; however, too much of this may put someone (e.g., Vicky) who is in the lower social class at a disadvantaged position in future undertakings, especially when humility and kindness breed silence. One of which is to make false accusations to appear true and to abuse and exploit the domestic worker in many ways. In some way, silence or saying "I'm sorry" can be considered an act of resilience and resistance. This means that saying sorry does not necessarily mean that one is sorry at all but is rather expressing resistance to a hegemonic force (e.g., the position of an employer as a higher entity in the domestic space). However, if silence (and saying sorry) is not managed well due to fear, silence can act back and refuse to encourage someone (e.g., a domestic worker, Vicky for instance) to take action in pursuit of a particular objective. That objective can be to express or assert an opinion or defend one's self from potential incrimination, exploitation, abuse or violence. In the context of FDWs, the aim of speaking their thoughts and reasoning out is to communicate a message in order to be understood and to understand. In my view, silence acts as a double-edged sword: as a form of resilience or strength or as a vehicle for potential and more damaging abuse to happen. If silence is managed well, it will help FDWs to achieve a transparent relationship and open communication in the domestic space where respect and fairness are observed.

Limitations

Since this is a qualitative study, my analysis and discussion are subjective. In qualitative studies, the focus is on meaning behind the action, not causation or correlation. Therefore, qualitative studies celebrate subjectivity rather than objectivity. One of the obvious limitations of this study is that the stories are stories coming from the FDWs, and the versions of these stories from their employers remain unheard. Although possible, getting the versions of stories from their employers would be a difficult undertaking and may have the potential to put themselves (the FDWS) and myself (as a researcher) in a precarious situation.

A qualitative study as it is, this study does not want to prove that these critical incidents are either 'true', sensationalised or fabricated. What is clear is that these stories came from the six FDWs who willingly shared such stories with me with an intent to be heard. Therefore, these stories reflect a reality that is common amongst these FDWs. Their trust and confidence to share their stories with me could somehow attest to the trustworthiness of these case stories or critical incidents that became the focus of this study.

The intent of this study is to find out how FDWs employ reasoning out as intercultural competence to help them express their opinions, position themselves as members of a domestic space, assert their rights as human beings, and amplify their seemingly muted voices. Credit to most qualitative studies, this study does not pretend to be anything other than retelling and analysing the narratives of the six FDWs, in which analysis has been largely drawn from consistent and iterative reading and persistent review and examination of their narrative data. Though these, I was able to arrive at codes and themes which form the key to my analysis.

Future Research Directions

A future stemming of this study is to explore the impact of silence on FDWs. As I have mentioned above, silence may act back and refuse to be mobilised in the domestic space. As this unfolds, the domestic workers who remain silent out of fear may consistently become victimised by employers in forms of verbal or psychological abuse and exploitation. Exploring silence may also open possibilities of deconstructing it not only in the context of FDWs, but also in the context of their marginalised counterparts, the construction workers in Singapore. What is silence to them? Why are they silent? How does silence help them cope with life?

Another potential study is to get the domestic agencies into the picture by asking them the common reasons that domestic workers disclose when they flee their employers' homes and how these common reasons attest to the severity of maltreatment, abuse and violence that domestic workers experience and endure. More importantly, it is interesting to explore as to how domestic workers negotiate meaning with agencies and employers through the power of reasoning especially with concerns relating to salary, benefits and other social services. In the same way, it is interesting to find out if the agencies in Singapore are following the regulations and policies set by the Singapore government through its employment arm, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), that serves the interests of the domestic workers and other marginalised groups.

Yet another potential study is to revert the research direction of this study, i.e., rather than interviewing domestic workers, researchers in the field may want to interview employers of domestic workers with

the goal to understand how reasonable (or not) their domestic workers are in communication situations that they are engaged in, and to comprehend the nuances of understanding domestic work from the employers' frame of mind. However, it must be noted that this is going to be a challenging endeavour. A potential impediment to this research direction is the employers' social position, social class and identification in the social hierarchy.

Conclusion

Despite the fear of losing their job as a shared feeling among the FDWs involved in this study, it can be inferred that they are empowered migrant women because they utilise reasoning as intercultural competence to express their ideas, assert their stand about an issue that affects them, and echo their voices in the domestic space. A common rhetorical act that the respondents share, which is to not be afraid to speak when they think that they are right and when they have done nothing wrong, has been revealed in this study. In short, these women speak their minds.

One of the reasons that help them achieve this sense of empowerment is their seemingly strong linguistic competence as well as their apparent awareness of their context and their fundamental human rights. It may be irritating for some employers to have domestic workers like these FDWs answering them back in communication situations in the domestic space, but this illustrates that these migrant women speak their minds and use reasoning as a rhetorical strategy for them to be heard and to be understood – understanding itself being a fundamental communication goal.

Their reasoning comes in forms of explanation, justification, common sense, seeking for empirical evidence, silence, apology and asserting assumptions based on careful observation of the environment they are in. These forms of reasoning as part of their rhetorical practices illustrate their intercultural competence as rational human beings, rather than being regarded as 'idiots' – a derogatory term that many employers associate them with. From these rhetorical practices, it can be argued that reasoning out as intercultural competence is a rhetorical tool that promotes logic or rationality, invites reflection, and fosters an empowering perspective on the part of the FDWs. Intercultural competence, as a rhetorical tool, also affords them agency to act on their circumstances in the domestic space and invite change in their employers' seemingly abusive behaviour. Reasoning out as intercultural competence enables them to accomplish not only their domestic work but more importantly intercultural communication, common understanding and respect to human dignity.

Further, it can be concluded that these six FDWs gather strength through prayer, perceived to be both a shared religious and a cultural act, and through crying that is believed to be their outlet to release the pain or anger brought by verbal insults from their employers. To them, to pray is a source of strength, and to cry in silence or to be silent is a form of resistance and resilience. However, silence as a form of a rhetorical practice may act back and refuse to be mobilized in accomplishing a communication goal in the domestic space – the goal

to be understood and to understand. Vicky, one of the FDWs in this study, is the one who predominantly uses this as an outcome of her kindness and humility. Although considered as ideal human values, it can be empowering on Vicky's part to reason out when necessary in order to amplify her seemingly muted voice in the domestic space and be empowered.

References

1. Collier L (2018) Why intercultural competence is essential and how schools and businesses are helping people develop it. ETS Open Notes.
2. Ministry of Manpower (2018) Work permit for FDW: Eligibility and requirements.
3. LiM K (2017) Minimum pay for Filipino maids to go up May 1: Philippine embassy.
4. Ho O (2017) Voices away from home. *The Straits Times*, pp. D2-D3.
5. ABS-CBN News (2010) Malacañang honours modern day heroes. ABS-CBN.
6. Nash EJ, Brown NC, Bracci L (2015) Intercultural competence: Key to the new multicultural societies of the globalised world.
7. Eden (2016) Things you need to know about Filipino maids before hiring them.
8. AIDHA (2015) AIDHA Annual report 2015-2016.
9. Schriefer P (2017) What is the difference between multicultural, intercultural and cross-cultural communication?
10. Laurant J (2011) Intercultural organizational communication: The social organizing of interaction in international encounters. 48: 231–55.
11. Korzeny F (2012) Relevance and application of intercultural communication theory and research. pp 42-49.
12. Lindlof TR, Taylor BC (2011) Qualitative communication research methods.
13. Collier MJ (2011) Cultural identity and intercultural communication. *Intercultural communication: A reader* pp 53-63.
14. Deardorff DK (2006) The identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization at institutions of higher education in the United States. *Journal of Studies in International Education* 10: 241-266
15. Hofstede G (2001) *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. London, UK.
16. Roskelly H (2004) What do students need to know about rhetoric?
17. Craig RT (1999) Communication theory as a field. *Communication Theory* 9: 119-161.
18. Connor U (2011) *Intercultural rhetoric in the writing classroom*. Michigan, USA: University of Michigan Press.
19. Mumby DK (1997) *Modernism, postmodernism and communication studies: A rereading of ongoing debate*.
20. Burke K (1945) *A grammar of motives*.
21. Strauss A, Corbin JM (1998) *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*.
22. Charmaz K (2006) *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
23. Bryant A, Charmaz K (2007) *The SAGE handbook of grounded theory*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
24. Glaser B, Strauss AL (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. N.B., Maine, USA: Aldine Transaction Publishers.