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Barriers to Health Communication Derived from Language Gap Related to Regional Differences and Generation Gap — An Example of Dialects Dying in Taiwan

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Abstract

Language gap has contributed to obstructions like misunderstanding in health communication, impacting doctors' diagnosis and patients' health decisions. It also hinders dissemination of health information, putting threat to public health.

Abundant studies indicated that dying of dialects has caused a wide language gap in Taiwan, for the older generations especially in Southern Taiwan speak dialects often, while younger professional doctors especially from Northern Taiwan rarely use them. This language gap is an impediment to patients' rights and patient-centeredness.

Since Taiwanese is the most widely spoken local dialect, our research aimed at it. We divided the discussions into three parts: improving communication between doctors and patients, the impact of setting up Medical Taiwanese courses, and prospects of other dialects.

66 doctors were queried in the study, and the following are results of analyzing the corresponding information. Firstly, the regions doctors work in influence their frequency of using Taiwanese, due to patients' preference of specific languages. Secondly, doctors of the older generation are adept at Taiwanese, while young doctors do not. The implementation of "Medical Taiwanese" hasn't been able to meet expectations of equipping younger doctors with fundamental Taiwanese oral ability. Last but not least, other dialects' users have the same rights to be taken care of well, therefore employing interpreters in hospitals would be feasible to deal with this.

After conducting this research, we believe that the language gap can be amended by implementing more thorough education policy and dispatching suitable interpreters in specific areas, and thus improve health communication.