

# Multiethnic Japanese-English Bilinguals' Meal Time Talk

*Marina Ruiz Tada, University of Barcelona*

*This study employs sequential conversation analysis and membership categorization analysis to multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual Japanese-English speakers. The research examines how participants accomplish social actions and goals such as teasing, planning schedules, and being friends. In doing these social actions, transportable ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities become emergent. Hence, this research shows instances of linguistic, multiethnic, and multicultural categories constructed and utilized for situational tasks and locally emergent goals. Furthermore, this study sees acts of codeswitching as a communicative resource that invokes not only multilingual identity, but also multiethnic and multicultural identity. This research hopes to give insight into how these categories become relevant and managed between various multiethnic Japanese friends. The audiorecorded excerpts are naturally occurring conversations among friends during dinner time.*

**Keywords:** Japanese-English bilinguals, conversation analysis, membership categorization, multicultural, multiethnic

## 1 Introduction

This study examines the interactional processes between Japanese-English speakers and multiethnic female friends talking on the kitchen counter. Incorporating sequential conversation analysis (CA), and membership categorization analysis (MCA), I examine the construction of dynamic ethnic and cultural selves through the conversations that take place during casual and daily dinners between friends of mixed ethnicity and who regularly speak in both English and Japanese.

---

Corresponding author's email: [marinaruiztada@gmail.com](mailto:marinaruiztada@gmail.com)

ISSN: 1457-9863

Publisher: Centre for Applied Language Studies, University of Jyväskylä

© 2014: The author

<http://apples.jyu.fi>

## 2 Background: CA and MCA approach to identity

This study builds on Greer's (2010) study of Japanese-English bilingual international school students in Japan and Kamada's (2005, 2009) study on mixed heritage Japanese-White adolescents. Greer employs both sequential CA and MCA to examine the microidentities that emerge through bilingual exchanges and the participants' choices in language varieties. MCA refers to the ways in which participants' orient themselves to certain memberships or groups in conversation. Kamada's research, on the other hand, takes on a fixed structural approach to culture and ethnicity, and has been done through content analysis of interviews with multiethnic participants. Although my research has a topical overlap with Kamada's study on multiethnic Japanese-White adolescents, my study takes on Greer's discursive- constructionist approach, in which these ethnic and cultural identities may become relevant for the participants as they become emergent in talk in interaction. From a CA perspective, we can locate identity by seeing it as something that we do, and not as something that we are; identity is situated in the talk itself. Therefore, through MCA, the speakers might cast themselves into certain categories or memberships within sequential contexts of the talk, making these categories relevant in their interactional businesses, potentially influencing how turns are taken up by other speakers. The CA approach examines this from a detailed bottom-up perspective, seeing how turns become relevant in moment-by-moment interactions. The following table (table 1), taken from Kasper and Omori (2010), compares the socio-structural rationalist perspective with the discursive-constructionist perspective on interculturality, suggesting that this framework views identity and culture as emergent features of talk-in-interaction rather than predetermined.

In line with its socio-constructivist approach, this research views multiethnicity and multiculturalism as coconstructed by the participants, and as a resourceful communicative tool to accomplish social actions and goals. These categories emerged to organize social actions. The recorded conversations were part of recorded casual conversations between friends during dinner time, and the transcript in this paper is a selection of an instance where the members orient to various memberships in broader ethnic/racial, cultural, as well as linguistic categories.

By employing a sequential CA and MCA perspective, the study examines the microdetails of talk-in-interaction, in which the participants display aspects of their transportable, situational, as well as discursive identities (Zimmerman, 1998.)

From a CA and MCA perspective of bilingual interactional contexts, codeswitching has often been regarded as a contextualization cue (Gumperz, 1982), a resource used by participants to frame their interpretations for what is being said. Furthermore, while there has been some research on MCA in bilingual interactional contexts, much of the research (Gafaranga, 2000, 2001, 2005) has focused on codeswitching instances where the linguistic identities of bilinguals are made relevant in conversation rather than their cultural or ethnic categories. In these earlier studies on codeswitching, these participants have been found to use codeswitching to categorize themselves as bilingual. However, in research such as Higgins (2009) MCA is employed in analyzing bilingual talk in Tanzania, where speakers use their English-Swahili bilingual abilities as

communicative resources to show affiliations with religious memberships. Other studies such as De Fina (2007) also examines the ways in codeswitching can be used as an interactional resource in constructing ethnicity in a community of practice. Therefore, although linguistic identity is revealed in the category bound activity of bilinguals through codeswitching, I also propose that the participants evoke multiethnic categories such as multiethnic Japanese by using their linguistic resources as communicative tools.

**Table 1.** Contrasting perspective on intercultural interaction

	<b>Socio-structural/ rationalist</b>	<b>Discursive- constructionist</b>
Culture	Unitary, static	Diverse, hybrid, dynamic, Resource and construction
Cultural Identity		
Locus	Internal cognitive-affective trait	Co-constructed interactional accomplishment
Duration & Scope	Stable, context-independent, Interculturally shared	Emergent, contingent, contextual, contestable
Relation to other identities	Dominant	Variably relevant, other identities may be more salient
Relations to actions and participation	Determines actions and participation	Reflexive, a resource to accomplish actions organize participation frameworks
Discourse practices and resources	Culturally determined	Construct (cultural) orientations and identities
Cultural diversity	Hazardous, source of miscommunication	Interactional resource
Foregrounded cultural distinctiveness	Disaffiliative	Potentially affiliative, disaffiliative, or relationally inconsequential
Research perspective	Etic: relevance of cultural distinctiveness as presupposed and conceptualized through exogenous theory	Emic: cultural distinctiveness as a topic for analysis only if visibly relevant to participants

### 3 Data and methods

This article draws on a larger study that examines audio recorded naturally occurring data collected over the course of four months from December 2010 to March 2011 of five female roommates who often gather around the kitchen counter during meal times in Hawaii. There are five hours of recorded conversation. The participants are all in their early to mid twenties, graduates of

international English-speaking schools from Japan, of mixed ethnicity, and multilingual Japanese-English speakers. The participants were chosen for their similar multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual backgrounds, including myself. The participants often, almost daily, gathered around the kitchen counter during meal times, especially during dinner. The participants dropped in whenever they were available to socialize, prepare, and eat their meals. Hence, the kitchen counter was a productive and fruitful site to gather naturally occurring bilingual data.

The following table illustrates the ethnicities of the participants. These upfront categorizations can be problematic from an ethnomethodological perspective, since the reader may interpret the participants' actions in terms of these categories. However, this information is needed because the participants' are aware of each other's ethnic categories and this will later be made relevant in talk. The role of ethnographic categories and macro-level identities is necessary from an analytical point of view since the researcher relies on shared cultural knowledge to understand participants' social and linguistic actions as well as shared orientations to memberships and categories in the data.

**Table 2.** Ethnic Background of Participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Marina	Japanese, White (Spanish)
Sasha	Japanese, White (American)
Yayoi	Japanese, Taiwanese

The data was transcribed using the Jeffersonian CA conventions and Japanese interlineal translation keys as indicated by Nguyen and Kasper (2009). The transcriptions were written in the original language, and when Japanese is used, the translations are given on the bottom line. Every speakers' turn that includes Japanese words will have the complete turn of the speaker translated in bold under the original transcript. The data extract chosen for analysis in this article was selected because the interactants' made reference to their cultural and ethnic identities. The selected excerpt was chosen to show when and how participants' accomplish social actions and how they make use of certain attributes that are connected to the identities that are at play. This research attempts to examine how the participants display responsiveness to micro and macro discourses of ethnicity, culture, and language choice.

#### **4 Multiethnic identity**

In excerpt 1, the participants Sasha, Yayoi, Akemi, and Marina are discussing Taylor's upcoming birthday party, which they are all invited to attend. Taylor is an African American friend who speaks fluent Japanese and who is having a birthday party where the majority of the invitees are Japanese. Everybody except Marina has said they will go to the party. In the following excerpt, Marina hints that she is not interested in going. She goes on to talk about her unpleasant experience in a previous birthday party she attended with the same

members. The focus of this excerpt is the way in which Marina disaffiliates herself from other Japanese to accomplish the social action of rejecting an invitation to a party. The other speakers' use Marina's multiethnic, or non-Japanese ethnic category as an interactional resource to tease Marina.

**Excerpt 1:**

- 1 Ma Watashi konomae tanjoubi kai  
Self recently birthday party  
2 cho bimyo: dattan da yo ne.  
very weird was COP IP IP  
**"I recently went to his birthdy party and it was  
very weird."**
- 3 Ma I hayame ni ichatte  
early LK went  
4 there were so many nihonjin who hated me  
Japan-person  
**"I went early and there were so many Japanese who  
hated me."**
- 5 Ma remember I told you about it Yayoi?  
6 Ya you told Sasha too  
7 Ma rememb[er?  
8 Sa [YEah  
9 Ma this one girl told me  
10 that I made her feel uncomfortable  
11 because I looked gaijin  
foreigner  
12 and spoke English and asked me why  
13 I was hanging out with them  
(lines omitted; the date, location, and time of  
the party is being discussed, Sasha comments on  
the food they are eating)
- 20 Ya are you going to um. (0.6)  
21 Taylor's birthday?  
22 Ma dakara Taylor no (0.1) crew kekkou nihonjin  
so NAME LK rather Japan-person  
23 dakara it's kinda::  
so  
24 (3.0)  
**"So Taylor's crew is rather Japanese so it's  
kinda:: "**
- 25 Sa \$jibun wa gaijin  
self TOP foreigner  
26 da tte i[i tai no?\$  
COP QT say want IP  
**"Do you want to say that you're gaijin?  
(foreigner)"**

- 27 Ma [BEtsuni II taku nai shi [hahaa  
no say want not IP  
**"That's not what I want to say haha"**
- 28 Sa [hahahahahaha
- 29 Sa \$hakujin no chi  
white LK blood
- 30 no hou ga tsuyokute watashi wa  
LK more LK strong self TOP
- 31 kawaii no yo\$ tte ii tai no?  
cute IP IP COP say want IP  
**"Are you trying to say I am cuter because my  
white blood is stronger?"**
- 32 Ma itte [nai shi sonna koto  
say neg IP such thing  
**"I didn't say that"**
- 33 Sa [HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA

From lines 1 to 4, Marina complains about an instance in which she experienced displeasure for attending a birthday party where there were Japanese people who hated her. Marina marks the category of Japanese by the use of the word *nihonjin*, Japanese, as a description of the other attendees in line 4, and therefore, marks the Japanese as responsible for hating Marina and giving her an unpleasant experience. In this manner, Marina disaligns with the other Japanese attendees and marks herself as hated and othered. From lines 5 to 8, Marina asks both Yayoi and Sasha if they remember whether Marina already told them of this experience. Through this, Marina accomplishes the involvement of Yayoi and Sasha in the conversation. From lines 9-13, Marina elaborates on how one particular girl othered her. The use of the words "*this one girl*" which functions as a pronoun, and the quotative marker "*told me*" as well as the complementiser "*that*" indicates indirect reported speech (Holt & Clift, 2007.) The presence of the pronoun "*I*" in lines 10-13 indicates that Marina is talking from her own perspective; therefore, she is now talking about what the girl said without claiming fidelity to the girl's original utterance, and stressing the racist content of what the girl had said. Marina's indirect reported speech claims that the girl had viewed her as a *gaijin*. As Suzuki (2009) points out in her study of multiparty talk between native Japanese speakers and one White Japanese non native speaker, the word *gaijin* is employed as a category bound predicate that separates the participants into memberships that do not go along with the other Japanese speakers. Similarly, Marina's use of reported speech indicates that the girl had unfairly othered her into a non-Japanese category for "*looking gaijin*," and speaking English, which are not category bound looks or linguistic identities of being Japanese; thus, questioned as to why she would hang out with "*them*." The use of the pronoun "*them*" in line 13 stresses how Marina was excluded into a category of "*them*." Therefore, in this instance, Marina uses reported speech to mark her ethnic and linguistic identity as relevant to other Japanese groups, and complains about how this resulted in an unpleasant experience for her.

In lines 20 and 21, Yayoi asks Marina if she is attending the birthday party, accomplishing the social action of trying to plan a schedule. Marina's responds to this question in line 22 and 23. The discourse marker *dakara*, translated as "so"

is used to close off an ongoing topic, as well as mark a point where an explanation will start (Furukawa, 2010; Maynard, 1993.) Hence, “*dakara Taylor no crew kekkou nihonjin dakara it's kinda*” serves as an explanation as to why Marina would not want to attend the party as well as close off the ongoing topic of going to Taylor’s birthday party. Note that Taylor is included as part of the crew who is rather Japanese although Taylor is African-American; hence, race is not the determiner for being Japanese, but rather, as indicated in previous talk, they are “*kekkou Japanese*” because they excluded her as non-Japanese for speaking English and looking *gaijin*. Additionally, the use of the word *kekkou* (rather) indicates that Japaneseness is viewed in degrees. Marina does not align with this membership of being rather Japanese by expressing this degree of Japaneseness as her reason for not attending the party. She then finishes her turn by saying, “*dakara it's kinda:::*”. In other words, Marina’s turn becomes hearably incomplete, and projects a designedly incomplete utterance, or a DIU (Koshik, 2002) since this projects a complement, a noun or an adjective, that *kinda* modifies. Hence this DIU serves as an utterance that projects a negative sentiment, and hence, an explanation as to why Marina would not like to attend the party. Therefore, in this instance, the topic of Japaneseness comes up to accomplish and negotiate social actions such as whether or not to attend a party.

When Marina does not seem to elaborate on her designedly incomplete utterance, Sasha takes the turn in line 25 by speaking in Japanese, where the previous turns by the participants were in English. Sasha’s linguistic choice indicates that Sasha is speaking from the membership category of a Japanese, and marks a contrast to the previous turns in English. The term *gaijin* is used once again in line 25, as a category bound predicate for Japaneseness that separates Marina as *gaijin* from the rest of the participants and Sasha, who are Japanese. Hence, the employment of the term *gaijin* constructs Marina’s foreign ethnicity as a salient feature that others her from the rest of the participants. Furthermore, the quotative marker *tte* in line 26 indicates Japanese reported speech (Maynard, 1996). Therefore, Sasha, in her smiley voice, teases Marina’s purported thoughts of *gaijin* arrogance, which not only differentiates Marina from the other participants, but also places Marina as superior to the other participants. (Kamada, 2009) This *gaijin* arrogance is therefore constructed as a category-bound activity of a multiethnic Japanese-White. Hence, Sasha teases Marina through reporting her purported thoughts and topicalizing the aspect of ethnicity.

Marina responds in line 27, speaking Japanese, which is an alternation from her previous turn, which was almost all in English. This illustrates the resistance Marina displays to the proposed membership category of Whiteness that Sasha implies by the term *gaijin*, as well as an expression to alter (Higgins, 2009) the alignment with the rest of the participants, who are more ethnically Japanese by using the Japanese language; hence, rejecting the social act of teasing as well. However, her laughter at the end of line 27 indicates that she, as the target of the tease, orients to the nonseriousness of this tease (Drew, 1987). Marina’s laughter therefore, indicates that she realizes her exclusion from the Japanese membership category is not part of any serious ritual offense. Sasha responds to this playful nature of the tease by responding through laughter in line 28.

From lines 29 to 31, Sasha takes the joke further and extends the previous tease by using direct reported speech once again, as employed by *tte* in line 31. Using direct reported speech of a speaker who just had their turn also indicates

teasing and mocking (Holt & Clift, 2007). Through the use of direct reported speech, Sasha questions if Marina considers herself cuter than the others because of her race. Sasha, however, respecifies the foreignness of Marina by using the word *hakujin* in line 29, which means White, whereas Marina and Sasha used the word *gaijin* in previous turns, to mean foreigners in general. Since the majority of the participants present in this talk are multiethnic Japanese-Asian, singling Marina out as White instead of simply a foreigner, stresses this whiter-as-cuter beauty standard, or more attractive than Japanese, voicing White arrogance and condescension; hence, contributing to othering Marina from the other participants. Therefore, the arrogant thoughts are jokingly attributed to Marina, and foreign vanity is attributed to a category bound activity of the multiethnic Japanese-White. Additionally, this also serves to objectify Marina, as she is subject to the exotification as seen in the foreigner-as-attractive beauty standards (Kamada, 2005; Darling-Wolf, 2003). In addition, Sasha mentions that Marina's White blood is stronger, making salient Marina's mixed race. Marina denies this accusation of arrogance, disaligns herself from the membership category of Whiteness and continues to use Japanese in line 32, while Sasha continues to laugh at the tease.

Through these repeated teasings on delicate topics such as ethnicity, the coparticipants' show knowledge of each other's ethnicities. The linguistic choices used in this excerpt reflect alignment and disalignment to and from the membership category of Japanese and White, as well as multiethnic Japanese-White.

## 5 Conclusion

This study examined multiethnic and bilingual meal time talk between female friends, and how multicultural and multiethnic identities became relevant in interaction when accomplishing social tasks like planning events, complaining, teasing, or maintaining friendly interpersonal relationships. This study attempts to show bilingual interaction as indicative not only of linguistic memberships such as being bilingual, but also of multiethnic and multicultural categories, and show when and how they become relevant. Marina disaligns with the *kekko* Japanese membership, who excluded her as non-Japanese with the employment of the term *gaijin*. However, the very same term is then turned against her, to then jokingly propose the category of arrogant Whiteness onto Marina. Marina resists this category and then shows alignment with the other participants as Japanese through speaking in Japanese. Hence, Marina rejects the notion of the "idealized other" (Darling-Wolf, 2003) in the presence of other multiethnic Japanese. While Kamada's research (2005) focused on how multiethnic Japanese-White construct themselves as attractive, my research shows how this notion of Japanese-White beauty can also be rejected and resisted by multiethnic Japanese that are both White and other Asians. Multiethnicity and multiculturalism were thus coconstructed and emergent features that became relevant for the participants in order to accomplish social actions such as eating dinner and maintaining friendly interpersonal relations in mundane interactions. Therefore, multiethnicity became foregrounded throughout the interaction. Hence, the participants used their linguistic resources as communicative tools, and

emergently drew on their various memberships as topics that can be used to tease each other.

The participants' use of the direct reported speech in Japanese and English resemble Bauman's ([1975]2001) notion of artful performance, where the participants display instances of "quick-witted resourcefulness" in presenting their identities and membership categories. In this case, the participants take part in a ritual offense of teasing each other and use stylization in speech patterns in order to stress the speech of others.

Videotaping the participants in the interaction would have added more depth to the transcriptions and the analysis, since I could not tell what facial expressions or actions they were using as they were speaking since they were eating at meal times. It would also have helped to analyze the actions of the minimally interacting participants, their facial expressions, and their way of orienting to the ongoing discourse. Nevertheless, this study has provided an interesting site for the study of multiethnic and multilingual Japanese friends.

## References

- Bauman, R. ([1975] 2001). Verbal art as performance. In A. Duranti (Ed.), *Linguistic anthropology: A reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 165–88.
- Coupland, N. (2007). *Style*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Darling-Wolf, F. (2003). Media, Class, and Western Influence in Japanese Women's Conceptions of Attractiveness. *Feminist Media Studies*, 3 (2), 153–172.
- De Fina, A. (2007). Code-switching and the construction of ethnic identity in a community of practice. *Language in Society*, 36, 371–392.
- Drew, P. (1987). Po-face receipts of teases. *Linguistics*, 25, 219–253.
- Furukawa, T. (2010). A Pragmatic Study of the Hawai'i Creole Discourse Marker *Daswai* in Second-Generation Okinawan American Speech. In G. Kasper et al (Eds.), *Pragmatics and Language Learning Vol. 12*. Honolulu, HI: National Foreign Language Resource Center, 67–89.
- Gafaranga, J. (2000). Medium repair vs. other-language repair: Telling the medium of a bilingual conversation. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 4, 327–350.
- Gafaranga, J. (2001). Linguistic identities in talk-in-interaction: Order in bilingual conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33, 1901–1925.
- Gafaranga, J. (2005). Demythologising language alternation studies: Conversational structure vs. social structure in bilingual interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 37, 281–300.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Greer, T. (2010). Switching Languages, Juggling Identities: A sequence of multilingual, multi-party talk. In G. Kasper et al (Eds.), *Pragmatics and Language Learning Vol. 12*. Honolulu, HI: National Foreign Language Resource Center, 41–63.
- Gumperz, J. (1982). *Discourse Strategies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Higgins, C. (2009). "Are you Hindu?": Resisting membership categorization through language alternation. In H. T. Nguyen & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Talk-in-interaction: Multilingual Perspectives*. Honolulu, HI: National Foreign Language Resource Center, 111–136.
- Holt, E., & R. Clift (Eds.) (2007). *Reporting Talk: Reported speech in interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Kamada, L.D. (2005). Celebration of Multi-Ethnic Cultural Capital Among Adolescent Girls in Japan: A Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis of Japanese-Caucasian Identity. *Japan Journal of Multilingualism and Multiculturalism*, 11 (1), 19–41.
- Kamada, L.D. (2009). Mixed-Ethnic girls and boys as similarly powerless and powerful: embodiment of attractiveness and grotesqueness. *Discourse Studies*, 11, 329–352.
- Kasper, G., & M. Omori (2010). Language and Culture. In Honrberger, N.H., & McKay, S.E. (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics and Language Education*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 455–491.
- Koshik, I. (2002). Designedly Incomplete Utterances: A Pedagogical Practice for Eliciting Knowledge Displays in Error Correction Sequences. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 5, 277–309.
- Maynard, S. (1993). *Discourse Modality: Subjectivity, emotion, and voice in the Japanese language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Maynard, S. (1997). Meta-quotation: The Thematic and Interactional Significance of *tte* in Japanese comics. *Functions of Language*, 4: 1, 23–46.
- Nguyen, H. t., & G. Kasper (Eds.) (2009). *Talk-in-interaction: Multilingual perspectives*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i: National Foreign Language Resource Center.
- Saft, S. (2007). Exploring aizuchi as resources in Japanese social interaction: The case of a political discussion program. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39, 1290–1312.
- Suzuki, A. (2009). When *gaijin* matters: Theory-building activities in Japanese multiparty interaction. In H.t.Nguyen & Kasper (Eds.), *Talk-in-interaction: Multilingual Perspectives*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i at Manoa, National Foreign Language Resource Center, 89–109.
- Zimmerman, D. H. (1998). Identity, Context and Interaction. In C. Antaki and S. Widdicombe (Eds.), *Identities in Talk*. London: SAGE Publications, 87–106.

## Appendix: Transcription conventions

### *Timing*

- [ Beginning of overlap
- (0.5) Paused, timed in tenths of a second
- (.) Micropause

### *Speech Delivery*

- . Falling or falling intonation
- ? Rising intonation (not necessarily a question)
- : Sound stretch (the more colons, the longer the stretch)
- word some kind of stress (volume, intonation)
- WOrd noticeably louder volume
- >word< noticeably faster speech
- <word> noticeably slower/stretched speech
- \$ smiley voice

### *Other symbols*

- ((word)) transcribers comment, i.e. ((cough)), ((sniff)), ((gesture))

### *Japanese Interlineal Translation Keys*

- CP: Copula
- GL: Goal Particle
- TP: Topic Marker
- IP: Interactional Particle (*yo, ne, sa, na*, etc)
- LK: Linking
- N: Nominalizer
- Neg: Negative inflection
- O: Object Marker
- Q: Question Marker
- QT: Quotation Marker
- SB: Subject Marker
- SF: Speech Filler

*Pseudonyms are used for all names:*

Sa= Sasha, Ya= Yayoi, Ak= Akemi, Ma= Marina (myself)

Received September 19, 2012  
 Revision received October 9, 2013  
 Accepted March 4, 2014