

“SHE’S HUNGARIOUS SO SHE’S MEXICAN BUT SHE’S MOST LIKELY INDIAN”: NEGOTIATING ETHNIC LABELS IN A CALIFORNIA JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL¹

Jung-Eun Janie Lee

Abstract

Schools in California have become increasingly diverse and the demographic composition of school populations has become heterogeneous in the language, nationality, and ethnicity of students. Using ethnographic and interactional analysis, the present article examines how California youth employ a variety of concepts associated with ethnicity to classify themselves and others. For youth who have peers from multiple national, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, the criteria of citizenship, national origin, language, and phenotype are negotiated interactionally for ethnic labeling. The article further suggests that ethnicity is not a simple category, but rather a concept that youth in a multiethnic context actively construct and co-construct with the help of associated notions. Finally, it is demonstrated that ethnic labeling in interviews may be a dispreferred practice for some interviewees due to its potential connection with racism and discrimination.

Keywords: California; Citizenship; Ethnic labeling; Ethnicity; National origin; Youth.

1. Introduction

With continuous immigration flow from Asia and Latin America, schools in Southern California have become increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. Consequently, the demographic composition of school populations has become heterogeneous with respect to the language, nationality, and ethnicity of students. Some students are born in the United States while others are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Hence a variety of languages are spoken on school grounds: some students are monolingual in English, others are fluent bilinguals, and still others are English language learners with fluency in another language. In this context what counts as sameness and difference is not always obvious: some students who speak the same first language may be from different countries, and students who may look “the same” to their peers of other races

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at the panel “Youth Language at the Intersection: Globalization, Transnationalism, Identity” at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Jose. I thank the participants of the study for allowing me to share a slice of their life. I also thank the two panel discussants, Mary Bucholtz and Jennifer Roth-Gordon, for their invaluable comments. Elaine Chun made insightful suggestions on earlier stages of the article. Ayla Applebaum and Mara Henderson made this article possible by kindly sharing their data. Lastly, I am greatly indebted to the editors of this special issue, Mary Bucholtz and Elena Skapoulli, for their extensive and valuable feedback.

may in fact come from distinct linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. These details of linguistic, ethnic, and national background make students' identity work more complex. In particular, when it comes to the ethnic labeling of themselves and their peers, a common practice in diverse schools, it is usually uncommon for students to have access to specific and detailed information about one another's backgrounds. Therefore, in using such labels youth have the opportunity to draw on the concepts that they themselves think are important to make sense of their own and their peers' ethnicities. That is, ethnic labeling and differentiation become a venue where ideologies of ethnicity among youth become discernible.

Language and ethnicity among youth is a lively research area. Covering various groups such as African Americans (Alim 2004, this issue; Fordham 1999), (East) Asian Americans (Chun, this issue; Kang and Lo 2004), European Americans (Bucholtz 1999; Cutler 1999), Latinas and Latinos (Mendoza-Denton 1999, 2008), and Native Americans (Wyman 2004) as well as more recently arrived groups that complicate these boundaries such as Southeast Asian Americans (Bucholtz 2004; Reyes 2007) and Dominican Americans (Bailey 2002), scholars have documented and analyzed the myriad ways in which young people express themselves in ethnic terms in social interaction. However, in such research the terms themselves are not necessarily the explicit focus of analysis. Recently, there have been efforts to investigate this question by examining how youth use ethnic labels when ethnicity becomes a topic of discussion in local interaction. Bucholtz (2006; cf. Bucholtz & Hall 2008), identifying the research interview as an important place in which adolescent interviewees do identity work, documents the types of labels that youth use to categorize themselves in this situation. In addition, in Shenk's (2007) discourse-analytic study of conversations in a Mexican American friendship group, pure blood, birthplace, and Spanish fluency are identified as constructs from which the ideology of "Mexicanness" emerges for these speakers. Shenk shows that the invocation of these three ideological conditions is not simple essentialism linking language, ethnicity, and nationality (cf. Joseph 2004) but the means by which the Latinas in her study situate their sometimes precarious ethnic authenticity in opposition to others. The focus on interactional strategies that youth use to construct the notion of ethnicity is useful, for it attributes preeminence to local contexts and interactions and describes the exact moments in which ideologies are produced.

Contributing to this research tradition, this article shows that California youth employ a variety of concepts ideologically associated with ethnicity to make sense of the inherent complexity of this category. Rather than using predetermined demographic categories, youth adopt their own categories to label ethnicity. The analysis shows that the notion of ethnicity cannot be explained on its own, but requires several interrelated categories, especially for youth who are or who have peers from multiple national, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Specifically, I show that citizenship, national origin, language, and phenotype all contribute to the ethnic labeling of self and other.

In the following analysis, *citizenship* refers to one's legal and political membership in a nation-state.² As it is analyzed later in the article, the concept of citizenship is particularly important for the participants in this study because of the school's practice of placing U.S.-born students in English Language Development

² As in much popular and academic discourse, *citizenship* is used in this article as a cover term including nationality as determined by birthplace as well as naturalized citizenship. In the data, no major differentiation between these two types of citizenship is made by participants.

classes. *National origin* is defined as the country of heritage. With the diverse national origins of Latin American immigrants in Southern California, national origin is established among many young people as an important category for ethnic labeling, as will be demonstrated in the following analysis. *Language* denotes any language that the speaker uses fluently but does not necessarily speak natively. The distinction between national origin and language is significant in the context of the present study largely due to the substantial Latino population of the school where the research was conducted. Unlike European or Asian immigrants, most Latinos who immigrate to the United States have the same linguistic background. Lastly, *phenotype* refers to any observable physical quality of an individual.

Historically, notions of national origin and language have been intimately linked to ethnicity. Going back to the Romantic era in the 18th century, folklore and national language were key ideas that bound the nation as a coherent unit. As the champion of Romantic nationalism, Johann Gottfried Herder not only identified a natural economy that developed around geography but also recognized a nation's language and the common ancestry of its people as the mechanisms that enabled the state to derive its legitimacy (for discussion, see Bauman and Briggs 2000; Silverstein 2000). In an influential framework for the analysis of language and ethnicity, Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1982) list place, family relationship, physical similarities, common cause, and common belief as possible ethnic parameters. Likewise, Farley (1988) establishes nationality, language, and religion as determinants of ethnicity.

Linguistic and linguistic-anthropological research on Romantic nationalism as well as anthropological and sociological surveys of the relationship of language, ethnicity, and nationality have focused on macrolevel analysis. However, a microlevel analysis is necessary as well. As De Fina (2007) argues, theories of ethnicity cannot advance if ethnicity is thought of as a set of personal attributes that cannot be challenged. The moments in which ethnicity is constructed and reconstructed in social actors' lives reveal how ideologies about this concept are created. Examination of this process becomes possible through interactional analysis informed by ethnography. In addition, youth are an especially important population in which to look at the construction of ethnicity. As social actors who have not been fully socialized into adult ideologies, youth, especially in multiethnic schools, constantly negotiate ethnic labels. Thus, the present article uses ethnographic and interactional analysis to examine how young people in local contexts make sense of ethnic categories. Participants in the present study draw from historical and cultural constructs to form local ideologies of ethnicity. These interrelated categories work together to distinguish microvariations among different groups and hence operate as useful tools that allow youth to negotiate both adult expectations and their peer-based social meanings.

2. Ethnographic context

The following analysis is based on over two months of fieldwork at a Southern California junior high school in a town I call Sunnyville.³ I carried out the fieldwork as part of a collaborative sociolinguistic ethnography of the school in Fall 2004 for a

³ All the names used for participants and geographic locations in this article are pseudonyms. Interviewees chose their own pseudonyms.

graduate course in ethnographic methods. Sunnyville is a small middle-class city with a population of around 55,000. The two major ethnic groups in the town are Anglos (67.4%) and Latinos (22.3%). Sunnyville Junior High's population likewise consists of mainly Anglo students and Latino students, with few students of Asian and African descent. (See Table 1 for the ethnic breakdown of the student population for the 2004-05 school year.) Even though the two major ethnic groups both in the city and in the school are Anglo and Latino, there is some discrepancy between the city population and the school population. Whereas there are three times as many Anglos in the city as Latinos, Latinos are overrepresented in the school, contributing 40.5 percent of the school population in comparison to 22.3 percent in the city. This discrepancy may be due to the younger age of the Latino population in California in general as well as white flight from public schools in California (e.g., Farlie and Resch 2002; Orfield et al. 1994).

Table 1. Ethnicity of students at Sunnyville Junior High School, 2004-05

White	47.1%	427
Hispanic/Latino	41.8%	379
Asian	8.3%	75
African American	1.5%	14
Filipino	1.0%	9
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.2%	2
Pacific Islander	0.1%	1
Other/Declined to State	0.0%	0
Total	100%	907

During my fieldwork, I visited the school once or twice every week for one to three hours each time. I attended Ms. Vance's eighth-grade English Language Development (ELD) class in fifth and sixth periods and moved to Mrs. Rodriguez's eighth-grade advanced ELD class for the same class periods after two weeks of fieldwork. Although Mrs. Rodriguez's class was my main fieldsite, it had a great deal of interaction with Ms. Vance's class and the two teachers often held classes together. Mrs. Rodriguez's class had fourteen students: one Korean girl, one Laotian girl,⁴ one Asian Indian girl, one male nonnative speaker of English whose country of origin I was unable to determine, and ten Latino students. Ms. Vance's class had a demographic profile somewhat similar to that of Mrs. Rodriguez's class, though with no representation of Asian ethnicities: there was one Finnish boy and around thirteen Latino students. Even though these two classes were not representative of the school population as a whole, I focused on them as my fieldsites because I was interested in how students placed in ELD classes positioned themselves and others in ethnic terms.

During my visits I observed students engage both in classroom activities and in peer interaction. At times I served as a teacher's aide and helped with classroom activities or brought supplies from the school library. Outside the classroom, I spent time with students during lunch recess as they talked or played volleyball. In addition, I

⁴ Although her parents are from Laos, I am not sure of this student's ethnic background. It is very likely that she is ethnic Hmong because she told me that she and her family speak Hmong. However, she did not identify herself with an ethnic term when asked and simply said that her parents are from Laos. I discuss this student's ethnic self-identification further in my analysis of Example (1) below.

conducted interviews with some students and videotaped interactions among several others. Other fellow researchers conducted fieldwork at the school during the same time period, and the following analysis uses some of the data they collected as well as my own.

The opportunity to conduct participant-observation with two different teachers had several advantages: It allowed me not only to observe more students than in either classroom alone but also to see how teachers of different ethnicities interacted with their students. Mrs. Rodriguez was a bilingual Latina in her early 30s who taught English and Spanish classes in addition to ELD, whereas Ms. Vance was a European American teacher who mainly teaches ELD; although she told students that she knew Spanish, I never heard her speak anything but English during my fieldwork.

The ethnic composition of the town, the school, and the classroom led to widespread use of ethnic labels in a variety of interactional contexts. I commonly observed this practice in my fieldwork. For example, one day, a Latino student, Pedro, asked Ms. Vance, "Do you know bad words in Spanish?" She replied that she knew some such words but that she never used them. Pedro then said, "Mexican people always use bad words." With this utterance, he distinguished Mexicans, who use bad words, from non-Mexicans, who do not. He thus expressed a language ideology regarding Mexicans' linguistic practices and simultaneously positioned Ms. Vance as an outgroup member.

Another interaction between Pedro and Ms. Vance also illustrates a more general phenomenon whereby ethnic labels or terms were frequently used by the students. For instance, one day in Mrs. Rodriguez's class, the students were working from a section of their textbook in which they were instructed to write a short essay about their favorite singers. As a related activity, the teacher asked the students to talk about music that "touches your heart." Mrs. Rodriguez asked a Latino student, Michael, to talk about his favorite music. When Michael, who was very playful outside of the classroom but not as confident during class, stated that he thought that his Latina classmate Stacey was laughing at his response (which was not recorded in my fieldnotes), Stacey reassured him, saying, "I'm not laughing at you. Mexican spirit right there." As a reassuring gesture, she brought up her own and Michael's Mexican heritage and invoked their ethnic solidarity. In another incident, one of my fellow researchers in the same classroom, who is herself Korean, asked a Korean student, Yeonhee, to wear an audio recorder during class. Most students immediately became interested in the recorder and asked Yeonhee questions about how to operate it, but a Latina student whose mother had not given consent for her to participate in the study expressed some concern to Ms. Vance. The teacher reassured her, saying, "They are not going to study you. Don't worry." Pedro, hearing this, asked, "Why? 'Cause we're Mexican?" He may have interpreted this incident as a discriminatory act based on ethnicity or citizenship, or the fact that my fellow researcher happened to be Korean and was studying another Korean student may have brought ethnicity to his attention. Either way, this incident illustrates that ethnicity was an important topic in the Sunnyville ELD students' everyday discourse.

The previous vignettes illustrate the widespread use of the category *Mexican* in interactions at the school. In fact, in discussions of ethnicity, the term *Mexican* was used as a dominant category by both students and teachers to refer to Latinos, regardless of their actual national heritage. On my first day in Ms. Vance's class, for example, she introduced the students to me and said that except for Yeonhee, the Korean girl, and

Niko, the Finnish boy, all the other students in the class were “from Mexico.” However, I later learned that most students in the ELD class were either born in the United States or had immigrated at an early age. Moreover, except for Niko and for Yeonhee, whose father, a professor, was visiting a nearby university for a year, no student had any trace of a foreign accent and none of them had any difficulty in conversational English. I did not understand why they had been placed in an ELD class at first because their speech patterns were just like those of all the other students in the school, except for occasional codeswitching by some students. Later, Ms. Vance told me that the reason for this placement was not that such students were nonnative speakers of English but that they did not speak English with their family at home and so they did not know academic English. In fact, the students in both ELD classes were placed in mainstream classes for all subjects other than English.⁵

This incident on my first day of fieldwork suggested that ELD students were positioned as linguistic and national Others by Anglo teachers, a fact that may have had consequences for their ethnic self-identification. This othering can also be seen in Ms. Vance’s remark to me that Yeonhee and Niko did not speak English with their families but because their parents are academics, they get good grades. In fact, both students were promoted to Mrs. Rodriguez’s advanced ELD class later in the semester and Yeonhee was placed in a non-ELD English class toward the end of my fieldwork. Thus, Latino students were mostly positioned as coming from a disadvantaged family background compared to other ELD students, despite the fact that only the Latino students were born in the United States or had lived there for most of their lives.

In the following ethnographic and interactional analysis, I show that in their ethnic labeling of self and other, students used four different resources for making sense of ethnicity: U.S. citizenship, national origin, language, and phenotype. The analysis focuses on how these categories function together to shape students’ ideologies of ethnicity. Especially for students with complex identities, negotiating these categories allowed them to claim or be assigned ethnicities that did not always conform either to adult understandings of these categories or to the binary ethnic structure of the school.

3. Analysis

The context in which ethnic labeling occurs in the present data set is important to understanding students’ use of ethnic labels. The following examples are taken from ethnographic interviews that focused on ethnicity and were conducted by me and my colleagues with small groups of students. The choice of ethnicity as the main topic of the interviews was motivated by our observations of ethnic labeling in student classroom interaction and conversations with teachers during fieldwork. However, before the interviews, the students had not interacted with any of us regarding the issue of ethnicity. Therefore, the interview situation worked as an opportunity for the students to characterize their identities for outside researchers with the help of the ethnic concepts that were relevant to them. As Bucholtz (2006) notes, the research interview is

⁵ It is possible that the school does not have enough resources to provide all classes at both ELD and non-ELD levels and that they offer the ELD class as a remedial class that prepares students for other classes. However, the absence of ELD classes for other subjects means that the ELD students are not perceived as having enough language difficulties for the school to provide such classes.

a “situated speech event” structured by the unfolding interaction between interviewer and interviewee, so self-presentation becomes important to both participants. In the interviews analyzed in this article, this self-presentation was realized through the use and delicate negotiation of various concepts as students sought the best way to describe their own and their peers’ ethnicity.

3.1. U.S. citizenship as ethnicity

One way that students in the study formulated ethnicity in the context of the ethnographic interviews was through U.S. citizenship. Students who were asked to identify themselves in racial or ethnic terms showed a pattern of first mentioning their citizenship status and then further explaining their ethnic background. I initially witnessed this phenomenon when I was having lunch at the school with two Korean-born students and several of my colleagues. While we were eating, a friend of the Korean students, Sally, who was phenotypically Asian, came by and chatted with them. When a member of our research team asked her where she was from, Sally, pointing to the ground, said that she was from “here” and then added that her parents were from Taiwan. In this encounter, birthplace operated as an important attribute for her that made explicit her citizenship status, but it is also noteworthy that she clarified her parents’ national origin.

The same phenomenon emerged in an interview I conducted with two students from an ELD class, Stacey and Llama Girl. At the beginning of the interview, I asked them for basic demographic information such as their age, gender, year in school, and racial/ethnic background (cf. Bucholtz 2006; Bucholtz & Hall 2008). Since the students were in the school setting, I expected that they would articulate their race and ethnicity according to bureaucratic categories. However, they first invoked their citizenship status (Example 1).⁶

(1)

- 1 J: And what is your racial or ethnic background?
 2 (1.4)
 3 S: Hyper?
 4 Or like,
 5 (0.5)
 6 LG: Wait you mean like,
 7 (0.3)
 8 where do we come from or something [I guess],
 9 J: [Ye]ah,
 10 S: (.) <SLOW> Oh I come from the United States. </SLOW>
 11 (.) But [I’m],
 12 J: [Uh huh],
 13 S: (.) I’m Mexican.
 14 (0.2)
 15 J: Aha.

⁶ See Appendix for transcription conventions.

- 16 (0.4)
 17 LG: Yeah I do too.
 18 Me too.
 19 J: (.) [And you're] from-
 20 LG: [#]
 21 (0.2)
 22 J: @ Mexico?
 23 @[@@@][₂@@][₃@]
 24 LG: [No].
 25 [₂No I'm not from Mex][₃ico].
 26 No.
 27 No.
 28 S: (.) She's from ###.
 29 LG: No.
 30 (0.2)
 31 LG: My mom and dad are from Laos.
 32 J: (H) Oh.
 33 Okay.

When I first ask the girls about their racial and ethnic backgrounds, Stacey interprets the question as asking for a personal characteristic. (I did not know what the word *hyper* meant to these students and asked for a definition later in the interview. The girls told me that it was a term that students at Sunnyville Junior High School used to refer to someone who is almost obsessively interested in a particular topic.)

Although Stacey offers *hyper* as a candidate answer in line 3, she is not sure about its adequacy, as evidenced from the rising intonation both in line 3 and in line 4, when she begins to posit another possible answer. Llama Girl then enters in line 6 and proposes a restatement of my question, asking if I am inquiring where they are from. Still, her hedges *or something* and *I guess* in line 8 express uncertainty. After my confirmation in line 9, Stacey states in line 10 that she comes from the United States and only then tells me that she is of Mexican heritage; her utterance in line 10 is marked by slower pace and enunciation, as if she is answering a question in a very formal context. However, her U.S. citizenship alone does not explain her ethnicity, so she adds in lines 11 and 13 that she is “Mexican,” using the contrast token *but*. At this point Llama Girl says, “Yeah. I do, too,” an utterance that is syntactically tied to Stacey’s statement that she comes from the United States (in line 17); in response I playfully misunderstand her meaning and pretend to interpret her remark to mean that she comes from Mexico (in lines 19 and 22). My laughter here signals that my interpretation is self-evidently a joke, based on Llama Girl’s Asian phenotype. It is only after this joke that Llama Girl states where her parents are from (line 31). Again, she, like Stacey, does not seem to consider her first answer adequate to capture her identity, going on to offer additional information about her family background after establishing her American citizenship status. From this example, we can see both that questions of race and ethnicity may not be straightforward for students and that they may interpret these notions as related to citizenship status. This interpretation may be especially common for students of color, who may be misread by teachers, other students, and even researchers as being from outside the United States. This “forever foreigner” stereotype has been found to be widely imposed on people of Asian origin (Lee 2006; Tuan 1998).

3.2. National origin as ethnicity

Another way in which students understood ethnicity was through the equation of ethnicity and national origin. Linking these categories is common in situations that involve transnational migration (e.g., Espiritu 1992; Padilla 1985). For instance, an ethnic Manchu from China would be classified as Chinese if she migrated to the United States, her national origin thus replacing her ethnicity. Likewise, at Sunnyville Junior High, students often blurred the distinctions among national origins by calling every Latino/a *Mexican*, the dominant national heritage represented at the school.⁷

The unexpectedness of non-Mexican national backgrounds among Latino students can be seen in the following ethnographic illustration. One day, Mrs. Rodriguez's and Ms. Vance's classes went on a joint field trip to the Sunnyville public library. I was sitting in the teen section of the library, observing what kind of books students were interested in, when one of the students, Melanie, said to me, "Habla español?" I said "No," but her friend Andrea asked how I had understood what Melanie had said if I did not know Spanish. I replied that I knew some Spanish but didn't speak the language very well. A little later, I asked the two girls and their friend Nicole if they all spoke Spanish and they said yes. Melanie then volunteered the information that she was from Honduras. Andrea and Nicole teased Melanie, saying that she was from Africa. This example suggests that a Honduran identity was not only not expected by Melanie's friends, it was not even recognized.

Such misreadings of Melanie's national background arose with other students as well. In Example (2), Melanie's Honduran background is again misread by her peers, and her Latino identity is reduced to a Mexican identity. The example opens with me asking Stacey and Llama Girl about the ethnicities of members of their class, in an attempt to follow up on what I had observed with Melanie and her friends. Since I knew that Melanie was not of Mexican descent, I was interested in how her classmates understood her ethnicity.

(2)

- 1 J: So are there like many many Asian students in the school or—
 2 is that,
 3 (0.7)
 4 like most[ly white?]
 5 LG: [Mostly Mexican] people.
 6 (0.6)
 7 S: What?
 8 LG: Mostly Mexican people are at the school.
 9 (0.8)
 10 S: [Yeah.]
 11 LG: [Mostly] [₂Mexican and] white people.

⁷ My expectation was that Latino students of non-Mexican heritage would make a clear distinction between Mexicans and non-Mexicans, but no incident of this kind was observed during my fieldwork.

- 12 J: [2Really?]
 13 (0.3)
 14 S: Yeah.
 15 (16 lines later)
 31 J: @ So [for ins]tance in your class there's Melanie?
 32 S: [No].
 33 (1.3)
 34 J: [Remember her]?
 35 S: [(H) Oh th]a[2t's uhm],
 36 J: ## [2Yeah].
 37 S: She-
 38 J: So what do you call her.
 39 (1.6)
 40 S: What it like a nickname?
 41 (0.6)
 42 J: Yeah.
 43 L: No.
 44 We don't call her anything.
 45 We just call her Melanie.
 46 S: M- Just call her [Mel][2anie].
 47 LG: [Yeah].
 48 J: [2@@@]
 49 (0.3)

From lines 1 through 9, I ask Stacey and Llama Girl if there are a lot of Asians at Sunnyville Junior High; being Asian, I was interested in Asian students in the school and was hoping to get to know some of them as part of my research. Both girls say that there are mostly Mexicans at the school, and Stacey adds in line 11 that there are mostly whites and Mexicans.⁸ However, since I know that at least Melanie is not Mexican, I bring her up in line 31 and ask in line 38 what term the girls use to describe Melanie's ethnic background. Because ethnicity is our topic at the moment, I assume that the two students will know what I am asking, and so I do not specify that I am looking for an ethnic label for Melanie. Stacey, however, fails to understand my intention and interprets my question as asking about Melanie's nickname. Since I wanted to discover students' own category labels, I initially accept Stacey's interpretation in line 42. But I soon go back to my immediate goal and ask a direct question about Melanie's ethnicity. Example (3) follows immediately after Example (2).

(3)

- 50 J: So is she Mexican [or what]?
 51 S: [She's hung]arious.
 52 LG: Yeah.
 53 (0.3)
 54 S: S[o yeah she's] Mexican,

⁸ In the portion of the transcript that is omitted, I ask Stacey if she knows the word *Hispanic* but receive the answer that she does not know the term.

- 55 J: [Oh].
 56 S: but she's most likely-
 57 (H) (0.3)
 58 Uh:-
 59 LG: Like Indian sort of.
 60 [right]?
 61 S: [Yeah].
 62 Indian kind of.

In line 50, I use the students' preferred label *Mexican* in order to see how students refer to the ethnicity of someone who is not Mexican but is of Latin American origin. Stacey, in line 51, responds by saying that Melanie is "hungarious." It seems that, as with Andrea and Nicole in the vignette above, the place name *Honduras* is unfamiliar to them, which explains the confusion between this term and the somewhat phonetically similar term *Hungarian*. Llama Girl agrees in line 52 that Melanie is "hungarious." Whatever Stacey and Llama Girl mean by this term, line 54 shows that they still see Melanie as Mexican as well. This example nicely illustrates that *Mexican* is used as a term equivalent to *Latino* among these students: "hungarious," then, is a type of "Mexican."

However, this classification is not sufficient for the girls. In line 56, Stacey indicates that she is aware of the fact Melanie is different from other "Mexicans" and tries to further explain what Melanie "most likely" is. When she shows hesitation and disfluency in lines 57 and 58, Llama Girl in line 59 helps her and explains this difference by saying that Melanie is "sort of" Indian. (She seems to mean that she is of indigenous descent, to account for the fact that Melanie is relatively dark-skinned.)⁹ When Llama Girl asks for confirmation in line 60, Stacey agrees and repeats that Melanie is "kind of" Indian, which suggests that *Indian* is the closest label she can come up with at this moment, although she knows that Melanie is not exactly Indian. In this excerpt, the national classification *Mexican* is used as a cover term for Latinos in general, yet students nonetheless perceive differences within this category and explain them by focusing on phenotype and drawing on other available ethnic labels such as *Indian*. In this way students can acknowledge and account for an atypical "Mexican" identity.

3.3. Language and phenotype as ethnicity

In addition to U.S. citizenship and national origin, language was also often an indicator of ethnicity for students. In the next example, again taken from the interview with Llama Girl and Stacey, I ask Stacey how she can tell someone's ethnicity.

(4)

- 1 J: So how can you tell someone is like a (.) Korean or Mexican or-
 2 (0.2)

⁹ It is unlikely that *Indian* here means 'South Asian' because it does not match Melanie's phenotype and linguistic background.

- 3 S: Well-
 4 (0.2)
 5 [You can tell] Mexican if they (0.2) talk Spanish,
 6 J: [@@@]
 7 S: And like-
 8 (0.6)
 9 they (0.2) they (.) kind they're kind of like (0.4) dark-skin[ned it's
 uhm-]
 10 LG [Well some Asian] people it's really hard to tell.

Here, my question in line 1 is about ethnicity, using ethnic groups such as Koreans and Mexicans as examples. These two categories are already established in the discourse because the students know I am Korean and we have been having a discussion of Mexicans as a dominant group at the school. In line 5, Stacey uses the Spanish language as her criterion to determine whether someone is Mexican or not. Given that not only Mexican Americans but also anyone of Latin American or Spanish origin speaks Spanish, it is apparent that she is once again using the term *Mexican* to include other groups as well. It is striking that the first criterion that she presents when judging someone's ethnicity is language, as evidenced in line 5. After pointing out this linguistic aspect, she moves on to physical features as another criterion of ethnic labeling.

The next excerpt also shows the equation of language and ethnicity. At the beginning of the example I ask Stacey and Llama Girl if either of them speaks a language besides English. When Stacey mentions her heritage language, Spanish, she initially refers to it as *Mexican language*.

(5)

- 1 J: Do you speak any other language other than English?
 2 (0.4)
 3 LG: I do.
 4 (0.2)
 5 J: [(H)]
 6 LG: [I speak Hmong].
 7 J: (.) Wow.
 8 Really?
 9 LG: Yeah.
 10 J: That's so c[ool].
 11 S: [I] (.) speak (0.8) Mexican (0.2) lan[₂guage].
 12 J: [₂@@@@] @@[₃@@]@[₄@@@@]@@@@
 13 LG: [₃Spanish #huh].
 14 S: ☺ [₄Spanish]. ☺
 15 LG: <#/ I don't think so. /#>

When I show interest in the fact that Llama Girl knows Hmong in line 7 and give a positive response in line 8, Stacey joins in and says that she speaks "Mexican language" in line 11. From her pauses between every word in her utterance, she seems to be recognizing that this is not an expected answer, and indeed, Llama Girl in line 13 repairs and questions her statement. After I start laughing hard, Stacey gives a more standard

answer, “Spanish,” in a smiley voice. This voice quality may either be designed to signal that Stacey intentionally used the term *Mexican language* in referring to Spanish or as self-repair to indicate her recovery from misspeaking. In either case, by using *Mexican* as a linguistic label, Stacey is emphasizing her ethnicity and its close connection to the Spanish language.

To summarize, different factors related to ethnicity are given prominence at different moments of interaction. However, each factor does not operate separately from the others. When multiple factors are intertwined and function together, as seen in the case of citizenship, national origin, phenotype, and language in the above examples, the widespread Romantic ideology of ethnicity is reflected and constructed in students’ discourse.

3.4. Failed elicitation

In the above examples, interviewees use various resources to label their own or others’ ethnicity. However, there are other occasions in the interview setting when ethnic labeling is avoided altogether and students’ ethnic origin is never clarified.

I illustrate this situation using data from two of my fellow researchers involved in the study. Lilly, Tree, and Sookie are non-ELD students that my colleagues interviewed during the same fieldwork period. Mara, a European American, and Ayla, a Turkish immigrant, were interested in the significance of students’ ethnicity in their school life and designed an elicitation task to investigate this question. They brought pictures of teenagers of various races and asked the interviewees to categorize them into groups. At the beginning of the interview, Mara and Ayla asked the interviewees to identify themselves with an ethnic term. However, the students avoided ethnic labeling by giving their American citizenship as their preferred answer.¹⁰ The next example comes from the beginning of the interview in which the students are asked to provide their pseudonym, age, gender, and ethnicity.

(6)

- 1 Mara: So like if you can each go through,
- 2 And say—
- 3 (0.4)
- 4 Say what your:—
- 5 Your- your fake name is,
- 6 (0.5)
- 7 And then say your age,
- 8 And [your—]
- 9 Tree: [Okay.]
- 10 Mara: Uhm—

¹⁰ Based on the students’ physical appearance, the researchers thought that Lilly was European American and that Tree was Southeast Asian American. Sookie’s ethnicity was never apparent to them (M. Henderson, personal communication, May 6, 2007). However, she mentions the word *China* when she relates ethnicity to one’s ancestral background in Example (14) below, which may be a clue to her ethnic identity.

- 11 (0.6)
 12 Gender and ethnicity.
 13 (0.5)
 14 Lilly: Okay.
 15 (0.6)
 16 [Okay.]
 17 Ayla: [We can all] # see.
 18 (0.2)
 19 Your [gender.]
 20 Mara: [@] @ [2 @ @ @ @ @]
 21 Ayla: [2 But we still ##] [3 ##]
 22 Mara: [3 But] we have to record it anyway.
 23 Sookie: Can I just say I'm born here?
 24 (0.3)
 25 <clears throat>
 26 (0.4)
 27 Mara: You [can say it yeah.]
 28 Lilly: [From Ameri]ca?
 29 Sookie: [<#> Cause they're like— </#>]
 30 Tree: ###?
 31 (0.2)
 32 Sookie: I have a (0.1) very (0.2) large (0.5) I don't know.
 33 I was everywhere.
 34 (0.2)
 35 Mara: [Yeah?]
 36 Tree: [Yeah.]
 37 Me too.
 38 I'm- I'm kind of--
 39 (0.7)
 40 Sookie: Across the world,
 41 (0.2)
 42 Lilly: Just say you're American then.
 43 (0.7)
 44 Sookie: Yeah I'm American@. @@
 45 (0.1)
 46 Ayla: Mhm.
 47 Mara: Okay.
 48 Sookie: Okay.
 49 I'm—
 50 S::ookie.

Before this excerpt, the two researchers asked the three students to choose pseudonyms for the interview. After Mara asks the students their gender and ethnicity, Ayla, in lines 17 and 19, comments that their gender is obvious from visual inspection and implicitly positions ethnicity as different from gender in that it is not as obvious. In line 23, immediately following Mara's account for having to record this basic demographic information, Sookie asks if she can say that she was born "here," meaning 'in the United States' (as Lilly notes in line 28). Her utterance is in question form, suggesting

that she knows that it may not be a preferred answer. Her use of the word *just* also indexes that there is something more to be said, but that she has chosen to state only her American citizenship. In line 32 she accounts for her answer by saying that her ethnic background is complex because she “was everywhere.” After Sookie’s turn, Tree joins in and says that she is from everywhere, too. Sookie co-constructs Tree’s answer, proposing the wider-encompassing *across the world* (line 40). Lilly’s comment in line 42, “just say you’re American then,” is worth noticing for two reasons. First, she uses the word *just*, as Sookie does in line 23, hinting that mention of citizenship in answering a question about ethnicity is not sufficient but still an easy solution. In addition, Lilly’s comment is specific to the group interview setting, in which interviewees are interacting with other peers at the same time that they are answering interview questions. As a result, the students’ answers are co-constructed with help from their peers and negotiated among co-conversationalists present in the situation, who are likely to have a shared understanding of each other’s ethnicities and what their answers imply. Indeed, Sookie takes up Lilly’s suggestion in line 44 and identifies herself as “American.”

After having rehearsed their answers in Example (6) to see if they are legitimate answers to the interview question, students start providing official answers in the next example. In (7), Sookie continues with an answer that is very similar to the one that she provided earlier. Here, she begins her official answer to the question by stating her age and gender.

(7)

- 51 Sookie: (0.6)
 52 Okay,
 53 (0.3)
 54 X: @@
 55 Mara: @@[@]
 56 Sookie: [Uhm.]
 57 (0.6)
 58 And,
 59 (0.5)
 60 I’m (.) twelve.
 61 Almost thirteen.
 62 (0.3)
 63 Mara: Okay.
 64 Sookie: Just a couple of more days,
 65 (0.6)
 66 And,
 67 Uhm,
 68 (2.7)
 69 I’m- (0.5) female,
 70 (0.4)
 71 Mara: Yeah? @[@@][2@]
 72 Ayla: [@@][2@]
 73 X: [2@@@]
 74 Sookie: [2And,]
 75 Ayla: @@@

- 76 (0.8)
 77 Sookie: I'm from a lot of <whisper> places <[pleisəs:]>. </whisper>
 78 Mara: Yeah?
 79 (0.5)
 80 Sookie: I just say I'm—
 81 I'm American.
 82 (0.3)
 83 Mara: O[kay.]
 84 Sookie: [From America.]
 85 (0.4)
 86 Ayla: [All right!]
 87 Mara: [Okay.]

Having tested her answer in (6), Sookie provides her official answer in this example. Her identification of her gender in line 69 results in laughter from both researchers, again suggesting that they understand gender as something that Sookie does not have to make explicit. However, describing her ethnicity is not an equally easy matter, as shown by the multiple attempts and clarifications she makes. First, Sookie uses what I call a *strategy of ethnic abundance* in line 77, saying that she is from “a lot of places.” Her whisper in *places* indicates a lighthearted key and suggests that she views her answer as different from what is expected. Next, Sookie provides her citizenship in lines 80 and 81 (“American”); her use of *just*, as before, shows that there is more to be said that she chooses not to provide. She repeats her answer in line 84 by clarifying that she is “from America.” Consequently, the interviewers are still left with uncertainty regarding her ethnicity. By (re)defining her ethnicity as citizenship, Sookie successfully avoids ethnic self-labeling.

After this example, it is Tree’s turn to introduce herself in ethnic and gender terms, and she provides an answer that is strikingly similar to Sookie’s.

(8)

- 88 Sookie: <coughs>
 89 X: @@@
 90 Tree: Uhm.
 91 (1.5)
 92 I'm Tree,
 93 (0.5)
 94 Mara: @@@
 95 Tree: And:—
 96 (0.7)
 97 I'm sure I'm female,
 98 (0.4)
 99 Mara: [@@][₂@@]
 100 Ayla: [@@@][₂@@]@
 101 Tree: [₂And uhm—]
 102 Mara: @@
 103 (1.6)
 104 Tree: I'm:: (0.6) twe::lve,

105 (0.5)
 106 And,
 107 (2.6)
 108 Tree: My family came from a lot of places so I'm not really sure but.
 109 Mara: Yeah?
 110 (0.5)
 111 Tree: I was born here.
 112 (0.4)
 113 Mara: Okay.
 114 (1.2)

In line 97, Tree first identifies her gender in a way that resonates with Sookie's previous response, as evidenced by the construction of her answer. She adds on an evidential clause *I'm sure*, which again constructs gender as an unquestionable matter. In line 108 Tree also uses the strategy of ethnic abundance, using a quantifier, *a lot of* ("My family came from a lot of places") to explain her family's diverse origins; here too the construction of her answer shows resonance with Sookie's answer. In contrast to line 97 in which she constructs gender as a self-evident category, in line 108, Tree finishes her intonation unit with *I'm not really sure*, presenting herself as uncertain about her ethnicity. The final answer she gives in line 111 is that she was born in the United States, a detail that makes clear that she is an American citizen by birth rather than naturalization. Thus Tree links her ethnicity with her citizenship, as did Sookie in her turn.

After Tree completes her response, Lilly too follows the same pattern.

(9)

115 Lilly: And:
 116 (0.4)
 117 I am Lilly,
 118 (1.0)
 119 And:
 120 (0.2)
 121 I too am also female,
 122 (0.5)
 123 Mara: [@@@]
 124 Ayla: [@@@]
 125 (0.4)
 126 Lilly: And: I'm thirteen,
 127 (1.2)
 128 And:
 129 (0.7)
 130 I'm (0.1) from (0.3) America also.
 131 Mara: Okay.
 132 (1.1)
 133 Ayla: [Wonder]ful.
 134 Tree: [#.]

Lilly provides her pseudonym, gender, age, and ethnicity, in the same order that Tree did. She formulates her gender in a formal style, which results in laughter from the researchers. At this point, she is the third person to go over this background information, and she exploits this position by resonating with the answers of the previous interviewees. In particular, in line 130 she briefly identifies her ethnicity with her citizenship as an American. Unlike the other two interviewees, however, Lilly does not claim ethnic abundance. This might be due to the fact that she is perhaps white and if so, may be seen as having a less legitimate claim to ethnic distinctiveness (Bucholtz 2006; Bucholtz & Hall 2008). In any event, in the end, the interviewers, although they try to obtain information on the students' ethnic backgrounds, fail to discover the interviewees' ethnicities.

After the researchers interview the students about their backgrounds, they start the exercise in which students are asked to classify pictures of high school students based on whatever criteria they choose. The people in the pictures are of various races and ethnicities, and the exercise is designed to investigate the importance of race and ethnicity in friendship groups, although this intention has not been expressed to any of the students. The next example illustrates the instructions that the students are given and their initial answer to the task.

(10)

- 135 Mara: [So you want to-]
 136 Ayla: [Okay.]
 137 I [have,]
 138 Mara: [We have a little-]
 139 Ayla: Actually,
 140 (0.3)
 141 Mara: exercise for you.
 142 (0.3)
 143 Ayla: Little exercise for you guys,
 144 (0.4)
 145 This is part of our homework.
 146 (0.4)
 147 Okay?
 148 (0.3)
 149 Sookie: Okay.
 150 (0.1)
 151 Ayla: I have (0.2) [bunch] of pictures.
 152 X: [##]
 153 Mara: # want to get your ###
 154 Ayla: Boys and [girls.]
 155 Lilly: <HI> [Yeah.] </HI>
 156 (0.4)
 157 Ayla: They are perhaps on your age.
 158 (0.3)
 159 Lilly: Mhm.
 160 (0.5)
 161 Ayla: And:

- 162 I just wanted you guys to sort them out.
 163 (0.5)
 164 Any way that you- (0.3) you want to.
 165 (0.7)
 166 And just (0.3) go through them and you can talk- talk about them,
 167 (0.2)
 168 And decide (0.3) where they go to.
 169 (0.6)
 170 You can just make (0.2) as many groups as you want and uh—
 171 (1.6)
 172 Talk about them and decide how you want to group them.
 173 (1.9)
 174 There's no right or wrong way of grouping.
 175 Sookie: Whoa.
 176 X: So #.
 177 Ayla: I know.
 178 (0.3)
 179 Lilly: That's so [weird.]
 180 Ayla: [I know.]
 181 Tree: [I know.]
 182 (0.1)
 183 Lilly: They're our age?

In this example, interviewers introduce the exercise as something that they are made to do by a teacher, as demonstrated in Ayla's description of it as their "homework" in line 145. Generally, this type of exercise is not a familiar task to people outside of a psychology experiment setting, so the researchers may have wanted to compensate for the unnaturalness of the task (as well as to connect with the interviewees as fellow students). The exercise is also described as innocent and easy, as demonstrated by the use of *little* in line 143 and the multiple uses of *just* as in lines 162, 166, and 170. Moreover, the exercise is presented as not having any single correct answer. For instance, in line 164, the interviewer says that the students can sort out the pictures in "any way" they want to and adds in line 174 that there is "no right or wrong way" to do the exercise. However, the students do not see the exercise as a natural thing to do. They first laugh at the funny faces in the pictures (lines 175 and 176). Then Lilly, in line 183, expresses skepticism about Ayla's claim that the pictures are of people their age.

Following this example, the students start grouping the pictures by age. Then they start to separate them by gender. As in the interviews, categorizing by gender is unproblematic, but ethnic categorization appears to be more controversial and the interviewees seem to try their best to refrain from using this criterion. After the students finish classifying the pictures by gender, Ayla suggests regrouping the female group, presumably trying to guide the students to focus on ethnicity. The students accept Ayla's suggestion, and Lilly suggests a new possibility, to categorize the girls based on their smiles. Her suggestion gets an enthusiastic response from Sookie, so they continue sorting the photos of the girls according to the size of their smile.

Ethnic labeling still has not come up, and Ayla continues to push the students to find another way to categorize the pictures.

(11)

- 271 Ayla: How about if you just regroup these five now?
 272 (0.9)
 273 These five girls.
 274 (1.9)
 275 You could just spread them and just so you can look at them.
 276 Lilly: Okay,
 277 Sookie: How can we group- regroup them.
 278 Ayla: Just take a look.
 279 Tree: How long their hair is?
 280 Sookie: Yeah!

After the students complete the task of classifying the pictures, Ayla asks them which group is the largest and then suggests that it can be recategorized into smaller groups. There are more than two races in the group with the biggest smiles, so it seems that the interviewer had this in mind when she asks the students to keep reclassifying the photos. The students try to reorganize the remaining pictures into subcategories, and the interviewer suggests that they spread the pictures and “look” at them. This comment indicates that racial and ethnic differences are so self-evident to the researcher that visual inspection is enough to make out differences among the people in the pictures. However, the students are still devising other ways to categorize the pictures. Sookie’s use of the word *can* in line 277 indicates that an answer is possible but not obvious, contrary to the researcher’s perspective. In line 279, Tree proposes hair length as the next criterion and gets an excited response from Sookie, just as in the previous example.

The girls continue to categorize the pictures according to hair length, and when they are done, the interviewers ask them what they think of the people in the pictures and which ones they would want to be friends with. The girls give a variety of answers, such as people who say “hi” first or people who smile to them. Clearly, these are not the categories that are expected by the interviewers, and the students are not following the presumed rules of classification. While it is possible that these girls are entirely unaware of ethnicity as a basis of difference, given the salience of ethnicity in the school generally and their reluctance to classify themselves ethnically even when explicitly asked to do so, it is quite likely that they are extremely aware of ethnic difference and are deliberately avoiding it in this activity.

When the category of race or ethnicity does not come up at any point during or after the elicitation task, the interviewer takes a more active approach and directly asks the students about ethnicity (Example 12).

(12)

- 1 Ayla: I have a question for you guys.
 2 (0.4)
 3 Maybe you could guess that I’m—
 4 I’m not from here?
 5 (0.3)
 6 I’m from Turkey?
 7 (0.6)

8 And in Turkey—
 9 When (0.2) we look at (0.2) the people's (0.6) pictures,
 10 Lilly: Mhm,
 11 Ayla: We do—
 12 Uhm.
 13 (1.3)
 14 Think about or- we do—
 15 (1.8)
 16 Group them in #a: terms of race or ethnicity too.
 17 (0.5)
 18 So I was just wondering.
 19 (1.0)
 20 How do you guys uhm talk or think about those things.
 21 (0.8)
 22 Sookie: ## <high pitch>
 23 (0.3)
 24 Ayla: Is it—
 25 (0.7)
 26 Do you ever—
 27 (0.4)
 28 Sookie: I don't [feel like it's—]
 29 Ayla: [Refer] to it?
 30 (0.5)
 31 Tree: We're not like—
 32 Lilly: Not really.
 33 (0.3)
 34 Sookie: ## not really but ##—
 35 If you're gonna like describe someone=
 36 =you know you [may] do [₂like—]
 37 Ayla: [Uh huh.]
 38 Lilly: [₂Like—]
 39 Sookie: She might [₃be from] like—
 40 Ayla: [₃Yeah.]
 41 (0.1)
 42 Sookie: Maybe our ancestors or [like—]
 43 Lilly: [Like—]
 44 Sookie: Grandparents from like China or—
 45 (0.4)
 46 Lilly: Yeah.
 47 (0.2)
 48 Tree: But it's really hard when people are like racist [about it,]
 49 Sookie: [I- I don't like] to be a racist.

The interviewer starts the question by disclosing her own background to the students. By communicating to them that race or ethnicity is indeed a criterion that people use to classify people in her home country, she opens up a window for the students to share their own discourse related to ethnicity. Though more explicit than before, Ayla still takes a cautious approach to bringing up this issue. In the rather lengthy time it takes her

to formulate her question (from line 2 through line 30), the intonation units are relatively shorter than in previous turns, and there are numerous hesitations marked by frequent self-repairs and by pauses between and within intonation units. In response to the question of whether they refer to race or ethnicity (lines 26 and 29), all three students display a negative reaction, as shown in lines 28, 31, and 32. In line 28, Sookie frames this as her personal feeling (“*I don’t feel like it’s -*”) and so does Tree in line 31 (“*We’re not like -*”). Of course, their utterances are very fragmented, so it is difficult to be sure what exactly they are trying to say here. But the incompleteness and inarticulateness of their utterances is reminiscent of the inarticulateness and discomfort of whites discussing race and affirmative action (McElhinny 2001). In the end, the interviewees formulate discourse about ethnicity as a personal matter. They describe ethnicity as something that does not have an immediate effect on them by distancing themselves from it and linking it to their ancestors (line 42) or grandparents (line 44).

Line 48, however, provides a possible reason why discussion of ethnicity is so taboo for this group of friends. Tree links ethnic or racial labeling to being “racist.” This hints at the possibility that talking about ethnic difference may be easily equated with racism for these students. Popular discourse on race and ethnicity in their school and society may have affected their view on this matter, and motivated them to be careful about this issue in an interview with adults.

In sum, ethnic labeling or explicit mention of race or ethnicity may be a sensitive matter for some students in some contexts, as demonstrated in the examples above. Because they share the same nationality and citizenship status, it may not have been a preferred practice for students to distinguish themselves in ethnic terms. Or being in an interview situation with outside researchers in which they were asked about their ethnicity and then asked to participate in an elicitation task may have made them hyper-aware of racism and virtually anything related to discourse concerning race.

On the other hand, among the ELD students I observed, ethnic labeling was quite frequent in their daily lives, and it is realized through various strategies of linking ethnicity to U.S. citizenship, national origin, language, and phenotype. It may be that ELD students in particular, situated in a setting where their language fluency is questioned, need a way to explain their complex identities to outsiders. Since most of them are born in the United States and are native speakers of English, it may be necessary to bring their citizenship status or nationality to the forefront in order to prevent adult outsiders (such as researchers) from misunderstanding their identities.

4. Conclusion

In this article, I have documented some of the strategies that youth draw on interactionally to ethnically classify themselves and others. Rather than using predetermined demographic categories, youth in the above data employed concepts ideologically associated with ethnicity to make sense of the inherent complexity of ethnic identity. To assign ethnic labels, students at Sunnyville Junior High School used the criteria of citizenship, national origin, language, and phenotype at different points in interaction, and the negotiation of these categories reproduced well-established ideologies of ethnicity in the U.S. context. Among these youth, the ideologies concerning these criteria are not fixed but are constantly negotiated to enable them to understand and communicate a complicated concept. The present study suggests that

ethnicity is not a simple category that is readily available to youth even in a multiethnic context, but rather it is something that they actively construct and co-construct with the help of associated notions.

To the youth in this study, citizenship, national origin, language, and phenotype are critical parameters in ethnic labeling. However, their practices may differ from those of youth in other communities. The fact that the students in this study reside in Southern California may have highlighted the significance of the Mexican-heritage population over other groups of Latin American origin. The ethnic binaries of their school and the town of Sunnyville may have prompted the students' use of the label *Mexican* as a term that encompasses all Latinos. In short, various elements of their immediate surroundings affect how they recognize and reproduce ideologies of ethnicity.

But the construction of ethnicity in local contexts is not separable from the social and political contexts of the day. Current U.S. political rhetoric regarding immigration and race is likely to have influenced what these teenagers think about these issues. Merely mentioning race and ethnicity in an interview may be a dispreferred practice because students associate it with racism and discrimination. In the middle of the tumultuous political events surrounding racial and ethnic discourse, we as researchers have to remind ourselves that categories such as race and ethnicity do not automatically come into individuals' minds and become readily available for them to choose from. Notions regarding ethnicity are not stable but establish their meaning in negotiation with other factors and in communication within local social contexts and interactions. For the study of youth, therefore, it is critical that we as researchers do not apply predetermined labels and instead focus our attention on locally meaningful practices.

References

- Alim, H. Samy (2004) *You know my steez: An ethnographic and sociolinguistic study of styleshifting in a Black American speech community*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bailey, Benjamin H. (2002) *Language, race, and negotiation of identity: A study of Dominican Americans*. New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing.
- Bauman, Richard, & Charles L. Briggs (2000) Language philosophy as language ideology: John Locke and Johann Gottfried Herder. In P.V. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of language: Ideologies, politics, and identities*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, pp. 139-204.
- Bucholtz, Mary (1999) You da man: Narrating the racial other in the linguistic production of white masculinity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 3.4: 443-460.
- Bucholtz, Mary (2004) Styles and stereotypes: The linguistic negotiation of identity among Laotian American youth. *Pragmatics* 14.2-3: 127-147.
- Bucholtz, Mary (2006) "I guess I'm white": Interviews, interaction, and ethnic self-classification. Paper presented at the *Conference on Language, Interaction, and Culture*, University of California, Los Angeles, May.

Bucholtz, Mary, and Kira Hall (2008). All of the above: New coalitions in sociocultural linguistics. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12.4:401-431.

Cutler, Cecelia A. (1999) Yorkville crossing: White teens, hip hop and African American English. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 3.4: 428-442.

De Fina, Anna (2007) Code-switching and the construction of ethnic identity in a community of practice. *Language in Society* 36.3: 371-392.

Du Bois, John W. (2006) Representing discourse.
<<http://www.linguistics.ucsb.edu/projects/transcription/representing>>

Espiritu, Yen Le (1992) *Asian American panethnicity: Bridging institutions and identities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Farley, John E. (1988) *Majority-minority relations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Farlie, Robert W., and Alexandra M. Resch (2002) Is there "white flight" into private schools?: Evidence from the national educational longitudinal survey. *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 84.1: 21-33.

Fordham, Signithia (1999) Dissin' "the standard": Ebonics as guerrilla warfare at Capital High. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 30.3: 272-293.

Joseph, John E. (2004) *Language and identity: National, ethnic, religious*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kang, Agnes, and Adrienne Lo (2004) Two ways of articulating heterogeneity in Korean American narratives of ethnic identity. *Journal of Asian American Studies* 7.2: 93-106.

Lee, Jung-Eun Janie (2006) Representations of Asian speech in Hollywood films. Unpublished master's thesis. University of California, Santa Barbara, Department of Linguistics.

Le Page, Robert B., and Andrée Tabouret-Keller (1982) Models and stereotypes of ethnicity and of language. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 3.3: 161-192.

McElhinny, Bonnie (2001) See no evil, speak no evil: White police officers' talk about race and affirmative action. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 11.1: 65-78.

Mendoza-Denton, Norma (1999) Sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology of U.S. Latinos. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28: 375-295.

Mendoza-Denton, Norma (2008) *Homegirls: Language and cultural practice among Latina youth gangs*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Orfield, G., S. Schley, D. Glass, and S. Reardon (1994) The growth of segregation in American schools: Changing patterns of separation and poverty since 1968. *Equity and Excellence in Education* 27.1: 5-8.

Padilla, Felix M. (1985) *Latino ethnic consciousness: The case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Reyes, Angela (2007) *Language, identity, and stereotype among Southeast Asian American youth: The other Asian*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Shenk, Petra Scott (2007) "I'm Mexican, remember?": Constructing ethnic identities via authenticating discourse. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 11.2: 194-220.

Silverstein, Michael (2000) Whorfianism and the linguistic imagination of nationality. In P.V. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of language: Ideologies, politics, and identities*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, pp. 85-138.

Tuan, Mia (1998) *Forever foreigner or honorary whites?: The Asian ethnic experiences today*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Wyman, Leisy Thornton (2004) Language shift, youth culture, and ideology: A Yup'ik example. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Stanford University, School of Education.

Appendix: Transcription conventions

Transcription conventions are adopted from Du Bois (2006), with some modifications.

Jill:	Speaker attribution
X:	Uncertain speaker attribution
(1.2)	Pause, timed
(.)	0.1 second or less
:	Prosodic lengthening
[]	Overlap (first pair)
[₂]	Overlap (second pair)
=	Latching
.	Final intonation
,	Continuing intonation
?	Rising intonation
!	Exclamation
—	Truncated intonation unit
wor-	Truncated word
(H)	In-breath
@	Laughter
@you're @kidding	Laughter while speaking
< XXX >	Vocalism
<MISC> </MISC>	Manner/quality
☺ XX ☺	Smile voice quality
##	Unintelligible (one symbol for syllable)
#you're #kidding	Uncertain
<[IPA]>	Phonetic transcription