

## **SPEAKING LIKE ASIAN IMMIGRANTS: INTERSECTIONS OF ACCOMMODATION AND MOCKING AT A U.S. HIGH SCHOOL<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the relationship between immigrant and non-immigrant Asian American youth identities and the use of language to manage this relationship. Focusing on everyday interactions at a high school in Texas, the analysis examines how fluent English-speaking Korean and Filipino American students draw on linguistic resources associated with Asian immigrants, thus attending to generational identity, an important, though often oversimplified, social dimension in transnational contexts. According to the present analysis, salient generational differences may exist between Asian American youth, yet their linguistic practices complicate simple binaries of opposition. Specifically, this article focuses on how fluent English-speaking students both accommodate toward and mock Asian immigrant speech and notes that these ostensibly divergent practices exhibit linguistic overlap. It is argued that the convergences and divergences of these practices can be productively examined by distinguishing between the levels of *frame* and *ideology*, thus explaining how speakers interpret Asian immigrant revoicings as accommodation, mocking, or, in some cases, an ambiguous linguistic act that hovers in between.

**Keywords:** Accommodation; Asian Americans; Identity; Mocking; Stereotypes; Youth.

### **1. Introduction**

For Asian American youth, generational status has historically constituted a defining dimension in discourses about their ethnonational identity. During the Second World War, a U.S. government document reported that the children and grandchildren of Japanese American immigrants, or *nisei* and *sansei* respectively, had greater national loyalties to the United States than their immigrant, or *issei*, counterparts (Munson 1941). The notion of generation has also often figured in literary depictions of Asian American experiences, in which writers have described parent-child relationships as characterized by intergenerational conflict (Lowe 1991). In more recent years, Asian Americans raised in the United States sometimes note cultural and linguistic differences between themselves and their immigrant, or FOB (“fresh-off-the-boat”), counterparts (e.g., Chun 2004; Maira 1999/2000; Reyes 2007). Generational status continues to be a salient axis of identity for Asian American youth, whose experiences often straddle boundaries of nation, culture, and language.

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While such distinctions of generation tend to underlie discourses about Asian American youth, the relationship between immigrant and non-immigrant identities is far more complex than one of difference, as these previous discourses may suggest. This article addresses this complexity by examining how fluent English-speaking Korean and Filipino American students at a high school in Texas used linguistic resources associated with Asian immigrants to position themselves in relation to their immigrant counterparts. Specifically, it focuses on how these students engaged in two kinds of language practices - accommodation and mocking - as tools for negotiating their relationships with other students at the school. In the local context of this high school, immigrant and non-immigrant lives may have often been defined in opposition by distinctions of accent and language, but they were closely intertwined through friendship groups, kinship relations, and ethnic alliances.

Drawing on specific examples of these practices recorded during fifteen months of fieldwork, I discuss their linguistic and social significance. My analysis illustrates that accommodation involves a speaker's symbolic movement toward another speaker and that mocking entails a movement away. Yet I argue that these ostensibly divergent practices exhibit linguistic overlap because they both involve the stereotypical representation of Asian immigrant speech by fluent speakers of English. The convergences and divergences of these practices can be productively examined by distinguishing between the interpretive levels of *frame* and *ideology*, notions that have been widely used in studies of language and identity but whose precise relation is less commonly understood.

Specifically, I show that the interpretation of styles used in accommodation and mocking depends on the kind of frame (Goffman 1974) in which speakers embed a style in the moment of interaction, such as whether they engage in stylization (Bakhtin 1984; Coupland 2001a, Coupland 2001b), placing themselves at a momentary social distance from the style, or whether they claim the style as their own.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, performances of immigrant-like speech are understood as accommodation when speakers, who construct themselves as non-immigrants, adopt, or frame, such forms as part of their authentic repertoire of styles. By doing so, they successfully align themselves with Asian immigrants. On the other hand, interpretations of mocking arise when speakers stylize Asian immigrant speech, framing it as "not their own" and ostensibly positioning themselves above the immigrants who are stylized. At the same time, the meanings of temporarily embodied immigrant styles depend on an additional interpretive level, namely, that of ideology. In other words, speakers' stylistic acts are read according to local ideologies of social identity, or circulating assumptions of the speaker's social positioning in relation to Asian immigrants.

The examples show, however, that the levels of frame and ideology are shot through with ambiguities. First, these levels frequently do not exist in a harmonized pattern, as my brief description of accommodation and mocking may suggest, given that a speaker may sometimes stylize forms associated with her "own" community, or in the reverse case, she may present - or at least attempt to present - forms understood as belonging to a social "other" as part of her "own" stylistic repertoire (Rampton 1995). A second source of ambiguity is the fact that community membership is hardly categorically definable (as suggested by my use of scare quotes above); in my data,

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<sup>2</sup> Other kinds of frames are possible, such as the kind of "play" frame with which Goffman (1974) was more centrally concerned.

speakers were understood by different observers and at different times as variously positioned in relation to the particular community in question. For example, a multiethnic Filipino American ostensibly constructed himself as a member of a Tagalog speech community, despite his apparent exclusion by at least one of his Filipino American peers. (I discuss this case further below.) Likewise, the framing of an utterance - as stylized speech or as one's own - encounters similar sorts of ambiguities. My analysis suggests that these cases of ambiguity are not problems in need of resolution but complexities of social meaning that speakers are well equipped to manage. While in some cases in the data examined below speakers negotiated a precise understanding of Asian immigrant revoicings as either accommodation or mocking, in other cases, they permitted these acts to hover somewhere in between.

## **2. Accommodation and mocking: A difference of frame**

The excerpts I discuss in the analysis that follows constitute snapshots of language use that I observed and recorded between August 2003 and January 2005 at a high school I refer to as Diversity High. These examples articulated with a range of social practices and ideologies at this multiethnic school in Fortville (a pseudonym), a city that had a population of nearly 100,000 and that stood next to a military base in Texas. For reasons rooted in the historical presence of U.S. soldiers in South Korea and the Philippines, the two largest groups of Asian Americans in the city were of Korean and Filipino descent, respectively comprising 49.7 and 24.6 percent of the local Asian American population.<sup>3</sup> It is thus not a coincidence that the examples I present involve Asian American students of Filipino and Korean descent alongside their friends of same and other ethnic identifications. In addition, the most salient friendship group of Asian immigrants at the school was of Korean descent. This social network was maintained primarily through participation at a lunch table consisting of other Korean Americans who spoke Korean fluently, although some of these students also attended an English as a Second Language (ESL) class together.

It is also important to note that most of Diversity High's Asian Americans, who constituted about 6 percent of the student population, had been raised in the United States.<sup>4</sup> In fact, all of the examples presented below focus on revoicings by Asian Americans who were fluent speakers of English, either having been born in the United States or having immigrated there at an early age. Despite the fact that non-immigrant Asian Americans typically viewed themselves as distinct from their immigrant peers with respect to their linguistic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991), friendships and encounters between immigrants and non-immigrant Asian Americans were not uncommon. Importantly, they had frequent contact with one another through their

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<sup>3</sup> The relatively visible Korean immigrant population is linked to the large number of U.S. soldiers, currently estimated at 30,000, stationed in South Korea since 1945. The "camptowns" established there have led to marital ties between soldiers and Korean civilians, or "military brides" (Yuh 1999), and subsequently the sponsored immigration of Korean relatives to U.S. cities with military bases, such as Fortville. It has been estimated that 40 to 50 percent of all Korean immigrants since 1965 are ultimately linked to military brides (Lee 1997).

<sup>4</sup> According to one Diversity High statistic, at the time of my fieldwork 5.2 percent of the students were Asian American, although this figure likely excludes many perceived to be racially Asian, given that, according to those I spoke with, students of multiracial parentage were encouraged by their teachers to claim their father's racial identification as their own.

mainstream (non-ESL) classes such as Calculus and Government, extracurricular activities such as soccer, and off-campus religious worship at one of the city's several Korean ethnic churches.

My examination of accommodation and mocking may seem at first an odd juxtaposition. In fact, discussions of these two linguistic practices have hardly overlapped. "Convergent accommodation" has typically been discussed from a social-psychological perspective and is described as involving the adoption of language features associated with the addressee as a means of making the speaker's persona more acceptable to the addressee (Giles and Powesland 1975; Giles et al. 1991). These accounts have suggested that the desire for acceptability, due to both perceived similarity and enhanced communicative effectiveness, motivates speech convergence. The assumed identification of the speaker with her interlocutor places accommodative shifts in the realm of practices of style-shifting toward what may be regarded as a style that is adopted and thus presented as "authentic" to the accommodator; accommodation is therefore a tactic of "adequation" (Bucholtz and Hall 2004) involving the signaling of social sameness.

"Foreigner talk" constitutes a specific form of convergent accommodation. As Ferguson (1975) describes, a native English speaker may adjust her speech style in ways assumed to be more easily understood by her non-native English-speaking interlocutor, often by using features that reflect both a general process of structural simplification and the speaker's perceptions of the non-native recipient's speech patterns. Like cases of accommodation more generally, the use of foreigner talk conveys a native speaker's willingness to engage in a successful communicative exchange - and often to identify at some level - with her non-native interlocutor.

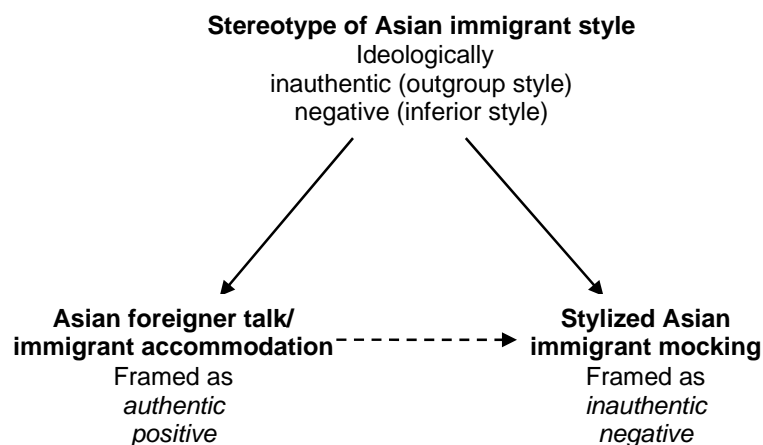
The practice of mocking, on the other hand, ostensibly achieves the opposite effect, attributing negative value to a mocked target, typically through some form of mimicry. It thus involves the temporary embodiment of a ridiculed figure who thereby becomes the target of critical commentary. In mocking acts, the mocker's voice enters a dialogic relationship (Bakhtin 1981, 1984) with the voice it mocks, structurally merging with it in the moment yet implicitly distinct and superior. These portrayals constitute forms of parody, an intertextual relationship in which a text stands in a contrastive relation to an evoked text, over which it has a "higher semantic authority" (Morson 1989: 67, cited by Coupland 2001b: 373) or, as Bakhtin (1984: 160) writes, a situation in which an author's voice "collides in a hostile fashion with the original owner and forces him to serve purposes diametrically opposed to his own." The cases of stylized mocking that I examine in this article involve the "knowing deployment of culturally familiar styles and identities that are marked as deviating from those predictably associated with the current speaking context" (Coupland 2001b: 345). They are, in other words, performances (Bauman and Briggs 1990) which display linguistic images to an audience that are "'put on', 'for now', and 'for show'" (Coupland 2001b: 347), implying their artificiality. Mockers may "deauthenticate" (Coupland 2001b: 347) the voice of an other, but they simultaneously present it as if it were their own, at least within the temporary, and often playful, frame of its presentation.

The practice of mocking I explore here can be differentiated from "mock language" introduced by Hill (1993, 1995, 1999, 2005) in her work on Mock Spanish, although overlaps may be found in both form and interpretation. As Barrett (2006: 165-166) has observed, Mock Spanish practices are cases of linguistic appropriation that have semiotic parallels with cross-racial African American Vernacular English

(Bucholtz 1999, Chun 2001, Cutler 1999) as well as with “crossover” lexical items (Smitherman 1994). These practices involve non-African American speakers’ use of slang terms that incorporate linguistic forms associated with African American stereotypes (Bucholtz 2004). In contrast, mocking, as analyzed in this article, depends on caricatures used when voicing other characters, such as in a comedy performance (Chun 2004; Labrador 2004; Mesthrie 2002; Rahman 2004; Reyes 2005) or portrayals in films (Lee 2006; Meek 2006). Thus in Bakhtin’s terms, cases of crossover African American English (AAE) and Mock Spanish are unidirectionally double-voiced - that is, the two voices have shared “aspirations” (Bakhtin 1984: 160) - as crossers benefit from their association with qualities stereotypically attributed to the represented outgroup. On the other hand, mocking acts by the Diversity High students that I analyze here were varidirectionally double-voiced, as the represented voice was the object of derisive commentary, even if playfully so.

Each of the examples I present may be interpreted as cases of accommodation by fluent English speakers toward Asian immigrant speech, but I show how certain cases not only flirted with an interpretation as mocking but sometimes became fully contextualized as such. In my analysis of these two seemingly contrastive acts, I contend that the slippage between them was a consequence of the parallel linguistic forms that they entailed. In both cases, a native speaker of English drew on stereotypical characteristics of Asian immigrant language features; that is, she drew on features that native English speakers regarded within the context of local ideologies as both outgroup and inferior to the variety of English she normally spoke. A key difference, however, lay in how these forms were framed within the moment of interaction. As discussed above and as depicted in Figure 1, an accommodating speaker who used Asian foreigner talk adopted these features as authentically her own and as positively valued, at least during the particular moment of their adoption. By contrast, in the case of stylized Asian mocking, immigrant linguistic features were not only framed as inauthentic to the speaker but also attributed a negative value.

Figure 1. Stereotypical Asian immigrant language features used for both accommodation and stylized mocking



As the diagram illustrates, acts of Asian foreigner talk differed from those of Asian immigrant mocking with regard to how they were framed, but they risked a mocking

interpretation because of circulating ideologies about the devalued status of Asian immigrant identities and speech in the local community. In other words, frame and ideology, while analytically distinct levels of analysis, were not wholly separable in moments of interpretation.

### 3. Unambiguous accommodation

During the time I spent with various groups at the school, I rarely observed students using Asian foreigner talk, perhaps because of the relative infrequency of prolonged non-classroom interactions between recent Korean immigrant students and their non-Asian peers. One frequent user of a foreigner talk style, however, was a Korean American named Brian<sup>5</sup> who had lived in the United States since early childhood yet whose friendship group consisted primarily of recent immigrants from Korea. He and his friends ate lunch daily at a table locally referred to as the “Korean table,” where Korean constituted the dominant language.

When Brian spoke with his close friend Taesik, who had emigrated from Korea just two years before, he sometimes used features that may be regarded as part of a set of accommodation strategies. A common strategy Brian employed was code-switching between Korean and English in order to facilitate Taesik’s comprehension of relatively complex ideas, such as when they regularly prepared for exams at lunch. In Example 1 below, in which the two boys reviewed concepts from their government class, they conducted most of the conversation in Korean, using English only to refer to central concepts from the textbook (e.g., *treaty*, *president*, *two-thirds vote*, *approval*). The interaction follows a regular two-part pattern of instruction: Brian’s explanation of the material (lines 1-4, 6-7, and 22-23) followed by Taesik’s demonstration of his understanding through his repetition of the content (lines 5, 8-12, and 24-26).<sup>6 7</sup>

#### Example 1. “Power to make treaties” (12/2/03)

<sup>5</sup> All personal names are pseudonyms chosen by either the participant or the researcher.

<sup>6</sup> Transcription conventions:

<b>bold Arial font</b>		Korean
<b><u>bold underline</u></b>		Focus of analysis
<i>italics</i>		Emphasis (pitch, amplitude)
:		Lengthening
–		Sudden cut-off
.		Falling contour
?		Rising contour
H		Breathiness, laughter
overlapping	[speech	Overlapping speech
	speech	
((details))		Additional transcription details
(xxx)		Problematic hearing

<sup>7</sup> As researchers of code-switching have discussed, words do not always display clear code membership; for example, originally English lexical items sometimes carried Korean morphological and phonological features. Since this article does not explore code-switching beyond its use as a strategic tool for accommodation, the transcription of code choice is based, somewhat arbitrarily, on the lexical, rather than morphological or phonological, level.

Brian, Korean American, male, senior  
 Taesik, Korean American, male, senior  
 Luke, Korean American, male, senior

	Original	English
1	Brian: Power <b>t<sup>h</sup>o</b> make treaties?	Power <b>t<sup>h</sup>o</b> make treaties?
2	<b>Ø</b> President can make treaties?	<b>Ø</b> President can make treaties?
3	write the treaty?	write the treaty?
4	but he has to send it to the senate.	but he has to send it to the senate.
5	Taesik: Senate <b>hanthey ponay-ya-han-ta-ko?</b>	<b>You're saying he has to send it to the senate?</b>
6	Brian: Yeah and then he has to get it approved	Yeah and then he has to get it approved
7	by two thirds vote.	by two thirds vote.
8	Taesik: Two-third?	Two-third?
9	<b>Kunikka</b> , treaty <b>hal-ttay-nun?</b>	<b>So when there's a treaty</b>
10	<b>caki-ka s-</b> president <b>hal-swu iss-nun-tey?</b>	<b>the president can do it himself</b>
11	<b>ku</b> senate <b>hanthey ponay-ka-ci-ko</b>	<b>But he has to send it to the senate</b>
12	two-third <b>pata-ya toyn-ta-ko</b>	<b>And get two-thirds</b>
13	Brian: Approval <b>pata-ya tway</b>	<b>He has to get approval</b>
14	Taesik: Okay.	Okay.
15	Next?	Next?
16	Luke: ((to Taesik)) <b>Hyeng (xxx xxx xxx ?)</b>	((to Taesik)) <b>Brother, (xxx xxx xxx?)</b>
17	Taesik: ((to Luke)) Nope? I don't think so.	((to Luke)) Nope? I don't think so.
18	Brian: This is just like the quiz.	This is just like the quiz.
19	The easy ones?	The easy ones?
20	Taesik: Ten- I did ten problem right?	Ten- I did ten problem right?
21	Luke: (xxx)	(xxx)
22	Brian: <b>ku taysin</b> senate-un?	<b>On the other hand, the senate?</b>
23	<b>amwu kes-to ssulswu-nun epse.</b>	<b>can't write anything.</b>
24	Taesik: senate-i treaty-lul halswu eps-ko	<b>The senate can't do the treaty</b>
25	<b>taythonglyen man-</b> president <b>halswu iss-ta-ko</b>	<b>Only the president- president can do it</b>
26	<b>kuntay</b> senate-un kunyang appro-approval <b>kulen ha- hanun-ke-ko</b>	<b>But the senate just gives appro-approval</b>
27	Brian: <b>kuntay kuke ttaymwuney</b>	<b>But because of that</b>
28	president- <b>ka pakkwe-ya toynun ke manha.</b>	<b>There are a lot of things the president has to change</b>

A few aspects of this interaction suggest that Brian accommodates to Taesik's speech in his explanation of how a U.S. president creates treaties. Most saliently, Brian's use of a Korean morphological and syntactic frame, first in line 13 and then throughout the rest of the exchange, appears to respond to Taesik's preference for using Korean, a fact that is reflected in Taesik's consistent use of Korean in most of the conversation. Although he begins his instruction by using English exclusively, Brian initiates his use of Korean when he clarifies a detail that Taesik appears to have overlooked (lines 8-12). Specifically, Taesik's attempt to confirm in Korean that "[the

president] has to send [the treaty] to the senate and get two thirds” excludes the term *approval*, prompting Brian to reiterate that “[the president] has to get approval.” Brian draws on code-switching as a resource for accommodating to Taesik’s dominant language.

Yet even when speaking English, Brian appears to draw on other accommodative strategies: his hyper-articulation of the intervocalic and unstressed infinitival *to* in line 1 by aspirating the initial /t/ and his syntactic simplification by excluding the determiner *the* in line 2 (*President can make treaties*). The next example similarly illustrates how Brian accommodates his speech to Taesik’s perceived ability level in English. For example, he employs prosodic features such as long pauses between intonation units, and syntactic structures such as simple sentences lacking embedded clauses; both types of features may be viewed as making the language easier to understand.

Example 2. “I think I’m ready” (11/30/03)

Brian, Korean American, male, senior

Taesik, Korean American, male, senior

- 1       Taesik:    I think I’m- I’m ready.
- 2                I think.
- 3       Brian:    (2.0)
- 4                I thought that I was ready too.
- 5                (3.3)
- 6                I slept at two o’clock?
- 7                (0.7)
- 8                I studied?
- 9                (0.7)
- 10               I uh what is it
- 11               Read uh chapter twenty?
- 12               (0.7)
- 13               And wrote it out?
- 14               Notes?
- 15               (0.6)
- 16               And then I did it?
- 17               (0.5)
- 18               I’m like.
- 19               (1.2)
- 20       Taesik:   Did you use this
- 21                (1.0)
- 22                This sheet?
- 23       Brian:    (0.8)
- 24                You can’t use it on the test
- 25       Taesik:   (0.4)
- 26                I know
- 27                but I ca- I think I can
- 28                because (I will call her?)
- 29                for the (red table) then
- 30                nobody care me.

The various interactions I recorded between these two boys illustrate Brian’s general pattern of accommodation when speaking with Taesik, whether by drawing on the strategy of code-switching as in Example 1 or on the strategies of simplicity and



clarity as in Example 2. In these cases, his accommodative acts seem to convey his social alignment with his immigrant friends.

By contrast, when he spoke with those who spoke English fluently, Brian typically did not use the features noted above. Example 3 below demonstrates how Brian spoke with his Korean American friend Mora, who had also been raised in the United States, as they discussed a class project during lunch.

Example 3. "That video was weird" (11/21/03)

Brian, Korean American, male, senior

Mora, Korean American, female, senior

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1  Brian:  That  [video was weird
2  Mora:    [Did you guys do your video?
3          (0.3)
4  Brian:  Huh?=  
5          =Yeah.=  
6          =Ours is funny.  
7          (0.3)
8  Mora:    Really?  
9          (0.3)
10         Where'd you guys do it at.=  
11         =Erica's house?  
12 Brian:  (4.0)  
13         We have um==  
14         (1.0)  
15         =the funniest part?  
16         (0.5)  
17         is probably when  
18         (0.5)  
19         we have th- one scene where Hareton?  
20         (0.4)  
21         is learning how tho read?  
22         (0.2)
23 Mora:    Uh huh. h.  
24         (1.0)
25 Brian:  And we write one after like that scene?  
26         (0.1)  
27         Like right when she teaches him how tho read?  
28         (0.1)
29 Mora:    Uh-huh=  
30 Brian:  =We like go like  
31         (0.8)  
32         ((shift to enthusiastic style))  
33         "No one should go without learning."=  
34         =And like=  
35         =we hold up like the book?=  
36         =Wuthering Heights?=  
37         =and like  
38         (0.3)  
39         give a thumbs up and wink.  
40         h h h h

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Not only is the conversation in Example 3 completely in English, unlike Example 1, but the pauses between intonation units are relatively short, when compared

to the pauses in Example 2. That is, the mainstream style of English that Brian uses when speaking with fluent English speakers such as Mora in Example 3 structurally contrasts with the style he demonstrates in Examples 1 and 2, in which he accommodates to Taesik's speech. Although I suggest below that the features that Brian used with his immigrant friends structurally resembled those that some Asian American students used when mocking immigrants, I contend that his interactional style with Taesik was locally understood as accommodation rather than mocking. Importantly, he constructed such accommodation as part of his own voice rather than the performance of a social other. In other words, Brian's accommodative style was not framed explicitly as a linguistic display or performance that highlighted Brian's and Taesik's different immigrant statuses.

In fact, the features that Brian used when engaging in a foreigner talk style sometimes appeared in contexts in which he was not directly addressing an immigrant recipient. Such was the case in lines 21 and 27 of Example 3, in which he used an aspirated [t<sup>h</sup>] in infinitival *to*. By contrast, native speakers of American English frequently produce a flap [ɾ] in similar intervocalic, unstressed, and casual contexts, reserving aspiration in this word for cases of marked articulation that may display a careful stance. Rather than understanding Brian's use of features that I have identified as characteristic of accommodation as necessarily triggered by online psychological motivations, it is possible that some features had become part of his habitus (Bourdieu 1991), given the frequency with which he spent his days talking to non-native speakers of English.

It may have been the everydayness of the foreigner talk features seen in the above examples that allowed them to be part of a repertoire of stylistic features that Brian and his friends seemed to regard as authentic to him. Accommodating in this way was not a representation of another but part of his everyday self-representation. In other words, his accommodative strategies drew on language features ideologically linked with a social outgroup and were thus a form of crossing (Rampton 1995), given that he was not a recent immigrant. At the same time, Brian's length of residence in the United States, which tied him more closely to a U.S. community than a Korean one, was only one aspect of his identity. He may not have been a member of the local community of recent immigrants at the school by strict definition, but he was an unquestionable participant in their social network, given that he ate lunch, discussed schoolwork, and engaged in interactions with recent immigrants on a regular basis. Through these regular practices over time, he had achieved an identity status as a core participant in the immigrant community, and as suggested in my description of his language practices, traces of this history of practices had become a part of his embodied habitus.

A psychological account of accommodation may be inadequate for yet another reason: its assumption that social meaning derives from the intentions of the accommodating speaker. In actual practice, linguistic moves made in an attempt to achieve social sameness, or adequation, may end up serving instead to highlight social distinction (Bucholtz and Hall 2004), such as when accommodation is perceived as condescension that constructs the recipient as linguistically incompetent relative to the accommodating speaker. In other words, in certain moments of practice, ideologies of social difference may be made salient even when language structures converge. In fact, in some cases, the social distance implied by speech convergence may appear to constitute a form of stylized mocking, in which the speaker's implicit voice is constructed as distinct from and superior to her embodied voice. Contrary to canonical

cases of accommodation, the assumed “inauthenticity” and “inferiority” of the accommodated voice may be made salient in such instances.

#### **4. Ambiguities of interpretation in quoted accommodation**

The next two examples illustrate the potential for practices of accommodation to be interpreted as mocking when they are represented in reported speech. The first excerpt is taken from a recording of a dinner that I hosted for students as part of my data collection. In this example, a fluent English-speaking Korean American girl named Miss Thang describes to her friends her communicative struggle with her immigrant mother, stemming from their lack of competence in each other’s primary languages. Her self-quotation of her accommodation, so that her mother could understand her instructions for using a tampon, draws on stereotypical speech patterns that she associates with Korean immigrants.

Example 4. “Relax” (Sakaci Girls, 12/6/04)

Miss Thang, Korean American, female, freshman

Yoshi, Korean American, female, freshman

White Tiger, Korean-European American, female, sophomore

Piggy, Korean American, female, sophomore

1	Miss Thang:	Some words my mom like-	
2		I dunno	
3		if I say it?	
4		I’m like “Okay mom.”	
5		Cause I was teaching her	
6		how to put a tampon in right?	
7	Yoshi:	Ha ha ha	
8	White Tiger:	Ew	
9	Miss Thang:	Cause when we bought it	
10		and the next day we came home.	
11		She was just like “You put a tampon in?”	
12		I was like “Yeah I’m learning to”.	
13		She was like “uhhhh”	
14	Piggy:	(Why would you) put in a tampon.	
15	Miss Thang:	Yeah cause I’m trying to get used to	
16		putting it in?	
17		And then.	
18	Piggy:	Oh Miss Thang. Oh	
19	Miss Thang:	And my mom was like	
20		“Last time I did it it hurt.”	
21		I was like “Emma. ((Korean <i>emma</i> ‘mom’))	
22		You gotta <u>relax</u> ” ((Korean phonology))	/ɹi.lɛk.su/
23	Yoshi:	ha ha ha	
24	Miss Thang:	She was like “What?”	
25		I was like “What is ‘relax’”	/ɹi.læks/

26 I was like "You gotta relax." /ɹi.læks/  
 27 I was like "Body calm:: calm::."  
 28 All: ((light laughing))  
 29 Miss Thang: She was like "Whatever."  
 30 I was like "Okay"  
 31 I was just like "You just stick it in."  
 32 She was like "Oh okay"

Miss Thang's self-quotation includes a Korean phonological structure for the English word *relax* (/ɹi.læks/ as /ɹi.lək.sʊ/, with syllabification of final /s/ and raising of /æ/ to /ɛ/, line 22). She also quotes herself as using a directive with a simplified and marked grammatical structure consisting of only a noun and an adjective (*Body calm*, line 27), instead of one that begins with a verb, as generally preferred in direct imperatives among native English speakers (e.g., *Stay calm*), or one in which the adjective precedes the noun (e.g., *Calm body*). Miss Thang's quoted accommodation thus conveys an attempted approximation of Korean immigrant English for her Korean immigrant mother's ease of comprehension.

An interpretation of this example as accommodation may be possible given that Miss Thang displays her intention of being more communicatively effective; in line 1 she seems to begin to suggest that her mother fails to understand her English, and in line 25, she presents herself as searching for the Korean equivalent of the English word *relax*. Although she did not identify as an immigrant, having been born in Arizona, she was clearly in close social proximity to immigrant experiences; the participants in this interaction were aware that her parents were immigrants from Korea.

However, Miss Thang's frame of quotation and stylization functions to distance her at least momentarily from the utterance, despite the fact that it is a representation of her own past speech. This distancing makes possible the utterance's potential decontextualization from a past context and recontextualization into a current one (Bauman and Briggs 1990) in which Miss Thang is speaking to her friends, who also speak English fluently. The laughter in lines 23 and 28, as responses that immediately follow the two instances of stylization, suggests the lurking interpretation of the act as a humorous mocking of Asian immigrant speech, although it never becomes entirely clear (at least to me) whether the participants of this interaction in fact favor such a reading. It may be clearer, on the other hand, that Miss Thang's act of stylized quotation displays a particular linguistic competence through her use of contrastive styles, constructing her cultural competence as a humorous individual and positioning herself in relation to Asian American immigrants like her mother. Specifically, Miss Thang's narrative represents her own voice as distinct from that of her mother, whose speech bears traces of her immigrant past. The multiplicity of potential readings of her quotation parallels the ambiguity present in mocking quotations of Asian immigrants by professional Asian American comedians such as Margaret Cho (Chun 2004).

In the next example, a fluent English-speaking Asian American similarly quotes herself accommodating to an Asian immigrant speaker, yet the quoted act of accommodation becomes unmistakably recontextualized by her participants as a mocking act. The recontextualization occurs as Big Dog, a Filipina American, describes to her friends and me how she engaged in accommodation when she sometimes ate lunch at the Korean table with one of her close Korean American friends, who was a regular member of this lunchtime group. According to Big Dog, the language barrier

was “uncomfortable” (line 1), prompting her unconscious shift to an accommodating language style (line 17), for example, when speaking to her Korean American immigrant friend Luke.

Example 5a. “Pass ketchup please” (12/9/04)

Big Dog, Filipina American, female, junior  
 Elaine, Korean American, female, researcher  
 Joanne, European American, female, junior  
 Bob, Pakistani American, male, junior  
 Liam, European American, male, sophomore

- |    |          |   |   |
|----|----------|---|---|
| 1  | Big Dog: | Yeah. I felt so uncomfortable<br>eating with them.  |   |
| 2  |          | But like  |   |
| 3  |          | then I'd start to speak broken<br>English           |   |
| 4  |          | h so they [could understand me.                     |   |
| 5  | Elaine:  | [h h h  |   |
| 6  | ALL:     | ((laugh))   |   |
| 7  | Big Dog: | <u>"Pass ketchup.</u>                               | ((reduced tempo, article<br>deletion, direct speech)) |
| 8  |          | <u>Plea:se."</u>                                    | ((hyper-formality))                                   |
| 9  | ALL:     | ((laughing))  |   |
| 10 | Big Dog: | <u>"Oh ya:h.</u>                                    | ((monophthongal /o/, [æ] →<br>[a] in yeah))           |
| 11 |          | <u>Ketch(h)up"</u>                                  | (([kʰ] → [k], repetition))                            |
| 12 |          | h h h   |   |
| 13 |          | I'm just kidding.                                   |   |
| 14 |          | Like Luke always used to joke<br>around with me so. |   |
| 15 | Elaine:  | Yeah.   |   |
| 16 | Big Dog: | Like every time he'd talk to me                     |   |
| 17 |          | I'd notice I'd break up my English<br>a lot h h?    |   |
| 18 |          | So he could understand me better.                   |   |
| 19 | Joanne:  | Like instead of "Open the door"                     |   |
| 20 |          | you say <u>"Open door?"</u>                         | ((article deletion))                                  |
| 21 | Big Dog: | Yeah. <u>"Open door"</u> h                          | ((article deletion))                                  |
| 22 | Bob:     | [Yeah~h~yeah~h~yeah                                 |   |
| 23 | Joanne:  | [ <u>"Open door.</u>                                | ((article deletion,<br>emphatic))                     |
| 24 | Big Dog: | [ <u>Give me pencil.</u>                            | ((article deletion))                                  |
| 25 | Joanne:  | [ <u>Open door</u>                                  | ((article deletion))                                  |
| 26 |          | <u>Come in. Come in."</u>                           | ((sentence reduplication,<br>emphatic))               |

As in the previous example involving Miss Thang, Example (5a) involves an ambiguous interpretation. In this excerpt, Big Dog notes her unconscious movement toward the language practices of immigrants such as Luke, and her allusion to her friendship with him (line 14) suggests her regular participation in the local immigrant network. Her quotation might thus be read less as a mockery of her immigrant friends than as a mocking of her own unconscious slips into an immigrant style despite her non-immigrant status.

Big Dog's reference to her own speech accommodation as “broken English” in line 3 and as English that she would “break up” in line 17 blurs the distinction between

accommodation and stereotypical immigrant speech, as she uses lexical items commonly used to characterize non-native English speech. The structural overlap is apparent as well in Big Dog's initial quotation of her accommodation in line 7 (*Pass ketchup. Plea:se*), which contains features common to both "foreigner talk" and stereotypical representations of non-native English speech. Most notably, her use of telegraphic speech is characterized by the deletion of articles, a feature that is reiterated several times in this example (lines 7, 20, 21, 23, 24, and 25).

Thus the shift that occurs soon afterward (Example 5b) may not be surprising. The group's shift from quoted accommodation to a collaborative mocking activity is spurred in line 27, when Bob states, "Well Luke still kinda does that."<sup>8</sup>

Example 5b. "Pass ketchup please" (continued) (12/9/04)

- 27 Bob: Well Luke still kinda does that.  
 28 "Yeah I went- I went hotel?" ((article deletion, preposition deletion))  
 29 "Ma::n?"  
 30 "I got drunk." h h h ((staccato))  
 31 ALL: ((laughs))  
 32 Big Dog: Yeah see Luke?  
 33 He [mixes it up.  
 34 Bob: ["I saw hot girl." (([a] → [ɔ] in *hot*, /r/-deletion in *girl*, staccato, unstressed head noun *girl*, article deletion))  
 35 ALL: ((laughs))  
 36 Joanne: They leave out all those- the little words in between.  
 37 Big Dog: hh "That [girl o:ff chai::n" h h ((article deletion))  
 38 Joanne: ["That- that represents ((use of interjection as a verb))  
 39 [(me:: and ay::)" h h  
 40 Bob: ["Off chai::n" ((article deletion))  
 41 Big Dog: "Off chai::n" h ((article deletion))

Bob's deictic pronoun *that* in line 27 connects the previous topic—that is, how non-immigrant students accommodate to Asian immigrant listeners—to how a particular Asian immigrant, Luke, speaks. In this way, Bob suggests a close relationship between foreigner talk and non-native students' English. His engagement in stylized Asian mocking (Chun 2007a) allows the conversation to shift with apparent naturalness to a series of stylizations of Asian immigrant speech by Big Dog and Joanne. These three students, perhaps in part licensed by their friendships with Luke, allude to his cultural and linguistic incompetence, ultimately making ambiguous the line between forms of accommodation and mocking.

The structural assimilation of the accommodative style in Example (5a) with that of the mocking style in Example (5b) is partly a product of an ideological symmetry

<sup>8</sup> An initial stylized mocking may occur in line 10 when Big Dog quotes a hypothetical response to her request for ketchup: "Oh yah, ketchup," she says, incorporating /o/ monophthongization, /æ/-lowering to /a/, and the de-aspiration of /k/ in *ketchup*. She immediately follows this stylized mocking with the disclaimer "I'm just kidding" in line 13, which not only makes explicit her play frame but suggests the potential danger of her racial mocking.

between speech comprehension and production, such that language produced for Asian immigrants is modeled on the language they are thought to produce. Big Dog describes the apparent symmetry of these two styles when she provides her reason for using what she labels “broken English,” namely, in line 4, “So they could understand me” and, in line 18, “So he could understand me better.” The symmetry is also reflected in the use of some of the same structural features; for example, the deletion of articles noted above in Example (5a) are also in Example (5b) in lines 28, 34, 37, 40 and 41. The bivalent (Woolard 1998) status of article deletion allows this feature not only to simultaneously index two kinds of acts but also to blur the distinction between them. Such bivalency is possible because both accommodation and mocking constitute native speakers’ representations of stereotypical Asian immigrant speech.

The structural merging of these two styles may also be facilitated by the context of directly reported speech, as quotations involve the decontextualization of a text and its denaturalization from the quoting speaker. Temporarily let loose from its framing as accommodation, Big Dog’s speech is opened to a broader field of possible interpretation in ways that parallel Miss Thang’s quoted accommodation in Example (4) above. The quotation may thus make salient an ideological contrast between Big Dog’s authenticated (non-immigrant) and deauthenticated (immigrant) styles. Additionally, her quotation - “Pass ketchup. Ple:ase” in line 7 - entails a display of her accommodating speech style, “licens[ing] the audience to evaluate the skill and effectiveness” (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 73) of her verbal performance. It thus invites an exaggerated simplification at the levels of prosody (the distribution of equal stress across all of the words), syntax (the absence of the article *the*), and pragmatics (*Pass ketchup, please* rather than *Can you pass the ketchup, please?*). The structurally highlighted nature of this entextualized quotation mirrors that of mocking, which often similarly depends on processes of simplification and exaggeration.

The performances of Asian immigrant speech in the examples I have discussed are represented in the following set of schemata, which loosely adapt Goodwin’s (1980) visual representations of participant frameworks. Figure 2 depicts how Brian accommodates to Taesik in Examples 2 and 3 by using stylistic resources that Taesik is more likely to understand. Some of these resources include Korean morphological and syntactic features as well as article deletion in English; both kinds of features resemble those that Taesik often produce. In other words, Brian’s style incorporates features that are in part a stereotypical representation of Taesik’s speech.

### Key

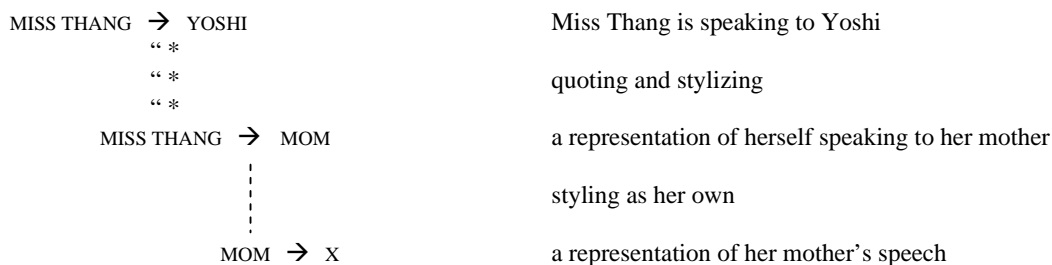
→	= ‘speaking to’	⋮	= ‘styling as one’s own’	“	= ‘quoting’	*	= ‘stylizing’
				“		*	

Figure 2. Accommodation in Examples 2 and 3



Like Figure 2, Figure 3 involves accommodation, but it goes beyond Brian's speech to Taesik in including an additional layer of embedding. Figure 3 illustrates cases such as Example 4, in which Miss Thang quotes herself speaking to her mother.

Figure 3. Quoted accommodation in Example 4



In this case, quotation creates an intermediary level in which Miss Thang stylizes her past self speaking to her mother in an accommodating speech style. This style, like Brian's speech to Taesik, is a representation of immigrant speech, but it is not mocking.

Mockery enters the picture in Figure 4, which shows how the intermediary level in Figure 3 may be erased, as Miss Thang's quotation of her own accommodation to her mother's speech becomes a humorous act that potentially mocks her mother's speech.

Figure 4. Reinterpretation of Example 4 as mocking



The last set of diagrams, Figures 5 and 6, represent a case in which the erasure of the intermediary level is fully achieved: in Examples 5a and 5b, a non-immigrant's self-quotation of an accommodating act leads to mocking practices. Thus, as these figures illustrate, the intended meaning that is interactionally projected by an accommodating speaker has the potential for reinterpretation, particularly when embedded within a quoting act.

Figure 5. Quoted accommodation in Example 5a

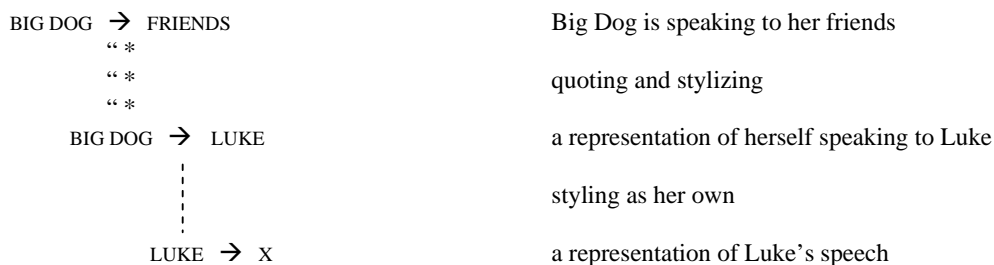


Figure 6. Mocking in Example 5b



BIG DOG → FRIENDS	Big Dog is speaking to her friends
“ *	
“ *	quoting and stylizing
“ *	
LUKE → X	a representation of Luke's speech

These schemata visually represent the complex dynamics of accommodation versus mocking, which is only interpretable through close analysis of both the interactional and the ethnographic context. Specifically, they illustrate that the multiple layers of framing involved in stylized quotations of styled speech are subject to a simplification that mirrors local ideologies of linguistic and social hierarchies. In other words, despite the initial framing of Big Dog's quotation of her accommodation to Luke, the deauthentication necessitated in her quotation of her own speech permits a reinterpretation that instead highlights local ideologies of immigrant and non-immigrant difference. According to these ideologies, her own non-immigrant identity stands in superior relation to Luke's immigrant identity.

## 5. The limits of accommodation

The preceding discussion has suggested that the deauthentication required in quotation broadens the field of interpretation, allowing quoted accommodation to be understood as mocking. I turn now to a case of accommodation that was not embedded in reported speech but nevertheless was in danger of receiving a mocking interpretation. The student who produced this ambiguous speech was Damon, a student who identified as black, Filipino, and Puerto Rican. Although Damon was not fluent in Tagalog, he sometimes erupted into playful Tagalog monologues lasting several seconds, as apparent insults to friends who did not speak the language at all. At other times, he shouted enthusiastic Tagalog greetings to Maria, one of his bilingual Tagalog-speaking Filipina American friends, when he saw her in the cafeteria. During the many instances that I observed this practice, Maria never reciprocated his Tagalog greetings, either appearing to ignore him or telling him to “shut up.” Knowing that his Tagalog abilities were minimal, she may have assumed that his greetings were less an opening to a Tagalog conversation than a symbolic claim about ethnic identity (Chun 2007b).

While Damon sometimes seemed flippant in his use of Tagalog, he often expressed to me a sincerity regarding his Filipino ethnic pride and eagerly aided me with my research project by explicitly discussing his Asian identity. For instance, he explained that although his mother, who was of Filipino and Puerto Rican heritage, had not taught him Tagalog, he had learned a few phrases from his grandmother. He was also teaching himself Tagalog using a tattered dictionary he carried with him daily in his backpack. In addition to his interest in Filipino symbolic practices, including wearing a miniature cloth national flag of the Philippines as a necklace, he could identify most of the other Filipino American students at the school. Thus understanding Damon's jocular uses of Tagalog as mocking was complicated by his expressed respect for Filipino culture. His uses of what I perceived to be attempts to use actual Tagalog words were in many ways different from the Mock Spanish that Hill (1999) critiques as racist. Hill has argued that the jocular use of stereotypical forms of Spanish by white monolingual English speakers in U.S. public contexts necessarily reflects negative stereotypes of Spanish speakers as “stupid, politically corrupt, sexually loose, lazy, dirty, and

disorderly” (1999: 683). In contrast, Damon generally appeared to hold Tagalog speakers in high esteem.

Damon’s practices bring to the fore the difficulties of characterizing languages and styles as inherently authentic or inauthentic to a speaker. On the one hand, Tagalog was a language with which he appeared to claim an intrinsic connection based on his Filipino ancestry and his close relationship with his Filipina grandmother. On the other, he presented markers that others may have interpreted as part of his ethnic blackness, such as his Afro hairstyle and ability to use African American English features as part of his everyday repertoire. While Damon may have regarded his Filipino ethnic displays, such as speaking Tagalog, as symbolic practices licensed by his Filipino community membership, these displays were necessarily juxtaposed with the local perception of his ethnic identity as more black than Asian; as he explained to me in an interview, “They think I’m black and white” (November 30, 2004). His limited abilities in Tagalog may also have betrayed his limited access to Tagalog-speaking social networks in the past, potentially putting his claim to Filipino ethnic authenticity on uneasy footing for some listeners.

Alongside the ideological ambiguity of Damon’s membership status with respect to the Filipino community, the interactional framing of his style was also somewhat ambiguous. His uses of Tagalog seemed to tend toward “spectacular” rather than “everyday” performances (Beeman 1993), unlike some of the other Filipino American students at the school who did not appear to purposefully draw attention to the flags on their backpacks or demonstrate their knowledge of Tagalog words. Damon seemed to engage in a kind of performance, which “puts the act of speaking on display - objectifies it, lifts it to a degree from its interactional setting and opens it to scrutiny by an audience” (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 73). In the sense that a stylized act is often regarded as a “quasi-theatrical” performance of style (Coupland 2001b: 346), Damon’s performance of ethnic symbols may be regarded as a stylization. Such performance necessitates a style’s decontextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990), such that it is temporarily held at a distance from the speaker’s authentic voice. In fact, Maria’s non-reciprocation of Damon’s loud greetings seems to support the interpretation that she understood his act as constructing his racial difference from her rather than creating a social connection based on their shared Filipino heritage. Perhaps more significantly, the incongruence between Damon’s Filipino symbols and his perceived non-Filipinoness, such as his phenotype and his linguistic limitations, seemed to automatically assign these symbols an inauthentic and performed status; ideologies of ethnic membership thus may have placed limits on the kinds of symbols he could style as his own.

## 6. Conclusion

In my examination of acts of accommodation and mocking among Asian American students at Diversity High School, I have demonstrated that the potential meanings of linguistic acts are not predetermined; even when they are presented in a specific interactional context, these acts are always subject to potential reinterpretation. Yet not all acts bear the same risk - or flexibility - of reinterpretation. In the case of Brian, who identified closely with a local Korean American immigrant group at the school, his use of accommodative strategies was successfully constructed as part of his authentic

stylistic repertoire. In the other examples I examined, such as cases in which accommodation acts were embedded in humorous narratives or stylized by a speaker with an ambiguous membership status, hierarchies between native and non-native forms of English were potentially reproduced and highlighted, thus encouraging a reading of these acts as mocking.

Central to this discussion has been the notion that speakers engage in language practices with a particular identity, a social positioning that results from and permits a particular trajectory of practices. Part of this identity is a speaker's habitus, which bears the imprint of her participation in these practices. Thus understandings of language practices must carefully consider their patterning across time - within a community and for a single speaker - as an act is never analyzable in isolation; it must be understood in relation to practices in the past and future. I have also emphasized that much of the meaning-making process depends on how linguistic acts are contextualized in interaction; such framing places speakers in relation to their speaking acts, such as through quotation, stylization, or the adoption of a style as their own. It is in this interactional context that acts are not only contextualized but potentially decontextualized and recontextualized, resulting in alternative candidates of interpretation.

At the same time, I have suggested that the recontextualizable status of linguistic forms does not license their freedom to transcend the ideological contexts from which they emerge. While forms of language may be tied to new contexts, these forms can recall past contexts, exhibiting forms of ideological "leakage" across contextual boundaries (Hill and Irvine 1993; Irvine 1996). In Big Dog's case, her quotation of her accommodation easily led to her friends' recalling of Asian immigrant stereotypes, suggesting the inherent instability of forms of Asian foreigner talk as a positive form of social connection. In the case of Damon, his ostensible attempts to claim Tagalog as his own were limited by ideologies of ethnic membership. Speakers such as Brian may be better positioned to construct such foreigner talk features as part of their authentic style, but there is always the potential for readings that make salient the ideological contrasts of language, race, nation, and power with which these stylistic features necessarily articulate.

While the present discussion of the negotiable meanings of stylistic acts has relevance to any kind of encounter between speakers, negotiations of this sort may be particularly salient for youth whose lives exist at the intersection of nations, cultures, and languages, such as the Asian Americans I have described. For these immigrants and children of immigrants, the salience of linguistic difference was reinforced by differences of generational status and cultural experience. Recognizable ways of speaking, or stylistic features, that were linked to immigrant and non-immigrant identities served as resources for fluent speakers of English who positioned themselves in relation to those they spoke to as well as those they spoke about.

At the same time, the examples demonstrate a slippage between lived experience and ideologies of cultural and linguistic difference. While it may be the case that the acts of accommodation and mocking analyzed above necessarily assumed and reproduced hierarchies of competence, membership, and value, these acts were also evidence of frequent and often positive social encounters between immigrants and non-immigrants. In other words, the boundaries of difference co-existed with ties of friendship and kinship. In light of this situation, the language of Asian American youth constitutes both an important and fruitful site for investigating the ambiguity between

linguistic acts that ostensibly create social sameness and those that inherently suggest social difference.

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