Co-constructing Identity: The Use of '*haafu*' by a Group of Bilingual Multi-ethnic Japanese Teenagers

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1. Introduction

Issues of multi-ethnic identity are gaining increased attention in Japan as the number of international marriages rises (Kawai, 1998), more so-called 'half-Japanese' babies are born (Lee, 1998), and children with multiple ethnic identities attempt to fit into an education system that has traditionally dictated assimilation and homogeneity over multiculturalism (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999; Takahashi & Vaipae, 1996). In places where multi-ethnic Japanese exist in community, such as in an international school (Ochs, 1993) or on American army bases (Williams, 1992), they develop a multicultural outlook on life which is manifested in an eclectic mix of language, tastes and worldviews.

Neither strictly 'half' nor 'double', multi-ethnic Japanese teenagers often find themselves crossing between their parents' cultures, as well as occupying the fluctuating middle ground in between (Greer, 2001). In order to adapt to the variety of situations in which they find themselves they develop a fluid understanding of ethnicity that enables them to cross racial and cultural borders (Stephan & Stephan, 1989) emphasizing different aspects of their identities according to the context and the language they are using (Ervin-Tripp, 1973) and using a mix of languages to demonstrate solidarity or distance according to the interlocutor's perceived group alliances (Kramsch, 1998).

Many bilingual people are similarly able to selectively foreground and background elements of their linguistic identities, even though their phenotype remains unchangeable, ready for others to invoke as they wish (Bailey, 2000). However, in the case of multi-ethnic people, even the physical cues to their heritage can be ambiguous and may allow them to resist ascription according to the changing linguistic context.

The present paper aims to document one such episode in which a group of Japanese teenagers from international families co-construct identities-in-interaction (Aronsson, 1998) through the ascription and attestation of the term *haafu* ('half'), which is the most commonly used social descriptor given to multi-ethnic people in Japan. Through an applied conversational analysis of approximately two minutes of group talk, it will examine, in particular, the ways in which the participants employ positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) and code-switching to align and disalign themselves with ascriptive societal images of exogamy and "mixed-race".

2. Discursively co-constructed identity

While traditional variationist sociolinguists assume a fixed notion of self in which identities are expressed rather than negotiated, the present study will adopt a post-structuralist approach whereby the notion of identity will be operationalised as a fluid, subjective position co-constructed at the discourse level. Blackledge and Pavlenko (2001) note that "post-structuralist scholarship theorizes identities as multiple, dynamic and subject to change, and the relationship between language and identity as mutually constitutive" (2001:249) and as such the focus here will be on the (re)negotiation of identity in bilingual conversation rather than on rigid sociopychological notions of identity based on fixed and assumed group memberships.

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Ethnomethodologist Harvey Sacks first introduced the notion that social identities are chiefly resources for the interactants themselves, a view that came to be known as Membership Categorization Analysis or MCA. He claimed that participants 'occasioned' various ordered collections such as male/female, expert/novice or driver/passenger by indexing their membership during sequences of talk. Here again, membership is neither fixed or assumed, although it may be discursively ascribed by others based on their assumptions and ultimately accepted or rejected by the participants.

Aronsson's notion of 'identity-in-interaction' (Aronsson, 1998) further theorizes discursively co-constructed identity by combining a number of other established sociological frameworks to analyze localized sequences of talk from the participants' perspective. Focusing on CA notions of embedded talk in prior and ensuing turns, Aronsson relocates social psychological issues within their discursively produced context, pointing to the responsive and formative dialogic nature of identity in locally achieved interaction. In particular, she points to the value of frames (Goffman, 1972; Tannen, 1993) and footing (Goffman, 1979), positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), voice, and alignment. It is with such a battery of micro-analytic tools that the present study will examine the ways in which the participants work through issues of multi-ethnic identity in their talk.

3. Background and approach to data collection

The segment of conversation examined in this analysis is taken from a focus group session, or more precisely, from a free conversation that continued on directly after the focus group session had officially finished. The participants were six Japanese teenagers from international families. Specifically, they each had one Japanese parent and one non-Japanese, native-English speaking parent, from Canada, the United States or Britain. For five of the six participants, the non-Japanese parent was their father. Their ages ranged from 14 to 18 at the time of recording and all were students at a medium size international school in Japan. They have been given pseudonyms for the purpose of this analysis.

The data were collected by the researcher during a pilot study for a more extensive investigation of codeswitching and multi-ethnic identity. The focus group session was the first time the students and I had met and English was used almost exclusively throughout the majority of the discussion. This was probably because they saw me as an outsider and perhaps an authority figure, and therefore someone with whom they were obliged to speak English. The international school which the students attend adopts an "English-only" policy, which in practice means that students speak English in formal situations and English-Japanese codeswitched speech among their peers. Although originally the wider aim of this focus group session was to discuss the participants' attitudes to codeswitching, one of my sub-agendas was to document the ethnic referents they applied to themselves, as well as those they rejected when ascribed by others.

Before analyzing the particular segment of talk in detail, it may be pertinent to give a brief explanation about the nature of the focus group as a qualitative methodology. Its aim is to collect data through group interaction focused on the participants rather than the researcher, who instead acts primarily as a facilitator rather than an interviewer by using a discussion guide to encourage group members to talk among themselves (Morgan, 1997). Although most commonly employed in business for market research, focus groups are being used increasingly in education, psychology, and the social sciences (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). A large amount of relevant information can be gathered in a short period of time and the opinions of others in the group generate further discussion which leads to richer data than can be obtained by using a conventional survey instrument. However, Agar and MacDonald (1995) note that the structure of a focus group session sets certain constraints on the interaction it produces. Typically, these include short turn length, a tendency toward moderator control and situations in which a few participants dominate the talk. All of these can be noted to varying degrees in the data analyzed in the present study.

Ordinarily focus group data is then transcribed and coded according to the content of the discussion. However in this study, I will adopt an Applied CA approach to examine not only *what* is being said, but *how* it is being said and the way in which that affects the participants' sequentially emerging discursively co-constructed identities. The dialogues in each sub-section represent a total of around two minutes of conversation in which the participants attend to societal images of "mixed-race". While they have been arranged in eight segments to facilitate the present analysis, they do in fact represent one continuous conversation and readers are reminded that for the real-time participants there is no pause in between segments to consider what is happening.

4. Analysis of data

Segment 1: It's because you're *haafu* (Turns 1-9)

As mentioned in section 3, the talk to be examined here stemmed from a more general discussion of language use during the focus group and actually occurred after the session had officially ended. In this sense, the language is somewhat more natural than that which took place earlier in the focus group because the participants address each other far more than they did the researcher. Since Eli and Erika were carrying on their conversation of multi-ethnic identity I restarted the tape recorder just as Eli was saying, "…was the fact that you were, well it was not like you didn't like it but you felt uncomfortable that you had two separate…". Transcription conventions are listed in the appendix.

```
1  Erika:     I didn't (.4) I didn't feel uncomfortable at all(.) it felt
              uncomfortable when-
2  Eli:                                [no but I don't like it when-
3  Erika:                              [whenever I'd done (.4) something
              good um (.2)  it was like oh it's because you're half
4  Peter:     Half and-
5  Erika:             ->hashiru no ga hayakattara: ne (.)marason taikai
              de ichii ni nattara (.)haafu dakara atarimae dayo tte
              iwareru  to<
              'If you're a fast runner and you get first place in a
              marathon and they say "Yeah naturally because she's half"'
              (.4) mutto shite
                 'it pisses me off'
6  Others:    ha ha hah
7  Erika:     ((hotto [shite))
              'like, get lost'
8  Others:            [shee ha hah(.)
9  Erika:     That(.4) that I don't need↘
```

Erika rejects Eli's attempt to interpret her feelings for her, possibly to avoid being positioned (Davies & Harré, 1990) as someone who is confused about her ethnic identity. The mid-turn self-repair in turn 1 indicates disagreement between the speakers' interpretations.

Erika's self-selection in turn 5 may be related to her overlap with Eli in turn 3. Li Wei (1994) notes that codeswitching can be employed as a turn security device. Bilingual speech generally maintains a preference for same language interaction (Auer, 1984) with the implication being that cooperative speakers will respond in the language in which they are addressed. The competition for turn creates a linguistic contrast such that the participants' attention is drawn to the codeswitching speaker, allowing him or her to win the overlap. In this case Eli has self-selected in a bid for turn, and Erika attempts to re-seize the floor while obeying the same-language convention. She is successful in her bid, and continues her talk in turn 3 but when interrupted again by Peter in turn 4, she codeswitches to regain control of the conversation. Other elements of Erika's speech accompany this switch; higher pitch, a

stronger intonation, increased volume and speed; the kinds of prosodic features commonly found in monolingual speech which attempts to fulfill the same function.

Erika's codeswitched outburst is significant because it is clear that she is using it to address her peers rather than the (non-Japanese) researcher. The tone of the utterance and Erika's idiosyncratic use of onomatopoeic slang terms in Japanese like *mutto shitte* and *hotto shite* in turns 5 and 7 not only produce a comic effect, but, on later consultation with native-speakers, these two expressions were determined to be indicative of teenage speech in Japanese. Along with the pace and emotion with which they were delivered, they create a decided juxtaposition to Erika's English speech in this conversation, which would otherwise be regarded as reasonably standard.

This reinforces the notion that the codeswitch is intended for Eli and the other participants rather than the non-Japanese researcher. Although I had told the group at the start of the session that I speak Japanese and they were welcome to use either language, the majority of the formal discussion had been carried out in English up until this sequence. At this stage in the talk-in-interaction, I hadn't really backed up my claims to Japanese proficiency with an extended turn in Japanese so Erika's switch back to English in turn 9 could also be viewed as a coda giving an evaluative assessment of the narrative ("that, I don't need") for the outsider's benefit, perhaps as an explanation for the recipient laughter in turns 6 and 8. Alfonzetti (1998) maintains that one reason bilingual speakers codeswitch is to signal the end of a narrative sequence by using the contrastive juxtaposition of the two codes to enact a change in footing from narrator back to participant. At the same time here Erika seems to be signaling her return to English as the preferred medium of communication in this conversation.

An additional motivation for Erika's codeswitch in turn 5 might be argued in terms of her own language competency. Erika demonstrates trouble in expressing her thoughts in turns 1 and 3 in the face of bids for turn from other members. The codeswitch in turn 5 could also indicate that Erika has reverted to her stronger language in order to reserve the turn.

From an identity-in-interaction perspective, the switch to Japanese in turn 5 also serves the function of implicitly identifying the nationality of those who position her as *haafu*. In turn 3, she begins the narrative in English, but the reiteration in Japanese in turn 5 tends to indicate that it was Japanese people who said "*haafu dakara atarimae dayo*" ("Yeah, naturally because she's half"). Reported speech has been widely documented as one of the key functions of codeswitching (Auer, 1995) and in this case the Japanese gloss of the English "oh it's because you're half' makes it even clearer that Erika is reporting direct speech because of the passive verb, *iwareru,* which denotes that someone has said this about her, without actually mentioning who the speaker was.

Another salient point to be gained from this segment of talk is that the participants use both the terms 'half' and its phonological equivalent '*haafu*'. In standard English, a phrase like "it's because you're half' would strike most native speakers as incomplete. However, the participants have reclaimed the word from Japanese, itself a kind of borrowing, and this expression would be highly understandable by all members in this discussion. It is important to note that at this stage in the discussion this is the first occurrence of *haafu* as a referent for multi-ethnic Japanese people, and becomes the springboard for further investigation into its usage later in the sequence.

Erika's codeswitch to Japanese in turn 5 appears to have been successful, even if it is a dispreffered act in bilingual speech. The narrative account concerning her experience of being positioned as a proficient athlete because of her mixed genetic background, and her indignant response to this characterization seems to hit a chord with her audience, and is ratified by laughter in turns 6 and 8, indicating that the other members have perhaps had similar experiences, or at least can empathize with her.

Segment 2*: Gaijin dakara…*it's because you're foreign (Turns 10-18)

Erika's coda in turn 9 signals the end of her story and allows Luke to self-select with his own narrative about another Japanese racial epithet, *gaijin*, in turns 10-14. The word *gaijin* is often translated as "foreigner" but more literally means "outsider" or "non-Japanese".

```
10 Luke:      When I started in the Japanese school((inaudible))
              and we were learning English, when I read in front of the
              class (.2)
11 TG:        mm
12 Luke:      I (.) I had(.3) I have uh pretty good pronunciation(.)
              well it was better than anyone else and it was like gaijin
              dakara
                                                  '(That's) because
              he's a foreigner'
13 TG:        Oh, right
14 Luke:      You know
15 Erika:     But if you don't take 100% then they think(.) why↗
16 Peter:     Yeah right
17 Erika:     You're (Gaijin, aren't you↗)
18            (1)
```

Luke refers to an incident when he was studying at a public Japanese school and his classmates positioned him as *gaijin* because of his native-like pronunciation in English. This sequence again relates to Japanese constructions of multi-ethnic Japanese and indicates that the previous narrative by Erika is also understood by the participants to refer to Japanese images of "mixed-race". However, as Luke chooses to relate his experience in English, along with non-verbal cues such as the direction in which he was facing, the researcher is ratified as the intended recipient. The mid-turn codeswitch in turn 12 "*gaijin dakara*" is another example of reported speech which provides further evidence that this evaluation of Luke's English ability was given by his Japanese peers.

However, the researcher's response to this narrative is limited. In turn 11, I offer a backchannel which yields the turn back to Luke and signals approval for an extended turn. This is followed in turn 13 with a reactive token which demonstrates a minimal display of acknowledgement and is employed as a means to avoid taking a full turn. This was probably because I was still attending to Erika's use of *haafu* in turn 5. At this stage in my research I was unsure of the appropriate address terms to use with the group and I had been meaning to broach the subject in this session as one of my sub-agendas. It is also possible that I was internally formulating my next question (turn 19), which I wanted to deliver in Japanese (see next segment). In addition, I wanted to encourage the participants to talk more among themselves, as the focus group had been relatively facilitator-centered up until this sequence.

As a result, Luke signals the completion of his narrative in turn 14 with "You know?", widening his intended audience with an invitation for other members to speak and appealing for recipient alignment. This allows Erika to self-select in turn 15 and reiterate the theme proffered in her earlier narrative about unfair expectations being placed on multi-ethnic Japanese, which in turn is ratified by Peter in turn 16. At this stage, the participants are not questioning the terms *haafu* and *gaijin* themselves, but rather the way they are used in mainstream Japanese society to construct unrealistic images of an individual's physical or linguistic ability based on societal views of ethnicity and "race".

Segment 3: Defending the use of *haafu* (Turns 19-29)

In the following segment the researcher problemizes the word *haafu* as a referent for multi-ethnic Japanese people to use among themselves and discovers a range of opinions from the group.

```
19  TG:       Saki hodo haafu toiu iikata ga detan desu kedo(.) sore wa
              minna futsuuni tsukatteiruno↗ Jibun no koto
               'You just mentioned the word "half". Is that a word that
               you all commonly use? About yourselves?'
20 Erika:     Iwareru =
              'People call us that'
                      =[I didn't y-
21 Eli:                [um-
22 Erika:                      -I didn't really use(.) I didn't really
              like
23 TG:        Mm
24 Erika:     the way they use that
25 Karen:     I always like haafu better than gaijin
                            'half'            'foreigner'
26 Erika:     [Gaijin wa=
              'foreigner is…'
27 Eli:       [Gaijin-
28 Peter:               =It's better than gaijin but I don't really like
              'haafu'
29 Luke:      I don't I don't care [about that
```

The silence in turn 18 becomes a transition relevant place and indicates that the participants have selected me, the facilitator, as next speaker. This allows me to change the topic and proffer the question that I have been preparing during the previous sequence. I deliberately choose to codeswitch by posing my inquiry in Japanese in turn 19. This is the first extended turn I have made in Japanese after almost an hour of interaction with the focus group, so to a certain extent this represents a dramatic change of voice for me as an outsider. I am not only attempting to demonstrate my linguistic proficiency in Japanese, but also tacitly indicating an implied comprehension of Erika's earlier narrative which she had probably intended more for her peers. More importantly, my switch here also conveys Japanese as an acceptable form of communication within the bounds of this discussion, which would otherwise be marked speech with non-Japanese adults in the institutional setting of the international school. As an outsider I am therefore attempting to construct myself as different to the participants' teachers by signaling that they are free to codeswitch with me.

However, as someone who is yet to provide much physical or linguistic evidence to back up his claims to Japanese ability, this initial turn runs the risk of being taken as "crossing" (Rampton, 1995), a form of language alternation in which the speaker is not recognized as belonging to the in-group. The way that I formulate my question demonstrates a versant understanding of Japanese syntax and pragmatics which might back up my claims to fluency, but it still does not in itself afford me the right to claim in-group membership. My Japanese has a slight Australian-English accent, such that native speakers may recognize some phonological interference, particularly at phrasal endings. In addition, the use of honorifics (*saki hodo*) and polite verb endings (*desu*) in this turn adds a social distance between me and my interlocutors, as is appropriate in Japanese for someone posing a personal question at a first time meeting. Moreover, the power difference between researcher and participants may be emphasized by the use of the interrogative marker *no*, which can sound either familiar or condescending, depending on the relationship between the interlocutors.

At any rate, as the question itself indirectly takes Erika to task on her use of the word *haafu* in turn 5, Erika self-selects, reserving the turn with a rapid response in Japanese according to the bilingual preference for same-code continuation, but quickly switching back to English indicating her rejection of

my attempt to steer the conversation into Japanese. Her immediate response "*iwareru*" (turn 20) indicates she feels that *haafu* is a word that others use about multi-ethnic Japanese and her protests in turns 22-24 recognize that this is not necessarily the way she would identify herself. In other words, she disaligns herself with my positioning of her as 'someone who uses the word *haafu* about herself'. Her shift back to English re-establishes that language as the main mode of communication, at least for out-group interaction.

Erika's response to my question is the second part of an adjacency pair, or in CA terms a second pair part. Preferred second pair parts, such as expected answers or acceptance of offers, are usually structurally simple and occur without delay, whereas dispreferred seconds are marked by hedges or pauses, or in bilingual speech by linguistic contrast through codeswitching (Li Wei, 1994). In this case Erika's response is dispreferred because she is defending herself and disputing my understanding of her use of the word *haafu*.

Turns 25-29 contain a number of brief turns in which the speakers rapidly compete for turn allocation, indicating a high level of interest in the topic. Karen disagrees with Erika's rejection of *haafu* (turn 25), maintaining that it is more appropriate than *gaijin* as an identifier for multi-ethnic Japanese. Both Erika and Eli begin to respond with an evaluation of the term *gaijin* but their overlap causes them to abort their bid for turn in deference to the one speaker rule. Peter then self-selects to signal his agreement with Erika while also reinforcing Karen's view of *gaijin* as worse than *haafu*.

In turn 29 Luke attempts to disalign himself with the developing representation of *haafu* and *gaijin* as negative terms, but is cut off by Eli's codeswitch to Japanese in turn 30. Table 1 provides a summary of the way the speakers position themselves at this particular point in the talk-in-interaction with regard to the terms Japanese ascribe to them.

Table 1 A diagrammatical representation of participants' change in footing regarding the two words *haafu* and *gaijin*.

Time	***Turn***	***Speaker***	***position***				
			Best	**Better**	**Neutral**	**Worse**	**Worst**
10.48 seconds	Turns 22-24	Erika				*haafu*	
	Turn 25	Karen		*haafu*		*gaijin*	
	Turn 28	Peter				*haafu*	*gaijin*
	Turn 29	Luke			*haafu/gaijin*		

As can be seen, the question of a single appropriate referent for this group of people is a point of contention between the speakers. In ten and a half seconds they put forward four different opinions about the two terms and consequently co-construct a deeper understanding of the pragmatic force behind the referents. In this brief exchange they have discursively adapted elements of their ethnic identity according to the unfurling linguistic context.

Segment 4: *Konketsuji*… What's that? (Turns 30-39)

In the next segment, Erika brings up a third referent used to refer to multi-ethnic Japanese people, *konketsuji*, which literally means 'mixed blood child' but has an illocutionary effect somewhat like 'half-breed'. The group demonstrates a variety of understandings of this word, from disbelief and rejection to bewildered incomprehension.

```
30  Erika:     ((laughing))          [konketsuji ga ichiban iya da
                                      'Half-breed is the worst'
31 Others:     un heh heh hheh HAH
32 TG:         sore wa hidoi
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                ‘That’s terrible’
33 Erika:       obasan ni (.) anta konketsuji toka tte hhh
                ‘By some lady. She goes, “You half-breed”.’
34 Eli:         Woah!!
35              (.8)
36  Karen:      What’s that↗
37  Erika:      ha konketsuji (.) Chi ga majitteiru tte koto (.) [ma-
                ‘Half-breed. It means your blood is mixed.   Mi-
38 Peter:                                                        [ore-
                                                                  ‘I’
39 Erika:       Ma(.)mazatta chi to kaite
                ‘You write it((with the Chinese character for))m(.)mixed
                -blood’
```

Erika’s reversion to Japanese in turn 30 serves a similar function to her codeswitched interruption in turn 5, wrenching the floor from the speaker mid-turn by providing a linguistic contrast. At the same time, it is accompanied by laughter that further indicates that it is being directed towards her peers rather than the researcher. She proffers an additional ascription, *konketsuji* (mixed-blood) and a negative assessment of the term. However the jocular tone identifies her opinion as one that is not entirely serious, and the recipients’ laughter also ratifies that assessment. On the other hand, as an outsider my reaction to this term is in contrast to the light-hearted mood of the participants and my Japanese utterance in turn 32 notifies them that I consider it a much stronger word than they do. This may account for the pursuant change of tone in turns 33 and 34 and the micro-pause in turn 35. As an adult, my opinion on such a potentially controversial issue may hold some sway, particularly when it is at odds to the current group consensus. The participants may also be acknowledging the presence of the outsider in their midst by accommodating their assessment of the ascription to mine, as Erika initially did with *haafu* in turn 20.

However, if *konketsuji* is an offensive term, it is not one that is used often in the experience of this particular group of teenagers. In turn 36 Karen makes this clear by her question, “What’s that?” occasioning Erika’s switch back to Japanese to give a literal explanation based on the Japanese reading of the Sino-Japanese characters that make up the word (see below). Erika’s motivation for not reciprocating the codeswitch here may be two-fold. Firstly, the rapid pace at which these turns are delivered make it likely that Erika is in fact continuing on in Japanese without much recognition that Karen has framed the question in English, particularly considering its short and fairly standard structure. Secondly, the literal explanation is expedited by referring to the way the word is written in Japanese. Erika supplies her own gloss on *konketsuji* by using the Japanese reading of two of the main compound Kanji characters of which it consists.

Sino-Japanese reading	混血児 *konketsuji* “half-breed”
Erika’s Japanese gloss	混ざった血 mazatta chi “mixed blood”

An English explanation here (‘mixed-blood’) would no doubt also have sufficed but the lexical connection between the meaning and its pronunciation would not be as readily apparent. Erika does not switch to English because it is more convenient for her to continue her explanation in Japanese. This is

an example of what Auer (1984) terms preference-related rather than competence-related switching. In this case the medium of Japanese facilitates a fuller understanding of the lexical item in question. Implicit in such an explanation is the expectation that Karen, as interlocutor, has not only a bilingual understanding of the spoken Japanese but at least some biliterate comprehension of both the Chinese and Japanese origins of the written language. From Karen's perspective, the fact that she had not come across this term may in fact be competence-related but in acknowledging Japanese as her interlocutor's dominant language by remaining in that medium Erika demonstrates her preference for a Japanese gloss of a Japanese word in this case. Such codeswitching is primarily related to the discourse itself rather than a direct expression of bilingual identity, but by giving her definition in Japanese, Erika implies an expectation that Karen will be able to comprehend it.

Segment 5: *Zasshu*… that's like a dog or something (Turns 40-49)

In the next segment, Peter takes the opportunity to relate the story he preempted in turn 38. This narrative has been made relevant by Erika's introduction of the alternative racial epithet *konketsuji* and Peter tenders a further term *zasshu*, which, as Eli mentions in turn 42, is a term normally reserved for mixed-breeds in animals, particularly dogs.

```
40 Peter:     ore zasshu to iwaretchatta
              'I was called mongrel'
41 Others:    ((loud laughter)) ooh ha ha HUH
              ((jocular hand clap))
              that's (a good one)
42 Eli:       (laughing) Zasshu↗ That's like you're a dog or something
                 'Mongrel?'
43 Peter:     Mm. ((casts gaze down at desk))
44 Eli:      ((Sees it is perhaps not a laughing matter and changes her
              tone of voice))
              Zasshu↗(.6) ° Zasshu↗°
              'Mongrel?' ° 'Mongrel?'°
45 Erika:     Nani↘ Kodomo ni↗
              'What? By some kid?'
46 Peter:     Un
              'Yeah'
47  Eli:      How could someone say that
48 Peter:     ((smiling again))hee ha Hidokunai↗
                      'Don't you think that's terrible?'
49 Others:    ((somewhat more subdued laughter)) ° ha ha ha ↘ °
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The Japanese verb ending *chatta* in turn 40 indicates that Peter has negative feelings about having the word ascribed to him, but within the local context of this talk-in-interaction, the recipients interpret it as an appropriate place to laugh perhaps because Erika and Eli have made jocularity an appropriate response in the preceding turns. The verb ending *te-shimau* used here in its colloquial past tense form *chatta* indicates that the action (in this case, being called *zasshu*) produced unexpected or inconvenient results (Kaiser, Ichikawa, Kobayashi, & Yamamoto, 2001) but the severity with which Peter uses it in this particular instance is unclear. In an earlier sequence during the focus group, Peter related several incidents in which he had been referred to as 'Chinkie' and even 'Nigger' while living in Britain the previous year. It seems that humor is one way that multi-ethnic Japanese learn to cope with racial epithets, but this may only be a surface reaction as indicated during the unfurling turns in this segment.

The laughter reaches its crescendo in turn 41 accompanied by a loud handclap from one of the participants. However at this point Peter's body language is at odds with the evolving comical framing of *zasshu*. Although this transcript is based on an audio recording, Peter's body language referred to in

this segment was so striking that I remembered it and included it later in my notes. It is also attended to by the other participants within the localized context of the talk-in-interaction. He has cast his gaze down and is staring at the desk and Eli attends to this in turn 42. Her English gloss of the epithet, "*Zasshu*? That's like you're a dog or something", serves to vocalize the group's collective understanding of the illocutionary strength of the Japanese word, as demonstrated by the dramatic reduction in the laughter as a result of the lexical contrast produced by the turn-internal medium switch. Eli attends to Peter's minimal acknowledgement and disengaged eye contact by adopting a more sensitive tone of voice as the laughter subsides. Erika likewise adopts a more serious tone of voice and attempts to illicit further information from Peter, by asking who it was that called him *zasshu*. This is significant not only because the term *zasshu* is evolving as one with greater potential to insult, but also because Erika is Peter's older sister and even though they are very close, her question implies that they have never talked about this topic. Multi-ethnic teenagers may tend to suffer in silence rather than discuss such incidents with their family and peers. This focus group, which was made up entirely of Japanese teenagers who have one non-Japanese parent, was perhaps a rare opportunity for them to discuss such topics in an open, sympathetic environment.

Nonetheless, in turn 48, Peter adopts again his tough façade, smiling and laughing at the term *zasshu*, implying that he would prefer to put it behind him. Multi-ethnic Japanese children and teenagers, particularly boys, are often victims of institutional bullying (*ijime*) in Japan (Daulton & Seki, 2000). It is possible that Peter and the other participants have learnt that adopting a jocular attitude to such name-calling is one way of avoiding being categorized as ethnically different, something Day describes as "resistance to ethnification" (Day, 1998). The subdued laughter from the others in turn 49 acknowledges the ascription as laughable, but no longer to the same extent as it was at the beginning of the sequence.

Segment 6: *Haafu* is the best word for us (Turns 50-55)

As the discussion tends to be focusing on other-ascribed referents rather than those words that the participants prefer to use when describing their multi-ethnic identity, in the next section of talk, the researcher attempts to steer the conversation back to his original question from turn 19 about the words they use for themselves.

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50 TG:        Sore wa:: ma(.) minna kara iwareru n dakedo(.) jibun kara
              iu nowa nihongo de nan to iu no ↘
              'That's, well, what everyone else calls you, but what do
              you call yourselves in Japanese?'
51 Peter:     Haafu
52 Erika:     Haafu
53 Karen:     Haafu
54 Eli:       Haafu
55 Peter:     Haafu ga ichiban ii n dayo
              'Half is the best word for us'
```

Once again this segment begins with the researcher refocusing the conversation at a TRP by deliberately forming his turn in Japanese. In this case the group does not switch back to English, probably because I specifically asked them for a response in Japanese. When asked directly to chose the ethnic referent which they felt most comfortable with, most of the participants respond with '*haafu*' in rapid succession, along with an upgraded assessment of the term from Peter, privileging it as the best word to describe them (*haafu ga ichiban ii n dayo*). This is surprising, given that they have earlier mentioned that they don't appreciate the term being used by other people. The implication is that the participants in this group both align to the term haafu as an in-group referent and disalign when it is ascribed to them by others.

Segment 7: Contesting the use of *Haafu* and *Gaijin* by others (Turns 56- 61)

Next, Luke reiterates a point about the word *gaijin*, positioning himself as non-Japanese and gaining both support and resistance from other participants.

```
56  Luke:      Well I don't really care if people call me (.) gaijin cos
               I am a foreigner
                                                          'foreigner'
57 TG:         Hhh
58 Erika:      I don't really (.) I don't really care(.) but sometimes
               when they're (.6) too fake(.) ° it's like↘°
59 Eli:        I always used to hate that(.) like gaijin gaijin gaijin
               gaijin
                                        'foreigner, foreigner, foreigner,
               foreigner'
               But now(.)Right now I have the ability to look back at them
               and say(.) yeah I'm a gaijin and you can't speak English
               ha ha ha=
60 Peter:              =Whenever s=
61  Eli:                          =Ima sara deshoo
                                  'it's too late for that now'
```

Luke's statement in turn 56 is in contrast to the emerging theme of resistance to ethnification, both in terms of its content and its linguistic mode. He adopts an adverse linguistic footing by codeswitching back to English to position himself as a *gaijin*. Coming from someone who was born and raised in Japan and who has Japanese nationality, Luke's alignment with a term that essentially means "non-Japanese" is surprising. Earlier in the focus group discussion he had related an incident in which he was refused a part-time job washing dishes because he didn't look Japanese enough. Physically, Luke does appear more 'Caucasian' than Asian so it is possible that he has accepted some of the ethnic ascription that has been applied to him from his Japanese peers. Framing his assertion here in English here may serve to emphasize his alignment with "Western" culture, but more likely it is only serving a discourse function because he is directing his comments chiefly to me as the researcher, someone he has demonstrated in segment 2 and earlier in the focus group that he sees as an interviewer and a representative of English speaking cultures.

In turn 58 Erika attempts to hedge her earlier assertions of resistance in order to align herself to Luke and recast herself as not overly concerned about the issue, much in the same way that Peter's casual attitude and the laughter did in segment 5. Eli takes up on the positioning of the word *gaijin* as a positive ascription, noting that it implies knowledge of English, an elite language in Japan.

Segment 8: What of it? (Turns 62-66)

In the final segment, Peter and Erika give a commentary on how to disalign from an unwanted ethnic ascription, demonstrating that they have considerable experience with such situations.

```
62 Peter:      Whenever so:mebody calls me um (.) gaijin I just say (.)
               j-just say like 'dakara'
                                 'So what?'
63 Others:     HeheHEH HA:::
64 Peter:      yeah ↗ and they they just knock off so it's (.) kekko ii
                                                          'pretty good'
```

```
65  Erika:    "gaijin da" ttsara
              'When they say, "It's a foreigner"'
              "soh dayo"
              '(I say) "Yeah that's right"'
66 Peter:     "Dakara nan da"
              'What of it?'
```

Here Erika and Peter formulate a plan for resisting ethnication that is not found in Day's data. They suggest that the ethnified should adopt an attitude of acceptance and then challenge the ethnifier to its relevance. This is the most obvious example in which the participants are challenging forced notions of ethnicity. Again, the switch to Japanese in turns 65 and 66 are to accommodate quoted speech and imply that the ethnifiers in this hypothetical frame are Japanese. The example given here is probably a generic conglomerate of a number of different past situations in which the participants have been positioned as foreign based on their looks.

Peter's hesitation in turns 62 and 64, such as the micro-pauses, stuttered speech and turn-final switch, are more competence-related rather than having any direct relevance to the force with which he is attempting to speak. His strong tone of voice in turn 66 make it clear that he believes what he is saying here, even if he is having some trouble expressing it in English. In my later experiences with Peter I found that a slight stutter is typical of his speech in English.

5. Discussion

As can be seen from these data, the most acceptable term for multi-ethnic Japanese is still something of an issue in Japan even for those most directly concerned. In mainstream Japanese society, the word *haafu* enjoys many positive nuances, inferring on its recipients cosmopolitan qualities of internationalism, elite bilingualism and worldly experience. However, many parents of multi-ethnic Japanese children oppose this term for its negative connotations in English ("half-breed", "half-caste") and for its nuance of incompleteness (McCarty, 1996), which denies their children access to one of their cultures (Moriki, 2000). Instead some intercultural families in Japan have begun using the term *daburu* or "double" (Life, 1995) in order to give a fuller description of their children's bicultural experience.

Yet, as Singer (2000) warns, multi-ethnic children in Japan have to "tread the fine line between self-confidence and conceit" (2000:77) because by using the term 'double' they risk sounding arrogant or boastful in front of their Japanese classmates, an unforgivable sin in a society which values group harmony over individual prowess. Some parents also regard the term *daburu* as counter-productive because of the unfair pressure it places on children to be 'double(ly) good and talented' (2000:80). The participants in this particular focus group did not mention the word *daburu* (double) or other recent terms like *kokusaijin* (international) or English referents like multi-ethnic or 'biracial'. Instead they seemed to accept the term '*haafu'* at least by way of default, recognizing that in some contexts it is less bother to bear it than to dispute it. As bilingual teenagers, they are acutely aware that *haafu* is acceptable in Japanese but less so in English.

Yet it is perhaps this discrepancy between the Japanese and non-Japanese interpretations of *haafu* that brought about this whole conversational thread. When the researcher, as an outsider, challenged Erika's use of *haafu* in turn 5, she was quick to point out that it was others that were using the word, not her. Outsiders, particularly non-Japanese parents and authority figures demonstrate a greater reaction to *haafu* and this creates a conflict of interest for multi-ethnic Japanese as they try to please both camps.

The negotiation of ethnic identity is not something that happens as clearly as this on a daily basis. It is only because the researcher has occasioned it that this conversation is occurring at all. In most situations, the everyday co-construction of ethnicity is carried out at a much more subtle level.

This will be explored further in my on-going ethnographic investigation of communication at the international school in Japan.

As a first contact experience for a more extensive ethnography of communication study, knowledge of how the informants label themselves was both pragmatic, and exploratory. Initially my interest in their use of *haafu* was primarily so that I could gauge the most appropriate way to address them as a group. In fact in my later daily dealings with them I adopted what seems to be the most common practice among the participants themselves; not referring to them by any ethnic category at all. It seems the only time someone refers to them as *haafu* or *gaijin* is when they particularly want to index their ethnic identity, such as in the talk analyzed in this study.

Finally, there is one more interesting observation to be made about the tone of the talk in this analysis. Although the transcript tends to render it a fairly dark topic, the participants treat it with an overwhelmingly jocular attitude. There are numerous instances of laughter and the group resist the ethnification (Day, 1998) by ridiculing it. This may be one method of coping with the gravity of the topic, particularly within the company of peers.

6. Conclusion

The conclusions to be drawn from this analysis are necessarily tentative having been based on a limited amount of data, but they do bear comparison to similar discourse analytic studies of language alternation and the co-construction of identity in interaction (Bailey, 2000; Bailey, 2001; Cashman, 2001; Lo, 1999). As such it is important to note that the participants' identities are not fixed, but co-constructed though and by the local unfurling sequence of their talk. Their position towards the referents that are applied to them by Japanese people vary between individuals and contexts. Their level of acceptance changes even throughout the two minutes of conversation dealt with in this paper. They adapt their attitudes towards the use of *haafu* when challenged by a non-Japanese outsider, demonstrating that they realize it can have negative connotations for native English speakers, but at the same time they use it unquestioned among themselves, perhaps because they have been ethnified that way by others throughout their lives. Depending on the situation in which the participants find themselves, the word *haafu* is tolerated and ignored, assumed and ascribed, accepted and attested.

This is particularly the case in first-time meetings, as in this situation. The focus group setting allowed me as a ethnographer to gain access to a deeper understanding of the participants' reactions to the word *haafu* than would normally be allowed to outsiders at a casual first time meeting. However, the reaction is inevitably the same, whether from a researcher or a curious child, multi-ethnic people are routinely met with the inquiry, "What are you?" (Gaskins, 1999). Their position at the borders of established definitions of ethnicity and "race" allows them to (re)define themselves according to the context and interlocutor. In the case of multi-ethnic Japanese, bilingual proficiency is also an expected part of what it means to be *haafu*. For this group, codeswitching played an important role in both participant and discourse related aspects of their bilingual speech, allowing them to direct comments at their peers or the researcher according to the language they employed.

One of the limitations of the present study may be the mode in which the data was collected. The talk arose from a focus group session, which allowed the researcher to occasion certain topics by participating in the conversation, even if it was originally adjunct to the main theme of the discussion. If I hadn't questioned Erika's use of the word *haafu* in line 19, the talk would probably have continued without any noticeable challenge to the credibility of the referent. This does not invalidate the findings, but it does place the onus on the researcher to acknowledge his part in the discussion, which in this case in fact turned out to be a useful demonstration of the differing illocutionary power the word *haafu* holds for multi-ethnic Japanese teenagers and native-English speaking parents. Even so, further research will focus on similar kinds of positioning and discursively co-constructed identity in natural conversations which do not involve the researcher and are therefore expected to be far more subtle than the kind of

language data obtained in the study.

The terms the group listed represent only some of the words that are currently used in Japan to describe multi-ethnic Japanese. The teenagers in this study were able to identify a variety of racial epithets and euphemisms that are used about them in both English and Japanese, even if they disagreed about the strength that these words hold. It would seem that most of the participants involved in this study identify themselves as *haafu* but don't always appreciate being positioned that way by others. As Japanese is their first language, they are no doubt acutely aware of the generally positive intentions Japanese people have when using the word. The *haafu* referent is inescapable for multi-ethnic people in Japan and to varying degrees most tend to learn to live with it as a label, particularly from those they don't know well. Parents who accept the word *haafu* often prefer not to make an issue out of it for the sake of their children's self-concepts (Singer, 2000). Like the word *gaijin*, it is not always intended to be derogatory, even if it is taken that way.

However this does not mean that all multi-ethnic Japanese will identify with the *haafu* referent. Researchers must respect that ownership of these terms is privileged by group membership and while some participants may call themselves *haafu* this does not automatically afford outsiders the right to use it. Many multi-ethnic Japanese people who recognize the negative connotations of this word are becoming increasingly reluctant to have their identities imposed on them by others (Life, 1995; Murphy-Shigematsu, 1997). Ideally the future will see the decline of terms based on binary notions of ethnicity such as 'double' and 'half', in recognition of the dynamic and shifting in-between culture which is closer to the experience of not only multi-ethnic people, but perhaps all of us who have access to more than one worldview.

Appendix

Transcription conventions

`[`	marks overlapping talk
`(.4)`	marks silence, in tenths of a second
`(.)`	indicates a micropause
`((`*`jocular hand clap`*`))`	indicates non-verbal behaviour
`gaijin dakara`	italics indicates talk is in Japanese
`'Because he's a foreigner'`	single quotes indicate an English translation of Japanese talk
`hh, hee, hah, heh`	indicate laughter or breathiness
`!`	denotes emotion
<u>`dog`</u>	underlining marks emphasis
`HUH`	capitals mark increased loudness
`:`	indicates that the preceding sound has been lengthened
↗	indicates a rise in pitch

↘	indicates a drop in pitch
°	marks talk which is softer
><	indents mark talk which is compressed, faster

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