

The invisibility of Asian American women:  
Gender and dialect recognition of Asian American New Yorkers

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The poster reports data on dialect recognition with a focus on Asian Americans by undergraduates at an urban public New York liberal arts college all of whom grew up in the NY metropolitan area. Judges listened to one of two sets of eight same-sex speakers reading a short (approx: 25 second) passage. Each set consisted of 2 Korean Americans, 2 Chinese Americans, 2 European Americans, 1 Latino, and 1 African American. All were born in New York or arrived before beginning kindergarten.

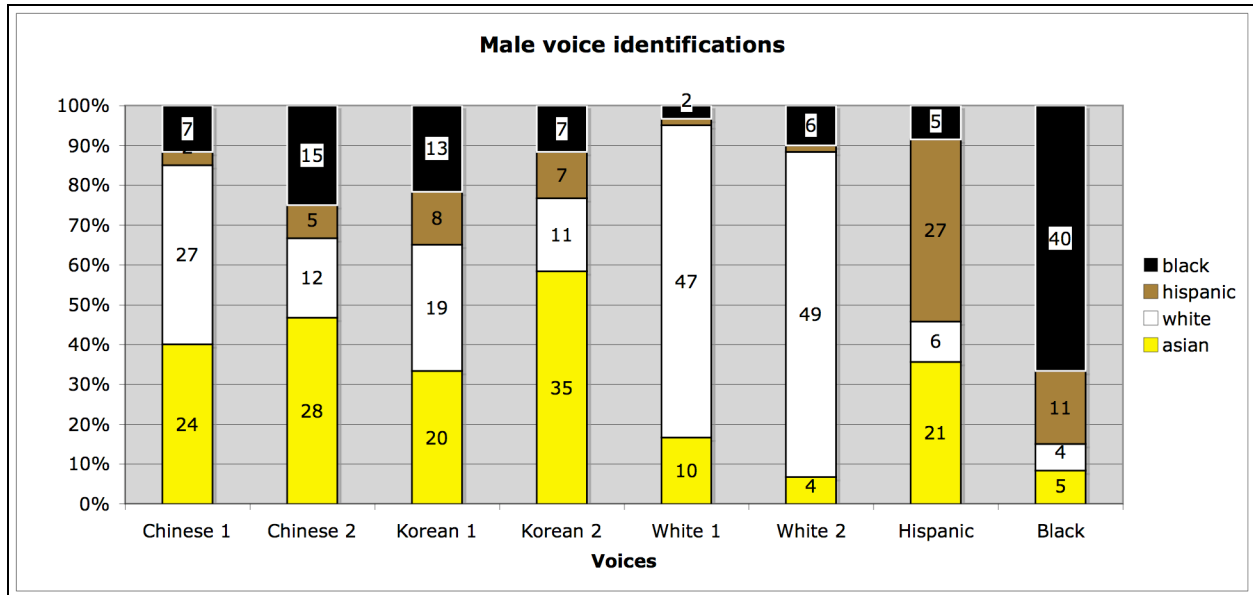
Judges were asked:

- (1) to identify the race of the speakers: White, Black, Latino, or Asian
- (2) if Asian, to decide whether speakers were Korean or Chinese, and
- (3) to respond on Likart scale to traits targeted at potential Asian stereotypes.

Speakers were chosen not only on the basis of ethnic identity but in terms of researchers' and pre-judges' perceptions as to their typifying their corresponding ethnolect.

The 60 judges were successful at a well above chance rate in identifying the race of the each of the male voices. The only partial exception was one Chinese American, who was thought to be European American by a plurality, as shown in Figure 1., and even he was identified as Asian well more often than the actual European Americans:

Figure 1: Identification of Male Voices:

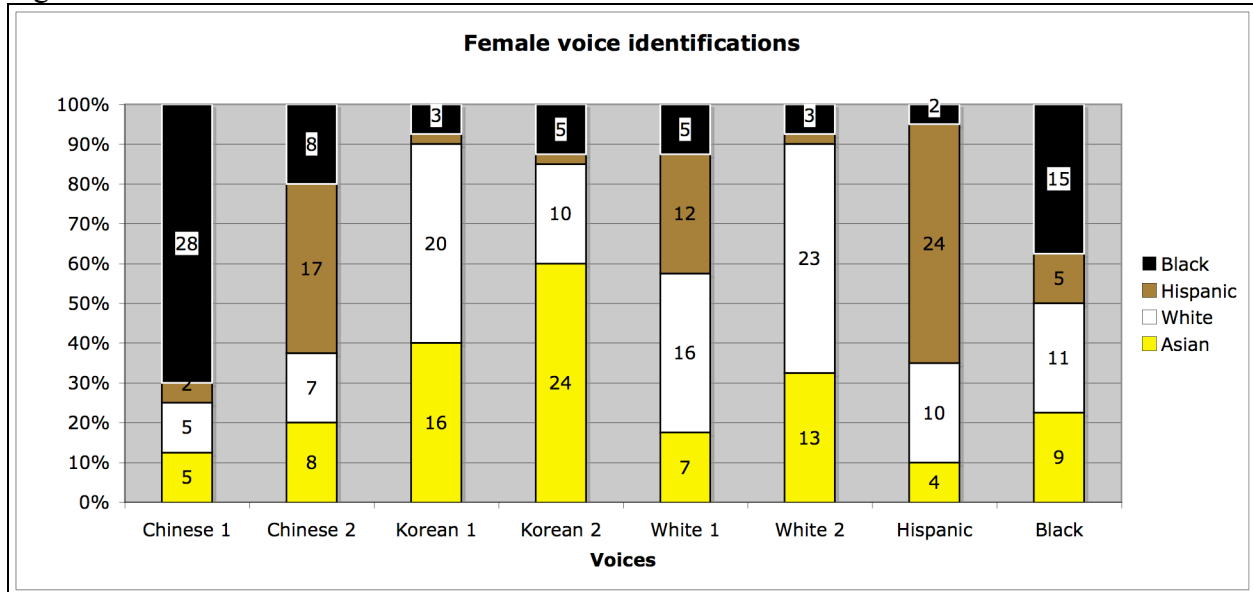


Chi square = 300.1,  $p \leq .001$

By contrast, judges, were unable to distinguish Koreans from Chinese, although they consistently paired the each of two same-national speakers on subjective reaction questions scores. Interestingly, the Asian voices did not evoke Asian stereotypes of hard-working, lack of sociability, intelligence, or involvement with technology on these questions. Instead, these traits, which also reflected high-status, were most strongly associated with the European Americans.

The panorama was radically different for the female voices as judged by 40 participants shown in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Identification of Female Voices:



Chi-square =166.7,  $p \leq .001$

As can be observed, a strong majority of judges misidentified one Chinese American as African American and the other was misidentified by a plurality as Hispanic. One Korean American was also thought to be European American by exactly half the judges, whereas the other was the only one identified by a majority as Asian. The non-Asian American voices were correctly identified by a majority or at least plurality of the judges. Again, the respondents judged the European American voices most positively on the subjective reaction test for traits associated with status. Curiously, the Chinese American speaker misidentified as African American, showed few AAE features apart from lateral coda vocalizations; nor did the one misidentified as Latino show characteristic New York Latino English segmental features.

Therefore, these misidentifications show that either linguistic indicators are considerably less salient in female voices than in male ones or, more likely, that sociolinguistic identities, beyond the European American, are somehow less focused on in females than males.

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