To Walk the Same Road

Convivial Possibilities and Ethical Affordances in Borderlands Schooling

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Abstract: In this article, I explore how teachers and students in two distinct regions of the US-Mexico borderlands, southern Arizona and south Texas, treated social difference as an ethical affordance (Keane 2014) or a resource for moral stancetaking. Inspired by work in the anthropology of morality and ethnomethodological analyses of "accountable moral choice" (Heritage 1984, 76) in interaction, I examine how the salience of social difference can become an imaginative affordance for probing experiences of and possibilities for living with difference. When axes of social differentiation became relevant to ongoing interaction, participants used them to frame their own actions or others' actions as morally admirable, justifiable, or questionable. At times, they did so in ways that foreclosed possibilities for conviviality; at other times, their "ordinary" ethical activity (Das 2012) suggested new possibilities for dealing with social difference in diverse contexts. The analysis testifies to the "internally riven" nature of the moral universe (Keane 2011, 173)—the different stances available to be taken up, even in relation to the same people and the same objects of evaluation—and underscores that conviviality is better viewed not as a lasting state of affairs, but as a provisional interactional achievement and a site of struggle and contradiction.

Keywords: conviviality; interaction; schooling; education; morality; ordinary ethics; Latino; stance; stancetaking; discourse

Résumé: Dans cet article, j'explore la manière dont les enseignants et les élèves de deux régions distinctes de la frontière des États-Unis et du Mexique, au sud de l'Arizona et du Texas, ont traité les différences sociales comme une affordance éthique (Keane 2014) ou une ressource pour prendre une position morale. Inspiré par les travaux de l'anthropologie de la moralité et les analyses ethnométodologiques du « choix moral responsable » (Heritage 1984, 76) dans l'interaction, j'examine comment la saillance de la différence sociale peut

devenir un moyen imaginatif de sonder les expériences et les possibilités de vivre avec la différence. Alors que les axes de différenciation sociale sont devenus pertinents pour l'interaction en cours, les participants les ont utilisés pour définir leurs propres actions ou celles des autres comme moralement admirables, justifiables ou discutables. Parfois, ils le faisaient d'une façon qui excluait toute possibilité de convivialité ; à d'autres moments, leur activité éthique « ordinaire » (Das 2012) suggérait de nouvelles possibilités de traiter la différence sociale dans divers contextes. L'analyse témoigne de la nature « intérieurement rivale » de l'univers moral (Keane 2011, 173) – les différentes positions disponibles pour être adoptées, même par rapport aux mêmes personnes et aux mêmes objets d'évaluation – et souligne que la convivialité est mieux considérée non pas comme un état de fait durable, mais comme une réalisation interactionnelle provisoire et un site de lutte et de contradiction.

Mots-clés : convivialité ; interaction ; scolarité ; education ; moralité ; éthique ordinaire ; Latino ; position ; prise de position ; discours

This article focuses on teachers' and students' moral work in acts of self-presentation that touch on the possibility of conviviality, or the necessity of dealing with social difference in diverse contexts. This is not to suggest that social actors fail to notice social categories like race or gender in "convivial" moments or that these categories ever cease to be relevant to ongoing interaction. Rather, it raises the possibility that "permanent" forms of social difference (like race, social class, and gender) might momentarily cease to be of *primary* importance to ongoing interaction (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014, 345) as individuals seek ways to live with difference in everyday life. In his pioneering work on conviviality, Gilroy (2002, 4) suggests that we ought to be suspicious of "the habitual resort to culture as an unbridgeable division," not because social categories like race, culture, and nationality do not shape social life in fundamental ways, but because treating such categories as "invariant" reduces "the messy complexity of social life" to "a Manichaean fantasy in which bodies are only ordered and predictable units."

Here, I analyze data from two research projects to explore how teachers and students in two distinct regions of the US-Mexico borderlands, southern Arizona and south Texas, treated social difference as an ethical affordance (Keane 2014) or a resource for moral stancetaking. Counterintuitively, perhaps, the article engages the question of how the visibility or salience of social difference can become a tool for conviviality (Illich 1973), or an imaginative affordance for

probing experiences of, and possibilities for, living with difference. When axes of social differentiation became relevant to ongoing interaction, the participants in both areas and both studies oriented to them as ways to frame their own actions, or others' actions, as morally admirable, justifiable, questionable, and so forth. In itself, this is not surprising or noteworthy. Noticing forms of social difference often prompts ethical reflection on others' behaviour or one's own. What *is* worthy of attention in these data, I argue, is the fact that interactional orientations to social difference (with respect to race, nationality, or language use) could prompt teachers and students to shift their interactional stances in ways that reflected the necessity and challenges of living with difference in highly diverse contexts.

Ethical Affordances and Moral Dilemmas in Everyday Life

I situate this analysis in the linguistic anthropological tradition of analyzing talk as social action with the goal of understanding how enduring social types and categories, such as forms of moral personhood (Shoaps 2009), emerge within particular interactions and accrue over subsequent interactions, or speech chains (Agha 2007; Wortham 2005). My approach is indebted to sociologist Erving Goffman's work on the presentation of self in everyday life (1959) and its moral implications, as well as linguistic anthropologists' creative appropriation of Goffman's ideas.

In response to criticism that Goffman's (1967[1955]) version of morality is just playacting, carried out by a "willful and amoral self" that seeks to preserve the smoothness of interaction, Webb Keane (2011, 172) commented that "the presentation of self" is not at all disingenuous but is "a kind of moral work on the self." Keane was inspired by Jane Hill's (1995) "original and creative" (Keane 2011, 167) reading of Goffman in her classic essay "The Voices of Don Gabriel," which analyzes a Mexicano-speaking man's heteroglossic narrative about the death of his son. Don Gabriel's staging of different voices, according to Keane, is, indeed, a kind of self-presentation. Contrary to what Goffman's less original readers might assume, however, the narrative does not aim only to ensure the smooth functioning of the interaction order or to make a positive impression on Don Gabriel's interlocutor. Rather, it is a "discovery process" through which Don Gabriel pursues self-knowledge. By "[choosing] among the moral possibilities at play in a community," typified as voices, the narrator is able to enact a morally coherent stance. He does this in dialogue with co-present and imagined others, certainly, but also within his own dialogic consciousness (Keane 2011, 173). In

other words, Don Gabriel's presentation of self happens with others in mind, but it is not fundamentally *for* them.

This interplay of critical voices (Goffman, Hill, Keane, with Bakhtin's implied influence) invites us to consider what people are doing when they tell stories with moral implications. Keane's argument implies that people's "encounter[s] with the moral universe [are] neither created tabula rasa nor scripted in advance" (Keane 2011, 172). Social actors make use of the affordances of everyday interaction, including others' voices, to "find [their] way amidst … moral possibilities" (Keane 2011, 175). In so doing, they make plain the multiplex moral dilemmas that individuals confront in their everyday lives, tied to a number of possible "moral modes of being," among them "concern, care, predicaments, and 'at-stake-ness,'" or what is at stake for people in particular situations (Zigon and Throop 2014, 4–5). These moral dilemmas have to do with people's sense of themselves as well as the ethical judgments they make about others' behaviour. Individuals are engaged both "in an endless struggle to think well of themselves" (T.S. Eliot, cited in Zigon and Throop 2014, 4) and in "inevitably evaluative" activity toward others, human and non-human (Keane 2015, 4). Both of these tendencies come into play in "moral work on the self," theorized, here, as self-presentation and self- and other-positioning.

As with Keane's (2011) reading of Don Gabriel's story, the point of my participants' interactional work was not just to pass judgment on others or to portray their own actions and stances in a positive light. The participants' stancetaking was a discovery process through which they situated themselves in a heteroglossic moral universe—one, like Don Gabriel's, in which "the moral communities [that] … voices index [were] not isomorphic with socially bounded groups" (Keane 2011, 173). That is, there was not a simple one-to-one mapping of voices and groups, and individuals' moral discovery process was far from straightforward. Because of this, participants' moral stancetaking with respect to social difference could reroute interaction in unexpected ways. At times, these configurations opened up the possibility of convivial relations; at other times, they appeared to foreclose such relations. Visible dimensions of social difference were ethical affordances (Keane 2014) that the participants sometimes treated as tools for conviviality (Illich 1973) and, at other times, used to reject the possibility of conviviality.

I treat conviviality as one dimension of what anthropologists have termed "ordinary ethics." Das (2012, 134) urged anthropologists not to consider the ethical as a realm of human activity in which we distance ourselves from

ordinary practices, but to "[think] of the ethical as a dimension of everyday life." As opposed to a philosophical approach to morality and ethics, in which people might be imagined to apply abstract moral values to concrete situations, recent work in the anthropology of morality has emphasized the "everydayness" of ethical life and the embeddedness of morality in "ordinary" speech and action (Lambek 2010). Ordinary ethics treats morality as an emergent property of human action, in which people confront and work through moral differences in real time. Those moral differences are not understood as abstract phenomena but are inseparable in practice from the interactional events through which they come to be visible and consequential for social actors.

The social norms that take shape in everyday interaction are not just "there." They can be understood as "ethical *affordances*," "aspects of people's experiences of themselves, of other people, or of their surround, that they may draw on as they make ethical evaluations and decisions" (Keane 2014, 7). In other words, such contingencies must be taken into account, but they can also be used as a *resource* for moral stancetaking. In the case at hand, orientations to social difference are sometimes treated as "resources for the peaceful accommodation of otherness in relation to fundamental commonality" (Gilroy 2002, 3)—not by ignoring racism, crucially, but through "increased familiarity" with it (Gilroy 2002, 4).

This is not to assert that social norms have no existence outside of particular interactions, or that morality can only ever be understood in terms of our duties to others, as some analysts have appeared to argue (Lempert 2013). In treating ethics as "an emergent quality or property of action" (Lambek 2015, 2), we can regard it as "both already present (that is, immanent) and as yet unrealized (that is, imminent)" or "about-to-be-present" (Sidnell, Meudec, and Lambek 2019, 307). This is to say that analyses of interaction may *locate* ethics in speech acts such as "deliberating, making excuses, and offering justifications", but that "ethics is unfolding and is never fully realized or accomplished" in such acts. (Keane 2010, cited in Sidnell, Meudec, and Lambek 2019, 307).

Conviviality as an Interactional Achievement

Rather than treating conviviality as a disposition or a social or political ideal, linguistic anthropologists might productively reframe the concept as an interactional achievement. In reframing conviviality as an interactional achievement, or "an adaptive pragmatics of coexistence" (Taha, this issue), analysts can hold discussions of conviviality to a higher empirical standard. To do so, I follow recent work in linguistic anthropology and the anthropology of

morality that foregrounds "the labor and methods through which actors strain to make the ethical ... effective" and visible to each other, rather than assuming the "findability" of ethical constructs like conviviality (Lempert 2013, 371). Conviviality is understood as a discursive object that emerges from people's dialogic action within specific histories of discourse and cultural contact. Hence, the concept refers not to a stable social situation, in which a pro-social ideal of "constructively creat[ing] modes of togetherness" among diverse social actors has been definitively realized (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014, 342). It refers to interactional moments in which social actors are, indeed, "negotiating shared meanings" (Bauman 1996, 32) across lines of difference but takes for granted that any convivial alignments that emerge from such moments are transitory, tenuous, contested, and contingent on social and interactional processes that are scaled differently in space and time.

This view of conviviality has parallels with previous articulations of the concept as "an achievement ... [that] requires constant effort" (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014, 344, citing Overing and Passes 2000). It also resembles framings of conviviality as an aspirational project (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014, 346) that takes shape in settings where diverse social actors have to make the best of their "thrown-togetherness" (Massey 2005) in "mundane" or "everyday" encounters "when cultural difference is present but has a secondary meaning" (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014, 345). However, this article extends prior work on conviviality by using the analytic toolkit of linguistic anthropology to "scrutinize real-time ethical events" (Lempert 2013, 371) and examine, in detail, how people take advantage of convivial possibilities in interaction or foreclose possibilities for conviviality through their interactional moves. This approach heeds Wise and Noble's admonition that, given the difficulty of pinning down conviviality, research on the concept must involve "the examination of the practices of inhabiting diversity, not simply a bland ethical imperative" (2016, 425).

Stance and Morality in Interaction

Anthropologists' recent emphasis on ordinary ethics can be related to an older tradition within ethnomethodology of regarding people's everyday interaction as having to do with "accountable moral choice" (Heritage 1984, 76). To this way of thinking, all conversation has an essentially moral basis because social actors can and do hold each other accountable for their rights and responsibilities to speak about certain topics (Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig 2011). Furthermore, people's "adherence to, violation of, and enforcement of

... social norms [governing knowledge]"—that is, their relative cooperation or lack of cooperation—"affects ... social relationships moment-by-moment" and, therefore, gives others opportunities to orient to their participation in ways that presuppose a moral stance (Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig 2011, 20). As Goodwin (2007, 65) noted, citing Garfinkel, social actors' stances with respect to participation frameworks in ongoing activity are "a key site for the integration of cognition with morality," in which "the very possibility of joint social action" is either sustained (through alignment) or undermined (through disalignment); Kiesling (2022, 421) refers to this narrower dimension of stance as "action alignment."

Still, morality in conversation goes beyond "directing traffic" in ways that allow for the possibility of joint social action and intersubjective understanding.[1] Over the long term, individual acts of stancetaking contribute to the emergence of understandings of moral personhood, predicated on durable "stances" that are associated with social personae (Hill 1995; Shoaps 2009). I concur with scholars of interaction that "the micro-level moral order can be understood as cut from the same cloth as other forms of moral reasoning" (Stivers, Mondada, and Steensig 2011, 3). Insofar as "real-time ethical events" (Lempert 2013, 371) have repercussions for social relations, both momentary and lasting, attending to participants' moral orientations toward each other's ongoing activity can yield valuable insights into the ever-unfolding, as yet unrealized nature of ethical life (Sidnell, Meudec, and Lambek 2019; see also Keane 2010).

To analyze how this takes shape in particular interactions, Keane (2011) suggested that we turn to Du Bois's (2007) notion of the stance triangle, or the relative positioning of subject, object of evaluation, and other subjects that results from evaluation or stancetaking in interaction. As Du Bois put it:

> Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously *evaluating objects*, *positioning subjects* (self and others), and *aligning with other subjects*, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field (2007, 163, my italics).

Working through stance triangles allows us to see how the intersubjective structuring of links among interactants and objects sketches "a fundamentally moral dimension of interaction" (Keane 2011, 170). Building on insights from Kockelman (2004), Kiesling (2022, 420) expands Du Bois's original triangle to include "investment" as a third element of stance, alongside evaluation and alignment, reflecting the degree to which speakers (Goffman's "animators")

commit to evaluations (in the sense that they wish to be identified as "principals" per Goffman). I continue to find Du Bois's triangle a useful starting point for modelling stancetaking; the analyses hew mostly to dimensions of evaluation and alignment in participants' stance work, as I focus primarily on the relevance of stancetaking to communicating across difference. Simultaneous attention to the "commitment event" in these stance triangles would undoubtedly enrich and complicate the analytic narrative (Kiesling 2022; Kockelman 2004).

With attention to stance, we can approach conviviality as an emergent property of interaction, a dimension of everyday ethical activity according to which people explore possibilities for coexistence in fraught, diverse contexts. As axes of differentiation (Gal 2016), or semiotized forms of social difference, are made relevant to ongoing interaction, participants' ethical activity can be analyzed according to the stance triangles that emerge. Visible lines of difference are an ethical affordance (Keane 2014) that may be taken up in different ways: at times, participants seize upon them to disalign from others (within the relevant stance triangle); at other times, such lines of difference become a resource for cooperatively exploring conviviality.

Seizing Convivial Openings: An Example from Arizona

The first example comes from a linguistic ethnography of an Astronomy/Oceanography classroom at Vista Del Sol (VDS), a Title I (lower-income), majority Mexican American high school in southern Arizona. The study, conducted in 2010–11, focused on everyday talk and social relations among Mexican American students and Julia Tezich, a novice white teacher who had been my student as an undergraduate. The research took place during a time of heightened tension around immigration and race in Arizona, as the state legislature passed several anti-immigrant, anti-Latinx measures, including Senate Bill 1070, a law that essentially legalized the racial profiling of Latinxs (according to its critics) and enlisted local authorities in federal immigration enforcement. Because of this, dimensions of students' identities that related to being ethnically Mexican—speaking Spanish; phenotypes, haircuts, clothing, and activities that students saw as stereotypically "Mexican;" citizenship and immigration status, etcetera—were frequently made relevant to ongoing interaction, often by the students themselves, and even in situations that did not seem to be "about" race or ethnicity. Previous work from this study documented students' use of other social categories, such as gender and socioeconomic class

(which was also connected to rurality), to enact racial differentiation discursively within and between peer groups at the high school (O'Connor 2016).

At the time of the study, Julia, a white, English monolingual, second-year teacher who had grown up in a middle-class family from a semi-rural area of Indiana, was twenty-three years old. Prior to teaching at the high school, she had pursued a degree in geology and worked on a university-based, NASA-sponsored Mars imaging project. Thus, the forms of social difference with which she and her students had to live in their "thrown-together" classroom situation (Massey 2005) were frequently apparent, as the students would often remind her. Unlike Julia, VDS highschoolers were primarily Mexican American and from lower-income backgrounds; many were bilingual or Spanish-dominant, and many regarded themselves as scientifically inexperienced.

The analysis here incorporates two related pieces of data collected during the same week in late October 2010: first, an interaction from a "star party," or a nighttime stargazing event that Julia had organized for the students; second, an in-class exchange between Julia and the students. Both interactions were documented in my fieldnotes, rather than video or audio recorded. (I did not start video and audio recording until the following week since I had decided to wait until I had gotten to know the students better).

From my perspective, the star parties were valuable opportunities to spend time with students in an informal but academically-oriented setting where school-based norms and expectations were temporarily loosened. Students, especially boys, sometimes brought up taboo topics (for example, drinking and guns) to try to get a rise out of Julia; others confided in Julia and me about challenges (for example, being undocumented, relationship issues) that could not be broached privately in school. Other students treated the star parties as "teachable moments" to tease the adults present (that is, Julia and me) about differences in our identities. For example, at a star party in August 2010, early in the academic year, a bright meteor suddenly streaked across the sky, prompting a loud, enthusiastic reaction. When a jokester named John S., who identified as Hispanic, saw Julia and me high-five each other in celebration, he yelled, "White power!" Julia and I laughed it off, not knowing if there was anything significant underlying John's comment or if he was just taking advantage of our excitement to poke fun at two of the only white people present. Elsewhere (O'Connor 2017), I discuss the difficulty of analyzing such talk among students at Vista Del Sol, as it was often ambiguous and contradictory.

This star party under consideration here took place in October 2010 at an elementary school located in a semi-rural, outlying area of the city with less light pollution and better observing conditions than the high school. The high school students who lived in this neighbourhood, according to Julia, tended to be more involved with what she described as "rural/Mexican/agricultural culture" and some students even referred to the neighbourhood as "Little Mexico." This was not just because many of its residents were of Mexican descent; that was true of most neighbourhoods on the south side of the city, where the high school and elementary school were located. Rather, "Little Mexico" evoked the rural, agricultural lifestyle that some students, in interviews and casual conversation, associated with their experience of visiting or living in Mexico, or, sometimes, with Mexican culture in general. For example, one night later in the year, I was dropping off a student named Alex in a nearby neighbourhood, which consisted of a rambling assortment of houses and trailers belonging to his family members and friends and ample fenced areas for horses or other animals. As my car rattled over the ruts of the unpaved, muddy road leading to his trailer, he offhandedly remarked, "Mexican neighbourhood!" Alex and other students sometimes made self-deprecating jokes about being Mexican (O'Connor 2017), which suggests that his remark may also have been intended as a joke about the supposed poverty of Mexican-origin people.

This star party was notable because several students who lived nearby rode horses to the elementary school and, soon after arriving, started racing them on the playing fields, which made Julia worry about having to clean up after the horses. A few days later, while we were debriefing the star party in Julia's classroom after school, she recounted a transformative moment with one of the horse-riding students:

> Julia mentioned that she was able to show interest in the lives of the kids who showed up with their horses (and relate to them because of her own background with animals) and that this has made a big difference for one of them who is in her credit recovery class[2] (but showed up for the star party, for some reason) ... Julia rode his horse (she was a bit nervous because it was a racehorse and skittish)—Julia on kid's reaction: "He was like, 'You respect my life.'" Julia has noticed a change in class since then—"before he just wanted to play [online] pool all class, and this week he was focusing and doing his work"—also brought her a pancake that he had made in cooking class.

Julia consistently sought interactional opportunities to lean on what she had in common with the students while remaining respectfully attentive to their differences. In the interaction with the horse-riding student, Julia oriented to a visible form of social difference (Mexican identity, vis-à-vis rural/agricultural identity in "Little Mexico") as an ethical affordance (Keane 2014), an aspect of ongoing interaction that could be leveraged to take a moral stance or communicate moral understandings. In this case, analyzing the interaction—as Julia reported it to me—according to the stance triangle (Du Bois 2007) that emerged shows how Julia's stance work and embodied action allowed her to communicate "respect," which, in turn, held forth the possibility of conviviality, as reflected in her student's markedly different attitude afterwards.

From the student's perspective, showing up on horses to an astronomy-themed school event in Little Mexico could be seen as a challenge, a way to force Julia to confront forms of difference that were always present but not always salient. While the specific form of social difference at play in this interaction is somewhat murky, the students' flamboyant display of rural expertise—not just showing up on horses but racing them!—in a neighbourhood that was widely recognizable to participants as a quintessentially "Mexican" place (O'Connor 2016) suggests that it had something to do with racial/ethnic identity or national origin (possibly vis-à-vis social class). Julia sought to align herself with the student by "showing interest in his life" and riding the horse. In so doing, she *also* positioned herself with respect to a certain object—the way of life that her student's horse-riding represented—and communicated a high degree of investment, or a desire to be identified with the agricultural persona her words and actions indexed (Kiesling 2022). This led the student to evaluate Julia's actions in moral terms, concluding that she "respected his life," and to adjust his own behaviour accordingly in subsequent interactions.

In the moment, this convivial maneuvering could take the form of conversational alignment or affiliation. Over a semester or an academic year, however, linking individual moments of alignment into longer-term speech chains (Agha 2007; Wortham and Reyes 2015) allowed Julia to build enduring relationships of trust with many students. Seizing convivial possibilities in the moment laid the groundwork for what Keane (2011), following Agha (2007) and reaching back to Schutz's concept of interpretive schemes (Kim and Berard 2009), called *typification*: the tendency for moral stances to become increasingly recognizable or presupposable across successive interactional

events. In this case, the encounter at the star party was one of several moments when Julia capitalized on the salience of social difference to establish herself as a person who could relate to students in matters of rural/agricultural life (for example, animal handling), thereby showing respect and showing herself worthy of respect.

The following example, a brief, jocular exchange from later the same week, gives a glimpse of how individual acts of alignment, in which Julia treated social difference as an ethical affordance, could contribute to a process of typification. The star party had been on Tuesday; Friday was the school's Halloween celebration. In the hubbub before class, a student asked, "Miss, what are you?" in reference to Julia's costume, which, as most of the students probably knew, doubled as her work uniform for her previous job at Starbucks. I documented the ensuing exchange in my fieldnotes:

Julia: A barista.
Student 1: A burrito?
Julia: Not a burrito, a ba<u>r</u>ista!
Student 2: [Spanish] *Una burrista!* She rides burros!
Julia: I hate riding those things. They're so stubborn!

The first student took up Julia's "barista" as "burrito." He might have misheard, misunderstood, not known the word, or pretended to misunderstand. Either way, Julia's move to repair Student 1's utterance and clarify what she was—"Not a burrito, a barista!"—offered an irresistible opportunity for more teasing. The students would bait Julia into interactional moments where they could seize the chance to poke fun at their differences, but this sometimes had the effect of bringing them into closer alignment in the end. Student 2 further upped the ante, turning English "barista" into the obviously absurd Spanish *burrista,* '[female] burro/donkey rider,' and then adding "She rides burros!" in English, perhaps to ensure that no one would miss the joke. Julia, however, seized the opportunity to present herself as an expert on all things livestock-related: "I hate riding those things. They're so stubborn!"—as if to say, "Oh, you think I haven't ridden a burro before? Think again!"

As at the star party, where knowledge of horses allowed Julia to show a disengaged student that she respected his life, a bit of teasing about Julia's Starbucks-themed Halloween costume—itself evocative of the "neutral" interactional spaces associated with middle-class whiteness from colonial times onward (Gaudio 2003)—resulted in a chance for her to position herself

as a knowledgeable donkey-rider, not that different, in important ways, from her students. Through her stance work, Julia consistently foregrounded some aspects of context over others, emphasizing points of commonality over points of difference.[3] However, there is evidence that students came to regard her stancetaking as meaningful not in spite of their differences, but because of them. The backdrop to Julia's "respectful" stancetaking—that is, her enactment of respect and the students' responses to it—was a school and community context where Mexican-origin students, by and large, did not feel respected by those in positions of authority. In this context, Julia stood out to many of the students because she showed sincere interest in their out-of-school lives, lived near the high school, made efforts to learn Spanish and use it in limited ways, and encouraged students to draw freely on their cultural and linguistic resources in class.

The students' uptake of Julia's efforts in subsequent discourse suggests that they saw her stance work as distinct from mere "gestures of responsibility" or niceness in mundane encounters (Laurier and Philo 2006). While not every student ratified Julia's efforts or responded similarly to her moral stancetaking, her moments of convivial alignment with students were consequential in a variety of ways. Elsewhere (O'Connor and Crawford 2015), my co-author and I have documented the effects of Julia's consistent displays of respect for Spanish language and Mexican culture on teacher-student and peer interactions in the classroom. For example, students felt comfortable switching fluidly between Spanish and English for academic and social purposes in the classroom; students sometimes intervened in conversations to teach Julia words or phrases in Spanish; and students commented explicitly and approvingly on Julia's stance toward Spanish, which, according to some, was "not like other white people" in the school and community.

Julia's deft stance work in the interactions analyzed above—her ability to pivot from orientations to racial, ethnic, or linguistic difference to convivial displays of knowledge of, and respect for, rural life—recalls Hill's (1993) discussion of early Spanish-English language contact in what is now the US Southwest. While "Anglo Spanish" ultimately led to the development of Mock Spanish, a register of racialized linguistic mockery, Hill (1993) noted that older Spanish borrowings into American English follow a different pattern. The range of these borrowings—cowboy terms, geography, social organization, food and liquor, architecture—suggests "quite intensive language contact in [the] narrow

domain" of working-class life in rural Southwestern communities where English and Spanish speakers were thrown together (Hill 1993, 152). Hill (1993, 152) argued that the morphological and phonological characteristics of Spanish loan-words suggested only "minimal bilingualism" among Southwestern English speakers. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Anglo Spanish, which later descended into mockery, arose from English and Spanish speakers' shared, intimate knowledge of the same types of rural agricultural labour—the same sort of knowledge, in other words, that allowed Julia to orient to the students' assertions of difference as tools for conviviality.

From the standpoint of conviviality, the possibility of "negotiating shared meanings" (Bauman 1996, 32) in interactions such as the two discussed here relied on the students' (mostly) unspoken expectation that visible lines of difference were more likely to lead to discriminatory treatment than to displays of respect, making Julia's moves that much more noticeable. For orientations to social difference to become ethical affordances, or "resources for the peaceful accommodation of otherness," in Gilroy's (2002, 3) terms, it was necessary for Julia to display "increased familiarity" with the racism the students experienced (Gilroy 2002, 4), rather than ignoring or disregarding it. This was, at times, a tense and painful process of socialization for her (O'Connor 2017). Conviviality, in this case, was not a state of equilibrium awaiting Julia and the students at the end of a sufficiently long speech chain. It was, as always, a fragile, provisional achievement that required constant effort (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014, 344) and in which different social actors were invested differently.

Foreclosing Convivial Possibilities: An Example from South Texas

The second example comes from a participatory qualitative study of *transfronterizo* (border-crossing) university students in South Texas conducted during the 2013–14 academic year. The study investigated the effects of changes in students' cross-border mobility on their identities and postsecondary experiences at a time when many were crossing the border more or less frequently than in the past. These changes came about largely as a result of increased narco-violence in northern Mexico and the militarization of border enforcement in the US (see O'Connor 2018 for details). While all the participants were navigating changes in the US-Mexico borderlands in their everyday lives, they differed considerably in the nature of their cross-border mobility and their experiences on both sides of the border. Participants fell broadly into three groups: (1) those who were living in Mexico at the time of the

study and attending university in the US, (2) those who had previously lived in Mexico but had moved to the US (usually to attend university), and (3) those who had lived mostly in the US throughout their lives but had spent significant time with relatives in Mexico.

An oft-commented-upon aspect of diversity within the *transfronterizo* student population was the distinction between Mexico-based students, who had to cross the border on a daily or weekly basis to attend class, and US-based students with roots in Mexico. Participants from both sides frequently remarked that Mexican students had to be exceptionally organized and hardworking to succeed in university courses while enduring the hassles and occasional dangers of border-crossing. This discourse of appreciation for Mexican students' resilience, however, sometimes shaded into a related discourse about the supposed deficits of US-based students, who, as Mexico-based participants said, "don't make as much of an effort or ... take things very lightly" (Ana) or "don't make a big effort at school or don't want to take advantage of it" (Sara). Some US-based students voiced similar sentiments, one bemoaning the fact that she was supposedly "dumping [her] education out, like ... not even caring about it" (Mary) in contrast to Mexican students who did not have access to the same resources or opportunities (O'Connor 2018).

The juxtaposition of hardworking, academically superior Mexican students and apathetic American[4] students was not accurate in my experience as a teacher. Still, it pointed to an area of tension in the *transfronterizo* student population that the participants generally elided in our conversations. Students living in Mexico who had the legal and financial wherewithal to go to college in Texas were often from relatively privileged socioeconomic backgrounds in the wealthiest region of Mexico. Some had attended private schools and planned to enroll at elite Mexican universities (for example, el Tecnológico de Monterrey) before the sociopolitical upheaval of recent years. Students living in the US, on the other hand, tended to come from poor, working-class, or middle-class families and most had grown up and attended public schools in the Rio Grande Valley, one of the most impoverished and educationally under-resourced areas in the country.

I do not mean to overstate the differences between the various groups of students or to reinforce stereotypes about students from either side. Both Mexico- and US-based *transfronterizo* students had extensive knowledge of both sides of the border. They prided themselves on their cosmopolitan ability to

assess social conditions without the distorted views they associated with family, friends, and media figures who did not have their direct experience of both countries. Despite this, social class distinctions among *transfronterizo* students, which often surfaced in discourses about education and language use, speak to the possibilities for conviviality in fraught circumstances. Julia and the Mexican American high school students seemed to share very little, but their visible forms of social difference became ethical affordances for enacting moral stances associated with respect and mutual understanding. *Transfronterizo* students from Mexico and the US, by contrast, appeared to share a great deal. Their apparent similarities, however, did not mean that they were quick to embrace convivial possibilities in any given situation. The example below reveals how social class difference vis-à-vis linguistic difference could be leveraged interactionally to draw sharp lines between groups of students (that is, Mexico-versus US-based) for whom conviviality might seem to be a comparatively simpler proposition.

This example comes from an interview with Yu, a student who had always lived in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico, except for a brief stay with relatives in Texas during his elementary school years. However, Yu attended high school and college in Brownsville, Texas, USA, crossing the border every day as he continued living with his family in Mexico. Like some other Mexico-based students, Yu had less than flattering things to say about his American classmates:

> How people speak here sometimes annoys me. How they're like speaking languages. They speak both and talk like Spanglish. 'Cause I want to be a translator too, so that kind of like offends me 'cause I'm like, "Okay, speak proper Spanish." ... But one other thing that annoys me is that, here at [the University of Texas at Brownsville],[5] that there's not a lot of scholarships for Hispanics and that really annoys me 'cause I have to pay the whole tuition ... *O sea* [Or like] ... why would you not have like good scholarships for Hispanics if a lot of Hispanics here come from Mexico, you know, [as] students?

Yu began by disaligning from "people ... here" (that is, in the US) who speak "Spanglish," voicing a discourse of linguistic purism and language separation, prevalent among Spanglish (or Tex-Mex) speakers and others, that denigrates Spanish-English translanguaging and highlights borderlands residents' supposed inability to speak "proper Spanish," a source of shame for many people in South Texas (Rangel, Loureiro-Rodríguez, and Moyna 2015). (The local understanding of "proper Spanish" does not just mean an absence of language

mixing but entails avoidance of English borrowings and "nonstandard" or archaic grammatical features). In evaluating his peers' language use negatively, Yu distanced himself from Spanglish and Spanglish speakers and aligned himself with "proper" Spanish and English, commenting that he wanted to be a translator, which implies expertise in both languages.

Yu then changed the topic, somewhat abruptly, and complained about his lack of access to scholarships at the university. In his telling, it was unfair that he had to pay full tuition because "there's not a lot of scholarships for Hispanics." With "Hispanics," Yu was referring to Mexican citizens who were enrolled at the university, not US citizens of Hispanic ethnicity (who, since over 90% of the student body was Hispanic/Latino, made up the majority of scholarship recipients). Yu's move from language ideologies to the availability of scholarships, which may appear incongruous, makes sense in light of the moral underpinnings of his stance work in this example. His remarks about Spanglish were not merely the expression of an attitude or a preference. They were a moral commentary on (US citizen) speakers whose verbal behaviour "offended" him (Cameron 2012).

In treating linguistic difference (speaking Spanglish/speaking improperly versus speaking proper Spanish/separating languages) as an ethical affordance, Yu disaligned from Spanglish speakers in linguistic and moral terms, in much the same way that other students contrasted industrious Mexican peers with lazy or unappreciative classmates from the U.S. Like Yu, other Mexican students sometimes moved from commenting on the work ethic of their American counterparts to criticizing them in starkly moral terms. Sara, an undergraduate business student from Matamoros, made the commonplace observation that US-based students "don't make a big effort at school or don't want to take advantage of it," compared to Mexican classmates, but broadened her critique to assert that American students took their many advantages for granted: "They don't realize either that they've had a lot of opportunities living in this place where you aren't in danger. It's easier to find work here. You have more rights. And … truthfully, I think they don't value it."

If American students' inability to speak "properly" was a moral failing in Yu's eyes, the topic shift to scholarships can be understood as a commentary on American students' deservingness—or lack thereof—of the scholarships that were off-limits to Mexican students like Yu. "Deservingness" is a moralizing discourse that evaluates people as "deserving" or "undeserving" of certain social goods—for example, with reference to "deserving" undocumented immigrant

youth and their supposedly "undeserving" parents (Patel 2015). In this case, Spanglish, or codeswitching/translanguaging, indexed residence on the US side of the border. In turn, this indexed both national origin/citizenship status and moral character for Yu, in whose estimation Spanglish speakers were less deserving of the scarce resources that were available to help pay tuition and costs at the university, but who, unlike him, had access to scholarships.

The outcome of this stance triangle, as I have sketched it, is a social situation in which Yu's moves foreclose the possibility of convivial relations with US citizen classmates, and in which differences in language use become linked to different moral positionings and, as in the example of Julia and the students, reinforce social *types* associated with these positionings (Agha 2007; Keane 2011). Here, we are faced with the type of the American student who "doesn't make an effort" and cannot speak properly, contrasted with the type of the resilient, academically successful, and linguistically sophisticated Mexican student.

If speakers' stance work is a "discovery process" through which people engage with others' voices and, in so doing, "choose among the moral possibilities at play in a community" (Keane 2011, 173), speakers are relatively free to choose different forms of engagement and explore different moral possibilities, and it is in those moments that "[constructive] ... modes of togetherness" may emerge, if only momentarily (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014, 342). To say that speakers in the Rio Grande Valley are *relatively* free to explore moral possibilities is not to say that they are *equally* free to do so, however. As the data above suggest, US-based participants were acutely aware of hegemonic language ideologies and less apt to foreground their (stigmatized) linguistic and educational practices (see also Christofferson 2019; Nuñez 2021). In contrast, Yu seized on linguistic difference (Spanglish versus proper Spanish) as an ethical affordance to sharpen class divides and paint American students as morally wanting and therefore less deserving of scholarships. This allowed him to disalign from people who were competing for the same scarce resources, in his view, and to use his self-positioning vis-à-vis American students (and discursive objects like Spanglish and "proper" Spanish) to take a moral stance on the unfairness of resource allocation at the university.

Other Mexican students, however, used a similar ethical affordance (the salience of linguistic difference) to find different "way[s] amidst ... moral possibilities" in the world of higher education in the borderlands (Keane 2011, 172). A doctoral student named Angela, who was also from Matamoros,

Mexico, said this about encounters between US and Mexico-based students at the university:

Entonces eso nos hace también diferentes porque mucha gente aquí [en EE.UU] y que vive y que siempre ha estudiado aquí, habla español pero lo habla mal. Igual que nosotros que venimos para acá y hablamos inglés y lo hablamos mal. Entonces, es como un estar aprendiendo de todos, de allá para acá y de aquí también. Es como estar aprendiendo en ambas partes, en ambos sentidos para poder — pues no sé, caminar . . . por el mismo camino.

[So that makes us different, too, because a lot of people here (in the US), who live and have always studied here, speak Spanish but speak it badly. Just like those of us who come here and speak English and speak it badly. So it's like a learning experience for everyone, from over there to here and here as well. It's like we're learning on both sides, in both senses to be able to- well, I don't know, to walk . . . the same road.]

Angela, unlike Yu, had never attended US schools prior to graduate school. Also unlike Yu, who was proficient in both languages, Angela was much more comfortable speaking Spanish than English. Rather than harnessing language to differentiate herself linguistically and morally from her American counterparts, she used the example of "speaking Spanish or English badly" to explain that what "makes *us* different"—meaning Mexican students who speak Spanish well and English badly—is "just like" what English-dominant students experience in Spanish settings. As in the example from Julia's classroom, Angela oriented to a visible form of social difference (language proficiency) as an ethical affordance for emphasizing an underlying sameness and capacity for mutual understanding among English and Spanish speakers at the university. Instead of seeing herself as someone who was competing for scarce financial resources with morally inferior peers, she framed her and her classmates' disparate language experiences as "a learning experience for everyone," ending with the convivial image of students' "walk[ing] ... the same road," regardless of which side of the border they were coming from.

Angela's stance work exemplified the convivial tendency that Radice (2016, 436) associates with "everyday cosmopolitanism." "The capacity to draw on various strands of identity in oneself and imagine how it might be to belong to the world in other ways." As with Julia, Angela's ability to do this relied on choosing which aspects of context to emphasize or foreground in interethnic

encounters, in which various forms of social difference are always "available" and can be turned to different interactional ends. The contrast between Angela's comments and Yu's reveals that the same ethical affordance can be used to take opposing moral stances in similar contexts, foreclosing possibilities for conviviality in some cases and exploring new modes of togetherness in others.

Conclusion

In considering why and how people find different ways through moral possibilities, we must keep in mind the question of what is at stake for social actors in a given situation (Zigon and Throop 2014): respect or lack of respect for one's way of life, as in the horse-riding and *burrista* interactions between Julia and the high school students; the possibility of empathy and solidarity with speakers whose practices are outwardly different, as for Angela; or, by contrast, the need to draw attention to differences between oneself and others with whom one is competing on an unfair playing field, as in Yu's case.

Yu's example, especially, is a valuable reminder that convivial possibilities are not only, or even primarily, responsive to people's dispositions or discursive behaviour. The possibility or impossibility of coexisting convivially also has to do with the concrete material circumstances of people's lives, the sociomaterial contexts where they encounter others and their beliefs about the potential costs and benefits of conviviality. Self- and other-positioning in potentially convivial encounters, fraught with moral possibility, also entails evaluating objects—discursive, social, and material. These analyses testify to the "internally riven" nature of the moral universe (Keane 2011, 173)—the different stances available to be taken up, even in relation to the same people and the same objects of evaluation—and underscore that conviviality should not be viewed as a lasting state of affairs, but as a provisional interactional achievement and a site of struggle and contradiction.

In closing, I want to acknowledge that this article, as a presentation of my self, is also "a kind of moral work on the self" (Keane 2011, 172), no less than the students' or the teacher's. Looking closely at how the participants made use of the ethical affordances of borderlands discourse is connected to my "endless struggle to think well of [myself]," as T.S. Eliot put it, and to see my work in Texas and Arizona as part and parcel of an ethical life in which I have had to reckon with the constant presence of the US-Mexico border as *una herida abierta,* an open wound in the lives of my students (Anzaldúa 1987). In one

sense, the border is itself an ethical affordance, an unavoidable reminder of the historically conditioned forms of social difference that shape people's everyday interactions in borderlands settings, and, for many, a source of inexcusable moral injury. Despite this, students and teachers in the borderlands continue to seek the convivial openings that "make it possible for people to enter into interaction with each other," as Keane (2011, 168) paraphrases Grice. But the deeply moral character of the participants' utterances and actions challenges me, as a scholar and teacher, to question our "always-contingent claims to innocence" (Gomberg-Muñoz 2018, 36) and to remember that we can never count on conviviality as "the peaceful accommodation of otherness" (Gilroy 2002, 3) for very long.

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Notes

1 Thanks to a reviewer for suggesting this phrasing.

2 Credit recovery was a thankless teaching assignment, separate from the astronomy and oceanography classes, which involved cajoling and threatening students to complete thick packets of work in order to make up credit lost to absences, suspensions, and so forth.

3 Thanks to a reviewer for helping me articulate this point.

4 I typically avoid using "America/American" to refer to the United States or its citizens, since they do not represent the totality of America, but I resort to it here in order not to overuse "US/US-based."

5 Participants' names are pseudonyms. I use the real name of the university and border cities where the research was conducted because understanding the specific history of the Matamoros-Brownsville area (as opposed to other regions in the US-Mexico borderlands) is crucial to making sense of the participants' comments and interactions. We received permission from the university's Institutional Review Board to use the name of the university. Participants were made aware during the consent process that they might be more identifiable as a result.

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