Article

The Segregation of *Foreigners* in U.S. Mainstream Classrooms

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Abstract: (1) This study investigates the norms of speaking in the classroom by examining the speaking practices of Japanese international students (JIS)—a nonnative English speaking group—in classroom conversations with native English speakers (NES). (2) Semi-structured interviews in Japanese were conducted with 12 JIS in undergraduate programs at a predominantly White university in the United States. (3) The use of speech codes theory and Hymes's SPEAKING framework, coupled with the grounded theory, reveal that all the interviewees dealt with conflicting feelings of eagerness and dread when deciding whether or not to participate in classroom conversations. The JIS revealed threatening classroom dynamics that made them feel inadequate, isolated, and intimidated. The norms for speaking in the classroom subjugate the JIS into silent observers and subalterns who lack colloquial English skills or local cultural knowledge. Unforgiving sanctions, including discrimination, exclusion, ignorance, and silent treatment, are used by the NES to illegitimize JIS membership in the classroom community. (4) These micro-level nuances of classroom culture are discussed in relation to the macro-level institutionalized structures of U.S. higher education that are, in turn, embedded in the socio-historical dynamics of the nation.

Keywords: classroom; English; speech; culture; intercultural; Japanese; conversation; international students; Whiteness

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of the shy and reticent international student in U.S. college classrooms, particularly those from Southeast Asia, is a common topic of inquiry in international education. The students' lack of participation in classroom conversations is problematized as contributing to unsatisfactory classroom experience for instructors and the students themselves [1,2]. Recognizing that these students' English language skills are not comparable to that of native English speakers (NES), scholars have called for remedial attention to enhance intercultural exchange in the classroom. Common strategies proposed to maximize the learning experience of the students include assisting them to hone their English language skills, teaching them how to overcome reticence and shyness and adapt to the U.S. academic culture, and encouraging them to forge intercultural friendships with their U.S. counterparts [2–7].

While these remedial strategies provide invaluable knowledge in enhancing the students' learning experience, the approaches have also exposed the unchallenged, taken-for-granted assumptions of U.S. academic practices. For example, silence is undesirable and problematic in the talk-oriented classroom [8,9]; therefore, those who stay silent need help to adapt to the mainstream classroom culture. Moreover, the ones stigmatized by deficit in communicative skills are expected to be responsible for asserting themselves and remedying the undesirable situation in classroom conversations. Despite sharing the goal of improving intercultural dialogue in higher education, such approaches contradict interculturalists' long-held beliefs about achieving meaningful intercultural dialogue [10].

Fundamentally, intercultural dialogue is interactive and contextual [10,11]. Classroom conversation, then, is a place where participants mutually influence one another, and all parties have multiple roles to play. Hence, message exchanges among the classroom participants in constructing the emotional tone of the conversation, for example, are essential in creating a welcoming or threatening atmosphere for student engagement. What is said, what is not said, and how it is said—often the very heart of a conversation—signal the participants' intention and attitude toward each other. The reciprocal nature of classroom interaction, thus, shapes the norms for speaking in the classroom community and greatly influence the participants' willingness to engage in classroom conversation.

The interactive nature of classroom conversation as illustrated above is emphasized in the mainstream scholarship of teaching and learning. However, it is not explored extensively in studies that examine the speech behaviors of nonnative English language (NNEL) speakers in U.S. traditional (i.e., 4-year) undergraduate classrooms. Instead of facts reported by international students, speculations from predominantly English-speaking instructors and practitioners are used as authoritative knowledge to inform research designs and pedagogical practices [12,13]. This exclusion of the very essence of classroom conversation [14]—that is, the message exchanges between/among the participants—in such research approaches does not lead to a meaningful understanding of the international students' speech behaviors in the classroom.

To enrich the existing scholarly understanding on the topic, this study interrogates the speech norms of the classroom community and their effects on the NNEL international students' experience in classroom participation. To do so effectively, the narratives of the international students are privileged to provide their emic (i.e., insider) understanding of their experience. The study focused on Japanese international students (JIS)—the largest percentage of international students at the university in question. The university, located on the U.S. West Coast, is a popular destination for many JIS. Additionally, a popular exchange program since the 1970s between the university and institutions in Japan has encouraged the growth of the JIS population on campus.

An understanding of the JIS experience of their classroom conversations with NES, thus, permits the revelation of the NES' reactions to and appraisals of the JIS' speech behaviors. The reactions and appraisals, as revealed through the NES' message exchanges with the JIS, shapes the interactional dynamics between the White NES and the mostly non-White NNEL students. Participants who keep silent also contribute to these dynamics, often inadvertently through nonverbal cues (e.g., mocking laughter, nodding, etc.), and thereby giving hints to which side they support [15,16]. All these factors influence the interactional dynamics that, in turn, shape the classroom atmosphere (e.g., whether or not students with certain identities feel welcomed and safe to engage in classroom conversations) [17]. To explore the norms for speaking in the classroom, the following questions are pursued:

Question 1: *How do NNEL international students describe their experiences in classroom conversations with NES?*

Question 2: *What are norms for speaking in the U.S. classroom community that affect NNEL international students' participation in classroom conversations?*

This study is only one of many projects that contribute to intercultural dialogue in higher education. It is hoped that the findings will enrich the existing scholarly knowledge on JIS' and NNEL international students' speech behaviors in English-speaking classrooms. More importantly, through better understanding of the students' experiences, the study might encourage reflections and dialogue on certain Western academic practices that remain unchallenged and taken-for-granted.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Classroom Conversations as Academic Practices

The norms for speaking in the classroom community are the force that shapes the message exchanges in classroom conversations. The participants, informed by their personal knowledge and

assumptions that are themselves influenced by the larger socio-historical contexts, co-construct and influence the norms for speaking. In U.S. classrooms, NES, who are predominantly White, constitute the dominant participants. In fact, U.S. higher education institutions comprise about 76% White faculty and 54% White students [18].

U.S. academic practices, particularly conversational practices in the classroom, essentially reflect the values of the mainstream White culture. However, instead of understanding the elusive and pervasive normative practices, researchers who use the traditional research paradigm mainly interrogate the behaviors of students from *ethnic* groups and analyze the associated ethnic cultural practices [14]. Since classroom conversations are a dominant cultural practice in the U.S. classroom community, the current study focuses on examining and understanding conversational practices—particularly, the norms for speaking—in influencing students' (in this case, JIS as non-White NNEL speakers') engagement.

2.2. The Role of Speaking in the Classroom

In the U.S., the classroom is considered a place where community members (i.e., instructors and students) engage in a dialogical process and collaboration in sharing knowledge. Speech activities, thus, constitute the core of this student-centered learning environment [19]. Due to the emphasis on verbosity (i.e., the spoken word), silence is generally assumed to be a social and cultural stigma [20]. The competence to speak, particularly in the colloquial English informed by local cultural knowledge, is the quintessential tool needed to function, thrive, and belong in the classroom community.

Since speaking is the privileged mode of communication, participants who wish to belong to the classroom community or be legitimized as proper community members must have access to the classroom speech codes. Speech codes is "a system of socially constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct" [21]. Knowing what to say, what not to say, how to say it, and when to say it, thus, determines the students' membership in the classroom community (e.g., whether they are insiders, hence desirable, or outsiders, hence undesirable).

The rules for student conduct, particularly those involving speech behaviors, are plenty and stated in classroom resources (e.g., the syllabus, university catalog, assignments, etc.). For example, in order to foster a conducive learning environment, classroom conversations are highly encouraged. Students are urged to actively engage in civil discourse—that is, conversations that are free of discrimination and/or harassment [22,23]. Students should voice and listen actively to different perspectives in order to foster a diverse and respectful learning environment.

These rules, while claimed to support the social mores of the classroom community, are in fact the conscious knowledge of the mainstream culture—that is, the ideals that are readily articulated by the mainstream community members. However, the rules are not necessarily the mundane communicative practices that community members perform unconsciously (i.e., without questioning the ways of doing things). This unconscious knowledge is what constitutes the speech codes of the community. Speech codes in the mainstream U.S. classroom, thus, reveal the nuances in classroom interaction. For example, the illegitimization of NNES speakers by the NES is guided by the norms of communication in the dominant culture, such as the cultural knowledge of the NES about racial minority people who speak non-colloquial English. Therefore, the delineation of the Other, whose communicative behaviors are contested—namely, the JIS in the predominantly White U.S. classroom—informs group dynamics in classroom conversation.

2.3. Group Dynamics in Shaping Classroom Climate

Research studies in various disciplines document that students' classroom participation is informed by classroom climate—that is, the physical, social, and emotional aspects of the classroom environment [24]. A positive classroom climate that is supportive of and conducive to student learning, is associated with higher level of student participation [25,26]. Conversely, a chilly climate is associated with low student participation and is thought to adversely affect student learning [27,28]. Among other

influences, the instructor's leadership is documented extensively as playing a dominant role in building and guiding the classroom atmosphere [29,30] (also see the paragraph below).

In general, instructors' use of verbal and nonverbal cues in the classroom remain a popular topic of investigation in communication education. Variables such as instructors' use of humor [28–30], verbal aggressiveness [31,32], nonverbal immediacy [15,16], self-disclosure [16,33], and social attractiveness [28,34], to name but a few, are tested in association with students' perception of classroom climate, teacher credibility, cultural diversity atmosphere, students' learning, and others. In essence, students' active engagement in learning is largely influenced by positive instructor-student interaction.

In fact, racial tensions on campuses signify differing group dynamics in disputing the dominant Whites' arbitrary conferring of legitimate membership in higher education [35,36]. The illegitimization of the Other in academia marginalizes the personhood of the Other. These cultural and language conflicts, including those between the NES and NNEL students, chart the communication along the *color line* [37]. In the present study, race, nationality and language of classroom participants are the visible cultural markers that are used to tease out the conscious and unconscious knowledge of the participants. In short, communicative practices in the classroom, such as conversations among student participants and instructors, are highly nuanced. The intricacies in this complex system of human relations, cultural knowledge, and communication, however, can be examined meaningfully and productively through the application of the speech codes theory [21,38].

2.4. The Speech Codes Theory (SCT)

Rooted in the long tradition of the ethnography of communication, the speech codes theory (SCT) is a popular theoretical and methodological framework adopted by researchers who wish to interrogate people's unconscious cultural knowledge [39,40]. This form of taken-for-grantedness is the force of social interaction—taken together, language, discourse, and nonverbal cues—in situatedness [38,41,42]. This current study adopts the conceptualization of discourse used in the academic discipline of language and social interaction. Discourse, in this sense, attends to communicative practices and the interactional dynamics that are culturally shaped and historically situated (i.e., inclusive of participants' nonverbal features, communicative competence, and cultural knowledge) [39,42–44]. Although implicit, the practical knowledge about communication and culture can be teased out—both described and interpreted—according to the propositions in the SCT [38,41,45].

The SCT contains six propositions. First, a distinctive speech code can be found in a distinctive culture. Second, multiple speech codes may be used within a given speech community. Third, each code gives practical knowledge about the ways of knowing and acting in a speech community (e.g., psychology, sociology, and rhetoric). Fourth, there are different meanings that people attach to speech practices based on the salient code. Fifth, people inherently display their culture when they communicate. Sixth, speech codes are used to explain "the intelligibility, prudence, and morality of communication conduct" [45] (p. 147).

Applied in the current study, the SCT can be used to unveil the norms for speaking in classroom conversations. Fundamentally, people's metacommunication (i.e., talk about talk)—in this instance, NNEL international students' discourse about conversations in the classroom—reveals the interpersonal ideologies of the community members. Communicative practices that are contested (i.e., illegitimized), thus, elucidate the *shoulds*—that is, what the community members appreciate as normative [40,46,47]. In this study, the JIS' joining of classroom conversations by their NES counterparts permits the observation of what happens when these norms for speaking are violated, since the JIS do not speak the colloquial language or possess the native cultural knowledge. Consequently, their speech behaviors elicit NES responses that reveal the latter's understanding of the social world and human relations.

3. Method

3.1. Data Collection

The data for this study come from a larger project that examines the JIS' experience as NNEL speakers in classroom oral participation. The faculty researcher for the project (i.e., the author) devised the research plan for collecting, interpreting the data, and writing the results of the study. An undergraduate student researcher who speaks Japanese with native proficiency was recruited to collect and translate the interview data. The researchers worked closely during the data collection and transcription processes.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 JIS (n_{male} = 5; n_{female} = 7; age range = 21–32 years) who were recruited through snowball sampling. The students were enrolled full-time in the liberal arts, humanities, social sciences, and business undergraduate degree programs at the university. Classroom conversations as a means of teaching and learning are emphasized in the curricula of these academic programs. All study participants had attended U.S. colleges for at least 17 months and were familiar with the dialogic approach to classroom participation that is widely practiced and expected in U.S. undergraduate classrooms.

The participants gave their consent to participate in the study through the university approved human subjects standard. The interviews were conducted in Japanese to build rapport between the interviewee and the interviewer while avoiding nonnative language speaking challenges (e.g., anxiety, articulation, interpretation, etc.) [48]. Each interview lasted 1–1.5 h. All interviews were audio-recorded. No compensation was given, and pseudonyms are used to protect the participants' confidentiality.

The interviewees were asked about their typical experience in the classroom, their recollection of their speech behavior in the classroom, and their peers' and instructors' reactions toward their oral participation. The questions were constructed using the Spradley's ethnographic interview approach to ensure the inclusion of different question formats in getting at meaningful responses [48]. For example, descriptive questions were asked in order to allow the interviewees' use of their native language to label their understanding, whereas structural questions were asked to allow the exploration of domains—the interviewees' cultural knowledge (i.e., how they come to know their perceived reality).

The interviews were transcribed fully using the Santa Barbara transcription method, a school of textual representation of spoken discourse in which linguists are committed to understanding speech as a sociocultural phenomenon [49], and translated into simple English guided by the natural semantic metalanguage theory (NSMT) [50]. The NSMT maintains that semantic primes—words that are simple and indefinable (e.g., *I, you, think, want, know, say, feel*, etc.)—are universal in meanings across languages and hence suitable for analysis. Therefore, lexicons with complex conceptualizations in the Japanese language are represented in simplified English words in order to accurately capture the interlocutors' understanding of their cultural world.

3.2. Data Analysis

In keeping with the speech codes perspective, a close reading of the transcriptions was done. The SCT also suggests the use of the mnemonics in Hymes's SPEAKING framework to guide data analysis (i.e., setting or scene, the participants and participant identities, the ends, the act sequence and act topic, the key or tone, the instrumentalities, the norms of interaction and of interpretations, and the genre) [51]. Therefore, during the analytic process, specific attention was paid to instances that conformed to the elements of Hymes's SPEAKING framework. The constant comparative method, informed by the grounded theory, was then used to guide further data analysis [52,53]. Connections were sought among what is said, what is not said, how it is said, to and with whom, and what effects the message triggers in the interaction, paying specific attention to Hymes's mnemonic components of emotional key, the participants and participant identities, the tone of messages, the ends (i.e., the results) of communication in teasing out the norms for speaking in the classrooms.

Upon completion of the data analysis, the author also conducted member check (i.e., respondent verification) with three JIS who were not part of the original study. Narratives of various participants' experiences in classroom conversations and their understanding of the norms for speaking in the classroom were presented to the members. Their interpretations of these episodes largely matched the earlier interpretations of the author.

4. Findings

All the interviewees consistently described their experience of engaging in classroom conversations as challenging. Using phrases such as "feeling intimidated," "emotionally vexing," and "humiliated," the interviewees revealed classroom dynamics that affected their subsequent decisions of whether or not to speak up in class. While lack of English language skills impeded many JIS from expressing themselves effectively, the fear of oral participation was further heightened by unsettling classroom interactions in which the NES illegitimized the JIS' speech practices. What is said and what is not said to the JIS by their NES peers and instructors contribute to the JIS' reluctance to participate in classroom conversations. The following subsections detail the reasons for the conflicting feelings of eagerness and dread the JIS feel as a result of these classroom dynamics.

4.1. The JIS' Experience of Speaking up in the U.S. Classrooms

4.1.1. Feeling Inadequate

Sometimes I think, "Why can't I do something others can do?" I think, "I'm just like a baby . . . . But I know I'm wrong. I've been in America for five years, so I think I should be able to speak up normally like others do.

These sentiments expressed by Akiho, who has been studying at universities in the U.S. East and West Coasts, captured in equal measure the feeling of inadequacy and ownership of her weakness. Akiho compared her inability to function "normally" like other NES in the classroom to being helpless like a "baby." Not having what the NES have (i.e., colloquial English language competence) felt like a social stigma—something that was shameful and not "normal." Makato, who would rather keep quiet in class, illustrated the inadequacy from which one could not hide and for which one could be ridiculed by others. The deep shame he felt as a result of feeling inadequate was made even worse by the NES' ridicule:

How could they make fun of me? . . . .Two students . . . imitated me. One said, "Your English is not English!" . . . the other laughed and they continued talking . . . I was shocked . . . I cried. I was so mad, so sad. . . . Why?! I tossed in my bed, every night, thinking . . .

While inadequate skills in English and lack of local cultural knowledge made the JIS feel like outcasts in the community, the feeling of being excluded from classroom conversation by peers was equally demeaning. Take for example, Rie, who was denied legitimate membership in the classroom community and felt slighted. Having attended international schools in Japan from an early age, she considered herself fluent in English, but her American peers treated her like any other international student with limited English skills.

As contributing to classroom discussion is not optional in the talk-oriented classroom, the feeling of inadequacy, as Takashi explained, is inevitable, "I feel like I'm in a bad position. I cannot really express what I want. . . . I feel sorry for others even when I participate in the discussion because I don't feel I contribute meaningfully."

4.1.2. Feeling Isolated

The reactions of the NES—both peers and instructors—to the JIS' half-hearted attempts to speak up in class often made them excluded in the classroom. As a result, explained Nao:

> … they ((JIS)) don't want to interact with the Americans. … they tend to form work groups with other international students. It's like, they don't even try to go close to the wall, to climb over the wall to go to the other side, the wall between us and the Americans.

In this case, the JIS' affinity for fellow international students was most likely a reaction to the treatment and reactions they received from the NES. These feelings of isolation, which Nao likened to a "wall" separating them from the NES, further deterred them from engaging in classroom conversations. Sinichi lamented:

> … they probably think that we don't like expressing our opinions and that we are not capable of saying something that carries weight. Even when I say something ((in class)), others usually do not seem to care.

In a way, this perception of isolation perpetuates the feeling of inadequacy. Sinichi added that besides feeling ignored in class, the instructor's lack of acknowledgement and feedback for him made him feel even more disconnected from the class:

> His reaction was like, "Um." ((Sinichi imitated his professor's nonverbal cues by tilting his head and looking a little confused)). I thought it was the worst reaction that I've ever seen. … Not only did the professor's reaction imply that my response was bad, he asked, "Um, okay. Who else?" Really?! … I was upset … but I had to brush it off in order to continue attending to the class business.

> The rude treatment of JIS by the NES in classroom conversations further alienated the JIS. Describing a conversation between one of her JIS peers' and the NES, Sayuri revealed that the lack of interest, care, and support by the NES leads to psychological isolation. She divulged, " … they didn't even try to listen. … They started to use their phones … started to talk about other things … they didn't even care."

In a few instances, participants described moments when they felt appreciated upon being invited to join a classroom conversation. However, a deeper analysis suggests that while such invitations seemed like privileged treatment, they did not make the JIS feel like full members of their classroom communities. In many instances the participants thought their opinions were sought only when the NES wanted to know about exotic culture, particularly Japanese and/or Asian culture. Sinichi observed, "I think that from the instructors' perspective, if Japanese students are participating in the class, they should talk about something different."

The "something different" is often the stereotypical portrayal of the Japanese and Asian culture that is common in the U.S. mainstream media, such as *go-kon* (group dates), *karaoke, manga* (a style of Japanese comic books and graphic novels), and *ai puchi* (a cosmetic glue used to produce eyelid crease). Akiho observed, "They don't ask me meaningful questions. They usually ask the same shallow questions, like, 'Do you miss sushi?'"

These feelings of disrespect further isolate the participants from the classroom community. Rie confessed, "I didn't want to say that I'm an international student. If others find out … I'll be looked down upon. Therefore, I act like I'm American. But this is wrong too … " It seems the only time the JIS could command NES respect was when they were acting as their country's cultural ambassadors or providing something different that their American counterparts were eager to see or hear. Even so, their membership in the classroom community was not fully legitimized.

4.1.3. Fearing What Others Think

Based on the previous discussion, it would appear the JIS' silence in the classroom is used strategically to reduce their exposure to feelings of inadequacy, shame, and inferiority, all of which lead to their further isolation. However, the emphasis on verbosity in U.S. college classrooms pressures the JIS to speak up and thus exposes them to uncertainty and vulnerability that they do not know

how to handle. Unfortunately, engaging in classroom conversations subjects them to anxiety-inducing evaluation by peers and instructors.

The JIS perceived three types of evaluations when engaging in classroom conversations: (a) positive feedback that affirms something good about the JIS; (b) negative feedback such as ridicule; and (c) uncertain feedback where the JIS is unsure what to think. The positive and negative feedback helps the JIS identify the skills they have mastered or need improvement. However, the ambiguity of the uncertain feedback provokes anxiety in the JIS, since they cannot tell how their continued engagement in classroom conversations will be received. Yuko described one such incident, thus, "They didn't say, 'Why don't you speak?' . . . .They were silent, waiting for me. However, the uncertainty was disconcerting, "After such things happen, I feel really frustrated and vexed . . . " Clearly, positive or negative feedback would reveal to Yuko the actions she should take to improve her oral participation in the classroom.

While Takuya shared Yuko's negative feelings, he further described the transformation of his negative feelings into motivation for improvement. He concurred with a number of participants that the breakthrough helps him leave behind the feeling of inadequacy. He recounted an incident during which he could not come up with a good response in class:

> I feel ashamed, and it hurts. It is really frustrating and worrisome. . . . When I feel better eventually, I think about the reasons why I did poorly . . . then it becomes my motivation. . . . So, I reflect, practice, and I think I should be able to do it next time.

There were several instances where the participants were unable to interpret the reactions of the NES and at a loss for what to do next. Hiroto, for example, said his feelings of inadequacy were exacerbated after being ridiculed by his White peers. "You don't speak English, do you?" they jeered. "Your English is not English!" Hiroto felt humiliated:

> I cried on the way home. . . . I thought "What should I do?" I asked my host mother. . . . "How bad is my English?" and she said, "Not bad . . . " So I asked, "What else do you think is my problem?"

Hiroto was not sure if his English was the problem or if his NES peers were just being mean. He recounted another occasion that left him feeling worthless and unsettled. Mimicking his peers' and instructors' taunts when he was struggling to come up with good responses:

> "I don't know what you are saying. . . . What are you talking about? . . . Why are you so nervous?" . . . .They ask, but they don't really care to find out. I don't think they are interested in understanding and befriending us.

> Instead, "Friends critique each other. We know what others are thinking of us," Ryuta concluded.

4.2. The Norms for Speaking in U.S. Classrooms

The JIS feelings of inadequacy and isolation, and fear of what others in the classroom think of them when they engage in classroom conversations with NES represent the illegitimization of their membership in the classroom. This illegitimization—expressed as a rejection and exclusion that hurts—has made the JIS more aware and observant of the speech codes in the classroom. By reflecting on their experiences conversing with the NES, the JIS are able to articulate the conscious cultural knowledge that partially informs the norms for speaking in the classroom. More importantly, they are able to make sense of some of the unconscious cultural knowledge that the NES hold, protect, and reinforce as the standard in the classroom discursive space.

The patterned norms that are used as guides for conducting classroom conversations, as readily understood by the NES, closely match the descriptions of the SCT. Specifically, the classroom, dominated by White students and instructors who are native speakers of English, is construed as a discursive space that contains a discrete cultural script that delimits the mundane functioning of the community.

In other words, the U.S. classroom is a speech community that has multiple speech codes and various conducts that are highly nuanced. However, ways of speaking that do not adhere to the dominant expectations and the set codes of conduct that are held as normative are subject to sanctions.

The nuances become discernible when violations of the codes occur, as suggested in the SCT. In fact, the norms of speaking in the classroom community can be teased out from the nuances of the resistance the JIS face when attempting to claim legitimate membership. In the case of the JIS, who do not speak colloquial English or possess local cultural knowledge or codes, the sanctions can be unforgiving, to the extent of causing emotional scars. There were numerous instances where the JIS were excluded from classroom conversation by the NES, who used tactics such as oblivious ignorance, silence, mocking laughter, and ridicule. The following subsection discusses the specific norms for speaking in the classroom.

Fundamental Expectations for Membership Legitimization

In order to be accepted as a member of the U.S. classroom community, one must conform to the accepted norms of the classroom culture. Fundamentally, the speaker must be fluent in colloquial American English and possess local cultural knowledge. The speaker must also be someone who has his or her own opinions or viewpoints to contribute to an ongoing conversation. Whatever the opinion or viewpoint, it should be expressed in a way that conforms to the expectations of the NES—that is, acceptable to the privileged members of the dominant White culture, the predominantly White educational system, and knowledge construction rooted in Eurocentrism. These expectations are the taken-for-granted social knowledge of the dominant group, as exemplified in White stereotypes about some exotic outsiders. In this sense, exotic or foreign cultural knowledge is only appropriate if it emanates from cultural outsiders (i.e., those whose membership is illegitimized) and only if the outsiders are permitted space in the conversation to share that knowledge. In short, outsiders in the U.S. classroom community are those who the NES assign some *ethnic* identity (i.e., non-White).

This extemporaneous mode of communication (i.e., classroom conversation), therefore, requires the speaker to possess the skills to compete for the floor in a conversation in progress. Shyness, thus, is not appreciated and should not be shown by the speaker. The speaking is performed in front of others (i.e., in small groups or in class) who have the claimed membership. Collectively, members of the classroom community cast judgment, whether positive or negative, on those who fail to conform to the speaking norms. The ability to cast judgment reveals a position of power dominance in the classroom, which is generally reserved for the NES.

5. Discussion

In the spirit of genuine intercultural dialogue, this study does not suggest condemning any group. While the dominant group comprised of the White student and instructor population in the college classrooms examined, the use of the term *dominant White* by no means implies that all White people subscribe to the same ideologies [54,55]. In fact, participants also reported positive encounters with many White community members on and off campus. However, it is important to note that *all* the JIS participants described many instances where they received harsh, culturally insensitive and often disrespectful comments and criticisms from members of the dominant group that gave rise to negative and emotionally charged responses.

The overall findings of the study show that understanding the dynamics that inform JIS participation in classroom conversations requires the interrogation of micro-level influences in classroom interaction. Clearly, the need for supportive and caring interactional dynamics to effect a positive classroom atmosphere that is encouraging of student participation is evidenced in this study as consistent with previous studies in instructional communication [24–26]. Furthermore, this study emphasizes respect in classroom interaction that involves communication along the color line—a topic that has not been explored in depth in past mainstream studies examining non-White NNEL in predominantly White classrooms [56]. Respect in this case not only signals to JIS a welcoming acceptance

of their membership in the classroom community, but also an affirmation of their personhood—one that also acknowledges their non-White and NNEL speaking identities [14,57]. In fact, the dominant group's lack of respect for the dignity of non-dominant students has been challenged in various social realms dealing with racial tensions in college life [35,58]. While respect for diversity may seem like a rudimentary espoused value in any classroom, the fact that the JIS were made to feel inadequate and inferior suggests that the NES lack respect for those who do not look or speak like them.

What is more, the findings of this study show that even when the JIS are doing quite well academically, they feel belittled and unappreciated when the NES look down upon them. The NES' lack of respect for foreigners—or those who (look like they) are from other countries—appears tied to the latter's poor English-speaking skills. However, a deeper analysis reveals the NES' assumed arbitrary connection between non-standard or accented English and the ownership of ethnicity [59]. Thus, White racial biases towards non-Whites are ingrained in their interaction with the JIS in the classrooms [60,61]. Based on the study's findings about the norms for speaking in U.S. college classrooms, this reaction to JIS is, shamefully, permissible without critical questioning.

More disturbingly, this study finds that instructors in U.S. college classrooms often participate in the co-construction or lead the hostility towards *foreign* students in their classrooms. The JIS reported that some instructors used culturally insensitive, offensive, and sometimes racist language in front of the class. As authorities who wield the most power in their classrooms, the instructors are duty bound to positively shape the young minds of their students, and not just maintain the status quo or promote White supremacy by bullying those who are different. It seems the eloquent professing of progressive views by the (White) instructors at the institution in question does not necessarily translate to genuine understanding of intercultural dialogue or concern for JIS and other non-White students. Clearly, even (predominantly White) educators who seem well-equipped with culturally responsive teaching skills may not necessarily possess culturally sensitive communication skills [62,63].

The findings of this study challenge some commonly held views about NNEL speakers' classroom participation. Previous studies about NNEL speakers' language anxiety emphasize the speakers' physiological state of mind—something they have the power to change if they learn some communicative competence, such as anxiety reduction and social skills [64–67]. Regarding the NNEL speakers' fear of evaluation by others, these studies characterize the phenomenon as an emotional, internal process that loads the speakers' cognitive processes and adversely affects their speech performance [66,68]. However, the findings of this study reveal that other external stimuli over which the JIS have no control affect their self-esteem and resolve to be part of the classroom community. Moreover, the emotional strains engendered by the actions of their (dominant White) NES counterparts often does not allow the JIS full agency to define their own experience. On the surface, it looks like the JIS should solve their language deficiency and build self-confidence. However, this study shows that the U.S. classroom is not a safe place for JIS to thrive. The hostility shown to those whose membership is illegitimatized, such as the JIS, is consistent with other reports of interracial unrests that continue to plague predominantly White institutions in the U.S. [35,60,69].

The findings of this study also suggest the need to understand the macro-level institutionalized structures that govern day-to-day living in the larger U.S. society. The classroom community is governed by norms, cultural practices, and speech codes that are defined by and for the dominant groups in the community. In this study, these socially ingrained practices are reflected in the White classroom. Typically, those who are different are treated as less than normal, and who or what they are subjected to scrutiny [35–37]. The deviant, then, has to accommodate and assimilate in order to appeal to and not appear different from those in the dominant system [8].

In a way, the old saying that "When in Rome, do as the Romans do"—a reminder for outsiders to follow the customs and practices of the host—is embedded in the norms for speaking in the U.S. college classroom. This norm is also manifested in the theoretical assumptions of mainstream intercultural communication literature. In particular, studies focusing on cultural adaptation of international students in U.S. and other Western colleges cite the students' low cultural adaptation as a major

hindrance to their integration into the host countries academic systems [4,5,70]. Along with the literature on language anxiety, this traditional area of study, in a way, highlights the inadequacies of NNEL students by suggesting that the correction of these flaws is entirely up to the victims. However, the current study shows that the JIS' language problems are not the main reason for their reluctance to engage the NES in classroom conversations. Rather, the NES' attitude and treatment of JIS, which essentially restricts membership in the classroom community to speakers of colloquial English, is a bigger culprit.

Additionally, the findings of this study demonstrate that the classroom community is in fact a replication of the larger U.S. society, where racial inequities are rampant and the system corrupt and unjust [59,71,72]. Racial minorities who have suffered systemic abuse and a harsh history full of unequal treatment are placed in direct competition with members of the dominant group, whose advantageous position often stems from decades of unearned privileges [72,73]. In this dysfunctional environment, the JIS, who themselves bear a heavy burden of emotional stressors that challenge their growth as learners in the classroom, are expected to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, so to speak, and have a lively engagement in class. These are struggles that a majority of the NES, the dominant group in the classroom, do not have to confront.

Despite the unreasonable assumption that the JIS are somehow to blame for their inadequacies, many JIS have developed admirable work ethics that help them cope, albeit with great difficulty. This ability to perform well despite less than ideal classroom environment is remarkable. Many JIS in the study had spent an average of 3.5 years in U.S. college classrooms, but were exasperated that they could never fully blend into the U.S. academic community. This study suggests that the JIS are still considered outsiders in the classroom for the simple reason that they are "not White" and "look different"—a finding that implies a lack of tolerance for diversity in U.S. college classrooms [58,70,74]. Even with the passage of time, the progressive outlook of U.S. higher education seems entrenched in the nation's racist past. Representational diversity, a popular term in college and university recruitment of non-White students, will thus remain just another corporate business technique that cements U.S. higher education in the for profit, consumer model [75]—unless and until the voices of the marginalized are genuinely incorporated in higher education and college administration.

6. Implications

From the basic but arbitrary assumption that only White skin or speaking colloquial English automatically confers membership in the classroom community, to the unforgiving sanctions imposed on JIS, the classroom cultural script guides a mundane academic life that mimics the nation's racist history of oppression, inequality, and discrimination. The current climate in U.S. classrooms reinforces and protects the cultural codes, ways of speaking, and interests of the NES, just like the macro-system of U.S. society does for the dominant White culture [57–59]. It seems life in the academic ivory tower is inseparable from that in the broader American society—a society that is not ready to move past the legitimization of personhood based on skin color, despite the numerous lessons on humanity offered by its racist past.

Collectively, the findings suggest a need for a critical examination of the U.S. education in general and in teacher training, so that those who lead can also benefit from any changes made to improve the system. Evidently, many White educators' claims that they use culturally responsive curricula in their university teaching are undermined by the inadequacies and spuriousness of current mainstream diversity work on U.S. campuses [10,72]. After all, works that promote diversity are not necessarily those that focus on dismantling the White-centered social system [10]. In fact, current teacher training in the U.S., pioneered and designed by predominantly White elites, remains largely White-washed [62,69,70] despite recent demographic shifts.

Given the abundance of diversity issues in U.S. classroom conversations, the NES' reluctance to fully appreciate intercultural interaction with JIS shows that the continuing work by university administrations to enhance representation diversity is not sufficient. The integration of the marginalized

voice is crucial to this effort. However, the recruitment of the marginalized voice in classroom conversations, and in the wider realm of teaching, learning, and training, should be designed and executed with a genuine concern for understanding and engaging the minority perspective [72]. As shown in the limited works that call for curriculum revamp, the dominant (White) culture's suppression of indigenous people's versions of U.S. history (e.g., by treating Christopher Columbus as a hero and suppressing talk of the historical genocide against native people) is, in fact, an act of injustice [59,76,77]. Therefore, historical connections to the community in relation to White power should be taught in all academic disciplines [72].

Furthermore, the common practice of parading (non-White) ethnicities and cultures in classroom conversations and educational materials [78,79] mimics the NES' perception of JIS as exotic foreigners who are only good enough to speak for exotic, foreign cultures. While pedagogical improvements to academic materials take time, instructors can do their part for social justice through honest and critical interrogation of the (White) elite identity as it pertains to equity, inclusivity, and justice [72]. Teacher education, university discourse, and classroom conversations must decenter and disrupt the normalization of Whiteness. White fragility—that is, the inability of the Whites to address and thus critically reflect on racism and social injustices [73]—is the current trend in many culture and diversity discourse that must be confronted [58].

In some ways the isolation of the JIS in U.S. classrooms—either psychological isolation or silencing by NES—invokes visions of the U.S. segregation of people of Japanese ancestry in the early 1900s, especially during World War II [77]. Unlike the days in internment camps, the JIS may not be deprived of any physical needs in present day U.S. college classrooms. However, their fundamental psychological needs (e.g., needs to feel included, respected, cared, etc.) are not being met. Instead, a form of power abuse is evident in the classroom conversations examined in this study.

The JIS feel isolated. This isolation may be a contributing factor to the loneliness many international students internalize [80,81]—a fact that is underreported in empirical works and not readily acknowledged in academic circles. Unfortunately, professional counseling services that are culturally sensitive and tailored to the language needs of NNEL students, are virtually non-existent in U.S. colleges. This study is, thus, calling out the ignorance and double standards in U.S. higher education that, despite aggressive recruitment efforts and massive income from astronomically high out-of-state tuition, continues to ignore the needs of NNEL students.

Given the foregoing, it is suggested that some education for the NES about intercultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and respect for NNEL speakers will be useful. However, given that the classroom climate is a reflection of the wider society, this study calls for a larger-scale dialogue and a deliberate, critical, and aggressive examination of why the system continues to perpetuate this oppressive system. Clearly, the system can only be further encouraged by the lack of critical examination and self-reflexivity [82] among those who enjoy the benefits of the status-quo, as noted in various works that aim to dismantle the oppressive White system [23,71,72]. In other words, the discourse on dismantling White privilege and its associated ills (e.g., racism) should not be restricted to an assumed safe space inhabited by a few idealists, be they in academia (instructors, administrators, or students) or civil rights organizations. After all, some claimed safe spaces, such as university classrooms, have been shown to be hostile to anything (people or ideas) that exhibits differences from the norm [35,69,70]. Hence, public discourse that can liberate society from unconscious biases and uninformed racial practices should be ongoing and not occasional or ad hoc [83]; it should be a movement that considers and supports, but also cross-checks any critical cultural knowledge produced in academia.

In sum, norms, unstated and invisible, are the taken-for-granted that educators must question and challenge because they tend not to promote social equity. The norms are often defended even when they infringe on the rights of others, as demonstrated by the JIS' experience. Social injustices in college classrooms are a violation of the ethical treatment of all students, and if the true purpose of higher education that emphasizes internationalization is to enhance diversity, then educators must encourage genuine intercultural dialogue [10,72]. For that to happen, academics must engage in critical

cultural inquiry and self-reflexivity [82,84]. Equally critical is the need to educate and sensitize the predominantly White college faculty to such issues of classroom diversity because those who are not educated cannot educate others.

7. Conclusions

The study set out to examine the experience of NNEL speaking international students, particularly JIS, in U.S. college classrooms. As guided by the SCT and the Hymes's SPEAKING framework, norms for speaking in the predominantly White classroom community are identified through the analysis of the JIS' reported classroom conversations with NES. The JIS revealed threatening classroom dynamics that adversely affect their classroom participation. The illegitimization of JIS membership in the classroom community further subjugates them into subalterns. In short, the norms for speaking in the classrooms basically favor those who possess the local cultural knowledge and speak English with colloquial competence, which further separates the JIS from their NES counterparts and instructors. Moreover, the NES ridicule the JIS in their attempts to enjoy legitimacy in the classroom, often with the overt or covert collusion of the instructors. Consequently, this study calls for the education of NES students and educators so that they can accept, respect, and appreciate differences and diversity in the classroom setting.

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