



## Problematizing Fluent Speakers' Unintentional Exclusion of Emergent Bilinguals: A Case Study of an English-Medium Instruction Classroom in Japan

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### Abstract

In English-medium instruction (EMI) classrooms in Japan, less proficient English speakers are often marginalized, positioned as powerless, and quiet (e.g., Iino, 2019). This situation is problematic for inequitable access to activity and the possible consequences for their identity and emotional wellbeing. However, few studies have examined how exclusion is co-constructed in such a context. This study addresses that lack, illustrating how exclusion is co-constructed by shedding light on the microlevel social interactions in an EMI classroom. In the study, observation notes, students' weekly journals, and interview data were gathered. The findings show that fast-paced interactions and some gestures made the emergent bilinguals hesitant to participate in the discussions. Also, a mismatch of expectations from both the emergent bilinguals and the fluent speakers suggested that the exclusion was unintentional. An analysis of the findings underscores how social interactions, if not sensitive enough towards less proficient speakers, may cause unintentional exclusion and inflict emotional harm in the classroom.

**Keywords:** English-medium instruction, exclusion, emergent bilinguals, case study, Japan

### Introduction

Being excluded from a conversation is a painful experience. People feel discomfort at least, and severe distress at worst. Research in neuroscience has shown that when people feel socially excluded, they suffer significant psychological damage (Kawamoto et al., 2013, 2014, 2015) and behave in ways to help avoid such situations (Cohen et al., 2007). Exclusion can happen when a less proficient speaker of a language can neither understand what is spoken nor take turns in fast-paced discussions regulated by more proficient—thus, fluent—speakers. Language itself is not harmful, but if used in such a fast-paced way that it excludes certain members and inflicts emotional pain, depriving them of their comfort and pride, it can become an injurious tool.

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This study frames such language practices in microlevel social interactions in the classroom, which may harm certain members, as language weaponization. Language weaponization, in this article, refers to the process by which words, discourse, and language in any form have been used or are being used to inflict harm on others, and how language education policies, programs, and curricula are weaponized (Bryan & Gerald, 2020; Pascale, 2019). This term originally appeared in the social sciences to characterize discursive strategies in using language as a political tool (e.g., Pascale, 2019). Today, the term as a broader concept has also been used in applied linguistics. It resonates with the raciolinguistic perspective (Rosa, 2019; Rosa & Flores, 2017), which looks critically at how language practices and ideologies harm less linguistically privileged people (Ortega, 2019). For example, Bryan and Gerald (2020) specifically use this term to describe the contemporary social issues of anti-Black racism in the United States. Also, there are other studies that do not adopt the term language weaponization but problematize the harmful aspect of language use and practices at microlevel social interactions, such as linguistic violence (Baker-Bell, 2020a, 2020b) and microaggression (Corona & Block, 2020; Dovchin, 2020; Kubota et al., 2021). This study aims to apply this critical conceptual lens to a Japanese educational context where a foreign language (in this case, English) is used as a medium of instruction, and thus there are linguistically privileged (more proficient) and less privileged (less proficient) students in the classroom.

English-medium instruction (EMI) is spreading rapidly in Japanese higher education (Bradford & Brown, 2017; Brown & Iyobe, 2014; Curle et al., 2020; Macaro et al., 2018), as well as in other countries, in the current time of neoliberal globalization (Block et al., 2012; Kubota, 2020). EMI refers to the “use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English” (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 37). In Japan, the literature on EMI reports that less proficient English speakers are marginalized in the classrooms and positioned as powerless and quiet (Iino, 2019; Iino & Murata, 2016; Kojima, 2021). Some of these marginalized students experience significant pain, which pushes some to the verge of withdrawing from a class (Kiyota, 2022). Drawing on the concept of language weaponization as a theoretical lens, this study explores how language practices in social interactions may harm others through the marginalization of less proficient speakers in EMI classroom settings.

## **Theoretical Considerations and Previous Research**

Kobayashi et al. (2017) point out that students’ language proficiency in the language of instruction exacerbates stratification and marginalization in classrooms. Marginalization is salient in discussion-based EMI classes, as proficiency plays a significant role in participating in discussion tasks. Some studies have shown that one of the top difficulties of EMI tasks for Japanese students is spontaneous speech in discussion tasks (Suzuki et al., 2017; Tahara et al., 2021). Previous research has discussed the problem by examining inhibitory factors such as language proficiency (e.g., Brown, 2017), foreign language anxiety (e.g., Chou, 2018; Kudo et al., 2017), or culture shock of “outspokenness of their international classmates” (D’Angelo, 2019, p. 131).

However, this study proposes two new, more socially oriented perspectives in applied linguistics (Atkinson, 2011; Duff, 2019; Duff & Byrnes, 2019; Hall, 2019; Douglas Fir Group, 2016) to approach the problem. One is from conversation analysis (CA). For example, some CA studies explain that the low participation rates of second language (L2) learners in group discussions that involve native speakers are due to the difficulty of turn taking in multiparty talk (e.g., Ryan & Forrest, 2021). Levinson and Torreira (2015) highlight the temporal constraints that turn taking imposes on language processing. According to them, in verbal interactions such as oral discussions, members must comprehend the L2 speech while at the same time predicting the end of the current speaker’s turn

and mentally preparing their articulation. The rapid turn taking makes it more difficult for less proficient speakers to participate in the conversations.

Another new perspective is from second language socialization (SLS) studies, which recognizes more socially oriented dimensions. Taking anxiety, for example, SLS posits L2 users' discomfort not as an internally generated form of anxiety, but as something "co-constructed through interactions and other social practices" (Duff, 2010, p. 176). Through social interactions, "[users] are positioned—by themselves, by others, and by their institutions—as capable (or incapable), as worthy, legitimate, showing potential for fuller participation or membership (or not), as insiders (or outsiders), and so on," constructing identities in the group (Duff, 2010, p. 176). Taking these two perspectives, few studies have shed light on the microlevel social dimensions of the interactions in EMI group discussion activities. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the language practices of social interaction from a critical perspective (Pennycook, 2021, 2022), questioning the classroom norm and its inherent contextual operation of power between more fluent and less fluent speakers.

The students featured in this study are those who have already acquired a certain level of L2 English proficiency, but are less proficient and less fluent compared to their more proficient and more fluent classmates. They can handle a heavy load of reading assignments and term papers, and yet find participation in the discussion difficult and uncomfortable. I call these students emergent bilinguals rather than L2 learners, resonating with García's (2009) perspective. Emergent bilinguals refers to "students in the process of developing proficiency in a new language" (Baker & Wright, 2021, p. 12). The term emphasizes the aspect of students' potential in language development towards fuller bilingualism, whereas the term L2 learners may imply that they are limited in L2 English because they are still 'learning.' Although this term originated in the US context, the term is now used in studies on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in higher education outside US contexts, such as Costa Rica (e.g., Fallas Escobar, 2019) and Japan (e.g., Turnbull, 2019). Viewing these students as L2 learners may legitimize the monolingual norm and ideology in EMI classroom practices that the language standard of the classroom should adhere to the fluent speakers, thus dismissing the potential of contributions from less proficient speakers, which should be equally valued and respected.

Outside EMI studies, some scholars have addressed the marginalization of emergent bilinguals in terms of equity and inclusion in classrooms. For example, Pentón Herrera (2021) portrayed the marginalization of an Ixil-speaking minority student in a mainstream classroom in the US. The marginalization was due to various factors, including the medium of instruction (English) and the discrepancies between the education style and the participant's limited background in formal education. To avoid discomfort and pain, the participant chose to become invisible in the classroom, eventually withdrawing from school. In another example, Morita (2004) provided narratives of the marginalization of three international students in Canada. One student, Rie, was active in one class and was silenced in another class where the instructor imposed a deficit view on the student. Parks and Raymond (2004) depicted the ostracism of Chinese students in group presentation classroom tasks in Canada. Class members constructed a deficit view of the Chinese students and behaved uncooperatively in preparing for a presentation. While these studies have raised the issue of marginalization in classrooms, we still do not know the microprocesses of how exclusion was constructed by the people involved. Also, many of these studies concentrate on the North American context, where implicit and explicit racism cannot be separated from the discussion of marginalization.

Nevertheless, marginalization also occurs in EMI contexts in Japan among Japanese students when there are proficiency gaps among them, although the issue of racism may not be relevant in this context. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to illustrate how exclusion is co-constructed in EMI

in the Japanese context, particularly shedding light on the multiple views of the people involved in the scenario. The following research questions guide the data analysis and the presentation of the findings.

### **Research Questions:**

1. How does exclusion occur in an EMI classroom in Japan?
  - a. How do emergent bilinguals view exclusion from their purview?

## **Method**

### **The Design**

This study employed a qualitative case study approach (Duff, 2008, 2012; Yin, 2018) to gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of the participants' experiences, perspectives, and context. It adopted narrative methods (Riessman, 2008) to depict the experienced exclusion of emergent bilinguals in English-medium classrooms in Japan. Also, the study examined participants' social interactions through classroom observations. Three focal participants were chosen, and their classes were observed for an entire semester. The criterion for the purposive sampling of focal students was exhibiting the required proficiency to attend EMI courses (with 500 or above on the Test of English as a Foreign Language [TOEFL] Institutional Testing Program [ITP]), yet having perceived difficulties in oral social interactions in EMI classes. This criterion for the proficiency level was set because the present study was designed to exclude cases in which students cannot participate in discussions mainly due to a lack of necessary proficiency to attend EMI courses.

### **The Site**

The classroom selected for the study was an EMI course with a class size of 15 students, where opportunities for oral social interactions were abundant. There were three proficient English speakers whose language of instruction was English up to the end of secondary education. The other 12 students were emergent bilinguals who graduated from Japanese high schools. The instructor was an English and Japanese bilingual male. He studied and taught in several English-speaking countries and is a fluent speaker of English. The class was student-centered and evaluation was based on short quizzes based on the reading assignments and two student presentations. Every class had a minimum of four group discussion sessions (approximately 40 minutes in total). At the time of this study (2020–2021), the COVID-19 pandemic forced all courses to be held online, including this course. All the classes were conducted online synchronously, using a video conferencing system called Zoom. Group discussion sessions were conducted in separate breakout rooms with three to four students in each breakout room. Because only one breakout room can be entered at a time, the instructor had to visit each discussion group one by one. In other words, there were times when students were not monitored by the instructor.

### **Participant Recruitment and Case Selection Procedure**

On the first day of the course, the author of this study introduced herself, explained the study's purpose, and collected online consent forms from all the students. The focal participants were recruited then. The author called for students who found difficulties with EMI courses, and then six students volunteered. All of them reported they did not have problems reading and understanding course materials, but their obstacle was spontaneous speaking in their L2 (i.e., English). Among the six students, this study particularly uses the narratives of three students due to relevance. The three focal participants are briefly introduced in Table 1 below; all names provided throughout the study are pseudonyms.

**Table 1.** *Three focal participants*

	Gender	Year	Number of past EMI courses taken	Overseas experience in an English-speaking country
Satomi	F	2	3	1 month in Australia
Yuria	F	2	3	2 months in England 1 month in Canada
Rintaro	M	3	6	2 weeks in Canada 1 month in Australia

**Note.** Country names are slightly altered to protect the participants' personal information.

### Data Sources

Following VanLier (1988), the study gathered multiple data sources for triangulation and various perspectives. The first data source was the author's classroom observation notes, which provided some snapshots of exclusion. The COVID-19 pandemic forced all courses to be held online, including the observed course, which was conducted using a video conferencing system called Zoom. The author observed one ninety-minute EMI course, including group discussion sessions conducted in breakout rooms, for 16 weeks (for a total of 11.5 hours) with her video camera off while simultaneously typing her notes, including her reflections.

The second data source was the focal participants' weekly reflective journals. The participants wrote their reflections and feelings within a few days after each class and sent them to the author using a smartphone text messaging app. This method allowed the author to collect their vivid articulation regarding their experiences, since delayed interviews may deteriorate participants' memory (Heigham & Croker, 2009). The third data source was pre- and post-semester interviews to understand how participants reconstruct their past events (Duff, 2012). These interviews offered a delayed time where focal students could better articulate some topics retrospectively (Bamberg & Demuth, 2016). All data were collected in Japanese.

### Data Analysis

First, on classroom observation data, including group discussion sessions in breakout rooms, analysis was conducted concerning the exclusion of the emergent bilinguals. Questions emerged during the analysis, and they were triangulated with followup questions in interviews. Second, all the weekly journals were transferred to spreadsheets and coded according to emerging themes. Third, the interview data were transcribed verbatim, which scripted the focal participants' narratives. Narrative refers to "a discrete unit of discourse, an extended answer by a research participant to a single question, topically centered and temporally organized" (Riessman, 2008, p. 5). On these narratives, I conducted thematic analysis and structural analysis, following Riessman (2008). Thematic analysis focuses on the content (what was said) and extracts themes from the analysis. Structural analysis analyzes a narrative through structural coding (how it was conveyed), which guided my interpretation of meaning—what the focal participant intended to express and communicate.

### Positionality

The author briefly describes her positionality in this section, which concerns the theoretical perspective of this study and the data quality. First, her own experiences may have helped her better understand the exclusion of emergent bilinguals in interactional settings. She was a minority (Japanese)

child in the US with no English proficiency in her early childhood. She also experienced struggles through her EMI university undergraduate years. These lived experiences have made her sensitive to the issue, thus affecting her axiology (Ortega, 2005), her theoretical stance, and her understanding of the data. Secondly, her researcher identity as a graduate student and a middle-aged woman as old as the participants' mothers may have eased recruitment and data collection. For example, one participant honestly expressed frustration with fluent speakers in her classroom and how she felt so tired in her EMI classes. This kind of information might not have been disclosed to a younger teacher-researcher. Also, another participant spoke about her embarrassment when she felt her 'imperfect' English was revealed to others during oral social interactions. Being young adults, this topic might have been too embarrassing to disclose if the researcher's age was too close to the participants'.

## Findings

This section starts with two classroom scenes, showing the context in which exclusion of the emergent bilinguals occurred. Then, data from the author's observation notes, weekly journals and interviews are provided to demonstrate how the exclusion was co-constructed by both fluent speakers and emergent bilinguals due to inaccurate expectations of each other. Data was collected in Japanese, and the excerpts provided below in English are the author's translations. In presenting the data, underlines are used in excerpts to highlight analytical points.

### Marginalization of the Emergent Bilinguals

The following observation notes from the classroom illustrate how turn-taking in the discussion can progress quickly between fluent speakers. For clarity, neither of the students presented in this observation are focus students; however, the interaction is noteworthy in the context of this study. Of particular relevance is the experience of Tsubasa, a fourth-year student and emergent bilingual who is usually talkative and good at argumentative speech and moderating discussion (i.e., eliciting others' opinions). However, as shown in the observation notes below, he could not join the fast-paced discussion by the fluent speakers.

The group discussion took place in breakout rooms on Zoom. There are Sally and Naomi, fluent speakers of English, and Tsubasa, an emergent bilingual. Naomi reads the discussion question, and Sally answers. She speaks very fast: "I think that's true. It sucks, but..." Naomi comments on what Sally said, and Sally speaks again. The screen displays that the breakout session would end in 60 seconds. Tsubasa could not join this discussion. There was no space in the turn-taking. The group members politely say, "Thanks guys..." and "Thank you..." to each other and go back to the main room on Zoom. (Researcher observation from the sixth-week classroom, November 4, 2020)

The two fluent speakers (Sally and Naomi) were focusing on the content of the discussion, and whether they noticed that their fast-paced turn-taking excluded the emergent bilingual (Tsubasa) remains unclear. For the emergent bilingual, it was almost impossible to stop the fluent speakers' talk to have his turn or ask for any clarifications.

Not being able to participate in the discussion leaves a pain of embarrassment in the heart of the emergent bilinguals, as shown below.

今日は全然会話には入っていかなくて、みんなが話しているのをウンウンと相槌打つだけで精一杯だったけど、これから頑張りたいなと思った。I agree with you.しか言えなかった自分がすごい恥ずかしい、、、。

Today, I couldn't get into the conversation at all. All I could do was just nod and say, "Yes, yes." I was so embarrassed about myself, who could only say, "I agree with you." (Satomi's second-week journal, October 7, 2020)

The final interview with this student, Satomi, revealed that she had invested time, usually ranging between one hour to three days, on her reading assignments to be perfectly ready for the classes. However, disappointedly, she could only nod and say, "I agree with you."

### **The Absence of Recipient Reactions and Comments: A Gesture of Exclusion?**

Rintaro, an emergent bilingual, analyzes how his discomfort varies in discussions with different types of people. He notices that speaking in English is difficult with those who do not provide recipient reactions and comments. On the other hand, the people he feels most comfortable talking with are those who show recipient reactions and elaborate his talk by giving feedback.

今回は、(1) ネイティブっぽくないが、意見に対して笑ってくれたり、反応を見せてくれたりする人たちのグループ、(2) ネイティブ1人とそうでない人2人がいて、反応が薄かったグループ、(3) ネイティブの人たちが沢山いて、意見に対して反応してくれるグループがありました。1番英語で話しやすかったのが、1のグループです。ネイティブの人がいなかったことでプレッシャーは減ったと思います。あと意見に対して共感や敷衍してくれる人が多かったので、話すのに不安はなかったです。2はとても英語を話すのが難しく不安でした。自分の英語が伝わっているのかわからなかったです。3はプレッシャーを感じましたが、意見に対して反応をしてくれたので、自信を持つことができました。

Today, I spoke with three kinds of groups: (1) A group of people who were not native speakers but responded to my opinions; (2) a group with one native and two nonnative speakers who did not respond well; and (3) a group with many native speakers who responded to my opinions. The group that was easiest for me to speak with in English was group 1. The fact that there were no native English speakers in the group made me feel less pressured. Also, people showed empathy and elaborated on my opinions, so I was not worried about speaking. The second group was tough, and I was worried about speaking English. I wasn't sure if my English was being understood. For the third group, I felt a lot of pressure, but since people responded to my opinions, I was able to gain confidence. (Rintaro's fourth-week journal, October 21, 2020)

The following observation notes provide a scenario where discussion members do not react to Rintaro's talk. In the discussion room, there are three students: Sally, a native speaker of English, and Emi and Rintaro, who are both emergent bilinguals. Although Rintaro bravely speaks up, he must have experienced some discomfort.

Sally, Emi, and Rintaro enter the breakout room. Emi kicks off the discussion, "Do you think there is diglossia in Japan?" Rintaro responds, giving an example of using standard Japanese at press conferences. Next, Sally, a native speaker of English, gives her opinion. "We don't use dialect in Tokyo." Sally speaks faster than ever before and ends the conversation in a somewhat unclear manner. Emi and Rintaro listen intently. Sally looks down after she speaks. I [the researcher/observer] don't know why she does so (The zoom screen does not show what she is doing). However, no one asks why. Rintaro then speaks up, but it is not communicated very well, and there are no reactions or comments from either of them. (Researcher observation from the sixth-week classroom, November 4, 2020)

Sally spoke quickly and ambiguously, but no one clarified her statement. Here, Emi and Rintaro might have thought that their inability to comprehend was due to their lack of proficiency. On the contrary, their incomprehension might have been due to Sally's ambiguity in her talk. This misconception can

lead to their—and by extension, other emergent bilinguals’—loss of confidence in an EMI classroom. Also, Sally looked down after she spoke, which could be taken as a gesture of “I do not want to talk anymore.” This gesture may make the other students, particularly emergent bilinguals who lack confidence, feel that discussing with them is not worthwhile. There is no explicit discourse of exclusion; however, the absence of reactions and comments is discouraging for emergent bilinguals and may be interpreted as a gesture of exclusion.

### **The Oversight: The Mismatch of What Is Visible and What Is Interpreted**

It is difficult to know whether the discussion members fully comprehend the speech. This difficulty may be because incomprehension is not expressed but hidden under the poker faces of emergent bilinguals. The following reflective notes by the author reveal her own oversight in interpreting the emergent bilinguals’ facial expressions.

Today, we have a presentation by Naomi, who grew up in the US as a bilingual Japanese minority. The teacher is smiling as usual. The others are listening carefully. Naomi shows some pictures of her community heritage language classes. Sally is looking down, but she is nodding. Naomi delivers a very heartfelt presentation. Everyone seems to be absorbed in her presentation. In the middle of the presentation, Naomi asks a question of Sally. After that, Naomi talks about her experience. It is very moving, I guess because the story is based on her actual experience. The teacher says, “Very important point, but we have to look at the watch...” referring to the remaining class time. Naomi says, “I have two more slides...” and continues her presentation. (Researcher observation from the eighth-week classroom, November 18, 2020)

The author took her observation notes, commenting that “everyone seems to be absorbed in her presentation.” On the screen, students looked serious and focused. However, this was the author’s oversight. In fact, some were struggling, as revealed in Yuria’s weekly journal below.

プレゼンターが2人ともネイティブスピーカーだったからついていくのに必死で疲れた。スライドに書いてないことを早口で言われるとつらい。

Both the presenters [Naomi and Sally] were native speakers, so I was struggling to keep up with the pace. It was hard to catch up when they spoke about things very fast that were not on the presentation slides. (Yuria’s eighth-week journal, November 18, 2020)

Yuria writes that she had difficulty comprehending Naomi’s presentation and the impromptu interaction with Sally. Here, it should be questioned why I, the researcher-observer, could not sense that Yuria was not comprehending, but interpreted instead that she was “absorbed” in Naomi’s presentation. This was because I was focused on Naomi’s presentation, which was a narrative of her personal struggles. Such an intense focus deviated my attention and sensitivity away from the emergent bilinguals. Instead, I wrongly assumed that all classmates were mesmerized *too* because they looked serious on the screen and seemed attentively listening.

This episode clearly shows that fluent speakers may not correctly estimate how much emergent bilinguals understand their talk unless explicit clues are provided, such as tilting their head or verbally expressing that they do not understand. Also, speakers are so focused on the content of their talk that there simply may not be enough cognitive space to consider their classmates’ comprehension. This may be particularly so with students who are not language teachers. Yuria’s weekly journal exemplifies the difficulty of listening to fluent-speaking students/classmates rather than teachers.

先生より生徒の英語が聞き取れなすぎて集中力切れた。ほんとに聞き取れないのは先生じゃなくて、ガチネイティブの生徒なんだと思う。ディスカッションできないから、純ジャパがいるって知ってたら、ゆっくり話して欲しい。

I lost my focus because I couldn't catch the student's English. I really think it's not the teacher's English that I can't catch, but the real native English-speaking students' English. Because I can't participate in the discussion, I hope they slow down if they know there are 'Jun-Japa.' (Yuria's second-week journal, October 7, 2020)

*Jun-Japa* refers to 'pure Japanese,' a rather self-derogatory term referring to Japanese people who are emergent bilinguals and who have never studied abroad, often associated with deficient proficiency and academic socialization in EMI (Aso, 2014).

Yuria complains that it is inconsiderate of fluent speakers not to notice the *Jun-Japa*—the emergent bilinguals—in the group and slow down. In the final interview, the author asked Yuria why she did not ask the fluent speaker to slow down.

筆者：                    ちよつとでも何かあの、すいません、ゆっくり話してくださいって言いづらい雰囲気?

ゆりあ：                いや、言いづらいですよ。もう、なんか、みんなの、なんか時間だから、1人が、なんか「あ、すいません」みたいな、行くのは私は絶対無理です、それは。

筆者：                    もし先生とかが、ちよつと、もうちよつと、ゆっくり話してくれないとか、誰かそういったリーダー的な人、あるいは先生がそういうこと言ってくれたら、どうでしょう。

ゆりあ：                そしたら、もう本当に感謝、もう感謝します。本当に感謝って感じ。ありがとうございます。感謝です。

Author:                 Do you feel you can't say, "Excuse me, please speak slowly"?

Yuria:                    No, that's hard to say! It's everyone's time, so, it's hard for one person to say, "Oh, I'm sorry, but...". No, I can't go like that. Definitely not.

Author:                 What if the teacher says, "Well, can you slow down a bit?" or someone like a leader in the group...

Yuria:                    Then, I would be really grateful, really grateful. It's like, really grateful. "Thank you." I would appreciate that. (Yuria's interview, February 16, 2021)

In a one-on-one situation, emergent bilinguals may make a clarification or do a negotiation of meaning; however, as explained in Yuria's interview, it is difficult to do so in group discussions. She explains that it is usually awkward for "one person" to stop the class or group discussion by consuming "everyone's time." It should also be noted that Yuria would appreciate it if someone in charge of power (such as a teacher or someone with leadership) would change the situation of fast-paced conversations in the classroom.

## Discussion

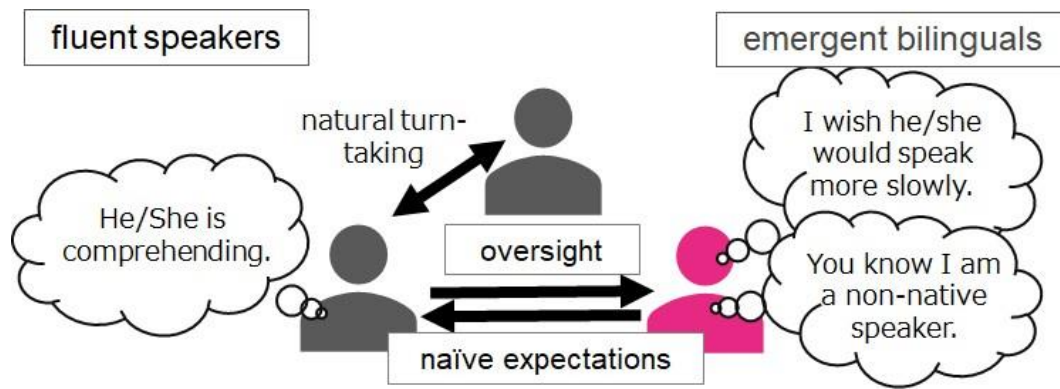
The two more socially oriented perspectives from CA and SLS (Duff, 2010; Levinson & Torreira, 2015; Douglas Fir Group, 2016) support the understanding of the data in the findings and generate the following claims. First, fast speech and fast-paced verbal interactions inhibited the participation of the emergent bilinguals, consequently excluding them from the discussions. This is supported by CA

studies that find that timing in turn-taking is crucial for any speaker (e.g., Levinson & Torreira, 2015). This is understandably so with emergent bilinguals who need to process cognitive demands in their L2. On top of fast-paced interactions, the data showed the fluent speakers' absence of recipient reactions (both physical and verbal) and detaching themselves from the conversation by looking down elsewhere (gaze). According to SLS, this behavior by fluent speakers carries critical nuances for emergent bilinguals. SLS maintains that emergent bilinguals are positioned by others and themselves regarding whether they are identified as "worthy" or "legitimate" (or not) (Duff, 2010, p. 176). In this light, the absence of recipient reactions and avoiding eye contact can communicate to the speaker (i.e., the emergent bilingual) that they are not a worthy or legitimate member of the discussion group. These behaviors can be regarded as a gesture of exclusion, which may demotivate emergent bilinguals from participating in the discussion.

These findings add a new perspective to the current research on the marginalization of less proficient students in EMI in Japan. The previous studies generally have addressed the problem in terms of L2 speaker-based issues, such as insufficient proficiency (e.g., Brown, 2017), anxiety (e.g., Chou, 2018; Kudo et al., 2017), and culture shock (e.g., D'Angelo, 2019). While these are undeniably crucial factors in the EMI problems in Japan, the author wonders whether looking only at these dimensions may entail a danger of attributing the problem exclusively to emergent bilinguals. In this regard, the data of this study additionally present the social dimension of the problem, highlighting that the exclusion was co-constructed in the social interactions. It critically problematizes the norm, ideology, and power of linguistically privileged speakers in the classrooms (Pennycook, 2021) and brings forward the social aspect of the issue as a factor to consider for more inclusive EMI classrooms.

The second point the findings indicate is that the co-construction of exclusion was unintentional. The provided data suggested that there was a mismatch of expectations on the part of both the fluent speakers and the emergent bilinguals. As exemplified, the incomprehension, frustration, discomfort, and pain were not noticed in the observer's reflective notes. To her, all these emotions and cognitive struggles were hidden under the emergent bilinguals' poker faces. Thus, it can be inferred that it was difficult for fluent speakers—including the researcher—to perceive their incomprehension and needs, such as slowing down the turn-taking. Similarly, the emergent bilinguals' expectation to be understood by the fluent speakers concerning their needs without explicitly expressing them might have been too naïve. Because of both parties' oversight, both fluent speakers and emergent bilinguals unintentionally co-constructed the exclusion of the emergent bilinguals from the discussion group, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** *The co-construction of marginalization of emergent bilinguals in an EMI classroom*



There are several limitations to this study. First, the study did not provide transcription of actual classroom interactional data. Such data would provide more credibility and confirmability of the findings. Secondly, the study did not interview the fluent speakers in the class. If the data had included the native speakers' views, confirmability could have been more robust; however, I refrained from doing so for ethical reasons. Also, due to the scope of this research, the analysis did not cover the nature of online classrooms (using Zoom) in contrast to traditional face-to-face classrooms. However, this study sufficiently pointed out the unintentional exclusion regardless of whether the class was delivered online or face-to-face.

## Conclusion

This study made a novel attempt to look critically at the marginalization of emergent bilinguals in a Japanese educational context through a theoretical lens of language weaponization, where a foreign language (English) is used as a medium of instruction. The study explored the language practices in microlevel social interactions between the linguistically privileged (more proficient) and the less privileged (less proficient) in a classroom, and illustrated the exclusion of less proficient speakers, harming these less fluent speakers. The study also highlighted that the exclusion was unintentional, which is problematic since people may be weaponizing their language practices without realizing it. The point may be crucial in understanding how exclusion may occur unintentionally in classrooms, and calls for more critical investigations of the taken-for-granted language practices and norms in EMI classrooms. Considering the pain of struggling marginalized students in Japanese EMI (Kiyota, 2022), the author problematizes such unintentional exclusion of the emergent bilinguals and calls for more awareness and effort to ensure equity and inclusiveness in EMI classrooms to develop the potential of all students.

The findings of this study have the following pedagogical implications. Firstly, instructors may direct students' attention to members' comprehension when there are proficiency gaps among class members. They may choose to slow down their speech accordingly. Also, both fluent and less fluent speakers should be encouraged to always give feedback to what they hear and express appreciation of each other's contributions to the discussion. Secondly, emergent bilinguals are encouraged to not blame themselves for their emerging proficiency, anxiety, or nonacculturation, but instead recognize that they are legitimate and valuable members of their class community.

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