

“Please do not leave any notes for the cleaning lady, as many do not speak English fluently”: policy, power, and language brokering in a multilingual workplace

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Abstract This article investigates the covert language policy and micro-language planning practices of one female Brazilian-American entrepreneur, Magda, within her multilingual cleaning company. Because Magda is plurilingual (Spolsky in *Language policy*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004), she is able to draw on her metalinguistic awareness and multicompetence in order to facilitate communication between her working-class migrant employees and her English-speaking clients as well as engage in what we call “inter-employee brokering”. Magda’s position as the company’s primary language broker enhances her authoritative power in both employer-employee and company owner-customer relations. The current study addresses the need to look into language practices and micro language planning within local contexts (Nekvapil and Nekula in *Language planning in local contexts. Multilingual Matters*, New York, pp 268–287, 2008) as well as blue-collar workplaces (Holmes in *Continuum companion to discourse analysis*. Continuum, London, pp 185–198, 2011; Lønsmann and Kraft in *The Routledge handbook of language in the workplace*. Routledge, New York, forthcoming), which in one way reflect macro social structures, class differences and asymmetrical power relations concerning language use, but also emphasize a deviation from these macro-level patterns through the value placed on Portuguese as the lingua franca within the cleaning company.

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Introduction

Early studies of language in the workplace focused on institutional discourse conducted in monolingual and white-collar workplaces (cf. Atkinson and Drew 1979; Gumperz and Cook Gumperz 1982; Heritage 1985). More recent investigations into language practices within the workplace have expanded to include multilingual worksites, but they, too, have favored white-collar workplaces (Clyne 1994; Koester 2006; Kelly-Holmes and Mautner 2010; Holmes et al. 2012; Angouri 2014a). In a recent publication, Holmes states that blue-collar worksites are “undoubtedly another direction in which it is important to expand workplace discourse research” (2011: 197).

We agree with Holmes and argue that investigating blue-collar workplaces from a sociolinguistic perspective, in contrast to white-collar workplaces, brings greater attention to the informal processes through which covert language policies may take shape and be legitimized by particular actors (Duchêne et al. 2013; Angouri 2014b).¹ These findings provide insight into the asymmetrical relations of power within a particular community of practice like the multilingual cleaning company under investigation. The small but growing literature on multilingual, blue-collar worksites include: Goldstein’s (1997) study of Portuguese women factory workers in Canada, Sunaoshi’s (2005) study of workplace interactions and negotiations between American and Japanese workers in car-manufacturing companies, Barrett’s (2006) work on the added advantages of Spanish language proficiency among the low-wage employees in a Mexican restaurant in the US, Nekvapil and Nekula’s (2008) study of language management in a subsidiary of the Siemens VDO Automotive Corporation, Schluter’s (2014) work on the hidden nature of Kurdish language use among Kurdish migrant workers in Istanbul eating establishments, Piller and Lising’s (2014) study of temporary meat workers in Australia, and Gonçalves’s (2015) study of English use among domestics in the US.² In line with Lønsmann and Kraft’s (forthcoming) findings, we argue that gaining access to the research site, employers and employees represents the most challenging aspect of such studies. This access (or rather lack thereof) is connected with often existing language barriers between researchers and participants in addition to trust concerns.³

¹ We use the term ‘blue-collar’ as workers in the primary or secondary sector, whose job is often, but not always, temporary, and low status (Lønsmann and Kraft forthcoming). White and blue-collar workers have also been distinguished between hourly versus salary paid workers (Cf. Lederer 1979).

² Cf. Lønsmann and Kraft (forthcoming) on language and blue-collar workplace studies and Duchêne et al.’s (2013) volume on language and migration in different institutional and workplace settings.

³ Goldstein (1997) required a translator for her study since she was not an L1 Portuguese speaker and Rollins (1985) engaged in ‘deliberate deception’ to access employers.

Because this is an interdisciplinary study, we draw on the theoretical frameworks of language choice, the political economy of language (Gal 1988; Grillo 1989; Heller 1995; Grin 2003) and practice theory (Bourdieu 1977; Ortner 1989, 2001, 2006). The aim of our study is to contribute to a better understanding of unofficial language policy more generally by investigating language brokering within a local context (Liddicoat and Baldauf 2008) and private business sector within an informal setting (Hult 2010). Our work addresses the call for more deeply-rooted ethnographic research on these topics within LPP studies (Johnson and Ricento 2013; Hult and Johnson 2015). Through discourse analysis, we investigate the ‘covert’ language policy (Schiffman 1996; Shohamy 2006), local power relations (Gal 1988; Hill 1987; Heller 1995) and “legitimate domination” (Grillo 1989) exercised through specific linguistic strategies of the female Brazilian-American company owner, Magda.⁴ Our analysis shows that Magda draws on direct language (Li 1986), direct reported speech (Coulmas 1986) and the use of directives (Vine 2009), which index the role of agency within her speech (Ortner 1989; Ricento 2000; Ahearn 2001) and shed light on the local and existing asymmetrical relations of power between company employees, clients, and Magda herself.

In part two, we discuss the concept of language brokering among adults in workplace settings. Afterwards, we outline the theoretical framework and key definitions employed before discussing our data, methodology and research questions. Part four is devoted to our results and analyses using examples from our data. In part five, we discuss our findings, conclusions and future research suggestions.

Language broker

According to Tse (1996: 485) “language brokers facilitate communication between two linguistically and/or culturally different parties. Unlike formal interpreters and translators, brokers mediate, rather than merely transmit, information”. Because language brokers are considered mediators and, often, decision makers, they are equipped with metalinguistic awareness that is embedded within the ability to assess and act according to given situational contexts (Malakoff and Hakuta 1991). Moreover, they tend to be very familiar with both parties’ differing socio-cultural perspectives. This knowledge allows brokers to tap into their socio-cultural know-how to convey messages between parties by employing specific interpretive strategies, including adapting the message to suit the other party’s socio-cultural positioning. The majority of studies that look at language brokering, unlike the current study, have focused on children who serve as language brokers for their parents within various domains (Tse 1995, 1996; Del Torto 2008; Corona et al. 2012; Weisskirch 2013; Lazarevic et al. 2014).

In this study, we focus on one Brazilian-American female entrepreneur, Magda (70 years old), who, subsequent to obtaining a university degree in Brazil in the 1970s, moved to the US. Magda has resided in the US for over forty years and has run a cleaning

⁴ Names of the participants in this study are pseudonyms in order to protect individuals’ anonymity.

company for nearly thirty. As the owner and operator, Magda serves as the main language broker between her primarily Portuguese-speaking staff and English-speaking clients. She shares a migrant, Portuguese-speaking background with many of her employees; however, her university education, multilingual abilities, and American citizenship serve as valuable symbolic resources that most of her employees lack.⁵ The covert language policy of the company favors Portuguese, which reflects the majority language among her working-class European Portuguese, Luso-Brazilian Portuguese and Spanish-speaking migrant female staff. Because of the multilingualism present within the company, Magda's brokering duties include "inter-employee", in addition to employee-client, brokering and mediation. Language policies are considered to be "mechanisms of power" (Johnson and Ricento 2013: 12); we argue that because of Magda's Brazilian background, cultural knowledge of European Portuguese, previous work experience and metalinguistic awareness, she is able to draw on her full linguistic repertoire or "multicompetence" (Cook 1999), which empower her brokering and mediating skills. Magda's cultural and linguistic capital may be her most important assets as an entrepreneur since they allow her to facilitate communication for company-internal and external purposes while retaining the means of exercising power.⁶ Furthermore, Magda's ability to manipulate this kind of power through language and managerial strategies indexes her agentive, powerful (Vine 2004) and demanding businesswoman identity while, simultaneously, contributing to her company's success.

Power, symbolic resources and exerting agency

Power asymmetry is emergent and always present in speech situations regardless of the type of relationship interlocutors have with one another (Locher 2004). The cleaning company under investigation is no different. Language use represents one of the ways particular goals are realized, and, as such, draws on individuals' cultural capital as well as symbolic and material resources (Bourdieu 1977, 1991).

Norton (2000), drawing on Bourdieu's work, posits that language, friendship and education represent symbolic resources on the one hand while capital goods, money and real estate represent material resources on the other hand. Recent scholarship sees language as not only a symbolic resource, but as a "central tool" and "raw material" (Duchêne 2014: 6) within the new globalized economy (Heller 2003; Duchêne and Heller 2012; Kelly-Holmes 2013). Understanding the value of linguistic, cultural and material resources in the local cleaning company context and its simultaneous ties to current economic and political conditions (Heller 2002) is central to our analysis.

Within multilingual communities a hierarchical ordering of languages is usually thought to exist (cf. De Swaan 2001). Studies conducted in these contexts have shown that speakers of different language varieties within a defined space and time are often considered to be of unequal status. The dominant language is usually the language

⁵ At the time of data collection, only one of Magda's employees had a university degree.

⁶ Magda was formerly married to a European Portuguese man for 10 years and resided with him in Elizabeth, New Jersey for 5 years. In the 1980s, Magda worked as a bank manager in the city of Elizabeth, where she used primarily Portuguese in daily interactions with local customers and Portuguese-speaking residents.

associated with authority and, in the vast majority of cases, the state (Bourdieu 1991). Drawing on Weber's (1958) work, Grillo (1989) understands authority as "legitimated domination", which is similar to Bourdieu's vision of symbolic power as "invisible" in its practitioners' ability to exercise power without actually exerting force. Minority language-speaking migrants are often the experiencers of legitimated domination due to their subordinate social, cultural, economic, political and linguistic statuses within the receiving society (Grillo 1989; Goldstein 1997).

Indeed, this subordinate status applies to the historical dominance of English over such migrant languages as Portuguese in the US despite the country's unexamined, multilingual past (Crawford 1992) and long tradition of widespread cultural and linguistic pluralism, (cf. Potowski 2010). Recent conflicts about official language policy (Ricento 1998, Wiley 1996; Schmidt 2001; Spolsky 2004), including the English Only Movement, represent attempts to transform the *de facto* into the *de jure*.

Portuguese, the migrant language of focus in the current study, ranks eleventh among the most widespread non-English languages spoken in the US. These speakers number approximately 687,126, which accounts for 0.24 % of the national population (Carvahlo 2010: 223). The number of Portuguese speakers within the state of New Jersey has grown in recent years (Scott 2009; Carvahlo 2010), especially in Elizabeth and The Ironbound District of Newark, or "Latino Newark" (Ramos-Zayas 2012) in which the Portuguese language is celebrated and commodified (Gonçalves 2012). The symbolic and material value placed on Portuguese within both of these cities is very high as observed through, among other types of evidence, local businesses' explicit attempts at indexing Portuguese and Brazilian cultures.

Within our interview data and field notes, we recognized that power is omnipresent: various power structures and asymmetrical relations of power connected to material resources like language are always at work as they are embedded within existing large-scale power structures. This means, for instance, that we acknowledge the positioning of Magda and her Portuguese-speaking company within larger-scale, predominantly English-speaking imperialist power structures of American society. From this perspective, English represents the dominant language and Portuguese, the subordinate language; however, the opposite holds true within the structure of the cleaning company in which Portuguese, rather than English, is associated with authority. From a sociolinguistic perspective, we are interested in analyzing the ways in which Magda exploits her Portuguese, Spanish, and English language skills to express her agentive voice and index her authority.

The notion of agency has been conceptualized differently by various scholars influenced by their own research agendas, (cf. Ahearn 2001 for an excellent overview), but for the purpose of this study, we understand agency as the "socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn 2001: 112). More specifically, we draw on Practice Theory, defined by Ortner as "a theory of the relationship between the structures of society and culture on the one hand, and the nature of human action on the other" (1989: 11). Practice theory focuses on the social influences of individual agency. While human actions take center stage, they are never looked at in isolation: individuals' actions are always more or less constrained or enabled by the given social context. As a result, agency is not equated with individuals' unconstrained acts of will or resistance, but is best regarded as a balancing act in terms of individuals' ability to act within the confines of existing larger macro social structures. In this way, Magda's

agency within her own company also reflects her *capacity to act* according to limitations set by larger socio-economic forces.

Methodology, data and research questions

We collected data by means of critical ethnography (Thomas 1992; Goldstein 1997; Heller 2011; Madison 2012; Flores Carmona 2014). In her description of ethnographies of bilingualism, Heller states that, “fundamentally, ethnographies allow us to get at things we would otherwise never be able to discover” (2008: 250). This is certainly the case within care work and domestic labor workplace contexts (cf. Rollins 1985; Lan 2006; Romero et al. 2014; Gonçalves 2015; Gonçalves and Schluter forthcoming; as well as blue-collar worksites (cf. Goldstein 1997; Schluter 2014; Lønsmann and Kraft, forthcoming). This methodology allowed us to take an interpretivist stance based on the ontological underpinnings of poststructuralist realism concerned with Magda’s use of language to construct the social world in which her business is embedded. This perspective guided our analysis and enabled us to view Magda’s language brokering as a node to her company’s positioning within the macro context and her “inter-employee brokering” with regard to the micro context. At the same time, we remained fully aware that the story Magda tells is our own interpretation of it, which is being recounted here.

As researchers, we are mindful that our own positionalities, identities and interests influenced our research agenda (Cotterill and Letherby 1994). We gained access to Magda and her company through familial ties. Since the first author has known Magda since childhood, she has been able to observe Magda alone, with clients and with employees for over 20 years. For the purposes of the current study, she was able to shadow Magda’s workdays for consecutive days, weeks and even months at a time (Czarniawska 2007). We know that our status as “insiders” and “outsiders” had advantages and disadvantages for our investigation (Zentella 1997; Li 2000; Lanza 2008; Gonçalves 2013), including enhanced access and ethnographic depth. However, we are also aware that such close contact compromised the objectivity of our analysis.

In 2011, both authors obtained permission from Magda to begin collecting data. Magda facilitated participant recruitment and interview scheduling by discussing the study with her staff and sending out a one-page description of the study and invitation to participate to all of her clients via email. Having Magda do the initial introduction to our study with both her employees and clients meant that they were already familiar with our research objectives. Moreover, we were presented to Magda’s staff and clients as a family member and ‘a friend of a friend’ (Milroy 1980). This allowed participants to relax and open up during interviews.

We conducted 41 informal, open-ended interviews [16–90 min in length], which were recorded and transcribed.⁷ During this interview period, we also took field notes and shadowed Magda’s workday for several hours at a time over a 7-day

⁷ Of the 41 interviews, 18 were with domestics, 20 with English-speaking clients, 2 with language brokers and one with a company driver. In the current study, we focus on Magda, 3 employees and 1 client.

period. In these ways, we were able to observe her management style (Rutherford 2001) and brokering duties first hand as well as ask any follow up questions.

Through our relationship with Magda, we also gained access to written material of her company, including an information booklet intended for clients as well as copies of memos given to her staff. Our relatively unfettered access to both participants and related materials sets our study apart from the majority that explore these topics through similar methodological approaches (Said, forthcoming). Due to budget sizes, time restrictions and difficulties obtaining participants' consent, many such ethnographic studies become accounts or situated, discursive performances (Briggs 1986; Cicourel 1988) about participants' descriptions of their language and behavior with limited potential for triangulation. Data triangulation was achieved in our own study by consulting with Magda's employees and clients about her claims vis-à-vis her language use and management style.

Both authors grew up in New Jersey and are multilingual speakers of English, Portuguese and Spanish. This background facilitated data collection procedures, especially in terms of speech elicitation from all participants. The authors' ties to New Jersey provided another advantage: follow-up interviews with Magda and/or her employees could be conducted during trips back home. Our interest lay in the language policies and practices within Magda's company, which led to the following research questions:

1. What is the 'covert' LP of Magda's company? How does she practice *legitimate domination* over her employees through the use of a 'subordinate' language within society?
2. How do Magda's language brokering and language choices in both oral and written discourse affect "inter-employee" communication and employee-client communication?
3. What discourse strategies does Magda employ to assert authority and an agentive voice as the manager of the company?

Studies on domestic labor have often been theorized from a feminist perspective by analyzing the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and citizenship. They find women's subordination to be a by-product of both capitalist and patriarchic structures, which, within a global economy, act to reinforce exploitive and asymmetrical relations (Rollins 1985; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1990; Chang 2000; Parreñas Salazar 2001; Anderson 2001; Romero 2002; Lan 2006; Moras 2008; Romero et al. 2014). Within the current study, participants' undocumented status, low education levels and limited English proficiency represent the most salient factors that restrict their access to the marketplace and account for their subordinate position in society.⁸ Magda's American citizenship, university level education and English language proficiency grant her a higher status among her employees. As a full discussion of these three influences on the company and its employees is beyond the scope of the current study, the following analysis will focus primarily on the role of language.⁹

⁸ Magda's company consists of primarily documented workers.

⁹ Cf. Ladegaard's (2012, 2013, 2014) work on domestic narratives and Lorente's (forthcoming) study on scripted language.

Paid domestic work is the point at which the home and the market economy intersect. A picture of covert language policies that exist within this informal setting (and outside public space) helps to contribute to our understanding of micro-language planning processes in general. We aim to improve our comprehension of the ways in which LPP functions by focusing on local power relations, interpretative agency and language brokering.

Results

Company-internal communication

Launch of a Portuguese-by-design cleaning company

Within the context of Magda's cleaning company, economic gain and symbolic capital are associated with the use of Portuguese. European Portuguese is the L1 of the majority of her employees. This demographic reflects Magda's bias towards Portuguese women, whose strong work ethic and honesty make them, according to Magda, model house cleaners. Although Portuguese is a minority language on both national and regional levels, it is endowed with linguistic authority on the local level because of its link to upward mobility within the cleaning company. In fact, Magda's conception of her company was strongly tied to her positive perception of Portuguese cleaners. An investigation into her hiring practices confirmed that, indeed, she primarily relies on local transcultural Portuguese networks for new employee referrals and that Portuguese workers make up the majority of her current staff (see Figure 1). At the time of our investigation into Magda's company in 2011, she had a total of 19 employees: 18 domestic workers (two of whom also served as drivers) and one driver who did not clean houses.

The company's majority European Portuguese workforce (as indicated in Figure 1) reflects Magda's expressed preference for these employees. Magda, an L1 Luso-Brazilian Portuguese speaker herself, employs four Brazilians. The covert, company-internal language policy that favors Portuguese comes out of these numbers. Furthermore, our observations of casual interactions between co-workers suggested that Portuguese is also connected to feelings of "sisterhood" (Goldstein 1997) between employees. Some knowledge of Portuguese would, thus, benefit all employees as it functioned as a soft skill within the company (Urciuoli 2008).

Preference for European Portuguese employees

The factors contributing to Magda's preference for employing Portuguese as the company-internal language have to do with her own L1, but, more importantly, with her visions of the company's philosophy. As stated previously, she strongly values the Portuguese work ethic and has created a company that reflects this bias.

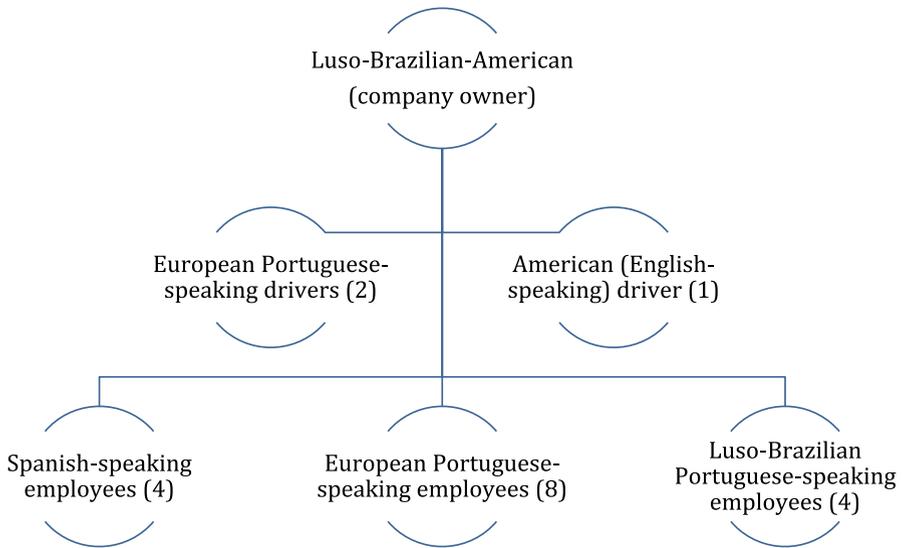


Figure 1 The cleaning company hierarchy: Magda is at the top of the hierarchy, where company values and job instructions trickle down to her employees. Spanish speakers hail from Ecuador (3) and Honduras. (1)

Moreover, as indicated by extract [1] (below), Magda also values Portuguese women’s ability to comply with orders.

Extract (1)

- 1 Anne: Yeah erm, would you ever consider hiring like, do you think it would
- 2 work out if you hired an English speaker who didn’t speak Portuguese or
- 3 Spanish?
- 4 Magda: Honestly? ... they don’t wanna work, they don’t want to... it would be
- 5 unaccept, unacceptable? Erm for them, they would think that we work
- 6 too hard, I mean I’m very demanding and erm I think working with the
- 7 Portuguese erm actually I like to work with the Portuguese better than
- 8 erm with the Brazilians erm you know, whatever I tell them to do, they
- 9 are you know? More accept, they accept it better, the, the Brazilians are
- 10 “Oh, do I have to do this” “Yes, you do” and erm I always say to them
- 11 if, if I hire a Brazilian you know and I have a few Brazilians and they are
- 12 really very nice but when I hire them I say, “Listen, if you have any
- 13 problems with one of my Portuguese employees, if somebody’s gonna
- 14 go home, it’s gonna be you, it’s not gonna be the Portuguese girl”.

In this extract, Magda expresses strong favoritism towards European Portuguese workers because she believes in their superior capacity to carry out the company's mission. This favoritism is contrasted with Magda's negative characterizations about the local English-speaking population and the Brazilians' difficulty accepting authority. Magda employs two stance markers, *actually* and *honestly* (lines 4 & 7), which signal her attitude about employees with different L1s. Her use of *honestly* expresses her opinion about potential English-speaking employees and their inability to fit into the company for several reasons, including, primarily, their differing ideas about work that are rooted in their American up-bringing. The directness of *actually*, *honestly*, and *listen* suggests a stance that is uninfluenced by politeness strategies and, as such, reflective of Magda's higher position in the workplace hierarchy. Her demeanor as an employer reinforces this stance: it is acceptable for a manager to be "very demanding" but not an employee. These features index her authoritative, agentive voice because she can change the demand to suit her preference. These workers' easy acceptance of instructions is a product of their submissive roles within the company hierarchy. In subsequent statements, Magda connects this role with her employees' gender: they are submissive because they have to serve their Portuguese husbands at home. Her company provides another context for them to carry out their traditional gender roles (Hochschild 1989).¹⁰

The Portuguese staff is contrasted with the Brazilian staff, who "work well and are very nice" (line 12), but may question her instructions. Her use of the interjection "oh" (line 10) within the direct reported speech clause is a performative that conveys her negative opinion of their reaction (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 224) to her instructions, which she interprets as a challenge to her authority and, quite possibly, a face-threatening act (Brown and Levinson 1987; Vine 2009). Magda's use of on the record directness to describe her response to these perceived challenges is on display with her use of another direct reported speech clause: "Yes, you do [have to do it]". Furthermore, Magda reaffirms her powerful position as the person responsible for her workers' employment status by issuing a forceful warning.

Portuguese as the covert company language

Magda's preference for European Portuguese working values (as discussed in the previous section) was also voiced by more than one of the Spanish-speaking employees. Lila from Ecuador, who is married to a Portuguese man, cites this preference as a reason for working with this Portuguese-speaking cleaning company instead of a Spanish-speaking one:

¹⁰ This claim was confirmed by the 10 EP women who were all married with children and in line with Hochschild's (1989) notion of the "second shift".

Extract (2)

- 1 Lila: Pero no me gusta trabajar con hispanos (But I don't like to work with
2 [Spanish speakers])
3 Anne: Por que? (why?)
4 Lila: Porque... Cuando viene a otro [de nuestro país] no te tratan de
5 ayudar... Ellos son muy egoísta, me entienden? (Because, when
6 another person comes [from our country], they don't try to help you,
7 they are very self-centered, you understand?)
8 Lila: Cualquier hispano ... Entonces es preferible trabajar con otras personas
9 que con ellos... Nunca te tratan de ayudar. Son egoístas. No puedes
10 pedir un favor decirles "me enseñas eso." No quieren. En cambio si tú
11 te vas al portugués o cualquier otro, te enseña es más sociable
12 (whichever [Spanish speaker] ... it's preferable to work with people
13 other than them ...they never try and help you. They are selfish. You
14 can't ask for a favor and say "teach me this." They don't want to. In
15 contrast, if you go to a Portuguese person or whoever else, they'll teach
16 you. They're more sociable).

The same employees who Magda views favorably for their submissive nature and superior capacity to accept instructions are considered much more sociable and helpful by Lila than people with her own language background. In discussing previous employment experiences with local Spanish speakers Lila, too, expresses her opinion through generalizations: she considers Spanish speakers [from Central and South America], regardless of their country of origin, to be 'not helpful' and 'selfish' (line 5). As a result, she, too, prefers to work with the Portuguese.

Although Lila could use Spanish to communicate with many of her Portuguese-speaking co-workers (who claim to understand Spanish), we found that she, instead, draws on her truncated multilingual repertoire (Blommaert 2010) and infuses some Portuguese lexical items into her Spanish-language speech. By incorporating some Portuguese into her speech, Lila invests in Portuguese as a symbolic resource. These practices, along with her interview comments, reflect her orientation toward Portuguese. Interviews with the other Spanish-speaking employees suggest that they, too, make efforts to adapt in a similar direction.

Inter-employee brokering

Despite the Spanish-speaking employees' efforts to adapt to the company's covert Portuguese language policy, misunderstandings between co-workers still occur. This is also true for communication between Portuguese and Brazilian employees as extract [3] suggests. Primarily in an effort to help non-European Portuguese speakers navigate this European Portuguese-centric company, we found that Magda, at times, engages in what we call "inter-employee brokering" and mediation:

Extract (3)

- 1 Magda: Mara is from Brazil. ... Mara is married to a Portuguese guy, so
 2 she... understands that kind of language... if I had a brand new
 3 Brazilian that had not had, you know, too much contact with
 4 Portuguese people, erm it would be you know, erm difficult. But what
 5 I say to them is like you know, you have to understand that
 6 Portuguese people say some things that means differently. You know,
 7 it may sound like erm insulting to us to Brazilians but it's, it's not you
 8 know? ... There are a lot words, a lot of reactions from you know
 9 from Portuguese that are different from the Brazilians but erm, erm if
 10 you really understand it's just the way they express themselves, they
 11 don't mean that, a Brazilian has to understand that, I do and if
 12 sometimes... someone complains about this, I explain it to them.

In this extract, Magda provides an example in which she must tap into her cultural and metalinguistic awareness in order to mediate between employees who speak different L1 varieties. She references a current Brazilian employee who is married to a Portuguese man and, therefore, “understands that kind of language” (line 2). Her comments suggest that European Portuguese differs considerably from Luso-Brazilian Portuguese and that mutual intelligibility cannot be assumed.¹¹ Due to Magda's familiarity with European Portuguese, she is able to draw on her “multicompetence” and “active repertoire” (Matras 2009) for communicative goals to be met within particular scenarios of language contact such as this one in which Brazilians may otherwise be insulted.

Magda has had to learn about the metalinguistic differences between the two varieties of Portuguese within the company, and she expects her Brazilian employees to do the same with the help of her brokering and mediation if necessary. We claim that engaging in “inter-employee brokering” imbues Magda with further symbolic power by drawing on the linguistic and cultural capital necessary for smooth and harmonious interactions between co-workers. In essence, Magda is the source of information that, at times, plays a valuable role in facilitating co-workers' communication.

Magda's familiarity with Spanish, too, serves as a resource for her Spanish-speaking employees as indicated in extract [4].

¹¹ The literature does not regard European (EP) and Luso-Brazilian Portuguese (LBP) as two monolithic categories. Rather, regional dialects exist within each variety. The more simplistic distinction between EP and LBP in the current discussion is tied to intelligibility. Magda's Portuguese employees speak different—albeit mutually intelligible—EP varieties (as confirmed in our interviews). Greater differences exist between spoken EP and LBP varieties. As vowel reduction across the EP varieties is more extreme than in LBP varieties, phonological differences between them represent the most striking challenge to mutual intelligibility (Azevedo 2005). Lexical, morpho-syntactic, and metapragmatic differences between EP and LBP may also lead to miscommunication between speakers of EP and LBP (as Magda and her employees explain in their interviews).

Extract (4)

- 1 Anne: Do you normally choose Spanish or do you normally choose
- 2 Portuguese [to address a group of workers]?
- 3 Magda: If I do a memo you know, I will write it in Portuguese, yeah and I tell
- 4 the girls in Spanish, “If you don’t understand, you know just ask me”
- 5 but they will receive the memo in Portuguese also.

The above extract provides insight into Magda’s unwritten rules for clarification and further evidence that Portuguese is the company’s default language. Magda’s translation and “inter-employee brokering” serve an important function within the company. However, as Lila’s comments in extract [2] suggest, the employees themselves also negotiate communication with their co-workers. The nature of this accommodation appears to be bidirectional: we found examples of both Spanish speakers accommodating to Portuguese speakers as well as Portuguese speakers accommodating to Spanish speakers. The direction of accommodation appears to depend largely on the language repertoires and resourcefulness of the specific speakers involved. (For a more in depth look into these accommodation practices, see Gonçalves and Schluter forthcoming). Of the employees who make little effort to accommodate to their co-workers, all are Portuguese. The company’s language policy favors them and creates less incentive for them to expand their language repertoires.¹²

Language brokering and authority over employees

Similar to their efforts to accommodate to co-workers from Luso-Brazilian or Spanish-speaking backgrounds, this sub-group of Portuguese workers shows a limited ability to accommodate to their English-speaking clients. As Magda explains in extract [5], her language brokering between clients and employees removes much of the potential communication difficulties:

Extract (5)

- 1 Magda: If they [the customers] leave a note, erm [one of the cleaning ladies]
- 2 will pick up the erm phone and say “Well you know, I understand so
- 3 much, so much but there’s this that I don’t understand” depending
- 4 where it is you know sometimes I say, “Well, spell it for me” you
- 5 know? and she starts spelling and I can just you know pick up right
- 6 away “Oh ok, that’s it” so I will give her the instructions, yeah.

Magda functions as the company’s disseminator of instructions both during the initial planning process as well as in cases of spontaneous changes that cannot be communicated directly between the customer and the housecleaner. Magda’s micro-management diminishes employees’ need for English language proficiency while

¹² From our interviews and observations, we also found that some employees from different L1 backgrounds engaged in ‘dual-linguality’ (Piller 2002) or receptive bilingualism in which each speaker uses her L1 to communicate with the other.

enhancing her legitimate domination over them. Furthermore, the workers' reliance on Magda influences their perception of the important skills for the job:

Extract (6)

- 1 Paloma: As vezes a gente quer se falar mais coisas ou as mulheres às vezes
 2 querem nos falar a nós. A gente não consegue ... a gente pronto a gente
 3 hello, good morning ou bye-bye ou assim mas o essencial mesmo não
 4 sabe e, quer e não consegue e ... Mas pronto, mas a gente pra mim acho
 5 que se a gente, souber falar o essencial por exemplo, hello, good
 6 morning, O mais importante, ser simpático pra mulheres pra falar
 7 pronto o essencial, de ser educado assim (Sometimes we want to be
 8 able to say more things or the women sometimes would like to say
 9 more to us. We aren't able to ... we well ... we, well, ... we hello, good
 10 morning or bye-bye like that but the important things really we don't
 11 know, you want to but you're not able to. But anyway, we for me I
 12 think if we're able to say the essentials for example, hello, good
 13 morning. The most important thing, is to speak nicely to the women ...
 14 well the most important thing is to be polite).

In this extract, Paloma, a European Portuguese-speaking domestic, explains that she does not possess the linguistic capital necessary for her to work as an independent housecleaner. However, the explanation that follows this statement minimizes the importance of English for her job: being nice, respectful and polite (lines 6 & 7) to the clients surpasses the need to converse with them. When more elaborate communication is required, Paloma simply calls Magda and relies on her to do the brokering work as stated later in Paloma's interview. Paloma's truncated multilingual repertoire and limited English proficiency is thus 'in sync' with a working context in which Magda is always available for consultation.

Magda's language brokering also intensifies her contact with clients. Due in part to this more intense contact, employees believe that Magda may pass by a customer's house at any moment to check in with him/her and to judge the quality of her employees' work. The possibility of this occurring, according to one long-time employee, Bianca, is ever-present and stressful:

Extract (7)

- 1 Bianca: [Magda] quer tudo muito bem feito, e quando chega nas casas, nós
 2 sempre trememos um pouquinho... apesar dos anos que nós trabalhamos
 3 com ela... porque não sei porque precisamente no sítio onde eu esqueci
 4 de limpar hoje é que a Magda vai lá passar a mão ou um pano
 5 Bianca: [Magda] wants everything to be done well, and when she arrives
 6 at the houses, we always tremble a little bit...despite all of the years
 7 we've been working with her...because I don't know why...in exactly
 8 the place where I forgot to clean today it might be that Magda goes there
 9 and runs her hand or a cloth over it.

In the extract above, Bianca describes Magda's way of holding her employees accountable for their efforts. Magda's position as a language broker increases her direct interaction with customers and the opportunities to inspect her employees' work. Her employees are keenly aware of this possibility. Her language brokering activities are thus tied to her authority over her employees and to her presentation of herself as the legitimate speaker for the company in company-external communication. In the preceding examples, power is tied to the linguistic and material resources required in worker-customer interactions. As Magda is able to supply the language necessary to facilitate these interactions, she gains greater power and legitimated domination over employees.

Company-external communication

A language policy for customers

Magda's micro-management style is also reflected in the language policy designed for communication between customers and workers. In extract [8], Magda briefly describes this policy:

Extract (8)

- 1 Kellie: Do you give them [the clients] explicit instructions...not to
2 communicate with the cleaning ladies or?
3 Magda: No... I don't tell them, "don't communicate", there, there is erm,
4 erm, a paragraph [in the company booklet] that says, 'Do not leave a
5 note because most of the cleaning ladies do not speak English' so
6 they may not understand and we really want to do a good job... if
7 you leave a note, you leave it to me so then I can you know, tell the
8 cleaning lady this, this and that and erm you know, there's no
9 miscommunication in there ... I tell some customers, 'If you leave
10 a note for her, she's gonna take that note for me, so if you're asking
11 her to do something, it may not get done' ... I mean the customers
12 are told not to leave a note... but, but if they leave a note and some of
13 them don't follow the rules you know?

This extract refers to the 7-paged document designed for clients that conveys details about the company's service and their expectations for customers. We checked this document and, indeed, this explicit request appears on page one in bold italics: "Please do not leave any notes for the cleaning lady, as many do not speak English fluently".

This extract helps to show the role of language brokering in preserving a top-down communication structure in which Magda leaves very little room for horizontal or bottom-up input. As the company owner and primary language broker between her clients and employees, Magda is not only able to oversee any communication between the two groups, but she attempts to maintain full control over it. This becomes apparent through the changes of pronoun use from the inclusive "we" (line 6) to the use of the singular first person pronoun "I" (line 7),

suggesting that, initially, the company [the group of women] wants to do a good job, but in order for this to occur, Magda [the individual] requires instructions or requests from customers directly. Magda positions herself as the individual with the power to change her employees' practice: Magda—rather than the clients—disseminates instructions to the domestics, and they carry out their cleaning duties according to her instructions. This kind of employee micro-management, which was done via brokering, occurred repeatedly throughout our time with Magda.¹³

Furthermore, Magda's use of imperatives demonstrates, once again, a very direct, on the record speaking style that helps to indicate her position of power. In line 4, the imperative "do not leave a note" also functions as a possible warning or repercussion, and, as such, references Magda's agentive voice through her ability to influence this repercussion. Again, these are Magda's rules, and failure to comply with them has a consequence, which, in this case, is a less-than-optimal cleaning job due solely to clients' inability to follow Magda's explicit instructions rather than her employees' inability to read and understand notes written in English. While clients may accuse Magda's employees for other reasons, possessing "scant material resources" (Duchêne et al. 2013: 7) based on their English skills (or lack thereof) is not accepted by Magda and illustrates a way in which language operates as a means of social control within this local context.

Overall, we found that Magda's brokering duties between her employees and clients, along with the explicit language policy that customers are supposed to adhere to, assist Magda's micro-management of her employees and maintenance of control over the cleaning and business operations.

Magda-customer power relations

As the company's policy against clients' leaving notes for the cleaning staff suggests, Magda's transfer of symbolic and material resources into her powerful position extends beyond company-internal communication. Throughout our discussions with Magda, it became clear that she makes many specific choices about company operations and company size, which over the years has alternated according to her personal preferences rather than market forces.

As with any small business, Magda's company relies on the market forces that create demand for her professional cleaning services. This demand is high in the local context and places Magda in the position of selecting the clients that suit her. The upsurge in middle-class women entering the workforce over the last few decades likely contributes to this demand (Anderson 2001). In this way, macro-level market dynamics of the new market appear to influence this

¹³ In the evenings, Magda is occupied with speaking to clients directly on the phone and taking notes of their requests. Magda then relays these instructions to her employees before they arrive at the client's house.

micro-level situation. One customer's awareness of this selectivity comes through in the extract below:

Extract (9)

- 1 Mrs. I felt that Magda, erm, was very helpful to me because she knew
2 Gloski: in the past that I was using her on a temporary basis and I needed
3 the help, I'm also erm coming out of chemotherapy so erm, it
4 was- I was anxious to have them work erm have them.

With her descriptions of Magda's helpfulness and friendliness, Mrs. Gloski appears to reconceptualize traditional customer-worker relations. In this case, Magda's acceptance of Mrs. Gloski as a customer is constructed as a helpful act during a very difficult time in her life rather than a pure business agreement. In a later portion of the interview, Mrs. Gloski provides a practical reason that supported her bid for acceptance as a customer:

Extract (10)

- 1 Mrs. I also know that this, erm particular space is easy to mani- easier
2 Gloski: to maneuver because it's, fairly spare...as compared to [my
3 neighbor's] who has a lot more stuff going on... so, I just felt, at
4 ease.

Mrs. Gloski classifies the burden on the cleaning staff of cleaning her apartment as minimal. She understands that Magda does not accept everyone as a client; however, her uncluttered apartment and her infirmity provided compelling reasons to "help" her. Instead of the company being helped by the income from paying customers, customers like Mrs. Gloski appear to view the situation in reverse.

In our interview with Magda, we learned that adding Mrs. Gloski to her list of clients, in fact, was a decidedly straightforward process that was based primarily on logistics. First, Mrs. Gloski, as a referral from one of Magda's existing clients, was adhering to Magda's referral rule for initiating services. Second, Mrs. Gloski's residence in the same apartment complex as the client who referred her served to minimize logistical work: the clients' proximity to one another allowed Magda to take on an additional client without disturbing the employee transfer system that was already in place. Magda pointed to this practical consideration as an important factor that influenced her decision to accept Mrs. Gloski as a client.¹⁴ In these ways, Magda is constructed as the chief decision maker who is in control of the clientele she accepts. Moreover, her client appears to recognize the business's selectivity and expresses her gratitude for being selected although she is the paying customer.

¹⁴ Each employee is assigned to one house during the morning shift. The afternoon shift is shorter but includes two employees per house. Drivers are responsible for transporting and transferring employees throughout the day. Since clients' homes are distributed between several towns, transfers can take up to 20 min. Clients' close proximity to one another is favorable to Magda since it allows her drivers to transfer workers more efficiently.

The above example is contrasted with that of a client's husband who neither recognizes Magda's position of power nor expresses gratitude (or even respect) for the cleaning service. The following extract begins with Magda's description of a telephone conversation with a client's husband who called to inquire about the location of a missing puzzle piece from the children's playroom:

Extract (11)

1 Magda: I said, "Well, I think it's going to be impossible a piece of puzzle
 2 that my cleaning lady?" He said to me, "oh, I don't know where you
 3 find these people, they have no brains", I have never been rude, but I
 4 said, "you know what, since you have the brains, from now on you
 5 clean your house" and I hung up the phone. Two seconds later, his
 6 wife called me and she said, "Magda, please, do not cancel my
 7 house, my husband had a bad day at work today and he's very upset",
 8 I said, "I have nothing to do with the, the bad day he had at work and
 9 he should be respectful to my cleaning ladies and also to myself, I'm
 10 cancelling your house, find somebody else". Three weeks later, she
 11 calls me and she said, "Magda, could you please come back, please,
 12 please". I said, "no, once I cancel a house, it's done". Three months
 13 later, she called me and she said, "we have had like six companies to
 14 clean our house, nobody ever cleaned our house the way you guys
 15 clean, please come back, I can give you anything you want". I said,
 16 "if you pay me a thousand dollars a week, I would not clean your
 house, thank you, but no thank you", the end.

Magda's negative assessment about finding the missing puzzle piece is taken up by the husband in which he blatantly accuses Magda of being a poor employer and the cleaning ladies as having "no brains". These insults are interpreted by Magda as face threatening and function to justify her "rude" response and behavior. The linguistic strategies and actions employed throughout the extract index the asymmetrical relations of power between Magda and her clients within this context. Although the husband assumes power in his initial conversation with Magda, Magda quickly reverses the power dynamics by immediately cancelling the house (lines 5 & 10), leaving both husband and wife in a powerless position by abruptly discontinuing her company's service in their home.

Because Magda is in the professional service sector, customers are regarded as those who usually (but not always) provide the material resources in exchange for symbolic ones. The client, therefore, may be considered as retaining the power-over his/her service provider. According to Magda's account, this client's power was immediately usurped by her agentive actions. With her decision to cancel the house, Magda reinstated herself as not only the authoritative figure within her company, but, simultaneously, the legitimate spokesperson for the company. Not only does Magda refuse to tolerate disrespect when it is aimed at her, she does not accept it when it is directed at her employees. Despite numerous calls from the wife over time, who is positioned as both desperate and apologetic (lines 11–15), Magda

retains full control of the situation. Magda's refusal to grant these customers their request and their inability to alter the situation indexes her agentive voice.

Magda further demonstrates her unwillingness to tolerate a client's disrespectful behavior through her refusal to accept increased monetary compensation. The reported speech clause in lines 8-10 is done through the means of a forceful directive, "I'm cancelling your house, find somebody else", which further positions Magda as a powerful businesswoman who places more value on her employees and their services than potential economic gain. Based on our ethnographic data and conversations with Magda, we found out that Magda only cancels customers homes for two main reasons, namely, their failure to pay on time or due to clients' disrespectful behavior to either her employees or her.¹⁵ This extract illustrates that Magda's brokering duties between clients and domestics extend beyond the pure transmission of information; they also function as a means of maintaining power relations between the company and its clients.

This finding, together with the previous discussion that reinforces Magda's position at the top of the company hierarchy, helps to paint Magda as an agentive company owner who employs various communicative strategies to maintain her position of power in customer-employee, employer-employee, and customer-company owner relations.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion has highlighted company-internal and company-external language policies, both of which reflect and help to maintain Magda's authority.

European Portuguese dominates company-internal communication. Magda values Portuguese workers for their honesty, work ethic and ability to accept orders. Her company is Portuguese-centric by design, and knowledge of European Portuguese within Magda's company is key to fully understanding workplace instructions and maintaining harmonious relations with co-workers.

Within the realm of the company, therefore, Portuguese carries the most symbolic and material value despite its minority status within the US (Carvahlo 2010). This finding contrasts with literature that advocates English as the dominant global language for economic and social mobility, especially in contexts like the US, in which English is also the dominant state language (cf De Swaan 2001; Laitin and Reich 2003).

This company-internal Portuguese language policy places Magda in a position of power in two ways: it indexes the submissiveness of the ideal Portuguese house cleaner and it places value on what we have called "inter-employee brokering".

¹⁵ Magda has cancelled customers' homes in the past due to late payments and false accusations. In the latter case, Magda explained that cancelling a home is the best option for her company since employees no longer feel comfortable in a client's home, where their trust has been questioned. Cancelling a house can be initially difficult for all parties, but Magda's business has not suffered economically since the demand for her services remains very high. Therefore, whenever a house is cancelled, a vacancy to clean a new home becomes available and, according to Magda and her employees, this vacancy is filled within the same week.

This policy favors European Portuguese workers with limited accommodation skills who, like Paloma, tend to be the most poorly equipped to interact with their Spanish-speaking co-workers and English-speaking customers. It is precisely these employees who are the most dependent on Magda's language brokering. Magda's status as a language broker in both contexts positions her as *the* language policy agent.

Such language brokering activities influence company-external language policy, which, in turn, affects company-internal power relations. Magda's instructions to customers to refrain from leaving a note for the cleaning staff allow her to control instructions that may emerge while the workers are at the worksite. Through this brokering role, Magda becomes fully aware of customers' expectations. By maintaining close contact with the customers, she positions herself to check the customers' satisfaction with her staff's work (as shown in Bianca's interview). Magda's top-down approach to company communication through brokering and inspection underlines her legitimated domination over her employees. Her bold, on the record directness and use of directives throughout her interviews suggests, too, that she identifies with her rank at the top of the workplace hierarchy.

Magda's top-down approach to the LPP of her company helps maintain local asymmetrical relations of power; moreover, it also grants her a degree of control over her customers. This finding is rooted in Magda's ability to select her customers, command respect from them and partially dictate the nature of their communication.

Magda derives some of this micro-level power from macro-level market forces. When hiring new employees, Magda can choose from a large supply of potential employees who have few employment opportunities because of their undocumented status, limited English language proficiency, and low levels of education.¹⁶ When considering working with a new customer, Magda can select from a relatively large supply of eager customers. Of course, part of this high-supply (from both potential clients and employees)-and-low-demand (Magda's unwillingness to expand her business) dynamic likely comes out of the high quality of Magda's service. However, it is also true that Magda's business profits from the influx of transnational migration into the region and the capitalist forces that provide a space for informal labor. Investigating LPP of an informal site has shed light on the unequal distribution of power and agency on the local level (Tollefson 1991), which are always constrained by the larger power structures within society and the new globalized economy (Heller 2013).

In line with Grillo (1989), the current investigation has allowed us to uncover the covert and overt language policies used by one language agent to maintain and exert legitimated domination over her minority language employees. These findings provide insight into some of the informal policies and practices that exist in one of the many layers of the complex LPP "onion" (Ricento and Hornberger 1996; Johnson and Ricento 2013).

¹⁶ Magda describes responses to earlier advertisements in the local *Luso-Americano* newspaper as overwhelming. Therefore, she only hires employees based on employees' recommendations. Similarly, Magda only accepts new clients based on current clients' referrals. Her services are not advertised, but she currently has a waiting list for future clients.

Our research complements current LPP studies that employ ethnographic methods (Johnson 2009; Hornberger and Johnson 2011; Johnson and Ricento 2013; Hult and Johnson 2015; Johnson and Johnson 2015); moreover, our less restricted access to the participants has allowed us to address these authors' calls for increased ethnographic depth. The study's micro-level analysis provides an example of the different value placed on minority language speakers' linguistic resources according to the spaces in which they are deployed while, simultaneously, reflecting their subordinate working-class status on the societal level (Blommaert et al. 2005; Blommaert 2010).

Further research on LPP would benefit from investigating additional local, multilingual contexts, which explore the complexities of individuals' sociolinguistic realities within a given community of practice, such as a multilingual workplace setting.

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