

## **Oral communication and domestic labor: Codes and discourses of Portuguese-speaking cleaning ladies in a majority English-language environment**

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**Problem statement:** This paper explores the sociolinguistic consequences of a language contact situation between Portuguese-speaking cleaning ladies and their Anglophone clients in a multilingual cleaning company in New Jersey, USA. As long-time members of tightly knit social networks in a Newark, NJ Portuguese-speaking community, these women use Portuguese exclusively to conduct their daily interactions, both social and commercial. Their reality reflects the Chinatown Effect described in Kuo (2011): within a national context, theirs is a minority culture, but it is a majority culture within their immediate surroundings. This perspective affects their notions of prestige and, consequently, their language choices.

Language attitudes and ideologies about English for many of these cleaning ladies index their national identities as well as their migrant identities with reference to their particular Portuguese varieties (both Luso-Brazilian Portuguese & European Portuguese). Their beliefs and desires to eventually return to their home countries influence their minimal investment (Norton 2000) in English. Due to their low proficiency in the target language, most of these women cannot directly communicate with their clients. As a result, the main employer of the cleaning firm and several first-generation daughters serve as 'language brokers' between cleaning ladies and clients. These language brokers, along with the available Portuguese-language services, effectively enable the cleaning ladies to continue to live Portuguese-dominant lives. Nevertheless, the Portuguese spoken by these women differs from the variety spoken in their hometowns in two important ways: first, their interactions must be comprehensible to both Brazilians and Portuguese, and, second, their language must express American realities not present in their mother tongues. The details of this oral language are the focus of this research.

**Review of Literature:** We align ourselves with Norton's (2000) work, which emphasizes individuals' identities and the omnipresent relations of power within any social interaction. This element manifests itself linguistically: the participants index their migrant identities with reference to their particular Portuguese varieties. As in Goldstein (2001), Portuguese serves as a lingua franca in this workplace context: the majority language (English) is the language marked with less prestige, both in terms of solidarity and market value. This finding is contrary to the expectations that would come from a traditional Fishman (1965) view of the functions of low vs. high varieties. Likewise, it contradicts Schluter's (2010) observations about Kurdish in Istanbul workplaces in which Kurdish participants from different regions generally choose the majority language (Turkish) as their lingua franca despite their membership in the minority (Kurdish) group and their dominance in the given contexts.

**Methodology:** In this paper we employ multimodal corpora to gain a holistic perspective about this language contact situation. We scrutinize the discourse of 20 migrant Portuguese and Brazilian women aged 26-65, four language brokers aged 15-64 and 23 Anglophone clients. The data collected stem from ethnographic research, video footage and semi-structured interviews. The speech is transcribed, and the corpora are subject to discourse analysis. Employees' perceptions of language learning, the question of access to the target language and target language speakers represent principle foci. In addition, analysis of the corpus draws attention to the pragmatic and lexical peculiarities of the given linguistic code.

**Results:** Analysis of the illocutionary and semantic aspects of code-switched elements indicate attachments to a bicultural identity despite membership within a seemingly monolingual social

network. The participants' code parallels other migration and language contact studies in which Gumperz's (1982) we-code helps to shape language choices. As with Jørgensen's (2010), investigation into Turkish migrants' language choices in Denmark, these participants' incorporation of elements from both the native (minority) language and the dominant language reflects their shared culture and expresses solidarity.