



Two Languages at Work: Bilingual Life on the Production Floor. Tara Goldstein.
New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1997. 277 pp.

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This work is described by author Tara Goldstein as a “critical ethnography of bilingual life and language choice in a Canadian manufacturing factory” and its implications for English-as-a-second-language teaching (p. vii). With the assistance of an interpreter, Goldstein conducted participant-observations and tape recorded Portuguese speakers employed in a toy factory in Toronto. The two broad questions that frame the study are, What kinds of language practices characterize the multicultural/multilingual workplace? and What meanings do particular language practices carry for immigrant workers in the multicultural/multilingual workplace? (p. 6). The researcher conducted the study in three stages over a period of two years. She collected

39 ethnographic interviews [and spent] 30 hours ... observing everyday work activities in each of the five plant departments (Production, Textiles, Raw Materials, Specialties, and Shipping and Receiving); 29 hours of language practice observations; and 24 hours of recording workers’ interactions on the production lines. [p. 69]

Through a critical ethnographic lens the author questions the assumption that all immigrants must learn to speak English in the workplace. The study cites evidence of the type of variables that may shape some immigrants’ linguistic choices and why some immigrants may not choose to use English with each other. Goldstein builds on the notion that linguistic choice in bilingual communities may be attributed to the status and economic viability of the code in question and thus adopts Monica Heller’s notion of the speech economy (“Introduction,” in *Codeswitching: Anthropological and Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, Monica Heller, ed., Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988). Goldstein also argues that given prior work by Jane Hill (“Women’s Speech in Modern Mexicano,” in *Language, Gender and Sex in Comparative Perspective*, Susan U. Philips, Susan Steele, and Christien Tanz, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and Susan Gal (“The Political Economy of Code Choice,” also in *Codeswitching*), gender and authority are key in understanding the speakers’ negative attitudes toward a marked language.

Goldstein’s study has important implications for educators of adult second-language learners and the current controversy surrounding English-only movements in places like the United States. At a societal level, the work provides a basis for thinking about the overzealous, conservative political campaigns against non-English-speaking immigrants both in Canada and in the United States. By also asking two other questions in her inquiry—How do language practices in the multicultural/multilingual workplace relate to immigrant workers’ experience at work and outside work? and How does a new



understanding of immigrant experience inform the practice of English language training in the multicultural/multilingual workplace?—Goldstein is able to make a compelling case for the economic viability of using native language.

This book should make a real contribution to the English-as-a-second-language field and to bilingual language policy planners. It uses a complex setting such as a factory and the interaction of the Portuguese/English speakers to examine the role that language choice and gender play in the construction of a productive workforce. More interestingly, Goldstein provides “sketches” and varying “voices” of the women, thus showing how ethnographers and educators can report a range of possibilities and scenarios when interpreting the lives of participants. These sketches can serve to explain how the social construction of relationships is shaped by language, social status, gender, and economics. Goldstein argues that the Portuguese women use Portuguese with each other to maintain their ethnic ties because in the production line there is little need for English while there is a greater reliance on each other as a network. She also illustrates how the Portuguese women use linguistic mechanisms to monitor these intricate ethnic/linguistic boundaries.

Methodologically, however, the study presents some issues of concern. Chapter 2 describes the language samples collected. The investigator did not speak Portuguese, so she worked with a “research assistant who did all the hand transcriptions” (p. 74). The assistant spoke a standard variety of Portuguese, but she was also familiar with the Azorean variety. One is left with some concern about the principal investigator not speaking the language herself, even though she does acknowledge this as a potential problem for other ethnographers. Goldstein observed the use of Portuguese by the women in the production line. Quantitatively, she could count the number of times the code was used; however, her observations and analysis were constrained to only that aspect of the interactional context. For Goldstein’s other findings, one has to rely on the translator’s interpretation of the code choices. In other linguistic anthropological works, such as those the author cites, each linguist has spoken the language or code in question.

These considerations of the findings should not distract from the value of the questions the researcher has constructed. The broader issues center around the need for language program planners and policymakers to factor in sociocultural and economic structures, including gender and language status. Ana Celia Zentella (*Growing Up Bilingual*, New York: Blackwell, 1997) suggests the notion of anthropological linguistics as a methodology that usefully combines qualitative ethnographic methods of linguistic anthropology with quantitative methods drawn from sociolinguistics. Zentella, for example, balances methodologically the code selection study of Puerto Ricans in a community where she lives, and has lived, for over twenty years. Her examination of linguistic codes in homes, on the streets, and in other contexts includes a structural and interactional analysis of the use of the two codes, across generations and in several contexts. Such triangulation enables the reader to examine the linguistic data in a social historical context. Goldstein’s text does not live up to that ideal of triangulation; nevertheless it is a creative work that can enable language planners and educators to



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authentically examine the motivation behind English-only movements and policies. It is particularly exciting to see this critical ethnographic direction in English-as-a-second-language research.

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