

Power dynamics at work

Citation for published version (APA):

Hovens, D. (2021). *Power dynamics at work: an ethnography of a multilingual metal foundry in the Dutch-German borderland*. [Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University]. LOT.
<https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20211014dh>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2021

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20211014dh](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20211014dh)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

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- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

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Power Dynamics at Work

An Ethnography of a Multilingual Metal Foundry in the Dutch-German Borderland

This PhD dissertation is a linguistic ethnography of a metal foundry in the Dutch province of Limburg, in the Dutch-German borderland. When its fieldwork data were collected in 2017, over 300 people with many different language backgrounds worked in the production departments of the foundry, including Dutch, German, Limburgish, and Polish, as well as Arabic, Greek, Russian, and Turkish, among others. Some workers lived on the Dutch, others on the German side of the border. Slightly more than half were temporary workers, and an important part of their daily and nightly work consisted of interactions with machines.

The dissertation shows that majoritised speakers in the foundry tended to find the language diversity at work more problematic than minoritised speakers. Furthermore, it shows that the transience of many work relations posed a bigger challenge to workplace communication and workplace learning than language diversity. In fact, workers often had a harder time understanding the machines in the foundry than each other. The dissertation reflects upon these and other observations, and it explores a rich theoretical vocabulary in its descriptions of blue-collar life-worlds in order to do justice to the complex relations between different speakers, and between humans and machines.

Power Dynamics at Work may be of relevance to anyone interested in multilingual communication in blue-collar workplaces, language policies, ethnographies of workplace learning and human-machine interaction, as well as posthumanist applied linguistics.

ISBN 978-94-6093-387-5
DOI <https://dx.medra.org/10.48273/LOT0602>



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