



Berber language ideologies, maintenance, and contraction: Gendered variation in the indigenous margins of Morocco

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Abstract

Language contraction is shaped by the unequal distribution of power and resources, both between the language community and the dominant society, and within the contracting language community itself. Gender is connected to other social divisions and inequalities, rendering it central to processes of maintenance and loss. For indigenous groups struggling for recognition and rights, public acknowledgement of intra-group fractures may be political suicide, but for scholars it is crucial, albeit absent from the outpouring of attention to endangered languages. Linguistic ideologies about place, gender, and social change naturalize, reinforce, and mediate subjectivities, ethnolinguistic repertoires, national identities, and collective moralities. Two groups of Tashelhit Berber speakers of southwestern Morocco – Anti-Atlas mountain dwellers and Sous Valley plains dwellers – contrast in regard to their patterns of language maintenance and contraction, but in both, women are central in ways that engage their dissimilar relationships to Arabic speakers and to their own conceptions of rurality.

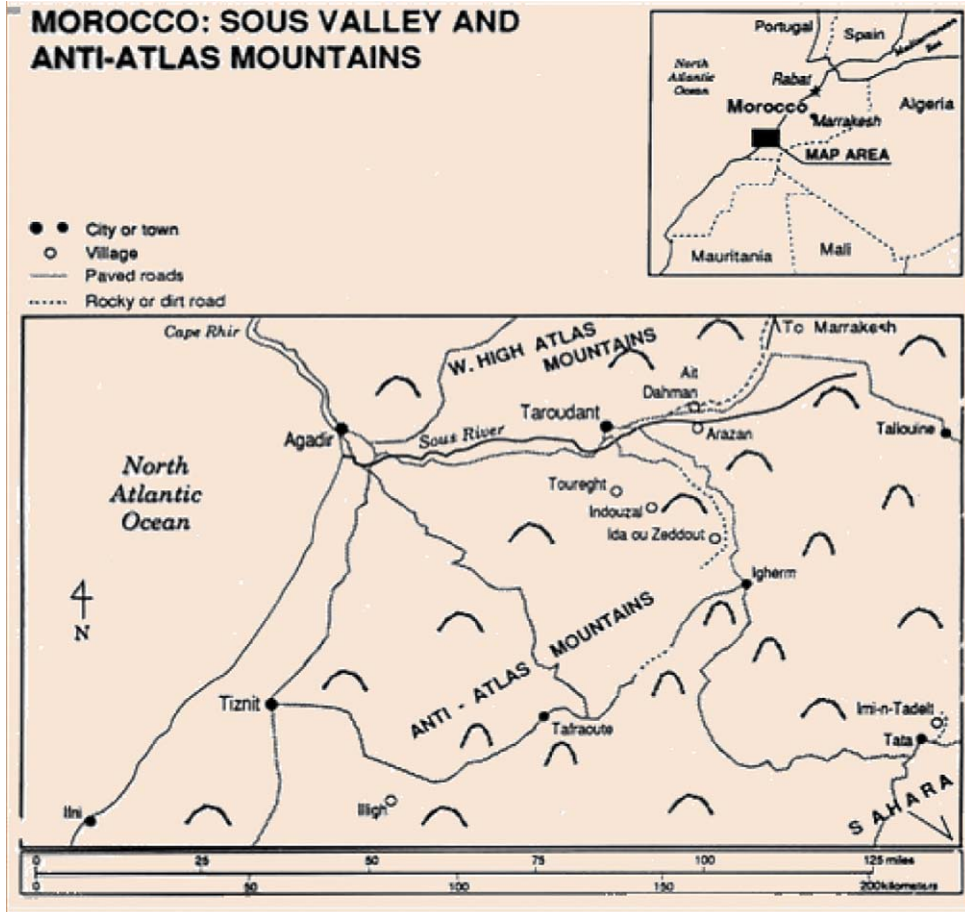
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Keywords: Gender; Language maintenance; Language contraction; Ethnic identity; Imazighen (Berbers); Morocco

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Map: Sous Valley and Anti-Atlas Mountains, Morocco.



1. Introduction

Within a short thirty years, Moroccan Berbers have witnessed a radical reformulation of both governmental language policies and state-society relations. Arabizing tendencies in this multiethnic (Arab-Berber) part of the world began during the French Protectorate (1912–1956), as the archival records suggests. While classical Arabic is closely associated with Islam, the shared religion of Arabs and Berbers, there is no evidence demonstrating that Arabic's 'sacred' character (Haeri, 2003) has spurred language shift in itself in Morocco. Instead, factors encouraging language shift away from Berber and towards Arabic include changes in political economies that put Tamazight ('Berber' language) speakers in wage labor positions with Arab supervisors and owners and the emergence of symbolic capital in the form of state diplomas as a gateway to economic betterment. Linguistic markets have consolidated and centralized around Arabic-dominant institutions, marginalizing the Tamazight indigenous language varieties. Massive (cultural) Arabization and (linguistic) Arabization in the 1970s was coupled with widespread urbanization in a decade of

drought. In response, as Boukous (1995) has argued, an indigenous rights movement emerged that met with widespread resistance from the state, and whose publications were subject to periodic censure under the late King Hassan II up to his death in 1999.

Until the early 21st century, Amazigh matters were cause for governmental censure, and for self-censorship in both media and scholarship, for they signaled potential disloyalty to the Arabo-Islamic nation and thus to the monarch. Hassan II's son Mohamed VI has made preliminary moves towards reversing this discrimination since assuming the throne in 1999. He initiated the introduction of Tamazight language into public spheres, acting on his father's promise of 1994, most notably as a topic of study in the school curriculum in 2003. Two years prior, he founded the state-sponsored Moroccan Royal Institute for Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) whose team of academic researchers work with policymakers on language instruction and research in multiple social science and humanities divisions. Language maintenance efforts in Morocco are linked to an ethnic revitalization whose central activities have been to remove the stigma of speaking Tamazight, push for state recognition of Amazigh heritage and Tamazight language, and increase the presence of both in public domains. The political climate has opened dramatically concerning Berber matters since the mid-1990s when I, like other researchers, encountered widespread suspicion among governmental authorities and some laypeople alike for working on language and identity issues in Berber communities and perhaps more for conversing in Tashelhit (southwestern Tamazight geolect) with Tashelhit speakers in public spaces, not just homes.

Rural Berber women have been the linchpins of language maintenance in Morocco, yet urban Berber men have figured prominently in the Amazigh rights movement for valorizing and preserving Tamazight language (Demnati, 2001). Governmental, non-governmental, and university circles are populated by men. Historically, the structure of the grassroots local organizations and their activities has ensured minimal female participation, as these organizations tend to hold meetings in the evenings, and sometimes in bars, both of which discourage female attendance. The majority of researchers associated with IRCAM are men, including all but one director of a research division within the institution, and with the important exception of the pedagogical specialist Fatima Agnaou who has overseen the development of school manuals and is a committed women's literacy specialist. Amateur folklorists who locally print compendia of verbal art, sung poetry, and stories are men, although their informants are often women. With the appearance of the internet in 1995 in Morocco, there has been an increased presence of women in cyberspace that may ultimately change this dynamic and make participation more equitable across genders.¹ The educated Berber urban women participating in online forums, however, are not the women who are perpetuating Tashelhit use in the domestic spheres, in the rural homelands. Thus it seems likely that even with more equitable distribution of maintenance work across genders, a growing chasm will develop between language revival activists on the one hand and those rural residents engaged in daily maintenance and language socialization on the other.

It is too early to tell what effects the governmental recognition of Amazigh heritage will have on indigenous language preservation, and whether institutional support will reverse

¹ In this respect, Hinton and Hale's (2001) observation that language survival is bound up with technologies and politics of literacy sounds true, but not just because of increased language documentation possibilities.

the language contraction underway since the Protectorate period. More than language maintenance, however, these moves may stimulate a rise in status of female-gendered rural expressive genres. Purist linguistic and narrative proscriptions may become more inclusive of Arabic-influenced expressive forms, or instead shift towards a more purified, unified international standard Tamazight heavily influencing Berber expressive forms in neighboring Kabylia (Algeria). When oral tales, songs, and such long deemed trivial and unimportant become part of a newly appreciated collective heritage – as they do when Berber language forms are codified in writing by amateur folklorists and IRCAM word-smiths – women may eventually benefit from their association with these genres. Alternatively, however, women's central role in the perpetuation of this valued intangible heritage may be appropriated by the new (male, urban) culture brokers. The Moroccan state may now display national pride in the Berber contributions to Moroccan heritage, but it remains unclear whether the individuals most closely associated with formerly devalued Berber culture – rural women – benefit, or whether the apparently gender-neutral valuation of Amazigh identity is more salient to already-public males.

To assess the role of gender in language contraction within indigenous groups, we must explore the question of locality:

The preoccupation with the locality is not a way to forego any responsibility towards recognition of larger processes at work, like education and social policies. Locality does help us to identify what in many ways is the most significant point of view, that for the 'native speaker', whose gender is significant in his/her world view and in his/her (linguistic) decisions. (Constantinidou, 1994, p. 123)

Here is where ethnographic analysis can help us understand language shift and gendering of this process more than a strictly descriptive linguistic approach. Surely reconciliation is necessary in how we assess shift and loss. Shift may occur gradually, over generations, and in those cases the shift may be evident in increased bilingualism, linguistic markers, etc. But when the shift happens in the course of a few generations – as with East Sutherland Gaelic in Scotland (Dorian, 1980, 1989) and with Taiap in Papua New Guinea (Kulick, 1992) – it must be understood in term of pressing and widespread social change. Thus, the fact that some of the languages in which anthropologists and linguists work on have thousands or even tens of thousands of speakers may not in itself ensure preservation, if other social pressures encourage change (Krauss, 1992). What we do see in many of these cases is the pivotal role of women – but in locally-specific ways that are grounded in gendered laboring processes and language ideologies.

Ultimately, the status of Tamazight language affects rural Berber women's access to resources – and thus as the language is reconfigured into new social domains, it will be important to track changes in the structural possibilities open to women for marriage, economic opportunities, and positions of governance. Widespread valorization of Tamazight language could provide the opportunity for greater recognition of women's contributions to national civilization, and could help increase women's literacy and economic stability. Yet if an integral component of valorizing Tamazight continues to be the standardization of regional varieties into a single national form, women's participation in language maintenance may be even further marginalized and the language further dismissed as not useful in everyday life. Dorian (1980) writes that standardization, rather than leading to native speaker pride, can amplify latent insecurity and shame, as speakers may once again see their own way of speaking deficient relative to the newly standardized form. Use of stig-

matized language varieties simultaneously makes the claims ‘I am strong’ and ‘I am weak’ (Hewitt, 1986, p. 204 in Tonkin, 1994, p. 187) – depending on whether the assessment is based on local notions of covert prestige (Trudgill, 1983) or the broader society’s recognized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991).

This article considers the semiotic associations between speech, gender, ethnicity, and inequality among speech communities that are topographically distinct but geographically adjacent: the Sous Valley plains (especially the village of Arazan) and the Eastern Anti-Atlas mountains (especially the Ida ou Zeddout tribe/region). Their members are native speakers of the Berber vernacular called Tashelhit, a language that is contracting in both absolute numbers and in the range of domains of use. In the Anti-Atlas mountains, women situate themselves firmly in closely circumscribed networks of moral and material support, networks whose code of solidarity is Tashelhit. Ardener (1975) has called this phenomenon the muting of subordinate groups, where ‘muted’ groups develop alternative models of society. In contrast, Tashelhit-speaking plains women are able to navigate differently framed communities to maximize their access to resources – a crucial move given their multiply-marginalized position. The range of networks from which mountain dwellers may access needed resources is a monolingual one – although not a linguistically identical one, given the internal variability allowed within Tashelhit conversation, with notable exceptions in discussions on lexical purity, a preoccupation that was invariably initiated by men, not women, in my research data.

This paper has three sections. First, I outline the ethnographic case of Tashelhit speakers of the southwestern Moroccan mountains and plains. Second, I consider rurality as an index of female gender and the broader ethnosemiotic and ethnolinguistic repertoires in which this relationship of meaning is engaged, considering their effects on language maintenance and contraction. Third, I consider possible outcomes for indigenous Berber women’s status as linked to the gendering of language forms undergoing decline, comparing this case with others in the ethnographic record.

2. Tashelhit Berber speakers in the Anti-Atlas mountains and Sous Valley

There is little danger that Tashelhit or its umbrella language Tamazight will ‘die’ or cease to be used in the immediate future. However, Tamazight is certainly contracting, using Dorian’s terminology (1989): it has decreasing numbers of speakers as rural families emigrate to cities and as whole villages shift from Tamazight-dominant to Arabic-dominant, despite an increase in Morocco’s population. Moreover, it is contracting in that it is used in fewer expressive domains than it once was. Tashelhit has become almost exclusively a rural language: while temporary emigrants to urban areas speak it amongst themselves, most permanent emigrants shift to Moroccan Arabic within only one or two generations, and their children assimilate into an Arabic-speaking Moroccan society in which speech tends to index geographical residence more than ethnicity or heritage. In the countryside, Tashelhit-speaking Ishelhin (sing. m. Ashelhi, sing. f. Tashelhit) are internally heterogeneous, linguistically and culturally, and their lands vary topographically, comprising mountains and flat plains. These differences hold clues to the patternings of language contraction in subgroups of the language community.

Despite geographic, political economic and social diversity, Ishelhin and the other speakers of Tamazight varieties are consolidated by the state for analytical and public policy purposes, bolstering an extant conflation in the collective urban Arab imaginary as well.

Berbers across North Africa share a common struggle vis-à-vis state institutions, especially in their relations with schools, local and national administrations, and courts where classical Arabic is the official language and Arabic the de facto lingua franca. The Tashelhit women in the two groups I discuss here – in the mountains and plains – are unschooled, village-dwelling agriculturalists whose native language is Tashelhit and who have limited access to both colloquial Moroccan Arabic (*ad-derija*), the country's lingua franca, and standard/classical Arabic (*al fusha*). These women likely will live out their days in the countryside, whether in their parents' village or that of their husband, usually nearby.

In the Sous Valley plains 30 km from the provincial capital of Taroudant, nestled between the Anti-Atlas and High Atlas mountains, primarily Tashelhit-speaking villages border those inhabited by Arabic speakers. In the Tashelhit-speaking villages, the group I call plains Ishelhin are comprised of women and mostly male wage-labor agriculturalists and rural proletarians working at milk and citrus factories. These plains communities, which are imagined as peripheries of a mountain homeland (Hoffman, 2002b), have many bilingual residents. Likewise, their ethnolinguistic expressive repertoire is bilingual and generally compartmentalized by modality such that community singing at festive events and life cycle rituals is in Arabic, while everyday communication in homes, fields, and even the market is mostly in Tashelhit, with some Arabic as needed to accommodate interlocutors. Few native Arabic speakers in Morocco speak or understand any of the geolects of Tamazight, such as Tashelhit, given that these regional varieties have some phonological, lexical, and pragmatic particularities. Among an older generation, language shift went both ways, with men and women shifting their language of everyday speech according to their fortunes and residences, so that native Arabic-speakers who emigrated to Tashelhit-speaking areas took up Tashelhit. This does not occur today, as the vernaculars of Arabic and Berber are no longer of equal status (see Hoffman, *in press*).

In the memory of current plains residents, some formerly Tashelhit-speaking plains villages have shifted towards Arabic. For other villages, the only evidence of a Tashelhit-speaking past is in tribal identifiers that double as placenames: Ait ('people') rather than the Arabic Beni or Ouled (see Afa, 1989). During the time of my primary fieldwork (1995–1999), community-wide language shift was not a topic rural people comfortably discussed, even though they animatedly spoke about individual Ishelhin who chose to become Arabic-dominant. The broader implications of individual actions went undiscussed, either because people considered themselves insufficiently knowledgeable about the topic, or found the topic to be too politically charged, or – in sharp contrast – because they simply found it unimportant. Nonetheless, in the plains village of Arazan, a history of movement and change presents itself in the shared ethnolinguistic and ethnosemiotic plains repertoires. Their practices and semiotic systems accommodate Arabic-speaking neighboring villages with whom many Razanis (people of Arazan) maintain dense social networks. The ethnolinguistic repertoire is notable for including Tashelhit as the everyday spoken vernacular and Moroccan Arabic – and a heavily regional Arabic of the Houara plains at that – for sung performances at crucial life cycle events. Simultaneously, Razanis insist that Tashelhit is the language of intimacy. The extent of bilingual competence and practice varies considerably by individual according to linguistic exposure, place of residence during childhood and adulthood, spouse selection, and work requirements. Similarly, a Razani ethnosemiotics encompassing musical tastes and wedding rituals highly values cultural practices associated with both Arab plains villages and the nearby ethnically mixed market town of Taroudant. Such market centers-turned-regional capitals throughout the

country increasingly anchor homogeneous Moroccan cultural practices, heavily influenced by northern Moroccan Arab traditions (Kapchan, 1996), rather than reflecting their residents' ancestries. These practices are part and parcel of what Herzfeld calls *disemia*, an expansion of the concept of *diglossia* that includes language but extends beyond it to comprise a "semiotic continuum that includes silence, gesture, music, the built environment and economic, civil, and social values" (Herzfeld, 1997, p. 14). Inherent in this conceptualization is the hunch that public presentations and private experiences of culture are in tension, with the former marked by a formality. *Disemia* is most apt, Herzfeld argues, in "countries with an ambiguous relationship to ideal images of a powerful culture" (1997, p. 15), which I would argue used to characterize Morocco's relationship with the West and especially France, and by now concerns the self-consciously Arab Morocco's concern with an alleged internal Other: Berbers. Those engaged in *disemic* practices, most notably here the Berber plains dwellers more than mountain or town residents, have mastered a range of expressive customs other than those of their own villages. They are accustomed to linguistic and social heterogeneity, even within the family, where one roof may house monolingual Arabic-speaking children raised in town, their bilingual parents, and a Tashelhit-monolingual grandmother.

In contrast to plains residents, mountain merchant men are landowners whose wives and daughters tend rain-fed barley fields. Men have left the arid mountains for the cities to work in commerce since the 1920s, returning for a few days or weeks each year. Women stay in their husbands' or fathers' land to tend the fields and raise children. Native Tashelhit speakers who have emigrated permanently to towns have shifted at an increased rate towards Moroccan Arabic with massive urbanization of the 1970s. Those men who move their wives and children to the cities become bilingual in Arabic, and children grow up in the cities as Arabic-dominant speakers, many even going so far as to reject the widely stigmatized *Ashehli* identity. In practice, then, cities tend to encourage the linguistic and social acculturation of non-Arab Moroccans into an Arabo-Islamic nation that semiotically conflates religious and linguistic practices, marginalizing the country's non-native Arabic-speaking Muslims. Tashelhit and the other Tamazight geolects remain dominant in use only in the countryside.

Tashelhit mountain women's monolingualism earns them both accolades and contempt. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere (Hoffman, 2002b, 2003a), it is clearly in the interest of many migrant Anti-Atlas men that their wives and daughters remain monolingual Tashelhit speakers rather than bilinguals with competence in Arabic. Monolingualism assures, on a logistical level, that wives will remain in their husbands' homelands, tend land, and preserve the husband's patrimony and reputation, rather than striking out on their own, without material or emotional support. In exchange, women's contributions to cultural and linguistic maintenance are highly valued by men who assure that their material needs are met to the best of their abilities. Thus while mountain women have little choice over where they live, or how their households are financed, they are widely recognized for holding down the fort during the bulk of the year while men work in commerce in the northern Arab cities of Casablanca, Khouribga, Fes, and Rabat and occasionally in France.² To the broader Moroccan community familiar with representations of Berbers in

² A crucial exception to this generalization occurs at the time of marriage where young women are active and integral agents in selection of a spouse, despite their discursive claims to the contrary in both song and talk (Hoffman, 2002b). While in her father's household, and after marriage, however, a woman's residence is generally subject to the wishes of her guardian, whether father or husband.

the public sphere, mountain women themselves have come to embody the sturdiness, persistence, and provincialism of their native tongue and their homelands, qualities that are reflected in the idealized Berber woman's self-presentation: traditional dress and jewelry, upright posture, sun-parched skin, loud, confident speech, physical strength.

Tashelhit language, then, indexes rurality, which in turn indexes female gender. This follows the semiotic chain that Ochs elaborated in arguing that often what seem to be gendered features of speech are instead indexical features: 'few features of language directly and exclusively index gender' (1992, p. 342). Additionally, it complicates already little-appreciated maintenance efforts initiated by urban men, anchored in the writing of Tamazight in the little-known Tifinagh script, an ancient Libyco-Berber script, and taking the form of traditional stories, song, proverbs, and other folklore compendia, as well as language instruction. Urban-based maintenance efforts are largely disconnected from the experience and expertise of rural women, those who are held most responsible for Tashelhit language maintenance, particularly given the unremitting pressures on their co-ethnics in plains and townspeople to shift towards the dominant national Arabic vernacular.

While older mountain women are largely shielded from these pressures, younger mountain women in their teens and twenties are more influenced by subtle pressures to Arabize and Arabicize. The influence of peers in the mountains – even those one sees only periodically – is significant given the heightened importance of festival times when the countryside 'fills up', as they say, with returning emigrant males. The year starkly vacillates between labor and leisure. Women categorize time using this dichotomy, both on the everyday level, with constant domestic commands and refusals to 'sit' (*sggus* or *ggyur*) and 'get up' (*nikr*), where sitting means resting and getting up means working, both at a given moment and as a continuous manner of using one's body in social activity and physical space (see Munn, 1986, p. 75). One 'gets up' to work and 'sits' in moments of leisure.

When mapped onto annual festive events, such as the Muslim 'Id holiday and the summer wedding season, leisure receives significant metadiscursive and metapragmatic attention: what happens both physically and discursively during leisure gets repeated verbatim and analyzed the whole year long, with the collaborative reconstruction of family and friends. Teenaged young women from the mountains whom I knew in the late 1990s had intensive (albeit infrequent) contact with male age-mates from their villages and those nearby, even though young men lived and worked for most of the year in the cities, returning periodically with what they called *tifawt* ('light'): manufactured goods, money, and urban tales. The time young women and men spend together, *msqar*-ing (talking tête-à-tête) outside under the stars, or cooking and eating together at festive *zerda* parties, are symbolically powerful and formative moments during which understandings of individual and collective subjectivity are constructed, negotiated, and reinforced. This means that although quantitatively these bilingual young men have little influence on young women's speech, qualitatively the weight of those instances of contact are charged and may have a sustained influence on shaping young women's language practices and language ideologies. Evidence of this includes the increased lexical borrowings and Arabic expressions among the unschooled as well as the primary-schooled younger generation of females relative to their mothers and grandmothers.

As Milroy (1987) has argued, social network influences on language choices are not only weighted by the frequency or density of contact, but also the symbolic weight of contact moments and types of social contact. The disproportionate importance of encounters

with urban male youths in young mountain women's self-presentations helps explain the increased influence of Moroccan Arabic on the young women, who socialize with bilingual young emigrant men during their village returns, despite the lack of exposure to Arabic in schools, travels, or other contexts. Thus there is generational shift that extends throughout expressive genres, including not only song (Hoffman, 2002) but also everyday talk, and that remains 'Tashelhit' as the young women characterize it, but is heavily influenced by Arabic lexicon and discursive forms, even if not by Arabic phonology or syntax.³ Through symbolically charged, mixed-sex interactions, youths of both genders construct visions of themselves and their communities that integrate rural and urban practices and aspirations. Tashelhit language and the *tamazirt* ('countryside', 'homeland', 'rural place') land are central to this imagining (Hoffman, 2002b). While each side – the rural-dwelling young women and the city-dwelling young men – romanticizes the other, collectively an idealization of personhood and the closely linked *tamazirt* implicates Ishelhin of both genders in a symbiotic relationship. In rural youth circles, multilingualism is regarded as a virtue, albeit a male one, and languages are resources allowing individuals to move between social worlds.

As with the young women's peer group, grown married women in the mountains constitute a peer group characterized by regular and intensive interactions and similarities of speech. But married women in the mountains have an alternative system of valuation that requires no recourse to an outsider language, instead stressing the virtues of the solidarity code (Tashelhit) over the power code (Arabic).⁴ Tashelhit women in the plains, unlike their co-ethnics in the neighboring mountains, have a less-developed solidarity code independent from the dominant national narratives that favors Arabs. A disemic repertoire in the plains straddles two systems of valuation. One system in use in the plains is largely Tashelhit monolingual and resembles that of the mountains. A second, in contrast, considers bilingualism with Arabic as preferable at the individual level. In this second rendition of things, exclusively female (and Tashelhit-based) systems of verbal expressive valuation are largely absent. Tashelhit women in the plains are closer to the national Arabocentric semiotic systems than are their mountain co-ethnics. In the plains, Ashelhi veiling practices, domestic architecture, collective musical productions, and other cultural practices more closely resemble those of rural Arabs. In a fundamental respect, plains ethnosemiotics stress integration and accommodation across ethnic and linguistic lines, rendering language shift towards Arabic just one more accommodationist practice that humbly acknowledges Ashelhi marginalization. Native Tashelhit-speaking bilingual plains women are consequently more receptive to national narratives that privilege spoken Arabic over the Tamazight geolects.

Rural Tashelhit women in both mountains and plains as I knew them in the late 1990s were unconcerned with Tashelhit language maintenance, but in different respects. Mono-

³ The relative low frequency of proverbs and traditional stories – fixed forms – among young women in Ida ou Zeddout, at least relative to their mothers, is another important angle on generational change, but it remains outside the scope of the present discussion.

⁴ Brown and Gilman's (1972) terminology distinguished between the singular and plural/formal second-person pronouns common in many languages (e.g., tu/vous) in terms of solidarity and power. This rationale for language use based on relative speaker relationship has been borrowed extensively into analyses of code-switching. The power-solidarity distinction is a useful shorthand for indexing competing valorizations of the languages (and their speakers) involved in language contact.

lingual mountain women, ensconced as they were among Tashelhit speakers and members of social networks in which Tashelhit language and rural land brought honor, could not imagine things being otherwise. A prevailing language ideology they shared was that all Tashelhit women in the mountains spoke Tashelhit, and that their daughters would do so for as long as they continued to live in the countryside, since it was urban residence that led to language shift. Language maintenance was thus non-sensical to mountain women: it was unnecessary in the mountains and impossible in the cities.

For plains women, the disinterest in Tashelhit maintenance took a different form. Given their shared participation in economic and social life with Arabic-speaking plains dwellers, and with residents of regional towns such as Taroudant and market centers such as Ouled Berhil, the intrinsic value of Tashelhit was less evident to many plains dwellers, who instead used it out of respect for older family members and villagers, but certainly not out of a sense of pride or alternative collective identity to ‘Arabs’. I often heard schooled Tashelhit speakers from plains and towns refer to themselves as Arabs, subcategorizing this group into ‘Tashelhit-speaking Arabs’ and ‘Arabic-speaking Arabs’. This may have been a categorization scheme particular to the 1990s of the kind that would be more unlikely now with an early 21st century emphasis on Amazigh heritage. Regardless, it constitutes a reversal of the French Protectorate-era tendency to claim that all Moroccans were Berbers, but that there were Arabized Berbers and pure Berbers (Hoffman, 2003b). For Tashelhit plains women who married Arabic-speaking men and had monolingual Arabic-speaking children, Tashelhit remained a female language of solidarity. Plains women I knew moved deftly between the languages according to addressee, yelling at a mischievous child in Arabic, for instance, then turning back to recounting a narrative to a sibling in Tashelhit. In both plains and mountains, speaking Tashelhit marked a closer affinity to the code of solidarity than the code of power. Despite differences between plains and mountains, rural Tashelhit women attributed meanings to speaking Tashelhit that were different from those of the Amazigh activists who demonstrated a preference for linguistic and cultural purity (variously defined but primarily lexically indexed; see Wertheim, 2003), and a desire to elevate Tamazight to the role of language of power alongside Arabic.

When an ideology of solidarity governs language use more than an ideology of power, individuals may demand use of Tashelhit within the group context, and may even scold or chastise those who speak Arabic within it (cf. Hart, 1984). Yet practiced and situated acts of interactional solidarity tend to allow for variability in the sound, shape, and composition of Tashelhit, permitting extensive code-switching, assimilated borrowings, regional phonological variations, and prosodic features even in the speech of rural Tashelhit speakers. Gal (1979) similarly found significant tolerance of borrowings and code-switches among bilingual Austrians on the Hungarian border. In contrast to borrowing, however, inter- and intrasentential code-switching among rural Ishelhin of both the mountains and plains is dispreferred and rare, certainly not what Woolard calls a ‘safety valve’ for speakers without full use of the language (1989, p. 361). Indeed, as Haugen (1989) found for American Norwegian speakers, tolerance of lexical borrowing (provided syntactic and phonological systems remained stable) may give way to language shift. Perhaps the unarticulated dispreference for ‘mixed’ (*xaldn*) language among rural Ishelhin is less a concern with precipitating language shift and more a desire to index a social identity distinct from that of urban dwellers with their heavily code-switch-marked Tashelhit. Certainly code-switching need not lead to language shift: Makihara (2004) elaborates the emergence of a ‘colonial diglossia’ among Rapa Nui speakers of Easter Island, where shift towards

Spanish preceded lexical borrowings and the syncretic language form increasingly in use among young people. Regardless, ideologies of linguistic purity focus on languages as properties of speakers, whereas solidarity brings the attention more to the interaction of two or more speakers – a different unit of analysis.⁵

I have argued elsewhere that the spatial arrangement of the Anti-Atlas mountains, with men in the cities and women in the rural homelands, is crucial to identity construction for Ishelhin as a whole, who incorporate both men's moving and women's dwelling into their senses of personhood and community (Hoffman, 2002b). A disturbing aspect of this phenomenon concerns women's restriction to rural lands, a move that potentially compromises their human rights. The resulting paradox is good news for language maintenance but bad news for human rights as the gendered practices allow men to delimit the spatial boundaries of women. Since women are associated with the countryside, and Tashelhit is primarily spoken in the countryside, Tashelhit has come to be associated with both rurality and women – a link that seems logical and is ideologically imagined as the longstanding state of affairs, but is historically situated.

Tashelhit-speaking women in the plains are subject to different linguistic pressures – and increased use of Arabic – relative to their mountain co-ethnics. This is due to plains women's geographic proximity to towns and Arab villages and their political economic status as landless agriculturalists, many of whom vaguely claim ancestry elsewhere in southwestern Morocco, including areas their ancestors fled due to economic misfortune and drought, particularly during the French Protectorate administration. Indeed, what surprises about the Tashelhit-speaking plains communities is that they continue to speak Tashelhit at all given the number and density of incentives to shift to Arabic, at both the individual and societal level. Yet Tashelhit remains an important marker of solidarity within plains communities, at least in everyday talk. On festive public occasions, in contrast, these Tashelhit speakers sing in Arabic, accommodating monolingual Arabic speakers from neighboring villages as well as relatives relocated to towns and cities. Untangling some of this complexity within a compact region allows us to explore the gendering of responsibilities for language maintenance and contraction as a function of differently gendered divisions of labor.

On the national level in Morocco, it is urban male intellectuals who are designing Amazigh language policy and setting activist agendas. These policies and agendas have periodic idealizing reference to women's purity or centrality in Amazigh culture and society, but are not made in consultation with rural women. This is no surprise given the systematic exclusion of women from decision-making structures outside the home, and not just in Moroccan society (Rogers, 1979). Feminist anthropologists and linguists have argued that this tendency not only denies women's humanity, but it makes for bad social science (Spender, 1984). One of the main tenets of Amazigh scholars, activists, and governmental officials charged with Tamazight language policy is the centrality of language documentation to maintenance efforts, despite cross-cultural evidence that documenting a language does not in itself ensure language survival (Nettle and Romaine, 2000), and may even imperil language preservation efforts (Muhlhauser, 1996, 2001; Tabouret-Keller et al., 1997), although it may be good for community morale (Dorian, 1997; Terrill, 2002).

⁵ An anonymous reviewer helpfully drew my attention to this distinction, noting further that language maintenance efforts may not be identifying the relevant unit when they focus on individual language production.

Documentation was key historically, however, to the recognition of legitimacy for Tamazight and its geolects. Thus it is not surprising that native Tamazight-speaking linguists applied their training and expertise to the scientific study of their language, albeit usually in French and English departments, since the first thesis written in an Arabic department was not approved until the late 1990s (Elmedlaoui, 2002). Such documentation was the primary activity in the struggle for recognition of Berber legitimacy and cultural rights during the period from the mid 1970s to the late 1990s. As with the other Tamazight varieties, doctoral theses on grammatical structures of Tashelhit by Boukous (1977) and El Moujahid attested to the regularity and internal consistency of this language variety as counter to the then-widespread misperception that since Tamazight was not commonly written and varied regionally, it was not a ‘language’ but only a ‘dialect’ (see Edwards, 1985, pp. 19–22).

The contemporary emphasis on text creation as a maintenance strategy is particularly perplexing given that the Moroccan Tamazight varieties have remained more widespread in speech (as compared with Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya) in large part due to Morocco’s low rural female literacy rate and late development of a state educational system (Combs-Schilling, 1998). The communities with the highest concentration of Tamazight speakers in Morocco coincide with the lowest literacy levels. Language shift towards Arabic has remained somewhat limited – although extensive – precisely because so many rural women have remained monolingual and removed from Arabic language influence.

A look at literacy rates is revealing. Among the Ida ou Zeddout people of the eastern Anti-Atlas mountains, for instance, female illiteracy was at 98% in 1997, compared with Taroudant town women’s illiteracy of 56%. Mountain men’s illiteracy was at 62%, as contrasted with Taroudant men’s illiteracy of 25%. Arazan plains women’s illiteracy was at 93%, significantly more than the 80% female illiteracy rate in neighboring Arabic-speaking Ouled Berhil (CERED, 1997). All of these rates are elevated relative to the overall Moroccan illiteracy rates of around 30% for men and 50% for women.⁶ Given these gendered and region-based discrepancies, it is unsurprising that there are significant intra-group differences that may shape access to, use of, and ideologies about the languages in use. These figures hint at a potentially powerful clash of interests and delegation of relative responsibilities in language management. An understanding of language contraction among Imazighen, or even Ishelhin as a sub-group of Imazighen, insists that we acknowledge local-level, intra-group variation that sociolinguists, at least, conventionally presumes.⁷ One hint at the future might be the Moroccan government’s decision to use a modernized version of Tifinagh to write Tamazight in public schools, further marginalizing women from the state-sanctioned forms of their language. The ‘full range of code variation’ (Hill, 1987, p. 158) for Tamazight language now includes a third script in addition to the Arabic and Roman scripts already in use.

⁶ The literacy figures include some former schoolchildren who did not develop literacy skills or who lost them with disuse. Literacy statistics are of course notoriously imprecise, albeit suggestive, in terms of actual literacy practices in that individuals may use writing in ways not captured by these statistics (Collins and Blot, 2003; Street, 1984, 1993; Wagner, 1993).

⁷ But note Tonkin’s (1994) argument that sociolinguistics was late to consider gender, even though it took class and other social variables seriously. Even studies in bilingualism that accepted Ochs’ argument that children more easily learn the language of the parent with whom they are closer (e.g., Romaine, 1989) still have not sufficiently studied gender.

3. Indexing gender through rurality

In rural communities where labor is gendered and women keep company with women, women's ways of speaking are likely to be key markers of solidarity, comprising a code of intimacy that marks and validates shared experience, regardless of the dominant society's evaluation of their cultural and symbolic capital (or lack thereof) (Bourdieu, 1991). Solidarity practices begin before adulthood, although late adolescent and adult initiate language socialization is widely disregarded in language shift studies. Cross-cultural examples attest to the significant variation in gendered engagements with ethnolinguistic and ethnosemiotic practices shaped by political economies in which women rather than men are the primary agriculturalists. Among the rural Aymara of Bolivia, for instance, adults begin to speak Aymara publicly as they transition into adulthood in the community and the laboring in the fields that will be their life's work. The context for speaking Aymara rather than the Castilian spoken to children is field laboring, where even those who speak Castilian at home instead speak Aymara at work. Rural laboring is quantitatively significant in Aymara communities, and thus so is the language associated with laboring and with women: coca is harvested three times a year by women, and through their work parties, women talk constantly, forming and critiquing public opinion comparable to the work of men's syndicate meetings (Spedding, 1994). Thus the usual developmental expectations and language socialization practices cannot be applied to the Bolivian Aymara case, because language socialization into Aymara occurs in adulthood rather than childhood. In both Scotland (Dorian, 1981; Constantinidou, 1994) and Austria (Gal, 1979), a gendered laboring of the land led to a gendered language shift, but one in which women remained the critical actors, for they intentionally did not pass their heritage language on to children. Similarly, Taiap speakers of Papua New Guinea associate this local vernacular with women and with now-devalued pre-missionization practices and beliefs, contributing definitively not only to shift towards Tok Pisin, the national lingua franca, but also towards the disappearance of Taiap (Kulick, 1992).

In the instance of the Moroccan Anti-Atlas mountains, we can hypothesize a different gendering, since women are the agriculturalists and men are considered unfit to farm, more suited for clean city work. Perhaps women's close relationship to the land through labor in itself brings women closer to Tashelhit language than men, or men have other forms of attachment to the land that then tether them to the Tashelhit language. Men may have other types of attachments to Tashelhit language than through land that would best be explored through a study of their practices in urban settings. Just as women's social networks revolve around Tashelhit-speaking spaces, men's social and economic networks make Tashelhit a key index of belonging and make Tashelhit central to assessing potential business partners and employees. Since native Moroccan Arabic speakers do not learn Tashelhit, the tacit requirement that employees speak Tashelhit ensures that they are not ethnic Arabs. Yet simply speaking Tashelhit is not sufficient to go into business with urban merchants native to the mountains. Tashelhit-speaking plains men do not find employment and upward mobility in the businesses of Anti-Atlas men for whom tribal affiliation validates origins and genealogy, believed to shape character and behavior (Geertz, 1983; Rosen, 1984). In this urban context, despite recent scholarly insistence on the disappearance of the tribe in Morocco (Hammoudi, 1993, pp. 39–40; Hart, 2000; cf. Leveau, 1985), tribal affiliation trumps linguistic practice as a gate-keeping device. Land tenure and participation in political economic systems are key indicators of group belong-

ing and predictors of ethnolinguistic and ethnosemiotic repertoires for rural Moroccan men. For women, similarly, specific laboring practices in which women engage (manual agricultural labor in the mountains, domestic labor/factory work in the plains) may prove to be equally influential in language maintenance and contraction.

As with Tashelhit women in both plains and mountains, Mexicano (Nahuatl) women use the heritage language more than do men, and are expected to do so (Hill and Hill, 1986; Hill, 1987). Multiple facets of Tashelhit women's speech indicate this proclivity towards the heritage language: they use fewer Arabic borrowings and assimilated loanwords, and for those with some Arabic familiarity, their speech production is expected to be influenced by Tashelhit more than is men's speech. Moreover, rural men and women are surprised when 'even women' use Arabic, given that rural women are expected to speak the allegedly more modest Tashelhit, much as rural Mexicanas are supposed to speak Nahuatl. Tashelhit women use fewer Arabic lexical borrowings especially for counting and identifying colors, two domains where Arabic prevails among males.

Additionally, Tashelhit-speaking mountain women use particular intersentential and introductory vocables as emphatic discourse markers (Schiffrin, 1988). The most striking and prevalent examples include:

1. *aq!*, a linguistic feature with no referential content (Ochs, 1992, p. 338), a marker that signals surprise at an interlocutor's utterance, indignation, or simply functions pragmatically to 'hold the floor' in preparation for a more extensive utterance (Goffman, 1981). The speaker briefly pauses after this feature and before resuming the utterance.
2. *niġ-am/niġ-ak* (lit. 'I said to you' f. or m.), a vocative that precedes a new, not a repeated, segment of discourse; and
3. //, a lateral click resembling the sound Anglo Americans use to urge on a horse (Lee, 1993) and that operates pragmatically to indicate agreement or close listening to an interlocutor, similar to English-speaking American women's use of the back channeling 'uh huh' or head nod.⁸

Each of these discourse markers is an icon of rurality but also a qualisign (Peirce, 1955) which, as Munn has elaborated, refers to 'embodied qualities' that 'provide the most salient value signifiers' in clusters of 'polarized elements' (Munn, 1986, p. 17), here substance and intransigence. These qualisigns embody the notion of not only the 'hard' or 'solid' Tashelhit language, but also the 'hard' or 'stubborn' Ashelhi person (to which the polar quality is not 'soft' but 'mixed'). Each serves as a class marker and is absent from the speech of urban and educated Ishelhin. In mountain schools, where class and gender are partially socialized by teachers who hail almost exclusively from urban and Arabic-speaking milieux, the use of these discourse markers is discouraged and even punished. I heard one teacher in Ida ou Zeddout scold a seven year-old girl for using the // when

⁸ Western Anglophone scholars have noted that men's use of back channeling, both in the form of head nods and a repeated verbal 'uh-huh' have slightly but importantly different meanings than women's back channeling. For women these practices signal empathy or close listening, whereas for men they are offered less freely and are reserved for cases of agreement with the speaker. Clearly the lateral click's Arabness or Berberness is semiotically significant only in relation to local ethnolinguistic or cultural systems of meaning: some Yemeni and East African Arabic speakers use the lateral click as well (Rossi, 1939; Martine Vanhove, personal communication, 11/29/2005).

listening attentively to the teacher, who then sternly reminded the girl that the sound was used to summon a donkey, not concur with what someone has said. Such linguistic proscriptions are reinforced by other cultural practice admonitions. In another instance in Ida ou Zeddout, a primary school teacher remarked to students as an adolescent girl passed the window with a plow that ‘Islam doesn’t allow women to work like that outside – it’s *haram* (forbidden by Islam)’. Similarly, distinctive regional female dress marking Berber ethnicity – the navy *tamelheft* overwrap – is barred from classrooms. Outside the state institutional context of the school, however, distinctive ethnic dress is widely appreciated by mountain men and women alike as modest, attractive, and practical. Mountain Ishehlin consider their Muslim identity central to their sense of self and collective, despite suggestions by some outsiders that their practices and Islamic principles are mutually exclusive.

‘Hard Tashelhit’, the women who speak it, and the lands where both are rooted are all romanticized by Ashelhi men and outsiders (Moroccan and foreign) for their critical role in transmitting heritage untainted by Arabic and Arab influence. Indeed, none of the three discourse markers noted above is found in Arabic discourse, even in the rural plains: each indexes a mountain dweller, and none is used by men.⁹ Additionally, high pitch and loud volume index femaleness by recursively evoking female features valued by the collective (although absent in stereotypes of the ideal Islamic woman): confidence, boldness, assertiveness, and bravado.¹⁰ These aspects of an aesthetic ideal are exploited in Tashelhit popular music, where high pitch indexes hyper-femininity (as with Western male drag), and breathy loud enunciation, epitomized by the popular commercial artist Fatima Tabaamrant, iconizes a roughness admired in mountain women.

Tashelhit discourse markers of femininity are noteworthy because they operate outside the sphere of Arabic and Arab cultural influence. They indirectly index gender rather than directly marking it, and attention to this process represents what Ochs calls a ‘move toward defining men’s and women’s communicative styles, their access to different conversational acts, activities, and genres, and their strategies for performing similar acts, activities and genres (Borker, 1980; Gal, 1989; Goodwin, 1990)’ (Ochs, 1992, p. 343). Regardless of the referential content of mountain women’s discourse about the difficulties of emigration and their abiding desire to leave the tamazirt (Hoffman, 2002b), the linguistic forms that they use suggest a high density of social networks within the countryside and among Tashelhit monolinguals. The use of these discourse markers suggests that women recognize their reliance on solid female relationships. Their use reinforces the collective as a refuge from the criticism levied at their communities by outsiders and insiders alike who may echo national discourses favoring Arabocentric practices.

In addition to the discourse markers I discussed above, communicative styles particular to mountain communities are found in lexical choice, narrative styles, and shared greeting formulas. For instance, mountain women repeat a greeting sequence with each individual

⁹ In the case of Bergamasco language in Northern Italy, Cavanaugh (2004) argues that members of the Bergamasco speech community subscribe to a language ideology that associates Bergamasco language with a difficult and poor past, and a peasant roughness. They are nostalgic for it, but because they see it as already gone, their language practices do not attempt to perpetuate the language as an everyday conversational code. Instead, there are a set of Bergamasco sounds that people produce that are iconic of the language as a whole, most associated with male speakers, in contrast to discourse markers in Tashelhit I discuss there.

¹⁰ The use of these prosodic features draws attention to the performativity of verbal performance over its referential content, which perhaps explains its increased prevalence at large public events such as weddings.

twice each day: first upon a first encounter, for example in the morning heading out to the fields, and again in the late afternoon, having washed up, changed out of work clothes and into clean ones, and gone out to the public spaces to socialize until sunset when they return to their homes and prepare dinner. This occurs even in villages where there may be only 30 women in residence who may have spent the entire day together. This communicative practice marks space and time in which labor and leisure are distinct. Involving not only the recognition of the other (Youssouf et al., 1976) but also the representation of self in public, this greeting practice is not found among Tashelhit speakers in the plains and towns, and instead is an indexical practice of a mountain rurality, and hence of female gender.

Rather than positing that certain linguistic or prosodic features directly index female gender, then, we can identify the qualities to which these features they point and the relationship between those qualities and gender. The discursive features specific to Tashelhit mountain women are qualisigns that help clarify how dissimilar attributes of mountain residence – of being a *tabudrart*, a ‘mountain woman’ (m. *abudrar*) – ‘count as ‘the same’ (Keane, 2003, p. 415). Rather than indexing an attribute directly, qualisigns point to properties believed to be shared by distinct objects or, we can say here, practices and attributes. In the case at hand, the qualisign mediates the indexing of gender by pointing to multiple attributes of femaleness: mountain-residing, unschooled, illiterate, detached from the Arabic-speaking society. The attributes indexed by the qualisign may characterize the few male shepherds in *Ida ou Zeddout*, generally judged as insufficiently masculine compared with the emigrant merchants, but they overwhelmingly describe resident women. The discourse markers thus point only to some qualities of a rural dweller (specifically gender and topography) rather than the whole group of *Ishelhin* (comprising men and women, plains and mountains). Further strengthening the hypothesis that these discourse markers index mountain residence rather than just female gender is their absence from the speech of Tashelhit monolingual plains women.

A male *abudrar* might hypothetically speak using some of these qualities, but in practice he would tend to avoid these speech features in favor of others more closely approximating the speech of emigrant men, who arguably define the male prestige code due to their value in the village for financing both household and community projects with their remittances. As I have elaborated elsewhere (Hoffman, 2002b), the political economy in Anti-Atlas societies confers prestige on men for their movement, and on women for their attachment to the land and maintenance of the homelands. But while women bolster men’s status and sanction their speech, men do not return the favor. Among Tashelhit speakers, as Hill writes regarding Mexicano speakers, men do not ‘value the speech of women; their speech, although conservative in many ways from the linguist’s point of view, apparently is not considered by men to exemplify the purist norm’ (Hill, 1987, p. 135). This purist norm – the speech form advocated by Amazigh *militants* – is not the Tashelhit of the monolingual woman, despite her infrequent and low-level contact with Arabic language and Arabs, given that it is studded with Arabic assimilated borrowings. Thus either the purist norm is male, or it is urban, or it remains elusive.

Another way of considering communicative styles and how gender may be indexed through them is to consider the entire repertoire of expressive forms performed by a group’s members and then assess differential access to these styles. This is the approach Hill takes in positing that Mexicano women have available to them only a subset of men’s speech forms: Mexicano women’s speech is ‘highly constrained within a narrow

range of possibilities, at the same time less Mexicano and less Spanish than men's speech, whereas men are able to use the full range of code variation' (Hill, 1987, p. 158). I remain skeptical about this approach, however, given that at least among the Ishelhin, as with the Paxtun (Grima, 1992), Egyptian Bedouin (Abu-Lughod, 1986) and numerous other groups (Hirsch, 1998; James, 1999; Joseph and Joseph, 1987; Keesing, 1985; Mills, 1991; Schieffelin, 1990; Seremetakis, 1991; Tsing, 1993), women engage in speech forms unknown or disregarded by men, even if they lack access to certain male genres. In any event, Tashelhit women are seen as having access to a highly coveted and valued 'pure Tashelhit', otherwise called 'hard/solid Tashelhit', by virtue of their mountain residence, infrequent exposure to men and Arabic, and familiarity with stories and oral literature. Yet paradoxically, the linguistic practices of monolingual mountain women are criticized when they do not conform to the lexical purist ideal of the proponents of Tamazight language maintenance.

4. Gendered indigenous language maintenance and contraction: comparative perspectives

The outpouring of recent attention to indigenous people in the social sciences has made scant reference to the variety of language practices and ideologies within groups whose ancestral languages are undergoing contraction in absolute number of speakers and in domains of use.¹¹ Similarly, intra-group differences in status and practice, especially those indexical of gender, are virtually absent despite attention to differences correlating with generation, residence, and schooling. Solidarity and unity are political imperatives for many communities whose access to resources depend on their dispelling critiques of diversity and fragmentation. In this tense political and intellectual climate, the gendering of language practices and ideologies among indigenous peoples has not received the attention that has enriched studies of language shift and contraction more generally. Yet without understanding internal fractures – a central tenet more generally in studies of both speech communities (Labov, 1966; Gumperz, 1968; Dorian, 1982; Duranti, 1997) and communities of practice (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Wenger, 1998; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999; Bucholtz, 1999) – we cannot grasp the local forces that shape linguistic practices and thus shape possibilities of language maintenance.

Perhaps this is in part because of a widespread rejection by anthropologists of the sociolinguistic consideration of gender as an independent variable like class or age.¹² Yet it is important to take seriously the gendered categories and characterizations of the people whose lives we render in our scholarly writing even while recognizing variation within both the indigenous group and the construction of the categories of 'men' and 'women'. The vigor of our scholarly rejection of universal gender does nothing to lessen the significance of gendered distinctions in the lives of those about and with whom we write. In the Moroccan Berber communities I have discussed here, the immediate and incessant female or male

¹¹ Exceptions include Romaine (2002) and Warner (2001) on Hawaiian. Scholarship on declining use of languages that are more commonly considered regional than indigenous has more mindfully attended to intra-group variation. See, most notably, studies in the pragmatics of the European regional languages of Corsican (Jaffe, 1999), Catalan (Pujolar, 2001), and Breton (McDonald, 1989, 1994).

¹² Dialectologists and sociolinguists have remarked that male speech typically is seen as the norm (cf. Coates, 1993). It is thus difficult to track change in women's speech, or even change in speech generally for a community, when we only have access to older data from men.

gendering of a person from infancy conditions the possibilities available to any person that are naturalized, perceived as inherent and immutable. In this article, I have parsed two taken-for-granted categories of people – one ethnolinguistic (Berbers) and the other gendered (women) – by examining the role of political economies in shaping the ethnolinguistic and ethnosemiotic practices of rural Ishelhin (Tashelhit-speaking) Berbers of southwestern Morocco. My use of the terms ‘men’ and ‘women’ is thus highly specific, as is my use of the categories ‘plains Berbers’ and ‘mountain Berbers’. Despite intra-group diversity among Berbers, and within this umbrella category among Ishelhin, there are discernible patterns related to land ownership and engagement with the Arabo-Islamic Moroccan nation-state that permit an analysis of the distribution of resources in this male-privileging society. That gender has been neglected in studies of the ‘progression and regression’ of language (Hyltenstam and Viberg, 1993) at both the individual and societal levels is particularly perplexing given the close attention to gender in language socialization (Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez, 2002; Kulick and Schieffelin, 2004; Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986). Constantinidou speculates that the “moral” and “political” undertones of language-shift make it rather difficult and/or unproductive to introduce “en-gendered” observations into the sociolinguistic analysis of such sensitive areas’ (Constantinidou, 1994, p. 114).

The range of features and structural processes of shift away from contracting or so-called ‘endangered’ languages (cf. critiques of this biological metaphor in Errington (2003) and Hill (2002)) resemble those of shift away from a non-endangered language, namely domain reduction; reduction in range of expressive genres; code-switching; and phonological, lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic influences from the dominant language (see Campbell and Muntzel, 1989; Dorian, 1999). This is evident in code choice (Dorian, 1981), marriage partner (Gal, 1979) and the language mothers choose to speak to their children (Eckert, 1983; Bratt Paulston, 1986, p. 495) (but see Kulick, 1992; Makihara, 2004). Dorian (1998) has noted that we know far more about impetuses to language loss than we do about the ‘psychosocial underpinnings’ of long-term language maintenance of small languages co-existing with a dominant language. The ethnographic record suggests that women may be either at the forefront of linguistic innovation and shift, or conversely they may be among the most traditional of speakers. In the case of the former, women’s sensitivity to issues of power (Bratt Paulston, 1986) – power that tends to disfavor them – may be instrumental in their haste to adopt the dominant language and abandon the ancestral language. In the latter tendency, women are simultaneously more conservative in their linguistic practices and in their self-presentations of other cultural markers such as dress. Today, women are often seen as heritage vessels by men in their communities, by governments, and by cultural anthropologists; they thus retain outward markers of traditional society, through speech, dress and other aspects of self-presentation. Indigenous women’s conservative role in regard to cultural practices is most notable in conventional litmus tests: clothing, food preparation, knowledge of oral heritage in the form of songs, poems, etc. (Hoffman, 2003a; Rindstedt and Aronsson, 2001). For instance, writing of the gendered multilingual practices of Peruvian Quechua speakers, Harvey notes, ‘Women can remain forceful and authoritative in other spheres. As Quechua speakers and as women, they are the guardians of indigenous culture and exemplify the source of moral attachment, while men as bilinguals stress their Spanish competence in negotiating inter-community, even inter-household status’ (Harvey, 1994, p. 55). Berber women’s “moral attachment” to Berber indigenous culture may or may not motivate language practices,

but it may be helpful to recall its post-colonial status that animates dichotomizing discourses on tradition and modernity. Writing about India but with an application to N. Africa as well, Chatterjee (1993, p. 135) argues that nationalist discourses duplicated the colonial dichotomies of feminine/masculine and tradition/modernity such that women remained associated with the private spheres and men to the public. Such dichotomies characterize patriarchy more generally, and are further reinforced by with the discrepancy between rural men and women in public and private institutions in Morocco, most crucially schools and political councils, whose adequate treatment is outside the scope of this piece. For Moroccan nationalists, the largely unacknowledged Berbers and Berber language came naturally to be associated with the home and with intimacy, and were excluded from male, Arab public spaces. By association, then, things Berber came to be feminized. Despite women's centrality to Berber language maintenance, if history is any guide, it is highly possible that their efforts will not be rewarded with greater social and legal rights. Scholars of anti-colonialism and nationalism will recognize the dilemma here: women participate and share a stake in the movement's goals, then men take positions of institutional authority and restore the gender inequality prevalent before the struggle (Parker et al., 1992; Lazreg, 1994; Baker, 1998; Kanaaneh, 2002). Similarly, when indigenous groups struggle for recognition and rights, public acknowledgement of intra-group fractures may be political suicide. Internal to the society itself, struggles that have emerged as dominant-minority struggles may even predate engagement with the state, newly mapped onto a struggle for resources – economic, political, and symbolic – between insiders and outsiders.

Attempting to reconcile instances in which women are conservative or instead innovative in their speech practices, Hill (1987) suggests that women move towards the prestige speech variety in situations of change, but are otherwise conservative. Yet even this explanation seems tautological given that it remains unclear what this change consists of or how change would manifest. We simply cannot make a universalizing statement about women as linguistic conservationists or innovators. Instead, we can attend to the diversity of ethnographic accounts that suggest conditions (political economic, social, political) under which women in particular speech communities engage in contextually-situated conservative or innovative practices.

5. Conclusion

In this article I have examined the complexity of the Tashelhit language community of southwestern Morocco, arguing that intra-societal factors – particularly political economy and geographical placement – shape not only women's language practices, but also the processes of language maintenance and contraction. The pressures that shape women's language practices and social networks exert a more profound influence on the maintenance or contraction of an endangered language than a conscious concern for the preservation of heritage. In this article, I have considered Tashelhit Berber women as key agents in language maintenance, but according to the seemingly contradictory approaches of distinction from or embrace of linguistic and semiotic practices associated with Arabs. Indeed, some Berber women inadvertently contribute to Berber language stability even against their express intentions and to their own detriment. I have questioned easy hierarchies of gendered language use, instead considering women's access to alternative systems of valuation to those embraced by powerful groups, what

Labov calls ‘alternative vernacular culture[s]’ (Labov, 1972a,b) that validate minority language use, signal the group’s attachment to a set of alternative legitimating factors (Harvey, 1994), and bring a speaker covert prestige (Trudgill, 1983). Competing language ideologies (Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994; Schieffelin et al., 1998) – some of which are held by both genders, not only women – shape people’s possibilities to interpret and judge verbal expressive competence, negotiate linguistic difference, and allocate communicative labor.

We cannot presume that Tashelhit-speaking men have intentionally limited women’s language abilities. We can take seriously, however, language ideologies that simultaneously have glorified and degraded monolingual women. Indeed, when ‘women’ of all ages and social positions are conflated into an ideal ‘woman’ who iconizes heritage and the antithesis of urbanity – even within a single nation-state context, or an ethnic subgroup thereof – the complexities of women’s lives and choices are simplified and degraded. A semiotic system is well-entrenched in which a Tashelhit woman’s gender fulfillment is contingent on her working hard, speaking Tashelhit, spending frugally, and valuing the homeland over other places. Yet some Tashelhit women do emigrate, work in factories, or renounce Tashelhit for Arabic when given the opportunity. Such Tashelhit-speaking native women are de-ethnicized when their speech resembles that of men’s, meaning that of (Arab) urban dwellers.

Burton (1994) suggests directions for future research on gendered multilingual practices that are useful as well for work on language contraction in indigenous communities. We need comparative data on bilingual women, especially women who cross-boundaries between languages by marriage or migration; on language problems of women refugees; and on monolingual women in bilingual communities. We also need to know more about the role of women and men in language transmission, and the effect of age cohorts. Whether Tashelhit rural women retain their (sometimes syncretic, sometimes rarified) language practices, men seem to keep the upper hand over them – by keeping women monolingual, by restricting their movements to the mountains, or by permitting their bilingual practices. So long as this ethnosemiotic arrangement is in place, the resulting ethnolinguistic repertoire will serve to both maintain Tashelhit as the language of women and the countryside and to denigrate it outside of those restricted contexts.

Acknowledgements

Field research in the Anti-Atlas mountains and Sous Valley plains of Southwestern Morocco (August 1996–July 1999) was generously funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the Moroccan-American Commission and Fulbright Institute for International Education, and the Social Science Research Council’s Program on the Near and Middle East; language training (September 1995–July 1996) was supported by the Social Science Research Council’s International Predissertation Fellowship Program. The people of Ida ou Zeddout, Arazan, and Taroudant generously welcomed me into their homes and lives, particularly Fatima Mohammed, Fatima Hamid (*asstirham rbbi*), Mina, and Hajja. Ray Brod designed the map. I am grateful to all of them and to Latifa Asseffar, Jillian Cavanaugh, Kathleen McKeown, William Murphy, Suzanne Wertheim, two anonymous reviewers, and students in my winter 2004 freshmen seminar on *Endangered Languages and Indigenous People*. Any remaining errors are my sole responsibility.

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