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EXPLORING THE PATTERNS OF AMAZIGH MAINTENANCE AND SHIFT: A STUDY OF YOUNG AMAZIGH BILINGUALS IN AGADIR, MOROCCO

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Abstract
Research in Language Maintenance and Shift is mainly concerned with the dynamics by which a minority language is either preserved and transmitted across generations or replaced by a dominant language. This study examines this phenomenon within the Moroccan context, specifically among bilingual speakers of Tashlhiyt (an Amazigh variety) and Darija (Moroccan Arabic). The research sample consisted of 300 young males and females of Amazigh origin,aged 18 to 30, from five higher education institutions in Agadir. A mixed-method design was employed to collect data on the informants' proficiency and use of Amazigh. The findings revealed an ongoing shift towards Darija, particularly in urban settings where the bilingual environment favors the use of Darija over Amazigh.

Keywords Language maintenance, language shift, language proficiency, language use.

INTRODUCTION

The study of Language Maintenance and Shift (LMS) has been at the heart of both macro and micro sociolinguistics research for several decades. The foundations of research in this field are principally attributed to Joshua A. Fishman's seminal writings and research studies he conducted to investigate LMS processes among minority groups in the USA (Fishman 1964, 1965). Equally, other pioneers in the field, including Susan Gal (1979) and Nancy Dorian (1981), have made significant contributions to the body of research in this field. Recently, the challenges posed by globalization have triggered more awareness and concern among researchers about the need to preserve the world's linguistic and cultural diversity.

Early research in the field focused mainly on the LMS dynamics in migrant settings in Europe and North America, with less attention given to indigenous ones (Pauwels, 2016). The specificities that characterize each type of these settings imply that they potentially involve different types of variables and, therefore, require particular research approaches and methodologies. Kloss (1966) contended that the same factors that promote language shift in one group might lead to language maintenance in other ethnolinguistic groups. These views imply that each bilingual

context is unique in terms of the factors involved in Language Maintenance (LM) and Language Shift (LS) processes. While these intergroup differences mean that attempting generalizations about various language contact situations is not feasible, they establish the need to approach each language group as a unique community that needs to be investigated on its own. Accordingly, the present study envisages exploring the patterns of LM and LS processes among a young population of Tashlhiyt variety speakers- an Amazigh variety spoken widely in the Souss region in Morocco. These patterns are investigated by exploring the informants' Amazigh proficiency and their synchronic and diachronic use of Amazigh in daily communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Maintenance vs Language Shift

Language shift, as defined by Weinreich (1953, p.68), is "the change from the habitual use of one language to that of another" and typically occurs among subordinate or minority speech communities in continuous contact with a dominant speech community. Conversely, language maintenance (LM) is the counterpart of language shift, involving the continued use or retention of one's native language in various spheres of language use (Pauwels, 2016, p.20). The domain construct is often employed in defining LSM processes, with language shift signifying a reduction in the habitual use of a language within specific domains.

The process of language shift is presumed to be gradual, occurring across generations. Scholars (e.g.Veltman,1983; Fishman,1989) assert that language shift involves the progressive replacement of one language by another, with the first generation predominantly maintaining their first language, the second becoming bilingual in their first and second learned languages, and the third generation exclusively using the second

language. However, some argue that changes in language use can transpire within a single migrant generation (Jia & Aaronson,2003; Pease-Alvarez,2002).

Clyne (2003) has illustrated a variety of meanings that are associated with language shift. First, the term can describe the language behavior of both the whole community and the individual. Besides, language shift is viewed as a gradual process through which a particular language is gradually and slowly replaced by another as the case of the Hungarian which was replaced by German in Oberwart (Gal,1979). In addition, language shift can designate a change in the main language, the dominant language of an individual or a group, the language of one or more domains (home, work, school for example), and the "exclusive language for between one and three of the four language skills" (Clyne,2003, p.20).

Fishman et al. (1966: 424) contended that "The study of language maintenance and shift is concerned with the relationship between change and stability in habitual use, on the one hand, and ongoing psychological, social or cultural processes on the other hand, when populations differing in language are in contact with each other". This delineation underscores the association of language shift and maintenance phenomena with alterations or stability in the habitual use of linguistic varieties among their speakers.

Pauwels (2016, p.18) delineates language shift as the gradual replacement of one's main language or languages (L1) by another language (L2) across all spheres of usage. The rate and pace of the shift vary across different communities, emphasizing the gradual nature of the process and its non-simultaneous occurrence across all functions, settings, and uses of the native language.

This definition has highlighted two key features of the language shift process which will be of paramount importance to the objectives of the

present study. The first feature is that LS is a gradual process, which occurs across generations, and, hence, may take more than one generation before a language is completely replaced by another one. The second feature that can be inferred from the definition is the fact that " the shifting away from the L1 does not occur simultaneously across all its uses or functions; rather ,it gradually recedes across an increasing number of uses, functions and settings"(Pauwels, 2016,p.19).

Research in this domain primarily focuses on investigating the impact of psychological, social, or cultural factors on bilinguals' linguistic behavior tendencies regarding language maintenance or shift. Language shift typically emerges in multilingual contexts, linked to 'subtractive multilingualism,' which denotes the loss of the native language due to the development of another language (L2), often the dominant language in the community or educational setting.

The phenomenon of shifting from AMZ to MA in the Moroccan context is an excellent example of indigenous settings that LMS researchers have not sufficiently attended. The only two studies that the researcher has accessed are exploratory (Bentahila & Davies,1992; Boukous, 1995); they did not provide an in-depth analysis of the complexities of the patterns and dynamics of AMZ maintenance and shift. Accordingly, the present study focuses on the dynamics of LMS in the Moroccan linguistic setting by exploring the patterns of the shifting from an Amazigh (AM) variety (Tashlhit) to Moroccan Arabic (MA) among youngsters from five higher education institutions in Agadir.

Amazigh Maintenance and Shift research

Many Moroccan researchers and linguists have warned against the regression of AMZ in Morocco particularly in urban areas (Bentahila and Davies, 1992; El Aissati, 2001; Ennaji,1997). The number

of AM-speaking populations is gradually decreasing in these areas due to the linguistic and cultural assimilation that AMZ people have been subject to for centuries (Haut Commissariat au Plan ,2014)).

Ennaji (1997) and El Aissati (2001) discussed the factors that stand behind AMZ speakers' language shift process. The main factor is rapid urbanization, resulting from emigration from rural areas to urban ones. Since the 1960s, there has been a massive emigration of Amazighophones towards such cities as Casablanca, Agadir, Marrakech, Fes Nador, and Elhoceima. Searching for job opportunities and better living conditions have been the main motives behind this movement. This emigration created a favorable context in which Amazigh-Dialectal Arabic was nurtured. The new AMZ arrivals find themselves in a context where they had to learn MA as the language of daily activities.

Another reason behind the AMZ regression is the spread of education (Ennaji, 1997) and its expansion to rural areas, especially during the post protectorate period. At school, Amazighophone children have been exposed to Arabic both as a language of instruction and also as a content subject. Besides, they are also exposed to foreign languages like French and English, which promote multilingualism among them. What is more, AMZ has been initially excluded from education until 2003, when it has been first introduced in some schools. This kind of marginalization, which was paralleled with an Arabization education policy, has led to the regression of AMZ in Morocco.

The spread of the new technology to rural areas has also been considered a threat to the AMZ language (El Aissati,2001). Rural areas have usually been considered strongholds of AMZ varieties as they have resisted language loss for centuries. However, the advancement of the new media technology has brought these 'protected

zones' into contact with other languages and cultures. The main worry is that this massive contact would lead shortly to the erosion and regression of AMZ among its indigenous speakers.

Ennaji (1997) argued that the low status of AMZ is another factor that is involved in AMZ regression. The fact that AMZ has been officially treated for a long time as a mere 'dialect' has influenced people's attitudes towards its utility, which has led to its regression in various domains of language use.

Bentahila and Davies (1992) investigated AMZ language shift issue among 180 families whose members are bilingual in an AMZ and MA. According to the study, it was reported that the surveyed families exhibited a very low degree of intergenerational language transmission as the youngest generation has completely shifted to MA. What is more, the respondents expressed little sense of regret about their children's loss of Amazigh. This might be explained by the type of attitudes and perceptions they hold toward AMZ language, which is usually considered less useful compared to Arabic. The study also showed that 63% of the respondents consider AMZ as their language, whereas 27% believe Arabic as their own. More importantly, the study reported that only 30% of AM-speaking respondents consider themselves exclusively AM, while 47% think of themselves as being both AMZ and Moroccan; of those who have entirely shifted to MA, only 37% still define themselves as AM.

Despite the rapid regression of AM, its status as a mother tongue of many Moroccans has kept it away from the danger of extinction (Sadiqi,2003). That is to say, the fact that AMZ is spoken as a mother tongue among large AM-speaking communities living in rural areas is vital in preserving both the AMZ language and culture. Moreover, AM-speaking communities' concentration in such big cities as Agadir,

Casablanca, and El Hoceima has contributed to its maintenance. Although these factors have contributed to the survival of AMZ for centuries, their influence is diminishing in the face of rapid urbanization and the spread of education in rural areas. The present study investigates this issue in Agadir, which is considered the capital city of the Souss region.

Context of the study

Morocco's linguistic landscape is characterized by diversity, with multiple varieties in interaction. This includes Arabic varieties (Standard, Classical, and Moroccan Arabic), Amazigh varieties (Tamazight, Tashlhit, and Tarifit), as well as French, Spanish, and English. Within this linguistic mosaic, Amazigh and Moroccan Arabic stand as the predominant native language varieties.

The focus of the present paper is on the Moroccan language contact situation that involves Amazigh and Darija (Moroccan Arabic) varieties as mother tongues of most Moroccans. The most common bilingualism pattern that results from the contact between these varieties is a one-way, Amazigh-Arabic bilingualism. In this vein, Bensoukas (2010) argued that Darija is gradually gaining the status of a mother tongue instead of a second language in Moroccan urban bilingual settings. This implies that, in such contact settings, Amazigh speakers are more susceptible to the language shift process, whereby their traditional home language is gradually replaced by Darija.

Today, it seems that this shifting process is reaching up to Amazighophone areas that used to be considered the repository of AMZ language and culture. For instance, Agadir is considered the capital city of the Souss basin- a vast region in the center of Morocco, which is dominantly populated by speakers of the Tashlhit variety. As the biggest urban center in Souss, it has been initially the direction of waves of migration from various neighboring Souss areas. Therefore, most of the

city inhabitants are of AMZ origin; yet, MA tends to be more dominant in public places. More specifically, shifting to MA was observed among youths descending from various urban and rural areas in the Souss region. Accordingly, the present study explored the patterns and determinants of AMZ maintenance and shift in a unique linguistic where the observed process of L1 shifting (AM) occurs in a language contact setting where L1 speakers constitute the majority rather than a minority.

Research objectives & questions

The present study investigates some patterns of AM maintenance and shift among young bilinguals in Agadir, Morocco. It characterizes how Amazigh youths descending from urban and rural areas vary in their Amazigh proficiency and in their patterns of Amazigh use. The purpose is to explore how urbanization impacts these youths' Amazigh maintenance and shift as indicated by their reported L1 proficiency and their diachronic use of Amazigh in daily communication. Accordingly, the present study endeavors to address the following research questions:

• How do Amazigh youths descending from urban and rural areas vary in terms of their Amazigh proficiency?

• How do Amazigh youths descending from urban and rural areas compare in terms of their patterns of Amazigh use in daily communication?

• Has the informants' use of Amazigh in daily communication changed over time?

METHODS

The research design adopted in this study is a 'mixed-methods research' in which quantitative and qualitative elements are integrated. At the exploratory stage, qualitative data was collected through conducting unstructured interviews with ten informants representing variant cases of Amazigh maintenance and shift. This initial phase constitutes a starting point where major patterns and variables related to LMS processes were explored. The qualitative exploration of the issue under study was also a preparatory stage for developing a more structured questionnaire that was used to collect quantitative data.

Table1
Demographic Information of the Sample

Variable	Categories	Sample population in % (N=300)
Gender	Male	41
	Female	58
Age	18-21	63
	22-25	26
	More than 25	10
Place of origin	Agadir city (AC)	38
	Regional urban areas (RUA)	32
	Regional rural areas (RRA)	30
Higher education institution	CPGE	30
	FLSH	36
	FSA	18
	FSJES	9
	FLASH	5

As Table 1. Displays (see Appendix), the sample of this study included 300 students of Amazigh origin, who were sampled from five higher education institutions in Agadir, namely CPGE Reda Slaoui, Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences (FLSH), Faculty of Science (FSA), Faculty of Law and Economics (FSJES), and Faculty of Arts and Languages (FLASH). The participants were 124 males (41%) and 176 females (76%); the age of most of them (90%) ranges from 18 to 25, while only 10% were above 25, but less than 28. In terms of their linguistic background, the participants are reportedly bilingual in Tashlhit variety, as their mother tongue, and Darija (Moroccan Arabic) as an L2. Additionally, as Moroccan higher education students, they have assumedly developed some proficiency in one or some foreign languages taught at school, particularly French, English, and Spanish.

The participants are originated in different urban and rural areas in the region of Souss. Accordingly, they were categorized into three groups according to their home city or village. The first group constitutes 38% of the sample. It includes

informants who were born and raised in Agadir city (AC group), the second one (32% of the sample) is the group of informants who are from regional urban areas (RUA) like Tiznit, Biougra, and Taroudant. The third group (30% of the sample) includes informants from regional rural areas (RRA).

The self-report questionnaire is the instrument that was employed in this study to collect data about the informants' Amazigh proficiency and use. Following Milroy (2001), the present study's questionnaire data was obtained in one shot as the respondents were required to report their language choice patterns during the time of the study.

The questionnaire was divided into two main parts. The first part was about the socio-

demographic and linguistic background of the respondents. The second part of the questionnaire was devised to collect information about informants' perceived Amazigh proficiency and use.

RESULTS

Proficiency in Amazigh

The use of a particular variety by an individual speaker is particularly determined by one's proficiency in that language. Accordingly, exploring the informants' proficiency in the variety under study (Tashlhit) is a necessary step before the investigation of their language choice patterns. Figure1 (see Appendix) demonstrates statistics about the respondents' perceived proficiency in the Tashlhit variety across three major regions from which they descend.

Figure.1.

The Informants' Reported Proficiency in Tashlhit Variety
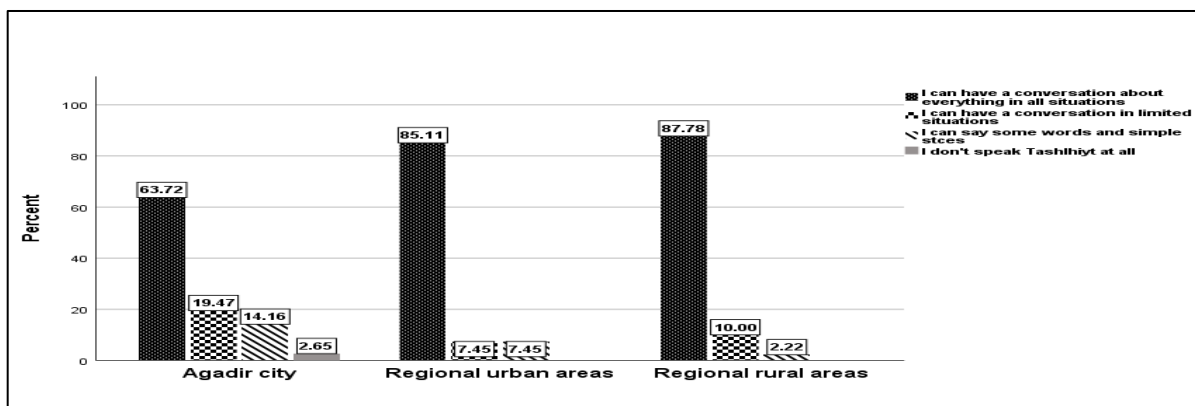
As Figure1 displays, informants from regional rural areas (RRA) of Souss seem to be more proficient than other regions: 87% from this group reported their ability to use Tashlhit variety to converse about everything in all situations; 10% stated that they could use Tashlhit variety to interact in limited situations. Very few informants (2%) declared that they could use merely some

words and sentences, but none of them expressed his inability to speak the Tashlhit variety.

Also, the statistical results show that the language proficiency of the regional urban areas (RUA) descendants is almost similar to their rural area counterparts: 85% of the informants from this group reported a high level of proficiency in Tashlhit as they can carry on conversations about

any topic and in different contexts; 7% stated that they are not very proficient as they can have conversations only in limited situations; equally, the same number (7%) expressed their lack of proficiency as they can speak only some words and sentences. It is also noticed that none of the respondents from this group expressed their inability to speak Tashlhit.

However, the group of Agadir City (AC) residents seems to differ from the general tendency of language proficiency exhibited by the former two groups. This group is less proficient in the Tashlhit variety than other groups. The results show that 63% of the respondents from this group can use Tashlhit to speak about any topic in different situations; 19% reported that they could use Tashlhit only in limited situations; 14% declared their ability to use only some words and sentences, and 2% stated that they do not speak Tashlhit at all.

Table2.

Language Proficiency across the Place of Settlement

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
AC	113	1.56	.834
RUA	94	1.22	.571
RRA	90	1.14	.412
Total	297	1.33	.671

To summarize these statistics, Table 2 (see Appendix) demonstrates the Means and Standard deviation of the major tendencies across the groups. The participants' reported language proficiency is analyzed along a continuum of values that ranges from 1 to 4, with the value 1 indicating the highest level of proficiency (A native-like) and value 4 describing the lowest proficiency level. As presented in the table, the total Mean (M=1.33, SD= .671) indicates that the whole sample is relatively proficient in the Tashlhit variety. However, individual means reflect differences among participants descending from different geographical backgrounds; the

regional rural areas group seems to be more proficient than other groups (M=1.14, SD= .412), followed by the descendants from regional urban areas (M=1.22; SD=571), and finally, the Agadir city group (M=1.56; SD=.834).

The frequency of Amazigh use in daily communication

Descriptive were run to identify variance in the use of Amazigh (AMZ) in daily communication among informants descending from the three main regions of Souss: AC, RUA, and RRA. The following sections present the statistical results of the informants' reported frequency of using Amazigh in daily communication.
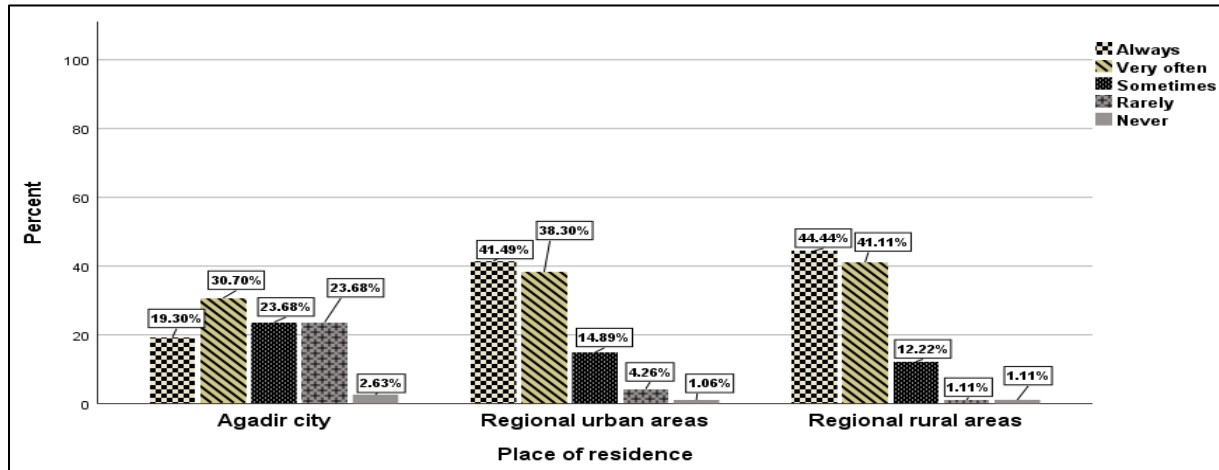
Figure 1

Patterns of the Frequency of AMZ Use in Daily Communication

Figure 2 (see Appendix) displays the descriptive statistics of the questionnaire item that probes the informants' frequency of AMZ use in daily communication. A small number from the AC group reported their frequent use of AMZ in their daily communication (always (19%); very often (30%), while a quite higher number of informants from both RUA (Always:41.5%; very often:38.3%) and RRA ones (always: 44.4%; very often:41.1%) stated that they use AMZ frequently on a daily basis. Also, 23.7% of the AC group indicated that they rarely use AMZ in their daily communication, while a smaller number of RUA (4.3%) and RRA (1.1%) reported a similar tendency.

Table 3

Means and Standards Deviations of the Frequency of Amazigh Use

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
AC	114	2.60	1.127
RUA	94	1.85	.903
RRA	90	1.73	.804
Total	298	2.10	1.043

These differences among the groups become clearer in Table 3 (see Appendix), where the Mean and Standard deviation values relevant to each group are displayed. The frequency of AMZ use was analyzed on a scale of values ranging from 1 to 5, with lower Means indicating more use of AMZ in

daily communication and higher Means indicating less use and a greater tendency to shift to other varieties (often Moroccan Arabic). As displayed in the table, the total Mean is 2.10, with an SD=1.043 indicating a fairly average degree of AMZ use in daily communication. However, the Mean related to each group of informants displays varying degrees of the frequency of AMZ use in daily communication. While the Means related to informants descending from RRA (M=1.73 /SD=.804) and RUA (M=1.85 /SD=.903) show a high degree of similarity, indicating more frequent

use of AM, the Mean pertinent to the residents of AC is far higher (M= 2.60/ SD=1.127) pointing out to less frequent use of AMZ in daily communication.

The rate of Amazigh use between past and present

Figure 3 (see Appendix) demonstrates the percentages of the informants' self-reports about the change in their language use between past and present.

Figure 3

The Informants' Reported Diachronic Change in AMZ Use
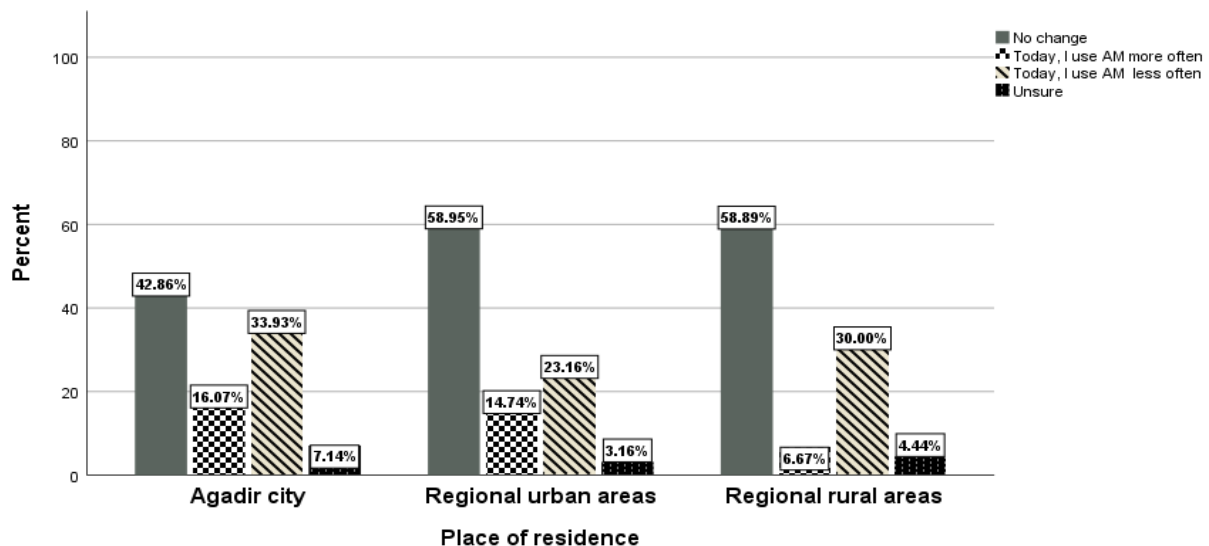
As the statistics show, less than half (42%) of AC informants and over half (58%) of RUA and RRA descendants stated that there had been no change in their AMZ use between past and present. Also, a small number of the respondents from the three groups (AC,16%; RUA,14%; and RRA, 6%) reported that they tend to use more AMZ at

present. On the other hand, a fairly big number of AC (33%) and RRA (30%) informants indicated that their present language behavior is characterized by less use of AMZ compared to the past. Finally, a few respondents from the three geographical areas (AC,7%; RUA,3%; RRA,4%) declared that they were unsure if their AMZ use had changed over time.

Table 4

The Means and Standard Deviations of the Change in Amazigh Use

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
AC	112	2.05	1.030
RUA	95	1.71	.933
RRA	90	1.80	1.019
Total	297	1.87	1.004

Table 4 (see Appendix) sums up the respondents' major tendencies by displaying the Means and Standard deviations relevant to each group. The change in informants' AMZ use has been examined through a scaled question, with values ranging from 1 to 3. The lowest mean value (1) indicates stability in AMZ use, followed by value (2), which indicates an increase in AMZ use (value2), and the mean value (3) points out to a decrease in its use.

As the statistics in Table 4 (see Appendix) demonstrate, informants from both RUA and RRA groups exhibited a tendency towards stability (RUA: M= 1.71, SD=.933/ RRA: M=1.80, SD=1.019), whereas the Mean value related to the AC group (M=2.05, SD=1.030) indicates increased use of AMZ in daily interactions.

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the patterns and determinants of AMZ maintenance and shift among a sample of 300 AMZ variety (Tashlhit) speaking youths enrolled at one of the higher education institutions in Agadir city. More specifically, it investigates the informants' self-reported language proficiency and their language use across It is also worth mentioning that the constructs of Amazigh maintenance and shift in the present study were measured with reference to 1) the reported Amazigh proficiency, 2) the synchronic and (3) diachronic use of Amazigh in daily communication.

The reported Amazigh proficiency

First, the reported AMZ proficiency showed variation across the three main regions in the expected direction: youths from rural areas exhibited better maintenance of AMZ than their urban counterparts. As was hypothesized, the RRA group appeared to be more proficient than RUA and AC groups. This suggests that urbanization impacts the youths' AMZ proficiency; the closer they are to urban regions, the poorer their AMZ proficiency is; in turn, the closer they are to the rural areas, the more proficient they become. This can be explained by the massive contact that AMZ youths have with Darija speakers in urban areas. This goes in line with other studies' findings (Ennaji,1997; El Aissati, 2001), which contended that the main factor behind the AMZ regression is the rapid urbanization that resulted from a massive emigration from rural areas to urban ones since the beginning of 1960s. The Amazighophone arrivals in urban areas had to learn Darija since it

is the language of daily activities in the city. In this vein, Sadiqi (2003) argued that the spread of Darija in Amazighophone areas is attributed to the prestigious status that it enjoys as a predominant language in such vital domains as trade transactions, education, and media. Accordingly, the low status of AMZ is more likely to nurture negative attitudes towards it as a less useful variety in matters of trade and transaction. However, the informants' reported language proficiency as an indicator of LMS remains questionable; it may either reflect the reality of the informants' actual AMZ proficiency or their emotional attachment to the mother tongue.

In general, the informants' LMS patterns, as determined by their reported AMZ proficiency, revealed that youths from rural areas tend to maintain AMZ better than those from urban ones. This variance was attributed to the effect of urbanization, the parents' language policy, and the contact variable. The following section explores the informants' reported language use as a second indicator of AMZ maintenance and shift.

The reported Amazigh use

In the present study, the frequency of language use was adopted as one of the measures of the processes of LM and LS. As Jasparet and Kroon (1993) argued, the frequency of language use should be considered, along with language functionality, in measuring the process of shift. They explained that reduced frequency designates the scarcity of occasions/domains where speakers find themselves and which call for the use of that variety. Accordingly, the frequency of AMZ use in the current study was explored in both synchronic and diachronic ways: the former designates the current frequency of AMZ use in daily communication, and the latter refers to stability/ change in language use across time.

Firstly, the reported frequency of AMZ use in daily communication indicated an overall tendency towards shifting to Darija with variant degrees. The statistical results indicated a low rate of AMZ use frequency among the three groups despite the RRA and RUA groups' tendency to use AMZ more frequently than the AC group. This expected overall tendency towards shifting to MA can be attributed to the situational factors (Topic, interlocutor) related generally to the urban linguistic setting where youths live (Agadir city), and particularly to the school/ university environment in which MA tends to be dominant. While the informants from urban centers (AC & URA) have already been familiar with such a bilingual urban setting, the language behavior of rural areas informants is more likely to undergo a significant change since their arrival in the new linguistic environment. In such a setting, MA tends to be dominant as the primary language of communication among youths. Besides, MA can even sometimes function as the lingua Franca of speakers of different AMZ varieties, especially when there is a lack of mutual intelligibility between these regional varieties (Ennaji, 1991). These school-related factors will be discussed in more detail in the section about the school domain.

Secondly, despite the significant differences among the groups in their diachronic change in AMZ use, the informants' reported AMZ use indicated an overall instability of AMZ use across time. The change in AMZ use exhibited mainly by the AC group can be well clarified if the language learning history is taken into account. It is worth mentioning that the mother tongue was among the criteria used to sample all the informants of this study. This means that all informants' mother tongue is the Tahlhit variety under study- the variety that has been acquired from parents or other caretakers. Accordingly, we can assume that, during childhood, the main variety of communication in the home domain, at least, used to be AM. Hence, any change in language use can be attributed to the competing LMS forces

represented by other language use domains.

Additionally, although the RRA and RUA groups appeared to be more stable in their use of AMZ than the AC group, the statistics showed that almost half of the sample reported that their language behavior had witnessed a sort of the change in either L1 maintenance or shift. This is an expected result as one's language behavior is often prone to change depending on both subjective and objective factors. In the same direction, it appears that the AC group exhibited a tendency to shift from AMZ more than the other two groups. This can be explained by the fact that the city-grown-up youths are more subject to language shift as they have more contact with MA speakers, and therefore more chances to develop bilingual proficiency, which may eventually end up in subtractive bilingualism or language shift (Appel & Muysken, 2005).

More importantly, though unexpectedly, the RRA group reported lower use of AMZ in daily communication than RUA. This can be attributed to the fact that the new linguistic environment (Agadir city) is significantly different from its counterpart in rural areas where AMZ is spoken natively by most people; arriving in the biggest urban center in the region (Agadir city) has induced an abrupt change in the language behavior of youths from rural areas. They find themselves in a context where they need to use MA more to integrate into the new environment, particularly at school, where students usually come from different linguistic backgrounds.

Reversely, the tendency to use more AMZ in the present has been reported by more youths from urban areas (AC & RUA groups) than the rural ones. This can be related to the AMZ exposure that the new school setting offers. While the home used to be the main setting of AMZ use for most youths from the AC & RUA groups, the school now provides an ample environment for more AMZ use thanks to the contact they have with other classmates and roommates from rural areas, who sometimes lack sufficient MA proficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that youths' Amazigh proficiency varies significantly based on their proximity to urban or rural regions, with rural youths demonstrating better maintenance of Amazigh. This tendency is attributed to the massive urbanization and emigration from rural to urban areas, leading to increased contact with Darija speakers in cities. The higher status that Darija enjoys in domains like trade, education, and media has led to its dominance, thereby reducing the perceived utility of Amazigh. In the same vein, reported language use frequency indicates an ongoing shifting process towards Darija, particularly in urban settings such as Agadir city, where the bilingual environment promotes the use of Darija over Amazigh. Although rural youths exhibited better maintenance of Amazigh in daily communication, the new linguistic environment of urban centers promotes a shift towards Darija. However, urban youths occasionally report increased AMZ use due to interactions with rural classmates lacking Darija proficiency.

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