

Communicative Insecurity and Gender Relations: An Analysis of the Discursive Practices of Amazigh Women in the Family Context. (The Case of the Ult¹ Merghad Women)

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ABSTRACT: This article examines communicative insecurity as a socially produced and interactionally enacted phenomenon in the discourse of Amazigh women in a family context. Specifically, it asks: how do intra-familial gendered hierarchies produce and sustain communicative insecurity in women's speech within the Ult Merghad community of Tinjdad (southeastern Morocco), unlike prior work on female linguistic insecurity - which primarily examines speakers' orientation toward dominant standard varieties (Labov, 1966; Singy, 1997; Biichlé, 2007, 2011) - this study situates insecurity not in standard-language contact but within the domestic interactional order itself, making Amazigh familial power relations the primary structuring force of the phenomenon.

Communicative insecurity is conceptualized as an interactional and symbolic disposition: a socially constructed tendency toward self-censorship, mitigation, or withdrawal from speech, not due to linguistic incompetence but to the internalization of gendered authority structures that regulate the legitimacy of speaking. Based on semi-structured interviews with ten Amazigh women, the study shows that this phenomenon is simultaneously discursive, interactional, and socio-affective, shaped by gender, generation, and Amazigh family hierarchy.

The impact of communicative insecurity on women's speech is well documented, regardless of age or social status. A gender-based approach allows for a deeper understanding by revealing that this insecurity is rooted in power dynamics inherent to social relations between the sexes.

The issue of gender equality within the context of family discussions remains unresolved. One facet of this inequality stems from the prevalence of communicative insecurity, which disproportionately affects women. This research seeks to examine the scope and nature of the insecurities experienced by women in their interactions with specific family members, particularly elders.

KEYWORD: social differences, insecurity, language practice, Amazigh women, gender, communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

During my fieldwork, I witnessed an exchange between a man and his mother concerning the future marriage of his daughter. One episode in particular drew my attention: at a certain moment, the child's mother, visibly concerned about her daughter's young age, attempted to intervene in the discussion. She was abruptly cut off by her husband with a terse remark: « *qqn imi nnm, ur tssind adu !!* », which can be translated as: « You don't understand anything, be quiet! » Although this sentence may seem trivial at first glance, it in fact reveals a complex family dynamic marked by an unequal distribution of the right to speak.

The mother's dissent-rooted in emotional proximity and maternal responsibility toward her daughter-was rapidly neutralized, thus illustrating the gendered power relations operating within the household. This interaction, which occurred in the absence of the primary individual concerned-the daughter-raises questions about the decision-making processes surrounding an event as consequential as marriage, and about the space granted (or denied) to women's voices within this process.

¹ Ult is a morpheme that marks a nominal particle in Amazigh.

from a grammatical and semantic perspective, the sentence is a complement subordinate clause [*qqn imi nnm, ur tssind aḍu!* = 2nd person sg. + close + imperative + « your mouth » = « close your mouth / be quiet »; *ur* (negation marker) + 2nd person sg. + understand + object « nothing » = « you have understood nothing »²], in which the verb of the main clause is in the simple imperative (formed in Amazigh on the basis of the aorist³), whereas the verb governing the subordinate clause is in the negative perfective. The imperative structure adopted by the husband in the example above serves to express command and prohibition, thereby conveying values of authority and dominance.

Speech, often regarded as the central tool of human communication, is in fact only one element within a much broader semiotic system. In this sense, language, as a structured system of signs, constitutes one particular manifestation of this wider ensemble. It plays a fundamental role in the transmission of information, yet its significance extends far beyond that of a simple communicative instrument.

Language cannot be reduced to an abstract object of linguistic study; it is above all a social phenomenon, embodied in situated discursive practices that actively contribute to the structuring of social relations. Through the everyday use of language, collective representations-particularly those related to gender-are reflected, maintained, and transformed. Thus, the linguistic modalities of verbal interaction - whether explicit or implicit - express the social norms associated with femininity and masculinity, while also contributing to their reproduction or contestation.

In other words, language doesn't merely reflect gender relations passively; it also constitutes a space in which these relations are negotiated, challenged, and reconfigured. Rooted in specific socio-historical contexts, it becomes a privileged indicator of the dynamics of power relations between the sexes, as well as of evolving collective imaginaries surrounding gender⁴.

Daily adherence to the norms and rules governing oral communication occurs, in most cases, unconsciously. This implicit dimension makes it difficult to question such conventions, which tend therefore to persist over time with minimal change. In the absence of reflexive awareness of these mechanisms, it becomes nearly impossible to interrogate their legitimacy or relevance. Yet it is precisely the exercise of critical thinking that forms the basis of any social or discursive transformation.

This issue pertains to both intragroup interactions (between women or between men) and intergroup interactions (between women and men). Linguistic practices aren't neutral: they are embedded in socio-cultural contexts marked by power relations, particularly those linked to gender. One of the aims of this research is to highlight certain manifestations of linguistic insecurity in the discourse of women-an insecurity that may affect the fluidity, clarity, or assertiveness of their speech.

By making these mechanisms visible, this work seeks to raise readers' awareness of the effects these dynamics exert on the quality and balance of communication. Ultimately, the goal is to contribute to the emergence of new forms of expression-freed from the constraints imposed by traditional norms and better able to reflect genuine equality in linguistic exchanges⁵.

This woman's experience inevitably prompts the researcher to inquire about the reasons behind such harsh behavior toward her. Why did she remain silent? And when I asked her why she chose not to speak, she simply-and sadly-replied: *"lḥayat inew kullu imki ayd tga ḡur babi new, ur ḡuri lḥeqq ad rary awal, ur da akk" i yakka tizi ad iniḡ aynna ḡuri d hat imki ayd iga lḥal ḡur uryaz inew, [tusy tixt] ammi da sawaly s kan wawal ur igin am winsn*" = "My life has always been like this at my father's house ; I'm not allowed to respond, he doesn't permit me to express my opinion, and it is the same with my husband [sighs]. It is as if I were speaking a language that is not theirs. They do it on purpose to discredit us, to belittle us."

Such stigmatization can lead some women to develop a sense of illegitimacy with regard to their language and linguistic practices. This category of individuals uses language as a weapon against women, in order to frustrate and demean them, fully aware of the breadth of their strength and their capacity to excel. It is this phenomenon that I propose to examine here.

²The abbreviations used are as follows: 2ps = second person singular; imper = imperative; PN = negative particle; acc = perfect (or completed aspect).

³ Manuel de conjugaison amazighe, Centre d'aménagement linguistique, IRCAM Rabat 2012. P22

⁴ SINGY, Pascal, (sous la dir. de), *Les Femmes et la langue. L'insécurité linguistique en question*, Delachaux et Niestlé, Lausanne-Paris, 1997 p .57

⁵ Slembeck, E., Modes de communication spécifiquement féminins ou masculins, p.65, 78

The feeling of insecurity in women's speech, often taken for granted, remains largely overlooked or insufficiently interrogated in analyses of social interactions. Yet it constitutes a significant factor in the reproduction of inequalities in communication between genders. While insecurity may be an experience shared by many individuals, it manifests differently depending on gender due to social norms, gendered expectations, and the roles assigned to women and men.

For women, this sense of insecurity is rooted in a set of social and cultural practices internalized from early childhood. From a young age, girls are taught to be cautious in their speech and not to voice every thought indiscriminately, that is, to refrain from intervening in matters that do not concern them, especially in public spaces or in the presence of men or elder family members. They are also instructed to distrust strangers, avoid moving alone - particularly at night - and anticipate potential dangers within their environment. This constant vigilance, often framed as "common sense," in fact reflects gendered social norms that place the burden of safety on women rather than interrogating the structural conditions that produce insecurity in the first place.

One of the most striking factors in this social construction is the threat of sexual violence, which is omnipresent both in representations and lived experiences. This threat influences not only women's physical behavior in public spaces but also affects the way they express themselves, their ease in speaking publicly, and their level of confidence in social interactions. In this sense, linguistic insecurity cannot be dissociated from the physical or symbolic insecurity that women experience daily; it is, rather, a discursive manifestation of an unequal relationship to the social world.

When women articulate their sense of insecurity through language, this expression often takes a form imbued with emotion and subjectivity, translating into verbalizations of fear, anxiety, or stress linked to their lived experiences. Such verbalization may include personal narratives of harassment, sexual assault, or domestic violence-realities that disproportionately affect a significant number of women worldwide.

However, the very possibility of sharing these experiences is profoundly shaped by social norms and gendered representations. Women may hesitate to speak about their insecurity or trauma in public spaces, or even in environments perceived as safe, for fear of being seen as vulnerable, overly emotional, or even hysterical-stereotypes deeply rooted in social imaginaries associated with femininity. This self-censorship is reinforced by a culture of silence and doubt surrounding women's narratives, especially when they concern violence.

Furthermore, women who transgress gender norms-whether through their appearance, sexual orientation, or behavior-are often perceived as more exposed to insecurity, or even as responsible for their own victimization. This normative bias contributes to a hierarchy of feminine vulnerabilities, within which some voices are granted greater legitimacy than others.

Thus, women's discourse on insecurity is not constructed in a social or emotional vacuum: it is shaped by power relations, cultural expectations, and mechanisms of invisibilities that condition its form, its scope, and its reception.

This work is organized into 4 main sections. The first is devoted to the general introduction, in which the theoretical framework, the research objectives, and the central questions are presented. The second section addresses the core problem of the study, outlining the conceptual and methodological issues that underpin it. The third section focuses on the analysis of the characteristics of the selected corpus, detailing the selection criteria, the analytical approaches used, and the salient features observed. Finally, the last section offers a synthesis of the findings, followed by a general conclusion and an opening onto future research perspectives.

2. RESEARCH ISSUE

Communication situations provide a privileged framework for examining the interactions between gender-understood here as the social construction of sex-and language. It is from this perspective that the present study is situated, aiming to analyze linguistic specificities linked to the factor of sex, conceived as a social dimension that structures human relations. Indeed, gender cannot be reduced to a mere biological variable: it is embedded in a set of norms, practices, and collective representations that profoundly influence behaviors, including linguistic ones.

In human societies, gender contributes to the organization of social interactions and to the distribution of roles within various communicative spaces. It therefore plays a fundamental role in discursive practices by shaping the styles, registers, and communicative strategies adopted by speakers. That said, gender is only one factor among

many that may account for linguistic variation. Elements such as age, social background, educational level, and the context of enunciation likewise contribute to the diversity of linguistic practices.

The emergence of what is sometimes referred to as "women's speech" and "men's speech" has long been interpreted through a biologizing lens, positing that sex-based differences would determine distinct modes of expression. This essentialist perspective, now widely questioned, tends to naturalize the observed disparities between feminine and masculine linguistic practices, without interrogating their social, cultural, or symbolic foundations.

Our approach aligns with a critical perspective on discourses that tend to naturalize gender differences. It seeks to examine the foundations of these distinctions by analyzing the social, historical, and interactional conditions in which they take shape. The aim is therefore not merely to observe linguistic differences between women and men, but to understand the mechanisms that produce them, the ways in which they are perceived, and the effects they exert on communicative and power dynamics⁶.

In a society where women remain largely confined to the domestic sphere and are significantly underrepresented in spaces of power, the expression of women's perspectives continues to encounter numerous obstacles. This difficulty is particularly evident within the family setting, often perceived-and experienced-as a space strongly shaped by masculine logics. The present study seeks to interrogate this gendered dimension of the family institution, focusing more specifically on the impact of the feeling of insecurity on women's linguistic practices.

It should be noted at the outset that research addressing these issues within the Amazigh context remains scarce, particularly in the field of linguistic analysis. Nevertheless, numerous international studies on women's language converge in demonstrating that linguistic differences attributed to sex are in fact socially constructed.

These studies also show that the mechanisms of gendered socialization that influence one's relationship to speech emerge from the earliest stages of life. Moreover, although the notions of insecurity and the feeling of insecurity are frequently mobilized in public debate, they are rarely examined through a gendered lens.

This lack of differentiated analysis obscures the specific experiences that women and men may encounter, both in public spaces and in private spheres. In this respect, the present study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the forms of linguistic insecurity experienced by women, by situating them within a gendered socio-discursive framework.

Quantitative surveys generally indicate that women report more frequently than men experiencing fear when speaking in the presence of certain relatives, particularly elders. This reality directly affects the quality of life of women within certain families, as constraints related to linguistic usage significantly influence their behavior, thereby limiting their ability to communicate freely with a broader circle of relatives.

The central issue that emerges from this observation can be formulated as follows: what social and interactional mechanisms produce and sustain communicative insecurity in the speech of Amazigh women within the intra-familial context? More precisely, this study seeks to demonstrate that communicative insecurity among the women of the Ult Merghad community isn't a reflection of linguistic deficit, nor merely a psychological state, but a structurally produced interactional disposition sustained by gendered family hierarchies. This argument distinguishes the present research from existing scholarship on female linguistic insecurity, which has predominantly located insecurity in the speaker's anxious orientation toward a dominant standard variety (Labov, 1966; Singy, 1997; Biichlé, 2007, 2011). Here, by contrast, the structuring force is not an external prestige norm but the symbolic and interactional authority order within the Amazigh family itself.

For the purposes of this study, "communicative insecurity" is defined as a socially induced and interactionally manifested disposition whereby a speaker self-censors, hedges, or withdraws from verbal participation - not owing to any deficit in linguistic competence, but as a consequence of internalized gendered authority structures that regulate the legitimate right to speak.

This concept operates simultaneously at three levels: (1) the discursive level, where insecurity is reflected in specific linguistic features (hedging, attenuation, negative self-evaluation lexicon, topic avoidance); (2) the interactional level, where it emerges in turn-taking behavior, self-repair, and deference to dominant interlocutors;

⁶ https://www.memoireonline.com/04/20/11782/m_La-variation-sexolectale-entre-pratiques-langagieres-realite-et-stereotypes17.html (consulté le 10 février 2023)

and (3) the symbolic and socio-affective level, where it reflects an internalized hierarchy of legitimacy that assigns lower communicative authority to women in family exchanges. This tripartite conception enables a more precise, empirically grounded analysis than approaches that conflate communicative insecurity with general social anxiety or with Labovian standard-language insecurity.

These questions open a reflection on the internalization of social inequalities between the sexes and their repercussions on interpersonal relations, particularly within the domestic context, where the anonymity and confidentiality characteristic of the family environment can paradoxically reinforce mechanisms of linguistic control and surveillance.

In connection with an emerging theme within the Amazigh family context, this article offers an exploratory analysis based on semi-structured interviews conducted with ten women residing in Tinjdad. This qualitative approach aims to deepen the understanding of the ways in which this feeling of insecurity is expressed and to shed light on the underlying sociolinguistic issues.

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

Within the field of language sciences, gender is often approached as an extralinguistic variable-considered merely a contextual factor influencing discursive production-without being subjected to a genuine critical examination of its nature and complexity. All too often, it is conflated with biological sex and reduced to a binary dichotomy between "woman" and "man," perceived as self-evident, natural, and mutually exclusive. Such an essentialist perspective freezes sex-based differences within supposedly universal and timeless categories, thereby neglecting the socio-historical, cultural, and symbolic dimensions that underpin them.

This approach tends to obscure the fact that gender cannot be reduced to a simple descriptive parameter. Rather, it constitutes a complex system of hierarchical social relations that shapes subjectivities, structures interactions, and is deeply embedded in linguistic practices.

In this sense, gender is an inherently semiotic, political, and critical issue: it serves simultaneously as a framework of perception, a vector of social norms, and a site for the reproduction-or even the contestation-of power relations. It must therefore be examined as a discursive and performative construction, articulated in multiple ways with social structures, cultural practices, and communicational dynamics.

Language does not merely reflect social gender relations; it also functions as an active vector of these relations. It contributes to their enactment, their reproduction, and can even facilitate their contestation. In this respect, gender cannot be reduced to a mere discursive content; it operates as a structuring principle of discourse, mobilizing implicit norms that regulate the legitimacy of speech, the distribution of turn-taking, and the forms of authority and credibility attributed to speakers of different genders. The reproduction of symbolic hierarchies between genders is often the result of these linguistic mechanisms, often in subtle and unconscious ways.

However, this critical dimension of gender-central to gender studies and contemporary gender theory-remains largely marginalized within traditional linguistic approaches. Such approaches tend to privilege descriptive, objectivist, and often decontextualized analyses of linguistic phenomena, at the expense of a political and situated reading of language. By overlooking the ways in which discursive practices participate in the construction and naturalization of power relations, these approaches overlook a fundamental issue: the active role of language in the reproduction (or subversion) of gender norms.

This lack of consideration contributes to the invisibilities of mechanisms of power and the dynamics of exclusion or legitimation that shape linguistic practices. It has therefore become essential to re-establish gender as a central analytical category-not only to account for the diversity of linguistic practices but also to reveal the unequal social structures they help reproduce or subvert.

Scholars working in the field of linguistic gender studies-such as Bucholtz et al. (1999), Cameron (1992, 2005), Greco (2014, 2015), Motschenbacher (2010), and West & Zimmerman (1987), among others-Scholars working in the field of linguistic gender studies - such as Bucholtz et al. (1999), Cameron (1992, 2005), Greco (2014, 2015), Motschenbacher (2010), and West & Zimmerman (1987), among others - have argued that gender is both constructed and continually reconstructed in discourse and interaction through the mobilization of multiple semiotic resources. The present study draws on four theoretical approaches that are not merely associated but explicitly articulated into a coherent interpretive framework.

First, the theory of gender performativity (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987) provides the epistemological foundation: gender is not a fixed attribute but an ongoing interactional accomplishment, enacted through repeated, norm-governed communicative acts. This framework allows us to treat communicative insecurity not as an expression of a pre-given feminine nature, but as the product of a disciplinary social process that continually regulates women's verbal behavior in family interactions.

Second, Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1993) connects micro-level discursive practices to macro-level power structures. It explains how dominant family norms - encoded in conversational conventions such as deference to elders, obligatory silence on certain topics, and prohibition of first-name address of the spouse - are not merely cultural customs but discursive mechanisms that reproduce the symbolic subordination of women within the domestic sphere. In Bourdieu's (1991) terms, such conventions enact and reinforce the unequal distribution of legitimate speech.

Third, Conversation Analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) provides the micro-interactional tools for examining turn-taking organization, interruptions, self-initiated repairs, and hesitation patterns as situated practices. These phenomena are not analyzed as isolated performance deficits but as interactionally produced responses to asymmetric authority relations - moments at which the gendered distribution of speaking rights becomes visible in the texture of talk itself.

Fourth, the sociolinguistics of gender (Cameron, 1992, 2005; Coates, 1996; Tannen, 1990) frames variation in speech styles as socially constructed and context-dependent, resisting essentialist interpretations that reduce gendered speech differences to biological determinism. Together, these four approaches enable a multi-level reading of communicative insecurity as simultaneously performative, discursive, interactional, and sociolinguistic - each level informing the categories retained for corpus analysis and the interpretive logic guiding the reading of the data.

This fieldwork allowed us to make numerous and rich observations. The quality of the corpus is closely linked to the trust established between us-as members of the same linguistic community-and the participants, as well as our role as researchers, who, from the participants' perspective, may contribute to the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity. Before beginning the recording, we made a point of familiarizing ourselves with each participant to ensure they felt completely at ease and that the recorded conversation would be as natural as possible. Indeed, we systematically took the time to engage in informal discussion with the participants to gain their trust. This approach has the advantage of mitigating the "observer's paradox" (Labov 1976: 116-117 & 289-290) and of accessing the speaker's vernacular. As Bourdieu (1993: 1395) notes, "Social proximity and familiarity indeed provide two of the main conditions for non-violent communication."

When investigating such a sensitive subject, simple interviews appear most appropriate, as "expressions of fear often require prolonged reflexes to be released" (Condon et al., 2005). However, this research approach carries the risk of introducing an "interview effect": the interviewer's intent in conducting the interview-the search for information-may influence participants by guiding, suggesting, or amplifying certain responses.

In the context of in-depth interviews, the limitation often ascribed to this method-namely its lack of representativeness or systematicity-is largely compensated by the richness, subtlety, and reflexivity of the responses obtained. Unlike standardized or quantitative approaches, qualitative interviews allow participants to produce nuanced discourse grounded in their subjective experiences and to develop their own reflections during the exchange. Accordingly, participants repeatedly questioned, sometimes with hesitation or perplexity, the very notion of "insecurity" they were asked to articulate, thereby revealing the discursive and emotional depth of this experience.

Another methodological choice deserves clarification and justification: we deliberately focused our inquiry on women, not to exclude male experiences from the outset, but to highlight the gendered nature of linguistic insecurity, particularly within interactions with parental figures. The aim was therefore not to establish an exhaustive typology of the social manifestations of this feeling nor to explore the plurality of its sources, but to reveal how the fear of speaking in a family context constitutes a specifically female experience.

Consequently, this research does not aim to analyze potential convergences or divergences between male and female experiences of discursive insecurity. However, it is important to note that adherence-often expected or internalized-to certain family norms, such as restraint in the presence of elders or the valorization of silent respect, can act as a catalyst for this insecurity, particularly among women. These norms are rarely neutral: they contribute

to the (re)production of a symbolic order in which female speech remains regulated, if not marginalized, in both private and social spaces.

Given that this issue remains underexplored in the Amazigh context, the study presented in this article takes an exploratory approach. It relies primarily on qualitative research based on semi-structured individual interviews conducted with ten women. Unlike quantitative studies, which analyze statistical correlations, qualitative studies focus more on "the underlying mechanisms of behaviors and the interpretation actors give to their own behaviors" (Alami et al., 2009).

Within this framework, the selection of participants was guided by the intention to diversify profiles, aiming to collect a range of testimonies while exploring potential convergence in the experiences and discourse of the women interviewed. The goal was therefore not to produce a statistically representative sample, but to identify, through the plurality of social trajectories and situations, discursive regularities that could reveal common gendered dynamics.

The introduction to the study followed a uniform protocol for all participants. They were clearly and transparently informed of the general objectives of the research-focused on women's discourse and the experience of insecurity analyzed from a gender perspective-as well as the data collection procedures. It was specified that the interviews would be audio-recorded, fully transcribed, and treated in a manner that guaranteed the anonymity of both the participants and their statements.

The interview guide was structured to address both the exploration of representations and of discursive practices. On the one hand, the questions focused on participants' subjective perceptions of linguistic insecurity: situations perceived as intimidating or constraining, associated emotions, and the meanings attributed to these experiences. On the other hand, participants were invited to describe their actual practices: types of debates engaged in (or avoided), choices of topics addressed, and reasons for taking or refraining from speaking, among other aspects.

This dual level of analysis allows for the cross-examination of the interpretative and interactional dimensions of the phenomenon under study, linking what women say about their speech with how they actually use it in the concrete contexts of their daily lives.

Our corpus consists of 10 individual interviews, each approximately 25 minutes long (total corpus: approximately 250 minutes of recorded speech), recorded on a mobile phone between June and September 2022 in Tinjdad, a semi-rural town in the Errachidia province of southeastern Morocco. Tinjdad is located in the Draa-Tafilalet region and belongs to the Amazigh-speaking zone of the Tafilalt, where the Ul T Merghad community - organized around strong generational hierarchies and kinship networks - has received minimal sociolinguistic research attention to date. The community is predominantly Tachelhit-Arabic bilingual, and women's daily linguistic practices occur in a context of diglossia marked by asymmetric gendered authority in family interactions.

Participant selection followed a purposive sampling logic designed to capture diversity across the social variables most likely to mediate communicative insecurity. The selection criteria were: age (range: 22-70 years, covering three generational groups); marital status (single, married, divorced, and widowed, in order to capture varying configurations of authority within the domestic sphere); occupational profile (civil servants, homemaker, student, to control for differential exposure to formal speech contexts); and origin (all participants are members of the Ul T Merghad community resident in Tinjdad). The goal was not statistical representativeness but discursive saturation: the diversity of profiles was sought in order to identify recurrent patterns across different social positions. The independent variables ultimately retained for the recruitment of participants were: age, sex, origin, and occupation. The characteristics of this sample are as follows:

- Sex: female
- Age: between 22 and 70 years
- Origin: Tinjdad
- Language: Amazigh, Arabic/French
- Social status: single, married, divorced, and widowed
- Occupation: civil servants, student, and homemakers

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format using an interview guide specifically developed for this study. In designing this guide, we drew inspiration from previous works of a similar nature, notably Luc Biichlé's doctoral thesis (2007) and the book by Pascal Singy et al. (Women and Language: Linguistic Insecurity in Question).

The interview guide aimed to explore both factual elements and subjective dimensions of the participants' experiences. On the one hand, it addressed relatively objectifiable aspects, such as their socialization habits with elders-the frequency of interactions, types of contexts, and modes of communication. On the other hand, the questions invited participants to provide a more introspective discourse on their relationship with language:

linguistic competence, perception of their accent, ease or discomfort in speaking, and the emotions associated with these experiences. The study also sought to capture participants' perceptions of others' reactions-particularly those of elders-to their manner of speaking, and how these interactions influenced their own sense of discursive legitimacy.

Linguistic insecurity, as conceptualized in this study, was specifically addressed through three main questions, which will be detailed in the following section. However, it became apparent that this insecurity could also manifest in a diffuse, implicit, or indirect manner throughout the interviews. For this reason, the second part of the corpus analysis relies not only on responses to the questions explicitly dedicated to this theme but also on excerpts from other moments in the interviews, where participants spontaneously-sometimes incidentally-shared experiences or narratives related to this feeling.

This approach allows us to apprehend linguistic insecurity not only as a discursive object but also as a discursive stance, sometimes perceptible through hesitations, self-corrections, or justifications, revealing a form of linguistic self-monitoring.

After completing the interviews, we proceeded with their transcription. All interviews were transcribed orthographically using an adapted Latin-based notation for Amazigh aligned with the conventions of the Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe (IRCAM, Rabat). The transcription system also incorporates paralinguistic markers where analytically relevant: pauses are indicated by [...], laughter by [taḍṣa], sighs and groans by [tixt], silences by [ifsti], and omissions or non-verbalizations by [axmmem]. We then conducted an inductive thematic analysis. On one hand, we identified manifestations of insecurity in both the content and the form of participants' discourse; on the other hand, we evaluated these manifestations to enable commentary on the participants according to their type of insecurity. The coding was performed by the primary researcher using iterative reading of the transcribed corpus.

A critical methodological precaution must be stated explicitly here. Hesitations, reformulations, and hedges are not automatically interpreted as markers of communicative insecurity; to treat them as such would conflate ordinary conversational disfluency with a socially produced phenomenon. In this study, a feature is coded as a marker of communicative insecurity only when it co-occurs with at least one of the following contextual criteria:

- (1) an explicit negative self-evaluation in the same or adjacent turn (e.g., "ur ghiygh" = I cannot, "hchuma" = I am ashamed);
- (2) a reported or enacted avoidance of a topic, an interlocutor, or a conversational turn;
- (3) a meta-discursive attribution of the restriction to social norms or the authority of others, rather than personal preference. This multi-criteria threshold was applied consistently across the corpus to minimize circular interpretation and to ensure that the analysis captures the specifically social and hierarchical dimension of the insecurity, rather than individual speech variation.

From the perspective of a critical approach to gender, it becomes possible to deconstruct the naturalization of the feeling of insecurity and to analyze its social and symbolic implications. The observation that women express, statistically more often than men, a sense of insecurity cannot be interpreted as merely reflecting a supposed "natural" or inherent vulnerability of the feminine.

On the contrary, this feeling is fully embedded in processes of differentiated socialization and the socio-sexual construction of identities. It results from social learning, often early and internalized, which imposes on women a constant vigilance and the mastery of behaviors perceived as appropriate in order to protect themselves from explicit or implicit forms of disapproval, sanction, or even symbolic violence.

In a context where gender equality is legally and institutionally proclaimed, the gap between formal equality and lived inequalities reveals the persistence of discriminatory mechanisms, all the more difficult to denounce because they remain largely invisibilized and naturalized.

This is particularly the case in certain Amazigh communities, where norms of respectability, generational hierarchies, and gendered expectations around public speech contribute, in an insidious way, to maintaining an unequal symbolic order. Such a shift in perspective invites us to recognize the feeling of insecurity not as an individual or psychological trait, but as a structural effect of social gender relations.

4. CORPUS ANALYSIS

Starting from a corpus of oral interviews, we conducted an analysis of the linguistic practices of Amazigh women. This article focuses on one of the main aspects of the study: the feeling of insecurity, although similar studies have approached the topic differently.

The interviews largely took place in public and domestic spaces (*igran* = fields, *taddart* = house, *tasammrt/lelawi* = neighborhood alleys), with the exception of interviews with informants N 5, 6, and 8, which were conducted at home or by telephone, respectively. All participants were informed that the interviews would later be used to analyze their language use and its relation to various attitudes and situations.

In women, linguistic behavior often conveys a sense of uncertainty, as if they are only offering a preliminary sketch of their thoughts. The objective of the corpus analysis is therefore to identify, observe, and analyze manifestations of insecurity in the speech of our informants, with the aim of contributing to research on the impact of this sentiment on Amazigh women.

4.1. Discourse Content: Questions and Responses

Three questions were posed to the informants to prompt reflection on their degree of language proficiency and the sense of security or insecurity they experience when speaking with family members. The responses are discussed below, alternating between direct transcription and reported speech.

Question 1: *is tswanfad ig da ttmsawald d lahl nmm?* – "Are you confident / at ease when speaking with your close relatives (father, elder brother, spouse, and in-laws)?"

Informants 4, 5, 6, and 8 answered negatively, expressing disorientation when interacting with elders:

"uhu! uhu! ur yiyy ad ids mmsawaly, da day as tqquduy aynna mi iynna sskrt; babi new ur ilaq ad as iniyy uhu wala as ruriy awal, [tusy tixt], waxa d ka yifi yayull" – "No! No! I cannot speak to him; I was just responding as they wanted; it's my father! I am not allowed to refuse or discuss [groan], even if it's a topic that concerns me."

Informants 1, 2, 3, 9, and 10 responded affirmatively. Among these, some reported feeling at ease, able to change a few words freely without obstacle. However, informant 10 noted that this depends on the topic:

"llan iwaliwn g i ssummun, ilin wiyy g la, ačku da trgiy ar skstufy, inin hat ilaq ad i ssummun" = "There are topics where I can debate with them and others where I lose my fluency because, according to them, I am not worthy of discussing it."

Paradoxically, informant 7, who had demonstrated considerable insecurity and self-dissatisfaction, was the only one to answer negatively with:

"la, ur djin, [ifsti], imyarr inw gan i d amm kan tbraniyt" = "No, never, categorical, [silence], my in-laws saw me as a stranger."

Question 2: *max allig ur tyiyd ad tqqard i uryaz nmm s yism nns?* = "Why can't you pronounce your spouse's first or proper name?"

Informants 4, 5, 6, and 7 explained that in all communities to which they belong, calling a spouse by their first name is considered disrespectful:

"haaaa!!, mayd akk" lliy ur djin as yriy s yism nns [axmmem], ig t riy da qqary s yism n memmi ifhm iyf nns [taḍṣa], ny as nniy a aryaz, a waha..." = "Huuuh! Never in my life would I try to call my husband by his first name; [omission] as a substitute, I address him indirectly: 'man,' 'husband,' or use the eldest son's name [laugh], or the neutral vocative 'a waha/awa' = that one...."

"aynay ag ur nyiy ad ng irgn nny d amm nkk"ni, ur ilaq ad nyr s yism nns, hcuma ur id lewayd nny" = "This is why we women cannot consider our husband as our equal and therefore cannot call him by his own first name; it is totally inappropriate, it is not our custom."

Informant 8 added a more flexible nuance:

"ih, ih, kan tikkal [taḍṣa], ig zefy, ny i tuly taṭṭast, ny ka ur da d ttawiy aḥal ard tt sskry ur baḍy, imkinnay ard iffy" = "Yes, it happens [laughs]; for example, when I am angry or stressed, I don't think, and it just comes out, directly, in any way."

The women interviewed continuously negotiate "arrangements" between the widely internalized idea that addressing their husband by name is shameful. They seek-and-find-ways to prevent situations considered delicate. In this way, the feeling of insecurity structures their apprehension during discussions.

A tension is noticeable in their discourse between the desire to present themselves as courageous and the unmistakable timidity that leads them to protect themselves through regulation of their speech and behavior in the presence of their spouse. Speaking safely thus requires certain communicative strategies. They resort to measures aimed at avoiding what they consider shameful (*hcuma*). These practices differ from those adopted by the majority of men.

Question 3: mantur ayd ttawin ayt yurrun yif iwaliwn nnm? - “When do you feel that your speech is useful and that your opinion should be taken into account?

Informants 4, 5, 6, and 7 responded simply:

"imki ay sskarr ur inni ikks mayd urta giy tamyart [tusy tixt]" = "This terrible treatment and contempt never cease until I become a mother-in-law [groan], because daughters-in-law are treated differently, not like men [silence]; men not only have priority in everything, but they also influence decisions regarding their wives' daily lives.

"nkkwni, [trgig] da nswunfu nfrh ig da nsawal d warraw nny nyd d tmddukkal nny [tusy tixt], ačku ixatarr abda da aysksiwn nmzziy ur ngi nil umčawar wala nil asn.... ar ntggwd abda i ishirran nnsn, ig nurm ad nsiwl" = "We [hesitates for a few seconds] feel confident and safe when speaking to our young children or with friends [groan], because elders always see us as young, and we are not at their level... so we fear their reprimands and avoid communicating with them" (Informants 1, 2, 3, 9, and 10).

According to the responses of most informants, the feeling of insecurity in their speech is not linked to a lack of linguistic competence. Rather, it is associated with a mindset in which they have been socialized to believe that their speech has no value and that they are not on par with men, due to entrenched practices in many rural families. It is considered normative for women not to speak to elders (father, elder brother, spouse, in-laws) or to express their opinions on any subject whatsoever.

Many of the norms and rules underlying communication are unconscious; they are learned from early childhood and applied intuitively depending on the situation.

In women's discourse, insecurity is often expressed in a more emotional and personal manner than in men's. Women may speak of their fears, anxiety, and stress related to insecurity. They may also recount experiences of harassment, sexual assault, or domestic violence—realities that affect many women.

However, women's discourse on insecurity can also be influenced by social stigmatization. Women may hesitate to discuss their experiences of fear and insecurity, fearing judgment as weak or overly emotional. Moreover, women who do not conform to gender norms regarding appearance or behavior may be perceived as more vulnerable to insecurity, which can further reinforce their victimization.

At the grammatical, lexical, and semantic levels, the corpus analysis shows that our informants frequently employ verbal strategies that weaken or limit their statements. One such strategy is the recurrent use of the imperfect/imperfect negative to denote habitual, durative, iterative, or modal actions, such as: *da tthccamy, da ttggwdy, ur da ttiyy, ur da nsawal*. In contrast, the perfect/perfect negative is used to indicate completed actions or habitual actions in the past (*ggwdy, hccmy*).

The use of particles and limiting expressions (reflecting beliefs or hedging) is also notable, such as *eniy/ieini* (probably, perhaps, relatively), *qlil, imih, ur wala* (a little), *kan tikkal, mrra mrra* (sometimes). Additionally, redundancy is frequently observed: *uhu, uhu, la la, ggwdy, ggwdy*, signaling insecurity, hesitation, distress, and confusion.

The lexicon used by these women explicitly reflects their sense of insecurity. On the one hand, it involves strong negative self-evaluation (*hcuma* = shame, *tawda* = fear, *icqqa i* = lack of confidence, *ur yiyy* = I can't). On the other hand, it highlights concern with others' perception or reaction (*tawda* = fear, *taḍṣa* = mockery, laughing, *leib* = shame).

Non-verbal behavior also plays a crucial role, often operating unconsciously. Many extra-verbal behaviors signal the social status of the speaker in the communicative situation, for example: *ifsti* = silence, *taḍṣa* = laughter, *tixt* = groan, *axmmem* = omission. When an informant has not yet formed a definitive opinion on a subject, extra-verbal behavior can indicate insecurity. However, the social reality is often quite different. Until relatively recently, women were generally deprived of public speech; thus, the idea that speech is equally available to everyone is largely mythical.

In all languages, certain behaviors and expressions are tabooed or forbidden. These are behaviors or expressions that are left unspoken out of modesty or fear. Some taboos affect women more than men, and some reflect the historical silencing or marginalization of women's voices.

Why such precautions? During the investigation, it was observed that social representations regarding behavior deemed appropriate for each sex contribute to the reproduction of gendered stereotypes. Yet, the fears experienced by women do not stem solely from the internalization of these representations; they are also tied to daily experiences of mistreatment and lack of dialogue.

Various difficulties encountered by our informants during discussions with elders—be it remarks, gestures, or intrusions—further reinforce their sense of apprehension. Although often perceived as trivial, these acts have significant consequences for women's discourse. They act as reminders of the gendered social order, ultimately reproducing the dominant notion that women are inferior to men on the one hand and submissive to them on the other.

The ways in which social injustice between the sexes is conveyed through various modes of communication are clearly evident. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that greater awareness of this phenomenon might lead to change, even if one might fear that shifts in communication forms—through the Internet and globalization—may not necessarily diminish male dominance.

Gendered social relations have historically and culturally been organized hierarchically within a patriarchal system. This hierarchy is reflected in socialization practices, which establish a ranking between the sexes and assign each sex specific social functions. Language, traditions, social norms, and cultural representations work to confine each sex to its assigned status within a hierarchical configuration. Here, our interest lies in understanding the reasons behind the sense of insecurity observed in the speech of our female informants.

It is frequently observed that oral tradition and customs attribute weakness, emotion, and modesty to the feminine, and strength, reason, and boldness to the masculine. In verbal exchanges between heterogeneous interlocutors, certain characteristics mark linguistic differentiation, as women and men occupy distinct social roles.

Furthermore, verbal exchanges between women and men are characterized by successive series of discourse, as each interlocutor seeks to present their point of view. This dynamic often leads to interruptions, which violate conversational norms. Such interruptions are typically associated with men, whose social weight grants them a degree of dominance over women.

The idea that the sexes are inherently different (the *doxa* of sexual difference) thus affects not merely their biological sex but also their ways of speaking, interacting, and interpreting the speech addressed to them. In other words, if women perceive men as fundamentally different from women, it is likely that this perception will manifest in their own discourse, even unintentionally, motivated by more or less conscious desires such as the need to be liked or recognized. For example, one woman explicitly articulates what she considers a communicative rule: women are allowed to interrupt in conversation, whereas they should avoid doing so when a man (such as a spouse) is speaking.

5. CONCLUSION & FUTURE SCOPE

The abundance of markers of insecurity observed in the discourse of our female informants is striking. The content of their testimonies is not devoid of manifestations of this sentiment either. When asked about their perception of their language use, expressions such as "*gg'dy i ushirr nns* = I am afraid and feel panicked", "*hat ur yiyy xlah!!!* = I cannot do it!!!", "*awal inw da ifrri addag idsn sawly* = my communication will never be perfect with my parents", or "*awd awal inw ur t hmily*" = I really don't like my voice" reveal that this negative feeling toward their communication did not emerge suddenly, but rather results from a cumulative series of neglect and oppression. Similar statements have been documented and analyzed by Biichlé, who highlighted a potentially bidirectional influence between social marginalization and the feeling of linguistic insecurity.

However, we observe that our informants maintain relatively rich social networks, and their insecurity does not necessarily constitute an obstacle to socialization or autonomy. The feeling of insecurity among women stems from the way they perceive male presence and the social relationships that bind them to men.

One particularly striking observation is that the practices and perceptions our informants have of their own behaviors do not always align. In some cases, the content of their responses does not correspond to the degree of insecurity apparent in their discourse. For example, informant n°8's discourse does not contain many markers of insecurity, yet her responses suggest a higher level of insecurity and dissatisfaction.

Conversely, informant n°10 claims to feel confident when speaking with her parents in various situations, but her discourse is filled with markers of insecurity. This discrepancy can obviously be linked to the inherent subjectivity of self-perception; whether discussing communication skills or any other ability, personality traits such as self-confidence or pride shape one's perception of competence.

Subjectivity is not the only factor to consider, as there is both what one thinks or feels and what one decides to convey to others. Our informants may thus have a motive to mask their feelings, presenting a certain level of confidence and security that is not entirely genuine. It should also be noted that the degree of insecurity varies significantly among our informants.

Furthermore, sexism-defined as attitudes and behaviors that discriminate against individuals based on their sex (Ku, 2011)-has its roots in gender stereotypes, that is, shared beliefs about characteristics considered inherent to men and women. These stereotypes assign higher status to men than to women in numerous societies, both Western and non-Western (Glick, 2005).

In conclusion, the findings of this study confirm that communicative insecurity in women's discourse is not a psychological trait or a reflection of linguistic deficit, but a structurally produced interactional disposition sustained by gendered social norms and family hierarchical expectations. Women are perceived - and perceive themselves - as less authorized to speak on certain topics, in certain presences, and according to the authority patterns encoded in the norms of the Ul T Merghad community. This insecurity is reinforced through mechanisms of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991) that remain largely invisible precisely because they are internalized as natural and appropriate.

The scholarly contribution of this study is fourfold. First, it introduces and operationalizes "communicative insecurity" as a concept distinct from Labovian "linguistic insecurity": whereas the latter concerns anxious orientation toward a prestige standard, communicative insecurity as defined here describes a socially produced inhibition of verbal participation rooted in the gendered authority structure of the Amazigh family. This conceptual distinction has theoretical implications for the field, inviting scholars to disaggregate the multiple social sources through which different forms of speech-related insecurity are produced.

Second, the study re-reads prior scholarship on female linguistic insecurity by displacing the analytical focus from standard-language contact to the domestic interactional order itself, arguing that family hierarchies - not external prestige norms - are the primary structuring force in this context. Third, it provides first-hand empirical documentation of a terrain that has received minimal sociolinguistic attention: the women of the Ul T Merghad community in Tinjdad, southeastern Morocco.

Fourth, it advances a multi-level analytical framework - integrating gender performativity (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987), Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992), Conversation Analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), and the sociolinguistics of gender (Cameron, 2005; Coates, 1996) - that may serve as a model for future research on communicative insecurity in other minority-language family contexts. Future research should extend this approach to other Amazigh communities, examine intergenerational variation, and investigate whether digital communication spaces are modifying the traditional authority structures that sustain communicative insecurity.

Table 1: Markers of insecurity identified among the ten informants and their personal/marital status

annex

	Markers of Insecurity	Marital Status / Personal Information
n° 1	<i>la! la!</i> = No! No! <i>cwiy</i> = a little; <i>kan tikkal</i> = sometimes; <i>ħcuma!!</i> = What a shame! <i>Gg^wdy ad yldy</i> = I am afraid of making mistakes; <i>ur yiyy</i> = I can't	- Single - 25 years old - High school graduate
n° 2	<i>ur wala</i> = often no; <i>ħccmy digsn</i> = I'm so ashamed of them; <i>ur zeimy</i> = I'm not brave; <i>ur walfy</i> = I'm not used to it	- Single - 33 years old - Literacy course instructor
n° 3	<i>Ur rdy ad idsn mraray awal, ačku qqad zgly</i> = I wasn't used to speaking to him because I fear making mistakes; <i>ur yiyy, ħccmy</i> = I can't, what a shame!	Single - Teacher - 40 years old
n° 4	<i>ur da ttfhamy maxf sawall</i> = I don't always understand what they are talking about; <i>ard uħly iniy yuf is fstiy</i> = so I don't speak much; <i>ħčmy ičqqayi</i> = it's a shame, it's hard for me	- Married - 45 years old - Housewife - No children
n° 5	<i>la, la!!</i> = No, No!; <i>ħčuma aynnay</i> = it's shameful; <i>ixatarr fħmn ugar nny</i> = elders understand better than us; <i>nitni ayd issn lšlaħa new</i> = they know what's good for me; <i>ur nssin ad nsiwl</i> = we didn't know how to speak	- Divorced - 35 years old - 1 child
n° 6	<i>mr ufiy awd nkkin ar ittcawarr</i> = I like to discuss and consult; <i>ggwdy</i> = I'm afraid; <i>da digi ttššan</i> = they make fun of me; <i>ħčmy</i> = I'm ashamed	- Divorced - 45 years old - 1 child
n° 7	<i>da iyfrry yils ig da asn sawalay</i> = I feel unsettled when I speak to them; <i>ħčmy</i> = I'm ashamed; <i>ur yiyg ad as yry s yism nns</i> = I can't call him by his name; <i>aya axfd ngma</i> = that's what we're used to	- Widow - 59 years old - Housewife - 5 children
n° 8	<i>ur yiyy</i> = I can't; <i>ħčmy</i> = I'm ashamed; <i>ur iřwib</i> = inappropriate; <i>mřřa mřřa</i> = sometimes; <i>iwaliwn nsn urd am winw</i> = our topics are not the same	- Divorced - 29 years old - Tailor - No children
n°9	<i>ur i iqqil ka</i> = I don't care; <i>ic! ic!</i> = everyone has their own way of thinking; <i>kan tikkal, ur ssiny mayd ttiniy</i> = sometimes I don't think what I see	- Divorced - 24 years old - Student - 1 child
n°10	<i>ur yiyg</i> = I can't; <i>İfdiħt!! ħccmy</i> = Shame; <i>kan tikkal</i> = sometimes; <i>ela ħsab</i> = it depends	- Single - 28 years old - Executive secretary

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