

LANGUAGE VARIATION AND CHANGE IN AN AMDO TIBETAN VILLAGE: GENDER,
EDUCATION AND RESISTANCE

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By

Jermay J. Reynolds, M.A.

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Jermay J. Reynolds, M.A.

Thesis Advisors: Natalie Schilling, Ph.D. & Robert J. Podesva, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines variation in the realization of the final bilabial nasal (m) among speakers of Amdo Tibetan farmer dialect. The bilabial nasal (m) in words like *lam* ‘road’, for example, neutralizes with the alveolar nasal /n/ in syllable final positions and thus becomes *len*. The merged variant [n] is typically described as an innovative dialect feature of farmer dialect resulting from language contact with Chinese and other languages of the area. Using sociolinguistic interview data from 60 speakers of a single (transitional mountain) farmer village in Qinghai Province in Western China, balanced in terms of sex and age and stratified by literacy, this dissertation quantitatively explores linguistic and social factors conditioning the use of the variable.

The overall production pattern associated with merging is indicative of a sound change in progress, with younger speakers leading older speakers. This is perhaps the first report of a sound change in progress in a Tibetan speech community. Moreover, it finds that merging interacts with age, sex and literacy in a number of complex ways. While merging is led by female speakers in the earlier stages of sound change, sex-

based variation disappears among younger speakers, among whom literacy status is the primary social conditioning factor, with the illiterate speakers favoring the merged variant [n].

By drawing on ethnographic insight, it is shown that the originally female-led change towards the non-merged variant [n] is best explained by local marriage practices and the traditional socioeconomic roles played by older speakers. On the other hand, the disfavoring of the merged variant [n] by more literate younger speakers suggests a revitalization of this non-merged variant. Furthermore, examination of the local linguistic ideologies and production patterns of younger speakers suggests that the increased use of the non-merged variant [m] is socially motivated. Many of the more educated speakers are taking a stance against merging, as it indexes encroachment of the Chinese language.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

One famous Tibetan proverb says, ‘Every valley has its dialect and every lama has his religion¹’, and another variation of the same proverb says, ‘Every valley has a river and every village has a dialect²’. Both reflect the same phenomenon - the complexity of linguistic variation in Tibetan areas. While there has been a number of studies describing phonological features of various dialects (Sun 2003; Janhunen & Kalsang Norbu³ 2000), dialectal variations within a single village, to my knowledge, have not been studied in any Tibetan area. This dissertation uses a quantitative variationist approach to investigate language variation and change associated with the bilabial nasal coda (m) within a Tibetan farming village in Northern Amdo Tibet of contemporary China. The linguistic variable (m) in words like ‘gram ‘side’ can be realized as a merged variant [n] or can retain its original non-merged form [m]. The merged variant [n] is a widespread innovative feature of farmer dialect shared by many dialects in Northern Amdo Tibetan areas. The non-merged form [m] is a feature

¹ ལྷང་པ་རེ་ལ་སྐད་རེ། ལྷམ་རེ་ལ་ཚོལ་རེ།

² ལྷང་པ་རེ་ལ་ཚུ་རེ། ལྷེ་པ་རེ་ལ་སྐད་རེ།

³ Many Tibetans have one name. To respect the original spelling choice of the Tibetan writers cited in this dissertation, I am using their names in *hanyu pinyin* if the original works appeared entirely in Chinese. If the original work is in Tibetan, I use the Wylie transliteration system developed by Turrell Wylie (1959). The names of Tibetans writing in English are given as per their own renderings.

typically found in more conservative Tibetan dialects such as nomad dialect and the written Tibetan language. This dissertation examines complex relationship between the internal and external factors associated with the linguistic variable in production and explores the social motivation of the maintenance of the non-merged variant [m] among younger educated speakers.

This chapter is organized in the following way: In section 1.2, I provide a very brief introduction to the Tibetan language and some relevant Tibetan linguistic ideologies. Section 1.3 provides the relevant sociocultural dimensions of Tibetan in contemporary China. In section 1.4, I give a linguistic overview of Amdo Tibetan by exploring some of the general linguistic features associated with Amdo Tibetan dialects and identify the final nasal coda (m) as a linguistic variable of interest. In section 1.5, I discuss why an in-depth analysis of this variable is important not only in terms of Tibetan linguistics but also within a larger sociolinguistics. Finally, I present an overview of the remainder of the dissertation in section 1.6.

1.2 Introduction to Tibetan

Tibetan belongs to the Bodish branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Tibeto-Burman, along with the Sinitic languages, constitutes the super Sino-Tibetan language family, which is comparable in size and diversity to the Indo-European language family. Languages within the Tibeto-Burman family exhibit a great deal of typological diversity which is partially due to areal influences from Chinese on one

hand and Indian languages on the other hand. Language members of the Loloish subgroup are tonal and monosyllabic without affixational morphology, while other languages like those of the Kiranti group of Eastern Nepal are marginally tonal or atonal with complex morphology. Most languages within this family tend to be verb final (SOV) (Matisoff 2003). Of roughly 250 languages in the Tibeto-Burman family, 9 languages have over one million speakers while the majority of languages in this group have less than 10,000 speakers (Matisoff 2003: 3). Many of these less spoken languages are considered endangered.

Tibetan is spoken in a large area, comparable in size to Western Europe. In the north, the area extends to the northern part of Gansu and Qinghai Provinces in western China. It stretches as far as parts of Sichuan Province in the east and extends to the Baltistan of Pakistan in the West. The area includes the southern slopes of the Himalayas, with Bhutan, Sikkim in India, parts of Mustang and Dolpo, and Solukhumbu of Nepal, and parts of Mount Everest inhabited by the Sherpas of Nepal (Tournadre & Sangda Dorje 2003: 25). This area encompasses in whole or in part, a number of countries including China, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Burma. Tibetan is used or has been used as a semi-official language in various Himalayan kingdoms from Ladakh in the west to Mustang in north central Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan (Bradley 1997). The estimated number of Tibetan speakers ranges from a conservatively low 4.9 million (Bradley 1997) to a liberal estimate of 8 million (Padma Lhun'grub 2009).

In terms of dialectal variation among contemporary Tibetan, modern Tibetan dialectologists agree that there are five larger Tibetan dialects. These dialects include Western (which is further categorized into Archaic varieties like Balti in Pakistan, Ladakhi and Purik of India and innovative dialects spoken in Northwestern India), Central/U-Tsang (varieties found in the contemporary Tibetan Autonomous Region in China and in Eastern and Western parts of Nepal), Southern (varieties spoken in Sikkim of India and Bhutan), Eastern (Kham varieties spoken in parts of Qinghai, Tibetan Autonomous Region, Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces of China) and Northeastern. This last dialect group is what Amdo Tibetan belongs to (Hu 1991; Zhang 1993; Bradley 1997; DeLancy 2003; Padma Lhun'grub 2009). And I explore the linguistic features of this Amdo Tibetan in 1.4.

Linguistically, Tibetan dialects are ergative-absolutive. Nouns are marked for grammatical case but not number which is marked with the demonstratives appearing after nouns. Verbs have four alternate forms, including the present, past, and future as well as the imperative aspect, thus making Tibetan morphology a complex one. Unlike dialects of Central Tibet or U-Tsang which tend to have phonemic tone and relatively simplified syllable structure (see a study of Lhasa Tibetan in DeLancy 2003), geographically peripheral dialects like Amdo Tibetan tend to lack tone but have a relatively complex syllable structure (see the study of Labrang Tibetan Makley, Dede, Hua & Wang 1999).

Within contemporary China, one popular way to conceptualize Tibetan linguistic diversity is to categorize Tibetan varieties into three major regional dialects, loosely corresponding to the ethnically Tibetan Kham, Amdo and U-Tsang areas (Gesang Jumai and Gesang Yangjing 2002; Qu 1996; Jin 1983). These three regional dialects are Central dialect (Central Tibetan dialect), Amdo dialect (North Eastern dialect) and Khams dialect (Eastern). Even though it is customary to talk about dialects in terms of these three different regions, it should be pointed out that the actual linguistic relationship between different Tibetan dialects spoken in each area is poorly understood (c.f. Sun 2003). Nevertheless, these three salient dialects are enregistered with sociocultural values and play a significant role among speakers of Tibetans in terms of conceptualizing Tibetan (Jamsu 2010). By ‘enregistered’, I am referring to Agha’s (2003:231) notion of enregisterment – ‘processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognized register of forms’. One such example is provided in Jamsu’s (2010) analysis of a comedic performance in Amdo Tibet which shows how a set of linguistic features such as the present linguistic variable (m) are associated with two larger sociolects generally known as farmer and nomad’s dialect, despite the fact that linguistic differentiation in Amdo Tibetan is more gradual on a continuum of a set of features. These three enregistered dialectal areas within China are roughly presented in Map 1.



Map 1 Tibetan dialect areas in China⁴

Mutual intelligibility varies greatly among these Tibetan dialects even though there are more than 70% cognate words between some of the major dialects. While no studies to my knowledge have examined the issue of mutual intelligibility, anecdotes reports and personal observations suggest that speakers of different dialect backgrounds find it extremely difficult to communicate due to great differences in the phonology, vocabulary, grammatical particles and use of honorifics among these dialects. This is especially true if the speakers are illiterate. Many illiterate speakers, particularly those living in the villages, find it impossible to understand dialects that are other than their own. Literate people, given their knowledge of written Tibetan, find it relatively easier to communicate with other speakers. With the exception of speakers who have had

⁴ All of the maps used in the dissertation have been created using Google Maps.

prolonged exposure and interaction with other dialect speakers (such as within exile communities in India and established communities in the West), a speaker with Amdo dialect background often, for example, finds it difficult to communicate with speakers of Lhasa Tibetan (a sub-dialect of Central Tibetan), but less so with speakers of Kham dialect. Thus, speakers generally resort to the use of dominant languages like Mandarin as a *lingua franca* in China.

The differences between dialects are thus often compared to those between European languages such as Dutch and German (c.f. Tournadre and Konchok Jiatso 2001). But similar to ‘Chinese dialects’ and ‘Arabic dialects’, these various Tibetan varieties, despite their relatively low level of mutual intelligibility, are considered dialects of Tibetan language due to the fact that they share similar cultural roots and a heritage of literary Tibetan. This literary Tibetan has a significant role in the conceptualizations and evaluations of spoken Tibetan dialects as Tibetans see the literary Tibetan uniting a diverse group of Tibetan speaking communities.

There is a general understanding that the Tibetan dialects are derived from Old Tibetan, the spoken language in the Yarlung Valley, the cradle of Tibetan Empire and civilization (Tournadre and Konchok Jiatso 2001: 178; Hill 2010: 111). Unlike modern dialects such as Central Tibetan, Old Tibetan is non-tonal (Sun 1997; DeLancy 2003). This Old Tibetan, captured in literary works produced between the 7th and 10th centuries (DeLancey 2003), ceased to exist with the collapse of the Tibetan Empire in the 9th and 10th centuries (Hill 2010; Tournadre and Koncho Jiatso 2001). The legendary minister

Thonmi Sambhota invented the Tibetan script, which has 30 consonants and 5 vowels, in 650CE (Denwood 1999). The term ‘Classical Tibetan’ is often used by Tibetologists to refer to the literature and long tradition of prescriptive grammar of Old Tibetan (DeLancey 2003: 255). Classical Tibetan, unlike the various dialects, has remained remarkably conservative over the last millennium (Beyer 1992: 18).

In terms of salient language ideologies, Classical Tibetan and literary Tibetan in general, has the highest prestige among Tibetan speakers. This stems from the great presence of Classical Tibetan in centuries of Buddhist scriptures as well as its role in unifying the many diverse communities speaking ‘Tibetan’. Literary Tibetan (Classical Tibetan) functions as a ‘Standard Tibetan’ among Tibetan speakers both inside and outside of contemporary China. It is the standard against which all forms of spoken dialects are contrasted with. Thus, spoken Tibetan varieties in general are considered grammatically ‘incorrect’, while literary Tibetan is considered ‘correct’ and ‘standard’. These sorts of language ideologies involving written Tibetan are similar to ‘standard language’ ideologies prevalent in more industrialized societies.

Literary Tibetan is radically different from spoken dialects in terms of morphology, syntax and lexicon. The relationship between the spoken and literary Tibetan varieties forms a semi-diaglossic situation. Thus, speakers often talk about how spoken Tibetan cannot be rendered using written Tibetan and vice versa. Various writers have incorporated vernacular features into their literary works but they are not

always received favorably⁵. Many educated Tibetans view the inclusion of vernacular features in literary Tibetan as a major problem. Because of this, educated speakers usually strongly discourage the creation of dictionaries for specific dialects. Doing so, educated speakers believe, will pose a threat to the continuity of the literary Tibetan language⁶ (gnya' blogros rgyalmtshan 1999: 456).

Given the supreme status given to the literary Tibetan, it is not a surprise that there are no universally recognized spoken Tibetan variety considered to be 'Standard' - that is, a variety which is institutionally imposed and taught in educational systems. There is no equivalence of 'Standard English' in Tibetan speaking areas besides that of literary Tibetan. Within contemporary China, for example, there are regionally prestigious dialects in different Tibetan areas – a sociolinguistic situation very similar to that of Arabic speaking countries where the standard and prestigious Classical Arabic coexists along with regionally prestigious dialects. In this case, written Tibetan

⁵ One example of such recent work is Nagstshang Nusblo's autobiography, *nags tshang zhi lu'i skyid sdug* (Joys and Sorrows of the Nagsthsang Boy). This work has been very controversial, in part due to its great reliance on vernacular features of Tibetan. 'Translation' into other Tibetan dialects such as Central Tibetan has been recently proposed.

⁶ I have experienced this kind of negative reaction from educated speakers in the past. Almost a decade ago, I was involved in a folktale documentation project in which I was using written Tibetan to capture the vernacular speech of the storytellers. My work met with an explosive reactions by Tibetan educators. They publically condemned my efforts to capture the vernacular Tibetan and described my actions as being detrimental to the future of Tibetan language.

functions as a standard language variety whereas locally prestigious dialects such as Lhasa and Amdo nomad dialects are commonly used in radio and television⁷.

Nevertheless, one can occasionally find the term ‘Standard Tibetan’ being used in textbooks such as *Manual of Standard Tibetan* by Tounadre and Sangde Dorje (2003). Such a term appears to refer to the variety spoken in Central Tibet in the region of Lhasa (including the all the prefectures and villages within one hundred kilometers from the capital), and the diaspora communities in India, Nepal and elsewhere (Tournadre & Sangde Dorje 2003). This variety of Tibetan is used increasingly in the diaspora communities in India and elsewhere where Tibetan speakers of different dialects live together. However, this ‘Standard Tibetan’ does not have similar social currency among other dialect speaking areas such as Amdo and Kham, as speakers of Tibetan in these areas of China rarely come into contact with speakers of this so-called ‘Standard Tibetan’. In fact, within contemporary China, there are some efforts to standardize spoken Tibetan⁸ and numerous publications in Tibetan suggest that standardizing spoken Tibetan in contemporary China is an ongoing, contentious and hotly debated issue among educated Tibetans (See Prins 2002 for an overview the earlier initiatives).

1.3 Sociocultural dimensions of Tibetan language in China

⁷ In Amdo Tibetan areas, the primary dialect used on the radio is based on Amdo nomad dialect. However, in the last decade or so, Qinghai Tibetan Radio station has also begun to air one hour of broadcasting in Lhasa dialect.

⁸ Efforts to standardize spoken language continue to this day. In December of 2011, a number of scholars attending a language conference organized by Trace Foundation in New York talked about these efforts at great lengths.

I have so far focused on some general social, linguistic and ideological dimensions related to the Tibetan language – which will be quite relevant in understanding language variation and change in this dissertation. In this section, my goal is to provide an overview of Tibetan language issues within the context of contemporary China. A sound understanding of language variation and change studied in this dissertation has to be embedded in the larger cultural forces operating within contemporary China and that is the focus of this section.

Tibetan language, as a so-called ‘minority language’, shares similar fates with other regionally dominant language such as Yi, Mongolian and Uygur. As is the case in many parts of China, the dominant language is the common language of China generally known as *putonghua* or Mandarin. As Dwyer (1998:79) accurately puts it, Mandarin Chinese is the default language, much like the sun around which the minority language planets orbit. This is the official language through which all government functions are carried out. As part of a nation building effort, the Chinese government has been promoting this national official language rigorously both in educational settings and public venues. Figure 1 is a scene at a meeting of such Mandarin promotion week taking place in Lhasa, Tibet.



Figure 1 “Closing ceremony for the 14th National Mandarin Promotion Week, September, 2011 – Lhasa”⁹

Besides this kind of public promotion of Mandarin Chinese in public venues, Mandarin is taught in educational settings across China and speaking it is strongly encouraged. Graduating students from college are required to prove their proficiency in Mandarin in order to graduate but a similar requirement is not mandated for non-Mandarin language varieties. Through these kinds of Chinese language initiatives, one can also interpret the unwritten rules of the power relationships between Mandarin Chinese and those of so called ‘minority’ languages. Figure 2 shows a banner common on campus of many schools in contemporary China. The banner reads, ‘Speak Mandarin, write standard character, and be a civil person!’. This reflects a larger national discourse about language variation in China and suggests that Mandarin Chinese is being

⁹ <http://www.jbxyz.com/>

promoted as the language of ‘civility’ while non-Mandarin languages are implicitly constructed as languages of ‘uncivil’ people and cultures including the Tibetans.



Figure 2 “Speak Mandarin, write standard character, and be a civil person!”¹⁰

Similarly, Figure 3 shows a promotional banner hung at the main gate of a primary school in the city of Lhasa, Tibet. The bilingual banner reads, ‘Mandarin is the language of our campus’. This also suggests the increased presence of the role of Chinese language even in primary educational settings. This type of aggressive advocacy of the Mandarin Chinese is thus ubiquitous in public venues and educational settings. And indeed, such effort is done to the detriment of lesser spoken languages such as Tibetan (c.f. Varennes 2009).

¹⁰ <http://www.pzh.gov.cn/>



Figure 3 “Mandarin Chinese is the language of our campus”¹¹

In terms of teaching of Tibetan language in China, it is taught in many Tibetan schools along with Mandarin. The teaching of Tibetan in contemporary schools is typically restricted to ‘nationality’ schools¹² at various regional levels and is not taught to Han Chinese, the majority ethnic group in China. In general, Tibetan elementary schools (7-12 year olds) tend to rely more on the Tibetan language as an instructional language. However, in higher education, the role of Tibetan is limited as more subjects are taught in Chinese and a mastery of Mandarin is thus required in higher education. Tibetan students graduating from high school have to take a Tibetan language exam as

¹¹ <http://woeser.middle-way.net>

¹² Minzu, or ethnic group, is typically translated as ‘nationality’. Despite that the fact that Han Chinese is considered one of the ‘56 nationalities’ of China, ‘nationality school’ is a term reserved for schools exclusively attended by non-Han Chinese students. Nationally, the Han Chinese remain *invisible* while the non-Han people including Tibetans are highly *marked*.

part of their college entrance exam. As is the case of many policies and their implementations in China, the use of Tibetan language in education varies not only from place to place in Tibetan areas but also from one year to the next.

A variation of this ‘bilingual’ education has been in existence since the 1950s until the late 1970s. A more accommodationist policy towards non-Mandarin Chinese languages was adopted towards the end of 1970s. As a result of this, different forms of bilingual education have existed. Whatever the actual forms bilingual may be, the ultimate goal of these larger education initiatives appear to be making a transition from the non-Han Chinese speaker’s native language to that of the mainstream Mandarin Chinese. The government of Qinghai Province, which is the area where the current study takes place, for example introduced a policy plan in 2010 aimed at achieving this overall national agenda with respect to use of Mandarin Chinese as the main medium of teaching at various school levels. These policy initiatives are aimed limiting the use of Tibetan language as a single subject instead of instructional language in middle and high schools in rural Tibetan areas (see Blum 2011).

The increasing importance placed on the teaching of Chinese language, and its enforcement through educational settings is more and more seen as a threat to the survival of non-Mandarin Chinese languages such as Tibetan. Over the last decade or so, Tibetans have been increasingly concerned about the future of their language as they see the increasingly powerful role that Mandarin plays in public and educational life. This is in part due to changing state policies that are increasingly disfavorable towards

the Tibetan language but also other sociopolitical factors that are beyond the scope of this dissertation. There is a growing concern among Tibetans about the future of their language as evidenced by a number of protests and movements common across the Tibetan speaking communities in China. Let me elaborate on these two movements.

In response to government-led initiatives towards the promotion of Mandarin Chinese and limiting the role of Tibetan language in educational contexts, many protests led by both students and laypeople have sprung up across many Tibetan areas demanding more equal rights (Varenes 2009; Blum 2011). These protests¹³ which still continue to this day in some areas a growing sign of not only many Tibetans' discontentment with larger educational reform and policies but also perhaps an increase effort to expand the domains in which Mandarin Chinese is to be used. Figure 4 shows Tibetan students marching to the streets of Tongren, Qinghai, demanding more language rights. The sign reads in Tibetan, 'equality of ethnic groups, freedom of language'.

¹³ <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/content/view/44778/>



Figure 4 “Equality of ethnic groups. Freedom of Language¹⁴”

In addition to protests, a widespread language movement currently taking place promotes the speaking of ‘pure’ Tibetan. In many villages of Amdo Tibetan areas, Tibetans from all walks of life (nomads, farmers, artists and so forth) are actively participating in what is commonly referred to as the ‘revitalization of the father tongue’. Village level movements for have promoted the translation of Chinese loan words into Tibetan, encouraging people to speak a ‘pure’ language. Figure 5 shows a scene where local Tibetans ‘pledge to speak a pure father tongue^{15c}. Villagers, regardless of educational level and gender, are speaking only Tibetan and are beginning to stigmatize the use of loan words, particularly from Chinese. Along with this, more prominent artists are also engaging in raising people’s awareness about language issues.

¹⁴ <http://www.rfa.org>

¹⁵ བསྐྱེད་གཙང་མ་སྐྱ་བའི་དམ་བཅའ་ཞེ་



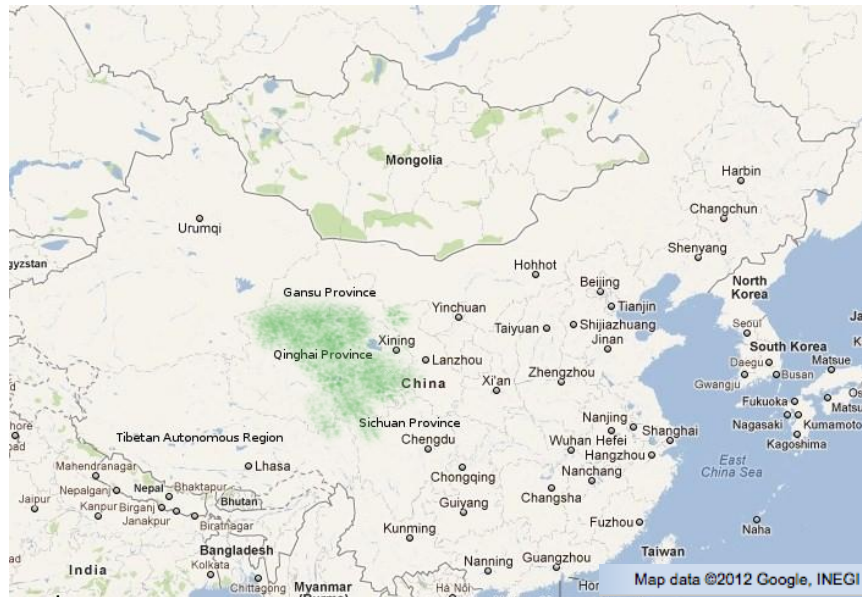
Figure 5 “Please pledge to speak a pure father tongue!”¹⁶

These large social changes in many Tibetan areas indicate a growing awareness of the importance of language maintenance as well as a focus on the linguistic identity of Tibetans in general and also a rising Tibetan ethnic identity in China. Having provided an overview of the Tibetan language and salient linguistic ideologies, I will focus on general linguistic and social dimensions of Amdo Tibetan as a motivation for the current study. I will introduce the linguistic variable of interest, argue for its significance and suggest it as a linguistic feature under the current study.

1.4 Amdo Tibetan and variable of interest

¹⁶ <http://www.tibettimes.net/>

An estimated 1.8 million Tibetans speak Amdo Tibetan in what is commonly known as Northern Tibet, or Amdo Tibet (Padma Lhun'grub 2009). The cultural area encompasses Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures and Counties of Gansu Province and Qinghai Province in contemporary China. It also includes parts of Xunhua and Hualong counties of Haidong and parts of Aba Tibetan prefecture of Sichuan Province (Xi 2002; Qu 2004). Map 2 shows the approximate areas (highlighted in green) where Amdo Tibetans live in contemporary China.



Map 2 Approximate areas where Amdo Tibetans live in China

Map data ©2012 Google, INEGI

There are two enregistered Amdo Tibetan dialects. These dialects are distinguished in terms of the socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds of the speaker

communities. These are commonly referred to as farmer dialect¹⁷ and nomad dialect¹⁸.

Of these dialects, nomad dialect is the more conservative, and is used in the media.

Farmer dialect, on the other hand, is more innovative due to indirect language contact in the area and is more stigmatized at the regional level.

Nomad dialect, whose speakers tend to be more isolated and buffered from other cultural forces, retains vestiges of earlier language varieties that have receded among farmer dialect (Spriggs 1974). Consequently, the differences between nomad dialect and written Tibetan are perceived to be quite small (Lcagsthar rgyal 2008). Because of this, nomad dialect is considered to be ‘consistent with the law of Tibetan language’ and is regarded highly by Amdo Tibetan speakers, particularly among educated Amdo Tibetans. This, along with the general ideologies involving written Tibetan as discussed above, is a salient ideological dimension of nomad dialect shared by more educated speakers.

Farmer dialect, the linguistic variety in which the current study is based, is typically spoken in ethnically diverse areas of Northeastern parts of the Amdo Tibetan dialect region by an estimated 0.5 million speakers (gna’ blogros rgyalmtshan 1999: 473). Linguistically, farmer dialect speaking areas form part of what is generally known as Amdo Sprachbund (Janhunen 2004). There are around 15 mutually unintelligible languages spoken in areas where farmer dialect is spoken. These languages span four

17 རིང་སྐད།

18 འཕྲོག་སྐད།

different language families including Turkic, Mongolic, Sinitic and Bodic. During various historical periods, different languages such as Amdo Tibetan, Northwestern Mandarin and Mongolian each held a dominant linguistic position and influenced each other as well as other languages in the areas of phonology, word order, and case markers for centuries (Dwyer 1995; Janhunen, Peltomaa, Sandman & Xiawu Dongzhou 2008). All of the languages within this Amdo Sprachbund, including farmer Tibetan, have been moving towards the gradual development of similar forms (Janhunen 2004; Slater 2003; Dwyer 1995).

One of the common typological features shared by languages of Amdo Sprachbund is evident in the final coda system, as it has been moving towards a reduced system. The reduced coda consonant system is more advanced in farmer dialects. Due to geographic and linguistic isolation, there is a tendency for more conservative Tibetan varieties such as nomad dialect to exhibit more or less the original Proto-Bodic finals including /b/, /d/, /g/, /r/, /m/, /l/, /n/ and /ŋ/¹⁹. An exception is /s/²⁰, which has long been lost. The non-nasal consonants such as /b/, /d/, /g/ and /r/ are synchronically realized as the weak continuants [w], [l], [ɣ] and [r] (Janhunen et al 2008: 45). The nomad dialect spoken in Golok is an example of a conservative nomad dialect that retains all of these features (Qu 1982; Padma Lhun'grub 2009; Janhunen & Kalsang Norbu 2000). Farmer dialects such as the ones spoken in Xunhua and Chamtsang,

¹⁹ ག ང། ཅ། ཆ། ཇ། ཉ། ཏ། ཐ། ད།

²⁰ ལ།

however, have lost almost all of these oral finals including /b/, /d/, /r/ and /l/, retaining only a three way distinction between /g/, /n/ and /ŋ/ (Janhunen & Kalsang Norbu 2000: 259 – 261, Padma Lhun'grub 2009). This reduced final coda system is a common typological feature of dialects in Amdo Sprachbund and is more advanced within farmer dialects than is the dialect of nomads.

Besides the coda consonant inventory, certain vocalic and consonantal features of farmer dialect also represent the diffusion of certain areal sounds through different languages of the area. The basic vowel inventory of Amdo Tibetan, for example, is composed of /a/, /e/, /o/, /ə/, /i/ and /u/ (Gesang Jumai and Gesang Yangjing 2002), aligning it with many nomad dialects (Padma Lhun'grub 2009). However, in Amdo Tibetan, as in farmer dialects more generally, these vowels are often slightly raised (Padma Lhun'grub 2009). In addition, there are not only diphthongal vowels (Janhunen & Kalsang Norbu 2000). Moreover, farmer dialect (especially the variety spoken in Hualong, Xunhua and Jianzha) even has rounded vowels²¹ such as /y/, /ø/ and /œ/ which are not found in other Tibetan dialects in the area but found only in Chinese dialects (Wang 2004, 2005). In addition, due to prolonged language interaction in the area, phonetic features such as the presence of /f/ and other characteristics of Northwestern Chinese have penetrated the Amdo Tibetan phonology (Padma Lhun'grub 2009; Gesang Jumai and Gesang Yangjing 2002: 198). All of the above discussion highlights

²¹ These rounded vowels are common in Tibetan communities that are closer to non-Tibetan speaking communities. In words like *chu* 'water' speakers from these communities tend to say \widehat{tjy} with a rounded vowel instead of $\widehat{tj\ddot{a}}$.

the distinguishing linguistic features of Amdo Tibetan are the outcome of closer linguistic interaction with other languages, as compared with the nomad dialects of Amdo Tibetan.

The linguistic variable that I have chosen to study is one of these shared linguistic features. I am focusing on only one linguistic feature, the bilabial nasal coda (m), as it illustrates the social dynamics of language variation and change in a small farming Tibetan community. This linguistic feature is the bilabial nasal coda (m), as it occurs in words like *lam* ‘road’. The variable has two salient forms. In the case of the merged variant [n], the underlying nasal coda (m) loses its bilabial feature and becomes [n]. This merger is also often accompanied by a change in the quality of the preceding vowel, which often gets raised due to the raising of the tongue in producing the merged variant [n]²², at times resulting in homophony (e.g. /lam/ becomes [len] ‘road’, rendering it homophonous with /len/ [len] ‘to take’). The loss of the bilabial feature results in its merger with another distinctive coda sound /n/, and hence becomes indistinguishable. On the other hand, the non-merged variant [m] retains its original bilabial feature and remains unchanged. The following examples containing the original words in Tibetan along with their glosses and different realizations should give a clear picture of this linguistic feature. I will return to this variable in Chapter 3. Examples demonstrating the variability of the bilabial nasal coda are given below in Table 1.

²² The full range of factors driving the vocalic variation is more complex. My focus in this dissertation is the consonantal variation only.

Columns labeled non-merged and merged are transcribed in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

<i>Tibetan</i>	<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Non-merged</i>	<i>Merged</i>
Lam	n. road	[lam]	[len]
Rim	n. level	[rəm]	[rən]
Gsum	n. three	[^h səm]	[^h sən]
‘gram	n. side	[dʒam]	[dʒen]

Table 1 Variability in coda (m) in Amdo Tibetan

The merged variant [n]²³, as part of the general coda consonant reduction, is widespread in farmer dialect (Hua 2005). Farmer dialect, as we recall, is the dialect that is more innovative, as a result of its intense linguistic interaction with other dialects and languages in the area. This is also the type of dialect upon which the current study is based. The non-merged variant [m] on the other hand, is typically found in more conservative dialects such as the nomad and semi-pastoral dialects of Xiahe, Tongren, Huangyuan, Guinan, Zeku and Tianjun²⁴ counties (Jiang 1996; Hua 2005). In addition,

²³ This merged variant [n], as Jamsu (2010) shows, is also one of the highly enregistered features distinguishing farmer from nomad dialect.

²⁴ མ་ཇུ། རེབ་ལོང་། ལྷོང་ལོང་། མང་ར་ རྗེ་ལོག ཐེམ་ཆེན།

the same non-merged variant [m] is also taught in ‘normative’²⁵ schools throughout the area, as the written Tibetan retains clear distinctions between the two forms.

In the preceding sections, I have provided the larger sociolinguistic dimensions of language variation in Amdo Tibetan and identified the linguistic feature to be studied in this dissertation. The linguistic variable (m), which merges with the alveolar form [n] in coda positions in farmer dialect, is the focus of this dissertation. In the next section, I will provide three reasons for the necessity of an in-depth study of this feature at a community level, not only in terms of Tibetan dialectology but also larger sociolinguistics theories.

1.5 Why this study?

The primary goal of this dissertation is to understand the social and linguistic dimensions of merging at a community level. This merging is a part of larger ongoing linguistic change characteristic of many farmer dialect speaking areas. Many of the existing studies have so far focused on the description of various dialects spoken in Amdo (Hua 2002; Padma Lhun’grub 2009; Janhunen & Kalsang Norbu 2000), and have not systematically explored any aspects of language variation and change at the community level. This dissertation is an attempt to unravel the social and linguistic dimensions involved with the variable (m). Through the exploration of this particular feature, the dissertation seeks to identify and then address, the social factors such as age,

²⁵ I have borrowed the term ‘normative’ from Janhunen and Kalsang Norbu (2000). I am using this term to refer to the linguistic norms taught and enforced through schools.

gender which are leading the community towards the merged variant and literacy which is disfavoring the merged variant. This in-depth analysis of the linguistic variable (m) intends to provide a more nuanced understanding of language variation and change in contemporary Amdo Tibet.

Merging is a common phenomenon which is occurring at an ever increasing rate in many farmer dialect speaking areas. A simultaneous rise in literacy and educational levels complicates the sociolinguistic context – an issue that I will return to in Chapter 3. The rise in education is important to note because Janhunen and Kalsang Norbu (2000) make the observation that “the school system seems to be gradually influencing the dialectal situation by introducing the regional norm of Amdo Tibetan as an alternative to the local vernacular” (250). In the community studied by Janhunen and Kalsang Norbu (2000), the non-merged variant [n] is considered the ‘local’ dialect whereas the non-merged variant [m] is considered the ‘regional norm’²⁶. Similarly, Padma Lhun’grub (2009) observes that some speakers use the non-merged variant [m] when using ‘a more literary style or making a banquet speech’²⁷ (201). These anecdotal observations suggest that the non-merged variant [m] may also be getting introduced back into the community by those who have been educated through the normative schoolings and this is indeed what I have found. The overall change towards the merged variant and the rising level of education in many farming Tibetan areas thus paints a

²⁶ Binary categorization of these linguistic features is problematic as many of the older speakers of farmer dialect such as the one studied here still use the non-merged variant [m].

²⁷ ཡིག་ཀླད་ལ་བཟུན་ཁུལ་གྱིས་བརྗོད་པ་དང་ལྷོན་བཤད་སྐོར་གྱི་ཀླབས་སུ་རྩེ་མའ་འབྲོག་གི་ཀླད་ལྟར་-མལི་རང་གླུ་ཐོན་ལ།

complex picture which requires analysis not only of production patterns but also of concomitant social meanings as I will show in this dissertation.

Inquiry into the social meanings attached to aspects of linguistic variation is particularly important in the present linguistic situation. In this case, traditional characterizations of linguistic variables cannot be applied. Traditional variationist studies tend to characterize linguistic variables in terms of a number of binary categorizations. These terms include binary categorizations such as ‘local’ vs. ‘regional’, ‘standard’ vs. ‘non-standard’, ‘formal’ vs. ‘vernacular’, and ‘stigmatized vs. non-stigmatized’. While such concepts have proven to be important in diagnosing patterns of language change in many industrialized societies, parameters of sociolinguistics such as notions of ‘standard’ cannot be easily applied to other language contexts where different social realities persist (c.f. Clarke 2009). Unlike more industrialized social contexts in which studies of mainstream language variation and change have been typically carried out (c.f. Milroy 2004), many communities, such as the one under consideration, lack a clear notion of standard spoken language. This sociolinguistics situation presents a new reality.

To categorize the linguistic features in terms of ‘local’ vs. ‘regional’ or ‘normative’ vs. ‘dialectal’, as Janhunen and Kalsang Norbu (2000) did, does not help one understand the social meaning of these linguistic variants in a sociolinguistic context. If one were to characterize different realizations of the bilabial nasal coda (m) as ‘normative’ vs. ‘dialectal’, one would immediately run into difficulty in trying to

explain the linguistic behaviors of older speakers who still show high usages levels for the more conservative feature [m]. In this case, the non-merged variant is the feature that many older speakers learned natively when they were growing up. One cannot ascribe typical ideological associations of a ‘standard’ language to these speakers’ linguistic behavior. However, in the case of a younger speaker who has acquired the non-merged variant feature through normative schooling, then it might be appropriate to talk about the distinction in terms of ‘normative’ vs. ‘non-normative’ and ‘non-local’ vs. ‘local’. Similarly, one might characterize the distinction between the two variants of the linguistic variable as simply ‘nomad’ and ‘farmer’ dialect. This label again is not an accurate term to characterize the linguistic feature as both features are found in farmer dialect. Distinctions between ‘nomad’ and ‘farmer’ dialects highlight regional and socioeconomic variability, whereas the term ‘normative’ vs. ‘non-normative’ places this variable along the dimension of ‘standard’ vs. ‘non-standard’. Similarly, while the dimension of ‘local vs. normative’ might be relevant for those who have had the opportunity to be educated in contemporary school settings, this does not apply to those who are older and have never had the opportunity to go to school.

This type of sociolinguistic context, as Nagy (2009) points out, can be a positive one, when employed as a means to move beyond the influence of ‘standard ideology’ (Milroy 2004; Cheshire 2005). The researcher is thus required to understand the stereotypes and social values associated with different variants rather than subscribing to ‘standard ideology’ which undoubtedly has been quite influential in many

mainstream variation studies (Cheshire 2005). Thus, it requires us to consider the social significance of these linguistic variants more carefully in the process of understanding language variation and change. Understanding how these linguistic variants are perceived and understood by the speakers themselves, rather than assigning them any of the above labels, is one of the goals of this project.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in applying and testing some of the fundamentals of variationist sociolinguistics in lesser studied linguistic communities or ‘indigenous minority languages’ (Dennis and Stanford 2009). This is evidenced by the recent publication of a collection of variation studies based on indigenous minority languages represented by Dennis and Stanford (2009). The interest is driven by a need to move beyond mainstream languages in order to test our current understandings about language change and social dimensions, as findings in less-urbanized communities have differed and even challenged established sociolinguistic concepts. One example is the notion of class, which has been heavily used in explaining patterns of language variation and change in Western-oriented studies or urban contexts (c.f. Noglo 2009). This social factor, as a primary independent social factor, has had a profound impact on sociolinguistic theories about language variation and change since the beginning of the field. However, the concept of social class has not been all that useful in studies of many indigenous minority language communities such as the Nganhcara of Australia (Smith & Johnson 1986), the Vaupes region of the Amazon (Jackson 1983), and the Sui People of China (Stanford 2007, 2009). Instead, it is locally

relevant social factors such as ‘clan’ or ‘marriage patterns’ that have been found to correlate with social variations of the linguistic feature (Stanford 2009; Smith & Johnson 1986; Bowerman 2008).

This suggests that there are merits in studying previously uninvestigated speech communities because these communities exist within unique social realities. For example, mass education has become available only very recently in many Tibetan areas of China and consequently many people have never had the opportunity to receive any formal education in many Tibetan areas of contemporary China. A good number of people, with the exception of the younger generation, remain completely illiterate in this subsistence-based farming economy. Further, male and female speakers have had different levels of access to education, making this community an interesting site in which to explore relationships between education and gender. The relatively high illiteracy rate present among members of this community also gives us a rare opportunity to investigate the dynamics of language variation and change before mass education and standardization of language became common. The study focuses on a type of community long gone in more industrialized societies. It brings into sharp focus the differing tensions and challenges faced by such a community as it confronts the challenges of globalization. As various social groups participate in local sound change quite differently, the investigation of sound change in this community may bring new insights into patterns of language variation and change.

Taken as a whole, there is a great need to fully unpack the sociolinguistic dimensions associated with merging. On the one hand, merging is part of a larger linguistic change observed in many of these languages. This is not taught in the normative schools. It is part of a larger sound change that is affecting many different languages in the area. Such linguistic change appears to interact with social dimensions such as speaker's education level, a factor which is itself intricately tied to other social factors such as gender and age. This presents a complicated sociolinguistic situation worthy of investigation. One of the objectives of this study is to provide a full and more nuanced understanding of this linguistic feature by situating its observed patterning within the local speech community. By probing the ethnographic information and social meaning of linguistic features, the social motivation for the usage patterns associated with the final nasal neutralization can be better understood. This dissertation aims to fill a gap within Tibetan dialectology by employing not only new ways of investigating language variation and change but also attending to the local conceptualization of language variation and its significance.

1.6 Organization of the dissertation

The remainder of the dissertation is organized in the following way. In Chapter 2, I review the theoretical framework within which this dissertation is situated. Chapter 3 provides an ethnographic description of the farming village in order to contextualize the study. Chapter 4 details the type of data used, its collection, sociolinguistic

characteristics of speakers, and methods of analysis employed. Chapter 5 provides results for the production patterns of the variable and discusses the social and linguistic factors that have led to the overall trend towards the merged variant. Chapter 6 examines different indexical values associated with the variable (m) among the older speakers (above the age of 45) and younger educated speakers and then investigates the social meaning of the resurgence of the non-merged variant [m] among certain educated younger speakers. In Chapter 7, I discuss the main findings and implications of this study for Tibetan dialectology and sociolinguistics in general.

Chapter 2 Theoretical approaches

2.1 Introduction

This dissertation combines three different theoretical approaches to the study of language variation and change. In section 2.2, I explain the apparent time construct which is used in traditional Labovian sociolinguistics to understand the production patterns of language variation and clarify how it is typically studied. This approach will help us investigate the overall language usage patterns in the community and identify social and linguistic factors correlating with linguistic variation. In section 2.3, I engage with orders of indexicality as a way of conceptualizing the social meaning of language variation. I will elaborate on how indexical values are the same and different from social meanings. Conceptualizing meaning in terms of orders of indexicality helps us identify different types of potential social meanings associated with the linguistic variants in question. This will help me address the issue of social motivation of language variation and change. In section 2.4, I briefly discuss the importance of ethnography as a way of discovering the locally relevant social practices that shape and influence speakers' choice of linguistic variants.

2.2 Language change in Labovian sociolinguistics

This dissertation employs a combined quantitative and qualitative, ethnographic approach to the study of language variation and change. The study of language change

within Labovian or quantitative sociolinguistics is largely based on the apparent time construct (Labov 1966). The basic assumption underlying this theoretical construct is that synchronic differences observed among different generations of adult speakers are reflective of differences in the language variety that was spoken when each generation acquired language, and therefore studying the language patterns of different generations of speakers at a given moment in time gives us a picture of the diachronic change.

Labov's foundational study of language change in progress (1963) examined sound change in Martha's Vineyard. He investigated speakers' use of the (ay) and (aw) diphthongs across different generations of speakers and found that the nuclei of these diphthongal vowels were higher among younger speakers. Based on this apparent time data, combined with supplemental data from earlier time periods, as well as general historical linguistic knowledge on the development of English, he was able to show that the age-related patterns reflected a change in progress.

The effectiveness of the use of apparent time data to study diachronic language change has been largely corroborated in subsequent studies (Trudgill 1988; Bailey, Wikle, Tillery & Sand 1991; Labov 1994; Cukor-Avila 2002). For example, Bailey et al (1991) investigated a number of phonological variables in the speech of Texas residents through two telephone surveys conducted in 1989 and compared them to real time data from the Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States compiled in the mid-1970s (Bailey, Wikle, Tillery & Sand 1991). The results of this comparative study confirmed that the linguistic changes observed 15 years prior were indeed reflective of an ongoing change.

Trudgill's (1988) restudy of a community he had studied 20 years ago, Norwich, England, also came to a similar conclusion. This approach to language change, utilized in quantitative studies over the last three to four decades, has been shown to be very effective methodological tool in sociolinguistics and historical linguistics (Chambers 1995: 200). Therefore, this dissertation utilizes this apparent time construct to investigate possible language change in the context of Spearhead village.

In describing language change, patterns are often characterized as either coming from above or below (Labov 1966, 1994, 2001). The distinction here refers to 'levels of social awareness' (1994: 78). Changes from above are often socially favored and prescribed and are led by dominant social groups. Labov's (1966) classic study of final and post-vocalic /r/ in words like *fourth* and *floor* in New York City department stores, and more generally, the Lower East Side, provides a good example of a change from above. He showed that the increased rhotic use of /r/ among younger speakers in New York City (a traditionally non-rhotic dialect), was in part due to the emergence of the rhotic /r/ as a feature of prestige dialect as taught in the educational setting.

Language change from below on the other hand involves forms that are not overtly prescribed. Both native speakers and trained linguists generally do not notice this kind of change, especially when the change is relatively new. However, as the change advances in the community, the newer linguistic form may begin to be noticed and even stigmatized in the speech community. More crucially, language change from below is not overtly prescribed and can in fact be introduced by any social class (Labov

1994) (and indeed is very often introduced by classes in the middle of the socioeconomic hierarchy rather than by upper class groups).

While such characterization of language change in terms of above and below the level of ‘social awareness’ has been indeed useful in many variationist studies, the present sociolinguistic situation requires us to move beyond such binary categorization. The increasing use of the non-merged variant [m] among the more educated speakers might be described as a change from above in the sense that it is overtly prescribed through schools. The overall change towards the merged variant [n] from that of the non-merged variant [m] on the other hand can be described as a change from below in the sense that this more innovative variant is a part of larger linguistic change that is not introduced through normative schools. Therefore, the basic distinction that I am making here is not in terms of above or below ‘social awareness’ but rather whether it is prescribed or not. I will return to this issue in Chapter 3 and discuss this in greater detail with respect to the current linguistic variable.

2.3 Indexical values and social meaning

Before defining ‘social meaning’, let me first briefly introduce an important and necessary theoretical concept. I am referring to the notion of indexicality as explored by Silverstein (Silverstein 1976, 1985, 1998, 2003). This theoretical notion offers insights into the manner in which linguistic forms can carry various types of non-referential meanings. Silverstein observes that linguistic forms have traditionally been studied in

the context of referential value. This property of the linguistic form has been the subject of semantics. Furthermore, he argues that this type of referential function is only partial to the meaning of linguistic utterances. The non-referential meanings of linguistic utterances are therefore quite essential. While this is indeed a very general and simplified interpretation of the term 'indexicality', the view that language is at heart both indexical and referential will be sufficient in my discussion of the role of indexicality in social meaning in this dissertation.

When we invoke the notion of indexicality, we can also speak of indexical values or orders. The indexical meaning of a particular linguistic utterance, Silverstein (2003) argues, starts with the n -th order. The n -th level indexical order value could be simply an index of a group or category. It entails an association between a particular linguistic feature or variety and some meaningful social group or category such as female and working class. While relationships between any linguistic form and indexical values are always ideological in nature, the $n + 1$ st order is more ideological than the n -th order since the $n + 1$ st order presupposes a relationship between linguistic forms and socio-demographic categories but goes beyond this by implicating stance and persona types of meanings. Silverstein (2003) uses Labov's (1972) discussion of the association between the standard variant of (r) and 'prestige' as an example. For Silverstein, the n -th order indexical value is the association between the standard variant (r) and the middle class while the $n + 1$ st order value is "prestige" which comes about as a result of the interpretation of the n -th order indexical relation.

The notion of orders of indexicality is helpful for us to investigate the social meaning of linguistic variation in interaction. However, this is not to say that this specific theoretical apparatus is a precursor to the study of the social meaning of linguistic variation. This is clearly demonstrated by Labov's (1963) foundational study of the social meaning of sound change in Martha's Vineyard. Nevertheless, thinking in terms of orders of indexicality allows the researcher to draw connections between different types of social meanings which include not only larger social categories but also relationships between social categories and ideologies such as 'prestige', as well as between social categories and interactional positions/moves, or 'stance'. Thus, to repackage Labov's (1963) discussion of social meaning in terms of indexicality, one might suggest that the increased use of centralized /ay/ by fishermen may not only index membership in a particular group or a particular group identity (social meaning at the n -th indexical level) but also an oppositional stance towards the mainland incursion and positive orientation towards the island (social meaning at the $n + 1$ st level)²⁸. However, it is important to note that the social meanings at different orders of indexicality are not mutually exclusive as centralization of (ay) could index either or both an – 'islander' identity and the stance 'oppositional to the mainland'.

Utilizing this approach to the study of social meaning allows me to properly understand the social significance of the resurgence of the non-merged variant [m] among the younger educated. I take a social constructionist view of the relationship

²⁸ Specifically, this refers to the old time fishermen and younger islanders who have a positive orientation towards the island.

between language and social categories (Eckert 2000; Schilling-Estes 2004; Podesva 2007). Linguistic variation observed among the younger speakers is therefore not simply reflecting social structure but rather co-constitutes social meanings such as an identity as a particular type of Tibetan or a stance of resistance. By exploring the ideological interpretations of the local linguistic variation (as evidenced in the variable realization of (m), I attempt to elucidate the social significance of the resurgence of the non-merged variant (m) among the younger educated speakers.

2.4 Ethnographic approach

Ethnographic research, implicitly or explicitly, as Johnstone (2000) points out, has always been a facet of sociolinguistic work. The importance of ethnography in understanding language variation and change has been highlighted by a number of previous researchers. Wolfram and Fasold (1974: 96-97) emphasize the importance of the researcher having extensive ethnographic knowledge of a community in order to fully understand the social dynamics of language change. Indeed, many studies have demonstrated the utility and importance of this approach, including a number of earlier variationist studies (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 1996; Dubois and Horvath 1999). They have shown that motivating the correlations between linguistic variants and social factors should be based on a sound understanding of the socio-historical background, as well as the ideologies and identities that are relevant in the social context. The approach taken with this study is a similarly ethnographic one - one that allows the researcher to

investigate the social motivation of language change by attending to the sociocultural histories and practices associated with the community. In following other researchers of language variation and change (Nichols 1976; Dubois and Horvath 1999; Eckert 2000; Schilling-Estes 2002b), I also maintain that the linguistic leadership of women in general is best understood by understanding the local context within which men and women live their lives.

There are three principle ways in which this study is ethnographically driven to understand the ‘social organization, social activities, symbolic and material resources’ particular to the community under study (Duranti 1997: 85). First, I rely extensively on my own ethnographic knowledge of the current speech community. Second, I use sociolinguistic interviews as a source of ethnographic information (I will elaborate on the nature of sociolinguistic interviews in Chapter 4). Moreover, I use extensive cultural and historical research to supplement my knowledge as a member of the community. These kinds of ethnographic knowledge provide an insider’s crucial perspective into local cultural practices relevant to the current study. In addition, I also take the position of a researcher and relate the ethnographic components to patterns of language use. These different approaches have granted me both an insider’s subjective and outsider’s objective perspective which I have found to be useful in understanding the dynamics of language variation and change in the local context. Let me elaborate on each of these points separately.

One of the ways through which I incorporate the practice of ethnography into this variationist study is to rely on my own ethnographic knowledge of the local community. I grew up in Spearhead – the site where the current study is situated and the village where I was born and raised. My upbringing in the village has provided me with extensive ethnographic knowledge as I, myself, lived and experienced village life up until the age of 19. My earlier years in the village have provided me with an intimate experience of what life is like in the village, and I have found this experience to be very useful in presenting local linguistic and cultural practices from an insider’s perspective. My knowledge of the local community has been supplemented by my close interaction with family and friends over the previous 10 years of undergraduate and graduate studies in the United States. During these years, I have returned to the village several times and have remained in close touch with family members and friends there . Through phone calls and recently Skype, I have been able to keep abreast of the changes happening in Spearhead. I have been able to consult with different people in the village and ask personal questions about their family history through virtual communication. This has enabled me to observe new developments in the village with intense curiosity from a physically distant, yet emotionally close vantage point. This has given me tremendous subjective and personal insight into cultural practices integral to this study while at the same time allowing me to achieve a certain degree of objectivity.

An additional resource is the use of sociolinguistic interviews as a source of local knowledge. The interviews conducted for this study are a rich source of ethnographic

information and have become important pieces of text through which I have gained a deeper understanding of local socio-cultural practices. They have not only supplemented my understanding of the village and its history but have challenged my thinking as well. My experience as a member of the community contributes to the insider perspective that I attempt to bring to life in this dissertation. Of course, insider perspectives are most valuable when combined with a more objective perspective. My role as a researcher has allowed me to achieve exactly that.

Although I have been back three times over the past 10 years, the pace of change in many aspects of village life has been accelerating rapidly. While this has been taking place, I, as an educated member of the village, have been living in a completely different culture, occupied with different types of worries and concerns. This growing distance between me and the village is symbolized by the fact that my family and relatives still leave a portion of the meal for me when they get together and each year they make me a ceremonial arrow to be offered to the local mountain deity. The annual making of the ceremonial arrow and the symbolic sharing of a meal with me also constantly remind them that I am slowly drifting away from the ways of village life – a trend that might continue with younger generations in the village. It serves to remind me that I simultaneously am, and am not - an insider. Putting on the hat of a sociolinguist has allowed me to shift perspective from that of a member of the village to that of a researcher. This unique combination of perspectives, has granted me multiple lenses through which I can analyze language variation and change in a locally relevant

and meaningful way. This combination has allowed me to interpret the linguistic variable (m)'s observed patterning within the local and larger social context.

This dissertation thus builds upon previous ethnographically informed variationist studies of language variation and change. It moves beyond abstract terminology and thinking to the perspectives of the speakers themselves as they experience language. Language change must be considered in the context of the particular social circumstances in which communities live. And thus the perspective that guides interpretation of the phonological variation presented in this study is an ethnographic one - one that is sensitive to how different ways of talking makes sense to local speakers. I aim to understand the unwritten common sense of the village and to understand the immediate and local meanings that organize the speakers' conceptualizations of language variation. I make an attempt to gain a sound understanding of what people of the mountains and villages do with their language and relate these to the social dynamics that go into the social stratification of sound change. This approach allows me to talk about the meaningful aspect of language variation and understand how speakers construct their sense of belonging in the local community and beyond.

Chapter 3 Language variation in local context

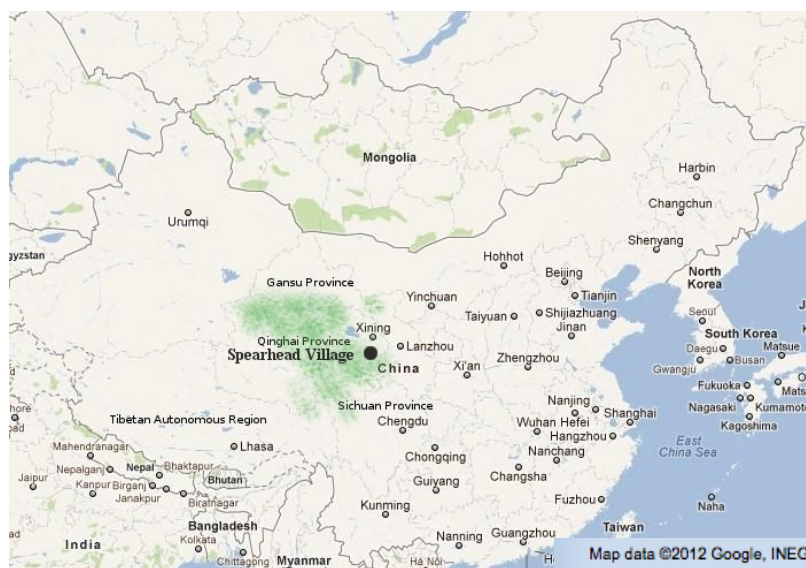
3.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I have introduced the linguistic feature of interest and the theoretical frameworks necessary to understand language variation and change. In this chapter, I will provide a closer look at a number of the cultural practices and ideologies that are important in the understanding of language change variation and change in a local context. With this aim in mind, I first introduce the farming village where the current study is situated in section 3.2. In section 3.3, I provide some overview of local dialect variation, ideologies and the linguistic variable (m). Furthermore, I also discuss the linguistic variable as it relates to ‘social awareness’. I then focus on several cultural norms including marriage patterns in 3.4, traditional gender-specific local labor practices in 3.5, childrearing practices in 3.6 and the rising level of education in 3.7. Finally, I also describe new acts of identity taking place in the local Tibetan area in 3.8 to show a shifting identity of Tibetan in contemporary China.

3.2 Introduction to Spearhead

The village of Spearhead (pseudonym) is the speech community in which this study of phonological variation and change takes place. It is a medium-sized farming community of about 380 people, all speaking farmer dialect. Spearhead is a mountain community – a designation, as I explore below, with important linguistic consequences. Situated not far away from Xining, the provincial capital city of Qinghai Province in Western China, this small monolingual village is nestled high up in the mountains. It is about 10 miles distant from the county seat, which is home to a number of ethnic groups

including Tibetans, Han Chinese, and Chinese Muslims. To the west is a township that is traditionally nomadic, and to the north are more Tibetan farming communities. Still more Tibetan villages lie not far to the south. All of these villages, like Spearhead, rely on annual rainfall for cultivating the fields. To the east, at the foot of the mountain range, is one of the few Tibetan and Chinese Muslim farming villages. All of the valley communities depend on the nearby river to irrigate their fields, and all of these communities are within a 7-mile radius of each other. Small rivers, mountain ranges and farming fields separate these villages. A small, unpaved road originating from the county seat connects most of these villages. Spearhead village is squarely within the farmer dialect speaking area. Map 3 below shows the approximate location where Spearhead village is in contemporary China.



Map 3 Approximate location of Spearhead village

Despite the fact that many of the villages in the area engage in farming as a means of making a living, local dialect variation parallels the presence or absence of irrigation among the local farmers. Two types of distinctive farming communities, water and mountain are recognized. Water communities are at a lower elevation, and live closely with non-Tibetans including Chinese Muslims and Hui (Han Chinese). These water farming communities rely on irrigation systems instead of natural rainfall. Within the general category of mountain communities, two subcategories including dark mountain and transitional zone are often recognized. Dark mountain villages are semi-pastoralists who rely on both non-irrigated farming land and on a large number of livestock. They usually inhabit higher grounds in the vicinity of nomadic communities where the higher altitude permits planting of only selective crops. Sandwiched between these two types of communities is the transitional zone, a subset of mountain communities that rely on rainfall. Each of these types of villages is associated with a particular type of dialect; Spearhead belongs to the transitional mountain dialect.

As is the case with nearly all Tibetan villages in the area, people in Spearhead village have traditionally been self-employed subsistence-based farmers. Like many nearby villages and many others across China, the village was swept up in a number of Chinese Government campaigns including the period of the Great Leap Forward between 1958 and 1961, and the Cultural Revolution of the mid 1960's and 1970's. The village suffered from massive food shortages and lost many people to the great famines of the late 1950s and early 1960's. Starting in the late 1950's, individual families' lands

and properties including livestock were collected and managed by the village communes. The collectivization period stretched over almost twenty years during which time the villagers worked in the commune for work-points. The work-points were then tallied towards the end of the year to calculate the total income for each individual family. Redistribution of the land and livestock did not occur until around 1980. A new chapter in the history of the village began with the post-Mao era of the late 1970's. With the introduction of a series of favorable policies initiated by Deng Xiaoping and other leaders, the village entered a new era.

For the last three decades, more visible and tangible material changes have also occurred in the village. Electricity, for example, was introduced to the village in the early 90's - a time when major roads connecting the village to the nearby county seat were barely existent. People rode mules and donkeys to travel between the village and the county seat to buy essentials like matches, salt and shoes. Prior to the introduction of mobile phones in the village, villagers stood on their roofs and shouted their messages to fellow residents. Only one or two families owned black and white television sets and few owned radios. After only little more than a decade, however, these have all become things from a distant past. Families now own flat-screen televisions, satellite dishes and DVD players. Motorcycles and, increasingly, automobiles are the preferred mode of transportation. Most, if not all, family members own their mobile phones. More recently, families have begun to own real estate down at

the county seat where several different ethnic groups co-exist. Many families now have houses both in the county seat and in the village up in the mountains.

One of the major factors leading to these changes in the local economy is related to the harvesting of a particular fungus used for medicinal purposes in China. This fungus, *ophiocordyceps sinensis*, naturally grown in remote higher areas of the Tibetan Plateau and available only for about a month in April, has suddenly become so valuable over the last decade that anyone, regardless of their skills and education, can become well off within one collection season. Because of this, parents sometimes remove their school-aged young children from school and take them with them to distant areas to collect this valuable fungus. This sudden increase in individual family income is beginning to redefine the socioeconomic status of many families in the village. Reliance on special skills such as traditional woodcraft and traditional medicinal knowledge, which require years of practice and learning, brings in very little money in comparison to the seasonal income from the sale of this highly valued fungus. And livestock, which used to be an indicator of well-off families in the village, is no longer an important part of the local culture.

In recent years, the villagers have gradually split into two different groups, each struggling for the power that comes with being a part of the village leadership team while accusing each other for whatever has gone wrong in the village. The conflict has been so intense at times that on several occasions it has even resulted in physical confrontations between these two groups. These days, members of the opposing groups

are barely on speaking terms. As a result, religious gatherings and activities have split along group lines. This kind of intense local political atmosphere has impacted the very quality of village life. Villagers constantly lament the political pall that has taken hold of their village but yet remain caught in its throes²⁹. Various government representatives, local and culturally important figures have stepped in on occasion to resolve the conflict - but all to no avail. Perhaps this is the cost of rapid social change. Whatever the actual reasons are, these days villagers often do not get together even during important holidays such as Tibetan New Year but instead tend to stay home and entertain themselves watching TV or listening to Tibetan radio.

Having provided a general introduction to the village site, I will now provide a picture of local dialect variation and the ideologies associated with local dialects. Through exploring language variation and ideologies, I will also describe how the linguistic variants of the final bilabial nasal (m) are related to local language varieties and social evaluations.

3.3 Local dialect variation and the linguistic variable

Despite the fact that many of the villages in the area engage in farming as a means of making a living, local speakers characterize the communities in discrete units based on economical and ecological factors. Two larger types of farming communities

²⁹ Changes are finally taking place in the village. Younger members of the village recently got together and decided to rebuild the village temple that had long been neglected. Younger villagers are actively seeking funds to repair the village temple in the fall.

are distinctively recognized by the local people, who refer to them as mountain and water villages³⁰. Within the general category of mountain communities, local speakers see two types of sub-communities including dark mountain and transitional. Dark mountain villages are semi-pastoralists who rely on both non-irrigated farming land and on large herds of livestock. Water farming communities rely on irrigation instead of natural rainfall. Sandwiched between these two types of communities is the aptly named transitional. These communities, as a subset of mountain communities, rely on natural rainfall as well as on ownership of limited livestock. Spearhead, the site of current study, is a transitional community of mountain villages, as opposed to water village.

The distinctions made by local communities are also associated with particular types of local farmer dialect. Villagers typically refer to the dialect varieties in terms of broader mountain and water dialects. Within their immediate environments these dialects can be hierarchically organized based on their geography. Mountain dialect speakers inhabit higher ground in the vicinity of nomadic communities where the higher altitude permits planting of only selective crops. Water communities on the other hand, are down at lower elevations, living closely with non-Tibetans including Chinese Muslims and Hui (Han Chinese). The socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds of these communities play an important role in the social evaluation of the local dialects.

Figure 6 illustrates the way that the local non-educated speakers organize the local

³⁰ These are common ways of describing where one is from. For example, I recently called someone at home by mistake and the woman on the other end of the line identified herself as being from a mountain community rather her village of origin.

dialects. Quite interestingly, high social valuation corresponds with literally high geographic elevation, while low social valuation corresponds with dialects found at lower elevations.

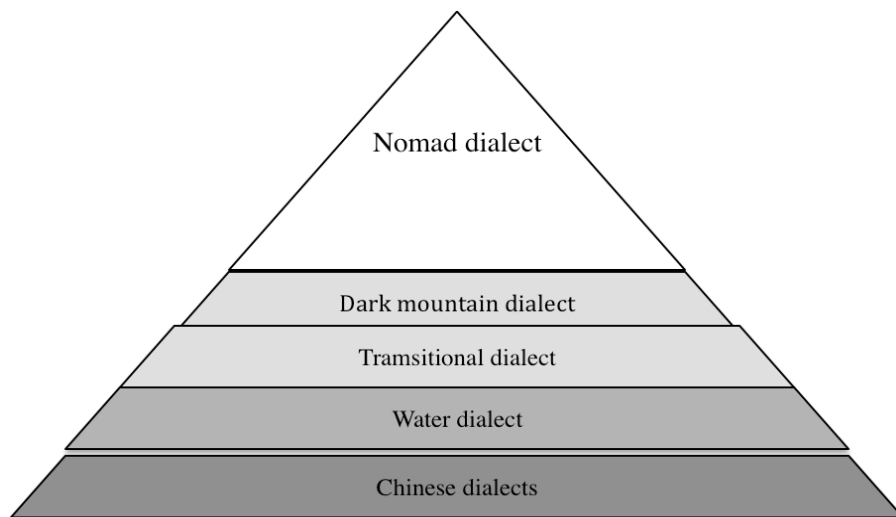


Figure 6 Conceptualization of local dialects by geographic location and socioeconomic background

The pyramid above reflects the perception that positive evaluation of a Tibetan dialect largely depends on to what extent that particular dialect sounds more like nomad dialect or local Chinese dialect. These two language varieties are the reference points for the social evaluation of the local dialects and are the focus of opposition for many of the non-educated speakers. Dialects that are considered more like ‘nomad dialect’ are overall more positively evaluated than those that are perceived to be more like ‘Chinese dialects’. For example, water dialect is often described as sounding ‘too Chinese’ as

speakers of the dialect articulate are perceived to be speaking with their ‘tongue tips’. This local ideology as I explore in Chapter 6 has a greater significance in how the linguistic variants themselves are evaluated. Nevertheless, the perceived distance between these two polar opposites determines the social evaluation of the local dialects and associated linguistic variants.

The merged variant [n] is typically associated with the dialect spoken in water communities, whereas the non-merged variant [m] is characterized as a feature of dialect spoken in mountain communities. Even though Spearhead is a transitional mountain community, the merged variant [n] is also a stereotyped linguistic feature of Spearhead. Local speakers, particularly villagers from mountain communities, stereotype dialect of Spearhead as being similar to that of water communities. Lexical items such as *lam* ‘road’ and *ham* ‘shoe’ are salient in the local community and their merged forms are often cited by local villagers as a feature of dialect spoken in water communities as well as dialect spoken by younger speakers of Spearhead. However, as I show below, this is a gross over-characterization of the linguistic variable, because speakers in fact vary in their usage and evaluation of these linguistic features depending on a number of social factors.

Describing these variants in traditional variationist terms as being simply ‘above’ or ‘below’ the level of social awareness, is inadequate as I have indicated in Chapter 2. Instead, it is more useful to characterize the merged and non-merged variant in terms of various *levels* of aware, a la Preston (1996). For example, some of the younger speakers

(both educated and uneducated) voluntarily talk about the distinction between the non-merged variant [m] and the merged variant [n] during the course of the sociolinguistic interview. Furthermore, they characterize the merged variant [n] as a stereotyped feature of water community dialect and Spearhead dialect. However, many of the uneducated younger speakers are not able to produce the non-merged variant [m] accurately even when they are explicitly asked to do so during the sociolinguistic interviews.

In contrast to these uneducated younger speakers, their educated counterparts are able to produce both variants quite accurately. Using the non-merged variant [m] is often described as a conscious decision which requires more effort. One young college student talks about doing his best to use the non-merged variant [m] but then found himself using the merged variant [n] after being in the village for few days. Moreover, these speakers often talk about the non-merged variant [m] with reference to written Tibetan and nomad dialects rather than a feature of older speakers' dialect in the village. The situation is quite different for the older speakers regardless of education. The older speakers have a more matter-of-fact understanding of the merged variant [n] in the sense that they talk about it being used by predominantly younger speakers of Spearhead village and of water communities in the area. In fact the older speakers often talk about how younger speakers play a major role in local language change and often go to great lengths in the sociolinguistic interviews to talk about how the speech of the younger speakers is diverging from that of the older speakers of the village characterized by the non-merged variant [m]. The older speakers can imitate how the

younger speakers use the merged variant [n], but they themselves tend to use the non-merged variant [m]. Many of the older speakers describe the non-merged variant [m] as something they learned from other speakers in the village when they were growing up.

In addition to characterizing the linguistic variants in terms of speakers' awareness and production abilities, the variants might also be described as to whether or not they are prescribed. Overall, the merged variant [n] is not prescribed through normative schools. Instead, it is the non-merged variant [m] that has been taught through educational settings as the distinction between these variants is clearly maintained by orthographic representations. However, in Spearhead, one cannot treat the non-merged variant [m] as the prescribed form across the community. While the non-merged variant [m] can be accurately described as the prescribed form for the younger educated speakers, the same cannot be said of the older speakers (those that are older 45). Many of these older speakers have never been taught to read Tibetan as no mass education was available when they were growing up. Hence, the use of the non-merged variant [m] among the older speakers is unrelated to the availability of mass education in the recent history of Spearhead village which is only relevant for the younger educated speakers. Thus, while overall merging is not prescribed across the entire village, the status of the non-merged variant has changed over the years such that it is not prescribed for the older speakers but is taught to the younger educated speakers.

3.4 Marriage practice in the village

The population of the village has been relatively stable over the years. Fewer than 15 people have been able to leave for higher education or have moved away from the village to seek employment. However, there soon may be more movement away from the village, as younger villagers become educated and join the workforce in remote areas. Another social factor that strongly influences the demography of the village is marriage practices. Local marriage custom dictates that men almost always stay within the village taking care of their parents while women marry out to men's families and leave their homes. Because of this, many of the married females are from nearby farming communities. Men, on the other hand, have always been born in the village and rarely marry out. Only one in perhaps 50 men is from another nearby village. This female-led micro-migration into the village through marriage has shaped and reshaped the demographic and linguistic composition of the village. Let me briefly review this.

If we briefly examine the demographic composition of the entire village population, 61% of the villagers are married. About 30% of the married women have married into the village from nearby farming communities. In contrast, only 3% of 116 men were born outside and married into the village. The ratio between in-marrying women and men is more dramatic among those older than 45. This would place their parents' dates of birth in the early 1900's. While percentage of the married women among this group born outside of and married into the village similarly remains around 29%, no men

were born outside in this older group. Thus, it immediately becomes apparent that women have tended to be from outside of the current speech community and this overall trend is not changing significantly these days. As examined in this dissertation, this cultural practice has significant impact on local linguistic differentiation.

One important feature of marriage practice that needs to be made clear is the fact that women from nomadic areas never marry into farming communities. This is due to the fact that living in a farming community such as Spearhead requires skills that are important to farming. Thus, one cannot imagine a nomad dialect speaking woman marrying into a farming community. Because of the different types of life skills needed in farming communities, all of the in-marrying women are from non-nomadic areas. And similarly, village women who marry out also do not marry into nomad dialect speaking communities, as living in a nomadic community again requires skills not usually practiced in farming communities. This distinctive marriage practice plays an important role in the process of local dialect variation and change as people with relatives in water communities have greater contact with water dialect which is largely characterized by merged variant [n].

This type of traditional marriage practice continues to this day, especially among those who are not educated. However, this practice is no longer in existence among those who have gone to college and have higher levels of education. Many of these younger educated speakers no longer live in the village and reside elsewhere along with their spouses who also tend to be more educated. They work away from the village,

either teaching or working for various government offices. Understanding these local marriage practices will be helpful in motivating patterns of local variation and change.

3.5 Traditional gender-specific local labor practices

In addition to these unique marriage practices, men and women have traditionally had very different labor roles that provided different access to various local dialects. These economic roles varied depending on the season but in essence their different roles provided different types of access to various local dialects. Let me describe several specific traditional gender roles to highlight these differences.

In a subsistence-farming community, weeding and harvesting are important activities that demand a strict schedule. Delaying these activities can have grave consequences in terms of crop yields. It is women who are responsible for getting these tasks done. In order to speed the process, village women used to go down to the water communities to help in their fields. Because of differences in altitude and irrigation, these communities have slightly different growing and harvesting times. Once the fieldwork in the lower altitude villages was complete, those who had been helped return the favor by visiting Spearhead and helping the women there with farming. A 66-year-old woman recalls a year when they had so many weeds in their fields that all of the women from an entire water village came to help them weed. According to local ethnographic knowledge, this kind of intense social interaction among women of water

and mountain dialects had been taking place for at least 70 years until the turn of the century.

In addition to exchanging labor, many of the women in the village used to go to the water communities to do fieldwork for pay. Moreover, in the fall and winter, women engaged in barter with people from water communities. The women of Spearhead village used to weave willow baskets and make brooms with foxtail and then take them down to low-lying Tibetan and other communities to trade for fruits, vegetables and cooking oil. The fruits and vegetables were preserved for the winter. The economic roles assumed by the women provided not only labor and goods but also exposed them to other varieties of speech such as the water dialect.

Despite their mobility and exposure to other dialects in a relatively confined local context, Spearhead women traditionally had limited mobility and exposure in any wider sense. There are two ways in which the older women of the village had been exposed to dialects at the local level. One of the ways through which women have been exposed to other dialects is through the incoming women who marry into the village. The incoming women are all from a wide range of farming communities. Thus, women often refer to specific women in the village who are from communities closer to nomadic dialect speaking areas and talk about their experience with these dialects. Through marriage practices, families also form relationships with speakers of other dialects. This may in fact be one key way through which women had been exposed to other farmer dialects.

In contrast, this type of dialect contact has not been common for men. Instead, their labor role required interactions with a different type of community – speakers of nomad dialect. With the relatively higher level of education and the skills that men tended to possess, men often traveled to remote areas in pursuit of seasonal labor such as tailoring, performing religious ceremonies or constructing houses for nomadic communities. Further, men have traditionally been responsible for the procurement of meat and dairy products from the nomads and have interacted with speakers of nomad dialects far more than women have. In addition to different patterns of interaction, men also tend to be more educated. They have been able to receive traditional religious training through monastic education and thus hold important secular and religious leadership in the village. They are the ones who reside over the administrative tasks of the village. Their knowledge of written Tibetan might have also played a key role in their linguistic behavior because written Tibetan retains the non-merged variant [m].

In either case, the traditional socioeconomic roles and responsibilities assumed by different gender groups has shaped and reshaped their linguistic behaviors throughout history. As I will show, these kinds of distinctive social and cultural practices have had a profound impact on the linguistic behaviors of men and women.

3.6 Child rearing practices

In a traditional subsistence-based community, child-rearing practices are slightly different than what we typically find in the west. In more industrialized societies,

women are generally the primary caregivers. Child-rearing practice is important because gendered patterns of child-rearing have been proposed as explanation for why women lead in linguistic change (Labov 1994). This is an issue that I will visit in Chapter 5 with respect to the current linguistic feature and its variation. But first, let me provide some background information on the child rearing practices of the village.

After childbirth, a village woman typically spends a month recovering at home with the child. Grandparents or husbands, who tend to live in the same house, care for the mother and the newborn during that period. After the recovery, the woman has to leave the house and carry out various household chores including weeding, collecting shrubs for fuel, taking fertilizer to the fields, milking female yaks, etc. Her responsibilities do not allow her to spend any time with the child and she is under constant watch by family members, continually evaluating her worth as a daughter-in-law. The image of a mother playing with her young babies is a negative one that people associate with young, new brides from outside families. Therefore, the child is often left with other members of the family to care for.

In the case of a relatively large family where the husband's parents are still living, it is usually the grandparents' responsibility to care for the child. They are the ones who clothe them, feed them and tell them stories. If on the other hand, there are no elderly people in the family, the husband will usually step in and care for the child while the mother busies herself with various household chores in and away from the village. If no one is around to help in the family, the mother will take the baby with her

to wherever she works. Thus, the only time that young babies spend with their parents is at night. From the age of 4 or 5 years on, the child spends most of his or her time with children from the neighborhood and in the care of any family members who happen to be not otherwise engaged. Child rearing practice is thus driven by the economic reality of the family rather than being assigned to the members of a single gender.

To illustrate this, let me use my own brother as an example. When my brother was born, I was around 8 or 9. For the first month, my mother stayed at home while recovering from childbirth. After that, she started working in the fields because it was early summer and there was much weeding to be done. Consequently, taking care of my brother became the responsibility of my grandfather and me. I was going to school at the time. When I returned home from school each day, it was my job to help my grandfather who has been disabled since the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. I was there to help my grandfather with chores including cooking, fetching water from the spring and taking care of my brother. Every day I carried my brother on my back to the fields to be nursed. I will revisit child-rearing in Chapter 5 and discuss these cultural practices further in the context of language change.

3.7 Rising literacy level in the village

The rising level of education is another way in which the demographics of the village are changing. There are three periods that uniquely define the history of education within the present village. The first period was right before the establishment

of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Prior to this, with the exception of two primary schools which were established in the 1930s, there were virtually no schools within a 20 mile radius. The traditional mode of education in the village relied on religious institutions such as monasteries and other local Buddhist practitioners. Men were sent to nearby monasteries to receive a monastic education and to become monks. Those men who participated in local religious groups learned to read and write Tibetan under their personal teachers. This characterized much of the educational history of the village before the early 1950s. Education in Tibetan was mostly restricted to these institutions and the literacy rate was extremely low.

Between the 1950s and the early 1980s, an increasing number of village level schools were established in the area, including one in the present village. One of the earliest schools was established in the early 1950s and was not far away from the present village. Rudimentary curricula included Tibetan language and fundamental mathematical concepts. Staff members often included local people who belonged to religious groups. In the ensuing decades, almost all of the school-aged children initially attended the local primary school. Very few continued beyond the primary level. Schooling was a relatively new introduction and many residents did not value the potential of an education. Government officials often came to the doorsteps of the families asking them to send their children to school. Many did not desire to go to school because of the wide use of corporal punishment. Those who did wish to continue

were unable to pursue further studies because of economic pressures. Many families had to keep their children at home.

The most important milestone in the history of local education began with the establishment of Tibetan middle schools and primary schools in the post-Mao era of the late 1970s. A Tibetan middle school established in 1979, for example, provided mass education in Tibetan beyond the primary level. The availability of modern education is evidenced in the literacy rates among current speakers in the village. The literacy rate has increased from to 70% among younger speakers who have had access to the post-Mao era education system. There is a rise in literacy rates in Tibetan as well as in Chinese proficiency among younger speakers.

3.8 New acts of identity

Over the last decade, the village, like many Tibetan villages in the area, has been participating in a number of cultural practices indicative of a changing social identity. These seemingly unrelated activities are, in fact, all related as an expression of solidarity with a pan-Tibetan identity. These social practices include the discontinued use of fur in clothing, the gradual abandonment of the Lunar New Year in favor of Tibetan New Year as celebrated in Lhasa, and participation in language revitalization movements. Let me discuss each of these in greater depth to illustrate this changing social identity of Tibetans in the area.

Let us begin with the abandonment of traditionally valued decorative items for clothing. Many traditional Tibetan clothes are made from animal parts such as hides. The use of otter and fox skins used to be a sign of one's wealth because they are astronomically expensive. Families used spend their fortunes on the acquisition of these decorative clothing items. However, since the beginning of this century, a wide-spread movement advocated the abandonment of these traditional decorative items as they reflected the taking of life, cruelty towards animals and at odds with the goal of preserving the natural environment of Tibet. These movements were widespread in many Tibetan areas of China and even became politicized. Whatever the actual intentions of the original grassroots movements were, many local Tibetan villages also joined in. They brought all of their expensive decorative items and burned them in public as an act against animal cruelty. Through their participation in these wide-spread movements, local Tibetans also expressed their solidarity with an emerging pan-Tibetan identity within contemporary China. The use of otter and fox skins is now a virtually extinct element of Tibetan clothing as a result of this movement.

Secondly, there has been a gradual abandonment of local Tibetan New Year or Losar, commonly celebrated on the same day as that of the Lunar New Year. These dates are equivalent to the New Year that millions of Chinese also take part in. Lunar New Year tends to fall sometime in early February of the Gregorian calendar. However, some villages in the area have begun to celebrate the Tibetan New Year as is often observed by Tibetans in Lhasa and other Tibetan areas. Some neighboring villages and

monasteries have completely stopped observing the locally recognized Tibetan New Year and instead celebrate what they consider to be the ‘real’ Tibetan New Year which falls between February and March in the Gregorian calendar. The Lunar New Year is now viewed as un-Tibetan, whereas the New Year celebration practiced in Lhasa is seen as the more ‘real’ one. This slow and gradual shift towards the cultural practices of Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, indexes a reconfiguration in the local Tibetans’ understanding of ‘belonging’. By synchronizing the New Year celebration, they align themselves with Tibetans from other areas and dis-align with the Chinese.

Thirdly, the area has recently been home to a number of language related movements. Two of these, I believe, will give a better understanding of the sensitivity associated with language. Let me first begin with the protests led by students in the area. In the last decade, students and teachers have led numerous protests locally. On several occasions, they marched in the streets of the county seat demanding more rights for Tibetan language in education. This was a response to changing state policies that aimed to reconfigure the education system as it relates to Tibetan language. Due to liberal policies following the post-Mao era, Tibetan middle schools in the area were allowed to use Tibetan as an instructional language. However, local teachers and students now fear that the government is planning to implement an educational policy that would remove Tibetan as an instructional language, and teach it instead only as a single subject in middle school. This volatile issue has become a passionate rallying point for many Tibetan educators and students.

In addition to the student led protests, there have also been a number of grassroots movements aimed at raising people's awareness of language issues. This is the 'Tibetan language only' movement. This movement rejects the use of loan words from Chinese in favor of using only 'pure' Tibetan. Community organizers have translated many popular loan words into Tibetan and have distributed them to villagers to learn. Many of the villages in the area have been participating in this cultural practice. The movement reflects not only changing language ideologies but also a heightened sense of the urgency of the maintenance of the Tibetan language. There is a fear that Tibetans will lose their language if they do not take action by purging what they see as elements of Chinese language influence. Thus, villagers, regardless of age, are becoming aware of language issues and are consciously using Tibetan terms rather than Chinese loanwords.

These cultural practices and movements happening at the local level are indicative of a shift in Tibetan identity in contemporary China. These diverse sets of cultural practices including the discontinued use of fur, gradual abandonment of the Lunar New Year in favor of the Tibetan New Year as celebrated in Lhasa, and language purity movements constitute a major re-alignment in the way the Tibetans position themselves with respect to the majority Han Chinese and their language. The Tibetans see Chinese as increasingly invading their linguistic identity. This is particularly evident in the speakers' active participation in language purity movements that are aimed at purging the influence of Chinese language on Tibetan. These newer acts of identity,

reflecting solidarity with a pan-Tibetan identity beyond the local context, will be important to in interpreting the social significance of the linguistic variable among the younger educated speakers.

3.9 Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced the speech community in which the present study is situated. In addition to exploring local linguistic ideologies, I have also discussed a number of local cultural and economic practices that are relevant in understanding patterns of language change investigated in this study. In particular, I highlighted the importance of local marriage practices, unique child-rearing practices, and traditional economic roles assumed by different gender groups. Moreover, I have also highlighted a tension between rising education levels among the village and increasingly unfavorable state policies towards the teaching of Tibetan language in school. Recall that in Chapter 1, I also identified this conflict between the overall change towards the merged variant [n] and the rising level of education. These two tensions remain very much important throughout the dissertation and I will resolve these in chapter 5 and 6 respectively. To link these local practices with larger changes in Tibetan areas of China, I have also examined newer acts of identity in which local Tibetan are actively resisting the influence of Chinese language and culture. These acts, as I explore in Chapter 6 will be intricately related to linguistic behaviors of the younger

educated speakers. In the next chapter, I introduce the types of data and methods used in this study.

Chapter 4 Data and methods

4.1 Introduction

The first three chapters have focused on identifying the linguistic and sociolinguistic issues under study, introducing the theoretical frameworks in which this study is grounded, and provided in-depth discussion of the sociocultural and sociohistorical context that have shaped and continue to shape the village of Spearhead. In this chapter, my focus is on data and methods used in the study. Section 4.2 describes the sociolinguistic interviews used as the primary source of linguistic data in this study and explains how they have been conducted. Section 4.3 provides demographic information about the participants. In section 4.4, the linguistic variable (m) is explained in more detail. Section 4.5 describes the coding procedure. Section 4.6 provides information on the linguistic and social factors considered in the analysis of variation in (m). Section 4.7 describes the statistical tool used in the analysis. Section 4.8 provides a summary of the chapter.

4.2 Conducting the sociolinguistic interviews

The primary source of data on language production for this study is a set of 60 interviews with members of the Spearhead community. The author's brother conducted all of these interviews. He is a 22-year-old college student from the village of

Spearhead and still lives in the village for part of the year. My brother does not have any formal training in sociolinguistics. However, I trained him briefly in sociolinguistic interview techniques prior to the data collection. He approached the participants directly and asked them if they would be willing to sit down for an interview. He informed them of the general purpose of the research project without disclosing any information about the type of linguistic feature that I was personally interested in. While my brother recruited most of the speakers randomly at the beginning of the data collection period, we also had to choose some speakers specifically to fit particular type of sociolinguistic profiles (e.g. women and men of different age groups and literacy levels).

For this component of the project, my brother interviewed a total of 60 individuals resulting in more than 55 hours of recording. Each interview lasted around 50 minutes. None of the speakers interviewed for the project was paid. He interviewed the speakers in a variety of settings. Some of those being interviewed were up in the mountain taking care of livestock as the interview took place. One can hear the bleating of sheep and the occasional dog bark in the background. Some were recorded in their kitchens and one can even hear the crackling noise of the fire burning in the adobe stove. Some students were recorded in their classrooms away from their home village.

We originally based the interview on classic sociolinguistic interview modules but soon discovered that we had to change the modules to fit the local context. For example, soliciting demographic information made the speakers very uncomfortable. There are two reasons for this. First, my brother and the speakers knew each other fairly

well. Thus, asking questions that he obviously already knew the answers to, made their conversation more contrived and unnatural. Second, the speakers are also unwilling to have their names recorded in the interviews. My assumption is that this is a precaution on their side to protect themselves in case the interview data are used for questionable purposes that might bring about serious personal risks to the speakers. As a result of this, we abandoned many components of the interview template.

Instead, my brother engaged in naturalistic conversation with the speakers. This approach put the speakers at ease, and yielded surprisingly valuable ethnographic information. These conversations yielded insights into many aspects of local village life that would otherwise not have been captured by the originally proposed interview template. Many of the speakers spontaneously talk about their experiences as seasonal laborers in remote cities as well as in nomadic areas. Some intimately describe the loss of a child and others detail unsuccessful previous marriages. My brother's general familiarity with the nature of this community combined with his lack of more specific knowledge about the research project proved to be advantageous in not 'leading' the speakers in a certain direction. Inclusion of a local interviewer thus allowed us to elicit speech that more closely approximates what villagers might use with other members of the village.

Flexibility on the part of the researcher, I believe, is important when it comes to collecting sociolinguistic interviews. I have learned that some of the typical sociolinguistics interview modules do not necessarily work in other communities such

as the present one. Apart from the demographic questions, ‘danger of death’ questions, which have been used in many sociolinguistics studies, for example, have not been found to be fruitful in the present speech community. Perhaps there is a cultural norm about not talking about the danger of death or these speakers may not live lives that are as dangerous as urban lives. Either way, this highlights the fact that there may not be a perfect set of questions that would yield longer stretches of natural talk. Instead, we have to tailor the questions to the specifics of the community that we study.

While many components of the original interview modules were abandoned, we also made sure to ask a list of language related questions towards the end of the interview. These questions are designed to elicit speaker’s metalinguistic commentaries about the local language and their evaluations of the linguistic variable that I was interested in. Thus, they were asked whether they have noticed anything different about the way that villagers speak. They were also asked to comment on what kind of people are more likely use the merged variant [n] in their speech. Prior to this segment of the interview, no attempt was made to draw the speaker’s attention to merging - which is the focus of the study. This final segment of the interview and spontaneous metalinguistic commentaries found elsewhere in the interview help inform my discussion of the speakers’ attitudes and ideologies toward the variants and toward language variation and language more generally.

Inclusion of a local interviewer in the data collection, in part motivated by the logistical difficulties involved in me personally traveling to the village, has proved to be

valuable in a number of ways. First, this removed me from the speakers. This is important because as someone who is being educated in the U.S., I have more social status than perhaps someone still living in the village. By distancing me from the speakers, it allowed people to say ‘no’ to the interview invitation. We had a number of speakers who did not want to participate in this project. While this was difficult news to hear first, it slowly became clear to me that this was the sign of a healthy relationship between the researcher and the researched – a relationship that is often quite delicate when researching less advantaged communities around the world.

Although the presence of a local interviewer was invaluable, relying on an ‘insider’ was not without some unintended consequences. As detailed in Chapter 3, the current state of village politics means that, ironically, some of these ‘speakers’ are not on speaking terms with each other. This includes my brother who was able to contact only one ‘group’ of the village. At first glance, this appears to result in a data sampling bias, but if we regard these ‘groups’ as their own small communities of practice or in effect as discrete villages in and of themselves, I do not think that the political divisions within the village make any difference in the findings overall. In addition, my ethnographic knowledge of the village suggests that both groups are very similar in terms of sociolinguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Nevertheless, for any researcher considering including local speakers as interviewees, this could be a potential concern, especially if one is trying to sample an entire community.

All interviews were initially recorded using an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder (VN 6200PC) with a sampling rate of 44,000 Hz, and a lavalier microphone (Olympus ME-15). Each interview lasted for an average of 50 minutes. The original recordings were all mono (16-bit PCM) in Window Media Audio (WMA) but were later converted to Waveform Audio File Format (WAV)³¹. Transcriber (Version 1.5.1) was used for segmentation of tokens. Many of the recordings are sufficient for acoustic analysis except for a few interviews, which took place in a large classroom with the resulting background noise. Nevertheless, all of the recordings are more than sufficient for the auditory analysis upon which this study is based.

4.3 Participants

The 60 Tibetan speakers are all residents of Spearhead village. They were interviewed over the course of two months in the early spring of 2010. In order to remove potential dialectal differences between villages, speakers who moved into the village through marriage within the last ten years have been excluded from the study³² (I will return to this issue shortly). The primary focus of this study is thus the linguistic behavior of a single traditional and what appears to be a homogeneous Tibetan village

³¹ This conversion, as pointed out by Schilling (personal communication), typically results in signal loss that cannot be recovered. However, for the purpose of the present study, the conversion did not noticeably impact coding of the linguistic variable as it was done impressionistically.

³² When I was initially designing this study, my focus was on linguistic behaviors of villagers who had been living in the village for longer than 10 years. It did not occur to me at that time that local marriage practices might have an influence on linguistic behaviors of the village.

in a farming area. An overview of the speakers by gender and age is represented in Figure 7. Of the 60 participants, 28 are women and the remaining 32 are men. Their ages range from 20 to 77 with an average age of 43.5. The number of speakers range from 10 to 14 for each decade of age, represented in colored bars in Figure 7. The x-axis represents speakers' age whereas the y-axis represents the number of speakers.

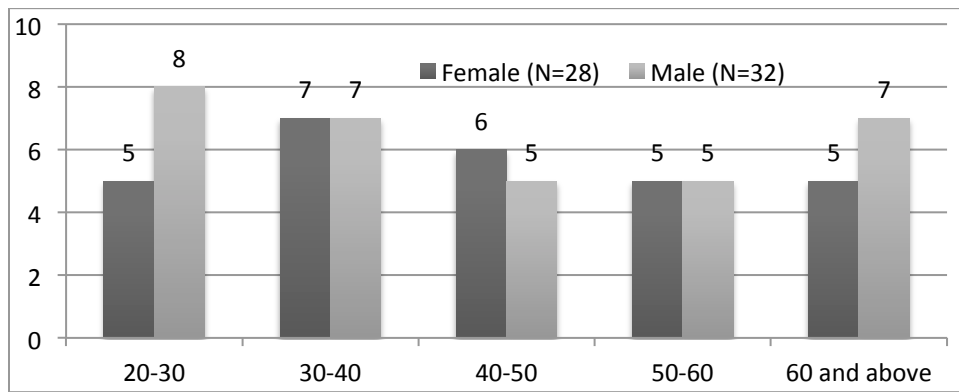


Figure 7 Speakers by gender and age

These speakers generally fall into three different occupational groups. The term ‘occupational’ is to be used here loosely since many of the villagers primarily practice farming for a living except those who have received college degrees. These are mostly teachers in the local area. These teachers do not practice farming but still spend much of their time in the village with their families. These three occupational groups include: 1) schooled, 2) skilled, 3) general. The first category of speakers includes those who have either completed college degrees, been to school beyond third grade, or are currently

being schooled beyond third grade. The second group, the skilled villagers, includes those that either have a background of religious training or have special skills such as knowledge of carpentry or medicine. And finally, speakers in the ‘general’ category include villagers primarily engaging in farming as a means of living and lacking education and special skill trainings. Figure 8 illustrates these occupational differences according to gender.

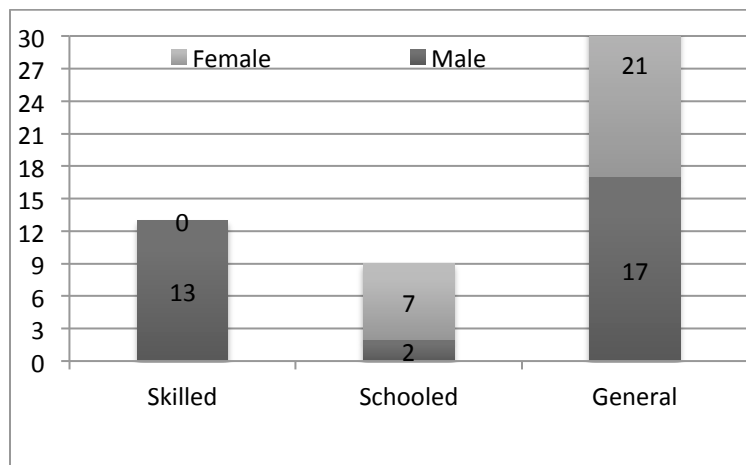


Figure 8 Speakers by gender and occupation

Figure 9 shows that while the majority of the speakers (52) were born in Spearhead village, eight women were born outside the village and married into it. Six of these were born in neighboring mountain communities with similar sociolinguistic characteristics. These are speakers of the mountain dialect. Only two out of the six were born in water communities. The dialect background of the speakers however is not

included in any of the multivariate regression analyses since speakers of water dialect are highly under-represented.

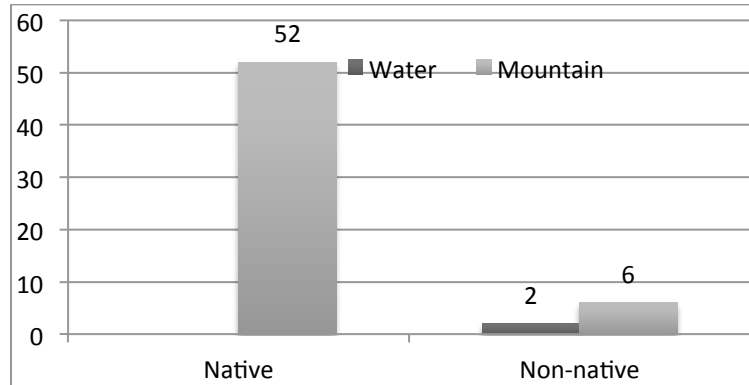


Figure 9 Speakers by their birthplace and dialect

While literate and illiterate speakers of Tibetan are almost equally represented, their gender and age distribution is quite different. I will return to the methods used in assessing speaker's literacy shortly. Figure 10 shows that 25 of the 60 speakers are literate and the remaining 35 are illiterate (the figure on the right displays the number of female speakers by age and literacy whereas the figure on the left displays the same information for male speakers). The 18 literate men are well represented and similarly distributed regardless of age group. Among the women there are only 7 literate speakers - all under the age of 35. As detailed in Chapter 1, all of the older women in the village are illiterate.

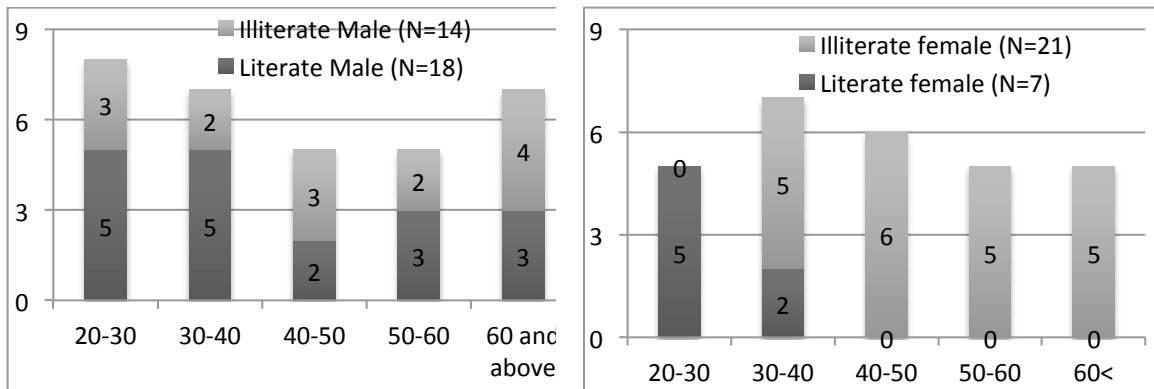


Figure 10 Speakers by literacy and gender

While most speakers are categorically illiterate or literate in Tibetan, there are those who fall somewhere between these two extremes. Speakers are considered illiterate if they have never been to school. This group includes most of the older women and some elderly men. The literate speakers include those who have finished at least primary school. This group includes current teachers, college graduates and students, high school students and high school dropouts. Categorizing these speakers' literacy status was very straightforward and unproblematic. Determination of literacy status was more subjective when classifying those who had completed only limited elementary education. Some of these speakers can read very basic Tibetan but cannot write, while others may have a marginal capacity to read and write. Literacy of speakers in these ambiguous cases was determined by several steps. First, I identified the speaker's literacy status based on the sociolinguistic interview. I then discussed this evaluation with two other villagers who knew the person well. If there were

disagreements between the villagers and me, the other villagers' characterization of the speaker's literacy status (which both seemed to agree) was accepted. In case of disagreements between the two villagers, I chose the categorization that matched my initial assessment.

4.4 The linguistic variable

The linguistic variable on which this study is focused is the coda nasal (m). This is prosodically restricted because its variability is restricted to the coda position. There are two salient variants of this linguistic variable which form the basis for the linguistic analysis in this study. In case of the merged variant [n], the underlying nasal coda /m/ loses its bilabial feature and becomes [n]. The loss of bilabial feature results in its merger with another distinctive coda sound /n/ and hence becomes indistinguishable. Merging in some lexical items tends to result in homophones. In such cases, I was able to distinguish the underlying form based on the context³³. Non-merged variant [m] retains its original bilabial feature and remains unchanged. In addition to these two realizations, there is also another extremely rare realization where the nasal coda /m/ is lost completely but leaves a trace of nasality on the preceding vowel (Qu 1991). However, occurrence of this realization was extremely low and this was considered ambiguous in the analysis.

³³ Since there were very few of these special item items, I have not considered them as a separate factor group in the analysis.

Before going into details about the coding procedure in 4.5, it is also necessary to provide a bit of detail regarding the linguistic factor of preceding vowel. To understand the preceding linguistic context, let briefly introduce the basic Amdo Tibetan vowel paradigm in relation to the wider regional norm as supported by reading pronunciations. Classical Tibetan has five cardinal vowels. These include a low unrounded central vowel /a/, high front unrounded vowel /i/, high back rounded vowel /u/, mid front vowel /e/ and mid back vowel /o/. While most of these core vowels have direct correspondence within Amdo Tibetan dialects spoken by nomads (in the regional norm), in Amdo Tibetan more generally, including in farmer dialects, the high vowels /i/ and /u/ have coalesced into the mid-central vowel /ə/, leaving only four (Padma Lhun'grub 2009). These four vowels make up the vowel inventory of Amdo Tibetan. While the /a/ and /ə/ pair is distinguished by tongue height, the remaining two, /o/ and /u/ are distinguished by their unround vs. round status. In closed syllables, the permissible four vowels are [a], [e], [o] and [ə]. These are the possible four preceding linguistic contexts whose effects on the variable are examined in this dissertation. Effect of the preceding linguistic context, in addition to the linguistic factors outlined below in section 4.5, is examined because previous descriptions of farmer dialect report that the non-merged variant [m] tends to be more common after the low and unrounded central vowel /a/ (Padma Lhun'grub 2009: 197).

The following examples in Table 2 demonstrate the variability of this bilabial coda nasal in a number of words. Columns labeled non-merged and merged are

transcribed in IPA. The examples in Tibetan are represented in Wylie, a method for transliterating Tibetan in English, along with their glosses. Two examples are given for each of the four possible vocalic contexts – which include [a], [ə], [o] and [e].

Vowel	Wylie	Gloss	Non-merged variant	Merged variant
[a]	lam	n. road	[lam]	[len]
	bsam.pa	n. intention	[^h sam ba]	[^h sen ba]
[ə]	rim.pa	n. level	[rəm ba]	[rən ba]
	gsum	n. three	[^h səm]	[^h sən]
[e]	dem	n. tea pot	[tem]	[ten]
	sems	n. heart	[sem]	[sen]
[o]	Khom	Adj. free	[k ^h om]	[k ^h on]
	vdom	n. arm length	[ⁿ dom]	[ⁿ don]

Table 2 Variability in coda (m) realization by preceding vowels

4.5 Coding procedure

Each interview was coded 5 minutes into the conversation to maximize the chance of obtaining naturalistic tokens. In order to minimize lexical specific effects, I have limited each token type to a total of 5 occurrences in a majority of cases. Averaged number of tokens per speaker is 40. This resulted in a total of 3052 tokens.

These tokens have been impressionistically coded for three different types of realizations including merged, non-merged and ambiguous. The ambiguous cases include tokens that are perceptually difficult to categorize between the merged [n] and non-merged variant [m]. While I am the principal coder, all tokens have been coded several times in an attempt to achieve higher accuracy. First, I coded all tokens over the course of a month. Several weeks after this first round of coding, the same tokens were coded again on a separate sheet. Results from these two rounds of coding were then compared against each other. 84% of these tokens were identically coded. The remaining 16% were coded again to compare with previous coding results. After three rounds of coding, those tokens for which it was difficult to reach a consensus were considered to be ambiguous.

All tokens that are immediately followed by any nasal consonants which are the onsets of the following syllable (whether in the same word or the first segment of the following word) have also been excluded, as for example in the phrase *kham na* ‘in kham’. This is because the contiguous nasals will assimilate to one another; hence a word-final nasal segment followed by /m/ will always be perceived as [m] and one followed by /n/ will always be perceived as [n]; hence, no determination of merged vs. non-merged status would be possible in this environment. This resulted in a reduction of the number of overall tokens for all speakers as many of their potential tokens were followed by nasal consonants. Furthermore, tokens from segments of recorded data that contain topics concerning language are excluded from the quantitative analysis, though

again, they are a valuable part of the qualitative consideration of the social meanings attached to the merged and non-merged variants. This was done to ensure that discussions about language would not influence the particular realization of the target linguistic feature. And more importantly, as I detail below, individual lexical item was treated as a random factor rather than a fixed effect.

4.6 Linguistic and social factors considered

The linguistic variable has been coded for both linguistic and social factors. The linguistic factors include both the preceding vowel, following segment, grammatical category of the word, and number of syllables in a word. The preceding vowel has been considered based on previous phonological descriptions of similar dialects in the area which suggest a correlation between the merged variant [n] and raising of the preceding vowel (Janhunen & Kalsang Norbu 2000). I have considered the other potential linguistic factors because previous studies of phonological variation have often found these factors to influence the realization of the target linguistic variable (Diaz-Campos 2008). In addition, lexical item and lexical frequency³⁴ are included as potential factor groups as previous studies have demonstrated their influence in production of certain linguistic features (Jurafsky, Bell, Gregory & Raymond 2001). The following table summarizes these linguistic factor groups with their possible factors.

³⁴ This was based on the occurrence of lexical items in the interview data.

Factor Group	Factors
Preceding environment	[a], [ə], [o] and [e]
Following environment	Pause, Consonant
Grammatical category	Function vs. Content words
Syllable count	Monosyllabic vs. multisyllabic word
Lexical item	<i>All lexical items</i>
Lexical frequency	<i>Variable</i>

Table 3 Linguistic constraints considered

In terms of social constraints, speaker's age, gender and literary skills in addition to speaker's occupation were included. As is the case with the lexical item, the individual speakers themselves have been included as a random (not fixed) factor in order to improve the accuracy of the overall model. An additional factor group was also constructed based on speaker's gender and literacy. This factor group includes literate women, illiterate women, literate men, and illiterate men. Since there are no literate women among the older speakers, the effect of literacy across separate factor groups for age and gender would incorrectly predict the influence of for example literacy on the merged variant [n]. Shown in Table 4 is the list of social factors considered for the analysis.

Factor Group	Factors
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Speaker age	<i>Continuous</i>
Gender	Male vs. Female
Literacy	Literate vs. illiterate
Occupation	Schooled, general, skilled
Individual Speaker	<i>Random</i>

Table 4 Social factors considered

4.7 Statistical analysis of the data

The tokens were analyzed using Rbrul, a multivariate statistics analysis script for linguistic data developed by Johnson (2011). One of the reasons why Rbrul was chosen as a statistics tool over the more traditional VARBRUL (Sankoff 1975) was due to its ability to carry out mixed effect multivariate regression analysis. Mixed effect regression allows individual speakers and lexical items as random factors. They are considered ‘random’ because each speaker or lexical item is unique in different studies. By including these factors as random factors, the mixed effect regression analysis can take individual inter-speaker variation into account. It can prevent individual speakers and lexical items from influencing the statistical model (especially if some speakers or lexical items favor one type of realization more than the average). This analysis can estimate a single factor weight for the individual speaker in addition to capturing factors pertaining to groups such as gender. The underlying assumption is that some speakers favor or disfavor a particular realization of a linguistic feature far more or less than

what their social categories such as gender or social class would predict. The same principle applies to individual lexical items.

In addition to its ability to fit mixed models, the program's ability to handle age as a continuous factor was a consideration in using this program. This can be particularly useful if it is believed that there is a change in progress. Conventional sociolinguistics tools such as VARBRUL are unable to handle age as a continuous factor. However, this is not to suggest that traditional tools such as VARBRUL are somehow less effective in detecting the statistical significance of differences between ethnographically relevant social groups. The effect of age within each larger age group cannot be calculated with VARBRUL. With Rbrul, however, one can categorize speakers into meaningful groups and still be able to factor in the role of age within groups. Rbrul's ability to treat age as a continuous factor was one of the primary reasons to choose this statistics tool over VARBRUL.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed overview of data collection and methods of analysis. In Section 4.2 I described the contexts in which the sociolinguistic interviews were conducted, in doing so I also reflected on the pros and cons of including a local interviewer. Section 4.3 provided detailed demographic information about the participants including their age, gender and literacy. In section 0, the linguistic variable (m) was explained in more detail. Section 4.5 described the coding procedures

utilized in the study. Section 4.6 provided a list of social and linguistic constraints considered in this study and then finally in Section 4.6 I provided several reasons as to why I Rbrul was chosen as the statistical tool. In the next chapter, I will focus on the production patterns associated with the merged variant [n] and then provide some locally-based motivations for the observed patterns.

Chapter 5 Results and analysis

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the social and linguistic factors correlating with the merged variant [n] of the bilabial nasal coda variable (m) - the linguistic variable analyzed in this dissertation. In other words, what kinds of social (in terms of sex, literacy and age) and linguistic (the preceding linguistic context) factors are conditioning the overall change towards the merged variant [n]? Recall that the linguistic variable of interest explored in this dissertation is the final bilabial nasal (m) in words like *lam*. The bilabial nasal has a tendency to lose its bilabial feature and become realized as [n], as in [len] for /lam/ ‘road’ and [sen] for /sem/ ‘heart’. To explore the variation in this linguistic feature, I will first examine both linguistic and social factors relevant for the entire group of speakers represented in the data set. I will then explore these dimensions in greater detail as they interact. Finally, I will provide explanations for sex-based and literacy based variation and discuss how they relate to larger sociolinguistic theories about gender. In Chapter 6, I will examine the ideological dimension of the linguistic variation using the notion of social meaning as introduced in Chapter 2.

5.2 Overall production patterns

Multivariate regression analysis with a mixed effect model suggests several significant factor groups conditioning the variable's realization. Summarized in Table 5 is the best model generated by Rbrul. This model has the merged variant [n] as the application and has a total of 3052 tokens from 60 speakers stratified by gender and education. In addition, age is treated as a continuous factor. Following traditional methods of representation in variationist studies, I have represented the only significant factor groups on the left column. Similarly, I have also ordered factors within each group in descending order of relative centered factor weight. The final representation is very similar to the output of a traditional VARBRUL analysis.

Unlike traditional VARBRUL analysis, I have used centered factor weights, rather than uncentered factor weight. This is due to the fact that this mixed-effect model treats age as a continuous factor – a type of data that cannot be assigned meaningful uncentered factor weight. Nevertheless, I remind the reader that the centered factor weights should be interpreted similarly to those factor weights typically found in VARBRUL analysis. Thus, a factor with weight value of more than 0.5 suggests that the factor favors the merged variant [n] while a weight below 0.5 suggests otherwise.

In addition to the relevant social and linguistic factors, I have also included the best model generated by the multivariate analysis. This is presented in the first row with its corresponding significance value. Moreover, I have also included further parameters

of this model such deviance, degree of freedom, intercept, mean and total number of tokens.

Speaker (random) + Lexical item (random) + Preceding (4.87e-80) + Age (4.63e-12) + SexLit (2.33e-09) [A]					
	Factor	Logodds	Tokens	Proportion	Centered factor weight
Preceding					
	[e+o]	1.81	880	0.77	0.86
	[ə]	0.68	1358	0.65	0.66
	[a]	-2.94	814	0.04	0.08
Sex*Literacy					
	IlliterateF	1.47	978	0.64	0.81
	IlliterateM	0.11	779	0.54	0.53
	LiterateF	-0.66	377	0.61	0.34
	LiterateM	-0.92	918	0.34	0.29
Age					
	Continuous	Logodds			
	+1	-0.08			
Deviance					
	DF	Intercept	Mean	N	
	2247.15	9	2.26	0.52	3052

Table 5 Best model generated by Rbrul

One initial finding clearly represented in Table 5 is that merging is conditioned by both linguistic and social factors. As I show below, some of these factors are more straightforward than others. For example, both the preceding linguistic context and

speaker's age are correlated with the merged variant [n]. However, sex and literacy, which I have included as separate social factors in the exploratory model, do not clearly correlate with the merged variant [n] across all speakers. Instead, the factor group of literate male, literate female, illiterate male and illiterate female is directly related to the merged variant [n]. Let me elaborate on this factor group before getting into details about how merging is conditioned by social and linguistic factors.

The factor group, based on speaker's literacy and sex, was constructed to account for potential interactions between sex, literacy and age. However, I should also note that a real comparison between these three social dimensions has not been possible because of the lack of literate females above the age of 40. Recall that while the older speakers are generally less educated than the younger speakers, older female speakers are entirely illiterate in contrast to men. This factor group captures the relationship between these larger social categories and the merged variant [n] and ignores their potential roles among different age groups – an issue that I will resolve by separating these speakers into two distinctive age groups. The interaction between speaker's sex, literacy and age, as we will see, is a complicated relationship that requires separate regression analysis.

The results of the multivariate regression analysis with mixed effects, shown above in Table 5, also indicate that the speaker's age, treated as a continuous factor group has been found to be significant in its correlation with the merged variant. It should be noted that unlike other categorical factors such as speaker's sex, the effect of

age is typically given in logodds. This value indicates the degree to which an increase in the speaker's age is correlated with the speaker's probability of producing the application value. I will discuss this further in 5.2.2 below.

Besides this factor group, I should also briefly explain two additional significant factors within this model. The first row of the table finds both individual 'speakers' and 'lexical items' to be significant. This suggests that certain individual speakers and lexical items tend to favor or disfavor the merged variant [n] more than would generally be predicted for them (In keeping with standard variationist practice, I have not presented the random effects of individual 'speakers' and 'lexical items' in Table 5). This suggests that realization of the target variable displays both inter-speaker variation as well as inter-word variation. Let me explain this briefly here.

For individual speakers, the mixed-effect regression analysis does not just average the tokens from all of the speakers. Instead, it examines the effect of speakerspecific effect. In other words, not only do larger categories of social and linguistic factors condition a particular variant, certain individuals themselves tend to use the merged variant significantly more than what would normally be predicted given the individual speakers' social characteristics. The same principle applies to the lexical item. The overall findings suggest certain lexical items favor the merged variant far more than others and vice versa. The treatment of lexical item as a random factor theoretically assumes that not all words are participating in the merging equally. Inclusion of individual 'speakers' and 'lexical item' in the final model however helps to

capture the effects of internal linguistic and external social constraints. This assumes that both individual speakers and lexical items may participate in merging differently. However, I will not be focusing on random effects in the remainder of the dissertation since they do not contribute significantly to this dissertation's general findings.

Apart from the identification of important social and linguistic constraints that condition the merged variant [n], many of the potential factors analyzed in the exploration of the data did not turn out to be significant. Speakers' occupational level as a group was not significant. (Recall that speakers' occupational level was loosely categorized in terms of skilled, schooled and general.) Linguistically, word frequency and part of speech (function vs. content word) also were not found to be significant. Moreover, the total number of syllables in a word and the segment following do not influence whether the bilabial nasal is realized as [m] or [n]. These results indicate that the overall merged variant [n] is correlated with the preceding linguistic feature only.

Having provided a global overview of the linguistic and social constraints that have been analyzed, we shift our focus to examine the factor groups that do significantly affect the variable realization of the merged variant [n].

5.2.1 Linguistic environment: preceding vowels

In returning to the overall results presented in Table 5, the data indicate that besides individual lexical item, the preceding vowel is the only linguistic environment significantly influencing the variable's realization. Recall that there are only four

vowels including [a], [ə], [o] and [e] that are allowed within this context and high vowels including [i] and [u] are not permitted in this particular position. Among these four vowels, I have found that the two mid vowels [o] and [e] as in words like *khom* ‘free’ and *tem* ‘teapot’ have very similar effects due to the fact that they similar heights and are thus collapsed into one category. The pattern as illustrated in Figure 11 uses centered factor weights, and suggests a relationship between height of the preceding vowel and the merged variant [n].

These patterns show that mid vowels [e] and [o] strongly favor merging with a factor weight of 0.86 while [ə] favors merging but slightly less so at a factor weight of 0.66. These factor weights are taken from the overall model presented in Table 5 above. The low vowel, [a], which is shown to the right of Figure 11, strongly disfavors the merged realization with a centered factor weight of 0.08. These overall patterns suggest that height of the preceding vowel is positively correlated with the merged realization of the final bilabial nasal coda: the higher the preceding vowel is, the more likely the variable will be realized as a merged variant [n].

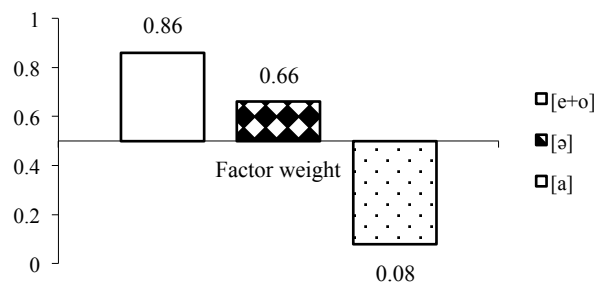


Figure 11 Merged variant [n] and preceding environment

The phonological basis of this tendency seems to be related to tongue position. In order to produce the merged variant [n], the tongue tip must be raised. However, raising of the tongue tip hinders the production of a vowel with low tongue position such as [a]. Similarly, the mid vowels [e] and [o] favor the merged variant because they are produced with slightly higher tongue position than [ə] and [a]. Schwa [ə], as vowel between these two sets of vowels, slightly favors the merged variant because the tongue is in a neutral position. This relationship between the merged variant and height of the preceding vowel suggests that the preceding linguistic context is an important correlation factor, yet the underlying reason for this pattern is unremarkable. I will not be concerning myself with linguistic constraints in the remainder of this chapter. Instead, I will be focusing on social dimensions.

5.2.2 Effect of speaker's age: a possible change in progress

In addition to the correlation between the preceding linguistic context and the realization of the linguistic variable, there is yet another clear correlation. And this is the correlation between speaker's age and the merged variant [n]. The multivariate regression analysis with mixed effects, shown above in Table 5, indicates that speaker's age, treated as a continuous factor group, is correlated with the merged variant with a log-odds value of -0.08. This means that for every year older the speaker is, the log-

odds of producing the merged variant [n] decrease by 0.08. In other words, the odds of producing the merged variant [n] go down by 2.3%.

Figure 12 shows an overall inverse correlation between the merged variant and speaker's age. The usage rate of the merged variant [n] is represented in percentages along the y-axis and speaker's age is plotted along the x-axis. The overall trend, with all other relevant factors considered, suggests that the older the speakers are, the less likely they are to use the merged variant [n], while the younger the speakers are, the more likely they are to use the merged variant [n] (Remember that correlation is not equal to causality). The line represents the linear fit between the merged variant and that of speaker's age and the relationship between the two is significant ($R^2 = 0.34$). Correlation between age and the merged variant [n] is observed across the sample of speakers and is indicative of a possible change in progress where the merged variant [n] is becoming more frequent among the younger speakers.

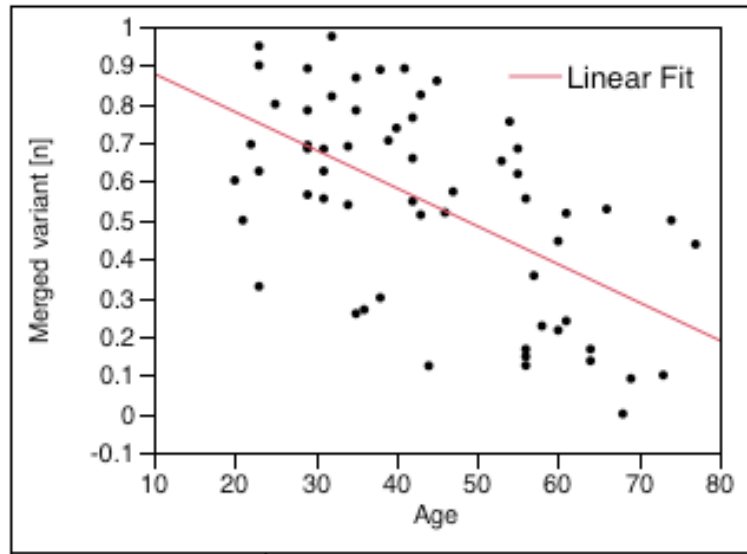


Figure 12 Merged variant [n] and speaker's age (R square = 0.34)

The same data, presented in a more familiar traditional way, in terms of five discrete age groups, highlights the overall change towards the merged variant [n] across the 60 speakers represented in the study and illustrates the pattern associated with a possible change in progress. This is illustrated in Figure 13. Speakers above the age of 60 on average have a usage rate of less than 30%. This trend rises sharply in the next two groups of speakers in their 50s and 40s. This sharply increased usage rate of the non-merged variant [n] remains relatively stable (around 65%) between speakers in their 40s and 30s and then approaches 70% for the youngest group of speakers. This overall pattern suggests that merging reaches 70% among speakers between 20 – 30 years of age.

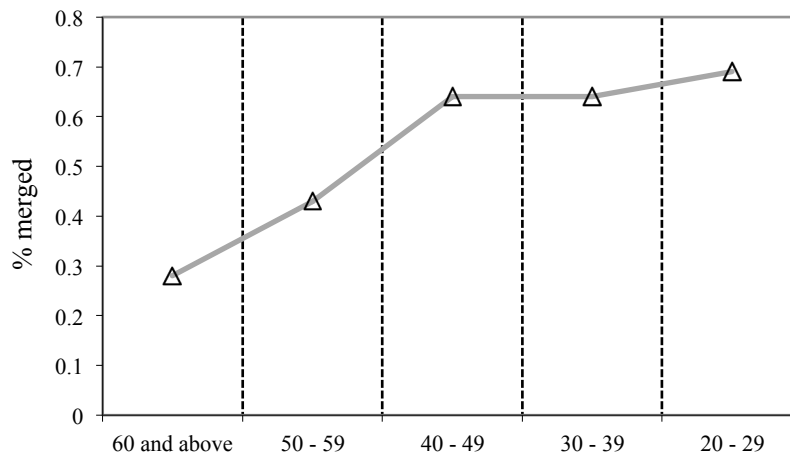


Figure 13 Apparent time distribution of the merged variant [n]

Although the relationship of speaker's age with respect to the realization of the linguistic variable strongly indicates a general connection between the two, exploring the effect of age by literacy and sex group provides a more nuanced picture of the effect of age. Recall that there are four categories including illiterate female, literate female, literate female and literate male. Figure 14 shows the significant linear relationship ($R^2 = 0.58$) between illiterate female speakers, age and percentage of merged variant [n] in each speaker's total count of possible cases of merger. The fitted line represents the linear relationship between age and the merged variant [n] among the illiterate female speakers. Except in the case of two people with the same year of birth, each dot represents age and thus corresponds to one individual speaker. This suggests that there is a very strong relationship between the merged variant [n] and age of the illiterate speakers – a stronger relationship than the overall relationship suggested above.

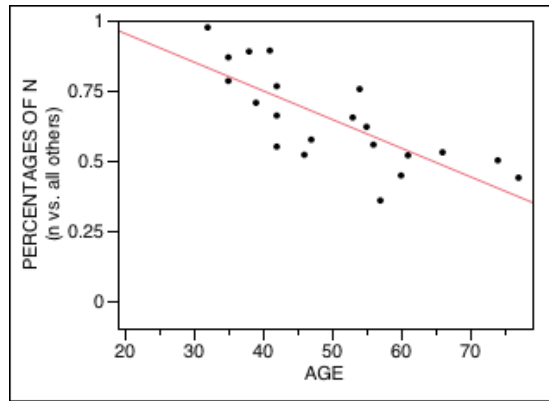


Figure 14 Linear relationship between illiterate female speakers and age

A more dramatic relationship can be observed among illiterate male speakers. This is illustrated in Figure 15 where usage rates of the merged variant [n] are plotted by the y-axis and speaker's age on the x-axis. The relationship between speaker's age and number of total merged variant is linear and is significant ($R^2 = 0.69$). Compared to the overall relationship between age of illiterate female speakers and merged variant as illustrated in Figure 14, there is a stronger linear relationship among these illiterate male speakers. The major difference between the two groups of speakers with respect to merging is evident among speakers above the age of 45: illiterate female speakers use the merged variant [n] far more than their counterparts. I will return to this issue very shortly.

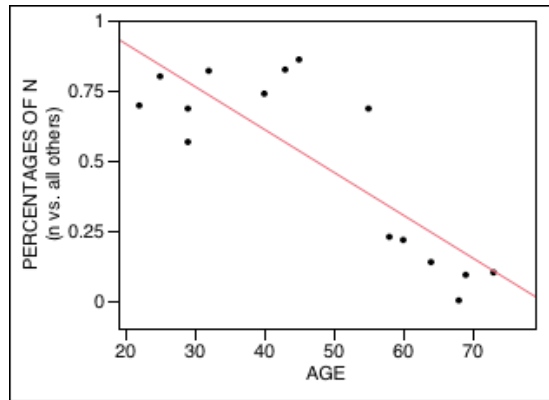


Figure 15 Linear relationship between age of illiterate male speakers and use of merged variant

Similarly, there is also a linear relationship between age and percentage of the merged variant [n] for literate male speakers. I have presented the significant relationship between the two dimensions in Figure 16.

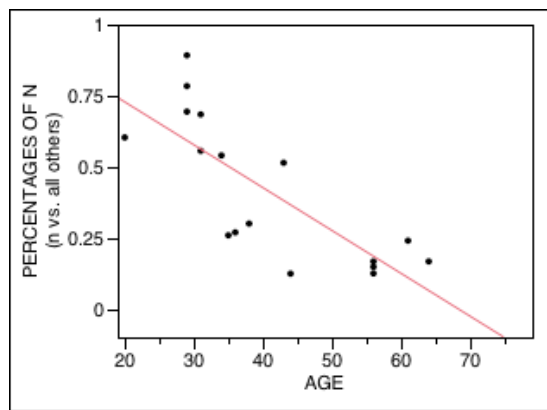


Figure 16 Linear relationship between age of literate male speakers and use of merged variant [n]

In contrast, there is no linear relationship between the merged variant [n] and age of the literate female speakers ($R^2 = 0.0$). This may have something to do with the fact there are no literate female speakers above the age of 40. This is the sociolinguistic

reality of the village. Whether there would be a correlation between age of literate speakers and that of the merged variant [n] cannot be solved based on empirical data. This is not a bias in speaker representation but rather the sociolinguistic reality of the older female speakers in the village. The pattern is shown in Figure 17.

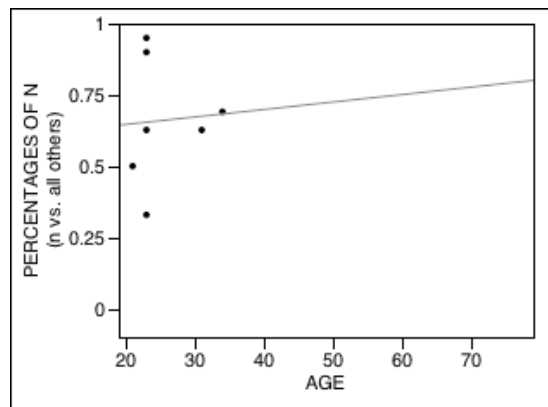


Figure 17 Literate female speakers and their use of the merged variant [n]

A detailed examination of the relationship between the merged variant and age of these four groups including illiterate female, literate female, illiterate male and literate male indicates that age is not always correlated with the merged variant. This is evident among younger literate female speakers where there is a lack of relationship between the merged variant [n] and speaker's age. Furthermore, the linear relationship is stronger among illiterate male speakers than it is among illiterate female speakers. Nevertheless, there is a clear pattern whereby younger speakers lead older speakers in usage of the merged variant [n], the innovative linguistic variant between the two.

This overall pattern associated with merging appears to be indicative of a community change in progress (Labov 1972; Bailey, Winkle, Tillery & Sand 1991). The incremental increase in the use of the merged variant in the speech of young people suggests that merging is generally becoming more common among younger speakers. For some younger speakers, merging is complete while some older speakers do not merge at all. Based on the underlying assumption of the apparent-time construct, I suggest that this synchronic snapshot of variation indeed reflects diachronic language change. Of course, apparent time data ideally would be supplemented by real time evidence; however, due to the robustness of the patterns presented here, as well as of the apparent time construct in variation study more generally, we can feel confident that indeed Spearhead has undergone a change toward increasing usage of merged [n] across the past several generations of speakers.

5.2.3 *Speaker's sex and literacy*

The preceding discussion has established the fact that merging appears to be a change in progress: younger people use more of the merged variant [n] than do older speakers. Moreover, it has been found that except in the case of literate females, there is a correlation between age and use of the merged variant [n] that exists to various degrees among all speakers. I here examine the combined factor group of sex and literacy, and its interaction with the merged variant [n]. Recall that this factor group, including illiterate female, literate female, illiterate male and literate male factors, was constructed to compensate for the lack of literate speakers among older females. While

these patterns presented in Table 5 and Figure 18 are true of the overall data, they also suggest a more complex interaction involving sex and literacy. Let me first review the literacy/sex factor group based on the overall multivariate regression analysis.

Figure 18 illustrates how the four-way factor group of sex and literacy correlates with the merged variant [n]. The numbers next to the bars represent centered weights for each factor based on the overall model presented in Table 5. Thus, females who are illiterate overall favor the merged variant [n], most with a factor weight of 0.81. Similarly, illiterate men also favor it with a factor weight of 0.53. On the other hand, the more literate groups including literate male and female disfavor use of this merged variant with a factor weight of 0.29 and 0.34 respectively.

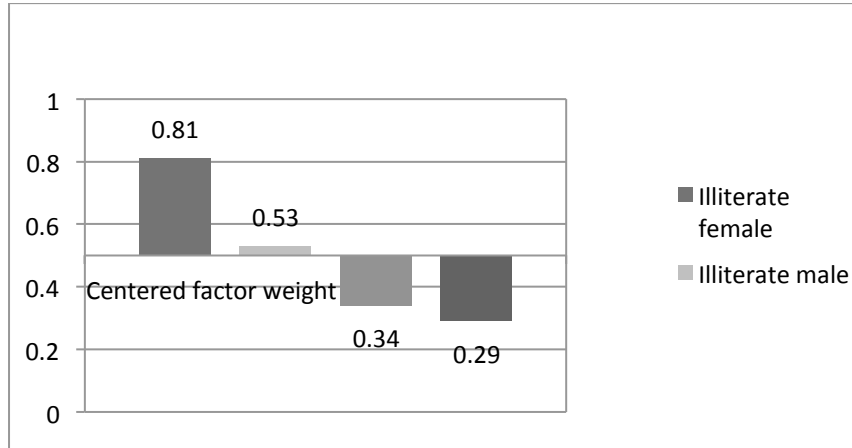


Figure 18 Interaction between merged variant [n] and sex-literacy factor group

While the relationship between the merged variant [n] and the sex-literacy factor group is illuminating overall, the pattern ignores the potential interaction between age,

sex and literacy. Recall that the overall results shown in Table 5, on which Figure 18 is based, did not consider the potential interaction between age and these two social factors. This was due to the fact that age was treated as a continuous factor in the overall model to investigate the overall correlation between age and the use of the merged variant. This overall relationship, as I explore in section 5.3, is a complicated one deserving closer scrutiny.

I have so far shown that merging appears to be a change in progress: younger speakers favor the use of the merged variant [n] and older speakers disfavor its use. I have also shown that illiterate female and male speakers overall favor the merged variant [n] while both literate men and female disfavor it. These results indicate that neither literacy nor sex alone affects the realization of the variable across the entire sample of speakers. This is potentially related to the complete absence of elderly literate females. While the multivariate mixed effect regression analysis results clearly suggest the overall effect that this factor group has on the merged variant [n], they ignore how both sex and literacy as separate factor groups interact with other social dimensions.

5.3 Interaction between speaker's sex, age and literacy

To better understand how sex and literacy affect and interact with the merged variant [n], I have categorized the speakers into two distinctive groups based on the educational history of the village. One natural dividing point, informed by my

ethnographic knowledge of the village presented in Chapter 3, is speaker's literacy. Recall that the speakers who are currently in their early 40s (45 to be precise) are the earliest group of people, who, for first time in history, had access to Tibetan education beyond the local primary school (more in Chapter 3). While there are literate male speakers above the age of 45, these men were educated by their religious teachers and/or by practitioners of traditional medicine. These two age groups thus form meaningful groups that are based on the cultural and educational history of the village.

Based on this, the speakers are categorized into two social groups. Speakers above 45 are categorized as 'older' and those below 45 are considered 'younger'. Categorizing speakers in these binary categories of 'older' and 'younger' allows us to unpack the effects of speaker's age, sex, and literacy in a more socially meaningful way. With the goal of exploring the role of different social factors within these two groups, I have subjected tokens from each group into two separate mixed-effect multivariate regression analyses. I will justify this decision with more details in the next section.

5.3.1 Sex-based variation among older speakers

To understand the potential role of literacy and literacy among the older speakers, I have carried out various regression analyses to explore the potential effect of all of the social and linguistic constraints found relevant in the overall multivariate regression analysis (presented in Table 5). The social constraints include speaker's sex, age and a semi-interaction group based on sex and literacy. The semi-interaction group

of sex and literacy among the older speakers is composed of three separate factors including illiterate female, literate male and illiterate male. Inclusion of this factor group is necessary since none of the females above the age of 40 are literate. This, as I have mentioned before, is not because they are not represented in the study but rather because they are not present in the village. In addition to these social constraints, I have also included the preceding linguistic environment along with both individual speakers and lexical items. Individual speakers and lexical items have again been treated as random factors.

As is the case of the overall model presented above in Table 5, age is again treated as a continuous factor. This was necessary since the overall model suggests a linear relationship between the speaker's age and the use of the merged variant. Including the speaker's age as a continuous factor, the model considers the role of age within this group so that the effect of other group constraints such as gender can be accurately investigated. By excluding the speaker's age as a separate and continuous factor within this older group, one might run the risk of over-estimating the effect of external factors such as gender because this method would treat all female speakers the same without considering the effect of their age.

Out of a total of 25 speakers within this older speaker group, 13 are male and the remaining 12 are female. All 12 females are illiterate, with an average age of 59 whereas 6 of the 13 men are literate and 7 are illiterate. The average age for this older group is 60. The demographic composition of this group is illustrated in Figure 19.

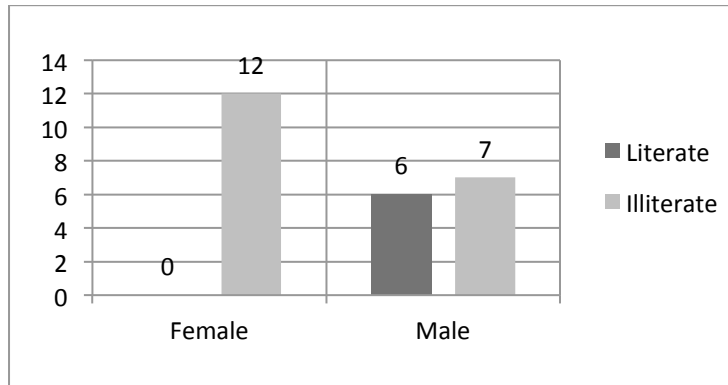


Figure 19 Literacy and sex among the older group

Result of a regression analysis for older speakers is presented in Table 6. As is the case with the overall model presented in Table 5, the model has the merged variant [n] as the application value and includes a total number of 1268 tokens. The significant factor groups are shown in the left-most column. Factors within each group are presented in descending order of their relative factor weight. The best model generated by the multivariate analysis is also presented in the first row with corresponding significance value. Additional parameters of this model are presented in the bottom row.

Speaker (random) + Lexical item (random) + Preceding (7.2e-22) + Sex (3.41e-05) + Age (0.004) [A]

Factor	Logodds	Tokens	Proportion	Centered weight
Preceding				

	[e+o]	1.37	220	0.57	0.80
	[ə]	0.94	581	0.54	0.72
	[a]	-2.31	417	0.04	0.09
Sex	Female	1.06	576	0.55	0.74
	Male	-1.06	692	0.24	0.26
Age	Continuous	Logodds			
	+1	-0.08			
Deviance	DF	Intercept	Mean	N	
995.33	7	3.23	0.38	1268	

Table 6 Social and linguistic factors among the older speakers

The results presented in Table 6 suggest that three factor groups including preceding linguistic environment, speaker's sex and age have been found to be significant among these speakers. The preceding linguistic environments, though differing slightly in terms of their absolute factor weights, have similarly been found to correlate with the merged variant [n]. The same is true of the effect of age in both this and the overall model presented in Table 5. What is different and interesting, however, is the effect of sex among these speakers: female speakers favor the use of the merged variant with a factor weight of 0.74 while male speakers disfavor it at a factor weight of 0.26. This sex-based variation is presented in Figure 20 with respective factor weights noted on each bar representing different sex groups.

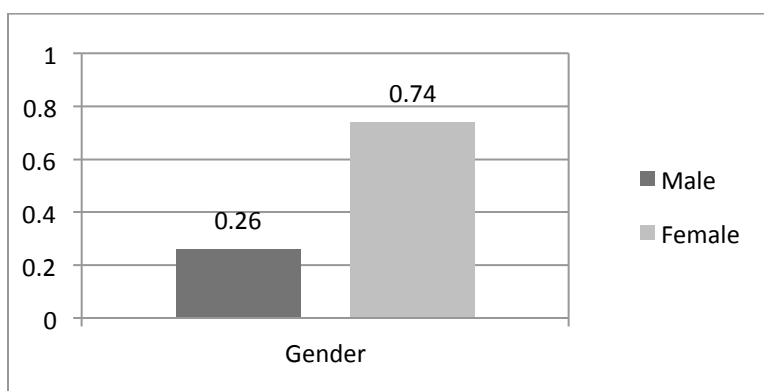


Figure 20 Sex effect among the older speakers (factor weights)

Besides a sex-based variation, the semi-interaction group composed of literate male, illiterate female and illiterate male was not found to be significant. This is important because it indirectly suggests that the older literate and illiterate male speakers exhibit similar usage patterns with respect to the merged variant [n]. The absence of literacy effect among the older male speakers is quite interesting because literacy plays a significant role among the younger speakers. However, it is important to note again that this conclusion is based on linguistic behaviors of the older male speakers. Whether or not literacy would have played a significant role among older females cannot be empirically tested given the lack of older literate female speakers in the village.

In summary, analysis of the production patterns among the older speakers shows that there is a sex-based variation where female speakers overall lead male speakers in their usage rates of the merged variant [n]. However, the analysis also shows that the older male speakers do not exhibit a literacy-based variation. These patterns, as I show

below, will be reversed among the younger speakers where a literacy based variation begins to emerge while sex-based variation disappears.

5.3.2 Literacy-based variation among younger speakers

As I hinted above, the pattern is slightly different for younger speakers, both in terms of the effects of specific factors as well as in terms of the overall demographic composition of the group. Out of 35 speakers within this younger group, 19 are men and 16 are female. Among the females, 9 are illiterate with an average age of 38, and 7 are literate with an average age of 25. Of the 19 men, 12 are literate and 7 are not. There are a total of 16 illiterate younger speakers and 19 literate speakers. These sociolinguistic characteristics are presented in Figure 21.

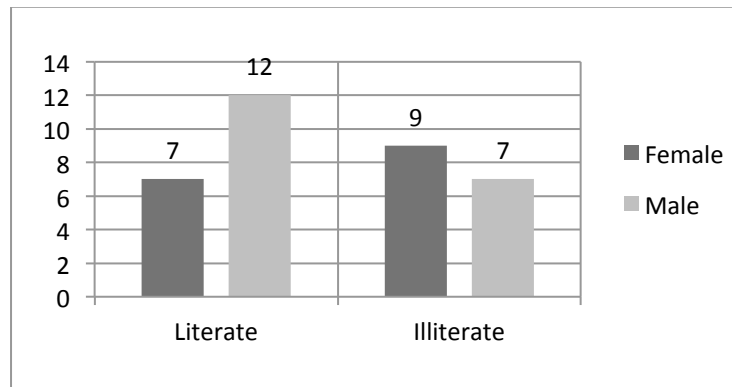


Figure 21 Number of speakers by literacy and sex among the younger group

As with the group of older speakers, I have included all of the social and linguistic constraints found significant in the overall multivariate regression analysis (presented in Table 5). Similar to the older speaker group, these factors include speaker's literacy, sex and age. Furthermore, I have also included the preceding linguistic context. As is the case with the overall model presented above, age is again treated as a continuous factor. An interaction between speaker sex and literacy was also tested as part of this regression analysis – recall that there are both literate and illiterate speakers in this group. In addition to these factors, both individual speakers and lexical items have been included as random factors.

Regression analysis of 1748 tokens from these 35 younger speakers, presented in Table 7, suggests that both age and preceding linguistic constraints have similar effects as those reported in Table 5 and Table 6. I will not explore these in greater detail as the underlying principles remain the same despite slightly different values. However, the sex-based differentiation exhibited by the older speakers disappears among these younger speakers. Instead, it is literacy that has been found to be significant within this younger group; Illiterate speakers tend to significantly favor the use of the merged variant [n] with a factor weight of 0.68 and literate speakers disfavor the variant with a factor weight of 0.32.

Speaker (random) + Lexical item (random) + Preceding (7.2e-22) + Sex (3.41e-05) + Age (0.004) [A]					
	Factor	Logodds	Tokens	Proportion	Centered weight
Preceding	[e+o]	2.08	610	0.86	0.89
	[ə]	1.11	777	0.73	0.75
	[a]	-3.19	397	0.03	0.04
Literacy	Illiterate	0.75	736	0.75	0.68
	Literate	-0.75	1048	0.53	0.32
Age	Continuous	Logodds			
	+1	-0.06			
Deviance	DF	Intercept	Mean	N	
1262.15	7	1.9	0.62	1748	

Table 7 Social and linguistic factors among the younger speakers

Figure 22 illustrates literacy based variation using associated factor weights. The illiterate female group, which has been found to favor the merged variant [n] overall, is no longer a social group favoring its usage. This is important because the overall model presented in Table 5 suggests that illiterate female speakers favor the merged variant over illiterate male speakers. This more in-depth analysis of the younger speakers highlights the importance of paying attention to socially meaningful groups of speakers rather than treating all speakers as a single group. This clearly suggests that literacy, instead of sex, correlates with the merged variant [n] among younger speakers.

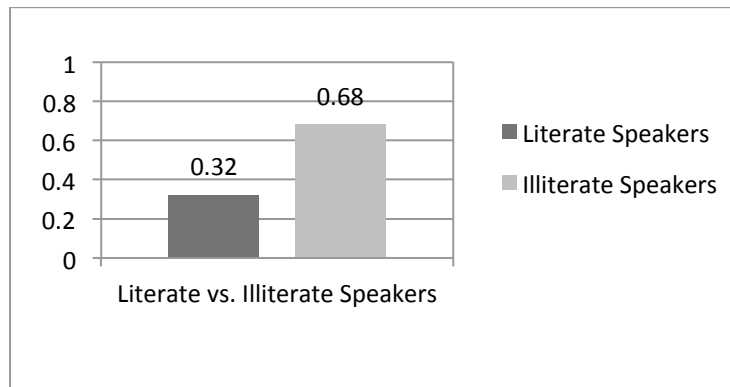


Figure 22 Effect of literacy among younger speakers (factor weights)

Differing age groups display variants in rates of literacy and sex based variation as correlated with the merged variant [n]. There is also a difference in the rate at which the merged variant [n] decreases as the speaker's age increases. The log-odds for effect of age among older speakers, as presented in Table 6, is -0.08 or about 2.3%. This expresses the correlation value as the speaker's age increases. On the other hand, among younger speakers, the log-odds value is 0.06 or 4.2%. This is presented in Table 7 above. The rates at which the merged variant [n] correlates with an increase in age suggest that for younger speakers there is accelerated change towards the merged variant, as compared to that among the older speakers where the change rate is relatively slow.

The decrease in usage rates of the merged variant [n] by younger literate speakers is worth contrasting with the rate of usage of this variant by older speakers.

Among older speakers, male speakers disfavored the merged variant with a factor weight of 0.26. Among younger speakers, literate speakers are the ones who disfavor the merged variant [n] with a factor weight of 0.32. This is illustrated in Figure 23. This comparison suggests that younger literate speakers are linguistically behaving very similar to older men, in spite of an overall increased usage of the merged variant [n] among younger speakers. This is a very surprising finding, given that the literate speakers are far younger than the older men and that there are overall changes towards the merged variant in the community. I will return to discussion of this unexpected result in section 5.6 of this chapter and also in Chapter 6.

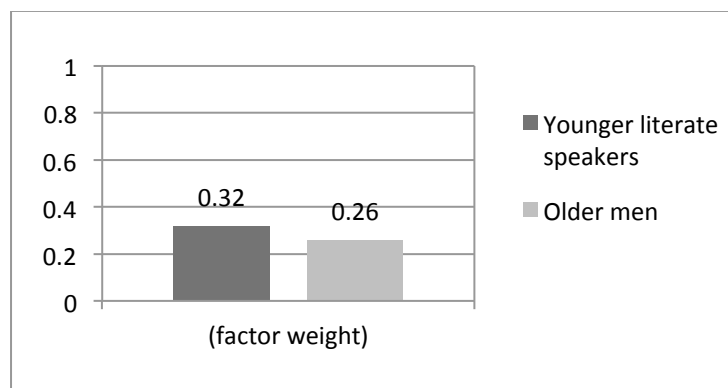


Figure 23 Use of the merged variant [n] by younger literate speakers and older men

5.4 Summary of production patterns in the community

To summarize the production patterns associated with the merged variant [n] so far, multivariate analysis with mixed effects suggests that that merged variant [n] is

conditioned by both linguistic and social constraints including the preceding vowel, speaker's age, literacy and sex. Let me briefly state them here again.

In terms of linguistic constraints, height of the preceding vowel is positively associated with merging: the higher the vowel is, the more likely that merging takes place. In terms of overall social factors, the direct correlation between age and use of merged variant [n] shows that the younger the speakers are, the more likely they are to use the merged variant.

An examination of the interaction between age, sex and literacy reveals that both sex and literacy play a significant role but only in different social groups: Sex plays a significant role in linguistic differentiation among older speakers (those older than 45) and literacy becomes a significant factor among younger speakers (those below 45). More importantly, younger literate speakers, much like older male speakers, disfavor the merged variant [n] significantly.

Having isolated the social and linguistic constraints conditioning the merged variant [n] among this sample of speakers, I now turn to the issue of interpreting these patterns of linguistic variation and change. The goal of this section is to explain the observed usage patterns by situating them within local social context.

5.5 Explaining the sex based variation

Sex-based variation among speakers older than 45 suggests that adoption of this innovative linguistic feature is led by female speakers. For speakers over 45, female

speakers are leading the change towards the innovative and merged variant while male speakers are lagging behind. Recall that the overall change towards the merged variant [n] is an areal feature found in Amdo Sprachbund (Janhunen 2006; Dwyer 1995). This is similar to larger linguistic changes such as the Canadian Raising and Northern City Vowel Shift (Labov 1994) and is internal to linguistic change. The overall change towards the merged variant [n] is a linguistic change that is relatively ideologically free.

One of the primary reasons behind the spread of this female-led change towards the merged variant appears to be related to local cultural practices and the traditional economic roles of the sexes. Let me elaborate on what kinds of cultural practices and traditional economic roles I am referring to. By cultural practices, I am specifically referring to a particular type of marriage practice that may have impacted the general introduction of the initial spread of this more innovative variant [n] into the current village. As I discussed in Chapter 3, local marriage practices have greatly shaped and reshaped the demographic composition of the village.

As is the custom in many Tibetan villages in the area, females always in-marry and move into the husband's home permanently. Within this patrilocal culture, it is extremely rare for outside men to marry into the village and live at the woman's parents' house. This type of cultural practice is a time-honored tradition and it continues to this day except among some of the college educated villagers. Summarizing the demographic composition of the entire village population of married people, there are a total of 234 individuals (61%). Of these, 30% of the married women were born

elsewhere and married into the local village whereas only 3% of married men were born outside of the village. This speaks to the general differences in the dialect backgrounds of the men and women in the village.

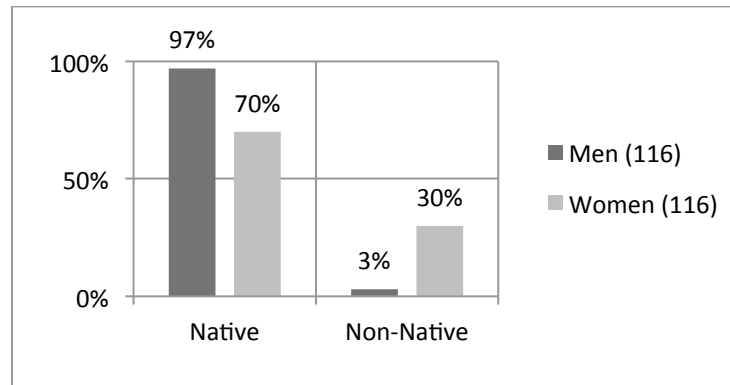


Figure 24 Birth place of all married men and women in the village

The difference in sociolinguistic backgrounds is more pronounced if we consider the parents of currently married couples (79) who are older than 45. This would place their parents' dates of birth in the early 1900s. Among these villagers, 40% of females married into their husband's families while none of the men were born outside of the current speech community. These demographic characteristics reflect the imbalance between females, who have moved into the village, as opposed to men, who have all been born in the village. It immediately becomes apparent that women have traditionally tended to be from outside of the current speech community. This marriage practice, as a type of local migration and form of local dialect contact, may have had a profound impact on the female led adoption of the innovative variant [n]. And this

claim is indeed consistent with the local speaker’s interpretation and conceptualization of the linguistic variation.

The following response from a 60-year-old illiterate woman illustrates several points related to this issue. The speaker, like many other older females, got married in her early 20s. She moved into her husband’s village and spent her entire life in the current village. Shown in Excerpt 1 is her answer to the question of whether or not other villagers have been able to identify her village of birth based on her accent.

Excerpt 1

ད་སྐྱོན་མ་ལ། དམར་སྐྱོད་ལ། ཨ་ཡེ་བཟའ་མ་ལ་དེ་ཚོ་ནགས་གསོང་དུ་ད། ད་གཟེས་ནགས་སྤང་གིས་ལེན་རྒྱ་བཟེས་ལ། ད་དེང་ཚོ་གིས་ལྷ་བ་ཡས་ལ། ད་ལྷོ་ཚོ་ཉ་འདས་ རྒྱུ་ཚང་མ་ལྟེ་གཟེས་ནགས་སྤང་གིས། ཟླ་བ་མི་གཅིག་གི་མོད། ལྷོ་ཚོ་ཚང་མ་བྱ་མོ་ཉག་ཉག་ རྒྱུང་རྒྱུང་ལྟེ་མ་རེད། ལྷོ་ཚོ་ཚང་མ་མནའ་མ་ཉག་ཉག་རེད། ད་ཨ་ཡེ་སྐྱོན་མ་གིས་ནགས་སྤང་ལ་འདི་ལྟར་ལྷ་བ་ཡས་ རྒྱུས་ལྟེ་ནི་རེད། ལེད་ལེད་ལེད། ཨ་བྱ་ལེད་ལེད། ཨ་བྱ་ལེད་ལེད། མར་སྐྱོད་གིས། ཨ་སྤེས་ལེད་ལེད་ཨ་སྤེས་ལེད་ལེད་བཟེས་ལྷ་བ་བྱས། གན་གིས་ཨ་ཡེ་བཟའ་མ་གིས། ཨ་རྒྱ་བདག་པོ་ལེད་ལེད། ད་དེང་ཅག་འགོ་གི་རྒྱགས་བཟེས་ནི་རེད། ད་ངས་གཟེས་ཨ་མ་ལེད་ལེད་ཨ་མ་ལེད་བཟེས་ལ། ད་དེང་ཚོ་དེ་གར་ད་མ་གཅིག་ནི་རེད།

So, one day a group of us including Drolma, Markyi and Tama went to collect shrubs in the forest but the forest guards came to confiscate our loads. So we had to beg them to let us go. So they said, ‘You are all from different villages. You are not daughters of this village. You are all in-married females’. Drolma, for example, begged by saying ‘Please, please, abu’. Mardo on the other hand said, ‘Please, please, ayi’. Tama said, ‘Dear brother, please let us go’. And I said, ‘Please, please, awa awa’. So that’s how they figured that we were not from this village. (019_F_61 @ 44:44)

Her account provides insight into the demographic and dialectal background of the older female. She points out that the older females in the village, including her and her friends, tend to be from other villages where other types of local dialects are spoken. She uses specific non-local distinctive dialect features to substantiate the sociolinguistic heterogeneity observed among older females. Her account of this incident highlights two sociolinguistic characteristics of the older female. First, in general, older females are far more heterogeneous in terms of both demographic and linguistic background than are the men in the community. Second, it also implies that in-marrying females retain linguistic features of their home villages and have maintained these features in later life. Both of these phenomena have consequences in terms of female led adoption of innovative linguistic features.

In a farming village, in-marrying women are always from other nearby farming communities and not nomadic communities where merging has not yet taken place. Many of the married older female speakers tend to be from water communities. This is important because local sociolinguistic knowledge suggests that the merged variant [n] is a linguistic feature typical of water communities and not mountain communities – two types of local farming communities generally recognized by the speakers. Mountain communities such as Spearhead rely on natural rainfall as the source of water for their crops while water communities are situated at lower altitudes and utilize irrigation. They are also closer to non-Tibetan speaking populations, particularly the Chinese, confirming the general perception that the merged variant [n] sounds more ‘Chinese’.

In-marrying females lead the change towards the merged variant [n] in part because of the retention of their dialect features. This marriage practice, as a type of local migration and form of local dialect contact, may have had a profound impact on the initial introduction of sex-based variation among older speakers and encouraged this change through the dialect contact of females in the village. The importance of the marriage pattern in relation to retention of linguistic features such as the merged variant [n] is also confirmed by some keen observations made by local people. A 56-year-old woman, for example, notes the relationship between these in-marrying females and the local linguistic variation in Excerpt 2:

Excerpt 2

ད་དེ་ལྟ་ཚོའི་འཁྲུག་གི་སྐད་རིགས་འདི་ལྟ་ཚོ་ལྟེ་བ་ནང་ནི་ལ། ད་སྐད་རིགས་མི་གཅིག་གི་ད་ལྟ་ཚོའི་སྐད་རིགས་འདི་གཟེས་ཚུ་མ་ཅིག་གཞོལ་གི་ཟེར་ནི་རེད། ས་ཐང་གཟོར་སོང་ན། ད་གཟེས་མའུང་མགོ་གི་སྐད་རིགས་དེར་བཟླ་ཡེད་གི་འདུག་གི་ལན་གོང་ཟེར་གི་ལན་ཡོག་ཟེར་གི་བཟེས་ལ། དེའི་བཟླ་ཡེད་གི་བཟླ་ཡེད་གི་དེའི་ལྟ་ཚོ་ལྟེ་བ་ནང་ནི་ལ། ལན་གོང་ལན་ཡོག་ཟེར་གོ་ནོ་དེ་ཅིག་གན་ཡེད་མཉམ་གཟིག་ཡེད་གི་དེ་ལྟ་ཚོ་མགོ་ཚང་འདི་གི་ཉ་ནས་སྐོང་མཉེ་གིས་ཅིག་ཚུ་མ་གི་སྐད་རིགས་དེ་བཤད་གི་དེ་ད་ཨ་མ་ཚུ་མ་གི་ཡིན་ནོ་གི་སྐྱོན་གཟིག་ཡིན་ནི་ནང་། གཟེས་ས་ཐང་ཁོ་ས་ཐང་གཟོ་གིས་དེ་གས་ཨ་ལྷ་ལྷུ་མགོ་གིས་ཅིག་ཟེར་གི་ལྷིག་ཟེར་གི་ཟེར་ར། དང་ད་སྐྱོན་ཚད་ལྟོ། དེ་ལྟ་ཚོའི་ནང་ནས་ལ་སྐད་རིགས་དེ་ཉ་ར་ཚུར་ར་རྒྱག་རྒྱའོ་རྒྱག་གི་གཟེས། གཟེས་ས་ཐང་གིས་གནམ་འབབ་གོ་གི་བཟེས་ན་ལ། ལྷ་གཟོས་སྐོང་ལྟོ་གནམ་འབབ་གོ་གི་དེ་ཟེར་ནི་རེད། ད་ས་ཐང་གིས་གཟེས་མའུང་མགོ་ཚོ་གིས་གནམ་འབབ་གོ་གི་ཟེར་ནི་རེད། ཁོ་ཚོས་གིས་གནམ་འབབ་གོ་གི་དེ་ཟེར་ནི་རེད། ད་ཁོ་ཚོའི་དེ་ད་ནང་ཁོ་གི་སྐད་རིགས་ཅིག་གཞོལ་གི་ལྟ་ཚོ་གི་སྐད་རིགས་འདི་ལྟ་ཚོ་ཚོ་བ་ལ་ཚོ་བ་ལ་མི་གཅིག་གི་འདི་གས་ཅིག་གིས་བཟླས་ན། གཟེས་ཅིག་གིས་ཆེད་ཅིག་གིས་བཟླས་ན། ད་དེ་ལྷོགས་ཅུ་ལྷོགས་ནས་སྐྱོགས་གང་མང་ནས་ལྟོ་ཡོང་ནོ་ལ་ཉ་ནས་གིས་སྐྱོན་གིས་ད་ད་གཟེས་དྲི་མ་སྐྱོང་ཚམ་ལྟོ་གཟིག་ཅིག་ཉ་ར་ཚུར་ར་རང་རང་གི་སྐད་རིགས་དེ་ཅིག་བཤད་གོ་གི་ལ།

I think there is a lot of variation even within the village. Other people say that our dialect tends to be more like water dialect. And if you go to other villages, they will

mimic our dialect. But even within our village, there are those that do speak more like water people and those that do not. For example, people related to Mr. Chugo all speak more like water people which might have something to do with the fact that the mother is from water communities. People from other villages used to quote Mr. Chugo (who is the husband) because of the way he spoke. So for example, I would say /^hnam/ but our village is perceived to be saying /^hnen/... and so within our village, there is also variation due to tribes. That is, if you look at it as an outside observer. I think this probably has to do with the fact that people tend to be from different areas. And I think that's what the language variation is due to (F56_127).

This 56-year-old woman's observation resonates with other people's understanding of the local linguistic variation. While characterizing linguistic variation within the village, this speaker points out that certain families and types of people are far more likely to speak like people from water communities by using the merged variant [n]. This is particularly true of members of Mr. Chugo's family, and the speaker attributes this to the fact that Mr. Chugo's mother is from a water community area. The multivariate regression analysis with mixed effect indeed shows that Mr. Chugo favors the merged variant [n] with a factor weight of 0.83. This is very unusual considering the fact that he is an older literate male, all factors which would otherwise have disfavored the merged variant [n]. Thus, it is highly possible, as understood by the local people, that those in-marrying older female speakers or their mothers have brought the non-local or innovative linguistic variant [n] into the current speech community, paving the way for the sex-based variation observed among the older speakers.

Marriage practices have been shown to be a new source of language variation in studies of dialect contact among small population groups in other parts of the world as well. Smith and Johnson's (1986) study of the Ngahara community of Cape York Peninsula in Australia finds that in-marrying females maintain linguistic features of their patrillects. Duran (1995) also reports that in-marrying females in the Aran Islands of Ireland and their children introduce new linguistic variants into the dialect of the husbands. Similar findings are also reported in Bower's (2008) study of clan-based groups in Arnhem Land, Australia and Stanford's (2009) study of the Sui people of China. These studies show that in-marrying women (e.g. those from a different village/clan) tend to retain the dialect features of their patrillect (i.e. home village) to a high degree. Marriage practices of the Sui people of Southwest China dictate that each member of the couple comes from different clans where slightly different dialects are spoken. Stanford's investigation of lexical tone among married female adults and non-mobile speakers shows that many in-married females maintain their home dialectal features despite having lived in the husband's community for several decades. And the persistence of their patrillect through this type of micro-immigration indeed contributes to the hybridity (Owens 1965) of the local dialect and has further consequences for language variation and change. Marriage, as a fundamental social unit, has been shown to have great sociolinguistic impact on the local dialect when dialects come in contact with each other.

In addition to the unique marriage practices described above, men and women have traditionally had very different labor roles that may have facilitated the acquisition of the newer sound [n] from water communities. In other words, economic necessity has given men and women significantly different types of dialect contact. This is important to consider because dialect contact has always been part of the sociolinguistic history of any dialect. Spearhead village is no exception in this regard. Let me highlight some of the unique gender-specific labor roles that provided different types of contacts with speakers of different dialects in the past.

I have discussed many aspects of these sex-specific labor practices in much greater detail in Chapter 3. Recall that water communities and nomadic communities have distinctive dialects. Partially because of their differing geographic proximity to non-Tibetan speaking populations such as Chinese in the area, these dialects also exhibit different degrees of contact induced features. In the case of the present linguistic variable (m), for example, the merged variant [n] is a widespread in water communities but not in nomadic communities. Women traditionally interacted with speakers of water communities for a variety of reasons. These specific economic roles include women's participation in weeding and harvesting as well as their engagement in small seasonal trades with speakers of water dialect speaking communities. For their part, the traditional economic roles of men have required interaction with speakers of nomad dialect.

These traditional labor practices and economic roles assumed by the female provided not only labor and goods but also exposed them to other dialect features and ultimately may have facilitated the diffusion of the merged variant [n]. Interaction with speakers of water dialect may have provided access to the linguistic change involving the merged variant that was already taking place in many of the water communities. Men's exposure to these traditionally non-merged dialect speakers may have resulted in their maintaining the more conservative form of speech, in contrast with their female counterparts whose interaction has been primarily among water dialect speaking communities (although, as noted above, some men seem to be quite influenced by their wives' language patterns). This differentiated pattern of social interaction may have given speakers access to knowledge of the linguistic practices of others. The traditional socioeconomic roles and responsibilities assumed by different gender groups, in addition to the role of in-marriage in the community, may have shaped and reshaped their linguistic behaviors throughout history. This finding suggests that this gender-based variation that I have found in this particular community is best understood by fully understanding the local context within which men and women live their lives – a point made by previous researchers (Nichols 1976; Dubois and Horvath 1999; Eckert 2000; Schilling-Estes 2002a). I will return to the issue of general leadership of women in sound change in 5.7 and also discuss it further in section 6. 6 as well.

5.6 Explaining the literacy based variation

These social and cultural practices have diminished in importance as the village has gone through a series of changes including different types of population mobility and the introduction of modern education. At the same time, the leadership of women in adoption of this sound change has ceased to exist among the younger speakers as the diffusion of the merged variant [n] has advanced steadily among the younger speakers. These younger speakers, particularly female, are beginning to have more geographic mobility than female speakers of the older generation whose mobility was limited to the local water dialect speaking communities (many of these water communities are within 20 mile radius) and hence are having more social interaction with speakers of other dialects. For the first time in the history of the village, female villagers are able to travel to remote areas³⁵ and work alongside the men in construction industry or collection of cash crops. Younger female speakers who have traditionally worked in and around the village (less than 20 miles radius) have begun to be away for many months of the year, earning a supplemental income.

The traditional labor roles that each sex group assumed are no longer significant in terms of providing access to different forms of linguistic variability. Instead, sex-based variation has been taken over by literacy. This coincides with the introduction of modern education. The most important milestone in the history of local education began with the establishment of Tibetan middle schools and primary schools during the post-

³⁵ Many younger villagers travel to Golok prefecture or other places more than 300 miles away. The roads are treacherous and unpredictable. Traveling such distance requires two days of laborious journey. This type of mobility is unprecedented in the history of the community.

Mao era of the 1970s. With the liberalization period in contemporary China that began towards the end of the 1970s, those under the age of 45 have grown up in an environment where education in Tibetan has been available, and it is the members of this younger group that have been able to become educated. For example, a Tibetan middle school, which was established in 1979 with an initial student body of 50 and 6 teachers, provided education in Tibetan beyond the primary level. By 1990, there were around 2254 Tibetan students in the middle school. The establishment of middle schools was a sign of improved educational policy towards ethnic Tibetans in the area, and provided an environment in which younger villagers could receive an education. By this means they were exposed to the non-merged variant [m] that is normatively taught in schools. These younger villagers, who have had access to education, have a literacy rate of 70% as compared to a literacy rate of 24% for villagers above the age of 45. This has led to what appears to be a revitalization of an otherwise disappearing sound.

Certainly, this is one possible reason why literate speakers in general are lagging behind this trend towards the merged variant [n]. While overall increase in speakers' education levels explains why the younger literate speakers disfavor the merged variant [n] overall, not all literate younger speakers disfavor it. There are some younger college students whose usage rates of the merged variant [n] are not significantly different from those of young uneducated speakers. This suggests that speakers' education level alone cannot capture the linguistic behaviors of these younger more educated speakers. It is also worth noting that it is exactly among these younger speakers where the change

towards the merged variant [n] is accelerating. As I showed above in 5.3.2, the different correlation values associated with increasing age suggest that the change towards the merged variant [n] among the older speakers was slower than the change among the younger speakers. There are perhaps historical reasons for this accelerated merging rate among the younger speakers but this is an issue that I do not further investigate. The precise social dynamics for this interesting pattern remains to be investigated in future studies.

Regardless of why the merger is accelerating as well as spreading, the fact that education level alone cannot account for the behavior of the merged vs. non-merged variant among the younger speakers suggests the variants of the linguistic feature are perhaps more socially meaningful among this group of speakers than others. To understand why younger literate speakers are linguistically behaving similar to older men in the village, we need to understand the ideological dimensions of these linguistic variables. This is the goal of the next Chapter. First, let me review implications of these patterns in terms of broader sociolinguistic theories.

5.7 Language change, gender and local context

The linguistic leadership of women in adopting the innovative variant [n] corroborates Labov's (2001) observation that women tend to generally lead men in the adoption of changes, regardless of whether the linguistic features are overtly prescribed or not (Labov 1966; Holmquist 1985; Nichols 1976, 1983 Haeri 1991; Bauer 1982).

This study, situated in a completely different sociolinguistic context also thus aligns with Labov's (2001) observation that women are leaders of linguistic innovation not prescribed. However, the fact that neither gender among the literate speakers of the younger group favors the non-merged variant [m] - the prescribed variant, indicates that this general tendency is not born out in this particular community. I will explore this dimension of language variation further in Chapter 6 when engaging with social meaning of the linguistic variable.

Just as variation studies traditional have sought (but not always found) generalized patterns with respect to gender and language variation and change, early studies also offered more essentialist explanations for the gendered variation. Chambers (1995) argued that women have superior verbal skills as compared to men. Similarly, Gordon and Heath (1998) also note a biological basis for the general leadership of women. Instead of resorting to these more generalized explanations for women's leadership of linguistic change, the foregoing discussions have highlighted important aspects of the local cultural (marriage patterns) and labor practices (men and women's labor roles) that have shaped the linguistic behaviors of the men and women of the village among the older speakers of the village. This locally based explanation suggests that the relationship between gender and language change may be rooted in the particulars of the local community. In following other researchers of language variation and change (Nichols 1976; Dubois and Horvath 1999; Eckert 2000; Schilling-Estes

2002b), I also maintain that the linguistic leadership of women in general is best understood by understanding the local context.

The same argument also goes for the general tendency of female speakers to use more of the prescribed linguistic variants. Previous studies have similarly provided generalized explanations for the tendency of women to use more of the prescribed linguistic features. Labov (1966), attributes this to women's 'linguistic insecurity' while Trudgill (1972) argues that women are sensitive to prestige. Labov (2001) reengages with his earlier proposals and suggests that the greater "conformity of women is a reflection of their burden of responsibility for the upward mobility of their children – or at least their role in preparing the symbolic capital necessary for that mobility" (278). However, these generalized explanations do not appear to work in the current sociolinguistic context. The fact that both male and female literate speakers of the younger group are disfavoring the merged [n] variant without any significant difference suggests that the relationship between the prescribed linguistic variant and the speaker's sex is very much based in the particularities of the local community and not any of these generalized explanations. The lack of gender-based variation as I further show in Chapter 6, has to do with the social meaning of the linguistic variable and its symbolic association within the local context.

One of these generalized principles requiring further examination within this present sociolinguistic context is the idea of women's "linguistic conformity as a reflection of their greater assumption of responsibility for the upward mobility of their

children” (Labov 2001: 278). The underlying assumption, as Labov himself clearly states, is the existence of gendered childrearing practices. Labov (2001: 307) states that there is no community that he has been able to locate where the great majority of people do not learn their language from their female caregivers. This view, I believe, is a culturally biased view of the role of females with respect to childcare. I will explore how this gendered childcare practice in fact reflects our own biases rather than something that is inherently female in nature.

The childrearing practices in the village, as I have explored in Chapter 3, reflect a particular set of economic realities. In a traditional subsistence-based community, child-rearing generally is not associated with either gender. It is a joint effort carried out by different members of the extended family that usually includes not only parents of the husband but also those of the mother. Child-rearing practices are very much driven by practical considerations, falling in turn to whomever is available to take care of the children. Mothers and fathers are more able to perform heavy physical tasks, and are both needed to contribute to the welfare of the family. Neither person is by him or herself sufficient to sustain the family economically. More often, the parents, especially the mother, are absent as they have to work all the time and cannot afford to be at home unless they are working on chores around the house.

This is particularly true in the case of mothers. Young mothers especially are under the constant watch of family members, who continually evaluate her worth as a daughter-in-law. She will be the last person in the family to sleep at night after finishing

her chores and the first to get up early in the morning to make the fire in the stove. In the summer, the mother has to be out in the field either weeding or harvesting. And in the winter, the mother has to collect biofuel for the family or doing family chores. Therefore, the task of child rearing often fell to older family members such grandparents or, when possible, to younger children. If none of these options are available, the parents would take turns depending on the season of the year and the type of work needing to be done.

Children are separated from the mother at an early age and spend the majority of their days and nights in the care of either older siblings or grandparents. Once the children are above the age of 5 or 6, the children play with their siblings and with other children in the village. No one has to supervise the children's play. The children play in groups and roam the streets of the village or explore the small grove by the village. The kinds of lives led by the children in the village are the same throughout many different Tibetan communities in the area. The assertion that caregivers tend to be female appears to be a phenomenon that is perhaps popular among more industrialized societies in the west. Similarly, the reasoning that children learn language from female speakers and hence the notion that female speakers conform to established norms does not explain why female speakers might have a tendency to be more conformist.

In addition to this, women in the village are illiterate, and therefore cannot help the children with their homework. The women do not overtly correct the children's speech. It is in fact the fathers, who, due to their generally high social standing,

discipline the children and keep them in order in terms of their linguistic behavior. Even then, there are no overt institutionally prescribed language features that speakers can easily conform to. I have elaborated on this issue in Chapter 1. Furthermore, there is no bed-time story reading as it may be common among middle class in the west. Children, after playing all day and helping with chores are exhausted by the time the family gets together to eat in the evening. At times they fall asleep even before dinner is served. These child-rearing practices are quite different from those of the many communities in which language variation and change with respect to gender have been examined.

This study also highlights the importance of more ethnographically driven variationist studies to explore patterns of change as they relate to social categories like gender. Drawing on my own extensive ethnographic knowledge of the community, in combination with ethnographic sociolinguistic interviews, I have been able to bring to light locally relevant cultural practices as they relate to marriage and childrearing. This suggests that there are merits to the study of previously uninvestigated speech communities such as the present one because these communities present the researcher with different social realities, including factors like low literacy rates and childrearing practices that are not female dominated. An ethnographic approach to such communities is crucial in understanding the patterns and meanings that lie behind the linguistic features displayed in these settings.

The relatively high illiteracy rate present among the members of this community also gives us a rare opportunity to investigate the dynamics of language variation and

change before the proliferation of mass education and standardization of language. It provides us with access to a type of community that is long gone in more industrialized societies. This also highlights the fact that communities face different kinds of tensions and challenges in this globalizing world. Different social groups may participate in local sound change quite differently and investigation of sound change in this community may bring new insights into patterns of language variation and change. This dissertation is thus an effort to refine our existing theories about language change and the role of factors such as sex, literacy, mobility, and economic roles, while simultaneously expanding the domain of inquiry into less studied societies. I hope to have made at least some contribution to our existing theories of language variation and change.

5.8 Summary

The foregoing analysis has provided an analysis of the social and linguistic constraints that condition the merged variant [n]. We have considered a number of social and linguistic factors that are influencing merging and found that merging is a change in progress. In terms of linguistic constraints, the height of the preceding vowel was found to be directly related to the merged variant [n]. Thus, mid vowels including [e] and [o] favor the merged variant [n] while the low vowel [a] disfavors the variant [n]. The social factors of speaker's age, sex and education interact in a number of ways. Due to the lack of literate female speakers above the age of 45, a factor composed of sex and literacy found that overall illiterate female speakers favor the merged variant [n]

whereas literate male speakers disfavor it compared to other groups. However, a detailed analysis of the speakers, which were categorized into two groups based on the educational history of the village, found that sex and literacy interact with age in a number of ways. While younger speakers overall favor the merged variant far more than do older speakers, sex is only significant among speakers older than 45. Among these speakers, women lead the shift towards the merged variant [n], thus aligning with Labov's (2001) observation that women are leaders of linguistic innovation.

However, rather than relying on the conventional explanation citing the leadership of women in language change when it is not overly prescribed, I have examined social and economic patterns specific to the village and found that female speakers are the introducers of this innovative variant for locally relevant reasons. Historically, women have almost always (except younger educated female speakers) moved into the village upon their marriage and men have always stayed in the village. This, combined with women's intense interaction with speakers from water dialects was argued to have influenced the initial spread of the merged variant [n]. In addition to women's economic roles within the village, I also examined the different social activities that older men typically engaged in. These included constant interaction with people of nomadic backgrounds who are primary users of the non-merged variant [m].

The younger speakers under the age of 45, exhibit markedly different patterns of language change with respect to merging. The sex-effect, significant among those older than 45, ceases to be important among younger speakers. Instead, literacy begins to

emerge as a significant social factor within this age group. Illiterate younger speakers favor the merged variant [n] far more than the literate speakers who disfavor the merged variant [n]. As sound change spreads through the community, significant changes including the availability of modern education are becoming more important in influencing language variation. The availability of modern education, for the first time in history, now allows the villagers access the non-merged variant [m] that was otherwise slowly disappearing. Due to the availability of modern schooling in Tibetan areas during the post-Mao era, those who have had the opportunity to attend school also begin to acquire the normative variant [m]. These literate speakers begin to lag behind this overall change towards the merged variant [n]. Instead, it is those who have never had an education and who remain illiterate in Tibetan who continue to lead towards the merged variant [n].

To understand why both male and female speakers are both disfavoring the non-merged variant [n], and favoring the non-merged variant [m], I explore the ideological dimension of local linguistic variation in the next chapter and then motivate why a gendered pattern does not exist among younger literate speakers by appealing to the social meaning of the resurgence of the non-merged variant [m].

Chapter 6 Indexical values and social meaning

6.1 Introduction

My primary goal in this chapter is to move beyond the quantitative findings and provide a social motivation for the younger educated speakers' increased usage of the non-merged variant [m]. This is the linguistic form that is otherwise disappearing in the community. Recall that merging is an overall areal linguistic feature that is evident in a number of languages in the area. The younger educated speakers are disfavoring this trend and are not participating in this larger change to the same extent as their cohorts. In fact, these younger educated speakers' linguistic behaviors are quite similar to those of the older male speakers (regardless of literacy). As chapter 5 shows, while the older speakers acquired the non-merged variant [m] when they were young, the younger educated speakers learned these through the educational system.

Apart from the similarities in their speech patterns, these two groups (speakers older than 45 and the younger educated speakers) are quite different in terms of their sociolinguistic characteristics. As I pointed out in discussions about the demographics of Spearhead villagers in Chapter 3, these two groups are contrastive along a number of social dimensions. In addition to differences in age groups, these groups are also differentiated by the fact that the younger educated speakers have been able to go to Tibetan schools in the post-Mao era whereas many of the older speakers have never had

the chance to be educated in Tibetan. Some of the older speakers who are literate in Tibetan learned to read and write as a part of their religious training or in the study of traditional medicine.

In terms of the socio-demographic characteristics of these younger educated speakers, a number of them are currently college students and/or recent graduates working as teachers in Tibetan areas. They are all bilingual speakers of Tibetan and Mandarin Chinese (unlike the older speakers who are monolingual in Tibetan) and represent the highly educated segment of the village. Moreover, these educated younger speakers, through their schooling, have been exposed to larger regional dialects such as the speech of the nomads. They have been exposed to other languages such as Chinese as well as the more dominant linguistic ideologies and discourses about language variation and identity in the area. Some of the older educated speakers within this younger group also include skilled villagers such as carpenters, traditional Tibetan doctors and members of a local religious group.

This chapter is organized in the following way. In 6. 2, I explore the more traditional language ideologies expressed by older speakers (above 45) by means of metalinguistic commentary and then explore newer language ideologies common among the younger educated speakers in section 6. 3. Section 6. 4 then briefly examines these language ideologies using the notion of indexicality and argues that the same linguistic variable (m) has quite different indexical values among the older and younger educated speakers. Section 6. 4 then investigates the social meaning of the resurgence

of the non-merged variant [m] and argues that this increased usage rate indexes not only a particular type of educated Tibetans (*n*-th order meaning) but also a stance of resistance against the encroachment of Chinese language and culture (*n* – 1st order meaning). And finally section 6. 6 revisits the general theme of language change and gender and explains why a gendered pattern ceases to exist among the younger speakers of Spearhead village.

It should be note however that by ‘language ideologies’, I am referring to “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein 1979). I am interested in not only speakers’ ideas about language and its relationship with social structures but also their evaluations of local language. As mentioned above, the metalinguistic commentaries drawn from the sociolinguistic interview help not only inform my discussion of the speakers’ attitudes and ideologies toward the variants and but also providing a social motivation for the maintenance of otherwise a disappearing sound among the younger educated speakers.

Having stated the goals of the chapter, let me first introduce the way in which the older speakers, those above the age of 45, talk about local linguistic variation and what particular linguistic variants, including merged and non-merged (m) index. This is the more traditional linguistic ideology prevalent among older speakers, many of whom have never been to school.

6.2 Traditional linguistic ideologies

The dialect spoken in water communities, characterized by the merged variant [n], is perceived to be more like ‘Chinese dialect’ – this is a very salient local linguistic ideology. The reason, as a 58-year-old man suggests, is related to the fact that dialects of Chinese and water dialect both tend to be pronounced with ‘tongue tips’. The observation, presented in Excerpt 14 from a 58-year-old man makes this connection very clear. He characterizes the dialect of water communities as becoming more like Chinese and then substantiates his claim by pointing out this shared linguistic feature.

Excerpt 3

དེ་མོ་ལ་ རྒྱ་འདྲེ་ཆེན་པོ་ཅིང་ རྒྱ་ཡང་ཡོད་གོ་མེད་གི་ལ། ད་ལྟ་གཞོ་ རྒྱ་ཅག་ལྟོ་ཚུ་མ་ལ་ལྟོ་གཞོ་ཡར་ར་ལི་མ་ས་ལུ་ལ་གི་སྐད་ཆ་འདི་
གས་ཅིག་བཟུར་ན་ཟེར་གོ་ནི་རེད། ཚུ་མ་གི་དེ་ཅིག་ད་རྒྱ་ལྱི་ རྒྱ་མི་ལྟོ་འདྲ་མོ་གཞོ་ལ་ག ད་ལྟོ་གཞོ་ལི་ རྒྱ་ཚོ་ལྟོ་བཤད་ཚོ་ལ་གི་ ད་རྒྱ་གི་སྐད་
རིགས་རེད་ཟེར་གོ་ནི་རེད། དེ་མོར་གཞོ་ལ་གི་ཟེར་གོ་ནི་རེད། ད་ལྟོ་གནས་ནས་ཅིག་བཤད་གོ་གི་ཟེར་གོ་ནི་རེད།

...in general, there are no major differences between the two. But if we compare water and nomad dialects, water dialect tends to be more like Chinese. We often characterize water dialect as being more like the Chinese language because they are all produced by tongue tips (M58_029).

The non-merged variant [m], on the other hand, is associated with dialects spoken in mountain communities - a dialect area that Spearhead traditionally falls into. The local linguistic conceptualization would suggest that Spearhead could also be characterized by the non-merged variant [m]. However, that is not the case. The dialect of Spearhead is often stereotyped by other mountain dialect speakers as being largely

characterized by the merged variant [n] and stigmatized by villagers of mountain communities. Speakers of other mountain dialects commonly characterize the dialect spoken in Spearhead in this way.

The variants of the linguistic feature (m) are typically associated with these two broader dialects within the general farmer dialect. The merged variant [n] indexes dialects that are spoken in water communities and the non-merged variant [m] indexes all other dialects that are not water dialect. The observation of a 61-year-old female speaker, presented in Excerpt 4, illustrates the general associations between the merged variant [n] and the dialect spoken in water communities. She characterizes the peculiar way that the village dialect sounds using a number of phonological features including the present linguistic feature. Because of these general phonological tendencies, the dialect of Spearhead sounds a lot like the one spoken in water communities. The merged variant [n] in [ʰnen] ‘sky’ and [len] ‘road’ thus indexes the dialect spoken in water communities and the distinction between the [m] and [n] largely indexes the distinction.

Excerpt 4

ད་རང་གིས་ཤེས་ནི་མ་རེད། གཟེས་གཞན་པ་ནས་ད་མདུང་གོ་གིས་ཚུ་སྐད་བཤད་གི་དེ་བེད་གི་ གཟེས་ལྷན་གི་སྤྱིང་ང་ ཉམིང་ལོ་ཏུ་གཟོས་
ཉེངས་ལྷན་དེ་བཟེས་ནས། ལབ་གི་སྤྱིང་ང་ལྷན་དེ་བཟེས་ནས། ... ད་ལོ་ཚོ་གིས་ལྷན་གི་སྤྱིང་ང་ལྷན་དེ་བེད་གི་མོ། ལབ་གི་སྤྱིང་ང་ལྷན་དེ་བེད་
གི།

འབར་ར་མར་ཐང་འདི་ད་རྒྱ་ལྷོ་མ་གཞི་ལ་གི་ད་རྒྱ་ལྷོ་མ་གཞི་ལ་གི་ད་དེའི་ནང་ནས་ལ་ས་ཐང་། ལ་རྒྱ་ད་ལྷོ་མ་འདི་ཚེ་རྒྱ་ལྷོ་མ་དེ་མོ་གཞི་ལ་མོ་
གཞི་ལ་གི་ད་བོད་རྒྱ་དག་མ་ཡང་ད་རྒྱ་ལྷོ་མ་གཞི་དེ་མོ་དག་གི་ཟེར་གོ་ནི་རེད། མཇུང་མགོ་ལ་ད་རྒྱ་ལྷོ་མ་འབར་ར་མ་ཐང་འདི་ར་བཞུས་
ན་མཇུང་མགོ་དག་གི་ན། རོ་མ་དག་གི་དེ་མོ་གཞི་ལ་རེད། ... རྒྱ་གཞི་ས་ཁྲོད་ད་བབ་གི་ཞོང་གི་ད་འབྲོག་ཐང་གི་འབྲོག་པ་ད་ཉ་ར་སོ་ཚ་
ཡིན་ན་ད་རྒྱ་དེགས་དེ་བཞུད་ན་ཡག་གི་འདོད་གི

What do you think about the way that people from water communities such as Barra and Mathang speak?

Dialect of those areas sounds more like Chinese. It sounds more Chinese. However, the dialect spoken around here including Sathang and Khagya villages is less like Chinese. Even though the dialect of Spearhead is generally said to be unclear, compared to villages such as Barra and Mathang (water communities), dialect of Spearhead is relatively clear, isn't it? It is really clear. ... But I think what the nomads of the Drogthang and those people from So and Tsha speak is beautiful. I am serious about this. The Tibetan spoken in those areas appears to be clear (F46_015).

Clearly, local dialects that resemble dialects spoken in nomadic areas are generally considered to be more 'beautiful' – a point that I made in Chapter 3 while proving a brief introduction to local linguistic ideology. This is illustrated in the observation that a 60-year-old female villager makes regarding the dialect spoken in Le and Tse, villages close to nomadic areas (located about 30 miles away). Positive evaluations of these dark mountain dialects are widespread among older speakers, particularly among those have had very limited interaction with speakers of nomad dialect. This is presented in Excerpt 6 below.

Excerpt 6

ད་རང་གིས་རང་གི་སྐད་རིགས་ཡག་ཉོ་ཡེད་ལས་བཟང་ཡོད་ནི་རེད། ད་ལྟ་གཞོ་འདི་གས། ངས་ད་ལ་ རྩོམ་ནེེ་བཤད་ནོ། ལ་བརྗེད་ན་ད་
ཚར་གི་སྐད་རིགས་འདི་ཡག་གི་བཟེས་ལས་དེ་གས་བཤད་ནི་གཟིག་རེད། ལྷ་ཚོ་ན་ས་ཚར་གི་ཚུ་ལྷོ་གི་རེད་ལ་བྱ་མོ། མནའ་མ་གཟིག་ཡོད་ལ།
དེའི་སྐད་རིགས་ཡག་གི་བཟེས་ལས་དེ་ཟེར་གི་ད་རང་གིས་རང་གི་སྐད་རིགས་འདི་མི་ཡག་ཉོ་ཞེས་གོ་ཡོད་ནི་མ་རེད། ཡང་གནམ་ཐང་ལ་རྒྱ་
གིས་དེ་གས་བཟུ་ཡོད་ནི་གཟིག་རེད།

Now, people in general have a tendency to think of their dialect being beautiful. Like I mentioned earlier, if we are just having a conversation, people generally say that the dialect of Tsha area is beautiful. We have a bride from Tsha, no, from Shun, in the village and people say that her dialect is very beautiful. I don't know whether what we speak is beautiful or not but it is something that the neighboring villages such as Namthang and Khagya often mimic (F60_117).

Among those that have had more mobility in the local context and exposure to dialects beyond these local varieties, the nomad dialect is highly regarded and positively evaluated. Recall that nomad dialect is spoken relatively further away from Spearhead village (the closest variety spoken some 30 miles away). As the following 69-year-old male speaker points out in Excerpt 7, the way that nomads speak is considered very 'clear' and 'articulate'. He uses a metaphor to describe the clarity dimension associated with nomad dialect and suggests that their dialect is crisp and clear.

Excerpt 7

མཚོ་རྩོམ་པོ་ད་འབྲོག་པ་ཚོ་རྩོམ་གིས་ལད་ནས་བཟང་ནི་རེད། འབྲོག་པ་ཚོ་རྩོམ་གིས་ད་གཟེས་སྐད་ཆ་བཤད་ན་གསལ་བོ་རེད། དག་མོ་
རེད་ལ། བཅད་གིས་སྐོར་གི་འཛོག་གི་ ལྷ་ཚོས་སྐད་ཆ་བཤད་ནོ་འདྲ་མོ་ཡིན་ནི་མ་རེད།

I stayed with nomads around Kokonor (when I visited there). What they speak is very articulate and clear. Unlike our dialect, the way that nomads speak is *very much like a sharp knife slicing an object, clean and sharp*³⁶ (M69_059 @ 2:39).

A similar perception is reported by another 60-year-old man who has had some contact with nomad dialect speaking communities. He points out in Excerpt 8 that he is not sure whether the dialect is ‘articulate’ but listening to nomads speak gives him the impression that it is a ‘pleasant’ dialect to listen to. This is shown in Excerpt 8.

Excerpt 8

དེས་ན་ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚོམ་བུ་གི་སྐད་ཆ་འདི་སྐོར་མེ་འབབ་གི

འདིས་རང་གིས་ཤེས་ནི་མ་རེད་དེ། གཟེས་ཅིག་གིས་ཉན་རྒྱ་ན་གཟེས་གན་འཕྲོག་པ་ལ་འདི་མོ་འདི་གི་དེ་མོ་གཟེག་ཆེད་ཡིན། དེ་མོ་གཟེག་
ཡག་ནི་མ་རེད། སྐད་ཆ། སྐད་ཆ་མོ་མ་དག་གི་ཟེར་གོ་ནི་ནང་ད་དེ་ཆེ་གཟེག་ཡིན་ནི་ནང་ལ་ལྷེ་གཟེག་གི་ཟེར་གོ་ནི་ནང་། གཟེས་འཕྲོག་པ་
གིས་ལ་བཤད་ཡེས་ རྒྱུས་ལྡན་དེ་ཉན་ན་འདྲོད་ནོ་དེ་ཡང་གཟེག་ རྒྱུག་པར་ལྟེ་རེད།

Do you like our village dialect?

I don’t know myself but when others listen to it, it may not be as beautiful as the dialect of nomads. I don’t know whether the pronunciation is unclear or inarticulate but when nomads converse, their dialect is pleasant to listen to and is quite unique (M60_128 @ 6:23).

These older speakers associate these variants with not only different types of local dialects but also with different groups of speakers within the local Spearhead

³⁶This is not a literal translation but captures the meaning behind the original Tibetan expression.

community. . They perceive the merged variant [n] to be a common occurrence among the younger speakers of the village – an observation that has also been found in the production patterns found in Chapter 5. A 68-year-old man sums up this perception in Excerpt 9. These older speakers associate the merged variant [n] with the contemporary dialect of the village and they often suggest that the younger speakers are responsible for changing the older way of speaking. The non-merged variant [m], on the other hand, is linked with dialects of the past or old ways of speaking. It is what they used to speak and what other villages in mountain communities speak.

Excerpt 9

འུ་ཚེ་གི་སྐད་རིགས། མདུང་མགོ་གི་དེ་སྐད་རིགས། ལྷོད་ལན་ཡོག་ག་འགྲོ་རྒྱ་ན་ལན་གོང་ང་འགྲོ་རྒྱ་དེ་ཟེར་རྒྱ་རེད། གཟེས་གཞན་པ་གིས་
 བཤད་ན་དེ་ཟེར་ནི་མ་རེད། ལྷོད་ལན་ཡོག་ག་འགྲོ་རྒྱ་ན་ལན་གོང་ང་འགྲོ་རྒྱ་ཨ་ར་དེ་ཟེར་ནི་རེད། ... ལན་འདི་དེད་ལས་བཟེས་ལས། ད་ལྟེ་
 གིས་སྡེ་མོར་ལུག་གི་བཞག་བཏང་། བབ་གི་སོ་བར་འདི་གི་སྡེ་གི་སྡེ་མོར། ... སྐད་རིགས་དང་བོ་གི་སྐད་རིགས་དེ་དེ་གས་རྒྱ་ལམ། ལམ་གོང་།
 ལམ་ཡོག་བཟེས་དེ་ཡེས་ན། དེང་སང་གི་སྡེ་གིས་སྐད་ཆ་ཡར་ར་མར་ར་བསྐྱར་གཏོང་གི་ ... ད་འདི་གས་དང་བོ་གི་སྐད་ཆ་བཤད་གོ་ཡོད་ནི་
 མ་རེད། དེང་སང་གི་སྐད་ཆ་བཤད་གོ་ནི་རེད།

Our Spearhead dialect, (people who speak) dialect of Spearhead say, ‘are you going to go above [len] (e.g. road) or below [len]?’ Others won’t speak that way. They say, ‘are you going to go above [lam] or ‘below [lam]?’ This is what others would say. (People of this village) say, ‘following [len]’, and use the tip of their tongue to touch between their teeth ... In the old dialect, one would say, [d̪ʒalam], [lamkoŋ] and [lamjok]. But contemporary people have changed this way of speaking. ... They are not speaking the old dialect anymore. They are speaking the modern dialect (M68_096).

Despite this overall association with the younger speakers and dialects of water communities, the variants are not associated with education or gender. The following exchange, Excerpt 10, between the interviewer and a 60-year-old woman speaks to this point. When explicitly asked what kinds of people are likely to use words that do contain the merged variant, the speaker is quick to point out she does not know much about the personal qualities of these speakers. However, she suggests that the merged variant [n] sounds more like Chinese-Muslim speech, which in turn is described as being similar to that of the Tibetan spoken in water communities.

Excerpt 10

མྱི་གཟིག་གིས་རྒྱ་ལམ་མ་བཟེས་འ་རྒྱ་ལན་ནང་ན་བཟེས་ན།

རྒྱ་ལན་ནང་ན་བཟེས་བཏང་ན་དམི་དེ་གི་གན་གཞོ་མི་ཤེས་གི་ལ། རྒྱ་རིགས་ད་རྒྱ་ཉེ་ཉེ་གི་རྒྱ་རིགས་རེད། མི་དེ་གི་རྒྱ་སྐད་ལ་མི་དེའི་
ལུངས་མི་ཤེས་གི་ད་རྒྱ་རིགས་ད་རྒྱ་ཉེ་ཉེ་གི་རྒྱ་རིགས་རེད་ཟེར་གོ་ནི་རེད་ད། ད་རྒྱ་ལམ་གཞོས་གི་དེ་ཟེར་གོ་ནི་རེད། དེ་མིན་ད་རྒྱ་ལོ་གི་
མ་གཞི་གི་རྒྱ་ལམ་མི་ཤེས་གི།

What kind of people do you think would say [d̪ʒalen] instead of [d̪ʒalam]?

If someone says [d̪ʒalen], I cannot tell you what kind of people they are but I can tell that it is Chinese-Muslim speech. I don't know much about the speaker's personal quality and origin. That speech is however often said to be characteristic of the speech of Chinese Muslim. It sounds more Chinese. I don't know the person's personal characteristics (F60_117).

Thus, the older speakers typically take a neutral position with respect to the changed dialect of the younger speakers and water communities. For these speakers, these dialects represent different ways of speaking in the local community. The older speakers typically characterize these local dialects as a natural part of language change that is beyond the control of the speakers themselves. The observation of a 64-year-old man illustrates this point. Excerpt 11 reveals how he ideologically positions himself with respect to the dialect of the water community. Even though people often laugh about the way that water dialect sounds, he implies it is not something that people should laugh at. Each area has its own dialect and that is simply the way life is:

Excerpt 11

མུ་མ་གི་སྐད་ཆ་འདི་ཆེ་གས་མི་གཅིག་གི

མུ་མ། མ་ར་མུ་མ་ཟེར་གོ་ནོ་འདི་མར་ལོ་བ། ཡོ་བ། མར་ཐང་འདྲ་མོ་འདི་རེད། འདི་ཚོས་ད་ལྟ་གཞོས་གན་གཞིག་ཡིན་རྒྱ་ན་ལ་ད་ཅིག་རྒྱ་ལྷེ་
 འདྲ་མོ། ལྟ་ཚོ་གིས་དེ་ཟེར་ནི་རེད། རྒྱ་ལྷེ་མོར་གཞོས་གི་ཟེར་ནི་རེད། སྐད་རིགས་དེ་ད་ལྟ་གཞོས། ད་ལྟ་གཞོས་གནས་དེ་བཞེས་ན། མ་ར་
 དེ་ཚོ་གིས་ཅིག་གནས་དེ་ཟེར་གི། དེ་ལ་ལྟ་ཚོ་སོང་ན་ལ་ཅིག་དགད་ལས་དེ་མོ་དེ་ཡོད་གི་འདུག་ག། ད་དེ་ལ་རང་རང་གི་བཤད་ཚུགས་དེ་དེ་
 གས་གནས་ཟེར་ནས་གནས་ཟེར་ནས། ད་ལྟ་གཞོ་མ་ར་མུ་མ་གི་ལྷི་ཉ་ནས་གིས་གནས་ད་གནས་ཟེར་ར། གནས།

How is water dialect different?

Water communities? Yeah, water communities refer to villages such as Iowa, Yowa and Marthang. We typically say that their dialect sound more Chinese. We say what they speak sounds more Chinese. We say [hnam] but people down there say [hnen]. So when we go to these water communities, we often laugh at how they speak. But each area has its own way of speaking, either [hnam] or [hnen]. People down in water communities say [hnen] (M64_134). These traditional local linguistic

ideologies as they relate to the current linguistic features suggest that the merged variant [n] is indexical of dialects spoken in water communities and of younger speakers in Spearhead. The non-merged variant [m] on the other hand, is typically associated with the mountain dialect and younger speakers. In addition, older speakers with contact with nomads also associate [m] with nomad dialect as well. Dialects, associated with the merged variant [n], are also perceived to be more ‘Chinese’ and ‘Chinese Muslim’ dialect sounding. As I discussed in above, they often attribute this to the general influence of Chinese language. Even though some speakers do indeed evaluate water dialects and hence the merged variant as ‘changed’ and ‘unclear’, written Tibetan does not play a role in their linguistic ideologies as many of the older speakers remain illiterate.

6.3 Newer language ideologies

The foregoing discussions have provided insights into how the older speakers view and talk about local language variation - that is the more traditional linguistic ideologies. While certain ideologies of the older speakers are still relevant for examination in this section, for younger literate speakers the merged variant [n] is increasingly becoming an index of more than just a feature of a specific local dialect. Awareness of the written form and ideologies associated with it are beginning to be the centerpiece of the literate speakers’ interpretation of the linguistic variable (m). This written-language informed ideology, much like standard language ideologies, is the

interpretative framework within which the younger educated speakers view local linguistic variation. They evaluate spoken dialects and their linguistic features in relationship to written Tibetan and interpret dialects along a dimension of how ‘close’ they are to the written language. I will demonstrate this through a number of examples based on metalinguistic commentary.

The basic distinction between the merged [n] and non-merged variant [m] for many of the educated speakers is its position relative to spoken vs. written Tibetan language. Excerpt 12, from a 31-year-old local teacher, illustrates how the dialect of water communities is characterized by a lack of distinction between variants of (m). The evaluation of this lack of distinction is very different from the view of many of the older speakers who tend to talk about the local linguistic variation in terms of ‘older’ vs. ‘younger’ speakers rather than in terms of written vs. spoken norms. This mismatch between the written and the spoken as we will see has great significance in how the dialects are socially evaluated.

Excerpt 12

ན་ནིང་གཞེས་ནིང་ཏུ་ཚོལ་དགོ་ཚན་གཞིག་ཡོང་ཏུ། རྒྱ་མ་གི་དགོ་ཚན། མར་ཐང་གི་རེད་ད། ད་རྒྱ་མ་གི་དགོ་ཚན་གཞིག་ཡར་ར་ཡོང་ངས་
 ད་བབ་གི་བོད་ཡིག་མི་དག་གི་བཟེས་ལས། ད་གཞེས་ཡུལ་གི་ཁྱིམ་བདག་ཚང་མ་གིས་འདི་དགོ་ཚན་སྲུ་གཞིག་ཡིན་ནི་ནང་། བོད་ཡིག་བརྗོད་
 ར་ཉེ་འབྲེན་ནེ་བོད་ཡིག་ལྷན་བཟེས་ན་ལྷན་བཟེས་ལུ་འདོན་གི་ གྲན་ཡིན་རྒྱ་ན་གྲན་བཟེས་ལུ་འདོན་གི་ འདི་དགོ་ཚན་སྲུ་གཞིག་ཡིན་ནི་
 རང་བཟེས་ལུ་ དེ་གས་སློབ་གྲྭ་གཞེས་བཤད་གི་ལ་ཡོང་གཞིག ད་རྒྱ་མ་གི་རྒྱ་རིགས་དེ་བབ་གི་ཞོང་ཉོང་གི་ ཉེ་འབྲེན་ནས་ལེ་ཡིག་སློབ་ནས་ཁོ་ཚོ་
 དེ་བབ་གི་ལོ་བས་སོང་ད། དེ་ཡི་གི་བརྗོད་ན་ལ་བབ་གི་ ད་འདོན་ཐུབ་གི་མེད་གི་ རྒྱ་མ་གི་རྒྱ་རིགས་དེ་དེ་མོ་གཞིག་རེད། རྒྱ་མ་གཞིག་ལྟེ་ཚེ་

ནས་ལེན་རྒྱ་མང་གི་དམི་གེ་གི་རྒྱུར་རྣངས་འདྲ་མོ་དེ་ལ་དཀའ་གཉིས་ཀ་དམི་ཟེར་གོ་ནི་རེད། དེ་ཙོ་འདྲ་མོ་མ་ཐུག་གཟེག་ག་ཁོ་ཚོས་བཏོན་ནི།
ད་དེ་མོ་གཟེག་རེད།

A few years ago, a teacher from Marthang, a water community, came to us. This teacher's Tibetan was described as not being very clear. So many parents came and asked who the Tibetan teacher was. The parents complained that the children were pronouncing [lam] as [len] and [hnam] as [hnen]. Due to the teacher's dialect background, he was not able to teach and articulate words the way they are written. That's just the way it is. Speakers of water dialect have a tendency to speak with their tongue tips. So there seems to be a mismatch between their dialect and the written Tibetan language (F31_111 @ 0:33).

While dialects of water communities are generally believed to be at odds with written Tibetan, the dialect of nomads on the other hand is believed to be consistent with written Tibetan. The 'closeness' between the written and spoken dialect of the nomads is what many speakers see as the main reason for the positive social evaluation of the nomad dialect. The importance of conformity between the written language and spoken Tibetan is evident in the following observation made by a 29-year-old man in Excerpt 13. When asked by the interviewer what he thinks of a dialect spoken by a particular group of nomads in the area, the 29-year-old answers that it is 'beautiful' and then substantiates his claim by highlighting certain perceived characteristics.

Excerpt 13

དེ་ན་འཛོག་ཐང་གི་འཛོག་པ་ཚོ་གི་བཤད་གོ་ནི། བཤད་ལྟགས་ཆེ་མོ་རེད།

འབྲོག་ཐང་གི་འབྲོག་པ་ཚོ་གི་སྐད་རིགས་དེ་ཞེ་གི་ཡག་གི་འདོད་གི

དེ་ཆེ་གས་ཡག་གི་འདོད་གི

དྲི་མ་གཟིག་ཉན་ན་སྐད་ཆ་དྲི་མ་གཟིག་ཡིག་སྟེང་ང་གཞུལ་ནི་འདྲ་མ་དེ་མོ་གཟིག་རེད།

What do you think about the dialect spoken by nomads in Drogthang?

I think what the nomads of Drogthang speak is really beautiful.

Why do you think it is beautiful?

Listening to them gives you the impression that it sounds more literary Tibetan

(M29_036).

The issue of conformity between the spoken and written languages is a cornerstone of these educated speakers' linguistic ideology and is a popular way to frame the social evaluation of larger dialects. This is illustrated by observations of a 23-year-old college student regarding two prominent radio newscasters in Excerpt 14. She is one of the speakers who disfavor the merged variant quite strongly. She used to be a hostess for cultural events in town, a role that is often reserved for speakers of nomad dialect. Her observations about two professional broadcasters in the provincial capital city, Ms. Yangchen and Drolma, reveal aspects of language ideology that are widespread among educated speakers in Amdo Tibet.

Excerpt 14

ད་དབྱངས་ཅན་གིས་ཆེ་གས་བཟེས་ན་ད། ད་རྒྱན་ལྡན་གིས་འདི་གས་ཁ་བར་ཡེད་རྒྱ་ན་ད། མོ་གི་ ཉམ་འོ་ལྟ་ཆ་དག་ནི་མ་རེད་
ཞོད་གི་ ཉམ་འོ་ནས་ལྟོ་ད། ལྟོ་རིགས་དག་ནི་མ་རེད། ད་དཔེ་ཆ་དོ་ན་ཆེ་གས་བཟེད་ཡོད་གི་དེ་གས་བཟེད་ནི་མ་རེད། ད་བབ་གི་འདྲ་གཞོས་ཆེ་
གས་བཟེད་རྒྱ་ན། དེ་གས་བཟེད་ནི་རེད། ད་དཔེ་གཞིག་འཛོག་རྒྱ་ན། གནས་ཡིན་རྒྱ་ན་ལ་གནས་གཞོ་ཟེར་ནི་ལ་ཡོད་ནི་རེད། རྒྱན་ལྡན་གིས་
འདི་གས་ཁ་བར་ཡེད་རྒྱ་ན། ... ད་དཔེ་གཞིག་ལེན་རྒྱ་ན། ད་ཆགས་བར་གཞིག་ཡིན་རྒྱ་ན། ... ཡིག་དོར་བསྐྱས་ལ། ད་དེ་ལེར་རེ་རེ་འདོན་གི་
བཅུག་ན་ད་མོ་གི་དེ་གས་ལ་ནི་རེད། ཞེ་གི་གས་ལ་ནི་རེད། ད་ཁ་བར་ཡེད་གི་བཞག་ན་གས་ལ་ནི་མ་རེད།

... the way that Yangchen speaks, much like our speech, is not articulate at all. Her
speech is not very articulate. She doesn't speak the way that it's written in the books.
She will speak just like the way that we do. For example, [h^hnam] is sometimes
pronounced as [h^hnen] if she is having a normal conversation. ... For example, if she is
given a newspaper to read out aloud, her reading of the written words is very articulate.
However, her conversational speech is not very articulate at all ... (F23_073 @ 17:30).

Thus, Ms. Yangchen, who is from a farmer dialect speaking village in the area,
is considered 'articulate' only when she is reading written material but not when
speaking in ordinary context. This ideological interpretation rests on the assumption that
speakers of farmer dialect find it hard to maintain the distinction between the merged
variant [n] and the non-merged variant [m]. The lack of distinction between the two
variants in her speech indicates non-conformity with the written Tibetan. And that is
why her speech is not considered to be 'articulate'. This highlights the important role
that written Tibetan plays in the educated speakers' evaluation of spoken dialects.

This general characterization of Ms. Yangchen however does not hold true for
Ms. Drolma. Ms. Drolma, in contrast with Ms. Yangchen, is from a nomadic area and
hence her speech is considered 'articulate'. Ms. Drolma does not show much variability

across reading and conversational styles and this is what makes her ‘articulate’ – the similarity between the written and the spoken. Whether she is reading a written paragraph or just having a conversation, she articulates words very ‘clearly’.

Excerpt 15

མོལ་མ་གཤིས་དེ་ཆེ་གསལ་བཤད་ནི་རེད་བཟེས་ན་དུ། ... ཚགས་པར་གཞིག་ལྟན་ཚེར་བཞག་བཏོང་རྒྱ་ན། ད་གནས་ཡིན་ན་གནས་བཟེས་ལུ་དེ་
གསལ་བཏོན་ནས་ཞེ་གི་དག་ནི་རེད་མོ། དེའི་འཕྲོར་ད་...མི་གཞིག་ག་བཅར་འདྲི་ཡེད་དགོས་རྒྱ་ན། ... ད་མོ་གི་དེ་གསལ་ནི་རེད་གཞིག་གཉིས་
ཀ་གསལ་ནི་རེད། འདོན་གོ་དུས་ལ་གསལ་ནི་རེད། ལ་བད་ཡེད་གོ་དུས་ལ་གསལ་ནི་རེད། ཆེ་གསལ་གསལ་ནི་རེད་བཟེས་ན། མོ་འབྲོག་པ་ས་ཁུལ་
གི་ཡིན་ནས་ཁོལ་ རྒྱུན་གྱིས་ཤེད། གསལ་ནི་རེད་བཟེས་ལུ། ... ཞོང་ རྒྱུར་ཤེལ་ནང་ནས་ད་སྐད་ཆ་དེ་ད་བཅའ་མི་དགོས་འ་ཞོང་རྒྱང་གི་རྒྱང་
གི་འབྲུར་ཡོང། ... གཞན་པ་གི་དེ་ལ་གཉིས་ཀ་མི་གཅིག་གི།

How does Drolma speak? If she is given a newspaper to read, she will pronounce /^hnam/ as [^hnam] and thus read it very clearly. ... And even if she is interviewing someone, she is very articulate too. Both are very articulate. The way she reads and speaks is very articulate. The reason is that she is from nomadic area. She doesn't have to modify her speech. Language naturally falls out of her mouth. How she speaks is quite different from others (F23_073).

According to the observer, Ms. Drolma, as speaker of nomad dialect, does not have to ‘modify’ her speech because it ‘falls naturally out of her mouth’. Consequently its native speakers do not have to put much effort into producing sounds that resemble written Tibetan. This ideologically aligns dialect of the nomads with that of the written language. The association of the nomad dialect with naturalness and authenticity can be seen in Excerpt 16 from a 44-year-old man.

Excerpt 16

འབྲོག་པ་ས་ཆ་གི་སྐྱེ་འདི་རང་བཞིན་གིས་ཁ་བརྗེད་ཤིང་། ལོ་རྒྱུས་ན་ཁོའི་སྐད་ཆ་འདི་དེ་ཁོར་ལྷན་སྐྱེས་རེད། དངོས་པོ་ལ་ཅིག་ཡིན་ཏུ་
ན་རང་བྱུང་འདྲ་མོ་རེད། གཅིག་ལ་བརྗོད་པའི་ལེ་མོ་དགོས་ནས། རང་བྱུང་གིས་གྲུབ་ལས་བཟང་ཡོད་ནས་ཚད་དེ་མོ་གཟེག་རེད།

When people from nomadic areas ordinarily speak, their language is innate, much like an object that is natural. Dialect of the nomad does not have to be repaired because it is naturally formed ... (M44_042).

Thus, the way that nomads speak is seen as being ‘innate’ because their speakers do not have to alter their speech. This is viewed as resembling naturally occurring elements and is believed to lack artificiality and modifications. On the other hand, speakers of farmer dialect, even when they are using what appear to be features characteristic of the written language, such as the non-merged variant [n], are modifying their ‘innate’ speech which is regarded as being inherently different from written Tibetan. Therefore, they have to ‘force’ and ‘modify’ their language because their language is naturally inarticulate. While the nomad dialect is far more positively evaluated, the written Tibetan language is the ultimate gold standard against which the other living dialects are contrasted and compared. Notice how a 44-year-old man talks about the importance of speaking ‘genuine’ Tibetan in 0. He frames this in terms of the written Tibetan language, believed to be the oldest form of the language and which has existed since the invention of the written Tibetan language back in the 7th century.

འདི་དང་མ་བོད་ཡིག་འདི་གསར་གཏོང་ཡས་དུས་གི་སྐབས་ལྷན་ཞུ་འདི་ཡོད་གི་མོ། ད་ངས་བཤད་གོ་ན། རྩེ་རྩེ་ནས་ཡོང་དགོས་གི་སྐབས་ནས་
ཡོང་དགོས་གི་རྒྱ་གཞི་ལྷན་གསུང་། རྩེ་རྩེ་ནས་ཡོང་དགོས་གི་རྩེ་རྩེ་ཡར་ར་ཡར་རྒྱུ་རྩེ་དགོས་གི་... འདི་ཐམས་ཅད་གོ་སྐབས་ཡོང་ཚུགས་
ཡོད་གི་མོ། གཟུང་ཚོ་གི་འདི་ད། ཡར་ར་མཚོ་རྩེ་བོ་ཚ་ལ་ཡར་ར་མགོ་ལོག་ཚ་འདི་ཚ་ད། གཟུང་ཇི་མ་ཇི་བཞིན་རེད།

... since the invention of the written Tibetan, a clear distinction has always been made between ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ sounds. So like what I have been saying, some sounds are produced with tongue tips, some produced between teeth, some from the palate, ... so each Tibetan character has a distinctive way of pronouncing. The dialects spoken around Koknor and Golok are just like that. (M044_042). ...

Thus, written Tibetan is the fossilized form of a speech variety that existed a long time ago and is what connects the present to the distant past. This is the ‘genuine’ language above all, and some spoken language varieties such as the ones spoken in nomadic areas are viewed as reflecting and preserving the original ways of pronunciation as captured by written Tibetan. However, the dialect spoken by the nomads is not always completely unchanged from the written Tibetan language. This a perception echoed by a 43 year-old-man who has been asked how he would speak an ‘articulate’ language. He suggests that such a language must model itself on nomad dialect because it is considered more beautiful than farmer dialect. But, as the speaker points out in Excerpt 17, nomad dialects are not entirely ‘articulate’ either because presumably some elements of the nomad dialect are not consistent with the written language.

types of local dialects such as water vs. mountain dialects, younger vs. older speakers. Thus, the merged variant indexes not only water dialect but also the speech of the younger speakers in the village. Alternatively, the non-merged variant indexes mountain dialects and speech of the older speakers in the village. The indexical values at the n -th order thus simply index water dialect and a type of dialect spoken by the younger speakers, both of which are meanings related to social type.

These types of indexical values are then ideologically reinterpreted by the older speakers at the $n + 1$ st indexical order, giving rise to various additional indexical values. This level involves more explicit ideological work such that the newer, merged variant [n] is interpreted as 'changed', 'unclear', sounding 'Chinese'. Conversely, the older unmerged variant and other older ways of speaking are as being 'clear' and 'articulate' based on the assumption that they have not changed from the older ways of speaking. These types of indexical values are far more ideologically loaded than those at the n -th indexical order.

In contrast with these traditional indexical values, the newer indexical values associated with the linguistic ideologies of the younger educated speakers are different. I will begin with the indexical values at the n -th order. At this level, the linguistic variable indexes not only locally distinctive ways of speaking but also larger regionally enregistered dialects such as nomad and farmer dialect among these younger educated speakers. The merged variant [n] is indexical of dialects spoken in water and farming communities in general whereas the non-merged variant is indexical of dialects spoken

in nomadic areas. More importantly, the written language becomes a major element in the indexical values of the linguistic variable such that the non-merged variant [m] indexes written Tibetan whereas the merged variant [n] indexes the spoken language. This is an important indexical value for the younger educated speaker that gets swept up into the more explicit ideological interpretation at higher orders of indexicality and gives further indexical meanings to local dialects indexed by the linguistic variants.

At the $n + 1$ st order of indexicality, written Tibetan is interpreted as being 'standard'. This is an ideological interpretation of the written language. In addition, the written language is indexical of 'authentic' and 'real' language as well. Linguistic features and dialect varieties that are similar to written Tibetan are given indexical values such as 'standard', 'articulate' and 'authentic'. On the other hand, those that are different from written Tibetan are given negative indexical values such that the water dialect and farmer dialect are interpreted as sounding like Chinese language. Thus, the nomad dialect and the non-merged variant get $n + 1$ st indexical values through their perceived closeness with written Tibetan and get positive indexical values including 'articulate' and 'authentic'.

It is clear that the linguistic feature has different indexical values for these two social groups. It is the same form, either [n] or [m]. The major difference in the indexical values of this linguistic feature is related to the written language. For older speakers, the non-merged variant [m] indexes an older dialect and is what they used to speak. It does not index the written language and associated linguistic ideologies as is

the case for the younger educated speakers. These differences in the indexical values of the linguistic feature explored above corroborate previous findings that linguistic features may not necessarily have the same indexical values across members of the speech community (c.f. Johnstone & Kiesling 2008).

6.5 Social meaning of the resurgence of [m]

The goal in this section is to investigate the social meaning of the resurgence of non-merged variant among the younger educated speakers. To begin, the younger educated speakers whose usage patterns are similar to the older male speakers take a negative stance towards the change from the non-merged variant [m] to the merged variant [n], partly because the merged variant is not reflective of the written language but also because of its associations with Chinese. To these speakers, the change towards the merged variant is not simply a ‘natural’ language change but represents one of a number of aspects of the local language that need to be changed specifically because they are viewed as being the product of the undesirable influence of the Chinese language. This rests on the perception that the merged variant [n] and local Chinese dialects are pronounced with ‘tongue tips’. The merged variant, as some of the literate speakers point out, is one specific example of local dialect that needs to be changed, as highlighted in Excerpt 18.

Excerpt 18

ལྷན་ནང་ནས་བཟེས་ན་བབ་གི་འུ་ཚོ་གི་གན་འདི་གས་ཅིག་བསྐྱར་གཏོང་རྒྱ་ན། རང་གི་སེམས་གཟིག་ནས་རང་ངེ་མོ་གཟིག་འདོད་གི་དེ་
 ལྷན་བཟེས་ལྷ། དེ་མི་ཉ་གི་མོ། དེ་ལྷེ་གནས་དེ་ཅ། དེ་ཉ་ར་གསལ་ར་དགའ་ར་ཡས་ལྷ་དག་མོ་ཡས་ལྷ། ཚོག་གི་སྐྱ་བཙོང་དག་གི་བཞག་གས་
 བཤད་ན། ཡང་ཚང་མ་གིས་དེ་བཟེས་བཏང་ན་ཉ་ར་བསྐྱར་གཏོང་གི་དེ་མོ་མི་ཟེར་རྒྱ་ན་དེ་སེམས་ན་དེ་མོ་གཟིག་འདོད་གི་

When people from our village say things like [dʒalen], I wish that they would change it.
 Saying [dʒalen], using the tip of their tongues, is not very good. If you speak
 articulately and clearly and everybody does the same thing, we can change it. I wish
 people don't pronounce it that way (the merged variant) (M31_038).

Because the merged variant [n] is a linguistic feature that is influenced by
 another language, it is something that should change. And indeed some of the younger
 educated speakers report doing their best to change the way they speak. A college
 student for example talks about how he needs to learn how the Tibetan language is
 supposed to be pronounced. This is presented in Excerpt 19.

Excerpt 19

ད་ལྷོས་བསྐྱར་ལུབ་རྒྱ་ན་ལྷོས་ཆེ་གས་བསྐྱར་རྒྱ།
 བསྐྱར་ལུབ་རྒྱ་ན་དང་ས་རྒྱན་ལྷན་གིས་སྐད་ཆ་བཤད་གོ་དུས་དེ་མ་ ཉུང་ཙམ་ལྷེ་གཟིག་མཁྱེགས་གི་འཛོག་རྒྱ་མ་རེད་མོ། དལ་མོ་ལས་བཤད་
 རྒྱ་རེད། དེའི་མི་ཚང་གི་ད་གསལ་བཤད་སུམ་བུ་བོར་མཚན་ན་བོད་ཡིག་གི་སྐྱ་གདངས་ཆེ་གས་ལེན་དགོས་གི་ ་ ད་དཔེར་ན། ན་ཅན་གོ།
 ང་ཅན་གོ་དེ་མོ་དེ་ ཉེ་འདྲའི་རིགས་ལྷོ་ཞོང་གི་ ཉུང་ལྷོ་སྐྱ་རྩ་ནང་ནས་ལེན་དགོས་ནི་འདྲ་འདྲ། མ་ཅན་གོ་དེ་ཆེ་གས་ཟེར་གོ་ནི་རེད། ལ་
 བུམ་དགོས་ནི་འདྲ་འདྲ། ་ དེ་རྩར་ར་ཡས་ན་འདོད་གི་ དེ་རང་གིས་ཅིག་ད་བར་གཟེར་འདང་རྒྱག་རྒྱ་ན་དེའི་ལྷོགས་ནས་གཟོ་ཅིག་ཡེད་
 རྒྱ་ན་ཅིག་ཉ་གི་ ཉུང་གི་འདོད་གི་

How would you change the way that you speak?

If I were to be able to change it, I would speak very slowly. Beyond that, I would like to learn how the thirty consonants of written Tibetan language are pronounced. ... For example, consonants like [n] and [ŋ] are nasal consonants and others like [m] should be articulated using both lips ... so I want to be able to speak like this. I think that it is a good idea to do that these days. ... (M20_139)

Thus, educated speakers are also the ones who are extremely aware of their own linguistic behaviors, with this awareness in large part stemming from the current sociopolitical climate in which the speakers are immersed. A 43-year-old educated speaker, Excerpt 20, for example alludes to the kinds of language movements and linguistic revitalization efforts taking place in the area (see Chapter 1 and three more for details). He talks about how he is mindful of his own speech.

Excerpt 20

ད་ན་ནིང་དོ་ཚེགས་ག་ད་འདི་གས་ད་ཅིག་སྐད་རིགས་གི་ལ་ལ་ནས་ རྒྱུགས་ནས་ཤེ་འདི་གས་ཅིག་གན་ཡེད་གི་བཟང་ཡོད་མོ་འདིའི་ལྷོང་
 ནས་ཡང་ཅིག་བྱིན་གཏོང་གི་དེ་བཟེས་ནི་མིན་དུ། ད་ཚུན་ཚད་གཟོར་ལ་ནང་ད་སྐད་ཆ་ཆེ་གཟེག་ཡོད་གི་དེ་རེད་པ་དུ། ལམས་ན་ཤར་ཤར་གོ་
 ར་ལ་ནང་ད་ཡོང་ཡོང་གོ་བཤད་གི་བཟང་ཡོད་ནི་རེད། ... ད་ན་ནིང་དོ་ཚེགས་ཉ་ནས་གིས་ཅིག་གན་འདྲ་མོ་ཡས་ན། ད་རང་ཉིད་ལ་མཚོན་
 རྒྱ་ན་ལ་ད་ཅིག་གི་གཟེག་ རྒྱུང་ཚམ་ཤེ་སྐད་ཆ་བཤད་ན་ཚེག་ག་ རྒྱུང་ཚམ་ཤེ་ཆ་ཅིག་བཤད་དགོས་བཏང་ན་ལ། ད་དེ་ཅིག་གི་གཟེག་ཅིག་འདང་
 རྒྱག་གཟེག་འདྲ་མ་གཟེག་བྱིན་གཏོང་གི་དུ། ད་རང་གི་བོད་སྐད་དེ་ཅིག་ཅིག་གི་གཟེག་མི་ཡོང་ན་ལ་ད་རང་གི་ཚོད་གིས་ད་ཨ་ལེད་ལུ་ལེད་
 རྒྱུང་ཚམ་ཤེ་ཡེད་ལས་ཚེག་ཀ་བཟུ་ཐམ་པ་བཤད་རྒྱ་ན་དེའི་ནང་གི་ཚེག་རྐང་ལྡ་ཅིག་དག་མོ་གཟེག་ཡོང་ནང་བཟེས་ལུ། དེ་མོ་གི་རེ་བ་གཟེག་
 ཡོད་གོ་ནི་རེད།

The recent language movements have given me some thoughts to consider. In the past, I didn't pay much attention to how I spoke. I spoke whatever came to my mind and fell into my mouth. ... given that everybody is being aware of language issues over the last

few years, I myself, when having to say a few words, am forced to think twice about it.

Even if I cannot speak a good Tibetan, I have the desire to speak to the best of my ability and articulate at least 5 of 10 words very clearly (M43_138).

Further, not changing the way that one speaks is associated with a type of person who is viewed quite negatively among younger educated speakers. The following is how a 38-year-old carpenter, businessman and a respected villager characterizes people using the merged variant [n]. For him, the use of the non-merged variant has great social significance because it represents something that he is very concerned about – the maintenance of a unique Tibetan identity. The male speaker has been schooled and is a respected local carpenter. He characterizes the use of the non-merged variant in the following way when asked of his opinion about the potential speaker.

Excerpt 21

འོ་ན་མུ་གཟེག་གིས་རྒྱ་ལན་ནང་ན་བཟེས་ན་ལྷོས་མུ་དེ་ཆེ་མོ་གཟེག་རེད་འདྲོད་གི

ད་ཁོ་ཞོང་ རྒྱུ་རྟེ་མུ་དེ། ད་ཁོ་ག་དེ་གས་ཉ་ར་ རྩམ་རྟེ་བལྟས་ན་ད། ད་ཁོ་གི་རང་བཞིན་ཆེ་མོ་གཟེག་ཡིན་ནོ་བཟླག་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་ཐུབ་གི་ཁོ་གིས་
ད་ཆེ་གཟེག་ཤེས་གོ་གི་བཟེས་ན། ད་ཁོ་གི་སེམས་ཐོག་ག་དེ་བོད་རྒྱ་གཟེག་ཡིན་འདྲོད་ལུ་བཟུང་ཡོད་ནི་རེད་ལ། གཟེས་ད་རྒྱ་རིགས་དག་
མོ་བཤད་ནི་གཟེག་གིས། ད་ཁོ་ག་ རྩམ་རྟེ་བལྟས་ཡིན་ཟེར་གོ་ཡོད་ནོ་མེན་ནས། ད་བོད་རྒྱ་དག་མོ་བཤད་ཤེས་གོ་ཡོད་ནི་མ་རེད། ཁོ་
གིས་དེ་བལ་གི་གན་ཡོད་ཐུབ་གོ་ཡོད་ནི་མ་རེད། ཐུང་རྒྱུ་གཅིག་ག་ཡོད་གོ་ཡོད་ནི་མ་རེད་ད། ད་རུང་མར་ར་འཐེན་གི་བཟུང་ཡོད་ནི་རེད།
རྒྱ་ལན་ནང་ན་བཟེས་བཏང་ན་ད། དེ་རེད། བལ་གི་འགྲིག་ཡོད་ནི་མ་རེད། ད་གཟེས་ཅིག་ཤེས་ནས་གོ་ནི་གཟེག་གིས། ད་རིག་ན་དེ་གས་
རྒྱ་ཆ་དེ་བཤད་བཏང་ན་ཉ་ནང་ན་ རྩམ་གས་སུ་དེ་གོ་ད་རྒྱ་ཡོང་ནི་རེད།

If someone said [len] instead of [lam], what kind of person do you think would speak that way?

I can usually tell what kind of person is likely to speak that way. He thinks he is speaking Tibetan. But to someone who actually speaks an articulate Tibetan, this person is just a mere human being. He is not making any efforts towards the preservation of the language. He is making it worse. If you say [dʒalen], then that is definitely not right. But someone who is a little bit more knowledgeable would definitely laugh at him if he hears this person speak this way.... (M38_050@ 55:00).

Use of the merged variant [n] thus indexes the speaker's lack of education and lack of awareness related to social issues such as language preservation. Its continued use is perceived to be detrimental to the Tibetan language – something that educated speakers resist and don't wish to participate in. The perceived speaker of the merged variant [n] is regarded to be ignorant of the current linguistic reality of the Tibetan language, and the educated speakers quoted is highlighting this quality in taking his stance against the merger. The use of merged variant [n] thus is not necessarily associated with someone of farming background directly but rather someone of lesser knowledge.

Just as the merged variant [n] represents a negative element of the local language, use of Chinese loan words is another aspect of the local language that younger educated speakers feel should be discouraged. This is also a theme that the larger language purity movements over the years have advocated. Thus, for many of the educated speakers, being able to fend off language change, either in the form of

herself and her people. The stance that she takes towards the Tibetan language in Excerpt 23 is typical of many of these more educated speakers. These also reflect issues advocated through the language movements in the area for the last decade or so as I explained in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3. This type of stance towards Tibetan language is reflects a growing sense of unease about the future of their language:

Excerpt 23

ང་ཚོར་མཚན་རྒྱ་ནའང་རང་གི་ཉེད་ལོ་བོད་རེད། བོད་ཡིག་གཞིག་ཡིན་ན་ད་རང་གིས་ཤེས་དགོས་གི་ཆེས་མ་མཐའ་ཡིན་ནའང་། ད་
རང་གི་ཕ་སྐད་རེད། བོད་ཡིག་འདི་རང་གི་བོད་རིགས་འདིའི་སློབ་ཚུ་རེད་བཟེས་བཤད་ནའང་ཚོག་གི་དེ་ཡིན་ན་ད་བོད་ཡིག་འདི་ཞེ་གི་
སྐད་ས་དགོས་གི

Since we are all Tibetan ourselves, we at least need to be literate in Tibetan. It is the language of our forbearers. One can say that the Tibetan language is the lifeline of the Tibetan people. So people should take learning Tibetan very seriously ... (F21_076)

These younger speakers' stances and positioning with respect to the local language change (of which the merged variant [n] is a part) provides us crucial insights into the social motivation for the resurgence of non-merged variant among these speakers. I use the term 'social meaning' to refer to social categories and stances indexed by the increased usage of the non-merged variant among the younger educated speakers. I conceptualize social meaning in terms of orders of indexicality as outlined in Chapter 2.

There are several distinctive social meanings indexed by the increased use of the non-merged variant among the younger educated speakers. At the *n*-th order of social

meaning, social meaning imparted by the linguistic variable (m) lies along the dimension of educated vs. non-educated (or knowledgeable vs. ignorant). The increased usage of the non-merged variant [m] thus indexes their membership within this educated social category or identity. More specifically, it not only indexes someone of educated background but also someone who in fact cares about the future linguistic fate of the Tibetans in Contemporary China. This ‘knowledgeable’ person is not only a speaker who is educated but is also someone who is aware of larger social issues and cares about the linguistic change³⁷. This indexes people who are making a conscious effort to preserve the Tibetan language, perhaps speakers like these educated speakers. On the other hand, the merged variant [n] is indexical of someone who is ignorant, and who is not making any conscious efforts on behalf of the language. These are people who are going with the flow of linguistic change and making it ‘worse’.

This indexical meaning at the n -th order can in fact be interpreted at the $n + 1$ st level where it can gain a stance meaning. This type of social meaning indexes a resistance stance towards encroachment of Chinese language and culture. These younger educated speakers are not only using the non-merged variant as way to construct themselves as members of an educated group of speakers who care about language and issue of identity but its use is simultaneously indexing a stance of resistance. The $n + 1$ st meaning of resistance comes about through the association

³⁷ This is an important point because not all educated speakers use the non-merged variant [m] similarly. As I have shown in Chapter 5, some of the younger educated speakers in fact behave quite similarly to their uneducated counterparts. The indexical meaning is quite precise here.

between the variants and types of social groups including educated and non-educated speakers. As I discussed above, it is important to note that the meaning of non-merged variant [m] is very specific at the social category level. The non-merged variant [m] indexes a particular type of educated speaker with an active stance. Through this, it can be argued that the increased non-merged variant [m] among the younger educated speakers is best understood as indexing a stance of resistance at the $n + 1$ st order of indexicality.

These analyses indicate that the resurgence of the non-merged variant [m] among younger speakers overall can articulate a number of social meanings both in terms of social category and stance. In following a social constructionist view of the relationship between language and social categories (Eckert 2000; Schilling-Estes 2004; Podesva 2007), I argue that the resurgence of the non-merged variant [m] among the younger educated speakers thus does not simply reflect social structure but rather constitutes the social categories, identities and stances. Use of the non-merged variant [m] by the educated speakers is one way through which the speakers construct such social meaning.

More importantly, even though the non-merged variant [m] is used both by the older speakers of the community, particularly the men, and the younger educated speakers, the younger speakers' non-merged variant [m] is not directly related to the older speakers' [m]. This is not directly evidenced in the production patterns of the linguistic feature but can only be revealed through close examination of the indexical

values associated with these features. The resurgence of the non-merged variant [m] in Spearhead thus stands in stark contrast to previous studies (Kiesling & Wisnosky 2003; Johnstone & Kiesling 2008; Labov 1963; Wolfram & Schilling-Estes 1998) in which receding linguistic features used by the older speakers are recycled by younger men because of their older social associations rather than because they have taken on new social associations.

6.6 (Un)Gendered linguistic variation in times of uncertainty

Studies of language variation and change in post-insular communities have generally found that the maintenance and revitalization of receding linguistic features is typically led by men. Consider the case of Labov's (1962, 1972) study of Martha's Vineyard and Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1996) study of Ocracoke. In both cases, men in general are participating in the maintenance or even resurgence of receding linguistic features - an apparent reversal of an otherwise larger linguistic change towards the regional norm. One of the reasons why men instead of women are revitalizing receding linguistic features is tied to the local identity of these communities. These maritime communities have traditionally been male dominated. Those receding linguistic features served as an important ideological resource for men as they indexed an older way of life that was threatened. The use of receding linguistic feature symbolically indexed their opposition to the encroachment of mainland influence. Because the iconic traditional island way of life in these communities is essentially a

male way of life, women do not have much stake or ownership in this way of life, and so do not tend to invoke it via linguistic means.

The complementary phenomenon with respect to language change and gender in times of social change is woman's role in acquisition of more standard linguistic features. This has been demonstrated in less urbanized social contexts such as the Spanish village in Northern Spain (Holmquist 1985). Holmquist finds that younger women, who have a preference for working in factories in town, lead towards the change from the local variant [u] in words like 'jachu' towards the [o] variant because the latter is associated with the urban life and the standard Castilian language, both of which were beginning to have more social currency. Similarly, Nichols (1976, 1983) study of language change in two separate African American communities in coastal South Carolina also illustrates a similar pattern. She found that young and middle-aged women on the mainland, who were far more mobile than their older cohorts, were leading in the use of more standard features due to the availability of economic and employment opportunities in sectors that required standard language.

Taken together, the two groups of studies just outlined suggest that both men and women have different incentives, whether ideological or economic, in either the maintenance of localized linguistic feature or the adoption of more regionally prestigious and standard varieties. However, neither of these patterns holds true in the present study. Both gender groups use the receding, normative linguistic feature without any significant differences. For these educated men and women, the active maintenance

of this otherwise disappearing sound is symbolically significant for both groups as it indexes an ethnic Tibetan identity that is implicitly contrasted with Chinese. By an increased usage of the non-merged variant [m], educated speakers are articulating a resistant stance towards the influence of Chinese as indexed by the merged variant [n]. They are united in their stand towards the influence of Chinese language and constructing themselves as a group of educated Tibetan speakers who deeply care about the future of their language.

A similar type of motivation for ungendered variation with respect of local identity is also reported in Schilling-Estes' (2001; 2006) study of Smith Island – a shrinking coastal community. She observes that gendered variation with respect to regularization of past-tense negative *be* to *weren't* (e.g. *It weren't me; he weren't home*), an innovation originally led by men, has ceased to exist among the youngest generations as women increased their usage of *weren't*. The closing of this gender gap, she argues, represents a symbolic united front towards the encroachment of the outside world.

The relationship between gender and linguistic change in times of uncertainty has to be based on the local social realities in which men and women lead their lives. To understand how men and women participate in language change during times of uncertainty, we need to be sensitive to different socioeconomic and cultural practices that shape their different identities. This is demonstrated by the older Spearhead women's earlier adoption of the merged variant [n] through marriage practices. However, we also need to attend to the ways in which the lives of men and women are

bound together by common social practices and to the ideological orientations that characterize speakers like the younger educated speakers. These younger educated speakers are keenly aware of the role of Tibetan language in a national context where Mandarin is promoted as the hegemonic linguistic variety at the expense of lesser spoken languages such as Tibetan (Verennes 2010). This educated group, particularly those who are using far more of the non-merged variant [m] than are their peers, are not only making a claim about using ‘articulate’ speech but are also holding on to a symbolic linguistic feature that is slowly disappearing in the speech of ordinary people. The non-merged variant [m], introduced through the written language, is an iconic window into the past and their use of the non-merged feature [m] is best interpreted as holding onto the past while taking a resistance stance towards the incoming influence of Chinese language indexed by the merged variant [n].

The fate of this linguistic variable, caught in the tug of war between the larger areal linguistic change towards the merged variant [n] and educated speakers’ conscious resistance, remains a mystery. The outcome depends on not only the wills of individual Tibetans, but also on the existence of favorable external conditions for the teaching of Tibetan language. If the Tibetan language is normatively taught, then as long as people are concerned about their linguistic identity, there is a possibility that the larger trend towards the merged variant may be reversed.

6.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have first explored traditional and newer language ideologies and examined them using the notion of orders of indexicality. I showed that while there is a relationship between two age groups in terms of ideologies surrounding the linguistic variable (m), yet differences still remain. The role of written Tibetan is only significant among younger educated speaker as they evaluate these linguistic variants in relation to the written Tibetan. I highlighted differences and similarities in terms of indexical values of the linguistic variable and argued that there are very different and often competing indexical values for them. I then I examined the social meaning of the non-merged variant [m] among younger educated speakers and showed that the disfavoring of the merged variant [n] by younger educated speakers indexes a type of educated Tibetan who cares about their linguistic identity. In addition, the increased usage of the non-merged variant indexes a stance of resistance towards the encroachment of Chinese language and culture. By appealing to the social meaning of the linguistic variable (m), I also motivated why a gendered pattern was not found among younger speakers. In following previous studies (Eckert 2000; Schilling-Estes 2002b), I argued that the relationship between linguistic variants and social factors such as gender can be best understood by appealing to the local social contexts in which women and men live.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have explored a number of sociolinguistic issues associated with the linguistic variable (m) in Amdo Tibetan. The merged variant of the linguistic variable is typically characterized as a feature of farmer dialect. However, my in-depth quantitative analysis of a farming dialect (a transitional mountain dialect) shows that this is not the case. In fact, there appears to be a change in progress associated with this particular linguistic feature, whereby younger speakers overall lead older speakers in adopting this more innovative linguistic feature [n]. Furthermore, I have also demonstrated the sociolinguistic complexities associated with this linguistic variable not only from a production point of view but also from an ideological perspective - both of which have never been systematically studied in any Tibetan communities. This dissertation makes not only a significant contribution towards Tibetan dialectology but also highlights the importance of in-depth analysis of linguistic features using the variationist framework.

Perhaps most important is my engagement with speakers' linguistic ideology – an area of Tibetan linguistics that is still very much in its infancy. By attending to how local speakers talk about the language variation, I was able to gain important insights not only into local patterns of dialect variation and change but also the social and ideological meanings underlying the changing usage patterns. In particular, I

demonstrated how linguistic ideologies are shifting in many areas of Tibet?. I suggest that Tibetan language ideology, which has rarely been systematically studied in Tibetan linguistics, should be given more prominence in Tibetan linguistics. Instead of privileging the researchers, whether they are Tibetan, Chinese or Western, I strongly endorse the need to pay attention to how the local speakers actually describe and talk about local language variation. Local speakers provide important sights into what they do with language and why they do what they do – a point that is applicable in all sociolinguistic studies, not only those of small, relatively isolated communities that lie far from ‘mainstream’ language varieties. In other words, incorporating both insider and outsider perspectives on language variation and change is an effective methodological tool. Taking the position of both a researcher and an insider provides very important insights into the local dynamics of language variation and change.

This dissertation also has important implications for those who are interested in language revitalization, including in Tibetan farming communities. What this dissertation shows is that while being literate or having an education is helpful in maintaining some of these disappearing features including the non-merged variant [m], what is even more important is the ideological factor. In other words, whether or not disappearing dialect features can be revitalized, in Spearhead or in any community, is largely dependent on the ideological orientation of the speakers themselves. Thus, as I have shown in this dissertation, just being an educated speaker does not necessarily correlate with use of a particular linguistic variant, but being educated and having a

positive orientation towards Tibetan language greatly increases the possibility of maintenance of these dying linguistic features.

In terms of larger sociolinguistic theory, this dissertation highlights a number of issues. In following previous ethnographically informed variation studies, I have highlighted the importance of paying attention to the local social and cultural contexts in which social actors live. This is evidenced, for example, in the role of the traditional marriage practices of the local community in patterns of gendered variation among the older speakers of the village. One cannot abstract the patterns away from the particularities of local communities. Similarly, the resurgence or maintenance of linguistic features such as the non-merged variant is grounded in local reality. Furthermore, locally based explanation for the leadership of women in language change demonstrates, as do many other studies, that there can be no single universal explanation for this general tendency of women's linguistic behavior (c.f. Labov 1994: 292, 2001). Instead, the precise motivations for the general tendency of women's leadership in language change lie in local communities, and explanations cannot be generalized.

In post-insular communities, tension is typically between local and non-local. As a result, male and female speakers have different investment or economic incentives in either the maintenance of the localized linguistic feature or adoption of wider prescribed varieties. In a speech community like the present one where speakers are increasingly concerned about the maintenance of their linguistic identity, the receding linguistic

feature assumes symbolic values not attributed to them in other sociolinguistic settings. In a situation where speakers perceive their language to be under threat from a different culture, both gender groups have stakes in maintaining their linguistic identity.

More importantly, investigation of language ideologies of older and younger educated speakers suggests that the same linguistic variable (m) does not have the same indexical values for all speakers. Hence, we need to be mindful of making connections between indexical values and linguistic form and cannot simply assume that a single form carries a single meaning, even in a very small, seemingly homogeneous community like Spearhead. As the dissertation shows, we cannot ascribe the same kind of indexical values to the same form without fully understanding the larger structural changes taking place in the language. In other words, understanding larger linguistic changes is critically important to the understanding of indexical values of even a single variable feature.

In terms of future research, a great deal remains to be done. One particular finding needing more elaboration and research is the accelerated pace of merging evidenced among younger speakers (see Chapter 4). Understanding why there is an accelerated rate of change towards the merged variant among younger speakers has implications related to larger changes in the recent history of Tibetan communities in China. Furthermore, the underlying mechanism governing the correlational relationship between the merging of the final coda (m) and the raising of the preceding vowels

requires more investigation into the diachronic change associated with Amdo Tibetan vowels.

Although this dissertation raises some unanswered questions, I hope that the answers it reveals have proven to be illuminating to scholars of Tibetan, endangered languages and dialects, dialectology, sociolinguistics and quantitative variation analysis. Above all, I hope I have demonstrated the crucial need for all researchers interested in gaining full understanding of the interrelation between language and social meaning to pay full attention not only to how variation patterns in its sociocultural and sociohistorical context but to what particular variants mean to the people who use them.

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