The Vernacular Literacy Practices of a Newly Literate Moroccan Woman: An Ethnographic Perspective

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Abstract

This paper offers a discussion of the literacy practices of a newly literate Moroccan woman. I draw on the social practice theory of literacy and I use ethnographic methods to explore the participant's life history and offer an account of her family-related literacy practices within the framework of gender studies. In-depth interviews, informal discussion, participant observation, visual ethnography, and documentary photography were employed to collect data over one year. Literacy events were used as the basic unit of analysis and patterns were identified through coding and theme analysis. The findings indicate that the family is a strong impetus for the participant's literacy acquisition and a major context where she uses the literacy skills she has developed in an adult literacy class. Literacy for this participant is an empowering tool because she has become able to carry out many of the outdoor tasks that were formerly exclusive to men. However, literacy has extended rather than reversed Imane's home-based roles within her family. These results corroborate the findings of previous research on the embedded nature of literacy practice and illustrate the numerous ways in which the vernacular literacy practices of a participant from Morocco is embedded in a strong gender-based division of labor.

Keywords: literacy practices, emergent literacy, adult literacy, gender, ethnography

Introduction

This article offers insights into the literacy practices of a newly literate Moroccan woman. It reports the findings of a year-long ethnographic study of the literacy practices of a woman adult literacy student. Strong emphasis is laid on the opportunities and challenges she faces in relation to the literacy activities she engages in within the family domain. More specifically, the aim is to (i) examine this newly literate woman's beliefs about and attitudes toward literacy, (ii) document and analyze her literacy practices as they take place in specific real-life contexts, and (iii) investigate how her literacy practices are part of her personal

and/or social life as a daughter, mother, and wife (this is the status of a large segment of participant in adult literacy programs in Morocco). Emphasis is laid on the degree to which the literacy skills she has developed in the adult literacy class either empower or disempower her. This study therefore addresses the following questions: how does this newly literate woman utilize her newly acquired literacy skills in the family context? In what ways is her literacy practices embedded in socio-cultural structures and in different contexts, and how is this literacy practices shaped by gender relations in her family context? What strategies does she employ to deal with the literacy problems she encounters and to learn new literacy skills?

The present study is informed by the social practice theory of literacy and presents a case study from the Moroccan context of the embedded nature of the literacy practices of an adult literacy student. As Purcell-Gates (2007) notes, "[i]t is now generally recognized that literacy *is* multiple and woven within the sociocultural lives of communities, but what is not yet fully understood is how it *is* multiple – how this multiplicity plays out across and within differing sociocultural contexts" (p. 2). Second, previous studies on adult literacy in Morocco (see review below) focused on the results of surveys and quantified achievements, but they did not fully explore the ways students use literacy in everyday life; conversely, the present article aims to cover the gap in this literature through bringing in an ethnographic perspective. Indeed, an ethnographic study of the everyday life literacy practices of an adult literacy student that stresses her own beliefs, perspectives, and voice is likely to yield results that can inform adult literacy policy, research, and instruction in Morocco.

This article is organized along the following lines. In section one, details about the context of the study are presented. The second and third sections offer an account of the theoretical framework adopted as well as the methods utilized to address the objectives of the study. After laying out the findings in section four, a discussion ensues aiming to analyze them in the light of the findings of previous research. The paper concludes with several implications.

Context

Since Morocco gained Independence in 1956, literacy has been a fundamental component of national policy. Successive governments have adopted different policies and various measures to eradicate illiteracy. These ranged from generalizing access to schooling among school-age children, including the encouragement of the schooling of girls in rural areas, to the organization of large-scale literacy programs targeting adults who either had never joined school or who had dropped out (Agnaou, 2002). The civil society has played a crucial role in these "illiteracy-eradication programs." The International Literacy Year in 1990, however, marked a turning point in the national policy in matters related to adult literacy dissemination. The focus shifted from simply encouraging enrollment and increasing the number of the participants in adult literacy programs across different social groups, to place more emphasis on the quality of learning within these programs. Consequently, the priority of the department of adult literacy consisted in considering adult literacy students' specificities and using pedagogy suitable for adults' literacy needs (Direction de la Lutte, 2003). *The National Charter of*

Education and Training, which was adopted in 2000 and which outlines the national policy in education, made education and adult literacy a national priority. As the charter stipulates, education is the social duty of the State and literacy training is a prerequisite for socioeconomic development (Charte nationale de l'éducation, 2001; Direction de la Lutte, 2003; Secrétariat d'Etat chargé, 2006). However, statistics relative to the literacy situation in Morocco do not align with the government's claims and goals. In point of fact, in spite of the enormous literacy efforts invested since 1956, statistics show that illiteracy and school drop-out rates are still high especially among women and girls (see table 1).

Table 1
Breakdown of literacy, school enrollment and drop-out rates in Morocco in 2006 by sex

	Men	Women	Total	Source
Literacy rates (people aged 10 and up)	70.2%	47.3%	58.7%	(Haut-Commissariat au Plan, 2007)
School enrollment rates (2006)	90.8%	86.4%	85.4%	(World Bank Report, 2009)
School dropout rates (children aged 6 and up)	7.72%	10.33	8.90%	(Haut-Commissariat au Plan, 2007)

In addition to being a priority in the national policy of the Kingdom of Morocco, literacy has also been the object of research in academia. A seminal literacy research project was conducted by Wagner and his colleagues between 1980 and 1986. The objective of their Moroccan Literacy Project was to study the impact of socio-cultural factors such as language, family background, preschool experience, and socioeconomic status on literacy acquisition and retention among Arabic- and Amazigh-speaking children (Wagner, 1993; Wagner, Messik, & Spratt, 1986; Ezzaki, Spratt, & Wagner, 1987). In similar terms, Afkir (2001) investigated the ways Moroccan children's socioeconomic background shapes their socialization into a literate environment. However, one area that remains to be researched is the literacy experience and practices of Moroccan adults.

The research on adult basic education in Morocco is of two types. The first is concerned with the Moroccan government's efforts to fight illiteracy, the obstacles that face literacy provision, and the various strategies to fight illiteracy (Essaknaoui, 1998; Maddi, 1999; Qabaj, 1998). The second type of research is based in fieldwork and is concerned with the adult students' demographic characteristics, the reasons why they did not attend school, their motivations to enroll in literacy programs, and the literacy difficulties they face (Secrétariat d'Etat chargé, 2006). Other studies within this line of research offer an assessment of the adult students' literacy achievements, the correspondence between the participants' needs, and the program objectives as well as the portrayal of women in adult literacy textbooks (Aganou, 2002; Agnaou & Boukous, 2001; Ibaaquil, 2001).

These studies, however, have methodological limitations: they either rely on self-reported data collected through quantitative data collection instruments and analyzed through statistical measures (Secrétariat d'Etat chargé, 2006), or they measure the participants' literacy achievements using school-based tests (Agnaou, 2002; 1Boukous & Agnaou, 2001). Literacy programs in Morocco, however, have not been studied ethnographically in terms of the participants' actual literacy uses. The present article, which is part of a larger study, aims to fill this gap in the literature and thus contribute to scholarship on the social nature of literacy.

Theoretical Framework

The present ethnographic study of the literacy practices of a newly literate Moroccan woman is couched within research tradition commonly known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS) and is informed by the social practice theory of literacy, which posits that literacy is a social practice embedded in social relationships and institutions, historically situated and informally learnt. As Baynham (2004) argues, emphasis is placed on,

> the social meaning of literacy: that is, the roles these abilities [reading and writing] play in social life; the varieties of reading and writing available for choice; the contexts of their performance; and the manner in which they are interpreted and tested, not by experts, but by ordinary people in ordinary activities. (p. 285)

The springboards for the present study include four seminal studies that highlight the social nature of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 160; Heath, 1983, p. 196; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984). These researchers have examined the "'vernacular' or non-dominant literacy practices . . . that are overlooked and ignored by the constructions of literacy elaborated by and within dominant institutions" (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2000, p. 3). They are concerned with the ways "literacies are positioned in relation to the social institutions and power relations which sustain them" (Prinsloo & Breire, 1996, p.15).

Within the NLS scholarship, a significant body of research has been concerned with emergent literacy and has focused on exploring the outcomes of adult education in different communities. Within this line of research, simplistic claims of governments and development agencies that literacy alone leads to socioeconomic development and to women's empowerment are questioned. Papen (2005), for example, notes that the Namibian and South African participants in the adult literacy programs she researched ignore the everyday life literacy skills they are taught in the adult literacy classes and express instead a need for a school-based curriculum because they were formerly excluded from formal education. Prinslo and Breire (1996), by contrast, argue that South-African paticipants in adult literacy programs make limited use of the literacy skills they learn because they are exposed to school-based literacy practices which are unrelated to the everyday life literacy demands. Again by contrast, Betts's (2003) concludes that, based on ethnographic study in El Salvador, participants' low-attendance of literacy classes does not indicate their lack of motivation to acquire literacy but rather the existence of

literacy mediators who offer literacy help to the community and make literacy acquisition unnecessary. Even more interestingly, Ahearn's ethnographic work in Nepal reveals that adult literacy acquisition has negative repercussions; that is, newly literate women engage in love-letter writing and decide to elope with their lovers, but they become powerless and cut off in cases where the marriage fails. Finally, Erguig (2017) examines the ideological nature of the national adult literacy program in Morocco, and stresses the crucial role of a strong political will in the status the mosque-based literacy program currently enjoys as the predominant "literacy sponsor." He argues that the mosque is no longer an "ideology-free" site for the delivery of the adult literacy of reading, writing, and math to the predominantly women participants, but it has rather become a site where a moderate view of Islam is promoted and where "balanced" ideological beliefs and values are inculcated as part of a larger state policy that seeks to preserve the "spiritual security" of the nation. The present study contributes to this literature by presenting an ethnographic case study from the Moroccan context that foregrounds the multiple ways in which a newly literate woman's literacy practices is "located in the broader patterning of social activities" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 160).

In addition, this study is framed by gender theories, namely scholarship, which is concerned with the connection between adult literacy and gender equality (Molyneux, 1987; Stromquist, 1987). Molyneux (1987) made a distinction in gender interests in terms of whether they are (i) practical and lead to women's access to and use of literacy to serve practical functions or whether they are (ii) strategic and enable women to claim their place in the world and to participate in the social-cultural, economic, and political activities on an equal footing with their male counterparts (p. 260). Robinson-Pant's (2005) research in Nepal is another case study concerned with the processes involved in Nepalese women's literacy acquisition and the literacy practices in which they engage. She views the link between women's literacy, gender, and development as a dynamic process and demonstrates that literacy planners often introduce theoretical approaches to the design and implementation of literacy programs which take little account of the local teaching situations and the local participants' beliefs about adult education. As Robinson-Pant (2000) contends, the "relationship between objectives and outcomes of a programme, between teaching methods and learning outcomes, should therefore not be seen as a simple equation to be balanced" (p. 159).

Method

Design and Context

The present study is ethnographic in nature: a multi-method approach, consisting of interviews, informal discussion, participant observation, photographs, and artifact collection, was used. These methods were deployed to gain an emic perspective and to capture the entirety of the participant's literacy experience in order to ultimately provide a detailed, in-depth description of her everyday life literacy practices within the family domain. The approach is holistic and interpretive, and it aims to highlight the participant's lived experience and give space for her voice.

The participant in this ethnographic study, Imane, a pseudonym, is aged 47 and lives in a popular and relatively old neighborhood of a growing urban center, Temara, which is about 7.5 miles south of Rabat, the capital city of Morocco. She is married to a military serviceman who makes around 2,500 dirhams ($280) a month, which means they are a low-income family. She is mother to three daughters: Sanaa, Nawal, and Noura aged 11, 8, and 2, respectively. Sanaa is in 5th grade and Nawal is in 2nd grade.

Imane lives in an old apartment in the same neighborhood as that of her parents'. Her nuclear family is characterized by a clear gender-based division of labor: the husband is the breadwinner and Imane is in charge of domestic chores, including the literacy-related ones. She does the housework, attends to the needs of the daughters, prepares food, and also does the shopping. Her father runs a small local business for making women's traditional clothing, and her mother is a housewife who also works as an occasional cook. Her two brothers, 40 and 35, work as teachers of English in state-sponsored schools, and her 16-year-old sister is a high school student. She spends part of her day time in her parents' apartment, helping her mother with the housework. To earn some money to cover her personal needs, she occasionally helps make cakes for her mother's clients.

Along the lines of purposeful sampling (see Patton, 1990, p. 169), I selected Imane because she represents an "information-rich case . . . for study in-depth." Although the insights the present case study offers can by no means be generalized to all newly literate women, Imane is a woman Moroccan adult literacy student who, unlike her brothers, who continued their education until they got jobs as teachers, willingly dropped out of a nearby school when she was in 4th grade against her father's will (Imane's father, personal communication, November 10, 2017). By her father's account, he did not put much pressure on her to return to school (see subsection "Ruling Passions" below for a discussion of the reasons why she returned to attend an adult literacy class). In this respect, it is important to cite the national survey conducted by the Ministry of Education to explore adult basic education students' characteristics and their motivations to enroll in adult literacy classes; the results showed that 16.4% of the adult literacy students in Morocco left school when they were either 4th or 5th graders (Secrétariat d'Etat chargé, 2006, p. 22).

Second, Imane is like thousands of women adult literacy students who attend literacy classes in addition to their family responsibilities. Interestingly, she is indeed highly motivated to improve her literacy skills as attested by her non-stop literacy learning pursuits. She attended an evening state-sponsored literacy class offered in a near-by public school in 1994 over a period of two years to learn how to read and write in Arabic, but she had to quit upon suspension of the program. When she got married in 1996, she moved to a small town where no literacy class was available. In 2004, she came back to live in Temara when her eldest daughter had reached 11 years old and was able to attend a literacy class for another year. However, she had to leave it again for family reasons. She said, "I was often disturbed because I used to take my elder daughter with me to the literacy class. When I gave birth to my second daughter, I had to leave the literacy program in order to attend to her needs" (Imane, personal communication, September 5, 2017).

Third, I have been a long-term friend of Imane's family and regularly visited them for over 20 years; her two brothers have been long-time friends and colleagues. Such a background has indeed led to the development of a brother-sister type relationship between us. My position as a friend of the family enabled me to gain genuine access to her reading and writing practices. This social relationship with Imane was also vital in the sense that the researcher as a man could not have conducted this ethnographic study with her given the gender components in the analysis of study. However, thanks to these social ties and to the close personal relationship to her, I managed to have easy access to her day-to-day reading and writing practices. In short, despite the existence of a potential researcher bias and the fact that much of the evidence comes from the participant's self-reported experiences, both of which should be acknowledged as a possible limitation of the study, Imane's confidence that her collaboration is for research purposes to promote the cause of millions of Moroccan women who are eager to learn literacy resulted in an anxiety-free atmosphere wherein she willingly shared her stories about her literacy acquisition journey.

The Ethnographic Research Process

This ethnographic study aims to provide a detailed, in-depth description of a woman's everyday life literacy practice based on field work that spans over one year. Its guiding principle was an exploration of a Moroccan woman adult literacy student's literacy beliefs, attitudes, and practices in their entirety, with a particular emphasis on the intersection of these factors. This research experience was characterized by the author's participant observation of aspects of the life of this woman made possible by the relationship he had developed with the participant's family and her husband. The variety of ethnographic research methods discussed below was used to represent the participant's perspectives and to highlight "the centrality of literacy in the patterning of contemporary everyday activities and how people act within *a textually mediated social world"* [emphasis in original] (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 196; see also Barton, Ivanič, Appleby, Hodge, & Tusting, 2007).

In-depth interviews were conducted to collect demographic data about Imane and to explore her literacy history and former schooling experience. I also continually interviewed her (in Moroccan Arabic) to uncover the ways in which the observed and reported literacy events fit into her personal and/or social life (the interview transcripts in this article are translations from Moroccan Arabic). The interviews centered on her daily literacy practices with a special focus on the functions in which she put reading and writing to use, her roles and attitudes in the literacy events in which she engaged, and the literacy difficulties she faced. Informal conversation with her family members also helped collect additional background information about her.

I also observed Imane in real-life settings (i.e., the contexts where she interacts with written text) as she engaged in some literacy events using visual ethnography, and photographs were taken while she was involved in literacy events. I additionally asked her to report the day-to-day occasions when reading and writing were part of

her social interactions. Finally, I used documentary photography, photographing the literacy artifacts in her apartment in order to provide a vivid picture of the ecology of writing in her home. Throughout this process, I used field notes to record my observations and comments.

Data Collection and Analysis Process

The grounded theory approach, "a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23), was used to generate themes. I continuously interviewed Imane and analyzed data to inform the following process of data collection; data were coded and themes were generated and enriched until theoretical saturation was achieved. In this process, which took place from August 2017 through July 2018, the three ethical considerations of the participant's informed consent, right to privacy and protection from harm were observed and explicitly shared with the participant in the study.

The basic units of analysis are "literacy events" which refer to "the occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies" (Heath, 1983, p. 196). Emphasis in the analysis focused on the following five elements: (i) Imane, the *participant*, (ii) the *activities* performed by participants (i.e., Imane and the people involved in the literacy events in which she engaged), (iii) the *settings* in which the interaction takes place, (iv) the *domains* within which literacy events take place (i.e., the areas within which her reading and writing activities can be categorized), and (v) the *resources*, or the material artifacts and non-material values involved in the interaction. Literacy events were the springboard for the study of the literacy practices, which Street (2003) describes as "the broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts" (p. 82).

I analyzed the ethnographic data to generate categories and identify the prominent literacy domains. The themes that emerged from the data were then identified, combined, and further analyzed with reference to the research questions raised initially. I placed Imane's literacy practices within a gender framework, and I explored the implications of her status as a newly literate woman for her roles within a gender-based family structure.

Findings

In the present article, I examine the participant's literacy practices within the family domain and analyze the ways she uses literacy in connection with the following categories: her children's schoolwork and their health needs, shopping, having home appliances repaired, cooking, withdrawing money from the post office, checking documents, and reading mail. Before I provide a discussion of Imane's day-to-day literacy practices, a review of her motives to return to an adult literacy class after having dropped out of school when she was in primary school is in order.

"Ruling Passions"

In my different interviews and informal discussions with Imane, religion, her children, and the daily literacy demands were her "ruling passions." She often turned the conversation round to these topics as major reasons behind her decision to attend an adult literacy class after having dropped out of school when she was in primary school. She said, "To be frank, I attended the literacy class primarily to be able to read the Quran and for my daughters' sake" (Imane, personal communication, September 9, 2017).

Therefore, religion is a major impetus for her decision to attend a literacy class and to recall the literacy skills she had lost after she had left school. Although the Quran and other religious information are nowadays accessible to the illiterate via audiovisual media (CDs, TV channels, and social media), Imane insisted that she wanted to be able to read the Quran as a book and to understand the teachings of Islam. she said, "I can now read short Sourates easily" (Imane, personal communication, August 8, 2017). Nonetheless, her biggest dream is to manage to read the Quran in its entirety: "I want to be able to read Al Baqara Sourate, especially the Al Kursi verses, which are posted on the wall in my sitting room in my flat" (Imane, personal communication, September 1, 2017). The second motive behind her enrollment in an adult literacy class consists of her intention to develop the literacy skill she needs to be able to help her daughters with their schoolwork. Like many parents who may be unsatisfied about the quality of education offered in some state-sponsored schools and who may be unable to hire a private tutor, Imane is intent on offering her daughters the literacy support they need to achieve school success.

Children's Schoolwork

The participant's major family-related literacy use consists of helping her 2nd and 5th 5 grade children with their schoolwork (see image 1). As a matter of fact, 22% of the adult literacy students surveyed in 2006 stated they joined a literacy program to better educate their children (Secrétariat d'Etat chargé, 2006, p. 17). Indeed, in the different interviews I had with her, she consistently affirmed that she helps her daughters learn the letters of the alphabet, read the Quran, and memorize and recite excerpts from it. In spite of being a newly literate woman equipped with only basic literacy skills, she manages to provide useful literacy help to her children because they are primary school pupils who do not yet necessitate that she should have advanced literacy skills. Thus, literacy was an enabling tool to help meet a family need. Such literacy help is part of the domestic chores she performs in a family structure characterized by a strong gender-based division of labor: "I help my daughters mainly with the Quran and math. I am also the first to read their transcripts; my husband doesn't often read the children's school grades because when he does, he keeps scolding them" (Imane, personal communication, September 6, 2017). In this family task, however, she at times receives help from her siblings:

> My sister and brothers occasionally help my children with their schoolwork. My husband can read and write, but he doesn't help the kids with their school tasks. He comes back from work and then he lies down . . . he watches TV and sport, that's all . . . He has a busy schedule; he leaves home early in the morning and comes back late in the afternoon. (Imane, personal communication, May 15, 2018)

Second, Imane helps her daughters with mathematics:

> Imane happily related how she was very delighted when she once managed to understand and explain to her eldest daughter the difference between the mathematical symbols of less than ($<$) and greater than ($>$). She managed to distinguish one from the other using her prior knowledge of numbers 4 and 7. She said that for her the symbol ($<$) looks like a "4" and ($>$) looks like a "7." (Imane, field-note, February 27, 2009)

This vignette illustrates that, in addition to literacy, Imane's numeracy practices are also embedded in her gender-based roles. Drawing on the skills she has learned at school and which she managed to remember in the literacy class, she handles the family-related numeracy tasks and helps her daughters with their math exercises.

Image 1. The participant is at home helping her daughter with a school task.

A third kind of literacy event associated with Imane's use of literacy to help her children with their schoolwork is her practice of reading an easy reader which she performed at the request of her eldest daughter. She reported, "Yesterday, Sanaa [her eldest daughter] asked me 'Please, mum, read this story! I want you to improve your literacy skills and to be like my classmate's mum, who helps her daughter with schoolwork'" (Imane, personal communication, September 6, 2017). In this literacy event, Imane is invited by her daughter to read the easy reader in the aim of improving her own reading skills, and this in turn will enable her to better help her children with their school-based literacy tasks.

The literacy help that Imane offers her children is a common literacy practice in the Moroccan family in which the wife is literate. There is a remarkably strong interest in children's schooling even among the most low-income families. Some families even take bank loans or sell real estate and other property to ensure an adequate and modern education for their children. The concern for the children's education is also manifest in the literacy help parents offer their children and/or the evening classes' fees they pay for them.

In terms of the social theory of literacy, Imane's literacy uses are consistent with previous research which shows that literacy practices are purposeful and that they "are already embedded in an ideology and cannot be isolated or treated as 'neutral' or merely technical" (see Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1984). From a gender perspective, these examples align with the findings of previous research on the gendering of literacy: they support the view that literacy tasks within the household are seen as the woman's task and that women tend to help their children with schoolwork and to respond to the family literacy demands more often than men (Rockhill, 1993, p. 160; see also Barton & Hamilton, 1998). The examples also show that while literacy enables her to engage in some activities formerly customarily carried out by males, it also entails more family responsibilities for her.

Children's Health Needs

Imane also engages in literacy practices when attending to her children's health needs. She reported, "My husband doesn't interfere with anything. It is I who have to attend to the needs of my daughters when they are ill" (Imane, personal communication, December 23, 2017). Drawing on her knowledge that every medical box bears an expiration date, she reads labels on medical boxes to check the expiration date of the medicine she wants to give her daughters:

> My daughter was sick a couple of days ago; she had fever. I wanted to give her fever syrup, and I asked my eldest daughter to re-check the expiration date. I learned that the medicine had expired, so I bought her another bottle of the syrup at the pharmacy. (Imane, personal communication, August 1, 2017)

Imane also read directions and signposts when she was taking her sick daughter to the doctor's office:

> My mother and I took my daughter to the pediatrician because she was ill. We found ourselves in front of a building where there were many doctors' offices. I was glad when I managed to recognize all by myself the name of the "pediatrician" I was looking for. (Imane, personal communication, September 17, 2008)

These examples illustrate Imane's gender roles enactment. As a mother administering a medicine to her daughter or taking her to the pediatrician, literacy and numeracy enabled her to accomplish her tasks and be autonomous. From a

gender perspective, also, these instances lend support to the claim that, through her literacy skills, Imane managed to fulfill her domestic obligations. From an empowerment perspective, however, literacy did not lead to a radical change in household gender roles, nor did it entitle her to perform tasks formerly performed by males only.

Shopping

Within the family domain, the participant also writes shopping lists at home before going shopping at "lahri," a nearby non-self-service wholesale shop where she buys groceries and dairy:

> Interviewer: Who does the shopping at home?
> It's me of course. You see, brother [being a long-time friend of her brothers' entitled me to the status of an almost family member], I have to attend to all the domestic chores.
> Interviewer: Do you use a shopping list?
> I don't use a shopping list for produce and meats. But as I buy everything else [grocery and dairy] at "lahri, " I have to use a shopping list. Without a shopping list, I would buy some items and forget others. I sometimes ask my daughter to check the shopping receipt for me.
> (Imane, personal communication, September 2, 2017)

Getting Home Appliances Repaired

Imane's literacy practice as embedded in her gender-based family structure is also evident in her completion of another family task: getting the home appliances repaired. For example, "when her fridge broke down, she was looking for a person to repair it for her. She went to his shop and read a note posted on the door saying that he does not work on Sunday so that people would not knock on his house door and disturb him" (Imane, field-note, September 17, 2017). This vignette illustrates the way Imane uses literacy to perform a family duty related to her current status as a newly literate wife. This is an opportunity for her to engage in social activities beyond the borders of her home and to practice her literacy skills; however, it also shows that literacy is used to serve the traditional gender-based family role and not necessarily to challenge the domination of the male in the life of the family.

Imane views the act of taking the fridge to have it repaired as a family duty assigned to her because she because she does not work outside the home. However, although she does not now aspire to be a working woman, she believes her husband would help with the housework if she had a job. As she reported, "My husband doesn't help me with the domestic chores . . . . If I were a working woman, he would help me with the housework and would take the fridge to have it repaired" (Imane, personal communication, December 23, 2017).

At the Post Office: Mail and Documents

Imane's literacy activity at the post office further exemplifies the embedded nature of literacy. She often goes to the post office to cash a check for her husband or withdraw money from his account. Such a family task usually begins as a literacy

practice in which she draws on her own literacy skills, but it turns into a mediated literacy practice when she turns to a man who assists people with form filling usually for a three to 10 dirhams fee ($0.25 to $1.15). She needs his help especially with the fields to be completed in French thanks to his knowledge of French; she also solicits his expertise in handling the post office paperwork. She said, "If I were literate, I would rely on myself and not ask for . . . [this man's] help" (Imane, personal communication, February 30, 2017). Such a literacy event reveals overlap of two languages (Arabic and French) and two alphabets (Roman and Arabic), and highlights the idea that part of being literate in Morocco is to be able to use both languages and writing systems fluidly. More importantly, although it is primarily a family duty in which she serves a function traditionally assigned to a woman, the post office vignette indicates that Imane unintentionally interacts across gender boundaries and language/literacy resources. Because of her status as a newly literate woman and because she is not literate in French, she enters a realm formerly a male domain and interacts with a man she does not know to obtain information and solicit his literacy help.

In addition, Imane engages in reading the mail she finds in the mail-box in both her apartment and her parents' apartment. She related to me how she had read a letter from her sister's school about the school final examination. She said, "Yesterday, I found a letter in my parents' mail-box and I read the name of the person to whom it was destined. I read the address too and I knew it was destined to my sister" (Imane, personal communication, September 9, 2017). Imane also related having read the cover to a letter mailed to her brother which stated:

> I met Imane in her parents' flat this morning. She happily related how she had been so delighted a few days before when she managed to decode the letters of the Roman alphabet and to read what was written on the cover of a letter (bank statement), which was destined to her younger brother. Although this was a rudimentary skill, it was for her a moment of victory and self-fulfillment. (Imane, field-note, February 27, 2018)

This literacy practice illustrates how Imane's literacy practices are centered on her nuclear and/or extended family. Reading the cover of the mail and passing it over to the right person illustrates how literacy fits into her management of the domestic chores as a wife (within her apartment) and as a daughter and sister (within her parents' apartment).

Finally, Imane occasionally reads documents she comes across while she is doing the housework. She related how, out of curiosity, she once read her husband's salary statement, which she came across when she was doing the laundry:

> I was about to wash my husband's pants at home this morning when I came across a document in his pocket. It was a salary statement, and the total was in Moroccan dirhams. I knew how to read it, but I didn't know how to convert the sum into riial (cents). I asked a neighbor's help on how to convert it. After all, I knew how much my husband earned, but I wanted

to know for sure how much he made. (Imane, personal communication, February 30, 2018)

This literacy activity features overlap of two monetary systems that exist together in Morocco (dirham and riial). As is the case in several other literacy events, Imane is autonomous at the beginning and draws on her literacy skills and reads the document by herself, but this turns into a mediated literacy practice when she asks for her neighbor's help. This literacy event reflects a gender-based division of labor because such a reading act was embedded within the task of her housework duties, namely the laundry. This gendered literacy practice also reflects Imane's exclusion from detailed knowledge of her husband's salary based on gender; because he is the breadwinner in the family where a strong labor division is predominant, he is the type of husband who does not want his wife to know details about his salary.

A second type of document Imane read at home is her marriage contract, which she came across while doing the housework:

I didn't know what the document was about at first. It was thrown among some papers. But after reading a few lines, I recognized it as my marriage contract. I knew it when I read my parents' and grandparent's names on it. (Imane, personal communication, September 6, 2008)

Unlike many other occasions in which Imane faces literacy difficulties and seeks help from her daughter or neighbors, in this literacy event she manages to understand the content of the document relying on her own knowledge and literacy skills. This vignette further highlights the fact that, through literacy and her reading of the marriage contract, Imane manages to reduce her exclusion from the documentary circumstances of her marriage. This is an additional example of a literacy activity which is embedded within a domestic chore and which is strongly related to her gender-based family tasks and to her status as a housewife.

Discussion

In line with the assumptions of the social theory of literacy, Imane's literacy practices demonstrates the multiple ways in which her literacy practices are embedded in gender roles and as such "are patterned by social institutions and power relationships" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 160; see also Hamilton, 1998; Barton & Hamilton, 2000). The literacy help she provides to her children with their school assignments, and her reading of shopping lists and directions highlight the centrality of literacy in her management of the household affairs. They demonstrate the ways her literacy practices are gendered and the ways they fit into her world as a wife and mother who uses literacy to maintain her traditional roles and carry out family responsibilities. These literacy practices are an assertion of her position as a person who has acquired enough skills to be autonomous when meeting the daily literacy demands and also a translation of her desire to achieve more autonomy regarding these literacy tasks. In fact, Imane constantly evaluates her social position in terms of self-worth, and she feels a positive change in her social status because she successfully meets her family literacy demands.

These findings are consistent with the results of previous research within NLS on the embedded nature of literacy. They support Rockhill's (1993) findings that Hispanic women in Los Angeles "conducted most of the literacy work of the household, and that associated with the purchase of goods, interface with public services and their children's schooling" (p. 139). They equally corroborate the view that the literacy tasks within the family are assigned to the mother and that "part of being a good mother is to be a literate mother" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, pp. 172-3). Smythe (2006) similarly concludes in a study of American women's domestic literacy work that "women's domestic literacy work had become invisible as 'real work' in the home" (p. 294). Furthermore, the results obtained align with Kulick and Stroud's (1993) contention that newly literate people "far from being passively transformed by literacy, instead actively and creatively apply literate skills to suit their own purposes and needs" (p. 31). However, it is noteworthy to know that these findings deviate from Rockhill's (1991) observation regarding the violent conflicts women in her study experienced as their husbands opposed the shifting power dynamics resulting from the former's decision to improve their literacy skills. Imane's husband seems to welcome her new status and appreciate her new skills, probably because they at least extend the duties she performs for the family.

A second characteristic of Imane's literacy practices is that they are historically situated and they reflect changes within her family roles. As a newly literate wife and mother, she still conducts domestic chores, but these roles have been extended to include literacy-based tasks beyond the borders of the family. At the post office, for instance, Imane is an example of the traditional Moroccan housewife who, besides the domestic chores of doing the housework and cooking food for the family, now engages in outdoor literacy-based activities. This supports my central claim in the present article that, far from empowering her to claim her place in the world and play leading roles in the family life, literacy places new family demands on her.

Multimodality is a third characteristic of Imane's literacy practice. At the post office, Imane engages in a multimodal literacy practice in which two languages (Arabic and French) and two orthographic systems (the Roman and Arabic alphabets) are used. This event also draws attention to the idea of *multiliteracies*, the recognition that the skills and competencies required to be "literate" in contemporary culture are no longer limited to the traditional tasks of reading and writing but are extended to knowledge of how to complete forms and handle paperwork. Other literacy practices such as the reading and/or writing of shopping lists and medical labels also involve overlap of different semiotic systems: literacy and numeracy. A fourth characteristic of some of Imane's literacy practices is that they are mediated (for the concept of literacy mediation see Baynham, 1993; Wagner, Messik, & Spratt, 1986). At the post office, she initially draws on her own literacy skills, but she later seeks a literacy mediator's help with form filling.

Finally, to handle the everyday literacy problems and/or learn new literacy skills, Imane uses informal strategies. At the post office, she turned to the man who fills forms for people for literacy help. This example underscores the situated nature

of learning and illustrates the strategic use of "informal responses to dominant practices" in cases of difficulties (Barton & Hamilton, 2005, p. 21).

In short, from a gender perspective and within the broader social and cultural context of Morocco, the results of the present study demonstrate that literacy can be both enabling and constraining. On the one hand, literacy is enabling for Imane since it allows her to position herself as an autonomous person who can handle the outdoor everyday life family-related literacy tasks by herself. She can now check her own shopping receipt and also help her children with their schoolwork. Her gender roles also advance as she now engages in literacy-based family tasks beyond the borders of her home, including the management of the family money, which were formerly assumed by males. However, literacy does not play a liberating role in the life of Imane, who, despite her status as a newly literate woman, does not perform tasks which were formerly exclusive to males such as using her literacy to engage in income-generating activities. Thus, literacy has indeed extended rather than reversed Imane's home-based roles within her family.

Indeed, literacy does not enable the participant to challenge the male domination of the family life or to perform tasks which are similar to her husband's. Rather, literacy places new demands on the participant. Because she can now meet many of the everyday life literacy demands, she is expected to carry out additional family duties. Literacy therefore helps her serve her practical rather than strategic needs (Molyneux, 1987; Robinson-Pant, 2005). In short, and in line with Scribner and Cole's (1981) argument about the use of the Vai script to serve the Vai people's practical or pragmatic needs, the ways Imane engages with the written word shows that literacy serves as a practical response to social changes and family demands rather than a revolutionary act against the gender-based division of labor within her family.

The findings of the present study have several implications. In terms of policy, the day-to-day family-based literacy practices discussed above should be considered when implementing and evaluating adult literacy programs in Morocco. Since Imane uses literacy to respond to her children's school-based literacy demands, adult literacy classes designed for middle-aged women should be focused, among other things, on their family-based literacy needs. These classes can be useful even if they adopt a school-like curriculum, in which case they will provide literacy instruction that may not be closely linked to the participants' daily literacy needs but will still help them satisfy their children's school literacy needs. Further, when designing and implementing literacy classes, the needs and constraints of participants who have to leave out their literacy classes must be taken into account.

The results obtained also have implications for adult literacy evaluation and research. While the previous studies in Morocco reviewed above (Agnaou, 2002; Boukous & Agnaou, 2001) claim that literacy classes have limited outcomes, the results of the present study suggest that they may have overstated the case, since the participant under study, for instance, manages to handle the everyday life literacy demands. Methodologically, these results also show the value of an ethnographic approach to the study of everyday life literacy practice. Instead of measuring literacy outcomes, such an approach enabled me to provide an account of a newly literate woman's literacy practices which differs from the findings of large-scale

quantitative studies which rely on pre-designed tools and take little account of the socio-cultural context in which literacy is acquired and practiced. Further ethnographic research needs to be conducted on newly literate Moroccan women's literacy practices across domains of literacy use and age groups and from different regions and linguistic backgrounds because studies of this nature can deepen our theoretical understanding of literacy as social practice, enrich our knowledge of their literacy use, and have implications for the design and implementation of literacy classes.

Conclusion

This article has offered an examination of the literacy practices of a newly literate Moroccan woman and demonstrated the complex ways in which literacy is dynamic, purposeful, and embedded within her gender-based family roles. For Imane, literacy is an enabling tool that allows her to perform additional literacy-related tasks for her family. Her identity as a wife and mother is evident in the literacy practices which she engages in, and such practices fit within her traditional roles in the family. Her gendered literacy practice thus aligns with findings of a body of literature within NSL, which shows how newly literate people appropriate literacy and adapt it to meet their own needs, hence the emphasis on human activity and agency (Ahearn, 2004; Kulick & Stroud, 1993). However, literacy does not empower the participant in the sense that it does not allow her to play roles that were previously the exclusive privilege of males such as establishing her own business, or engaging in income-generating activities, or shouldering responsibilities within the community, nor does it lead to a significant change in her family roles or relationships.

The variety of Imane's family-related literacy practices reflects how the family is both an impetus for her literacy acquisition plans and a major locus for her literacy practice. The ways she draws on her recently acquired/recalled literacy skills show that her family needs are a strong factor for her decision to enroll in the literacy program and a major site and source of support for her literacy practice. The family domain is indeed a significant domain in which she continues to practice and "scaffold" her literacy skills and also informally learn more literacy skills (Bruner, 1985). However, her family is at times a handicap for her literacy learning pursuits as her domestic obligations are a reason why she had to drop out of the literacy class (see Tighe, Barnes, Connor, Steadman, & Steadman, 2013).

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