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**ETHNOCULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC FEATURES
OF PAMIR-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES AT DIFFERENT STAGES
OF MIGRATION PROCESSES****Leyli R. Dodykhudoeva** Institute of Linguistics, Russian Academy of Sciences,
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The article determines the place of mother tongues in the life of Pamir-speaking communities, their transformation and functioning at different stages of the migration process. It outlines features that enhance our understanding of the phenomenon of Pamir diaspora. The linguistic and cultural priorities of diasporic Pamir communities are identified in light of their linguistic ideology, and ethno-religious and cultural perspectives. To study the dynamics of language life in different contexts, data on language biographies are presented, together with an analysis of the work of grassroots activists, who, by their lingua-cultural creativity, are involved in promoting their cultural and linguistic heritage, thus demonstrating their sociolinguistic rights. Analysis of the mother tongue – an important marker of the community's socio-cultural life – reveals that Pamir languages lie at the core of the community's cultural heritage, its spiritual and material traditions. These languages fulfil reproductive, creative and existential-ethical functions, acting as a reference point for socio-cultural practices that stimulate the revival of local culture and support the preservation of traditional cultural values. The prospects for the functioning, development and preservation of Pamir languages in the diaspora are considered.

Keywords: ethnic community, transnational community, mother tongue, diasporic language, linguistic characteristics of the community

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**ЭТНОКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ И ЯЗЫКОВЫЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ
ПАМИРОЯЗЫЧНЫХ СООБЩЕСТВ НА РАЗНЫХ ЭТАПАХ
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В статье определяется место родных языков в жизни памироязычных сообществ, их трансформация и функционирование на разных этапах миграционного процесса, а также приводятся характерные черты, расширяющие наше понимание феномена диаспоры в практике этих сообществ. Выявляются лингвокультурные приоритеты диаспоральных памироязычных общин, основанные на языковой идеологии и этнорелигиозных и культурных особенностях. Для представления динамики языковой жизни в различных контекстах

применяются данные языковых биографий, проводится анализ деятельности низовых организаций и языковых активистов, которые в своем лингвокультурном творчестве занимают активную социолингвистическую позицию по отношению к культурному и языковому наследию, актуализируя свои социолингвистические права. Анализ родного языка – важного маркера социокультурной жизни сообщества – показывает, что памирские языки лежат в основе культурного наследия сообщества, его духовных и материальных традиций. Родные языки выполняют репродуктивную, творческую и экзистенциально-этическую функции, выступая ориентиром для социокультурных практик, стимулирующих возрождение местной культуры и поддерживающих сохранение традиционных культурных и нравственных ценностей. Рассматриваются перспективы функционирования, развития и сохранения памирских языков в диаспоре.

Ключевые слова: этническая общность, транснациональное сообщество, родной язык, язык диаспоры, языковые характеристики общности/диаспоры

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1. Introduction

The research methodology is based on the analysis of scholarly works on Pamir languages in the country of origin and in the diaspora, and also draws on the author's field observations on the use of such languages. In light of the multidimensional nature of the phenomena under study, we use field research methods and analyse data, applying comparative historical approaches to a broad range of disciplines. The main methods of acquiring knowledge about language biography include the analysis of extended autobiographical narratives, personal documents (letters) and interviews in the form of dialogues, the central theme of which is proficiency in, and use of, native languages. This analysis is supplemented by the results of observations in the linguistic environment of live spoken languages, as well as by digital data (online chats and visual materials).

The empirical basis of the study consists of materials of scholarly works on Pamir languages and the author's field studies conducted in 2000–2020 in different regions where Pamir-speaking peoples live: in the Mountainous Badakhshan Autonomous Region (MBAR) in the Republic of Tajikistan, and in Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and Russia. We apply a comprehensive approach based on qualitative methods. We conducted four interviews with representatives of NGOs and heads of local administration, and two interviews with community representatives on issues of language use in the family according to gender/age, and socio-normative ideology. We also analysed several personal letters, as well as two narratives and two interviews on the topic of language biography (personal language, and language in general).

2. Factors of group identity: language – ethnicity – religion

2.1. Types of Pamir-speaking communities in MBAR, Tajikistan: their configuration and dynamics

An original feature of Pamir diasporic communities in Tajikistan, Russia and elsewhere is their multilingualism. In light of the contemporary relevance of linguistic, ethnocultural and religious components as factors in group identity, in MBAR the following types of communities with their distinctive linguistic features stand out.

1. The Pamir-speaking Ismaili communities of MBAR in Tajikistan historically lived within a dominant confessional Sunni Muslim environment. In the 19th century, the communities of the Vanj valley lost their East Iranian language (Old Vanji) and their Ismaili affiliation; the population of the Yazghulam valley retained their language, but at about the same time converted to Sunnism, although Ismailis were still living in the upper reaches of the valley in the early 20th century [Monogarova, 2003: 127]. In the Ishkashim region of MBAR, the population of the Ghoron area, along the Panj River, and some of the villages in the Wakhan Valley are today Tajik-speaking. In Ishkashim and Zebak, in Afghanistan, although Pamir languages have been lost and the population now speaks Dari, the Ismaili faith has been preserved.

2. The Pamir communities of the interior regions of Tajikistan (Kuybyshev district (today Abdurahmoni Jomi), in Khatlon region), and the cities of Dushanbe, Khujand, etc.) emerged historically as a result of “internal” migration due to extralinguistic conditions. Nowadays, these communities are generally designated as linguistic and confessional communities. Their members, especially young people, are bilingual and speak both the state Tajik language and their mother tongue (one of the Pamir languages).

3. Pamir urban communities of Russia (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazan, etc.), now ethno-confessional communities with their own languages, emerged after the 1990s as a result of external mass migration, and preserved their ethnocultural and religious identity and languages in the context of the multi-confessional Christian-Muslim environment. Members of these communities are bilingual and speak the state Russian language and their mother tongue (one of the Pamir languages); among younger speakers, the process of moving away from speaking their native languages and switching to Russian is now underway.

4. New, young transnational communities have begun to emerge in the 21st century in Europe, America, the Gulf countries, etc. due to labour migration of people from MBAR, often after a period of residence in Russia where they were separated from their homeland. These communities, although forged in an era of globalization, multiculturalism and dispersed settlement, also retain their ethno-

cultural and religious identity and native language. Their members – mostly young people – are mobile, multilingual and speak a range of languages, including their mother tongue, Russian/Tajik, Arabic, English and other European languages.

When considering the situations from a sociolinguistic and sociocultural perspective, there is a direct correlation between the degree of preservation/loss of ethnic or heritage languages and cultures on the one hand, and the type of migration, country of residence and time of diaspora formation on the other. It should also be borne in mind that Pamir communities include people who speak mutually incomprehensible languages, i.e., already within the diasporic communities a certain *lingua franca* is needed. Usually the majority language – Shughnani – is used in this case; however, within the community from the Ishkashim district of MBAR (which includes Wakhi, Ishkashimi and Tajik-speaking inhabitants), Wakhi or Tajik/Russian is used.

It is widely acknowledged that a diasporic language, as the language of an ethnic minority, functions primarily in oral form, but that gradually its communicative function fades and gives way to symbolic socio-cultural functions, such as diasporic cohesion and the formation of ethnic identity (see, for example: [Belykh, 2019: 172]).

At the same time, the very definition of minority Pamir languages as “less used”, emphasizes that they are used by a smaller number of speakers and their use has declined even within the family. This situation highlights the importance of monitoring such parameters as the number of speakers and their degree of linguistic proficiency in the mother tongue, as well as the current linguistic features of Pamir languages, and issues of speaker loyalty and language sustainability.

2.1.1. Tajikistan – Russia

According to ethnographers, in the 20th century “Tajik language is becoming the second native language of the Pamir Tajiks. It is one of the important factors in the process of overcoming the former isolation of the Pamir Tajiks, strengthening their gradual closer rapprochement with the Tajik majority, and furthering their introduction into modern national Tajik and all-Soviet socialist culture” [Monogarova, 1965: 33].

In communities residing outside the original territories where they lived close together, researchers observe declining proficiency in mother tongues in the second and even in the first generation, especially in the case of dispersed settlement in an urban environment. This phenomenon is acknowledged by the members of diasporic communities themselves.

Consequently, communities and their organisations are taking steps aimed at younger generations to support and strengthen the position of mother tongues and cultures. To this end, general community gatherings with activities in native languages and significant communal celebrations, folk

festivals and cultural and sports festivals, as well as educational groups, birthday parties and events for children, are held regularly. The NGO “Nur” organises concerts and performances in Moscow, at various venues. As part of cultural and educational activities, festivals are held where people can learn about the region, its language and culture, such as “Roof of the World” (Khorog, 2019) and “Pamir – Moscow”. Other activities include sports and arts festivals (such as “Providing Care”, 2023), educational lectures and panel discussions, folk concerts and performances, creative poetry evenings, events especially for the older generation, etc., all with ethno-cultural components. Such environments create a homeland atmosphere; people meet and have an opportunity to communicate in their native language in line with traditionally established customs, recreating a situation of verbal and non-verbal communication similar to their usual communication back home.

The transmission of ethno-religious, ethno-cultural traditions and language to children and the conditions of this transmission assume paramount importance in multilingual settings. This activity is largely related to issues of ideology, language loyalty and language attitudes within the community, as well as to preservation of the languages themselves and their linguistic components. As part of Nur’s programmes for children, Sunday schools, educational courses and summer camps are organised for young people. This creates conditions for free interaction in native languages and immersion in the children’s own culture. On the initiative of members of diasporic communities, especially parents, support for native languages and culture is being provided for the children of the second, third and even first generation of speakers. Through the efforts of family and kinship relations, family pre-school groups (each of 3 to 7 children) are created for young children, similar to “language nests”, where staff speak mother tongues; here various forms of support for native language and culture are organized. These groups provide programmes as part of pre-school education. Such family pre-school groups are created to meet the needs of speakers of Pamir languages at an early age, to enable interaction in their native language as well as to teach other languages (Russian, English, etc.) in a safe and comfortable environment in the context of their native culture. During the holidays, in addition to summer camps (in Russia and Tajikistan) and club activities, kinship exchange programmes for young people are organised; these involve sending children on holiday to their grandparents’ homes to maintain contacts with close relatives locally and, more broadly, to maintain cultural and linguistic contacts with their home districts.

In this regard, it can be noted that in the context of activities to preserve ethno-confessional and ethno-cultural identity, language acts as a valuable, socially significant symbolic resource, an element of information-rich space and a cultural phenomenon. In the light of globalisation and migration, we can point to the increased interest in ethnic languages as part of linguistic and cultural heritage, as well as the advancement of the preservation of native languages as an emblem of the homeland.

It is significant that compulsory universal education in titular languages (the introduction of education for boys and girls in Tajikistan in the 20th century, and later in China and Pakistan), access to knowledge and new technologies via the internet, and expanded career opportunities have sharply reduced the demand for speaking mother tongues, leading to the spread of other, more widely spoken and prestigious languages. This, in turn, leads to more intensive convergence processes and, on the other hand, to a process of “freezing” and “attenuation” of local dialects in communities of predominantly older speakers, and thus to the even more rapid disappearance of these dialects. These trends serve to redistribute areal contacts and traditional influences within a geographical region and to intensify the multilingualism that accompanies computer-mediated communication.

3.1. Language as factor of group identity

In a number of cases, a language in the diaspora – the language of oral communication – can act as a regional form of the source language (for details, see: [Belykh, 2019]).

Pamir languages¹ have long acted exclusively as oral communication languages of ethnic minorities². For centuries they developed locally in closed mountain valleys, with linguistic characteristics that were unique in form and content. By the 20th century, in traditionally established Pamir-speaking communities in Tajik-speaking regions, we find that the native language is preserved with changes in certain linguistic features and in function of the level of proficiency of the mother tongue in relation to the language of the environment and education (Tajik). Repatriation to MBAR in the 1990s from the southern and central regions of the country contributed to the introduction of new features from the Southern Tajik dialects of Khatlon, and of Dushanbe, Faizabad and Nurek, into the local Pamir languages.

With the emergence of diaspora communities in modern times on the basis of permanent/seasonal migration, we can posit the development of areal forms of original languages among their speakers. At the same time, the question should be raised about the qualitative content of such language forms and their differences from one region to another. Such studies have not yet been undertaken, but it can be noted that, for example, representatives of the Dushanbe or Moscow diaspora and speakers of the original language in the homeland have differences in vocabulary and pronunciation; such distinguishing characteristics can also be found in the speech of members of diasporas from different regions. It is highly likely that younger generations of speakers in the diaspora initially become

¹ In Tajikistan, these languages are currently referred to as Badakhshani (Pamir) languages and their speakers are considered part of the Tajik nation.

² Except for mention of the existence of writing in Shughnani and Wakhi in the early Middle Ages, and a short period in the early 20th century when Shughnani writing was developed and schooling began.

bilingual, and later acquire a “Tajikicized/Russified” pronunciation in their native language. This is observed even between speakers of different Pamir languages. Thus, a distinctive pronunciation of a number of sounds in some words was noted by Z.O. Nazarova among people from Wakhan living in Ishkashimi-speaking area and children raised in such families. She identifies similar tendencies for young speakers of the Ishkashim language in Moscow [2023]. The speech of a Muscovite in any native Pamir language is characterized by intensive code switching in dialogue (Russian-Shughnani, Russian-Ishkashimi, Russian-Wakhi) even with an older interlocutor; Russian speech is heard more often when peers are talking. In Dushanbe, however, switching to the native language, especially recently, is “not recommended” and parents try not to speak their mother tongue with their children in public areas. When two young Shughnanis who have grown up in Russia meet, only the first greeting formulas are spoken in their mother tongue, and further communication takes place with a switch to Russian. All this indicates a tendency towards diglossic functioning of languages, a narrowing of the sphere of native languages, as well as a reduction in the volume of vocabulary and proficiency in these languages.

As an example, we refer to B.B. Lashkarbekov’s observations on the Wakhi language of central Tajikistan in the 1970s. He noted that with the movement of community members from mountain gorges to relatively wide valleys, in the absence of landmarks on mountain peaks and waterways, the system of orientation and deixis was restructured. Later, in 2010, we observed similar changes in the means of transmission of spatial and deictic signs among the Wakhi people of China (in Xinjiang, in a number of villages and in the cities of Khotan, Guma, Yarkand, Kashgar), where the movement of Wakhi communities from traditional habitats to urban settlements was accompanied by a complete loss of native language with the preservation of only ethno-religious identity.

In general, the issue of vitality of diasporic languages is closely related to ties with the homeland (in this case, the Tashkurgan-Tajik Autonomous District, where the Wakhi population is concentrated) and to the conditions of language implementation in the host state. However, in the latter case the situation was influenced not so much by language priorities and attitudes within the community as by the general sociolinguistic situation in the Xinjiang region of China, where until 2009 Wakhi was the language of oral communication and Uyghur was used in schools and in the administration; Chinese was hardly spoken by the non-urban Wakhi population.

3.2. Pamir languages – language biography

We accept the definition of language biography in a broad sense as a cognitive reconstruction of the events experienced by an ethnic group related to their language/languages and linguistic-cultural complex. In this light, considering the timeline of known historical events related to Pamir communities

and their languages, economic or educational³ reasons are mostly posited as causes of migration. However, it is the specificity of ethno-cultural and confessional identity, and the tensions in the MBAR population between Pamir-language speakers and Tajik-speakers, that underlie many problems.

We give as an example the following extract from the report on the implementation by Tajikistan of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by “ADC Memorial” [Pamiri, 2017: 6]:

“Of course, now it’s not as bad as it was during the civil war, when you could be killed for speaking your native language. After the war, the Pamiri were generally afraid to speak their language on the street, in buses, at the bazaar. For example, now in Dushanbe, we have no trouble speaking Shughni, and in Pamirs even more so. But sometimes you can hear people call us names: “You’re a krauts!” (lit. “You are Gansy!”, from German name Hans). That’s because our language sounds like German, it’s even easy for us to learn German, since the sounds are similar. But they identify us by our accent – we speak Tajik with a very recognisable accent”. A female Pamiri teacher.

The main means of studying language biography is the use of interviews based on data about the functioning of language and about its speakers [Vakhtin, Golovko, 2004] or autobiographies and interviews, the central theme of which is language, supplemented by observations of speakers’ discourse [Bitkeeva, 2022: 18]. In general, the language biography of an individual or people is understood as the sociolinguistic reconstruction of the people’s history, developed on the basis of autobiographical narratives, observations of language use, code switching, speakers’ loyalty to the language and recording of the respondent’s individual vocabulary, as well as analysis of the functioning of language in different situations. The study of language biography also involves a preliminary study of the sociolinguistic situation in the region, identification of the main extra-linguistic parameters, establishment of the spheres of usage of state and regional languages and interpretations of the situation and its causes by native speakers [Dorofeev, 2021: 29-30].

With this in mind, it is important that through the prism of the language biography of an individual, we can reconstruct a set of features for the biographical narrative of an entire language community, allowing to determine the recurring characteristics of speakers of a language. In this way, based on our conversations with speakers of different Pamir languages, we can identify specific aspects of speakers’ perceptions of their language and identity, of their belonging to a community. The feeling

³ See, for example, a work, which provides quantitative data: [Aleksieva, 2015].

of being outsiders does not leave Pamiris even in their country of origin, Tajikistan. This is how our female respondents talk about this feeling, describing their reasons for moving out of the country:

“...when our people – Pamiris⁴ – were killed, then those women, their Russian wives, or those who looked like Russians, who were not afraid of being caught and could speak Tajik without an accent, went to the morgues looking for their relatives. There was nobody [elders from our family], so I went. After that I couldn’t forget, that’s why I decided to go to Russia. I had to leave.”

During the civil war, especially early in the conflict, being of a Pamir-origin and speaking one of the Pamir languages was enough to get a speaker killed:

“They took us out to the courtyard and told us to count to ten in Tajik. ‘We will find out who is a Pamiri. If you can’t count correctly, then we will shoot you’. We were very afraid. We did not speak Pamir-languages at that time, but they (=neighbours) knew that we were from there. They told them... we had to run for our lives.”

Currently, the situation in Tajikistan is tense again. After recent events, most of the youth and intelligentsia are either under arrest or in other countries. Many older residents, airing their grievances, recount that they feel bored in Moscow “without a homeland, without fresh air, without a home” and remember their life in their motherland and their mother tongue:

“I love our language, my mother’s language, when I can speak it, with children, grandchildren, with whoever can speak, whoever understands; at home in Sokhcharv, everyone around me spoke it. Here now not everyone knows their native language, although everyone loves to listen to my songs and fairy tales.”

3.3. Shughnani language – phonetics, vocabulary, syntax

According to researchers, already by the mid-20th century, speakers of Pamir languages were beginning to access Tajik culture and national life through their growing familiarity with the Tajik language, as noted in a previous quotation by L.F. Monogarova [1965: 33]. Nowadays the vocabulary of Pamir languages regularly continues to be enriched with borrowings from the Tajik language, which is used for school and university teaching and office work, as well as by the media, in films, theatrical performances, etc. Tajik, in turn, has been actively replenished in recent years with borrowings from

⁴ Rushani woman.

Persian, English and Russian, and this vocabulary has subsequently penetrated the Pamir languages. Shughnani students master Tajik pronunciation in school, gradually introducing it into their native language.

To determine the role of language in the diaspora, a sociolinguistic profile has yet to be developed and described, delineating the scope of its use in specific contexts. We will just give an overview of some particular features.

We have already mentioned above the interference of the pronunciation of speakers of Shughnani-Rushani group languages with that of the Tajik language. However, nowadays the speech of Pamiris in Tajikistan is increasingly converging with Tajik, while retaining its own distinguishing features in phonetics, vocabulary and syntax. We note the particularly diligent adherence to the pronunciation norms of the Tajik language by young speakers, for example, the introduction of a voiceless fricative *h* into Shughnani speech, or the pronunciation in Tajik speech of the labial-velar approximant *w* instead of the labial-dental fricative *v* characteristic of some Southern Tajik dialects.

On the influence of Shughnani language phonetics on the Russian speech of Shughnani speakers, see [Nazriddinova, 2017], where she analyses the pronunciation of the Russian vowels “a” (different in quality from the Shughnani “a” and “ā”) and “o” (Shughnani “ō”), as well as “s” and “i” pronounced in different phonetic positions by Shughnanis. Distinguishing aspects of the Russian speech of Shughnanis, especially at younger school ages, include the pronunciation of the vowels *ya, yu, yo* after soft consonants, when these vowels are replaced by [a], [y], [o], [ə], or decomposed into the sounds “y + vowel”. In this case, between the soft consonant and the vowel there appears a reduced vowel, which makes it possible to determine the similarity / difference in the vocalism of Russian speech of Shughnanis compared with the vocalism of normative Russian speech, and also to identify the potential field of interference in the vocalism of the Russian speech of Shughnanis [Nazriddinova, 2017: 24-27].

Differences in the socio-cultural and material conditions of life in the diaspora and the homeland are also characterized by differences in the composition of borrowed words. These are explained by the spheres of life in which the borrowed vocabulary is most often found and the frequency of its use: finance, social institutions, technology, household items, electronic devices, etc. Examples of newly created vocabulary for a language include words such as *sidewalk*; among loanwords, examples include words for *airplane*, or *minaret*. Here it is particularly interesting to observe not only the introduction of borrowed words or expressions not assimilated by the language, but also the degree and frequency of their use when referring to realities that did not exist in the everyday life of the country of origin, and variations in their usage between speakers in MBAR and those in diasporic communities. However, borrowings are in general less common in such thematic groups, as plant and animal names, natural

phenomena and elements of landscape, which may be due to cultural and environmental factors. In general, diasporic languages are characterized by a reduction in vocabulary.

There follows another typical example taken from the speech of Shughnani schoolchildren living in Russia. They would say: *Ту пойдеš' v čoxonu* 'Are you going to the teahouse?'. Here, the Shughnani children pronounce the verb correctly, in accordance with the phonemic composition of the Russian word. But, the word for "teahouse", borrowed by the Russian language from Shughnani/Tajik, is pronounced in accordance with its original Shughnani pronunciation: *čoxona*, i.e., differently from the Russian *chaikana* [Nazriddinova, 2017: 24–25]. Here the Shughnani-Tajik loanword, which entered the Russian language in modern times and has undergone adaptation⁵, is introduced into Russian speech, but the rules of pronunciation in the native language are habitually applied to it.

In another example, Shughnani women discussing among themselves in Russian a nanny looking after a child and expressing approval, say: *ona ego xorošo smotrit* 'She watches him (= the child) well', which is explained by the fact that in the native language the verb "to watch" (*čixtow*) with a direct object is used when caring for a child.

3.4. Vitality of diasporic Pamir languages

If we consider the vitality of Pamir diasporic languages in light of their preservation or loss, then given the intensive (especially seasonal) migration, as well as the turbulent situation in their homeland, the influx of new migrants – Pamir language speakers – has not decreased, ensuring that the diasporic languages of MBAR natives do not become disconnected and linguistically isolated.

In Soviet times, it was believed that the assimilation of Pamiris was probably due to the process of linguistic homogenization, the introduction of education in the Tajik language in Tajikistan and the elimination of religion as a differentiating factor [Monogarova, 1965: 25]. Later L.F. Monogarova noted that the expected assimilation of the Pamir "*sub-ethnic group*" and its accession as part of the Tajik nation was hampered by linguistic and religious differences [1989]. She revised her opinion and eventually came to the conclusion that attempts to assimilate the Pamiris during the Soviet era and later only strengthened the internal consolidation of the community and reinforced the position of Pamir languages [2003]. Today, these communities, who speak different Pamir languages, are in the process of forming a common Pamir identity [Davlatshoev, 2006], indicating the presence of other significant factors that unite groups of speakers of different languages⁶, such as religion and culture. The internet and social networks provide speakers of Pamir languages with ample opportunities to create content in

⁵ The lexeme *chaikana* 'teahouse' is included in a dictionary of foreign loanwords [Krysin, 2008], which includes borrowed words and the latest terms of foreign origin.

⁶ In this regard, it should be stressed that most Tajiks believe that all Pamiris speak the same language [Davlatshoev, 2006]. It is possible that this factor strengthens the internal cohesion of these groups.

their mother tongues, contributing to the preservation of native languages as important markers of identity [Qurboniev, 2019: 237, 238].

Nowadays, the transmission of ethno-religious and ethno-cultural traditions and language to children, understood as part of the cultural heritage, is considered an absolute value, the presence of which must be ensured, i.e., as evidence of the preservation of cultural and linguistic loyalty.

In this regard, the reason for the creation of the “Pamir Languages” group on Facebook is described by its administrator, Mahbub Rajabbekov, as follows: *the purpose of creating the group is for us together to save our language from extinction... Our Pamir languages are our main asset... if we let them disappear, we will be forgiven by nobody, neither by our history, nor by our future generations...* (25.05.2013).

In many cases, we observe initiatives to preserve ethnically or culturally marked linguistic components. Thus, when toponyms were renamed in MBAR in 2023, several (micro)toponyms were introduced referring to the Pamirs or similar designations: for example, in the Murghab region of MBAR, the following names emerged: Pomir glacier; Ganji Pomir plateau, Bomi Jahon ridge, lit. “Roof of the World”. Personal names with toponymic components denoting local mountainous areas are represented among local anthroponyms: for males: Pomi/er, Badakhshon, Wakhon, Rushon; for females: Mo(y)i Shughnon, lit. Moon of Shughnan.

The retention of mother-tongue language skills among young people in Pamir communities remains relatively high, and native languages can be used within the community in almost all situations. We observe that native languages are verbally assigned to the expression of culturally meaningful information that also carries social significance: formulas expressing politeness/sociability, expressions of gratitude, congratulation formulas, as well as wishes for various occasions in life, phraseology, and socially meaningful information enshrined in memory.

Alongside these positive aspects, language problems have also emerged: lack of language rights, declining levels of proficiency in native languages among younger generations (limited language skills in learning and communicating in another language). There is a tendency towards a general decline in the quality of native languages (archaization of part of the vocabulary, reduction of the system of pronouns, nominalization, code-switching).

Today the phenomenon of mixed families is widespread in diasporic communities and is a sign of growing bilingualism, multilingualism and translanguaging. In a number of cases, diasporic respondents use different expressions when referring to “our language” (*maš ziv*) and “the speech of another, mixed (*alalaš*) language”. When speaking of others, some note that “they speak their mother’s language” (*nān ziv/gāp* ‘mother tongue’ (in general) and ‘mother’s language’ (about the language of children of women who married from other Pamir-language communities). Others, speaking of their

mother tongue, stress that they speak their “father’s language” (*tāt ziv/gāpen/naqli*). This is due to the fact that in diasporic communities, many still treat the paternal side of the family as the indicator of their ethnic origin.

4. Conclusion

In this study, we have delineated and analysed mother tongue usage in various Pamir communities at different stages of the migration process, and traced the transformations in such usage in modern times. Our research has highlighted the priority areas of activity of diasporic Pamir-speaking communities and the initiatives undertaken by grassroots organizations and activists in the field of linguacultural heritage, focusing on their efforts to replenish the language environment and to maintain language vitality. We have shown how mother tongue usage is related to language ideology, indicating close ties between language and ethno-religious identity – how mother tongue is considered an important marker in the ethnocultural life of a community, contributing significantly to its cultural heritage.

The study has also emphasised how, within these communities, language usage is closely interwoven with the socioeconomic life of community members. Based on the data of language biographies, we have examined language dynamics in different communities, focusing on the spheres of everyday life in which mother tongues are spoken. Through the prism of interviews with speakers of different Pamir languages, our research has analysed, within the linguacultural complex, the events these speakers have experienced as members of an ethnic group related to their mother tongue. Through cognitive restructuring of language situations by respondents, their perceptions of their language and identity have been identified, in terms not only of their loyalty to their mother tongue, but also of their identification with their ethno-religious and ethno-cultural community.

The study concludes with an overview of the prospects for the future vitality and functioning of Pamir languages in diasporic communities, focusing on the example of changes in the Shughnani language via its speakers’ interaction with the language of their host environment (Tajik/Russian).

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