

Ishkashimi: A Father's Language

How a Very Small Language Survives

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Abstract*

This paper presents the results of sociolinguistic research conducted in August 2003 and August 2004 among the Ishkashimi people living in the southwestern part of Badakhshan in Tajikistan. The primary goals of the research were to document and suggest reasons for the observed ethnolinguistic vitality of the language in spite of the fact that the number of speakers is small. Of particular interest is the status of the language as “a father’s language,” and the responsibility fathers take in ensuring it is passed on to wives and children. Data were gathered through a set of questionnaires dealing with social networks and language use, language functions and attitudes, and ethnic identity.

1. Introduction

Ishkashimi is spoken by fewer people than any other language in the Pamir Mountains in Tajikistan. It is spoken in only two villages, Ryn and Sumjin, in Ishkoshim¹ administrative region² of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province (GBAP). In this paper we try to determine how vital Ishkashimi is today and point out some factors that might influence the future survival of the Ishkashimi language.

Ishkashimi is very closely related to Sanglechi and Zebaki. Grimes (2000) lists them as a single language, while noting they may be separate languages. Sanglechi is spoken in Badakhshan Province of Afghanistan, as was Zebaki, although Pakhalina and Kurbanov (2000) report it is now extinct. They are members of the Pamir group of Southeastern Iranian languages (Grimes 2000).

Although the term *Ishkashimi* is used in the literature to refer to the people and language of Ryn and Sumjin villages, it is generally used by residents of Ishkoshim administrative region to refer to the ethnic Tajik living in the region as well as the ethnic Ishkashimi. Within the region, the people and language of Ryn and Sumjin are generally referred to as *Ryni*. In this paper we follow the practice of the literature and use *Ishkashimi* to refer to the people and language of Ryn and Sumjin, not including the ethnic Tajik in the Ishkoshim administrative region.

Although Shaw and Tomashek presented data from Ishkashimi in the late 1800s (Shaw 1876, Tomashek 1880), systematic descriptions by Grierson and Zarubin did not appear until the 1920s (Grierson 1920, Zarubin 1927a, 1927b). More recent work includes that of Russian linguists Sokolova and Pakhalina, and of Ishkashimi linguists Nazarova and Nazarov (Sokolova 1953, Pakhalina 1987, Pakhalina and Kurbanov 2000, Nazarova 2003).

Before the 1930s, the Ishkashimi lived in the Abkhor Valley in the western part of Ishkoshim known as the Ghoron. At that time, they felt pressured to leave when the Shughni from the Shakhdarin Valley moved into the Abkhor, and they founded the villages of Ryn and Sumjin.

The Ishkashimi people live in a multilingual setting. While Ryn is still ethnically Ishkashimi, Sumjin is now mixed with Tajiks from the Ghoron. Both villages are surrounded by Tajik and Wakhi-speaking

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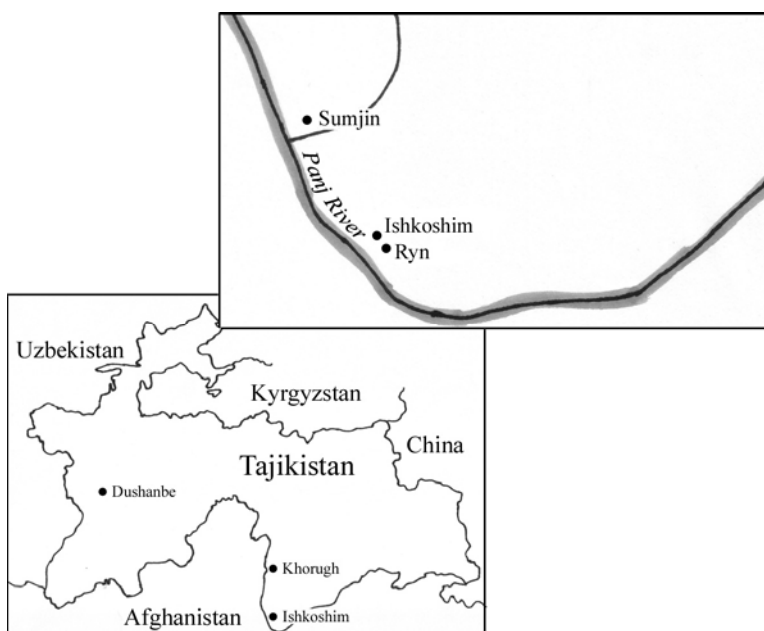
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¹ We follow Ofaridaev (2001) for the spelling of place names in the Pamirs.

² The political unit to which we refer as an administrative region is a *nohia* in Tajik, or *rajon* in Russian.

villages, and most Ishkashimi have relatives in Wakhi-speaking communities.³ In addition, they live close to the town of Ishkoshim and a border post.⁴

Figure 1: Region around the Ishkashimi



Ishkashimi is a nonwritten language. It is used as the language of the home and in Ryn, as the language of daily communication. Even social and religious gatherings such as weddings, however, are held in Tajik (Nazarova 2003). Due to the small number of speakers and the lack of any official recognition of the language, the Ishkashimi language would seem to be a prime candidate for language shift and death. Our research, however, seems to indicate that Ishkashimi exhibits signs of high language vitality. In this paper we investigate factors that might account for this vitality.

Landweer (2000) examines a number of factors to account for language vitality and language shift. We will examine the effects of the following factors that might have an influence on language vitality in Ishkashimi:

- Population numbers, relative position in urban/rural continuum, economic basis
- Social networks and language use
- Children's language
- Language prestige and social outlook (language attitudes)
- Ethnic identity

Language maintenance or language shift is not claimed to be due to any one of these factors, but to the collective impact of all indicators. Furthermore, these factors do not result in an absolute prediction, but rather in a suggestion of the direction a language might take.

In section 2 of this paper, we outline the methodology we followed to investigate the issue of vitality. We present the results from our research in section 3. Finally, in section 4 we use our results to explain the current vitality of the Ishkashimi language.

³ The Wakhi live in all the villages along the upper Panj River after the bend.

⁴ This border post is being turned over from the Russian Federation to Tajikistan.

2. Methodology

This section is divided into four parts. In the first three parts, we outline the issues involved in investigating three topics: social networks and language use (section 2.1), language functions and language attitudes (section 2.2), and ethnic identity (section 2.3). Finally, in 2.4 we describe the decisions we made regarding locations for research and sampling procedures, and the questionnaires we used to obtain information relating to the three topics we investigated.

2.1. Social Networks and Language Use

A social network is the set of relationships and interactions one person has with others in daily life. A social network can be analysed in terms of its density and multiplexity. A dense network is one in which many of any one individual's contacts are also contacts of each other. A multiplex network is one in which an individual is related to contacts in more than one way, such as when a neighbour is also a family member or work colleague.

The density and multiplexity of a network correlate with measures of linguistic variation and language use. For example, Schooling (1990) used an analysis of social networks to investigate the conditions under which less widely spoken language varieties are maintained. This analysis dealt with four types of relationships: family and relatives, neighbours, co-workers and friends.

In order to examine language use within these relationships, we asked the interviewees about the following:

- the family of origin, its members, their place of birth, language used within the family, frequency of recent contact and language now used with them;
- the present family, dates and places of birth of its members, present place and of residence and length of time there, language of daily communication with individual family members;
- marriage patterns within the present family and (for interviewees from Ryn) within the original family;
- neighbours and friends, place of birth, present place of residence and length of time there, frequency of contact and language used;
- co-workers, place of birth, present place of residence and length of time there, frequency of contact and language used.

In some cases we asked for information about contacts with whom the interviewee would use a particular language. We also obtained second-hand information about language use within the family by women who were born outside Ryn.

2.2. Language Functions and Language Attitudes

We collected information about language use and attitudes in three areas in addition to the information about language use in social networks. First, we collected information about language use in the four functional domains of arguing, cursing, counting and singing. These domains were chosen as domains of personal expression and, except for counting, of interaction with other individuals or groups.

Second, we collected information about children's use of language. Children's patterns of language use are a well-accepted indicator of language vitality. So, we had specific interest in parents' use of language with children, children's use of language among themselves and with their parents, and the perceived proficiency of Ishkashimi by children.

Third, we collected information on the perceived benefits of each of the three languages: Ishkashimi, Wakhi and Tajik. We followed the Perceived Benefit model of language shift as developed by Karan and Stalder (2000). The central idea of this model is that people are motivated to speak certain languages if they perceive these languages to be of benefit in some way. We asked interviewees to assess how important each of the three languages was in three domains: communication, earning money and gaining respect. For each language in each domain, the interviewee was asked to indicate whether the language was very important, important, somewhat important, or not important. By asking these questions, we hoped to understand what interviewees' motivations might be for speaking the various languages.

2.3. Ethnic Identity

Two aspects of ethnic identity are important to consider. First is whether members of the ethnic group see themselves as distinct from neighbouring ethnic groups. Second is what role they see language playing in their ethnic identity. Both of these aspects can affect language vitality.

We asked four questions in an attempt to determine the ethnic identity of the Ishkashimi community.

- What are the differences between the Ishkashimi and other ethnic groups?
- What are the most important factors in being Ishkashimi? Rank the 3 most important ones.
- Are you a typical Ishkashimi? If yes, why? What makes other people typical Ishkashimi?
- How important is an ability to speak Ishkashimi for a person to be Ishkashimi?

The fourth question deals explicitly with the relationship of language to the ethnic identity of the Ishkashimi.

2.4. Locations and Sampling

We collected data in two research trips to the Ishkashimi region. On the first research trip, conducted in August 2003, we concentrated on the village of Ryn, since it is the main village of the language group. We first interviewed administrative staff in the town of Ishkoshim to obtain both general information about the basic demographics and references for local experts such as medical and school personnel. We also elicited information about language use in their domains and various attitudes towards the Ishkashimi language.

In Ryn, we interviewed the school director and the resident nurse of the medical facility in the village centre. The school director gave us information about the school-aged children, while the nurse gave information about the medical situation and language use in this domain. Both the school director and the nurse also responded to questions about their own language use and attitudes.

The school director, in turn, introduced us to other people in Ryn, arranging for us to meet with various individuals and groups. Four questionnaires were used in these interviews, though not all of the questions were asked of each individual or group. The four questionnaires dealt with language use (LU), language attitudes (LA), language proficiency (LP), and marriage patterns (MP). The demographics of the interviewees is given in table 1.

Table 1: Individuals interviewed in Ryn

ID	Group	Gender	Ethnicity	Age group	Questionnaires
R-01	Individual	M	Ishkashimi	16–30	LU, LA, LP, MP
R-02	Individual	M	Ishkashimi	30–55	LU
R-03	Individual	F	Ishkashimi	30–55	LU, MP
R-04	Individual	F	Wakhi	30–55	LU, LA, MP
R-05	Individual	F	Ishkashimi	16–30	LU, LA, LP, MP
R-06	Group 1	F	Wakhi	30–55	LU, LA, LP, MP
R-07	Group 1	F	Ishkashimi	16–30	LU, LA, LP, MP
R-08	Group 1	F	Ishkashimi	16–30	LU, LA, LP, MP
R-09	Group 1	F	Ishkashimi	16–30	LU, LA, LP, MP
R-10	Group 2	M	Ishkashimi	30–55	LU, LA, LP, MP
R-11	Group 2	M	Ishkashimi	30–55	LU, LA, LP, MP
R-12	Group 2	M	Ishkashimi	over 55	LU, LA, LP, MP

We also asked these individuals and groups about Sumjin so that we could gather basic information about this village.

On our second research trip, in August 2004, we visited both Ryn and Sumjin. We felt it was important to visit Sumjin since there was little information in the literature regarding Sumjin, and there were considerable differences in the opinions expressed by individuals in Ryn about language use and language vitality in Sumjin. While some interviewees indicated residents in Sumjin consistently used Ishkashimi, others indicated they consistently used Tajik. Our time in Ryn was devoted to gathering more detailed information regarding social networks, language use, and ethnic identity.

During our second research trip, we interviewed seventy-two people in Ryn and fourteen people in Sumjin. We attempted to choose a range of interviewees on the basis of three factors: gender, age, and marriage status. Interviewees were categorised in one of three age groups: 16–30, 31–55, and over 55. The number of respondents in Ryn, categorised by gender, age and marriage status, are shown in table 2. Widows and widowers were considered married and, when possible, were asked questions regarding the deceased spouse.

Table 2: Respondents in Ryn by gender, age, and marital status

		16–30	31–55	55+	Total
Men:	Single	8	2	0	10
	Married	1	10	9	20
Women:	Single	10	2	0	12
	Married	4	17	9	30
Total		18 5	4 27	0 18	22 50

In Ryn, we talked to seventy-two people (30 men and 42 women). The majority of respondents under age 31 were unmarried, while there were no unmarried interviewees older than 55.

The number of respondents in Sumjin, categorised by gender, age and marriage status, are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Respondents in Sumjin by gender, age, and marital status

		16–30	31–55	55+	Total
Men:	Single	1	0	0	1
	Married	1	2	2	5
Women:	Single	0	0	0	0
	Married	2	3	3	8
Total		1 3	0 5	0 5	1 13

As our research time in Sumjin was very limited and most people were at work in the fields, we were only able to interview fourteen people in Sumjin. In both Sumjin and Ryn, however, we also obtained second-hand information on families of neighbours and friends.

On our first trip to Ryn, we discovered that many of the wives are ethnically Wakhi or Tajik.⁵ These women did not speak Ishkashimi as their first language. Since the language of the mother frequently affects the language of the children, these non-Ishkashimi wives were a major focus of our second research trip. Therefore, as indicated in table 2 and table 3, thirty of the seventy-two respondents in Ryn and eight of the thirteen respondents in Sumjin were married women. We were also able to obtain second-hand information on a few other wives who were not ethnically Ishkashimi. The ethnicities of the wives on whom information was obtained, along with how long they have lived in Ryn or Sumjin, are given in table 4.

⁵ All men in Ryn are ethnically Ishkashimi.

Table 4: Wives by ethnicity and length of time in village

	Time in Community	Ishkashimi	Wakhi	Tajik	Shughni/Rushani
Ryn	≥ 10 years	0	6	2	0
	< 10 years	8	10	3	1
Sumjin	≥ 10 years	0	0	2	0
	< 10 years	1	1	4	0

We were able to obtain information about eighteen Wakhi women in Ryn and one Wakhi woman in Sumjin, and five Tajik women in Ryn and seven Tajik women in Sumjin. We were told of a total of three women in Ryn and one woman in Sumjin from the Shughni/Rushani region. Although we were able to obtain information on only one of these women, she was said to be typical of the three women from that region living in Ryn.

3. Results

The results portion of this paper is divided into six sections, looking at the two locations (section 3.1), at social networks in those locations (section 3.2), language use in social networks (section 3.3.3) and functional domains (section 3.5), language attitudes (3.7) and ethnic identity (3.8).

3.1. Locations

In this section, we describe three aspects of Ryn and Sumjin: population figures, accessibility, and the economy. These factors will provide the context for the rest of our research.

Ryn, situated one kilometre from the town of Ishkoshim, has about 1,045 inhabitants. The village consists of three main parts. The lower part of the village stretches towards the town of Ishkoshim. The newest, or upper, part was started in 1974 and extends towards Dasht. The village has grown from ten to twelve homes in the 1950s, to fifty-five homes in 1974, and to 148 homes in 2002. Two main reasons were given for this growth. First, the birth rate is high. Most families have at least four to six children. Second, adult children have been able to build their own houses due to the general material well being of the village.⁶ More detailed demographics for the village are given in table 5.

Table 5: Demographics of Ryn

Population	Number
Male	500
Female	515
School age 6–17	218
0–30 (except school age 6–17)	121
50+	55
Working in Russia	93

As indicated above, Ryn is located very close to the town of Ishkoshim. In fact, the lower part of the village now borders on the town. This results in a high level of accessibility. The town plays a major role in such aspects of life as shopping, administration and work. Many people travel to the town on a daily basis for any number of reasons.

While a medical facility that is staffed by a nurse and nurse's aide is situated in the central part of the village, the staff there treats a limited number of medical conditions. For more serious illnesses, people go to the hospital in the town of Ishkoshim.

Ryn has a full school with grades 1–11 which most of the children from the village attend. In addition, a small primary school with grades 1–4 is located in the upper part of the village. Even in this domain, there

⁶ It is unclear whether this is still the case, since the economic situation is more difficult now than it has been in the past.

is interaction between the village and the town. About ten children from the village attend school in the town of Ishkoshim, and about the same number from the town attend school in of Ryn. While twenty-three of the twenty-six teachers live in Ryn, three live in the town of Ishkoshim.

Men and some women from Ryn are employed in various institutions and offices in the town of Ishkoshim. The head doctor at the hospital in Ishkoshim Centre reported that roughly 60% of his medical staff is from Ryn. Another important source of employment is the border post located next to the town of Ishkoshim. In addition, a significant number of young people, mostly men, are working in Russia. In spite of these employment possibilities, it is difficult for young people to continue their education past grade 11; only three of last year's eleven graduates had the means to go to university.

Turning to Sumjin, it is a small village in the Ghoron, the Tajik-speaking area of Ishkoshim County. Sumjin is located on the road connecting the towns of Ishkashimi and Khorogh, approximately twenty kilometres from the town of Ishkoshim. Approximately 260 people currently live in Sumjin. The number of households including Ishkashimi speakers has grown from eight in the early 1970s to thirty or thirty-one at present. In addition, there are five or six households in which all members are ethnically Tajik. Most families have four to six children, which ensures continuing population growth.

Most residents are local farmers and have little opportunity to travel. In general, the people of Sumjin are cut off from life outside the community by the amount of work required to earn a basic living. Approximately twenty-five young men, however, are currently working in Russia in an attempt to ensure a stable economic basis for their families.

3.2. Marriage Patterns

Marriage patterns are an integral part of social networks. As noted above, many wives are taken from neighbouring ethnic groups. Because of this, we examine marriage patterns in Ryn and Sumjin in this section.

Although the people of Ryn and Sumjin consider themselves to be a single group, there is little contact between the young people of the two communities. Only one young woman in Ryn reported that she had friends from Sumjin. No one from Sumjin reported having visited Ryn recently. In fact, one young man from Sumjin reported using Ishkashimi when meeting people from Ryn in Khorogh or Dushanbe.

Turning explicitly to marriage, while it was common for residents in Ryn to report having relatives in Sumjin, young people indicated they had never met any of these relatives. There was a report of one woman from Ryn who recently married into Sumjin, but no reports of any women from Sumjin who recently married into Ryn.

In both villages, the majority of wives come from ethnic groups other than the Ishkashimi themselves. It is not uncommon for several generations of men from one family line to take wives from the same village, or even the same family. The approximate percentages of wives in the two villages according to ethnicity as reported by our respondents are shown in table 6.

Table 6: Percentages of wives by ethnicity

Ethnicity	Ishkashimi	Wakhi	Tajik	Shughni/ Rushani
Ryn	40%	49%	10%	1%
Sumjin	13%	1%	85%	1%

Several respondents in Ryn estimated that approximately 50 percent of the wives in Ryn are Wakhi. The Ishkashimi wives in Ryn are from Ryn itself. None of these wives live in the upper part of the village. Tajik wives make up only 10 percent of the wives. They live mainly in the central and upper part of the village. The differences between the parts of the village are reflected in the fact that of the twenty-three or twenty-four wives in the upper part of the village, twenty wives are Wakhi, and the other three or four are Tajik. Since 2000, there have been eighteen marriages in Ryn. Of these, six wives are Wakhi (33%), three are Tajik (17%), and nine are from Ryn (50%).

In Sumjin the vast majority of wives (approximately 85 percent) come from the surrounding Tajik-speaking villages of the Ghoron. A small percentage of ethnically Ishkashimi wives are from Sumjin itself and from Ryn. A negligible number of Wakhi or Shughni/Rusani women have married into Sumjin.

3.3. Language Use in Social Networks in Ryn

As indicated in section 2.1, a social network is the set of relationships and interactions one person has with others in daily life. As shown in table 7, the relationships that have been established by both men and women in Ryn are similar in terms of frequency and place of contact.

Table 7: Place and frequency of contact within social networks in Ryn

Relationship	Men	Women	Contact place
Family	Daily	Daily	Ryn
Relatives: Man's	Daily	Daily	Ryn
Relatives: Woman's	Rare/ Often*	Rare/ Often*	Ryn or woman's place of birth
Neighbours: Male	Daily	Rare	Ryn
Neighbours: Female	Rare	Daily	Ryn
Friends	Often	Rare, often**	Ishkoshim Centre
Colleagues	Daily	Rare, daily**	Ishkoshim Centre

* often: when woman is from Ryn

** often or daily: when working outside the village

As noted in section 3.2, a given line of men tends to marry within the same village and family through multiple generations. For this reason family and relatives form a single social network for the Ishkashimi of Ryn. Men and women have daily contact outside their immediate family with the man's family of origin since they live in the man's village. The woman's relatives are also an important part of the social network even when the wife is not from Ryn and so contact with her family of origin is rare.

Men and women have daily contact with neighbours of the same gender, and rare contact with neighbours of the opposite gender. Neighbours, therefore, make up a second social network for men and women.

Many men work outside the village, and they see their co-workers on a daily basis. Working outside the village, men also develop friendships, friends whom they see from once a week to once a month. Considerably fewer women than men work outside the village, but those who do work outside the village follow the same pattern as do men who work outside the village. These friends and colleagues make up a third social network.

In summary, there appear to be three distinct social networks: family and relatives, neighbours, and friends and colleagues. In the rest of this section we will examine language use within these networks.

3.3.1. Language Use with Family and Relatives

The network of family and relatives can be divided into two major groups: those people with whom one interacts on a daily basis and those people who are seen on rare occasions, perhaps once or twice a year. This second group is made up of relatives from the woman's family origin when she is not ethnically Ishkashimi. Within these two major groups, relationships can be categorized in terms of the ethnicity and gender of the contacts. Language use varies on the basis of these various differences. The overall patterns of language use are summarized in table 8.

Table 8: Language use in the family and relatives network in Ryn

	Ethnicity	Gender	Place	Frequency	Language
Family	Ishkashimi	Mixed	Ryn	Daily	Ishkashimi
	Wakhi	Female			Ishkashimi, Wakhi*
	Tajik	Female			Ishkashimi, Tajik*
Relatives	Ishkashimi	Mixed	Ryn/Wakhan	Rarely	Ishkashimi
	Wakhi				Wakhi
	Tajik		Ryn/Ghoron		Tajik

* Wakhi and/or Tajik is only used by female members of a family if those spoken to are from the same ethnic group.

All men have relatives from their father's side in Ryn. New homes are often built in the neighbourhoods with relatives, and brothers, cousins, uncles and nephews see each other daily. One's grandmother, mother and wife are often from the same village and even from the same family. The relatives of these family members are generally not seen more than two or three times a year. The language of these relatives is generally used during these visits. Half of the women for whom we obtained information reportedly stay at home. Their socialization is limited to the immediate and wider family of their husband. In this setting, women are expected to use Ishkashimi, especially with men and children. Women do, however, use their native language with relatives with whom they share a common ethnicity.

Language use within the immediate family follows definite patterns, as shown in table 9.

Table 9: Language use within immediate families in Ryn

	Ethnicity	With Spouse	To Child	From Child
Men	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi, Wakhi/Tajik*	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi
Women	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi
	Wakhi	Ishkashimi, Wakhi*	Ishkashimi, Wakhi**	Ishkashimi, Wakhi
	Tajik	Ishkashimi, Tajik	Ishkashimi, Tajik	Ishkashimi, Tajik

* when non-Ishkashimi wife first arrives

** to teach child Wakhi

Men generally use Ishkashimi with all members of the family, with the possible exception of a new bride who does not yet know Ishkashimi. Women born in Ryn also use Ishkashimi with all family members. Women born in the Wakhan valley might speak to their spouse in Wakhi early in the marriage, but always use Ishkashimi with their children. Most also teach their children Wakhi in addition to Ishkashimi. Finally, Tajik women use both Ishkashimi and Tajik with their spouses and children. While children might sometimes use Tajik with their mothers, they generally use Ishkashimi with them.

3.3.2. Language Use with Neighbours

Patterns of language use with neighbours differ according to gender. Men have daily contact with male neighbours. All men interviewed said they use only Ishkashimi with other men within the village. Although contact with female neighbours is rare, two thirds of the men interviewed (20 of 30) found this contact worth mentioning. While these men said they use Ishkashimi with all women in the village, they admitted using Wakhi or Tajik with women who were new in the community. One men said, "We use Wakhi or Tajik with them to make them feel welcome and to encourage them to learn our language."

Women's language use with female neighbours is dependent on the place from which each of the women comes. These patterns are summarized in table 10.

Table 10: Language use amongst women in Ryn

Women from ↓ with women from →	Ryn	Wakhan	Ghoron/Ishkoshim
Ryn	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi, Wakhi	Ishkashimi, Tajik
Wakhan	Wakhi, Ishkashimi	Wakhi	Tajik, (Ishkashimi)
Ghoron/Ishkoshim	Tajik, (Ishkashimi)	Tajik, (Ishkashimi)	Tajik

Women generally use their mother tongue with other women from their own ethnic group. Since women are often related in some way to those neighbours with whom they most frequently interact, this is the most common pattern.

Women from Ryn most commonly use Ishkashimi with women from the Wakhan and the Ghoron, although they also use Wakhi and Tajik as appropriate. Women from the Wakhan use Ishkashimi and Wakhi with their Ishkashimi neighbours, but Tajik for the most part with their neighbours from the Ghoron. Tajik-speaking women from the Ghoron and Ishkoshim Centre use Tajik and some Ishkashimi with women from Ryn or the Wakhan. The language of conversation is often dependent on who initiates the dialogue.

3.3.3. *Language Use with Friends and Colleagues*

Fourteen of the men interviewed work in the town of Ishkoshim, and two work as teachers in Ryn. An additional four of the seven men who are now farmers in Ryn indicated they had previously worked in Ishkoshim. Far fewer women work away from the home: eight women work in the town of Ishkoshim, while three work as teachers and one as a nurse in Ryn.

Within the work environment Tajik is the dominant language even when a co-worker is Wakhi. But as soon as conversation with a Wakhi colleague turns to private matters it is likely to switch to Wakhi rather than stay in Tajik. Language use is even more dependent on ethnicity with friends; Tajik is used with Tajiks and Wakhi with Wakhi.

3.4. *Language Use in Social Networks in Sumjin*

Sumjin is geographically more isolated than Ryn; men and women do not travel much. Relationships are centred in and around the village of Sumjin and the neighbouring Tajik-speaking villages of the Ghoron. The places and frequency of contacts for men and women in Sumjin are summarised in table 11.

Table 11: Place and frequency of contact within social networks in Sumjin

Relationship	Men	Women	Contact place
Family	Daily	Daily	Sumjin
Relatives: Man's	Daily	Daily	Sumjin
Relatives: Woman's	Rare	Rare	Sumjin or woman's place of birth
Neighbours: Male	Daily	Rare	Sumjin
Neighbours: Female	Rare	Daily	Sumjin
Friends, Colleagues	Often	None	Neighbouring Tajik villages

Daily life is centred around the village – in the family, the man's relatives, and local farm work. As in Ryn, a woman's relatives are generally seen only once or twice a year. Residents socialize with neighbours of the same gender.

3.4.1. *Language Use with Family and Relatives*

Patterns of language use in families in Sumjin differ considerably from those in Ryn. In Ryn, Ishkashimi is used nearly exclusively within the family, but in Sumjin, Tajik has an equal place with

Ishkashimi in families. Patterns of language use within the family and with relatives are summarized in table 12.

Table 12: Language use with family and relatives in Sumjin

Network group	Ethnicity	Gender	Contact place	Contact frequency	Language used
Family	Ishkashimi	Both	Sumjin	Daily	Ishkashimi, (Tajik)
	Wakhi	Female			Tajik, (Ishkashimi)
	Tajik	Female			Tajik
Relatives	Ishkashimi	Mixed	Sumjin/Wakhan Sumjin/Ghoron	Rarely	Ishkashimi
	Wakhi				Tajik, (Wakhi)
	Tajik				Tajik

While ethnic Ishkashimi generally use Ishkashimi within the immediate family, Wakhi and Tajik wives use Tajik. With relatives from Wakhi or Tajik-speaking villages, most family members use Tajik, although Wakhi women might use Wakhi with their own kin.

Taking a closer look at patterns of language use within the immediate family, we see nearly equal use of Ishkashimi and Tajik. Patterns of language use between spouses and between parents and children are shown in table 13.

Table 13: Language use within immediate families in Sumjin

	Ethnicity	With Spouse	To Child	From Child
Men	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi, Tajik	Ishkashimi, Tajik	Ishkashimi, Tajik
Women	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi
	Tajik	Tajik, (Ishkashimi)	Tajik, (Ishkashimi)	Tajik
	Wakhi	Tajik, (Ishkashimi)	Tajik, (Ishkashimi)	Tajik, (Ishkashimi)

A number of interviewees indicated that men generally use Ishkashimi with their wives and children, but even men who generally use Ishkashimi, use Tajik in some situations with their wives and children. Ishkashimi women born in Sumjin (or Ryn) use Ishkashimi with their husbands and children, and their husbands and children use it with them. Tajik women use Tajik with their husband and children, although one was reported to also use Ishkashimi with her children. Children use Tajik with Tajik mothers.

3.4.2. Language Use with Neighbours, Friends and Co-Workers

None of the men or women we interviewed worked outside the village, nor was there any indication that other men or women do so. So neighbours become co-workers in the fields and friends outside work environment. Ishkashimi men tend to use Ishkashimi with each other, but they switch to Tajik when a Tajik speaker is present. Women generally use Tajik with each other.

3.5. Language Use in Functional Domains

We asked about language use in the four functional domains of arguing, cursing, counting, and singing. Men are very uniform in their patterns of language use in both Ryn and Sumjin. The responses from the men in Ryn and Sumjin are summarised in table 14.

Table 14: Language use by men in Ryn and Sumjin

	Arguing	Cursing	Counting	Singing
Ryn	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi, Tajik	Tajik, (Ishkashimi)
Sumjin	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi, Tajik	Tajik, (Ishkashimi)

Men in both villages argue and curse in Ishkashimi, count in both Ishkashimi and Tajik, and sing mainly in Tajik.

In the case of women, we expected differences in language use on the basis of ethnicity and the amount time in the community. In Ryn, ethnicity did not play a major role, but the amount of time lived in the community did. In Sumjin, on the other hand, ethnicity played a larger role than time. The patterns of language use among women in Ryn are presented in table 15.

Table 15: Language use by women in Ryn

	Arguing	Cursing	Counting	Singing
Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi, Tajik	Tajik, Ishkashimi
Others, >10 years	Ishkashimi, (Tajik)	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi /Tajik, Tajik	Tajik
Others, ≤10 years	Tajik/Wakhi, Ishkashimi	Tajik/Wakhi, Ishkashimi	Wakhi/Tajik, Ishkashimi	Tajik

Once again, women sing primarily in Tajik, regardless of women's ethnicity or length of time in the community. Both men and women from Ryn, however, know some traditional Ishkashimi songs.

Greater variation in patterns of language use is seen in the other domains. In the domain of arguing, women argue primarily in their own vernacular during the first ten years in Ryn, although they begin to use Ishkashimi during this time. After ten years, most women argue mainly in Ishkashimi, although Tajik women still use Tajik nearly as much as Ishkashimi. In the domain of cursing, women use both languages in the first ten years, after which they curse almost exclusively in Ishkashimi. Finally, in the domain of counting, women use mostly Tajik for the first ten years. After ten years, Wakhi women count in a combination of Ishkashimi and Tajik, while Tajik women keep counting in Tajik.

The patterns of language use among women in Sumjin are presented in table 16.

Table 16: Language use by women in Sumjin

	Arguing	Cursing	Counting	Singing
Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi, Tajik	Tajik, Ishkashimi
Tajik	Tajik	Tajik	Tajik	Tajik

Ishkashimi women in Sumjin, like men, argue and curse in Ishkashimi, count in Ishkashimi and Tajik, and sing primarily in Tajik. Tajik women, on the other hand, use Tajik exclusively in all four domains.

3.6. Children's Language

Since the children of today will determine patterns of language use twenty years from now, assessing their patterns of language use plays an important role in predicting language vitality in the future. Patterns of language use among children in Ryn and Sumjin are compared in table 17.

Table 17: Comparison of children's language in Ryn and Sumjin

	Ryn	Sumjin
Child's First language	Ishkashimi	Tajik, Ishkashimi
Know Ishkashimi fully and well	All	Most
Fathers to children	Ishkashimi	Ishkashimi, Tajik
Mothers to children	Ishkashimi, a few Tajik or Wakhi	Tajik, only Ishkashimi mothers Ishkashimi
Children with other children	Ishkashimi	Tajik, Ishkashimi

In Ryn, all children are reported to speak Ishkashimi as their first language, and to know the language fully and well. Within the village all children use Ishkashimi with each other. Both parents use Ishkashimi

with them, though mothers might use their own language, as well. Only two or three Tajik-speaking women are reported to use only Tajik with their children. Five non-Ishkashimi women said they use Ishkashimi with their children because it is the ‘father’s language.’

In Sumjin, Ishkashimi is the first language for some children, while Tajik is the first language for others. Many children are reported to mix in Tajik when speaking Ishkashimi. Fathers are likely to use Ishkashimi with their children, although in at least one case, the father focused the efforts to speak Ishkashimi on the oldest son. This young man reported that his sibling’s first language is Tajik and that they use Tajik with each other, their mother and even, in most cases, with their father. In two other families both parents use Tajik with the children, even though the father is Ishkashimi. In spite of these patterns in the home, other people reported that, at present, all children learn Ishkashimi from friends on the street.

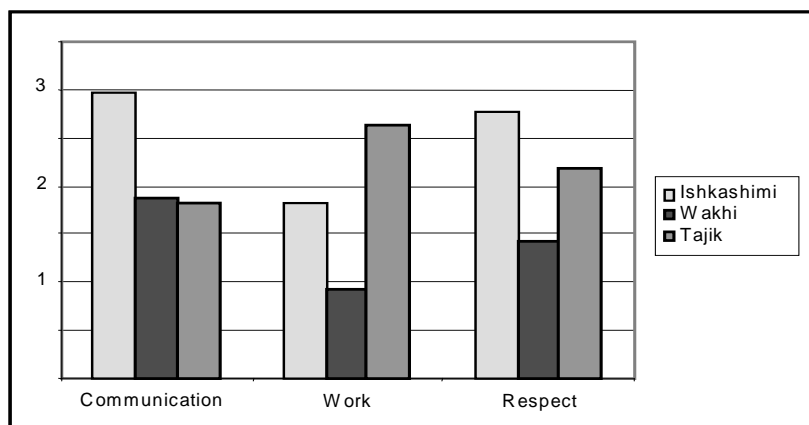
3.7. Language Attitudes in a Multilingual Environment

The questions of language attitudes become important since Ryn is situated close to the town of Ishkoshim and near the Wakhi-speaking area. Many men from Ryn marry Wakhi or Tajik women, and most Ishkashimi use all three languages on a regular basis.

While staying in the town of Ishkoshim, we talked to officials in the regional administration and to local Tajik and Wakhi people. During these conversations, we detected a certain pride by ‘outsiders’ in this village with its own, different language. On more than one occasion, we were asked if we knew about the ‘Ryni’ people and their language. A major question, then, is whether this apparent pride in the Ishkashimi language is shared by the speakers of the language and what value the speakers see in the language. In the rest of this section, we examine attitudes towards Ishkashimi, Wakhi, and Taji in the three domains of communication, work, and gaining respect.

Men use Ishkashimi almost exclusively in their daily life in Ryn. The way in which men in Ryn perceive the importance of Ishkashimi, Wakhi, and Tajik is summarised in figure 2. A score of 3 indicates the respondents felt the particular language was very important in a domain, while a 2 indicates the language is important, a 1 indicates it is somewhat important, and a 0 indicates it is not important in that domain.

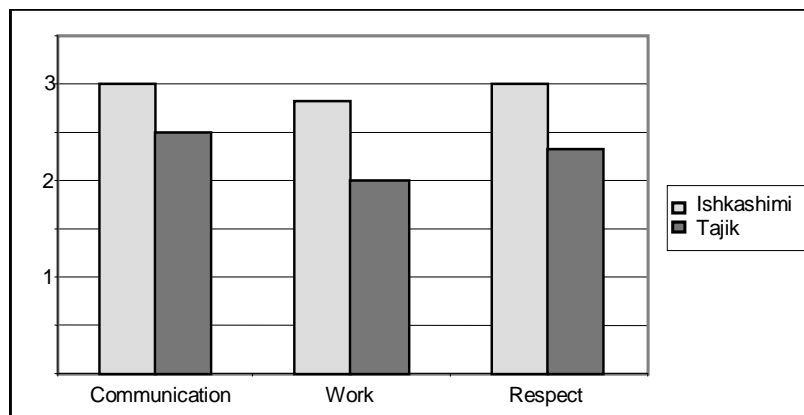
Figure 2: Perceived benefit of Ishkashimi, Wakhi, and Tajik by men in Ryn



Not surprisingly, men see Ishkashimi as very important for communication. Wakhi and Tajik are a bit less than important for communication within the village. Men see Tajik as most important for earning money, probably since it is the language of the town of Ishkoshim. For farmers in Ryn, Ishkashimi plays a role nearly as important for earning money. Wakhi is much less important for earning money, since it is only used with Wakhis when they come to the village or Ishkoshim Centre. Finally, knowing Ishkashimi is very important for gaining respect. In this particular context, three men mentioned that Ishkashimi is the ‘father’s language’. Knowing Tajik is also important for gaining respect, while once again, Wakhi is less important.

In Sumjin, Wakhi plays no role at all, since marriages to Wakhi-speaking women are rare and there are no Wakhi villages nearby. The way in which men in Sumjin perceive the importance of Ishkashimi and Tajik is summarised in figure 3.

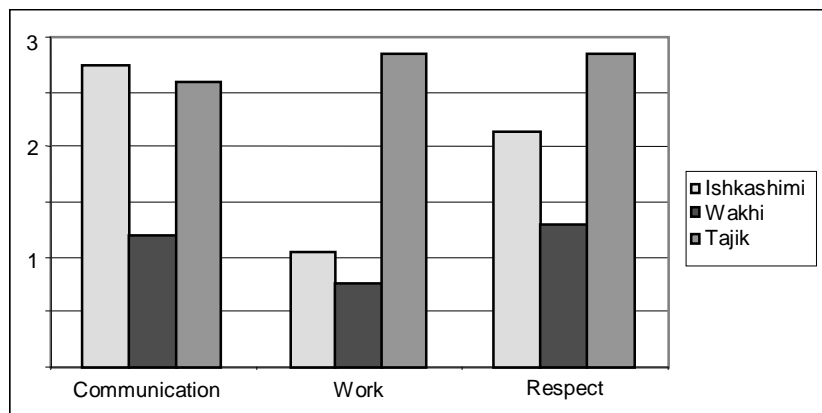
Figure 3: Perceived benefit of Ishkashimi, Wakhi, and Tajik by men in Sumjin



Since most men work as local farmers, Ishkashimi is very important for them for communication and earning money. Again, in terms of gaining respect, we heard the phrase ‘father’s language’ as the reason to consider Ishkashimi to be very important in gaining respect from others. Tajik plays an important role in all three domains of life. It is especially important for communication both within the village and also with men from the surrounding Tajik-speaking villages.

Turning to women in Ryn, patterns of perceived benefits differ depending on ethnicity. The way in which the Ishkashimi women in Ryn perceive the importance of the three languages is summarised in figure 4.

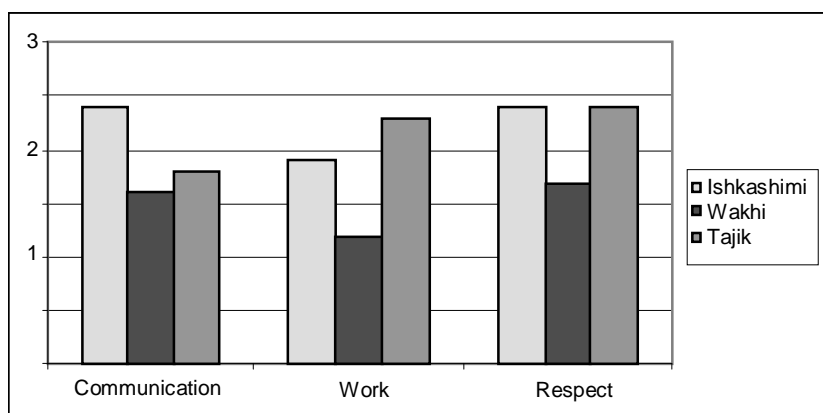
Figure 4: Perceived benefits by Ishkashimi women in Ryn



Ishkashimi women see Ishkashimi and Tajik as very important for communication. Tajik is the only language considered to be very important for earning money. Tajik is very important and Ishkashimi is important for gaining respect. Wakhi is only somewhat important in any of these domains.

The way in which the Wakhi women in Ryn perceive the importance of the three languages is summarised in figure 5.

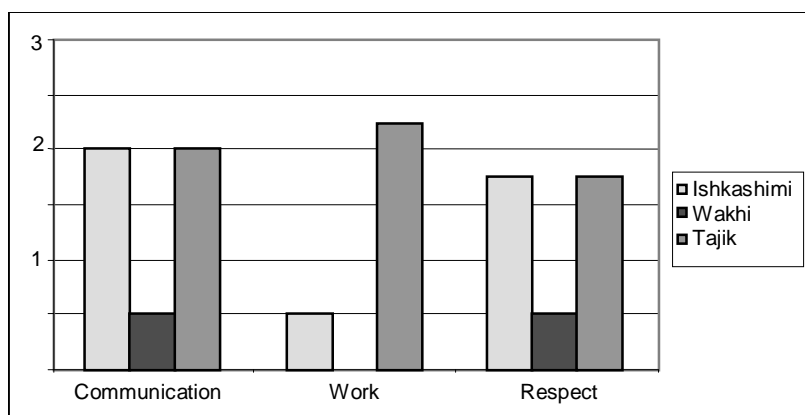
Figure 5: Perceived benefits by Wakhi women in Ryn



Although Wakhi women see greater benefits in their own language than do Ishkashimi or Tajik women, even they see Wakhi as less than important. In fact, they see it as only somewhat important for earning money. They see Ishkashimi as more than important for communication, and gaining respect, and important for earning money. Tajik is seen as more than important for earning money and gaining respect, and important for communication. Wakhi women see Ishkashimi as more important for gaining respect than do either the Ishkashimi or Tajik women. Once again, two Wakhi women underlined the importance of Ishkashimi for gaining respect with the phrase ‘father’s language.’

The way in which the Tajik women in Ryn perceive the importance of the three languages is summarised in figure 6.

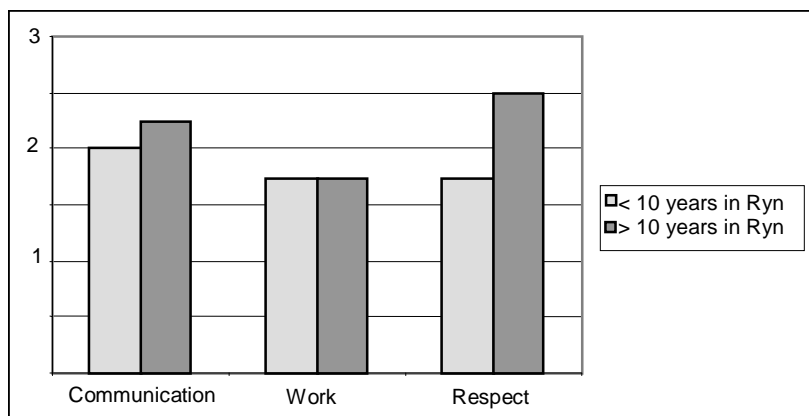
Figure 6: Perceived benefits by Tajik women in Ryn



Tajik women see both Ishkashimi and Tajik as important for communication, and slightly less important for gaining respect. Tajik is the only language of importance for earning money. Wakhi is seen as unimportant in all of these domains.

Wakhi and Tajik women who have lived in Ryn for more than ten years see Ishkashimi as more important than do those who have lived in Ryn for less time. The differences are illustrated in figure 7.

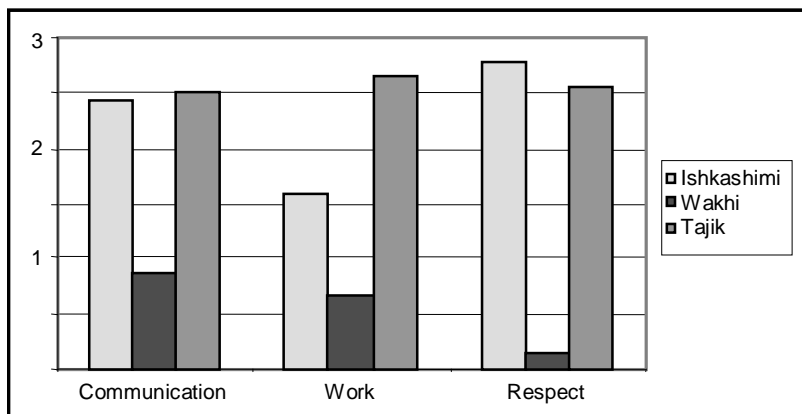
Figure 7: Perceived benefit of Ishkashimi by women of other ethnicities



There is no difference between the two groups with regard to the perceived importance of Ishkashimi for earning money. The women who have lived in Ryn longer, however, see slightly more importance of Ishkashimi for communication, and quite a bit more importance for gaining respect.

In Sumjin, Ishkashimi and Tajik are the main languages. Wakhi plays nearly no role in daily life. The perceived benefits of the three languages are shown in figure 8.

Figure 8: Perceived benefits by women in Sumjin



Both Ishkashimi and Tajik are seen as close to very important for communication and gaining respect. Tajik is seen as close to very important for earning money, while Ishkashimi is somewhat less important in this domain.

3.8. Ethnic Identity

Being Ishkashimi is closely connected with a few specific factors. Not surprisingly, language is one of those factors. After presenting all the factors involved in the ethnic identity of the Ishkashimi, we will examine the role of language more closely.

Only two respondents saw no difference between themselves and other people groups. As indicated in section 2.3, we asked interviewees the following four questions to determine what makes a person Ishkashimi.

1. What are the differences between the Ishkashimi and other ethnic groups?
2. What are the most important factors in being Ishkashimi? Rank the three most important ones.
- 3a. Are you a typical Ishkashimi? If yes, why?

3b. What makes other people typical Ishkashimi?

4. How important is an ability to speak Ishkashimi for a person to be Ishkashimi?

Although the responses to the first three questions were open-ended, we were able to categorise all but three as one of the following eight factors.

- Ancestors: ancestors or grandparents are Ishkashimi
- Father: father is Ishkashimi
- Parents: parents are Ishkashimi
- Birthplace: born in an Ishkashimi village
- Residence: currently live in an Ishkashimi village
- Language: speak Ishkashimi
- Culture: follow Ishkashimi culture or traditions
- Pride: proud of being Ishkashimi

The responses to the first three questions are summarised in table 18.

Table 18: Responses to questions of ethnic identity

Factors	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3a	Question 3b
Ancestors			15	6
Father		11	3	1
Parents		9	5	3
Birthplace		8	12	8
Residence			3	13
Language	25	24	2	15
Culture	4	6		2
Pride		4		

In response to question 1, asking for differences between the Ishkashimi and other groups, the most common response was language. In fact, the four respondents who indicated that culture was a differentiating factor saw both culture and language as important.

Five main factors were mentioned in response to question 2, asking what are the most important factors for being an Ishkashimi. Speaking the language was mentioned by the largest number of respondents (24). Having an Ishkashimi father (11 respondents) or parents (9 respondents) also plays a major role in being Ishkashimi. Being born in Ryn or Sumjin (8 respondents) and keeping Ishkashimi traditions (6 respondents) are also seen as important. Finally, four respondents indicated that it is important to be proud of being Ishkashimi.

In response to question 3a, all respondents saw themselves as typical Ishkashimi. The most frequently mentioned reason for this was having Ishkashimi ancestors, father, or parents (23 respondents). The second most frequent reason was being born in Ryn or Sumjin (12 respondents). When the focus moved to what made others typical Ishkashimi, language is again the most frequent factor (15 responses), followed by living in Ryn (13) or being born in Ryn (8). For ten people it was important that a person has ancestors, father, or parents from Ryn.

In response to the fourth question, all but one interviewee indicated that it is important for people who are considered Ishkashimi to be able to speak the language. For six people it is very important and for three it is the most important factor. One respondent stated that while language is important for being Ishkashimi, those Ishkashimi who live in Dushanbe and do not know the language are still Ishkashimi. But another respondent stated that those who do not know the language are very poor Ishkashimi.

4. Discussion

In section 1, we laid out two goals. These were to show that Ishkashimi exhibits signs of high language vitality, in spite of the fact that relatively few people speak it, and to suggest factors that might account for

this vitality. We also listed the following factors that we thought might influence language vitality in Ishkashimi.

- Population numbers, relative position in urban/rural continuum, economic basis
- Social networks and language use
- Children's language
- Language prestige and social outlook (language attitudes)
- Ethnic identity

In the rest of this section, we examine the contribution of these indicators to the language vitality of Ishkashimi.

The situations in Ryn and Sumjin are very different, and have resulted in different sociolinguistic dynamics. Ishkashimi is widely used in Ryn, while it seems to be in danger of being replaced by Tajik in Sumjin. Therefore, we will examine the situations in Ryn and Sumjin separately. In many ways, the situation in Sumjin is what we would expect: a less-widely spoken language appears to be losing ground to Tajik, a language of wider communication. So, we will first examine the situation in Sumjin. Then we will attempt to account for the apparent vitality of Ishkashimi in Ryn.

Sumjin is considerably smaller than Ryn. Furthermore, a significant number of the households are ethnically Tajik. The economic basis of the economy is poor; the only available jobs are in farming. As a result, approximately forty young men have gone to Russia to find work. With the departure of these young men, the body of Ishkashimi speakers gets even smaller in an already small community.

Although the community has grown from eight to thirty households, there is little contact between it and the larger group of Ishkashimi speakers in Ryn. This isolation from Ryn, along with the fact that the village is surrounded by Tajik-speaking villages, has resulted in a much higher proportion of intermarriage with Tajik-speaking women. These Tajik-speaking women do not learn Ishkashimi. Instead, they tend to use Tajik both with neighbours and within the family. Most of these women have also continued to use Tajik in the functional domains of arguing, cursing and counting. Thus, for the most part we cannot speak of Ishkashimi-speaking households, but of households that include Ishkashimi speakers.

When we realise that the original eight households were exclusively Ishkashimi-speaking, it becomes apparent that the use of Ishkashimi has actually decreased, in spite of the increase of households that include Ishkashimi speakers. Children in these households are, at most, using Ishkashimi alongside Tajik; in many households children are using only Tajik. At present, most children still learn Ishkashimi outside the home, but an increasing number of young people use Tajik among themselves.

In Sumjin, only men value the Ishkashimi language. Tajik wives value their own mother tongue, and even wives from other groups use Tajik rather than Ishkashimi or their own mother tongue. Since men accept Tajik as the language of the home, Ishkashimi is in danger of being replaced by Tajik as the language of the family and daily life. Furthermore, although men use Ishkashimi with each other, they switch to Tajik whenever a Tajik speaker is present.

One young man in Sumjin reported that he, as the oldest son of a mixed marriage, is the only child who was expected to learn and communicate in Ishkashimi with his father. His younger siblings are free to use Tajik in the home with both parents. As a result, he is not fluent in Ishkashimi. Only in the few families where both parents are from Ishkashimi-speaking homes is Ishkashimi the first language of the children.

The situation in Ryn is very different from that in Sumjin. The population is growing, and the economy is relatively stable. A potential problem is that much of the economy is dependent on the use of either Tajik or Russian. This includes work in the town of Ishkoshim and the border post, as well as in Russia. A common claim is that such dependence on languages of wider communication, along with proximity to the town of Ishkoshim, is likely to result in language shift (Landweer 2000:8). In the case of Ishkashimi, however, the fact that families are relatively large means that most family members can remain in the community while one or two work in Russia for several years. In addition, most family members who work in the town or at the border post remain in the community.

Furthermore, Ryn is accepted by its Tajik and Wakhi neighbours as a village with its own language. Ishkashimi men seem to place a high value on using only Ishkashimi within the village of Ryn. The Ishkashimi language is the language of the home and the first language for all children. While the majority of wives are Wakhi or Tajik, they are expected to learn Ishkashimi and use it with their children. This is reflected in the fact Wakhi and Tajik wives come to use Ishkashimi, even in such functional domains as arguing, cursing, and counting.

To summarize, the growth in population seems to support language vitality. Furthermore, factors such as proximity to the town of Ishkashimi and an economy based to a large extent on knowing Tajik or Russian has provided a stable economy which allows stability in the community.

In terms of language prestige and social outlook, Ishkashimi speakers in Ryn have a healthy self-esteem and pride in their language. Especially men see Ishkashimi as the only option for communication within the village. At the same time, they value Tajik and Wakhi as languages used outside the village. This ability and willingness to use Tajik and Wakhi has resulted in the Ishkashimi being accepted by neighbouring groups. The fact that people outside Ryn are proud of having a village with its own language certainly lowers the pressure of language shift towards Tajik or Wakhi. In addition, the fact that wives from other ethnic groups learn to value Ishkashimi over time supports the use of Ishkashimi in the home.

Language consistently appeared as a major factor in the ethnic identity of the Ishkashimi in Ryn. It is the only difference consistently seen as separating them from neighbouring ethnic groups. Not knowing the language makes one a 'poor Ishkashimi,' although this is in any case only conceivable for Ishkashimi who have never lived in Ryn.

All people born in Ryn are reported to know the language well and to use it in daily life in the home and on the street. Children learn it as their 'father's language' and women are expected to speak the father's language with their children. As an indication of how seriously Ishkashimi take the concept of the 'father's language', children from Ishkashimi women who marry into other ethnic groups are addressed in their 'father's language', whether that is Wakhi or Tajik. This concept and the fact that Ishkashimi is the language of the home puts considerable pressure on new wives to learn Ishkashimi in order to be able to communicate. Men not only feel responsible for teaching their wives and daughters-in-law the Ishkashimi language, they take pride in doing so.

5. Summary and Conclusion

The positive (+) or negative (–) implications of the five factors we examined for the vitality of Ishkashimi in the villages of Ryn and Sumjin are summarised in table 19.

Table 19: Summary of the factors influencing language vitality

	Sumjin	Ryn
Demographics	–	+
Networks and Use	–	+
Children	–	+
Prestige and Outlook	+/–	+
Ethnic Identity	(+)	+

In Sumjin, Ishkashimi is in danger of being replaced by Tajik. We are not able to clearly determine the implications of ethnic identity for the vitality of Ishkashimi in Sumjin. Even if we assume it is positive, however, the first three factors point clearly in the direction of language shift. The fact that in many families, Tajik is already the dominant language of the home and that most marriages are to Tajik speakers support this tendency. Only men value Ishkashimi as an important language; wives value Tajik more. It appears likely that Ishkashimi will continue to lose ground to Tajik in Sumjin.

In Ryn, on the other hand, all five factors support the maintenance of Ishkashimi. Therefore, Ishkashimi is vital in the village of Ryn and is being passed on to the younger generation. As the 'father's language,' men take a special responsibility in teaching the language to wives from other ethnic groups and to children. Though women use different languages when communicating with each other, all use Ishkashimi in the home and acknowledge it to be their children's first language. In spite of the small number of speakers of Ishkashimi, the language appears alive and well in Ryn.

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