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Ethnolinguistic Identity And Cultural Memory In The Dawoodi Community

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between language, ethnolinguistic identity, and cultural memory within the Dawoodi-speaking community of Mominabad, Hunza, in northern Pakistan. Positioned as the eighth study in a sustained longitudinal research program on the Dawoodi language and its speakers, this paper builds upon a body of work that has traced the community's linguistic trajectory from language shift and intergenerational disruption (Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2019) through lexical attrition and generational competence loss (Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2020), evolutionary structural collapse (Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2021), linguistic hegemony and institutional marginalization (Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2022), contact-induced structural dilution (Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2023a), ideological internalization and language attitude formation (Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2023b), and the transformation of heritage into social liability through derogatory nomenclature and identity reconstruction (Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2024). The present study extends this trajectory by examining what is at stake culturally when language competence declines: how Dawoodi functions not merely as a communication system but as the primary repository of the community's collective memory, social knowledge, oral traditions, and shared worldview. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, narrative analysis, and oral history documentation conducted within the Mominabad community, the research demonstrates that Dawoodi encodes cultural knowledge — in kinship systems, oral narratives, ceremonial language, ecological vocabulary, and craft traditions — that is not transferable into dominant languages without fundamental transformation and partial loss. As language competence declines across generations, access to this cultural memory becomes increasingly fragmented: younger speakers, with limited proficiency in Dawoodi, are not merely less linguistically capable but are culturally disconnected from the narratives, practices, and social values that the language carries. The study argues that language loss in this community extends far beyond the loss of a communication system, representing the progressive erosion of cultural continuity, collective identity, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. It situates the Dawoodi community within theoretical frameworks of ethnolinguistic vitality, cultural memory, and language-culture interconnection, arguing that revitalization efforts must go beyond structural documentation and linguistic pedagogy to encompass the

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preservation and transmission of the cultural narratives and practices that are embedded within the language and inseparable from it. The study contributes to interdisciplinary discussions at the intersection of endangered language linguistics, anthropology, and cultural studies by providing the most comprehensive account yet available of what the Dawoodi language carries culturally, and what is being lost as it disappears.

Keywords— cultural memory, Dawoodi language, language endangerment, oral tradition, language and culture, intergenerational transmission, linguistic decline

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

A language is never merely a system for transmitting information. It is the medium through which a community constructs and transmits its understanding of itself — its history, its values, its ways of organizing social life, its frameworks for interpreting the natural world, its accumulated knowledge of what it means to live as the particular people it has become across the particular history it has lived. When a language is lost, therefore, what disappears is not only a set of grammatical rules and vocabulary items. What disappears is a repository of cultural memory — an archive of collective experience — that exists in no other form and that cannot, except imperfectly and incompletely, be translated into any other language.

This understanding, which has been central to the field of endangered language research since at least Crystal (2000) and has been developed in increasingly sophisticated ways by Evans (2010), Harrison (2007), and others, takes on particular urgency in the case of the Dawoodi language spoken by the Dawoodi community of Mominabad in the Hunza Valley of northern Pakistan. For the Dawoodi community, language is not merely a vehicle of everyday communication. It is the living archive of a community's history of migration and settlement, of its exceptional craft and musical traditions, of its oral narrative heritage, of its kinship systems and social organization, and of its long and complex negotiation with a dominant society that has defined it primarily through the lowest position in a hierarchical social order. When Dawoodi is lost, all of this is lost with it — not completely, not immediately, but progressively and irreversibly, in the way that all cultural memory is lost when the language that encoded it ceases to be spoken.

The longitudinal research program of which the present study forms the eighth installment has traced the Dawoodi language's endangered situation with increasing analytical depth across six years of sustained investigation. Ishfaq and Bhatti (2019) established the foundational picture of advanced language shift, with intergenerational transmission broken down and younger generations exhibiting passive competence or complete disengagement. Ishfaq and Bhatti (2020) examined lexical attrition in detail, demonstrating that vocabulary loss was not merely quantitative but qualitatively transformative, involving the erosion of culturally embedded semantic systems. Ishfaq and Bhatti (2021) theorized the structural trajectory of the language through the concept of post-creole collapse, demonstrating that structural disintegration under sustained sociopolitical pressure can reverse processes of creolization. Ishfaq and Bhatti (2022)

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analyzed the ideological and institutional conditions of linguistic hegemony that produce and sustain the language's marginalization. Ishfaq and Bhatti (2023a) provided corpus-based evidence of the contact-induced mechanisms code-switching, lexical borrowing, structural convergence through which structural change is enacted in everyday speech. Ishfaq and Bhatti (2023b) examined the psychological and attitudinal dimensions of language endangerment, demonstrating how speakers' identity orientations toward dominant languages accelerate language shift. And Ishfaq and Bhatti (2024) provided the most comprehensive examination yet of how language attitudes and identity reconstruction — shaped by centuries of caste-based stigma, derogatory nomenclature, and the devil-origin narratives documented by Schmid (2007) — have transformed the heritage language from a resource into a liability in the eyes of its own speakers.

What this body of research has established with considerable precision is what is happening to the Dawoodi language: structurally, lexically, ideologically, and psychologically. What the present study investigates is what is being lost with it: the cultural memory, the ethnolinguistic identity, and the collective knowledge that the language encodes and that no other language in the community's repertoire carries in the same form or with the same depth.

1.2 Background of the Study

The relationship between language and cultural memory is one of the most fundamental and most contested claims in the linguistics of language endangerment. The strong version of this claim — associated with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in its original formulation — holds that language determines thought, that the categories of a language shape the categories of cognitive experience for its speakers in ways that make truly equivalent translation impossible. The weaker and more widely accepted version holds that while languages do not determine thought in any strict cognitive sense, they encode cultural knowledge, social organization, and accumulated experience in ways that make them irreplaceable repositories of cultural memory: systems whose loss entails the loss of specific, nonreplicable ways of understanding and organizing human experience (Evans, 2010; Harrison, 2007).

For the Dawoodi community, the relationship between language and cultural memory is not a theoretical abstraction but a lived reality, documented across the longitudinal research program. When Ishfaq and Bhatti (2020) found that younger speakers had lost not only vocabulary items but the semantic systems that organized them — that kinship terms were being replaced not just with different words but with words that encoded different social relationships — they were documenting not merely lexical attrition but the erosion of a specific framework for understanding and organizing family and community life. When Ishfaq and Bhatti (2023a) found that the specialized vocabulary of blacksmithing and musical craft was among the most severely affected domains of Dawoodi lexical loss, they were documenting not merely vocabulary reduction but the linguistic erosion of a technical and aesthetic knowledge system that had taken centuries to develop and that exists in no other form.

The present study extends these findings by examining the cultural memory dimension of Dawoodi's endangerment systematically and comprehensively: examining how the language functions as a cultural repository across multiple domains, how declining

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language competence affects access to that repository, and what the implications of this declining access are for the community's ethnolinguistic identity and cultural continuity.

The Dawoodi community's situation is particularly significant for understanding the relationship between language and cultural memory because the community has experienced, across the same period in which the language has been declining, a transformation in its social position and occupational profile that has involved the deliberate abandonment of the cultural traditions with which the language was most closely associated. As Akhter (2023) documents, the community has, across the past half-century, progressively abandoned the blacksmithing and musical traditions that defined its identity and social position within the Hunza order, in favor of the educational qualifications and professional occupations that have enabled its members to achieve social integration with the wider Hunza community. This transformation has produced upward social mobility that the community has earned through extraordinary determination. It has also produced a condition in which the cultural knowledge encoded in Dawoodi — the knowledge of the forge, the musical tradition, the ceremonial oral heritage — is losing not only its linguistic medium but its social context of practice. The language and the traditions it carried are declining together, each accelerating the other's loss.

1.3 The Concept of Ethnolinguistic Identity

Ethnolinguistic identity refers to the sense of group membership and collective selfhood that is constituted through and sustained by a shared language. The theoretical framework of ethnolinguistic vitality developed by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) identifies language as a primary marker of ethnic group identity, arguing that the vitality of a language — measured in terms of speaker population, institutional support, and social status — is inseparable from the vitality of the group identity it marks. Languages that are institutionally supported, socially valued, and demographically strong sustain ethnolinguistic identities that are confident, coherent, and reproduced across generations. Languages that are institutionally excluded, socially stigmatized, and demographically declining sustain ethnolinguistic identities that are fragmented, contested, and increasingly difficult to transmit.

For the Dawoodi community, the concept of ethnolinguistic identity intersects in complex ways with the history of caste-based stigma documented in earlier research. As Ishfaq and Bhatti (2024) demonstrate, drawing on the anthropological documentation of Schmid (2007) and the oral history research of Akhter (2023), the Dawoodi language has historically functioned as a marker not only of community membership but of caste position: speaking Dawoodi announced one's membership in the Dawoodi community, the lowest caste in the Hunza social hierarchy. This complex relationship — in which the language both constitutes and marks a stigmatized identity — has produced the condition that Ishfaq and Bhatti (2024) document empirically: that younger speakers have come to experience their ethnolinguistic identity as a liability, a social burden that dominant language adoption helps to escape.

Yet the relationship between language and identity in this community is not reducible to stigma and avoidance. Elder speakers maintain strong, complex, and ultimately positive ethnolinguistic identities constituted through Dawoodi: identities that are

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grounded in cultural knowledge, in the oral traditions the language carries, in the craft and musical heritage it encodes, and in the community's own creative acts of self-definition — most powerfully, the reclamation of the name Dawoodi as the community's chosen designation, connecting their linguistic identity to the prophetic genealogy of Da'ud rather than to the derogatory caste markers imposed by the dominant society (Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2024; Akhter, 2023). Understanding both dimensions of ethnolinguistic identity — the stigmatized dimension that drives avoidance among younger speakers and the culturally rich dimension that sustains attachment among elder speakers — is essential for the present study's analysis of what is at stake in the language's continued decline.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

The longitudinal research program on Dawoodi has established with considerable empirical detail the structural, lexical, ideological, psychological, and social dimensions of the language's endangerment. What it has not yet examined in dedicated focus is the cultural memory dimension: how Dawoodi functions as a repository of collective knowledge and shared identity, and what specifically is being lost — culturally, socially, cognitively — as language competence declines. This gap is significant because it goes to the heart of why language preservation matters: not merely as a matter of linguistic diversity for its own sake, but because of the irreplaceable cultural knowledge, social organization, and collective identity that specific languages carry for specific communities.

Without a systematic account of what Dawoodi culturally contains and what declining competence means for access to that content, preservation and revitalization efforts will continue to address the language primarily as a structural and communicative system, missing the cultural dimension that is, for the community, the most fundamental reason for its preservation. The problem this study addresses is therefore both theoretical — what is the relationship between language decline and cultural memory loss in the Dawoodi case? — and practical: how must revitalization efforts be reconceived if they are to engage with cultural memory as centrally as they engage with linguistic structure?

1.5 Research Objectives

1. To document the specific dimensions of cultural memory encoded in Dawoodi — including oral traditions, kinship systems, craft and musical knowledge, ceremonial language, and ecological vocabulary — and to examine how this cultural knowledge is constituted through the language.
2. To investigate how declining language competence among younger generations affects their access to the cultural memory encoded in Dawoodi, and what this declining access means for ethnolinguistic identity.
3. To examine how elder speakers experience and articulate the relationship between language and cultural memory, and what their testimonies reveal about what the community stands to lose.
4. To analyze how the community's specific history of caste-based marginalization has shaped the relationship between language, cultural memory, and identity — including how stigmatized cultural traditions have become devalued alongside the language.
5. To develop a framework for language revitalization that integrates cultural

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memory preservation as a central rather than supplementary dimension of the preservation effort.

1.6 Research Questions

1. What specific systems of cultural knowledge and collective memory are encoded in Dawoodi, and in what ways does this knowledge resist full translation into dominant languages?
2. How does declining Dawoodi competence among younger generations affect their access to the cultural memory encoded in the language, and how do community members experience and articulate this relationship?
3. How does the community's history of caste-based stigma — including the derogatory nomenclature system, the devil-origin narratives, and the stigmatization of traditional occupations — shape the relationship between language decline and cultural memory loss?
4. What is the relationship between ethnolinguistic identity and cultural memory in the Dawoodi community, and how is this relationship being transformed as language competence declines?
5. What does the Dawoodi case reveal about the relationship between language and cultural memory that has implications for endangered language theory and for revitalization practice?

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is significant at several levels. Theoretically, it extends the longitudinal research program on Dawoodi by adding the cultural memory dimension to the structural, lexical, ideological, and psychological dimensions established in earlier research, completing an integrated account of what is at stake in the language's endangerment. It contributes to the broader field of endangered language research by providing a detailed, empirically grounded analysis of the relationship between language decline and cultural memory loss in a specific community — a relationship that has been widely theorized but less frequently examined with the combination of linguistic and anthropological rigor that the longitudinal program enables.

Empirically, it adds new ethnographic, narrative, and oral history data to the research record on Dawoodi, providing the most comprehensive account yet available of the community's oral tradition, ceremonial heritage, and the systems of cultural knowledge encoded in the language. This empirical contribution has value both as scholarship and as documentation — as a contribution to the archive of knowledge about this community and its language that will exist regardless of the outcome of current revitalization efforts.

Practically, the study provides the analytical foundation for revitalization efforts that engage with cultural memory as a central rather than supplementary dimension, arguing that preserving the language without preserving the cultural knowledge it carries — and preserving the cultural knowledge without the language in which it was originally encoded — are both insufficient responses to the community's endangered situation.

1.8 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the relationship between language, cultural memory, and ethnolinguistic identity within the Dawoodi-speaking community of Mominabad, Hunza. It draws on ethnographic fieldwork, narrative analysis, and oral history

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documentation conducted within the community, complemented by the corpus and interview data generated across the longitudinal research program. The study is primarily qualitative and interpretive in its orientation, though it draws on quantitative findings from earlier research in the series where relevant. Its implications extend to the broader fields of endangered language linguistics, anthropology, cultural studies, and language policy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The relationship between language and cultural memory has been a central concern of the interdisciplinary field of endangered language research since at least the late twentieth century, when the scale of the global crisis of linguistic diversity began to be systematically documented. This chapter reviews the key theoretical and empirical literature on language, cultural memory, and ethnolinguistic identity as it bears on the present study of the Dawoodi community. It draws on established frameworks while identifying where the specific contributions of the present research lie.

2.2 Language as Cultural Repository: Theoretical Foundations

The foundational claim of this study — that language functions as a repository of cultural memory — rests on a theoretical tradition that extends from early twentieth-century anthropological linguistics through contemporary cognitive linguistics and endangered language research. Sapir's (1929) insight that language is not merely a vehicle of expression but a shaping force on thought and perception established the principle that different languages encode different ways of understanding the world. While the strong Whorfian claim that language determines thought has been substantially revised, the weaker claim that languages encode culturally specific frameworks for organizing experience — frameworks that resist full translation — is widely accepted and extensively documented (Lucy, 1992; Evans & Levinson, 2009).

Evans (2010), in his study of dying languages and what they carry, provides the most accessible and comprehensive account of how specific languages encode specific ways of understanding human experience: different kinship systems that organize family relationships differently, different spatial and directional frameworks that orient the self in the landscape differently, different systems of evidentiality that require speakers to indicate how they know what they are claiming, different ecological vocabularies that encode centuries of specialized knowledge about particular environments. Each of these systems is not merely a different linguistic form for encoding a universal content; it is a different way of structuring and transmitting culturally specific knowledge, a way that is fully available only through the language that developed it.

Harrison (2007) extends this argument specifically to endangered languages, documenting in detail what is lost when particular languages disappear: not merely communication systems but archives of human knowledge accumulated across millennia of specialized practice in specific environments and cultural contexts. His examination of specialized ecological vocabularies — the detailed taxonomic knowledge encoded in languages spoken by communities with centuries of experience of specific ecosystems — demonstrates concretely what Evans argues theoretically: that the loss of a language is the loss of a knowledge system that exists nowhere else.

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Crystal (2000) frames the argument in terms of cultural diversity, arguing that linguistic diversity is to human culture what biodiversity is to the natural world: a measure of the richness, resilience, and adaptability of the total system. When a language disappears, human culture loses a way of organizing experience — a perspective, a knowledge system, a set of cultural practices — that is as irreplaceable as an extinct species. The parallel is imperfect but illuminating: both biodiversity and linguistic diversity represent accumulated complexity that, once lost, cannot be recreated.

For the Dawoodi community, these theoretical arguments take on concrete form through the empirical findings of the longitudinal research program. The lexical attrition documented by Ishfaq and Bhatti (2020) is not merely a reduction in vocabulary size; it is the progressive erasure of the semantic systems through which the community has historically organized kinship relationships, encoded craft knowledge, and transmitted oral narrative. The structural collapse documented by Ishfaq and Bhatti (2021) is not merely a simplification of grammatical complexity; it is the erosion of the formal systems through which cultural knowledge is structured and transmitted. And the contact-induced changes documented by Ishfaq and Bhatti (2023a) are not merely the natural outcome of multilingualism; they are the progressive replacement of Dawoodi cultural frameworks with the frameworks of dominant languages that do not carry the same cultural content.

2.3 Cultural Memory: Halbwachs, Assmann, and the Social Dimensions of Memory

The concept of cultural memory, developed most influentially by Jan Assmann (1995; 2011) and building on the earlier work of Maurice Halbwachs (1950/1992) on collective memory, provides a theoretical framework for understanding how communities maintain their shared sense of identity and continuity across generations through the preservation and transmission of shared representations of the past.

Halbwachs (1950/1992) established the foundational insight that memory is fundamentally social: individual memories are formed, maintained, and recalled within social frameworks that provide the structures through which past experience is organized and made meaningful. Collective memory — the shared representations of the past that communities maintain and transmit — is not merely the aggregation of individual memories but a social construction that serves to constitute and sustain communal identity.

Assmann (1995; 2011) extends this framework by distinguishing between communicative memory — the living memory of recent events transmitted through everyday communication among contemporaries — and cultural memory — the institutionalized, formalized memory of the more distant past transmitted through ritual, ceremony, narrative, and cultural practice. Cultural memory is maintained through what Assmann calls memory figures: the stable, codified representations of significant past events, persons, and practices that constitute a community's sense of its own history and identity. Languages are central to the transmission of cultural memory because they are the primary medium through which memory figures are encoded, communicated, and reproduced across generations.

For endangered language communities, the relationship between language and cultural memory identified by Assmann has urgent implications. When a language ceases to be

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transmitted, the cultural memory encoded in it — the memory figures, the narrative traditions, the ceremonial language through which communal identity is constituted — becomes inaccessible to the generations that do not speak the language. The community does not immediately lose its cultural memory; elder speakers continue to carry it. But the chain of transmission is broken, and the cultural memory becomes increasingly archival — preserved in the memories of aging speakers but no longer living in the everyday linguistic practice through which it would be reproduced and renewed (Nettle & Romaine, 2000).

In the Dawoodi community, this dynamic is documented with particular clarity across the longitudinal research program. The intergenerational disruption established by Ishfaq and Bhatti (2019) is not merely a sociolinguistic phenomenon; it is a disruption of the chain of cultural memory transmission. The oral traditions, ceremonial language, and encoded cultural knowledge that elder speakers carry in Dawoodi are not being transmitted to younger generations — not because younger speakers are uninterested, but because the linguistic medium through which this transmission occurs is no longer being acquired.

2.4 Ethnolinguistic Identity and Language Vitality

The theory of ethnolinguistic vitality developed by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) establishes language as a central marker of ethnic group identity and argues that the vitality of a language — measured across dimensions of status, demographic strength, and institutional support — is directly related to the coherence and confidence of the ethnolinguistic identity it marks. Languages with high vitality sustain strong, confident ethnolinguistic identities; languages with low vitality sustain fragmented, contested, and increasingly difficult-to-transmit identities.

Edwards (2009) extends the ethnolinguistic identity framework to examine the complex relationships between language, identity, and cultural continuity in communities experiencing language shift. His analysis demonstrates that language shift does not necessarily dissolve ethnolinguistic identity immediately: communities can maintain ethnic and cultural identities even after language shift, substituting other markers of group membership for language. However, he also documents how this substitution is always partial: the cultural knowledge, oral traditions, and social practices that were encoded in the heritage language are not fully transferable to the dominant language, and the ethnolinguistic identity that survives language shift is therefore impoverished relative to the identity that the heritage language carried.

For the Dawoodi community, the ethnolinguistic identity situation is further complicated by the specific history of caste-based stigmatization examined in earlier research. As Ishfaq and Bhatti (2022; 2024) demonstrate, the community's ethnolinguistic identity has historically been constituted not only through language and cultural tradition but through a social position — the lowest caste in the Hunza hierarchy — that has been a source of stigma and shame rather than of cultural pride. The community's identity reconstruction efforts — including the renaming of the language as Dawoodi and of the village as Mominabad, documented by Akhter (2023) — represent attempts to reconstitute ethnolinguistic identity on the basis of dignity rather than stigma. The present study examines how these efforts relate to the preservation and transmission of cultural memory, asking whether the reclamation of a

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dignified ethnolinguistic identity can provide the motivational foundation for renewed engagement with the cultural memory that the language carries.

2.5 Oral Tradition, Narrative, and Language

The relationship between oral tradition and language is particularly intimate and particularly vulnerable to language shift. Oral traditions — the stories, proverbs, ceremonial texts, and narrative conventions through which communities transmit cultural memory across generations — are not merely content that happens to be expressed in a particular language; they are formal as well as semantic constructions whose full meaning is inseparable from the linguistic forms in which they are encoded. Foley (1988) demonstrates in his foundational study of oral epic traditions that oral narrative is characterized by formulaic language — recurring phrases, epithets, and structural patterns that are not merely decorative but constitutive of the narrative's meaning and aesthetic effect. When oral traditions are translated into another language, or when language shift means that they are transmitted by speakers who have incomplete command of the formulaic resources of the traditional language, the formal dimension of the tradition is lost even when the semantic content is preserved. What survives is a summary of the tradition, not the tradition itself.

Vansina (1985) documents extensively how oral tradition functions as a primary vehicle of collective memory in communities without writing, preserving historical knowledge, social values, and cultural identity across generations through the systematic transmission of codified narrative. The dependence of this transmission on the maintenance of the language in which the tradition was developed is absolute: when the language ceases to be transmitted, the oral tradition cannot be transmitted in its full form, and the cultural memory it carries is progressively reduced to the imperfect summaries available in dominant language translation.

For the Dawoodi community, the oral tradition dimension of language and cultural memory is particularly significant. As documented in earlier research (Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2020), and as the present study examines in detail, Dawoodi carries an oral tradition of considerable richness: founding narratives, migration stories, ceremonial texts, proverbs, and the specialized musical and craft knowledge transmitted through apprenticeship and oral instruction. This tradition is currently carried primarily by elder speakers and is not being fully transmitted to younger generations. The present study documents what this tradition contains and what declining transmission means for its future.

2.6 Language, Cultural Practices, and Embodied Knowledge

The relationship between language and cultural practice is not limited to the explicit, verbal transmission of oral tradition. Language is also the medium through which embodied, practical cultural knowledge — the knowledge of how to make things, how to perform ceremonies, how to navigate social relationships — is transmitted, evaluated, and maintained. When blacksmiths teach their craft, they do so through language; when musicians transmit their tradition, they do so through a combination of demonstration and verbal instruction; when community elders perform the social roles that organize collective life, they do so through the ceremonial and social language that those roles require.

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Ingold (2000) argues that skilled practice — the embodied knowledge of craft, of navigation, of environmental engagement — is transmitted through a combination of direct participation and linguistic apprenticeship: the novice learns not only by watching and doing but by participating in the verbal contexts through which skilled practitioners describe, evaluate, and reflect on their practice. When the language of this verbal apprenticeship is lost, the transmission of skilled practice is disrupted even when the physical demonstration continues.

For the Dawoodi community, this argument has direct relevance. The blacksmithing tradition that defined the community's identity and social position for centuries was transmitted through a combination of physical apprenticeship and Dawoodi verbal instruction: the technical vocabulary through which tools, materials, processes, and qualities were named and evaluated was Dawoodi vocabulary, and the social relationships of apprenticeship within which this transmission occurred were organized through Dawoodi social practice. As Ishfaq and Bhatti (2020) document, this vocabulary is among the most severely affected domains of Dawoodi lexical attrition. The present study examines what the loss of this vocabulary means for the transmission of the blacksmithing tradition and what it reveals about the relationship between language and practical cultural knowledge.

2.7 Research Gap

The longitudinal research program on Dawoodi has established what is happening to the language structurally, lexically, ideologically, and psychologically. What it has not yet examined in dedicated focus is the cultural memory dimension: what Dawoodi carries culturally, how this cultural content is constituted through the language, and what its decline means for the community's ethnolinguistic identity and cultural continuity. The present study addresses this gap by drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, narrative analysis, and oral history documentation to provide the first systematic examination of language and cultural memory in the Dawoodi context.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The investigation of language and cultural memory requires methodological approaches that can access both the linguistic forms through which cultural knowledge is encoded and the lived experiences of community members who carry, transmit, or are losing access to that knowledge. This study employs a qualitative research design combining ethnographic fieldwork, narrative analysis, and oral history documentation, complemented by the corpus and interview data generated across the longitudinal research program.

3.2 Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

The study is situated within an interpretive research paradigm that prioritizes the understanding of meaning — how community members make sense of their linguistic and cultural situation — over the measurement of frequency or distribution. This orientation is appropriate for the study's central questions, which concern the experiential and cultural dimensions of language decline rather than its quantitative parameters, which have been addressed in earlier research in the series (Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2019; 2020; 2023a).

The research design integrates ethnographic and narrative approaches in a way that is

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consistent with what Creswell (2014) describes as a phenomenological case study: an intensive investigation of a specific community's experience of a significant social phenomenon — in this case, the progressive loss of access to cultural memory as language competence declines — that seeks to understand the meaning of this experience from the perspectives of those living it.

The design builds on and complements the earlier studies in the longitudinal program by adding new methodological dimensions — ethnographic observation and oral history documentation — that were not the primary focus of earlier research, while drawing on the corpus, interview, and attitudinal data those studies generated to provide contextual depth and comparative grounding.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Ethnographic Fieldwork. Extended ethnographic observation was conducted in Mominabad across multiple fieldwork visits, focusing on contexts in which language and cultural practice intersect: household interactions involving multiple generations, community gatherings and ceremonial occasions, the remaining craft and musical practice within the community, and educational settings in which the relationship between heritage language competence and cultural knowledge access is directly observable. Field notes recorded both the observable dimensions of language use in cultural contexts and the researcher's analytical observations about what cultural knowledge was being activated, transmitted, or lost in specific interactions.

Oral History Documentation. Oral history interviews were conducted with elder speakers, focusing specifically on the dimensions of cultural knowledge encoded in Dawoodi: the oral narrative traditions the speakers carry, the ceremonial and social language of traditional community life, the craft and musical vocabulary of traditional occupational practice, and the speakers' own reflections on how Dawoodi carries knowledge and identity that other languages in their repertoire cannot carry in the same way. Oral histories were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed with particular attention to the formal as well as the semantic dimensions of traditional language use — attending to the formulaic expressions, the narrative conventions, and the ceremonial registers that mark specific kinds of speech as culturally significant.

Narrative Analysis. Traditional oral narratives — founding stories, migration accounts, ceremonial texts, and proverbs — were elicited from elder speakers and subjected to formal narrative analysis using frameworks drawn from Labov and Waletzky (1967) and Foley (1988), examining not only the content of the narratives but their formal linguistic features: the formulaic expressions that structure them, the specific vocabulary that is essential to their full cultural meaning, and the aspects that are lost or transformed when they are rendered in dominant languages. This analysis provides the most direct evidence available for the claim that cultural memory is encoded in language in ways that resist full translation.

Cross-Generational Comparison. Younger speakers were asked to engage with selected oral narratives and cultural knowledge domains — to retell stories they had heard from elders, to discuss traditional practices they knew about, to use the vocabulary of traditional occupational and ceremonial domains. The comparison between elder speaker production and younger speaker engagement with the same material provides direct evidence of how declining language competence affects access

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to cultural memory.

3.4 Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected using purposive sampling designed to capture the full range of the community's engagement with Dawoodi as a carrier of cultural memory. The sample included elder fluent speakers who are primary carriers of the oral tradition and traditional cultural knowledge; middle-generation speakers who occupy the transitional position between full oral tradition competence and dominant language orientation; and younger speakers whose limited Dawoodi competence provides evidence of how cultural memory access is affected by language decline. Community members with specific traditional knowledge — the remaining blacksmiths, the musicians, the community elders who perform ceremonial roles — were specifically sought out as participants with particular expertise in the cultural dimensions of language the study examines. Snowball sampling was employed to identify participants with especially relevant knowledge (Milroy & Gordon, 2003).

3.5 Data Analysis

Oral history recordings were transcribed and analyzed using narrative analysis techniques (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; Riessman, 2008), attending to the formal and semantic dimensions of traditional language use. Ethnographic field notes were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), organized around themes emerging from both the theoretical framework and the data: oral tradition and its linguistic encoding; craft knowledge and language; ceremonial language and social organization; the experience of cultural memory loss; and the relationship between ethnolinguistic identity and cultural memory. Cross-generational comparison of engagement with cultural knowledge domains was analyzed both qualitatively (through thematic analysis of the content and character of responses) and with reference to the quantitative findings on lexical competence established in Ishfaq and Bhatti (2020).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Research with a culturally sensitive community that has a history of discrimination and whose oral tradition and cultural knowledge constitute heritage deserving particular protection requires strict ethical care. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Oral history recordings and transcriptions are treated as community property and will be returned to the community in a form accessible to community members. Participants' identities are protected throughout. The study is conducted with explicit awareness that the cultural knowledge documented here is the community's heritage, and that the researchers' role is to assist in its preservation and accessibility rather than to appropriate it for scholarly purposes.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, organized around five analytical themes that together provide a comprehensive account of the relationship between language, cultural memory, and ethnolinguistic identity in the Dawoodi community: the oral tradition and its linguistic encoding; craft and musical knowledge as culturally embedded language; ceremonial language and social organization; the experience of cultural disconnection among younger speakers; and the relationship between the community's history of stigma, its identity reconstruction efforts, and the future of its

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cultural memory.

4.2 The Oral Tradition: Cultural Memory in Its Purest Linguistic Form

The oral tradition of the Dawoodi community represents the most direct and formally developed system through which cultural memory is encoded in language. Elder speakers carry a rich repertoire of narrative forms — founding stories, migration accounts, explanatory myths, historical narratives, proverbs, and ceremonial texts — that constitute the community's shared archive of collective experience. The formal analysis of these narratives reveals the extent to which their full cultural meaning is inseparable from the specific linguistic forms in which they are expressed.

Elder speakers' production of traditional narratives exhibits consistent formal features that mark them as distinct from ordinary conversational speech: formulaic opening and closing expressions that frame the narrative as a special kind of utterance; recurring lexical and phrasal patterns that provide structural organization and aesthetic coherence; and specific vocabulary items — often archaic, often untranslatable, often carrying multiple layers of cultural meaning — that are essential to the narrative's full significance.

The founding narratives documented in this study — the migration stories that trace the community's origins to Kashmir, the arrival narratives of the founding craft specialists, and the accounts of early settlement in the Hunza Valley — function as primary cultural memory texts: they encode the community's understanding of where it came from, how it became what it is, and what values and practices define its collective identity. As Assmann (1995) would predict, these narratives are not merely historical accounts but identity-constituting memory figures: they tell the community not only what happened in the past but who it is in the present.

The formal linguistic features of these narratives are critical to their identity-constituting function. The opening formulae that mark a narrative as traditional — that signal to the audience that what follows is not ordinary conversation but a transmission of collective memory — are specific Dawoodi expressions that carry no equivalent in Urdu. The recurring phrasal patterns that provide narrative structure are Dawoodi constructions. The archaic vocabulary that elder speakers use in narrative contexts — vocabulary that Ishfaq and Bhatti (2020) documented as among the most severely attrited in the lexical systems of younger speakers — is embedded in these narratives as essential rather than decorative: it carries cultural meanings that more recent vocabulary cannot replicate.

When younger speakers attempt to retell the same narratives, the contrast with elder speaker production is stark and analytically revealing. Younger speakers can convey the plot — the sequence of events, the outcome, the general moral — in Urdu or in highly simplified Dawoodi. What they cannot convey is the form: the opening formulae are absent or replaced with generic conversational markers; the recurring patterns are not reproduced; the archaic vocabulary is absent, replaced by dominant-language equivalents that capture some of the semantic content but none of the cultural resonance. What survives is, in the terms used earlier, a summary of the tradition — not the tradition itself.

One elder male speaker reflected on this contrast with quiet precision: "When I tell this story, I am telling it the way my father told it and his father told it before him. Every

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word has its place. When my grandchildren tell it, they are telling something like the story. But it is not the same. The words carry the weight. Without the words, it is just an outline." This testimony articulates, from within the community, the theoretical claim that has been established in the literature: that oral tradition is not merely content carried by language but content constituted by language, and that the loss of the linguistic forms is the loss of the tradition in its full cultural meaning.

4.3 The Language of the Forge and the Song: Craft Knowledge and Musical Heritage

The relationship between language and cultural knowledge is particularly vivid in the domains of blacksmithing and music — the two defining craft traditions of the Dawoodi community. The specialized vocabulary of these traditions represents not merely technical terminology but a system of cultural knowledge that was developed within the community across centuries of practice and that exists, in its full form, only in Dawoodi.

The blacksmithing vocabulary documented from elder speakers in this study encompasses terms for specific tools, materials, processes, qualities of iron and finished work, and the social relationships of craft apprenticeship. These terms are not merely alternative names for concepts that could equally well be expressed in Urdu; they encode a specific technical knowledge system that reflects the particular methods, materials, and aesthetic standards of the Hunza blacksmithing tradition. The term for a specific type of agricultural tool produced by traditional Hunza blacksmiths, for example, encodes not only the object's identity but its function, its quality standards, and its place in the material culture of traditional Hunza farming — all of which are available to a Dawoodi speaker through a single lexical item that has no Urdu equivalent carrying the same cultural weight.

The five remaining blacksmiths in the community — whose continued practice represents the last living connection to a craft tradition that defined the Dawoodi community for centuries — speak of their work in Dawoodi when they are speaking to each other or to the researchers, and in an impoverished mixture of Urdu and technical terms when speaking to younger community members who do not have the Dawoodi vocabulary. One elder blacksmith described the experience with both precision and sadness: "When I teach a young one, I must first teach him the words. But the words are Dawoodi, and he does not have Dawoodi. So I teach him Urdu words for things, but those words do not carry what the Dawoodi words carry. He learns what to do. He does not learn what it means."

This testimony captures a distinction that the theoretical literature on embodied knowledge (Ingold, 2000) makes in abstract terms: between the technical competence to perform an action and the cultural knowledge of what that action means within a larger system of practice, value, and identity. The Dawoodi vocabulary of blacksmithing encodes not only technical procedures but the cultural significance of those procedures — their place in the social world of the Dawoodi community, their relationship to the community's history and identity, their aesthetic standards and evaluative frameworks. When the vocabulary is lost, the technical competence may be preserved but the cultural meaning is not.

The musical heritage presents a parallel and, in some respects, more poignant

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dimension of this analysis. The community's musical tradition — documented comprehensively by Schmid (2007) and reflected on in detail by elder community members in this study — is a system of specialized knowledge that encompasses specific instruments and their construction, a repertoire of tunes organized around their ceremonial contexts and their social meanings, and an aesthetic vocabulary for evaluating musical performance that is entirely Dawoodi. The irony documented by Schmid (2007) — that the words of songs performed on instruments made and played by the Dawoodi were in Brushaski rather than in Dawoodi, so that even the dominant community did not know the Dawoodi names of the instruments the Dawoodi built — is highlighted here as a historical demonstration of the structural conditions through which the community's cultural knowledge was made invisible while its labor was appropriated.

4.4 Ceremonial Language, Social Organization, and the Grammar of Community Life

Beyond the oral narrative tradition and the craft and musical vocabularies, Dawoodi encodes cultural memory through the ceremonial and social language through which community life has historically been organized. The language of lifecycle ceremonies — birth, marriage, death — the language of community decision-making and conflict resolution, the language of seasonal agricultural practice and its social organization, and the language of hospitality and social exchange all constitute specialized registers of Dawoodi that carry cultural knowledge about how social life is organized and what values structure it.

These ceremonial and social registers are among the most vulnerable dimensions of Dawoodi cultural memory because they require not merely linguistic competence but social context for their full meaning to be activated. When ceremonies are conducted in Urdu or in a highly simplified Dawoodi that lacks the full formal register, not only is the linguistic form lost but the social meaning that the formal register carries — the respect it commands, the collective identity it constitutes, the connections to past practice it affirms — is diminished.

Elder speakers' reflections on the changing language of ceremonial contexts reveal a consistent and painful pattern: where their own childhoods and early adult lives were organized through Dawoodi ceremonial language, the ceremonies of the present generation are conducted in Urdu or in a hybrid that no one would recognize as traditional. One elder female speaker described her experience of her granddaughter's wedding with a mixture of pride in the occasion and grief at its linguistic form: "It was a beautiful celebration. But the words were Urdu words, modern words. When I was married, the words were old Dawoodi words that my grandmother had used at her wedding, and her grandmother before her. Those words connected us to everyone who had come before. The new words are just for now. They do not connect to anything."

This testimony articulates, from within the community, the concept of cultural memory that Assmann (1995) theorizes from without: the ceremonial language does not merely express social values; it constitutes them, connecting the present to the past through the specific formal tradition that marks the occasion as belonging to a continuous community extending across time.

4.5 Cultural Disconnection and the Fragmentation of Ethnolinguistic Identity

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The cross-generational comparison of engagement with Dawoodi cultural knowledge reveals a pattern of progressive cultural disconnection that maps closely onto the pattern of linguistic competence loss documented in earlier research. Younger speakers' limited Dawoodi competence does not merely restrict their communicative capacity; it restricts their access to the cultural memory that the language carries, producing a condition in which they are increasingly unable to access the oral traditions, craft knowledge, ceremonial language, and social practices that have historically constituted the community's ethnolinguistic identity.

This cultural disconnection is experienced and articulated by community members across all generational cohorts, though differently by each. Elder speakers experience it primarily as loss and grief: the knowledge they carry, accumulated across lifetimes of practice within the community's traditional cultural world, is not being transmitted, and they are aware that when they are gone, much of what they know will go with them. Their ethnolinguistic identity — the sense of who they are constituted through their full command of Dawoodi and everything it carries — remains intact, but they carry it increasingly alone.

Middle-generation speakers experience it primarily as ambivalence and regret: they retain enough Dawoodi competence to access some of the cultural memory the language carries, and enough cultural knowledge to understand what younger speakers are losing, but they have made decisions — in how they raised their children, in the language choices they made within the household — that have contributed to the disconnection they now observe with sorrow. Their ethnolinguistic identity is constituted through a mixture of heritage attachment and dominant language orientation that reflects the transitional position they occupy.

Younger speakers' experience of cultural disconnection is, paradoxically, both the most severe and the least consciously felt. Because they have grown up with limited Dawoodi competence, the cultural memory that fluent Dawoodi carries is not a living presence from which they feel cut off; it is more like a distant inheritance they know exists but cannot access. Several younger speakers described this experience with metaphors of geographic distance rather than active loss: the culture is "somewhere back there," "in the old language," "with the grandparents." This spatial metaphor — which recurs across multiple interviews — is itself revealing: it frames the cultural memory carried by Dawoodi as somewhere that younger speakers know exists but cannot visit, a territory whose language of access they have not fully acquired.

This condition of cultural distance represents the advanced stage of what the present study conceptualizes as ethnolinguistic identity fragmentation: a condition in which the community retains an awareness of the cultural memory that the heritage language carries but increasingly lacks the linguistic means to access it fully. The ethnolinguistic identity that survives is real but impoverished: it carries the awareness of heritage without the full capacity for engagement with that heritage that fluent language competence would provide.

4.6 Stigma, Reclamation, and the Future of Cultural Memory

The relationship between the community's history of caste-based stigmatization and its engagement with cultural memory is one of the most analytically complex dimensions of the present study. The cultural traditions most closely associated with the Dawoodi

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community's identity — blacksmithing and music — are also the traditions most directly stigmatized by the dominant society's derogatory narratives about the community's origins (Schmid, 2007; Ishfaq & Bhatti, 2024). The devil-origin narrative that attributes the musical tradition to instruction by sheitan and the curse-of-Da'ud narrative that attributes the blacksmiths' difficult social position to ancestral theft constitute a system of cosmological stigma that has made these traditions — and the language in which they are encoded — objects of shame rather than pride for younger speakers who have absorbed the dominant society's evaluative framework.

The community's reclamation of the name Dawoodi — connecting the language to the Prophet Da'ud rather than to devilish ancestry and ancestral sin — represents the most significant act of cultural memory reclamation the community has performed. By renaming their language after the prophet whose forge their ancestor violated (in the dominant narrative), the community has attempted to transform their relationship to their own cultural memory: from the lineage of thieves who incurred a curse to the bearers of a prophetic tradition. The attitudinal data from Ishfaq and Bhatti (2024) demonstrates that this reclamation has succeeded in creating a positive evaluative anchor for the language in the minds of community members across all generations — the name Dawoodi consistently generates dramatically more positive evaluations than any imposed name.

The challenge is whether this positive evaluation of the name can be extended to a positive evaluation of the cultural memory the language carries — whether the community's recognition of Dawoodi as a dignified name can provide the motivational foundation for renewed engagement with the oral traditions, craft knowledge, and ceremonial practices that the language encodes. The present study's findings suggest that this potential exists but that it requires active cultivation: the elder speakers who carry this cultural memory are still living, and the cultural knowledge is still present within the community in fragmented form. The window for revitalization — for creating the conditions in which younger community members can access, engage with, and begin to reinhabit the cultural memory that Dawoodi carries — is narrow but not yet closed.

5. Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

5.1 Language as the Irreplaceable Medium of Cultural Memory

The findings of this study confirm and extend the theoretical claim that language functions as a repository of cultural memory in ways that resist full translation into other languages. In the Dawoodi community, this claim is not a theoretical abstraction but an empirically documented reality: the oral tradition, craft knowledge, ceremonial language, and social practices encoded in Dawoodi constitute a system of cultural memory that is partially inaccessible to younger speakers whose Dawoodi competence has declined, and that will become progressively less accessible as the generation of fluent elder speakers passes.

The specific dimensions of cultural memory that the present study has documented — the formal features of oral narrative that constitute tradition rather than merely transmit content; the craft vocabulary that encodes technical knowledge within a cultural framework of meaning; the ceremonial language that connects present practice to historical community; and the social vocabulary that organizes collective life according

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to culturally specific values — each demonstrates in its own way that language is not merely the vehicle of cultural memory but its constitutive medium. The cultural memory does not exist independently of the language that encodes it and then use language to communicate itself; it exists in and through the language, and the loss of the language is not the loss of the vehicle but of the memory itself.

This finding has implications that extend well beyond the specific case of Dawoodi. It supports and empirically elaborates the position of Evans (2010) and Harrison (2007) against skeptical accounts that minimize the cultural consequences of language loss by arguing that cultural content can be translated. What cannot be translated, the Dawoodi case demonstrates, is not the semantic content of cultural knowledge — the plot of a story, the function of a tool, the sequence of a ceremony — but the formal and evaluative dimensions through which that content carries its full cultural meaning. When the formal features of oral narrative are lost, what survives is an outline. When the craft vocabulary is replaced by dominant-language equivalents, what survives is a procedure without a cultural framework. When the ceremonial language is replaced by everyday speech, what survives is an occasion without a tradition.

5.2 Ethnolinguistic Identity Fragmentation as a Stage in Language Death

The condition of ethnolinguistic identity fragmentation documented in this study — in which the community retains awareness of the cultural memory carried by the heritage language but increasingly lacks the linguistic means to access it fully — represents an analytically significant stage in the process of language death that has not been adequately theorized in existing models. Fishman's (1991) GIDS scale describes stages of language vitality from active transmission to extinction, but it does not fully capture the psychological and cultural experience of communities at the advanced stages: the condition in which the community knows what it carries but increasingly cannot reach it, in which cultural memory is present as an awareness but not as a living practice.

This condition is qualitatively different from both the stage that precedes it — in which cultural memory is fully alive within a community that actively transmits it — and the stage that follows it — in which cultural memory has been reduced to archival documentation and scholarly reconstruction. It is a liminal stage: the memory is still living but its transmission is broken; the knowledge is still present in the community but its access requires a linguistic key that fewer and fewer community members possess. This liminal quality makes it particularly significant for revitalization: it is the stage at which intervention is still possible — the cultural memory has not yet been lost — but at which the urgency is most acute, because the elder speakers who carry the full cultural knowledge in its living form are passing.

The concept of ethnolinguistic identity fragmentation, developed in this study to describe the Dawoodi community's situation, may have applicability to other endangered language communities at comparable stages of language decline, providing a more analytically precise framework for describing the psychological and cultural dimensions of advanced language endangerment than existing models offer.

5.3 Implications for Revitalization

The findings of this study have direct and specific implications for how revitalization efforts for Dawoodi should be designed. The central implication is stated in the research's framing: revitalization must go beyond structural documentation and

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linguistic pedagogy to encompass the preservation and transmission of the cultural narratives and practices that are embedded within the language and inseparable from it.

Documentation must prioritize cultural memory. The oral tradition documentation initiated in this study must be urgently expanded. Every elder speaker who carries the full formal oral narrative tradition, the ceremonial language registers, and the specialized craft and musical vocabulary represents an irreplaceable archive that will not survive their passing. Documentation programs must prioritize not merely recording these speakers' language but recording them in the cultural contexts — the narrative occasions, the ceremonial events, the craft practices — that activate the full registers of cultural memory-carrying speech.

Revitalization must make the cultural memory of Dawoodi viscerally present. Younger speakers' cultural disconnection is not primarily intellectual — they know, in the abstract, that Dawoodi carries cultural knowledge they lack access to — but experiential: they have not had the visceral experience of what the language carries, the direct encounter with the oral tradition in its full formal power, the apprenticeship in craft practice through the Dawoodi vocabulary that encodes it. Revitalization programs must create these experiences: not classroom instruction in Dawoodi grammar, but structured encounters with the living cultural memory that fluent speakers carry.

The community's reclamation of Dawoodi as their chosen name must be the foundation. The positive evaluative charge that the name Dawoodi carries in the minds of community members across all generations, documented by Ishfaq and Bhatti (2024), is the most important existing psychological resource for revitalization. Programs that build on this positive charge — that connect the cultural richness of the oral tradition, the craft heritage, and the ceremonial language explicitly to the dignity of the Dawoodi name — can potentially transform the abstract positive evaluation of the name into a concrete positive engagement with the cultural memory the language carries.

Revitalization must challenge the stigmatization of traditional cultural practices. The devil-origin narratives and the derogatory naming system documented by Schmid (2007) and analyzed by Ishfaq and Bhatti (2024) have stigmatized the cultural traditions — blacksmithing and music — that are most closely associated with Dawoodi linguistic knowledge. Revitalization efforts that celebrate these traditions as evidence of extraordinary skill and cultural richness, rather than as markers of low social status, can begin to create the conditions in which engagement with the cultural memory encoded in them is motivated by pride rather than avoided through shame.

5.4 The Longitudinal Program: A Synthesis

The present study completes and synthesizes the longitudinal research program on Dawoodi by adding the cultural memory dimension that the earlier studies had approached from different angles but not examined in dedicated focus. The complete program can now be understood as tracing the story of a community's language from six complementary perspectives.

Ishfaq and Bhatti (2019) asked: what is happening to the transmission of Dawoodi across generations? Ishfaq and Bhatti (2020) asked: what specifically is being lost at the lexical level, and what cultural knowledge goes with it? Ishfaq and Bhatti (2021) asked: what is the full structural and evolutionary trajectory of the language? Ishfaq and

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Bhatti (2022) asked: what structural and institutional conditions produce and sustain this trajectory? Ishfaq and Bhatti (2023a) asked: through what specific contact-induced mechanisms is structural change enacted in everyday speech? Ishfaq and Bhatti (2023b) asked: how do speaker attitudes and identity investments drive language shift at the psychological level? Ishfaq and Bhatti (2024) asked: how has the community's history of caste-based stigma and derogatory nomenclature transformed the heritage language into a liability, and what does the community's reclamation of the Dawoodi name mean? And the present study asks: what cultural memory does Dawoodi carry, how does declining language competence affect access to that memory, and what is the relationship between language loss and ethnolinguistic identity fragmentation?

Together, these eight studies constitute a research program of unusual depth and comprehensiveness that has produced, over seven years of sustained investigation, the most complete scholarly account of an endangered minority language and community in the Hunza region currently available, while making original theoretical contributions — the concept of post-creole collapse, the analysis of cosmological stigma and derogatory nomenclature as mechanisms of language death, the concept of ethnolinguistic identity fragmentation — that extend beyond the specific case to the broader field of endangered language research.

5.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The qualitative orientation of this study, while essential for accessing the experiential and cultural dimensions of language and cultural memory, limits the generalizability of its findings in ways that quantitative approaches do not. The sample, while purposively designed to capture the full range of the community's cultural knowledge engagement, is necessarily constrained by the small size of the Dawoodi-speaking community. Future research should employ longitudinal tracking of cultural knowledge access among younger speakers over time, examining whether revitalization efforts have measurable effects on cultural reconnection.

Research specifically focused on the musical heritage — the most publicly visible dimension of Dawoodi cultural tradition — would complement the present study's broader focus on oral tradition and craft knowledge. Comparative research examining the relationship between language and cultural memory in other endangered artisan and musician community languages of South Asia and Central Asia would establish whether the patterns documented for Dawoodi reflect a broader regional dynamic.

5.6 Conclusion

The Dawoodi language carries more than words. It carries the founding stories through which the Dawoodi community understands where it came from and who it is. It carries the craft knowledge of the blacksmiths whose forge served Hunza for centuries. It carries the musical tradition of the musicians whose instruments announced the movements of the Mir and accompanied every significant moment of community life. It carries the ceremonial language that connects the present to the past through the formal tradition of collective practice. And it carries the names — above all, the chosen name Dawoodi — through which the community has defined itself with dignity rather than accepting the identities that the dominant society has imposed.

When younger speakers do not speak Dawoodi, they do not merely lose a communication system. They lose access to this archive — progressively,

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imperceptibly, irreversibly. The oral traditions become summaries. The craft vocabulary becomes generic terminology. The ceremonial language becomes ordinary speech. The connection to the past becomes a distant awareness rather than a living practice. And the ethnolinguistic identity constituted through all of these — the specific, irreplaceable sense of who this community is and where it comes from — becomes fragmented, hollowed, increasingly difficult to inhabit.

The present study has documented what is in this archive, mapped the dimensions of disconnection that declining language competence is producing, and argued for a revitalization approach that treats cultural memory as central rather than supplementary to the preservation effort. The window for such an approach is narrow: the elder speakers who carry the full cultural memory in its living form are still present in the community, and the oral traditions, craft knowledge, and ceremonial practices they carry are still recoverable. What is needed now — urgently, before that window closes — is the will, the resources, and the scholarly and institutional support to make the recovery possible.

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