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# The Raja's Big Ears: The Journey of a Story across Cultures

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The story of *The Raja's Big Ears*, as we encountered it, has been on a long journey. In the course of a wider study of the language use and literacy practices of Gujarati-speaking Muslim children in a North London community, children were recorded retelling the tale both in English and Gujarati. The present study explores how the story travelled: from Gujarat, in India, where it is a well-known folk tale, via a skilled story-teller, to London, where it was transformed through contact with the multicultural world of London schoolchildren. The study is situated within the theoretical framework of language shift, social networks and the Cummins' concept of the Common Underlying Proficiency. As the children in the study retold the tale, we looked more closely at how they – third generation Londoners and speakers of a dialect of Gujarati – came to terms with the very formal and unfamiliar standard Gujarati of the story, and how they made it their own.

## Introduction

The daily lives of many children from new minority communities in Britain are lived in two or more languages. A study of language maintenance and shift entitled 'Language and Literacy in the Multilingual Family' was carried out in the Gujarati and Urdu speaking Muslim community in London from 1996 to 1999. The language use and literacy practices of 36 children aged 3½, 7 and 11 were explored in their families, their community and their schools. The study tracked the children's use of three languages within their three-generation families. Story-telling and literacy experiences within the family were investigated, as well as the relationship between these and the children's literacy in school in English (Sneddon, 2000a & b).

As a means of verifying the children's levels of fluency in their two main languages of Gujarati and English, they were asked to retell a story (a different one for each age group) in both languages. While all the stories provided valuable information about how children's linguistic and narrative skills were developing, the stories told by the 11-year-olds particularly attracted our attention. By that age the children had attained a fairly high level of bilingualism and their narratives proved to be of great interest, both with respect to style and content and the actual language used.

After the completion of the study, the transcriptions of the children's Gujarati narratives tempted us into further investigations. We looked at the way in which the children interpreted the story in their own way, according to their competence in Gujarati and the particular dialect they use, and what this revealed about the shifting patterns of language in their community. This in turn led us to look at

the story itself and how the book that we had chosen in a dual-text English and Gujarati version had developed from an Indian folktale.

### **The story-tellers and their community in the context of research**

The children are part of a three-generation Gujarati Muslim community which settled in the north-east of London in the 1960s. The families originated from the district of Surat, in the region of Gujarat in India. They speak a dialect of Gujarati, sometimes referred to as Surti. As practising Muslims they live in close proximity to a mosque which provides daily religious instruction for the children. Participants in the earlier study by Sneddon who were born or educated in India are literate in both Gujarati and Urdu and some in English as well (2000b).

The survey of language use within the families revealed a pattern of language shift towards the majority language: the children spoke Gujarati with their grandparents, Gujarati and English with their parents and noticeably more English with their siblings and friends. This pattern is typical in new minority communities (Fishman, 1972, 1980, 1989). In the British context this is documented by the Linguistic Minorities Project (LMP, 1985) and in more recent studies of language use among bilingual schoolchildren (Blackledge, 1993, 2000; Cramer, 1997).

The work of Milroy in Belfast and of Li Wei in Tyneside suggests that the density of social networks has an effect on language use (Milroy, 1987) and the speed of language shift (Li Wei, 1994; LMP, 1985). The social networks of the families in the Sneddon study were investigated (2000b). One of the most significant findings was that children who had substantial opportunities (as provided, for example, by a community centre that organised summer play-schemes) to meet other children from the same community were very much more likely to use Gujarati with their siblings and friends than those who were not; they used it to a much greater extent than many children of their generation in similar minority communities.

The study also looked at literacy practices and the use of story-telling within the families. Studies of the literacy experiences of children from new minority communities in Britain have revealed a rich variation of practices: different languages are commonly used for different purposes (Datta, 2000); practices vary from community to community, reflecting the hierarchy of prestige of the languages used, the availability of materials in print and whether or not a particular language (such as Urdu or Arabic) is used for religious instruction (Blackledge, 2000; Gregory & Williams, 2000). In many communities the language of literacy is substantially different from the language of communication.

Story telling practices also vary greatly between and within communities. Datta comments on the 'world of stories at home, oral and written, in three languages' (2000: 23) and how children develop a 'story grammar' from experiences at home and at school. The desire to keep their children connected to their background and culture, and to provide moral instruction in keeping with the family's religion, can result in parents providing a rich diet of story-telling in the home (Blackledge, 2000; Parke & Drury, 2000).

Cummins' theoretical framework and, in particular, the Common Underlying Proficiency theory, (Cummins, 1984) was used to analyse the relationship

between children's literacy experiences in the home and the community and their skills in literacy in school.

The Sneddon study found that while stories are told to the children in Gujarati from an early age in many families, the children have currently no access to literacy education in that language either at home or at school (Sneddon, 2000b). In the course of the religious studies which they undertake at the mosque, they learn to read and understand Urdu, a more prestigious language used by the community to interpret religious texts. They also learn the Qur'an in Arabic, although few develop any understanding of the language. As a result of these experiences, by the age of 11, the six girls and six boys of that age who took part in the study could use their dialect of Gujarati for communication in the home and with friends (with varying degrees of competence), but had difficulty with the less familiar vocabulary and structures of the more literary Gujarati used in books. The opposite is generally true for Urdu: the children have learned to interpret religious texts, often using Gujarati and English to clarify and discuss the meaning of a passage in Urdu. Their knowledge of the language is restricted to the religious domain and few use it much for communication.

The children attend local authority schools which are very multilingual and multicultural in their intake. They are fluent in conversational English, in both standard and colloquial forms, and are developing their familiarity with the more complex and academic language of books.

## Methodology

When families were interviewed at home as part of the original research project (jointly by an English-speaking and a Gujarati-speaking researcher), they were asked if they would be willing to read a dual-text book to their child in both Gujarati and English. All families agreed to do this and none had a problem because all included at least one member who could read Gujarati and one who could read English. The dual-text version of *The Raja's Big Ears* was selected for the 11-year-old children. Parents were requested to ensure that the children read the English version (which all were able to do). They were also asked to read the Gujarati version to the children as few of them had literacy skills in Gujarati and none were able to read the book unassisted. It was explained to the parents that these recordings were to be used to provide some evidence of children's fluency in the two languages. Bearing in mind the importance of the cultural context and the natural trigger provided by the person addressed (Parke & Drury, 2000), the Gujarati-speaking researcher visited the home and recorded the child telling the story in Gujarati. When the children were interviewed in school by the English researcher they were recorded retelling the story in English.

## The Raja's Big Ears

The story chosen for the children to retell in the original research project was a bilingual Gujarati/English version of *The Raja's Big Ears*, written by Niru Desai, illustrated by Amanda Welch and published in 1989 by Jennie Ingham Associates. There is a shortage of good quality, culturally appropriate, dual-text publications for children. This particular story was chosen for its clear and simple structure, its strong narrative and its potential, in retelling, for interpretation, elaboration and

development. The book is attractively presented and the high quality illustrations provide both direct support for the text and an interesting subtext.

As we worked on analysing the children's narratives, one of us remembered being told the story as a child in the Gujerati community in Kenya and was able to locate two versions of the story published in India.

### Story A: 'Soopad kanna Rajani Varta'

The Story of the 'Big-eared King' is taken from a book of children's stories by Gijubhai, published in Bombay and Ahmedabad in 1973 by R.R. Seth & Co.

As this story begins, the King goes hunting. As he fails to find any game, he goes on and on; it is evening; he is very hungry. He has forgotten the way back and cannot return. As he sits under a tree he spots a couple of sparrows; he kills them and cooks them for his supper. As a punishment for this act he is cursed: there and then, his ears grow and become like *soopra*, a winnowing frame, as big as elephants' ears. He goes home to his palace in the night and enters it in secret; he swears his Prime Minister to secrecy. He goes up to the seventh floor where he remains and refuses to admit anyone. The Prime Minister keeps his secret. The day comes when the king needs to have his beard shaved and he asks the Prime Minister to admit the barber, the only other person allowed in to the seventh floor apartment. The barber, whose name is Dhania, is surprised at the King's ears. The King tells him, 'If you ever tell anybody about my ears I will not let you go alive. I will crush you as in a mill [an oil extracting mill].' The barber bows humbly saying, 'Bapa, I won't tell anybody.' Now barbers, as a species, are known for not keeping secrets. The secret was churning in Dhania's stomach: he paced backwards and forwards, wondering whom he could tell. Eventually he *pachi e disha e jawa gayo* (went to the toilet, literally the 'woods'). But the secret was still churning in his stomach, dying to come out. At last the barber saw a piece of wood and told it the secret, '*Raja soopad kanno, Raja soopad kanno*' (the Raja has ears like winnowing frames). The log started repeating the phrase. Later, a carpenter came along and heard the log talking. He thought it might make a musical instrument that he could present to the king and that the king would be happy with it. And so he made a tabla, a *sarangi* (stringed instrument similar to a violin), and a *dholaki* (a small drum). He took the new instruments to present to the King. The King would not admit him and sent a message, 'Play them on the ground floor, I can hear.' As soon as the carpenter started playing, the tabla played '*Raja soopad kanno, Raja soopad kanno, Raja soopad kanno*.' The *sarangi* joined in with its shrill voice, '*tane konay kithu?*' (Who told you?). The *dholaki* beat out '*Dhania hajamay*' (Dhania the barber). The King got the message! As he didn't want anyone else to hear what he had just heard, he kept the instruments and gave the carpenter a present. Then he called the barber and asked him, 'Who did you tell those secrets to?' '*Shab*, I haven't told anybody. Because the secret was bothering me, I told it to a piece of wood.' So the King dismissed Dhania and was very sorry that he ever let someone like the barber know his secret.

### Story B

This version of the story has only been available as a copy and its origin and publisher are not known to us. It has the same title and is similar in many respects to Story A.

Like Story A, it begins with a hunting scene. The King sits under a *vad*, a very large, wide tree, like an oak, and kills birds. Like the King in Story A, he finds himself cursed with outsize ears; he is ashamed and sneaks off to the seventh floor of his palace in the dead of night. But, as his beard grows longer, he has no option but to call the barber. The barber, whose name, in this version, is Bhikhla, is threatened, 'If you tell anybody about my ears, I will not let you leave.' Bhikhla could not keep any story to himself, let alone this one, but when tempted to tell it he remembered the King's threat. What to do? Like his counterpart in Story A *evama bhikhhalo jajru jawa vagadama gayo* (he went to the toilet on wasteland). While there, he saw a piece of wood and said to it, 'Brother wood, shall I tell you a story? *Raja soopad kanno!*' The rest of the story unfolds as in Story A, until the carpenter brings his instruments to the King. The King sends a message that he should leave the instruments and go. But the carpenter argues, 'But I want the King to take the instruments, only then will I accept the present.' He is instructed to play on the ground floor and the same dialogue is repeated. He is offered a present and leaves. The story ends in the same vein as Story A, with the barber offering an explanation and being dismissed.

### Story C

The third version is a bilingual Gujarati/English version of the story, entitled *The Raja's Big Ears*, written in both versions by Niru Desai.

Story C, while broadly following the same narrative, is different with respect to structure, the language and imagery used and the underlying meaning and moral of the tale. The story begins, as English stories do, 'Once upon a time there was a Raja who had big ears'. There is no explanation for the big ears: they appear to be natural. There is no hunting scene. The King, who is popular with his subjects, does not hide away in his palace, but covers his ears with a turban, a fashion which his loyal and admiring subjects copy. The barber, called Manji, goes into the jungle 'to think in peace and quiet' and the illustrations in the book provide a subtext that reveals how greatly troubled he is by his secret. He tells it to a tall, wide tree: 'Our Raja has big ears!' The carpenter episode is more developed: a woodcutter chops the tree, hires an elephant to take the wood to a factory where he sells it, for a lot of money, to be made into musical instruments by craftsmen. The instruments, which in this version are a tabla, a flute and a tambourine, are then bought by the Royal Musician. At this point Story C departs substantially from the original in the framework that it provides for the playing of the talking instruments. It is the Raja's birthday and he decides to have a party to which 'Very Important People from all corners of the land' are invited and at which music is to be played. The illustrations again provide a rich subtext which elaborates on the party theme. The scene is set in India, in a palace garden, but aspects of the birthday party are very British: the iced cake with candles, the balloons, the birthday cards displayed on a shelf. When the instruments sing, in exactly the same way as they do in Stories A and B, the Raja is very publicly shamed. There follows a well-structured episode in which Manji is brought in and interrogated and the Raja pursues a detailed enquiry to verify Manji's story. The story ends very differently: the Raja appreciates that Manji had no intention to betray him, that his subjects 'did not mind him having

big ears. They were far more bothered about having a kind and fair King' (Desai, 1989: 25).

This version of the story was developed by Niru Desai, a teacher and a story-teller. It grew and developed as such stories do, through telling and retelling with actions, music and drama, to groups of children of all ethnic origins in London schools, incorporating their interests and experiences of stories from many different cultures (Mechti, 2000). Interestingly, while the English version of the story is told in a very accessible style, the Gujarati is both more formal and more elaborate than the language of folktales A and B. The children in the sample would have found the latter more accessible.

The story development was part of a multilingual story-telling project entitled 'Reading Materials for Minority Groups' directed by Jennie Ingham in the 1980s (*Telling Tales Together*, 1988). The project aimed to encourage parents from minority linguistic communities to share their story-telling traditions with children in primary schools. The children then used these stories as a basis for drama productions, art work, book making and cross-curricular activities. Parents, teachers, story-tellers, translators and illustrators worked collaboratively to prepare versions of these stories for publication. A range of these were published in dual-text versions in English and the languages most commonly spoken by children in local schools.

The dual text version retains its Indian flavour but is heavily influenced by other traditions and the interests of schoolchildren, for example, in birthday parties. It is also more contemporary in its references to factories and payment. The story that emerges from this process is highly structured and has a wholly different and more sophisticated moral of the kind that generally appeals to children in the primary age group.

## The Children's Story-telling

### Narrative style

When the researcher visited the children's homes to record their story in Gujarati, a number of parents and children commented to her on the distance between the language of the story-book and the variety of Gujarati generally spoken by the children. Parents reported that both individual words and turns of phrase had to be paraphrased or explained. For example, words such as *kathiyaro* (woodcutter) or *vrixsh* (tree) were not familiar to the children; neither were many of the formal turns of phrase. With hindsight, it would have been valuable to record the parents reading and interpreting the story for their children. This would obviously have been an important influence on the vocabulary and structures used by the children themselves in their retelling and the evidence would have provided another link in the chain of transformation of the story from Indian folktale to children's narrative. The illustrations in the book, by the artist Amanda Welsh, influence the children's retelling: for example, the reference some children make to birthday cards and the different ages shown on them and to everyone throwing away their topees at the end of the story.

In spite of difficulties with the formal language, the children were keen to tell the story to the researcher and to demonstrate their skill, and they took the task very seriously indeed. A few of the children mentioned that they were a little

nervous and some checked with the researcher before starting ('how do you say . . . ?') or even, occasionally, *sotto voce*, along the way. All but one of these children gained in confidence as the narrative proceeded and, on the evidence of the tapes, appeared to be enjoying their performance. Other children were confident from the start and told the tale fluently and dramatically, in full story-telling mode, using a lot of direct speech with different voices for different characters and appropriate intonation and stress.

The children's narratives follow the Desai version fairly closely, retaining its narrative structure and referring to most of the key episodes. The best story-tellers elaborate on events and character, sometimes using as cues the subtext provided by the illustrations, for example by referring to the birthday cards, as mentioned above:

*Ek daro Raja party karvano hato. Eni birthday hati pan . . . batha . . . batha . . . nay ni Khabar hati tay ketala varsno hato. Batha eney cards apya hata nay em lakheloo hutoo kay fifteen, thirteen, hundred and five nay bathoo* (One day the King gave a party. It was his birthday. Everybody, everybody did not know how old he was. Everybody gave him cards that had written fifteen, thirteen, hundred and five and all)

or to the Raja dancing at the end '*toe pachi King dance karto nay nachato toe bija bhi*' (the King danced and others danced too). In another example of this, whereas the text refers to the Raja sending for Manji and Manji walking into the throne room, the illustration shows him being dragged by the seat of his pants. This probably prompted Irfan to describe the episode as '*e Manji nay lithu ne Raja pahay muki dithu*' (he picked Manji up and put him in front of the King). See below for a description of Irfan's use of gender.

The stories vary in length from 195 words to 611 (with a mean of 524), and the number of key episodes referred to from 7 to 14 (mean 12 out of a possible 14 identified). Of particular interest is the close relationship between both the story length and the style of telling in Gujarati and English. Children who tell long and detailed stories in one language do so in the other: there is a strong and highly significant relationship between story length in English and in Gujarati: the Pearson Correlation Coefficient is 0.85, which is significant at the 0.0001 level. It is also noticeable that the children who are most confident and tell the most detailed and dramatic narratives in English also do so in Gujarati (Sneddon, 2000a: 261).

All but two of the children use the same opening phrase at the start of the story, which translates as 'One day there was a Raja, he had big ears': '*ek daro Raja hatto*'. This formula is not incorrect, but appears to be influenced by the English version 'Once upon a time there was a Raja'. Desai starts the story in Gujarati with '*Ek hato raja*' (There was a king) (Desai, 1989: 2). The influence of English is evident in an error made by most of the children: they make an inappropriate extension to the meaning of a word in Gujarati of the sort that is allowable in English. For example, Rehana says '*Ena pahay mota kaan huta*' (he had big ears), where the use of *pahay* is inappropriate as it cannot apply to possession of a part of one's body. The sentence should be '*enay mota kaan huta*'. It is possible that structures of this nature have become common in the children's Gujarati as a result of contact with English.



The children's story endings are much more varied. The Desai version ends '*Raja oodaar nay nyayi hovaathi Manjinay tenay maaf Kari dhitho nay potani Kantopee oodaadi mooki*', which translates, in her text, as 'he was so kind and fair, he forgave Manji and threw away his topee' (Desai, 1989: 25). Many of the children refer to the discarding of the topee and this is generally expressed in a way that is correct and close in meaning to the original '*pachi Raja eni topee nakhi didthi*' (then the King threw his topee). Two children refer to the King's subjects also discarding their topees: '*to e loko kay o badha potani topee kari*' (they all took off their topees), a version which is inspired by the illustration, on the penultimate page, of the King dancing with his subjects, all of whom are topee-less. Other children, in their story ending, choose to focus on the forgiveness of Manji, e.g. '*e fair ooto ne ni punish kareloo*' (the last word is in the wrong gender and should read *karelo*) (but the Raja was a fair man and he did not punish). Others mention the people's appreciation of their Raja's kindness: '*e lokonay khali kind ne nice Raja joytoo ooto*' (they only wanted a kind and nice Raja). The child who departed most from the original ending is the one, referred to above, who mentioned the dancing that features in the penultimate illustration (Desai, 1989: 26).

As mentioned earlier, the children's encounters with stories in Gujarati were almost entirely oral. These were told in the dialect spoken by the family. Few of the children in the project had regular opportunities for sustained encounters with Gujarati in print. While the children's retellings follow closely the plot and the main features of the story in the book, the language they use reflects their experience and is very much their own: the language of everyday communication within the home.

### The children's dialect

In this section attention is drawn to some of the ways in which the children's language differs from that of the story. The main differences reflect the children's dialect and the limited experience of formal story language which causes them difficulties with complex sentence structure and aspects of grammar such as gender.

None of the children in the sample use standard Gujarati. Most of them use the same variety of Surti, with the exception of Irfan, a very fluent, enthusiastic and creative story-teller, whose family originate from a different village and whose Gujarati is more distant from the standard. The child whose Gujarati is closest to the standard has spent a year at boarding school in Gujarat and, interestingly, he is also the child who code-switches most freely.

The following are examples of differences between the children's dialect and the standard:

- The shortening of words is a notable feature of the children's speech, e.g. *bo* (a lot) for *bahoo*; *to* (was) for *hato*; *ni* (no) for *nahi*; *kay* (say) for *kahay*.
- Other features common in the speech of most children are *ena* used rather than *enay*, and *hara* for *sara*, a colloquial form meaning 'good'.
- Irfan's use of *hamda* (we all) is a distinctive feature of the speech of his village. His family come from Waryaw, whereas most of the other children in the sample have families that originate in Bardoli.

## Sentence structure

In their English retelling, most children make some use of complex sentences. They are sophisticated story tellers and do not fall into the 'and then . . . and then . . .' pattern that is so common in young or inexperienced story-tellers. However, there is very little use of complex sentences by the children in Gujarati. The 'and then' pattern is very much in evidence and *pachi* is the main device that they use for connecting clauses in their narratives. The structures they use and the way they assemble strings of simple sentences with repetition suggest that they have insufficient experience of handling subordination and connectives. Another common device children use for carrying along their narrative is the use of the tag *chay nay* (isn't it)?

For example, Rehana tries to use complex compound sentences and loses the thread of her narrative. The meaning of the story has been understood, but she cannot, in spite of her evident attempt to do so, reproduce the structure of the original or produce grammatically correct complex sentences. Such sentences are either missed out or wrongly expressed. For instance she says, feeling her way and using the conjunction *pun* (but) inappropriately:

*ey topee paihra karto huto . . . hide karva nay ey hamji raho batha enay laugh karhay. Pun . . . um . . . um . . . etlay topee pairto hato. Nay tey bathai nay khabar nahoti kem topee paira karto to*  
(he used to wear a topee . . . to hide and he thought that everybody laughs at him. But . . . um . . . um . . . so wore the topee. And everybody did not know why he was wearing the topee).

In a more fluent version of standard spoken Gujarati, one would expect:

*ey kaan santadva matay topee paherto hato, jethi bathanay eni khabhar na paday anay hansa na udavay or maskari naa karay*  
(he wore the topee to hide his ears so that no one would know about it or laugh at him)

In some cases, her use of tenses is incorrect. She (and two or three others), referring to Manji's position under the tree, says '*palathi baythi gayalo*' (he had sat cross-legged), whereas the context requires '*palathi vari nay besi gayo*' (he sat cross-legged). Similarly she said '*Raja e ek party karoloo*' (Raja gave a party), instead of '*Raja e ek party kary*', and '*batha people ne bola vayloo*' (invited all the people) for '*batha lokanay bolaviya*'.

Shahed has a similar problem with subordination: he uses strings of simple sentences connected loosely together. Hazra attempts subordination but her clauses are the wrong way round and she loses track of the subject: a whole paragraph about the Raja hiding his ears is broken up into short sentences with inappropriate connections and repetitions.

Farhaan (a more detailed account of his language use is presented below) on the other hand, is more comfortable with the concept of subordination. It is not clear whether he uses English connectives ('but', 'after', 'so', 'of course') because he does not know the Gujarati ones or simply because he is a confident and habitual code-switcher.

## Gender

This is a minefield for children who have become dominant in English, a language without grammatical gender. All the children make some errors and this may be due to unfamiliarity with the gender of infrequently encountered words. The number of gender errors made varies between 2 (five children) and 8 (one child), with the mean being 4.6. There are three genders in Gujarati. Adjectives agree with the noun and adverbs and verbs agree with the subject. Masculine words generally end in *o*, feminine ones in *i* and neuter ones in *oo* (*u*). Children commonly confuse these.

Irfan, the fluent story-teller mentioned above in relation to his use of an unusual dialect, makes more errors than most, e.g. '*Raja ni moti kaan*' (the king's big ears) for '*Raja na mota kaan*' (uses *f.* instead of *m.*); '*motu kaan*' (its ears), uses *n.* instead of *m.* '*mota kaan*'; '*enu birthday utu*' (it was his birthday) for '*eno birthday hato*' (*n.* instead of *m.*); '*mutu kaan che*' (has big ears) where he has used *mutu n.* sing. instead of *m. pl.* '*mota kaan che*'; '*e Manji nay lithu ne Raja pahay muki dithu*' (he took Manji up and put it in front of the king): *lithu* and *dithu* are *n.*; both words should be *m.* The use of the neuter gender is very inappropriate in this context as it implies that Manji is an object, a bundle to be picked up and moved around rather than the intended meaning of a servant placing Manji next to the Raja.

## Vocabulary

Children experienced difficulties with the formal vocabulary of the Desai version and several children commented specifically on this point. Rehana spontaneously raised this issue with the research assistant. She had particular difficulty with the word 'barber' (*hajam* in Gujarati). She observed, 'it's not a word I use in Gujarati, it's a story word; but I don't use it in English much either, I say "hair cutter" or "hairdresser".' Irfan actually uses *baal kapnawalo*, literally 'haircutter'. Children commonly use a more informal, colloquial word, rather than the one used in the text: for example, most children use *jaad* for tree, instead of the very formal and literary word *vrixsh*, which children could not be expected to know.

The children simplify the language of the story they have heard, making it less literary and adapting it to the everyday style of colloquial language that they commonly use. For example '*bahoo haroo rameloo*', ('very good played', instead of 'the music was enchanting'). No child used 'shame' and only one 'anger' (*gussay*) in their Gujarati text, although these words were commonly used in the English version of their narratives.

## Code-switching strategies

In well-established communities in which two languages are in regular use, the speech of bilinguals is characterised by the regular use of mixing, borrowing and switching between languages; code-switching effectively becomes a third language option. In the British context this phenomenon has been well documented for the Panjabi community: 'The use of unadulterated Panjabi has nearly ceased to exist among the Sikh children in Leeds' (Agnihotri, 1987: 108; Chana & Romaine, 1984).

In the Gujarati community, which is the focus of the present study, the vari-

able length of residence of individuals and the pattern of language shift are such that not all individuals have equal command of Gujarati and English. Therefore it is common for individuals in a group discussion, not only to switch languages according to the situation and the topic, but also according to the individual being addressed. This practice was verified through tape-recordings in family settings. All but one of the parents and all the children in the study reported that they commonly included single words and whole expressions in English and Urdu while speaking in Gujarati. Children report using words in English 'because it came first into my head'.

There are essentially two styles of code-switching in the children's narratives: Farhaan's and everyone else's. The most common form of code-switching is the borrowing of words where it seems that the Gujarati word in the story is less familiar to the children than the English one.

Some words, where they are used by the children, occur in English in all the narratives: 'secret', 'embarrassed', 'musicians', 'instruments', 'party', 'birthday', 'shame', 'fair', 'forgive'. Others occur mostly in English, but some children have attempted the Gujarati. 'Barber' occurs in some instances as *hajam*, 'clever' as *bahoo hoshiyaar che*, 'woodcutter' is interpreted in both English and Gujarati by two inventive children as '*laakli cutter*' or '*lakla cutwala*'. In other cases children know the word but switch anyway and use it both in Gujarati and in English. A common example is the use of both 'elephant' and *hathi*.

A few children use whole phrases and clauses ('scratched their heads', 'all sorts of instruments') and tags ('that's why') in English in the Gujarati text. Some switch several times in a short sentence: 'shop *nay* sold *karela*' (sold it to the shop); '*Raja baou* people invite *karela* from *bathas* corner *ma thi*' (Raja invited lots of people from all the corners (of the world)).

On the whole the children are aiming to avoid code-switching. They had been asked to tell the story in English to one researcher in school and in Gujarati to another researcher in their home. The stories were recorded. Both situations were interpreted by the children as formal and mostly they were intent on speaking one language or the other.

## Farhaan's Story

Farhaan's story is one of the most linguistically interesting. His family are keen that their children both maintain their use of Gujarati to a high standard and attain high levels of education in English. To maintain a high level of bilingualism and ensure a high quality religious education, Farhaan's family sent him to boarding school in Gujarat for a year.

Farhaan was enthusiastic about the story and he tells a sophisticated tale in a fluent and informal style. He code-switches noticeably more than any of the other children. There are 65 switches to English recorded in his text, almost one in every sentence. These include connectives as mentioned above, individual items that he may not know in Gujarati, but also a great deal of casual switching from one language to the other in the interest of maintaining the flow of his narrative, as in the example below:

*Ek divas Manji jungle ma walk karva gayo. Peace ma – se ena pahay ek answer hutoo tay ek tree nay kahay*

(One day, Manji went for a walk in the jungle. To be in peace – and so he got the answer, he'll tell it to the tree)

The following single words occur in English in his narrative: 'secret', 'keep', 'leaves', 'follow', 'angry', 'cross', 'shivering', 'trouble', 'branches', 'uncomfortable', 'factory owner', 'woodcutter' etc. Like the other children, he uses phrases: 'of course', 'important people'.

Like most of the other children, Farhaan has difficulties with complex sentences. In his own narrative he expresses the same meaning in shorter simple sentences, often linked with English connectives. He uses 'because' and 'that's why' in English, but alternates this with the Gujarati '*toe*', meaning 'so'.

No child in the sample understood the Gujarati *orix perna pandala havama ferfer hali udhia* (the leaves on the trees rustled in the breeze). Most children simply avoided mentioning this. Farhaan makes an attempt '*a che ne leaves . . .*' (that is leaves . . .) and then abandons the sentence.

Farhaan does not quote any passages verbatim from the Desai text; he has made the story his own. His narrative is creative and he adds detail, for example: *batha* musical instruments *baou haroo nay atalay tay Raja nay jotu tu* (all the instruments were very good, so the Raja wanted them). His story-telling style is much more informal than the very literary Desai text. In many ways it is closer to the simple narrative style of the folktales A and B discussed earlier in this paper.

## Conclusion

While the focus of the present investigation has been on cultural and language change, the rich data base of the recorded stories opens many possible lines of further and more detailed enquiry into issues such as code-switching and the role of stories in children's lives.

The story of *The Raja's Big Ears*, as we have encountered it, has been on a long journey. In our first experience of it, it is a well-known tale told in Gujarat and featuring in collections of traditional folk tales. The story travelled to London via the knowledge and skill of a story-teller and writer, Niru Desai. As stories grow from stories, *The Raja's Big Ears* adapted to the culture of London children and came to reflect their experience, of birthday parties, for example, and their expectations of stories: repeated sequences and a moral that is relevant and applicable to their own lives.

The culture of the school is increasingly influencing the literacy practices of the home. The Sneddon study revealed that, as well as telling stories in Gujarati, parents were increasingly likely to follow the practice recommended by the school of reading to children from books sent home by the teacher. However, as the work of Gregory and Williams in the London Bangladeshi community has shown, the cultural traffic is generally one way: schools are far less likely to be aware of the literacy practices of children's home (Gregory & Williams, 2000).

The work of Blackledge in the Birmingham Bangladeshi community (1993), of Datta (2000) and of Kenner (2000) have all shown how children's varied experiences of literacy practices in home and school enable them to make use of these traditions and to reflect on language use and how it relates to cultural context, for example in deciding what language to choose to tell a particular story. Datta and

Kenner in particular have demonstrated the benefits to children's literacy development and language awareness of teachers who encourage children to make use of their home language skills in the classroom.

The detailed study of the children's narratives has revealed the complexity of the story-telling task and the challenge presented by the Desai text. There is clear evidence of both language maintenance and of substantial language change. Issues of language maintenance and change pose a particular challenge for publishers of children's books (Multilingual Resources for Children Project, 1995). While using the standard variety of a language for a dual-text book would seem the most appropriate choice, many children who encounter these books in school do not speak the standard variety and find the books difficult. This fact, in turn, creates a difficulty for teachers, who may not be aware that the book they are providing to help a child in their home language is not fully accessible.

The comparative density of the social networks and the recreation facilities they offer to the children in the Gujarati community, as revealed in the earlier study, have kept the oral use of Gujarati buoyant among many of the children. Although for all the children who were aged 11 in the study English has become the dominant language, all could tell a good story in Gujarati.

Just because children have an everyday fluency in two languages (or more) does not mean that the task of story-telling is equally easy in both languages. There are currently no Gujarati classes for children in the area. Unlike those of their parents who were educated in Gujarat, the children have difficulty with the formal standard Gujarati found in books. While they can understand it, with help from their parents, the study has shown that they do not reproduce it in their narratives.

The children's language use reflects the fact that many of the stories heard in the home are told rather than read. Most parents tell stories to their children in the dialect they understand. Most children in this study tell stories with a lively style and pace. The language they use is their own. It includes code-switching and an unorthodox use of gender and tense. When recording the English version of their story in school, the children did not code-switch: the use of English only is expected in the school and the children responded to that norm. In the home code-switching is the natural mode of expression. In their narratives, the children are reflecting the oral tradition of the home rather than the book tradition of the school. In so doing they demonstrate their skill at adapting their language to the discourse conventions appropriate in the different social contexts of their everyday lives.

While the language the children use is alive and well in their London community, parents have commented that language shift has made it difficult for children to communicate with their family when they visit Gujarat. As an elder of the community said, 'Our grandchildren still speak some Gujarati now, but they speak a lot of English. What language will they speak to their children?'

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